



Malamiyyah Psycho-Spiritual Therapy by Patrick Laude

"Though this be madness, yet there is method in't"
-Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (Act II, sc. II, 223)

Let us begin with the harmless premise that medicine is a response to sickness and that the definition of sickness presupposes an understanding of what is meant by health. No doubt, health may be considered on a variety of levels, beginning with the two distinct planes of the soul and the body that are, in the Islamic *Weltanschauung*, the respective domains of spiritual psychology and medicine. In the context of this present essay, we will focus on the former, specifically on the relationship between the soul (*nafs*) and the spirit (*ruh*) that lies at the core of Islamic mystical understanding of the innermost reality. However, it should be noted at the outset that physical sickness is, according to Ibn Sina, following Empedocles and Hippocrates, the result of a rupture of equilibrium between the various 'humors' of the body.¹ Thus, sickness (or health) cannot be set apart from a fuller cosmological understanding of the correlation between the anima and the physical organism that, in many ways, suggests a certain correspondence between the inner states and bodily afflictions. In Islamic traditional medicine, the four 'humors' of the body correspond to the four cosmological 'elements': black bile to earth, phlegm to water, blood to air and yellow bile to fire.² These correspondences emphasize the 'natural' foundation of health as an orderly set of relationships. Disease is, therefore, fundamentally linked, either directly or indirectly, to a loss of balance that bears witness to a separation from a primordial norm of being.

The Koran itself refers to the "hypocrites" (*munafiqun*) as those who are "sick in their hearts" (*fi quibihim maradun*) (XXXIII, 60). This is in itself a clear indication that sickness is a condition that originates in the spiritual and animistic strata of being. Bodily health is, in this view, inseparable from that of the health of the soul.³ In the Koran 'health' refers more specifically to a state of integrity or totality⁴ that can be identified in a very general sense with the *fitra*, the primordial norm or the original state of mankind. From a Koranic standpoint, the loss of the *fitra* amounts to a straying away from the *shahada*, the Islamic testimony of faith, that reads in Arabic *la ilaha illa Llah*, literally, "There is no divinity but the Divinity." In other words, what could be called 'ontological sickness' is akin to *shirk*, that is, 'association' of other realities to God with all the spiritual and moral consequences that this association entails. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that for Sufi gnostics the *shahada* does not simply mean the affirmation of one God as opposed to a plurality of gods which would be, as Henry Corbin has pointed out, as much of an idolatry as any other (Corbin 1980). Above all, it stands as a testimony that there is only one Reality and that all realities 'are' only in so far as they 'participate' in the only Reality like drops of water in a vast ocean. Consequently, any fault, vice or transgression fundamentally amounts to an existential *shirk*, or association, that envisages creatures independently from the Reality that begets them.

From an epistemological standpoint, the *shahada* is considered by many Muslim mystics as an expression of intelligence as such, or as a ray of divine light. It is ultimately linked ('*aql*') or identified with the Spirit (*ruh*) since only that which 'is' in some way the One may affirm the metaphysical unicity of the One without contradiction or hypocrisy. As for the central agency of denial of truth, it is the tenebrous soul (*nafs al-ammara*), divorced from the spirit or disconnected from intelligence, that 'absolutises' the individual status of man and the passions that ensue from it, thereby severing him from his Creator by claiming an illusory metaphysical independence. All disorders, imbalances and forms of degeneracy result from this existential error and, furthermore, all sicknesses are manifestations or symbols of it.

The 'sick' soul must be restored to spiritual health. In general terms, Sufi mystics have two main prescriptions for the cure, two complementary remedies that are most often referred to as *faqr* and *dhiqr*. Some emphasize the latter, others stress the former, but no *mutasawwif* (Sufi traveler) would consider any one of the two as a mere accessory to the restoration of health. *Dhiqr* can be best defined as a sustained, and ultimately permanent, awareness of God through the methodical invocation of one or several of His Names. As such, *dhiqr* is sometimes referred to as a remedy.⁵ Since the Name *Allah* flows from the verbal and textual substance of the Koran, and since the primary message of the Koran is God, or the primacy of God, many Sufi mystics tend to consider this Name (*al-ism al-a'zani*) as the very essence of the Koran and, therefore, as the heart of the whole Islamic tradition that flows from it. In point of fact, it is important to understand that most Sufis consider the Divine Name not only as a means of reference to God, or a way of remembering Him, but as a vehicle for His grace. This allows us to understand *dhiqr* as the 'divine side' of the spiritual way. Although the repetition of the Name of God is obviously contingent, at least initially, upon the efforts of the mystic, it remains nevertheless true that, from the highest point of view, the Divine Name, repeated by the mystic with the right intention in a suitable religious and moral context, derives its spiritual effectiveness from its divine 'content', in the same way that the ritual and transformational efficacy of the words of the Koran issues not only

from their meaning and their utterance but also, and above all, from their origin and their divine prototype (*umm al-kitab*).

