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FINDING NEW LIFE AMONG THE DEAD: THE ETHICAL MYSTICISM OF *THE BOOK OF PURE GOLD*

Paul L. Heck

The figure of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1132/1719), a spiritual virtuoso of Morocco whose life overlapped with the long and formidable reign of Ismā‘īl Ibn al-Sharīf (r. 1672–1727), presents us with a compelling yet unusual illustration of the relation of the mystical and the ethical in Islam. In the sayings of al-Dabbāgh, as collected by his disciple, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī (d. 1156/1743), the human being is marked by darkness (*ḡalām*), a condition intrinsic to the state of being a creature. As such, this darkness cannot be overcome by acts of worship, however many one performs. Indeed, given this state, one’s worship—and, with it, one’s ethical integrity—remains deficient. To overcome the darkness that inheres in one’s being, making it possible for satanic forces to spoil one’s religion, one must receive a new spirit, the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad as transmitted over the centuries through the bodies of saintly figures, known in Islam as the friends or allies of God (*awliyā’ Allāh*). However, for a body to bear the spirit of the Prophet, it has to be, as it were, the body of the Prophet. Thus, what the saints carry in their bodies—and transmit to disciples—is not only the spirit but also the body of the Prophet. Significantly, the saints, while playing this role in life, do so most effectively in death because in death they are at their strongest in terms of their spiritual effect.

The mystical vision of al-Dabbāgh points to aspects of ethical life in Islam that are not limited to his own period, including 1) the purpose of mysticism as preserving

the integrity of worship, 2) the fact that the integrity of worship—as purpose of religion—includes spiritual renewal and not only the correct performance of ritual actions, and 3) the impact of the righteous dead in their graves on the spiritual renewal of the living and even on the integrity and efficacy of their worship. We treat these questions in what follows with a focus on the third. Before doing so, we begin with a very brief reflection on the idea of accompanying the dead in their graves.

People across time and place have sought communion with the dead: ancestors, saints, and martyrs. Even in the so-called modern world with its allegedly disenchanting outlook, the nation's dead heroes are alive in its collective memory, strengthening the feeling of national glory and inspiring citizens to sacrifice for it. When it comes to religious community, the way of relating to the dead depends on the character they exhibited in this world—the extent to which they are remembered as having perfected righteousness. For example, Christians have always offered prayers *for* the dead who are remembered as not having perfected righteousness. Such imperfect believers undergo a process of being sanctified after having passed—and therefore stand in need of the prayers of the living. In contrast, Christians have always prayed *to* the righteous dead (saints and martyrs), invoking them for help in growing in sanctity in their own earthly journey.¹

Believers recognize that the righteous are spiritually strongest in death. They can impact one's life, especially one's spiritual life. If, then, the righteous dead are able to impact the living in this sense, they are actually alive in their graves, even more alive—spiritually if not physically—than they had been while in this world.² For this reason, believers across traditions visit the shrines of the righteous dead in the hope of acquiring a blessing from their presence. The practice has become controversial but features prominently in the history of Islam. We have ample documentation of the practice, including literature that instructs people on the norms of shrine visitation and the travelogues of those, such as the famed Ibn Battuta, whose itineraries were composed with visits to the friends and allies of God—living and dead—very much in mind.

What, then, is a shrine—the space that houses one of the righteous dead? And what is the point of visiting one? Shrines have long been part of the landscape of Islam across time and place. While the faithful visit them for diverse reasons, a common feature of a shrine is the power it represents. At the shrine, social status disappears. To be sure, rulers may patronize a shrine with the aim of harnessing its otherworldly sovereignty to their own claims to rule. However, such patronage is not received without rulers establishing their own pious credentials. Indeed, the otherworldly power of the shrine can serve either to buttress or to counter the claims of rulers that their rule is aligned with the purposes of God.

1. See Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

2. See, for example, Uzma Rehman, "Spiritual Powers and 'Threshold' Identities: The Mazārs of Sayyid Pīr Waris Shāh Abdul Latif Bhitāi," in Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (eds.), *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 61–81. For the idea of the dead as alive, see p. 66: "The tomb . . . contains the essence of that [unseen] power and a part of the Divine. In this sense, the tomb is a living tomb. It is the tomb where the person who became one with the Divine lies. He lives in God!"

It is also true that shrines are not simply places of refuge for society's outcasts. A shrine attracts the needy who hope for a share in its blessing, a charitable offering from devotees, but a shrine cannot be defined as a pre-modern soup kitchen. Rather, it is more accurate to speak of a shrine as a liminal space—a space between this world and the next—where divine power of a kind is accessible. Most fundamentally, the divine power of the shrine exists for spiritual and ethical ends.³ Visitors are purified (sanctified) by the blessing of the shrine. The shrine thus allows for a more enhanced experience of worship. Prayer in the extraordinary space of the shrine has a more palpable impact on the soul than it does in the ordinary space of the world. The holiness of the shrine preserves one, at least for a time, from the powers of the world. As one takes on the sadness or joy of others, so the presence of the righteous dead becomes the object of one's identification, imbuing one with the saint's righteousness. At the shrine, one is purified of the effects of the world that diminish one's righteousness. The shrine's fundamental purpose is thus renewal of spiritual and ethical character. The body of the righteous occupant of the shrine, which is inaccessible to Satan's power (cf. Q 16:99), possesses a lordly character that establishes a holy space beyond the power of Satan so that visitors themselves might experience life beyond the power of Satan.

If one goal of religion is purification of worldliness, a shrine serves that purpose, doing so as a spiritual alternative to purification by the law. Is one to be purified of the effects of one's sins by being punished—paying the price—for them as stipulated by the law? Or is one to be purified of them by the saintly blessing one experiences at the shrine? The shrine offers purification by the latter, saintly, method, granting the devotee a sense of divine favor. That is, the saintly body, as object of divine favor, offers visitors the experience of divine favor through association with the righteous dead. To be sure, a shrine has a varied social function, but it exists primarily as a place of spiritual power by which the soul is purified of the corrupting effects of worldly life. How exactly does such spiritual impact work? What takes place within the workings of the soul in the presence of the living dead? The many studies on shrine culture notwithstanding, there is room for further analysis of the impact of the righteous dead on the soul and the way the encounter with the dead in their graves ennobles the ethics of the living.

How do the righteous dead impact one's soul to its spiritual and ethical benefit? Muslims have long acknowledged that the dead in their graves hear the living,⁴ but the religious benefit that one gets from companionship the righteous dead remains to be explained. We pursue the question here through the lens of *The Book*

3. For the essentially spiritual and ethical purpose of shrines, see Rian Thum, "The Shrine" = chapter three in *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2014), 96–132. Of course, the dynamics of shrines are not static, but shift across time and place. For one example of changing meanings around shrine-related practices, see John Rasanayagam, "Healing with spirits and the formation of Muslim selfhood in post-Soviet Uzbekistan," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 2 (2006): 377–393.

