

end. In this way, this epistle would give strength to the followers¹¹ of this path and make you testify that my presentation is correct. As for me, in spreading these laments¹² I shall have a diversion and from the generous God a favor and reward.

So I seek God's help in what I am about to mention and ask Him to protect and defend me from error in this undertaking. I plea to God for forgiveness and pardon. He alone deserves praise and He alone is capable of everything!//15

A chapter explaining the beliefs of the Sufis concerning the fundamentals of religion

Know, may God have mercy on you, that the elders of this path built the foundations of their affair upon the sound fundamental principles of God's oneness. In this way they protected their beliefs from [reprehensible] innovations and tried to bring themselves closer to the ways of the pious forefathers¹³ and the followers of the Prophet's Sunna,¹⁴ namely the doctrine of God's oneness that contained neither likening¹⁵ nor stripping.¹⁶ They knew well the true nature of God's eternity and realized fully how an existent entity emerges from non-existence.//16

It is this issue that the great master of this path al-Junayd,¹⁷ may God have mercy on him, mentioned when he said: "The [true] doctrine of oneness consists in separating the eternal from the originated." Thus, they strengthened the fundamentals of the religious belief by clear proofs and irrefutable evidence. Abu Muhammad al-Jurayri,¹⁸ may God have mercy on him, said: "He who does not learn the science of God's oneness by one of its evidential proofs, will place the foot of deception into the chasm of perdition." By this he meant that he who relies exclusively on blind imitation and is unable to contemplate directly the proofs of God's oneness, will stray from the path of salvation and enter the realm of destruction.

Upon looking into their words and examining their statements one will find out that their entire teachings and the quotations thereof confirm that this folk¹⁹ have not failed to realize their goal, nor have they diverged in their quest through any shortcoming.

11 *Muridun*; sing. *murid*. Lit. "seeker" or "aspirant", followers of a Sufi master.

12 That is, the author's complaints about the decline of contemporary Sufism from the originally high standards.

13 That is, the members of the first Muslim community in Medina and their immediate successors.

14 The code of exemplary behavior established by the Prophet and his Companions to be emulated by subsequent generations of the Muslims.

15 That is, ascribing to God the attributes of His creatures.

16 That is, declaring God to be devoid of any attributes.

17 The leader of the Baghdad school of Sufism, who died in 298/910. See *IM*, pp. 52–56.

18 A disciple of al-Junayd who succeeded him as the head of the Baghdad school of Sufism after his death. See *IM*, p. 66.

19 *Al-qawm* – that is, the Sufis.

In this section we shall mention a summary of their statements in which they deal with the problems of the fundamentals of religion. Then, God willing, we shall proceed to lay down in proper order a synopsis of necessary doctrines in a concise and brief manner.

I heard Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad b.²⁰ al-Husayn al-Sulami²¹ say: I heard 'Abdallah b./17 Musa al-Salami say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Shibli²² say: "The One²³ is known before any definition and before any letters".²⁴ This is an unequivocal statement from al-Shibli that the Essence of the Eternal – praise be to Him – has no definition, nor does His speech consist of letters. I heard that Abu Hatim al-Sufi said: I heard Abu Nasr al-Tusi²⁵ say: Someone asked Ruwaym²⁶ about the first duty that God – may He be great and exalted – imposed upon His creatures. Ruwaym answered: "Knowledge, because God – may His name be exalted – said: 'I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me.'"²⁷ Ibn 'Abbas²⁸ explained: "[That is,] except to know [God]."

Al-Junayd said: "The first act of wisdom required of the servant of God is that each work of art should know its artisan and that each originated thing should know how it came to be. This allows one to distinguish the Creator from His creatures and the Eternal from the originated thing. As a result, the servant of God submits to His call and acknowledges the necessity of obedience toward Him. If, however, one does not know one's owner, one cannot attribute ownership to whom it rightfully belongs."

Muhammad b. al-Husayn told me: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Abu 'l-Tayyib al-Maraghi say: "To the intellect belongs argumentative proof, to wisdom allegorical allusion and to mystical gnosis²⁹ direct witnessing. The intellect demonstrates, wisdom alludes, and gnosis witnesses directly the fact that the purest acts of worship can only be obtained by the purest belief in God's oneness."

