

The Life and Works of Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh

Introduction

Muḥammad Ja‘far Kabūdarāhangī (1172/1759–1238/1823), known by the spiritual title of Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh,¹ was one of the greatest Ni‘matullāhī masters of the Qājār dynasty. He belonged to the Qarāguzlūw tribe, and his father and ancestors were the elders, nobles and commanders-in-chief of their tribes and provincial districts.² He started learning religious sciences from an early age and became a well-versed seminary scholar.³ His successor, Mast ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1253/1837), maintained that the Ni‘matullāhī order flourished during Majdhūb’s leadership.⁴ He claimed that Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh was like Shāh Ni‘matullāh and Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) as regards his place in the development of Sufi theosophy, and referred to a dream in which he saw Majdhūb as the essence of Shāh Ni‘matullāh.⁵

Many scholars believe that he, along with Kawthar ‘Alī Shāh, was the most important disciple of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh.⁶ After Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh passed away, Majdhūb became the Master of the Ni‘matullāhī order, but his approach to the survival of Ni‘matullāhī Sufism was different from that of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh, and he introduced a novel perspective on the religious sciences.⁷ As an erudite Shi‘ite seminary scholar during the reign of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh Qājār (r. 1212/1772–1250/1834), he was both a philosopher and an independent religious thinker.⁸ He wrote masterly philosophical glosses on marginal interpretations of Bāghūnawī on the *Muḥkamāt-i Quṭb al-Dīn Rāzī*.⁹ He also studied Shi‘ite jurisprudence under the direction of well-known Uṣūlī jurists, but at the same time corresponded with Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā‘ī (1756–1825), seminary scholar and founder of the Shaykhī school, with anti-*Ijtihād* arguments about the philosophical concept of ‘Existence’ (*wujūd*).¹⁰ As a result, in his treatises one can find writings on theology (*kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), although he is more focused on philosophical matters, with an approach dominated by his mystical beliefs.



Portrait of Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh. (Private collection of Sultānḥusayn Tābandih)

Unlike Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, Majdhüb did not dissimulate his Sufi beliefs. He held Sufi sessions, just like Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh. The difference was that, unlike them, he did not wear Sufi attire in public but instead chose the garments of the ulama. Although he did not identify himself as a scholar, he always mentioned that he studied in religious seminaries and that he was qualified to issue fatwas. He was the first Ni'matullāhī master who wrote in Qājār Iran in defence of Sufism, while dissociating himself from non-Shi'ite Sufi beliefs, which he considered to be heterodox. During Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh's lifetime, as we shall see, his ability to defend Sufi beliefs proved extremely useful, particularly since religious verdicts were issued against Sufis and the Sufis of the Ni'matullāhī order fell victim to persecution.¹¹

The Life of Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh

In his autobiography, entitled *Majdhüb's Beliefs* (*Aqā'id al-Majdhübīyya*), Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh defends his Sufi beliefs and relates them to his studies at a religious seminary school and his quest for the truth.¹² Mast 'Alī Shāh in his *Walled Gardens of Travel* (*Ḥadā'iq al-siyāha*) and *Gardens of Travel* (*Būstān al-siyāha*), and Mīrzā Ma'sūm Shīrāzī in his *The Paths of Spiritual Realities* (*Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*), both provide detailed biographies of Majdhüb. There are also secondary sources such as *Rīyāḍ al-ārifīn* by Riḍa Qulī Khān Hidāyat and *Shams al-tawārikh* by Asad Allāh Īzadgushasb, which will be used here to reconstruct his biography.

In his autobiography Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh begins by describing his ancestors, since belonging to a noble and religious family was held to be a virtue during that period. As noted above, Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh belonged to the Qarāguzlūw tribe,¹³ a branch of the Qizilbāsh tribe, in which all his ancestors were nobles and commanders-in-chief.¹⁴ His grandfather, Ḥājji 'Abdullāh Khān ibn Ja'far Khān, was a trusted ally of Karīm Khān Zand, and a general renowned for his fairness.¹⁵ Ḥājji Šafar Khān, his father, was a religious man who avoided worldly matters and spent most of his time in prayer and self-mortification.¹⁶ His father was well versed in the religious sciences and was among the class of religious elites in his city who were students of Sayyid Muḥaqqiq Ibrāhīm Raḍavī. Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh introduced his father as a devout Muslim who performed his ordinary religious duties as well as supererogatory exercises and certain prayers and religious invocations (*dhikr*). His father also went on an annual pilgrimage to the shrines

of Shi'ite Imāms. On one of his pilgrimages he passed away in Karbalā and was buried near the shrine of the second Shi'ite Imām Ḥusayn.¹⁷

Majdhūb, apart from belonging to a noble and religious family, took pride in being knowledgeable about the religious seminary sciences and having an interior realisation of Sufi mystical states (*aḥwāl*). Mast 'Alī Shāh claims that Majdhūb was a unique man owing to what he called the 'tri-partite virtues'. The first was his noble ancestry, the second his knowledge of outward religious learning, and the third his realisation of those mystical states and possession of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*). Mast 'Alī Shāh believed that Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh had reached the level of perfection in all three virtues to the extent that he exceeded all other Sufi masters of his time.¹⁸

Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh started learning religious sciences at an early age. Until the age of 17 — that is, until the year 1189/1776 — he lived in Hamadan, where he mostly studied logic and literature, and then moved to Isfahan to study scholastic theology (*kalām*), mathematics, philosophy (*ḥikmat*) and natural sciences.¹⁹ In Isfahan he lived as a student, studying the traditional and speculative sciences (*'ulūm-i naqlī wa 'aqlī*), which he continued to do for a further 20 years in different cities, according to his own account.²⁰

After five years in Isfahan, in the year 1195/1781 he moved to Kashan,²¹ where he was a student of the well-known scholar, Mullā Muḥammad Mahdī Narāqī (d. 1209/1795).²² In Kashan Majdhūb studied jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of religion (*uṣūl*) and theosophy (*ḥikmat Ilāhī*) under Narāqī's instruction.²³ It was during his stay in Kashan that he began to familiarise himself with mystical and philosophical texts by philosophers such as Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), Ibn Fahad Ḥillī (d. 841/1437), Qāḍī Nūru'llāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610), Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 787/1385), Maytham Baḥrānī (d. 678/1280), Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1030/1621), Mīr Findiriskī (d. 1050/1640), Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1632), Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī (d. 1070/1660), Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī (d. 1080/1670) and Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1680).²⁴ Majdhūb's studies of these theologians and philosophers proved to be crucial for the formation of his own thought, particularly since later in his books, he used their words as proof-texts for his own ideas.

By studying these texts he understood that he should practise certain types of self-mortification that conformed to the Shi'ite tradition.²⁵ During this period Majdhūb lived an ascetic lifestyle. He did not pursue knowledge in order to attain social status, but to gain proximity to God through gnosis.²⁶ He went in search of admirable men of learning and good char-

acter, and he endeavoured to learn various litanies and prayers of the heart from them.²⁷ He mentions the scholars from whom he was inculcated with the practices of remembrance of God (*dhikr*). In Isfahan, Muḥammad 'Alī Muẓafar and Miḥrāb Jilānī instructed him to occupy himself with practices of spiritual remembrance. In Kāshān, he received invocation and litanies from Mīr Muḥammad 'Alī Muẓafar.²⁸ Majdhüb also met many other scholars and philosophers (*ḥukamā'*), such as Mīrzā Muḥammad Muddaris Bīdābādī (d. 1197/1783), Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī Muẓaffar Iṣfahānī (d.n.), Mulla 'Alī Nūrī (d. 1246/1831), Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī Kāshānī (died after 1217/2803), Mīrzā Mahdī Mashhadī (d. 1215/ 1801), Āqā Muḥammad Baqir Bihbahānī (d. 1204/1790), Mīr Sayyid 'Alī Bihbahānī (d. 1229/1814) and Mīrzā Mahdī Shahrīstānī (d. 1214/1800), and became their disciple.²⁹ In his *Mir'āt al-Haqq*, Majdhüb says that he spent his life in search of different sciences, including Islamic philosophy (*ḥikmat*), the natural sciences and the divine sciences, in order to obtain spiritual knowledge and gnosis.³⁰

At the age of 30, Majdhüb moved from Kashan to Qum, where he became the pupil of Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim Qumī (d. 1231 /1816), known as Mīrzā-yi Qumī. During this period, he secluded himself and strictly limited his social life. According to his autobiography, he was consequently accused of being a Sufi.³¹ In Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat's account, he says that Majdhüb lived this life of seclusion in Qum from the age of 27.³² During this time, he also made many pilgrimages to the holy Shi'ite cities in Iraq.

While Majdhüb was a student of Mīrzā-yi Qumī, Qumī ordered him to write books. Majdhüb wrote an exegesis on Shams al-Dīn Sayyid Muḥammad 'Āmilī's (d. 1009/1600) *Madārik al-aḥkām* and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Makki 'Āmilī's (d. 786/1385) *Luma'ya Damishqīyya*, which Qumī praised.³³ Once Qumī felt that Majdhüb was qualified to be a Shi'ite jurist and satisfy the religious needs of the people, he asked Majdhüb to leave Qum and go to Hamadan, giving him permission to issue public religious verdicts.³⁴ However, Majdhüb refused Qumī's offer.³⁵ Although he was not initiated into any Sufi order during that period, he had his own mystical point of view and tried to avoid religious quarrels, spending his time occupied with spiritual matters and in prayer.

From Majdhüb's own autobiography as well as the other accounts of his life, it seems that he had succeeded in attaining a very high level in his knowledge of the sciences of philosophy (*ḥikmat*), scholastic theology (*kalām*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Ma'ṣūm Shīrāzī claims that Majdhüb received numerous authorisations to teach from different Shi'ite scholars.³⁶ Mast 'Alī Shāh, with

typical hyperbole, celebrated Majdhūb as being the most eminent *mujtahid* as well as the foremost exponent of rational sciences of his day.³⁷

Majdhūb ended his seclusion after four years and then spent most of his time studying religious texts. It was during this time that he wrote glosses on *Kifāyat al-maḥṣad*.³⁸ Although Majdhūb now had a social life and attended religious seminaries, he still avoided eating meat as much as possible and continued to practise a 40-day retreat and seclusion (*chilih nishinī*) in his leisure time. However, he stipulated that he would never avoid meat completely, on the basis of the tradition from Shi'ite Imāms ordering their followers not to avoid meat for more than 40 days at a time.³⁹

Majdhūb was never satisfied with the sciences taught in the religious seminaries, which were purely exoteric (*ẓāhirī*).⁴⁰ It was during this period of Majdhūb's life that he began his quest for realisation of the divine reality and truth (*ḥaqīqat*) within Islam and travelled to different places, like Khurāsān and Iraq, where he met different Sufi masters. At the end of this quest he met Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī, who initiated him into the Ni'matullāhī order.⁴¹ He also met Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh and Nūr 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī.⁴²

In Karbalā in the year 1207/1792 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh appointed Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh as a shaykh to guide seekers and inculcate the practice of spiritual remembrance (*dhikr*) to novices.⁴³ Eight years later, in 1215/1800, Riḍā 'Alī Shāh passed away, leaving Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh as the spiritual pole (*quṭb*) of the Ni'matullāhī order.⁴⁴ In the year 1234/1818⁴⁵ Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh appointed Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh as next in line to serve as the spiritual pole.⁴⁶

At this juncture, Majdhūb moved back to his home town of Hamadan. There, he encouraged people to unify their practice of the exoteric canonical law (*sharī'at*) of Islam with the esoteric Path (*ṭarīqat*) of Sufism and claimed that the combination of the two led one to salvation.⁴⁷ He remained in Hamadan where he spent most of his time trying to reconcile Shi'ism with Sufism and engaging in public debates over religious books.⁴⁸

Majdhūb was well known among his contemporaries as an extremely pious and sincere ascetic. These qualities led Mast 'Alī Shāh, as well as later biographers, to compare Majdhūb to Salmān al-Farīsī⁴⁹ and to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī;⁵⁰ he was called the Salmān of his time (*Salmān-i Zamān*) and the Abū Dharr of his time (*Abūdharr-i Zamān*).⁵¹

There are several accounts of Majdhūb's death. According to Mast 'Alī Shāh, Majdhūb lived for 64 years.⁵² He said that before Majdhūb travelled to Azerbaijan he had predicted his imminent death, and claimed that Majdhūb told his disciples that he would not return from this journey.⁵³ On the other

hand, Ma‘šūm Shīrāzī believed that Majdhüb passed away at the age of 63, when there was a cholera epidemic in Tabriz and the city was evacuated.⁵⁴ Although Majdhüb himself became afflicted with cholera, he commanded his disciples to leave, except for Mīrzā Naṣrullāh Ṣadr al-Mamālik Ardabīlī. Majdhüb asked Mīrzā Naṣrullāh to perform the ritual prayer for his funeral and bury him in the holy shrine of Sayyid Ḥamza.⁵⁵ According to some of his biographers, Majdhüb passed away during his prayers⁵⁶ on 1239/1823 in the city of Tabriz.⁵⁷

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In what follows I will outline Majdhüb ‘Alī Shāh’s religious, philosophical and mystical thought and place it in the socio-political and theological context of Qājār Persia. First, I review his views on the issue of imitating religious authority (*taqlīd*), before outlining his views on various mystical topics such as the ‘Divine Faculty’, the remembrance or invocation of God, religious extremism and so on. Next, a major section of the chapter is devoted to Majdhüb’s interpretation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* or ‘unity of being’, that had come to be associated with the the mystical philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī. A rather long review is then given of Majdhüb’s views on the different types of Sufism, that is, his distinction between the religiously acceptable vs. damnable and heretical mystical paths in Islam. The final section of the chapter is devoted to Majdhüb’s works.

