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AL-ḤALLĀJ: STORIES OF HIS LIFE
AND EXCERPTS FROM HIS WRITINGS

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Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (244/858-309/922) was one of the most remarkable figures in early Sufism. Ḥallāj was executed in Baghdad by officials of the ^CAbbasid court, after several trials and years of imprisonment, and his execution was sanctioned by a juristic decision approved by a majority of contemporary jurists. His most famous utterance, anā al-haqq ("I am the Truth") has been popularly considered as the cause of his execution, although in fact he was charged with advocating a symbolic substitution for the pilgrimage to Mecca. Once a student of the leading Sufis of Baghdad, Ḥallāj was disavowed by them in public for having broken the discipline of secrecy. His wide travelling, public preaching, and unusual behavior led the authorities also to charge him with being an agent of the Ismā^Cīlī insurgents known as the Qarmatis.

In the following selection, excerpts from Ḥallāj's own writings are given, including the striking portrait of Satan as the fallen lover of God (pp. 532-3), and Ḥallāj's theology of union with God (p. 536). The anecdotes about Ḥallāj, collected by his followers about fifty years after his controversial death, illustrate his unusual behavior and ingenuity (the answer to the riddle on p. 535, in Arabic, is nāmūsī, "My law", which becomes anā mūsā, "I am Moses"). Ḥallāj's strange desire to be declared anathema and be killed for the sake of religion is also shown here. The account of his martyrdom is one of the most well-known events in the history of Sufism. Later poetic tradition in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and in a variety of Indic vernaculars, celebrated "Manṣūr" as the martyr of mystical love. Author of exquisite poems and recondite treatises, Ḥallāj remains to this day a disturbing and challenging figure.

MUHAMMADS PEOPLE

A TALE BY ANTHOLOGY

*the
Religion
and Politics
Poetry and Violence
Science Ribaldry & Finance
of the Muslims from the Age
of Ignorance before Islam
and the Mission of
Gods Prophet
to Sophistication
in the Eleventh Century*

A MOSAIC TRANSLATION
BY ERIC SCHROEDER

THE BOND WHEELWRIGHT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS: PORTLAND 5, MAINE
MCMLV

That was trial, Satan said, and not Command.

Was it not sin ? thy face has faded since.

Wisdom lasts, said Satan, although the wise man's face may wither for it.

Dost thou still remember Him ?

O Moses, Satan answered, pure thought needs no memory; and thought is His memorial with me, as it is mine with Him. I serve him now with a purer service, in a present emptier of self-purpose, and remembering to His greater glory. In Heaven I served Him for my own well-being, but now I serve for the sake of His. Because of my zeal for Him alone He made me lonely. Because my eyes dazzled He blasted me. Because He had made me what I was to be in His Foreknowledge He stripped me. Because He had established my desire for decay He made me unlike the rest. Nor, by His Truth, have I failed His Decree in aught, nor murmured against Destiny; nor have I cared for my lost beauty. Through these Dooms I walk upright. Let Him torment me in His Fire for ever and ever, I shall not bow down before any other; for I know He has no peer nor Son, and my love for Him is pure love.

* * *

As to Satan, the most eloquent of mystics have remained dumb. Satan is closer bound than they to his adoration; Satan is nearer to Being than they; to his zeal Satan sacrificed more than they, he kept his word better than they, and he is closer than they are to Him Who is adored.

His disaster overtook him when trust ended, in the moment when he said: I am nobler than Adam. From that instant he remained shut out beyond the Veil, not knowing what the Form of Adam hid. He fell, to sprawl in dust, and twined himself for ever and for ever with damnation.

For the O of Satan's final No is GOD WHO IS THE LIVING GOD.

* * *

SATAN

When God commanded Satan: Bow down before Adam, Satan answered: I will not bow before any other than Thee. Of all the dwellers in Heaven there was no champion of God's Unity so strict as Satan.

