

Religious Ecstasy in Classical Sufism

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The purpose of this essay is to shed some light on the phenomenon of religious ecstasy as met with in Islamic mysticism and there particularly during its classical period; by the expression “classical Sufism” I do not intend to imply any evaluation but use the phrase solely as a term of convenience to cover the period of Sufi history from about 850 A.D. until *circa* 1100 A.D. (cf. Meier 1971, 551 and 567 sq.), that is, until the incipient upsurge of the conventual orders.

I have only been able to find one previous independent study of religious ecstasy in Islamic mysticism (Gardet 1950).¹ But since this study is based primarily on secondary material *about* the ecstasy of the Sufis,² it does not succeed in conveying to the reader any “inside” information from the Sufi ecstatic’s world of experience.

This is, therefore, a particularly stimulating task, although it is not without some hesitation that I commit myself to it, for—as Tor Andræ has pointed out in his sympathetic study of some central features in the spiritual climate of early Islamic mysticism—“the Sufi mystics are particularly reticent in their descriptions of ecstasy and offer only brief hints about the wonderful things they have beheld and experienced in the moments of rapture” (Andræ 1981, 132/1980, 106).

Fortunately some new material has been discovered whilst other material has been made more accessible since Andræ’s study was published thirty-five years ago, followed by Gardet’s account three years later. In addition, I am particularly favoured in being able to use a unique little treatise—unique both in its contents, concerning the experiential world of the ecstatic, and in its circulation, for it is hitherto only known to have been preserved in one manuscript; but more of this unique *document humain* later.

¹ The material amassed by Ernst Arbman on Sufi ecstasy in volume two (Arbman 1968, 480–515) of his opulent three-volume work *Ecstasy or Religious Trance in the Experiential Point of View* is too hastily and inclusively adopted from translations and secondary literature by European orientalisists to be regarded as an independent study of Sufi ecstasy.

² It consists chiefly of a translation of a chapter entitled “*Wağd*” (“Ecstasy”) in the well-known Sufi manual *Kitāb at-ta’arruf* by al-Kalābāḏī (d. 995) (Al-Kalābāḏī ed. 1934, 82–83) and of a translation of a poem by al-Ḥallāḡ (d. 922) (Al-Ḥallāḡ ed. 1931, 54–55). It is largely on this paper by Louis Gardet that the chapter “*Extase*” in Anawati-Gardet (1960) and Gardet’s article in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Gardet 1961) are based.

Firstly, some reflections on the concept of “religious ecstasy” in general. What is meant by “religious ecstasy” as a concept in *Religionswissenschaft*? I myself felt the necessity of establishing a certain clarity about the scope of “religious ecstasy” before plunging into the study of the texts, especially since the Greek word *ékstásis* is not to be found in the Arabic word hoard, neither by itself nor in any translated equivalent. Had that been the case, such a linguistic correspondence might then in the Sufi texts have functioned as a first signal of the presence of the phenomenon, which is the case with many other Sufi mystic categories which, via Syriac, often derive from Greek.³

To judge from the literature of *Religionswissenschaft*, the concept of “religious ecstasy” does not seem to have undergone any more exhaustive analysis of meaning or historical description of contents,⁴ a fact which might suggest the existence of a consensus regarding the meaning of this concept. It is also possible, however, that such an analysis of meaning and description of contents will prove necessary when the summary of this symposium is to be made and an inventory of the contents of “religious ecstasy” becomes relevant.

In expectancy of such an inventory, I have contented myself with discovering how this concept is *actually* used in the general handbook literature of *Religionswissenschaft*. For this purpose I have chosen to consult some representative encyclopedias in the field.⁵ All these works, with a span of some sixty years, are largely unanimous in their descriptions of what is characteristic of religious ecstasy. These descriptions may be summed up under the following four points:

1. Ecstasy denotes a state in which the ecstatic is aware of being outside himself (RGG; DCR; DS), or in an abnormal state of consciousness (ERE;

³ As, for instance, *gnōsis* which, via the Syriac *īdū' tā*, reoccurs with the Sufis in the Arabic form *mā'rifa*; *thēoria* which, via the Syriac *teūrīā*, has sprung roots with the Sufis in its Arabic equivalent *mušāhada*; or *anámñēsis* which, via the Syriac *dākrānā* or *'uhdānā*, is easily recognizable as *dīkr* in the Sufi authors, etc.

