

CHAPTER THREE

IBLĪS: MODEL OF THE MYSTIC MAN

A. *The Science of Opposites*

1. *Iblīs: preacher, monotheist, and martyr*

This inquiry thus far has taken us through many of the pertinent texts that contain elements for the construction of Iblīs' mythic biography. Qur'ān, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *qīṣaṣ*, historical texts—each was shown to play a critical role in shaping the Iblīs legend. From this vantage point a more detailed inquiry was initiated into the development of the Iblīs motif within a specifically Sufi context. What can be pinpointed as the underlying element of unity at the heart of this second stage of the examination is the conviction, shared by all the Sufi practitioners whose works were cited, that Iblīs is clearly a negative force within the spiritual life.

This conviction, however, did not in any way limit the developmental scope of Iblīs both as mythic figure and religious symbol. On the contrary, the involvement of Iblīs in Sufi life ranged from sober discussions of religious psychology to highly charged, dramatic encounters which reflect Sufi preoccupations with thorny ascetical and theological issues, such as how one deals with God's *irāda* and *amr*.

Despite the subtle and complex variations manifested within the personality of Iblīs, the predominant motivation discovered at the core of his being was unabashed evil, albeit capable of clothing itself in an infinite variety of appealing forms. The final verdict rendered by the Sufis who perceived Iblīs in this light was "guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt." Moreover, in their estimation, there is no possible hope for his future rehabilitation; Iblīs is condemned to an eternity of torment in Hell.

In addition to the above strands of the Iblīs motif that were woven into the fabric of the Sufi tradition, a parallel strand has yet to be examined, one that can be traced back to the early periods of Sufism. The underlying presupposition of the Sufi theorists whose works illustrate this parallel development differs considerably from that encountered in the Sufi texts of Chapter 2. While the latter Sufis held that Iblīs had earned eternal damnation for himself because of his arrogant refusal to bow before Adam, the former propose a variety of hopeful avenues for the possible rehabilitation of Iblīs. Even though this belief in the possible redemption of Satan functions as a unifying substratum in the works of

those Sufis who will be the focus of Chapter 3, a broad diversity in approach, theme, and expression will become apparent as the discussion progresses.

The roots for this branch of the Iblīs motif can be found, as Professor Annemarie Schimmel has pointed out, in the writings of Ḥusayn Ibn Maṣṣūr Al-Ḥallāj,¹ especially the chapters *Tāsīn al-azal wa ʿl-iltibās* and *Tāsīn al-mashīʿa* of his work *Kitāb at-tawāsīn*. The text of the *Kitāb at-tawāsīn* is preserved both in the original Arabic (edited by Louis Massignon) and in Persian translation with extensive commentary by the renowned mystic of the 12th-13th centuries, Rūzbihān Al-Baqlī (most recently edited by Henry Corbin). The Persian text with commentary of Al-Baqlī is invaluable for extracting the meaning of a difficult and often obscure Arabic text; it also provides a fine example of a more sober Sufi's struggle to deal with Al-Ḥallāj's paradoxical and seemingly unorthodox attitude towards Iblīs.

One of the most striking pedagogical techniques employed by Al-Ḥallāj in his work is the juxtaposition of opposites; it jolts the reader's mind and forces him to ponder these antithetical spiritual realities anew. The first pair of opposites is made up of Iblīs and Muḥammad: "The only ones whose preaching was sound are Iblīs and Aḥmad—may God bless him and grant him peace!"² This sound preaching of Iblīs is itself described by Al-Ḥallāj as a combination of opposites; in the heavens Iblīs preached to the angels about obedience and the Path to God, while on earth he taught mankind the ways of Evil.³ However, these opposite poles become complementary when viewed from the perspective of their ultimate purpose:

Because things are known through their opposites, fine white silk is woven with a backing of coarse black wool. The angel can point out good deeds to someone and say to him as an abstract statement, 'If you perform these deeds you will be rewarded.' But he who does not know evil in the concrete, cannot know good.⁴

As pointed out before, Ibn Ghānim alludes to this Ḥallājian theme in the *Taflīs Iblīs*,⁵ but in a substantially different context. In Ibn Ghānim's

¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 194.

² Ḥusayn Ibn Maṣṣūr Al-Ḥallāj, *Kitāb at-tawāsīn*, ed. Louis Massignon (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1913), p. 41 #1. The Massignon edition also contains the Persian text of Al-Baqlī. However, in this essay the more recent Persian edition of Henry Corbin, which contains both the text and commentary of Al-Baqlī, will be used. See Rūzbihān Al-Baqlī Ash-Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-i shāḥīyāt (Commentaire sur les paradoxes des soufis)*, ed. Henry Corbin (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1966), p. 509 #972.

³ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, p. 49 #18; Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 524 #1007.

⁴ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, p. 49 #19.

⁵ See Ch. 2, pp. 106-107.

account, the tragic soliloquy of Iblīs cannot be separated from his belief in the essential corruption of the Iblīs nature; Al-Ḥallāj, on the other hand, sees both Iblīs and Muḥammad as pivotal characters in the unfolding of God's divine plan. They are both faithful instruments whose obedience is unswerving, despite the vicissitudes each must suffer.

Iblīs was told, 'Bow!' and Aḥmad was told, 'Look!' But this fellow did not bow and Aḥmad did not look. He turned his face neither right nor left. 'His eye turned not aside nor did it wander from its orbit' (Qurʾān 53:17).⁶

This fidelity to God's will forever links Iblīs and Muḥammad in the eyes of Al-Ḥallāj. Neither strayed from his appointed course, although each reacted quite differently to encounters with God's *amr*. Iblīs fell back on the resources of his own majestic power and spiritual perfection acquired through aeons of obedient worship, while Muḥammad was overcome by the sense of his own creatureliness and God's overwhelming might.⁷ Al-Ḥallāj does not ascribe moral significance to this difference between the reactions of Iblīs and Muḥammad; however, Al-Baqlī seizes on it as an opportunity to reiterate the oft-repeated condemnation of Iblīs based on his preoccupation with power. This preoccupation, Al-Baqlī insists, blinded Iblīs to the true nature of Adam and thereby nullified the value of his previous obedience and preaching.⁸

Nevertheless, Iblīs is singled out by Al-Ḥallāj for these two eminent qualities, preaching and single-minded obedience. He is also, in Al-Ḥallāj's estimation, spiritual model for all Muslims because he, more perfectly than any other created being, witnessed to the Unity and Oneness of God, even at the expense of self-destruction.

There was no monotheist like Iblīs among the inhabitants of the heavens. When the essence revealed itself to him in stunning glory, he renounced even a glance at it and worshipped God in ascetic isolation.... God said to him, 'Bow!' He replied, 'To no other!' He said to him, 'Even if My curse be upon you?' He cried out, 'To no other!'

My refusal is the cry, 'Holy are You!'
 my reason is madness, madness for You.
 What is Adam, other than You?
 and who is Iblīs to set apart one from the other?⁹

This daring proclamation of Iblīs as the perfect monotheist scandalized Al-Baqlī who was at a loss to find a sober interpretation for this apparent heresy of Al-Ḥallāj. Al-Baqlī was driven to attack Al-Ḥallāj's basic

⁶ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, p. 41 # 2. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 509 # 976.

⁷ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, p. 42 # 3-5. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 509-510 # 976.

⁸ Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 510-512 # 977-979.

⁹ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, pp. 42-43 # 6-7, 9-10. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 512-514 # 980, 984, 986.

presupposition that Iblīs was faced with a real choice between worshipping God or an “other”. There really was no “other” there, asserts Al-Baqlī; it was the veiled state of Iblīs that induced his double vision. Were he a true monotheist, he would have seen only God’s glory and obeyed this command of the Almighty.

He was unaware that Adam was God’s creation, and God’s creation mirrors Him. If you should look into the mirror, you would see Him clearly. Thus it has been said, ‘I have gazed upon nothing without seeing God in it.’¹⁰

The paradoxical juxtaposition of opposites reaches a peak when Al-Ḥallāj turns not to Iblīs alone, but to both Iblīs and Pharaoh for models of the spiritual life. The virtue they share in common is *futūwa*, a term that comprises all of the noble and chivalrous qualities of the Muslim knight, especially fidelity and dedication to duty. Al-Ḥallāj tells of a discussion he had with both of these cosmic figures concerning this virtue of noble manliness:

I debated with Iblīs and Pharaoh about manliness. And Iblīs said, ‘If I bowed, I would have lost the title of manliness.’ And Pharaoh said, ‘If I had believed in His messenger, I would have fallen from the rank of manliness.’ And I said, ‘If I had gone back on my preaching and my sayings, I would have slipped from the carpet of manliness.’...

My friend and my teacher are Iblīs and Pharaoh. Iblīs was threatened with the fire, but he did not go back on his preaching. And Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea, but he did not acknowledge any mediator at all.... And if I were killed, or crucified, or if my hands and feet were cut off, I would not go back on my preaching.¹¹

Unwilling to accept these anti-heroes as spiritual guides, Al-Baqlī minimizes Al-Ḥallāj’s assertions, and, in the process, illustrates again the schizophrenic attitude many less intoxicated Sufis take towards Al-Ḥallāj. On the one hand, Al-Baqlī expresses continued reverence and respect for the spiritual wisdom of Al-Ḥallāj; yet, at the same time, he is incapable of accepting the ecstatic and paradoxical essence of Al-Ḥallāj’s doctrine. For it to be acceptable to Al-Baqlī, the Ḥallājian corpus must be neutralized by means of a commentary that envelops the paradoxical in logic, the shocking in sobriety, and the antinomian in the mantle of the law. In conformity with this *modus operandi*, Al-Baqlī takes the attribution of *futūwa* by Al-Ḥallāj to Iblīs and Pharaoh and reduces it to an acknowledgement by Al-Ḥallāj of their extraordinary, though misguided, courage.

¹⁰ Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 513-515 #985, 987. The quotation is found on p. 515 #987.

¹¹ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsin*, pp. 49-52 #20, 21, 24, and 25. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 373-374 #673.

Al-Baqlī completely separates the abstract virtue of *futūwa* from the morality of the concrete acts of Iblīs and Pharaoh which he can only characterize as anti-religious. He states that any act of bravery is a laudable deed, even when performed by an unbeliever; as proof Al-Baqlī quotes the Sufi saying, “A generous fool is closer to God than a miserly wise man.”¹²

Al-Baqlī points to Iblīs and Pharaoh’s acts of perverted *futūwa* as proof of the fantasies that can be sparked by ecstatic religious experience. Before his fall Iblīs was lost in the sea of gnosis (*maʿrifa*), explains Al-Baqlī, and this very ecstasy spawned his prideful delusions.

Because of God he became deluded about God. The sea of Oneness (*tawhīd*) flung him on the shore of isolation.... Ignorance deceived him into abandoning intermediaries (i.e. Adam). He cried out, ‘It is associationism to acknowledge intermediaries in the ascetic isolation of Oneness!’¹³

In the mind of Al-Baqlī, Iblīs’ experience was not true *tawhīd* but the direct result of the sin of “I”.¹⁴ An identical case, Al-Baqlī insists, is Al-Ḥallāj’s own “*Ana ʿl-Ḥaqq!*” (“I am the Divine Truth!”). His ecstasy blinded him to the differentiation between himself and God, and he saw only “I”. This, however, cannot be interpreted as an expression of metaphysical identity; it is, on the contrary, analogous to God’s breathing into Adam at creation, which did not transform Adam into an incarnation of the divine, but did allow him to shine forth the Spirit of God. “*Ana ʿl-Ḥaqq!*” is, therefore, only an ecstatic witness to the fact that Al-Ḥallāj, like every created being, reflects the *vestigia Dei*, traces of the divine, creative Spirit.¹⁵

Al-Baqlī’s commentary continually refuses to deal candidly with the paradoxical kernel at the heart of the teachings of Al-Ḥallāj. In the *Ṭawāsīn* no moral blame is ascribed to Iblīs, as Al-Baqlī would prefer. Nor is Iblīs depicted as the blackhearted deceiver who manipulates his tragic situation in order to ingratiate himself with mankind. Iblīs, as portrayed in the *Ṭawāsīn*, is a tragic, martyr figure, who, despite his dedicated preaching, perfect monotheism, and eternal loyalty, suffers destruction at the hands of the God whom he lovingly worships.

He was told, ‘Do you not bow, O despicable creature?’ He replied, ‘You say “despicable creature” but I read in a book of evident truths what will come to pass for me, O Powerful, Steadfast One!’ How could I humble myself before him? You created me from fire and You created him from clay; they are opposites that will never accord. I am older in service, more

¹² Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 375-376 # 676.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 376 # 677.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 377 # 679.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 377-379 # 681-682.

advanced in virtue, more skilled in knowledge, and more perfect in the way I lead my life.' God said to him, 'The choice is Mine, not yours.' He replied, 'All choices, mine included, belong to You! You have already chosen for me, O Creator. If You have prevented my bowing to him, You are Preventer. If I have sinned in speech, You do not forsake me, for You are the All-Hearing. If You willed that I bow to him, I would have been the obedient one. I know of no one among the gnostics who knows You better than me!'¹⁶

Iblīs is a martyr to the transcendent God whose designs cannot be encompassed by the created spirit. Al-Ḥallāj describes this unfathomable realm as a series of four circles: the first is the circle of God's will; the second, His wisdom; the third, His omnipotence; the fourth, His pre-eternal knowledge. It is impossible for Iblīs to pass through these circles unscathed. Were he to escape the first, he would be put to the test in the second; were he to struggle past the second, the third would await him, and so on through all the circles that make up God's foreordained plan.¹⁷

If I had learned that bowing would save me, I would have bowed. But I learned that beyond that circle lay the other circles. And I said to myself, 'Granting I am saved from this circle, how will I be delivered from the second? the third? the fourth?'¹⁸

Al-Baqlī refers in his commentary to an alleged further amplification by Al-Ḥallāj of Iblīs' wrestling with these circles of divine power:

From the science of will, wisdom, omnipotence, and knowledge I learned that my recompense was that I be driven away. Whether I bow or not, I have taken hold of God's intention. On the tablet of God's will I had read, 'Iblīs is an unbeliever.' On the page of wisdom I had read, 'Iblīs is accursed.' On the scroll of omnipotence I had read, 'Iblīs is banished.' And in the mother of books I had read, 'Iblīs is veiled.' If from the first circle I find escape, I will be put to the test in a similar way in the other circles: 'For He is the All-Powerful over His servants.' Bowing profits not; 'the pen has dried up concerning what He will create, forever.'¹⁹

It would be easy to assume from Al-Ḥallāj's enormous emphasis on the determinative power of God's will that Iblīs is simply a puppet manipulated according to the changing patterns of the divine plan. This perspective overlooks his interest throughout the *Ṭawāsīn* in the interior states of Iblīs, especially his emotional turmoil when faced with the conflict between God's will and His command. Iblīs is no empty, emotionless product of determinism. The most significant sign of the true

¹⁶ Al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāsīn*, pp. 52-53 # 27-28. See also Ch. 2, p. 107 for Ibn Ghānim's borrowing of the Ḥallājian theme.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56 # 1-2. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 527 # 1013.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57 # 4. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 527-528 # 1013.

¹⁹ Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 528 # 1014.

reciprocity of the relationship between Iblīs and God is the conviction expressed by Al-Ḥallāj that the motivating force behind Iblīs' choices, especially his refusal to bow, is not coercion, but the depth of his mystic contemplation of the Beloved: "The angels bowed to Adam as a gesture of support. Iblīs refused to bow because of the long duration of his contemplation."²⁰ The essence of contemplation is the free gift of self in love, a mutual self-donation; such an experience cannot come about through compulsion.

Al-Baqlī refused to accept the words of Al-Ḥallāj at their face value; he felt obliged to mitigate their impact by reducing Iblīs' experience of God to a vision of the kingdom of heaven apart from God. If he had truly contemplated the divine realm, God would not have called him *kāfir* (unbeliever), adds Al-Baqlī, who, again, shows himself unprepared to cope with Al-Ḥallāj's paradoxical juxtaposition of condemnation and moral uprightness in the person of Iblīs. In Al-Baqlī's mind, it is Adam, not Iblīs, who experienced contemplation and attained unique preeminence because of the spirit that God breathed into him.²¹

In corroboration of this stance Al-Baqlī quotes Abū Bakr Al-Wāsiṭī who teaches that one must not put great stock in protestations of faithful obedience, for there have been obedient Sufis whose obedience was nothing more than rote imitation, devoid of gnosis. viz., Iblīs.²² For-

²⁰ Al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāṣīn*, p. 55 #35. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 525 #1009.

This candid testimony by Al-Ḥallāj to the contemplation of Iblīs is the focus of an important textual disagreement. In the Arabic text of Massignon these lines form the dramatic conclusion to the chapter *Ṭāṣīn al-azal wa 'l-iltibās*. However, in the Persian text of Al-Baqlī that Massignon includes with the Arabic edition, several additional lines appear (supposedly part of Al-Baqlī's translation of the *Ṭawāṣīn* text) that denigrate the obedience of Iblīs, condemn his refusal to bow, and attribute his veiled state to the sin of "I" (*Ṭawāṣīn*, p. 55 #36). When juxtaposed with the above testimonial to Iblīs' contemplation, these lines tend to nullify the testimonial's impact by interpreting the claim to contemplation as a lie.

In his French translation of the *Ṭawāṣīn*, which appears in his monumental work on Al-Ḥallāj (*La passion de Husayn Ibn Manṣūr Ḥallāj*, 4 vols. new edition [Paris: Gallimard, 1975]), Massignon includes these added lines as part of the *Ṭawāṣīn* text (see *Passion*, 3:333). The same inclusion is made in the recent English translation of the *Ṭawāṣīn* which clearly is based on the earlier work of Massignon (*The Ṭawāṣīn of Manṣūr Al-Ḥallāj*, tr. Aisha Abd Ar-Rahman At-Tarjumana [Berkeley: Diwan Press, 1974], p. 49).

However, in the most recent edition of the Persian text by Henry Corbin (subsequent to the edition of Massignon) these lines are not included in the actual text of the *Ṭawāṣīn* but rather are to be found in the commentary of Al-Baqlī where they make far more logical sense, and are an integral part of Al-Baqlī's discussion of the contrast he perceives between Iblīs and Adam (see *Sharḥ*, p. 527 #1011). It therefore seems appropriate to rely on the Arabic edition of Massignon and the Persian edition of Corbin, but not on the Persian edition of Massignon or on the French and English translations of the *Ṭawāṣīn*, for an accurate picture of the text at this critical point.

²¹ Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 525-527 #1010-1011.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 300 #534.

tunately Al-Baqlī's commentary does not succeed in dimming the brilliance of Al-Ḥallāj's mystical vision of Iblīs. On the contrary, the Iblīs of the *Ṭawāsīn* stands forth as a testimony to the inherent power of mystic contemplation to carry the soul beyond the paradoxes and logical contradictions that permeate the mundane experience of materiality and individuality to an experience of annihilation in the Beloved.

He (Iblīs) fell into the ocean of omnipotence and became blind. He cried, 'My path leads to no one except You, for I am a humble lover.' He replied to him, 'You have boasted!' He answered, 'If there were but one glance between us, it would be right for me to boast about it and be puffed up. I am he who has known You in all eternity. I am better than he, because for ages past I have been in Your service. There is no one in the two worlds more knowledgeable about You than me. I directed my will towards You and You directed Your will towards me, and both were prior (to the creation of Adam). Whether I bow to another or do not bow, it is inevitable that I return to my origin. You created me from fire, and fire returns to fire. To You belong the decree and the free choice.

