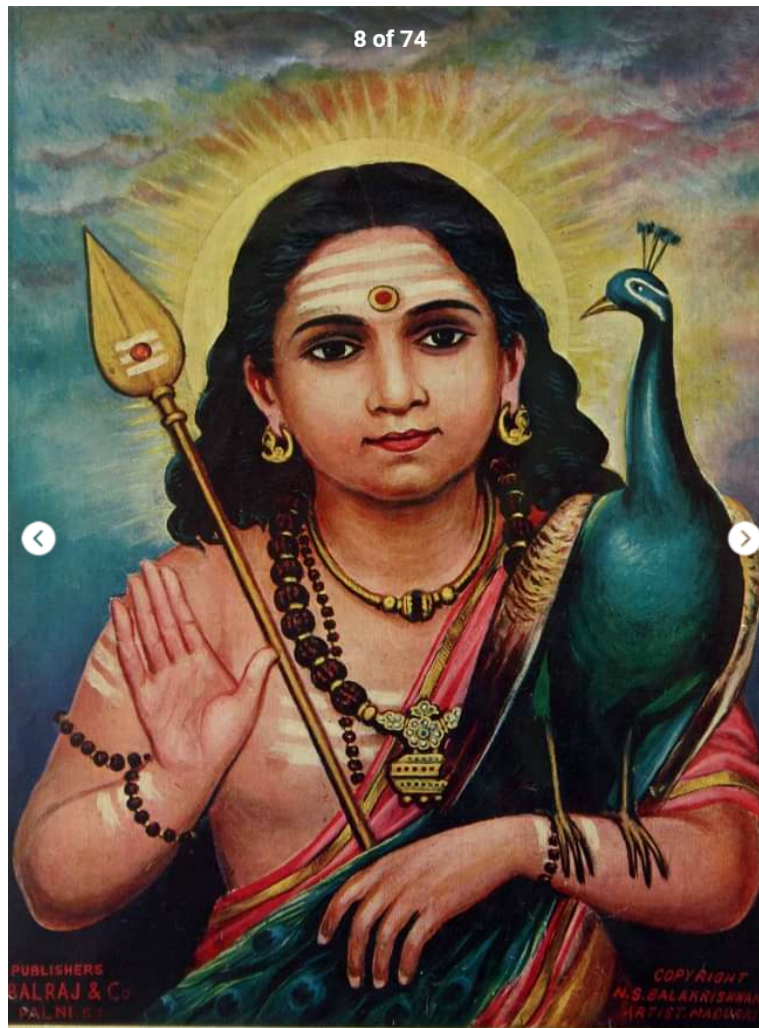


# ESOTERIC ANTINOMIANISM



**From the book Peacock Angel: The Esoteric  
Tradition of the Yezidis by Peter Lamborn Wilson**

In 1597 there appeared the book known by the name of its author (Sharaf al-Din Khan Bedlisi) as the Sherefnameh, "Book of Glory," sometimes called the "Chronicles of the Kurds," wherein we read this early description of the Yezidis:

They believe falsely that Sheikh Ad; has taken upon himself their duties to fast and to pray, and that on the day of resurrection they will be carried to heaven without being exposed to any punishment or any reproach. These Kurds have sworn hatred and the most implacable enmity against the virtuous sages of Islam!

Allowing for the author's bias, these "charges" are simply true. The fascinating thing about Yezidism (and, from the Islamist point of view, the repugnant thing) is that it began as a pagan sect, then became a Sufi order, then deviated into heresy and ended in schism. It is not simply a non-Islamic religion; it is an anti-Islamic religion. It should be emphasized that Yezidism cannot be structurally compared with "Satanism" in the anti-Christian or anti-religious sense, because Yezidism does not view Melek Ta'us (who is esoterically "the devil") as a principle of evil. The Meshef Resh makes it clear that he is only

