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ASPECTS OF DIVINIZATION ACCORDING TO FARĪD-AL-DĪN ‘AṬṬĀR NIŠĀPŪRĪ (DIED C. 1221)

Farīd ad-dīn ‘Aṭṭār (ca 1145/6–1221)¹ is to be accounted amongst the greatest Sufi poets and philosophers of Medieval Persia. Unfortunately he is less well known than Ġalāl ad-dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207–1273) and Muḥammad Hāfez-e Šīrāzī (1315–1390). Although Aṭṭār was overshadowed by his great successors nowadays he is still discovered and recognized as one of the canonical masters of Sufi thought. ‘Aṭṭār who left an overwhelming influence on Persian mysticism in reality was called Abū Hamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm but today is better known by his pen-names Farīd al-Dīn and ‘Aṭṭār — “the pharmacist”.

a) ‘Aṭṭār’s life

Reconstruction of ‘Aṭṭār’s life is very difficult because we do not possess enough reliable facts on his biography. Information on ‘Aṭṭār’s life is rare by his contemporaries. He is mentioned only by Moḥammad ‘Awfī (d. after 1223) and K̲vāja Naṣīr ad-dīn Ṭūsī (1200–1273)². In principle ‘Aṭṭār tells us very little about himself. His works contain isolated allusion to contemporary persons or political events preferring a timeless world of mysticism³. It is understood when we take into consideration that all his works are a religious nature concentrating reader’s attention on

¹ Transliteration: Farīd-al-dīn ‘Aṭṭār; Transcription: Farīd ud-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār.

² H. Ritter, *Aṭṭār* [in:] *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New edition*, vol. I, Leiden 1960, pp. 752–755; B. Reinert, *Aṭṭār; Shaykh Farīd al-dīn*, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. III, ed. E. Yarshater, London 1989, p. 20; B. Reinert, *Aṭṭār; Farīd al-dīn — Persian poet, Sufi, theoretician of mysticism, and hagiographer*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, [on-line:] <http://www.iranica.com/articles/attar-farid-al-din-persian-poet-and-sufi>, [quoted 5.05.2010]; *Fifty Poems of ‘Aṭṭār*, transl. K. Avery, A. Alizadeh, Melbourne 2007, *Introduction*, p. 3.

³ F. de Blois, *Persian Literature — A Biobibliographical Survey*, vol. V: *Poetry of the Pre-mongol Period*, London 2004, p. 233.

spiritual subjects and having little occasion for biographical references. The only biographical date appears in 'Aṭṭār's writings, namely 1177 (573 Š.) as the year of his completion of the *Manteq at-ṭayr* (*The Conference of Birds*) cannot be taken as conclusive evidence because the verse in question was not found in all the manuscripts.

There is disagreement over the precise date of his birth but several sources confirm that he lived almost 100 years. The traditional information that he was born in 1119 and murdered precisely in 1230 is generally rejected by modern historians⁴. Currently, according to the most widespread scholar opinion Farīd ad-dīn 'Aṭṭār was born circa 1145 in Nīšāpūr⁵ (Neyshabur) located in 115 kms. west of Mašhad in present-day Iran in the province of Khorasan (that's the source of his name, Farīd ad-dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī). In 12th and 13th century Nīšāpūr was a flourishing and prosperous city favourably located on the great West trade route, main highway between the Levant and Central Asia⁶. The city's prosperity was resulted not only by merchant and artisan class⁷, but also by influential scholar and religious groups⁸.

All sources confirm that he spent most of his life in Nīšāpūr, but according to 'Awfī, he composed literary masterpieces in the Seljuk period⁹. It seems that 'Aṭṭār in his own lifetime was well known as a poet only his home town. All signs that his greatness as a mystic and a master of narrative was not discovered in Persia until the 15th century¹⁰.

The sources give little information on the formative Nīšāpūrī's life. It seems that Nīšāpūrī received an excellent education in medicine, Arabic, and theology at Mašhad. His name 'Aṭṭār literary means "a perfumer" or "a pharmacist". Probably he inherited the prosperous pharmacy from his father. According to his own *Moṣṭabat-Nāma* (*Book of Afflictions*) 'Aṭṭār in youth worked in his father's prosperous pharmacy preparing medicines for a very large number of clients¹¹. After death his father he inherited this business.

