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# Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī

The Role of the Heart

Saeko Yazaki



# Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī

Both in everyday language and in religious metaphor, the heart often embodies the true self and is considered to be the seat of emotion in many cultures. Many Muslim thinkers have attempted to clarify the nature of Sufism using its metaphorical image, particularly in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

This book examines the work of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and his wider significance within the Sufi tradition, with a focus on the role of the heart. Analysing his most significant work, *Qūt al-qulūb* ('The Nourishment of Hearts'), the author goes beyond an examination of the themes of the book to explore its influence not only in the writing of Sufis, but also of Ḥanbalī and Jewish scholars.

Providing a comprehensive overview of the world of al-Makkī and presenting extracts from his book on religious characteristics of the heart with selected passages in translation for the first time in English, this book will give readers a better understanding not only of the essential features of Sufism, but also the nature of mysticism and its relation to monotheistic faiths.

**Saeko Yazaki** (PhD, Edin.) is Lord Kelvin Adam Smith Fellow in Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow, and Research Associate at the Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on mysticism and epistemology of religion, the Judaeo-Islamic tradition, and their continuing relevance to the present. She is also pursuing comparative study of monotheistic and non-monotheistic faiths.

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# **Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī**

The Role of the Heart

**Saeko Yazaki**

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# Preface

The substance of the present study first appeared as my doctoral thesis, ‘A study of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’, submitted to the University of Edinburgh in 2010. Since then I have received further inspiration and support from a number of people. From my life in both Japan and the UK, there are far too many people to list here who have generously offered me their help. Their goodwill, without which my book would have never appeared, has often caught me by surprise in a most delightful way.

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Professor Carole Hillenbrand who was unfailing in her care. I would have to compose another book to describe the generosity and abundant support which she and my friends offered me especially when my study was interrupted during my PhD. I have never forgotten their encouragement, which was unconditionally given when needed. My grateful thanks are also due to Professor Yasir Suleiman and Paul Anderson for their constant support, patience and understanding in allowing me time for my research. My time at the Centre of Islamic Studies has been a priceless learning experience not only for my study but also for life in general.

My doctoral study in Edinburgh was such a wonderful time. I would like to express my great debt of gratitude to all the members of staff and friends in the Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh. I can find no words to express my deep appreciation for having given me a sense of belonging, when my home country is on the other side of the globe. Reliable support, comradeship and friendship were offered by a number of people at 19 George Square, including Jokha Alharthi, Marilyn Booth, Stephen Burge, Tony Gorman, Margaret Graves, Rhona Hajcman (née Cullen), Christian Lange, Alex Mallett, Andrew Marsham, Songül Mecit, Golnaz Nanbakhsh, Guy Puzey, Kamran Rastegar, Ayman Shihadeh, Clarissa Sweet, Richard Todd and Ben White. They have greatly enriched my PhD life and beyond.

My special thanks go to various people at the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, especially Heather Elliott, Kate Marshall and Sebnem Susam-Sarajeva, and Jim Mooney and other staff at the Office of Lifelong Learning, and members of the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World, Professor Robert Hillenbrand and Jonathan Featherstone above all. It was delightful to be acquainted with them and it is my sincere hope that our paths will cross again. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my examiners, Professor Ian Richard Netton and

Dr Andrew Newman, for reading my long thesis and offering me helpful feedback. I am grateful to Professor Netton in particular for his encouragement to submit a proposal to the publisher.

Outside Edinburgh University, it is impossible for me not to thank Ben Young, whose feedback on my thesis was enormously helpful, and Peter Evans, whose friendship I simply treasure. Being acquainted with the members and staff of the Taichi Society, the Japan Society of Scotland and the Consulate-General of Japan in Edinburgh has also been a source of inspiration directly and indirectly. In Damascus and afterwards, encouragement and support were willingly given by al-Ustadh al-Misri and Fadi al-Fatayri. The time I spent with them was something special, and all my fingers are crossed for their safety. Teaching at the University of St Andrews offered me the opportunity to look at my thesis from a different angle. I am particularly indebted to Catherine Cobham – without her support I could not have managed.