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Majdhüb tried his best to stay out of religious disputes among Shi‘ite seminary scholars, since he knew that not doing so would inevitably increase his religious duties and responsibilities. He tried to ensure that his fundamental and mystical beliefs were always kept in line with mainstream Shi‘ism. Hence, throughout his own writings he always derived most of his arguments and evidence from the great Shi‘ite texts. For example, in his *Aqā'id al-Majdhübīyya* Majdhüb claims that it was his study of Shi‘ite books such as *Hujjat al-Kāfi*, *Ziyārat Jāmi‘ Kabīr* and *Ziyārat Mulūd* that enabled him to gain knowledge of the spiritual dignity of the Shi‘ite Imāms.⁵⁸ As cautious as he tried to be, historical narration and texts written by Majdhüb and his contemporaries suggest that his life was threatened because of his mystical beliefs.⁵⁹ Although Majdhüb never wrote any apologetic text in direct defence of his mystical beliefs, since it had become life-threatening to do so,

he referred to a verse from the Qur'ān: 'Do not seek destruction at your own hands' (Qur'ān: 2:195). He continued, 'I am afraid of this verse, otherwise there is no escape from God's destiny; since his destiny is predestined.'⁶⁰ Consequently, he decided to write apologetic treatises in defence of his theological and mystical beliefs after all.

Commenting on Majdhūb's life-threatening situation, Mast 'Alī Shāh states that he was oppressed by the political powers and the bigoted seminary scholars of Shi'ism, some of whom issued fatwas that Majdhūb was an infidel who should be executed.⁶¹ Mast 'Alī Shāh himself will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Imitation (*taqlīd*)

Taqlīd is one of the controversial principles of Shi'ite theology which 'in Islamic jurisprudence means "emulation of another in matters of the law"'.⁶² Although in early Shi'ism the concept of *taqlīd* was not highly disputed, there were some instances in which narrators of hadith, such as Muḥammad al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) and Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.413/1022),⁶³ rejected *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*.⁶⁴ The majority of Shi'ites, on the other hand, believed that a Shi'ite must emulate a mujtahid on the derivatives of faith (*furū' al-dīn*). Muqaddas Ardibīlī (d. 993/1585) said, 'The "imitation" [*taqlīd*] of the mujtahid is good and permissible.'⁶⁵ *Ijtihād* and imitation were subjects of dispute between the two seminarian schools of Uṣūlī and Akhbārī Shi'ites from the early days of their formation.⁶⁶

The Akhbārī School was founded at the beginning of the 11th/17th century by Mullā Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623),⁶⁷ who did not believe in the legitimacy of *ijtihād* and was the first to criticise mujtahids.⁶⁸ Afterwards, several Shi'ite scholars adopted his beliefs and became influential during the late Safavid period, before being suppressed by the Qājārs.⁶⁹ The Akhbārīs are known for their rejection of *taqlīd*. They believe that Shi'ites must imitate their Imāms, while it is not permissible to imitate a mujtahid.⁷⁰ They also believe in the illegitimacy of *ijtihād*⁷¹ and, as Arjomand stated, they clearly challenge the authority of mujtahids.⁷² They firmly believe that the religious needs of Shi'ite society were formed by the traditions of Shi'ite Imāms. The Akhbārīs stood in opposition to Uṣūlī scholars and rejected Uṣūlī beliefs about ulama being the general deputy of the Imām.⁷³ They restricted the authority of scholars to the area of jurisprudence and Shi'ite tradition.

Some scholars with Sufi tendencies and Shi‘ite Sufis, like Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, adopted Akhbārī views on jurisprudential matters. As their name indicates, the Akhbārīs relied on scripture and traditions (*akhbār*) from Imāms. This ‘non-rational’ approach to religious matters led to the belief that knowledge could be gained through spiritual disclosure (*kashf*) and the mystical sciences. Many Akhbārī scholars also adopted a mystical lifestyle.⁷⁴

Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī expressed Akhbārī views in his writings, and an Akhbārī seminary school was founded by this great mystic scholar.⁷⁵ His pupils, including Mullā Muḥammad Ṣālih Māzandarānī (d.1081/1670), were among the followers of the school of Akhbārism.⁷⁶ He was also close to Sufi traditions, and some people claim that he was initiated into the Dhahabīyya order.⁷⁷ Muḥammad Akhbārī (d. 1232/1817), a zealous Akhbārī, practised some mystical rituals related to folk Sufism.⁷⁸

In opposition to Akhbārī views, the Uṣūlī scholars, who considered themselves to be the general deputies of the Imām (*nā’ib al-‘āmm*) in spiritual and jurisprudential matters, emphasised the importance of *taqlīd*, especially during Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh’s era.⁷⁹ Mīrzāy-i Qumī in his *Qawānīn al-uṣūl* and Sayyid Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. 1242/1826) in his *Mafātīḥ al-uṣūl* have lengthy discussions about *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* with a firm anti-Akhbārī tone.⁸⁰ Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī, known as Waḥīd,⁸¹ already discussed in detail above, delivered the final blow to the Akhbārīs by making the Uṣūlī Shi‘ite school dominant amongst the seminary schools.⁸² The Uṣūlīs divided people into two groups. The first were mujtahids, and the second were laymen imitating the mujtahid, known as *muqallids*.

Like many other Shi‘ite mystics, Majdhūb criticised the controversial concept of *taqlīd*, or imitation of a mujtahid. He stated that the imitation of mujtahids is from the Divine Legislator, *shāri‘ muqaddas*.⁸³ Obviously, his views are similar to those of the Akhbārī School on this matter.

He also made reference to and relied on Akhbārī scholars like Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī and Mullā Muḥammad Ṣālih Māzandarānī. In confrontation with Uṣūlī scholars, however, he was cautious and did not directly challenge their ideas; instead of posing any direct opposition, he quoted from Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī. Majlisī says that he has taken the middle path: he is neither suspicious of the Shi‘ite ulama nor believes them to be the perfect leaders of the community. Consequently, they cannot be imitated.⁸⁴ Their responsibility, in his view, is limited to the branches of religion (*furū‘ al-dīn*).⁸⁵

Majdhūb said that when the Shiʿite Imāms pass away or for any reason cannot be accessed by their followers, the Shiʿites must go to the narrators and knowers (*ʿarifīn*) of hadith, who know the traditions by heart.⁸⁶ The master who has become illuminated by the Lights of the Prophet and Shiʿite Imāms becomes a knower of divinity, and it does not matter if he is called a Sufi or not.⁸⁷

With regard to the term Majdhūb used above, *ʿarifīn*, some further explanation is required. The Akhbārī scholar Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī used the term *ʿarifūn* to refer to scholars who are qualified to interpret the Qurʾān. Akhbārīs believe that the Imāms provided the real meaning of the Qurʾān through their hadith and, therefore, those who have knowledge of hadith can interpret the Qurʾān.⁸⁸ Astarābādī, the first known Akhbārī scholar, believed that the only true knowledge (*ilm*) is the knowledge of hadith, whereas mujtahids based their religious verdicts on their own opinions.⁸⁹ Kāshānī merged his mystical theology with his Akhbārī beliefs and created a new amalgamation of Akhbārī theology and Sufi philosophy, teaching that through following the acts and sayings of Shiʿite Imāms one can become endowed with spiritual insight (*ṣāhib baṣīrat*).⁹⁰

In a similar idea to Kāshānī's, in his *Mirāt al-Ḥaqq* Majdhūb stated that although following the Shiʿite Imāms is a divine command, imitating the scholars and righteous men is not; in fact, it has even been prohibited in some traditions.⁹¹ However, Majdhūb did not want to distance himself from the Uṣūlī school, the dominant school of Shiʿism in the Qājār era. He opposed any harsh criticism of the Uṣūlī scholars and even condemned Ghazālī, who had reproached 'evil' scholars (*ʿulamā'i sū*).⁹² In this he referred to Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī, an Akhbārī jurist who stated that Ghazālī was excessive in his reproach.⁹³ As we have seen, Shiʿite Sufis and Akhbārī scholars constituted religious masters who challenged the ultimate authority of Uṣūlī scholars, creating a spiritual alternative to *ijtihād* for their followers.⁹⁴

The 'Divine Faculty' (*quwwa qudsiyya*)

A number of Shiʿite scholars with tendencies towards Islamic mysticism believed that for a scholar to be qualified to issue a religious verdict he must possess a divine faculty (*quwwa qudsiyya*).⁹⁵ In this regard, Majdhūb referred to a tradition attributed to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, who said, 'It is not permitted for a person to issue a religious legal opinion (*fatwā*) who does not seek it from God with inner purity.'⁹⁶

Majdhūb distinguished between different levels of scholarship within the Shi‘ite tradition. In the *Mir‘āt al-Ḥaqq*, he refers to *Munīyāt al-murīdīn*, in which Shahīd Thānī divides the ulama into three groups. The first group has the gnosis of God in its heart; the second is well versed in exterior religious sciences; and the third has gnosis in its heart and is well versed in the exterior sciences. In order to reap the rewards of the hereafter, people should follow the first group. From the second group people can obtain their religious opinions. Being with the third offers both benefits. Majdhūb does not draw any conclusion on this matter in his treatise of *Mir‘āt al-Ḥaqq*; he just refers to these great scholars.⁹⁷ However, in his *Marāḥil al-sālikīn* he is more explicit, stating that the first group are like stars that illuminate only a small area around them,⁹⁸ while the second group are like candles that burn themselves and provide only a little light. Among this group there are some scholars whose love of the material world destroys religion. They do not have knowledge of the afterlife or qualifications for the guidance of anyone except common people (*‘awwām*).⁹⁹ The third group, however, are those who possess both exterior and interior knowledge, and are like the sun whose light is a guide for humanity.¹⁰⁰ Majdhūb called them the pole (*qutb*) of their time, which is a Sufi term. He continues by remarking that this group has been excessively criticised and unfairly persecuted by the scholars of the exterior sciences.¹⁰¹

Sufi masters can be found among the first or the third group, according to the level of their seminary background. The only group that may destroy itself is the second group. Therefore, it is evident that in terms of guiding humanity Sufi masters are in a superior religious condition compared to ordinary seminary-trained Shi‘ite scholars. Majdhūb believes that the seminary scholars should engage in mystical practices. He refers to a tradition from Imām Ḥusayn stating that scholars (*‘ālim*) should always have fear as they become familiar with the Majestic and Beautiful Attributes of God, and their deeds must be in accordance with their words, so that what they teach and preach are one. Majdhūb says that when a scholar reaches the state of fear, his soul becomes imbued with Divine Light, which extinguishes his carnal desires. During this stage he witnesses the Divine Attributes through the Eye of Certainty (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*). Every blameworthy quality is burnt away through the fire of witnessing.¹⁰²