⁴ *Muslim Saints and Mystics. Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya' (Memorial of the Saints)* by Farīd al-Dīn Attar, trans. A. J. Arberry, Ames 2000, *Introduction*, p. VII.

⁵ Especially it is result of detailed researches B. Forūzānfār, *Šarḥ-e aḥwāl wa naqd o taḥlīl-e āṭār-e Šayḡ Farīd-al-dīn Moḥammad 'Aṭṭār Nīšābūrī*, Tehran 1975 (1353 Š.), pp. 7–16. He calculated that 'Aṭṭār was born 540 Š. that is 1145/1146.

⁶ R. W. Bulliet, *The patricians of Nishapur. A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Cambridge 1972, pp. 4–12.

⁷ H. Jaouiche, *The histories of Nishapur: Register der Personen- und Ortsnamen ('Abd-al-Ġāfir al-Fārisī)*, Wiesbaden 1984; Ch. K. Wilkinson, *Nishapur some early Islamic buildings and their decoration*, New York 1986; J. Kröger, *Nishapur glass of the early Islamic period*, New York 1995.

⁸ M. Malamuda, *Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994), pp. 427–442; Ch. Melchert, *Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur*, *Iran* 39 (2001), pp. 237–247.

⁹ Moḥammad 'Awfī, *Lobāb al-albāb*, ed. S. Nafisi, Tehran 1956, pp. 480–482.

¹⁰ B. Reinert, 'Aṭṭār, *Farīd al-dīn — Persian poet, Sufi, theoretician of mysticism, and hagiographer...*, p. 1, [quoted 5.05.2010].

¹¹ B. Forūzānfār, *Šarḥ-e aḥwāl wa naqd o taḥlīl-e āṭār-e Šayḡ Farīd-al-dīn Moḥammad 'Aṭṭār Nīšābūrī...*, p. 39.

Dawlatšāh Samarqandī (d. after 1487), 15th century 'Aṭṭār's and other Persian poets biographer, made a note that 'Aṭṭār spent many years in Šādyāḥ, a suburb of Nīšāpūr, where his pharmacy was situated. There is a story about 'Aṭṭār's conversion to the religious life which related us above mentioned Dawlatšāh Samarqandī and another important Sufī biographer 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ġāmī (d. 1492)¹². One day, a wandering hideous dervish impetuously came to the shop asking 'Aṭṭār for preparedness for departure from this world. The fakir died suddenly in front of 'Aṭṭār's eyes, which worried him so much that he immediately abandoned his business and spent some years in the Sufī lodge. Irağ Baširī, Professor of History at the University of Minnesota using this tradition found 'Aṭṭār's new life was one of travel and exploration, following the example of the fakir. For a long time, he might have travelled to Ray, Kufa, Mecca, Damascus, Turkistan, and India, meeting with famous Sufī shaykhs (arab. šayḥ; pl. šuyūḥ)¹³, learning about the mystical path (arab., pers. *Ṭarīqah*), and experiencing life in the Order's Sufī centres — khaniqahs (pers. *ḥanegah* and *ḥaneghah* — lodges).

After several years of his Spiritual growth 'Aṭṭār returned to Nīšāpūr, where settled and reopened his pharmacy. He also began to promote of Sufī thought.

There is only little information about Sufī master whom 'Aṭṭār would have known. According to Kennath Avery 'Aṭṭār's writing show that he was well versed in many areas like literature, philosophy, astronomy, medical and pharmaceutical sciences which was connected with his occupation¹⁴. In contrast to this opinion Benedickt Reinert conclude that it is difficult find adequate picture from 'Aṭṭār's writings which show us 'Aṭṭār's general education and culture.

b) Character and chronology of 'Aṭṭār's works

However 'Aṭṭār was the creative, sophisticated and ambitious early Muslim mystical poet. He started writing *Mošibat-Nāma* (*Book of Afflictions*) and the *Elāhī-Nāma* yet at work in the pharmacy¹⁵. Regarding the poetic works, there is the question whether all the texts that have been ascribed to him are really his authorship. The problem has not been unambiguously solved. We possess conflicting sources both with respect to the number of books that he might have written and the number of distiches he might have composed. For example, Rezā Gholi ḥān Hedāyat reports 190 'Aṭṭār's works containing 100.000 distichs (for comparison, the famous Persian Firdawsī's *Šāhnāmeḥ* — *The Great Book* contains only 60,000 bayts). Another authors put the number of 'Aṭṭār's books to be the same as the number of the Suras

¹² Dawlatšāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirat al-šu'arā'*, ed. M. Ramḍānī, Tehran 1344 Š., p. 145; 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad Ġāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥadarāt al-quds*, ed. M. Tawḥīdī Pūr, Teheran 1375 Š., p. 599.