There is in the Koran itself an element of divine presence without which the religious insistence on the benefits of its recitation would not be fully intelligible. If one were to define the respective modes of effectiveness of the Divine Name and the Koran in terms of spiritual therapeutics, one could assert that the Name *Allah*, by virtue of its unicity and coherent simplicity, must be primarily understood as a cure by means of 'centering' and 'unifying'. It constitutes a kind of negation of the negation-a piercing through the mist of the phenomenal universe, a rending of the existential veil (*hijab*) that hides the Divine. Clearly, the Koranic recitation, inasmuch as it consists of numerous verses and words, should be discerned as a means of re-integration, in the sense that the plurality of its form and content addresses the multiplicity of the soul, thereby reintegrating this multiplicity into the unity from which it proceeds.

As for *faqr*, it can be defined as a state of perfect awareness of one's dependence upon God's will. *Faqr* is the state of the one who "has made himself independent of everything but God and who refuses anything that leads him astray from God" (Jean-Louis Michon 1973, p. 263). The spiritual content of *faqr* can also be approached through reference to the state of *mudtarr* or being in spiritual 'need' or 'constraint'. *Mudtarr* could be best defined as the state of being on an existential edge-this extremity precipitating an awareness of one's powerlessness or loss of control over one's own reality. As Sara Sviri has suggestively put it: "when the seeker gives up all hope of being in control, and yet 'knows'-consciously or in his heart of hearts-that he is vertically aligned with a higher source of power, he knows surrender" (Sviri 1997, p. 34). In some respects, the station of *faqr* corresponds to the human side of the spiritual work, since all that a man can do is acknowledge his own nothingness. However, *faqr* would be unthinkable without *dhikr*, at least in the sense in which an independence from everything but God implies a perfect remembrance of Him. As for *dhikr*, its perfection is evidently incompatible with placing any reality on the same level of awareness as that of God, which is another way of saying that it requires *faqr* as its precondition. So, in a certain sense, Sufi psychology presents us with the two sides of the same spiritual reality. At its most elementary level of manifestation, 'outer' *faqr* could be defined as a socially-bound religious practice that is exclusively defined in terms of conformity to the *shari'a*- the individual submitting himself to God's Law, which means, literally, islam, whereas the 'outer' *dhikr* could be defined as the performance of the various obligatory and supererogatory devotional prescriptions. However, *faqr* and *dhikr*, relatively external manifestations of devotion, do not take us beyond the realm of the individual self since they are perfectly compatible with a lack of awareness of one's immediate and constant dependence upon God's kun, or act of origination. Of course, these practices and attitudes take for granted a mode of subservience to God and a rational and emotional recognition of His awesome power. They do not, however, delve into the deepest spiritual meaning of human existence, such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya expressed in the oft-quoted Sufi *koan*: "Thine existence is a sin wherewith no other sin can be compared"(Lings 1993, p. 97). It is this seemingly absurd predicament that *malamiyyah* spirituality addresses in a most radical and uncompromising way.

One generally associates *malamiyyah* ⁶ spirituality without referring to any particular *tariqah* with a systematic disdain for social norms, including a transgressive tendency with respect to customs and conventions, and with the cultivation of disruptive attitudes aimed at attracting upon oneself the blame of others. Now, although such a vision is undoubtedly founded upon psychological and social realities, it does not do full justice to the profound meaning and the vocational principles of this methodical course of action.

The term *malamiyyah* refers to a variety of movements and individuals. Strictly speaking, the *malamiyyah* originated with Hamdun al-Qassar and his disciples, the Qassarids. ⁷ Hamdun is also referred to as one of the *abdal*, or 'hidden saints', the apotropean figures that are referred to by Massignon as being the pillars of light of the world. These saints that the Sufi tradition considers to be in the number of forty are the invisible and pure witnesses of God in the world, unknown to the world and sometimes to themselves. As it will appear more clearly in the following pages, this principle of unknowing is one of the keys of *malamiyyah* spirituality.

The *malamiyyah* inspiration, one of the main trends of the mystical milieu of Nishapur in the third and fourth century of the hegira, constitutes a path that is predicated upon the distinction between levels of human subjectivity. It emphasizes the discontinuity among the various levels of the soul, the deepest layer being the spirit (*ruh*). In his *Risalat* on the *malami*, Sulami (d.1021) enumerates four levels of consciousness that he defines as *nafs* (soul), *qalb* (heart), *sirr* (secret) and *ruh* (spirit) (Deladriere n.d., p. 10). These four levels of consciousness are to be understood as forming a hierarchic chain ranging from the lowest to the highest. Although the unity of the human subject is not substantially altered by this quadripartition, the spiritual psychology of the *malamati* tends to emphasize the discontinuity that permits a differentiation of the various levels of the soul. This discontinuity allows one to understand that a lower level cannot identify with the higher level, for in so doing it reduces the higher level to its own limitations. In other words, the continuity between the various levels of the soul a continuity without which the very idea of a subjective identity would be unthinkable can only be envisaged from the standpoint of the highest or the deepest level of consciousness, and not the other way about. The spiritual goal of *malamati* psychology consists in preventing any appropriation of a higher spiritual state of consciousness by a lower one. ⁸ Strictly speaking, a spiritual mode of consciousness cannot be experienced by the lower soul: any appropriation by the soul amounts to a vanishing of spiritual gleams. Spiritual consciousness pertains to the three highest dimensions: the heart, the secret and the spirit. These refer to numerous central states of consciousness that are, so to speak, increasingly universal and 'divine' and less and less individual and human.

