

Dhu 'l-Nun,⁶⁷ who was famous for his clear expression.⁶⁸ I saw Sahl,⁶⁹ who was famous for his allegorical allusion. I saw Bishr al-Hafi, who was famous for his scrupulousness.⁷⁰ Someone asked him: ‘To whom of them are you more inclined?’ He said: ‘To my teacher, Bishr b. al-Harith.’” It is said that for many years he craved beans, but he [never permitted himself to] eat them. Someone saw him in a dream after he⁷¹ had died and asked him how God treated him. He [Bishr] answered: “[God] pardoned me and said: ‘Eat, O you who have not eaten! Drink, O you who have not drunk!’”

Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – told me: ‘Ubaydallah b. ‘Uthman b. Yahya told me: Abu ‘Amr b. al-Sammak told me: Muhammad b. al-‘Abbas told me: Abu Bakr b. Bint Mu‘awiyya said: I heard that Abu Bakr b. ‘Affan said: I heard Bishr b. al-Harith say: “For forty years I was craving roasted meat, yet I never could afford its price due to the lack of untainted money.”⁷²

Someone asked Bishr what he was eating his bread with. He answered: “I think of salvation⁷³ and make it my seasoning.”⁷⁴ I was told about this by Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him. He said ‘Ubaydallah b. ‘Uthman told: Abu ‘Amr b. al-Sammak related to us: ‘Umar b. Sa‘id said: Ibn Abi al-Dunya related to us that a certain man said that this famous story [is indeed] about Bishr.

Bishr said: “That which is permitted tolerates no wastefulness.”⁷⁵

Someone saw Bishr in a dream and asked him: “What did God do to you?” He answered: “He pardoned me and gave me a half of Paradise, then said: ‘Bishr, even if you were to perform your [ritual] prostrations before Me on the burning coals, you would still be unable to repay Me for the [exalted] place that I allotted you in the hearts of My servants.’”

Bishr said: “A man who loves to be known to people will not taste the sweetness of the Hereafter.”//45

Abu ‘Abdallah al-Harith al-Muhasibi⁷⁶

He was unique in his age in regard to [religious] knowledge, pious scrupulosity, acts of devotion and mystical states. He came from Basra and died in Baghdad in

67 A famous Sufi of Egypt; on him see pages 19–20.

68 *Ibara*, a clear, unambiguous expression or speech – as opposed to *ishara*, a mystical allusion, which is often ambiguous in order to conceal its true meaning from the uninitiated.

69 Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896), a famous Sufi of Basra; on him see Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, passim.

70 *Wara‘*; a Sufi term denoting scrupulous discernment between what is permitted (under the shari‘a law) and what is prohibited.

71 Meaning Bishr.

72 That is, the money that he would consider to have been earned in a proper way.

73 Literally, “health” (*al-‘afiya*), but here it probably means “health in the Hereafter”.

74 That is, spices that enhance the taste of food.

75 That is, the permitted is rare and hard to come by.

76 On him see *IM*, pp. 43–48.

243.⁷⁷ It is said that he inherited from his father the sum of 70 thousand *dirhams*, but he did not take anything from it. It is said that this was because his father was an adherent of [the doctrine of] human free will⁷⁸ and he considered that it would be unscrupulous to take anything from his legacy. A sound report from the Prophet – may God bless and greet him – says: “People of two different religions do not inherit anything from one another.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: al-Husayn b. Yahya said: Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr [al-Khuldi] said: I heard Muhammad b. Masruq say: “When al-Harith b. Asad al-Muhasibi died, he had not a single *dirham*. His father left him land and real estate, but he did not take anything from it.” I heard that our master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said: “Whenever al-Harith al-Muhasibi extended his hand to a suspicious food,⁷⁹ a vein in his finger would begin to move and he would abstain from it.”

Abu ‘Abdallah b. Khafif⁸⁰ said: “Follow the example of five of our masters and think well of the rest. They are: al-Harith al-Muhasibi, al-Junayd b. Muhammad, Abu Muhammad Ruwaym, Abu ‘Al-‘Abbas b. ‘Ata’ and ‘Amr b. ‘Uthman al-Makki. They combined knowledge⁸¹ with [mystical] truths.”