considered evil by outsiders, but it appears to be the case that he is beyond good and evil because he rules this world without reference to the “slave morality” of monotheism. The world is good, for those who see it in the light of Lucifer. Now, “beyond good and evil” doesn’t mean do evil—Nietzsche is firm about this, and only a fool of a Satanist would ignore it. The Yezidis and the “Satan worshippers” amongst the Ahl-i Haqq are free of what Nietzsche called “moralic acid.” In fact, Yezidi praxis is based on purity and decent behavior. To discover their inner, esoteric antinomianism, we must perform a hermeneutic unfolding of their texts; we must “trace them to their source” (Ta'wil) in the mystical realization of what Rimbaud called *liberté libre*: “free freedom.” In doing so, I maintain, we will discover that their closest analogues in Occidental tradition are not Satanists but the Ranters and the Brethren of the Free Spirit.\* The Yezidi “Declaration of Faith” (Shebda Dini) makes clear their refutation of Islam, both Shiite and Sunni; Moslems are called swine and heretics. “We have remained separate from the heretics, from the Shari‘a,” the Declaration states.! The “Tradition” with which it is declared that “we have cast our lot” is not the Islamic Sunna (as Kreyenbroek sometimes seems to suppose) but Yezidism

itself—and in the eschatological “Hymn of Sherfedin” this is made apparent:

When the Mehdi arises  
Neither lords nor judges will remain.  
On that day the community of the  
Tradition will be  
comfortable.

The Tradition will be comfortable  
To whom Melek Sherfedin shows his mercy and  
benevolence  
He will invest us with spiritual clothes.

A kind of utopia will come about on earth. The faithful will all be dressed as fegirs (in luminous black khirges) and “will abolish laments and injustice from this world.”

In this same hymn, Sultan Ezi is chided for not doing what lies in his power:

Oh Sultan Ezi,

you have the power to do it and you  
are not doing it

You can raise Melik Sherfedin from the Cavern  
You can make rebellious people obedient to him!?

The future king always sleeps in a cave. King Arthur, Emperor Frederick, King Sebastio of Portugal—an archetype perhaps originating in the Old Stone Age of the painted caves and the shamanism inherited from Neanderthal dreamers. It is a prominent motif of the Yezidi hymn:

All nights, all days

The House of Tradition is free from sin, free from  
guilt, sincere

This world is in the hands of the Shari'a, for us it has  
become a hell.

All nights,

all days The prayer of the House of Tradition is always:  
Melek Sherfedin, come out of the Cave for us!?

“The Hymn of Mullah Abu Bekir” must be counted as one of the world’s most antinomian poems. Here again, the “Tradition” in question is not the Sunna but the Yezidi way:

We are wholly thankful

That we have stayed aloof from the Shari‘a

Praise be to God and thanks

That we have cast our lot with the Sheikh of the Tradition.

We are grateful to the holy men

That they have stayed away from the pigs

Praise be to God and thanks

That we have cast our lot with the Sheikhs and Pirs.

I was taken to the realm of the robes

Mullahs and Sufis flocked to me

Saying: Didn’t Mullah Abu Bekir become a Muslim?

I said: No indeed, by God!

. . .

I was taken to the long, far realm

There I abandoned religious salutations, fasting and prayer

They caught hold of Mullah Abu Bekir’s arm and said:

Come, tell the Truth!

So I come to affirm my faith in what is good  
To paint the mosque with undiluted wine  
Whilst explaining the truth of Sultan Ezi.

Any books they bring  
They darken with stains of wine

At the head they put the name of Sultan Ezi, the  
sweet, the noble

A hundred books, a hundred tomes  
They gave into the hand of Mullah Abu Bekir in  
large quantities  
All went and sided with the wine stains.

It is a red and yellow book  
I shall read it from beginning to end  
The names of Sultan Adi and Sheikh Shems the  
Tartar are in it.

I am a researcher of books

Going from place to place, I am Mount Qaf

I am the middleman for the House of Adi

They took me to the realm of the pure, deep ocean

The cup-bearer contemplates that ocean from afar

The diver in that ocean is the Forgiving Angel.

The mixed prose and poetry “Tale of Soltan Zeng” is another compendium of anti-Islamic sentiment, in which Sheikh Hesen “abrogates Islam” and says the Yezidis have no need to visit Mecca—only Lalish. And in the “Hymn of the Black Furgqan” it is said that Hell was made “for those who sin against the name of Tawusi Melek three times a day”—that is, faithful Muslims who curse Satan in their everyday prayers.”

(Incidentally, this verse proves that Melek Ta'us really “is” Satan—despite the cavils of certain scholars!)

