

**Farid ad-Din 'Attār's
Memorial of God's Friends**

LIVES AND SAYINGS OF SUFIS

THE CLASSICS
OF WESTERN
SPIRITUALITY





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Farid ad-Din 'Attār's Memorial of God's Friends

LIVES AND SAYINGS OF SUFIS

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY
PAUL LOSENSKY

PREFACE BY
TH. EMIL HOMERIN



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PREFACE

The recounting of saintly lives has been a prominent feature of Western spirituality. The saints display heroic virtue, profess sound religious doctrine, and perform miracles attesting to their devotion and surrender to the divine will. They undertake ascetic practices and dedicate themselves to prayer and selfless service to others, and yet, though they may be graced by God, their lives are never easy. There are many struggles—against the body, against worldliness, against Satan, against pride—and sometimes the saints are martyred for their faith. Later, their pious lives become lessons and models for leading an honest life and for being true to oneself and, most of all, to God.

But even more, perhaps, the saints become another means of salvation as visits to their graves and petitions for their aide offer hope for intercession and immortal life for lesser mortals. Many readers of the *Classics of Western Spirituality* are undoubtedly familiar with the genre of hagiography, particularly in the Catholic tradition, as represented by Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*. Now, readers have the opportunity to explore the world of Muslim saints, brought to life by Paul Losensky in his deft translation of the *Tazkerat al-owliyā*, the *Memorial of God's Friends*, by the thirteenth-century Persian mystic Farid ad-Din 'Attār.

As Losensky notes in his introduction, 'Attār was a gifted poet, most famous for his beautiful, mystical allegory the *Conference of the Birds*. In his *Memorial* he presents another side of Islamic spirituality, one concerned less with doctrine and more with behavior and practice. Within Islam, the *owliyā* are God's special friends who are protected by him, and they include, first and foremost, the family and companions of the prophet Muhammad. Martyrs and mad people, too, have been reckoned among God's friends, as well as Muslim mystics, especially the early masters of Sufism, who are 'Attār's focus in the *Memorial*. 'Attār was not the first Muslim scholar to compile stories of these pious Sufis, but his *Memorial* is certainly one of the most eloquent works of

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Muslim hagiography as he combined his extensive knowledge of Islamic mysticism with his elegant Persian prose.

Like other hagiographers, 'Attār venerates his subjects, while offering them to his readers for inspiration and imitation, as did medieval Christian writers. Similar, too, are the many “shapes and sizes” of sanctity, as 'Attār compiles his accounts in such a way as to portray particular aspects of Muslim spirituality. His brief introductions to each life set both the scene and the issues to be addressed: from faith to fear, asceticism to altruism, selfishness to love, and finally, martyrdom. Moreover, an austere attitude prevails throughout the *Memorial*, as one saint after another eschews riches, fame, and power:

Anyone who pursues his lust for this world saves demons
the trouble of pursuing him. (Malek)

If a dervish hovers around the wealthy, know that he is a
hypocrite. If he hovers around the sultan, know that he is a
thief. (Sofyān)

As with saints in other religious traditions, these Muslim mystics may go to extremes in their denial of the world; 'Attār remarks in one account, “He was so far from the normal way of things.” This is particularly the case with human interactions, nearly all of which are fraught with temptation:

For Sufis, disaster lies in talking to children, socializing with
opponents, and being friends with women. (Yusof)

Stay away from the pretty young boys and women who are
not of your family, especially today when there are women
and children here on the pilgrimage. Don't let your eyes
wander. (Ebrāhim)

Within the Christian tradition, sanctity is usually tied to celibacy, if not always virginity, but within Islam, Muslims are encouraged to marry and procreate. In the *Memorial*, then, we hear of loyal wives and loving children, but sometimes with a sense of ambivalence and reticence:

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Nothing comes of any disciple who takes a wife and writes learnedly. (Joneyd)

The dervish who marries boards a ship, and when a child is born, it sinks. (Ebrāhim)

As ‘Attār clarifies, taking a wife entails physical, emotional, and financial obligations that will distract a man from his religious devotions and that may lead him to divided loyalties, as he will love his wife and children along with God. Indeed, in several stories, a saint despairs when he realizes that love for his child has made him forgetful of God, and he is relieved when the child suddenly dies. ‘Attār likens these incidents to the prophet Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son at God’s command. Muslim readers would also know that, according to the Qur’ān, dead children are brought to paradise, where they will greet their parents on judgment day, as another of ‘Attār’s saints inform us.

Though the vast majority of saints in the *Memorial* are men, holy women also appear as spiritually insightful and wise, particularly in the case of Fātema, the wife of Ahmad-e Khezruya, and of Rābe’a-ye ‘Adaviya. ‘Attār gives a long account of Rābe’a, highlighting her ascetic practices and love of God, noting that “when a woman is a man on the path of the Lord most high, she cannot be called a woman.” Still, perhaps with a touch of humor, ‘Attār relates that one day a group of men chided Rābe’a by asserting that all the virtues had been given to men, and that there had never been a woman prophet, to which she replied: “Everything you said was true....[a]nd no woman has ever been a pederast.”

‘Attār also recounts many miracles at the hands of Rābe’a, including bringing a dead donkey back to life, and these are among the many fantastic events that occur throughout the *Memorial*. Saints travel from Iran to Mecca in the blink of an eye, converse with angels, and foretell the future of others; these abilities underscore the saint’s spiritual advancement. Nevertheless, in one story, ‘Attār tells of a master’s one-thousand disciples, all of whom could walk on water, although all but one of them was still unworthy to meet the great Bāyazid. The reason was, as always, spiritual pride, the “self” of egoism and selfishness that is the mystic’s greatest foe:

The most difficult of veils is the vision of the self. (Zu’n-Nun)

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The difference between the urgings of the self and the temptations of the devil is that when the self begs for something and you forbid it, it will keep after you until it gets what it wants, even if it takes a while. When the devil calls you and you oppose him, he'll give up. (Joneyd)

Opposing selfishness is a lifelong struggle; alone, a profession of faith is not enough. Perhaps taking a swipe at more worldly Muslims, 'Attār tells the following story:

It is related that a Zoroastrian was told to convert to Islam. He said, "If Islam is what Bāyazid does, I don't have the strength for it and I can't do it. If it's what you do, I don't have any need of it.

Thus, fearing egoism and hypocrisy, the saints practice their austerities, ever-mindful of God, and may spend days in seclusion and deny themselves food and sleep. Their emaciated physical condition comes to embody their denial of selfish pride, and with God's grace, they ultimately succeed in suppressing selfishness, thus performing the greatest of miracles. Though this is a personal struggle, most of these saints were not alone but in community with their spiritual masters and, subsequently, disciples of their own. One of the most engaging aspects of the *Memorial* is the many stories involving teachers leading their students to moments of realization. Even the great Joneyd had moments of doubt when he was a young man learning the Sufi way from his sheikh and uncle, Sari-ye Saqati. Sari felt that his nephew had accomplished much and that it was now Joneyd's turn to preach in public:

Joneyd vacillated. He was not fond of the idea and said, "It's not polite to preach in the presence of the sheikh." Then one night, he saw the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) in a dream. "Preach!" he told Joneyd.

At dawn Joneyd got up to talk to Sari. He saw Sari standing at the door. Sari said, "Were you waiting for others to tell you to preach? Now you must—your words have been made the salvation of the world's people. You did not preach at the urging of your disciples. You did not preach at the

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pleading of Baghdad's religious leaders. You did not preach when I told you to. Now that the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) has commanded it, you must preach.

Joneyd consented and, apologizing, he asked Sari, "How did you know that I saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) in a dream?"

"I saw the mighty and glorious Lord in a dream," Sari replied. "He said, 'I sent my Messenger to Joneyd to tell him to speak from the pulpit.'"

The *Memorial* is filled with such stories of the early Sufi masters, their misgivings, realizations, and eventual success with the grace of God. Significantly, 'Attār concludes nearly every saint's story with an account of how the deceased mystic was seen in a dream as having earned God's favor and a place in paradise. Thus, their saintly status is assured, and we may trust their words and advice, which form a large portion of each saintly life:

Hold no one in contempt, even if he is a polytheist. (Zu'n-Nun)

If you want to see how this world will be after your death, see how it is after the death of others. (Hasan)

The most powerful person is one who overcomes his anger. (Sari)

Open the closed purse, and close the open mouth. (Ebrāhim)

Rapture is a tongue of flame that the innermost self cannot contain and it emerges from yearning, so the limbs of the body move, whether with joy or sorrow. (Nuri)

'Attār cites many such proverbs in the *Memorial*, so that his readers might pause and examine their own lives. To remain spiritually sound, 'Attār notes, "Read eight pages of their sayings everyday." With this fine translation of the *Memorial* by Paul Losensky, many more have the opportunity to read, reflect, and remember.

Th. Emil Homerin

ON THIS TRANSLATION

Memorial of God's Friends (Tazkerat al-owliyā') is the sole extant prose work of the great Persian Sufi poet Farid ad-Din 'Attār (d. ca. 1230). Integrating the writings of generations of Sufi scholars and historians, it relates the saga of Islamic spirituality through the lives and sayings of some of its most prominent exemplars, from the time of the Prophet to the death of Hallāj in 922. With the same literary skill found in poetic works such as *Conference of the Birds*, 'Attār combines popular legend, historical anecdote, ethical maxim, and speculative meditation in lively and thought-provoking biographies. Sufism is presented not as a doctrinal system but as a lived experience, and 'Attār's lucid and economical style encourages readers to participate fully in the efforts of these pioneers of the sacred to live out and express their unfolding encounter with the divine. Scholars, shopkeepers, princes, and outcasts—God's friends come from all classes of medieval society and embody the full range of religious attitudes, from piety and awe to love and ecstatic union. *Memorial of God's Friends* merges the miraculous and the everyday in one of the most engaging and comprehensive portrayals of spiritual experience in the Islamic tradition. This translation makes the major biographies of *Memorial of God's Friends* available in their entirety for the first time to a general audience in a contemporary American idiom. The lives translated here include such formative figures as Hasan of Basra, Rābe'a-ye 'Adaviya, Zu'n-Nun of Egypt, Bāyazīd of Bestām, and Joneyd of Baghdad, as well as a sampling of shorter biographies.

As desirable as an unabridged translation might be in purely academic terms, it would defeat the fundamental purpose of all translation—opening the work to a new readership. In the original Persian the text of the *Tazkerat* runs to almost six hundred pages, and a full translation without annotations weighs in at over eight hundred. The cost of a book of this length would limit its distribution to specialists, and size alone would discourage many students and readers with an interest in the

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Islamic faith traditions. 'Attār himself was well aware of such practical considerations. In his introduction he appeals to a hadith, or saying of the Prophet, to defend "taking the path of brevity and abridgment." This path was also taken by an earlier English translation. A.J. Arberry's *Muslim Saints and Mystics* presents only extracted narrative "episodes."¹ This approach, however, seriously distorts the basic structures of 'Attār's biographies. Throughout the *Memorial* the words of God's friends feature as prominently as their deeds. Teaching and experience go hand in hand, and the dicta give intellectual and spiritual substance to the stories. By omitting the aphorisms as well as the preface to each biography, Arberry's version deprives the *Memorial* of its conceptual depth, leaving behind a collection of mystical exotica that is of limited usefulness for most serious purposes. By presenting the major biographies in their entirety (constituting almost two-thirds of the entire text), I aim to preserve the integrity of 'Attār's complex portraits of these vital representatives of the principles of Islamic spirituality.

Memorial of God's Friends is itself an example of the translator's art. As 'Attār claims in his introduction, the sayings of the friends of God are a commentary on the Qur'an and hadith and thus lie near the heart of the Islamic revelation. But since these sayings are in Arabic, they have remained closed to those who cannot devote time to the formidable task of mastering this language. 'Attār undertakes the task of rendering them into Persian "so everyone," from the common people to the elite, "can be included." This inclusivity implies an approach to translation that stresses the naturalization of the source text for a broad target audience. In rendering the Persian into English, I have tried to make 'Attār's principles my guide. This decision has a number of implications for usage and style. Whenever possible, I have avoided importing Arabic and Persian words directly into English. There are, however, a few culture-specific terms that have resisted my efforts to find appropriate English equivalents and have been incorporated into my translation without italics. Some of these are likely to be known to most readers. The Qur'an is God's revelation to Mohammad and the scriptural foundation of Islam; the Ka'ba is the main shrine at Mecca and the goal of the Muslim pilgrimage or hajj. Less widely known perhaps is "hadith," the body of reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet, that provides an essential guide for the behavior and beliefs of all pious Muslims, Sufi or otherwise. "Rak'at" is the sequence of physical move-

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ments made by the Muslim worshiper during prayer, such as bowing, kneeling, and touching the forehead to the ground, accompanied by prayers and recitations from the Qur'an. "Dinar" and "dirham" are the names of gold and silver coins respectively.

In the same spirit I have used a simplified, pronunciation-based Persian transliteration for proper names. Most of the diacritical markings in scholarly transliterations are based on Arabic sounds and letters that have no effect on Persian pronunciation and would serve little purpose in the present context. Simplified Persian spellings should help bring the names more easily to the mind and tongue of the general reader, while those familiar with the original Arabo-Persian spellings should have little trouble recognizing the names in this form. Persian consonants are pronounced like their English equivalents with three exceptions: "kh" is sounded like the "ch" in Bach; "gh" is the same consonant voiced, that is, sounded with vocal cords vibrating; and "q" is pronounced like a "k" pushed to the very back of the mouth (the uvula). The vowels also have near equivalents in English: "a" is pronounced as in "cat"; "e," as in "pet"; and "o" as a short version of the vowel in "coat." The Persian "i" is like the long vowel in "meet," and the "u," like "lute." The long "ā" indicates an open sound similar to the vowel in "call." Where there is a possibility of confusion with other standard transliterations of these names into Latin characters, I have included full consonantal diacritics in the notes and bibliography based on the Library of Congress Persian transliteration system. In the interest of guiding pronunciation, I have also indicated the assimilation of the Arabic definite article where appropriate: "al-Hoseyn," but "as-Sādeq."

I have purposely kept annotations to a minimum. 'Attār remarks that if he had provided a commentary on all the sayings of God's friends, "it would have required a thousand sheets of paper." The same might be said of extensive explanatory notes to this translation. Passages from the Qur'an are identified by chapter and verse in brackets following the quotation. I have included a glossary of proper names that appear more than once in the text and notes on the sole occurrence of others. In identifying historical figures, I have relied on the annotation provided by Mohammad Este'lāmi in his edition of the *Tazkerat*, as well as standard reference works, such as Dehkhodā's encyclopedic Persian dictionary *Loghatnāma*, the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (abbrevi-

ated *Elr*), and the second edition of *Encyclopedia of Islam (EI²)*. Entries in these latter two works will provide the interested reader with additional historical information on the major figures included in the *Memorial* and some suggestions for further reading. Dates in the notes and glossary are given in current era reckoning. The spelling of geographical names follows the third edition of *Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*. I have annotated only those place-names that do not appear in this standard reference work.

A few other points of usage should be mentioned here. Although 'Attār was rigorous in his efforts to render his Arabic sources into Persian, he did let certain passages stand in their original language. For the most part, these are fundamental religious texts, such as hadith and quotations from the Qur'an (with which most of his audience would have been familiar), but they also include the occasional proverb or line of poetry. I have used italics to indicate passages that are translated directly from Arabic into English. 'Attār sometimes follows an Arabic passage with a Persian translation; in these cases, I render the Persian into English and note only those passages where 'Attār's Persian translation differs markedly from the literal sense of the Arabic.

Many everyday words gradually acquired specialized meanings in the Sufi lexicon. The expressions "this clan" and "this folk," for example, usually refer to the Sufis and other friends of God. I have generally adhered to a single English equivalent throughout the text when such words are used in a technical sense; *zohd*, for example, is rendered as "renunciation," and *morāqabat* as "watchfulness." In rendering this technical lexicon, I have tried to find equivalents with a broad semantic range in English. God's friends themselves offer repeated and varied definitions of such terms, and too narrow an English translation would cramp this exploration of meaning. I have also felt free to deviate from these equivalencies when such words are used as part of the common vocabulary of the language. In one case, however, I felt that it was crucial to preserve the play between the technical and the common lexical meanings. In Arabic (though more rarely in Persian), the word *nafs* serves as a reflexive pronoun, "self"; in mystical writing the word further denotes the part of the human personality that is bound up with status, material values, and individuation. Modifiers such as *car-nal* or *lower* are not only verbally clunky, but also overemphasize the physicality of *nafs*, a concept that encompasses bodily desire, egoistic

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identity, and public standing. I have attempted to signal this complexity by playing the English reflexive—"He said to himself"—against an apparently ungrammatical possessive—"He said to his self."

Note should also be made of one especially problematic term. Many members of the spiritual elite cultivated an intuitive and experiential knowledge of God called *ma'refat* in Arabic and Persian; those especially noted for this type of knowledge are called *'ārefān*. These terms are often translated as "gnosis" and "gnostic" respectively. For the English reader, however, these words are probably too closely associated with the Gnostic movements of early Christian and late Hellenistic philosophy to ever return to their original lexical meanings. Although diverse forms of Gnosticism were among the threads woven into the fabric of Islamic spirituality, "mystical intuition" took on senses in the lives and sayings of God's friends that have little kinship with the dualism often associated with Gnosticism. I have therefore opted for the term "realization"; one who has undergone the immediate experience of "realization" enters the ranks of "the realized."

My translation maintains the distinctions among the three terms 'Attar uses to refer to the deity. "God" renders the Arabic *Allāh*, and "Lord," the Persian *Khodā*. Following Michael Sells,² I have translated *Haqq* as "the Real" to convey the sense that God is the only absolute, ontological reality—as 'Attār writes, "*If we ponder existence, nothing exists but him.*" Although the coalescence of the terms *realization* and *the Real* creates a pun that does not exist in the Persian original, it is one that is appropriate to both the beliefs and the word play of the Sufis. I have chosen not to capitalize adjectives and pronouns referring to the deity. This decision is based in part on the usage of the original; the Persian alphabet lacks the distinction between uppercase and lowercase letters, and imposing it except in the case of grammatical necessities like the beginning of sentences and proper nouns seemed an unnecessary intervention. More important, in *Memorial of God's Friends*, as in other mystical texts, there is a constant interplay between the transcendent and the immanent aspects of the divinity, and capitalization would threaten to put a typographic foreclosure on this dynamic.³ In this regard, the Persian pronoun system has one other virtue that I have been unable to bring over into English—it is gender neutral. English grammar insists on an overt marking of gender in the pronouns, and following convention, I use "he" and "him" to indicate

a reality that is ultimately beyond all demarcations of gender or typography.

The basis of my translation is the text of *Tazkerat al-owliyā'* edited by Mohammad Este'lāmi, which is based on two early manuscripts copied within a century of 'Attār's death.⁴ Though less philologically reliable and containing some obvious scribal interpolations, the earlier edition of Reynold A. Nicholson proved useful for correcting the occasional misprints in Este'lāmi and shedding light on a few especially obscure passages.⁵ It was reassuring to find that some of the sentences that most puzzled me were also the bane of medieval scribes. As is common practice in modern critical editions, Este'lāmi has punctuated the Persian text fully. However useful, this punctuation does not have manuscript authority, and I have deviated from Este'lāmi's division of sentences when it seemed necessary to maintain the pacing and rhythm of 'Attār's prose.

Decisions about parsing sentences are only one small aspect of the daunting challenge of doing justice to the prose style of *Memorial of God's Friends* in English. At the time 'Attār was writing, Persian prose was well on its way to developing a rhetorically ornate and syntactically complex "high" or "artificial" prose style. Though signs of this emerging style can be found in the rhymed epithets that open each biography, 'Attār for the most part employs a much simpler and more straightforward diction. The *Memorial* is often regarded as the last great masterpiece in the so-called plain style (*nasr-e sādā*) in Persian prose. A recent Iranian critic identifies word choice, resonant phrasing, and inimitable brevity as the factors that most contribute to the power and grace of 'Attār's artfully artless style.⁶ Arberry's translation pays little regard to these qualities. At his best, Arberry demonstrates a keen accuracy in selecting English equivalents for Persian words and a knack for turning a phrase. All too often, however, the laconic and almost colloquial vigor of 'Attār's Persian is replaced by an English that is stilted, archaizing, and unidiomatic in its over-literal rendering of Persian idiom. Readers are seldom allowed to forget that they are reading a translation of an "oriental" text. In attempting to re-create 'Attār's style in English, I take his poised restraint as my model. I have tried to resist temptations to spice up 'Attār's lexicon with unnecessary synonyms, to smooth out his short prose periods by subordinating and fusing sentences, and to create a more obviously "polished" flow by

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adding or deleting transitional phrases. My goals have been well-defined syntax, elevated natural diction, and rhythmically crisp phrasing. Though I cannot pretend to rival 'Attār's mastery, I do hope to have conveyed accurately the stylistic register and inflection of the original as well as my ear permits.

While I remain as close as possible to the style and phrasing of the text, certain changes were inevitable if the naturalness of the Persian was to be brought over to English. Whenever too literal an adherence to syntax or wording resulted in awkward "translator-ese," I did not hesitate to modify it in keeping with contemporary American usage. I have adapted Persian phrase order to the usages of native English syntax and consistently altered a few sentence structures that are natural to Persian but invariably sound forced when brought directly into English, such as long, non-specific relative clauses ("the one who"). Persian pronoun reference is much looser than its English counterpart, and I have sometimes substituted the appropriate noun where the reference in Persian is clear but would be vague in English. Finally, in the long section of sayings and aphorisms that are an essential component of every biography, I have used line spacing and quotation marks in place of the repeated citation verb "s/he said" (*goft*) that demarcates the sayings in Persian.

