Chapter Four

Alone to the Alone:

Travels of the Sufi Soul

Sufism is spiritually an interiorized journey towards perfection (*kamal*) where union with God is the wayfarer’s *telos*. It is basically associated with asceticism (*zuhd*) and purification (*safa*) that are the initial steps to the Sufi path. The Sufis are said to be the people of *suffa*, the traditional bench on which the Prophet Muhammad’s poor, pious companions used to sit on in his mosque located in Madina. Based on this, the Sufis preach following the Prophet’s companions in their daily wear and practice. The Sufi is described as *abid* (worshipper), *zahid* (ascetic), dervish\(^33\) or *faqir* (impoverished ascetic); *arif billah* (knower of God by God), *salik* (traveler), and *ashiq* (lover).

Sufism is an Islamic mystical stream of thought that pays heed to the heart as the medium of meditation in God and His theophanies (*tajalliyat*) in the universe (*al-kawn*). A priority accorded to the Eye of the Heart over the eye of the mind is obviously based on Koranic verses such as “And also in your own selves. Will you not then see?” (51:21). A Sufi’s prayer is meditation by which the Sufi’s awareness of the mystery of God is shaped in the praying heart. Harith Muhasibi (d. 857 AD), the founder of Baghdad School of Islamic Philosophy, explicates the Sufi prayer as distinct from ordinary prayer:

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\(^33\) A dervish (*al-darwish*) is defined in John Renard’s *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* as a ‘door-seeker,’ “[Dervishes] are individual Sufis not connected with specific orders, or those affiliated with organizations whose members tended to be less attached to stable institutional life. In more colloquial usage, however, the term has come to refer more loosely to the generality of Sufis. In North Africa, dervishes are referred to as “brothers” (*ikhwan*), and in Arabic generally the equivalent is *faqir* “poor one” (73).
What is the most potent in the heart of the mystic while he is at prayer is his awareness of the mystery of Him in whose Presence he is, the power of Him for whom he is looking, and the love of Him who graces him such tender and direct familiarity with Himself. He is conscious of these until he has finished praying and leaves with a face so transfigured that his friends would not recognize him, because of the awe he feels at the majesty of God. (qtd. in *Perfume* … 27)

Thus, Sufism is a journey of the soul (*nafs*) towards perfection. Knowing or witnessing God is not impossible for Man, because Koran refers to God’s proximity to His servants in verses such as “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (50:16). With reference to Ibn Arabi’s exegesis of the Creator-creature relationship, Henry Corbin comments:

[…] He is creation of the imagination that we pray to him, and that He exists. Prayer is the highest form, the supreme act of the Creative Imagination. By virtue of the sharing of roles, the divine Compassion, as theophany and existentiation of the universe of beings, is the *Prayer of God* aspiring to issueforth from His unknownness and to be known, whereas the *Prayer of man* accomplishes this theophany because in it and through it the “Form of God” (*surat al-Haqq*) becomes visible to the heart. (Alone with the Alone: The Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi xviii-xix)

In Sufism, this journey is redemption of the self and its reality. The restoration of the self into its reality is achieved in Sufism through the Oneness of Being. The act of seeing God through His theophanies is considered by Ibn Arabi to be the point of
intersection between the Prayer of God and the prayer of Man so as God’s aspiration to be known is achieved by Man’s meditation in prayer.

The emergence of Sufism shows an ascetical attitude to life, a total isolation from the world and a life in aloneness. Wandering is one of the defining characteristics of Sufi saints in the history of Islam. They are wandering strangers. Ibn Arabi is born in Spain and died in Damascus. Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236) came from Persia (Sistan) and died in India. Abu Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 AD) moved from Persia to Iraq. Even those who died in their countries of birth conducted travels for tens of years. Travel (sayr) is essential for initiation (shuru’) to the Sufi path, for it is considered a communion with God where God unveils Himself to the traveler. Based on the fact that Koran is the path to knowing God, Ibn Arabi bases his school of Oneness of Being on his esoteric interpretation of Koran. The Sufi journey is nourished by physical travels of its sheikhs and masters. Travel is the main trait of Sufi masters over the centuries. They are as mobile as the nomads. Sufism is a spiritual journey that is fulfilled by physical travels through which unaccountable manifestations of the Divine become visible to the Sufi wayfarer.

By and large, Sufism upsets both religious men (fundamentalists) and philosophers (Surrealists, for example). Adonis compares Surrealism with Sufism as a case in point. For him, “The prime objection that will be raised will be that Sufism is

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34 The Chishti order was founded in Central Asia. Mehru Jaffer writes, “Muinuddin was the first one to introduce the Chishtiya way of life in India […] His disciples were Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Baba Farid Ganj Shakr, Mubarak Nagauri, Nizamuddin Awliya and Khawaja Nasiruddin Chirag […]” (The Book of Muinuddin Chishti xi).

35 The following Koranic verse evidently shows that nothing is left unmentioned in Koran, but humans need to dig up their hearts in order to meditate on its verses and reach the Reality of God which is the Reality of realities: “There is not an animal, nor a bird that flies on its two wings, but they are communities like you [mankind]. We have left out nothing in the Book. Then to their Lord shall they all be gathered together” (6:38). God in this verse also draws our attention to Oneness of Existence through likening us to animals and birds, for all are created by God and are theophanies of God, they are the mirror and are in union with the One.
a religious movement, oriented towards religious salvation, whereas Surrealism is an atheistic movement, with no aspirations to heavenly salvation” (1). On one hand, if Sufism is rejected by the philosophers, on the other hand, it is also totally rejected by the Islamists. Political Islam poses a threat to Sufism. In my field visit to Morocco in 2014, I met several Sufi sheikhs. None of them talked to me about Ibn Arabi and his worldview of wahdat al-wujud (Oneness of Being). Tears rolling down the cheeks of a sheikh were the response, though he spoke out of creation-based ideas similar to Ibn Arabi’s. That sheikh did not condemn listening to music, rather, he claims that everybody has his own mode of expression towards the world around and many Muslim singers show more love to God and creatures than some of the Muslim religious elites. Ibn Taymiyya pronounced the following fatwa on Sufism: “The nature of these people [Sufis] is evil, as they contradict the messengers (prayers and the peace of God be upon them), as is apparent from the words of the writer [Ibn Arabi] of the Futuhat al-Makiyya, the Fusus and other writings […]” (qtd. in Adonis 13). However, elsewhere he states that “Ibn Arabi’s system is nearer to Islam insofar as he discriminates the One who reveals Himself and the manifestations thereof, […]” (qtd. in N. Hanif 52 ). Ibn Taymiyya’s self-contradiction obviously shows how Ibn Arabi’s paradoxical language causes perplexity to many. Therefore, Sufism is considered heretical by Moslem fundamentalists. Actually, Sufism is put under the

36 The term Fatwa (responsa) in Arabic means a legal opinion by an expert (a’lim) in Islamic law. In today’s Islamic world, there is almost a council of fatwa in every country. However, fatwas may be in conflict with each other. Fatwas are ideological especially when they are declared in relation to politics, particularly, mufteen (ulama) declare fatwas that go against the Koranic verses of obedience to the ruling elite. Fatwas are the modus operandi by which ideologies, which are sometimes non-Islamic, are legislated in favor of a sect or a ruler. They are used as means of empowering the tribal solidarity of a certain clan or monarchy to rule all other clans and tribes in a certain country. Today’s Saudi Arabia is a case in point, as the family of Saud derives its legacy as a monarchy from the fatwa of obeying the ruler owing to the manipulation of terms in the history of Islamic jurisprudence. Jurists, especially those who worked as legislators for their states, are corrupted in the sense that they issue fatwas at the rulers’ requests irrespective of their authenticity in the Islamic creed. However, they are publicly respected and their sayings are strictly followed by people to the point that if you ask anyone to give you Koranic evidence on any issue, he will run into what a certain jurist stated instead. Although the hadith (Prophetic tradition) comes in a second rank to Koran, more recourse to it occurs than to Koran.
charge of heresy owing to its openness, tolerance, and acceptance of the other in a peaceful atmosphere of coexistence. Sufism does not oppose the stories of the Creator and creation mentioned in the holy texts; however, it interprets them in a radically different way from that of the sectarian schools.

In contrast to Ibn Taymiyya, Ahmed al-Hassani speaks about the origins of Sufism as follows: “Its subject is the divine essence of God, because the Sufi searches for him [God] in order to know him, either through signs or witnessing him or seeing him with his own eyes […] The founder of the science of Sufism is the Prophet himself” (qtd. in Adonis 16). What characterizes the written dogma (philosophical literature) of Sufism is gnosticism. The way Sufis read the holy texts is innovatory in the sense that it goes beyond the narrow dogmatic legacy of reading to explore new meanings and dimensions of these texts—such meanings contribute to a sort of Islam that Stephen Schwartz (2008) called *The Other Islam* or *Islam without Extremes*, a book by Mustafa Akyol (2013). In this regard, Adonis believes that “Sufis have gone beyond the legacy of the ‘established principles’ to set up the legacy of the mysteries […] Because Sufism has been accused of heresy and atheism. […] Sufism has become the pariah within the society” (20-21).

