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CHAPTER 7

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND SUFISM

First, a preliminary observation.

The term "pantheist" is bandied about a great deal, almost always by people of either Protestant or Jewish background. I am most certainly not an admirer of Sigmund Freud, whom I usually refer to as "Sigmund Fraud". However, I do agree with something Freud said in his compendium of creaky village atheism, titled: The Future of an Illusion, in which he said:

"So far as pantheism is concerned, I have no objection to make except to note that it says nothing."

Freud had the philosophical and theological acumen of a mole, yet in this case he was right; the word "pantheism" is oxymoronic and meaningless.

Aldous Huxley's book The Perennial Philosophy has many admirable points; however, in one aspect said book demonstrates either that Aldous Huxley's learning was broad but shallow in places, and/or that in some parts it simply was not thought through. In The Perennial Philosophy Aldous Huxley divides mystics into "theist" and "pantheist", with Sufis and Christian mystics "theist" and Hindu and Buddhist mystics as "pantheist". Said distinction is completely false; Christian, Muslim and Hindu mystics all strongly emphasize that God is both immanent and transcendent (we will not get into the question of Buddhist mysticism in this respect); none are pantheist. Christian mystics

and Muslim Sufis may insist more strongly on God's transcendence than do Hindu mystics, but this is a distinction without a difference. Note that Aldous Huxley was an Englishman from a Protestant background.

Numerous times I have heard Hindu mysticism defined as "pantheist", and even heard and read expressions such as "pantheistic Christian mystics" and "pantheistic Sufi mystics". These expressions are meaningless oxymorons, because "pantheist" and "pantheistic" are meaningless words. To repeat, Christian mystics, Sufis and Hindu mystics all affirm that God is both immanent and transcendent; none are pantheists.

Protestantism, especially those sects in which Judaizing and Manichaeian influences are strong, tends to deny God's immanence, and even to denounce any affirmation of it as "pagan" or "pantheist". How said Protestants are able to square their effective denial of the immanence of God with the doctrine of the Incarnation and the first chapter of the Gospel According to St. John is beyond me, as both are unambiguous affirmations of the immanence of God. It is no wonder that some doubt that Protestantism could be considered Christian at all.

Traditional Catholicism and Traditional Eastern Orthodoxy have always affirmed that God is both immanent and transcendent, as the Doctrine of the Incarnation and the First Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John leave them no options in this respect. It is no surprise that Protestantism lacks any mystical tradition; Jakob Boehme is sometimes held up as an exception

(virtually the only one); however, if one examines the biography of Jakob Boehme, it is obvious that his was a case of "crypto-Catholicism", "Catholic nostalgia", or "Catholic persistence in a time and place in which Protestantism was only recently established". Significantly, Jakob Boehme is generally considered by Protestants to have been a "pantheist". The poet William Blake was a romantic, and so under powerful non- or even anti-Protestant influences.

In the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad one finds very clear and strong affirmations that God is both immanent and transcendent. In Islam as well as Christianity there are indeed aberrant and heretical sects which deny God's immanence; however, Shi'ism as well as Sufism strongly affirm that God is immanent as well as transcendent. Once again, the parallel with Christianity is obvious; as the Southern conservative Charley Reese has noted: "The Wahhabis are the Puritans of Islam", something with which I have dealt at length in other parts of this book. To summarize, "pantheist" and "pantheism" are contrived and meaningless words; there are no pantheists among Christian, Sufi and Hindu mystics, nor can there be.

In this book we speak at some length concerning Hindu *Vedanta* philosophy, notably *Bhakti Vedanta*, and most especially *Advaita Vedanta* (one does not preclude the other, the two are not mutually exclusive, and, in fact, could be considered as complementary). Some people say that Vedanta is pantheist: however, this is false; it simply affirms that God is immanent as well as transcendent:

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this is not "pantheist", nor is it "pagan" nor "polytheistic".

Though I consider "process theology" to be arrant nonsense, I must give Charles Hartshorne credit for clarifying certain things. In his book The Philosophers Speak of God, Hartshorne, affirming that the term "pantheism" is meaningless, spoke of *panentheism* (I do not know whether or not Hartshorne invented the term). We will avoid a definition of *panentheism*, as it would of necessity be long-winded and a bit recondite, as well as not very relevant to our main topic. Suffice it to say that the term *panentheism* is, at base, a sophisticated way of saying that God is immanent as well as transcendent. Significantly, Hartshorne considered Advaita Vedanta to be panentheist, not, repeat not pantheist. Though Hartshorne is generally associated with "process theology", the book The Philosophers Speak of God and his lavish praise of Alfred North Whitehead (at one point Hartshorne, speaking of an essay by Alfred North Whitehead, said: "One cannot avoid a feeling of impertinent when commenting on thinking as great as this) would seem to indicate that at some point Hartshorne "saw the light" and abandoned the arrant nonsense of so-called "process theology" and embraced panentheism. One may hope so. In any case, we must be grateful to Hartshorne for clarifying certain things

Enough of those contrived, oxymoronic and meaningless words "pantheist" and "pantheism"!

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Very interesting from our viewpoint is a quotation from ibn Batuta (14th Century) who speaks of Persian dervishes (or Sufis)

who chose Granada as their home because of its resemblance to their native land (1). Ibn Batuta mentions knowing personally in Granada a dervish from Tabriz, another from Samarkand, yet another from *Kuniah* (Konya in Asia Minor?) and two from India (2). This is perfectly logical considering the devastation suffered by Persia in the 13th and 14th Centuries. Certainly the Kingdom of Granada with its very high cultural level and Sufi traditions must have appeared more attractive to Persians fleeing their devastated homeland than would the domains of the Ottoman Turks or North Africa. This observation of course has no relevance for the 12th Century golden age of Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism, but is very relevant for their silver age under The Nazirids of the Kingdom of Granada. Perhaps the greatest figures of the silver age were ibn Abbad of Ronda, said to be a descendant of the banu Abbad kings of Seville, and Yusuf Qalandar al-Andalusi (died 1294) mentor of the "Wandering Dervishes" (3). The very use of the Persian name *Qalandar* and the existence of dervish orders points to a Persian influence.

I do not mean to suggest that the Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism died out or disappeared, though it must have gone underground for a part of the Almohad period. Large numbers of Muslims left Western Andalusia, which had been the heartland of Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism when this region was reconquered by the Castilians, the majority migrating to the

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Kingdom of Granada. These remnants, combined with the influence of the Persian sufis and dervishes, alluded to by ibn Batuta,

produced the silver age of Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism during the Nazirid period.

Even the decadence of this great movement is interesting. The movement of the *alumbrados* in Western Andalusia in the 16th-17th Centuries is now considered to have been a resurgence in a somewhat debased and degenerate form of the old Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism (it should be noted that St. John of the Cross had no sympathy whatever for this movement, and it is not difficult to see why)(4). On the other hand, many of the *Santones* (holy men) of Morocco in the 16th-17th Centuries known for their unorthodox or fanatic faith were of Andalusian origin (5).

The importance of all this is very much greater than it might appear at first glance. St. John of the Cross, the Castilian mystic of the 16th Century, is considered by many to be the greatest mystic of the Western Church and is certainly the greatest poet among all Christian mystics as well as perhaps the greatest lyric poet of the Castilian language. Of all Christian mystics, only St. John of the Cross is comparable to the Persian Sufis as a poet.

Even speaking in the most general terms, the similarities between the poetry of St. John of the Cross and the Sufi poets, both Hispano-Muslim and Persian, are numerous indeed. The great Castilian mystic does not attempt a logical or even an allegorical

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commentary on his verses, but rather wrote prose commentaries often as enigmatic as the original verses. Like so many Sufis,

including ibn Arabi of Murcia, (whom we shall refer to by his Arabic name Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, i.e. Ibn Arabi the Murciano) St. John of the Cross affirms that the mystical experience cannot be logically explained, but only hinted at to those already on the mystical path.

A vast number of typically Sufi symbolisms appear in the works of St. John of the Cross, some of which we will later discuss in detail. Among said symbols, we note at this point:

- ❖ 1.) The wine of mystical intoxication, so dear to the Persian Sufi poets, the great Castilian mystic even using the wine or juice of the pomegranate (a glance at an Iranian cookbook will demonstrate how much pomegranate juice is used in Iranian cuisine) as symbolizing the unity which is the basis of the multiplicity of the grains of the pomegranate. This last is most appropriate as we shall see; the Spanish word for "pomegranate" is "granada", so the pomegranate is the symbol of Granada, where St. John of the Cross lived for six years, and where he no doubt learned most of his Sufi lore from Moriscos.
- ❖ 2.) Then there is the interior fountain where the eyes of the Beloved ("The Beloved" is by itself a Persian Sufi symbol) appear immediately before the mystical union. In Arabic, "'ayn" may mean "eye", "spring" (of water), or, less commonly, "identity", and the great Castilian mystic seems to have been aware of this).
- ❖ 3.) There is also the lock of hair that serves as a hook to entrap the Beloved, something so typical of Persian Sufi poetry.

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- ❖ 4.) The foxes and cattle which appear in the poetry of St. John of the Cross symbolize sensuality or animal lusts, another typically

Sufi symbol.

- ❖ 5.) In the works of the great Castilian mystic we also find the caterpillar which by metamorphosis becomes a splendid butterfly, thus symbolizing the soul's development. The Sufis knew this symbol well.
- ❖ 6.) Nor must we forget the orchard or garden which must be irrigated by spiritual waters. How very Persian!
- ❖ 7.) The we have the solitary bird symbolizing the soul in mystical flight, which includes all colors, but is itself colorless, because it is free of attachment to any created thing. How Sufi, how reminiscent of the Persian Simurgh!
- ❖ 8.) Finally, we have the lilies which symbolize mystical abandonment into the hands of God. Once again, very Sufi indeed! (6)

We shall deal with the above elements in a monographic way in the course of this essay.

Annemarie Schimmel says that St. John of the Cross never appeared to her to be a "strange poet", because she read him as though he were a Sufi.(7) I also never found St. John of the Cross to be a "strange poet", no doubt for the same reason.

All this is very important, because St. John of the Cross lived for more than six years in Granada at a time in which the majority of the population was composed of Moriscos or descendants of Muslims of the Kingdom of Granada who were still Hispano-Muslim by culture and many of whom, perhaps the majority, were still Muslims in secret. I myself, when I lived in Granada, heard of people in Granada and Ronda who were still (after nearly 500

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years) clandestine Muslims. Most significantly, St. John of the

Cross wrote all his great poetic works in Granada(8).

It is important here not to go to extremes and lose perspective. St. John of the Cross's father, Gonzalo de Yepes, was of the nobility of Old Castile, as the Spanish say, Old Christian on all four sides. St. John of the Cross's mother, Catalina Alvarez was a *Morisca*. Catalina Alvarez was a native of Toledo, an orphan who had been adopted by a widow of Fontiveros, where lived Gonzalo de Yepes. Little is known concerning the parents of Catalina Alvarez, but it is considered probable that she was a *Morisca*, but there is no solid proof. Also, St. John of the Cross was very learned in Christian Mysticism. The subject of his thesis at Salamanca (which most unfortunately has not been preserved) was Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite and St. Gregory of Nyssa. It would seem that he also knew the works of later Byzantine Christian Mystics, especially St. Gregory Palamas. In fact, except for a great part of his literary expression and a few other things which we will deal with later, St. John of the Cross is well within the *apophatic* tradition of Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite, the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory Palamas.

Many have attributed a neo-Platonic origin to both Christian Mysticism and Sufism. However, there is a profound difference, well expressed by Vladimir Lossky:

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"The ecstasy of Dionysius is a going forth from being as such. That of Plotinus (the neo-Platonist) is rather a reduction of being to absolute simplicity. This

is why Plotinus describes his ecstasy by a name which is very characteristic: that of "simplification." It is a reintegration in the simplicity of the object of contemplation which can be positively defined as the One and which, in this capacity, is not distinguished from the subject contemplating. Despite all outward resemblances (due primarily to a common vocabulary), we are far removed from the negative theology of the Areopagitica of Dionysius. The God of Dionysius, incomprehensible by nature, is the God of the Psalms: "Who made darkness His secret place", not the primordial God-Unity of the neo-Platonists. If He is incomprehensible it is not because of a simplicity which cannot come to terms with the multiplicity with which all knowledge relating to creatures is tainted. It is, so to say, an incomprehensibility which is more radical, more absolute. Indeed, God would no longer be incomprehensible by nature if this incomprehensibility were, as in Plotinus, rooted in the simplicity of the One. Now it is precisely the quality of incomprehensibility which, in Dionysius, is the one definition proper to God-if we speak here of proper definitions. In his refusal to attribute to God the properties which make up the matter of affirmative theology, Dionysius is aiming expressly at the neo-Platonist definitions: "He is neither One nor Unity" (in the words of Dionysius) ...

If the God of revelation is not the God of the philosophers, it is this recognition of His fundamental unknowability which marks the boundary between the two conceptions (i.e., that of the neo-Platonists and that of Dionysius). All that can be said in regard to the Platonism of the Fathers (of the Church), and especially in regard to the dependence of the author of the Areopagitica on the neo-Platonist philosophers, is limited to outward resemblances which do not go to the root of the teaching, and relate only to a vocabulary which was common to the age. ...

For St. Gregory of Nyssa every concept relative to God is a simulacrum, a false likeness. an idol. The concepts which we form in accordance with the understanding and the judgement which are natural to us, basing ourselves on an intelligible representation, create idols of God instead of revealing to us God Himself" (9).

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St. Gregory Palamas expresses all this very concisely:

"The super-essential nature of God is not a subject for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that exists and more than

unknowable, being founded upon the uncircumscribed might of the celestial spirits-incomprehensible and ineffable forever. There is no name whereby it can be named, neither in this age nor in the age to come, nor word found in the soul and uttered by the tongue, nor contact whether sensible or intellectual, nor yet any image which may afford any knowledge of its subject, if this be not that perfect incomprehensibility which one acknowledges in denying all that can be named. None can properly name its essence or nature if he be truly seeking the truth that is above all truth." (10)

At an early date in the history of Islam this is expressed by the sayings of the Shi'a Imams. Here are some examples from the collection of the sayings of the Shi'a Imams titled Al-Kafi, redacted by Shaykh al-Kulayni, translation by Muhammad Reza al-Ja'fari, (edition published Tehran, 1980):

"I (Abd ar Rahman ibn Abi Najran) inquired of Abu Ja'far (the 5th Imam, born 676 AD, 57 AH, died 733 AD, 148 AH) about the Unity (of God): "Should I think of anything (to understand God)?" He (the Imam) replied: "Yes, but you have to imagine a thing which the mind cannot contain and which is without limit. He is unlike whatever comes into your mind. Nothing resembles Him nor can any thought reach Him. How can He be conceived when He is totally different from whatever is conceived and is the reverse of whatever is imagined. (Because Allah cannot be limited through the limitations of the senses.) Certainly, the thing which cannot be encompassed by the mind and which is without limits is that which should be imagined."

Said Abu Ja'far ath-Thani (i.e., Abu Jaafar the Second, the 9th Imam, born 811 AD, 195 AH, died 835 AD, 220 AH):

"Abu Ja'far ath-Thani was asked, "Is it proper to refer to Allah as a thing?" He (the Imam) replied, "Yes, in the sense that this will absolve Him from two constrictions: tatil (i.e., to negate the attributes of "existent" or any of His positive attributes), and
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tashbih, or anthropomorphism (the similarity between Him and His creatures in His "existence" or any of His positive attributes).

Abu Abdillah (the 6th Imam, born 702 AD, 83 AH, died 765 AD,

148 AH) said in reply to an atheist who asked him what God was:

"Allah is a thing which is quite different from all other things. From what I say, the stress is specifically on this point, that it is an established (truth) that Allah is a thing which is a reality in Itself and by Itself, except that he has neither any body nor any shape. He can neither be brought into perception nor can He be touched and felt. He can neither be perceived through the five senses, nor can He be conceived and imagined. Neither can age shorten Him, nor can time bring any change to Him." The interrogator further inquired: "Do you say that He is All-hearing, All-seeing?" The Imam replied: "He is All-hearing, All-seeing. It means that He hears and sees but not with any organ or by any instrument. But He hears and sees by Himself. When I say that He hears and sees by Himself, I do not mean that He is one thing and His Self is another thing. I have made this interpretation myself, since I was and I wanted to make you understand because you have inquired. Now I further explain, verily, He hears from the totality and completeness of His Being. This totality and completeness is not any part or fraction of Him. Even here my idea was just to make you understand and this interpretation is also my own. By what I have said I mean nothing except that He is All-hearing, All-seeing, All-knowing and All-aware without any duality in His Essence or any duality in the meaning (of His Positive Attributes)."

The interrogator inquired, "What, after all is He (Allah)?" Abu Abdillah replied, "He is the Nourisher, the Worshipped, and He is Allah. And this affirmation, that He is Allah, does not mean the letters A-L-L-A-H, nor does it mean the letters R-A-B (the Nourisher). But turn to the meaning that He is a thing which is the Creator of all things and their Maker. This meaning has been described by these letters ... It is this meaning which has been given the name of Allah, ar-Rahman (the merciful), ar-Rahim (th Compassionate), al-Aziz (the Powerful) and the like of His other names. He is the (Only) worshipped, the Great, the All-Mighty."

