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Sahl Tustarī's (d. 283/896) Esoteric Qur'ānic Commentary and Rūmī's *Mathnawī*: Part 2

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FOREWORD

In the first part of this article¹ we exposed how Rūmī's *Mathnawī* had been profoundly influenced by Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh al-Tustarī's (d. 283/896) *Exegesis of the Tremendous Qur'ān* (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-azīm*).² We also raised the issue of the possible influence of other works by classical Sufis and exegetes upon Mawlānā's grand poem. In particular, we discussed the impact of *The Spiritual Realities of Qur'ānic Exegesis* (*Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*) by Abū 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and the *Latā'if al-ishārāt*, the mystical commentary on the Qur'ān by Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), upon Rūmī's *Mathnawī*. We demonstrated how certain passages from the *Mathnawī* are so deeply steeped in these classical Sufi mystical exegeses that one can, by way of circumstantial evidence, adduce that Rūmī himself had read and come under the influence of these authors' works.

Among the various themes found in Tustarī's mystical interpretation of the Qur'ān that we analysed in detail in the first part of our essay – similarities and echoes of which also reappear in the hermeneutics of the Qur'ān in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* – the following motifs can be highlighted: the struggle against the lower soul (*jihād al-nafs*), the metaphors of the *anima bruta* or 'calf of the lower soul' (*gāv-i nafs*) and the idol of the lower soul, the moral doctrine of altruistic self-sacrifice and generosity of soul, the spiritual practices of fasting and eating *ḥalāl* food, the theory of God's saints who direct the esoteric hierarchy of the world, and the ethical precept of overlooking the faults of others (*'ayb-pūshī*) while simultaneously reviling the evils of

1 'Sahl Tustarī's (d. 283/896) Esoteric Qur'ānic Commentary and Rūmī's *Mathnawī*: Part 1', *Mawlana Rumi Review* V (2014), pp. 180–203.

2 Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Muḥammad Basīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya 1423/2001); see also Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-azīm*, ed. M.B. al-Na'sānī al-Ḥalabī (Cairo: Maṭb'a Sa'āda 1329/1908). We will be largely using the English translation of this text: Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 2011), with minor modifications.

exposing the flaws of one's neighbour ('*ayb-jū'i*'). During our discussions we showed how much of Mawlānā's hermeneutical approach to the Qur'ān had been fed and nurtured by the rich veins of mystical exegesis, developed over the previous four centuries by a variety of Sufi exegetes, and in particular by Sahl Tustarī and Sulamī in their grand commentaries on the Qur'ān written in the ninth century.

In this second and final part of our article, the exploration of other Sufi motifs found in the *Mathnawī* continues. Here, we will try to show how Mawlānā's expressions of a number of other Sufi mystical theories, ethical principles, and esoteric doctrines drew upon the esoteric interpretations of the various passages from the Qur'ān by Tustarī and Sulamī, as well as upon the works of other great mystical commentators. We hope in this manner to be able to answer the question posed in the first part of the article as to why it was that Rūmī celebrated the rhyming couplets of his *Mathnawī* as the 'Decoder of the Qur'ān' (*Kashshāf al-Qur'ān*).

TEMPTATIONS, TRIBULATIONS, AND THE DIVINE GUILE (*MAKR, ISTIDRĀJ*)

In the Sufi lexicon, the mystic's dependence upon his own strength of self-determination and powers of volition, which may consequently cause him to vaunt his secular or spiritual accomplishments and boast of his charismatic powers (*karāmāt*), is technically referred to either as 'being led into temptation' (*istidrāj*) or 'God's guile'/'divine deceit' (*makr*).³ The Sufis maintain that such boasting is the result, psychologically speaking, of spiritual narcissism, while on the spiritual level, the vaunting of oneself constitutes a kind of a trial and tribulation ultimately animated by the divine guile (*makr*) – *Al-Makir* (the Beguiler, Plotter, Schemer) being one of the divine Names. Throughout the various Sufi esoteric commentaries on the Qur'ān one thus finds constant reference to the related concepts of *istidrāj* and *makr*, with succumbing to temptation and thereby becoming subject to the divine guile reflected in mystical interpretations of specific verses from the Qur'ān.

Thus, commenting on the following Qur'ānic verse: 'Leave Me to deal with those who give the lie to this pronouncement. We shall lead them on

3 The term literally means 'being led on by degrees – step by step – into temptation, and is closely allied to the concept of divine deceit (*makr*). On *istidrāj* see Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism*, trans. Terry Graham *et al.* (London: KNP 1994), vol. VIII, pp. 63–65; on *makr* see *ibid.*, pp. 65–67.

by steps from whence they know not' (LXVIII: 44),⁴ Sahl Tustarī observed that this means: 'We shall leave them with their heads bowed over, diverted in their preoccupation with it [the world] from the duties that they should perform for Us, such that they forget to show gratitude towards Us, so We shall seize them whence they know not.'⁵ The idea here is that the reliance on one's own personal contrivance and the self-conscious assumption of all the credit for one's good works indicate that one has been 'led on into temptation' by God's guile. In the words of the Qur'an: 'So they plotted a plot (*makran*), and We plotted a plot, while they perceived not' (XXVII: 50).

