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# The Gnosis

The Sûfîs distinguish three organs of spiritual communication: the heart *(qalb),* which knows God; the spirit *(rûh),* which loves Him; and the inmost ground of the soul *(sirr),* which contemplates Him. It would take us into deep waters if we were to embark upon a discussion of these terms and their relation to each other. A few words concerning the first of the three will suffice. The *qalb,* though connected in some mysterious way with the physical heart, is not a thing of flesh and blood. Unlike the English "heart," its nature is rather intellectual than emotional, but whereas the intellect cannot gain real knowledge of God, the *qalb* is capable of knowing the essences of all things, and when illumined by faith and knowledge reflects the whole content of the divine mind; hence the Prophet said, "My earth and My heaven contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me." This revelation, however, is a comparatively rare experience.

Normally, the heart is "veiled," blackened by sin, tarnished by sensual impressions and images, pulled to and fro between reason and passion: a battlefield on which the armies of God and the Devil contend for victory. Through one gate, the heart receives immediate knowledge of God; through another, it lets in the illusions of sense. "Here a world and there a world," says Jalâluddîn Rûmî. "I am seated on the threshold." Therefore man is potentially lower than the brutes and higher than the angels.

> Angel and brute man's wondrous leaven compose;
> To these inclining, less than these he grows,
> But if he means the angel, more than those.

Less than the brutes, because they lack the knowledge that would enable them to rise; more than the angels, because they are not subject to passion and so cannot fall.

How shall a man know God? Not by the senses, for He is immaterial; nor by the intellect, for He is unthinkable. Logic never gets beyond the finite; philosophy sees double; book-learning fosters self-conceit and obscures the idea of the Truth with clouds of empty words. Jalâluddîn Rûmî, addressing the scholastic theologian, asks scornfully:

> Do you know a name without a thing answering to it?
> Have you ever plucked a rose from R, O, S, E?
> You name His name; go, seek the reality named by it!
> Look for the moon in the sky, not in the water!
> If you desire to rise above mere names and letters,
> Make yourself free from self at one stroke.
> Become pure from all attributes of self,
> That you may see your own bright essence,
> Yea, see in your own heart the knowledge of the Prophet,
> Without book, without tutor, without preceptor.

This knowledge comes by illumination, revelation, inspiration.

"Look in your own heart," says the Sûfî, "for the kingdom of God is within you." He who truly knows himself knows God, for the heart is a mirror in which every divine quality is reflected. But just as a steel mirror when coated with rust loses its power of reflection, so the inward spiritual sense, which Sûfîs call the eye of the heart, is blind to the celestial glory until the dark obstruction of the phenomenal self, with all its sensual contaminations, has been wholly cleared away. The clearance, if it is to be done effectively, must be the work of God, though it demands a certain inward co-operation on the part of man. "Whosoever shall strive for Our sake, We will guide him into Our ways" (Kor. 29. 69). Action is false and vain, if it is thought to proceed from one's self, but the enlightened mystic regards God as

the real agent in every act, and therefore takes no credit for his good works nor desires to be recompensed for them.

While ordinary knowledge is denoted by the term '*ilm,* the mystic knowledge peculiar to the Sûfîs is called *ma'rifat* or '*irfân*. As I have indicated in the foregoing paragraphs, *mârifat* is fundamentally different from *'ilm,* and a different word must be used to translate it. We need not look far for a suitable equivalent. The *ma'rifat* of the Sûfîs is the "gnosis" of Hellenistic theosophy, *i.e.* direct knowledge of God based on revelation or apocalyptic vision. It is not the result of any mental process, but depends entirely on the will and favor of God, who bestows it as a gift from Himself upon those whom He has created with the capacity for receiving it. It is a light of divine grace that flashes into the heart and overwhelms every human faculty in its dazzling beams. "He who knows God is dumb."

