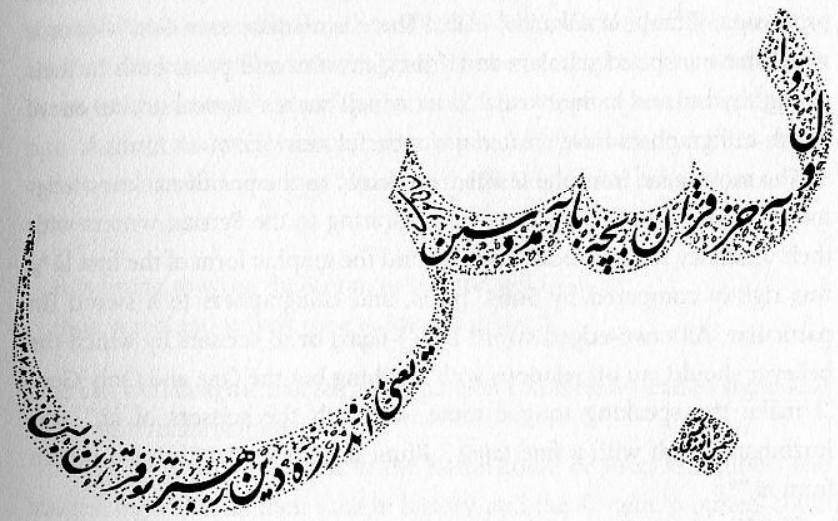

The first and last letters of the Koran are b *and* s*: that means, in the way of religion, the Koran is enough* (bas) *for you.*

One can say without exaggeration that the most important source of inspiration for Persian poets was the Koran. Just as in Christian countries in former times allusions to biblical terms or sayings were perfectly natural, so too for the Muslim the word of God, the Koran, has always occupied a central position in life. Père Nwyia has rightly spoken of a "Koranization of the memory" when discussing the early Sufis.[1] But every Muslim, even the least educated one, was acquainted with the words of the profession of faith, *lā ilāha illā' Llāh*, "There is no deity save God"—words which have inspired scholars and artists, mystics and poets both in their strong rhythm and in their visual form, which has ten vertical strokes out of which calligraphers have created a wonderful network of art forms.[2]

The movement from the *lā ilāh*, "no deity," to the positive acknowledgment *illā'Llāh*, "save God," was very inspiring to the Persian writers with their tendency to dialectical thinking, and the graphic form of the first *lā* لا was rightly compared by Sufis, poets, and calligraphers to a sword (in particular ʿAli's two-edged sword Dhu'l-fiqar) or to scissors by which the believer should cut off relations with anything but the One and Only God. "I make the speaking tongue mute, *lāl*, with the scissors of *lā*," says Ruzbihan-i Baqli with a fine *tajnīs*.[3] Rumi has his reader "bring a broom from *lā*."[4]

The Koran, God's word "inlibrated" (as in Christianity, Christ is God's word "incarnated"), offered the faithful thousands of possible interpretations, ranging from purely literal ones to esoteric ones; even today some search the sacred text for references to contemporary issues from Darwinism to the H-bomb. But the poets discovered other aspects of the Koran that inspired them. Countless poets have seen the face of their beloved as a manuscript copy of the Koran in which the human features are as immaculate as the written letters (for if the copyist makes a mistake, the page must be remade). As the creative power of God was revealed through the letters and words of the Koran, it is also revealed in the perfect beauty of a human face.

> Whosoever saw your face, compared it to the copy of the Koran,
> and whosoever heard that said: "Yes, there is no doubt!"[5]

This reply comes from the beginning of Sura 2 and thus makes the verse particularly elegant. Ḥafiẓ, in contrast, wanted to read from his friend's face

an *āyat*[6]—that is, both a miracle or sign and a verse of the Koran—as these things offer clearer explanations than anything found in commentaries like the *Kashshāf* or the *Kashf*.[7] The idea is that a single sign of the radiant beauty of the beloved's face, like a single verse from the Koran, surpasses all the wisdom of the commentators.

Comparisons of the human face with the perfectly copied Koran, *muṣḥaf*, appear early in poetry but become even more common in later periods, when Shia and especially Hurufi tendencies become stronger. The eyebrows are then the artistically drawn *ṭughrā*, "In the name of God," and the dark down on the friend's upper lip resembles the script of revelation (for the pun in *khaṭṭ*, "down," "script," see chapter 17).[8] However, even a rather early poet like Khaqani may allude to the beauty of the beloved in similar terms:

> It is fitting to write the Koran in red and gold—
> thus, a red and yellow robe is fitting for you.[9]

One can well imagine that such comparison could easily lead to somewhat frivolous transformations!

All the persons mentioned in the Koran could be used as symbols and images, regardless of their time in history, and the Koranic prophets could appear, as it were, as partial aspects of the beloved, just as in theology they are considered precursors of Muḥammad, each of whom manifested a specific aspect of him, the Perfect Man.

Entire Koranic sentences were likewise, though selectively, incorporated into or alluded to in Persianate poetry. That is in particular true of the Koranic statement in Sura 7:171, a centerpiece of mystical meditation, according to which God addressed in pre-eternity, the not-yet-created souls with His word *Alastu bi-rabbikum*, "Am I not your Lord?" and they answered *balā*, "Yes!" This primordial covenant, as it has been called, in which the souls surrendered willingly to God's eternal lordliness is mentioned frequently under the rubric of the "banquet of *alast*," the festive meal during which the entire future of humanity was fixed, and love, suffering, intoxication, and grief were distributed once for all.

> Whatever He pours into our goblet, we drink it,
> be it the wine of Paradise, be it the poisonous wine of death.[10]

On that day it was the primordial wine of love that intoxicated the souls. Around the enormous dome of the mausoleum of Gesudaraz (d. 1422), the great Chishti Sufi in Gulbarga, Deccan, are inscribed his famous verses which begin,

> Those who are deeply drunk from Love's cup
> are senseless from the sweet wine of *Alast*. . . .[11]

That *alast* also rhymes well with *mast*, "intoxicated," certainly facilitated such allusions at least among minor poets.

But the human answer *balā!*—"Yes!"—also had a special meaning. Playing with the word's second meaning, "affliction," poets at least from the days of Sana'i found that

> Because of one *balā* which the soul said in pre-eternity,
> the person who said "Yes" is eternally in affliction (*balā*).[12]

The moment of the covenant in which the destinies were fixed was often called *dūsh*, "yesternight," in contrast with *fardā*, "tomorrow," which designates in the Koran the Day of Judgment, which is as close as or even closer than tomorrow. Thus when Ḥafiẓ sings, at the beginning of a famous *ghazal*,

> Yesternight I saw the angels knocking the tavern's door,
> they kneaded Adam's dust and cast it into the goblet,[13]

he is not describing a poetic vision or a dream but rather thinking of the banquet of the covenant as well as of the day when the dust of the newly created Adam (kneaded, according to tradition, forty days by the hand of God) was saturated with the wine of love. Rumi perceived the Divine word *alast* as heavenly music, which so intoxicated Nonbeing that it rushed dancing into existence.[14]

The poets also like to quote the *amāna*, "the entrusted good" (Sura 33:72), which is, for Ḥafiẓ and those who follow his tradition, the burden of love which heaven and earth refused to carry while humans, though "stupid and cruel," accepted it without knowing what they were doing.[15] For Iqbal, on the other hand, the *amāna* is the spark of individuality, of human personality.

