

THE DIALECTIC OF LOVE IN EARLY PERSIAN SUFISM

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1. Introduction

In modern English, the word “mysticism” generally carries negative connotations, not least that of irrationality. I normally avoid it in my writings about the Islamic tradition, preferring instead the term Sufism, which at least suggests an appropriate cultural specificity and calls for a definition. I will not try to define it here;¹ instead, let me cite a description of mysticism by a specialist in Christianity. This is certainly not an adequate definition of “Sufism,” but it does suggest some of the concerns of the authors associated with the Sufi tradition:

A mystic is a person who is deeply aware of the powerful presence of the divine Spirit: someone who seeks, above all, the knowledge and love of God and who experiences to an extraordinary degree the profoundly personal encounter with the energy of divine life.²

If we are looking for Muslims who “experience to an extraordinary degree the profoundly personal encounter with the energy of divine life,” one of the first sources that comes to mind is Persian poetry, which has left a deep impression on the Islamic culture of India. Few poetical traditions in the world analyze in such detail the experience of divine love, always with a solid grounding in knowledge of God and the human self.

Nowadays, when we read celebrations of love by Rūmī or Ḥāfīz, it seems easy at first to understand what they are saying, because all of us have been in love and have experienced its ups and downs. But, the more we pay attention, the more we realize that there is a great deal going on in the poetry for which our own experience of love and our own cultural

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¹On the meaning of the term, see W. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

²Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages*, Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2001, 3.

background have not prepared us. Ḥāfīz, the greatest of the Persian poets, is not joking when he writes, in the very first line of his *Diwan*:

Cupbearer! Pass the cup, pour the wine,
for love seemed easy at first – then the problems began.

Persian speakers who have looked at the popular translations of Rūmī in English and compared them with the original are well aware that they are seldom accurate and, to put it mildly, fail to catch something vital in the original language. The most important thing that is missing, however, cannot be supplied simply by making the translations “more accurate.” The real problem is the profound cultural gap that separates modern English speakers from the pre-modern Persian world. Moreover, many Persian speakers today suffer from the same cultural gap, which began to appear from the moment that Western models of education were introduced in Iran during the early twentieth century.

Our basic difficulty in understanding the message of poets like Sanā’ī, ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa’dī, and Ḥāfīz is that they offer subtle expressions of a world view that is alien to most of us, even those who happen to be native Persian speakers. This means that, although anyone with a good knowledge of Persian will be able to appreciate the poetry’s beauty, few will know much about how the poets actually looked at the world. The problem is not so much the literal sense of the words, but rather the structure of the symbolic universe of Persian culture in pre-modern times. Our own world view, into which we have been indoctrinated since infancy, would have been utterly incomprehensible to the Persian poets, and, if we take the trouble to understand their view of reality, we will find that it is in fact alien to most of us.

One of the best places to investigate the sort of thinking that inspires Persian poetry is the early works of Persian prose that first explore the themes and imagery of love. These works, which belong mainly to the Sufi tradition, began to flower around the turn of the sixth/twelfth century, 250 years before the appearance of Ḥāfīz. The most famous of the early authors is Aḥmad Ghazālī, who wrote a short treatise on love, *Sawānīh*.³ A much more detailed source for the imagery and symbolism of love is *Kashf al-asrār*, a ten-volume Koran commentary by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, which was completed in 520/1126, the year of Aḥmad Ghazālī’s death. This book is one of the great classics of Persian literature and an

³The Persian text has often been published in Iran. Nasrollah Pourjavady translated it into English as *Sawānīh: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*, London: KPI, 1986.

enormously rich source of Sufi teachings, but it has largely been ignored by modern scholars of Sufism both in Iran and in the West.⁴ Another important source is *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, "The Refreshment of the Spirits," written by Aḥmad Sam'ānī, who was a member of a well-known family of scholars from Marv and died at the young age of 46 in 534/1140. This is a 600-page commentary on the ninety-nine names of God, the first commentary of its kind in Persian, though the genre was common in Arabic. It is divided into many chapters, each of which deals with one or two names of God.⁵

