

The Metaphysics of Sufism and Concomitant Philosophies: Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*

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Abstract:

The contribution of Sufism in the field of religious syncretism has exerted a powerful influence from the 14th to the 17th centuries. While mysticism deals with the inner emotional life of man, Sufism attempts a mystical interpretation of the religious life in Islam. For the Sufis, the spiritual essence is to be obtained not through formalism but through the mystic path of yearning after and coming into union with God. Therefore essentially, Sufism is a spiritual, emotional and esoteric reality that has influenced and continues to influence the fountain-springs of knowledge, intuition, literature and the performing arts. This paper would explore the philosophic nuances and moral precepts inherent in the Sufi principles of the Lebanese American poet and writer Khalil Gibran, with reference to *The Prophet*; a monumental work of theosophical mysticism in relation to man, God and nature, without adhering to any one particular religious paradigm.

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The first blossoming of Sufism, an Indo-Asian religious mystic movement emerged at the end of the 12th C and continued till the end of the 15th C, with three great Sufi orders that had migrated to Northern India from Iran and Persia: the Chisti, the Suhrawardi and the Firdausi. The Chisti had widespread popularity and exerted the largest influence on society, both Hindus and Muslims. It concentrated in the areas where the two greatest of saints of all times lived and operated—the famous Nizam ud-din Auliya (1238-1325) and Nasir ud-din Muhammad Chiragh of Dehli (d. 1356). The greatest luminaries of Indo-Muslim culture in the Sultanate period namely Ziya ud-din Barni, the historian and Amir Khusrau the poet were their avid devotees. The Suhrawardi order was primarily confined to Sind and the Firdausi order receiving opposition from the Chisti order of Delhi moved eastwards to Bihar. All these mystic orders were greatly indebted to the writings of three most seminal works of Sufi philosophy—one was the *Kashf ul-Mahjub*, (*the Unveiling of the Veiled*) the mystic text book penned down in the 11th and 12th C by Shaikh Ali Hujwiri in Lahore at the time of Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion of Punjab. The book is an encyclopedia of notable Sufi saints, their discourses, sayings and biographies written down by their consummate pupils. Two other books of unequal merit were the *Fawa'id ul-Fawad* (*The Morals of the Heart*) written by Amir Hasan Sijzi on the conversations of Shaikh Nizam ud din Auliya between 1307 and 1322, and *Maktubat* of Shaikh Sharaf-ud-din Yahya of Bihar (hailing from the Firdausi order) was another work containing a collection of letters that is supposed to have been written during the 14th and 15th centuries.

Based on the above mentioned works and the movement itself, Sufism the elixir to the mystic's soul dominated Islamic religion and theosophy in Asia and India from the end of the 12th C, specially patronized by the Turks and Mongols. Scholars and historians express dissidence in the conceptualization of ideas regarding Sufism when related to the Islamic Shariah; and though in places the Holy Quran makes subtle references to mystic experience, a unanimous consensus about the relationship between traditional Islamic scriptures and the much later Gnostic philosophy of Sufism, is often baffling and problematizing.

