

Editor

Seyed G. Safavi
SOAS, University of London, UK

Book Review Editor

Sajjad H. Rizvi
Exeter University, UK

Editorial Board

G. A'awani, Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Iran
A. Acikgenc, Fatih University, Turkey
M. Araki, Islamic Centre England, UK
S. Chan, SOAS University of London, UK
W. Chittick, State University of New York, USA
R. Davari, Tehran University, Iran
G. Dinani, Tehran University, Iran
P.S. Fosl, Transylvania University, USA
M. Khamenei, SIPRI, Iran
B. Kuspinar, McGill University, Canada
H. Landolt, McGill University, Canada
O. Leaman, University of Kentucky, USA
Y. Michot, Hartford Seminary,
Macdonald Center, USA
M. Mohaghegh-Damad, Beheshti University,
Iran
J. Morris, Boston College, USA
S.H. Nasr, The George Washington University,
USA
S. Pazouki, Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Iran
C. Turner, University of Durham, UK
H. Ziai, UCLA, USA

Assistant Editor:

Shahideh Safavi, University of London

Coordinator:

Seyed Sadreddin Safavi, University of London

Layout & Design

Mohamad A. Alavi, www.mediatics.net

Transcendent Philosophy Journal is an academic peer-reviewed journal published by the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) and aims to create a dialogue between Eastern, Western and Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism is published in December. Contributions to *Transcendent Philosophy* do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or the London Academy of Iranian Studies.

Contributors are invited to submit papers on the following topics: Comparative studies on Islamic, Eastern and Western schools of Philosophy, Philosophical issues in history of Philosophy, Issues in contemporary Philosophy, Epistemology, Philosophy of mind and cognitive science, Philosophy of science (physics, mathematics, biology, psychology, etc), Logic and philosophical logic, Philosophy of language, Ethics and moral philosophy, Theology and philosophy of religion, Sufism and mysticism, Eschatology, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Art and Metaphysics.

The mailing address of the *Transcendent Philosophy* is:

Dr S.G. Safavi
Journal of Transcendent Philosophy
121 Royal Langford
2 Greville Road
London NW6 5HT
UK
Tel: (+44) 020 7692 2491
Fax: (+44) 020 7209 4727
Email: philosophy@iranainstudies.org

Submissions should be sent to the Editor. Books for review and completed reviews should be sent to the Book Review Editor. All other communication should be directed to the coordinator.

Transcendent Philosophy is published in December. Annual subscription rates are: Institutions, £60.00; individuals, £30.00. Please add £6.00 for addresses outside the UK. The Journal is also accessible online at: www.iranianstudies.org.

© London Academy of Iranian Studies
ISSN 1471-3217

Volume 15. December 2014
Transcendent Philosophy
An International Journal for
Comparative Philosophy
and Mysticism

Articles

The Gawharshād Mosque in Imām Rezā Shrine Complex: A Hermeneutic Approach to its Architecture and Decoration

Hasti Safavi – SOAS [7-66]

Islamic Spirituality and the Needs of Humanity Today - in commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the death of the founder of the Safaviyyah Sufi order, Sheikh Safī al-Din Ardabili

Seyyed Hossein Nasr [67-92]

SHI'ITE 'IRFAN

Mohammad Faghfoory [93-124]

The Knowledge of Unity (*'ilm al-wahdah*): Comparative Reflections on Ibn 'Arabī and Persian Kubrawī Mystics in Their Approach to the Concept of Unity

Seyyed Shahabeddin Mesbahi

[125-154]

Farabi and the Invention of Post-Secular Social Theory

Seyyed Javad Miri [155-164]

A Critical Essay of the Answers of Theosophers Concerning the Dilemma of Gratuitous Evils (Relying on William Rowe's Reading)

Rubabeh Jalili Bahabadi

Mohammad Bidhendi

[165-194]

The Gawharshād Mosque in Imām Rezā Shrine Complex: A Hermeneutic Approach to its Architecture and Decoration¹

Hasti Safavi – SOAS, University of London - UK
BA and MA in History of Art and Archaeology

Abstract

The Gawharshād Mosque is an exquisite example of architecture and decoration of mosques in Islamic art. Applying hermeneutics, this work discusses the architecture and decoration of Gawharshād Mosque through a descriptive approach, as well as an interpretative approach. In this work, the mosque's location, the importance of mosque in Islamic architecture, the general architecture of mosques in Timurid era, the overall architecture of Gawharshād Mosque, the role and importance of decoration in Islamic art, the symbolic meaning of colour in Islamic art, the use of calligraphic inscriptions in Gawharshād Mosque, as well as the architecture and decoration of the Iwān Maqṣūra, the dome, the *mihṛāb* and the mosque's two minarets are discussed. The unique feature of this article is that rather than simply taking a descriptive approach, in order to gain a deeper understanding of both the visual and conceptual dimensions of Gawharshād Mosque, the hermeneutic approach has been employed to interpret the symbolism and the relationship of the parts and the whole of the architecture and decoration. This article is the result of fieldwork, carried out over a period of two years.

Keywords: Gawharshād Mosque, hermeneutic, Islamic calligraphy, Iran, tilework, Islamic art, Imām Rezā Shrine Complex, Shī'a Islam.

1. Introduction

The Gawharshād Mosque is one of the most outstanding monuments built by the Timurids in Iran, which forms part of the Imām Rezā Shrine Complex in Mashhad, Khurāsān. It has been renovated throughout the centuries, and certain parts, such as the dome, have been reconstructed. The mosque is an exemplary portrayal of Timurid and Iranian architecture and decoration, as it includes many different art forms, such as tilework, plasterwork, brickwork, *muqarnas*, paintings and calligraphic inscriptions. It is a manifestation of the religious, artistic and cultural beliefs of not only the ruling empire at the time, but also later times, due to its constant restoration and partial reconstruction. The Gawharshād Mosque is significant because of its elaborate tilework, and the unique symmetry visible in its architecture and decoration from a visual and conceptual perspective, in terms of the calligraphic inscriptions, and their interplay with the other decorative elements adorning the mosque.

In this article, the hermeneutic approach, based on Islamic art philosophy, has been employed in order to discuss and analyse the architecture and decoration of Gawharshād Mosque. Through the application of the hermeneutic approach, the different elements of architecture and of decoration, which have been specifically chosen for each location, have been placed in the hermeneutic circle, and their interplay has been analysed, in order to decipher the symbolic meaning embodied in Gawharshād Mosque.² This approach is particularly fruitful in the Gawharshād Mosque as visual and conceptual symmetry is a prominent feature of the mosque.

To understand the importance and significance of Gawharshād Mosque, one must first discuss the mosque's location, as it plays an

important role in understanding the reasons for its constructions, as well as its continued restoration and preservation. Secondly, the importance of mosque in Islamic architecture and the general Timurid architecture of the mosque are discussed. These are followed by separate sections on the overall architecture of Gawharshād Mosque, the role and importance of decoration in Islamic art, and the symbolic meaning of colour in Islamic art, with specific reference to calligraphy, which has been used extensively throughout Gawharshād Mosque.