The poets loved to play with the ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of God, which are applicable to every situation in life. Thus they found

consolation in the thought that even though they might indulge in the prohibited pleasures of wine, God is *al-ghafūr*, "The All-forgiving,"[16] and that the singer, *mughannī*, does nothing but praise "the Eternally Rich One," *al-ghanī*, as they say with a fine pun on the root *gh.n.y.*[17]

A number of Koranic sayings were preferred for describing the beauty of the beloved. One was *nūr ʿalā nūr*, "Light upon light" (Sura 24:35), which might express the beloved's unsurpassable radiance. Another was the first three letters of Sura 2, *alif-lām-mīm*, which seemed to point by their graphic form to the stature, tresses, and mouth of the beloved (see chapter 17). Around 1300, Amir Khusrau of Delhi sang that

> I used to talk as much about her eyebrows and eyelashes
> as children in school recite *Nūn wa'l-qalam!* ["*Nūn*, and by the Pen!"][18]

The children here are reciting the beginning of Sura 68, which refers to the letter *nūn* ں and, quite literally, to the pen. This rounded letter is generally compared to the beloved's eyebrows, and the long, dark eyelashes similarly resemble long, thin reed pens. So, just as the schoolchildren recite this sura again and again until they know it by heart, the poet talks ceaselessly about his beloved's eyebrows and eyelashes. An additional point is that the last three verses of this sura, *Wa in yakādu* . . . , "They nearly had . . . ," are recited against the evil eye. Thus by alluding to this particular chapter of the Koran, the poet at the same time averts the rival's evil eye from the beloved's beauty.[19]

Other poets are more daring. ʿUrfi, the master of grand hyperbolical conceits who lived at the Mughal court in Lahore toward the end of the sixteenth century, claims that Gabriel, the angel who brought the revelation, would not have been able to utter the words *Lā taqnaṭū*, "Don't despair [of God's grace]" (Sura 39:54), had he only seen ʿUrfi's own innumerable sins.[20] Ḥafiẓ, more subtle in his use of shocking motifs, informs his listener that the dreaded market superintendent, *muḥtasib*, is intoxicated by "the wine of hypocrisy"—

> Thus you may drink, and "Do not fear!"[21]

The "Do not fear," from Sura 20:71, in this context gently invites the reader to drink wine without fear as the *muḥtasib* himself is drunk and thus cannot

control anyone else; and besides, his drink is hypocrisy, which is certainly more abominable than wine.

Allusions to the *shaqq al-qamar*, "Splitting of the moon" (Sura 54:1)—one of the miracles the Prophet Muḥammad performed—can be found now and then when a poet wants to point out the overwhelming beauty of his friend, before whose moonlike face the moon itself is ashamed. But one may find it rather tasteless when an author, after a series of puns on letters, compares the friend's nose to the Prophet's finger, which split the moon (that is, the face) into two halves.[22]

Weaving such allusions into poems of course presupposed a sound knowledge of the Koran on the part of readers and listeners as well as poets. But that was something one could take for granted in medieval Muslim society.

If allusions to single words or even entire verses of the Koran are quite common, allusions to the persons mentioned in the Holy Book, or to specific events, are even more frequent. There is scarcely a prophet anywhere in the Koran who does not feature in some poetic context or another.[23]

Adam, the prototype of humanity, is the one to whom the angels were ordered to bow down (Sura 2:31), as God had breathed into him from His breath (Sura 15:29) and, according to Muslim tradition, he was "created in His image." That, among other things, accounts for man's superiority over everything in the universe: did not God also "teach him the names" (Sura 2:31) and thus make him the overlord of the named beings? But, as Ḥafiẓ thinks, the angels who obediently fell down before the newly created father of mankind intended in reality to prostrate themselves before his, the poet's, beloved to kiss his feet![24]

The only angel[25] who refused to bow down before Adam was Satan, Iblis, who was cursed then by God. As Ghalib says in his great hymn on Divine Unity, God

> has stitched the eye of Iblis with the nail of Destiny.[26]

However, as one strand of Islamic mysticism claims, Iblis accepted this curse as though it were a robe of honor.[27] Recalling God's pre-eternal will that nobody should fall down before anyone but Him, Iblis obeyed the hidden will and not the spoken word, thus becoming, as Hellmut Ritter has put it, "more monotheistic than God."[28] For this reason he appears in some Persian and Indo-Muslim poems as the great lover who suffers for his obedience and yet will never reach God, who is actually his only beloved. Sarmad, the eccentric Judeo-Persian poet at the Mughal court, who was executed in 1661 on account of heresy, thus dared to say:

> Go, and learn the art of true service from Satan.
> Choose *one* direction of prayer and don't fall down before anyone else![29]

These ideas percolated even down to the level of folk mystics such as Shah ʿAbdul Laṭif in Sind (d. 1752), whose remark *ʿāshiq ʿAzāzīl*, "Lover is Satan," has caused his interpreters so many headaches.[30] At the other end of the spectrum, Iqbal's image of Satan as the necessary whetstone for man—who must fight him and who will overcome him at the end of time, so that he will finally offer to perfected man the obeisance he did not deign to the immature Adam—is a very sophisticated development of this image.[31]

For most poets, though, Satan is the embodiment of analytical, loveless intellect,[32] or the one-eyed seducer, the cunning fiend. How thus can one confront him? One poet suggests that

> If Iblis had only once drunk some wine,
> he would have performed two thousand prostrations before Adam![33]

Intoxicated by love, Iblis would have recognized the divine spark in the dust-form of Adam and would not have boasted of his own origin—fire, which he regarded as superior to Adam's clay. But as the inventor and victim of dangerous rational comparison, he was liable to punishment.

In the context of Adam's story one should not forget that in Islamic tradition Adam was not seduced by means of an apple and that Eve had no share in the seduction. Instead both are equally guilty, and the means of seduction is usually considered to be a grain.[34] Comparisons of the mole of the beloved with this dangerous grain, by which the soul-bird easily falls into the snare, therefore recur frequently in poetry.

It is rather rare to find Noah (Nuh) mentioned by the poets, unless his name is used to point to *nūḥa*, "complaining, lamenting." Nevertheless his ark stands for salvation from danger, as one easily understands, and for this reason Ḥafiẓ calls even the "boat of wine"—the cup—an ark, for without its

help the poet would be carried off easily by the flood and tempest of events.[35] More in tune with the dramatic aspect of the story of the flood is Kisa'i's use of the topic in a threnody about a deceased patron:

[The city of] Marw became like Noah's flood from the water of the
[people's] eyes—
your bier floated thereon like the ark![36]

In panegyric poetry the ark and even more Mount Ararat (Judi) generally offered good comparisons for praise, because the ruler offers the greatest (perhaps the only) security in the storm of trials and tribulations. According to popular legend the flood was started by an old woman in Kufa, who boiled water on her stove and lost control over it. Hence Ghalib claims that

My heart incorporates the heat of the furnace,
my eyes have enough water to inundate the whole world.[37]

Much more prominent in poetry is Abraham (Ibrahim), the "friend of God," *khalīl Allāh*, who according to the Koran built the Ka'ba and destroyed the idols of his father Azar. He is thus the ideal monotheist. Goethe says, in an allusion to Sura 6:98,

Abraham, den Herrn der Sterne
hat er sich zum Herrn erlesen . . . ,[38]

Abraham has chosen as his lord the Lord of the stars . . . ,

because Ibrahim, after looking at sun, moon, and stars, ultimately turned to their creator, for he "loved not those that set," *al-āfilīn*.

