The Divine Covenant (mithaq) and Mythopoetic Romance of Sufism

One day in pre-eternity a ray of your beauty
Shot forth in a blaze of epiphany.
Then Love revealed itself and cast down
A fire which razed the earth from toe to crown.

“My slave draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My slave never ceases to draw near to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks. And when he approaches a span, I approach a cubit and when he comes walking I come running.”

Source: Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1996/1417), no. 2117.
Terminology of Love in the Qur’an

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<td>intimate association (waltijah)</td>
<td>(وليجة)</td>
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**In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.**

1. caritas, charity (hubb) (حب)
2. loving-kindness (mahabba) (محبة)
3. preference (istihbā) (استحبة)
4. mercy (raḥmah) (رحمة)
5. pity (ra’fah) (رأفة)
6. amity (wudd) (ود)
7. affection (muwaddah) (مرضة)
8. loving attachment (widad) (ودد)
9. loving devotion (irādah) (ارادة)
10. infatuation (shaghaf) (شغف)
11. passionate desire (hawa) (هوا)
12. distraction (istihwa) (إشحواء)
13. straying (ghawa) (غاوة)
14. preoccupation (hamm) (هم)
15. longing (raghāb) (رغبة)
16. proximity (tagarrub) (تقرب)
17. anguish (gharām) (غرام)
18. distraction in love (hawam) (هيم)

**Source:** Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, *Love in the Holy Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications 2010), ch. 21 (pp. 191-225) which details these 37 types of love.
The Twelve Divine Names of God’s Loving Qualities in the Qur’an

Source: Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, Love in the Holy Quran, p. 15
O ye who believe! if any from among you turn back from his Faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him (Qur’an, V: 54)

In truth He loves ‘them’ for He loves only ‘Himself’
– Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī’l-Khayr (d. 440/1049)

All love is ultimately spiritual, since it is the fruit of God having sown the seed in pre-Eternity which later sprouted up in the tree of “they love Him.”
– Ahmad Ghazali (d. 520/1126)

God poured out His own love upon human hearts, and it took hold of them, and clothed them with a garment (attribute) of their beloved. Accordingly the word [mahabbat] may rightly be used when speaking of the hearts of men, and the human attribute thus takes its name from the name and attribute of God.
– Ibn Khafif Shirazi (d. 371/981)

The creatures never love anything but God, whether they know it or not – since “the entire universe loves Him.”
– Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), Futuhat, II, p. 114
**Love Between the Sexes: Love as Mawaddah**

Among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love (mawaddah) and mercy (rahmat) between you. Verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.

- Qur’an, XXX: 21

Although it is right and true that men and women find peace and tranquillity in being beside each other, it can be seen that in establishing such ‘rest’, ‘tranquillity’ and ‘peace’, the heavier pan in the scales lies with the woman. For it woman who dwells nearer to the realm of peace, that is, to the ever-lasting, eternal and spiritual world. Man, who on the other hand is, more often than not, stranded in the bustle and hustle of the world, can best relish the taste of this serenity, security, and tranquillity in the company of woman. [For man] sees in her a theophany of God’s mercy and a wondrous sign of the Creator. In this way, he makes himself so utterly one with her that he himself comes to experience the station of tranquillity and rest. For this reason, since the sages have remarked that ‘no tranquillity exists save through God’ (*la sakin siwa Allah*), when man and woman unite in this relationship, their [sexual] intercourse is transmuted into a kind of divine union which allows them a taste of eternity. As Rumi states: “When man and woman unite as one, that one is You/ and when these ones all dissipate, that too is You.”

–Source: Husayn Muhyi al-Din Ilahi Qumsha’l, *365 ruz dar suhbat-i Qur’an*, p. 577
Pre-Eternal Love and Beauty

I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known. Therefore I created creation and made Myself known to them so that they came to know Me.

– Hadith Qudsi –

(حديث قدسي) أنَّهُ تعالى قال: "كُنتَ كَنُورًا لا أُعْرِفُ، فأَحَبَّتْ أن أُعْرِفُ، فَخَلَقَتْ حَلْقًا، فَعَرَفْتُهُمْ بِي، فَبَيِّنَي عِرْفُونِي"

“If it had not been for this love, the world would not have appeared in Him. Its movement from nothingness to existence is a movement of love on the part of the One who gave it existence. …God loves beauty now, He is beautiful, so He loves Himself. Then he wanted to see Himself in something other than Himself, so He created the world in the image of His beauty. He looked at the world and loved it with the love of One whose look is binding.”

– Ibn ‘Arabi

Anas reports of the Prophet that he said: ‘When God loves a man, sin cannot harm him; he who repents of a sin is like one without sin.’ Ghazali comments on this hadith: “God makes forgiveness of sins conditional on love for He says, ‘Say, if you love God, then follow me so that God will love you and forgive you your sins’.”