As the mosque is vast and its decoration is both exquisite and detailed, a prototype of each of the main elements of the mosque has been chosen and discussed in detail, in terms of architecture and decoration. The sections chosen are the Iwān Maqsūra, the *mihrāb*, the dome and the two minarets. The Iwān Maqsūra has been chosen, as it is the mosque's most important *iwān*, as it is in the direction of *Qibla*³; furthermore, it is covered with the most elaborate and significant decorations. The *mihrāb* and the dome have been chosen, as there is only one of each in the mosque. In addition, the *mihrāb* marks the Qibla and where the congregational prayer leader stands. Both of the minarets have been chosen, as they are uniform in shape, and parallel and symmetrical in terms of decoration. There is a glossary of technical terms at the end of the article, followed by thirty figures⁴.

The fieldwork for this project was done over a period of two years on five separate occasions, studying the Imam Reza Shrine Complex, as well as having numerous meetings with Āstān Quds Razavī Organisation. This organisation, established over 500 years ago, is a charitable foundation dedicated to the management of the Imām Rezā Shrine Complex.

2. Location

In order to discuss the architecture and decoration of Gawharshād Mosque, one must first discuss the geographical, political,

economical and cultural setting of the monument built in the city of Mashhad, Khurāsān in 1416-1418 CE. Geographically, during the Timurid era, Khurāsān encompassed the North East of Iran, South of Turkmenistan and North and North West of Afghanistan, including the main cities of Neishābūr, Marv, Herāt, Balkh, and Samarkand, the first capital of the Timurid dynasty. The city of Mashhad in Khurāsān was previously known as Sahnabād; however, “in the early tenth century, the site acquired the name Mashhad, “Place of Martyrdom”⁵, as it was the burial site of the eighth Shī’a Imām, ‘Alī ibn Musā al-Rezā.

The political governing system that was established by Timūr, following his conquest, was unable to impact the “governing system of areas such as Anatolia and Syria, and, therefore, they were left with their previous governing systems. However, the governing system of Iran and Afghanistan was changed and later on managed by Timūr’s successors.”⁶ Aside from the wealth the Timurids gained through the spoils of war, with the establishment of a postal system throughout the road network, trade became easier, creating an atmosphere for cultural and social growth. Furthermore, Shāhrukh, Timūr’s youngest son, facilitated commercial relationships and road works, thus, simplifying the life of traders and travellers.⁷

Although Sunnīs themselves, the Timurids respected other religious school, such as Shī’a and Sufi⁸ groups, such as *Ni’mat-Alālhīs* and *Naqshbandī*, and allowed them to practise their faith, thus, creating a society where various religious ideologies were recognised and practised. The Timurids were greatly known for their buildings and architecture, which can be categorised into three classes of “residential, commercial (and industrial), and charitable. The charitable foundations were maintained by *vaqf* foundations, which include mosques, *madarasahs*, *khanqahs*, ... hospices and hospitals, and a variety of different water-supply facilities.”⁹ Timurid princes, including Bāisunqur, were greatly interested in art, architecture and poetry, creating a society where various forms of arts were

appreciated and flourished. Bāisunqur was also a prominent calligrapher, which is evident in the calligraphic inscriptions he inscribed on the Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad, which was commissioned by his mother, Gawharshād Āghā.

One of the most important factors regarding the location of Gawharshād Mosque is that it is part of the Imām Rezā Shrine complex. The Shrine Complex is of immense value to Shī'a Muslims around the world, as it is the location of the burial site of the eighth Shī'a Imām. Considering that the Timurids were Sunnī Muslims, their choice of location for the Gawharshād Mosque, could be construed to indicate both the spiritual significance of Imām Rezā, and the prominence of the *Ahlul Bayt*¹⁰, and possibly Shī'a Islam in the Timurid era. By situating the mosque in the Shrine Complex, Gawharshād Āghā was able to derive religious and spiritual legitimacy and significance for the mosque and the Timurids. In hindsight, the choice of location led to the continued restoration and significance of the mosque in later eras. Gawharshād Āghā commissioned two mosques in her own name: the Masjīd Jāmī' (1417-1438 CE) in Herāt, which was part of the Gawharshād Mausoleum Complex, which was her capital at the time, and Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad, as well as Dār al-Huffāz, Dār al-Sayyādeh and Dār al-Islām of Imām Rezā Shrine Complex. The choice of Mashhad as the location for one of the mosques gives further support to this argument.

3. Architecture

3.1 The Importance of Mosque in Islam

The creation of mosque is essential in Islam, as it is the most important location for prayer for Muslims. Furthermore, it is a symbol of sanctity, unity, and purity in Islamic ideology. The word 'masjīd' in Arabic, meaning mosque, comes from the word 'sujūd', which means prostration in prayer. Consequently, one can say "the Muslim stands directly as the primordial man, himself his own priest, facing God without an intermediary."¹¹ The fundamental role

of a mosque is prayer, recitation of Qur'ān and establishing a connection with God. At the beginning of Islam, it was also used as an establishment for political, social and military gatherings. In today's society, mosque also acts as a social and cultural centre in society, where classes, celebrations and council meetings occur. Quba Mosque in Medina, is the first mosque created in Islam, after the *hijrah*¹² of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. In Chapter 9, *Al-Tawbah* (The Repentance) verse 18 of the Qur'ān, it is said in regards to establishing and maintaining mosques:

“The mosques of Allāh are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allāh and the Last Day and establish prayer and give *zakāh* and do not fear except Allāh” (9: 18)

The religious belief of Muslims in regards to the importance and sanctity of a mosque motivated them to create magnificent mosques throughout the Islamic world. Gawharshād Mosque is an example of one of the grand mosques built in the Islamic world, as not only it is part of Imām Rezā Shrine complex, but is also decorated with striking tilework, brickwork, plasterwork, muqarnas, and calligraphic inscriptions.

3.2 The General Architecture of Mosques in Timurid Era

Timurid architecture can be divided into four periods, “building under Timur (r. 1370-1405); that of his son Shahrukh (r. 1405-47) and his wife Gawharshad; that of the Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1470-1506) and his confidant, the bureaucrat ‘Alishir Nava’i; and that of the Timurids’ Turkoman rivals in west Iran, the Qaraqoyunlu (1380-1468) and the Aqqoyunlu (1378-1508).”¹³

The mosques erected during the Timurid era were highly influenced by the design of mosques built during the Seljuk Empire. The design usually being a “rectangular courtyard, surrounded with four *iwāns* and a domed hall behind the main *iwān*, which is also in the direction of the Qibla, and minarets erected in the main *iwān* of the

mosque, usually on the four corners.”¹⁴ Examples of monuments with such architectural plans are Kalyān Mosque in Bukhara and Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad. During the Timurid Empire, monuments with ribbed dome were erected, such as the Gūr-i Amīr Mausoleum Complex in Samarkand (1403-1404 CE) and Madrasa¹⁵ of Ūlūgh Beg in Samarkand (1417-1421 CE). Additionally, they were famously known for the “addition of domed chambers beyond the lateral iwāns”¹⁶, which influenced the architecture of later monuments such as Masjid Shāh of Isfahan (1612-1637 CE), built by the Safavids.