I no longer experience a sense of distance after being distanced from You,
since I have realized for certain that nearness and distance are one.
As for me, even if I am abandoned, then abandonment becomes my companion;

how right it is that abandonment and love are one!

May You be praised! in Your providence and Your pure essence,
for the sake of a guiltless worshipper who bows to no one but You.'²³

2. *Iblīs and Moses on Mount Sinai*

One central passage of the *Ṭāsīn al-azal wa 'l-iltibās* yet to be discussed represents Al-Ḥallāj's use of mythic fable to dramatize the personality of Iblīs. This particular tale recounts a meeting between Iblīs and Moses on Mount Sinai. Ibn Ghānim, too, incorporates much of this same passage into his own work,²⁴ however Al-Ḥallāj and Ibn Ghānim differ profoundly in their intentions. Ibn Ghānim aims to describe the wiles and deceptions of a tragic, cosmic figure whose internal corruption brought about his eternal damnation. Al-Ḥallāj means to highlight the paradoxical truth that condemnation and degradation can be the emblems of triumph for the mystic who is totally caught up in the contemplation of the Beloved.

Whereas the basic plot remains the same in both versions of the fable, the divergent theological concerns of each author make themselves felt throughout. The story begins in identical fashion in both texts with Moses encountering Iblīs after he, Moses, has spoken with God on

²³ Al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāsīn*, pp. 43-45 #11-12. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 515-516 #988-990, pp. 517-518 #992-993.

²⁴ See Ch. 2, pp. 107-108.

Mount Sinai. Moses questions Iblīs about his refusal to bow to Adam; Iblīs answers that it was his single-minded dedication to monotheism that would not allow him to look on another than God. Iblīs, in fact, chides Moses for permitting himself to be enticed to gaze upon the mountain instead of focusing his attention on God alone.²⁵ Al-Ḥallāj continues:

Moses said to him, 'You abandoned the command of God!' He replied, 'That was a test, not a command.' He said, 'But surely your form has been radically altered.' He answered, 'O Moses, that, well, that is but deception. This state is not at all reliable because it changes; but the gnosis is as sound as it was before, even if the outward person has changed.'

Moses asked him, 'Do you remember Him even now?' He replied, 'O Moses!

His remembrance is my remembrance, and my remembrance is His remembrance;

can it be that those who are remembering be anything but united together?'

'My service now is purer, my moments freer, and my *dhikr* clearer. For I used to serve Him for the sake of my own prosperity; now I serve Him for His.'

'We have eliminated the desire for self-interest from acts of prohibition and repudiation, loss and gain. He has separated me, filled me with longing, bewildered me, and driven me away lest I mingle with the faithful ones. He refused me access to others because of my jealous ardor. He deformed me because of my bewilderment; He bewildered me because of my exile; He exiled me because of my service; He made me a pariah because of my companionship; He reviled me because of my praise.... He separated me because of my unveiling of Him; He unveiled me because of my attainment of union. He brought me to union because of my being cut off; He cut me off to frustrate the object of my desire.'

'By His Truth!' I did not sin against His design; I did not reject His plan. I did not pay attention to the mutilation of my form, for throughout these fateful events, I am able to cope. If He should torment me with His fire for eternities on end, I would not bow to anyone. Nor would I grovel before any person or physical body, for I know of no adversary to Him, nor any child begotten of Him. My preaching is the preaching of truthful men, and I am a sincere lover.'²⁶

²⁵ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, pp. 45-46 #13. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 518 #994. The Qur'ānic verse alluded to here by Iblīs is Qur'ān 7:143:

And when Moses came to the time We appointed and his Lord spoke with him, he said, 'Lord, show me, that I may look upon You!' He replied, 'You will not see Me, but look at the mountain! If it stands firm in its place, you will see Me.' When God revealed His glory to the mountain, He turned it into dust; and Moses fell unconscious. When he revived, he cried out, 'Glory to You! I have repented, and I am the first of the believers!'

²⁶ Al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāsīn*, pp. 46-49 #14-17. See also Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 518-520 #994-995.

In the context of the *Ṭawāsin*, this passage leaves no doubt about the difference between Ibn Ghānim and Al-Ḥallāj, especially as regards each's judgement on the authenticity of the interior states of Iblīs. Ibn Ghānim is not alone, however, in interpreting this soliloquy of Iblīs as a sham, a subtle and skillfully executed seduction of Moses by Iblīs. Al-Baqlī, in his commentary on this fable, alludes to the time-honored Sufi insight that Iblīs has the power to appear in ecstatic visions in order to fill pious men with doubts about the authenticity of their spiritual states. This was already singled out as one of Iblīs' most potent spiritual weapons.²⁷ Al-Baqlī presents as additional proof a tale of Iblīs and Moses on Mount Sinai, similar to the one in Al-Ḥallāj's *Ṭawāsin*, where Iblīs shamelessly spins a web of confusion in which to ensnare Moses:

Iblīs said to Moses, 'Where are you coming from?' He replied, 'From my prayers to God.' He said, 'Did you consider that those words you heard might be mine?' Moses became very upset and angry. God Most High called to him, 'O Moses, drive this accursed one from your presence! For this is his accustomed play with the faithful.'²⁸

No one, Al-Baqlī warns, should presume that he is immune from this illusion created by Iblīs. Not only Moses, but Jesus, too, was accosted by Iblīs on a mountain road, ostensibly so that Iblīs could acknowledge and praise the extraordinary level of spiritual development that Jesus had attained: "O Jesus, your endeavor has achieved such preeminence that you are now god of the earth and He the god of the heavens!" Jesus disclaims any divine status and reaffirms his role as humble servant of God. Yet Iblīs does not abandon his purpose and vows to repeat his temptation of Jesus. One after the other, God sends his chief angels, Gabriel and Michael, to seize and bind Iblīs, and carry him off to the realm of the sun. But, undaunted, Iblīs devises his escape and returns to waylay Jesus once again upon the mountain road:

He shouted, 'O Jesus, you are the creator of the earth, and He is god of the heavens!' Jesus became frightened and cried out, saying, 'I am His servant, and by means of these signs He shows Himself to be the All-Holy, the Provident One.' Thereupon both Isrāfīl and 'Azrā'īl came and seized the accursed one; in the same way three hundred thousand angels came as reinforcements. They bound him in the pit of the West where they imprisoned him; there they kept guard until Jesus had finished his prayers.

²⁷ See Ch. 2, pp. 79-80 and especially note 105.

This belief in the power of Iblīs to appear in pseudo-mystic trance is found in the writings of Sufi masters two hundred years before Al-Baqlī (As-Sarrāj, Ibn Al-Khaffīf) and is still in evidence more than two hundred years later in the work of Jāmī. See 'Abd Ar-Rahmān Ibn Aḥmad Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, ed. Maḥdī Tawḥīdīpūr (Tehrān: Kitābfurūshī-yi Maḥmūdī, 1337 A.H. solar), pp. 245-246.

²⁸ Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, p. 520 #996.

After some days, he (Iblīs) saw him again and said, 'O Jesus! if they had not imprisoned me in the pit of the West, and had not bound me fast, and had not stationed three hundred thousand angels as guards, I would have done with you what I did with your father Adam!'²⁹

Al-Baqlī is undoubtedly convinced that Moses' vision of Iblīs described in the fable of Al-Ḥallāj is similar in worth to that experienced by Moses and Jesus in the two subsequent mythic tales that he relates. Moreover, it is Al-Baqlī's firm belief, expressed here and elsewhere, that no good can come from such a vision, for it contains no truth except the truth of the frightening power possessed by Iblīs, the father of lies and master of religious deception.³⁰

If Iblīs had seen Adam as the mirror of God, in the way that Moses perceived the miracle of the mountain, Iblīs would have bowed without question, choosing God's intention over his own, as Moses did.³¹ But no, he invented the fallacious distinction between God's *amr* and His *irāda*, alleging that God's command was only a test.³² Not even Iblīs' obvious deformation into a satanic being persuaded him to acknowledge his sin; it only stimulated him to invent a more fantastic lie, the claim that his gnosis was sound despite his ghoulish exterior.

One need only look to the case of the blessed Joseph, insists Al-Baqlī, to see what actually happens to one who is imbued with the contemplative experience of God, for the gnosis of Joseph transformed his exterior as well as his interior.³³ In short, the curse of Iblīs is a true curse; he is a true *kāfir* who strives to associate himself with God by claiming that he can somehow promote God's good fortune. Iblīs is veiled, arrogant, and isolated from the Divine Presence for all eternity.³⁴

While Al-Baqlī's exegesis of the mythic fable of Iblīs and Moses on Mount Sinai is an eloquent reiteration of the particular strand of the Iblīs tradition that views him in a negative light, it is not an exegesis substantiated by all other occurrences in the Sufi tradition of this tale. Ibn Al-Jawzī preserves another version of the Iblīs-Moses myth in his *Kitāb al-quṣṣā wa ʿl-mudhakkirīn* where he attributes the use of the fable to Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī, the brother of the renowned mystic-theologian Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī.³⁵ The story, as recounted by Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī by way of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 520-521 #997.

³⁰ Rūzbihān Al-Baqlī Ash-Shīrāzī, *Kitāb mashrab al-arwāḥ* (Istānbūl: Maṭbaʿa kullīyat al-ādāb, 1973 C.E.), pp. 274, 304.

³¹ Al-Baqlī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 521-522 #998. See also Qurʾān 7:143 (above).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 522 #999.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 522-523 #1000.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 523-524 #1001-1006.

³⁵ However Ibn Al-Jawzī does not recount this myth to laud the spiritual insight of Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī whom he considers 'one of God's marvels in lying.' In fact a bit

Ibn Al-Jawzī, begins in the same way as in the *Ṭawāsīn* of Al-Ḥallāj: Moses encounters Iblīs on the mountain road of Sinai and questions him about the reasons for his refusal to bow before Adam.

‘Never! I would never bow to a man. O Moses, you proclaimed God’s unity, but I am the true monotheist who has never paid attention to another than Him. You said (to God), “Show me!” but you looked toward the mountain. I am more faithful than you in monotheism; He said to me, “Bow to another!” I did not bow, but you turned to look.’ (Al-Ghazālī said, ‘Whoever does not learn monotheism from Iblīs, he is a dualist [*zindīq*].’) And Moses said to him, ‘Your outward form has changed from that of the angels to that of the satans.’ He replied, ‘That state changes and will continue to change. O Moses, every time He increases His love for someone other than me, I increase in my love for Him.’ He (Moses) asked him, ‘Do you remember Him still?’ He replied, ‘I am the remembered one whom He has remembered: “For upon you is My curse!” Has He not joined “My” and “you” together in this expression of curse?’

And he (Al-Ghazālī) said, ‘When Iblīs was driven away, he did not diminish his service, nor his love, not his *dhikr* in the least way.’³⁶

Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī’s use of this mythic fable is very much in the Ḥallājian mode; Iblīs is described as the most assiduous of monotheists whose loving devotion cannot be diminished, even by deformation and damnation. No hint appears at all of moral culpability that would support Al-Baqlī’s later exegesis of the fable.

One additional example of the Moses-Iblīs tale occurs in the work of the renowned Persian Sufi, Farīd Ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār who was a contemporary of Al-Baqlī. His poetic version of the fable differs from that of Al-Ḥallāj and Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī because it stresses the power of God’s decree more than Iblīs’ proclamation of the purity of his monotheism.

further on in the text, Ibn Al-Jawzī quotes Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāḥir Al-Maqdisī’s condemnation of the excesses of Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī:

I (Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāḥir Al-Maqdisī) heard him one day in Hamadhān say, ‘I (Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī) saw Iblīs inside this monastery. He bowed to me, and I said, “Woe to you!” for God Most High had ordered him to bow to Adam and he refused.’ And he (Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī) added, ‘And by God, he bowed to me more than seventy times!’ And so I realized that he would not return to his religion or the articles of faith. He also used to claim that he had visions of the prophet while he (Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī) was awake and not in his sleep. And he used to mention in his preaching that whenever something was problematic for him, he had a vision of the messenger of God, and he would ask him about the problem.’

See Abū Ṭ-Faraj ‘Abd Ar-Raḥmān Ibn Al-Jawzī Al-Qurayshī Al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-quṣṣās wa ṭ-mudhakkirīn*, ed. and tr. Merlin S. Swartz (Beirut: Dār el-machreq, 1971), pp. 105 l. 19-106 l. 7 of the Arabic text.

³⁶ Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-quṣṣās wa ṭ-mudhakkirīn*, p. 104 l. 3-14 of the Arabic text. This passage is also quoted by Louis Massignon in *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l’histoire de la mystique en pays d’Islam* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929), p. 96.

However, the outcome is the same, an increase in love and devotion by Iblīs notwithstanding the tragedy of his fate.

Again Moses is found upon Sinai's road; from a distance he espies the arrival of Iblīs whom he proceeds to interrogate about the reasons for his refusal to bow before Adam.

The accursed one replied, 'O you who are accepted in the Divine Presence!
I was driven away by the Almighty without reason.

If there had been a way for me to perform that bow,

I would be His intimate now, like you.

But since God Most High has willed thus,

what could I do to make things different for myself?'

The intimate of God said to him, 'O you who have fallen into servitude,
do you ever remember God?'

The accursed one answered, 'Since I am overcome with loving affection,
not for a moment do I ever forget Him.

For in the same way that I bear no rancor towards Him,

His love never leaves my heart.'

Although he is distanced from the threshold because of his curse,
nevertheless, according to this tale of Moses, he (Iblīs) is in the Divine Presence.

Although the curse engulfed his heart with fire,
because of that curse, his burning ardor increased.³⁷

From these few examples it is apparent that the Iblīs-Moses myth is expressive of the versatility inherent in mythic forms, for it is part of the very nature of the mythic literary mode that it be an artistic medium malleable enough to take on the contours intended by the artist. The instances in which this particular myth occurs are indicative of at least two very distinct strands of the Iblīs tradition: the more sober view, which bases its interpretation on the principle that all visions of Iblīs are the products of his power of deception, in spite of the emotional quality of his words and the tragedy of his separation; the more intoxicated view, which discovers in the complex, tragic personality of Iblīs the exemplar of loving self-sacrifice and the model for the life of mystic love.

3. *Iblīs: chamberlain of illa ʿllāh, black light of divine power, and curl on the cheek of the Beloved*

The science of opposites, which plays such a central role in Al-Ḥallāj's vision of Iblīs, undergoes amplification and refinement at the hands of another Sufi martyr, Abū ʿl-Maʿālī ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad ʿAlī Ibn Al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAlī Al-Mayānājī Al-Hamadhānī, known more commonly

³⁷ Farīd Ad-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Ilāhīnāma* ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istānbul: Maṭbaʿa maʿārif, 1940), p. 138 l. 3-11.

as 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, who was put to death at Hamadhān in the year 525 A.H./1131 C.E. At the heart of 'Ain Al-Quḍāt's perception of Iblīs and his role in the spiritual life lies a paradox. It is the insight that God's condemnation and distancing of Iblīs because of his refusal to bow have earned Iblīs cosmic stature and proximity to the Divine Presence. The images employed by 'Ain Al-Quḍāt to express this paradoxical intimacy of cosmic opposites—God and Satan—are unique and multifaceted. While the spirit of his Sufi theologizing owes much to Al-Ḥallāj, the richness and vitality of the religious and literary expression are due to his own particular genius.

'Ain Al-Quḍāt pinpoints the tension of cosmic opposites within the Muslim profession of faith itself, the *lā ilāh illa ʾllāh* (There is no god but God!). The realm of *lā ilāh* (There is no god) is the realm of falsehood and negation, the realm of all that seduces the soul of the mystic away from God. Truth and security are discovered only within the circle of *illa ʾllāh* (but God!), after *lā ilāh* has been traversed and left behind once and for all.³⁸

Lā is the circle of negation. One must place his first step within this circle, but he should not stop here nor dwell here. For if the traveller halts at this station or finds tranquility here, he becomes an associationist, a wearer of the *zunnār*. O what a tale there is about *lā ilāh*! You find that every hundred thousand travelling seekers of *illa ʾllāh* have set foot in the circle of the *lā* of negation, in their ardent desire for the jewel of *illa ʾllāh*. But if they take as their goal the inferior desert of God, the guardian of the Divine Presence of *illa ʾllāh* confounds and perplexes them.³⁹

Who is this guardian and chamberlain of the Divine Presence of *illa ʾllāh*? None other than Iblīs.⁴⁰ He has earned this position of honor because of his unfailing obedience to God and his jealous protection of the experience of intimacy with the Beloved. In addition, he is, as 'Ain Al-Quḍāt describes, the best qualified and most adept at testing mankind in order to separate those truly worthy of access to the Divine Presence from those whose dedication and fidelity are but superficial and easily snatched away. These latter souls find themselves trapped within the circle of *lā* where they continue to worship their *nafs* and carnal desires rather than God.⁴¹

³⁸ Abū ʾl-Maʿālī 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī Al-Mayānājī Al-Hamadhānī ('Ain Al-Quḍāt), *Tamhīdāt*, ed. 'Afif Osseirān (Tehrān: Chāpkhāna-yi dānīshgāh, 1341 A.H. solar), p. 73 # 101.

³⁹ 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 74 # 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30 # 43, p. 74 # 103. See also Abū ʾl-Maʿālī 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī Al-Mayānājī Al-Hamadhānī ('Ain Al-Quḍāt), *Nāmāh-yi 'Ain Al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī*, 2 vols., ed. 'Alīnaqī Munzavī and 'Afif Osseirān (Tehrān: Intishārāt-i bunyād-i farhang-i Irān, 1969-71 C.E.), 1:304 # 509.

⁴¹ 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt*, pp. 74-75 # 103.

Without Iblīs' permission, therefore, no one can attain to God. Moreover God has definite need for Iblīs in this role of doorkeeper, for, if the king had no chamberlain, everyone, indiscriminately, would have access to the royal presence regardless of individual merit. Of what value would intimacy with the lord be if it were open to the profligate as well as the tested lover?⁴²

By distinguishing between the pretenders and the sincere, Iblīs is performing the essential function of preserving the Divine Presence from desecration while at the same time acting as a principal agent in the unfolding of God's plan for mankind. In this role as agent of the divine will, Iblīs is linked by 'Ain Al-Qudāt with Muḥammad because both are the chief preachers on the Path of God, the difference being that Muḥammad's preaching invites men and women to submit to the divine will while Iblīs draws mankind away from God.⁴³ However, Iblīs, like Muḥammad, is but an obedient instrument in the hands of the Almighty.

Iblīs was retained to watch over the door to the presence of the Almighty and was told, 'You are My lover. Be jealous about My threshold and keep strangers out of My presence. And continue to proclaim this:

'The Beloved said to me, 'Sit at My door,
do not allow inside anyone who is not in accord with Me.
To him who desires Me, say, "Be enraptured!"
This state is not suitable for any man unless I find it suitable.' '' ''⁴⁴

'Ain Al-Qudāt employs the imagery of light to express more dramatically both the intimate relationship between Iblīs and Muḥammad and the radical tension between them. Whereas the light of Muḥammad is the blinding brightness of the sun of Truth and the pure light of gnosis which springs from the eternal East, Iblīs is the black light of the moon which springs from the eternal West.⁴⁵ The image of black light is also closely entwined with Iblīs' role as chamberlain of the Divine Presence; the Divine Presence is the actual source of Divine Light, and it

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 342-343 # 454.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 228 # 296. See also *Nāmāh*, 1:304 # 509.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229 # 296.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127 # 175. In 'Afīf Osseirān's edition of this passage of the *Tamhīdāt*, he describes the black light as the essence of the angel 'Azrā'īl rather than 'Azāzīl, i.e., Iblīs. However it is clear from his notes that the manuscript tradition is by no means unanimous on this point, for 'Azāzīl appears in the place of 'Azrā'īl in two instances. Considering the frequent reference by 'Ain Al-Qudāt to Iblīs as the black light, it appears more logical in this particular case to opt for the variant, 'Azāzīl.

