THE DIVINE COLLOQUIY IN ISLAM

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It belongs not to any mortal that God should speak to him, except by revelation, or from behind a veil. (Koran, xlii. 50)

It is a striking and curious fact that Mohammed never claimed to have received the Koran directly from God, and that " Tradition is unanimous on the point that it was Gabriel who was the agent of revelation ". Indeed, in Sura ii. 91 the matter is put clearly and unequivocally:

Say: "Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel— he it was that brought it down upon thy heart by the leave of God, confirming what was before it, and for a guidance and good tidings to the believers."

The vital question, "Does God ever speak to man?" is nevertheless answered in the Koran in two contexts. It was the unique privilege of the prophet Moses to have been addressed by Allah immediately:

And unto Moses God spoke directly.

The reference earned for him the title Kalim Allāh. That is all so far as the present world is concerned. As for the other world, there was of course the famous encounter that took place before creation:

1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 14th of March, 1956.
2 R. Bell, Introduction to the Qur'ān, p. 31; cf. A. J. Wensinck in Encyclopaedia of Islam, iv. 1092, with references.
3 See also Koran xvi. 104, xxvi. 192, lxxxi. 19.
4 Koran iv. 162. For a discussion of the implication of takliman in this passage see al-Ash'ārī, al-Iḥānā, p. 27.
5 See D. B. Macdonald, in Encyclopaedia of Islam, ii. 699, with references.
6 Koran, vii. 171.
And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we testify."

There we have the entire human race—in embryo so to speak, or rather not yet even in embryo—partaking in a divine colloquy which would not be repeated for the great majority until the Last Day, and then indeed not for all of them.¹

Those that sell God's covenant, and their oaths, for a little price, there shall be no share for them in the world to come; God shall not speak to them neither look on them on the Resurrection Day.

For the rest the Day of Uprising will be a time for testifying once again.²

"Company of jinn and mankind, did not Messengers come to you from among you, relating to you My signs and warning you of the encounter of this your day?" They shall say, "We bear witness against ourselves".

The suggestion that Moses was sui generis in having conversed with God in this life cannot, however, be accepted without further discussion; and the occasion and nature of his reported conversation are clearly not without importance.³

And when Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke with him, he said, "Oh my Lord, show me, that I may behold Thee!" Said He, "Thou shalt not see Me; but behold the mountain—if it stays fast in its place, then thou shalt see Me."

And when his Lord revealed Him to the mountain He made it crumble into dust; and Moses fell down swooning.

So when he awoke, he said, "Glory be to Thee! I repent to Thee; I am the first of the believers."

Said He, "Moses, I have chosen thee above all men for my Messages and My Utterance; take what I have given thee, and be of the thankful."

¹ Koran iii. 71; cf. ii. 169. ² Koran vi. 130. ³ Koran vii. 138-41; cf. xix 53.
It was of course on the right-hand slope of Mount Sinai that Moses heard God speak.\(^1\) As for the mountain which crumbled into dust, that was called Zubair;\(^2\) God chose this peak for the miracle of His theophany because it humbled itself on knowing of the Divine intention. Anas ibn Malik quoted the Prophet as saying that after its disintegration the mountain was split into six, three standing at Medina and three at Mecca.\(^3\)

It is therefore not surprising that when Mohammed, according to certain traditions, emulated Moses in talking with God he should also have needed to climb high in order to hear the Divine voice. For him the occasion was the marvellous night-journey briefly mentioned in Koran xvii. 1:

\begin{quotation}
Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque, the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs.
\end{quotation}

The story of the Ascension of Mohammed, mounted on the winged horse Burāq and accompanied by Gabriel, is the most famous of all Moslem legends;\(^4\) for our present purpose the phase of that adventure to be particularly noticed is what took place when the Prophet reached the seventh heaven. Anas ibn Malik is again the transmitter.\(^5\) There Mohammed met Moses, who inhabited those high regions because of his distinction as having conversed with God;\(^6\) the Hebrew lawgiver expressed surprise that anyone should be elevated higher than himself; for Gabriel proceeded to mount further with Mohammed—and God alone knows how much further—until he reached the Lote-Tree of the Boundary. To appreciate what happened then we must refer to Koran liii. 4-17:

\begin{enumerate}
\item Koran xix. 53, xxviii. 44, 46.
\item Yaqūt, Mu’jam al-buldān (Cairo, 1324/1906), iv. 377.
\item See al-Tha’labī, Qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā’ (Cairo, 1340/1922), p. 140.
\item For the literature of the subject see J. Horowitz in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, iii. 505-8.
\item So in al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xv. 4.
\item Ibid. In some accounts Moses is in the sixth heaven and Abraham in the seventh, see J. Horowitz, loc. cit.
\end{enumerate}
This is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by one terrible in power, very strong; he stood poised, being on the higher horizon, then drew near and suspended hung, two bows'-length away, or nearer, then revealed to his servant that he revealed. His heart lies not of what he saw; what, will you dispute with him what he sees? Indeed, he saw him another time by the Lote-Tree of the Boundary which is the Garden of the Refuge, when there covered the Lote-Tree that which covered; his eye swerved not, nor swept astray. Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord.

The usual interpretation of this mysterious passage is that it describes two visions which Mohammed had of Gabriel. Some authorities, however, such as Ibn ‘Abbās and Anas ibn Mālik, declared that it was God Himself who “drew near and suspended hung”. Then it was that God—not, as in the other version, Gabriel—“revealed to His servant that He revealed”. Among the matters revealed was that the Moslem community should perform the ritual prayer fifty times every twenty-four hours—an imposition which was progressively reduced to five on Mohammed’s intercession, prompted by Moses. It was ‘Ā’isha who protested against the suggestion that Mohammed had actually seen or spoken to God, calling it “the greatest lie ever forged against God”. Others explained the whole incident as a dream.

The question whether God can be seen in this world, or for that matter in the next, interested many Moslem scholars, not least the Sufis; I cannot forbear to refer to the excellent discussion of this topic that occurs in the Kitāb al-Ta‘arruf of al-Kalābādhī. Vision and audition were felt to be closely-

