

Hazrat Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī, The Ecstatic Sufi (c.800-c.874)

By Timothy Conway, Ph.D.

Bāyazīd (or Abū Yazīd), born at Bisṭām in Khurāsān (eastern Iran), was the first major “ecstatic” Muslim Sūfī mystic known to us. In the words of A.J. Arberry, Bisṭāmī was “a mystical genius of the first order . . . a man of profound spirituality, who through long austerity and meditation reached a state of compelling awareness of the merging of his human individuality into the Individuality of God. . . . To him is attributed the introduction of [divine] ‘intoxication’ [*sukr*] into Sūfī doctrine, and in this respect he is contrasted with the ‘sober’ school of Baghdad [*ṣaḥw*, sobriety], headed by the great al-Junayd (d. 910).” (Arberry [Tr.], *Muslim Saints & Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya’* [“Memorial of the Saints”] by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, p. 4). Annemarie Schimmel notes: “Bāyezīd hoped for a complete extinction [*fanā*] of the traces of self. . . the negative way is his; but he was also the first to describe the mystical experience in terms of the [positive] image of the *mi‘rāj*, the heavenly journey of the Prophet.” (See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina, 1975, pp. 46-51.)

Bāyazīd was one of three brothers, each of whom became “a renunciate and servant of God.” Their grandfather, a Zoroastrian, had converted to Islām. Bāyazīd’s own youthful piety may have been influenced by this. He entered a Ḥanafī school of legal study, the most liberal approach to the Muslim *sharī‘a*. Yet he was strict in observing both voluntary and obligatory religious forms of worship. His career as a promulgator of Ḥanafī law was transcended when a student turned him toward Sūfism. He began to practice a regimen of terrible self-denial and to visit many dervishes and saints to learn from them the Sūfī way. We read that “Imām Ja‘far Sādiq and Imām Musa Kazīm were among his Shaikhs.” Bāyazīd spent long sojourns as an itinerant wanderer, “meeting 360 Sūfīs,” and later embraced solitude and the contemplative life. During one 12-year period he engaged in various austerities and spiritual practices in almost complete isolation. Later, he allowed himself periods of teaching disciples back at Bisṭām.

In some places so many people became his disciples that he committed uncouth acts to drive them away, such as once eating bread during the daytime fasting period in the holy month of Ramaḍān. Another story of Bāyazīd recounted by ‘Aṭṭār tells that in an Arabian town he visited *en route* to Medina, a large throng wanted discipleship under him. Though Bāyazīd left town, the crowd still followed him. Looking back, he asked his inner Divine Guide, “Who are those men?” “They wish to keep you company,” came the answer. “Lord God!” he cried, “I beg of Thee, *veil not Thy creatures from Thee through me!*” Then, wishing to expel love of him from their hearts and remove the “obstacle” of himself from their spiritual path, after performing the dawn prayer he looked at them and said, “*Verily, I am God; there is no god but I; serve Me.*” “The man has become mad and committed blasphemy!” they cried. And they left him.

In Sūfism, such deliberate “sins” by a saint became known as *Malāmat*, so Bāyazīd is viewed as founder of the informal *Silsila* (lineage) of the *Malamatiya*, also called *Tayfuriya* Order of Sūfīs.

When he wasn’t preferring solitude with Allāh, but allowing a circle of disciples near him, Bāyazīd urged them to put their affairs in God’s hands and to accept sincerely the pure doctrine of *Tauḥīd*, the Oneness or Nonduality of God, along with five essentials: keep all obligations

enjoined by the *Qur'ān* and *Sunna*, always speak truth, keep the heart free from hatred, avoid forbidden food, and shun religious innovations. Muslim scholars and mystics say that Bāyazīd was the first or one of the first Sūfīs to spread the ideal of *fanā*, annihilation or extinction in God (a word likely derived from the old Buddhist term *nirvāṇa*, well known in Central Asia), to insure that the *Tauḥīd* view was authentically lived, not just thought about or talked about.