Almost all great mystics have written about the dual concepts of *istidrāj* and *makr*. Thus, it is narrated from Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) that 'God's plot is more hidden than the crawling of an ant upon a black rock on a pitch-black night.'⁶ Regarding the difference between being led into temptation (*istidrāj*) and God's guile and deception (*makr*), Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945) observed: 'God's guile and deception relates to *inward* blessings that the mystic receives, whereas being led into temptation occurs through the reception of *outward* bounties and boons.'⁷ However, as Abū Bakr al-Wāsitī (d. 320/931) observed, the gnostics (*ārifān*) may experience 'being led into temptation' by being vouchsafed and then showing off their (inward) miracle-working powers. Likewise, external bounties can sometimes cause them to fall into pride and self-conceit.⁸ In this respect, Shiblī reportedly quipped: "We undertook to follow the Sufi Path to save ourselves from deception (*makr*) – yet we've come to understand that Sufism itself is all one big deception!"⁹

One may recall in the same vein how the Qur'an in one passage declares: 'Are they then secure from God's plotting? None feels secure from God's devices but those who are already lost' (VII: 99).¹⁰ Taking the

4 Citations from the Qur'an with minor modifications follow either the classic rendition: *The Glorious Koran*, trans. M. Pickthall (London: Allen & Unwin 1976; frequently reprinted), or *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. A.J. Arberry (Oxford: OUP 1983). A nearly identical verse is: 'And those who deny Our revelations – step by step We lead them on from whence they know not' (Qur'an, VI: 182).

5 Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Basīl, p. 70; see also *ibid.*, p. 30 (commenting on Qur'an, II: 41). See the translation: Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Keeler and Keeler, p. 243 (with minor modifications). See also Abū 'Abdu'l-Rahmān al-Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī wa huwa Haqā'iq al-tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid 'Umrān (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya 1422/2001), vol. I, p. 251.

6 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 91; translation from *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur'an Commentary Ascribed to Ja'far al-Šādiq as Contained in Sulamī's Haqā'iq al-tafsīr from the Text of Paul Nwyia*, trans. Farhana Mayer (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 2011), p. 109.

7 Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, ed. 'Umrān, vol. II, p. 91. 8 *Ibid.* 9 *Ibid.*

10 *The Message of the Qur'an*, trans. Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus 1980), with minor modifications.

scripture's rebuke to heart, those who are spiritually awakened thus perpetually fear becoming ensnared by God's guile. In his commentary, Sulamī states (citing a certain Abū'l-Ḥasan ibn Hind) that the person who is being gradually led on into temptation (*mustadraj*) is like the drunkard unaware of his insobriety; only when he regains sober consciousness will he realize what sorry intoxication had afflicted him.¹¹

In the following passage from the *Mathnawī*, written as an interpretation of the tale of the two fallen angels, Hārūt and Mārūt,¹² who are strongly reprimanded in the Qur'ān (II: 102) for practicing sorcery, we can see how the above ideas concerning becoming subject to temptation and God's be- guilement are given eloquent poetic exposition by Rūmī:

Listen to (the tale of) Hārūt and Mārūt, O thou to whose face we are (devoted) slaves and servants.

They (Hārūt and Mārūt) were intoxicated with the spectacle of God and with the marvels of the King's gradual temptation [*istidrāj*] (of them).

Such intoxication arises (even) from God's gradual temptation, so that (you may judge) what intoxications are wrought by the ascension to God.

The bait in His snare produced intoxication like this: what things, (then), can the table of His Bounty reveal!

They were drunken and freed from the noose: they were uttering rapturous cries in the fashion of lovers;

(But) in their road there was one ambush and trial: its mighty wind would sweep the mountain away like straw.

The (Divine) trial was turning them upside down, (but) how should one that is drunken have consciousness of these things?¹³

CONCEALMENT OF SECRETS

It has always been common practice among the Sufi 'saintly friends of God' (*awliyā'*) to camouflage their spiritual states from outsiders, fearful lest they be led into temptation through exposing the mysteries of their inner life to the philistine gaze of the masses. Likewise, they never discuss their spiritual affairs or mystical experiences except with fellow initiates or with those who harbour spiritual kinship with them. In this respect the Sufis often cite this

¹¹ Ibid., vol. II, p. 346. ¹² See G. Vajda, "Hārūt wa-Mārūt," *EP*, III, pp. 236–37.

¹³ Jalāl al-Din Rūmī, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī*, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Tehran: Nashr-i Butih 1381 A.Hsh/2002), III: 800–06.

Qur'ānic verse: 'God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners' (IV: 58).¹⁴ The Sufis interpreted the word 'trust' (*amanat*) here to mean divine mysteries; the 'adepts of the trust' were considered to be gnostics (*'arifān*) cognizant of those mysteries – those who are endowed with a particular illuminated inner vision through which they behold the innermost hearts and secrets of everyone. In this respect Abū Muḥammad Jurayrī (d. 311/924)¹⁵ remarked: 'The [divine] mysteries are the greatest trust. Beware that you do not reveal them to anyone except to those akin to them.'¹⁶

Commenting on the Qur'ānic verse that follows the one cited just above – 'O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you'¹⁷ (IV: 59) – Imām Ja'far Ṣādiq observed:

There are three customs that are unavoidable for the believer to follow: the custom of God, the custom of the prophets and the custom of the friends of God. The custom of God is concealment of the secrets. As God has said: 'He is the Knower of the Unseen and He reveals His Unseen unto none' (Qu'rān, LXXII: 26).¹⁸

In the following verses, we can clearly see how Mawlānā expounds and sets these ideas to verse. The subtitle to the passage appropriately features this *ḥadīth*: 'Verily, God most High has friends who are concealed.'¹⁹

Another party go to and fro exceedingly hidden: how should they become well known to the people of externals?

They possess all this spiritual dominion, and yet no one's eye falls upon their sovereignty for one moment.

Both their miracles and they themselves are in the Divine sanctuary: even the *Abdāl* do not hear their names.²⁰

14 *Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arberry.

15 Jarīrī was one of Junayd's greatest disciples and ultimately his successor. He was also a student of Sahl Tustarī; see Nicholas Heer and Kenneth Honorkamp, *Three Early Sufi Texts* (Louisville: Fons Vitae 2003), p. 164, n. 25.

16 Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, ed. 'Umrān, vol. I, pp. 150–51.

17 *Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arberry.

