

217. . . . So they led Judas to Mount Calvary, where they hanged criminals, and there they crucified him naked for even greater humiliation. Judas did nothing but cry out: "God, why have you forsaken me, since the criminal has escaped and I die unjustly?"

I say in all truth that the voice, the face, and the character of Judas were so like that of Jesus that his disciples and believers entirely believed that he was Jesus. Thus some abandoned the doctrine of Jesus, believing that Jesus had been a false prophet, and that he performed his miracles through magic.

Jesus had said that he would not die until near the end of the world, and at that time he would be taken away from the world. But those who stood firm in the doctrine of Jesus were so overcome with sorrow, seeing him die who looked entirely like Jesus, that they did not remember what Jesus had said. So in company with the mother of Jesus they went to Mount Calvary. . . . They took Judas down from the cross crying unbelievably, and buried him in the new tomb of Joseph, having wrapped him up in a hundred pounds of precious ointments. . . .

218. Each man then returned to his house. . . . Those disciples who did not fear God went at night, stole the body of Judas and hid it, spreading a report that Jesus was risen again. Great confusion then arose. . . .
219. Jesus [while in heaven] prayed that God would give him power to see his mother and his disciples. Then merciful God commanded his four favorite angels—Gabriel, Michael, Rafael, and Uriel—to carry Jesus to his mother's house, and keep watch over him there continually for three days, permitting him only to be seen by them that believed in his doctrine. . . .
220. The four angels then explained to the Virgin Mary how God had sent for Jesus and transformed Judas so that he would suffer the punishment to which he had sold another. . . .

Then I, Barnabas, said: "Master, seeing that God is merciful, why has he tormented us, making us believe that you were dead? . . ."

Jesus answered: "Believe me, Barnabas, every sin, however small, God severely punishes, because God is offended by sin. Since my mother and my faithful disciples that were with me loved me a little with earthly love, God in his righteousness has chosen to punish this love with the present grief, in order that it may not be punished in the flames of Hell. I have been innocent in the world, even though people have called me "God," and "Son of God." To prevent me from being mocked by demons on the Day of Judgment, God has willed that I should be mocked by people in this world through the death of Judas, making all people believe that I died on the cross. This mocking will continue until the coming of Mohammed, the messenger of God, who will reveal this deception to those who believe in God's law."

Source: Adapted from *The Gospel of Barnabas*, tr. Lonsdale Ragg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), chs. 42, 43, 70, 215–220.

SUFI WRITINGS

LOVE: RABI'A

Almost as old as Islam itself, Sufism is the mystical tradition of Islam that emphasizes mystical union with God. Rabi'a al-Adawiya (717–801) was one of the earliest and most admired Sufis and is sometimes referred to as the Muslim St. Teresa. She was kidnapped as a girl, sold into slavery, and later freed because of her piety. Thereafter she lived as an ascetic with a small group of followers. Although she did not write systematic treatises on Sufism, her sayings were passed down to later generations of Sufis who recorded them and used them as sounding boards for their own mystical ideas. Her key theological contribution is the notion of the unconditional love of God (mahabbah), which parallels the Hindu notion of bhakti or the Christian notion of agape.

Abd Allah b. Isa said: I entered Rabi'a's presence and I saw the light on her face, and she used to weep much, and a man related of her that at every mention of fire (representing the punishment of the unrepentant sinner), she swooned, and I heard the falling of her tears on the ground like the sound of water filling a vessel. . . . I came into Rabi'a's presence and she was worshipping, and when I reached my place, she raised her head, and lo, the place of her worship was like a marsh from her tears and I saluted her. Then she received me and said, "O my son, do you need anything?" and I said, "I came to you to greet you," and she wept and said, "May God censure thee!" Then she rose up for the ritual prayer and said, "I ask forgiveness of God for my lack of sincerity when I say those words 'I ask forgiveness of God.'"

It is related that at one time she saw someone who had a bandage bound about his head. She said, "Why is this bandage bound round your head?" He said, "My head is painning me." Rabi'a asked him how old he was. "Thirty years old," he replied. She asked him, "Were you in pain and trouble for the greater part of your life?" "No," he answered. Then she said, "For thirty years (God) has kept your body fit and you have never bound upon it the bandage of gratitude, but for one night of pain in your head you bind it with the bandage of complaint."

They told us that Rabi'a al-Adawiya once said: I praised God one night with the praises of dawn, then I slept and I saw a bright green tree, indescribable in its size and beauty, and lo, upon it were three kinds of fruit, unknown to me among the fruits of this world, like virgins' breasts, white, red and yellow, and they shone like spheres and suns in the green spaces of the tree, and I admired them and said, "Whose is this?" and one said to me, "This is yours, for your praises aforetime." Then I began to walk round it, and lo, under it were eighteen fruits on the ground, of the color of gold, and I said, "If only these fruits were with the fruits on the tree, it would surely be better." That personage said to me: "They would have been there, but that you, when you offered your praises, were thinking, 'Is the dough leavened or not?' and this fruit fell off."

