

Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī and an Islamic Framework for Religious Diversity

Muḥibb Allāh ibn Mubārīz Ilāhābādī (1587–1648), the well-known Sufi *shaykh* (spiritual master) and Islamic “mystical” philosopher of South Asia,¹ was born in the latter portion of the long reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and lived through the tenure of his successor, Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27). The majority of Muḥibb Allāh’s scholarly activities, however, took place during the reign of the fifth Mughal emperor, Shāh Jahān (r. 1627–58), as Muḥibb Allāh spent the last two decades of his life writing and teaching from Ilāhābād (Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India). It was most likely at some point during this twenty-year period that Muḥibb Allāh composed his short Arabic work *al-Taswiyah bayna al-ifādah wa’l-qabūl* (*The Equivalence between Giving and Receiving*; hereafter, “*Taswiyah*”), arguably his sole “philosophical” treatise (in the restrictive, demonstrative sense of the word). Virtually the entire remainder of his considerable corpus of writings expands, interprets, or otherwise mirrors the writings of the extremely influential Andalusian Sufi thinker Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240). Indeed, Muḥibb Allāh was so dedicated a commentator that later historians would label him “the second Ibn ‘Arabī” (*Ibn-i ‘Arabī-i ṣānī*) and “the Ibn ‘Arabī of India” (*Ibn-i ‘Arabī-i Hind*)—a not insignificant title, given the historical observation that Ibn ‘Arabī, regarded as the founder of the Sufi “school” of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (“unity of being”),² came to “have enormous influence throughout the Muslim world, not the least in the Subcontinent.”³ As William Chittick expresses the matter:

During the reigns of Akbar and Jahāngīr, numerous Indian Sufis were writing books and treatises that one might classify as belonging to the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī. Indeed, by this time, it was difficult to write anything on Sufi theory without employing the technical terminology of this school. This is not to say that all these authors had

necessarily read any of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works or considered themselves his followers, but rather that this school of thought had played a major role in shaping the intellectual language of the day.⁴

Regarding Muḥibb Allāh, in turn, Chittick rightly asserts: “the most outstanding defender of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own teachings in the subcontinent during the whole period under consideration was no doubt Muḥibb Allāh [ibn] Mubāriz Ilāhābādī.”⁵ However, despite Muḥibb Allāh’s prominence even in his own time, modern scholarship has yet to seriously examine this important intellectual of seventeenth-century India, most glaringly in the arena of the contextualization of his thought within the wider intellectual milieu of Mughal South Asia. Such is the lacuna I hope to address here.

The aims of this chapter, accordingly, are threefold. First, I want to contextualize Muḥibb Allāh’s life and writings within his Mughal South Asian context. Modern scholarship erroneously tends to reduce Muḥibb Allāh’s multifaceted career to a single historical confrontation, namely, the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (“unity of being”) versus the doctrine of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (“unity of witnessing”), the latter doctrine attributed to the famous Naqshbandī Sufi *shaykh*, Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624). Against such a thin and inadequate contextualization, an acute need remains to recover the variety and scope of Islamic philosophical disputations in this time period. Accordingly, my second aim in this chapter is to outline the philosophical positions that Muḥibb Allāh articulates in his writings, with particular attention paid to the *Taswīyah*, in an attempt to trace out the debates that Muḥibb Allāh engaged and the thinkers with whom he was in conversation. This exercise will help us to establish certain contours of the early modern Arabo-Persian jet stream during Muḥibb Allāh’s lifetime. Third, this chapter will analyze how this jet stream dictated, enabled, and restricted the possibilities of Muḥibb Allāh’s scholarly engagement with Hindu thought and practice, illuminating, in the process, Muḥibb Allāh’s own framework for conceptualizing religious diversity.

Of the three major intellectuals examined at length in this book, Muḥibb Allāh is the only one not to have had any direct dealings or interest in the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha/Jūg Bāsisht*. This would seem to make him an odd choice for inclusion in this study. However, as I indicated in chapter 1 and will illustrate further in chapter 5, the translation team’s principal vocabulary of choice within the *Jūg Bāsisht* draws primarily from the *waḥdat al-wujūd* (“*wujūdī*”) tradition. Moreover, the main Muslim scholars of *waḥdat al-wujūd* within the Mughal court at that time, who might seem at first glance more appropriate choices, deployed *wujūdī* thought in certain ways that are notably at odds with the approach of the *Jūg Bāsisht* translation team, as will be seen below. As such, this study includes Muḥibb Allāh as not only a preeminent representative of *waḥdat al-wujūd* for the era in general, but one whose particular interpretation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* better accords with that of the translation team. Even though Muḥibb Allāh perhaps never attended the

Mughal court and was too young to have been a direct influence on the *Jūg Bāsisht*, he can nevertheless be examined as an exemplification of a broader, early modern *wujūdi* “current” within the Arabo-Persian jet stream from which the translation team drew. In making use of Muḥibb Allāh for these ends, the specific, novel contributions to Islamic thought that are uniquely his own need not preoccupy us here, as such contributions, though important and fascinating in their own right, were almost certainly unknown to the translation team, and hence must await another inquiry for another time.

A SUFI PHILOSOPHER
OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH ASIA

Both in his own time and in modern scholarship, Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī—a spiritual master of the Ṣābirī branch of the Chishtī Sufi order (*ṭarīqah*)⁶—has been recognized as an eminent intellectual and “the most prolific Chishtī author.”⁷ Not only do the compilers of the Persian (and, later, Urdu and Arabic) *taẓkirahs* (“biographical compendia” or “memorials”) consistently praise Muḥibb Allāh as a prominent and erudite scholar of his time,⁸ but he even caught the attention of numerous imperial personalities. Emperor Shāh Jahān, for instance, desiring Muḥibb Allāh’s presence at the royal court, once wrote to him in a letter: “Greetings, O knower of gnosis and locus of the splendor of the divine sciences, Shaykh Muḥibb Allāh. Having considered well the command, ‘Obey God, and obey the Messenger [Muḥammad] and those who have authority among you’ [Qur’an 4:59], come to me, for my desire is beyond limit!” Muḥibb Allāh, notably, politely declined the emperor’s order.⁹ Similarly, Shāh Jahān’s heir-apparent, the Mughal prince Dārā Shikōh (d. 1659), initiated a brief but detailed correspondence with Muḥibb Allāh, posing numerous spiritual and doctrinal questions to him in two particularly dense letters. Upon accepting the position of governor (*ṣūbahdār*) of Allahabad in 1645, Dārā wrote to him: “more than receiving the governorship of the province of Allahabad, I am most gratified at your exalted presence [there].”¹⁰ Even the sixth Mughal emperor Awrangzēb (r. 1658–1707), having taken the throne by force from his elder brother Dārā Shikōh, went out of his way to verify the contents of Muḥibb Allāh’s *Taswiyah*, despite the fact that Muḥibb Allāh had already passed away more than a decade earlier. I will have occasion to revisit these events in what follows below.

Aside from the recorded opinions of contemporaries and subsequent generations, there is also the evidence of manuscript distribution and commentarial traditions, which again speak to Muḥibb Allāh’s enduring prominence as an early modern intellectual. Manuscripts of Muḥibb Allāh’s numerous Arabic and Persian treatises abound in South Asian, and also Iranian, libraries.¹¹ The commentarial tradition linked to Muḥibb Allāh is similarly quite extensive: with regard to the

Taswiyah specifically, no fewer than sixteen Arabic and Persian commentaries have been attached to it both during and after Muḥibb Allāh's lifetime.¹² Muḥibb Allāh's relevance persists to an extent even through the colonial period, as, in addition to his regular inclusion in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century *tazkirahs*, the influential Muslim reformer Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) references the *Taswiyah* in his famous commentary on the Qur'ān (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*), completed in 1895.¹³ Modern historians of South Asia, meanwhile, routinely cite Muḥibb Allāh as one of the most consequential Mughal intellectuals of his time.¹⁴

Shaykh Muḥibb Allāh was born in 1587, during the reign of Emperor Akbar, in Ṣadrpūr, a village just outside the area of Khayrābād in modern-day Uttar Pradesh, India.¹⁵ In his *Anfās al-khawāṣṣ*, Muḥibb Allāh explains that he received his early education in this region itself, where he also learned breath control—a Sufi practice of presumably yogic origins¹⁶—from a wise local Sufi. At a certain point, desiring more advanced learning, Muḥibb Allāh traveled to Lahore to pursue additional studies.¹⁷ There, under the renowned Mullā 'Abd al-Salām Lāhōrī (d. 1627), Muḥibb Allāh learned the standard rational (*'aqlī*) disciplines, including logic (*manṭiq*) and philosophy (*ḥikmah*), in addition to the traditional transmitted (*naqlī*) sciences, such as *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Muḥibb Allāh reports that, after completing his education in Lahore, he returned to his hometown but found no livelihood there, so he sought work in Aḥmadābād, but promptly returned home a second time and took up teaching.¹⁸ One of Muḥibb Allāh's classmates at Lahore was Sa'd Allāh Khān (d. 1656), who would later become Emperor Shāh Jahān's prime minister (*vazīr*). Some of the later *tazkirahs* report that, upon receiving the post of minister in 1645, Sa'd Allāh Khān invited Muḥibb Allāh to the capital in Delhi to take up his own government post there. Ali rightly notes, however, that “[t]his [episode] is not above doubt because it is not found in any contemporary history.”¹⁹

In any case, at a certain time, Muḥibb Allāh reports that he was overcome with “Divine attraction” (*jadhbah*) and so set out in search of a Sufi *shaykh*.²⁰ In his *Mir'āt al-asrār* (“Mirror of Secrets”), Muḥibb Allāh's close friend, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī (d. ca. 1683), recounts that Muḥibb Allāh went to the tomb of the famous Chishtī *shaykh*, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī (d. 1235), where the deceased master invisibly directed him to a still-living Chishtī *shaykh* in the Ṣābirī sub-lineage, Abū Sa'īd Gangōhī (d. 1639/40), then residing in the town of Gangōh. In his *Manāẓir-i akhaṣṣ al-khavāṣṣ*, Muḥibb Allāh describes that he became Abū Sa'īd's disciple and quickly reached the advanced stages of the spiritual path, at which point Abū Sa'īd named Muḥibb Allāh as his vicegerent (*khalīfah*), thus authorizing him to leave Gangōh to instruct others and, eventually, become a *shaykh* in his own right.²¹ Muḥibb Allāh affirms in his *Anfās al-khawāṣṣ* that, after departing from Gangōh, he returned to Ṣadrpūr for a time to pursue scholarly activities, but decided at a certain point to venture out on pilgrimage to a number of the Chishtī centers scattered across north India. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī reports that he first met Muḥibb Allāh during this period at the tomb of Shaykh 'Abd

al-Ḥaqq Aḥmad (d. 1434) in Rudawli.²² Finally, after visiting a few more Chishtī centers, Muḥibb Allāh settled permanently on the banks of the Yamuna River in Ilāhābād (Allahabad) in the year 1628, where he spent his last twenty years teaching and writing.²³

As already mentioned, during his time in Allahabad, Emperor Shāh Jahān and Prince Dārā Shikōh corresponded with Muḥibb Allāh. Shāh Jahān requested his attendance at the royal court, but Muḥibb Allāh politely declined, implying that he wished to devote himself to the spiritual life—in his words, to “obedience to God and to the Messenger [Muḥammad]”—rather than entering into any imperial affairs.²⁴ Dārā Shikōh, in his own letter, having already requested a copy of Muḥibb Allāh’s commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, posed sixteen questions on various spiritual and intellectual matters to Muḥibb Allāh, who responded with an extremely dense, carefully written, lengthy letter (spanning approximately forty pages in the manuscripts). Dārā responded with some follow-up queries, as well as a few reservations regarding Muḥibb Allāh’s responses, to which Muḥibb Allāh again replied in a second short, polite letter (approximately seven manuscript pages).²⁵ Scholarship has frequently singled out this correspondence as concrete evidence of Muḥibb Allāh’s direct influence over the prince;²⁶ it should be noted, however, that Dārā Shikōh never actually resided in Allahabad despite the post he had received there, and there is otherwise no evidence of the two having any further interactions. Thus, though well-known to the royal court, Muḥibb Allāh really sat on its outer fringes. Muḥibb Allāh’s disciple, Mīr Muḥammad Qannaujī (d. 1690), on the other hand, became Shāh Jahān’s close attendant and the tutor of Dārā Shikōh’s brother Awrangzēb (at the time still Prince ‘Ālamgīr),²⁷ while Mullā Muḥsin Fānī (d. 1668/9), Shāh Jahān’s chief justice (*ṣadr*) who also had a notable relationship with Dārā Shikōh, is sometimes counted among Muḥibb Allāh’s pupils as well.²⁸ Accordingly, if Muḥibb Allāh exerted any noteworthy influence over Prince Dārā—which is far from certain—then it would likely have had to come through one of these intermediaries. In a more general sense, however, it can certainly be said that the sort of *wujūdī* learning that Muḥibb Allāh exemplified had numerous avenues through which to exert a presence at the Mughal court, and, indeed, was already vibrantly present there.