Ibrahim's role as the razer of idols inspired Sa'di to address a friend of his, named Khalil, with the lines

My eye cannot rest on anyone,
my friend (*khalīl*) has destroyed all of Azar's idols.[39]

That is, the poet now knows only one single object of worship, though whether this is his worldly beloved, or the Eternal Beloved, is left obscure. To understand such puns completely one must remember that the word *but* or, less frequently, *ṣanam*, "idol," was generally used for the beloved: *but* and *ma'shūq*, "beloved," are interchangeable, which accounts for many "impious" expressions. Later poets sometimes regarded the "idol" as a positive object—after all, is not God constantly busy with creating new "idols"?

Does not God give wine all the time, yet he cannot be called
cupbearer?
He always chisels idols and yet cannot be called Azar![40]

Thus says Ghalib, who created one of the finest descriptions of the true artist, as Azar, who "sees the dance of the uncreated idols already in the stone."[41] Here one can see, if one wants, an allusion to the inherent conflict between legalistic, unimaginative religious attitudes and creative artistic work. And thus the *butān-i āzarī* have led a rather cheerful life throughout the history of Persian poetry.

More frequent, however, than these images are those that developed out of Sura 21:69, which tells how the tyrant Nimrod cast Ibrahim into a blazing pyre—but "We [Allah] addressed the fire 'Be cool and peaceful!'" Hence the innumerable allusions to the "rose garden of Ibrahim," a term which appears both in poetry and as a title of books, in particular those dedicated to a patron named Ibrahim.[42] Poets admonished their readers to remain safe amid the fire of troublesome events "as Ibrahim was in Nimrod's fire."[43] For Ibrahim is the ideal believer, whose pure faith can change even fire into cool rose gardens—just as the lover feels like being in a rose garden when he is in the midst of love's flames.

I am the one who gathers roses from *Khalīl*'s rose garden.
I am in the fire, but I am a-smiling,[44]

says Mir Dard in eighteenth-century Delhi. Five centuries before him an ecstatic mystic in the Indus Valley, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, had sung in jubilant verses:

Due to my friend's love I dance every moment in midst of fire![45]

In between, hundreds of poets took up this theme.

At some point Ibrahim also began to appear as the representative of daring love, leaping into the fire (of love and ecstasy) when intellect would hesitate to move. This contrast appears especially in Iqbal's poetry.[46] In a similar image more familiar to Westerners of Christian background, it was Ibrahim's absolute and unquestioning faith which inspired his son Isma'il

to offer himself without hesitation when he was to be sacrificed. The father's model inspired the son's faithful action.[47]

Other poets who liked to extend traditional comparisons to their farthest limit could boast that "you have heard that Ibrahim did not burn in the pyre, but I burn without sparks or flame."[48] By burning but not showing his suffering, the lover is superior to those who are famous for the miracle of not burning in the fire.

There is yet another side to the fire symbolism. In garden poetry, red flowers can be seen as flames. Thus Ḥafiẓ tells his reader to

> Refresh the ritual of Zarathustra in the garden,
> now that the tulip has lit the fire of Nimrod![49]

With the double allusion to ancient Persian fire worship and to the fire of Nimrod he has cleverly brought together two non-Islamic figures noted for their associations with fire, though their connections were quite different.

As for Nimrod himself, he was killed in a slow and painful process by a gnat that entered his brain.[50] The smallest cause, be it only a tiny insect, can thus bring the death of the mightiest tyrant. This example appears with some frequency in Islamic poetry and in general literature as well.

As important as Ibrahim is for the religious tradition, the true favorite of Persian and Turkish poets is Joseph (Yusuf), to whom the Koran devotes a whole sura (Sura 12) and whose story is called "the most beautiful story." In poetry Yusuf became the embodiment of Beauty and of the beloved, but he also appears, in more general applications, through his adventures as told in the Koran.[51] The time he spent in the well, where he was thrown by his envious brothers, seems to model the lover's situation: one learns patience in the seemingly hopeless darkness.

> All the nights of sorrow are pregnant with the day of joy—
> they see the Yusuf "Day" in the well of the longest winter night.[52]

Thus says Khaqani, cleverly introducing in his first hemistich the well-known proverb "Nights are pregnant." Amir Khusrau, on the other hand, describes "losing his heart" as a tumble into the well:

> My heart fell in the well the very moment that from his face
> the *Sūra Yūsuf* came as a good omen![53]

Here the beloved's beautiful face and "the most beautiful story" seem interchangeable, and the whole story of Yusuf—separation, suffering love, his second imprisonment in Egypt, and final reunion—is, no doubt, a good omen for everyone who seeks prognostication from the Koran.

The enamored poet could also compare his narrow heart to the well that encloses the beautiful Yusuf, who will manifest himself someday.[54] The Western reader, however, will find less pleasure in the frequent image that the dimple in the beloved's chin resembles a well into which thousands of Egyptian Yusufs might fall, because the beloved surpasses them in beauty a thousand times.[55]

Yusuf would have never attained to such a high rank in Egypt had he not left his native country and suffered patiently. For emigration—be it that of the Prophet, or of Yusuf, or of any comparable being—is the condition for growth and development.

> In its native country the pearl is nothing but a blister—
> how could Yusuf have reached the rank of the Mighty One, had he
> not been sold?[56]

Thus asks Kalim, who refers to the old belief that pearls are nothing but water drops (or, in the parlance of seventeenth-century poets, blisters) which, risen to the clouds, fall back into the ocean and can be swallowed by an oyster to grow into a pearl (see below, chapter 15).

This aspect of the Yusuf story was frequently used by the poets to console themselves (for many of them had left their native country) and also their listeners. The mystics could even see this story as pointing to the mystery of death and resurrection.[57] ʿUrfi describes his suffering by the same set of images, only interpreted in the negative:

> I am that unfortunate Yusuf, who has not reached Egypt—
> barely rescued from the well I have gone to the prison. . . .[58]

One of the great themes of Persian literature is the love of Zulaykha (in the Western tradition, Potiphar's wife) for Yusuf. Long before Jami gave this romance its classical form in a celebrated epic poem, numerous poets had alluded to the story, in which the eternal interplay of Beauty and Love, the factor that underlies almost all of life, is represented so beautifully. As Ḥafiẓ expresses the experience,

When Zulaykha saw the day-illuminating beauty of Yusuf,
Love brought her out from the veil of chastity.[59]

Wherever there is Beauty there is a lover to adore it—that is the quintessence of the Yusuf story. The Koranic statement that the Egyptian women whom the lovesick Zulaykha invited to a feast gazed so at Yusuf's beauty that they did not feel it when they cut their hands, instead of the fruits they were holding (Sura 12:30–31), is a favorite with the poets. Would the lover feel any pain provided he can enjoy the presence of the beloved? The beloved's presence would make him forget everything. In this story infatuation with a beautiful human being could be described as being much like the complete surrender of the heart in the contemplation of the Divine Beloved.