18 Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, vol. I, pp. 150–51; *Spiritual Gems*, trans. Mayer, p. 29 (with modifications in the translation).

19 The full text of the *ḥadīth*, which is given by Nicholson in his commentary on the Heading to his passage, is: 'Verily, God most High hath friends who are concealed, their heads squalid, their faces stained with dust: when they seek to approach the Amīr, they are not admitted; when absent, they are not missed, and when present, they are not invited; when sick, they are not visited, and if they die, there is none to witness it. They are unknown on the earth and celebrated in Heaven.'

20 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, III: 3104–05 (with minor modifications).

Likewise, in this passage from the *Mathnawī* one encounters the idea broached above by Muḥammad Jurayrī that the 'adepts of the trust' never divulge the secrets and sins of ordinary folk, despite their clairvoyant inner vision:

Gnostics who have drunk of the cup of God have known the mysteries and kept them hidden.

Whosoever has been taught the mysteries of the Divine action, his lips are sealed and closed.²¹

At this juncture, it may be helpful to psychologically contextualize the above doctrines relating to concealment of the divine mysteries. In Sufi *malāmatī* psychology, the locus of contemplation and place of manifestation of the 'secrets' or 'mysteries' is the realm of the 'spirit' (*rūḥ*). Sulamī thus writes as follows:

Whoever reveals his mystical states (*aḥwāl*) unto the transconscious level of his own spirit (*al-sirr*) manifests a kind of secret hypocrisy, but whoever exposes his heart's mysteries and divulges his own mystical experiences unto his lower soul (*nafs*) effectively becomes scattered and blown about like a cloud of dust. However, [much worse than this is] when one exposes one's good deeds and mystical states to the purview of the masses, one manifests one's own haughty temperament and shows oneself to be the Devil's playtoy.²²

There are several passages in the *Mathnawī* where Rūmī analyses this subtle tenet of Sufi *malāmatī* psychology. Exactly echoing Sulamī's above statement, he writes:

What wonder is it that you should hide your secret from evil folk?
The wonder is this: that you should hide the secret from yourself!

Hide your work from your own eyes, that your work may be safe from the evil eye.

Yield up yourself to the snare of the divine reward, and then in selflessness, steal something from yourself.²³

21 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, V: 2239–40.

22 Abū 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, 'Risāla Malāmatīyya', in *Majmū'a āthār-i 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān al-Sulamī: bakhshhā-yī az Haqā'iq al-tafsīr va risālāt-i digar*, ed. N. Pūrjavādi (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Danishgāhī 1369–1372 A.Hsh./1990–1993), p. 416.

23 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, II: 1500–02 (with major modifications).

In sum, any manifestation of one's spiritual states may cause the mystic to become 'led on' to indulge in ostentatious self-promotion and pretension and so fall into the snare of religious hypocrisy. To take notice of one's good deeds and virtues is bad enough, but to then parade them before the public view is outright vice! Consequently, one can neither judge a man by his clothes, nor estimate anyone's rectitude and sincerity simply by observing their words or deeds:

In the case of one class of people, the dress makes known the man. When he appears in an ordinary robe, they declare he's one of the vulgar . . .

One must need be free of slavish blind imitation and deception and possess interior vision to know a man – without relying on his mere word and deed.²⁴

Dervishes who endeavour to put such *malāmatī* doctrines into practice always endeavour to conceal their secret inner lives from the public gaze, engaging in 'pious dissimulation' and deliberately camouflaging their virtues beneath the habiliment of vice. Their attitude was characterized by a sense of 'jealous exclusivity' or 'jealous zeal' (to protect the divine mysteries) known as *ghayrat* in Sufi terminology. In his multivolume esoteric Persian commentary on the Qur'an entitled *The Revelations of Mysteries* (*Kashf al-asrār*), Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 520/1126) comments that although the prophet Solomon belonged among the 'spiritually poor' (*faqīr*), out of 'jealous zeal' he always concealed his dervish temperament under the guise of his immense and ostentatiously evident wealth.²⁵ At the same time, Solomon's inward detachment from his riches and estates, and his frequenting of the company of *faqīrs*, among whom he counted himself, is also mentioned by Rūmī.²⁶

The same doctrine can be found in the esoteric exegesis of this Qur'anic verse: 'Lo! He it is Who produceth, then reproduceth' (LXXXV: 13) by Ja'far Ṣādiq, who commented: 'He dons the garment of God's friends upon His enemies that this may lead them into temptation (*istidrāj*). And He dons the friends of God with the garments of His enemies lest they become conceited about themselves. Then restores them, at death [to their true state].'²⁷

24 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, II: 1474; 1476 (with major modifications).

25 Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa 'uddat al-abrār*, ed. 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāhī 1952-60), vol. VIII, p. 180.

26 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, I: 986.

27 Paul Nwyia, 'Le tafsir mystique attribué à Ga'far Ṣādiq', in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, t. 43/fasc. 4 (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique 1968), p. 50; Sulamī, *Majmū'a āthār*, vol. I, p. 61; *Spiritual Gems*, trans. Mayer, p. 182.

Rūmī, it would seem, had this passage in mind in the following verses from the *Mathnawī*:

When the master goes to a place where he is not known, he puts his own clothes on his slaves.

He himself puts on the slave's clothes and makes his slave the leader.

He goes behind him in the road, as slaves do, lest anyone should recognize him as a master.

'O slave,' says he, 'go you and sit in the place of honor: I will take your shoes, like the meanest slave.'

Masters have performed these slavish offices in order that it might be thought that they were slaves.

They saw their fill of masterdom and were sated with it: hence they made themselves ready to do the work of slaves.

On the contrary, these slaves of sensuality have represented themselves as masters of intellect and spirit.