### 4.1 Exploring the Sufi Path

The *salik* (wayfarer) conducts a journey to God and a journey in God through encountering hardships and experiencing annihilation along the Sufi path. Andrew Harvey defines these two interrelated journeys as follows:

The journey to God is one that the soul makes as it leaves the world and all the games of the false self behind in a progressive blaze of love
and gnosis. This journey ends—with the grace of God—in Union, in a permanent possession of conscious divine identity. The second journey [in God] begins with Union and ends nowhere, for it is taken in love as Love, and Love is infinite. For the journey to God to become the journey in God and for the seeker to be permanently established in divine consciousness, a death has to happen—the death of false self.

(Perfume…101)

The return of the self to its True Nature implies a transformation of the self to the Self along the path. It is the seeker’s passage through non-existence (‘adam) by the existence in God. The Sufi poet and master Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) describes the hardships encountered in one’s travel as the climax of one’s joy: “Someone asked, ‘What is Sufism?’ the answer was ‘To possess joy and ease in the heart at the time of affliction’ […] Do you know why the Dervishes suffer (practice) afflictions on earth? Because these corporeal sufferings give an everlasting life to the spirit” (Mathnawi III/ 3260-3265).

Sufism has become a terminus technicus for the Arabic term (al-Tasawwuf), which is usually defined as the mystical dimension of Islam. Mumamrasah (practice) is its approach to religion. Therefore, the Sufis stress the Sufism of Muhammad wearing the wool (suf). Traditionally, a Sufi is defined as the one whose heart is as soft and as warm as wool. In the history of Sufism, some people took the advantage of the title Sufi to gain people’s attention, get gifts, and have other worldly pleasures. This corrupted movement within Sufism was condemned by several Sufi masters and ascetics. Defining Sufism, Abu al-Hasan Bushanji (Fushanji), around the tenth century A.D. states that: “Today Sufism is a name without a reality, but it used to be a
reality without a name” (qtd. in William Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner’s Guide* 1). In the same way, Hujwiri in the treatise of *Kashf al-Majub (The Revelation of the Veiled)* adds: “In the time of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors this name [Sufism] did not exist, but its reality was in everyone” (qtd. in Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* 45). To be a Sufi means to be pure from the self-ego and close to God. Dhu al-Nun al-Misri defines Sufis as “[…] people who have preferred God to everything, so that God has preferred them to everything” (qtd. in *Perfume*… xxiii and xiv). Definitions of Sufism and Sufis perhaps are expressed in different ways but the meaning is the same. Sufis show tremendous flexibility in dealing with life and changes in the world where they live. They embrace the other by including without giving any space to exclusion. For example, they consider the boundaries of different levels as an illusion. Ibn Arabi is well-known for his religion of love.

In *Perfume*…, Harvey quotes his Parisian friend’s definition of Sufism as follows:

[…] Sufism is the ancient wisdom of the heart and the science of love born from that wisdom, a science as precise but far more beneficial than the external sciences, perfected over centuries of brave exploration of the Desert of the Absolute […] the word for mystic path in Sufism—*tariqah*—means the path in the desert that the Bedouin takes to travel from oasis to oasis […] Obviously such a path is not clearly marked like a highway and isn’t even a visible road. But it is there to those who know. To find your way in the trackless desert you need to know the area intimately. Sufis are those who know the area intimately. (XIII-XIV)
The nomads in the desert are analogous to Sufis in the path, because both journeys entail training and expertise. Islamic literature accentuates the importance of life as travel and Man as passerby not as indulger in worldly pleasures, “So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear?” (Koran 22:46). In a hadith, Muhammad instructs his companions, “Be in the world as if you are a traveler, a passerby.” Travel in the desert is a metaphor for travel in the Sufi path. The nomadic wandering is an epitome of the Sufi spiritual journey.

The Sufi approach to reality is a quest for God, a quest that is both passionate as well as detached. Travel in Sufism is a radical passion that leads to drastic change in the wayfarer’s character. The Sufi heart becomes “a garden amidst flames,” a furnace where all bodily passions and desires are burnt and the Sufi’s prayer materializes as a result. The bedouin knows the reality of the path in the desert; likewise, the Sufi knows the reality of the path to God. The travel of the Sufi is a deliberate and passion-based act. Rumi describes this passion as a “[…] howling storm in which all the houses of the false self are flattened forever” (qtd. in Harvey, Radical Passion… 209). As it appears from Rumi, this passion is the most devastating of all passions of the soul, for it leads the wayfarer to spiritual awakening. The Awakening is a witness to the beauty of the Beloved and the greatness of the journey, as it involves the self-restoration to the greatness of life, its joy and grief, the fathomless spiritual growth that reaches perfection when the self is intimately devoured by the Divine Love.
Accordingly, God becomes the power of the perfect Sufi. A perfect Sufi is endowed with divine blessings and miracles. Farid al-Din al-Attar narrates a story of an Egyptian ascetic woman who lit the lantern with water thanks to the power of God. The Sufis perform miracles and shower people around them with blessings, therefore, their shrines and tombs are visited by many seekers. In my 2014 field visit to the most famous Sufi dargahs in India of Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236) in Ajmer and his disciple Nizamuddin Aulia (d. 1325) in Delhi, I observed that Indians of different religions, Muslims and Hindus, express their reverence to these two masters by seeking their blessings even centuries after their passing. Chishti also founded the Sufi circles of Sama’ (music and whirling), through which the spirit is nourished. Chishti rejects the fanatics’ objection to musical soirees as un-Islamic, for it illuminates the heart. According to Mehru Jaffer, “Chishtis reply that lovers of music may seem to be strangers to the world but they are friends of the divine” (The Book of Muinuddin Chishti 11). Similarly, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali considers the Sufi sama’ as the entry to the heart, “There is no entry into the heart except through the antechamber of the ears. Musical tones, measured and pleasing, bring forth what is in the heart and make evident its beauties and defects…whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which preponderates in it” (Revival of Religious Sciences, Book 18 “On Music and Singing,” Vol. 2: 237).

Aulia’s asceticism is revealed in his refusal of the invitation of Sultan Alauddin

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38 Attar writes, “Omm Ahmad was a holy woman from Egypt who was also a midwife. She never charged for her services but did her work only to please God. One winter night,” her son tells us, “She ordered me to light the lantern. I told her that we were out of oil. She then ordered me to pour water into the lantern and to remember God. As I did so, the wick caught fire of itself. I was astonished and asked her, ‘Mother, is the water really burning?’ “No” she replied, ‘but to the one who obeys God, all things are obedient’” (Perfume… 60).

39 The Chishti order was founded in Central Asia. Mehru Jaffer writes, “Muinuddin was the first one to introduce the Chishtiya way of life in India [……] His disciples were Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Baba Farid Ganj Shakr, Mubarak Nagauri, Nizamuddin Awliya and Khawaja Nasiruddin Chirag [……]” (The Book of Muinuddin Chishti xi).
(1296) to be his spiritual counselor, because he knew that the Sultan’s invitation was a means of securing his throne through Nizamuddin’s popularity that was politically dangerous to his rule. Jaffer notes, “Without opening the invitation from court, Nizamuddin replied, ‘We dervishes have nothing to do with the affairs of state. I have settled in a corner away from the men of the city and spend my time in praying for the Sultan and other Muslims. If the Sultan does not like this, let him tell me so. I will go and live elsewhere. God’s earth is vast enough” (The Book of Nizamuddin Aulia xxix). The reply shows that Nizamuddin’s purpose was to establish peaceful coexistence in the hearts of the multi-religious subcontinent for thousands of years to come. In my visit, I was impressed by the peaceful gatherings of men and women, who belong to different religions and castes. My field visit to Ajmer and Delhi helped me actualize and understand better Ibn Arabi’s “religion of love.” Aulia and Chishti are lovers of God, therefore, they are loved by His people.40 People believe in the Sufis’ posthumous blessings as they are the Friends of God41 awlya’ Allah who are reassured in Koran as safe and happy people with the mercy of God, “Surely the friends of Allah—they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve” (Koran 10:62). God bestows the power of kun “Be” upon His perfect friend when the latter’s self is absorbed into the Former’s Self.

40 “When Allah loves a servant, He calls Gabriel and says: Verily, I love this person so you should love him. Then Gabriel loves him and makes an announcement in the heavens, saying: Allah loves this person and you should love him. Thus, the dwellers of the heavens love him and he is honored in the earth. When Allah is angry with a servant, He calls Gabriel and says: I have resentment for this person, so you should resent him. Then Gabriel is resentful towards him and makes an announcement in the heavens, saying: Verily, Allah is resentful with this person, so you should resent him. Thus, they become resentful with him and he is hated in the earth” [Source: Sahih Muslim 2637] (qtd. in Fazlul Karim, The Ideal world prophet 367).