The relation of gnosis to positive religion is discussed in a very remarkable treatise on speculative mysticism by Niffarî, an unknown wandering dervish who died in Egypt in the latter half of the tenth century. His work, consisting of a series of revelations in which God addresses the writer and instructs him concerning the theory of gnosis, is couched in abstruse language and would scarcely be intelligible without the commentary which accompanies it; but its value as an original exposition of advanced Sûfism will sufficiently appear from the excerpts given in this chapter.[1]

Those who seek God, says Niffarî, are of three kinds: *firstly,* the worshippers to whom God makes Himself known by means of bounty, *i.e.* they worship Him in the hope of winning Paradise or some spiritual recompense such as dreams and miracles; *secondly,* the philosophers and scholastic theologians, to whom God makes Himself known

1. I am now engaged in preparing an edition of the Arabic text, together with an English translation and commentary.

by means of glory, *i.e.* they can never find the glorious God whom they seek, wherefore they assert that His essence is unknowable, saying, "We know that we know Him not, and that is our knowledge"; *thirdly,* the gnostics, to whom God makes Himself known by means of ecstasy, *i.e.* they are possessed and controlled by a rapture that deprives them of the consciousness of individual existence.

Niffarî bids the gnostic perform only such acts of worship as are in accordance with his vision of God, though in so doing he will necessarily disobey the religious law which was made for the vulgar. His inward feeling must decide how far the external forms of religion are good for him.

> God said to me, "Ask Me and say, 'O Lord, how shall I cleave to Thee, so that when my day (of judgment) comes, Thou wilt not punish me nor avert Thy face from me?' Then I will answer thee and say, 'Cleave in thy outward theory and practice to the Sunna (the rule of the Prophet), and cleave in thy inward feeling to the gnosis which I have given thee; and know that when I make Myself known to thee, I will not accept from thee anything of the Sunna but what My gnosis brings to thee, because thou art one of those to whom I speak: thou hearest Me and knowest that thou hearest Me, and thou seest that I am the source of all things.'"

The commentator observes that the Sunna, being general in scope, makes no distinction between individuals, *e.g.* seekers of Paradise and seekers of God, but that in reality it contains exactly what each person requires. The portion specially appropriate in every case is discerned either by means of gnosis, which God communicates to the heart, or by means of guidance imparted by a spiritual director.

> And He said to me, "My exoteric revelation does not support My esoteric revelation."

This means that the gnostic need not be dismayed if his inner experience conflicts with the religious law. The contradiction is only apparent. Religion addresses itself to the

common herd of men who are veiled by their minds, by logic, tradition, and so on; whereas gnosis belongs to the elect, whose bodies and spirits are bathed in the eternal Light. Religion sees things from the aspect of plurality, but gnosis regards the all-embracing Unity. Hence the same act is good in religion, but evil in gnosis—a truth which is briefly stated thus:

> The good deeds of the pious are the ill deeds of the favorites of God.

Although works of devotion are not incompatible with gnosis, no one who connects them in the slightest degree with himself is a gnostic. This is the theme of the following allegory. Niffarî seldom writes so lucidly as he does here, yet I fancy that few of my readers will find the explanations printed within square brackets altogether superfluous.

## The Revelation of the Sea

God bade me behold the Sea, and I saw the ships sinking and the planks floating; then the planks too were submerged.

[The Sea denotes the spiritual experiences through which the mystic passes in his journey to God. The point at issue is this: whether he should prefer the religious law or disinterested love. Here he is warned not to rely on his good works, which are no better than sinking ships and will never bring him safely to port. No; if he would attain to God, he must rely on God alone. If he does not rely entirely on God, but lets himself trust ever so little in anything else, he is still clinging to a plank. Though his trust in God is greater than before, it is not yet complete.]

And He said to me, "Those who voyage are not saved."

[The voyager uses the ship as a means of crossing the sea: therefore he relies, not on the First Cause, but on secondary causes.]

And He said to me, "Those who instead of voyaging cast themselves into the Sea take a risk."

[To abandon all secondary causes is like plunging in the sea. The mystic who makes this venture is in jeopardy, for two reasons: he may regard himself, not God, as initiating and carrying out the action of abandonment—and one who renounces a thing through "self" is in a worse case than if he had not renounced it—or he may abandon secondary causes (good works, hope of Paradise, etc.), not for God's sake, but from sheer indifference and lack of spiritual feeling.]

And He said to me, "Those who voyage and take no risk shall perish."

[Notwithstanding the dangers referred to, he must make God his sole object or fail.]

And He said to me, "In taking the risk there is a part of salvation."

[Only a part of salvation, because perfect selflessness has not yet been attained. The whole of salvation consists in the effacement of all secondary causes, all phenomena, through the rapture which results from the vision of God. But this is gnosis, and the present revelation is addressed to mystics of a lower grade. The gnostic takes no risk, for he has nothing to lose.]