From the spiritual master comes the practice of self-abasement; from the slave of sensuality comes naught but slavishness.²⁸

TRUST IN GOD (*TAWAKKUL*) AND RENUNCIATION OF PERSONAL CONTRIVANCE (*TARK-I TADBĪR*)

Trust in God is one of the key principles of Sufi doctrine, upon which many masters founded their teachings.²⁹ Although it is also a keynote motif of the Qur'ān, to which many verses are devoted (such as V: 23, XXIX: 17, and XI: 88, for example), its precise interpretation among Sufis has always been a cause of debate and controversy. The key issue of disagreement is on how to find and maintain a proper balance between working and earning a living (*kasb*) in the world while at the same time relying on God's Providence, from Whom all grace and beneficence, ultimately speaking, ever ensues. One of the earliest Sufis to discuss this problem in detail was Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), who in his *Risāla al-Makāsib* (*Treatise on Licit Earnings*) analysed how one's daily bread and employment should be sought.³⁰ He tried to establish an equilibrium between action and contemplation,

28 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, II: 1485–88; 1491–94 (with major modifications).

29 See Leonard Lewisohn, 'The Way of *Tawakkul*: the Ideal of "Trust in God" in Classical Persian Sufism', *Islamic Culture* 73/2 (1999), pp. 27–62.

30 For an overview of this treatise and its contents, see Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muḥāsibī* (London: Routledge 2011), pp. 73–74.

earning a livelihood through work in the world while putting absolute trust in God at the same time. Muḥāsibī defended action (*ḥaraka*) and the usefulness of seeking lawful employment, and permitted ‘earning a living’ (*kasb*). In this he was opposed by Shaqīq Balkhī (d. 194/810), who believed that expending any effort to possess or acquire worldly goods was a sin.³¹

In this respect, Sahl Tustarī, who was influenced by Muḥāsibī’s doctrine of *kasb*, maintained in his commentary on the verse: ‘And trust thou in the Living One Who dieth not’ (XXV: 58) that refraining from seeking to earn a livelihood is contrary to the tradition (*Sunna*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, and voiced the view that ‘just as anyone who ridicules earning a living ridicules the *Sunna* of the Prophet, so anyone who mocks “trust in God” (*tawakkul*) mocks faith [in God and all the principles of Muslim belief].’³²

Put in the context of the above debates about passive reliance on God versus active earning a living, Rūmī’s position might be characterized as ‘moderate.’ In his tale of the lion and the beasts of the chase in the *Mathnawī*, the poet brings these scholastic debates on the relationship of *tawakkul* and *kasb* into focus.³³ The fearless lion in Rūmī’s poem symbolizes freewill (*ikh-tiyār*) and the merits of individual striving and effort (*kasb*), in contrast to the ‘beasts of the chase,’ who advocate relying solely on Providence, the virtues of passive necessitarianism (*jabr*), and the uselessness of all activity except *tawakkul*.³⁴ Rūmī puts the views of the doctrine of *kasb* into the mouth of the lion, who maintains the superiority of working to earn one’s living over trust and resignation to God’s will, in these verses:

‘Yes,’ the lion said; ‘but if trust in God is the true guide, yet use of the means too is the Prophet’s *Sunna*.

31 Shaqīq was famous for his remark: ‘All action in pursuit of earning a living is indeed a sin’ (*inna al-ḥarakat fī al-ḥaraka ma’ṣiyat*). See Al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Masā’il fī a’māl al-qulūb wa al-jawāriḥ wa’l-makāsib wa’l-aql*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Cairo: s.n. 1969), pp. 183–86; Josef Van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Hārith al-Muḥāsibī*, *Selbsverlag des Orientalischen Seminar der Universität* (Bonn: 1961), p. 100.

32 Sulamī, *Jawāmi’ ādāb al-ṣūfiyya* and ‘*Uyub al-naḥs wa mudāwātuhā*, ed. Etan Kohlberg (Jerusalem: Mahad al-Dirāsāt al-Asīwiyyat wa’l-Afriqiyya, al-Jāmi’a al-‘Ibrīyya fī al-Urshalīm, al-Maṭba’a al-Ākādīmīyya 1976), § 36 (citing Tustarī); see also Sulamī, *Majmū’a āthār*, vol. I, p. 355.

33 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, I: 900–1200; 1263–1371.

34 For the wider context of Rūmī’s thought in the Baghdad and Khurāsān schools of Sufism, see Lewisohn, ‘The Way of *Tawakkul*’, pp. 30–31. For further remarks on the *kasb-tawakkul* polarity in this passage of the *Mathnawī*, see Christine van Ruymbeke, ‘The *Kalīla wa Dimna* and Rūmī: “That Was the Husk and This Is the Kernal”’, *Mawlana Rumi Review* IV (2013), pp. 85–105.

The Prophet said with a loud voice, "While trusting in God bind the knee of thy camel."

Hearken to the mystery within the Ḥadīth: "The businessman is dearly beloved of God."³⁵ By preaching "Trust in God" don't ignore all secondary ways and means.³⁶

Trust in God is connected to other core ideas in Sufism. In the most extreme sense, the defence of *tawakkul* led some Sufi mystics to preach that one must ignore and disassociate oneself from all 'secondary ways and means' (*asbāb*, causes), totally abandoning self-will, self-reliance, and personal contrivance (*tark-i tadbīr*), discarding and disregarding all individual strength and initiative, and not exercising any stratagem or cleverness to obtain anything; all actions stemming from such motives were interpreted as being evidence of 'darkness of heart'.³⁷ The basis of trust in God and the quintessence of servanthood was held to be renunciation of self-will and personal contrivance.³⁸ We find many enunciations of this idea throughout Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, as in the following verses:

Cast away this contrivance of yours before the Beloved; though
your contrivance indeed is of His contriving.