41 Ibn Arabi refers to Abraham’s title as al-Khalil as “a friend of God.” A hadith implies that ulama are the vicegerents of prophets, so, the Sufi walis are titled friends of God as a title inherited from Abraham. In Fusus (The Bezels of Wisdom), Ibn Arabi writes, “Abraham was called the Intimate [khalil] [of God] because he had embraced (takhallul) and penetrated all the Attributes of the Divine Essence” (91). Therefore, Ibn Arabi’s chooses “The Wisdom of Rapturous Love in the Word of Abraham” as a title for the section on Abraham in Fusus.
Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1074) in the *Risala (Epistle on Sufism)* explains the secrets of the Sufi path to God as follows:

Presence comes first, then unveiling, then witnessing. Presence is the presence of the heart [with God]. It can be achieved through a continuous manifestation of the [divine] proof, during which a person finds himself in [God’s] presence through the power of recollection [of God]. This [state] is followed by unveiling, which is presence through clear evidence. In this state one need not see the [divine] proof or seek the path. One is neither subject to the promptings of doubt, nor veiled from the realm of the Unseen. This [state] is followed by witnessing. This means to be in the presence of the Absolute Truth, where there is no room for doubt. When the sky of the innermost heart is free from the clouds of veiling, the sun of witnessing begins to shine from the zodiacal sign of nobility. The True Reality of witnessing was captured by al-Junayd when he said: “God’s existence appears when you lose yours.” (97-98)

The following sections explore the secrets of the Sufi world where *wuḥdat al-wujud* (Oneness of Being) is achieved.

4.2. The Sufi World

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the earliest companion of the prophet, is known for being the closest among companions to God not because he prays and fasts more than them but “[…] because of a secret that is deeply rooted in his heart” (*Kitab Fada’il al-Sahaba* “The Book of the Companions’ Virtues” 118). Abu Bakr was the model for
the successors (al-tabi’een) such as Hasan al-Basri, Sufian al-Thawri and others of later ascetic Sufis. Al-Qushayri in his Epistle (al-Risala al-Qushayriyya) relates to Junayd the latter’s definition of Tasawwuf, “Tasawwuf is not the abundance of praying and fasting, but wholeness of the breast and and selflessness” (60). The act of praying and fasting is rarely represented by al-Koni’s characters. Other Sufi traits and acts such as fana, wandering, and isolation are reminiscently present in al-Koni’s novels which means that al-Koni’s representation of Sufism is self-conscious. Sufism is the practice of penetration of the unknown world (al-alam al-ghaybi) through the heart’s active imagination. The path of Sufism is a path to God whose wayfarer (al-salik) seeks union with Him. Crossing the Sufi path involves the wayfarer’s movement through states (ahwal) and stations (maqamat). Asceticism is the initial step towards mystical Sufism, because an ascetic remains a mustawsif (pretender of Sufism) until the achievement of perfection. Sufism is characterized by an unconditional love of the Divine Beloved, a love that is a metaphor for the void and which is free of reason. Further, it concentrates on the practical manners that are explored in the Sufis’ interpretation of the holy texts. John A Subhan, defines Sufism in terms of its esoteric nature as the “[…] mode of the religious life in Islam in which the emphasis is placed, not on the performances of external ritual, but on the activities of the inner-self—in other words it signifies Islamic mysticism” (6). However, the ascetic Sufis prove their adherence to both the outer and the inner dimensions of Islam in the sense that they do all the duties that every Muslim does, but they have more rituals and practices that relate to the inner, spiritual and the esoteric such as doing extra rituals and liturgical exercises, visiting the shrines of the Sufi Friends of God (awlaya), constant remembrance of God, and self-isolation from other worldly pleasures.
Many studies have been released on Sufism, its thought, paths, masters and the way it historically has developed from Persia to India, from Arabia to Andalusia, and from North Africa to North America. Studies offer theses on Sufism at the levels of thought, teachings and practices. Several Sufi paths historically emerged with some subtle differences from one to another but inspired by Koran and Hadith (the Prophetic Traditions). Etymologically, Juan Campo defines Sufism as a term “[…] coined at the end of the 19th century by British scholars in India, refers to the Islam of inward vision and individual religious experience, but it also encompasses an assortment of outwardly oriented doctrines, practices, social organizations, and literary works that span many centuries, regions, and cultures” (639). Understanding Sufism can happen at different levels and might be understood by different people in different ways based on different contexts, but the point here is to understand Sufism in its different dimensions, viz. that Sufism is taken as a contemplative stream of thought through a spirit of unity in diversity. The mystical nature of Sufism remains a point of curiosity and confusion in terms of its definition to literary and religious scholars. Evelyn Underhill gives a clear-cut explanation of the mystical experience that goes hand in hand with Sufi experience:

He [The inquirer] will learn that mysticism is a philosophy, an illusion, a kind of religion, a disease; that it means having visions, performing conjuring tricks, leading an idle, dreamy, and selfish life, neglecting one’s business, wallowing in vague spiritual emotions, and being “in tune with the infinite.” He will discover that it emancipates him from all dogmas—sometimes from all morality—and at the same time that it is very superstitious. One expert tells him that it is simply “Catholic piety,” another that Walt Whitman was a typical mystic; a third assures
him that all mysticism comes from the East […] At the end…the inquirer is still heard saying—too often in tones of exasperation—

“What is mysticism?” (Practical Mysticism 12)

Sufis are not against any creed, doctrine or sect, further they are not against people who do not believe in God, because they know that unbelief in God is a result of one’s ignorance. Seemingly, Sufism upsets mind-driven people, for the locus of mystical reflections is the heart. It confuses all mental operations. Sufism is an ‘ocean without shore’ to which Ibn Arabi marveled in the Futuhat or al-Junayd al-Baghdadi’s Sufi Sea when he told his disciple Shibli to be like him in order to obtain the pearls of awakening and divine wisdom by diving in it.\(^42\) Defining Sufism is like defining God because it is incomprehensible to the ordinary intellect. Sufi masters neglect the mind and consider the heart as the taken-for-granted medium of knowledge that happens in bewilderment which is the highest plane of knowledge in Sufism. Bewilderment (hayra) is essential in the Muhammadan religion where it is considered the supreme level of knowing God.

The paradoxical language of Sufism puts it under the charge of heresy. Moses wants to see the non-terrestrial God with the naked eye, therefore, seeing God becomes impossible to him. Corbin in Alone with the Alone… discusses the story of Moses in relation to seeing God as follows:

No theophany (tajalli) is possible except in the form corresponding to the predisposition of the subject to which it discloses itself (mutajalla

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\(^42\) Shibli sought out Junayd as a teacher and said to him, “Many people have informed me that you are a supreme expert on the pearls of awakening and divine wisdom. Either give me one of these pearls or sell one to me.” Junayd smiled. “If I sell you one, you won’t be able to pay the price; if I give you one, coming by it so easily will drive you to undervalue it. Do like me; dive headfirst into the Sea. If you wait patiently, you will obtain your Pearl” (Perfume… 19).
lahu). The subject who receives the theophany sees only his own form, yet he knows that it is only in this form as in a divine mirror that he can see the Form of the theophany, and in this theophany recognize his own form. He does not see God in His essence; the response given to Moses is still valid: “Lan tarani, thou shalt not see me.” It is the same with a material mirror: when you contemplate a form in it, you do not see the mirror, though you know perfectly well that you see forms and your own form only in this mirror; you cannot at the same time look at the image which appears in the mirror and at the body of the mirror itself. Ibn Arabi regards this comparison as adequate: God (al-Haqq) is your mirror, that is, the mirror in which you contemplate your self (nafs, anima), and you, you are His mirror, that is, the mirror in which He contemplates His divine Names. (270-1)

The vision of God happens ‘through God’s self-disclosure, not His Essence.’ Ibn Arabi affirms, “In respect to His Essence and His Being, nothing stands up to the Real; He cannot be desired or sought in His Essence. The seeker seeks and the desirer desires only knowledge (ma’rifa) of Him or witnessing of Him, and all of these are from Him; they are not He Himself” (qtd. in Chittick, The Sufi Path… 228). Moses, as a prophet, already witnessed God by tasting (thawq) and unveiling (kashf) and God spoke to him, but, he wants to see the Divine Essence, which is impossible. Therefore, he falls unconscious.