⁴ Thus Ernst Arbman, in his *opus magnum* on ecstasy referred to in note 1, has not, for example, devoted any analysis of length to the definition of ecstasy or the concept thereof.

⁵ Viz. 1) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ERE) from 1912 with W. R. Inge as author of the article (ERE 1912, V 157–159), 2) *An Encyclopaedia of Religion* (ER) from

1945 with R. W. Frank as author of the article (ER 1945, 243), 3) *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG) from 1958 with A. Schimmel as author of the article (RGG 1958, II 410–412), 4) *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (DCR) from 1970 with S. G. F. Brandon as author of the article (DCR 1970, 253). I have also compared with 5) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ODCC) from 1958 with an unsigned article (ODCC 1958, 437) and with 6) *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (DS) from 1961 with H. Gratton and O. Leroy as authors of articles (DS 1961, IV 2171–2186) since these more theologically oriented encyclopedias also include common material from *Religionswissenschaft*.

ER; ODCC)—that is, what recent psychology classifies as *Out-of-Body-Experiences* (Grof 1976, 186 sqq.) and generally as *Altered States of Consciousness* (Ornstein 1977, 81 sq.).

2. Ecstasy produces a changed or inhibited reaction to external stimuli (ERE; ER; RGG; DCR; ODCC; DS), inability to experience pain (ERE), passivity along with an intensive joy (ER), a drop in breathing and circulation to a minimum whereby the ecstatic state may exhibit an external resemblance to sleep (RGG); uncontrollable movements may also occur (RGG).

3. Ecstasy is a more or less extreme state of mono-ideism (ERE; ER; RGG) and may entail the cessation of the normally experienced flow of time as linear (RGG).

4. The ecstatic state raises the subject to a higher noetic sphere of consciousness than the common one and allows the subject insights into divine or religious truth, although they may remain inexpressible by way of normal, discursive language (ERE; ER; RGG; ODCC).

Furthermore, experience of levitation may also occur in connection with the ecstatic state (RGG); also the duration of the ecstasy may vary considerably (ERE; RGG).

The neurophysiological and psychological correlates that may possibly be related to the above mentioned manifestations of religious ecstasy I refer to the religio-psychological department for explication.⁶ I merely point out that the concept of “religious ecstasy” covers a host of phenomena for which it seems to function as a generic term and that, in the Sufi texts, it is one or several of these phenomena which should indicate the presence of religious ecstasy.

Not unexpectedly, since ecstasy evidently is related to universal categories of experience, I have also come across reports of these phenomena in the Sufi texts. In the Sufi vocabulary there is even a rather differentiated terminology concerning these ecstatic experiences or states; whether different descriptions of one and the same experience are involved or whether the terms actually describe different experiences is a question that we must set aside for the present. There are, however, Sufis expressing the opinion that these different states of mind are based on one single experience in spite of the difference in terms (Al-Kalābāḍī ed. 1934, 96).

A generic term for these experiences or states is not to be found in the Sufi terminology however, so the problem of which of these phenomena must be present in order for ecstasy to be evidenced—or which of them

⁶ In particular, the research findings detailed in this context should be observed in this context (Grof 1976, 104 sqq. and 154 sqq.)

would be sufficient— does not therefore arise for the Sufis. So instead of speaking of religious ecstasy in general, they either refer to the single specific terms in question or else use the plural of one of the words employed to designate one of the terms we include in “religious ecstasy”. They thus speak of “ecstasies”, *mawāğīd* from the singular form *wağd*⁷—if one should at all attempt a translation of this plural. This plural is a genuine Sufi construction and does not otherwise seem to occur in the Arabic language, except as a later borrowing.

As-Sarrāğ (d. 988), author of the oldest known Sufi handbook, employs the plural *mawāğīd* a couple of times (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 296 and 306) and so does al-Kalābādī a couple of years later (Al-Kalābādī ed. 1934, 99), but it is not—as far as I can see—until al-Quşayrī about a hundred years later that the plural *mawāğīd* receives a definition. “*Mawāğīd*,” he writes, “are the fruits of the litanies (*tumrāt al-awrād*),” respectively, he continues, “the results of ‘clashes’ (*nata’iğ al-munāzalāt*)” (Al-Quşayrī, ed. 1972–74, 217).