This translation of *Memorial of God's Friends* has taken shape over the course of several years. It was too often set aside for other projects, for unexpected professional convulsions, and for an extended period of medical convalescence. During all this time, however, the *Memorial* was never far from my thoughts or my pen and was a valued companion through all these vicissitudes, as 'Attār would have wanted it to be. This extended gestation tried the patience of more friends and colleagues than I can name here and has earned them my deepest gratitude. This project began when Michael Sells first asked me to undertake the translation of the biography of Rābe'a-ye 'Adaviya for his book *Early Islamic Mysticism*;⁷ it is a testament to both the power of 'Attār's words and Michael's encouragement that what first seemed to be the diversion of a few weeks became an obsession of many years. Over this time I received great moral and intellectual support from colleagues that I first met at the University of Chicago, Th. Emil Homerin, Franklin Lewis, and Sunil Sharma. Devin DeWeese, Jacques Merceron, Kemal Silay,

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and Suzanne P. Stetkevych were among the many who offered counsel and friendship during the ups and downs of the work-a-day world at Indiana University. The enthusiastic response of my colleagues at Indiana's Medieval Studies Institute and of the students in my courses on Persian mystical literature assured me that 'Attār's world could indeed be translated across language, culture, and time. In the final stages of the project the editor of the Persian text of the *Tazkerat*, Mohammad Este'lāmi, kindly sent me the introduction for the forthcoming revised edition. Leonard Lewisohn shared many an illuminating word of strength and insight during some very dark days. I can only hope that my efforts here begin to requite them all for their enduring generosity. Despite this collective wisdom and good will, I have no doubt often gone astray of my own volition and ignorance. In the words of the great translator of Plotinus, Stephen MacKenna, "The present writer must have made mistakes, some perhaps that to himself will one day appear inexcusable: his one consolation is that the thing he will that day welcome from other hands has most certainly passed through his own, and been deliberately rejected. Where he appears most surely to have sinned against the light, it is most sure that he has passed through an agony of hesitation."⁸ My wife, Arzetta Hults Losensky, shared in all these agonies and hesitations and in the joys and delights as well; she read through every draft, painstakingly compiled lists of names and quotations, and still woke up with a smile in the morning—to her I dedicate this book.

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Society's praise can be cheaply secured, and almost all men are content with these easy merits; but the instant effect of conversing with God will be to put them away. There are persons who are not actors, not speakers, but influences; persons too great for fame, for display; who disdain eloquence; to whom all we call art and artist, seems too nearly allied to show and by-ends, to the exaggeration of the finite and selfish, and loss of the universal.

—Emerson, “The Divinity School Address”

Like all good titles, *Tazkerat al-owliyā'*—*Memorial of God's Friends*—can tell us much about the purpose and topic of the book. The Persian word *tazkerat*, like the English word *memorial*, is related in form and meaning to ideas of memory and remembrance. Etymologically, the causative verbal noun *tazkerat* comes from the Arabic root *dh-k-r* and means “to make remember” or “to remind.” In later centuries *tazkerat* would become common in the titles of collective biographies (especially of poets), but 'Attār was apparently the first writer to employ the word in this way.¹ Earlier biographical compendiums had commonly been called *tabaqāt*; roughly meaning “rank” or “layers,” this word indicates a method of classification according to social and professional classes or generational succession. Like these earlier works, 'Attār's *Memorial* follows a broadly chronological sequence. The choice of title, however, speaks less to the organization of the work than to its intended effect and purpose.

This purpose has its foundations in scripture and devotional practice. Remembrance, as Michael Sells observes, “is one of the core concepts of the Qur'an and of Islamic civilization.”² In explaining his reasons for composing the *Memorial*, 'Attār quotes the opening sentence of Qur'an 11:120, activating the memory of the reader to recall the conclusion of the verse:

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We make your heart firm with all the stories of the prophets that we relate to you. In them there has come to you the truth and an exhortation and a remembrance to those who believe.

“Remembrance,” *dhikrá*, in turn, evokes its echo in *tazkerat*. The *Memorial* thus partakes in the work of the Qur'an itself—to exhort believers to follow the path of mindful awareness and to remind them of God's constant omnipresence. It does so by recalling the words and lives of those who believe with a special intensity, the men and women who best exemplify humankind's continuing relationship with the divine in a post-prophetic age. Following etymological memory to its source, we arrive at *zeker* (*dhikr*). Remembrance here manifests itself in a broad range of Sufi devotional practices. These typically involve the ritualistic repetition of God's names and attributes but may extend to regulated breathing, prescribed movements, or dance. In this wider sense *zeker* is closely bound up with all varieties of contemplation and meditation.³ Whatever form it may take, the purpose of *zeker* is always the same: to purify oneself in order to draw closer to God.⁴

The rich linguistic and cultural resonance of the title word *tazkerat* suggests how 'Attār approaches his task as biographer. Although he has a remarkable command of the sources available to him, his purpose is not primarily to give an accurate, well-documented historical record. Rather, like architectural monuments built to commemorate deceased national heroes, *Memorial of God's Friends* serves to assure the continuing significance of certain ideals in the present. It provides a locus of veneration and emulation. At the end of his introduction, 'Attār summarizes the reasons that motivated him to collect and transmit the words of God's friends, emphasizing the devotional aims of his work:

First, [these words] make people's hearts cold to this world. Second, they make the mind dwell continually on the after-world. Third, they bring out the love of the Real in people's hearts. Fourth, when people hear this sort of discourse, they begin to prepare provisions for the endless road.

In memorializing the spiritual heroes of the past, 'Attār hopes to free his readers of the material and worldly attachments of the self, to focus their attention on the true reality of the sacred realm, to rekindle their

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primordial bond with God, and to prepare them for the endless journey toward divine union. 'Attār boasts that his book is the best of all books in creation because it constitutes a commentary on the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions. 'Attār's statement of purpose recalls similar passages in the Qur'an itself:

True believers are those whose hearts fill with fear when God is remembered and whose faith increases when his verses are recited and who put their trust in their Lord. [8:2]

Memorial of God's Friends is not primarily a historical recreation of a lost past, but rather an act of sacred remembrance and devotion that intends to enable its readers to transcend the limitations of the self and reconnect with ultimate values and realities.

So, who are these friends of God? This brings us to the second word in 'Attār's title, *owliyā'*, the plural form of *vali*. The word derives from the Arabic root *w-l-y* meaning "to be near or close." In its basic sense, then, the *vali Allāh* is someone who enjoys an especially close relationship with God.⁵ The nature of this relationship can vary. In some regards, as one scholar has recently suggested, the affinity between God and the *vali* can best be described in terms of patronage and alliance. The *owliyā'* are those who "aid God's cause on earth,"⁶ his allies and helpers rather than his friends. For some *owliyā'*, such as Hasan of Basra and Dāvud-e Tā'i, the relationship with God is shaped largely by fear of divine wrath and seems to fall outside our usual notion of friendship. In the Qur'an, God characterizes himself as *vali* on several occasions, but even false idols can be identified as *owliyā'*. In such contexts the word is usually rendered as "protector" or "patron":

God is the protector of those who have faith. He will lead them out of the darkness into light. The patrons of those who reject the faith are idols, and they lead them out of the light into darkness. [2:257]

An essential element of the bond between God and his closest followers, then, is guidance, alliance, and mutual support.

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'Attār recognizes the various affiliations embraced by the term *owliyā*'. In his introduction he sketches the diversity of God's friends:

Some are adherents of mystical realization and some of proper conduct; some are adherents of love and some of unity; and some are all of these. Some are self-possessed, and some are ecstatics.

The attributes here include not only the intuitive apprehension of God and ecstatic participation in the unity of being that we associate with the Sufi way, but also the moral rectitude, self-restraint, and pietistic conduct of those whose devotion falls within more normative ideals of ritualistic law and faith. Nevertheless, when 'Attār renders the Arabic-derived *owliyā*' in words of strictly Persian origin, he uses the expression *dustān-e khodā*—"friends of the Lord." 'Attār is less concerned with the precise nature of the relationship than with its ardent closeness, an intimacy that embraces deferential respect, painful yearning, brash forwardness, awestruck trepidation, and loving union.

To better understand 'Attār's concept of *owliyā*', let us turn to one of his lyric poems. In a *ghazal* that can aptly serve as a verse introduction to *Memorial of God's Friends*, 'Attār describes many of the typical features and paradoxes of these spiritual heroes. As the poem opens, 'Attār alludes to two hadith. The first, a *hadith-e qodsi*, relates the words of God as spoken by Mohammad and employs an architectural image to express the secluded and privileged converse between God and his friends: *My friends are under my domes, and no one knows them but me*. The effect of such communion, in Emerson's words, is to put away society's praise. As so often in Sufi literature, this detachment from the world is represented by poverty. According to 'Attār's interpretation of the Prophet's saying *Poverty is on the verge of unbelief*, God's friends fall outside the pale of social respectability and religiosity not simply because of the material impoverishment that characterizes many of their lives, but because of their estrangement from the mundane and their disregard for conventional societal mores. Living in the world of time and space, but existing with God beyond both, they suffer from the very yearning that brings them into the proximity of the divine.

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On your path, there are people hidden
from themselves, without form or direction,
nameless, leaving not a trace.
Beneath a secret dome,
“where no one knows them but me,”
beloved from eternity,
they are veiled from the world.
They have pitched a tent, woven of poverty
“so close to unbelief.” They remain hidden
from people behind the grimy faces of the poor.

They are a folk neither good nor evil,
not self-less, not self-possessed,
neither existent, nor nonexistent,
absent in plain sight.
In the world of me and we,
they are neither me nor we.
With you in time and space,
they remain timeless and placeless.
Their souls universal in the truth,
their bodies are one with the law:
They are both all soul and all body,
but neither this nor that.

Turning like a circle, fixed at its center,
a hundred circles climbing to the empyrean
without leaving the point of the soul—
seeing the essence of subsistence,
they pass away from themselves.
Drowned in the sea of certainty,
they are lost in the deserts of doubt.
From the tip of every hair,
they speak in myriad tongues,
but muteness leaves them
speechless and dumb.

All flying quickly with weighty reason
and suddenly burdened by light spirit.

Endless worlds beyond hope and fear—
under a writ of protection,
they are emaciated by dread.
The backs of the warriors were broken
by riding too quickly. The mount vanished,
the hands are left holding the reins.
With high aspiration, they happily sold
both worlds for a loaf of bread,
but they remain dependent on two loaves
from the unhappiness of the world.
A person never of mother born:
all of them just so,
yet still with you through poverty.

When 'Attār explained the path of such folk,
his heart palpitated,
and he nearly breathed his last.⁷

Memorial of God's Friends presents “the path of such folk” in all its glory and pain. Like the title of the work, this poem encapsulates the subject and the purpose of 'Attār's compendium of the words and deeds of these broken yet victorious warriors. In remembering those who seem “never of mother born,” 'Attār finds himself on the verge of slipping his mortal bonds and entering a realm of pure spirit, a state of being not unlike that of God's friends themselves.

Earthly Remains: 'Attār's Life and Works

'Attār marks the end of this *ghazal* by inscribing his name in the final verse. Though this closing act of self-naming is conventional in the Persian lyric, it does remind us of how few traces 'Attār left of his material existence. We know virtually nothing of his personal life, and like the mystical quest for knowledge of the divine, the painstaking research of modern scholars has been more successful in defining who 'Attār was not than in revealing the attributes of who he was. Legend, for example, gave 'Attār a lifespan of 114 years, the same number as the chapters in the Qur'an, and credited him with 114 works to match.

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This coincidence cannot withstand even the most mildly skeptical examination, but it indicates the sort of pious legends that accumulated to fill the historical vacuum. When 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmi (d. 1492), the great Sufi and poet of fifteenth-century Herat, tells the tale of 'Attār's conversion to the mystical path, he displays a greater command of hagiographic narrative than of positivistic accuracy:

They say that the reason for his conversion was that one day he working away happily in his apothecary shop. A dervish happened in and several times asked, "Something for God?" 'Attār paid no attention to him. "Sir," the dervish asked, "how will you die?"

'Attār said, "Just as you will."

"Can you die like me?"

"Certainly."

The dervish placed the wooden bowl he was holding beneath his head, uttered "God," and surrendered his soul. 'Attār was transformed, closed up his shop, and embarked on this path.⁸

Jāmi's story echoes the anecdotes of the conversions and deaths of God's friends that are basic, recurring elements of the biographies in *Memorial of God's Friends*. Like Sari-ye Saqati (p. 278, below), 'Attār in this story repents of his mercantile concerns to take up a life of Sufi devotion. Like 'Ali-ye Sahl of Isfahan (pp. 385–86, below), the dervish in this story wills his own death; both mystics demonstrate the power of the will over biology in the presence of a representative of the medical profession, an apothecary (pharmacist) in this tale and a phlebotomist (surgeon) in the case of 'Ali-ye Sahl. Though such precedents contribute to the literary force of Jāmi's story of 'Attār's spiritual awakening, they also call into question its validity as an account of a historically unique event. Like 'Attār's accounts of the pioneers of Islamic spirituality, Jāmi's biography of 'Attār tends more to the devotional than to the reportorial.

Another oft-repeated legend of 'Attār's life began to circulate at about the same time that Jāmi was writing. In *Tazkerat ash-sho'arā* (*Memorial of the Poets*) completed in 1487, Dowlatshāh of Samarqand tells of the meeting of two giants of Persian mystical poetry. Fleeing the

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city of Balkh in Central Asia, the young Jalāl ad-Din Rumi passes through the city of Nishapur in the company of his father, Bahā' ad-Din:

Sheikh Farid ad-Din 'Attār came to see Bahā' ad-Din. At that time, Jalāl ad-Din was a child. 'Attār gave his book *Asrār-nāma* to Jalāl ad-Din as a gift and said to his father, "It won't be long before this son of yours sets fire to all in the world who are consumed by love and suffering."⁹

As Franklin Lewis has shown, though such a meeting was "theoretically possible," it cannot be supported by another "shred of credible evidence" beyond this late source.¹⁰ Despite its lack of factual substance, however, the story does embody historical reality of another sort: Rumi held 'Attār's poetry in the highest esteem and was profoundly influenced by his work. Their poetic and spiritual encounter was, in fact, more powerful than any actual, face-to-face meeting could have been. The stories in *Memorial of God's Friends* will often put far more strain on the modern reader's credulity than this imagined meeting of 'Attār and Rumi. But in such cases, as here, we must be on the lookout for other realities that the story is meant to convey.

Once late, legendary accretions such as these have been chipped away from 'Attār's life story, the remaining certainties are few.¹¹ Although 'Attār's exact date of birth is unknown, we can be confident that his life spanned the second half of the twelfth and the first quarter of the thirteenth centuries (1150–1225). His grandfather was named Eshāq, and his father, Ebrāhim. As the penname 'Attār suggests, the family was probably connected to the medical arts in some way, though there is scant direct evidence that the poet himself was active as a professional apothecary. His personal name was Mohammad, and he bore the honorific Farid ad-Din, "Unique in the Faith." He lived and died in the city or district of Nishapur, located in what is today northeastern Iran. The most widely accepted date for 'Attār's death is April 1221, when the Mongols sacked the city of Nishapur and put its inhabitants to the sword. Persuasive arguments, however, can be made for dates as late as 1229 or 1230.¹² Recent research has put forward new suggestions regarding 'Attār's spiritual and literary training, but these findings remain tentative.

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The most important traces of 'Attār's earthly existence are, of course, his literary works, and here we are on somewhat firmer ground. As many as twenty-five works have been reasonably attributed to poets with the pen name 'Attār, but philological research has shown that most of these do not belong to our Farid ad-Din. Some appear to come from the pen of another poet who shared the same *nom de plume* and lived in the same area of Iran but was active more than two centuries later—'Attār of Tun. Others can perhaps be most generously characterized as pious fabrications by otherwise anonymous writers who wished to bask in 'Attār's spiritual aura. Scholars were still sifting through these works as late as the 1990s, and their research has now resulted in what seems to be a general consensus on the authenticity of six poetic works in addition to the one prose work translated here.¹³

Two of these works are, properly speaking, collections. 'Attār's *Divān*, or collected shorter works, contains his lyric poems, an example of which we read above. These include songs of spiritual longing and despair, meditations on mystical themes and symbols, and even short narratives. They are organized alphabetically according to rhyme, a formal scheme of arrangement typical of the collected works of medieval Persian poets. Like the *Divān*, *Mokhtār-nāma* (*The Choice Book*) consists of shorter poems, specifically *robā'i* or quatrains, a genre familiar to English readers through Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyām. The method of arrangement in *Mokhtār-nāma*, however, is thematic rather than formal. Over two thousand quatrains are grouped into fifty chapters according to topic. The first half of the work is devoted to mystical and ethical matters, such as the extinction of the self, bewilderment, union with the spirit, and God's unity; the second half turns to various attributes of the beloved and the phases of amatory and spiritual love. *Mokhtār-nāma* indicates not only the range of 'Attār's poetic vision but also his insistent concern for the coherent disposition of literary material.

The other four poetic works are didactic poems of several thousand verses written in rhymed couplets, a form known in Persian as the *masnavi*. Each of these works is made up of a series of short narratives—drawn from folk tales, history, and religious lore—that serves to illustrate ethical, moral, or mystical themes. This basic structure appears in its simplest form in *Asrār-nāma* (*The Book of Secrets*). This work consists of twenty-two discourses: a basic concept of Sufi teach-

ing is first presented in general terms and then elaborated with a number of exemplary tales. In the other three *masnavis* this repeated pattern of theme and illustration is unified by an overarching frame story. The most famous of these is the allegory now known as *Manteq at-teyr* or *The Conference of the Birds*.¹⁴ In it, birds of every species set off in search of the mythical bird Simorgh under the guidance of the hoopoe. As each bird voices its excuses and doubts, the hoopoe takes the opportunity to explain the values and doctrines of the mystical quest with pertinent exemplum. In *Mosibat-nāma* (*The Book of Hardship*), a Sufi pilgrim (*sālek*) in a state of spiritual bewilderment is advised by his elder to appeal to forty celestial and terrestrial entities for relief and enlightenment. Each entity, from the angels and the heavenly throne to the four elements and heaven and hell, comments on its own spiritual state with a series of tales, showing the pilgrim that they are no better off than he is. Only when the pilgrim encounters Spirit does he discover that the answer to his confusion and despair lies within himself. It has been recently demonstrated that the poem we now know as the *Elāhi-nāma* (*The Book of the Divine*) was originally entitled *Khosrow-nāma* (*The King's Book*).¹⁵ It tells the story of a king who discovers that his six sons have all fixed their aspirations on worldly desires; mixing his counsel with exemplary anecdotes, he tries to persuade them that their goal, if properly understood, can be achieved by drawing on their own spiritual resources.¹⁶

These frame stories and the pattern of theme and illustration give structure to a wildly heterogeneous mass of anecdotal material. 'Attār's seemingly boundless store of narrative draws on history, legend, folklore, everyday life, and the religious tradition, including some of the same tales of God's friends that are found in the *Memorial*. To show how 'Attār integrated such tales into his longer poems, let us turn to a passage from *Elāhi-nāma*. The king's fifth son expresses his desire to possess the signet ring of Solomon, which would give him power over the entire world of animate creation from humans and genies to insects and birds. His father replies that such political dominion is no more than a transitory pleasure that will cost his son his immortal soul. To drive his point home, the king tells stories of some of the most powerful monarchs in Iranian history, such as Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Ghazna, and Sultan Sanjar, who are reminded of their responsibilities and limitations by sages and commoners alike. Among these tales

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we read the story of the conversion of Ebrāhim ebn Adham at the hands of the immortal spiritual guide Khezr:

Ebrāhim son of Adham sat enthroned;
slaves, arms folded, stood before and behind.
A jewel-encrusted crown upon his head,
he wore a robe embroidered with silver.
Unannounced, Khezr barged into the hall,
dressed in the garb of a camel driver.
Fearful of him, slaves all caught their breath.
Everyone who saw him was overwhelmed.
When Ebrāhim caught sight of him, off guard
he demanded, "Beggar, who let you in?"
"Isn't there a room for me here?" Khezr replied.
"This is an inn. I'll rest here a while."
Ebrāhim son of Adham shouted back,
"This is the castle of a mighty sultan!
Why, you fool, why do you call it an inn?
You seem to be bright enough—are you mad?"
Khezr then loosed his tongue and said, "O King,
who was the first that this country possessed?"
Ebrāhim told him that so-and-so first
conquered the place and then stayed on as king.
After him came so-and-so, after him
one more: "Now I rule here, king of the world!"
Khezr said, "Although the king is unaware,
this palace is an inn and nothing more.
People come and go continuously.
Can one take up residence in an inn?
As many a king has come before you,
passing on whether they were good or bad,
so they will come for you seeking your life
and steal you away from this ancient inn.
Why do you lounge in this caravanserai?
You don't belong here. Why is it you stay?"
When Ebrāhim heard this, he was transformed.
These words set his head spinning like a ball.
When Khezr departed, he ran after him.

(How can anyone escape from Khezr's snare?)
 He swore him many an oath and begged him,
 "Young man, knight, accept me now if you can.
 Since you have secretly planted a seed
 in my heart, give it water. Give it life!"
 Ebrāhim said this and followed Khezr's path
 till he became a man of truest faith.
 He rejected the old inn of this world.
 He gave up sovereignty for poverty.
 The great recognized poverty's secret
 and purchased it with transitory wealth.
 They fled the form and image of kingship,
 escaping beggary to find meaning.
 Though the realm of this world is sovereignty,
 when you look close, at root it's beggary.¹⁷

The basic story line of Ebrāhim's encounter with Khezr as 'Attār tells it here is virtually identical to the prose version in *Memorial of God's Friends* (pp. 128–29, below). But two differences in plotting are indicative of 'Attār's attention to context. In *Elāhi-nāma*, 'Attār presents the story as part of the king's instruction to his son and points up the thematic message of the story by adding a moralizing coda that contrasts the liberating poverty of the spiritually enlightened with the abject dependency of those blinded by material power and riches. In the *Memorial*, on the other hand, this story is only one element in a longer, compound story of Ebrāhim's conversion. To build narrative suspense 'Attār withholds the identity of the intruder until the end of the tale. Khezr's revelation of his name and subsequent disappearance launch the reader into the second part of the story, in which Ebrāhim wanders dazed through the desert and attains enlightenment through the miraculous speech of a gazelle and a saddle pommel. Such suspense would only muddle the thematic point that the king wants to make in the *Elāhi-nāma* but is appropriate to building tension when the focus falls directly on the story of Ebrāhim himself.¹⁸

Intellectual Background and Sources of *Memorial of God's Friends*

The stories and aphorisms that 'Attār utilized in his poetic works and in *Memorial of God's Friends* are the product of a rich intellectual and poetic tradition. Nishapur, where 'Attār lived and died, was one of the major cities in the broad geographical area known as greater Khorasan. The region is today divided among the countries of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. Medieval geographers roughly defined Khorasan as a quadrangle with four cities at its corners: Merv (now Mary), Balkh, Herat, and Nishapur. Located at the boundary of Central Asia and the Iranian plateau, Nishapur was one of the principal trading cities on the network of caravan routes known as the Silk Road. In the ninth century the city also became an important political center. As the centralized rule of the 'Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad lost its influence over more distant reaches of the empire, a succession of local dynasties rose to power in Khorasan, with Nishapur as a key administrative capital. In spite of a series of manmade and natural catastrophes, Nishapur would remain one of the most influential and prosperous cities in the Islamic world for the next four centuries, until its heyday came to a violent end with the Mongol sack of the city in 1221.

