IBN AL-ʿARABĪ AND ABŪ YAZĪD AL-BISṬĀMĪ

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BINYAMIN ABRAHAMOV

Bar-Ilan University

Many Sufis appear in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, a treatise in which the author puts forward his principal ideas. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī is mentioned in this work 143 times, more than any other Sufi. The present article seeks to examine Ibn al-ʿArabī's attitude toward his Sufi predecessor by considering al-Bisṭāmi's personality as it appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī, as well as Ibn al-ʿArabī's views on al-Bisṭāmī's Sufi practice, his presence as a model of moral conduct and his mystical philosophical notions. Ibn al-ʿArabī does not accept all the notions and statements expressed by al-Bisṭāmī. Sometimes he mitigates al-Bisṭāmi's daring assertions and thus reveals his unfavorable attitude toward *shaṭaḥāt*. However, in some cases al-Bisṭāmī's statements serve as corroboration for Ibn al-ʿArabī's theses.

Aparecen muchos sufíes en la obra de Ibn al-ʿArabī *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, un tratado en el que el autor presenta sus ideas principales. En esta obra se menciona a Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmi un total de 143 veces, más que a cualquier otro sufí. Este artículo tiene el propósito de examinar la actitud de Ibn al-ʿArabī hacia su predecesor sufí considerando la personalidad de al-Bisṭāmī tal y como aparece en la obra de Ibn al-ʿArabī, además de analizar las ideas de Ibn al-ʿArabī sobre las prácticas *al-Futūḥāt* sufíes de al-Bisṭāmī, su presencia como modelo de conducta moral y sus ideas filosóficas místicas. Ibn al-ʿArabī no acepta todas las ideas y declaraciones de al-Bisṭāmi. A veces suaviza sus afirmaciones más atrevidas y de esta manera revela su actitud negativa hacia *šaṭaḥāt*. Sin embargo, en algunos casos Ibn al-ʿArabī se sirve de las afirmaciones de al-Bisṭāmi para corroborar sus tesis.

Key words: Ibn al-ʿArabī; Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī; *Zuhd*; *Waraʿ*; *Maqām*; *Manzil*; *Shaṭḥ*; *Maʿrifa*; *Karāmāt*; *ʾIrāda*.

Palabras clave: Ibn al-ʿArabī; Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī; *zuhd*; *waraʿ*; *maqām*; *manzil*; *šaṭḥ*; *maʿrifa*; *karāmāt*; *ʾirāda*.

I

There is no doubt that al-Shaykh al-Akbar, the greatest mystic of Islam and one of the most prominent mystics of all world religions, developed an original mystical philosophy unprecedented in its thoroughness. It is also safe to say that he owed certain components of his mystical theory to a number of other mystics, philosophers and theologians. His sources have been discussed by several scholars in

the decades that have passed since the publication of A.E. Affifi's basic analysis of his work.[1] In this book Affifi noted the appearance of Abū Yazīd in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, principally in his capacity as an adherent to pantheism.[2] References to Abū Yazīd have also appeared in other studies published in recent decades, such as the detailed analyses carried out by W.C. Chittick.[3] However, the only work which deals exclusively with the subject of Abū Yazīd's contribution to Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought is C.E. Ernst's article "The Man Without Attributes: Ibn ʿArabī's Interpretation of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī",[4] in which Ernst examines a number of Ibn al-ʿArabī's interpretations of the sayings of Abū Yazīd in the light of the latter's legacy as understood by other Sufis. Although Ernst's article is of great importance to the study of the sources of Ibn al-ʿArabī in general and to the influence of Abū Yazīd on Ibn al-ʿArabī in particular, it lacks an overall vision of Abū Yazid's impact on Ibn al-ʿArabī. A comprehensive assessment of Abū Yazīd's contribution to Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought will perhaps only be achieved by examining all references to the former in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings. However, since Ibn al-ʿArabī's principal work provides a fairly accurate picture of his attitude toward his predecessors, in this essay, I will limit my attention mainly to our author's *magnum opus al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations or Illuminations).[5] The 1999 Beirut edition of this work includes a reliable index which demonstrates that Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions Abū Yazīd 143 times in the text – more than any other Sufi (al-Ḥallāj appears only 15 times and al-Junayd 34). This would appear to suggest that Ibn al-ʿArabī ascribes significant importance to his predecessor. In addition, I have examined *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) and two collections of Ibn al-ʿArabī's epistles.[6]

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[1] Affifi, A.E., *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul ʾArabī*, Cambridge 1939.

[2] Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, pp. 138, 190.

[3] Chittick, W.C., *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Albany, 1989; Chittick, W.C., *The Self-Disclosure of God – Principles of Ibn al-ʾArabī's Cosmology*, Albany, 1998.

[4] Ernst, C.E., "The Man Without Attributes: Ibn ʿArabī's Interpretation of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʾArabī Society*, 13 (1993), pp. 1-18. Website of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society: http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/.