4. Of the countless examples, we mention the case of Abu Sālim al-'Ayyāshī (d. 1090/1697), a scholar and traveler from Morocco. In one of his travelogues, he advises his readers, when passing through Misrata (Libya), to visit the shrine of Ahmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) and to entrust their lives, animals, and goods to his protection, since "nothing harms those [who do so] on their journey until they return to him [Zarrūq's shrine] safely." Al-'Ayyāshī also advises his readers to recite the divine office (*wazīfa*) composed by Zarrūq at his grave, acknowledging the presence of his gravity (*hayba*), "because he hears" (*li-anna-hu yasma*). See Abu Sālim al-'Ayyāshī, *Rihlat al-'Ayyāshī al-hajjiyya al-ṣughra*, ed. 'Abdallāh Ḥammādi al-Idrisī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013), 78.

of *Pure Gold from the Words of the Master* ‘Abd al-Azīz al-Dabbāgh (*al-Ibrīz min Kalām Sayyidi* ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh).⁵ The hero of the book, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, introduced above, spends time in the company of the righteous dead as we see in the reports at the beginning of the book that describe his journey to mystical illumination. Across the rest of the book and its reports, enough clues are given as to the impact that visitation to the righteous dead has on one’s soul. (Of course, we are not referring to impact on the brain, a question for neuroscience to pursue, but rather impact on the soul as conceived by the religious community, which, in this case, is the community of the Prophet Muhammad.)

The impact does not lie simply in the fact that the righteous dead represent ethical models worthy of emulation, nor in the fact that they carry the prophetic light in their bodies. More profoundly, the impact lies in the possibility that the bodies of the righteous dead are passed on to living devotees; there is a corporeal effect on the bodies of the living, thereby allowing them to manifest the prophetic light in their bodies. For this reason, the community of Muslims is not just a community of believers but actually represents the prophetic body insofar as the bodies of its righteous members not only carry the spirit of the Prophet but are his body—a religious state that is confirmed by their ethical character manifesting the prophetic character, notably its identification with divine mercy. Thus, the community of believers can claim to be the prophetic body to the extent that divine mercy is manifest in its members, making the manifestation of divine mercy the final proof of the integrity of the community’s worship.

A short word on why I decided to read this book from this angle. During a year (2018–2019) spent teaching at the Faculty of the Principles of Religion (*Kulliyāt Uṣūl al-Dīn*) in Tetouan, Morocco, I happened to be at the well-known bookstore, *Dār al-Amān*, in Rabat. While I was browsing the section on Sufism in Morocco, a man entered the bookstore, elderly and evidently weak-sighted, since a daughter of his, who was with him, guided him as he walked. Immediately upon entering, he announced his goal as if addressing the bookstore itself: *The Book of Pure Gold*, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh. His voice suggested a man seeking not merely a good book, but a friend he had not seen for a long time. He was presented with two editions of the book, chose one of them, and then asked his daughter to read out the titles of books in the section on Sufism in Morocco. He selected a handful of them, but it was clear that his chief purpose had been to procure *The Book of Pure Gold*. He repeatedly asked his daughter—until they exited the store—if the book was still in their possession, as if fearful his purpose might be thwarted.

It was also clear that his aim was not simply to peruse a book on the history of Sufism in Morocco but, rather, to accompany al-Dabbāgh by reading his words, as one would converse with a friend. I felt that this aged man, attired in the clothing of spiritual adepts of a past age, had realized that in this world there was no longer

5. Ahmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidi* ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, trans. John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2007). I know of two editions: *al-Ibrīz min kalām Sayyidi* ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, ed. Muḥammad Bashīr Ḥasan al-Hāshimī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1424/2004); and *al-Ibrīz min kalām Sayyidi* ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, ed. unmentioned (Beirut and Tyre: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 1433/2012), hereafter referred to as *al-Ibrīz(1)* and *al-Ibrīz(2)*, respectively. I use the latter—*al-Ibrīz(2)*—when referring to and citing the text. Translations are my own, but I do benefit from O’Kane and Radtke.

anyone left in whose company one might grow spiritually, and so he decided to accompany one no longer in this world, al-Dabbāgh. What would transpire, I wondered, in this man's soul by reading the words of a soul long dead?⁶

The Book of Pure Gold is a complex work. It was compiled by a disciple of al-Dabbāgh, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī (d. 1156/1743), who collected the statements of his master on a variety of religious questions and also added his own comments and observations throughout the course of the book.⁷ Our goal is not to separate al-Lamaṭī's views from al-Dabbāgh's, but simply to understand the work's overall vision—or one aspect of it, namely, the religious benefit of accompanying the dead. We first discuss the issue in general and then turn to relevant details as derived from the variegated reports that make up *The Book of Pure Gold*.

The religious benefit of accompanying the dead comes from what I call ethics transference. For better or worse, our companions impact our character. Ethics transference might make sense in terms of the living, but does it apply to the dead? Are the righteous dead also able to impact the character of the living? If so, are they really dead or are they as alive as one's living companions, at least in a spiritual if not a physical sense? And what's the point of being ethically impacted by the dead, however righteous they be? What purpose does it serve?

Of course, we remember loved ones who have passed. We feel that they remain with us. If righteous, their memory inspires us to be righteous. In our case, however, we are dealing not with reverent memories of ancestors but with a theistic mysticism. At stake is the efficacy of our worship of God. How does the company of the dead help purify our worship of God? After all, the goal of religious life is integrity of worship (*al-ʿibāda bi-l-ikhlāṣ*).⁸ But such worship is difficult when one's soul remains subject to this world's trials and temptations. The ways of the world—its stresses in addition to one's sins, both of which weaken one's character—weigh down the soul, leaving marks on it. One might call them spiritual scars. As a result, one becomes disoriented and needs the help of other souls, decidedly purer than one's own, to help reorient towards one's true end. In other words, the integrity of our worship links to the integrity of our character, which transcends the world's harmful effects to the extent that one's worship is sincere, that is, free of the effects of the world's forces that drag it down.

The Book of Pure Gold begins by narrating al-Dabbāgh's own journey to pure worship. Featuring prominently in the narrative is his accompaniment of past spiritual masters. Those whom he companioned were not dead but alive with God.

6. It is worth noting that *The Book of Pure Gold* continues to be read today in Morocco's pious circles. Also, while some Muslims today condemn the book's vision, it is worth noting that his ideas have attracted interest beyond the world of Sufism. We thus need to be careful about positing strict divisions between one strand of Islam and another before undertaking a broad reading in the scholarly heritage. For example, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1332/1914), the Syrian scholar seen as a forerunner of contemporary Salafism, does not hesitate to rely on al-Dabbāgh's distinction of the three kinds of revealed speech: qur'anic scripture, prophetic saying, and prophetic transmission of divine statement (*kitāb, ḥadīth, and ḥadīth qudsī*). See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-taḥdīth fi funūn al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Bahja al-Biṭār (Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Zaydūn, 1935), 41–44.