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1 See for instance R. Blachère, Le Coran, pp. 5, 83-4.
3 See al-Bukhārī, “Ṣalāt”, ch. 1; al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xv. 4-5.
4 See al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xxvii. 30; authorities cited in J. W. Sweetman, Islam and Christian Theology, ii. 221.
5 Especially the Ḥanbalites; see J. Horowitz, loc. cit.
linked phenomena, in view of what had happened to Moses and Mohammed, and therefore the problem of vision is not irrelevant to our present topic. "They are agreed", wrote al-Kalābādhī about the middle of the tenth century, meaning the Sufis, "that God will be seen with the eyes in the next world, and that the believers will see Him but not the unbelievers". This was the Sunni (Ash'arī) position;¹ the Muʿtazilites had denied that God could be seen by ordinary vision, even in Paradise.² However, "they are agreed that God is not seen in this world either with the eyes or with the heart, save from the point of view of faith; for this (vision) is the limit of grace and the noblest of blessings, and therefore cannot occur save in the noblest place. If they had been vouchsafed in this world the noblest of blessings, there would have been no difference between this world which passes away, and Paradise which is eternal; and as God prevented His conversant (Moses) from attaining this in the present world, it is more proper that those who are beneath him should be likewise (prevented)". Then did Mohammed see God? "They are at variance", our Sufi theorist concedes, "as to whether the Prophet saw God on the night of the heavenly journey. The majority of them, including the most important Sufis, declare that Mohammed did not see Him with his eyes, nor any other created being, in this world. This view is taken, among others, by al-Junaid, al-Nūrī and Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz. Certain of them, however, assert that the Prophet saw God on the night of the heavenly journey, and that he was specially designated from among men for (the grace of) vision, just as Moses was designated for (the grace of) speaking (with God). To this end they cite the story told by Ibn 'Abbās, Asmā' and Anas;³ and this view is supported by Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurashi, al-Haikal,⁴ and certain of the later Sufis. We have not, however, known of a single shaikh of this order—that is, not one who is

¹ A. S. Tritton, Muslim Theology, p. 173.
² See al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn, i. 150; L. Gardet-M. M. Anawati, Introduction à la théologie musulmane, p. 173.
³ As reported in al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xv. 4.
⁴ So this name is spelt by al-Kalābādhī; al-Sarrāj, Kitāb al-Luma', pp. 255, 256 calls him al-Haikali.
recognized as a valid authority—and we have not seen it stated in their books, compositions or treatises, or in the genuine stories that are related of them, neither have we heard it stated by any of those whom we have contacted, that God is seen in this world, or that any of His creation has seen Him; with the exception, that is, of a sect who have not been recognized as being of any importance among the Sufis. It is true that certain people have asserted that some of the Sufis have claimed vision; but all the shaikhs are agreed on convicting of error such as make this statement, and on refuting their claim, and they have written books to this end, among them being Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz; al-Junaid has also written and discoursed much refuting and convicting of error those who make such a claim.”

According to Abū Naṣr al-Sarraj, the heresy mentioned here was prevalent among certain Sufis in Syria, and it was for the people of Damascus that al-Kharrāz composed his refutation.1 Followers of al-Ṣubaiḥī at Basra also suffered from the same delusion, due in their case to excessive austerity; and a pupil of Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Tustarī went so far as to say that he “saw God every night with the eyes of his head”. The shrewd teacher advised him to spit next time he had such an experience, which he recognized as a trick of the Devil; and at once “the Throne flew away, the lights darkened, and the man was delivered from that and never saw anything thereafter”.2 It was al-Sarrāj’s view, like that of al-Kalābādī, that Mohammed’s vision was of the heart and not of the eyes.3 Hujwīrī, who quotes al-Bīšāmī as saying in his old age that he had seen God for four years, offers an ingenious explanation of the discrepancy between the reports of ‘Ā’isha and Ibn ‘Abbās touching the heavenly journey. “The Apostle told ‘Ā’isha that he did not see God on the night of the Ascension, but Ibn ‘Abbās relates that the Apostle told him that he saw God on that occasion. Accordingly, this remains a matter of controversy; but in saying that he did not see God the Apostle was referring to his bodily eye, whereas in saying the contrary he was referring to his spiritual eye. Since ‘Ā’isha was a formalist and Ibn ‘Abbās a spiritualist, the

1 Kitāb al-Luma’, p. 428. 2 Ibid. 3 Ibid. p. 429.
Apostle spoke with each of them according to their insight.”

In short, Hujwîrî also held that the Prophet’s vision was with the eyes of the heart. “Some Sufis have fallen into the mistake of supposing that spiritual vision and contemplation represent such an idea of God as is formed in the mind by the imagination either from memory or reflection. This is utter anthropomorphism and manifest error.” However, “contemplation in this world resembles vision of God in the next world, and since the Companions of the Apostle are unanimously agreed that vision is possible hereafter, contemplation is possible here.”

There we must regretfully leave this fascinating subject, if time is to remain for an adequate treatment of our selected theme. God may not be seen with the physical eyes in this world; that is the orthodox Moslem doctrine. Then may God be heard, and is it possible for mortal man to converse with Him? This problem appears not to have attracted nearly so much notice. It is necessary to divide the answer to our question into three parts. First, may man speak to God? Secondly, if man does speak to God, will God hear and answer? Thirdly, may man converse with God? The first and second queries are dealt with readily enough; this phenomenon is what is called prayer—not so much ritual prayer (ṣalāt), but private petition (du‘ā’).

And when My servants question thee concerning Me—I am near to answer the call of the caller, when he calls to Me; so let them respond to Me, and let them believe in Me; haply so they will go aright.

Such is the plain statement of Koran ii. 181. Guidance for the form of such petitioning is supplied by Koran vii. 53:

Call on your Lord, humbly and secretly.

Consequently the Sufi manuals abound in examples of prayers addressed to God by famous mystics; and of course the Prophet’s

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2 Ibid. p. 332.
3 Nevertheless Ibn al-Fârîd returns to the view that Mohammed saw God; see R. A. Nicholson, Studies in Islamic Mysticism, p. 229.
prayers were religiously preserved.\(^1\) Another word used to denote private litany is \textit{munâjât}; this seems to derive from the epithet \textit{najî} applied in Koran xix. 53 to Moses. We learn that al-Junaid composed a \textit{Kitâb al-Munâjât}, though it has not survived;\(^2\) and the intimate supplications of al-\textit{Hallâj} were famous.\(^3\) The \textit{Munâjât} of \textit{Aşşârî} is one of the most popular Sufi works in Persian;\(^4\) al-Suhrawârdî al-Maqtûl is credited with a book by that name.\(^5\) The composing of rhetorical litanies became a literary convention, an outstanding example being the relevant parts of al-Tauhidî's \textit{al-Ishârât al-ilâhiyya}.\(^6\) The first Sura of the Koran is in effect a primitive model for all like petitions. There is, however, no suggestion that in this kind of communion God actually replies to the suppliant in words; the speech is all on one side.