The interrogator addressed the Imam, "Whatever we conceive of we do not find it except as a created

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thing." The Imam replied, "If the truth is as you say, then our *taklif* (the imposition of a task) in (believing in) the Unity of Allah should be withdrawn from us, since we cannot undertake the imposition of a task of believing in an inconceivable thing. Although we say that anything which is conceived, perceived and encompassed by our senses or by comparison (to any other sensory object) is a creation in itself (and not

the Creator). We must prove the Creator of all things while avoiding two reprehensible aspects. First, the negation (of the Positive Attributes of Allah, because negation is [reverts to] the invalidation and non-being [of Allah]. The second aspect is to imagine Him by resemblances. But such resemblances are nothing but the attributes of the created, which are apparent, compounded and made up of something. Hence there is no other way except to accept a Creator for the existence of all that is created. And we cannot but acknowledge that these created things have been created and their Creator is totally different from them and is unlike them. Since the one who had been like the created would have been applicable to such a creator, like their occurrence after their being non-existent, and their growth from infancy to puberty, and from being black to being white, and from being strong to being feeble, and all these existing conditions (of the created) for which we need no proof since they are obviously real."

The interrogator then remarked, "When you have established (the existence of Allah) you have (automatically) put limitations on His Being." The Imam said, "I have not limited His Being, rather I have only proved His existence, since there is no common ground between the affirmation and the negation (regarding His existence)."

At this time the interrogator inquired, "Does Allah have an entity and an individuality?" The Imam replied: "Yes, since there can be no proof of (the existence of) anything unless it has got an entity and individuality."

The interrogator inquired: "Does Allah have any quality (state and condition)?" The Imam replied, "No, since quality (state and condition) is an aspect of (added) attributes (which are quite separate from His Being) and which encompass the very Being Itself. But it is essential to get rid of the thought of His non-existence and also of the thought of His resemblance to any other thing. Since whoever negated His Being has actually denied His Existence and His Lordship, and also invalidated Him. And whoever likened Him to any other thing, has actually

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established for Him the quality of the created who are not worthy of Lordship. But it is essential to establish a quality for Him - the quality which cannot apply to the case of other things, and of which no other than He can have any knowledge." The interrogator further inquired, "Does He conduct all things by Himself (through expedience and endeavors)?" The Imam replied, "He is far too exalted to conduct all affairs through expedience. Allah is above all this. He has

only to desire and will, and His affairs (are) executed at once, without any expedience, and He does what He wills." (11)

We have already mentioned ibn Abbad of Ronda as a descendant of al-Mutamid. He was also a member of the *Shadiliyyah* Sufi or Dervish Order, whose founder, Abul Abbas al-Mursi, a native of Murcia, Spain, claimed to be an initiate in a direct line of spiritual succession (a sort of Apostolic Succession) begun by Hasan ibn Ali, second Shi'a Imam. Thomas Merton and Miguel Asin Palacios have noted a possible relation between ibn Abbad of Ronda and St. John of the Cross. Says Merton:

"(Ibn Abbad) has a special interest for the students of Western (i.e., Christian) Mysticism because some researchers believe that he had at least an indirect influence on St. John of the Cross. Like the Doctor of the Dark Night of the Soul (St. John of the Cross), ibn Abbad taught that in the night of desolation is when the door of mystical union secretly opens, although it remains firmly closed during the "day" of comprehension and light (12)."

The concept of "dark night of the soul" is found in the works of St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th century), though in an embryonic and incomplete form.

There is a paradox in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa on this point. The first mystical stage is freedom from the darkness of sin, which is expressed as illumination. However, in the next

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stage one enters darkness, but of a radically different sort; here the soul has entered into the "darkness" of the incomprehensible and inexpressible, as we see below:

"Next comes a closer awareness of hidden things, and by this the soul is guided through sense phenomena to the world of the invisible. And this awareness is a

kind of cloud, which overshadows all appearances, and slowly guides and accustoms the soul to look towards what is hidden."(13)

A further example is the following:

"... that our goal transcends all knowledge and is everywhere cut off from us by the darkness of incomprehensibility."(14)

Speaking of fellow Cappadocian St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, St.

Gregory of Nyssa says:

"His darkness was a vision not vouchsafed to others. ... Thus he received (and all those who were initiated by him) a revelation of the mysteries."(15)

Speaking of his brother St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa says:

"Often we saw him enter into the darkness where God was. By the mystical guidance of the Spirit he understood what was invisible to others, so that he seemed to be enveloped in that darkness in which the Word of God (Logos) is concealed."(16)

In somewhat greater detail St. Gregory of Nyssa refers to the same topic in his Life of Moses:

'The true vision and the true knowledge of what we seek consists precisely in not seeing, in an awareness that our goal transcends all knowledge and is everywhere cut off from us by the darkness of incomprehensibility. Thus that profound evangelist, John, who penetrated into this luminous darkness, tells us that NO MAN HAS SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME, teaching us by this negation that no man - indeed, no created intellect - can attain a knowledge of God."(17)

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In his Commentary on the Song of Songs, St. Gregory of Nyssa powerfully reminds us both of St. John of the Cross and the Persian Sufi poets. The "she" is the soul of the mystic:

"By the night she refers to the contemplation of the invisible, just as Moses, who entered into the darkness to the place where God was; and God, as the Prophet says, MADE THE DARKNESS HIS COVERT ROUND ABOUT HIM. ... Now, she says, that I have been deemed worthy

of the nuptial rites, I rest as it were upon the BED of all that I have hitherto understood. But I am suddenly introduced into the realm of the invisible, surrounded by the divine darkness, searching for Him Whom I desired - though the Beloved Himself resists the grasp of our thoughts. ... Then at last she gives up all she has found; for she realizes that what she seeks can be understood only in the very inability to comprehend His essence, and that every intelligible attribute becomes merely a hindrance to those who seek to find Him. This is why she says: WHEN I HAD A LITTLE PASSED BY THEM, I abandoned all creatures and passed by all that is intelligible in creation; and when I gave up every finite mode of comprehension, then it was that I found my Beloved by faith. And I WILL NEVER LET HIM GO, now that I have found Him, from the grasp of faith, until He comes within my CHAMBER. For the heart is indeed a CHAMBER to be filled by the divine indwelling - that is, when it is restored to the state that it had in the beginning."(18)

Though in a somewhat different sense, the concept of "dark night of the soul" is also found in the works of St. Isaac the Syrian (7th century). It should be noted that St. Isaac the Syrian was called the "Syrian" only because he wrote in Syriac; in fact he was an Arab from Qatar who lived much or most of his life in what is today Iraq and southwestern Iran.

The nineteenth century Russian Slavophil thinker Ivan Vasilyevich Kireevsky, when he wished to name the author who best exemplifies the essence of Eastern Orthodox spirituality, chose St. Isaac the Syrian, saying that:

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'The teaching of St. Isaac the Syrian is more profoundly thought through than that of any other Church Father.'(19)

Here is an example of "dark night of the soul" by St. Isaac the Syrian:

"He (God), however, contrives a cause to bring us close to Him by leaving us in tribulation. For by His very delay in coming to our rescue, He obliges us to

tarry before His door in our supplications, and thus He brings about our help."(20)

It is obvious as we shall see that in the "dark night of the soul" of ibn Abbad of Ronda and St. John of the Cross, both the "dark night of the soul" of St. Gregory of Nyssa and that of St. Isaac the Syrian are included; though not identical the concepts of the two early Christian mystics are by no means contradictory nor incompatible.

Thus, though in embryonic form, the concept of "dark night of the soul" is found in the works of early Christian mystics, as is much of the imagery used by St. John of the Cross and the Persian Sufi poets.

The details of the life of St. John of the Cross in Granada are not well known. Nevertheless, it is perfectly evident that he must have mingled a great deal with the Moriscos. The monastery where he lived in Granada (he was a Descalced Carmelite) was

between the Alhambra, the palace and stronghold of the Nazirid Kings, and the Antequeruela, one of the two districts mainly occupied by Moriscos. Nearly all the artisans and craftsmen in Granada at this time were Moriscos. At the moment of the death of

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Ste. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross was commenting on his great poem the Spiritual Canticle in a talk delivered at the grille of a convent in the Calle (street) Elvira (21). Now, the Calle Elvira forms one of the borders of the Albaicin Quarter, the other quarter mainly occupied by Moriscos. The Calle Elvira takes its name from the Gate of Elvira, at the North end of said street.

At this point it might be wise to digress a bit. Granada was outside the main centre of Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism in its great period, which, as we said before, was centred more to the West. Ibn al-Arif, one of the forerunners of Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism, was from Almeria (22). One of the great figures of this movement, ibn Tufayl (died 1185) was born in Guadix, near Granada, was educated in Granada, and for some time practiced medicine there. His best known work is The Self-Taught Philosopher (best known in the Latin translation Philosophus Autodidacticus). Basically, ibn Tufayl was a follower of Avicenna, though also a great admirer of al-Ghazzali. Of great interest here is that many of the writings of ibn Tufayl indicate that the later Almohads were partisans of al-Ghazzali(23). This is a fact of very great importance. It must refer to the later Almohads, and would indicate that Hispano-Muslim Sufism and Esoterism influenced even the Almohad conquerors.

Another great figure was ibn Saba'in (1216-1271), Murciano as was ibn Arabi and Abul Abbas al-Mursi. Ibn Saba'in was a declared Shi'a, Ismaili to be exact, as well as a Sufi. When he visited Granada in 1251 he stayed with some Muslim holy men

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(Sufis?) who had taken a vow of poverty and formed a sort of convent near the Gate of Elvira (24).

Certainly it is not surprising that Persian Sufis found Granada so congenial. Here there was a lively mystical tradition, the cultural level was very high, and the works and doctrines of al-Ghazzali were well known.

Around the end of the 16th Century a Morisco scholar from Avila (interestingly, so was Ste. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross was born in a village near Avila and spent much of his childhood there) known in Spanish as the "Mancebo de Arevalo", traveled through Spain, observing the lamentable condition of Spanish Islam and receiving from his fellow Moriscos the teachings of their ancestors. When he arrived in Granada he paid a visit to the "Moorish Woman of Ubeda" (La Mora de Ubeda) who lived near the Gate of Elvira. At the time she was 93 years old, which indicates that she was almost certainly living in Granada at the same time as St. John of the Cross (remember, St. John of the Cross lived in Granada from 1582 till 1588). Let us see what the Mancebo has to say concerning this remarkable woman:

"(She) did not speak elegantly. Her phrases were harsh and her tone of voice common. But, for instructive ideas, her like could not be found amidst the whole world of scholars... Doctors came to pay her compliments on great festivals, and at other times. But what enhances her fame, above all, was the strong affection she manifested towards everyone, and this was not due to any natural gift but to Divine Providence... She was unlettered, yet she reasoned with such good sense and judgement, that it is impossible to say how much light she threw upon our honored Quran... All Granada and its environs were ruled by what she said. The
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people declared that she was highly esteemed above all those of her country for her knowledge of our laws and customs... She was well known to all nations, because she showed me letters from (doctors or alfaquis) of the four rites (schools, i.e., Hanifi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbali) of our law, not to speak of others from great muftis and scholars. (She believed that) there was no higher goal than to make our religion resplendant in Granada... La Mora de Ubeda closely followed the doctrine of al-Ghazzali"(25).

Miguel Asin Palacios assumed that St. John of the Cross lived

in Granada at the same time as the Mora de Ubeda, and was followed in this by Fr. Bruno de Jesus-Marie. However, in recent years doubt has been cast on this.

Morisco or *Aljamiado* documents are, with few exceptions, impossible to date. Those who say that St. John of the Cross did not live in Granada at the time as the Mora de Ubeda are basing their theory on suppositions which are impossible to prove, since the documents to which they refer are impossible to date with any sort of precision. Also, said critics ignore the facts which contradict their theory, such as the fact that the Mancebo de Arevalo describes the Mora de Ubeda as being at a very advanced age at the time of his visit to her, something which contradicts the very early dates which they give for the visit of the Mancebo de Arevalo to Granada. Finally, some of their arguments are worthless. For example the critics ignoring the fact that the Mancebo de Arevalo says that she was of very advanced age at the time of his visit to Granada say that in her interview with the Mancebo, the Mora de Ubeda makes no mention of anything later than the fall of Granada in 1492 to the armies of Castile and Aragon.

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By the same token, someone could take a recorded conversation of mine and say that I must have died in the early part of the 20th century, because I make no reference to anything which occurred after World War I.

Assuming, as seems most probable, that St. John of the Cross was indeed in contact with the Mora de Ubeda, there is a most interesting parallel between St. John of the Cross and the Mora de

Ubeda on the one hand, and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and Fatima bint ibn al-Muthanna of Seville, known in some sources as *Fatima bint Waliyya*, on the other. We have spoken of her before. However, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a youth at the time that he was instructed by the woman Sufi Fatima, while St. John of the Cross was a man of early middle age at the time of his probable contacts with the Mora de Ubeda

During his stay in Granada, St. John of the Cross was in daily contact with Moriscos, and frequented the area near the Gate of Elvira. Considering that the Mora de Ubeda was well known and highly influential in Granada and its environs, is it possible that there was no contact between them, assuming that she was living in Granada at the time? There was certainly no lack of direct, personal contacts between St. John of the Cross and Hispano-Muslim Sufism, which is to say between him and al-Ghazzali, ibn Abbad of Ronda and the many Persian Sufis and Dervishes who lived in Granada during the 13th, 14th and probably 15th centuries.

Fr. Bruno de Jesus-Marie is a Friar of the Descalced

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Carmelite Order as was St. John of the Cross. He has written an admirable biography of the Saint which I have cited a great many times in this work. Fr. Bruno, while admitting what I have said above, tends to minimize, almost to reject, the idea of any Sufi influence in the works of St. John of the Cross. With all respect to Fr. Bruno, I humbly beg to disagree with his assessment on this particular point because:

❖ 1.) At least in his very fine and admirable work he shows what appears to me to be an insufficient knowledge of Sufism and of certain aspects of the mysticism of the Eastern Church, such as *Hesychasm*. For instance, Fr. Bruno tends to reduce the Sufi Mysticism to artificially induced trances, contrasting this with the Love of God so clearly manifested in Christian Mysticism. Let it be noted here that the mystical technique known as Hesychasm or more commonly as the "Jesus Prayer" or "prayer of the Heart" is widespread in the monasteries of the Eastern Church, and has been since the 4th century. The similarity of Hesychasm to both Hindu Yoga and to the "Zikr" of the Sufis has been noted by many.(26) Among the yogis, the Sufis and the mystics of the Eastern Church the object of these exercises is to eliminate external distractions, not to artificially induce trances. Love of God, called *Ishq* or Divine Love, is the very keystone of Sufism.(27) The proofs of this are voluminous, as anyone with even the most superficial knowledge of Sufi verse knows. The similarities between Sufism and Christian Mysticism are much greater and the differences much less than Fr. Bruno seems to be aware.

❖ 2.) Fr, Bruno tends to confuse Sufism with Illuminism (of the *Alumbrados* of whom we have spoken before). Certainly one cannot blame the Sufis for what was a debasement and a degeneration of their doctrines and practices. The true sufis are very much closer to St. John of the Cross than to the "Alumbrados", and would have joined St. John of the Cross in his condemnation of said movement. For example, the true Sufis would most certainly side with St. John of the Cross and against the "Alumbrados" on the issues of Quietism, and in his opposition to the opinion of the
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Alumbrados that manual labor "should not be carried out by the servants of God". The sufis would also side with him against the principle of the Alumbrados that "servants of God should not obey superiors in matters that might interfere with contemplation", since the sheikh or pir plays so important a role in the Dervish Orders and in Sufism in general. St. John of the Cross was a man of great and broad learning as his writings make plain. The Alumbrados, on the other hand, had a sort of "cult of ignorance" (which one finds among certain Protestant sects), affirming that the ignorant are better fitted than the learned to receive "illumination". Abdullah Ansari of Herat listed "indifference to fools and respect to the learned"

in his Sufi Law of Life(28). The Sufis would also side with St. John of the Cross in denouncing the "demonstrations, movements, strange attitudes and extasis in presence of witnesses" typical of the Alumbrados(29) and would also side with his warning against "interior locutions, visions, revelations and spiritual feelings" which may deceive and also sidetrack one from the true mystical quest(30). While the origins of Illuminism may well be in Hispano-Muslim Sufism, Illuminism itself is a very debased and degenerate sort of mysticism which leads to the repulsive combination of hysteria and gross ignorance so common in Protestant Revivalism and Pentecostalism. Finally, like many of the Sufis, St. John of the Cross was a very great poet, The Alumbrados produced no poets and in fact despised poetry along with everything else which smacks of learning and superior talents.

❖ 3.) Fr. Bruno makes no distinction whatever between the fact of Mysticism and its interpretation in terms of scholastic theology. Abbot John Chapman said: "St. John of the Cross is like a sponge filled with Christianity - squeeze out all that is specifically Christian and the full mystical theory remains"(31). I am most certainly not suggesting that St. John of the Cross was a secret Muslim. To doubt the sincerity of his Christian faith would be madness. The great Christian scholastics of the Middle Ages borrowed a great deal from Muslim philosopher, particularly Avicenna, al-Farabi, al-Ghazzali and Averroes, something which noone denies nor accuses them of having been "Crypto-Muslims" for this reason.

