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Taufik Abdullah

REFLECTIONS ON THE MYSTICISM
OF SHAMS AL-DĪN AL-SAMATRA'Ī (1550?–1630)

A.H. Johns

SYMBOLIC AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION
OVER HUMANITARIAN EMBLEMS:
THE RED CRESCENT IN ISLAMIZING INDONESIA

Hilman Latief

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A.H. Johns

Reflections on the Mysticism of Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭra'ī (1550?–1630)

Abstrak: *Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭra'ī (w. 1630) adalah satu dari empat tokoh penting dalam kehidupan Islam di Aceh antara 1500-1700. Tiga lainnya adalah Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī (w. 1590?), Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (w. 1658), dan 'Abd al-Ra'ūf ibn 'Alī al-Jāwī al-Faṣṣūrī (1615-93). Ketiganya memiliki tempat istimewa dalam sastra Melayu dan sejarah Islam. Ḥamzah adalah seorang pujangga besar dan pemikir agama. Al-Rānīrī adalah ulama asal Gujarat yang produktif menulis tentang sejarah dan ilmu-ilmu Islam. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf adalah orang asli Aceh yang produktif menulis karya-karya tentang hukum, sufisme, dan tafsir Qur'an. Seperti ketiganya, Shams al-Dīn juga meninggalkan banyak tulisan dalam bahasa Melayu. Bahkan ia dikenal sebagai orang Sumatera pertama yang menulis karya dalam bahasa Arab.*

Meski demikian, masih sedikit penelitian yang dilakukan atas karya Shams al-Dīn. Kontribusi yang paling penting terkait studi atas teks Shams al-Dīn adalah karya Drewes dan Brakel yang berisi komentar Shams al-Dīn atas sejumlah puisi Ḥamzah. Sementara penelitian dasar paling awal adalah disertasi C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze pada 1945, yang di antaranya berisi daftar manuskrip dalam bahasa Arab dan Melayu yang dikaitkan dengan Shams al-Dīn yang berhasil diketahui ketika dia melakukan penelitiannya.

Pemikiran Shams al-Dīn mengenai tasawuf banyak dipengaruhi oleh karya Muḥammad ibn Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānfūrī (w. 1620) yang berjudul al-Tuḥfah al-mursalāh ilā rūḥ al-nabī. Al-Burhānfūrī berasal dari anak benua India dan hidup hampir semasa dengan Shams al-Dīn. Karya ini pertama kali populer di kalangan sarjana sufi asal Gujarat di Madinah yang kemudian dibawa ke Aceh. Karya ini menjadi salah satu karya tasawuf filosofis yang

otoritatif. *Al-Rānirī* dan *‘Abd al-Ra’ūf* juga merujuk kepada karya itu dalam menuliskan karya-karyanya.

Artikel ini berupaya menumbuhkan kembali minat dan apresiasi terhadap *Shams al-Dīn* sebagai seorang guru dengan penguasaan bahasa Arab yang luar biasa, seorang yang memiliki kecintaan untuk belajar dan hasrat kepada Tuhan. Artikel ini memberi perhatian pada beberapa aspek dari karyanya yang berjudul *Jawhar al-ḥaqā’iq* yang menggambarkan kualitas, kehalusan, dan kapasitas karya tersebut, serta menunjukkan kekhasan atas gaya dan ekspresi *Shams al-Dīn*. Upaya tersebut dilakukan dengan memperlihatkan dedikasi dan hasrat yang mendorong karyanya itu, kualitas kepribadian, pikiran, dan pengabdianannya yang membuatnya layak untuk menduduki posisi *Shaykh al-Islām* selama masa pemerintahan tiga sultan—*‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ri’āyat Shāh*, *‘Alī Ri’āyat Shāh*, dan *Iskandar Muda*. Bahkan, *Iskandar Muda* sendiri kemudian menjadi muridnya.

Kitab *Jawhar* memperlihatkan esensi pemikiran dan spiritualitas *Shams al-Dīn*, dan merupakan karya yang berhasil mencapai posisi istimewa dalam pemikiran Islam di semenanjung Asia Tenggara. Kitab *Jawhar* berisi rasa hormat dan kagum pada Kesatuan Makhhluk, dan memperlihatkan bahwa *Shams al-Dīn* memiliki perhatian mendalam terhadap murid-murid yang dia sebut sebagai teman perjalanan. Kitab itu menyuntikkan suatu kesegaran dan kekuatan terhadap kalimat *tawḥīd*, serta menawarkan pengetahuan dan pengalaman mengenal Tuhan melalui Sifat-sifat dan Nama-nama-Nya yang membawa para penyembah-Nya ke penghayatan yang lebih jauh daripada sekedar mengucap *lā ilāha illā Allāh*— semata.

Jawhar secara spiritual lebih kompleks dibanding *al-Tuḥfah*. Jika *al-Tuḥfah* diumpamakan sebuah koper, maka *Shams al-Dīn* melalui *Jawhar* telah berhasil mengurai dan menulis komentar yang tidak sebatas menjelaskan, tetapi lebih dari itu mengelaborasi dan mengembangkan konsep-konsep tasawuf filosofis di dalamnya.

