JA'FAR AL-SĀDIQ, SPIRITUAL FOREBEAR OF THE SŪFIS

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HIS LIFE

SINCE most biographers lived in an age where divisions between Sunnī and Shi'ī and between followers of shari'ah and followers after taqīqah had hardened, these categories of approval or repudiation were often projected back to the earlier centuries of Islam. Orientalists too have made similar value-judgements and the Shi'ī and Sūfī have often provoked instinctive disapproval. This paper attempts to rescue the person of Ja'far al-Sādiq from such sectarian antipathies; it is not the present purpose to prove that Ja'far was a Sūfī, a Shi'ī or even a Sunnī; his personality is too complex for such labelling, and the age in which he lived was still free of such rigid antitheses. The life and thought of Ja'far deserve to be studied in their own right; one may then proceed to judge his social significance in the crucial years of the establishment of the Abbāsid regime, and of the parting of the ways for Sunnīs and Shi'īs; one may also point to the way in which his thought significantly anticipates much of the Sūfī spirituality which was to develop in both Sunnī and Shi'ī traditions in the next centuries. It is this latter purpose which is to be undertaken here. Having sketched the events of his life, and having touched upon some of its social implications, an attempt will be made to perceive the intellectual and spiritual achievements which make Ja'far so important a forebear of the Sūfis.

The wide range of biographers of Ja'far is testimony to his influence. Apart from figuring in the histories of Tabaqī and Mā'sūdī, in the dictionary of Ibn Khalikān and in all such general works, Ja'far is also important for three main groups of biographers: the heresiologists, the traditionists and the hagiographers. Each of these in his turn will betray a particular motive for his work, but material taken from a combination of them may give a reasonably balanced picture. Shahristānī and Nawbakhti show, from Sunnī and Shi'ī standpoints, how Ja'far belongs to the Shi'ī tradition; Dīhabī, for all his opposition to tasawwuf and the Shi'ah, can recognize Ja'far's contribution to Sunnī tradition; Abu Nu'aym and Fard al-Dīn 'Attār place Ja'far at the head of the line of saints and mystics. It is perhaps from early writers less concerned with such categories that the most faithful picture of Ja'far can come; some of the most suggestive clues to the personality and spirituality of Ja'far are to be found in Kullaynī or Kashshī. The versatility and magnetism of Ja'far in his own age was still more strongly felt by subsequent generations. His influence, or, if one prefers it, the re-occurrence

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of his ideas, is particularly pervasive in the development of the Sufi movement. The Sufis took up those intimate spiritual issues of revelation and the search for haqiqah, of personal morality, of individual communion with God, and of His continuing guidance, issues which will be seen to be the raison d’être for the early Shi’i self-assertion. It is when sectarian considerations engrossed the Shi‘a that the responsibility of such spiritual leadership passed to Sufis of both Sunni and Shi‘i persuasion.

The birth of Ja‘far, son of the fifth Imam Muhammad Baqir, and ‘Umar Farwah, great-granddaughter of Abu Bakr, took place in Medina in the year A.H., or perhaps 83 A.H. He thus inherited the position of Shi‘i leadership held by his father. The Shi‘as were not a monolithic group ready to profit from the downfall of Umayyad dynasty; the group which Ja‘far headed was quietest in politics, although some of the ideas which he formulated were to become, after his death, divisive and even explosive. Shahristani, having introduced the subject of the Imamityah and having shown how sects multiplied from Ja‘far’s family’s disensions, makes clear his disapproval by exclaiming: “As for him who wanders from the Path and goes astray, God does not care in what river-bed he comes to grief.” Nevertheless he goes on to give a not unsympathetic picture of Ja‘far:

“He was possessed of great wisdom in religion and letters, of perfect hikmah (science and philosophy), of mature ascetic discipline with respect to this world, and of complete abstinence from lusts. He stayed in Medina time enough to benefit the Shi‘a sect which traced their origin from him and to enthrall his friends with the secrets of the ‘ilm (occult sciences). Then he went to ‘Iraq and stayed there for a time, but never interfered in the Imamite and never argued with anyone about the Caliphs. He who is submerged in the sea of ma‘rifah (inner knowledge) has no desire for the shore, and whoever clings to the summit of haqiqah (Truth) has no fear of falling down. It is also said that he who is intimate with God is unsociable with men, and he who is sociable with other than God will be carried off by Satan.”

Ja‘far’s quietism is a frequent theme. In the above quotation Shahristani used the word tawabahasha for the concept “unsociable”; Nawbakht also illustrates this almost farouche quality of the Imam with the following statement attributed to him:

“He who calls me by any name, God’s curse be upon him. A man of the Shi‘is came up to meet him, and Ja‘far, shunned him. It is told of him that a man of the Shi‘is met him on the road and shunned him and omitted to greet him; and Ja‘far thanked him for this and praised him and told him ‘Such and such a man, however, met me and greeted me as nicely as possible’ and he blamed him for this and did something unpleasant to him for it.”