7. The introduction to the translation by John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke sufficiently explains this and other matters.

8. Needless to say, there is disagreement on the meaning of religion, to say nothing of its purpose. Some speak of religion as friendship with God and experience of the love of God, others in terms of obedience to the commands of God. In either case, love or obedience, devotion is central. Is the goal of religion devotion to other than God?

In other words, they were physically dead but spiritually active. They had achieved salvation, that is, perfect purification of the soul, something possible only after one has passed from this world, since souls in this world are never safe from its trials and temptations. In other words, in this world, however righteous you seem to be, there is always the chance of sin overpowering you. Your righteousness can therefore only be established with certainty in death. Hence, the righteous exert greater spiritual impact after they have passed from this world. Thus, the company of the righteous dead, whose souls have been perfectly purified as indicated by their having reached their final destination, works to purify one's soul and, in turn, the quality of one's worship.

Of course, such a process is to be described in language familiar to one's own tradition. Al-Dabbāgh describes the righteous dead as conveyors of the prophetic light to believers in this world, enabling them to achieve purity of worship (*al-ʿubūdiyya al-khāliṣa*), which, he notes early on, is his goal. A key concern of his, then, is the means by which to achieve purity of worship. Significantly, one cannot do so through one's own efforts. Indeed, even thinking that one can attain purity of worship leads to excessive scrupulosity, which is sometimes noticeable in mosques today: Worshippers are occasionally seen starting to pray only to restart from the beginning a moment later. Something didn't feel right externally or internally. One could leave it to God to accept one's worship, however imperfectly performed, but Muslims have long looked to holy figures whose company works to enhance the purity of the imperfect worshipper's worship.

One might ask why one needs to accompany the righteous dead in order to receive the light by which worship is purified. Why not go directly to the prophetic source? Religion, of course, is not only a prophetic message. It is also a tradition that conveys it. How might one be certain of accessing the prophetic life without engaging the tradition that conveyed it? Al-Dabbāgh does eventually encounter the Prophet, even seeing him while awake, but only after he has accompanied the righteous dead who make the prophetic light available to the *umma*.

A note on mysticism: The theistic mysticism of Islam diverges from other kinds of mysticism where a sense of oneness with all existence is experienced. Such mystical experience might follow from communion with nature or from the use of psychedelic drugs. Islam's mysticism, like Jewish and Christian mysticism, may include this sense of existential oneness, but it is primarily at the service of purity of worship, namely, worship of God not only by correctly moving one's limbs as specified by ritual law but also by doing so with inner purity. The question is, of course, closely connected to the question of character. How might one purify one's soul so that one's worship be pure? For worship to be pure, to be done with *ikhhlās*, you have to confirm that your soul is rightly oriented—oriented to God rather than to something else, and yet it is a complex process that involves both body and soul. Each needs to have spiritually correct orientation. The term for the spiritually correct orientation of outer (physical) action is *niyya*, whereas *ikhhlās* is the term

for the spiritually correct orientation of inner (psychological) action.⁹ The first, *niyya*, applies to the ritual state of the body. Are your limbs spiritually prepared for worship? That is something that you can do by your own effort. You simply need to do ablutions (*wuḍūʿ* or *ghusl*). The second, the spiritually correct inner action of worship, involves overcoming the so-called evil aspect of one's soul (*sūʿ al-naḥs*). That's something you cannot do on your own. You need the help of other souls, more ethically elevated than you, whose company will have the effect of elevating your soul, and the most ethically elevated of souls are those alive with God even if physically dead in their graves. The fact that purity of worship is a primary concern of *The Book of Pure Gold* is apparent in its several references to the orientation of the heart (*wijhat al-qalb*).¹⁰ For prayer to be pure, a correct orientation of the heart necessarily accompanies correct bodily movements of prostration.

However, correct orientation of the heart is easier said than done because, as explained in *The Book of Pure Gold*, demons seek to corrupt one's inner orientation out of envy and hatred for humans. In other words, they don't want us to be spiritually successful. In this regard, mysticism in Islam is not at all about out-of-body experiences. At stake in the mysticism of Islam is the integrity of the worship of the *umma*—and thus its ethical integrity, which follows from the integrity of its worship. Islam certainly recognizes the possibility of a moral life apart from faith, but Islam also insists that worship makes for a purer goodness since without it one's motive for doing good is suspect. The mind alone can distinguish good from evil, but do you do the good for God or for some less pure impulse?

In short, the ethical integrity of the *umma* depends upon the existence in its ranks of souls that have been perfectly purified, that is, that have realized the end of the mystical journey and so worship God purely. Not all are expected to achieve a perfectly pure state, but it would be odd for the message of religion to be revealed without anyone fulfilling it. One might wonder why God had revealed a way of life that no one can fully live out in both body and soul.

It is up to a saintly elite to realize the religious message—to worship God as the Prophet did—on behalf of the *umma*, thereby ensuring its ethical integrity, a point to which we return below. What does one do to enter into the ranks of the saintly elite? In a nutshell, acts of worship, no matter how many, are not enough to purify one's inner being. You need to defeat the demons that seek to corrupt

9. The basic idea, which is widespread even if variously explained in the scholarly heritage, is that one's inner being no less than one's outer must be endowed with ritual intention for worship to be worship. Sometimes intention of the inner being—that is, the work of the heart (*ʿamal al-qalb*)—is conceived in terms of correct doctrine (*iʿtiqād*). However, in the case of al-Dabbāgh, given his concern for attaining purity of soul without which one's worship is deficient, the intention of the inner being is not reducible to correct doctrine, but includes orientation of the heart. Moreover, to conflate *niyya* and *ikhlas*, which some do, would not adequately represent his vision. He speaks of *ikhlas* in relation to *wijhat al-qalb*, which is the equivalent of what others call *qasḍ wajh allāh* and the like. For one example within the heritage of Sufism in Morocco to which al-Dabbāgh was heir, see Abu 'Abdallah al-Sāhili (d. 754/1355), *Bughyat al-sālik fi ashraf al-manālik*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahīm al-'Alamī (Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 2003), 293–294, where he explains that while some conflate *niyya* and *ikhlas*, it is correct to distinguish them; he describes *niyya* as “the spirit of the outer works,” *ikhlas* as “the spirit of the inner ones.”

