Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

‘Do not say they are dead’ : the political use of mystical and religious concepts in the Persian poetry of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)

Nematollahi Mahani, M.A.

Citation
Nematollahi Mahani, M. A. (2014, May 15). *‘Do not say they are dead’ : the political use of mystical and religious concepts in the Persian poetry of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/25764

Version:	Corrected Publisher’s Version
License:	Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/25764

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/25764 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Nematollahi Mahani, Mahnia A.
Title: 'Do not say they are dead' : the political use of mystical and religious concepts in the Persian poetry of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)
Issue Date: 2014-05-15

CHAPTER TWO

MYSTICAL LOVE IN IRAN-IRAQ WAR POETRY

INTRODUCTION

My objective in writing this chapter is to explain how during the war with Iraq the medieval, mystical concept of love, and related motifs, were extensively used by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the war poets to mobilize the Iranians to fight against the enemy, or to send their loved ones to the battlefield. Soldiers were commonly identified as 'lovers' and 'gnostics' on a mystic journey to union with the Beloved (*ma'shuq*). Poetry played a significant role in this identification of war with love mysticism. According to the war poets, the soldier in battle attains the spiritual station of the mystic, whether or not he is killed. In this chapter, I will discuss the mystical love-centered themes.

The mystics took the image of the relation between lover and Beloved from the relationship between the lover and the metaphorical beloved that is a common theme in the *nasib*, or prologue, of a *qaside* (an ode).[103] Meisami discusses how a Persian courtly *qaside* reflects the relationship between the lover and beloved. She says that the poet, as a lover, shows his fidelity toward his patron, the beloved, by praising the latter's generosity, bounty and beauty, using metaphors and similes. Later, more of the courtly concepts of the lover and beloved were applied to mystical poetry. For example, the mystic poet Hakim Sanā'i Ghaznavi employed courtly elements in his mystical poems; encouraging the audience to take up the role of the lover to become the "achieved personification," according to Meisami. In mystical poetry, the lover is presented as one who suffers loneliness, and endures harsh treatment from the Beloved, but expects no compensation for the hardships that he endures. The courtly poet praises the beloved more for his generosity and benevolence, while the mystic poet praises the Beloved for offering him pain and

[103] F. Orsini, "Introduction," in *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, Cambridge: the University of Cambridge Oriental Publication, 2006, p. 17.

affliction.[104]

To serve their own ends, the war poets used the image of a lover who sacrifices his life for the sake of the Beloved, and several literary and mystical motifs. For instance, they defined death on the battlefield as a mystical stage that would purify the soul. Thus, the soldier attains the stage of union with the Beloved on the frontline. The war poets considered fighting the enemy as a pre-requisite for companionship with the Beloved. They proclaimed that the soldiers who fought against the Iraqi enemies and sacrificed their lives would join the Beloved in the hereafter. Death, therefore, should hold no fear.

Obedience is an indispensable part of spiritual progress as it is treated in classical mystical literature, and it is a central motif in this war poetry. To be more precise, the soldier is portrayed as a faithful, obedient lover who strives to fulfill the will of the Beloved. In such war poems, the spiritual master or beloved may be Ayatollah Khomeini or the Third Shiite imam, Hosein. In Persian love literature, absolute obedience requires the lover's loyalty, represented as the lover's death. Like the lover, the soldier offers his life on the battlefield to affirm his fidelity toward the spiritual beloved (i.e. Ayatollah Khomeini).

The war poets used the mystical concept of self-mortification. The hard mortifications that the mystic inflicted on himself are analogous, in the war poetry, to the hardships that a soldier endures. Consequently, in the war poetry, fighting the enemy leads to spiritual elevation. Like the mystic, the soldier repudiates his own existence, considering it as an obstacle that bars him from union with the Beloved. For this reason, he goes to the frontline, to sacrifice his life and become one with the Beloved.

In mystics' treatises, love is the goal of progress, and also motivates the mystic to begin his spiritual journey. Love is presented as an agent making the lover aware of himself. Earthly love usually leads to a spiritual love,[105] making the lover long for the beloved, and long to lay down his life for the beloved. The lover experiences the pain of separation. He becomes patient, and he will be happy when he is allowed to be in the presence of the beloved. To prove his love and fidelity, he offers his most precious belonging, his life, to achieve union with the beloved. In this process, the lover attains

[104] J. S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 253.
[105] Ibid., p. 137.

spiritual perfection through this sacrificial behavior. In a spiritual love relationship, the lover seeks the Ideal Beloved and, as there is no analogue for Him in the world, the lover begins to mortify his body so that his soul may progress to a spiritual stage of perfection that is worthy of the Beloved. By passing through the stages of perfection, the lover's soul attains the Beloved's character-traits and is led to eternal life within the Beloved, which ultimately, changes the lover's character.

This chapter shows how metaphorical mystical love, popular with classical love poets, was transposed into a literal mode during the Iran-Iraq war in the form of soldiers offering their lives for the cause of the ideal Beloved. Death on the front was made meaningful by equating it to attaining mystical spiritual perfection. Various love motifs, such as the school of love, were used to alleviate the fear of death and transform it into a transcendent event. This transformation of the spiritual mystical concepts to experiences in the real life will be illuminated by taking some of the themes and tropes found in love poetry, the poetry of mystical love, and the poetry of the Iran-Iraq war, to show how an idea or image is confirmed and transformed as it passes from one context to another. For instance, the concepts of illness/emaciation that in mystical treatises are signs of a lover's absolute devotion and profane love to the Beloved in the war poetry show a soldier's preparedness for self-sacrifice on the battlefield.

LOVE THAT DESTROYS

Love's destructive aspects, which appear quite frequently in war poetry, are also addressed in the classical literary tradition. Love inflicts illness, suffering, and dishonor upon the lover. In his *Savāneh,* the medieval mystic Ahmad Ghazāli writes: "Truly, love is an affliction, and ease and intimacy in it are strange and borrowed."[106] Love, whether it is metaphorical or mystical, affects the lover's body. Profane love causes the lover's illness, and is mentioned as such even in medical treatises. The physician and philosopher, Ebn Sinā (980-1037) writes about the lover's characteristics: "hollowness of the eye, continuous

[106] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Resāle-ye Savāneh va resāle'i dar mow'eze*, with notes and introduction by J. Nurbakhsh, Tehran: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi, 1352/1947, p. 21.

movement of the eyelids, dryness and emaciation of the body, tearful eyes …"[107] In war poetry the soldier is likened to a lover afflicted by love. He does not hold back from the hardships that love imposes on him on the military front, rather he seeks more. Like a lover, the soldier cries out and weeps on the battlefield.

A destructive aspect of love that is highlighted in the war poems is that it emaciates the lover. The lover comes to resemble an ill person but cannot lament because of extreme weakness. Rather, the lover is selfless. He denies himself (*anniyat*) in his search for the beloved. His pale and yellowish face and his emaciation show that he eats little and does not sleep except to see the beloved in his dreams.

Love destroys the lover's ego and leads him to repudiate his own identity (*hoviyyat*) as he seeks union with the Beloved. The mystics understand self-denial as a gateway to eternal life because they consider it as a process through which the mystic annihilates into the Beloved. War poets elaborate on this phenomenon by equating death on the battlefield with the self-denial of a mystic. For the war poet, self-denial is a remedy for the heart, and separation from the 'self' is a way to become one with the Beloved.

In classical love literature, love is of the same nature as fire: they both destroy whatever they touch. Love burns the lover, and transforms him from within.[108] When love occupies the lover's heart, he denies his "I-ness" (*maniyyat*) and his sense of self. In this dynamic process, love destroys the lover's negative traits and purifies his soul; afterwards, he is worthy to receive the positive traits of the Beloved. Love annihilates the lover into the Beloved. This purifying characteristic of love is highlighted in war poetry to inflame the emotions of the youth and inspire them to participate in the fight. The soldier is compared to a lover who is burning from the fire of love. This fire makes his soul pure and worthy of union with the Beloved. In war poetry, the imagery of the moth and candle is used. The martyr is the moth that sacrifices its existence in the path of love for the candle. Having reached the stage of selflessness, the moth enters the candle's fire to unite with it.[109] Like

---

[107] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 7.

[108] L. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us, We're Safe: Self and Selflessness in the Divān of Attār," in *Attār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, eds. L. Lewisohn & C. Shackle, London & New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2006, p. 242.

[109] For the development of candle metaphors in Persian literature from the nine to the fourteenth century, see:

the selfless moth, the soldier goes to the battlefield to be annihilated into the Beloved.

Annihilation (*fanā*) is, on the one hand, a mystic's separation from consciousness of all things, including himself, and replacement of these things with a pure consciousness of God. On the other hand, through annihilation (*fanā*), the mystic's imperfect attributes are replaced by the perfect ones bestowed by God. *Fanā* is not the end of life: the divinely-bestowed attributes remain (*baqā*) with the mystic.[110] The medieval mystic Najm al-Din Rāzi (1177-1256) writes: "love burns the metaphorical (i.e., worldly) existence (*vojud-e majāzi*) of the lover to reveal his real (i.e., spiritual) existence that is the Beloved covered under the clothing of lover."[111]

These mystical concepts are used in the war poems. The soldier's participation in battle is depicted in terms of denying his consciousness, destroying his negative attributes, and replacing them with the positive attributes of the Beloved. The soldier's death on the battlefield is compared to attaining the mystical stage of continuance (*baqā*), which follows the stage of annihilation.

A LOVE NOT CHOSEN

In classical mystical treatises, love is defined as a divine grace that falls on the chosen ones, so the lover has no control over his destiny. In his *Savāneh,* Ghazāli likens the lover to dice on a board, as a lover has no free will. He further adds that the lover cannot undertake anything. Ghazāli, in the story of the furnace stoker, shows that falling in love is out of the lover's control. In this story, a furnace stoker falls in love with a king. The king decides to punish him, but his vizier rescues the man from punishment by saying that it is not fitting for a king to punish a man for what is outside his free will (*ekhtiyār*).[112] The idea of love as an uncontrollable force can be traced back to a Qur'ānic verse (5:59) in which God says that He has chosen His lovers at the beginning of creation (*azal*): "He loved them and they

---

A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Waxing Eloquent…," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, pp. 84-123.

[110] F. Rahman, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Baḳā' wa-Fanā'.

[111] N. Rāzi, *Resāle-ye ʿeshq va ʿaql, meʾyār al-sedq fi mesdāq al-ʿeshq*, edited and annotated by T. Tafazzoli, Tehran: Bongāh-e tarjome va nashr-e ketāb, 1345/1966, p. 65.

[112] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 168.

love Him" (*yohibbohum va yohibbunahu*). This verse is interpreted by Ghazāli, and in Sufism in general, as showing God's eternal Will. Thus, man cannot fall in love through his own free will. Ghazāli quotes from the medieval mystic Abu Yazid Bastāmi (d. 848 or 875), "I supposed that I loved Him, but recognized that He loved me first."[113] Ghazāli implies that Bāyazid is among the elected lovers and his love for the Beloved was determined in pre-eternity. For these predestined lovers, knowledge and schooling are considered obstacles that hold them back from union with the Beloved.

THE SCHOOL OF LOVE

One of the dominant themes is that of 'the school of love' (*madrese-ye 'eshq*). In mystical literature, it expresses the necessity of abandoning conventional education and following the path of mystical perfection. The war poets used the school of love to mobilize youth for the front. The war poets compare the battlefield to the school of love and the soldier to a lover who is attending the school of love. A soldier who dies at the front-line is considered as a graduate from the school of love. Needless to say, both the soldier and the lover prepare themselves to offer their lives for the ultimate goal: unification with the Beloved. On the battlefield, a soldier experiences the lesson of self-sacrifice, as the mystic in the academy of love learns to abandon his life and this world to be united with the Beloved. This motif is related to the teacher of love (*ostād-e 'eshq,* or *mo'allem-e 'eshq*), 'the book of love' (*ketāb-e 'eshq*) and 'the lesson of love' (*dars-e 'eshq*), which will also be discussed here.

EDUCATION AND PURIFICATION IN THE SCHOOL OF LOVE

In classical mystical literature, the metaphor of a school of love refers to the spiritual purification that guides the mystic towards union with the Beloved. The student in the school of love learns the principles of love, and the first principle is to fight against the

[113] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Savāneh*, p. 26.

carnal soul, described as an enemy. This self-purification is also self-sacrifice for the sake of union with the Beloved. The school of love motif is indicated in Persian either by *madrese-ye 'eshq* or by *maktab-e 'eshq*.

The word *maktab* (pl. *makātib*) means a place of education. It has been an important Islamic institution from the earliest days of Islam.[114] In an Iranian *maktab* children learn to read and write, based on the recitation and memorization of the Qur'ān, and they read from medieval Persian literature. In the Islamic tradition, education or *tarbiyat* connotes morality and discipline, as well as knowledge. In literary texts, *tarbiyat* is shown through virtuous behavior, rather than erudition. In traditional schools, *adab* ('etiquette' or 'refined and well-mannered conduct') was the main subject. *Majles al-adab* referred to schools for children, and the teacher was known as the *mo'addeb*, *mo'allem* or *mokatteb*, referring respectively to his role in teaching good conduct, knowledge, and literacy.[115] There is a genre of *adab* books telling how to achieve proper behavior and a better position in the hereafter.[116]

The medieval Persian mystics introduced the motif of the school of love in their literary works to express the process of spiritual elevation. Love educates the lover to develop spiritual and moral strengths. To attain spiritual perfection, the mystic should pass through spiritual stages, analogous to classes, to purify his soul from negative character traits. For instance, the mystic Ruzbahān Baqli (d. 1209) elaborates on the transitions of the soul. He identifies twelve stations, beginning with servitude and ending with longing, through which the mystic ascends to perfect love.[117] On achieving each station, the mystic gains a better understanding of the Beloved's Beauty, and his desire for union with the Beloved increases.

In *The Garden of Truth*, the mystic poet Sanā'i says that love teaches the lover to

---

[114] J.M. Landau, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Maktab. R. Hillenbrand, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madrasa, 2. Islamic Studies in the Mosque: Early Period. For more information about madrase see A. Zaryāb, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Education v. The Madrase in Shiite Persia.

[115] R. Hillenbrand, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madrasa, 1.Children's Schools. For further information see A. Azarnoosh, Tr. Suheyl Umar, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Adab. For a war poem on the subject of *adab*, see M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre* (*majmu'e-ye she'r*), Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 219.

[116] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 43.

[117] C.W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism from Rābi'a to Ruzbihān," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publications, 1993, pp. 449-51.

offer his life, because a "headless man" (*sar-boride*) is a companion of love and knows the secrets of the Beloved.[118] In Persian literature, the head implies either life or reason and rational thinking. Thus the image of "headless man" points both to self-sacrifice and detachment from discursive reason. The initial step for the student in the school of love is to deny his discursive reason (*'aql*) because it is unable to understand the mystic secret. In the school, love like a teacher guides the lover to abandon self when he embarks on the path of love. Only a selfless lover may enjoy the bliss of union.

Uniting faith (*din*) and infidelity (*kofr*) is another lesson that love teaches, according to Sanā'i. *Kofr* and *din* are veils (*parde*) that prevent the lover from understanding the secrets of love. In mystical literature, *parde* hides the Beloved from those who do not understand the secret of love because they follow the principles of discursive reason. Love teaches the lover to abandon mundane desires for the sake of union with the Beloved, because worldly desires are the greatest veils that separate the lover from the Beloved.[119]

The mystic poet, Rumi identified the school of love as a mystical stage through which one learns immediate divine knowledge (*'elm-e ladunni*) without participating in a conventional education using paper and ink.[120] According to Rumi, God teaches the lover to read divine knowledge from the tablet of the invisible World.[121] He reveals the divine secrets to the heart of the lover. He thus attains knowledge through divine revelation.

In the school of love, a lover learns how to behave before the Beloved. This proper conduct is called *adab* in Persian literature. A lover who wants to show his love for the beloved should not only behave politely, offer his life and all his belongings for the

---

[118] Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat va shari'at al-Tariqt*, Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Dāneshgāhi, 1382/2004, p. xx. Bektāshis, a dervish group active in sixteenth century and afterwards, called " beheaded dead people" (*sar-boride morde*) they died before death. See A.T. Karamustafa, *God's Unrully Friendes: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period 1200-1550*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press,1994, p.92.

[119] Ibid., pp. 228-30.

[120] A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 337.

[121] A. Schimmel, *I am Wind, you are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi*, Boston & London: Shambhala, 1992, p. 177. Rumi writes: "The teacher of the school of love is He, the Owner of Glory/ We are like a seeker of knowledge and this is what we repeat (*madrese-ye 'eshq-o modarres zol-jalāl/ mā cho tāleb 'elm-o in tekrār-e māst*). See Mowlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, biography by Badiʿ al-Zamān Foruzānfar, explanation about *Divān-e Shams* by A. Dashti, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1337/1959, p. 266, *ghazal* no. 608.

beloved, Love teaches proper conduct to the lover, which he cannot learn through a conventional education.

In the Iran-Iraq war poetry, self-sacrifice on the front-line (namely the school of love) is defined as etiquette and proper conduct. Virtue leads a man to offer his life. The war poet Mohammad ʻAli Moʻallem from Dāmghān employs the concept of *adab* in a *ghazal* entitled ʻThe Etiquette of Being in Love' (*adab-e ʻāsheqi*):

hamin basam adab-e ʻāsheqi ke az tab-e sharm
cho shamʻ pish-e rokhash āb mitavānam shod[122]

For me this etiquette of being in love is enough,
That I in a fever of bashfulness may melt like a candle before his face.

The poet Rumi says that there is no proper conduct for the etiquette of love (*adab-e ʻeshq*) but rudeness:

adab-e ʻeshq jomle bi-adabist
ommat-e ʻeshq ʻeshqohom ādāb[123]

The etiquette of love is nothing but rudeness
Love is the proper conduct for the community of the lovers

The word *bi-adabi* is opposite to the word *adab* in Persian language. Literally, *bi-adabi* came to mean ʻrudeness and to behave unmannerly.' Rumi says for a community of lovers there is no rule. They follow the principles prescribed by love although others say that these behaviors are inappropriate.