Someone asked al-Junayd about God's oneness. He answered: "Rendering God one by realizing fully His uniqueness through the perfection of His

20 Here and henceforth the letter "b." stands for the Arabic "ibn" (son).

21 A major exponent of Sufism in Khurasan and a teacher of al-Qushayri, who died in 412/1021. See *IM*, pp. 125–127.

22 A famous Sufi of the Baghdad school who studied Sufism under al-Junayd; he died in 334/946. See *IM*, pp. 64–66.

23 That is, God.

24 *Huruf*, sing. *harf*. In Arabic, this word can mean both "letters" and "sounds".

25 Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi (d. 378/988), a Khurasani exponent of Sufism who wrote the famous Sufi manual "The Book of the Essentials of Sufism" (*Kitab al-luma' fi 'l-tasawwuf*). For details see *IM*, pp. 118–120.

26 A famous Sufi master associated with the circle of al-Junayd. He died in 303/915.

27 *Q*. 51:56.

28 A cousin of the prophet Muhammad by his uncle al-'Abbas, Ibn [al-]'Abbas distinguished himself as a collector of stories about the Prophet; he was also one of the first Muslim exegetes. He died around 68/686–7. See *EI*, "'Abdallah b. al-'Abbas".

29 *Ma'rifa*, a Sufi term for divinely inspired, intuitive knowledge of God and the world.

solitude, that is, that He is one and only, 'Who has not begotten and has not been begotten',³⁰ who has no opponents, rivals or likes, without likening Him [to created things], without asking 'how [He is]', without representing Him as an image or form, in accordance with [the verse] 'Like Him there is naught; He is the Hearing, the Seeing.'"³¹

Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Yahya the Sufi told me: 'Abdallah b. 'Ali al-Tamimi the Sufi told me: It was said that [Abu] al-Husayn b. 'Ali al-Damaghani said: Someone asked Abu Bakr al-Zahirabadhi about [divine] gnosis.//18 He answered: "Gnosis is a name. Its meaning consists in elevating [God] in the heart in such a way as to prevent you from either stripping [Him] of [His] attributes or likening [Him] to [His] creatures."

Abu 'l-Hasan al-Bushanji, may God have mercy on him, said: "God's oneness is to know that He is not similar to created essences, yet [at the same time] not devoid of His attributes."

Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on Him – told us: I heard Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Ghalib say: I heard Abu Nasr Ahmad b. Sa'īd al-Isfanjani say: al-Husayn b. Mansur [al-Hallaj]³² said: "Consider everything to be originated in time (i.e., created), for eternity pertains to Him alone. Everything that has appeared [in this world] as a corporal being is bound with accidents. Everything that is assembled by means of an intermediary³³ is held together by its powers. Everything that is affiliated with a moment of time is [one day] abandoned by it.³⁴ Everything that is sustained by someone else is by necessity dependent on it. Everything that is subject to the imagination can be represented as an image. Everything that is contained by a place can be confined by a space. And everything that belongs to a certain category can be grasped by a qualifier. As for God – praise be upon Him – He cannot be protected by something above Him nor supported by something below Him.³⁵ He cannot be defined by something that preceded Him, no togetherness can appear next to Him, no behindness can follow Him, no in-frontness can grasp Him, no beforeness can prevail over Him, no afterness can annihilate Him. No term can comprehensively define Him, no becoming can add existence onto Him, no absence can cause Him to disappear.//19 There is no description of Him whatsoever; His actions have no cause; His existence has no end. He is far removed from the characteristics of His creatures, nor does He mix with them; His actions require no intermediary. He is distinct from His creatures through His eternity, while they are distinct from Him through their origination in time.

30 Q 112:3.

31 Q 42:11.

32 A famous (and highly controversial) mystic of al-Junayd's circle, who was tried and executed as a heretic and troublemaker in Baghdad in 309/922. See *IM*, pp. 72–82.

33 That is, any body that was originated through something other than it and is possessed of various sensory and physical faculties.