On a somewhat lower level, both Christianity and Islam put a high premium on charity, in the sense of doing good works for the unfortunate. After the reconquest of Granada many Christian priests praised
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the alms-giving of the Muslims. Now, the particular theological interpretation or evaluation of an act or work of charity may vary, though these interpretations do not alter the act or work itself. The above analogy is somewhat weak and inexact, but I think that the reader must know what I am getting at. If any sufis are reading this they most certainly understand and the same is true of Catholic thinkers such as Pope John Paul II and Thomas Merton and Eastern Orthodox thinkers such as Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky.

❖ 4.) Fr. Bruno also makes no mention of a very important fact: the close resemblance between the poetry of St. John of the Cross and that of the Persian Sufis. Al-Ghazzali was a philosopher and theologian who

wrote in prose in a language which was for him an acquired one (al-Ghazzali was a Persian from Tus, though he wrote mainly in Arabic) not a poet. In the purely literary field it is well to note that one of the principal works of St. John of the Cross is Ascent of Mount Carmel, two of the principal works of al-Ghazzali are entitled Ascent to the Court of Sanctity (Miraj al-Quds) and Ascent of the Pilgrims (Miraj al-Salikin).

Fr. Bruno notes the similarity between the title and content of another of the works of al-Ghazzali Niche for Lights (Mishkat al-Anwar) and the title and content of one of the works of St. John of the Cross, Living Flame of Love. Fr. Bruno admits: "It is possible that (St.) John may have had (a copy of) the Mishkat in his hands" (32).

We will have more to say of this later.

Could anything of the Persian Sufi poetry have reached St. John of the Cross? This is a most important question from our point of view. In the last analysis it is as a poet that St. John of the Cross is so unique among Christian mystics, among whom there is such a great abundance of profound and subtle thinkers and spiritual genius, nor is there a lack of brilliant prose stylists.

As we said in an earlier chapter, it is highly possible that the Persian language was known among certain erudite circles in

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al-Andalus, though our sources are virtually silent on the subject. However, this very silence indicates that the number of Hispano-Muslims with any knowledge of the Persian language must have been very small. Certainly it is most unlikely that any of the Moriscos of Granada of the 16th Century had any knowledge of the Persian language and literature.

Nevertheless, one should be cautious about jumping to conclusions. Ibn Batuta spoke of the number of Persian and Indian

dervishes who came to Granada. He also spoke of personally knowing a dervish from "Kuniah". This "Kuniah" is probably "Konya" or "Konia", the Roman and Byzantine "Iconium", where Rumi lived for many years and where he founded the Order of the Mevlevi ("dancing" or "whirling") dervishes. Certainly the dervish from Konya whom ibn Batuta knew in Granada in the 14th Century (about 50 years after the death of Rumi) must have been thoroughly familiar with the works and teachings of Rumi.

The dervishes when they arrived in Granada may have spoken only Persian and/or Hindi or Turkish or perhaps Greek; however, they would hardly have remained "mute" for long, but would have learned to speak Arabic as soon as possible. The fact that they were able to speak with ibn Batuta proves that they must have spoken Arabic, since at the time ibn Batuta was at the beginning of his travels and certainly did not speak Persian, Turkish, Hindi or Greek.

The wearing of Persian garb in Granada may of course be due to the influence of Persian immigrants who were not sufis or

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dervishes. However, there are at least two facts which seem to indicate that the influence of the dervishes in Granada was very considerable. The first is the existence of Yusuf Qalandar (pronounced "ghalandar" in Persian) *al-Andalusi*.

There is yet another proof of the great esteem in which the Hispano-Muslim Sufis and dervishes were held, even in Persia itself. The Sufi poet Muhammad Shirin (1349-1407) was born and died in Tabriz, yet he was known by the poetic name *Maghribi*

because he traveled to the "far West" where he was invested with a dervish cloak by a sheikh who was a follower of the great ibn al-Arabi *al-Mursi* (the Murciano). (33). The term "Maghrib" is ambiguous, meaning simply "far west", a term which in the East included both North-west Africa and al-Andalus. As we have seen, al-Andalus was a very great centre of Sufism which Morocco was not, and ibn Arabi al-Mursi, as his name indicates, was an Andalusian, not a North African. As we have seen, many Persian dervishes came to Granada. Ibn Batuta, himself a Moroccan from Tangier, makes no mention of anything similar in his homeland, and found it strange and exotic that there should be Persian dervishes in Granada. For chronological reasons, Muhammad Shirin Maghribi cannot possibly be the same dervish from Tabriz whom ibn Batuta knew in Granada.

The second fact is even more interesting, as it indicates a penetration of dervish lore among the populace of Granada, not only among an elite. Idries Shah says that Ravel's Bolero is an adaptation of a piece of music of the Mevlevi and Chishti

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(musicians) dervishes used as an aid to elevate the perception(34). Now, Ravel was very partial to Spanish themes. The Bolero is a folk dance of both Andalusia and Castile, as anyone knows who has lived in Spain, and is the direct source of Ravel's piece. If the Bolero is indeed derived from the music of the dervishes, and Idries Shah should know, being a grand sheikh or pir of the Sufis, this most certainly indicates that the influence of the Persian dervishes was widely extended in the

Kingdom of Granada, and not merely confined to a small elite circle.

The Muslims of Granada, except perhaps for a small elite, of course could not read nor understand the Persian sufi poetry in the original. Certainly poetry loses a great deal in translation. In the case of Persian sufi poetry, the form is of course lost in translation, as well as the euphonia. However, the content as well as the imagery survive translation very well. This I know from experience. I myself translated some fragments of sufi verse to Spanish. Even in translation the impact of the powerful imagery and the profundity of these verses was such that even people who generally neither read nor appreciate lyric verse were captivated by them.

This is really the key point. It is, of course, quite impossible to translate the euphony or "music" of poetry from one language to another. Rumi and St. John of the Cross both occasionally used the versification technique called *tarj-i-band*" in Persian. However, as we have said before, said technique is

(1663)

very ancient in Spain, where it probably is not of Persian derivation, and it is therefore most unlikely that St. John of the Cross derived it from Rumi. The content, imagery and allegory of Persian Sufi verse is another matter. This may indeed have come to Granada with the dervishes of whom ibn Batuta speaks and through their efforts have passed from Persian to Arabic. Though of course knowing nothing of the euphony and the versification techniques used by Rumi and other sufi poets, the Moriscos of the

time of St. John of the Cross (at least the more learned and pious among them) may well have been quite familiar with the content, the imagery and the allegory of the sufi poets, and this they passed on to St. John of the Cross. To demonstrate this, here are some selections from St. John of the Cross. The translation is mine.

Dark Night of the Soul

In a dark night
With apprehension, inflamed by love
Oh blessed venture!
I left unseen
All being quiet in my house...
Oh night which was my guide!
Oh night more friendly than the dawn!
Oh night that united the Beloved with the lover!
The lover being transformed in the Beloved...

From:

Spiritual Canticle

Where did you hide,
Beloved, leaving me sobbing?
Like a deer you fled
Having hurt me
I followed after you crying, but you had gone...

(1664)

Seeking my Beloved
I will go over mountains and valleys
I will not pick flowers
Nor fear the wild beasts
And will pass the forts and the borders
Oh forest and thickets
Planted by the hand of the Beloved!
Oh green meadows
Sprinkled with flowers
Tell me if He has passed this way
A thousand graces pouring
He passed swiftly through these knolls
And, perceiving their glances
With only His figure
He left them arrayed in beauty
But how do you continue
Oh life!, not living where you live

And striving that you may die
Of the arrows that you receive
From that which the Beloved inspires in your heart?...

To the small birds
Lions, deer, leaping antelope
Mountains, valleys, river banks
Rain, wind, heat
And fears of the night...
In the winecellar
Of my Beloved I drank, and, when I left
In all that valley
I then knew nothing
And I lost the herds that I once guarded...

My soul is now occupied
And all my being is in His service
Now I do not watch herds
Now I have any task
Now that Love is my only goal...
The breathing of the air
The song of the sweet nightingale
The knoll and its surroundings
In the tranquil night
With a flame that consumes without pain

Oh Living Flame of Love (complete)

Oh living flame of love
How tenderly you wound
My soul in its deepest centre!
Now that You are not hiding
Finish now if you will
Break the thread of this sweet encounter
(1665)

Oh sweet captivity!
Oh wound that is a gift!
Oh soft hand! Oh delicate touch!
That savors of Eternal Life
And pays all debts
Killing, You have transformed death into life

Oh lamps of fire
In whose brilliance
The deep caverns of the senses
That were dark and blind
With strange
Heat and light give beside the Beloved

What gentle and lovely
Memories in my bosom
Where secretly only You abide
And with Your sweet sighs

Filled with righteousness and glory
With what delicacy You taught me of Love!

From:

Coplas del Extasis

***I entered where I did not know
And I stayed unknowing
Transcending far all temporal lore***

I knew not where I entered
But, when I saw myself there
Without knowing where I was
Great things I comprehended
I will not say what I felt
That left me all unknowing
Transcending far all temporal lore

Of peace and piety
Was the perfect science,
In profound solitude
Understood (in the straight path)
Was a thing so secret,
That it left me babbling incoherently
Transcending far all temporal lore.
I was so immersed
So absorbed and transfigured
That my sense remained
Deprived of all sense
And my spirit was endowed
With a comprehension not comprehending
Transcending far all temporal lore

(1666)

He that truly there arrives
Forgets all of himself
That which he knew before
Appears as something very base
And his knowledge so increases
That he remains all unknowing
Transcending far all temporal lore

The higher one climbs
The less one comprehends
Which is the dark, gloomy cloud
That the night will disperse
For this reason one who knows
Remains forever all unknowing
Transcending far all temporal lore

This knowledge unknowing
Is of such great power
That the arguments of the sages

Can never overcome it
Because their knowledge does not reach
To the incomprehension comprehending
Transcending far all temporal lore.

And is of such supreme excellence
That summit of knowledge
That there is no faculty nor science
That can reach it
He who knows how to win
With a knowledge unknowing
Will be forever transcending

And if you wish to hear
In what consists this most highest of sciences
In an exalted feeling
Of the Divine Essence
It is the work of His Clemency
To make on remain uncomprehending
Transcending far all temporal lore

(Note that in the above work St. John of the Cross uses the
"tarj-i-band" verse form)

From:

Gloss of the Divine

Such a work does love
That after I have known it
If there is good or evil in me
(1667)

It is all of the same savor
And the soul becomes transformed
And thus, in its savory flame
Which in me I am feeling
Quickly, leaving nothing
All of me is being consumed

Summa of Perfection (complete)

Forgetting the created
Remembering the Creator
Attention to the inner
And loving the Beloved

Note: Ascent of Mount Carmel is a prose work, and therefore
no selections from it are included at this point. The above
poems may be found in the original in any Spanish edition of the

poetry of St. John of the Cross.

At times the similarities between the imagery and symbolism used by St. John of the Cross and those used by Rumi are striking indeed. Here are some examples. The first two quotations are from the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross:

Seeking my Beloved
I will go, over mountains and valleys
I will not pick flowers
Nor fear the wild beast
And will pass the forts and the borders
To the small birds
Lions, deer, leaping antelopes
Mountains, valleys, riverbanks
Rain, wind, burning heat
And fears of the night

Here are the prose commentaries to these passages,
translation mine:

"In these verses I have put the three enemies of the soul, which are the world, the devil and the flesh, which are those which make war (on the soul) and put difficulties in the road; for the "wild beasts" understand the world, for the "forts the devil and for
(1668)

the "frontiers" the flesh..."

"For "lions" understand the acrimonies and impetus of the irascible faculty, for this power is as active and bold in its acts as are lions."

Compare the above with these citations from the Masnavi of Rumi,
translation mine:

The inner (or moral) lions are not rabbit-like
Vicious schemings of the carnal desires
And dragons of Hell are they (36)

The (true) lion is he who conquers himself (37)

The chapter head of the above goes: "Explanation of passing from the lesser *jihad* (holy war) to the greater *jihad*."

Here is another citation from the Spiritual Canticle:

To the mountain and to the hills
Where springs the pure water
We will penetrate
Farther in the thicket

Here is the prose commentary on this passage:

"The thicket is the trials and tribulations to which the soul desires entrance, because it is very delightful and profitable to the soul, because it is a means for entering into the thicket of the delightful Wisdom of God."

Compare the above with this citation from the Divani Shamsi

Tabriz:

Go into the wood of lions and reckon not of the wound
For thought and fear, all these are figments of women
For there is no wound: all is mercy and love

One finds St. John of the Cross and Saadi using virtually the same words:

I will not say what I felt
Which left me all unknowing...
Deprived of all sense
And my spirit endowed
(1669)

With a comprehension not comprehending - St. John of the Cross

How might I, senseless, of the Signless speak - Saadi

And his knowledge so increases
That he remains all unknowing...
For this reason he who knows
Remains forever all unknowing
Transcending far all temporal lore - St. John of the Cross

Who knows indeed knows nothing eternally
Beyond imagination Thou dost move
Higher than all that is said, written, heard of - Saadi

And Rumi in the Divani Shamsi Tabriz echoes both:

That which the imagination has not conceived
That which the understanding has not seen
Visits my soul from Thee - Rumi

The similarities between the imagery used by St. John of the

Cross in Living Flame of Love and that so frequently used by the Persian sufi poets are so evident that little comment is needed. However, one example is particularly noteworthy: Living Flame of Love, which we have quoted earlier.

And when the blazing tide
Engulfed me and I sighed(38)

The Persian sufi verse is of enormous bulk; that which is accessible to me at the moment is only a very small part, and I have no way of knowing if this part is that which most resembles the poetry of St. John of the Cross. For this reason the above is particularly significant. A full comparison between the poetry of St. John of the Cross and that of the Persian sufis is a task that awaits its champion.

Says Rumi in Divani Shamsi Tabriz:

"From the body you are far, but in my heart, fronting my
(1670)

face, is a window;

Through that secret window, like the moon, I am sending you a message."

St. John of the Cross, prose commentary to Ascent of Mount Carmel:

The soul resembles this window, in which is ever being reflected, or rather is dwelling, the Divine Light of the all-pervading presence of God.

Here it might be a good idea to deal in a monographic manner with ibn Abbad of Ronda, little known outside Spain and North Africa, whom Miguel Asin Palacios and Thomas Merton considered to be a forerunner of St. John of the Cross. Ibn Abbad was a member of the Shadhiliyyah school of Sufism, which, like the Christian Carmelite school of Christian mysticism (of which St. John of the Cross, a Descalced Carmelite Friar, was the chief exponent) has as

its distinguishing feature the renunciation of charismas. Said attitude has deep roots in Indian (Hindu and Buddhist) and Christian Mysticism; apparently the Persian al-Hallaj (39) was its first propagator in Islam. It was introduced to al-Andalus by Abul Abbas ibn al-Arif (11th Century), a sufi of Almeria. It should also be noted that Abul Abbas al-Mursi, (note that "Mursi" means "from Murcia"; thus Abul Abbas al-Mursi was a Murciano, as was ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the founder of the Shadhiliyyah Order to which ibn Abbad of Ronda belonged, claimed to an initiate of a direct spiritual succession (i.e., an unbroken chain of spiritual masters, rather like Apostolic Succession) begun by Hasan, 2nd Shi'a Imam and son of Ali ibn Abi Talib, 1st Shi'a Imam.(40) As we shall see, Abul Abbas al-Mursi has a special status in Shi'ism, and there is a firm, if indirect link between him and

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Imam Hussein ibn Ali, 3rd Shi'a Imam.

Thus, by way of ibn Abbad of Ronda St. John of the Cross could in a real sense be considered a spiritual master in the line of Hasan ibn Ali, Second Shi'a Imam, and to have a firm, if oblique conection to Imam Hussein, Third Shi'a Imam. The question of Shi'ism and Shi'ite influence in al-Andalus will be dealt with more fully in the following chapter.

"Charismas" in general refers to the strange, paranormal powers of some mystics. Notes Aldous Huxley in The Perennial Philosphy, his fine introduction to mysticism:

"The Sufis consider miracles to be "veils" between the soul and God. The masters of Hindu spirituality warn their disciples to pay not attention to the "siddhies"

or psychic powers, which may come upon them unawares, as a secondary product of Unitive Contemplation. The cultivation of said faculties, they warn, distracts the soul from Reality and raises impregnable obstacles in the path of illumination and liberation. The best Buddhist masters take a similar attitude, and in one of the Pali scriptures there is an anecdote which records a dry comment of Buddha concerning a prodigious feat of levitation realized by one of his disciples:

"This", he said, "is not conducive to the conversion of the unconverted, nor will it be beneficial for the converted."

Later he continued speaking of liberation"(41).

Sayyid Shah Nimatullah Wali (14th century) was the founder of the *Nimatullahi* Order, a Shi'a Sufi Order numerous in Iran and the Indian Subcontinent. Sayyid Shah Nimatullah Wali was a descendant of Muhammad al-Baqir, the 5th Shi'a Imam; through an unbroken line of "pirs" or "masters", he also traced his spiritual ancestry to Ali Reza, the 8th Shi'a Imam.(42)

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Those of the Nimatullahi Sufi Order thoroughly agree with ibn Abbad of Ronda, St. John of the Cross and Buddha in reference to the rejection of visions and miracles. Says Dr. Javad Nurbaksh, present "Pir" or "Master" of the Nimatullahi Order:

"In Sufism, paying attention to visions and miraculous occurrences makes one's being impure. In such an impure state, one is manifesting one's existence and thus is unable to truly perform "namaz" (daily prayers).

