

it on the fourth. On the first day I renounced this world and everything in it. On the second day I renounced the Hereafter and everything in it. On the third day I renounced everything other than God. And on the fourth day there was left nothing for me but God alone. So I fell into an ecstasy and I heard a voice telling me: “[When you are] with me, you have no power [of your own].” I cried: “This is exactly what I want!” Then I heard someone say: “You have found [it], you have found [it]!””

Someone asked Abu Yazid: “What is the most difficult thing you have ever encountered on your way to God?” He answered: “It is impossible to describe it.” Someone then asked him: “What, then, was the easiest thing that you subjected your soul to?” He said: “As for this, yes. I called upon her [the soul] to obey God and she refused. Then I denied her water for one year.”

Abu Yazid said: “For thirty years I have been praying. And each time I prayed I felt in my inner self as if I was a Zoroastrian who sought to cut his girdle.”¹⁰² I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. ‘Ali say: I heard Musa b. ‘Isa say: My father told me that Abu Yazid once said: “When you see a man who is endowed with miracles to such an extent that he can sit on the air, do not be deluded by him until you have tested his [attitude toward] what is permitted and what is prohibited, his observance of the legal rules and of the Divine Law.”

‘Ammi al-Bastami (al-Bistami) said on the authority of his father: “One night, Abu Yazid went to a hospice¹⁰³ in order to recollect God’s name¹⁰⁴ on one of the walls of that hospice. He stayed there until dawn without uttering a word. I asked him about this and he answered: “[While there], there had passed through my mind a [rude] word that I once uttered in my childhood, and I was ashamed to mention God – may He be blessed and exalted.”

Abu Muhammad Sahl b. ‘Abdallah al-Tustari¹⁰⁵

He was one of the greatest Sufi masters. He had no peers in his age in regard to devotional acts and pious scrupulosity. He performed many miracles. He met Dhu 'l-Nun [al-Misri] during the year when he came [to Mecca] on a pilgrimage. It is said that he died in the year 283, although some say that it was in 273.¹⁰⁶

Sahl said: “When I was three years old, I used to stay awake during the night watching my uncle Muhammad b. Sawwar perform his prayers. He kept vigil during the night. He used to tell me: ‘Go away, Sahl, and have a sleep. You are distracting me!’”

102 Non-Muslims living under Muslim jurisdiction were required to wear “a girdle of unbelief” as sign of their affiliation with a non-Muslim community.

103 *Ribat*. This term may also denote a Sufi retreat.

104 *Dhikr*, literally “remembrance” or “recollection” [of God], a common spiritual practice among the Sufis. See *IM*, pp. 317–322.

105 On him see *IM*, pp. 83–87 and Böwering, *Mystical Vision*.

106 That is, 896 and 886 C.E.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard that Abu ʿl-Fath Yusuf b. ʿUmar the Ascetic said: I heard that ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbd al-Hamid said: I heard that ʿUbaydallah b. Luʿluʾ said: I heard that ʿUmar b. Wasil al-Basri recounted about Sahl b. ʿAbdallah that he told him: “One day my uncle asked me: ‘Don’t you remember God, Who created you?’ I asked him: ‘How can I remember Him?’ He said: ‘Say by your heart as you move around in your clothes, without however moving your tongue: “God is my watcher.”’ I said this for three nights, then I told him about this and he said to me: ‘Say this seven times during the night.’ I said this, then told him about this. He said to me: ‘Say this eleven times during the night.’ I said this and I felt the sweetness of this in my heart.//53 After one year my uncle told me: ‘Keep on [doing] what I taught you and continue to do this until you enter your grave, for this will benefit you in this world and in the Hereafter.’ I kept doing this for many years and I felt the sweetness of this in my innermost heart. One day my uncle told me: ‘Sahl, how can a man with whom God is always present and whom He always watches and observes commit a sin? So, stay away from sin!’