(1) Shahristani: Milal wa Nihal, p. 124.
(2) Ibid., p. 125.
(3) Nawbakht: Firq, p. 92.

Ja‘far did not commit any of the excesses of the Malamatiyah who were aggressively anti-social. He disowned and denounced the followers of Abu al-Khaṭṭāb, whom he had originally sent out as a dī‘ā’, but who developed a perverse antinomianism; one sect went so far as to say:

‘Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was a prophet sent out by Ja‘far and ordered to obey him. But the Khattabiyah made lawful the forbidden acts of fornication, theft and wine-bibbing; they gave up almsgiving, prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.’

Ja‘far’s rejection of these ghulat Shi‘is was probably more painful to him than his instinctive and consistent rebuttal of ingratiating partisans and of all direct political involvement. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb had been an intimate disciple of Ja‘far, but had misused his esoteric teaching. Both Shahristani and Nawbakht describe the belief of the Khattabiyah in a Divine incarnation in Ja‘far and in his immortality.

Nawbakht also sees among their extremist “ghulāt” (sunnūf al-ghailiyah) the roots of the Qarīmīyah who believed in a transmission of the soul of Ja‘far through Abu al-Khaṭṭāb and Muḥammad b. Isma‘il b. Ja‘far. We shall see that Ja‘far was indeed personally involved in formulating an “imamology,” but this was rooted in doctrines of prophetic revelation rather than political opportunism.

Ja‘far anticipates the whole Sufi tradition in his political quietism. He took no part in the revolt of Zayd in 122 A.H.; nor would he set himself up over against Zayd. Tabari tells how deserters from Zayd came to Ja‘far at Medina and were told that they should honour their oath and return to Zayd. However, Ja‘far’s blatant ignoring of the government in Baghdād did not please the Caliph, al-Mansūr. The biographers who make most of this aspect of Ja‘far’s life are, predictably, the biographers like Abū Nu‘aym and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār. The attitude in which the latter introduces Ja‘far was to be emulated by countless Sufis:

“One evening the caliph al-Mansūr said to his minister ‘Go and bring Šādiq that I may kill him.’ The minister replied, ‘He is sitting in a Corner in seclusion and is engaged in worship. He has withheld his hand from any temporal power.’……… The Commander of the Faithful will not be vexed by him. What use is there in killing him. However much he said it, he had no effect. The minister went to look for Šādiq, and al-Mansūr said to his servants, ‘When Šādiq comes in and I raise the royal cap from my head, kill him.’ The minister brought in Šādiq, but al-Mansūr immediately jumped up and made way for Šādiq, and seated him on the throne, and made obeisance before him. His servants were astonished. Then al-Mansūr said, ‘What need do you have?’ Šādiq said, ‘That you should not summon me before yourself and should leave me to my worship of God.’”

(4) Ibid., p. 37.
(8) ‘Aṭṭār: Tadhkira, p. 11.
Abū Nu‘aym relates another tradition concerning Ja‘far and al-Mansūr:

“Some flies settled on al-Mansūr, and he drove them away from him; they returned, and he drove them away until he became angry with them. And Ja‘far b. Muhammad came into his presence, and al-Mansūr said to him, ‘Abū ‘Abdullāh why did God create flies?’ He replied, ‘In order that the tyrants might be humbled by them.’”¹⁹

Two further quotations from Abū Nu‘aym may illustrate the motive behind Ja‘far’s passivity; he did not preach passive resistance as a political protest but as a spiritual affirmation. This is seen in a meeting of Ja‘far with Sūfyan al-Thawrī:

“Sūfyan al-Thawrī said, ‘I shall not rise until you relate me a tradition,’ Ja‘far said to him, ‘I shall do so, but what use to you are a number of traditions, Sūfyan. When God blesses you with His blessing, I would that it were enduring and permanent! Multiply praises and thanks for this! God has said in His Book (14: 7): ‘If you are thankful, I shall assuredly give you increase. And if you find His providence slow, multiply your requests for pardon. For God has said in His Book (71: 10): ‘Ask pardon of your Lord; verily He is One Who pardons. He will send upon you the rains of heaven in torrents, and will aid you with wealth and sons, and will appoint gardens for you and rivers too.’ Sūfyan, when the misfortune of an order from the sultān or someone else befalls you, multiply your affirmations that ‘There is neither might nor strength but in God.’ This is the key to the door of happiness, and one of the treasures of Paradise.” And he clasped Sūfyan by the hand.²⁰

Ja‘far’s personal refusal of power is underlined in the tradition of his saying:

“God Almighty revealed to the world: ‘Serve him who serves me, and weary of him who serves you.’”²¹

Any organization of a following by Ja‘far is to be seen chiefly in the intellectual and spiritual leadership which he exercised. The academic and spiritual discipes of Ja‘far were not only concerned with the disciplines of hadith collection and criticism and of fiqh elaboration. Ibn Khallikān wrote:

“He composed a discourse (or treatise) on algebra, augury and omens and the Sufi Abū Mūsa Jābir b. Haiyān of Tarsus compiled a work of two thousand pages in which he inserted the problems of his master Ja‘far as-Sādiq, which formed five hundred treatises.”²²

This is not the place to pursue the many questions which surround the work of Jābir, much of which Ruska and Kraus have plausibly attributed to later Istārī‘ī authors.²³ But it may be suggested that one should not too quickly dismiss this study of alchemy as nonsensical magic; its chief aim is a viable doctrine of gnosis, and even its syncretist echoes of Sabean rite should not rule it out of consideration as a genuine spiritual searching.