Since I moved to England in summer 2010, I have received another source of inspiration from a number of staff and members of the Centre of Islamic Studies, the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, the Main Library, the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit and the Sanskrit Manuscripts Project at the University of Cambridge, the Woolf Institute, the Islamic Manuscript Association, the Gulf Research Centre-Cambridge, the Cambridge Arab Media Project and the Kaetsu Centre. What I have learned from them on various occasions has been a source of motivation and strength. Among them, I would like to thank especially Mohammed Abdul-Aziz, Abdullah Baabood, Tony Brinkman, Edward Cheese, Jill Cooper, Yuval Evri, Steve Fagg, Ahmad Azem Hamad, Jeremy and Tania Henzell-Thomas, Mary Howe, Khaled Hroub, Dilwar Hussain, Yoni Mendel, Molly O'Reilly, Tash Sabbah, Ghazala Sadiq, Anas Al-Shaikh-Ali, Françoise Simmons, Omer Totonji, Vincenzo Vergiani and Susie White, who have always shown their care despite their undoubtedly hectic life. My special gratitude also goes to Harith Bin Ramli for stimulating discussion and useful information, sharing a common interest in al-Makkī. My dear friends and colleagues in the UK, France, Sarajevo, the Middle East, North Africa, Ukraine, China, Canada and the United States have always been more willing than I could have expected to provide me with their expertise and helping hands. Just remembering them is enough to warm the deepest part of my heart. It has been a sheer joy to get to know so many inspiring people that I do not even know where to stop.

All the inadequacies and insufficiencies that still remain in this book are, needless to say, mine. In this regard, al-Makkī left us a sensible remark: perfection does not belong to humans. While emphasising the importance of improvement, he claimed that we should *not* try to be perfect in order to avoid devilish arrogance and non-repentance, which inevitably accompany the false feeling of achieving perfection. Greatly encouraged by this piece of wisdom, I offer you the findings of my intellectual exercise. This is my hope that the readers, whose numbers may not be large but whose enthusiasm must have been great to have picked up this book, will also enjoy employing their interpretative muscles and will offer me the fruits of their exercise.

Lastly, but not least by any means, grateful thanks are due to my family, relatives and friends in Japan for their acceptance of my stubbornness in leaving them for so

long and for their safeguarding a place for me that I can call one of my homes. I would like to dedicate my humble work especially to those who departed this life and have been suffering from the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Although these events have shown the precariousness of human civilisation, they have led to a heart-warming demonstration of international goodwill. May the latter be the side which we always see in the future.

Cambridge, December 2011 (Heisei 23nen, Junigatsu kichijitsu)

Saeko Yazaki

# Notes on presentation

## Transliteration and dates

The transliteration for Arabic used in this book follows the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Case endings are only marked when necessary, and common English names (such as Sufism, Mecca) are not transliterated. The word *ibn* (son) is abbreviated as ‘b.’, unless it is part of a commonly known name (for instance, ‘Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’, rather than ‘Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’, indicating that he is generally known as Ibn Ḥanbal).

The transliteration for Hebrew used in this book follows the *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*.

Dates are mostly given according to the Hijra followed by the Common Era. I employ CE only for modern figures and Jewish scholars especially in the last two chapters. In the bibliography, I include the Hijra when the publisher year appears in this way.

## Citations from the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, Hebrew Bible and New Testament

Chapter and verse numbers of the Qur’ān follow:

*The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an*, trans. M.M. Pickthall, New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2002.

Translations of Qur’anic verses are cited from Pickthall’s interpretation, unless specified. (Although Pickthall generally uses the word ‘Allah’, ‘God’ is used throughout this book.) Two more interpretations are consulted in this book:

*The Koran Interpreted*, trans. A.J. Arberry, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998;

*The Qur’ān*, trans. A. Jones, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, Exeter: Short Run Press, 2007.