[5] In the present article I used two editions: *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut n.d. (rep. of the Egyptian edition of 1329 A.H.) and *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Beirut, 1999.

[6] *Rasā'il Ibn al-ʿArabī*, Ḥaydarabad, 1942; *Majmūʿat rasāʾil ibn al-ʿarabī*, Beirut, 2000. Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote a book (nonextant) on Abū Yazīd entitled *Miftāḥ aqfāl ilhām*

My aim here is to introduce Abū Yazīd, his personality and his mystical notions as they appear in these works. It is not my objective to make comparisons between those of Abū Yazīd's sayings which occur in other sources, such as Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj's *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī l-taṣawwuf*,[7] and the differing or identical versions of them contained in Ibn al-ʿArabī's text. Rather, their value is seen as reflected by the place that Ibn al-ʿArabi assigns to these sayings and a notion of how they might have influenced his thoughts.[8] In a previous article entitled "Ibn al-ʿArabī's Attitude toward al-Ghazālī",[9] I sought to demonstrate al-Ghazālī's influence on Ibn al-ʿArabī, not only by indicating Ibn al-ʿArabī's references to al-Ghazālī, but also by considering identical ideas appearing in the works of both writers. However, the occurrence of al-Ghazālī's notions, which are systematically arranged in books rather than in separate sayings, made the work carried out there somewhat easier than is undertaken in the present study.

It is worth noting that the study of Ibn al-ʿArabī's sources and the very likely possibility that he was influenced by a number of Sufis does not detract from his originality, as expressed both in his major ideas and his minor remarks on the Sufi way.[10] A great deal of work remains to be done in the study of Ibn al-ʿArabī's sources, and I would go so far as to say that as long as such research continues our admiration for the achievements of al-Shaykh al-Akbar will not diminish. Only the first steps have been taken as yet, and it is my hope that the present article might make a contribution in this respect.

al-waḥīd wa-īḍāḥ ashkāl aʿlām al-murīd fī sharḥ aḥwāl abī yazīd; Uthman Yaḥyā, *Muʾallafāt ibn ʿarabī taʾrīkhuhā wa-taṣnīfuhā*, Cairo, 2001, p. 573, no. 851.

[7] Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī l-taṣawwuf*, R.A. Nicholson (ed.), London 1963 (rep. of the 1914 ed.).

[8] Al-Sarrāj points out that the materials transmitted in Abū Yazīd's name took different forms owing to the different periods and the various countries in which his sayings were spread. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, p. 380. According to this assessment, which seems correct, we are not dealing with the historic Abū Yazīd, or the true Abū Yazīd, but rather with the way he is reflected in Islamic mystical literature.

[9] Abrahamov, B., *Avicenna and His Legacy – A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, Y. Tzvi Langermann (ed.), Turnhout, Belgium, 2009, pp. 101-115.

[10] Cf. Sells, M.A. (ed. and transl.), *Early Islamic Mysticism – Sufi, Qurʾān, Poetic and Theological Writings*, New York, 1996, p. 358, n. 66.

II

Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to Abū Yazīd in the context of several important issues. Of these, I will first address the question of Abū Yazīd's personality as presented in the *Meccan Revelations*. There is a clear difference, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes at one point in the text, between physical entities: just as spiritual way-stations *(manāzil*[11] *rūḥāniyya)* transcend one another, so do corporeal way-stations *(manāzil jismāniyya)*. A pearl is different from a simple stone, and a house built of mud bricks differs from a house built of gold or silver bricks. Subtle hearts are impressed by places, such as mosques, in which pious people once lived and worked. One such place, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes, was the house of Abū Yazīd, known as the house of the pious *(bayt al-abrār)*.[12] Al-Junayd's solitary dwelling place *(zāwiya* – literally, corner) and Ibn Adham's cave are also mentioned in this context. These men had long since died, but their impressions *(āthār)* remained in these places and continued to influence visitors' hearts. This proves the great personality of Abū Yazīd who was deemed Pole *(qutb)*[13] by Ibn al-ʿArabī.[14]

Ibn al-ʿArabī also introduces the idea of Abū Yazīd's perception of asceticism *(zuhd)*. He characterizes him as having stated that asceticism was an easy matter and that he had been an abstinent for three days. On the first day he renounced this world *(al-dunyā)*, on the second the world to come *(al-ākhira)*, and on the third everything which was not God.[15] The saying is quoted in full in two additional passages in the text. In one of them, after expressing the idea that in his view abstinence had no value and that he abstained from this world, the next world and all that existed except God, Abū Yazīd was asked what he willed. He answered: "I will not to will, for I am the object of will *(anā al-murād)* and you (God) are the one who wills *(wa-anta al-murīd)*". The passage ends with Ibn al-ʿArabī's remark that Abū Yazīd had established the principle that renunciation of all things except God is the true meaning of asceticism.[16]

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[11] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 281, 407, n. 3.
[12] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, pp. 98f; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, I, pp. 153f.
[13] Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, index.
[14] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 6; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 11; Chodkiewicz, M., *Seal of the Saints - Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʾArabī*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 94f.
[15] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 469; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 137.
[16] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 19; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 29.