And the wave came and lifted those beneath it and overran the shore.

[Those beneath the wave are they who voyage in ships and consequently suffer shipwreck. Their reliance on secondary causes casts them ashore, *i.e.* brings them back to the world of phenomena whereby they are veiled from God.]

And He said to me, "The surface of the Sea is a gleam that cannot be reached."

[Any one who depends on external rites of worship to lead him to God is following a will-o'-the-wisp.]

And its bottom is a darkness impenetrable.

[To discard positive religion, root and branch, is to wander in a pathless maze.]

And between the two are fishes which are to be feared.

[He refers to the middle way between pure exotericism and pure esotericism. The "fishes" are its perils and obstacles.]

Do not voyage on the Sea, lest I cause thee to be veiled by the vehicle.

[The "vehicle" signifies the "ship," *i.e.* reliance on something other than God.]

And do not cast thyself into the Sea, lest I cause thee to be veiled by thy casting thyself.

[Whoever regards any act as his own act and attributes it to himself is far from God.]

And He said to me, "In the Sea are boundaries: which of them will bear thee on?"

[The "boundaries" are the various degrees of spiritual experience. The mystic ought not to rely on any of these, for they are all imperfect.]

And He said to me, "If thou givest thyself to the Sea and sinkest therein, thou wilt fall a prey to one of its beasts."

[If the mystic either relies on secondary causes or abandons them by his own act, he will go astray.]

And He said to me, "I deceive thee if I direct thee to aught save Myself."

[If the mystic's inward voice bids him turn to anything except God, it deceives him.]

And He said to me, "If thou perishest for the sake of other than Me, thou wilt belong to that for which thou hast perished."

And He said to me, "This world belongs to him whom I have turned away from it and from whom I have turned it away; and the next world belongs to him towards whom have brought it and whom I have brought towards Myself."

> [He means to say that everlasting joy is the portion of those whose hearts are turned away from this world and who have no worldly possessions. They really enjoy this world, because it cannot separate them from God. Similarly, the true owners of the next world are those who do not seek it, inasmuch as it is not the real object of their desire, but contemplate God alone.]

The gnostic descries the element of reality in positive religion, but his gnosis is not derived from religion or from any sort of human knowledge: it is properly concerned with the divine attributes, and God Himself reveals the knowledge of these to His saints who contemplate Him. Dhu 'l-Nûn of Egypt, whose mystical speculations mark him out as the father of Muslim theosophy, said that gnostics are not themselves, and do not subsist through themselves, but so far as they subsist, they subsist through God.

> They move as God causes them to move, and their words are the words of God which roll upon their tongues, and their sight is the sight of God which has entered their eyes.

The gnostic contemplates the attributes of God, not His essence, for even in gnosis a small trace of duality remains: this disappears only in *fanâ al-fanâ,* the total passing-away in the undifferentiated Godhead. The cardinal attribute of God is unity, and the divine unity is the first and last principle of gnosis.[2]

Both Muslim and Sûfî declare that God is One, but the statement bears a different meaning in each instance. The Muslim means that God is unique in His essence, qualities, and acts; that He is absolutely unlike all other beings. The Sûfî means that God is the One Real Being which underlies all phenomena. This principle is carried to its extreme consequences, as we shall see. If nothing except God exists,

2. According to some mystics, the gnosis of unity constitutes a higher stage which is called "the Truth" *(haqîqat)*. See above. p. 22.

then the whole universe, including man, is essentially one with God, whether it is regarded as an emanation which proceeds from Him, without impairing His unity, like sunbeams from the sun, or whether it is conceived as a mirror in which the divine attributes are reflected. But surely a God who is all in all can have no reason for thus revealing Himself: why should the One pass over into the Many? The Sûfîs answer—a philosopher would say that they evade the difficulty—by quoting the famous Tradition: "I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known; therefore I created the creation in order that I might be known." In other words, God is the eternal Beauty, and it lies in the nature of beauty to desire love. The mystic poets have described the self-manifestation of the One with a profusion of splendid imagery. Jâmî says, for example:

> From all eternity the Beloved unveiled His beauty in the solitude of the unseen;
> He held up the mirror to His own face, He displayed His loveliness to Himself.
> He was both the spectator and the spectacle; no eye but His had surveyed the Universe.
> All was One, there was no duality, no pretense of "mine" or "thine."
> The vast orb of Heaven, with its myriad incomings and outgoings, was concealed in a single point.
> The Creation lay cradled in the sleep of non-existence, like a child ere it has breathed.
> The eye of the Beloved, seeing what was not, regarded nonentity as existent.
> Although He beheld His attributes and qualities as a perfect whole in His own essence,
> Yet He desired that they should be displayed to Him in another mirror,
> And that each one of His eternal attributes should become manifest accordingly in a diverse form.
> Therefore He created the verdant fields of Time and Space and the life-giving garden of the world,
> That every branch and leaf and fruit might show forth His various perfections.

The cypress gave a hint of His comely stature, the rose
gave tidings of His beauteous countenance.
Wherever Beauty peeped out, Love appeared beside it;
wherever Beauty shone in a rosy cheek, Love lit his
torch from that flame.
Wherever Beauty dwelt in dark tresses, Love came and
found a heart entangled in their coils.
Beauty and Love are as body and soul; Beauty is the mine
and Love the precious stone.
They have always been together from the very first; never
have they traveled but in each other's company.

In another work Jâmî sets forth the relation of God to the world more philosophically, as follows:

> The unique Substance, viewed as absolute and void of all phenomena, all limitations and all multiplicity, is the Real *(al-Haqq)*. On the other hand, viewed in His aspect of multiplicity and plurality, under which He displays Himself when clothed with phenomena, He is the whole created universe. Therefore the universe is the outward visible expression of the Real, and the Real is the inner unseen reality of the universe. The universe before it was evolved to outward view was identical with the Real; and the Real after this evolution is identical with the universe.

Phenomena, as such, are not-being and only derive a contingent existence from the qualities of Absolute Being by which they are irradiated. The sensible world resembles the fiery circle made by a single spark whirling round rapidly.

Man is the crown and final cause of the universe. Though last in the order of creation he is first in the process of divine thought, for the essential part of him is the primal Intelligence or universal Reason which emanates immediately from the Godhead. This corresponds to the Logos—the animating principle of all things—and is identified with the Prophet Mohammed. An interesting parallel might be drawn here between the Christian and Sûfî doctrines. The same expressions are applied to the founder of Islam which are used by St. John, St. Paul, and later mystical theologians

concerning Christ. Thus, Mohammed is called the Light of God, he is said to have existed before the creation of the world, he is adored as the source of all life, actual and possible, he is the Perfect Man in whom all the divine attributes are manifested, and a Sûfî tradition ascribes to him the saying, "He that hath seen me hath seen Allah." In the Muslim scheme, however, the Logos doctrine occupies a subordinate place, as it obviously must when the whole duty of man is believed to consist in realizing the unity of God. The most distinctive feature of Oriental as opposed to European mysticism is its profound consciousness of an omnipresent, all-pervading unity in which every vestige of individuality is swallowed up. Not to become *like* God or *personally* to participate in the divine nature is the Sûfî's aim, but to escape from the bondage of his unreal selfhood and thereby to be reunited with the One infinite Being.

According to Jâmî, Unification consists in making the heart single—that is, in purifying and divesting it of attachment to aught except God, both in respect of desire and will and also as regards knowledge and gnosis. The mystic's desire and will should be severed from all things which are desired and willed; all objects of knowledge and understanding should be removed from his intellectual vision. His thoughts should be directed solely towards God, he should not be conscious of anything besides.

So long as he is a captive in the snare of passion and lust, it is hard for him to maintain this relation to God, but when the subtle influence of that attraction becomes manifest in him, expelling preoccupation with objects of sense and cognition from his inward being, delight in that divine communion prevails over bodily pleasures and spiritual joys; the painful task of self-mortification is ended, and the sweetness of contemplation enravishes his soul.

When the sincere aspirant perceives in himself the beginning of this attraction, which is delight in the recollection of God, let him fix his whole mind on fostering and

strengthening it, let him keep himself aloof from whatsoever is incompatible with it, and deem that even though he were to devote an eternity to cultivating that communion, he would have done nothing and would not have discharged his duty as he ought.

> Love thrilled the chord of love in my soul's lute,
> And changed me all to love from head to foot.
> 'Twas but a moment's touch, yet shall Time ever
> To me the debt of thanksgiving impute.

