

The Prophetic Light

Nur Mohammadiyya

Perhaps no doctrine is more central and critical to a right understanding of Islam and the role of the Prophet than the concept of *Nur Mohammadiyya*. Ironically, no concept in Islam is more shrouded in mystery and lack of understanding than this one. Few know the general importance of the concept and fewer still its mystical significance. Literally translated the term means the Light of Mohammad but it has also been referred to as the First Light, Prophetic Light and sometimes as the Ancient Word or *Kalma i Qadim*. This concept developed as early as 300 years after the death of the Prophet by mystics like Sahl al Tustari and al Hallaj, later became a central feature of classical Islamic philosophy under the authorship of Ibn Arabi perhaps the greatest of Islamic mystics and theologians. By understanding it in its totality and its varied implications we can do much to understand the role of the Prophet in Islam and prophetic revelation in general. By truly grasping its significance we can take a few baby steps in helping to heal the cultural and religious divide not only between Islam and other traditions but also within the Islamic community itself.

In order to grasp it's essence we need to see it within the totality of Islamic philosophy and the Islamic explanation of the creation of prophecy itself. From a mystical perspective Allah was in himself unknowable, unapproachable, infinite and beyond all rational comprehension in a state referred to as the *Cloud* in the Qur'an. Hence knowledge of God's essence is impossible since it is not known by either proof or logical demonstration and is untouched by definition. Gnosis of him then is that "there is nothing like

Him” (Qur’an, 42:10) and “Allah cautions you about Himself” (Qur’an, 3:27).

When He (Allah) wanted the world to exist he began it according to the limit He knew by His knowledge of Himself. It was then He brought forth by His pure will about which it is said, “Our only word to a thing when we desire it, is to say to it, Be and it is.” *Kun fia Kun* (Qur’an XVI: 40). The first expression of this Absoluteness was the creation or presencing (*tajalli*) of its essence referred to as *Kalam i Qadim* the Ancient Word, First Divine Name, or Unique Essence, which is an emanation of Pure Uncreated Light. About which it is said in the Qur’an, “God is the light of the Heavens and the earth” (Qur’an, 24:35). This Light of God or *Nur Allah* as stated by Ibn Arabi was the “exhalation” of the *Breadth of the All Merciful (nafs al Rahman)*. This *exhalation* according to Ibn Arabi is equivalent to the bestowal of existence (*ijad*).¹ This is God’s first expression and contains the entire universe in potentiality in the form of His Names.

This divine emanation appeared from the All Merciful and was responsible for the downward descent of creation and of every other plane of creation and is the animating power sustaining every form and every reality from animate to inanimate; The mystery of this first emanation is expressed the famous Hadith “I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known. So I created man.” This is the treasure of the Name *Al Rahim* the Merciful. Since God in his Mercy bestows *existence* upon everything. Everything we can know about God, and ultimately everything we can know about “other than God” (*ma siwa’Llah*) that is, “the world” or “the cosmos” (*al ‘alam*)-is prefigured by the Names.²

The first and most important divine name prefigured in this first emanation or *tajalliyat* were the names *Al Rahman and Al Rahim* of which

the later *al Rahim* mercy was the essence. It's literal meaning being derived from the root word meaning womb. It was in fact the womb of all other names bestowing each form with its unique existence and essence. About which it is said, *My Mercy encompasses every thing* (Qur'an 7:145). The entire universe was then brought forth with the sole purpose of manifesting the power of these Names and with the sole purpose of worshipping Allah "I only created men and jinn to worship me" (Qur'an, 51:56)

This first emanation was a pre eternal column of Light from the core of this divine being and called by the term *Nur Mohammadiyya* or the Light of Mohammad, or the *Mohammadan reality* and is, using Ibn Arabi's term, the "Unseen Theophany" (*al-tajalli al ghaybi*). This is the core or first emanation of the Light of Prophecy of which every prophet before Mohammad and after has a portion of. Moreover every mystic, saint or spiritual master whether of the East or West regardless of religion or affiliation draws their illumination from this first Light. Each bearing a unique portion, aspect or divine name from this eternal fountain head of illumination. This is the same light which is referred to in the New Testament when it says,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shinieth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. And everything that was made was made by the Word and the Word was the light of man and lightieth every man that comes into the world." (John: 1:1)