Sufism in its most simplistic aspect is searching for the emotional life in Islam by looking upon God not as an incomprehensible, inscrutable and abstract entity, but as a loving succoring friend and guide, less dogmatic and judgmental in his essence. The belief and endorsement of heaven and hell and the path to salvation, underwent a conceptual and peripheral paradigm shift with regard to Sufi thought and belief, as reinstated by many devout and powerful Sufi mystic saints. One such saint was Hasan-al-Basri (643-728) whose ideas about spiritual transcendence and God can be taken as an authentic yardstick of Sufi religious faith: " I have not served God from fear of hell for I should be a wretched hireling if I served Him from fear; nor from love of heaven for I should be a bad servant if I served for what is given; I have served Him only for love of Him and desire for Him." (1) Before the second century Hijra (722-822) had ended, the Sufis as a sect had already derived methods of attaining Gnosis (*ma'rifat*) or mystic knowledge of the divine by establishing an ecstatic union with God through the path (*tariqa*) of man's ascent to God. The *Tariqa* had a seven-fold path starting from repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in god and satisfaction, after which Gnosis (the higher plane of consciousness) would set in culminating in the final revelation that Knowledge, the knower and the known are one. The basic premise to the seven fold path was through intense love and extreme devotion to God by denouncing worldly desire and worldly love. From this followed wholesome knowledge and belief in God so much so that the Sufi, would in his final transcendence, be one and inseparable with God. In concordance with this belief Al-Hallaj, (2) a famous mystic was executed for heresy in Baghdad in 922; Al-Hallaj proclaimed "I am He whom I love and He whom I love is I. We are two spirits dwelling in one body. If thou seest me, thou seest Him, and if thou seest Him, thou seest us both." If this statement somewhat rings an alarm for the dogmatic believers of Islamic shariah, it was Ibn Arabi (3) (Abu bakr Mohammad Ibn Ali Mohiyud-Din Al Hatimi-Al-Andalusi b. 1164 AD) who asserted that knowledge of god does not mean reaching or meeting Him, but an acute awareness of the deep connection between man and God that has always existed; therefore the individual soul awakens in the knowledge of the realization of this unity. Man may never become god, as God can never come down to the status of a human being. Again they are always one, though we are seldom aware of this fact, only the mystic has this realization. The great Muslim theologian Al-Ghazali (b. 1111 A.D) also redefined the relationship between Sufism and traditional Islam. According to Al-Ghazali, even in the moment of supreme illumination and enlightenment, a distinction between god and the mystic saint always prevailed. Ghazali is thus said to have reconciled the wide berth that existed between the tenets of the Ulama and the Sufi doctrine of gnosis. It goes to the credit of Al-Ghazali that Sufism became a powerful spiritual dimension of Islam, the most profound impact of which was the beginnings of the cult of 'Saint worship' in order to reach God. Sufism became a dominant ideology under the saints who had their own coterie of followers and their own succinct methods of attaining divine inspiration and knowledge. If popular Islam embraced the pir, murid nomenclature, then the more traditional Islam entered into a schism with Sufism, with the more powerful Ulama questioning the Sufi mystic power. This was an issue that remained

unresolved and any attempts to bridge the barriers always created clashes, especially during the Sultanate period in India.

The above rudimentary introduction to Sufism is important for contextualizing the writing of Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* (b. Jan1883, d. 1931), the Lebanese American artist, poet and writer whose romantic and symbolist style of writing brought about a renaissance in modern Arabic literature, especially prose poetry, which was relatively a new genre for his times. Basically a painter and writer who painted more than 700 pictures in water colour and drawings, Gibran was trained in the symbolist tradition of Paris in 1908. He was a close friend of such English writers and artists like W. B. Yeats, Carl Jung, August Rodin and the English poet William Blake, who was a big influence on Gibran whose major works after 1918 were all in English. Gibran's classic work of universal appeal in this regard is his 1923 book *The Prophet*, a kind of religious fiction voicing in the most profound manner philosophic ideas from Amharic, Islamic and Christian sources but with an anti-authoritarian stance that combines conventional wisdom with singular idealism, sagacity and a strange hypnotic power. Written in prose and translated into more than 50 languages around the world Gibran's book sold more than nine million copies in the American edition alone and often comes amidst top-most names in the best-seller lists of the world classics. The focus of this paper is analyzing select portions from Gibran's *The Prophet* in the light of Sufi mystical perceptions, and trying to show how there is a close relevance between the philosophy contained in *The Prophet* and Sufi mystical interpretations.

The Prophet is made up of 26 prose poems, the story progresses by means of sermons delivered by a wise man Al Mustapha who had been in exile on the fictional Island of Orphalese for 12 long years before returning to his own hometown. The people of the island on the eve of his departure request him amidst laments to share his wisdom and Al Mustapha in his prophetic style delivers his sermons on albeit every aspect of existence right from love, joy, sorrow, family, work, life, death and the like. As Al Mustapha ponders over what to leave for his people, and what to give them in return, he says:

“And what shall I give unto him who has left his plough in midfurrow, or to him who has stopped the wheel of his winepress?