In the first definition of *mawāğīd* as “the fruits of the litanies” al-Quşayrī is most probably referring to the *dīkr*-litanies, an assumption that is corroborated by a text from as-Sarrāğ that reads: “One day the forceful ecstasies [that occur] during the intensive *dīkr*-litanies (*al-ađkār al-qawīya*) were mentioned in the presence of Sarī as-Saqāṭī [. . .] ‘Yes,’ said Sarī, ‘his (the mystic’s) face were hit by the sword he would not sense it’ ” (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 306). *Dīkr* we may briefly define as the act of calling God to remembrance verbally and/or mentally (*bi’l-lisān/bi’l-qalb*) through a prayer-formula or a formula of praise (*dīkr*, pl. *ađkār* or *wird*, pl. *awrād*); in Arabic, *dīkr* can imply either the verb or the noun.

As to the second definition of *mawāğīd* as “the results of the ‘clashes’”, the word “clash” here mirrors the fundamental Sufī view of the encounter between God and man as a highly dynamic one. This fundamental view runs through most definitions of the singular *wağd* which is usually translated by our “ecstasy”. “*Wağd*,” states al-Quşayrī, “is what your heart meets with and what comes upon you without [your] intention or [your] securing [it]” (Al-Quşayrī ed. 1972–74, 217).

In descriptions of this encounter, the following antithetical pairs of concepts are frequently recurrent: “closeness (*qurb*) / distance (*bu’đ*)”, “presence (*huđūr*) / absence (*ğayba*)”, “attacking (*huğūm*) / vanishing (*dahāb*)”, “ecstasy (*wağd*) / loss [of ecstasy] (*faqd*)”, “perplexity (*dahşā*) / joyous rapture (*ğarab*)”, “drunkenness (*sukr*) / sobriety (*şahw*)”, “disappearance (*fanā*) / staying (*baqā*)”.

⁷ So, for example, al-Ḥallāğ in his poem *Mawāğīdu ḥaqqin* (Al-Ḥallāğ ed. 1931, 54) as an early instance of this usage.

Most of these words, also familiar from the general literature of *Religionswissenschaft* dealing with mysticism, are registered in the earliest Sufi manuals as technical terms, as for example in the above mentioned work by as-Sarrāğ (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 333 sqq.), where they are described or defined in a way showing that they express phenomena within the ecstatic category of experience.

But instead of presenting these definitions and descriptions one by one and illustrating them with suitable anecdotal material—interesting and valuable as this might be—it now seems fitting to return to the little treatise I mentioned at the beginning. The work concerned is a small tractate entitled *Kitāb a ṣ-ṣafā*⁸ and attributed to al-Ḥarrāz. Al-Ḥarrāz died in 898 A.D. and thus lived about a hundred years before as-Sarrāğ, author of one of the earliest Sufi manuals.

This short piece of writing is particularly interesting from two points of view, besides the history of its transmission—it has survived in only one known manuscript according to its editor (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 16): firstly, it is a quite rare original document demonstrating the presence of religious ecstasy in the world of Islamic spirituality; secondly, it is notable how the speaker in this text wrestles with the difficulties of expressing, through a literary medium, the experiences and states of mind that the ecstatic encounter with God has provided. Furthermore, this treatise also presents us with an exquisite sample of how the technical vocabulary of Islamic mysticism grows forth from an immediate personal experience, tentatively formulated in a literary form, out of which certain key-words have crystallized into so-called *iṣṭilāḥāt* or technical terms; to enter upon problems connected with this process, however, would bring us too far afield.

This direct and unelaborated language, so characteristic of most first-hand reports of intensive personal experiences, also makes it difficult to provide an adequate translation, besides the purely formal deficiencies of the text in question. I therefore ask for indulgence in respect to the translations to follow, as well as for possible misconceptions of the intended meaning of the original text,⁹ for I shall now let al-Ḥarrāz speak mainly for himself for a while. I shall only complement his words with necessary explanations and commentaries and supplement them with the Arabic words that have later become incorporated into the standard Sufi vocabu-

⁸ I read *ṣafā*² with the editor of the text (Al-Ḥarrāz 1967, 22; cf. also the facsimile of the title on page 25 of op. cit.), whereas Fuad Sezgin reads *ṣifāt* (Sezgin 1968, 646) as does Paul Nwyia (Nwyia 1970, 252).