Jami's epic poem *Yūsuf Zulaykhā* describes the colorful palace which the longing woman had built and decorated with sensual pictures in the hope of seducing her beloved. These ravishing settings have offered a fine subject to the miniature painters who illustrated the great poem.[60]

But how could Yusuf have been tempted to look at such imperfect pictures? He, who is Beauty personified, needs only one thing: a pure mirror. That is the only gift one can offer him, as Rumi has repeatedly stated—a mirror that, like the purified heart of the lover, reflects the beauty of the beloved.[61]

Poets who dwelled upon Yusuf's beauty and its bewitching effects may have felt themselves to be embodiments of Zulaykha's soul. For them, as Rumi says in a breathtaking passage at the very end of his *Mathnawī*, everything is a reflection of Yusuf:[62] wherever they look, they see him; wherever they listen, they hear his voice; every breeze brings them the fragrance of his garment, until his name becomes "food in the time of hunger, a fur coat in winter days," and they are lost in his remembrance. For the woman-soul, first greedy and trying to seduce the beloved Yusuf, is purified in suffering: the *nafs ammāra*, the "soul inciting to evil" of which the Sura Yusuf speaks (12:53), grows into the *nafs lawwāma*, "the blaming soul" (Sura 75:2), and ends in speechless contemplation of the Beloved, as the *nafs muṭma'inna*, the "soul at peace" (Sura 89:27).

This romance reveals the never-ending interaction of Beauty and Love, but there is still another aspect to the Yusuf of Sura 12. This is his relation to

his father, Jacob (Ya'qub), who had wept so much in the pangs of separation from his most beloved son that he had become blind. He was cured, as the Koran tells, by the scent of Yusuf's shirt. Sitting in the "hut of sorrows," *kulba-i aḥzān* as the Persian poets call it, he is consoled by the fragrance of his son, for scent or fragrance is the miraculous power which calls back to memory the faraway or invisible beloved.[63]

Scent is the portion of him who does not enjoy the actual vision,

says Rumi,[64] who used the motif of scent hundreds of times in his work (and was very fond of the Yusuf motif). When one of the translators of Rumi's *Mathnawī* into Urdu called his work *Pīrāhan-i Yūsufī* (Yusuf's Shirt), he conveyed by that very title that he was offering in his book at least a first "taste" of the great poem to those unable to read the original: like the shirt placed into Ya'qub's hands, it might give the reader some spiritual joy and bring healing to the eyes of the heart.[65]

Yet only rarely, in this connection, do poets speak of another of Yusuf's shirts, the bloodstained one that his brothers had shown to Ya'qub after throwing Yusuf into the well. In early poetry a tulip may remind the writer of that shirt,[66] but it is more common to compare the beautiful rose to Yusuf. The rose exudes fragrance, and its shirt is torn (the petals, when the bud opens) just as Yusuf's was torn by Zulaykha:

The Yusuf "Rose" arrived, and thanks to the scent of his garment
the narcissus became radiant.[67]

To enjoy this line by Amir Khusrau one needs also to know that the narcissus has been since olden times the ideal substitute for the eye (see below, chapter 12). Often it is thought to be blind, because the flower is white. And the formula "May your eye be radiant" (or "bright") is used to congratulate someone. Thus the poet is saying that the narcissus should be congratulated because the rose is approaching, and at the same time he congratulates his eye which, being cured of blindness, will soon be able to see the roselike cheeks of the Yusuf-like beloved.

Later poets ventured into even more exotic comparisons. They thought that the red wine with its fragrance, which certainly enamored them, resembled the attractive Yusuf:

You cannot see any more wine in the bottle
because Yusuf cannot endure the prison.[68]

Thus Qudsi describes a drinking party in seventeenth-century India. Two centuries later Insha compared the bottle to a shirt for the rose(-colored) Yusuf, that is, the wine itself.[69]

Yusuf is the favorite figure of poets for whom the manifestation of beauty is the highest goal. But he rarely if ever appears in the work of Iqbal, whose emphasis is on God's Majesty and human spiritual strength. Iqbal prefers Moses, the prophet "to whom God spoke," *kalīm Allāh*, and who was turned back when he asked to see God without veils. *Lan tarāni*, "Thou shalt not see me" (Sura 7:143), was the Divine answer to this daring request—and for the poets it is the answer given by the beloved when asked to show his (or her) face to the lover, who longs for direct vision. In *ghazal* poetry writers have even gone so far as to describe the beloved's minute mouth with an allusion to this same divine word:

The atom (*jauhar-i fard*) of his [or her] mouth tells the seeker:
"Thou shalt not see me!"[70]

The dialogue between Moses and his Lord could also be invoked in panegyrics. For example, Muḥammad ibn Naṣir says of his patron:

Eternal duration (*baqā*) says to him all the time: "Let me see you!"
Annihilation (*fanā*) says to him: "You will not see me in eternity!"[71]

That is, the patron's life will last forever, and so will his rule.

Because Moses saw the Lord's glory made manifest through the burning bush, it was easy for poets to connect him with fire. In spring poems one sometimes finds the "fire of Ibrahim" and the burning bush of Moses paired in one verse, when the poet tells of roses and tulips coming into bloom.[72] A late Indian poet like Ghalib might even compare the pretty girls in the streets of Benares to the burning bush[73]—may we assume here a (subconscious?) combination of the Divine fire with the fire that was so central in Hindu rites? But for Iqbal the "Tulip of Sinai," *lāla-i Ṭūr*, constitutes a model for the ideal human being: like a flaming tulip in the steppes, man should grow out of his own depths and illuminate the world by his fire.[74]

God's command to Moses as he stood before the burning bush—"Put away your two sandals!" (Sura 20:12)—also offered possibilities of punning to poets and in particular to mystical writers. Around 1700 an Indian poet wrote:

Cast fire upon the world—that is [true] seeking!
Throw away both worlds like two sandals—that is good behavior![75]

However, many poets thought that Moses' burning bush was much too insignificant a vision. They craved a more "direct" vision of God or even boasted of having known him much more closely. This seems to be the case especially among Indo-Muslim writers, beginning with ʿUrfi and continuing to Iqbal. Even Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khan (d. 1898), the modernist reformer of Indian Muslims, had written on his tombstone:

Neither Moses nor the Sinai could bear the radiance of one manifestation—
this is my heart, which has seen thousands of that kind.[76]

Iqbal's last poetical collection in Urdu, *Żarb-i Kalīm* (The Stroke of Moses),[77] honors the power of the prophet, whose miraculous rod could produce water out of the rock, cleave the Red Sea, and overcome the magicians of Pharaoh, whose rods turned into serpents which were in turn devoured by Moses'. For this reason, in Iqbal's verse Moses is the symbol of a strength that is not cut off from its divine source—the kind of strength the poet envisaged for the ideal modern Muslim.

In an earlier era, when Kalim claimed that times had deteriorated, he warned that it does not mean that Moses has appeared when a stick falls into a blind man's hand.[78] It was in memory of this Kalim, whose pen name itself alludes to Moses, the *kalīm Allāh*, that another Kashmiri poet invented a fine threnody, playing on his name:

Finally he went off and put the pen out of his hand—
Kalim traveled on this road without his wand.[79]

Just as Moses performed miracles with his wand, the poet had performed miracles with his pen. Such claims can be found in earlier poets' self-praise,[80] but they gain a special charm here when linked to a poet who chose a name that recalled Moses'.