The Sufi Cult of Beauty: God’s Beauty and Love of Beauty

“A man once said to Muhammad: ‘Oh, Envoy of God! I like my shoes and clothing to be beautiful (hasan).’ In reply, the Prophet quipped: ‘Indeed God is Beautiful (jami) and loves beauty (jama).’”

– (Muslim, Iman, 147)

Every pleasurable thing is loved... the mere perception of every beautiful thing is pleasure. No one can deny that beauty is intrinsically worthy of love.... This is just as the Messenger of God ... said: ‘God is beautiful and He loves beauty’.

– Al-Ghazali

Whoever loves God for His Beauty, which is nothing other than the beauty which can be contemplated in the universe, [let him remember that] God gave it existence in accordance with His own form, so that in this same way, he who loves the world for its beauty loves God alone, since divine Reality has no place of transcendence and manifestation except the cosmos.

– Ibn ‘Arabi


The beauty of each lovely boy, 
each comely girl, 
derives from His—
on loan


It is He who in every beloved being is manifest to the gaze of each lover... and none other than He is adored, for it is impossible to adore being without conceiving the Godhead in that being... So it is with love: a being does not truly love anyone other than his Creator.”


Love’s reality] is hidden behind the veils of intermediate causes and beneath the faces of all those who are beloved. Howevermuch Majnun may gaze upon Layli’s beauty, Layli is no more than a mirror. Therefore, the Prophet said, ‘Whoso has loved, remained chaste, kept the secret and has died, dies a martyr.’ Majnun’s contemplation of her loveliness is aimed at a beauty beside which all else is ugliness, although Majnun himself may not understand this. ‘Indeed God is Beautiful (jamil)’ means that it is improper to attribute beauty to anyone besides Him. And also: ‘God loves beauty (jamal)’ for beauty by its very nature is made to be loved. It is God who looks through Majnun’s own eyes on His own beauty in Layli, and through Majnun, He loves Himself.

Those witless idiots to Majnun said of Layli:
“In fact, she doesn’t have all that much beauty. There’re many girls who vie with her in loveliness, All just like moons, and in this town they’re numerous.”
“The form of women,” Majnun said, “is just a cup. God’s gives me wine to drink through her face and shape. From Layli’s shape, God gives you vinegar to taste, Lest Love lay hand on you and give your ear a twist.”

The Sufi Cult of Beauty-worship (*jamāl-parastī*)

Know that those things that we perceive to be beautiful have derived their beauty from the universal beauty, which is near to God. Moreover, beauty remains intense in proportion to their proximity to the universal (beauty) and is diminished in proportion to their remoteness from it. The subtler and rarer a body, the clearer the manifestation of beauty in it, which shows, moreover, that it is closer to the universal (beauty) and its source. The form of beauty is strongest and the functions of the spirit are most apparent in the eye. The nearness of the eye to its source and to the universal (beauty) is shown by the fact that the Messenger of God, when he saw an early fruit, would kiss it and place it on his eye. One day, also, he went out into the rain and took off his garment so that the rain would fall on him. When he was questioned about this, he said: ‘It has recently been with its Lord’. Hence when you see in something a manifest beauty, this tells you two things: first, that it has been present at the scene of universal beauty and has acquired from it a clear trace, and second, that the locus of beauty is free from corrupting elements and has received beauty in a manifest way.

THE MAN WHO ACCEPTS BLAME

I’m notorious throughout the whole city
As a renegade lover; and I’m that man who has
Never darkened his vision by seeing evil.

Through my enthusiasm for wine, I have thrown the book
Of my good name into the water; but doing that insures that
The handwriting in my book of grandiosity will be blurred.

Let’s be faithful to what we love; let’s accept reproach
And keep our spirits high, because on our road, being easily
Hurt by the words of others is a form of infidelity.

I said to the master of the tavern: “Which road is
The road of salvation?” He lifted his wine and said,
“Not talking about the faults of other people.”
Learn to love the beautiful faces by noticing
The light down on the face of the Friend; nothing is sweeter
Than taking a stroll around the face of a beautiful woman.

What is our purpose in admiring the garden
Of this world? The answer is: Let the man inside
Your eye reach out and take roses from Your face.

Let’s veer toward the tavern, and turn our horses
Away from the formal church. It’s incumbent not to listen
To the sermons of the man who never acts on his own words.

I have great confidence in the mercy hiding in the tips
Of your curly ringlets! If there were no evidence of grace
On the other side, what would be the point of all our effort?

Don’t kiss anything except the sweetheart’s lip
And the cup of wine, Hafez; friends, it’s a grave mistake
To kiss the hand held out to you by a Puritan.

—Khanlari, ed. Divan-i Hafiz, ghazal 385; The Angels, p. 21
BEING CONTENT

One rosy face from the world’s garden for us is enough,
And the shade of that one cypress in the field
Strolling along gracefully is enough for us.