Another well-known episode—at least in modern memory, though less conspicuous in precolonial accounts—is Awrangzēb’s investigation into Muḥibb Allāh’s *Taswīyah* some years after the latter’s death.²⁹ It is reported that Awrangzēb found sections of the treatise objectionable, and asked two of Muḥibb Allāh’s still-living disciples near at hand, Muḥammad Qannaujī and Shaykh Muḥammadī al-Fayyāz (d. 1696), to explain and defend it. Shaykh Muḥammadī reportedly replied that he had not yet reached the elevated spiritual station of his teacher and was thus unqualified to comment on the text, but, in any case, if the emperor should desire to burn the book to ashes, much more firewood would be available in the royal kitchens than in the home of a humble ascetic!³⁰ Some *tazkirahs* report

that Awrangzēb placed Shaykh Muḥammadī in prison, where he eventually passed away,³¹ though it is unclear if this event had any connection with the *Taswiyah*, especially since Awrangzēb apparently allowed the treatise to continue to be promulgated, as suggested by the copious commentaries on the *Taswiyah* composed and circulated during and after Awrangzēb's reign.

Yet another significant event, though it occurred in 1664—some sixteen years after Muḥibb Allāh's passing—was the issuing of a *fatwā* (juristic ruling) by certain religious scholars (*ulamā'*) of Allahabad, proclaiming Muḥibb Allāh, as well as his disciple Shaykh Muḥammadī, to be an unbeliever (*kāfir*) and a heretic (*zindīq*). It is reported that the well-known scholar Shaykh 'Abd al-Rashīd of Jawnpūr (d. 1672), an associate of Muḥibb Allāh, was invited to endorse the *fatwā*, but refused to sign it, retorting that, if Muḥibb Allāh and Shaykh Muḥammadī could not be called Muslims, then no one could.³² This episode is often sensationalized in modern scholarship as evidence of Muḥibb Allāh's "heterodoxy,"³³ though some early sources do make note of the wide spectrum of responses to Muḥibb Allāh's teachings even in his own lifetime.³⁴ The severity and practical implications of this diversity of opinions—that is, to what extent the disagreements remained written and intellectual, and to what extent they manifested plainly in the socio-political sphere—remains for future research to determine.

Muḥibb Allāh's various writings, the majority of which were composed during his twenty years in Allahabad, include the following³⁵:

- 1) *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, a commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's famous *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom"), composed in Persian, completed in 1631–32. Muḥibb Allāh had also written an Arabic commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, entitled *Taḥliyat al-Fuṣūṣ*, some years prior from Ṣadrpūr, but he mentions in his letters that this attempt was not sufficient and suggests that a more complete commentary, in Persian, would be more beneficial to readers.³⁶ Muḥibb Allāh later composed a third such commentary, an abridgment of the second commentary, in Persian.
- 2) *Manāẓir-i akḥāṣṣ al-khavāṣṣ* (Persian, completed in 1640), detailing twenty-seven "perspectives" (*manāẓir*) on various Sufi teachings concerned with the practices and stations of the Sufi path, drawing repeatedly from Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*.
- 3) *Tarjumat al-Kitāb* (Arabic), on the interpretation of the Qur'ān, on which he later composed a super-commentary (*ḥāshiyah*).
- 4) *Anfās al-khawāṣṣ* (Arabic), consisting of a series of commentaries on individual sayings (*anfās*) of great spiritual authorities in the Islamic/Sufi tradition.
- 5) *Ghāyat al-ghāyāt* (Persian), treating numerous issues, and composed at the request of his disciples inquiring into Ibn 'Arabī's account of how and why God grants existence to the universe.

- 6) *Haft aḥkām* (Persian, completed in 1643), on seven principles of *maʿrifah* or “gnosis,” mainly a translation of and commentary on chapter 177 of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Futūḥāt*.
- 7) *Risālah-i sih ruknī* (Persian), on three “pillars” of spiritual praxis, including the rites and practices known as the “five pillars” of Islam, other prayers performed on specific days of certain months, and the particular rites of the “seekers after Truth” (*tālibān-i ḥaqq*).
- 8) *Mughālaṭat al-‘āmmah* (Arabic).³⁷
- 9) *‘Aqā’id al-khawāṣṣ* (Arabic), covering a series of twenty-one “subtle” topics (*daqīqahs*), aimed at refuting the claim that anything exists other than God.
- 10) *‘Ibādāt al-khavāṣṣ* (Persian, completed in 1643), a commentary on five chapters of the *Futūḥāt* concerning acts of worship (*‘ibādāt*), and a further treatment of the central practices (the “five pillars”) of Islam, moral and creedal topics, and related questions of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The text’s introduction stands as a semi-independent treatise, entitled *Imālat al-qulūb*.
- 11) *Maktūbāt-i Shaykh Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī* (Persian), Muḥibb Allāh’s preserved correspondence. Muḥibb Allāh states in one of these letters, addressed to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khayrābādī, that the letter is so long it could stand as its own independent treatise, entitled *Risālah-i wujūd-i muṭlaq*, a title sometimes listed in manuscript catalogues. The *Maktūbāt* contains a total of eighteen letters to Mullā Maḥmūd al-Jawnpūrī (2), ‘Abd al-Rashīd al-Jawnpūrī (2), Shaykh ‘Aṭā’ Allah al-Jawnpūrī (1), Mīr Muḥammad Qannaujī (1), Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm [Siyālkōtī?] (1), Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khayrābādī (3), Shaykh Tāj Muḥammad (1), Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī (5), and Prince Dārā Shikōh (2).
- 12) *al-Taswiyah bayna al-ifādah wa’l-qabūl* (Arabic), which Muḥibb Allāh himself translated into Persian accompanied by an auto-commentary, the *Sharḥ-i Taswiyah*.

As Chittick points out, most of Muḥibb Allāh’s writings are based in some manner—often quite explicitly, even at the level of format and style—on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, “with relatively little influence from such intermediary figures [in the school of Ibn ‘Arabī] as Farghānī and Jāmī,”³⁸ though Muḥibb Allāh nevertheless demonstrates in his writings and letters his thorough acquaintance with these central figures of the post-Ibn ‘Arabī *wujūdī* philosophical tradition. Long sections of many of Muḥibb Allāh’s works, in fact, consist of translations, paraphrases, and exegeses of specific passages from Ibn ‘Arabī’s corpus, most frequently the *Futūḥāt* and secondarily the *Fuṣūṣ*.³⁹

Of all these writings, it was arguably the *Taswiyah* that became the most widespread. Though the preoccupation with Awrangzēb’s reaction encapsulates the character of modern scholars’ interest in the treatise, it is the record of commentaries

and refutations, numbering no fewer than sixteen works, that best speaks to the manner and scope of premodern engagement with the text. An examination of this commentarial tradition, authored by various scholars aligned with competing philosophical and theological schools, would do much in itself to help map the contours of the early modern Arabo-Persian jet stream in which Muḥibb Allāh participated. As a first step, for the purposes of this chapter, I will examine the earliest links in this commentarial chain, namely, the *Taswiyah* itself, Muḥibb Allāh's Persian auto-commentary, the refutation of Mullā Maḥmūd al-Jawnpūrī (d. 1652), and the critical commentary of Khwājah Khwurd (d. 1663). Although the three commentaries of Ḥabīb Allāh Patnah-ī (d. 1728) were composed somewhat later, I reference them here as well, given that they were written in direct response to Mullā Maḥmūd and Khwājah Khwurd and hence help to illuminate their counter-arguments.⁴⁰ Through retracing these seventeenth-century discussions, and the transregional array of antecedent philosophers who were being drawn upon, we can achieve a better understanding of the *Taswiyah* and Muḥibb Allāh's scholarly career as located within the Arabo-Persian jet stream.

Modern scholarship on Muḥibb Allāh, unfortunately, has done a rather poor job of reconstructing this intellectual context. Indeed, due to a notable dearth of studies to address South Asian Islamic philosophy and theology,⁴¹ compounded by a broader neglect of the history of postclassical Islamic philosophy in general,⁴² modern scholarship lacks even the basic knowledge of the contours of Indian Islamic intellectual history that would be required to contextualize Muḥibb Allāh's scholarly activities properly. In part as a result of this vacuum, modern studies have instead problematically projected his career within a nationalist lens, erroneously shoehorning Muḥibb Allāh into a "liberalism vs. orthodoxy" binary of the sort outlined in the introduction, here correlated with a theological debate between two competing visions of Islamic metaphysics: Muḥibb Allāh's *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("unity of being"), on the one hand, purportedly representing the voice of "liberalism," "Hindu tolerance," and "heterodoxy," and the *waḥdat al-shuhūd* ("unity of witnessing") doctrine of Aḥmad Sirhindī, on the other, supposedly representing the voice of triumphalist Islamic "orthodoxy." To cite just two representative examples of this flawed, binary contextualization:

The seventeenth century of the Christian era . . . saw the conflict of two metaphysical concepts, *wahdatu'l wujūd* (Unity of Being) and *wahdatu'l shuhūd* (Unity of manifestation), in the realm of Muslim theosophy, and this conflict expressed itself in the formation of many religious groups The supporters of these two schools of thought were drawn from different strata of society. Shah Muhibbullah of Allahabad, Dara Shukoh, Miyan Mir, Mullah Shah, Sarmad and Baba Lal belonged to the pantheistic school of thought; Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, Khwaja Muhammad Masum and Ghulam Yahya belonged to the other school [W]ith the advent of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (ob. 1624) pantheistic ideas received a setback and his powerful criticism of Ibnu'l 'Arabi discredited his works in mystical circles It was

left to Shah Muhibbullah of Allahabad, despite severe opposition from orthodox sections, to rehabilitate Ibnu'l 'Arabi and his pantheistic philosophy in the Indian mystical circles.⁴³

Thus, Muḥibb Allāh's career, and much of the rest of the seventeenth century, is depicted as a struggle between these two opposing poles: one "pantheistic" and the other "orthodox." Ali depicts the scenario even more dramatically:

This was the period when the whole atmosphere was vibrating and echoing with the doctrine of *Waḥdat-ush-Shuhud* propounded by . . . Shaikh Aḥmad of Sirhind, against the doctrine of *Waḥdat-ul-Wujud* of Ibn-ul-'Arabi. Shaikh Muhibbullah made up his mind to revive the mystical doctrine of Ibn-ul-'Arabi . . . [Sirhindī] left no stone unturned in refuting the pantheistic doctrine. He tried to prove that this doctrine was anti-Islamic . . . Muhibbullah undertook the task of presenting the correct import of the doctrine of unity of Being in the light of the Qur'ān and Hadith. He tried his level best to prove that the doctrine was in no way anti-Islamic.⁴⁴

And so, according to such scholarship, Muḥibb Allāh's primary motivation throughout his career was the refutation of Sirhindī and the defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd* against him, an implicit prefiguring of India and Pakistan's contemporary battle over the soul of the subcontinent.