Like many early Sūfīs, Bāyazīd never wrote anything, but some 500 of his sayings have been relayed in texts by other writers, many of these sayings expressed in boldly mystical, paradoxical, even shocking language. A few later Sūfīs—like Ibn Sālīm in the next generation—branded him a heretic, while others like Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj (d. 988) and Jalāluddīn Rūmī (d. 1273) defended Bāyazīd and similar mystics, saying that they were overtaken by God in a prophetic way and made to utter momentary, involuntary utterances (*shathiāt*) by God Himself. Thus, claim the defenders of Bāyazīd, his ecstatic utterances should not be construed as actual egotistic beliefs or self-aggrandizing claims. Bāyazīd's seeming antinomianism and blasphemy were, in fact, balanced by obviously humble, devout, self-effacing statements, such as “Better that Thou be mine without me, than I be my own without Thee” (in the *Tadhkirat*); and “If I could say—and absolutely mean it—‘There is nothing real but Allah [*Lā ilāha illā Llāh*],’ there would be nothing to concern me after that.” (Quoted in M. Abdur Rabb, *Persian Mysticism: Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī*, Dacca: Academy of Pakistan Affairs, 1971.)

Despite a frequently expressed humility and self-restraint found in the sayings and stories of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī preserved by Sūfī tradition, early on he came to symbolize for the Sūfism one of two main trends, namely, the eastern, Khurāsān, Persian-speaking “(God-)intoxicated” and more-or-less antinomian variety, contrasted with the western, Arabic-speaking, Baghdad brand of more “orthodox” Sūfism represented by that sober sage, al-Junayd, of the next generation. Bisṭāmī's ecstatic Sūfism did heavily influence the later Persian-speaking Sūfī mystic love poets like Sanā'ī, ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Ḥāfez, et al., as well as the “mad” Malāmatī and Qalandarī dervīshes.

One particularly notable element in the stream of literature about Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī is his *mi'rāj* or “heavenly ascent.” Michael Sells wisely notes: “There is more involved in this text than a Sūfī appropriation of the account of Muḥammad's *Mi'rāj*. The early *Mi'rāj* accounts of Muḥammad are themselves part of a rich and complex Near Eastern tradition of heavenly ascents, a tradition that includes Enoch texts, most notably, the Enoch tradition and the account of the heavenly ascent of Moses. The parallels between Bisṭāmī's *Mi'rāj* and the Jewish *Merkavah* [Divine chariot or throne] mystical tradition are particularly striking. Such parallels do not show that the Bisṭāmī *Mi'rāj* was dependent on any particular *Merkavah* source, nor that the *Merkavah* tradition was dependent on *Mi'rāj* accounts. What the parallels reflect, rather, is the role of a partially shared symbolic cosmology of the heavenly ascent as one of the major meeting points... in the late antique and medieval Near East.” (Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, NY: Paulist Press, 1996, p. 242; see his translation of various passages on/by Bisṭāmī, pp. 212-50.)

We will reproduce below an especially poetic version of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī's *mi'rāj* as penned by Farīduddīn ‘Aṭṭār in the 13th century; Sells has translated for us (pp. 244-9) an earlier version, attributed to Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910), “but more likely composed considerably after Junayd's death.” In this version, Bāyazīd is said to report, “I saw myself in the dream as if I had risen to the heavens in quest of Allāh... that I might abide with Him forever.” Bāyazīd goes on to tell of being taken by various ever-more incredibly luminous, gifted angels up through a series of