At the beginning of chapter 93 (*fī l-zuhd*), the saying occurs again, this time with a reference to it by Ibn al-ʿArabī.[17] Contrary to some Sufis who censured Abū Yazīd's attitude toward *zuhd*, our author does not regard *zuhd* as a notion elaborated by Abū Yazīd, who did not consider *zuhd* a *maqām* or permanent station, but rather a station which must disappear when the cover of the heart's essence is removed by revelation (*kashf*). On the one hand, one cannot renounce that which was created for one's sake, because one cannot free oneself from that which is in one's possession. On the other hand, it is impossible to abstain from that which does not belong to one. In fact, according to the essence of reality or truth (*ʿayn al-ḥaqīqa*) there is no *zuhd*. Besides, writes Ibn al-ʿArabī, God does not renounce His creation, hence, one should follow God in one's actions. Elsewhere, Ibn al-ʿArabī argues against renunciation, saying that it actually means canceling out the possibility of increasing one's knowledge of God,[18] which is one of the cornerstones of his philosophy. Emphasizing the role of revelation in the life of the Sufi, Ibn al-ʿArabī thus employs Abū Yazīd's evaluation of *zuhd* as a corroboration of his own thesis.

In the *Futūḥāt* Abū Yazīd serves as a model of ethical behavior. His scrupulousness (*waraʿ*)[19] is best expressed in the following story. One night when Abū Yazīd was in a state of scrupulousness, he felt distressed by loneliness (*waḥsha*)[20] and attributed his distress to a certain lamp. Thereupon, his followers told him that they had borrowed a jar from a greengrocer to bring the oil for this lamp, with the stipulation that this be done only once, but had subsequently, and in violation of their promise, used the jar twice. Abū Yazīd ordered them to inform the greengrocer concerning the matter and to please him. They did so and Abū Yazīd's distress consequently disappeared.[21] Elsewhere Ibn al-ʿArabī relates that Abū Yazīd traveled some miles to return a fruit dropped from a greengrocer on his own fruits.[22]

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[17] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 178; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 267.

[18] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, III, p. 263; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, V, p. 389; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 157.

[19] Sometimes this term is translated as equivalent to *zuhd* (abstinence). Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, pp. 279, 282; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, pp. 31, 110; Kinberg, L., "What is meant by *zuhd*?", *Studia Islamica*, 61 (1985), pp. 42-44. However, in the story told here it is suitable to translate it as scrupulousness.

[20] Cf. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 132.

[21] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 480; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 152.

[22] *Mawāqiʿ al-nujūm* in *Majmūʿa*, III, p. 319.

Likewise one day when Abū Yazīd entered into a state of disengagement (*tajrīd*)²³ and felt the need to absent himself from the accumulation of material things (*ʿadam al-iddikhār*), he said to his followers "I lost my heart", and instructed them to search the house. They did so and found a bunch of grapes, upon which he said to them: "Our house has become a house of greengrocers". His followers gave alms equal to the number of grapes and Abū Yazīd found his heart.²⁴

In addition to being a man of scrupulousness or *waraʿ* Abū Yazīd is here revealed as a sensitive person who felt where a transgression had been made, a man who knew the causes of his feelings and acted accordingly.

When asked whether the gnostic (*al-ʿārif*) disobeyed God, Abū Yazīd answered by quoting Qurʾān 33:38, "God's commandment is predetermined decree". Ibn al-Arabī points out that Abū Yazīd's answer was an example of most correct behavior (*adab*), for he did not answer either in the affirmative or the negative. This correct behavior stemmed, according to our author, from Abū Yazīd's perfection of state, knowledge and behavior. The phrase "May God be pleased with him and others like him" concludes Ibn al-ʿArabī's appreciation of Abū Yazīd's personality.²⁵

Ibn al-ʿArabī's admiration of Abū Yazīd's conduct is best exemplified by the story he cites about Abū Yazīd honoring his mother. On a cold night his mother asked him to bring her a cup of water. Abū Yazīd got out of bed with some effort and fetched it for her, but found that she had fallen asleep again. He stood beside her until she awoke and then gave her the cup, on whose handle a piece of skin from his finger had stuck because of the freezing temperature, thereby causing her grief.