⁹ I am very much indebted to the pioneer

translation of this text by the late Paul Nwyia in his work *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (Nwyia 1970, 256–267) for my own translations from this primitive text. In some cases, however, I deviate from Nwyia's interpretations (cf., e.g., notes 11 and 15).

lary concerning ecstatic experiences and states; it is of course beyond the scope and purpose of this essay to offer a requisite philological and contextual analysis of the writing in question, the aim of the present essay being primarily that of bringing one aspect of Sufi experience—the ecstatic—within the wider orbit of general religious experience and its psychology.

This treatise—which is formally constructed as a dialogue between al-Ḥarrāz and an anonymous seeker—commences with an account of four different ways of responding to God’s calling. The first two concern that of the people of the world, the latter two that of the people of God. Let us immediately proceed to the response of the people of God.

While both categories belonging to the people of God choose God rather than the world—even to the extent that the latter is legitimate—yet the majority of those belonging to God miss the point of their choice because—according to al-Ḥarrāz—they are more occupied with the spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) leading to God than with God himself. From those remaining unaffected by this spiritual gluttony, “God selects them for himself and shows them the greatness of His kingdom in order thereby to subject them to a veritable [spiritual] training, so that they can attack His majesty” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 22).

The expression “attack His majesty” (*al-huḡūm ‘alā ‘aẓmatihī*) is not arbitrarily chosen by al-Ḥarrāz but results from his reading of Sura 6:75 about Abraham. “Thus,” this verse reads, “we (God) let Abraham behold the kingdom of the heavens and the earth in order that he should belong to the convinced ones.” This verse al-Ḥarrāz comments in the following way: “He let Abraham behold this in order that he might be able to attack God’s nearness and His majesty” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 22).¹⁰

“Attack God’s nearness”—with these words al-Ḥarrāz clearly declares the Sufi point of departure for the encounter with God as a spiritual combat on the part of the mystic. We thus find here a fairly early attempt at the definition of *mawāḡīd*—ecstasies—subsequently given by al-Quṣayrī as “the results of the ‘clashes’ ” (cf. supra p. 154).

It is worth while noting that al-Ḥarrāz’ use of the rather strong verb “attack” (*huḡūm*)—with its primary association of a hostile and capricious assault—in order to illustrate the active encounter of the mystic with God already occurs in the earliest Sufi handbooks as a technical term *but* in a weaker and more passive sense (As-Sarrāḡ ed. 1963, 341 and Al-Quṣayrī ed.

¹⁰ This exegesis by al-Ḥarrāz is also literally rendered in as-Sulamī’s (d. 1022) collection of Sufi Koran commentaries, his *Ḥaqā’ iq at-tafsīr*, (Ms. Br. Lib. Or. 9433, fol. 62 a); this

circumstance may thus also serve as indirect proof of the genuineness of the authorship of the tractate in question.

1972–74, 251, where its definition is almost synonymous with that of *wağd* translated above on page 154). In addition, the object of the “attack”—nearness (*qurb*)—has become part of the standard Sufi terminology (Al-Kalābādī ed. 1934, 77).

Admonished by his anonymous interlocutor, al-Ḥarrāz now sets out to describe the first spiritual station characteristic of those possessing the spiritual stations of nearness to God, and he begins with: *wağd*—ecstasy! The first stage of *wağd* he describes as “concentration of intention (*hamm*) by way of intensive [self-]observation (*murāqaba*), calmness of the limbs through rest, drawing close to God together with little variation in the notions of contemplation (*ḥaṭarāt al-muṣāhada*), and with few movements when experiencing the first flashings of the ascending [sun-]light (*bi’dawq ṭawāli’ al-muṭāla’ a*),¹¹ fleeing into solitude (*uzla*), separation (*infirād*), and loneliness (*waḥda*) [. . .] and seeking rest with Him after the confusion and the multitude of means [employed] in the search of obtainment, and becoming happy with Him and finding intimacy with His word [from Sura 7: 157] ‘He lifted their burden from them’ [. . .]” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 23).

From a psychological point of view, one phrase above all in this description might arouse particular interest, viz. “when experiencing the first flashings of the ascending [sun-] light”. The expression “first flashings” (*ṭawāli’*) is listed in the technical vocabulary of the Sufis and it will thus be profitable to turn directly to as-Sarrāğ for illumination of this term. “The first flashings (*at-ṭawāli’*),” he explains, “are the lights of the realization of God’s unconditional unity (*anwār at-tawḥīd*) which shine on the hearts of the gnostics (*al-‘arīfūn*) through their radiation and which through the power of their brightness calm what there is of light in the hearts, just like the ascending sun. When she has arisen, the brightness of the stars disappears from the onlookers as a result of the power of the sun’s light in spite of the stars remaining in their places” (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 345).