seven heavens. In each one the huge numbers of angels are amazed to see “an Adamite” or human ascending so high and capable of returning their greetings in the angelic languages. The guiding angels that successively come to take him to the next heaven show him various astonishing wonders wrought by Allāh, but Bāyazīd’s aspiration for God-alone surges up, a “flame of longing... reducing the angel to a gnat.” His refrain expressed to the Lord in each case is, “I knew that He was testing me in that. I was saying: ‘My Dear One, my goal is other than what You are showing me.’ I did not turn toward it out of respect for His sanctity.” And Allāh would, via an angel, then take Bāyazīd up to the next level, finally at the seventh heaven turning the mystic into a magnificent bird of spirit who roams through the wonders of God’s most subtle heavenly expressions of form, “kingdom after kingdom, veil after veil, domain after domain, sea after sea [of light], curtain after curtain, until I ended up at a throne....” Again, Bāyazīd states his refrain that “my goal is other than what You are showing me.” And Allāh thereupon beckons, “To Me, to Me!” and brings Bāyazīd closer to Him. “It was as if I were melting like lead. Then He gave me a drink from the spring of graciousness (*lutf*) with the cup of intimacy. Then he brought me to a state that I am unable to describe... closer and closer to Him until I was nearer to Him than the spirit is to the body.... I kept on in this way until I was like He was before creation and only the Real remained (*baqiya*) without being or relation or place or position or quality. May His glory be glorified and His names held transcendent!” (Note: capital letters added to Sells’ translation for the Divine “He,” “His,” “Him”; and Abū Yazīd re-spelled as “Bāyazīd.”)

When Bayazid physically expired in or around 874, he was over seventy. Before he died, someone asked him about his age. He humbly replied: “I am four years old. For seventy years I was veiled. I got rid of my veils only four years ago.” (R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 1914, p. 57.) His lovely tomb-shrine is located in Bisṭām, Iran. No less a spiritual authority than Baghdad’s sober Sūfī al-Junayd allegedly declared: “As the Archangel Gabriel is superior among all angels, in the same way Bāyazīd is the superior Sūfī among all.” Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj, a century after Bāyazīd’s passing, wrote of the saintly mystic as “a man famous for austerity, worship, knowledge and understanding,” and reported, “the learned of our regions take blessings (*yatabarrak-ūna*) at the tomb of Bāyazīd (God grant him compassion) down to the present day.” Sarrāj further said that earlier shaykhs used “to pay visit to him (*yazūrūnahu*) and take blessings from his devotions (*du‘āyahu*). They considered him one of the most exalted of worshippers and renouncers and people of wisdom (*ma‘rifā*) in Allāh. They recall that he surpassed the people of his age in conscientiousness and striving (*ijtihād*) and the uninterrupted remembrance of Allāh Most High.” (Quoted in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 228)

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From ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-Auliya*’ [A.J. Arberry’s translation]:

In his youth, Bāyazīd, was deeply struck yet confused by the *Qur’ān*’s words, “Be thankful to Me and to thy parents.” He approached his mother. “Either you ask God for me so that I may be yours entirely, or apprentice me to God, so that I may dwell wholly with Him.” “My son, I resign you to God, and exempt you from your duty to me. Go and be God’s.”

Sitting at the feet of his teacher, he was suddenly told, “Bāyazīd, fetch me that book from the window.” “Window? What window?” asked Bāyazīd. Said his teacher: “Why, you have been coming here all this time and did not see the window?” “No, what have I to do with the window?”

When I am before you I close my eyes to everything else. I have not come to stare about.” “Since that is so,” said the teacher, “go back to Bisṭām. Your work is completed.”

[Bāyazīd said:] For twelve years, I was the blacksmith of my soul. I thrust my soul into the furnace of discipline and made it hot in the flames of arduous endeavor, then I placed it upon the anvil of reproach and hammered it with the hammer of self-blame, till I fashioned out of my soul a mirror. For five years I was my own mirror and I polished that mirror with every manner of godly service and obedience. After that I gazed upon my own reflection for a year and I saw about my waist an infidel girdle of delusion and coquetry and self-regard, because I relied upon my own acts of obedience and approved of my conduct. For five years further I labored, until that girdle was snapped and I was a Muslim anew. I looked upon all creatures, and saw that they were dead. I said four *Allāhu akbars* over them, and returning from their obsequies without the jostling of God’s creatures by God’s succor I attained to God.

[‘Aṭṭār’s version of Bāyazīd’s recounting of his famous *mi‘raj* or inner heavenly ascent:]

I gazed upon God with the eye of certainty after that He had advanced me to the degree of independence from all creatures, and illumined me with His light, revealing to me the wonders of His secrets and manifesting to me the grandeur of His He-ness. Then from God I gazed upon myself, and considered well the secrets and attributes of my self. My light was darkness beside the light of God; my grandeur shrank to very meanness beside God’s grandeur; my glory beside God’s glory became but vainglory. There all was purity; here all was foulness.