Economic prosperity and political independence helped to bring about a florescence in cultural life. Tenth-century Khorasan witnessed the reemergence of Persian as a written language, soon to be on a par with Arabic as a medium of poetry, history, and scholarship. Ferdowsi (d. ca. 1021), the author of the Persian national epic or *Shāhnāma*, came from the village of Tus, located in the district of Nishapur, and the tomb of the famous mathematician and poet 'Omar Khayyām (d. 1122) lies on the outskirts of the city, only a few miles from that of 'Attār. Literary life flourished amid a rich material culture. Excavations have revealed elaborately constructed homes adorned with murals, and local potters created striking painted ceramics with calligraphic, figural, and abstract designs, among the finest ever produced in the Islamic world. So prominent was Nishapur that local historians documented the life of the urban elite in extensive biographical compendiums.¹⁹

The province of Khorasan was a crucial area for the development of Sufism. *Memorial of God's Friends* includes the biographies of sev-

eral formative figures active in the region, such as Ebrāhim ebn Adham, Abu Torāb of Nakhshab, and Bāyazid of Bestām, whose teachings informed Sufism for centuries. Modern scholars have speculated at length on the identity of 'Attār's teachers in poetry and Sufism but with limited success. The most likely candidates are either well-known figures with no established links to the poet or obscure names that add little to our understanding of 'Attār.²⁰ In broader terms, however, the identity of his personal mentors is of secondary importance: his intellectual and spiritual life was shaped by over two centuries of poetic achievement and Sufi activity in Khorasan. 'Attār felt a particularly close kinship to the great Sufi sheikh Abu Sa'id ebn Abi'l-Kheyr (d. 1049).²¹ His hospice was a center of religious activity in Nishapur for several decades, and his life is the subject of one of great masterpieces of biographical writing in Persian.²² Although he probably wrote no poetry himself, Abu Sa'id frequently used secular, popular verse in his sermons and was instrumental in establishing Persian poetry as a vehicle for Sufi teaching and preaching. 'Abdollāh Ansāri (d. 1089) was active further east in Herat but spent some years as a student in Nishapur and left behind a substantial body of writing in both Arabic and Persian. His theoretical treatise *Manāzel as-sā'erān* (*The Stations of the Wayfarers*) systematically lays out the stages of the mystic path. In a series of moving prayers and meditations, *Monājāt*, Ansāri transforms the flexible rhythms and rhymes of the early, hymn-like revelations of the Qur'an into a mesmerizing, incantory Persian prose.²³ Out of this milieu appeared the first great Persian Sufi poet, Majd ad-Din Sanā'i (d. ca. 1138).²⁴ Though he began his career as a poet of the court, Sanā'i earned his place in literary history through his mystically colored *ghazals* and his *Hadiqat al-haqiqat* (*The Walled Garden of Truth*), the first substantial *masnavi* in Persian devoted to ethical and mystical teaching that survives intact today. Sanā'i's work opened the door for later poets such as 'Attār and Rumi and had an abiding influence on the subsequent tradition of Sufi poetry.

Of more immediate concern for our present purpose are the authors and works that contributed directly to the making of *Memorial of God's Friends*. 'Attār, as researchers have often noted, does not list his sources by name, and his reference in the introduction to three works has raised more questions than it has answered. *Sharh al-qalb* (*The Commentary of the Heart*) is apparently one of 'Attār's early

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poetic works that he himself destroyed.²⁵ The other two—*Kashf al-asrār* (*The Unveiling of Secrets*) and *Ma'refat an-nafs* (*Knowledge of the Self*)—have yet to be satisfactorily identified, but it is generally thought that they, too, are lost works by the poet himself. In any case, 'Attār does not refer to these books as sources for the *Memorial* but as commentaries on the mystical aphorisms. Despite his silence on the subject, however, it is clear that 'Attār did his research well, drawing on as many as a dozen sources for information on the words and deeds of God's friends. Though these sources have yet to be thoroughly studied,²⁶ the Sufi circles of Nishapur and Khorasan produced the three works that contributed most to the *Memorial*. The first of these is one of the earliest accounts of the lives and sayings of the Sufis, *Tabaqāt as-sufiyya* (*The Sufi Ranks*) by Abu 'Abd ar-Rahmān as-Solami. Solami was born in Nishapur in 937 and died there in 1021,²⁷ and his biographical compendium provided 'Attār not only with much of the material, but also with the chronological sequence of *Memorial of God's Friends*. Two other works to which 'Attār was deeply indebted are expository manuals on the Sufi path. Perhaps no book was more important in consolidating and propagating the teachings and ideas of Sufism than the *Resāla* of Abu'l-Qāsem al-Qosheyri.²⁸ A student of Solami, Qosheyri (986–1072), was another of the great Sufi masters of Nishapur. Originally written in Arabic, his "Treatise" was translated into Persian by a student under Qosheyri's direction shortly after it was written and was no doubt among 'Attār's earliest introductions to the mystical path. A similar work was also composed in Persian at about the same time further east in Khorasan—*Kashf al-mahjub* by 'Ali ibn 'Osmān Hojviri (d. ca. 1072–77).²⁹ Like Qosheyri's *Resāla*, *Kashf al-mahjub* sets out to present Sufism as a coherent system of thought in line with mainstream Islamic doctrines and to introduce its fundamental concepts to a learned audience. The two works have a similar structure. A general introduction is followed by brief biographies of the major figures of Sufism; these lay the foundation for the main component of the work: a systematic exposition of the major terms, ideas, and stages of the Sufi path based on the saying of the great sheikhs.

Identifying 'Attār sources, however, is only a first step in understanding how he utilizes this disparate material and organizes it into coherent biographies. 'Attār employs the full resources of what the late André Lefevre defined as "rewriting"—quotation, paraphrase, word-

for-word and free translation, the integration of independent sources, and imitation.³⁰ In its simplest form this process is perhaps most familiar to us today through the anthology or encyclopedia entry, types of rewriting that are essential to education and the formation of a canonical body of knowledge. 'Attār selects key passages from texts that were well over a century old at the time when he was writing and makes them accessible and attractive to a contemporary audience in a single volume. Like modern translators, editors, biographers, and compilers, 'Attār popularizes, propagates, and interprets the written tradition in ways that will ensure its ongoing relevance and significance. In so doing, he creates a new image of his sources that often reaches a larger audience and exercises a greater influence than the source itself.

We can roughly divide the complex processes of rewriting into three stages: assimilation, recasting, and disposition. Assimilation operates most obviously at the level of language and style. Having gathered material from diverse sources in two different languages, 'Attār faced the task of forging it into a consistent and uniform prose. This was most easily done with passages that were already available in Persian. Even a cursory comparison reveals that 'Attār frequently incorporates passages from *Kashf al-mahjub* and the Persian translation of Qosheyri's *Resāla* into the *Memorial* word for word or with minor stylistic revisions. For the most part these revisions modify word choice to reflect current usage or edit syntax to create more concise and elegant sentences. Translating from Solami (and other Arabic sources) presented greater challenges. 'Attār's translation techniques range from an almost word-for-word calque to free interpretation. In the Arabic text of Solami's *Tabaqāt*, for example, 'Attār found this saying attributed to 'Ali-ye Sahl of Isfahan:

'Ali was asked about the reality of unity. He said, "It is close to speculations, distant in realities," and he recited this verse to some of them:

I said to my companions, "It is the sun.

*Its light is near, but grasping it, a remote possibility."*³¹

'Attār's Persian translation of the first part of this saying follows the Arabic word for word, adding only a particle or two for clarity:

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They asked about the reality of unity. He said, "It is near to where there are speculations, but it is distant in realities."

'Attār treats the verse that rounds out the saying in Solami very differently, making it into an independent aphorism that at first glance has little resemblance to its source:

They asked 'Ali-ye Sahl, "Say a few words about the idea of perception."

"Whoever fancies that he is closer is in reality further away. When the sunlight falls through the window, children want to grab a hold of the dust motes. They close their hands. They fancy they have something in their grasp. When they open their hands, they see nothing."

'Attār here exploits the metaphorical link between physical and mental apprehension, between grasping and perception. He then gives the notion of grasping the sun, a patent impossibility, a greater immediacy by introducing what one critic calls "one of the most prevalent motifs for the idea of the unity of being in 'Attār's poetry"—the dust mote.³² The attempt to take hold of the transcendent through its myriad material manifestations is no longer an absurdly unthinkable gesture but an act of innocent, childlike naivete. 'Attār here translates as a poet, exercising an independent creativity in re-creating his source in a new language and context. Through paraphrase, skillful editing, and translation, 'Attār transforms the disparate idioms of his sources into one of the recognized masterpieces of Persian prose style.

Recasting, or recontextualization, is the way in which an author creates a new compositional setting for earlier material in accordance with a new design and purpose. In the tradition of early Arabic historical writing and hadith scholarship, Solami typically authenticated anecdotes and aphorisms by using a device known as *esnād*. A chain of transmission cites a series of reporters, leading back from the author to a contemporary of the original speaker: "So-and-so told me that So-and-so told him...that So-and-so said." 'Attār announces his decision to omit these *esnāds* in his introduction, and he replaces them with simple formulas like "It is related" or "he said." Unlike Solami, 'Attār does not set out to provide a substantiated and well-documented historical

record, but rather to bring the words and deeds of God's friends into the spiritual consciousness of his readers. His work is a reminder (*tazk-erat*), not a "classification" (*tabaqāt*). Without the constant interruption of documentary *esnāds*, the biographies gather pace and cohesion. The characters are more sharply delineated as emphasis falls squarely on the anecdotes or aphorisms as expressions of personality and beliefs. 'Attār also recasts the material that he derived from expository treatises like those of Qosheyri and Hojviri. In these sources the sayings of the Sufis are organized topically; under the heading of renunciation, for example, we find pertinent utterances from many different teachers, normally linked together by the author's commentary. 'Attār, on the other hand, places the aphorisms together with the biographical anecdotes with little explanatory elaboration. Interest shifts from abstract principles of behavior or doctrine to the nuances and particulars of the individual encounter with the divine. *Memorial of God's Friends* thus not only epitomizes the rich spiritual heritage of Nishapur, Khorasan, and the wider Islamic world, but it refashions it with a new devotional relevance and experiential immediacy.

Dispositions of Character and Form

Once source material is assimilated to a consistent style and cast to fit a new design and purpose, there remains the problem of how to arrange this vast collection of stories and sayings into a coherent and self-contained whole. It is in the disposition or organization of material that 'Attār's creativity as a rewriter and literary artist is most evident. In the medieval Arabic and Persian tradition, biographical data was handed down in short, independent units that were easily memorized and transmitted orally. Anecdotes typically involve no more than two characters with well-defined roles in a simple story consisting of one major action or discovery. Dicta similarly are seldom longer than a sentence and usually exhibit a straightforward and often formulaic syntax. Even in a sustained discourse, these units tend to remain semi-independent. Flexible, yet clearly recognizable patterns of arrangement were essential if 'Attār was to succeed in integrating these detachable components into complex, cohesive portraits worthy of a reader's devotion and remembrance. In his narrative poems 'Attār achieves

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structural clarity and cohesion through the use of frame stories. But the greater demand for verisimilitude in biographical writing militates against such carefully crafted allegories. There is no equivalent in *Memorial of God's Friends* to the avian pilgrimage in *Conference of the Birds* or the celestial progress in the *The Book of Hardship*. We can nevertheless observe a conscientious shaping of historical material both in the *Memorial* as a whole and within each biography. Understanding how 'Attār uses disposition to create meaning and character is essential if we are to enter fully into the spiritual, intellectual, and experiential world of God's friends.

The original Persian version of the *Memorial* contains seventy-two biographies.³³ There is nothing in the historical record or in earlier biographical compendiums to dictate this number. Solami's *Tabaqāt* consists of one hundred and five lives, while the biographical portions of Qosheyri's *Resāla* and Hojviri's *Kashf al-mahjub* include eighty-three and sixty-four entries, respectively. The proliferation of three- and four-page biographies toward the end of *Memorial of God's Friends*, however, suggests that 'Attār took pains to reach precisely seventy-two. This number is common in medieval Islamic writings and does not have an exact quantitative value.³⁴ Seventy-two is used to indicate a general abundance and multiplicity, similar to the English *dozens*. The lack of quantitative specificity, however, only enhances the symbolic potential of the number. Most famously, seventy-two figures in a well-known saying of the Prophet: "*The Jews were split into seventy-one or -two sects; and the Christians were split into seventy-one or -two sects; and my community will be split into seventy-three sects.*"³⁵ This resonance of sacred history seems crucial to 'Attār's calculations. Each of his biographical subjects constitutes, as it were, a sect of one, and together represent the full range of Islamic spirituality, from the uncompromising moral scrupulousness of Dāvud-e Tā'i to the visionary realization of Nuri. Following the mathematics of the hadith further, each reader completes the count at seventy-three, traveling his or her own unique path to the divine. Whether the number of chapters has a specific allusive meaning or a more general symbolic association, it is a first indication of 'Attār's attention to significant structure in *Memorial of God's Friends*.

As we noted earlier, the arrangement of biographies in the *Memorial* follows a roughly chronological (as opposed to geographical

or alphabetical) order, based on the sequence established in Solami's *Tabaqāt*. Though chronology is resistant to rhetorical shaping, the beginning and ending of the work show that historical sequence was only one of the factors that entered into 'Attār's arrangements. In strictly chronological terms, the semi-legendary Oveys of Qaran, a contemporary of the prophet Mohammad, is the earliest figure included in the *Memorial*. His biography, however, is postponed, and the first chapter is devoted instead to Ja'far as-Sādeq, the sixth imam (or descendant of the Prophet), who died in 765. The placement of this biography runs counter to two of 'Attār's basic organizational principles. In the introduction he disclaims any intention of writing about the Prophet's family or companions, and in the chronological sequence of biographies, Ja'far's should come ninth or tenth. 'Attār goes out his way to explain this inconsistency:

We had said that if we were to memorialize the prophets, Mohammad's companions, and his family, it would require a separate book. This book will consist of the biographies of the masters of this clan, who lived after them. But as a blessing, let us begin with Sādeq (may God be pleased with him) for he too lived after them. Since he among the Prophet's descendants said the most about the path and many traditions have come down from him, I shall say a few words about this esteemed man, for they are all as one. When he is remembered, it is the remembrance of them all.

Given the importance of devotion and remembrance in the overall design the *Memorial*, it is only appropriate that 'Attār invoke them again here. But the inclusion and placement of Ja'far's biography is significant in other ways as well. Establishing heirship to the Prophet was a guiding principle in Islamic biographical writing,³⁶ and with a single stroke 'Attār integrates the family of Mohammad into the Sufi tradition, implying that its later exponents, too, are legitimate heirs of the prophetic lineage. As the *Memorial* progresses, Ja'far takes his place in other networks of association. Dāvud-e Tā'i, for example, makes his first appearance here as one Ja'far's interlocutors, and Ja'far himself will reemerge in an important subsidiary role later as the teacher Bāyazid of Bestām. 'Attār, however, also links biographies without the

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characters interacting directly. The placement of Ja'far's biography becomes more meaningful when 'Attār initiates the chronological sequence in Chapter 2. Ja'far and Oveys are complementary opposites. The former is of noble lineage, learned, and socially prominent; the latter is an outcast from his own tribe, unlettered, and an impoverished camel herder. Although neither met Mohammad face to face, Ja'far partakes in the prophetic heritage through genealogical descent, while Oveys sees the Prophet with spiritual sight and knows his teachings through divine inspiration. At the very beginning of the work 'Attār thus encompasses the full sweep of spiritual affinity and initiation: familial descent is set alongside devotional affiliation, and genealogical inheritance is balanced against spiritual attraction.

Patterns of interaction and opposition run throughout the course of *Memorial of God's Friends* and open up an expanding series of perspectives on each character. The most important of these oppositions is between two figures who never met—Bāyazīd of Bestām and Joneyd of Baghdad. In the two longest biographies in the *Memorial*, 'Attār establishes the famous distinction between the “intoxicated” and the “sober” schools of Sufism, between Bāyazīd's cultivation of rapture and self-effacement and Joneyd's struggle for self-control and subsistence in God. The contrast between the private mentor of rural Khorasan and the public preacher of metropolitan Baghdad extends even to their modes of dress. The opposition between these two masters is foreshadowed in the early chapters of the *Memorial*. Hasan of Basra and Rābe'a-ye 'Adaviya lived at the same time in Basra, and 'Attār gives them key roles in each other's biographies, embodying in dramatic form the contrast between Hasan's path of grief and Rābe'a's way of love. Joneyd's repeated appearances create another network of interaction. He plays an important part as a narrative foil in the biographies of more ecstatic mystics. In the account of Abu'l-Hoseyn Nuri, for example, Joneyd acts as a mentor who allows the reader to follow Nuri's spiritual development. In the tragedy of Hallāj, on the other hand, Joneyd represents the religious establishment and is instrumental in Hallāj's condemnation and martyrdom. By interweaving characters through the course of the work, 'Attār creates a sense of a coherent spiritual evolution across the historical sequence of discrete biographies.

'Attār manipulates chronology more subtly at the end of the *Memorial*. Composed at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the

work looks back on the lives it recounts from a distance of almost three centuries. From this distance 'Attār could choose his end point as he saw fit. His decision to end with the martyrdom of Hallāj in 922 is so artistically satisfying that it is seldom questioned, but it is not as obvious as it seems. None of 'Attār's sources gives Hallāj this pride of place. If 'Attār's goal were simply to define the end of the classical period of Sufism, Shebli's death in 946 would appear a far more appropriate date. He is mentioned far more frequently than Hallāj in the *Memorial*, but because he died after Hallāj, he is denied his own independent biography. From a purely historical point of view, Shebli is the last of the formative figures to live before the period of consolidation represented by Solami and Qosheyri. Historical precision, however, is not 'Attār's foremost concern. Hallāj's tragic fate, his gruesome execution, and his postmortem miracles give the closure of *Memorial of God's Friends* a resounding power that goes beyond questions of proper periodization.

'Attār's attention to significant form is also evident when we examine the internal structure of the biographies. A common structure provides a basis for comparison and interpretive judgment as we move through the book. Each biography is composed of three basic components. First comes an introduction—prefaced by a series of rhymed, laudatory epithets³⁷—that briefly summarizes the subject's beliefs and accomplishments and lists teachers and associates. This is typically followed by a set of brief anecdotes or stories. Aphorisms and sayings are grouped together after the stories. (Each section of sayings in my translation is clearly demarcated.) We can further isolate two recurrent types of anecdote: stories of repentance and conversion to the spiritual life come immediately after the introduction, and stories of death and after-death miracles follow the sayings at the end of the biography. A basic five-part sequence—introduction, conversion, stories, sayings, and death—serves to organize even the longest biographies, such as those of Bāyazīd and Joneyd. Variations of this pattern are possible and significant. For example, in the biographies of both Hasan of Basra and Joneyd a short selection of sayings and dicta is placed in the midst of the narrative anecdotes, foregrounding the role of public preaching in their lives. The loving intimacy of Rābe'a's relationship with God is emphasized by the substitution of a section devoted to her private devotions for the more typical maxims and aphorisms. Bāyazīd's say-

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ings culminate in a first-person recital of his visionary ascension into the divine presence. In shorter biographies the narrative content may be reduced to no more than a couple of brief anecdotes, and stories of conversion and death may be absent altogether. In spite of the priority often given to the stories in the *Memorial*, it is the introduction and sayings that constitute the essential core of every biography.

'Attār's introductions to the biographies announce the basic principles exemplified by each of his "sects of one" and guide our reading of the stories and sayings that follow. The opening phrases in the biography of Rābe'a, for example, place before the reader a set of terms and issues, such as sincerity, love, and proximity, that will figure throughout 'Attār's account of her life. The word *veil* alone sets in motion problematic questions of gender and secrecy that take on narrative form in the stories of Rābe'a's upbringing, her confrontations with the eminent men of the day, and even the manipulation of the narrator's point of view.³⁸ A very different thematic is established in the opening of the account of Dāvud-e Tā'i: "He was the utmost perfection in scrupulousness." His single-minded pursuit of moral probity and purity leads him to withdraw ever further from the compromises and corruptions of human society, until he is "rewarded" with a paralysis that leaves him unable even to attend prayers in the mosque. 'Attār's biographies sometimes develop around multiple themes, exploring the conflicts and connections between apparently disparate ideals. The account of Abu'l-Hoseyn Nuri, for example, takes as its themes altruism and rapture and uses narrative and dictum to show how both are grounded in the sincere sacrifice of the self, whether to others or to God.³⁹ Even a biography as brief as that of 'Ali-ye Sahl unfolds as a meditation on the conflict between an often-deceptive outward appearance and its transcendent, inward significance, which is broached in the opening rhymed phrases that present 'Ali as both "the seer of human foible" and "the knower of realms invisible."⁴⁰

In his introduction 'Attār places the responsibility for interpretation in his readers' hands. Disavowing any intention to provide commentaries, 'Attār instructs the reader "who happens to need a commentary" to renew the encounter with the text itself, "to look closely at the words of God's friends and interpret them again." This statement is not only a challenge to the reader's attentiveness and intelligence, but also an invitation to join in the creation of meaning and to

engage fully in the spiritual universe of each of the “sects of one.” In each biography the reader must continually weigh anecdotes and aphorisms against one another: To what extent are they consistent with one another? What are the advantages and the limitations of the character’s spiritual experience? How is it reflected, or not, in his words? The give-and-take between anecdotes, between aphorisms, and between action and teaching gives the characters a depth and complexity that prevents them from being reduced to mere typological embodiments of a particular school of thought. For his part, ‘Attār organizes his biographies in ways that facilitate the task of reading, creating networks of interrelated images and themes held together at key points by recurring words and motifs.