Any quotations from the Qur'ān are cited in italics in guillemets («*Qur'ān*»), while any quotations from the Ḥadīth are put in angle brackets (<Tradition>).

All translations of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament are from the King James Version, unless specified:

*The Bible: authorized King James version with Apocrypha*, ed. R. Carroll and S. Prickett, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

# List of abbreviations

## Books, articles and theses

- Amin Amin, W. Mohd Azam b. Mohd, 'An evaluation of the *Qūt al-qulūb* of al-Makkī with an annotated translation of his *Kitāb al-tawba*', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1991.
- '*Awārif*' al-Suhrawardī, Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar, '*Awārif al-ma'ārif*', Cairo: al-Maktabat al-'Alāmiyya, 1358/1939.
- Bin Ramli Bin Ramli, H., 'A study of early Sufism in relation to the development of scholarship in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.H./C.E.: with special reference to knowledge and theology in the *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996)', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2011.
- Böwering Böwering, G., review of *Die Nahrung der Herzen: Abū Ṭālib al-Makkīs Qūt al-qulūb, vol. 1: chs 1–31*, trans. R. Gramlich, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 3, July 1995, pp. 555–6; review of *Die Nahrung der Herzen: Abū Ṭālib al-Makkīs Qūt al-qulūb, vol. 2: ch. 32*, trans. R. Gramlich, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 3, July 1997, pp. 619–20; review of *Die Nahrung der Herzen: Abū Ṭālib al-Makkīs Qūt al-qulūb, vol. 3: chapters 33–48 and vol. 4: bibliography and indices*, trans. and ed. R. Gramlich, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 1, January 1998, pp. 145–6. (The volume number will be specified in brackets.)
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- De Slane Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, trans. W.M. de Slane, 4 vols, New York; London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1842.
- Dialogue* Lobel, D., *A Sufi–Jewish Dialogue: philosophy and mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paqūda's Duties of the Heart*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

- Dimensions* Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Direction* Ibn Bāqūdā, Baḥyā, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. M. Mansoor, Oxford; Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004.
- Doctrine* al-Kalābādī, Abū Bakr, *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs: kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, trans. A.J. Arberry, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935.
- Early Mystic* Smith, M., *An Early Mystic of Baghdād: a study of the life and teaching of Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī A.D. 781–857*, London: Sheldon Press, 1935.
- Epistle* al-Qushayrī, Abū'l-Qāsim, *al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism: al-risala al-Qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, trans. A.D. Knysh, Reading: Garnet, 2007.
- Fatāwā* Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Majmū' fatāwā shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Najdī al-Ḥanbalī *et al.*, 30 vols, Riyad: Maṭābī al-Riyāḍ, 1381/1961–2.
- Futūḥāt* Ibn al-'Arabī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. 'Uthmān Yaḥyā, 4 vols, Cairo: al-Hay' at al-Miṣriyyat al-Āmma lil-Kitāb, 1405-12/1985–92.
- GAL* Brockelmann, C., *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, 2 vols and 3 supplementary vols, Leiden: Brill, 1943.
- GAS* Sezgin, F., *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, 9 vols, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967–84.
- Gedankenwelt* van Ess, J., *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī*, Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961.
- Ghunya* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Abū Muḥammad, *Ghunya li-ṭālibī ṭarīq al-ḥaqq*, 2 vols in 1, Cairo: Maṭba'at Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīḥ wa Awlāduh, 1288/1871–2.
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- Hidāja* Ibn Bāqūdā, Baḥyā, *al-Hidāja ilā farā'id al-qulūb des Bachja Ibn Jōsef Ibn Paqūda aus Andalusien im arabischen Urtext zum ersten Male nach der Oxforder und Pariser Handschrift sowie den Petersburger Fragmenten*, ed. A.S. Yahuda, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1912.
- Ibar* al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-'ibar fi khabar man ghabar*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid and Fuād Sayyid, 5 vols, Kuwait City: Dār al-Maṭbū'āt wa'l-Nashr, 1960–6.
- Iḥyā'* al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols, Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d.