Majdhūb maintains that a gnostic jurist, contrary to the doctrine taught in in the seminary schools, knows that he has to hide his knowledge, since many people are not worthy of understanding it. He also exhibits patience towards those who are harsh in criticising him. Silence, a quality given

only to the possessors of chivalry, is also an attribute of a gnostic jurist.¹⁰³ Another point is that the scholar possessing the 'divine faculty' cannot be corrupted, in contrast to the multitude who, although they may claim to be scholars, are too close to the authorities of their time, foolishly using their knowledge to further material concerns related to their worldly careers.¹⁰⁴

Majdhūb provides a mystical explanation of the true scholar, explaining that scholars like Kāshānī, Shaykh Bahā'ī and others of their type emphasised the belief that Shi'ite scholars must possess the divine faculty, which cannot be gained merely by attending a seminary school. There is need for a certain mystical progression through Sufi practices.¹⁰⁵

Dhikr

Dhikr is a fundamental practice within the Sufi tradition, but not in Shi'ism. It is such an important concept that Sufi masters such as Abū Naṣr Al-Sar-rāj,¹⁰⁶ Abūl-Qāsim Qushayrī,¹⁰⁷ Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. ca. 618/1221),¹⁰⁸ 'Alī ibn Uthmān Hujwīrī¹⁰⁹ and many others have written extensively about its practice. In this regard, Majdhūb chose to be a Sufi and a Shi'ite seminarian at the same time, integrating authentic Shi'ite prayers with the *adhkār* (plural of *dhikr*) of the Sufis. In order to do this, he sought help from the Shi'ite Sufi masters before him.

Majdhūb believed that the invocation of God (*dhikr*) during a period of seclusion constitutes spiritual medication for human beings and leads them to salvation.¹¹⁰ This seems to contradict the general Muslim belief that following obligatory religious duties is the only path to salvation. However, Majdhūb indicated that each obligatory act is inseparable from *dhikr*, and there is no contradiction between the two.¹¹¹

In the *Mirṣād al-'ibād* Najm al-Dīn Rāzī declares that constant practice and persistence (*mulāzimat wa mudāwimat*) in the invocation (*dhikr*) free the soul of the wayfarer from everything other than God.¹¹² Majdhūb follows the same doctrine, and he considers 'practice of the invocation' (*mulāzimat-i dhikr*) as a principle on the spiritual path. One must avoid the remembrance of other than God, and remember only God.¹¹³ Continuance in *dhikr* leads to its domination over the heart and, consequently, the heart becomes the locus for the manifestation of Divine Attributes.¹¹⁴ The attachment (*uns*) to *dhikr* is more important than any other attachment. The invoker (*dhākir*) needs both physical and spiritual purification and must sit cross-legged while doing *dhikr*.¹¹⁵

Vocal Dhikr (dhikr-i jalī) vs. Silent Dhikr (dhikr-i khafī)

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī stated in *Mirṣād al-‘ibād* that the *dhikr* starts from verbal invocation (*dhikr-i lisānī*), but as it progresses it is transformed into the heart’s invocation, and that is when the invoker (*dhākir*) stops repeating it verbally. Rāzī believes that *dhikr-i lisānī* is a lower level of remembrance and is for novices.¹¹⁶

Majdhūb first explains the same practice by referring to Qur’ānic verses about remembrance and Shi’ite traditions from the *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*.¹¹⁷ The heart must be always in remembrance and remembrance must become part of the heart, but the purpose is not merely remembrance of the tongue.¹¹⁸ Many exoteric scholars criticised the way Sufis practised remembrance, so Majdhūb made frequent reference to Shi’ite traditions to counter their criticisms.

Majdhūb states that the affirmation of faith, ‘There is no god but God’ (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*) is one of the most common remembrances of Sufis and is also, in a way, the foundation of Islam, because anyone who becomes a Muslim must utter ‘*lā ilāha illā Allāh*’ first. Since this remembrance is so fundamental in Islam, Majdhūb confidently condemned those scholars who issued a fatwa excommunicating Sufis practising remembrance.¹¹⁹

Majdhūb discusses the difference between vocal invocation (*dhikr-i jalī*) and silent invocation (*dhikr-i khafī*). He states that *dhikr-i jalī* is different from *dhikr-i lisānī*.¹²⁰ Majdhūb did not believe that the Prophet and Shi’ite Imāms practised open vocal remembrance.¹²¹

Majdhūb himself divided authentic *adhkār* into two categories: verbal remembrance (*dhikr-i lisānī*), which is on the lowest spiritual level, and invocation of the heart (*dhikr-i qalbī*), which is the same as silent invocation.¹²² In *dhikr-i qalbī*, when one reaches the highest level, one realises ‘the innermost remembrance’, which is the invocation of the transconscious (*dhikr-i sirr*).¹²³

He asserts that, based on traditional and speculative sciences, both *adhkār* are supererogatory acts. Rationally speaking, remembrance of God is the reason for inner purification, and there is no doubt that silent invocation is less hypocritical a practice than vocal invocation. Majdhūb cites some traditional accounts of silent invocation as supererogatory act,¹²⁴ referring to traditions from Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muḥammad, Imām Sajjād and Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq in praise of silent invocation and invocation of the heart.¹²⁵ From these he concludes that the inculcation and instruction of the silent invocation is not an innovation, but an authentic tradition and practice received from the prophets and the Imāms.¹²⁶

Dhikr with Permission (dhikr ba ijāza)

In *Mirṣād al-‘ibād*, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī states that the *dhikr* must be inculcated from a shaykh who is a possessor of sainthood (*ṣāhib wilāyat*). The possessor of sainthood must have received this grace through a spiritual chain of other Sufi saints.¹²⁷ Majdhūb likewise emphasised the importance of having a master, to the extent of claiming that even Moses needed a guide. These spiritual guides, according to Majdhūb, are possessors of sainthood and spiritual influence.¹²⁸ He refers to Shi‘ite traditions, Shi‘ite scholarly writings and Sufi writings, all of which state that a wayfarer needs a shaykh, who is the deputy of the Prophet.¹²⁹ It is also notable that, since *dhikr* is not known to be part of Shi‘ite culture, when he discusses this subject Majdhūb is careful not to distance himself from Shi‘ite traditions, referring to Shi‘ite prayers frequently. In *Kanz al-asmā’*, he discusses the requisite remembrance (*adhkār-i lāzima*). For example, the recitation of “There is no brave youth except ‘Alī and there is no sword save Zulfiqār” (*lā fatā illā ‘Alī lā sayf illā Zulfiqār*) and other litanies prove his devotion to the Shi‘ite Imāms.¹³⁰

Majdhūb had strong reasons for believing that following the Sufi path requires the help of a pathfinder. There are trials and tribulations on the Path, and the shaykh can move the wayfarer towards his goal.¹³¹ As he reaches a higher state, the seeker may be dangerously waylaid by his own pride, and here the shaykh becomes his conscience. Not all the manifestations along the path are divine, and there is a need for a shaykh to interpret both sacred and profane experiences.¹³²

Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh emphasised that one must receive *dhikr* from a person who is permitted to give it through a spiritual chain or lineage that can be traced back to a Shi‘ite Imām or a well-known companion of the Imāms.¹³³ A real shaykh resides in the court of God and can lead the wayfarer to that majestic presence.¹³⁴ Majdhūb believed that in all Sufi orders, novices must put their hearts in concord with the heart of the shaykh,¹³⁵ and the disciple (*murīd*) needs to be sincere (*ṣādiq*) with his shaykh.¹³⁶

Majdhūb referred to different Qur’ānic verses and traditions about companionship with shaykhs and the way pious people help the wayfarer on the path due to their illumination with the lights of Shi‘ite Imāms.¹³⁷ It is through the possessor of spiritual permission, the shaykh, that the wayfarer can attain any spiritual degree and, by the grace of the light of the Imāms, his heart may be illuminated.¹³⁸

Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh referred to a long quotation from Aḥsāwī, the author of *Majlā*, who stated that novices must be obedient to their mas-

ters (*mashāyikh*), because they are the people who have purity of beliefs. Therefore, they will receive great illumination from proximity to them.¹³⁹ He also referred to another Shi‘ite scholar in this context, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Damāwandī (d. ca. 1160/1747), known to be a Nūrbakhshī master living at the time of Nādir Shāh.¹⁴⁰ Using many sources and references, Majdhüb discussed the importance of the spiritual master and also referred to traditions in *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* and *Biḥār al-anwār* regarding the same.¹⁴¹

Majdhüb also wrote about the duties of the seeker of truth (*ṭālib*), who must search for the true master who will enlighten his heart with the Light of God and gnosis.¹⁴² The seekers seek not their master, but this light. In this regard, Majdhüb referred to Sufis such as ‘Aṭṭār (d. ca. 618/1221), Rūmī and Abū Sa‘īd Abū al-Khayr,¹⁴³ as well as to Shi‘ite traditions from *Biḥār al-anwār*, compiled by Majlisī, and from Ibn Ṭawwūs, to prove that it is out of ignorance that some people accuse Sufis of worshipping their masters in lieu of the light of God.¹⁴⁴ He narrates that some of the ulama accused Sufis of being idolaters because of their concentration on the faces of their masters.¹⁴⁵ Majdhüb condemns those Shi‘ite scholars who excommunicated Sufi masters and speculates that it was due to their lack of knowledge, concluding that any excommunication of a spiritual seeker is not in accordance with either reason or tradition.¹⁴⁶

Majdhüb ‘Alī Shāh said that the faithful (*mu‘min*) know the Imām through this spiritual light obtained by the practice of *dhikr*.¹⁴⁷ He believed that when a wayfarer is always absorbed in *dhikr*, at the end he will see the Light of the saint or Imām, which is derived from the Light of God.¹⁴⁸ The subject of *dhikr* with permission was controversial in mainstream Shi‘ism and, therefore, he refers to authentic Shi‘ite sources such as *Sharḥ-i Kāfi* by Mawlānā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī.¹⁴⁹ Majdhüb says that Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī had received permission to inculcate *dhikr* to seekers from Shaykh Bahā’ī.¹⁵⁰ While Majdhüb was in religious seminaries, he was always searching for a person among the ulama who had genuine permission to offer instruction in the practice of *dhikr*. He asked for *dhikr* and prayers like *Du‘ā-yi ṣabāḥ* and *Saḥīfa Sajjādiyya* from whomever he thought had the virtue and permission to administer them.¹⁵¹

Majdhüb’s Views about Shi‘ite Extremism (*ghuluww*)

Sufism in the Qājār era was highly influenced by a Safavid Sufi culture inspired by extremist views.¹⁵² Those who exceeded the proper boundaries

of religion became known as extremists (*ghulāt*).¹⁵³ Shi'ite scholars were vehemently against *ghuluww*, and the Safavid Shāhs used the religious decrees of Shi'ite scholars to suppress *ghulāt*.¹⁵⁴

Shi'ite Sufis and Shi'ite mystic philosophers like Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, who had more of a conciliatory attitude towards Sufism, were also critical of extremists claiming to be part of Shi'ite Sufi culture. Āmulī believed that these quasi-Sufis, like the *ghulāt*, the Ismā'īlīs and Zaydīs, were infidels.¹⁵⁵

Majdhūb was also highly critical of the *ghulāt*, just like his predecessors, especially those who were extremists regarding their spiritual masters. From the beginning of the Safavid era extremist Sufis believed in the divinity of their masters; the Qizilbāsh dervishes thus venerated the Safavid shahs as God.¹⁵⁶ Majdhūb made the definitions of what a master is and is not clear and emphasised that a master should be praised only to a certain extent. The definition he provides indicates that a master is a person with authentic permission and an intermediary for the seeker of God, who is responsible for the inculcation of *dhikr*. Majdhūb also emphasised that the divine blessing (*baraka*) is from the spirit of Shi'ite Imāms, not the master himself.¹⁵⁷ Majdhūb also believed that it is outside a master's authority to permit what is religiously prohibited (*ḥarām*). He emphasised that having permission to inculcate *dhikr* does not bring about permission to change the Divine Law, and thus those disciples who called their masters the thirteenth Imām were fools whom he vehemently opposed.¹⁵⁸