For other references to Iblīs as the black light, see *Tamhīdāt*, pp. 48-49 # 67, pp. 118-119 # 166, pp. 119-120 # 167, p. 122 # 170, pp. 269-270 # 353. The poetic allusion to Iblīs as black light that occurs on p. 119 # 166 is also found in the *Sawānīḥ* of Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī. See Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ (Aphorismen über Die Liebe)*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istānbul: Staatsdruckerei, 1942), p. 37 # 19.

can only be attained by passing through its opposite, the black light of Iblīs.⁴⁶

The light of Iblīs became black because God cursed him and bestowed the title of *kāfir*, unbeliever, upon him for all eternity. Yet this curse is paradoxically described as the chamberlain's robe of honor, for it is the insignia of Iblīs' perfect obedience and his willing embrace of the role of divine instrument. Likewise the sword of this black light who reigns over the domain of *lā* and jealously guards *illa ʿllāh* from intruders, is the sword of God's own divine power: "By Your power, I will surely seduce them all!" (Qurʾān 38:82).⁴⁷

ʿAin Al-Quḍāt takes pains to emphasize that both Muḥammad and Iblīs spring from God and reflect concrete attributes of the Divine, viz., mercy and anger. Only in the unknowable essence of the Absolute is the tension between these two opposites resolved; on the experiential plane of lived reality these attributes are in conflict, although they do depend upon each other in one important respect: it is only through the one that the other can be known or experienced.

But have you never realized that God has two names? One is 'The Compassionate, The Merciful' and the other is 'The Omnipotent, The Imperious'. From the attribute of overpowering might He brought Iblīs into being, and from the attribute of mercy, Muḥammad. Thereupon the attribute of mercy became Aḥmad's food, and the attribute of might and anger, the food of Iblīs.⁴⁸

Elsewhere ʿAin Al-Quḍāt posits that the creation of both Iblīs and Muḥammad derives from one and the same divine attribute, God's almighty power. Muḥammad is the product of the light of God's power, while Iblīs springs from its fire. One need not take his word alone on this matter, ʿAin Al-Quḍāt explains, because it is on the testimony of Muḥammad that he relates this tradition. As further confirmation of his position, ʿAin Al-Quḍāt calls upon Sahl At-Tustarī and Shaybān Ar-Rāʿī, who ultimately derive their opinions from an encounter with the mysterious, mystical figure, Khidr. Their words corroborate the fact that Muḥammad's light is formed, nurtured, and lovingly cherished by the Almighty Himself.⁴⁹

Finally Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī joins his voice to the chorus:

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119 # 166.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120 # 167.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227 # 294. See also p. 270 # 353:

That black light comes from the mine of might and anger;
it is the wellspring of unbelief and the abode of Satan.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268 # 351.

Truly the light of Iblīs springs from the fire of almighty power, according to the saying of the Most High, 'You (God) created me (Iblīs) from fire!' If he (Iblīs) manifested his light to creatures, he would surely be worshipped as a god.⁵⁰

It is this participation in the divine light that enables Iblīs so successfully to entice the faithful into substituting him and the circle of *lā* for the fulness of the light of *illa ʿllāh*.

The essences of both Muḥammad and Iblīs are, therefore, grounded in the divine essence, even though they express two conflicting and opposite poles of spiritual reality. This should not be seen as a contradiction, 'Ain Al-Quḍāt cautions, for just as water is the cause of life and growth for fish, and the cause of death for other beings, so the light of God is the catalyst for enlightenment and truth in the essence of Muḥammad and the catalyst for darkness and straying in Iblīs. Both are responses to the creative will of God, and neither Iblīs nor Muḥammad can claim for himself the power to lead aright or the power to lead astray, because both salvation and condemnation are brought to completion through the power of God's will.⁵¹

The analogy on the cosmological plane to the lights of Muḥammad and Iblīs is found in the lights of the sun and the moon. These two celestial bodies are the products of God's handiwork; however, each shines forth a different light. Sunlight reflects the brightness of God's beauty while moonlight glows with the light of God's power. In the same way that the essences of Iblīs and Muḥammad reflect the power and beauty of God, symbolized by the light of moon and sun, so, too, do the souls of men and women take on the characteristics of one or the other light, depending on each's response to the Word of God in the Qurʾān. The spirit of the unbeliever burns with the light of God's might and cries out at the rising of the moon, "This is my Lord!" The soul of the man of truth, however, recognizes as Lord only the sun of the light of Aḥmad which floods him with the luminous beauty of The Compassionate and Merciful.⁵²

As a final symbol, 'Ain Al-Quḍāt employs the lock of hair that hangs in an arrogant curl over the face and cheek of the Beloved to describe the juxtaposition of Iblīs with God. These tresses enjoy a privileged state of intimacy with the Beloved since they are allowed to caress her cheek.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 211 #270.

This is consonant with the strain of the Iblīs tradition transmitted by As-Sarrāj, Ibn Al-Khafīf, Al-Baqlī, and Jāmī that describes the appearance of Iblīs in blinding light upon a throne of glory, in order to make the Sufi believe he has experienced the vision of God. See above, p. 131 and note 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186 #244.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213 #272. See also Qurʾān 6:75-79.

Because of the rapture of this union, the curl pridefully scorns all who would seek to duplicate her unique relationship with the Beloved.

People have heard the name of Iblīs, but they are ignorant about why he puts on such airs and shows concern for no man. Ah! why does he put on airs? Because he has been the intimate of cheek and mole. What say you! Do cheek and mole ever achieve perfection without curl, eyebrow, and hair? No, by God, they do not achieve perfection. Do you not realize that when you pray, you are obliged to say, 'I take refuge in God from Satan the Stoned'? It is exactly for this reason that he puts on airs and plays the vain coquette, for he is himself chief of the prideful and self-conceited.⁵³

Instead of driving man away from the door of *illa ʿllāh* with the sword of divine power, or deceiving him with black moonlight, the Iblīs of the curl distracts and seduces man with the amorous gestures of coquetry, thus entangling the soul in the world of lesser spiritual attainments.

In the artifice of the tip of your curl, we become hapless wretches;
in the power of your two saucy eyes, we are overwhelmed.
Because of the impurity in our nature, we feed on blood;
now, too, in our nature, we feed on sorrow.⁵⁴

The suffering and confusion brought on by the encounter with the Iblīs-curl leaves the soul of the wayfarer stricken and half dead. This Iblīs-induced state is likened by ʿAin Al-Quḍāt to the ecstasy of annihilation, *fanāʾ*, a laudable state but one that is unstable and, therefore, unreliable. *Fanāʾ* must be passed through and superseded by the more mature state of *baqāʾ*, perdurance in divine intimacy. It is this state that for ʿAin Al-Quḍāt is the irrefutable sign of the spiritual attainment of the Sufi practitioner.⁵⁵

In his previous metaphoric constructs, ʿAin Al-Quḍāt indicated that the unique intimacy with the Beloved experienced by Iblīs was also shared by the prophet Muḥammad. The image of the Iblīs-curl is no exception to the rule, for the curl is not alone in its privileged state, lying upon the cheek of the Beloved. The mistress also possesses another mark of beauty, a black mole which is equated with the light of Muḥammad. Both curl and mole spring from the Beloved, however the arrogant curl is seducer while the mole is the guide of Truth. Nevertheless they are both essential stages along the Path to union with the Beloved, the curl and the mole, the light of Iblīs and the light of Muḥammad. Neither can be avoided; on the contrary, they both must be experienced if there is any hope for the Sufi traveller to attain his goal.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 121 # 169.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 232 # 302.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233 # 302.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30 # 43.

These images of power, light, and beauty not only illuminate the nature of Iblīs and Muḥammad, but they also provide an insight into the transcendent nature of God Himself. Through the tension between curl and mole, black light and light of Muḥammad, *lā ilāh* and *illa ʿllāh*, God reveals Himself as the creator and source of paradoxes that point beyond themselves to a resolution of conflict in God's very essence. Moreover, to experience the conflict of these opposites is to experience personally the conflict that springs from God and that is resolved only in the serene, unfathomable essence beyond the Beloved's face.⁵⁷

A fundamental presupposition that buttresses all of 'Ain Al-Quḍāt's unique imagery declares that God has Himself willed the creation of these opposing spiritual poles, and that they exist and interact in a state of mutual interdependence. Only by means of one pole can the other be defined and grasped in the fulness of its reality.⁵⁸

O noble fellow, this is wisdom, that whatever is, was, and may be, may not and could not be otherwise. Whiteness could never exist without blackness; the heavens without earth would not be right; substance could not be conceived without accident; Muḥammad could never exist without Iblīs. Obedience could not exist without disobedience, nor unbelief without faith. And in the same way with all opposites: 'Things manifest themselves through their opposites.'

Muḥammad's faith was impossible without Iblīs' unbelief.... Therefore it is clear that the good fortune of Muḥammad would be nonexistent without the misery of Iblīs; and Abū Bakr and 'Umar could not exist without Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab.

...No saint could exist without there being a sinner inseparably joined to his fate; the prophet could never exist without the heedless, nor the righteous without the sinner. Muṣṭafā—may peace be upon him!—was the cause of the mercy showered on creatures; however, in truth, Abū Jahl was the cause of it.... Because through his total villainy the shining essence of Muḥammad became manifest. Have you never heard tell how the black light of Iblīs and Abū Jahl is joined from head to toe with the light of Aḥmad?⁵⁹

Assuredly this creative tension induced by the interaction of spiritual opposites cannot be fully resolved in the realm of human experience. The eternal resolution ultimately occurs only in God. However it would be an unfair reading of 'Ain Al-Quḍāt to restrict the scope of his vision to the beyond, without offering some hope to the Sufi for a resolution of opposites in the here and now.

'Ain Al-Quḍāt continually urges the Sufi to struggle beyond the sword-wielding chamberlain of black light to the realm of *illa ʿllāh*. He points, of

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119 # 166.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122 # 170.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-188 # 245.

course, to the ecstatic experience of mystical union as the foretaste of the final resolution of opposites in God. In the here and now the gnostic lover must mirror in his own life the cosmic resolution of opposites by moving beyond the negative pole of Iblīs and also beyond the positive pole of Islamic faith.

‘Ain Al-Qudāt describes the righteousness of faith, which is based upon the passage through straying and unbelief, as only a partial advance towards mystical union.⁶⁰ The ecstatic experience of union, once attained, obliterates these conflicting spiritual poles and focuses the lover’s attention completely on the object of his desire. Nothing matters any longer to the enraptured mystic but his experience of the overwhelming power of divine love: “Unbelief and faith are two veils beyond the Throne between God and the servant, because man must be neither unbeliever nor Muslim.”⁶¹

Upon the road of wayfarers and in their religion, what is unbelief? what is faith? They both become one. Yūsuf ‘Āmirī said:

In the alley of the tavern, who is darvish? who is king?
 On the road of unity, what is obedience? what is sin?
 Upon the parapet of the Throne, what is the sun? what is the moon?
 Upon the countenance of a Qalendar, what is luminous? what is black?⁶²

In ‘Ain Al-Qudāt’s mind, a resolution of the tension of spiritual opposites is available in the here and now to the Sufi who attains the pinnacle of religious perfection, union with the Beloved. However, ‘Ain Al-Qudāt does not appear to wish to make a metaphysical statement equating the resolution of opposites that is present within God’s essence with the resolution encountered in mystical union. They are not identical, only analogous.

Rather than carefully delineating a metaphysics of mysticism, ‘Ain Al-Qudāt struggles to express the enormous intensity of the mystic’s experience of God. To do so he employs elaborate metaphors and poetic hyperbole which, despite their creative originality, cannot encompass the full range of the mystical experience. Mystics in all the major religious traditions testify that the written word falters before the magnitude of God’s love. It can do no more than feebly allude to what is encountered as ultimate Truth.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49 # 67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123 # 171.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 228 # 295.

4. *Iblīs: the paradox of fulfillment through separation*

There remains one final group of paradoxes touching the mythic history of Iblīs that ʿAin Al-Qudāt discovers imbedded within the final stages of the mystical life. Their focus is on the relation between love and affliction. ʿAin Al-Qudāt does not intend, however, to overemphasize the morbid elements of the Iblīs myth. On the contrary, the tragedy of Iblīs, when examined through the eyes of this Sufi master, becomes transformed into glorious fulfillment. This paradox reflects not only ʿAin Al-Qudāt's understanding of Iblīs' relationship with God, but also his own insights into the nature of the mystical love experience, quite apart from Iblīs' particular case.

Ah! To what do you pay attention? This madman (Iblīs) loved God. Do you know what became the touchstone of his love? On the one hand, affliction and oppression; on the other hand, reproach and humiliation. He (God) said, 'If you lay claim to My love, there must be a sign.' He (God) laid out for him the touchstones of affliction and oppression, blame and humiliation. He accepted in an instant, and these two touchstones testified that the mark of his love was faithfulness. Will you never grasp what I say? In love there must be persecution, and there must be fidelity, so that the lover becomes thoroughly ripened by the gentle kindness and the oppression of the Beloved. Otherwise he remains raw, and nothing comes from him.⁶³

Iblīs recognizes the curse from God as the most precious of God's gifts to him, because it is the instrument for his spiritual purification and the emblem of his special relationship with the divine. There is no gift from the Beloved that Iblīs cherishes more;⁶⁴ he fixes his eyes intently upon the eternal affliction which, in reality, is for him the food of life. He drinks in the curse as others would drink in the mercy of God, and mercy is to him an abomination.⁶⁵

The curse inflicted on Iblīs by God is not a gesture of divine aggression; it is a challenge to Iblīs and a test of the quality of his love. God's act demands a response; the crux is whether that response will be the resentful cries of the self-styled victim who bemoans having been singled out as the object of divine persecution, or the expressions of magnanimous love from the grateful servant who accepts God's gift of pain because it comes from His hand.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 221 #283.

⁶⁴ ʿAin Al-Qudāt, *Namahā*, 1:97 #134. See also Abū ʿl-Maʿālī ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad ʿAlī Ibn Al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAlī Al-Mayānājī Al-Hamadhānī (ʿAin Al-Qudāt), *Risāla-yi lawāyih*, ed. Dr. Raḥīm Farmanish (Tehrān: n.p., 1337 A.H. solar), pp. 24-25.

⁶⁵ ʿAin Al-Qudāt, *Namahā*, 2:188 #282. See also 2:411-412 #649-650 and *Tamhīdāt*, p. 226 #292.

⁶⁶ ʿAin Al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 223 #287.

This manly fellow Iblīs says, ‘If others flee from the blow, I will take it upon my own neck!’... ‘Whether my fortune be black or white, both are one since the Beloved made me worthy of His remembrance. Whoever considers these separate, he is still raw in matters of love. When it comes from the loved one’s hand, what difference is there between honey and poison? sugar and colocynth? kindness and oppression? Whoever is either a lover of kindness or a lover of oppression, he is a lover of self, not a lover of the Beloved. Ah! When the Lord bestows a special tunic and cap upon someone, this is enough. The rest is not in the reckoning of lovers.

Ah! He (God) asked him (Iblīs), ‘This black carpet of My curse, why do you not cast it from your shoulder?’ He replied,

‘I will not sell this carpet, I will not sell!

If I should sell it, my shoulder would be bare.’⁶⁷

The relationship between Iblīs and God, mediated by God’s curse, is one of complete openness and self-donation. In response to every act of destructive power, Iblīs offers himself as sacrifice; when God torments, he accepts; when God oppresses, he increases his love.⁶⁸ ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt recalls that it was for such unswerving dedication to God that Al-Ḥallāj eulogized Iblīs and Aḥmad.⁶⁹ For each, his personal joy and suffering were of negligible concern in comparison with his desire to conform to the will of God: “I am prepared for eternal torment, so be eternally merciless towards me!”⁷⁰

This curse, however, is not a one-dimensional reality; there are several levels encompassed within it, not all of the same spiritual import. The curse of Iblīs by God entailed his removal from the seat of celestial power, the degradation of his external form, his dismissal as treasurer of Paradise, humiliation by God, etc. While these aspects of the curse are never overlooked by the mystical writers, no particular one is singled out as its main, constitutive element. This role is reserved for Iblīs’ experience of separation from God. Separation is what impinges most on his relationship with the Beloved:

Behold this oppression which made me wretched!

He himself invited me and He himself drove me away; this is the way
He tormented me.⁷¹

The experience of separation and its opposite, the experience of union with God, become for ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt the principal elements in his exposition of the import of the curse on the spiritual life of Iblīs. And in typical fashion, ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt molds these elements into a paradox, a juxtaposi-

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224 #289.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223 #286.

⁶⁹ ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Nāmāh*, 2:187 #281. See also *Tamhīdāt*, p. 223 #288, p. 284 #369.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:187 #281.

⁷¹ ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 225 #290.

tion of opposites that turns the accepted views of spiritual guides topsy-turvy. Separation, not union, he insists, is the hallmark of intimacy with God.

Firstly, the separation of Iblīs is a blessing, not so much because of the actual experience of separation, but because any gesture bestowed by God on His creature is far superior to being forgotten and ignored by Him. The nature of the gesture is unimportant, only the fact of the relationship matters.

The station of the perfection of love is that station in which, if one heard an insult from the Beloved, it would be more agreeable than the kindness of others. Whoever is unaware of this fact, he is an ignorant soul on the Path of love. But have you not heard this verse?

Separation from You is more agreeable than union with others;
to be repudiated by You is better than the acceptance of others.⁷²

Secondly, separation is affirmed as a value in and for itself because it represents the most crucial test of the mettle of the Sufi's love. Consequently separation is unavoidable for one who aspires to the loftiest mystical goals. However, prolonged separation and the intensity of the ever present desire for union work together to inflict the most wrenching of agonies upon the tormented soul:

You set a fire in my heart and You pour oil on my soul;
then You say, 'Keep our secret hidden!'⁷³

Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī, revered master of 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, too, proclaims separation a higher degree of mystic fulfillment than union, in addition to its being the final test of love. Why is it superior to the unitive state? Unless one has previously experienced union, one cannot know separation; union is, therefore, only a preparation for the more exalted state of separation.⁷⁴ Not only is separation on a loftier plane, but it possesses the unique quality of dynamic tension which is completely absent from the static state of peaceful union. The mystic Fakhr Ad-Dīn 'Irāqī likens the power of separation to a fire scourge that drives the soul unceasingly towards God. Because of its inherent dynamism, separation, he claims, cannot but be more fruitful than the state of union; and it is the Beloved's knowledge of this paradoxical truth that makes separation and distance His most precious gift, reserved for the elect alone.

I desire union with Him; He desires separation from me;
so I abandon what I desire for what He desires.⁷⁵

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222 # 284.

⁷³ 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Nāmāhā*, 2:418 # 660.

⁷⁴ Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīh*, p. 48 # 28.

⁷⁵ Fakhr Ad-Dīn Ibrāhīm 'Irāqī, *Risāla-yi lama'āt wa risāla-yi iṣṭilāhāt*, ed. Dr. Javād Nūrbakhsh (Tehrān: Khānqāh-yi ni'mat Allāhī, 1353 A.H. solar), p. 41 # 22.