Ibn al-ʿArabī writes about Abū Yazīd's mistaken belief that honoring his mother derived not from an inclination of his soul, but rather from veneration of the Law. Abū Yazīd was frustrated to realize that his acts of honoring his mother were accompanied by laziness and reluctance to leave his bed. Consequently, he also became fully aware

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²³ According to Chittick this term means literally "stripping" the spirit from its attachment to the body. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, p. 274.
²⁴ *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 480; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 152.
²⁵ *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 516; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 205.

of the fact that all those acts of honoring his mother which he had carried out with gladness and pleasure were due to an inclination of his soul and not for the sake of God. If they had been for the sake of God, says Abū Yazīd, it would not have been difficult for the soul, since that which the beloved (God) commands, the lover loves. He therefore blamed his soul for deceiving him, for he had thought that that which he had done for seventy years was for the sake of God, whereas in fact it had been a result of the soul's inclination. Thereupon he repented.[26] There can be no doubt that Abū Yazīd's behavior serves Ibn al-ʿArabī as a model for the minute analysis of acts of the soul (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*).[27] Likewise Ibn al-ʿArabī reckons him among the People of Blame (*malāmiyya*), the perfect Gnostics[28] and the Verifiers.[29] It is thus hardly surprising that Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to Abū Yazīd as "the great Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī".[30]

This reverence for Abū Yazīd might have resulted, *inter alia*, from the story about God saying to him: "Go out to my creatures with My attributes, so that whoever sees you, will see Me". Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets these words to mean the appearance of the Lord's attributes in Abū Yazīd. Just as rulers have the power to prescribe, prohibit, rule and judge, and these are God's attributes, so Abū Yazīd also assimilated God's attributes.[31]

It is therefore no surprise that Abū Yazīd, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, was one of those who inherited the attributes of the angel Isrāfīl[32] (*kāna ʿalā qalb isrāfīl* – literally: "he was upon the heart of").[33] If he possessed God's qualities, it was certainly possible to ascribe angelic qualities to him. I do not know whether Abū Yazīd's adherence to belief in God's predetermination is connected to Isrāfīl in Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, but Ibn al-ʿArabī certainly presents him an-

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[26] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 717; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 494.

[27] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 54.

[28] *Mawāqiʿ al-nujūm*, in *Majmūʿa*, III, p. 309.

[29] *Kitāb al-isfār ʿan natāʾij al-asfār*, in *Rasāʾil*, part 2, p. 3.

[30] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 745, II, p. 408; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 535, IV, p. 55.

[31] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 757; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 550.

[32] Isrāfīl is the name, probably derived from the Hebrew *serāfīm*, of an archangel whose mission is to transmit the divine decisions written on the Preserved Tablet to the Archangel who is responsible for the fulfillment of these decrees. Wensinck, A.J., "*Isrāfīl*", *EI²* (Online Edition). In Sufi mythology Isrāfīl is the angel of the Resurrection; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 200.

[33] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 11; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 18.

swering the question of the possibility of disobedience of the gnostic, twice citing Qur'ān 33:38: "God's commandment is predetermined decree".[34] Abū Yazīd seems to suggest that even the gnostic is not exempt from God's decree. Ibn al-ʿArabī cannot on the one hand deny Abū Yazīd's opinion on God's predetermination and, on the other, he cannot ascribe to a person who experiences God's revelation (the gnostic) the transgression of His laws. Consequently, he tries to soften Abū Yazīd's view by stating that God makes the gnostic consider the sin in favorable terms due to an interpretation, also caused by God, which includes a true aspect through which the gnostic feels that he does not violate a prohibition. In fact, when the gnostic commits a sin, he does not know that it is a sin, because this fact is revealed to him only after his action. Ibn al-ʿArabī compares the gnostic's situation to that of a legist (*mujtahid*) who errs in his decision, and whose error is revealed to him by proofs only after he has made his decision.[35] In such a way, reminiscent of the solutions put forward to maintain the immunity of prophets from sin (*ʿiṣma*), Ibn al-ʿArabī reconciles God's decree with the elevated position of the gnostic who, like the prophets, cannot be believed to commit sins.

Abū Yazīd belonged to a special group called "the people of the Qur'ān", and these people were identified, according to a prophetic tradition, with the people of God and His elect. What characterized them was the preservation of the Qur'ān in their memory and through their acts. The Qur'ān was firmly rooted in their memory, not because they learned it, but rather because it was revealed to them by God. It is worth noting that Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) gained this station when he was just six years old; as for Abū Yazīd, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that he did not die until the Qur'ān was rooted in his heart.[36] This indicates the high estimation in which Ibn al-ʿArabī held al-Tustarī.

Abū Yazīd and al-Tustarī share still another trait: both were among the saints who had achieved all the way-stations (*manzil* pl. *manāzil*).[37] Ibn al-ʿArabī dedicates a detailed discussion to the number and characteristics of these way-stations, although this is not our concern here.

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[34] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 23; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 36.

[35] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 491; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 180.

[36] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 20; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 32; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Isfār ʿan natāʾij al-asfār*, Rasāʾil, part II, p. 16; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, p. 394, n. 4.

[37] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 40; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 62.