The terms \textit{muḥâdatha} and \textit{musâmara} were used to "denote two states of the perfect Sufi. \textit{Muḥâdatha} is really spiritual talk conjoined with silence of the tongue, and \textit{musâmara} is really continuance of unrestraint combined with concealment of the most secret thoughts. The outward meaning of \textit{musâmara} is a spiritual state existing between God and Man at night, and \textit{muḥâdatha} is a similar state, existing by day, in which there is exoteric and esoteric conversation. Hence secret prayers (\textit{munâjât}) by night are called \textit{musâmara}, while invocations made by day are called \textit{muḥâdatha}". That is Hujwûri's definition; he adds that "in love \textit{musâmara} is more perfect than \textit{muḥâdatha}, and is connected with the state of the Apostle, when God sent Gabriel to him with \textit{Burâq} and conveyed him by night from Mecca to a space of two bow-lengths from His presence. The Apostle conversed secretly with God, and when he reached the goal his tongue became dumb before the revelation of God's majesty, and his heart was amazed at His infinite greatness, and he said: 'I cannot tell Thy praise.' \textit{Muḥâdatha} is connected

\(^1\) Cf. al-Sarrâj, op. cit. pp. 257-63; al-Qushairî, \textit{Risâla} (Cairo, 1330/1912), pp. 119-22.
\(^2\) See al-Sarrâj, p. 259.
\(^3\) See Hujwûri, op. cit. p. 344.
\(^4\) For an English translation see \textit{Islamic Culture}, 1936, pp. 369-89.
\(^5\) See C. Brockelmann, \textit{Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur}, i. 438.
\(^6\) Edited by \textquote{Abd al-Raḥmân Badawi} (Cairo, 1950).
with the state of Moses, who, seeking communion with God, after forty days came to Mount Sinai and heard the speech of God and asked for vision of Him, and failed of his desire. . . . Night is the time when lovers are alone with each other, and day is the time when servants wait upon their masters." ¹ Al-Sarrāj agrees that muḥādatha is "a description of the final goal of true devotees" and quotes a remarkable saying of Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī: "God created the creatures in order that He might converse secretly with them, and they with Him. God Most High said, 'I created you in order that you might converse secretly with Me. If you do not do so, then speak to Me and address Me; if you do not do so, then commune with Me; if you do not do so, then listen to Me.'" ² He understands musāmarā to imply 'the heart’s reproach in secret commemoration', a phrase that hints at the erotic connotation of this term.³

A moving description of the scene in which musāmarā takes place between the mystic and God is provided by Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz. "These two are the qualities of the intimate: that he is disgusted with people and mankind, and finds delight in solitude and loneliness. Being in a darkened house, he abhors a light when he sees one; he closes his door, and draws his curtain, and is alone with his heart. He grows familiar with his Lord’s nearness, and becomes intimate with Him, taking delight in secret converse (munājah) with Him. . . . When night covers him, and all eyes are sleeping, when every movement is stilled, and the senses of all things are quiet, then he is alone with his sorrow, and long he moans, demanding the fulfilment of what his Expectation promised him, and the benefits and lovingkindnesses whereby He has aforetime sustained him. Then he obtains some part of his request, and a portion of his wants is satisfied." ⁴ The nightly vigil is a familiar theme in Moslem mystical literature; no doubt the prototype was provided by those Christian monks whose lamps shining through the desert darkness constituted well-known landmarks for nocturnal travellers even in pre-Islamic times.⁵ We have many

examples in prose and verse of the sort of thing the ardent lover
of God said on such occasions; how the Divine Beloved replied
to those human overtures is unfortunately not so well documented.
Though Blanquerna may have "remembered how that once
when he was Pope a Saracen had related to him that the Saracens
have certain religious men, and that among others are certain
men called Sufis, who are the most prized among them, and these
men have words of love and brief examples which give to men
great devotion";¹ there exists no Moslem counterpart of Ray-
mund Lull's exquisite *Book of the Lover and the Beloved.* For
all that, it is notorious how the Sufis stimulated their religious
emotions by listening to the recitation of amorous poetry,²
and it was not long before images drawn from bacchanalian
and erotic verse became the conventional repertory of mystical
poets.

It is therefore in the works of such popular favourites as
'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a and Abū Nuwās that we may legitimately
look to find the models of amorous conversation which was later
a feature of Sufi verse. The sources of inspiration for "Arabic
mystical poetry are the secular odes and songs of which this
passion is the theme; and the imitation is often so close that
unless we have some clue to the writer's intention, it may not be
possible to know whether his beloved is human or divine."³
The most famous dialogue in Moslem mystical literature occurs
in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's masterpiece, the *Nazm al-sulāk*; though to
be sure the commentators, eager to defend the Egyptian poet
against the ready accusation of blasphemy, explain—and no
doubt rightly—that the loving conversation sustained at great
length in the opening scene of that elaborate ode in 760 couplets
takes place not between the human soul and God, but between
the human soul and the eternal Spirit of Mohammed.⁴ But it
is in the lyric proper that the ancient tradition of love-making
is most characteristically preserved—let us recall that the
dictionaries define the original meaning of *ghazal* as "play, sport,

⁴ Ibid. pp. 193-4; see my *The Poem of the Way,* pp. 75-8.
dalliance, or wanton conduct, and amorous talk, with women." —and this fact helps us to appreciate the significance of the dialogue in so sophisticated a form as the poetry of Ḥāfiz.

"Ah, when shall I to thy mouth and lips attain?"
"'Fore God, but speak, for thy word is sovereign."
"'Tis Egypt's tribute thy lips require for fee."
"In such transaction the less the loss shall be."
"What lip is worthy the tip of thy mouth to hold?"
"To none but initiates may this tale be told."
"Adore not idols, but sit with the One, the True."
"In the street of Love it is lawful both to do."
"The tavern's breath is balm to the spirit's smart."
"And blessed are they that comfort the lonely heart."
"No part of faith is the dervish cloak and the wine."
"Yet both are found in this Magian faith of mine."
"What gain can coral lips to an old man bring?"
"A honeyed kiss, and his youth's recovering."
"And when shall bridegroom come to the couch of the bride?"
"The morn that Moon and Jupiter stand allied."
"Still Ḥāfiz prays for thy yet ascending might."
"So pray and praise the angels in heaven's height."

The Persian poet writes with his customary ambiguity. At the common human level he reports a conversation between an old Sufi and a young disciple who is also of course a wine-bearer (saki); on a higher but still human plane, the saki is the poet's royal patron who dispenses—or it is hoped that he will dispense—all favour and generosity; a loftier view sees in the youthful figure a symbol of the Prophet Mohammed, the wine in whose flagon is Divine revelation; at the sublimest height he would be God Himself. Centuries of development have gone before this masterly treatment of the central myth of speculative Sufism.

It is of course no part of the Sufi poet's intention to reproduce or even to formalize an actual colloquy; he merely employs this convention, borrowed from his mundane predecessors, to elaborate new variations on an old theme. We may therefore dismiss the dialogue in verse from our enquiry; in any case the poet is often reminded that certain things are too sacred to be put into words.

1 E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, i. 2255.
"Speak not of this," Thou saidst,  
Then into speechless mysteries Thou ledst  
My wandering soul:  
Can utterance describe the unutterable?