In the war poetry, the relationship between the lover and beloved is often depicted

[122] M. ʻA. Moʻallem Dāmghāni, *Rejʻat-e sorkh-e setāre*, p. 219.
[123] Mowlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, p. 197, *ghazal* no. 434.

through the metaphor of a candle, very common in Persian literature.[124] The lover burns and melts as a candle does. In these lines, the lover is in fever because of the excitement of meeting the Beloved, and feelings of awe for the Beloved. He is bashful, as is proper for a lover (self-confidence would be arrogant). He melts like a candle before the beloved, so that nothing remains of his self. The poet is defining the soldier as a lover and using the concept of *adab* to imply that the soldier is sacrificing his most precious belonging, his life, at the Beloved's door (i.e., on the battlefield). In short, volunteering and fighting is defined as proper conduct, part of the etiquette of self-sacrifice for the Beloved.

The mystical motif of the school of love is adapted in a modern political context by Ayatollah Khomeini in a *ghazal* entitled 'The School of Love' (*maktab-e 'eshq*):

dard mijuyand in vārastegān-e maktab-e 'eshq
ānke darmān khāhad az ashāb-e in maktab gharib ast[125]

These graduates of the academy of love are seeking pain
Only rarely does anyone seek a remedy from the members of this academy.

Ayatollah Khomeini implies that the lover who detaches himself from the physical world seeks more pain (*dard*) from love. He calls the lover *vāraste,* meaning both liberated and pious (translated here as 'graduates' to match the metaphor). He is liberated in the sense that he is saved from punishment in the hereafter. Ayatollah Khomeini implies that one who attends the school of love, finds his soul purified and attains a higher spiritual perfection. The pain of love (*dard-e 'eshq*), which the lover demands from the Beloved, is a motif found in the mystic literature on love. Khomeini has politicized the mystical motif of the school of love. In his sermons, he equated the mobilization unit, the *Basij*, with the school

[124] For candle imagery see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Candle: ii. Imagery in Poetry; also see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Waxing Eloquent …," in *Metaphor and Imagery*, pp. 84-123.
[125] Ayatollah Khomeini, *Divān-e Emām: Sorudehā-ye hazrat-e Emām Khomeini*, Tehran: Mo'assese-ye tanzim va nashr-e āthār-e Emām, 1377/1998, p. 51.

of love: "Basij is the school of love (*Basij madrese-ye 'eshq ast*)."[126] During the war, many soldiers were selected from among the Basij units. The members were trained to offer their lives on the battlefield with passion, in expectation of union with the Beloved. They considered themselves members of the school of love, and those who went to the battlefield were graduates from the school.

For the classical mystical poets, and the war poets, the school of love is superior to a conventional school. If there is a battlefield where the lover can die, what need of an ordinary conventional classroom? An element of disdain for conventional (especially Western) education was part of the revolution. Anti-Western sentiments were propagated to assert that the West is responsible for destroying Islamic culture in Iran. People who actively participated in demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime, and who were loyal to the principles of the Islamic Revolution, are known as *maktabi*, students. The term is used to mean literalists or activists. After the Revolution, later called Islamic, and during the war, *maktabis* gained the highest official positions, while educated people were dismissed from their posts. [127] However in the war poetry, the conventional school has its value, as the

[126] U. Marzolph, "The Martyr's Way to Paradise: Shiite Mural Art in the Urban Context," in *Sleepers, Moles and Martyrs: Secret Identifications, Social Integration and the Differing Meanings of Freedom*, ed. R. Bendix & J. Bendix, Copenhagen: Musum Tusculanum Press &University of Copenhagen, 2004, p. 93. The Basij was established in January 1981. Its full name is the *Vāhed-e Basij-e Mostaz'afān* ('the mobilization unit of the down-trodden'), and its members are called *basijis*. It was a preliminary step toward creating an'Army of twenty million,' which Ayatollah Khomeini referred to in his sermons necessary for the ultimate victory of the Islamic Revolution. The *basiji* volunteers were mostly very young boys or older men. During the war, the clergy used religious codes to inspire a sense of altruistic sacrifice in the *basijis*. For instance, they compared the road to the battlefield with the road to Jerusalem (*tariq-e qods*). *Basijis* would clear a path for army equipment by running across minefields, and they were successful in confusing or even overwhelming Iraqi armies. (E.L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, Westport, Connecticut, London: Westwood Press, 2001, p. 208; D. Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*, London: Paladin, 1990, p.52. For the military function of the *Basij-e Mostaz'afān* see pp. 55, 92, 106, 112, 171 and 176.) In Islamic doctrine, the word 'oppressed' (*mostaz'af*) is applied to people oppressed under a tyrant regime. However, in the lead-up to the Islamic Revolution (1979), Mortezā Motahhari and 'Ali Shariati, ideologues of the Revolution, extended it to spiritual and cultural oppression. They said that the oppressed should defend the spiritual and cultural values of their society. Iranians as a whole were considered *mostaz'af* because their cultural and religious values were threatened by the Pahlavi monarch and, during the war, by the Sunni leader of Iraq, who was seen as a real threat to the Shiite's faith. (A. Ashraf, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Islam in Iran: xiii. Islamic Political Movements in 20th Century Iran) The 1979 Revolution mobilized many different groups, but the leaders of the Revolution in retrospect highlighted the role of the 'barefoot and oppressed.' The authorities registered people in the Basij Unit as volunteers to serve the principles of the Islamic Revolution.

[127] For example, during Mohammad 'Ali Rajā'i's (1933-1981) brief presidency, in 1981, the Islamic activists (*maktabis*) occupied the state's managerial and technical posts. See S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the*

place where students were recruited for the war.[128] The war poet Qeysar Aminpur, in a poem called 'The Twin of the Lovers of the World' (*hamzād-e 'āsheqān-e jahān*), compares both the *madrese* or university, and the battlefield, to the school of love:

harchand 'āsheqān-e qadimi
az ruzegār-e pishin
tā hāl
az dars-o madrese
az qil-o qāl
bizār budehand[129]

Although lovers of bygone ages
From the past until now
Have been weary of lessons and schools
Disputes and talks …

The poem continues below. The mystics said that conventional education was not required to attain spiritual progress. Here, Aminpur says that lovers have never been interested in any form of education, whether it is following lessons or participating in a discussion. The lover is interested in the school where love reveals itself and educates the lover. In other words, love deepens the lover's understanding of the worthlessness of the mundane world and the necessity of detachment from it.

Although in mystical poetry, love is considered an act of grace from God, in the war poetry, love can be cultivated and developed in the school of love. Aminpur continues:

Crown, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 164.

[128] Speaking of his interviews with young Iranians imprisoned in an Iraqi camp, Ian Brown writes: "They left the school during the year and went to the front directly or were recruited via the local unit of the Basij to which the child belonged." (I. Brown, *Khomeini's Forgotten Sons: The Story of Iran's Boy Soldiers*, London: Grey Seal Books, 1990, p. 45.)

[129] Q. Aminpur, *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Morvārid, 1388/2009, p. 272.

ammā
e'jāz-e mā hamin ast:
mā 'eshq rā be madrese bordim
dar emtedād-e rāhro-i kutāh
dar yek ketābkhāne-ye kuchek
bar pellehā-ye sangi-ye dāneshgāh
va milehā-ye sard-o felezi
gol dād-o sabz shod[130]

But
This is our miracle
We took love to the school
At the end of a short corridor
In a small library
On the stony steps of the university
And the cold metallic fences
[Love] flowered and flourished.

The 'small library' is presumably the locale being used as a recruitment office. In Aminpur's poem, the lover has chosen to be possessed by love. When love for self-sacrifice is taught to the students, they will quickly respond to this religious-mystical appeal because their heart is open. Aminpur exaggerates the positions of the lovers when he compares them to prophets by using the word *e'jāz*, which refers not to a simple wonder but to the miracle by which a prophet demonstrates that he has a mission from God. Mohammad's *e'jāz* was to produce the Qur'ān, while the soldiers have become lovers, transforming the educational system to love martyrdom. In this way, the poet, as a pioneer of war poetry, and his peers are able to perform a miracle: developing love in the hearts of the students.

[130] Ibid, pp. 272-3.

In the above poem, Aminpur uses a concept that is common in Persian mystical literature: the lover's heart is fertile soil prepared for the tree of love to grow. The mystic Ghazāli, for example, compares the soul to the soil in which the tree of love (*shajarat al-'eshq*) grows, watered by the lover's tears.[131] In the war poetry, it is the blood of the lover that waters the tree of love. Aminpur defines the school as a stage through which love grows. When the tree of love occupies the heart of the student, there is no room for worldly desires, so he offers his life on the battlefield.

In Persian literature, the tulip symbolizes martyrdom. After the section of this poem cited above, Aminpur compares love to a tulip, to show that a martyr never dies. A tulip's flowering every spring is comparable to the mystic concept of continuation (*baqā*) after annihilation (*fanā*). In the war poetry, a soldier's love for death on the military front is comparable to the growth of a tulip. The desire for self-sacrifice develops, grows and flowers in the heart of students at universities and schools. Love guides the students to the front line to offer their lives and attain the stage of continuation. There is a similarity between a university and the battlefield: in both places, when one 'graduates,' another one takes his place. This cycle is like the flowering of a tulip every spring.

In Aminpur's poem, love does not lead the lover to abandon worldly desires, or call him to remembrance and meditation, or even to recite the Qur'ān and pray the whole night. The mystics or pious Muslims perform the mentioned practices and rituals in order to get closer to God. Love encourages the lover to prepare the soil of his heart for the plant of love.

At the end of this poem, Aminpur compares the lover to the plant, and says that the plant may be reborn:

ān fasl
fasli ke hatman mitavān motevalled shod
hatman bāyad bahār bāshad
…

[131] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Resāle-ye Savāneh*, pp. 7, 21.

mā bāz mitavānim

har ruz nāgahān motevalled shavim

mā

hamzād-e 'āsheqān-e jahānim[132]

That season

The season in which one can certainly be born,

Surely it should be Spring?

…

We may be born again every day

We are the companions of the lovers of the world.

According to the poet, spring is the best season to be born. Spring is the symbol of resurrection and the re-birth of existence on the Last Day. A lover can never die, because he dies before he dies. That is, the lover detaches his soul from the idol of himself, causing the death of selfish desires while he still lives, and he then continues (*baqā*) eternally in the Beloved. The poet uses the concept of eternal survival in the Beloved to encourage young men onto the battlefield. The dynamic setting that the poet creates allows the soldier to see his potential death to a mystic ultimate union with the Beloved.

To sum up, in the war poetry, the soldier survives eternally in three senses: in the mystical sense, he attains the same spiritual perfection that a mystic can, and therefore survives eternally in the Beloved. In a more orthodox religious sense, the soldier's death on the battlefield is martyrdom and guarantees him eternal life in heaven. Moreover, the community honors his death by emulating his act.[133]

[132] Q. Aminpur, *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār*, p. 274.

[133] In this thesis 'orthodox' refers to Muslims whose religious practices are confined to the execution of religious duties as defined by Islamic jurists.

LOVE AS SPIRITUAL TEACHER

An indispensable part of the school of love is the motif of 'the teacher of love' (*mo'allem-e 'eshq*). In addition to the term *mo'allem*, synonyms such as *āmuzgar* and *ostād* are also used. For the mystical poets, God is the Universal Teacher of love, who is superior to any ordinary teacher. As we have seen above, taking the work of Rumi as an example, God teaches the lover to read divine knowledge from the tablet of the invisible World. The student repeats whatever God teaches to him. The war poets used the motif, but they introduce the imam Hosein, the third Shiite imam, as the teacher of love. Imam Hosein died on the battlefield, and in the war poetry, he teaches soldiers to offer their lives in battle to preserve Shiite Islam. War poets say that Hosein offered his life in battle because of his passionate love for the Beloved, and that he serves as the teacher of love encouraging young men to go to the battlefield.

The war poet Sorush from Esfahān introduces the theme in a *mathnavi* entitled 'The Water Carrier of Karbalā' (*Saqqā-ye Karbalā*).

…
cheshm az jān-e jahāni dukhte
az barādar 'āsheqi āmukhte
har ke rā bāshad Hosein ostād-e 'eshq
lājeram dāde be kolli dād-e 'eshq[134]
…
He ['Abbās] closed his eye to the soul of the world
He learned love from his brother [Hosein]
Everyone who has Hosein as his teacher of love
There is no doubt that he does justice to love

The title of this poem, 'The Water Carrier of Karbalā' (*Saqqā-ye Karbalā*) points to a motif

[134] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, Tehran: Howze-ye Honari-ye Sāzemān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi, 1370/1991, p. 64.

that is related to love, and in this poem, to the teacher of love. A s*aqqā* is someone who brings water to people, and is the title of Abo al-Fazl al-'Abbās, imam Hosein's half-brother. 'Abbās is the archetype of love and loyalty in war poetry and in Persian passion plays (*ta'ziye*), because of his exceptional behavior on the day of *'Āshurā* (10th of Moharram 680) when the Sunni Umayyad soldiers barred Hosein and his companions from the Euphrates. The children cried bitterly from thirst. Abo al-Fazl galloped to the Euphrates several times to bring water, but his hands were cut off and he perished.[135] The poet identifies Hosein with the teacher of love and Abo al-Fazl with his student, using this historical event to encourage young men to go to the battlefield. The poet writes that, on the day of *'Āshurā*, Abo al-Fazl fought against the enemy alone. He galloped from the left of the army to the right, fighting the Sunni soldiers as he went. An enemy soldier cut off his right hand but he fought on with his left hand until it too was cut off. But Abo al-Fazl was happy with this event; he says that he would receive two wings as his reward in paradise. Sorush from Esfahān says that Hosein, the teacher of love, taught the brave Abo al-Fazl to choose death over life; therefore, a student should not be afraid of death because through death he receives his reward and the Beloved reveals Himself to him.

Sorush from Esfahān calls Hosein the teacher of love (*ostād-e 'eshq*). In the second hemistich, he plays on the word *dād,* meaning both justice and a lament or appeal for justice. To give *dād,* as in the phrase, *dād-e kasi rā dādan*, means to answer an appeal, to release someone from oppression or hardship. In this hemistich, love is the one who intercedes, for Abo al-Fazl's life, and will intercede for all. Therefore, one who abandons his life on the battlefield pays his debt to love.

Another example of the teacher of love motif is found in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Ka'be of the Intended One' (*Ka'be-ye maqsud*), by the war poet Azizollāh Shekarriz:

āmukht dars-e 'eshq Shekarriz az Hosein
bigāne shod ze khish cho shod āshenā-ye 'eshq[136]

[135] For information on Abo al-Fazl al-'Abbās see J. Calmard, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under 'Abbās B. ʿAlī B. Abū Ṭāleb .

[136] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p.70.

Shekarriz has learned the lesson of love from Hosein

As soon as he knew love, He [Shekarriz] became a stranger to himself

Shekarriz equates Hosein's death in battle with the lesson of love. Consequently, a soldier who chooses death, as Hosein did, teaches the lesson of love to his peers. In the second hemistich, the poet employs the word *khish*. The word means in Persian relatives, kinship, or oneself. Hosein not only teaches the soldier to offer his life but also to deny his sense of self.

In the school of love, in which the Universal Teacher guids the lover to the final stage of spiritual perfection, the guidance is connected to the concept of leadership in worldly sense. During the Iran-Iraq war, Ayatollah Khomeini was considered both a political leader and a spiritual master. He was called the leader (*emām* or *rahbar*) of the Revolution. In Shiite tradition, *Emāmat* refers to "supreme leadership" of the Muslim community after the death of the prophet Mohammad. For the Twelver Shiites, the legitimate imams are the descendants of the prophet. The twelfth imam, Mahdi, was 'occulted' (removed to a spiritual existence which is nevertheless in contact with this world) and will return before the Day of Judgment.[137] Khomeini, a descendent of the seventh imam, Musā al-Kāzem, was accorded the title of imam, and it was thought that his leadership, like that of the legitimate imams, was a sure path to salvation in the hereafter.[138] For many Iranians, Khomeini was a spiritual leader. During his career, he taught philosophical and mystical subjects at Qom's Feiziya School.[139] His career along with his family background gave him both a political and mystical position during the war.

[137] For more information on the doctrine of the Imāmate see W. Madelung in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Imāma; also see O. Leaman & Kecia, A., *Islam: The Key Concepts*, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 124-8.

[138] H. Algar, "A Short Biography," in *Imam Khomeini Life, Thought and Legacy: Essays from an Islamic Movement Perspective*, ed. A. R. Koya, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust & Crescent International, 2009, pp. 19-21.

[139] M. Baqar, "Khomeini's Search for Perfection: Theory and Reality," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. A. Rahnema, London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994, p. 77.

THE BOOK OF LOVE

Another aspect of the school of love is the book of love (*ketāb-e'eshq*). In order to understand the modern political use of the motif, its theological and mystical dimensions should be considered. In an Islamic context, the archetypical book is Qur'ān. In theology, several words mean book: the word *moshaf*, often translated as codex, denotes one of the first collections of the Qur'ānic material.[140] Another form of a book is *lowh*, usually translated as tablet. The Qur'ān (35:22) refers to a tablet that is preserved in heaven (*lowh al-mahfuz*),[141] and the same word is used elsewhere in the Qur'ān. One's destiny is thought to be written on the Preserved Tablet, and to be unchangeable. In Qur'ān 98:1, the *lowh* is the first revelation to Mohammad, and the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'ān. The divine will is preserved on the *lowh* by the pen (*qalam*).[142] From a theological point of view, the importance of the Book lies in reciting and understanding religious principles. Mystics say that reciting the Qur'ān leads one to spiritual perfection.

