3. ECSTATIC READINGS IN SUFISM

The following presentation of Sufi discourse is essentially based on the same disposition as was used in the analysis of Syriac discourse, but the differences in the contents and emphasis of the Sufi material bring about some changes in the arrangement. The general characteristics concerning the nature and limitations of language also apply to Arabic Sufi discourse, and so unnecessary repetition concerning these is avoided as much as possible.

3.1. THE ENABLING CAUSE

Sufi literature provides plenty of allusions to particular methods. It is noteworthy that, although usually not very detailed, they are not disparaged either. The Sufi attitude towards human effort to promote the appearance of ecstasy will be discussed further in chapter 3.3.2. First we shall take a look at the general enabling methods that correlate with the experience but not necessarily with actual causality.

3.1.1. General Methods

The Sufi setting is entirely different from the monastic context of the Syriac scrolls. Rather than remote hermit cells, the practical context is usually communal: the participants in Sufi gatherings live in the "world". The practice of solitude does exist as a temporary method, but interestingly, the difference (or any speculation on the relation) between these two radically divergent contexts is not presented in our corpus in relation with mystical experiences.

The general term for all exertion to produce ecstasy (*wajd*) is *tawājud,* a derivative of the corresponding ecstatic root *WJD*. According to Hujwiri's definition, *tawājud* is "taking pains to produce *wajd*".[1] Qušayri defines *tawājud* as "petitioning of ecstasy through some kind of free will".[2] Jilani, too, recognises

---

1 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 415.

2 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 61. استدعاء الوجد بنوع من الاختيار .

that 'spiritual ecstasy' (*wajd al-rūḥāniyya*) usually comes by means of exterior influences and stimuli.[3]

The other side of the matter, however, is that when ecstasy is an intent of determined efforts, the outcome is not spontaneous and the subject's attention may be distracted to various forms at the expense of content. Hujwiri states that a merely outward *tawājud*, which is imitation of outer movements and methodical dance, is "absolutely unlawful".[4] Niffari offers striking criticism of the nature of ecstasy produced by recitation of the Qur'an: "The (divine) word turns into ecstasy (*wajd*), but using the word to induce ecstasy turns unto the raptures induced by words."[5]

Generally speaking, the ascetic attitude of life is a kind of indirect cause behind the ecstatic phenomena, but in the textual discourse the causality between ascetic practices and actual ecstasy is not expressed in very clear terms. This is not entirely by chance. Hujwiri states as his own view that "although mortifications are excellent, intoxication and rapture cannot be acquired at all", the meaning being that an experience cannot be a product of human effort if it is supposed to be a real experience.

This provides some elucidation as to why the methods are not explained in great detail in the present corpus. In literary discourse the stress is placed on the ideal nature of the experience and on the purity of the motives leading to it. All actions in the mystical life should take place for the sake of God alone, surely not for the sake of the activities themselves. Authors who emphasise this, like Niffari, have a constant "de-methodologising" tendency in their discourse. Niffari's divine subject may even exhort: "How could you be with me, when you are (occupied) between 'descending' (*nuzūl*) and 'ascending' (*ṣu'ūd*)"[6]

The first prerequisite of the experience, in logical order, takes place before the actual ecstatic methods: one should of course *learn* to know what to do and what kind of obstacles to remove. This is, generally speaking, where Sufi instruction and discipline is needed. "Who knows the veil, is near to the unveiling".[7] This is connected with a basic requisite mentioned by Niffari: since the mystical experience takes place in the psychological dimension one must first know it. "If you do not know who you are, you do not belong to the people of my mystical knowledge (*'ahl ma'rifī*)."[8] Self-knowledge, however, is subjective and thereby a

---

3 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; *Secret of Secrets,* 90.

4 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 415.

5 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 34:5 (Arberry's translation slightly altered).

6 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 21:6. كيف تكون عندى وأنت بين النزول والصعود

7 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 29:2. من عرف الحجاب أشرف على الكشف

8 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 14:9; cf. Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 14:1.

matter of practice and personal direction, and consequently the textual corpus does not directly discuss it to a large extent in relation to the mystical experience. And in any case it is a kind of implicit prerequisite: at the moment of the experience itself, one's 'self-experience' must be set aside.[9]

In logical order, the next enabling cause that is required would be acceptance of the experience. This somewhat obvious aspect is implicitly present in the discourse. It is not, however, taken as a subject of independent exploration in the discourse which, according to what we might call a "Semitic paradigm", puts more stress on God's might than on the individual's responsibility. Niffari, however, in his chapter on 'choice' (*ikhtiyār*) portrays this feature as if he was illuminating it from various perspectives, all the while implicitly, however. "I have planted at every gate a tree and a spring of cool water, and I have made you to thirst"[10] – what is required is acceptance.

Contemplation, or a contemplative attitude, is certainly an important factor behind the experience; it is usually implicitly present in the discourse. Junayd, however, declares boldly that "If a man says *allāh* without first experiencing contemplation (*mušāhada*), he is a liar."[11] Junayd's idea is that God as an entity, as an "object", is so different from all other objects that he must be approached in a way which is correspondingly unique. This is a basic aspect in 'contemplation', which is, however, a wider phenomenon. A functional way to define it is to state that in contemplation one sees all things through (one's conception of) God, or that one sees God in all and before all. According to Niffari, God has "friends who do not see except through Him".[12] Contemplation (*šahāda*), unlike vision, implies some knowledge.[13]

3.1.2. Specific Methods

What then is one to do in practice? This question, a most interesting one, is given relatively little and non-systematic attention in the present texts, partly because the subject is more a matter of practical instruction. Evidently one is supposed to pray. Islamic ritual prayer, however, is more a matter of sobriety and hence not

---

9 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 24:27. بينى وبينك وجدك بك فألقه أحجبك عنك
"Between Me and you is your self-experience (*wajduka bika*): cast it away, and I will veil you from yourself."

10 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 50:15.

11 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 75; Arberry, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 97.

12 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 27:10–11.

13 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 36:44; cf. *Mukhāṭabāt*, 27:1–2.

mentioned in our corpus as a cause of mystical experience.[14] Yet prayer in the general sense is counted among the prerequisites. Niffari's divine subject urges: "Pray to me with your heart, and I will reveal to you the pleasure in prayer."[15]

Yet on the other hand, in the sensitive world of man's inner dimension, praying, as a verbal activity, may also be a hindrance to mystical experience. When the sense of the presence of supernatural power is intense, one should pay no attention to thoughts that suggest that one should start petitioning, which would be essentially a pursuit of the state that was already at hand. The position is described by Kalabadhi in the following story:

> God's nearness (*qurb allāh*) cut me off from the (desire to) petition God (*su'āl allāh*). Then my soul contended with me, that I should petition God, but I heard a voice saying: "After you have found God, do you petition another than God?"[16]

For this reason, prayer is not presented as a logical postulate of mystical experience; it rather belongs to the context from which the experiences arise.

As examples of specific *tawājud* Hujwiri gives some meditative practices such as representing to one's mind the bounties and evidences of God, thinking of union (*ittiṣāl*) and of the practices of holy men, and the recitation of the Qur'an.[17] The latter is for Sufis even more important than the Psalter for Christian monks, due to the different understanding of revelation. For Sufis the mere listening to God's speech is a sacramental experience, for it is where the transcendent God is brought near to the human level, and accordingly the one who recites the Qur'an in a sense becomes a mouthpiece of God through whom His eternal word moves. The specific methods mentioned by Jilani include recitation of the Qur'an "with a beautiful voice", the chanting of poetry and the special Sufi ritual of *dhikr*.[18]

Niffari, on the other hand, seems to be in opposition with his negative remarks concerning those who want to stay up all night in prayer reciting all the sections of the Qur'an but do not really pray. Niffari's point is that the concentration on the rosaries and verses and other methods that are more or less separate entities disconnected from the rest of man's existence are not able to guarantee genuine mystical experiences.[19]

---

14 On the contrary, we are told that ecstatic states may cease for the time of ritual prayers. Qušayri: *Risāla,* 66.

15 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 9:2. صل لى بقلبك أكشف لك عن قرة عينه فى الصلوة

16 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 115. Slightly altered from Arberry's translation (*Doctrine of the Sufis*, 153).

17 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 394–396, 415.

18 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; *Secret of Secrets,* 90.

19 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 50:1.

The most interesting details on the matter are revealed in the discourse of Niffari, in spite of the cryptic character of his verses. Among the enabling causes in the psychological dimension perhaps the most important is concentration, which may be seen as an outgrowth of meditation, a dynamic culmination of the contemplative attitude. According to Niffari, one should consider one's 'attention' (*hamm*) and 'heart' (*qalb*) as if they were 'faces' (*wajh*) that one is supposed to turn *wholly* towards the experience.[20] The divine subject of Niffari's discourse urges one to beware of paying attention to any kind of thought that occurs, not to mention closer dealings with them. "When you stay before me, everything will call you: beware of paying attention to it in your heart, for if you pay attention to it, it is as if you had answered to it."[21] Concentration means that one sets aside one's expectations[22] and does not accept any discursive thoughts during prayer but rather concentrates on the motion of one's heart, seeking divine assistance from it, and continues to recollect God during the sense of his absence so that no other things might arise to disturb the forthcoming experience.[23]

> When knowledge (*'ilm*) with all its conditions (*jawāmi'*) calls you at the time of prayer, and you answer it, you are separated from me (*infaṣalta 'annī*)."[24]

The process of concentration also applies during the acceptance of the experience itself: Niffari advises one to 'summon' to oneself as many qualities of experience as possible and resort to those that one experiences as 'responding' most forcibly.

> Experience the experience (*wajd*) of presence, in whatever quality the experience (*wajd*) may come to you. If the qualities avoid you, summon them, and the things qualified by them, to your experience. If they respond to you, well; otherwise, flee to the quality in which you experience the experience of presence. [25]

Complete concentration is the logical postulate of the quality of totality present in the experience. Concentration also means that when the experience is about to

---

20 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 74:21.

21 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 24:2.

22 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 48:1.

23 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 4:5,7.

24 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 24:3.

25 جد وجد الحضرة على أىّ صفة جاءك الوجد ،
فإن عارضتك الصفات فأدعها وأدع موصوفاتها الى وجدك ، فإن
استجابت لك وإلا فاهرب الى الصفة التى تجد بمقامك فيها وجد الحضرة
The nuances of the verbs used here are noteworthy: 'summoning' is expressed with the verb *da'ā* which means to 'call', but often in a very causative sense: 'call forth', 'cause', 'provoke'; 'responding' is expressed with *istajāba*, stem X of *jāba*. Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 72:14.

come, unreserved surrender is required. Niffari's instructions are: "Experience the experience of presence in whatever quality the ecstasy may come to you."[26]

The remembrance of God, *dhikr*, the Islamic version of mantra practices, is the most important form of *tawājud*. The verb *dhakara* signifies remembering, recalling, and hence reminding, mentioning. *Dhikr* has a corresponding double meaning, concrete mentioning and mental remembering. If these aspects are understood as separate entities, the inner one is naturally seen as the more important. According to Qušayri, vocal remembrance or repetition (*dhikr al-lisān*) leads to inner remembrance (*dhikr al-qalb*), which in the widest sense is continual remembrance, unceasing orientation towards God.[27] Jilani agrees that the *dhikr* of language is the first step towards inner states of *dhikr*.[28] The inner *dhikr* is credited with the fact that it is not restricted to time or place.[29]

Kalabadhi differentiates three levels in *dhikr* depending on whether it deals with remembering the one remembered, (*dhikr al-qalb*, 'recollection of the heart'), recollecting the attributes of the One remembered, (*dhikr awṣāf al-madhkūr*) or 'contemplation of the One remembered' (*šuhūd al-madhkūr*).[30]

Shadhili gives four meanings for *dhikr*:

(1) Act of remembering (portion of the common people).
(2) Object of remembrance (punishment or bliss etc.).
(3) *Dhikr* that evokes one's remembrance concerning
    (a) good things from God,
    (b) evils due to the lower self,
    (c) evils due to the Adversary and
    (d) evils created by God.
(4) *Dhikr* that causes one to be remembered by God.[31]

The most common phrases in practising *dhikr* are *subḥān allāh* ('Praise the Lord'), *allāhu akbar* ('God is greater'), *lā-ilāha-illā-llāh* ('There is no God but God') and *al-ḥamdu lillāh* ('Thanks to God') and the simple invocation *allāh,*

---

26 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 72:14. جد وجد الحضرة على أيّ صفة جاءك الوجد

27 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 221–223; *Principles of Sufism*, 207–209.

28 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 80–81; *Secret of Secrets,* 45 (for details, see p. 242). The difference between inner and outer *dhikr* is also stepless in practice: the tongue may move but without the voice, which is often regarded as the third main type of mantra technique alongside the silent one and the one uttered aloud. It is also to be remembered that the practice of *dhikr* is not restricted to mystics alone but is characteristic of Muslims in general.

29 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 223 (tr. *Principles of Sufism,* 209).

30 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 76; Arberry, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 98. Kalabadhi bases the divisions on the writings of Ibn 'Ata.

31 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 163.

allāh. These may be repeated a thousand times a day, for example.[32] The twelve names that are supposed to be invoked in the inner *dhikr* are *lā-ilāha-illā-llāh, allāh, hū* ('He'), *ḥaqq* ('Truth'), *ḥayy* ('Life'), *qayyūm* ('Self-existing'), *qahhār* ('Subduer'), *wahhāb* ('Donor'), *fattāḥ* ('Opener'), *wāḥid* ('the Only One'), *aḥad* ('One'), *ṣamad*, ('Eternal').[33]

In the practise of *dhikr* the most important thing is to concentrate one's thoughts intensively, so that ultimately *dhikr* is the only attribute of which one is aware. "Real recollection consists in forgetting all but the one recollected."[34] This may, according to Hujwiri, lead to a kind of ecstasy in which one speaks something not resulting from one's own thought.[35] On the other hand, the repetition of even the best formula (*lā-ilāha-illa-llāh*), according to Sayf al-Din, does not lead the common people to the highest degrees "even if they have heard it from a sheikh who is the possessor of governing control" unless it happens out of an untainted conviction.[36]

The importance of *dhikr* has been expressed with maxims like "No one reaches God except by continual *dhikr*",[37] "Sufism is *dhikr* with concentration" (Junayd)[38] and justified with a Qur'anic commandment.[39] According to Hujwiri's explanation derived from (or into!) salvation history, all the prophets had their own spiritual stations (*maqām*) and that of Muhammad was *dhikr*.[40] In this way *dhikr* becomes a subject of its own in the Sufi discourse. The importance of the

---

32 So Makhluf al-Qaba'ili in Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 123. Qušayri: *Risāla,* 221 (tr. *Principles of Sufism,* 206). Al-Tustari (d. 896) used *allāhu šāhidī*, 'God is my witness'. (Böwering 1999, 60.)

33 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 108, 115–116; the twelve names are given by Bayrak in *Secret of Secrets,* 77, 85–86.

34 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 74; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 95; Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 254.

35 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 254.

36 Chittick 1992, 147. Chittick also stresses that usually there is nothing unusual about *dhikr* (p. 173).

37 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 221 (tr. *Principles of Sufism,* 207). The sentence also shows the wide meaning of *dhikr* as a general term for orientation towards God.

38 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 281 (tr. *Principles of Sufism,* 304).

39 *Qur'ān* 33:41 (*yā 'ayyuhā-lladhīna 'āmanū-dhkurū-llāha dhikr*^{an} *kathīr*^{an}; literally "O you who believe, recollect God with a great recollection".) For example, Qušayri begins his chapter on *dhikr* with this sentence. (Yet Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates: "O ye who believe! Celebrate the praises of Allah, and do this often".)

40 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 371. "The station of Adam was repentance (*tawbat*) that of Noah was renunciation (*zuhd*), that of Abraham was resignation (*taslīm*), that of Moses was contrition (*inābat*), that of David was sorrow (*ḥuzn*), that of Jesus was hope (*rajā*), that of John (the Baptist) was fear (*khawf*), and that of our Apostle was praise (*dhikr*)." (Translation Nicholson's.)

mantra practice is implicitly connected with the belief in the power of the word, common in the thought of Semitic religions, in which the world is believed to have been created by the word (*kalima*) of God, so that there is a kind of ontological kinship between speech and the world.[41]

The numerous praises of *dhikr* in Sufi literature, however, encounter a peculiar but sublime counterbalance in the works of Niffari, who makes somewhat arrogant remarks about a state where the reiteration of *dhikr* is no longer necessary.

> The recollection of Me in the vision of Me is an outrage.[42]
>
> If you recollect Me in vision, you are veiled by your recollection.[43]

For Niffari the practice of *dhikr* is a veil, albeit the most elected thing that God has manifested.[44] He prefers a total, existential *dhikr*: "Remember me in everything, and I will remember you in everything."[45]

However, Niffari does offer some practical advice as well. He urges one to turn one's soul (or self, *nafs*) to an 'encounter' (*liqā'*) of God once or twice every day, casting away all external things, and meeting him alone. This takes place through guarding one's heart, which enables one to keep one's attention under control, and then turning to God in the 'endings of prayers' (*adbār al-ṣalawāt*) or once a day and once a night.[46] One should turn one's attention from one's own practice to the bountiful guidance of God, from cognition (*'ilm*) to forgiveness (*'afw*).[47]

The collective application of *dhikr*, that is *samā'*, 'hearing' is a phenomenon the nature of which it is impossible to express in a single word. The basic meaning of the term refers to the hearing of God as the individual's act, and as a technical term, general in Sufi use, to a special gathering of ecstatic music, a Sufi session.

The most detailed description of the ritual *samā'* is to be found in Hujwiri's *Kašf al-Maḥjūb*. The principles of his rules run as follows: Firstly, one should not practice *samā'* habitually by custom, but only so seldom that one does not lose one's reverence for it. Secondly, *samā'* should not be set out according to one's own will, but instead it should be practised when it comes by itself. Thirdly, a

---

41 E.g. Burckhardt 1976, 100.

42 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 23:6.

43 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt* 30:11. True to his all-challenging approach, however, Niffari does state elsewhere that "the true servant is he who rests in the *dhikr* of God" (*Mukhāṭabāt*, 20:3).

44 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 49:2.

45 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 33:27.

46 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:42–45.

47 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:42–46.

spiritual director should be present. Fourthly, *samā'* should not be practised in the presence of outsiders, "the common people". Fifthly, the singer should be a respectable person free of worldly thoughts. Sixthly, the aim of *samā'* must not be amusement. All artificial efforts should be put aside, and one should not exceed the proper bounds until the *samā'* itself manifests its power. The participant must have the ability to distinguish strong natural impulses from real ecstasy (*wajd*), which is meant to be followed, not repelled. Ecstasy must not be opposed when it is intensifying; nor should it be revived or stimulated when it is declining. During ecstasy one is not allowed to expect help from anyone, but if it is offered, it should not be refused. Seventhly, during the *samā'* it is forbidden to direct any disturbing comments, questions, estimations or applause to the singer or to anyone – this remark obviously applies to those not in an ecstatic state themselves. And lastly, beginners especially must be careful (even neglect the whole practice, as some maintain) because of the dangers posed by disturbing elements like women watching the scene "on the roofs or elsewhere".[48]

From *samā'* we are able to shift smoothly to the most troublesome ecstatic method, that of dance (*raqṣ*). Our Sufi sources are somewhat irritated concerning *raqṣ*, since it is in practice the most famous and best-known method, but from the theoretical and theological point of view it is a most peripheral aspect. Kalabadhi and Qušayri do not treat it at all; Hujwiri has a short, somewhat fretful chapter on dancing. According to him, dancing belongs entirely outside both Islamic law and Sufism.

> Dancing (*raqṣ*) has no foundation either in the religious law or in the path. [...] Since ecstatic movements and the practices of those who endeavour to induce ecstasy (Pers. *ahl-i tawājud*) resemble it, some frivolous imitators have indulged in it immoderately and have made it a religion. I have met with a number of common people who adopted Sufism in the belief that it is this (dancing) and nothing more.[49]

Jilani has the same position. He lists eleven heretical sects, six of which attempt to reach ecstasy through dancing, singing, shouting or hand-clapping; some of them also claim that the state to be reached is beyond the jurisdiction of religious law, and still others practise gazing at beautiful faces, do not see any difference between the sexes or favour free sexual relations.[50]

Solitude is not presented as a decisive key to the world of experience, as the formation of Sufi ecstasy is basically social in character. Even during seclusion

---

48 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 418–420.

49 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 416.

50 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 140–141; *Secret of Secrets*, 117–118.

the idea is to participate in the common prayers in a mosque five times a day.[51] The function of concrete methods of retreat (*khalwa*) and seclusion (*'uzla*) is the inner purification which in turn functions as a prerequisite of the experience, although logically speaking, it is not an absolutely necessary requirement, due to the "own coming" of the experience. Seclusion, spiritual exercise (*riyāḍa*), silence (*ṣamt*) and perseverance in *dhikr* purify the inner being and hence "the repression of outer sensation opens the inner qualities".[52] An explicit causal connection between seclusion and mystical experience, however, is very seldom mentioned in the texts. Niffari's divine subject does bid: "Go forth to the empty desert, and sit alone, until I see you."[53] (Niffari and his admiration of solitary experiences, however, is a somewhat exceptional case in the present corpus.) Shadhili mentions as a result of *khalwa* 'unveiling' (*kašf al-ghiṭā'*), descent of mercy, experience of true love and veracity (*ṣidq*) in speech.[54] "Some are provided drink without an intermediary."[55] Jilani mentions as the advantages of seclusion the enlightening of the heart and the reformation of the ego, caused by silence and spiritual exercise, but counterbalances this immediately by stating that the way is not one's own, but that of the Prophet and of those who follow him.[56]

More than seclusion, however, the sources emphasise the necessity of a spiritual guide (*muršid*).[57] Abu Yazid is reputed as having said: "He who has no sheikh has Satan for his sheikh."[58] The intermediary may be an angel, learned man or a saint.[59] The role of the Sufi community, however, appears in the texts mainly implicitly or indirectly. For example, the 'circles of remembrance' (*majālis al-dhikr*) are likened to 'meadows of Paradise' (*riyāḍ al-janna*).[60] The

---

51 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 98; *Secret of Secrets*, 127. Chapter 21 gives a detailed description of the midnight prayers that the one in seclusion is supposed to perform. The fixed number of certain prayers (e.g. 100) intimates the use of the rosary.

52 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 121, 124; cf. *Secret of Secrets*, 93, 95. According to Qušayri, the right motive for seclusion is not to hide oneself from the evil of the world, but rather to save others from one's own evil. Qušayri: *Risāla*, 101–102 (tr. *Principles of Sufism*, 19–20.) For anecdotes in favour of *khalwa* and *'uzla*, see *ibid*, 101–104 (tr. 19–24) and Kalabadhi, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 111; Arberry, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 147.

53 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 50:10.

54 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 114.

55 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 144.

56 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 124–125; *Secret of Secrets*, 95.

57 E.g. Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 85, 102, 115, 135; *Secret of Secrets*, 50, 71, 85, 112.

58 Anonymous Sufi text from the 13th century. Chittick 1992, 1992, 55.

59 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 144.

60 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 222 (tr. *Principles of Sufism*, 208).

main line of Sufism is social in character, and *khalwa* remains merely a temporal method that belongs primarily to the early stages of the path.[61]

It is of course difficult to say anything exact concerning the relationship between the two ideals. Yet they may be harmonised by stating that the ideal is to be outwardly with men and distant from them inwardly.[62] The seventy-one Sufis introduced by Ibn ʿArabi include one sitting on the top of a mountain, one who remained 60 years in his house "without leaving it once" and still another who withdrew to the wilderness seeking solitude,[63] but these are mentioned more as exceptional cases, albeit admired, the main line of Sufism being more collective in character.

We may also note the ideal of staying awake. Yet the practice, an extreme one, is very seldom dealt with in the sources of the present study, and when it does occur, the question is expressed in quite a sophisticated way, based on the somewhat technical questioning of the literary Sufi discourse. Hujwiri discusses the question on quite an abstract level: why do other Sufis advise novices to avoid sleeping as far as possible and would not allow "the lover sleep or rest by day or night", but others consider sleep as a gift of God and even encourage their novices to constrain themselves to sleep?[64]

However, actual wakefulness is considered to be one of the ideal pursuits, partly because of the early hour of the Islamic morning prayer. Ibn ʿArabi, for example, mentions with reference to a sheikh who was "almost free from sin" that he "would sometimes sleep the whole night through, which caused me doubts regarding his spiritual effort."[65] According to Hujwiri, some sheikhs regarded sleep as a state resembling death, and therefore considered "not permissible for a novice to sleep except when he is overpowered by slumber". Others, however, considered sleep as a state of innocence or even "God's act towards us" (Junayd),

---

61 Some examples in Ibn ʿArabi's hagiography show the ideal of modesty in communication. Sufis who lived in society could, for example, keep "aloof from men and maintain long periods of silence" (*Sufis of Andalus,* 124), and another "was never the first to speak and only answered when it was really necessary" (*ibid*, 92). Al-Rundi is reported to have "kept to the mountains and coasts and avoided the inhabited areas for nearly thirty years." (*ibid.*, 116).

62 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 102; *Principles of Sufism,* 20.

63 Sitting on the mountain was not continual but only one of the practices he was known for. Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalus,* 118, 87, 126.

64 Junayd's answer is that sleep is to be preferred since it is God's gift, independent of the human will, and his acts towards man. On this point Junayd is exceptionally in agreement with the principles of drunken Sufism. Others consider sleep as a veil since it is not needed in Paradise. Both views are supported with miscellaneous, mainly apocryphal, anecdotes. Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 352–354.

65 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalus,* 111 (for praying in the night, see also p. 140).

and thereby held that a novice may sleep at will and even constrain himself to sleep.[66]

Finally, we may note here that age does not necessarily set any limitations to achieving ecstatic states, as is revealed by the following incident:

> He had a daughter under one year of age. So influenced was she by his spiritual state that when the brethren had attended for the Invocation and had formed a large circle, she would jump down from her mother's lap and stand in the middle of the circle on her legs. At such times ecstasy would overcome her (Ibn 'Arabi).[67]

3.2. EXPRESSION

If one wishes to find descriptions of the experience itself, what it is and what it feels like, the Sufi sources give surprisingly few "direct" descriptions. The emphasis of the discourse takes its character from the more theoretical stages presented below.

As we have seen before, there is no established, permanent vocabulary to express the ecstatic experience, and the creation of such terminology cannot take place without theorisation that is inevitably more or less incommensurable. The problem is definitely comprehended by the Sufis themselves. The following sayings are attributed to al-Makki:

> Ecstasy does not admit of explanation, because it is a secret between God and the true believers. Let men seek to explain it as they will, their explanation is not that secret, inasmuch as all human power and effort is divorced from the Divine mysteries.[68]

> There is no explanation for the nature of ecstasy (*kayfiyyat al-wajd*), for it is a secret of God among firm believers (*al-mu'minin al-mūqinīn*).[69]

This is even more the case when the non-linguistic experience is silent in its manifestation and even in its methods. According to Hujwiri, the one who possesses a state (*ḥāl*), becomes silent in tongue, and its reality is proclaimed in his works instead. "To ask about *ḥāl* is absurd, since *ḥāl* is the annihilation of speech."[70]

The verbal reality divides the mental reality into apparently distinct sections in a way that may be misleading or insufficient. Therefore, concentration on the experience itself diminishes concentration on its expression. Niffari states plainly

---

66 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 351–352.

67 Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalus,* 109. However, the end of the story reads: "She died before she was weaned" (sic).

68 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 138.

69 Sulami, 202 (§5); *Adab al-mulūk*, 134.

70 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 369–370.

that "the more the vision (*ru'ya*) increases, the more the expression (*'ibāra*) decreases."[71] The sensitivity of the matter is shown by the fact that the character of mystical experience may be reversed if the subject concentrates on the discursive aspect. According to Niffari, if the state of concentration takes place on the verbal level, it is actually separation.[72]

Moreover, language itself is limited in expressing absolute truths because of its instability. Niffari expresses this quite modern idea sublimely by stating that "people of names are people of shadow".[73]

But on the other hand, semantic insufficiencies do not put an end to the discussion, which is allusive in intention. Mystical discourse is essentially non-reaching by character, always tending to point further. One indicator of this is that Niffari proceeds to declare that it is not only language (*kalām*) but also silence (*ṣamt*) that can function as a veil during the mystical experience.[74]

Mystical language operates in a twofold tension field. On the one hand, it is bound to be insufficient, due to its operation with unlimited and indefinite entities, the connotations of which are constituted on a subjective basis. And on the other hand, the terms are universal in form: they are the same for all users and recipients, and this common form may easily delude one into thinking that one has grasped its meaning in its pure or full form. The misleading character of language is disclosed various times by Niffari in maxims like "expression is a veil" (*al-'ibāra sitr*)[75], "speech is a veil" (*al-qawl ḥijāb*)[76] or "letter is a veil" (*al-ḥarf ḥijāb*).[77]

Entanglement in human language and the outlines produced by it also support the tendency, psychologically very natural, to project human qualities and one's own conceptions onto the mystical reality. Niffari is again well aware of the danger. His divine subject announces: "My attributes (*'awṣāfī*) which are supported by expression (*'ibāra*) are in a sense your attributes".[78]

---

71 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 28:2. *Ru'ya* is for Niffari a wide concept that does not imply actual visual apparitions.

72 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 33:3–4. "How long will you be concentrated by nothing but words (*aqwāl*)? […] If you are concentrated by other than Me, you are separated so long as you are concentrated."

73 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 67:10. أهل الأسماء أهل الظل

74 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 28:10. The experience in this case is 'vision' (*ru'ya*).

75 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 28:3. العبارة ستر

76 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 20:15.