A.H. Johns

Reflections on the Mysticism
of Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭra'ī (1550?-1630)

الخلاصة: كان شمس الدين السومطري (١٦٣٠ م) أحدَ أربعة رجال المشتهرة المهمة في التاريخ الإسلامية المتطور في آشيه (Aceh) وذلك في القرنين الماضين بين ١٥٠٠ و ١٧٠٠ م. والثلاثة الأخرى فهم حمزة الفنصوري (١٥٩٠؟) ونور الدين الرانيري (١٦٥٨ م) وعبد الرؤوف ابن علي الجاوي الفنصوري (١٦١٥-١٦٩٣ م). وكان لهؤلاء الأربعة منزلة خاصة عالية في الآداب الملاوية والتاريخ الإسلامية. أما حمزة كان شاعرا صوفيا ومفكرا إسلاميا. وأما الرانيري فهو عالم من الهند وله يد طولى في كتابة التاريخ والعلوم الإسلامية. وأما عبد الرؤوف فهو من آشيه وله تأليفات متنوعة في الأحكام الإسلامية والتصوف وتفسير القرآن. وأما شمس الدين فألف كثيرا باللغة الملاوية، لكنه أيضا يعتبر أول مؤلف من سومطرة الذى ألف باللغة العربية.

ومع ذلك، قد قل من اهتم بالبحوث على ما ألفه شمس الدين. وقد بذل بعض الباحثين إلى البحث عن مؤلفات شمس الدين الغربيون مثل دريويس (Drewes) وبراكيل (Brakel)، وقد قدم شرحا لشمس الدين على أشعار حمزة الفنصوري. وأما قبلهما قد ابتدأ ش.أ.أ. فان نيونيهويز (C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze) في سنة ١٩٤٥. فنقل في بحثه عن جدول المخطوطات المنسوبة إلى شمس الدين، سواء عربية كانت أو ملاوية، وذلك حسب ما وجدته أثناء البحث.

وقد تأثر شمس الدين بكتاب *التحفة المرسلّة إلى روح النبي* لمحمد بن فضل الله البرهانفوري (١٦٢٠ م). وكان البرهانفوري أحد علماء الهند وعاش في وقت متقارب بشمس الدين. هذا الكتاب مشتهر عند الصوفيين من الهند في المدينة ثم حمله الحجاج إلى آشيه. ويعتبر هذا الكتاب متضمنا على التصوف الفلسفي. وذلك يرى من استناد الرانيري وعبد الرؤوف إليه في تأليفاتهما.

هذا البحث يبحث على تحريض الحماسة والتقدير الأجد على شمس الدين من كونه معلما متبحرا في اللغة العربية، وله نشاط في التعلم والشوق العميق إلى الله. وهذا البحث ملاحظ على بعض النواحي من تأليفاته التي تعبر عن حسن تأليفه ولطفه ونظريته خاصة في كتاب *جوهر الحقائق*. وذلك يرى من خدمته وإرادته في تأليف هذا الكتاب حتى أصبح نفسه لائقا أن يقوم في منزلة شيخ الإسلام في سلطة ثلاث سلاطين - فهم علاء الدين رعاية شاة وعلى رعاية شاة واسكاندار مودا (Iskandar Muda). بل صار السلطان اسكاندار مودا مريدا له.

كتاب *جوهر الحقائق* مكشف على ماهية الفكر والتصوف لشمس الدين، وارتقى هذا الكتاب إلى أن يكون له منزلة خاصة معترفة في الأفكار الإسلامية المنتشرة في الأرخيبيل. ويتضمن هذا الكتاب على بيان نظرية وحدة الخلق وظهر فيه أن لشمس الدين اهتماما كبيرا على مريديه الذين سماهم بالسالكين. ويتميز هذا الكتاب بحقن العذبة والقوة في إدراك التوحيد، وقدم فيه معرفة مكتشفة إلى الله وتجربة ممتعة إليه من طريق صفاته وأسمائه ليصل السالكون إلى فهم معاني لفظ لا إله إلا الله متجاوزا من لحن اللسان فحسب.

وأمكن أن يقال أن كتاب *جوهر الحقائق* أغنى علما وعبارة من كتاب *التحفة المرسلّة*. ولو شئنا نقول أن كتاب *تحفة* مثل الحقيقية، فشمس الدين هو الذي فتحه وشرحه في جوهر، ولا ينحصر فيه بشرح على معانيه اللفظي لكنه أتى ببيان على المعلومة المهمة التي تتعلق بنظرية التصوف الفلسفي.

Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭra'ī¹ (d. 1630) is one of four names that inevitably appear in any account of Islamic life and learning in Aceh between 1500–1700. The others are Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī (d. 1590?²), Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1658) and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf ibn 'Alī al-Jāwī al-Faṣṣūrī, (1615–93). All three have a distinguished place in Malay literary and religious history. Ḥamzah was, by any standards, a great poet and religious thinker. Al-Rānīrī, a foreign *'ālim* of Gujarati origin, was something of an interloper, who spent only a few years in Aceh at the court of Sultan Iskandar Thānī (r. 1637–41). After his death and the succession of his widow to the throne as Sultanah Ṣafiyat al-Dīn Tāj al-'Ālam (r. 1641–75), he abruptly returned to India.³ He was a prolific author on history, and the religious disciplines.

'Abd al-Ra'ūf was a native Acehnese who left Aceh to study in the holy land at Medina, and other centres of learning in 1641, and returned in 1661 to accept the court patronage of the Sultanah and her successors until his death in 1693. He was so renowned for his piety that in popular belief he is revered as the founder of Islam in Aceh, and his grave is a place of pilgrimage. He was a prolific polymath, writing on jurisprudence, the devotional practice of *dhikr*, Sufi theosophy, and Qur'an exegesis. He has the distinction that one of his works, *Tarjumān al-mustafid* (The explanation of what brings great benefit) a rendering in Malay of a standard work of Qur'anic exegesis, the *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* (the Tafsīr of the two Jalāls),⁴ is the earliest surviving work to include a full rendering of the Qur'an. It is moreover still reprinted⁵ and used in *pesantren* and *madrasah* today.