I want to be far away from people whose words
And deeds don’t match. Among the morose and heavy-hearted, a heavy glass of wine is enough for us.

Some people say that good deeds will earn them
A gated house in heaven. Being rakes and natural beggars,
A room in the tavern will be enough for us.

Sit down beside the stream sometime and watch
Life flow past. That brief hint of this world
Which passes by so swiftly is enough for us.
The Sophianic Feminine and Love of Women


“When man loves woman, he desires to conjoin and unite with her, and when the act is consummated pleasure overtakes all parts of his body, and it is as if he were annihilated in her. Thus, God is jealous for his servant, He orders him to perform a full ablution in order that he be cleansed of ‘other’ and return to observing Him in the one in whom he has been annihilated, i.e. woman. God has cleansed man by complete ablution because he has to witness God in woman, because it is a witnessed of God as actor and acted-upon simultaneously.”

– Ibn ‘Arabi

Love does not absorb the lover entirely unless his beloved is the Real [*al-Haqq*] or someone of his own kind or a slave girl [*jariyya*] or slave boy [*ghulam*]. Except for what has been mentioned, the love for anything else cannot fully absorb him. We say this because the human being in his complete essence does not conjoin with anything except one that is of his own form. When he loves that person, there is no part of him that doesn’t have a [corresponding] likeness in the other. Then there remains nothing left over of him by which he can be sober for a single instant. He is enraptured, his outer form in the other’s outer form, and inner being in the other’s inner being.

– Ibn ‘Arabi


“The Sophianic Feminine and Love of Women


“Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours: women, perfume, while the coolness of my eye was placed in ritual prayer”
Authors of Sayings or Works on Mystical Love from the Seventh to the Tenth Centuries

Abu Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 145/765): Author of a mystical Qur'an commentary that frequently speaks of divine love

Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728): the earliest Muslim mystic to speak of God’s Passionate Love (‘ishq)

Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. ca. 162-176/788-92): the most famous interpreter of love (Ibn ‘Arabi)

Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 194/810). One of the first Sufis to categorize the stations of love

Dhu’l-Nun al-Misri (d. 245/859): a Sufi famous for saying that the mystic is intimate with all beautiful faces, fragrances and forms in creation

Bayazid Bistami (d. 261/875): the greatest Muslim ascetic mystic, originator of the doctrine of Fana, and advocate of mystical Intoxication

Sumnun al-Muhibb (‘the Lover,’ d. 287/900): Author of the doctrine that love is the main foundation and principle of the Sufi way

Abu’l-Husayn Nuri (d. 295/907), a Sufi of the School of Baghdad who used ‘ishq to refer to the love of God

Abu’l-Qasim Junayd (d. 297/910): Leader of the School of Baghdad of Sufism, and author of the doctrine of Sobriety in Love (sahw)

Mansur al-Hallaj (executed 309/922): Advocate of the doctrine that God’s Essence is Love; most later Persian Sufi poets are his followers

Abu al-Hasan al-Daylami (fl. 10th century): author of the Kitab ‘atf al-alif al-ma’luf ‘ala’l-lam al-ma’tuf (The Book of the Inclination of the Familiar Alif toward the Inclined Lam), the oldest extant mystical book on love, which describes 11 stations, the last of which is ‘ishq
Blessed is He who placed in the sky stellar constellations, and placed therein a Lamp and a Moon giving light

– (Qur'an, XXV: 61)

The Stages of Love according to Ja'far al-Sadiq

Heaven is called ‘Heaven’ due to its loftiness. The heart is a heaven, since it ascends by faith and gnosis without limit or restriction. Just as the Known [i.e., God] is unlimited, so the gnosis of it is unlimited. The zodiacal signs of heaven are the courses of the sun and moon, and they are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. In the heart there are zodiacal signs, and they are:
1. The sign of faith (īmān);
2. The sign of gnosis (maʿrifa);
3. The sign of intellect (‘aql);
4. The sign of certainty (yaqīn);
5. The sign of submission (islām);
6. The sign of beneficence (iḥsān);
7. The sign of trust in God (tawakkul);
8. The sign of fear (khawf);
9. The sign of hope (rajā’);
10. The sign of love (maḥabba);
11. The sign of longing (shawq);
12. The sign of ravishing (walah).

It is by these twelve zodiacal signs that the heart remains good, just as it is by the twelve zodiacal signs, from Aries and Taurus to the end, that the evanescent world and its people are good.

Key Sufi Doctrines in the Religion of Love in the Schools of Baghdad and Khurasan

1. The Spiritual Hierarchy of Mystical Stations Culminating in Love

“The stages where the *ahl al-ṣidq* halt are four: the first is Renunciation (*zuhd*), the second is Fear (*khwaf*); the third is Yearning for paradise (*al-shawq ilā-l-janna*); and the fourth is Love for God (*maḥabba li-Lāh*).”