34 That is, it dies.

35 That is, He cannot be subject to spatial descriptions.

If you ask “When?”, His being preceded all time. If you say *huma*,³⁶ the [letters] *ha* and *waw* were created by Him. If you ask “Where?”, His existence was there before any place. The letters are but His signs; His existence is the confirmation of Him; His knowledge is the knowledge of His oneness; and the knowledge of His oneness is what makes Him distinct from His creatures. Whatever the imagination might fathom regarding Him, He will be different from it. How can anything that originated from Him dwell in Him? How can anything that He produced try to join Him? The eyes cannot contemplate Him nor can thought grasp Him. Closeness to Him is [a sign of] His beneficence; remoteness from Him is [a sign of] His neglect; His elevation takes place without climbing up;³⁷ His descent occurs without stepping down.³⁸ He is “the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden”,³⁹ the Close and the Remote, “like Him there is naught; He is the Hearing, the Seeing”.⁴⁰

I heard Abu Hatim al-Sijistani say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi⁴¹ narrating on the authority of Yusuf b. al-Husayn⁴² who said: “A certain man came to Dhu ‘l-Nun al-Misri⁴³ and said: //20 ‘Tell me, what is God’s oneness?’ He [al-Misri] answered: ‘To understand that God’s power in all things [exists] without mixing, that He crafted them without any implements, that His act [of creation] is the cause of everything that He has crafted, that His act [of creation] had no cause; that neither in the skies above nor on the Earth below is there any planner but God and that whatever you may imagine by your fantasy, God is different from it.’” Al-Junayd said: “The doctrine of God’s oneness is your knowledge and confirmation that God was alone in His pre-eternity, with Whom there was no one, and that nothing can do what He does.”

Abu ‘Abdallah b. Khaffif⁴⁴ said: “Faith consists in the heart’s acceptance of [the mysteries of] the Unknown that God communicates to it.” Abu ‘l-‘Abbas al-Sayyari⁴⁵ said: “God’s gifts are of two types: graces and afflictions. What He bestows upon you is a grace, while what He takes away from you is an affliction. Therefore, say: ‘I am a believer, God willing.’” Abu ‘l-‘Abbas was the [greatest Sufi] master of his time. I heard [my] teacher Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “A man squeezed the leg of Abu ‘l-‘Abbas al-Sayyari.

36 That is, “He” (God).

37 That is, His elevation does not occur in a physical space.

38 A reference to the tradition according to which God descends to the lower heaven in order to communicate with His creatures.

39 Q. 57:3.

40 Q. 42:11.

41 On him see note 000.

42 Yusuf b. al-Husayn al-Razi (d. 304/916), a renowned Sufi from Rayy, Iran. See al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, pp. 151–156.

43 A famous Sufi master from Upper Egypt, who died in 245/860. See *IM*, pp. 40–42.

44 A famous Sufi from Shiraz, who died in 371/982. See *IM*, pp. 79, 87, 118, and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, “index”.

45 For his biography see later (p. 68).

He said: 'You are squeezing a leg that has never made a single step toward disobedience of God – may He be great and exalted!'” Abu Bakr al-Wasiti⁴⁶ said: “When someone says: ‘I am a believer in God in truth’, one should tell him: ‘The true faith implies scrutiny, understanding and comprehension. If someone loses this, his claim to true faith is invalidated.’”⁴⁷ By this he meant the teaching of the people of the [Prophet’s] Sunna, according to which the true believer is destined to enter Paradise. If one has not known directly from the mystery of God’s wisdom that he is a believer in truth, then his claim is false.

I heard Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard that Mansur b. ‘Abdallah said://21 I heard Abu ‘l-Husayn al-‘Anbari say: I heard Sahl b. ‘Abdallah al-Tustari⁴⁸ say: “Believers contemplate God with their eyes without comprehension and without ever reaching the limit of their understanding.” Abu ‘l-Husayn al-Nuri⁴⁹ said: “The Real⁵⁰ looked at the hearts of men and did not find a heart that had more passion for Him than the heart of Muhammad – may God bless and greet him. Therefore He bestowed upon him the Ascension⁵¹ in order to hasten the vision [of God by Muhammad] and [their] conversation.”

I heard imam⁵² Abu Bakr Muhammad b. al-Hasan Ibn Furak⁵³ – may God have mercy upon him – say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Mahbub, a servant of Abu ‘Uthman al-Maghribi,⁵⁴ say: “One day Abu ‘Uthman told me: ‘If someone said to you: “Muhammad, where is your God”, what would you tell him?’ [The servant] said: I answered: ‘Where He has always been.’ [Then Abu ‘Uthman] said: ‘And if this person asks, where God was in eternity, what would you say?’ [The servant] said: I answered: ‘[He was] where He is now.’ That is, as He was in no particular place before, so He is now.’ [The servant] said: ‘He was satisfied with my response and he took off his shirt and gave it to me.’”