Another contention with which I must respectfully disagree is that Yezidism can be categorized as a Gnostic dualist religion. Spits Late Antique Motifs certainly demonstrates rather conclusively that Yezidism was influenced by Gnostic 72071fs,



but I contend that these are limited to mythemes and metaphors, and do not implicate Yezidism in any dualist disdain for the Creation or hatred of the body in a Manichaean (or Marcionite or even Valentinian) metaphysical sense. Like many Gnostics, the Yezidis reconsidered the role of the devil, but not in order to exalt him over a “stupid” Jehovah or Demiurge, or as 2 principle of uncreated immaterial spirit infinitely superior to fleshly creation. Superficially, one might mistake Melek Ta'us for the Serpent of the Ophites, because their stories appear so similar. But Melek Ta'us presides precisely over a material world that is good in itself. The Black Snake represents the Peacock's Shadow (to borrow a Jungianism)—but the Shadow is integrated with the Self here, not alienated. Melek Taus is indeed beyond good and evil—but as the Creator's viceregent he bestows good on his devotees, and on the green world. Only his enemies see him as negative, because they have failed as mystics (i.e., as esoteric antinomians). Thus Khuda, the Creator God, is described as an ocean of “Light without beginning,” and as “perfect” This god has gone into retirement, so to speak, and left governance of the world to his beloved angel, but remains the one true god; he is no Ialdabaoth. If this were not so, great

mystics like al-Hallaj, or Sheykh Hesên, could not have been both divine and “part of this world,” as Pir Khidr Sileman told Kreyenbroek—though “even now the Yezidis are afraid to say such things openly.” In Gnostic religions the ocean hides the pearl, as matter hides the divine Spirit sunk in it; “great efforts must be made” to rescue it? In Yezidism, by contrast, the ocean nurtures the pearl and reveals it to the angels. The ocean is “positive.” Yezidism can most usefully be conceived as a dialectic reversal of Gnostic dualism.

This world is a good world  
Neither fear nor mercy has  
remained in the hearts of the Mirids

We take refuge in Sultan Ezid. HymN ofF THE CANDLE!

Here we see that the Yezidi “yes” to the world is a Nietzschean affirmation, leaving no room for slave morality or pity in the degraded sense; Soltan Ezi is the obvious patron saint of this Dionysian attitude, and Yazid’s wine is its inspiration:

What a wine! Any creature that has a little of it Gives his life  
and his house for it

In his eyes this world becomes a feast. THE GREAT HYMN!?

In the “Hymn to Earth and Sky,” two halves of Creation debate  
about which has most honor. If Sky (as Spirit) should prevail  
 (“You are impure, I am holy”) we might conclude that the hymn  
leans toward dualism—but Earth (as Body) puts up a powerful  
counterargument:

The sky says to the earth:

My origin and yours are from the same place.

We were created from one essence.

A (divine) gaze shows me compassion.

On me one finds roses and lilies.

Peaches and camomile, willows, apples and olives

These also have flourished on me.

You are my brother on high

Opposite me a flame becomes visible

On me one finds charm, benevolence and wine.

Heaven boasts of angels, but Earth claims to have angels as well, “roaming on the face of the earth.” Finally

The Sky says to its sister  
God is both my and your witness  
But I pity you, by God!

For your sake, oh Merciful One,  
Earth and Sky came together  
Like sister and brother.

Earth is to be pitied because it is the scene of tribulation—  
But it is not a lesser partner. In effect there takes place a  
hierogamy, as in alchemy, the same way in which yin and  
yang are both children of the Tao. (This is the secret of  
Egyptian pharaonic brother-sister marriage, and the incest of  
the Greek gods.)

Two opposing views of alchemy prevail in modern times. One  
(argued by Newman and Principe, admittedly with interesting

results) is basically physical, and takes alchemy as the historical precursor to chemistry. The other view is spiritual and allegorical (Burckhardt), or psychological (Jung). Against both of these reductionisms, there persists the argument of alchemy itself—that it is both spiritual and physical. It is “at the moment of conjunction of that spirit with that body” that the wonders of the Work are seen.

But Morienus fell silent and, casting his gaze downward, reflected deeply for some time. Then he raised his head and spoke: “Truly, this matter is that created by God which is firmly captive within you yourself, inseparable from you, wherever you be, and any creature of

God deprived of it will die.

And in a separate dialogue (the Late Antique Dialogue of Cleopatra and the Philosophers):

Ostanes and those with him answered Cleopatra: “In this is concealed a strange and terrible mystery. Enlighten us, casting your light upon the elements. Tell us how the highest

descends to the lowest and how the lowest rises to the highest, and how that which is in the midst approaches the highest and is united to it, and what is the element which accomplishes these things. And tell us how the blessed waters visit the corpses lying in Hades fettered and afflicted in darkness and how the medicine of Life reaches them and rouses them as if wakened by their possessors from sleep.