"Namaz" is the affirmation of Divine Unity. How then can one who is attending to and thus affirming the multiplicity at the surface of the Ocean of Oneness become drowned in its depths? As Magribi (of whom we have spoken before) has said:

Do not speak to us of visions and miracles
For we have long ago transcended such things.
We saw them all to be illusion and dreams,
And dauntlessly we passed beyond them.

Thus, the Sufi has nothing to do with visions and

miracles."(43)

St. John of the Cross a faithful follower of the doctrine of renunciation of these powers. While there are abundant testimonies that he possessed the power of levitation, one cannot find a single mention of said power in his writings. Thus he followed the counsel of Buddha to the letter. Here are the words the Cross referring to the charismas or miracles:

"The soul should take little or no joy in supernatural powers or miracles, because they are of no importance, since they are not a means by which the soul may be united with God."(44)

In another place St. John of the Cross says:

"Better to suffer for the sake of God than to work miracles."(45)

This renunciation is well expressed by Abdullah Ansari of
(1673)

Herat:

"Can you walk on water? You did no more than does a straw. Can you fly through the air? You did no more than does a horse-fly. Conquer your own heart; then perhaps you will be someone."(46)

Ibn Abbad of Ronda paraphrases Ansari of Herat thusly:

"How is it that the habits (of the natural laws) be interrupted in your honor if you do not interrupt the (moral) habits of your own soul?"(47)

And again:

"Your desire that people should know that you are an object of Divine Favor is a sign of lack of sincerity in your service to God."(48)

And finally:

"Frequently, God grants charismas to those who do not possess perfect moral rectitude."(49)

Among other things, it is perfectly evident from the above

that ibn Abbad would, like all true sufis, have been as much opposed to the *Alumbrados* as was St. John of the Cross, and for the same reasons. While the movement of the *Alumbrados* was remotely of Sufi origin, it represents a severe decadence and degeneration of Sufism rather than a continuation of it.

Certainly the great Sufis of al-Andalus cannot be blamed for the perversion of their doctrine at the hands of the vain, the ignorant and the superficial. The real Christian heirs of the sufis of al-Andalus were the great, and orthodox, Spanish Christian mystics such as St. John of the Cross, Ste. Teresa de Avila, Sor Ana de Jesus (Sister Anne of Jesus) and St. John of Avila. Yes, Avila, the city of Christian Mysticism par

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excellence.

Many of the parallels which Fr. Asin draws between ibn Abbad and the Carmelite Mystics of Christian Spain are not really of much importance, being characteristic of mysticism in all eras, places and authentic religious tradition. An example of this is "renunciation", i.e., renunciation of sensual appetites and things of the spatio-temporal world, the purgation of the mind of sensual images and distractions and that which Sr. Asin calls "abandonment" or *dejamiento* (literally "leaving"). The first part is a prerequisite of all mysticism; as Jesus said:

"One cannot serve two masters".

The second point is equally universal; the yogic exercises of Hinduism, the *Hesychasm* of the Eastern Church, and the *zikr* of the Sufis all seek to purge the mind and spirit of sensual images and

outside distractions. The third point is an echo of the "non-attachment" of the Hindu mystics and the "desert" of Christian Mysticism.

Much more striking are the semantic parallels between ibn Abbad and St. John of the Cross, this in spite of the linguistic differences, i.e., ibn Abbad wrote in Arabic while St. John of the Cross wrote in Spanish. Ibn Abbad uses a great deal the terms **QBD**, which among its various voices means "squeeze" or "tighten", "be sad", or "be anxious". Due to the peculiar (at least it appears very peculiar to speakers of Indo-European languages) structure of the Semitic languages and of Classic Arabic in particular, a single triliteral root (in this case **QBD**) may take

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on a great number of voices depending on how one builds the word based on said root. This is of course not possible in Indo-European languages, which are based on stems to which one adds grammatical suffixes or, less frequently, prefixes, change of meaning being accomplished by modifying words: adjectives, adverbs or particles. St. John of the Cross expresses the root **QBD** with a variety of words: "squeeze", "tightness", "prison", "oppress", "straitness", "torture", "anxiety", "pain". Ibn Abbad also uses the opposite of **QBD**, which is **BST**, meaning "extend", "widen" or "dilate", metaphorically "be happy", "be comfortable", "well being", etc. The Spanish word *anchura* (literally "wideness") has the same metaphorical connotations as the Arabic **BST**, and is so used by St. John of the Cross (50).

This needs to be developed further. Ibn Abbad extends the

metaphor, comparing QBD with night and BST with day. The "night" has a triple symbolism - the "squeezing" of the soul by "purgation of sensual images, the spiritual desolation of the Absence of God, and the dark night in whose obscurity God reveals Himself more frequently than in the day of light and comfort. Here indeed one encounters the "Dark Night of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross, though not quite fully developed. It should be emphasized that only the poetic metaphor can make any claim to originality, and even this is questionable; said Rumi:

"How should I, like night, without His
Day and favor of His day-illuminating countenance?"

The concepts themselves are found in the mysticism of all

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authentic religious tradition, most particularly among the Persian sufis. The first point is a universal feature of all mysticism; the second and third points very nearly so. In sentence 181 of his Sarh Hikam, ibn Abbad says:

"Tribulations are the feasts of the contemplative (51).

Sor Ana de Jesus (Sister Anne of Jesus), a disciple of

St. John of the Cross, wrote:

He who knows nothing of tribulations
In this sad valley of suffering
Knows not of the good
Nor has tasted of Love
Because tribulations are the vesture of lovers(52)

But Sana'i (cerca 1150), one of the earliest of the great Persian sufi poets, wrote:

That heart which stands aloof from pain and woe
No seal or signature of Love can show(53)

And Rumi:

You are all the comfort of my soul, You are all the
adornment of the feast(54)

And again:

That which the imagination has not conceived
That which the understanding has not seen
Visits my soul from You; hence in worship I turn toward
You(55)

There are other, less important semantic parallels between
St. John of the Cross and ibn Abbad.

Referring to the renunciation or purgation, St. John of the
Cross uses the words "nakedness", "liberty", "void" or
"emptiness" and "leaving the (spatio-temporal) things".

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Ibn Abbad uses the Arabic words *tajrid* = nakedness, *hurriya* =
liberty, *tafrigh* = void or emptiness and *al-khuruuj min al-asbab* =
leaving the (spatio-temporal) things (56).

Here are some selections from the Sarh Hikam of ibn Abbad:

[Sentence 11: The Love of Darkness]

***"Bury your existence in the earth of darkness, as
the plant which germinates without the seed having been
well interred, will never fructify as its should."***

"There is nothing more damaging for the novice than
celebrity and renown, as fame is one of the greatest
satisfactions of pride and must be combatted and
avoided. Easily and even with pleasure the beginner may
be deprived of all other sensual pleasures save this
one. The love of worldly glory, the desire to be known
by the people is, also, contrary to the sentiment of
service which God requires of the novice.

Ibrahim ibn Adham said 'It is not sincerity in
dealing with God that one should love celebrity.' And a
mystic said: 'Our way of life only serves for persons
who have cleaned letrines with their own souls.'(57)

[Sentence 89: Theory of "straitness" and "wideness".]

"God puts you in wideness of spirit to not abandon

you when you are anxious, and puts you in straitness to not leave you when you are in wideness of spirit, and He takes you from both states so that you are not of anything but HIM".

"The opening and wideness are states of the soul which alternately experience intuitive mystics. Both cause, respectively, fear and hope, states proper to beginning novices. Obey, on occasion, sudden inspirations which overcome the interior of the servant of God. Its intensity and weakness is caused by the intensity and weakness of the inspirations.

The sense of this sentence is that both states of the soul are imperfect qualities if they are compared with the superior states. Both, in effect, necessarily imply that the servant of God is yet with himself (and not with God), and yet finds himself rather than God. On the contrary, it is a singular favor of God to His servant that after having been put successively in one state and the other, that the servant is freed from

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both states in order that he might lose his self-consciousness and remain now with his Lord. Said Faris: 'First, the straitness and later wideness, and finally, neither straitness nor wideness, because the straitness and wideness occur in a state of consciousness, no when the subject loses his self-consciousness nor when he remains in the presence of God.'" And al-Junaid said: "Fear puts me in straitness and hope puts me in wideness of spirit; the truth puts me in clarity of spirit and consciousness of being in the presence of God confuses me. When fear makes me anxious, it causes me to lose consciousness. When I am consoled by hope, it makes me regain consciousness. When truth puts me in clarity of spirit, I am in His presence. When His presence clouds my consciousness, it forces me to contemplate things different from myself, and these, like a veil, hide me. He is, thus, in all this, who puts me in movement and at rest. It is He who puts me in sad desolation, in place of consoling me with His presence. If I feel myself present, it is because I enjoy the flavor of my existence. Oh that he would annihilate me and make me His or, that I become absent from my being and achieve peace and quiet!"(58)

[Sentence 90: Perils of "Wideness".]

"The mystics has more to fear when God puts them in wideness of spirit, and not when He puts them in straitness of spirit, for there are only very few who achieve the requirements of courtesy in relation to God."

If the mystics fear the consolation of wideness of spirit far more than the desolation of straitness, it is only because that which serves the inclinations of pride, contrary to that which occurs with the desolation of straitness, as our author now proceeds to expound. Thus, the mystics then fear to return to their selfishness and egotism and enjoy once again the flavor of pride, and be, for this reason, expelled from the presence of God and distances from Him. Yusuf ibn al-Husayn al-Razi wrote to al-Junaid: "God will not make you enjoy the flavor of your pride and egotism, for, if you enjoy it, you will never enjoy the flavor of virtue." And from this comes the most strict obligation which is required of the mystics, to strictly attend the requirements which demands the respectful courtesy in dealing with God, procuring to be always sad and beaten down. The thing is, certainly, very difficult to achieve in this state. And for this reason only very few are those who achieve the requirements of courtesy

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in wideness of spirit, as our author says ... The author adds in his book Latayf al-Minan: "The consolation or wideness of spirit is the stone which causes the feet of the mystics to stumble. For this reason the mystic in this state must be far more cautious and vigilant in order to escape from the peril. The desolation of spiritual straitness is, on the other hand, much nearer to the encounter with salvation, because it is really the home of the servant of God, now that he is taken by the hand by God Who subjects him and encompasses him completely. From whence, then comes the wideness of spirit to the mystic, if such be his condition? Said expansion is outside the requirements of that moment in which the mystic lives. On the contrary, the desolation of straitness is the spiritual state proper to his life in this world, since the present life is for him the mansion of laws to obey, where he never knows what will be the end which God has prepared for him, what is his eternal destiny and what account God must take of his duties to Him." And later adds: "I refer to a *Sufi*: "I saw our master of spirit in a dream after his death and noted that he was anxious and I said to him: "Oh master! What is this, that you are anxious?" And he replied: "Oh my son! The anxiety and wideness of spirit are two stations that who does not pass in this world, he must pass them in the next." And it was that master of the spirit in his life almost always enjoyed the consolation of wideness. Here ends the text of the Latayf al-Minan. (59)

[Sentence 91: Norms of conduct in straitness and wideness.]

"Of wideness of spirit the sensitive souls takes its pleasure, experiencing joy, while in straitness it finds no joy in sensuality."

In this sentence the author alludes to what was said before, that it is very difficult to fulfill the the required reverential courtesy to God in the state of wideness of spirit. And it is thus because in wideness the sensitive soul finds its pleasure, and as joy overtakes it, it can neither dominate nor contain itself, until for this reason falls into sins against the reverential courtesy to God. On the other hand, in the straitness there exists no pleasure whatever in sensuality, and for this reason it is the most secure spiritual state.

In reference to the rules of courtesy in wideness and in straitness, I do not know of any of the wise
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Sufis nor of their authors who have dealt to the limit with this question. We only find, in this respect in their works, simple allusions to general principles, as occurs, for example, in what the learned Abu-l-Qasim al-Qusayri said, that after speaking of the two states, straitness and wideness, and explaining their meaning, adds: "At times, the cause which produces straitness is doubtful for the subject: he notes that he feels in straitness; but does not know what is the motive and the cause of his straitness. The conduct which must be followed by the subject of this class of straitness is abandoning oneself in the hands of God, until that momentary state passes, because if one attempts to dissipate it by force or if one confronts it with a deliberate act of will before the straitness attacks violently and without warning, one only augments the straitness and perhaps this causes one to neglect the norms of reverential courtesy towards God. On the contrary, if one abandons oneself to the divine decrees of the moment, very soon the straitness will cease.. . . Also at times, the wideness of spirit comes by surprise and attacks the subject without warning, without the subject knowing the cause which fills him with emotion. The conduct which the subject must follow is quietness and the observance of courtesy, because in those moments there exists a grave peril that God subjects him to a hidden proof of spiritual illusion, from which the subject must beware, as someone said: "May God open a door of wideness of spirit and I stumbled and lost consciousness as to where I was." Thus said the wise Abu-l-Qasim.

I have seen also seen an extensive and very complex discourse, concerning the norms of courtesy of straitness and en wideness, of my master Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili, and I wish to quote it here in order to expound

the most beneficial thing which the author explains in this sentence, as that which was said by the spiritual master Abu-l-Hasan is much more general in its relevance than what is said by all the other Sufi masters.

It goes thusly: "The straitness and wideness are two states which rarely cease affecting the servant of God. Both occur successively in the soul, as night succeeds day. That which pleases God which one does in one state or the other is service. The servant of God finds himself momentarily in straitness, one thing or the other, or he knows the cause of the straitness, or he does not. The occasional causes of straitness are three: a sin which has been committed, or a good period which has been lost completely or in part, or an unjust injury which he has suffered in his person, in his

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reputation or his honor. When the straitness overtakes one for any of these motives, the service which God demands of you is that you turn your eyes to the ascetic doctrine and complete that which God commands: if one deals with sin, by way of penitence, repentance and begging forgiveness; if it is a case of total or partial loss suffered by your temporal goods, then by abandoning oneself to the will of God, in conformity with His will and being content with it; if one is dealing with an unjust injury which one has suffered, by way of patience and tolerating the offense. Then beware of offending oneself, so that you do not condemn yourself to two offenses; that which the unjust aggressor has inflicted and that which you inflict upon your own soul. On the other hand, if you do that which you should, i.e., if you patiently support that inflicted upon you by someone else, God will reward you by enabling you to pardon and forget he who has offended you, that God may forgive his sin. Therefore, pray to God for him, that your prayer may be granted. How beautiful is this: that by your mediation, God takes pity on he who has offended you! These are the degrees of virtue proper to the just and charitable. And commit yourself trusting in God; for God loves those who confide in Him."

"If suddenly you are overcome by depression and do not know what is the cause, then recall that the state of your spirit must be one of these two: night and day. The straitness is that which most resembles the night, as wideness is that which most resembles the day. If, then, straitness overcomes you without you knowing the cause, you are then obliged to remain at peace. And you must be at peace in three aspects: in words, in movements and in the will. If thus you act, very soon the night will vanish from you with the appearance of the sun of the day, or the light of a star which guides you or of the moon which gives light or of the sun by which you are able to see. The stars are the stars of

knowledge; the moon is the moon of ecstatic union; the sun is the sun of gnostic intuition. But if you move in middle of the darkness of your night, rarely will you be free from ruin. Meditate well on these words of God (Qur'an, XXVIII:73): "for your mercy I have given the night and the day, so that you may rest, and so that you may desire grace. Perhaps you will be grateful." And this is that which reclaims the duty of service in the two states of straitness: [when you know its cause and when you do not know it]."

When you feel momentarily in wideness, one thing or the other: or you know its cause or you do not. The causes are three: the first cause is progress in virtue
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or a divine favor achieved by it, as, for example, the graces of illumination and intuition; the second cause is an increase in temporal goods, obtained, or as wages or as a gift of men; the third cause is the praise of the people, who come to you to ask that you remember them in your prayers and to kiss your hands. When wideness of spirit comes upon you suddenly for any of these causes, service to God demands that you see the grace or gift received as a blessing of God upon you. Beware that you do not see any of these blessings as something which belongs to you. The strength with which you defend your service to God consists in that it is not accompanied by fear of losing the grace with which God has distinguished you, for then you will make yourself odious in His eyes. This is true even when dealing with the first cause, i.e., virtue and the graces obtained because of it. So far as the second cause is concerned, the increase in temporal goods is also a blessing or grace of God, as is the first cause; but beware of the hidden spiritual dangers which lie concealed in it. So far as the third cause is concerned, the praise of the people, the service demands of you that you be grateful to God for the blessings which you have gained by hiding your defects from the people; and beware that God reveal the most insignificant of them, because then you will be detested by even your closest relatives. These are the norms of courtesy in straitness and in wideness within your service. So far as the wideness of spirit whose cause is not known, service demands that you abstain from criticizing with vehemence those men and women whose besiege you with questions. You must limit yourself to saying: "Save me, Lord, save me, until the day of my death."