The science of unknowing that is at the core of *malamiyyah* spirituality, can be defined as a way to place each reality on its own level. Thus, spiritual health consists in preventing confusion of the various levels. Such a confusion would be deadly since it would amount to a 'deification' of the human individual as such, or of one of his deeper layers of being. Now, this type of confusion is intrinsically connected, according to Sulami, to the very notion of inner 'consideration' or 'vision' of oneself (*nazar*). For the soul to 'see' is, in a certain sense, to 'appropriate' and therefore to 'bring down'. Spiritual progress presupposes a measure of 'unknowing', and any attempt at monitoring this progress amounts to individualizing what pertains, by definition, to the universal. *Malamati* identify this individualized appropriation to the Koranic "dispersed dust" *Habd'an manthuran* (XXV, 23)

To 'blame', whether it be inner or outer, is the superior way to make such a perfidious identification difficult, if not impossible. This is attained by breaking in upon and discontinuing the complacent 'gaze' upon one's self, keeping in mind that the *malamati's* work is focused on the lower realms of the soul and does not impinge upon the Intellect. Their attitude is also coupled to a vigilant distrust towards any kind of self-satisfaction or pleasure that would arise from acts of devotion or virtuous behavior. In his *Usul al- Maldmattiyydt wa-gbilitat al-sufiyah*, Sulami emphasizes this ascetic principle of *malamiyyah* spirituality in a most radical manner:

They [(the *malami*)] believe that their submission is not in their hands but belongs to destiny, and that they have no choice in performing their actions. They went so far as to say that they were forbidden to find any sweetness in worship and submission because when a man likes something and finds pleasure in it while looking at it with satisfaction this is the sign that he is not in a lofty position. One of them said: "Far from you the pleasure of submission, for it is indeed a deadly poison." ⁹

Such an ascetic determination illustrates most clearly, once again, that the *malamiyyah* perspective is, in a certain sense, centered on the lowest levels of human subjectivity, inasmuch as its starting point, or principle, is the congenital limitations of the concupiscent, individualistic soul (*nafs*). In this respect, *malamiyyah* spirituality tends to embody a perspective that may be considered to be at odds with the general religious climate of Islam. The Koran centers its reminder on the use of intelligence as a means to reconnect with God and it repeatedly appeals to this intelligence in man. Although the deceptiveness of the lower soul is also a major Koranic theme, man is far from being defined by the Koran in terms of his identification with his *nafs*. The *malamiyyah* inspiration, by contrast, appears to be less intellectual in its approach since, as we have seen, it builds on the opacity and distorting power of the soul.

Two fundamental methodical practices unfold from this perspective: 1) the need to hide the 'good' and, 2) the benefits of manifesting the 'bad.' Commenting upon the man of blame in his *Mi'raj*, the XIXth century *shadhili* Ibn 'Ajiba, defines him as "one who does not manifest anything good outwardly and does not hide anything bad" (Michon 1973, p. 57). As we will see, these two tendencies may give rise to seemingly contradictory types of behavior that are respectively 'conformist' and 'aberrant.' Concerning the first of these tendencies, Sara Sviri defines *malamiyyah* as follows: "The main aim of the *Malamatiyya* is to reach a stage in which all one's psychological and spiritual attainments become totally introverted" (Lewisohn 1999, p. 599) This utter occultation finds its spiritual models in the ascetic climate of early Islamic mysticism.