When I looked again, I saw my being by God’s light. I realized *my glory was of His grandeur and glory. Whatsoever I did, I was able to do through His omnipotence.* Whatever the bodily eye perceived, it perceived through Him.... *All my worship proceeded from God, not from me, and I had supposed that it was I who worshipped Him.*

I said, “Lord God, what is this?” He said, “*All that I am, and none other than I.*”

Then ... He instructed the gaze of my eye in the root of the matter, *the He-ness of Himself.* He annihilated me from my own being, and made me to be everlasting through His own everlastingness, and He glorified me. *He disclosed to me His own Selfhood, unjustled by my own existence. So God, the one Truth, increased in me reality.* There I dwelt for a while....

God had compassion on me. He granted me eternal knowledge, and put into my throat a tongue of His goodness. He created for me an eye out of His light, and I saw all creatures through God. With the tongue of His goodness, I communed with God, and from the knowledge of God I acquired a knowledge, and by His light I gazed on Him.

He said, “O thou without all with all, without instrument with instrument!” [The idea here is that a mere impotent being can, by Divine Grace, be made a channel for some of God’s power.]

I said, “Lord God, let me not be deluded by this. Let me not become self-satisfied with my own being, not to yearn for Thee. *Better it is that Thou should be mine without me, than that I should be my own without Thee. Better it is that I should speak to Thee through Thee, than that I should speak to myself without Thee.*”...

When He had perceived the purity of my inmost soul, then my soul heard a shout of God’s satisfaction; He sealed me with His good pleasure. He illumined me, and delivered me out of the darkness of the carnal soul... I knew that *through Him I lived*; and of His bounty I spread the carpet of gladness in my heart.

He said, “Ask whatsoever thou wilt.” I said, “I wish for Thee, for Thou art more excellent than bounty, greater than generosity, and through Thee I have found content in Thee.... Keep me not

from Thee, and proffer not before me that which is inferior to Thee.... If I have seen [Truth], through Thee I have seen, and if I have heard, through Thee I have heard. First Thou heard, then I heard.” And I uttered many praises to Him. Consequently, He gave me wings of majesty, so that I flew in the arenas of His glory and beheld the wonders of His handiwork.... He strengthened me with His own strength and arrayed me with His own adornment. He laid the crown of munificence on my head, and opened unto me the door of the palace of Unity. *When He perceived that my attributes were annihilated in His attributes, He bestowed on me a name of His own presence and addressed me with His own Selfhood. Singleness became manifest; duality vanished.*

He said, “Our pleasure is that which is thy pleasure, and thy pleasure is Our pleasure....” Then He spoke, “Whose is the Kingdom?” I said, “Thine.” “Whose is the Command?” “Thine.” “Whose is the Choice?” “Thine.”... He gazed on me with the eye of Overwhelming through the medium of All-compelling, and once more no trace of me was evident.

In my intoxication I flung myself into every valley.... I galloped the steed of questing in the broad expanse of the wilderness; no better game I saw than utter indigence, nothing I discovered better than total incapacity, no lamp I saw brighter than silence, no speech I heard better than speechlessness. I became a dweller in the palace of silence.... He opened a fissure of relief in my darkened breast, and gave me a tongue of divestiture and unity. *So now I have a tongue of everlasting grace, a heart of light divine, an eye of godly handiwork. By his succor I speak, with His power I grasp. Since through Him I live, I shall never die.... My tongue is the tongue of unity [tauḥīd, “only God!”]... He moves my tongue according as He wills, and in all this I am but an interpreter. In reality the speaker is He, not I.*

Having magnified me, He spoke again, “O Bāyazīd, My creatures desire to see thee.” So I said, “Adorn me with Thy Unity, and dress me in Thy I-ness and raise me to Thy Oneness so that when Thy creatures see me they may say ‘We have seen thee and it is Thou,’ and I am no longer there.” This desire He granted me; and He laid the crown of munificence on my head, and caused me to surpass the station of my fleshly nature.