¹³ I. Bashiri, *Farid al-Din 'Attar*, [on-line:] <http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/Poets/Attar.html> [quoted 6.05.2010].

¹⁴ *Fifty Poems of 'Aṭṭār*, transl. K. Avery, A. Alizadeh..., *Introduction*, p. 4.

¹⁵ H. Ritter, *Philologica X, Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār I*, *Der Islam* 25 (1939), p. 148.

of the *Qur'ān*, i.e., 114¹⁶. More realistic researches give thought to the number of his books to have been between 9 to 12 volumes¹⁷. The analysts of 'Aṭṭār's poetry have been observed in his books considerable differences of style among these Sufi works. More, some of them indicate a Sunnite, and others a Shia, influence of the author. German scholar Hellmut Ritter (1892–1971) at first gave the interpretation that the problem of this divergences could be explained by a 'Aṭṭār's spiritual evolution. He distinguished three phases Farīd-al-dīn's creativity¹⁸. Firstly, there are works which concentrate on mysticism manifesting in the idea of communion with God, identity with an ultimate reality and divinity truth. It is presented way to God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insight. Secondly 'Aṭṭār wrote works contained pantheistic elements. Finally, master from Nīšāpūr in a great age left us the texts in which he idolizes leadership position of Imam. This evolution of 'Aṭṭār's Poetic creation can present in following schema:

► **1: mysticism in perfect balance with a finished story-teller's art** ► **2: a pantheistic zeal gains the upper hand over literary interest** ► **3: idolization of Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (there is no trace of ordered thoughts and descriptive skills)**

The detailed studies, first by Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmud Šerani (1888–1945)¹⁹, next Saeed Nafīsī (1896–1966)²⁰ and especially above mentioned Hellmut Ritter²¹ allow us to come to conclusion that two works *Mazhar al-'ağā'ib* (*The Executor of Wonders*) and *Lisān al-ğaib* (*Voice from the Outer World*) were forgeries from around the middle of the 15th century. Hellmut Ritter supposed that the last phase of 'Aṭṭār's poetry in the old age, was coincidental with a conversion to Shi'ism. In 1941, the Persian scholar Saeed Nafīsī proposed a thesis that the works of the third phase in Ritter's classification were written by another 'Aṭṭār ('Aṭṭār of Tun) who lived about two hundred and fifty years later in Mašhad one of the holiest cities in the Shia world, located close to the borders of today Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

It seems that this identification could be under discussion. Nowadays Sufis have generally been contrasted with the Sunni ulema. This suggests that Sufism and official Islamic law were incompatible and even hostile to each other. The ulema have concentrated on the the elaboration and guardianship of Islamic law (*fiqh*). In the other hand Sufis concern the inner, experiential dimension of Islam. Therefore Sufis flouted the sharia in their quest for knowledge of God. Sometimes reconciliation between

¹⁶ Cf. I. Bashiri, *Farid al-Din 'Attar*, [on-line:] <http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/Poets/Attar.html> [quoted 6.05.2010].

¹⁷ In the introductions of *Mokhtār-Nāma* and *Khosrow-Nāma*, 'Aṭṭār lists the titles of further his works: *Dīvān*, *Asrār-Nāma*, *Maqāmāt-e Toyūr* (= *Manteq at-Tayr*), *Mošibat-Nāma*, *Elāhī-Nāma*, *Jawāher-Nāma*, *Šarḥ al-Qalb*.

¹⁸ Cf. H. Ritter, *Philologika X, Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār I...*, p. 134–173, especially pp. 143–144.

¹⁹ Cf. H.M. Šerani, '*Tašnīfāt i šaiḥ Farīdu l-dīn 'Aṭṭār*', Urdū 7 (1927) pp. 1–97.

²⁰ Cf. S. Nafīsī, *Just-u-jū dar aḥwāl wa āğār i Farīdu l-dīn 'Aṭṭār i Nīšāpūrī*, Teheran 1942.