All four wrote following the Ibn 'Arabī school of *wujūdīyah* mysticism, a theosophy based on the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* -- the unity of being. Al-Rānīrī, however, despite his scholarly status, was a venomous polemicist. He denounced Ḥamzah and Shams al-Dīn as unbelievers, alleging that in their writings they expressed their ideas in a way that contaminated the transcendence of the divine unity with the plurality of creation. For many years western scholars, and anti-*tarekat* trends in the Islamic Reformist movement, have accepted his views with little question, and the literature generally refers to these two authors as exponents of a heterodox pantheistic mysticism.⁶

'Abd al-Ra'ūf, though writing in the same Ibn 'Arabī tradition, did not become prominent as a religious teacher until long after al-Rānīrī had left the scene. This and the aura of his holiness among the people

of Aceh assured him protection from similar accusations. Thus the literature that condemns Ḥamzah and Shams al-Dīn as heterodox, refers to him (and al-Rānīrī) as “orthodox” mystics.⁷

The reputation of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī has been rehabilitated in recent years. This is due largely through the work of Sayyid Naquib al-Attas,⁸ expounding his teaching, and Drewes and Brakel’s edition of his poems have made it possible for scholars to gain both an insight into his poetic genius and the richness and authenticity of his spiritual wisdom. That of Shams al-Dīn however awaits a similar rehabilitation. Notwithstanding he was Shaykh al-Islām at the Acehnese court from around 1588 until his death in 1630 and confidant, senior court official, foreign minister and spiritual guide to three Sultans, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ri‘āyat Shāh (r.1588–1604), ‘Alī Ri‘āyat Shāh (r. 1604–7) and Iskandar Muda (r.1607–36). Like the other three, he has left a significant corpus of writings in Malay. More important, he is also the earliest Sumatran known to have written a major work in Arabic. Nevertheless his work has attracted little research interest. The most recent significant contribution to Shams al-Dīn text studies is in Drewes and Brakel’s *The Poems of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī* (1986) which includes four commentaries attributed to him on a number of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī’s poems.⁹ For basic research prior to this, one has to go back to 1945, to C. A. O. van Nieuwenhuijze’s dissertation, which established a place for him on the academic map of Islamic studies in the region, but also gave added authority to al-Rānīrī’s condemnation of him as an exponent of a heterodox pantheistic mysticism.¹⁰

Van Nieuwenhuijze’s dissertation gives an account of or lists virtually every manuscript in Arabic or Malay associated with Shams al-Dīn known at the time he was doing his research. It provides a body of information about his activities at the Acehnese court, and presents an analysis of the theosophy of divine self-revelation that he elaborated. It includes, in an appendix, editions of two of his Arabic works, *Jawhar al-ḥaqā’iq* (The Essence of Realities), and a shorter treatise not relevant to this essay. It affords material to support further research into Shams al-Dīn’s standing as a mystic, teacher and spiritual guide, who played a major role in the continuing re-fecundation and vernacularisation of Islam in what is now Indonesia, and his role as a link in the network of scholarly and religious interchange between Aceh, South Asia, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Little is known of his background. He appears, without introduction, as Shaykh al-Islām at the court of 'Alā' al-Dīn Ri'āyat Shāh.¹¹ Under the three rulers he served, Aceh attracted foreign scholars from as far afield as Mecca, Egypt, Syria and the Gujarat, among them, Shaykh Abū al-Khayr Ibn Shaykh Ibn Ḥajar, son of the great jurist Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (1504–67).¹² There is no record of any interaction between him and these visitors during their stay in Aceh. From the work of Drewes and Brakel already referred to, however, it is clear that he knew the mystical verse of his fellow Acehnese Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī, although there is no evidence that they ever met.

Of the three sultans he served, he was closest to Iskandar Muda (r.1607–36). He was the Sultan's *murshid* (mystical guide), and he inducted him into a *tarekat* (sufi order). The *Adat Atjeh* includes vivid accounts of the celebration of the great festivals of the Islamic calendar at the court, telling how Shams al-Dīn accompanied the Sultan in procession from the palace to the mosque with an array of elephants, dozens of Abyssinian guards armed with swords and lances and a riotous musical accompaniment of wind instruments, drums and gongs. He prayed beside the Sultan in the mosque, and at the festival of the sacrifice, after the sultan had ceremonially put a knife to the throat of the sacrificial animal, took the knife himself and completed the slaughter.¹³

In his historical work *Bustān al-salātīn*, al-Rānīrī briefly records the death of Shams al-Dīn as occurring “on the eve of Monday [i.e. Sunday evening], 12 Rajab of the *Hijrah* year 1036 [24 February 1630]” and that “he was learned in the Islamic disciplines, well-known for his standing in Sufism, and author of a number of works on religious topics”,¹⁴ but gives no information as to his date of birth, teachers under whom he had studied, travels, or any *silsilah* (spiritual lineage).

Van Nieuwenhuijze observes this “isolated” aspect of Shams al-Dīn,¹⁵ noting however in passing that in the manuscript material in which work of Shams al-Dīn is to be found, are references to Muḥammad b. Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānfūrī (d.1620), a near contemporary of him, from the Indian sub-continent, and to a work of al-Burhānfūrī written around 1690,¹⁶ *al-Tuhfah al-mursalāh ilā rūḥ al-nabī* (The Gift addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet), subsequently referred to as the *Tuhfah*.¹⁷

From this remote point in time, it appears curious that nowhere does Van Nieuwenhuijze refer to any specific manuscript of the *Tuhfah*,

although there are a number extant. Apparently he did not realize that the structure of Shams al-Dīn's theosophy of seven grades of being, is presented in it. Moreover, nowhere does he engage with any single work of Shams al-Dīn as a text in its own right, not even *Jawhar al-ḥaqā'iq* (The Essence of Realities, subsequently referred to as the *Jawhar*), one of the Arabic works he edited. It is even more curious that he shows no awareness of the quality of this work, or realizes that it is an exquisitely organized treatise that merits recognition in its own right as a minor classic of the Sufi tradition.