[Bāyazīd also related, according to ‘Aṭṭār’s account:] When I reached Unicity—and that was the first moment that I [truly] gazed upon [Divine] Unity [tauḥīd, “only God!”]—for many years I ran in that valley on the feet of understanding; till I became a bird whose body was of Oneness, whose wings were of Everlastingness. I kept flying in the firmament of Unconditionedness. When I had vanished from the things created, I spoke: “I have reached the Creator.” Then I lifted up my head from the valley of Lordship. I quaffed a cup, the thirst for which I never slaked in all eternity. Then for a thousand years I flew in the expanse of His Unicity, and for thirty thousand years more I flew in Divinity, and for thirty thousand years more I flew in Singularity. When ninety thousand years had come to an end, I saw Bāyazīd, and all that I saw, all was I.

[Another version of probably the same statement from Bāyazīd was preserved by Sūfī sage al-Junayd, which goes as follows:] I came upon the domain of Nothingness (*laysiyya*). For ten years I continued flying in it until I arrived from nothing in nothing through nothing. Then I came upon perdition, which is the domain of *tauḥīd*. I continued to fly through nothing in perdition until I was lost in the loss of being lost. I was lost to the extent that I was lost from perdition in nothing, nothing in the loss of perdition. Then I came upon *tauḥīd* in the vanishing of creatures from the knower and the vanishing of the knower from creatures. (Quoted in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 222-3.)

“What is the Divine Throne?” a man asked Bāyazīd. “It is I,” Bāyazīd replied. “What is the Footstool?” “I.” “What is the Tablet and Pen?” “I.” “God has his servants the like of Abraham and Moses and Jesus.” “All are I.” “God has angelic servants like Gabriel and Michael and Seraphiel.” “All are I.” The man fell silent. “*Whoever has become effaced in God,*” said Bāyazīd, “*and has attained the Reality of all that is, is God.*”

“The first time I entered the Holy House, I saw the Holy House. The second time I entered it, I saw the Lord of the House. The third time I saw neither the House nor the Lord of the House.” By this Bāyazīd meant, “I became lost in God, so that I knew nothing. Had I seen at all, I would have seen God.”

A man came to the door of Bāyazīd. “Whom are you seeking?” asked Bāyazīd. Replied the man, “I seek Bāyazīd.” “Poor wretch!” said Bāyazīd. “I have been seeking Bāyazīd for thirty years and cannot find any trace or token of him.”

“You walk on water!” they said. “So does a piece of wood,” Bāyazīd replied. “You fly in the air!” “So does a bird.” “You travel to the Ka’aba [shrine at Mecca] in a single night!” “Any conjurer travels from India to Demavand in a single night.” “Then what is the proper task of true men?” they asked. Replied Bāyazīd: “*The true man attaches his heart to none but God.*”

Bāyazīd said: Keep your vision fixed on high and descend not; for whatever you descend into, by that you will be veiled.

Bāyazīd heard of a teacher who taught, “Whosoever of you on resurrection day does not intercede for the inhabitants of hell, is not one of my disciples.” Bāyazīd declared, “I say that he is my disciple who stands on the brink of Hell and takes by the hand everyone being conveyed to Hell and dispatches him to Heaven, and then enters Hell in his place.”

A man encountered me on the road. “Where are you going?” he demanded. “On the pilgrimage [to Mecca].” “How much have you got?” “Two hundred *dirhams*.” “Come, give them to me; I am a man with a family. Circle round me seven times. That is your pilgrimage.” I did so, and returned home.