This same light is referred to by Ibn Arabi when he recollects his mystical return to this fountain of all Being:

“Then I was enveloped by the divine Lights until all of me became light and a robe of honor was bestowed upon me. The likes of which I had never seen”

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Quranic Light Mysticism:

A great portion of all mysticism in the Qur'an can be derived from two *Suras* the *Mir'aj* or Night Journey of Mohammad (Verse 17; 1) and the Light Verse from the Sura of Light (Qur'an, 24:35). In trying to understand who Mohammad was and is and the essence of Islamic prophecy we turn to one of the earliest of Sufi commentaries on the Qur'an, the Baghdad mystic, Sahl at-Tustari. In the following quote he sums up the essence of Prophet Mohammad in cosmic terms as an aspect of this first pre-creative column of Light.

God most high, when he wished to create Muhammad (the blessings and peace of God upon him) manifested some of his light. When it attained the veil of majesty, it bowed down in prayer before Allah. Allah created from the position of prayer a great column like a glass of light, as both his interior and exterior. In it is the 'ayn (very being, essence, source, eye) of Muhammad, (God's blessings and peace upon him.) He stood in service before the Lord of the two worlds for one thousand, thousand years with the dispositions of faith, the beholding of faith, the unveiling of certitude, and the witness of the lord. ⁴

Muhammad (one who is praiseworthy) is considered the perfect manifestation of this pre eternal light, which is the first cause of creation and the perfect glorification of God's essence because he is the perfect servant having stood for an endless time (one thousand , one thousand years,) in service to this light. The very essence of prophecy is this pre eternal Light of which the very essence of Prophet Mohammad is derived. This light however is not just reserved for prophecy but is the essence of Allah just as

the rays of the Sun are no different from the Sun itself. But they are a borrowed essence or existence. So all mysticism in a sense, is a return to the Treasure of the Ancient Name *Al rahim* which is a being of Light.

Certainly most scholars will agree the single most important verse about light found in the Qur'an is the famous Light verse (Qur'an, 24; 35). Within it we find the mystical revelation of the essence of this Nur Mohammadiyya and the central pillar of Quranic ascension mysticism.

*God is the light of the heavens and earth,
The light like the light of a lamp in a niche
The lamp enclosed in a cover of glass
The glass like a glistening star
Kindled from the oil of a blessed tree
An olive not of the East not of the West
Its oil glows forth nearly without the touch of fire
Light on light God guides to his light whomsoever he wills
Allah strikes symbols for humankind
Allah in all things is most knowing.*

The Qur'an itself affirms the role of Nur Mohammadiyya in *sura* 6:125 when the Prophet was asked about the meaning of the term "the dilation" in the Most High's utterance he said, "So he whom God wishes to guide aright, He dilates his breast for submission to Himself (i.e. to embrace Islam)" (Qur'an 6:125). Al Ghazzali who in many respects codifies the mysticism of the Qur'an quotes one of the Hadith supporting this argument, "The Prophet said again: It is a light, which God casts into the heart." Then someone said; "And what is the sign of it?" He replied, "Withdrawal from

the mansions of delusion and turning to the mansion of immortality." Again, the Prophet reiterates the same thought, "God Most High created men in darkness, then sprinkled on them some of His light"⁵

The sura of Light provides us with one of the most brilliant metaphorical treatments of this essence of Nur Mohammadiyya. A line by line reading reveals the particular beauty and subtlety of spiritual revelation within Islam.