To get a better idea of how we can enter into these networks of meaning and interpretation, let us look in some detail at the biography of Zu'n-Nun of Egypt (Chapter 10). The introductory paragraph presents a set of key terms. Following the accounts of such masters of asceticism and proper conduct as Hasan of Basra and ‘Abdollāh ebn Mobārak, the term *realization* stands out. For the first time in the *Memorial*, the idea of an intuitive, immediate knowledge of God takes prominence, establishing Zu'n-Nun's place in the history of Islamic spirituality and sounding a major theme of his biography. ‘Attār uses a closely related concept to suggest a first definition of *realization*: “a precise insight into the secrets of unity.” But realization and unity are only half of the picture. They are balanced syntactically and conceptually with complementary themes: affliction, detachment, and blame. The life and thought of Zu'n-Nun unfold as an exploration of the implications and interrelations of these aspects of spiritual experience.

Their interplay is first seen immediately following the introduction in the story of Zu'n-Nun's conversion. Zu'n-Nun has apparently already embarked on his spiritual journey when he comes upon “a devout recluse” hanging from a tree. This seeming model of ascetic discipline deprecates his own deeds and directs Zu'n-Nun to climb further up the mountain. Here he is met by a shocking and gruesome sight: a young man who has amputated his own foot, which now lies before him in a state of advanced decomposition. Such is the punishment that this ascetic has meted out to himself in response to the temptations of carnal flesh. But he, too, finds his sacrifice inadequate and instructs Zu'n-Nun to climb higher still. To this point the story exhibits many of

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the features of the legendary quest. The mountain provides an archetypal setting for the struggle to ascend to a higher reality, and in the progression of self-mutilation, we apparently have the first two stages in a typically three-step pattern of cumulative narrative repetition. Here, however, Zu'n-Nun's journey takes an unexpected detour. He does not make the final ascent. Instead, he relies on a secondhand account of the third recluse. Zu'n-Nun's path to enlightenment mirrors that of the reader, who also participates in a spiritual conversion through the medium of story. Further deflecting our expectations, the recluse on the mountaintop, instead of exhibiting a yet more extreme form of self-inflicted mutilation, surrenders himself body and soul to divine sustenance and tastes the sweetness of honey. The summit of self-imposed asceticism is found in trusting submission to God's will. However, even this recluse has taken an oath, a purposive act of personal intention. The final stage of Zu'n-Nun's awakening comes after his ascent up the mountain has ended. The blind bird that miraculously feeds from bowls of silver and gold has no ego to master, no self to discipline, and no reward to gain from doing so. Nevertheless, it too partakes of divine benevolence and provides an object lesson in unity and immanence.

The story of Zu'n-Nun's conversion creates a first nexus of the themes of affliction, detachment, and unity, condensing into a single narrative the progress from self-willed striving to a complete, intuitive trust in God. As Zu'n-Nun grows into the knowledge and practice intimated in this opening encounter with the ways of God's friends, these themes are further inflected, elaborated, and intertwined. Here we can trace only a few of the patterns of association and contrast that extend from this nexus. The first is a pattern of narration. The conversion story is presented to us in Zu'n-Nun's own words as first-person narrative. The following anecdote—Zu'n-Nun and the pot of gold—is told in the third person by a narrator so omniscient that he is able to record the content of Zu'n-Nun's dreams. These points of view are the opposite of what we might expect; the fable-like conversion is presented as autobiography, and the private dream vision as public event. This manipulation of point of view provides an "objective" verification of Zu'n-Nun's burgeoning spiritual maturity. In rejecting the material riches of the pot of gold, Zu'n-Nun applies the lesson that he learned from the blind bird and is rewarded with the opening of the doors of divine knowledge, a

first hint of the theme of realization. The alternation of narrative perspective continues for the next four anecdotes, as other aspects of the conversion story receive a fuller airing. Zu'n-Nun undergoes his own temptation of the flesh in his conversation with the young maiden on the palace roof. His deferred meeting with the mountain-dwelling spiritual master is fulfilled in the person of the recluse who emerges from his cell once a year to cure the sick but who refers Zu'n-Nun to God for the cure of his inner illness. The sequence of tales culminates in a second dream vision—Zu'n-Nun's membership in the spiritual elite is projected back to the choices God gave humankind at the moment of creation in pre-eternity. *Seen* from various points of view, the implications and promise of the conversion tale extend into an increasingly complex network of meaning and association.

The story of Zu'n-Nun's spiritual education, with its surprising turn from the ascetic masters to the blind bird, finds its counterpoint in stories of his career as spiritual educator, teacher, and exemplar. His first student is his sister, who attains such spiritual realization under his influence that she brings down manna from heaven and disappears into the desert. Other disciples are more socially prominent, including a wealthy, young heir and an honored prince, who are both made to recognize the insignificance of material wealth and natural law in the face of the power of divine unity. Zu'n-Nun's most pious disciple, however, has undertaken every manner of devotional exercise without gaining God's favor. When Zu'n-Nun advises him to skip his prayers, the "poison cure" reduces both master and disciple to tears. But the divine rebuke that Zu'n-Nun receives for his unorthodox teachings is followed up in two tales in which roles are reversed and Zu'n-Nun unexpectedly finds himself the student. He is rightly castigated as a "worthless fool" by a nomadic Arab and a woman, two figures from the fringes of the social hierarchy who frequently serve as foils to the renowned saints in the *Memorial*. These stories are all the more powerful for their brevity and the fact that they are narrated by the chastised master himself in the first person.

Patterns of association based on a narrative motif like teaching are complemented by those based on imagery. The blind bird belongs to a cluster of images illustrating the often miraculous "secrets of unity." The jewel-bearing fish, the walking bench, the pills transformed into rubies—all show how divine power permeates material reality and

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how it can be channeled through God's friends. Another group of related images that gets its start in the story of Zu'n-Nun's conversion concerns physical and spiritual nourishment. The divine honey that sustains the fasting recluse on the mountaintop is echoed in a number of other tales in which food plays a prominent role. Zu'n-Nun's sister, for example, quotes the Qur'an concerning God's gift to the Israelites of manna and quails. Zu'n-Nun himself faces one of his greatest temptations in the humble form of vinegar beef stew. A baker even serves as an ignorant dupe when he misappraises a valuable ring and helps bring about the repentance of a skeptic. Zu'n-Nun's fast during his imprisonment brings him into contact with the sister of another pious exemplar, Beshr the Barefoot.

Zu'n-Nun is imprisoned under charges of heresy and is brought from Egypt to Baghdad to defend himself before the caliph. This story exemplifies another theme broached in the biography's introduction—the skepticism that Zu'n-Nun had to face throughout his life. Here we can also briefly note how patterns of theme and variation like those established within one biography are interwoven throughout the work. From Ja'far to Hallāj, God's friends repeatedly confront worldly power in the person of the caliph. This basic plot motif, however, is open to wide variation. The dragon that materializes before the eyes of the caliph Mansur is a visual manifestation of Ja'far's prophetic charisma. His display of power is almost casually arrogant yet surprisingly private. The onlookers are unaware of the dragon's presence until it is confessed by Mansur, a fact that confirms Ja'far's indifference to public, political dominion. By contrast, Zu'n-Nun's face-to-face meeting with the caliph Motavakkel is understated and almost anticlimactic. Emphasis falls instead on his meetings with common folk on his way to the prison. As we saw in the teaching stories, Zu'n-Nun learns from social outsiders (here an old woman and a water carrier) and teaches the power brokers. In realist fiction, characters are often individuated by idiosyncratic details of behavior and appearance. Though 'Attār is more interested in the exemplary than the particular, these varied and interlinked patterns of theme, image, and motif have a similar effect: they provide his literary portraits with a many-faceted and distinctive wholeness.

A crucial turning point in each biography in *Memorial of God's Friends* comes at the transition between the stories and the sayings and

can be especially revealing of 'Attār method of disposition. In the case of Zu'n-Nun this transition begins subtly: "It is related that Zu'n-Nun fell sick." This sickness foreshadows Zu'n-Nun's final illness and death and aptly initiates the closure of the section. When Zu'n-Nun snaps back at his well-intentioned visitor, he condemns the comforting platitudes that mock a truly intimate relationship with God. But even for Zu'n-Nun, this intimacy can only go so far. In the brief snippet from one of his letters that follows, Zu'n-Nun asks to be protected behind "a veil of ignorance." From an aspirant to intuitive realization this is a startling request and a stark recognition of frightening and debilitating possibilities that are best left beyond mortal ken. These rather cryptic intimations are spelled out more fully in the closing anecdote. Zu'n-Nun's encounter with the Zoroastrian pulls together many of the strands that we have traced in earlier tales. Scattering millet for hungry birds gives a more plausible version of the miraculous feeding of the blind bird. As physical food is transformed into spiritual nourishment, it is Zu'n-Nun who offers up a platitude. He is once again instructed by an outsider, a non-Muslim this time, and as we saw in similar tales above, the story is related in the first person. The episode concludes with a moment of divine intuition: an "unseen voice" asserts the inability of human reason and logic to predict "the action of *the one who acts as he chooses*." This moment of insight into the incomprehensible sets the stage for Zu'n-Nun's private devotions: the veil takes on a more typical meaning as a symbol of the intimacy of direct communion with the divine and the disgrace of public acclaim. This image is given yet another reading in the first entry in the extensive collection of Zu'n-Nun's aphorisms: "The most difficult of veils is the vision of the self."

For modern Western readers, whose literary expectations are based more on narrative forms like the novel and short story than on the gnomic and vatic pronouncements associated with poetry, it is easy to underestimate the crucial role sayings and aphorisms play in *Memorial of God's Friends*. 'Attār, however, leaves no doubt about his priorities:

Leaving aside the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, there are no words loftier than those of the masters of the path—God have mercy upon them. Their words are the outcome of experience and inspiration, not the fruit of memo-

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rization and quotation. They come from contemplation, not commentary; from innermost self, not imitation; and from divine knowledge, not acquired learning. They come from ardor, not effort and from the universe of *my Lord instructed me*, not the world of *my father taught me*, for these masters are the heirs of the prophets—the blessings of the Compassionate be upon them all. I saw that a group of my friends took great delight in the words of this folk, and I too had a strong inclination to study their lives and sayings.

'Attār alludes to the narrative lives only as a passing afterthought, lavishing his praise instead on the words of "the masters of the path." From this perspective the stories are not an end in themselves but are valuable primarily because they serve to substantiate and explicate the sayings.

Like the anecdotes, the aphorisms are presented as discrete units within a carefully arranged sequence, organized in thematic clusters. (Such a paratactic arrangement of dicta is not unusual in world literature and can be found in works as diverse as *The Analects* of Confucius and the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*.) After beginning with the image of the veil of the self, 'Attār presents Zu'n-Nun's instructions on how it can be removed, placing together some twenty sayings on the actions that a seeker can take of his own volition. These include eating sparingly, asking forgiveness, following the example of the Prophet, and seclusion. The aphorisms, in other words, start where the story of Zu'n-Nun's conversion did, with affliction and self-denial, recalling the figure of the recluse and the motif of nourishment in the stories. The first turning point in the sequence of sayings comes with Zu'n-Nun's utterance "You must attain what you seek with the first step." 'Attār marks its importance by adding one of his rare commentaries and alluding to it again at the end of the section. The placement of this utterance casts a new light on the preceding teachings: even the most diligent asceticism leads nowhere unless it leads to a leap of awareness, to the loss of the self. This saying gives conceptual substance to the pivotal story of Zu'n-Nun's teaching career. The exercises and devotions of his disciple had become ends in themselves and required an unconventional "poison cure." Following this quantum step, the second cluster of aphorisms turns to revelation, loving unity, and realization. These themes

culminate in a set of three long utterances beginning with the caution "Beware, do not presume to realization." The reader pauses over another of 'Attār's commentaries, a verse of poetry, and Zu'n-Nun's quotation of one of the most famous of the mystical hadith of the Prophet. All three aphorisms point to the paradoxes of intuitive realization of the divine: it is a wisdom that cannot be claimed, awareness in bewilderment, a knowing that eludes self-consciousness. The disposition of aphorisms thus follows a thematic arc from detachment to unity first voiced in the introductory paragraph.

This pattern expands to incorporate an ever-widening network of concepts and themes in the following utterances. The next cluster begins with renunciation and devotion, self-discipline seen in the light of an ongoing relationship with God. To round out and summarize these ideas, 'Attār includes another long commentary on Zu'n-Nun's definition of watchfulness as a merger of the will of the believer with the will of God. Following the now well-established thematic progression, the fourth group of sayings takes up terms associated with a partaking in the intuitive knowledge of the sacred: ecstasy, trust, intimacy, acceptance, and certainty. The end of this thematic unit is signaled by an unusually long utterance. Zu'n-Nun opens with a startling metaphor—God is more obedient than any disciple. He goes on to explain that the Lord invariably responds to the efforts of anyone who turns to him. In the end, the piety inspired by fear yields to the realization of love and wisdom: "The heart of anyone who fears the mighty and glorious Lord melts away, and the Lord's love becomes firmly fixed in it, and his reason becomes perfect."

The progress from dread through repudiation of the world to unity and realization is recapitulated for a third time in a series of brief dialogues. A question-and-answer session marks the conclusion of the section of aphorisms in many of the biographies. The effect of introducing the dialogical form is twofold. First, the reader seems to become an active interlocutor in a final review of the principal themes of the biography. Second, in the course of a long series of aphorisms, the speaker's voice tends to become abstracted from biographical circumstances and individual identity; this detachment, indeed, gives the aphorisms much of their gnomic authority. However, as we return to the narrative, the speaker again becomes a character in the text interacting with other characters. Like the first-person narratives, Zu'n-Nun's exchanges with

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his anonymous questioners blur the line between story and saying. In the dispositions of text and character, words emerge as a form of action, and actions become as articulate as words.

The final part of the five-part structure of Zu'n-Nun's biography consists of the narrative of his death and burial. 'Attār again handles the transition with superb and unobtrusive artistry. The closing aphorism combines two distinct utterances. The first again takes up the intimate secrecy of the relationship between the Sufi and God: "The person furthest from the mighty and glorious Lord is the one who outwardly alludes to him the most." This saying recalls previous key points in the biography, such as Zu'n-Nun's rebuke of the well-meaning visitor to his sickbed or his dictum warning against the presumption of realization. Zu'n-Nun's own lack of presumption is evident in the confession of uncertainty in the second, concluding utterance: "For seventy years, I walked in unity, seclusion, detachment, and affirmation, and out of all of this I laid hold of nothing but a conjecture." The reappearance of the first-person pronoun completes the turn from gnomic utterance to biographical narrative. We have heard this note of bewilderment before, and it informs Zu'n-Nun's dying wish—to "know him, if only for a moment." As Zu'n-Nun goes behind the final veil, this moment of knowledge is withheld, as it must be, from onlookers and readers alike. We learn only of Zu'n-Nun's astonishment at "his benevolence." The end of the biography returns to its beginning. The key image of the blind bird that launched Zu'n-Nun on the mystical path now seems to take flight in the birds that spread their wings above his bier.

Memorial of God's Friends draws together a long and diverse tradition of Sufi history and biography into a comprehensive account of the development of Islamic spirituality. As the large number of surviving manuscripts suggests, the *Memorial* shaped how generations of readers understood Sufism and the lives of its formative exponents, and the work continues to exercise its influence today. Assessing 'Attār's literary achievement as a whole, Benedikt Reinert has written, "The thought-world depicted in 'Aṭṭār's works reflects the whole evolution of the Sufi movement in its experiential, speculative, practical, and educational-initiatory ramifications."⁴¹ The same can be said of *Memorial of God's Friends* in particular. But it is not simply the scope and inclusiveness of this work that make the *Memorial* a classic of spiritual biography. 'Attār shapes his sources in a way that allows the reader to

enter fully into his thought-world. In a prose that is a marvel of laconic eloquence and profundity, 'Attār creates a flexible literary form capable of embracing a wide range of religious experience from the most rigorous asceticism to the most visionary ecstasy. The patterns of repetition, variation, and placement, such as we see in the biography of Zu'n-Nun, give significant structure to the entire work and "set up a necessarily interpretative and critical chain of association in the reader's mind."⁴² Principle, expression, and experience are united in literary portraits of these sects of one that are exemplary without being one-dimensional. The friends of God, in Emerson's words, converse with God and are spiritual influences "too great for fame." Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of *Memorial of God's Friends* is that it allows those "who disdain eloquence" to speak eloquently and crafts such artful and memorable biographies without "the exaggeration of the finite and selfish and the loss of the universal." It is 'Attār's artless artistry that distinguishes the *Memorial*, as the product of a poet's pen and makes it a monument of the Islamic spiritual tradition.

NOTES

On This Translation

1. Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya'* ("Memorial of the Saints"), trans. A.J. Arberry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). There are numerous translations of the *Memorial* into various Turkish languages: see Hellmut Ritter, "Philologika XIV: Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār II," in *Oriens* 11 (1958): 62–76. The Uighur version was published in Paris in 1889 with an accompanying French translation, which was later published separately as *Le Mémorial des Saints*, trans. A. Paret de Courteille (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1976). I have not been able to examine what is, to the best of my knowledge, the only complete translation in any European language, the Swedish translation of E. Hermelin published in Stockholm in 1931–32.

2. Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 7.

3. This usage is becoming increasingly widespread: see, for example, recent translations of the writings of the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart by Oliver Davies (New York: Penguin Books, 1994) and by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981).

4. Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Tazkerat al-owliya'*, ed. Mohammad Este'lāmi (Tehran: Zavvār, 1967). The bases of this edition are manuscripts dated 1292 (692 AH) and 1302 (701 AH). For a listing of the large number of surviving manuscripts, see Ritter, "Philologika XIV," 63–68, and C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographic Survey* (London: Luzac, 1927-): 1, pt. 2, 930–33.

5. Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Tazkerat al-owliya'*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson, 2 vols. (London: Luzac, 1905–07). This text was extensively revised and its spelling modernized by Mohammad Khān Qazvini (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-ye Markazī, 1957).

6. Bābak Ahmadi, *Chahār gozāresh az Tazkerat al-owliya'-e 'Attār* (Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1997), 118.

7. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 151–70.

8. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, abridged with an introduction by John Dillon (London: Penguin Books, 1991), xxviii.

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1. *EF*, "Tadhkira. 2. In Persian literature" (J.T.P. de Bruijn).
2. Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999), 40.
3. Muhammad Isa Waley, "Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, *Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 497–548.
4. See 'Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ: *Sufi Verse and Saintly Life*, trans. Th. Emil Homerin (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 30–34.
5. For a more detailed analysis of the scope of the term *valilowliyā'*, see Bernd Radtke, "The Concept of *Wilāya* in Early Sufism," in *Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1: 483–496, and his entry in *EF*, "Walī. 1. General Survey."
6. Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 141 n147.
7. Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Divān*, ed. Taqī Tafazzoli, 4th ed. (Tehran: 'Elmi va Farhangi, 1987), 592–94.
8. Nur ad-Din 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmi, *Nafahat al-ons men hazarāt al-gods*, ed. Mahmud 'Ābadi (Tehran: Ettelā'āt, 1991), 597.
9. Dowlatshāh Samarqāndī, *Tazkerat ash-sho'arā*, ed. Mohammad Ramazāni (Tehran: Khāvar, 1959), 145.
10. Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi—Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalāl al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 64–65.
11. The foundations of the modern critical investigation of 'Attār were established by Sa'id Nafisi, *Jostoju dar ahvāl va āsār-e Farid ad-Din 'Attār* (Tehran: Eqbāl, 1941), and Badi' az-Zamān Foruzānfar, *Sharh-e ahvāl va naqd va tahlil-e āsār-e Sheykh Farid ad-Din Mohammad 'Attār-e Nishāpuri* (Tehran: Anjoman-e Āsār-e Melli, 1961). The results of these investigations form the basis of the article in *Elr*, "'Attār, Shaikh Farīd al-Dīn" by Benedikt Reinert, the single best source in English on the poet's life. More recently, Mohammad-Rezā Shafī'i Kadkani's *Zabur-e Pārsi: negāhi be-zendagi va ghazalhā-ye 'Attār* (Tehran: Āgāh, 1999) has further refined the findings of these scholars and opened up several new avenues of investigation.
12. Shafī'i Kadkani, *Zabur-e Pārsi*, 62–69.
13. The fullest study of 'Attār's poetic works remains Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978). This book has now been translated into English as *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār*, trans. John O'Kane with editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003).

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14. Also known as *Maqāmāt-e toyur*, this work has been frequently translated into English and other European languages. The best translation available is Farid al-Din 'Attār, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

15. Shafi'i Kadkani argues on philological and stylistic grounds that the courtly romance usually known as *Khosrow-nāma* was originally entitled *Gol va Hormoz* and is not a product of 'Attār's pen. The *Khosrow-nāma* properly attributed to 'Attār is, in fact, the poem now called *Elāhi-nāma*. See Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Mokhtār-nāma*, ed. Mohammad-Rezā Shafi'i Kadkani, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1996), 34–59.

16. For a lineated prose translation of this work in English, see Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *The Ilāhi-nāma or Book of God*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1976).

17. Farid ad-Din 'Attār, *Elāhi-nāma*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (reprint edition, Tehran: Tus, 1989; Istanbul, 1940), 253–54. This passage is also translated in 'Attār, *The Ilāhi-nāma*, trans. Boyle, 235–36.

18. For other stories from *Memorial of God's Friends* included in the *Elāhi-nāma*, see 'Attār, *Ilāhi-nāma*, trans. Boyle, 58, 298–99 (Ebrāhim ebn Adham), 110–11, 272–73, 300–31, 346–47 (Bāyazīd), 115–16, 153 (Rābe'a), 165, 173–75 (Hasan of Basra), and 168–69 (Ebn al-Mobārak). Stories from the *Memorial* are also incorporated into *Manteq at-Teyr*; see 'Attār, *Conference of the Birds*, trans. Davis, 76, 145, 151 (Bāyazīd), 86–87 (Rābe'a), 99–100 (Mālek-e Dinār), 114 (Hallāj); 135–36 (Beshr the Barefoot), and 137–38 (Ebn al-Mobārak).

19. On Nishapur, see *EF*², s.v. "Nīshāpūr" (E. Honigmann-[C. E. Bosworth]), and W. Barthold, *An Historical Geography of Iran*, trans. Svat Soucek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 95–102.

20. As Shafi'i Kadkani has noted, there was little mystical poetry of note written during the decades immediately before 'Attār began writing. One early source identifies the little-known poet Shekar as 'Attār's literary mentor (*Zabur-e Pārsi*, 48–53).