The figure of Uways Qarani¹⁰ is most representative in this respect. Farid al-Din 'Attar tells us about him: "during his life in this world, he (Uways) was hiding from all in order to devote himself to acts of worship and obedience" ('Attar 1976, p. 2). 'Attar also relates that the Prophet had declared at the time of his death that his robe should be given to Uways, a man he had never met in this life. When 'Umar looked for Uways during his stay in Kufa, he asked a native of Qarn (the home town of Uways) and was answered "there was one such man, but he was a madman, a senseless person who because of his madness does not live among his fellow countrymen (...) He does not mingle with anybody and does not eat nor drink anything that others drink and eat. He does not know sadness nor joy; when others laugh, he weeps, and when they weep, he laughs" (*ibid.*, p. 29). We can already perceive here, in the case of an early mystic like Uways, the dual, and seemingly contradictory, spiritual vocation of 'obscurity' and 'eccentricity.' The unassuming figure of Uways¹¹ is, at the same time, blatantly discordant in the social context. This discordant status that is often referred to as 'madness' is the mark of the irruption of a transcendent, vertical perspective within the world of terrestrial horizontality. It is akin to a negation of the negation: the Spirit 'negates' the distorted notions of the soul, the biases and comforts.¹² When Uways finally meets with 'Umar, he tells him that it would be better for him that "nobody (but God) would know him and had knowledge of who he was." To remain *incognito* can be considered as the leaven of *malamiyyah* spirituality.¹³ However, *malamiyyah* will tend to apply this principle in a way that amounts to opting for the spiritual 'desert of solitude' among men rather than choosing a flight toward the physical 'desert' of nature. In this sense, the *malamiyyah* orientation manifests itself as an apparent involvement in exoteric sciences, in the *shari'a*, and in *adab*.¹⁴ As Ibn 'Arabi has expressed it: "God has imprisoned their outer states (the *malamiyyah's*) in the tents of habits and worships of outer actions." (*Futuhāt*, I, 141) In this respect, *malami* practice will appear primarily in the forms of rigor and separation. Their outer manifestations are a testimony to the divine Majesty (*jālāl*) that finds a human receptacle in an extreme mode of *'ubudiyya* or servitude. Thus, we read in Sulami's *Usul*:

When they (the *malumi*) attained a high degree and were confirmed as the people of proximity, connectedness and gathering, the Truth was jealous of their being unveiled to other people so that He showed to human beings only their exterior aspect, which carries the meaning of separation, so that their state of proximity to the Truth be preserved (Sulami 1985, p. 141).

It is important to point out that the *malamiyyah*, as presented by Sulami, stand for a unique spiritual calling-God being the conscription 'agent' of the *malamat* orientation-that precludes any kind of experimental alternative or personal whim.

The original inclination to hide their states (*talbis al-hal*) may be converted, by the same token, into an open manifestation of states. The 'folly' of the *malamiyyah* is not to be understood as a calculated method since it professes an element of inspiration, 'disposition' or 'state' (*hal*).¹⁵ The mystic is led to behave in a manner that may make no sense to him or to others, as if to portray the unintelligible kernel of relativity alive in the world. As a consequence, Ibn 'Ajiba defines the *malamati* as one who "hides his taste of sanctity and displays states that make people flee his company" (Sulami 1985, p. 263). This type of display will tend to situate the mystic in an apparently offensive position toward the *shari'a*, and in a disruptive situation vis-a-vis traditional societal practices (*adab*).

Forms, whether psychological, moral or social, are viewed as inadequate vis-a-vis spiritual realities. The world of forms, even though conventional, is a 'scandal' that must be scandalized in order to suggest 'real' normality. *Malamati*

ordinariness can actually result in a bad reputation. According to Muhammad Parsa, a Naqshbandi figure from the 9-10th century, the fact that the Prophet was called a liar, a madman and a poet was a kind of veil with which God hid him from the eyes of the world.¹⁶ Along the same lines, the *malamati* bases his perspective on the idea that sanctity can only be 'abnormal' and 'shocking' in a world that is defined by the law of spiritual gravity. In other words, in a sick world, health can only appear in the guise of illness. Moreover, on a microcosmic level the Spirit appears in all its 'poverty' and 'sickness' from the haughty perspective of the soul. Titus Burckhardt illustrates this in terms of the recurring mythological theme of the "royal hero who comes back to his kingdom under the guise of a poor stranger, or even of a mountebank or a mendicant" (Burckhardt 1980, p. 39). In a similar vein, Sulami quotes Abu-I-Hasan al Husri's comment that "if it were possible that there be a prophet (after Muhammad) in our days, he would be one of them (the *malamiyyah*)" (Deladrière n.d. p. 13). A prophet could only be hidden or scandalous in a time when the world has become a spiritual wasteland. He would be totally inconspicuous or else so 'different' and 'marginal' that he would disconcert and unsettle even those - particularly those - who claim to be religious.

The *malamiyyah* are fundamentally saints 'in the world', not to say, 'worldly saints'. As Ibn 'Arabi (*Futuhat*, III, 53) describes them:

The *Malamiyyah* do not distinguish themselves in anything from any of the creatures of God, they are those whom one ignores. Their state is the state of ordinary people (*al- 'awam*), and it is for this reason that they have chosen this name for themselves and their disciples: they do not cease to blame their soul on the side of God, and they do not accomplish any action in such a way that their soul would rejoice for it, and they do so in order to be forgiven by God.

