

ERİ

ULUSLARARASI ÜSKÜDAR SEMPOZYUMU

V

1-5 Kasım 2007

B İ L D İ R İ L E R

CİLT II

EDITÖR

DR. COŞKUN YILMAZ

Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi Kütüphanesi	
Dem. No:	179439
Tas. No:	956.141 ÜSK.5



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SEMPOZYUM FOTOGRAFLARI

Kenan Koca, İsa Telli

TASARIM

Hamit Celebi

BASKI VE CİLT

Görsel Dizayn Ofset Matbaacılık Tic. Ltd. Sti.

İstanbul 2008

ISBN 978-9944-5807-5-5

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ÜSKÜDAR BELEDİYESİ

Hakimiyeti Milliye Caddesi,

Atlas Çıkmaızı No: 69

ÜSKÜDAR / İSTANBUL

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Sufic Love and Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî (d.1628)¹

J O S E P H S H A M I S

Uzman / ABD

Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî (d. 1628) lived during the height of the Ottoman Empire. He studied in Istanbul, Cairo, Bursa, and elsewhere and came to know many notable people of his time, having relationships with a number of Ottoman Sultans, including Sultan Ahmet I. He became a master of Sufism and eventually founded his own *tarîqa*, the Jilwatiyya. He wrote about ten Turkish and twenty Arabic works.² Among them is a treatise entitled *Habbatu l-Mahabba* (The Seed of Love).³ In this work, he describes the love that transpires between believers, God, the Prophet Muhammad, and his family.

Habbatu l-Mahabba is divided into three chapters, showing love of God, the Prophet, and his family respectively. Hüdâyî supports his explanations with verses from the Qur'an, sayings of the Prophet, his family and companions, and well-known scholars and saints from Islamic history. It is hoped that by focusing on some ideas presented in this work, Hüdâyî's beliefs and teachings may be better understood.

The first chapter begins with a quote from part of a Qur'anic verse, "He loves them and they love Him" (Ma'ida 5:54).⁴ In this chapter, lovers are divided into three categories: the masses (*awâmm*), the elite (*khawâss*), and the elite of the elite (*akhassu l-khawâss*). The masses are those people who desire the reward of paradise and fear the fire of hell. The elite are those who have overcome the desire for reward and desire only God. They are, "suspended between the vision of His beauty (*jamâl*), at one time, and his glory (*jalâl*) at another."⁵ Those of the elite of the elite are those who have reached perfect gnosis of God, or at least the highest level humanly possible. Also in this chapter, Hüdâyî discusses *fanâ'*, or the passing away of the self.

The three-part division of people has been used by Sufis well before Hüdâyî. In an article on al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111), Jonathan Brown traces the development of the term through history. Especially in the Sufi context, *'awâmm* (masses) is not usually a negatively charged, derogatory word. This seems to have been the case even before al-Ghazâlî's time. It may refer to novices on the Sufi path, and in the case of Hüdâyî's work, lovers of the lowest degree. In the second chapter of *Habbatu l-Mahabba*, Hüdâyî uses *'awâmm* to describe the commoners among the people of gnosis (*ahl al-ma'rifa*), who are certainly not a low group of people. The subject of *fanâ'* is of great importance in Hüdâyî's work. Before looking at Hüdâyî's explanation, it may help to introduce a general definition. Two complimentary definitions of *fanâ'* are presented in Fazlur Rahman's article on the subject in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*:

"(1) the passing-away from the consciousness of the mystic of all things, including himself, and even the absence of the consciousness of this passing-away and its replacement by a pure consciousness of God, and (2) the annihilation of the imperfect attributes (as distinguished from the substance) of the creature and their replacement by the perfect attributes bestowed by God."⁶

In Hüdâyî's presentation of *fanâ'*, he divides it into three grades: *fanâ'* of actions, attributes, and essence. At the lowest level, one loses his or her individual actions as they come into accord with the will of God. This seems to be below the *fanâ'* referred to in Rahman's definition listed above. However, this may be seen as the first step on a path which then leads to the *fanâ'* of attributes. This level of *fanâ'* is twofold; individuals are purified of their bad characteristics while they are filled with those of God. Those who attain the *fanâ'* of attributes are like the elite mentioned above. They are held between God's beauty (*jamâl*) and glory (*jalâl*). In an article by Paul Ballanfât, "Azîz Mahmud Hüdâyî and the Subtle Centers," Hüdâyî is shown to have ascribed purificatory powers to the supplication, "*lâ ilâha illallâh* (There is no god but God)." It is said that, in this supplication, there is both fire that burns away the impure elements of the soul, and light that illuminates the heart. It is this fire and light which act as *jamâl* together with *jalâl* to balance and prepare one to reach a higher level.⁷ The final level of *fanâ'*, that of essence, is reached by those who are mentioned in the above definition as having attained, "a pure consciousness of God."

Hüdâyî supports this three-part division with a quote from the Prophet:

"I take refuge in your forgiveness from your punishment, I take refuge in your contentment from your displeasure, and I take refuge in you from you."⁸

It is interesting that *fanâ'* is discussed in a treatise on love. Hüdâyî is demonstrating that love is what leads one to *fanâ'*. This is shown in a quote he gives from Junayd al-Baghdâdî (d. 910), who quotes his teacher, al-Sarî (d. 867):

"Love is not suitable between two (people) until the one says to the other, 'O me!'"⁹

Judging by this quote and the explanation above, true love is something that must be totally unselfish; something that in fact destroys the self of the lover.