The associates of Ja‘far were not all suspicious forerunners of the Qarāmātī, like Jābir b. Hayyān or Abū al-Khaṭṭābī. Ja‘far is also frequently described in the company of such eminently respectable men as Abū ‘Haniḍah, Mālik b. Anas and Wāsīl b. ‘Aṭā, all of whom heard traditions from him. We shall return to Ja‘far’s role as a traditionist, but meanwhile we may complete our sketch of Ja‘far’s life by reference to the nature of Ja‘far’s relationship with these distinguished Sunnīs. Abū Nu‘aym records a pithy statement of Ja‘far which combines suspicion of both political and “eclesiastical” institutions:

“The fuqahā‘ are the confidants of the prophets but when you see them riding towards the sultāns suspect them.”²⁴

This is found more fully stated in Kūlaylī:

“Ja‘far said that the Prophet said: ‘The fuqahā‘ are the confidants of the prophets in so far as they do not enter into the dunyā, Ja‘far was asked what their entrance into the dunyā meant. He said: Following the sultān; when they do that beware of them, for the sake of you din.”²⁵

Stories of Ja‘far’s victory in argument with Abū ‘Haniḍah have appealed to people. Ibn Khallikān quotes an anecdote of Ja‘far’s tripping him for weak knowledge of a gazelle’s teeth-construction:²⁶

Before turning to the aspects of Ja‘far’s intellectual, ascetic and spiritual life, one may note one final external observation of Ja‘far’s life which was to exercise such an attraction and command, such an allegiance among his posterity. Without searching for strikingly miraculous Karāmātī in Majālī, one may cite as an example of the charisma of wālīyāt attached to Ja‘far’s family a tradition recorded in Nawbakhti:

“Muhammad b. Ja‘far entered into his father’s presence one day. He was a little boy and, as he ran to him, he stumbled on his shirt. His face became flushed, and Ja‘far rose for him, kissed him, brushed the dust from his face, and put him on his lap, saying, ‘I heard my father say, “When you have a child who resembles me—call him after me, and he will be like me and like the Prophet of God (peace be upon him, and his family, and his sunnah”.”’²⁷

The response of popular piety which such a story suggests reminds one of the contexts in which spirituality, however abstruse, must eventually communicate its discoveries.

Ja‘far al-Sādiq died in 148 A.H., poisoned, according to Shi‘i traditions, by grapes sent by the caliph.
Whoever was responsible for the original compilation, it seems almost certain that these traditions and their exegesis did come from Ja'far. Makki, the traditionist and ascetic of the third century of the hijrah, makes several references to a written source which he describes as follows: "musnadun min ṣābih al-abwār". Massignon elsewhere describes these as "moral hadith with a Sufi tendency, circulating in the mystic circles of Baghdād and Kufah and attributed to Ja'far." A passage in the Ḥaqiqāt al-tafsīr of Sulaimān describes them as "detached verses, classed without order," however it was that they were compiled, the ideas, and more important, the terminology of Ja’far, made a significant contribution to Sufi thought. We shall return later to specific examples of this, collected by Massignon in the work of al-Hallaj. Meanwhile we shall notice the principles which must have guided Ja’far in his tafsīr.

It may be misleading to dwell upon the cabalistic intricacies of the esoteric Dīvān alphabet attributed to him;[22] one must first appreciate the spiritual convictions which governed his attitude to the Qur’ān. Corbin quotes an incident where Ja’far’s disciples respected his long ecstatic silence after the prayer rite. Ja’far explained this as follows:

“I did not cease to repeat this verse until I could hear it from that same Angel who pronounced it for the Prophet.”[23]

Abū Nu‘aym records Ja’far’s exegesis of Sūrah 15:75, which reads: “Surely in that there are signs for those, who mark (mulawwasimīn).” Ja’far gives the meaning as mutafarrissūn, “those who look steadfastly on the outward to perceive the inward.”[24]

The importance of esoteric contemplation and apprehension is great for both Sufis and Shi’is; nor should it be incomprehensible to a Sunni who perceives the dimension of mystery in God’s dealings with men and man’s response to God. Corbin points out that when Ja’far makes repeated references to sīr he is referring at once to that which is hidden and also to that which may be discovered through the “pensee secrete,” “transcognition” or “supra-cognition.” He explains this with a quotation from Ja’far:

“Our cause is a secret veiled in secrecy (sīr masā’ir fī sīr), the secret of something which remains veiled, a secret, which only another secret can expand; it is a secret on top of a secret, which is sufficient as a secret.”[25]

Again, Ja’far is quoted:

“Our cause is the Truth, and the Truth of the Truth (ḥaqq al-ḥaqq); it is the exoteric, and it is the esoteric of the esoteric (bīṭīn al-bīṭīn), and it is the esoteric of the esoteric (bīṭīn al-bīṭīn). It is the secret, and the secret of something which remains veiled, a secret which is sufficient as a secret.”[26]

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[22] Ibid., p. 85.
[26] Ibid., p. 102.