The *malamati* does not escape the world but works within it as a hidden warrior in the 'greater *jihad*.' He may have an inclination to solitude and retreat, but his destiny consists in being a spiritual presence in the world. Actually, by contrast with the usual Sufi practices, the *malamiyyah* way tends to de-emphasize the role of communal structures, organizations and collective practices, including majalis and *sama'* in spiritual life. It could even be said that *malamiyyah* spirituality is akin to the Sufism 'without a name' present in the early days of Islam, before Sufism became 'recognizable' as a set of institutions and specific collective practices. The Naqshbandi and Shadhili orders are the most representative examples of this orientation in the world of Sufism, since they tend to place the emphasis on inner *dhikr* and social 'inconspicuousness'.¹⁷ In this sense, the *malamiyyah* embodies one of the most fundamental tenets of Islamic spirituality, a spirituality that radiates through an ordinary presence in the world. The splendor of the *malamiyyah* is purely inward and does not reveal itself outwardly in a spectacular fashion. The mystic is like the Prophet who "talks to people and goes to the markets." This way of being goes along with a staunch distrust of the most representative methodical supports of Sufism: spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) and spiritual concert (*sama'*). These practices are held in suspicion by most *malami*. It is important to understand, in this respect, that *malamiyyah* objections to *khalwa* and *sama'* have nothing to do with the intrinsic value and goals of these methodical elements. They are merely directed at the dangers and abuses of these practices, but the very fact that the *malami* would focus on these dangers and abuses is indicative of their pessimistic approach to the human soul. In his *Usul*, Sulami criticizes the Sufi disciples "who made the error of living in isolation":

They delude themselves in thinking that isolation and living in caves, mountains and deserts would secure them from the evil of their *nafs* and that this retreat could allow them to reach the degree of sanctity, because they do not know that the reason for Masters' retreat and isolation was their knowledge and the strength of their states. It is the divine attraction that attached them to Him and made them rich and independent from all that is not Him, so he who cannot be compared to them in terms of inner strength and depth of worship can only simulate isolation, thereby being unfair to himself and harming himself. (Sulami 1985, p. 182)

And in the same vein, *sama'* presupposes spiritual requirements that are not met by most Sufi practitioners:

(They think) that *tasawwufis* chanting, dancing, music, poetry and attending meetings because they saw sincere souls enjoying *sama'*; but they erred again because they do not know that every heart that is polluted by worldly things and every soul that carries some laziness and lack of intelligence does not have a right to *sama'* and should not attend *sama'*. Junayd said: "If you see that a disciple likes *sama'* you can be sure that there is laziness in his soul." (*Ibid.*, p.184)

The dangers of *khalwa* and *sama'* are envisaged from the standpoint of *faqr* or lack thereof. In other words, the *malamiyyah* assessment is once again predicated upon the distance that separates the soul from the Spirit, man from God. The self-deceptive nature of the soul may reveal itself both in the realm of rigor and in that of beauty and mercy. An ascetic isolation that is neither firmly rooted in *faqr* nor the result of a Divine attraction can only foster presumptuousness or self-glorification. Participation in *sama'* may also encourage spiritual passivity and over-reliance on external and communal supports when it is not solidly grounded on spiritual vigilance.

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In the Sufi tradition, several questions, or objections, have been raised concerning the legitimacy of the *malamiyyah* path from a mystical point of view. First, the *malamiyyah* concern with blame seems to imply a focus on the individual in his gloomiest mood, *al-nafs al-ammara*, which may be deemed to confine the individual to a kind of egocentric exercise. Why concentrate on the soul when spirituality pertains to concentrating on God? This 'soul-centered' examination testifies to a path that appears to be much more based on will rather than intelligence, since intelligence would presumably be sufficient to dispel the illusions of the *nafs*. It can even be argued that the *malamiyyah* focus on the corruption of the soul leads, paradoxically, to *shirk* by the painstaking attention paid to it rather than focusing exclusively upon God. In his *Kashfal-Mahjub*, al-Hujwiri has proposed a critique of the *malamiyyah* that is based upon this very line of reasoning:

In my opinion, to seek blame is mere ostentation, and ostentation is mere hypocrisy. The

ostentatious man purposely acts in such a way as to win popularity, while the *Malumati* purposely acts in such a way that the people reject him. Both have their thoughts fixed on mankind and do not pass beyond that sphere. (Hujwiri n.d. p. 67).

In other words, the *malamiyyah* way is deemed to be incompatible with a genuine metaphysics of essential unity, *wahdat al-wujud*, since it *de facto* 'absolutizes' the negative singularity of the complacent soul, instead of focusing on the essential unity of *wujud*. We find parallel reservations concerning the *malamiyyah* in Jami's (d. 898/1492) *Nafahat al-Uns*.

"However worthy of esteem and commendable the state of *malamatibe*, it is nevertheless certain that the veil of the existence of creatures has not been completely lifted for them, and that, for this very reason, they are unable to see clearly the beauty of the doctrine of unity, and to envisage in all its purity the nature of the only Reality. For to hide one's actions and supernatural states from men is to make manifest that one still sees the existence of creatures and one's own existence; something that is irreconcilable with what is meant by the doctrine of unity". (Jami 1977, pp. 102-3)

The very notion of hiding presupposes the reality of a separation of the veil and the veiled when such a duality is excluded by *wahdat al-wujud*. Along more strictly theological lines, such a view may be considered incompatible with the theomorphic nature of man as *kbalifatullah* by suggesting a fundamental corruption of the human soul that is closer to the Christian concept of original sin than to the Islamic notion of a loss of the *fitrah*. An extreme mystical depreciation of the self would seem to run counter to the overall Islamic ideal of inner and outer balance. Secondly, the *malamiyyah* way appears to place the mystical 'interest' of the spiritual traveler above the collective demands of the religious community, thus setting a bad example by shocking ordinary people to the point of troubling them in their faith. In other words, it places subjective spiritual benefits above objective collective balance,¹⁸ thereby manifesting a very un-islamic emphasis on the mystical element at the expense of the overall religious health of the umma.

