



BAQĀ' WA FANĀ'

BAQĀ' WA FANĀ', Sufi term signifying “subsistence and passing away.” The Sufi teaching of passing away from worldly reality and being made subsistent in divine reality describes the apex of mystic experience and union with God. As a correlative pair of notions, in which *fanā'* logically precedes *baqā'*, it is applied to two levels of meaning, the passing away of human consciousness in the divine and the obliteration of imperfect qualities of the soul by substitution of new, divinely bestowed attributes. Of the two terms, *fanā'* is the more significant concept in Sufi writings and occasionally implies connotations expressed by its counterpart. Though possibly similar in its meaning to the Buddhist *nirvāṇa*, *fanā'* does not denote the extinction of individual life. The link of *baqā' wa fanā'* with ideas of *ekstasis* prevalent in Hellenistic culture appears to be tenuous as well.

In his ascetic struggle, the mystic of Iranian Sufism strives to abandon this world (*donyā*) before it leaves him and to slay his carnal soul (*nafs*) before it breathes its last, because he experiences physical existence—including the body, the senses, and the lower self—as existence alienated from God. In mystic vision on the other hand, he professes and actually realizes oneness of God (*tawhīd*), the eternal and true reality, one without partners, beside whom the mystic's temporal existence has no claim to reality and his self no right to selfhood. In realizing *tawhīd*, the mystic has to pass away from any trace of individual self-consciousness so that his self is blotted out in actual non-existence and God alone exists and in truth subsists (*al-fanā' fi'l-tawhīd*). The teaching of [Abu'l-Ḥasan Kāraqānī](#) (d. 425/1033), “One is a Sufi who is not. The



Sufi is a day that has no need of sun, a night that needs neither moon nor star, and a non-existence that needs no existence” (Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, p. 298) expands Jonayd’s insight that the mystic’s existence is his greatest sin (‘Aṭṭār, II, p. 7; Ebn Kallekān, I, p. 374), and Abū Bakr Wāseṭī’s statement that non-existence is the mystic’s *qebla* while existence his falling into *kofr* (‘Aṭṭār, II, p. 273).

This non-existence, however, equals the state of original existence humanity possessed in the presence of God at the primordial covenant of *alast* prior to creation (Qur’ān 7:172). Originally conceived by Abu’l-Fayẓ Ḍu’l-Nūn (d. 245/860), developed by Sahl b. ‘Abd-Allāh Tostarī (d. 283/896), spread in Sufi circles by Abu’l-Qāsem Jonayd (d. 298/910), publicly proclaimed by Ḥosayn b. Manṣūr Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), and enigmatically articulated by Abū Bakr Šeblī (d. 334/945), this original standing of man (*waqfa*) before God at the primordial covenant, when man received his own intellect in and through his profession of God’s oneness, is reactualized by the Sufi in his dying to worldly existence and his returning to his original, primal state in the presence of God (Böwering, pp. 153-57, 185-207). Returning to his non-existence, which actually is his only true existence, the mystic “is as he was, when he was before he was” (Ḍu’l-Nūn, quoted by Kalābādī, p. 105) or has reached his goal of “returning to the beginning” (Jonayd, quoted by Anṣārī, p. 168), so to speak “being the way he was at the moment he was not as yet” (Šeblī, quoted by ‘Aṭṭār, II, p. 175).

The fundamental experience of passing away from actual existence and subsisting in primordial existence was couched in the language of *fanā’* and *baqā’* by the Sufi Abū Sa’īd Kārrāz (d. 286/899; *ennaho awwal man takallama fī ‘elm al-fanā’ wa’l-baqā’*, Solamī, p. 228; cf. Hojvīrī, p. 180) and adopted in the short epistle, *Ketāb al-fanā’*, attributed to Jonayd (Abdel-Kader, p. 31-39; for questions of authenticity cf. Reinert, p. 132). There is no proof for the views advanced by Zaehner that the Sufi teaching of *fanā’* derives from Hindu philosophy or, even more temerarily, adopts the Upanishadic *tat tvam asi* (*Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, London, 1960, pp. 94-97, and *Indo-Iranian Journal* 1, 1957, pp. 286-301). It is an erroneous claim as well that Bāyazīd Beṣṭāmī was the first to have introduced the term *fanā’* into Sufism, as assumed by Hartmann (p. 64) and apparently also Ritter (1954, p. 231). The connection of the teaching of *fanā’* and *baqā’* in Sufi *tafsīr* literature with the sole Koranic passage (55:26-27) citing the roots of both terms together (“All that dwells upon the earth is perishing [*fānen*], yet still abides [*yabqā*] the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid”) is a reading of Sufi views into Koranic



language rather than an organic terminological development out of Koranic roots.

The transition from existence to non-existence or primordial existence is not a total annihilation, since the Sufi's self is not reduced to pure nothingness. Rather, it is purification of the Sufi's self which is drawn to higher forms of being and ultimately absorbed in God. Ebn al-'Arabī defined the matter in categorical terms: "There is no passing away (*fanā'*) except from such and such as there also is no subsisting (*baqā'*) except through such and such and with this and that. The from-away belongs necessarily to *fanā'* (*fa-'an le'l-fanā' lā bodd menh*). According to the Sufis, however, passing away on the mystic path means always passing away from the lower (state by being absorbed) in the higher" (II, p. 512). At an advanced stage of perfection the mystic puts on divine attributes, in Abu'l-Ḥosayn Nūrī's words, "being fashioned in the attributes of God" (*al-takalloq be-aklāq Allāh*, 'Aṭṭār, II, pp. 54-55), and in Najm-al-Dīn Kobrā's view, becoming the subject of divine attributes and capable of "creating, bringing forth, giving life, causing death, having mercy, punishing and other things that belong to the divine attributes of bounty and justice" (*Fawā'eḥ*, ed. Meier, p. 29). In its perfect form, the experience of *fanā'* and *baqā'* is understood in Sufism as *al-fanā' 'an al-nafs* and *al-baqā' be'llāh*, and ultimately as *al-fanā' fe'llāh*, but not as *al-fanā' 'an Allāh*.

