

ON TWO ŠUFĪ TERMS: *QABḌ* AND *BAST* AL-BIŠṬĀMĪ'S ASCENSION AND HIS REFUTATION OF THE DELIGHTS OF PARADISE

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In the mid-ninth century Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, whose everlasting influence had always been enormous on the later development of the Šufī orders, once reached the dangerous point in his ecstasy to exclaim: *subḥānī, subḥānī, mā a'zama ša'nī*, that is “Glory be to me, glory be to me, how great is my state”, instead of glorifying God by saying *subḥān Allāh*¹. He was sincere and truthful, when he uttered these strange words, according to the alleged sayings of his contemporaries².

Since earlier he had made many similar exclamations, most of his followers left him after this event and common people were said to have regarded him as a madman³. A man whose dismal lot it was to be his companion during these years told that this was the period of al-Biṣṭāmī's *qabḍ*, ‘constriction’ or depression as one would call it nowadays, and that things would have been very different had he had the good fortune to be with him during his *bast*, his ‘extension’ or ‘elation’ in modern term⁴. R. C. Zaehner in his book on *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* comments on this report as follows: “The alteration of extreme elation and intense depression is known to psychology as a manic-depressive psychosis, and the fact that Abū Yazīd (i.e., al-Biṣṭāmī) was indeed considered by his contemporaries to be mad would indicate that he may very well have suffered from

¹ See al-Biṣṭāmī, *Maǧmū'a* 49. Or in another version of the story: *mā a'zama subḥānī*, Badawī 1978:186. He also declared answering a question that he was the well-kept table (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), *ibid.*, 123, al-Biṣṭāmī, *Maǧmū'a* 47. Zaehner regards it the characteristics of mania, the megalomania and takes it for a sign of the deceptive expansion against which al-Quṣayrī warned, i.e., *bast*, not *qabḍ*. See Zaehner 1994:117.

² See Badawī 1978:38 on the famous *subḥānī* exclamation and its place in Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī's spiritual way. See as-Sahlaǧī, *Nūr* 101 and 186. See also Badawī 1978: 28 ff., 35 no. 7.

³ as-Sahlaǧī (*Nūr*) quotes Ḍū n-Nūn al-Miṣrī saying: “My brother Abū Yazīd lost himself in the love of God and now he has started to seek it together with the seekers” (Badawī 1978: 95).

⁴ See as-Sahlaǧī, *Nūr* 133. Cf. Zaehner's remarks (1994:117-118).

this affliction”⁵. Zaehner saw *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* as the opposite poles of this maniac depressive psychosis⁶.

A well-known story from as-Sahlaḡī’s book⁷ also shows what was meant by being in the state of *qabḍ* for a long time. “Once a man came and knocked on Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī’s door. What are you looking for – asked him Abū Yazīd. I am looking for Abū Yazīd – answered the man. I myself have also been looking for Abū Yazīd since twenty years – said al-Biṣṭāmī.” This state is what al-Ġunayd, himself a sober Ṣūfī, tried to explain by saying that in *qabḍ* God obliterates the Ṣūfī’s existence⁸.

According to another story told by one of his students, who had been in the company of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī for thirteen years, he had woken Abū Yazīd up every morning for thirteen years, but the latter had not spoken a word during these years, only had sighed a little, and had put his head on his knees, then had lifted it again. “This had been caused by his having been in the state of *qabḍ* during all these years” – added the *faqīh* who handed over the report. Had he (i.e., Abū Yazīd) been in the state of *baṣṭ*, his companion would have heard from him what other people had heard”⁹.

The state of *qabḍ*, as related in these narratives, may have served as the starting point later on for both types of what was called *malāmatī* behaviour¹⁰. For the novice (*murīd*) *malāmatiyya* meant an extravagant way of conducting everyday life, inciting the blame (*malāma*) of ordinary people as the above story shows, while for a gnostic (*‘arīf*) it meant hiding one’s true devotion, speaking nothing about one’s friendly terms with God (*walāya*) as exemplified in the previous story by al-Biṣṭāmī’s thirteen years of silence¹¹.

⁵ Zaehner 1994:118. He also quotes al-Quṣayrī’s *Risāla* to support his opinion. See al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* 58-60.

⁶ Zaehner 1994:118, referring to al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla*. Others consider al-Biṣṭāmī’s behaviour and words as a sort of psychological “escape from the responsibilities of life”. See, e.g. az-Zayn 1988:9ff.

⁷ *an-Nūr min kalimāt Abī Ṭayfūr*. Also known as *Manāqib Abī Yazīd*. In: Badawī 1978.

⁸ See as-Sahlaḡī, *Nūr*. In: Badawī 1978:141. al-Biṣṭāmī says: “I have also been looking for him for twenty years.”

⁹ That is, ordinary speech. See as-Sahlaḡī, *Nūr* 178-179.

¹⁰ See as-Sulamī, *Malāmatiyya* and its French translation by Deladrière (1991). Cf. aš-Šiblī, 1982:544-553, cf. also Addas 1993:71. The chief antagonists of the *malāmatīs* were the so-called *ṣūfīs* in Nīšāpūr at that time who were in reality ascetes (*zuhhād*), begging and showing off their piety. Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī once said: “The gnostic is interested in what he may hope (i.e., his future) while the ascete is interested in what he may eat (i.e., begging)” (as-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt* 74). This is another sign that al-Biṣṭāmī’s behaviour was similar to that of the *malāmatīs*.