3.3 The Overall Architecture of Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad

Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad, is one of the monuments built on the order of Gawharshād Āghā, wife of Shāhrukh in 1416-1418 CE, others being Gawharshād Mausoleum Complex in Herāt, which includes Masjid Jāmī’ Gawharshād (1417-1438 CE), as well as the Mausoleum and Madrasa of Gawharshād (1432 CE). Furthermore, Gawharshād had great interest and affection for Imām Rezā; consequently, she commissioned the building of Dār al-Huffāz, Dār al-Sayyādeh and Dār al-Islām, adjacent to the Shrine of Imām Rezā. As discussed previously, Gawharshād Mosque is situated in the Imām Rezā Shrine Complex. The mosque is 9410 square meters, and includes a courtyard, which is 50 x 55 meters, a library, four iwāns which are different in dimension to one another, “twenty two two-storey arcades, six vaults on the sides of Iwān Maqsūra, seven *shabestāns* on four sides, twenty eight entrances from the courtyard to the *shabestāns*, a turquoise dome and two minaret on either side of the Qibla.”¹⁷ There is a 9 x 9 meters area, known as Masjid Bīvezan or Pīrezan, in the middle of the courtyard, where today, they have built a small pool in that area, where pilgrims do their *wudu*¹⁸. The mosque is connected to the other parts of the Imām Rezā Shrine Complex, through eight entrances, on the western, northern and southern sides.

When looking at the four iwāns of Gawharshād mosque, one must note that “three of the ivans display decorated tunnel vaults, while the vaulting system of the ivan-i maqsūrah is complex.”¹⁹ The four iwāns of the mosque are connected to one another via two-storey arcades. The western iwān is famously known as Iwān Āb (Iwān of Water), with the Golpāyḡānī or Mīlānī Shabestān on its southern side, and the Āghāi Najaf Ābādī Shabestān located on its northern side. Additionally, from this iwān one can reach the Bast of Sheikh Bahā al-Dīn, the courtyard of Jomhūrī Islāmī, and the porch of Dār al-Velaieh. The Iwān Āb is also decorated with calligraphic inscriptions from the Qur’ān, names of God, brickwork and blue tilework, marble flooring and vegetal and geometric patterns. The eastern iwān, known as Hājī Hassan, is connected to the courtyard of the museum. On the eastern side, it is connected to the courtyard of Imām, and on the southern side, to the Faqīh Sabzevārī Shabestān. It is also decorated with Qur’ānic calligraphic inscriptions, *ahadīth*²⁰ (pl. *hadīth*) from Prophet Muhammad, and names of God, with floral and vegetal motifs, marble flooring and tilework. The northern iwān, known as the Dār al-Sayyādeh or Sādeh (simple), is connected to the Dār al-Sayyādeh of Imām Rezā’s Shrine, with the Āghāi Sarābī Shabestān on its western side, and the Dār al-Huffāz on its eastern side. Similar to the other two iwāns of Gawharshād mosque, it is decorated with calligraphic inscriptions from the Qur’ān, names of the Imāms, and *ahadīth* of Prophet Muhammad, marble flooring, more elaborate tilework than that found in the eastern and western iwāns, and vegetal and geometric patterns. The fourth iwān, located on the southern side of the mosque, known as Iwān Maqsūra, will be discussed in detail later on.

The seven shabestāns are decorated in white plasterwork, and have been renovated many times. The white plasterwork creates a peaceful atmosphere for praying and meditation; furthermore, they connect the different parts of the mosque to one another. The two southern shabestāns, located on either side of Iwān Maqsūra, were famously known as “Mirzā Hassan and Mirzā Muhammad, during

the Qājār Empire. The two eastern shabestāns were known as Mulā Mustafā and Karam, whilst the three shabestāns on the western side, were known as Mirzā Nasr-Allāh, Imām Jum'a and Mirzā Muhammad Taghī.²¹ However, today the names of the seven shabestāns have changed, and are known as Sheikh Gholām Hussein, Sabzevārī, Shabestān-e Garm, Sarābī, Nahāvandī, Milānī and Najaf Ābādī.

Gawharshād Mosque has been renovated many times, the main three reasons being “firstly, the occupation of the city of Mashhad in 1589-1698 CE by the Uzbek Sheibānī tribe, secondly the earthquake of 1673 CE in Nishāpūr which also damaged Mashhad, and, thirdly, the artillery attack of Imām Rezā Shrine Complex in 1912 CE by the Russians.”²² A great number of renovations were made during the Safavid Empire in the 17th Century, Qājār Empire in the 19th Century, and later on, during the time of the Islamic Republic in the 20th Century.

Architectural and decorative elements of Gawharshād Mosque influenced elements of monuments in the same period, such as Madrasa Du Dar in Mashhad (1439 CE), and Madrasa Parīzād in Mashhad (1417 CE), and later monuments, such as Kamāl al-Molk Mausoleum (1962 CE) in Nishāpūr. However, in the next architectural period “this type of structure only occurs once, namely in the Herat madrasa. Otherwise we find the covered mosque, which demanded less expenditure, or a kind of combined form, a mixture of covered and courtyard mosque.”²³

Ghavām al-Dīn Shirāzī, one of the most famous architects of Iranian history, is the architect of Madrasa and Khānqāh²⁴ of Shāhrukh (1410 CE) in Herāt, Gawharshād Mosque (1416-1418 CE) in Mashhad, Gawharshād Mausoleum Complex in Herāt, including Masjid Jāmi' Gawharshād (1417-1438 CE), as well as the Mausoleum and Madrasa of Gawharshād (1432 CE), and Madrasa Ghiyāthiyya (1444 CE) in Khārgīrd. As discussed by Kiāsari, although Imām Rezā Shrine Complex and Gawharshād Mosque

were built four hundred years apart, “they are completely proportional, as though a universal blueprint has been used to build them both.”²⁵ One of the important aspects of the Gawharshād mosque is the use of symmetry, one of the main principles of Islamic architecture and decoration. For example, symmetry is employed in the two minarets located on either side of Iwān Maqsūra, the two minarets having symmetry in design, decoration, and calligraphic inscriptions.

4. Decoration

4.1 Decoration in Islamic Art and Timurid Era

In Islamic religious buildings, figurative representation is forbidden in order to eliminate “a presence which might set itself up against the Presence – albeit invisible – of God. The other and positive purpose is that of affirming the transcendence of God, since the Divine Essence cannot be compared with anything whatsoever.”²⁶ Consequently, the artist uses other material such as tilework, plasterwork, brickwork, stonework, calligraphic inscriptions, painting on plasterwork, muqarnas, arabesque, geometric, vegetal and floral motifs to adorn a monument, such as Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad; as “art to a Muslim is a “proof of the divine existence”.”²⁷ Looking at the decorations covering Gawharshād Mosque, one can divide them into two separate categories of calligraphic inscriptions and non-calligraphic inscriptions. One must also note the use of regular repetition, not only in terms of decorations but also architectural elements in Gawharshād Mosque, which is one of the principles of Islamic architecture and decoration.