21. On Abu Sa'id, see *Elr*, s.v. "Abū Sa'id ebn Abī'l-Keyr" (G. Böwering). Shafi'i Kadkani has recently proposed a possible spiritual lineage that would link 'Attār directly with Abu Sa'id (*Zabur-e Pārsi*, 70–83).

22. For a complete translation of Abu Sa'id's biography, *Asrār al-towhid*, in English, see Mohammad Ebn-e Monavvar, *The Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness*, trans. John O'Kane (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1992).

23. On Ansāri, see *Elr*, s.v. "Abdullāh al-Anṣārī" (S. de Laugier de Beauceuil). For a translation of Ansāri's *Monājāt* in English, see: Kwaja Abdullah Ansari, *Intimate Conversations*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, with

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Ibn 'Ata'llah, *The Book of Wisdom*, trans. Victor Danner (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

24. On the development of Persian mystical poetry in general, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems* (Surrey: Curzon, 1997), which contains discussions of all of 'Attār's poetic works. Sanā'i is the subject of two superb, recent scholarly studies: J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanā'i of Ghazna* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983); and Franklin D. Lewis, "Reading, Writing and Recitation: Sanā'i and the Origins of the Persian Ghazal" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995).

25. See 'Attār, *Mokhtār-nāma*, 3.

26. For the beginnings of such a study, see the list and evaluation of 'Attār's possible sources, in 'Attār, *Tazkerat*, ed. Este'lāmi, *davāzdah-bist va yak*. To Este'lāmi's list we should probably add Ghazzālī's *Kimiyā as-sa'ādat* and Sahlajī's *Kitāb an-nur men kalemāt Abi Tayfur*.

27. On al-Solami, see *EF*², s.v. "al-Sulamī" (G. Böwering).

28. On Qosheyri, see *EF*², s.v. "al-Ḳuṣhayrī" (H. Halm). Substantial portions of Qosheyri's *Resāla* have been translated into English. See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 97–150 (chapter 3 of the treatise on mystical expressions), and al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, trans. B. R. von Schlegell (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1990), which covers chapter 4 to the end of the work. The biographical portion of the *Resāla* has not yet been translated into English.

29. On Hojviri, see *EF*², s.v. "Ḥudjwīrī." For an English translation, see 'Alī ibn 'Uṣmān Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-mahjūb: the Oldest Persian Treatise on Ṣūfism*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leyden: Luzac, 1911).

30. André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1–10. I have examined some of the issues in 'Attār's rewriting of earlier sources in more technical detail in Paul Losensky, "The Creative Compiler: The Art of Rewriting in 'Attār's *Tazkirat al-Awliyā*," in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on his 80th Birthday*, ed. Franklin Lewis and Sunil Sharma (Amsterdam and West Lafayette, IN: Rozenberg Publishers and Purdue University Press, 2007): 107–19.

31. Abu 'Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt as-ṣūfiya*, ed. Johannes Pedersen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), 229–30.

32. Shafī'i Kadani, *Zabur-e Pārsi*, 263.

33. The twenty-five additional biographies found in some later manuscripts (and as an appendix in the print editions) are the work of another hand. For arguments concerning their authenticity, see 'Attār, *Tazkerat*, ed. Este'lāmi, *bist va panj-bist va hasht*.

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34. Ahmad Mahdavi Dāmghāni, “Nazari be-‘adad-e 73 dar hadis-e ‘tafriqa,” in *Hāsel-e awqāt: majmu‘a’i az maqālāt*, ed. Sayyed ‘Ali Mohammad Sajjādi (Tehran: Soroush, 2002): 615–622.

35. Abū Dawud as-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwud*, ed. Mohammad Mohyi ad-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ([s.l.], Dār Iḥyā’ as-Sunna an-Nabawīya, 1970), 4: 197–98 (no. 4596).

36. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 13–16.

37. I have attempted to mimic these rhymes in my translation when possible without distorting the meaning of the text; see, for example, the beginning of the biographies of Mālek-e Dinār, Habib-e ‘Ajami, and Ebrāhim ebn Adham.

38. See Michael Sells’s introduction to my translation of Rābe‘a’s biography in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 151–54.

39. For a detailed analysis of the biographies of Dāvud-e Tā’i and Abu’l-Hoseyn Nuri, see Paul Losensky, “Words and Deeds: Message and Structure in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*,” in *Farid al-Din Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and Charles Shackle, 75–92 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

40. The biography of ‘Ali-ye Sahl is discussed at greater length in Losensky, “The Creative Compiler.”

41. *Elr*, s.v. “‘Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn” (B. Reinert).

42. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 192.

Translation

MEMORIAL OF GOD'S FRIENDS

Author's Introduction

Praise be to God—generous with the finest of favors, benefactor of the greatest of gifts, praised at the loftiest summits of honor and grandeur, adored with the most beautiful of adorations from the depths of the earth to the heights of the heavens, possessor of majesty, might, and magnificence, of glory, sovereign right, and resplendence, the one on high who is veiled from the eyes of onlookers and from the vision of the discerning by the lights of splendor, sanctity, and praise, the one here below who lures the gaze of those who are consumed in the fire of distress.

He joins the final vision of those who plunge into the depths of the sea of his unity to the extinction of the self. He blends the noble extinction of those who are immersed in the profundity of his radiant proximity with genuine subsistence in him. In the glory of poverty in him, he enriches them beyond the humiliating reliance on things. He grants them success in offering praise for what they have received from the treasure house of blessings. Through passing away, he frees them to abide, and through abiding, to pass away. Then they plunge into the light of the extinction of extinction and are purified of the whim of craving. They dismount with intimacy in the courtyard of sanctity, bidding farewell to the extinction of extinction. Eminent among the masses, towering over creation, they withdraw from the delusions of error and the wavering shadows into the true and perfect light.

We praise him for protecting us from the deceit of anyone who opposes us concerning him and for defending us from the evil of anyone who is hostile toward us in his heart or who injures us with his tongue and for distracting from us everything that distracts us from him and for uniting us with everything that unites us with him and for making us his devoted servants and for honoring us with his sublime words and his noble book and for making us followers of his beloved Mohammad and then counting us too among his lovers.

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We bear witness that there is no god but God, the One—he has no partner who is his equal and he has no peer who is his like. If we look to the attributes of divinity, there is no God but him, and if we ponder existence, nothing exists but him.

We bear witness that Mohammad is his servant, his messenger, his Prophet, and his true friend. He sent him in truth to all creation. From his lofty position, he untied the knots that bind those who deviate in error. With his divine ordinance, he reduced the ranks of disgrace and humiliation. With his light, he extinguished the fire of sin. He settled his companions in the abode of guidance. He illuminated the hearts of the rightly guided with the glistening pearls of faith. He made them fit to acquire the glorious treasures of certainty. He made them understand the obscure secrets of the prophets. He singled out the elect and the pious among their followers—those who have wiped the dust of the two worlds from their hands, those who have dismissed from their hearts any concern for the comforts of this world or the next—by means of the hidden and unseen evidence of that which the eye's gaze does not perceive and to which the sun of intellect and the stars of speculation do not ascend. He allowed their hearts to attain that which was revealed by their furthest quests and utmost ambitions. He dispelled the clouds of sorrow from their innermost selves by that which shone upon them from their utmost goals. He purified their spirits of blemished lights and murky darknesses by the lights of the holy revelations that he possesses. May God bless him and his family and his companions.

After him, no sun of favor will rise in the East of divine grace, and no distant evening star will set below the horizons of banishment. No lover will be afflicted with remoteness. No guiding bolt of lightning will flash from a solicitous cloud. No truthful speaker will utter a word of love. No passionate step will stir in the desert wastes of ecstasy. May God grant him peace.

Leaving aside the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, there are no words loftier than those of the masters of the path—God have mercy upon them. Their words are the outcome of experience and inspiration, not the fruit of memorization and quotation. They come from contemplation, not commentary; from the innermost self, not imitation; and from divine knowledge, not acquired learning. They come from ardor,

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not effort, and from the universe of *my Lord instructed me*, not the world of *my father taught me*,¹ for these masters are the heirs of the prophets—the blessings of the Compassionate be upon them all. I saw that a group of my friends took great delight in the words of this folk, and I too had a strong inclination to study their lives and sayings. If I had collected everything, it would have gotten too long. I gathered some for my friends and family—and for you too, if you are among this intimate company.

If anyone wants more than this, many of these sayings will be found in books by early and recent members of this clan. Let him look for them there. If a seeker is seeking a full commentary on the sayings of this folk, tell him to study these books: *Commentary of the Heart*, *Unveiling of the Secrets*, and *Knowledge of the Self*.² It is our opinion that none of the sayings of this clan will remain obscure to him, except what God wills. If I had given a commentary on them here, it would have required a thousand sheets of paper. Taking the path of brevity and abridgment, however, is sound tradition: as the Messenger of God (may God bless him and give him peace) boasted, “*I was given all the words, and the word was abbreviated for me.*”³ I have also omitted the chains of transmission. There were sayings that were related by one sheikh in one book and by one sheikh in another. There were also additions to the stories and differing anecdotes. I exercised caution to the best of my ability.

Another reason for not giving commentaries is that I did not consider it proper to put my words in among theirs and did not find it to my taste. Nevertheless, in a few places remarks have been made to ward off the fancies of the vulgar and the uninitiated. Another reason is that the most suitable thing for anyone who happens to need a commentary is for him to look closely at the words of God’s friends and interpret them again.

Another reason is that the friends of God are different: some are adherents of mystical realization and some of proper conduct; some are adherents of love and some of unity; and some are all of these. Some are self-possessed, and some are ecstatics. If I had given a commentary on them one by one, the book would have gone beyond the limits of brevity. And if I had given notices on the prophets and Mohammad’s companions and his family, it would have required another, separate book. What capacity does the tongue have to describe a people who are mentioned by God and the Prophet and praised by the Qur’an and the

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traditions? That realm is another universe, another world. The prophets and Mohammad's companions and his family are three groups. God willing, a book will be collected memorializing them, so a perfume compounded of these three will remain as a memento of the apothecary 'Attār.

I had several motives for collecting this book. The first motive was to please the brethren of the faith who implored me for it. Another was to leave some memento of myself behind, so that whoever reads this book will find some comfort in it and will remember me well in his prayers: perhaps I will be comforted in the grave for having comforted him. So it was that when Yahyā ebn 'Emād⁴—the imam of Herat and teacher of Sheikh 'Abdollah Ansāri—passed away, someone saw him in a dream and asked, “What did the mighty and glorious Lord do with you?”

He answered, “God spoke to me: ‘Yahyā, I had some harsh things to say to you, but one day you were praising us at a prayer meeting, and one of our friends was passing by. He heard what you were saying and had a moment of rapture. I forgave you to gratify him. Had it not been for that, you would have seen what I would have done with you.’”

Another motive is that they asked Sheikh Abu 'Ali Daqqāq⁵ (God have mercy upon him), “Are there any advantages to listening to the words of true believers when we cannot act on them?”

“Yes,” he answered, “there are two advantages. The first is that if the person is a seeker, his aspiration will be strengthened, and he will seek further. The second is that if he perceives any pride in himself, it will be broken. He will expel pretense from his mind. His good will seem bad, and if he is not blind, he will contemplate himself.”

As Sheikh Mahfuz⁶ (God have mercy upon him) said, “Do not weigh people according to your own standards, but weigh yourself according to the standards of the men of the path, so you will know their credit and your own bankruptcy.”

Another motive is that they asked Joneyd (God's mercy be upon him), “What advantage does the disciple gain from these stories and anecdotes?”

“The words of God's friends,” Joneyd said, “are one of the armies of the mighty and glorious Lord. If the disciple's heart is broken, he

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will be strengthened and aided by that army.” The proof of these words is that the Real most high states, “*We make your heart firm with all the stories of the prophets that we relate to you.*” [11:120]⁷

Another motive is that the Master of the Prophets (peace and blessing and salutations be upon him) states, “*Mercy descends when one recalls the pious.*” If someone sets a table that mercy rains down upon, perhaps he will not be turned away from it empty-handed. Another motive is that perhaps the succor of their holy spirits will come to this destitute man and cast a propitious shadow over him before his final day.

Another motive is that I considered the words of God’s friends to be the finest words after the Qur’an and the hadith and considered all their words to be a commentary upon the Qur’an and the hadith. I threw myself into this task so that if I am not one of God’s friends, at least I might make myself resemble them: “*Whoever imitates a people is one of them.*”⁸ So it was that Joneyd (God’s mercy be upon him) said, “Regard pretenders kindly, for they are seeking certainty. Kiss their feet, for if they had not had high aspiration, they would have pretended to something else.”

Another motive is that it is necessary to master Arabic vocabulary, grammar, and syntax to understand the Qur’an and the traditions. Most people were unable to grasp a portion of their meaning. These sayings are a commentary on them, and both the common people and the elite can share in them. Although most of them were in Arabic, I translated them into Persian, so everyone could be included.

Another motive is that I see plainly that when anyone says anything against you, you seek revenge and hold a grudge against him for years on account of that one word. When an idle word has such an effect on your soul, a true word can have an effect a thousand times greater, even if you are unaware of it. So it was that they asked Imam ‘Abd ar-Rahmān Akkāf⁹ (God’s mercy be upon him), “Does the Qur’an have any effect on someone who reads it without knowing what he is reading?”

He replied, “Medicine has an effect on someone who takes it without knowing what he is taking. How can the Qur’an fail to have an

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effect? Yes, it has a powerful effect.” And how much more so when someone knows what he is reading!

Another motive is that my heart would not allow me to speak or listen to anything but these words, except reluctantly and by necessity or compulsion. As a result, I took on the responsibility of relating the words of God's friends to the people of the age, so that I might perhaps drink a cup with them from this table. So it is that Sheikh Abu 'Ali Seyāh¹⁰ (God's mercy be upon him) says, “I have two desires. One is to hear one of God's words. The other is to meet one of his people.” He added, “I am an illiterate man. I can't write or read anything. I need someone to speak his words, and I will listen. Or I will speak, and he will listen. If he will not converse in paradise, then Abu 'Ali is through with paradise.”

Another motive is that they asked Imam Yusof of Hamadan (God have mercy upon him), “When this age passes, and this clan withdraws behind the veil of concealment, what will we do to remain spiritually sound?”

“Read eight pages of their sayings everyday,” he said. Thus I considered it my utmost obligation to compose some daily prayers for the negligent.

Another motive is that from childhood on, for no apparent reason, love for this clan has welled up in my soul, and their words have always brought joy to my heart. In the hope that “*a man will be with the one he loves,*”¹¹ I have set forth their words to the best of my ability. This is an era when this way of speaking has disappeared entirely. Pretenders have emerged in the guise of spiritual folk, and people of the heart have become as rare as the philosopher's stone. As Joneyd said to Shebli (God have mercy on them both), “If you find anyone in all the world who agrees with one word you say, stick close to him.”

Another motive is that when I saw that an age has come when *good is evil* and when evildoers have forgotten the righteous, I prepared a collection of the biographies of the friends of God and named it *Memorial of God's Friends*, so that the wretched of this age will not forget this fortunate folk and will seek out recluses and hermits and take delight

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in them so that by the gentle breeze of their good fortune, they might be united with eternal happiness.

Another motive is that these are the best of words in several regards. First, they make people's hearts cold to this world. Second, they make the mind dwell continually on the afterworld. Third, they bring out the love of the Real in people's hearts. Fourth, when people hear this sort of discourse, they begin to prepare provisions for the endless road. So, in accordance with these principles, collecting such words is one of our obligations. It can be truly said that there is nothing better than this book in creation, for the words of God's friends are a commentary on the Qur'an and the traditions, which are the finest of all words.

It may be said that this is a book that will turn weaklings into men and turn men into lions and turn lions into paragons and turn paragons into pain itself. How can it fail to turn them into pain itself? Whoever reads this book and reflects on it as he should will become aware of what pain there was in the souls of God's friends to bring forth such deeds and words like this from their hearts.

One day I came to visit Imam Majd ad-Din Mohammad of Khwārazm¹² (God's mercy be upon him). I saw him weeping. "I hope it's for the best," I said.

He replied, "Here's to the commanders who have lived among this people! They are like the prophets (peace and blessing be upon them). As Mohammad said, *'The learned among my people are like the prophets among the Israelites.'*" Majd ad-Din continued, "I am weeping because last night I prayed, 'Lord, your actions are inexplicable. Make me one of this folk or one of their onlookers, for I cannot tolerate any other group.' I am weeping—perhaps my prayer has been answered."

Another motive is that on the morrow of the resurrection they might look on the work of this weak man and intercede on his behalf and will not turn me away in despair, even if I am all skin and bone, like the dog with the companions at the cave.¹³

It is related that Jamāl of Mosul¹⁴ (God's mercy be upon him) suffered and agonized and squandered his property and reputation so he could obtain a place for his grave opposite the area of the cemetery of the Master of the Prophets (peace and blessing be upon him). Then he

gave this final testament: "Write on my tombstone: *Their dog stretches his front paws across the threshold.*" [18:18]

O Lord, a dog took a few steps following after your friends, and you made it part of their affair. I too claim the friendship of your friends and tie myself to their stirrups and occupy myself with their words and utter them again. O Lord! O King! Although I am unworthy of these words and know that I am among the least of the travelers on this path, still I love their sayings and stories, their mysterious and allusive teachings. By your unchanging oneness, by the souls of your prophets, messengers, and archangels, by your majesty's friends, elders, and scholars, do not veil this weak stranger from this company. Let this book be the reason that you bring him near your presence and not the reason you cast him into the far abyss. *Truly you have the power to answer this prayer.*

∞ 1 ∞

Ja'far as-Sādeq

The sultan of the people of Mohammad, the proof of prophetic argument, the trustworthy scholar, the world of verity, the lifeblood of God's friends, the heartbeat of the prophets, transmitter of 'Ali's teachings, heir of the Prophet, the knowing lover, Ebn Mohammad Ja'far as-Sādeq—may God be pleased with him.

We had said that if we were to memorialize the prophets, Mohammad's companions, and his family, it would require a separate book. This book will consist of the biographies of the masters of this clan, who lived after them. But as a blessing, let us begin with Sādeq (may God be pleased with him) for he too lived after them. Since he among the Prophet's descendants said the most about the path and many traditions have come down from him, I shall say a few words about this esteemed man, for they are all as one. When he is remembered, it is the remembrance of them all. Do you not see that the people who follow his school follow the school of the Twelve Imams? In other words, the one is twelve, and the twelve are one.

If I try to describe even his attributes, my words will not come out right, for without exaggeration, his expressions and allusions in all branches of knowledge were perfect. He was the exemplar for all the

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masters, and everyone relied on him. He was the perfect model, the sheikh of all the men of God, and the imam of all the followers of Mohammad. He was both the leader of the adherents of intuition and the guide of the adherents of love. He took precedence among the believers and was honored by the ascetics as well. He was outstanding in recording the inner truths and without peer in the fine points of the inner mysteries of revelation and exegesis. He handed down many great sayings from Bāqer (may God be pleased with him).¹

I am amazed by those people who have the idea that there is some difference between the followers of the tradition and consensus and the followers of the Prophet's family, for in reality the Sunnis are followers of the Prophet's family. I cannot believe that anyone is caught up in this vain fancy. I believe that anyone who has faith in Mohammad (peace and blessing be upon him and his family), but has no faith in his offspring and family really has no faith in Mohammad (peace and blessing be upon him). It reached the point that the great Imam Shāfe'i (God's mercy be upon him) loved the family of the Prophet so much that they accused him of heresy and imprisoned him. He composed a poem on this topic, and here is one verse from it:

*If love of the Prophet's family is heresy,
then let all men and jinn bear witness—I am a heretic!*

If acknowledging the Prophet's family and companions is not one of the fundamentals of the faith, you will accept a great deal of useless and unnecessary foolishness. If you acknowledge even this, there is no harm in it; indeed, it is only just that when you acknowledge Mohammad as the king of this world and the next, you must acknowledge the position of his viziers and of his companions and of his descendants in order to be a Sunni of pure faith. Do not take sides against anyone close to the king, except for just cause.

So it was that they asked Abu Hanifa (God's mercy be upon him), "Who was the noblest of the Prophet's followers (peace and blessing be upon him)?"

"Among the elders," he replied, "Abu Bakr and 'Omar; among the young men, 'Osmān and 'Ali; among his daughters, Fātema; and among his wives, 'Ā'asha (may God be pleased with them all)."²

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It is related that one night the Caliph Mansur³ said to his vizier, "Go, bring Sādeq, so we can put him to death."

The vizier said, "He lives in an out-of-the-way place and has retired from the world. He occupies himself by serving God and has renounced all interest in worldly power. He causes no trouble for the Commander of the Faithful. What use is there in harming him?"

Whatever the vizier said, it did no good. He left. Mansur told his guards, "When Sādeq comes and I take off my hat, kill him."

The vizier brought Sādeq in. Mansur immediately jumped up, ran toward Sādeq, set him on his throne, and knelt down before him on both knees. The guards were shocked. Mansur then asked, "What can I do for you?"

Sādeq said, "You can stop summoning me before you and let me go back to serving the mighty and glorious Lord."

Mansur then gave an order and sent Sādeq on his way with all due honor. At that moment, Mansur began to tremble. He lowered his head and fainted. He was unconscious for three days, or according to one account, until the time for three daily prayers had elapsed. When he came to, the vizier asked, "What happened to you?"

"When Sādeq came through the door," Mansur said, "I saw a dragon—it put one lip under the throne and the other above. The dragon said, 'If you harm him, I will swallow you up along with this throne.' I was so afraid of the dragon that I didn't know what I was saying. I apologized to Sādeq and fainted."

It is related that Dāvud-e Tā'i once came to see Sādeq and said, "Descendant of the Prophet, give me counsel, for my heart has grown dark."

"Dāvud," said Sādeq, "you are the ascetic of the age. What need do you have of my advice?"

"Offspring of the Prophet," said Dāvud, "you are superior to all creatures, and it is your duty to give counsel to all."

Sādeq said, "Dāvud, I fear that at the resurrection, my forefather will lay hold of me and ask, 'Why didn't you live up to your duties in following me?' This affair has nothing to do with sound lineage or powerful ancestors. This affair has to do with conducting oneself in a way that is worthy of the presence of the Real."

Dāvud wept and said, "O Lord, when one whose clay is kneaded with the water of prophecy, one whose forefather is the Messenger and

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whose foremother is the chaste Fātema, when one like this is so bewildered, how can Dāvud be pleased with his own conduct?"