The *Tuḥfah* is important for a number of reasons, not least that it reduces the teeming cornucopia of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical exuberance to a convenient portmanteau format of seven grades of being. Of these seven grades of being, three are aspects of God within Himself, and four present the "exterior" spiritual and material individuations generated within the divine mind that lead to the manifestation of the phenomenal world. The three "internal" grades are *aḥadiyyah*, the level of non-individuation — God as unknowable —; *waḥdah*, that of the hidden realities, also referred to as predispositions in the Essence, and the light of Muḥammad; *wāḥidiyyah*, the level of individuation of the content of the divine knowledge. The four "exterior" grades are *ālam al-arwāḥ* (the world of spirits), *ālam al-mithāl* (the world of ideas), *ālam al-ajsām* (the world of bodies), and *ālam al-insān al-kāmil* (the world of the perfect man) the end-point of manifestation in the phenomenal world, and point of return to its origin in the divine mind. Having given a succinct definition and analysis of the dynamics of each grade of manifestation, the work concludes with an account of four levels of spiritual ascent achievable by the ritual recitation of the sentence of *tawḥīd*, "There is no god but God — *lā ilāha illā Allāh*." Although brief, it offers ample scope for expansion.

It soon became a well-known, and even authoritative exposition of Sufi theosophy. It is likely that it first became popular among a circle of Sufi scholars of Gujarati provenance in Medina, where a group of Acehese scholars about to make the pilgrimage to Mecca became acquainted with it. Subsequently, they visited Aceh, met Shams al-Dīn¹⁸ and may well have introduced it to him. He may then have played an early role in its diffusion throughout the island archipelago. It soon established itself as one of the most important single texts in the development of Sufi devotion and practice. al-Rānīrī and 'Abd al-

Ra'ūf referred to it in their writings, and it became well known in Java as the source of *martabat pitu* (seven grades mysticism) in Javanese mystical writings from the seventeenth century on. It remains current in Sufi teaching in other regions of Indonesia and Malaysia. Its popularity was not limited to the Malay world. The Medinan scholar Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d.1690)¹⁹ — prompted by requests from *Jāwī* students in Medina over a number of years — wrote an extensive commentary on it, and likewise the Syrian 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī (d. 1731).²⁰ Its teaching is still presented as a theosophical norm in publications of the Naqshabandīyah order today, and it remains popular in the Sufi devotion in the Indian sub-continent²¹ and the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asia.

The *Jawhar* expresses the essence of Shams al-Dīn's thought and spirituality, and is a high point among the achievements of Islamic thought in insular and peninsular Southeast Asia. The manuscripts on which Van Nieuwenhuijze's edition is based are relatively late (circa eighteenth century). Though its value is enhanced by the inclusion of marginal glosses on the manuscripts in both Arabic and Malay as footnotes, the edition is by no means perfect, and further work on the text is probably not possible without direct reference to the manuscripts on which it is based.

This essay is an attempt to stimulate a renewed interest and appreciation of Shams al-Dīn as a teacher with a remarkable mastery of Arabic, a man infused with the love of learning and the desire for God. It draws attention to some aspects of the work that illustrate the quality, subtlety and insight of this treatise, and the distinctiveness of his style and expression. In doing so, it attempts to communicate a sense of the dedication and passion that drives his writing, and the qualities of personality, mind and religious dedication that qualified him to hold the position of Shaykh al-Islām during the reign of three sultans, and gained Iskandar Muda himself as his student.

The *Jawhar* is redolent with awe and wonder at the Unity of Being, and shows Shams al-Dīn driven by a concern for the pupil he addresses as a companion on the journey. It infuses an immediacy and power to the declaration of *tawhīd*, the sentence of divine unicity, and offers a knowledge and experience of God through his attributes and names that takes the devotee far beyond the mere physical utterance of the Arabic words *lā ilāha illā Allāh* — “There is no god but

God.”

The work opens with a two part invocation in rhymed prose. The first is a doxology:

In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate. Praise be to God who in His knowledge first engendered (*anshā'a*) our essences (*a'yānanā*), and secondly fashioned (*khalāqa*)²² our spirits (*arwāḥanā*) after fashioning (*khalq*) the spirit of our Prophet (*rūḥ nabīyinā*), and finally placed in the world of elements our immaterial forms (*ashḥabanā*), and on it brought into being our [physical] human form (*insānanā*).

Blessing and peace — our Messenger (*rasūlunā*) has a unique claim to them both — along with his household (*ālubū*) and companions (*ṣaḥḥubū*) — those who are our models, and their followers (*atbā'uhum*) — those who are our leaders, and after them, those who are our brethren (*ikhwānūnā*).

We pray God that He provide us what we need to attain to Him, and by this prayer/aspiration what is requested of Him for us, and that out of His goodness He will overlook the occasions when our feet have slipped [on the path to Him] and our pens have erred [in writing of it].²³

This is the work of Shams al-Dīn b. Abī 'Abd Allāh, one acknowledging his sinfulness before the God of whom he asks guidance and forgiveness, to whom he has recourse, of whom he asks help.²⁴

Though conventional in structure, it is a doxology with a difference. Parentheses and inversions give it an individual articulation and rhythm. More significantly, it introduces the key terms and concepts of the monistic theosophy to be expounded in the work with remarkable economy of language. God's work of "creation" is at five levels: that of our essences (*a'yānanā*), that of the spirit of the prophet (*rūḥ nabīyinā*), of our spirits (*arwāḥanā*), our (immaterial) forms (*ashḥabanā*), and our physical forms (*insānanā*). Further, the critical interventions that manifest God's design in time and history are five, indicated by the Arabic words in bold in the translation. They are the Messenger, his household, his companions, his followers (i.e. the second generation of Muslims), and our brethren (i.e. the spiritual brotherhoods to which Shams al-Dīn is heir, and among whom he belongs). Finally, the bases on which Shams al-Dīn founds his teaching, are five: The *Qur'ān*, *Ḥadīth qudsī*, *Ḥadīth*, (non-Qur'anic divine utterances to the Prophet), *Aṭhar* (utterances of the Companions) and the sayings of the mystics.