For the mystics, a human being is the Qur'ān par excellence, or is a copy of the Preserved Tablet, in which all its beauty and wisdom appears, and the face of the beloved is like the manuscript of the Qur'ān.[143] The classical love poets introduced this motif to their poems to emphasize the necessity of purifying the heart, the site of love, which is comparable to the Preserved Tablet. As with the Tablet, the divine will is written on the tablet of the heart, and nothing can be erased.

The heart (*del*) is the center of one's understanding and of divine knowledge, and the location of *zekr,* the remembrance of God that illumines and perfects the soul.[144] God knows what is hidden in the heart, and on the Day of Judgment, one's actions will be

---

[140] J. Burton, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Muṣḥaf.

[141] R. Wisnovsky, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qu'ān*, under Heavenly Book. For mystical view on Preserved Tablet see M. Tourge, *Rumī and the Hermenutics, of Eruticism*, Leiden: Koninkelijke Brill, 2007, p. 58. For Ghazāli's view on Preserved Tablet see M. Elkaisy- Friemuth, *'Abd al-Jabbār, Ebn Sinā and al-Ghazāli*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 128-29.

[142] A.J. Wensinck and C.E. Bosworth, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Lawḥ.

[143] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 412-3.

[144] *The Niche of Lights: A Parallel English–Arabic Text*, by Mohammad Ghazāli, translated, introduced and annotated by D. Buchman, Brigham: Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah, 1988, pp. xix-xxiv.

judged on the basis of one's heart.[145] Hypocritical actions will be counted as worthless.[146] God casts the divine Light into the purified heart of his servant, according to Abu Hāmed Ghazāli.[147] Likewise, the heart records evil and false thoughts, and the hearts of evildoers are hardened so they cannot accept God's revelation and messages.[148]

The motif of the book of love is popular with the war poets. In addition to words such as tablet (*lowh*) and codex (*moshaf*), found in a religious context, they use more secular terms such as *daftar* (notebook, used by Bahrāmchi in the example just cited) and also preface (*dibāche)*.[149] The war poets used the mystical motif of the book of love to define self-sacrifice as a spiritual stage, in which the soldier reads divine secrets from the preserved tablet of his heart. In mysticism, self-denial may be considered as a pre-requisite for self-sacrifice on the path to perfection. In the war context, the soldier who denies himself becomes capable of understanding the divine secret.

The war poetess Akram Bahrāmchi uses the motif in a *ghazal* (published 2008) entitled 'The Myth of History' (*osture-ye tārikh*):

khāterātash ruzhā-ye rowshan-e sangar va nur
daftar-e 'omrash ketāb-e 'eshq-o shur-o sāz bud [150]

His memories were the bright days of trenches, and light
The notebook of his life was the book of love, longing and preparation [for battle]

Bahrāmchi links the trenches to light to suggest a mystical purpose to the war and its aftermath. For the mystics, "the real light is God and anything else called light is a

[145] J.D. McAuliffe, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), 'God Acts upon the Hearts,' under Heart.
[146] A.Z. Nasr Hamid, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Intention.
[147] M. Smith, *Al-Ġazāli the Mystic*, London: Luzac & Co., 1944, p. 120.
[148] J.D. McAuliffe, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), 'Negative Associations,' under Heart.
[149] For the preface of love (*dibāche-ye 'eshq*) see: S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 132.
[150] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: Majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'-e moqaddas*, ed. A. Binā'i, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 16.

metaphor."[151] God guides his servant through the appearance of light. Mystics point to the Qur'ānic verse (24:35) quite frequently.[152] Najm al-Din Rāzi defines those who are enlightened by the light of God as the only survivors in the world: the rest are dead, but think they are alive.[153] The inner light that is revealed to the mystic after self-purification guides him on the path of love,[154] and the light of guidance is revealed in the heart of the youth on the front. Bahrāmchi uses this connotation of light to inspire self-sacrifice in the soldier. She implies that the light of God is revealed on the battlefield and guides the soldier to read from the book of love. This creates a setting that allows the soldier to equate himself with a mystic who is guided by the divine light. In a compact double metaphor, Bahrāmchi refers to the soldier's diary as a notebook in which the deeds of one's life are recorded (*daftar-e 'omr*), which implies, it is the preserved tablet of the heart, and then equates this with the book of love. His deeds on the battlefield, written in the book of love, will be preserved until the Day of Judgment.

Following the extract that has been cited, Bahrāmchi refers to predestination (*taqdir*) to indicate that the soldier was selected in pre-eternity to fight against the enemies of religion. The soldier's journey to the battlefield is a prelude to a pilgrimage to the Beloved, and the soldier's heart is compared to the purified heart of a mystic who receives the divine beauty and revelation. While the mystic goes through an ascetic training to achieve his goal, the soldier attains the same spiritual level by accepting the hardship of war out of love, and going to the front to die. One who wants to understand the divine secret should offer his life on the front-line. Then, his short life is transformed into a book of love that will not perish.

The war poet Mohammad-'Ali Mardāni uses the book of love motif in a *qaside* entitled 'In Relation to the Imposed War' (*dar rābete bā jang-e tahmili*):

bar lowh-e 'eshq naqsh-e moqarnas kesham

---

[151] M. Ghazāli, *The Niche of Lights (Meshkāt al-Anwār)*, p. xxxii.
[152] C.W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism from Rābi'a to Ruzbihān," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its' Origins to Rumi*, pp. 449-50.
[153] N. Rāzi, *Resāle-ye 'eshq*, p. 80.
[154] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 4-60.

āzin ravāq-e bāgh-o golestān konam[155]

I am making engravings on the tablet of love
I will adorn the threshold of the garden and the rose-garden.

Moqarnas is a way of decorating the inside of a half-dome in Islamic architecture, especially in mosques. The poet compares his heart (*lowh-e 'eshq)*, literally, the tablet of love, to a mosque, which he decorates with engravings or incising. As a moqarnas pattern looks pitted, it resembles a battlefield covered with shell-holes.

The contemporary poet Mohsen 'Ali-khāni uses the motif of the notebook of love (*daftar-e 'eshq*) in a *robā'i*:

in daftar-e 'eshq az Hosein in dārad
rokhsāre-ye khun chehre-ye shirin dārad
gar khāter-e dargāh-e 'azizi dārad
del bordan az u vazhe-ye khunin dārad[156]

In the notebook of love from Hosein, we find the following:
"What sweetness there is, in a bloodied complexion?
If one seeks acceptance at the threshold of a beloved
And to steal his heart; he should use words stained with blood."

The notebook of love is linked to Hosein's self-sacrificing behavior. Self-sacrifice is a heritage he has left for the Shiites, and it is preserved in the notebook of their hearts. The poet compares the soldier to a suitor who, if he wishes to be accepted by the beloved, should paint his face with blood.

[155] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e sherkat-e sahāmi-ye chāp-e vezārat-e Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1361/1982, p. 19.
[156] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'e moqaddas,* ed. A. Binā'i, p. 41.

THE GRAMMAR OF LOVE

The motif of grammar of love is derived from the motif the lesson of love (*dars-e 'eshq*), which is in turn, related to the academy of love. Medieval mystics used the motif in the sense that spiritual disciplines are an alternative to ordinary lessons. They said that their relationship with the Beloved requires ascetic preparation. For this purpose, they denied themselves and disregarded the world. In his mystical work *al-Monqiz men al-Zalāl* ('Deliverance from Error'), Ghazāli writes that following one's desires makes one blind, unable to see the truth and follow it, but the fear of God can save one from going astray, for it means following God's commands and detachment from all things, lawful and unlawful alike.[157] Self-discipline is an important principle in mystical progress. It increases love toward God in the heart of the mystic. Fear of God is one of the mystical disciplines that unite the mystic with God. When his purposes become a single purpose, he frees himself from everything and begins contemplating and 'remembering' God. This process clears his mind and light enlightens his heart. All these guide the mystic to love of God and nearness to Him.[158] Orthodox Muslims insist on performing the devotional duties that are obligatory on every individual: prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca and charity.[159]

The motif of the lesson of love, which for the mystics was a preparatory ascetic discipline, takes a different form in the war poetry. A number of these poets speak of the grammar, or the grammar-book, of the language of love, in a way that resembles the etiquette of being love, in poems and treatises on profane love. The war poet Qeysar-e Aminpur used the motif of *dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq* ('The Grammar of the Language of Love') as the title of a volume of poetry, for a chapter in his book *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār* ('The Complete Collection of Poems'), and as the title of a *ghazal*. A *dastur* is a book of model texts which the student copies, to learn the art of writing or of correct expression, so it relates to the motif of the lesson of love rather than the book of love. However a *dastur* is also an order issued, to be obeyed. Aminpur refers to motifs in the

[157] A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London, Boston, & Sydney: Mandala Books, 1979, p. 45-49.
[158] Ibid., p. 56.
[159] W.A.R. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsveld, *Religious Freedom and the Position of Islam in Western Europe: Opportunities and Obstacles in the Acquisition of Equal Rights*, Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995, p. 67.

etiquette of love such as indirect communication with the beloved, hiding the secret of one's love, the lover's patience and the jealousy of a rival, and to both meanings of *dastur*, as a model text for the student, and as an order to be obeyed.

dast-e 'eshq az dāman-e del dur bād
mitavān āyā be del dastur dād?[160]

May the hand of love be kept from grasping the hem of the heart,
Is it possible to give orders to the heart?

The question is rhetorical: love asks no permission, it commands the heart. The power of love, and its functioning according to its own rules and principles, are emphasized in the following lines: "Can one order the ocean/ not to remember the shore?" The mystical motif of the ocean of love (*bahr-e 'eshq,* or *daryā-ye 'eshq*) appears several times in this poem. In mystical love treatises, a perfect mystic enters the ocean of love and finds the pearl of Truth, but one who is unready, who does not experience this love, cannot reach even the shore of love.[161] By using the term, the poet indirectly compares the soldier with a perfect mystic who is able to dive into the depths of the ocean of love if he denies himself. Thus, the battlefield is like the ocean of love in which real lovers may find the pearl of Truth, according to the poet. The next line puts the rhetorical question in a new form: "Can one order the wave and the wind to stop?" Here, the poet compares the action of love on the heart to the wind and the wave: their movements are beyond man's power. The wind is a common feature in classical love poetry, where it is called *sabā*, *nasim* and *bād*. The wind carries the message or the perfume of the beloved to the lover. Through his rhetorical questions, Aminpur says that love attracts and occupies the lover's heart, and the lover has no control of this. Using these mystical motifs in the political context means that one need not ask whether war makes sense. War and its violations are compared to love coming upon

[160] Q. Aminpur, *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār*, p. 34.
[161] For a classical mystical example see Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat*, p. 228.

a lover, and death to falling in love. It is an order (*dastur*) to be obeyed.

In the following lines Aminpur refers to the other meaning of *dastur.* In combination with *zabān* ('language'), *dastur* means the grammar or grammar-book that is a model to copy.

ān ke dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq rā
bi gozāre dar nahād-e mā nahād
khub midānest tigh-e tiz rā
dar kaf-e masti nemibāyest dād

The One who put the grammar of the language of love
In our nature, without an explanation
Well knows that he should not put
A sharp blade in the hand of a drunken man

The poet implies that one does not learn the language of love in school: rather, it is put into our nature at the time of creation. The language of love has a grammar (*dastur*) like every other language. In the second line, Aminpur plays with the ambivalence of *nahād*, which means both 'nature' or 'essence,' and as a verb, 'to put.' In Persian grammar, the subject of a sentence is also the *nahād,* while the *gozāre* (literally, 'the explanatory part') is the predicate that completes the sentence. The poet refers to the Creation when the Creator put the language of love in human nature, but without any explanation. Therefore the grammar of love in one's nature is incomplete, like an incomplete sentence that every one completes as he wishes. The soldier completes the sentence of love with his death.

In the last line, the poet compares this incomplete grammar of love to a sharp blade that should not be given to a drunkard because he has no control over his actions. The poet compares the soldier-lover to a drunken man. In mystical love literature, a lover is described as drunk on heavenly wine. He seeks the eternal Cupbearer and offers his life to become one with Him.

Aminpur uses the motif of the grammar of love to assert that the soldier completes the sentence when he offers his life on path of love (i.e. on the military front) and achieves eternal survival.

THE RELIGION OF LOVE: FIGHTING IN THE PATH OF LOVE

In the poetry of the Iran-Iraq war the mystical motif of the religion of love and other motifs connected to it were used to fan the flame of self-sacrifice. I will also discuss how death became meaningful for Iranian soldiers, so that they offered their lives for the cause of mystical love, and not merely for their country.

The mystics attribute several practices, doctrines and concepts to the religion of love, through which one can achieve union with the Beloved.[162] One of the first requirements of the religion of love is to tread the path of love, referred to as the *tariq-e 'eshq* or *rāh-e 'eshq*. The path of love in classical mystical texts offers an alternative to the orthodox path of Islam, defined by the practices of the mosque and the religious law (*shari'at*). However *shari'at* itself means a path: the main path, and the concept of the path of religion is part of orthodox theology. Some terms for it are taken from the Qur'ān. For example, *shari'at* and *menhāj* are used together at 5:48, where Arberry translates them as "a right way and an open road," and *din,* religion, occurs almost 100 times.[163] The path, or religion, entails following the direction given by God, which consists of religious principles and practices. Staying on the path limits a Muslim to a distinctive way of life; the way of obedience and submission to God. The path guides a Muslim to spiritual progress and eventually to salvation.

The orthodox path has a political dimension, for a Muslim who follows it not only fulfills his personal religious obligations, but also demonstrates and witnesses God's will in society. He must not only watch his own steps but also take part in social, political, economic and cultural affairs. Sufism also constitutes a path (*tariqe*) that begins with

[162] For information on Jāmis, a groupe of dervishes lived in classical period, called 'men of the religion of love, see A.T. Karamustafa, *God's Unrully Friendes,* p.80.

[163] N. Calder & M.B. Hooker, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Sharīʿa, 1. Sharīʿa in Ḳurʾān and ḥadīth.

repentance and leads through a number of stations (*maqāmāt*), representing the acquisition of virtues, such as absolute trust in God, and on to a higher series of ecstatic states (*ahvāl*). These culminate in the extinction (*fanā*) of the mystic (or the extinction of his lower soul or human attributes), and the subsequent continuance of his transformed personality, which has now taken on the attributes of God).[164] However, in the war poetry, the path of love is defined by sacrifice on the battlefield.

One political aspect of the path is to struggle[165] for the cause of God (*jehād fi sabil Allāh*). Iranian leaders, during the war, called the fight against the Iraqi regime a 'sacred defense' (*defā'-e moqaddas*). They legitimized the war by referring to religious motives such as 'defending righteousness' (*defā'-e haqq*) and the 'defence of Islam and Islamic values' (*defā' az eslām va arzeshhā-ye eslāmi*).[166] Constant elaboration on such motifs persuaded the audience that fighting the war was a religious duty. They saw themselves as preserving Islam from its infidel enemy. To confirm the infidelity of the Iraqi Ba'thist regime, the leaders of the Islamic Republic classified them as dissenters (*boghāt*, sing. *bāghi*). According to Shiite Islam, a dissenter is one who is against the Shiite imam. In a sermon at Friday prayers in Tehran Ayatollah Mohammed Emāmi Kāshāni (b.1934) defined *boghāt* as those who act against the ruler of Islam, Muslims and the Islamic community. Therefore, Iraqi authorities are *boghāt*, because they attacked the Islamic country of Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini, in his sermons, referred to the Iran-Iraq war as a war of Islam against infidelity (*kofr*).[167] These sayings legitimized the fight against Iraq: Iranians should fight to preserve Islam.

The necessity of the fight with the enemies of God is confirmed by the Qur'ān: God will reward in Paradise one who fights with the infidels (9:111). Iran's Shiite authority called the Sunnis infidels, whose ancestors had taken the caliphate from the family of the prophet and killed them. However according to them about sixty percent of Iraq's

---

[164] J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, New York: Tauris, 2000, p. 3.
[165] For different kinds of *jehād* see S. M. Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999, p. 40.
[166] Ibid, p. 45.
[167] Ibid, pp. 55-61.

population are Shiite, and most of the Iraqi soldiers were Shiite Muslims.[168] In the Iranian war propaganda the population in Iraq were called 'the oppressed nation of Iraq'. Rescuing the oppressed Iraqis from the tyrannies of the Sunni state was one of the goals of the war. Saddam Hosein had taken authority by force, thus, the Shiite Muslims of Iran had a responsibility to free Iraqis and restore their rights.

The Qur'ān makes a distinction between one who fights on the path of God and one who remains in a safe place (4:95); it gives a higher status to the former. The importance of performing *jehād* is seen in the earliest years of Islam, when the Muslim community was shaped. In later periods, *jehād* was considered a duty that had to be performed regularly. For instance, the Caliph Hārun al-Rashid (766-809) performed *hajj* one year and fought against the Byzantines the following year. In this period, some mystics took part in fighting against the infidels. 'Abdollāh Ebn al-Mobārak is a famous example. Some even devoted their lives to fighting the infidels, as part of an ascetic discipline. These people were connected by a common ideology, lifestyle and goals. For them *jehād* was a religious obligation to be fulfilled by all believers "irrespective of the political authority."[169] For the medieval mystics, fighting for the cause of God was equal to other core religious practices, such as fasting and prayer. *Jehād*, in the sense of physical struggle, was a form of self-mortification and a method of attaining spiritual progress.