Contemplative Vigilance (*murāqaba*)

Contemplative vigilance (*murāqaba*) is one of the most important duties for all Sufis, emphasised by all Sufi masters. Sufis must be vigilant of the Divine presence in all their acts and movements. Just as the sharia controls the external aspects of life, so contemplative vigilance controls the heart and interior aspects of life.¹⁵⁹ Abū Naṣr Al-Sarrāj dedicated a chapter of his book to 'Contemplative vigilance of states, its realities, and the attributes of the people of vigilance.'¹⁶⁰ Qushayrī also has a chapter about vigilance in which he refers to traditions from the Prophet and Sufi masters to prove that one must be vigilant all the time, as God is omnipresent.¹⁶¹ Likewise, according to Majdhūb, 'contemplative vigilance' is one of the most important principles on the spiritual path for a wayfarer.¹⁶²

Majdhūb explained that a devotee of God must be aware of his acts. The first and highest level of contemplative vigilance is the contemplation

of ‘those made near to God’ (*muqarrabīn*), who bear witness to the Divine Majesty. The lowest level is contemplation of the people of abstinence, in whom the certitude of divinity dominates.¹⁶³

He referred to the sermons and sayings of Shi‘ite Imāms and suggests that the vigilant person must be like a dead body without any authority and power, immersed in the sea of love, waiting for the appearance of the countenance of the Beloved.¹⁶⁴ The outcome of contemplative vigilance is annihilation in that Divine Realm, where the contemplative is illuminated by the lights of the Divine Names.¹⁶⁵

He again referred to a statement by Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, who declared that he had practised invocations such as ‘O the Living, the Everlasting, O there is no God but you’ (*Yā Hayy u yā Qayyūm yā man lā ilāhā ilā Anta*) and ‘Ya Allāh’, and believed that the continuous practice of *dhikr* and *murāqaba* for a 40-day retreat (*‘arba‘īn*) ends in the the heart being enlightened with wisdom (*ḥikmat*), gnosis (*ma‘rifat*) and spiritual love (*maḥabbat*). An invoker (*dhākir*) will also progress to the state of annihilation in God and subsistence with God (*fanā’i fī Allāh wa baqā’i bi Allāh*).¹⁶⁶ Majdhūb believed that contemplation is emptying the heart of all thoughts, and the invoker must consider God as present at all times.¹⁶⁷

The result of *dhikr* is love (*maḥabba*), which is the fruit of unity (*tawḥīd*).¹⁶⁸ There are different levels of the remembrance of the heart. The lowest is focusing the attention of the heart on one of the Divine Attributes without concentrating on the meaning of it. The second lowest level is knowing the meaning yet doing the ritual with attention to its meaning. The third level is when the invoker of remembrance is immersed in witnessing Divine Majesty and Beauty. During this stage, the invoker reaches the state of annihilation in God (*fanā’ fī Allāh*), becomes free of the self and does not find anything in the heart other than the one invoked or remembered (*madhkūr*).¹⁶⁹ The highest stage of remembrance is that which flows through all the limbs and every part of the body, thereby preventing the invoker from committing any sins, inspiring him to perform works of devotion and supererogatory acts.¹⁷⁰

The Spiritual Heart (*qalb*)

Majdhūb also wrote a detailed explanation of the spiritual heart (*qalb*). He says that in its physical sense it is a cone-shaped piece of flesh positioned in the left side of the chest.¹⁷¹ However, this heart has a soul—the intellect—

which is possessed only by human beings. The wellbeing and soundness of the spiritual heart results in a state of spiritual purity (*ṣafā*), whereas the corruption of the spiritual heart leads to its darkening and turbidity (*kudūrat*). He believed that the heart has five spiritual senses:

1. sight, which witnesses the visions of the invisible;
2. hearing, which audits the sayings of God and the sayings of beings of the Divine Realm;
3. smell, which imbibes the scent of the world of the invisible;
4. touch, which benefits from the spiritual connection with physical beings; and, finally,
5. taste, which relishes love, the sweetness of faith and gnosis.¹⁷²

Furthermore, Majdhūb believed that the heart experiences different stages. The first is the breast (*ṣadr*), which is the essence of a person's beliefs, whether submission to God (*islām*) or infidelity. The *ṣadr* is the shell of the heart. The second stage is the heart (*qalb*) itself, the source of faith and the light of the intellect. The third stage is the pericardium (*shaghāf*), the place of love for creatures. The fourth part is the inner heart (*fuād*), the locus of mystical witnessing, gnosis and spiritual visions. The fifth is the grain of the heart (*ḥabbat al-qalb*), the source of love of God. About this fifth stage Ibn 'Arabī stated that, since the heart is the place for knowledge of God, it can become the place for love of God when it fully recognises Him.¹⁷³ The sixth stage is the heart's core (*suwaydā*), where the gnosis of Divine Secrets descends, which is the source of divinely inspired knowledge and the cause for divine visions.¹⁷⁴ The seventh is the blood of the heart (*muhjat al-qalb*), the place for the manifestation of Divine Attributes and Divine Lights.¹⁷⁵ These seven stages lead a wayfarer to give up his dependence on material beings.

Majdhūb also explained the concept of tranquillity (*sakīna*). There are three types of *sakīna*. The first is peace of the heart (*sakīna-i qalbīyya*); the second is inner peace of the chest (*sakīna-i ṣadriyya*); and the third is spiritual peace of the intellect (*sakīna 'aqliyya*). These are gained through the recitation of certain remembrances and litanies.¹⁷⁶ Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh believed that the heart needs instruction, which is obtained by practising the *sharī'at*, and the heart of the *sharī'at* is the Sufi Path (*ṭariqat*),¹⁷⁷ and, therefore, he recognised the *sharī'at* to have a certain role in the purification of the heart.¹⁷⁸ He wrote that it is by the grace of sainthood (*wilāyat*) that the rust of human nature and the darkness of human attributes are

removed from the heart, allowing it to become the place of illumination and manifestation of lights.¹⁷⁹ Majdhūb, in his interpretation of the Sufi *mathnawī* poem *Sab‘i mathānī*,¹⁸⁰ stated that as a person becomes a knower or adept of the heart (*ṣāhib dil*), he moves in the spiritual path towards the divine presence. The divine lights will settle on the wayfarer and the wayfarer’s heart will become purified by the love of God. Then the poet explains the heart by saying that it is the locus of apparition of revelation, the rose garden of the Beloved, both Mount Sinai and heaven, both Moses and the divine illumination. Therefore, the heart is God’s abode if purified from worldly distractions.¹⁸¹ When the mirror of the heart is polished it is time to engage in spiritual invocation (*dhikr*).¹⁸² The ‘invocation of God’ detaches the seekers from all other material attachments.¹⁸³ Perseverance with *dhikr* leads to the domination of the one remembered (God) over the heart.¹⁸⁴ It is at this stage that the heart becomes the place for the manifestation of Divine Attributes.¹⁸⁵

The Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)

In order to elaborate on the concept of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), it will be necessary to explain some of the intellectual history behind the theory. The main exponent, but by no means originator, of the concept of unity of being was the Andalusian mystic and theosopher called Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ḥātīmī al-Ṭā’ī (560/1162–638/1240), one of the most popular thinkers of the medieval period of Islam.¹⁸⁶ He was so influential in the history of Islamic thought that, in the conclusion of her biographical study of Ibn ‘Arabī, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, Claude Addas mentions a metaphorical story about his worldwide influence. The story is that Ibn ‘Arabī felt a hair rising from his chest and expanding to the eastern and western horizons. His own interpretation of this vision was that his word (*kalamī*) would expand through both the East and the West of the Islamic world.¹⁸⁷ And, of course, there is no doubt about the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī and his school of thought on Islamic culture.

There are different opinions about Shi‘ism’s influence on Ibn ‘Arabī. Scholars such as Henry Corbin believe that Shi‘ism influenced the formation of his philosophy.¹⁸⁸ However, scholars like Michel Chodkiewicz fervently oppose Corbin’s representation,¹⁸⁹ asserting that Corbin falsely interpreted certain of Ibn ‘Arabī’s views as crypto-Shi‘ite, when in fact Ibn ‘Arabī was a self-confessed Sunni Sufi.¹⁹⁰ Whatever the truth may be, Shi‘ite

philosophy was highly influenced by Ibn 'Arabī's writings and the school of thought that was developed by Sufi scholars after his passing. Scholars like Maytham al-Baḥrānī and Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī were among the first Shi'ite philosophers to present their interpretation of the school of Ibn 'Arabī. As mentioned above, the formation of the 'School of Isfahan' was a pivotal event in the marriage of Shi'ite thought with Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy.

There are different interpretations of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, although his emphasis on God's transcendence is indisputable. Despite this, the school of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is still accused of the heresies of union (*ittiḥād*) and incarnation (*ḥulūl*), and of having pantheistic views towards all beings. Ibn 'Arabī says, 'God is identical with the existence of the things, but He is not identical with the things.'¹⁹¹ In other words, God is not physically incarnated in or substantially united with any existent being. God's being is inherent in all beings; there is a reality in the essence of every being and that reality emanates from God, which is the spirit. These spirits are the manifestation, *tajallī*, of the Divine.¹⁹²

Majdhūb is a pivotal figure in propagating a Shi'ite interpretation of the teaching of unity of being and in laying down the foundations for all the later philosophical beliefs of the Ni'matullāhīyya order. After Aqā Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī led the persecution of Sufis in Persia, Majdhūb was the first Ni'matullāhī master versed in religious sciences to propagate the philosophy of the school of Unity of Being. He was highly influenced by mystical thinkers of the school of Isfahan, especially by Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī.

The followers of Ibn 'Arabī's school of thought believe that God in His essence is transcendent, which is beyond the capacity of human beings to apprehend or perceive. However, there are emanations or manifestations from the Divine that are perceivable. As Ibn 'Arabī says, 'It is impossible for any being to be related to Allāh directly in the original form of synthesis.'¹⁹³ Ibn 'Arabī was precise about the independence of God from all creatures. However, there is only one real expanding existence, which is identical to God, and those 'other' (than God) are manifestations of this expanding divine being.¹⁹⁴ Each and every being represents God's Attributes. These manifestations and attributes are separate entities from God's essence.¹⁹⁵

Majdhūb gives a detailed explanation of this mystical philosophy in his *Aqā'id*. In the first chapter he says that Ibn 'Arabī was the first theosopher among Sufis who believed that God is the Absolute Being.¹⁹⁶ Majdhūb referred to Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt* and the writings of a number of other Sufi thinkers to dispel the accusation that Ibn 'Arabī's theory could lead to pan-

theism, and to establish that he believed in God's transcendence and the fact that God's Being is above and beyond all other beings in its 'Divine Essence'.¹⁹⁷ Majdhūb made a reference to ‘Abd Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1072/1662), the great Shi‘ite philosopher from the School of Isfahan, that believing in ‘unity of being’ is believing in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*); however, he also stated that this is difficult for ordinary people to understand.¹⁹⁸

Majdhūb was cautious about conforming to mainstream Shi‘ism, so he stayed as close as possible to the perspectives and beliefs of Shi‘ite scholars by referring to their traditions and authenticated books. At the same time, he was vigilant about not distancing himself from the unity of being school of thought and emphasised that unity with God is impossible only in regard to the Essence of God, but not in regard His attributes. Majdhūb's position on the unity of being is ambiguous. In some of his treatises he refutes the certain beliefs associated with the teaching, especially those that are close to pantheism. Beginning with a refutation, he then demonstrates his own views and praises the school, which he nonetheless tries to avoid calling ‘unity of being’.