Only that which God has established – and that alone – is of
any use: what He has at first sown at last will grow up.³⁹

Many stories of the *Mathnawī* are consecrated to warning against the ego's confabulation and the lower soul's (*nafs*) contrivances. The ego's clever games of manipulation and its tricky devices of self-assertive conceit are a kind of spiritual short-sightedness, declares Rūmī, which are ultimately as sophomoric as someone who believes he can swim unaided across a vast ocean:

He that is blessed and familiar with spiritual mysteries knows that
cleverness comes from the Devil, while love comes from Adam.

Cleverness is like a swimmer in the vast ocean, who rarely frees
himself from the sea – he's drowned at the end of the business.⁴⁰

35 See Nicholson's study of the meaning of both Ḥadīths (the first: *Iqil ba'iraka thumma tawakkul*, and the second: *Al-kāsib ḥabību Allāh*) in his commentary on the *Mathnawī*, I: 912–14.

36 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, I: 912–14 (with major modifications).

37 Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Basīl, p. 38. 38 Ibid., p. 51.

39 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, II: 1060–61.

40 Ibid., IV: 1402–03 (with major modifications).

Tale after tale in the *Mathnawī* admonishes the reader to beware of the empty pretence and imposture of the clever-by-half ego. The lower soul or egocentric self (*nafs*) prides itself on its superficial learning – its so-called ‘scientific’ and ‘scholarly’ knowledge and rational intelligence – but remains unaware that this knowledge and intelligence grants it no spiritual benefit at all; all the worldly advantages gained thereof are but ‘the edifice of a stable . . . the supports for an ox and camel’s existence’.

The cunning and the quackery of man, that teaches one to know how to spin, is not produced by another animal:

To weave gold-embroidered robes or discover pearls on the ocean bed,

The fine artifices of geometry or astronomy, the sciences of medicine and philosophy –

All of which are connected only to this world and allow no way for man to ascend to the Seventh Heaven –

These so-called ‘sciences’ are but like the edifice of a stable: they serve as the supports for an ox and camel’s existence:

For the sake of keeping that animal alive a few more days, these idiotic bunglers have given the name ‘mysteries’ to those ‘sciences’.

The lore of the Way to God and knowledge of His station – *that* only the heart’s suzerain knows or else his heart itself.⁴¹

Rūmī’s criticism of the worldly sciences vaunted by rational philosophers and the materialists who ignore and reject the spiritual sciences of the heart, is strongly reminiscent of Sahl Tustarī’s commentary on the Qur’ānic verse: ‘Corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as a consequence of what men’s hands have wrought . . .’ (XXX: 41).⁴²

God, Exalted is He, has made the land a similitude of the bodily members and the sea a similitude of the heart. It [the sea, and therefore the heart] is more widely beneficial and much more dangerous. This is the inner meaning of the verse – do you not see that the heart was thus named due to its tendency to turn (*taqallub*), and due to the extent of its depth (*ghawr*). This is why the Prophet said to Abū Dardā’ [d. 32/652] ‘Overhaul the ship, for the

41 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, IV: 1514–20 (with major modifications).

42 Asad (trans.), *Message of the Qur’ān*, XXX: 41.

sea is deep.' In other words, 'Make afresh your intention (*nīyya*) for God, Exalted is He, from your heart, for the sea is deep.' Therefore [with this renewed intention (*nīyya*)], when the trafficking (*mu'āmala*) goes on in the hearts, which [as we have seen] are [like] seas, the self will leave its place at the centre, and the bodily members will come to rest. Thereafter, with each day, the possessor of [the sea of the heart] will find himself closer to its ultimate depth and further away from his self until he reaches Him.

Later on in his exegesis of this verse, Tustarī was asked, 'When does the heart become purified of all corruption (*fasād*)?'

The heart does not become purified until it abandons all conjecture (*ẓann*) and scheming (*ḥiyal*) – for it is as scheming in the eyes of your Lord [and] is [as bad] as a major sin to our eyes. Indeed, the Prophet said: 'Righteousness (*birr*) is what causes an expansion within your breast, and iniquity (*ithm*) is what sows intrigue (*ḥaka*) in your breast, even if those who are authorized to give out legal rulings provide you with [legal] *fatwā* upon *fatwā* [to the contrary].'⁴³

As we can see, exactly like Rūmī, he comments here that it is the worldly intellect's machinations and 'rational' scheming that is the source of all 'corruption' in the human realm.

THINKING WELL OF GOD

The concept of trust in God is closely related to that of having a good opinion or thinking well of God (*ḥusn al-ẓann*) as well as to the related notion of having confidence in God (*thiqa*). Examining the exegeses by Sulamī and Tustarī of certain Qur'ānic verses concerning both ideas, it will become clear – as we will see below – that Mawlānā was influenced by their views.

For instance, regarding the Qur'ānic verse: 'And whoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him' (LXV: 3), in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* Sulamī cites the view of 'Amr Ibn 'Uthmān al-Makkī (d. 297/909), writing that trust in God (*tawakkul*) is nothing but to think well and have a good opinion of God. Likewise, citing the view of Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad Ibn Khafif

43 Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Basīl, p. 122; Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Keeler and Keeler, pp. 152

(d. 371/982) he declared that the meaning of trust is to be satisfied with the assurances given by God (in the divine scriptures) and to reject all ill thoughts about Providence.⁴⁴

Similar interpretations of the relationship between certainty (*yaqīn*) and the related concepts of 'confidence in God' (*thiqa*) and 'thinking well of God' (*ḥusn al-ẓann*) can be found in Tustarī's commentary on the Qur'ān. Sahl Tustarī was thus asked, 'How can you tell the soundness of someone's certainty?' To which he replied: 'By the strength of his confidence (*thiqa*) in God, Exalted is He, and his good opinion (*ḥusn al-ẓann*) of Him. Trust in God is witnessing (*mushāhada*) through certainty (*yaqīn*).'⁴⁵