²¹ Cf. H. Ritter, *Philologika X, Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār I...*, pp. 134–173; *Philologika XIV, Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār II*, Oriens 11 (1958), pp. 1–76; *Philologika XV, Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār III*, Oriens 12 (1959), pp. 1–88; *Philologika XVI, Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār IV*, Oriens 13–14 (1961), pp. 194–239.

law and Sufism became necessary like for example by al-Ġazālī (1058–1111). This reconciliation allowed to the spread and develop of Sufi institutions (Sufi brotherhoods — *arīqas*) in the late 12th and 13th centuries. Before 12th century Sufis had formed loose circles or groups that had had no institutional structure or affiliation²². During 'Aṭṭār's life, these groups crystallized and autonomous Sufi institutions and practices emerged. Probably this context also could be useful for explanation of the third phase of 'Aṭṭār's poetry. In the 13th century Sufis became part of Muslim social and devotional life uniting in their philosophy and theology various Islamic doctrinal elements.

It is doubtful whether Saeed Nafīsī was right in attributing the poetry of the second group to another 'Aṭṭār ('Aṭṭār of Tun) because the principal figure in the second group is not 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661), as in the third group, but Maṣṣūr-e Hallāğ (858–922). Certainly the style the 'Aṭṭār's works in the first group and those in the second group is deeply different so it is impossible to explain this phenomenon by a spiritual evolution of the philosopher from Nīšāpūr. It remains an unsolved problem whether works of the second group are or not 'Aṭṭār's authorship.

c) *The Conference of Birds*

Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī was inspired by a fresh and enlarged spiritual vision which stimulated Persian Sufi tradition of the next generations to new spiritual growth. His thought about religious and spiritual attitudes dramatize the deepest aspects of the human condition.

One of Aṭṭār's major poetic books is called *Asrār-Nāma* (*Book of Secrets*) about Sufi ideas. According to tradition aged Aṭṭār gave this work Ġalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207–1273) when Rūmī's family stayed over at Nīšāpūr on its way to Konya. Another great contribution of Aṭṭār is *Elāhī-Nāma* (*Divine Book*)²³, about *zuhd* (asceticism). Without doubt among Aṭṭār's books *Maqāmāt-e Toyūr* or *Mantiq at-Ṭayr* — *The Conference of the Birds*²⁴ is masterpiece in which he makes extensive use of Al-Ġazālī's treatise on Birds and as well a work on the same topic composed by the Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā²⁵, the Brothers of Serenity or the Brethren of Purity) a secret society of Muslim philosophers in Basra (Iraq) in the 10th century.

Mantiq at-Ṭayr is usually translated as *The Conference of Birds*, but this title can also be understood as *The Logic of birds*, because meaning of the word *mantiq* is connected not only with term "speaking", but also "logic". *Mantiq at-Ṭayr* is

²² M. Malamuda, *Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur*, International Journal of Middle East Studies 26 (1994), pp. 427–442.

²³ *The Ilahi-Nama (or Book of God) of Farid al-Din Attar*, Manchester 1976.

²⁴ This masterpiece has many edition: Farid-ud-din Attar, *Conference of the birds : a seeker's journey to God*, ed. R. P. Masani, York Beach 2001; *The conference of the birds*, eds. A. Darbandi, D. Davis, Harmondsworth 1986; *The conference of the birds: Mantiq ut-tair; a philosophical religious poem in prose*, ed. C. S. Nott, London 1974; *The conference of the birds. A Sufy Allegory, being an abridged Version of Farid-ud-Din Attar's Mantiq-ut-Tayr*, London 1961.

²⁵ I. Bashiri, *Farid al-Din 'Attar*, [on-line:] <http://www.angelfire.com/rmb/bashiri/Poets/Attar.html> [quoted 6.05.2010].

composed as great philosophic religious poem with many little spiritual stories, concealing the big spiritual context.

There is observed in *Mantiq at-Ṭayr* a clever play of words between the terms *Simorgh* and *si morgh*. The first word *Simorgh* means a mysterious bird in Persian mythology often being a symbol in sufi literature similar to the phoenix bird. The expression *si morgh* have meaning “thirty birds” in Persian. The stories *Mantiq at-Ṭayr* recounts the overwhelming desire of a group of birds who crave to know the great Simorgh, and who under the guidance of a leader bird Hoopoe start their journey toward the kingdom of Simorgh. One by one, they drop out of the journey, each offering an excuse and unable to endure the journey. In the large context of the story of the journey of the birds, Aṭṭār masterfully tells the reader many didactic short, stories and deep sentence in captivating poetic style.