¹¹ See also Badawī 1978:157 for Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī’s other communication: “I was absent from God for thirty years”. In the earliest version of Abū Yazīd’s 30 years of contemplation he said. “I have worked in fighting (my soul)” (Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt* 70).

The famous Baghdadi Šūfī, al-Ġunayd explains the strange stories about al-Biṣṭāmī, and at the same time relieves him from the accusations¹²:

“The stories about Abū Yazīd differ widely, and those quoting what they heard from him are also of different kinds of people. All this may be explained by the fact that these people met him in different moments (of his spiritual life) and at different resting places specified for him.” Here he may have referred to the *qabd* – *baṣṭ* alternation.

“Therefore everyone rendered his words precisely” – however contradictory these reports may seem superficially – “and delivered what they had heard from the details of his exclamations suiting his relevant resting places. These words of Abū Yazīd are drawn from a sea uniquely made for him alone. Then (after hearing all these different stories) I saw how far the end of his state was. It was such a state that only a few could understand his words about it or could give expression of them” – i.e., give back the exact wording of his exclamations – “when they had heard them. No one can give back such words who is not able to comprehend their meaning. If the hearer himself is not in this special disposition (*hay’a*), he refuses everything what he hears from Abū Yazīd¹³. al-Huġwūrī also shows understanding towards the extremism of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, saying: “He is the greatest of the Shaykhs in state and dignity, so that al-Ġunayd said: “Abū Yazīd holds the same rank among us as Gabriel among the angels”¹⁴.

Without these introductory remarks it cannot be understood why al-Ġunayd, considered by his contemporaries and the succeeding generations as a sober mystic, could accept and speak highly of such an extremely eccentric Šūfī like Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī. The explanation is that he regarded and valued Abū Yazīd’s words and the stories about him in the light of his momentary spiritual dispositions, even allowing for a long duration of these alternating states which he calls ‘resting places’ because of their temporal length. But he warns, at the same time, that these exclamations and peculiar behaviour were only allowed to

¹² as-Sarrāġ, *Luma*^c 459ff: in the “Chapter on the ecstatic words (*ṣaḥīyyāt*), related from Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī and explained partly by al-Ġunayd”.

¹³ See as-Sarrāġ, *Luma*^c, ed. Nicholson, 381. Cf. Zaehner 1961:114, and fn. 2 there. He omits from his translation a key word, *hay’a*. Badawī (1978:39) also mentions al-Ġunayd defending Abū Yazīd.

¹⁴ Nicholson 1911:106. al-Huġwūrī did not believe the stories about Abū Yazīd having said the above mentioned extreme exclamations and wrote: “He was a lover of theology and a venerator of the sacred law, notwithstanding the spurious doctrine which has been foisted on him by some persons with the object of supporting their own heresies”. Comparing these contradictory views one should think that they only serve to affirm the theory of his “alterating states” proposed by Zaehner. A similar view is expressed by some modern Arab defenders of al-Biṣṭāmī, see e.g. Maḥmūd 1985:59ff.

Abū Yazīd, because he is unique in having a special sea of spiritual knowledge created by God exclusively for him.

At this point the question of madness, supposed or pretended, has to be faced. Since in my view this special state of the soul or heart, or way of conducting life called *qabḍ* contrasted with *bast*, is also a spiritually highly esteemed state, it cannot be simply identified with the notion of ‘manic-depression’ of modern psychiatry – although al-Bisṭāmī may have been a madman or maniac independently of the problem of characterisation of these two Ṣūfī states. However, simply on the basis of this *qabḍ* hypothesis he cannot be called mad. As for his pretending madness, it is completely out of question. Though the way he conducted his life might easily have been mistaken for madness. In this respect I would like to mention a story from as-Sahlaḡī’s *Nūr*, the final source of what allegedly are al-Bisṭāmī’s own words. It runs as follows¹⁵:

“A man from the people of Bisṭām who had always been present at his master’s (i.e., al-Bisṭāmī’s) sessions, never being late or leaving them before the end, once told al-Bisṭāmī: ‘Oh Master, I had been fasting in the last thirty years at daytime and had not been sleeping at night. I had suppressed all my desires and I believe in everything you have said, still I could not reach the knowledge you had been speaking about. Why?’ al-Bisṭāmī responded: ‘Had you been fasting for 300 years and spending the night awake you would have not found a grain of this knowledge.’ ‘Why, Master?’ ‘Since you are veiled by yourself.’ ‘Is there a medicine for it?’ – asked the man. ‘Yes – answered al-Bisṭāmī – but you will not accept and will not do what I suggest.’ ‘O yes, I will accept everything you say.’ al-Bisṭāmī then gave him his medicine, saying: ‘Go immediately and shave your head and beard, take off these elegant clothes and put on a simple cloak. Then hang on your neck a copper dish, full of nuts. Go out to the street, call all the boys around you and tell them: Boys, I give a nut every one of you who hits me on the face. Afterwards go in this state to your market place where everybody knows you and reveres you.’