From these few examples, it is clear that a semantic link among all these concepts existed in the extensive exegetical literature of Sufism. Throughout the *Mathnawī*, echoing ideas first posed by Sulamī and Tustarī, Rūmī frequently associates trust in God with having a good opinion of Him and exhibiting confidence in the ways of Providence. His stories mirror all the varieties of subtle theological debates that were found among scholars and Sufis in Islamdom on these matters during the three centuries prior to his day. Not only do these theological issues play a central part in the famous story of the lion and the beasts of chase mentioned above (particularly the polarized debate between contemplation and action – trust in God versus earning a living), but the subsequent tale of 'The Wolf and the Fox who Went Hunting with the Lion' highlights the notions of casting away personal contrivance and having a good opinion of God. In the extract below (verse 3037), we find this Qur'ānic passage cited: 'and that He may punish the hypocritical men and women and the idolatrous men and women who think ill of God' (XLVIII: 6). In the following verses the lion, who personifies God, addresses the fox and the wolf, who have gone hunting with him. Both fox and wolf, however, in their hearts harbour ill thoughts of the lion/God and suspect that He might not give them a fair portion of the prey that He has stalked and killed for them:

Was my judgment not enough for you? Is this your opinion of
my bounty,

44 Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, ed. 'Umrān, vol. II, p. 334.

45 Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Basīl, p. 30; Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Keeler and Keeler, p. 19. For further commentary on the concept of harbouring a good opinion (*ḥusn al-ẓann*) of God in relation to two other verses of the Qur'ān: 'Doth not thy Lord suffice' (XLI: 53) and 'Is not God the most conclusive of all judges?' (XCV: 8), see Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Keeler and Keeler, p. 31.

O you whose understanding and judgment are derived from my judgment and from my world-adoring gifts?

What else but good should the picture think of the painter, since he has bestowed thought and knowledge upon it?

Had ye such a vile opinion of me, O you who are a scandal to the world?

I will strike off the hypocritical heads of them 'that think ill of God'

I will deliver the Sphere of Time from your disgrace, so that this tale shall remain in the world as a warning.⁴⁶

Here, the poet assumes the voice of the lion, propounding a general view that is reflected in mystical interpretations by Sulamī and Tustarī of the above-cited Qur'ānic verses, and preaching the doctrine that, as Nicholson put it: 'thinking well of God (*ḥusnu'l-zanni bi'llāhi*) is a sign that one does not despair of His mercy.'⁴⁷

NEGATING SECONDARY CAUSES

Another issue in the debate over the meaning and practice of 'Trust in God' (*tawakkul*) is the precise significance of 'causes' or causal intermediaries (*asbāb*) and the place of causal phenomena in the religious life. In their quest to rely exclusively on God, many Sufis spoke of the necessity to negate and sever all attachment to ways, means, and secondary causes (*qaṭ'-i asbāb*). The singular of *asbāb* in Arabic is *sabab*, meaning 'means', 'means of subsistence', 'cause', 'rope', or 'way' according to the context. Using this term, the Qur'ān refers to Dhū'l-Qarnayn – who is sometimes identified by Qur'ānic commentators with Alexander the Great – as follows: 'Truly we established him in the land, and We gave him the means (*sababan*) to all things. So he followed a means (XVIII: 83–84).'⁴⁸ Commenting on this verse, Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq said:

Verily, God Almighty has made for everything a different cause or means (*sababān*), and He has made these causes or means the

46 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, I: 3033–38 (with minor modifications).

47 As Nicholson, referring to Qushayrī's *Risāla* on Sufism, notes in his commentary on *Mathnawī*, I: 3037.

48 *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. S.H. Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard and Mohammed Rustom (New York: HarperOne 2015).

hidden spiritual senses of existence (*ma'ānī al-wujūd*). Whoever witnesses the [secondary] cause [alone] becomes cut off from the [primary] Causer or Originator (*al-musabbib*). But whoever witnesses the workmanship of the Originator has his heart preoccupied and filled by the world of secondary causes. Now when his heart is filled with doubts, this condition will become as a curtain between him and the [divine] object contemplated, and veil him from vision.⁴⁹

In the *Mathnawī* exactly the same doctrine is enunciated in these verses:

Inasmuch as you have observed secondary causes from your childhood, through ignorance you have stuck to the secondary cause.

Being preoccupied with causes, you are forgetful of the Causer: hence you are inclining towards these veils.⁵⁰

The same Sufi doctrine of the negation of secondary causes appears in Sahl Tustarī's interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse: 'God is the Protecting Friend of those who have faith' (II: 257).

That is, [He protects them with] the protection of [His] good pleasure (*riḍā*). He is their protector due to the former guidance He granted them, and His knowledge concerning them, of their affirmation of His oneness. This is due to His knowledge that they have freed themselves from every cause except their Creator.⁵¹

And we can see that exactly the same idea – that the mystic detached and freed from witnessing any secondary causes perceives God alone as the sole Actor and Agent of phenomena – is espoused in these verses by Rūmī:

When the spiritual eye has become piercing, the seer sees everything without secondary causes. You who are fettered by sense perception, hearken to causes!

49 Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, ed. 'Umrān, vol. I, p. 416; Nwyia, 'Le tafsīr mystique attribué à Ġa'far Ṣādiq', p. 40; also *Spiritual Gems*, trans. Mayer, pp. 81–82 (with major modifications).

50 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, III: 3153–54 (with minor modifications).

51 Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Basil, p. 17; Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Keeler and Keeler, p. 29.

One whose spirit is beyond the world of natural properties can supernaturally break the chain of causation.