This principle is Life itself, or in modern terms “negentropy,” and, as Ibn Umail said in *The Silvery Water* (known in Latin as the *Tzbul's chemica*): “Nothing is commoner on earth than this mysterious thing.”

In the radical monism of Yezidism, as with other antinomian sects such as the Ranters or Brethren of the Free Spirit, matter and spirit are one; they can be separated (so/ve) but also united (coagula), and this operation comprises the whole of alchemy. The precipitating substance is called rennet or leaven, as we have seen. Mixing the water of the White Spring with the dust of Adi's grave produces the beraz, the clay pellets which symbolize alchemical transmutation—that is, Creation itself. The leaven is love.

Let us recall that Melek Ta'us has extinguished the fires of Hell with his tears,<sup>?</sup> and that “when Sheikh Adi came from Mecca, he told his followers in one of his sermons: “God commanded me to tell you that there is no need of prayer; believe in the power of Melek Ta'tis and ye shall be saved.” In al-Jilwabh, the Angel says, “I participate in all the affairs which those who are without call evil because their nature is not such as they approve. . . . I allow everyone to follow the dictates of their own nature, but he that opposes me will regret it sorely . . . [and if] anyone obey me and conform to my commandments, he shall have joy, delight, and goodness.”

In the “Hymn to Melek Tawus” we read “O my Lord . . . You are the desired, we are the desire.”? As Avicenna said in the Recitals, the principle that keeps the cosmic spheres in motion (generating Life) is desire, the longing of each archangel for the angel of the next higher sphere. Iblis eternally desires God, because Iblis Jives in separation, not union; paradoxically, separation must be accounted the higher state. According to the Mamluk historian al-Magqrizi (d. 1442), “In the course of Time, the excesses (of the followers of Adi)

increased to such an extent that they finally claimed that it was Sheykh Adi ibn Musafir who granted them sustenance, and that they often said, “We are not content with food that does not come from Sheykh Adi.” . . . They neglected the prayers prescribed for day and night, saying ‘Sheykh Adi prays in our place.’ They declared forbidden sexual intercourse licit.”

Not all antinomianism has the same metaphysical justification or the same sexual code. Among Gnostic dualist tendencies there exists a strict “puritan” attitude of total abstention from carnality (invariably linking sex and meat eating), as, for example, with the Cathar Perfecti—but the rank-and-file Cathar “Hearers” were free to marry and even reproduce, on the understanding that they were imperfect but would be reincarnated as Perfecti. (If any of the Troubadors were secret Cathars, by the way, this would be consistent with their cult of chastity, of loving their beloveds outside of marriage and without “union.”)

Other dualists have engaged in a full spectrum of sexuality (although often eschewing reproduction, on the grounds that it causes the exile of souls into flesh), because morality was,



after all, empty of meaning in a world where escape from the world comprised the sole true “salvation.” Related to this idea is the doctrine of “exhaustion of sin”—the belief that all sin must be experienced in order to transcend it. This notion seems to have inspired the Carpocratean Gnostics of second-century Egypt, as well as later antinomians like the Russian Khlysty, and the much-maligned Rasputin. Most Christian Satanists are just mirror-images of these dualists, except that they embrace evil for its own sake. The Yezidis do not align with any of these.

Outside of religion per se, one might adopt antinomian-style libertine behavior out of Epicurean agnosticism, either in the restrained and sensible style of a Lucretius, or in the unrestrained and obnoxious style of de Sade, who would justify hurting others because it gives him or her pleasure to do so. I, personally, object to sadism, and in response to Max Stirner would insist that my freedom logically involves a “price,” which is the recognition of other people’s freedoms. Of course, I could declare war on all humanity, like the pirates—but then I must be prepared to bear the cost: a short life, and perhaps none too jolly after all.