God is the light of the heavens and earth,

Allah is Light and has created everything out of Light. Not only the light we perceive in the physical world but the light we perceive spiritually which supports all creation itself. When this light starts shining upon the regions of the heart, the lamp of the heart will be lit. This light has a special quality or effect and when ignited in the regions of the heart provides the spiritual impetus to return to God.

The light like the light of a lamp in a niche

This light has been placed in the heart of each being just like a light which has been placed in a lamp which has been covered by a glass. It needs only a touch of a saint to be lit or awakened.

The lamp enclosed in a cover of glass

The glass like a glistening star

Is like a light within the heart which shines like a glistening star in the middle of the night illuminating the darkness of the heart in all directions.

As the darkness is dispelled in the heart it now begins to radiate outwardly with this First light. Since this light is

Kindled from the oil of a blessed tree

It shines within the deepest recesses of the heart with such purity that unleashes the lightning of divine discoveries. This lightening will generate the thunderclouds of meaning, from

An olive not of the East not of the West

And shedding light upon the tree of discovery, so pure, so transparent that.....

Its oil glows forth nearly without the touch of fire

Nothing can compare to the experience of this divine luminosity which defines rationale description, explanation and is at once an answer to the cry of the soul within every being who comes into this world.

Light on light God guides to his light whomsoever he wills

As He who is All Light reaches down to touch our light with His light we are divinely attracted back to our source which is the pre eternal light, first Light, Divine Essence the Nur Mohammadiyya, through which....

Allah strikes symbols for humankind

Whose Prophets and saints are his *signs* or *symbols* which give faith, direction and certitude and ultimately mediate our return to our original Face, about which it is said “and to Him we are returning”....and

Allah in all things is most knowing.

God’s wisdom is unlimited beyond comprehension apprehension or explanation and the only path is to submit to the will of the almighty. It is God who is the pre-eternal source of light, manifesting the being of the Prophet out of this Light and then casting a light into those souls he seeks to guide back to Him.

The Prophet reiterates this same thought, "God Most High created men in darkness, then sprinkled on them some of His light." ⁶

God in his perfect wisdom created his saints from this same light who are his living *symbols* ("strikes symbols") of his power and glory in this world. Each of them has the obligation of knowing his Lord by coming fully into the Light of Lights. We can then say it is only through these polarized Lights of God his saints and Prophets that souls can return to God. Who then is the true Shaykh? Rumi tells us, “*The Perfect Shaykh is the absolute Light of God,*” ⁷

By replicating the Prophets visionary Journey to Allah known as the *Mir'aj* or Night Journey later saints and seekers come fully into the knowledge of God Most High. While Mohammed's night journey has no specific references to light, later Sufis articulated their own ascent in the language of light and illumination. By reaffirming this as the central paradigm of ascent, it laid the foundations for the mystical journey itself for

all later Muslims. A brief review of Mohammed's mystical Night Journey is important as it sets the stage for many later references to the same symbols and experiences.

Presented here is the extensive account of Mohammed's *Mir'aj* from the authoritative hadith collection known as the *Sahih Muslim* (the "Sound" collection of *Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj* (d.261/874). He informs us "the Envoy of God, blessings and peace be upon him, said, "I was brought Buraq, a tall white beast, larger than a donkey but larger than a mule. In each stride, he would place his hooves as far as his eyes could see." He begins his journey by traveling spiritually on this animal to Jerusalem where he performs two *rakats* of prayer. He continues accompanied by the angle Gabriel (Jibril) through the sevens heavens to the house of life (*al-bayt al-ma'mur*) into which seventy thousand angels would disappear each day, not to return. He was then taken to "Lote tree of the furthestmost boundary (Qur'an, 53:14) (*sidrat al-muntaha*)." From here, he sees a marvelous fruit from the tree and this fruit by the command of the Lord (53:16). "There enveloped the tree what enveloped it," and it was transformed. "Then Allah inspired in me what he inspired" (Qur'an, 53:10). From this point Prophet Mohammad receives a command from Allah to complete fifty prayers a day. As he returns he encounters Moses who pleads with him to return and lessen the amount of prayers as it is too much for his people. He goes back and forth between Allah and Musa (Moses) until it is agreed that five prayers will be obligated from all his people, which will count as fifty. He then returns on the mythical animal Buraq back to where he started and only a brief period had elapsed.