Only rarely do poets allude to the earlier stages of Moses' life. One such

instance invokes his herding the cattle of Shuʿayb in the Wadi Ayman (Sura 28:21), to teach the listener patience in heeding the incomprehensible decrees of God:

He makes Yazid sit on the carpet of the caliphate,
He makes Kalim work in the dress of a shepherd.[81]

Much more frequent are allusions to another of Moses' miracles, that of the White Hand (Sura 7:105), known also from the Old Testament: when he placed his hand in his bosom it came out white. This becomes in Persian poetry a symbol of prophetic and, by extension, poetic power. To underscore Islam's miracle-working, egalitarian force, Iqbal sings that

Love gives the White Hand to the black man![82]

More often, however, the image appears in love poetry in quite unexpected connections: the beloved's face and mole are "the hand of Moses and the heart of Pharaoh,"[83] that is, "wonderful and cruel," or, as an early Indian Sufi poet envisioned it,

His tress is Moses' serpent,
the palm of his hand is like the White Hand.[84]

That the white lily in the garden is likewise compared to the White Hand is understandable,[85] for it is the prophet that announces spring.[86]

Moses' antagonist is Pharaoh, the cruel tyrant and restive infidel who instead of listening to the prophet's preaching considered himself to be God (Sura 79:24). He was punished for this sin when the Red Sea swallowed him. It is important to remember that this theme, though not too frequently mentioned in poetry, inspired Muslims to invent the chronogram *Firʿaun gharq-i baḥr*, "Pharaoh drowned in the sea" = [A.D.] 1916 when Lord Kitchener's boat capsized during World War I and the British commander lost his life: had he not fought against the Mahdi of Sudan and his followers and opened the Mahdi's grave? Iqbal, in his *Jāvīdnāma* (published in 1932), builds a dramatic scene on this comparison.[87]

Another actor in the Moses story is Samiri (Sura 20:85), who according to Islamic tradition invented the Golden Calf and thus turned the Children of Israel away from the worship of the One God.

Don't be Samiri who gave gold and, out of asininity,
left Moses, to run after a calf![88]

Thus says Ḥafiẓ, with a nice pun on the stupid ass and the calf.

Another, and more frequently mentioned, negative figure appears from the same story: Qarun (the biblical Korah), known as the rich miser who was in the end swallowed up by the earth, pressed down under the weight of his treasures.[89] Saʿdi admonishes his reader to remember that

Qarun perished although he had forty treasure houses,
Nushirwan did not die because he left behind a good name.[90]

And Iqbal compares the learned mullah to a "Qarun of Arabic dictionaries,"[91] because he clings only to the outward letter of the Koran and *ḥadīth* and thus will go down under the dust, as he never understood the spirit of faith and love, which carries the true believer heavenward.

One of the most fascinating figures connected with the story of Moses in the Koran is Khiḍr, or Khiżr, the mysterious guide.[92] Although he is not mentioned by name in the Koran, tradition identifies him with Moses' companion on the way to the "confluence of the two oceans" (Sura 18:59–60). The three strange actions of this traveler were not comprehended by Moses, who saw only their external, seemingly destructive aspects without knowing the esoteric meaning. Khiżr, whose name is derived from the Arabic root *kh.ḍ.r*, "to be green," more generally appears as the guide of the wayfarer and the mystic in his quest for the Water of Life, for it was he who guided Alexander to the Fountain of Life and, drinking from it, became immortal, while Alexander was deprived of the drink. The Water of Life can be found only after overcoming the most terrible obstacles and surviving frightful adventures, for it is hidden in deepest darkness. In poetry it is always connected with the name of Khiżr, and even Goethe sings in the very beginning of his *West-Östlicher Divan*:

Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen
soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.[93]

While loving, drinking, and singing,
Khiżr's fountain shall rejuvenate you.

The Water of Life thus came to mean, among the poets, either wine, or the kiss of the beloved. Ḥafiẓ, taking up earlier examples, skillfully plays with the name Khiżr, "Greenish," when describing the "greening" down that sprouts on his friend's cheek and upper lip:

Your down is Khiżr, and your mouth is the Water of Life. . . .[94]

The lover who has tasted this elixir will remain eternally alive; or rather, he has found Paradise and eternal bliss already here on earth. Ḥafiẓ even thinks that

If the Water of Life is that which is contained in the friend's lip,
then it is evident that Khiżr owns only a mirage.[95]

Compared to a lip, even Khiżr's water cannot quench the lover's thirst and make him immortal. In later times the image was stretched rather far: one may not exactly savor the idea that the beloved's mouth is Khiżr's fountain, in which the tongue is a fish.[96] Yet an eighteenth-century poetaster in India went even farther:

In the sugar of your smile I saw the pearls of a few teeth—
a few orphans are the inhabitants of Khiżr's fountain![97]

"Orphan," *yatīm*, is also the term for a "priceless pearl" or a unique (hence "orphan") jewel.

Besides the beloved's saliva and the wine, one other thing can constitute the Water of Life: the poet's ink, for it is hidden in the dark valley of the inkwell and grants immortality to the poet or the calligrapher who uses it for his work, as it also helps to immortalize the patron in whose honor the poem was written.[98]

Khiżr's own immortality is often mentioned but not always construed as a positive value—for, as lovers knew, "Death is a bridge that leads the lover to the beloved."[99] Perhaps, as Ghalib remarks, one should rather pity Khiżr and his immortal companions, as they have no hope of dying and being rescued from this miserable life.[100] The endless duration of Khiżr's life has also inspired longing souls to compare it to an event that seemed endless to them:

The life of the true lover would be longer than that of Khiżr,
if he would count the days of separation as life,

says Qasim-i Kahi,[101] implying that a day without the beloved is not real life at all.

The term *majmaʿ al-baḥrayn*, "the confluence of the two oceans," which occurs in the overlapping contexts of the Khiżr story and Moses' story, is sometimes used to denote the unification of two seemingly remote entities. But its most famous use in Persian literature is the title of Prince Dara Shikoh's (d. 1659) work *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn*, which aims at the "confluence" of the ocean of Islam and that of Hinduism.[102]

Though the cluster of persons and events from the life of Moses is widely represented in poetry in various contexts, Luqman (Sura 31) appears, like his Koranic prototype, exclusively as the wise old man who offers good advice to people. Thus one finds him more frequently in didactic and, at times, panegyric poetry than in lyrics, and Anwari invented a book allegedly written by the sage which contains typical models of behavior.

Aṣaf's wisdom, Qarun's treasure, the prophet Job's patience—
these are the three which the wise Luqman has mentioned in his book.

One would expect David (Da'ud), the singer of the Psalms (*Zabūr*), to play an important role in the poetical universe.[103] However, it was mainly his skill in making coats of mail (as mentioned in Sura 34:10) which inspired poets when they attempted to describe the gentle movements of silvery brooks and rivers in the spring. He also appears as the singer with the enchanting voice, so that "Davidian song" is a common expression for every lovely sound, in particular for the birds' twittering on a spring morning.

But when Ḥafiẓ says,

O morning breeze, repeat David's song,
for the Solomon "Rose" has returned from the air,[104]

the emphasis is placed rather on Solomon (Sulayman), who, according to Sura 27, was master over spirits and animals, which he ruled by virtue of his magic seal. He was wont to sit on a lofty, windborne throne—hence his relation to the rose, which blooms atop a high stem, moved by the gentlest breeze. However, this windborne throne also often reminded the poets of the impermanence of power or glory in the cold wind of fate. Friedrich Rückert, imitating Ḥafiẓ, writes in perfectly "Persian" imagery:

Salomon, wo ist dein Thron? Hingegangen in den Wind!
Lilie, wo ist deine Kron'? Hingegangen in den Wind!