If the Yezidis ever had an antinomian sexual code, it would have to have been justified by a radically zonist, not a dualist, position. Reality is one, not two (as we learned from the “Hymn to Earth and Sky”). The dyad, like yin and yang, is reconciled on the higher level of the Tao, the “oneness of being” (Ibn Arabi’s *wahdat al-wujud*). The antinomian experiences this reconciliation not as a promise for the eschatological future (because this would mean “God is unjust” to us, who are not allowed to live in this future state) but as present reality: Paradise Now! This perspective is afforded by the central Yezidi mythos of Azazel’s reconciliation with Khuda, and the consequent “abolition of Hell.” We are (always) already free from sin. We are (already) perfect—we cannot sin. A modern Yezidi is quoted: “We believe (Malek Ta’wus) is a proud angel who rebelled and was thrown into Hell by God. Now he is reconciled to God.” Asked if Melek Taus is good or evil, he answers, “He is both. Like fire. Flames can cook but they can also burn. The world is good and bad.”

The “justified” antinomian can of course fall into delusion, as in James Hogg’s dark masterpiece *Confessions of a Justified*

Sinner (1824). Not all Ranters and Brethren of the Free Spirit strike us as completely sane. (True undeceived Übermenschen are very rare, it seems.)

Nevertheless, in historical moments of fervor and realization, such as the Nizari Qiyamat, or the early Fourierist movement, or May 1968, it is possible to glimpse the reality of antinomian claims. I believe that at one time the Yezidis experienced such a moment.\* Later it must have faded and been replaced by taboos. But it left its unmistakable perfume behind it. This essay is my attempt to recover it, by means of exegesis of Yezidi myths, readings of the hymns, and Ta'wil or esoteric hermeneutic of the symbolique.

If a distinction can be made between religious antinomianism and mystical antinomianism, it would be found in the existential experience or visionary subjectivity of the mystic, as opposed to the faith (or “mere belief”) of the religious exponent. I don't know if theory can be distinguished from practice here:

It has been said that one of the Sheikhs (probably Baba

Sheikh) at a certain time brings water in closed vessels while the commoners bring roosters covered with handkerchiefs.

Afterwards that Sheikh recites a certain secret incantation and the water in the vessels reportedly boils and every Yezidi present shakes his shirt and utters “I have been clean(s)ed of any sins,” and then they dance and rejoice.”

It seems to me that “belief” in a state of liberation from “sin”—as a matter of theological certainty—would necessarily be difficult to distinguish from a psychological certainty at the deepest level of conviction. To act on the mere supposition that one has been “saved” would lead either to disillusionment or to experiential certitude—but finally even the simplest existentialism would seem to lead inexorably to a participation in the mystical antinomian state; the “leap” to commitment and its performance would either fail or succeed, and if it succeeded it would feel indelible. One sees the water boiling—or not. There exists no in between state.

Sheikh Erebeg Entush is not identified by Kreyenbroek, but he has a hymn named after him,” and it can serve as a primer on

the whole phenomenon of esoteric antinomianism. It begins by criticizing the “heedless” who remain adamantly blind to “the Mystery” (Su7 the Angel)—or “the Mystery did not see them”<sup>\*</sup>—which makes sense, since the realization of a mystery must be reciprocal. But if gold is thrown in the fire it is not consumed, only changed in shape; similarly, the true mystic is already alchemically perfect, and only needs heat in order to melt. Verse 6 addresses the “People of the Book,” and asks “Who was it who made the daughter licit to the father?”

Before he (began to) speak,  
It was Adam who made the daughter licit to him.  
He embraced her with lion-like vigour.

I dare not say it.  
If I say that it is a custom from before Adam’s time  
I shall be stoned.

We have already seen that pre-Adamite time is a guarded mystery in Yezidism. Here we realize it as a “Golden Age” like Saturn’s, when the concept of “sin” is not known. Adam inherits this “time” as his birthright, despite the intervention of

religion and its new dispensation—but he cannot reveal the secret openly.

Kreyenbroek in a note suggests that, like ancient Zoroastrians, the Yezidis may once have considered consanguineous unions licit, although one of his informants “confidently claimed that the text must be a forgery.” Metaphysically (though not in practice), incest is an antinomian act because it symbolizes divine unity, and because it is practiced by “the gods” while being forbidden to mere mortals. Ergo, humans who practice it would achieve apotheosis. It may be that the religious forbidding of certain forms of sexuality was the original move in the ideologization of Stone Age spirituality into a control mechanism

for the emergent State. This would explain the myth of the Saturnian Age (whether in Hecataeus or Hesiod, Macrobius or Ovid), and the Hyperboreans who knew no form of repression. Under classical paganism, the Saturnalia makes a periodic reappearance as “pagan license,” and a sign that the original freedom has not (yet) been erased from human possibility.