I heard the imam Abu Bakr b. Furak – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu ‘Uthman al-Maghribi say: “I used to believe in the teaching [that

46 A Sufi of al-Junayd’s circle, who emigrated to Central Asia (Marw) following the execution of al-Hallaj. He died around 320/932. See *IM*, pp. 100–101.

47 A mere oral proclamation that is not supported by personal conviction, experience and insight is not sufficient to become a true believer.

48 On this famous Sufi of Basra, who died in 283/896, see *IM*, pp. 83–88 and Böwering, *Mystical Vision*.

49 A famous Sufi of al-Junayd’s circle who represents the erotic trend in Baghdad mysticism. He died in 295/907. See *IM*, pp. 60–63.

50 That is, God.

51 On Muhammad’s Night Journey (*al-israʿ*) and subsequent Ascension (*al-miʿraj*) to Heaven, see the article “al-Miʿraj” in *EI*.

52 Literally “prayer leader”, a term that is often applied to any distinguished religious scholar.

53 This individual, who died in 406/1015 at Nishapur, was known primarily as a Shafīʿi jurist and Ashʿari theologian. He was a teacher of al-Qushayri. For details, see the article “Ibn Furak” in *EI*.

54 On this Sufi master, who died in Nishapur in 373/983, see al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, pp. 358–362 and the sources cited therein. His biography will be mentioned later (see p. 72).

postulated] that God is located in a certain direction.⁵⁵ However, when I arrived in Baghdad, this [idea] disappeared from my heart. I then wrote to my companions in Mecca, saying: 'I have become Muslim once again.'⁵⁶

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Sulami say: I heard Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi say, when he was asked about creatures: "[They are but] carcasses and ghosts who are governed by the rulings of Divine Power." Al-Wasiti said: "When the spirits and the bodies [of men] were brought forth by God, they came into being through Him and not through their own essences. Likewise, their thoughts and movements also appeared through God." He meant that the movements and the thoughts are but the ramifications⁵⁷ of the bodies and the spirits.//22 In saying so he explained that the acquisitions of the creatures are created by God Most High;⁵⁸ likewise, God Most High is the only one Who creates all essences and their accidents.⁵⁹

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah say: I heard Abu Ja'far al-Saydalani say: I heard Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz⁶⁰ say: "He who thinks that he can achieve his goal by exerting himself is only wearying himself in vain, while he who thinks that he can attain his goal without effort, is but a wishful thinker." Al-Wasiti said: "The stations [of the Sufi path] are but portions apportioned and attributes predetermined [by God's will]. Therefore, how can one strive to attain [something] through one's own actions and how can one seek to achieve [one's goal] through one's own effort?"⁶¹

Someone asked al-Wasiti whether unbelief [occurs] through God or belongs to Him. He answered: "Unbelief and faith, this world and the next, are all from God, to God, through God and belong to Him. That is, [they] originate from God, then [they] return to Him; [they] subsist and disappear through God and belong to Him as His domain and His creatures."

Al-Junayd said: Someone asked one of the scholars about the doctrine of oneness [of God]. He [the scholar] replied: "This is certitude." Then the inquirer asked: "Explain to me what it is?" [The scholar] answered: "It is when you know that the movement or immobility of creatures are the work of God alone – may

55 That is, that God has spatial characteristics and is seated on a physical throne in a concrete location. This teaching was attributed to some Islamic schools of thought, namely the Karramiyya and the Hanbalites.

56 That is, "I have converted to the true Islam."

57 *Furu'*; lit. "branches".

58 That is, they receive their acts and thoughts from God, whereupon they appropriate them.

59 This is a reference to the polemic between the Ash'arite theologians, whose position is upheld by the author, and their opponents, the Mu'tazilites, who treated the essences of things as being self-sufficient carriers of accidents. For details see Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, pp. 10–13 et passim.

60 On this controversial Sufi master of the Baghdad school, who was repeatedly exiled for his bold mystical ideas (he died around 286/899 or earlier), see *IM*, pp. 56–60.