During the era of the Timurid Empire, great attention was paid to decoration by covering large surfaces of monuments with enamelled and *mu'arraq* tilework, with ultramarine as the dominant colour. The domes were decorated with tilework or enamel brick in turquoise and blue, and the decorative tiles were adorned with

calligraphic inscriptions, geometric, vegetal and floral motifs. Examples of such monuments are Gūr-i Amīr Mausoleum Complex (1403-1404 CE) in Samarkand and Gawharshād Mosque in Mashhad. Furthermore, calligraphic inscriptions, vegetal, floral and geometric motifs, and different materials, such as brick, stone and tiles were used to adorn monuments in an exquisite manner.

4.2 The Use of Colour in Gawharshād Mosque

The mosque is considered a sacred architecture in Islam, as the most important act of a Muslims, prayer, is performed in that sanctuary. Thus, one can say the colours and geometric patterns used to adorn Gawharshād Mosque “serve as a key for the understanding of the material with which the architect deals while unravelling also the structure of the cosmos before the eyes of the beholder.”²⁸ Islamic art scholars, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his book *Islamic Art and Spirituality*²⁹, Nader Ardalan and Lāleh Bakhtiār in *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*³⁰, and ‘Amer Amīnī Kiāsarī in *Boniān hāie Nazarī Hendesī va Tazīnāt dar Memārī Masjid Gawharshād*³¹, discuss the importance and symbolic meaning of colour in Islamic and Iranian art. The majestic beauty of Gawharshād Mosque is a result of its unique decoration and splendid colour scheme. Most of the colours used in the Gawharshād Mosque are ultramarine, turquoise, blue, white, green, yellow/gold, black and brown.

Ultramarine, symbolic of the Divine World, is used for calligraphic inscriptions, and as a background for most of the calligraphic inscriptions decorating the mosque; with turquoise colour a symbol of inner peace, adorning the dome, and used for calligraphic inscriptions and tilework. Blue, which is a symbol of faith, adorns the inner arch ceiling of Iwān Maqṣūra and tilework. White, a symbol of purity, holiness and light, covers the seven shabestāns of the mosque, and is used for calligraphic inscriptions and tilework. The colour green, a symbol of Prophet Muhammad, is used for colouring the vegetal and floral motifs adorning the tileworks.

Yellow/gold, symbolic of light, knowledge and wisdom, adorns the geometric and vegetal motifs, depicted on tilework, and is also used for calligraphic inscriptions. Black, a symbol of the magnificence of God and the soul's revolution, is used in tilework and as calligraphic inscriptions on stone. Brown, symbolic of Earth, is used for calligraphic inscriptions and decorative motifs.

4.3 Calligraphy in Gawharshād Mosque

The importance and immense use of calligraphy in Islamic art, is due to its association with the Qur'ān, the written word of God. Calligraphy is the manifestation of the Divine world into the material world, which establishes a connection between the ink used in calligraphy and Sufism, Qur'ānic verses, ahadīth of Prophet Muhammad and his holy successors according to Shī'a belief and Islamic mannerism. One of the most important attributes of calligraphy is the portrayal of beauty and spiritual feeling, more evident in mosques and religious complexes. In Islamic calligraphy, and, most importantly, Persian calligraphy, there is a balance between its elements and various parts. Additionally, it is of great importance to Muslims, as its foundation is based on the embodiment of God's revelation. Consequently, the calligraphic inscriptions covering Gawharshād Mosque are of great importance due to their creative beauty, content and the conceptual and symbolic relation between the content of the inscriptions and the location they are inscribed on. In Islamic art, calligraphy and tilework fulfil the role of figurative representation, such as paintings and statues, in other artistic traditions, in particular, the Christian artistic traditions.³²

The various styles of calligraphy used in adorning Gawharshād Mosque are *kufic*, *bannā'ī kufic* (geometric *kufic*), *nasta'liq*, *naskh*, with *thuluth* being the major style used. They depict a number of different topics, such as Qur'ānic verses, ahadīth of Prophet Muhammad and his successors according to Shī'a beliefs, names of God, prayers, Persian poetry, artists' names and the commissioner's

reasons for the construction of Gawharshād Mosque. The calligraphic inscriptions remaining today are the work of various artists, such as the Timurid prince, Bāisunqur, Mohammad Rezā Imāmī, one of the most prominent calligraphers of the Safavid Empire, and other calligraphers, such as Muhammad Bāgher, Shahīd Mashhadī, Ibrāhīm Kāshīpaz and Tabrīzī Gharavī.

5. Iwān Maqsūra

The main iwān of Gawharshād Mosque, known as Iwān Maqsūra or Iwān Qibla, where the Qibla is situated, is located on the southern side of the mosque and “is nested with an inner arch, as in the palace at Kesh.”³³ The length of the iwān is thirty seven meters and reaching a height of twenty nine meters, with the portal having a height of twenty seven meters and width of thirteen meters. From an artistic perspective, the calligraphic inscriptions decorating the main iwān are a combination of various art forms, such as the use of elaborate tilework, plasterwork, and arabesque, geometric and floral motifs. These various art forms were utilised in order to display various written words, such as Qur’ānic verses and ahādīth of Prophet Muhammad, with differing geometric forms and dimensions. From a hermeneutic perspective, the composition of calligraphic inscriptions and the decorative material mentioned above, display a transcendent subject and holistic metaphysics via the physical application of the four elements of earth, water, fire and air. The contrast between the physical appearance of the decoration of Iwān Maqsūra, and its metaphysical message, creates a holy and magnificent atmosphere for the visitors.

One can understand the relationship and interaction of the calligraphic inscriptions and other decorative elements of the main iwān of Gawharshād Mosque, through the application of the hermeneutic circle, which is the dialogue between the parts and the whole, and the whole and the parts. The application of the hermeneutic circle is discussed at a later stage in this article. Colours used in Islamic and Iranian art are seen as a symbolic

language for the manifestation of a specific meaning, with each colour having a hermeneutic meaning and needing an interpretation. The colours employed in Iwān Maqsūra are white, ultramarine, blue, turquoise, yellow, brown and black, which have been discussed before.