- ʿIlm* pseudo-al-Makkī, Abū Ṭālib, *ʿIlm al-qulūb*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAtā, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004.
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- Kashf* Hujwīrī, ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān, *Kashf al-maḥjūb of al-Hujwīrī ʿThe revelation of the veiledʼ: an early Persian treatise on Sufism*, trans. R.A. Nicholson, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 2000.
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- Mīzān* al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, 4 vols, Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1382/1962–3.
- Munqidh* al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, ed. Maḥmūd Bījū, Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā; Amman: Dār al-Faṭḥ, 1992.
- Muntaẓam* Ibn al-Jawzī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *al-Muntaẓam fī taʿrīkh al-mulūk wa ʿl-umam*, 10 vols, Haydarabad: Maṭbaʿat Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1357/1938.
- Mustarshid* al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ḥārith b. Asad, *Risālat al-mustarshid*, ed. Sharafī Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī, Qusanṭīna (Algeria): Dār al-Baʿth, 1401/1981.
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## **Encyclopaedias, journals and publishers**

<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>BSOS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies</i>
<i>CUP</i>	Cambridge University Press
<i>EI<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1 <sup>st</sup> ed.
<i>EI<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.
<i>EI<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed.
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>
<i>EJIW</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i>
<i>EUP</i>	Edinburgh University Press
<i>IC</i>	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
<i>IS</i>	<i>Islamic Studies</i>

<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press

Abbreviations of books of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament follow the Chicago Manual of Style.



# Introduction

Despite the discourse on Islamophobia and topical issues around Islam and the West, Sufism appears to be accepted in Western society compared to other dimensions of Islam. Sufi thought is often described as ‘moderate’ and ‘tolerant’, in stark contrast, for example, to ‘extreme’ Salafis who attack ‘peace-loving’ Sufis.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this liberal image, the religious status of Sufism in Islam seems to be equivalent to Yoga in Hinduism and Zen in Buddhism, especially in popular culture; while Islamic (or Hindu or Buddhist) aspects are not entirely neglected, they are not central. The spiritual teachings of Sufism (and Yoga and Zen) are often regarded in the West as an alternative to conventional religious institutions and not incompatible with other belief systems. Many Sufism-related organisations in Europe and the United States have contributed to this image by focusing on humanity, peace, love and the universality of mysticism.<sup>2</sup> (One of the prime examples would be the doctrine of Inayat Khan (d. 1927) – the Sufi and musician from India who tried to spread the idea of universal Sufism in the UK, Holland, France and the USA.<sup>3</sup>)

Alongside this appreciation of Sufism that appeals to the popular spiritual movement, Islamic mysticism has also attracted significant scholarly attention in the West. The modern study of Sufism began in the colonial period when the image of Sufis was influenced partially by political interests and partially by European travellers’ narratives of exotic dervishes in the Orient.<sup>4</sup> From the early twentieth

1 Ibrahim, ‘Salafi intolerance threatens Sufis’, *Guardian* 10 May 2010, online, available HTTP: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/may/10/islam-sufi-salafi-egypt-religion>> (accessed 8 March 2012). (For the sake of brevity, unless necessary, full bibliographical information, e.g. the full name of author, the subtitle, the name of editor and/or translator appear only in the bibliography.)

2 See e.g. websites of the International Association of Sufism <<http://ias.org/>>, the Threshold Society <<http://sufism.org/>>, the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society <<http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/>> (all accessed 24 March 2012).

3 See the International Sufi Movement <<http://www.sufimovement.org/>> formed by Inayat Khan (accessed 24 March 2012).

4 See e.g. Ernst who provides a concise description of a complicated history of the term ‘Sufism’ in the modern study of Sufism in Europe (*The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1997, pp. 1–31).