Renunciation —> Fear —> Yearning —> Love

–Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/810), *Etiquette of Devotion* (*Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*)

2. Hadith: “Gazing upon fair faces amplifies one’s vision.”

“Whoever becomes an intimate of God becomes intimate with every beautiful thing (shay’ malāth), every beautiful face (wajh ṣabīth), every beautiful form and every delectable fragrance (rā’iḥa ṭayyiba).”

— Dhū’l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859)

Commenting on this saying, Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1210) wrote:

At the spiritual station of love, such contemplation has been said to amplify one’s insight into divine knowledge, insofar as [the hadith relates], “Gazing upon fair faces amplifies one’s vision (al-naẓar ilā al-wajh al-ḥasana yuzīda fi al-baṣar).” That pure and pious lady, the truthful daughter of Abū Bakr – may God be pleased with her – declared, “That superior man [the Prophet] loved fair faces.”

Key Sufi Doctrines in the Religion of Love in the Schools of Baghdad and Khurasan

3. “Love is the Supreme Spiritual Station; all other states and stations suffer diminution, but love never suffers decrease...”

   — Sumnun al-Muhibb (‘the Lover,’ d. 298/910-11)

4. Nothing is more subtle than love.

   “A thing can be explained only by means of something more subtle than itself, and since there is nothing subtler than love, by what, then can one explain it?”

   — Sumnun al-Muhibb

5. Love is always associated with adversity (bala).

   They asked Sumnun: “Why has love always been bound up together with adversity (balâ)?” He replied, “It is so that each and every ignoramus will not lay claim to love, and being confronted with adversity, they are forced to retreat.”


   “Love (mahabba) is to rend the veils and unveil the secrets.”

   — Abu’l-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 295/907)
7. Love is Exclusive and Jealous

“Love (mahabbat) is called mahabbat because it obliterates from the heart everything but the beloved.”

— Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945)

8. The Doctrine of the Essential Union (ittihad) of Lover and Beloved

I am the one I love, and the one I love is I.
We are two spirits dwelling in one body.

Ever since we were bound by the covenant of love,
our affection has been proverbial among men.

If you see me, you see him,
and if you see him, you see me.

You who desire to know our story,
if you were to see us, you could not tell us apart.

His spirit is my spirit and my spirit is his spirit.

Who has ever seen two spirits abiding in one body?

— Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 309/922)
Key Sufi Doctrines in the Religion of Love in the Schools of Baghdad and Khurasan

9. The Summit of all the Sufi Spiritual Stations is Love

Hallaj’s Eight Stages of Love

“One who claims (i) fear (khwaf)
needs (ii) agitation (inzi‘āj);
one who claims hope (iii) (rajā’)
needs (iv) quietude (tama‘nīna);
one who claims (v) love (maḥabba)
needs (vi) yearning (shawq);
one who claims yearning
needs (vii) ravishing (walah);
one who claims ravishing
needs (viii) God (Allāh).”

The Eleven Stations of Love of Abu al-Hasan al-Daylami (fl. 11th Century)

1. ulfa or familiarity —>
2. uns or intimacy —>
3. wudd or affection —>
4. maḥabba ḥaqiqiyya dīna al-majāziyya real love without figurative (physical) love —>
5. khulla or friendship —>
6. sha‘af or excessive love —>
7. shaghaf or infatuation —>
8. istihtār or recklessness —>
9. walah or ravishing —>
10. hayamān or bewilderment. —>
11. ‘ishq or passionate love

Source: Daylamī, A Treatise on Mystical Love, pp. 31-37.
10. Love = the Divine Essence

Hallaj’s originality “lies in his treating Love (‘ishq) as an attribute of the Essence in the Absolute just as he does the loci of the Absolute’s epiphanies. Other masters have demonstrated this [love theory] in respect to the love of the beloved and lover and their arriving at the height of ecstasy in this feeling, such that the whole of the lover is annihilated in the beloved. But they have not professed any view about the divine nature (lahut) and human nature (nasut). Indeed, they have equally maintained that God’s love for the saints is pre-eternal and that their love for Him comes from the effects [of that pre-eternal love] which He leaves in their hearts without fusion [of the two natures], but with union of the faithful believer [to his God] to the point where he becomes annihilated in Him, so there appears to be no one left but Him.”

Some of the Main Authors of Works on Theo-erotic Love from the 11th to the 13th Centuries

Abu ‘Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 428/1037): his Risala fi al-‘ishq (Treatise on Love) describes God as the First Beloved (Ma‘shuq-i awwal)

‘Abdu’llah Ansari (d. 481/1089): author of the first didactic treatise in Persian, on 100 Fields or spiritual stations, the last of which is love, asserting, ‘These one hundred ‘fields are all submerged in the field of love (mahabba).”

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111). His Kitab al-muhabbat wa’ l-shawq wa’ l-uns wa’ l-rida, Bk 37 of his Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din is one of the best discussions of the varieties of human and divine love. He believed love (al-mahabbat) increases in exact proportion to gnosis.

Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 520/1126). His Sawanih al-‘ushshaq is the first Sufi treatise on mystical love in Persian; its advocation of beauty-worship (nazar-bazi) influenced later poets such as‘Attar, ‘Iraqi, Sa‘di & Hafiz
Some of the Main Authors of Works on Theo-erotic Love from the 11th to the 13th Centuries

Sana’i (d. 525/1131): his famous mystical epic poem: *Hadiqa al-haqiqa wa shari‘a al-tariqa* devotes several sections to the erotic hierarchy (adopted from Shaqiq al-Balkhi) of Renunciation —> Yearning—> Love

‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadhani (executed 526/1132): Chapters of his *Tamhidat* are devoted to the symbolism of love in the human beloved’s body, with ‘ishq interpreted as the essence of the human soul

Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191) (‘Shaykh al-ishraq’, the ‘Master of Illuminationist Theosophy’) His *Risala fi haqiqat al-‘ishq* (Treatise on the Reality of Love) relates a mystical allegory of Beauty (Joseph), Love (Zulaykha) and Grief (Jacob)

Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 606/1209). His ‘*Abhar al-ashiqin* (Jasmine of the Lovers) elaborates 12 stages of love based on Daylami’s hierarchy. His theories underlie all later articulations of mystical love by Persian poets
The Sad maydān and Manāzil have fifty-one stations in common and differ in forty-nine stations, as the following list illustrates:

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<th>Sad maydān</th>
<th>Manāzil</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>2. Magnanimity (muruwwat)</td>
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<td>3. Contrition (ināba)</td>
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<td>4. Chivalry (futuwwat)</td>
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<td>5. Devotion (irādat)</td>
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<td>6. Intention (qasā)</td>
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<td>7. Patience (sabr)</td>
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<td>8. Striving (jihād)</td>
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<td>10. Refinement (tādhilī)</td>
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<td>13. Renunciation (zuhūd)</td>
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<td>15. Abstinence (wara)</td>
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<td>16. Piety (taqād)</td>
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Annihilation (fanā’)

From the field of Observation comes the field of Annihilation. God, the Most High, says, ‘Everything will perish except His face. To Him belongs the Command, and to Him will you be brought back’ (28:88).

Annihilation is nonexistence and it is the annihilation of three things in three things: the annihilation of the seeking in the Sought, the annihilation of knowing in the Known, and the annihilation of seeing in the Seen.

How can that which never existed discover that which will never cease to exist? What may ‘None like Him’ (lam yakun) find in that which is revealed and sent (lam yazal) [How can the everlasting God unite with the finite [who is] in a transitory fashion?] How can the Deserving [God] join the non-deserving [man]? All except Him will fall into three things: the ruin of yesterday, the passing of today, and the nonexistent of tomorrow, thus all save Him are nonexistent, except they exist because of Him, thus all existence is His. Raindrops that fall in the ocean are united with the ocean, as is the star that disappears in sunlight, so the one who reaches the Lord reaches oneself.

Subsistence in God (baqā’)

From the field of Annihilation the field of Subsistence in God comes. God, the Most High, says, ‘God is the Best, the most long-lasting and Subsisting’ (20:73).

God is the Most High, and that is all: [over time] attachments will end, means will vanish, customs will be voided, limits will be broken, understandings will be eliminated, history will fade away, allusions are transient, expressions are negated, information will be wiped out, but God eternally exists, and He exists in His ultimate Unity.

All these one hundred stations are dissolved in the field of love (mahabbat); the field of friendship is the field of love. God, the Most High, describes how He will produce a ‘people whom He loves and who love Him’ (5:54), and ‘Say: if you love God, follow me’ (3:31). But friendship has three stations: it begins with truthfulness, its middle is drunkenness, and it ends in non-existence.

Praise be to God, the Beginning (al-a’warad) and the End (al-akhir).

This book of One Hundred Fields, by Khvāja Abdullah Ansārī, may God sanctify his soul, is completed.77

Salutations to the best of mankind
—Muhammad, and his people.
Ahmad Ghazali on Love and the Erotic Imagination

Sometimes Love makes an appearance through the curl (zulf), sometimes by the down (khāṭṭ), sometimes by the beauty-spot or mole (khāl), sometimes by the lofty stature (qadd), sometimes by the eye (dīda), sometimes by the face (rū’y), sometimes by the coquettish glance (ghamza), sometimes by the beloved’s laugh and sometimes by her reproach. Each of these spiritual realities (ma‘ānī) is a sign testifying to the quest of the lover’s soul.