When the birds of the world assemble, they wonder why they have no king. The Hoopoe²⁶ shows herself at one’s best as a messenger from the spiritual world with knowledge of God and the secrets of creation. It is worth to stress that the Hoopoe is mentioned once in the Quran, in Sura 27, 20–29²⁷ but has important place in the Muslim folklore and tradition²⁸. According to the Quran the Hoopoe is intelligent, smart, knows and worships his Creator, and communicated with King Solomon²⁹.

The birds guided by hoopoe spared no efforts in search of Simurgh. They must cross seven valleys in order to find their king. In the first valley *Ṭalab* (valley of the quest) one undergoes a hundred difficulties and trials. After one has been tested and become free, one learns in the second valley *‘Iṣq* (Modern Persian *eshgh*, valley of love). The birds understood that love has nothing to do with reason. This mystic doctrine refers to “divine love” or “a creature’s love for its creator”; i.e. man’s love for God. Stepping into the next, third valley *Al-M‘arifa* (the valley of understanding), the birds found in the place of understanding where understood that knowledge is temporary, but understanding withstands. Overcoming faults and weaknesses moves the seeker closer to the aim. *Al-M‘arifa* which literally means “knowledge”, is the term used by Sufi to describe mystical intuitive knowledge of spiritual truth reached through ecstatic experiences. It is equivalent of neoplatonic “Gnosis”. In the valley of unity the Hoopoe announces that although you may see many beings, in reality there is only one, which is complete in its unity.

The fourth valley *Istighnah* is presented as the valley of independence or detachment, i.e., separation from wish to possess and the desire to discover. The birds begin to feel that they have become part of a universe that they are separated from their

²⁶ It is about the bird *Upupa epops*.

²⁷ K. Kościelniak, *Tematyczna konkordancja do Koranu*, Kraków 2006, p. 95.

²⁸ N. H. Dupree, *An Interpretation of the Role of the Hoopoe in Afghan Folklore and Magic*, Folklore 85 (1974), pp. 173–193; J. Lassner, *Islamizing of Story of the Hoopoe [in:] Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: boundaries of gender and culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam*, Chicago 1993, pp. 97–101.

²⁹ On the contrary in the Bible the Hoopoe is detestable, unclean and forbidden for eating (Lev 11, 13–19; Deut 14, 18).

physical recognizable reality. In their new mystical world, the planets are as minute as sparks of dust and elephants are not distinguishable from ants.

Entering to the fifth valley *Tawḥīd* (valley of the “Unity of God”) the birds realize that unity and multiplicity constitute the one reality. The Hoopoe announces that although there are seen many beings, in reality there is only one, which is complete in its unity. The birds have transformed in entities in a vacuum — without sense of eternity. The birds realize fundamental truth, that God is beyond unity, multiplicity, and eternity.

When unity is achieved, one forgets all and forgets oneself, the birds stepping into the sixth valley *Ḥayrat* (the valley of astonishment and bewilderment). There they became surprised at the dazzling beauty of the Beloved. That was the highest amazement. Experiencing extreme sadness and despondency, they feel that they know and understand nothing. They are not even conscious of themselves.

Finally, only thirty birds reach the homeland of the Simurgh, the seventh valley *Fuqur* and *Fana'* (the valley of Selflessness and Oblivion in God). There is impossible to see king anywhere. Simurgh's high ranking official keeps them waiting for Simurgh long enough for the birds to figure out that they themselves are the *si* (thirty) *murgh* (bird). The last valley is the place of deprivation and death which — and according to the Hoopoe — is almost impossible to describe it. In the immensity of the divine ocean the situation and order of the present world and the future world disappears.

As a result, the seventh valley represent depravation, forgetfulness, dumbness, deafness, and death. These represent the stations that a Sufi or any individual must pass through to realize the true nature of God. Flying through seven valleys the birds came under attack from many difficulties. They undergo many tests as they try to free themselves of what is precious to them and change their state. The last station — valley of Selflessness and Oblivion in God show the Sufi pupils that the present and future lives of the thirty successful birds become shadows chased by the celestial Sun. And themselves, lost in the Sea of His existence, are the Simurgh. *The Conference of the Birds (Mantiq at-Ṭayr)* stress, that as long as we are separate, good and evil will arise; but when we lose ourself in the divine essence, they will be transcended by love³⁰.