Bayzad al Bistami and the Landscape of Light

Bayzad al Bistami one of the most respected of the early sufi saints recounts his own inner miraj in the context of the earlier night journey of Muhammad but dilates upon the experience of divine luminosity over and over again. These references to light are to the essence of God essence and therefore the first topography of light in early mystical revelation.

"I continued to fly and roam kingdom after kingdom, veil after veil, domain after domain sea after sea, curtain after curtain, until I ended up at a throne. I was received by angels with eyes as numerous as the stars of the heavens. From each eye there was flashing a light that would illuminate the viewer. Those lights became lamps. From the interior of the lamps, I heard chants of divine unity.

I continued to fly like that until I ended up at a sea of light with crashing waves. Alongside it, the light of the sun was darkened. There on the sea was a ship of light. Alongside its light, the lights of those seas were darkened."⁸

What then is gnosis? "*Gnosis* is in reality God's providential communication of the spiritual light to our inward hearts." ⁹ This light is both the means by which God communicates to his elect knowledge of Himself but also the Gift of his Being or essence. After reaching the throne (*arsh*) of the *compassionate*, Bistami is ushered into the presence of Allah where he hears Allah calling out to him. Saying,

"To me, to me, and said 'Oh my chosen one (*safi*), come near to me and look upon the plains of my splendor and the domain of my brightness. Sit upon the carpet of my holiness until you see the subtleties of my artisanship I-ness. You are my chosen one, my beloved, and the best of my creatures. Upon hearing that, it was as if I were melting like melting lead. Then he gave me a drink from the spring of graciousness (*lutf*) with the cup of intimacy. Then he brought me to a state I am unable to describe. Then he brought me closer to him until I was nearer to him than the spirit is to the body."¹⁰

The same journey through the seven heavens now replicated by Bistami describes in detail the inner topography of light. Here the central element of Bistami's journey is light itself which outshines the outer sun by many degrees. The last phase of his journey considered in Sufi terminology to be his merger with God or *fana fil Allah* is metaphorically describe as *melting lead*. Not only is light coequal with God but its preeminent expression as well as in "the domain of my brightness." Light is the super substance of Divine truth and its creative power in expression.

This excerpt exquisite in its rendering of language hearkens back to the nature of the *Prophetic Light* itself. Prophet Muhammad like all prophets and saints partake of this prophetic emanation which is a continuous *Light* pouring forth from the divine presence. Beyond this presence he would have "Seen God (glory be to him who is transcendent) without a veil."¹¹

While many of the first generation of Sufis (Rabia, Al Hallaj, Qusahryi, Dhun L Nun, and Muhasibi) did not recount their inner mystical journeys, references to light abound in their writings. We note here that often references to Light are employed metaphorically in the sense of illuminating or revealing a certain truth or the attainment of some mystical state. However, in the illuminist tradition it is rarely used metaphorically but literally as in the *Mir'aj* accounts. Distinguishing this difference is important in the larger context of understanding the use of light in mystical traditions. Al- Muhasibi here describes what distinguishes God's lovers and those who know him, from those who do not, is precisely the attainment of this mystical divine Light;

"To him has been granted that supernatural wisdom by which his understanding is enlightened, "A certain Divine light given to the soul where by it both sees and tastes God and the Divine things," that

esoteric wisdom (*batin-al-hikma*) which is the characteristic of God's elect by which He has distinguished them."¹²

Continuing Al Muhasibi explains in specific the significance of this Inner Light (*basa'ir al nur*). This is "insight without sight," for the Gnostic has within him that inner light whereby he sees and apprehends the spiritual meaning of things, and is conscious within himself that he has attained the Truth. Here we see light is both the means by which God communicates to his elect knowledge of Himself but also the Gift of his Being or essence.