Some people were speaking in Rabi'a's presence of a devotee, who was known to be holy and in the favor of God, and who lived on what he

collected from the refuse-heap of one of our kings, and a man said in her hearing, "What harm would there be in this, if he is in favor with God, and he should ask of him to provide him with food by some other means?" and Rabi'a said to him, "Be silent, O worthless one, have you not realized that the saints of God are satisfied with Him, that they accept his will even if he takes from them their means of livelihood, so long as it is he who chooses this for them?"

"I have loved you with two loves, a selfish love and a love that is worthy of you. As for the love which is selfish, I occupy myself therein with remembrance of you to the exclusion of all others. As for that which is worthy of you, therein you raise the veil that I may see you. Yet is there no praise to me in this or that, but the praise is to you, whether in that or this."

Source: Rabi'a al-'Adawiya, selected sayings, from *Rabi'a: The Life and Work of Rabi'a*, Margaret Smith (London: Cambridge University Press, 1928). Reprinted by permission.

UNVEILING THE QUR'AN'S SECRETS: SANA'I OF GHAZNI

Born in the city of Ghazni, in what is now Afghanistan, Sufi poet Sana'i (d. ca. 1150) composed The Enclosed Garden of the Truth upon his return from a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. In the selections here from that work, he explains the urgency of disciplining oneself to be receptive to Allah's message. He warns, though, not to confuse the words of the Qur'an with its hidden and secret meaning. As beautiful as the words themselves are, there is a deeper content that can only be grasped by the soul, and not through the intellect.

Parable of the Schoolboy. If a boy is unable to learn his task, hear at once what it is that he wants; be kind to him and treat him tenderly; do not make him grieve in helpless expectation; at such a time give him sweetmeats in his lap to comfort him, and do not treat him harshly. But if he will not read, at once send for the strap. Take hold of his ears and rub them hard. Threaten him with the schoolmaster and say that he will have strict orders to punish him—that he will shut him up in a rat-house, and the head rat will strangle him. In the path that leads to the life to come, do not be less apt than a boy to receive admonition. Eternity is your sweetmeat. Hurry, then, and you can obtain paradise for the price of two rak'ahs [i.e., a cycle in the Salah prayer ritual]. Otherwise the rat-house will for you be Hell. It will be your tomb which meets you on your way to that other mansion. Go to the writing-school of the prophets for a time. Do not choose this folly for yourself, this affliction. Read just one tablet of the religion of the prophets. Since you know nothing about this, go, read and learn, that happily you may become their friend and may happily escape from this stupidity. In this corrupt and baleful world do not think that there is anything worse than stupidity.

The Secret Qur'an. The tongue cannot tell the secret of the Qur'an, for His intimates keep it concealed. The Qur'an indeed knows its own secret;

hear it from itself, for itself knows it. Except by the soul's eye no one knows the measurer of words from the true reader of the Qur'an. I will not take upon myself to say that you truly know the Qur'an though you are Uthman [the third Caliph]. The world is like the summer's heat, its people like drunkards in it, all wandering in the desert of indifference. Death is the shepherd, and men his flock. In this waste of desire and wretchedness the hot sand appears to be running water. The Qur'an is like the cool water of the Euphrates, while you are like a thirsty sinner on the plain of the Judgement. You should hold the letter and Qur'an as a cup and its water. Drink the water, but do not gaze on the vessel. . . . In a cry of anguish, the suffering of a pure heart will tell the secret of the pure Qur'an. How can reason discover its interpretation? Take a delight in it and you will discover its inmost secret. . . . The letter may be uttered by the tongue, its soul can only be read by the soul. The letter is like the shell, and the true Qur'an is the pearl; the heart of the free-born does not desire the shell. . . . When the soul recites the Qur'an it enjoys a luscious morsel. Whoever hears it, mends his ragged robe. The words, the voice, and the letters of the verses are like three stalks in bowls of vegetables. Though the husk is neither fair nor sweet, it still guards the kernel. . . . When the day of true religion dawns, the night of thought, fancy and sense will fly away. When the veiled ones of the unseen world see that you are stainless, they lead you to the invisible abode and reveal to you their faces.

Disclosing to you the secret of the Qur'an, they will withdraw the veil of letters. The earthy will have a reward of earth, but the pure will see purity. An understanding of the Qur'an does not dwell in the brain where pride starts up. The ass is as dumb as a mere stone, and does not lend his ear to the secret of God's word; he turns away from hearing the Qur'an and pays no heed to the sura's secret. But if your mind is disciplined towards God, it will discover in the sura the secret of the Qur'an.