So Abu 'l-Husain al-Nūrī reported his own silencing.  
Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī uses the word khāmūsh (silent) so frequently in his lyrics that it virtually becomes a second signature. So, having described the soul's descent from its heavenly home, he suddenly ends:  

Now I would tell  
How thither thou mayest come;  
But ah, my pen is broken  
And I am dumb.

Hāfīz too reminds us that it was because he published the story of his Divine romance that al-Ḥallāj was crucified:  

That friend who, being raised sublime  
Upon the gallows, glorified  
The tree that slew him for his crime,  
This was the sin for which he died,  
That, having secrets in his charge,  
He told them to the world at large.

Who then broke the rule of silence, and under what circumstances did they publish "to the world at large" the conversations which they enjoyed with the Most High? A passage in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī appears to give the answer. "Know then, that between every manzil, munāzala, maqām, and ḥāl there is a buffer state in which the mystic pauses. . . . When God desires to transfer the mystic from one thing to another, He stays him between the two, and provides him with certain rules proper to the state to which he is being transferred, teaching him how to conduct himself as befits what is about to befall him. For God has rules of behaviour proper to every manzil, maqām, ḥāl, and munāzala; the mystic must at such times obey the Divine rules, or be expelled. . . . In this way sound instruction has

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1 See al-Kalābādhi (tr. A. J. Arberry), p. 82.
3 A. J. Arberry, Fifty Poems of Hāfīz, p. 98. The theme is of course ancient and originally profane; the lover should keep the story of his love to himself, see Ibn Ḥazm, The Ring of the Dove (tr. A. J. Arberry), pp. 76-81.
come down through God's revelation in times of confusion, revelation contrary to the forms of dogmatic beliefs, though preserving the dogmatic beliefs themselves. At the present day, however, nobody ever thinks of accepting or welcoming such revelation; but all declare, when the 'I am your Lord' comes to them, 'We take refuge from thee in God'.” ¹ In another context Ibn 'Arabi refers to “the Waqifiya” as “the people of the mauqif”—that is to say, those who hold the doctrine explained above—and quotes as instances the names of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī and Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī.²

Now in discussing the experience called mauqif Ibn 'Arabi is obviously basing his views upon the writings of one man only—al-Niffarī—and, more specifically, upon his book the Kitāb al-Mawāqif, on which the Murcian theosophist may well have written a commentary.³ I have suggested elsewhere that al-Niffarī derived the curious form in which he recorded his "revelations" from certain sayings attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī; ⁴ I shall return to this point again. Meanwhile it is to be observed that it is in these same sayings that we have seemingly the earliest examples of authentic Divine colloquy in Moslem mysticism.⁵ Let us therefore examine the relevant material, using the most ancient and therefore, presumably, the most reliable reports.

(1) Once He raised me up and stationed me before Him, and said to me: “Abū Yazīd, behold, My creatures desire to see thee.” Then I said: “Adorn me with Thy Unicity, and clothe me in Thy Selfhood, and raise me up to Thy Oneness, so that when Thy creatures see me they will say, ‘We have seen Thee’; and Thou wilt be That, and I shall not be there at all.”

This famous anecdote occurs in the Kitāb al-Luma’ of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, a work written approximately one hundred years after the death of al-Biṣṭāmī.⁶ Al-Sarrāj reproduces it as being a widespread and popular report, but expresses himself doubtful

¹ Ibn ‘Arabi, al-Futūḥat al-Makkiya (Cairo, 1293/1876), ii. 805.
² Ibid. ii. 187. ³ See my The Mawāqif and Mukhātabāt, p. 201.
⁵ Badawī (Shaṭāḥāt al-Ṣufiya, pp. 17-18) suggests a foreshadowing in the sayings of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiya; the evidence which he produces is not very conclusive.
of its authenticity; however, it was admitted as accurate by al-Junaid, who included this story in the collection of al-Bištāmi’s dark sayings upon which he wrote a commentary. Both al-Junaid and al-Sarrāj endeavour to interpret al-Bištāmi’s words along lines calculated to make them acceptable to orthodox Moslem sentiment; al-Sarrāj indeed treats the incident as a munājāt, using terminology which he employs elsewhere to explain that phenomenon.¹ This is, however, surely all a little too plausible; the matter deserves a closer investigation than they were prepared to give it. Let us look at the actual words used by al-Bištāmi to depict the situation: *rafa‘ānī marratan fa-aqāmanī baina yadaihi wa-qāla li.* What is the special significance of *rafa‘ānī?* In the story of the Prophet’s Ascension, upon which al-Bištāmi’s narrative is supposed to be modelled, the phrases used are quite different.² But when we turn to the Koran, we appear to find several clues. Thus, in Sura iii. 48 we read: *idh qāla llāhu yā ‘Isā innī mutawaffika wa-rāfi‘uka ilaiya.*

> When God said, “Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me. . . .”

Again, in Sura iv. 156 we have: *wa-mā qatalūhu yaqīnān bal rafa‘ahu llāhu ilaihi,*

> And they slew him not of a certainty—no indeed; God raised him up to Him.

Moreover, Sura xix. 57-58 states: *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi Idrīsa innahu kāna siddīqan nabīyan wa-rafa‘nāhu makānan ‘alīyan.*

> And mention in the Book Idris; he was a true man, a Prophet. We raised him up to a high place.

Are we not justified in concluding on this evidence that al-Bištāmi was comparing his experience with that of Jesus and Enoch, both of whom were miraculously translated?

Koran iii. 48 troubled the exegetes not a little. The word *mutawaffika* inevitably suggested the normal meaning of God


"taking the soul" at death, and this conflicted with the fundamental Moslem thesis that Jesus was not slain on the Cross. Fortunately there was Koran vi. 60 to support another interpretation: *wa-huwa lladhī yatawaffākum bi-l-laili.*

It is He who recalls you by night.

There the idea is of God "taking the soul" in sleep. So certain scholars took Koran iii. 48 to mean that God took Jesus and raised him to Him while he was in a sleeping state; others understood the words to signify a literal elevation without death, Jesus being reserved in God’s presence against the day when he should descend again to slay the Antichrist. The discussion immediately recalls the similar conflict on whether Mohammed experienced his Ascension waking or asleep. The same dispute arose over Koran iv. 156. As for Koran xix, 57-58, this set a limit to the height which Enoch's levitation reached; "to a high place" was stated by some to mean the fourth heaven, while others averred that it signified the sixth heaven. In any case there is no suggestion that he attained God's presence. We have therefore cause to eliminate Idris = Enoch from our purview, for all his special position in Moslem wonder-legend, and to conclude that al-Bistāmī had in mind only the miraculous raising-up of Jesus; the parallel is emphasized by the fact that in Sura iii. 48 it is revealed that God actually spoke to Jesus.

