

Dhu'l Nun

Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (796-861) was born in Upper Egypt near Sudan, and is regarded by many as the founder of Sufism. He was imprisoned and persecuted by Mu'tazila on a charge of heresy, for his belief that the Qur'an was uncreated. A legendary figure as alchemist and thaumaturge (wizard or magician), he was said to know the secret of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. As a reputed founder of Sufism, he was credited with being the first to provide a systematic exposition of *tasawwuf* (spiritual development) and its doctrines.

Dhu'l Nun's words and ideas sifted into Jewish spirituality via a number of avenues. As Dhu influenced so many later Sufis, his ideas were rife in the medieval Jewish mystics that turned to Sufism to revivify the Jewish Religion. For instance, Bahya Ibn Pakuda (c. 1040, who wrote the seminal Jewish mystical treatise, *Guide to the Duties of the Heart*) quotes a Sufi sage in a short aphorism that ended up inspiring the title of Moses Maimonides' greatest philosophical tract, the *Guide for the Perplexed*. In Bahya's words: "One of the knowers (of God) said, 'The more one knows God, the more one is perplexed by Him.'" This "knower of God," however, was none other than the Sufi Dhu'l-Nun, as related in a quote by the 11th century Sufi al- Qushayri.

Dhu'l Nun influenced Jewish mysticism in other ways, reaching all the way to 18th century Hasidism with his ideas. For instance, he said, "*Sama* is the rapture of God that incites hearts towards God," *Sama* being the practice of achieving mystical awareness through music and dance. Nearly 1000 years later, Hasidic attitudes towards music and dance mirrored Dhu'l Nun's ideas.