Prayer is an act conducted in the spiritual journey. Corbin highlights the act of Prayer as a reciprocal mode of interaction between God and Man as a gnostic prayer through which God yearns to be known by and in Man. God commands Man to see
Him in ourself (Koran 51:21). Ibn Arabi untiringly cites the following hadith, “I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them,” which Corbin translates with fidelity to Ibn Arabi’s thought: “[…] in order to become in them the object of my knowledge” (Alone…114). Ibn Arabi’s emphasis on the heart as the locus of God and to which God’s visibility is possible (mumkina) is in accord with the Koranic verse “For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts […]” (22:46). People who do not use their hearts in understanding are analogous to animals and even poorer than animals: “They have hearts with which they do not understand […] Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless” (Koran 7:179). There are several other similar verses that accentuate Ibn Arabi’s view of the heart as a medium of the Active Imagination (himma) by which God becomes visible to Man. In the presence of God silence becomes the language of communication with the divine within oneself. The inadequacy of language prevents the Sufis from expressing whatever is revealed to them by God, therefore, the memorable saying of Ibn al-Hasan an-Niffari (d. 965) “The broader the vision the narrower the expression” describes the seeker’s ecstasy in the barzakh. It is ineffable for the mind’s eye to see what the Eye of the Heart sees.

Although Sufis emerged in the early Islam as ascetics, they were put under the charge of heresy. Extremism emerged in the early era of Islam. Ascetics such as al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 AD) and Ibrahim Ibn Ad’ham (d. 777) were deemed heretics on the pretense of imitating Jesus and David by wearing wool. However, poverty was

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43 Among the Koranic verses that stress the importance of meditation on the Koran and on God’s theophanies and creation by the heart at the levels of spiritual and physical levels are: “Will they [humankind] then not meditate on the Qur’a’n, or there are locks on their hearts?” (47:24) and “Men who remember Allah […] and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth […]” (3:191). These verses, among others, show the importance of knowing God through His Beauty and Creativity that are manifest in the universe and in the language of the Koran as it is the Word of Allah.
the foundational principle of Sufi ascetics, “[…] al-Basri attributed to Jesus and David the austere practices which presently characterised so distinctively the Sufi ascetics, even to the wearing of wool” (A. J. Arberry 35). The Sufi ascetic movement spread from Basra and Kufa to the other parts of the Islamic world; however, Khorasan, where the plot of over-throwing the Umayyads and establishing the Abbasids, was the ascetics’ stronghold in the second half of the eighth century. The Umayyads and their supporters exploited the fact that “[…] people in Khorasan were following Buddhism, and Sufism came to the place thereafter”, so they accused the Sufi ascetics of being influenced not only like Christians but also Buddhists. As a Sufi model of austerity, Ibn Ad’ham earned his living by wandering as a gardener in Syria but “[…] his identity was discovered, and so he went out to live in the desert, where ‘he fell in with Christian anchorites, from whom he learned the true knowledge [gnosis] of God’” (Arberry 36). As he comes from Balkh, which was the center of Buddhism, Ibn Ad’ham faced the problem of being similar to Gautama Buddha in austerity, and so, accusing him of heresy intensified among the Muslims. The environment of religio-political conflicts heightened the campaign against the early generation of Sufi ascetics. However, the differences between mystic Sufis and ascetic Sufis have recently collapsed for scholars of Sufism. Nile Green observes, “For scholars writing in the 1930s, […] this interpretation presents a developmental model of history in which asceticism is not an end in itself but must mature and blossom into mysticism” (Sufism: A Global History 20). Although asceticism is the pre-stage to Sufi mysticism, the latter appears in the early centuries of Islam with Hallaj and Ibn Arabi who focus on deeper levels of Islamic philosophy of the body, the heart and the \textit{nafs} (soul). Their Sufism surged as a point of departure for gnosticism, even though an ascetical attitude to the body and self-mortification is found in their lives.
Ibn Arabi in *Fusus al-Hikam (The Bezels of Wisdom)* explains paganism and polytheism with regard to their worship of deities. He considers the multiplicity of deity for different people a result of the worshipper’s imagination of the divine. He critically unearths his own interpretation of worshipping objects and venerating them according to the worshipper’s consciousness:

[…] every worshipper serves only his passion, by which alone he is moved to worship, whether it conforms to the Sacred Law or not. The perfect gnostic is one who regards every object of worship as a manifestation of God in which He is worshipped. They call it a god, although its proper name might be stone, wood, animal, man, star, or angel. Although that might be its particular name, Divinity presents a level [of reality] that causes the worshipper to imagine that it is his object of worship. In reality, this level is the Self-manifestation of God to the consciousness of the worshipper of the object in this particular mode of manifestation. Because of this, certain people ignorantly said, *We worship them only that they might bring us nearer to God* (Koran 39:3), but calling them gods when they said, *Would be make the gods into one God, surely this is amazing.* They were not rejecting Him, but showed their amazement, being limited to a notion of multiple forms and the attribution of divinity to them. (247)

Ibn Arabi knows that there is “no compulsion in religion” according to Koran. Moreover, he does not rush to the conclusion of putting them under the charge of blasphemy or non-belief. This passage evidently shows his tolerance and open-mindedness.
4.3 Know Thy Self

In the Islamic literature, the Arabic term *nafs* stands for the self. Physically, the *nafs* is associated with appetite and desire, but spiritually it stands for the soul or the spirit as a transcendent substance. According to Sara Sviri, “In the psycho-philosophical terminology that was coined during the process of translating Greek into Arabic, *nafs* became the equivalent of *psyche* (or *anima*) and was hence understood as *soul*, essentially a subtle and transcendent substance” (“The Self and Its Transformation in Sufism” 195). The co-relation between the self (the *nafs*) and the soul (the *ruh*) is represented by the duality of the earthly and the heavenly, as the former emanates from an earthly energy whereas the latter emanates from a divine energy.\(^4^4\) In the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, God is the origin of cosmogony.

In Sufi literature, the self stands for the soul. However, the self in Koran is mentioned in three contexts: 1) the soul as “a persistent enjoiner of evil [*al-nafs al-ammarā*], except those upon which my Lord has mercy” (12:53), 2) the self-reproaching spirit [*al-nafs al-lawwama*] (75:2), and 3) the reassured soul [*al-nafs al-mutma‘inna*] (89:27). The *nafs* undergoes stages of transformation from the commanding evil soul to the self-reproaching soul. In the process of self-reproaching, the self turns out to be a reassured soul with the help of divine mercy according to the Koran. In Sufism, the soul goes through a process of initiation which is the state of being on the Sufi path towards perfection. Remarkably, self-perfection is more of a divine mercy [in God’s hands] than self-mortification, because many initiates undergo

\(^4^4\) Koran has several verses about the soul [*ruh*] or the Divine blow as a command of God. The soul belongs to God, “And they ask you (O Muhammad) about the Ruh (the Spirit); Say: ‘The Ruh comes by the command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men!)’” (85-17). “And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, “I will create a human being out of clay from an altered black mud. And when I [God] have proportioned him [Adam] and breathed into him of my soul, then fall down, prostrating yourselves to him” (15:28-9). As a Divine Self, the *ruh* does not die but becomes in union with God.
self-mortification for different purposes such as fear from hell and aspiration for paradise. Najm al-Din al-Kubra in his book *Fawih al-Jamal wa-Fawatih al-Jalal (The Perfumes of the Beauty and Openings of the Lord of Majesty)* describes the Sufi vision of the *nafs* (self) in the process of self-transformation as follows:

[…] the *nafs inciting to evil* . . . is dark. If remembrance [of God] falls on her, it becomes like a lamp shedding light in a dark house. Then she becomes *blaming*, for she sees that the house is full of polluted creatures, such as dogs, pigs, panthers, tigers, asses, oxen and elephants—all the hateful things in existence. Then she strives to chase them away [….] To do so, she needs to practice the remembrance of God and to repent continuously, till the remembrance of God overpowers them and chases them away. Then she becomes close to the *serene self*, yet she must never stop striving [….] When the divine power descends and Truth is revealed, then the *nafs* calms down. (qtd. in Sviri 208)

The telos of the mystic exceeds this self-centered goal by seeking union with the Divine out of love and not because of longing for a paradise or fear from hell. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), \(^{45}\) a prolific Muslim writer who is still celebrated in the East and the West, defines the *nafs*, “The term *nafs* has two meanings. The one relates to that entity in man in which the power of anger and the power of desire are found [….] *nafs* means the element in man that includes all the blameworthy qualities [….] The second meaning is [that of the subtle entity […] that is man’s true reality, soul (*nafs* [!]) and essence” (*Bayan Ma’na al-nafs wal-ruh wal-qalb wal- ’aql*, qtd. in Sara

\(^{45}\) Ghazali started his career by studying philosophy, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and ended it by cherishing Sufis as the real knowers of God. He wrote an appendix to his famous multi-volume work *Ihya Ulum al-Din (The Revival of Religious Sciences)* in which he admires the Sufi asceticism and gnosis of God.
As true reality of the human person, the *nafs* is considered by Sufis as the means to *mukashafat* (unveiling or uncovering) which is followed by the *tajalli* (revelation) during which the human person’s *mushahadat* (perception of God) takes place. Al Ghazali’s awareness of the difference between the inferior, instinctual *nafs* and the true *nafs* necessarily entails one’s need to cross the boundary of the lower, impulsive *nafs/ego* and move to the higher *nafs*, the true self, or the soul.