"These are the norms of straitness and of wideness withinh your service, if you are discrete." Here ends the words of the master of the spirit Abu-l-Hasan...(60)

[Sentence 114: Tribulation is a blessing.]

"To lighten the pain of tribulation, recall that it is God who has sent it to you. And thus, the same as he to whom come the fatal decrees of fate is he who comes to prefer them as better for the spiritual health."

"When the servant knows that God is compassionate, tender and benevolent with him, and God sees him with eyes of mercy, it is natural that all such tribulations and tests come upon you. Do not pay the slightest
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attention to them nor let them worry you, since none of them can have an effect that is not good for you: and thus you must think well of all and firmly believe that all which happens to you is that which it is most convenient for you to prefer, since in them always exist latent mysterious spiritual advantages, whom no one knows save God. Thus says Qur'an II:213: "it is easy that you find repugnant a certain thing and that it is the best for you." Of this verse said Abu Talib of Mecca: "The servant of God abhors indigence, poverty darkness and physical illness, which, even so, are for him the best, in respect to his future life. On the contrary he loves wealth, fame and health, which, nevertheless, are for him an evil of the most grievous consequences in the eyes of God." In this manner says the Qur'an XXXI:19: "I will fill you with exterior and interior graces.", which is to say: of your exterior graces, which are tribulations, because these are blessings for the future life. For this reason, all that which occurs to the servant of God, whatever it may be, is a blessing for which you must give thanks to God..."(61)

[Sentence 115: Spiritual benefits of tribulation.]

"He who believes that the divine decrees do not come to him accompanied by divine favors, it is because of his shortness of vision."

This shortness of vision, which does not see the divine favor in the divine decree, only comes from weakness of faith which does not permit him to think clearly, as he should, of the wise Author of the eternal decrees. If the vision of the servant of God were perfect and if his vision were penetrating, certainly he would see innumerable advantages and uses and that the major part of them are not hidden from him, but that they function always like the saint and contemplative mystic who said: "I had an illness and desired that it not be cured." Another Sufi, 'Imran ibn al-Husayn, ill with *edema* or *anasarca* (dropsy) and had to remain thirty years lying on his back on a bed made of palm branches, with a hole below it for his necessities,

without being able to stand on his own two feet nor to sit. Mutarrif (or his brother named 'Ala' ibn al-Shakir) came to visit him, and he began to weep seeing him in such a lamentable state. The sick man asked him: "Why are you weeping?" He replied: "because I see you in such a lamentable situation." To which came the reply: "Do not weep, because I desire what God wishes for mee", and later added: "I will

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tell you something which perhaps will be of benefit to you; but keep the secret until after my death: the angels visited me and I conversed with them familiarly and they greeted me and I heard their greetings." One of them said: "We come to visit Suwayd ibn Shu'ba', and we do not see here anything other than a sheet on the floor. We thought that there was nothing under it, until we saw you. Your wife said to him: "My husband! For your life! Do you not give us anything to eat and drink?" He responded: "Long have I been in this posture, for certain, and my legs are ulcerated and I am extenuated without a bite of food nor a drink of water for many years; but it would not make me happy if God removed from me these pains, even only one."

All of these, saw divine favors in their tribulations, graces in their trials, benefits in their adversities; and this vision inspired in them such patience, complacency and well being in their sad situation, that it led them to the extreme of no desiring that their infirmities be cured, neither totally nor even partially.

Innumerable types of favors and graces are hidden in tribulations. Nevertheless, we cite here some of them which help to intensify in the beginner the spiritual energy to support his adversities with the confidence which he must have in the Lord.

1.) In the first place, let us say, then, what are the tribulations with which God tests His servants against their wills and puts an obstacle to the natural inclinations of his desires and appetites. Now, all that which contradicts the pride of the sensitive soul and disturbs it and causes pain, it is in the last analysis a praiseworthy thing, insofar as it makes one turn towards God and to welcome at the door with a sincere spirit and to seek in Him the refuge of his calamities. And this is the greatest of the advantages of the tribulation. All who are made to submit to any test or suffer an adversity, will thus experience it.

2.)The tribulations also give rise to a certain weakness in the sensitive soul, whose energies dissipate and whose bad qualities reel before adversities. Now, it is well known that sensuality is the reason for which

the servant falls into sin and offenses against God, because it is the stimulus which moves one to desire the things of here below and desire the satisfaction of the passions. For this motive it is said that the believer must not be free of illness or misery or vileness of nudity or poverty. En a tradition of the Prophet God says: "Poverty is my prison and

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illness my chain by which I hold prisoner those of my servants whom I love."

3.)Also in tribulations is when a man practices acts of interior virtue, the smallest of which has more merit than mountains of exterior works of virtue. These are, for example, patience, conformity, the renouncing of the things of this world, the confident abandoning to providence and the desire to go to the encounter with God. To 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd (of Basra) it was said: "There is here a man who for fifty years has consecrated himself to the devut life." Ibn Ayd replied: "My friend, tell me, are you so satisfied with God that He alone is enough for you?" "No", he replied. "And have you become familiar with Him?" "No", was the reply. "And do you accept with pleasure that which is pleasing to Him?" "No", was the reply. "Then, the only manner in which you have progressed has been prayer and fasting?" "Yes", was the reply "Then look here: if it did not move me to shame, I would say to you that all of your devout life during fifty years in service of God there lies hidden a secret vice which renders it useless." And Abu Talib of Mecca said that with this 'Abd al-Wahid wishes to cause you to understand the following: "God has not elevated you for your practices of devotion in the eyes of your intimate friends, nor has granted you the mystical states of the contemplatives. Your spiritual progress would then have consisted in acts of interior devotion, those practiced all those whose object is the love of God. Thus, the first virtue, that of being satisfied with God, is the mystical state of he who has a living faith in which God alone is sufficient; familiarity is the domain of he who loves God; conformity is the proper quality of he who trusts God only and abandons himself to Him. That is to say, : that you, in the eyes of God, though you are of those who are at the right hand of God, all your progress in His service belong to the vulgar category of thw works of external devotionwhich is practiced with the limbs of your body."

These words of Abu Talib indicate that which we have already said, or, the greater merit and excellence of the acts of interior virtue as compared with external practices of devotion. Therefore, he whom God helps with His grace to elevate to the degrees of this station and to fulfill the duties which are demanded in midst of

tribulations, will gain treasures of piety.

Abu Ibrahim Ishaq ibn Ibrahim al-Tujibi, *Maliki* jurist of Cordoba, in his Book of Good Counsel, notes that 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr was tested by God with an ulcer in the leg, whose seriousness reached such an

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extreme that it became necessary to saw the bone in the healthy part. The doctors told him: "Do you not feel that we should give you a narcotic to drink, so that you will not feel that which we are going to do to you?" But he replied: "No! Rather, do what you must to my leg." The doctors sawed his leg, and later cauterized it with fire, during which he did not move a muscle nor give any indication of pain, until they touched him with the cauterizing fire, at which point he limited himself to saying: "Enough." There was present his son Muhammad, who was his favorite. When the sick man saw his foot in the hand of one of the doctors, he exclaimed: "Does God not know that I never took a step toward sin with this foot?" And, directing himself to his son, he added: "Wash it, lad, and wrap it in a shroud and bury it in the Muslim cemetery."

4.) Tribulations also serve as expiation of past sins and faults, at the same time deserve from God, as a prize, magnificent gifts and favors, which the servant of God will not achieve except by supporting the adversities which God sends to him. Man, in effect, is by his own powers unable to fulfill his religious duties and negligent in persevering in the practice of the necessary devotions. He is therefore deprived of the merit which he has earned by fulfilling those duties and practicing those devotions, and thus, is also unable to expiate the sins committed. Even in the case in which he is able to fulfill his religious duties and be diligent in the practice of his devotions, he can never be certain that his good works are perfect, i.e., free from defects, free of all defects and all interior vice, and thus it will always result that what he does is useless and his hopes of spiritual benefits remain frustrated. But with tribulations, the servant of God may have confidence in his Lord and be certain that all which God prefers for him is the better than that which he himself prefers for being closer to his own appetites and passions... Remember that Jesus said: "He is not discrete who is not happy that occur to him calamities and illnesses in his body and his fortune, for the certain hope that all these tribulations will serve for the expiation of his sins."

5.) Tribulations, also offer to the servant of God a favorable occasion for the renovation of penance and to pay with them the debts, pains and iniquities committed

against God, and thus also to multiply the acts of contrition and to find in them excellent material for meditation. The thought of death is, in

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effect, when most results and continuity may be remembered, because it has been rightly said that "fever is the postal service of death. ...". For this reason the saints of the first centuries became unhappy when a year passed without them having suffered personal harm or damages in their material goods. And also for this reason it has been said that the good believer must not be free each forty days, of some motive of fear or of being afflicted with some calamity. And for this reason they are frustrated if in this space of time they are deprived of some adversity.

6.) Finally, in tribulations a man finds the means of remedying his faults in the fulfillment of the precepts and the devotions. And thus, for example, if one is ill, it is credited in his account, as a prize for his infirmity, the merit corresponding to good works and of devotion which he would have practiced in good health. And be reminded that this is more useful to achieve the object, which is union with God, because it is God who has preferred for him that illness, and it is always better for a man that which God prefers for him and not that which he himself chooses. ...

Adversities have many other advantages, of which we are aware. If we have only named a few, it is because those are the most coherent with the text of the author and thus in a certain sense serve as a commentary on his sentence. Besides, these ideas are very necessary to the servant of God, because when tribulations come to him, he becomes indignant, irritable and impatient, his faith is disturbed and trembles, and the firmness of his confidence shaken as though by an earthquake. For this reason he then requires someone to exhort him with ideas similar to these, so that he will commit acts of charity and of confidence in God by whose merits he may hope that, if he dies suddenly, he will have a good end and abandon this world with the desire to meet God... This is the reason which has obligated us to extend the commentary of this sentence, referring to traditions and accounts and in the majority of cases citing those cases of trustworthy narrators, so that with such examples may tranquilize hearts perturbed by adversity and that they may march toward God by these same routes."(62)

[Sentence 120: Providential objectives of charismas.]

"Not everyone who is the object of divine favor is perfect and free of any defect."

The favor to which we allude consists in that God gives palpable signs of His preference, of His singular providence, of His protection and His favor towards any of His servants. There are some to whom God permanently grants signs of predilection, so that they may achieve contemplation of God and cease to see those things distinct from Him. These are the intimate and predilect friends those whom He knows and loves. But there are others are others who are impeded from achieving the summit of perfection, and if they are granted favors, it is only to preserve them in their condition with the inspirations and good works which are suggested as convenient to Him. These are the simple ascetics and devotees, in contrast to those other intimate friends, although they may also be thought of as favorites, relative to the mass of the faithful. These last, those who live consecrated to the ascetic struggle and practices of devotion, have in common with the first named being object, like those, of favors and charismas, which god grants them, and of the graces which are communicated to them so that they may conscientiously fulfill the precepts and exercises of devotion; but, on the contrary, are not free of imperfection, because they continue to look after themselves and have not freed themselves of worry concerning their personal interest. Thus, these rest in temporal things and are yet connected to the apparent reality of the veils. To these, nevertheless, God has made the object of his predilection, permitting that in their hands and by their means there appear prodigious charismas, with the only object to quiet their own souls and strengthen their hearts with living faith. On the other hand, to some are denied charismas, because now they do not require them, because the certainty of mystical vision, spiritual energy and interior peace are firmly rooted in their souls...

Says the author of the book *Lataif al-minan*: "Be advised that the charismas appear, at times, in favor of the saint himself, and at other times, in favor of another person. When they appear in favor of the person of the saint himself, that which God intends with such prodigies is to demonstrate His omnipotence and the unparalleled unity of His sovereign Being, i.e., that the saint be convinced that the power of God is not detained by the limits of created things, but that all habitual phenomena are in submission to his judgement;

that God has not established the occasional causes, the habitual phenomena and the means, except as veils which cover His omnipotence, as clouds behind which shine the sun of His unity. He who detains himself before these veils will find himself abandoned by God. He who passes them to arrive at the presence of God, he will find himself aided by His particular providence."

Letr he adds: Says the spiritual master Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "The useful object of the charisma is that God may internalize in the soul the certain intuition of His wisdom, omnipotence, will and the other eternal attributes, conceived in a synthetic, not an analytic manner, as though all were a single attribute which subsists in the essence of the Unique Being, because he is not equal to him who God gives to know by His divine light, to that other who with his own understanding is enabled to know God. And thus when the charisma serves to confirm in the faith he to whom it is granted, we have the case in which the beginners at times are granted charismas in the first passes of the spiritual life, and by contrast the perfect ones, who are in the last stages of the journey, are deprived of charismas, because the profound rootedness of the mystical certainty, of spiritual energy and interior perfection now require no further confirmation. For this reason God did not need to grant exterior and sensual charismas to the saints of those first centuries: because they were favored, with the gift of secret intuitions and with the graces of contemplation; it is clear that a mountain does not need an anchor. Thus the charisma, eliminates the vacillations of doubt in reference to the friendship of God, makes the soul see intuitively that God wishes to honor and favor it and it serves as a trustworthy testimony of the moral rectitude in dealings with God."

"In regards to charismas, men are divided in three groups: some consider them to be the goal and object of the spiritual life; thus he is taken for great whom they find favored with charismas, and on the other hand see as inferior he who is deprived of them." Others, on the contrary, say: And what are the charismas? They are nothing but illusions by which God deceives the beginners, who, seduced by charismas, detain themselves in the limits of the spiritual level where they find themselves, so that they do not pretend to aspire to higher levels, which they do not merit." Asked Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi to Ab-l-'Abbas al-Raqqi: "Who says your colleagues of those things with which God honors His servants?" He replied: "I have not seen a single one who does not believe in its veracity." Replied Abu Turab: "It is clear that he who does not believe in

their veracity is an infidel. But that which I ask of you is only this: what is the value of the charismas in the mystical life?" He replied: "I do not know what they say." Abu Turab then said: "On the contrary, your colleagues say that the charismas are God's deceptions; the deception is that the soul should rest in them; on the contrary, for the soul which does not delight in the charismas nor rest in them, the charismas constitute a level of the divine mystics." And let it be known that, although Abu Turan said this, it was later that, when his disciples were thirsty, struck the earth with his hand and water sprang up from the ground. And he said later: "I want to drink the water in a cup.", struck the earth again and found a cup of transparent glass, from which he drank and gave us to drink. And this cup, added Abu'l-'Abbas al-Raqqi, did not leave our possession until we went to Mecca." Later said the spiritual master Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "but the decisive solution to the question is that one must not ask that he be subjected to the norms of courtesy with God those who [like Abu Turab] deserve all credit for having been favored with charismas, which are trustworthy testimony of his moral rectitude in the eyes of God."

"The third case is that in which the charismas appear in the saint, but not in his favor, but rather for the benefit of another. Then that which God wishes to say is to make known to the other, who contemplates the charismas, the healthy truth of the way of life of the saint for whom the charismas are realized. And this, or because the subject is an unbeliever who renounces Islam, and thus is returned to the faith, or because he is an infidel, and thus converts to Islam, or because he doubts the singular predilection of God for said saint, and for charismas which appear in the saint leads him to know effectively that God has deposited in his soul the gifts of His goodness." So end the words of Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili.

Said Abu Nasr al-Sarraj: (of Tusī in Khurasan): "I asked of Abu-l-Hasan ibn Salim, and he said: "What do the charismas mean [as proofs by which God honors the saints], if in fact the saints take great pride in freely abandoning all things of this world? How then, can they consider themselves honored by God with the favor in which they convert stones to gold? How do you explain this?" He replied: "God does not grant these charismas for the filthiness of the favor which they give, rather so that they may serve as an argument against their own souls, when they vacillate in their faith in providence and also against the danger of lacking the sustenance which God has destined for them."

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And thus, they may say to their soul: "He who has the power to convert in your favor this stone, as you

see, to gold, He also has power to grant sustenance, from where you least expect it." With this reasoning they may argue against their own souls and convince them that they will not lack sustenance, and this conviction will effectively aid them to be better disciplined and to control their appetites."

A certain wise man said: "I have not seen these charismas, except in the hands of the poor in spirit, of the simple and ingenuous." A disciple of Sahl ibn 'Abd Allah said one day: "Suppose that I go to make my ablutions for ritual prayer, and the water flows from pipes of gold and silver." And the master Sahl answered: "But, do you not know that the children, when they cry, are also given toys to entertain them?"

On the other hand, the contemplative mystics flee from charismas, and fear them when they achieve the ecstatic intuition. For this reason one of the ancients said: "The most subtle of illusions to which the friends of God are exposed is that of the charismas and favors." And said Abu Yazid al-Bistami: "In my first passes, God let me see prodigies and charismas, but I paid no attention to them. And when God saw me in such a mental state, He prepared for me the route to achieve His contemplation." (63)

[Sentence 136: Charismas, fruit of virtue.]

"How is it that the habits of the natural laws be interrupted in your favor if you do not interrupt the moral habits of your own soul?"