But al-Ḥarrāz’ friend is not content with this and asks him to describe a spiritual station even better than this first one, so al-Ḥarrāz proceeds to the description of the next spiritual station as: “Stupefaction (*dahṣa*) from the ominous impressions (*tawāriq*) of awe, and bewilderment from continuous exaltation [of God]; as a sincere yearning and as a contentment due to purity of union (*ittiṣāl*), as a consumption of much food without greed as a

¹¹ The original reads ذوق المطالعة بطوالح (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 23) but in order to obtain a meaningful rendering I suggest we read بذوق طوالح المطالعة as a cor-

rection of an unhappy reversal of order. Nwyia, however, follows the original reading in this case and translates with: “[. . .] ni trop se laisser mouvoir par les premiers éclairs de la connaissance gustative” (Nwyia 1970, 259).

result of being passionately in love, and as an overwhelming wisdom. Most strong gnostics (*ʿarifūn*), when experiencing the realities of nearness, start screaming and become stupefied, for they become wild [when they realize] that He is looking at them in various ways until He lets His veil fall over them and shades them in His bosom and lets them enter behind curtains illuminated with His light [. . .] From here they return with splendid marks of honour, not knowing what they have arrived at, for they are stupefied in this spiritual station. When they awaken from their stupefaction they become perplexed over what they have arrived at with [God's] permission; but what they conceal is greater yet" (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 23).

After this informative report, in which most of the criteria of ecstasy offered by *Religionswissenschaft* are easily recognizable, al-Ḥarrāz offers an account, no less interesting from the psychological point of view, about the ecstatic's situation after returning from his ecstatic state.

"You should know," al-Ḥarrāz confides in his friend, "that most of the weeping of the aspirants, their confusion, their screaming, and their movements are the result of grief following upon the spiritual stations [they have experienced] [. . .] And these in their turn are the result of the ascending lights [of the spiritual sun] (*mutālaʿāt*) due to nearness [to God], for they have beheld Him whom they have not [previously] beheld and they have heard the speech of God Most High that has not [hitherto] been their nourishment. This overwhelms them, for in spite of themselves these ideas (*ḥatarāt*) come upon them. And when that comes upon them of which they but seldom have had experience, this astonishes them, and that becomes manifest in them which you [can] see [yourself]. Those who are strong in gnosis (*maʿrifā*) are not affected by this state of mind however" (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 24).

The rather surprising expression in the previous description of the second spiritual station of nearness to God as, *inter alia*, "the consumption of much food without greed as a result of being passionately in love" (cf. above), here receives its explanation in the fact that it is now the immediate listening to the word of God Most High that constitutes the main nourishment of the mystic.

At the request of his friend, al-Ḥarrāz now brings him yet deeper into the secrets of nearness to God and makes it clear to him that there now is no further spiritual station to follow but that an intensification of the station in which the ecstatic already dwells takes place, which results in "the forgetting of the lot allotted him by God and the forgetting of his needs with regard to God; God's nearness has cut the mystic off from [his] calling God to remembrance (*dīkr Allāh*): he *is* now with God and needs no longer call Him to remembrance, and he no longer finds [his own] understanding

(*fahm*) interceding between God and him. The attack upon God (*al-huḡūm-‘alā Allāh*) has freed him from [the consciousness of] having found God: the slave [of God] becomes abolished (*saqāta*)¹² and God [alone] remains (*baqiya*)” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 24)!

Al-Ḥarrāz now experiences the agony of not finding adequate words for communicating what he has undergone and concludes this passage with: “All that I have mentioned to you is different from what I wanted to mention and I do not recognize it and I do not know what I want and I do not know what I say and I do not know who I am or from where I am. You who listen, do you understand what I say? It is a slave who has lost his name and no longer has a name, he is ignorant and no longer possesses any knowledge—but yet he has knowledge and yet he is not ignorant [. . .] Oh, how I long for one who recognizes what I say and together with me enters into what I say” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 24)!