Turning back to the “Hymn of Sheikh Erebeg,” we hear:

Eighty thousand trials and tribulations will come upon you each day

(But) do not look with envy at the house of the Shari'a. . . .

When the (followers of the) Shari'a are present, (there is) disgust and blame.

They are the enemies of the Sultan.

On the Last Day, that mill will grind their blood.

One day there will be a call. The (followers of the) Shari'a will be left naked and wailing.

Heaven preserve us from those swine.

The pig itself is a good creature." It is morning, the sun is coming up.

It, too, generously bears witness to the name of God.\*!

This is the same hymn that tells us the hashish smoker is “free of ran cor and disgust.” But hope is to be found only in the family of Adi Sheikh Mend, and Shems the Tartar, true intercessors, lords of “the dark Mysteries.”

In our following chapters on the life, legend, and literary works of Caliph Yazid ibn Mu‘awiya, much use will be made of the long “Story of the Appearance of the Mystery of Ezi” as a hagiographical source—but here I want to make use of one anecdote from it as an illustration of my “antinomian” thesis. Certain figures in Yezidism carry more of this teaching than others, and it is Ezi/Yazid in his angelic manifestation and his historical being who exemplifies the heroic aspect of the Yezidi revolt against Islam— Yazid, who “abrogated Islam” and “gave us permission to drink wine.”

In the story, Yazid’s father Mu‘awiya, in consultation with the religious jurists of Damascus, resolves to “throw (Yazid) into the sea” in order to punish his apostasy. But Yazid preempts them:



Sultan Ezi took his friends away He put them in the middle of the ocean He set up a tent, pulling the tent ropes taut And placed the tambourines and singers inside. An orchestra of “124,000 strings” entertained these rebels, and “golden shining flasks of pure wine” circulate joyfully.

So Mu‘awiya and the jurists nominated the Qazi (judge) to remonstrate with Yazid. With as many Qurans as he could hold under his arm, the Qazi went down to the sea, followed by a crowd of curious Damascenes. Ezi cheerfully invited him to join the revels. “But how can I reach you?” said the Qazi. “I dare not enter the water!”

Ezi said: “Say: By the power of God and Sultan Ezi!” The Qazi did so, and at once a pod of whales appeared, forming a living bridge to Ezi’s floating tent.” The Qazi passed over in safety, and at once began to upbraid Yazid for drinking wine.

“Suppose,” said Yazid, “I put a single droplet of wine on my little finger-nail. You drink it, and then tell me whether I should ever indulge in wine again. If you forbid it, I will abstain. I wonder if this droplet will suffice to cheer you up!” The Qazi

agreed, and licked the wine from Yazid's finger. At once

The Shari'a judge yelled and shouted

He said: Brothers, drink, it is lawful!

It is sweet to the heart, and a little bitter on the tongue.

The Shari'a judge no longer reads papers

He has become a member of this group of friends

He has become a dancer at the feast.

The Shari'a judge abandoned all his papers

He tore them all to shreds

He threw them into the ocean.

The judge became a dancer and danced

He became a diver and dove

The Shari'a judge became an initiate of that mystery.

Sultan Ezi changed the cup of the Shari'a judge

He adorned it with colours

He let it go round under the ocean.

Eventually the judge receives a vision of Ezi, clad entirely in red (the color of the Philosophers' Stone).

Modern secularized inhabitants of a disenchanted universe may wonder how Rabelais, for example, can exalt wine into a principle of what he calls "Pythagorean" (i.e., Hermetic) wisdom. It may seem a bit blasphemous to attribute an entheogenic quality to wine in a Christian/ alchemical context, given the doctrine of transubstantiation (i.e., transmutation) of wine into the blood of a god—too Dionysian! But quite appropriate, at least for Rabelais.

In the Islamic context, wine gets its entheogenic "kick" from a dialectical drama: it is forbidden, hence desired. As the Qur'an states (37:47), in Paradise it will be allowed, and will cause no hangover— surely a characteristic of a good psychedelic high. Sufi poets play with this imagery, but the official story holds that Sufi wine is strictly metaphorical. Of course this isn't so. Princes have always given themselves permission to drink, and Sufis are princes of the Unseen. The secret of Yezidism is that the Forbidden is allowed when understood in its mystical truth. Inner becomes outer for the liberated antinomian. Wine

is a sacrament because everything has been made “lawful” to esoteric consciousness. The materia prima of alchemy, as the Testament reveals, is Life itself. And all that lives is holy.

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