Most scholars were against Ibn ‘Arabī and the the evolving teachings of unity of being presented by Ibn ‘Arabī and Sufis who followed after him. Among the important Shi‘ite scholars who opposed this theory should be mentioned Abū al-Qāsim ibn Ḥasan Jilānī (d. 1231/1816), known as Mīrzāy-i Qumī, who was discussed above, one the most prominent Shi‘ite jurists, specialising in the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) during the Qājār era.¹⁹⁹ He was a student of Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir (Waḥīd) Bihbahānī and the successor to Kāshif al-Ghitā’ in Qum and the teacher of Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh.²⁰⁰ His *Masā’il ar-rukniyya* consists of correspondence between him and his followers about jurisprudential matters.²⁰¹ In this book one of the questioners asks him about Sufism, and Qumī refutes the school of Ibn ‘Arabī and his Shi‘ite predecessors, especially Mullā Ṣadrā and Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī.²⁰² He criticises this school because of its belief in incarnationism (*ḥulūl*), divine union (*ittihād*) and divine manifestation (*tajallī*).²⁰³ Majdhūb and Qumī, his teacher at the seminary school, disagreed about Muḥaqqiq Ardabīlī (d. 1585). Majdhūb argued that Muḥaqqiq, in his book *Ḥāshīya bar Ilāhīyāt*, upheld the philosophy of the unity of being. Qumī, on the other hand, did not accept this claim, and asked to see the book. After he read it, he told Majdhūb that he was astonished by Muḥaqqiq's beliefs.²⁰⁴

Qumī referred to ecstatic utterances (*shaṭḥīyāt*) from Ḥallāj and Bistāmī as blasphemous.²⁰⁵ Majdhūb's response was that they issued from the state of contemplative unity (*tawḥīd-i shuhūdī*) instead of the state of the unity of

being (*tawhīd-i wujūdī*).²⁰⁶ He believed that many religious scholars wrongly interpreted them as Incarnationism, therefore they excommunicated Sufis from the Muslim community. That is because they were unable to perceive that those sayings were based on the 'contemplative visions' of Sufis.

Again, not wanting to distance himself from the views of the ulama, Majdhūb clearly refuted the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and referred to the Sufi masters like 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī and Aḥmad Sirhindī, who argued vehemently against this metaphysical theory as well. In some of his writings, without however mentioning the theory of the Unity of Being by name, he defended it and noted how it was in conformity with traditional Shi'ite doctrine.

Heterodox and Orthodox Theories of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*

While Majdhūb refuted many of their beliefs, he did not excommunicate those who held to belief in the unity of being. He believed that there were some Sufi masters who had a true understanding of its philosophy. He explained the unity of being in two different ways. The first explanation is that all beings are non-being and their being is due to the Real Being (*wujūd-i ḥaqīqī*). The followers of this school believe that the manifestation of an object is by the Light of God, which is a manifestation of the Absolute (*Zuhūr-i muṭlaq*). Whatever is in the world emanates from God.²⁰⁷ The second explanation is that it is impossible for a creature to have any perception of God and that there is no possibility of multiplicity in God. However, there is a lower realm, which is the realm of divine actions (*fi'l ul Allāh*) or Shadow of God (*Ẓil ul Allāh*). This realm is separated from Divine Essence (*dhāt*) and it is like a ray of light from the sun.²⁰⁸

The Heterodox School of the Unity of Being

After the formation of the school of unity of being, many Sufi thinkers who were accused of heretical beliefs became categorised as belonging to the movement. Nevertheless, Majdhūb did not reject all of the accusations relating to the followers of this school.²⁰⁹ Where he agreed with the accusations, he referred to strong refuters of the school of Unity of Being, such as 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī. Simnānī claimed that as he reached a certain spiritual state he perceived everything to be in union with the Absolute

Being. According to him, once a wayfarer achieved spiritual disclosure (*mukāshifa*) the futility of the unity of being would be revealed to him.²¹⁰

Famous Sufis accused of heretical beliefs were Ḥallāj and Bistāmī, an accusation that Majdhūb rejected on both accounts. He stated that some may have drawn the conclusion from the sayings of Ḥallāj and Bistāmī that they believed in incarnationism and unificationism, but that was not true because they were endowed with many holy virtues.²¹¹

The Orthodox School of the Unity of Being

After explaining the unacceptable and reprehensible doctrine of the school of unity of being, he told his Shi‘ite audiences that he did not find any evidence of the belief in incarnationism (*ḥulūl*) and unification (*ittiḥād*). He said that one must be cautious about the correct use of the term.²¹² Another explanation that Majdhūb provided about the unity of being was that God was the Absolute Pure Being who did not rely on any other being. There was no possibility of multiplicity and diversity in God; no human being, even the prophets, saints and philosophers, could perceive the essence of divinity. Majdhūb suggested that if one could perceive that essence, it would then become limited by human perception. Majdhūb believed that imagining God and building a philosophy based on that imagination would limit God and bring about a lack of belief in the oneness of God.²¹³ He also referred to Shi‘ite traditions to back up his beliefs.

Another plane of being (*wujūd*), which is separated from the Being of God, is the plane of the Divine Shadow (*Ẓil ul Allāh*) and Divine Action (*fi‘l ul Allāh*).²¹⁴ Ḥaydar Āmulī used a similar term, mentioning that a realm separated from the Realm of Divine Essence was the Realm of Divine Names (*asmā’*). The third category in the Realm of Divine Names was called the Names of Actions (*asmā’ al-af‘āl*), which necessitated the existence of creatures.²¹⁵ The term Shadow of God (*Ẓil ul Allāh*) was first mentioned by Ibn ‘Arabī. He used this metaphor to clarify that the creatures were manifestations of the Shadow of God; however, the transcendence of God remained intact.²¹⁶

Majdhūb believed that God was existent in His essence and that all spiritual realities were generated by God. Some wrongly conceive that this results in pantheism. The divine emanation was like a ray of light from the sun, which at the same time did not have the same identity as the sun. Therefore, the Essence of God (*dhāt*) was free and independent of the realm of

the Divine Shadow and Actions. Whatever one conceived as being immutable and firmly unchangeable properly belonged to the Divine Essence and was inseparable from God.²¹⁷

Majdhūb went on to point out that all beings were contained and integrated in the 'Ever-expanding Being' (*wujūd-i munbaṣiṭ*). He stated that there were other names for the 'Ever-expanding Being'—some called it the Muhammadan Reality (*ḥaqīqat-i Muḥammadiyya*) and the Absolute Sainthood (*al-wilāyat-i muṭlaqa*).²¹⁸ Majdhūb used different terms like the Station of the Mystery (*maqām-i sirr*), the Reality of Realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*), the Light of Lights (*nūr al-anwār*) and the Point (*nuqta*) when mentioning this Being.²¹⁹

Majdhūb referred to verse 156 of the seventh chapter (*I'rāf*) of the Qur'ān, which reads, 'My mercy extendeth to all things.'²²⁰ From this verse Majdhūb concluded that God's mercy, which extended to all things, was the 'Ever-expanding Being'. He referred to the prayer of Kumayl, which read, 'O God, I beseech Thee by Thy mercy, which extendeth to all things . . .' and he also referred to other traditional Shi'ite prayers.²²¹

Intuitive Philosophy (dhawq-i ta'āluh)

In many treatises and books related to the school of unity of being, the school of Intuitive Philosophy (*dhawq-i al-muṭāliḥīn*) has been discussed and analysed.

In Muṭaharī's commentary, known as *Sharḥ-i Mabsūṭ-i Manzūma*, on Sabzivārī's theosophical poem (*Manzūma-yi Hikmat*), he explained that a group of gnostics believed that the Being is a single reality in which there is no multiplicity. Muṭaharī said that the Being is the absolute unity. 'Intuitive Philosophers' believed that all existent beings, creatures (*muwjudāt*), were related to God (Being).²²²

The followers of the school of unity of being believed that there was no existent being (*muwjud*) and everything was the emanation from the divine Being, whereas the school of *dhawq-i ta'āluh* believed that there was only one Being and that existent beings (*mujūdāt*) were numerous.

Majdhūb reasoned that many of those who had personally verified and realised the truth for themselves (*muḥaqqiqīn*) were followers of the school of Intuitive Philosophy. The term 'realised person' (*muḥaqqiq*) was a respectful and positive term used by Majdhūb, which provided evidence that he did not reject its followers as philosophers, regardless of any disagreements he had with them. Although he clearly stated that he did not adhere to the

school of Intuitive Philosophy, he did not reject them as being heretical or unorthodox. He said that Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Murtiḏā, two great Shi‘ite scholars, disagreed about a lot of jurisprudential issues, but neither of them excommunicated the other from the Muslim community.²²³

The Theory of Theophany (*tajallī*)

The concept of theophany (*tajallī*) was a pivotal point in the philosophy of the unity of being, around which Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophy revolved. Izutsu said, ‘His entire philosophy is, in short, a theory of *tajallī*.’²²⁴ Majdhüb believed that the human intellect was incapable of conceiving the Absolute Luminous Manifestation (*ghāyat-i nūrīyat zuhūrīyat*) and he referred to different Shi‘ite traditions and prayers in this regard, which said that God is the Light of Lights and God is hidden due to His excessive manifestation. This Real Light was the reason for the manifestation of creatures: God’s attributes were manifested for the creation of creatures. Majdhüb believed that this viewpoint expressed the orthodox and correct understanding of the theory of the Unity of Being.²²⁵

He recounted that God was the East (*mashriq*) for the lights of intellect. He narrated a tradition by ‘Alī and other Shi‘ite Imāms to prove that everything was a manifestation of the Divine Lights.²²⁶ In order to illustrate his philosophical beliefs, Majdhüb cited the Supplication of Kumayl, where the Imām ‘Alī had prayed ‘by the light of Thy face, through which all things are illumined.’²²⁷

Two Types of Theophany

Sometimes the soul becomes the manifesting place of all the Divine Attributes and the human attributes are extinguished.²²⁸ There are two kinds of theophanies of the divine: the theophany of Lordship (*rubūbiyat*), such as happened to Moses, and the theophany of Divinity (*ulūhiyat*), which happened only to the Prophet Muḥammad.²²⁹ The theophany of Lordship did not eradicate the existence of the Prophet Muḥammad as a human being. However, the theophany of divinity did annihilate his being. Humanity then received this divine grace from the Prophet Muḥammad.²³⁰

Majdhüb stated that there were also two kinds of theophanies of the Attributes: the disclosure of Attributes of Divine Majesty (*jalāl*) and dis-

closure of Attributes of Divine Beauty (*jamāl*). A wayfarer on the Sufi path experiences a mixture of both qualities of God. Unlike the disclosure of the Attributes of Majesty, the disclosure of the Attributes of Beauty came through witnessing. The real theophany was the extinction of duality and the appearance of unity.²³¹ Majdhūb concluded that human beings were the mirror of the Attributes and Essence of God. This is why they became the deputies of God on earth.²³²

Earlier masters of the school of the Unity of Being had also emphasised the doctrine of the disclosure of Divine Majesty and Divine Beauty. Ibn 'Arabi believed that intimacy (*uns*) was related to Divine Beauty, which is a manifestation of God's loving and comforting attributes, while in contrast awe (*haybat*) was related to Divine Majesty and the manifestation of Divine Might.²³³ Āmulī confirmed this view and he asserted that human beings alone were the whole manifestation of Divine attributes.²³⁴ Thus Majdhūb's view was greatly influenced by the philosophy of his Shi'ite predecessor, Āmulī.

The Theory of Divine Light

Majdhūb explained how the wayfarers through the spiritual stations would witness different coloured lights. As the light of the soul became stronger, the colour of the light became red and then, at the end, yellow. As the light of God began to shine without the veils of the soul and the heart, there would be no colour and no limits. This Light, which was never extinguished, was the beginning of the Lights of the Divine Beauty signifying Annihilation of Annihilation (*fanā' al-fanā'*). On the other hand, the Lights of the Divine Majesty appeared as a black Light, which was the all comprehensive Light.²³⁵ The black light is reflected on as the holiest of all spiritual lights in the path.