It is an axiom of the Sûfîs that what is not *in* a man he cannot know. The gnostic—Man *par excellence—could* not know God and all the mysteries of the universe, unless he found them in himself. He is the microcosm, "a copy made in the image of God," "the eye of the world whereby God sees His own works." In knowing himself as he really is, he knows God, and he knows himself through God, who is nearer to everything than its knowledge of itself. Knowledge of God precedes, and is the cause of, self-knowledge.

Gnosis, then, is unification, realization of the fact that the appearance of "otherness" beside Oneness is a false and deluding dream. Gnosis lays this spectre, which haunts unenlightened men all their lives; which rises, like a wall of utter darkness, between them and God. Gnosis proclaims that "I" is a figure of speech, and that one cannot truly refer any will, feeling, thought, or action to one's self.

Niffarî heard the divine voice saying to him:

> When thou regardest thyself as existent and dost not regard Me as the Cause of thy existence, I veil My face and thine own face appears to thee. Therefore consider what is displayed to thee, and what is hidden from thee!
>
> [If a man regards himself as existing through God, that which is of God in him predominates over the phenomenal element and makes it pass away, so that he sees nothing but God. If, on the contrary, he regards himself as having an independent existence, his unreal egoism is dis-

played to him and the reality of God becomes hidden from him.]

Regard neither My displaying nor that which is displayed, else thou wilt laugh and weep; and when thou laughest and weepest, thou art thine, not Mine.

[He who regards the act of divine revelation is guilty of polytheism, since revelation involves both a revealing subject and a revealed object; and he who regards the revealed object which is part of the created universe, regards something other than God. Laughter signifies joy for what you have gained, and weeping denotes grief for what you have lost. Both are selfish actions. The gnostic neither laughs nor weeps.]

If thou dost not put behind thee all that I have displayed and am displaying, thou wilt not prosper; and unless thou prosper thou wilt not become concentrated upon Me.

[Prosperity is true belief in God, which requires complete abstraction from created things.]

Logically, these doctrines annul every moral and religious law. In the gnostic's vision there are no divine rewards and punishments, no human standards of right and wrong. For him, the written word of God has been abrogated by a direct and intimate revelation.

"I do not say," exclaimed Abu 'l-Hasan Khurqânî, "that Paradise and Hell are non-existent, but I say that they are nothing to me, because God created them both, and there is no room for any created object in the place where I am."

From this standpoint all types of religion are equal, and Islam is no better than idolatry. It does not matter what creed a man professes or what rites he performs.

The true mosque in a pure and holy heart
Is builded: there let all men worship God;
For there He dwells, not in a mosque of stone.

Amidst all the variety of creeds and worshippers the gnostic sees but one real object of worship.

"Those who adore God in the sun" (says Ibn al-'Arabî) "behold the sun, and those who adore Him in living things see a living thing, and those who adore Him in lifeless things see a lifeless thing, and those who adore Him as a Being unique and unparalleled see that which has no like. Do not attach yourself" (he continues):

> to any particular creed exclusively, so that you disbelieve in all the rest; otherwise, you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for He says (Kor. 2. 109), "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah." Every one praises what he believes; his god is his own creature, and in praising it he praises himself. Consequently he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just, but his dislike is based on ignorance. If he knew Junayd's saying, "The water takes its color from the vessel containing it," he would not interfere with other men's beliefs, but would perceive God in every form of belief.

And Hafiz sings, more in the spirit of the freethinker, perhaps, than of the mystic:

> Love is where the glory falls
> Of Thy face—on convent walls
> Or on tavern floors, the same
> Unextinguishable flame.
>
> Where the turbaned anchorite
> Chanteth Allah day and night,
> Church bells ring the call to prayer
> And the Cross of Christ is there.

Sûfism may join hands with freethought—it has often done so—but hardly ever with sectarianism. This explains why the vast majority of Sûfîs have been, at least nominally, attached to the catholic body of the Muslim community. 'Abdallah Ansârî declared that of two thousand Sûfî Sheikhs with whom he was acquainted only two were Shî'ites. A cer-

tain man who was a descendant of the Caliph ‘Alî, and a fanatical Shî‘ite, tells the following story:

“For five years,” he said, “my father sent me daily to a spiritual director. I learned one useful lesson from him: he told me that I should never know anything at all about Sûfism until I got completely rid of the pride which I felt on account of my lineage.”