Shall my heart become a tree heavy-laden with fruit that I may gather and give unto them?

And shall my desires flow like a fountain that I may fill their cups?

And I a harp that the hand of the mighty may touch me, or a flute that his breath may pass through me?

A seeker of silences am I, and what treasure have I found in silences that I may dispense with confidence?” (4)

The passage as a whole resonates with the Sufi idea of God's abundance and love, the last two lines particularly hint about God's manifest presence in the human soul. The famous saint Shaikh Sharaf ud-din Yahya, in his very famous *Maktabut-i-Sa'di* (pg 2-4) talks about four divine stages in order to reach God and the fourth stage he defines as one of complete absorption; that is losing even the very consciousness of being absorbed in the divine, for if consciousness existed then a line of separation still existed between the devotee and God. In more precise terms the soul merges itself into the divine light

“Merge into Him, this is monotheism: lose the sense of merging, this is unity.” (5)

The Prophet as a work of profound philosophic revelation also lays bare the concept of love; in talking about love being ingrained with pain and love as an abstract concept that charts out its own course, Al Mustapha’s views are unmistakably revelatory. In his very first sermon Al Muatapha speaks at length about love; the following lines below are quite thought-provoking in their impact:

“For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.

Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,

So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.

Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself....

He sifts you to free you from your husks.

He grinds you to whiteness.

He kneads you until you are pliant;

And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God’s sacred feast...”

These lines culminate in the climactic:

“When you love you should not say, “God is in my heart,” but rather, “I am in the heart of god”.

And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course.

Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.

But if you love and must needs have desires, let these be your desires:

To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.

To know the pain of too much tenderness.

To be wounded by your own understanding or love,

And to bleed willingly and joyfully...” (6)

It is worthy of mention here that for the Sufis the ultimate quest for God was to be achieved through the passion of love for the divine. This ruling passion of love guided his way through all the stages of worldly existence, ultimately negating worldly comforts and coming to an ultimate recognition of sustenance in the divine. For this reason many a times Sufi philosophy has been referred to as *Love Mysticism*. According to Mansur-al-Hallaj God who is love incarnate Has created man after His own image with the desire that His created creature may adore Him, love Him, and through a spiritual transformation brought about by pain and redemption ultimately

attain a union with God's will and nature. This union is actually an understanding of god and His commandments, therefore a divine grace is bestowed on such an individual who truly exists in the essence of God and his acts become divine in that sense, as God acknowledges and blesses the being of the devotee.

If self-sacrifice is to be the price of love, then love is certainly painful (as in the passage by Al Mustapha) but definitely rewarding in its final essence, since it results in the ultimate realization of god and merging with God's will. Mansur-al-Hallaj practiced strict penitence and self-sacrifice in order to attain Gnosis; a fact which is quite in keeping with the deeper meaning of the passage above.

The Persian Poet Jalal-ud-Din Mohammad Rumi in accordance with the Sufi principle of divine love writes this beautiful poem, where all thoughts about time, place, action and consciousness are lost; negatives cancel negatives of this world and only He (God)is, Was, and shall Be:

“Lo, for I to myself am unknown, now in God's name what must I do?

I adore not the Cross, nor the Crescent, I am not a Giaour nor a Jew.

East nor West, land nor sea is my home, I have kin nor with angel nor gnome,

I am wrought not of fire, nor of foam, I am shaped not of dust nor of dew.