The outer border of the Iwān Maqsūra, covering all three sides, is adorned with mu'arraḡ tilework with yellow spirals and two-lined calligraphy, with the bottom line in white thuluth and the top line in turquoise kufic calligraphy, on an ultramarine background (figure 1). The calligrapher of this masterpiece, inscribed in 1418 CE is the Timurid prince, Baīsunqur, which was renovated during the Safavid era, by the famous Safavid calligrapher, Muhammad Rezā Imāmi in 1673 - 1676 CE. The inscription can be divided into three segments, with two verses from the Qur'ān, one hadīth from Prophet Muhammad, and the commissioner's reasons for constructing the Gawharshād Mosque. The inscription starts with verse 1, Chapter 1 *Al-Fāṭṭhah* (The Opener) "In the Name of God" and ends with verse 18, Chapter 9 *Al-Tawbeh* (The Repentance) stating:

"The mosques of Allāh are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allāh and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakah and do not dear except Allāh, for it is expected that those will be of the rightly guided." (9:18)

It is followed by a hadīth from Prophet Muhammad stating: "Whoever builds a mosque for God, God will also build him a house in Paradise." The last part of the calligraphic inscription, discusses Gawharshād Āghā's reasons and philosophy for the mosque's construction. She constructed the mosque using her own wealth, so that in return, God would change her spiritual state, and reward her on the Day of Resurrection.

From a hermeneutic approach, the calligraphic inscriptions above deal with the interaction of three important topics, and their relation with one another. First, it deals with God and His important

Attributes, which are His Mercifulness and Kindness, and the importance of the construction of a mosque. Secondly, Prophet Muhammad's saying, similar to the verse from the Qur'ān, deals with the importance of the creation of a mosque and the reward one will gain in the next life. Thirdly, it deals with the commissioner's strife for God's blessing and satisfaction, and hope for a reward in the next life. Everything starts with God, and God is the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful, and Prophet Muhammad delivers Divine teachings discussing the nature of the good life (*Al-Hayāt Al-Tayyibah*), which is considered as the believer's goal. In return, the Muslim practitioner will follow Prophet Muhammad's teachings in order to achieve a good life in the next world. The three inscriptions complement and define the purpose of the Gawharshād Mosque, as a place for the practitioner to follow in Prophet Muhammad's path and journey towards Unity with God. The three colours of white, turquoise and ultramarine illustrate in order, the relation between purity, inner peace, and the Divine World. In these inscriptions, the colour yellow has only a decorative purpose, as it is used for the colouring of the spiral motifs. The colours used, the inscriptions and the location they are inscribed on are in complete harmony with one another. The hermeneutic circle is completed when considering the choice of location for the calligraphic inscriptions, which is the outside border of the Iwān Maqsūra, which, as previously mentioned, is the location of the mihrāb and facing the Qibla, signifying the worship of God.

At the base of the border there are two rectangular panels in mu'arraḡ tilework, decorated with white thuluth calligraphy on an ultramarine background, with the colour brown used for vowels. The calligraphic inscription on the western panel states the date the mosque was built as 1418 CE (figure 2), with the calligraphic inscription on the eastern panel stating the name of Ghavām al-Dīn Shirāzī as the architect of the monument (figure 3). Underneath the rectangular panels there is a flower vase design, with floral motifs in blue, ultramarine, yellow, green and white, symbolising paradise and its beauty.

The main border of Iwān Maqsūra is framed at the top and bottom with the word *Allāh al-Bāghi*, meaning ‘God is Eternal’ (figure 4). This word has been inscribed 216 times on an ultramarine mu’arraḡ tilework, with a blue border, in white thuluth calligraphy, with the vowels in yellow. From a hermeneutic perspective, through the use of blue mu’arraḡ tilework which are set on brickwork, the architect not only creates a beautiful contrast in decoration, but also with the repetition of the word ‘God is Eternal’, he emphasises the annihilation of human beings and makes one aware of the Eternality of God. One can say the colours used in the tilework are symbolic of the Eternality and Holiness of God, with the colour of the brown brickwork surrounding the mu’arraḡ tilework, representing the earthliness, and, therefore, the temporal nature and annihilation of human beings, as it states in verse 2, Chapter 6 *Al-An’ām* (The cattle) of the Qur’ān, “It is He who created you from clay and then decreed a term and a specified time known to Him.”

Below the top part of the main border of Iwān Maqsūra, there is a horizontal panel decorated with double-lined yellow thuluth calligraphy, on an ultramarine background (figure 5). This work was also done by Muhammad Rezā Imāmi in 1676 CE, and renovated in 1920 CE. The borders of the panel are decorated with floral motifs in white, brown and yellow on a turquoise background. The calligraphic inscription includes a devotee’s prayer, praising God and asking for His blessing. It is continued with the verses 87-88 of Chapter 21 *Al-‘Anbyā* (The Prophets), famously known as the *Yūnesie dhikr*³⁴, which is one of the most famous Sufi *dhikrs*.

“There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers. So We respond to him and saved him from distress. And thus do We save the believers.” (21: 87-88)

From a hermeneutic approach these verses have a symbolic meaning, and with the invocation of the *Yūnesie dhikr* the believer strengthens his soul, heart and strives to achieve spiritual unveiling.

This *dhikr* has been inscribed on the portal of the main iwān, in order to emphasise the fundamental purpose of Gawharshād Mosque as a venue for establishing a spiritual connection with God. The composition of mu'arraḡ tilework, calligraphy and the colours used, highlight the devotee's prayers and verses from the Qur'ān, by creating a mystical and heavenly atmosphere for the believers in the most important iwān of the Gawharshād Mosque.

Two *toranj* medallions in mu'arraḡ tilework are situated above the outer arch of Iwān Maqsūra, surrounded by vegetal, floral and arabesque designs in white, green, ultramarine, blue, black and brown. The medallions are inscribed in ultramarine thuluth calligraphy, on a yellow background, with the borders in blue. The inscription on the eastern medallion states, "There is no power but God, Who is Magnificent 1381." (Figure 6) The 1381 AH, which is equivalent to 1961 CE, is referring to the date of the inscription. Therefore, one can presume they were renovated during the same period as the horizontal panel discussed above. The inscription on the western medallion states, "God is Glorious, all praise is due to God and there is no God but Him, and God is the Greatest." (Figure7)

From a hermeneutic perspective, balance and symmetry, which are two elements of the principle of harmony in Islamic architecture, are evident in the *toranj* medallions. This harmony appears through the symmetrical shape of the medallions, colours used, and with the word 'Allāh' meaning God, the focal point of the medallions. Furthermore, they are parallel to one another through the repetition of God's Attributes, which in return creates a balance. The use of yellow for background emphasises the importance of gaining spiritual knowledge and wisdom through the holy worship of God in a mosque. In addition, the use of ultramarine for the thuluth calligraphy refers to the Holiness of God, through the inscribed Attributes of God. The inscriptions on the medallions act as two flags for the army of Divine Light, and illustrate two fundamental beliefs of Muslims, which are Absolute Power of God and Unity of

God. The calligraphic inscription on the eastern side illustrate the Unity of Divine Acts, whilst the inscription on the western side, portray the Unity of Divine Attributes.