Moses met Satan on the side of Sinai, and asked of him: Satan, why wouldst thou not bow down?

Because I believed that only One is to be adored, said Satan. Disregarding God's Command?

For those who obey, sin, once they know Whom it is they offend, is death.

If a man would taste of Graces, let him reduce his soul to one of these three states: as when he was in his mother's womb, disposed without power to interfere and fed without even knowing he is fed; or quiet as he shall be in the tomb; or helpless as he shall be at Judgment.

* * *

From Basra Hallaj went a second time on Pilgrimage; thence returned to Basra, and to Ahwaz; and then, taking his wife and child and some of his more important Ahwaz disciples with him, he went up to Baghdad. There he stayed a year; and then, committing his son to one of the disciples, departed again.

To India first he went, thence into Khurasan and Turkistan as far as the marches of China, calling people to God, and writing books for them. After his return, the letters which came to him at Baghdad from India were addressed to him under the title of the Intercessor, those from China and Turkistan under that of the Provider. Khurasan letters addressed him as the Seer, those from Fars as Abu Abdallah the Ascetic, those from Khuzistan as the Shaykh who is the Carder of Consciences. Some people at Baghdad called him the Ecstatic, and others, at Basra, the Dazzled Man. And strange stories began to be told of him after he came back from these travels.

Then a third time he went on Pilgrimage, and spent two years in the Holy Cities. From this Pilgrimage (says his son) he came back greatly changed from what he had been before. But he bought a piece of land at Baghdad, and built himself a house.

Hallaj wished to convert a certain Ibn Harun, a man who used to hold salons where the better-known Baghdad shaykhs engaged in discussion. When all the guests were seated on one of these occasions, Hallaj opened the conversation with this riddle:

*Have you no time to recognize me?
Then recognize my verity!*

My first is softer than my fourth,

My fifth is longer than my third,

My second commonest of all

The thrice three threes. What is the word?

Divine; and you shall see me stand upright

Where Moses stood, on Sinai, wrapped in light.

Everyone was baffled.

It happened that Ibn Harun's little son was sick at that time, and sinking fast. And the host presently said to Hallaj: My boy is sick; I wish you would pray for him.

He is already healed, said Hallaj; don't worry any more.

It was only a few minutes later that the child was brought in, looking as if he had never been ill. Everyone present was dumbfounded; Ibn Harun pulled out a sealed purse and offered it to Hallaj.

Shaykh, said he, use this as you will.

Now the saloon where they were sitting opened on the Tigris bank. Hallaj, taking the purse, which contained three thousand dinars, threw it into the river.

You had some questions to ask me, I think, he said, addressing the company of shaykhs; but what questions could *you* ask of *me*? for I see only too well how right you are, and how wrong I am.

And with these words he went away.

Next day, Ibn Harun paid visits to the various shaykhs who had been present with Hallaj, and showed them the very purse which Hallaj had tossed into the stream. Yesterday, said he, I could not stop thinking about that present I had offered him; and I began to wish he had not thrown it into the river. Scarcely an hour after that thought came into mind, a poor disciple of his came to my gate to say: The shaykh greets you and bids me say to you: Make an end of regret and take this purse; to one who obeys Him God gives power, even over earth and water. And he put my own purse in my hand.

Knowledge of Me as I am is both too vast for the sight and too subtle, minute, and dense for the understanding of a fleshly creature. I am I — without attribute. I am I — without qualification. Actually *My Attributes have become humanity*; and this My Humanity is the cancellation of pure spirituality. I have only one quality: Deity.

By My own Decree a Veil screens Me from Myself; and for Me this Veil is the prelude to Vision. When the moment of Vision comes, then all attributes of My qualification — Deity — disappear.

Only thus am I parted from Myself. I am the *subject* of I am; I am not Myself. I am Metaphor (man for God) and not *kin* to man. I am Apparition, and not an infusion into a material vehicle. My Rising is not a recoil into Eternity, but simply a Reality beyond the range either of the senses or of analogy.