Indeed, in a great deal of the most widespread scholarship on Islam in South Asia, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is cast as a "non-dualism"—or, often meant more pejoratively, a "monism" or "pantheism"—that opened the gates for all varieties of "religious syncretism"—or, again more pejoratively, "heterodoxy"—which was opposed by the supposedly "strict" or "orthodox sections" of Muslim society, of which Sirhindī is proposed as a central example. Especially among authors who exhibit sympathies for modern-day Pakistan, it is frequently suggested that the increasingly influential "esoteric philosophy" of *waḥdat al-wujūd* found "a strong ally in the Vedantism of orthodox Hinduism," which raised the threat of "the disintegration of Islam in India and its gradual absorption into [the majority religion] Hinduism."⁴⁵ *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is in this manner seen as the intellectual foundation for the third Mughal emperor Akbar's novel courtly and political policies, such as the inclusion of greater numbers of Hindus in the Mughal administration, the abolition of the tax (*jizyah*) on non-Muslims, the patronizing of numerous translations of Hindu texts, and Akbar's supposed general promotion of and "experiments" with "syncretism" and "religious eclecticism."⁴⁶ Sirhindī, in turn, is regarded as reacting to this *waḥdat al-wujūd* "movement" that was taking hold throughout the subcontinent, but especially in the Mughal court—conceived alternately as an "imperial heresy"⁴⁷ or as a "reconciliatory politics,"⁴⁸ depending on the author's sensibilities—aiming at a "defense against syncretism"⁴⁹ and the "rehabilitation of Islam in India."⁵⁰ In place of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("unity of being"), Sirhindī is said to have proposed the "corrective" of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* ("oneness of witnessing"), in which the metaphysical assertion of the objective identification

between God and the world is rejected, but the “mystic’s devotional concentration on God wherein everything else except God goes out of his consciousness”—that is, the *subjective perception* of unity, even if it is not *objectively* the case—is affirmed as a lofty, if still incomplete, spiritual station.⁵¹ Thus, the mere experience of unity is not in itself a concern; it only becomes a concern when one concludes from this experience that God and the world are *actually* one and the same.⁵² Accordingly, Sirhindī expressed the need to transcend this subjective experience of unity in order to ultimately affirm the absolute difference between God and the world, lest the mistaken belief in “pantheism” lead one to reject necessary and true distinctions, such as between “right” and “wrong,” and hence to abandon the *sharī‘ah* and the example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet Muḥammad. Muḥibb Allāh, in turn, as we have seen, is regularly depicted as making it his life’s goal to refute Sirhindī’s supposed intervention, despite the fact that Muḥibb Allāh never mentions Sirhindī across his various treatises and does not seem to make much of “*waḥdat al-wujūd*” as a category of self-identity.

This tendency to avoid reading Muḥibb Allāh’s treatises on their own scholarly terms, and instead cherry-pick them to fill a nationalist narrative, is frustratingly widespread. I have already noted above the disproportionate emphasis placed on Muḥibb Allāh’s two letters to Dārā Shikōh: indeed, it is rare that even the entire letters are consulted, but only the specific few sentences in which Muḥibb Allāh affirms that a ruler should look after the welfare of both Muslim and non-Muslim subjects. This brief sentiment within a dense, complex letter has been repeatedly spun to allege Muḥibb Allāh’s facilitating role in Prince Dārā’s study and appreciation of Hindu thought and practice,⁵³ despite the two figures’ clearly limited interaction.⁵⁴ In a brief reflection on Dārā’s reaction to Muḥibb Allāh’s first letter—in which Muḥibb Allāh frequently quotes the renowned Sufis of earlier generations, including Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz (d. 890 or 899), Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī (d. 1131), Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. circa 1220), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfīz (d. 1389/90), and Ibn ‘Arabī—Carl Ernst notes that Dārā was impatient with being referred to so many “ancient authorit[ies]” and sought Muḥibb Allāh’s inspired, “ecstatic” response, even if it did not happen to be in accord with the Qur’ān. Muḥibb Allāh clearly but courteously replied that he did not support “any suggestions contrary to Qur’ān and *sunnah*” and “managed to insinuate very delicately that the prince was not completely egoless.”⁵⁵ In the end, Ernst observes, “Dārā Shikōh was not overly impressed by the shaykh’s advice, [so] too much should not be made of the Sufi’s ‘influence’ on the prince.”⁵⁶ Here we have a first small glimpse at the diversity of perspectives and attitudes that simultaneously inhabit the “*wujūdī*” category, contrary to the assumption that *waḥdat al-wujūd* necessarily, monolithically, amounts to a “liberal,” “heterodox,” “pro-Hindu” politics.

Even the scholarship that eschews over-exaggerating the *wujūdī-shuhūdī* polemic is nevertheless unable to fully break out from this “liberal-orthodox”

dichotomy. Despite the fact that Muḥibb Allāh hardly ever mentions Hindus across his myriad writings—and never in any kind of specificity or detail—Alam, for instance, continues to associate Muḥibb Allāh, as a prominent *wujūdī*, with a “pantheist” and “pro-Hindu” stance, affirming that he was “[a]mong the best interpreters and defenders of this idea of religious closeness and subterranean cultural bonds.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Alam repeatedly intimates that the natural corollary of being a proponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd* was that one “posed a . . . threat to orthodoxy” and “encouraged assimilation”;⁵⁸ those *wujūdī* Sufis who emphasized *sharī‘ah* and “the differences between faiths,” it is suggested, were somehow exceptional, fell short of following through on the full implications of the doctrine, or else “could not completely free themselves from the hegemony of orthodox, juristic Islam.”⁵⁹ When discussing Muḥibb Allāh’s close friend ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī, furthermore, Alam cannot reconcile the latter’s support of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, on the one hand, with his criticism of certain Hindu beliefs, on the other, resigning himself to describe ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s “attitude” as “complex and somewhat inconsistent.”⁶⁰ This assumptive *wujūdī*-orthodox dichotomy also manifests in scholarship on Muḥibb Allāh’s spiritual predecessor in the Ṣābirī Chishtī *silsilah*, ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangōhī (d. 1537),⁶¹ whose “views of Hindus are har[d] for modern biographers to reconcile.”⁶² Bruce Lawrence, for instance, reports that ‘Abd al-Quddūs “has been viewed as one of the staunchest Indian proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd*,” but then remarks at what appears to him to be a discrepancy: “In counseling against the assignment of government posts to non-Muslims, ‘Abd-al-Qoddūs was simply revealing the sober, militantly orthodox side of his multifaceted personality.”⁶³ Simon Digby similarly writes that “throughout his life[,] ‘Abd al-Quddūs’ attitudes towards the non-Muslim Indian environment were complex and contradictory.”⁶⁴ Never is it seriously entertained that *waḥdat al-wujūd*, on the one hand, and maintaining distinctions between religious communities on the basis of the *sharī‘ah*, on the other, might actually be perfectly consistent, compatible stances.

Fortunately, a few studies have signaled a more careful reconstruction of Muḥibb Allāh’s intellectual context in closer consultation with his actual writings, however preliminarily. Rizvi follows the clear indications in Muḥibb Allāh’s texts and letters to affirm that, rather than Sirhindī, the influential Islamic philosopher Mullā Maḥmūd al-Jawnpūrī (d. 1652) was in fact Muḥibb Allāh’s primary opponent in matters philosophical.⁶⁵ G.A. Lipton helpfully synthesizes the available scholarship,⁶⁶ telling of an influx of Iranian scholars into India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, coming initially from the prominent intellectual center of Shīrāz and later from Iṣfahān. These Iranian scholars helped to promote the Islamic rational sciences (*‘ulūm-i ‘aqlī*) in such Indian cities as Jawnpūr, later dubbed “the Shīrāz of India” (*Shīrāz-i Hind*) by Emperor Shāh Jahān, from which milieu emerged the well-known Peripatetic philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer (and Muḥibb Allāh’s primary philosophical interlocutor), Mullā Maḥmūd al-Jawnpūrī.⁶⁷ At roughly the same time, the prominent Iranian scholar of sixteenth-century Shīrāz,

Mir Faṭḥ Allāh Shīrāzī (d. 1590), emigrated to India, enlisted by Emperor Akbar to overhaul the Mughal educational curriculum. Faṭḥ Allāh incorporated a robust program in rational theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafah/hikmah*), and logic (*manṭiq*) that covered numerous foundational works including those of Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1414), Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 1501), Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Dashtakī (d. 1498), and his son Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr al-Dashtakī (d. 1541), all of whom were well known and oft-studied in intellectual circles across the Islamic world.⁶⁸ One of Faṭḥ Allāh's students, Mullā ʿAbd al-Salām Lāhōrī (d. 1627), would become Muḥibb Allāh's own teacher in the rational sciences, thus establishing Muḥibb Allāh within the recent revival of philosophical and rational learning then taking place in the subcontinent.⁶⁹

While these studies have accordingly provided a valuable starting point for the proper intellectual contextualization of Shaykh Muḥibb Allāh, there nonetheless remains much work to be done. Beyond the ongoing work of identifying the full cast of characters, recent scholarship betrays precious little familiarity with the actual writings and contributions of these interlocutors, leading to a variety of misreadings and misunderstandings.⁷⁰ Given such a situation, the prospect of fully comprehending a text like the *Taswiyah* becomes exceedingly daunting, as Muḥibb Allāh assumes the reader's familiarity with centuries of thinkers, including the likes of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), Ibn ʿArabī, Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355), Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qushjī (d. 1474), Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, and Mullā Maḥmūd al-Jawnpūrī, among numerous others. Given these difficulties posed by the current state of scholarship, my own analysis of the *Taswiyah* here cannot pretend to be flawless. Nevertheless, in order to understand Muḥibb Allāh's life and career, such attempts must be made. Accordingly, I will endeavor below to outline the philosophical positions for which Muḥibb Allāh argues in the *Taswiyah* in light of the rival philosophical stances of his interlocutors, in the hopes of better understanding the transregional Arabo-Persian jet stream with which Muḥibb Allāh was in conversation, and which played a prominent formative role in shaping the intellectual contours of the Mughal court. In particular, I will examine Muḥibb Allāh's philosophical articulation of the notion of *wujūd* ("being" or "existence"), a concept central not only to the *wahdat al-wujūd* tradition, but also to the lexicon and metaphysics of the *Jūg Bāsisht*.

AN ISLAMIC NON-DUALISM: MUḤIBB ALLĀH'S TASWIYAH BAYNA AL-IFĀDAH WA'L-QABŪL

On the basis of the commentarial tradition attached to the *Taswiyah*, as well as his letters, it becomes clear that one of Muḥibb Allāh's primary intellectual opponents was the aforementioned Mullā Maḥmūd al-Jawnpūrī al-Fārūqī. Not only did Mullā Maḥmūd make the effort to write a specific refutation of the *Taswiyah*,

entitled *Ḥirz al-īmān* (“The Fortress of Faith”),⁷¹ but the later Chishtī Sufi Ḥabīb Allāh Patnah-ī considered the debate with Mullā Maḥmūd significant enough that he undertook to compose his own rejoinder against the *Ḥirz al-īmān*.⁷² Muḥibb Allāh also wrote two intricate letters to Mullā Maḥmūd detailing numerous arguments and views rooted in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, from which Muḥibb Allāh quotes abundantly throughout the correspondence.⁷³

Mullā Maḥmūd was a central figure in the seventeenth-century flourishing of the intellectual sciences in Jawnpūr mentioned above, described by many sources as the greatest philosopher of his day, as well as a gifted mathematician, astronomer, and natural scientist.⁷⁴ Although Mullā Maḥmūd’s writings, much like Muḥibb Allāh’s, are still waiting to be edited and to receive proper study, biographers most typically associate him with the Aristotelian/Peripatetic (*mashshā’ī*) tradition of Islamic philosophy, a “school” closely associated with the likes of Ibn Sīnā and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. Mullā Maḥmūd was also intimately familiar with the works of the renowned Ṣafavid philosopher Mīr Dāmād; some have suggested that Mullā Maḥmūd studied under Mīr Dāmād for a time, though there seems to be little evidence to support the claim.⁷⁵ Mullā Maḥmūd later became attached to the Mughal court, functioning as, among other things, the tutor of Shāh Jahān’s second son, Prince Shujā’.