These objections can be, at least, partially addressed by considering two fundamental dimensions of *malamiyyah* spirituality: first, the emphasis on inner *dhikr* and its intimate connection with *malamiyyah* behavior; second, the spiritual and collective benefits of the *malamiyyah* function of "balancing through imbalance."

To define *malamiyyah* spirituality as an ascetic concentration on the self that loses sight of the real Divine Self amounts to separating the exterior manifestations of *malamiyyah* spirituality from the inner cultivation of the remembrance of God as concentration on the One. In other words, the emphasis on the combat against the *nafs al-ammarah* cannot be disassociated from *dhikr*. From this point of view, one could say that *dhikr* is an act of intelligence, or that *dhikr* is identification with the Intellect. Since *malamiyyah* asceticism functions on the level of the soul, it could also be said that *dhikr* is a means of union, and that *malamiyyah* practice is a means of distinction on the basis of this union. In other words, *dhikr* is a way to unveil the 'divine' nature of man while *malamiyyah* practices aim at preventing confusion between this 'divine' nature and human accidents.¹⁹ Accordingly, in *malamiyyah* spirituality, *dhikr* is strongly identified with inwardness, or the deepest zones of the soul, the *sirr* (the secret), or even the *ruh* (the spirit). As opposed to other Sufi orders, such as the Mevlevi, which exteriorize *dhikr* through *sama'* dance and the vocal repetition or singing of the Name and sacred litanies, the *malamiyyah dhikr* is purely silent and hidden. In this perspective, silent *dhikr* is in fact less likely to be 'appropriated' by the lower soul since it only minimally involves, if at all, its lower level.

It is a fact that *malamiyyah* spirituality cannot be considered to be a fundamentally intellectual way, as it is also true that it presupposes some sense of duality. In most instances, it cannot be identified with the state of the *majdhub*, the 'holy fool' who is enraptured by the love of God. Still, it cannot be designated as a mere path of action, in the sense of a way of observant and attentive conformity to the *shari'a*. In fact, whatever might be the level one wishes to assign the path of blame, the *malamiyyah* perspective raises the important question of knowing to what extent man *qua* man, or the individual self, can identify with pure intelligence. To the extent that one may assume that some areas of the soul remain relatively unenlightened by the Spirit, one may then conclude that their integration will have to take place in a way that the pure path of intellectual discernment and unity might not be generally able to achieve in and of itself. For certain individuals or in some circumstances, *malamiyyah* spirituality, one among other paths and methods, tends to address these lower levels of the soul without necessarily being unaware of the intellectual perspective of essential unity, nor being incompatible with it; and it does so in a way that may have a particular appeal to some spiritual temperaments, without being universally normative.

From a collective standpoint, *malamiyyah* spirituality postulates a distance between worldly values and practices - even those religiously cast - and spiritual authenticity or sincerity (*ikhlas*). As Shakespeare's Hamlet, *malamiyyah* spirituality tends to voice a 'pessimistic' anthropology, and *malami* mystics would no doubt agree with the prince of Elsinore that "the time is out of joint" and that it is indeed "a cursed spite" to be "born to set it right" (Act I, sc. V, v.215-6), if only in a spiritual sense. Like Hamlet, a typical *malami* would have no qualms in confessing: "I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me." (Act III, sc. I, v. 130-4.) The oscillation between 'invisible conformity' and 'shocking madness' is an expression of this keen awareness of the lowest possibilities of man, an intimation of the gravity of his sickness. As such, it constitutes a two-pronged strategy of 'humiliation' of the *nafs*. Moreover, this heightened sensibility to human defects and failures is closely related to an intense mystical awareness of God's perfection and presence. The medieval diagnosis of holy madness as the state of one whose body is in this world while his soul is already in heaven bears witness to this.²⁰ The tension that results from this dichotomy seems to be mystically crystallized in madness, real or feigned. As with Hamlet's feigned madness, there is both an aspect of 'sadness' and one of 'occultation' in the foolish, scandalizing ways of the *malami*.