The ceiling of the outer arch is made of white marble, which is coated with turquoise and dark blue mu'arraḡ tilework, and decorated with yellow and black geometric and arabesque patterns. There are two tablets in ultramarine mu'arraḡ tilework on the eastern and western wall decorated with white thuluth calligraphy, with the colour brown used for vowels. On the eastern wall the inscription is a hadīth from Prophet Muhammad, stating, "The believer in the mosque is similar to a fish in the sea" (figure 8); and parallel to this, on the western wall the inscription states "The hypocrite in a mosque is similar to a bird in a cage." (Figure 9)

From a hermeneutic approach, the two tablets, which are symmetrical in design and decoration and opposite in meaning, are positioned perfectly. Additionally, the tablets have created a symbolic symmetry between the objective order and the abstract order in the architecture of the Iwān Maḡsūra, which can be considered as a masterpiece of hermeneutic Islamic architecture. In the prophetic hadīth on the eastern wall, the fish is a metaphor for the practising believer, whilst the sea is a metaphor for the mosque. This is whilst in the prophetic hadīth inscribed on the western wall, the bird is a metaphor for the hypocrite, and the bird's cage is a metaphor for the mosque, which is contradictory to the inscription on the eastern wall. The use of white calligraphy on an ultramarine background is a symbolic representation of the calmness of the believer during his prayer with the Holy Sea of God.

The inner arch of Iwān Maḡsūra is decorated with ultramarine mu'arraḡ tilework with doubled-lined white thuluth calligraphy at the bottom and turquoise kufic calligraphy above, with yellow spirals for decorative purposes (figure 10). The colours used for the decoration are identical to ones adorning the main border of the iwān. The white thuluth calligraphy consists of verses 35-42 of

Chapter 24 *Al-Nūr* (The Light), and the turquoise kufic calligraphy consists of verses 255-257 of Chapter 2 *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow).

From a hermeneutic perspective, verses 35-42 of Chapter 24 *Al-Nūr* (The Light) deal with the Divine Attributes of Beauty, the importance of prayer and the Kingdom of God. One can say the key words of these verses are God as the Light of heaven and earth, Divine Knowledge, the act of prayer, and award and punishment. Verses 255-257 of Chapter 2 *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow) deal with the Divine Attributes of Perfection and Divine Attributes of Essence, such as Unity of God, Eternality, All Knowledge-able and All-Powerful. The use of turquoise for the inscription is symbolic of the presence of inner peace on earth and the sky, which God has created and is continually leading. The depiction of these verses on the inner arch of the iwān as a manifest of Islam can be seen and read from the courtyard of Gawharshād Mosque. Furthermore, the inner arch can be seen as a gate where the believer enters a sanctuary in which he will reach a spiritual connection with “Allāh who is the Light of the heavens and the earth.” (2: 35) This is further emphasised by the use of white for the inscription, which is a symbol of light.

6. Mihrāb

The mihrāb of Gawharshād Mosque is situated inside the Iwān Maqsūra, and is the location in which the congregational prayer leader stands. The word ‘mihrāb’ is translated as ‘prayer niche’ in English and meaning ‘the place of war’ in Arabic, which is referring to one’s battle with his carnal soul. According to a Prophetic hadīth, each Muslim is faced by two types of striving or ‘*jihād*’: the greater striving (*Jihād Al-Akbar*) and the lesser striving (*Jihād Al-Asghar*). The greater striving, which is incumbent upon every Muslim, is the striving through worship for purification, and the war between the soul and the body and carnal desires. Thus, the prayer niche is referred to as ‘mihrāb’ or place of war, as it is the site of prayer,

which is the highest form of worship, and the greatest manifestation of the greater jihād.

The current mihrāb “is from 1972 CE, as the previous mihrāb was damaged”³⁵. It is made of light green marble and situated underneath a muqarnas half dome made of plasterwork, and decorated with arabesque motifs. Furthermore, the mihrāb is decorated with repetitive arabesque, floral and vegetal motifs in blue, ultramarine, yellow white and turquoise, and calligraphic inscriptions. The inner surface of the mihrāb arch is decorated with a ribbed half dome, which is adorned with muqarnas, arabesque motifs in ultramarine, yellow, white, and floral motifs.

The outer border of the mihrāb is adorned with ultramarine mu’arraaq tilework with white thuluth calligraphy below and yellow kufic calligraphy above (figure 11). The inscription starts with verses 255-257 of Chapter 2 *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow). From a hermeneutic approach, as discussed before, these verses emphasise the Divine Attributes of Perfection and Divine Attributes of Essence.

The calligraphic inscription continues with verses 17-19 of Chapter 30 *Al-Rūm* (The Romans):

“So exalted is Allāh when you reach the evening and when you reach the morning. And to Him is due all praise throughout the heavens and the earth. And exalted is He at night and when you are at noon. He brings the living out of the dead and brings the dead out of the living and brings to life the earth after its lifelessness. And thus will you be brought out.” (30: 17-19)

In the above verses, the five times of daily prayer, Glorification of God, creation and the absolute occurrence of the Day of Resurrection are discussed.

In continuation, verse 3 of Chapter 57 *Al-Hadīd* (The Iron) is inscribed, stating “He is the First and the Last, the Ascendant and the Intimate, and He is, of all things, Knowing.” This verse reaffirms that God is the Efficient Cause and Final Cause of the world, and He is manifested in all that exists.

The mihrāb is considered the most important part of the mosque, as it is the location in which the congregation prayer leader stands. Therefore, verses of the Qur’ān, which deal with God, Day of Resurrection, Glorification of God and daily prayers, are beautifully inscribed, in order to accentuate the fundamental purpose of the mihrāb.

The inner border of the mihrāb is adorned with double-lined inscriptions, with black thuluth calligraphy below and gold kufic calligraphy above, on the light green marble of the mihrāb (figure 12). The inscription consists of verses 78-84 of Chapter 17 *Al-‘Isrā’* (The Israelites). The verses inscribed, and the colours used were chosen in accordance with their location, as they discuss the importance of evening and morning prayer, the need for establishing a connection with God at dawn, the Islamic philosophy of history which states that truth will come and falsehood will be destroyed. Furthermore, the importance of Qur’ān as the saviour of the believer’s soul is discussed.

Inside the arch of the mihrāb at the bottom, there is a dark gray stone tablet decorated with black thuluth inscription below, and white kufic inscription above (figure 13). The black kufic inscription states “The Prophet Said”, and the white thuluth inscription states “Hurry towards prayer before death, and hurry towards repentance before death”. Similar to the other inscriptions adorning the mihrāb of Gawharshād Mosque, the Prophetic hadīth emphasises the importance of prayer and the vital role of repentance before death, which is the state of compulsory return to God. Based on In Islamic teachings, praying creates a positive behaviour and spiritual status, and prevents the believer from bad behaviour, as in

the Qur'ān it says "Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing." (29: 45)

7. Dome

The dome of Gawharshād Mosque is located above the Iwān Maqsūra and is "made of two layers, which are ten meters apart"³⁶. Additionally, it was renovated many times and was completely replaced in 1962 CE. The inner layer of the dome, which can be seen from inside the Iwān Maqsūra, has a height of twenty-nine meters. The ceiling is made of white plasterwork and decorated with painted toranj-shaped medallions, adorned with calligraphic inscriptions, in three concentric circles, with toranj-shaped medallions decorated with arabesque and vegetal motifs, separating the three circles. Various colours such as ultramarine, turquoise, white, yellow, brown and green are used for the decoration of the ceiling (figure 14). The date for the decoration of the ceiling is 2005 CE.