The second part of the invocation is addressed to the recipient of the work, a brother, his companion on the way. Shams al-Dīn declares to him that he is writing a simple but comprehensive treatise (*nubdhah*). It is composed of lustrous pearls that he has put together, gleaned from his understanding of the hidden implications (*daqā'iq*) of the divine names. He has called it *Jawhar al-ḥaqā'iq* (Essence of Realities), and has arranged it in the form of a prologue (*fi ḥubb al-dhātīyah* — on the love of and in the divine Essence), followed by five chapters: on *ahādīyah* (being as without any determination), on *wahdah* (the primal stage of divine self-contemplation), on *wāḥidīyah* (the individuation of ideas in the divine mind), on *'ālam al-arwāḥ* (the world of spiritual realities — presented from two aspects, an inward and an outward), and on *'ālam al-shahādah* (the world of material realities — also presented from two aspects).

It concludes with an epilogue devoted to the path of attainment to the experience of God by recitation of the sentence of *tawḥīd* at the ascending levels of *dhikr*, *murāqabah*, *tawajjuh* and *mushāhadah*. His prayer is that God regard this work of his, in this world, as directed solely to His gracious countenance, and in the hereafter, as a means of deliverance from every fear and awesome horror. He prays that God may make it widely useful, and in addressing Him as *Walī al-ijābah*, (Master of the answer [to prayer]). *Walī* being one of the ninety nine most beautiful names, the use of it here further awakes the sonorities of the others that stud the work, from the first words of the Invocation, in which God is addressed as Allah, al-Raḥmān, and al-Raḥīm, and thus resound through the work from beginning to end. In the Ibn 'Arabī tradition, these names are the instruments of self-revelation that give form to phenomenal existence, and every stage of argument and exposition is sustained by their resonances.

With the prologue and epilogue added to the five chapters, the number of units that make up the work is seven, the number of levels of existential manifestation expounded in the *Tuḥfah*. Possibly in the threefold grouping of five items — five levels of manifestation, five interventions in history, and five sources of authority, there is a coded reference to Shī'ah devotion to the “Five of the Cloak” (Muḥammad, his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, his daughter and 'Alī's wife Fāṭimah, and their two sons, and the Prophet's grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn).²⁵

The invocation gives a bird's eye view of the structure of the treatise. The prologue and the succeeding units of the work are as skillfully structured as the invocation, each addressing its dedicated topic, foreshadowing what is to follow, and by articulating key words, maintains a continuity with what has gone before. These five chapters are an exposition of the economy of divine self-revelation that anyone desiring a full understanding of the sentence of *tawḥīd* and the Unity of Being must understand. The epilogue is an account of the spiritual exercises that can yield an experiential knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of God, and the ethical norms that must be observed if the fruit of this knowledge is to be realised.

Given its pastoral concern, the *Jawhar* is designed both to teach the companion on the way, and encourage him with words of prayer on behalf of teacher and pupil alike. Every part of it merits a discussion as close and detailed as our analysis of the invocation. Within the limits of this essay however, it is possible only to allude to some of their features.

The prologue explains that the essential meaning of the sentence of *tawḥīd*, *lā ilāha illā Allāh* is that all being is one, and argues, step by step on the basis of Qur'anic verses and *Ḥadīth qudsī*, that Man is a mirror for the divine names and attributes, and as such is indeed a vicegerent of God. Man should realize this, and be aware of the innate sublime dignity and awesome responsibility that is his, and the responsibility that this imposes upon him.

At its heart, however, — which is why Shams al-Dīn describes as its subject *ḥubb al-dhatīyah*, the love that is in and of the divine essence — is the wonder he is leading his companion on a journey to discover, the divine love revealed by the *Ḥadīth qudsī* in which God declares, “I was a hidden treasure, and I loved that I be known, so I created creation that I might be known: so by Me, know Me.” The fact that there is any phenomenal existence at all is a result of this love, for it is on account of this love, God manifests Himself. He does so, not because it is His nature to be manifest, but because He so wills. He does this at each of the levels of manifestation, and when he does so in Man, He says to him, again in a *Ḥadīth qudsī*, “You are a mirror [...] in which appear the Names and Attributes, and by virtue of which you are Vicegerent of God.”²⁶ It is this love which brings about the manifestation of the divine essence out of the hiddenness of *aḥadīyah* through the divine names and attributes to give humankind

the means to obey the divine command, “By me know me!”