The crucial point of passing away is reached when the Sufi's own self is stripped off, like a snake shedding its skin, and the mystic's own self-identity is obliterated. In shedding the self of ordinary self-perception—the self that is identifiable by a person's name—the mystic reaches his true self that is ultimately and profoundly one with God. This is illustrated by Šeblī's saying, "It has been my life-long desire to be alone with God, without that Šeblī was there at this being alone," and Šehāb-al-Dīn Yaḥyā Sohrawardī's description of the Sufi's ascent from the Muslim creed, "no god save God," through the stages of "no he save He," "no thou save Thou," and "no I save I" to the stage where there is but the One (*Resāla-ye safīr-e sīmorḡ*, in Spies and Khatak, pp. 27-29).

The mystic's true self is discovered in the depth of his personality as the divine secret of God's own I-ness taking the place of the mystic's self and overcoming the duality of subject and object in their identity. Realizing this secret, the *Bīsar-nāma* of pseudo-'Aṭṭār exclaims, "I am God, I am God, am God" (*man kodā-yam, man kodā-yam, man kodā*), and Nasīmī's *Dīvān* takes up a theme of Rūmī's *Maṭnawī* (bk. 5, vv. 2022-23), "I beheld that I am God from top to toe" (*sar tā ba-qadam wojūd-e k'vod ḥaq dīdam*; cf. Ritter, 1955, p. 590). Rūmī catches



this secret in the image of a ruby permeated by the rays of the sun and transformed as if into sunlight. As long as the ruby is ruby, there are as yet two, ruby and sunlight, but when the penetration of sunlight is complete there is only one brilliance (bk. 5, vv. 2025-35). The old “I” (*ana*) has become the “no” (*lā*) that is denied by the new “I”: *man man nī-am* (“I am not I”) as Rūmī says (bk. 1, vv. 3124-26).

As the mystic loses the identity with his own self, he experiences identity with God, as illustrated by Beṣṭāmī’s famous utterance, “I shed my own self as a snake shed its skin; then I beheld my own essence (*dāt*), and lo, I was He (*ana howa*)” (Sahlajī, pp. 77, 118), and in Abū Sa’īd b. Ab’īl-Ḳayr’s exclamation: “When you see me you see Him, and when you see Him you see me” (Ebn Monawwar, p. 259). The certainty that God has become the mystic’s I-ness, being the “this-ness” (*annīa*) not the “where-ness” (*aynīya*) of his individual self—a distinction recorded in Bīrūnī’s *Tahqīq mā le’l-Hend* (p. 66, quoted by Gramlich, p. 328)—induces the mystic to pronounce theopathic utterances (*ṣaṭahāt*), such as Beṣṭāmī’s *sobḥānī*, Ḥallāj’s *ana’l-Ḥaqq* and others (cf. e.g., Rūzbehān Baqlī, *Šarḥ-e ṣaṭḥīyāt*). These ecstatic expressions of Sufi experiences of *fanā’* and *baqā’* are rooted in the old Sufi conviction that only God can truly say “I” (Sarrāj, p. 32) and inspired by typical Sufi interpretations of Koranic verses, e.g., God’s word to Moses, “I am your Lord” (*ennī ana rabboka*; 20:12), and Pharaoh’s claim, “I am your Lord Most High” (*ana rabbokom al-a’lā*; 79:24) (see Nwyia, pp. 178-83, and Böwering, pp. 190-97).

The consciousness of absorption in God induced some Iranian mystics to lay claim to divine self-consciousness. Asked about the contradiction of his description of the true mystic as one able to lift the earth and the seven heavens with a single eyelash, while he had defined him earlier as unable to carry the weight of a fly, Šeblī answered, “at that time I was I, now I am He” (*āngāh mā mā būdīm aknūn mā ū’s*; cf. ‘Aṭṭār, II, p. 176). According to ‘Aṭṭār’s account, Ḳaraḳānī believed that he could fill the seven heavens and the earth by himself, span the distance between the earth and the divine throne with one giant step, cause a deluge with one drop of his heart’s blood, move heaven and earth, and engulf all of creation with his knowledge (II, pp. 212-15). He even is said to have claimed, “I am the Chosen of the age, I am God of the age” (*moṣṭafā-ye waqt-am wa kodā-ye waqt-am*; *ibid.*, II, p. 211). Claims ascribed to Beṣṭāmī, e.g., “I am I; there is no god save I; so worship me” (Sahlajī, p. 122), and, “Moses desired to see God. I do not desire to see God—He desires to see me” (Ebn al-Jawzī, p. 333), even more vividly depict the mixing of human and



divine consciousness in mystic speech uttered in the experience of *fanā'* and *baqā'*. The speaker of the utterance may be either God or the mystic, God speaking with the tongue of the mystic, or the mystic speaking out of the experience of divine consciousness within himself.

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