I was born not in China afar, not in Saqsin, and not in Bulghar; Not in India, where the five rivers are, nor 'Iraq nor Khurasan I drew,

Not in this world nor that world I dwell,

Not in Paradise, neither in Hell,

In a place beyond uttermost place, in a tract without shadow of trace,

Not from Eden and Ridwan I fell,

Nor from Adam lineage I drew,

Soul and body transcending, I live in the soul of my Loved One anew!” (7)

Many sufi poets, mystics and saints believed that the pleasures of the world are only deceptions to which one must never yield if he is to reach God, therefore one must forsake his worldly pleasures and possessions if he has to come to any realization about God. Al Mustapha in his fourth sermon draws on from this concept of worldly possessions and denounces a man who cannot be generous and benevolent; about the art of giving he says:

“You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow?

And to-morrow, what shall to-morrow bring to the over-prudent dog burying bones in the trackless sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city?

And what is fear of need but need itself?

Is not dread of thirst when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable?

There are those who give little of the much which they have—and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome.

And there are those who have little and give it all.

These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty.” (8)

These lines echo the perfect Sufi principle of renunciation and benevolence. According to Shaikh Sharaf ud-din Yahya in his *Maktubat-i-Sa'di* (Pg. 60-61 and 67-69) there are four stages, each leading to the next in order to attain perfect renunciation; these are *Nasut*, *Malakut*, *Jabarut* and *Lahut*. *Nasut* is the animal nature and functions through the five senses. When the Sufi follower controls these senses limiting it to the bare minimum, he is said to have transcended his animal nature which is further refined by asceticism and purification and reaches the second stage *Malakut*, the region of the angels. The duties of this stage include prayers to God in a state of absolute humility and humbleness towards His will; thus the devotee reaches the third stage of *Jabarut*, the region of the soul. This stage is indescribable, as the soul is unknown except by divine help and truth. Since it is indescribable, it cannot be defined fully except by a few guiding principles of this stage like love, earnestness, seeking joy, ecstasy etc, to such an extent that the Sufi follower becomes oblivious of his own being and reaches *Lahut*, the unconditioned state, at which no words and no definitions make room. In fact what Al Mustapha says about giving unconditionally and with piety properly resembles the first stage of *Nasut*, when man has gained control over his own senses. The act of benevolence and renunciation of worldly possessions also meant living a life of indigence and poverty. Even Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) embraced a life of poverty and outlined its merits as the perfect way of life. The Prophet is said to have prayed:

“O God, make me like lowly and die lowly and rise from the dead among the lowly; he also said “On the Day of Resurrection God will say:

‘Bring ye My loved ones nigh unto Me’, then the Angels will say: “Who are Thy loved ones?” And God will answer them saying “The poor and destitute.” (9) (Hujwiri, *Khashf-al-Mahjub*, translated by Nicholson, p. 19)

Besides denouncing worldly comforts the basic concepts of love, work, knowledge (including self knowledge) and the soul in Khalil Gibran’s *The Prophet* again and again reiterate many Sufi principles of reaching the ultimate goal of fusing with God and becoming one with the infinite. About work, Al Mustapha tells the people of Orphalese:

“And I say that life is indeed darkness save when there is urge,

And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge.

And all knowledge is vain save when there is work,

And all work is empty save when there is love;

And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God.”
(10)

Then in his fifteenth sermon Al Mustapha tells us how pain is integrally related to self-knowledge:

“Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.

Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.” (11)

Immediately after this in the sixteenth sermon self-knowledge, truth and soul are presented as one following the other in a complete and related sequence:

“And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.

For self is a sea boundless and measureless.

Say not, “I have found the truth, ”but rather, ”I have found a truth”.

Say not, “I have found the path of the soul.” Say rather, “I have met the soul walking upon my path”

For the soul walks upon all paths.

The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.

The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.” (12)

These lines express adherence to Hindu mystical thought where the soul (*Atman*) is one and same with the soul (*Brahman*) which is eternal, infinite, one and indivisible, unchangeable and attribute-less. It is the only one reality. Everything else is mere illusion (*Maya*) due to absence of true knowledge, what we might call ignorance (*Avidya*). The phenomenal world is illusory and unreal like a mirage or a vision. The soul (*atman*) being the soul, has its qualities. In one’s inner self lies the knowledge of this reality and the only way to recognize reality is by comprehending the unreality, which will end the illusion, as well as the fetters of seeming rebirth and suffering.