Let us now turn to Abū Yazīd's mystical philosophical notions as they were incorporated into the *Futūḥāt* and other works, and to the impact they had on Ibn al-ʿArabī's mystical philosophy. The notion that Abū Yazīd had no attributes appears several times in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *magnum opus* and is connected to Ibn al-ʿArabī's distinction between the world of phenomena and the divine world. In the context of a discussion concerning bliss (*naʿīm*) and chastisement (*ʿadhāb*), Ibn al-ʿArabī states that both concepts exist in the material world. Those who attain the stage of being aware of the unity of God's essence (*ahl aḥadiyyat al-dhāt*) have no feeling of either bliss or chastisement. That is because God's essence has no plurality of attributes. Abū Yazīd said: "I have been laughing for a while and crying for a while, and now I do not laugh or cry. [Then] he was asked: 'How are you in the morning?' And he said: 'I have no morning and no evening. Morning and evening belong to those who are delimited by an attribute and I have no attribute'".[38] Elsewhere our author attempts to explain the meaning of the rather obscure words "morning" and "evening". Morning points to the east where the sun rises, and thus designates manifest things, while evening alludes to sunset and hence to hidden things. The gnostic is the "olive tree that is neither of the east nor of the west" (Qurʾān 24:35). In this station the gnostic shares God's incomparability, as stated in Qurʾān 42:11 and 37:180.[39]

In the *Futūḥāt* (Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 133; 1999 edition, III, p. 198), with regard to Abū Yazīd's saying "I have no attribute", Ibn al-ʿArabī writes that the Sufis differed as to whether or not it was a phrase of ecstasy (*shaṭḥ*). Incidentally, we learn of Ibn al-ʿArabī's unfavorable attitude toward this term through his definition of it: "*Shaṭḥ* is a word with a flavor of frivolity (*ruʿūna*) and false (?) claim (*daʿwā*). It is rarely found among the verifiers, the people of the Revealed Law".[40]

A different explanation of Abū Yazīd's saying "I have no attribute" appears in chapter 105 (On the Abandonment of Sorrow). Here the aforementioned words morning and evening indicate that the mystic has no dominion over time; on the contrary, he is dominated by time,

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[38] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 73; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 111. Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 376.
[39] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 646; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, pp. 412ff; Chittic, *The Sufi Path*, p. 376.
[40] For a discussion of *shaṭḥ* in the *Futūḥāt* see chapter 195. Ernst, C.E., *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, Albany, 1985, p. 22.

whereas for God time is an attribute. In other words, Ibn al-ʿArabī very probably means by God's attribute the power by which He created the morning and the evening and is controlling them. Ibn al-ʿArabī rejects the view of those who claim that by making this statement Abū Yazīd laid claim to divine status (*ta'allaha*). Abū Yazīd, says Ibn al-ʿArabī, was too sublime to ascribe such an interpretation to himself.[41]

In sum, on this issue, Abū Yazīd appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī as a man of two facets. On one hand, he is depicted as one who transcends all states and stations, like God's essence, which is unlimited, whereas on the other, the absence of attributes points to his inability in relation to God who, by His attributes, rules the world. The first aspect seems to have caused some to censure Abū Yazīd for claiming divine status for himself, an accusation firmly rejected by Ibn al-ʿArabī.

As we have seen, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, God spoke to Abū Yazīd, and this fact alone testifies to the magnitude of Abū Yazīd in our author's eyes. One of God's sayings to Abū Yazīd, which serves as a point of departure for Ibn al-ʿArabī's notion of the relationship between God and His creatures, reads: "O Abū Yazīd, come close to Me through that which (the attributes) I do not possess: lowliness and neediness" (*al-dhilla wa l-iftiqār*). Ibn al-ʿArabī states that there are several kinds of relationship between God and human beings. Acts such as fasting (*ṣawm*)[42] serve to link the attribute of Lordship and the attribute of servanthood, while prayer, although it is common to the servant and God, is divided between the Real (God) and the servant, that is, the servant prays in a certain manner and God in another. In most other cases things belong to God alone. Ibn al-ʿArabī uses two terms to designate these relationships: *qirān* (connection), which denotes any kind of connection between God and human beings; and *infirād* (isolation), which designates an act or an attribute that belongs only to the servant (the human being) or to the Master (God).[43] God's saying to Abū Yazīd is an example of *infirād*, because lowliness and neediness pertain to human beings alone and not to God.

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[41] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 187; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 281.
[42] *Ṣawm* is the infinitive of *ṣāma 'an*, meaning "he refrained from". Thus God's abstention, i.e. His refraining from doing something is in principle like the human's.
[43] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, pp. 689f; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, II, p. 455.

In a slightly different version of the saying, Abū Yazīd asked God "Through what may I come near to You?" and God answered "Through that which I do not possess, lowliness and neediness". Connecting this exchange to Qurʾān 51:56 ("I created the Jinn and humankind only to worship Me"), Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets this verse to mean that people were created to be submissive to God. They are submissive, for they come to know that God exists in things, meaning that God is the source of all things. Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasizes that people do not yield to God's manifestations, but rather to God Himself, for their existence is identical with God.[44] Here our author makes use of Abū Yazīd's report, together with a verse from Qurʾān, in order to lay out his basic ideas of the world as God's manifestation and of the meaning of worshiping God, namely the knowledge that all phenomena are His manifestations. Abū Yazīd's saying serves not as the source of these ideas but merely as their corroboration.