Not only Sufi mystics but also Islamic philosophers dwell upon the study of the *nafs* as a soul, which is in Sufism an image of the Divine Being. Ibn Sina (d. 1037) is one of the most acclaimed philosophers in the history of Islamic thought. To him, “The fauna and flora have their *nafs* (*sura*) or image as their self-essence and their body and organs as their matter […] the *nafs* is *sura* (an image) in terms of its locus, but it is *kamal* (perfection) in relation to the perfection of its species” (*Kitab al-Shifa* “The Metaphysics of the Healing” 7-8). In his view, the body perishes but the soul achieves perfection and walks to eternity. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) writes:

> When the body dies and decays, the substance of the soul is released from its connection with the body; and if it is perfected in knowledge, wisdom and good deeds, it is drawn towards the divine lights, the lights of the angels and of the heavenly kingdom, just as a needle is drawn towards an enormous mountain by magnetic force; the divine presence flows over it, and it achieves real tranquility, as the call comes to it from the heavenly beings: ‘Oh soul at complete rest, return to thy Lord, well pleased and well pleasing. Enter then among my
devoted servants! Enter My heaven!’ (Jam‘i al-Bada‘a 37-8, qtd. in B. N. Mandal, Global Encyclopaedia of Education 70)

The soul is perfect because it is the image of the Divine and it derives its perfection from the Divine Light (al-Noor al-Ilaahi). Ibn Sina is closer to Sufism than to any other sect of Islam. Without union with the Divine, the self (ego) remains enshrined in the perishing body and enslaved by its desires. For this perfection, of which Ibn Sina writes, to be actualized there has to be Oneness of Being. Unlike the body, the soul is basically celestial and luminous and it subsists eternally. However, perfection in Sufism can be achieved before one’s death out of a long journey of self-purification and purgation at the ascetical level and closeness to and a love of God at the internal level. The soul of the perfect Sufi is like ‘a garden amidst the flames’ of love of God which surpasses abstention, fear and longing. He or she is not a lover of paradise or a hater or fearer of hell. This divine love is reciprocal and mutual between the Sufi lover and his Beloved. The Subject-object boundaries perish as soon as perfection is achieved because the lover becomes a lover and beloved at the same time.

The experience of seeing God in Sufism inevitably demands the seer’s annihilation in God, i.e. the seer must be liberated from all senses and sensations, drown in ecstasy, lose consciousness so that the unveiling (kashf) and witnessing (mushahada) become possible. For the wayfarer to be established in the Divine Consciousness, the extinction of the false self has to happen. The Sufi ascetic Abu Said Ibn Abi Khayr tells a fable of asceticism as a path to knowledge of God, “A Bedouin was asked,” “Do you acknowledge the Lord?” He replied, “How could I not acknowledge Him who has sent me hunger, made me naked and poor, and driven me to wander from country to country?” As he spoke those words, he entered a state of
ecstasy” (qtd. in *Perfume*… 106). The Seer’s Spirit (*Ruh*) is a synonym of God, it never perishes in annihilation. The Sufi view of the One as the Mirror finds echoes in Wilber’s mystical description of the “I AM state” of the True Seer as follows:

I am not objects in nature, not feelings in the body, not thoughts in the mind, for I can Witness them all. I am that Witness—a vast, spacious, empty, clear, pure, transparent Openness that impartially notices all that arises, as a mirror spontaneously reflects all its objects….This is actually the profound discovery of … the pure divine Self, the formless Witness, causal nothingness, the vast Emptiness in which the entire world arises, stays a bit, and passes. And you are That. You are not the body, not the ego, not nature, not thoughts, not this, not that—you are a vast Emptiness, Freedom, Release, and Liberation. (*The Simple Feeling of Being*… 7)

One is not the forms or objects that one sees, one is the mirror in which those objects are seen. Self-emptying of all forms, objects, ego, and feelings is an inevitable necessity for union with the Divine which Wilber describes as a restoration of one’s Truth in pre-existence. Self-emptiness means freedom from all the established patterns of self-awareness and voyaging to a consciousness which is void of forms and objects and boundaries. This awareness is not spatio-temporal, rather, it is the “Now,” the moment, the instant.

The actualization of one’s self through union with the Divine Self is highlighted by Ibn Arabi citation of the hadith “He who knows himself knows his Lord” (Corbin 127). The impossibility of knowing God lies in one’s definition of the self as a set of objects, sensations, and titles. Philosophers of the evolution of
consciousness accentuate the importance of self-exploration anew. The human self is not limited or defined as long as it is created by the Divine blow or sigh of the Compassionate (al-Nafas al-Rahmani). The Sufis practice this exploration of the True Self (the Subject) through meditation, for which to materialize one has to be in an atmospheric solitude. God chose the desert atmosphere for His revelation and spoken words because solitude and serenity are the two qualifying conditions of the desert as a land of Divine revelation (Wahy Ilahi). The desert’s physical emptiness is the atmospheric locus of the revelation of the Emptiness of the Divine Self which is mystically fullness. If one asks one’s self “Who I am?” in the world of objects and titles, one will be defined by such set of titles and objects, thus, one will turn out to be an object. This definition of one’s self in mysticism is deemed a reduction of the self into a limited entity, hence, the self becomes alienated from God and from its True Nature. The self in Sufism is not the body or the mind but the Divine Spirit as it appears from the hadith above.

Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 AD), the Persian mystic known as the martyr of divine love, is among other Sufi masters who travelled the Sufi path of self-realization until he says, “I am the True” (Ana al-haqiq) and “Nothing is the turban but God” (ma fi-l jub illa Allah). This is a moment of divine revelation where Al Hallaj sees nothing in his turban except God. Al Hallaj’s controversial statements are paradoxical in the sense that he does not mean he is Allah in essence, but he means he is totally absorbed in Allah. Al Hallaj does not claim to have the Divine Essence, the power to create and cause death, rather, his love of God makes him obtain the Sufi awareness of absorption in God (al-tamahi fi-Allah). In one of his poems, the poet Seer of Al Hallaj goes to the extreme of stripping away his attributes by asking his friends to kill him so that only God remains in the turban, “Kill me, my faithful friends,/ For in my being
killed is my life. / Love is that you remain standing” (qtd. in Louis Massignon 85). The request made by Al Hallaj to his friends to kill him is a reflection of an intense self-awareness of the falsity of earthly existence and the object-defined self. His freedom from narrow thought is the reason for his belief in the Real Self after death, the self in the terrestrial world. Death, for Al Hallaj, is the abyss or the barzakh through which transcendence of the boundaries of the self, worldly life, and death happens. The poetry of Al Hallaj is saturated with his love of the Divine on whose way he believes that his corporeal self and its attributes stand as barriers between him and his True Self. Several Sufi saints express the same thing as Hallaj but in different ways. Hallaj has released his feeling of love for God in the following unforgettable lines:

I swear by God, sun riseth not nor setteth,

But in each breath I breathe my love for Thee […]

Nor dwell my thoughts on Thee, sadly or gladly,

But Thou art in my heart, I murmur Thee.

Nor have I mind to drink of water in thirst,

But I behold Thine image in the cup. (qtd. in Julia Ashtiany, Abbasid Belles Lettres 246)

This poem shows Hallaj’s communion and union with God at every instant of his life. Hallaj’s case among other Sufis is controversial because he used to speak in the Sufi paradoxical language which is incomprehensible to the public.

In a similar vein, “Bayazid Bistami (d. 874 AD) visited the Ka’ba three times. In the first time, he saw the Holy House. In the second time, he saw the Lord of the House. But in the third time, he saw neither the House nor its Lord,” which is the state
of God before the creation of the universe (*ama*). Bistami’s story shows how a Sufi ashiq (lover) of God is absorbed in God with the passage of time till he sees the Truth (haqîqa) of God in pre-creation of the universe—this state is called by Ibn Arabi al-hayra (bewilderment) which he puts as the core of Muhammadan Wisdom in *Fusus*. As a result of being humble with the passage of time, Sufis become like nomads in the desert. Nothing rational is required for absorption in God, as Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (d. 859), an Egyptian Sufi saint to whom the previous story is attributed, puts it, “[…] see without knowledge, without sight, without receiving any information, without observation, without description, without being veiled, without a veil. If they can be said to exist at all, they exist in God.” In order to affirm Oneness of Being, al-Misri cites the hadith, “When I love a servant, I, the Lord, am his ear so he hears by Me; I am his tongue so he speaks by Me; I am his hand so he grasps by Me” (qtd. in N. Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: Central Asia and Middle East* 148-9).