In addition, this psycho-spiritual point of view conforms to a 'negative' assessment of mankind in society. In a mad world that claims to be sane, there is wisdom in madness and madness in wisdom ("Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, Act II, sc. II 223). Any formal system represents a subtle equilibrium

that points to a higher degree of balanced Reality that transcends it, and, thus, it must be disrupted in some instances so as not to allow it to close upon itself or become petrified to the point of obstructing access to its spiritual referent. In this regard, the most discordant and shocking aspects of *malamiyyah* spirituality are intended to provoke an alchemical dissolution that can be the prelude to a higher crystallization. On a spiritual level, this is the practice that consists in 'breaking habits' by forcing the soul, thereby, to bring to the fore what has, heretofore, remained unconscious. To behave in a *malamiyyah* way is not simply a ploy for drawing moral and social blames to oneself that will guard one from self-indulgence and self-overestimation, it is also a way to destroy the false equilibrium of the soul, thereby leading it into a state of uncomfortable helplessness that will result in a clearer transparency of the inner knots that help objectify its latent contents. This is clearly the goal of a Sufi Master like the Shaykh 'All al-Jamal who, according to his disciple al-'Arabi ad-Darqawi, seems to have taught his disciples how to break their soul's habits through the discomfiting means of social and psychological exposure and humiliation.²¹ In one of Shaykh al-'Arabi ad-Darqawi's letters, we read about the application of these tactics. 'All al- Jamal orders his young disciple to go through town carrying two baskets of prunes on his back. In another instance, we read:

He (the Shaykh 'All al-Jamal) took hold of my *haik* with his noble hands, put it off my head and twisted it several times around my neck. (Darqawi 1987, p. 33)

This "test of what is good" makes the disciple feel "oppressed to the point of death": going about town with two baskets of prunes on one's nape or with one's *haik* twisted around one's neck is likely to attract the mockeries of social peers for, as Titus Burckhardt notes in his commentary of this episode, the real intentions and feelings of most people only appear "under pressure" and once conventional masks have fallen. In other words, this strategy is a way to "raise hell" in others and in oneself, so as to reach a full measure of awareness of unconscious layers and knots in one's soul. This psycho-spiritual treatment is quite like homeopathic medicine, insofar as it cures the inner sickness through an initial exacerbation of its symptoms, "bringing out" the poison of the soul by subjecting it to its own 'venom.' In this case, being singled out as an "odd number" by passers-by and acquaintances in a society where eccentricities are not the norm, is likely to bring much discomfort to the soul, providing the person with a golden, if bitter, opportunity for self-knowledge and self-transcendence. The conclusion of the Shaykh ad-Darqawi's counsel is: "Woe to the *faqir* (...) who sees the form of his own soul (...) as it is and does not strangle it until it dies." Such counsel allows us to catch a glimpse of *malamiyyah* strategy. Mortification serves as an excellent catalyst for the ego's undoing and, consequently, the means of an alchemical transmutation. The disciple is taught how to 'see' his soul, which means that he becomes uncomfortably aware of it with a view to objectifying its nature. But this 'objectivization' is also a way to 'kill' the soul. To the question of knowing how this 'strangulation' of the soul may be attained, one must assume that the answer lies in the ability of the practitioner to resist his soul, on the one hand, and rely on God's power through the *dhikr*, on the other, for none can put to death but He who gives life. Only the Spirit can 'kill' the soul, but this 'killing' is also an act of 'love': *mors* and *amor* are the two faces of the same mystery, and the 'objectivization' which we mentioned above is the other side of an 'identification'²² or 'union' in which the Name of God, through the *dhikr*, 'annihilates' the soul within its 'embrace,' thereby 'reviving' it to a truer, deeper and more abundant life.

Notes

1. As indicated by Michael W. Dols (1992) and S. H. Nasr (1968), chapter VII.
2. "The Hippocratic doctors borrowed the concept of the four elements of nature-air, earth, fire, and water-and considered them to be the essential elements of the human body. These elements corresponded, in theory, to the four humours that were believed to be produced in various organs of the body: blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm. (...) The doctor, in various ways, was suppose to manipulate these humours by their qualities in order to maintain a humoral equilibrium, which was the meaning of health, or rectify their disequilibrium, which was illness." Michael W. Dols, (1992), p. 18.
3. "(...) The Koran could not have embraced a notion of the soul as being healthy and the body being sick or vice versa. Hence it is said of Saul, for example, 'We gave him amplitude in body and in knowledge' (2,246) ." Fazlur Rahman (1987), p.21.
4. Let us recall that the English 'health' derives from the Old English "hal" that connotes wholeness.
5. "The heart is healed by the permanent remembrance of God." Sviri (1997),p.124.
6. We use the term *malamiyya* as opposed to *malumatia* in accordance with Ibn 'Arabi's preference for the first of these denominations. (Futubat, 16/2)
7. "The importance of the *malamati* trend in Khurasanian Sufism, constituting an evolutionary development of the pure asceticism of the earlier generation, goes back to the precedence of Hamdun Qassar (d. 271/884), a master of Nishapur, who put his stamp on the Sufi practice of the region, and stressed the importance of sincerity, declaring, 'God's knowledge of you is better than people's.'" Terry Graham (1999), p.128.
8. Islamic mysticism presents a variety of classifications of the various levels of consciousness, not all of them being in agreement with Sulami's. According to Ibn 'Ajiba, *al-rub* is the place where the epiphanies of the Kingship (*al-malakut*) occur, whereas *al-sirr* refers on a higher plane to the level of All-Power (*al-jabarut*.) The latter refers to the Divine infinity whereas the former pertains to the realm of intelligible archetypes (*asrar al-ma'ani*). Let us remember, in this respect, that Shi'ite gnosis equates *malakut* with the intermediary or animic realm, whereas *j'abarut* refers to the angelic and

archetypal level of reality. Cf. H.Corbin(1986) p.192.