77 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:2, 67:2.

78 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:18.

3.2.1. Analytical Expression

The *whole* Sufi discourse takes place in some kind of relation to the mystical experience, in the broad sense of the term. In order to find a description in which a case of actual ecstasy, an actual ecstatic experience, has been designated analytically, one should first unravel what "ecstasy" is in Arabic, regardless of Sufism, and then proceed by differentiating the symbolic terms in Sufi terminology (and there are about a dozen of them[79]). This is, however, a very tricky question. It is in fact doubtful whether there ever was any literal discussion about "ecstasy" in Arabic before the era of Sufism.

Besides, the whole question is perhaps formulated inaccurately. If the inner states have no fixed criteria of identity, the hunt for "exact equivalents" will remain fruitless. And to be more exact: *to what* one should look for an equivalent? Should the starting-point be the Greek ἔκστασις? Or perhaps the Syriac *temhā*?

If this be the case, we are fortunate to have access to the portions of the oldest surviving manuscript of the Arabic New Testament, Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151, which dates back to 867 AD, slightly predating our Sufi corpus. The fact that it was translated from Syriac by a man who could make comparisons with the Greek original,[80] actually provides us with the Arabic equivalent of both ἔκστασις and *temhā*. Perhaps a little surprisingly, the translator chose to translate *temha* (ἔκστασις) as *sahw*, the basic meaning of which is 'inattentiveness', 'absent-mindedness'. But does this choice tell of the equivalence of concepts or of the difficulty faced by the translator? The usual classical Arabic usage of *sahw* in fact refers more to inattention in the sense of negligence than to ecstatic states. Fortunately, the text is provided with a note, most likely by the translator himself, where we are given an analytical definition of the mystical experience that is expressed by ἔκστασις in Greek, *temhā* in Syriac, and *sahw* in Arabic:

> it makes the person free from his thoughts which generally come to him; and it gathers all his thought, and snatches his mind, and he sees distant absent matters as though they are near and present. And this is like the absent-mindedness (*sahw*) which fell upon Adam and Abraham.[81]

---

79 These include *sukr*, *wajd*, *šurb*, *dhawq*, *'adhb*, *samā'*, *fanā'*, *ghayba*, *jadhba*, *ḥāl*, *ghalaba*, *lum'a* – depending on the context and the tradition of interpretation.

80 The translator Bišr ibn al-Sirrī, an East Syrian, made the translation in Damascus during Ramadan, 253 AH (867 AD). His knowledge of Greek, as well as his extensive knowledge of theology, and even of Greek mythology, is apparent from the remarks in the margins, which are most probably by him.

81 يعني بالسهو ان يصير الانسان متبرئا من فكره التي جرت بها عادته

According to the definition, the experience consists of four characteristic features: (1) discharge of ordinary discursive mental activity, (2) a concentrating effect, (3) a sense of the more rapid, smoother motion of consciousness, as I see the basic idea of being snatched, and (4) the prophetic quality of clairvoyance. The definition is, of course, focused on the prophetic character of the particular experience in question (Acts 10:10). It may also be asked whether the giver of the description really knows of ecstasy from his own experience or whether he derived the qualities by reasoning (most likely) or from some other source. But in any case the very decision to attach an explanation is already an indication of the difficulty faced by the translator here.

The choice of *sahw*, however, did not gain permanent acceptance in the Christian tradition, neither did it gain favour in the Sufi *parole* – even though it would have provided a nicely rhyming counterpart to *ṣaḥw*, 'sobriety'. In the later version of the Arabic Bible[82] ἔκστασις is translated as *ghayba*, which in its most literal sense denotes absence; the most recent translations have *ghaybūba*, a word often translated as 'trance', or a whole sentence *ghibtu 'an wa'yī*, "I went off from my consciousness", the closest classical parallel to which in the present classical corpus is Junayd's *ghayba 'an ḥālī*, literally "absence from my state", but to be translated simply 'ecstasy'.[83] The Arabic version of Isaac of Nineveh has a very good equivalent for *temhā*, the Arabic *dhuhūl* which signifies 'perplexity', 'daze', 'stupor', 'amazement', but this concept does not occur in Sufi vocabulary.[84] Moreover, the Oxford Dictionary gives three Arabic equivalents for ecstasy, all different from the ones above: *ibtihāj*, the primary meaning of which is literally 'joy', *ṭarab*, an expression of strong emotion, either joy or sorrow[85], and *našwa*,

---

يجمع جميع افكاره ويخطف بعقله ويرى الامور البعيدة الغائبة كالقريبة الحاضرة وهذا شبيه بالسهو الذي وقع على ادم وابرهيم *Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151 II*, 25. (Translation by Staal, 26.) The same choice (*sahw*) is also made when ἔκστασις occurs in less ecstatic contexts (Acts 3:10). In 11:5 and 22:17 the concept of ecstasy is omitted, as in the Peshitta.

82 The early history of the Arabic translations of the New Testament is somewhat obscure, but the version edited by Staal was hardly the first one. The documented versions include the 9th –10th century Jewish versions of the Old Testament, as well as the 16th-century manuscripts of both testaments in St. Petersburg, and the Arabic versions included in 17th-century Paris and London polyglots. The Arabic manuscripts have not been exhaustively investigated since they are not among the most relevant for textual criticism. The first printed edition of the Arabic Bible was published in Rome in 1671, followed by Protestant (London, 1822) and Catholic reprints. I have used a reprint of the 19th-century Protestant edition.

83 Junayd: *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 79; Zaehner 1960, 219.

84 The translation is a more recent version of Isaac by Ishaq 'Atallah. The version is abbreviated, and in fact the most ecstatic points of the discourse are among the sections omitted. Isḥaq al-Suryānī: *Naskiyyāt*, 18.

85 This peculiar mode of expression is typical of the Semitic languages, especially Arabic, portraying the intensity of feeling, not its 'colour', resulting in two opposite meanings.

which seems to be the least symbolic and therefore perhaps the most analytical concept of the three.

However, the Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms by al-Qašani does not mention any of these! *Našwa*, in fact, never did become a part of Sufi vocabulary. This can be illustrated with the example given by E. Homerin. The first verse is an original secular poem composed by the legendary wine poet Abu Nuwas (d. 813), and the second version is from Qušayri, who quotes it in the chapter on *ṣaḥw* and *sukr*.

> *lī* ***našwatāni*** *wa-lin-nudmāni wāḥidatun*
> *šay'un khuṣiṣtu bihī baynahumū waḥdī.*[86]
>
> *lī* ***sakratāni*** *wa-lin-nudmāni wāḥidatun*
> *šay'un khuṣiṣtu bihī baynahumū waḥdī.*[87]
>
> To me two *intoxications*, to my companions one,
> by this I am marked among them alone.

Therefore, *sukr* is more technical and as such fits Sufi discourse better than *našwa*. However, there is no actual reason to suggest that *našwa* should be considered as the most exact Arabic equivalent of ecstasy. The whole idea of having exact signs for indefinite entities, such as ecstasy as a mental phenomenon, is in fact a logical impossibility. Perhaps the most reasonable solution is to acknowledge the incommensurability of the signs of the concept of ecstasy and leave the very possibility of analytical signification in brackets.

As for the practice, the English translations of Sufi texts customarily translate *wajd* as 'ecstasy', yet it must be borne in mind that its basic meaning is that of existing and being found. The clearest exception here is Niffari, who often employs *wajd* in the more general sense of experiencing oneself or God; Arberry therefore usually translates it as 'experience', but sometimes as 'ecstasy'. Often both possibilities would make perfect sense.[88] In any case, the fact that *wajd* is used as a symbol of ecstasy indicates the notion that in mystical experience the true nature of *existence* is *encountered*. Reality, for Sufis, is existential,[89] and existence is experiential.

---

86 Abū Nuwās: *Diwān*, 180.

87 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 71. Translation according to Homerin 1994, 191.

88 Cf. Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 3:4, 7:2, 11:17, 13:7 (here Arberry's translation 'ecstasy' does not really fit the context), 17:1, 2, 4, 6; 18:13, 68:1.

89 "Existential" in the theistic context does not imply alienation but a stress on (the active use of) free will and personal responsibility, and particularly a tendency to view *passionate commitment* as a prerequisite for true existence (as in the case of Kierkegaard in *Avslutande ovetenskaplig efterskrift [Concluding Unscientific Postscript]*, 2:2–3).

The corresponding verb *wajada* may be used of the emergence of the relation between the subject and the experience. Consequently, an expression like *yajidūna* (*fī 'asrārihim karāmāt wa-mawāhib*) [90] may be understood as a continuum of the three basic meanings: 'they *find*', 'they *encounter*' and 'they *experience*' (favours and gifts in their inmost being). But the connotation with *wajd* introduces an evident nuance of ecstasy into the expression, that of ecstatic experience.

Besides *wajd*, Nicholson also adjoins to the category of terms "more or less equivalent to ecstasy" *ghayba* ('absence'), *jadhba* ('attraction'), *ḥāl* ('state', 'emotion').[91] The strong ecstatic nuance of *jadhba* is evident from the use of the same root in the passive participle (*majdhūb*) to refer to the possessed and lunatics. The function of these terms in the discourse, however, is more active in the category of interpretation. *Ḥāl* is in fact an analytical term for "state in general" which could, however, be understood as a symbolic and specific term when used of a single ecstatic experience (and translated 'ecstasy'). In principle a single *ḥāl* could be expressed by the nomen unitatis *ḥāla*, but this grammatical possibility has seldom been utilised in the actual discourse.[92]

Curiously enough, one could even suggest that Sufi Arabic lacks an actual equivalent for 'ecstasy', since all the potential candidates seem to have a wider or more symbolic range of meanings than the English word 'ecstasy', and in any case considerably different from the Greek ἔκστασις. This, however, is not to deny the possibility of analytical expression which may take place in two ways: as parlance that is analytical in intention or as discussion that is analytical in content (components). In the former case the author intends to describe the experience as objectively and exactly as he is able, and the latter deserves to be called analytical due to the disclosure of the psychological characteristics which are after all the most objective information we have, even though it is often presented through the elements of symbolic expression. Moreover, the two often overlap in the discourse.

Since we are dealing with *religious* and *mystical* experience, not just any ecstatic phenomenon, some criteria should be elaborated for the differentiation of supernatural experiences from other emotional peaks. The Sufi texts and the Arabic language in general, however, lack the concept of "supernatural", which would be useful in this respect.[93] But does the lack of a sign imply the lack of a

---

90 E.g. Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 51; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 66.

91 Nicholson 1914, 59.

92 E.g. Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 62.

93 The lack is at least partly due to the structure of the Semitic languages, which lack prefixes like *super-* or *hyper-* familiar from the Indo-European languages. The Greek word 'supernatural' (ὑπερφυης, ὑππερφυσικος), a combination of *hyper* + *physin*, has an equivalent in Syriac: ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܛܒܥܐ (e.g. Brock: *Second Part*, 20:1).

concept? Does the idea of the "supernatural" lie behind the actual expressions? The discourse may give the impression that the differentiation between the two things is indeed lacking, and the reader with a "Western" approach should outline the division from his own presuppositions – in the following quotation the line between natural emotion and mystical ecstasy would be somewhere between 'grief' and 'vision':

> Ecstasy (*wajd*) is a sensation which encounters the heart, whether it be fear, or grief, or the vision of some fact of the future life, or the revelation of some state between man and God (Kalabadhi).[94]

From Jilani's analysis of ecstatic experience we may note that it may be by nature joy (*surūr*) or sorrow (*ḥuzn*).[95] Moreover, he describes fear (*khawf*), confusion, bewilderment (*ḥayra*) and shame (*ta'assuf*) as varieties of ecstasy.[96] The quality of pleasure (*qurrat al-'ayn*) is mentioned by Niffari.[97] The quality of the joyous pleasure of ecstasy is also described as *irtiyāḥ*, 'satisfaction', 'delight',[98] or with the almost synonymous concept *mut'a*, 'enjoyment', 'pleasure'.[99] In other words, any motion when strong enough may be ecstatic.

Similarly, the mystical influence may make its recipients happy (*as'adahum*) or wretched (*ašqāhum*), and give rise to a sense of intimacy or of despair. Qušayri states that "the varieties of the acts of the Truth cannot be counted, and details of its acts cannot be explained or recounted."[100] The multiple number of possible emotional contents for the ecstatic experience is actually the main reason for the non-existence of a semantically exact sign for ecstasy.

However, the idea of ecstasy surpassing the natural may be found in the Sufi texts at the points where the discourse indicates that experience is not willed nor purposed.[101] The aspect of involuntariness is regarded as one of the basic qualities of the mystical experience, and therefore we may consider the criterion of the "supernatural" as being constructed in relation to the will of man.

---

94 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 82; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 106.

95 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 118; *Secret of Secrets*, 89. Here Jilani is quoting Junayd.

96 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; *Secret of Secrets*, 92.

97 E.g. Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 9:2.

98 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 331; *Principles of Sufism*, 345. The meaning of *irtiyāḥ* is altogether equivalent to Syriac *neyāḥā*: 'pleasure, relaxation, delight'.

99 Junayd: *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 79, 80.

100 وأنواع أفعاله لا يحيط بها حصر ، ولا يأتي على تفصيلها شرح ولا ذكر Qušayri: *Risāla*, 66; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 118.

101 E.g. Jilani's differentiation of 'psychic ecstasy' (*al-wajd al-nafsāniyya*) and 'spiritual ecstasy' (*al-wajd al-rūḥāniyya*) in *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; *Secret of Secrets*, 90.

Despite all the problems of analytical expression, it is possible to differentiate in Sufi texts, if not exact terms, at least descriptions that are analytical in intention.[102] Yet they have a constant tendency to turn into speculation and drift away from the mechanisms of expression to those of interpretation.

> Often in that condition, one becomes unconscious of sense and mental perceptions so that one knows neither what is said nor what one says, and that is intoxication (*sukr*). (al-Sabbagh)[103]

> The attestation (*šāhid*) appears, and the attestations pass away, the senses depart, and sincerity is abolished. (Yazdaniyar concerning the presence of God)[104]

The analytical descriptions chart the various qualities of the experience, the most basic of which are present in the discourse more or less implicitly (the most explicitly expressed qualities are mainly the emotional ones described above), subject to our meta-interpretation. Since all the basic activity of the human mind is intentional, one of the main characteristics of ecstasy is correspondingly a certain **vitality**. The concept of ecstasy may be seen as an abstraction for the result of the process that functions as a kind of stimulus for the prevailing content of mind, and for this reason one of the most analytical signs for ecstasy is that of 'motion' (*ḥaraka*), a functional overall term covering all emotional variants of ecstasy. "When the spiritual motions (*al-ḥarakāt al-rūḥāniyya*) prevail in the soul, the ecstasy (*wajd*) is true and spiritual."[105] Jilani divides the ecstatic phenomenon into ten 'motions', the last of which is signified as 'alteration' (*taghayyur*), a term which potentially covers most of the field of ecstasy though seldom used.[106]

The **intensity** of experience is shown by the fact that physical control, will and the ability to make choices disappear in 'spiritual ecstasy'. Jilani compares the effects of true ecstasy with 'fever' (*ḥummā*), which keeps the body under its control so that one cannot avoid physical reactions.[107]

The non-conceptual nature of the experience already implies that one of its main characteristics is **immediacy**. Niffari suggests that a genuine experience can be achieved not by aiming to attain it (i.e. the state which is in the first place a

---

102 E.g. 'In that moment you see no above or below, mastership or discipleship, or even yourself, which is nearer to you than all else' Rumi: *Fihi-ma-Fihi* (discourse 24), 186.

103 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar),* 145.

104 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 104; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 137.

105 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; *Secret of Secrets,* 91.

106 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; cf. *Secret of Secrets,* 92. The ten modes of ecstasy (*wajd*) are 1. affection of the heart (*mayl al-qalb*), 2. remembrance of God, 3. reading of the Qur'an, 4. weeping (*bakkā'*), 5. pain (*ta'allum*), 6. fear (*khawf*), 7. sorrow (*ḥuzn*), 8. shame (*ta'assuf*) and perplexity (*ḥayra*), 9. isolation (*tajarrud*) and support (*nuṣra*), 10. inner and outer alteration (*taghayyur*).

107 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119–120; *Secret of Secrets,* 91.

verbal concept) but only by orientating oneself towards the direct experience (i.e. God himself). "You desire either me or *waqfa*, or the shape (*hay'a*) of *waqfa*. But if you want me, you are in *waqfa*."[108]

Qušayri has several descriptions of mystical experiences that are analytical in intention. The quality of **totality** is expressed in an unequivocal way: "When effacement (*maḥw*) comes to dominate a person, he has no knowledge, no reason, no understanding, and no sense."[109] The physical part has no ability to make choices and is void of power.[110] When one is seized (*istawlā*) by the experience, one does not experience (*yašhadu*) identity (*'ayn*)[111], 'vestige' (*athar*), impression (*rasm*) or remains (*talal*) of oneself or of others, and this happens through the 'cessation of one's perception of oneself' (*zawāl iḥsāsihi bi-nafsihi*) and of other beings of this world.[112] The use of certain verbs also suggests several interesting features: Qušayri employs the word *mukhtaṭif*, from the root *KH-Ṭ-F*, already familiar to us from Syriac metatheology, to describe one's disappearance from among the created as 'being snatched away' when 'overpowered' (*istawlā*) by a greater force.[113]

Totality, as a total concentration, is in fact also a prerequisite for an ecstatic mystical experience, which by definition can hardly be only a partial aspect of consciousness. Niffari expresses this idea in his enigmatic fashion by stating: "if you see other than Me, you do not see Me".[114]

One way of signifying the extraordinary character of consciousness during the ecstatic experience is to employ the quality of 'rapidity' (*sur'a*), which expresses the intoxicating aspect in a very functional way.[115] The parlance on the smooth character of the experience also functions to express the idea that one of the aspects of the experience is the loss of control of ordinary consciousness. In mystical experience one is "reconciled with one's own self, utterly removed from sensation (*iḥsās*)".[116] According to Niffari, 'cause' (*sabab*) and 'relationship'

---

108 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 18:1.

109 فأما إذا كان الغالب عليه المحو فلا علم ولا عقل ولا فهم ولا حس Qušayri: *Risāla*, 64.

110 فلا يبقى للجسم قوّة واختيار Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; *Secret of Secrets*, 90.

111 *'Ayn*, literally 'eye', is sometimes used in the sense of 'core', 'substance', 'self'. The present case is translated 'vision' by Sells in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 120. Also, 'personality' or 'individuality' might not be out of the question.

112 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 68.

113 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 66.

114 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 5:2. إن رأيت غيرى لم ترنى

115 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 61; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 79.

116 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 66. مصطلحاً عن نفسه مأخوذاً بالكلية عن الإحساس

(*nasab*) are cut off during the experience – a description indicating the absolute totality of the ecstasy.[117]

Niffari also discloses the quality of **tranquillity** by defining the term *sakīna* as 'ecstasy in Me' (*al-wajd biya*). *Sakīna* is in both form and in meaning the Arabic form of the Hebrew שְׁכִינָה , '(divine) presence'. In the psychological reality this kind of *wajd* may be sensed as something that 'establishes' (*athbata*) or 'effaces' (*maḥā*).[118] Close to this comes the quality of **amenity** which is opened in the discourse by the use of the word *na'īm* ('bliss', 'comfort', 'ease').[119]

The aspect of warmth (*ḥarāra*) in the ecstatic experience is emphasised by Jilani.[120] He combines the qualities of warmth and uncontrollability in the following analytical description:

> The psyche (*nafs*) is unable to obstruct/hinder it, since these motions overpower the physical motion, like that of fever; and when the fever prevails, the psyche becomes too weak to control it and it has no choice at that time.[121]

The **intentionality** of Sufi ecstasy is evident since the experience may contain an element of yearning, which may even be regarded as the basic mode of the Sufi experience. Especially Junayd describes the ecstatic experience as a furious longing, as a God-given 'thirst' (*zhama'*) for God. "Their (sense of) loss distresses them, and their (sense of) finding (God) humbles them as they yearn and ache for him, longing for him in ecstasy."[122]

Sufi ecstasy may also have a **consuming**, even violent character, since a "being of flesh cannot endure the appearance" of the power of experience.[123] This quality may be described as pain (*ta'allum*) and torment (*law'a*) in the inner heart (*fu'ād*), 'passion' (*gharām*) in the innermost conscience (*ḍamīr*), and 'inconvenience' (*inzi'āj*) in the subconscious (*bāṭin*).[124]

And finally, we may make a remark concerning the relationship between the mystical experience and sleep. Namely, Niffari hints at the possibility of continu-

---

117 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 36:4.

118 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:1–2. Arberry translates *wajd* here as 'experience'.

119 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 67:12–13, where Niffari in fact denies the value of the experience in question.

120 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; *Secret of Secrets*, 91.

121 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; *Secret of Secrets*, 91.

122 قد شجاها فقدانها وذلها وجدانها أسوفة عليه موجعة لديه
متشوقة فى الوجد اليه Junayd, *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 82; Zaehner 1960, 223.

123 لا يكون للبشرية بقاء عند ظهور سلطان الحقيقة (Literally 'appearance of the Real Sovereignty'.) Qušayri: *Risāla*, 62. For the physiological manifestations, see p. 267 ff.

124 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 202; *Principles of Sufism*, 177; Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; *Secret of Secrets*, 92.

ance of the experience while asleep, which seems to be a somewhat ideal case. He refers to sleeping 'in the vision' of God,[125] vision being for him a general term for the mystical experience, and in a more cryptic passage, he refers to sleeping under the divine assistance or while weeping.[126] Niffari also requires purity of dreams.[127]

3.2.2. Symbolic Expression

When attempting to depict a single experience, one soon ends up using symbols derived from the sensible world. Symbolic expressions operate in various ways. Firstly, they may describe the experience itself as if it were a separate object: these include, for example, the images of flame, wine or cup. Secondly, symbolic expression may portray the *influences* of the experience on the subject on an analogous basis: these include 'drunkenness' (*sukr*) and 'fever' (*ḥummā*). Qušayri uses the symbol of 'melting' (*tadhwīb*) to represent the psychic sense of diffidence and bashfulness during the experience.[128] Thirdly, the focus may be on the *relation* between the subject and the experience, the most important being 'tasting' (*dhawq*), 'drinking' (*šurb*) and 'hearing' (*samā'*). Tasting can be focused as 'sweetness' (*'adhb* or *ḥalāwa*)[129], or ecstasy can be signified as 'nourishment' (*ṭa'ām*) with the aid of analogy.[130] In addition, touching and smelling are mentioned at least by Hujwiri,[131] and the image of 'seeing' is actually the basic category of mystical apprehension in Niffari's discourse, where its wide usage implies that it has little if anything to do with actual visual apparitions.[132] And finally, the symbolic expressions may indicate the contribution of the *causa efficiens* behind the experience as, for example, 'favours' (*karāmāt*) and 'gifts' (*mawāhib*).[133]

---

125 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 30:13.

126 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 13:6.

127 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 34:8.

128 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 217.

129 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 152, 222; *Principles of Sufism*, 96, 208. Tirmidhi's experiences of sweetness in Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 22, 180.

130 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120. الوجد طعام المحبين – "Ecstasy is the meal of lovers (of God)".

131 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 406. He explains lines from a poem by Abu Nuwās ("*Give me drink to drink and tell me it is wine. Do not give it me in secret, when it can be given openly*") as follows: Let my eye see it and my hand touch it and my palate taste it and my nose smell it [...]

132 E.g. Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 4:11, 7:20.

133 E.g. Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 51; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 66; Junayd: *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 79.

These signs hint at the given nature of the experience and therefore contain a certain interpretative element.

The expressions concerning the nature and characteristics of the experience are often analytical in intention but symbolic in content. The aspect of warmth is expressed with the symbol of fire (*nār*), one of the most common symbols.[134]

> Ecstasy is a flame (*lahīb*) which springs up in the secret heart (*asrār*), and appears out of longing, and at that visitation (*wārid*) the members are stirred either to joy or grief (al-Nūrī).[135]

> Whoever [...] knows the ecstasy (*wajd*) in Me, and departs from it and is tranquil in his departing – for him I kindle a solitary fire (*nār mufrada*) (Niffari).[136]

The symbol of light (*nūr*) is referred to by Jilani, the subject of whose narrative contemplates light with the "two eyes of the heart" and becomes luminous (*nūrāniyya*) himself and is enlightened (*munawwar*) in the same light.[137] Also, in Tirmidhi's experience "the heart is filled with the wonders of lights". The symbolic nature[138] of the light in question is illustrated in his statement that those who receive supernatural speech receive *sound as light*, "utterances in the form of light".[139]

The analogy of drinking produces further images such as 'cups' (*akwāb*).[140] According to Qušayri, the experience both 'gives drink' (*saqā*) and 'makes drunk' (*askara*).[141] Drunkenness is a state of mind that is extraordinary in character, yet not in any sense ultimate. As Qušayri puts it, "a person who is drunk (*ṣāḥib al-sukr*) can be feeling good (*mabṣūṭ*) even though he does not attain the full share of his drunkenness."[142] Drunkenness also makes one forget and lose one's will.[143] Due to the rich derivative faculties of Arabic, there is a word for the one whose

---

134 For instance, the divine subject of Niffari declares: "Who indicates (*dalla*) the veil (*ḥijāb*), for him I have raised the fire of union (*nār al-wuṣūl*)." Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 34:1.

135 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 82; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 106. Cf. Smith 34 (cit. Attar: *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, ii).

136 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:59.

137 E.g. Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 90; *Secret of Secrets*, 56.

138 The "symbolic nature" here, of course, results from our "empirical" perspective; a mystic whose world-view is structured from the spiritual dimension would rather present the material light as metaphorical if compared with the Eternal Divine Light. See al-Ghazali: *Miškāt al-anwār*, 55 (tr. 57).

139 Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 180, 115. The same image functions in both directions: an utterance can be taken as a symbol of an entity of non-verbal information.

140 E.g. Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 1:3.

141 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 66; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 118.

142 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 71.

143 Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 184.

drunkenness is to some extent self-induced, *mutasākir*, 'would-be-drunk'. In Sufi parlance it has been defined as the one "whose oncoming has not completely taken him over, so that he still has access to his senses".[144]

Drink may be identified with love. This is especially true in poetical language, but also in prose one may partake of the "pure drink of the cup of His love (*wadd*)."[145] Yahya ibn Mu'adh claims: "I am drunk from the long draught I drank from the cup of his love (*maḥabba*)."[146]

The symbols may also be combined in seemingly illogical ways – by connecting fiery and liquid images, for example. The mystical experience is said to 'inflame' (*aḥraqa*) one's heart (*qalb*) so that the subject partakes of the "drink (*šurb*) of the cup (*ka's*) of His love".[147]

The aspect of uncontrollability in the experience has led to its being signed with the symbol *ghalaba*, which literally means 'conquest' or 'victory'. However, Arberry translates it as 'overmastery' and Nicholson as 'rapture'. According to Kalabadhi, it means a certain force of fear, shame, reverence or the like which controls the subject for a short time, after which he returns to his original state.[148] 'Inspiration' might function as a dynamic translation.

The consuming quality of the experience may be described on the symbolic level as a 'sting' (*ladgha*) in the heart or, using the imagery of heat, as 'fires' (*nīrān*) blazing in the heart.[149]

The quality of tranquillity (*sakīna*) is further developed by Niffari, who expresses it on the symbolic level with the symbol of a 'gate' (*bāb*). "Tranquillity is that you enter to me through the gate."[150] The limited duration of the experience and its dependence on the subject's choice is expressed as 'entering' and 'departing' from the gate. In this respect the 'gate' refers to the beginning and end

---

144 المتساكر الذي لم يستوفه الوارد فيكون للإحساس فيه مساغ Qušayri: *Risāla*, 71; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 124–125.

145 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 327; *Principles of Sufism*, 339. صفا شربه من كأس وده

The concept of *wadd* is somewhat wider than *maḥabba*, for it covers the meanings 'affection', 'amity' and 'friendship'.

146 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 325; *Principles of Sufism*, 335. سكرت من كثرة ما شربت من كأس محبته

147 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 327; *Principles of Sufism*, 339.

148 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 83–85; Arberry, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 108–110; Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 184. It is interesting to note that *ghalaba* does occur in the Arabic version of Sahdona, where it is accurately translated by Halleux as 'la victoire'. Sahdona: *Oeuvres spirituelles IV*, p. 104.

149 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 202; *Principles of Sufism*, 177. The emphasis of the context indicates that fire does not here represent warmth but painful rapture.

150 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:3. السكينة أن تدخل إليّ من الباب

of the experience.[151] Likewise, the masters of mystical knowledge who enter with cognition (*'ilm*) are called 'masters of gates' (*aṣḥāb al-abwāb*).[152]

Symbols, however, are apt to be interpreted in diverse ways, which tends to direct the emphasis of the discourse towards refinement of the forms of expression, which more or less means departure from the actual experience in the mental reality towards even more colourful symbols that may, by gaining inherent value, occupy an independent position in the discourse. Then the discourse has moved to the category of interpretation.

Perhaps the most ambiguous concepts in this sense are the expression of 'annihilation' (*fanā'*) and all analogous or metaphorical descriptions related to it, such as 'iron melting in fire' or 'light in light'. As symbolic expressions these are more forceful than the previous cases – again a feature which leads the discussion towards the category of interpretation. In principle these expressions may be understood either as (a) descriptions of experiences of a similar kind, albeit bolder in the form of expression only, or (b) descriptions of experiences similar in nature but stronger in effect, or (c) descriptions of experiences that are of an entirely different character but the difference is not efficiently reflected on the verbal level. And moreover, in the actual discourse they usually seem to function as theological statements without actual reference to the subject's factual experience. Further reasoning on the question of the relationship between such expressions and (psychic) reality is prevented by the lack of objective criteria.