Let us now turn our attention to *fa-aqāmanī baina yadaihi.* Al-Sarraj rightly remarks that "all creatures are before God; not a breath nor a thought of theirs escapes Him, though they differ in the degree of their awareness of the fact." The context suggests, however, that al-Bistāmī was referring to a literal "standing before God" as on "the day when men shall stand unto the Lord of all Being". That Day of Resurrection (*yaumu l-qiyāmati*) on which "all creatures shall stand before the Living, the Everlasting". If this conjecture is correct, then

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1 The commentators are agreed, and the context proves this conclusively.  
3 Ibid. iii. 204.  
4 See above, p. 21.  
5 Ibid. vi. 13.  
6 Ibid. xvi. 72.  
7 See A. J. Wensinck in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ii. 450.  
8 *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, p. 382.  
9 Koran lxxiii. 6.  
al-Bistâmî is describing a foretaste he enjoyed of the experience which will be the common lot of all humanity at the Last Day. And if we are right in taking this phrase as anticipating al-Niffari’s oft-repeated aqâfânî, then it is to be remarked that the later writer chose a word—though his predecessor was before him even there—which has still clearer Koranic sanction as suggesting the Day of Judgment.¹

(2) The True One looked down into the secret hearts of the world, and beheld them empty of Him; save only my secret heart, for He saw that it was full of Him. Then He addressed me, magnifying me and saying: “All the world are my slaves, save thee.”

This report comes from al-Sahlajî writing two centuries after the death of al-Bistâmî,² his information deriving ultimately from Abû Muḥammad al-Jârîrî who died early in the tenth century.³ Here we have no suggestion of an Ascension; in this incident God descends into the sublunary world. The use of the word khâṭabâni (He addressed me) reminds us that al-Niffari’s second collection of “revelations” is called Kitâb al-Mukhâṭabât.⁴

(3) The True One stationed me (aqâfânî) in a thousand stations (maqîf) before Him, offering me the kingdom in every station, but I said, “I do not desire it.” Then He said to me in the last station: “Abû Yazîd, dost thou desire?” I said: “I desire not to desire.”

This also derives from al-Sahlajî ⁵ whose authority on this occasion mounts to Khalaf ibn ‘Umar al-Bistâmî, elsewhere mentioned as quoting Abû Yazîd’s personal attendant and nephew Abû Músâ.⁶ Its authenticity is therefore well attested; and it affords incontrovertible proof that al-Niffari was familiar with the anecdotes of the great Persian mystic. A variant version of this incident occurs elsewhere in al-Sahlajî’s monograph,⁷ the reporter there being Abû Músâ himself. It clearly belongs also

¹ Koran vi. 27, 30, xxxiv. 30.
² See Kitâb al-Nâr, edited in Badawi, Shatâhât al-Šâfiyya, p. 102; al-Sahlaji died in 476/984, see H. Ritter in Encyclopaedia of Islam (new edn.), i. 162.
³ Badawi, loc cit. prints al-Ḥarîrî but this is evidently wrong; for al-Jarîrî, who was a companion of al-Junaid, see al-Sulamî, Ṭabaqât al-Šâfiyya, p. 259.
⁴ Cf the use of khâṭâban in Koran lxxvii. 37. ⁵ Kitâb al-Nâr, p. 113.
to the same family as the next narrative, credited to Abū Musa’s
son ‘Ammī Musa.¹

(4) When He caused me to view the Unity, I divorced my soul and proceeded to
my Lord, and called unto Him imploring His succour and saying: “Master,
I pray to Thee as one to whom no longer anything remains except Thee.” When
He realized the truthfulness of my prayer, and how I had despaired of my soul,
the first answer to this prayer that came upon me was that He caused me to
forget my soul totally; then He caused me to forget all creatures and all dominions.
So I became empty of cares, and remained without any care. Then I continued
to traverse kingdom upon kingdom; and whenever I came to them I said to
them, “Stand up, so that I may pass.” So I would make them stand, and
I would pass, until I came to them (all). Then He brought me very near,
appointing for me a way to Him nearer than spirit to body. Thereafter He said :
“Abū Yazīd, they are all My creatures, apart from thee.” And I said: “So
I am Thou, and Thou art I, and I am Thou.”

This is very manifestly an adaptation of the story of Moham­
med’s Ascension, a more developed form of the preceding
narrative but far from the elaboration displayed in the version
given by the fourteenth-century writer Abu ‘l-Qāsim al-Junaid
al-Baghdādī, as edited and translated by R. A. Nieholson.²
That very fanciful account, which incorporates a number of
phrases drawn from the primitive version, presents the whole
incident as taking place in a dream, and with its wealth of
description and constant repetition recalls some tale from the
Arabian Nights rather than a mystic’s faltering attempt to give
expression to an ecstatic experience. In the version here
translated the dialogue, as in the three preceding anecdotes, is
very brief and confined to a single exchange; al-Bistāmi’s reply,
epitomizing the mystical annihilation of the subject-Object
relationship, is paralleled elsewhere in his semi-incoherent
utterances.³

(5) I saw the Lord of Glory in a dream, and I said: “How is the way to Thee?”
He said: “Leave thy self, and come!”
(6) I saw the Lord of Glory in a dream, and He said to me: “All men seek
of Me, except that thou seekest Me.”
(7) I saw the Lord of Glory in a dream, and He said: “What dost thou desire?”
I said: “I desire not to desire except what Thou desirest.” He said to me:
“I am thine, even as thou art Mine.”

³ See for instance Kitāb al-Nūr, p. 111.
These three anecdotes are in a class apart, since they report al-Bistāmi as admitting that on these occasions his experience was in sleep. It is curious that an exactly similar incident to that described in the second of this trio is told of a woman-attendant of the saint; she also saw the Lord of Glory in a dream "as if saying, 'It is as though all men seek other than Me, apart from Abū Yazīd, for he has sought Me'". This woman was presumably the same as the "royal lady" who claimed to have enjoyed a miraculous night-journey on her own account, in the course of which she saw God, as well as a remarkable inscription that read: "There is no god but God, Abū Yazīd is the Chosen of God." 3

This story goes back to Abū Mūsā al-Dabīlī, al-Bistāmi's visitor from Dabil in Armenia. 4 The same informant transmitted the next report. 5

(9) I divorced the world thrice and irrevocably; then I abandoned it, and proceeded alone to my Lord. Then I called unto Him, imploring His succour: "My God and Master, I pray to Thee as one to whom no longer anything remains except Thee." When He realized the truthfulness of the prayer from my heart, together with my despair—for He had been barring me from every gift I knew, until He should reach with His Selfhood the furthest extent of the understanding of those who had understanding, and then make me to understand how to seek Him without qualification, there being no god but God—then He bestowed gifts upon me for a time. Thereafter He expelled me from them into the arena of Unity; then He pastured me in the meadows of His Lordship and the prairie of His Essentiality, and said: "My darling, be thou My Omnipotence and My Tokens, and My Attribute in thy earth, and a light in thy universe, and a beacon in thy creation." Then He clothed me in the veils of His lights, and shrouded me with His coverings, and illumined me with the light of His Essence, and He said: "O thou My proof!" I said: "Thou art the proof of Thyself; there is no need for me in that."