In another formulation of Abū Yazīd's report of his perplexity concerning how he might come close to God, however, God said to him: "Leave yourself and come" (*utruk nafsaka wa-taʿāla*). Leaving one's self amounts to leaving the category of servitude (*ʿubūdiyya*), which connotes distance from God. However, leaving one's self also means emulation of God's attributes, and through this emulation God and human beings meet. Very probably aware of the paradox involved in the formula "leave yourself", Ibn al-ʿArabī makes an interesting distinction between servitude and one's knowledge that one is a servant. Whereas servitude requires distance from God, he writes, the knowledge that one is a servant requires nearness to God. Thus the same state, servitude, demands two opposing values, nearness and distance, depending on the aspects to be considered.[45] Ibn al-ʿArabī probably refers to this duality when he states elsewhere, with regard to the saying "Come close to me…", that the essence of nearness is here identical with the essence of distance.[46]

Ibn al-ʿArabī also follows Abū Yazīd's definition of the station of *maʿrifa* (gnosis). According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Sufis differed in their opinions concerning the station of *maʿrifa* and *ʿārif vis-à-vis* the

[44] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, pp. 16f, 214; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, pp. 26f, 322.
[45] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 561; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 285; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 319.
[46] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 487; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 173.

station of *ʿilm* (knowledge) and *ʿālim* (knower). Elevating the term "gnosis", some Sufis believed that the station of *maʿrifa* pertained to Lordship, whereas the station of *ʿilm* pertained to Godship. Among the Verifiers (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*), says Ibn al-ʿArabī, Sahl al-Tustarī, Abū Yazīd, Ibn al-ʿArīf and Abū Madyan held this view and he agrees with them.[47] *Maʿrifa* was probably higher than *ʿilm*, because the divine name "Lord" (*rabb*) designates the relationship between creation and the Divine Essence, which is the source of all created things.[48] Thus, the lordly station (*maqām rabbānī*) seems to denote a direct relationship between the human being and God's Essence, whereas the divine station (*maqām ilāhī*) seems to convey the notion of an indirect relationship. Thus, the gnostic receives knowledge directly from God, and the knower receives knowledge through mediators, such as God's signs in the world.[49]

One specific phenomenon characteristic of Sufism is the use of ecstatic expressions (*shaṭaḥāt)*. According to Ernst's analysis of this phenomenon, the Sufis sometimes express their ideas through boasting (*fakhr*), the origins of which are traced back to ancient Arabic literature. In this context the Sufis communicate their thoughts through audacious sayings.[50] I would add to Ernst's classifications of the forms of *shaṭḥ* the form of exaggeration which, as we shall now see, conforms to the following examples which Ibn al-ʿArabī, notwithstanding his reservations concerning this device, puts forward in the name of Abū Yazīd.

In the context of treating the lover, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that there are acts, such as the lover's mentioning of the beloved, which cannot be measured. Other things that belong to humans are compared to and surpass those of God: for example, the heart of the lover is

[47] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 318; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, p. 478; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 149.

[48] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 310.

[49] When Abū Yazīd wanted to emphasize the difference between the formal scholars and the Sufis he said: "You all took your knowledge like a dead person (receiving it) from another dead person. But we took our knowledge from the Living One who never dies (Qurʾān 25:58)". *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, I, p. 279; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, I, p. 423; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, pp. 248f; Morris, J.W., "How to Study the *Futūḥāt*: Ibn ʿArabī's Own Advice", in S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (eds.), *Muhydiddin Ibn ʿArabī – A Commemorative Volume*, Shaftesbury, Dorset, Rockport, Mass., Brisbane, Queensland, 1993, p. 76, 85, n. 13.

[50] Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, pp. 38-40.

wider than God's mercy. Here our author cites Abū Yazīd's saying which reads: "If the Throne and that which it contains were multiplied a million times and put in the corner of the gnostic's heart, he would not feel them, all the more so regarding the state of the lover".[51]

In another example of *shaṭḥ*, Ibn al-ʿArabī tries to moderate Abū Yazīd's seemingly audacious saying by setting forth a rational argument. When Abū Yazīd heard Qurʾān 85:12 "Surely, the assault of your Lord is strong" (*inna baṭsha rabbika la-shadīd*), he said: "My assault is stronger". Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets these words to mean that one's assault is stronger than God's because, in contrast to God's assault, it is not mixed with mercy. He understands *baṭsh* to mean anger, saying that when one is angry because of one's own interests, one's anger does not contain mercy. However, when one is angry for the sake of God, this anger is considered to be God's, and, hence, it is not exempt from His mercy.[52] Elsewhere he repeats the notion that God's assault when coming from the human being is stronger than when it comes from God, and he adds without explanation that such an assault coming from a natural servant is stronger than that which comes from a divine servant.[53] All in all, the nearer the assault is to God, the weaker it is.