Not all symbols necessarily have an analytical quality as their counterpart: they may be based on a theological function, for example. 'Shimmer' (*lum'a*), one of the most beautiful symbols, may be used either because of the enlightening quality sensed in the experience or it may be derived from God's attribute of light, which in turn may precondition the whole process by causing the mystic to suppose that the experience of Him is inevitably enlightened or illuminating in nature. However, Qušayri considers the following statement by "a certain sheikh" as a description of 'evident ecstasy' (*wajd zhāhir*): "shimmer glimmering with a language deprived of normal discernment".[153]

Arabic discourse is often characterised by the tendency to allow the choice of vocabulary be poetically orientated even in prose *parole*. Most authors are fond of choosing terms that rhyme, as with Qušayri's use of the words *istī'āb* (encompassing), *istighrāq* (immersion) and *istihlāk* (extinction) that describe the relation

151 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:4, 71:1.

152 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:5.

153 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 316. Von Schlegell translates "tongue of one who is taken away from normal modes of discernment" (*Principles of Sufism*, 323). The original, however, is more poetical: *lum'a lama'at bi-lisān ma'khūdh 'an al-tamyīz al-ma'hūd.*

between the subject and his experience.[154] Moreover, the exact choice of words is often adjusted by homiletic means as in the case of Qušayri's hyperbole: "If I was without ecstasy, I would die of yearning."[155]

The Sufis discussed the topic of mystical experience from such manifold aspects that we may also inquire whether they produced signs that are able to function as negative symbols, expressing the non-experience of ecstasy? And indeed, there is a symbol arising naturally from the Oriental cultural context, that of the veil (*ḥijāb* or *sitr*), one of the most common symbols in all Sufi discourse, and therefore a wide field of functions are attributed to it. Principally it may signify any hindrance between man and God with which one veils oneself from the divine reality,[156] and therefore it may ultimately be anything but God Himself: even his 'service' (*'ibāda*), 'veneration' (*ta'zhīm*) or 'vision' (*ru'ya*) are veils in this perspective.[157] Due to this breadth of meaning, however, the image of veiling may be used even to refer to the quality of totality of the experience. Niffari's semantic movements on the symbolic level are at times somewhat cryptic, but in the following the idea is clear: all sensual experience and rational thought is a veil over the mystical experience.

> Experience (*wajd*) of what is other than Me is a veil over ecstasy (*wajd*) in me; according to the intensity of the veil over experience of Me, the manifestations (*bādiyāt*) will take hold of you, whether you belong to them or not.[158]

According to some maxims, the greatest veil is man's own personality, his 'self' (*nafs*).[159] On the other hand, since God in his almightiness is behind all, the veils may be taken as something prepared and given by Him, which alone justifies the use of symbols such as 'veil of light'.[160] But the 'veil' is also used in a way that justifies us in considering it as a negative symbol of mystical experience. Niffari explicitly refers to the veil as the opposite of ecstasy: if one fails to accept the

---

154 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 63, 73.

155 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 223. Von Schlegell actually translates the sentence (*kuntu bi-la wajd*$_{in}$ *'amūtu min al-hawā*) in a more logical way: "Without ecstasy I would *almost* have died from love." (*Principles of Sufism,* 209). The original is superior in beauty.

156 See Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 64:1, 26:14, 68:13.

157 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:28–29.

158 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 1:23. Arberry's translation, which I tend to follow, here gives 'experience' for each occurrence of *wajd*, yet I suggest the possibility of 'ecstasy' in the second case. It is not completely unusual for Niffari to use the same word in the same sentence with two different references, a kind of word play enjoyed by others as well (e.g. Jilani: *Sirr al-asrār*, 86).

159 E.g. Qušayri: *Risāla,* 152; *Principles of Sufism*, 97.

160 E.g. Ghazali: *Miškāt*, chapter 3:3.

qualities of genuine experience, one will be ruled by the qualities of the veil.[161] This implies that both realities exist by their qualities – and in them alone, a modern positivist might add.

Niffari directs the symbolisation further by calling the veil (*ḥijāb*) in turn *al-balā'*, a term which may signify either 'affliction', 'trial' or 'visitation' and which functions in the discourse on a squared level, as a symbol of a symbol.[162]

When the symbols separate themselves from the clear analogous relation, the possibilities for their interpretation begin to display dispersion. In the following quotation from Niffari's prophetic speech we could take 'treasures' (*kunūz*), and perhaps also the 'keys' (*mafātīḥ*) leading to them, as signs of mystical experience, yet the passage is open to other interpretations as well (e.g. it would also serve as an analogy of man's spiritual growth in a more static sense).

> Your time has come, so gather for Me about yourself my bands. Treasure up my *treasures* with my *keys* which I have given you. And be firm and strong, for you are close to your manhood. Appear before Me in that in which I manifest you, and recollect Me through my compassionate bounty.[163]

In terms of semantic logic this kind of parlance is, albeit grammatically prose, perhaps closer to poetry in essence.

3.2.3. Poetic Expression[164]

The forms of expression reached their structural and aesthetic peak in Arabic and especially Persian Sufi poetry, which developed into a most important means of expression, with the result that finally Sufi ideas and images were adopted by non-Sufi authors as well. Schimmel makes a distinction between descriptive poems, in which the aim is to express the experiences, and technical poems with complicated word plays, puns and allusions,[165] but as might be expected, the division is somewhat indistinct. Since the structure of Persian poetry allows thematic inconsistency, it was possible to express satirical, didactic and mystical themes in the same *ghazal*. The thematic incoherence resulted in variation in interpretation: even the most erotic verses may be interpreted as mystical allegories, and this

---

161 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 72:14.

162 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 26:14.

163 Niffari: Mukhāṭaba wa bišāra, §5.

164 Sufi poetry is an extremely wide field, and very relevant to our topic, so I have here chosen to approach the subject by using the existing data from outside the actual corpus. The only entirely poetic work among my sources is Ibn 'Arabi's *Tarjuman al-Aśwāq*, utilised in the present chapter; in addition Qušayri and Kalabadhi frequently quote Sufi poetry.

165 Schimmel 1982, 18.

means a quite unique mixture and co-ordination of the sacred and profane. On the other hand, since poetry does not reveal the poet's personal circumstances or conditions, the themes were established into somewhat impersonal ones.[166]

Most themes, images and metaphors (*al-ma'ānī*) are common to all poets. Does this mean an intentional allusion to a specific subtext, or a conditioned, somehow automatic process in the state of poetic inspiration? The problem of creative originality and imitation has been discussed by both Muslim and Western scholars. Losensky estimates that it is possible to "broadly distinguish between formulaic or conventional usage and conscious allusion."[167]

The critic Ibn Rašīq (d. c. 1064–1070) made a distinction between theft (*sarq*) and the original inspiration (*badī'*). He admitted that not one of the poets can claim to be free of borrowings (*sariqāt*).[168] He gives ample latitude for *tawārud*, 'unintentional coincidences' between two texts resulting from similarity of topic, the demands of metre and rhyme, or from the unconscious. The point is in the way in which the theft is carried out. A good thief leaves no clues! Without traces of the intended allusion to the original source, the result is a "real and independent *ibtidā'* ".[169]

The poet may also intentionally activate a subtext by referring to an earlier text. According to Losensky, "the distinction between systematic repetition and conscious allusion is fundamental to medieval Arabic discussions of *sariqāt*, but it is not easy to draw."[170]

The main theme of Sufi poetry is usually considered to be 'Love', often taken as the opposite of legalism and reasoning. The main symbol is that of wine, the everlasting wine of love, the house of wine (tavern), the cup of wine and the cup-bearer (who is, for instance, a Christian boy of fourteen). According to a Persian key of interpretation called *Risāla-yi Mišwāq* by Muhsin Faid Kašani (17th century) wine (*šarāb*) means an enraptured experience of the manifestation of the true Beloved, which destroys the foundations of rationality, but a 'jug' (Pers. *sabū*), for example, means the manifestation of God's names and attributes.[171]

Symbolic usages of various persons, animals, flowers, stones, instruments and letters of the Arabic alphabet found in Persian mystical poetry have been put

---

166 Yarshater 1988, 23–28, 147–50, 191. (*Ghazal* is a monorhyme of approx. 7–14 lines.)

167 Losensky 1994, 227.

168 Losensky 1994, 227–228.

169 Losensky 1994, 228.

170 Losensky 1994, 228 (referring to Hasan Ibn Rašīq al-Qayrawānī: *al-'Umdah fī mahāsin al-ši'r*, Dār al-Jīl, Bayrūt 1981).

171 Arberry 1950, chapter 10; Schimmel 1982, 60, 78. See also J. Nurbakhsh: *Sufi symbolism: the Nurbakhsh encyclopedia of Sufi terminology* (*Farhang-e Nurbakhsh*), (Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, London).

together by Schimmel (1982 and 1984). They all signify various states of the lover or the Beloved. There are symbols for ecstasy selected from nature and the animal kingdom, for instance a *hawk* is able to carry away a feeble pigeon, a *daffodil* is a symbol of seeing, and home-sickness is symbolised by a *reed-pipe* or by an *elephant* tugging at its chains. Symbols such as light, fire, embraces and kisses are widely used.[172]

The choice of symbol is usually based on metaphorical or allegorical correlation. For example, Attar employs of divine experience the functional symbol *reward* – which in turn is symbolised with a symbol of a symbol, *swimming towards the dry land.*[173] The choice of words is also guided by technical requirements; refinement of the forms of expression may mean that the choice of word is based on its fittingness to the rhyme. Generally, however, even a more peculiar symbol is not an arbitrary sign chosen at random, but one arising from the religious cultural context. For example, in Attar's poetical work *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* the 'black cave', to judge by the context, seems to be a symbol of a certain experience; it was chosen, according to Davies, on the basis of the story of Muhammad and Abu Bakr hiding in the cave.[174]

One advantage of poetic expression is that it is free to surpass the limits of the analogy and adopt a more metaphorical function or make use of surreal ideas. A Sufi poet may boast that "the cup was passed around, and they became drunk, but my drunkenness comes from the cup-bearer (*sukrī min al-mudīr*)".[175]

If we want to know the "right" interpretation of a poem, we should first select the reference. In historical perspective the right reference would be the original intention of the author: what did he mean, what did he cogitate? (A psychoanalytical interpretation would go even further, to the motives and subconscious aims behind these very cogitations.) Since these are impossible to trace, we may understand poetry as being an open field for unregulated interpretations, resulting in an endless variety of meanings. In practice, however, the religious cultural context usually develops a kind of consensus of the principles of interpretation, which is based on the most generally accepted ways of interpretation, and this in turn, psychologically speaking, is based on the human need to know the "right" meaning, which gives rise to the tendency to seek authorities. The assigning of a meaning to a verse, therefore, is by no means a process limited to the authors of poetry

172 Schimmel 1984, 148; Schimmel 1982, 73–78.

173 Attar: *Conference of the Birds,* 152.

174 Attar: *Conference of the Birds,* 30. "Break nature's frame, be resolute and brave, then rest at peace in Unity's black cave." (Davis adds in a footnote that the episode became a symbol of withdrawal from the world.)

175 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 326; *Principles of Sufism,* 336.

alone. Meaning is produced by the reader as well, the result in this case being a kind of "second-hand Sufi poetry": secular poetry with a spiritual interpretation.

Now we may turn to our main sources. It is probably not a serious exaggeration if we take Ibn ʿArabi as the ultimate culmination of Sufi symbolism. And what is even more applicable, his poetic work *Tarjumān al-ašwāq* offers an indisputable way of entering into the symbolism since he himself wrote a profound commentary on it. Through his interpretations we are able to find a variety of miscellaneous symbols to signify ecstatic experiences. These interpretations by their very nature already represent the mechanisms of interpretation which we shall deal with in more detail in the next chapter, but on the other hand, Ibn ʿArabi himself claims that some of the interpretations were "suggested to him in moments of ecstasy" as the reference had remained unclear to him during the original inspiration[176] – a honest remark indeed.

salāmun ʿalā salmā wa-man ḥalla bi-l-ḥimā
wa-ḥaqqa li-mithlī riqqatan an yusallimā[177]

Greetings to Salma and to those who dwell in the shelter,
for it behoves one like me to give greetings.

The female name Salma, according to Ibn ʿArabi, alludes to 'Solomonic ecstasy' (*ḥāla sulaymāniyya*), a kind of prophetic station; *ḥimā* means 'refuge', 'protection', 'sanctuary' and symbolises an unattainable station of prophecy, the gate of which was closed by Muhammad.[178] Salma is a name used generally in poetry when the true identity of the beloved is intended to be hidden.[179]

lamaʿat la-nā bi-l-abraqayni burūqu
qaṣafat la-hā bayna-l-ḍulūʿi ruʿūdu.[180]

Flashes of lightning gleamed to us at al-Abraqan,
and their peals of thunder crashed between the ribs.

Here 'peals of thunder' (*ruʿūd*) is a Mosaic ecstasy (*ḥāla mūsawiyya*) which is a divine conversation (*munājāt*) following from the manifestation of the divine essence in the visible world. The plural 'flashes' indicates that there is variation in

176 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 7. Ibn ʿArabi's style of interpretation exercised a great influence on later Sufis.

177 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq* 4:1 (p. 16). I follow Nicholson's principle in translating *ḥāla* as 'ecstasy', but I deviate from his translation (p. 57): "...who dwell in the preserve, for it behoves one who loves tenderly like me to give greetings."

178 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 57.

179 Schimmel 1982, 27–28.

180 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 9:1 (p. 18).

the forms of manifestation. The reference to Moses is derived from the idea that he first saw the fire and afterwards heard God speak.[181]

For the context of our study we can hardly think of a more interesting symbol than the following:

> *bi-dhī salamin wa-l-dayri min ḥāḍiri-l-ḥimā*
> *zhibā'un turīka-l-šamsa fī ṣuwari-l-dumā.*[182]
>
> At Dhū Salam and the monastery in the abode of al-Ḥimā,
> are gazelles who show you the sun in the forms of marble statues.

The 'monastery' (*dayr*), according to Ibn ʿArabi, refers to a Syrian ecstasy (*ḥāla suryāniyya*). Here we have the temptation to accept the impression that the Syrian monasteries still enjoyed a kind of "ecstatic" reputation, at least being a potential context for mystical experience, in the 13th century when Ibn ʿArabi travelled in Mosul and other parts of Northern Mesopotamia. The choice of image as such does not necessarily imply this (more than the idea that all women called Salma are ecstatic), but the parallelism with the earlier prophets does, at least to some extent. We might even see a connection between the images in this verse and the liturgical beauty of the Syrian Church in the fact that Ibn ʿArabi explains *Dhū Salam* as a station "to which submission is rendered on account of its beauty", and 'abode of *al-Ḥimā*' meaning "that which surrounds the most inaccessible veil of Divine glory. 'Gazelles' are forms of divine and prophetic wisdom. The word *ṣuwar*, here translated as 'statues', in fact refers to images and pictorial representation in general, which could be interpreted as a reference to icons, objects strictly forbidden in Islam but revered in Orthodox Christianity. These are explained as being classes of knowledge with no connection with either reason or lust, which would fit in with the spiritual outlook of iconic presentation.[183]

We may note here that in Persian Sufi literature *dayr* may metaphorically represent the universe and the unity of existence, or occasionally the material world (*nāsūt*). In Sufi parlance *dayr-e Moghān* referred to an assembly of mystics

---

181 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq,* 63–64.

182 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq* 12:1 (p. 19).

183 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq,* 70–71. The actual statues were never introduced into the Churches of the Orient, the only exception being the Uniate churches, which received them as an import from Rome at a relatively late date (c. 18th century). The connection between church decoration and the imagery of the poem seems to be confirmed by the following verses (12:2–4) that contain further images from a Christian context:

> "Therefore I watch spheres and serve in a church (*bī'a*),
> and guard a many-coloured meadow in the spring.
> And at one time I am called the herdsman of the gazelles in the desert,
> and at another time I am called a Christian monk (*rāhib*) and an astrologer.
> My Beloved is three although He is One,
> even as the Persons (of the Trinity) are made one Person in essence."

and saints. The fact that Christian monasteries served as hostelries, providing temporary lodging for pilgrims and travellers, gave rise to literary uses of the word *dayr*, by itself or in constructs, as a metaphor for the transitory life of this world, comparable to *falak* (revolving firmament) and *čarḵ* (the wheel of fortune). Such examples as *dayr-e ḵāki* (earthly), *dayr-e sepanjī* (transient), *dayr-e šešjehatī* (six-sided), *dayr-e kohan* (decrepit), and *dayr-e mīnā* (enamel) are listed and explained in dictionaries (e.g., *Dehḵodā*, s.v. *dayr*).[184]

Other, and even more peculiar, signs of ecstasy in *Tarjumān al-ašwāq* include a 'camel saddled' for a journey (*bāzil raḥḥalū*). It is used for the kind of ecstatic experience that should illuminate the mystery of the Almighty but becomes an inherent value in itself so that it actually turns into an obstacle between its subject and God.[185] 'Zarūd and its sand' (*zarūd wa-ramlahā*) stands for elusive types of knowledge which can be reached only in ecstasy.[186]

The process of signification achieves a new level when the symbols of symbols are introduced. As examples of these second-degree symbols we may note 'paradise of refuge' (*jannat al-ma'wā*),[187] which seems to be employed by Ibn ʿArabi as a symbol of wine, which is elsewhere usually used as a symbol of spiritual joy, sometimes referring to the divine sciences leading to it, or in contexts that are ecstatic in some other way. [188] And further, 'escaping' (*falat*) is used as a symbol of the yearning of tasting (*dhawq*)[189], 'killing by a glance' (*qatalat bi-l-laḥẓh*) as a symbol of immersion in contemplation (*al-fanā' fī-l-mušāhada*),[190] and so forth.

In conclusion we may remark that in Sufi poetry represented by Ibn ʿArabi the processes of signification are extended to their uttermost limits. In principle any sign may be adopted to signify mystical experiences and the processes of reference may be continued forward. A symbol that is freely chosen, however, cannot be comprehensible, as Ibn ʿArabi had to admit: the rarest symbols demanded a commentary of their own. The very need to find exact meanings for every particular symbol is especially a problem of religious poetry since the meanings

---

184 Q. Āryān: Dayr. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, www.iranica.com (The sources are given as: Bākarzī, pp. 244–45, *Mer'āt al-ʿošš̄āq*, p. 150; cf. ʿErāqi, p. 414, *Hedāyat*, p. 39.)

185 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 31:15, (p. 34, 117, 118).

186 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 21:6 (p. 91, 25).

187 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 26:8 (p. 28). Nicholson translates 'The Garden of Eden' (p. 103).

188 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq*, 31:10 (p. 118), 26:6–7 (pp. 102–103), 48:12, (p. 136).

189 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq* 59:14 (p. 45, 147) *li-tuflita min mikhlabi al-ṭā'irī*, "that she might escape from the claw of the bird".

190 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Ašwāq* 2:4 (pp. 15, 50).

must be controlled in relation to orthodox doctrine. Secular poetry is freer to leave more room for open meanings.

Consequently, mystical poetry, because of its extraordinary themes and syntactic complexity, is often esoteric to the point of being unintelligible. Yet mystical poems are challenging and fascinating reading, and this is true not only from the semantic, but also from the syntactic point of view. In one line there may occur a number of contrasts, paradoxical oppositions, some play with subject-object relations, and maximal use of transitive allusions, which have great potential for opening new subtextual associations.[191]

'ajibtu minka minnī	I am amazed by you, by me
afnaytanī bika ᶜannī	You annihilated me in you from me.
aqamtanī bi-maqām$_{in}$	You stood me in a station
zhanantu annaka anī	where I supposed that you were me.
(Ibn Jinnī)[192]	

The poetry of Hallaj is reputed to contain "antithesis (*ṭibāq*), paronomasia (*jinās*), repetition of verbs and an abundance of prepositions in contrast and opposition within a single verse. The result is a paradox which ruptures the psychological barriers of space, time, and rationality."[193] This estimation may be applied largely to Sufi poetry in general.

3.3. INTERPRETATION

The level of interpretation is a wide field where mystical experiences undergo typification, termification, valuation and speculation as to its causes and effects and are set in their position in various contexts in theological discussion. On this level the experiences are no longer treated as single experiences but rather as general types.

Valuation means estimations as to the importance of the experience in relation to religious doctrines and values. Any aspect of the experience, for instance its joyous quality,[194] is certainly not an end in itself but part of a wider process.

---

191 For some examples, see Homerin 1994, 193–194.

192 Homerin 1994, 196. The poem is from the end of the 10th century.

193 Homerin 1994, 193.

194 For instance, Arberry translates Niffari's enigmatic utterance استعذ بى من سرّك بايوانك إلىّ as: "Seek refuge with Me from your joy in taking refuge in Me." Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 30:18.

The value of the experience is actually determined by its interpretation concerning its relation to the theological aspects.

But the way in which the discussion actually operates in the Sufi classics, is somewhat unequalled. The experience is modified into terms and types in a most circumstantial way.

3.3.1. Classification of Experience: Sufi Taxonomy

The enormous set of technical vocabulary developed for various types of experience or diverse modes of being, more or less mystical, is certainly one of the most distinctive characteristics of Sufi literature, the classics of which are largely based on the presentations of technical terms referring to general types of experiences, and the whole discourse is structured around them.

The formation of Sufi theory, however, is quite an ambitious endeavour since the inner states are essentially lacking in actual identifying criteria. In order to succeed in treating the interpenetrating existential states, imminent to each other in the mental reality, as independent entities, the semantic fields of the technical terms referring to them should remain so fixed that no significant variation occurs among the different authors. In principle this might not be totally impossible since natural languages are not closed systems but creatively employable: they grow like living organisms whenever there is an actual need to express something.[195] On the other hand, all logical reasons indicate that if we survey what kind of usages the terms have in contextual reading, and what kind of meanings are generated by these usages, we will find substantial differences. How then do the Sufis succeed in their pursuit of creating public language for inner states?

The aim of the Sufi discourse is to classify and arrange experiences into different states (*ḥāl*) along the mystic's path. Obviously there is much to interpret, since in principle the whole field of mental phenomena is potentially connected with mystical and ecstatic experiences. As has already been pointed out, the mystical influence may manifest itself in various ways: according to the qualities that are clearly interpretative in nature, it may 'guide' (*hadā*) or 'lead astray' (*aḍalla*), 'blind' (*a'mā*), 'veil' (*ḥajama*), 'attract' (*jadhaba*), 'bring into intimate closeness' (*ānasa*) or 'distance' (*ab'ada*), 'cause to despair' (*ay'asa*), 'honour' (*akrama*), 'awaken' (*aṣḥā*), 'efface' (*maḥā*), 'bring near' (*qarraba*) or 'make absent' (*ghayyaba*), 'bring close' (*adnā*), 'make present' (*aḥḍara*), 'give wretched-

195 B. K. Matilal 1992, 149.

ness' (*ašqā*) and 'alienate' (*akhkhara*), 'treat cruelly' (*aqṣā*) or 'abandon' (*hajara*).[196]

The states are usually presented in such a way that the state which has a single aim is shown from two different angles, as though positive and negative. Most of these could be arranged under the umbrella concepts of 'negation' (*nafy*) and 'affirmation' (*ithbāt*); the former referring to the negation of the attributes of humanity, and the latter to the affirmation of the power of the Truth. For example, both 'violence' (*qahr*) and 'tenderness' (*lutf*) may be used as divine methods of guidance: *qahr* annihilates human attributes, and *lutf* signifies God's help.[197]

In the following I shall compare systematically the most important pairs of concepts in Kalabadhi's and Qušayri's works with some reference to Hujwiri, Niffari, Ghazali and Qašani. The pairs themselves are not completely identical. It is noteworthy that even a basic concept like *ghayba* may have a different pair in different authors.[198]

Kalabadhi	Qušayri
sukr (drunkenness) – *saḥw* (sobriety)	*sukr* – *saḥw*
šuhūd (witness) – *ghayba* (absence)	*ḥuḍūr* (presence) – *ghayba*
	qurb (nearness) – *bu'd* (farness)
jam' (concentration) – *tafriqa* (separation)	*jam'* – *farq* (differentiation)
$tajall_{in}$ (revelation) – *istitār* (covering)	*sitr* (cover) – $tajall_{in}$
	kašf (uncovering) – *ḥijāb* (veil)
fanā' (annihilation) – *baqā'* (staying)	*fanā'* – *baqā'*
	hayba (awe) – *'uns* (intimacy)
	maḥw (effacement) – *ithbāt* (affirmation)
	qabḍ (seizing) – *basṭ* (spreading)
	badāwa (beduism) – *hujūm* (attack)
	talwīn (variation) – *tamkīn* (fixation)

The state-pairs can be seen as the mental context of an ecstatic experience, since in principle any state may grow stronger and therefore become an ecstatic one. Yet the manner in which Kalabadhi employs these terms implies that almost all

196 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 66; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 118. To what extent the processes are caused by mystical experience or are general trends in spiritual growth is a matter open to different interpretations. In addition, there is a curious expression *iṣṭalamahum 'inda rawmihim*, translated "uproot from desires through their realisation of it" by Sells in *Early Islamic Mysticism*.

197 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 377.

198 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 58–80.

religious emotions are constituted in relation to their opposite pole, carnal passions, lusts and instincts, and in this approach an ecstatic experience is at most a passing curiosity. Also, the progression of spiritual states is measured in relation to passions. For this reason, Kalabadhi's teaching on **drunkenness** (*sukr*) is strongly connected with choice: a drunk person cannot differentiate between pleasant and unpleasant. Kalabadhi gives as an example a Sufi in whose eyes stone and clay were similar to gold and silver. In **sobriety** (*saḥw*) there is the ability to differentiate between pleasant and unpleasant – and preferably to choose the latter. This is a higher state, because adversity has been a conscious choice.[199]

Qušayri treats the same terms in different ways. For him they are not moral standards but states of consciousness. He defines their strength and quality in relation to each other – "sobriety is the measure of drunkenness" – and with other terms. He speculates as to how *sukr* and *ghayba* interpenetrate: *ghayba* is more forceful, yet *sukr* can intensify to the point that it surpasses *ghayba*. "Through an intensification of *sukr*, the drunk can exceed in *ghayba* even one who is in the state of *ghayba*, or the one who is absent can be more completely absent than the drunk."[200] The lack of semantic points is shown precisely by the fact that the terms must be constituted dependent on each other. "The servant in the state of his drunkenness experiences (*yušāhidu*) a state, and in the state of sobriety he experiences knowledge (*'ilm*) [...] sobriety and intoxication come after *dhawq* and *šurb*."[201]

According to Hujwiri, the basic feature of *sukr* is insatiability: "The man of intoxication is he who drinks all and still desires more." *Sukr* may be divided into two categories with the aid of the symbol of wine: drunkenness with the wine of affection (*mawadda*) and with the cup of love (*maḥabba*), the former being 'caused' (*ma'lūl*) but the latter having no cause, since it is based on regarding the Benefactor, so that one sees all things through Him without seeing oneself at all. Correspondingly, sobriety is divided into sobriety in heedlessness (*ghafla*), "the greatest of veils", and sobriety in love, the latter being 'the clearest of revelations'. But are these divisions arbitrary in relation to the mental reality wherein such distinctions are far from being precise and their outlines are dim? Hujwiri poses a brilliant solution to the problem by intersecting the concepts and reversing their semantic fields: "The sobriety that is connected with heedlessness is really intoxication, while that which is linked with love, although it be intoxication, is

199 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 85–87; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 110–112.

200 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 71; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 125.

201 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 71–72. Sells translates the verb *šāhada* ('see, watch, observe, witness') in a slightly different direction: "The servant in the state of his drunkenness is under the sign of the state. The servant in the state of his waking is under the sign of knowledge" (*Early Islamic Mysticism*, 126).

really sobriety." Hujwiri explicitly states that ultimately "the boundaries of both are joined, and the end of the one is the beginning of the other". The reason given for this is that 'beginning' and 'end' are "terms that imply separation, which has only relative existence."[202]

Kalabadhi's teaching on **absence** (*ghayba*) and **presence** (*šuhūd*) is an illustration of the relationship between the subject and passions: in 'absence' a person is not aware of his passions even if they are still present in him. Kalabadhi gives the example of a man who was told: "We saw your blue-eyed handmaid in the market", and he replied: "Is she blue-eyed?" – thereby disclosing indirectly, according to Kalabadhi, that he still had "a delight for dark-eyed maidens". In 'presence' "man regards his passions as belonging to God", and therefore the action does not take place because of pleasure but because of God.[203]

For Qušayri, however, *ghayba* is a state related to drunkenness, full of hope or fear in its emotional content. His definition of *ghayba* is modelled as "absence of the heart from knowledge derived from the states of creation".[204] Here absence applies not only to the passions but to the whole mode of consciousness, being absence from the human senses (*iḥsās*). The difference of approach is also evident in Qušayri's examples of *ghayba* that are instances of varieties of trance where a person is not at all aware of himself and does not feel his physical organs: Rabīʿ ibn Khaytham saw an oven at the blacksmith's and 'fainted' (*ghušiya 'alayhi*), remembering the people of fire in Gehenna; Abu Ḥafṣ put his hand into the fire and took out the glowing iron with his bare hands without feeling any pain.[205] For some like Abu Yazid, according to Qušayri, the absence may be constant, but most people return to their senses, i.e. to the presence (*ḥuḍūr*) of creation. Yet the first, more essential, meaning of *ḥuḍūr* signifies being in the presence of God (*ḥaqq*) – through the remembrance of Him – during absence from creation. In this sense the concepts are dependent on each other and semantically parallel: the more one is absent, the more one is present.[206]

Hujwiri starts with the notion that *ghayba* and *ḥuḍūr*[207] are in opposition to each other only apparently: they rather express the same phenomenon from different angles, as if a kind of ontological scales. "Absence from one's self is presence with God, and *vice versa*." Then he proceeds to say what Kalabadhi does not, namely that it is during ecstasy – Hujwiri here employs the term *jadhba* – that

---

202 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 187–188.