Sam'ānī's basic theme is that no matter what the literal meaning of a divine name may be, it always expresses God's love for human beings. It makes no difference if the name signifies mercy or wrath, forgiveness or vengeance, gentleness or severity. The apparent meaning is not nearly as important as the underlying intention of the one who is named by the name, and that intention is love. Love is the key to understanding God, creation, and man's role in the universe. Sam'ānī's position on the divine names is similar to that of a much more famous figure in Sufism, who flourished a hundred years later. That is Shams-i Tabrīzī, Rūmī's teacher. According to Shams, each and every verse of the Koran is an *ishq-nāma*, a love-letter from God.⁶

⁴Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa 'uddat al-abrār*, edited by 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, ten volumes, Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1331-39/1952-60. Annabel Keeler recently published a long introduction to the book: *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁵Aḥmad Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā' al-malik al-fattāḥ*, edited by Najrb Māyil Harawī, Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1368/1989. For details on Sam'ānī and selections from his work dealing with the fall on Adam, see Chittick, *Sufism*, chapter 9.

⁶"For the travellers and wayfarers, each verse is like a message and a love-letter. They know the Koran. He presents and discloses the beauty of the Koran to them." Chittick, *Me & Rūmī: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrīzī*, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2004, 156. For the Persian text, see *Maqālāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, edited by Muḥammad-'Alī Muwaḥḥid, Tehran: Khwārazmī, 1369/1990, 634.

2. Love's Foundation

Sam'ānī follows the standard Sufī position on the nature of love by telling us that, like all other realities, love begins in God himself. This is simply an assertion of the first principle of Islamic faith – *tawhīd*, the declaration of God's unity. Muslim authors took it for granted that God is one, and they worked out the implications of divine unity in a great variety of ways and in many different fields of learning. What *tawhīd* means is that everything comes from God at the beginning, everything returns to God at the end, and everything is sustained and supported by God between the beginning and the end.

Sufī teachers made the world view of *tawhīd* much more explicit than did experts in theology and jurisprudence. In contrast to them, however, the Sufis preferred indirect and symbolic language, which helps explain why so many of them were poets. In contrast, few theologians or jurists wrote poems of any lasting value. When we hear Sufī poets talking about love, we need to keep the indirect nature of their language in mind. Otherwise, we might jump to the conclusion that they mean the same thing that we would mean if we were talking. Their discussion will then appear easy, because we will tie it down to our own experience and understanding. But, if we pay attention, we will see that love is not nearly as easy as it seems, because it is putting aside mundane experience and opening up the soul to new levels of perception and insight.

In the world view of *tawhīd*, love descends from God, and all love is ultimately love for God. The Sufī poets may sing about many different loved ones, but in fact they are praising the beauty of God and expressing their love for what is truly and ultimately real. This is especially difficult for us to grasp nowadays, because our world view is quite the opposite. We are taught not to believe that love descends from on high, but rather that it rises up from the bottom. Our schools and universities, not to mention popular culture, train us to think that, no matter how beautiful love may appear, it is subjective and has nothing to do with the real world. Often, love goes back to sex, hormones, and psychological hang-ups. This is the standard Freudian view that dominates our culture, and it is also one version of the all-pervasive scientific world view. By the very nature of its presuppositions, science reduces things to a material, physical base. It can only address the physical world, where love has the least resonance and the least reality. In the scientific way of looking at things, everything begins at the bottom and stays at the bottom. Any talk of “going up” or of “loving God” can be nothing but an expression of psychological need or

self-deception. As Freud put it, religion is nothing but an illusion. In the world view of the Persian poets, however, love is real, and the theories spun by scientists and scholars are woven upon the wind.

Among the Sufi poets, Rūmī is the most explicit about the reality of love. In the *Mathnawī* he goes into great detail explaining the difference between love that is "true" (*ḥaqīqī*) and love that is "metaphorical" (*majāzī*). True love is love for God, that is, love for that which is truly real and truly beautiful. Metaphorical love is love for anything other than God. What is other than God is illusory, which is to say that it is not in itself true, real, and beautiful. Love seems easy at first because, when it does come, we think we are in love with somebody. We fall into problems because, in fact, that person is not truly real, just as we ourselves are not truly real. The love of an unreal being for an unreal being is precisely "metaphorical love." Nonetheless, as the Arabic proverb puts it, "The metaphor is the bridge to the reality" (*al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqa*). Any metaphorical love can provide a bridge to true love. Or rather, every metaphorical love is in fact a bridge to true love, but most often we fail to see the connection. As Rūmī puts it, we become infatuated with the radiance of the sun shining on a mud wall. We think we love the wall, but in fact we love the sun.⁷