‘O Abū Yazīd, do you really want all this from me? – asked the man – Show me any other way and I will follow it.’ ‘There is no other way – said al-Bisṭāmī – You have to start with dropping your rank and breaking your haughty self. Then, and only then I will show you what is good for you. But (it seems to me that) I cannot do that. I told you that you would not do (what I prescribed to you).’ This story may shed light on the real meaning and significance of this behaviour in the purification of the heart connected with the *qabḍ* state which appeared and still appears for many as pure madness.

¹⁵ See the story in full details in Badawī 1978:112-113.

Now the question arises how to interpret these narratives in the light of al-Biṣṭāmī's Ascension (*mi'rāğ*) story? He seems to refuse when in this state both the worldly and the heavenly pleasures. The complete *zuhd* means for him the renunciation of everything that prevents reaching his goal, the intimate proximity of the Almighty God. He considers even the Paradise as a veil because 'it is other than Him'¹⁶.

According to later reports al-Biṣṭāmī claimed that he had ascended to the seven Heavens, i.e., he had made the *mi'rāğ* on the model of the Prophet Muḥammad's *mi'rāğ*¹⁷. The most detailed and celebrated description of this event is given by the 12th century Persian Šufī author, Farīd ad-dīn 'Aṭṭār in his *Tadkiratu l-awliyā*'¹⁸. Since the hypothesis mentioned above about the nature of these two states is widely accepted it seems desirable to examine, if only shortly, the oldest description of al-Biṣṭāmī's so called heavenly journey or *mi'rāğ*, in which we can find possibly the first mention of *qabḍ*. There is a relatively early Arabic account, dated from the beginning of the 11th century, a chapter in the book *al-Qaṣd ilā Allāh*, written by an anonymous author, which is titled *Bāb fī ru'ya Abī Yazīd fī l-qaṣd ilā Allāh ta'ālā wa-bayān qiṣṣatihi*, "On the Vision of Abū Yazīd in his Quest for God, and the Explanation of his Story". It should be noted that in this version the *mi'rāğ* is described as a dream (*manām*)¹⁹. In this we are told that at the first Heaven (*as-samā' ad-dunyā*) God spread before him the carpet of His gifts (*baṣaṭa lī bisāṭ al-hadāyā*) – said Abū Yazīd, but he refused to accept it. The relevant part of the text runs as follows:

"It is related that the servant of al-Biṣṭāmī said that he had heard Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī say: I dreamed that I ascended to the Heavens in quest of God, seeking to be united with God, who is glorious and exalted, on the terms that I should abide with Him forever; and I was put on a trial which the heavens and the earth and they that inhabit them would not withstand, for He was spreading before me the carpet of His gifts, one kind after another, and offered to me the kingdom of

¹⁶ See Biṣṭāmī, *Mağmū'a* 47: *al-ğannatu hiya l-ḥiğābu l-akbaru li-anna ahla l-ğannati sakanū ilā l-ğannati wa-kullu man sakana ilā l-ğannati sakana ilā siwāhu*.

¹⁷ For a comparison between the Prophet's heavenly journey and the Šufī ascension see ar-Rifā'ī 1993: especially 217-278.

¹⁸ Parts of this work, among them those about Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī's ascension have been translated by Arberry 1966:105-110. Ernst (1994:167-169) summarizes Rūzbihān Baqlī's version of al-Biṣṭāmī's vision which differs largely from the others.

¹⁹ The oldest extant version of al-Biṣṭāmī's heavenly journey is found in a manuscript in Hyderabad which bears the title *al-Qaṣd ilā Allāh* and is attributed in the MS to al-Ġunayd. This chapter was published as an additional chapter in al-Quṣayrī's *Mi'rāğ* and the editor, refusing the above mentioned authorship, attributes it to al-Quṣayrī, on the basis of Nicholson's research, who also published this short chapter in 1926:402ff. al-Quṣayrī, *Mi'rāğ* 129-135, Chapter Nine: *Bāb fī ru'ya Abī Yazīd fī l-qaṣd ilā Allāh ta'ālā wa-bayān qiṣṣatihi*, 129: *innī ra'aytu fī l-manām*.

each Heaven, but during this I was averting my eyes from them, because I knew that he was testing me therewith, and in reverence for the holiness of my Lord I paid no attention to them, saying all the while: ‘O my Beloved, what I desire is other than what You offer me’²⁰.

Now we should remember that all this happened at a time when al-Bisṭāmī, according to his companion’s testimony, was in the state of depression, *qabḍ*²¹. These Ṣūfī states and their psychological realities cannot, however, so easily be inserted into a rigid, preconceived and static system. It has to be taken into serious consideration that Mediaeval mystics did not comprehend the nature, significance and meaning of the world in a way as other, sober men would do and did not as well share their aims in the world. In the above story, when al-Bisṭāmī declined to accept what God presented to him, this offer is expressed by the verb *basaṭa* (spread) which is the origin of the technical term *baṣṭ* (extension), the state or station of the greatest rejoice. He refused the divine presents, which anyhow were offered for him only as a trial, since his goal lies in reaching God and remaining with him forever²². To achieve (or to hope to achieve) this end one should, according to the descriptions, remain extendedly in the state of contraction, i.e., *qabḍ*, later on considered a sad, sorrowful state²³.

al-Qaṣd ilā Allāh says²⁴ that the quest of God requires the *qabḍ* state the external features of which are in reality *at-taḡrīd* (*min ʿalāʾiq ad-dunyā*), depriving one’s self or soul from everything that is not God or does not belong to God, and *al-infirād* (*ilā Allāh*), turning exclusively towards God. Originally there may have been a strict bond between the states expressing similar notions, *qabḍ* and *taḡrīd* on one side, and *baṣṭ* and *infirād* on the other, since every Ṣūfī notion has, generally speaking, two sides, showing us how to handle the affairs of this world for the sake of our bliss and then concentrating on the proper behaviour in connection with the Beloved, God²⁵.