61 That is, the success or failure of one's striving was predetermined by God from eternity.

He be great and exalted – and that He has no partners. If you have done this, you have already declared His oneness.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ‘Abd al-Wahid b. ‘Ali say: I heard Muhammad b. Musa al-Wasiti say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Jawhari say: I heard that Dhu ‘l-Nun al-Misri said that a man had come to him and said: “Pray to God on my behalf!//23 Since you are assisted in your knowledge of the Unseen⁶² by your realization of the doctrine of God’s oneness, God has answered many of your prayers in the past. However, a cry for help does not necessarily save a drowning man.”⁶³ Al-Wasiti said: “Pharaoh claimed lordship openly,⁶⁴ while the Mu‘tazilites do so covertly, when they say: ‘You do what you will.’”⁶⁵ Abu ‘l-Husayn al-Nuri said: “God’s oneness is when every thought points to God Most High, without being mixed with the thoughts that imply that God is similar [to His creatures].”

Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard ‘Abd al-Wahid b. Bakr say: I heard that Hilal b. Ahmad said that someone asked Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari⁶⁶ about God’s oneness. He answered: “God’s oneness is to keep the heart upright by avoiding the teaching that strips [God of His attributes]⁶⁷ and by rejecting His similarity [with His creatures].⁶⁸ In one phrase, God’s oneness is asserted as follows: Whatever [human] imagination and thoughts might ascribe to God, He is the opposite of it, as stated by the Most High: “Like Him there is naught, He is the Hearing and the Seeing.”⁶⁹ Abu ‘l-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi⁷⁰ said: “Paradise subsists because He allows it to subsist. However, His thought of you, His mercy toward you and His love for you subsist as long as He Himself subsists. How different is that which subsists through His own subsistence from that which subsists because He allows it to subsist.” The words of Shaykh Abu ‘l-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi are the utmost goal of realization. The People of the Truth⁷¹ say that the attributes of the Essence of the Eternal – glory be to Him – subsist through His own subsistence. He drew attention to this issue and clarified that the Subsistent//24 subsists through His own subsistence, which is contrary to what is claimed by the opponents of the

62 That is, the world of the mystery of divine predestination that ordinary mortals cannot access.

63 That is, despite God’s predetermination of man’s fate, he is still responsible for his actions.

64 When he said [in the Qur’an 79:24]: “I am your Lord Most High!”

65 That is, they claim that they are the creators of their own actions.

66 A Sufi associated with al-Junayd’s circle. His biography is given later (see pp. 62–63), in the biographical section of the “Epistle”.

67 The doctrine of the “stripping” of God of His attributes (*ta‘til*) was attributed to the Mu‘tazilites, who insisted that God’s attributes do not have independent existence and are but modes of His eternal essence.

68 The doctrine of the “likening” of God to His creatures (*tashbih*) was ascribed to a number of Islamic schools of thought, including the Karramiyya and some radical Hanbalites.

69 Q. 42:11.

70 A student of al-Shibli, who sympathized with al-Hallaj’s teaching. He died in 367/977.

71 That is, the accomplished Sufi masters.

People of the Truth. Muhammad b. al-Husayn said: I heard that al-Nasrabadhi said: "You vacillate between [God's] attributes of action and attributes of the essence."⁷² Both are His – may He be exalted – attributes in truth. When He throws you into confusion by placing you in the station of separation, He binds you with the attributes of His action. When He delivers you to the station of unity, He binds you with the attributes of His essence."

Abu ʿI-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi was the master of his age. I heard imam Abu ʿI-Ishaq al-Isfaraini⁷³ – may God have mercy on him – say: "When I arrived from Baghdad [to Nishapur]⁷⁴ I began to teach at the Friday mosque of Nishapur the doctrine of the human spirit, arguing that it was created. Abu ʿI-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi used to sit at some distance from us and to listen to my speech. After several days he approached us and said to Muhammad al-Farra': 'I testify that I was converted to Islam anew at the hands of this man!' And he pointed at me."⁷⁵

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Sulami say: I heard Abu ʿI-Husayn al-Farisi say: I heard Ibrahim b. Fatik say: I heard al-Junayd say: "When would He Who has neither a like nor an equal join the one who has both a like and an equal? Is this at all possible? This strange idea can only come true through the kindness of the [All-]Kind in which there can be no grasping, imagining or comprehension, but only the allusion [springing from] certitude and the realization [that comes with] the genuine faith."⁷⁶ Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – informed us: I heard ʿAbd al-Wahid b. Bakr say: Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ʿAli al-Bardaʿi told me: Tahir b. Ismaʿil al-Razi told me: someone asked Yahya b. Muʿadh:⁷⁷ "Tell me about God – may He be great and exalted!" He answered: "[Your God] is one God."⁷⁸ He was then asked: "How is He?"⁷⁹ [Yahya] answered: "[He is] the [All-]Powerful Ruler." He was then asked: "Where is He?" [Yahya] said: "[Thy Lord] is ever watching you."⁸⁰ The inquirer said to him: "I did not ask

72 According to Ashʿarite theologians, God's attributes are divided into two categories. The first are the attributes that pertain to the essence and are co-eternal with it – e.g., life, will, knowledge, power and so on. The second category comprises the attributes that describe God's acts in the created world, namely His sustenance of His creatures, His determining the death and birth of human beings, His wrath at human disobedience, and His contentment with mankind's good deeds. In theological works, the borderline between these two categories remained blurred and was disputed by various theological factions. See the article "Sifa" in *EI*.