Sufi Treatises on Erotic Spirituality Inspired by Ahmad Ghazali’s *Sawanih*

Qādī Hamīd al-Dīn Nagūrī (d. 643/1245), *Lawaiyih* (Divine Gleams)

Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289), *Lama‘āt* (Divine Flashes)

Mahmud Shabistari (d. after 741/1340), *Haqq al-yaqīn* (Certain Truth)

Shāh Ni‘matu’Ilāh (d. 835/1437), *Sharh-i Lama‘āt* (Commentary on Divine Flashes of the Divine Flashes [of ‘Irāqī])

‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), *Ashī‘āt al-Lama‘āt* (Radiant Rays from the Divine Flashes [of ‘Irāqī])
Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111): The Five Types of Love

[1] self-love, or the instinct for survival

[2] love of beneficence from others which abet one’s survival;

[3] love of a benefactor for himself even if his benefaction doesn’t affect one personally;

[4] love of everything beautiful in itself, whether that be an external or internal beauty;


Sayings by Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali on Love and Gnosis

“The first principle of love (al-hubb) is that it cannot occur without interior knowledge or gnosis (ma‘rifah) and perception (idrāk).”

“Love (al-mahabbat) increases in exact proportion to gnosis.”

“Ma‘rifah gained in this world is like a seed which turns into vision (mushāhida) in the next.”

“Whoever does not enjoy the pleasure of ma‘rifah here in this world cannot enjoy the pleasure of [divine] vision (al-nazar) in the Next.”

“The ocean of ma‘rifah has no shore.”

Ma‘rifah —> Hubb —> ‘Ishq

Sources: Ghazālī, Love, Longing…, trans. Ormsby, pp. 29; 31; Ghazālī, Ihya’, IV, p. 312; 314; 315
By love bitter things become sweet; by love pieces of cotton become golden;
By love dregs become clear; by love pains become healing;
By love the dead is made living; by love the king is made a slave.
This love, moreover, is the result of knowledge:
When did the fool in his vanity ever sit on such a throne?
On what occasion did deficient knowledge give birth to this love?
Deficient knowledge gives birth to love, but only for that which is lifeless.
Deficient knowledge cannot discriminate: of necessity it deems the lightning
to be the sun.
Sayings by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali on Love and Gnosis

“The first principle of love (al-hubb) is that it cannot occur without interior knowledge or gnosis (ma’rifa) and perception (idrāk).”

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Sources: Ghazālī, Love, Longing…, trans. Ormsby, pp. 29; 31; Ghazālī, Ihyā’, IV, p. 312; 314; 315
Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 606/1210) on Universal Passionate Love (Ishq)


The ocean of passionate love (‘ishq) and the ocean of yearning (shawq) both dry up in the divine Essence which is the Eternity’s Essence. For when the lover is united with the Beloved whom is left to yearn for? And whom beside oneself does one love? For passionate love in the verse: “They measure not God’s power with true measure” (Koran VI: 91) is all duality. Yearning is the steed of passionate love, passionate love its rider, who, mounted on the steed of yearning, can go no further than the shore of the sea of Unity (tawhīd). Should the steed set foot therein neither yearning nor love would remain. Love is augmented through yearning, since only through yearning will its ship reach the shores of contemplation.

—From Rūzbihān’s Jasmine of the Lovers (Abhar al-‘āshiqīn)
“When man loves woman, he desires to conjoin and unite with her, and when the act is consummated pleasure overtake all parts of his body, and it is as if he were annihilated in her. Thus, God is jealous for his servant, He orders him to perform a full ablution in order that he be cleansed of ‘other’ and return to observing Him in the one in whom he has been annihilated, i.e. woman. God has cleansed man by complete ablution because he has to witness God in woman, because it is a witnessed of God as actor and acted-upon simultaneously.”

– Ibn ‘Arabi

Love does not absorb the lover entirely unless his beloved is the Real [al-Haqq] or someone of his own kind or a slave girl [jariyya] or slave boy [ghulam]. Except for what has been mentioned, the love for anything else cannot fully absorb him. We say this because the human being in his complete essence does not conjoin with anything except one that is of his own form. When he loves that person, there is no part of him that doesn’t have a [corresponding] likeness in the other. Then there remains nothing left over of him by which he can be sober for a single instant. He is enraptured, his outer form in the other’s outer form, and inner being in the other’s inner being.

– Ibn ‘Arabi

When man loves a woman, he seeks union with her, that is to say the most complete union possible in love, and there is in the elemental sphere no greater union than that between the sexes. It is precisely because such desire pervades all his parts that man is commanded to perform the major ablution. Thus the purification is total, just as his annihilation in her was total at the moment of consummation. God is jealous of his servant that he should find pleasure in any but Him, so He purifies him by the ablution, so that he might once again behold Him in the one in whom he was annihilated, since it is none other than He Whom he see in her. ...Because of this the Apostle loved women by reason of the possibility of perfect contemplation of the Reality in them. Contemplation of the Reality without formal support is not possible, since God, in His Essence, is far beyond all need of the cosmos. Since, therefore, some form of support is necessary, the best and most perfect kind is the contemplation of God in women.