God does not honor with the interruption of the habitual course of physical laws, which reveal His omnipotence, except for he who interrupts the habits of his own soul, annihilating his will and his appetites. He who does reach these heights, who does not seek the favor of the charismas, even though in his person is manifested something which has the apparent form of a charisma, must always fear that there lurks in his soul an astute deception or illusion, and, therefore, must not desire it nor ask it, because if he desires it or asks it, it is a sign that he is yet controlled by his will and his appetites and habits. And, How is God to interrupt the habits of the physical laws in favor and in honor of who is yet in such a condition? Would it not be impossible and incorrect? Said the spiritual master Abu 'Abd Allah al-Qurashi: "He who is not repelled that in himself are manifested the prodigies and miracles which interrupt the habitual course of

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physical laws (with equal repugnance of the sins that they produce), the public manifestation of his charismas will serve as a veil or obstacle to union with God; on

the other hand, if he hides them, it will be for him a sure sign of divine mercy. Therefore, he who has already broken the course of the habits of his egotism, cannot desire that in his honor God should grant any prodigy or miracle, on the contrary, he will consider that is soul is, by its smallness and vileness, unworthy of such favors. On the contrary, when he annihilates completely his own will, when he has achieved the true and profound of himself, looking with eyes full of contempt and of vileness, then is when he will acquire the dignity which will make him apt to receive divine favors."(64)

[Sentence 138: Humility, necessary to the servant of God.]

"Do not demand anything else, except the recognition of your grave necessity; nor does there exist a more effective means to quickly achieve the divine gifts, than the humble confession of your own baseness and misery."

The recognition of the required necessity which the servant has for God, is the most characteristic of the attributes proper to submission. For this reason no obligation asked of the servant is more valuable than this. Says Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah ibn Munazil: "Submission consists in recurring to God for everything, recognizing the absolute and obligatory necessity which we have for Him. In this also is the security that our prayers will be listened to."

The recognition which of necessity is asked of the servant of God, consists in not presuming to possess, by your own efforts, not the most minimum power and capacity for anything and that one must not believe that he has the most exiguous resource in which to support oneself, rather one must consider oneself to be shipwrecked and about to drown, or as a traveler lost in middle of the desert, who sees no possible help than that of his Lord, nor hopes to be saved from perishing save by Him. Says a contemplative mystic: "The servant who recognizes the necessity which he has for God, is he who is put in the presence of his Lord and raises his hands in supplication towards Him; exclaims: "Give me, Lord, non being." For this reason, the baseness and the misery are the two sentiments proper to this recognition, which necessarily produces, as a result, the rapid achievement of the divine gifts for the

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servant who possesses both sentiments."(65)

[Sentence 139: Abandonment, indispensable for union.]

"One cannot achieve union with God until you have annihilated the defects of your soul and suppressed your pretensions; otherwise, you will never reach God. But, on the other hand when He desires for you to arrive at union, cover your own attributes with His and cover your qualities with His, and then you will unite with Him by means of the graces which He grants you and not for the worship which you direct to Him"

One does not reach God, except by erasing the qualities of the soul and breaking the bonds of the heart; but not for all this can one conceive that the servant is able to do it for himself, it being that all this is natural and instinctive. Although one only needs, to reach union for oneself, the capacity to love and to work, these both will in reality be defects and pretensions, that must be suppressed. My Lord Abu-l-'Abbas of Murcia said: "The saint does not reach God, until he suppresses in himself the desire to reach God; but understand that with suppression inspired by reverence and not in discontent." And my Lord Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili also said: "The saint will not reach God while there yet remains any desire, any initiative, any free decision. But if God abandons His servant, he will never achieve this by himself. On the other hand, when God wishes to cause the saint to reach Him, He facilitates it thusly: putting in evidence some of the most excellent attributes and holy qualities and this will serve as a signal to know that God loves you. This is insinuated in the following divine tradition, referred to by the Prophet: "And when I love, I come to be now your own ear, with which you hear , and your sight, with which you see, and your hand, with which you grasp, and your foot, with which you walk." And then the servant of God has no will, except to love that which his Lord prefers and desires. Then is when occurs the union with God, but not by means of the praises which you give with your personal effort to serve Him, but rather for the grace which God grants by His mercy and His goodness."(66)

[Sentence 156: Desolation and consolation.]

"When God grants his favors you feel consolation and when He denies them, you feel desolation, a secure signal that you are yet in your infancy and that you lack sincerity in your service."

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To feel anxiety for the deprivation of the divine favors and wideness of spirit when you receive them if a symptom that the soul yet desires its wellbeing and that it works to achieve it, and this, according to the contemplatives, is contrary to service; thus, he who

feels said mental state, must recognize that he lacks purity of of intention, indispensable for service to God as a slave, who treats God like a whining child, pretending that he be given the gifts of the contemplatives, which he does not yet deserve. He is a parasite who goes to the feasts and banquets to participate in them, as a gate crasher in company with the invited, without anyone inviting him.(67)

[Sentence 159: God reveals Himself in the night of desolation.]

"Frequently God reveals in the night of desolation that which He does not reveal in the splendor of the day of consolation. Do you not see which of the two is the more useful."

We have said earlier that the contemplatives prefer the desolation to the consolation, because in desolation one is deprived of the wellbeing of the sensitive soul and for this reason, rather than in consolation, one finds the possibility to fulfill the requirements of reverential courtesy which is owed to God. In desolation, besides this, the doors of contemplation are opened, which are not opened in consolation. It is well, therefore, that the servant recognizes the grace which God confers upon him in the night of anxiety, as well as knowing well that which God does in the splendorous day of wideness of spirit, noting well that in the night there are advantages which are not present in the day. Ask confidently of God that He lets you know of them, and think well of your Lord, because the servant does not know which of the two, night or day, is the more beneficial, as is insinuated in a verse of the Qur'an. The comparison of the straitness of the night with the wideness of the day, is a strange metaphor, in regards to which we have already cited the text of the master Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili.(68)

[Sentence 170: Advantages and inconveniences of the divulgation of the charismas.]

"Your desire that the people know that you are the object of divine predilection is a sign of lack of sincerity in the service of God."

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The divine predilection means here the special graces with which God favors some of His servants, or to realize acts of virtue, or to come to know Him better. Sincerity in the service of God consists in that the servant is content that only God knows his spiritual state, without worrying about what is also known by God's creatures, because the reverential fear which God

inspires and the gratitude for His favors absorbs him completely, and impedes any desire that the people know of them and fell envy of that which the beings who are God see in your spiritual state. For this reason the virtue practiced in secret is seventy times more meritorious than that which is done in public, according to the words of the Prophet. And Jesus also said: "When the day of fasting arrives, anoint your head and clean your lips, and thus, when you go to present yourself to the people, these believe that you have not fasted. And when one of you gives something, give it with your right hand and hide it from your left hand. And when one of you prays, let fall the veil which covers your door. In truth does God distribute praise, as He distributes sustenance."

Says Muhammad ibn Wasi: "Men that I have known, of which some, even when laying his head alongside that of his wife on the same pillow, moistens it with tears which flow down his cheeks, without his wife being aware of it. I have also known others who, while praying in the same line, in the mosque, tears of devotion flow down their cheeks, without the neighbor noting it."

Thus, when it occurs that the servant of God needs to make manifest and to publish the divine favors, watch your own heart with close attention and guard it against the danger that it will suffer damage from the happiness felt at seeing that the people know of said favors; procure to feel repugnance and disgust for it, do not delight in it nor take pleasure in it, rather, combat and contradict your pride by all available means. Because if you do otherwise, if you desire and seek that others who are not God come to know your spiritual state, if you neglect the struggle against egotism in the moment in which the divine favor is made public, although it be no more than an opening and closing of the eyelids, it is much to be feared that the pleasure felt will cause great harm to your heart and you will fall at once in temptation. For if you are of weak will, you will not fail to fall into spiritual vanity, manifested and secret. And although you be of firm will, and now walk on the way of contemplation, you will not be freed of the danger of resting in your spiritual state, and thus lose the zeal which you had

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kept hidden the divine favors and for this reason fall from the peak of perfection. For this very reason the lack of social prestige is one of the necessary prerequisites for those who travel on this path of spiritual life, as has said the author in another of his sentences: "Bury your existence in the earth of darkness, for the plant which germinates without the seed having been properly buried, will never fructify perfectly."

Now, when the servant of God come to the pure intuition and contemplation of the divine unity, then it is licit to reveal his good works and manifest his mystical states, because now he does not see his acts as his own, but rather as being acts of God, and because thus he can better pay the debt of gratitude with God which he has contracted. One of the earliest ascetics said at daybreak: "Last night I prayed so many inclinations and recited so many chapters of the Qur'an." And when he heard the reply; "But, do you not fear falling into spiritual vanity by saying this?", he replied: "Ah! Have you ever seen anyone who was moved to vanity by acts which he had not done?" To another ascetic who traveled on the same path, he said: "Why do you not hide your good works?" And he replied: "But is it not God Himself who says (Qur'an XCIII:11): "Speak of the grace of your Lord"? Thus if the contemplative mystic, whose spiritual state is thus, he does propose any other object than to invite his neighbors to serve God and direct them to Him, then the publication of his mystical states and his acts of virtue will be useful for others who imitate and follow him. The second case is completely distinct from the first: in it the publicity is more meritorious than secrecy, because are excluded not only are the perils of vanity present in the first case, but also are present the advantages proper to fame and divulgation. It is true that a sentence of the Prophet says that secrecy is more excellent than publicity; but this, on the other hand, is more meritorious for he who proposes that his neighbor imitate him.

Says the author of the book titled *Lata'if al-minan*: "Be aware that all works of the friend of God are founded on this knowledge: believing that God alone is sufficient, to be satisfied that you are known only by God, that you are content that only God sees you. From this it follows that, in the beginning, the friends of God commit all their effort in fleeing from the creatures in order to be alone with the King of Virue; for this reason they hide their good works and are silent about their mystical states, in order to better realize their proper mysticism, confirm their

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ascetic austerity, do good works with a pure heart and give evidence of the sincere intention to serve God, until the certainty of mystical faith takes root in their souls and come to acquire the intimate conviction that they are nothing and thus reduce all their being to the conviction that only God is permanent and only God subsists. Then, if God wills, they may manifest to the others the virtues and charismas of their friends, or, if they wish, hide them; that is to say: if they wish, allow that their favors be known by the people, so that

they may be directed towards God, and if this is not desired, hide them from the eyes of the neighbors, to better hide them from all created things. Thus, if the friend of God manifests himself as such, it is not by his own will, but rather by the will of God, he thus makes Himself known. Still more: his desire, if he has one, is to hide himself and not show himself, as we said above. It being that they do not seek for themselves publicity and that in reality it is only God Who wishes to put them in evidence, it is God Himself Who realizes this manifestation and helps them with His grace and inspirations. It is this which the Prophet said to 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Salma: "Do not ask to be named chief, for if you are named without asking it, God will aid you, and if you are named because you requested it, it is in your petition and not in God that you have put your confidence." Finally, the friends of God who have living faith in their condition of servants, never will they ask neither that they be manifested nor that they be hidden, but that their wills obey only that which God prefers as best for them. Said the spiritual master Abu-l-'Abbas of Murcia: "He who loves to be famous, he is servant of fame, and who loves being ignored, he is servant of darkness. On the other hand, he who is servant of God, it is the same to him if God manifests him or if God hides him from the eyes of mankind." (69)

[Sentence 173: The effectiveness of prayer does not depend on the servant.]

"Do not ask as though your petition must cause God to do what you ask, for this will be a sign that you understand but little the reason for which God has commanded that you ask. Ask only to make manifest your submission and fulfill the duties which are owed to His Sovereignty."

God does not demand of His servants that they ask and supplicate, but rather that with the object of achieving that is thus manifested the necessity which
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He has of the humility and submission that they feel in His presence, that is to say, that they give abundant evidences of their submission and that they wish to fulfill the duties that are owed to the Lord; but not because they believe that their petition must be the effective cause to obtain that which they ask and achieve their desires, that is to say, the things which bring them benefits and pleasure. This is the end which God proposes and which the intuitive mystics understand, as is indicated by the author cited here.

Said Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "When you pray, do not worry about achieving your desires and the satisfaction

of your necessities, for this worry will impede you, like a veil, in reaching God. Let it be that you only object in praying be to converse with your Lord..." For this reason it is said: "A tribulation which causes you to seek refuge in the presence of your God is better for you than a favor which causes you to forget God and distance yourself from Him." (70)

[Sentence 179: Norms of conduct in prayer.]

"Frequently, reverential courtesy indicates the convenience in asking nothing of God, trusting in the providential distribution of His gifts and occupied with remembrance of God, rather than begging Him."

At times, asking for nothing is a duty of courtesy for he who now lives submerged in the memory of God and who are satisfied with and accepting of all the difficulties which by divine decree may occur. This is one of the ways of the mystics.

The learned Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushayri said: " There is disagreement among the people in regards to what is most excellent and meritorious, whether it be to petition God or to remain silent and accepting His will. Some say that supplication is in itself an act of service to God, because, as the Prophet has said, prayer is the heart of devotion. Therefore, the practice of that which is service to God must therefore be more meritorious than its omission. It is also a duty of the servant to his Lord; thus, even though God does not hear his prayer, nor, therefore, achieve that which is his own desire, he has fulfilled his duty to his Lord, because prayer makes manifest the necessity, part and parcel of his servitude... Others say that maintaining silence, without petitioning, to bow before the divine decrees is the more perfect, and that acceptance of the eternal will of God is the most convenient... Yet others, say that the servant of God

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must reconcile the two at one and the same time, i.e., to supplicate with the tongue, but cordially submit to the Divine Will. Nevertheless - adds the learned Abu-l-Qasim - the most correct is to say that it is best to distinguish between the two according to the circumstances: in certain states of the soul, prayer is more meritorious than silence, inspired in the reverential courtesy, while in other states, for this same courtesy, it must be said that silence is more excellent than prayer. This may only be discerned in the exact moment, because only then may one have consciousness of the state of the soul. Thus, when in his heart the servant feels some indication that he must pray, it is prayer that will be the most indicated, but the reverse in the contrary situation. At the same time

it must be noted the the servant must never lose, the presence of God in his prayer, whether by by forgetfulness or distraction, and must also observe with all of his attention his states of soul during prayer: if he feels that in prayer he finds consolation or expansiveness of soul, prayer is then the most indicated; but if he notices that to his heart returns, in the the moment of prayer, a certain state of soul similar to repulsion and to desolation or anxiety, in that moment it is most indicated to cease from prayer; finally, if in his heart he does not find an increase in consolation when he prays, nor disgust, it is the case that prayer and its omission are equally indicated."(71)

[Sentence 181: The Joy of the Perfect Ones in Tribulation.]

"Tribulations are the festivals of those who seek God."

Festivals are the dates indicated which occur every year and which are characterized by popular celebrations. For this reason men disagree among themselves: if some measure their joy and contentment in that which serves their pride, in which are achieved his desires and aspirations, and such is the general condition of Muslims; but there are others who measure their joy and contentment in the deprivation of their wellbeing and in the fact that their hopes and aspirations are frustrated, and such is the condition of those who seek God, for all the actions of their business are limited exclusively to the examination, of vigilance regarding their hearts and purging their consciences of all thought and desire for the created things, which are not God, but rather tracks of God,
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which disturb the soul. Thus one does not achieve the desired result, but rather experiences things which disturb him: necessities, miseries and tribulations. For this reason they prefer poverty to wealth, straitened circumstances to comfort, contempt to honors and sickness to health, because these produce a sweetness and satiety, which only they can appreciate, because it springs from feeling close to God and contemplating Him in that state of absence of all egotism; and thus, when his miseries and tribulations increase, the nearer they come to God and His grace and friendship...

Says the author of the book titld *Al-Tanwir*: "In tribulations and miseries are concealed secret divine favors which only may be understood by those gifted by an interior vision. Do you not believe that adversities extinguish the fire of the passions, leaving them forgotten in the satisfaction of the appetites? With

tribulations it also occurs that the soul takes note of its own vileness, and it is well known that with the recognition of one's own vileness always comes the help of God, as He Himself says (Qur'an III:119) "In truth that God aided us on the day of Badr, when we were very weak."

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Harawi said: "He who wishes to reach the highest peak of spiritual nobility must prefer seven things to their opposites, which the saints always prefer in their struggle to reach the peak of virtue; he must prefer poverty to wealth, hunger over satiety, lowness to height, vileness to nobility, humiliation to greatness, sadness to joy and death to life." In the same sense the author continues: "He who believes that the divine decrees are not accompanied with divine favors suffers from shortness of vision." For this reason it is that those who seek God must make festivals in the days of tribulation, as the author affirms; and on the other hand, when the tribulations are lacking because things are going well, then he must note that this earthly happiness is for them a veil which hides God from them, and distances them from God. On taking note of this they become sad and afflicted and wish for the previous state, desiring to return again to adversity... On this topic of the festivals of those who seek God and of the contemplative mystics are accustomed to recite the following poem, which is attributed to Abu Ali al-Rudabari:

They say to me: Tomorrow is fiesta. What suit will you wear? And I respond: "The tunic of honor which you put on he who with one gulp drains the cup of His love.
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Poverty and patience are the two suits which cover me, and under them beats a heart that sees in its own weakness its festivals.

The best of the suits to go to meet the Friend on the day of His visit, is that He finds you dressed in the tunic which He Himself gave you.

All time is for me a sad happening, if You are absent, my hope. It is always a festival when my eyes see You and my ears hear Your voice."(72)

[Sentence 182: Utility of the Tribulations.]