Al-Shaqiq Al-Balkhi (d. 810 AD) explains the process of one’s life in God as follows:

They become [contained] within God’s repose and mercy. Their hearts become attached to their Lord, and, when absorbed in Him, they delight in secret discourse with Him (*munajatihi*). In their hearts they are presented with His mercy and kindness for which they aspire. It is He who takes over their hearts. It is He who, in their lifetime (*fi-l-dunya*) becomes their companion, their peace of mind, their joy and the delight of their hearts. (qtd. in Sara Sviri 203)

The Heart is the locus of contact between the Sufi’s Self and the Divine. One has to lose one’s mind in order to find one’s Soul. Accordingly, the Sufi’s telos of Oneness
of Being is achieved through a long journey of purification and purgation of one’s self by crisscrossing different states and stations that end with one’s annihilation in God (al-fana fi Allah) which leads to self-perpetuation or what the Sufis call baqa (permanence) in God. A Sufi murid (initiate) has to lead the journey through the barzakh (the isthmus) which is the imaginal realm lived by murids in ecstasy (jadhb or inkhitaf). As a result, the soul dissolves into the Divine. Ibn Arabi, as al-Sheikh al-Akbar, explains the self’s journey as a journey in the barzakh. Junayd has written a book on fana titled Kitab al-Fana fi al-Mushahada (“The Book of the Annihilation in Witnessing”) where he considers the edge of fana as the main path to Oneness of Being through mushahada (witnessing). Junayd notes in Kitab al-Fana (“The Book of the Annihilation of the Self”) that union with the Real happens through the enjoyment of witnessing in ecstasy:

As for the select and the select of the select, who become alien through the strangeness of their conditions—presence for them is loss, and enjoyment of the witnessing is struggle. They have been effaced from every trace and every signification that they find in themselves or that they witness on their own. The Real has subjugated them, effaced them, annihilated them from their own attributes, so that it is the Real that works through them, on them, and for them in everything they experience. It is the Real which confirms such exigencies in and upon them through the form of its completion and perfection. (qtd. in Michael Anthony Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings 261-2)
The ideas of Junayd, Ghazali, and Bayazid with regard to annihilation as the murid’s means of communication with God spread all over the world. For them, *fana* is freedom from the self and the building block of the intimate relationship between the murid and God (love). *Fana* is the main path to perfection where the murid’s cessation of shyness leads to Oneness of Being. In the *barzakhi* state, all borders are eliminated and all doors of witnessing are opened to the murid.

### 4.3.1. The *Barzakh*

In Sufism, the darkness and the light, the spiritual and the corporeal are not perceived as opposites but a continuous hierarchy of states in the *barzakh*. Sufi ecstasy is *barzakhi*, as the self is totally absorbed in ecstasy and nothing exists in the Sufi’s heart except the One, therefore the initiate achieves perfection. According to Ibn Arabi, “There is nothing in existence but *barzakhs*, since a *barzakh* is the arrangement of one thing between two other things . . . , and existence has no edges (*atraf*).” Chittick comments on this statement as follows:

> Existence itself is a *barzakh* between Being and nothingness. In the hierarchy of worlds which makes up the cosmos, the term *barzakh* refers to an intermediate world standing between the luminous or spiritual world and the dark or corporeal world. The term is relative, like other cosmological terms, but it helps us to situate existent things in the cosmos with a bit more precision. Instead of saying that things are either spiritual or corporeal, we can now say that they may also be *barzakhi*, that is to say, neither spiritual nor corporeal but somewhere in between.
The term *barzakh* is often used to refer to the whole intermediate realm between the spiritual and the corporeal. In this sense the term is synonymous with the World of Imagination (*khayal*) or Images (*mithal*). From this perspective, there are basically three kinds of existent things: spiritual, imaginal or *barzakh*, and corporeal. The imaginal world is more real than the corporeal world, since it is situated closer to the World of Light […]. (*The Sufi Path*… 14-5)

The concept of *barzakh* occupies an outstanding position in Ibn Arabi’s hermeneutics. The *barzakh* is a world of dreams, visions, and revelations. According to Chittick, “The Book [of Koran] is a *barzakh* or isthmus between man’s intelligence and God’s knowledge of things as they are in themselves. It provides the God-given and providential means whereby man can come to know things in themselves, without the distortions of egocentrism” (*The Sufi Path*…xv-xvi). God reveals His realities to Man through the revelation of Koran to Muhammad. Ibn Arabi interprets Koran through divine openings (*futuhat rabbaniyya*) where God and the Prophet speak to him in visions or dreams.

A Sufi in ecstasy is similar to a one in a dream in terms of *mushahadat* (spiritual witnessing of God). Ibn Arabi defines the life being and the existence as dreams. Envisioning God and the prophet was the reason for him to write his more well-known works the *Fusus* and the *Futuhat*. Elizabeth Sirriyeh asserts that “[…] what the author [Ibn Arabi] cannot say on his own authority, he can support with testimony from an outside source through the narration of a dream or a vision […] asserting that it was Muhammad who transmitted to him his most famous work *Fusus* at Damascus in 1229” (149). Dreaming has its effective presence in Islamic culture.
Seeing the prophet in a dream for Muslims brings the dreamer the deepest bliss because Satan cannot take the form of the prophet in a dream. Dreaming in Sufism releases the dreamer from the distracting outer world and opens further horizons to the inner soul. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, an acclaimed contemporary Sufi master and scholar, explains the fruitful experience of dreaming from a Sufi perspective:

[…] when we sleep the outer world disappears. We are free to forget its illusions. We are free to hear the voice of our own longing as it speaks to us in our dreams, telling us the stories of our innermost self, a self we have often forgotten and disowned. When we awake the dream remains as a reminder, pointing our way along the path. It carries with it the energy of the inner world, the scent of the garden of the soul. The work then is to make the dream real: to integrate its energy into consciousness and make its story a part of our life (In the Company of Friends… 1-2).

The Sufis discuss their dreams with each other in groups and get the interpretation from their masters. The dream is a divine inspirational message to the dreamer and sometimes it is taken collectively. Dreaming and Sufism are synonymous with each other, because both are barzakhi, they penetrate worlds unfamiliar to us. Dreaming is one’s journey from the mind to the heart, “Our dreams guide us, outlining the path, pointing us deeper, giving us glimpses of the mystery He has hidden within us. The journey is endless because we are endless. It is an opening into our own infinite nature” (Vaughan-Lee 6). Attar’s Conference of Birds has a story of an Arab traveler invited by a Persian group of Sufis called Qalanders, who served him wine. The man lost his consciousness as he drank, so, the Qalanders took away all his possessions of
gold and silver. The man went back to his people empty-handed. When they asked him about his possessions, the man told them that he knew nothing except that his possessions were taken away. Then, he met the Qalanders who told him one word: “Enter.” Like a dreamer, the Arab loses his ego by drinking wine, which preexists the vine in Sufism, eliminates the separation between him and his other-worldly Self. In the story of the Arab in Persia, “Attar comments that for the secrets of love you must sacrifice everything: “You will lose what you considered to be valuable” (qtd. in Vaughan-Lee 18). The story is an allegory that depicts the drunk [Arab] as a dreamer awakened to his original soul that is stripped away from its worldly veils. Apparently, everything including dreaming in Sufism is spiritual, nothing is illusory but real.

Imagination supersedes rationalization in Sufism, but it is not to be mistaken for illusion as long as its medium is the active heart. Chittick notes that “Being is one and changeless, while the existent things never remain still for an instant. The source of this constant agitation must be sought in the relationship between God and nothingness, a relationship which is made possible by the barzakh which stands between the two.” Barzakh is the world of self-realization. According to Chittick, “The Barzakh is known by many names, one of which—“Nondelimited Imagination[…]Others include the Cloud, the Breath of the All-merciful, the Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place, the Universal Reality, Nature, and the Reality of the Perfect Man” (The Sufi Path…125). However, all the loci of God’s presence require the truth-seeker to generate the power of imagination for witnessing that presence. According to Ibn Arabi:

The Perfect Man (al-Insan al-Kamil) is a miniature of Reality; he is the microcosm, in whom are reflected all the perfect attributes of the
macrocosm. Just as the Reality of Muhammad was the creative principle of the Universe, so the Perfect Man was the cause of the Universe, being the epiphany of God’s desire to be known; for only the Perfect Man knows God, loves God, and is loved by God. (qtd. in Arberry 101).

God’s desire (shawq) to be known requires the Sufi’s taste (thawq). A Sufi’s body in the barzakh is spiritualized. The successful crossing of the barzakh makes the wayfarer what Ibn Arabi titles as the Perfect Man (saint). The Perfect Man is divinely endowed with miracles and blessings (karamat) that he bestows upon seekers.

Muslims in Africa and Asia as well as many other places around the world believe in the posthumous presence of their Sufi saints. Ahmed Ibn Alwan (d. 1266), a Yemeni disciple of Ibn Arabi, has a very strong posthumous presence among all Yemenis. People in different parts of Yemen today seek his help and blessings whenever they have problems, though this tradition is jeopardized by the escalation of extremism in the Middle East. They say, “O’ Ibn Alwan, the guardian” (ya ibn Alwan ya Hafeedh).

Another example from Smara, the spiritual capital of the Western Desert, is Sidi Ma’ Al-Ainine, the Sufi master whose zawiya is visited by many people throughout the year to seek his blessings. People in holy festivals celebrate in his zawiya, circle around his shrine, and slaughter goats and sheep as sacrifice.