Such a vision sees the *fons et origo* of the prophets' miracles as being not from natural things, but beyond all causes and means.⁵²

SUPPLICATION AND INVOCATION

'They fall down on their faces, weeping' – Qur'an, VII: 109

There are two general viewpoints among mystics concerning supplication and weeping. One group believes that weeping is contrary to the virtue of contentment with God (*riḍā*) insofar as it indicates dissatisfaction with and regret over the past and egocentric preoccupation with oneself. Another group, on the contrary, maintains that weeping demonstrates the overcoming of passion and is a sign of subjugation of the ego, and thus beneficial for the purification of the soul.

The debate between adherents of these two contrary positions can be seen in Sulamī's account of the disagreement between two contemporary Nishapuri Sufi masters: Abū Ḥafṣ Ḥaddād (d. 265/878) and Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥirī (d. 297/910). Abū Ḥafṣ considered weeping to be permissible in a state of remorse. In this view he was strongly opposed by al-Ḥirī, who maintained that weeping causes remorse itself to dissolve and disappear. Now, since remorse is good for disciplining the soul, and weeping removes remorse, weeping is always spiritually harmful.⁵³

Interestingly enough, we find Rūmī propounding the virtues of both viewpoints in different tales of the *Mathnawī*. When Rūmī adopts the viewpoint of Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥirī (opposed to supplication and weeping), he seems to be echoing the views of the Sufi Qur'an exegete Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 520/1126), who, in his interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse cited in the epigraph above (VII: 109), wrote:

Weeping is the state of beginners and the attribute of wayfarers. Each person weeps according to his own condition and each wayfarer according to his own deeds. The penitent one (*tā'ib*) contemplates his sins and weeps in fear of being chastised for them. The obedient devotee (*muṭī'*) looks at the laxness of his

⁵² Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, trans. Nicholson, II: 1842–44 (with major modifications).

⁵³ Abū 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Al-Malāmatīyya wa'l-ṣūfīyya wa ahl al-futuwwa*, ed. Abū al-'Alā 'Afīfī (Cairo 1945), p. 117.

obedience and weeps out of fear of its flaws. The worshipper (*‘abid*) weeps in fear of the final judgment, wondering what will befall him tomorrow. The gnostic (*‘ārif*), regarding the beginning of things in Pre-eternity (*sābiqa-yi azal*), weeps to think what has already destined to occur and what Fate had decreed for him back then. All the above are bound to befall wayfarers, and all are signs indicating the weakness of their spiritual state. However, for those who have been enraptured out of themselves (*rubūbagān az kh^wīsh^tan*) and those who are adepts in spiritual stability (*ahl-i tamkīn*), weeping is a flaw and a defect in the path they follow . . .⁵⁴

In the following verses from the tale of the ‘The Old Harper’ in the *Mathnawī* – appropriately subtitled: ‘How ‘Umar, may God be well-pleased with him, bade him (the harpist) turn his gaze from the stage of weeping, which is existence, to the stage of absorption, which is nonexistence’ – Rūmī reflects the criticism of weeping voiced above by al-Ĥirī and Maybudī:

Then ‘Umar said to him, ‘This wailing of yours is also one of the marks of your sober self-consciousness.

The way of him who has passed away from self and self-consciousness is another way, because there sober self-consciousness is another kind of sin.

Sobriety arises from recollection of what is past. The past and the future for you are a curtain separating you from God.⁵⁵

However, elsewhere in the *Mathnawī*, the spiritual benefits of weeping and desperate needy supplication (*zārī va gīrya*) during prayer are strongly emphasized and even recommended as the best remedy for the spiritual malady of the mystic.

Better than the entire kingdom of the world is spiritual pain – so by that pain you may beseech God in secret.

All who supplicate devoid of pain and grief have frozen hearts; the call to God with spiritual pain comes from rapture.

Such pain makes one lower the voice and whisper between one’s lips, to recall one’s origins and beginnings;

54 Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, ed. Ḥikmat, vol. V, p. 637.

55 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, I: 2199–2201 (with major modifications).

It makes one's supplication pure and mournful, crying: 'O God, O You Who All Implore; O Helper!'

On His path even the dog's bark sounds entrancing – for anyone who yearns [for God] has been made captive by a kind of brigand.⁵⁶

One might speculate that in verses like these, Mawlānā was influenced more by Maybudī's commentary than by Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, which by and large reflects the highest spiritual states realized by the most advanced Sufi adepts. Then again, Maybudī's *Kashf al-asrār* is a general homiletic work meant for a much wider reading public. Didactically speaking, it aspires to reach out and educate the masses about the subtleties of Sufi doctrine, inspiring ordinary believers with hope,⁵⁷ and motivating them to refine and perfect their devotional lives.

In the following passage from the *Mathnawī*, Rūmī adopts the opposite standpoint, maintaining that beseeching God, supplication, and prayerful entreaty for certain advanced saints should all be considered blameworthy. The subtitle of these verses is: 'Description of some saints who are content with God's ordinances, who do not beseech and supplicate to change this ordinance.'

I know another class of saints whose mouths are closed to supplication (*du'ā*).

Due to the contentment by which their noble character is tempered and tamed, they never allow themselves to seek to avert Fate's decrees.

They particularly relish submitting to Fate, for seeking freedom from Fate's decrees would be heresy to them.

Their hearts have been opened by such good opinion (*ḥusn-i zannī*) of God that they'll never never don mourning garbs for any woes they feel.⁵⁸

In these verses, he seems to come closer to the position of Sulamī, in his interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse: 'When God's command comes, justly the issue shall be decided' (XL: 78);⁵⁹ in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* he cites the

56 Ibid., III: 202–07. Translated by Leonard Lewisohn.

57 This is evident throughout Maybudī's *Kashf al-asrār*, but is particularly visible in vol. IV, p. 48.

58 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, III: 1880–83. Translation by Leonard Lewisohn.