203 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 87–88; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 112–113.

204 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 69. الغيبة هي غيبة القلب عن علم ما يجري من احوال الخلق

205 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 69.

206 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 70.

207 Hujwiri uses the same pair (*ghayba* – *ḥuḍūr*) as Qušayri.

both concepts reach their climax. When the heart of the seeker is overpowered by it, "the absence of his heart becomes equivalent to its presence." And moreover, the interpretation becomes even bolder: "partnership (*širka*) and division (*qisma*) disappear."[208]

As for Niffari, he uses *ghayba* as the opposite of 'vision' (*ru'ya*), with the sublime arrogance characteristic of him. In brief, *ghayba* means that one does not see God in anything, *ru'ya* that one sees God in everything. Niffari stresses that petitioning and *dhikr* belong to the former, which indirectly places most Sufis in the state of absence of God! Niffari considers *ghayba* as a 'veil' and identifies it with 'this world' (*al-dunyā*): both are prisons (*sijn*) of the believer. *Ghayba* belongs to the common people, *ru'ya* to the 'elect' (*khāṣṣ*) only.[209]

In Kalabadhi's discourse **concentration** (or 'union',[210] *jam'*) and **separation** (*tafriqa*) are also constituted in relation to the passions. In the former the choices are concentrated and harmonised in accordance with the will of God without the subject's own efforts; in the latter the subject has moved completely outside his passions (i.e. the passions are defined outside his ego), so that he is even able to observe them as from outside. "Their knowledge that they exist for God in his knowledge of them caused them to lose themselves (*nafs*) during the period when they came to exist for him: so concentration produced the state of non-existence (for the passions)."[211]

Qušayri has a "subjectual" approach to the terms: *jam'* is the position in which the Deity acts in human nature and *farq* refers to acts of worship carried out by the human agent. "*Farq* is what is attributed to you, and *jam'* what is stripped from you." This union is like a 'sign' (*šāhid*) which a person is under when "the Real allows him to witness what the Real has entrusted to him of His own acts." Both states are equally important: without separation there is no worship.[212] To sum up, Qušayri leaves the semantics of the terms quite open, focusing the significance, so to say, on the framework, so that the terms signify two categories of religious activity, which together may include practically almost any actual form of mental or concrete action.

---

208 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 248. Hujwiri here expounds the teaching of the Khafifis.

209 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 28:7, 29:16, 30:2; *Mukhāṭabāt*, 24:26, 26:5, 27:8. Niffari hints that commandments and prohibitions belong to the state of *ghayba* only (*ibid*, 29:23). In his challenging parlance he places the next world in the same category as this world and *ghayba*, contrasting both with *ru'ya*, the actual 'vision' (*ibid*, 30:2).

210 The basic meaning of the word is not so much in the "state-of-being-in-union" than in the "process-of-becoming-together-in-union".

211 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 88–89; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 114–116.

212 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 64–65; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 116.

Qušayri also mentions one more way in which the terms *jam'* and *farq* are used: *jam'* is how the Real unites the whole creation by his free 'disposition' (or 'alteration', *taṣrīf*) over them, and *farq* refers to the separation caused by his various acts and influences that give rise to different ontological distances in the spiritual status of the created beings . Thus the discussion of mystical states diffuses on effects of God's general action in the creation. Qušayri does give a list of 24 different modes of *farq*, but it is difficult to estimate which of these are meant to describe mystical experiences: most seem to be general characteristics of Sufi spirituality.[213]

In Hujwiri's discourse *jam'* is in the first place connected with the Islamic conception of salvation history. The omnipotent God unites all mankind in his call and separates them by his command. He may control the process by inverse means: for example, he commanded Abraham to behead Ishmael and Adam not to eat the corn but in both cases he actually willed the contrary. "The real mystery of union is the knowledge and will of God, while separation is the manifestation of that which he commands and forbids." This indirect prick for the legalistic interpretation of Islam implies that union is something totally dependent on God, and that it is far from being an emotional matter. "Union is that which he unites by his attributes, and separation is that which he separates by his acts." In the personal perspective of an individual *jam'* means cessation of human volition and exclusion of personal initiative.[214] In another context, however, Hujwiri presents *jam'* as the perfection of a saint, 'union' in which one attains such a degree of rapturous love that one's intelligence is enraptured in gazing upon the act of God (*fi'l*), and one is longing for one's Maker (*fā'il*) on the brink of losing control, but outwardly one remains in separation (*tafriqa*).[215]

In Qašani's glossary, however, *jam'* means to "witness Truth in the absence of creation" (*šuhūd al-ḥaqq bi-lā khalq*).[216] This definition refers directly to the experience of God that is characteristically total in nature, and is more suitable for "mystical experience" than the ones above.

Annihilation (*fanā'*) and **persistence** (*baqā'*) are in Kalabadhi's discourse, as one might expect, primarily the last phases in the mortification of the passions.[217] *Fanā'* means first of all the disappearance of all 'pleasures' (literally

---

213 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 66; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 118. For the modes in question, see above, p. 216–217.

214 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 252–255.

215 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 237–238. The context is a polemical one, and it is directed against those who consider *jam'* too easily attainable by anyone.

216 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 58.

217 It is to be recalled that Kalabadhi represents a collection and synthesis of the views of various Sufis, with no intention of expressing or describing his own experiences.

'portions', *ḥuzhūzh*) and 'personal demand' (*muṭālaba*) as well as 'sense of discrimination' (*tamyīz*), or to adopt Arberry's interpretation, the passing-away of all passions and feelings. This mental emptiness is why the concept is invalid without *baqā'*, persistence in the properties (*ḥuzhūzh*) of another, i.e. God. This is Kalabadhi's first basic meaning for *fanā'* and *baqā'*: to pass away from one's own characteristics and persist in those of another. In this perspective, however, *fanā'* still focuses on the morality of actions. Kalabadhi's example of the annihilated, ʿĀmir ibn ʿAbdallah, obtained this position in the discourse by urging: "I do not care whether I see a woman or a wall."[218] This is a phase, according to Kalabadhi, in which all the inner movements that function for one's own personal advantage have ceased to exist; emotions of passion or fear do exist but only in accordance with the limits decreed by God. This seems to be somewhat similar to the higher state of 'absence', "another *ghayba* beyond the ordinary *ghayba*", in which the subject is not aware of his own annihilation since "the one in annihilation in the presence of persistence is no different from the one in persistence".[219] In this way the emphasis on sound action leads Kalabadhi close to the identification of *fanā'* with *baqā'*.

Another way of defining *fanā'* operates with an ontological perspective: "being absent from human qualities in (undertaking) the fearful burden of the divine qualities". The absence of human attributes, however, does not imply that they cease to exist, but that "they are covered by a pleasure (*ladhdha*) which supplants the realisation of pain". One loses every intention directed against the Divine aim and one's consciousness (*šuhūd*) of inconsistencies (*al-mukhālifāt*) between oneself and God. To this Kalabadhi adjoins a few somewhat indefinite references to more extraordinary experiences of an exhausting vision (*ru'ya*) which makes one unconscious of one's present non-passionate quality. On the practical level the idea seems to be one of focusing one's attention away from oneself and acting without paying attention to the acting or to its nature, so that even opposite emotions seem to lose their identities.[220]

> The believer (*'abd*) does not attain unification (*tawḥīd*), until he feels totally alienated from his own conscience, in order that the Truth may be manifested to him (al-Šiblī).[221]

A third way of approaching the interpretation of *fanā'* is to set the starting-point of the perspective on the limited scope of human understanding in interpreting one's own self. During a mystical moment (*waqt*)

---

218 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 92–93; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 120, 122.

219 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 93, 87; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 121, 113.

220 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 94–95; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 122–125.

221 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 103. Translation mine.

> he (the mystic) remains without persistence so far as he knows, without passing-away (*fanā'*) so far as he is conscious, and without moment so far as he can understand; rather, it is the Creator who knows of his *baqā'* and *fanā'*.[222]

This approach of *via negativa* is surely able to comprise even the most radical "peak" experiences, and therefore it is applicable to the kind of dynamic *fanā'* that manifests itself as ecstatic phenomena, but it also leaves the matter open for all views. The most crucial disagreement in the Sufi discussion is that concerning the duration of *fanā'*, whether one returns to one's own attributes at all. The existence of disagreement on such a fundamental matter may in fact question the meaningfulness and sensibleness of the whole discourse on *fanā'*. At least it shows that the Sufis were adjoining to the concept of *fanā'* most divergent mental processes.

To sum up Kalabadhi's discussion, without becoming entangled in the terminology, we could say that in the mystic's final state the centre of identity has, as it were, moved from ego towards the Other, the result being that positive emotions (pleasure) do not feel different from negative ones (displeasure). Yet Kalabadhi's underlying aim to produce an orthodox work causes him to "orthodoxify" his discourse. This makes him very careful with the most ecstatic experiences, which in turn causes him to stress moral purity in every phase and to interpret all states in relation to moral purity. The totality of his interpretation forms a kind of field of inner phenomena which may function as a context for the ecstatic experience.

Qušayri, too, starts with the moral aspect of *fanā'*, which he defines as 'shrugging off the blameworthy properties' (*suqūṭ al-awṣāf al-dhamīma*). He actually extends the semantic field to cover the whole sphere of religious life: the servant of God is not in any circumstances free from either *fanā'* or *baqā'*.[223] Thereby *fanā'* applies to and operates in all human attributes: "Whoever passes away (*faniya*) from his ignorance, endures through his knowledge." Qušayri also gives a division of three different dimensions of *fanā'*: (1) *fanā'* of the self and its attributes, (2) *fanā'* from the attributes of the Real, and (3) *fanā'* from witnessing one's own passing away.[224]

And how are *fanā'* and ecstatic experience related? As we have seen, *fanā'* as a concept is so complicated and paradoxical that any discussion is doomed to drift into very theoretical speculation which is apt to lose all causal relations with the experienced reality, proceeding as a conceptual play according to certain rules. We might suggest, however, that one could read into the Sufi interplay an intersection where *fanā'* and "ecstasy" are identified in a way that the former is static, the latter a dynamic aspect of the same reality – in other words, ecstasy as a

---

222 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 96; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 126.

223 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 67.

224 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 68–69.

culmination of *fanā'*. "Drinking from the cup of union"[225] can be taken as a point of contact with God in the process of unification and annihilation, and in that sense also the final cause of the experience. This may also apply when *fanā'* is understood in an orthopractic sense, i.e. consisting rather of acts and omitted actions than of somewhat emotional states.

> We are united in one respect, but we are separated in another.
> Although awe has hidden you from the gladness of mine eye,
> ecstasy has made you near to my inmost parts.[226]

The most fervent state in Kalabadhi's discourse is **overmastery** (*ghalaba*), to be translated as 'inspiration' as suggested above, yet the discourse around the term concentrates on ascertaining that during *ghalaba* "it is permissible to do things not allowed in the state of repose (*ḥāl al-sukūn*)."[227] In the eyes of outsiders these seem to be objectionable. Kalabadhi's examples include 'Umar, who in his zeal for Islam and against pagans opposed even Muhammad himself, and Abū Ṭaybah, who cupped the prophet Muhammad and then drank his blood, against the law, yet Muhammad forgave him.[228] For Hujwiri, however, *ghalaba* seems to be one type of ecstasy equivalent to *sukr*, and his main point is to defend its given nature as the opposite of something acquired or produced by one's own means.[229]

Most of the symbolic expressions of ecstatic experience developed into technical terms that function in the discourse intrinsically. Especially important in the "stateological" discussion are *šurb* (drinking) and *dhawq* (tasting). According to Hujwiri, *šurb* refers to the drinking of spiritual pleasure, which is for the soul as important as water is for the body, and hence *šurb* is necessary for novices as well. *Dhawq* is used as a somewhat broader concept that includes bitter or painful experiences as well.[230] According to Qušayri, *dhawq* appears before *šurb*, which is a more powerful experience: "the possessor of *dhawq* is pretending to be drunken, but the possessor of *šurb* is drunken".[231]

As for Ghazali, he employs *dhawq* as the opposite of something acquired by scientific learning, and consequently his *dhawq* as an experience is characterised by subjectivity and emotionality. Indeed, Watt, in his translation of *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, gives 'immediate experience' for *dhawq*, and Gairdner in *Miškāt al-*

---

225 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 392.

226 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 255 (quotation from a poem by "a certain great Shaykh").

227 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 85; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 110.

228 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 83–85; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 108–110.

229 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 184.

230 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 392.

231 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 72. صاحب الذوق المتساكر و صاحب الشرب سكران

Anwār translates the adverb *dhawqiyy*^{an} 'experimentally and subjectively', meaning the opposite of the scientific (*'ilmiyy*^{an}).[232]

In Qašani's definition, however, the basic idea of *dhawq* is that it is the category of beginning: it refers to the "first steps of the vision of Truth" (*awwal darajāt šuhūd al-ḥaqq*). If this vision increases and grows stronger, it is to be called *šurb*, and in its final stage it is 'quenching' (*riyy*).[233] Since Qašani's interest as a whole is in the everlasting *extension* of experienced 'knowledge' or 'vision' – both terms are symbolic here – of God, he interprets practically all terms in relation to this pursuit.

Also, the standard equivalent to the sign 'ecstasy', *wajd*, is used as a technical term which adopts diverging tones in different contexts. In Hujwiri's discourse *wajd* adopts the meanings of 'finding' and 'uniting' in the context of *ḥāl* and *waqt*. Both of these states include admittance of the problem of human understanding in relation to the past and future; these are both abandoned as 'veils' in order to devote oneself to God in the present.[234] On the other hand, *wajd* as a state during *samā'* signifies sorrow caused by the loss of the Beloved, and *wujūd* correspondingly torrent of emotions resulting from finding – but both "cannot be reached by investigation".[235]

Qašani, however, defines *wujūd* as "the realisation that the essence of Truth is in its essence".[236] The definition is typical of his "existential ontology", where the true nature of the existence and the (development of) personal illumination are combined, and this combination is projected into the definitions of the terminology.

The endless number of various states is illustratively shown by the existence of "squared states", to use a mathematical expression. Qušayri has *jam' al-jam'*, 'union of union' which is 'beyond union and separation'; in it the subject is "utterly removed from perceiving any other", his whole consciousness being overpowered (*istawlā*) by the Divinity.[237] It is hard to see any other function for the term than indication of a complete and extreme *jam'*, an ultimate concentration. Qušayri continues even further, beyond *jam' al-jam'* where there is a state called 'second separation' (*farq al-thānī*):[238] this means a sober state to which one is returned from one's ecstatic state in order to perform one's prescribed duties, i.e.

---

232 Watt 1953, 62, 66; Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 57 (tr. 60).

233 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 500.

234 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 367–370.

235 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 413.

236 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, no. 87 (p. 26). وجد ان الحق ذاته بذاته

237 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 65–66.

238 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 66.

ritual prayers. The obvious benefit of this concept is that thereby one may prove that the mystic's apparently normal state is high above the apparently equivalent normal state of the ordinary people!

When the discourse operates on this more abstract level, with states that are built on others, the outcome may be states as colourful as *talwīn*, literally 'colouring', which seems to mean a fusion of states – a necessary concept indeed from the point of view of psychological reality. Junayd uses it in the sense of 'variety' of states.[239] However, Ernst translates the word as 'rapture'[240], Sells as 'transformation'[241] and Safwat as 'change'. Qašani explains that *talwīn* is the "veiling of the properties[242] of an exalted mystical state, or stage by the effects[243] of a lowly state, or stage", and quoting Ibn 'Arabi he even states that it is the most perfect of all stages, even though "to most others it is an incomplete stage (*maqām nāqiṣ*)".[244]

As for Qušayri, he presents *talwīn* with its opposite pair *tamkīn* ('fixity'), the ultimate goal being the latter. For *talwīn* he gives a solemn yet quite non-distinctive definition: "*talwīn* is an attribute of the lords of the states".[245] The idea seems to be that *talwīn* indicates the totality of the uplifting process in which the various states change constantly by transformation or interpenetration or otherwise. The essential point, however, is that the mystic is a possessor of *talwīn* as long as he is on the path "because he is rising from state to state (*ḥāl*), changing from one attribute to another".[246]

We may already make a few concluding remarks. As we have seen above, the authors are basically, albeit not absolutely, consistent within their own discourse but not commensurable with each other. This is because the endeavour to systematise and classify ancient ascetic modes of thinking and acting into dissimilar types and exact terms has no alternative for being more or less an artificial pursuit, a language game. This possibility is in essence recognised by Kalabadhi himself:

---

239 Junayd: *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 82; translated "different modes" by Zaehner (1960, 223).

240 Ernst 1985, 49.

241 *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 135; Qušayri: *Risāla,* 17. Since the interpretative translations vary remarkably, I prefer the literal translation 'colouring'.

242 *aḥkām*, more literally 'dominions', 'regimes' or 'authorities'. 'Properties' is the translation given by Sawfat. Qāshāni § 487 (text 156, tr. 107).

243 *āthār*, literally 'traces' or 'signs. 'Effects' is Sawfat's translation. Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 487 (text 156, tr. 107).

244 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 487 (text 156, tr. 107).

245 التلوين صفة أرباب الأحوال Qušayri: *Risāla,* 78.

246 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 78.

> Faith which is true, and faith which is merely formal, have outwardly the same appearance, but their real natures are diverse: on the other hand, annihilation (*fanā'*) and all the other special stations (*maqāmāt*), are diverse by their appearance (*ṣuwar*), but their true natures (*ḥaqā'iq*) are the same.[247]

Different authors use different terms in different ways. These varied usages give rise to meanings with different nuances that vary from author to author. This process reinforces itself: since the meanings are understood to be varied, the terms are, in turn, used in diverging ways. The varying meanings, however, are usually not to be understood as exclusive but rather as complementary in character. Nevertheless, they do demolish the idea of a public language consisting of exact signs for inner states: ways of application do not match, and hence the meanings cannot be exact either. This is also why the terms are impossible to understand in a specific manner when taken out of their context. I have no reason to disagree with the estimation given by Ernst:

> There is sometimes a wide variation in the definitions themselves, from one author to another; each one seems to have felt a considerable freedom to add or to subtract from the received definitions, in accordance with personal experience or the authoritative pronouncement of a teacher.[248]

The endless differentiation of states is connected with, and to some extent resulting from, the peculiarities of the vocabulary of classical Arabic. For example, *musāmarāt* and *muḥādathāt*, two states of a perfect Sufi, refer to different times of day; the former originally signifies something like "silent nocturnal discussion (between lovers)" and the latter the same in the day-time.[249]

Sufi speculation concerning terms has developed a construction of concepts on concepts, the process being in a way analogous to the development of Western philosophical thought. Concerning the structure of the use of language, such terms of second degree form a parallel to the symbols of symbols employed in Sufi poetry (see above, p. 214). These new special terms produced in the discourse can be understood only through the previous terms, for example: "*Muḥāḍarât* denotes the presence of the heart in the subtleties of *bayān*, while *mukāšafāt* denotes the presence of *sirr* in the domain of *'iyān*."[250] (The basic thought here is simply that the former has the signs of God in his mind, the latter the greatness of God.)

The Sufis, however, go still further. They adopt technical usages and mystical meanings for ordinary words that one perhaps would not expect to encounter in

---

247 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al–Ta'arruf*, 98; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 129.

248 Ernst 1992, 187.

249 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 380–381.

250 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 373. Nicholson gives 'demonstration' for *bayān*, 'spirit' for *sirr* and 'vision' for *'iyān*.

Islamic mystical vocabulary. For example, 'name' (*ism*) may refer to the names of God which are His attributes and therefore experiential qualities through which He may be experienced.[251] And correspondingly, 'letters' (*ḥurūf*) are "elementary realities deriving from the Essences".[252] This phenomenon should perhaps be seen as the outcome of a mystical attitude rather than of mystical experience.

The number of various terms for the inner states employed in the books is in the hundreds, and unknown in the actual practical relationship between master and disciple. For the practisers of Sufism the richness of Sufi language, particularly the contemplative and enigmatic character of the definitions of technical terms, means that the mystical experience is not restricted by too inflexible a linguistic system: instead, the process of conditioning may take place in various ways, through boundless possibilities.

On the other hand, the complexity of discourse produced by the over-specification may also give it a certain arbitrary taste. This cannot avoid causing a certain counter-reaction among the mystics themselves. One of the constantly present tendencies in Niffari's discourse is to leave the concentration on various states and turn towards the essence of the matter instead. "Leave nearness (*qurb*), and you will see God", he courageously declares.[253] The words, the verbal level, are for mystics only a means, not a goal, and therefore the lack of exactness is a problem only for outsiders.

3.3.2. Causa Efficiens

If we were to build our discussion on the ontological structure of discourse as seen by the Sufis themselves, the effective cause of experience would be a logical starting-point. In an objective analysis, however, the problem of the external cause behind the experience belongs within the category of interpretation.

In the Sufi perspective, the very ecstatic quality of the experience itself results from the existence of an outer cause and from its confrontation with man's physical capacity. If the effect is forceful enough, human "reason and natural faculties are too weak to sustain its rapture and intensity",[254] and for this reason it manifests itself as an ecstatic phenomenon.

---

251 "It is not the utterance of the Name which matters, but rather the essence of the thing named." Qāshāni: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 12; Ernst 1992, 189.

252 Qāshāni: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 117. الحقائق البسيطة من الأعيان ('Name' and 'letter' happen to be crucial concepts in Jewish mysticism.)

253 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 67:61.

254 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 254.

Junayd states explicitly that the experience "does not result from their own striving or from any perception or imagination" but from the fact that God exists and is at work in them (*al-ḥaqq bihim*).[255] Qušayri depicts the given nature of experience as follows:

> (Sufis') realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) are not collected by any sort of effort (*takalluf*) nor gained by any kind of action (*taṣarruf*); rather, they are meanings (*ma'ān*) that God has promised to the hearts of a people.[256]

According to the Sufi authors, the effective cause, as might be expected, is God (*allāh*): "The state (*ḥāl*) descends from God into a man's heart."[257] Most often, however, this is expressed by referring to some of God's epithets like 'gentleness' (*lutf*).[258] The most common of these is the Truth, *al-ḥaqq*. "Ecstasy is the glad tidings sent by the Truth (*bašārāt al-ḥaqq*) of the mystic's promotion to the stations of His contemplation (*maqāmāt mušāhadātihi*)."[259] Junayd presents as *causa efficiens* 'the lights of His Essence' (*anwār huwiyyatihi* – literally 'Heness').[260] Jilani employs 'power of the Spirit' (*quwwat al-rūḥ*) as the cause of the ecstatic experience which comes in 'intoxicating power' (*bi-quwwat al-jadhdhaba*).[261]

However, even on this basic point Niffari's daring expressions move in their own categories, for according to him ecstasy (*wajd*) means to be in God, which in turn is a result of *seeing* God:

> Oh servant! The one who sees me, stays with me, and the one who stays with me, remains in ecstasy (*wajd*) in me.[262]

The very existence of *causa efficiens* outside the subject of the experience is shown most apparently by the references of its autonomous coming.[263] The notion

---

255 Junayd: *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 80; Zaehner 1960, 220.

256 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 53. (Translation according to Ernst 1992, 188.) The term *ḥaqā'iq*, 'truths', here signifies the mystical states by emphasising their (ultimate) reality. It is also an esoteric expression since the truth (*ḥaqq*) of a state is beyond the ordinary explanations of the terms referring to it.

257 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 181. The idea is in fact so obvious that it is quite seldom mentioned.

258 Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 95.

259 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 83. Arberry (*Doctrine of the Sufis*, 107) translates 'sent by God'.

260 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 327; *Principles of Sufism*, 339.

261 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; *Secret of Secrets*, 90.

262 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt* 12:6. Arberry (p. 143) translates: "Whoso sees Me, abides for me; and whoso abides for me, abides in the experience of Me."

263 E.g. Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 418 (*samā'*).

also implies a distinction between real ecstasy and the product of a person's own psychological process. Hujwiri differentiates between ecstasy (*wajd*) effected by God and the natural impulses sensitised by music.[264] Shadhili recommends discernment when watching over one's heart: "If any good comes upon you from God, you accept it; and if the contrary comes upon you, you disapprove it, having recourse to God with respect to averting and procuring."[265]

Qušayri defines ecstasy (*wajd*) as what happens to one's heart and comes upon one without intention (*ta'ammud*) or effort (*takalluf*). He proceeds to state uncompromisingly that "any ecstasy which contains anything of its possessor is not ecstasy".[266] The use of the verb *šahida* ('to witness') to mark the mystic's relation to the experience is also illustrative in this respect: in that state (*ḥāla*) the servant "witnesses the one who originates through his divine power his own identity and essence."[267]

The existence of a *causa efficiens* is also used as a criterion behind the standard Sufi classification of experiences into states (*ḥāl*) and stations (*maqām*). According to Qušayri, "States are bestowed; stations are attained. States come freely given while stations are gained with effort (*majhūd*)."[268] Similarly, a state, unlike a station, can also be taken away from a person. Whether the states are really only momentary, is a debated question. Some claim, Qušayri agreeing with them, that the true states are continuous although there may be variation in their intensity at different times.[269] The very existence of disagreement on such a basic matter once more shows the difficulty of using a public language for objects that are inner and private in essence. Kalabadhi's solution here is to relate the items so that they overlap: "every station has a beginning and an end, and between these are the various states".[270]

The description of the quality of tranquillity, which was expressed by Niffari on the symbolic level as a 'gate', is completed on the level of interpretation by portraying it as 'entering unto God'; the gate is opened and kept open by God, and finally it leads to the seeing of God: "when you entered to me, you saw me".[271] And moreover, the gate is used from the other side by the 'self-revelation' (*ta'arruf*) of God that enters through it to the subject of the experience.[272]

---

264 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 419.

265 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 109.

266 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 62.

267 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 66; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 118. يشهد مبدأ ذاته وعينه بقدرته

268 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 57. (Translation according to M.A. Sells in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 104.)

269 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 57–58.

270 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 59; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 76.

271 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:3–4, 8. اذا دخلت إلىّ فرأيتنى

272 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:3.

The consuming quality of the experience may be portrayed on the interpretative level as love-sickness, infatuation, passionate yearning, and ardent desire for God. It seems that the quality derives its vitality from two directions: from the psychological passion of longing and yearning for God on the one hand, and from the burning divine presence on the other. The discussion on the subject takes place under the concept of *irāda*, 'desire'.[273]

Jilani differentiates real ecstasy from artificial or self-produced ecstasy by the fact that 'physical-psychological ecstasy' (*wajd al-jismāniyya al-nafsāniyya*) is outward and under the control of the will, and therefore hypocritical and worthless, whereas in 'spiritual compassionate ecstasy' (*wajd al-rūḥāniyya al-raḥmāniyya*) the body has no choice, which indicates that spiritual ecstasy is uncontrolled.[274]

The difference between sound ecstasy and artificial ecstasy is an important yet difficult topic. It has been perhaps somewhat avoided by many of the Sufi authors, however. Kalabadhi, for example, does not comment on it at all. This negligence is very understandable, for the problem is common to all religions: if one applied to one's own (or to one's tradition's) religious experience the same degree of criticality and rationality as one does to that of heretics, evidently the whole experience would be in danger of being lost in the category of psychic phenomena.

There is, however, an analysis given by Qušayri concerning the source of *khawāṭir*, a broad concept including all kinds of ideas, thoughts, desires and inclinations that rise to the mind more or less unannounced. They may have four different kinds of origin. (1) Those caused by **angels** are called 'inspiration' (*ilhām*). (2) Those caused by the **self** (*nafs*) are called 'ideas' (*hawājis*); these are usually connected with carnal desire or pride. (3) Those caused by **Satan** (*šayṭān*) are called 'temptations' (*wasāwis*, literally 'whisperings'), these usually entice a person to commit acts of disobedience. (4) And finally, those caused by **God** are 'true ideas' (*khāṭir ḥaqq*).[275] These four are the basic varieties of *causa efficiens* of mystical experiences, three of them transcendent.

Niffari discloses two basic principles concerning the recognition of the *causa efficiens*, the first actually leading to the *causa finalis*. It is possible to recognise the cause from the effects: if the experience separates the subject from the things that separate him from God, it is divine.[276] Another principle is that even if the experience starts to function in the right way but too early, before he has been

---

273 E.g. Qušayri: *Risāla*, 202; *Principles of Sufism*, 177.

274 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 118–119; *Secret of Secrets*, 89–90.

275 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 84. In *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf* (p. 62) Kalabadhi makes the same division, except for 'enemy' (*'adūw*) instead of Satan.

276 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 30:7.

"severed", the subject should be afraid of deception (*makr*).[277] True illumination does not come before purification, to use a Christian expression.

The role of Satan (*šayṭān, iblīs*) in the analysis of Sufi experience is very limited in character. According to Jilani, the devil cannot assume the form of Muhammad or any of his followers even in a dream. The devil may pretend to be God only with respect to anger and wrath, by assuming the attributes of God's delusion or anger. "The devil cannot appear with the character of any divine attribute in which there is a trace of guidance."[278] However, Jilani admits the existence of a satanic (*šayṭāniyya*) ecstasy (*wajd*) which is distinguishable from the lack of light (*nūr*, a divine attribute) and infidelity (*kufr*).[279] In this phase the position of the decisive criterion is left to Islamic law. According to Qušayri's instruction, the differentiation between demonic and angelic inspiration can be made only by those who do not eat forbidden food.[280]

Among things mentioned as effective causes of ecstasy there are also a few curiosities. Jilani mentions the singing of birds, the sighing of lovers and melodies of songs as movers of spiritual energy, and "evil and the ego have no share" in them.[281] These profane sources of inspiration seem to be in contradiction with the non-psychological origin of the spiritual experience. (The analytically orientated prosaic context does not support symbolic interpretation here.) Jilani's idea is probably that the three causes belong to the luminous spiritual realm and not to the dark side since they all are part of God's creation.