While any final say on Mullā Maḥmūd’s philosophy will have to await a more thorough examination of his numerous treatises (particularly his extremely widespread *madrasah* textbook, *al-Shams al-bāzighah*, covering primarily the subject of physics), his refutation of the *Taswīyah*, the *Ḥirz al-īmān*, corroborates his biographical reputation as a Peripatetic (*mashshā’ī*), exhibiting a metaphysical orientation closely aligned—though not identical—with the Peripatetic philosopher-theologian Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. Although a detailed account is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter,⁷⁶ Mullā Maḥmūd’s stance on the notion of *wujūd* (“being” or “existence”) is that it corresponds with the way the human intellect (*aql*) organizes its encounters with the world around it. In confronting the multitude of discrete entities in the world, which share the characteristic of being “there” or “present” rather than *not* being there, the intellect, naturally, abstracts a universal notion “existence” that applies equally to all “present” entities: the chair in front of me “exists” just as the apple in front of me “exists,” but *unlike* the apple I consumed last week, which, accordingly, no longer “exists.” This natural process of the intellect, however, merely creates a universal category “existence” that resides in our minds; it would be a mistake to conclude therefrom that “existence”/*wujūd* is a real, objective, singular entity *out there*, part of the basic furniture of the cosmos, with which all these diverse entities are somehow uniformly identified. To the contrary, says Mullā Maḥmūd, the multitude of existent objects in the world is veritably plural. In other terms, one could assert, a table, a chair, an apple, and even God, each possesses its own, unique “specific existence” (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) that is intrinsically distinct from the “specific existences” of the

others. Hence, against any suggestion, à la *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that would claim the diverse entities of the world to be ultimately reducible to a singular Reality or “Existence” (*wujūd*), Mullā Maḥmūd instead insists that the diversity of variegated entities in the world is a genuine, irreducible plurality: there are the mutually distinct “specific existences” (*wujūdāt khāṣṣah*) of tables, chairs, apples, and so on, which are incapable of being simplified or equated with one another; they certainly cannot be reduced to or equated with God’s existence, the one Creator—philosophically referred to, in the terminology of Ibn Sinā, as the “Necessary Existent” (*wājib al-wujūd*)—upon whom all other existents utterly depend for their creation and subsistence at every moment.⁷⁷

Khwājah Khwurd’s (d. 1663) reverential, yet critical, Arabic commentary on the *Taswiyah*, as well as the content of the *Taswiyah* itself, confirms another tradition or “school” of Islamic philosophical thought with which Muḥibb Allāh was also in conversation. ‘Abd Allāh al-Dihlavī, commonly known as Khwājah Khwurd, was a Naqshbandī Sufi and son of Shaykh Bāqī Bi’Llāh (d. 1603), the famous teacher of Aḥmad Sirhindī. Bāqī Bi’Llāh initiated Sirhindī into the Naqshbandī order and, supposedly, was instrumental in turning him away from *waḥdat al-wujūd* and towards *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, though a number of recent scholars have contested or complicated this suggestion.⁷⁸ Interestingly, Sirhindī was one of Khwājah Khwurd’s main teachers and initiated him into the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah*,⁷⁹ though the latter consistently preferred the formulations of *waḥdat al-wujūd* over those of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, having composed a number of treatises popularizing the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī or based on the works of important later *wujūdī* thinkers, such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 1492).⁸⁰ Khwājah Khwurd thus frustrates a number of the assumptions common to much modern scholarship: on the one hand, he was a direct student of Sirhindī, a fellow Naqshbandī, and the son of Sirhindī’s own *shaykh*, yet he demonstrated little interest in even saying much about *waḥdat al-shuhūd*.⁸¹ On the other hand, both he and Muḥibb Allāh were dedicated *wujūdīs*, and yet disagreed with one another to such an extent that Khwājah Khwurd felt compelled to compose a corrective commentary on the *Taswiyah*.

In this Arabic commentary, Khwājah Khwurd manifests his considerable debt to the aforementioned Iranian philosopher, Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī.⁸² Dawānī, also an interpreter and defender of Ibn ‘Arabī,⁸³ had become very well known in the subcontinent through the various lines of intellectual transmission passing between the Safavid and Mughal Empires in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as described above. Indeed, even before the Safavid dynasty came to power in 1501, Dawānī had already dedicated a treatise to Sultan Maḥmūd of Gujarāt (r. 1458–1511),⁸⁴ this being only one among many Iran-India connections, the most consequential being those facilitated by the abovementioned Mīr Faṭḥ Allāh Shīrāzī. It comes as no surprise, then, that both Muḥibb Allāh and Khwājah Khurd were thoroughly acquainted with Dawānī’s works. In the *Taswiyah*, Muḥibb Allāh frequently critiques the formulations of *wujūd* that are characteristic of Dawānī,

while Khwājah Khwurd, in his commentary, defends them at length, only to be refuted, in turn, by Ḥabīb Allāh Patnah-ī in his second super-commentary; a century and a half earlier, Dawānī, in the formulation of his own metaphysical and ontological positions, had already sought to critique the stances of such well-known philosophical defenders of Ibn ‘Arabī as Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī. What can thus be traced out is a centuries-long, transregional current of debates, situated within the wider Arabo-Persian philosophical jet stream, *between* so-called *wujūdīs*, and hence emblematic of the diversity of interpretations internal to “*wahdat al-wujūd*” that modern scholarship has been slow to recognize.

In some ways, Khwājah Khwurd’s (and Dawānī’s⁸⁵) stance on *wujūd* picks up from where Mullā Maḥmūd (and Ṭūsī) leave off. Mullā Maḥmūd, as we have seen, aims to safeguard the distinction between God (the “Necessary Existent,” *wājib al-wujūd*) and the created entities of the universe (the “possible” or “contingent existents,” *mumkin al-wujūd*) by postulating an intrinsically distinct existence—or “specific existence” (*wujūd khāṣṣ*)—to each thing. This means that every last object, including the Necessary Existent, is innately distinguishable from every other object because its own particular, concrete existence is inherently unique in relation to all other objects and their particular existences. Khwājah Khwurd, in turn, renders the distinction between the Necessary and the possible existents even starker by positing that there is, in fact, only one existence to speak of, namely, the existence of the Necessary.⁸⁶ The possible/contingent existents, on the other hand, do not actually possess any existence of their own, but are merely “tinged” (*inṣabagha*) by the Necessary’s *wujūd*.⁸⁷ Not only do possible entities not possess any existences (*wujūdāt*) of their own, Khwājah Khwurd insists, but, even further, they never really possess any share or portion of the Necessary’s existence either; rather, possible objects only acquire some ambiguous state of *apparent* existence—or, more accurately, “existent-ness” (*mawjūdiyyah*)—through relating (*intisāb*) in some fashion to the one and only existence there is, the Necessary existence. As such, Khwājah Khwurd concludes, the seeming existence of the possible objects is, in actuality, unreal (*ghayr haqiqī*), while the Necessary’s existence alone is truly real. In the process of arguing that the sole actual existence is the Necessary existence, Khwājah Khwurd affirms, like Mullā Maḥmūd, that the mental, universal concept of “existence” that resides in our minds (*fī’l-dhihn*) has no objective, extra-mental reality in the world “out there” (*fī’l-khārij*). Rather, for Khwājah Khwurd, the one and only real existence is not a universal that can be predicated of more than one thing, but only a single, discrete, concrete particular.⁸⁸

While this brief sketch of the positions argued by Mullā Maḥmūd and Khwājah Khwurd accounts for the philosophical and theological schools represented in the very earliest layers of commentary on the *Taswiyah*, it should be noted that the text itself addresses a number of other philosophical and theological groups, which thus illuminates even more fully the numerous intellectual strands that

constitute the Arabo-Persian jet stream in which Muḥibb Allāh participated. The later commentaries on the *Taswiyah*, similarly, represent a number of these additional philosophical perspectives, although an examination of them unfortunately lies beyond our present needs. The critical voices of Mullā Maḥmūd and Khwājah Khwurd, for the purposes of this study, provide enough of an intellectual context with which to sufficiently delineate Muḥibb Allāh's goals within the *Taswiyah*, though future scholarship should take note of the further philosophical currents that Muḥibb Allāh engages. Perhaps the most prominent of these groups was the school of speculative theology (*kalām*) known as the Ash'ariyyah, which traces its origins to the ninth/tenth-century figure Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936) and receives significant elaboration through the influential efforts of such later Ash'arī theologians (*mutakallimūn*) as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), al-Ījī, al-Taftāzānī, and Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī.⁸⁹ My exceedingly cursory glance at a manuscript suggests that Amān Allāh Banārasī's (d. 1721) commentary on the *Taswiyah* might represent an Ash'arī perspective on the discussion, although this identification is only tentative.⁹⁰ Muḥibb Allāh additionally addresses a group known as the Ḥusbāniyyah (usually translated as "Sophists" or "Skeptics"), who adopt a position in which the entirety of the universe, and all the objects within it, are deemed to be in a constant state of flux, change, and transience.⁹¹ Lastly, the *Taswiyah* contains what could be a reference to the *ishrāqī* ("Illuminationist") school attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), possibly as filtered through the lens of Dawānī, who also considered himself an interpreter within the *ishrāqī* tradition.⁹²

Confronted, in his own time, with these diverse philosophical and theological positions on questions of *wujūd*, Muḥibb Allāh sought, in the *Taswiyah* and in other writings, to insert his own positions and counter-arguments into this fray. Like most *wujūdīs*, Muḥibb Allāh invoked the writings of Ibn 'Arabī to formulate his arguments, particularly the latter's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom") as well as his voluminous *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* ("The Meccan Openings"). Muḥibb Allāh was also familiar with the more systematic, philosophical writers of the later *wujūdī* tradition, including such figures as Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1329), Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350), and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 1492), each of whom had composed a number of treatises in specific response to many of the same philosophical and theological schools with which Muḥibb Allāh was in conversation. In the *Taswiyah*, however, Muḥibb Allāh does not manifestly rely upon these authors, opting instead to formulate his own highly original statements and arguments, interspersed with lengthy quotations from the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* to amplify his point. Nevertheless, one may note certain basic conceptual similarities between Muḥibb Allāh and these authors, such that, one could assert, this particular group of *wujūdīs* constitutes the philosophical "school" with which Muḥibb Allāh exhibits the closest affinity.

Authors in the tradition of Qayṣarī and Jāmī—in writings such as *Maṭlaʿ khusūṣ al-kilām fī maʿānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām* and *al-Durrah al-fākhīrah*, respectively—maintain as their central tenet that the Necessary, God, is existence (*wujūd*), but insist that this sense of the term “existence” must be carefully distinguished from various other senses of the word.⁹³ To explicate these different senses of “*wujūd*,” Qayṣarī seemingly builds on a framework established by Ibn Sīnā in his discussions on natural kinds: he identifies one type of *wujūd* as “existence in the external world” (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*), which simply corresponds to the existence that we habitually attribute to a given particular object; another type of *wujūd* is “existence in the mind” (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), which corresponds to the mentally abstracted universal concept of existence; then there is “*wujūd* insofar as it is what it is” (*al-wujūd min ḥaythu huwa huwa*), which is the real existence of the Necessary, neither one nor many, neither universal nor particular.⁹⁴ Hence, in simpler terms, Qayṣarī identifies three varieties of existence: 1) existence instantiated in a particular, 2) the abstracted mental universal “existence,” and 3) Existence as such, which is identical with the Necessary, the absolute Real; this would correspond, by way of the example of “human,” to: 1) a particular human, Matthew (corresponding to Ibn Sīnā’s “*fī l-kathrah*,” also known as “*bi-sharṭ shayʾ*”); 2) the concept “human” that arises when the mind, having encountered multiple humans—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and so on—groups them all together under an abstracted universal genus “human” (corresponding with Ibn Sīnā’s “*baʿda al-kathrah*,” also known as “*bi-sharṭ lā*”); and 3) the essence “humanity” as such, which is prior both to instantiation in particulars and to mental conceptualization, and possesses a transcendent reality irrespective of whether particular humans are there to concretize or to mentally abstract it (corresponding with Ibn Sīnā’s “*qabla al-kathrah*,” also known as “*lā bi-sharṭ*”).⁹⁵ This latter sense of *wujūd* is what Jāmī refers to as “the reality of existence” (*ḥaqīqat al-wujūd*), as contrasted with mere particular instances of existence (*wujūdāt khāṣṣah*) or the mere concept of existence (*mafḥūm al-wujūd*). It should be noted that, although Qayṣarī and Jāmī seek to distinguish this third sense of existence—that is, the real existence of the Necessary, referred to as “absolute existence” (*wujūd muṭlaq*)—from a universal (*kullī*), some of their descriptions of the Necessary do seem to fit the characteristics of a universal. As such, opponents have often objected that, despite their best efforts, these *wujūdī* thinkers have simply made “Necessary existence” into a universal.