Solomon! Where has your throne gone? Oh, gone into the wind!
Lily, say, where has your crown gone? Oh, gone into the wind![105]

And knowing the passing glory of even the most spectacular power, the poets would generally think:

For the lover who has dwelt in the corner of your love—
a torn reed mat is Solomon's throne![106]

Solomon's love story with Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba—told with a number of details in Sura 27—enabled poets to create a charming wordplay on *sabā*, "Sheba," and *ṣabā*, "the morning breeze," although allusions to the actual story are rarer than one would expect. Rumi, however, devotes an interesting chapter in his *Mathnawī* to the love of the glorious queen, who was introduced by Solomon into the mysteries of Divine love and true faith.[107]

Much more common is Solomon's seal, the inscribed stone which has given its name to various spells and talismans.[108] In poetry it is a metaphor for the ruby-like mouth of the beloved, which is much more precious and can perform more miracles than a hundred seals of Solomon. The combination of "ruby" with "mouth" offered itself without any difficulty, but any spiritual value that helped man to overcome the vicissitudes of fate could also be called "Solomon's seal" or "ring." Thus the Pashto poet ʿAbdul Qadir Khan sings:

The universe lies under the seal of contentment and resignation—
shouldst thou draw it on thy finger, it is Sulayman's magic ring.[109]

The demons that surround Solomon's throne have inspired numerous miniature painters, who enjoy showing them in strange forms and colors.[110] They also turn up in poetry: at the beginning of this century, a poet compared them to the tsarist troops then threatening Iran.[111]

Though poetical and Koranic inscriptions on weapons for Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent's armory show that he certainly felt himself heir to the prophet-king's glory, Solomon's importance was particularly emphasized in the mystical tradition. The mystics derived their interest in him from the Koranic statement that he was aware of the "language of the birds," *manṭiq uṭ-ṭayr* (see below, chapter 13); in turn the soul-bird listens to his word. Rumi asks:

How would it be if one bird were flying
around whose neck there is the collar of our Solomon?[112]

that is, a soul who is completely bound to the mystical leader, and/or to the spiritual Beloved. This relation between Solomon and the birds, especially his role as the mystical guide who knows how to talk to the soul-birds, has inspired not only single verses but entire epic poems, the most famous being ʿAṭṭar's *Manṭiq uṭ-ṭayr*. And everywhere the hoopoe, *hudhud*, appears as the harbinger of good news, for he once was the go-between for Solomon and Bilqis.

The Koran (Sura 27:18) also speaks of Solomon's relation with the ant (after which animal the whole sura has received its name). According to legend a tiny ant once complained to the mighty king that the horses of his soldiers were disturbing the ants' colonies, and Solomon heeded the insect's complaint. This juxtaposition of highest power and grandeur with infinitesimal smallness and insignificance offered the poets wonderful possibilities for hyperbolic statements about their own unworthiness and the ruler's, or the beloved's, glorious position.[113]

Who will bring the ant's heartache to Solomon's throne?

Thus asks Amir Ḥasan Sijzi Dihlawi, as did many others.[114] In love lyrics, the motif could gain a new turn:

Whosoever saw the ant of your beauty spot no longer asks for
Solomon's place![115]

With these words the Turkish poet Fuzuli claims that to look at the antlike, minute beauty spot or mole on the beloved's cheek makes the lover much happier than to occupy Solomon's throne. The equation mole = ant occurs often; Mir Dard even sees the blackish down close to the beloved's mouth as "ants that have reached Solomon's place."[116]

From rather early times onward Solomon was identified, in Persian lore, with the mythical Jamshed (see chapter 6). Thus some distinctive images, such as Solomon's throne or Jamshed's cup, are mentioned in allusions to both rulers.[117] Similarly, the wise vizier Aṣaf ibn Barkhiya, who assisted

Solomon and has become proverbial for his wisdom, is often interchangeable with the legendary Persian vizier Buzurjmihr: both of them embody the wisdom of statesmanship.

One aspect of Solomon's activities has influenced folk tales and reached, in strange new forms, even American popular culture. This is the story that he took disobedient djinns and put them into bottles, which he sealed and cast into the sea. From the beginning stories in the *Arabian Nights* to the film television series *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965–70; frequently rerun) the "fairy [or genie] in the bottle" has entertained many generations.

Two other spirits are given a prominent place in the Koran as well as in tradition: the angels Harut and Marut (Sura 2:102). Enamored of a lovely musician, the playful Zuhra (Venus), they lightheartedly revealed to her the secret of the Greatest Name of God. As a punishment they were hung by their feet in a deep well in Babylon, and Zuhra was transferred into the fifth sphere of the sky. For the poets, Harut and Marut became the bewitching dark eyes of the beloved, or perhaps the beloved's long black tresses—a comparison which cleverly involves the theme of "hanging down." "Babylonian magic" as the power of a bewitching human being is understandably a rather frequent term.[118]

Among the Koranic prophets who are rarely mentioned by poets is Jonas (Yunus), who was swallowed by the fish. His story, according to the *ḥadīth* used by Rumi,[119] is a kind of "reversed heavenly journey": just as the Prophet Muḥammad reached his Lord in his heavenly flight during the *miʿrāj*, so Yunus found Him in his dark cell, that is, in the fish's stomach. Rumi's allusion evokes the two ways of mystical experience—the journey upward and the journey downward. But in poetry Yunus could scarcely be used for comparison to a patron or to the beloved. He appears, however, in poems that speak of God's mysterious ways of treating His friends.

> He gave flesh to the worms from the body of the patient one [Job],
> and gave to the fish a mouthful of Yunus.[120]

Job (Ayub) is more likely to be cited as the prototype of the afflicted lover who undergoes all kinds of tribulations and accepts whatever his beloved sends him.

Another Koranic prophet is Idris, who, according to legend, entered Paradise by a trick. He too is not among the common figures in lyric or panegyric poetry, but he is sometimes mentioned with other prophets who already enjoy eternal life, such as Khiżr, Ilyas (Elias/Elijah), and Jesus. In popular poetry, however, especially in Turkey, he appears as the heavenly tailor who sits under the Ṭuba tree and is busy with stitching the garments for the inhabitants of Paradise.[121]

The rebellious peoples ʿAd and Thamud, who were extinguished because of their disobedience and their refusal to listen to the prophets' words, or the dangerous personalities of Gog and Magog, who dwell behind Alexander's iron wall in eastern Asia (cf. Sura 21:96), appear mainly in *qaṣīdas*, when the poet intends to vilify his patron's enemies, who will be extinguished the same way that ʿAd and Thamud were destroyed by divine wrath. Panegyrists like Khaqani and Anwari, as well as those who imitated them in later centuries, might also compare the sound of the poet's pen to the blowing of an icy wind, *ṣarṣar*, which could destroy the patron's enemies.[122] And the beautiful gardens and the palace of ʿAd, *Iram dhāt al-ʿimād*—the richly pillared castle mentioned in Sura 89:6—are used as signs of worldly power which will be destroyed unless people repent.