In the hierarchy of spiritual lights, the first kind of light was the white light, which symbolised the end of inanimate creation.²³⁶ Due to the warmth of invocation (*dhikr*), the white light gradually turned to yellow. The wayfarer's desire became love; his heart opened so that he could distinguish a friend from an enemy just by looking at them. The third kind of light was a purple light, which was the station of love, reached when the heart was purified by the remembrance of God. As the wayfarer came to belong among the company of the 'people of purity', he witnessed the lights of his religious duties and his spiritual manners. He recognised the light of love, patience and all other stages on the path. The fourth and last of these lights, the green light, appeared to the dying just before death.²³⁷

In the fifth station, the wayfarer saw the green light as he had in the fourth. This stage represented the return from intoxication. The tree of his being became fruitful, and his spiritual body was illuminated. During this spiritual state the Light of Divinity extinguished the light of human intelligence.²³⁸ In the sixth spiritual station, the black light would appear to the wayfarer, which is the ever-expanding existence (*wujūd-i inbisātī*). Here the black light was manifested in the heart of the wayfarer, which is the Light of Divine Essence; and the manifestation of this light exemplified the highest rank of proximity to the Divine, the stage of Annihilation in God (*fanā’ fi Allāh*).²³⁹ The seventh and highest stage was the Light of Lights, which had no colour and was infinite. This was the station of eternity in God, at which the wayfarer was endowed with the Divine Attributes.²⁴⁰

Spiritual Disclosure (*kashf*)

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy there were two kinds of knowledge: the first was gained through the rational faculty, and the second, gnosis, was gained through spiritual disclosure (*kashf*).²⁴¹ Majdhūb explained that on the spiritual path there were 70,000 worlds.²⁴² The spiritual path began from the material lowest of the low in nature (*asfal al-sāfilin-i ṭabī‘at*) and progressed to the highest of the high in Islamic laws (*a’lā ‘ilīyīn-i sharī‘a*). It was through sincerity (*ṣidq*) that one entered into the esoteric path of religion (*ṭarīqat*). The eye of the intellect became clear-sighted and could experience spiritual disclosures. This was the state of theosophers and philosophers.²⁴³

Āmulī believed that the followers of the Muhammadan path had spiritual insight and that the eye of the heart was open for them. They witnessed God through spiritual disclosure.²⁴⁴ Disclosures by mystical witnessing (*kashf-i shuhūdī*) came through revelation and inspirations, and according to Āmulī were experienced only by prophets and saints. Majdhūb’s explanation of disclosure by witnessing was highly influenced by Āmulī.²⁴⁵ He said that when the eye of the heart was opened spiritual witnessing began. This witnessing had different levels; one of the highest was the Disclosure of Transconscious (*mukāshifāt-i sirrī*). Through this disclosure the secrets of creation, creatures and the wisdom underlying existence were revealed. Then there were the disclosures of the Spirit, which were called Spiritual Disclosures. These were disclosures of ascensions (*ma‘ūrij*), from earth, into the heavens, and visions of angels.²⁴⁶ As the soul was purified from corporeal contamination, the veils of time and place were removed.²⁴⁷

When God reveals His Attributes to the mystic, it is called 'unveiling of Attributes' (*kashf-i šifātī*), which a mystic needs to reach the state of annihilation, when he becomes immersed by the Attributes of Divine Majesty. If the wayfarer had experienced the disclosure of the Attributes of Absolute Unity, then he became subsistent (*bāqī*). Majdhūb said he was unable to explain the disclosure of Divine Essence (*kashf-i dhātī*) because mere phrases and expressions could not clarify this concept.²⁴⁸ Āmulī, before him, had likewise explained that verbal expressions (*'ibāra*) and symbolic allusions (*ishāra*) could not explain the gnosis of the divine essence, which could only be known through witnessing (*shuhūd*), spiritual taste (*dhawq*) and spiritual disclosure (*kashf*).²⁴⁹

Majdhūb believed that Sufis, 'the people of the Path', could experience these spiritual disclosures and thereby manifest the attributes of God, but the highest level of God's Self-disclosure was that of the divine Essence.²⁵⁰ No one could reach this stage except the Seal of the prophets, who is the Prophet Muḥammad, and the Seals of Sainthood, the Shi'ite Imāms.²⁵¹ Majdhūb emphasised that the Divine Attributes were manifestations of the Divine Essence and the only name for Divine Essence was Allāh.²⁵²

Creation

Ibn 'Arabī's theories about creation and cosmology were at this time widely diffused throughout Iran, but there were vast differences of opinion about his doctrines among scholars who claimed to be his followers. Ibn 'Arabī believed that the Divine Attributes stood between the creatures and Divine Essence, which he sometimes called the Isthmus (*barzakh*). However, when the Divine attributes were created, they became an act of God that emanated from God, which then descended into the material world through a series of manifestations. The Divine essence of all beings was the Breath of the All-Merciful (*naḥas al-rahmān*).²⁵³ If one recognised this being, then one gained the gnosis of the Divine.

Majdhūb also expounded a detailed theory of creation, based on what he had heard and read from the gnostics. He adopted the concept of macrocosm and microcosm: whatever was created in the world had a counterpart in the human soul. Although God was not tied to time and place, He dwelt in the hearts of the faithful. The human being was a model of the macrocosm, yet the material world was a less perfect manifestation of God than the inner world of human beings, which was a part of the spiritual world.²⁵⁴

Majdhūb cited verses from the Qur’ān and concluded that the final purpose of creation was to gain gnosis, which could be done by following Islamic laws and undertaking the contemplative disciplines and practices of Sufism.²⁵⁵ The wayfarer had to take a journey within himself and return to a younger age, as far back as the foetal stage. He had to return to his spiritual origin, which was the soul (*jān*); the soul was a Divine being and issued from the world of the divine command.²⁵⁶ Once the wayfarer realised his divine origin, he gained gnosis.²⁵⁷

Majdhūb said that all living beings were by nature in love with the beauty of Canaanite Joseph (who is a symbol of divine beauty in Sufi philosophy), and it was only from their stupidity that they had imprisoned this lovely Joseph in the dark well of the physical aspects of human nature.²⁵⁸ Those who inclined towards the material world failed to recognise their need to return to their spiritual origins and so did not gain gnosis. The Divine Soul was placed in the body and through servitude, gnosis and devotion was able to return to its origin. The wayfarer could reach the spiritual stage where he witnessed the manifestation of the Divine Attributes in every being in this world. Getting to this stage was possible through one’s innate ability, Divine graces and the guidance of a qualified master.²⁵⁹

The Spiritual Leaders: The Shi’ite Imāms

Izutsu, in his definition of the Perfect Man, said, ‘The Absolute, in its self-revealing aspect, reaches perfection in the Perfect Man’ and added that there could be no more perfect self-manifestation than this being.²⁶⁰ This reflects the views adopted by the Shi’ite followers of Ibn ‘Arabī and applied to mean the perfection of the Shi’ite Imāms alongside which could be found lesser ranks of perfection that belonged to those who guided others during the time of the occultation of the twelfth Imām.

The book of *Mashāriq al-anwār-i al-yaqīn* by Ḥafīz Rajab Bursī (d. 813/1411) is an influential text on Majdhūb’s theology. Majdhūb said that the physical body of an Imām was perishable but the act of the Divine was manifested in his person. Majdhūb asserted that the Shi’ite Imāms were the manifestations of the Divine. He referred to Shi’ite traditions, which could be interpreted as the Imāms being the place of the Divine manifestation.²⁶¹ The spiritual reality of the Shi’ite Imāms belongs to the Divine act, which is not perishable.

He also referred to a hadith by Imām ‘Alī from *Ḥayāt al-qulūb* and *Jalāl al-‘uyūn* by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, which stated that the first emanation

from God was the ‘Muhammadan Light’ (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*). From that Light 12 ranks of Lights emanated, which were the lights of the 12 Imāms. From these 12 lights, according to their rank, the lights of the prophets and other creatures emanated.²⁶² He believed that everything was created by this ‘Muhammadan Light’, directly or indirectly. The Light of Muhammad and Shiʿite Imāms was the source for all beings.²⁶³ Āmulī made the same claim that the existence of the lights of Imāms (the Muhammadan Light) was the source for the manifestation of the rest of creation and the main purpose of creation.²⁶⁴

Majdhūb referred to another hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, which stated that the first created being was the ‘Muhammadan Light’ and that the Divine Throne (*ʿarsh*), the Divine Pedestal (*kursī*), the Bearers of the Divine Throne (*ḥamaliḥ ʿarsh*) and the spirits of prophets, saints and martyrs were all created from a ray of this Light.²⁶⁵ He believed that ‘[t]he Prophet and Saints [Shiʿite Imāms] are the direct Divine Grace and all the beings are the manifestation of the Prophet Muḥammad and Saints.’ He continued, ‘No one became the manifestation of the name of the Essence, which is Allāh, except Muḥammad and his progeny [Shiʿite Imāms] (Peace be upon them), and all prophets attained their sublime rank through this Light [Muḥammad and his progeny].’²⁶⁶

Majdhūb cited a tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad from the book of *Knowledge of Certitude* (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*) by Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, which stated that ‘Ali and the Prophet were the Light between the Hands of God before the existence of creation. He concluded that the Lights of Shiʿite Imāms were the manifestation of the most Beautiful Names of God, which at the end of the day was called the Muhammadan Light (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*).²⁶⁷

The Gnostics (*ʿurafāʾ*)

Majdhūb defined a gnostic (*ʿarīf*, pl. *ʿurafāʾ*) as a person with spiritual perception (*baṣīrat*) who would not see anything other than God and His Acts, which were the traces of His power. A gnostic could see the world as the Act of God and was the true Unitarian (*muwwahid-i ḥaqīqī*).²⁶⁸

The absolute possessors of sainthood (*ṣāhib wilāyat*) were the Shiʿite Imāms. They were like flowers, while those around them smelled like flowers but were not yet flowers themselves and therefore were not yet perfect human beings (*insān-i kāmīl*). Hence the gnostic masters were interme-

diaries of the Imāms;²⁶⁹ their own lights were not perfect, but they could lead novices to the perfect light of the Imāms. In that sense, the face of the master was the representation of the face of the Imām.²⁷⁰ Āmulī had similar views, for he claimed that a knower (*‘ārif*) was a knower in respect of his gnosis compared to other human beings, but not in regard to the perfect saint, who was the Imām.²⁷¹

Majdhūb stated that these Shi’ite philosophers (*hukamā’*) and gnostics (*‘urafā’*) had spiritual visions because they followed the absolute prophet (*nabīy-i muṭlaq*) and the absolute saint (*walīy-i muṭlaq*).²⁷² Therefore, only those who were gnostics, but especially Sufis, could serve properly as intermediaries between the Imāms and the rest of humanity. They had gained enough gnosis to guide others towards the full gnosis of the Shi’ite Imāms.

Annihilation and Subsistence (*fanā’* and *baqā’*)

The concept of annihilation in God (*fanā’ fi Allāh*) existed among Sufis long before the formation of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī. However, his followers elaborated this belief, and Majdhūb continued the Shi’ite mystical and philosophical tradition on this subject.