Elsewhere in *The Prophet* in sermon fourteen, Al Mustapha speaking about reason and passion expresses ideas about the human soul trying to reach God so as to be completely absorbed in the infinite (*Fanaa*); very much similar to the Buddhist concept of Nirvana. Al Mustapha says:

“Your reason and your passion are the rudder and the sails of your seafaring soul.

If either your sails or your rudder be broken, you can but toss and drift, or else be held at a standstill in mid-seas.

For reason, ruling alone is a force confining; and passion, unattended, is a flame that burns to its own destruction.

Therefore let your soul exalt your reason to the height of passion, that it may sing;

And let it direct your passion with reason, that your passion may live through its own daily resurrection, and like the phoenix rise above its own ashes.”

Again in that same sermon the final clinching stanza says:

“And when the storm comes, and the mighty wind shakes the forest, and thunder and lightning proclaim the majesty of the sky,--then let your heart say in awe, “God moves in passion”.

And since you are a breath in God’s sphere, and a leaf in God’s forest, you too should rest in reason and move in passion”. (13)

In the above lines reason might mean true knowledge, while passion may stand for the divine quest for God, while the soul to attain perfection will resurrect itself like the phoenix again and again and be reborn from its own ashes. Shaikh Ali Hujwiri in *Kashf ul-Mahjub*, (pg.307-308) considers true knowledge as knowledge of annihilation that derives from the belief that this world is perishable, while true knowledge of subsistence lies in the understanding that the next world is everlasting. Hujwiri further states that annihilation comes upon a man through a vision of God’s magnificence and majesty and by a revelation of God’s Divine omnipotence to his heart. It is this overwhelming feeling due to which both this world and the next are obliterated from the devotee’s mind and states and stations appear contemptible in comparison to his ever-aspiring thought. In the ecstasy of his miraculous grace he becomes impervious to reason and passion alike, dead and impervious to even annihilation and in this annihilation, his tongue proclaims God.

In a veiled manner Gibran’s *The Prophet* is a subtle commentary on the formal practice of religion and worship; in sermon thirteen, Al Mustapha says:

“At the city gate and by your fireside I have seen you prostrate yourself and worship your own freedom,

Even as slaves humble themselves before a tyrant and praise him though he slays them.

Ay, in the grove of the temple and in the shadow of the citadel I have seen the freest among you wear their freedom as a yoke and handcuff.” (14)

Again towards the end of *The Prophet* in the twenty fifth sermon on religion, this idea is more clearly summed up and the purpose and function of religion is explicitly stated:

“He who wears his morality but as his best garment were better naked.

The wind and the sun will tear no holes in his skin.

And he who defines his conduct by ethics imprisons his song-bird in a cage. The freest song comes not through bars and wires.

And he to whom worshipping is a window, to open but also to shut, has not yet visited the house of his soul whose windows are from dawn to dawn.

Your daily life is your temple and your religion”

This idea leads to a couple of lines with another thought-provoking message:

“And if you would know god be not therefore a solver of riddles.

Rather look about you and you shall see Him playing with your children.

And look into space; you shall see Him walking in the cloud, outstretching His arms in the lightening and descending in rain.

You shall see Him smiling in flowers, then rising and waving His hands in trees.” (15)

The last few lines of the stanza above are an expression of pantheistic philosophy, viewing God not as an arbitrary dictator but as a close friend and guide who can be felt and perceived in every aspect of natural beauty; it is also to be noted that the starting lines from the same passage fully echo the Sufi principles of asceticism, quietism, intimate and personal love of god with a total disregard for formal worship, which was a distinguishing feature of the first brand of Sufism in the Indian context, like the ideas of Ibrahim Bin Adam (16) (d.160 AH/775 AD., the grandfather of Abu Yazid or Bayazid of Bistam, a Magian, was also the first to embrace Islam) and the celebrated Rabia Basri (17); both of whom renounced the things of the world; including all worldly passions and even negating the concept of heaven and hell. Only one thing they held dear and cherished was God’s name and the greatness of his glory. Rabia Basri professed this openly when she said:

“O God! give to Thine enemies whatever Thou hast assigned to me of this world’s goods, and to Thy friends, whatever Thou has assigned to me in the life of the hereafter, for Thou Thyself art sufficient for me”

Again

“O God! If I worship Thee for fear of hell, send me to hell; and if I worship Thee in hopes of Paradise, withhold Paradise from me; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me the Eternal Beauty.” (18)

Ibrahim Bin Adam with a similar sensibility like that of the mystic saint Rabia Basri, said:

“O God, Thou knowest that in mine eyes, the eight paradises weigh no more than the wing of a gnat compared with that honour which Thou has shown me in giving me Thy love, or that familiarity which Thou has given to me by the commemoration of Thy name, or that freedom from all else which Thou has vouchsafed to me when I meditate on the Greatness of Thy Glory.” (19)

In one of the manifestly eloquent prose-verses about the importance of prayer, in Khalil Gibran’s *The Prophet*, Al Mustapha’s views about prayer proclaim and assert the Islamic mandate about the necessity of prayers to God. Al Mustapha in sermon twenty-two says:

“You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance.

For what is prayer but the expansion of yourself into the living ether?...

And if you cannot but weep when your soul summons you to prayer, she should spur you again and yet again, though weeping, until you shall come laughing.

When you pray you rise to meet in air those who are praying at that very hour, and whom save in prayer you may not meet.

Therefore let your visit to that temple invisible be for naught but ecstasy and sweet communion.”
(20)

On elucidating the need for traditional worship alongside spiritual experience, both of which are necessary, Shaikh Nizam ud-din asserted that unless someone is a captive, or on a journey, or ill, he who can but does not offer his Friday prayers must realize that it tantamounts to staining the heart with one black spot; if he fails to offer prayers for the second congregational Friday also, he stains his heart with two black spots; and if this happens for the third time in continuation, then his entire heart becomes black; a disobedience which god strictly condemns. Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind (1564-1624) the greatest luminary of the *Naqshbandi Order* of the Sufi (21) introduced from Persia argued from within his mystic order the importance of traditional religious observance, as against the pantheism of the Spanish Muslim mystic Ibn Arabi (1164-1240) who exerted a strong influence on the *Naqshbandi* and the *Shattari* (whose propounder was Muhammad Ghaws) Sufi orders.

According to Ibn Arabi, Being is one, deriving from Allah and all things in the universe are His manifestations or emanations. God is neither immanent nor transcendent, He is All. Creation is only a way in which God expresses Himself, therefore at the end of the mystic path Fanaa, (22) the mystic knows himself to be Himself. In other words God's essence and his attributes are One. Such ideas had a wide appeal among various sects of the Sufis, but more traditional Sufi saints like Shaikh Ahmad especially in his “Maktubat” (a collection of letters, 530 in number, a classic work of Indo-Muslim religious literature) written for his disciples refutes the principles of Ibn Arabi, and lays claims for the traditional Islamic faith based on the Quranic interpretation.

Thus in its manifold sermons (26 in number) Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* expresses various truths and philosophies found in Islam, Sufism and Christianity. Though not specifically related to any particular religious framework, the work offers a striking parallel to scriptural doctrines through its visionary ideas and introspective revelations. The dogma free brand of spiritualism makes the work a unique piece of inspirational literature, tinctured by emotional sensibility and an awareness of the in-effable spiritual enlightenment of divine knowledge and Being in relation to man, God and nature. Man's unitive experience with god, mystic piety and austerity and a perfect providence transcending all, yet immanent everywhere forms some of the philosophical basis of the book.