The solution to the problems of love can be found only in wine. If the cupbearer comes and pours wine, the veils of ignorance and illusion will be lifted. This is the same wine that was drunk on the Day of Alast, when God took covenant with the children of Adam before they entered into this world, and it is also the same wine that God will give people to drink in paradise. This kind of wine, far from dulling the mind and clouding the perception, opens up the heart to an understanding of who it is that we truly love. Without it, people remain stuck in the metaphor and fail to see the reality.⁸

⁷*Mathnawī*, edited by R. A. Nicholson, London: Luzac, 1925-40, Book 2, vss. 552-53. For more of Rūmī's teachings on these points, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rūmī*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1983, especially pp. 200-206.

⁸The notion of the Covenant of Alast is a constant theme in Sufi literature (see, for example, Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 68-72). It is based on this Koranic verse: "When thy Lord took from the loins of the children of Adam their progeny and made them testify about themselves: 'Am I not (*alast*) your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed!' – lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this' (7:172).

In the following verses, Ḥāfiẓ refers both to the wine drunk on the Day of the Covenant, and the fact that wine opens up our eyes to the real significance of things:

Don't look for obedience, steadfastness, and piety in me – I'm drunk,
and I became famous for tossing down wine on the Day of Alast.
At soon as I made my ablutions in the fountain of love,
I recited the prayer for the dead over all that exists.
Give me wine, and I'll make you aware of the secret of that Decree –
whose face I came to love and whose scent has made me drunk.⁹

3. The Dialectic of Love

Like many other Sufis, Sam'ānī's favorite Koranic verse about love is "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54). This verse sets up a two-sided relationship. "He loves them" means that God is the lover, and man the beloved. "They love Him" means that man is the lover, and God the beloved. Thus God is both lover and beloved, and man is both lover and beloved. This verse should already alert us to the fact that Persian poetry's dialectic of love – the constant give and take between lover and beloved – is rarely clear-cut. Because of the indirect nature of the language, it is frequently difficult to understand if the poet means to say that man is lover and God beloved or vice versa. There is a confusion of roles precisely because each lover is also beloved.

If we apply the distinction between true and metaphorical love so as to differentiate between the lover and the beloved, we can see that God is always a true lover, for God is by definition reality and truth (*ḥaqq*). This is why Sufi texts often express *tawḥīd* with the formula, "There is no lover but God." As for man, as long as he takes God as his object of love, then he is a true lover, for he has come to understand that "There is no beloved but God." If he takes some other object as beloved, his love is metaphorical. "The problems of love" have everything to do with the difficulty of discerning between God as he truly is and God as we understand him, or as we perceive him filtered through the world and our thoughts.

When Sam'ānī cites the verse of mutual love – "He loves them and they love Him" – he typically reads it as asserting what the Sufi tradition sees as one of the deepest truths of human existence: that God loves man by definition, and man loves God by definition. God, after all, is eternal, so when he says "He loves them," he is referring to a love that stands outside of time. As for man's love for God, that arises because God

⁹From the ghazal whose first rhyme is *man-i mast*.

created man in his own image, so love pertains to man’s primordial nature. It first becomes manifest when he enters into existence, or from the Day of Alast, and it continues ad infinitum.

Nonetheless, there is also a second sort of love-relationship between God and man that comes into play when we consider the manner in which people grow and mature in their humanity. God loves man by definition, and he created the universe because of his love for human beings. But people are not simply static recipients of divine love. They can change their situation through the gift of free will. They are able to make themselves receptive to a more intense love from God if they follow his instructions on how to live the life of love. The Koran refers to these instructions in another verse that the texts frequently quote: “Say [O Muhammad!]: If you love God, follow me, and God will love you” (3:31). If the servant devotes himself to God by following the Prophet, he will earn God’s special love. Or, as Sam’ānī puts it, addressing Muhammad, “The dirt of your pure footsteps is the alchemy of our love.”¹⁰

There is a reference to this second kind of love in a commonly cited saying of the Prophet, in which he quotes God as saying,

My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through voluntary works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks.¹¹

If God is the hearing through which man hears and the sight through which he sees, he is certainly also the heart and mind through which man loves. So, if man loves God, who in fact is the lover? Is it the servant, or is it God loving through the servant? And if man is God’s beloved, who in fact is the object of love? God says that he loves the servant, but if God is the servant’s hearing, sight, and other faculties, then he is simply loving himself.