Mystic writers used the motif of the path of love (*tariq-e 'eshq)* to offer an alternative to formal religion. *Jehād* was used to refer to a moral struggle, in the first case against one's self. One who embarks upon the path of perfection has a higher spiritual power, because he abstains from worldly desires and mortifies his body to purify his lower soul (*nafs*) of negative traits.[170] The path consists of several stages and stations. It begins with repentance (*towbe*), meaning to turn one's face from sin. The mystic repents of sin, worldly desires, and the things that separate him from God. The next step is abstinence (*wara'*), which originates in the fear of God. An ascetic abstains from all worldly

[168] R. Wright, *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 86; for a historical example, see D.G. Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry and the Ayyār Phenomenon in the Middle Islamic World*, Istanbul: Wurzburg, 2007, pp. 39-40.
[169] Ibid., pp. 41-45.
[170] E. Geoffroy & et al, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ṭariḳa, I. the nature and Development of the Term in Sufism.

belongings and desires. What comes next is *tawakkol*, means absolute trust in God. The next station is patience (*sabr*), which is followed by the station of gratitude (*shokr*). Following that is contentment (*rezā*). The celebrated mystic Zo'al-Nun the Egyptian (d. 859) says, "*Rezā* is the joy of the heart in the bitterness of the divine decree." The next stations are fear (*khowf*) and hope (*rajā*). A mystic is not afraid of the fire of the Hell, but rather of God's scrutiny. The last stations are love (*'eshq*) and gnosis (*ma'refat*). The interconnection between love and gnosis is elaborated on by Ghazāli, who writes, "… one can only love what one knows."[171]

WAR POETRY, AND THE PATH OF LOVE

Persian war poets employ the terminology used in classical love literature, and by the medieval mystics, building on those traditions. In war poetry, the soldier's journey to the front line is defined as a mystical path of perfection involving obedience, and offering, to some extent, an alternative to the orthodox practices of the mosque. One who follows these principles has greater virtue and morality. His spiritual attainment connects him to the divine truth. The soldier on the battlefield quickly reaches the spiritual level that a mystic might achieve through a lifetime of ascetic practices. He becomes an example of virtue to be followed by other members of the community. There is a major difference, however, between the mystic striving to achieve spiritual elevation and the soldier fighting in the war.

The war poets equated death on the battlefield with embarking on the path of love, to persuade the young soldiers of Iran to sacrifice their lives. The war poet Seyyed Hasan Hoseini applied the motif of the path of love in a *ghazal* entitled 'Farewell' (*vedā'*):

vāy-e man gar dar tariq-e 'eshq kutāhi konam
khāsse vaqti yār bā bāng-e rasā mikhānadam[172]

Woe to me if I am not ready to go on the path of love

[171] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 109-132.
[172] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 33.

Especially when the beloved calls me with a clear voice

The poet compares a soldier's yearning to fight the enemy with a mystic's yearning to embark on the path of love. For the soldier it means *jehād*. The soldier hears the voice of the beloved (*yār*) calling him. The poet then elaborates on the mystical tenets: the path of love, in Islamic mysticism, embraces the *shari'at* (religious law), *tariqat* (the mystical path) and *haqiqat* (the Truth). *Shari'at* as we have seen is a Qur'anic term derived from *shar'* and meaning "the main road." The principles that a mystic (*sālek* or *morid)* who starts on the path should follow are called *tariqat,* In Arabic, a *tariq* is a branch of the *shar'*. Therefore, following the religious law is a prerequisite for entering the path.[173] Hoseini compares the soldier who goes to the front line to a mystic who resolves to act on the principles of the *tariqat.* Both may understand the divine reality (*haqiqat*), which is the ultimate destination of the mystic journey. Another important aspect of the war poetry is identification of the beloved.

In the second line, the poet compares Ayatollah Khomeini to the spiritual beloved (*yār*). Because of the gender neutrality inherent to Persian, the gender of the beloved remains unclear. '*Yār*' and '*dust*' ('friend') may refer to a female or male beloved.[174] Ayatollah Khomeini is also compared to a spiritual master (*sheykh*) whom the aspirant mystic must obey. In Islamic mysticism, the relationship between a mystic and his master is of great importance. A mystic who embarks upon the path to spiritual perfection should follow the principles of his master (i.e. the teacher of love), who for the mystic is a perfect model of God on earth, the prototype of the 'perfect man'. The aspirant mystic perceives the Beauty of God in his master,[175] who is represented as a friend who guides the student to follow the principles and practices of the path, such as abstinence, self-mortification, and

---

[173] Ibid., p. 33.

[174] See J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1968, p. 86.

[175] G. Böwering, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Ensān-e Kāmel. In late Safavid Iran, religious scholars such as the jurist mollā Mohammad Bāqir Majlisi (1037-1110/1627-8) and Mohammad Tāher Qomi heavily attacked Sufis who claimed that a mystic can see the beauty of God in the face of his master. See Z.A. Safā, *Tārikh-e adabiyyāt dar Iran: az āghāz-e sade-ye dahom tā miyāne-ye sade-ye dawāzdahom hejri*, 5th edition, Tehran: Ferdowsi, 1363/1984, pp. 209-211. For further information on Sufi orders in the Safavid period see S.A. Arjomand, "Religious Extremism, Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722," in *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 15:1, 1981, pp. 1-35.

reciting the Qur'ān and the remembrance (*zekr*) of God's names. The aspirant mystic should obey the instructions and principals that his master dictates.[176] In the war poetry, these ideas are applied either to Ayatollah Khomeini, who is presented as a spiritual master and beloved, or to imam Hosein.

Hoseini emphasizes the importance of obedience (*etā'at*) to the beloved. In the poem above, he says that the beloved (*yār*), meaning Khomeini, has called him. The lover follows the demand of his beloved, Khomeini, and offers his life on this path. It is worth noting that Ayatollah Khomeini was an ideal leader for both traditionally religious Iranians and the educated younger generation. For the former he represented cultural values and traditions, and for the later he was a champion of national independence. Ayatollah Khomeini intended to change the world, and this idea fascinated the young population.[177]

In the following couplet, Hoseini juxtaposes the path of love with death on the battlefield and compares Ayatollah Khomeini to the third Shiite imam, Hosein:

bāng-e hal men nāser az ku-ye Jamārān miresad
dar tariq-e 'āsheqi ruh-e khodā mikhānadam[178]

The call 'is there anyone to assist me' is heard from the direction of Jamārān
The Spirit of God (*Ruh-e khodā*) is calling me to embark on the path of love

The poet again says that a lover who embarks on the path of love should obey the will of the Beloved. The expression 'is there anyone to help me' (*hal men nāsir*),[179] repeats words attributed to imam Hosein, during the battle against the Umayyad caliph Yazid on the day of *'Āshurā*. Their use here implies that the Sunni Saddam Hosein, Iraq's president, and his men are faithless, and usurpers of authority, like Yazid. According to the Shiite sources, Yazid did not respect Islamic principles: for example, among Shiites it is believed that he

[176] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 135.
[177] A.M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921,* p. 201.
[178] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 33.
[179] This is the abstract form of *hal men nāser yansoroni*? ('Is there anyone to assist me?').

drank wine. In this comparison, the Iranian youth correspond to imam Hosein's righteous companions, and the Iraqi soldiers to Yazid and his men, who killed imam Hosein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammad, on the plain of Karbalā.[180]

The voice from Jamārān saying 'is there anyone to help me' is that of Ayatollah Khomeini, who lived in this suburb of Tehran. Khomeini is therefore being equated with imam Hosein. Khomeini, like Hosein, called Shiites to assist him against the enemy. The poet politicizes the mystical motif of the path of love to create a dynamic setting in which soldiers equate themselves with the historical companions and helpers of imam Hosein. They fight against the descendants of the Umayyad caliph to take revenge for Hosein's blood.

To illustrate Khomeini's influence on his followers, Hamid Dabashi refers to Khomeini's role as a leader who mobilizes the Revolution to an Islamic Revolution, and in turn the Islamic Revolution offers him the highest mystical position. For his followers, Khomeini "revived the religious consciousness…, he has made it possible to believe again in a metaphysics of Ultimate Salvation…, he is considered to have enacted a popular epic."[181] These notions are introduced in war poetry; Ayatollah Khomeini is also equated with a sage who knows how to cure the pain of love.[182] The poet Abd al-Hamid Ja'fari, in a *ghazal* entitled 'In Memory of Friends' (*yād-e yārān*), compares Ayatollah Khomeini to the "pole" (i.e., axis or guide post) of the chivalrous" (*qotb-e 'ayyārān*). The war poet 'Ali Mo'allem from Dāmghān describes Ayatollah Khomeini as opium (*afyun*) that cures the drunkenness of the wine of love, saying: "to believe it, this visible argument is enough for me because Khomeini is the best opium for my long-lasting drunkenness (*marā be bāvari insān dalil-e 'eyni beh*/ *ke dir nash'e-am afyun-e man Khomeini beh*).[183] The analogy between Khomeini and opium is not only that he is a remedy for drunkenness, but also that his charisma attracts followers who cannot leave him alone. Mohammad 'Ali Mo'allem also introduces Khomeini as the point to which the 'pillars' turn (*qeble-ye owtād*), saying:

---

[180] For further information on '*Āshurā* see M. Ayoub, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under 'Āšūrā'
[181] H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent,* p. 418.
[182] See 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, Tehran: Sherkat-e Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 40.
[183] M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre,* p. 53.

"no one asks, what do you have in the dish of perfume / O direction for the pillars! No one seeks what you have (*kas naporsad ke to dar table-ye orād che dāri / kas najuyad ke to ey qeble-ye owtād che dāri*).[184] Based on the doctrine of *qotb*s, Islamic mystics believe that existence is always supported by forty mighty men, the poles (*qotbs*), and when one dies another pole takes his place.[185]A 'pole' is a man who has achieved spiritual perfection. In Persian mysticism *qotbs* and *owtād* are used indiscriminately; *owtād* is a Qur'ānic term (38:12, 78:7; 89:10), *qotb* is not. The poet compares Khomeini to the *qeble* to which Muslims turn in prayer, to say that all the 'pillars' follow Khomeini's instructions and his principles. Thus, existence as a whole is in need of his support.

'Abdollāh Giviyān compares Ayatollah Khomeini to several famous mystic masters, entitled 'I Know my Lineage Well' (*man tabār-e khod rā khub mishenāsam*):

tā Bāyazid-o Joneyd…
tā Busa'id-o Khāje Ansār…
dar pish-e pāy-e pir-e zamān
āsude dar behesht-e Jamārān
be chelle benshinand[186]

… until Bāyazid and Joneyd…
Busa'id and Khāje Ansār…
Perform the forty-day retreat (*chelle neshini*)
in Jamārān, at the feet of the master of the age

Giviyān suggests that Khomeini's spiritual level is higher than medieval mystical masters such as Abu Yazid Bastāmi, known as Bāyazid, al-Joneyd (d. 910), Abu Sa'id Abi'l-Kheyr

[184] Ibid., p.115.
[185] Also known as the forty saints; see B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya in Early Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publications, 1993, pp. 483-496.
[186] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 139.

(967-1049) and Khāje ʻAbdollāh Ansāri (1006-1089). They should perform *chelle- nishini* before Khomeini. This means literally, "sitting for forty days" and refers to the mystic practice of a forty-day retreat, during which the mystic fasts, prays and contemplates God constantly, in the hope of receiving guidance from God. According to the poet, Khomeini spends most of his life in his room performing religious devotions, and has gained a divine knowledge through which he can interpret what is revealed to those mystics.

THE PRAYER OF LOVE

1. OBLIGATORY PRAYERS

The motif of the prayer of love (*namāz-e ʻeshq)* relates to the path of love, since prayer is part of the orthodox Islamic path, the *shariʻat*. Prayer is common to all religions: it distinguishes believers from non-believers, and the manner of prayer distinguishes one religious community from another. Prayer in Islam has different forms: it may be an appeal for forgiveness (*esteghfār*), an expression of praise for God (*tasbih*), a repeated recitation and remembrance of God, and more. I will discuss only *namāz* and (in the following section), mystic prayer.

The most characteristic and common form of prayer among Muslims is the obligatory prayer, known as *salāt* or *namāz*, which are performed five times daily by Muslims. The obligatory prayers are one of the 'five pillars of Islam,' the others being the declaration of faith, fasting during Ramazān, pilgrimage to Mecca, and almsgiving. In Islam, these practices demonstrate one's religiosity and piety, and obedience to God. The obligatory prayers connect the believer with God, without any intermediary. This evokes the image of Moses talking to God,[187] and the prophet Mohammad's ascension (*meʻrāj*) and conversation with God. Mohammad is reported to have said that daily prayer is a remembrance of the joy of the ascension. This enabled mystics to link mystical ecstasy to the ascension terminology. To some extent, a sincere Muslim may experience such a divine

[187] G. Böwering, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Prayer, the Institution of Ritual Prayer.

presence.[188]

The mystics developed an alternative literary and theological, motif, the prayer of love, to illustrate how their relationship with the Beloved differed from that of orthodox Muslims. According to the treatises on mysticism, a mystic should contemplate God constantly, not just as set times. Such a mystic's faith (*imān*) was considered superior to performing religious rituals without mindfulness. In the poetry of the Iran-Iraq war, the prayer of love is connected to the soldiers' prayer and their act of sacrifice on the battlefield. Their act is compared to the prayer of imam Hosein before he fights with, and is killed by, the soldiers of Ebn al-Ziyād. Using this comparison, war poets can introduce imam Hosein as a lover performing the prayer of love.

The importance of prayer is stressed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who writes that one should be happier with his prayers than with the victory of the Islamic Revolution.[189] For him, prayer sustains the Islamic political tradition. He implies that prayer is more important than the Revolution because, on the one hand, prayer connects one to God and, on the other hand, if more Muslims perform the prayers, this union strengthens the Islamic community. Performing prayer connects the believers to each other, creating a sense of community. Every individual performs his duty with one's personal space, it connects him each day to the community. The believer also knows he is performing the ritual in the way the prophet did. So prayer connects the believer with three realities: the community, the prophet and God.[190]

The war poets applied the terminology of ascension and prayer to the events of the war. In war poetry, a soldier's fight on the battlefield is compared to the prayer of a Muslim. During the war, the soldiers would perform the ritual obligatory prayers in congregation (*namāz-e jamā'at*) before an attack. The prayer was a means of preparing for death, and fostered belief in divine support for their fight against an enemy of religion. The possibility of death, after prayer, gave a transcendent quality to the fight, like the prophet's

---

[188] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 218; G. Monnot, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ṣalāt, B. The place of ṣalāt in the Muslim religion.

[189] *Pithy Aphorisms, Wise Sayings and Counsels*, Tehran: The Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division), 1994. p. 38.

[190] G. Monnot, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ṣalāt, B. The place of ṣalāt in the Muslim religion.

ascension.

The war poets used the mystical motif of prayer of love for further political purposes. Mohammad Khalil Mozanneb inserts the motif of the prayer of love into imam Hosein's death on the plain of Karbalā:

salām kard be ākhar namāz-e 'eshq be 'eshq
ke gheyr-e 'eshq be mehrāb-e khun nadid Hosein[191]

He [Hosein] saluted love, in his last prayer of love
Because he saw nothing except love in the prayer niche of blood

The lines tell us that Hosein's last prayer was directed to the prayer niche of blood (in contrast to the prayer niche in the mosque, which marks the direction for obligatory prayers. In this prayer, Hosein encountered, and greeted, love. The poet implies that the vision of love removes the fear of death. By using the term prayer niche of blood, rather than the prayer niche of the heart, the poet implies that this prayer is in fact the moment of Hosein's death on the battlefield. And when love manifests itself, the lover sees nothing but love.[192]

The war poet Samad Parviz introduces the motif of the prayer of love in a quatrain (*robā'i*), in which he compares the fight against the enemy to the prayer of love, and connects it to the death of imam Hosein:

namāz-e 'eshq dar sahrā be pā bud
emām-e 'āsheqān khun-e khodā bud
sary ke ruy-e neyze āye mikhānd

[191] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, Tehran: Howze-ye honari-ye Sazemān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi, 1369/1990, p. 24.
[192] For further examples, see *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 75; S. Behbahāni, *Majmu'e-ye ash'ār*, Tehran: Mo'assese-ye Enteshārāt-e Negāh, 1385/2006, p. 940.

be haftād-o do mellat āshenā bud[193]

The prayer of love was performed on the plain
The leader of the lovers was the blood of God
The head on a lance, that recited the Qur'ān,
Was one known to the seventy-two nations

The prayer of love, which in traditional Sufism had to be connected to battle against the temptations of the lower soul and self-sacrifice here it is connected to Hosein.

The importance of the lover's loyalty even in death is neatly examined in the section "The Narration of Mansur Hallāj on the Gallows" in the *Ellāhi-nāme,* by the mystic poet ʻAttār:

pas u goft ān ke serr-e ʻeshq beshnākht
namāzash rā be khun bāyad vozu sākht[194]

Then he [Hallāj] said one who knows the secret of love
Has to perform his ablutions with blood, to perform the prayer [of love]

By connecting the ablutions, which are done before beginning the obligatory prayers, to Hallāj's symbolic act of covering his face with his blood when his hands were cut off, ʻAttār shows the initial step in the path of love is willingness to death.

2. THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD IN MYSTIC PRAYER

The examples of the prayer of love above relate to the obligatory prayers, especially when they are performed by the congregation in a mosque. In other cases the prayer of love motif relates to forms of prayer that are free from the restraints of the mosque. The contemporary

---

[193] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e ʻĀshurā 3*, selected by M. ʻA. Mardāni, p. 30. In the second line, the term 'the blood of God' (*khun-e khodā*) is a title of Imām Hosein. It refers to the divine tradition (*hadith-e qodsi*), in which God speaks in the first person: "whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money."