10. Indeed, there are numerous statements and reports throughout the book that make it clear that al-Dabbāgh's foremost concern is purity of worship. For example, in one section, he repeats what seem to be all the narrations of the story of a young man who appears to be a model of pious worship but who actually has a demonic stain in his heart—excessive pride. The Prophet Muhammad's companions don't see it, but he does and orders them to kill him, since he'll only cause division in the community. Of course, they're not able to kill a man at prayer. The point of the story is that the community won't be united with the existence of duplicitous piety. See al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibriz*(2), 410ff.

your spiritual orientation. A mystical battle is at stake! As earlier noted, it is not possible to defeat the demons by one's own efforts. *The Book of Pure Gold* insists that the human state, including its corporeal, psychological, and spiritual dimensions, is essentially darkened. (Only the Prophet is preserved from this darkened state.) One's human state thus needs to be renewed for one to be preserved from the demons that seek to corrupt one's worship. This is achieved by mystical victory (*fath*) whereby your being (*dhāt*) is united to the being of the Prophet. Of course, the demons are not able to play with your human state once it has been fortified (illuminated) by the being of the Prophet. With this mystical victory, the prophetic being is operative in one's soul, allowing one to worship God with the prophetic spirit, and no worship in Islam is purer than that undertaken with the prophetic spirit. In short, purity of worship in Islam is contingent upon the assumption of prophetic character. For al-Dabbāgh, this is confirmed by his vision of Muhammad while awake. In other words, his vision of the body of Muhammad confirms that he has wholly assumed the prophetic character.

How does such mystical victory take place? It's all about the power of companionship. We see this in the account of al-Dabbāgh's own mystical journey. It is especially by accompanying the souls of the righteous dead that he advances on the path, and that's because they're not dead in any final sense. Rather, existing beyond this world's trials and temptations, they are now more spiritually active than they were in this world. The spiritual aspect of their existence is now fully established. As a result, their otherworldly (spiritual) existence has impact on those in this worldly (physical) existence. In the world of al-Dabbāgh, spirits impact bodies.¹¹

We see several references to this. For example, al-Dabbāgh attributes the disturbance of the body that sometimes occurs during worship to a spirit that casts light on the body; its response to this light depends on one's religious state. Is one obedient or disobedient to God?¹² He also says that the recollection of Hell stirs up one's blood and vapor (i.e., one's bodily temperament). However, he doesn't explain *how*, exactly, spiritual things impact bodily things, including the impact of the spirits of the dead on the bodies no less than the souls of the living. In other words, the character of the dead impacts the character of the living, the righteous dead imbuing living devotees with prophetic character. Is this a version of spirit possession? How are we to explain it beyond attributing it to a belief that is foreign to the modern mind?

The idea of spirit impacting body would have been consistent with medical assumptions in the milieu in which *The Book of Pure Gold* was composed.¹³ One example of such assumptions comes from *The Book of the Spirit* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Dabbāgh lived in different times and places, and even if they differ in religious outlook, it would be wrong to place them in opposing religious worlds. Even today, believers read both without feeling

11. He is explicit in the corporeality of spiritual phenomena. For example, see al-Lamaʿī, *al-Ibriz(2)*, 312, where he speaks of divine light that, upon entering a human's *dhāt*, penetrates its flesh and bone. In his view, *dhāt* is clearly bodily.

12. See *ibid.*, 270.

13. For a study on shifting medical sensibilities in Morocco during the colonial period, see Ellen J. Amster, *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956* (University of Texas Press, 2013).

schizophrenic. *The Book of the Spirit* suggests that a medical worldview informs the rationality behind the idea that the spirits of the dead impact the character of the living.

At one point in *The Book of the Spirit*,¹⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim responds to those who deny that the body experiences torment and reward in the grave. The naysayers claim that when a grave is opened, there is no evidence of angels who oversee torment and reward. Nothing has changed at all in terms of the physical situation in the grave. How, then, can it be said that the dead experience torment and reward? Ibn al-Qayyim counters: The grave is the realm of *barzakh*; things work differently there. In this world, spirits are subordinate to bodies, whereas in the grave, bodies are subordinate to spirits. In this world, the body is the active element of life, whereas the spirit is hidden, and yet the spirit is impacted by bodily activities. In the grave, the spirit is the active element, while the body remains motionless. And yet, just as the spirit in this world, even if hidden, is impacted by what happens to the body, so, too, in the grave, the body feels judgments (*aḥkām*)—torment and reward—as applied to the spirit.

In sum, it is the body of the living that impacts the spirit but the spirit of the dead that impacts the body. All this is background to Ibn al-Qayyim's medical outlook as articulated in works written after *The Book of the Spirit*. In several places in works such as *The Book of Illness and Remedy* (*Kitāb al-Dā' wa-l-dawā'*) and *Stations of the Wayfarers* (*Madārij al-sālikīn*), Ibn al-Qayyim discusses the salutary effect on the body of reciting the *Fātiḥa*, which heals, he attests, physical and not only psychological illness. In other words, spiritual remedy can heal the body. That is, the spiritual impacts the corporeal. It is important to emphasize that Ibn al-Qayyim's medical outlook is not wholly prophetic, but includes Hellenistic ideas on the temperaments, including their relation to character. It is through a particularly Hellenistic lens that Ibn al-Qayyim includes the character of the patient in his discussion of the impact of spiritual phenomena (such as recitation of the *Fātiḥa* and the *sakīna* verses in the Quran) on one's physical condition.

Such a view resonates with the mystical journey of al-Dabbāgh.¹⁵ Of course, he and Ibn al-Qayyim diverge on the idea of companioning the righteous dead as ethically edifying, and yet they share a common worldview when it comes to the impact of spiritual goods on the body. The difference between the two is that Ibn al-Qayyim limits spiritual goods to items specified in revealed texts, whereas al-Dabbāgh has a more expansive view of spiritual goods, including the righteous dead. Spiritual benefit is to be had from companioning the righteous dead. Not only do their spirits have impact on their own bodies, as Ibn al-Qayyim explained in *The Book of the Spirit*, but they also have impact on the bodies—and soul and character—of the living believers who companion them.

14. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Ajmal Ayyūb al-Isḥāḥī (Mecca: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, n.d.), 185–187.

15. For echoes of the spiritual-corporeal outlook in question, see al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibrīz*(2), 232: "What arrives first to minds in this world arrives first to bodies in the next world." In other words, spirit-body reality is reversed in the next world. See also ibid., 350, where reference is made to a sheikh: "This world of his is hidden to him, the next unfolded."

Of course, al-Dabbāgh did not visit the graves of ordinary believers, those still in the process of being purified, but those of the righteous, who are in a spiritually perfect state, are thus wholly purified, and, in turn, are able to have a purifying impact on those who accompany them. (Recall the statement at the beginning of this article on the Christian practice of praying for ordinary believers in the next world who are still in the process of being sanctified but to extraordinary believers who have been wholly sanctified and have reached the Throne of God.) Indeed, the righteous dead may have greater impact than a living spiritual master whose job is not only to teach but also to be purifier (*muzakki*) of his disciples. However, so long as he is alive in this world with its trials and temptations, his spiritual state cannot be finally established. In contrast, in the grave, beyond this world's trials and temptations, the righteous are able to convey a divine power to their companions even more effectively than they did while in this world. In other words, precisely because they are in the grave, the place where spiritual activity prevails over physical activity, the truly righteous are able to exert a spiritually powerful impact on the physical no less than the spiritual existence of those still in this world. They influence the character of their disciples, allowing them to advance on the path to mystical victory. In the language of *The Book of Pure Gold*, they act as conveyors of the prophetic light that alone illuminates the human soul, thereby fortifying it against the world's demons so that it might advance towards mystical victory.