In short, we can see that these basic texts, so frequently cited by the Sufis, support the idea of reciprocity between God and man, give and take in matters of love. In this dialectic, however, subject and object, lover and beloved, knower and known, quickly become confused. This is simply because they are essentially fused. They are two sides of one unifying principle, that of *tawhīd*.

¹⁰Sam’ānī, *Rawḥ*, 254.

¹¹This prophetic saying, one of the most famous and frequently cited in Sufi literature, is found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Riqāq 38.

Coming back to *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, we see that Samʿānī cites love as the only word used by the Koran to set up an equality of relationship between God and man. He mentions several Koranic verses that stress the difference between God and his creatures. In contrast, he says, “when God gives news of love, just as He affirms it for Himself, so also He affirms it for us – ‘He loves them, and they love Him’” (5:54). In continuing his explanation, he alludes to the title of his book, *The Refreshment of the Spirits*.

Here there must be a secret that will increase the refreshment of the spirits of the lovers: Knowledge, power, life, holiness, everlastingness, and unity are the attributes of God’s Essence, and God’s Essence is holy and incomparable... When we look at the human essence, we see that it is tainted and distracted. It is a muddiness, a dark water, a clay... Nonetheless, the site of love is the heart, and the heart is pure gold. It is the pearl in the ocean of the breast, the ruby in the mine of understanding. No hand other than God’s has ever touched the heart, and no one else’s eye has ever fallen upon it. Witnessing by God’s majesty has polished the heart, and burnishing by the Unseen has placed its seal upon it, making it bright and limpid. Since the work of the heart has all of this, the Presence of Divine Exaltation has a love for it... So, our love abides through His love, not His love through our love.¹²

Notice that for Samʿānī – as for the Sufī tradition in general – the key to love lies in the heart. But here we have to be careful about what we understand by the Persian word *dil* and its Arabic synonym *qalb*. In modern times, the heart has come to signify emotions, sentiments, and the artistic side of human nature. It is contrasted with the mind, which is the sober, rational, and scientific side of our nature. The Koran and all of Islamic literature, however, employ the word heart to signify the spiritual seat of the person, the fundamental nature of which is *ʿaql* – intelligence, rationality, and clear-sightedness. Emotions, feelings, and affectivity – the things that are associated with the heart in modern thought – cloud the heart and prevent it from seeing things as they really are. Moreover, far from being an emotion or a feeling, the love that rises up in the heart is a divine reality establishing an ontological link between man and God, lover and beloved. Love is the real quality of being that brings about union and unity and leads to a perfect understanding and embodiment of *tawḥīd*.

¹²Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 519-520.

4. The Origin of Love

In whatever form it may take, love's goal is to bring about union between lover and beloved. God's love for man and man's love for God both aim at overcoming separation and bringing about nearness. But "separation" is a quality of created things; it does not pertain to the primordial divine unity itself. Hence the initial goal of divine love is to establish separation. It is God's love for creation, in other words, that brings it into existence, but not with the aim of keeping it in existence, for then union could not be achieved. As the famous divine saying puts it, "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, so I created the creatures that I might be known."¹³ Because of God's love for what was hidden in himself, he disclosed himself (*tajallī*) by creating the universe, and he did so in order to be known and loved in return. This is to say that God in his eternity, before he ever disclosed the Hidden Treasure, already loved human beings. As Sam'ānī puts it, "In beginningless eternity, the good-pleasure that is 'He loves them' was busy with 'They love Him', without your intervention."¹⁴

"Beginningless eternity" here translates the word *azal*. With Sam'ānī's words in mind, we can get a better idea of what *Hāfiẓ* means in the line,

In beginningless eternity, the ray of your beauty disclosed itself—
love appeared and struck fire to all the world.¹⁵

In another passage Sam'ānī refers to God's eternal love for man by explaining that, when God says "He loves them," what he really means is "Never have I not been God, and, as long as I have been God in My Godhead, I have loved you."¹⁶

Or again, the meaning of the words "He loves them" is that God is addressing human beings in these terms:

¹³This saying is one of the most frequently cited in Sufi literature and it often quoted from the Prophet, though the most reliable sources of his sayings do not include it. In the saying's longer versions, it is the answer to a question put to God by David, "Why did You create the creatures?" Some authors, more careful in their ascription of sayings to the Prophet, say that it comes from "one of the revealed scriptures" (see, for example, the thirteenth century scholar Ibn Dabbāgh in his well-known Arabic treatise on love, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, edited by H. Ritter, Beirut, 1959, 123).