The tragic contradiction in trying to attain this goal, and also in the state of *qabḍ*, lies in its paradoxical impossibility which becomes clear at the end of the

²⁰ al-Quṣayrī, *Miʾrāḡ* 129-135, Chapter Nine: *Bāb fī ruʾyā Abī Yazīd fī l-qaṣd ilā Allāh taʿālā wa-bayān qiṣṣatihi*. Offering and refusal in the first Heaven p. 129.

²¹ Cf., e.g., Badawī 1978:178-179 and many other places.

²² “A certain Aḥmad b. Ḥaḍrawayhi once said: “Once I saw in my dream the Lord of Power who said to me ‘Oh, Aḥmad, everyone requests from me something except for Abū Yazīd, since he requests me’.” (Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt* 401.10-11.)

²³ Cf. Schimmel 1975:129, quoting ʿAṭṭār’s *Muṣībatnāme* 42: “constraint means the compression of the soul to make one’s home in a needle’s eye” – darkness, the oppressing desert of loneliness in which the mystic spends days and sometime months of his life. In the 13th century, as-Suhrawardī defined *qabḍ* as the “sadness of soul” (*ḥuzn an-naḥs*), cf. as-Suhrawardī, *Maqāmāt* 73.

²⁴ al-Quṣayrī, *Miʾrāḡ* 131 in describing his arrival to the Lowest Heaven.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *taḡrīdī ʿamman siwāhu*.

story: after achieving his goal, and reaching the Divine Throne and “melting as lead melts” (*kuntu adūbu ʿinda dālika kamā yadūbu r-raṣās*)²⁶ from God’s words. He has to go back to the Earth with a mission to fulfil: to give the salutation of the Prophet Muḥammad’s Spirit (*rūḥ*) to his people. However, the Prophet fortifies him, expressing his estimation towards him²⁷. This is the ‘returning’ (*ruḡūʿ*), the obligatory last state of the Şūfī way for those who want to be masters²⁸. It means that although he had reached the peak of his journey, attaining his goal, he could not realise his desire to remain with God forever. His *fanāʾ* (annihilation) is completed (although the word itself is not used here), since he is invited to sit on the carpet of God’s Sanctity. At that point, he may well have been described as in the state of rejoice, but then the return means again constriction, tension after relaxation (*aš-šidda baʿda l-faraḡ*). Dū n-Nūn al-Miṣrī said in relation with this: “The bird flew off to its nest and then returned to the cage”²⁹. al-Ġunayd was once asked by a man: “Which of his times does the lover (of God) feel sorry for?” And he answered: “For the time of *baṣṭ* which gives way to *qabḍ* and for the time of *uns* (intimacy) which gives way to *waḥṣa* (desolation)”³⁰.

But the ‘returning’ is at least as important and necessary in the mystic voyage as the ascension itself. The distraction stemming from it, however, is not simply the depression of the unfulfilled aim – it is a state elevated by God’s words (‘you are my chosen one’)³¹, which is required by further similar journeys to God, but from now on they will be taken in the heart. Thus we can see that though the mystical states have psychological relevance, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the mystical and the psychic sides as stated by modern psychology.

Now interestingly enough, *qabḍ* plays a role similar to that of al-Biṣṭāmī’s heavenly journey in one of the initiation stories of the Uwaysī path of Şūfism, as presented by Julian Baldick³². We are informed that a certain al-Ḥaraqānī,

²⁶ al-Quṣayrī, *Miʿrāḡ* 134: “It happened after God had known the truthfulness of my will to reach Him.”

²⁷ Ibid.: “The Prophet said: ‘God has really preferred you to many people’ (to his many creatures)”.

²⁸ See, for example, Ibn ʿAḡība, *Futūḥāt* translated by Munawwarah & al-Ustadh 1998:77: “The people depart and travel to the presence of the Real. In it they depend upon a guide who has inner sight of the travel and of the speech, who has travelled the path and returned to brief the people about what he has gained.”

²⁹ ʿAyn al-Qudāt, *Šakwā* (Arabic text) 54-55, (French translation) 241, (Arberry 1969:56-57) quotes Dū n-Nūn al-Miṣrī’s simile about the Şūfī way.

³⁰ Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt* 129.5-6.

³¹ al-Quṣayrī, *Miʿrāḡ* 134: *anta ḥayratī min ḥalqī*.