[194] Farid al-Din ʻAttār, *Elāhi-nāme*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Tus, 1368/ 1989, p.107.

poet Shahāb refers to this freedom of restraints in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Prayer of Love' (*namāz-e 'eshq*), intended to mobilize the youth of Iran to take part in the fight:

be ruy-e asb qiyāmam be ruy-e khāk qo'ud
in namāz-e rah-e 'eshq ast kaz ādāb tohi-st[195]

I stand up [in prayer] on the horse; I prostrate myself in the dust,
This is the prayer of the path of love, for which there are no proper forms

The poet makes a distinction between the prayer of love and daily prayers (*namāz*): there are prescribed forms (*ādāb*) for the daily prayers, but not for the prayer of love.[196] Although he uses the word *namāz*, the reference is to free-form prayers. He uses the word *qo'ud*, meaning sitting down or remaining in one place, rather than *sojud*, the movement in the obligatory prayer in which the believer kneels forward until his forehead touches the ground (or for a Shiite, touches a small tablet made of clay ideally from Karbalā). This is in part a contrast to the prayer on the back of a horse, representing prayer in movement and prayer in stillness respectively. But the use of *qo'ud* rather than *sojud* is also another sign that it is mystic prayer, not the prayer of the mosque, which is intended. Some of the classical mystics considered this a higher form of prayer, or even an alternative to the obligatory daily prayers. Mansur Hallāj is an example: he said, "It is You who drives me mad with love, not my remembrance (in prayer) of You."[197] The idea is that for one whose soul is pure, there is a stage at which one is in constant communion with the Beloved and so near to the Creator that the religious protocols are redundant. By saying that there are no proper forms required, in the prayer of love, Shahāb compares the soldier to a mystic, and his death to the spiritual elevation of the mystic. They both endure hardships to purify their soul from negative traits. They leave their family and their belongings through the path of

[195] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 74.
[196] The word *ādāb*, translated here as proper forms, means "high quality of soul, good upbringing, urbanity, and courtesy." F. Gabrieli, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Adab.
[197] H.W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995, p. 71.

perfection and give up their lives for a higher cause. The poem may be interpreted in another fashion: the soldier may not leave the battle to perform prayer. While fighting, he is in constant remembrance of God. Neither the mystic nor the soldier needs to pray in a specific form, but they purify their hearts to receive the revelation of the Beloved, and they remember God in their hearts, not with their tongues.[198] The soldier attains the same mystical level that the mystic does because he is performing prayer without any *ādāb.* To reach the ultimate goal of prayer, standing in presence of God, the soldier comes to believe that his body is a barrier between himself and the Beloved. The mystic fights with his lower soul, which is considered the primary enemy of man, while the soldier fights the enemies of his religion. According to the poet, both the soldier and the mystic have a common goal; both perform *zekr* constantly to connect with the Beloved.

Discipline of *zekr* is defined as "an act of worship," "a methodical and repeated invocation of a formula, divine name, or litany (*werd*)."[199] To assert the importance of invocation of God, Sufis refer to the Qur'ānic verses in which the remembrance of God is mentioned as an obligatory act (33:41; 29:44). No less important than the doctrine of obligation is the doctrine of reciprocity of *zekr* through which man receives God's blessing when he invocates Him. As the Qur'ān states: "So remember Me and I will remember you" (2:147). Another doctrine of invocation is that "in essence the invocation, the invoker, and the Invoked One are one."[200] The invoker is inseparable from the Invoked. Another reason for which one should remember God is not to forget that He is his Lord. Although, we in our essence profess God's Lordship, the darkness of existence has veiled our soul; thus, man needs an inwardly spiritual journey to purify his soul.[201]

In war poetry the spiritual practice of *zekr* is associated with the soldiers' prayer on the battlefield. In a quatrain called 'Burning because of Thirst' (*suz-e teshnegi*), an

---

[198] For more information on remembrance with the tongue and in the heart, and the method of performance, see L. Gardet, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Dhikr; Sh. Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes: Being an Account of the Sufi Order Known as the Mevlevis and its Founder the Poet and Mystic Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*, Abany, NY: State University of New York Press, c.1992.

[199] M.I. Waley, "Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publicaitons, 1993, p. 50.

[200] Ibid. p. 506.

[201] Ibid. pp. 506-8.

anonymous war poet writes:

az 'arsh gozasht zekr-e yā rabhā-yash
shod tire ze dud-e āh-e del shabhā-yash
bar ātash-e sine-ash kasi āb narikht
misukht ze suz-e teshnegi labhāyash[202]

His invocations, i.e. O God, passed from the throne of God
From the sigh of his heart his nights became dark
No one poured water on the fire of his heart
His lips were consuming because of heat of (i.e. extreme) thirstiness

The poet asserts that the soldier's remembrance of God passed through His throne while the soldier sighs from the pain of separation from the Beloved. There is no one who can assist the soldier and settle the fire of love burning his heart. In this poem, the soldier on the military front on the one hand is compared to a mystic performing God's invocation (*zekr*). On the other hand the soldier is likened to imam Hosein who martyred while he was suffering from extreme thirst. The soldier's prayer may be seen as invocating God's name and His attributes. Through *zekr*, his heart is filled with passion for God and yearning for union with Him. Although night is dark, the poet associates the darkness with yearning for union with the Beloved. In Persian literature the lover's night is dark and long because he cannot sleep because of the pain of separation. In the third and fourth lines, by using the compound *suz-e teshnegi* i.e. literally "heat of thirstiness;" the poet refers to Karbalā and imam Hosein's death. He was killed, while for ten days, had no access to water. By employing the mystical word *zekr* and making reference to the event of Karbalā the poet draws an analogy between the mystic and imam Hosein; afterwards, the poet likens the soldier to both a mystic who is performing invocation and to imam Hosein who offered his life in the fight.

[202] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p.11.

THE PRIMORDIAL COVENANT AND ITS WITNESSES

In mystical literature, the motif of the primordial covenant is derived from a Qur'ānic verse (7:171) in which God made a covenant between Himself and Adam's progeny.[203] He asked Adam's descendants, "Am I not your Lord?" (*alast-o birabbekom*) and they answered, "Yes, we witness it" (*balā shahidnā*). The affirmative *balā,* in Arabic, or *bali* in Persian, looks and sounds very much like *balā'*, meaning affliction. The similarity was exploited in Persian literature. The mystics say that from the Day of the Covenant, man has accepted continual afflictions, because through suffering one's soul becomes pure and worthy of union with the Beloved.[204] Covenant (*mithāq)* is also a Qur'ānic word meaning "to trust, to have confidence in." The souls who answered in the affirmative to this Covenant are known as witnesses to it – the *shāhed-e alast.*

Basing themselves on the Qur'ānic verse, mystics have asserted that humanity made a covenant with God, which obliges them to purify their hearts from negative attributes to become worthy of God's forgiveness and receive His grace. The mystic's goal is to return to that moment of the covenant, in which there was an accord between God and humanity. Mystics use the motif to say that men do not belong only to the physical world, they originate in a divine moment, and their short lifetimes are an opportunity to purify their souls and become worthy of returning home, to paradise.

The poets of the Iran-Iraq war adapted this mystical motif to draw an analogy between a martyr's death at the front and a moment of spiritual perfection. The martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war, being the elected ones, are witnesses to the Covenant in Pre-eternity, and will be witnesses on the Day of Judgment in the hereafter. In this poetry, the primordial covenant entails a responsibility to participate in the fight against the enemy, for this is an act of obedience. When the soldier says *bali* and goes to the front, he is accepting afflictions for the sake of the Beloved. Therefore, he is fulfilling his eternal covenant.[205]

---

[203] C.E. Bosworth, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mīthāḳ; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Belief and Practices*, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2011, pp. 144-45 and 253.

[204] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 137. On this account Rumi wrties, He said *alast*, you answered yes/ what is gratitude for saying 'yes' it is enduring afflictions (*goft alast u to begofti bali/ shokr-e bali chist keshidan balā*). See Mowlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, p. 161, *ghazal* no. 355.

[205] The idea goes back at least as far as Rumi. See A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 341.

Death on the battlefield makes the soldier a witness, *shāhed*, to God's unity, and also makes him a martyr (*shahid*), whose example will be followed by the community. The two words come from the same root.[206]

One of the Islamic theoreticians whose ideas were used during the Islamic Revolution, and also in the war with Iraq, was 'Ali Shariati (1933-1977). He presents an interpretation of witnessing, as mentioned in verse 2:143 in the Qur'ān: "And thus, we have made you a just nation, so that you may bear witness unto the rest of mankind, and that the Apostle [Mohammad] may bear witness unto you…" In Shariati's reading, "this witnessing entails a responsibility for Muslims to perpetuate the heritage of their martyrs, of the Shiite imams and religious leaders, and of the Book, to make their nations an example, and to become martyrs for the people of the world, like the prophet who is both a witness and a martyr." Shariati even asserts that a martyr achieves the same spiritual rank that the prophet did.[207]

During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic drew on the mystical motif of bearing witness to assert that a solider who dies in battle becomes a model of sacrifice that the community should imitate. In a Friday sermon, Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged the Iranian young men to participate in the fight and sacrifice their lives to bear witness: "…to tear the veils of darkness and oppression, shed your blood. O martyrs! I take you as a witness that I am delivering the message of your blood."[208] Repeated references remind the audience that the martyr is alive and his witness is remembered. In Shiite tradition the Shiites' twelve imams are "spiritually present and actively involved in human affairs long after [their] deaths."[209] A similar attitude toward soldiers who have fallen in action exalts their rank to that of the Shiite imams. Ayatollah Khomeini holds that he is delivering 'the message of the martyr's blood'' (*payām-e khun-e shahid*). He indicates that the martyr is

---

[206] R. Peters, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shāhid.

[207] 'A. Shariati, *"Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,"* in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam, Majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, Tehran: Qalam, 1367/1988, p. 200.

[208] *Dar maktab-e jom'e*: *Majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, compiled and ordered by markaz-e madārek-e farhangi-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi, vol. 2, week 71-113, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e chāpkhāne-ye Vezārat-e Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1365/1984, p. 53, (sermon of 19/10/1359; 01/09/1981).

[209] D. Pinault, "Zeynab bint Ali and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. G. R.G. Hambly, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 81.

still a witness and observes his act. Thus, someone in the audience may conclude that the martyr is observing his actions, and he should show his loyalty to the martyr by emulating the path he took.

The concept of witnessing to the nation led during the war to a genre of martyr's testimonies: letters and wills written by Iranian soldiers. Sa'id Fathollāh, one of those who died, writes to his mother: "Over here, there is a war between Islam and blasphemy, and I have witnessed to it in full."[210] Sa'id Fathollāh defines himself as a witness to other nations, and considers the Iraqis as unbelievers. His subsequent death made Sa'id Fathollāh a model of morality and virtue.

The poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini applies the concept of the witness of self-sacrifice in a quatrain designed to encourage the Iranian population to participate in the fight against the Iraqi enemy:

in ast payām-e khun-e yārān-e shahid
jang ast barādarān neshastan natavān[211]

This is the message of the blood of the martyred friends
O brothers! This is war: we cannot sit [idle]

The martyr's message – written in blood – tells the people of Iran that they cannot be indifferent to the invasion. In revolutionary and war poems, the verb "not to sit" (*neshastan natavān*) means to come into action against opponents.

In a *ghazal*, the war poet 'Abbās Barāti-pur (b. 1943) compares the fallen soldier to a primordial witness (*shāhed-e alast*), a lover and a mystic:

ey shāhed-e alast kojā bār baste'i

[210] N. Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: A Compendium of the Wills of Iranian Martyrs," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, Selections from the Literature of Iran 1977-1997, (Summer, Autumn 1997*)*, p. 269.
[211] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 148.

mast-e sabu-ye nāz kojā uftāde'i[212]

O Primordial Witness! Why have you packed up your things?
Drunk on the jar of coquetry, where are you heading?

Barāti-pur employs the mystical motif of the primordial witness to say that the fallen soldier has fulfilled his covenant with God. The compound verb "to pack a load" (*bār bastan*) points to a mystical attitude to temporal life, his dismay of clinging to earthly possessions is an idea that every Muslim is familiar with. The mystical motif of being drunk from the jar of coquetry requires some explanation. In Persian love literature, coquetry (*nāz*) is a characteristic of the beloved, who teases the lover by flirting and coquetry, but not following through. It is matched on the lover's side by supplication (*niyāz*), a characteristic through which the lover displays his need and dependence on the beloved. In mystical treatises, "The interplay of these forms of behavior mirrors man's relationship with God."[213] For instance, in his mystical work *Savāneh*, Ghazāli holds that the Beloved tells the lover that he may unite with the Beloved if he shows his *niyāz* to Him. This union results in the eternal survival of the lover.[214] The Beloved's coquetry is an appearance of indifference towards the lover, while revealing something of His beauty to attract the lover. Indifference and partial revelation awaken the lover's desire.

The mystical concepts of *nāz* and *niyāz* are employed in war poetry to define the soldiers' struggle for martyrdom as *niyāz* for union with the Beloved. The motif of being drunk from the jar of coquetry (*mast-e sabuy-e nāz*) may be observed from various points of view. Firstly, in a worldly sense, the soldier is defined as a lover drunk on the beloved's coquetry. Ayatollah Khomeini may be defined as the beloved who offers the wine of selflessness to the lover. He asks the lover to go to the battlefield and fight against the enemy, or run onto minefields to clear the way for the armour. In war poetry, the fight

[212] See *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 13.
[213] The translation 'supplication' is borrowed from Sh.A. Aflāki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God* (*Manāqeb al-'Arefin*), trans. J. O'kane, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 393; the quotation can be found at p. 717, n. 108.
[214] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Savāneh*, p. 20.

against the enemy of the Beloved proves the lover's fidelity and his *niyāz* for companionship and, possibly, union with the Beloved. The metaphor of drunkenness, referring in this line to death and religious rapture, will be discussed below. In the poem, the soldier is compared to a mystic/lover who strives to purify his soul to become worthy of union with the Beloved. The Beloved's coquetry, like wine, intoxicates the lover, removing his reason and his awareness of self, and transforms him into a selfless drunk who offers his life in the hope of union with the Beloved.

THE PRIMORDIAL CUP

Another aspect of the primordial covenant found in the war poetry is the primordial cup (*jām-e alast*). Mystics employed the motif of the primordial cup to characterize the mystic path as an alternative to orthodox religion, in which drunkenness is forbidden. Rumi, for example, refers to Qur'ān 76:21: "Their Lord will give them to drink of a pure wine (*sharāban tahurā*)."[215] In mysticism, a mystic becomes drunk from the wine offered to him by the Primordial Cupbearer. During the 1980s, religious scholars employed the mystical concept of intoxication to define martyrdom as *ipso facto* a guarantee of spiritual progress, so as to motivate the Iranian population to fight against the Iraqi enemy.

The war poets used the motif in comparisons between the soldier in battle and a mystic who has drunk the primordial wine and freed himself from the shackles of reason. 'Ali-Rezā Qazve (b. 1963) writes "O God! Offer me wine that I may deny the whole of existence/ while dancing in agitation and drunkenness."[216] Here the poet also uses the imagery of dancing, common with classical mystics such as Rumi, who said that every movement in the mystics' dance (*samā'*) results in a vision of the Beloved. Rumi shows the selflessness of this dance by stating that, at the moment of ecstasy, the Beloved may dance on the tablet of the lover's heart.[217] Qazve uses the mystical concept of dancing, devoid of

---

[215] A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 150. Arberry translates the verse, "Their Lord shall give them to drink a pure draught." See *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. A. J. Arberry, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1995, p. 316.
[216] 'A.R. Qazve, *Qatār-e andimeshk va tarānehā-ye jang*, Tehran: Lowh-e Zarrin, 1384/2005, p. 101.
[217] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 185.

self, and integrates the drunkenness resulting from passionate love. The soldier, drunk and devoid of self, dances when the Beloved reveals His beauty. This dance reaches its peak when the soldier dissolves in ecstasy and is killed in a minefield. In a *mathnavi* entitled 'The Narrative of Shamefulness' (*mathnavi-ye sharmsāri*) Qazve writes:

> …
> *kojāyand mastān-e jām-e alast*
> *dalirān-e 'āsheq, shahidān-e mast*[218]
> ...
> Where are the men intoxicated by the primordial goblet?
> The brave lovers, the drunken martyrs?

The poet compares the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war to a mystic intoxicated by the primordial wine of love. The poet inserts the motif of the primordial cup into his poem to define the martyr as a believer who witnessed God's Lordship at the time of *alast*. The motif of the drunken martyr (*shahid-e mast*) indicates that the soldier fights the enemy because he is intoxicated by the wine of love, and is delighted by fulfilling the Primordial Covenant.

HIDDEN TREASURE

Another motif related to the primordial covenant is that of hidden treasure. War poets, following in the steps of the mystic authors, drew on a divine tradition (*hadith qodsi*) in which God says, "I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known, so I created the world."[219] This tradition says that God's primordial motivation for creating multiplicity where there had been One, was to make it possible for humans to recognise God. Poets play on the rhyme between the 'treasure' (*ganj*) which is buried in a ruin and which man should strive (*ranj*) to find. In mystical literature, love is the treasure hidden in the heart which cannot shine until the lover bids farewell to his life, pictures as turning the building of his

[218] 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, p. 40.
[219] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 189.

heart to ruins.[220] Ruining the heart means self-mortification and detachment from worldly desires. When the heart's building is ruined, the beauty of the Beloved that was concealed becomes evident. Revelation (*tajalli*) implies the appearance of what was hidden before.[221] The imagery of the treasure of love hidden in a ruin is applicable to events during the war, when cites were bombarded and loved ones were buried under the ruins. Survivors, who symbolically are the lovers, dug to find their treasures: the bodies of their loved ones.