For the last time al-Ḥarrāz’s friend insists on also having the ecstasy of this intensified spiritual station described. And as invaluable help in our understanding of the ecstatic experience of the Sufis, al-Ḥarrāz agrees to this and announces that “he who has been drawn close [to God] (*muqarrab*)¹³ is in reality as if under supervision: he is sought and suspended, without knowledge, understanding, will, sensation, or movement. He is the happiest of creatures, except that those realities of the ecstatic state that are [still] valid for him in his realization of God’s unconditional unity (*ḥaqā’iq al-wuḡūd lahū fi’-tawḥhīd*) come between him and [the final] happiness. His spiritual station consists of a joyous rapture (*tarab*) due to continuous beholding of Him, and if it is said to one of those [in this station] ‘What do you want?’ he answers ‘God’. If it is said to one of them ‘What is your knowledge?’ he answers ‘God’. And if his limbs could talk they would say ‘God’. For his members, his joints, and his limbs are filled with the light of God. He knows nothing but God and all his knowledge is from God, yes, he himself is from God, through God, unto God, and with God. His identity and his reckoning have vanished (*dahaba*).¹⁴ If one says to him ‘What are you?’ he would be unable to answer ‘I’, because of the preponderance of God’s decrees. This is the reality of their ecstasy. And when he reaches the peak of nearness, he cannot even say ‘God’” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 24–26). This definitive ineffability occurs, al-Ḥarrāz reveals to us, when also the

¹² It is interesting to notice how al-Ḥarrāz, known in the Sufi tradition for having been the first to talk about *fanā’* (and *baqā’*) (Sulamī ed. 1953, 228), not once in this dialogue uses the term *fanā’* but prefers synonyms thereof such as *saqāta* or *dahaba* in order to

express the underlying experience which has later become conceptualized through the notion of *fanā’*.

¹³ According to Nwyia, *al-muqarrab* alludes to *al-muqarrabūn* in Sura 56: 11 and 88.

¹⁴ Cf. note 12.

gnosis [-consciousness] (*ma'arifa*) has left (*dahaba*) the mystic (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 26).

After this description of ecstasy, in which we continue to recognize without difficulty most of the criteria of ecstasy that I reported at the beginning (cf. supra p. 227f.), al-Ḥarrāz resumes his previous, highly interesting description of the ecstatic's situation after the cessation of his ecstasy.

"You should know," al-Ḥarrāz imparts to his friend, "that a life in perfection does not apply to the gnostics and that they are not completely delighted in this station, for after the presence [with God] they are [spiritually] absent even if they are [corporally] present [. . .] They are without [spiritual] aspiration (*himma*), without purpose, without means, without claim, without flight [into solitude (?)], without ecstasy (*wağd*) and without loss [of ecstasy] (*faqd*) [. . .] they see His reign as perfect as well as His remembrance (*dikr*) of them as perfect in all matters He has willed [for them]. Their lot from Him is perfect and what is with Him is perfect before they were [born] and after they were [born]. So is His purpose with them and for them perfect. Their calling Him to remembrance (*dikr*) does not add to their nearness to Him, nor does their negligence (*ğafila*) [in calling Him to remembrance] subtract for them from what was [decreed] for them with Him [. . .]" (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 27).

The reality behind this existential suspension and spiritual impotence is the circumstance that the mystic's act of calling God to remembrance (*dikr*) during the ecstatic realization of God's unconditional unity (*tawḥīd*) has become assimilated with the absolute theonymy (*dikr*) of God's primordial calling to remembrance of His creation, in which no trace of the mystic's own activity remains but only God's acting through the mystic. Al-Ḥarrāz formulates this total monoideization in the words: "God calls himself to remembrance through his (the mystic's) person (*nafs*) when He so desires, He praises himself through his tongue when He desires, and He glorifies himself through his laudations [. . .] So what place is there for 'I' or for 'You'?" (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 27)?¹⁵

¹⁵ That is, the ordinary references of identity have become void of meaning. I deviate here from Nwyia's translation which reads: "[. . .] Il fit mémoire de Lui-même par Lui-même, quand Il le voulut; [. . .] Il Se louangea par Sa propre langue, quand Il le voulut; [. . .] Il Se glorifia de Ses mérites dans l'exercice de Sa propre puissance. Où étions-nous, toi et moi" (Nwyia 1970, 265)? The original reads (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1967, 27):

والعلم في ذلك انه
نفسه بلسانه حين اراد و صجد
نفسه بنفسه حين اراد و سبح
فاين انا وانت ذكر
نفسه بحاصده في مجارى قدرته

The condition for the mystic's realization of God's unconditional unity (*tawhīd*) thus consists in a complete forgetting of 'I' and thence of 'You', which al-Biṣṭāmī, who died a quarter of a century before al-Ḥarrāz, has expressed in the following words: "Upon the forgetting of one's person, the Creator's calling the person to remembrance follows (*'inda nisyān an-naḥs dīkr bāri' an-naḥs*)" (As-Sahlaḡī ed. 1976, 105).