Regardless of the validity of this critique, however, a crucial distinction remains: as we have seen both Mullā Maḥmūd and Khwājah Khwurd suggest, a mental universal concept (*kullī*) like “existence” has no objective, *extra*-mental existence, but rather, only inhabits our minds. The closest a universal like “existence” could come to existing “out there” in the world is insofar as one would be willing to grant that the mental concept “existence” can be instantiated in particulars (*afrād*), that is, insofar as one is willing to affirm, in a qualified way, that the table, chair, and

apple “possess” (the mental universal) “existence.” *Wujūdī* thinkers in the tradition of Qayṣarī and Jāmī, however, affirm that universals do indeed have an objective existence outside the mind, irrespective of the presence or absence of concrete instantiations. It is for this reason that Jāmī emphasizes his aforementioned distinction between the mentally abstracted universal *concept* (*mafhūm*) of existence—a variety of existence that all parties agree exists only in the mind—from what he terms the *reality* (*ḥaqīqah*) of existence—a principal, Necessary reality that encompasses, transcends, and is the source of all other, ontologically “lesser” modes of existence.⁹⁶ As Qayṣarī affirms quite explicitly in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, “we do not concede that the natural universal (*kullī ṭabī‘ī*),⁹⁷ for its actualization (*tahaqquq*), depends upon the existence of that which occurs to it⁹⁸ . . . for the accident (*‘arīd*) is not actualized except in its substance (*ma‘rūd*), so, if it were [also] the case that its substance depended upon it (the accident) for its (the substance’s) actualization, then this would imply [the fault of] circularity.”⁹⁹ Here Qayṣarī compares the relationship between a universal and its particulars to that between a substance and an accident: red (an accident) cannot appear in the world without some kind of a substratum in which to appear, such as a piece of fabric; “red” or “redness,” in other words, can never be found in the world floating about on its own. The accident “red” thus depends upon the substratum “fabric” for its concrete existence in the world. The reverse is not the case, however, for the fabric can perfectly well exist without the red. Hence, the dependency is unidirectional. In the same way, Qayṣarī affirms, the particulars that fall under a given universal depend upon that universal for their existence, but not vice-versa: the universal reality “human” is there “first,”¹⁰⁰ and particular humans such as Matthew, Mark, and Luke, operating analogously to “accidents” or “attributes” that rest in this universal, depend on (or, we might even say, “derive from”) the universal “human” for their existence.

Accordingly, these *wujūdī* thinkers assert that the universal “human” is in fact ontologically prior to its particular instances, and, contrary to the views of the other groups surveyed so far, the same holds all the more true for absolute existence (*wujūd muṭlaq*) in relation to the particular instantiations of existence (*wujūdāt*) in the world.¹⁰¹ Qayṣarī adds that the universal does indeed require particular instances in order to exist in the levels of reality that lay beneath it,¹⁰² such that the universal reality “human,” for instance, in itself cannot appear within the realm of sensory perception (*‘ālam al-shahādah*), but can only exist before our physical eyes through the particular forms of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and so forth. Yet the universal does *not* depend upon these particulars for its objective reality as such: the universal will happily enjoy its existence in higher realms of reality, regardless of whether there is a particular through which it (the universal) can instantiate in the here-below. *Wujūdī* thinkers such as Qayṣarī and Jāmī will readily grant that the mentally abstracted universal is indeed mind-dependent and dependent on concrete particulars for its existence, but further stipulate that there is another kind of “real universal” that is an ontologically prior, objective entity, from which

the particulars themselves derive, and, thus, upon which they depend. *Wujūd*, for these thinkers, is the “real universal” par excellence, identified with God, who is *wujūd* per se. The particular existent objects of the world, in turn, instantiate and manifest (*zuhūr, tajallī*) this absolute *wujūd* in the here-below, much as particular humans instantiate and manifest the transcendent, universal reality “human.”

Though he formulates his views in a different manner than Qūnawī, Kāshānī, Qayṣarī, and Jāmī, Muḥibb Allāh, in interpreting Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ* in the context of the *Taswīyah*, articulates a philosophical perspective that exhibits several basic similarities. Muḥibb Allāh shares the realist commitments of these *wujūdī* thinkers, for instance, in asserting that universals are extra-mentally real and ontologically prior to their particulars, the latter depending upon the former for their existence.¹⁰³ Muḥibb Allāh also affirms, along with these figures, that the universal depends upon the particular only in the respect that the universal can only become manifest (*mutajallī*) at a lower level of reality—in the sensory realm, for instance—through a particular that is of that realm.¹⁰⁴ There is, accordingly, a certain reciprocal dependence, according to Muḥibb Allāh, between the universal and the particular, though the ontological priority of the former is never in question. Accordingly, unlike Qayṣarī and Jāmī, who shy away from such a formulation even if they may ultimately fall into it, Muḥibb Allāh is perfectly comfortable describing the absolute Reality (*al-ḥaqq*), the Necessary (*al-wājib*), as a universal: indeed, he unhesitatingly describes the Necessary as the “highest genus” (*al-jins al-‘ālī*), that is, the genus that contains all other genera or the universal that contains all universals.¹⁰⁵ While the likes of Mullā Maḥmūd and Khwājah Khwurd would insist that this highest genus is purely a second-order mental concept (*ma‘qūl thānī*) and nothing more—that is, a mental abstraction based on other mental abstractions that does not track with anything real in the external world¹⁰⁶—the realist Muḥibb Allāh, in contrast, affirms that the highest genus is in fact the real, objective, comprehensive source of all other genera and then, by extension, all particulars and existents. Muḥibb Allāh therefore dubs this highest genus, following Ibn ‘Arabī’s terminology, the *ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq* (“Reality of realities”), describing it as the Essence that includes and encompasses within it the essences of all existent things.¹⁰⁷

This Reality of realities, accordingly, contains all lower realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) within it. Muḥibb Allāh thus erects a three-level conception of existence, the most fundamental being 1) the Reality of realities itself, which is the source of 2) the realities—such as the essence “human,” the essence “horse,” and so forth—which are, in turn, the source of 3) the particular existent objects that we see and know in the manifest world. It is in light of this tripartite conception that Muḥibb Allāh can assert, quite strikingly, that concrete, particular objects in the world (the “possible existents,” *mumkināt*) are “not other than the Necessary (*al-wājib*).”¹⁰⁸ Though Mullā Maḥmūd, Khwājah Khwurd, and all the other Islamic theological and philosophical schools described here are at pains to establish the irreducible divide between God (the Necessary) and the world (the possible entities), Muḥibb

Allāh, even more strongly than Qayṣarī or Jāmī, readily affirms their fundamental, essential identity.¹⁰⁹ Muḥibb Allāh depicts this identity through the analogy of water and bubbles: each and every bubble, whether in a potential or an actual state, is always “contained” within the ocean water; likewise, every bubble, even though it looks different than water, is really made up of nothing but water.¹¹⁰ As such, even though there appear to be two distinct entities, ultimately there is only water, the bubbles being nothing more than delimited “forms” (*ṣuwar*) or “manifestations” (*tajalliyāt*) of the water; also evident is the ontological primacy of the water, and the bubbles’ complete and utter dependence upon it for their existence. In the same way, the possible existents all depend upon, consist of, manifest, and are principally contained within the real existence of the Necessary, a daring formulation of the ontological continuity between God and the world that is most typically withheld from the philosophical arena, and instead reserved for the more ecstatic, non-technical, “imprecise” realm of poetry, as in the oft-repeated Persian poetic utterance “*hamah ūst*” (“all is He!”).¹¹¹

Although, once again, Muḥibb Allāh was almost certainly too young to have influenced the translation team directly, the *Jūg Bāsisht* nevertheless does exhibit this characteristic emphasis on the ontological continuity between God and the phenomenal world. Muḥibb Allāh’s precise formulation of *wujūd* here, accordingly, will help us to make better sense of the *Jūg Bāsisht* in the chapters to follow. He represents, in a general way, a viable approach to *wahdat al-wujūd* that was on offer within the early modern Arabo-Persian jet stream, from which the translation team drew in composing the *Jūg Bāsisht*. What should also be noted from the foregoing is the sheer breadth and complexity of the Arabo-Persian philosophical jet stream in this early modern moment: between several varieties of Peripatetic, Dawānian, Ashārī, *ishrāqī*, and other philosophical and theological traditions, Muḥibb Allāh had a great many conversation partners from whom to choose, with only a select slice specifically addressed within the *Taswiyah*.¹¹² Modern scholars have largely missed this broad scope of pressing philosophical disputations, focusing instead on an imagined *wujūd*-vs.-*shuhūd* rivalry, despite the fact that Sirhindī, so far as is known, is nowhere mentioned across Muḥibb Allāh’s numerous compositions. With so much occupying his attention, furthermore, it should also come as little surprise that Muḥibb Allāh would have little time or inclination to engage Hindu philosophical traditions directly. Muḥibb Allāh does, however, engage in considerable reflection on the *general* phenomenon of humankind’s pronounced religious diversity, a topic to which we now turn via his less dialectical, more sapiential treatises.

THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

In light of Muḥibb Allāh’s exceptional willingness to affirm the ontological continuity—though *not* a simple, sheer identity—between God and the world, there

still remains to be addressed the socio-political attitudes that modern scholars have tended to associate with Muḥibb Allāh's *wujūdī* sensibilities. If, in the last analysis, everything in the universe is ultimately a manifestation of the one Reality and reducible to it, then how could the distinctions between different religions, between “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy,” or even between “right” and “wrong,” retain their integrity and normative force? In this vein, as seen above, a number of modern scholars have attributed to Muḥibb Allāh a somehow “pro-Hindu” attitude, with a concomitantly nebulous relationship with the *sharī'ah* and Islamic law.¹¹³ Such associations, however, are rarely grounded in any close, sustained consideration of Muḥibb Allāh's actual writings and teachings.

Indeed, the only concrete evidence offered to support the idea of Muḥibb Allāh's “pro-Hindu” stance are the abovementioned isolated sentences from his two letters to Prince Dārā Shikōh. In these letters, Muḥibb Allāh offers the advice that a ruler's primary consideration is the tranquility and safety of *all* of God's creations, whether they be believers (*mu'minūn*) or unbelievers (*kāfirūn*), since all of God's creation is His manifestation (*paydāyish*). Muḥibb Allāh continues that the lord of all human lords, the Prophet Muḥammad, was merciful to everyone—from the most pious to the most sinful—while the Qur'an proclaims that God sent the Prophet “as a mercy to the worlds” (21:107). Now, this means that the Prophet was sent as a mercy to *all* people and societies, just as God is the Lord of all the worlds and spreads His mercy over all of them. The prince or king, accordingly, in seeking to follow the example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet who himself reflects God's perfect Lordship, should display mercy towards all his subjects, Muslim or otherwise.¹¹⁴ Muḥibb Allāh adds at the end of the passage, however, that, even though God, the Lord, showers his unlimited mercy upon all of creation, each created thing only receives that mercy in accordance with its own level (*martabah*), that is to say, in accordance with its own degree of receptivity to that mercy.¹¹⁵ In other words, a creature may reject God's mercy even though it is being offered, much as, for instance, someone might reject a gesture of kindness from an individual with whom he is angry. Putting aside, for the moment, the likely scenario, based upon his letters, that Dārā Shikōh was not especially enamored of Muḥibb Allāh's replies—and, hence, it seems unlikely that Muḥibb Allāh's particular counsel had much of a formative impact upon the young prince—this passage nevertheless provides a seemingly promising entry point for recovering Muḥibb Allāh's attitudes toward, and potential relations with, the “Hindus” of South Asia. In order to determine whether this passage really does amount to a “pro-Hindu” attitude standing in tension with Islamic law, let us turn then to Muḥibb Allāh's other writings, both Arabic and Persian, in the hopes of deepening and nuancing our understanding of passages such as these, too often read in isolation when they should be read in light of the author's larger corpus.