Qušayri also mentions the aspect of 'beauty' (*jamāl*) as an effective cause behind the experience: "If the attribute of beauty is unveiled to the servant, he attains drunkenness, his spirit is transported and his heart is wander-lost."[282] According to Niffari, however, beauty (*ḥusn*) does not affect those who are on the highest spiritual level.[283]

---

277 كلما بدا لك فابتدأ يجمعك قبل قطعك فخف مكره "Whatever thing appears to you, and begins to concentrate you before you have been severed, fear its deception." Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 30:8.

278 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 133; *Secret of Secrets,* 109–110.

279 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 133; *Secret of Secrets,* 109–110.

280 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 84.

281 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; *Secret of Secrets,* 90 (wherein the words *alḥān al-aghānī*, 'melodies of songs' are neglected.)

282 فإذا كوشف العبد بصفة الجمال حصل السكر وطربت الروح وهام القلب
Qušayri: *Risāla*, 71. The beauty of God as a profit (*ribḥ*) in Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 60 (cf. *Secret of Secrets,* 23).

283 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:39. The statements are not in complete contradiction, not only because they seem to refer to people of different ranks but also because *ḥusn* is a broader concept than *jamāl*.

Perhaps surprisingly, 'love' is hardly ever explicitly mentioned as the *causa efficiens* in the prose works that form the corpus of the study; Qušayri does state that "When a person's love is strengthened, his drink becomes endless."[284]

The Sufis also discussed the possibility of receiving two divergent influences from God. (Actually, the problem has been present in Islamic thinking since the case of "satanic verses" during Muhammad's early career.) Qušayri puts forward three opinions: Junayd considered the first of these the strongest "because when it endures, its possessor returns to contemplation (*ta'ammul*)", Ibn 'Aṭa' preferred the second "because it builds upon the power of the first", and the third opinion is that they are equal "because both are from the Real one (*al-ḥaqq*)".[285]

Another aspect of Sufi criticality is directed towards the methods adopted. The dilemma is that the mystic's life largely consists of his mystical exercises, yet these are not supposed to produce genuine experiences. The problem is acknowledged, the artificial experiences are condemned by the authors, yet the dilemma remains. "Raptures (*mawājīd*) induced by words (*muqāwalāt*) are an infidelity (*kafr*) by definition."[286]

The fact that the existence of *causa finalis* and the actuality of particular methods behind the experience do not necessarily exclude each other, has an additional argument behind it in the Islamic context: the possibility of appealing to the idea of predestination so that the methods themselves may be viewed as being ultimately caused by God. This may be concluded from the predestining actions of God, or the single methods may be seen as having taken their rise from God's action. For instance, contemplation may be interpreted as being caused by God.[287]

Finally, we may point out that the confident parlance concerning the effectual cause does not imply that the Sufis were somehow blind to the human aspects of the phenomenon. The mystical experience takes place in the mental reality, and for that reason it is also fully dependent on the subject's psychological condition. Qušayri expresses this idea by stating that the purity – and he does not say 'quantity' – of the mystical states (*aḥwāl*) follows the purity of acts (*a'māl*).[288]

The Sufis also recognised that the subjective aspect of the experience makes it relative: the subject's awareness and consciousness of the experience (or state) may disturb the act of experiencing so that the attention is focused on the more psychological dimensions that are inevitably less essential. Qušayri expresses it

---

284 Qušayri: *Risāla,*72. ومن قوي حبه تسر مد شربه

285 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 84–85; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 145.

286 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 34:6.

287 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 19:4. This is implied simply by the use of the causative *ašhada*.

288 Qušayri: Risāla, 67; Early Islamic Mysticism, 120.

compactly in a poetic fashion: "the vision of nearness is a veil over nearness", i.e. to realise that one is close to God does not help one to come closer to him.[289]

The principle of relativity is reflected on the linguistic level as well. What this means concerning the discourse is brilliantly expressed by Niffari: "In everything there is a trace of me. If you speak of it, you change it."[290] This crystallises the notion that language does not describe the outside world objectively but *reshapes* the reality by forcing it into categories, as well as by supplying the semantic keys to all its users. When the mystical experience is portrayed verbally, its signs (both symbolic and analytical) become parts of discourse in which the meanings are reproduced in a process dominated by subjective significances.

3.3.3. Causa Finalis

What is the function of the experience? For Sufis the only inherent value is God Himself, and any other functions or effects of the mere experience are essentially misunderstandings and for that reason not widely discussed in a direct way. If we disregard God here as a feature of "theological interpretation", there are only occasional references to the *causa finalis*.

Firstly, in the mental reality the mystical experience effects certain rearrangements in the emotional field. This may mean feelings of joy *produced* by participation in the experience, for example: "Your joy (*farah*) for that which I give you is better than your sorrow for that which I do not give you." [291] This joy is in principle different by its position in the discourse from the joyous quality in the experience itself (described in chapter 3.2.2). Or it may mean a certain balancing effect. "When you see me, security and fear become equal."[292] This sense of the *causa finalis* infuses with the whole discourse where the control of the emotions is a basic motive constantly present in one way or another. However, in most contexts it is difficult – and artificial – to see or make differentiations between the emotional qualities present in the experience itself and those produced by it.

Secondly, there is the eschatological function. We may conclude from the discourse of Kalabadhi that mystical experiences function with a twofold relation to salvation. On the one hand, they function as the *causa efficiens* of salvation, and on the other, they are signs that indicate that their possessor will inherit salvation. Namely, in the Sufi perspective spiritual superiority is after all not based on religious practices such as prayer and fasting, but on the favours (*karāmāt*) and

289 Qušayri: Risāla, 82; Early Islamic Mysticism, 140. ورؤية القرب حجاب عن القرب

290 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 5:6.

291 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 25:10.

292 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 4:11.

gifts (*mawāhib*) that are experienced in the inner heart and on the spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) that are signs (*a'lām*) of God's friendship (*wilāya*).[293]

Niffari expresses the same idea in a slightly different way, indicating that the experiential states are a kind of participation in the existential state of the world to come. He proclaims: "Your body after death is in the place where your heart is before death."[294] And moreover, Niffari adds one more perspective to the same theme by hinting that the mystical states follow one after death: "As you enter to me in prayer, so you will enter to me in your grave."[295]

Unlike many mystics, however, Niffari is not too confident concerning the world to come: "Fear is the sign of him who knows his end: hope is the sign of him who is ignorant of his end."[296] The notion may be simply due to the fact that Niffari is constantly willing to set himself in opposition to other Sufis, if at all possible. As a drunken one he is above the sober speculators, and as a divine oracle he is above the drunken ones who are not concerned about salvation because they have identified themselves with God while on earth. Niffari's subtle discourse reprehends mystics who are high in wisdom but low in fear, and who thereby end up with mockery.[297]

3.4. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

3.4.1. Speculation on the States

As we have already glimpsed, the Sufis do not contend themselves with working up emotional states and impulsive moments into general types and adapting them into technical terms, but they enthusiastically proceed to speculate on the relationships between them as well. In this discursive "game" the states may be arranged into contrasting or consecutive series.

3.4.1.1. Contrasting Comparison

One of the surprising features of Sufi literature is the emphasis given to the question of superiority of one state in comparison with its counterpart. As we

293 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 50–51; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 65–66.

294 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 24:7.

295 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 12:8. The sentence, however, is open to other kinds of interpretation as well.

296 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 15:21.

297 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 15:28.

noted above, the states are often arranged and presented in polar pairs.[298] In principle they may be opposites of various kinds: directional opposites (*jam' – tafriqa*), antipodal opposites (*ḥuḍūr – ghayba*), counterparts (*qurb – bu'd*), reversives (*kašf – ḥijāb*). Yet in practice any pair, especially the most abstract ones like *fanā' – baqā'*, may be understood as belonging in various categories of oppositions; this is largely due to the semantic structure of the Arabic noun, which often means both *being* in the state of X and *becoming* (more and more) the state of X.[299] When the contents of these states are contrasted and their relationship discussed in great detail, the discourse often proceeds by means of negations so that the presentation of state X does not necessarily contain much more than speculation on its relation, usually superiority, to its opposite (-X).

The discussion on sobriety (*saḥw*) and drunkenness (*sukr*) is one of the most famous features of classical Sufism, and as we have seen, of our sources Kalabadhi and Qušayri in particular represent the definitive works of sober Sufism. Niffari's discourse, on the other hand, is above the whole questioning, and his terminology does not even contain the problematic pair at all.

According to Hujwiri, the ultimate state is that of sobriety, perhaps the most peculiar argument being that the prophets used to perform miracles in sobriety but the saints are able to perform them only in drunkenness. Yet he does also present the confronting view in great detail; the superiority of drunkenness is argued from the fact that the greatest veil between man and God is composed by the human attributes, and these are at their strongest in sobriety. This is in turn opposed by the view that man should become continually more sober in order to comprehend the true Reality and in order to be released from entanglement in superficial phenomena; as the drunken person supposes that he has been annihilated, even though the attributes have not really disappeared, which is a more serious veil than any other. This notion indicates that there is no valid criterion for annihilation on a subjective basis. However, there is "agreement" on the fact that even if the attributes be successfully annihilated, the speculation goes on: there is an equal diversity concerning the superiority of the next stages as well.[300]

When Hujwiri treats the controversy between 'absence' (*ghayba*) and 'presence' (*ḥuḍūr*), he recognises that it is essentially the same problem as the basic debate on drunkenness and sobriety. He even admits explicitly that the whole distinction is "merely verbal, for they seem to be approximately the same". Nevertheless, there are numerous Sufis who prefer *ghayba*[301] and others who

298 Contrasting pairs (*tazādd*) are also famous in Persian poetry. Schimmel 1982, 59.

299 On opposites, see Cruse 1986, 223–231.

300 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 118, 151–152, 184–187, 226, 248–249.

301 E.g. al-Hallaj, Ibn 'Ata, Abu Hamza "and numerous sheikhs of Iraq". Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 249.

prefer *ḥuḍūr*[302]. The former argue that man's self is the greatest veil between God and man, and when one becomes absent from oneself, one's evils are annihilated as though as they are "consumed by the flame of proximity (*qurba*) to God". The latter argue that the value of 'absence' depends on the 'presence', 'absence' being only a means that leads to 'presence', for 'absence' involves the sorrow of being veiled, while 'presence' involves joy.[303]

The notions on the status of the states appearing during *samā'* – namely, *wajd* and *wujūd* – vary according to the same pattern. *Wujūd*, according to its supporters, is superior because it is the state of love and of lovers. Those preferring *wajd*, on the other hand, consider *wujūd* to be a state of novices: they argue that since God is infinite, even the experiences of *wujūd* cannot be more than emotions (Pers. *mašrabī*). Yet there is agreement on the fact that the "power of knowledge should be greater than the power of *wajd*, since, if *wajd* be more powerful, the person affected by it is in a dangerous position".[304] This remark reveals a certain distrust, as if an experience given by God could lead one into danger (in relation to the revelation and to one's own self). The explanation is that one overcome by *wajd* is deprived of the ability of discrimination (*khiṭāb*), and cannot be recompensed or punished, for he is in the "predicament of madmen".[305]

In Qušayri's discourse *wujūd* comes after one rises beyond *wajd*. "*Wujūd* is an end, and ecstasy (*wajd*) is an intermediary between the beginning and the end."[306]

The question of the duration of *fanā'* belongs to the same theme. Kalabadhi takes the view of those who consider this state permanent (Junayd, al-Kharraz etc.); his arguments, however, do not seem to be more convincing than those of his opponents: the use of the Qur'an on both sides appears a little arbitrary. Those in favour of permanence and stability, in their own opinion, represent a more genuine experience, since they stress the given nature of experience setting it in opposition to that acquired by human effort.

> There appears to him a revelation of God's power, and shows him his desire of God departing in reverence to God; then there appears to him a revelation of God, and shows him the departing of his desire of the vision of the departing of his desire; and

---

302 E.g. al-Muhasibi, Junayd, Sahl ibn 'Abdallah, Abu Ja'far Haddad and Muhammad ibn Khafif, to whom Hujwiri attributes the authorship of the doctrine in question; Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 249.

303 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 248–251. Undoubtedly the choice of preferred terminology is largely a question of mentality: personalities with a tendency towards radicalism like bolder concepts, and those of a moderate temper find the positive concepts more pleasant.

304 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 414.

305 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 413–416.

306 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 62–63.

> there remains the vision of what was of God for God, and the One and Eternal is alone in His Oneness; and with God there is not for other than God either passing-away (*fanā'*) or persistence (*baqā'*) (al-Kharraz).[307]

The formation of theoretical speculation unavoidably has the potential to develop intrinsic values out of abstractions. If this be the case, the result is a variety of speculations on the states that always seem to be almost as unique and ultimate as the one following it.

> If the state of discrimination (*ḥālat al-tamyīz*) even causes me to be aware only of what is God's, and to lose sense of what is mine, what will the state of intoxication (*ḥālat al-sukr*) be like, a state in which discrimination passes away? (Kalabadhi)[308]

The basic disposition behind the discussion concerning the superiority of any particular state regularly functions according to the same pattern. Once the experience has been attained, one can either place stress on its decisive character and hence its finality and base one's conclusions as to its value on its divine origin, or one may recognise the casual quantity and subjective quality of the experience and use these facts as a basis for further conclusions. In other words, the problem is the value of subjective infallibility; even if one has attained perfect certainty one may still admit that the sense of certainty is not a universal proof. On the other hand, the question is also one of authority: who is able to define the truth on the Islamic status of the "enlightened" from a lower state? Moreover, it is possible that the masters of discourse may define more judgements on the matter than their personal experience of mystical experiences would allow. In the words of Ibn al-Farghani: "Who knows the form (*rasm*) becomes proud, and who knows the content (*wasm*) becomes bewildered."[309]

The same juxtaposition is reflected in the discussion of the value of the Sufi session, *samā'*, 'listening'. Others estimate it as belonging to beginners who still need to listen to God, "the Other". And according to others, *samā'* is presence with God and staying with the Beloved; listening is for the ear the same as service is for the body, union for the spirit, contemplation for the subconscious (*sirr*),[310] love for the heart (Pers. *dil*), or seeing to the eye.[311]

---

307 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 94; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 123.

308 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 87; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 112.

309 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 102; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 134. (Translation slightly altered.)

310 *Sirr,* literally 'secret', refers to the undermost hidden part of the soul, so it is often a very functional solution to translate it as 'subconscious', albeit a somewhat a modern expression. Here Nicholson's 'soul' would also do.

311 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 405–407.

Also, a state that is seemingly sound may contain a built-in opposition. The fact that the consuming quality of the experience functions, according to the perspective chosen for the interpretation, as both *causa efficiens* and *causa finalis*, produces a discussion on the juxtaposition of those who desire God (*murīd*) and those who are desired (*murād*) by Him, the result being that "every *murād* is a *murīd*", and *vice versa*: both concepts have the same reference but from opposite angles. However, according to those Sufis that use these concepts with divergent meanings, a *murīd* is a beginner and a labourer controlled by rules and regulations but a *murād* is at the highest degree, being controlled by the care and protection of God. Junayd puts this in brief: "The *murīd* walks; the *murād* flies. "[312]

The principle of the very existence of antithetical pairs, however, may have a great deal more significance than a mere verbal play. It introduces to Islamic thinking the category of paradox which is behind all the main doctrines of Christianity but not present in the basic doctrines of Islam. Yet paradoxes have always been a basic feature of mystical thought, due to their ability to test and extend the limits of common thought. The speech of Niffari's divine subject proclaims explicitly: "If you do not see Me behind every pair of opposites (*ḍiddiyya*) with a single vision, you do not know Me."[313]

Another good example of this "psychedelic function" of mystical language is also given by Niffari, who displays a paradoxical way of expressing the proximity of God who is so close to man that He is actually between Himself and man. "When you see me, and (when) you see the one who sees me, I am between both, listening and answering."[314]

On the other hand, the value of the whole system of multiple states can be questioned as well. Since the states as denominations are part of a complex that is ultimately verbal in nature, they are far from being intrinsic in comparison with the actual experienced dimension. Niffari disputes the value of state-concepts by setting even *waqfa*, his own preferred state, in opposition to the actual experience, which does not deal with concepts but with God himself. "You desire either me or *waqfa*", proclaims Niffari's divine subject.[315]

This may be the main reason for interpreting a state as deceit, a possibility that has also produced a technical term of its own. Namely, a state might be designated as 'fraud' (*makr*),[316] defined by Qašani as follows:

---

312 E.g. Qušayri: *Risāla*, 203–205; *Principles of Sufism*, 179–181.

313 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 19:7. The use of the root *'RF* of 'knowing' (*ta'rifnī*) implies that it is *ma'rifa* rather than *'ilm* that is referred to. Arberry translates the end "thou hast no gnosis of me".

314 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 25:17.

315 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 18:1.

316 Cf. Massignon 1954, 368 (45–46), 375 (72).

> This is following up blessings with misdeeds, sustaining mystical states without regard for propriety, and divulging signs and miracles without authority or restraint.[317]

3.4.1.2. Consecutive Comparison

The discursive play with states can operate in another, more harmonious way where the aim is to compare the states in order to arrange them not in antithesis but in succession, as a consecutive series, which may produce images of a path to be travelled or a ladder to be ascended. This applies to the whole system of states and to the other concepts connected with them, and in that way it also sets the ecstatic experiences in a new perspective.

For example, Ibn ʿArabi grades the states from the faintest to the strongest, the order being 'tasting' (*dhawq*) – 'drinking' (*šurb*) – 'quenching' (*riyy*) – 'intoxication' (*sukr*).[318] Qušayri starts in like manner but has a slightly different arrangement: 'tasting' – 'drinking' – 'quenching' (*irtiwā'*).[319] The idea of the latter division is that a person may become accustomed to the ecstatic states so that "drink no longer makes him drunk"[320] and he reaches the final state of intoxication, a kind of sober serenity where he is unaffected by what he encounters and is incapable of being moved emotionally.[321]

The position of ecstatic experience in Sufism has also been set in its proper context in a series of consecutive comparisons representing a broader perspective on the phenomenon. Ecstasy, characterised by its quality of 'rapidity' (*sur'a*), is presented as one of the ten basic elements (*arkān*) of Sufism.[322]

1. Isolation of unification (*tajrīd al-tawḥīd*)
2. Understanding of audition (*fahm al-samā'*)
3. Good fellowship (*ḥusn al-'išra*)
4. Preference for preferring (*īthār al-īthār*)
5. Yielding up of personal choice (*tark al-ikhtiyār*)
6. Rapidity of ecstasy (*sur'at al-wajd*)
7. Revelation of thoughts (*kašf 'an al-khawāṭir*)

---

317 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, § 224.

318 Ibn ʿArabi: *Tarjuman al-Aswāq*, 75.

319 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 72.

320 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 72. لم يورثه الشرب سكراً

321 The procedure, according to Sells, is parallel to the conception of drunkenness in classical poetry where one drinks wine in order to forget one's beloved, yet the wine makes one remember her all the more. (*Early Islamic Mysticism*, 126).

322 A quotation from al-Farisi; Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 61; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 79.

8. Abundant journeying (*kathrat al-asfār*)
9. Yielding up of earning (*tark al-iktisāb*)
10. Refusal to hoard (*taḥrīm al-iddikhār*)

Qušayri displays the most crucial ecstatic terms according to their ontological effects: *tawḥīd* entails the encompassing (*istiy'āb*) of the servant, *wajd* entails the immersion (*istighrāq*) of the servant, and *wujūd* entails the extinction (*istihlāk*) of the servant.[323]

Niffari gives an interesting structure of states that start from *waqfa*, Niffari's highest mode of knowledge, and ascend towards the solemn attributes of God. When reversed, this somewhat panentheistic ladder looks like this:

1. Essentiality (*dhātiyya*)
2. Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*)
3. Might (*'izza*)
4. Impermeability (*ṣumūd*)
5. Majesty (*kibriyā'*)
6. Splendour (*bahā'*)
7. Dignity (*waqār*)
8. Staying (*waqfa*)[324]

These states, moreover, are displayed in the discourse so that the lower one is always "only one of the qualities" of the one above, which implies a pyramid-like structure of states that are almost endless in number. This fits well with the principles of mystical discourse, which aims to keep perspectives open forwards and avoids setting any limits.

When intrinsic merit is attributed to a series, the result is an objective (i.e. independent of the subject) field in the mystical dimension. Tirmidhi, whose terminology frequently differs somewhat from the main stream of Sufism,[325] presents the states as various 'domains' or 'dominions' (*mulk*), a kind of cosmic field for the mystic sojourner, that all have their own functions in the experience.

---

323 The tripartite division is derived from al-Daqqaq; Qušayri: *Risāla,* 63. Translation according to M. A. Sells in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 114).

324 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 18:2.

325 For example, al-Tirmidhi (in the translation by Radtke & O'Kane 1996) apparently manages to treat the whole subject of 'sainthood' without many of the basic concepts of classical Sufism (such as *wajd, fanā', baqā'*). And on the other hand, he has some quite original speculations about 'supernatural speech' (*ḥadīth*) and the 'seal of the Friendship with God' (*khaṭm al-wilāya*).

The terms function as a cosmological macrocosm that is realised in the subjective microcosm.[326]

mulk al-jabarūt	makes upright
mulk al-sulṭān	refines
mulk al-jalāl	disciplines
mulk al-jamāl	purifies
mulk al-bahā'	renders sweet-smelling
mulk al-bahja	broadens
mulk al-hayba	educates
mulk al-raḥma	refreshes, strengthens, promotes
mulk al-fardiyya	nourishes

When these kinds of consecutive series are connected with a Gnostic or neo-Platonic vision of creation, the result is a set of aspects of emanation which the subject is supposed to return backwards and upwards towards its original source. This is presented by Jilani so that the first realm of the emanation from the Essence of the Creator is the realm of the world of divinity (*'ālam al-lāhūt*) in which was created the 'holy spirit' (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī*) which descended through the realms of 'omnipotence' (*jabarūt*), 'kingdom' (*malakūt*),[327] 'power' (*mulk*), being clothed with the garment of each realm and renamed first as 'the sovereign spirit' (*rūḥ sulṭāniyya*), then as 'moving spirit' (*rūḥ sīrāniyya*), and finally the holy spirit to enter the world of matter as 'bodily spirit' (*rūḥ jismāniyya*). God ordered the spirits to enter the bodies prepared for them. The macrocosm of the realms of spirits are in turn reflected in man where the spirit has various 'taverns' (*ḥānūt*) in his body: the physical aspect of the extreme limbs (*badan ma' al-jawāriḥ al-zhāhira*), the psychological aspect of the heart (*qalb*), an inner heart (*fu'ād*) and the subconscious secret part (*sirr*). The task of man is to ascend in the knowledge of names towards the Divine unity.[328]

The principle of consecutive series operates on all levels of the discourse. The symbol of the veil is categorised by Niffari in five grades as veils of 'essences' (*a'yān*), referring to the whole creation, 'sciences' (*'ulūm*), 'letters' (*ḥurūf*), 'names' (*'asmā'*) and 'ignorance' (*jahl*).[329] Even the category of methods

326 Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 94.

327 It is also possible to derive *malakūt* from *malak*, 'angel', and translate it accordingly as 'angelic realm'.

328 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 55–60; *Secret of Secrets*, 18–22.

329 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 64:2.

has been enumerated with progressive divisions. Jilani gives seven stages for the *dhikr*, one outward and six inner ones, which become progressively deeper:[330]

1. Tongue (*dhikr al-lisān*) – demonstrating that the heart has not forgotten remembrance
2. Soul (*dhikr al-nafs*) – inner emotional movement
3. Heart (*dhikr al-qalb*) – sensing the divine splendour (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*)
4. Spirit (*dhikr al-rūḥ*) – enlightenment through perceiving the lights of attributes
5. Secret (*dhikr al-sirr*) – revelation of divine secrets
6. Hidden (*dhikr al-khafiy*) – "lights of the beauty of Essence" (*anwār jamāl al-dhāt*)
7. The most hidden of the hidden (*dhikr akhfā al-khafiy*) – beholding the ultimate Essence of Absolute Truth.

The arrangement of states easily becomes a mere verbal exercise, even competition, as the anecdotes embedded in the Sufi classics reveal. When someone declares that he has "drunk from the cup of love, after which there is no thirst", another may marvel at the weakness of his state, boasting: "Here is one who has drunk up the seas of creation".[331]

3.4.1.3. Ecstasy and Time

All mystical and ecstatic experiences take place in the category of time. This somewhat self-evident aspect has been discussed by the Sufis from various viewpoints.

First, the time dimension can be used to settle some unsolved dilemmas in the interpretation. Qušayri manages to harmonise the dispute over 'states' and 'stations' by setting the experience in the category of chronological change. For example, the mental condition of 'satisfaction' (*riḍā'*) is both attained by human effort and bestowed by God: attained in the beginning and bestowed in the end, and in that sense it is both state and station.[332]

Most of the Sufi discussion on time, however, takes place under the concept of *waqt*, literally signifying both 'time' and 'moment', which in its widest sense in the Sufi *parole* refers to the present moment that is between past and future. The more specific usage of *waqt* is one of the most common signs of the mystical

330 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 80–81; *Secret of Secrets*, 45–46. Bayrak interprets the seventh stage as "annihilation of the self and unification with the truth" (*al-nazhar ilā ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqq al-yaqīn*).

331 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 73; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 127.

332 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 193; *Principles of Sufism*, 163.

experience and due to its basic meaning, it operates especially in the chronological dimension, signifying the moment during which the subject is under the influence of a mystical-ecstatic experience, and thereby distinguishing an actual (emotional) peak from abstract concepts in a very functional way. *Waqt* is used as a technical term of the mystical experience-in-general of any emotional content, and therefore *waqt* may signify anything that dominates a person completely yet transitorily. Qašani defines *waqt* as "whatever becomes present to you in the (ecstatic) state (*ḥāl*)".[333] According to Qušayri, it is what happens to Sufis "through the dispositions of the Real that come upon them without any choice on their part".[334] But on the other hand, even if the mere *waqt* was temporary, its effects may remain constant because of the state (*ḥāl*) granted during it.[335] In these definitions Qašani and Qušayri seem to employ the concepts of *ḥāl* and *waqt* in a somewhat reverse way.

Some of the emotional modes of experience are intentional in character in the sense that they refer to the future, like 'fear' and 'hope', the others being more immediate and self-fulfilling. Examples of the latter include states like 'constriction' (*qabḍ*) and 'expansion' (*basṭ*) whose mode of consciousness "occur in the present moment".[336] 'Constriction' operates like fear, but in the present moment only, not intentionally.

Qašani points out that concentration on either the past or the future is actually a waste of time (*taḍyī' al-waqt*), since a Sufi should be *ibn waqtihi* and concentrate on the present moment only.[337]

In the existentialist perspective, time is attributed a somewhat unmerciful character caused by the uniqueness and transitoriness of the present moment. The uniqueness of the *waqt* is the reason why there can be no general rules to guide one's actions during the mystical moment: every *waqt* must be encountered casually, sometimes resorting to invocation, sometimes to maintaining silence, as Qušayri instructs.[338] The mystical moment is even more unyielding, however, due to the consuming force of the experience. Sufis also express this idea by using of *waqt* the symbol 'sword'.

> As the sword is cutting, so the moment prevails in what the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) brings to pass and completes. It is said: "The sword is gentle to the touch, but its edge cuts. Whoever handles it gently is unharmed. Whoever treats it roughly is cut. Similarly for

---

333 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, no. 101 (p. 32). ما حضرك فى الحال

334 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 55. ما يصادفهم من تصريف الحق لهم دون ما يختارون لأنسهم

335 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 367–370.

336 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 58. واما القبض المعنى حاصل في الوقت وكذلك البسط

337 Qašani: *Kitāb iṣṭilāḥāt*, no. 101 (p. 32–33).

338 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 265; *The Principles of Sufism,* 277.

> the moment, whoever submits to its decree (*istaslama li-ḥukmihi*) is saved, and whoever opposes it is thrown over and destroyed.[339]

Consequently, the 'moment' (*waqt*) itself may also be favourable or opposing.[340] From this perspective *waqt* may be interpreted as consisting of 'effacement' (*maḥw*) and 'confirmation' (*ithbāt*), one more pair of states describing the same phenomenon from opposite angles. This pair portrays the divine action in man as an interplay of two complementary tendencies: "*maḥw* is what the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) veils and purifies, *ithbāt* is what it manifests and discloses".[341] Qušayri divides *maḥw* into three categories the meanings of which he aims to elucidate, even though his exposition almost yields itself up to the stream of words in his appetite for using rhyming concepts: the first is "effacement of any lapse in performance of exterior duties" (*maḥw al-zalla 'an al-zhawāhir*), the second "effacement of any negligence in the inner mind" (*maḥw al-ghafla 'an al-ḍamā'ir*) , and the third "effacement of any defect in the secret part of man" (*maḥw al-'illa 'an al-sarā'ir*). Similarly, the first is the 'confirmation of good conduct' (*ithbāt al-mu'āmalāt*), the second the 'confirmation of the encounters' (*ithbāt al-munāzalāt*), and the third the 'affirmation of the intimacies' (*ithbāt al-muwāṣalāt*).[342]

Hujwiri makes a corresponding division but using different vocabulary. *Waqt* as a specific term refers to two kinds of moments given by God, firstly 'losing' or 'departing' (*faqd*) and secondly, 'finding' or 'uniting' (*wajd*). In the latter case the effect given by God descends into the soul and gathers it together from the distraction caused by the tension between past and present.[343]

Sufism has been given multiple definitions, the most remarkable of which is undoubtedly Junayd's: "Sufism is the preservation of the moments (*awqāt*)".[344] The fruitfulness of the definition is not only in its quest for continuous experience but also in its aim to surpass the fleeting nature of time and the uniqueness of the present moment. The experience may certainly *surpass* time subjectively, in the sense that the subject loses the sense of time during it. Niffari suggests that during the moment, of which he uses the term *mīqāt*, derived from the same root *WQT*, one may attain an experience of eternity beyond time, even though the moment is an external phenomenon as well: "The hearts of those who know see eternity (*abad*) and their eyes see the moments (*mawāqīt*)"[345] Eternity is an attribute of

---

339 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 55; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 100–101.