[9.](#) Sulami (1985), p. 106, the English version that I quote is an unpublished translation by Amira El-Zein and Patrick Laude.

[10.](#) In his Kitub 'Uqala' al-majanin, an-Naysaburi ranks Uways among four of the best-known "wise fools" with Majnun, Sa'dun and Buhlul. Cf. Dols, p.355.

[11.](#) Uways is also, and quite tellingly, the 'patron' of Sufis who do not have a living master: "The Sufi tradition has distinguished a special group of seekers: those whose sole link with the teaching is through Khidr himself. There are those rare Sufis who do not have a teacher in the flesh. (...) They have been given a special name: uwaysiyyun." Sara Sviri (1997) p.98.

[12.](#) This 'madness' is also related to the function of the American Indian 'contrary', Sioux heyokao or Hopi kochare, or the "grey one" of the Apaches, who embodies the apparently senseless reversal of terrestrial and social norms of behavior.

[13.](#) It is interesting to note that Uways Qarani is both a norm and a shocking exception in the world of early Islam. He is a shocking exception in so far as his asocial perspective and ascetic disposition took him away from the communal establishment of the ummah that is, in a sense, the very identity of Islam. Still, at the same time, Uways al-Qarani is referred to in at least two ahadith that make of him the spiritual pole of the community. Two interesting facts must be commented upon in this context: first, the Prophet declared that on the Day of Judgment and later in Paradise, God will give the form of Uways to 70,000 angels so that nobody could know, even in the thereafter, who is the actual Uways. This hyperbolic and symbolic manifestation of anonymity is quite suggestive of the principle of 'invisibility' that presides over the malamiyyah way. Secondly, when referring to Uways in connection with 'Umar, 'Attar carefully avoids any expression that would seem to give precedence to Uways over 'Umar: "You should know that Uways al- Qarani was not superior to 'Umar, but that he was a man of detachment vis-a-vis things of this world. 'Umar, as for him, was an accomplished perfection in all his works." (op.cit. p.31) 'Umar's perfection is defined in terms of presence and action in the world of men, whereas Uways' perfection is understood in terms of separation from the world. Given its emphasis on equilibrium between the two worlds, Islam cannot extol Uways' virtues to the point of "otherworldliness." Moreover, the Prophet's robe is no doubt a different kind of investiture than the line of succession in the khilafat: it points to a spiritual authority like the khirka (or cloak) of the Sufi Shaykh; but this type of investiture and eminence must remain hidden.

[14.](#) This apparent involvement can also be a way to attract upon oneself the blame of the religious 'elite' of Sufis who may consider themselves of a different stuff than the common faithful.

[15.](#) We read, for example, in the letters of Shaykh ad-Darqawi, that he was wearing three prayer caps on his head, for "such was my disposition" at the time. Darqawi (1987), see No. 53.

[16.](#) Such an association of prophecy and madness has nothing extraordinary about it. In the Koran, for instance, Pharaoh accuses Moses of being struck with madness. (LI, 39).

[17.](#) "Other features of early Naqshbandi practice were also linked to the concern for sobriety and anonymity implied by the choice of silent dhikr. (...) As with the Shadhiliyya, all these features are highly reminiscent of the Malamati movement of Nishapur, and it may be suggested that Baha' al-Din Naqshband was an heir to the traditions of the Malamatiyya although not in a formal, initiatic sense." Alexander Knysh (2000), p.221.

[18.](#) This point of view has been expressed by Frithjof Schuon in his chapter "Sincerity: What it Is and what it Is Not" in Schuon (1981), pp.123-7.

[19.](#) The purely gnostic way of knowledge would simply consider these accidents to be 'unreal'. As Ghazali puts it: "Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own and a face of its Lord; in respect of its face it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face of God it is Being." Mishkat al-Anwar, quoted in Martin Lings (1993), p.169. The Malamiyyah applies this discernment on the level of the will and the soul.

[20.](#) " (In the Middle Ages) (...) madness might be explained by the fact that the weakened body of the medically insane allowed the soul partially to escape." Dols, p.369.

[21.](#) This does not necessarily point to the prideful nature of the disciple, for it may also function on a more impersonal level as the morally neutral shock of the Zen "warning stick."

[22.](#) This is effected through the alchemical 'blending' of the psychic 'matter' and the spiritual 'form,' the 'emotions' and the dhikr.

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