"Frequently you will discover in tribulations an increase of fervor that you do not find in fasting and prayer."

With the coming of tribulations it is achieved that he who seeks God finds a great increase of purity of heart and cleanliness of conscience, which at times is not achieved with prayer and fasting, because in fasting

and prayer it is possible that one finds the satisfaction of some appetite, liking or pride, and of the good works which are included in this, one is never certain that they are free of some hidden defect, which, therefore, deprive them of the merit of purity of intention. It is the reverse with tribulations, they are always the opposite of the passions and appetites.(73)

[Sentence 193: Utility of Tribulations.]

"Tribulations open with abundance the treasure of the divine gifts. If you wish that God rains blessings upon you, first discover if in yourself you achieve poverty and misery, because alms are given only to the poor."

Tribulations take the soul to the presence of God and teach it to converse with Him in sincerity. It is well, then to ponder how great will be the favors and holy inspirations which God will grant to you in that encounter. The proof for the soul of the genuine possession of poverty and misery is the same as possessing the qualities proper to the servant, those to which the author alludes in the sentence which immediately follows this. (74)

(1702)

[Sentence 184: The Necessity of Being Awestruck.]

"Acquire the profound conviction that your real qualities, and God will aid you with His own; convince yourself of your own vileness and God will aid you with His nobility; convince yourself of your own incapacity, and He will aid you with force and power."

This sentence is closely related to all that the author dedicates to the treatment of tribulations and divine favors...

Says Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "The reality of the submission of the soul with respect to God consists in its constant and sincere preference for poverty, weakness, and self contempt. The opposite qualities are in reality proper to God. What may you have in common with these? Convince yourself, therefore, of your own qualities and thus remain dependent on His, and say to God, prostrated on the prayer mat of spiritual poverty: "Oh wealthy! Who will aid the poor, if not You? On the prayer mat of incapacity, say to Him: "Oh powerful One! Who, if not you, will aid the powerless?" On the prayer

mat of your self-contempt, say: 'Oh noble! Who will aid the vile if not You?' Without delay you will find that your supplication has been answered and that God comes to your aid if you have done the above spontaneously..." Such are the words of Abu'l-Hasan. His other sentences correspond to the the spiritual method of Abu-l-Hasan.(75)

[Sentence 185: Charismas Are Worthless Without Perfection.]

"Frequently God grants charismas to those who do not possess perfect rectitude."

The genuine charisma is no other than the possession of rectitude and the achievement of spiritual perfection. Two things are in play: the living faith in God and the submission, exterior as well as interior, to the teachings of the Messenger. The servant of God must not aspire to more than these two, nor concern himself with anything save the achievement of both. On the contrary, of charismas, i.e., of the prodigies which interrupt the contemplatives, because at times God grants them to those who do not possess rectitude nor spiritual perfection.

Said Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "There are no more than two universal charismas, which include and comprehend all the others; the charisma of living faith, accompanied by the intimate certainty that comes

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from the mystical intuition or contemplation, and the charisma of the imitation of the Prophet, which consists in faithfully following his teachings without exception and avoiding all personal initiative. He to whom God grants these two charismas, should he later desire any others, will then be a worthless and dishonest servant of God, lacking the most minimum achievement in the spiritual doctrine and the ascetic life. Because, in effect, his condition comes to be that of he who is favored by the king with the honor of being admitted to his presence and contemplated by him with eyes of friendship, and who, then comes to desire to be his groom or master of armoire. All charismas which are not accompanied by the friendship of God and His favor, are the lot of lost souls, confused and imperfect, or irremissbaly lost and in God's disgrace."

Said Abu-l-'Abbas of Murcia: "There is no merit in travelling long distances in an instant leaving behind lands and cities and presenting oneself suddenly in Mecca, but rather, the merit consists only in leaving behind the evil qualities of the sensitive soul, to present oneself suddenly before your Lord."

They spoke of charismas in front of Sahl ibn 'Abd

Allah al-Tustari, and he said: "What are the prodigies and the charismas? They are things which pass in a moment and cease to exist. The greatest charisma is, rather, that you abandon a condemnable habit of your own soul in exchange for a praiseworthy one."

A spiritual master said to his disciples: "Do not marvel at him who, not having put anything in his pocket, puts his hand in his pocket and takes out anything he desires. Rather marvel at the other who, having put something in his pocket, puts his hand in it and finding nothing, his soul is not altered."

To Abu Muhammad al-Murta'is they said: "So-and-so walks on water." He replied: "To me, he who with the help of God comes to conquer his own passions, es much greater than he who walks on water and flies through the air."

Abu Yazid al-Bistami said: Although you see a man extend his prayer mat over the water or who sits in the air with his legs crossed, do not be seduced by this until you discover whether he fulfills the commandments of God." At another time he said: "So-and-so that in a single night he travelled to Mecca." He replied: "Satan also travels from the Orient to the Occident in an opening and closing of the eyes. Nevertheless, he is cursed by God." On another occasion he was told: "They say that so-and-so walks on water." He replied: "The fish in the sea and the birds in the air do things more marvelous than this."

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Junaid said: "The veils which cover the hearts of the chosen are these: to put their vision on the graces, to take delight in favors and rest in the charismas." The thought behind this sentence is similar to the previous one which says: "Not all of those who are objects of divine favor are free of faults in their perfection." (76)

[Sentence 195: The Divine Favors Must Remain Hidden.]

"The beginner must communicate to no one the inspirations with which God has favored him, because this tends to reduce the the good effect which said inspirations should make in his heart and will be an obstacle for the sincerity of intention with which God must be served."

The beginner must not reveal the divine inspirations to anyone for his own initiative, but, rather, keep them hidden and enclosed as through behind a wall without letting another person know of their existence, except for his master and spiritual director, because his pride will find satisfaction and pleasure in revealing them and this satisfaction helps to fortify in the soul the

egotistical qualities, with which is weakened the good effect which said divine inspirations should produce in the heart, and thus, dominated by egotism and determined to prefer that which is agreeable, he finds himself impeded in achieving purity and sincerity of intention in the service of God. At an earlier time noted the same author: "Your desire that the people know that you are object of divine predilection is a sign of lack of sincerity in the service of God." (77)

[Sentence 198: The Most Bothersome Must Be Preferred.]

"When you doubt which of two things you should choose, see which of the two is heaviest for the soul and follow it, because the soul is not heavier, but rather it is that which is better for it."

This is, in effect, the truest criterion for the majority of souls, because instinctively one feels dragged towards ignorance and greed of the temporal goods and always puts all one's effort in seeking only that which satisfies his wants and in fleeing from his duties... Thus, when the novice finds that his soul has more inclination and facility to realize one act in place of another, this should be enough to make one suspicious: one must cease to do that toward which the soul is inclined and which looks easier, and practice,
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on the contrary, that which is more heavy and laborious.

One of the contemplative mystics said: "In twenty years my soul has never rested in my sensitive soul not even for an hour." To rest the heart in the sensitive soul is the same as following the easier, in place of the most laborious. This inclination belongs, according to the contemplatives, among the defects of spiritual hypocrisy. He who yet preserves a stimulus of sensitive passion, although in minimal quantity, cannot be certain of freeing himself of these defects. The soul does not feel lightness and ease in doing a thing save when this harmonizes with its passions, but its passions do not naturally incline except towards that which is vain. For this reason, when you doubt about which of two things to choose, both obligatory or of simple devotion, and do not know which of the two is more obligatory or has more merit to be preferred over the other, see before which of the two is most painful to your soul and practice it."

We say that "this is the truest criterion for the majority of souls", because, on the other hand, the soul that is now in quietude does not partake of the double vice of ignorance and greed for temporal goods, and for this reason, though at times it may find itself taking an effort lightly, this does not indicate that this soul

is vain and that said effort is imperfect. In these cases, the servant of God must, therefore, examine which of the efforts is of the greatest spiritual benefit and merit that it should be preferred to others.

There exists yet another criterion more true and certain than the first, and it consists in the following: that the servant of God imagine that he is about to die in that very moment, and the effort with which he likes to be occupied at that time will be the one which he must practice as though it were obligatory, abstaining from all others as being vain and useless. Says the author in reference to the above in his book *Latayf al-minan*: "Death is the balance for which to weigh the efforts and the states of the soul...: when you have doubts concerning something because you do not know if it pleases God more that you do it or that you abstain from it, and when you have doubts concerning a state of the soul because you do not know if it is duty or passion that inspires you, recall death and imagine that you die while making this effort or find yourself in that state of the soul, and all efforts or states that are not fleeting, but which remain firm even in the face of death, that is the one to be preferred; on the other hand, every state of the

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soul or every effort which the idea of death causes you to forget, will be in vain, because death is truth, and truth puts error to flight."

Later add the following: "I debated with a man of science in relation to the purity of intention necessary for merit in the study and teaching, and I maintained that purity of intention requires that one must not dedicate oneself to science, but rather dedicate oneself to God. I therefore told him: "He who teaches for the sake of God is he who, if you say to him "Tomorrow you will die", does not let the book fall from his hand." This is the end of the text of *Latayf al-minan*.

This is, effectively, the decisive criterion and the one most certain, because the servant of God, in said state of the soul, will never commit any act which is not good, free of all stains of spiritual hypocrisy and free of all mixture of egotism and passion. Now, this is what the servant of God must always be seeking; but this desired result will not be completely achieved except by imagining that he is facing death. This is also the meaning of "the short-term hope", which is the root of all good works. "The short-term hope" means, effectively, that a man does not suppose that his soul must have another moment to continue living after the present one. That this how his efforts will be free of all defects and clean of all stains, because the idea of death at each breath and in each opening and closing of the eyes completely suppresses all the above, so says

our author. On the other hand, the efforts made while expecting to live longer and without consciousness of the idea that death may come at any moment, is therefore not free of these dangers, unless it be the case that the soul is filled with living faith to do everything only for the sake of God."(78)

[Sentence 199: Obligation Is Preferable to Devotion.]

"The sign that the soul has not freed itself from its own preferences is the zealous diligence for the good works of simple devotion and the slothful negligence for the obligatory works."

These are, effectively, the two ways of striving by which are put in evidence the fact that the soul makes light and easy that which is useless, and disagreeable that which is obligatory. What the author says is this; in truth, such is the state of the soul of the majority of people. You see, in effect, that when ne seeks to do penance and does not take into account anything else except to practice acts of devotion, i.e., fasting,
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passing whole nights in prayer, repeatedly visiting the house of God, etcetera; but, at the same time, not to occupy oneself in doing penance for past sins which you have committed by not obeying the law of God, nor in making reparations for the damages and injustices for which the responsibility falls upon your head. And this is because you have not occupied yourself with disciplining your appetites, which betray and deceive you; nor in combatting your passions, which enslave and dominate you; because had you taken account of them, they would have formed your greatest efforts and you would not have found time to commit yourself to any practice of mere devotion. For this reason a master of the spirit said: "He is deceived who is more occupied with devotions than with obligations." And Muhammad ibn Abu-l-Ward said: "The spiritual death of men consists of two things: in occupying oneself with devotion while neglecting that which is obligatory and in the practice of external works which are not accompanied by the fervor of the heart."(79)

[Sentence 204: The Benefits of the Dark Night of the Soul.]

"Frequently obscurity falls upon you, so that you may come to know the value of the graces with which God favors you."

"Obscurity is the opposite of light; there is no light, unless it is confronted by darkness; all obscurity or

darkness is in proportion to the light which corresponds to it; one comes to know the value of things thanks to their opposites, as the proverb says: "By their opposites does one come to know them." For this reason, the obscurity of veils and absence, which God allows to fall upon you in the nights of abandonment and separation, are not sent to you except to cause you to better know the value of the graces with which He favors you, i.e., of the lights of illumination and presence, in days of approximation and union because all these are graces which God showers on you in abundance, without you taking note of them."(80)

[Sentence 213: The "Moments" of the Interior Life.]

"There are duties which are proper to certain moments, which you must always fulfill; but there are also the duties of each and every moment, which you may not always be able to fulfill; because there is no moment in which God does not impose upon you a new duty and a firm precept; how, then, will you be able to
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fulfill in every moment the duty which He has imposed upon you in an earlier moment, if you have not yet fulfilled that which is imposed on you at the present moment?"

The duties, assigned to certain moments, are those which correspond to the external religious obligations, such as ritual prayer, fasting, et cetera. He lets slip by the time assigned to the fulfillment of any of these duties, may fulfill them at another time, for the law permits delaying its fulfillment and in doing reparation for the omission. But the other duties, which are required at each and every moment, are the acts of the interior life, required by the states of the soul which fall upon the servant of God and for the different sorts of inspirations with which God infuses your heart. Therefore, it is called the *moment* of the servant of God, in this sense, that which must be done in each and every one of these moments or states of the soul and which God requires as a duty, while at the same time infusing said state or sending you inspirations. God, in effect, imposes on each and every one of His servants, in every moment in which He sends an inspiration or causes you to submit to a state of the soul, a new duty and a firm precept, that, therefore, you cannot fail to fulfill in that very moment, for if you let that moment pass without fulfilling it, you will not find another opportunity nor possibility to make good said omission. Therefore, the servant of God must guard his own soul with perpetual vigilance, in order to scrupulously fulfill those duties which, their moment having passed,

it would be impossible to fulfill them.

Said Abu-l-'Abbas of Murcia: "Four are the moments of the servant of God, and no more: happiness, adversity, virtue, and sin. In each one you are required, in respect to God, the fulfillment of one of the duties proper to the service of God, who is their creditor by virtue of his sovereignty. He whose moment is virtue, must consider it to be a grace with which God favors him, so that God will thus direct you to correctly practice it, and will help you to fulfill that which this grace requires of you. He whose moment is sin, must feel repentance and contrition in his heart. He whose moment is happiness must feel gratitude, i.e., spiritual joy for the sake of God. He whose moment is adversity, must accept the divine decree willingly and suffer it with patience. Acceptance consists in remaining firm in regards to the decrees of fate, as one holds firm the shield before the flights of arrows. In one of the traditions sent by

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God, note that it says: "Those who, when God favors them with His gifts, is grateful, and when God tests them with adversity, suffer it with patience, and when they receive an injury, they pardon it, and when they cause an injury, beg pardon for it." The Prophet then fell silent, and his disciples asked him: "What happened to these men?, oh messenger of God!" And the Prophet replied: "They are secure and walk in the straight path." That is to say, that they are certain of salvation in the future life and God will direct them in the straight path in the present life."(81)

[Sentence 215: Only God Must Be Loved.]

"Do not love anything, for it will enslave you, and God does not wish you to be the slave of anything, except Him."

Love of a thing requires the submission and subjection to it, while desiring nothing in exchange. As the proverb says: "Love renders you blind and deaf", which is to say that the lover is enslaved by the object of his love. Therefore, if you love anything that is not God, this object of your love, whatever it may be, will make you its slave, and God does not wish nor is He pleased that you be the slave of anyone, except Him. Unfortunate slave of gold and silver, of clothing and shelter and of his wife!(82)

[Sentence 224: Spiritual Sweetness Is Deceitful.]

"Do not lose hope that your good works be accepted by God, even though when you do them you do not feel the

presence of God, because at times the works with which you do not perceive any immediate benefits are more acceptable to Him."

It is best that the soul not lose hope that the good works in which one does not feel the presence of God will be accepted, because it is for God to decide, and frequently He accepts the good works for which one does not perceive any immediate benefit, i.e., the feeling of the divine presence or the spiritual sweetness or pleasure or any other benefit, although it is nothing more than the intention to draw near to God.(83)

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[Sentence 225: By Its Fruits Shall You Know Divine Inspiration.]

"Do not glory in your interior for a divine inspiration whose benefits you do not yet know. One does not desire the cloud because of the rain; the cloud is only desired for the benefits which result from it."

Divine inspiration must be desired for its benefits, and not for the contentment which the sensitive soul finds in it, as the cloud is desired for the fruits which the trees produce thanks to the rain which falls from the cloud, and not simply for the rain. The fruit of the divine inspiration is no other than the desire which it produces in the heart to change its condemnable qualities into other, praiseworthy qualities. If, therefore, you are not aware that said benefit has been produced, do not glory in the inspiration nor become joyful when you receive it, for this contentment is an illusion that you suffer and a deception which you endure, fix your attention in the exterior appearance with which you are covered. Beware, therefore, of this illusion.(84)

[Sentence 226: God Alone Is Sufficient.]

"Do not desire nor seek that divine inspirations continue, after, by means of them, God has showered His lights and deposited His mysteries in your soul, because, having God, you have no need of anything else, and, on the other hand, without God nothing will benefit you."

The lights of the inspirations which God showers upon His servant modify his exterior and interior

proportioning them the qualities of service, and the mysteries by which God deposits in the heart causing it to contemplate the majesty of His sovereignty. When, therefore, the divine inspiration produces these mystical effects, do not desire that God should grant you more time in that state, nor lose hope and become afflicted for its loss should you come to lose it, because with God you have enough so that you do not need said inspiration nor any other, while without Him nothing will suffice for you nor will be of any use to you, as the poet says:

“Everything, should you lose it, has its compensation;

But if you lose God, there is nothing that can compensate for it.”