The Sufis, with their well-developed sense for the conditions of the spiritual life, have captured this psychological dialectic between the calling of God to remembrance (*dīkr*) and the forgetting of self (*nisyān*) in a very eloquent paradox as in the following quotation from al-Wāsiṭī (d. 932): "Those who remember [their act of calling God to remembrance] during their calling God to remembrance are more negligent than those who are forgetful [of their act of calling God to remembrance] during their calling God to remembrance for [the act of] calling Him to remembrance is other than He" (As-Sulamī ed. 1953, 305).¹⁶

That ecstasy has been a conducive factor for this forgetting of self is obvious. Al-A'rabī (d. 952), whose work on ecstasy as-Sarrāḡ has preserved in a summary, was, for instance, quite aware of this, for he writes: "Ecstasy in this world does not consist of the full disclosure [of God] but [is] the heart's contemplation (*muṣāhada*) [...] He (the mystic) contemplates [God during ecstasy] out of joy of certitude and purity of theomnemy (*dīkr*), for [during ecstasy] he is quite alert [inwardly] (*muntabih*)" (As-Sarrāḡ ed. 1963, 311).

Lest we ourselves fall victims to spiritual gluttony in trying to examine the nature of the theomnemy which—according to al-Ḥarrāz—"makes the heart beat from calling God to remembrance, makes the tongue mute, and the value of which nobody knows but God Most High" ('Aṭṭār ed. 1961, II 38), we shall content ourselves with what al-Ḥarrāz has let us know about the experiences of the Sufi ecstatic. Besides, we have most certainly got to know more about the workings of ecstasy and the secrets of nearness to God than what was intended for the outsider. In a book about the external aspects of intimacy with God, al-Ḥarrāz has stated unequivocally "that

I do not think that *bi'naḥsihi*, *bi'lisānihi*, and *bi'maḥāmidihī* should be interpreted as reflexive, an opinion that is confirmed by the following quotation attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī (As-Sahlaḡī ed. 1976, 105):

النفس
تند نسيان النفس ذكر بارر

¹⁶ The point of the paradox is, of course,

that an awareness of one's own activity of calling God to remembrance during theomnemy distracts the person from perceiving God's antecedent remembrance of him, whereas he who has an undivided awareness of God's primordial remembrance of him and forgets his own activity of calling God to remembrance, perhaps even the external act of calling, during theomnemy has a greater chance of so doing.

what remains of the spiritual stations of intimacy with God is more and weightier than can be put forward in a book; but something may be obtained in discourse with those who know about it” (Al-Ḥarrāz ed. 1975, 73). And discourse with such a person we have been lucky enough to follow!

With regard to one side of the Sufis’ ecstasy, al-Ḥarrāz leaves us behind, namely the question whether their ecstasy was spontaneously generated and hence not intentionally induced or whether the Sufi at this time had recourse to expedients for the express purpose of inducing ecstasy—and in that case, which ones.

However, just as we are not over-indulged with first-hand material about the internal dimensions of ecstasy—“for he who asks how good God tastes asks the impossible, for this cannot be perceived through description but only by him who has gotten to taste [and see]” (al- A’rābī, ap. As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 313)—likewise we are not over-indulged with first-hand sources about the external dimensions of ecstasy either. This situation holds true at least for the period before the consolidation of the orders (sg. *ṭarīqa*) and their monopolization of the spiritual life, i.e., before the thirteenth century when the ecstasy-inducive rituals we usually associate with this context, such as the *darwīš*-dance, the *dīkr*-séance, and the *samā’*-listening, receive their definitive structures and breakthrough.

And since there now is no al-Ḥarrāz to succour us, we must instead try to shape a picture for ourselves from those disparate notices that are available concerning the external conditions of ecstasy. That the Sufis did employ existent liturgical resources in order to attain an ecstatic state of mind becomes admirably clear from a previously quoted passage (cf. supra p. 229) from as-Sarrāğ’s *Kitāb al-lumá’*, where the commentary is reproduced which Sarī as-Saqaṭī (d. 865) gave when he was told of “those forceful ecstasies [that occur] during the intensive *dīkr*-litanies and there-with related phenomena that influence the mystic [. . .]” (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 306).