Each of the five chapters elaborates the grade of being to which it is dedicated, from *aḥadīyah*, that of the hiddenness of God “down” through the succeeding levels of manifestation and individuation to that of *‘ālam al-shahādah* (world of [visible] beholding, at which Man may know himself as encompassing the divine attributes). Each stage represents a configuration of and interaction between the divine names and attributes expressed with the denseness and intensity of Ibn ‘Arabī himself.²⁷

Each chapter begins and ends with a prayer uttered by the author on behalf of himself and his companion on the way. Chapter 2 (on *wahdah*), for example, opens with the prayer, “My dear brother, may God anoint with the light of reality my spiritual vision and your spiritual vision, and cleanse my innermost soul, and your innermost soul from what is other than that light.” The author then gives an account of God’s knowledge of all possible existents and intelligibles from the aspect of pre-eternity, undifferentiated one from another. Among the terms by which they are known is *al-hurūf al-‘alīyah* — lofty letters/sounds, not yet differentiated into words and meanings.²⁸

Chapter 3 (on *wāhidīyah*) opens with the prayer, “My brother, may God purify by the noble spirit of holiness my soul and your soul, and illumine by His wisdom, my mind and my senses, and your mind and your senses.”²⁹ Chapter 4 (on *‘ālam al-arwāḥ*), concludes with the exhortation, “Understand these expressions, and study these indications, for they are taken directly from the teaching of the Sufis [...] so may God make me trustworthy [in relaying their words] in this chapter. O [aspiring] Sufi! May God bring you joy in following the straight path of God.”³⁰ Chapter 5 (on *‘ālam al-shahādah*) closes with the stirring peroration, “My brother, you who profess the Unity [of God and of Existence], this is what I profess, and this is my conviction. I have imparted it to you out of my love and affection for you. Hold on to it firmly, for God gives the capacity to do this to those who have knowledge and understanding [...] Pursue it while you still have life, and if you reach it, hold on to it, and never be neglectful of it. And if signs of favor from your Lord supervene upon you, then say, ‘Lord, add to my knowledge (Q 20:114).’ Thank Him for what he has entrusted to you, and savor the kindness of God (*karam Allah*). You who seek to realize what is in this chapter, may God keep you on the

straight path.”³¹

Throughout the five chapters, each stage in the divine self-revelation through the names and attributes is prefaced by the words *fa lammā arāda al-Ḥaqq* ... (Then when the Truth willed ...) and each closes with the *envoi* “May God keep you on [God’s] right path (*sirāt* [*Allāh*] *al-mustaqīm*)” crucial phrases that like a drum beat, maintain the pulse of his exposition and argument.

The epilogue opens with a prayer, “Dear brother, may God bring to fulfillment [this journey] for me and for you by the good deeds we do, and may He grant you and me the best of rewards.”³² Shams al-Dīn then urges that once these chapters have been understood, the companion should seek the experience of God (*maʿrifah*) through the ritual recitation of the sentence of *tawhīd lā ilāha illā Allāh*, that he now understands in the depths of its full, essential meaning. This recitation is at four ascending levels. At that of *dhikr* it is with the tongue, at *murāqabah* with the heart, at *tawajjuh*, it is with the heart brought so far into the presence of God that the recitation no longer has need of the raiment of sound or letters (*ḥurūf*). This prepares to way to the level of *mushāhadah*, to vision, when the seeker enjoys the mystical experience of encountering the ultimate reality within himself, when he will have passed beyond his own sense of individuality, and God alone is both beholder and the beheld.

Shams al-Dīn writes with vigour and spiritual passion, at each stage urging his companion onward with similar words of encouragement and prayers on his behalf. This experience, he says, is the goal of the Sufi way, and he summons all to it with the declamatory rhetoric of al-Ghazālī, “This is the highway, so where is the traveller; this is the garment of Joseph, so where is Jacob [...] Where are the Sufis? O Sufis, what does the friary [*dayr*] mean to me if in it there are no brethren [*dayyar*].”³³

He presents the testimony of some of the earlier Sufis who have tasted this experience of the divine union. Among them is one who said, “In the world is a garden. Anyone who enters it will not yearn for the garden of the world to come, nor for anything, and he will never be weary of it”. He was asked, “What is this garden?” He replied, “Knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of God.”³⁴

But the jewel in the crown of these testimonies are two lines he quotes from the *Nazm al-sulūk* (Poem of the Mystical Journey) by Ibn

al-Fāriḍ (d.1235), the poet of divine love,

For me, every day on which with eyes refreshed I see the beauty of her
face
is a festival day
And every night when she draws near is the Night of Destiny
and every day of meeting is a Friday
And every hastening to her is a pilgrimage, and every standing
at her door a standing [on the plain of Arafat]³⁵

In the light of the wonder of such an experience, Man should realise the glory of his destiny and the splendor of the responsibility he bears as *khalīfat Allāh* (viceregent of God) on earth as the prologue has argued that he is. He should devote himself exclusively to his Lord, and serve him with all his heart.

The epilogue concludes with a warning. The seeker's setting out on his journey presupposes his obedience to the Law. In emphasizing this, Shams al-Dīn refers to a *Ḥadīth* "Every joy throughout life is gained through obedience to God" and quotes the Qur'anic verse (sūrat al-Fāṭir (35:10), "Good utterances (*kalīm*) ascend to Him, and good deeds raise them up."³⁶ Among these "good utterances" is the sentence of *tawhīd, lā ilāha illā Allāh*, the essential meaning of which Shams al-Dīn has expounded. But the fruit of this spiritual exercise is granted only when it is borne up by good works, i.e. by obedience to the Law. As Shams al-Dīn says to his pupil, "You must clear the land, sow it with divine knowledge, and water it with good deeds, for the better the land is sown and watered, the more complete and perfect the result will be."³⁷

The *Jawhar* concludes with a prayer that he utters on behalf of them both, "May God sustain me and you with what has sustained them (i.e. the saints), and grant me and you His enabling grace as he has granted it to them."

Shams al-Dīn has written a brilliant and deeply felt exposition of the Unity of Being, one filled with awe of God as a personal God. It is the fruit of a profound religious experience, and in it are glimpses of an ecstasy that permeates the intricate configurations and interactions of the "effects" of the divine names, every one of which depends for its realization on an act of the divine will.