Khalil Gibran's childhood of dire struggle and indigence as well as the political climate of Lebanon when his family migrated to New York was traumatic. Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire was in a state of domination and servitude, a fact that Gibran often lamented and bemoaned along with his severe indictment of the tyranny of the Church and oppression against women. With these preoccupations harking at the back of his mind he was no less susceptible to the various literary, cultural and political influences (in the European and Arab world in Particular) that shaped his uniquely eloquent yet somber and tranquil style of writing. K.Gibran in the U.S. was a close friend of Youssef Howayek, a painter and sculptor from Lebanon who

later moved to Paris to study Art with Augusto Rodin from 1909 to 1910. Ameen Rihani another Lebanese American writer joined them during this time. Rihani's versatile and erudite genius made him write simultaneously in Arabic and English, and he brought about a revolutionary change in Arabic poetic style with his new concept of free verse. Various poetic-religious traditions that were open to the Arab world were explored in Rihani's works; who was no less an intellectual and political activist and spearheaded important political movements of the times, one among which was pioneering the movement of Arab nationalism. His first major novel in English, *The Book of Khalid* (1911) combines spiritual materialism with ardent philosophic quest in the depiction of wisdom allied to prophecy, and many issues of the soul related to matter, faith and reason, along with a synergetic relationship between the Orient and the Occident, in order to explicate the essential unity of all religious faiths. It is unlikely that Gibran who was very close to Rihani could have been unaware of this book and one can only conjecture that *The Prophet* may have been remotely if not directly inspired by it. K.Gibran was also a close friend of Elia Abu Madi (a distinguished Lebanese American poet who emigrated to the U.S. in the year 1911) and Mikhail Naimy, who led a pioneering movement in New York for the rebirth of Arabic literature along with K. Gibran and eight other writers. This movement was named as *The New York Pen League*. Naimy's most important book- *Book of Mirdad* was a mystical text first published in Lebanon in 1948, later on translated to English and published in London in 1962. Clearly Naimy too adhered to the Relegio-mystic traditions of the Middle-Eastern world. K.Gibran also met Abdu'L'Baha, the leader of the *Baha' i Faith* (23) during his travels to America during 1911 and 1912. Baha's teaching's of peace and his doctrinal book of relegio-mystic orders related to the Baha faith may have profoundly influenced K.Gibran. Abdu'L Baha's father Baha'u'llah was strongly influenced by Sufi mysticism and Baha was widely read in Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious and mystic texts and was known to have lead religious debates in mosques of Baghdad, from quite an early age. K.Gibran himself had a good knowledge of the Bible, Arabic and Syrian religious texts and with such a tradition behind him, *The Prophet*, as a work of sustained devotional fiction can hardly be debated. From the view point of his Middle-Eastern cultural traditions and the immense diversity of Arabic literary legacy, K. Gibran stands as a charismatic figure in the realm of English Devotional fiction in Europe in the early decades of the 20th C. His contribution to English literature and Arabic literature in general accords him a position of singular importance in the Western canon, and *The Prophet* remains a brilliant example of inspirational fiction throughout the phase of American counter-culture and the New Age movements, its immense popularity is a vibrant testimony to the importance of the genre of inspirational writing that continues to influence and please millions around the globe.

Notes:

1. *Sources of Indian Tradition. From the Beginning to 1800*. Vol I. II Edition. Embree, Ainslie. T. (Ed. & Revised) N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1958. P.448.

2. Mansur Al-Hallaj (c. 858 – March 26, 922) (Hijri c. 244 AH – 309 AH) was a Persian mystic and a revolutionary writer who was also a famous Sufi saint and writer of poems, he was accused

of heresy and was executed at the orders of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Muqtadir after a long, drawn-out investigation. Al-Hallaj was born in Fars province of Persia to a cotton-carder (*Hallaj* means "cotton-carder" in Arabic). His grandfather was a Zoroastrian and his father lived a simple life, and this form of lifestyle greatly interested the young Al-Hallaj. At a very young age he memorized the Holy Qur'an and would often retire into solitude or join other mystics in their study or in their debates.