Ibn al-ʿArabī employs yet another rational argument to mitigate Abū Yazīd's daring assertion. God's speech remains His speech even if it is indirectly heard from His messenger. However, owing to the messenger's nearness to human beings because of their common essence, which can be summarized by the word "many" in contrast to the word "one", which characterizes God, the messenger's assault is stronger than God's when it reaches their hearing.[54] By implication we learn the importance of the messenger in bringing God's message to human beings; the messenger's speech is, somewhat paradoxically, more effective than God's.

Our author's attitude toward the saints' miracles (*karāmāt*), likewise, is heavily influenced by Abū Yazīd's view on this issue. When asked about flying through the air (*ikhtirāq al-hawāʾ*), Abū Yazīd answered: "The bird passes through the air. However, the believer is

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[51] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 361; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, pp. 540-1.
[52] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, III, p. 333; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, VI, p. 59. Cf. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, p. 39.
[53] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, III, p. 87; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, VII, p. 128.
[54] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, IV, p. 160; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, VII, p. 236.

better than the bird in God's eyes. So how can this act which is com-
mon to the bird and human being be considered a miracle?" Dividing
the saints' miracles into two kinds, physical (literally: sensuous -
ḥissī) and abstract (ma'nawī) miracles, Ibn al-ʿArabī regards flying
as a physical miracle. The common people know only of this kind of
miracles, while the elite know of the abstract sort of miracles which
include the carrying of precepts and morality to perfection. On the
basis of Abū Yazīd's saying, Ibn al-ʿArabī considers knowledge of
God and the world to come to be the most exalted gift that God can
bestow upon humans and thus the greatest miracle. Thus, Ibn al-
ʿArabī emphasizes that the true saint is one who is pious and has
divine knowledge. Physical miracles, in which deception may be
involved, do not play a role in characterizing this category of saints.[55]

Nevertheless, Abū Yazīd appears in the *Futūḥāt* and *Mawāqi' al-
nujūm* as a man with the ability to perform miracles. Comparing Abu
Yazid to Jesus, who had the noble knowledge of how to heal the blind
and the leprous and revive the dead,[56] Ibn al-ʿArabī tells us that when
Abū Yazīd killed an ant inadvertently, he immediately blew upon it
and it came back to life.[57] Moreover, Abū Yazīd is said to have pos-
sessed God's power to such an extent that he was identified with God:
a novice reportedly stated that he had dispensed with seeing God in
order to see Abū Yazīd. He said: "Seeing Abū Yazīd once is better
than seeing God a thousand times". Then Abū Yazīd passed near him
and the novice was told that this was Abū Yazīd, and when he saw
Abū Yazīd he died. On hearing that the novice had died, Abū Yazīd
said: "He saw that which he was not capable of seeing, for God was
revealed to him through me". Abū Yazīd compares this situation to
the revelation of God to the mountain which caused Moses, who
asked to see God, to fall down senseless (Qur'ān 7:143).[58]

[55] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, pp. 369f; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, III, pp. 553f; *'Anqā' Mughrib
fī khatm al-awliyā' wa-shams al-maghrib*, in *Majmū'a*, III, p. 19; Elmore, G.T., *Islamic
Sainthood in the Fullness of Time – Ibn al-'Arabī's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*, Lei-
den, Boston, Köln, 1999, pp. 302f.
[56] Qur'ān 5:110.
[57] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, III, p. 93; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, V, p. 136; *Mawāqi' al-nujūm*,
in *Majmū'a*, III, p. 320; *'Anqā' Mughrib*, in *Majmū'a*, III, p. 56; Elmore, *Islamic Saint-
hood*, p. 514, n. 23.
[58] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, III, p. 117; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, V, pp. 173f. p. 174, ll; 3-4
are not clear.

How can one explain Ibn al-ʿArabī's attitude toward the saints' miracles? As we have seen above, he regards physical miracles unfavorably while simultaneously holding abstract miracles in great esteem. However, the last story glorifies the physical aspect, i.e. the physical influence of Abū Yazīd on a Sufi. A possible explanation for this, I suggest, is that, although the last report includes a miracle, it does not involve the saint's actual activity, but rather his presence alone. In such an instance there was no possibility of deception, the subject of warnings by Ibn al-ʿArabī, because the saint does nothing at all.