Angels and men both have some knowledge of that Metaphor, that Apparition. Not that they know the real nature of this sole qualification: they know only according to the instruction they have received, and every man according to his capacity. *EACH TRIBE KNEW AT WHAT SPRING IT WAS TO DRINK.* For one man it may be a drug; it will be pure water for another. One sees only some human shape. Another sees only the Peerlessness of God; and his eye is therefore darkened by that qualification of Deity. One man wanders in the waterless valleys of research, another drowns in the oceans of thought — all are wide of Reality, for *all choose some goal* and therefore follow some wrong path.

God's intimates are those who ask Him for the Path only. They count themselves as nothing, and He devises glory for them; they make themselves nothing, and He makes their glory actual; they abase themselves, and He displays them as great marks.

Such men go to seek for wanderers. They set their glory low. And these are they whom He seizes from their human attributes by His own qualification — Deity.

Hallaj converted many people to his system, and some important men among the rest. It was the Reactionaries he most hoped to win over, for he thought of their belief as a good preliminary to his own; and he sent an emissary to Ibn Nawbakht, a member of that sect.

Ibn Nawbakht was a cautious, intelligent man. Your master's miracles, he said to the disciple, may well be conjuring-tricks. I am, he went on, what I may call a martyr to love: I enjoy the society of the ladies more than any other thing on earth. Unfortunately, however, I suffer from baldness. I have to let what hair I have grow long, and pull it over my forehead, and hold it there with my turban. And I have to disguise my grizzled beard with dye. Now, if Hallaj will give me a head of hair and a black beard, I will believe in whatever system he preaches; I will call him the Prophetic Vicar or the Sovereign if he likes; nay, I'll call him a Prophet, or even the Almighty.

When Hallaj heard this reply, he gave up hope of Ibn Nawbakht, and left him alone.

The man who would reveal God's secret to His creatures, the man too who wishes that the moment of his ecstasy may last, feels a suffering beyond human power to endure. Suffering lost its bitterness for Job when God blazed into his mind. For this my suffering and tribulation, he said, I have no more reward to hope; pain is become my native land, and pain my only bliss.

Happiness is His gift. But Suffering is Himself.

* * *

One night — it was bright moonlight — I went out to pray (says Ibn Farik) at the grave where Ibn Hanbal lies in the corner of the Qurayshi Cemetery. And there I saw in the distance a man standing, facing the Direction. He did not notice me as I drew near; but I made out that it was Hallaj, weeping aloud.

I heard him say: O Thou Who hast made me so drunken with Thy Love and Who dwellest alone in Thine eternal solitude!

Thy Presence is a mere knowing Thee, without Thy coming; Thy Absence the Veil of names, though Thou departest not. I pray Thee by that holy closeness Thou dost send down on me at times, and by those higher degrees I ask of Thee, I pray Thee not to give me back to my selfhood when Thou hast seized me from it! Do not let me see my soul again, now Thou hast once hidden me from myself! Multiply those in Thy cities who hate me; multiply against me those of Thy faithful ones who demand my death!

Suddenly he saw me, and turned, and came smiling towards me. Abu Husayn, said he, I have got no further than the novice's first degree.

How? cried I. First degree? What state could be more exalted than what I have just seen?

No, said he, I was lying. 'Twas scarcely the first step of a simple Believer. It is the first State of Unbelief!

And he cried out, three times, and fell. I saw blood on his lips; but he gestured with his hand that I was to go away. So I left him.

Next morning I saw him in the Mosque of Mansur. He took my hand, and stooped and said: Don't tell people what you saw of me last night.

I saw Hallaj in the Qati'a Market once. He was weeping bitterly and crying: Hide me from God, you people! Hide me from God! Hide me from God! He took me from myself and has not given me back; and I cannot perform the service I should do in His Presence for my fear of His leaving me alone again. He will leave me deserted, abandoned! and woe for the man who knows himself outcast after that Presence!