The idea of God as the “All-Merciful” (*al-raḥmān*) sits at the heart of much of Muḥibb Allāh's metaphysics, even as it forms one of the central themes of Ibn

‘Arabī’s thought and, indeed, the Qur’ān itself.¹¹⁶ Though the theme appears in the majority of his treatises, one of the most sustained treatments occurs in his Persian commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, particularly the chapters on the prophets Ādam, Hūd, Shu‘ayb, and Ṣāliḥ. Here, both Muḥibb Allāh and Ibn ‘Arabī recount the process of the world’s manifestation, when God, who was alone at the “beginning,” desired to be known and to witness His own perfections and beauties, a notion supported by the oft-cited *ḥadīth qudsī* where God declares: “I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known. Hence I created the creatures/world (*khalq*) in order that I would be known.”¹¹⁷ In this way, desiring to have His perfections and beauties shared with others, God first conceived the infinite possible creations within His own infinite knowledge. These possibilities, as the objects of God’s pre-eternal knowledge, are referred to by Ibn ‘Arabī and Muḥibb Allāh as the “immutable essences” (*al-a’yān al-thābitah*). Subsequently, God next brought these countless possibilities into existence, the fruit of which is the continuing process of the coming-to-be of the universe, drawn from God’s knowledge into a state of “manifestation” (*tajallī*).¹¹⁸

Now, since, according to Muḥibb Allāh, God’s existence (*wujūd*) is the only existence there is, this means that the possible (*mumkin*) entities of the created order can only “borrow” their existence from His. In reality, their existence is only His existence deployed in particular, delimited modes. Muḥibb Allāh’s analogy of water and bubbles provides a useful illustration: water contains within itself an array of possible modes of manifestation—it may appear as snow, ice, vapor, foam, etc.—but each one of those manifestations is really, ultimately, none other than the water itself. Furthermore, God manifests His own names, qualities, beauties, and perfections *through* these creations, such that, whatever majesty there might be in, for example, a particular mountain, is really just the manifestation or reflection of God’s own dimension of majesty (*jalāl*). Every object in the entire phenomenal order, accordingly, is simply the playing out of that “initial” moment in which God desired to see His intrinsic qualities disclosed in every possible outward modality and permutation. He first conceived those infinite modes and possibilities of His own nature—resulting in the fixing of the “immutable essences” within His knowledge—and then, in His infinite mercy, granted them all existence from out of His own *wujūd*. This process of generously pouring forth His own existence, beauties, and qualities into the infinite possible existents of the cosmos is referred to by Muḥibb Allāh, following Ibn ‘Arabī, as the “breath” or “breathing out” of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-raḥmān*).¹¹⁹

No possible existent, however, can manifest the fullness of God’s nature; each manifestation manifests only an aspect or dimension of His names and qualities (*asmā’ wa ṣifāt*). Hence, each manifestation (*tajallī*, *zuhūr*, *paydāyish*) is also referred to as a “delimitation” (*taqayyud*) or “specification” (*ta’ayyun*), given that it restrictively presents just one articulation of pure Existence to the exclusion of others. The possible entity, thus, simultaneously veils and discloses the divine

Reality.¹²⁰ Muḥibb Allāh affirms that it is in fact the immutable essence (*ʿayn thābitah*) that determines in exactly which mode the Real will manifest through that particular object and what that object will exclude: each *ʿayn thābitah* is, precisely, God’s pre-eternal knowledge of each and every possibility for that entity in every last detail of its becoming—how it will come to exist, how it will pass away, what it will be/become in every moment in between—a knowledge which is immutably and unchangeably fixed within God’s omniscient awareness. When God extends his mercy to grant existence to that immutable essence, then, it will only accept that mercy in accordance with its own pre-determined receptivity to it: the immutable essence of a particular lotus flower, for instance, will happily accept varying degrees and aspects of God’s dimensions of “beauty” (*jamāl*) and “peace” (*salām*), but will not especially well accept the more severe or wrathful qualities contained within God’s reality (God as the “slayer,” *al-mumīt*, or the “conqueror,” *al-qahhār*, and so forth).¹²¹ That flower’s existence, accordingly, will manifest only those specific qualities of pure, undelimited *wujūd*, while excluding the others. This “receptivity” (*qābiliyyah*) of the possible entity, referenced in the full title of Muḥibb Allāh’s *Taswiyah*, is also referred to by various other technical terms, including “capacity” or “preparedness” (*istiʿdād*).

So how, then, does this metaphysical framework relate to the particular question of a *shaykh* or prince’s treatment of Muslims and non-Muslims? The first thing worth emphasizing regarding this framework is that “distinction” and “difference” do play a prominent role within it: Muḥibb Allāh’s vision is not one of “sheer-unity-pure-and-simple,” but rather, a unity that has distinction and difference prefigured within it, as the entirety of the infinite, unique possibilities of the cosmos are principally contained within God’s knowledge and His pure, undelimited *wujūd*. Both the unity between a lion and flower, and all that which distinguishes a lion and a flower, have their roots in the most fundamental layers of Reality, which means that difference cannot be so easily discarded in the name of “sheer unity.” It is for this reason that Muḥibb Allāh, echoing Ibn ‘Arabī, never tires of insisting on the crucial need to find a balance between affirming God’s immanence in the world (*tashbīh*), on the one hand, and His utter transcendence of it (*tanzīh*), on the other, for, it is just as important to say “the world is *not* God” as it is to say “the world *is* God.”¹²² Indeed, when critiquing other thinkers, philosophical schools, and intellectual tendencies, Muḥibb Allāh continually returns to the *tanzīh-tashbīh* dyad, singling out the basic error of these thinkers as either falling too far on the side of *tanzīh* or else too far on the side of *tashbīh*—or, sometimes, both somehow at the same time!¹²³ If the created entities of the world are, thus, simultaneously different from and identical with God, then this is likewise true of created objects with respect to one another; given any two objects, there must be some respect(s) in which they are the “same” (*tashbīh*) and some respect(s) in which they are “different” (*tanzīh*).

In the language of Muḥibb Allāh’s letter, however, in the case of Muslims (“*muslimūn*” or “*muʿminūn*”) and non-Muslims (“*kāfirūn*,” i.e., “unbelievers”),

we are speaking not just about created objects, but about the more specific category of “religions,” or what Muḥibb Allāh calls, in Qur’ānic terms, “*dīn*” or “*shar*,” both of which suggest the idea of a path or “way-to-be-followed,”¹²⁴ “*shar*” also referring to a divine revelation. For Muḥibb Allāh, the starting point of all “religion” is, precisely, revelation (*shar*), that is, a descent (*tanzīl*) of God’s message or word into the world by means of a messenger (*rasūl*), who conveys that word to his community (*ummah*). Muḥibb Allāh is explicit that God has sent multiple revelations through multiple messengers, all of whose messages convey the same essential knowledge and wisdom.¹²⁵ At the outset of his Persian auto-commentary on the *Taswiyah*, for instance, Muḥibb Allāh affirms that every one of God’s numerous revelations has expressed the truth contained in the Qur’ānic verse “wheresoever you look, there is the face of God” (2:115).¹²⁶ This means that, according to Muḥibb Allāh, every single one of the messengers and prophets knew and conveyed to his community the teaching that God, the Essence (*dhāt*), is present and manifest in every last created thing—even the stars, or even the idols of idol-worshippers.¹²⁷ Indeed, Muḥibb Allāh even quotes from the considerable corpus of Persian poetry that articulates a certain defense of the practice: “If an unbeliever (*kāfir*) should become enlightened by means of an idol, where in his religion (*dīn*) has he gone astray?”¹²⁸ Such affirmations, at first glance, would seem to lend credence to the notion that Muḥibb Allāh, as well as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, go hand-in-hand with “heterodoxy” and a “pro-Hindu” outlook.

The story of revelation, however, does not end here. Even if Reality is one, and the revelations (*sharā’i*) communicate shared, universal truths, the fact still remains that each revelation is unique, descending in a different language than all the others, and containing teachings, perspectives, laws, and customs that are distinct from all the others—in some cases, drastically or even contradictorily so. This diversity of revelations, hence, must be explained and accounted for. Though there are many ways those in the *wujūdī* tradition have done so, one of Muḥibb Allāh’s preferred approaches is in reference to the distinctive souls of each prophet (*nabī*). He asserts that, like all possible, created entities, the prophets too each have their own unique immutable essences (*a’yān thābitah*), which means that the possibilities of a prophet’s soul (“*nafs*” or “*rūh*”) to manifest the myriad modes of God’s names and attributes—the modalities of God’s *wujūd* that it is able to adopt and embody—are different for each prophet.¹²⁹ Accordingly, each prophet’s unique soul “colors” the revelation that comes to it, granting the revelation a certain “tint” in accordance with the basic nature and temperament of the prophet in question’s soul, rather as pure light, shining through a stained-glass window, will be rendered red by one window, green by another, and so forth.

Indeed, the analogy ensconced within the very title of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, the “Bezels of Wisdom,” communicates precisely this teaching: each prophet is a “bezel,” that is, the setting on the top of a ring in which the ringstone is to be placed. Now, these settings vary widely from ring to ring, coming in various shapes and sizes.

Meanwhile, the actual jewel, which represents revelation or God's wisdom, has to assume the one and only particular shape that will fit into a given setting. In this way, the shape of a ring setting—in this case, a prophet's *'ayn thābitah*—determines the shape of the stone—the revelation—that will be deposited within it; the stone (revelation), in its own turn, willingly accommodates the shape of the setting (the prophet's *'ayn thābitah*) that is presented to it,¹³⁰ the two entities, in this manner, standing in a mutual relationship of shaping and re-fashioning one another. And so, although all the messengers—Muḥammad, Jesus, Moses, and so on¹³¹—have been sent a common message, the unique contours of each of their souls effect the diversity of the revelations. It is as if one imagined the entire constellation of God's names and attributes as stars in the sky: the unique position of each prophet within that sky—determined by his soul's inherent, particular affinity for some attributes over others, for instance—would re-orient or “skew” what that sky would look like, for the three-dimensional constellation would look different as viewed from different positions and vantage-points within it. The “total sky” of God's Reality (*ḥaqīqah*) that is communicated by each revelation, accordingly, will look different in each case, even though the sky and stars are one and the same throughout.

But it is not only the prophets' souls that are fixed by God's conceiving of the *a'yān al-thābitah*; the souls of every human individual and every human collectivity are also established within God's knowledge in that same pre-eternal “moment.” Accordingly, in his Persian auto-commentary on the *Taswīyah*, for example, Muḥibb Allāh asserts that the multiplicity of, and differences between, the conduct of the numerous prophets is in light of the multiplicity of, and differences between, the capacities or “preparednesses” (*isti'dādāt*) of the various human communities (or “nations,” *umam*, sing. *ummah*) to which those prophets were sent.¹³² Although a community is a much more complex phenomenon than a human individual, nonetheless, this affirmation implies that, for Muḥibb Allāh, different human collectivities, too, possess a particular nature, character, or temperament—not to mention different norms and social customs—that are unique to them. When God, accordingly, sends a new revelation to a community by means of a new messenger, that revelation is tailored to suit the specific needs, qualities, and “idiom” of that community, as is the example (*sunnah*) of their messenger, who embodies the ideal human response to revelation for that community. In other words, when God sends a revelation to a community—and, as God states in the Qur'ān, He has sent a messenger to every community (10:47)—He makes sure to do so in their own “language,” both literally and figuratively. Otherwise, revelation would be pointless, the *raison d'être* of revelations and prophets being, according to Muḥibb Allāh, to show people the way back to God. They cannot accomplish that purpose unless they speak to the listener in a way that will make sense to her and will address and remedy her specific ailment(s).