This dynamic tension present in the state of separation is analogous to the ardor and zeal that characterize the love experience itself. This ardor, Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī explains, is so essential to love that the Beloved, when caught in the trap of peaceful union, grows restless in this confining role, because the ardor of the quest has been dissipated. In reaction the Beloved manifests His omnipotence, as He did, for example, when He cursed Iblīs who dared believe that the love object somehow could be encompassed through union.⁷⁶

God's perfection needs no fulfillment through a mystical relationship with man. The state of separation, therefore, more aptly reflects the eternal tension between God's transcendent perfection and the dynamism of the human spirit's yearning in love for intimacy with the divine Other.

The ultimate goal, separation, is attained only by the very few whose long experience of union prepares them sufficiently for the excruciating torment that characterizes its every aspect. This honor was not accorded Iblīs until he had proven himself through aeons of faithful dedication to the divine will.

He (Iblīs) said, 'For so many thousands of years I was a diligent worshipper in the alley of the Beloved. When He finally accepted me, rejection became my portion from Him.... When He bestowed His mercy upon me, He cursed me: "For upon you is My curse, until the Day of Judgement."' ⁷⁷

Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī relates that, in recognition of this extraordinary achievement which was won only after ages of strenuous ascetical training, Iblīs was granted the title of Lord of the Separated Ones.⁷⁸ This title attests to all creatures that Iblīs has been especially chosen by the Beloved to be the recipient of His choicest gift, His curse, which Iblīs will cherish for all eternity.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīh*, pp. 94-95 # 64.

⁷⁷ 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 225 # 290.

The affirmation of the primacy of separation over union, which is expressed by 'Ain Al-Qudāt and others, should not be construed as the general Sufi understanding of these two stages of the Path. Most theorists opt for the traditional view that union is the ultimate goal of the mystic life, as these verses of Ash-Shiblī illustrate:

If separation dwelt in Paradise, Paradise would be transformed;
the blessings of Paradise would be Hell for God's servants.
If union dwelt in Hell, Hell would be transformed;
the fire of Hell would be a blessing for God's servants.

See Abū Bakr Ash-Shiblī, *Dīwān*, ed. Dr. Kāmil Muṣṭafā 'sh-Shaybī (Baghdād: Dār al-muta'adāmin, 1967 C.E. - 1386 A.H.), p. 123 # 57.

⁷⁸ 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāhā*, 1:97 # 134, 2:416 # 657; *Lawāyih*, p. 24. See also Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 416.

⁷⁹ 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāhā*, 1:97 # 134.

‘Ain Al-Qudāt does not, however, restrict this gift to Iblīs alone; it is open to those Sufis whose perfection of life allows them to cope with the paradoxical truth that God’s curse, especially the curse of separation, is the ultimate goal of the mystical life. The seeds of this attitude are buried in the paradoxes of Al-Ḥallāj, especially his desire to incur God’s wrath and suffer destruction at the hands of the faithful. He gloried, not in the praise afforded him for his sanctity, but in the curses heaped upon him for his infidelity.⁸⁰ Al-Ḥallāj baited the pious Muslims with his shouts of ecstasy that smacked of heresy, while in private he performed the ritual prayers enjoined by the law. His purpose, he explained, was to bring about the death of “the accursed one,” i.e., himself.⁸¹

Kill me, my trusted friends,
 for in my death is my life!
 Death for me is in living, and
 life for me is in dying.
 The obliteration of my essence
 is the noblest of blessings.
 My perdurance in my human attributes,
 the vilest of evils.⁸²

It is ‘Ain Al-Qudāt who brought these seeds to fruition by specifying that life-giving death is embodied in the curse of separation. And it is he who molds this paradox into a theoretical analysis of the structure of the Sufi Path. For him the experience of union is the experience of the beauty of the Beloved that feeds the soul and nourishes it with coquetry and amorous glances. But this nourishment fattens the soul and makes it lethargic. Only separation can accomplish the weaning process, for the Sufi must detach himself even from the joy and security of union with the Beloved. When the traveller finally progresses through union to separation, there he encounters the face of Iblīs, and the glory of the Separated One’s perfection.⁸³

5. *Iblīs: predestined yet free*

Much of our discussion concerning the use of the Iblīs myth to develop an elaborate science of opposites depicts Iblīs in the role of malleable instrument, joined to God in an intense love-relationship. Whereas the instrumentality of Muḥammad unfolds in the context of right-guidance, the characteristic of Iblīs’ instrumentality is *kufṛ*, the promulgation of

⁸⁰ See Ḥusayn Ibn Manṣūr Al-Ḥallāj, *Akhbār Al-Ḥallāj*, 3rd edition, ed. and tr. Louis Massignon (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957), pp. 14-15 and pp. 84-86 of the Arabic text.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83 of the Arabic text.

⁸² Al-Ḥallāj, *Dīwān*, pp. 33-34 l. 1-4.

⁸³ ‘Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāh*, 2:416-417 #657.

unbelief. Both, however, are true to their callings and never swerve from the faithful living-out of their appointed offices.

This emphasis on the instrumentality of Iblīs and Muḥammad cannot but raise the question of how involved each is personally in the acting-out of the particular cosmic task to which he is assigned. Are Iblīs and Muḥammad capable of freely assuming their responsibilities, or are they just religious robots, blindly conforming to the will of the master planner?

The complexities of the question of free will as it touches Iblīs became apparent in the previous chapter.⁸⁴ The insights expressed by the Sufis skilled in the science of opposites manifest many of the same conflicts between free will and predestination that raised their heads in the works of those Sufi theorists discussed earlier. The pervasive conviction among the majority of both groups is that God is directly involved in the actual deeds of His creatures, and, therefore, is ultimately responsible for them.

‘Ain Al-Quḍāt proves to be no exception in his description of the moral accountability of Iblīs and Muḥammad. He asserts that all deeds that seem to be the product of an individual’s free choice, and are thereby ascribed to him, must be seen in the light of God’s role as ultimate causal agent. Man’s apparent freedom is just a metaphor; the deed in its reality must be ascribed to God.

Muḥammad’s power to guide, know it to be a metaphor; and Iblīs’ power to lead astray, in the same way know it to be a metaphor. Know the truth to be, ‘He leads astray whomever He wills, and He guides whomever He wills’ (Qur’ān 16:93). I admit Iblīs leads creatures astray, but who created Iblīs with such a characteristic?⁸⁵

Iblīs possesses powers only by extension, because God has granted them to him, and he makes use of his own potentialities like a servant acting in accordance with his master’s desires. There is no possibility that Iblīs will rise up in defiance and perform what God does not will, for what God does not will, does not come to be.⁸⁶

The essence of instrumentality is loving obedience; there is no need for logical explanations from God nor for the servant to delve into the ultimate reasons behind God’s choice of one particular action over another. God chose, for example, to shower His favors on ‘Umar, who was an idol-worshipper, and He chose to condemn Iblīs, who served Him for thousands of years. The servant is enjoined only to accept the paradox

⁸⁴ See Ch. 2, pp. 96-109.

⁸⁵ ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 188 #246. See also *Nāmāh*, 2:7 #9; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 415.

⁸⁶ ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Nāmāh*, 2:68-69 #93. See also 1:371 #618.

of God's decree, not to interrogate Him about its justice: "He is not questioned about what He does" (Qur'ān 21:23).⁸⁷

At every step of his growing relationship with God, the Sufi encounters the unfathomable, conflicting realities that make up God's plan. To ignore them, or worse, to try to escape them, is to deny God's omnipotence and raise oneself up as final arbiter of reality in God's place. This is *shirk*, associationism, in its most blatant form and not the stance of the true believer, who, like 'Irāqī, stands awestruck in the face of the turmoil created by God's eternal will.

He created being out of nothingness, for the sake of His own splendor;
but at the same time He placed the mark of being on the markless.
A spirit possessed of such purity, He cast into the pit of the body;
a secret possessed of such nobility, He hid in the lower recesses of the soul.

He made Himself Adam's guide towards the wheat;
He placed Iblis in man's midst, for chastisement's sake.

'Irāqī goes on to describe how, even though God authors each deed, He places the blame for it on the shoulders of man. Some He chooses for Hell, others for Heaven. Throughout the process it is unseemly for man to inquire how or why, rather he must rely on his love-relationship to point the way to the meaning that lies beyond human understanding.⁸⁸

Despite this definite emphasis on instrumentality with its resultant passivity and submission, a clear commitment to man's freedom of choice is evident among the Sufis who profess the science of opposites. God's power is all pervasive, they agree, yet he would not allow man to be reduced to the state of an automaton.

O noble fellow, whatever happens in this world or the world of spirits, every single act is a determined act, fixed. However, a man is not compelled to perform one particular fixed act, rather he is compelled to exercise free choice. In the same way that burning is linked with fire, free will is linked to man. In the same way that for fire there is no unique characteristic except burning, for man there is no unique characteristic except free choice.⁸⁹

Freedom, therefore, is man's distinguishing quality that opens up to him the unique possibility of choice. However, this freedom must somehow be correlated with God's pervasive control over all that occurs in the universe:

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:376 # 626.

⁸⁸ Fakhr Ad-Dīn Ibrāhīm 'Irāqī, *Kullīyāt*, ed. Sa'īd Nafīsī (Tehrān: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanā'ī, 1338 A.H. solar), pp. 267 l. 3770-268 l. 3779. The translation is of lines 3773-3775.

⁸⁹ 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt*, pp. 189-190 # 247.

However, whomever He created for happiness, that man can choose only from among the deeds of the saved; and whomever He created for torment, that man can choose only from the actions of the damned. He provides explanations for the people of faith...and He reproaches the people of unbelief, promising them the fire.⁹⁰

This compromise solution proposed by ‘Ain Al-Qudāt does not deal adequately with the problem because it does not touch the heart of the matter, namely, moral choice. Can one who is originally good choose evil, and vice versa? ‘Ain Al-Qudāt’s compromise would indicate that this avenue is not open to man, and his analysis of Iblīs’ refusal to bow seems to corroborate this opinion. It is one thing, he explains, to be informed about the nature of God’s command, and quite another to be in touch with God’s will. The command of God is but an external, and sometimes ambiguous, phenomenon. Only in grasping God’s will does the faithful soul fully comprehend what is expected of him.

For example, if a father says to his son, ‘Do not show me affection anymore! I am ashamed of you,’ and that son redoubles his attentiveness towards his father, he is not opposing his father, by my life! He is opposing his command. But this is not contrary to his will. If Sultan Maḥmūd had said to Ayāz, ‘Go! Serve another,’ and he had gone, that would have been a sin. He who obeys in that situation is immature.⁹¹

Iblīs, therefore, never strayed from the path of goodness for which he had been created and upon which he had embarked with such spiritual ardor. His choices were in conformity with the choices open to those destined from all eternity for divine blessing. God’s command to Iblīs to bow was but a test; God never intended for it to be carried out. All the angels bowed except the foremost one among them, their preceptor, Iblīs, who was able to delve within the mystery of God’s will. Was it not inevitable that the teacher’s insight surpass that of his charges? His years of preparation and loyal worship stood him in good stead at this final moment of crisis:

‘If You should cut me to pieces out of love,
my heart would not yearn for another than You.
If You should rain down thorn and thistle upon my head,
I would stitch together what you rain down into a cloak.’

He freely chose separation from the Beloved over bowing to another. How great is the fulness of his love!⁹²

The essential continuity between the refusal to bow and God’s fore-ordained will is reinforced by creating a non-Qur’ānic dialogue between

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ ‘Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāhā*, 1:75 #98.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1:96 #132.

God and Iblīs in which God secretly reveals to Iblīs His particular will for him, while at the same time proclaiming a general command to the choirs of angelic hosts. This secret conversation is proof positive that Iblīs was especially privileged with access to the hidden depths of God's design for the cosmos.

Ah! Just as Gabriel, Michael, and the other angels heard in the realm of hiddenness, 'Bow to Adam!' in the hiddenness of the world of hiddenness and contemplation He spoke again (to Iblīs), 'Do not bow to another than Me!' ... In public He says, 'Bow to Adam!' and in secret He said to him, 'O Iblīs, reply, "Will I bow to one whom You have created from clay?"' This itself is something of a different sort!⁹³

And so that wretched fellow, in accord with what he was ordered in secret, said, 'I will not bow to one whom You have created from clay.' He replied, 'My curse is upon you!' He answered, 'Since the robe of honor comes from You, whether it bring curse or mercy, no matter.'⁹⁴

The upshot of 'Ain Al-Qudāt's treatment of Iblīs' limited freedom is a vindication of the righteousness of his choice not to bow to Adam. On the other hand, his limited freedom also brings him face to face with the paradox hidden in God's design. He, who was the teacher of the angels, the ascetic whose cell lay at the foot of the Divine Throne, as a result of his free conformation to God's will, has become "the plaything of the children of Your (i.e., the Beloved's) alley."⁹⁵

Despite the fact that he is declared possessor of the unique gift of freedom, limited though it be, Iblīs is incapable of unraveling the tangled strands that make up God's will; the power of choice does not of itself produce insight. Even though one possesses the power to recognize God's will and submit before it, there is no human faculty that can plumb the depths or resolve the paradoxes of His decrees:

He cast him into the ocean, firmly bound, and said to him,
'You there! take care not to get wet!'⁹⁶

B. *From Condemnation to Rehabilitation*

1. *Iblīs: recapitulation of fundamental themes — I*

Thus far several different branches of the Iblīs motif were described and analyzed in the contexts in which each developed. The various strains were discovered not to be bound to one, progressive,

⁹³ 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 227 #293. See also *Nāmāhā*, 2:186-188 #280-282, 2:411-412 #649-650; Massignon, *Recueil de textes inédits*, pp. 101-102.

⁹⁴ 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāhā*, 2:187 #280.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:417 #658.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:412 #650. See also Massignon, *Recueil de textes inédits*, p. 102.

chronological development; more often than not, they evolved in parallel fashion with occasional crisscrossing and intertwining in the works of one or more Sufis. These different lines of development not only afford unique perspectives on the life, personality, and symbolic significance of the Iblīs figure, they also take opposing stands on Iblīs' moral character. This judgement for or against Iblīs serves as the dividing line between the Sufis discussed in Chapter 2 and those of Chapter 3. For the former, Iblīs is a morally corrupt being who flaunted his arrogance in the face of God and spread his contagion among mankind; while, for the latter, he is the obedient, loving instrument of the Divine, and the model for the mystic life of self-sacrifice.

In the above examination of the Iblīs literature, aspects of these evolving strains were exemplified in the lives and works of individual Sufis, but the whole range of perspectives, with its contrasts and contradictions, needs yet to be discovered in the corpus of an individual Sufi writer. While this is not a common occurrence, it is, nevertheless, observable most especially in the work of Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (†1220 C.E.) and, to a lesser degree, in that of Ḥakīm Abū 'l-Majd Majdūd Ibn Ādam Sanā'ī Ghaznavī (†1131 C.E.). 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī recapitulate many of the images and symbols of the Iblīs motif, even to the point of voicing contradictory opinions within their own works about Iblīs' ultimate worth and God's final judgement on his life and actions.

The starting point for 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī's treatments of Iblīs is the same as that of many early religious writers, namely the realization that Iblīs is intimately involved in man's very existence. 'Aṭṭār incorporates into one of his own didactic treatises the myth of Adam and Eve's encounter with Iblīs and Al-Khannās, which was originally ascribed in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* to the Sufi Muḥammad Ibn 'Alī At-Tirmidhī.⁹⁷ In contrast to the prose presentation of the mythic tale in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, its poetic adaptation in the *Ilāhīnāma* includes at the end a commentary by 'Aṭṭār which makes definite reference to the *ḥadīth* describing Satan's presence in man's very lifeblood:

'Since I (Iblīs) have cast myself within his interior,
 Adam's offspring will be subject to my affliction.
 Sometimes with Khannās' help, I will, by my whispering,
 set in man's bosom a hundred snares of ignominy.
 Other times I will stir up a hundred kinds of passion within him;
 I will become like blood in his veins.

⁹⁷ See Ch. 2, pp. 62-64. No discussion of 'Aṭṭār should neglect the extraordinary work of Hellmut Ritter. See especially *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), pp. 536-550, where he lays the groundwork for a study of the Iblīs motif in the literary corpus of 'Aṭṭār.

Sometimes I will urge him especially to acts of devotion;
 but from that devotion I ultimately intend hypocrisy, not sincerity.
 I will employ a thousand other kinds of sorcery
 to deflect man from the true Path.'

Since Satan has made his home inside of you,
 he has seated himself in power and set up his throne.

.....
 He waylays you on the Path, and because of the suffering induced by this
 deed,

your eyes have become like blood-raining clouds.

If it was Adam's fate, because he gazed on one grain of wheat,
 to be obliged to weep for three hundred years,

Look at how many tears Iblīs must shed,
 he who bears God's curse and is consumed with jealousy!⁹⁸

In addition to the image of Satan abiding in man's bloodstream, 'Aṭṭār describes him as nesting in man's innermost core. To be rid of Iblīs, the Sufī must burn his heart clean in the fire of the ascetical life so that there remains no longer a hospitable place for Satan to alight.⁹⁹ Sanā'ī, for his part, depicts Iblīs living comfortably under man's skin until that day when the power of mystic love frees the novice from his hold.¹⁰⁰ Even Muḥammad, 'Aṭṭār recalls, was possessed of a satanic companion who, happily, converted to Islam on hearing the proclamation of God's Qur'ān.¹⁰¹

Satan's chief ally, say 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī, is man's *nafs*, the lower soul, which, like a puppet, submits to Iblīs in the same way that the peacock and the serpent became his pawns in Paradise.¹⁰² The *nafs* thrives especially well on sensual pleasure and worldly delight.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, pp. 127 l. 1-129 l. 2. The quotation begins on p. 128 l. 9.

Sanā'ī also makes reference to Al-Khannās as a title for Iblīs. See Ḥakīm Abū 'l-Majd Majdūd Ibn Ādam Sanā'ī Ghaznavī, *Makātīb Sanā'ī*, ed. Nadhīr Aḥmad ('Aligārḥ: Dānishgāh-yi islāmī, 1962 C.E. - 1382 A.H. - 1341 A.H. solar), pp. 65 l. 3-7, 74 l. 6-13.

It should be noted that reference to the presence of Iblīs in man's bloodstream is found even in the work of a Sufī like 'Ain Al-Quḍāt (see *Nāmāh*, 2:383 #600). Nevertheless, his presuppositions are quite different from those of 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī because he has a clearly defined view of Iblīs as the obedient instrument of God. There is no moral culpability in 'Ain Al-Quḍāt's Iblīs, whereas 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī, it will be seen, present conflicting views, sometimes agreeing with 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, other times reflecting the opinion of those who brand Iblīs a despicable foe. Consequently, even though they may refer to the same text or employ similar images, their understandings of the symbols differ substantially because of the presuppositions on which they are based.

⁹⁹ Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Muṣibatnāma*, ed. Dr. Nūrānī Wiṣāl (Tehrān: Zawār, 1338 A.H. solar), p. 240 l. 11-17. Similarly in 'Ain Al-Quḍāt, *Nāmāh*, 1:425 #711.

¹⁰⁰ Ḥakīm Abū 'l-Majd Majdūd Ibn Ādam Sanā'ī Ghaznavī, *Dīwān*, ed. Mudarris Raḍawī (Tehrān: Kitābkhāna-yi Ibn Sīnā, 1341 A.H. solar-1962 C.E.), p. 694 l. 5.

¹⁰¹ Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, ed. Dr. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Tehrān: Kitābfurūshī-yi Tehrān, 1353 A.H. solar-1968 C.E.), p. 19 l. 4.

¹⁰² Sanā'ī, *Makātīb*, pp. 57 l. 11-58 l. 5; *Dīwān*, p. 188 l. 2.

¹⁰³ 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, p. 29 l. 1.