People were weeping to hear him. Then Hallaj stopped, by the gate that leads into the Attab Mosque, and began to speak — words some part of which we understood, but part was obscure.

Surely, said he in the clearer part, if He create creature of

His, it must be in pure goodwill towards it. And if then He blazes upon it sometimes, and sometimes hides Himself from it behind a Veil, it is still always that the creature may go onward. If that Light never came, men would deny the very existence of God. If it was never veiled, all would be spellbound. That is why He will let neither state last for ever. For me in this moment there is no Veil, not so much as a wink, between me and Him — a time for quiet, that my humanity die into His Deity while my body burns in the fire of His Power; that there be an end to trace and relic, face and word.

And then he said something which we could not understand: What you have to learn is this: that ordinary material things subsist atom by atom in His Godhead; that particular decrees are performed by Him as man.

Then he recited these verses:

Prophecy is the Lamp of the world's lights;

But ecstasy in the same Niche has room.

The Spirit's is the breath which sighs through me;

And mine the thought which blows the Trump of Doom.

Vision said it. In my eye

Moses stood, on Sinai.

THE WARNING

*Have no truck with Us! Look at Our Finger
Prettily tinted with Our lovers' blood!*

* * *

I entered unannounced into Hallaj's room one day (says Ibn Fatik); someone had been in before me. Hallaj was in prayer, and his brow pressed to the ground. He was saying: O Thou Whose Closeness girds my very skin, Whose Mystery spurns me far away as lie all things in time from the Eternal, Thou shinest so before me that I think Thou art all these things; and then Thou dost deny Thyself in me, till I declare Thou art nothing

here. And this can neither be Thy Distance, for that would fortify my selfhood, nor Thy Closeness, for that would help me; neither Thy War, for that would destroy me, nor Thy Peace, for that would comfort me.

Then, noticing my presence, he raised himself. Come in, you do not disturb me, said he.

So I went farther in and sat down in front of him. His eyes glowed like burning coals, and they were bloodshot.

My dear son, he said, I hear people are going about saying I am a saint, and others saying that I am impious. I prefer those who call me impious; and so does God.

How so, master? I said.

They call me a saint because they respect me; but the others call me impious out of zeal for their religion. A man who is zealous for his religion is dearer to me, and dearer to God also, than a man who venerates a creature. What will you say yourself, Ibrahim, on the day when you see me hanging on the gibbet, and killed, and burned? Yet that will be the happiest day of all my life.

Well, don't stay here, he said presently. Go, and into the Grace of God.

When the giving of Love is entire,

And What Love cries to is bygone in the stress of its crying,

Then a man verifies

What passion testifies:

Prayer is Unbelief,

Once one knows.

*Ay, go. Tell them I sailed for the deep Sea,
And that my ship has foundered, far offshore.*

By Holy Cross I must go on to death;

To Holy Cities I can go no more.

I have renounced the Faith of God.

Obligatory on me

It was to do what for Belief

Would be iniquity.

Hallaj went one day into the Mosque of Mansur and cried: Gather round, and listen to what I have to tell.

And a great crowd assembled: lovers and followers of his, and haters and critics too.

You ought to know this, said Hallaj: God has made me your outlaw. Kill me.

People in the crowd began to weep; but Abd al-Wudud the Sufi pressed nearer to him and said: Shaykh, how could we kill a man who prays and fasts and recites the Word?

Shaykh, said Hallaj, the motive that really stays you from shedding my blood has nothing to do with Prayer or fasting or reciting the Word. So why not kill me? You will have your reward for it, and I shall come to my peace. For you it will be your Holy War; for me it will be my Martyrdom.

When Hallaj left the Mosque (says Abd al-Wudud) I followed him home and questioned him: Shaykh, what you have said troubles us. What did you mean?