THE GNOSIS OF LOVE IN MYSTICISM AND ON THE BATTLEFIELD

In Islamic mysticism, gnosis (*ma'refat*) is considered a means of guiding the mystic to a stage at which he understands the divine Truth. For the mystics, gnosis is superior to rational, prepositional knowledge ('*elm*). Gnosis deepens the mystic's insight, elevates his spiritual level, and unites him with the Beloved. Because discursive reason is incapable of understanding mystical secrets, the mystics consider *'elm* the greatest obstacle on the path of love because it causes the lover to stray and separates him from his final destination: union with the Beloved.[222] The mystics presented the gnosis of love (*ma'refat-e 'eshq*) as an alternative to conventional religious knowledge. For them gnosis is a gift God places in the heart to illuminate the path of love. It is thought that the Zo'al-Nun the Egyptian was the first mystic to describe gnosis as "knowledge of attributes of the Unity." He defines a gnostic as a selfless lover: "The gnostics are not themselves, but in so far as they exist at all they exist in God."[223]

The medieval mystic Hojviri defines gnosis as a measure of one's dignity: one without gnosis is worthless. Gnosis cannot be won, it is placed by God in the heart. Hojviri

---

[220] A. Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1928. p. 123. See also A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 189; according to Omaima Abou-Bakr the tradition is interpreted in Sufi texts as showing the "Diffusion of Unity in Plurality." See O. Abou-Bakr, "The Symbolic Function of Metaphor in Sufi Poetry: The Case of Shushtari," in *Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 12, Metaphor and Allegory in the Middle Ages, (1992), pp. 40-57.

[221] For further information on different forms of illumination such as the divine actions, divine names, divine attributes and divine essence see R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1921, pp. 125-130.

[222] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 140.

[223] M. Smith, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Dhu 'l- Nūn, Abu 'l-Fayḍ; for further information about Zo al-Nun see C. Field, *Muslims and Saints of Islam*, New York: Cosimo, 2011, pp. 60-7.

refers to the Qur'ānic verse "… We gave him life, and appointed for him a light to walk by, among the people…" (6:122) to show that gnosis originates from God.[224] Abu Hāmed Mohammad Ghazāli (1058-1111) writes that mystic insight is a necessary prologue to love: "Love without gnosis is impossible – one can only love what one knows."[225] The mystic Najm al-Din Rāzi stresses the superiority of gnosis over *'elm*. In his book 'Love and Reason' (*'eshq-o 'aql*), he draws an analogy between the lover and a diver: 'the lovers are divers who gamble their lives' (*ghavāssān-e jān-bāz-e 'āsheq-pishe*). These selfless divers are compared favourably to those who are not following discursive reason, and can reach the depths of the ocean of gnosis.[226]

The concept of gnosis is very important for Islamic mystics: they have dedicated a mystical stage to it. The mystic poet 'Attār, in his epic 'Conference of the Birds' (*Manteq al-Teyr*), places gnosis as the third stage in a mystic's progress. It comes after the stages of quest (*talab*) and love ('*eshq*).[227] According to the poet, the stage of gnosis has no beginning or end. When the heart of the mystic is enlightened by the knowledge of gnosis, he sees nothing but the Beloved (v. 3515-6), and follows the path; otherwise, according to 'Attār, one remains as ignorant as a donkey. The poet refers to Qur'ān 62:5, which compares people who have scriptures but do not put them into practice to "a donkey that carries books."[228]

In war poetry, a soldier who participates in the fight is compared to a mystic whose heart is illuminated by the divine light. Divine knowledge guides one to offer one's life on the battlefield, and through self-sacrifice, the soldier attains the same spiritual perfection as the mystic. The war poet Sāmet Borujerdi introduces the motif of the gnosis of love in a *ghazal* entitled 'Primordial Love' (*'eshq-e azal*).

ey ke az ma'refat-e 'eshq-e azal bi-khabari

[224] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, ed. V. Zhukovsky, introduction by Qāsem Ansāri, Tehran: Tahuri, 1376/1997, pp. 342, 44.
[225] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 130.
[226] N. Rāzi, *Resāle-ye 'eshq va 'aql*, p. 98.
[227] Farid al-Din 'Attār, *Manteq al-Teyr*, ed. M. R. Shafi'i-Kadkani, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e 'Elmi, 1384/2005, pp. 381-93.
[228] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 18.

sabr kon tā be to guyam khabar-e mokhtasari[229]

O! You who know nothing of the gnosis of Primordial love
Wait, so that I can give you a brief account

The poet defines gnosis as a prologue that leads one to understand primordial love. Primordial time (*azal*) is "the constant duration of existence in the past."[230] Thus, the existence of love is as old as existence itself. In Borujerdi's *ghazal*, the term primordial love alludes to the primordial covenant, which was discussed above. Borujerdi, like the mystics, says that both love and gnosis are primordial. In primordial time, God gave the soldier the freedom to choose either the Beloved or his daily life in the world. Needless to say the soldier chooses God's companionship. The soldier promised (in *azal*) to love God and not to choose anyone or anything else. Thus, he offers his life to fulfil his eternal covenant, according to the poet.

Borujerdi also tells us something about the characteristics of the gnosis of love in his *ghazal*. He uses the mystical concept of the fire of love (*ātash-e 'eshq*) to compare the soldier to a lover: "When love fires its sparks / it burns the roots of everything dry and wet."[231] The flame of fire transforms every creature. Love, like fire, transforms all the attributes of the lover to those of the Beloved. The fire-like nature of love is described by 'Attār: "I am sitting bewildered with dried lips/ the fire of love makes the water of my life boil."[232] The fire of love transforms the poet's existence, consuming the water of his life until nothing remains of him. The contemporary Persian scholar, Anwar, in a commentary on 'Attār's 'Conference of the Birds' (*Manteq al-Teyr*), writes that the fire of love burns and transforms the lover from within. In this process the Beloved makes the lover aware that He exists inside him, telling him that his existence is unreal in comparison to that of

---

[229] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.
[230] R. Arnaldez, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2*)*, under Ḳidam. The complement of *azal* is *abad*, "constant duration in the future."
[231] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.
[232] Farid al-Din 'Attār, *Manteq al-Teyr*, p. 277. The water of life is an allusion to the search for eternal life. The prophet Khezr guides the pious to the water of life.

the Beloved.[233] Borujerdi uses the concept in the war context to equate the soldier with a lover, burning from the fire of love and motivated to fight the enemy of the Beloved.

In the following line, Borujerdi refers to another classical mystical concept, the urgent longing of the lover. The poet writes, "Love is that thing which, when it makes a circle on the door to the lover's heart / the lover, out of longing, knows neither his head nor his foot" (*'eshq ān ast ke chon halqe zanad bar dar-e del* /'*āsheq az showq na pā'i beshenāsad na sari*).[234] The image of love making a circle on the door of the heart (*halqe zadan bar dar-e del*) is open to various interpretations. One can picture it as a bullet striking the chest, making a circular wound and rendering the lover/soldier insensible. But it contains an implicit analogy between love and a serpent, curling at the threshold of the treasury of the lover's heart. In Persian literature, a serpent settles at the door of a treasury to protect it. The green emerald is the only object that can blind the serpent and allow it to be removed. In mysticism, the serpent stands for the ominous lower self (*nafs-e shum*) and the world. The serpent also symbolizes the mystic's transformation and his union with his inner self. The serpent sheds his old skin, the mystic's lower soul is annihilated, and through this transformation, gains eternal life.[235] The poet equates the lover's heart with a treasury that love, the serpent, wishes to enter. When the heart has become a treasury, fit for the snake to enter, it longs for the Beloved. When the Beloved knocks, the lover, filled with longing, hastens to the door, unable to distinguish between his foot and his head (*sar az pā nashnākhtan*). The Persian idiom refers to someone filled with excessive longing. The poet indicates that the Beloved, on the battlefield, is knocking on the door of the soldier's heart; he should open the door and welcome Him.

One line further, Borujerdi tells his reader that a lover should show his fidelity toward the Beloved. From this line onwards, the poet focuses on the responsibilities of the lover, and introduces the third Shiite imam, Hosein, as a model of fidelity: "Love means that you offer your life on the path of fidelity/ and that you abandon the soul of the world."

---

[233] L. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us We're Safe …," p. 242.

[234] See S. Borujerdi, 'Eshq-e azal, in *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.

[235] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Majnun's Image as a Serpent," in *The Poetry of Nizāmī Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love and Rhetoric*, eds. K. Talattof & J. Clinton, New York: Palgrave, 2000, p. 86.

The Qur'ān emphasises fidelity and the necessity of being loyal to one's family, fellow-Muslims and friends. In the Qur'ān, contentment with the will of God is a sign of fidelity. Fidelity and loyalty distinguish believers from unbelievers.[236] In mysticism, fidelity is owed to the Primordial Covenant between God and humanity.[237] Borujerdi identifies fidelity with the act of self-sacrifice on the battlefield, and the soldier with a lover whose death affirms his fidelity toward the Beloved and the community. He saves the community, with his life, from the attack of the enemy. The lover abandons "the soul of the world" (*jān-e jahān*) for fidelity's sake. In Persian love poetry, *jān-e jahān* is one of the names of the Beloved, or the title of a celebrated person. Here it means the Beloved.[238]

The poet dedicates the remainder of the *ghazal* to the events of *'Āshurā* and imam Hosein's death. Love and fidelity, the signs of the gnosis of love, are centred on imam Hosein. According to the poet, imam Hosein is a real gnostic because he gave priority to the will of God and offered his life on the path of fidelity: "so that the truly faithful lover is the thirsty king Hosein/ the mother of the world has never raised such a son as him."[239] The image of thirsty king refers to the event of Karbalā where the soldiers of Yazid had blocked the Euphrates. Thus, imam Hosein and his family had no access to the water. The poet compares this event to mystical concept of the lover's thirst for the Beloved.[240] On the one hand, the poet compares imam Hosein to a gnostic, who offers his life to fulfil the eternal covenant that was made on the day of *alast*. On the other hand, the poet compares the soldier to imam Hosein, the archetype of self-sacrifice, whose act should be emulated. The poet implies that if the soldier follows the path through which Hosein attained perfection,

---

[236] E. Moosa, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (2), under Loyalty.

[237] G. Böwering, "The Scriptural 'Senses' in Medieval Sufi Qur'ān Exegesis," in *With Reverence for the World: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism Christianity and Islam*, eds. J.D. McAuliffe & et al., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 354-57.

[238] An example of *jān-e jahān* referring to a celebrated person can be found in the *Divān* of medieval poet Hāfez of Shirāz who addresses: "The manifestation of the primordial grace, the light of the eye's desire / the summation of knowing and doing, the soul of the world, Shāh Shojā' " (*mazhar-e lotf-e azal rowshani-ye cheshm-e amal/ jāme'-e 'elm-o 'amal jān-e jahān Shāh Shojā'*). See Hāfez, *Divān-e khāje Shams al-Din Mohammad Hāfez Shirāzi*, ed. H. P. Bakhtiyāri, Tehran: ketāb-forushi va chāpkhāne-ye Brukhim, 1318/1939, p. 134, *ghazal* no. 302.

[239] See Borujerdi's poem titled '*eshq-e azal* in *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.

[240] For increasing the thirst of love see the motif of seizing Hosein's cup chapter 4 in this study.

he acquires the gnosis of primordial love on the battlefield.

ABANDONING REASON FOR THE CAUSE OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

The motif of love and reason is popular with the war poets. In many of their references to the concept, they rely on classical Persian mystical literature that meticulously analyses the uneasy relationship between love and reason. The war poets emphasize the superiority of love over reason to promote a sense of self-sacrifice among the youth of Iran. Madness (*jonun* or *divānegi*) occurs in conventional religious contexts, as well as in mystical contexts, to emphasize the differences between love and reason.

In Islamic law, madness is usually represented by the word *jonun*, which came to mean "to cover, conceal" and "to be possessed, mad, insane."[241] In Islamic law, the insane person (*majnun*) has no "legal capacity."[242] Generally speaking, one who does not act rationally towards others or does not follow a moderate lifestyle is considered insane. He is incapable of legal action or the guardianship of his own property. Insanity does, however, have its privileges, and there are examples of sane individuals pretending to be insane. For example, a person accused of heresy might pretend that he is not aware of what he is doing or saying. In this case, insanity saves his life. In other cases, an authority figure may accuse a sane person, whose words or actions disrupt the status quo, of being insane.[243] Among the mystics, Loqmān al-Sarakhsi (d. 1407), al-Shebli (d. 1540), Abu Yazid Bastāmi and many more were called insane. According to Islamic lore, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad were also called insane.[244]

In mysticism, passionate love leads to madness. The words *divānegi* or *jonun* are used metaphorically to mean detachment from the mundane world. A mystic madman is overcome by selflessness; he forgets his bodily needs and seeks the divine truth. The

---

[241] A.T. Welch, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madjnūn.
[242] M. W. Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. D. E. Immisch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, pp. 425-9.
[243] Ibid., pp. 450, 465.
[244] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 151.

theologian Ebn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) considers excessive love a form of divine madness.[245] Excessive love for the Beloved separates the lover from other people and unites him with the true Beloved. The mystic Abo al-Qāsem Ebn Habib al-Neyshaburi writes, "He who knows himself is contemptible to others, and he who knows God is, to others, mad."[246]

The war poets admired this mystical tradition and gave a value to madness. For them, a real lover does not follow the principles of reason. His madness defines his spiritual progress. The war poets equated the soldier with the medieval mystics known as 'the wise fools' ('*oqalā al-majānin*) who knowingly separated themselves from worldly affairs and spent their time in contemplation.[247] They separated themselves from society, often living in cemeteries and wearing rags. For the wise people of the world, their unusual appearance and extreme piety and trust (*tavakkol*) in God were signs of madness. The wise fools did not hesitate to condemn the unjust behavior of those in authority. They advised others if they were asked. They had deep knowledge and were able to foresee the future. These qualities were considered signs that God chose to bestow gnosis on them, and inspired them to reveal truths.[248] They had a political role. Their unusual appearance was a sign of protest against unjust authority.

The war poets used the concept in a war context, comparing a soldier to a wise fool. Both are fighting against injustice, but the former fights on the battlefield. For the war poets, madness ending in self-sacrifice is superior to following the principles of discursive reason. By applying the concept in the poetry of war, they make the soldier to believe that he should act like a madman that in the war situation means attacking the enemy with no fear of death. The war poet Azizollāh Shekarriz pits love against reason in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Ka'be of the Intended One' (*Ka'be-ye maqsud*):

dar kish-e 'āsheqi nashavad pāy-band-e 'aql

---

[245] M.W. Dols, *Majnun*, pp. 12, 318.
[246] Sh. el-Ezabi, "Al-Naysaburi's Wise Mad men: Introduction," in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, no. 14, Madness and Civilization*, Cairo: Department of English and Comparative Literature, 1994, p. 198.
[247] For further information on the wise fools, see Al-Hasan Ebn Mohammad Ebn Habib Neyshāburi, *Oqalā al-majānin ('Wise Fools')*, Najaf: al-Makab al-Heydary, 1378/1968.
[248] M.W. Dols, *Majnun*, pp. 366-377.

divāne-i ke shod be jahān mobtalā-ye 'eshq[249]

A mad man who is afflicted by love in the world
does not follow discursive reason in the religion of love.

Shekarriz equates the soldier with a mystic madman (*divāne*). The word literally means, "one possessed by demons," and is used to refer to one who acts like a demon.[250] In classical mystical poetry, *divāne* refers to one possessed by love: love is like a demon possessing the heart. The lover stops rational thinking and follows the demands of his heart. He destroys his sense of self (*nafs*) by neglecting the needs of his body. He suffers from "humiliation, rejection, reproach, hunger and isolation" in the hope of union with the Beloved.[251] For mystics, discursive reason is an obstacle in the path of love, for it tends to follow a logical order and accustomed ways. Ghazāli defines the relation between love and discursive reason in his *Savāneh*: "The outer limit for knowledge is the seashore for love, if the mystic traveller takes one step further, he will drown."[252] Intellect may accompany the lover to the shore of the sea of love, but no further. The intellect is limited to the physical world, and its support in the mundane world makes one dependent on it. Discursive reason, by nature, cannot understand divine secrets. A love-afflicted madman therefore detaches himself from reason to follow love's decrees. Detachment from the world, in Shekarriz's poem, is indicated by the idiom *pāy-band-e 'aql nashodan,* which is literally, "one's foot not bound to reason." Detachment is the first sign of embarking on the path of love.

Shekarriz employs mystical terminology, linking the madness of excessive love (*divānegi*) with 'calamity' (*mobtalā*, translated above as 'afflicted with'). In medieval Islamic medicine, being in love is considered a sickness, as we have seen above. It has clear symptoms: one who is possessed by love laughs and weeps without any clear reason; he is thin and emaciated, his skin is yellow because of malnutrition, and the pain of separation

[249] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 69.
[250] Cl. Huart, H. Massé, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Dīw.
[251] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 147.
[252] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Savāneh*, p. 9.

causes him not to eat or sleep well.[253] Shekarriz compares a soldier who offers his life on the battlefield to a madman, possessed by excessive love. Both detach themselves from discursive reason and consequently from the mundane world in order to improve their spiritual level and gain a better understanding of the divine truth and eternal union with the Beloved.

Being in love is considered, by Shekarriz, a conversion to the religion (*kish*) of love, a theme that was discusses above. The convert to the religion of love must abandon discursive reason (*'aql*). Reason is cautious, it watches over one's steps and preserves one's life, but love cares nothing for mundane desires and urges the lover to sacrifice his life.

'Ali Mo'allem from Dāmghān employs the motif of love and reason in a *ghazal* called 'The Etiquette of Being in Love' (*adab-e 'āsheqi*), which has already been cited above. In part of this poem we find:

kamāl-e 'eshq-o jonun bin ke az sabok-bāri
moqim-e khāne-ye gerdāb mitavānam shod[254]

See the perfection of love and of madness: thanks to the light burden,
I can make my home in the house of the whirlpool

Love is equated with madness and this madness removes the burdens of worldly desires. The lover does not remain on the safe seashore but enters the ocean and makes his home in the whirlpool.

In a *ghazal* entitled 'The Sea of Grace' (*daryā-ye rahmat*), the war poet Thābet shows that excessive love ends in madness:

'eshq-e to ākher be sahrā-ye jonunam mibarad
ey tawallā-ye to andar zendegi Leylā-ye man [255]

[253] M.W. Dols, *Majnun*, p. 85.
[254] M.'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre*, p. 219.

Ultimately, love for you takes me to the desert of madness
Devotion to you has entered my life, O my Leyli!