Every Koranic figure could play a role in the poetical cosmos, whether it was the mighty Solomon or the Seven Sleepers, whose faithful dog Qiṭmir became the model of fidelity. Often the prophets are portrayed not only in their glory but also as suffering heroes who willingly took the suffering upon themselves for the sake of God and thus—as mentioned in the Koran itself—prefigure the Prophet of Islam, who had to suffer until he was given victory thanks to his "beautiful patience" (Sura 12:18). With this quality they also become models for the individual believer and, by extension, for the true lover. Was not Zacharias (Zakariya) sawn asunder while he was hiding in a hollow tree, without complaining when the saw was put on his skull? Likewise the lover should not utter a cry of despair when the saw of separation, or any other affliction, overcomes him.

The Christian reader will be surprised and perhaps shocked at the way Jesus (ʿIsa al-masiḥ) is presented by the poets. His virgin mother, Mary, is considered one of the four best women that ever lived. The dried-up palm tree which she grasped when labor overcame her and which showered sweet dates upon her (Sura 19:23–26) symbolizes unexpected release from deepest despair—one immediately thinks of Paul Valéry's poem *La Palme*, in which this motif is masterfully developed. As Mary became pregnant

from the breath of the Holy Spirit or Gabriel (as Rumi has told in a remarkably tender description in the third book of the *Mathnawī*),[123] the beginning of spring and the opening of buds were greeted with allusions to the lovely virgin.

Perhaps the midnight breeze has become Gabriel,
so that branches and twigs of the dried-up trees have become
Mary![124]

This verse was written by Kisa'i, one the earliest Persian poets, and the symbolism was taken over by numerous later poets; the idea that the buds resemble the virgin touched by the Holy Spirit is certainly moving. The rosebud too was compared to Mary, and the fragrance of roses reminded poets of the breath of Jesus, which could quicken the dead.

Mystical poets—here again, especially Rumi—regarded Jesus as the symbol of the human soul, or as the embodiment of spiritual values. The material body is often manifested in the donkey which carried Jesus to Jerusalem but had to stay behind when Jesus was taken up to heaven.[125] Rumi, who was fond of juxtaposing Jesus and his donkey, often indulges in rather vulgar details to highlight the difference between the spiritual Jesus and the material world. The donkey is thus as much part and parcel of the theme "Jesus" as the rod is part of the theme "Moses," and numerous poets have taken up Anwari's question:

How would everyone who carries a rod
and has a donkey, be like Moses and like Christ?[126]

The most common images in connection with Jesus are, however, developed from the statement (Sura 5:110) that Jesus' breath could heal the sick and quicken the dead. He could fashion little birds of clay and breathe into them to bring them alive (just as the beloved revives the agonizing lover by his breath), and he could wake the dead, as he first did for Lazarus ('Azar). Thus he was an ideal image for the beloved.

The breeze became, as it were, Jesus son of Mary,
for it gave sight to the eye of the blind-born (*akmah*) in the
garden.[127]

Thus said Waṭwaṭ, but Rumi gives the theme its classical expression:

If someone wants to see how Jesus quickened the dead,
then give me a kiss in his presence: "Thus, thus!"[128]

This expression was imitated throughout the centuries in Persian and Urdu poetry,[129] and when a poet rhetorically asks his friend, "Whose Jesus have you been?" he means, "Whom have you revived by your kiss?"—for according to ancient concepts a kiss is an exchange of souls. This is attested widely in Greek and Latin poetry, and the Persian expression, *jān bi-lab āmad*, "My soul came on my lip," means "I was on the point of dying"—so that some fresh, life-giving breath of Jesus is required to keep the ailing lover alive.[130]

Even in the first days of Persian poetry this concept was combined with the topic of the Christian cupbearer and the monastery as the place where one could drink the prohibited wine. As early as in Raduyani's work one finds a verse which plays with these concepts:

His two tresses became a cross and his lips a Jesus,
his face a psalm of loveliness and his waist a *zunnār* [infidel's
girdle].[131]

The crosslike tresses are often mentioned in early drinking poetry. But although this verse of Raduyani's looks very matter-of-fact and may well describe an actual party (for Abbasid Arabic poetry and prose description tell of such festivities in the Christian environment), there is still room for the mystical interpretation as well: the wine of Divine Love is found outside of orthodox sobriety.

Jesus, to whose followers such "impious" acts are frequently ascribed, appears in Sufi tales as the ideal ascetic, radiant in his love of God. Yet according to legend he lives not in the immediate presence of God but rather in the fourth heaven. One account says that despite his homelessness and poverty, he had not reached absolute trust in God, for he carried a needle in his garment. This tiny object was sufficient to bar him from the highest rank of poverty; at his stage of spirituality, a needle constitutes a veil as dangerous as Qarun's treasures.[132]

The Divinely prepared table which gives Sura 5 its name, *al-Mā'ida*, is mentioned only rarely. This table is given to those who fast and avoid sins, as Rumi says. But Jesus and Moses—the representatives of love and law, mildness and sternness—often appear together, in songs in honor of the

Prophet, "to glean the crumbs from Muḥammad's table," as Khaqani claims,[133] because the Prophet of Islam came to reveal the middle path between the ways that Jesus and Moses had shown to previous communities. They too belong to the store of dramatic contrasts which Persian poets like so much to pose and develop.

The tendency simply to combine different prophets and their specialities in order to describe either the beloved or the patron is likewise quite strong:

> Your lip is Jesus, and your cheek Yusuf, but your bloodshedding eye
> is clearly Khalil (Ibrahim), and I am its hidden Isma'il [who is to be
> sacrificed].[134]

The archangel Gabriel, who carried the divine breath into Mary's shirt or sleeve, is also the angel who brought the revelation to Muḥammad. That is why he is regarded as the mediator between man and God. But one must keep in mind that the angels are not equal to human beings. They had to bow down before Adam, who carried in him all the potential for development and spiritual growth whereas they are perfect and need no change or development. Millenium after millenium they remain in the same attitude of prayer for which they have been destined. Being perfect and created from light, they have no choice between good and evil, while humans have to prove their values in choosing the right path. Humans are made, as Rumi says with a drastic image, by binding a donkey's tail and an angel's wing together,[135] and just as man can reach the immediate presence of God, which even Gabriel cannot, man can also fall deeper than any beast. Man can, as the Persian poets liked to say, "hunt angels"; but the state of mystical confusion, *ḥayrat*, is a snare even for Gabriel, as Fayżi claims.[136] Gabriel and the angels are only a lowly prey in the snare of true man's high ambition: so Iqbal, following earlier writers, repeats unceasingly.[137] And for this reason one finds that Gabriel becomes a symbol of intellect, which can lead the seeker to the threshold of the sanctuary but is not allowed inside. The mighty angel had to stay back at the *sidrat al-muntahā*, the border point of the created universe, when the Prophet continued on his flight into the Divine Presence.[138] Yet Ghalib sees himself as "the she-camel of longing, and Gabriel [as] the singing caravan leader for me."[139]

If Rumi describes the angel of inspiration as a symbol of intellect, Iqbal goes farther and contrasts, in witty verses, the position of the static angel

with that of ever-striving man. He goes so far as to write in one of his most famous Urdu poems that Iblis, Satan, teases the obedient archangel and jokes about his constant and unswerving obedience—which is, he thinks, a pretty boring affair. He himself, as he boasts, never ceases playing the role of a thorn in God's side, and thus (one may infer) keeps Him awake.[140]

The traditional angels of Islam appear in various states in Persian poetry. There are, first of all, the *kirām kātibīn* (Sura 82:11), the noble angels who sit on every human shoulder to note down each person's actions. Sometimes a poet may claim that these angels cannot write down as many sins as he commits;[141] or perhaps he may hope and expect that the recording angel will be so confused and excited by the delightful countenance of the poet's beloved that the pen will fall from his hand and he will fail to take further notes.[142] (And, of course, he will not write down the sins the lover may commit during this period.) Or so Amir Khusrau thinks.