Ruzbihan Baqli and the Praise Worthy Station

During the formative period or Classical period (1074 -1273) we see an era of the full systemization of the Sufi doctrine and the appearance of some of the greatest Sufi Shaykhs of all time. Included in this period were Al Ghazzali, Ibn al-Arabi, Maulana Rumi, Farid Attar, Hafez and in Iran a little known but highly important figure Ruzbihan Baqli. Ruzbihan's mysticism while profoundly Islamic, touches universal themes recorded by all mystics. He was the author of one of the most important commentaries on the Qur'an, so it is not surprising to see that the language of his diary is saturated with references to the Qur'an; it is quoted dozens of times. The fundamental metaphor in the diary is veiling and unveiling. What is being unveiled is the hidden secret God's primordial essence. As with Abu Yazid Bistami, Ruzbihan's imagery also belongs to the class of mysticism associated with the Prophet's ascension to the divine presence. Likewise Ruzbihan employs many of the similar motifs found in Abu Yazid Bistai's ascension as well.

Ruzbihan Baqli's *Unveiling of Secrets* broke new ground and became one of the most powerful documents in the history of Islamic mysticism and I

dare say mysticism in general. Unlike most Sufi writing up to that time Ruzbihan's dairy is written in the first person, as he records his visionary experiences with God, the angels, the prophets and the Sufi saints. Ruzbihan was well known far beyond his native Persia; Sufis from North Africa, Central Asia and India knew him as *al-shaykh al-shattah*, "The Master of Ecstatic Speech."¹³ The elaborate imagery of ascension already developed by an earlier generation of mystics is here employed and developed still further. Because of the detail and scope of his writings, rare in any religion or tradition we see articulated an exquisite refinement of the stages and states of his mystical ascension. He speaks of passing by the angels, as did Bistami where he reaches the throne already alluded to by Mohammad:

"I saw that his creation, the angels, were greater than his creatures on earth; they were performing prayer, witnessing the nearness of the Truth, with voices thundering his praise. Then I rose up to the world of shining light to ask about it, and was told that this world is called the throne.....Often I saw the throne and the footstool, and I saw God most high clothed with divinity, as if he were a master wearing a cloak; I melted from his majesty and grandeur....."¹⁴

Still further, along this unveiling he writes,

"I saw one night something encompassing the heavens, and it was a red light shining like pearl. I said, "What is this?" I was told, "This is the gown of might." The Truth, who is transcendent, received me between the throne and the footstool, with legs bared (from tying the gown in readiness) with satisfaction and joy."¹⁵

As we study Ruzbihan's visions, we see a remarkable inner coherence and unity of expression. Because of his frequent Qur 'anic references, subsequent mystics found confirmation of their own mystical experiences as

well. Ruzbihan who traveled the inner path many times gives only the high lights of his visions which will confer on his friend a deeper understanding and strengthening of his faith. There are few works in any tradition that can compare with both the depth and subtlety of his expression and analysis. In the next except Ruzbihan refers to an important sura in the Qur'an which was inadmissible to all but the Prophet himself known as "The praiseworthy station" (Qur'an 17:79). Ruzbihan one day asked, "What is the meaning of this station?" His answer comes in the form of a vision, confirming both the reality of the station and the nature of the Light of Prophecy.

"Then I wanted to learn what was beyond the veil, so I went to the edge of the veil. When I reached it, I saw coming from beyond the veil a great light, and I saw a person like the moon from head to foot. His face was like the face of the moon, and he was greater than the heavens in their entirety. That person had seized the whole divine presence; there as not a point as big as the head of a pin that was not filled with it. There was upon his face a continuous light from the divine presence without interruption. I wanted to go in beyond the veil but was unable to do so. So I said to myself, "What place is this? And who is this person?" And a call came in my consciousness "This is the *praiseworthy station* and that is Muhammad and that which you see on his face is the light of manifestation...."¹⁶

This excerpt exquisite in its rendering of language hearkens back to the nature of the *Prophetic Light* itself. Prophet Muhammad like all prophets and saints partake of this prophetic emanation which is a continuous *Light* pouring forth from the divine presence. Beyond this presence he would have "Seen God (glory be to him who is transcendent) without a veil."¹⁷

Ruzbihan goes on to describe his vision of the Face of God. Here no image, likeness or thought can penetrate the mystery of God's presence. Ruzbihan's like all mystics falls silent in wonder at the door of eternity.