– Ibn ‘Arabi

When something is a place of disclosure [mujalla] to a viewer, he sees nothing but himself in that form. When he, the viewer, sees in this woman himself, his love for her and attraction to her intensifies because she is his form. It has been clarified to you that his form is the form of the Real [al-Haqq], through which he has been brought into existence. So he doesn’t see anything but the real one but with desire of love [shahwat al-hubb] and taking delight in ecstasy [iltidhādh wasla]. He dissolves [yafnī fanā’] in her with a real annihilation and sincere love. He encounters her with his essence in an absolute correspondence. For that reason, he dissolves in her. There is no part of him that is not in her. Love has suffused his parts, so his entire being is interconnected [t’allaqa] with her. For that reason he dissolves in his likeness with a complete annihilation [yafnī fanā’ al-kullī], in contrast to his love for anything that is not his likeness. He becomes one with his beloved so that he says, “I am the one I desire and the one I desire [ahwā] is I,” and at the final point of this station says, “I am God [anā Allāh].” So when you love a person who is like you with such a love, then your witnessing [of the one you love] turns you back to God with such a return [radd]. Then you are among those whom God loves.

– Ibn ‘Arabi

Mahmūd Shabistarī (d. after 737/1337) on Human & Divine Love

Romantic ‘unreal’ love (‘ishq-i majāzī), which constitutes an excess of loving-kindness (mahabbat), cannot be configured and formed except through the beauty of the epiphanic form of man/woman (mazhar-i insānī)—for his/her heart’s mirror (that heart which is endowed with spacious breadth of “My Heaven and earth contain me not, but the heart of my faithful servant contains me”) is never absorbed [in an experience of romantic love] except by medium of a form of absolute beauty. Now, it is (only) this sort of love which, when overwhelmed by the figure of the human beloved (ma'shūq-i majāzī), enables the lover to burn away the delimiting individuality of form (ta'ayyun) so that, undisturbed by the illusory veils of ‘other-than-itself’ (aghyār), of his own accord he may engage in love’s play. It is at this point that ‘love’ becomes divine/real (haqiqi). ‘(God will bring a people) whom He loves and they love Him.’” (Qurʾān, V: 54)


In way of spiritual reality, romantic love is all real, divine – although to adepts in spiritual truth, romantic love is never simply fiction...

– Khwājū Kirmānī (d. after 753/1352)
Key Persian Sufi Interpreters of Ibn 'Arabi's Doctrines in Greater Persia, Anatolia and India

- Sa'd al-Dīn ibn Ḥammū’ī (d. 650/1252), a great Sufi master and associate of Ibn ‘Arabi and of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, who helped spread Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas by his writings & through his disciples such as ‘Azīz Nasafi.

- Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256), author of an important Sufi manual: *Mirṣād al-ʻibād*, and according to Jāmī, an associate of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnāwī.

- Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnāwī (d. 673/1274). Son-in-law and successor of Ibn ‘Arabī. Author of *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* and *Fukūk*, as well as other works establishing what came to be known as ‘the Akbarian School’.

- Aḥwad al-Dīn Balyānī of Shīrāz (d. 686/1288): the earliest Persian Sufi exponent of *wahdat al-wujūd*.

- Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289): his treatise ‘Divine Flashes’ (*Lamaʻat*), inspired by Qūnawī’s lectures on the *Fuṣūṣ*, formed a separate literary genre imitated throughout Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, China and India.

- Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghanī (d. 699/1299), a commentator on Ibn Farid highly influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī.

- ‘Azīz al-Dīn Nasafi (d. circa 699–700/1300): One of the first exponents and interpreters of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophy in the Persian language, he was a disciple of Sa’d al-Dīn ibn Ḥammū’ī.

- Muʿayyid al-Dīn Jandi (d. 700/1301). Qūnawī’s student who wrote a commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

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- Mu‘ayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d. 700/1301). Qūnāwī’s student who wrote a commentary on Fuṣūṣ al-‘Hikam.

Key Persian Sufi Interpreters of Ibn 'Arabi’s Doctrines in Greater Persia, Anatolia and India

‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) was the author of al-Insān al-kāmil, which is devoted to interpreting Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrines. J.W Morris terms him “undoubtedly both the most original thinker and most remarkable and independent mystical writer in the school of Ibn ‘Arabī” “Ibn ‘Arabī and His Interpreters, Part II: Influences and Interpretations,” Pt. 3, JAOS, 107/1 (1987), p. 108.

Muḥammad Ḥusaynī (Ḡīsū–Dirāz) (d. 825/1422). “was probably the first author in the Subcontinent who tried to introduce the classical works of Sufism on a broad scale: he commented upon Ibn ‘Arabī’s Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam as well as upon Suhrawardī’s Ādāb al-murīdīn and wrote numerous treatises and books on mystical life and on Prophetic traditions. Thanks to him, both the refined love mysticism of ‘Aynu’l-Qudāt’s Tamhīdāt and the fundamental work of Ibn ‘Arabī were made accessible to Indian Sufis and came to influence the development of mystical thought in later centuries.” Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, 351. “In general, Ḡīsū Darāz employs the terminology of Ibn ‘Arabī’s school, though he is more inclined to the ecstatic modes of expression, as exemplified by ‘Irāqī’s Lama’āt, than the more philosophical and logical, as exemplified by most of the Fuṣūṣ commentators.” Chittick, “Notes on Ibn al–‘Arabī’s Influence in the Subcontinent,” Muslim World, LXXXII/3–4 (1992): 224.