There are sixteen rectangular toranj-shaped medallions, adorned with calligraphic inscriptions, in each circle, which increase in size as you move outwards from the apex of the ceiling. The inscriptions are in light brown thuluth calligraphy on an ultramarine background, with turquoise and brown borders. The decorative rectangular toranj-shaped medallions separating the circles also increase in size as you move outwards from the apex of the ceiling. The medallions in the first circle closest to the apex are inscribed with the saying "There is no god but God". The medallions in the second circle are inscribed with the saying "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God", and the medallions in the third circle are inscribed with the saying "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and 'Alī is the Guardian of God".

From a hermeneutic approach, in the first circle the Unity of God, and in the second circle the Unity of God, as well as the

appointment of Muhammad as God’s Messenger are stated. In the third circle, besides the two statements of faith discussed above, the absolute authority of ‘Alī is also mentioned. As these three sayings are the Shī’a statements of faith, they have been inscribed on the most important and visible structure of Gawharshād Mosque, which is the dome. The dome is symbolic of the sky, and, therefore, the inscription of these statements on the dome further emphasise their Divine nature. Furthermore, through the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and ‘Alī, the first Imām in Shī’a Islam and the fourth rightly guided caliph in Sunnī Islam, the believer can reach the Divine sky, as symbolised by the dome. The colours brown and ultramarine are a metaphor for the connection between earth and sky, and unity of Divine sky and earth.

The apex of the ceiling, which is the centre of all the other decorative elements of the ceiling, is decorated with a *shamsah* in ultramarine mu’arraḡ tilework with white thuluth calligraphy (figure 15). The inscription consists of Chapter 112 *Al-‘Ikhlās* (The Sincerity) and at the centre of the *shamsah*, the name of the architect, Hajī Muhammad is also inscribed.

“Say, “He is Allāh, [who is] One, Allāh, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent.” (112: 1-4)

Circle is symbolic of the Eternal Essence of God, including Luminosity, Completeness, Perfection and Eternal Truth. In the circle, Chapter 112 *Al-‘Ikhlās* (The Sincerity), which describes the Essence and Attributes of God, has been portrayed in an artistic manner. As God is the centre of all existence, He is displayed on the focal point of the dome of Gawharshād Mosque. He is One, and has a Needless Existence, whilst His creation is permanently dependent on Him. God is the Necessary Being, as He was not born; and contingent beings are created by Him. His creation is a manifestation of His most Beautiful Names.

The outer border of the ceiling, where the drum and the inner body of Iwān Maqsūra meet, is adorned with doubled-lined white thuluth calligraphy painted on green plasterwork. The inscription consists of verses 1-41 of Chapter 36 *Yāsīn*, with the ‘In the name of God’, at the beginning of the chapter written in gold thuluth, instead of white. From a hermeneutic approach, this chapter is considered the heart of Qur’ān, and is, therefore, written both on the dome’s ceiling and the exterior of the dome, which will be discussed later. Islamic beliefs are discussed in *Yāsīn*, starting with the appointment of Prophet Muhammad as the Messenger of God, and continue with questions regarding the Day of Resurrection, and the characteristics of heaven and hell. These verses were inscribed to be seen, and understood by the believers.

The exterior of the dome, covered in turquoise tilework, is forty-one meters in height and ten meters in diameter. The drum of the dome is covered with ultramarine mu’arraḡ tilework with double-lined white thuluth calligraphy, and sits on two squares (figure 16). The inscription, similar to the inscription decorating the inner ceiling, consists of verses 1- 52 of Chapter 36 *Yāsīn*, and ends with ‘The architect, Muhandes Abbās Āfarande 1967 CE’. By looking at the Qur’ānic verses inscribed on the dome of Gawharshād Mosque, the believer becomes aware of the message of these verses, which are piety, practical faith and spiritual awareness.

Similar to the inscriptions decorating the inner ceiling of the dome, the turquoise tilework covering the exterior of the dome is decorated with the Shī’a declaration of faith eight times (figure 17). The inscription “There is no god but God” is inscribed in yellow bannā’ī kufic calligraphy, with black borders. There are two inscriptions in smaller size, which overlap this inscription. The first overlapping inscription is “Muhammad is the Messenger of God”, which is inscribed in white bannā’ī kufic calligraphy. The second overlapping inscription, positioned below the first one, is “Alī is the Guardian of God”, which is inscribed in dark red bannā’ī kufic calligraphy. The saying “There is no god but God” is at the centre,

emphasising the centralism of monotheism in Islamic beliefs. The Shī'a declaration of faith was positioned on the exterior of the dome of Gawharshād Mosque to be seen and understood by the believers, and emphasise the role of Gawharshād Mosque as a holy monument of Islam. Underneath these inscriptions, there is a single row of eight-angle stars, in yellow and black, with a white and turquoise diamond in the centre.

In Islamic teachings, God is manifested in both the internal and external aspects of both His creations, and human-made creations. In Gawharshād Mosque, which is the symbol of humankind's social and spiritual relationship with God, the presence of God and His messages are manifested through the exterior and interior of the dome. Therefore, the inscription of verses 1-52 of Chapter 36 *Yāsīn*, and the Shī'a declaration of faith have been portrayed in both the exterior and interior of the dome, in accordance to the above mentioned Islamic principle. Through the use of holy words from the Qur'ān, the artist has been able to transform simple earthly and material elements, into a holy symbol.

8. Minaret

The two minarets of Gawharshād Mosque are situated on either side of Iwān Maqsūra. They are cylindrical in shape and have a height of forty-one meters, and a diameter of three meters. Furthermore, as Pope states, the minaret of Gawharshād Mosque “stretch right down to the ground, whereas previously in Persian proper, iwān minaret had risen from the parapet of the niche-facades.”³⁷ There is a staircase, which leads to the balcony on the top part of the minarets, where the ‘*muezzin*’, or person who calls to prayer, stands. Above the balcony, there is a cylindrical structure, decorated with mu'arraq tilework, adorned with arabesque, floral and vegetal motif in brown, green, ultramarine, white, turquoise. The cylindrical structure ends in a large sphere made from the same material and decoration, which is topped by three progressively smaller metal spheres ending with a flat disc-like plate (figure 18). The *adhān*³⁸ from the minaret

can be seen as a symbol for the call of prayer from heaven to all humankind on earth.