"He manifested himself within me, and from the vision of his face came the sweetness of longing, the melting of the spirit, the agitation of the inner consciousness, the shattering of the heart, and the annihilation of the intellect. If an atom of this befell the mountains of the earth, they melt from sweetness. I was sighing, weeping, turning and sobbing God took me into the angelic realm and he placed me at the door of eternity. Then he manifested himself to me as greatness and magnificence. I saw *light upon light*, glory upon glory, power upon power, and I cannot describe it. I was unable to proceed a step closer because of his majesty and power. If I looked at it forever, I would be unable to understand an atom in the likeness of any of perpetual qualities. But God is beyond any description." ¹⁸

In this numinous vision, Ruzbihan speaks of God as *light upon light* here recollecting The Qur'anic sura of light (24:35). Mystically, as Ruzbihan approaches the divine presence illumination is continuous and overpowering and the self is shattered (*fana*) in the light of the divine presence. Rumi himself tries to explain this state as holding a candle up to the light of the sun. Although the candle exists in relation to the sun it is non-existent. So to the spirit, which is, light becomes non-existent in the Light of the Face of God All Light.

Ibn al Arabi and the Methodology of Ascension

Not long after Ruzbihan appears on the landscape of Islamic mysticism one of the greatest Sufi Shaykhs of all time appears that of Muhyiddin ibn ul-Arabi (1165-1240). So great was his influence he was named *Shaykh al Akbar* or the greatest Shaykh. Ibn Arabi transforms not only the theological basis for much of later mystical writings but becomes a model for the highest inner attainment. Shaykh Muzaffer Ozak al-Jerrahi summarized his importance succinctly saying, "His teaching of the wonder of Creation and

his miraculous knowledge -displayed in such books as *al Futuhat al Makkiyya* ("Meccan Revelations"), *Fusus al hikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom") and many others numbering over 500 bear witness to his importance.¹⁹ His treatise *Journey to the Lord of Power* known most widely in Arabic under the title *Risalat ul-anwar fima yummah sahib al khalwa min al asrar* (Treatise on the Lights in the Secrets Granted one Who Undertakes retreat.") was originally edited in 1204/1205 in Konya. Written in a familiar letter style to answer the questions of an unnamed friend who was himself a saint and Sufi master, about the intricacies of the inner stages of ascension. In this letter, he deals with the conditions, experiences and results of union (*fana*) in God. While his prose is visionary, his description of the inner journey is purely didactic to explain to his friend the conditions necessary to enter retreat and experiences he will encounter as he travels inwardly toward union. His work as he states is based upon his own "unveilings" while in retreat and he speaks of nothing that he himself has not experienced. As such, it bears the stamp of authenticity rarely found in only the most unusual accounts.

We begin with a description of the pilgrim's ascension as he moves from the dissolution of the order of nature and the state of the infusion of the world of life-force into lives:

"And if you do not stop with this, He reveals to you the surface signs, you will be admonished with terrors and many sorts of states will befall you. You will see clearly the apparatus of transformations; how the dense becomes subtle and the subtle dense. And if you do not stop with this the light of the scattering of sparks will become visible to you, and there will be a need to veil yourself from it. Do not be afraid, and persevere in the *dhikr*, (remembrance of God), for if you persevere in the *dhikr* disaster will not overcome."²⁰