73 On this famous theologian see article "al-Isfaraʿini" in *EI*.

74 A major cultural and religious center in Khurasan, Iran.

75 That is, he embraced the Ashʿarite doctrine of the created spirit.

76 That is, a cognitive union between man and God can only occur through a pure act of faith and certitude. It cannot be achieved through sense perception, intellectual process or the imagination.

77 A famous mystic from Nishapur, who distinguished himself as an eloquent preacher; he died in 258/872. See *IM*, pp. 92–94.

78 Q 2:163.

79 That is, what is His mode of existence?

80 Q 89:14.

you about that!" [Yahya] replied: "All other attributes belong to [His] creatures. As for His [genuine] attribute, it is as I have just told you."

Muhammad b. al-Husayn told us: He said I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari say: "Whatever one imagines [about] God in his ignorance, the intellect shows [Him] to be different from that."//25

Ibn Shahin asked al-Junayd about the meaning of the [word] "with". He responded: "'With' has two meanings: the 'with' of the Prophets, which is [God's] assistance and protection, as in the words of God: 'I shall be with you, hearing and seeing.'⁸¹ The 'with' of the commoners, which is [God's] knowledge and understanding, as in the words of God: 'Three men conspire not secretly with one another, but He is the fourth of them.'⁸²" To this Ibn Shahin responded: "People like you should be leading this community to God."

Someone asked Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri about God's words: "The All-Compassionate sat Himself (*istawa*) upon the Throne."⁸³ He answered: "The All-Compassionate asserted His essence, while denying [His location] in a specific place. He exists through His own essence, whereas all other things exist through His command, as He wished [them to be]."⁸⁴ Someone asked al-Shibli about the words of God: "The All-Compassionate sat Himself on the Throne." He answered: "The All-Compassionate has existed forever, while the Throne is an originated thing. Therefore, the Throne was firmly installed (*istawa*) by the All-Compassionate."⁸⁵ Someone asked Ja'far b. Nusayr about the words of God: "The All-Compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne." He answered: "His knowledge of all things became equal,⁸⁶ in that no one thing is closer to Him than the other."

Ja'far al-Sadiq⁸⁷ said: "Whoever believes that God is [located] in something, [that originated] from something or [rests] upon something, has become//26 a polytheist. In other words, had He been upon something, He would have been carried by it; had He been in something, He would have been confined [by it]; and had He been from something, He would have been an originated being." Ja'far al-Sadiq also said about God's words: "Then [He] drew near and hung suspended."⁸⁸

81 Q. 20:46.

82 Q. 58:7.

83 Q. 20:5.

84 Meaning God's creative command "Be!"

85 In some contexts, the verb *istawa* may mean either "to [firmly] install [oneself]" or "to raise". As in the next example, various meanings of this Arabic root are brought into play in the sayings of the Sufi masters.

86 A word play on the meaning of the Arabic verb *istawa*, which may mean either "to sit firmly" or "to be equal".

87 The sixth Shi'ī leader (*imam*), to whom many esoteric teachings are ascribed by later Sufi authors. See Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, pp. 140–142.

88 Q. 53:8. The identity of the being seen by Muhammad in this Qur'anic episode was disputed by Muslim scholars. While some early authorities believed that the Prophet saw God Himself, later exegesis almost uniformly insisted that he saw the angel of Revelation Gabriel; see Josef van Ess, "Vision and Ascension: *Surat al-Najm* and Its Relationship with Muhammad's *mi'raj*" in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 1/1 (1999), pp. 47–62.

“Whoever imagines that God Himself drew near [to Muhammad] implies that there was a distance [between them]. In reality, ‘drawing near’ means only that each time [Muhammad] came closer to God, He removed him further from [conventional] knowledge, until there was neither ‘nearness’ nor ‘distance’.”