Source: Adapted from Sana'i of Ghazni, *The First Book of the Hadiqatu'l-haqiqat*; or, *The Enclosed Garden of the Truth*, tr. J. Stephenson (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1910).

SUFI PATH: AL-GHAZALI

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111) was a scholar of Islamic law and philosopher who ultimately rejected academic approaches to truth in favor of immediate mystical experience. The following is from al-Ghazali's biography, Deliverer from Error, in which he describes his initial acquaintance with Sufism.

When God in the abundance of his mercy had healed me of this malady, I ascertained that those who are engaged in the search for truth may be divided into three groups. (1) Scholastic theologians, who profess to follow theory and speculation. (2) The philosophers, who profess to rely upon formal logic. (3) The sufis, who call themselves the elect of God and possessors of intuition and knowledge of the truth by means of ecstasy.

"The truth," I said to myself, "must be found among these three classes of men who devote themselves to the search for it. If it escapes them, one must give up all hopes of attaining it. . . ." Determined to follow these paths and to search out these systems to the bottom, I proceeded with my investigation in the following order: Scholastic theology; philosophical systems; and, finally Sufism. . . .

When I had finished my examination of these doctrines [of the philosophers], I applied myself to the study of Sufism. I saw that in order to understand it thoroughly one must combine theory with practice. The aim which the Sufis set before them is as follows: to free the soul from the tyrannical yoke of the passions, to deliver it from its wrong inclinations and evil instincts, in order that in the purified heart there should only remain room for God and for the invocation of his holy name.

As it was more easy to learn their doctrine than to practice it, I studied first of all those of their books which contain it. . . . I acquired a thorough knowledge of their researches, and I learned all that was possible to learn of their methods by study and oral teaching. It became clear to me that the last stage could not be reached by mere instruction, but only by transport, ecstasy, and the transformation of the moral being.

Ten years passed in this manner. During my successive periods of meditation there were revealed to me things impossible to recount. All that I shall say for the edification of the reader is this: I learned from a sure source that the Sufis are the true pioneers on the path of God. There is nothing more beautiful than their life, nor more praiseworthy than their rule of conduct, nor purer than their morality. . . . In a word, what can one criticize in them? To purge the heart of all that does not belong to God is the first step in their cathartic method. The drawing upon of the heart by prayer is the keystone of it, as the cry "God is great" is the keystone of prayer, and the last stage of being lost in God. I say the last stage, with reference to what may be reached by an effort of will; but, to tell the truth, it is only the first stage in the life of contemplation, the vestibule by which the initiated enter.

From the time that they set out on this path, they begin to have revelations. They come to see in the waking state angels and souls of prophets. They hear their voices and wise counsels. By means of this contemplation of heavenly forms and images they rise by degrees to heights which human language cannot reach, which one cannot even indicate without falling into great and inevitable errors. The degree of proximity to Deity which they attain is regarded by some as intermixture of being (*haloul*), by others as identification (*ittihad*), by others as intimate union (*wasl*). But all these expressions are wrong. . . . In short, he who does not arrive at the intuition of these truths by means of ecstasy, knows only the *name* of inspiration. The miracles done by the saints are, in fact, merely the earliest forms of prophetic manifestation. Such was the state of the Apostle of God when, before receiving his commission, he retired to Mount Hira to give himself up to such intensity of prayer and meditation that the Arabs said, "Muhammad has become captivated of God."

This state, then, can be revealed to the initiated in ecstasy, and to him who is incapable of ecstasy, by obedience and attention, on condition that he frequents the society of Sufis till he arrives, so to speak, at the imitative initiation. Such is the faith which one can obtain by remaining among them, and intercourse with them is never painful.

Source: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Deliverer from Error*, sects. 78, 122-125, 132-135; adapted from *The Confessions of Al Ghazali*, tr. Claud Field (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1909).

UNION AND SEPARATION: RUMI

The most widely acclaimed Sufi writer is Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi (1207-1273), whose poetic work the Masnawi is often referred to as the Qur'an in Persian. Central to Rumi's writings are the paired notions of union and separation; that is, moments of the mystic's life consist of blissful union with God, whereas, of necessity, other moments involve separation. Separation frequently manifests itself in human pain and suffering. Rumi argues that such suffering must be understood in a larger context: The spiritual happiness we achieve in the state of union is accentuated by the suffering we experience while in separation. The following selections are from Rumi's Masnawi and his other epic writing, the Diwan.