It is no secret that one's soul gets wearied by the world's weight with negative effect on the character of one's worship and, ultimately, one's ethical capacity. You need to be renewed—even remade—through the special graces afforded by the companionship of the truly righteous. The idea is nicely captured in a statement by a Moroccan scholar, Abū Bakr al-Bannānī (d. 1284/1867),¹⁶ who says that when a great calamity strikes you, a share of your soul becomes accessible to powers other than divine power, but the lights of divine providence protect your soul. However, such protection comes through a human process: companionship of the people of God. In other words, good company keeps you good.

It is worth emphasizing that the mysticism we encounter in *The Book of Pure Gold* is very much a communally oriented mysticism.¹⁷ The goal is to access the prophetic light not for individuals to be personally illuminated but for the ethical capacity of the *umma* as a whole to be fortified, and in Islam, ethics is prophetic ethics. Thus, the community of the Prophet is to represent the character of the Prophet, but for character to be represented, a body is needed. In other words, the community of the Prophet is the representation of the prophetic body and, in turn, the representation of the prophetic character. And at least in our case, it is especially the bodies of the righteous dead that represent the prophetic body since, as we've seen, it is the bodies of the righteous in their graves that most powerfully convey

16. Abū Bakr al-Bannānī, *Bughyat al-sālik wa-irshād al-hālik*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Haddāwī and Ismā'īl al-Masāwī (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013), 117.

17. See al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibriz*(2), 476, where the *umma* is depicted as a single body: "As for the spirits of believers, they benefit from one another, give (spiritual) drink to one another, and intercede for one another, such that it is as if you see in some spirits the effects of the sins that their being has acquired and you see those effects manifest on the spirit; then those effects go away because of a spirit that is dear to God the Exalted, near to the soul with the effects."

to the *umma* the prophetic light by which its ethical capacity is to be preserved and fortified. Of course, there have been a host of other strategies—past and present—by which prophetic character might be embodied in the living members of the prophetic community. For example, another figure from the Islamic West, Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1374), whose religious outlook differs in significant ways from that of al-Dabbagh, spoke of intellect as the agent by which the names that God taught to Adam (meaning the divine names) are assumed by believers for their mystical illumination (i.e., victory) and ethical edification.¹⁸ The ethically elevating mystical journey is more philosophically informed in the case of Ibn al-Khaṭīb and more ritually informed in the case of al-Dabbagh. However, it is worth noting that Ibn al-Khaṭīb also makes purity of soul a stipulation of victory.

To convey the prophetic light is no simple matter. What kind of body is required in order to convey the prophetic light? In fact, the only body that can bear the prophetic light is the prophetic body. Thus, to bear and, in turn, convey the prophetic light, your body actually has to be transformed into the prophetic body. The idea, strange at first glance, is fundamental to the mystical vision of *The Book of Pure Gold*. As we've seen, the prophetic light is necessarily conveyed via the bodies of the righteous dead, and without the conveyance of that light, which constitutes the divine mystery, the mystical victory is unattainable, that is, the mystical victory by which your body is united to the prophetic body, thereby immunizing your worship from the demons that seek to corrupt it. Without that victory, the demons will succeed in corrupting the worship of the *umma* as a whole. As a result, no one in the *umma* will be righteous, and so its ethical capacity as a whole will be exhausted. In the final analysis, conveyance of the prophetic light is the lynchpin of the whole system. In other words, some bodies have to be transformed into the prophetic body for that light to be borne and conveyed to the rest of the *umma*. The bodies of the righteous dead play that role in a special way. Even in this world, the righteous represent the prophetic character, but it is only in the grave that the righteous fully represent the prophetic body that conveys the prophetic life to the *umma*, because, as we've seen, it is in the grave that their spiritual power is fully active. For this reason, al-Dabbāgh notes on several occasions that the body of the righteous is only transferred to their companions upon death.¹⁹

As recounted in the introduction to *The Book of Pure Gold*, al-Dabbāgh advances on the mystical journey—the path to mystical victory—in stages; in each of them, the righteous dead feature prominently. The journey begins when he receives the trust (*al-amāna*) from his maternal grandfather, Sayyidī al-ʿArabī al-Fishtālī (d. 1090/1679), who was considered one of the great saints of his day in Fez, but who had died before al-Dabbāgh was born. How, then, did al-Dabbāgh receive the trust from someone he never met? It is the memory of his grandfather as conveyed to al-Dabbāgh by his mother that is the link. Having received a message from the Prophet in a vision, al-Fishtālī entrusted his skullcap to his daughter, who would convey it to al-Dabbāgh in his youth. It is the reception of this prophetically designated

18. See Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawdat al-taʿrīf bi-l-ḥubb al-sharīf*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kattānī (Casablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 2004), 276.

19. For example, see al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibriz*(2), 25.

artefact that prompts him to aspire to pure worship (*al-tashawwuf ilā al-‘ubūdiyya al-khālīṣa*). He thereupon sets out in search of a spiritual master through whose companionship he might achieve his goal. However, he does not find what he seeks. His chest becomes constrained each time he accompanies a spiritual master for a period. Who in this world can guide him to the prophetic light that will open his soul to receive the divine mystery by which pure worship is achieved? He will find such a master in due time but not until after he has accompanied the righteous dead.

It was al-Dabbāgh’s custom to spend time at the shrine of Sayyidī ‘Alī Ibn Ḥirzihim (d. 559/1163), where he would recite poems in praise of the Prophet. A mysterious figure, Khiḍr as he’ll later learn, comes to him one night, disclosing al-Dabbāgh’s inner state and bestowing upon him a litany by which he will successfully beseech God to unite his being with the being of the Prophet in this world for the purpose of achieving pure worship. In other words, the company of the righteous dead, the likes of Sayyidī al-‘Arabī al-Fishtālī and Sayyidī ‘Alī Ibn Ḥirzihim, is critical for al-Dabbāgh’s advancement on the path.²⁰ The mystical victory is achieved as a result of the companionship of a third figure, namely, al-Dabbāgh’s spiritual master, a figure by the name of ‘Umar Ibn al-Hawwārī (d. 1125/1713), who, it turns out, had been a disciple of Sayyidī al-‘Arabī al-Fishtālī, a fact he discloses to al-Dabbāgh only on his deathbed. Moreover, Ibn al-Hawwārī had been custodian of the shrine of Sayyidī ‘Alī Ibn Ḥirzihim, which, as noted, al-Dabbāgh would frequent. For this reason, al-Dabbāgh credits Sayyidī ‘Alī Ibn Ḥirzihim with drawing him to his spiritual master.