It is related that Sādeq was seated with his associates one day. "Come," he said, "let us make a pact and take an oath that whoever among us is saved on the resurrection will intercede for all."

"Descendant of the Prophet," they said, "what need do you have of our intercession? Your forefather is the intercessor for all creatures."

Sādeq replied, "Because of my deeds, I will be ashamed to look my forefather in the face at the resurrection."

It is related that Sādeq secluded himself for a time and did not appear in public. Sofyān-e Sowri came to the door of his house and said, "The people are deprived of the benefits of your inspirations. Why have you withdrawn from the world?"

Sādeq replied, "The present looks like this: *The age has decayed, and brothers have changed.*" And he recited these verses:

*Faithfulness has fled, as flee the fleeting yesterdays,
and people are torn between their fancies and desires.
They make displays of love and faithfulness,
but their hearts are dens of scorpions.*

It is related that Sādeq was seen wearing an expensive fur coat. Someone said, "Descendant of the Prophet, this is not the sort of clothing your family wears."

Sādeq took the man's hand and put it inside the sleeve of his coat. He was wearing sack cloth that chafed the man's hand. "The one is for the people," Sādeq said, "and the other is for the Real."

It is related that they said to Sādeq, "You have all the virtues, asceticism, and inner generosity. You're the apple of your family's eye. But you're very highhanded."

"I'm not highhanded," Sādeq said. "Rather it's the loftiness of the One on high. When I rose above my haughtiness, his loftiness came and took its place. One should not be high-handed because of haughtiness, but should be high-reaching because of his highness."

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It is related that Sādeq asked Abu Hanifa, "Who is wise?"

"One who distinguishes between good and evil," Abu Hanifa said.

"Even a beast can distinguish between those who beat it and those who feed it," Sādeq answered.

Abu Hanifa asked, "In your opinion, who is wise?"

"One who distinguishes between two goods and two evils so he can choose the better of two goods and pick out of the lesser of two evils."

It is related that a purse of gold had been stolen from someone. The man grabbed a hold of Sādeq and said, "You stole it!" even though he did not recognize him.

"How much was it?" Sādeq asked.

"A thousand dinars."

Sādeq brought the man home with him and gave him a thousand dinars. The man later recovered his gold and brought a thousand dinars back to Sādeq. "I made a mistake," he said.

"We do not take back anything we have given," Sādeq replied.

Later the man asked someone, "Who is he?"

"Ja'far as-Sādeq."

He turned away ashamed.

It is related that one day Sādeq was going down the road alone, saying, "God, God."

Down on his luck, a man walked along behind him, saying, "God, God."

"God," Sādeq said, "I have no cloak. God, I have no shirt."

A suit of clothes appeared on the spot, and Sādeq put them on.

The hapless man went up and said, "Mister, I was saying God along with you. Give your old ones to me."

This pleased Sādeq, and he gave the man his old clothes.

It is related that someone came to see Sādeq and said, "Show me God."

Sādeq said, "Come on, haven't you heard that Moses was told, '*You shall not see me?*'" [7:143].

"Yes, but this is the community of Mohammad. One calls out, '*My heart sees my Lord,*' and another exclaims, '*I do not worship a lord I do not see.*'"

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“Tie him up and throw him in the Tigris,” Sādeq said.

They tied him up and threw him in the Tigris. The water pulled him under and tossed him back up again.

“*O Son of the Messenger! Help! Help!*”

“Water, pull him under!” said Sādeq.

The water pulled him under and tossed him back up.

“*O Son of the Messenger of God! Help! Help!*”

Once again Sādeq said, “Water, pull him under!”

It pulled him under and tossed him back up like this several times. Having completely given up hope in creatures, this time the man said, “*O God! Help! Help!*”

“Pull him out,” Sādeq said. They pulled him out and made him sit for a while until he recovered. Then they asked him, “Did you see the Lord?”

“As long as I appealed to another,” the man said, “I was veiled. When I despaired and sought refuge in him completely, a window was opened within my heart. I looked into it. I saw what I was searching for. Until there was despair, it was not there. *Who answers the despairing when they call on him?*” [27: 61].

Sādeq said, “As long as you kept saying ‘Sādeq,’ you were lying. Now take good care of that window through which the world of the mighty and glorious Lord descended. Whoever says that the mighty and powerful Lord is over something or in something or from something is an unbeliever.”



“Every sin that begins in fear and ends in repentance brings God’s servant to him. Every devotion that begins in faith and ends in conceit drives God’s servant away from him. To be devout with conceit is to sin, and to sin with repentance is to be devout.”

They asked Sādeq, “Who are nobler, the patient poor or the thankful rich?”

“The patient poor, for the hearts of the rich are in their purses and those of the poor are with the Lord.”

“Worship does not come out right except through repentance, for the Real most high gave repentance precedence over worship, for as he said, *‘The penitents, the worshipers’*” [9:112].

“To recollect repentance while recollecting the Real most high is to remain oblivious of recollection. To remember the Real most high truly is to forget all things beside the Lord, so that the Lord most high takes the place of all things.”

“Concerning the meaning of the verse *He reserves his mercy for whomever he pleases* [2:105 and 3:74]—He has removed the means, the reasons, and the causes, so that you may know that his mercy is a pure gift.”

“One who believes stands by his self. One who realizes stands by his Lord.”

“Whoever struggles against his self for the sake of his self attains wonders. Whoever struggles against his self for the sake of the Lord attains the Lord.”

“Divine inspiration is one of the attributes of the blessed. Rationalizing without inspiration is one of the marks of the cursed.”

“The ways that the mighty and glorious Lord deceives his servant are more hidden than the motion of an ant going across a black stone on a dark night.”

“Love is divine madness. It is to be neither condemned nor praised.”

“My innermost divine vision was confirmed when they stigmatized me for madness.”

“It is a man's good fortune when his enemy is wise.”

“Beware of associating with five kinds of people: first, liars, for you will always feel overconfident around them. Second, fools, for when they want to do something good for you, they will do something harmful and not realize it. Third, misers, for they will cut you off from the

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best of times. Fourth, cowards, for they will leave you in the lurch in your hour of need. Fifth, the corrupt, for they will sell you out for a piece of bread and they hunger after the smallest pieces.”

“The Real most high has a paradise and a hell here in this world. Paradise is sound health, and hell is hardship. Sound health is referring your own works back to the mighty and glorious Lord, and hell is performing the Lord’s works for your self.”

“Someone who does not have any secrets is dangerous.”

“If the company of God’s enemies were harmful to his friends, Āsiyeh would have been harmed by her husband, the pharaoh. If the company of God’s friends were beneficial to his enemies, Lot’s and Noah’s wives would have benefited. But there was nothing more than a contraction and an expansion.”

Sādeq has many sayings. We speak a few words as a foundation and conclude.

∞ 2 ∞

Oveys of Qaran¹

The compass for the second generation of Muslims, the exemplar for the Forty Substitutes,² the hidden sun, the friend of the Merciful, the Canopus of Yemen, Oveys of Qaran—God’s mercy be upon him. The Prophet (God bless him and his family and grant them peace) said, “*The most virtuous of my followers is Oveys of Qaran.*” How can my tongue properly describe and praise one whom the Prophet himself praises? Sometimes the Master of the World (peace and blessing be upon him) would turn toward Yemen and say, “*I find that the breath of the Compassionate comes from Yemen.*”³ The Master of the Prophets also said, “On the morrow of the resurrection, the Real most high will create seventy thousand angels in the likeness of Oveys, so that Oveys may rise up among them on the plain of judgment and go to heaven, and no creature will know which among them is Oveys, except as God wills. In the abode of this world, he worshiped the Real under the dome

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of secrecy and kept his distance from people; so, too, in the afterworld he will be protected from the eyes of strangers, for *my friends are under my domes; no one else knows them.*⁴

In a rarely attested tradition, it is related that on the morrow in paradise, the Master of the Prophets (peace and blessing be upon him) will come out from his palace as though he is looking for someone. A voice will ask, "For whom are you looking?"

Mohammad will answer, "Oveys."

The voice will call out, "Don't bother. Just as you did not see him in the world below, so you will not see him here."

"My God, where is he?"

"In an assembly of truth" [54:55].

"Does he see me?"

The edict will come down: "Why should anyone who sees us see you?"

The Master of the Prophets (peace and blessing be upon him) also said, "There is a man in my community who will intercede on the resurrection for as many people as there are hairs on the sheep of the tribes of Rabi'a and Mozar." And they say that among the Arabs, no tribe has as many sheep as these two tribes.

"Who is this?" Mohammad's companions asked.

"One of the Lord's servants."

"We are all servants of the Lord most High. What's his name?"

"Oveys."

"Where is he?"

"In the tribe of Qaran."

"Has he seen you?"

"With his outer eyes, no."

"Strange that a lover like this has not hastened to serve you."

"There are two reasons. First, overwhelming rapture. Second, reverence for my law—he has a blind and devout mother whose hands and feet have grown weak. By day, Oveys works tending camels and spends his wages to support his mother and himself."

"Will we see him?"

To Abu Bakr, Mohammad said, "You will not see him, but 'Omar and 'Ali will. He is a hairy man, and there are white marks the size of

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a dirham on his left side and on the palms of his hands. But he is not leprous. When you find him, give him my regards and tell him to pray for my people.”

The Master of the Prophets (peace and blessing be upon him) also said, *“The most loving of God’s friends are those who are pious in secret.”* God’s Messenger speaks the truth.

Some people said, “Messenger of God, we don’t find him among us.”

Mohammad (peace be upon him) said, “He is a camel herder in Yemen. They call him Oveys. Walk in his footsteps.”

It is related that when the Messenger (peace and blessing be upon him) was about to die, he was asked, “Messenger of God, to whom shall we give your cloak?”

“Oveys of Qaran.”

After the death of the Messenger (peace and blessing be upon him), when ‘Omar and ‘Ali (may God be pleased with them both) came to Kufa, ‘Omar turned to the people of Nejd during his sermon and said, “People of Nejd, stand up.” They stood up. ‘Omar asked, “Is there anyone from the Qaran among you?”

They said yes and sent some people forward. ‘Omar asked about Oveys. They said, “We don’t know him.”

‘Omar said, “The Founder of the Law (peace and blessing be upon him) told me about him, and he doesn’t speak empty words. You really don’t know of him?”

Someone said, “He’s too contemptible to be sought after by the Commander of the Faithful. He’s a foolish madman, a wild creature.”

“Where is he?” ‘Omar said. “We are looking for him.”

“He is in the valley of ‘Urana, grazing camels so he can get food at night. He doesn’t come into the settlements or associate with anyone. He doesn’t eat what people eat and knows neither sorrow nor happiness. When people laugh, he cries, and when they cry, he laughs.”

‘Omar and ‘Ali then went to the valley and found him praying. The Real most high had appointed an angel to graze the camels. When Oveys sensed humans, he cut short his prayer. After Oveys said amen, ‘Omar stood up and said hello. Oveys returned his greeting. ‘Omar asked, “What is your name?”

"The servant of God, 'Abdollāh."

"We are all servants of the Lord. I'm asking about your personal name."

"Oveys."

"Show me your right hand," 'Omar said. Oveys showed it to him. 'Omar saw the sign indicated by the Messenger (peace and blessing be upon him). 'Omar kissed it at once and said, "The Lord's Messenger has sent you his greetings and said, 'Pray for my peoples.'"

Oveys said, "You are more worthy to pray for them. There is no one on the face of the earth more honored than you."

"I do pray for them," 'Omar said, "but you should carry out the Messenger's final will and testament."

"'Omar, take a closer look," Oveys said. "Mustn't it be someone else?"

"The Messenger has indicated you."

"Then give me the Prophet's robe, so I may pray and ask for what is needed." Oveys went to a secluded place further away from them. He set the robe aside, put his face to the ground, and said, "My God, I will not put on this robe until you give me all of Mohammad's people. Your Messenger has turned them over to me here. The Prophet, 'Omar, and 'Ali have finished their tasks. Now only your task is left."

A hidden voice called out, "We give you some of them. Now put on the robe."

"I want them all," Oveys said.

He went on talking and listening, until 'Omar and 'Ali said, "Let's get up close so we can see what Oveys is doing."

When Oveys saw that they had come, he said, "Ah, why have you come? If it weren't for your coming, I wouldn't have put on the robe until he gave me all of Mohammad's people."

When 'Omar saw Oveys with his bare head and bare feet, dressed in a camel-hair blanket, and under that blanket the power of the eighteen thousand worlds, he despaired of himself and the caliphate. He said, "Who will buy this caliphate from me for a loaf of bread?"

"Someone who has no sense," Oveys replied. "What are you selling? Throw it away, so anyone who wants it can pick it up. What do buying and selling have to do with it?"

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The Muslim elders cried out, "You have accepted something from Abu Bakr. The work of so many Muslims cannot be squandered. One day of your justice is superior to a thousand years of devotion."

Oveys then put on the robe and said, "By the blessings of this robe, as many of Mohammad's people have been forgiven as there are hairs on the sheep of Rabi'a and Mozar."

Here someone might suppose that Oveys was more advanced than 'Omar, but this is not the case. However, Oveys's special characteristic was detachment. 'Omar had everything, but he also wanted detachment, just as the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) used to knock on the old woman's door, saying, "Remember Mohammad in your prayers."

Then 'Ali sat down in silence. 'Omar asked, "Oveys, why didn't you come to see the Prophet?"

"Have you seen him?" Oveys asked.

"Yes," they answered.

"Maybe you have seen his coat. If you have seen him, tell me, were his eyebrows joined or separated?"

Strangely, neither one could say, so imposing was Oveys's presence. Then Oveys asked, "Do you love Mohammad?"

"Yes," they said.

"If you really loved him, why didn't break your own tooth to conform on the day his tooth was broken? Conformance is the condition of friendship." Then Oveys showed them his mouth. There wasn't a single tooth in it. "Without having seen him face to face, I broke off my own teeth to conform with his, for conformance comes from faith."

They were overcome with tenderness. They realized that the dignity of conformance and proper behavior was other than what they supposed and that they had to learn proper behavior from Oveys, though he had not seen the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him).

'Omar then said, "Oveys, pray for me."

"Let there be no bias in the faith. I have made my prayers. In every prayer, I testify, '*O God, forgive the believers, man and woman.*' If you carry your faith sound to the grave, this prayer will find you on its own. If not, I'm not going to waste any prayers."

'Omar then said, "Give me a parting piece of advice."

"Omar, do you know the Lord?"

"Yes."

"If you don't know anyone else, it will be better for you."

"Say more."

"Omar, does the mighty and glorious Lord know you?"

"He does."

"If no one else knows you, it will be best."

"Wait," Omar said, "let me get something for you."

Oveys reached into his pocket and pulled out two dirhams and said, "I have earned this from herding camels. If you can guarantee that I will live long enough to spend this, then I will take something else." He continued, "You are troubled. Go back, for the resurrection is near. There will be a meeting there that has no return. I am busy now preparing provisions for the road to the resurrection."

When the people of Qaran returned from Kufa, Oveys was shown great respect among the people. Oveys did not care for this. He fled there and came to Kufa. After that, no one saw him except Harem ebn Hayyān,⁵ who reported:

When I heard of the extent of Oveys's intercession, I was overwhelmed by yearning for him. I went to Kufa and sought him out. Unexpectedly, I found him on the banks of the Euphrates, making ablutions and washing his clothes. I recognized him from the description I had heard of him and greeted him. He replied and looked me over. I was about to take his hand, but he would not give it to me. I said, "*May God have mercy on you, Oveys, and forgive you.* How are you?" I began to weep because of my love for him, the compassion that I felt for him, and his poor health.

Oveys wept and said, "*God give you long life, Harem ebn Hayyān. How are you and who has guided you to me?*"

"How did you know my name and my father's? How did you recognize me? You've never seen me."

"The One whose knowledge nothing escapes informed me. My spirit recognized your spirit—the spirits of the believers are familiar with one another."

"Relate to me some story about the Messenger (peace and blessing be upon him)."

"I never saw him, but I heard stories about him from others. I don't want to be a reciter of traditions or a religious scholar or a storyteller. I have my own affairs to keep me from doing these things."

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“Recite a verse of the Qur’an, so I may hear it from you.”

“*I seek refuge with God from the accursed Satan.*” And he sobbed. Then he recited, “*I have only created jinn and men so they might serve me*” [54:56], and “*We did not create the heaven and the earth and everything between for sport*” [21:16], and from “*We did not create them except for just ends, but most of them do not know it*” up to “*He is the mighty and compassionate*” [44:39-42]. Then he let out such a cry that I thought he had fainted. Then he said, “Son of Hayyān, what has brought you to this place?”

“I wanted to get to know you and to comfort you.”

“I never realized that someone who knew the mighty and glorious Lord could get to know any other than him or comfort any other than him.”

“Give me counsel.”

“Keep death under your pillow when you sleep and keep it before your eyes when you get up. Don’t look at how petty a sin is. Look at how great it is, for it led you to rebel against him. If you deem a sin petty, you have deemed the Lord petty.”

Harem continued:

I asked, “Where would you say I should settle down?”

“In Syria.”

“Can one make a good living there?”

“Ugh, hearts like these! They’ve been overwhelmed by polytheism and will not take advice.”

“Counsel me further.”

“Son of Hayyān, your father died. Adam and Eve have died, and Noah and Abraham and Moses and David and Mohammad (peace be upon them). Abu Bakr, his successor, also died. My brother ‘Omar died. Alas ‘Omar!”

“God have mercy on you! ‘Omar hasn’t died!”

“The Real most high informed me of ‘Omar’s death.” He added, “You and I are both among the dead.” Then he called down blessings on the Prophet and his family and said a prayer. “My counsel,” he continued, “is that you take up the book of the mighty and glorious Lord and follow the path of the righteous. Don’t let the thought of death slip your mind for an instant. When you reach your people, counsel them. Do not withhold advice from the Lord’s creatures. And do not take one

step that is not in conformity with the consensus of the community, lest all of a sudden you be left without faith and not know it and tumble into hell." He then said several prayers and said, "You are about to go, son of Hayyān. You will not see me again, nor I you. Remember me in your prayers, for I will remember you in mine. You go this way, and I'll go that."

I wanted to walk with him for a while. He would not allow it and wept. He brought tears to my eyes as well. Most of the things he said to me were about 'Omar and 'Ali (may God be pleased with them both). I watched him walk away until he disappeared, and I heard no news of him after that.

Rabi' ebn Kheysam⁶ (God's mercy be upon him) reported:

I went to see Oveys. He was performing the morning prayer. When he finished, he began to count his prayer beads. I waited until he was done. As soon as he got up, he started performing the noon prayer. In short, for three days and nights he did not stop praying and did not eat anything and did not sleep. On the fourth night I was listening to him. His eyes drooped a little from sleepiness. At once, he began to speak intimately with the Real most high and said, "O Lord, I seek refuge with you from my eyes, which sleep too much, and from my stomach, which eats too much."

I said to myself, "This is enough for me." I did not disturb him and turned away.

They say that during his lifetime he never slept at night. One night he would say, "*This is the night for prostration,*" and he would spend that night prostrate. One night he would spend standing up and say, "*This is the night for standing.*" One night he would kneel down until daybreak and say, "*This is the night for kneeling.*"

They asked him, "Oveys, how do you have the strength to spend such a long night in one position?"

"By the time the day breaks, I have not once yet said, '*Praise to my Lord most high.*' The Prophet's practice was to say it three times. I do this because I want to worship like those who dwell in heaven."



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They asked him, "What is submissiveness in prayer?"

"It is this: If they shoot an arrow into the side of someone while he is praying, he is unaware of it."

They asked him, "How are you?"

"How is someone who gets up in the morning and doesn't know whether he will live until nightfall?"

They asked him, "How goes your affair?"

"Alas for the lack of provisions and the length of the road!"

"If you worship the Lord with all the devotion of the creatures of heaven and earth, he will not accept it from you until you believe in him."

They asked, "How can we believe in him?"

"Have faith that he has accepted you. You will find yourself at ease in worship and will not be distracted by anything else."

"Hell is closer than the jugular vein to anyone who loves three things: first, eating fine food; second, wearing fine clothes; and third, lounging with the wealthy."



They told Oveys, "Near here, there is a man who dug a grave thirty years ago and spread out his shroud in it. He has been sitting on the edge of the grave ever since, weeping without rest day and night."

Oveys went there and saw him, thin and pale with his eyes fixed on the pit. "For thirty years," Oveys said to him, "your grave and shroud have held you back from the Lord most high and you have been left behind because of them. These two are the idols of your path."

Through Oveys's light, the man saw that wretchedness within himself. Rapture was revealed to him. He shouted and died and fell into the grave and onto the shroud. If the grave and the shroud can be veils, consider what the veils of others are.

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It is related that once Oveys did not eat anything for three full days. The fourth day, he saw a dinar on the road. He did not pick it up. "Someone must have dropped it," he thought.

He went to pluck some grass and eat it. He saw a sheep holding a loaf of warm bread in its mouth. The sheep came up and set the loaf in front of him. Oveys thought, "Maybe the sheep has stolen it from someone." He turned away.

The sheep began to speak and said, "I am the servant of the One whose servant you are. Take the sustenance of the Lord from the servant of the Lord."

"I stretched out my hand to take the bread," Oveys said. "I saw the bread in my hand, and the sheep disappeared."

His good qualities are many and his virtues countless. In the beginning, Sheikh Abu'l-Qāsem of Korakān used to chant, "Oveys! Oveys!" They know their worth.

Oveys's saying is "Nothing remains hidden from one who knows the mighty and glorious Lord." In other words, one can know the Lord by the Lord. Whoever knows the Lord by the Lord knows all things.

Oveys said, "Safety is in solitude." The solitary man is one who is alone in oneness, and oneness is where no thought of the other intervenes, so there is safety. If you adopt solitude in appearance, it will not come out right, for the hadith says, "*Satan is with the solitary man, and he is the more distant of the two.*"

He said, "Keep your heart." In other words, it is incumbent upon you to tend to your heart at all times, so the other may not find its way in.

He said, "*I sought grandeur and I found it in humility. I sought command and I found it in wishing people well. I sought chivalry and I found it in truthfulness. I sought glory and I found it in poverty. I sought fame and I found it in piety. I sought nobility and I found it in contentment. I sought comfort and I found it in austerity.*"

It is related that his neighbors said, "We figured him for a madman. Finally we asked him if we could build a room for him at the front of our house. A year went by when he didn't have the wherewithal to break his

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fast. He used to get his meals by gathering date pits from time to time and selling them at night and spending the money on food. If he found some dates, he would sell the pits and give the money away as alms. His clothes were old rags that he picked up from the garbage and washed off and sewed together. He made do with this—the Lord's people derive comfort from such things. He would go out at the dawn prayer and return after the night prayer. In every neighborhood he entered, the children would throw stones at him. He would say, 'My calves are thin. Throw smaller stones, so my feet won't be stained with blood and I won't be prevented from praying. I am worried about my prayers, not about my feet.'"