³² *The History of the Uwaysis*, by Ahmad of Uzgen, around 1600. It is a collection of biographies almost always of people that never existed, that played a major role in the sect’s development.

who according to the story, happened to be one of al-Biṣṭāmī's followers, was distinguished by a special state: sadness. The Persian word for sadness (*anduh*) is doubled with the Arabic *qabḍ* here. al-Ḥaraqānī's contraction is contrasted in the report with the 'expansion' (*baṣṭ*) of a Ṣūfī contemporary. al-Ḥaraqānī explains that his own special road to God is that of sadness, granted to him in reply to a request for a road on which others would not be able to join him. But he tells others to weep much and laugh little, and speaks of an elite of young manly ones, whose sadness (*qabḍ*) cannot be contained by this world and the next put together³³. Although this story – originating from the 16-17th century – is much later than that of al-Biṣṭāmī's, it seems to have conserved an early shade of meaning of the term *qabḍ*. Eventually al-Ḥaraqānī received his initiation into the Uwaysī order at the tomb of al-Biṣṭāmī³⁴.

On the basis of the above stories the first meaning of the Ṣūfī term *qabḍ* may have been 'the special concentration of the soul/heart needed to achieve the goal of reaching God (*al-qaṣḍ ilā Allāh*), in contrast with the relaxed, detached state of the heart, which tries to reach the more conventional aims of a true believer. The *qabḍ* /*baṣṭ* relation may have been originally parallel to that of the conventional love and *ʿudrite* or Platonic love.

The usage of these two words had quite early been supported by meanings received from a special interpretation of a Qur'ānic *āya* (2/245): *Allāhu yaqbiḍu wa-yabsuṭu*, "God straitens and is bountiful"³⁵. The orthodox interpretation from aṭ-Ṭabarī on had always been that "God is the provider of the *rizq*, sustenance, livelihood, and he gives little or much, makes one poor or enriches the other, as he wishes"³⁶.

The Ṣūfīs, naturally, gave this verse a spiritual meaning or at least a secondary Ṣūfī interpretation³⁷. The first extant Ṣūfī commentary, as-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq at-tafsīr* at the end of the 10th century, gives the following exegesis, attributed to Ibn ʿAṭā'³⁸: *yaqbiḍuka ʿanka wa-yabsuṭuka bihi wa-lahu*, i.e. "God restrains you

³³ See Baldick 1993:23-24.

³⁴ Id., 24. To reach illumination or inspiration to the knowledge of the divine world is a common phenomenon in Ṣūfism. See, e.g., Ibn ʿArabī's account on his illumination in the cemetery of Murcia when he was 17. In: Addas 1993:72-73. What is extraordinary in the case of Uwaysis is that they received or imagined to receive this initiation exclusively from dead saints as a body. For a picture of his tomb, see the colour plates, Plate No VIII.

³⁵ Alan Jones' translation (2007:57). For another translation, see Marmaduke Pickthall's (n.d.:49): "Allah straiteneth and enlargeth".

³⁶ aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* II, 351-352 on Q 2/245.

³⁷ On the Ṣūfī commentaries in general see Sands 2006:especially on pp. 67-78. See also ad-Ḍahabī 1995: II, 365-450.

³⁸ Abū l-ʿAbbās Ibn ʿAṭā', one of the first Ṣūfī Qur'ān commentators of the 9th-10th centuries, died in 922. His commentary was preserved partly in as-Sulamī's commentary.

from yourself and then makes you happy by himself and for himself”. Then, referring to al-Wāsiṭī³⁹, he adds: *yaqbiḍuka ‘ammā laka wa-yabsuṭuka fīmā lahu*, i.e. “He refrains you from which you have and makes you happy by what He has”. And citing a certain Baghdadi, as-Sulamī adds: *yaqbiḍu ay yūḥišu ahl ṣafwatihī min ru’yat al-karāmāt wa-yabsuṭuhum bi-n-naẓarāt ilā l-karīm*, i.e. “He refrains, i.e., alienates his chosen people from the divine miracles or favours and makes them happy by allowing to them to look at the most favourable, the miracle maker (i.e., God)”. Its aim is surely to purify the Šufī movement⁴⁰. Later Rūzbihān Baqlī at the end of the 12th century in his Šufī Qur’ān commentary, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* repeats it *verbatim*, adding the commentary of al-Wāsiṭī⁴¹.

Meanwhile, in the 11th century, al-Quṣayrī explains this *āya* in his *Laṭā’if al-iṣārāt* first in the traditional way as provision and almsgiving or, on the contrary, restraining them. Then he gives a Šufī interpretation as follows: “It is said that God grasps the hearts with his turning away (from them), inciting fear; and extends the hearts with his turning towards them, arousing hope. *Qabḍ* serves the heart’s subjugation, it is for (keeping) his secret, it is for those, who want (i.e., to reach God), while *basṭ* is for his piety, for the exposure of the secret, for those who are wanted (by God).” al-Quṣayrī also repeats Ibn ‘Aṭā’s commentary. And finally he says: “*qabḍ* is his right (i.e., your duty towards Him), while *basṭ* is your fortune (from Him)”⁴². At the end he gives eleven slightly differing commentaries, without quoting his sources, saying only: ‘it is said’⁴³.

The meaning of Q 2/245 is further supported by Q 29/62: “*Allāhu yabsuṭu r-rizqa li-man yašā’u min ‘ibādihi wa-yaqdiru lahu*”. Traditionally interpreted it can be translated as “God makes generous provision for those of His servants whom He wishes or measures carefully for them”⁴⁴. It is then on the basis of this verse that Q 2/245 is also interpreted as “God, the provision maker”.