¹⁴Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, 534.

¹⁵From the ghazal whose first rhyme is *dam zad*.

¹⁶Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, 595.

Do not suppose that Our business with you belongs to today, or Our talk with you pertains to right now! There was no world, and there was no Adam; there were no substances, and there were no accidents; there was no Throne and no Footstool, no paradise and no hell, no Tablet and no Pen – and I was talking to you without you.¹⁷

This essential love of God for man has no beginning, so it has nothing to do with human virtue or vice, obedience or disobedience, good or evil. It cannot be earned, because it pertains to the very nature of things.

In one of the scriptures it was revealed, “I have created the whole world for you, and I have created you for Me: ... I have created the hearts of My servants from My good-pleasure: I kneaded the earth of My loved ones with the pure water of My good pleasure, and then I tied the body to the saddle-straps of the heart and I sent it into the world of form. Next to the meddlesome body I sent a policeman – religious law and exhortation. I said, ‘Let your eyes be controlled by the policeman of religious law, and let your heart be the sitting companion of the sultan of love.’ ... O handful of dust and clay! “He loves them, and they love Him.” God did not say, “because of their obedience.” He did not say, “because of their worship.” He detached and purified love from every cause.¹⁸

5. The Covenant

For Sam‘ānī and others, God declared his eternal love for human beings in the mythic moment known as the “Day of Alast.” On that day he lined up all of Adam’s children and had them testify to his Lordship: *Alastu bi-rabbikum*, “Am I not your Lord?” They responded, “Indeed you are” (Koran 7:172). Sam‘ānī tells us that we should not be misled by the fact that this verse refers to God’s “Lordship” and man’s “servanthood.” Lordship and servanthood are simply the apparent, outward relationship. They pertain specifically to the bodily nature of man. In other words, Lordship and servanthood pertain to *gil*, not to *dil*, to clay, not to heart.

Although outwardly He said, “Am I not your Lord?,” He also addressed them inwardly – that was the words, “He loves them, and they love Him.” In this respect He was saying, “I am your friend.”

“By day I am the sultan, by night we are brothers.” During the day He opens up the tent of the kingdom and sits upon the cushion of the king, while the elect and the commoners stand before Him. When

¹⁷Sam‘ānī, *Rawḥ*, 83.

¹⁸Sam‘ānī, *Rawḥ*, 203.

night arrives once more, He comes down from the throne of the king and sits in the midst like a brother. . . .

When He said, "Am I not your Lord?", that was the time of exercising the sultanate. But when He said, "He loves them, and they love Him," that was the time of caressing.¹⁹

Like the poets after him, Sam'ānī often speaks about human love for God in terms of a man's love for a woman. In one passage he calls the divine beloved "the veiled virgin of the unseen" (*mukhaddara-yi ghayb*). He tells us that human beings alone, among all the creatures of heaven and earth, have the worthiness to be the husband of this bride.

We are the ones lifted up by His knowledge, we are the ones given eminence by His decree. No one came to the angels asking them to marry the Veiled Virgin of the Unseen, the daughter of nobility. They did not have the worthiness to speak to her, for they were mere servants. It would be shameful for the master to give his daughter to his own serving-boy. Those worthy of being asked in marriage for this Veiled Virgin were the children of Adam, for they were friends, and a man gives his daughter to a friend, not to a serving boy. . . .