You are filled with passion, and desire deceives you;
 the sensual form of reality is your Iblīs.
 If you wish to distance yourself from this Iblīs,
 break the neck of form altogether.¹⁰⁴

But many of a malleable nature follow the guidance of their *nafs*; too late they discover that they have become prisoners of the Evil-One.¹⁰⁵ Consider not the *nafs* a submissive or weak adversary; its venomous whispers are more deadly than the stings of scorpions;¹⁰⁶ its aggressiveness and tenacity are that of a savage dog capable of subduing lions.¹⁰⁷

As long as you possess this dog-like *nafs*,
 Iblīs will not flee from your heart.
 Iblīs' coquetry is for the sake of your deception;
 each and every desire in you is your Iblīs.
 If you bring one of your desires to fruition,
 a hundred new Iblīs are born in you, and so on.¹⁰⁸

In 'Aṭṭār's mind, the options are clear. The believer must submit his *nafs* to the ascetical life and subdue it, otherwise it will ceaselessly chase after Satan and his favors. This process of ascetic purification prepares the soul of each Sufi wayfarer for a transformation analogous to that which took place within Muḥammad's soul when his satanic *nafs* converted to Islam at the sound of the recitation of God's Qur'ān.¹⁰⁹

If the *nafs* is Satan's most versatile weapon, the arena in which it is put to greatest use is the *dunyā*, the world.¹¹⁰ The *dunyā* is Satan's own valley, the domain over which he reigns as unrivaled lord.¹¹¹

Pass by the valley of Satan; seek out the Lover;
 for how long will you remain outside the veil?

Whoever makes a covenant with the Satan of the *dunyā*,
 how will the honey of *alast* ever touch his mouth?

¹⁰⁴ Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Ushturnāma*, ed. Dr. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehrān: Chāp-i tābān, 1339 A.H. solar), p. 128 l. 10-11.

¹⁰⁵ Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Dīwān: qasā'id wa tarjī'āt wa ghazaliyāt*, ed. Sa'id Nafīsī (Tehrān: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanā'ī, 1339 A.H. solar), p. 390 l. 7367.

¹⁰⁶ Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Lisān al-ghayb bi ḍamīma miftāḥ al-irāda*, ed. Aḥmad Khushnavis 'Ammād (Tehrān: Intishārāt-i kitābfurūshī-yi Maḥmūdī, 1344 A.H. solar), p. 13 l. 3-4. It should be noted that the authenticity of the *Lisān al-ghayb* is disputed.

¹⁰⁷ 'Aṭṭār, *Dīwān*, p. 30 l. 478. See also p. 76 l. 1302.

¹⁰⁸ 'Aṭṭār, *Mantiq al-tayr*, p. 131 l. 6-8.

¹⁰⁹ 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, pp. 77 l. 20-78 l. 1.

¹¹⁰ Farīd Ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Mazhar al-ʿajā'ib wa mazhar*, ed. Aḥmad Khushnavis 'Ammād (Tehrān: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanā'ī, 1345 A.H. solar), pp. 235 l. 5287-236 l. 5313. See also *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 75 l. 15. The authenticity of the *Mazhar al-ʿajā'ib* is disputed.

¹¹¹ 'Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 135 l. 8.

Whoever becomes a lover of the here and now with Satan,
 in the end times the Avenger will strip the skin from his body.
 Whoever drinks wine with Satan here,
 he will be roasted in the fire of Hell.
 Abandon your gaze upon the Satan of this world,
 if you still desire union with your Friend.¹¹²

Nowhere else does Iblīs achieve such resounding victories than in the *dunyā*; nowhere else is the power of ruse and deception more potent, nor man more vulnerable.¹¹³

He who is a man of cunning and deception,
 is neither maternal nor paternal uncle; he is Iblīs.¹¹⁴

Both Sanāʾī and ʿAṭṭār witness forcefully to the ravages of fraudulent deception on the souls of the just. Because of it an ʿAzāzīl fell from the heavens and became an Iblīs.¹¹⁵ To follow in his footsteps is to end up a companion of Iblīs in Hell,¹¹⁶ or perhaps a carcass cast into his furnace.¹¹⁷ All of man's daily actions of social intercourse are fraught with danger because everything that partakes of worldliness is tainted by the touch of Iblīs. What appears sweet and pleasurable in the world of Iblīs, like delicate almond candies arranged upon his tray, when put to the mouth, is found to be cloves of sugarcoated garlic.¹¹⁸

If Iblīs quits the bazaars,
 how will the bazaars function?
 Because the world in its entirety is his bazaar,
 inflated selling and buying are his work.
 To him and no one else belong the Great Bazaar, every bazaar;
 no worldly deed occurs without him, not for a moment.¹¹⁹

The man of the world who excels at pretense, ruse, and deception is he who bears the mark of Iblīs.¹²⁰ With such a man Iblīs need no longer struggle, for they both are now members of the same troop. Iblīs has

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 113 l. 8, l. 13-16.

¹¹³ See Farīd Ad-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Dr. Sayyid Šādiq Gawharīn (Tehrān: Chāp-i sharq, 1959 C.E. - 1338 A.H. solar), p. 32 l. 497-500; *Ushturnāma*, p. 174 l. 16-18.

¹¹⁴ Ḥakīm Abū ʿl-Majd Majdūd Ibn Ādam Sanāʾī Ghaznavī, *Kitāb ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa wa shariʿat al-tariqa*, ed. Mudarris Raḍawī (Tehrān: Chāpkhāna-yi sipihr, 1329 A.H. solar - 1950 C.E.), p. 259 l. 11. See also p. 302 l. 14, p. 379 l. 6 and p. 742 l. 17.

¹¹⁵ Sanāʾī, *Ḥadiqa*, p. 303 l. 8.

¹¹⁶ ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāh-nāma*, p. 91 l. 8; Farīd Ad-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Pandnāma (Le Livre des conseils)*, ed. and tr. Silvestre De Sacy (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1819), p. 100 l. 6-7 of the Persian text.

¹¹⁷ Sanāʾī, *Ḥadiqa*, pp. 339 l. 20-340 l. 1.

¹¹⁸ Sanāʾī, *Dīwān*, p. 291 l. 3.

¹¹⁹ ʿAṭṭār, *Musibatnāma*, pp. 122 l. 20-123 l. 1.

¹²⁰ ʿAṭṭār, *Miftāḥ al-irāda*, p. 237 l. 13.

permeated every pore of his flesh and has nested at the root of each hair of his head.¹²¹ The student, thus transformed, begins to rival his master in the skill with which he perpetrates fraud and deception upon his fellows:

Because this age is rife with deception,
Iblīs takes his nourishment from *lā ḥawla*!
You are so adept at ruse and fraud,
that even Iblīs flees from you!¹²²

The more Iblīs-like a man becomes in his inner being, the more proficient he becomes at putting on the external airs of a pious Muslim. To have mastered the art of feigning the spiritual guide is to have achieved the pinnacle of satanic achievement, for nothing corrupts quicker the naive and unsuspecting novice than the false counsel of a pseudo-*shaykh*.¹²³

On this Path there are a hundred thousand Adam-faced Iblises;
so take care not to reckon every Adam-face an Adam.¹²⁴

There are also, as noted, descriptions of Iblīs that highlight the cruder, predatory aspects of his nature, for, when subtlety and cunning prove inadequate, Iblīs reverts to more violent tactics. ‘Aṭṭār speaks of this Iblīs who waits in ambush like the hunter, to pounce upon the innocent passerby.¹²⁵ Or Iblīs appears as the highwayman in the guise of a boon companion or fellow traveller, who waylays the novice struggling along the Path.¹²⁶

Nevertheless Satan cannot overcome his prey without at least tacit cooperation on the part of the victim. A heart filled with God leaves no room for Iblīs; conversely, it is the forgetful heart that invites the satanic guest to establish therein his permanent abode.

Whenever your heart is empty of the memory of God,
the accursed devil becomes your companion on the Path.¹²⁷

If for one moment you are forgetful of the Merciful God,
in that instant you become Satan’s companion.¹²⁸

¹²¹ ‘Aṭṭār, *Muṣibatnāma*, p. 122 l. 10.

¹²² Sanā’ī, *Hadiqa*, p. 676 l. 3-4.

¹²³ See Sanā’ī, *Diwān*, p. 701 l. 7.

¹²⁴ Sanā’ī, *Makātib*, p. 56 l. 11-12. See also *Diwān*, p. 656 l. 7.

¹²⁵ ‘Aṭṭār, *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, p. 258 l. 198; *Miftāḥ al-irāda*, p. 247 l. 5, l. 13; *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 94 l. 17.

¹²⁶ ‘Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 154 l. 10-16; *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, p. 150 l. 3368, p. 168 l. 3778-3779.

¹²⁷ ‘Aṭṭār, *Pandnāma*, p. 32 l. 7-8 of the Persian text.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45 l. 12-13 of the Persian text. See also pp. 8 l. 13-9 l. 1 and p. 125 l. 6-15 of the Persian text.

‘Aṭṭār counsels the initiate not to toy with Satan’s works or take lightly even casual involvements with Iblīs along the Path. One false step into his domain is fatal; it results in a complete transformation into the despised image of Ash-Shayṭān himself.¹²⁹ Above all the pious seeker must be vigilant, and he must ponder seriously the counsel he receives from his *shaykh*. Only then can he attain sufficient insight to understand the many complex and confusing aspects of the mystic life.

If you be not knowledgeable about this Path,
your only vision will be of Satan;
Your blessings will seem satanic,
all your light will appear obscure.¹³⁰

‘Aṭṭār is tireless in his warnings against joining the hordes of Iblīs’ followers who infest the *dunyā* to spread their disease.¹³¹ Iblīs reduces this mass of corrupt humanity to the most abject servitude; he invests each with the mantle of his service and attaches his collar of fire around every neck.¹³² No longer do their cries of *lā ḥawla* move the Almighty to compassion, for these spiritual corpses are Muslim in name only.¹³³ In their distraction, these pathetic folk chase mindlessly after Iblīs on their way to eternal damnation, their souls eaten away by Satan’s delusions of worldly delight.¹³⁴ They will suffer the same torments he does because of their reliance on the world; they, like him, will remain ever separated from God, driven like devils from the threshold of the Almighty.¹³⁵

2. *Jesus and the rock*

In the recapitulation of the various strains of the Iblīs motif in the works of ‘Aṭṭār and Sanā’ī, one mythic tale attains particular prominence, the story of Iblīs chiding Jesus for using a stone as pillow. It highlights especially well their attitudes toward the *dunyā*. The previous encounter with this fable, in the works of Al-Makkī, Abū Hāmid Al-Ghazālī, and Al-Kubrā,¹³⁶ occurred in a significantly different context. While there is no doubt that these Sufi theorists were pointing to the danger latent in even the slightest involvement with the world, they were, at the same time, revealing facets of Iblīs’ character that seem far

¹²⁹ ‘Aṭṭār, *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, p. 198 l. 4462 and *Pandnāma*, p. 117 l. 11-12 of the Persian text. See also *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, p. 26 l. 582 and p. 27 l. 604.

¹³⁰ ‘Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, p. 219 l. 7-8.

¹³¹ ‘Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 177 l. 10ff. See also p. 94 l. 3-5.

¹³² ‘Aṭṭār, *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, p. 286 l. 855-857; *Pandnāma*, p. 33 l. 4-5 of the Persian text.

¹³³ ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 132 l. 10-12.

¹³⁴ ‘Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, pp. 90 l. 8-91 l. 6, p. 174 l. 6-9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61 l. 21 and p. 64 l. 7.

¹³⁶ See Ch. 2, pp. 89-90.

removed from the cliché picture of a one-dimensional force of worldly evil. Far from being the tempter, Iblīs is acting in this fable as the wise counsellor, the *shaykh* concerned for the spiritual progress of his disciple. Consequently, Iblīs takes pains to point out to Jesus that he is not as detached from the world as he might presume because he still employs an object from the world for comfort, the stone pillow on which he rests his head.

The versions of this tale that both Sanāʾī and ʿAṭṭār incorporate into their works downplay the *shaykh*-like qualities demonstrated by Iblīs. In their amplifications of the tale and the commentaries they append to it, they show that their predominant concern is to prevent the Sufi practitioner from having anything to do with the material world, no matter how innocent or commonplace the particular object appears. Sanāʾī's version of this story illustrates well their common approach:

In the tradition I have read that the Spirit of God (Jesus)
 was out one night, unexpectedly, in the desert.
 After some time had passed, he became drowsy,
 and made haste to find a place to sleep.
 He espied a fallen rock and made it his pillow;
 he hastened no further and went to sleep.
 For a time he slept; but suddenly he awoke
 and saw Iblīs in that out-of-the-way place.
 He cried, 'O outcast! O accursed dog!
 for what purpose have you sneaked up on me?'
 How is it you seek refuge in a place
 that is a protected habitation for Jesus?'
 He replied, 'You have brought trouble for me,
 for you have appropriated my goods in my own very palace!
 Why, then, do you inconvenience me?
 Why do you appropriate the goods in my palace?'
 The kingdom of the world, all of it, is my palace;
 you do not possess dominion, I do.
 But when you plunder my possessions,
 you render me helpless because of your inviolability.'
 He (Jesus) replied, 'What trouble have I caused you?'
 Tell me how I have made designs against your goods.'
 He answered, 'This stone which is your pillow,
 when you were tired, did you not take it from the world?'
 Hastily Jesus hurled the rock away;
 when he did this, the body of Iblīs dissolved.¹³⁷

Before departing, however, Iblīs must have the last word. At the same time that he affirms that Jesus has now freed himself from the grasp of the world, he repeats his accusation that Jesus had no business toying with it

¹³⁷ Sanāʾī, *Ḥadīqa*, pp. 392 l. 18-393 l. 10.

in the first place.¹³⁸ The world belongs to Iblīs and is his proper domain. Sanāʾī's commentary reiterates his previous warnings against involvements in this realm of Satan with its apparent joys and pleasures. It is impossible, Sanāʾī claims, for the believer to grasp the ultimate consequences of such foolish risks. True hope lies only in the total abandonment of the world and the annihilation of desire.¹³⁹

Continuing with his commentary, Sanāʾī describes his vision of what epitomizes the consummate worldling; he is the crude, obese glutton whose voracious appetite exceeds that of the cow, and whose gullet is little more than a sewer-like trough. This is the degradation that awaits the unwary dabbler in worldly delights. Do not, Sanāʾī counsels, treat sensuality as a plaything, for it possesses power of deadly proportions:

Whoever strives against desire like Jesus,
he will escape from the torment of his existence.

.....

In this state, take my advice,
put on a coat of mail against the power of the enemy.
Your enemy is the accursed world;
extricate your intellect from its snare.¹⁴⁰

ʿAṭṭār treats this fable in two separate works, the *Manṭiq al-tayr* and the *Muṣibatnāma*.¹⁴¹ Both instances are virtually identical with regard to plot line; the commentary, of course, differs depending on the particular context. ʿAṭṭār's poetic version resembles more closely the prose example cited previously in Chapter 2¹⁴² with its paucity of detail, in contrast to the more amplified version of Sanāʾī. Nor does ʿAṭṭār place quite as much emphasis as Sanāʾī on Iblīs' claim to have been victimized by Jesus' plundering his goods. Especially the critical detail about his inability to retrieve his stolen property because Jesus possesses the divine gift of immunity, which is accorded all prophet-saints in Islam, is totally absent. However, ʿAṭṭār joins Sanāʾī in directing the thematic focus of the tale towards a condemnation of the world, with little evident concern for Iblīs' role as *shaykh* and counsellor to Jesus.

Jesus, son of Mary, had fallen asleep,
and had put half a brick under his head.
When Jesus opened his eyes after his restful sleep,
he saw the accursed Iblīs above his head.
He cried, 'O accursed one, why stand you there?'
He replied, 'Because you have placed my brick under your head!'

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 393 l. 11-12.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 393 l. 13-14.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 393 l. 15-394 l. 8. The translation is of p. 394 l. 3, 5-6.

¹⁴¹ See ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-tayr*, pp. 132 l. 17-134 l. 4; *Muṣibatnāma*, p. 179 l. 1-9.

¹⁴² See Ch. 2, p. 90.

The whole world is like my domain;
 it is clear that this brick belongs to me.
 You are appropriating goods in my kingdom;
 you have trespassed in my territory.'
 Jesus hurled that thing from beneath his head;
 he resolved to sleep with his face on the ground.
 When he (Jesus) flung that half brick away, Iblīs said,
 'Now that I leave your presence, sleep well!'¹⁴³

In the *Muṣibatnāma*, 'Aṭṭār's commentary is concise and to the point. Since death is man's ultimate fate, and the tomb his final resting place, what value is there in occupying one's time with the creation of an earthly paradise that will eventually crumble to dust? It is from the tears and lifeblood of the heart that the mortar and bricks of a lasting home are molded, not from the world's materiality.¹⁴⁴

The *Manṭiq at-tayr*, in contrast, contains a commentary that is longer than the fable itself. However, the gist is the same: the world is enticing but deadly, a novice easily gets caught in its web. Those who find themselves at home in the world are like the Old Testament figure Korah, who was known for his wealth and avarice, or like Pharaoh, Nimrod, and Shaddād, whose pride, arrogance, and tyranny epitomize the qualities of the depraved human spirit.¹⁴⁵

Recalling a familiar Sufi image of the world¹⁴⁶ 'Aṭṭār describes it as a rotting corpse, carrion for unmanly predators.¹⁴⁷ Or again, he calls it a raging fire that attracts the innocent moth-soul with its light, only to consume the soul instantaneously in its flame. Fire can be fought only with fire; therefore, the *nafs* must be subjected to the fire of asceticism if the raging world-fire is to be extinguished. Only in passing through the flame of purification does the Sufi discover hope of victory for the soul.¹⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that neither Sanā'ī nor 'Aṭṭār develops in his commentary the other major theme that seems an integral part of this meeting between Jesus and Iblīs, namely, the theme of Iblīs' victimization. Jesus, in all the versions of this tale, is accused of thievery and trespass. In Sanā'ī the theme is developed a step further: Iblīs is helpless to retaliate against Jesus, who has invaded his territory and appropriated his goods, because Jesus enjoys special protection from God arising from his prophetic office and his role as exemplar of the spiritual life.

An analysis of this theme is important, however, because of the light it sheds on the relationship between Iblīs and mankind, especially the

¹⁴³ 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, pp. 132 l. 17-133 l. 5. See also *Muṣibatnāma*, p. 179 l. 1-9.

¹⁴⁴ 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣibatnāma*, p. 179 l. 8-9.

¹⁴⁵ 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 133 l. 6-13.

¹⁴⁶ See Ch. 2, p. 70.

¹⁴⁷ 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 133 l. 14-19.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 133 l. 20-134 l. 4.

culpability each incurs through this relationship. One way to help clarify the issue is to examine another Sufi tale that is clearly related to the above story of Jesus and Iblīs. Its advantage is that it develops and explains Iblīs' role as victim with far greater precision, and does not restrict itself simply to an energetic condemnation of the evils found in the material world.

One version of this tale is found in the *Mantiq at-ṭayr* of ʿAṭṭār; however, there, it is presented in such a bare, skeletal fashion, that it is inadequate for the purposes of this inquiry.¹⁴⁹ We must turn to Ibn ʿArabī's *Rūḥ al-quds* for a more thorough treatment of the fable and its thematic content.