The Šufī commentator, al-Quṣayrī⁴⁵ says that the provision is of two kinds, provision of the apparent things and provision of the hearts and secrets (*sarā’ir*).

³⁹ Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī, died after 932. His sayings and commentaries are scattered in later Šufī compendia. See Schimmel1975:78.

⁴⁰ Richard Gramlich translates this commentary as follows (1995:134): “2.245. *Gott packt und lässt los. Oder: Gott macht eng und macht weit. Gott packt dich von dir weg und lässt dich los durch sich und für sich. Oder: Er macht dich dir gegenüber eng und durch sich und für sich weit.*”

⁴¹ Ruzbihān Baqlī, *‘Arā’is I*, 49: *yaqbiḍuka ‘ammā laka wa-yabsuṭu fīmā ‘alayhi*.

⁴² al-Quṣayrī, *Laṭā’if I*, 190-191.

⁴³ al-Quṣayrī, *Laṭā’if I*, 190. One of the most interesting comments says that *qabḍ* is for the novices (those who want God), while *basṭ* is for the masters (those wanted by God). This opinion may have derived from al-Ġunayd.

⁴⁴ In Alan Jones’ translation (2007:368). In Pickthall’s translation (n.d.:528): “Allah maketh the provision wide for whom He will of His bondmen, and straiteneth for whom (He will)”.

⁴⁵ al-Quṣayrī, *Laṭā’if II*, 104-105.

Thus this verse is meant to support the fundamental source for the mystic meaning of *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ*.

As we have seen in the commentaries, the meanings of the two words had changed during the century between al-Biṣṭāmī and as-Sulamī then al-Quṣayrī, and *baṣṭ*, meaning hope, became the positive, while *qabḍ*, fear, the negative side: God gives and holds back⁴⁶. It is interesting to compare the Ṣūfī commentaries (where the two terms are still uncertain and undefined as to their place in relation to other Ṣūfī notions) with what al-Quṣayrī has to say about *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* in his great *oeuvre*, the *Epistle on Ṣūfism*⁴⁷. Here the two terms are inserted into the hierarchy of other Ṣūfī concepts, *qabḍ*, a state of the gnostic (*‘arīf*) being superior to fear (*ḥawf*), since the latter always refers to the future (fear from the disappearance of the beloved, or from some unknown danger, or from Hell) and so it is the state of the beginner (*musta‘nif*). Similarly, *baṣṭ* is superior to hope (*raġā‘*), since the latter refers to the future: meeting the beloved, or passing from danger and trouble⁴⁸.

There are, however, some interesting, hostile features of al-Quṣayrī’s attitude to the terms examined here. First, they are not listed with the other Ṣūfī states and stations but are put in a chapter on mixed terms called “the words they use”. Second, it is noted that they are among the most dangerous states, from which one must seek protection (*isti‘āda*). Finally, *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* may have originally been the most elevated states of their kind, just before annihilation, here they are capped with two even more exalted, but much milder states: *hayba* (reverence) and *uns* (intimacy)⁴⁹. The sole reason for that seems to be to lessen the significance of the two dangerous modes of behaviour.

This latent hostility is explained by Zaehner with the fact that al-Quṣayrī had a personal grudge against one of the most enthusiastic followers of al-Biṣṭāmī in his age, Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī l-Ḥayr, a Ṣūfī extremist, and he had chosen the latter’s personal traits when he described these states⁵⁰. In my view, however,

⁴⁶ It is the Moroccan Ṣūfī Ibn ‘Aġība at the end of the 18th century who sums up the relation between the two terms: “For the Ṣūfīs the constriction and the spreading are two states which follow each other like night and day” (*al-qabḍ wal-baṣṭ ‘inda ahl at-taṣawwuf ḥālatāni tata‘āqabāni ta‘āquba l-layli wa-n-nahāri*), Ibn ‘Aġība, *Baḥr* I, 272.

⁴⁷ See al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* 51ff.

⁴⁸ al-Quṣayrī, *ar-Risāla* (ed. Zirrīq) 58-59. See also with the commentary of al-Anṣārī 68-69, where the chapter is called somewhat differently: *Bāb fī tafsīr alfāz tadūru bayna ḥādihi ṭ-ṭā‘ifa wa-bayān mā yuškilu minhā*.

⁴⁹ See al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* (ed. Zirrīq) 60-61. See also the commentary of al-Anṣārī, 69-70.

⁵⁰ Zaehner 1994:118: “When Qushayrī describes *baṣṭ* and its evil effects, then we may be sure that he had Abū Sa‘īd in mind”.

al-Quṣayrī's hostility is rather connected with the negative judgement of al-Biṣṭāmī in his age and with the possible Šī'ite origin of the *qabḍ/baṣṭ* terms⁵¹.

°Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamaḍānī (d. 1131) in his *Complaints (Šakwā l-ḡarīb)*⁵², written in the prison, protested against the accusation that his doctrines would be of Šī'ite origin⁵³. Defending his extraordinary usage of Arabic words he says that every science has its special terms and the Šūfī's terms are *fanā'*, *baqā'*, *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ*⁵⁴. He characterises the latter two terms in question in the following way: *baṣṭ*, 'expansion', is a state, in which the mystic, united with God, is not freed, detached from the external world; while *qabḍ*, 'contraction', is a state, in which the union with God removes, frees the mystic from the external world. This sense of freedom from every worldly bond may also have played part in judging *qabḍ*, and also its pair, *baṣṭ*, to be dangerous notions⁵⁵.