A man who rejected the sainthood of Bāyazīd once came to him and said: “I want to learn the secrets of God.” Bāyazīd first sent him to a mountain to meet a friend. When the man went up that mountain, he found a thick, large python, and fell unconscious from fear. After coming to his senses, he ran back to Bāyazīd and told him whole story. Bāyazīd remarked: “*It’s strange! You have such great fear for the creature, how could you bear dread of the Creator!*”

A certain ardent ascetic, with his own disciples and admirers, always came to hear Bāyazīd, but once complained that, despite all his fasting and night-vigils, “I discover no trace in myself of this [Divine] knowledge of which you speak.” Said Bāyazīd, “If for 300 years you fast by day and pray by night, you will never realize one atom of this discourse.” “Why?” asked the ascetic disciple. “Because you are veiled by your own self.” “What is the remedy?” “You will never accept it,” said Bāyazīd. The man persisted. “Very well,” said Bāyazīd. “This very hour go shave your beard and hair. Take off your clothes and tie a loincloth of goat’s wool about your waist. Hang a bag of nuts round your neck, then go to the marketplace and tell all the children you can,

‘I will give a nut to everyone who slaps me.’ Go round the city in the same way, especially to where people know you. That is your cure.” On hearing this, the disciple cried out, “Glory be to God! *Lā ilāha illa Llāh!* (There is no god but God!)” Replied Bāyazīd, “If an infidel uttered that sacred formula, he would become a believer. But by uttering the same formula you have become a polytheist [i.e., presuming the existence of someone other than God], because you counted yourself too grand to be able to do as I have said. You used this formula to express your own importance, not to glorify God.” The man protested, “I cannot do this task. Give me other directions.” Bāyazīd replied, “Did I not say that you would not do it, that you would never obey me?”

When his life drew toward its close, Bāyazīd entered the prayer-niche and bound a girdle around him. He put on upside down his fur jacket and cap. Then he said, “O God! I do not vaunt the discipline of a whole lifetime. I do not parade my all-night prayers... my fasting... the times I have recited the Qur’ān... the litanies.... You know I do not look back on anything... I give account of all of this, not in boasting, but because I am *ashamed of all that I have done*.... All that is nothing; count it as *naught*. I am an old Turkoman of seventy years whose hair has grown white in pagandom.... Only now I learn to say Allāh, Allāh.... Only now I set foot in the circle of Islām.... All that I have done I reckon as dust. Whatsoever Thou has seen of me not pleasing to Thy presence, do Thou draw the line of pardon through it. And wash the dust of disobedience from me; for I have myself washed away the dust of presumption that I have obeyed Thee.”

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More sayings from Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī [from various sources and translators]:

[Rūmī told a story about Bāyazīd:] Once during *Jazb* (Ecstasy) he said: “*Praise to Me, Glory to Me! [Subhānī!]*” And he also said, “*I set forth on an ocean when the Prophets were still by the shore.*” Later, when he came to his normal senses, his disciples told him what improper words he had said. *Bāyazīd said that if he ever again said such words, they should kill him without delay.* On another occasion, he repeated the same words, but when the disciples tried to cut his throat, the knife went through his body without harm, as the body was no longer material, but ethereal. The disciples repeatedly cut his throat many times, but failed; then they saw many Bāyazīds in the room and became afraid. So they stopped their efforts to kill him.

He often prayed in such words: “*Oh, Allāh, how long will this ‘You’ and ‘I’ remain between You and I? Take this ‘I’ from me so that all that remains is ‘You’.* *Oh, Allāh, when I am with You, I am greater than all; when I am without You, I am nothing.*” “*Oh, Allāh, my poverty took me to you and Your blessings protected my poverty.*”

Bāyazīd always said: “*I desire not to desire except what He desires.*”

He once said: “*O Allāh, what is your Fire? It is nothing. Let me be the one person to go into your Fire and everyone else will be saved. And what is your Paradise? It is a toy for children. And who are those unbelievers whom you want to torture? They are your servants. Forgive them.*”

During spiritual contemplation, he reached to the cosmic world, and there he saw the angels. He asked them: “Where is God? I’ve come to meet him.” The angels replied: “God isn’t here, he lives in the broken hearts of the people on earth, go search for Him there.”