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ISLAMIC CULTURE

HIS THOUGHT

(i) Ḥaqiqah and Revelation

In considering Ja'far al-Sadiq as a spiritual forebear of the Sufis, we shall organize our observations under four headings: "Ḥaqiqah and Revelation," "Personal Morality," "Individual Communion with God," and "Continuing Guidance." These issues seem to summarise some of the primary concerns, epistemological, ascetic, private and communal, felt by an early Shi'i like Ja'far and also by the Sufis who followed in later generations. In their search for the Truth, early Shi'is and Sufis threw over the authority of the community and initiated a search which must be personal to be genuine. They rejected the legal, social shari'ah for the inner knowledge of the Ḥaqiqah, comprised in the revealed text. Yet despite the different concepts of what is authoritative, despite the difference in tools between the almost mechanical rules of ḍarūr and usūl al-fiqh and the esoteric art of ta'wil, nevertheless one should not forget that there is a revealed authority common to both, the sahras of the Qur'ān.

That the Qur'ān is central in all Muslim experience may seem platitudinous, until one remembers the accusations of unfaithfulness which have attached to those who have gone further than the communally approved tafsīr in exploring the meaning of the Qur'ānic revelation. The very fact that the most bitter hostility directed to Sufis and Shi'īs alike has been occasioned by their exegetical esoterics shows the centrality of the search for Ḥaqiqah in Divine scripture, and the passionate convictions which surrounded it. Whereas it was the community which inherited, built and canonized its shari'ah, grounded in the principles of tafsīr, it was the individual Shi'i and Sufi who sought after Ḥaqiqah in the inner meanings discussed by ta'wil or ṣahih. It is of great significance that Ja'far should be regarded as the author of a tafsīr and of ḥadith which not only permeated into qualified Sunni acceptance but which also anticipated much of the mystical interpretation of the Sufis and the esoteric dogma of later Shi'is.

Hujwīrī speaks of Ja'far as having "written famous 'books' explaining ṭasawwuf."[27] Brockelmann (S.I., 194) is sceptical of the authenticity of works attributed to Ja'far. An edition of his tafsīr was influential from an early date in the edition of Dhū al-Nūn Miṣrī (born c. 180 A.H.). This widely travelled mystic is reputed to have written not only such spiritual meditations as Muḥāšābi quotes, but also works of alchemy, such as the lost treatises Rukn Abbar and Ṭiqqah; he clearly belongs in the line of intellectual and spiritual enquiry which stems from Ja'far. It is not certain that Ja'far composed the treatise edited by Dhū al-Nūn. Massignon makes two interesting suggestions. Jābir ibn Ḥayyān al-Sußī dedicated books, including those on asceticism, to Ja'far; and Dhū al-Nūn was a disciple of Jābir. Ibn Abī al-'Awjī is said to have fabricated and edited a mystical ḥadith which was condemned for ṭaswīḥ and ta'wil; its avoidance of such terminology as 'ishār and tafsīr suggests one who, like Ibn Abī al-'Awjī, had left the school of Ḥasan al-Ṣaqrī for that of Ja'far.

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[27] Hujwīrī: Kāhīf, p. 78.
Corbin goes on to show how this allowed *taqiyyah* to develop to the point where Ja'far could say:

"He who is without *taqiyyah* (he who does not observe discretion, through unawareness or refusal of the esoteric), such a man is without religion."^27

It was to be expected that a search for *haqiqah* such as Ja'far's would earn disapproval and suffer misunderstanding and distortion. Such works as his *Mishâb al-sharî'îh wa-nufussî'îh al-haqqah* have earned suspicious comment from orientalists like Strothmann who speaks of its "not-unobjectionable orthodoxy" and its "mystical tone." Corbin sees the profound influence that such a work played throughout the history of Shi'i spirituality, and sees that the chief issue is not the authorship of this anthology, but the undoubted succession of gnostic thought from Ja'far right through to Mullâ Şadrâ.\(^{19}\)

Ja'far's work had its undeniable impact upon the Sunni community too. The assessment of Ja'far as its *muhabbat* which one reads in al-Dhahabi is perhaps typical. In his *Tadkhira* al-Huffaz he quotes Abû Ḥanîfah's saying, "I never saw a man more learned than Ja'far ibn Muhammad." He gives the testimony of Abû Ḥâtim: "Trustworthiness such as his is unquestionable;" and he records a saying of Ja'far himself: "Bear with my loss before you miss me; assuredly no one will relate traditions to you after me as I do."\(^{80}\) Dhahabi's account of Ja'far's role as a *muhabbat* is more critically and more epigrammatically expressed in his *Mizân al-tîddîl*:

"Bukhari did not base arguments upon him. Yahyâ ibn Sa'id (Qaṭṭān) said: 'Lashes are dearer to me than he; there is something about him which eats into my soul.' Muḥâib said on the authority of al-Darâwîd, 'Mâlik did not relate traditions on the authority of Ja'far until the fortunates of the Banû Abbas were victorious; according to Maṣ'âb ibn 'Abbâs, Mâlik was not wont to relate anything on the authority of Ja'far until it was gathered together into one corpus.'\(^{31}\)

Two further anecdotes of Dhahabi may conclude our observations on the intellectual and academic influence of Ja'far:

"Abûmâd ibn Sa'id ibn Abû Maryam said: 'I heard Yahyâ saying: 'I used not to ask Yahyâ ibn Sa'id about Ja'far ibn Muhammad, and he said to me, 'Why have you not asked me about the *hadith* of Ja'far?' I said, 'I do not cite him as an authority.' And he said to me that Ja'far was a *bâfi* and that his father's *hadith* was rightly-guided (*masâhid*). And Ibn Mu'in said 'Ja'far is reliable'; then he said: 'The *sahâfa* ibn Ghâth went away to Abadân, a place which is a staging point on the road (from Basrah); and he gathered to himself the people from Basrah, who said: 'Do not give us traditions on the

authority of three men, Aṣ̄īr ibn 'Abd al-Malik, 'Umar ibn 'Ubayd and Ja'far ibn Muhammad.' And he said: 'As for Aṣ̄īr, he belongs to you and I leave him to you; and as for 'Umar, you are better informed; and as for Ja'far, if only you were in Kûfah and the blacksmith's mallet were beating your shoes.'\(^{28}\)

Ja'far was clearly a controversial figure. We shall return to some of the epistemological issues which underlie his philosophy, or rather theosophy, of revelation and Truth. His chief authority was, as for all Muslims, the Qur'ân and the morality and spirituality which he advanced was subservient to this. Our preliminary study of Ja'far as *muwaffiq* and *muhabbat* gives us the context in which to study that morality and spirituality, and thence the subsequent doctrines of the Prophet and imâm.

(ii) Personal Morality

The moral issue which dominated the generation of Ja'far was that of Divine predetermination. This doctrine often reflects an authoritarian tradition in political or theological circles. It is not surprising, then, that Ja'far shunned such a doctrine of *jafr*; nor did he go to the other extreme, attributed to Hasan al-Basri, whereby God "invested" man (*tawâhid*) with his own actions. Hasan 'Askari described the view of Ja'far as:

"Neither *jafr* (impurity!), nor *tawâhid* (idolatry!); but something between the two."\(^{32}\)

Massignon's somewhat cryptic comments on the *tafsîr* attributed to Ja'far mention that in the context of *adîl*, Divine justice, a distinction is made by Ja'far between *'amr* and *masâhi'ah*; furthermore *masâhi'ah* is chosen in place of *iradah*.\(^{33}\) For the *Mu'ażîlah*, God's *'amr* and His *iradah* were the same thing; but Ja'far's category of God's "good pleasure" is more intimate than His "command" or "will." Shahrastâni was apparently unaware of this lexical sensitivity, although he represents Ja'far's probable view clearly:

"This is his opinion on *iradah*, that God Almighty had willed one thing for us and has willed another thing through us. As for that which He has willed for us, He has concealed this from us, but as for that which He has willed through us, He has made it plain (azharahu) for us. So we are not so much concerned with what He has willed for us compared with what He has willed through us."\(^{34}\)

The chief solution to these moral dilemmas was not theoretical for Ja'far. Such problems were answered by a personal, practical morality. Charitable expenditure or donation is a starting point for all Muslim social ethic, and so the tradition that "Ja'far al-Sâdiq used to give food until nothing remained for his family" is naturally popular; Dhahabi repeats it from Abû Na'îm, and adds "the virtues of this sayyid are told in great number."\(^{33}\)
Abū Nu‘aym records a very wholesome prescription for the good-life, given by Ja‘far to Mūsā:

“If you remember what I say, you will live happy and die honoured. Whoever stretches his eye towards what is in another’s hand dies poor. He who is not pleased with God’s lot for him is insulting God in His ordering of life. He who draws the sword of desire is killed by it. He who digs a ditch for his brother in kindness is watered by it.”

Ascheticism vies with generosity as a virtue which even today wins instinctive admiration from Muslims. Abū Nu‘aym and Farāḍ al-Dīn ‘Attār predictably endow Ja‘far with the quality of zuhd. Dḥāhibī too quotes Abū Nu‘aym’s tradition of Ja‘far’s wearing the ascetic’s ṣūf, and of the Sufi Sufyān al-Thawrī’s discovery of this:

“I entered into the presence of Ja‘far ibn Muhammad and he was wearing a full-sleeved gown of silk and a robe of smoke-coloured silk. And I began to stare at him in amazement. ‘O al-Thawrī,’ he said, ‘what is the matter with you that you stare at me?’ And I said, ‘Son of the Prophet, this is not your garment, nor the garment that your fathers wore.’ Then he rolled back the sleeve of his gown and he disclosed beneath it a white gown of wool (ṣūf) bleached from end to end and sleeve to sleeve. And he said, ‘O al-Thawrī, our dress here belongs to God, and the other belongs to you. We have hidden that which belongs to God, and we have shown that which belongs to you.’”