Ibn Arabi’s cosmos is a single soul. It is a world where boundaries between the Mirror and the Seer blur. In other words, God is really unknown in the macrocosmic universe without the imaginal realm (barzakh) lived by the microcosmic

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46 Al-Zawiya (pl. al-zawaya) is an Arabic term that refers to a Sufi lodge whose main function is providing religious teachings and learning run by its Sufi masters and their murids (disciples). In other words, it is a religious/Sufi school, khanaqah circle, or ribat where disciples gather around their teacher for spiritual initiation and character reformation.
cause (man). Therefore, Ibn Arabi paradoxically defines God in this respect as “God created in the faith” (qtd. in Corbin 197), i.e. God discloses Himself to the Sufis in epiphanies and theophanies (mazahir and tajalliyat). Scholars of Ibn Arabi, namely Chittick, focus on terms used by Ibn Arabi that are related to ‘tartib alalam (the hierarchy of the cosmos)’ and ‘maratib al-wujud (the ontological levels of the universe)’ in terms of Divine Presence in proportion of God’s Names and Attributes. Every creature manifests a certain degree of divine theophanies in the universe. The role of a Sufi gnostic like Ibn Arabi is to delve into ghayb (the unknown world) to explore the secrets of divine manifestations. The Sufi knowledge of God leads to union with Him, and for this to happen there are three worlds of existence that should be well-known to the seeker of such knowledge—the known world and the unknown world—both of which are permeated by barzakh (the intermediate world). In the light of Ibn Arabi’s exegesis, Adonis considers the barzakh as the locus of the divine images and revelations, “Universal truth, according to Ibn Arabi, consists of three stages, the highest being that of abstractive or intellectual faculties, the lowest that of feelings and senses; in between the two is an intermediate stage, which combines and links these two stages and which is rational and sensory at the same time. This is the stage of imagination and fantasy” (61). To be a citizen of barzakh, the murid has to be annihilated in God so that his spiritual experience of seeing the unseen, the non-existent, and the unintelligible takes place. The Sufi perceives the image-object (al-mutakhayyal) with the Eye of Imagination. Perception of the image-object ordains that the murid has to experience fana’.

Ibn Arabi’s worldview of imagination is treated in terms of its psycho-cosmic function, i.e. what Corbin takes as the two aspects of its function: “the cosmogonic and the theogonic, [the ‘theogony’ of the divine Names]” (216). However, it is
important to mention that Corbin’s aim is to increase illumination rather than relating imagination to a *creatio ex nihlo* or the Neoplatonic idea of emanation as far as the matter of genesis is concerned. Imagination, in Corbin’s words, is dealt with as a process of increasing illumination, gradually raising the possibilities eternally latent in the original Divine Being to a state of luminescence. Simply, imagination in its cosmic function is defined as “Presence” or “Imaginative Dignity” (*Hadrat al-khayal*). To make Ibn Arabi’s perspective on the imagination intelligible, Corbin cites the example of Angel Gabriel’s appearance to Muhammad “[…] in the form of Dahya al-Kalbi, an Arab youth known for his beauty, the images seen in mirrors, which were neither objects nor abstract ideas—these are intermediary realities” (*Alone…* 217).

However, the existence of objects on Earth is just like existence of objects in a mirror—they appear in the mirror, but they are not really in it. Objects are spatiotemporal in the sense that they come and go like clouds. This is a simple interpretation of the Sufi maxim of Oneness of Being, “There is nothing in *wujud* but He”⁴⁷ (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure…* 15). Every existence is not real save His. Based on this, Corbin calls the science of imagination the science of mirrors. The mystic cosmology is summarized by Corbin, “[…] though forms appear in mirrors, they are not in the mirrors. Imagination, hence, is ‘the pillar (*rukn*) of true knowledge, the knowledge that is gnosis (*ma’rifah*)” (219).

### 4.4 Ibn Arabi

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ali b. Muhammad Ibn al-Arabi al-Tai al-Hatimi, commonly known as Ibn Arabi, is one of the most influential Sufis in the Islamic

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⁴⁷ *La mawjud illa Hu.*
world. Born on the 17th of the blessed month of Ramadan 560/28th of July 1164 AD in Murcia (south-eastern Spain), Ibn Arabi came from a noble Arab family while his mother is believed to have been of Berber stock. Educationally, Ibn Arabi was well-versed in numerous subjects ranging from the Islamic sciences—Koran and exegesis, hadith, Islamic law, theology, philosophy, and Sufism. He is well-known for his esoteric approach to knowledge irrespective of any dogmatic constrictions. The writings of Ibn Arabi came out of his lived experience. Most of his early life was studentship under several Gnostics. He never transcended his studentship until the age of thirty-five when he became a phenomenal spiritual master.

As a prolific Sufi master, Ibn Arabi contributed enormously to Islamic philosophy that has been influential till the present. The source of his writings is mainly whatever was rendered from God and the Prophet Mohammad to him either in vision or dream. In his encyclopedia of esoteric knowledge *Meccan Revelations* (*Futuhat*), Ibn Arabi himself described his journey of writing as follows:

In what I have written, I have never had a set purpose, as other writers. Flashes of divine inspiration used to come upon me and almost overwhelm me, so that I could only put them from my mind by committing to paper what they revealed to me. If my works evince any form of composition, that form was unintentional. Some works I wrote at the command of God, sent to me in sleep or through a mystical revelation... My heart clings to the door of the Divine Presence, waiting mindfully for what comes when the door is opened. My heart is poor and needy, empty of every knowledge. When something appears to the heart from behind that curtain, the heart hurries to obey
and sets it down in keeping with the prescribed limits. (*Sufis of Andalusia…* 48)

Ibn Arabi continues to influence thinkers of the East and The West today owing to the synthetic nature of his ideas, a syncretism that is the hallmark of Oneness of Being. As it seems from his theory, religious diversity that has resulted in many problems everywhere is not an issue as long as the unity of existence is realized. Another great book written by Ibn Arabi is *Fusus al-Hikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*). *Futuhat* and *Fusus* are the most well-known and studied books that received a great deal of criticism in the history of Islamic thought in particular and the evolution of consciousness in particular.

4.4.1. Ibn Arabi’s View of Being

According to a hadith, God was in a state of *ama* (cloud) below Him emptiness and above Him emptiness. Ibn Arabi’s reading of this hadith shows that eternality is synonymous with God and temporality is synonymous with anything engendered or created:

The Cloud is that which we have mentioned as eternal in the eternal and temporally originated in the temporally originated. This is like your words, or identical with your words, concerning Being/existence.

48 This hadith, concerning the Prophet’s response to the question “Where was our Lord before He created the creation?”: “He was in a Cloud (*ama’*), without air above it and without air below it, and He created His Throne upon the Water.” (This is a sound hadith (*حديث صحيح*) is found in the collections of Ibn Maja, Tirmidhi and Ahmad b. Hanbal.)
When you attribute it to the Real, you say it is Eternal, but when you attribute it to creation, you say that it is temporally originated. So the Cloud inasmuch as it is a description of the Real is a divine description, but inasmuch as it is a description of the cosmos it is an engendered description. (qtd. in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*… 137)

To know existence is to know non-existence. In Arabic, *wujud*’s antonym is *adam* (nonexistence). According to Chittick, “Nonexistence is an inherent, essential property of the cosmos and all things, given that the cosmos is, in Ibn Arabi’s most succinct expression, ‘He/not He,’ both the same as *wujud* and other than *wujud* at one and the same time.” Since, as the Arabic proverb has it, “Things become distinct through their opposites,’ to understand *wujud* we need to understand nonexistence” (Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*… 29). Entities or existences other than God’s are no more than manifestations of His names and attributes, as their *wujud* comes from God. Hence, entities really exist in non-existence or nothingness. Only in the union with divine existence creatures obtain real existence. This is what Ibn Arabi simply means by nothing truly exists but God. The dependency of creatures on God is their trait of zero-existence. Only when God is added to the zero, the zero has an existential value. According to Chittick, “He [God] creates things from ‘nothingness’ only in the sense that they are not found in the cosmos before… But even when they come to be found, they remain a nothingness in themselves, because their *wujud* is not their own” (*Self-Disclosure*… 30). In this way, the so-called nothingness of human existence or *creatio ex nihilo* is baseless, because it is in perpetual process, i.e. transformation from *wujud* of dust to *wujud* of Adam, not from non-existence to existence.
4.4.2 Ibn Arabi’s School of Oneness of Being

The world of Ibn Arabi is non-dual. His language always reflects this event. Technically, wuhdat al-wujud consists of two words—wuhda and wujud—wuhda simply means in Arabic that all become as wahid “one.” In the course of the development of Islamic thought we come across phrases such as “God is One,” “There is nothing in wujud but God,” which altogether bring us closer to Ibn Arabi’s idea of Oneness of Being. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali describes the fruit of the spiritual ascent of Sufi masters as follows: “They see through direct witnessing that there is nothing in wujud but God and that All things are perishing except His face [28:88]” However, we are concerned about Ibn Arabi’s idea of wuhdat al-wujud. More importantly, Ibn Arabi as a Sufi gnostic differs from “the exoteric scholars, the jurists or “knowers of formalities” (ulama al-rasum) as he calls them—in other words, the learned class of Muslims in the ordinary sense of the term.