However, it is important to note that the disclosure of the mystical victory occurs only after the death of Ibn al-Hawwārī. Here is the point: The impact of the spiritual master one accompanies in this world is complete only once he passes from this world because it is in death that he is able to transfer the fullness of his spiritual being, shaped by the prophetic spirit, to the *umma*. (As we saw with Ibn al-Qayyim, it is one’s spiritual aspect that is most fully active in the grave.) In the world of al-Dabbāgh, the process is to be taken quite literally. In death, the spiritual master is fully alive, enjoying full life in the prophetic spirit, which can only be represented by the body proper to it, namely, the prophetic body. Thus, in death, the spiritual master actually conveys the prophetic body to his companions in this world. Fortified by the Prophet’s being, they are now able to bear the divine mystery and, in time, hand it down to a subsequent generation of believers. In this respect, the worship of the *umma* will be preserved/represented by the prophetic character proper to it.

Another mysterious figure (described as black) by the name of ‘Abdallah al-Barnāwī, comes to Fez to mediate the disclosure of the mystical victory. It should be noted that nothing is known of this figure, and there is no evidence of anyone by that name in the lifetime of al-Dabbāgh. What are we to make of this enigma? Such figures, especially Khiḍr, play a symbolic role in the narrative, signaling that a spiritually powerful development is taking place. Whether such figures

20. See *ibid.*, 19–20.

actually existed or not is beside the point. (A parallel exists in the way al-Dabbāgh speaks of the Syriac language. Of course, history attests to the existence of the Syriac language, but not in the way al-Dabbāgh conceives it. In his world, it exists symbolically, signaling a cognitive space beyond the physical realm, which is defined by the Arabic of the Quran.)²¹

The important point for our purposes is the odd physical situation that al-Dabbāgh experiences following the death of his spiritual master, including bodily convulsions. It was not the result of sorrow. Rather, it indicates transference of the prophetic body to him from his now dead master, allowing him to bear the divine mystery and achieve mystical victory. Why does he receive the prophetic body from his spiritual master only after his spiritual master has passed from this world to the next? On the one hand, when it comes to the process of spiritual succession, a disciple only takes his master's place once he has passed. On the other hand, there is still the question of the mechanics of the process. As we've seen, it is after death that the righteous are most spiritually efficacious. The prophetic character is thus only fully transferable after death, but the prophetic character can only be communicated by the prophetic body, and so the prophetic body is conveyed to the disciple after death, allowing the disciple, here al-Dabbāgh, to bear the divine mystery, which only the prophetic body can bear; as a result, he is able to achieve mystical victory. His worship is now free of satanic intrusions,²² allowing him to be the bearer of the prophetic light to the world, and the prophetic light is the prophetic character, which in essence is divine mercy. We will return to this point, but let's first delve into the relevant passages from *The Book of Pure Gold* that illustrate the spiritual goods in question.

Of chief interest is the impact of al-Dabbāgh's dead master, ʿUmar Ibn al-Hawwārī, on his body and soul. The massive expansion of al-Dabbāgh's body, a phenomenon that is well known from other hagiographical accounts, is an indication of his reception of the prophetic body:

Three days after the death of Sayyidī ʿUmar I underwent the mystical victory . . . and God made known to us the truth of ourselves. . . . When I reached the Gate of Victory (in Fez), a trembling seized me, then a great shudder, and then my flesh began to tingle greatly. . . . The condition increased until I reached the grave of Sayyidī Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAllāl, may God benefit us by him, which is on the way to (the shrine of) Sayyidī ʿAlī Ibn Ḥirzihim. The condition intensified, and my chest began to be greatly agitated. Then something emerged from my being, like the steam from tossed couscous, and then my being began to grow tall until it became taller than the tallest of men. Then things were disclosed to me as if in my presence. . . . Then, by a great light, as if a flash of lightening that comes from every side, that light came . . . and from it a great coldness struck me, and I thought I would die. . . . I looked at the robes that were on me, and I saw that they did not veil (that is, impede) that glance which spread within my being. . . . When it was the third day of the Feast of

21. See *ibid.*, 181ff.

22. See *ibid.*, 449.

the Sacrifice, I saw the lord of existence, God's blessing and peace upon him. Sayyidi 'Abdallah al-Barnāwī said to me, "O Sayyidi 'Abd al-'Aziz (al-Dabbāgh), before today, I feared for you, but today, when God has joined you with His, the Exalted's, mercy, namely, the lord of existence [the Prophet], God's blessing and peace upon him, my heart was reassured and my mind is at peace, and so I entrust you to God the Mighty and Majestic." Thus he went to his country and left me. He had stayed with me in order to preserve me from the intrusion of darkness upon me during the (unfolding of the) mystical victory which I underwent until I underwent it, beholding the Prophet, God's blessing and peace upon him, because there is then (no longer) any fear for those illuminated by the victory, but there is fear for them before that (that is, before they should behold the Prophet).²³

Later in the work, explanation is given as to why mystical victory occurs only after the death of one's spiritual master—and the impact it has on the quality of one's worship. On the one hand, it grants one the spiritual strength—the power of the prophetic light that comes with transference of the prophetic body to one's soul—by which to bear the prophetic being without harm. On the other hand, with this victory, one prays purely with the prophetic spirit. It is thus through the bodies of such saintly figures that the *umma* is marked by the prophetic spirit and character:

The *walī* (saint) is only illuminated by the mystical victory after the life of his father (that is, spiritual master), because the mystical victory descends only upon the mystery of the (prophetic) being (*al-dhāt*).²⁴ Thus, if the mystery of the being is transferred to the son (that is, the spiritual disciple), he will undergo illumination by mystical victory. However, as long as the sheikh is alive, the mystery of the being does not transfer to anyone, and so no victory by mystical illumination will take place. . . . If the mystical victory is made to descend on one's being prior to (reception of) the light of the power (that is, the light that comes with the transference of the prophetic body), a defective and weakened state occurs in one's being. . . . But if the light of power is made to descend on one's being first, then the light of the mystical victory (that is, the light of the prophetic character) descends after it, and so one's being won't be harmed by the mystical victory. . . . As for the people who've undergone the great victory . . . no act of disobedience issues from them . . . since . . . they are always in the state of beholding the divine truth, and beholding the divine truth is fortification against disobedience. . . . If the *walī* prays with this apparent (prophetic) being (that is, the prophetic body), then the being of the (prophetic) spirit (that is, the prophetic character) prays with him in his (the *walī*'s) being. It (the prophetic spirit) prostrates when he prostrates and bows when he bows. . . . At the time of the mystical victory, something resembling a black snakeskin, that is, the darkness that totally surrounds one's body, withdraws from the one who has undergone the mystical victory. If that snakeskin withdraws, the light of victory pours out on his being.²⁵