During the journey 22 birds ask the Hoopoe about the aspects of life. Hoopoe's points is illustrated by short anecdotes. For example the nightingale announces that the love of the Rose fully satisfies him, but the Hoopoe warns against being a slave of self-perfection. The Parrot misses for immortality, and the Hoopoe encourages the Peacock to choose the total unit. The Hoopoe warns the Partridge that gems are not more as colored stones and that love of them hardens the heart. It is much better

³⁰ I. Bashiri, *Farid al-Din 'Attar*, [in:] <http://www.angelfire.com/rmb/bashiri/Poets/Attar.html> [quoted 6.05.2010].

seek the real jewel of sound quality. The Hoopoe gives a piece of advice the Humay which is distracted by ambition, and the Owl loving only the treasure he has found. A sharp reprimand is given the Sparrow for taking pride in humility. The Hoopoe recommends the birds struggling bravely with oneself. According to the Hoopoe's opinion the different birds are just shadows of the Simurgh. If they achieve aim, they will not be God; but they will be immersed in God. If the thirty birds look in their hearts, they will see the divine image. Their appearances are just the shadow of the Simurgh. The true love of God is realized if they do not think about their own lives but sacrifice their desires. Dilemmas of the thirty birds, their doubts and fears, the counsels of their leader Hoopoe, and first at all their choice of the Simurgh as a king, is in reality an allegory of the spiritual way of Sufism with its demands, its dangers and its infinite rewards³¹.

Working in the field of Aṭṭār's thought it is necessary to focus one's attention on the role Neoplatonism. An examination of both Aṭṭār's works and Neoplatonism reveals close similarities with regard to the nature of God, the soul, the body, concepts such as goodness, evil and beauty, death and life, and creation. Probably Aṭṭār enjoys a more liberal approach with his conception of mystic union connected also with a degree of Buddhism's influence. According to neoplatonism, God is the source and aim of everything; from him everything comes, to him all things return; he is the beginning, middle and end, the alpha and omega. Communion with God or absorption in God, therefore, is the real goal of all human actions. God is a supreme power, the final cause, the cosmic force, the highest spiritual, and creative Being. There is no aspect of Aṭṭār's philosophy that is not influenced by neoplatonism.

Using the image of journey of the birds, Aṭṭār masterfully gives the reader excellent reflection about the birds arriving in the land of Simorgh. Only the thirty birds reached the aim and consequently they see only there each other. In the last fragments *The Conference of the Birds (Mantiq at-Ṭayr)* presents reflection of the thirty birds in a lake — not thought of the mythical Simorgh. According to Aṭṭār God is not external or separate from the universe, rather is the totality of existence. The thirty birds looking for the Simorgh realise that Simorgh is nothing more than their transcendent totality. This concept seems to be similar to elements of Neoplatonic Pantheism³².

The deepest message of *The Conference of the Birds* is completely dominated by the philosophical thought that the individual self does not really exist, the drop becomes part of the great ocean forever in peace. It is used the analogy of moths seeking the flame. Out of thousands of birds only thirty of them become aware that the Simurgh is them. When the light of lights is manifested they are in peace beginning a new life in the Simurgh and contemplate the inner world. It was mentioned

³¹ *The Allegorical 'Conference of the birds' is Attars most famous work.* tr. Garcin de Tassy and C. S. Nott [on-line:] <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/24929-Farid-al-Din-Attar-Conference-Of-The-Birds> [quoted 28.05.2010]. *The Soul-Bird Symbol In Sufi Literature*, [on-line:] <http://indianmuslims.in/the-soul-bird-symbol-in-sufi-literature/> [quoted 6.05.2010].

³² *The Conference of the Birds*, Nation Master Encyclopaedia, [on-line:] www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/The-Conference-of-the-Birds [quoted 20.05.2010].

that name *Simurgh* in play the Persian word could be change into *Si murgh* with meaning “thirty birds”. However if forty or fifty birds had arrived to Simurgh’s homeland, it would be the same.