340 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 56; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 101.

341 فالمحو ما ستره الحق ونفاه ، والإثبات ما أظهره الحق وأبداه. Qušayri: *Risāla,* 73; *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 128.

342 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 73; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 128.

343 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 367–370.

344 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 62.

345 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 57:17.

God, and it may be experienced in a way analogous to seeing – but not expressed exactly.[346]

The experience of a timeless, eternal state is only one result of the *intensity* of the experience: if one is deprived of all ordinary sensing due to the all-filling nature of the ecstatic experience, inevitably one does not pay attention to the passing of time either, somewhat like a person who falls asleep and loses his awareness of time. Sufis do not express the idea precisely, perhaps because time itself was not understood in such an exact fashion as in modern times with our clocks and timers. Nevertheless, Qušayri describes *ibn waqtihi*, 'man of his moment' as one for whom the future does not exist so that he has no fear or sorrow, and no concern either for the past or for the moment to come.[347] Naturally it is the capacity of the subject which largely determines how quickly and how completely he is filled by an experience, and his will may to a large extent determine whether he retains the discursive reasoning during it.

The possibility of experiencing a state beyond time led some Sufis to reach the conclusion that since the only timeless entity is God, the one who has passed beyond time consequently has a good reason to declare his ultimate identity with God. The logical "mistakes" here – even if the experience is considered real – are that the mere losing of the *sense* of time is regarded as *surpassing* its limits, and secondly, even if one actually surpassed time, which is in fact true in the subjective sense, there is still an incoherent supposition that if the soul proceeds beyond time it cannot be a soul anymore, as if its identity was dependent on time and lost with it.[348]

3.4.1.4. Special Cases of "Stateology"

In the discussion on ecstatic experience there are also several curiosities connected with the problems of various states. The one we must not miss is Hujwiri's chapter on the 'rending of garments' (*kharq*), which is undoubtedly among the most bizarre religious regulations ever written down. The reading is characterised by a peculiar tension between the rational approach and its insane subject, inspired behaviour.

Hujwiri notes in the beginning that the one who is in full command of his senses must not rend his garments, since this has "no foundation in Sufism". Yet rending one's clothes may be a blissful act depending on one's motives and circumstances. One is firstly allowed to rend one's garments in rapture caused by

---

346 رأيت الأبد ولا عبارة فى الأبد – "You have seen eternity, but there is no means of expressing eternity." Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 60:3–4.

347 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 55; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 100.

348 See the discussion in Zaehner 1960, 90, 123.

samā', and secondly, others are allowed to rend their garments at the command of a spiritual director; and thirdly, they do this in the intoxication of ecstasy. The most difficult problem seems to be the treatment of the intact garments thrown off and torn during *samā'*, for the ascertaining of their destination implies clarification of the thrower's motives at the moment of throwing. The garment may be delivered to the spiritual leader or to the singer, or it may be divided among the party, depending on the thrower's intention and on the nature of his ecstatic state. For the sake of clarity it is recommended in many cases that "all should throw off their garments in sympathy".[349]

When treating the perception of esoteric knowledge (*samā'*),[350] Hujwiri starts with ordinary perception through the five senses. Of these, hearing is the most important, since it is crucial when embracing the religion. Similarly, the use of the sense of hearing involves more problems: Hujwiri gives a long analysis of characteristics and qualities of different types of hearing according to various schools. This was necessary because the use of music to achieve ecstasy had greatly increased among the Sufis, which in turn had divided opinions into various camps. According to one theory the temperaments of all living beings consist of sounds and melodies blended and harmonised. Therefore, for example, deer could be hunted by encircling them, "and sing until the deer are lulled to sleep by the delightful melody". On the other hand, this indicates universal musicality: "he who finds no pleasure in sounds and melodies [...] is outside of the category of men and beasts." Paradise is full of auditory enjoyment, for there is a different voice and melody coming from every tree.[351]

Hujwiri recognises that since the temperaments vary, it would be tyranny to pursue one law for all. The same sound can be heard outwardly in a material way or in a spiritual way, with understanding. If listening to music seems to strengthen the passions, the problem is in the way in which the audition is performed: it does not correspond to reality. *Samā'* is proper to strengthen the tendencies that already exist in the soul, whether good or bad, not so much to change them. A participant may, in accordance with his grade, receive supernatural influence, which may cause him to lose control of his senses, or even lead to death. The main purpose, however, is the transportation of the novice by audition to "such an extent that his audition shall deliver the wicked from their wickedness".[352]

---

349 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 417–418.

350 Here *samā'* means 'reception of knowledge'. Besides 'hearing' and 'Sufi ritual' there is one more separate meaning: Ibn 'Arabi, for example, "gave certificates of authenticity (*samā'*)" for his works. (Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalusia*, Austin's Introduction, 43).

351 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 393–413.

352 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 402–403, 406–410.

3.4.2. Ecstasy and Theology

The speculation concerning ecstasy inevitably leads from a comparison of the states to a discussion of the evaluation of the experience in the wider Islamic context. What is the relation between ecstatic experience and Islamic systematic theology? The divine cause of ecstasy raises questions as to its evaluation: does it give authority somehow comparable with the Divine revelation, Sunna or *šarī'a*, Islamic law?

The basic Sufi answer is simple: the inspiration of genuine experience is in principle the same and therefore as sure as the inspiration of the Qur'an, and for this very reason such experience cannot contradict but only support the truths of revelation.[353] Nevertheless, Niffari's answer, I assume, would assign the revelation of the Qur'an, as far as it is verbal, to the dimension of the creation, but sound mystical experience, as far as it is immanent, is above the divine *parole* subdued to human language.[354] Even if the meanings of the words of the Qur'an were divine in reference, they are surely human in significance.

A closer appraisal of the topic, however, is impeded by the esoteric principle prevalent in Sufism, according to which people should be approached according to their ability to comprehend and secrets should be guarded from the "common folk".[355] The position could be described with a linguistic term such as 'situational acceptability': what is appropriate depends on the current context. Hallaj, for example, is reputed to have acted as a member of every particular sect he happened to encounter – yet in the end his sin, from the Sufi point of view, was the very disclosing of secrets.[356]

The esoteric principle is one result of the recognition of the limitations of language in describing inner realities that lack objective criteria of identity. According to Kalabadhi,

> if a man discoursing does not take account of the spiritual conditions (*aḥwāl*) of his hearers, but expounding a certain station (*maqām*) denies and affirms, it is possible that there may be in his audience one who has never dwelt in that station: what he denies may be affirmed in the station of the hearer, so that he will imagine that the speaker

353 Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 117.

354 P. Nwyia even states that "il a démasqué l'idolâtrie du *ḥarf*" (Nwyia 1970, 370).

355 For instance, Qušayri has a division of four groups of people: the masses (*'āmma*), the elect (*khāṣṣa*, literally 'special'), saints (*awliyā'*, often translated 'friends of God') and prophets (*anbiyā'*). *Risāla,* 108; *Principles of Sufism*, 29.

356 Ernst 1985, 124–125, 131.

> had denied something which knowledge (*'ilm*) affirms, and that he has either made a mistake, or fallen into heresy, or even perhaps relapsed into unbelief.[357]

This twofold intention is one of the basic characteristics of Sufi discourse. It means that the terms may function to facilitate the understanding of the topic for Sufis and to make it perplexing for outsiders. Qušayri states in the preface to his dictionary of Sufi vocabulary:

> The Sufis employ terms (*alfāzh*) on matters they share, through which they intend to reveal (*kašf*) their meanings to themselves, and to veil (*sitr*) from those who disagree with them in their path (*ṭarīqa*) so that the meanings of their terms may be a mystery for outsiders, out of jealousy toward them for their secrets. [358]

Also, the sources of the present study set themselves explicitly behind the Qur'an and Sunna, and within their orthodox interpretation, when the question is under discussion, but indeed outside these settings the discourse often seems to be quite independent of them. This is clearly illustrated in the way the Sufis *use* the Qur'an.

3.4.2.1. Ecstasy and the Qur'an

The main line of Sufism determinedly underlines its substantial unity and historical continuity with Muhammad and his revelation. The Qur'an is therefore the main subtext for all Sufi discourse, which is no wonder since many Sufis had learnt the whole book by heart. Even the discourse of such an esoteric and original thinker as Ibn 'Arabi is full of Qur'anic allusions and quotations.[359]

This means that the expression of the mystical experience is potentially influenced by the preconditioning effect of the Qur'anic subtext. This applies both to the reference and to the significance of the expression. For example, all references to light have a Qur'anic connotation, since 'light' is a divine attribute in the famous light verse.[360] Jilani states that ecstasy is the conjunction of human light with the divine light (*al-nūr ilā al-nūr*).[361] When the awareness of the subtext is present in the subject, any emotion interpreted as Divine proximity will potentially be signed by the subject with the symbol of 'light'. In the present corpus this possibility has been especially utilised by Jilani and Ghazali.[362]

---

357 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 60; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 77.

358 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 53. (Translation mine, cf. Ernst 1992, 184.)

359 Chodkiewicz 1993, 20–21.

360 "God is the light of the heaven and earth..." (*Qur'ān* 24:35).

361 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119; I follow the interpretation of Bayrak in *Secret of Secrets,* 90.

362 E.g. Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 108; *Secret of Secrets,* 77; Ghazali's *Miškāt al-anwār* is thoroughly based on the idea.

What is more remarkable, however, is the fact that the Qur'an is repeatedly used as a source where justification for Sufi doctrine is sought. This has often been accomplished by reading *into* the text new meanings in a way that may appear somewhat arbitrary. The grammatical and graphemic structure of the Semitic languages – e.g. the root consonants and their derivatives in the unvocalised consonantal script – seems to be especially favourable for the development of the practice of loading the old text with new meanings.[363]

The outcome of the position is that almost any mystical state may be described as Qur'anic by isolating a phrase from the Qur'an and reconstructing it as the starting-point of the doctrine in question, at least if the root in question occurs in the Qur'an. For example, Shadhili employs the verse *kullu man 'alayhā fān*$_{in}$ from the *Sūrat al-raḥmān* (55:26) as the basis of his doctrine on *fanā'*, although the verse in its context only emphasises the mortality of man.[364] Jilani points to verse 23 from *Sūrat al-zumar*, where "the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble",[365] and considers it as an account of the ecstatic state, and thereby presents it as the basis and starting-point of his teaching. As for Kalabadhi, he justifies *fanā'* by explaining how the women who were admiring Joseph cut their hands because "their attributes (*awṣāf*) had disappeared".[366] Qušayri, however, uses the same verse to illustrate human fallibility in the estimation of spiritual realities, not to mention in the case of Divine qualities.[367] The teaching on 'drunkenness' Qušayri flavours with the verse "When the Lord manifested at the mountain, he caused it to shatter. And Moses fell down in a swoon"[368] – undoubtedly one of the most fruitful verses for ecstatic purposes.

---

363 The phenomenon can be compared with the development of the thirty-two methods of interpretation employed in Rabbinical Judaism. It is useful to remark here that the appearance of the Qur'an was still in the early tenth century AD somewhat different from the present standard. The vowels and the diacritical points were gradually added, when considered necessary, after c. 700 AD, but the process was not completed before 934 AD. (Hämeen-Anttila 1997, 80–81.)

364 Shadhili: *Qawānin ḥikam al-Išrāq*, 70. The translation to be expected for 55:26 is "All that is on earth will perish".

365 The verse تقشعر منه جلود الذين يخشون ربهم (*Qur'ān* 39:23) is employed by Jilani in *Sirr al-Asrār*, 118 (tr. *Secret of Secrets,* 89), as well as by Niffari, the most original mind in our corpus, who entitled one of his mystical stations (*Mawqif* 73) as 'standing of the trembling of skins' (موقف إقشعرار الجلود).

366 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 95; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 125.

367 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 67.

368 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 72; *Qur'an* 7:143 (فلما تجلى ربه للجبل، جعله دكاً، وخر موسى صعقا). My translation of the verse is a compromise between Abdullah Yusuf Ali's (*The Holy Qur'an* 1934) and that of M.-A. Sells in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 126.

Are there arguments to consider this kind of interpretation "right" or "wrong"? The *choice* of the way of interpretation is a philosophical question that concerns the whole paradigm of religious thought, and as such it cannot be solved within Holy Writ: the principles of interpretation cannot be deduced from the reading of the Qur'an. In any case, it is obvious that the esoteric way of interpretation makes the meaning of the sacred text relative, and this *de facto* moves the authority from the text to its interpreter.

Due to the abstract and "open" nature of the various states and stations, it is not impossible to find in the Qur'an indirect allusions that might be associated with them. The custom of presenting the states in pairs opens the possibility of making use of parallel structures employed in the Qur'an. For example, Qušayri takes verse 1:5 and divides it into two, explaining the first part "You do we worship" as referring to 'separation' (*farq*), and its sequel "and your aid we seek" to 'union' (*jam'*).[369]

In spite of the frequent use of Qur'anic quotations and subtextual allusions, it is easy to agree with Ernst's assessment that the "Sufi authors are unanimous in agreeing that the real source of their terminology is mystical experience [...] Occasionally, verses from the Qur'an are cited as illustrations."[370] The definitive bulk of the material in Qušayri's and Kalabadhi's discourse consists of quotations from authoritative Sufis, and often even poetic testimonies of non-Qur'anic origin appear more frequently.

However, one must also admire the skilfulness and subtlety of Sufi interpretation. The 'inner sense' is a dimension which is able to contribute interesting projections to the basic meaning, and thereby increase the value of Holy Writ. The phenomenon produced further speculations on the matter. Jilani, for example, divides the Qur'anic information into three dimensions that are assigned to different groups: (1) the kernel (*lubb*) is the 'science of mystical states' (*'ilm al-ḥāl*), given to 'real men' (*rijāl*), (2) the husk of the kernel (*qišr al-lubb*) is given to the *'ulamā'* and it deals with external matters, the good and the forbidden, and (3) the husk of the husk (*qišr al-qišr*) is political wisdom dealing with justice and given to those in authority.[371] The fullest development of the inner dimension (*bāṭin*), however, was attained in the texts of the more philosophical schools of theosophic Sufism that are beyond the scope of this study.

---

369 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 65; *Qur'an* 1:5 (إياك نعبد و إياك نستعين).

370 Ernst 1992, 187.

371 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 73; *Secret of Secrets,* 38. It is interesting to note that the "political" aspect of Islam is not excluded or underrated even in the discourse of a "spiritual" author.

Finally, it is to be noted also that Sufis, in principle at least, do not mean the divergent dimensions of meanings to compete with or oppose but rather to fulfil each other in one totality. Sometimes, however, semantic confrontation may be difficult to avoid; for instance, in Jilani's 'paradise of intimacy' (*jannat al-qurba*) there is neither milk and honey nor dark-eyed maidens, for "man should know his worth".[372] In such cases there is an evident possibility that the significance surpassed the reference.

3.4.2.2. Ecstasy and šarī'a

The Sufis explicitly committed themselves to the tradition and practices of the Prophet and his companions, claiming these to be ecstatics (*ahl al-jadhba*)[373] themselves. Nevertheless, the Sufis' own practices were at least occasionally more or less in contradiction with the customs of orthodox Islam. The very development of technical terms, for example, irritated orthodox jurists, since the Sufi definitions were in fact different from the way in which Muhammad and his followers had used the same vocabulary.[374] This tension reflects the position already referred to: the authors commit themselves to orthodox doctrine in plain words, yet the intention of the discourse occasionally seems to observe divergent principles.

As we have seen, Kalabadhi interprets all states in relation to moral choices, and his path certainly does not culminate in trances or any ecstatic phenomena. We might even say that in Kalabadhi's *fanā'* and *baqā'* everything contrary to *šarī'a* is lost. Kalabadhi avoids even mentioning the name of Hallaj; instead he uses the periphrasis 'one of the great ones' (*ba'ḍ al-kubbār*). Kalabadhi, in stressing constant human responsibility, makes polemical comments concerning the *malāmatiyya* sect, unlike Hujwiri, who praises the attitude of *malāma*.[375] A weak ecstasy, according to Kalabadhi, is when a man cannot control himself but discloses it; whereas when the ecstasy is strong, he controls himself and remains passive.[376] Unfortunately, he does not try to argue this opinion in any way, but the appeal to the concept of strength does not attach a very emotional character to the ecstasy in question. Moreover, he undervalues ecstatic experiences in relation to permanent things, i.e. states or knowledge that are really worthy of endeavour.

---

372 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 60; *Secret of Secrets*, 29.

373 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 141; *Secret of Secrets*, 119.

374 Ernst 1985, 123.

375 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 63; Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 83; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 107, see also 121, 112, 170–71.

376 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 82; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 106.

> Ecstasy (*wajd*) is akin to passing-away (*zawāl*),
> while knowledge (*ma'rifa*) is stable and does not pass away.[377]

It is also remarkable that a considerable portion of Kalabadhi's chapter on 'ecstasy' (*wajd*) consists of poetic quotations stressing the relativity of ecstasy in relation to the Truth.

> In ecstasy delights he who finds in it his rest:
> But when Truth comes, ecstasy itself is dispossessed (Junayd).[378]
>
> I hold that ecstasy is doubt
> If it spring not of witnessing (Al-Shibli).[379]

Hujwiri, too, emphasises that even the most sanctified Sufi must obey the law of Islam, and therefore statements made in a state of intoxication do not represent ultimate wisdom but are rather a transient phase: "He who says: 'I have arrived' has gone astray".[380] For the same reason, Hujwiri argues, a character like Hallaj should not be taken as an ideal example, for "his experiences are largely mixed with error". On the other hand, Hujwiri does mediate and arbitrate by explaining that Hallaj's words are pantheistic only in appearance, for "no Muslim can be a witch".[381]

Jilani follows the same line. He sees it as necessary to disregard miracles as no more than the first of the thousands of stages leading towards God. Jilani calls miracles 'menstruation of men' (*ḥayḍ al-rijāl*).[382] His view on the position of the religious is strict and unambiguous.

> On the way to God the body (*jism*) must follow the straight way
> (by obeying) the precepts of *šarī'a* day and night.[383]

According to Shadhili, impulses that resemble knowledge (*'ilm*) arising from inspiration (*ilhām*) or unveiling (*kašf*), inasmuch as they are products of the imagination (*tawahhum*), must be rejected by returning to the decisive truth of Scripture or Sunna.[384] According to a 13th-century Sufi author, whenever something is "shining down from the horizon of the dominion upon the tablet of his

---

377 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 82; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 106.

378 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 82; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 106.

379 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 83; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 107.

380 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 118.

381 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 151–152, 184–187, 248–249.

382 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 54; *Secret of Secrets,* 17. The reference to men is not incidental but characteristic of Sufism, which was basically a masculine pursuit.

383 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 82. (Translation mine.)

384 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar),* 113–114.

heart, he must compare it with the Book of God. If it agrees with the Book, he should accept it; if not, he should pay no attention to it." After this the matter should still be compared with the Sunna, with the consensus of *'ulamā'*, and with the consensus of the sheikhs of the community.[385] Individualism or freedom of thought are certainly not among the virtues of classical Sufism!

According to Qušayri, one should adopt one's behaviour in relation to one's mystical moment (*waqt*): "If his moment is sobriety (*ṣaḥw*), his performance[386] is of the *šarī'a*, and if his moment is effacement (*maḥw*), the rules of Reality (*aḥkām al-ḥaqīqa*) prevail upon him."[387] Qušayri tells a story where a man went out of his mind when realising that people are starving as a result of famine, when there was plenty of wheat in his own house. "His mind become disordered (*khūliṭa fī 'aqlihi*) and he did not come to consciousness (*lā yufīqu*) after that except for the times of prayer."[388] By the last remark Qušayri wants to show how the 'people of the Reality' (*ahl al-ḥaqīqa*) are protected wondrously so that their experiences do not lead them to disobey the *šarī'a*. Elsewhere he states explicitly that the servant in a state of drunkenness is protected, yet not through his own intentional efforts.[389]

The discussion of the value of ecstasy has surely divided opinions more than it may appear from the readings of the mouthpieces of sober Sufism described above. As the authoritative authors of basic classical works of sober Sufism they *are* in fact sober Sufism. In the sources of the present study it is Niffari alone who seems to be in actual opposition towards those who unconditionally submit to the Qur'an, Sunna and *šarī'a*. This is most clearly realised in his way of presentation: the speech of God in the first person, which in terms of logic *de facto* sets itself on the same level as the Qur'an itself. Niffari, moreover, does not even try to reach harmonious compromises. He states plainly that the one in *waqfa* is "not approved by theologians (*'ulamā'*), and the theologians are not approved by him".[390]

---

385 The author may be al-Qunawi. Chittick 1992, 55.

386 or 'subsistence' (*qiyām*).

387 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 55.

388 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 64.

389 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 72. أنه في حال سكره محفوظ لا بتكلفه

390 Niffari: *Mawāqif,* 8:32.

3.4.2.3. Ecstasy and tawḥīd

Ecstatic experience poses a special problem for Islamic theology mainly because almost all the images used of it refer to some kind of unification with God. Since even to set something *beside* God is the worst possible heresy, it is clear that unification is a concept that causes counter-reactions among the Sufis themselves, not to mention Sunnite orthodoxy. Any possibility of "God being in the created" was judged in Orthodox dogmatics as an impossibility because it would imply three mistaken conclusions: (1) God would no longer be an absolute existent, (2) there would be two eternal beings, and (3) mixing with a concrete being would introduce separation in God. *Ḥulūliyya*, 'incarnationism', became a general term that has been used to label various dubious parties and groups.[391]

Hujwiri states explicitly that it is impossible for God to become incarnate (*ḥulūl*), mix (*imtizāj*), unite (*ittiḥād*) or join (*wuṣūl*) with man. According to him, *wuṣūl* means only that God appreciates men, and even 'nearness' (*qurb*) or 'neighbourhood' are not appropriate concepts to be applied to God. Nevertheless, in other contexts he does use *qurb* without problems or criticism.[392]

Ghazali, too, argues in *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* that images like *ḥulūl* (incarnation, befalling), *ittiḥād* (unification) and *wuṣūl* (joining) are clearly erroneous. Instead he would prefer to talk about the nearness (*qurb*) of God.[393] However, in his latter work *Miškāt al-anwār*, certainly intended for smaller circles, he does consider it possible to use *ittiḥād* metaphorically – and *tawḥīd* even *de facto*![394] Here we again face the lack of a "scholastic skeleton" resulting from the esoteric aspect of Sufism. If this be the case, it is hardly surprising that Niffari, uncompromising as ever, does not have the slightest hesitation in using the term *wuṣūl*.[395]

3.4.2.4. Visions

The Sufi discussion of visions operates in a wide field which contains (a) general visionary insight, (b) actual visions, visionary revelations and (c) dreams. The first case is actually what we have encountered before as the "symbolical expression of the mystical experience": some indefinite inner enlightenment that is expressed with images of seeing in the analogous sense.

---

391 Ernst 1985, 122.

392 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 118–119, 254, 260, cf. 226–227, 238–239.

393 Ghazali: *Munqidh* 85; Watt: *Faith and Practice*, 61 (where *ḥulūl* is translated 'inherence').

394 Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 58 (tr. 61)

395 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 57:13, 64:18 etc.

Reports of actual visions, visual apparitions, are rare or non-existent in Kalabadhi's and Qušayri's discourse where they occur in more or less trustworthy anecdotes to fulfil a homiletic function.[396] Hallucinatory visions are attributed mainly to heretical Sufis who were reputed even to have had sexual intercourse with the fanciful 'dark-eyed maidens' (*ḥūr*) during their ecstasy.[397]

The theological problem of visionary experiences is in the nature and possibility of the vision of God. Due to the strong preconditioning effect of the Islamic context, the questioning in Sufi discourse is not in the description of actual particular visions but concerns the limits of what is appropriate to be said of any visions of God in general. Even Muhammad, according to "most Sufis", did not see God during his heavenly journey.[398] Kalabadhi, however, puts forward as the general Sufi view that in the next world God will be seen 'with eyesights' (*bi-l-abṣār*) but in this world not even with the heart (*bi-l-qulūb*), and the vision (*ru'ya*) is possible through the intellect (*'aql*).[399] The vision in question is better seen as a general mental orientation towards God and realisation of his presence, being and acting *as if* seeing him. This kind of conception of the "vision" may apply to other heavenly subjects as well: "(It was) as though I beheld (*ka-annī anzhuru*) the throne of my Lord coming forth."[400]

As might be expected, Niffari is also in this respect bolder than other authors, claiming to have literally seen Paradise and even the Lord (*al-rabb*) both without His servants and with His servants.[401] Whether the difference between Niffari and others is in his experience or in his parlance, is beyond our knowledge. However, this somewhat rare description of a literal vision must be kept apart from what Niffari means by the concept of 'vision' (*ru'ya*), which for him is a technical term of the relationship with God based on the imminent awareness of him, "seeing God in everything". In this sense Niffari dares to state that whoever does not see God in this world, will not see Him in the world to come.[402]

The visions that are seen in sleep clearly constitute a definite category of their own within the field of visionary experiences. Kalabadhi, for example,

---

396 For example, two apparitions of a mystic man to a Sufi in Kalabadhi (*Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 117; Arberry, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 155) can in principle be interpreted as an encounter with an actual human being as well.

397 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 141; *Secret of Secrets*, 118.

398 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 22; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 26.

399 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 20; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 24.

400 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 91; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 117.

401 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 21:1; "I saw the Lord without any servant … I saw the Lord in the midst of his servants" (*ibid*, 47:25–26).

402 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 26:5, 14:4.

discusses dreams under the title of 'visions' (*ru'ya*).[403] Dreams are actually outside our topic, mystical and ecstatic experiences, although as a hallucinatory way of sensing they are in fact separated from what is considered "mystical" only by their general frequency! However, it is worth noticing that in their dreams Sufis have actually seen the Prophet Muhammad and even God Himself.[404] In the thought-world of the Sufis and their contemporaries major epistemological authority used to be attributed to dreams since they were considered to be expressions of reality and a true dream (*ru'ya ṣādiqa*) as a part of prophecy. [405] Jilani states that "when the body is asleep, the heart finds an opportunity to depart to its original homeland"[406] and to become able to bring information when returning, for in the worship of God being asleep or awake are of equal worth.

Jilani divides dreams into 'subjective' (*anfasī*) and 'extrinsic' (*āfāqī*). The category of benign (*ḥamīda*) subjective dreams operates in connection with the heart (*qalb*) and these contain several Islamic archetypes such as the desert in white light, dark-eyed maidens, castles, young servants, the sun, moon and stars. Unfavourable (*dhamīma*) subjective dreams are connected with the lower soul and they comprise edible animals and birds, camels symbolising outer and inner pilgrimage, horses symbolising the two *jihād*s, and mules representing the lowest state of tranquillity. The extrinsic dreams also contain animals that have symbolic functions: tiger – pride, lion – arrogance, bear – anger, wolf – gluttony, swine – envy, malice and lust, snake – verbal sin, and so forth.[407]

3.4.3. Ecstasy and Epistemology

Epistemology as such is one of the most complicated and unfinished arts, and evidently the epistemology of mystical discourse is no less delusive a field. Cosmic knowledge, gnosis, is by definition indefinable and therefore unanalysable. Since the Sufis do present ecstasy and this knowledge (*ma'rifa*) in imminent relationship, we may take a look at Sufi epistemology and outline several features

---

403 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 119–120, 123; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 157–159, 161.

404 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 206, 102; *Principles of Sufism*, 184, 21.

405 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 132; *Secret of Secrets,*108; Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 9. For more Sufi discussion on dreams, see Tirmidhi's teaching in Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 18–36, 136–139, 236.

406 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 62,98; *Secret of Secrets,* 26, 65–66. Cf. Tirmidhi's tripartite concept of knowledge: external knowledge (*al-'ilm al-zhāhir*) [of the jurists], interior knowledge (*al-'ilm al-bāṭin*) and knowledge of God (*al-'ilm billāh*). Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 42.

407 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 121–126; *Secret of Secrets*, 108–115.

of the relationship between knowledge and ecstatic experience in the Sufi discourse.