At the end of his life, so they say, he came to visit the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (may God be pleased with him). They fought together at the battle of Seffin⁷ until Oveys was martyred. *He lived commendably and died happily.*

Know that there is a group of people whom they call the Oveysians. They have no need for a spiritual guide, for prophecy nurtures them in its shelter without the mediation of another, just as it nurtured Oveys. Although outwardly he did not see the Master of the Prophets (peace and blessing be upon him), Oveys was nevertheless nurtured by him. He was fostered by prophecy and was in harmony with the truth. This is a great and lofty station. Who will be made to attain this station and to whom will this good fortune show its face? *That is the grace of God, which he will bestow on whomever he pleases [5:57].*

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Hasan of Basra

Nourished by prophecy, accustomed to victory, the Ka'ba of works and learning, the compass of scrupulousness and restraint, foremost in the seat of honor, at the forefront of religious practice, Hasan of Basra—God's mercy be upon him. His virtues are many and his laudable qualities countless. He was the master of learning and proper conduct, and the fear and the grief of the Real enveloped him constantly.

His mother was one of the retainers of Omm Salama¹ (God be pleased with her). When his mother was busy at some task, Hasan would begin

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to cry. Omm Salama would place her nipple in his mouth for him to suckle. A few drops of milk would appear. The many thousands of blessings that the Real most high manifested were all the result of that.

It is related that during his childhood at Omm Salama's house (God be pleased with her), Hasan drank water one day from the Prophet's jug (peace and blessing be upon him). He asked, "Who drank this water?"

"Hasan," they said.

The Prophet said, "As much as he drank of this water, so much shall my knowledge permeate him."

It is related that one day the Prophet (peace be upon him) went to Omm Salama's house, and Hasan was set down next to him. The Prophet prayed for him. Whatever Hasan attained was from the blessing of that prayer.

It is related that when he was born, they brought him to 'Omar ebn al-Khattāb (God be pleased with him). He said, "Name him Hasan," meaning handsome, "for he has a pretty face."

Omm Salama (God be pleased with her) raised him and cared for him. Because of the tenderness she felt for him, she began to lactate. She always used to say, "O Lord, make him an example for your creatures!" He chanced to meet one hundred and thirty of the Prophet's companions and saw seventy of those who fought at the battle of Badr.² He was the disciple of 'Ali ebn Abi Tāleb (God be pleased with him) and received his robe from him.

The beginning of his conversion happened this way: He was a jewel merchant, and they called him Pearly. Once he went to Byzantium and approached the vizier. The vizier said, "We're going somewhere today. Will you come along?"

"I will," Hasan said, and they went into the desert.

Hasan related:

I saw a tent made of brocade with silken ropes and golden pegs and I saw a mighty army, fully equipped for war. It circled the tent for an hour, said something, and departed. Then scholars and scribes came, about four hundred men, and they too circled the tent, said something, and departed.

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After that I saw honored elders who did just the same and departed. Then gorgeous serving girls, nearly four hundred of them and each with a platter of gold and jewels upon her head, did the same and departed. Then the emperor and the vizier went into the tent, came out, and departed. I was astonished and thought, "What's going on?"

I questioned the vizier. He said, "The emperor had a beautiful son. He was perfectly accomplished in the various sciences and without peer on the field of battle. His father loved him. Suddenly he took ill. Skilled physicians were unable to cure him, until in the end he perished. They buried him inside that tent.

"Once each year they come to pay their respects to him. First, the mighty army that you saw comes, and the soldiers say, 'O prince, if the condition that befell you could have been warded off with arms and war, we would have all sacrificed our lives to rescue you. But war can never be waged against the one responsible for your condition.' They say this and turn back.

"Then the scholars and scribes come and say, 'O prince, if our learning and philosophy or our science and subtlety could have warded this off, we would have done so.' They say this and turn back.

"Then the honored elders come and say, 'O prince, if it had been possible to ward off this condition with compassion and sympathy or with learning and subtlety, we would have done so. But the one responsible for it will not be bought off with compassion or sympathy.'

"Then the gorgeous serving girls come with their golden platters and say, 'If we could have ransomed you with wealth or pomp or beauty, we would have sacrificed ourselves, but wealth and beauty carry no weight here.'

"Then the emperor and the vizier enter the tent and say, 'O soul of your father! What could your father do? He brought a mighty army, scholars and scribes, elders, intercessors, and counselors, beautiful girls, wealth, and riches of all sorts for you. I myself came too. If anything within my power would have helped, I would have done it. But your condition resides with one before whom your father, with all his grandeur, is helpless. Peace be upon you for another year.' They say this and turn back."

These words moved Hasan deeply, and at once he turned back and went to Basra. He swore that in this world he would never smile until the outcome of his affairs became clear. He tormented himself

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with such austerities and devotions that no one else in his time could exceed that discipline. For seventy years, his purity was violated only in the privy.

His seclusion was such that he gave up hope in all creation until inevitably he surpassed it all. Thus it was that one day someone got up and said, "Why is Hasan our superior and so much better than we?"

An eminent person was present and said, "Because all creatures are in need of his knowledge, and he needs nothing but the Real. In religion, all creation requires him, but he is free of everything in this world. His superiority and excellence come from that."

He would speak at prayer meetings once a week. Whenever he climbed up to the pulpit, he would come back down if Rābe'a was not present. Once he was asked, "So many important and honored people are present. What does it matter if an old woman's not here?"

"The drink we have prepared for elephants cannot be served to mice," Hasan replied.

Whenever the meeting warmed up, whenever hearts were afire and eyes were swimming in tears, he would turn to Rābe'a and say, "*O noble lady, this is from the embers of your heart.*" In other words, "All this warmth comes from one sigh from the depths of your being."



They said, "We know you must be happy when such a huge crowd comes to your meeting."

Hasan said, "Quantity does not make us happy. We are happy if two dervishes are present."

"What is Islam, and who is a Muslim?"

"Islam is in the books, and Muslims are under the earth."

"What is the source of religion?"

"Scrupulousness."

"What destroys it?"

"Appetite."

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They asked, "What is the Garden of Eden?"

Hasan said, "It is a palace made of gold. No one reaches it but a prophet or an honest man, a martyr or a just sultan."

Someone said, "How can a sick doctor cure others? 'First cure yourself, then others,' they say."

"When you listen to my words," Hasan answered, "you profit from my knowledge and lose nothing from my ignorance."

"Sheikh, our hearts have fallen asleep, so your words have no effect on them. What should we do?"

"Would that they were asleep! When you jostle a sleeper, he wakes up. Your hearts are dead. They won't wake up, however much you shake them."

They said, "There are some folk who frighten us so much with their words that our hearts shatter from dread. Is this right?"

Hasan said, "It's better than talking with folk who make you feel safe today and leave you stricken with dread on the morrow."

"Some folks come to your meetings and memorize your words just so they can criticize and find fault with them," they said.

"I have seen dark-eyed women who desire the highest paradise and the proximity of the Real most high," Hasan replied. "They never crave men's greetings, for even their Creator will never accept the greetings of such tongues."

They said, "Someone says, 'Do not call the people until you have purified yourself.'"

"The devil desires nothing more than these words," Hasan replied. "He wants these words to adorn our hearts, so we will hold back from commanding good and forbidding evil."

"Does the believer envy?" they asked.

Hasan said, "Have you forgotten Joseph's brothers? But it costs you nothing when you cast a torment from your breast."



Hasan had a disciple who would throw himself on the ground and cry out whenever he heard a verse from the Qur'an. Hasan said to him, "If you can stop what you're doing, then you've burned up all your fine conduct in the fire of nothingness. If you can't stop, then you've left me ten stages behind."

"*Thunder comes from the devil,*" he added—when anyone shouts, it is no one but the devil shouting. He laid this down as a general rule that does not apply everywhere. And Hasan himself interpreted it: if one can refrain from crying out and the thunder crashes, then it is the devil's doing.

One day Hasan was speaking at a meeting. Hajjāj entered with many soldiers brandishing their swords. An eminent person was present: "Today I'll test Hasan," he said. "This will be the moment of truth." Hajjāj sat down. Hasan did not so much as glance at him, nor did he interrupt what he was saying until the meeting was completed.

"Hasan means 'beautiful,'" the eminent one said.

When the meeting ended, Hajjāj forced his way up to Hasan, grabbed his arm, and said, "*Look at this man!* If you want to see a man, look at Hasan."

Hajjāj was seen in a dream, fallen prostrate on the plain of the resurrection. "What do you seek?" they asked him.

He said, "I seek what the people of unity seek." He said this because in his death throes, he had said, "O Lord, show these narrow minds the truth of your words: 'I am the most forgiving and the most generous of the generous.' They are in unanimous agreement that you will send me down and not forgive me. Forgive me to spite them and show them: *He does as he wills*" [11:127].

Hasan was told about this and said, "It seems that this wicked man will win over the afterworld with some trick, too."

It is related that 'Ali (peace be upon him) came to Basra. With the camel's lead ropes tied around his waist, he did not linger more than three days. He ordered that the pulpits be torn down, and he banned the preachers. He went to Hasan's meeting and asked him, "Are you a scholar or a student?"

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“Neither,” Hasan said, “I repeat a few words that reached me from the Prophet.”

‘Ali did not ban him and said, “This youth deserves to speak.” Then he departed. Hasan had recognized ‘Ali intuitively. He came down from the pulpit and ran after him until he caught up. “For the Lord’s sake,” he said, “teach me to purify myself.” There is a place called Gate of the Basin. They brought the basin, and ‘Ali taught Hasan to perform ablutions and departed.

Once there was a year of drought in Basra. Two hundred thousand people came out to pray for rain. They set up a pulpit and sent Hasan there to pray. “If you wish for rain,” Hasan said, “expel me from Basra.”

Dread had such dominion over him that when he was seated, you would have said that he was seated before the executioner. No one ever saw a smile cross his lips. He possessed a mighty pain.

It is related that one day Hasan saw someone weeping. “Why are you weeping?” he asked.

The man replied, “I was at a prayer meeting held by Mohammad ebn Ka‘b of Qaraz, and he related that for the misfortune of his sins, the truest of believers will remain in hell for many years.”

Hasan said, “I can only hope that Hasan will be one of those who is brought out of hell after a thousand years.”

It is related that one day Hasan was reading the prophetic tradition: *The last person to come out of hell from among my people will be a man called Honād*. Hasan said, “If only I were Honād!”

It is related that one night Hasan was moaning and sobbing in his house. “Why do you lament,” he was asked, “with the life that you lead?”

“It is for fear,” Hasan said, “that without my knowledge or intention, something has come over me or I have taken a step in error somewhere that was not pleasing in the court of the Real. Then they will say to Hasan, ‘Go, for you have no standing in our court, and none of your service is acceptable.’”

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It is related that one day Hasan had wept so much on the roof of his meditation cell that water had run out from the rain spouts and dripped on someone who asked, "Is this water pure or not?"

"No, go wash," Hasan said. "These are the tears of a disobedient sinner."

It is related that Hasan once went up to a funeral bier. When the corpse was interred, Hasan sat on the grave and wept so much that he turned the earth to mud. Then he said, "People! The beginning and the end is the tomb. Behold the end of this world—it is the grave. Behold the beginning of the afterworld—it is the grave: *The first way station on the road of the afterlife is the tomb.* How can you take pride in a world whose end is this? And why don't you fear a world whose beginning is this? Since this is your beginning and your end, you heedless people, arrange your affairs, first and last." The crowd that was present wept so much that all of the people were reduced to the same state.

It is related that one day he passed by a graveyard with a group of people. He said, "In this graveyard there are men, the summit of whose aspirations did not fall short of the seven heavens. But so much regret is mingled with their dust that if one mote of it were displayed to the inhabitants of heaven and earth, they would all collapse in a heap."

It is related that as a child he had been disobedient. Whenever he sewed a new shirt, he embroidered that sin on the collar and then wept so much that he fainted.

Once 'Omar ebn 'Abd al-'Aziz (God be pleased with him) wrote a letter to Hasan, saying, "Give me a bit of counsel in a few words, so I can memorize them and make them my guide." Hasan (God have mercy upon him) wrote this: "When the mighty and glorious Lord is with you, whom do you have to fear?"

Another time Hasan wrote a letter, saying, "Assume that the day has come when the last person is to die. Farewell." 'Omar wrote in response, "Assume that the day has come when this world and the afterworld have never existed." But the afterworld has always existed.

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Once Sābet-e Bonāni (God have mercy upon him) wrote a letter to Hasan: "I hear you are going on the pilgrimage. I wish to accompany you." Hasan wrote back: "Let us live in the shelter of the Lord. Being together will reveal our faults to one another, and we will regard one another as enemies."

It is related that he advised Sa'id-e Jobeyr,³ "Do not do three things. First, do not set foot in the presence of sultans, even if it is entirely out of compassion for God's creatures. Second, do not keep company with any woman, even if she is Rābe'a, and you are teaching her God's book. Third, never pay heed to the emir, even if you have the rank of the truest of believers, for this always involves hardship and in the end will be a self-inflicted wound."

Mālek-e Dinār said, "I asked Hasan, 'What is a scholar's punishment?'

"'The death of the heart,' he said.

"'What is the death of the heart?'

"'Love of this world.'"

An eminent person said, "At dawn one day I went to the door of Hasan's mosque to pray. I saw that the door was closed. Hasan was praying inside the mosque, and some people were answering amen. I waited until it grew light. I set my hand on the door. It swung open. I went inside and saw Hasan all alone. I was amazed. When we had performed the prayer, I told Hasan the story and said, 'For God's sake, let me in on what was happening.'

"'Don't tell anyone,' Hasan said. 'On Friday mornings before dawn, fairies approach me, and I teach them and pray with them, and they answer amen.'"

It is related that when Hasan would pray, Habib-e 'Ajami would tuck up his robe and say, "I will see it answered."

It is related that an eminent person said, "We were traveling in a group on the pilgrimage. We got thirsty in the desert. We arrived at a well but saw no rope or bucket. 'When I go to pray,' Hasan said, 'you will have water to drink.'

“Then he began to pray, and we went to the water. Water had come to the top of the well. We drank our fill. One of our companions took a canteen of water. The water receded back into the well. When Hasan finished his prayers, he said, ‘You did not hold firmly to the Lord, so the water receded back into the well.’

“Afterward we left. On the way, Hasan found a date and gave it to us. We ate the date bit by bit—it had a golden pit. We took it to Medina, sold it for food, and gave that away as alms.”

The master of Qur'an reading Abu 'Amr⁴ was teaching. Unannounced, a beautiful child came in to learn the Qur'an. Abu 'Amr looked him over with treachery in his eyes and forgot the whole Qur'an from its first letter to its last. A fire blazed up within him, and he came completely undone. He approached Hasan of Basra and told him what had happened. He wept bitterly and said, “This occurred, sir, and I forgot the whole Qur'an.”

Hasan was saddened by this affair and said, “It's now time for the pilgrimage. Go and perform the hajj. When you have done so, go to the Kheyf mosque, where an old man will be sitting in the prayer niche. Don't break in on his moment. Wait until he is alone. Then go speak to him, so he will pray for you.”

Abu 'Amr did just that and sat down in a corner of the mosque. He saw a dignified old man with some people seated around him. When some time had passed, a man entered wearing a pure white robe. The old man and the people turned toward him and greeted him, and they spoke together. When it was time for prayer, that man departed, and the people went with him. The old man was left alone.

Abu 'Amr related, “I went up to him and greeted him, saying ‘God, God, help me!’ I told him what had happened to me. The old man was grief-stricken and looked at heaven from the corner of his eye. He had no sooner lowered his head than the entire Qur'an opened up before me.”

Abu 'Amr continued, “I collapsed out of sheer happiness. Then the old man asked, ‘Who directed you to me?’

“‘Hasan of Basra,’ I said.

“‘When someone has an imam like Hasan, what does he need from anyone else?’ ‘Hasan has disgraced us,’ he added. ‘Let us rend his veil too. That old man whom you saw wearing the white robe, who

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came after the noon prayer and went over to everyone and whom they all honored—that was Hasan. Everyday he performs the noon prayer in Basra, then comes here, speaks to us, and is back in Basra to perform the afternoon prayer.'

“‘When someone has an imam like Hasan,’ he repeated, ‘why ask us for a prayer?’”

It is related that in Hasan’s time a man’s horse was injured. He was at a loss over what to do and told Hasan what had happened to him. Hasan bought the horse from him for four hundred dirhams and gave him the silver. That night in a dream, the man saw a meadow in paradise. In that meadow there was a horse with four hundred frolicking, frisky colts. “Whose horses are these?” the man asked.

“They were in your name, but now the title has been made over to Hasan.”

When he awoke, he went to Hasan and said, “Imam, cancel the sale. I’ve come to regret it.”

“Go on!” Hasan said. “The dream that you had I had before you.” The man turned back in sorrow. The following night, Hasan dreamed of palaces and broad vistas. He asked,

“Whose are these?”

“They belong to the one who cancels the sale.”

Hasan sought the man out in the morning and canceled the sale.

It is related that Hasan had a Zoroastrian neighbor, a certain Sham’un. He took ill and was on the verge of death. They said to Hasan, “Go help our neighbor.”

Hasan came to his neighbor’s bedside and saw him all blackened with smoke and fire. “Fear the Lord,” Hasan said. “You’ve spent your whole life in the midst of smoke and fire. Turn to Islam, so that the Lord most high might have mercy upon you.”

“Three things keep me from Islam,” Sham’un said. “First is that you curse the world, and night and day you go seeking it. Second is that you say, ‘Death is the reality,’ but you do nothing to prepare for it. Third is that you say, ‘The vision of the Real shall be seen’ but do everything today that is contrary to his pleasure.”

“This is the mark of the enlightened,” Hasan said. “Well, if believers talk this way, what do you have to say for yourself? They con-

fess his oneness, and you've spent your life worshipping fire. You've worshiped fire for seventy years, and I have not, and yet fire burns us both and shows no special regard for you. But if my Lord wills, fire will not have the gall to singe even a hair on my body, because fire is created by the Lord, created and under his command. Now come, let's both put our hands in the fire, so you may witness the weakness of the fire and the power of the Real most high."

He said this and placed his hand in the fire and held it there—it was not burned and not one atom of its substance was altered. When Sham'un saw this, he was stunned, and the morning of awareness began to dawn. He said to Hasan, "For seventy years, I have worshiped fire. Now that only a few breaths remain, how can I set my affairs in order?"

"Become a Muslim," Hasan said.

"If you give me a document," Sham'un said, "that the Real most high will not punish me, I will adopt the faith. Until you give me the document, I will not." Hasan wrote out a document. Sham'un said, "Order just men of Basra to witness it." They endorsed the document. Then Sham'un wept profusely and adopted the faith. He gave Hasan his last testament: "When I die, order them to wash me and commit me to the earth with your own hands. Put this document in my hands to serve as my proof."

Hasan said, "I accept." Sham'un recited the testimony of faith and died. They washed his body and performed prayers over it, and they put the document in his hand and buried him. That night Hasan could not sleep for worry, thinking, "What is this I have done? I myself am drowning. How can I help another drowning man? I have no control over my own property—why did I write out a deed for the property of the mighty and glorious Lord?"

Lost in thought, he fell asleep. He saw Sham'un shining like a torch. He was wearing silk with a crown upon his head, smiling and walking gracefully through the fields of paradise. Hasan said, "Sham'un, how are you?"

He said, "Why do you ask? I'm just as you see me. In his bounty, the Real most high brought me near to him and, in his generosity, revealed his face. What he graciously commanded for my sake is beyond description or expression. Now you have fulfilled your obligation to act as my guarantor. Take this document of yours. I don't need it."

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When Hasan awoke, he saw the paper in his hand. He said, "Lord, it is clear to me that your actions have no cause but pure grace. Who will suffer loss at your door? You allow a seventy-year-old Zoroastrian into your presence with a single word. How will you exclude a seventy-year-old believer?"

It is related that Hasan was so broken and humbled that he considered anyone he looked at to be better than he was. One day he was passing along the banks of the Tigris. He saw a black man drinking from a large flagon with a woman seated in front of him. It occurred to Hasan that this man was better than he was himself. He fought off this thought: "How could this man be better than I am anyway?"

Just then a heavily laden ship arrived with seven men aboard. Without warning, the ship foundered and sank. The black man entered the water and rescued five of the men. Then he turned to Hasan and said, "Get up, if you're better than I am. I've rescued five of them—you save the other two, Imam of the Muslims! There's water in this flagon, and this woman is my mother. I wanted to test whether you see with the outer eye or the inner one. Now it is clear that you are blind—you saw with the outer eye."

Hasan fell down at the man's feet, asked for forgiveness, and knew that he was one appointed by the Real. Then he said, "O black man! Just as you rescued them from the sea, deliver me from the sea of speculation."

The black man said, "May your eye be illuminated!" And so it was that after that Hasan certainly did not consider himself to be better than anyone else again.

It reached the point that once Hasan saw a dog and said, "God, accept me with this dog!"

Someone asked him, "Are you better or the dog?"

"If I escape the punishment of the Lord, I am better than it. Otherwise, by the glory of the Lord, it is better than a hundred like me."

It is related that Hasan said, "I was astonished by the words of four people: a child, a pederast, a drunk, and a woman."

"How is that?" they asked.

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He said, "One day, as I was passing by a pederast, I was gathering up my robe to avoid touching him. 'Sir,' he said, 'our true condition is not yet apparent. Don't pull your robe away from me, for only the Lord knows how things will turn out in the future.'

"And I saw a drunk who was staggering through the mud and I said to him, 'You wretched man, steady your steps, so you won't fall.' 'So presumptuous!' he replied to me. 'Have you steadied your steps? If I fall, I am a drunk soiled by the mud. I'll get up and wash off. It's a simple thing. Fear your own fall!' These words made a profound impression on me.

"And once a child was carrying a lantern. I asked, 'Where did you get this light from?' He blew out the lantern and said, 'Tell me, where did this light go? Then I'll tell you where I got it from.'