I found in the handwriting of [my] master Abu ‘Ali [al-Daqqaq] that someone asked a Sufi where is God? He answered: “May God banish you [from good]! How can you seek the ‘where’ of witnessing [the divine Essence]?!” Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami told us: I heard Abu ‘Al-‘Abbas al-Khashshab al-Baghdadi say: I heard Abu ‘Al-Qasim b. Musa say: I heard Muhammad b. Ahmad say: I heard al-Ansari say: I heard al-Kharraz⁸⁹ say: “The true essence of closeness [to God] is when the heart loses the perception of all things and the soul finds rest in God Most High.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Hafiz say: I heard Abu Mu‘adh al-Qazwini say: I heard Abu ‘Ali al-Dallal say: I heard Abu ‘Abdallah b. Qahraman say: I heard Ibrahim al-Khawwas⁹⁰ say: “I came to a man who was possessed by Satan. I began to utter the call to prayer in his ear. Then Satan called me from the man’s belly, saying: ‘Let me kill him, for he says that the Qur’an is created!’”

Ibn ‘Ata⁹¹ said: “When God Most High created the letters,⁹² He made them one of His mysteries. When He created Adam, He infused this mystery⁹³ into him, without however giving it to His angels. The letters⁹⁴ streamed from the tongue of Adam – upon him be peace – in different manners and in different languages, and God made them the [outward] forms.” By saying this Ibn ‘Ata’ clearly affirmed that the letters are created.//27 Sahl b. ‘Abdallah⁹⁵ said: “The letters are the tongue of action and not the tongue of the essence,⁹⁶ for they themselves are an action in that which is acted upon.”⁹⁷ This too is a clear statement that the letters are created.

In his “Replies to the Questions of the Syrians” al-Junayd said: “Trust in God is an action of the heart; the oneness of God is a word of the heart.” This is the teaching of the people of the fundamental principles [of religion], that is, speech

89 Abu Sa‘id al-Kharraz. See note 60 on page 9.

90 A Sufi of al-Junayd’s circle who died in 291/904. See al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, pp. 220–222 and the biographical chapter of the “Epistle” on page 56.

91 Ahmad b. ‘Ata’ al-Rudhbari (d. 369/980).

92 *Huruf*, sing. *harf*. In Arabic this word denotes both letters and sounds. Here al-Qushayri refutes the thesis, upheld by some Hanbali scholars, that the letters or sounds of the Qur’an are uncreated.

93 That is, the knowledge of God.

94 Or the sounds, see note 92.

95 Sahl b. ‘Abdallah al-Tustari (d. 283/896), an early Sufi theorist and exegete from Basra, who exerted a profound influence on the subsequent development of Sufi thought. See *IM*, “Index” and Böwering, *Mystical Vision*.

96 That is, they express God’s actions, but not His hidden essence.

97 That is, they are created and take place in the created – that is, in language.

is the entity that resides in the heart; it comes from command and prohibition, from the [prophetic] tradition and search for this tradition. Al-Junayd also said in his "Replies to the Questions of the Syrians": "Only God possesses the knowledge of the Unseen."⁹⁸ He knows what was, what will be, what will not be and how this would be, were it to be." Al-Husayn b. al-Mansur [al-Hallaj] said: "He who has realized fully the truth of God's oneness, sheds [such questions as] 'why?' and 'how?'" Muhammad b. al-Husayn related to us: I heard that Mansur b. 'Abdallah said: I heard Ja'far b. Muhammad say: I heard al-Junayd say: "The most noble and exalted counsel is to allow your thought to roam in the arena of God's oneness."

Al-Wasiti said: "God has brought forth nothing more noble than the human spirit." He thus stated clearly that the spirit is created. The master and imam Zayn al-Islam Abu 'l-Qasim⁹⁹ said: "All these stories prove that the beliefs of Sufi masters agree with the teachings of the People of the Truth,¹⁰⁰ as far as the fundamentals of religion are concerned. We stop here in order to avoid going beyond the concision and brevity, which we have pledged to follow [in this work]."