A man came to our master Abū Madyān—may God be pleased with him!—and said, 'O master, Satan is troubling me. Perhaps you would drive him away from me.' The *shaykh* replied to him, 'Before your arrival, Iblīs already complained to me about you!' The man asked, 'What did he say to you?' The master answered, 'He said to me, "O *shaykh*, you know that God created the world for me, and He made it my snare and my trap. He granted me dominion over it, but someone has come along to infringe on my rights and to take from it what is mine. I ran after him to demand my rights from him. By God, I have not pursued men indiscriminately nor sought out any one of them. I have not left my own realm; I guard my garden and my goods. But he who has taken from there what is mine, him I have followed in order to demand my rights. And I knew that so and so would complain about me to you, so I followed after him and I have told you the whole story. As for me, I will not relinquish what is my due from him. I will snatch away whatever I can from his religion; or else let him return my goods to me like the ascetics did, and the adepts. It is for this

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 131 l. 9-132 l. 5.

The sparseness of ʿAṭṭār's version will be evident once it is compared with the text of Ibn ʿArabī. ʿAṭṭār reads as follows:

A foolish fellow went before a spiritual director
and complained loudly of Iblīs.
He said, 'Iblīs leads me astray by his deception;
he corrupts my religion with his imposture.'
The sage replied to him, 'O noble fellow,
Iblīs was here a little while ago, too.
He was annoyed and complained about you,
and poured dirt on his head because of what he endured at your hand.
He (Iblīs) said, "The whole world is my domain,
but he who is an enemy of the world does not belong to me.
You, tell him, 'Get going on your way!
hands off my territory!'
Because he has started this fierce battle in my world,
I resolve to do violence to his religion.
Hands off my territory,
and I will have nothing to do with any of you!
Whoever stays completely outside of my domain,
him, I will leave alone, and so be it!"'

reason that God said, 'As for My servants, you have no power over them.' I have no charge against them, nor any right, for they abandoned my goods. But this fellow infringed on my rights.'''

'Whoever acts unjustly against you, act unjustly against him in the same way that he acted unjustly against you. So who is the evildoer?' The man replied, 'I am.' The *shaykh* said to him, 'Return to him his world, and he will return to you your hereafter.'¹⁵⁰

This tale of Abū Madyān and Iblīs, and the related tale of Jesus and Iblīs, especially as told by Sanāʿī, reflect a strain of the Iblīs tradition that affirms his obedience and submission while downplaying any real moral culpability on his part. God created the world and commanded Iblīs to take charge of it, with all its deceptions and enticements to evil; Iblīs acquiesced to God's will and now acts as His agent. He does not force men to embroil themselves in the temptations of the world; on the contrary, Iblīs spends most of his time playing the role of guardian-steward, watching over this earthly garden that has been entrusted to his care. It is man who is the interloper, man who freely chooses to encroach upon Iblīs' domain to steal away his worldly goods. "Who is the evildoer?" asks the *shaykh*; it is man and no one else.

This theme is reinforced further by references to the detachment, perfection, and resulting inviolability of the great Sufi saints. They are the ones who have divested themselves of any trace of Iblīs' *dunyā*, and, consequently, they are the ones most able to reduce Iblīs to the abject state of victimhood, because he no longer possesses weapons potent enough to combat the level of their holiness.

Iblīs' outrage at Jesus' appropriation of the brick is, therefore, understandable given this particular perspective on both his and Jesus' cosmic roles. Jesus, here, is toying with a realm of existence that, supposedly, he has completely renounced. Is it not unfair that he, who is impeccable and beyond the reach of Satan's power, avails himself of Satan's goods without paying the price, i.e., without allowing the possibility of his succumbing to the temptations of the world?

Judging from these mythic fables, the rules of the spiritual life in this regard are clear: the Sufi saint who has achieved a high level of perfection and attained to virtual inviolability must, at the same time, return to Iblīs the goods of the world that are Iblīs' due. And once having returned these goods, the Sufi adept must never again meddle with them, for he and they are now parts of opposing realms of spiritual existence. To act in any way as if these two worlds are compatible is to perpetrate a deception worthy of Iblīs himself.

¹⁵⁰ Muḥyī ʿd-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Risāla rūḥ al-quḍs fī muḥāsabat an-naḥs* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿilm, 1384 A.H. - 1964 C.E.), p. 31.

3. *Iblīs: recapitulation of fundamental themes — II*

The recapitulation of the major strains of the Iblīs motif in the works of Sanāʿī and ʿAṭṭār would be incomplete without reference to Iblīs' predominant characteristic, pride, and its consequences for him and mankind.

To the extent of your ability, do not make pride the pivot
on which your life turns;

see what pride did to ʿAzāzīl.

It cut off the water of obedience from his stream,
and drew forth a Nile of curses upon his face.¹⁵¹

No amount of obedient worship was able to neutralize the destructive power of Iblīs' pride. The merit of so many thousands of years was flung like ashes into the wind; his heart, which had for so long been the abode of divine contentment, was transformed into a vale of bloody tears and eternal suffering.¹⁵² Because of one act of conceit, one neglectful deed, he was hanged ignominiously in a place reserved for bowing.¹⁵³ His refusal to make prostration before God's *khalīfa* earned him expulsion from Paradise, where he once stood in angelic splendor, and sent him, deformed and cursed, to wander the earth seeking to shed the blood of innocent men.¹⁵⁴

Self-boasting is Satan's profession;
he who esteems himself little is truly a man.

Satan said, 'I am better than Adam!'

Without doubt he is accursed until Resurrection Day.

Man was fashioned from clay because of its humility;
that creature of fire and light was lost because of his pride.

Iblīs was banished because of his overweening pride;

Adam was welcomed because he sought forgiveness.

Adam was ennobled when he repented;

Satan was humiliated when he boasted.

A grain falls to the ground; people rush to pick it up.

When an ear of corn raises high its head, they cut it down.¹⁵⁵

The whole of Iblīs' pride is encapsulated in the one word "I", the symbol of his narcissistic preoccupation with his own superiority. His "I" so distorts his spiritual vision that he sees all reality as a reflection of

¹⁵¹ Ḥakīm Abū ʿAlī-Majd Majdūd Ibn ʿĀdam Sanāʿī Ghaznavī, *Mathnawīhā-yi Ḥakīm Sanāʿī*, ed. Mudarris Raḍawī (Tehrān: Intishārāt-i dānishgāh-yi Tehrān, 1348 A.H. solar-1969 C.E.), p. 105 l. 260-261.

¹⁵² ʿAṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma*, p. 6, l. 96-100. See also *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 107 l. 9.

¹⁵³ ʿAṭṭār, *Dīwān*, p. 472 l. 9005.

¹⁵⁴ Sanāʿī, *Dīwān*, p. 263 l. 2-4. See also ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 9 l. 12-16.

¹⁵⁵ ʿAṭṭār, *Pandnāma*, pp. 38 l. 11-39 l. 7 of the Persian text.

himself.¹⁵⁶ For Iblīs to love, he must love himself; for him to seek God, to seek an Other who is beyond himself, is impossible because of the self-centered “I” that dominates his spirit. It is this proclamation of “I” that links Iblīs and Pharaoh as spiritual brothers, for Pharaoh, too, proclaimed himself lord above all beings and placed himself on a par with the Almighty.¹⁵⁷

Iblīs is not only the author of the sin of “I”, he is also, as indicated previously, the one who warns the faithful against succumbing to this same temptation.¹⁵⁸ ‘Aṭṭār, too, perceives these two sides of Iblīs’ personality. In contrast to the Iblīs who arrogantly shouts the “I” of self-divinization, he presents us with Iblīs, the counsellor, who, like a devoted *shaykh*, carefully guides the novice through the forest of self-delusions that springs from the fertile soil of pride.

God Most High spoke in secret to Moses,
 ‘Go, seek guidance from Iblīs.’
 When Moses espied Iblīs upon the road,
 he expressed his wish to receive guidance from Iblīs.
 He (Iblīs) said, ‘Always remember this one bit of advice,
 never say “I” lest you become like me.’¹⁵⁹

In addition to offering good counsel, Iblīs, the *shaykh*, attempts to confront his comrade, Pharaoh, with the presumptuousness of his own claim to divinity. ‘Aṭṭār describes an occasion when Iblīs approached Pharaoh with a handful of sand which he, Iblīs, proceeded to transform into a shower of pearls:

He (Iblīs) said, ‘Take this sand and you, too, make a pearl.’
 He (Pharaoh) replied, ‘I do not know anything about this sort of thing.’
 Then Iblīs, the accursed, opened his mouth
 and said, ‘You, with such pompous airs!
 If I show my ugly face, you play the beggar.
 Under what pretext do you make yourself God?’¹⁶⁰

Instead of attaining God-like stature, the prideful man can only hope to become another Iblīs,¹⁶¹ wallowing in his own selfishness and vanity.¹⁶² Like a deformed Satan, he takes on the characteristics of a dog; in fact he sinks to a state of ritual impurity lower than that of any canine

¹⁵⁶ Sanāʾī, *Ḥadiqa*, p. 232 l. 8-11.

¹⁵⁷ See Sanāʾī, *Makātīb*, p. 113 l. 4-6; *Ḥadiqa*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ See Ch. 2, p. 93.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 195 l. 11-13.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Aṭṭār, *Muṣibatnāma*, pp. 184 l. 9-185 l. 14. The translation is of p. 184 l. 3-5.

¹⁶¹ Sanāʾī, *Makātīb*, p. 115 l. 3-4.

¹⁶² ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 192 l. 17.

scavenger.¹⁶³ This deformation does not, however, impair Iblīs' intellectual faculties; quite the contrary.¹⁶⁴ ʿAṭṭār speaks of the boundlessness and immeasurability of Iblīs' knowledge,¹⁶⁵ while Sanāʾī dwells on the profundity of Iblīs' insight into the religious life of faithful Muslims.¹⁶⁶

Iblīs possesses knowledge, not for true achievement,
but for the sake of boasting and deception.
The devil knows better the value of your religion,
since he provides enticements to seize your religion.
You, O ass, are more contemptible than Iblīs,
because you are a religion seller, and he a religion buyer.
Since you are hung up in his snare,
you flee from God and his messenger.
Whoever gets drunk on his (Iblīs') talk,
no one sees him sober for all eternity.¹⁶⁷

The expansion of Iblīs' knowledge produces an opposite result in his victims; their reason dulls and they stagger mindlessly after their new master.¹⁶⁸ With eyes, as Sanāʾī describes, anointed with the collyrium of ignorance, they drink freely from the honeyed wine of indolence supplied by Iblīs.¹⁶⁹ These people can no longer be relied upon to witness to the truth; they stand dumbfounded in the face of Iblīs' deceptions.¹⁷⁰

He who seeks ruse and fraud from Iblīs,
what worth does he acknowledge in Idrīs?¹⁷¹

Sanāʾī suggests that, to revive the moribund intellect, the novice must reshape it in the image of the holy companion of the prophet, Salmān, and thereby vanquish once and for all the devil of the heart by forcing him to submit to Islam.¹⁷² ʿAṭṭār, in turn, counsels the Sufi to listen attentively, not to the whisperings of Satan, but to the whisperings of God about the secrets hidden in the Divine Mind that contain the key to an understanding of man's destiny and his spiritual origin.¹⁷³

If you grasp the meaning of your origin, you will be king;
if not, you will be like a devil, like Satan himself.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶³ Sanāʾī, *Mathnawīhā*, p. 105 l. 256-257.

¹⁶⁴ See Ch. 2, pp. 79-80.

¹⁶⁵ ʿAṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 33 l. 2.

¹⁶⁶ Sanāʾī, *Dīwān*, p. 200 l. 3-4. See also ʿAṭṭār, *Ushtunāma*, p. 170 l. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Sanāʾī, *Hadīqa*, p. 322 l. 5-9.

¹⁶⁸ ʿAṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 152 l. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Sanāʾī, *Hadīqa*, p. 3.

This conviction that Satan makes fools of the ignorant and indolent, and manipulates their lives, is shared by many Sufi writers. See Jāmi, *Nafahāt al-uns*, pp. 252, 329; ʿAin Al-Qudāt, *Nāmahā*, 1:11 #13, 1:32 #34; *Tamhīdāt*, pp. 75-76 #105.

¹⁷⁰ Sanāʾī, *Makātīb*, p. 60 l. 1-3.

¹⁷¹ Sanāʾī, *Hadīqa*, p. 260 l. 16.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 300 l. 15-16.

¹⁷³ See ʿAṭṭār, *Mazhar al-ʿajāʾib*, p. 110 l. 2453, p. 180 l. 4053; *Dīwān*, p. 420 l. 7969.

¹⁷⁴ ʿAṭṭār, *Mazhar al-ʿajāʾib*, p. 21 l. 468.

Knowledge of the secret of origin is not allied to the apparent superiority of one created essence over another, as Iblīs sadly discovered when he touted his fiery essence over the clay of Adam's fragile body. His proud fire mourns now in anguish because of the nobility of that humble dust;¹⁷⁵ the Sufi should learn from Iblīs' plight that it is better to bow, unquestioningly, before Adam the just, rather than to doubt and rebel.¹⁷⁶ Despite the bravado of his fire, Iblīs possessed an adolescent spirit in contrast to the mature spirit of Adam;¹⁷⁷ why then abandon Adam to join the immature sensualists who follow Iblīs?¹⁷⁸

Both Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār enjoin the traditional virtues of the ascetical life upon the Sufi wayfarer, as a tried and true means of coping with the satanic elements of human existence. Repent, and you will be secure, otherwise you will be of less worth than a dog's corpse;¹⁷⁹ practice poverty and you will have nothing to fear from Satan's taunts. His shouts are merely the signs of his frustration and envy at your progress.¹⁸⁰ Detach yourself from the world and live as a solitary wanderer;¹⁸¹ make your resting place among the ruins, seek not the fame and recognition of men if you desire true humility.¹⁸² Far from being a joyless task, the way of asceticism enkindles within the soul an ardent longing for more intimate encounters with God. It is the ever present consciousness of this relationship of lover and Beloved that wipes away any pain or grief suffered by the Sufi on the ascetical Path.

Be thankful, O lover, because you possess a Beloved.
 Come out now, happily, from inside your shell.
 Since you have Him for Beloved, do not grieve;
 but beware, eat not the morsel proffered by humanity,
 Eat not the morsel like the people of temporality,
 lest you become afflicted, like Satan.
 If you would eat, eat the morsel prescribed by the Beloved,
 so that a hundred moons and suns arise from your body.¹⁸³

There is no need for discouragement; have confidence in the love God offers and muster your strength for an attack on Satan's citadel to free yourself once and for all from his power.¹⁸⁴ Whoever shares the Beloved's

¹⁷⁵ Sanā'ī, *Dīwān*, p. 166 l. 9.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 675 l. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Sanā'ī, *Ḥadīqa*, p. 722 l. 9.

¹⁷⁸ Sanā'ī, *Makātib*, p. 40 l. 9-10. Repeated on p. 124 l. 4-5.

¹⁷⁹ 'Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 87 l. 8, p. 88 l. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Sanā'ī, *Dīwān*, p. 174 l. 9-17.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 299 l. 10.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 506 l. 3-5.

¹⁸³ 'Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 46 l. 19-22.

¹⁸⁴ See 'Aṭṭār, *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*, p. 51 l. 1165, p. 63 l. 1438, p. 107 l. 2402-2403, p. 122 l. 2718; *Pandnāma*, p. 63 l. 3 and p. 96 l. 12 of the Persian text.

affection, acquires thereby a steadfast faith. Such a faith, grounded in love, will be the Sufi's most potent weapon against Iblīs.¹⁸⁵ Conversely the man whose faith is lukewarm and fickle cannot hope to survive the battle;¹⁸⁶ he will wander the Path, blindly, finally dying in Satan's grip.¹⁸⁷

Do not bestow a robe of honor on the Jonahs of your body, no, do not;
do not throw the Josephs of your religion into the well or in prison.

.....

If you sell honest Joseph to Satan,
when you pull him out of the well, do not make his price cheap.
Today you are buying the Canaanite Joseph's body;
do not traffic, however, with the Joseph of your faith, like bread.¹⁸⁸

The Beloved will not tolerate a halfhearted response from the Sufi; an authentic commitment to the Path must entail single-minded dedication. Sanā'ī advises the *murīd* to drink so much wine of love that he will be too drunk to place his foot off the true Path. Were he to stray, Sanā'ī warns, drunkenness of a totally different sort would overcome him, the drunken stupor of Satan.¹⁸⁹ 'Aṭṭār, too, perceives the ambivalence of the drunken state; it need not always be a sign of the intoxication of love, but can as easily proclaim one's commitment to the world of unbelief and the abandonment of all that is godly.¹⁹⁰

The Sufi who succeeds in losing himself in the love-embrace of mystic union has, as noted earlier, attained an enviable position with regard to his dealings with Iblīs. No longer will he be prey for Iblīs the hunter; the roles are now reversed and it is the proficient mystic who victimizes the pathetic Iblīs.¹⁹¹ According to 'Aṭṭār, the holy caliph 'Umar would, when annoyed, simply stick his fingers in Iblīs' eyes.¹⁹² Whoever has cast the world from himself, be he caliph or beggar, has reduced Iblīs to slavery.¹⁹³ 'Aṭṭār tells the story of a renowned *shaykh* who fell asleep in the

¹⁸⁵ 'Aṭṭār, *Maṣṣar al-ʿajāʾib*, p. 221 l. 4957. Similarly on p. 121 l. 2699.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163 l. 3665-3672.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48 l. 1087.

¹⁸⁸ Sanā'ī, *Dīwān*, p. 507 l. 4, 8-9.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 432 l. 9.

¹⁹⁰ See 'Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 13 l. 1-2, p. 30 l. 14-15; *Ilāhīnāma*, p. 291 l. 7-9.

'Ain Al-Qudāt describes the drunken man as the bride of Satan. He takes on female characteristics and forfeits forever the name of "man". See 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāhā*, 2:230 #345.

¹⁹¹ This theme occurs throughout the writings of Sufi *shaykhs*, regardless of the particular stance each takes vis-à-vis the Iblīs tradition. In addition to the material presented in Ch. 2, see 'Ain Al-Qudāt, *Nāmāhā*, 1:426-427 #713; Al-Baqlī, *Mashrab al-arwāḥ*, p. 314 l. 14-18; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 379.

¹⁹² 'Aṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma*, p. 16 l. 229.

¹⁹³ 'Aṭṭār, *Lisān al-ghayb*, p. 181 l. 14.

mosque. Another worshipper caught sight of Iblīs and asked him what business he had in a house of prayer:

The accursed one replied, 'I continually desire, even this very moment,
to divert the ignorant man from the Path.
But I have neither the strength nor the ardor,
because I am terrified of that wise man who is asleep.
If that wise man did not have me hobbled,
that ignorant man would be like wax in my hand.'¹⁹⁴

What is most significant, however, is not the power latent in mystic perfection to ward off Iblīs; far more critical is the power of mystic love to transform the Sufi who has been caught up in its embrace. Sanā'ī encapsulates in a single verse this profound vision of love's transforming power, prefiguring at the same time Jalāl Ad-Dīn Rūmī's passionate lines a century later on this same theme:

The tips of Your lashes, with every glance that flows down the road of love,
bring forth Adam, Iblīs, and the unbeliever as Muslims.¹⁹⁵

4. *Iblīs: the saving power of martyrdom*

The recapitulation of the major themes reflecting Satan's involvements with the religious lives of men and women does not alone hold the stage in Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār's works. Both authors, in addition, offer their own particular analyses of the ultimate significance of the critical events that are central to the Iblīs myth. It is apparent that neither one considers Iblīs to be simply a one-dimensional symbol of pure malice; both recognize that Iblīs' fate is the tragic fall of a figure of nobility and advanced spiritual development.