1 Kitāb al-Nūr, pp. 64, 85, 96. 2 Ibid. p. 74.
5 Kitāb al-Nūr, p. 99.
This anecdote clearly belongs to the same family as the "Ascension" group; common features of phraseology prove this. At the same time the employment of technical terms distinguishes it sharply from the primitive forms of the narrative, and suggest that the original tradition has been modified by someone, perhaps al-Bistāmi himself but more likely a disciple, who wished to give it a semi-theological, semi-gnostic colouring. This tendency, which is not present in the fourteenth-century version that is ascribed not, as R. A. Nicholson supposed, to Abū Mūsā al-Dabīlī but to al-Bistāmi's nephew Abū Mūsā, shows itself most strikingly in the very long colloquy, unique in Moslem literature, which al-Sahlajī has preserved, significantly again on the authority of the Armenian visitor. As I have given elsewhere a complete translation of this remarkable narrative, I shall limit myself here to presenting a few extracts.

(10) I gazed upon my Lord with the eye of certainty, after He had turned me away from other than Him and had illumined me with His light; and He showed me marvellous things of His secret. He also showed me His Selfhood, and I gazed upon my identity with His Selfhood; and there passed away my light in His Light, my glory in His Glory, my power in His Power. . . . Then I gazed upon Him with the eye of truth, and said to Him: "Who is this?" He said: "This is neither I nor other than I. There is no god but I." Then He changed me out of my identity into His Selfhood. . . . Then I gazed upon Him with His Light, and knew Him through His Knowledge, and communed with Him with the tongue of His Grace, saying: "How fares it with me with Thee?" He said: "I am thine through thee; there is no god but thou." . . . Then He was silent towards me, and I knew that His silence was a sign of His good pleasure. Then He said: "Who made thee to know?" I said: "He that asks knows better than he who is asked. Thou art the Answerer, and Thou art the Answered. Thou art the Asker, and Thou art the Asked. There is no god but Thou." God's proof to me through Him thus ended. . . . Then He lit me with the light of the Essence, and I gazed upon Him with the eye of Divine Bounty, and He said: "Ask what thou wilt of My Bounty, and I will give it thee." I said: "Thou art more bountiful than Thy Bounty; Thou art more generous than Thy Generosity. I am content with Thee in Thee, and I have come in the end to Thee. . . . Thou art the Seeker, and Thou art the Sought. Desire is cut off from Thee, and asking is cut off from Thee through Thee." Then He did not answer me for a time; but presently He answered me, saying: "Truth it is that thou hast spoken, truth thou hast heard, truth thou hast seen, truth thou hast confirmed." I said: "Yes indeed; Thou art the Truth, and
through the Truth the Truth is seen. . . . Thou art the Truth, and the One who makes true. There is no god except Thee." He said : "Thou art naught but the Truth, and the truth thou hast spoken." I said : "Rather, Thou art the Truth, and Thy words are true, and the Truth through Thee is true. Thou art Thou; there is no god except Thee." Then He said to me : "What art thou?" I said to Him : "What art Thou?" He said : "I am the Truth." I said : "I am through Thee." He said : "If thou art through Me, then I am thou and thou art I." I said : "Delude me not with Thee instead of Thee. No indeed; Thou art Thou; there is no god except Thee." So when I had reached unto the Truth, and stood with the Truth through the Truth, He created for me the wing of glory and majesty; and I flew with my wing, yet I did not attain to the extremity of His Glory and Majesty. So I called upon Him, beseeching Him to succour me against Him, for I had no power against Him save in Him. Then He gazed upon me with the eye of munificence, and strengthened me with His Strength; and He adorned me, and crowned me with the crown of His Generosity upon my head. He made me unique in His Uniqueness, and one in His Oneness; and He attributed me with His Attributes, the which none shares with Him. Then He said : "Become single in My Singularity, and unique in My Uniqueness. Lift up thy head with the crown of My Generosity, and be glorious in My Glory, and majestic in My Majesty. Go forth with My Attributes unto My creatures, that I may see My Selfhood in thy selfhood. Whosoever sees thee, will see Me; and whosoever seeks thee, will seek Me, O thou My light in My earth, and My ornament in My heaven." . . . Then He gazed upon me with the eye of Power, and naughted me through His Being, and manifested in me through His Essence; and I existed through Him. The communing thus ended, and the word became one, and the All became one through the All. Then He said to me : "O thou!" And I said through Him : "O I!" Then He said to me : "Thou art the single." I said : "I am the single." He said to me : "Thou art thou." I said : "I am I. If I had been I in respect of I, I would not have said I; so since I was never I, be Thou Thou!" He said : "I am I." My speaking of His Identity was like in Unity to my speaking of His Selfhood. So my qualities became the Qualities of Lordship, and my tongue the Tongue of Unity, and my qualities were "He is He, there is no god but He."

We have good reason to be grateful for the preservation of this singular document, surely the most perfect expression imaginable of the sublime experience of what the Sufis call *fana*, the passing away of the mystic's human individuality in union with God. We do not meet the like of this ecstatic colloquy elsewhere; the nearest approach to it—and how far away from the original the imitation seems—occurs in the records of that lonely and mysterious anchorite of Iraq, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī. The unexpected recovery of an autograph manuscript of a previously unrecorded section of his writings
has confirmed the statement by his commentator ‘Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī that the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*—and the *Kitāb al-Muḥātdabāt*—as hitherto known to us had been compiled as such not by al-Niffārī himself but by a later editor. The original arrangement, as testified at least by the author’s transcript dated 344 (955-6), discloses a series of mixed passages in prose and verse, each section being introduced by the Koranic formula *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*. The fragment contains three sections in the manner of the *Mawāqif* and two similar to the *Muḥātdabāt*, together with some petitions and other material. The *Mawāqif* and *Muḥātdabāt* purport to be communications received by al-Niffārī direct from God, and the use of the *basmala* inevitably challenges comparison with the Koran; it was presumably for this reason that their author was described by al-Dhahabī as “the man of the *Mawāqif* and the pretensions and the heterodoxy”.

The substance of the “revelations” does little to encourage the belief that the Iraqi mystic was setting down more than the contents of his conscious, or perhaps unconscious mind, for their vocabulary is highly technical and abounds in personal idiosyncrasies. The discourse is almost entirely one-sided—only this time it is the Creator and not the creature who is supposed to be speaking—and the form of colloquy occurs but rarely; where it does occur, it seems somewhat artificial and far less impressive than that exhibited in al-Bīstāmī’s utterances. To clarify the record, al-Niffārī’s pretended conversations with God are here isolated from the body of his writings.