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For this reason Abu 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ata Allah said: “Beware of putting your eyes on a created thing, while you find a path to put your eyes on God.” In the idea expressed by Ibn 'Ata' Allah with the words “created thing” are included all those beings which are not God, including divine lights, the mystical states, the rewards of the future life, as well as the goods of the present life, the interior graces as well as the exterior graces. Therefore, do not put your eyes on any of these things, nor repose in them, nor lean on them, whether they endure or whether they disappear, for this will destroy the purity of intention with which one must serve God alone.

Says the author of the book titled *Tanwir*: “Keep in mind that God, if He introduces to you a mystical state, it is only that from it you will benefit from it and not for that which you yourself pretend in relation to it. This mystical state has not been granted to you except to draw you, by the will of God, to an intuitive contemplation of Him. Receive it, therefore, in the name of God, Who is the initiator of everything. It is He Who initiates your mystical state and it is He Who prolongs it, until causing you arrive at the goal which is conceded to you in that state. When you have reached security, receive it in the name of God, Who is the sustainer of all things. It is He who repeats your state and it is He who completes it. Therefore, do not seek nor desire the presence of the messenger, after he has delivered his message; nor the presence of the vender on credit after he has brought the merchandise. Those who vainly presume to be perfect are the only ones who feel shame on being deprived of their mystical states and deposed from the ranks of divine communication. It is then that the hidden vice is made manifest and the veils are rent. How many are those who presume to be content with God alone and nevertheless, whose contentment is

measured in his visions, in his illuminations and his revelations! And How many are they who presume to seek nothing but the glory of God and only love their own glorification for the prestige of which they enjoy among the people, based precisely in the fame which the contemplatives have! Be, therefore, the slave of God and not the slave of created, temporal things. Thus, as God is for you Lord for no reason, you are for Him servant for no reason, for you will be for Him as He is for you."

Says Abu-l-'Abbas of Murcia: "There are two classes of servants: he who, in the mystical state, is with said state, and he who is With God, Who has granted the mystical state. The first is servant of his mystical state, and the second is the servant of God

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who has granted it. The distinctive sign of the first is this: that he is afflicted when he loses his mystical state and is joyous when he achieves it. The characteristic sign of the second is this: that neither is he joyous when he achieves the mystical state nor is saddened when he loses it."(85)

[Sentence 227: God Alone Is Sufficient.]

"If you put your effort in preserving something which is not of God, it is a sign that you have not yet found Him. And if you are saddened when you lose something which is not God, it is a sign that you have not yet achieved union with Him."

The encounter with God and the union with Him is the crown of the aspirations of the servant, the object of his hopes and desires, for which he gains his happiness, which consists in enjoying the grace of the King of Majesty. Then he forgets every other object worthy of being loved, and abandons every other being, worthy of being desired and enjoyed with happiness. This is the condition unique to those mystics who live only with God, separated from that which is not Him and hidden behind the veil of the memory of his glorious Lord.(86)

[Sentence 239: Adversity Brings us Closer to God.]

"God permits that men harm you so that you will not seek their support, because He wishes to free you from all things so that nothing will keep you from seeking support only in Him."

The damage which the servant of God receives at the hands of men is an immense grace which does you a great favor, in particular when the damage is done by those persons by whom one should expect to be treated with

benevolence and pity, with respect and veneration, because this ill treatment cause the servant of God not to trust in men nor to seek their support, and thus cease to be familiar with them in order to put all his effort in completely achieving his condition as servant of God.

Said Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "Once I was harmed by a certain person and could not abide it; but later I went to sleep and in dreams a voice said to me: "The sign characteristic of the sincere friends of God is this: that they have many enemies and that, nevertheless, are not worried by this."

Said a contemplative mystic: "The cry of pain
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because of the unjust attack by an enemy is the whiplash with which God strikes the hearts when they seek rest in something which is not Him. Without this whiplash, the servant of God would sleep trusting in the shadow of the mundane honors and glory, which are veils which impede that one reaches the God of Majesty."

And said Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Sallam, master of Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili, said in one of his prayers: "Oh my God! There are people who ask You that you force Your creatures to submit to his orders and You grant what they ask and with this they are satisfied. Oh my God! On the contrary, I ask that You force me to submit to the tyranny of Your creatures, so that I will have no refuge save in You."

Says the author of the book *Latayf al-minan*: "Take note that the most usual is that the friends of God, in the first steps of the spiritual life, live in submission to the harsh treatment of the people, so that thus they are purged of their defects which they yet possess and adopt completely the habits of virtue which they lack. God also thus disposes them, so that they will not seek repose in the support of the creatures, nor ask succor from them. Of he who does you a service it is evident, in effect, that he makes of you his slave, because of the gratitude which you owe to him. Said the Prophet: "To him who extends you his hand to give you something it is just that you respond in kind; and if this is not possible, you must at least pray to God for him." All this in order to free your heart of the slavery contracted for the benefits received from the creature and to be only obliged to God. For this reason the master Abu-l-Hasan alShadili said: "flee from the kind man far more readily than you flee from the malicious man, because the kind man will wound you in the heart, while the malicious one will wound you only in your body, and the wound in the heart is far more serious than the wound in the body. An enemy, by whose means you come closer to God, is better for you than and friend who separates you from God. From the kind welcome

with which men greet you will come the dark night of the soul, while from the insults that you suffer will come the joyous day. Do you not see that with their kind welcome they seduce and tempt you?" For this reason the harsh treatment to which the saints in their first passes in the spiritual life by the people is the habitual conduct which God follows with his friends and chosen ones. In relation to this point says the same Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "Oh my God! For them you have decreed vileness so that they may be ennobled, and to non-being so that they may find being.

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All nobility which separates us from You, we ask that it may be exchanged for vileness, but accompanied by the gifts of mercy. All encounters which veil our eyes so that we cannot see You, we ask that they be changed to loss, accompanied by the lights of Your love."

"In the same manner, he who feels spiritual sweetness in the mystical state or he who feels a sensation of peace in an abode, it is the habitual conduct of God with His friends to perturb them or cause them ill being, because God is jealous of their hearts and does not wish them to become familiar with anything that is not Him, nor that they become enchained by the affection of the creatures."

On this point the learned Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushairi said: "One of the hidden causes which separate the soul from God is the confident repose in the spiritual sweetness which God causes you to feel in the various stages of your approach to Him, as though in those moments in which He speaks to you in a familiar manner you are filled with love and affection. All the new favor which distinguishes and consoles you beneath it hides a deceptive spiritual illusion. The soul which has the good fortune to avoid it is that to whom God has revealed the contemplation of His majesty and beauty, and not for the peace and repose in the enjoyment of his mystical states and of the graces and favors with which God distinguishes him."

From this we conclude that the practice of pious exercises, in order to seek this spiritual sweetness, is considered by the mystics to be a secret sensuality and voluptuousness. This is the sense of what my master Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili said, when he first made the acquaintance of his spiritual master Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Sallam, who asked him concerning the state of his soul, 'Abd al-Sallam replied: "I complain to God for the fresh sweetness which resignation and abandonment to His will produces in me, the same as you complain to Him of the feverish ardor which the activity and exercise of your own freedom." To which replied Abu-l-Hasan al-Shadili: "My complaints for the feverish ardor which I feel in the exercise of my free will and independent

activity, effectively I have enjoyed them and still enjoy them. But you complain to God of the fresh sweetness which is produced by your obedience to the divine will and your surrender into God's hands, this I do not understand." Replied 'Abd al-Sallam: "It is that I fear that the sweetness of both mystical states will distract me and distance me from God."

My master Abu-l-'Abbas of Murcia also said in this connection: "Divine favor is a veil which conceals that which it concedes. In other words: to repose in the
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favor received, to rest and detain oneself in it, to enjoy it and be happy to possess it." (87)

The alternating states of "wideness" and "straitness" experienced by the mystics are both imperfect, provisional states.

"He who believes that the Divine Decrees are not accompanied by Divine Favors, it is because of his short-sightedness." Sentence 115. (58)

The same point given above by ibn Abbad, Sister Anne of Jesus, Sana'i and Rumi.

"Frequently God reveals to you, in the night of desolations that which He does not reveal to you in the day of consolation. Can it be that you do not know which of the two is more useful?" Sentence 159. (89)

Lucid and concise expression of the "Dark Night of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross, two centuries before the time of the great Castilian Christian mystic.

"Frequently you will find in tribulations an increase in fervor, which you will not find in fasting and prayer." Sentence 182. (90)

Same point as above, in Sentence 115.

Frequently obscurity falls upon you, so that you may come to know the value of the graces with which God favors you." Sentence 204. (91)

Same point as in Sentence 159, once again prefiguring the Dark Night of the Soul of St. John of the Cross.

"Do not desire nor seek that Divine Inspiration continue, after God by this means has spilled lights in your soul and deposited His mysteries, because having God, you need nothing else, and without Him everything is worthless. Sentence 226. (92)

Same idea found in all mysticism: he who has God has everything, he who is without God has nothing.

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In the work of Fr. Asin one sees quite clearly how much St. John of the Cross owed to Ibn Abbad, one of his Hispano-Muslim Sufi forerunners. The similarity between ibn Abbad and the Carmelite School of Christian Mysticism is very clear, and, as a matter of fact, obvious. However, as we have shown, most of said similarities are in reality widely found among the mystics of all the great religions. The interrelations between Sufism and Christian Mysticism are particularly close and intimate. It would be a very narrow and bigoted mind which would deny the continuity between Early Christian Mysticism and Sufism. Later Sufism "returned the favor", and later Christian Mysticism owes a great deal to Sufism.

Far more convincing are the semantic parallels between ibn Abbad and St. John of the Cross, which indeed appear to be far too close to be mere coincidences. There is something yet more convincing.

The most original element in ibn Abbad is his "Dark Night of the Soul". This is a rather complex concept, with various layers of symbolism and poetic metaphor and imagery. It is found in a very embryonic form in the writings of Rumi, as we said before. That this same concept, albeit a bit more polished and developed,

is used by St. John of the Cross is indeed a convincing proof of the debt of St. John of the Cross to his forerunner of Ronda. The basic thesis of Fr. Asin is fundamentally correct.

However, some further comment is necessary. Sr. Asin, like his great disciple Emilio Garcia Gomez, was an Arabist but not an

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Iranist and even less an Indianist. It is no doubt for this reason that many aspects of the complex relation between St. John of the Cross and Sufism were not touched on by this great Arabist. Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and of the Sharia or Islamic Law, but Persian is the real language of Sufism. Thus, the Masnavi of Rumi is often called "The Qur'an of the Persian Language".(93) Likewise Sanskrit, being at once the language nearest to the original Indo-European language, is the language of mysticism par excellence. Any study of Sufism done from an Arabist or Semiticist point of view, without a good knowledge of Iranian, Indo-Aryan and even Indo-European studies is bound to be incomplete, or, as is said in Spanish, *cojo* (lame). A surprising number of Arabists seem to think that Persian is a "variant of Arabic", apparently not being aware that it is an Indo-European and not a Semitic tongue.

While Fr. Asin was certainly aware that Persian is not a "variant form of Arabic" but an Indo-European language, the above is very largely true in reference to the works of Sr. Asin on the origins of Sufism and his work on the Hispano-Muslim forerunners of St. John of the Cross: correct enough as far as it goes, but incomplete.

First of all, it should be noted that ibn Abbad, born in 1371, was almost certainly influenced by the Persian sufis and dervishes spoken of by ibn Batuta and others. While his vocabulary and his concept of the Dark Night of the Soul seem to be original enough, the basic idea is, as we have shown, found in

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the works of Sana'i, one of the first of the great Persian sufi poets as well as in the works of Rumi. The renunciations of the charismas typical of ibn Abbad and the Carmelite mystics is, as we have shown, very far from being original.

More important, as we have seen, the similarities between the mystical theory and literary style of St. John of the Cross on the one hand and those of the great Persian sufis on the other are at least as close as those between ibn Abbad and St. John of the Cross, as well as far more numerous. Said similarities or parallels between St. John of the Cross on the one hand and the Persian sufi poets and Suhrawardi on the other are much more extensive, i.e., they cover far more ground, than is the case of St. John of the Cross and ibn Abbad. The similarities or parallels with ibn Abbad are found nearly exclusively in Dark Night of the Soul; the similarities or parallels with the great Persian sufi poets and esoterics, particularly, Sana'i, al-Ghazzali, Rumi, Suhrawardi, Saadi and Ansari of Herat permeate all of the major works of St. John of the Cross, and appear with great frequency and insistence in the prose. Indeed, the poetry of St. John of the Cross is very nearly an anthology of Persian sufi verse written in Spanish. In addition to the examples given

above, I wish to give more examples from Rumi:

They say that the blazing fire is the infidel's portion
I have seen none, save Abu Labab (bitter enemy of the Prophet
Muhammad, condemned to Hellfire in Quran CXI) excluded from
Thy fire. (94).

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Often I laid the spiritual ear at the window of the heart
I heard much discourse, but lips I did not see (95).

From the body You are far, but in my heart, fronting Your
face is a window;
Through that secret window, like the Moon, I am sending You
a message (96).

The parallel between the first two lines of the first
quotation and various works of St. John of the Cross, particularly
Living Flame of Love, is so obvious that no comment is really
necessary; exactly like St. John of the Cross, Rumi is speaking of
the Heavenly Fire of Love.

Compare the second and third quotations with these citations
from St. John of the Cross:

"And thus, being that the soul is in the body, it is as
though it were in a dark prison and knows nothing save
that which it comes to see by way of the windows of
said prison, and if it sees nothing there, it will see
nothing" (97).

"And thus the soul is like this window, through which is
ever passing, or, rather, in which is ever dwelling this
Divine Light of the Presence (literally "Being") of
God." (98)

And again says Rumi:

Dismiss cares and be utterly clear of heart
Like the face of a mirror without image and picture
When it becomes clear of all images, all images are
(1168)

contained in it (99).

When the spirit lovingly embraces Thee

In Thy presence all images become spirit (100).

St. John of the Cross says:

"In giving place the soul which is free of all veils (remember the Mishkat al-anwar of al-Ghazzali and its exegesis of the "Hadith of the Veils") and marks of
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creature, which consists in having the will perfectly united with that of God, because to love is to work to discover and benude the soul of all that which is not God for the sake of God - it is then clarified and transformed in God, and God communicates His Supernatural Presence (literally "Being") in such a way that it appears to be God Himself and has that which has God Himself". (101)

Says Rumi;

Let us give up earth and fly heavenward
Let us flee from childhood to the banquet of men (102)

And St. John of the Cross:

"Now we have given to understand how the things of the senses and knowledge and that which the spirit may derive from them are children's games; and thus, if the soul wishes always to cling to them, it will never cease to be a little child, and will always speak of God as does a child, and know of God as does a child, and think of God as does a child, because clinging to the bark of the senses it will never reach the essence of the spirit, which is the perfect man (remember Suhrawardi).
And thus, the soul must not wish to admit said (sensual) revelations, even though God proffers them, as a child must leave (his mother's) breast to adapt his palate to more substantial and stronger fare."(103)

And again Rumi:

I am a painter, a maker of picture; every moment I shape a beautiful form
And then in Your Presence I melt them away (104)

And St. John of the Cross:

"In this second book, the first subject is the interior corporal sense, which is imagination and fantasy from which we must also empty all imaginary forms and apprehensions which may naturally appear in it, and prove that it is impossible that the soul reach Union

with God until all operations of these senses ceases in it, because they cannot be a proper means for Union with God."(105)

Thus it is perfectly clear how near is St. John of the Cross in his mystical vocabulary (allowing for language differences, of
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course) and poetic style, i.e., imagery, metaphors, symbolism, even to some extent versification techniques, to the Persian sufis. One may easily imagine the works of St. John of the Cross without the influence of ibn Abbad, since such influence is found only in Dark Night of the Soul and its prose commentary of the same title; however, take away all which so forcefully calls to mind Suhrawardi and the great Persian Sufi poets and St. John of the Cross would be reduced to a spiritual counselor in the tradition of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory Palamas as well as a minor poet, his uniqueness and greatness as poet and thinker gone.

In summary, Persian Sufis and Dervishes came to the Kingdom of Granada, particularly in the 13th and 14th Centuries, and their influence there was very considerable, combining with the sufi and esoteric traditions of al-Andalus. Later this influence passed to St. John of the Cross by way of the Moriscos and perhaps other means as well. Spain and Safavi Persia were both mortal enemies of the Ottoman Turks; during this time Spaniards did visit Persia, and did learn the Persian language while there. St. John of the Cross may have been in direct or indirect contact with said ambassadors. While there is no documentary proof of this, the thing itself is perfectly possible.

The observations of Fr. Asin relative to the evident influence of ibn Abbad do not weaken one whit the thesis that St. John of the Cross owed a great deal to the Persian Sufis; rather they strengthen it, being yet another proof that St. John of the

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Cross was in contact with the Moriscos and from them learned much.

Nor does all this detract from the genius of St. John of the Cross as a poet and mystic. Of the many millions who have read the verse of the Persian Sufi poets (and St. John of the Cross knew this verse only indirectly), how many have been able to compose such works of genius as are the poems of St. John of the Cross? The fact that St. John of the Cross was so open to said influence is a proof of the fact that he was an initiate in the esoteric path and of the ecumenism typical of all true mystics. If Rumi is the St. John of the Cross of Persia, then St. John of the Cross is the Rumi of Spain.