Although, as I have pointed out, in the early centuries hardly any of the important Šūfī sources mention *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ*, later on they were put into almost every Šūfī manual or book on the rules of conduct for the novices (*ādāb al-murīdīn*)⁵⁶.

The cause of this change of attitude is possibly to be sought in the fact that the arguably most influential moderate mystical thinker, who is considered in every order as one of the spiritual fathers, the 9th century al-Ḡunayd of Baghdad spoke positively of the two terms. It is not so surprising if one takes into consideration that it was also he who defended al-Biṣṭāmī against critics interpreting his words and deeds in a dispassionate way⁵⁷. There is, however, another pecu-

⁵¹ On Šī'ite influence in Sūfism, see aš-Šiblī 1982.

⁵² °Ayn al-Qudāt, *Šakwā*. Cf. also its translation by Arberry (1969).

⁵³ °Ayn al-Qudāt, *Šakwā* 35-36, Arberry 1969:34: He says that he who has no Shaikh is without religion, but he protests against the accusation of spreading Ismā'īlīte doctrine by this saying that the Shaikh cannot be identified with their infallible imam.

⁵⁴ On the accusation of using strange words, see Arberry 1969:34. The special terms of Šūfīs are defended on p. 41f.

⁵⁵ °Ayn al-Qudāt, *Šakwā* (287-288, 292) sums up the author's opinion in connection with the above mentioned Šūfī terms in the following way: "*al-baṣṭ*: l'expansion; état où tout en étant uni à Dieu, on n'est pas "abstrait" du monde extérieur; *al-qabḍ*: la contraction: état où l'union avec Dieu "abstrait" l'homme du monde extérieur; *at-tafriqa*: la séparation; *al-ḡam'*: la réunion par opposition à *at-tafriqa*; *al-ḡam'* consiste à penser au Réel en faisant abstraction de tout ce qui n'est pas Lui; *at-tafriqa*, c'est penser à ce qui n'est pas le Réel, à la création, qui n'a de réalité que par la toute-puissance du Réel et non en soi." Cf. as-Sarrāḡ, *Luma'* 343, Huḡwīrī, *Kaṣf* 374, al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* 35, Q 2/245)

⁵⁶ See for an early example the al-Harkūšī, *Tahḍīb* (382-383): "*dīkr al-qabḍ wa-l-baṣṭ*". He first quotes the above mentioned Abū Sa'īd's definition.

⁵⁷ Cf. Zaehner (1994:118) writes: "When Abū Yazīd vented himself of these strange ejaculations, Junayd maintains, he was speaking in ecstasy and his words were not to be understood literally".

liarity of his handling of these and two other terms: *gamc*, ‘joining together, unification’ and *tafriqa* or *farq* ‘separation, partition’. He did not use them as terms in the nominal forms but only as verbs. He writes in *The Book of Differentiating sincerity and truthfulness (al-Farq bayna l-iḥlāṣ wa-ṣ-ṣidq)*⁵⁸:

“Fear distresses me, Hope comforts me, Reality unites me with God and God’s right⁵⁹ separates me from God. When God distresses me with fear, he obliterates my existence and takes care of me (so that I need not take care of myself). When he comforts me with hope, he returns my existence to me after my absence and commands me to take care of myself. When he unites me with Him through the real (vision of God) He causes me to be present before Him and invites me”⁶⁰.

al-Ġunayd does not use here the terms *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* as the distinct, higher grades of fear and hope – ‘as contraction surpasses fear and spreading surpasses hope, i.e. in its strength’ adds al-Anṣārī⁶¹ – but instead, he combines the four terms, using the verbal forms – *qabaḍa* with fear and *basaṭa* with hope – in accordance with the Qur’ānic text. This usage seems to have preceded their later nominal terms⁶².

“When I am before God I savour the taste of my existence – would that God obliterate my existence and cause me to enjoy His vision, or that He would make absent from myself and give me respite from that which is due to Him as formal ritual. Would that God show me complete *fanā*’ (annihilation), in which there is eternal life for me”⁶³. al-Ḥarkūšī finishes his chapter on *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ*

⁵⁸ “*al-ḥawf yaqbiḍunī wa-r-raġā’ yabsuṭunī wa-l-ḥaqīqa taġma’anī wa-l-ḥaqqu yufarriqunī fa-īdā qabadanī bi-l-ḥawf afnānī ‘annī bi-wuġūdī fa-ṣānanī ‘annī wa-īdā basaṭanī bi-r-raġā’ raddanī ‘alayya bi-faḍlī fa-amaranī bi-ḥifẓī wa- idā ġama’anī bi-l-ḥaqīqa aḥḍaranī wa-da’anī*” al-Ġunayd, *Aḥmāl* 256-269, esp. 263 in the sixth fragment. See also in Abdel-Kader 1976:53, English translation 173-174.