Superficial observers have described Bâbism as an offshoot of Sûfism, but the dogmatism of the one is naturally opposed to the broad eclecticism of the other. In proportion as the Sûfî gains more knowledge of God, his religious prejudices are diminished. Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahîm ibn al-Sabbâgh, who at first disliked living in Upper Egypt, with its large Jewish and Christian population, said in his old age that he would as readily embrace a Jew or Christian as one of his own faith.

While the innumerable forms of creed and ritual may be regarded as having a certain relative value in so far as the inward feeling which inspires them is ever one and the same, from another aspect they seem to be veils of the Truth, barriers which the zealous Unitarian must strive to abolish and destroy.

> This world and that world are the egg, and the bird within it
> Is in darkness and broken-winged and scorned and despised.
> Regard unbelief and faith as the white and the yolk in this egg,
> Between them, joining and dividing, a barrier which they shall not pass.
> When He hath graciously fostered the egg under His wing,
> Infidelity and religion disappear: the bird of Unity spreads its pinions.

The great Persian mystic, Abu Sa‘id ibn Abi ’l-Khayr, speaking in the name of the Calendars or wandering

dervishes, expresses their iconoclastic principles with astonishing boldness:

> Not until every mosque beneath the sun Lies ruined,
> will our holy work be done;
> And never will true Muslim appear
> Till faith and infidelity are one.

Such open declarations of war against the Muslim religion are exceptional. Notwithstanding the breadth and depth of the gulf between full-blown Sûfism and orthodox Islam, many, if not most, Sûfis have paid homage to the Prophet and have observed the outward forms of devotion which are incumbent on all Muslims. They have invested these rites and ceremonies with a new meaning; they have allegorized them but they have not abandoned them. Take the pilgrimage, for example. In the eyes of the genuine Sûfî it is null and void unless each of the successive religious acts which it involves is accompanied by corresponding "movements of the heart."

A man who had just returned from the pilgrimage came to Junayd. Junayd said:

"From the hour when you first journeyed from your home have you also been journeying away from all sins?" He said "No." "Then," said Junayd, "you have made no journey. At every stage where you halted for the night did you traverse a station on the way to God?" "No," he replied. "Then," said Junayd, "you have not trodden the road, stage by stage. When you put on the pilgrim's garb at the proper place, did you discard the qualities of human nature as you cast off your clothes?" "No." "Then you have not put on the pilgrim's garb. When you stood at 'Arafât, did you stand one moment in contemplation of God?" "No." "Then you have not stood at 'Arafât. When you went to Muzdalifa and achieved your desire, did you renounce all sensual desires?" "No." "Then you have not gone to Muzdalifa. When you circumambulated the Ka'ba, did you behold the

immaterial beauty of God in the abode of purification?" "No." "Then you have not circumambulated the Ka'ba, When you ran between Safâ and Marwa, did you attain to purity *(safâ)* and virtue *(muruwwat)*?" "No." "Then you have not run. When you came to Minâ, did all your wishes (*munâ*) cease?" "No." "Then you have not yet visited Minâ. When you reached the slaughter-place and offered sacrifice, did you sacrifice the objects of worldly desire?" "No." "Then you have not sacrificed. When you threw the pebbles, did you throw away whatever sensual thoughts were accompanying you?" "No." "Then you have not yet thrown the pebbles, and you have not yet performed the pilgrimage."

This anecdote contrasts the outer religious law of theology with the inner spiritual truth of mysticism, and shows that they should not be divorced from each other.

"The Law without the Truth," says Hujwîrî,

> is ostentation, and the Truth without the Law is hypocrisy. Their mutual relation may be compared to that of body and spirit: when the spirit departs from the body, the living body becomes a corpse, and the spirit vanishes like wind. The Muslim profession of faith includes both: the words, "There is no god but Allah," are the Truth, and the words, "Mohammed is the apostle of Allah," are the Law; anyone who denies the Truth is an infidel, and anyone who rejects the Law is a heretic.