23. See *ibid.*, 20–22.

24. It is important to recall that in this work, *al-dhāt* is very much a bodily phenomenon. See footnote 11 above.

25. See al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibrīz*(2), 262–268.

Of course, the transference is not a transference of flesh per se but of the master's mystery (*sirr*), that is, his prophetically illuminated being (*dhāt*), a term that in *The Book of Pure Gold* embraces one's corporeal as well as psychological existence, since, here, ethics transference includes prophetic corporeality; without such corporeality, it is not possible to bear the prophetic spirit and character. In other words, with mystical victory, the prophetic being of the spiritual master is transferred to the disciple, with bodily impact on the disciple:

If God the Exalted grants mystical victory to the servant, He assists him with one of the lights of the divine truth, which enters into his being from all sides, penetrating it until it penetrates his flesh and bone, so that he suffers from its coldness and the hardship that comes with its entrance into his being, which is akin to the throes of death. . . . If God has promised a servant mystical victory in terms of beholding the noble (prophetic) being, he won't see it until he is given to drink of the mysteries which are in the noble (prophetic) being. Let's suppose that one's being before the mystical victory is like something darkened and that the noble (prophetic) being is like a light with diverse branches that number one-hundred thousand or more. If God wants to show mercy to that darkened being, then the light that He extends to him and gives him to drink comes to it (one's being) one time, penetrating it with those branches, one after another. Let's suppose that (the branch of light to be given) is the branch of patience, and so the blackness of its opposite goes away, that is, fear and anxiety. Another time the light comes to one's being with another branch. Let's suppose it's the branch of mercy, and so the blackness of its opposite goes away, that is, the lack of mercy. . . . And so on until you come to all the branches which are in the illuminated and purified (prophetic) being. Thus, all the blackened characteristics depart from one's darkened being. Only then is the servant able to behold the noble (prophetic) character because, if any of the blackness remains, that is blackness in one's being, and one cannot behold the noble (prophetic) being until the blackness has entirely departed from one's being.²⁶

Such illumination, a process both spiritual and bodily, is vital in giving correct orientation to disoriented souls. Acts of worship do help orient souls to God,²⁷ but ritual action alone is not enough, since demons have access to the soul at prayer, necessitating fortification against them. And it's not enough to read pious literature to be so fortified.²⁸ One must seek the companionship of ethically elevated souls:

26. See *ibid.*, 312–313.

27. See *ibid.*, 259, where it is explained that works of worship yield rewards and that those rewards bring lights. To summarize the passage: If works of worship are purely for God (i.e., in accordance with the mystery of the truth of the prophetic being), then the lights that follow such works shine on one's being with bodily manifestation. Is he saying that pious works illuminate the soul? For purity of worship, one must be spiritually and ethically elevated by the companionship of the righteous, as we highlight in this article. So, the above report does not mean that illumination comes from ritual action alone but rather that the bodily affections—al-Dabbāgh mentions humility, shaking, and weeping (all effects of the impact of the lights on the soul)—indicate one's worship is pure and thus accepted by God. How does one know that God views one's worship favorably? It is not clear. See footnote 10.

28. It is not enough to read the manuals of Sufism. You need to accompany one who bears a light that extends from the prophetic light and, in turn, from divine truth, making him heir to the prophetic character and thus capable of illuminating your interior state. Debate did arise, notably in the fourteenth century (no less a scholar than Ibn Khaldun entered the fray), about the possibility of advancing on the spiritual path by reading the manuals of Sufism apart from accompanying a divinely illuminated sheikh. The consensus was negative. For example, Abu 'Abdallah al-Sāhili (d. 754/1355) is very clear that you need a divinely illuminated sheikh. See al-Sāhili, *Bughyat al-sālik fi ashraf al-mamālik*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahīm al-'Alī (Manshūrāt

The orientation of the hearts to God is their prayer, just as the prostrating and bowing of the physical being is its prayer. . . . If demons see a person who wants to become so oriented by doing such things as recalling God and listening to spiritual speech, they penetrate his heart and so corrupt his (spiritual) orientation out of jealousy and hatred for the Children of Adam.²⁹

In the being of the believer is a thread of light that emerges through a hole in his being, and that light is connected to the gift of the divine truth, may He be glorified, and it increases (in efficacy) when one associates with His, the Exalted's, *awliyā'*, and decreases when one does not do so, and it is feared that such a one will be wholly cut off (from the light as a result of not associating with them). The hole is blocked when one associates with those possessed of (worldly) superiority, because they will overpower his being with their superiority, wealth, and prestige. His being will be hostage to them and under their control, and he'll not cease to listen to them inwardly and outwardly. He remains in that condition for a long time, and so the divine truth, may He be glorified, doesn't enter his thought or mind, and thus he ends by giving himself over to his own goals, being cut off from God, until the hole is entirely blocked.³⁰

Again, as the second of the above two passages indicates, believers in the world are ceaselessly under the influence of trials and temptations, chief of them being association with the powerful whose company disorients one's soul. One thus needs another kind of companionship to reorient the soul, the companionship of the *awliyā'*, and it is the dead *awliyā'* who are more effective in extending spiritual goods to believers,³¹ and that is because the grave of the righteous dead is the place where the prophetic spirit is most active. We see this in al-Dabbāgh's recollection of the graves of the *awliyā'* in Fez, whose mystical lights he associates with the light of the grave "of our Prophet." The former extends from the latter:

How many a time I gaze at the graves of Fez . . . and see lights emerging from the ground. . . . So, I know that the possessors of those lights are the best *awliyā'*. . . . It is similar at the grave of our Prophet and master Muhammad, God's blessing and peace upon him, for the pillar of the light of the faith of him, God's blessing and peace upon him, extends from the noble grave (in Medina) to the dome of the *barzakh*, where the pure spirit (of the Prophet) exists. The angels come in groups to circumambulate that noble grave. . . . When God wished to grant me the mystical victory and join me to His mercy (that is, the prophetic being), I gazed, while I was in Fez, at the noble grave (in Medina). Then I gazed at the noble grave, and it began to draw close to me while I gazed at it, and when it drew close to me, a man emerged from it, and lo, it was the Prophet, God's

Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 2003), 126; and al-Sāhili, *Bughyat al-sālik fi ashraf al-mamālik*, ed. Rashid Muṣṭafā (Casablanca: Maṭba'at al-Khalij al-'Arabi, 2004), 18. This latter edition is based on the editor's dissertation from Complutense University in Madrid.