Majdhūb believed that a lover must put everything aside for the Beloved. It is in the ultimate state of love that all the veils are lifted and the lover and beloved become one.²⁷³ It is the human soul that loses everything for love. The soul of the lover reaches the fire of the Divine Beauty. It flies towards the light, and its whole being is submerged in Divine Beauty.²⁷⁴ Majdhūb also stated that a wayfarer must drown in the sea of love, waiting for the appearance of the countenance of the Beloved.²⁷⁵ The outcome of contemplation is annihilation in that Divine Realm. Annihilation illuminates the contemplative person with the Lights of Divine Names.²⁷⁶

As the Light of God, free from the veils of the human soul and the human heart, begins to shine, there is no colour, no limits and no opposites. It is the beginning of the lights of the Divine Beauties and the state of Annihilation of Annihilation (*fanā’ al-fanā’*).²⁷⁷ Disclosure of the Attributes comes when the wayfarer acquires the Divine qualities. The Divine Attributes are then unveiled to the wayfarer; and if he or she receives the disclosure of the Attributes of Divine Majesty, then the wayfarer reaches the state of real annihilation and becomes subsistent (*bāqī*) in God. Sometimes the soul becomes the place where all the Divine Attributes are manifested and its human attributes are annihilated.²⁷⁸

Majdhūb explained that this union with the Divine is not physical but comes through the Divine graces and the effect of the raptures.²⁷⁹ One must transcend his or her own being to reach the state of 'Or Nearer' (*uw adnā*).²⁸⁰ Majdhūb cited the state of Muḥammad as explained in the Qur'ān. Human beings come into this world with the spirit of God; therefore, perfect happiness and salvation can come only by returning to God.²⁸¹ To reach Divinity the fire of love has to burn the tree of humanity to its very root.²⁸²

One of the first states is when the invoker is drowned in witnessing the Divine Majesties and Beauties. At this stage, he leaves everything behind and reaches the state of Annihilation in God (*fanā' fi Allāh*); he becomes freed of his self and finds nothing in his heart other than the One he invokes or remembers (*Madhkūr*).²⁸³

* * * * *

Majdhūb's philosophy of the unity of being differed sharply from that of mainstream followers of the school of especially Sufi Sunnis. He had always been careful to stay as close as possible to mainstream Shi'ite beliefs. While he was highly influenced by Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī as well as Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610) and Ḥāfiz Rajab Bursī, he preferred to follow the path of Kāshānī and Āmulī. He developed a more moderate Shi'ite interpretation of the Unity of Being, which was more comprehensible for mainstream Shi'ites. He placed greater emphasis on the supremacy of the Shi'ite Imāms. Finally, Sufis were portrayed as those who were knowers (*ʿarif*) of the spiritual state of Shi'ite Imāms and who had received rays of light from the sun of the sainthood of the Shi'ite Imāms.

Muslim Sects and Heretical Sufism

Majdhūb rejected theologians who tried to prove the existence of the Creator through reason, because human reason belonged to the material world and was thus inconstant and fallible in its judgements.²⁸⁴ While he said that one must reflect on the doctrines of the theosophers (*ḥukamā'*), he refuted the pretenders to philosophy (*mutifalsafa*).²⁸⁵ Majdhūb referred to pseudo-philosophers and pseudo-Sufis as *mutifalsif* and *mutiṣawwif* to distinguish them from real philosophers and Sufis; instead, he used the word scholar (*ʿālim*) to refer to pseudo-philosophers and pseudo-Sufis and rejected all theologians.²⁸⁶ In this his views agreed with those of the majority of Shi'ite scholars.

Majdhūb was always more positive and sympathetic toward philosophers, even those such as Ibn Sina who were not part of the Sufi tradition. He cited a quotation from Shūshtarī, who said that the Sufi and the philosopher were following the same path; one relied on witnessing, while the other relied on intellect. But the path of philosophy was better avoided, because it was full of dangers that might take the wayfarer from the straight path to God.²⁸⁷ While Majdhūb did not deny that there were heretical beliefs among Sufis, he gives the impression of being an apologist for Sufism. He tried to show that he was innocent of heretical beliefs, and he tried to refute Shi‘ite clerics.²⁸⁸

Majdhūb claimed that his Sufi order did not share any of the views of the heretical Sufis. He said:

It is important to know that negating Sufism, in general, is due to the inability of people to discern and distinguish between Shi‘ite Sufis and Sunni Sufis. And as they perceive indecent beliefs in them, they think that all Sufis are like that. They have not taken notice of those elect members of the people of the house of the Prophet [Shi‘ites] who always practise self-mortification, the struggle against the carnal soul, and remembrance of God (*dhikr*), abandon the material world, and hold themselves aloof of the malefactors. Their path is the path of real Sufism.²⁸⁹

Religious verdicts of excommunication were issued against him.²⁹⁰ He tells us that he was accused of being a heretical Sufi because of the ego-centric and ignorant nature of the common clerics.²⁹¹ He did not defend himself until he heard that the accusations had reached the holy cities where scholars (*‘ulamā*), pious people (*atqīyā*) and righteous people (*ṣulahā*) resided, at which point those accusations became serious and life-threatening.²⁹²

He then referred to a hadith from *Al-Tawhīd* by Shaykh Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), where people came to Imām Ṣādiq and asked him, ‘Why is it that when we call God, there are no answers from Him?’ The Imām replied, ‘Because you do not know the person you are calling.’²⁹³ The majority of Shi‘ites believed that this saying had been addressed to the common people, but Majdhūb held that it was addressed to the Shi‘ite ulama.²⁹⁴ Therefore, like his predecessors, Majdhūb taught that some Sufis were heretics — an idea that remained key in his apologetic treatises — and while he opposed heterodox, deviant Sufis, he staunchly defended his own theology, philosophy and beliefs.

Shiʿism

Majdhūb's view of Shiʿism resembled that of mainstream Shiʿites who had tendencies towards extremist Shiʿism (*ghuluww*). He condemned any Shiʿite who did not declare his or her disgust at and hatred of the enemies of Shiʿite Imāms. He said that a real Shiʿite did not enter hell and believed that the traditions about these beliefs were authenticated. The real Shiʿite lived a life of piety.²⁹⁵

He discussed the succession of Shiʿite Imāms and their immaculate being.²⁹⁶ Intercession was possible only if it came from the Prophets, the Imāms and the companions or people of moral soundness.²⁹⁷ He strongly emphasised his Shiʿite beliefs as he said that the friends of the Imāms were friends of God, while the enemies of Imāms were enemies of God. If so, it did not matter if they were jurists, theosophists or pseudo-Sufis (*mutiṣaw-wif*); they were all damned and would be discarded.²⁹⁸

Majdhūb stipulated, however, that Shiʿites must not be proud of their beliefs; the people of faith had to stay between the two states of fear and hope (*khuwf wa rajāʾ*). According to him, if one gave way to fear it caused hopelessness, and if hope prevailed he would believe he was secure from Divine punishment.²⁹⁹ Majdhūb explained these beliefs but did not make any direct reference to the classical texts of Sufism, and he was careful to ensure that his words conformed to Shiʿite beliefs. He said a person who followed the traditions of the Shiʿite Imāms was safe from the devil. Based on a tradition from Prophet Muḥammad, Majdhūb believed that the Qurʾān and the people of the house (*ahl al-bayt*) were the only inheritance of Prophet Muḥammad, and the Shiʿite Imāms were the only ones who had the true perception of the Qurʾān.³⁰⁰ Majdhūb believed that one could not have the true perception of the Qurʾān without appealing to the Shiʿite Imāms, and that reaching for the Divine proximity without relying on the traditions of the Shiʿite Imāms would only lead to perdition.³⁰¹

Shiʿite Heretics

Āmulī said that there were some people who wrongly condemned Sufis, while there were also people who were Shiʿites only by name, such as the Ismāʿīlis and Zaydis.³⁰² Majdhūb similarly classed the Zaydiyya, Fathīyya, Wāqifiyya, Kaysāniyya and Nāwūsiyya among the non-Imamate Shiʿites and condemned them as infidels because they refused to follow one of the tenets of Islam, which was the 'love of Imāms'.³⁰³ He called two groups of

Muslims infidels: the first group who did not believe in the Shi'ite Imāms at all, and the second group who exceeded the proper bounds and ascribed divinity to them.³⁰⁴

Shi'ite Sufism

While Majdhüb refuted the theologians (*mutakalimīn*), pseudo-philosophers (*mutifalsafih*) and pseudo-Sufis (*mutiṣawwifa*), he acknowledged that a few of them had acquired their beliefs from the traditions of Shi'ite Imāms. This small group, outwardly and inwardly, followed the path of Shi'ite Imāms who had received the gnosis.³⁰⁵ Āmulī believed that 'Shi'ite' and 'Sufi' were two different names that signified one reality, a reality which might also be named the 'True Believer' (*mu'min mumtaḥan*).³⁰⁶ In this matter, Majdhüb followed almost the same path as Āmulī, who believed that the true Sufi was the follower of Shi'ite Imāms.³⁰⁷ He stated that the true faithful, who were called Shi'ites, were Sufi, *faqīr* and *darwīsh*.³⁰⁸

Majdhüb believed that Shi'ite Sufis were innocent of the deviations held by Sunni Sufis. Those Sufis who had received their beliefs from the Light of the Shi'ite Imāms had attained the Divine gnosis (*ma'rifat ilāhī*) and were distinct from the heretical Sufis.³⁰⁹ Majdhüb claimed that Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī was the most perfect transcendental theosopher and truthful narrator of Islamic traditions (*muḥadith*) of his time.³¹⁰ He discussed Shūshtarī's perfection in every religious science and referred to Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, who said that it was obligatory for every Shi'ite to have two books, *Iḥqāq Ḥaqq* and *Majālis al-mu'minīn* by Shūshtarī.³¹¹ Shūshtarī was a great seminary scholar and philosopher and said that if one accused Sufi masters like Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874) or Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 297/910) of heretical beliefs, it was calamitous for one's faith because they were followers of the Shi'ite Imāms.³¹²

Majdhüb, following the same path as Shūshtarī, claimed that Sufi masters like 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sanā'ī (d. 525/1131), Jāmī (d. 898/1492), Abū Sa'īd Abū al-Khayr, Shāh Nī'matullāh and Shāh Qāsim Anwār (d. 837/1433) were all Shi'ites.³¹³ Making reference to Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 520/1126), Majdhüb stated that Shāh Nī'matullāh, Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, Iṣḥāq Khutlānī (d. 827/1423) and Mir Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385) were all Shi'ites who claimed to be followers of Aḥmad Ghazālī. Therefore, there could be no doubt that Ghazālī himself was a Shi'ite as well.³¹⁴

Majdhüb dedicated a chapter in *Mir'āt al-Ḥaqq* to proving that a real Sufi could not be a follower of 'people of tradition and consensus' (*ahl-i sunnat*

wa al-jamāʿat). He believed that a Shiʿite could not be a disciple of a Sunni master, although Sunnis had been disciples of Shiʿites. Shiʿite Sufis had dissembled their Shiʿite beliefs to attract Sunnis and later on encourage them into Shiʿism.³¹⁵ Majdhūb referred to Āmulī, who said that the real Shiʿites were those Sufis who paid attention to the Islamic laws and spiritual aspects of Shiʿism.³¹⁶

Majdhūb referred with approbation to a treatise called *Insāfiyya* written by Fayḍ-i Kāshānī at the end of his life, where he had stated, 'I am neither a theologian (*mutikalim*), nor pseudo-philosopher (*mutifalsif*), nor pseudo-Sufi. I am an imitator of the Qurʾān and traditions of the Prophet. I am a follower of the People of the House (*ahl al-bayt*) of that master and I am tired of the sayings of the four sects. I am a stranger to anything other than the Qurʾān and traditions of the People of the House.'³¹⁷ Majdhūb concluded that no one could condemn Kāshānī as a debauchee (*fāsiq*) or excommunicate him, because he had reached the state of perfection on the spiritual path.³¹⁸ Majdhūb was a true follower of his predecessors, the Shiʿite mystics Āmulī, Kāshānī and Shūshtarī. He believed that Shiʿism and Sufism were two different words for one reality; therefore, all real Sufis were Shiʿite. He followed both Āmulī very closely and in certain aspects took Shūshtarī as his model.³¹⁹

Sunni Sufism

Majdhūb believed that Sufis who lacked the Light of Sainthood that came from the Shiʿite Imāms were heterodox and should be counted among the heretics of Sufism.³²⁰ He also made a direct and long reference to the *Ajwaba* by Majlisī to explain the different varieties of Sufi heretics. The first group of heretical Sufis were the Sunni Sufis. The second group had been Shiʿite in their hearts but had dissimulated. Majlisī and Majdhūb rejected the first group but reserved judgement about the second. The third group were the real Sufis, whose orthodoxy Majlisī and Majdhūb had also affirmed, and who had sought their gnosis from the Light of the Shiʿite Imāms and avoided whirling (*charkh zadan*) and listening to music (*samāʿ*).³²¹ Shūshtarī said that only the common Sufis were Sunnis, whereas the elect Sufis like Junayd and Bistāmī were real Shiʿites. He claimed that certain Sunni Sufis believed in incarnation and unification and did not follow Islamic laws.³²²