Firstly, a few general remarks. The Sufi exposition of epistemology is based on a methodological approach. Ghazali presents four classes of seekers of truth: scholastics (*mutakallimūn*) who claim to be "men of independent reasoning (*ra'y*) and intellectual speculation (*nazhar*)", esoterics (*bāṭiniyya*) who "claim to be the unique possessors of instruction (*ta'līm*) and the privileged recipients of knowledge acquired from the infallible Imam", philosophers (*falāsifa*), divided into further classes, who claim to be "possessors of logic (*manṭiq*) and apodeictic demonstration (*burhān*)", and Sufis. It is noteworthy that there is no empiricist school at all.[408]

According to Ghazali, the Sufis are distinguished by their access to the Divine Presence (*ḥaḍra*) and their ability of contemplation (*mušāhada*) and illumination (*mukāšafa*).[409] Their knowledge surpasses the limits of reasoning and is in fact the same phenomenon as 'prophecy' (*nubūwa*). This knowledge is received with the 'eye of the heart' (*'ayn al-qalb*); it is immediate and direct 'presential knowledge' (*'ilm ḥuḍūrī*). Why then, if everyone has this inner eye, is mystical knowledge so uncommon? Simply because it is not a separate phenomenon from the transformation of the knower's being which is veiled by passion. Therefore, mystical knowledge implies remembrance (*dhikr*) and annihilation (*fanā'*) which function as its enabling causes.[410]

Jilani presents Sufi epistemology in quadripartite arrangement. 'Science of the law' (*'ilm al-šarī'a*) deals with the external aspects of the life of this world and their rules, 'science of the path' (*'ilm al-ṭarīqa*) deals with the meanings, causes and effects of the external aspects. 'Science of the knowledge' (*'ilm al-ma'rifa*) concerns their spiritual essence and thereby the divine, and 'science of the truth' (*'ilm al-ḥaqīqa*) the Truth itself. We might name the four as empirical sciences, philosophy, theology and mysticism. It is to be noted that the field of *šarī'a* seems to reach only the lowest quarter of the knowable. Correspondingly, there are four worlds that are analogous with the four sciences: *'ālam al-mulk* is the world of matter (earth, water, fire and ether); *'ālam al-malakūt* the world of spiritual entities (angels, jinns, dreams, death, eight paradises and seven hells),

---

408 Ghazali: *Munqidh*, 47. The same division is to be found in Ghazali's contemporary Omar Khayyam and seems to have become quite widely accepted among Sufi thinkers. For further discussion, see Bakar 1998, 181–197, whose translations are used in the expressions above (except that Bakar gives 'Ta'limites' for *bāṭiniyya*.)

409 Ghazali: *Munqidh*, 47.

410 Bakar 1998, 194–195.

'ālam al-jabarūt the world of the names of God's attributes, and *'ālam al-ḥaqīqa*, the world of God's pure Essence, known to no-one but God himself.[411]

Qašani's glossary of Sufi vocabulary is sublime enough to leave the concept of *ma'rifa* totally unexplained; Shadhili classifies knowledge into two: bestowed (*mawāhib*) by God and acquired (*makāsib*), which in turn is divided into that learned by instruction and that developed by speculation (*nazhar*).[412]

Kalabadhi discusses *ma'rifa* on the basis of predestination. He starts with the notion that the human intellect is too limited to reach the Truth itself, and *ma'rifa* is first of all God's act consisting of Self-revelation (*ta'arruf*) and instruction (*ta'rīf*). In the former God causes man to know Him and to know things through Him, and the latter functions in the creation in a way that corresponds to the natural revelation of Christian theology.[413]

For Qušayri *ma'rifa* means knowledge of God's attributes, purification from wicked qualities, withdrawal of the heart from earthly matters and enjoyment of the nearness of God. What is even more important, Qušayri explicitly attributes the same qualities to *ma'rifa* as those we have encountered with the mystical experience (awe, tranquillity) and stresses that any feeling of attainment does not belong to it.[414] Therefore, we would be justified in considering *ma'rifa* as a sign which signifies mystical experience in a general way without referring to any of its particular characteristics. And in another perspective it is also possible to classify the contents of the mystical experience as knowledge, the object of which may be the transcendent Truth or created reality.[415]

Also, the kind of experience that is expressly ecstatic in character is explicitly connected with epistemology: "Drink unceasingly of its full cup with intoxication (*sukr*) and sobriety (*saḥw*) [...] The cup is mystical knowledge of God."[416] "He who has access to the divine realities is drawn away in rapture."[417]

Niffari in one place identifies ecstatic experience (*wajd*) and knowledge (*'ilm*) of the Divine;[418] elsewhere he presents ecstasy as a consequence of the

---

411 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 52; cf. the interpretation in *Secret of Secrets,* 14.

412 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-asrār),* 108.

413 The division is from Junayd. Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 37–39; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 46–50.

414 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 311–317. (Chapter 45 in the Arabic original, 41 in von Schlegell's translation).

415 The latter definition is to be found in Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 101; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 132.

416 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar),* 143–144.

417 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar),* 108.

418 "You will see his knowledge of that to be his *wajd*, and his *wajd* of that to be his knowledge." (Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 59:2.) In this kind of sentence, however, all the various tones of

ma'rifa.[419] He also suggests that ecstatic experiences imply mystical knowledge: "When the gnoses (*ma'ārif*) of a thing fail, the experience (*wajd*) of it fails also."[420] And on the other hand, *ma'rifa* may also have a certain ecstatic quality since one of its prerequisites is given as *al-wajd biya*, 'experience of me' or 'ecstasy in me'.[421] And true to his challenging approach, he finally denies the value of ecstatic experience in comparison to *ma'rifa*:

> Pure bliss knows me not [...] if bliss knew me,
> it would be stopped from enrapturing by my *ma'rifa*.[422]

Sufi literature contains numerous definitions of *ma'rifa*; these are seldom less intuitive than its mysterious contents and quality. Their reference is left open in many directions, so that the production of significances remains a vital process where no ends or semantic points are reached, and this position demands of the reader a certain contemplative approach. The maxims below portray the various aspects of *ma'rifa* from different angles: the first one presents *ma'rifa* as a reconstructed *causa efficiens* of spiritual growth, the second as mastery of paradoxical thought, the third as reflective contemplation, the fourth shows its enabling causes and so forth:

> *Ma'rifa* is that which has severed you from everything except God and brought you back to Him (Shadhili).[423]
>
> *Ma'rifa* consists in knowing that, whatever may be imaged in the heart, God is the opposite of it (Junayd).[424]
>
> *Ma'rifa* is the mirror of the knower. When he gazes in it, his master is shown (Ruwaym).[425]

---

wajd – 'ecstasy', 'experience' and even 'finding' – would do in translation. Sells translates "its knowing is its experience and its experience is its knowing." (*Early Islamic Mysticism*, 290.)

419 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 57:4.

420 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 18:13.

421 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 4:1.

422 النعيم كله لا يعرفنى [...] لو عرفنى النعيم انقطع بمعرفتى عن التنعيم
Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 67:12–13. My translation is a compromise between Arberry's ("If bliss knew me, it would be cut off by My gnosis from blessing") and that of Sells ("If bliss knew me, it would no longer enrapture" in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 290.) The fact that *na'īm* refers to the mystical experience and not to worldly 'pleasure' is shown by the context where it is paralleled with divine punishment.

423 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 137.

424 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 101; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 133.

425 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 314; *Principles of Sufism*, 319. Von Schlegell translates *ma'rifa* – Gnosis, *'ārif* – Gnostic.

> *Ma'rifa* is built on three pillars: awe (*hayba*), shame (*ḥayā'*) and intimacy (*uns*) (Ibn 'Aṭā').[426]
>
> *Ma'rifa* is the attribute of one who knows God (*ḥaqq*) – may He be exalted – by His names and attributes and is truthful toward God by his deeds, who then purifies himself of base qualities and defects, who stands long at the door, and who withdraws his heart continually (Qušayri).[427]
>
> *Ma'rifa* is the tongue of singleness (*lisān al-fardāniyya*). When it speaks, it destroys all beside it; and when it is silent, it destroys what makes itself known (Niffari).[428]
>
> *Ma'rifa* is an insight (*baṣīra*) limited by My infused contemplation (*išhād*) (Niffari).[429]
>
> *Ma'rifa* is a fire devouring love, because it reveals to you the reality of self-independence (*ḥaqīqa al-ghinā*) (Niffari).[430]

The ways of receiving *ma'rifa* are depicted by al-Sabbagh as twofold: firstly, from the 'source of generosity' (*'ayn al-jūd*) or by the 'great endeavour' (*badhl al-majhūd*).[431] These two aspects, one from God to man, and another from man to God, are present on most levels of the discourse. Qušayri says of the former, "He who has no union, has no knowledge".[432]

The function of *ma'rifa* is in the first place to fulfil religious understanding and spiritual growth. Whenever a believer encounters a feeling of contraction coming over him, according to the words of Shadhili, illumination is provided by the stars of the knowledge of faith, the moon of unity (*tawḥīd*), and the sun of knowledge (*ma'rifa*).[433]

> When *ma'rifa* comes down to the heart (*sirr*), the heart has not the means to bear it: it is as the sun, whose rays prevent the beholder from perceiving its limit and essence. (Kalabadhi)[434]
>
> When the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) gives him the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of himself, he so stays his *ma'rifa* that he feels neither love, nor fear, nor hope, nor poverty, nor wealth; for all these are short of the goals, and the Truth is beyond all ends. (Kalabadhi)[435]

---

426 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 315; *Principles of Sufism*, 321.

427 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 311–312; *Principles of Sufism*, 316–317.

428 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 9:11.

429 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 17:14.

430 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 37:18. And *waqfa* is a fire devouring *ma'rifa* (*ibid*, 37:18).

431 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-.Asrar),* 107. *Badhl* literally means 'giving away', 'sacrifice'.

432 Qušayri: *Risāla,* 65. من لا له جمع لا معرفة له

433 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar),* 120.

434 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 101–102; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 133–34. Kalabadhi is here quoting "one of the Sufis".

435 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 102. Arberry has 'God' for *ḥaqq* (*Doctrine of the Sufis*, 134). Again a quotation from "one of the great Sufis".

If one wishes to find more *concrete* manifestations and results of *ma'rifa* and the world-view filled by it, it is actually the whole Sufi discourse that should be taken into consideration, due to the indefinite and multidimensional character of *ma'rifa* as both knowledge and a way of knowing. Even anecdotes in hagiographies should not be excluded, even though there was no explicitly shown causal direction between the acts related and a mystical experience. Feelings of cosmic unity may be found, as in the case of Al-Qaba'ili, in supplications that embrace "all things in heaven and earth, even the fishes of the sea".[436] On the practical level *ma'rifa* may be manifested also as foreknowledge of future events. Ibn ʿArabi, for example, notes that a certain al-Šarafi "used to tell me of things before they occurred and they would always happen as he had said".[437] Some Sufis are reported to have had the ability to recognise other people's spiritual state without knowing them or discussing with them.[438]

So far we have dealt with the epistemological conceptions of sober Sufism. The closest that we can reach to a "drunken epistemology" is certainly the one that can be deduced from Niffari's opaque parlance. His epistemology is basically tripartite. Firstly, there is what we should call empirical knowledge (*'ilm*), secondly what we might designate 'mystical knowledge' or perhaps 'spiritual understanding' (*ma'rifa*), and thirdly, an epistemological mode called *waqfa*, Niffari's own contribution to Sufi discourse.[439] In relation to each other they are, logically speaking, one within the other so that the minor is not able to bear the higher one. The one who is in *waqfa* comprehends *ma'rifa* likewise, and the one in *ma'rifa* comprehends *'ilm*, so that every possessor of *waqfa* is inevitably a possessor of *ma'rifa* as well.[440] The concepts are related to other mystical terms so that *'ilm* belongs to the sphere of 'farness' (*bu'd*), and *ma'rifa* to that of 'nearness' (*qurb*) but *waqfa* is beyond both, dealing with God Himself.[441]

All three modes of knowing function as a way of self-presentation of God: *'ilm* is his 'veil' (*ḥijāb*), i.e. knowledge relating to the other, *ma'rifa* is his 'speech' (*khiṭāb*), i.e. knowledge of the divine attributes, but *waqfa* is his actual

436 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 123.

437 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 77. Ibn ʿArabi also happens to make an interesting remark hinting at the possible source of al-Šarafi's inspiration: "This sheikh made his living from the sale of opium."

438 E.g. Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 153. A sheikh surprised Ibn ʿArabi, who on a visit to Tunis was standing in an "unlawful place", by saying: "The likes of you do not stand in a place like that".

439 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:91.

440 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:43, 91.

441 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:82, 90.

'presence' (*ḥaḍra*).[442] Correspondingly, the authority (*ḥukūma*) of the knower of *'ilm*, empirically based knowledge, is in the knowledge itself, in its inner logic and coherence; the authority of the possessor of *ma'rifa* is in the 'pronounced speech' (*nuṭq*), but the authority of the possessor of *waqfa* is in his silence (*ṣamṭ*).[443]

Niffari's enigmatic utterances, however, are extremely problematic for a brief general outline. Nevertheless, it seems evident that *ma'rifa* has various modes. (If this goes unnoticed, much of Niffari's discourse in fact remains incomprehensible.) In the widest sense *ma'rifa* is anything experienced in a mystical or contemplative way.[444] This *ma'rifa* is non-composite and thereby non-resolvable. For example, Niffari declares that if one asks about *ma'rifa*, one does not know God, and the sign of *ma'rifa* is that one does not ask concerning it, nor does the master of *ma'rifa* pass on information about it to others.[445] Since there does not seem to be any actual discursive content in *ma'rifa*, it might be concluded that in this sense *ma'rifa* is more a way of knowing than information to be known. The most interesting feature in this respect is the actual function of *ma'rifa*: Niffari may indicate that it harmonises various dimensions of knowledge and enables one to comprehend the unity of discursive thought and mystical wisdom.[446]

More often, however, Niffari uses the concept of *ma'rifa* in another sense that refers to the theological knowledge based on the revelation – it is important to note that here *ma'rifa* is still verbal or, to be exact, it is the 'end of the utterable'.[447] In addition, it may be the apprehension of the inner dimension of ordinary knowledge (*'ilm*), since the possessor of *ma'rifa* comprehends *'ilm*. And finally, God Himself is the mystic's *ma'rifa*. [448] Niffari also discovers that *ma'rifa*, in some sense at least, is transient – which is logical since a good portion of it deals with the perishable world.[449]

Nevertheless, *ma'rifa* is not in the least dependent on human reasoning, since it must take place for the sake of God alone: "If you heed anything on its own account or on your own account, it is not *ma'rifa*, and you have no part of

---

442 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:92.

443 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:94.

444 E.g. Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:95. "*Ma'rifa* is what you experience (encounter)." المعرفة ما وجدته

445 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 57:1–3, 5.

446 إذا ألفت معرفتي بينك وبين علم أو إسم أو حرف أو معرفة فجريت بها
Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 57:4. Arberry translates: "When my gnosis *combines* between thee and science, or name, or letter, or gnosis, and thou proceedest by it..."

447 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:95. المعرفة منتهى ما يقال

448 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 16:5. انا معرفتك

449 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 16:3.

ma'rifa."[450] The relation between *ma'rifa* and the mystical or ecstatic experience is *supportive*: the culmination of *ma'rifa* is the preservation of one's (ecstatic) state (*ḥāl*).[451]

Ma'rifa is also a divine perspective to one's self. Namely, it contains the knowledge of what the knower is in God's opinion.[452] This indicates the notion that *ma'rifa* is a divine favour caused by grace (*marḥama*).[453]

Like the mystical language itself, and indeed all mysticism, *ma'rifa* is by nature intentional and orienting, always aiming forward, never reaching a complete fulfilment.[454] For this reason we are told that *ma'rifa* always contains ignorance (*jahl*).[455] And correspondingly, Niffari may sometimes present *ma'rifa* as vitality,[456] whereby it is contrasted with a verbal expression that is compared to sleep, and sleep further to death.[457]

Niffari also presents a squared dimension of *ma'rifa*, called *ma'rifat al-ma'ārif*, 'gnosis of gnoses', which is 'true ignorance' (*al-jahl al-ḥaqīqī*) of everything through God.[458] It may concern all created beings: "every dominion (*mulk*) and kingdom, every sky and earth, land and sea, night and day, prophet and angel, *'ilm* and *ma'rifa,* and words and names, and all that is in that, and all that is between that".[459] This supra-gnosis seems to be derived from (or perceived in) both the rational and emotional dimensions of mentality, for it has 'two springing sources' of inspiration: 'spring of knowledge' (*'ayn al-'ilm*) and 'spring of wisdom'[460] (*'ayn al-ḥukm*). In Niffari's paradoxical discourse, however, these are somewhat reversed: the 'spring of knowledge' flows from 'real ignorance' and the 'spring of wisdom' flows from the 'spring of that knowledge (*'ilm*)'.[461] Moreover, as the principles of mystical discourse indicate, all modes of *achieving* are avoided: even the 'gnosis of gnoses' is only 'one of his lights' (*nūr min anwārihi*).[462] The function of this kind of *parole* is "psychedelic", mind-expand-

450 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 9:5.

451 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 9:4. رأس المعرفة حفظ حالك

452 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 1:9.

453 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 1:1.

454 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 7:13

455 Niffari expresses this in his own way: "*Ma'rifa* in which there is no ignorance is *ma'rifa* in which there is no *ma'rifa*." Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 36:27.

456 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 53:4.

457 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 55:19.

458 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 11:1.

459 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 11:2, 5.

460 Arberry translates *ḥukm* 'condition' which makes better sense in the context.

461 Niffari: *Mawāqif* 11:2, 5.

462 Niffari: *Mawāqif* 11:15.

ing, in the sense that it aims to open up further perspectives: first the reader is led with verbal concepts into a new phase of understanding, then he is again shown an additional dimension in the mystical world-view.

The dimension beyond *ma'rifa*, as noted above, is called *waqfa*, which is "the spirit of *ma'rifa*, just as *ma'rifa* is the spirit of life".[463] Niffari's idea seems to be that *ma'rifa* is here used in the sense that it concerns the knowledge of God's attributes, hence dealing with otherness, but *waqfa* is related to God Himself. Perhaps *ma'rifa* as a term had undergone a certain inflation in Sufi circles, and Niffari as a lofty spirit needed an unused and more unusual term to express his sense of superiority to an average Sufi.

There are certain features that indicate that we are justified in considering *waqfa* as an ecstatic state. (Or to be more precise, that an ecstatic state may be described as *waqfa*.) *Ma'rifa* is relative in character and its possessor comprehends the limits of his knowledge, but *waqfa* seems to be a total state which is not hindered by reasoning or discerning. The one in it (*wāqif*) is "beyond every limit"[464] and he is not to be moved by desires.[465] It is the only level from which one may see the (divine) reality.[466]

Niffari also seems to indicate that each Sufi should be faithful to his own mode of knowledge and persist in it, without aiming higher than his capacity admits.[467] Behind this estimation is probably Niffari's twofold division of mankind into the 'elect' (*khāṣṣ*) and 'common' (*'āmm*).[468]

Finally we may note that both ignorance and knowledge (*'ilm*) are, according to Niffari, 'veils' (*ḥijāb*) in relation to the experience itself.[469] In his thought knowledge (*'ilm*) is more harmful than ignorance (*jahl*) for those who 'see God'.[470] In this way the dimensions of empirical and mystical knowledge are sharply separated, which once more shows that the latter is not a matter of discursive knowing.

---

463 Niffari: *Mawāqif* 8:42; see introduction, pp. 14–16.

464 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:83.

465 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:93.

466 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:81.

467 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 8:86, 90.

468 E.g. Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 29:4–10. Both groups seem to have their own standard of salvation: *'ilm* is "almost enough" for the common people, but the elect one perishes unless he acts on the principle that he is elect. The categories are not predestined but one may become elect by turning towards God. The doctrine resembles some works of Syriac spirituality, especially *Liber Graduum*.

469 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 29:1. The experience in this case is called 'vision' (*ru'ya*).

470 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 25:1.

3.4.4. Some Remarks on the Philosophical Postulates

Interpretations concerning the function of the experience have a latent capacity to link themselves with manifold problems in the whole field of theological thought. For instance, whether one understands one's experience as an indicator of forgiveness granted by God, and in what way one relates it to one's own sinfulness, lead to questions of freewill and predestination.

Some Sufis held that *tawba* means "that you do not forget your sin", while Junayd maintained that *tawba* means "that you forget your sin" and concentrate on God instead.[471] According to the Mu'tazili view, God, because of His justice, is bound to accept sincere repentance, as the Ash'ari view emphasised that the Almighty has absolute freedom to grant or refuse forgiveness.[472]

Sufis are basically in line with the Sunna doctrines on predestination. Kalabadhi presents as the Sufi view the deduction that God is the Creator of all things, and since man's actions and motions are things, God is the Creator of them as well. Consequently, happiness (*sa'āda*) and unhappiness (*šaqāwa*), for instance, are not caused by acts but prescribed by the will of God.[473]

During the time of our sources (around the 10th century) the prevailing poetical, philosophical and theological modes of expression were already internalised by the authors. This means that the ecstatic discourse is conditioned by the religious cultural context, and the expressions tend to be steered into the forms described above, and this is in fact the point where the discourse adopts its nature as Islamic discourse: if the expressions diverged too much from the Qur'an and Sunna, the discourse would no longer be Islamic.

The "philosophical" conditioning in the case of Sufism is a complicated matter, however, and much more sophisticated than in the case of Syriac literature, since philosophical ideas penetrated into Sufism in a more profound way, producing actual schools of speculative mysticism of a Gnostic nature (outside our corpus). We must content ourselves with quoting a few remarks from the authors of this study, the most scholastic of whom is Kalabadhi, who employs philosophical reasoning mainly in the beginning of his work, where he discusses basic theological matters.

The main dilemma in mystical language is how to portray the final state so that there is nothing more to improve in the mystic's path towards God, but on the other hand the outcome should not be a nirvana-like essential oneness between

471 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 64.

472 Böwering 1999, 45.

473 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 23–24, 35; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 28–29, 44.

man and God either. This boundary between the common identity of will and the identity of essence seems to have been surpassed by the bold teaching of Abu Yazid.

As an example of philosophical conditioning we may note the manner in which the climax of the mystical experience, that of *fanā'*, is explained as disappearance of the accidents (*'araḍ*), or attributes (*ṣifa*), of man and persistence of his substance – a derivation of one of the basic differentiations in Greek philosophy not present in traditional Semitic thought (e.g. the Old Testament).

Correspondingly, unification with God has customarily been divided as unification with the name of God's essence and unification with His Essence.[474] This may be applied to all description of experiences interpreted as having a relation to God. For example, the experiences connected with the symbol of light, revealed by Jilani, are further interpreted by specifying them into the experiences of the "light of names and attributes" (*nūr al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*) of God and those of the "manifestation of the lights of the Essence" (*tajallī anwār al-dhāt*) of God.[475] The *parole* is apt to be taken as a description that refers to a static transformation rather than to an emotional peak.

In the same way Hujwiri's *fanā'* does not reach a pantheistic extent: it is likened to fire which transmutes the qualities by its burning but leaves their 'essence' unchanged. In other words, essences are not capable of annihilation, but attributes are.[476] This is the way in which it was possible to explain how an experience that is interpreted as unity with the Divine was, on the one hand, final and ultimate, but on the other hand man was not one where man lost his humanity. (The interpretation, however, is now in a sense out of date, since modern analytical philosophy has actually abandoned the whole concept of substance: an entity is not considered anything else but its properties.)

If the disposition of the will as an attribute of the essence seems too obvious, it is good to note that man's essence and properties can be constituted in reverse order as well. The concept of "everlasting essence (of man) with disappearing attributes" implies a non-pantheistic cosmology, yet there are more pantheistic or metaphysical systems of philosophical thought in both East and West that offer alternatives. Perhaps the most sophisticated is that of Schopenhauer in whose philosophy even man is an accidental cover for the basic principle of the universe, *Ding an sich*, which is Will, the only thing beyond the structure of subject–object.[477] This may be illustrated as follows:

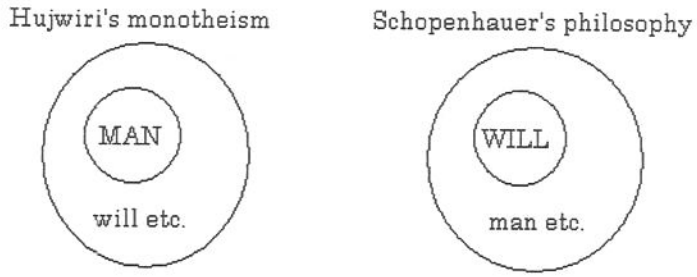
---

474 Morewedge 1992, 215 (quoting Najm al-Din).

475 E.g. Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 90–91; *Secret of Secrets,* 56.

476 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 171, xii–xiii (Nicholson).

477 E.g. Schopenhauer 1991, 61–70.



In historical perspective the identification of *fanā'* and ecstasy is a parallel for, and continuation of, Plotinus' neo-Platonic mystical theology in which ecstasy is a direct and immediate expression of return and unification to the first principle.[478] Ecstasy and unification also appear together in poetical language: Rumi makes his lover and Beloved be "united in ecstasy".[479]

One solution is to adapt the myth of the original existence of souls, corresponding to the neo-Platonic true identity in primaeval Reason, which has slender support in the Qur'an (7:172). According to 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān Makkī, God first created the hearts of men and kept them in a state of 'union' (*waṣl*), then after another 7000 years he created the spirits (Pers. *jānhā*) and kept them in the degree of intimacy (*uns*) for 7000 years, then he created the souls (Pers. *dilhā*) in the station of proximity (*qurb*) and again after 7000 years he finally created the bodies. Then God "imprisoned the heart in the spirit and the spirit in the soul and the soul in the body; then he mingled reason (*'aql*) with them, and sent prophets and gave commands; then each of them began to seek its original station."[480]

Niffari refers to the same doctrine mostly in an indirect way. The ecstatic 'gate' of Niffari opens to consideration of that from which the one who enters is created.[481] The divine subject of his discourse exhorts: "I manifested creation, and divided it into classes: and I appointed for them hearts,"[482] and urges one not to forget one's creation.[483] According to Kalabadhi, God operates with an annihilating mystic (*fānī*) as follows:

---

478 Morewedge 1992, 66; Plotinus, *Enneads* VI, 9:3.

479 Yarshater 1988, 193. (T.S. Halman's translation.)

480 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 309.

481 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:7. For the 'gate' in question, see above p. 207 and 230.

482 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 53:2.

483 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 20:21.

> God [...] makes him unconscious of the vision of his own attribute, that is, the vision of the departing of his desire. There then remains in him only what proceeds from God to him, and what proceeds from him to God passes away from him. So he becomes as he was when he existed in God's knowledge, before God brought him into being, and when that which came to him from God came without any act on his part.[484]

Similarly, the end of the individual is to be "as he was where he was before he was".[485] In Sufism this pre-existential vision is effortlessly combined with a doctrine familiar from Pythagoras and Plato, according to which the memory of pre-existent Paradise is awakened in the soul by music.

Around the speculations on the return to the primordial state there gradually developed a whole neo-Platonic branch of Sufism (Suhrawardi, Najm al-Din etc.) which is beyond the scope of this study.[486]

3.5. MANIFESTATION

3.5.1. Physiological Manifestation

Sufi sources, at least those of the present study, are quite sparing in providing any information on the outward forms of the manifestation of the experience. For the authors themselves these may have been self-evident and for the reader somewhat repulsive – it is to be recalled that the Sufi classics were intended mainly for a general audience.

How the discourse directed itself towards abstractions, may be demonstrated with the following beginning of Muḥāsibi's answer when he was asked for the *signs* of attaining ecstasy (*'alāmāt wujūd qalbihi*):

> The hearts of such lovers are held captive in the hidden shrine of the Divine loving-kindness, they are marked out by their knowledge of the revelation of the Divine Majesty, being transformed by the joy of the Vision, in contemplation of the Invisible, and the enveloping Glory of God, and from them all hindrances are removed, for they tread the path of friendship with God, and are transported into the Garden of Vision and their hearts dwell in that region, where they see without eyes, and are in the company of the Beloved without looking upon him, and converse with an unseen Friend. [...][487]

---

484 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 95; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 124.

485 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 105; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 138.

486 See Morewedge 1992, 212–213.

487 Smith 1935, 247 (cit. *Ḥilyat al-Awliya* fol. 238a).

Nevertheless, experiences are manifested empirically as well. Firstly, indicators of natural reactions like *sighing* are occasionally mentioned.[488] Hujwiri discloses stronger effects by reporting how the body firstly opposes the 'divine influence' descending on it – by crying out, for example – but when the body becomes accustomed to the continual influences, it is able to stand them quietly.[489] Najm al-Din, too, mentions 'screams and shrieks' as signs of union (*ittiṣāl*) with the Most High Name (*ism al-a'zham*).[490] This may be the reason why Jilani refers to the shame connected with *dhikr*.[491]

Jilani discloses several ways of the manifestation of ecstasy (*ḥarakāt al-wajd*).[492] These include symptoms of fever – shaking, trembling and moaning. Jilani uses the analogy between spiritual ecstasy and high fever because in both cases it is impossible to control the physical reactions – to prevent oneself from shaking, trembling and stiffening. The equivalent movements, however, are not legitimate if they take place under the control of the will. He also mentions weeping (*bukā'*) as a sign of ecstasy.[493]

Ibn 'Arabi's Sufi hagiographies include allusions to physical changes in the mystic. The phenomena include strengthening of the heartbeat [494] and even a case of transfiguration of the body with bright light.[495] Weeping is usually connected with sorrow for one's soul.[496] The ideal of weeping is mentioned more often than

---

488 "Someone said to Rumi: 'When you sighed a moment ago, the ecstasy departed. Do not sigh, so the ecstasy will not leave.' Rumi answered: 'Sometimes that ecstasy departs if you do not sigh.'" Rumi, *Fihi-ma-Fihi* (discourse 41), 277.

489 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 407–408. A sudden ecstatic cry in Rumi's *Fihi-ma-Fihi* (discourse 10), 78.

490 Morewedge 1992, 216 (D. Martin, cit.: Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā, *Die Fawā'ih al-G'amāl wa Fawātih al-G'alāl* [Wiesbaden 1957] 145, 147).

491 التأسف والحيرة عند ذكر الله Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 120; *Secret of Secrets,* 92. Bayrak here interprets freely: "shame for one's moments of unconsciousness".