If the seeker continues and does not stop he enters a stage called the *light of ascendant stars* which is a technical term used by the Shaykh to refer to the lights of the declaration of divine Unity. "If you do not stop with this, He reveals to you the *light of the ascendant stars* and the form of the universal order. And you will see directly the *adab*, the proper conduct, for entering the Divine Presence and *adab* for standing before the real and the *adab* for leaving His presence for creation:..."²¹

These lights according to Ibn Arabi extinguish the rest of the "lights" meaning the light of speculative proofs, not those of prophetic, revelatory proofs. And they extinguish as well the lights of intuition. In simpler terms, as the illumination of the Gnostic increases, he or she renounces the lesser means of comprehension known as *speculative proofs* more specifically the use of the intellect or reasoning which is blind in comparison to the *light of prophecy* and revelatory lights. The closer the gnostic comes to the divine presence the need for intermediaries is eliminated. Here the gnostic comprehends directly without the aid of intellect. He draws his knowledge and inspiration directly from the *Light of the Revelation*. This in itself is a further declaration of the Unity of the Divine presence which demands at this stage total allegiance to the One. Rumi too spoke of these *ascendant stars* born from the radiance of God which give unto those who receive it the power of *prophetic proof* and the turning away from all that is not God.

Beyond the stars are Stars in which there is neither combust nor sinister aspect,
Stars moving in other heavens, not the seven heavens known to all,
Stars immanent in the radiance of the light of God, neither joined to each other nor separate. Whoso hath his fortune from these stars, his

soul drives off and consumes the unbelievers. God sprinkled His light over all spirits, but only the blest held up their skirts to receive it; And, having gained the largesse of light, they turned their faces away from all but God.²²

This prophetic light which for Islamic mystics was the *Nur Mohammadiyya* or Light of Mohammad was the self same light which precedes everything that was created. As Attar says in his direct style

*The origin of the soul is the absolute light, nothing else,
That means it was the Light of Mohammad nothing else.*²³

While Salh al Tustari may have been the first to speak of this early Light mysticism in terms of the Prophetic ideal it continued onward for 2 or 3 centuries until Ibn Arabi and his followers fully articulated it and systematized it. The early mystic and martyr of love al Hallaj reaffirms the Prophet as the very cause and goal of creation. Creation itself is without purpose but for the manifesting of the Light of prophecy. This was given even more weight and authority in early Islamic mysticism when according to Schimmel it was couched in a Hadith qudsi, *laulaka ma khalaqtu'l-aflaka*- “if thou hadst not been but for thee, I wouldn’t have created the heavens.” Here the prophet himself is credited with the words which point to his special position in creation, “The first thing God creates was my spirit, I was a prophet when Adam was still between clay and water.”²⁴

The Prophetic Light, is in fact nothing other than the First Light of God’s creation emanation or (*tajalli*), and since the Prophet existed before that

actual physical appearance of his corporeal frame we equate His Being with the first Principle of the Light of Lights the Ancient Name *Kalma i Qadim*.

Not only did Mohammad exist in his pre-eternal form as Light but every prophet, saint and mystic was formed and created out of this Light. In fact, it was for this alone that creation came into being and through this light alone must it return. Light is the mediator between us and the Absolute and the saints are his manifestations of this or *his symbols* meditating our return through this light.

If we understand this we see no difference between any of God's saints, prophets, mystics and spiritual masters regardless of tradition, lineage or religion. As the great Kabir as eloquently said, "From One light all creation sprang forth, from this same light all creation was born, who then is good who then is bad."²⁵ Through this First eternal Light we have been created, by this First Light we shall all return and through this Light we come to understand ourselves, prophecy and the unique Name of God *Al rahim* which is the Face of God's FACE. It should not be surprising that the most famous prayer ascribed to Mohammad is a prayer for Light. Abu Talib al Makki quoted it; Ghazzali taught it and the eighteenth century Indian mystic Mir Dard wrote it down as his last orison before his death.²⁶