Shiʿite Sufis were very critical of Naqshbandī Sufis because the initiatic chain of their order went back through Abū Bakr and their strong Sunni beliefs. Majdhūb followed the same path in criticising Naqshbandīs, cit-

ing Shūshtarī's contention that they were deviant Sufis who had introduced innovation and could be traced back to Abū Bakr.³²³ He claimed that all Sufi orders could be traced back to ‘Alī except the Naqshbandīs. He asserted that the Naqshbandī order had two chains of spiritual authority and both had the name of Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. One of these went through the Shi‘ite Imāms to ‘Alī, while the other went to Salmān al-Fārsī and from Salmān to Abū Bakr. Shūshtarī therefore accused the Naqshbandīs of innovation,³²⁴ and Majdhūb developed Shūshtarī's contention further. He argued that Salmān had been a disciple of the Prophet Muḥammad and a Shi‘ite based on authentic Shi‘ite traditions, and so no one could trace an order that derived from him to Abū Bakr.³²⁵ Majdhūb commented that many of the great figures in the history of Sufism had been followers of the Naqshbandī order, and he did not reject them, since one of the initiatic chains of their order was in clear accordance with Shi‘ism and most of their practices were in accordance with the traditions of the Shi‘ite Imāms.³²⁶

Majdhūb clearly stated that he did not intend to defend all Sufis, and certainly not Sunni Sufis. They followed the path of deceit and trickery (*shu‘badih*), and the common people thought of this deceit and trickery as a miracle (*karāmat*). Majdhūb reiterated that supernatural acts were no proof of Divine favour, because yogis, Christian monks and Hindus all performed these supernatural acts with the support of demonic powers. One had to evaluate such acts using the standard of the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Imāms.³²⁷

Heretical Sufism

In his apologetic treatises, *Mir‘āt al-Ḥaqq* and *Aqā’id*, Majdhūb's style of writing in the prefaces closely resembled that of Shi‘ite scholars. He not only made no effort there to defend Sufism but also refuted the Sufi heretics. He discussed their heretical beliefs, which were the major focus of scholars when refuting Sufis.

Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh used several terms to distinguish what he considered real Sufism from heretical Sufism, referring to heretical Sufism (*taṣawwuf-i radīyya*), the evil pseudo-Sufis (*mutiṣawwifa khabītha*) and pseudo-Sufis (*mutiṣawwifa*).³²⁸ He believed that the beliefs of this group were all apostasy.³²⁹ One well-known book about the term *mutiṣawwif* was *Kasr-i aṣnām al-jāhilīyya* by Mullā Ṣadrā. He condemned pretenders of Sufism for believing in unificationism (*ittiḥād*), incarnationism (*ḥulūl*), partition (*tajziya*) and

cognition (*sinkhīyat*).³³⁰ Majdhūb emphasised that no one could perceive the essence of God. He refuted sophists, transmigrionists (*tanāsukhiyya*), Nuqṭawīyya, materialists, naturalists, anthropomorphists and agnostics. According to him, the only cure was to put them to the sword.³³¹

Majdhūb cited *Ḥadiqat al-Shīʿa* by Aḥmad Ardabillī as expounding the heretical beliefs of pseudo-Sufis. There Ardabillī had claimed that the very word Sufi was an innovation, which some of the extremist Sufis tried to justify by tracing it back to the ‘Companion of the Porch’ (*ashābi ṣuffā*).³³² This text identified the first known Sufi as Hāshim Kūfī, who had lived like a Christian and accepted belief in incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and unification (*ittiḥād*).³³³ Outwardly, he had believed in predestination (*jabr*), but inwardly he was a heretic and an atheist.³³⁴ Majdhūb also condemned the denial of the Divine Attributes (*taʿtīl*) and anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), based on Shīʿite tradition. He believed that absolute predestination and absolute free will were worthless concepts.³³⁵

Majdhūb also cited *Tabṣarat al-ʿawām* by Sayyid Murtiḍā Rāzī regarding the heretical beliefs of Sufis. Sayyid Murtiḍā’s view of Sufism had been much harsher than Ardabillī’s, for he had attributed to them all kinds of forbidden and unethical acts. Majdhūb referred to Sayyid Murtiḍā’s account of Ḥallāj’s life as a Sufi claiming to be God on earth and deceived others through magic.³³⁶ Majdhūb also referred to Jāmī to clarify two groups of Sufis. Jāmī said that the first group, the pseudo-Sufis (*mutiṣawwifa*), were Sufis who had gone astray. The second group were the people of blame (*malāmātīyya*), who were far from hypocrisy and followed the religious laws. They were sincere (*mukhlis*), whereas real Sufis were purified (*mukhlas*). Therefore, the people of blame were not heretical, but they were not as close as Sufis to the path of truth.³³⁷ Majdhūb referred to Aḥsāwī, the author of *Majlā*, and explained how the pseudo-Sufis did not follow Islamic laws.³³⁸ Majdhūb believed in the damnation of those who claimed to be Sufi but believed in incarnation (*ḥulūl*), unification (*ittiḥād*) and transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*) and failed to follow Islamic laws. The true Sufis were those who followed Islamic laws and the recommended duties (*mustaḥab*) of Islam.³³⁹

Incarnationism (*ḥulūl*) and Unificationism (*ittiḥād*)

Majdhūb held that ‘the believers of reincarnation’ were materialists and heretics. He said that if God were incarnated in an object, it would follow that He was in need of that object for His Being, which was blasphemy. Majdhūb

stressed that unification with God is impossible.³⁴⁰ According to him, the sayings of some Sufis appeared to imply that they believed in incarnationism like Christians, a position made by many Shi‘ite narrators of *ḥadīth* as well.³⁴¹ Majdhūb said that many of the followers of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj believed that God was incarnated in the bodies of saints (*awlīyā*) and they had reached the degree of unification with God. Majdhūb refuted this belief and argued that it resembled the belief of the Christians about Jesus Christ, which was blasphemy.³⁴²

Majdhūb stipulated that one should not immediately accuse Sufis but should reserve judgement until one had studied their beliefs. Afīfī believed that Muḥammad had an eternal object, which one could conceive of as Annihilation in God and subsistence with God (*fanā’i fī Allāh wa baqā’i bi Allāh*). However, some, like Majlisī, held that such belief exceeded the proper bounds and was an example of extremism (*ghuluww*). Majdhūb believed that one should keep silent about Afīfī and Sufis like him and not accuse them of blasphemy and debauchery.³⁴³ Majdhūb cited Nūrullah Shūshtarī to prove that Sufis who believed in incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and unification (*ittiḥād*) belonged to low-brow, vulgar or pseudo-Sufism (*taṣawwuf-i ‘amma*) and not to the elect Sufism (*taṣawwuf-i Khāṣṣa*).³⁴⁴

Nuḡṭawīyya

Another heterodox Sufi sect that Majdhūb considered heretical because they believed in *tanāsukh*, reincarnation, was the *Nuḡṭawīyya*.³⁴⁵ According to him, they believed that the ‘primordial origin’ of everything was the ‘essence of the square’ (*dhāti muraba*), which was the spirit of human beings. They believed that they were divine as they had obtained the knowledge of God. He condemned these beliefs as clearly worthless and false and went on to curse the founder of that sect, Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī.³⁴⁶

Wāṣīliyya (Mystics United with God)

According to Majdhūb, there was another group of Sufis known as *Wāṣīliyya* (those united with God), who believed they were directly united with God. They believed that because there were no veils between them and God, there was no need to follow Divine laws, prayers, fasting or other religious duties. Majdhūb refuted this sect, citing authenticated standard scholarly

Shi'ite books, and excommunicated it from the mainstream Muslims.³⁴⁷ He believed that following the canonical laws of Islam or sharia was one of the main principles for the wayfarer on the path of Sufism.

'Ushshāqīyya (The Lovers)

Another heretical Sufi sect was the so-called 'lovers of God' or '*Ushshāqīyya* who believed that being occupied with the sayings and commands of prophets was being occupied with something other than God, which they believed was futile. Majdhūb condemned this sect and called them apostates. He believed that prophethood was the closest state to Divinity.³⁴⁸

***Tanāsukhīyya* (Transmigration and Reincarnation)**

Majdhūb always emphasised that *tanāsukh*, reincarnation, was to be rejected and that believers in it denied God, since they believed in the eternity of the world and souls. Many of them did not believe in heaven and hell but held that souls transmigrated and reincarnated in this world forever and there was no other world beyond this material one.³⁴⁹ He referred to Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī and Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Razī (d. 606/1209), who said that true Muslims believed human souls were created by God and did not transmigrate from one body to another and that transmigration also contradicted the resurrection. Majdhūb concluded that believers in reincarnation and transmigration were not Muslims.³⁵⁰

* * * * *

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion of unorthodox movements within the Sufi tradition, Majdhūb was clearly a follower of his predecessors in advocating a kind of Shi'ite Sufism within the context of various philosophical schools of mystical Shi'ism. He usually began his treatises by refuting what he saw as deviant, erroneous Sufi beliefs, and then went on to reject the doctrines of reincarnation, divine unification and other heretical beliefs held by these heterodox Sufi groups. However, he did not condemn Sufism as such; he believed that true Sufism was Shi'ism and that real Sufis were the followers of Shi'ite Imāms. To prove these beliefs he sought help from Shi'ite mystics such as Kāshānī, Shūshtārī and Āmulī.

Conclusion

Majdhüb 'Alī Shāh became the leader (*qutb*) of the Ni'matullāhī order for a short time after Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh and played a crucial role in its revival. During this time, although subjected to criticism, he successfully managed to avoid persecution and prosecution by his fundamentalist foes, such as the anti-Sufi jurist Aqā Muḥammad 'Alī Biḥbahānī. In his book *Resurrection and Renewal*, Abbas Amanat made the crucial point that the Ni'matullāhī order needed to be institutionalised rather than continuing to be led by wandering leaders. Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh had begun to urbanise the order, but it became isolated during his time because of its suppression by Shi'ite clerics.³⁵¹ Majdhüb was well versed in Shi'ite theosophy and jurisprudence, and his treatises and scholarly disputes attracted many scholars and influential people. 'Abd al-Ṣamad Hamadānī, the author of *Baḥr al-Ma'ārif*, was initiated by Nūr 'Alī Shāh, and his guide to initiation on the Sufi Path (*dalīl-i rāh*) was Majdhüb.³⁵² Other influential people like the Khān of Tālīsh, Ayāz Khān Tālīshī, became his disciples.

There were a huge number of initiations into the Ni'matullāhī order during his time, causing jealousy among some of the anti-Sufi clerics. For example, Muḥammad Riḍā Mīrzā, the ruler of Gilān, and a group of his deputies were initiated into the Ni'matullāhī order. Ma'ṣūm Shīrāzī, the author of *Ṭarā'iq Al-ḥaqā'iq*, and Arjomand suggested that a group of 'ulama were unhappy with what was happening. Accordingly, they wrote a letter to Fath 'Alī Shāh, the King of Persia, accusing the Ni'matullāhī initiates of conspiring to seize power. The shah summoned Muḥammad Riḍā Mīrzā to Tehran and deposed him. He then sent Faḍīl Khān Gurūsī to Hamadān. Faḍīl Khān fined Majdhüb and his disciple, Ḥasan Hamadānī, a vast amount of money. By some accounts they were fined 1,000 tomans, whereas others record a fine of 2,000 tomans.³⁵³ To conclude, Majdhüb was more successful in engaging in religious dialogue with the Shi'ite seminary scholars. He was able to bring the Ni'matullāhī order out of its isolation through his writings and preaching, which led to the initiation of some influential people. His literary contribution to Shi'ite Sufism was enormous. His philosophical and seminarian knowledge helped him to create an atmosphere of dialogue with Shi'ite clerics.