Section [on divine oneness]

The master, the Adornment of Islam, Abu 'l-Qasim – may God make his glory eternal – said:

The following sections contain their beliefs concerning God's oneness, which we shall present in proper order. The dispersed and collected sayings of the masters of this path, as well as their books, teach about God's oneness as follows://28 God Most High – praise be to Him – is existent, eternal, one, wise, powerful, knowing, overpowering, compassionate, willing, hearing, glorious, exalted, speaking, seeing, proud, strong, living, one, everlasting, and everlasting refuge.¹⁰¹

He knows by [His] knowledge;¹⁰² he is powerful by [His] power; he wills by [His] will; he sees by [His] sight; He speaks by [His] speech; He lives by [His] life; He is everlasting by [His] everlastingness. He has two hands, which are His attributes and with which He creates what He wishes and gives it a specific form. He has a face. The attributes of His essence are unique to it. One must not say that they are He or that they are not He. They are [His] eternal attributes and [His] everlasting properties. He is unique in His essence. He is not similar to any originated thing, nor is any created being similar to Him. He is neither a body,

98 That is, the world of divine mystery that contains the true realities of all existing things and the knowledge of things to come until the end of time.

99 That is, al-Qushayri.

100 That is, the Sunnites who adhered to al-Ash'ari's theological doctrine.

101 *Al-Samad*; the exact meaning of this epithet of God mentioned in Q. 112:2 remains a matter of dispute. I follow A. J. Arberry's translation.

102 These statements are directed against the Mu'tazilite theologians who considered God's attributes to be mere modes of His being and who tended to allegorize the anthropomorphic features ascribed to God in the Muslim scripture.

nor a substance, nor an accident. His attributes are not accidents and He can be neither fancied by the imagination nor represented by the intellect. He has neither direction nor place and He is not subject to the flow of time or age. His properties neither increase nor decrease. He has neither shape nor corpus and cannot be limited by an end or a limit. No originated thing can dwell in Him, and no cause can move Him to action. He is subject to neither color nor coming-to-be and is in no need of help or assistance. No essence endowed with power can escape His power nor can any creature disengage itself from//29 His command. No known thing eludes His knowledge and no one can reprimand Him for what and how He does what He does.

About Him one ought not ask “where?”, “in what way?” or “how?”. His existence has no beginning, therefore, one should not ask: “When did He come to be?” His duration has no end and one cannot say [about Him]: “[His] age and time have ended.” One cannot say why He did what He did, since His actions have no cause. Nor can one say: “What is He?”, for He belongs to no category [of beings] and therefore cannot have any special mark setting Him aside from the other [similar beings]. He will be seen [on the Judgement Day], but not by positioning Himself in front of the viewers, while He will see others without applying [His] eyesight. He fashions [creatures] without touching them directly or handling.

His are the most beautiful names¹⁰³ and the most exalted attributes. He “does whatsoever he desires”,¹⁰⁴ and [all] creatures obey His verdict. Nothing can happen in His realm unless He so willed, and no event can take place in His kingdom, unless He has predetermined it. When he knows that something should happen, He wills it and it happens indeed. And when He knows that something should not happen, although [in principle] possible, He wills that it should not happen. He is the creator of men’s deeds, both good and bad; He is the originator of all the entities and events in this world, rare or numerous. He sends [His] messengers to mankind, although He is under no obligation to do so.

It is He Who causes men to worship Him by communicating with them through the prophets in such a way that no one can either censure or oppose [Him]. It is He Who helped our prophet Muhammad – may God’s prayer and blessing be upon him – by evidential miracles and resplendent signs, depriving [his deniers] of an excuse [not to embrace his message] and making clear through him [the distinction between] certain knowledge¹⁰⁵ and denial. It is He Who, at first, protected the sanctity of Islam after the death of His Prophet – may God’s prayer and blessing be upon him – through the Rightly-Guided Caliphs,¹⁰⁶ then proceeded to protect and aid the truth by revealing the irrefutable proofs of the religion through lips of His friends.¹⁰⁷ He has since been safeguarding His

103 Q. 7:180 and 17:110.

104 Q. 2:253.

105 That is, true faith.

106 That is, the first four successors of the Prophet.

107 Meaning probably both Sufi masters and religious scholars (*‘ulama*’).

monotheistic Community from agreeing upon error.¹⁰⁸ He has cut the root of falsehood by presenting irrefutable evidence and fulfilled His promise to support His religion, in accordance with His words: "That he [the prophet Muhammad] may uplift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse."¹⁰⁹

These are the passages that present in brief the principles of the Sufi masters. May God grant us success!//30

108 According to a famous *hadith* of the Prophet, his community will never agree on an error.

109 Q. 9:33.