59 *Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arberry.

statement of Abū Bakr al-Wāsitī (d. 319/931) that ‘whoever recollects the allotted portion that Providence has provided for him (*qismat*) and what has been decreed beforehand breaks off all entreaty (*al-suʿāl*) and supplication (*al-duʿā*) to God.’⁶⁰ These lines from the *Mathnawī* also reiterate Wāsitī’s doctrine in greater detail:

When the servant contents himself with the will of Providence, submission to God’s decree becomes itself his own will and pleasure.

This is not a religious obligation for him, nor the seeking for reward or religious merit, but rather because his temperament has become meet and right.

He desires to live only for God’s sake, not for life itself, nor to relish the enjoyments of life.

. . . His faith in God is just to do God’s will, not in pursuit of heaven and its trees and brooks.

. . . This all comes from his own original nature; it is not the product of ascetic discipline, training or his own exertions and efforts.

. . . If a devotee has such a character and temperament, is not the world then at his beck and call?

Why then should he make entreaty and supplicate: ‘Avert, O God, this fate that’s befallen me!’⁶¹

As we have seen in the *Mathnawī*, both the viewpoints of Abū Ḥafṣ Ḥaddād and Abū ʿUthmān al-Ḥirī, respectively advanced in support of and opposed to weeping and supplication, can be found. There is even a third viewpoint, which maintains that in some cases, when God Himself makes the devotee weep, utter a prayer, and supplicate, that sort of supplication, being selfless, is always praiseworthy, being the utterance of God Himself.⁶²

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have first shown how Rūmī utilized the dual concepts of *istidrāj* and *makr* – ‘being led into temptation’ and ‘God’s guile’/‘divine

60 Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī*, ed. ʿUmrān, vol. II, p. 213 (also see *ibid.*, II, p. 268 for similar views).

61 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and trans. Nicholson, III: 1905–08, 1911, 1913, 1915–16. Translated by Leonard Lewisohn.

62 *Ibid.*, III: 2219–21.

deceit' – in a passage of the *Mathnawī*, apparently being influenced in this respect by the interpretations of the Muslim scripture by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Sulamī. Second, we have shown how Rūmī evidently drew upon these same commentators as well as the *Kashf al-asrār* of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, in his interpretation of the idea that the Sufi gnostics who understand the divine 'trust' (*amanat*) never divulge the secrets and sins of ordinary folk, despite their clairvoyant inner vision. Third and fourth, we observed how in his discussions of the concepts of trust in God versus individual striving and effort to earn a living, as well as the notion of 'thinking well of God' (*ḥusn al-ẓann*), Rūmī closely followed previous scholastic debates on the relationship of *tawakkul* and *kasb*, which are present in the writings of Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, the Qur'ān commentary by Sahl Tustarī, and in the *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* by Sulamī. Fifth, we have shown how the Sufi doctrine of the negation of secondary causes (*qaṭ'-'i asbāb*) that appears in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* can be traced back to similar expressions of that mystical doctrine that appear in Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Tustarī's Qur'ān commentaries. Finally, we reviewed what the earliest Sufi mystics had to say concerning supplication, weeping, and invocation. In light of the disagreement between two contemporary Nishapuri Sufi masters – Abū Ḥafṣ Ḥaddād and Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥirī – on these practices, we found that Rūmī reiterated and advocated the virtues of both their opposing viewpoints in different tales of the *Mathnawī*. This led us also to conclude that Mawlānā was probably influenced both by Maybudī's *Kashf al-asrār* and by Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* in his views on these matters.

Overall, parts one and two of this article have both demonstrated how Rūmī's esoteric method of interpreting the Qur'ān in the *Mathnawī* drew upon and was deeply indebted to an ancient exegetical tradition initiated by the Qur'ān commentary ascribed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, sections of which were cited in Sulamī's *The Spiritual Realities of Qur'ānic Exegesis* (*Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*). Rūmī clearly derived many of his key themes and mystical ideas directly from Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq*, either by way of direct quotation or thematic adaptation. Likewise, as we have seen, the poet was also clearly inspired and influenced by Sahl Tustarī's *Exegesis of the Tremendous Qur'ān* (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-aẓīm*), which is perhaps the earliest independent mystical exegesis of the Qur'ān. He was also evidently well acquainted with *The Subtleties of Symbolic Allusions* (*Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*), the mystical commentary on the Qur'ān by Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī. Finally, among the other great mystical commentaries that perhaps influenced Rūmī, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī's Persian commentary on the Qur'ān entitled *The Revelation of Mysteries* (*Kashf al-asrār*) may be mentioned.

In sum, the impact of these exegetical works upon the Sufi doctrines, theosophical teachings, contemplative disciplines, ethics, psycho-spirituality, metaphysics, and hermeneutics of Rūmī's *Mathnawī* is everywhere in evidence.

However, not only the Qur'ān but also all of being has a two-layered structure according to Rūmī. On the one hand, there is the esoteric, hidden dimension, which the Qur'ān calls the Realm of the Unseen ('*ālam al-ghayb*'); on the other, there is the Visible Realm ('*ālam al-shahādat*') of everyday phenomena in the world. The aim of all spiritual discipline is to access and cultivate the interior dimension underlying exoteric doctrine, since curing the afflictions of the soul and the moral transmutation of man is ultimately effected as much by the force of contemplation and grace of prayer as by meritorious deeds and pious action. For Rūmī, as for the Sufis in general, salvation in the next world and well-being in this one largely depend upon grasping and understanding the esoteric dimension of religion that animates both the outward book of the cosmos and the divine scripture, whose revelation enlightens the inner hierocosmos. In conclusion, it is clear that one of the central aims of the *Mathnawī* was to expound the Qur'ān's esoteric significance, aspiring to reveal the secondary, hidden connotations *derrière la lettre* of the text in order to disclose the spiritual and moral meanings that lay secreted therein. It is for this reason that Rūmī referred to his *Mathnawī* as the 'Decoder of the Qur'ān' (*Kashshāf al-Qur'ān*).

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