The second chapter begins with “Say, ‘If you love God, then follow me in order that God will love you’” (Al ‘Imran 3:31).¹⁰ As the beloved of God, the Prophet should, by association, be the beloved of all lovers of God. It becomes the duty of all lovers to harmonize with his inner and outer natures. Hüdâyî explains why love for the Prophet and love for God, in effect, amount to the same thing. Hüdâyî argues the need for the Prophet with a quote from Shaykh Abû Abdu l-Rahmân al-Sulamî (d. 1021):

“There is no attainment of the higher light except for whoever is guided to it by the nearer light. And whoever has not taken the path to the higher light by adherence to the manners (*âdâb*) of the nearer light and following him has become blind to both lights together and clothed himself in the clothes of delusion.”¹¹

The meaning of the nearer light here is of course the light of the Prophet, while the greater light refers to God. Just as Hüdâyî describes three levels of *fanâ’*, he presents three ranks of followers of the Prophet. The masses follow the prophet in his actions (*a’mâl*), the elite imitate his character (*akhlâq*), while the elite of the elite follow him in his states (*ahwâl*). If one follows the Prophet’s actions out of love for him, then he will also reach the *fanâ’* of actions mentioned above. Likewise, if one follows the prophet in character and states, the self will pass away further into the mysteries of God’s love and essence. This process whereby love is perfected is explained with the Hadith Qudsî:

“I was a hidden jewel and wanted to be known...so I made human beings that I would be known.”¹²

The third and final chapter is opened with “Say, ‘I do not ask you for any recompense for it except love with respect to kinship’” (Shura 42:23). There is ambiguity present in this verse with respect to the word, *qurbâ*, translated here as kinship. Hüdâyî addresses this by quoting a tradition where the Prophet explained that those referred to in this verse were Ali, Fatima, and their two children. This verse is taken then to command worshipers to love the Prophet’s blood-family. Other commentators have taken a different interpretation of this verse. Muhammad Asad, in his commentary in *The Message of the Qur’ân*, interprets *qurbâ* in this particular verse to have the more general sense of “fellow men”, instead of the familial sense.¹³ Regardless of the interpretation of this specific verse, Hüdâyî later states that kinship is both of clay (*tîniyya*) and of spirit (*dîniyya*).¹⁴ Another Hadith is also quoted where the Prophet says, “The family of Muhammad are all who are God-fearing.”¹⁵

Hüdâyî gives many examples that show the importance of a believer’s love and respect for the Prophet’s family. Sayings of the Prophet, in addition to anecdotes where people are rewarded for loving the Prophet’s family or punished for treating them unkindly make the point clear enough. It is mainly through their

closeness to the Prophet, who is himself the beloved of God, that they deserve love and respect.

Finally, it should be noted that throughout the work Hüdâyî stresses that God is the source of all love. As may be guessed from contemplating the title of the work, *The Seed of Love*, it is God who plants the seed of love in human beings and causes it to sprout and grow. It is God's love that comes first and makes it possible for his creation to love him. However, if a believer follows the example of the Prophet and those close to him, God will certainly give his love to him or her. When God loves his creation, however, he is actually only loving himself; he is praising his own work. All love begins with and returns to God.

In *Habbatu l-Mahabba*, Hüdâyî presents a picture of Sufic love that is partly his own, and partly that of those he quotes. He quotes sources that range from God, the Prophet, his companions, and the great founding Sufi scholars. It would be a good endeavor to sift out Hüdâyî's thoughts in this and other works in order to determine whatever unique contributions he has made, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. One may conclude here, that with such strong connections to previous scholars, and an exposition of love that is so illuminating, *Habbatu l-Mahabba* establishes Hüdâyî's position among the great Sufi teachers, guides, and lovers.

FOOTNOTES

¹ There is some variation in the spelling of "Hüdâyî". The *y* is not pronounced, but is usually written because of a spelling convention from the Arabic script; the *y* acts as a chair for a *hamza*; see H. Kâmil Yılmaz, *Aziz Mahmûd Hüdâyî ve Celvetiyye Tarikatı*, Istanbul 1999, p. 43.

² For an account of his life and works see H. Kâmil Yılmaz, *Aziz Mahmûd Hüdâyî ve Celvetiyye Tarikatı*, Istanbul 1999, pp. 42-149.

³ The edition of the work referenced in this paper is, Sa'id 'Abdu l-Fattâh, ed., *Habbatu l-Mahabba*, Cairo 2002. English translations from the Arabic are my own. An edition with a Japanese translation and commentary is available from Tarui Hiroshi, "Treatise of Sufi Love; Hudâ'i's Seed of Love," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle Eastern Studies*, 9, 1994, 273-307. Also, there are several Turkish translations available, including Emrullah İşler, "Aziz Mahmud Hüdâyî'nin Habbetü'l-Mahabbe Adlı Risalesi", *Aziz Mahmud Hüdâyî Uluslararası Sempozyum Bildiriler*, I, Istanbul 2005, 291-303. and A. Remzi Akyürek, *Mahbûbu'l-Ehibbe*, (published by Rasim Deniz) Kayseri 1982.

⁴ Sa'id 'Abdu l-Fattâh, ed., *Habbatu l-Mahabba*, Cairo 2002, p. 51

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 54.

⁶ F. Rahman, "Bakâ' wa-fanâ'," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill Online 2007.

⁷ Paul Ballanfat, "Aziz Mahmud Hüdâyî and the Subtle Centers," *Aziz Mahmud Hüdâyî Uluslararası Sempozyum Bildiriler*, I, Istanbul 2005, 197-198.

⁸ Sa'id 'Abdu l-Fattâh, ed., *Habbatu l-Mahabba*, Cairo 2002, p. 64

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58,59

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹³ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ân/translated and explained by Muhammad Asad*, London 1980.

¹⁴ Sa'id 'Abdu l-Fattâh, ed., *Habbatu l-Mahabba*, Cairo 2002, p. 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.