

## The *Lawā'ih* of Jami

The *Lawā'ih* is one of three works which 'Abd al-Rahman Jami wrote under the theme of light, all beginning with the letter 'l' and all plural forms: the others are called *Lawāmi*' ("shimmerings") and *Lama'āt* ("sparkles"), both from the same root *l-m-'*, suggesting something brilliant and bright like a star, twinkling, sparkling, as well as signalling, indicating. The singular (*Lum'a*) was often used as a title in Sufi treatises.

*Lawā'ih* literally means "gleams" or "flashes" (both words have been used for the English translations<sup>1</sup>). The root *l-w-ḥ* means to shine, gleam, glisten, flash like lightning, or simply appear. The word also suggests a quick look or glance, a tablet on which one writes (cf. the Tablet on which all God's decrees are written is called *al-lawḥ*), daybreak, the external signs of a thing.

It is not a commentary on a specific work, but it is a summary of what Jami regarded as Ibn 'Arabi's key teachings. In the preface to the *Lawā'ih* Jami portrays himself as a mere translator or communicator of what has been presented to "the secret hearts and spirits of the lords of gnosis and the masters of tasting and finding", i.e. the great spiritual masters of the past. But this description is not mere hyperbole: he is acting as interpreter of Ibn 'Arabi and others. The language he uses in the preface is very precise and suggestive. The terms he uses here for gnosis and tasting and finding are key Sufi terms: *'irfān*, the science of direct experience (from the same root as *ma'rifa*); *dhawq*, taste or immediate experience; and *wijdān*, finding (from the same root as *wujūd*, being or existence). This last brings to mind Ibn 'Arabi's famous definition of *wujūd*: *wijdān al-ḥaqq fi'l-wajd*, 'finding the Real in ecstasy', which plays on the three inherent meanings of the root *w-j-d*, being, finding and ecstasy.

The work is made up of 36 'Gleams', each of which has a prose section and poetry section devoted to the theme of the particular 'gleam' he is discussing. The prose comes first and is fairly explicit and didactic, while the poem summarises the topic in a more graphic way. The contrast between the two is both elegant and thought-provoking. Usually, there is only one piece of prose and one poem, but sometimes as many as four.

As Chittick explains in his excellent introduction, "most of the book is dedicated to explaining how cosmic existence arises from the one and undifferentiated Real Being... one can discern two main issues: *tawḥīd* as practice and *tawḥīd* as theory. The practical issue is the devotional imperative of turning one's full attention toward the One. The theoretical issue is discerning between the One and the many, or God and the world. In practical terms, Jami is telling his

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<sup>1</sup> See Chittick's translation which is included in *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* by Sachiko Murata (Albany, 2000); and Whinfield's more archaic and rather less accurate translation as "Flashes" (London, 1978 repr).

readers that it is necessary to see things correctly in order to be able to remember God as He should be remembered. In theoretical terms, he is differentiating between existence (*wujūd*) per se, or the reality of God, and the existence that is ascribed to the cosmos.”<sup>2</sup>

While the first twelve Gleams deal primarily with practical matters of right understanding, remembrance and maintaining the inner relation with God, Gleam 13 to the end are devoted to explaining the relationship between the True Being of the Real and the manifold existence of the world. We have selected texts from the first section, with one example from the second as an illustration of Jami’s method.

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<sup>2</sup> *Chinese Gleams*, p. 116.