Dear son, said he, no task is more urgent for the Muslims at this moment than my execution. Realize this, that my death will preserve the sanctions of the Law; he who has offended must undergo them.

that I am, by the truth of this my word which declares that Thou art, I beseech Thee, my Master, give me grace to be grateful for this happiness of Thy giving, that Thou didst hide from others what was unveiled to me, the raging fires of Thy Face, and forbid them to look, as I was permitted to look, into things hidden in the Mystery of Thee.

And these Thy servants who are gathered to slay me, in zeal for Thy Religion, longing to win Thy Favor, forgive them, Lord. Have mercy on them. Surely, if Thou hadst shown them what Thou hast shown me, they would never have done what they have done; and hadst Thou kept from me what Thou hast kept from them, I should not have suffered this tribulation. Whatsoever Thou wilt do, I praise Thee! Whatsoever Thou dost will, I praise Thee!

Then he was silent. The headsman stepped up to him and dealt him a smashing blow between the eyes; the blood poured from his nostrils. Shibli cried out, and rent his dress, and fell fainting.

The headsman was ordered to administer one thousand strokes with a scourge. It was done. Hallaj uttered no cry, nor did he plead for pardon.

Only according to one witness, when he had endured the six-hundredth blow, he cried out to the Chief of Police: Send for me! and I'll tell you what will more profit the Caliph than the storming of Constantinople!

They told me to expect some such offer, answered Nazuk, or a bigger one. It won't get you out of your stripes — nothing will.

After that Hallaj said nothing more until the thousandth blow came at last. His hand was then amputated, then his foot; and he was fastened on the gibbet.

There he hung till nightfall, when an order arrived from the Caliph Muqtadir giving permission for his beheading. However, the officer in charge said: It is late now — leave him till to-morrow.

HIS PASSION

A crowd beyond counting was assembled.

I was there (says Abu Hasan of Hulwan) the day they executed Hallaj. They brought him from his cell bound and chained; but he was laughing.

Master, said I, why are you like this?

He answered only with a verse:

*My Host, with His own ruthless courtesy,
Passed me His Cup, and bade me drink. I drank.
Round went the wine; sudden I heard Him cry:
Headman! the Mat and Sword! This is the end
Of drink with Liodragon in July.*

When they had brought him as far as the gibbet, and he saw the scaffold and the nails, he laughed till the tears ran from his eyes. Presently, turning to look at the crowd assembled, he saw Shibli among the rest.

Abu Bakr, said he, have you your prayer carpet with you? Yes, said Shibli.

Will you lay it for me?

Shibli laid out his carpet. Hallaj performed a Prayer of two Bows, reciting the passage *WE SHALL TRY YOU* with the first and the passage *ALL SOULS TASTE DEATH* with the second. When his Prayer was finished, he spoke; I can only remember some of his words, the following:

O our God! Who dost glow in all places and art not in any place, I beseech Thee by the truth of Thy Word which declares

When morning came, he was taken down, and dragged forward for decapitation. It was at this time that he spoke his last words: All who have known ecstasy long for this . . . the loneliness of the Only One . . . alone with the Alone.

He was set a little way in front of the gibbet, and his head struck off. The trunk was rolled up in a strip of reed-matting, and soaked in naphtha, then burned.

I was there (says the Clerk Ibn Zanjī). I was standing up as tall as I could on the back of my mule — I had not been able to get into the Square. The trunk twisted on the coals as the flames burned it. When there was nothing left but ashes, they were collected and thrown from the Minaret over the Tigris. The head was set up on the Bridge for two days, and then sent to Khurasan to be exhibited in the various districts.

All booksellers were summoned to appear and obliged to take an oath that they would neither sell nor buy any work by Hallaj.

His disciples asserted that the person who had endured the scourging was not he, but some enemy of his on whom his likeness had been cast. Some of them even claimed to have seen him afterward, and to have heard something from him to that effect, along with more nonsense not worth the trouble of transcribing.

*God threw a man into the Sea, with his arms tied behind
his back,
And said to him: Carefull carefull or you will get wet in
the water!*