3. Ibn Arabi was a devout monist who propounded his ideas of *Wahdatul Wajud* (*The Unity of Existence*) which means that all things pre-exist in the knowledge of God, from Whom things emanate and to Whom they ultimately return. There can be no creation without the knowledge of God (*ex-nihilo*). What is revealed to us in its outward aspect is actually an inward aspect of God. While every phenomenon reveals some attribute of reality, man is the microcosm in which all the divine attributes rests in unison, and in man alone is God's presence felt to the greatest degree. This belief along with elements derived from Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Christianity and other sources, occupies the central scheme of things in Ibn Arabi's philosophic rationale.

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6. Gibran, Khalil. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*. Delhi: K.R.J. Book International, 2006. P.16.

7. Rumi, Jalal-ud-Din Mohammad. *The Masnavi*. R.A. Nicholson (Ed) London: Gibb Memorial Series, 1937.

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10. Gibran, Khalil. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*. Delhi: K.R.J. Book International, 2006. P.29.

11. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*. P.50.

12. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*. P.53.

13. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*. P.48-49.

14. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*.P.46.

15. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*.P.73.

16. Ibrahim ibn Adham was one of the most prominent of the early ascetic Sufi saints, who miraculously converted to a Sufi mystic from a princely lifestyle (being the King of Balkh) in order to choose a life of asceticism and piety. The story of his life closely resembles that of Gautam Buddha. Abu Nu'aym tells that for Adham meditation in stillness along with asceticism was all and everything. Rumi extensively described the legend of Ibrahim in his *Masnawi*. The most famous of Ibrahim's students was Shaiq al-Balkhi (d. 810)

17. Rabia Basri (713-717 C.) was a female Muslim saint and Sufi mystic, she was the fourth daughter of a very poor family. Rabia was a slave but on being released by her master went into the desert and lost herself in prayers and became an ascetic. Her murshid was Hazrat Hassan Basri. Rabia introduced the actual concept of Divine Love. She was the first to introduce the idea that God should be loved for God's own sake, not out of fear—as earlier Sufis had done. She died in Jerusalem in 185 AH.

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19. Bijli, S.M. *Musticism*. P.22.

20. *Complete Works of Khalil Gibran*.P.63.

21. The Naqshbandi order is the only Sufi order that claims its lineage (*silsilah*) to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, through Abu Bakr, the first caliph and Muhammad's companion. This lineage also indirectly connects to Ali, Prophet Muhammad's cousin, son-in-law and the Fourth Caliph, via Jafar as-Sadiq. In contrast, most other Sufi orders (*turuq*) trace their lineage through Ali. Abu Ya'qub Yusuf al-Hamadani and Abd al-Khaliq al-Ghujdawani, were regarded as the organizers of the practices of this order and they were also responsible for placing stress upon the purely mental *dhikr*. The order was later associated with Muhammad Baha ad-din an-Naqshabandi, hence the name of the order.

22. Fana (Fanaa) is the Sufi term for self "dissolution" or "annihilation" or *Muraqaba*. It means dissolving the ego, the self, while remaining physically alive. Persons having entered this enlightened state obtain awareness of the intrinsic unity (*Tawhid*) between Allah and all that exists in the physical world, including the individual's mind. This concept is also related to *Baqaa*, or subsistence, which is the state of pure consciousness under God's will and nothing else.

23. The Baha'i Faith is an independent monotheistic religion with its own sacred scriptures, its own laws, calendar, and holy days. It has no clergy and its affairs are administered by freely elected governing councils that operate at the local, national, and international levels. It had its birth in mid-19th century Persia (now Iran) and emerged as a world religion with more than five million adherents from virtually every nation and ethnic group on earth. In the year 1863-1892 – Baha'u'llah revealed numerous volumes of Sacred Scriptures, outlining his teachings, and answering difficult theological questions, by establishing the laws and institutions of his faith.

Baha'u'llah remains a unique world religious figure in that he established in writing the future pattern of the organization of his faith. He also wrote letters to the kings and rulers of his day, informing them of the advent of his Revelation. After him the legacy of this faith was bestowed on his son 'Abdu'l-Baha.

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