He (Iblīs) said, 'In the beginning, for thousands of years, I
drank deeply from this full cup of mine,
Until in the end I turned the cup upside down,
and the torment of the curse came out from under it.
In the two worlds, from top to bottom,
there is no place I have not made a bowing place.'¹⁹⁶

For all this loyalty, Iblīs has only his disfigured form to show. He, who at first made the houris of Paradise his bed companions, now frequents

¹⁹⁴ 'Aṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma*, p. 78 l. 1247-1251. The translation is of l. 1249-1251.

Jāmī relates another story of the holy *shaykh* Abū Madyān (see above, pp. 160-161) based on the testimony of Ibn 'Arabī. In it Iblīs expresses his terrible frustration from trying to insinuate sinful *khawāṭir* into the psyche of Abū Madyān. He has as much chance of sullying Abū Madyān's soul, he explains, as does a man who tries to pollute the Mediterranean by urinating in it. See Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, pp. 527-528.

¹⁹⁵ Sanā'ī, *Diwān*, p. 142 l. 14. See also Ch. 2, pp. 120-121.

¹⁹⁶ 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 241 l. 16-18.

devils in the baths.¹⁹⁷ Yet even in this state of degradation, ‘Aṭṭār discovers within Iblīs’ character remnants of his former virility and spiritual perfection. He describes him in terms reminiscent of ‘Ain Al-Quḍāt, who accorded Iblīs the honor of chamberlain at the door of the Divine Presence for his loyalty and self-sacrifice.

He (Iblīs) said, ‘Far off stood I, sword in hand;
 I drive from that door whoever appears,
 So no one loiters around that door.
 In the whole world, that is my work, that and nothing else.
 Far off stood I, two eyes like clouds,
 because that face denies itself to me.
 Far off stood I, yet I cannot abide that anyone else
 behold that face for even a moment except me.
 Far off stood I, for though I am on His Path,
 I am not worthy of His threshold.
 Far off stood I, (I turn) neither foot nor head from Him.
 Since I am afire, it is better far away from Him.
 Far off stood I, in a state of gloom because of separation,
 because I do not possess the radiance of that union’s intimacy.
 Although I have been banished from His threshold,
 I do not turn my head a jot from His Path.
 Since the moment I set foot in the Friend’s alley,
 I have not looked in any direction but the direction of the Friend.
 Since I am now intimate companion to the secret’s meaning,
 I will not look—not even the littlest bit—at anyone.¹⁹⁸

Earlier we alluded in passing to the motivating force behind Iblīs’ determination to remain loyal to his Beloved, according to ‘Aṭṭār.¹⁹⁹ He interprets Iblīs’ refusal to bow to Adam not only as an act of personal pride, but more significantly as a quest for knowledge, a desire to share the divine secret that has been hidden within the essence of Adam. When God ordered the angels to bow, it was to prevent their acquiring knowledge of this secret. Iblīs, however, spurred on by his obsessive love of God, refused to allow this unique opportunity to escape. He would possess the gnosis, no matter the cost.

On several occasions ‘Aṭṭār analyzes Iblīs’ longing for gnosis and its impact on his relationship with God.²⁰⁰ The thrust of the argumentation appears to be derived from a passage of ‘Amr Ibn ‘Uthmān Al-Makkī’s *Ganjnāma* which ‘Aṭṭār quotes in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* and which he versifies and incorporates into the *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242 l. 1.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 242 l. 9-18.

¹⁹⁹ See Ch. 2, p. 91, note 139.

²⁰⁰ See ‘Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, pp. 134 l. 18-135 l. 3; *Ushturnāma*, pp. 28 l. 18-31 l. 2; *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*, pp. 216 l. 5-217 l. 12; *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, pp. 452-453.

²⁰¹ See ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, pp. 452-453 and *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*, pp. 216 l. 5-217 l. 12.

He (ʿAmr Ibn ʿUthmān Al-Makkī) said, ‘When God breathed that pure soul
 into the body of Adam made of water and clay,
 He willed that the hosts of angels bow low,
 lest they obtain any knowledge about the soul, or any hint.
 He said, “O spirits of the heavens,
 bow down before Adam this very moment!”
 They all bowed their heads to the ground.
 Assuredly not one beheld that mystery pure.
 But Iblīs held back and spoke this word,
 “No one will see a bow from me!
 If they should cast my head from my body,
 that would not be as painful to me as this bending the neck.
 I know very well that Adam is not mere clay;
 I would give my head to see this more wondrous secret, have no
 fear!” ’²⁰²

And so he does not bow, but seizes the treasure hidden away in Adam’s
 essence. God rages at this thief who has lain in ambush to pillage His
 most guarded secret; yet the curse He lays upon Iblīs pales before the
 gnosis he has plundered.

‘He said, “O Lord, grant a respite to this servant;
 bestow a remedy upon this downcast soul.”
 God Most High replied, “Your respite is granted;
 I have placed the collar of curse round your neck.
 I will brand you with the name ‘liar’;
 you will remain accused until Resurrection Day.”
 After that Iblīs said, “This treasure pure,
 since it has been revealed to me, what fear I of curse?
 Both that curse and that mercy are Yours;
 that servant and that fate are Yours.
 If my fate is the curse, no fear;
 for every poison is there not an antidote?
 When I, seeking mercy, beheld Your creation,
 I rudely incurred Your curse.
 Are not some destined for Your curse, like Your mercy?
 I am the servant of the curse, one who is not humiliated.” ’²⁰³

The most extensive treatment by ʿAṭṭār of Iblīs’ refusal to bow,
 however, is not in the two above-mentioned works, but in the *Ushturnāma*
 where ʿAṭṭār presents his most complex analysis of both the gnostic
 theme and the additional theme of Iblīs’ fidelity to monotheistic worship.
 In fact this latter motif occupies the stage in the beginning and middle
 sections of the passage where it is linked, as it often is, with Iblīs’ pro-
 testations of superiority over Adam’s fragile form.

²⁰² ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 216 l. 6-12.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 217 l. 3-10.

The accursed Iblīs was created of fire and light;
 Adam was created from the image of God, wrought in dust.
 One can discover light in darkness,
 but darkness in light goes undiscovered.
 When 'Azāzīl saw clay Adam,
 immediately he gazed upon himself in his purity,
 And he said, 'O Lord, I am created of light unalloyed;
 this, You have made of useless clay. I speak the truth!'
 (Whoever sees himself the center of attraction,
 he is set apart from the pure state of Sufīs.)
 'I, who have spent so many years at Your threshold,
 and have progressed along Your Path,
 How will I bow to someone other than You?'

 'I will bow to no one but You for eternity,
 whether You will accept me or drive me away.'²⁰⁴

Iblīs does not seem at all aware of the treasure hidden within Adam's essence; in fact God chides him for his ignorance and explains in detail the superior qualities of Adam, including his possession of the secret of secrets. God acknowledges that He has sown a seed within this clay form that grows in yearning for its sower. In addition to sowing this seed, God wills to shower His love on Adam's clay so that the seed may continue to flourish.²⁰⁵

At this particular juncture 'Aṭṭār begins to weave into the text language reminiscent of the *Ganjnāma*. God orders the angels to bow but Iblīs refuses:

They all placed their heads on the ground;
 Iblīs the accursed, however, remained standing.
 God Most High said, 'O spy of the Path,
 how long will you stare at Adam?
 Bow before Adam, O accursed one,
 afterwards see in him all the secrets.'²⁰⁶

Iblīs, however, does not pursue the gnostic theme but rather reiterates his unswerving monotheism.

Iblīs replied, 'O God of the universe,
 king of the manifest and hidden,
 I will never bow to anyone but You.
 I never see duality except as the One.
 I have bowed before You for years,
 always I obeyed Your august command.
 I will not bow to another than You;
 this word of command I will not obey.'²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ 'Aṭṭār, *Ushturnāma*, pp. 28 l. 18-29 l. 1, 7.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29 l. 8-20.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29 l. 22-30 l. 1.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30 l. 2-5.

God again interrupts to point out to Iblīs the foolishness of his position. There are not two before him, God explains, but only one, for the secret essence of Adam is from God Himself. And if Iblīs continues to refuse to bow, there is no alternative but that God tie the collar of curse around his neck and mark him with the name liar. In keeping with the gnostic theme, these threats ring hollow to Iblīs when compared with the prize he is about to win.²⁰⁸

After this Iblīs lay in ambush;
 he saw the secret; he attained to the essence of Truth.
 He said, 'This secret, at this very moment, is unveiled.
 This hope was the object of all my designs!
 To me Your curse is better than Your mercy;
 all this mercy, how could it take the place of Your curse?
 Whatever You desire, do. Pay no need to my talking,
 because I am helpless in the face of Your speech.
 That curse is Yours and that mercy is Yours;
 that servant is Yours and that fate is Yours.
 Your speech renders my heart unconscious;
 from this pain it has been rendered senseless for eternity.'
 O you who flee from your Beloved,
 in His presence all is the same. So what is good and what is bad?²⁰⁹

From these brief selections, it is apparent that 'Aṭṭār has woven a variety of strains from the Iblīs saga into his poetic descriptions of Iblīs' critical encounter with Adam. This is especially evident in the passage from the *Ushturnāma* where Iblīs is both a devoted monotheist and at the same time plots to deceive God in order to seize the secret of divine gnosis. While these strains are often complementary, when they are woven into the same text, inconsistencies are bound to arise. 'Aṭṭār cleverly tries to overcome this difficulty in the selections presented by having Iblīs say that his whole plan from the beginning was to seize God's gnostic treasure. The entire first section of the story, however, clearly comes from the monotheistic genre of Iblīs' soliloquies where Iblīs always expresses negative views of Adam, precisely because he sees nothing in him but clay. To explain these protestations of monotheism as a feigning of ignorance to put God off the track and thereby prepare the scene for the theft of God's gnosis, does not deal adequately with the ideological contradictions. Nevertheless it is an ingenious attempt to integrate the various levels of the tradition.

Alongside these forceful descriptions of what Iblīs' unflinching willpower achieved, especially the acquisition of gnosis, 'Aṭṭār paints a violently contrasting picture of God's will, which is so pervasive in its

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30 l. 6-14.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30 l. 15-21.

outreach that it nullifies the validity of anything any individual spirit may appear to accomplish on his own. In ‘Aṭṭār’s lengthy tale of the tragic fall of Adam and Eve, also in the *Ushturnāma*,²¹⁰ this theme predominates. There need be no logic, or even justice, in the unfolding of His divine plan; what matters is that the transcendent God will it. In this fact is its total justification.

Whatever God wills comes to be in time;
 because of this mystery, without notice, body and soul came to be.
 Whatever God wills comes to be without doubt;
 the person who sees, knows; he alone.
 Whatever God wills He performs in power;
 know this, O ignorant fellow, if you are perceptive.
 Whatever God wills He performs without discussion.
 No matter how much you talk, there is no conversation at all.²¹¹

This frightening inability to resist before the power of the divine decree is not limited to the example of Adam’s succumbing to the whisperings of Satan in Paradise, but it reaches back to the fall of Satan itself. In stark contrast, therefore, to the preceding vision of Iblīs the lover, who proclaims his monotheism and freely chooses destruction at the hands of his Beloved for the sake of the gnostic treasure, ‘Aṭṭār speaks of an Iblīs who has been victimized by the divine decree, an Iblīs who, in his humiliation, passes his days lamenting the incomprehensibility of his fate and the anguish of his separation. An illustrative story appears in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*² where the renowned mystic Abū Ḥusayn Nūrī is discovered seated with a man; both have been overcome with grief and an abundance of tears. Soon, however, the man leaves and Nūrī returns to his friends:

‘Do you know who that man was?’ They replied, ‘No.’ He said, ‘It was Iblīs, and he was relating the story of his services and the tale of his fate. And he was lamenting the pain of his separation. And as you saw, he was weeping and I myself was weeping too.’²¹²

Elsewhere ‘Aṭṭār describes in greater detail the reminiscences of the once glorious Iblīs. In the *Muṣibatnāma* Iblīs attempts to gain access to the prophet’s celestial dwelling. Eventually Gabriel allows him to enter so that he might have a chance to describe the torment of his separation. Iblīs recalls to the prophet the night of his Ascension and questions him about what he saw: The Throne of God, the secrets of the universe, etc.²¹³

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 36 l. 3-39 l. 14.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36 l. 1-4.

²¹² ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, p. 470.

²¹³ ‘Aṭṭār, *Muṣibatnāma*, p. 244 l. 9-19.

He said, 'Did you see to the left of the Throne of God
the valley of iniquity, the black desert?'
He replied, 'I saw it; it was far from my path.'
He said, 'That plain was my place of assembly.'
He continued, 'Did you see that overturned flag?
That flag is mine, O guide.'
He added, 'Did you see the broken *minbar* (pulpit)?
Truly it was put there for this wretched soul.
That was my *minbar*, and I summoned an assembly;
I proclaimed myself gold and creatures copper.
Seven hundred thousand angels from a hundred thousand directions
came to rest under that *minbar*.
I recited to them the traditions from God;
I made acquaintance with them, one by one.
How was I to know that I was the alien?
that they were the wise and I the madman?
I supposed that I was the fortunate one;
I was unaware of the collar of "My curse!" ' ²¹⁴

Perhaps the most striking image 'Aṭṭār employs to describe Iblīs' lamentations over the tragedy of his fate is that of flowing, black streams, which occurs in the *Ilāhīnāma*:

That incomparable man said, 'Upon a desert road,
I beheld two black streams flowing.
I followed the flow to discover what this water was
that was flowing along with such speed.
Finally, when I reached the side of a rock,
I saw Iblīs, fallen in the dust.
His two eyes were like two clouds flowing blood;
from each eye a stream of blood kept flowing.
Like rain he wept and made lament;
incessantly he spoke these words with an even voice:
"This tale is not about that face like the moon,
but about my own misfortune.
He does not accept my acts of obedience;
then He lays the fault on my own neck!
Upon whom else has such a tragedy ever fallen?
No one can recall anything like this, ever." ' ²¹⁵

The most poetic gem of this genre of Iblīs literature is found in the poetry of Sanāʿī, who captures best the full flavor of Iblīs' tragic plight at the hands of God's unfathomable will.

With Him my heart was united in love and friendship;
my heart was nest to the Simurgh of love.
At my gate stood an army from the hosts of angels;
my rank was to be stationed by the Divine Throne.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 244 l. 20-245 l. 5. The lament of Iblīs continues until line 16.

²¹⁵ 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, p. 129 l. 4-11.

But upon my path He lay the trap of His wiliness;
 Adam was the bait in the middle of that trap.
 He willed to make me the butt of His curse;
 He effected what He willed; clay Adam was but the pretext.
 I was the teacher of the angels in the heavens;
 I set my hope in eternity on this Eternal One.
 I have passed seven hundred thousand years in obedient worship;
 thousands upon thousands of treasures were amassed from my
 obedience.
 I had read upon the tablet that someone would be cursed;
 I was suspicious of everyone; I didn't suspect myself.
 Adam was created of clay, and I, from His pure light.
 I cried, 'I am incomparable!'—and he was the incomparable.
 The angels said, 'You did not bow even once.'
 How could I have done it, for He had this laid out for me.
 Come, O soul, and do not depend on your obedient deeds,
 for this verse is meant to give insight to people of the present.
 I understood the end to which we had come because of His decree.
 Thereupon a hundred fountains flowed from my two eyes.
 O you who are wise in the ways of love, I am sinless!
 For (my) finding the way to their (Adam and Eve) side was not without
 leave.²¹⁶

These contrasting views of Iblīs (the Iblīs who freely chooses perfect monotheism and seizes the divine gnosis vs. the Iblīs who is the victim of God's overpowering decree) do not, surprisingly, serve 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī as jumping-off points for more extensive discussions of freedom and predestination. 'Aṭṭār does not devote any space at all to the development of this aspect of the Iblīs tradition; Sanā'ī, however, does broach the problem on one occasion in the *Dīwān*:

What do you say about his refusal to bow?
 Was he compelled or free to choose?
 If he was able to choose, then God is impotent.
 If he was impotent, then God is a tyrant.
 Do not ponder about business that is not your business.
 Travel not a road that is not your road.²¹⁷

Rather than engage in a philosophical discussion whether or not Iblīs possessed any freedom of choice, 'Aṭṭār prefers to focus his energies on the mystical science of opposites which was developed so skillfully by Al-Ḥallāj and 'Ain Al-Qudāt. He is especially concerned with the way this science touches upon Iblīs' understanding of his own curse. Because of the intensity of Iblīs' relationship with God, 'Aṭṭār believes that he does not interpret his curse as a negative encounter; it is, paradoxically, an experience of intimacy.

²¹⁶ Sanā'ī, *Dīwān*, pp. 871 l. 2-872 l. 1.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272 l. 15-17.

In that hour when Iblīs became accursed,
 he opened his mouth in hymns of praise and glorification:
 ‘A curse from You is a hundred times more wonderful
 than if I turn my head from You toward others.
 If, because of a blow, a dog should run far away from the door,
 he would be forever separated from the bone.’
 What will I say? When he (Iblīs) heard the curse,
 all in tears because of that curse, he saw only Him.
 Someone who had drunk pure wine for thousands of years,
 (not a little, but cups filled to the brim he had drunk!)
 How could he forget that pure wine
 because of some dregs that he drank at the end?
 Although he tasted the dregs of the curse,
 in that curse he beheld only the Cupbearer.
 Since he beheld that Cupbearer for thousands of years in the pure wine,
 how, in the dregs, could he behold another than Him?
 Since the curse was decreed from that threshold,
 and since his name ‘the accursed one’ came from that Presence,
 He did not see that to be bad or good;
 he saw only this—that it came from His threshold.
 Since that curse was his robe of honor from the threshold,
 he accepted it heartily. That is the long and short of it.²¹⁸

This gift of curse that Iblīs has received is not simply one gift from among the many God bestows on the adepts of the spiritual Path; it is superior to all others and possesses an unparalleled uniqueness.

You believe that His blow is free;
 but thousands of years of obedience are its price.
 Even if your obedience to Him be thousands of years old,
 that is the price of only one hour’s curse from Him.²¹⁹

Many sought God’s grace but Iblīs alone riveted his eyes upon God’s wrath; this curse set him above all others in manliness and endowed him with power over the sons and daughters of Adam.

The curse appeared on no one else,
 for he alone was capable of buying the curse.
 Because it came from God, that curse was full of riches for him,
 although to others it seemed like death.²²⁰

Iblīs explains in another passage of the *Ilāhīnāma* that the curse should be compared to the king’s arrow. Undoubtedly the arrow terrifies the one at whom it is aimed, but the soul-target should rejoice that the king has deigned to gaze upon it.

²¹⁸ Ḥaṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, p. 134 l. 1-11.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137 l. 14-15.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131 l. 17-18.

You, at this moment, are aware only of the arrow;
if you have eyes, look at the one aiming!²²¹

Iblīs' refusal either to diminish his loving devotion or abandon his self-sacrificing submission to the Beloved, influences in a significant way 'Aṭṭār's views on Iblīs' ultimate end. However, here, as in previous cases, 'Aṭṭār does not present one, coherent and systematic theory about Iblīs' rehabilitation; he merely echoes, to a greater or lesser extent, the several theories that already had found their way into the corpus of the Sufi religious literature of his day. In fact 'Aṭṭār presents clearly contradictory opinions; at times he condemns Iblīs to eternal punishment in Hell and declares him bereft of all hope of divine mercy;²²² at others he suggests that Iblīs' rehabilitation is a distinct possibility. This latter perspective, in its various forms, is what concerns us here.