O god give me light in my heart and light in my tongue and light in my hearing and light in my sight and light in my feeling and light in all my body and light before me and light behind me. Give me, I pray light on my right hand and light on my left hand and light above me and light beneath me. O Lord, increase light within me and give me light and illuminates me.²⁷

Mystically speaking all creation is nothing but an expression of this everlasting Light and its essence is none other than *Al rahim* the mercy of

love. We leave you with the mystical utterance of Ibn Arabi, the greatest of all shaykhs on the theme of Divine unity and the hidden secret of Nur Mohammadiyya and Prophecy itself whether of the East or West;

My heart has become capable of all forms;
For gazelles, a meadow, for monks, a monastery,
A temple for idols, the pilgrim's Ka'ba
The Tablets of the Torah, the Book of the Qur'an
I profess the religion of Love, and whatever the direction Taken by
its mount, Love is my religion and my faith.²⁸

Ibn Arabi,

End Notes

¹ Ibn Arabi and his School, William Chittick, in Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, Edited, by *Islamic Spirituality Manifestations*, (Crossroads Publishing, New York, 1997, pp. .59.

² Ibid, pp. 60.

³ Ibn Arabi, *Meccan Revelations*, volume 1, edited by Michael Chodkiewicz, translated by William Chittick and James W. Morris. Pir Pres New York, 2002, pp. 228.

⁴ Muhammad Sahl ibn 'Abdullah at Tustari, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al 'Azim* (Cario; *Dar al-Kutab al-Gharbiyya al-Kubra*, 1329/1911), pp.40-41. Quoted from Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, New York, 1996 pp. 11.

⁵ Al Ghazzali, *Deliverance from Error, An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al Dalal* and other relevant works, by Richard Joseph McCarthy , Fons Vitae, Louisville Kentucky, 1980, pp. 58.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 58).

⁷ Rumi Jalaluddin Mathnawi, Book 5 verse:

⁸ R.A. Nicholson *An Early Arabic version of the Mir'raj of Abu Yazid al-Bistami*, *Islamica* 2, no. 3 ,1926: pp. 403-408.

⁹ *Kashf al-Mahjub*, pp. 275, quoted from Margaret Smith, *An Early Sufi Mystic* pg. 225.

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- ¹⁰ R.A. Nicholson *An Early Arabic version of the Mir'raj of Abu Yazid al-Bistami*, *Islamica* 2, no. 3 (1926): pp. 403-408.
- ¹¹ Ruzbihan Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets, Dairy of a Sufi Master*, Trans by Ernst Parv ardigar Press, 1997, pp.21.
- ¹² Margaret Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, pp. 224-225.
- ¹³ Carl Ernst *The Unveiling of Secrets, Dairy of a Sufi Master*, Trans by Ernst Parv ardigar Press, 1997, pp. xv)
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 17 and 18.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.18.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.21.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 77.
- ¹⁹ Ibn Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power, A Sufi Manual on Retreat*, translated by, Rabia Terri Harris, Inner Traditions, New York, 1981 pp, 7.
- ²⁰ Ibn Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power, A Sufi Manual on Retreat*, translated by, Rabia Terri Harris, Inner Traditions, New York, 1981 pp, 40.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 40.
- ²² Cohen, and Phillips, quoted in *The Common Experience* J.P. Tarcher. Los Angles 1979, pp.157 from Rumi's (Mathnawi)
- ²³ (Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pg . 215.
- ²⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pg . 215.
- ²⁵ "From one light the whole *universe* was created. ..." *Adi Granth Bibhas Prabhati, Kabir ji p. 1285*) Kabir, also trans. By Sant Kirpal Singh, Satsandesh, pp. and Sant Rajinder Singh Talk given July 27th 1995 Vancouver Canada.
- ²⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pg . 215. .
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁸ Ibn Arabi, *Tarrjuman Al –Ashqaq A collection of Mystical Odes by Ibn Arabi.*
Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson Preface of Dr. Martin Lings. , 1978, vii.