On the day when He said, "I blew into him of My spirit" [Koran 15:29], He set in place the ability of Adam's children. For, in beginningless eternity, He had decreed that there would be a marriage contract between sheer servanthood and the nobility of utter Lordship: "Am I not your Lord?" That contract could only be made with someone worthy. In Adam's earth He prepared a subtlety from the pure realm of the Unseen, and that subtlety was the cause of the worthiness, for that subtlety acquired a lineage from the gentleness of the [Divine] Presence. "He confirmed them with a spirit from Him" [58:22] is an allusion to this subtlety.²⁰

In the Koran, the marriage contract drawn up between God's Lordship and human servanthood is called the "Trust" (33:72). The verse tells us that God offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they all refused, and it was carried by man. Hāfīz refers to it in the famous line,

Heaven was not able to carry the burden of the Trust -
Its lottery came up in the name of me the mad man.²¹

¹⁹Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, 512-13.

²⁰Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, 512.

²¹From the ghazal whose first rhyme is *maykhāna zadand*.

Hāfiẓ is not speaking just for himself. He is speaking for everyone who has understood the human role in the universe. That the Trust should have been won as the result of a lottery (*qur'a*) has everything to do with the fact that God did not offer it to human beings on the basis of merit. The image does suggest, however, that it was a great prize, since heaven and earth were not able to carry it. What it represents is precisely God's love for human beings and the possibility of loving him in return.

Hāfiẓ was not the first to talk about the Trust as a lottery. The image goes back at least to Sam'ānī, who refers to it in the following passage:

Noble youth! What is left that He has not done for us? Which robe has He not bestowed upon us? Which honour has He not conferred upon us? Which gentleness has He not inscribed in our name in the register of generosity? Which exaltation has He not sent down upon us? Which proximate angel has He not employed in our work? Which noble prophet has He not sent to our corner? Which instruction did He give that was not for us? Which good news was not about us?

We are those caressed by His gentleness and pulled up by His kindness. We are knowers through His giving knowledge, eminent through His bestowal of eminence, arrivers through His making us arrive, and joyful in arrival at Him. We are the narcissus of the garden of munificence, the cypress of the meadow of existence, the jewel-box of the pearls of His wisdom, the blossom of the lawn, and the light in the eye of the world of His power.

We were created without likeness and peer, and He is a Creator without likeness and peer. It is not permissible for us to have a likeness, nor for Him. "There is nothing as His likeness, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing" [Koran 42:11]. It is permissible for us to have a likeness in respect of power, but not permissible in respect of the jealousy of love. In power, He created a hundred thousand like us, but in respect of love, creating someone like us is never permissible...

The master Abū 'Alī Siyāh said, "God said about Adam, 'Surely God chose Adam and Noah' [3:33]. He said about Abraham, 'God took Abraham as an intimate friend' [4:125]. He said to Moses, 'I made you for Myself' [20:41]. Then, He said about this handful of dust, 'He loves them, and they love Him' [5:54]. 'God is the friend

of those who have faith' [2:257]. 'Their Lord gives them to drink of a pure wine' [76:21]."

From the first,
you won the lottery of love.

Heaven and earth, the Throne and the Footstool, paradise and hell, the Tablet and the Pen—all are free-loaders on your existence. . . .

What was intended by these robes was not in fact heaven and earth, the Throne and the Footstool, paradise and hell. Rather, the eternal decree had already been issued that you would pass by these way stations and that you would be casting your glance on these places and stages: "In each way station, We have placed a token of Our kindness so that, when Our friends reach there, they will take their share and portion."²²

In this way of looking at things, it is the human lot to carry the Trust. We won the lottery, whether we like it or not, and we acknowledged God's Lordship on the Day of Alast. All of this means that we cannot escape or ignore the problems of love, because love defines our nature. And love, as Rūmī in particular likes to remind us, is nothing but thirst, hunger, and need. If it is to be true love and not just metaphorical, we need to recognize our own lack of reality and our inherent need for and dependence upon the true Beloved.

This spot of earth is the quarry of need and the mine of poverty and indigence. "Our poverty is our pride." O Adam! You came into paradise and you sat down at the tablecloth of satisfaction. That's fine, but why should a traveller have anything to do with the tablecloth of satisfaction? You must invite your children to the Covenant: "Let's spread out the tablecloth of the words, 'Am I not your Lord?' Let's drink down the cups of 'He loves them' one after another. Let's keep on drinking down the flagons of the gentleness of 'Their Lord gives them to drink.'"

The highest angels remained in wonder: "Playing the game of love is no surprise from Adam. What is surprising is these children of his, who are leaping on the ship of affliction [*balā*'] and seating themselves in the boat of 'Indeed You are' [*balā*]."