29. See al-Lamaṭi, *al-Ibriz*(2), 270.

30. See *ibid.*, 263.

31. See *ibid.*, 290, where it is explained that it is more beneficial to ask for the help of a dead saint (*wali mayyit*). See also 292 for a story of the efficacy of visiting a shrine in meeting one's needs. This recalls a story as told by the Syrian scholar, Muḥammad Ramaḍān al-Būṭi (d. 2013): For the longest time, he was unable to understand the point of one of the aphorisms (*ḥikam*) of Ibn 'Atā'allāh (d. 1310) until he visited his shrine in Cairo.

blessing and peace upon him. Sayyidī ‘Abdallah al-Barnāwī said to me, “God has united you . . . with His mercy, and he is the lord of existence, God’s blessing and peace upon him, and so I no longer fear that the demons might deceive you.”³²

The ultimate purpose of this schema—where saintly figures who embody prophetic character ensure the community’s favorable standing before God by undertaking the community’s worship with inner and outer purity—is the ethical character of the *umma* as a whole. The souls of those who worship God purely are pure souls of the noblest character, which in the case of Islam means the prophetic character as animated by the divine names:

And so the being of him, God’s blessing and peace upon him, embraces all that is correct in that vision and is assisted by all its mysteries—mercy for people, love of them, pardoning them, forbearance, beseeching God to grant them what is good for them. . . . (Here al-Lamaṭī comments.) When we assume that the vision embraces all of the beautiful names (of God) and we assume . . . that the (prophetic) being of him, God’s blessing and peace upon him, is given to drink from all the lights of the beautiful names and is assisted by their mysteries, then there is in the being of him, God’s blessing and peace upon him, the light of patience, the light of mercy, the light of forbearance, the light of pardon, the light of forgiveness, the light of knowledge, the light of capacity, the light of hearing, the light of seeing, the light of speaking, and so on until you come to all the beautiful names; and thus their lights are in the noble (prophetic) being perfectly. Then the sheikh (al-Dabbāgh), may God be pleased with him, said: In looking at other than he (the Prophet Muhammad), at angels, prophets, saints, we find that they have been given a portion of what is in his noble being because they have been given to drink from the noble being; thus, the mysteries present in their beings are derived from him, God’s blessing and peace upon them.³³

In sum, the Prophet’s character is illuminated by the lights of the divine names, and all other spiritually elevated beings are illuminated by virtue of being related to the Prophet. What is al-Dabbāgh’s purpose in envisioning this elaborate mystical-ethical system? As earlier noted, he is concerned about the harmful effects of worldly powers on the ethical character of the *umma*.³⁴ Worldly powers somehow mediate satanic impact on the soul, which is countered by companionship righteous souls. Thus, to offset the harm of worldly powers on the soul, al-Dabbāgh envisions a spiritual realm as an abode of prophetic authority by which to guide the community, thereby maintaining its religious integrity. In other words, the true rulers of the *umma* are not the sultans but the saints. A story illustrates the point.³⁵ A man has been assigned to a post at the court (*al-makhzan*).³⁶ He has no choice but

32. See al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibrīz*(2), 479–480. The idea is clearly stated: If you see the Prophet while awake, you are secure from demonic deceptions. In other words, Satan no longer has any power over your being.

33. See *ibid.*, 390–391. In other words, all prophets and saints share in the being of the Prophet Muhammad and so there is religious benefit in gazing at them.

34. See the passage cited in footnote 30 (*ibid.*, 263).

35. See *ibid.*, 282–283.

36. For historical perspective on this concept, see Roman Loimeier, “The Bilād al-Maghrib: Rebels, Saints, and Heretics” (chapter two) in *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 35–53.

to accept the assignment. Not doing so would put his life at risk, but he's concerned about the effect it will have on his soul and so seeks the advice of al-Dabbāgh. The first point worth noting is the identification of the court with injustice—in echo of the earlier idea of worldly power as mediating satanic impact on the soul. Such is the nature of worldly power. Thus, working at court is a trial—a test of the purity of one's conscience and thus of one's religious integrity: If you have to work for the court, will you be troubled by doing so or not? Al-Dabbāgh teaches: If you have a righteous character, your soul will be troubled by working for the court. If you don't, you'll actually take pleasure in the injustice of the work. In short, if you work for the court, you're bound to be implicated in injustice, and so your soul should be troubled by it. Al-Dabbāgh tells the man to accept the job but to serve the deprived (*al-masākīn*) as atonement, so to speak, for working for the court. However we take the story, it illustrates that the saints, not the sultans, are the ones who preserve the ethical integrity of the *umma* by their character and the advice they dispense.

It would therefore be wrong to see *The Book of Pure Gold* as merely affirming a spiritual hierarchy as associated with the prophetic being. The *umma* is a community not of injustice but of divine mercy, and if such character is not manifest, the integrity of its worship is in question, since its character flows from its worship. In other words, the *umma* is the place where divine mercy is to appear. After all, the prophetic character, which is divine mercy, runs in its veins, as it were. If its worship is pure, divine mercy will appear as its character. Hence, if divine mercy is not apparent in the *umma*, the purity of its worship is suspect. The *umma* is thus the prophetic body as seen in its worship and its ethics. Its character in that sense is preserved not by the sultans but by divine lights conveyed to it by the *awliyā*'.

The entire scheme, placing the character of the *umma* in the hands of the saints, is not to justify their privileged place but to lay out what is expected of them, especially given the fact that the rulers of the *umma*—holders of worldly power—pose a threat to its ethical integrity. In short, you cannot claim spiritual virtuosity—and thus the right to educate believers—if you do not display the character of the Prophet, which al-Dabbāgh describes as divine mercy. He is critiquing saintly pretenders who have stature in society but don't display divine mercy. It is in this respect that we must understand the idea of seeing the Prophet while awake. Doing so is what guarantees prophetic character. Thus, if you don't see him, your spiritual purity is suspect. But if you do see him, as a true saint should as proof of his possession of prophetic character, your claims to see him, al-Dabbāgh makes clear, must be confirmed by display of his character, the pure qualities of which (*shamā'iluh al-muṭahhara*) are well known from scholarly writings.

The overall vision of al-Dabbāgh, which is complex and even apparently eccentric at times, is rooted in the overall scholarly and spiritual heritage of Islam and offers a message for today. Who you accompany effects your worship and, in turn, the orientation or disorientation of your ethical character. There is a connection—with ethical implications—between companionship and worship. Worship under the influence of ignoble companions yields no ethical benefit. (One might think of worship that leads to violence.) *The Book of Pure Gold* invites us to think about the nature of worship: the spirit with which we pursue it and also its ethical fruits. We might find its reports odd, but it is worth thinking about its emphasis on the transmission and reception of divine light. How is a worshipper to be sure that the light he or she receives in prayer is not a demonic deception or psychological delusion? Whose souls effectively transmit the divine light? And what does that say about their bodies? For al-Dabbāgh, companionship extends to the righteous dead. One accompanies them by visiting their graves, reading their writings, or actually seeing them. They are not dead but alive, wholly purified, making companionship with them vital for the ritual and ethical integrity of the *umma*.

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