If every community has a general “preparedness” (*isti'dād*) or capacity to display God's names and attributes, then every human individual, all the more so,

possesses a unique, specific preparedness to manifest the various dimensions and qualities of *wujūd*. Just as each individual, therefore, manifests God's *existence* in a unique manner, in the same fashion, every soul also *knows* God in a distinctive way, in accordance with her distinct *isti'dād*.¹³³ In other words, the *'ayn thābitah* is, precisely, the distinctive relationship that exists between a soul, on the one hand, and God's names and attributes, on the other; the soul's peculiar knowledge of God is, of course, deeply implicated in that relationship. Accordingly, Muḥibb Allāh often states, following Ibn 'Arabī, that every soul creates its own Lord within itself, and then projects that Lord as though He were outside of it.¹³⁴ Just as the bezel of a ring "makes" its own ringstone, each soul considers God's nature to be in accordance with its specific relationship with Him; God, in turn, knowing, comprehensively, a given soul's particular relationship with Him, willingly discloses Himself to that soul in that form so that it will accept Him and not turn away from Him, much as the jewel "willingly" shapes itself to fit into the ring's bezel.¹³⁵ The problem, however, occurs when someone takes her own individual "lord," fashioned in the image of her own soul, to be absolute, as though only her conception of God is valid to the exclusion of all others. This, Muḥibb Allāh flatly asserts, is no different from the worst forms of idol-worship: just as an idolater may consider God to be within her idol and nowhere else, likewise, the narrow-minded individual creates her own "lord" within herself, and then worships that idea as an idol to the exclusion of all other conceptions of God.¹³⁶ As Muḥibb Allāh elegantly states the matter in his Persian *Fuṣūṣ* commentary, "beware, lest you restrict God to your own specific belief (*i'tiqād*), and then you become an unbeliever (*kāfir*) and a rejecter of that which is outside of your own specific limitation."¹³⁷ The believer, accordingly, must strive to be constantly open to aspects and dimensions of God's nature that may simply escape her comprehension at the present moment. One's knowledge of God is not static over the course of a lifetime; rather, there is the unceasing possibility of its becoming ever more encompassing and comprehensive, if one would only pursue it in the proper manner. It is for this reason that Muḥibb Allāh insists that, even though we all have our own unique conceptions of God in accordance with our own peculiar capacities, not all conceptions of God are created equal. On the contrary, such conceptions are situated within a hierarchy, with some being more comprehensive than others, just as some descriptions of a complex object are better and more exhaustive while others are more limited, partial, or potentially even distorting.¹³⁸

If it is true, then, as the Qur'ān affirms, that our knowledge of God and our manifestation of His names and attributes may increase,¹³⁹ then how does one accomplish this? The most rudimentary answer, for Muḥibb Allāh, is religious praxis, specifically the forms of religious practice sanctioned by God and sent down with His prophets. Muḥibb Allāh is abundantly clear that we cannot accomplish the return to God through our own devices or by any feat of our own individual will (*ikhtiyār*).¹⁴⁰ Since God is the source of all knowledge and salvation, His help or

favor (*ināyat*) is needed in order to escape ignorance, and He has already offered us that help through the practices enjoined in the Qurʾān and in the example of the Prophet Muḥammad and the other great friends of God (*awliyāʾ*) throughout history.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, Muḥibb Allāh insists time and again, throughout all of his writings, on the need for formal religious *praxis* (*ʿamal*), including such rites as the recitation of the Qurʾān (*tilāvat-i Qurʾān*), the repetition of God's names (*zīkr*), and the spiritual retreat (*khalvat*).¹⁴² So vital is formal *praxis*, in fact, that Muḥibb Allāh undertook to write a lengthy Persian treatise, the *ʿIbādāt al-khavāṣṣ*, on the specific subject of Islamic acts of worship (*ʿibādāt*), covering such central topics of Islamic law as the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), purification (*ṭahārat*), canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*), supererogatory acts (*nawāfil*), recommended acts (*sunan*), obligatory acts (*farāʾid*), and numerous others.¹⁴³ These were the lifelong activities undertaken by the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who, for Muḥibb Allāh, attained a greater degree of knowledge than any non-prophet could ever hope to achieve, and who manifested God's names and attributes as comprehensively as any human being ever could. So, one should practice as the Prophet practiced in the hopes that she might approach as close as possible to his lofty station.¹⁴⁴

Of course, we non-prophets will never equal the Prophet's station, which means that we can never abandon the *sharīʿah* and the Prophet's example in this lifetime. This is why, Muḥibb Allāh insists, Ibn ʿArabī himself expended constant efforts to protect the *sharīʿah* of Muḥammad, declaring that the perfection of the traveler on the spiritual path "is that his step never once goes outside of the boundary of the *sharīʿah*."¹⁴⁵ Indeed, according to Muḥibb Allāh in his Persian *Manāẓir-i akhaṣṣ al-khavāṣṣ*, there is actually no end to the levels of certainty and degrees of repose in the divine presence that can be achieved. Accordingly, the traveler on the path must, day after day, exert continuous efforts for her spiritual advancement, just as the prophets never ceased to do.¹⁴⁶ The proper believers, accordingly, consistently imitate the conduct of the prophets (*al-anbiyāʾ*) and the messengers (*al-rusul*), rather than following their own whims and "reasoned" opinions, for, to follow only one's own opinion is, again, to make an idol out of one's own individual "lord."¹⁴⁷

Yet, if all the prophets were sent by God and conveyed authentic revelations, then why follow one prophet over any other? After all, they all know God's nature and manifest His names and qualities with exceptional profundity, so are they not all worthy of being followed? In answer to this question, in his *Sharḥ-i Taswīyah* and in his Persian commentary on *Faṣṣ Hūd*, among other places, Muḥibb Allāh constructs an image in which all the prophets, owing to their intrinsic differences (as outlined above), are all situated in different "locations," all of them facing in the *direction* (*qiblah*) of God, here metaphorically referencing the orientation of the daily prayers (*ṣalāt*), for which Muslims across the globe pray in the direction of the Kaʿbah in Mecca.¹⁴⁸ Now, since they are standing in different places, each prophet faces a different compass direction, even though they are all oriented toward a common central point, God. Muḥibb Allāh first acknowledges that, yes,

God, the Real, is present everywhere and encompasses everything, and so, He is fully present to each direction or *qiblah*; to deny this would be to limit God, that is, to say that He is only in one place and not some other place, which amounts to unbelief (*kufr*) and idol-worship. At the same time, however, qua human individual, each prophet is only able to stand in his own given location at a given time; none of the prophets, being specified (*muta'ayyin*), delimited (*muqayyad*) beings, can stand in all places at once. Only God, the unspecified, undelimited Reality, is present everywhere, while the delimited possible entity, for so long as it remains a possible entity, can only reside in a single “where.”¹⁴⁹

And so, while it may be true, in principle, that all the prophets are to be followed, in actual, practical fact, as a delimited existent, each human can only follow one path back to God, which means following a single prophet within whose “jurisdiction” that particular path falls. Accordingly, Muḥibb Allāh calls for his readers to maintain a balance: on the one hand, it is an error to restrict God only to one’s own *qiblah*—rather, He is present to all *qiblahs*—yet, at the level of practical conduct, one must only pray according to the particular *qiblah* that is appropriate to her location, which means following the one and only prophet that is hers to be followed.¹⁵⁰ God fixes the possibilities for a given *‘ayn* from pre-eternity, which means that He also fixes its destiny. Accordingly, God providentially intends for each *‘ayn* a particular prophet, who will exemplify the *qiblah* for that *‘ayn*.¹⁵¹ If one were to invoke the analogy of “religion” as a path up a steep mountain, difficult of ascent, it could be said that the revelation brought by each prophet establishes, upon one face of that mountain, a new, broad path to the top.¹⁵² While upon a particular path, one is only to follow the guidance offered by that path’s particular guide;¹⁵³ it would be, in fact, *dangerous* to follow the instructions offered by a guide on one of the other sides of the mountain, where the terrain and obstacles will be distinct, in which case any guidance offered would be, at best, only accidentally beneficial and, at worse, a veritable *misguidance* of drastic and potentially deadly consequences. From the summit of the mountain, one might be able to look down and observe all the paths simultaneously; the summit of the mountain, however, would coincide with God Himself, the absolutely Real, undelimited *wujūd*. An individual soul, in contrast, is a *delimited* existent: for so long as she remains in the world, a delimited, possible entity with a specific, restricted *‘ayn*, then, by this very condition, she has no choice but to stand on a specific one of the numerous revealed paths.¹⁵⁴ Only sheer, undelimited Being can, metaphysically speaking, be present to all places and to all paths all at once. As such, “the one who is to be followed by the entirety of Muslims is the messenger [Muḥammad].”¹⁵⁵

Hence, confronted with the common scholarly tendency to associate Muḥibb Allāh and *waḥdat al-wujūd* with the ignoring of religious difference and some kind of inevitable, monolithic agenda in favor of “Hindu-Muslim unity,” it must be re-emphasized that distinction and difference do play a critical role in Muḥibb Allāh’s conceptualization of religious diversity. Even if every created entity is

ultimately a manifestation of the one and only *wujūd*—which, in the last analysis, is the only reality there is—it also cannot be denied that some existents manifest a nobility, an excellence, etc., which surpasses that of other existents:¹⁵⁶ at some level, it is difficult to deny that a spectacular mountain, for instance, is a more majestic theater than a putrid landfill. In this regard, there are very real distinctions between different objects and different people, differences which cannot simply be overlooked and washed away in the name of sheer “unity.” Every soul and every entity is specified and individuated in God’s pre-eternal knowledge, which means that it uniquely manifests and uniquely veils the full plenitude of God’s *wujūd*; for so long as the possible entity remains a possible entity, which is thus in some sense other than the Necessary, absolute *wujūd*, then distinction and difference will have a claim to it. As Muḥibb Allāh expresses the matter, the Ka’bah and the wine-tavern are indeed, ultimately, one,¹⁵⁷ but, for so long as the heart of the believer is not purified—for so long as there remains even a trace of “otherness” from the Real within him—the two places will not be the same for him.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, Muḥibb Allāh asserts elsewhere, perfect knowledge means knowing an object *completely*, that is to say, in all of its aspects. This means knowing all that which makes a given entity what it is, which is not only *wujūd*, but also its specific *‘ayn thābitah*. True wisdom (*ḥikmat*)—knowing things *as they are*—is also “to know the difference between a snake and fish” and to “distinguish honey from poison.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, one must distinguish between good deeds and bad deeds, and one must act accordingly, for we are not yet at the station of perfection (true perfection belonging to the Real alone) and we do not yet know whether we have molded our souls in this life in such a way as to merit salvation (*najāt*).¹⁶⁰

Such “soteriological humility” is characteristic of another persistent theme in Muḥibb Allāh’s writings (particularly in his Persian treatises), namely, the proper evaluation of spiritual intoxication and transient spiritual states (*aḥwāl*, sing. *ḥāl*).¹⁶¹ Throughout his works, Muḥibb Allāh insists that “mystical states” of any variety—ecstatic experiences, visions, intoxications, or other comparable phenomena—have no independent authority of their own. If a particular spiritual experience communicates something that is contrary to the Qur’ān and the example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, or even contrary to reason, then the latter should win out, with the *ḥāl* deemed to be vain, invalid, and utterly valueless. Muḥibb Allāh is even averse to placing any stock in *aḥwāl* that *do* conform to the Qur’ān and *sunnah*, simply for the sake of comprehensively protecting against the temptation to invest these *aḥwāl* with any semblance of authority when, in actuality, they possess none. Hence, repeatedly throughout his writings, Muḥibb Allāh critiques those around him who base their spiritual wayfaring on transient ecstatic experiences, convincing themselves that they have attained salvation or some great spiritual rank without any sound basis. Such individuals should instead be seeking the enduring condition of *ma’rifah* or gnosis through following the model of the Prophet:

A group of the fools who fancy themselves to be travelling upon the path of the true gnostics (*'urafā'*) . . . those [fools] do not manifest proper seeing and hearing, and their speculation (*fikr*) is deficient . . . their views arise in ecstasy (*wajd*) and transient states (*hāl*), and they fancy that [such] a state is more noble than gnosis (*ma'rifat*) . . . [This] is a lie which leads people astray.¹⁶²

Your own [individual] speculation cannot grasp which path is good and which is ugly. Rather, it is necessary to grasp every beauty and ugliness from the Book [the Qur'an], from the *sunnah*, and from the discourse of the friends of God (*awliyā'*) . . . If you enact this advice, you will be saved from going astray.¹⁶³

Given this utter worthlessness of *aḥwāl* for Muḥibb Allāh and the considerable danger of misguidance that they pose, whenever he discusses Ibn 'Arabī in any of his Persian writings, Muḥibb Allāh frequently adds the appellation “free of ecstasy and states” (*az wajd u ḥāl barī*) in order to emphasize that the spiritual path is in no way based on such fleeting experiences.¹⁶⁴ The authority, for Muḥibb Allāh, is unambiguously the Qur'an and the Prophet, and even discriminating reason (*'aql*), while one must be wary of any *aḥwāl* experienced along the spiritual path, lest one, “in the grips of a particular *hāl*, turn toward a *qiblah* other than that of the Messenger.”¹⁶⁵

Though additional research is in order, it is not clear whom exactly Muḥibb Allāh has in mind when he speaks of these “fools” who erroneously base their spiritual wayfaring on ecstatic states. There is no shortage of examples of ecstatic mystics with little concern for the *sharī'ah* hailing from Muḥibb Allāh's time, such as the naked poet-mystic Sarmad or certain groups among the Nātha Yogis.¹⁶⁶ One might surmise that Muḥibb Allāh was referring to a figure of the likes of the Chishtī *shaykh* 'Abd al-Jalīl ibn Ṣadr al-Dīn (d. 1633/34), a contemporary of Muḥibb Allāh hailing from either Allahabad or Lucknow. 'Abd al-Jalīl was a vocal proponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but he often presented himself as having little concern for the observance of *sharī'ah*.¹⁶⁷ If he was indeed one of the targets of Muḥibb Allāh's criticisms, then this would constitute another case of *wujūdīs* debating other *wujūdīs*, once again signaling the underappreciated internal diversity hidden within this category.