The tongue of gentleness replied from the pulpit of bounty, "Don't be surprised! They're ducklings—it's not necessary to teach ducklings how to swim."

²²Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, 82-83.

O dervish! No one in the whole created realm was able to drink wine from the cup from which they drank. The cup of the angels, whether elect or common, was no more than “They are honoured servants” [Koran 21:26]. No one in the eighteen thousand worlds other than the children of Adam drank down the cup of the covenant of love – “He loves them.”

Yes, this story is not a wine that just any stomach can tolerate, it’s not a hand that takes hold of just anyone, it’s not a sultan that kills just anyone, it’s not a hat for which every head is worthy, it’s not a wind that blows in every garden, it’s not a tongue that speaks to everyone, it’s not a beautiful woman who lifts her veil for just anyone...

It would never have occurred to the mind of water and clay that it has the station of servanthood in order to reach the degree of friendship. First, in beginningless eternity He talked about you to Himself, and then He talked about you to you.

Shiblī was once asked what it is to which the hearts of the knowers incline. He replied, “To the first things that happened to them in beginningless eternity, in the Presence, when they were absent from themselves.”²³

6. Conclusion

One of the favourite themes of the ghazal is the pain and suffering of unrequited love. The lover is characterized by *niyāz* – “need” – and the beloved by *nāz*, an untranslatable word that designates pretending not to need the lover and showing disdain for him. Human beings may have won the lottery of love, but that does not make them worthy of embracing their beloved. Love, much more than it is joy and delight, is trial and tribulation. The beloved will not accept the lover in her embrace until he proves his worthiness by suffering and toil. In the typical image, which we just saw Sam’ānī employ, by accepting the Trust and answering the question “Am I not your Lord” with the word *balā*, “Indeed You are,” the children of Adam threw themselves into *balā*, affliction, trial, and trouble. The source of all pain and suffering is to be separate from what we really love, and that will remain our situation as long as we do not pass from metaphorical love to true love.

Very well has it been said, “There is no alienation with God, and no ease without God.” To be with the Beloved without anything is

²³Sam’ānī, *Rawḥ*, 156-57.

sweet, but to be without the Beloved with everything is not. Everyone veiled from the Beloved dwells in affliction itself, even if he has the key to the kingdom's treasures up his sleeve. Everyone attracted to the Beloved's gentleness dwells in bestowal itself, even if he does not have his evening meal. This is why Sarī Saqatī said, "O God, chastise however You want, but do not chastise with the lowliness of the veil, for I do not have the capacity for the veil."²⁴

Given the ontological reality of "He loves them and they love Him," suffering the pain of love is simply the human situation. There is no way to escape the ship of affliction, because to be human is to be a lover. This is what Sam'ānī is saying in this passage:

The kings and sultans of this world decorate their thresholds and courts with spears and shields. [God] decorates the court of Majesty, the porch of Magnificence, and the court of Exaltation with the souls and livers of His truthful ones and His prophets. In every corner there's one He's killed, in every nook one He's burned.²⁵ Which body has not been melted in His severity? Which heart has not been caressed by His gentleness? Which soul has not been clutched by the claws of the falcon of His exaltation? Which head is not intoxicated with the wine of His love?

If you go to the khanaqah of the dervishes – burning for Him. If you go to the lane of the tavern-goers – the pain of not having found Him. If you go the church of the Christians – all are on the carpet of seeking Him. If you go to the synagogue of the Jews, all are yearning for His beauty. If you go to the fire-temple of the Zoroastrians, all are burned by His majesty. If you look at His familiars, all are wounded by His drunken eyes and the glances of His beauty. And if you look at those estranged from Him, all are tied down by the bond of His exaltation and majesty.²⁶

Let me conclude with a line from Hāfīz, on which, in many ways, this paper is simply a commentary:

Everybody's seeking a beloved, whether sober or drunk,
everywhere's the house of love, whether mosque or synagogue.

²⁴Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, 5.

²⁵For modern readers, talk of the beloved's "killing" the lover may seem a bit gruesome, but the image is commonplace in Persian poetry. Rūmī frequently employs it, often explicitly making the connection with the saying of the Prophet, "Die before you die!" This is death to metaphorical love and birth to true love.

²⁶Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ* 35-36.