The poet refers to the proverbial love of Majnun ('the possessed' or 'mad') for Leyli. The proof of selfless love is madness, following the example of Majnun. Only then can the lover benefit from the Beloved's love.

The superiority of madness over sanity is also mentioned by the contemporary war poet Mortezā Amiri Esfandaqe:

jonun rahbar-e in hemāsi rame ast
shaqāyeq dar injā bozorg-e hame ast[256]

Madness is the leader of heroic herd
Here, the anemone is the greatest of all

Through the parallel hemistiches, madness is linked to the anemone, which grows wild in dry places and has the connotations of red, blood and martyrdom. It is this anemone that is Lord and example of all soldiers.

THE KA'BE OF THE HEART

Another classical mystical motif used during the Iran-Iraq war is the Ka'be (House of God) of love. The Ka'be, the central shrine at Mecca, is in every sense central to Muslim life.

[255] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 22. The story goes that love for an Arabian girl, Leyli, made Qeys Ebn Āmir mad and he wandered in the desert. From then on, he was called Majnun (lit. "Possessed" or "Madman"). The mystic poet Nezāmi composed an epic based on the story. See N. Ganjavi, *Leyli va Majnun*, ed. B. Thervatiyān, Tehran: Tus, 1364/1985; for an analysis of this epic see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Leylī and Majnun*. For another example of the theme of love and reason in Persian war poetry, see: S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 43.

[256] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 275.

The Ka'be is "the place of God's grace, His worship, and the proclamation of His glory."[257] A Muslim faces the Ka'be when performing the obligatory prayer and other religious rituals, with the awareness that the prophet did the same. An able-bodied Muslim with sufficient means should make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca and greet the Ka'be at least once during his lifetime. This is a sign of obedience to God, and a time set aside to detach oneself from worldly desires and concerns.

In medieval mystical literature, compounds such as the ka'be of love (*ka'be-ye 'eshq*), the ka'be of the heart (*ka'be-ye del*) and the qeble of love (*qeble-ye 'eshq*) are used in contrast to the Ka'be of clay (*ka'be-ye gel*), which is the Ka'be in Mecca and is incapable of perceiving the beauty of God.[258] Although the Ka'be is made of stone, I assume that the mystics used the word clay to criticize worshipping the Ka'be as a physical object, rather than the Lord of the Ka'be. Referring to the clay reminds the reader of man's creation from clay, and that he is more concerned with his physical appearance than his spiritual progress. The mystics called the heart the ka'be of love, believing that self-mortification purifies the heart from false ideas and temptations, to be worthy of receiving the Beauty of the Beloved. Therefre the pilgrimage to one's own heart is more important than the pilgrimage to Mecca. The heart is important in mysticism because it is the location of belief in God and of testimony to His unity. Mystics fault those who go to visit the Ka'be while their hearts are busy with worldly affairs. The mystic Mohammad Ebn al-Fazl (d. 931), on this account, writes: "I wonder at those who seek His temple in this world: why do they not seek contemplation of Him in their hearts? ... if they are bound to visit a stone, which is looked at once a year, surely they are more bound to visit the temple of the heart, where He may be seen three hundred and sixty times in a day and night."[259] According to Ebn al-Fazl, one who wants to see the light of God has to purify his own heart, because God illuminates the heart of His servant when it is clean and pure. The Ka'be of clay cannot make such a transformation.

Although mystics recognize the sacredness of the Ka'be, the rituals relating to it are

---

[257] A.J. Wensinck, & J. Jomier, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ka'ba.
[258] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 229.
[259] As cited in Ali Ebn Othmān al-Hojviri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: A Persian Treatise on Sufism*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, preface by M. Karamshah al, Lahore: Zia-ul-Quran Publications, 2001, p. 427.

seen from a different point of view. Their spiritual importance is connected to the individual, and his presence in the *Masjed al-harām* surrounding the Ka'be. Ghazāli, for example, emphasizes the high station of the human person when he writes that circumambulation (*tawāf*) and other rituals gain their high spiritual level from the people performing them.[260] The medieval mystic Muhy al-Din Ebn al-'Arabi (1165-1240), in *al-Fotuhāt al-Makkiyye (The Meccan Revelations),* writes that the real Ka'be is man's being.[261] Ebn al-'Arabi emphasizes that man's being is superior to the Ka'be, which is made of stone, because man is God's vicegerent (*khalife*), he contains and represents all realities and, through him, God has mercy on other creatures.[262]

For Islamic countries, the Ka'be, as the locus of daily prayer and of pilgrimage, is politically important. Muslims performing similar rituals have a shared identity. Both sociologists and nationalist Muslims have recognized the annual gathering in Mecca, around the Ka'be, as a symbolic act of Muslim unity. When Muslims gather in Mecca, cultural differences, legal boundaries and political ties are put aside. The pilgrims all dress in similar white clothing, and see themselves as equals before God.[263]

'Ali Shariati, an Iranian Islamic modernist, equates one's preparedness for *hajj* to preparedness for death. He writes that the pilgrimage to Mecca is a political gathering; it is the beginning of rethinking what one has done, and what one is responsible for doing after returning home. The *hajj* eliminates distinctions between people: all are standing before God as at the Last Judgement. According to Shariati, a pilgrim should ignore his identity and begin to serve others, and should break idols and spread monotheistic religion, in imitation of the Prophet Abraham. Like Abraham, he should establish a community whose members are ready to offer their lives: a community of martyr-witnesses (*ommat-e shahid*).[264]

In his sermons, Ayatollah Khomeini presents the political aspect of the *hajj* ritual by

---

[260] A.J. Wensinck & J. Jomier, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ka'ba: iii. The Ka'ba and Islam.
[261] Ibid. For further examples see Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat va Shari'at al-Tariqat*, p. 221.
[262] R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 155-6.
[263] R.R. Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 45.
[264] Ibid, p. 31; A. Shariati*, Hajj: Reflection on its Rituals*, trans. A. A. Behzādniā & N. Denny, Costa Mesa: Evecina Cultural & Educational Foundation, 1993, pp. 9 and 12.

comparing it to a Muslim uprising: "This grand house is built for the people and for the people's uprising." He equates the rituals with protests against tyrannical authority. He calls the governor of Mecca "the idol" and the United State of America "the Great Satan." "[265] A Muslim has a duty to break idols, an archetypal act associated with the father of monotheistic religion, Abraham the idol-breaker, and with the prophet Mohammad. He compares opposition to unjust authority to the ritual of stoning Satan, which is part of the pilgrimage. Ayatollah Khomeini holds that the duties that *hajj* imposes upon a Muslim are not limited to the *hajj* period. Throughout his lifetime, a Muslim should be stoning the 'Great Satan,' whose temptations distract Muslims with the desires of the world and increase rancour and enmity. This entails political activism, protest, and fighting against anyone or anything that distances the believer from God.

The war poets used the same terminology, but they gave a different meaning to religious obligations and presented them as moral virtues. For them, there is no obligation to visit the Ka'be and perform the ritual. The soldier, like the pilgrim, leaves his belongings, his family, and his interests. His destination, the battlefield is compared to the ka'be of the heart, the place of the revelation of the Beloved, to offer a mystical sense to the participationg in the fight. Thus, the hardships that the soldier endurs on the battlefield purifies the heart, the ka'be of love, from the presence of 'idols.' So the soldier who chooses the battlefield over the pilgrimage to Mecca attains the same spiritual perfection that a mystic achieved. They used the motif to mobilize young men to participate, and to foster support for the army. During the war, Iranian soldiers would in fact dress in a white cloth resembling a burial shroud, or the white dress of pilgrims, but made from one piece of cloth rather than the three used to wrap a body, or the two pieces used by pilgrims.

KA'BE AND KARBALĀ

The war poet, Habibollāh Khabbāz introduces the motif of the ka'be in a *qaside* entitled 'The Purity of Karbalā' (*safā-ye Karbalā*):

maqām-e Ka'be beyt al-Allāh-e a'zam bā hame onwān

[265] *Pithy Aphorisms, Wise Sayings and Counsels*, pp. 41-2.

zamin-e karbalā rā ka'be-ye 'eshq-o safā guyad[266]

The station of the Ka'be, the House of God, for all its exalted position,
Praises the soil of Karbalā and names it the ka'be of love and purity.

The poet says that the soil of Karbalā, where imam Hosein was killed has a higher spiritual station than the Ka'be, and he calls Karbalā the Ka'be of love and purity. This suggests that self-sacrifice in battle has a higher station than the rites of orthodox Islam. According to the poet, Hosein's love of God was the main reason he continued the fight against the Umayyad caliph Yazid.

In this couplet, the poet employs the word *maqām*, meaning a station or rank, but also a place.[267] Qur'ān 2:124-127 associates "the House" (*al-beyt*) with the prophet Abraham who, with his son Ishmael, erected the Ka'be to be used by Muslims as a place of meeting and sanctuary. According to the Qur'an, the place where the prophet Abraham was standing (*Maqām-e Ebrāhim*) should be a place for performing prayer.[268] Pilgrims visiting Mecca feel they are linked to the prophet Abraham.

Islamic mystics consider *maqām-e Ebrāhim* as both a physical and spiritual abode. Al-Hojviri writes that *maqām-e Ebrāhim* has two connotations: firstly, it refers to an abode in Mecca, a place used for performing the *hajj* ritual. Secondly, it is the abode of the heart, where perfect friendship (*khollat*) and submission (*taslim*) to God appear.[269] The stage that Abraham attained, friendship with God, is defined as the final goal of a mystic.[270]

---

[266] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 42.
[267] J-Cl.Ch., Chabrier, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Maqām.
[268] G.R. Hawting, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ka'ba.
[269] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, ed. V. Zhukovsky, p. 422. The source states that when Abraham was about to be burnt in the fire, the archangel Gabriel asked him: "Do you need to ask for anything from God?" Abraham replied: "It is enough for me that He knows that I am thrown in the fire because of Him."
[270] The mystics call a saint 'a friend of God' (*wali*). The word is derived from the root *waliya* meaning 'to be close or near.' See B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya in Early Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publications, 1993, p. 488. The medieval mystic 'Ali al-Tirmizi (d. ca. 910), known as al-Hakim (the sage), offers a broad outline of the saints' (*awliyā*'s) presence in the universe. There are forty saints who control the world after the prophet's death and their existence guarantees the continual preservation of the world. *Awliyā* are blessed

In the above couplet, Khabbāz elevates Karbalā above the *maqām* of the Ka'be. He writes that the *Maqām* calls Karbalā the Ka'be of love and purity. Karbalā is associated with love and purity because Hosein sacrificed his life there, while on the path of love. Karbalā is also a Shi'a pilgrimage place, lying in Iraq, so 'Karbalā' not only represents Shiah identity, and the ideal of self-sacrifice in battle, it is a concrete war aim.

The poet also calls Karbalā the ka'be of love (*ka'be-ye 'eshq*), which as we have seen is a metaphor for the heart. The heart of the lover, in turn, is that which bears witness to God. Thus, Karbalā (self-sacrifice in battle) is identified as the place of God's revelation. The poet creates a dynamic setting through which the soldier compares the battlefield to Karbalā, and to the ka'be of love, and so promises him spiritual progress if he dies in battle.

The war poet Nasrollāh Mardāni employs the motif of the ka'be of love in a *ghazal* entitled 'Heirs to Dust, Your Sun is the Spirit of God' (*vārethān-e khāk khorshid-e shomā Ruh-e Khodā).* The phrase *Ruh-e Khodā,* (the Spirit of God) in the title is the Persian equivalent of 'Ruhollāh', the given name of Ayatollah Khomeini.

bāyad ey yārān be suy-e qeble-gāh-e 'eshq tākht
bā samand-e sobh mitāzad be shab sardāretān[271]

O! Friends we must charge towards the Qeble of love
Because your leader is riding the horse of morning toward night

The poet compares Ayatollah Khomeini with a general who is fighting against darkness. He lightens the path for the soldiers to follow the direction of love (*qeble-gāh-e 'eshq*).

---

with extraordinary powers and serve as mediators between the people and God. Their tombs are a source of blessings (*baraka,* lesser miracles). See B. Radtke, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Walī. For a chronological treatment of the concept of *welāyat* see B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya …," pp. 483-96.

[271] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 57.

SACRIFICE IN THE MENĀ OF LOVE

Another metaphor relating to the rites of pilgrimage is the Menā of love (*menā-ye 'eshq*), and its equivalent in Persian literature, the *maslakh-e 'eshq*. Menā is the last place that a pilgrim should visit before leaving Mecca and, significantly, the place where the pilgrim offers a sheep as a sacrifice, as well as the site of the pillars that pilgrims pelt with stones. This day, in the pilgrim's programme, is called "the day of the great sacrifice (*yawm al-azhā* or *yawm al-nahr*).[272] The pilgrim's sacrifice is a symbolic re-enactment of the prophet Abraham's sacrifice at the same place. In a dream, Abraham received a divine command to sacrifice his son (Qur'ān 37:102). According to tradition, he tried to follow the divine command several times, but each time, a miracle happened, and, at the last moment, a ram was sent for Abraham to sacrifice.[273]

Classical mystics introduced these motifs in their literary works to offer an alternative to orthodox understandings of Islam. They used the Menā motif as a metaphor for two spiritual processes: firstly, detachment from desires and purification of the soul; secondly, self-sacrifice for the cause of the Beloved.[274] One who intends to visit the House of God and, afterwards, go to Menā, has to empty his heart of worldly desires, otherwise, his effort is of no value. In his mystical work entitled *Kashf al-Mahjub*, al-Hojviri, quotes from al-Joneyd the leader of the Irāqi school of mysticism, that one who goes to perform *hajj* must separate his soul from its worldly attachments and deny his sense of self in Menā, the place of sacrifice. Al-Hojviri writes:

> "A man came to Joneyd; he asked him: 'Where are you coming from?' The man answered: 'I am returning from *hajj*.' Joneyd asked: 'Did you perform *hajj.'* The man answered: 'Yes, I did.' Joneyd asked: 'When you left your country, did you abandon all your sins?' The man said: 'No, I did not.' Joneyd asked: 'Then you did not travel.'… Joneyd asked: 'When you arrived in Menā, did you leave your sense of self (*maniyathā*)?' The man replied: 'No, I did not.' 'Then you have not visited Menā.'

[272] F. Buhl, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Minā.
[273] R. Firestone, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Abraham.
[274] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, ed. V. Zhukovsky, p. 425.

> Joneyd asked: 'When you sacrificed [an animal] in the slaughter place, did you slaughter the desires of your heart?' The man answered: 'No.' 'Then you have not yet sacrificed.'"[275]

For a mystic, the real goal of performing *hajj* and visiting Menā is abandonment of self and its desires.

In his book entitled, 'An Interpretation of Hajj Rituals' (*Tahlili az manāsek-e hajj*) the contemporary scholar 'Ali Shariati refers to the prophet Abraham's act as archetypal behavior that a Muslim should imitate. Shariati writes that Abraham sacrificed his most precious belonging, his son, in the Menā of love. A Muslim should sacrifice whatever prevents him from confessing the truth. Furthermore, Shariati adds that one is responsible for knowing and sacrificing whatever keeps him from God.[276]

The war poets politicised the mystical motif of the Menā of love, linking it to the themes of fidelity, obedience and sacrifice. A pilgrim follows in the footsteps of the prophet Abraham and sacrifices a sheep to affirm his fidelity and obedience to the divine command, but the war poets motivate youths to offer their own lives as a sign of obedience and fidelity. The motif also contains an appeal to Iranian parents, asking them to emulate Abraham and encourage their children to participate in the war. They too were offering their children as a sacrifice in the Menā of love: the battlefield.

The war poet Azizollāh Shekarriz employed this motif in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Ka'be of the Intended One' (*Ka'be-ye maqsud*):

hargez kasi be Ka'be-ye maqsud rah nayāft
tā jān-e khod nakard fadā dar menā-ye 'eshq[277]

---

[275] Ibid.

[276] 'A. Shariati, *Tahlili az manāsek-e hajj*, Tehran: Elhām & Bonyād-e farhangi-ye doctor 'Ali Shariati, 1389/2011, p. 145.

[277] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 69. For more examples see M. Akbari, *Naqd va tahlil-e adabiyyāt-e enqlāb-e eslāmi*, vol. 1, Tehran: Sāzmān-e madārek-e farhangi-ye enqlāb-e eslāmi, 1371/ 1993, p. 304.

No one can enter the Ka'be of the Intended
Until he sacrifices his own soul in the Menā of love

Shekarriz writes that one cannot attain the final stage of perfection unless he sacrifices his life on the menā of love. The poet links the concept of the Intended (*maqsud*) to death on the front line. *Maqsud* can also be translated as "the object" (of a quest), or the desired one: it is analogous to the Beloved (*ma'shuq*). The *ka'be* of the Intended (*ka'be-ye maqsud*) means that what one lives and strives for, is like the Ka'be, the end point of a pilgrimage and the direction in which one turns in prayer. Each individual is free to direct his efforts as he chooses, but a lover seeks union with the Beloved through self-sacrifice in the Menā of love.

In the above couplet, Shekarriz states that sacrificing one's life (*jān-e khod fadā kardan*) enables the lover/soldier to reach the *ka'be* that is the goal, the intended, which is of course to unite with the Beloved. The mystics tell us that a lover who seeks to be one with the Beloved must sacrifice his identity, his desires, and his lower soul to be worthy of union. This self-sacrifice is called, usually metaphorically, 'death,' as in the famous prophetic tradition, "die before you die" (*mutu qabla an tamutu*).[278] One's death before the time of literal death is detachment from one's identity and desires for the sake of the Beloved. A mystic does not need to perform *hajj* to attain such a degree of purification. He is elevated to the state of purification through self-mortification, prayer, and abstinence from the world. While a pilgrim who travels through the desert to the House of God, but darkens his soul with worldly amusement, attains no spiritual perfection. As we have seen above, the Ka'be of clay is not the final destination (*maqsud*) of the mysticKhabbāz reiterates the priority of the *ka'be* of the heart over the rites of outward pilgrimage, using the motif of the menā of love:

safā-ye digari dārad menā-ye 'eshq-o jānbāzi

[278] L. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us We're Safe…," p. 246.

sezad tā Ka'be bar in ka'be-ye del marhabā guyad[279]

The menā of love and self-sacrifice holds a different pleasure,
The ka'be of the heart deserves to be praised by the Ka'be

The word *safā,* translated here as 'pleasure,' has the connotations of cheerful, pleasant, and clean. The poet says that there is more joy for one who sacrifices his life at the "Menā of love" (the pure heart) than there is for a pilgrim who visits Menā and sacrifices a sheep.