When Bāyazīd reached to the highest stage of spirituality, God asked him: *“What do you want?”* He replied: *“Whatever You have, give that to me.”* God said: *“Annihilate (Fanā’) yourself for My eternal nearness.”* Bāyazīd agreed, then said to God: *“Without having any spiritual and eternal benefit, I won’t go from here.”* God asked: *“What else do you want?”* Bāyazīd asked God *to forgive all mankind.* God told him to watch clearly, and when he looked toward mankind, he saw that every human had the generosity of God. But the most generosity of God was upon Bāyazīd himself. *Then Bāyazīd asked God to also forgive Satan.* God replied: *“He is made of fire, and is suitable for fire. But you should keep away from fire.”*

Once Bāyazīd said: *“I have come to know Allāh through Allāh, and I have come to know what is other than Allāh with the light of Allāh.”* He said: *“Allāh has granted his servants favors for the purpose of bringing them closer to Him. Instead they are fascinated with the favors and are drifting farther from Him.”* He also said, praying to Allāh: *“O Allāh, You have created this creation without their knowledge and You have placed on them a trust without their will. If You don’t help them, who will help them?”*

A man asked Bāyazīd: *“Show me a deed by which I will approach my Lord.”* He replied: *“Love the friends of Allāh in order that they will love you. Love his saints until they love you. Because Allāh looks at the hearts of His saints and He will see your name engraved in the heart of His saints and He will forgive you.”*

A Sūfī master, Sahl at-Tustarī, sent a letter to Bāyazīd that read: *“Here is a man who drank a drink that left him forever refreshed.”* Bāyazīd replied: *“Here is a man who has drunk all existences, but whose mouth is still dry and burns with thirst [for God].”*

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From Abū ‘Abd ar-Rahmān as-Sulamī’s *Tabaqāt al-Awliyā’* (Ranks of the Friends of God) [Michael Sell’s translation]:

Bāyazīd was asked about the ranking of the knower (‘*arīf*) [of God]. He said: *“There is no rank there. Rather, the greatest benefit of the knower is the existence of the One known.”*

Allāh has looked upon the hearts of His friends. Those who are unable to bear pure knowing, He has occupied with worship.

Asked, *“What should be one’s support in worship?”* Bāyazīd replied: *“‘O God,’ if you know Him.”*

Asked, *“How is knowing attained?”* He replied, *“By losing whatever you have and by relying upon whatever He has.”*

Asked, *“How have you experienced (*wajadta*) this knowing?”* Bāyazīd said, *“With a hungry belly and a body naked.”*

No one knows himself who is accompanied by craving of appetite.

Asked, *“What is the mark of the knower?”* Bāyazīd said, *“He does not slacken in his remembrance of Him, and he does not tire from the reality of Him, and he does not keep company with any other than Him.”*

Paradise is of no concern to the people of love, and the people of love are loved through their love.

Whoever listens to speech in order to converse with people, Allāh will nourish him with the understanding to converse with people. Whoever listens in order to engage with Allāh through them in his act, Allāh will nourish him with the understanding to engage in intimate conversation with his lord Almighty.

I recognized Allāh through Allāh and I recognized what was below Allāh through the light of Allāh almighty.

O Lord, let me understand you. I cannot understand from you except through You.

God Most High enjoined upon worshipers His command and his prohibition, and they obeyed. He bestowed upon them His robe of honor and they were distracted from Him by robes of honor. I do not wish from Allāh anything other than Allāh.

Allāh has provided his worshipers with sweets, and on account of the joy they take in them, he has forbidden them the realities of nearness.

Blessed is one whose concern is one, whose heart is not occupied with what his eyes have seen and his ears have heard.

Whoever knows Allāh will be an ascetic in everything that distracts him from Him.

I erred in the beginning in four things. I thought that I was remembering Him, recognizing Him, loving Him, and seeking Him. Finally I realized that His remembrance preceded my remembrance; His act of recognition preceded my act of recognition; His love was older than my love; He sought me first so that I could then seek Him.

Bliss is everlasting; gratitude for bliss should be everlasting as well.

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From Abū l-Qāsim ‘abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī’s *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī at-Taṣawwauf* (The Qushayrian Treatise on Sūfism) [Michael Sell’s translation]:

If you see a man who has been given such divine favors (*karamāt*) that he rises into the air, do not be deceived. Watch and see how you find him with the command and prohibition [enjoined by the *Qur’ān*], the guarding of the boundaries (*ḥifẓ al-ḥudūd*) and the carrying out of the *sharī‘a* [Muslim law].