Middle ways, though proverbially safe, are difficult to walk in; and only by a *tour de force* can the Koran be brought into line with the esoteric doctrine which the Sûfîs derive from it. Undoubtedly they have done a great work for Islam. They have deepened and enriched the lives of millions by ruthlessly stripping off the husk of religion and insisting that its kernel must be sought, not in any formal act, but in cultivation of spiritual feelings and in purification of the inward man. This was a legitimate and most fruitful development of the Prophet's teaching. But the Prophet was a

strict monotheist, while the Sûfîs, whatever they *may* pretend or imagine, are theosophists, pantheists, or monists. When they speak and write as believers in the dogmas of positive religion, they use language which cannot be reconciled with such a theory of unity as we are now examining. 'Afîfuddîn al-Tilimsânî, from whose commentary on Niffarî I have given some extracts in this chapter, said roundly that the whole Koran is polytheism—a perfectly just statement from the monistic point of view, though few Sûfîs have dared to be so explicit.

The mystic Unitarians admit the appearance of contradiction, but deny its reality. "The Law and the Truth" (they might say) "are the same thing in different aspects. The Law is for you, the Truth for us. In addressing you we speak according to the measure of your understanding, since what is meat for gnostics is poison to the uninitiated, and the highest mysteries ought to be jealously guarded from profane ears. It is only human reason that sees the single as double, and balances the Law against the Truth. Pass away from the world of opposites and become one with God, who has no opposite."

The gnostic recognizes that the Law is valid and necessary in the moral sphere. While good and evil remain, the Law stands over both, commanding and forbidding, rewarding and punishing. He knows, on the other hand, that only God really exists and acts: therefore, if evil really exists, it must be divine, and if evil things are really done, God must be the doer of them. The conclusion is false because the hypothesis is false. Evil has no real existence; it is not-being, which is the privation and absence of being, just as darkness is the absence of light. "Once," said Nûrî, "I beheld the Light, and I fixed my gaze upon it until I became the Light." No wonder that such illuminated souls, supremely indifferent to the shadow-shows of religion and morality in a phantom world, are ready to cry with Jalâluddîn:

The man of God is made wise by the Truth, The man of God is not learned from book.
The man of God is beyond infidelity and faith, To the man of God right and wrong are alike.

It must be borne in mind that this is a theory of perfection, and that those whom it exalts above the Law are saints, spiritual guides, and profound theosophists who enjoy the special favor of God and presumably do not need to be restrained, coerced, or punished. In practice, of course, it leads in many instances to antinomianism and libertinism, as among the Bektâshîs and other orders of the so-called "lawless" dervishes. The same theories produced the same results in Europe during the Middle Ages, and the impartial historian cannot ignore the corruptions to which a purely subjective mysticism is liable; but on the present occasion we are concerned with the rose itself, not with its cankers.

Not all Sûfîs are gnostics; and, as I have mentioned before, those who are not yet ripe for the gnosis receive from their gnostic teachers the ethical instruction suitable to their needs. Jalâluddîn Rûmî, in his collection of lyrical poems entitled *The Dîvân of Shamsi Tabrîz,* gives free rein to a pantheistic enthusiasm which sees all things under the form of eternity.

I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;
One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.
I am intoxicated with Love's cup, the two worlds have passed out of my ken;
I have no business save carouse and revelry.

But in his *Masnavî*—a work so famous and venerated that it has been styled "The Koran of Persia"—we find him in a more sober mood expounding the Sûfî doctrines and justifying the ways of God to man. Here, though he is a convinced optimist and agrees with Ghazâlî that this is the best of all possible worlds, he does not airily dismiss the problem of evil as something outside reality, but endeavors

to show that evil, or what seems evil to us, is part of the divine order and harmony. I will quote some passages of his argument and leave my readers to judge how far it is successful or, at any rate, suggestive.

The Sûfîs, it will be remembered, conceive the universe as a projected and reflected image of God. The divine light, streaming forth in a series of emanations, falls at last upon the darkness of not-being, every atom of which reflects some attribute of Deity. For instance, the beautiful attributes of love and mercy are reflected in the form of heaven and the angels, while the terrible attributes of wrath and vengeance are reflected in the form of hell and the devils. Man reflects all the attributes, the terrible as well as the beautiful: he is an epitome of heaven and hell. Omar Khayyâm alludes to this theory when he says:

> Hell is a spark from our fruitless pain,
> Heaven a breath from our time of joy

A couplet which Fitzgerald molded into the magnificent stanza:

> Heav'n but the Vision of fulfilled Desire,
> And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,
> Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves
> So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

Jalâluddîn, therefore, does in a sense make God the author of evil, but at the same time he makes evil intrinsically good in relation to God—for it is the reflection of certain divine attributes which in themselves are absolutely good. So far as evil is really evil, it springs from not-being. The poet assigns a different value to this term in its relation to God and in its relation to man. In respect of God not-being is nothing, for God is real Being, but in man it is the principle of evil which constitutes half of human nature. In the one case it is a pure negation, in the other it is positively and actively pernicious. We need not quarrel with the poet for coming to grief in his logic. There are some occasions

when intense moral feeling is worth any amount of accurate thinking.