The wahdat al-wujud school of Sufism is synonymous with Ibn Arabi. The central doctrine of this school is that God is Absolute Existence (al-wujud al-mutlaq). There is a clear-cut evidence of Ibn Arabi’s non-pantheism. He writes in Futuhat (Ch. 559), “Whoever believes in hulul (Incarnate God), then he is ma’lul (diseased) […] and no one speaks of ittihad (oneness of being) except ahl al-ilhad (atheists).” Ibn Arabi explicates the nature of the anthropos (human nature) and the cosmological scheme. It is important to show in what ways Ibn Arabi interprets the idea of God’s manifestation in creatures. The cosmos (alam) is in Islamic terminology ma siwa Allah (the other-than-God). Ibn Arabi explains, “[…] the manifest complexity and

49 The development of these terms in Islamic thought before and after Ibn Arabi is explained in Chittick’s book titled In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought, (71-72). Chittick traces the origins of the terms in Islamic thought and the way they are developed and explained by Islamic thinkers the most well-known of whom are Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, who discusses them in his works Mishkat Al-Anwar (The Niche for Lights) and The Revival of Religious Sciences.
multiplicity of the Cosmos conceals the all-pervading reality of God […] just as God is implicitly present in cosmic creation, so is creation implicitly and essentially present in God” (The Bezels… 90). Oneness of Being, for Ibn Arabi, is mutual penetration and permeation (takhallul) of the Divine Attributes and Names in the Cosmos and vice versa. He puts the equation of Being both in divinis and in aeternis, “[in divinis] in knowing the Cosmos, God is knowing Himself, and that in knowing God, we as creatures know ourselves in essence. Thus, in aeternis, we are the latent and essential content of His knowledge of Himself, while, in time and space, He is the all-permeating substance and reality of which we are but apparent facets” (The Bezels…91). The timeless and placeless Existence permeates the spatiotemporal existence.

All beings and creatures are equal in terms of being theophanies; therefore, animals and other beings have their own rights (huquq) in the same way that humans do. The keystone to Ibn Arabi’s cosmological scheme is the breath of the All-Merciful by which God blows his spirit (ruh) in order to give life to all beings through His command kun (Be): “His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, “Be,” and it is” (Koran 36:82). Thus, life is a divine energy by which “the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence” (Koran 2: 255) permeates all creatures through His Names and Attributes. Ibn Arabi negates the duality of the animate and the inanimate, “[…] nothing can emerge from Him but living things. So, all the cosmos is alive, for indeed the nonexistence of life, or the existence of something in the cosmos that is not alive, has no divine support, but every contingent thing must

50 The following Koranic verse shows how every aspect of existence is living and animate including heavens, the earth, and the mountains, “Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant” (33-72). This verse shows the validity of Ibn Arabi’s hermeneutics of Oneness of Being which is based on Koran.
have a support. So, what you consider to be inanimate is in fact alive” (*Futuhat*, Vol. 3: 324). God’s mercy is the source of life, “My mercy embraces everything” (*Koran* 6: 156), which means, as for Ibn Arabi, “He has mercy on the cosmos through life, for life is the sphere of the mercy that embraces everything” (*Futuhat*, Vol. 2: 107). The personhood of fauna, flora, and other elements of nature stems from the *hayawan* (animals and living things) capable of glorifying God, “All are pervaded by life, so they speak the praise of their Creator from whence we do not hear. God teaches them things through their innate disposition (*fitra*) from whence we do not know. So there remains nothing wet or dry, hot or cold, inanimate, plant, or animal, that does not glorify God with a tongue specific to its kind” (*Futuhat* Vol. 2: 678). Ibn Arabi’s consideration of animals as equal to humans in terms of knowing and glorifying God is Koranic, “The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting […]” (17:44). All worlds are communities that have senses and faculties as humans but humans do not understand their communication. God understands them, however. I would like to refer to the eco-Sufism of Ibn Arabi by showing the following nature-wise and animal-friendly passages from the *Futuhat*:

Know that even though God has subjected and abased the dumb beasts to man, you should not be heedless of the fact that you are subjected to them. You look to their well-being by watering and feeding them, by cleaning their places, by coming into contact with dung and waste because of them, and by protecting them from the heat and cold that harm them. This and similar things are because the Real has subjected you to them and has placed need for them in your soul [...]. By God,
when the dumb beasts have more independence than you, how can it occur to you that you are superior to them? Very true are the words of him who said, “No man will be destroyed if he knows his own worth.” (Vol. 3: 490)

Eco-Sufism is similar to eco-paganism as long as the inanimate beings are ensouled and animated. The Tuareg are ecological bedouins as it appears from al-Koni’s cosmology. They sanctify the waddan as the locus of God’s presence. They do not hunt the waddan. Al-Koni’s inspiration from Ibn Arabi’s eco-Sufism is expressed through the characters’ speeches and actions throughout the novels under study.

In the worldview of Ibn Arabi, all existing forms are mortal and annihilative, whereas God is the only Permanent. That is, God is the prequel and the sequel, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. In his summary of The Meccan Revelations Ibn Arabi explains the nature of Oneness of Being in the following formula:

God in His Essence is independent of the world and its inhabitants. But His infinite Names require that each have a locus of manifestation, so that the effect of that Name will appear in that locus, and the Named – which is the Essence – will reveal Itself in that locus to him who professes the divine Unity. For example, “the Merciful”, “the Nourisher”, and “the Vanquisher” are each a Name of God, and their manifestation takes place through the merciful and the object of mercy, the Nourisher and the nourished, and the vanquisher and the vanquished […] Therefore the reason for the manifestation of all particular beings is the demand of the Names of God. And all of the
Names are under the sway of the Name “Allah”, which encompasses and comprehends them. (40-41)

To summarize, the Sufi world is a non-dual world. It is not a sensory or rational world but a world of imagination and barzakh, a world between existence and non-existence, a world operating through the heart not the mind, a world that is penetrated by spiritualizing one’s self so as to be in union with the Divine, and a world through which one’s self experiences redemption of its True Nature of Being through isolation and liberation from every existence and becoming the Vast Emptiness of God. Religiously, Sufism goes beyond the established norms, for it is an exploration of the unknowable and the hidden treasures of the Divine. Sufism is a spiritual journey from the sensory to the supersensory, from the physical to the metaphysical, and from the real to the imaginal. The Sufi path is an amalgam of passion and practicality intertwined with suffering and ecstasy. Annihilation for the Sufis is redemption of the Self in its cloudy state (ama) that precedes the existence of Adam. The Sufi journey in the barzakh is the soul’s awakening to its divine nature, a journey to Oneness, to the Origin. Jala ad-Din al-Rumi (d. 1273), one of the greatest Sufi masters in the history of Sufism, invites us to join in the Sufi prayer, “Each moment from all sides rushes to us/ The summons to Love./ Do you want to come with us?/ This is not the time to stay at home/ But to go out and give yourself to the garden” (qtd. in Harvey, Light Upon Light: Inspirations from Rumi 48).

The Sufi’s journey is a return to the Origin, to the True soul, and the Perfect Man who is described by Dhu al-Nun al-Masri, a great early Sufi sheikh, as “[…] one who is as he was before he was as he was” (qtd. in Perfume… 3). The Sufi journey is a return to the state of ama (cloud) whose locus is emptiness. Thus, a Sufi wayfarer
starts the journey with initiation followed by annihilation towards perfection which is permanence in God. Today, Sufis untiringly sing the paradoxical maxim in remembrance (dhikr) sessions: “In my annihilation is my permanence and in my permanence is my annihilation.”\textsuperscript{51} The Sufi journey is not to be mistaken as vertical travel where ascending and descending might take place. Rather, it is a spiritual journey towards one’s Soul as it appears in Rumi, “Before any garden or grape or wine existed/ Our soul was drunk an eternal wine. In the Baghdad of Eternity, we all proclaimed ecstatically: “I am the Supreme Reality!” (qtd. in \textit{Light Upon Light... 53}). Mystically, walking to eternity and in eternity is a horizontal act of consciousness. It is the \textit{alone’s} endless walk in an ocean without shore, the Alone.

\textsuperscript{51} (Fafi fana’ee baqa’ee wa fi baqa’ee fana’ee). I have visited Sufi zawiyas, schools, and centers in Morocco, Egypt, Yemen, and India where I noticed that this is a line of celebrity among the Sufis especially in festivals and mawlids. This lyrical maxim shows the Sufi desire for journeying in God and their taste of the ecstatic experience.