492 Literally 'movements of ecstasy'; Bayrak translates as 'manifestations'.

493 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 119–120; *Secret of Secrets,* 91–92. Bayrak here interprets the qualities of 'freedom' (*tajarrud*) and 'victory' (*nuṣra*) as indicators of the change of colour on one's face: "one grows pale, or the face flushes".

494 Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 92. "So much was he dominated by the fear of God that the beating of his heart during prayer could be heard from a distance."

495 Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 118. "A man was on a mountain and saw a shimmering pillar of light so bright that he could not look at it. When he approached he found that it was al-Rundi standing in prayer." See also Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 75–76; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 97.

496 When al-Šarafi prayed "the tears would fall down his face on to his beard like pearls" (Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalusia*, 77); Abu Abdallah "wept much and kept long periods of silence" (*ibid*, 92); Al-Šakkaz "put down a new mat to pray on and, as he prayed, tears fell upon that mat." Afterwards "the spot where his tears had fallen had begun to rot" (*ibid*, 97). Al-Baghi

one might expect on grounds of the classical works of Sufism, where the context of tears often suggests a homiletic hyperbole rather than analytical description. Sometimes weeping is mentioned with reference to a saying from the Prophet Muhammad's tradition, as if to offer a certain justification. As the cause of the flow of tears we are given *dhikr* and especially the recitation of the Qur'an.[497] Ibn ʿArabi tells how one Sufi was unable to restrain his tears whenever he heard Holy Writ recited, the result being that his eyes had become ulcerous from his frequent weeping.[498] Junayd considers weeping (*bukā'*) to be a result of joy and ecstasy (*wajd*) due to meeting the Beloved after passionate longing for Him.[499]

Tirmidhi sheds some light on the feature of crying by setting it at the point when the ecstasy is already fading. He compares the phenomenon with a child that has lost its mother. The verbal picture painted by Tirmidhi is beautiful: "a remnant of intoxication, however, still remains in him, namely his heart feels itself to be a stranger in the wastelands of bewilderment, isolated in that Singleness (*fardiyya*). He experiences the scent of kindness in his heart and raises a cry to the Possessor of kindness".[500]

Concerning the duration of a genuine experience Shadhili notes: "If that continues for anyone for an hour or two, he is the drinker in truth."[501] Hujwiri mentions a dervish who during *samā'* kept his lips shut and was quiet "until every pore in his body opened; then he lost consciousness, and remained in that state for a whole day."[502]

The practice of *dhikr* may become so earnestly conditioned that it is no longer dependent on active consciousness. Ibn ʿArabi mentions a Sufi who was known for the fact that he used to continue the invocation while asleep. This could be recognised from the motion of his tongue, which Ibn ʿArabi himself witnessed many times.[503]

---

al-Šakkaz was usually "in a sad and tearful state" (*ibid*, 110); Al-Rundi's "ecstasy was intense and his tears copious" (*ibid*, 116); Al-Qaba'ili "was also much given to weeping" (*ibid*, 123); Ahmad ibn Hammam "wept for his soul like a mother who has lost her only son" (*ibid*. 126–127); al-Salawi "was much given to weeping" (*ibid*, 127). An ecstatic weeping by non-Muslim 'unbelievers' is mentioned in Rumi's *Fihi-ma-Fihi* (discourse 23), 174.

497 E.g. Qušayri: *Risāla*, 193; *Principles of Sufism*, 169; Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 106; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 140.

498 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia*, 133.

499 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 333; *Principles of Sufism*, 348.

500 Radtke & O'Kane 1996, 185.

501 Sabbagh: *Mystical Teachings (Durrat al-Asrar)*, 145.

502 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 407–408. Another example of losing consciousness on p. 410.

503 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia*, 68.

Sufi anecdotes include cases of a trance-like state where the subject seems to be really "absent". These may offer an entirely new kind of perspective on the state of *ghayba*. Al-Maghribi visited a sheikh, and they exchanged greetings according to the Arabic idiom. Since the sheikh, however, was "as if he did not see me at all, I repeated the greeting more than once until I realised that the man was absent. Then I left him and departed from the house."[504]

A great emotional charge present in the concentration on prayer is reported to have been manifested in various ways. One Sufi did "groan and mutter so that no one could understand what he was saying".[505] The climax of the ideal of intensive concentration seems to have been attained by a Sufi who had gangrene in his feet: once when he was finishing his prayers, he found out that his foot had been amputated by the doctors without him noticing anything![506] The function of the story is clear: ecstasy concentrates one's awareness and consciousness completely on the non-physiological dimension.

Moreover, during the ecstatic state one may become immune to fire, being unaware of what is happening and unable to relate it afterwards. Ibn ʿArabi witnessed many times how "a spiritual state overcame (Ahmad al-Šariši) and he fell into a fire, but the fire did not harm him.".[507]

Among the physiological manifestations of Sufi ecstasy we may include various unconventional manoeuvres like the rending of garments or throwing them away, as mentioned above; some of the heretical groups reprehended by Jilani threw away their clothing and were naked during their ecstasy.[508] The anecdotes of the deranged actions are charming. Al-Ḥawari threw all his books into the sea, declaring: "A guide is needed only so long as the disciple is on the road; when the shrine comes into sight the road and the gate are worthless." Šibli threw 400 dinars into the Tigris, for "stones are better in the water."[509]

As might be expected, the hagiographic literature contains a multitude of stories concerning the miracles performed by the Sufis, and a good portion of the anecdotes are imbedded in our sources as well. The frequent topics include healings[510] and clairvoyance, which may be based on hearing inner voices (*hātif*)

---

504 *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 115. The story appears in chapter 6 (entitled *al-tawājud wa-l-wajd wa-l-wujūd*) of Qušayri's *Risāla* but is absent from the 1990 Beirut edition.

505 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 73.

506 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 304.

507 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 149.

508 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 141; *Secret of Secrets*, 118.

509 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 118, 417, 228.

510 E.g. Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 81–82, 137. In the latter case a man reads a book that condemns Ghazali. Suddenly he becomes blind, which makes him prostrate himself and swear that he would never read it again, and then his sight is restored.

or intuitive insight (*firasāt*), or occurring thoughts (*khawāṭir*).[511] (The boundary between the latter two may be more or less arbitrary.) In addition to these we may encounter even more curious cases such as levitation,[512] the power to walk on water,[513] the ability to make fire without incendiaries, flying in the air,[514] disappearance (*tayy al-makān*),[515] magic (i.e. affecting other people's thoughts or causing things to take place from a distance), turning of urea into water for ritual purification and even an instance of "open sesame".[516] It is noteworthy that Ibn ʿArabi, a brilliant mind, took these as evident facts and strongly criticised those (jurists) who did not believe in the existence of the spiritual degrees and miracles but instead assumed that all claims to this were fabrications and superstition.[517] Kalabadhi also mentions talking with beasts and a case of "apport mediumship" (production of an object in another place) in his chapter on miracles, where he utilises a few authoritative miraculous traditions of the Prophet and other saints of old, and discusses the functions of miracles in the divine economy.[518]

The consuming character of the experience may manifest itself in various ways. Kalabadhi reports an incident in which a man was giving an exhortation in a mosque when he suddenly fainted (*ghušiya 'alayhi*), by the divine action, and did not recover until before the following day.[519]

Sufi literature, oddly enough, does contain even the most absolute possible culmination for the category of manifestations, namely that of dying. Hujwiri presents several cases where the subject of the experience did actually die during his ecstasy. Even more odd is the fact that such an objective thinker as Hujwiri

---

511 E.g. anecdotes by Kalabadhi (*Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* chapters 67–68), Qušayri (*Risāla,* chapter 32) and Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 118 and 158 in which, for instance, a certain Abd al-Haqq visited Jerusalem with his wife, who refused to leave the city. Abd al-Haqq "told her that the Franks would come and take over Jerusalem and take her captive. Then she would go to Acre, but she would return to Jerusalem where she would die. Everything happened exactly as he had foretold."

512 E.g. Qušayri: *Risāla,* 154; *Principles of Sufism*, 99.

513 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 57; *Secret of Secrets,* 21.

514 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 57–58; *Secret of Secrets,* 21.

515 Jilani: *Sirr al-Asrār*, 58; *Secret of Secrets,* 21.

516 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 83, 119, 153, 155, 103–104, 150, 132.

517 Ibn ʿArabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 106–107.

518 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 44–51; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 57–66.

519 E.g. Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf,* 118; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 156. The function of the incident in its context is to teach one to guard one's own inner state before judging others.

neither considers it necessary to judge this phenomenon nor tries to justify it in any way.[520]

> A man cried out during *samā'*. His spiritual director bade him be quiet. He laid his head on his knee, and when they looked he was dead.
>
> Some one laid his hand on the head of a dervish who was agitated during *samā'* and told him to sit down: he sat down and died on the spot.

3.5.2. Verbal Manifestation

One of the most famous characteristics of Sufism, and perhaps its most unique feature overall, is to be found in the category of verbal manifestation. Ecstatic utterances (*šaṭḥ*, pl. *šaṭḥiyyât*) indicate sayings given during the ecstatic state, but in most cases they appear to be given in a state of mind that does not seem in any way extraordinary – often as an answer to a question, sometimes even literally.[521] Since there can hardly be any reasonable criteria to differentiate such utterances according to the quality of the ecstasy behind them, and since they are generally considered ecstatic in the broad sense of the term, it is absolutely appropriate to take a closer look at the ecstatic utterances, their various types and their interpretations.

In the following I shall give a systematic presentation of the most important and best-known ecstatic utterances. I have arranged them into five main types according to their logical structure.[522]

The first type is to be called "**I–God**". It consists of self-esteem given as with the mouth of God. The human subject here acts as a divine subject (or *vice versa*) concretely representing the divine in the world.

1. "I am I, and there is no God but me, therefore worship me."[523]
   – Abu Yazid Bistami (i.e. Bayazid) addressing the congregation in a mosque

---

520 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 408–410. See also Schimmel 1982, 24, 220, and the discussion in *Kitāb al-luma'*, 267–299.

521 Ernst 1985, 48.

522 Niffari is a special case counted outside those who give ecstatic utterances, since his works would constitute a separate (and massive) category of ecstatic utterances.

523 Ernst 1985, 45. (Badawi: *Shatahat al-Sufiyah* I, 122.)

2. "I am the Truth." (*anā al-ḥaqq*)[524]
   – Hallaj
3. "Praise to me! How mighty am I" (*subḥānī, mā a'zhama ša'nī*)[525]
   – Abu Yazid

Cases two and three are the most famous: there are few books on Sufism, classical or modern, that leave them without comment. (Kalabadhi is one of the exceptions.) Hallaj has been considered as a kind of paradigmatic and normative ecstatic in whose utterances Islamic ecstaticism and the whole of Sufism in a sense culminates.[526]

The second type "**I-He**" consists of like sayings that are not uttered in the character of the Divine subject but connected with the third person singular. The unity is just as evidently present, the result being a kind of bi-personal human estimation of one's own "divine unity".

4. "Behold, I am He!"[527]
   – Hallaj
5. "I am the one I love, and the one I love is me."
   (*anā man ahwā wa man ahwā anā.*)[528]
   – Hallaj
6. "I am my highest Lord."[529]
   – Abu Yazid
7. "There is nothing under the cloak but God." (*mā fī-l-jubba illā-llāh*)[530]
   – Abu Yazid

---

524 *Anā al-ḥaqq*, though simple in structure, has extraordinarily divergent equivalents when translated into Western languages: "I am the truth" (Arberry 1950, 59), "I am the Divine Truth" (Schimmel 1982, 92), "I am the Ultimate Reality" (Watt 1953, 14), "I am God" (Nicholson 1914, 150), "I am the ONE REAL!" (Gairdner in Ghazali's *Mishkat al-anwār*, 60), "Je, c'est la Vérité Créatrice" (Massignon 1954, 38), "Ich bin die Absolute Wahrheit" (Schimmel 1984, 115).

525 Al-Ghazalī: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 57; Jilani: *Sirr al-asrār*, 136; Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 254; Ernst 1985, 10–11; Arberry: Sufism/Handbuch der Orientalistik 455 etc.

526 History seldom follows logic: the very same sentence was uttered by Abu Yazid decades before Hallaj without receiving hardly any attention (Ernst 1985, 43). Moreover, the reading has a variant *arā al-ḥaqq*, 'I see the Truth', which may well be the original one. Baldick 2000, 48.

527 Shadhili: *Qawānin ḥikam al-išrāq*, 72.

528 Schimmel 1982, 32 (Cit. Massignon [ed.]: *Diwān, muqaṭṭa'a* no. 57).

529 Ernst 1985, 51 (Cit. Badawi: *Shatahat al-Sufiyah* I, 103, 68.)

530 Jilani: *Sirr al-asrār*, 136; Ghazali: *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 57 (tr. 60).

8. "My 'am' is not 'am', since I am He and I am 'he is He' (*huwa huwa*)."[531]
   – Abu Yazid
9. "I shed my self (*nafs*) as a snake sheds its skin, then I looked at myself, and behold! I was He (*anā huwa*) ."[532]
   – Abu Yazid

The third type, **I-Thou** is an application of the preceding case in the second person, which gives a slightly more emotional impression – especially so, if we allow ourselves a Buberian subtext. In fact this type functions as the ultimate form of Martin Buber's famous I–Thou relation, which refers to an intimate encounter with the Other; here the logical deep-structure of the relation goes a phase deeper in intimacy and identity.

10. "I saw my Lord with the eye of the heart and I asked: 'Who are you?' (*man anta*) He answered: 'You' (*anta*)." [533]
    –Hallaj
11. "My spirit mixes with your spirit, in nearness and in distance, so that I am you, just as you are I." [534]
    – Hallaj

The fourth type, which we may name as **God in nature** consists of the cases of a kind of "local pantheism", i.e. applications of God's particular manifestations:

12. "Here am I, Lord!" (*labbayk*)[535]
    – Nuri when hearing a dog barking
13. "One morning I went out, and God came before me. He wrestled with me and I wrestled with him. I continued wrestling with him until he threw me down."[536]
    – Hasan al-Kharaqani

---

531 Ernst 1985, 26 (Cit. Ruzbihan: *Sharh,* chapter 76.)

532 Ernst 1985, 27 (Cit. Badawi: *Shatahat al-Sufiyah* I, 77.)

533 Schimmel 1982, 32 (Cit. *Le Dīwān d'al-Hallaj*, ed. Massignon, *muqaṭṭa'a* no. 10.)

534 Ernst 1985, 27 (Cit. *Le Dīwān d'al-Hallaj*, ed. Massignon, 82.)

535 Ernst 1985, 37. (Ruzbihan: *Sharh*, chapter 96.) In this case the conventional Sufi use of the expression is to be found in Niffari, whose divine subject urges one to say *labbayka rabbī* in every mystical state (*ḥāl*). Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 7:3 (cf. 33:1).

536 Ernst 1985, 38. (Ruzbihan: *Sharh*, chapter 182.) cf. Gen. 32:23–32.

14. "Praise be to him whose humanity manifested the secret of the splendour of his radiant divinity, and who then appeared openly to his people, in the form of one who eats and drinks!"[537]
– Hallaj

And finally I should like to add one more category based on the function of certain utterances: the category of **provocation**. A certain "teasing" aspect is always present in the ecstatic utterances, but some of them, it seems, do not necessarily have any other function or meaning than provoking the audience by exaggerating remarks that aim to break the barriers of conventionality in ever-renewing ways.

15. "I am greater than He."[538]
– Abu Yazid as a response to the prayer call *Allāhu akbar*, God is great.

To this category we may count remarks that challenge and question common Islamic presuppositions. For example, Abu Yazid said when passing a Jewish cemetery, "They are pardoned", but when passing a Muslim cemetery he said: "They are duped."[539] The function of this kind of utterance is to show his contempt for all organised religion and belief in the worthiness of all spiritual religion. By this overstatement he perhaps aimed to create some balance between somewhat arrogant Islamic presuppositions and his own exaggeration.

Finally we may note that Niffari's discourse, written in the form of divine speech, constitutes a type of its own: his opaque treatises are a kind of **divine oracle**. Due to his method of presenting his discourses in the 1st person singular as from God Himself, they contain a multitude of sayings that, when taken separately, would do well as instances of ecstatic utterances of extraordinary boldness:

I am God. (*anā allāh*)[540]
I am the Almighty, the Compassionate. (*anā al-'azīz al-raḥīm*)[541]
I am the Merciful (*ra'ūf*).[542]
I am God: none may enter to me in the body.[543]
I am the Mighty (*anā al-'azhīm*) whose mighty can bear no other than He. [544]

---

537 Ernst 1985, 27. (Ruzbihan: *Sharh*, chapter 267.)
538 Ernst 1985, 38. (Ruzbihan: *Sharh*, chapter 53.)
539 Zaehner 1960, 108. (Cit. Sarraj: *Kitāb al-luma'*, 138).
540 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 19:22–24.
541 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 5:8.
542 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 47:26.
543 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 13:4.
544 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 54:5.

I am the Manifest (*al-zhāhir*) without veil, and I am the Hidden (*al-bāṭin*) without unveiling.[545]

Obey me for that I am God, and there is no God except me.[546]

The time has come for me to unveil my face and manifest my splendour.[547]

Curiously enough, the divine subject of Niffari's discourse requires to be addressed 'You, you' by those in the state of vision (*ru'ya*), but 'I, I' by those in the state of absence (*ghayba*).[548] This may be a pointed rebuke to those who utter ecstatic utterances without full inspiration (compared with Niffari's own, of course).

3.5.3. Interpretation of Verbal Manifestation

A theoretical basis for the interpretation of ecstatic utterances was developed by Ja'far al-Sadiq (d.765), the sixth imam of the Shiites, who produced a theory of divine speech. It is based on the exegesis of the phrase *innī anā* spoken by God to Moses, and explained by God Himself: "I am He who speaks and He who is spoken to, and you are a phantom (*šabaḥ*) between the two, in which (*khiṭāb*) takes place."[549] Nwyia (1970) and Ernst (1985) agree that this is a precise explanation for Sufi ecstatic utterances.[550]

Junayd (d. 910) wrote a commentary on ecstatic utterances (*Tafsīr al-šaṭḥiyyāt*), in which he seems to estimate that Abu Yazid's utterances do not emanate from the highest mystical experiences. Junayd preferred not to talk openly about such experiences.[551] According to Sarrāj (d. 988), too, the ecstatic utterances belong to the beginning of the path rather than being intended for the advanced; he even avoids mentioning Hallāj's *anā al-ḥaqq*. Yet both of them considered ecstatic utterances worthy of *tafsīr*.[552]

Hujwiri explains the utterance given by Abū Yazīd during his ecstatic moment by shifting the subject of the clause from the created being to the Creator.

> These words were the outward sign of his speech, but the speaker was God. [...] When the divine omnipotence manifests its dominion over humanity, it transports a man out of his own being, so that his speech becomes the speech of God. But it is impossible

545 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 29:1. (cf. 48:6.)

546 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 33:12.

547 Niffari: *Mawāqif*, 5:8.

548 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 47:9.

549 Nwyia 1970, 179; English translation according to Ernst 1985, 10; Massignon 1954, 201–205.

550 Ernst 1985, 11.

551 Schimmel 1975, chapter 2.

552 Ernst 1985, 11–13.

> that God should be mingled (*imtizāj*) with created beings or made one (*ittiḥād*) with his works or become incarnate (*ḥall*) in things: God is exalted far above that, and far above that which the heretics ascribe to him.[553]

This choice of words is one way to unite the transcendent Islamic God and a mystic speaking as his mouth so that they are not united; man's psychic faculty is somehow turned "off" during the experience and the functioning subject is God.

Ghazali, in his classical work *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, distinguishes between two kinds of ecstatic utterances: (1) extravagant, exaggerated claims and (2) unintelligible babbling or otherwise misarticulated voices. Neither should be displayed in public, for the danger of misunderstanding is inevitable, and common folk would be misled by weird sayings. For that reason he even declares that "the killing of him who utters something of this kind is better in the religion of God than the resurrection of ten others."[554]

In his more esoteric book, *Miškāt al-Anwār*, however, Ghazali displays a much more positive attitude towards ecstatic utterances. He places them in the same category with those anthropomorphic traditions and Suras in which God "sits down on the throne"[555] or otherwise acts in human terms.[556] When treating utterances *Subḥānī* and *Anā al-ḥaqq* Ghazali places stress on the fact that a subject is always bound with a perspective: any state exists in relation to its subject (*bi-l-iḍāfa ilā šāḥib al-ḥāla*) who does not necessarily comprehend the phenomenon in its all totality.[557] "In that state he is unconscious of his own self, and unconscious of his own unconsciousness."[558] This state may be called metaphorically 'unification' (*bi-lisān al-majāz ittiḥād*) and in the language of reality 'unity' (*bi-lisān al-ḥaqīqa tawḥīd*).[559] This bold use of *tawḥīd* probably indicates here, as Zaehner puts it, "affirmation of the divine unity".[560] After such a choice of words even Ghazali has to calm down: "beyond these verities there are also

---

553 Hujwiri: *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 254

554 Ghazali: *Ihyā'*, I:1; translation according to Ernst 1985, 14. (Ernst's views on Ghazali's ideas remain somewhat limited, for they are based on *Ihyā'* alone.)

555 *Qur'an* 32:4. The phrase *istawā 'alā-l-'arši* can be translated also "established Himself on the Throne", as Abdullah Yusuf Ali does.

556 Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 61–62 (tr. 64–65).

557 Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 57 (tr. 61).

558 إنه ليس يشعر بنفسه فى تلك الحال ولا بعدم شعوره بنفسه
Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 57 (tr. 61).

559 Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 58 (tr. 61). Gairdner translates *ittiḥād* as 'identity', and *tawḥīd* as 'unification'.

560 Zaehner 1960, 166.

secrets/mysteries, the treatment of which would take us too far."[561] Elsewhere he states: "The words of passionate lovers in the state of intoxication are for hiding, not for discussing."[562]

What, then, does Ghazali leave unsaid here? In his Persian commentary on *Miškāt al-anwār* he finally argues that since two different things can never become one, "perfect *tawḥīd* means that nothing exists except the One".[563] This is the secret which may be labelled 'pantheism' or 'monism', or it might be explained in terms of the concepts of Atman and Brahman – in any case it unquestionably surpasses traditional orthodox Islamic thought.

Various interpretations ultimately deal with the limits of the ego: has the (God of) experience filled the consciousness completely or has the subject surpassed the limits of his ego? In the previous case the subject itself will inevitably give an exaggerated interpretation: God is all and/or he is God. The second possibility is illogical and paradoxical itself: how could a subject surpass *his own* consciousness? (Wherever the subject goes to or is in, there is also his consciousness, by definition.)

According to Rumi's mystical explanation, well in line with the position of Ja'far al-Sadiq described above, Hallaj represented extreme humility by saying *anā al-ḥaqq*, for by calling himself God he made himself non-existent and recognised only one true Existent, God.[564] Nevertheless, Rumi also states that "the mouth of a drunken camel must be tied", in other words: experiences should not be divulged in public.[565]

The art of commentating on the ecstatic utterances reached its peak in the Persian work called *Šarh-i Šaṭḥiyyat* by Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209), which consists of 192 different ecstatic utterances by 45 Sufis. This exhaustive work also aimed at restoring the reputation of Hallaj. Ruzbihan describes beautifully the journey of the soul in the world of beauty and how it reaches various states that may "overflow" and hence be manifested to outsiders as ecstatic utterances. Ecstatic utterances are symbolic (*mutašābih*) expressions of divine secrets, just as certain secrets are expressed in the Qur'an symbolically as anthropomorphic attributes, or in *ḥadīth* as actions. The object that *šaṭḥ* symbolises is, according to Ruzbihan, firstly *'ayn al-jam'* (Pers. *'ayn-i jam'*), which is translated by Ernst as 'essential

---

561 وراء هذه الحقائق أيضا أسرار يطول الخوض فيها Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 58 (tr. 61) Gairdner translates "... mysteries which we are not at liberty to discuss", the basic meaning of *ṭāla* is no more than 'to be long', 'lengthen'.

562 كلام العشاق فى حال السكر يطوى ولا يحكى Ghazali: *Miškāt al-Anwār*, 57 (my translation).

563 Quoted from Zaehner 1960, 166. Original in *Faḍā'il al-anām* (ed. M. Sābitī, Tehran 1333 A.H.), 24.

564 Rumi: *Fihi-ma-Fihi* (discourse 52), 349; Iqbal 1956, 97.

565 Schimmel 1982, 97.

union' and secondly, 'clothing' (*iltibās*) which represents how man is clothed in the divine.[566]

According to Ernst, Ibn 'Arabi considered ecstatic utterances as vainglorious acts that merely indicate pride, and this actually became the final reason that resulted in the general devaluation and gradual disappearance of ecstatic utterances, since it was his school that occupied an eminent position in Sufism. Yet Ibn 'Arabi's own doctrine of *wajd al-wujūd* finally led towards similar formulations, though as if via another route.[567] For example, he himself said after being saved from danger, "How may the one be imprisoned in whose humanity divinity resides?"[568]

3.6. SOME REMARKS IN CONCLUSION: MYSTICAL LANGUAGE AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Sufi discourse is largely discussion about words. This makes an outsider wonder whether there is anything to be discovered about the mystical conditions themselves. The problem is recognised by Sufis as well, most profoundly by Niffari, who makes remarks on the introspectiveness of (Sufi) parlance and its "letter that speaks about letter". As we have already seen, he also distances himself from the standard discourse by refraining from the usual classifications of states and their comparison.

One may also wonder whether, or to what extent, the spiritual phenomena are intended to be uncovered or concealed in the Sufi classics. Often the primary purpose of the discourse does not seem to be spiritual instruction but a certain intellectual, albeit not exactly rationalistic, discussion of the various ways of perceiving and arranging the inner states in spite of their imprecise and inexact nature. Perhaps we could call this a "metaspiritual" way of discoursing. One reason for this is that in Sufism, as in other mystical traditions, mystical literature is clearly secondary to practice. This is explicitly stated in the textual discourse itself. For instance, after a long discussion on various states, Qušayri gives a division of three phases: (1) the master of the moment (*waqt*) is a beginner, (2) master of the states (*aḥwāl*) is in between, but (3) the master of the breaths (*anfās*) is an end.[569] One way of interpreting this is that anyone can have individual experiences, and the ability to control their totality in linguistic discourse is

---

566 Ernst 1985, 15–20. *Sharh-i Shathiyat* has been edited by H. Corbin in the series *Bibliothèque Iranienne 12* (Teheran 1966.) Ernst gives several long quotations.

567 Ernst 1985, 22, 24 (Ibn 'Arabi: *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* II:2, 238).

568 Austin's introduction in Ibn 'Arabi: *Sufis of Andalusia,* 39. (Cit. *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* IV, 560.)

569 Qušayri: *Risāla*, 83; *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 142.

reached by some, but only the one who *practises* it constantly – by recollecting God in every breath – has reached the point.

Yet on the other hand, mystical language is not a purposeless veil but an important means of mystical growth; a 'letter' is not only a 'veil' but a 'treasury' (*khizāna*) and 'fire' (*nār*) as well.[570] Nor can genuine mystical language be independent of the experience. The primary function of mystical discourse is to direct one towards the experience: to make the reference and significance come together by the recipient's participation in the same reality.

> The true saying of every speaker is that which establishes you in the experience of Me (*al-wajd biya*). Therefore, interpret (*i'tabir*) the sayings in the light of your ecstasy in Me (*bi-wajdika biya*), and interpret your experience of Me in the light of your turning away from other than Me (Niffari).[571]

The second function of mystical language is to extend the limitations of human thought and widen the subject's perspectives towards the whole creation by opening new trails of thought for the mind. The function could be called "psychedelic": it reaches for the verbal and conceptual limits and aims to move them farther. Niffari's divine subject promises:

> Be through Me, and you shall see knowledge and ignorance as limits, and speech and silence in them as limits. You shall see every limitation veiled from Me by its limitation, and you shall see the outer part of the veil to be knowledge, and its inner part ignorance.[572]

The main factor in this respect is the paradoxicality of expression in various forms. The semantic openness of mystical language is revealed illustratively by the sentences that are absolute paradoxes in their formal structure. The logical structure of a sentence like "my speech is not speech (*mā nuṭqī al-nuṭq*)"[573] implies that the same sign is used in two different senses: $nuṭq_1$ refers to the boundless expression of imperceptible thought, the significance of which is dependent on the recipient's capacity of comprehension, and $nuṭq_2$ to the ordinary expression in natural language. The same principle of twofold meaning can be applied to any crucial term like *waṣl* or *ittiḥād*. Paradoxical sentences like "their presence is absence"[574] shows that the reference is not bound to the verbal form – and not to the significance, we might add.

Consequently, a mystic like Niffari is not afraid of language (which may be seen as an indirect proof of the genuineness of his mystical experience that caused

---

570 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 23:6, 53:1.

571 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 19:27.

572 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 14:8.

573 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 1:4.

574 حضورهم فقد Junayd: *Kitāb al-fanā'*, 80; Zaehner 1960, 221.

him to rise above the discursive level and above religious language games.) In his approach there is no force with the ability to veil or unite as such: the qualities and attributes are 'paths' in the created dimension but no more; God is not known by the letter, nor by that which is of the letter, nor in the letter.[575] This "supra-linguistic" approach to reality is the one that the mystical language, in an analogous or metaphorical way, is all about. As uttered by a Sufi poet:

> So Truth is known in ecstasy,
> For truth will everywhere prevail;
> And even the greatest mind must fail
> To comprehend this mystery.[576]

575 Niffari: *Mukhāṭabāt*, 56:6; *Mawāqif*, 67:10.

576 Kalabadhi: *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 104; Arberry: *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 137.