After death each human being will be asked what he or she believes. The two angels of the grave, Munkar and Nakir, are thus much feared, as they not only interrogate the deceased but punish them if necessary. But these angels too can be seen on earth—the beloved's cruelty is a perfect reflection of their behavior.

> Under your lip, a Christ is hidden,
> under your eyelashes there are Munkar and Nakir.[143]

That is, though these lips are life-bestowing, the eyes are tormenting.

The period before the general resurrection is the time that the Mahdi and/or Jesus will appear on earth to fight the Dajjal, after whose death will come a time of peace. This is the eschatological peace for which mankind has always hoped, the time when "lion and lamb shall lie down together." To many poets the reign of their patron would seem to inaugurate this peace—hence the numerous allusions, in panegyrics, to the Peaceful Kingdom. Sometimes, though rarely, the reign of the beloved is also seen as bringing peace between predatory animals and soft-hearted lambs and goats.[144] Similarly, Persian and Indo-Muslim miniaturists sometimes depicted this scene when the painter wanted to honor the patron—as in the well-known portrait of the emperor Jahangir.[145]

Once the period of peace is over, the mighty angel Israfil will appear and blow the trumpet to inaugurate resurrection and Doomsday, awakening the

dead, who will run around in terrible turmoil. Thus it is that the word *qiyāmat*, "resurrection," has acquired in most Islamic languages the meaning "riot, horrible tumult, absolute confusion."[146] A pun occasionally is worked between *qiyāmat* and *qāmat*, the "stature" of the beautiful friend. With this *ishtiqāq* the poet intends to convey the confusion into which the lover is thrown at the very sight of the beloved's graceful form.[147]

Yet quite a few poets have felt that they are no less than Israfil—is not the scratching of the poet's pen equal to the sound of the trumpet of resurrection? They too are able to awaken slumbering humanity by their powerful words—that, at least, is what they like to think.[148] In the present century Iqbal has used the motif often and elaborated it in various ways: Israfil even complains because the poet himself has announced resurrection earlier than expected.[149]

Most of the eschatological vocabulary serves to describe the poets' own state of mind, although they at times ridicule the whole instrumentarium that will be set up on this terrible day. Why should God need scales to weigh the dirty sins of man? And why does he build a bridge thinner than a hair over which people have to walk?[150] Rebellious questions of this type are found primarily among folk poets in the Turkish tradition, who sometimes elaborate them into highly amusing verses.

Most of the classical poets, however, would probably agree with Ḥafiẓ:

> The story of the horror of the Day of Judgment, which the city
> preacher told us yesterday
> is nothing but an allusion to the day of separation.[151]

The time when the lover is separated from the beloved is as long and painful as the apparently endless Day of Judgment, which will be scorching hot. But as for those who are close to the beloved, they would not care even if there were seventy thousand suns that day![152]

On the Day of Judgment everyone will be given the book of his actions in his right or left hand, according to whether the actions were good or evil. But Qudsi in India declares enthusiastically that he would rather bring along the picture of his beloved—because that is all that he was busy with during his life.[153] Such a picture would be all the more fitting as many a writer has claimed that the beloved indeed reminds him of the events on Doomsday, for the beloved has

> a face like the result of good actions [that is, white]
> and tresses like the book of the sinners [that is, black].[154]

These ideas have been repeated over the centuries; therefore one enjoys the fresh view of these events given in Ṣa'ib's critical verse:

> Concerning the day of resurrection there is only one thing that
> worries me.
> That is, that I have to see the faces of these people once again.[155]

For the majority of poets the fires of love and Hell are interchangeable; or rather, Hell is just a tiny spark of the fire of love, as Sauda said in the eighteenth century, using a traditional image. Hell thus appears time and again in the visions of the poet who is separated from his beloved and carries, as it were, Hell within himself (thus Ghalib). Paradise too is connected with the beloved: the water of the heavenly fountain Kauthar comes from the beloved's sweet lips, and so does the pure water of the *salsabīl* (the paradisiacal pond), and the high-rising Ṭuba tree is nothing but the reflection of the beloved's slender stature.[156] Once in a while, though, both heavenly fountains may represent the poet's ink.[157]

In a verse that has become proverbial Ḥafiẓ sums up the lovers' viewpoint, addressing the letterbound theologian and the ascetic:

> You and the Ṭuba tree, I and the stature of the beloved—
> everyone's thought corresponds to his ambition.[158]

That is, the orthodox believer's ambition, *himmat*, is to reach the paradisiacal tree by works of piety and obedience, whereas the lover thinks only of the ravishing beauty of his beloved. Whether this beloved is one of flesh and blood, or the eternally beautiful Beloved, is left to the reader's understanding.

Ḥafiẓ also reminds his readers that there is a reflection of Paradise right here and now:

> Ḥafiẓ's eye under the balcony of that houri-like being
> had the character of a "garden under which flow rivers."[159]

The balcony or roof of the unattainable beloved is, for the lover, Paradise with a houri in it, and as he cannot come close to that heavenly virgin his

tears flow like the rivers beneath the Garden of Paradise, as the Koran mentions several times.

Now and then descriptions of the primordial Paradise are transferred to the beloved:

With the cheek and curl and face which you have,
you have a peacock, a paradise, and also a serpent.[160]

According to popular tradition the serpent (here, the beloved's tresses) entered Paradise (the cheek) by means of a trick: carried in the peacock's beak, it managed to reach the presence of Adam and Eve. Such comparisons were used with increasing detail in later days.

The promised Paradise is, for many writers, nothing but a projection of their present state:

How long shall I still ponder Hell and Kauthar? For I too have
such a fire in my breast and such a drink in my goblet,[161]

says Ghalib.

To think of castles and houris, *ḥūr u quṣūr*, is no doubt a mistake, *quṣūr*, as the poets like to pun. What matters is the contemplation of the smiling face of the eternal Beloved.[162] After all, these houris are already many thousand years old; they may be good enough for the ascetic who longs for such a recompense for his deprivations in this life.[163] But

Riḍwan's garden, which is praised so much by the ascetic,
is nothing but a rose bouquet in the niche of oblivion for us who
have lost ourselves,[164]

as Ghalib says in a convoluted Urdu verse. A withered nosegay, left in some abandoned nook and never noticed by those who have forgotten themselves in their quest for the Real—that is the traditional Paradise. True lovers, however, know that

In the sanctuary of Love
there are a hundred stations, the first of them being resurrection.[165]

Thus they will continue wandering into ever new depths of the fathomless abyss of the Infinite, "growing without diminishing,"[166] as Iqbal says at the end of his spiritual journey, or

bis im Anschaun ew'ger Liebe
wir verschweben, wir verschwinden,[167]

until in looking at Love Eternal
we float away and vanish,

as Goethe says in the Book of Paradise in his *West-Östlicher Divan*, perfectly faithful to the spirit of Persian poetry.