From a study of the *Jawhar* and the *Tuhfah*, it is clear that the *Tuhfah* provided Shams al-Dīn with the organizing structure

and terminology of his work. He nowhere mentions it explicitly by name, but there are more allusions to it in his work than can be accounted for by chance. Ibn Faḍl Allāh's work is a book dedicated to "the Spirit of the Prophet" (*rūh al-nabī*). In the invocation, Shams al-Dīn highlights God's "fashioning (*khalq*) the spirit of our Prophet". Ibn Faḍl Allāh declares that the *Tuhfah* concerns "*ilm al-ḥaqā'iq* – Knowledge of Realities",³⁸ Shams al-Dīn calls his work *Jawhar al-ḥaqā'iq*. In themselves, these may be coincidental. But there is more. At the conclusion of the prologue, Shams al-Dīn urges his companion to pay heed to what he has explained to him, by the "bounty of God", i.e. *faḍl Allāh*, the patronymic of the author of the *Tuhfah*.³⁹ In the epilogue, he prays, on his behalf, "May God gift you (*athafaka Allāh*) with the gift (*Tuhfah*) of His care." And the sentence ends, "the bounty of God (*faḍl Allāh*) upon you is immense, and the generosity of God to you is gracious".⁴⁰ The case then for regarding the name Muḥammad b. Faḍl Allāh, and his work the *Tuhfah* (Gift) as encrypted in *Jawhar al-ḥaqā'iq* may with confidence be rested.

The *Jawhar* is spiritually richer and more intense than the *Tuhfah*. If the *Tuhfah* is a portmanteau, it may be said that Shams al-Dīn in the *Jawhar* has unpacked it and produced a commentary on it, not in the formal sense of a self-declared explication of the work, but an integrated development and exposition of its content.

Present in both works is the same ambiguity and tension that is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabī's thought and the tradition stemming from it. At one level, within it, there is a complete fidelity to the conventional monotheistic pattern of unity (God), and multiplicity (His creation), yet at another, in his sufistic metaphysics, there is an identification of the one and the many. As Nettler puts it, there is a subtle interweaving of the two principles on different levels from various perspectives, in a way that achieves a fluid synthesis.⁴¹

The same is true of the theosophy of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf who stepped into Shams al-Dīn's shoes at the Acehese court thirty years after his death. Among his works is *Daqā'iq al-ḥurūf*, (Hidden implications of the letters/sounds) a commentary on two lines of verse in a work of Ibn 'Arabī,

We were lofty letters/sounds unuttered
held latent in the highest peaks of the hills.
I am you in Him and we are you and you are He
and all is He in Him -- ask those who have attained!⁴²

He sees in the metaphor a reference to phenomenal existents as unuttered letters (or sounds) within the mind of God at the grade of *wahdah*. Shams al-Dīn uses the same expression in his account of undifferentiated existents at the grade of *wahdah*. Both in explaining this grade use the terminology of the *Tuhfab*, and there is no inconsistency or contradiction between the accounts they give of it. Further, it is perhaps not a coincidence that Shams al-Dīn in the Invocation of the *Jawhar* says that it is about the hidden implications (*daqā'iq*) of the divine names, and that 'Abd al-Ra'ūf calls this work of his *Daqā'iq al-hurūf* — the hidden implications of the letters/sounds. It is thus not unlikely that he knew the *Jawhar*. There is further support for this possibility in that Shams al-Dīn's explanation of the Qur'anic verse "Good utterances ascend to Him, and good deeds raise them up" (35: 10), that land should be cleared, cultivated and watered with good works, occurs in the *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* referred to earlier. This suggests that Shams al-Dīn too knew and used this work, the work that 'Abd al-Ra'ūf forty years or so later, was to render into Malay as *Tarjumān al-mustafīd*. In commenting on this verse, he too stresses the role of good works and obedience to the Law in bearing "good utterances" up to God. In other words, a number of links between the works of these two scholars can be established.

Certainly, it is clear that in writing on these topics both knew that they were on difficult if not dangerous ground. In *Daqā'iq al-hurūf* 'Abd al-Ra'ūf cites the aphorism *nahnu qawm tuharrām muṭāla'at kutubinā* "We (Sufis) are a people the study of whose books is forbidden [to those who do not understand our special language]."⁴³ Shams al-Dīn said words to the same effect in chapter five of the *Jawhar al-ḥaqā'iq*, "If, in studying this treatise, you encounter anything ambiguous or problematic, put the best construction you can on it until the ambiguity is resolved, and you are certain of its meaning".⁴⁴ Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf's teacher in Madina in his commentary on the *Tuhfab*, *Iḥāf al-dhakī* (Presentation to one of Discriminating Intelligence) refers to the warning of the great scholar al-Taftāzānī (d.1390), that the limitations of human language may result in the use of misleading words to describe the state of divine gnosis. For, he says, "this experience of being united with God, cannot be expressed in words while we are in this world, on this beach where we yearn for God, trying to ladle out what we can from the ocean of *tawḥīd*".⁴⁵ Shams al-Dīn is no more

to be dismissed as a purveyor of heterodox pantheistic mysticism than were 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī, his teacher in Madina, or that sublime poet of Divine love, Ibn al-Fāriḍ. And since al-Rānīrī and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf each have universities in Aceh named after them, might not Shams al-Dīn be deserving of a similar honour for outstanding service to *dīn* and *dawlah*?!