More interestingly, however, one wonders if Muḥibb Allāh had in mind the sorts of exchanges that he shared with Prince Dārā Shikōh: as seen above, in his first reply to Muḥibb Allāh, Dārā had become impatient with the latter's constant referral to the words of the Prophet and the writings of other past sages. Dārā proclaimed that “the ecstasy (*wajd*) that does not happen to be in accord with the Word of God and the Prophet is much better than that which is written in books . . . Do not refer me to any more books!”¹⁶⁸ To this, Muḥibb Allāh replied: “a mode of being and a vision that is not in accordance with the Book of God and the *sunnah* of the Messenger is not worthy of consideration.”¹⁶⁹ Even more interesting, on this point, is how closely Muḥibb Allāh's persistent critique of transient states (*aḥwāl*) echoes the critiques of Aḥmad Sirhindī, who similarly writes that

“experience is inferior to the *sharī‘ah* and not vice versa, because *sharī‘ah* is based on incontrovertible proof, while Sufi experience is a result of fallible speculation only.”¹⁷⁰ Hence, on this most central of issues, contrary to nearly everything that has been written about Muḥibb Allāh in English-language scholarship, it seems that he and Dārā Shikōh are locked in contention, while Muḥibb Allāh and Sirhindī are in fact allies toiling on the same side. Never has the assumption that Muḥibb Allāh was aiming for some ideal of “Hindu-Muslim unity,” and that he was Dārā’s inspiration for pursuing that purported goal, seemed more unlikely.

What is most important to take away from the above discussion, for the larger purposes of this study, is that Muḥibb Allāh did not exhibit any kind of “Hindu-Muslim” socio-political agenda in his writings. What interests him throughout his varied treatises, above all else, is truth, salvation, and spiritual realization, articulated in a specifically Islamic idiom. Whereas modern readers might see in Muḥibb Allāh’s commentary on the Bezel of *Hūd*, and the affirmation that God is present even in idols, a proclamation for a program of Hindu-Muslim cooperation, Muḥibb Allāh, instead, concludes the section on the note that we may be taken from this world at any moment, and so we should make sure our last moment is one of remembrance (*dhikr*), for God is present everywhere, and so we should be present with Him.¹⁷¹ The nearest to a social teaching he has to offer is not one of Hindu-Muslim commonality, but rather, of Hindu-Muslim *difference*, as Muḥibb Allāh repeatedly relates the need for each community to follow its *own* prophet, which means that, for Muslims, every last detail of the Prophet’s teachings, practices, and customs is indispensable. It may well be the case that, in principle, Muḥibb Allāh wished the best for the myriad non-Muslim communities of the world, and that he—again, in principle—maintained a potentially high opinion of them; it could just as easily be the case that Muḥibb Allāh followed the conventional Islamic view that, after the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad, all other religions were rendered abrogated (*mansūkh*) and hence invalid. What is perhaps more significant than either of these, however, is that, across his voluminous writings, Muḥibb Allāh penned hardly a word about any non-Muslim communities in any kind of specific detail, preferring, instead, to remain a thinker who wrote to and for those already within his own intellectual and religious community. In a manner largely comparable to Madhusūdana, Muḥibb Allāh’s prevailing attitude appears to be one of genuine and principled indifference, on the one hand, while exerting great efforts, in a thoroughly “Islamic” manner, to mind one’s own soul before God, on the other.

One should of course remain open to the possibility of more fertile cross-pollinations informing Muḥibb Allāh’s life and career in less overt ways. As noted above, for instance, Muḥibb Allāh’s fellow Šābirī Sufi, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī, composed his own adaptation and “Sufi commentary” on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the *Mir‘at al-ḥaqā’iq*. Surely Muḥibb Allāh would have been aware of his friend’s scholarly activities in this vein. Additionally, Muḥibb Allāh’s spiritual predecessor

in the Chishtī-Şābirī *silsilah*, ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangōhī (d. 1537), was well-known for his deep interest in Nātha *yogi* practices and Indic *haṭha yogi* breathing exercises, writing of himself that he taught an Arabic rendition of the *yoga* manual known as the *Pool of Nectar* (*Amṛtakunḍa*) to one of his disciples, while also discussing aspects of yogic practices in his *Ruṣhd-nāmah*; this Chishtī interest in *yoga* of course endured long after Gangōhī’s and Muḥibb Allāh’s respective eras, with later Chishtī masters such as Ḥājji Imdād Allāh (d. 1899) “continu[ing] to include descriptions of yogic mantras in Hindi alongside Arabic *dhikr* formulas, together with explicit accounts of yogic postures.”¹⁷² Through the Sufi breathing exercises mentioned above, likely of yogic provenance, that he learned in his early years, Muḥibb Allāh may well have participated, at the level of his regular spiritual practice, in this very same Chishtī tradition of engaging and adopting Sanskritic knowledge-systems. While there are surely additional such nodes of fascinating intercultural engagement for future scholarship to unearth, however, none of this should obscure the character of Muḥibb Allāh’s public scholarly record, which remains steadfastly situated within and internal to the Arabo-Persian jet stream.

THE ARABO-PERSIAN JET STREAM AND THE QUESTION OF INTERACTION

As just described, throughout his numerous scholarly treatises, Muḥibb Allāh makes almost no explicit reference to any non-Muslim community or figure, much less a specifically “Hindu” or Sanskrit intellectual, nor does he ever discuss Sanskritic thought or practice in any recognizable form. Non-Muslims are simply referred to as “unbelievers” (*kāfirūn*), as was the convention in most Arabic and Persian writing, while no particular qualities of any particular non-Muslim groups are ever described. One might assume, of course, that Muḥibb Allāh had some specific group(s) of “Hindus” in mind when he wrote of these *kāfirūn*, but there is no way to know, and it is nevertheless significant that he chose not to name or describe them. In short, in his scholarly writing, Muḥibb Allāh was a thinker—entirely unremarkable, in this regard—thoroughly engrossed in the inquiries, norms, and prevailing concerns of the Arabo-Persian jet stream. This hugely rich tradition was already more than enough to demand his full attention, and so it should come as no surprise if the majority of participants in this intellectual tradition, like Muḥibb Allāh, lacked any particular need or inclination to explore other intellectual worlds in other languages. When one’s primary interest is truth, knowledge, and salvation, and one is convinced that these are already fully available within one’s own tradition, then there is little likely reward in looking elsewhere.

And yet, religious diversity is clearly a topic of great interest to a thinker like Muḥibb Allāh, and so one might reasonably expect *some* degree of concrete, particular engagement with non-Muslim traditions. There is certainly some precedent

for this sort of phenomenon: Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), of course, penned his well-known Arabic account of the various beliefs, practices, and sects of India, the *Kitāb al-Hind*—a text which examined Sanskritic thought in lengthy detail—while some Buddhist philosophical tenets also found their way into certain genres of Arabic theological writing, however distortedly.¹⁷³ Bīrūnī’s work, however, was a unique piece of scholarship that, according to most modern scholars, did not inspire further Muslim writing in a comparable vein and was otherwise little known among later medieval and early modern Arabic-writing intellectuals. In other words, Bīrūnī’s treatise never belonged to a *tradition* of scholarship, and so, it seems, never properly entered into an intellectual jet stream. The vaguely Buddhist ideas that sometimes appeared in medieval Arabic theological treatises, similarly, were such negligible phenomena as to be easily forgotten or overlooked.

The medieval Arabic language, it seems, at least in its scholastic modes, was simply ill-equipped to build a new vocabulary and to incorporate other intellectual worlds into its sphere of interest in a sustained and detailed way. This became all the more the case by the early modern period, when Arabic had acquired additional volume, complexity, and entrenched disciplinary inertia that could not be easily altered. By the mid-seventeenth century, Arabic had been in use as the primary medium for Muslim thinkers to address philosophical and theological queries for nearly a thousand years; to ask the Arabic jet stream, at that ripe age, to cultivate new vocabularies, new conceptual systems, and dramatically new topics of inquiry for the sake of engaging Sanskrit thought in a deliberate disciplinary fashion was no small request indeed. Given these constraints—and recognizing that a few individual counter-examples might perhaps come to light—a full-fledged Arabic-Sanskrit cross-philosophical “dialogue” seemed largely untenable in Muḥibb Allāh’s historical moment. For any such “dialogue” to begin to take place, a language with far less scholastic inertia would seem a more promising option.

Enter Persian: as indicated above, in the early modern period Persian was expanding into new scholarly arenas and in many ways still finding its footing as an intellectual language of philosophical inquiry. Though Persian had, by this time, enjoyed quite a lengthy record as the *de facto* scholarly language for certain disciplines, Arabic had retained predominant claim over *philosophical* enquiry for centuries. During the course of those centuries, however, one finds the utilization of Persian for certain philosophical purposes, as in Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 1037) or Suhrawardī’s (d. 1191) employment of Persian for the sake of expressing philosophical ideas in a less technical, more accessible, or even “emotional,” literary, or “ecstatic” way. In later periods, one finds, for example, Jāmī’s (d. 1492) Persian and Arabic “mixed” treatises, where the Persian provides, again, a more accessible, less technical, often more poetic elucidation of the Arabic. By the early modern period, however, one encounters numerous scholars writing voluminous treatises in Persian with, in many cases, language every bit as technical as an equivalent Arabic

work. Mīr Fīndiriskī, for instance, as we shall see in the next chapter, wrote the majority of his works in Persian; Fīndiriskī's contemporary Mīr Dāmād also wrote a number of advanced philosophical texts in Persian. Muḥibb Allāh, for his own part, penned such technically challenging, scholarly works as the *Risālah-i wujūd-i muḥlaq*, *Tbādāt al-khavāṣṣ*, and *Sharḥ-i Taswīyah*, suggesting his full comfort with the Persian language to express technical scholarly matters. It also seems as though Muḥibb Allāh was concerned with accessibility, as he notes, in his preface to his Persian commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, that he had originally written a commentary in Arabic, but found that it was not serving its desired audience, and so he composed a second (and, subsequently, a third) commentary in Persian. The "accessibility" of Muḥibb Allāh's Persian version, however, is in no way on account of his watering down the material; quite the contrary, in fact. One could also note the apparent continuance of this trend into the era of Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762), who wrote numerous treatises in Persian on varied topics that were once the exclusive purview of Arabic, such as the science of *ḥadīth*; indeed, Walī Allāh even translated the Qur'ān into Persian, despite considerable opposition.

Hence, we find a general trend in the early modern period of Persian's elevation into the realm of a technical philosophical language. Although, given its history, the basic vocabulary of this emerging world of Persian scholarship was overwhelmingly drawn from the Arabic jet stream, this "newness" also allowed possibilities for Persian-writing authors to develop more innovative or even experimental modalities. I would suggest that the *Jūg Bāsisht*, and the Mughal translation movement more broadly, represents, among other things, just such an experiment, for which the "wisps" of the *wujūdī* metaphysics of someone like Muḥibb Allāh, as well as his conceptualization of religious diversity, would serve as foundational resources.