Hosein Esrāfili, in a *qaside* called 'My City Khorramshahr' (*shahr-e man Khorramshahr*), compares the city to the menā of love. This city is one of Iran's ports-of-entry on the Persian Gulf. During the war, Khorramshahr was the scene of heavy fighting. Iraqi forces occupied the city on October 24, 1980, and held it until May 23, 1982. Because of the intensity of the fighting, Khorramshahr became known as 'the city of blood' (*Khuninshahr*).[280] Esrāfili however calls Khorramshahr the menā of lovers:

ey menā-ye 'āsheqān dar molk-e khāk
ahreman az rajm-e cheshmat khowfnāk[281]

O menā of lovers in the kingdom of clay
Satan is afraid of the stone cast from your eye

Esrāfili draws an analogy between the city of Khorramshahr and Menā, both being places of sacrifice. In Khorramshahr the lover offers his life on the path of love. The poet creates a setting in which the soldier equates himself with one who is performing an act of ritual sacrifice. In the second line, Esrāfili compares the city to a pilgrim who performs the ritual

[279] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 43.
[280] A number of poets used the epithet 'city of blood' in the titles of their poems. See *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 75.
[281] Ibid., p. 52.

of stoning (*rajm*) Satan.[282] This metaphor implies that the Iraqis, the object of resistance, are Satan. This metaphorical Satan is afraid of the city of Khorramshahr.

The poet Khalil Mozanneb uses the motif of the slaughter-place of love (*maslakh-e 'eshq*, translated below as the altar of love) in a poem entitled 'The Epic of Hosein' (*hemāse-ye Hosein*). A *maslakh* is a place where sacrificial animals are slaughtered. Love in this term is the deity in whose honour the sacrifice is made. The poet refers to Hosein's death at Karbalā to praise his sacrifice:

keshid jazbe-ye gheybash be su-ye maslakh-e 'eshq
be ka'be az pe-ye qorbān shodan david Hosein[283]

The attraction of the Unseen drew him towards the altar of love
Hosein ran toward the Ka'be to be sacrificed

The poet draws an analogy between imam Hosein and a mystic who is 'attracted' (*jazbe*) by the divine beauty. In mystic terminology, attraction is the divine initiative that draws the lover to God, as distinct from the effort of the lover. A mystic may "abandon himself to be sized by divine attraction" (*jazbe, jazb*; Persian *keshesh*)."[284] Hosein is attracted to the altar of love (*maslakh-e 'eshq*), and runs to offer his life. Mozanneb equates Karbalā, where imam Hosein was killed, with the place of sacrifice a pilgrim visits at Menā. The connection is reinforced by the fact that imam Hosein performed the pilgrimage before travelling to Karbalā. The historian Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ebn Jarir Tabari (839-923) writes in *The History of al-Tabari* that when Hosein heard the call of people going to Minā, he joined them, and "performed the circumambulation of the Sacred House and ran between al-Safā and al-Marwah."[285] This is interpreted by Persian poets as Hosein's

[282] *Rajm* means throwing a stone. In the Old Testament the term means, "to stone, to drive away or kill by throwing stones". In Arabic the root has almost the same meaning "to stone, to curse." See: M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes & T. Fahd, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Radjm.
[283] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 24.
[284] R. Gramlich, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madjdhub.
[285] Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ebn Jarir Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. xix, The Caliphate of Yazid. Ebn

preparation to be sacrificed.

THE MARTYR OF LOVE

Martyr (*shahid* pl. *shohadā*) is a Qur'ānic term meaning "witness." It is a sacred name, designating the blessed ones selected by God to sacrifice their lives for His cause. Qur'ānic verse 3:140 states that the martyrs are those who when tested have proven faithful: "So that God may know those who believe and may take martyrs from among you." The martyr is rewarded in the Hereafter: for example, a martyr is thought to enter into Paradise immediately, without passing through 'the torments of the grave,' to reside beside God and to be allowed to intercede on behalf of his family members. Martyrdoms may be classified as follows: 1) voluntary self-sacrifice for truth, reminiscent of Christ's death; 2) death on the battlefield defending Islam, as in Mohammad's fight against the Meccan pagans; 3) a sudden and unnatural death resulting from sickness or catastrophe.[286] Death on the battlefield gives an even higher status, and death, fighting unbelievers gives a higher rank again.[287]

Mystics, in their treatises, identified self-mortification and self-purification as means by which one experiences union with the Beloved. In addition to this mortification, mystics refer to those who offered their lives for the beloved as killed by love, or *koshte-ye 'eshq,* martyr of love or *shahid-e 'eshq*. These compounds were particularly common among Persian poets in medieval times. The modern war poets used this motif of *shahid-e 'eshq* to define the soldier's death on the battlefield as self-sacrifice for the cause of the Beloved.

Mo'āwiye, trans. I.K.A. Howard, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 69.

[286] A. Neuwirth, "From Sacrilege to Sacrifice: Observations on Violent Death in Classical and Modern Arabic Poetry" in *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity,* ed., F. Pannewick, Germany: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2004, p. 265. For further information on martyrdom see E. Kohlberg, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* (2), under Shahīd; E. Kohlberg, *Meideval Muslim Views on Martrydom*, Amsterdam: KNAW Press, 1997; A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Martelaren: van Mystieke Weg tot Oorlogspad*, in the series Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), Amsterdam: KNAW Press (Aksant Academic Publishers), 72, no. 4, 2009.

[287] E. Kohlberg, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shahīd.

A *shahid* witnesses the Truth and submits physically and spiritually to it. Therefore, he is ready to offer his life for the cause of Truth.[288] The question arises of why a mystical death on the path to perfection is defined as martyrdom. The answer has a great deal to do with the death of a mystic who was in fact martyred: Hallāj, who was tried in Baghdad in 922. Later, Hallāj was said to have died for the sake of love, and was called a martyr of love. When the mystic, Shebli asked God about the meaning of Hallāj's death, a *hadith-e qodsi* is revealed to him: "Whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money."[289] In the mystics' view, God kills His lover and promises Himself as the blood money. Therefore, the lover does not suffer the pain of separation.

According to the mystics, divine love causes spiritual progress and perfection. This leads the lover to complete detachment from all that is worldly, and even to yearn for death in the hope of union with the Beloved. A mystic's unusual life and death can plant the seeds of a legend. Without doubt, more legends are attributed to the life and death of the martyred Hallāj, than to any other mystic.[290] Friederike Pannewick describes Hallāj's death as a scene in which the lover is asking the audience to kill him: "… al-Hallāj … 'before an enormous crowd' with a crown on his head … cried out:

> Kill me, O my friends,
> As only in death is my life."[291]

The medieval mystic, 'Attār, characterizes Hallāj as, "This combatant killed by God in the holy war… this fearless and sincere warrior."[292] Just as one who dies in battle defending Islam is a martyr, so the mystic 'killed by God' is also a martyr.

---

[288] A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam," in *Al-Serāt*, vol. XII, Papers from the Imam Hosein Conference, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 119.

[289] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 136. The Qur'ān (17:35; 25:68; 6:152) allows a murder victim's family to exact revenge on the killer. But the killer may pay compensation, if the family accepts this. See further J. Schacht, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ḳiṣāṣ.

[290] L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. H. Mason, Princeton & New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982, vol. 1, (The life of al-Hallāj), p. lxvii.

[291] F. Pannewick, "Introduction," in *Martyrdom in Literature*, ed. F. Pannewick, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2004, p. 7.

[292] L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 1, (The life of al-Hallāj), p. 85.

From a political perspective, martyrdom is not a passive act.[293] ʻAli Shariati tackles this subject in his book *Shahādat* (*Martyrdom*), in which he asserts that one who offers his life for a cause gains awareness. This awareness transforms him into a model to be emulated by the community. He writes: "… in our culture, martyrdom is not a death that our enemy imposes upon the fighter (*mojāhed*). Martyrdom is a beloved death that the fighter himself chooses with all his consciousness, all his reason, knowing, awareness, and vision."[294] Shariati asserts that Hosein is an archetype of martyrdom and Muslim Shiites should follow his example because he laid down his life to preserve faith in God's religion.

The classical mystic poets used the motif of the martyr of love to stress the importance of spiritual death and self-purification as a means of spiritual progress, with reference to the prophetic tradition: die before you die (*mutu qabla an tamutu*). The classical love poets used the motif of the martyr of love to compare spiritual death to real death. But in the war poetry the motif depicts death on the battlefield as a bridge that unites the martyr with the Beloved. For instance, Ayatollah Motahhari, in a sermon, states, "Martyrdom is a virtual death as well as spiritual progress."[295] He defines martyrdom as the achievement of moral virtue and spiritual perfection. A martyr dies a mystic's death; therefore, the martyr lives eternally besides God.

The war poets apply the mystical motif of the martyr of love to show that God fulfils the quest for spiritual perfection, for one who embarks on the path of love. Love guides him to the front line, and through his death he sees the Beauty of the Beloved. One of the principles of this path is keeping silent and preserving the secret of love. When the lover reaches this stage, he becomes an intimate of the Beloved, and worthy of union with the Beloved.[296]

The war poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini applied the motif in a *mathnavi* entitled ʻA Romantic Narrative' (*mathnavi-ye ʻāsheqāne*). The poet dedicates his poem to the martyr, Māshāʻallāh Sarhangi:

---

[293] F. Pannewick, "Introduction," in *Martyrdom in Literature*, p. 9.

[294] ʻA. Shariati, *Shahādat*, United States of America and Canada: Anjoman-e Eslāmi-ye Dāneshjuyān dar Āmrica va Kānādā, 1352/1933, p. 76.

[295] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, eds. M. Abedi, G. Legenhausen, Houston: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, p. 141.

[296] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmāʻil*, pp. 21, 44.

bebin khāneqāh-e shahidān-e 'eshq
saf-e 'ārefān-e ghazalkhān-e 'eshq
che jānāne charkh-e jonun mizanand
daf-e 'eshq bā dast-e khun mizanand[297]

Be aware of the monastery of the martyrs by love,
Of the mystics who are singing lyrics of love
How lovingly they strive for madness
How they beat the drum of love with the blood-stained hand.

Hoseini draws an analogy between the front line and the monastery *(khāneqāh*) where the mystics gather to remember God and perform spiritual rituals.[298] The couplet contains several metaphors. First, the monastery symbolically represents the battlefield. Secondly, soldiers standing in line and fighting the enemy are equated with worshipping mystics, whose love for God unites them in the community of the lovers. Thirdly, soldiers' prayers on the battlefield are likened to the *zekr* practice of mystics. During the war, Iranian soldiers did in fact recite prayers and remember God before going into action. The poet creates a setting that allows the soldier to compare himself to a mystic and equate his journey to the battlefield with a mystic's quest to find a master, and his initiation into a Sufi order. The soldier equates his participation in military service and his fight against the enemy with the *bay'a* ('oath of allegiance') of an adept when he enters the path of spiritual perfection. The oath of allegiance binds the student to follow his master's principles. The soldier's donning of a military uniform is comparable to a mystic's donning of a dervish's garment. The soldier is ready to sacrifice his life to achieve spiritual progress, according to the poet.

[297] Ibid., p. 43.
[298] A *khāneqāh* is the lodge of a mystic order, and serves two purposes: community life (rooms for prayer and meetings) and accommodating individual mystics. A *khāneqāh* is used by the disciples of a particular shaykh. See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 234.

The metaphorical aspect of the martyr of love is turned to reality in war poetry. The soldier equates the hardships that he endures on the battlefield with the spiritual principles that the mystic performs to perfect his soul. Annihilation of self to achieve union with the Beloved (*baqā*) is the final stage of perfection. The soldier's self-sacrifice on the battlefield is seen as absolute obedience to the Beloved.

The war poet Habibollāh Khabbāz employs the concept of blood money to draw a comparison between spiritual death and real death, and encourage young men to participate in the fight against the enemy of the Beloved and achieve the title of 'martyr of love.' This motif appears in a *mathnavi* called 'The Purity of Karbalā' (*safā-ye Karbalā*):

bahā-ye khun-e 'āsheq rā ke midānad bejoz ma'shuq
shahid-e 'eshq dar maqtal khodā rā khun-bahā guyad[299]

Who but the Beloved knows the value of a lover's blood?
In the place of slaughter; the martyr of love says God is his blood money.

This couplet refers to the divine tradition which says, "Whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money" to exalt the spiritual rank of a soldier who dies in action. The poet draws an analogy between the soldier and a lover, and defines the soldier's death as a spiritual 'death' (renunciation) for the sake of the Beloved. It is the Beloved who knows the value of the soldier's blood.

The female war poet, Simin-dukht Vahidi uses this motif in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Green Tree of Afrā' (*derakht-e sabz-e Afrā*).

ma rā māndan che dardi bud sangin, sakht jānfarsā
to rā she'r-e shahādat ey shahid-e 'eshq, shivā bud[300]

---

[299] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 44.

[300] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 88. For more examples see *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 9.

Continuing to live was such a heavy pain for me, eroding my soul
O martyr of love, poetry on martyrdom suits you.

Vahidi uses the terminology and motifs of the classical love poets. The mystics used the motifs of love poetry metaphorically, to picture their inner mystical progress. Vahidi, in contrast, applies these motifs to literal war. As a woman, she is writing about a martyrdom in which she cannot participate, yet, in a life that is wearisome, the admiration of martyrdom is something to hold on to. She calls herself a martyr of love (a metaphorical martyrdom again) and aligns her writing about martyrdom with a soldier conveying the meaning to the Iranians through death on the battlefield. She goes on to say that the soldier's martyrdom is more eloquent than the poem. Accordingly, a man who understands the beauty of the martyr's death will follow his example.

CONCLUSION

My objective in writing this chapter was to illustrate how the war poets, during the Iran-Iraq war, fundamentally changed classical mystical motif of love and its afflictions to justify violence. Concepts and motifs drawn from classical love literature were used by mystics as metaphors for the trials and joys of the spiritual path and to emphasize man's potential for union with the Beloved through self-denial. The war poets applied the mystical concepts of renunciation and self-sacrifice to the real war situation. They concealed the horrific facts of the conflict with mystic metaphors that drew parallels between fighting the enemy and striving for spiritual perfection. This was a way to inculcate a desire for self-sacrifice in the youth of Iran, for mobilisation purposes, and a way of making the sacrifices of Iranian parents meaningful, and, as in the last example quoted, a way in which the poets themselves found meaning when life was a burden.

The mystical concept of love was popular with the war poets. In mystical treatises, love metaphorically unites the lover with the Beloved. A lover strives to cleanse his heart of

impure temptations. He comes to understand divine reality through contemplation, concentration, and remembrance. This understanding is only possible through the heart. During the war, capacity of love to unite the lover with the Beloved was used to impress upon the soldiers that the Beloved illuminates their hearts when they participate in the fight against Iraqi forces, who are considered the enemies of God. In war poetry, the enemy is depicted as Satan (*sheytān*), who aims to deceive humanity and deprive it of spiritual progress and union with the Beloved. The soldier's deepest love for the Beloved is shown by killing His enemy. The soldier is compared to a lover who is going to kill his rival (*raqib*), who is an obstacle separating him from the Beloved. Whether the soldier kills the enemy or the enemy kills him, the soldier will be rewarded in the hereafter: death unites the lover with the Beloved. The soldier, comparable to a perfect mystic, then remains eternally alive (*baqā*) within the Beloved.

In the classical love literature both the lover and the beloved are idealized; the lover is prepared to offer his life for the cause of the most beautiful, but cruel, beloved. In mystical treatises the characteristics of the worldly beloved are applied to the divine Beloved. The mystic is a lover who lays down his life in the path of love, in the hope of eternal union. This mystical concept underwent a fundamental change in the war poetry. The metaphorical meaning of the concept was transformed into real life. The soldier compares himself to an ideal lover who seeks death, hoping for union with the Beloved. Fighting the enemy becomes the path to union with the Beloved. The soldier is called a gnostic of love (*'āref-e 'eshq*); he belongs to the same class as other gnostics or lovers of God. Communal feeling encourages him to sacrifice his life for the cause, for the benefit of the community. Love is the common thread that binds this community together. The soldier/lover endeavours to show that he is worthy to offer his life to attain to the threshold of the Beloved. He tries to be the ideal lover. He transcends the limitations of reality and is transformed on the "level of analogy."[301]

The mystical relationship between a master and a mystic is redefined in war poetry, in the form of the spiritual relationship between Ayatollah Khomeini and his soldiers. The soldier, like the student of mysticism, follows the instructions of his master. Khomeini, in

[301] J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 269.

his speeches, reminded his soldiers to perform their religious duties and purify their hearts. He emphasizes the necessity of the fight against the infidel enemy (*jehād*). *Jehād* is seen as both a religious duty and a gate through which one may enter the path of salvation.

In mystic literature, self-sacrifice is used as a metaphor for detachment from mundane desires and taming the lower soul, which lead to spiritual perfection. The soul's entanglement with the attractions of the world separates it from its origin. In the war poetry, the concept of self-sacrifice is used to equate death in battle with the spiritual perfection of a mystic. The soldier who offers his life on the front line believes that the hardships that he endures on the battlefield will purify his lower soul. Therefore, through death, he attains the mystical perfection through which he annihilates his identity and becomes one with the Beloved.