In another passage as-Sarrāğ confirms this circumstance in his own words: “You should know,” he writes, “that absence/presence (*ğayba/ḥuḍūr*), sobriety/drunkenness (*ṣaḥw/sukr*), ecstasy (*wağd*), attacking (*ḥuğūm*) and overwhelms (*ğalabāt*), disappearance/staying (*fanā’/baqā’*) belong to those states that have been actualized through theomnemy (*dīkr*) and exaltation (*ta’zīm*) of God” (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 344).

In addition to this, as-Sarrāğ claims that in the traditions (*aḥbār*) there are many reports about those who “heard a word (*kalima*), a *dīkr*-litany (*dīkr*), an edifying speech (*maw’aza*), or a fine wisdom-word (*ḥikma*) that gladdened them and elicited ecstasy (*wağd*) in their inmost (*sirr*) . . .” (As-Sarrāğ ed. 1963, 295).

Now we also know that there have existed, from the middle of the eighth century, so-called *dikr*-sessions (*mağālis ad-dikr* or *halaq ad-dikr*), in which various *dikr*-litanies were recited, chosen Koran-words were proclaimed and edifying speech was listened to (cf. Massignon 1968, 105). Although it is not possible to enter into details here, it is in all probability this liturgical milieu, with or without connection to the ordinary divine service, that constitutes the historical background of the subsequent traditional *dikr*-séance and *samā'*-listening.

Unfortunately, the material at our disposal does not allow us any possibility of judging to what extent the Sufis have purposely utilized these liturgical resources in order to put themselves in an ecstatic frame of mind, or how these gatherings were organized or structured. It was probably not until the so-called educating shaykh (*šayḥ at-tarbiya*) in the eleventh century that these sessions, as far as the Sufis are concerned, received their definitive organization and guidance.

We do know, however, that there were individual Sufis who tried to imitate the ecstatic state and who behaved as if they were in ecstasy (*tawāğada*)—a feigned ecstasy may also be conducive to real ecstasy. But this is more specifically a Sufi problem proper, concerning genuine and false ecstasy according to their own criteria of judging ecstasy and, in the last instance, a problem which only they themselves are qualified to settle.

In any case, Louis Massignon's statement remains irrefutable: "A fact to be borne in mind," he writes, "is that psalmody based on the Koranic vocabulary remains the main procedure for putting oneself in ecstasy." (Massignon 1968, 106) If we add 'and listening to psalmody', we then obtain a fairly satisfactory picture of the external conditions for the Sufis' ecstasy until the eleventh century, when various innovations begin to appear (Massignon 1968, 106). And as far as the *darwīš*-dance is concerned, it is not until the thirteenth century with Rūmī (d. 1273) that it becomes transformed from an expression of ecstasy—and as such, quite a controversial one (Molé 1963, 147)—into an expedient for ecstasy (Meier 1954, 127). Stimulants such as hashish, coffee, and opium also seem to have been first introduced during the thirteenth century (Massignon 1968, 107).

To illustrate the external conditions of ecstasy I would like to relate, by way of conclusion, firstly the case of at-Tustarī, a contemporary of al-Ḥarrāz, a case which illustrates both the liturgical context of ecstasy and some of its concrete manifestations; and secondly the case of al-Ġunayd, also a contemporary of al-Ḥarrāz, a case which illustrates spontaneously generated ecstasy.

First, at-Tustarī (d. 896): "It is reported that when Sahl at-Tustarī listened to a *samā'* (a kind of musical performance), ecstasy (*wağd*) manifest-

ed itself in him. For twenty-five days he remained in this ecstasy and ate no food. And in spite of it being winter, he sweated to the extent that his shirt became wet. When he was in this state, learned men put questions to him, and he answered 'Do not ask me since a word from me at this point of time is not meaningful to you' (ʿAṭṭār ed. 1961, I 230)!

And finally al-Ġunayd (d. 910): "Ġunayd put a question to Šiblī and said 'What about your theomnemy (*dīkr*)? You do not heed the true theomnemy, do you?' Šiblī replied 'It is inessential how many times I call Him to remembrance, if He just calls me to remembrance one single time!' At these words, Ġunayd fell into ecstasy (literally: came out of himself—*az ḥod bešod*)" (ʿAṭṭār ed. 1961, II 148).

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