I heard Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. ‘Ali al-Tusi say: I heard Ja‘far al-Khuldi say: I heard Abu ‘Uthman al-Baladi say: al-Harith al-Muhasibi said: “He who has cleansed his inner self with self-observation and sincerity, God will embellish his external form with pious self-exertion and the following of [the Prophet’s] Sunna.”

It is related that al-Junayd said: “Once I saw al-Harith al-Muhasibi passing by. I noticed traces of hunger on his face. //46 I told him: ‘Uncle, come into the house and have something to eat.’ He agreed. I entered the house and searched for something to feed him with. At that time, there was in the house some food that was brought to me from a wedding party. So, I took this food and gave it to him. He took a morsel of the food and rolled it in his mouth [with the tongue] several times, then he stood up, threw it into the corridor, and left. When I saw him a few days later, I inquired about this. He answered: ‘I was hungry and wanted to make you happy by eating your food. However, there is between me and God a [special] sign. He does not permit me to eat any suspicious food.⁸² Therefore He did not allow me to swallow that food. Where did it come to you from?’ I said that it was brought to the house of a relative of mine from a wedding party. I asked him whether he would come in today. He said that he

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78 That is, he taught that men, and not God, are the creators and performers of their acts. This was a thesis later advocated by the religious group known as the Mu‘tazilites. See the article “Mu‘tazila” in *EI*.

79 That is, the food that was considered to have been improperly obtained – e.g., provided by an unjust ruler.

80 A famous Sufi of Shiraz, who died in 371/982; on him see *IM*, “Index”, under “Ibn Khafif”.

81 Of the Divine Law.

82 That is, one that was improperly obtained.

would. I gave him a piece of dry bread that we happened to have. He ate it and said: 'If you want to give something to the poor one,⁸³ it should be something like this [piece of bread].'"

Abu Sulayman Dawud b. Nusayr al-Ta'i

He was a person of great importance. Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – told me: Abu 'Amr [b.] Matar told me: Muhammad b. Musayyib told me: Ibn Khubayq told me: Yusuf b. Sibab told me: "Dawud al-Ta'i inherited twenty *dinars* and he ate from them for twenty years." I heard our master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "The cause of Dawud's conversion to asceticism was as follows. He used to wander the streets of Baghdad. Once he was passing through a street, when a group of the bodyguards [of Humayd al-Tusi] pushed him away from Humayd al-Tusi. When Dawud noticed Humayd, he said: 'Fie to the world in which Humayd takes precedence over you!'/47 So, he secluded himself in his house and began to practice ascetic austerities and perform acts of devotion."

Once I heard one of the poor⁸⁴ say in Baghdad that the cause of his conversion to asceticism was that he heard a bereft woman whining: "On which of your two cheeks have appeared the traces of decay? And which of your eyes has flowed out?"

It is also said that the reason for his conversion to asceticism was that he attended the circle of Abu Hanifa,⁸⁵ who told him once: "Abu Sulayman, we have already prepared the [required] equipment."⁸⁶ To which Dawud replied: "So what else is left?" Abu Hanifa answered: "[Only] works in accordance with it." So Dawud said: "My soul prompted me toward seclusion. I told her: 'As long as you sit with them,⁸⁷ you should not speak about any issue at all!' So for a whole year I was sitting with them, but I never spoke about any issue." Sometimes issues would dawn upon me and I would be as eager to discuss them as the thirsty man is eager to drink cold water, yet I would not talk." Thus he achieved what he achieved.

[Once] Junayd al-Hajjam (the Cupper) cupped Dawud al-Ta'i. The latter gave him a *dinar*. Someone told him that this was too much. He answered: "He who has no manliness⁸⁸ has no devotion [to God]." Also he used to say during his night [vigils]: "O my God, my concern for You has annihilated all other mundane concerns and now stands between me and [my] sleep."

83 That is, a Sufi.

84 That is, a Sufi.

85 Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man (d. 150/767), a renowned scholar of Iraq who founded the Hanafi school of law.

86 That is, theoretical knowledge.

87 That is, Abu Hanifa and his followers.

88 *Muru'a*; on this rather vague moral virtue see *EI* under "Muru'a". One of its most important aspects is generosity.