⁵⁹ It may mean the Muslim ritual, *‘ibāda*, according to the 18th century Moroccan Ṣūfī, Ibn ‘Aġība. See Ibn ‘Aġība, *Baḥr* I, 271-272 on Q 2/245, esp. p. 272. He qualifies *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* as ‘prescribed behaviour’. In the state of ‘compression’ the suitable behaviour is to wait for the relaxation from the Beneficent and Forgiving (God).

⁶⁰ Within the chapter “*Muṣṭalahāt aṣ-ṣūfiyya*” 4. *al-qabḍ wal-baṣṭ*, al-Quṣayrī also quotes al-Ġunayd’s above saying /*Risāla* (ed. Rizzīq) 59-60/. The same text is translated from *ar-Risāla al-quṣayriyya* by Sells (1996:107): “Fear of God grips me. Hope unfolds me. Reality draws me together. The real sets me apart: When he seizes me with fear, he annihilates me from myself. When he unfolds me with hope, he returns me to myself. When he recollects me in reality, he makes me present”.

⁶¹ Cf. al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* (with al-Anṣārī’s commentary) 69.

⁶² For instance, the Qur’ān uses *ġāhada*, instead of *ġihād* and *hāġara* instead of *hiġra*.

⁶³ Quoted by al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* 59-60. Also quoted *verbatim* much earlier by al-Ḥarkūšī, *Tahḍīb* 383.

with the following summary: “Fāris b. ‘Īsā said: ‘First *qabḍ*, then *bast*, then neither *qabḍ*, nor *bast*, and it is the place of stillness”⁶⁴.

al-Ġunayd makes apparent in these definitions what one can observe covertly from the stories and some of other definitions, too, quoted above – that is, the dynamic nature of these two terms and also the dynamism of the two other, strongly related terms, *ḡamʿ* and *tafriqa*. In reality they are not states but, at least in the case of al-Biṣṭāmī, ways of behaviour and conducting life.

Ruzbihān Baqlī speaks about the two polar states *qabḍ* and *bast* in the following way: “These are two noble states for gnostics. He [God] gives them constriction with the wrath of unity, the veils of authority, the accumulated lights of greatness, and the mounting of magnificence in their hearts, so that they are removed from the qualities of humanity. When He gives them expansiveness, with the beauty and loveliness of the Attributes and the delights of speech (with Him), He gives them intoxication and purification with the state of ecstasy, so that they dance and listen to music, speaking and giving. The principle of constriction is the annihilation of conscience in eternity, while the principle of expansiveness is the subsistence of conscience in the witnessing of post-eternity”⁶⁵.

al-Biṣṭāmī is also credited with saying that a true gnostic would come back even from Paradise if he could not see there his Lord, just as the people of Hell strive to come out of Hell⁶⁶. He also said that “true Paradise does not have significance for the people of love, since the people of love are veiled by their love”⁶⁷. It is also related that Abū Yazīd had said: “Paradise hath no value in the eyes of lovers, and lovers are veiled (from God) by their love”⁶⁸. His ideal is reflected also in another saying of his: “There are two Paradises – the Paradise of (God’s) graces and the Paradise of (God’s) knowledge. The Paradise of knowledge is eternal, while the Paradise of graces is temporary”⁶⁹.

Finally, to complement al-Biṣṭāmī’s refusal of the delights of Paradise and his search for the Divine knowledge and love, I would like to quote a comment

⁶⁴ See al-Ḥarkūṣī, *Tahqīb* 383.

⁶⁵ Rūzbihān Baqlī, *Šaḥīyyāt* 551. For the English translation, see Ernst 1996:32-33. He also speaks about the ecstatic experience of lovers (Corbin 1991:223-228).

⁶⁶ Badawī 1978:141: *inna lillāhi ḥawāṣṣa min ‘ibādihi law ḥaḡabahum fī l-ḡanna ‘an ru’yatihi sā‘atan istaḡāṭū bi-l-ḥurūḡ min al-ḡanna kamā yastaḡīṭu ahlu n-nār bi-l-ḥurūḡ min an-nār*. See also Badawī’s remarks in the introductory part of the *Šaḥāḥāt* (Badawī 1978:34 no. 19).

⁶⁷ as-Sulamī (*Ṭabaqāt* 70) quoting al-Biṣṭāmī’s words: “*al-ḡannatu lā ḥaṭara lahā ‘inda ahl al-maḥabbati wa-ahlu l-maḥabbati maḡḡūbūn bi-maḥabbatihim*”.

⁶⁸ See Nicholson 1911:107.

⁶⁹ Badawī 1978:114: *ḡannat an-na‘īm wa-ḡannat al-ma‘rifa*. Cf. *ibid.*, 109: “God has devotees who, had the Paradise appeared to them with all its ornaments, they would have cried loudly (from its appearance), just as the people of the Hell cry loudly from (the appearance of) the Hell”.

from Ġalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī from his *Fīhi mā fīhi* on the inhabitants of Hell. He says that they will be happier than they were on the Earth, since while they were on the Earth they were not aware of God. But in Hell they will know God and nothing can be sweeter than the knowledge of God⁷⁰.

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⁷⁰ Arberry 1993:105. Rūmī here refers to an unnamed wise man.

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Plate VIII

al-Bisṭāmī's tomb, Bastam, near Shahrud, Iran, 2011.
Photograph by courtesy of Miklós Sárközy.