Neoplatonism is the closest doctrine of Aṭṭār’s philosophy in system of his belief. The universe is just an appearance of God, and does not have an independent existence. By annihilating themselves in the Simurgh the birds receive immortality finding themselves in joy and learning the secrets. In principle it is a instruction for Sufi. So long as he does not realize his nothingness and does not renounce his self-pride, vanity, and self-love, he will not reach the heights of immortality. As a matter of fact Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī concluded the epilog of *The Conference of Birds* with the warning that if someone wish to find the ocean of his soul, then die to all his old life and then keep silent. Aṭṭār deeply believed that God is beyond all human knowledge and experience. The soul will show itself when corporeality is totally laid aside. Sufi cannot gain spiritual knowledge without dying to all things.

The Hoopoe confirms this idea saying:

*So long as we do not die to ourselves,
and so long as we identify with someone or something,
we shall never be free.*

The spiritual way is not for those wrapped up in exterior life. 5

There are not a “duality” and separation between God and the universe. In reality, the God and the universe are the “One”. It is not possible to think of God and the universe as separate entities because God is not something outside the universe, but rather something within the universe. This Aṭṭār’s belief was initially suggested by neoplatonism. They both recognize the existence of the universe as an emanation from God.

The Aṭṭār’s idea of the oneness of God-universe-human beings share neoplatonic same beliefs about the soul. According to neoplatonism, the soul is a divine essence and the source of all existence. The body is a cage where the soul is trapped, and it can be freed when the body dies. The soul always inclines toward perfection and exaltation. According to Aṭṭār the soul is treated similarly, and expressed as a divine essence in humans.

In the one of the expression the Hoopoe admonishes the sixth bird against the dog of desire that runs ahead. Each conceited desire becomes a demon and therefore the world is a prison under the devil. The Hoopoe also explains that if someone let no one benefit from his gold, he will not profit either; but by the smallest gift to the poor they both benefit.

*Good fortune will come to you only as you give.
If you cannot renounce life completely,
you can at least free yourself
from the love of riches and honors. 6*

A Sufi student becomes afraid in facing a choice between two paths, but a spiritual master advises getting rid of fear so that either path will be good.

The body, like soul, is also treated similarly in Aṭṭār's philosophy and neoplatonism. According to neoplatonism, the body is not divine, mortal and temporary. The body tends not towards beauty and goodness, but towards ugliness and evil. What is beautiful, valuable and divine is the soul, but not body. The body inclines towards temporary desires and wishes. It is a cage for the soul. Aṭṭār shares the same belief. The Hoopoe remarks that sensual love is a game inspired by passing beauty that is fleeting and she asks what is uglier than a body made of flesh and bones. According to this logic is better to seek the hidden beauty of the invisible world:

*Strive to discover the mystery before life is taken from you.
If while living you fail to find yourself, to know yourself,
how will you be able to understand
the secret of your existence when you die?*

The fifteenth bird explains that justice is salvation, which saves from errors. Being just is better than a life of religious worship. Justice exercised in secret is even better than liberality; but justice practiced openly may lead to hypocrisy. One Aṭṭār's anecdote about two drunks teaches that we see faults because we do not love. When we see the ugliness of our own faults, we will not bother so much with the faults of others. For neoplatonism beauty means much more than mere symmetry. It involves a close relationship to the ideal reality; it is an appearance of God over the objects of the universe. Aṭṭār thinks exactly the same about beauty. For him it is the appearance of divine light in the face of a human. Neoplatonism identified beauty with divine essence, and Aṭṭār adopted the similar idea.

Aṭṭār Nīšāpūrī presents God, quite different from Orthodox Islamic belief. It is really a question of the social and cultural environment in which sufism flourished how happened the interaction between islam and neoplatonism. In principle Islamic philosophy has its roots mostly in the works of Aristotle which were all translated into Arabic. The most Classical Islamic philosophers established their theories on the basis of Aristotle's philosophy. Through the translations of the writings of Plato and Plotinus, they also were introduced into the Muslim culture first in Anatolia and then in Persia. The Neoplatonic mystic elements were incorporated with ancient Anatolian beliefs. The best example is the sacredness of natural events such as the sun³³. It was used also in *The Conference of the Birds* in the belief of God's resemblance to the sun. In this way Neoplatonism prepared the way for liberal interpretations of Islamic principles in Sufi philosophy.

*Come you lost Atoms to your Centre draw,
And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw:
Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide
Return and back into your Sun subside*

³³ K. Modelek, *The neoplatonic Roots of Sufi Philosophy*, [on-line:] <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/CompGode.htm> [quoted 2.06.2010].