“I used to seclude myself [from people]. Then [my parents] sent me to a Qurʾanic school. I told [them]: ‘I fear that my internal concentration [on God] might dissipate. Make arrangements with the teacher so that I would come to him for a short while, study with him, and then come back.’ So I began to go to the school. I learned the Qurʾan by heart when I was six or seven years old. I was fasting constantly and ate nothing but barley bread until I turned twelve years of age. When I turned thirteen, I came across a problem and asked my family to send me to Basra, so that I could inquire about it. I arrived in Basra and began to ask local scholars about it. However, none of them was able to satisfy me. Then I left for ʿAbbadan¹⁰⁷ in order to meet a man known as Abu Habib Hamza b. ʿAbdallah al-ʿAbbadani. I asked him about this problem and he answered me. I stayed with him for a while benefiting from his teaching and imitating his good manners. Then I returned to Tustar.¹⁰⁸ There my only meal consisted of a sack of barley that one could buy for one *dirham*, which I ground and from which I made bread for myself. Every night, before dawn, I ate of this just one ounce¹⁰⁹ without salt or seasoning. Thus one *dirham* was enough for me for a whole year. I decided to fast for three nights and to break my fast on the fourth, then on the fifth, then on the seventh, then on the fifteenth. In this way I spent twenty years, whereupon I began to roam the land until I again returned to Tustar. There I used to stay awake all night.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ʿl-ʿAbbas al-Baghdadi say: I heard Ibrahim b. Firas say: I heard Nasr b. Ahmad say: Sahl b. ʿAbdallah [al-Tustari] said: “Every deed that the servant [of God] performs without

107 An island in the mouth of Shatt al-ʿArab that was frequented by early Sufis and ascetics. See *IM*, pp. 17–18.

108 That is, his native town in Iran.

109 That is, around 33 grams.

imitation,¹¹⁰ be it obedience [to God] or disobedience, is done to please his own self, whereas every deed//54 that he performs in imitation [of the Prophet or his companions] is painful to the soul.”

Abu Sulayman ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Atiyya al-Darani¹¹¹

Daran is a village near Damascus. He died in the year 215.¹¹²

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Razi say: Ishaq b. Ibrahim b. Abi Hassan told me: I heard Ahmad b. Abi ‘l-Hawari say: I heard Abu Sulayman say: “He who is doing good during the day, will be rewarded during the night; and he who is doing good during the night, will be rewarded during the day. He who has relinquished his [carnal] desire, God will remove it from his heart, for God – Most High – is too noble to torment the heart with [carnal] desire after it has relinquished it for His sake.” According to the same chain of transmission, he also said: “When [desire for] this life settles down in the heart, [desire for] the Hereafter departs from it.”

I heard Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard al-Husayn b. Yahya say: I heard Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr [al-Khuldi] say: I heard al-Junayd say: Abu Sulayman al-Darani said: “Whenever a word of spiritual wisdom enters my heart, I would not accept it unless it [is confirmed] by two just witnesses, the [Holy] Book and the [Prophet’s] Custom.” Abu Sulayman said: “The noblest of all deeds is to oppose the lusts of the soul.” He said: “Each thing has its sign; the sign of forgetfulness [of God] is when one stops crying.” He said: “Each thing has its own rust; the rust on the heart’s light is when one’s belly is full.”

He said: “Whatever distracts you from God Most High – be it wealth or a child – brings you misfortune.”

Abu Sulayman also said: “One cold night I was praying in front of a *mihrab*.¹¹³ Cold began to bother me, and I hid one hand//55 from cold, while leaving the other one exposed. Then sleep overcame me and I heard a voice: ‘Abu Sulayman, we have already bestowed upon this one what it deserves. If only there were the other one, so that we could do the same to it!’ I then swore to myself that I would never pray without exposing both hands, whether it is cold or warm.”

Abu Sulayman said: “Once I overslept my personal prayer.¹¹⁴ All of sudden I saw a maiden of paradise who said to me: ‘You sleep, while I am being prepared for you in the female chamber for five hundred years!’”

110 That is, without imitating the actions of the Prophet or an earlier Muslim authority.

111 On him see *IM*, pp. 36–38.

112 That is, 830 C.E.

113 A recess in the wall of the mosque that points toward Mecca, indicating the direction of the prayer.

114 That is, a private, non-canonical prayer.