It is evident that the doctrine of divine unity implies predestination. Where God is and naught beside Him, there can be no other agent than He, no act but His. "Thou didst not throw, when thou threwest, but God threw" (Kor. 8. 17). Compulsion is felt only by those who do not love. To know God is to love Him; and the gnostic may answer, like the dervish who was asked how he fared:

> I fare as one by whose majestic will
> The world revolves, floods rise and rivers flow,
> Stars in their courses move; yea, death and life
> Hang on his nod and fly to the ends of earth,
> His ministers of mourning or of joy.

This is the Truth; but for the benefit of such as cannot bear it, Jalâluddîn vindicates the justice of God by asserting that men have the power to choose how they will act, although their freedom is subordinate to the divine will. Approaching the question, "Why does God ordain and create evil?" he points out that things are known through their opposites, and that the existence of evil is necessary for the manifestation of good.

> Not-being and defect, wherever seen,
> Are mirrors of the beauty of all that is.
> The bone-setter, where should he try his skill
> But on the patient lying with broken leg?
> Were no base copper in the crucible,
> How could the alchemist his craft display?

Moreover, the divine omnipotence would not be completely realized if evil had remained uncreated.

> He is the source of evil, as thou sayest,
> Yet evil hurts Him not. To make that evil
> Denotes in Him perfection. Hear from me
> A parable. The heavenly Artist paints
> Beautiful shapes and ugly: in one picture
> The loveliest women in the land of Egypt

Gazing on youthful Joseph amorously;
And lo, another scene by the same hand,
Hell-fire and Iblis with his hideous crew:
Both master-works, created for good ends,
To show His perfect wisdom and confound
The sceptics who deny His mastery.
Could He not evil make, He would lack skill;
Therefore He fashions infidel alike
And Muslim true, that both may witness bear
To Him, and worship One Almighty Lord.

In reply to the objection that a God who creates evil must Himself be evil, Jalâluddîn, pursuing the analogy drawn from Art, remarks that ugliness in the picture is no evidence of ugliness in the painter.

Again, without evil it would be impossible to win the proved virtue which is the reward of self-conquest. Bread must be broken before it can serve as food, and grapes will not yield wine till they are crushed. Many men are led through tribulation to happiness.

As evil ebbs, good flows. Finally, much evil is only apparent. What seems a curse to one may be a blessing to another; nay, evil itself is turned to good for the righteous. Jalâluddîn will not admit that anything is absolutely bad.

Fools buy false coins because they are like the true.
If in the world no genuine minted coin
Were current, how would forgers pass the false?
Falsehood were nothing unless truth were there,
To make it specious. 'Tis the love of right
Lures men to wrong. Let poison but be mixed
With sugar, they will cram it into their mouths.
Oh, cry not that all creeds are vain! Some scent
Of truth they have, else they would not beguile.
Say not, "How utterly fantastical!"
No fancy in the world is all untrue.
Amongst the crowd of dervishes hides one,
One true fakir. Search well and thou wilt find!

Surely this is a noteworthy doctrine. Jalâluddîn died only a few years after the birth of Dante, but the Christian poet

falls far below the level of charity and tolerance reached by his Muslim contemporary.

How is it possible to discern the soul of goodness in things evil? By means of love, says Jalâluddîn, and the knowledge which love alone can give, according to the word of God in the holy Tradition:

> My servant draws nigh unto Me, and I love him; and when I love him, I am his ear, so that he hears by Me, and his eye, so that he sees by Me, and his tongue, so that he speaks by Me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me.

Although it will be convenient to treat of mystical love in a separate chapter, the reader must not fancy that a new subject is opening before him. Gnosis and love are spiritually identical; they teach the same truths in different language.

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