This story is further elaborated by ‘Attār:

“Ṣādiq was said to have been wearing a precious robe of silk. They said, ‘Son of the Prophet of God, this is not in accord with the life of your holy family.’ He took that man by the hand and drew it into his sleeve which was clad in coarse lint so that his hand was pricked. Ṣādiq said, ‘This is for God and this is for men (ḥādhā li al-‘amār wa ḥādhā li al-khalīq).’”

However attractive these anecdotes are, they are to be suspected as artificial attempts to clothe Ja‘far in the charismatic ṣūf. If these sayings attributed to Ja‘far have any historical value, it may be as echoes of his insistence upon bāji, as opposed to zahir, values. Suspicion hardens when one reads in the early editors of Khashshi a remarkably similar story under the biography of Sufyān al-Thawrī:

“Sufyān al-Thawrī entered into the presence of Abū ‘Abdullāh who was wearing splendid clothes. ‘O Abū ‘Abdullāh,’ he said, ‘Your father used not to wear the like of these clothes!’ He replied, ‘My father lived in a time of barrenness and shortage; but the present time is one when this world has loosed its water-skins and its people have a right to their striped garments.”

(37) Ḥadīth: p. 194; Dḥāhibī: op. cit., p. 167.

This example of the romanticising by later hagiographers encourages a scepticism for some of the traditions concerning Ja‘far which Ritter quotes from ‘Attār’s discussion of zuhd in his Taḥānīmah; the world is represented as a wilderness to which the human heart should not cling:

“Ja‘far al-Sādiq said, ‘The world is a wilderness; but still more so is the heart which attaches itself to what is wilderness. However the other world is a well-built land; but still better-built is the heart which covets nothing else but that.’”

Ja‘far’s teaching should not so much point to an other-worldly escapism as to a commitment to both this world and the next; the other pose of the paradox is seen in a statement attributed to Ja‘far elsewhere in ‘Attār’s works:

“It is in this world that God Almighty has His Paradise and His Hell. Heaven is well-being and Hell is disaster. It is well-being when you do your own work with God; and it is Hell when you do God’s work with your own resources.”

Ḥujwīrī quotes Ja‘far as saying that there can be no ‘ibādah without taqwah. The perpetual spiritual exercise of taqwah is illustrated by Ja‘far’s plea and by Ḥujwīrī’s comment upon it:

“Ja‘far replied: ‘My actions are such that I shall be ashamed to look my grandfathers in the face on the Last Day.’ To see one’s faults is a quality of perfection and is characteristic of those who are established in the Divine presence, whether they be prophets, saints or apostles.”

Taqwah is the hallmark of preaching which insists that rite is insufficient; the celebrated Mu‘tazilī al-Jubbā’ī advanced the view that taqwah must be part of the sincere ‘amīl which authenticate imān. Ja‘far—and al-Hallāj—went further in seeing it is something which must actually precede ceremonial rite and intellectual enquiry. ‘Attār expresses as follows Ja‘far’s doctrine of taqwah: ‘Ibādah which al-Hallāj was to develop:

“‘Ibādah cannot become true without taqwah, for God Almighty made taqwah preferable to ‘ibādah since God Almighty said (9.113) ‘Al-tā‘lībūn al-‘abidūn.’”

Preliminary searches in Makki, when he commences his descriptions of the maqāmāt of mystical progression by discussing taqwah, have not shown any reference to Ja‘far’s doctrine of taqwah. This may be because Makki regards taqwah as a canonical necessity, wajib, whereas Ja‘far’s approach is less systematic.

We shall see that the road which takes its departure from taqwah ends in maḥabbah; the tafsir of Ja‘far (apud Baqī‘) states:

(40) Ritter: Das Meer, p. 51; cf. p. 216.
(42) Ḥujwīrī: op. cit., p. 86.
"God made famous His love for the believers before His Creation; He showed that love is the most intimate form of observance which our rite can offer Him."15

The metaphor of a road from moral conversion to the spiritual, reciprocal relationship of love between God and the faithful (Massignon compares Sāraḥ 5:59 and 2:169) is not fully adequate. Personal morality for Ja'far is not a steady progression from ṭawḥīd through ẓuhd to mukhabbah. It is a spiritual communion, apprehended but uncomprehended, rooted in the historical revelation of the Qur'ān but guided by the continual inspiration of God. To this avowedly esoteric, cyclical experience we now turn. It is built on the humble but confident personal morality which we have just sketched and to which 'Aṭṭār tellingly summarizes:

"Ṣādiq was told, 'You have all the virtues—asceticism (ẓuhd) and inner nobility (ḵurem-i bāltān). You are the lustre of your family! But you are very proud.' Ja'far said, 'I am not proud; but it is pride in God's Almightiness (ḥib-i ḥibriyāt-i āsī), because when I desist from personal pride, His Almightiness enters in and settles in place of my own pride. There can be no Almightiness in personal pride, but there should be pride in God's Almightiness."16

(iii) Individual Communion with God

The almost tangible reality of man's spirit (rūḥ) for Ja'far is shown in answers attributed to him which Kulaynī records in the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Bīb al-Rūḥ of his Usūl al-Kaffā:

"I asked Abū 'Abdullāh concerning the spirit in man and God's saying (15:29; 38:72), 'When I have formed him and I have breathed into him of My rūḥ.' Ja'far said, 'This spirit is something created (makhkhīq), and the spirit that was in Jesus was something created.' ....

"I asked Abū 'Abdullāh about God's word, 'And a spirit from Him' (4:109). He said 'This is the spirit of God, a created thing which God has created in man and Jesus.' ....'I asked Abū 'Abdullāh about the word of God, Mighty and Glorious, 'And I have breathed into him of My rūḥ.' I asked him how this breathing took place and he said 'The spirit is set in motion like the wind, and it is only called the rūḥ because its name is derived from the rūḥ, for the soul resembles the wind.' ...."

Ja'far was probably something of a metaphysicist as well as a theosophist. It is in the latter role that Sūfīs and Shi'is were to elaborate his personality, as we shall see when we come to study the development of his doctrine of wahāy and elāhān. Meanwhile another line of 'Aṭṭār seems relevant:

"Whoever strives with his soul for soul will achieve blessing, and whoever strives with his soul for his Lord will achieve his Lord."18

It has already been realized in studying Ja'far's intellectual and moral priorities that his spirituality has practical foundations and manifestations. Ṭasawwuf must not be understood as all ecstasy and escapism. Spiritual communion with God, al-Ḥaqiq, is assuredly an inward, and an individual experience, but for Ja'far as for the whole line of Sūfis, there was a temptation to articulate and express this experience for others to recognize it and emulate it. Even the most solitary ascetic can have this sense of responsibility for communication of his spiritual discoveries. Ja'far, in his esoteric 'ṭājr, as in his hadiths, which played so large a part in the formulation of Shi'ism, and especially Ismā'īlī fah, introduced a terminology which attempted to explore and expose these spiritual realities, chief among which was the conviction that a man's soul may aspire to see God.

Ma'rūfah qalbīyāh is possibly the most important concept both for the mysticism of the Sūfis and for the imāmi doctrines of the Shi'is. Corbin draws attention to the passage in Kulaynī where one sees Ja'far's views on the vision of God growing out of the views of his father, the fifth imām, Muhammad Bāqir:

"A man of the Khawārij came into the presence of Abū Ja'far and said to him, "Abū Ja'far, what thing do you worship?" 'God,' he replied. 'Do you see Him?' he said. 'No,' he replied, 'The eyes do not see Him with the vision of sight, but the hearts (al-qādīh) see Him by the realities of faith (baḥaqa 'al-îmān). He is not known by analogy (qiyās) and he is not grasped by the senses (bi al-haṣūs) and cannot be likened to men. He is described by signs (muṣawwaf bi al-a'dilāt) and known by symbols (Mā' rūf bi al-ʾālāhāl). He does not use force in His judgements. It is He Who is God, than Whom there is no other god."19

Kulaynī goes on to Ja'far's recording the answer of the first Imām:

"A learned man (ḥabīb of the Jews) came to the Commander of the Faithful and said, 'Commander of the Faithful, have you seen your Lord when you worship Him?' 'Woe on you!' he replied, 'I would not have worshipped a lord whom I did not see.' 'How did you see Him?' he said. He replied 'Woe on you! The eyes do not grasp Him with the vision of sight, but the hearts have seen Him by the realities of faith.'20

The theme of these two quotations is vividly taken up in the biographies of Ja'far by Abū Naʿaym and Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. Abū Naʿaym shows Ja'far's attacking the rā'ā and qiyās of the intellect on the occasion of Ibn Abī Laylā's and Abī Hanifah's visiting him:

"He said to Ibn Abī Laylā, 'Who is this with you?' He replied, 'This is a man with insight and penetration in the matter of religion.' He said, 'Perhaps he constructs analogies (qiyās) 'measures' in the matter of religion with his rā'ā.' 'Yes,' he replied; and Ja'far said to

Abû Hanîfah... 'Have you measured your head yet?' (Ja'far proceeds to confound Abû Hanîfah with various riddling questions)...Ja'far said, 'My father told me on the authority of my grandfather that the Prophet of God, upon whom be peace, said “The first who measured the matter of religion with his râ'y was Iblis...And him who measures religion with his râ'y, God Almighty binds together with Iblis on the day of Resurrection because he followed him in qiyâs.”