"And I saw a woman, a great beauty, with her face and both hands exposed. She was complaining angrily to me about her husband. I said, 'First cover your face.' She said, 'Because of my love for a creature, I've lost my reason. If you had not told me, I would have gone down to the market just like this. With all your presumption of love for God, how is it that you did not fail to notice that my face was uncovered?' This too astonished me."

It is related that when he would come down from the pulpit, he would take aside several members of this clan. He would say, "Come, let us spread the light." One day someone who was not among the people of this tradition went with them. "Go back," Hasan told him.

It is related that Hasan said to his friends one day, "You resemble the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him)." They seemed happy. Hasan added, "I'm talking about your faces and beards, not about anything else. If you had laid eyes on that folk, they would have all seemed crazy in your eyes. If they had been informed of you, they would not have called one of you a Muslim. They were in the vanguard, riding on horses, like the wind or a bird in flight. We are stuck on asses, hiding behind our beards."

It is related that a Bedouin came to Hasan and asked about patience. "There are two sorts of patience," Hasan said. "One is patience with affliction and misfortune, and one is patience with those things that the

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Real most high has forbidden to us.” He explained patience to the Bedouin as it ought to be.

The Bedouin said, “I have never seen anyone more ascetic than you, or heard of anyone as patient.”

“Bedouin,” Hasan said, “my asceticism is entirely motivated by desire, and my patience is motivated by anxiety.”

“Tell me what these words mean,” the Bedouin said. “You’ve shaken my confidence.”

“My patience in affliction and service to God tells of my fear of hellfire, and this is the essence of anxiety. My asceticism in this world is desire for the other world, and this is the essence of self-interest.” Hasan continued, “Strong is the patience of one who eliminates self-interest, whose patience is for the sake of the Real, not for the sake of saving his body from hell, and whose asceticism is for the sake of the Real, not for the sake of attaining paradise. This is the mark of sincerity.”



“A man must have useful learning and accomplished works; sincerity is with him. He must have complete contentment, and patience is with him. When these three things are achieved, I don’t know what can be done to him.”

“Sheep are more aware than humankind, because the shepherd’s call keeps them from grazing, while the word of the mighty and glorious Lord does not keep humankind from its desires.”

“Associating with the wicked makes people suspicious of the good.”

“If someone accuses me of drinking wine, I consider this more amiable than if he accuses me of pursuing this world.”

“Realization is not finding a mote of enmity in oneself.”

“Eternal, unending paradise is not in a few days’ good works. It is in right intention.”

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“When the people of paradise first look upon paradise, they will faint away for seven hundred years, so the Real most high can reveal himself to them. If they look upon his grandeur, they will be drunk with his awesomeness. If they look upon his beauty, they will be drowned in unity.”

“Thought is a mirror that shows you the good and evil within you.”

“Words not born of wisdom are the essence of misfortune. Silence not born of thought is lust and negligence. Gazes not born of prudence are idle play and error.”

“The Torah says that whoever has been content is without want. Whoever has retired from the created world has found peace. Whoever has crushed lust under foot has been liberated. When anyone refrained from envy, true humanity appeared, and when he was patient for a few days, he found eternal satisfaction.”

“People of the heart continually return to silence, so that when their hearts have something to say, it will pervade their tongues.”

“Scrupulousness has three stages. First is that God's servant speaks only the truth, whether in anger or pleasure. Second is that he keeps his limbs from whatever will anger the mighty and glorious Lord. Third is that his goal be something of which the Real most high will approve.”

“A tiny bit of scrupulousness is better than a thousand years of prayer and fasting.”

“The noblest of good deeds are thought and scrupulousness.”

“If I knew that there were no hypocrisy in me, I would hold that more dear than anything on the face of the earth.”

“Disagreement of inner and outer, of heart and tongue, is part of hypocrisy.”

“There were no believers in the past, nor will there be any in the future, who have not quaked with fear, thinking, ‘I must not be a hypocrite!’”

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“Most surely, whoever says, ‘I am a believer,’ truly is not.” In other words, *do not justify yourselves. He knows best who is mindful* [53:32].

“The believer is one who is deliberate and calm and is not like one who gathers firewood at night. In other words, he is not like one who does something just because he can or who says whatever comes to mind.”

“It is not backbiting to point out the faults of three kinds of people: the lustful, the libertine, and the tyrannical imam.”

“In atonement for backbiting, it is enough to ask for forgiveness, although you do not seek pardon.”

“Adam’s poor children! They are pleased with an abode where they are held accountable for what is lawful and tormented for what is forbidden.”

“The souls of Adam’s offspring will take leave of this world with only three regrets. The first is that they have not had their fill of hoarding. The second is that they have not obtained what they hoped for. And the third is that they have not made provision for a road like the one ahead of them.”

Someone said, “So-and-so is giving up the ghost.” Hasan replied, “Don’t say that—he’s been giving up the ghost for seventy years. When he gives up giving up the ghost, where will he go?”

“The lightly burdened are saved, and the heavily laden perish.”

“The Lord most high will forgive a folk to whom this world was given as a trust and who returned the trust and departed lightly burdened.”

“In my opinion, the clever and knowing are those who destroy this world and erect the afterworld on its ruins, not those who destroy the afterworld and erect this world on its ruins.”

“Whoever knows the mighty and glorious Lord loves him. Whoever knows this world despises it.”

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“In this world, no beast of burden deserves firm reins more than the self.”

“If you want to see how this world will be after your death, see how it is after the death of others.”

“By God, they did not worship idols, except out of their love for this world.”

“Those who came before you considered the Qur'an a letter that had reached them from the Real. They would meditate on it by night and put it into action by day. You studied it and gave up acting on it. You correct its spelling and grammar and make it into bill of lading for this world.”

“By God, no one loves silver and gold and holds them dear whom the mighty and glorious Lord does not humiliate.”

“It is a fool who sees a people coming up behind him and whose heart does not hold steady whatever happens.”

“Before you order someone else to do something, you must first be willing to carry out orders.”

“Whoever reports what people say to you will report what you say to them.”

“The brethren are dearer to us than family or children, for they are the friends of faith, while family and children are the friends of the world and the enemies of faith.”

“God's servant will be held accountable for whatever kindness he shows himself or his mother and father, but not for the food that he sets before his friends and guests.”

“Every prayer in which the heart is not present verges on chastisement.”

They asked, “What is humility?”

He said, “A fear that has stopped in the heart and to which it clings.”



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They said, "There is a man who has not come to congregational prayers for twenty years. He has associated with no one and has retired to a secluded place."

Hasan went to him and said, "Why don't you come to prayer or associate with anyone?"

"Excuse me," he said. "I'm busy."

"What are you doing?"

"I do not take a breath without some favor reaching me from the Real or without some disobedience reaching him from me. I am busy giving thanks for that favor and asking forgiveness for that disobedience."

"Remain just as you are," Hasan said. "You are better than I am."

"Have you ever been happy?"

"One day I was up on the roof," Hasan said. "The neighbor woman was saying to her husband, 'For nearly fifty years, I've stayed in your house. Whatever the circumstances, I endured both heat and cold. I looked for nothing extra and I preserved your good name and reputation. I never complained to anyone about you. But there is one thing I will not put up with: You will not choose another to put above me. I did all of this so I would see everyone in you, not so you would see someone else. Today you're showing interest in somebody else. I will appeal to the imam of the Muslims in reproach.'"

Hasan continued, "I was overjoyed, and tears flowed from my eyes. I sought out a parallel for it in the Qur'an and found this verse: *God does not forgive that partners should be set up beside him. He forgives everything else to those whom he pleases*"⁵ [4:48].

It is related that someone asked him, "How are you?"

He said, "How are those folk who are at sea, whose ship has broken up, each one clinging to a plank?"

"That's a hard situation."

"That's just how I am."

It is related that one day at the end of the month of fasting, he passed by a crowd that was laughing and playing. He said, "I consider it strange that they laugh when they are unaware of the reality of their situation."

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It is related that he saw someone eating bread in the graveyard. "He is a hypocrite," Hasan said.

"Why?" they asked.

He said, "Someone who is moved by his appetite in the presence of the dead would seem to have no belief in death and the afterworld. This is the mark of hypocrites."

It is related that in his intimate prayers he would say: "My God, you have given me favor, and I have not thanked you for it. You have sent misfortune, and I have not borne it patiently. You did not withdraw your favor from me because I did not thank you for it. You did not make misfortune into a continual bane because I did not bear it patiently. My God, does anything but generosity come from you?"

When the moment of death neared, he smiled—no one had ever seen him smiling—and kept saying, "Which sin?" and died.

An elder saw him in a dream and said, "In the course of your life, you never smiled. What happened in your death throes?"

He said, "I heard a voice saying, 'O Angel of Death! Grab hold of him firmly, for one sin still remains.' I smiled with happiness at the thought. I said, 'Which sin?' and died."

A great person saw him in a dream on the night he died: the doors of heaven were flung open, and they proclaimed, "Hasan of Basra has reached the Lord, and the Lord is happy with him."

Abu Torāb of Nakhshab

Warrior in the ranks of adversity, combatant in the arena of loyalty, realized in honesty and purity, standing alone in the portico of piety, affirming God and the Prophet, the axis of the age, Abu Torāb of Nakhshab—God’s mercy be upon him. He was among the gallant sentinels of the way and the detached wayfarers of affliction, a traveler in the desert of poverty and a chieftain of this clan. He was one of the eminent sheikhs of Khorasan; he had a firm step in striving and mindfulness and a sublime breath in allusions and adages.

He stood forty times in the plain of ‘Arafāt and for many years had never laid his head on a pillow, except once when he fell asleep one morning in the sacred precincts of Mecca. A group of angels wished to present themselves before him. Abu Torāb said, “I care so much for the forgiving that I do not care for angels.”

“Great one,” the angels said, “even though this is so, our friends will gloat over our disappointment when they hear that we were not admitted into your presence.”

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Rezvān¹ then intervened: "It is not possible for this dear man to care for you. Go till the morrow when he takes his place in paradise and sits upon the throne of dominion. Then come and make up the shortcomings in your service to him."

"O Rezvān," Abu Torāb said, "if I should alight in paradise, tell *me* to serve."

Ebn Jallā reports: "I studied with three hundred elders. Four were the greatest among them, and the first of these was Abu Torāb." Ebn Jallā further reports: "Abu Torāb entered Mecca. He was refreshed and smiling. 'Where did you eat?' I asked. He said, 'In Basra, again in Baghdad, and once more here.'"

It is related that when Abu Torāb saw something in his followers that was repugnant to him, he would repent for it himself. He would redouble his striving and say, "This poor man has fallen into affliction due to my ill fortune."

He used to tell his followers, "Each one of you who donned the patched frock was looking for a handout. Each one of you who took up residence in the hospice was looking for a handout. Each one of you who read from the Qur'an was looking for a handout."

One day one of his followers stretched out his hand toward a melon rind, not having eaten anything for three days. Abu Torāb said, "Go! You aren't fit for Sufism. You ought to go to the marketplace!"

Abu Torāb said, "There is a pact between the Real most high and me: whenever I stretch out my hand toward something forbidden, he holds me back from it."

Abu Torāb reported: "No desire has ever laid hold on my heart, except once when I was coming through the desert, and the desire for warm bread and eggs passed over my heart. I happened to lose my way. I came upon a tribe. A group of men were standing up, arguing with one another. When they saw me, they grabbed hold of me and said, 'You have stolen our goods.'"

Someone had come by and stolen their goods. The tribesmen seized the sheikh and pummeled him with two hundred blows. As they beat him, an elder passed by. He saw them beating someone. He approached and recognized Abu Torāb. The elder ripped off his patched

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frock, began to shout, and said, "This is the greatest sheikh of the path! What is this rudeness, this disrespect that you are inflicting on the chieftain of all the elders of the path?"

The men cried out, regretting what they had done, and asked for Abu Torāb's forgiveness. "Brothers," Abu Torāb said, "by my faith in Islam, no moment has ever passed sweeter than this to me. For years I have wanted to see this self get what it deserves. Now I have achieved this desire."

Then the Sufi elder took Abu Torāb's hand, led him to his hospice, and ordered someone to bring some food. The servant left and brought warm bread and eggs and set them before the sheikh. The sheikh was about to stretch out his hand when he heard a voice say, "Abu Torāb, after all these blows, eat! No desire will pass through your heart without being accompanied by two hundred blows."

It is related that Abu Torāb had several sons, and in his time, a man-eating wolf was prowling out in the open. It tore several of his sons to pieces. One day, Abu Torāb was seated on his prayer rug. The wolf stalked him. He was warned of this but remained just as he was. The wolf saw him. It turned away and left.

It is related that once Abu Torāb was going through the desert with his disciples. His followers grew thirsty and wished to perform their ablutions. They appealed to the sheikh. He drew a line, and water bubbled up. They drank and performed their ablutions.

Abu'l-'Abbās² used to say: "I was with Abu Torāb in the desert. One of our friends said to me, 'I'm thirsty.' Abu Torāb stamped his foot against the earth: a spring of water appeared. 'But I long to drink from a glass,' the disciple said. Abu Torāb struck his hand against the earth: a goblet made of the finest clear crystal rose from the earth. The disciple drank from it and gave water to our friends. The goblet was with us as far as Mecca."

Abu Torāb asked Abu'l-'Abbās, "What do your companions say about the actions that the Real most high performs through his friends as wonders?"

Abu'l-'Abbās answered, "I have met only a few who have faith in them."

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“I do not know of anything more harmful to a disciple than traveling in obedience to the self. If not for the depravity of vain travels, no depravity finds its way into a disciple.”

“The Real most high has decreed that you should refrain from mortal sins, and there are no mortal sins except depraved pretensions and vain allusions. This has been taken to include meaningless expressions and hollow words without reality.” Then, he said, “*God most high says: ‘Devils inspire their allies’*” [6:121].

“No one ever attains satisfaction in the mighty and glorious Lord if this world amounts to even a mote of dust in his heart.”

“When God’s servant is honest, he finds a sweetness in good works even before he does them, and if he is sincere in performing them, he finds a sweetness in them even as he acts.”

“You love three things, and these three things do not belong to you. You love the self, and the self belongs to mighty and glorious Lord. You love the spirit, and the spirit belongs to the Lord. You love riches, and riches belong to the Lord. You seek two things and do not obtain them: happiness and ease. Both these will be found in paradise.”

“There are seventeen stages that bring about union with the Real. The lowest of these is having one’s prayers answered, and the highest of them is truly trusting in the Lord.”

“Trust in God is throwing yourself into the sea of servitude and binding your heart to the Lord: If he gives, you give thanks, and if he withholds, you bear it patiently.”

“Nothing darkens the realized, and all darknesses become luminous to them.”

“Contentment is taking nutriment from the Lord most high.”

“No form of devotion is more profitable than rectifying one’s intuitions.”

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“The true heart among hearts is the one that lives in the light of understanding through the Lord most high.”

“Watch over your thoughts because this is the first step in everything. When someone makes his thoughts right, everything that comes to him later, whether actions or states, will turn out right.”

“In every age, the Real most high makes the learned speak in accordance with the actions of the people of the age.”

“The reality of freedom from want is that you can do without anyone like you, and the reality of destitution is that you need someone like you.”

It is related that Abu Torāb was asked, “Do you need us?”

The sheikh answered, “How should I need you or anyone like you when I don't even need the mighty and glorious Lord?” In other words, “I am at the stage of acceptance. What use is need to the accepting?”

“The dervish is one whose food is what he receives, whose clothing is what covers his nakedness, and whose dwelling is where he is.”



It is related that Abu Torāb died in the desert near Basra. After several years a group of people came upon him. They found him standing up, facing Mecca. His body was desiccated; there was a small water bag set before him, and he was grasping his staff. No wild beast had come near him.

Abu ‘Abdollāh ebn al-Jallā

The ship on the sea of religion, the repose of people of firm resolution, the guide to the spiritual stations, the mirror of prodigies, the sun in the sky of acceptance, Abu ‘Abdollāh ebn al-Jallā—God’s mercy be upon him. He was one of the great sheikhs of Syria, accepted and praised by this clan. He was distinguished by his elevated sayings and innovative intimations. He was without peer in spiritual realities and realizations and in the fine points of their subtleties. He met Abu Torāb and Zu’n-Nun and studied with Joneyd and Nuri.

Abu ‘Amr of Damascus¹ said, “I heard that Abu ‘Abdollāh said, ‘In the beginning, I told my parents to put me to work in the Lord’s business. They said, “We do so.” I then left them for a time. When I returned, I went up to the door of the house and knocked. My father asked, “Who’s there?” I answered, “Your son.” He said, “We had a son and gave him to the Lord. We won’t take back what we’ve given away.” He did not open the door to me.’”

Abu ‘Abdollāh reported:

One day I saw a handsome Christian youth. Gazing at him, I was stunned and stopped short in front of him. Sheikh Joneyd was passing by. “Teacher,” I asked, “will such a beautiful face burn in the fires of hell?”

“This is the self’s little marketplace,” Joneyd said, “and the snare of Satan that will catch you. You are not looking at him to gain awareness. If you were, you would see that a marvel exists in every mote of

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the eighteen thousand worlds. However, it won't be long before you are punished for looking at him with this disrespect."

When Joneyd left, I forgot the Qur'an. For years I sought the aid of the Real most high and wept and repented, until the Real in his grace and munificence bestowed the Qur'an on me once again. For some time now, I haven't had the gall to pay heed to any being, so I won't waste my time looking at mere objects.

It is related that they asked Abu 'Abdollah about poverty. He fell silent. Then, he went out and came back. "What was that about?" they asked.

"I had four thin silver coins," he answered. "I was ashamed to speak about poverty until I gave them away as alms."

Abu 'Abdollah said, "Having endured want and hardship, I reached Medina. As I came upon the tomb of Mohammad (peace and blessing be upon him) I said, 'O Messenger of God, I have come as your guest.' Then I fell asleep. I saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) give me a loaf of bread. I ate half of it. When I awoke, the other half was in my hand."



Abu 'Abdollah was asked, "When does a person become worthy of the name of poverty?"

He said, "When nothing remains of him."

"How is it confirmed?"

"When the angel at God's left hand² has written down nothing against him for twenty years."

"Anyone who sees praise and blame as one and the same is a renunciant. Anyone who attends to the ritual obligations as soon as possible is a devotee. Anyone who sees all his actions coming from the Lord is united."

"The realized aspire to the Real and do not turn from the Real toward anything else."

"The renunciant looks on the world with the eyes of extinction, until it becomes contemptible in his eyes, so he can remove his heart from it easily."

“If mindfulness does not keep company with someone in his poverty, he will eat the manifestly forbidden.”

“The Sufi is a poor man detached from things.”

“If it were not for the nobility of meekness, it would be the rule of the poor to swagger proudly.”

“Mindfulness is being thankful for realization. Meekness is being thankful for might. Patience is being thankful for hardship.”

“One who feels dread before the Lord is kept safe from sorrows.”

“Anyone who reaches a certain level through his self will soon fall from there. Anyone who has been brought to a certain level can remain in that position permanently.”

“Any truth with which a falseness can associate leaves the category of the true for the category of the false, for the real truth is jealous.”

“Pursuing your livelihood drives you away from the Real and makes you dependent on people.”



It is related that when his death approached, Abu 'Abdollāh was smiling and when he died, he was still smiling. The doctor asked, “He's not alive, is he?” but when they looked he was dead.

‘Ali-ye Sahl of Isfahan

The poor man of wealth, present without self, the knower of realms invisible, the seer of human foible, the treasury of subtleties and ideas, Sheikh ‘Ali-ye Sahl of Isfahan—God’s mercy be upon him. He was very eminent and well respected. He was one of the great sheikhs, and Joneyd maintained a subtle correspondence with him. He was a companion of Abu Torāb, and his sayings regarding spiritual realities are very lofty. His conduct and austerities were perfect, and he had a proper exposition of the path. ‘Amr ebn ‘Osmān of Mecca came to visit him in Isfahan; he had a debt of thirty thousand dirhams, and ‘Ali-ye Sahl paid it all off.



These are ‘Ali-ye Sahl’s words.

“Rushing to devotions is one of the signs of success. Refraining from transgressions is one of the signs of God’s protection. Watching over the innermost self is one of the signs of wakefulness. Coming out with our pretense is part of human pride. Anyone who has not made his intention right in the beginning will not attain prosperity and well-being in the end.”

They asked ‘Ali-ye Sahl, “Say a few words about the idea of perception.”

LIVES AND SAYINGS OF SUFIS

“Whoever fancies that he is closer is in reality further away. When the sunlight falls through the window, children want to grab a hold of the dust motes. They close their hands. They fancy they have something in their grasp. When they open their hands, they see nothing.”

“Being present in the Real is preferable to being certain of the Real, because presence is in the heart and negligence is not admissible there. Certainty is a passing intuition that comes and goes. Those who are present sit at the head of the table, while those who are certain wait at the threshold.”

“The negligent live according to the decree of the Lord most high. Those who remember him live in the compassion of the Lord. The realized live in the proximity of the Lord.”

“It is forbidden for a person to call on him and know him and to take comfort in anything else.”

“May you take heed to avoid pride in the beauty of your good works, leading to the hidden corruption of the innermost self.” In other words, Satan was like this.

“I asked for wealth; I found it in learning. I asked for glory; I found it in poverty. I asked for well-being; I found it in renunciation. I asked for a light reckoning; I found it in silence. I asked for ease; I found it in despair.”

“From the time of Adam (peace be upon him) forward, until the hour of the resurrection, people have been talking about the heart and still are. I want someone who will counsel me on what the heart is or how it is, but I have not found him.”

They asked ‘Ali-ye Sahl about the truth of unity. “It is near to where there are speculations, but it is distant in realities.”



It is related that he said, “Do you imagine that my death will be like your death when you fall ill and people visit you on your sickbed? Let

FARID AD-DIN 'ATTĀR'S MEMORIAL OF GOD'S FRIENDS

them summon me, and I will answer." One day, he was walking along when he said, "*I am at your service*" and lay down his head.

Sheikh Abu'l-Hasan-e Mozayyen¹ related, "At that moment, I said to him, 'Say, "*There is no god but God.*"' He smiled and said, 'Are you telling me to say something? By his majesty, there is nothing between me and him but the veil of his majesty!' and he died."

After that, Abu'l-Hasan-e Mozayyen would take hold of his mustache and say, "How can a phlebotomist like me instruct the friends of God in how to die? What a disgrace!" and he would weep.