I resolved to ask Allāh Most High to free me of the burden of food and the burden of [attraction to] women. Then I said, “How can I ask Allāh for something that the God-sent [Prophet Muḥamad] never asked for?” I did not ask. Then Allāh, praised beyond praise, freed me from the burden of women until I no longer took note whether it was a woman I encountered or a wall.

[Asked about his spiritual beginning and renunciation, Bāyazīd said, speaking figuratively with his numbers:] I spent three days in renunciation. When the fourth day came, I left it behind. The first day I renounced this world and what it contains. The second day I renounced the world to come and what it contains. The third day I renounced everything other than God. When the

fourth day arrived, nothing remained for me other than God. I understood. I heard a voice saying, “Bāyazīd, you will not be able to endure being with us.” I said, “This [annihilation] is what I want.” I heard a voice saying, “You’ve found! You’ve found!”

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Someone asked, “When does man reach God?” Bāyazīd replied, “O you miserable one—*does he reach Him at all?*” [i.e., the ego cannot ever co-exist with God who is the only One] (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 48)

I saw my Lord in my dreams and I asked, “How am I to find You?” He replied, “*Leave yourself and come!*” (Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *Travelling the Path of Love: Sayings of Sufi Masters*, POB 428, Inverness, CA 94937: Golden Sufi Center, 1995, p. 19)

As I reached the stage of proximity to God, He said, “What dost thou desire?” I replied, “I desire Thee.” He said, “As long as there remains even one particle of Bāyazīdness in thee, that desire cannot be fulfilled.” (*ibid.*, 189)

I came out from Bāyazīdness as a snake from its skin. Then I looked. *I saw that lover, Beloved, and love are one because in that state of unification, all are one.* (*ibid.*, 137)

I went from God to God, until He cried from me in me, “*O Thou I.*” Thus I attained the stage of annihilation in God. (*ibid.*, 192)

The thing we tell of can never be found by seeking, yet only seekers find it. (*ibid.*, 27)

A man will not be a mystic until he is *like the earth*—both the righteous and the sinner tread upon it—and until he is *like the clouds*—they shade all things—and until he is *like the rain*—it waters all things, whether it loves them or not. (*ibid.*, 7)

If the eight Paradises were opened in my hut, and the rule of both worlds were given in my hands, I would not give for them that single sigh which rises at morning-time from the depth of my soul in remembering my longing for Him. (*ibid.*, 49)

All this talk and turmoil and noise and movement is outside the veil. Inside the veil is silence and calm and peace. (*ibid.*, 82)

Nothing is better for a man than to be without anything—having no asceticism, no theory, no practice. *When he is without all, he is with all.* (*ibid.*, 208)

That which I was I am no more, for “I” and “God” represents polytheism, a denial of His Unity.... I am no more... I have passed away. (Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, London: Luzac, 1950/1972)

For thirty years I sought God. But when I looked carefully, I saw that in reality God was the seeker and I was the sought. (L.F.R. Williams, *Sufi Studies East & West*, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1973)

He who discourses on eternity must have within him the light [lamp] of eternity. (Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 1914, p. 51)

A saint must keep the religious law in order that God may keep him in his spiritual state. (*ibid.*, 127)

Bāyazīd purchased some cardamom seed at Hamadhān and, before departing, put into his garment a small quantity that was left over. On reaching Bisṭām and recollecting what he had done, he took out the seed and found that it contained a number of ants. Saying “I have carried the poor creatures away from their home,” he immediately set off and journeyed back to Hamadhān—a distance of several hundred miles. (*ibid.*, 109)

Notwithstanding that the lovers of God are separated from Him by their love, they have the essential principle, for whether they sleep or wake, they seek and are sought, and are not occupied with their own seeking and loving, but are enraptured in contemplation of the Beloved. It is a crime in the lover to regard his love, and an outrage in love to look at one’s own seeking, while one is face to face with the Sought. (*ibid.*, 115)

His love entered and removed all besides Him and left no trace of anything else, so that this love remained single, even as He is entirely single. (*ibid.*, 115)