(1) He stayed me in His Reality. . . . And I saw the sparklings as darknesses, and the waters as a stony rock. . . . And I saw that which never changes; and He gave me a mutable condition, and I saw everything that was ever created. . . . And the vision was divided into two parts, ocular and mental; and lo, the whole of it, neither moving nor making utterance. And He said to me, “How didst thou see it before the vision of My reality?” And I said: “Moving and making utterance.” And He said to me: “Know the difference, that thou mayest not be lost.” And He made me to turn away from His reality, and I saw nothing.

This brief exchange occurs in *Mauqif* 38, which is stated by the scribe of the old Gotha manuscript to have been composed in the year 352 (963-4); two other copies confirm his assertion.

(2) He stayed me. . . . And He unveiled to me the face of every living thing, and I saw it attaching itself to His face. . . . And He said to me: "Look upon My face." And I looked; and He said: "There is naught beside Me." And I said: "There is naught beside Thee." And He said to me: "Look upon thy face." And I looked; and He said: "There is naught beside thee." And I said: "There is naught beside me." And He said: "Depart, for thou art the learned."

There can be no doubt that this extract from *Mauqif* 41 is closely modelled upon a scene from al-Bistami's "Ascension."

(3) He stayed me. . . . And I saw the sun and the moon, the stars, and all the lights. . . . He said to me: "Who am I?" And the sun and the moon were darkened, and the stars fell from the sky, and the lights grew pale, and darkness covered everything save Him. And everything spoke, and said: "God is most great." And everything came to me, bearing in its hand a lance. And He said to me: "Flee!" And I said: "Whither shall I flee?" And He said: "Fall into the darkness." And I fell into the darkness, and beheld myself.

This astonishing passage, obviously inspired by the Koranic descriptions of the Last Day, comes from *Mauqif* 44.

(4) He stayed me in Raiment. . . . And He said to me: "Say unto them, 'I have returned unto you.'" So I said: "He stayed me, and before I should return I had no speech. For He showed me Unity, whereby I knew neither passing-away nor continuance; and He caused me to hear Unity, and I had no knowledge of the hearing of it. And after this, He restored me to what I was before; and in the restoring, I saw a sheet, and I will read it to you."

This section from *Mauqif* 48 is of course not an example of colloquy, but has been quoted to show al-Niffari's explanation of how his "revelations" came to him. An alternative account is given in *Mauqif* 58.

(5) He stayed me in His Vision. . . . And He said to me: "Write down the manner of My Self-revelation to thee by means of the gnosis of revealed certainty, and write down how I caused thee to witness and how thou didst witness, that it may be a recollection to thee, and a stablising for thy heart." So I wrote down with the tongue of what He caused me to witness, that it might be a recollection to me, and to whomsoever my Lord revealed Himself unto among His friends, whom He desired to stablish in His gnosis, not desiring any temptation to come upon their hearts.

1 *Kitāb al-Nūr*, p. 140.  
2 Cf. Koran lxxxi.  
The phrase "and a stablishing for thy heart" is surely an echo of Koran xxv. 34:

The unbelievers say, "Why has the Koran not been sent down upon him all at once?"

Even so, that We may stablish thy heart thereby, and We have chanted it very distinctly.

The next three passages all occur in Mauqif 67, which is admittedly a preview of the Day of Judgement.

(6) And He said to me: "What is the Fire?" I answered: "One of the lights of onslaught." He said: "What is onslaught?" I answered: "One of the qualities of might." He said: "What is might?" I answered: "One of the qualities of majesty." He said: "What is majesty?" I answered: "One of the qualities of greatness." He said: "What is greatness?" I answered: "One of the qualities of authority." He said: "What is authority?" I answered: "One of the qualities of power." He said: "What is power?" I answered: "One of the qualities of essence." He said: "What is essence?" I answered: "Thyself, O God; there is no god beside Thee." He said: "Thou hast spoken the truth." I answered: "It is Thou that didst make me to speak." He said: "That thou mayest see My clear evidence."

(7) And He said to me: "What is Paradise?" I answered: "One of the qualities of blessing." He said: "What is blessing?" I answered: "One of the qualities of kindliness." He said: "What is kindliness?" I answered: "One of the qualities of generosity." He said: "What is generosity?" I answered: "One of the qualities of sympathy." He said: "What is sympathy?" I answered: "One of the qualities of love." He said: "What is love?" I answered: "One of the qualities of friendship." He said: "What is friendship?" I answered: "One of the qualities of approval." He said: "What is approval?" I answered: "One of the qualities of election." He said: "What is election?" I answered: "One of the qualities of regard." He said: "What is regard?" I answered: "One of the qualities of essence." He said: "What is essence?" I answered: "Thyself, O God." He said: "Thou hast spoken the truth." I answered: "It is Thou that didst make me to speak." He said: "That thou mayest see My kindness."

(8) And He said to me: "Who are the people of the Fire?" I answered: "The people of the letter manifest." He said: "Who are the people of Paradise?" I answered: "The people of the letter concealed." He said to me: "What is the letter manifest?" I answered: "Theory that guides not unto practice." He said: "What is the letter concealed?" I answered: "Theory that guides to reality." He said to me: "What is practice?" I answered: "Sincerity." He said to me: "What is reality?" I answered: "That whereby Thou makest Thyself known." He said to me: "What is sincerity?" I answered: "To Thy face." He said: "What is self-revelation?" I answered: "What thou castest into the hearts of Thy saints."

1 See my edition, p. 111.
It is difficult to accept these catechisms as examples of genuinely ecstatic colloquy; their artificiality is all too apparent. Nevertheless in *Mauqif* 72 al-Niffari is told: "When thou abidest in this station, I say to thee, 'Speak', and thou speakest; and that which thou speakest is through My speaking." That is a sufficiently clear commentary on the famous Tradition, so often quoted by Sufi writers, according to which God said: "In no way does My servant so draw nigh Me as when performing those duties which I have imposed on him; and My servant continues to draw near to Me through works of supererogation, until I love him. And when I love him, I am his ear, so that he hears by Me, and his eye, so that he sees by Me, and his tongue, so that he speaks by Me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me."  