Endnotes

- This article has been previously published in Jan van der Putten and Mary Kilcline Cody, eds., 2009 [reprinted 2011]. *Lost Times and Untold Tales from the Malay World*, Singapore: NUS Press: 148-163, and republished in this journal by permission of the author.
- 1. The *nisbah* al-Samaṭra'ī means “the Sumatran”, but the reference here is not to Sumatra as a whole, but Samudra-Pasai, a trading centre on the northeast coast of the island.
- 2. 1590 as the year of Ḥamzah's death is little more than an educated guess. A recent publication by C. Guillot and L. Kalus “La stèle funéraire de Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī”, *Archipel* 60 (2000): 3–24, raises the possibility that Ḥamzah died in Mecca in 933/1527. An assessment of the seismic implications of this finding, if confirmed, is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 3. See Michael Laffan's contribution in Putten and Cody, (eds), 2009: 139-147.
- 4. The work is named after its two authors. It was commenced by Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (d. 1459) and completed by Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505). It rapidly gained popularity, and even today continues to be a standard work in virtually every *madrasah* across the Muslim world.
- 5. By publishing houses such as Sulayman Mari'e in Singapore.
- 6. R. O. Winstedt, *A History of Malay Literature with a chapter on Modern Developments by Zaba (Zain Al-'Abidin bin Ahmad)*, [London and Singapore: Malay Branch Royal Asiatic Society 17, 3 (1939/40): 97–8], gives a “classical” summation of the tradition view.
- 7. A comprehensive and lucid account of these four scholars is given in Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World, Transmissions and Responses*, (London: Hurst, 2001), 101–38.
- 8. Notably in his book *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*, (Kuala Lumpur, 1970).
- 9. G. W. J. Drewes and L. F. Brakel, *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri*, (Dordrecht- Holland/ Cinnaminson USA: Foris Publications, 1986), 190–225.
- 10. C. A. O. van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai: Bijdrage tot de kennis der Sumatraansche Mystiek*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1945). See especially p. 23 and 198–203. I too was guilty of sharing in the propagation of this view in my first academic publication, A. H. Johns, “Nur al-Dakā'ik by the Sumatran mystic Shams al-Dīn of Pasai”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1953): 137–51. *Peccavi!*
- 11. Teuku Iskandar, *De Hikajat Atjeh*, (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde 26; 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958), p. 153.
- 12. Details of these scholars and the disciplines they taught are provided by Riddell op. cit., loc. cit.
- 13. Takeshi Ito, *The World of the Adat Aceh A Historical Study of the Sultanate of Aceh* (1984), 232–8. The dissertation is based on G. W. J. Drewes and P. Voorhoeve, *Adat Atjeh Reproduced in Facsimile from a Manuscript in the India Office Library* (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde 24; 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958).
- 14. Teuku Iskandar, *Bustanu's-salatin: Bab II, fasal 13* (1966), 35.
- 15. Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai*, 27.
- 16. Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, (Leiden: Brill, 1937–42) Supplement II, 617.
- 17. A. H. Johns, *The Gift addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1965). This is an edition of a Javanese rendering of the *Tuhfah*, together with an edition and English rendering of the Arabic text.
- 18. Iskandar, *Hikajat*, 168. These Acehese had previously visited Istanbul. A possible date is 1615.
- 19. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, vol. 5, 432–3.

20. See Anthony H. Johns, "Sufism in Southeast Asia: Reflections and Reconsiderations," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995): 176–9.
21. Mir Valiuddin, *The Qur'anic Sufism*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977).
22. *ansha'a* (also "to bring into being") and *khalaqa* (also "to measure out, to fashion") in the Ibn 'Arabī tradition are ambiguous. They may mean "to create" in the conventional sense, or "bring into a state of individual being something already existing in another form".
23. This may be compared with the relative simplicity of the exordium to the *Tuhfab* which is brief and matter of fact. See Johns, *The Gift* (Arabic text p. 129; English rendering p. 138).
24. The author of the *Tuhfab* introduces his work "Now follow the words of a sinful servant, one who stands in need of the intercession of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, Shaykh Muḥammad b. Faḍl Allāh. This is a selection (*nubdhah*) of sayings concerning the knowledge of realities (*ḥaqā'iq*). See Johns, *The Gift* (Arabic text p. 129; English rendering — here revised, p. 138).
25. It must be conceded that such an association while intriguing, remains speculative.
26. Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai*, 249.
27. For an account of the Divine Names as lines of force in God's manifestation of Himself in creation, see A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyī Dīn-Ibnul 'Arabī*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 41–7.
28. The word *huruf* may be understood as the written forms of the letters, or the sound of their being organised and pronounced as words conveying meaning. The reference is to lines of verse in a work of Ibn 'Arabī, *Kitāb Manāzil al- Insānīyah*, commented on by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf. See below.
29. Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai*, 253.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
35. Lines 355–7. Maḥdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn (ed.), *Dīwān Ibn al-Farid*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2002), 52. The poem is lengthy and very difficult, and his familiarity with it is a measure of Shams al-Dīn's learning. Quite wrongly, Van Nieuwenhuijze footnotes this citation, "A quotation, probably very corrupt".
36. Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai*, 266.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
38. Johns, *The Gift*, 129.
39. Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai*, 249.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
41. Ronald L. Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur'anic Prophets: Ibn 'Arabī's thought and method in the Fusus al Hikam*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 8–9.
42. A. H. Johns, "Daka'ik al-Huruf by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf of Singkel", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1955): 55–73, 139–58. The article consists of an edition of the Malay text and an English translation. I resile from my facile use in the introduction of the words orthodox and heterodox to distinguish between Shams al-Dīn and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf. *Peccavi nimis!*
43. Johns, "Daka'ik", 59.
44. Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Shams al-Dīn van Pasai*, 260.
45. A critical edition of this important text together with an Indonesian translation is being prepared by Dr. Oman Fathurahman, researcher at the Center for the Study of Islam and Society, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University.

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