The problem of the true knowledge and vision of God in Ja'far's teaching is explained in the lively anecdote of 'Atîf:

"A man came before Sâdiq and said 'Show me God.' He said, 'But have you not heard that Moses was told (7.139), 'Thou shalt never see me?' He said, 'Yes, indeed; but this is the creed of Muhammad, that one man exclains “My heart sees my Lord,” another man raises a cry that, “I do not worship a lord whom I do not see,” Sâdiq said, ‘Tie him up and cast him into the Tigris’... (The man’s cries of help to Ja’far are left unheeded until, on the point of drowning, he cries “My God. Help! Help!”)...’ Sâdiq said ‘Pull him out.’ They did so, and left him for an hour till he regained his composure. Then Sâdiq said ‘Did you see al-Hâqq?’ He replied, ‘So long as I put my hand in other than God’s, I was behind a veil. When I took refuge in Him and was in desperate straits, a window was thrown open in my innermost heart. At that place where I was looking down, I saw Him Whom I was seeking. And when my desperation had passed away, He had passed away (27.63); “He is one to answer the man in desperation if he calls upon him.” Sâdiq said, ‘So long as you were saying Sâdiq (trustly) you were (kâdîh) false. Now you should preserve that window which reveals that the God of the world is down there.”

Once again one notes the elaboration of Kulañi's more historical account. While some of 'Atîf’s terminology is more poetically metaphorical—the “veil,”—than Ja'far may have used, the basic Sûfi principle of ma'rifah gâibihah is faithfully stated. Other lexical details, such as the use of al-Hâqâ, are also (doubtless by accident) historically faithful. Massignon suggests that it was from the tâfîr of Ja'far and the mystic circles of Kulañi that the term al-Hâqâq spread, through Dhu al-Nûn al-Misri and others, to become the classic name for God in tâsawwuf.

(iv) Continuing Guidance

Ja’far's thought, anticipating that of the Sûfis in the several areas which have been noted, also extended beyond the conventional dimensions of theology; God’s action in history, in the present, and in the hereafter. The intellectual, moral and spiritual concerns which we have discussed drew Ja'far to attempt a theosophical, metaphorical doctrine of God and man.


[54] Iblîs., p. 629.


remembering the definitions and stratification of prophecy.

Corbin points out that Ja'far's insistence upon the necessity of God's sending prophetic guidance is not exceeded even by the logical insistence upon this by Ibn Sīna and Bīrūnī. Man's innate human weakness allows no possibility of his arranging his affairs alone." Accordingly, Kulağlı attributed to Ja'far an eloquent justification for a continuing, cyclical prophetic guidance from God:

"It is settled, then, that men must have those who give orders and prohibitions in the name of God, the Ḥakīm and 'Alīn, and who are His interpreters ('mu'ābhirūn 'aḥlū); they are the anbiyā' and the choicest of His creation; they are the ḥukūmā' taught and sent forth by ḥikmah. They are not different from men in their creatureliness and bodily frame, but in men's normal conditions they are assisted by ḥikmat through Him Who is Ḥakīm and 'Alīn. This is a settled thing in each age and time through the signs and proofs (al-dalā'īl wa-l-barā'īn) brought to them by the rasūl and anbiyā', in order that God may not leave the earth bare of a Huṣayn with whom there is an 'alam to show the truth of his sayings and the lawfulness of his justice." 58

Only the evidence and proof of such a Ḥuṣayn will maintain the permanence of God's guidance of mankind, the validity of the metahistorical pact whereby God challenges man's estrangement from Himself: sūrah 7.171 "Am I not your Lord?"

The sense of man's exile and need for guidance is a poignant and intimate conviction in the rich tradition that grew from Ja'far. For it is only in exile from the human community that one can feel the full force of exile from God. Indeed, a man must become ghārib if he is to be guided. Nawbakhtī records Ja'far as saying:

"Ismā'īl in its beginning was a stranger and it will revert to being a stranger as it began. Paradise belongs to the strangers." 59

Corbin draws attention to the elaboration of this theme by Ja'far ibn Hayyān al-Ṣādiq:

"Indeed the summons of the Imām Ja'far does not tend towards a social religion. It is a summons to the spiritual exile, renouncing all established orders in this world in order to emigrate to the Imām of the Resurrection or towards the spiritual cult of Sūfīsm, which is one and the same thing for Shi'ī ṣūfīsm." 60

The constant prayer for God's guidance expressed in sūrah 1.5—iḥyā' al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm—is interpreted by Ja'far as urshāana tla malakhabātika. God's Love was the supreme aspiration of many Sūfīs, not so much a final goal as a permanent assurance. The continuing evidence and experience of God's Guidance and Love could illuminate the Sūfī's mind, empower his will, and satisfy his soul. Among the first in the Muslim tradition to apprehend this was Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.

57 Corbin: op. cit., p. 54.
58 Kulağlı: op. cit., p. 97.
59 Nawbakhtī: op. cit., p. 63.
60 Corbin: Combat Spirituel, p. 89.