(9) He stayed me in Resignation, and said to me: "It is My religion; desire therefore nothing other than it, for (other) I will not accept." And He said to me: "It is this, that thou shouldst resign to Me that which I decree for thee, and that which I decree against thee." I said: "How shall I resign to Thee?" He answered: "Do not oppose Me with thy opinion, and do not seek any guide for My right over thee of thyself; for thy self will never guide thee to My right, nor will it embrace My right in obedience." I said: "How shall I not oppose Thee?" He answered: "Thou wilt follow, and not invent." I said: "How shall I not seek any guide for Thy right of myself?" He answered: "When I say to thee, 'This is thine,' thou wilt say, 'This is mine,' and when I say to thee, 'This is Mine,' thou wilt say, 'This is Thine.' Then will My command be thy addresser, and will have a right over thee; it will guide thee, and thou wilt seek guidance of it unto it, and by means of it attain to it." I said: "How shall I follow?" He answered: "Thou wilt hear My word and tread My way." I said: "How shall I not invent?" He answered: "Thou wilt not hear thy word nor tread thy way." I said: "What is Thy word?" He answered: "My doctrine." I said: "Where is Thy way?" He answered: "My ordinances." I said: "What is my word?" He answered: "Thy bewilderment." I said: "What is my way?" He answered: "Following thy own judgement." I said: "What is following my own judgement?" He answered: "Thy analogy." I said: "What is my analogy?" He answered: "Thy incapacity in thy theology." I said: "How should I lack capacity in my theology?" He answered: "I have made trial of thee in everything that proceeds from Me to thee, by means of something that proceeds from thee to Me. I have tried thee in My theology by means of thy theology, that I might see whether thou followest thy theology or Mine; and I have tried thee in My ordinance by means of thy ordinance, that I might see whether thou judgest by My ordinance or thine." I said: "How should

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1 See my *Sufism*, p. 27, with references.
I follow my theology, or how should I act according to my ordinance?" He answered: "Thou departest from the ordinance concerning My theology, to the ordinance concerning thine." I said: "How do I depart from the ordinance concerning Thy theology, to the ordinance concerning mine?" He answered: "Thou makest lawful by thy doctrine what I have made unlawful by Mine, and thou makest unlawful by thy doctrine what I have made lawful by Mine; and thou claimest that that is by My leave, and that that proceeds from My command." I said: "How do I make claim of Thee?" He answered: "Thou comest with an act which I have never commanded thee, and makest judgement for it by My ordinance concerning an act which I did command thee; and thou comest with a word which I have never commanded thee, and makest judgement for it by My ordinance concerning a word which I did command thee." I said: "I will not come with an act which Thou hast not commanded me, and I will not come with a word which Thou hast not commanded me." He said: "If thou comest with it as I have commanded thee, it is My word and My act; and by My word and My act falls My ordinance. But if thou comest with it as I did not command thee, then it is thy word and thy act; and by thy word and thy act falls not My ordinance, nor do My religion and My commandments thereby live." And He said to me: "If thou equatest My word and thy word, or if thou equatest My ordinance and thy ordinance, thou hast made thyself equal with Me." I said: "There is no ordinance, save as belonging to Thy word and Thy act." He said: "Thou hast understood." I said: "I have understood." He said: "Incline not." I said: "I will not incline." He said: "Whoso has understood My command, he has truly understood; but whoso understands the opinion of himself, he has not understood."

That is Mauqif 76 in its entirety; and it seems inconceivable that this long discussion of the legal principle of qiyaṣ (analogy) should have formed the subject of an authentic Divine colloquy. The argument floods over into Mauqif 77, which is equally artificial.

(10) He stayed me in Protection, and said to me: "Resign thyself to Me, and depart. If thou departest not, thou opposest; and if thou opposest, thou becomest contrary." And He said to me: "Thou knowest how to resign thyself to Me and not to intermediaries." I said: "What are intermediaries?" He answered: "Science, and every object of science." And He said to me: "Thou knowest how to resign thyself to Me and not to intermediaries." I said: "How?" He answered: "Thou resignest to Me with thy heart, and to intermediaries with thy body."

"In this way sound instruction has come down through God's revelation in times of confusion, revelation contrary to the forms of dogmatic beliefs, though preserving the dogmatic beliefs themselves." So Ibn 'Arabi evaluated the contents of al-Niffari's

1 See A. J. Wensinck in Encyclopaedia of Islam, ii. 1051-2.
writings,¹ which in certain places do not hesitate to parody the Koranic formula "Say!". Not only did he approve of and admire the work of the Iraqi mystic, but he paid it the sincere compliment of faithful imitation.

The writings of the Murcian are so extremely voluminous, and so many of his scattered treatises have yet to be published that it is impossible in our present state of knowledge to attempt anything approaching a comprehensive survey. Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabî’s method, or rather his lack of method, is indeed remarkable; the relevant material for the discussion of any aspect of his “system” often enough lies buried in a mass of unrelated matter. Thus, for instance, in the middle of a book entitled Kitâb al-Kutub, which purports to be a collection of letters written to various friends, we suddenly light upon a Mauqif in the true manner of al-Nîsîfî, complete even with a fragment of colloquy.² But Ibn ‘Arabî, who could not allow any predecessor to have the advantage of him, and claimed to have conversed in the spirit with the greatest Sufis of old,³ inevitably experienced an “Ascension” on his own account and wrote down the Divine communications received on that occasion in his al-Isrâ' ilâ 'l-maqâm al-asrâ'. This book, completed at Fez in the year 594 (1198),⁴ ostensibly describes a miraculous vision vouchsafed to the author when “he set forth from the land of Andalusia, intending to come to Jerusalem, having taken Islam for a steed, mortification for a rolling plain and trust-in-God for provision”.⁵ He was accompanied on his celestial ascent, not by Gabriel, but by the Prophet Mohammed; during his progress through the seven heavens he met and talked with Adam, Jesus, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses and Abraham. After further wonderful adventures the pilgrim reached the near presence of God and was privileged to enjoy a prolonged Divine colloquy. Here convention attains its natural conclusion; the entire narrative proves of course to be an elaborate allegory enabling Ibn ‘Arabî to set out once more in yet another novel guise his characteristic theosophy.

³ See his Kitâb al-Tajalliyât, pp. 31-8. ⁴ See the author’s colophon, p. 92. ⁵ Op. cit. p. 3.
Even less acceptable are the "revelations" contained in the book called al-Mawāqif al-ilāhiya. The author of this poor plagiarism, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Muḥammad known as Ibn Qādīb al-Bān, was born at Hama in 971 (1563-4) of a family which traced its descent from the caliph ‘Alī, and died at Aleppo c. 1040 (1630). He is stated to have written more than forty books, including al-Futūḥat al-Madaniya in emulation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s al-Futūḥat al-Makkīya, as well as much poetry, not forgetting an imitation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Naẓm al-sulūk; of all that misdirected productivity only the parody of al-Niffarī seems to have survived. Ibn Qādīb al-Bān also pretends to have "ascended"; in his account of the affair he obviously draws upon the fourteenth-century legend of al-Bistāmī’s heavenly journey, going so far as to cite names of angels invented after the identical pattern—whereas the Persian mystic is represented as meeting Nayā’il in the fourth heaven and Baryā’il in the seventh, the Syrian counterfeiter encounters Balsā’il in the sixth and Rūḥā’il in the seventh. We have travelled a long way from Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī in the ninth century to Ibn Qādīb al-Bān in the seventeenth; what began as a high adventure into the loftiest ranges of spiritual ecstasy ends as a barefaced and somewhat puerile imposture.