One finds other proofs elsewhere that Abū Yazīd did not act to influence people. When he was told that people touched him in order to be blessed, he said: "They do not touch me for blessing; rather they touch an ornament with which God has adorned me. Shall I prevent them from touching the ornament, since it is not mine?"[59]

Abū Yazīd appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings as a Sufi model. Ibn al-ʿArabī often mentions an outstanding personality alongside that of Abū Yazīd for the purpose of comparing the two. For example, Ibn al-ʿArabī tells us that he once met a veracious person, a possessor of a state who followed Abū Yazīd's way, and that this person had told Ibn al-ʿArabī that no evil thought had come into his mind for fifty years.[60]

Another person, a Sufi *shaykh* (spiritual master) who belonged to the people of God, is also mentioned by Ibn al-ʿArabī as comparable to Abū Yazīd with regard to his state, and even stronger than Abū Yazīd in his state (*amkan minhu*). This Sufi told Ibn al-ʿArabī about his state with God, saying that God pointed out to him the greatness of His rule. Thereafter the *shaykh* said to God: "O my Lord, my rule is greater than Yours. And God asked: How can you say so, while God knows best?" And the *shaykh* explained that acts he carried out, such as calling to God who answers and asking God something which He bestows, were not fulfilled by God; God does not call or ask anyone, hence no one has influence over Him, while, through calling and asking, the *shaykh* has some dominion over God.[61]

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[59] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, III, p. 136; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, V, p. 201.
[60] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 384; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 20.
[61] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 410; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 58.

In spite of this statement, Abū Yazīd emphasized several times the seeming existence of the human being and this point, as we know, is central in Ibn al-ʿArabī's mystical philosophy. As we have seen, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, will (*irāda*) in Abū Yazīd's view means the absence of will, and he expressed this notion by his saying: "I will not to will" (*urīdu an lā urīda*). Abū Yazīd justifies this statement by saying "I am the object of will (*al-murād*) and You are the one who wills" (*al-murīd*). Since Abū Yazīd knew, says Ibn al-ʿArabī, that the object of the will, as a possible thing, is nonexistent, he referred to himself as nonexistent and ascribed existence and hence will only to God.[62]

Ibn al-ʿArabī seems to have agreed with Abū Yazīd on the latter's consideration of God the real existent. However, in this context Ibn al-ʿArabī contradicts Abū Yazīd, in specifying a will which pertains to human beings. This is the intention to know God not through rational arguments but through revelation. Faithful to his idea that all things in the cosmos are God's manifestations, he only wishes to increase his knowledge of the cosmos through God's help. Knowledge about God is an object of will which can be supplied by God Himself, hence such knowledge becomes the object of God's will; if He wills, He bestows this knowledge on humans. In such a way, Ibn al-ʿArabī accepts Abū Yazīd's principle of the real existence, but also leaves a sort of will to the human being. If he had been asked who causes this will in the human being, he would undoubtedly have said that the cause is God.

However, Abū Yazīd elsewhere points to the existence of a will which can be connected to God's absolute rule of the cosmos. In a poem cited several times in *Futūḥāt*, Abū Yazīd said that he wanted God not to give him reward but punishment. He wanted to have pleasure by suffering (*ʿadhāb*). Apart from explaining the etymology of *ʿadhāb* (the root ʿ.dh.b in the first form [*ʿadhuba*] denotes "to be pleasant"),[63] Ibn al-ʿArabī writes that, as he understands it, Abū Yazīd expresses the idea that he wants to have pleasure not by nature, but by miracle, that is, by that which breaks custom, something which is unnatural and made by God.[64]

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[62] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, pp. 521f; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 225.

[63] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 673, l. 26, IV, p. 185; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 452, VII, p. 273.

[64] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 524; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, p. 229. Some mystics regarded affliction as a sign of closeness to God. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, p. 97.

Ibn al-ʿArabī further elucidates Abū Yazīd's idea of seeking pleasure in suffering as referring to the general idea of God's absolute power. According to him, God can do what contradicts the human intellect or, to put it another way, He can do what the intellect regards as absurd (*muḥāl*). Basing himself on Qurāʾn 33:27 ("God is capable of doing everything"), Ibn al-ʿArabī concludes that God's absolute power can produce that which is absurd.[65]

To sum up, Ibn al-ʿArabī admires Abū Yazīd and regards him as a Sufi model in his moral conduct and connection to God. He employs Abū Yazīd's sayings to corroborate and explain his own teachings. When he discerns boldness in Abū Yazīd's sayings, he tries to ameliorate it. He has reservations concerning the phenomenon of *shaṭḥ*, but does not refrain from citing ecstatic sayings. In his attitude toward the saints' physical miracles he seems to rely on Abū Yazīd. One cannot argue, however, that Abū Yazīd's pronouncements serve as the source of Ibn al-ʿArabī's idea of the seeming existence of creation, because this idea was already well established in early Sufism. Moreover, the idea that the relationship of God to the world is expressed through both transcendent and immanent aspects does not appear in the sayings of either Abū Yazīd or other Sufis, but remains original to Ibn al-ʿArabī.

[65] *Al-Futūḥāt*, Dār Ṣādir, II, p. 614; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1999, IV, pp. 364f. Most Muslim theologians oppose the notion that God can do everything including absurd things and state that His power is limited by rational considerations, so that, for example, He cannot create a thing and its opposite in the same time and place. Abrahamov, B., "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality", *Studia Islamica*, 67 (1988), pp. 75-98.