One sign of hope is discovered, curiously enough, in the overwhelming power of God's divine will, the same will that so capriciously crushed Iblīs in its grasp. 'Aṭṭār describes a conversation between Ash-Shiblī and Iblīs in which Iblīs at first bemoans the loss of his former glories; however, he quickly moves on to more pertinent concerns:

My heart was filled with His glory;
I was a confessor of His unity.
Nevertheless, without cause, in spite of all this devotion,
He drove me from His threshold without warning.
No one of the creatures of the threshold had the courage
to ask, 'Why did You banish him so suddenly?'
So if He should, without cause, accept me back again,
it would not be strange, for it cannot be fathomed.
Since without cause I was driven away by Him,
I can also, without cause, be called back by Him.
Since in God's actions there is no how and why,
it is not right to abandon hope in God.
Since His anger decreed my being driven off,
it would not be strange if His grace called me back.
I do not know; O God, I do not know!
You know; You know what You will.
One You call with a hundred caresses,
another You drive away with a hundred blows.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135 l. 17.

In both the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* and the *Manṭiq at-tayr* 'Aṭṭār recounts the last moments in the life of Ash-Shiblī who was overcome with envy over Iblīs' curse. He burned with jealousy and vexation because he was about to die without having shared this wondrous gift from God. See *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, p. 636 and *Manṭiq at-tayr*, pp. 217 l. 14-218 l. 12.

²²² See 'Aṭṭār, *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*, p. 244 l. 5493-5494 and *Pandnāma*, p. 9 l. 8-9 of the Persian text, which reads:

The sea of Your grace is without limit,
only Satan is without hope of Your mercy.

Since, without cause, You bestow great wealth,
 now, too, without cause, grant me this favor.
 Since, without cause, You bestowed the gift of existence,
 in the same way, without cause, drown me in Your generosity.
 Since Your repose depends not on my suffering,
 Your liberality depends on no cause.²²³

A second, and more compelling expression of the possible bases for Iblis' rehabilitation focuses on the fact of Iblis' role as instrument. The plight of Iblis is compared to that of the Old Testament figure Benjamin, brother of Joseph of Canaan; he, too, was unjustly victimized when Joseph hid a cup in his saddlebag and then accused him of thievery. This manipulation of Benjamin by Joseph was not, however, without purpose since it put Joseph's brothers to the test, and led to the eventual reconciliation of the sons of Jacob. In the same way, the manipulation of Iblis at God's hands results in his eventually being rewarded with the post of chamberlain at the door of the Divine Presence. There he waits, to scrutinize and test those who would enter. Without the approval of Iblis, no one can pass. In this passage 'Aṭṭār mirrors very closely 'Ain Al-Qudāt's perception of Iblis:

Thus spoke that sainted man, "In exactly
 the same way (as with Benjamin) God dealt with Iblis.
 He drove him from the door, and for the sake of this secret,
 He set him apart from the whole world by the curse.
 If He robbed him with the cloak of His anger,
 it was to conceal him forcibly from the eyes of the world.
 At this threshold he now stands continually,
 holding in his hand the weapon of wrath.
 Unless you first seek refuge from him,
 you will not be able to set foot in the Divine Realm.
 He is stationed at the door day and night for this purpose:
 to seize those reprobates who appear there.
 The touchstone to test men's worth is in his hand;
 from East to West they pass before him in ranks.
 Anyone who brings counterfeit money there,
 Iblis cuts him down on the spot with his sickle.
 Thus speaks Iblis to the owner of the money,
 "O you who have stolen from me the prize for deception!
 God, in half an hour, flung back in my face
 my thousands of years of obedient worship;

²²³ 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, pp. 376 l. 18-377 l. 7, pp. 377 l. 18-378 l. 2.
 Sanā'ī, too, affirms that Iblis should not be written off as a total loss:

He announced the glad tidings of His mercy to Idrīs;
 He made not hopeless His grace for Iblis.

See Sanā'ī, *Hadīqa*, p. 200 l. 14.

Yet you who are all aglow because of one atom of obedience,
 you appear before God! Have you no shame?
 If the creatures of the world curse me,
 the love in my soul diminishes not one atom.
 But if someone should curse you,
 in an hour you would collapse from your suffering.”
 From the first, be like the courageous men of the Path;
 then, ready to sacrifice your soul, throw yourself before the King!’²²⁴

There is no doubt that ‘Aṭṭār places his weight on the side of those favoring Iblīs’ final rehabilitation, even though he does not himself opt for one single explanation of why or how this is to come to pass. His own particular stance seems best summarized in these two brief verses:

Although he has been driven off, he is not also hopeless;
 his curse, it seems, is not eternal.
 Although at this moment he is steeped in hopelessness,
 he will pass his eternity in hopefulness.²²⁵

5. *Iblīs: the return to the One*

The theories thus far examined that posit the final restoration of Iblīs in glory are based on a firm belief in the power of God’s merciful love and the innate nobility, moral uprightness, and spiritual perfection Iblīs demonstrated in his cosmic roles. One further theory merits attention; however, it approaches Iblīs’ return to God’s presence not from the perspective of the intrinsic worth he possesses, but out of metaphysical necessity. The Qur’ān commentary attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī points the way most clearly in this regard,²²⁶ with ‘Azīz Ad-Dīn Nasafī providing complementary additions. Finally, with ‘Abd Al-Karīm Al-Jīlī an interesting integration of the metaphysical theme with the themes of Iblīs’ moral rectitude and loving dedication is effected.

In pseudo-Ibn ‘Arabī’s formulation of the psychology of the mystic life, the figure of Iblīs is equated with *wahm*, the power of imagination and self delusion.²²⁷ The imaginative faculty, the text explains, is created

²²⁴ ‘Aṭṭār, *Ilāhīnāma*, pp. 129 l. 16-130 l. 11. See also p. 137 l. 18-19:

If you possessed this manliness for an instant,
 at every moment you could revive the world.
 Although he was driven away and is the accursed of the Path,
 he is always in the presence of the King.

²²⁵ ‘Aṭṭār, *Muṣibatnāma*, p. 244 l. 7-8.

²²⁶ Osman Yahya, in his study of the oeuvre of Ibn ‘Arabī, indicates that this commentary is most probably a work begun by ‘Abd Ar-Razzāq Kāshānī (†1330 C.E.) and later completed by one or more of his disciples. See Osman Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l’oeuvre d’Ibn ‘Arabī*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique, 1964), 2:483-484.

²²⁷ See Muḥyī ‘d-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1 and 2 (Beirut: Dār al-yaqāzat al-‘arabīya, n.d.), 1:39, 1:425.

from the subtlest part of the animal spirit, which is also the hottest spirit within the body. But this Iblīs-power is veiled from the more exalted perfections of the human spirit because of its basic animality and resulting inferiority. Nevertheless, imagination deludes itself with pretensions of self-worth and exaltation, rebelling in arrogance against the *‘aql*, the pure Intellect.²²⁸

In his *Al-Insān al-kāmil*, Nasafī echoes much of pseudo-Ibn ‘Arabī’s perception of the Iblīs-*wahm* identity. He describes the creation of God’s representative in the lower world (*‘ālam-i ṣaghīr*), an event parallel to the same creation that already occurred in the cosmic realm (*‘ālam-i kabīr*):

Thereupon He sent His viceregent into the world of men. And God’s regent was *‘aql*, the Intellect. When *‘aql* assumed the caliphate in the world of men, all the angels of the lower world bowed to Intellect, except *wahm*, Imagination, who did not bow. He refused. This was the same as when Adam, in the cosmic world, assumed the caliphate; all the angels bowed down to Adam except Iblīs who did not bow. He refused.²²⁹

In more traditional fashion than Nasafī, pseudo-Ibn ‘Arabī describes the mythic origin and eventual downfall of the angel Iblīs-*wahm*. Iblīs is neither from among the pure angels on earth who are compelled to obey God’s command, nor from those heavenly angels of Intellect who perceive Adam’s nobility, acknowledge his Intellect, and obey God’s command out of loving devotion. Iblīs is derived from Al-Jānn, the essence of fiery, animal spirit, and is, consequently, a member of the family of spirits called *jinn*.

However, Iblīs was brought up and educated among the heavenly beings, from whom he acquired partial knowledge and the ability to ascend into the realms of Intellect. But he deceived himself with self-boasting and refused to submit to the judgement of *‘aql*. He proclaimed himself superior to clay creation and to the angels of both heaven and earth, thereby exceeding the limits of his partial knowledge. Iblīs’ mad rush to penetrate the mysteries of *‘aql* was doomed to defeat from the very

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:425. See also 1:428.

²²⁹ ‘Azīz Ad-Dīn Nasafī, *Le livre de l’homme parfait (Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil)*, ed. Marijan Molé (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962), p. 143 l. 11-15.

A wide range of correspondences occurs in both pseudo-Ibn ‘Arabī and Nasafī. They are not restricted to the Iblīs/*wahm*, Adam/*‘aql* correspondences. There are, for example, Eve/*nafs*, Adam/*qalb* (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Tafsīr*, 1:39-40); Eve/body, Tāwūs/desire, serpent/wrath (Nasafī, *Al-Insān al-kāmil*, p. 149 l. 1-9). Nasafī even distinguishes between Ash-Shayṭān and Iblīs, associating a different reality to each: Ash-Shayṭān/envy, Iblīs/disobedience (p. 404 l. 15-18) or Ash-Shayṭān/nature, Iblīs/imagination (p. 149 l. 10-11). The *‘aql*, too, is known under a variety of names: the first essence (*jawhar-i auwwal*) created by God, spirit (*rūḥ*), light, pen, angel brought near, throne of majesty, etc. (pp. 398 l. 18-399 l. 9).

beginning, because, by nature, he was veiled from the fulness of Truth and destined to succumb to *qiyās*.²³⁰

This is not the only perspective Ibn ʿArabī offers on the composition of Iblīs' nature. Elsewhere he discusses it in the light of a particular Qurʾānic verse: "He said, 'O Iblīs, what prevented your bowing to one whom I created with *My own two hands*?' " (Qurʾān 38:75). Adam-ʿaql was created by God as a mixture of both earthly and divine forms, each represented by a hand of God. Iblīs, however, was not granted this composite nature; he is merely a fragment of earthly form. Adam, however, as God's viceregent, had to possess the form of Him whose representative he was, otherwise he would have no link with the one who appointed him to this office.²³¹ His nobility of essence raises Adam above all the creatures of creation, above even the purest of angels.²³²

Nasafī, in contrast, describes an elaborate cosmic construct of seven hells and eight paradises. The first paradise possessed no hell counterpart because it was a realm that lacked all complex created substances; only Adam and Eve existed there in precreated isolation. When God pronounced the creative word "Be!" Adam and Eve moved to the second paradise where they first encountered not only the goodness of creation, but also the power of evil. The crisis between Iblīs-*wahm* and Adam-ʿaql came to a head in the fourth paradise and symbolizes the submission of all spiritual and corporeal powers to ʿaql, all except Imagination which refused to submit.²³³

Nasafī makes an interesting observation about what constitutes the motivation for Iblīs' refusal. He is not evil by nature, or uncontrollably drawn to sin; rather he incurs blame because of his free choices: his prideful disobedience, his villainous deeds, and his corrupt teachings. Therefore, Nasafī cautions, any man who imitates these choices becomes satanic and Iblīs-like in the process.²³⁴

Nasafī explains that the power of choice is one single reality; when it is perverted through a choice for evil, it bears the name Iblīs. When, however, the choice is for the good, the power reveals itself as *malak*, the angel.²³⁵ Referring to such illustrious predecessors as Saʿd Ad-Dīn Ḥamūyā and ʿAin Al-Quḍāt, Nasafī describes the angel as unveiler while

²³⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Tafsīr*, 1:39. See also 1:665-666, 1:765, 2:365-366.

²³¹ See Muḥyī ʿd-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abū ʿl-ʿAlā ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1365 A.H. - 1946 C.E.), p. 55, pp. 144-145.

²³² *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51, 145.

²³³ Nasafī, *Al-Insān al-kāmil*, pp. 299 l. 10-301 l. 20.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 149 l. 19-150 l. 3.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150 l. 10-13.

Satan is the veiler; the angel incites to good and warns from evil while Satan incites to evil and deflects from the good.²³⁶

Even though both pseudo-Ibn 'Arabī and Nasafī paint rather bleak pictures of Iblīs' character, they both hold open the door for his eventual return to favor. Pseudo-Ibn 'Arabī believes that Iblīs' personal humiliation and his involvement in the seduction of the sons and daughters of Adam will continue only until the Day of Resurrection. This is the length of the respite God granted Iblīs so that he could take his revenge on mankind and, in the process, serve as God's instrument of judgement.

In pseudo-Ibn 'Arabī's scheme there are two resurrections, the minor or "little" resurrection, which entails the stripping of the *nafs* from the body by the cutting off of all attachments, and the final or "big" resurrection, which is the *fanā*²³⁷ or passing away of all reality back into *tawhīd*, the unity of the One.²³⁷ This theory of resurrection illustrates clearly the metaphysical bias of the *Tafsīr* attributed to Ibn 'Arabī. At the final apocalyptic consummation of the universe, i.e., the final resurrection, all, whether good or evil, will be subsumed into the one, pantheistic reality who is God: "...and he (Iblīs) will not be accursed.... And both the respite to lead astray and the curse will come to an end at that time."²³⁸

The powers of Iblīs to corrupt, limited as they were to those people who had given themselves over to the world, now, in the end times, are rendered null and void. "If he was totally unable to lead them (i.e., the faithful believers) astray in the beginning, how could he do it at the end?"²³⁹

Nasafī does not speak in such strongly metaphysical language as does the *Tafsīr*. However, he does describe the *'ālam-i jabarūt*, the world of angelic hosts (which is the world immediately below the world of the Divine Presence), as the world of *waḥda*, unity, where opposites exist no longer.²⁴⁰

O darvish! In the *'ālam-i jabarūt* both honey and colocynth have the same taste; both the antidote and the poison are concocted in the same vessel; both the hawk and the hen live together; both the wolf and the sheep are

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 403 l. 9-17.

²³⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *Tafsīr*, 1:666.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:367.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

Even though pseudo-Ibn 'Arabī frees Iblīs from his curse, he still assigns him to Hell for all eternity (see *Tafsīr*, 2:367). However we would be wrong, as A. E. Affifi explains, to equate what the master Ibn 'Arabī himself meant by Hell with a traditional understanding of the term. Because of his metaphysical pantheism, Hell, too, is subsumed into the One at the end of time. Thus it is transformed into a Hell of eternal happiness. See A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Dīn Ibnul 'Arabī* (London: Cambridge University Press; reprint ed., Lahore: Muḥammad Ashraf, 1964), pp. 163-170.

²⁴⁰ Nasafī, *Al-Insān al-kāmil*, p. 178 l. 9-10.

together; day and night, light and darkness have the same hue; eternity without beginning and eternity without end, yesterday and tomorrow abide in the same house; Iblīs has no enmity towards Adam; Nimrod and Abraham are reconciled; there is no quarrel between Pharaoh and Moses.²⁴¹

Here Iblīs finds peace and the cessation of conflict. And in the absence of conflict, his pain of separation, too, disappears, for the world of *jabarūt* is the realm where individuality ceases.²⁴²

A further perspective on Iblīs' rehabilitation is formulated in the *Al-Insān al-kāmil* of 'Abd Al-Karīm Al-Jīlī. The theory of origin he proposes for Iblīs differs from that of the previous two authors. All the angels in Al-Jīlī's schema were created by God from the *nafs* of the cosmic Muḥammad—the noble angels from the beauty, light, and right-guidance of Muḥammad's *nafs*, and Iblīs and his followers from the overpowering might, darkness, and straying of his *nafs*.²⁴³

In accord with the traditional accounts of Iblīs' prefall, mythic history, Al-Jīlī identifies him as 'Azāzīl, an angel of single-minded devotion.²⁴⁴ When God created Adam and ordered the angels to bow, the command appeared to 'Azāzīl to be an exercise in equivocation. He did not realize that one who bowed to Adam in accordance with God's command was truly bowing to God Himself. Therefore he refused and earned the name Iblīs.²⁴⁵

When God confronts him with his disobedience and demands an explanation, Iblīs vaunts his essential superiority over clay Adam: "If you take a candle and turn it upside down, the flame still rises upward, in contrast to clay; for if you take a handful of dirt and throw it up in the air, it falls right back down."²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 178 l. 18-179 l. 5.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 178 l. 11-13, p. 179 l. 16-20.

²⁴³ 'Abd Al-Karīm Ibn Ibrāhīm Al-Jīlī, *Al-Insān al-kāmil* (Cairo: n.p., 1886 C.E. - 1304 A.H.), p. 39.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

In general Al-Jīlī reflects much of the traditional theory about Satan's involvements in human life. After describing Iblīs' oath to waylay all of mankind except those whom God chooses to spare (pp. 40-41), Al-Jīlī provides a lengthy description of the seven principal manifestations Iblīs employs to accomplish his end: 1) the *dunyā* (explained in detail); 2) the desires of nature; 3) the manipulation of the good; 4) the corruption of pure intention; 5) the corruption of the wise through *ilm*; 6) leading the novice astray by perverting his desires for relaxation; 7) appearing to the gnostic in visions of glory and leading him astray (see pp. 41-43).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Al-Jīlī distinguishes two groups among the angels. One group, the more noble, was created from divine light like the angel Nūn; the second group is composed of baser elements. This latter group of angels is the one God ordered to bow to Adam.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

Al-Jīlī offers the opinion that Iblīs was not in a state of psychological expansion (*bast*) as

In spite of his curse, Iblīs does not show one ounce of regret nor does he beg forgiveness from God for his refusal. He is confident that God does only what He wills; in fact he is convinced that nothing can come to be without God's willing it. Who is he, therefore, to attempt to alter the will of God?²⁴⁷ No, he will accept God's decree with joy.

People say that when Iblīs was cursed, he was so excited and overcome by the intensity of his joy that he filled the whole world by himself. Some asked him, 'How can you act this way seeing that you have been driven from the Divine Presence?' He replied, 'By this robe of honor the Beloved has singled me out; neither an angel who has been brought near wears it, nor a prophet who has been sent forth.'²⁴⁸

Even in his joy, however, Iblīs must fulfill the requirements of his curse. God drives Iblīs away and isolates him from Himself; He stations him in the world like a scarecrow amidst the crops. Animals shrink from him in disgust; birds fly off in terror. Nevertheless, it is through his watchfulness that the crops are preserved.²⁴⁹ Similarly in the created world, men and women come to know good and evil through their contact with Iblīs. Here again the paradox of opposites centers on him; it is only by knowing the ugliness and evil of the tempter that one can recognize the beauty and goodness of the fruits of the divine realm. This is but a variation of the theme so well developed by 'Ain Al-Qudāt.

Iblīs obediently fulfills his duties during the respite God grants; this is what has been decreed for him since the time of his creation. But there is more to God's decree for Iblīs than curse and separation. Al-Jīlī affirms that this state will last only until the final apocalypse when the spirit of Iblīs will be clothed again in all its perfections, including intimacy with the Divine Lord.

Then Iblīs will return to the divine intimacy he possessed in God's presence. And this will come to pass after the disappearance of Hell, for everything created by God will inevitably return to what it possessed. That is a fundamental principle that has been decided, so take note!²⁵⁰

some would hold (see, for example, Al-Baqlī, *Mashrab al-arwāh*, pp. 185-186). If he had experienced the state of expansion, not only would he have proclaimed his own superiority, but, more importantly, he would also have boasted of his dedication to monotheism in response to God's question about the reason for his refusal to bow. In addition he would have realized from his name change that he had succumbed to deception, and he would have repented. These lapses appear to Al-Jīlī as indicative of the psychological state of *qabḍ*, contraction, rather than of *bast*, expansion (p. 40).

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

STUDIES

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With a foreword by Annemarie Schimmel



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