Only the imagination that has contemplated Unification, and then, after direct vision, has undergone separation;

Not a definitive separation, but one for a good purpose, since that station is secure from all separation;

In order to preserve the spiritualized body, the Sun pulls back from the snow for a moment. (*Masnawi* 6:4012-15)

At the time of union, only God knows what that Moon is! For even during separation, what incredible joy and expansion of spirit! (*Diwan* 30321)

Separation and parting from Thee is difficult, oh Beloved, especially after Thy embrace! (*Diwan* 13901)

If man should see himself at all, if he should see that his wound is deadly and gangrenous,

Then from such looking within, pain would arise, and pain would bring him out from behind the veil.

Until mothers feel the pain of childbirth, the child finds no way to be born.

The trust is within the heart and the heart is pregnant; all the exhortations of the saints act as a midwife.

The midwife says, "The woman has no pain. Pain is necessary, for it will open a way for the child."

He that is without pain is a brigand, for to be without pain is to say "I am God."

To say "I" at the wrong time is a curse, but to say it at the right time is a mercy. (*Masnawi* 2:2516–22)

The body is pregnant with the spirit, the body's suffering is the pain of childbirth—the coming of the embryo brings pain and torment for the woman.

Look not at the wine's bitterness, look at the joy of drunkards! Look not at the woman's affliction, look at the hope of the midwife! (*Diwan* 5990)

How much the Beloved made me suffer before this work settled into the eye's water and the liver's blood!

A thousand fires and smokes and heartaches—and its name is Love! A thousand pains and regrets and afflictions—and its name is Beloved!

Let every enemy of his own spirit set out to work! Welcome to the spirit's sacrifice and a pitiful death!

My heart keeps saying, "I suffer because of Him," and I keep laughing at its weak hypocrisy. (*Masnawi* 1:1773–82)

Union with this world is separation from that world. The health of this body is the sickness of the spirit.

It is hard to be separated from this caravanserai—so know that separation from that permanent abode is harder!

Since it is hard for you to be separated from the painting, think what it will be to be parted from the Painter!

Oh you who cannot bear to be without this despicable world! How can you bear to be without God, oh friend, how?

Since you cannot bear to be without this black water, how can you bear to be without God's fountain? . . .

If you should see the Beauty of the Loving God for one instant and throw your soul and existence into the fire,

Then having seen the glory and splendor of His proximity, you would see these sweet beverages as carrion. . . .

Strive quickly to find Self in selflessness—and God knows best the right course. (*Masnawi* 4:3209–13, 15–16, 18)

Source: Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi, *Diwan* and *Masnawi* selections, from *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, tr. William C. Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), pp. 235–236. Reprinted by permission.

Baha'i Faith

INTRODUCTION

The Baha'i Faith began in mid-nineteenth-century Persia, a Shi'i Islamic society. Founded by Baha'u'llah and his forerunner the Bab and developed and guided by his son, Abdu'l-Baha, and great-grandson, Shoghi Effendi, it is now widely recognized as an independent world religion. The Baha'i Faith emphasizes the unity of all religions and world peace. "To be a Baha'i," according to Abdu'l-Baha, "simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood." Baha'i doctrine is sometimes expressed in the "three onenesses." (1) The oneness of God: There is a single and ultimately unknowable God who is given different names. The knowledge we do have of God derives from his various prophets who instruct us. (2) The oneness of humankind: There is a single human race, and we are all members of it. (3) The oneness of religion: All religions are unified insofar as they are each stages in God's revelatory plan.

Baha'i Founders

The Baha'i Faith is historically founded on the Babi religion, which in turn rests on the Shi'i Muslim doctrine of the Hidden Imam. According to this doctrine, the Mahdi, the final Imam—or spiritual successor to Ali—is alive but was placed by God in a condition of occultation in which he can see others but others cannot see him (or at least they cannot recognize him). He will return at the end of time, take vengeance on the wicked, and initiate an era of peace. Shi'i Islam has numerous denominations and sects that have differing views of the status of the Imams in general and of the Mahdi. The nineteenth-century Shaykhi sect, founded by Shaykh (Sheik) Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1753–1826), maintained that Imams have an almost divine status and that each generation needs a gate (Bab) as an intermediary between the Hidden Imam and believers. Although one of the Shaykhi leaders claimed to be guided by the Mahdi in his dreams, no one initially claimed to be the Bab himself.

The forerunner to the Baha'i Faith was affiliated with the Shaykhi sect—either formally or as a sympathizer. Sayyid Ali-Muhammad Shirazi (1819–1850) was born into a merchant family in south Persia; his father died soon after his birth, and he was raised by his uncle. He married at age 22 and subsequently joined the Shaykhi. In 1844, while on a pilgrimage to Mecca, he claimed to be the Bab, which was a more extreme claim than his Shaykhi predecessors had made.