Shah Ni‘matu’llāh (d. 833/1430). Founder of the Ni‘matu’llāhī Order, and a major Persian poet who wrote many prose commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabī’s works. His Persian poetry resembles that of ‘Irāqī and Maghribī.

Tāj al-Dīn Husayn al-Khwārazmī (d. ca. 835/1432): author of a free–style Persian translation of Qayṣarī’s Sharḥ–i Fuṣūṣ.

Shāh Dā‘ī Shīrāzī (d. 870/1464–65), a follower of Shāh Ni‘matu’llāh who composed a commentary on Shabīstārī’s Gulshan–i rāz, and whose Persian works were all impregnated with Ibn ‘Arabī’s terminology.
• Khwāja ‘Ubaydu’llāh Aḥrār (d. 896/1490). Famous Naqshbandī master whom Jāmī consulted about problematic passages in *al-Futūḥāt*.

• ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (817/1414–898/1492). Author of numerous commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, whose own poetry and prose are steeped in Ibn ‘Arabī’s terminology.

• ‘Alā al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad Mahā’imī (d. 835/1432) from Gujrat, “wrote several important Arabic works in the philosophical style of Qūnawī, including commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ*, Qūnawī’s *Nuṣūṣ*.” Chittick, “The School of Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 520.

• Muḥammad Lāhījī (d. 912/1507), author of the *Mafātīh al-ʾiʿjāz fī sharḥ-i Gulshan-i rāz*, a commentary on the *Gulshan-i rāz* of Shabistarī; he was an eminent exegete of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought.

• ‘Abdu’l-Quddūs Gangūhī (d. 944/1537), an Indian Sufi whose writings are full of theories of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

• Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ilāhī Ardabilī (d. 950/1543), a Persian Shī‘ite scholar and Sufi, wrote a commentary on the *Gulshan-i rāz* which cites Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ* and *Futūḥāt* and terminology.

• Muḥammad Ghawth of Gwalior (d. 970/1573), a Shaṭṭārī Sufi master living in India who integrated Yoga doctrines into his Sufi writings, many of which exhibit familiarity with the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī
Key Persian Sufi Interpreters of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Doctrines in Greater Persia, Anatolia and India

- Ḥāfiz Husayn al–Karbalā’ī (997/1588) was the major Persian historian of Sufis and Sufism of sixteenth-century Iran, author of Rawdāt al–jinān wa jannāt al–janān, a history of Sufi saints, scholars, poets, artists and other notables who flourished in the outlying suburbs of Tabrīz (and occasionally Adharbāyjān in general, who cites a wide range of philosophical and mystical authorities, such as Shaykh al–Ishrāq Suhravardī, Shihāb al–Dīn ‘Umar Suhravardī, Muḥyī al–Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, Najm al–Dīn Rāzī and Jalāl al–Dīn Dawwānī, and many others throughout his book.


- Mīrzā ‘Abd al–Qādir Bīdil (d. 1133/1721), the great Perso–Indian poet, who shows an intimate acquaintance with Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought in his mathnawī poem ‘Irťān.
Key Features of the Religion of Love in Later Islamic Thought

* In the Conflict between *Eros* and *Nomos*, Islamic Ecumenism Originates in the Sphere of *Eros*, Being Expressed Through a Language of the Religion of Love

* Poetry, Music, and Painting in Islam Are Inconceivable Without the Sufi Religion of Love

* Romanticism, Eroticism & the Fine Arts in Islam Originate in the Religion of Love

* Radical Islamic Esotericism: the *Lisan al-Isharat* (Language of Mystery) in Sufism Derives from the Religion of Love

* Islamic Anti-Clericalism is Inspired by the Qur’an’s Religion of Love

* The Sufi Religion of Love Derives from the Qur’an’s Descriptions of God’s Divine Names and Qualities, or from Hadith

* Most Islamic Doctrines of Tolerance Are Expressed in the Language of the Sufi Religion of Love

* The Adoration of Women and the Sufi Cult of the Sophianic Feminine: Modern Islamic Feminism’s Origins Lie in the Religion of Love

* All Great Classical Muslim Philosophers from Avicenna (d. 428/1037) to Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 638/1240) Professed Doctrines of the Sufi Religion of Love
In this matter of love, let’s not put the Sufi gathering house
In this spot and the tavern in another; in every spot of the
universe Light shines out from the face of the Friend.
The End