The minarets are decorated with five sections of calligraphic inscriptions. The base of each minaret is decorated with mu'arraḡ tilework inscribed with nine verses of Persian poetry in double-lined white *nasta'liq* calligraphy on an ultramarine background (figure 19). Each verse is separated with arabesque *toranj*s in yellow, turquoise, white, red and black. The poetic verses praise Imām Rezā and Hesām al-Saltaneh, who commissioned the renovation of Gawharshād Mosque in 1858 CE. Above the poetry panel, the saying "There is no god but God" is inscribed on mu'arraḡ tilework in yellow kufic calligraphy, with ultramarine borders, on brickwork background. Furthermore, the inscription "The pure words, there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" inscribed in green bannā'ī kufic calligraphy, with white diamond shaped patterns on tilework, overlaps with the Islamic monotheistic belief in God (figure 20). As this saying is the main pillar of Islam, it is displayed on the cylindrical minarets. Additionally, this message is also inscribed permanently on the wall of the minarets to reiterate the call to prayer, which is sung artistically from the minaret, saying "I testify that there is no god, but God".

The third section of calligraphic inscriptions, inscribed in 1677 CE, are eight mihrāb shaped mu'arraḡ tilework panels, alternating with ahadīth from Prophet Muhammad and Imām 'Alī, and vegetal and arabesque designed panels. The mu'arraḡ tilework panels decorating the eastern minaret are inscribed with the following four ahadīth in yellow thuluth calligraphy on an ultramarine background: "Prophet Muhammad said: this world is the field for the hereafter" (figure 21), "Prophet Muhammad said: this world is hell for the believer, and paradise for the sinner" (figure 22), "Prophet Muhammad said: this world is worthless, and is loved by dogs" (figure 23), and "'Alī said: hurry towards repentance, before death" (figure 24). The ahadīth panels on the western minaret in white

thuluth calligraphy on an ultramarine background, state: “Prophet Muhammad said: prayer is the journey to heaven for the believer” (figure 25), “Prophet Muhammad said: whoever stops praying on purpose, is a sinner” (figure 26), “Prophet Muhammad said: life is short, so be obedient” (figure 27), “Alī said: hurry towards prayer, before death” (figure 28).

From a hermeneutic approach, the *ahādīth* on the eastern minaret are based on Islamic world-view principles of the world and the hereafter. Humanity’s behaviour and practices affect their life in the hereafter. Whilst the believer follows God’s orders and repents when he does any wrongdoing, the sinner believes this world to be heaven. The *ahādīth* on the western minaret are in regards to humanity’s spiritual behaviour, with praying being the most important act. These inscriptions are inscribed on the minarets, to focus the believer on the finite nature of the material world, and the importance of prayer and spirituality. The artist has been able to beautifully establish a connection between the temporal life and eternal life through the use of the above calligraphic inscriptions, and bring close the earth and the sky, as the minarets start on earth and reach the sky.

There are forty-three rows of toranj medallions made of mu’arraḡ tilework decorating the middle section of the minaret walls, set on a brickwork background. They are decorated with alternating arabesque and vegetal motifs in ultramarine, brown, green, white and turquoise, and God’s Beautiful Names (*Asmā’ Al-Husnā*), in white thuluth calligraphy on an ultramarine background, which date back to 1677 CE and 1960 CE (figure 29). Some of the names inscribed are: The Merciful, The Hidden, The Compeller, The All-Knowing and The Everlasting. In the *adhān*, the *muezzin* artistically sings some of God’s beautiful names, and in parallel, with the use of various artistic elements such as calligraphy, the artist has also portrayed some of God’s Beautiful Names.

The fifth section of calligraphic inscriptions, inscribed in 1858 CE, is located below the muqarnas decorations, adorning the bottom section of the balconies. The muqarnas decorations are covered with multi-coloured mu'arraaq tilework, depicting arabesque and vegetal motifs. The calligraphic inscriptions in double-lined yellow thuluth calligraphy on an ultramarine background, consists of verse 9 of Chapter 62 *Al-Jumu'ah* (The Congregation, Friday) on the eastern minaret and verse 10 of the same chapter on the western minaret (figure 30). These verses emphasise the importance of Friday prayer, as it is considered one of the most important Islamic social gatherings. One of the differences between daily prayer and Friday prayer is that there are two sermons in Friday prayer, in which the social, economical, and political issues of the time, as well as the importance of spirituality, piety and ethics are discussed. Elaborate symbolism is evident in the two sermons of Friday prayer, and the two Qur'ānic verses decorating the upper part of the two minarets. Through the symbolic symmetry of the two Qur'ānic verses on the two minarets, the artist has depicted the secretive and symbolic relationship between the visible and the invisible world. The sacred art and sacred words used in architecture, act as a bridge between the visible and invisible world. In Gawharshād Mosque, the bridge between the visible and invisible world, is between the two minarets and the turquoise dome situated above the Iwān Maqsūra, as they represent the symbolic union of earth and sky. Through this bridge, between earth and sky, one can travel spiritually between the two worlds, by the personal act of prayer and the social act of Friday prayers.

9. Conclusion

As part of the Imām Rezā Shrine Complex, the Gawharshād Mosque is annually visited by millions of pilgrims. It is an example of different Islamic art forms, such as tilework, brickwork, stonework, arabesque, geometric, vegetal and floral motifs, muqarnas, calligraphic inscriptions, plasterwork and paintings carried out in the highest possible quality. The tilework of the

Gawharshād Mosque is exquisite in nature and is one of its unique features.

The mosque is a venue for establishing a spiritual relationship with God through acts of worship and contemplation, and, as such, the Islamic art decoration and architecture compliment each other, creating an aesthetically pleasing sacred space. The Gawharshād Mosque is vast in size, and both its decoration and architecture are exquisite and detailed in nature; thus, we have chosen examples of the prototypes of the mosque, and the most important locations of the Gawharshād mosque as the subject of this study. For example, although the Gawharshād mosque has four iwāns, the Iwān Maqsūra is the most important, as it is the location of the Qibla wall, the mihrāb, and the dome is also above this iwān. Thus, this iwān has been chosen amongst the four iwāns to be studied in detail.

The calligraphic inscriptions discussed in this study are verses of the Qur'ān, prophetic ahadīth, devotees' prayers, names of God, artist's names, Persian poetry, Muslim proclamation of faith and the commissioner's reasons for building the mosque. Through the employment of these calligraphic inscriptions, the importance of the mosque, the significance of prayer as a vehicle for reaching God, Divine Unity (*tawhīd*), Day of Resurrection, Divine Attributes of God and the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad and the *Imāmah* (Divine Guardianship) of Imām 'Alī have been discussed.

Although Gawharshād Mosque's architecture and decoration have been the subject of a few studies in western literature on Islamic art, there is room for more studies to be carried out on the symbolic meaning of the mosque. In this study, rather than simply taking a descriptive approach to the study of the mosque, I have also identified and discussed the symbolic elements of the mosque, and interpreted the relationship between the different parts of its architecture and decoration through the application of hermeneutics, which makes this study unique both in western and eastern literature on the topic. Through this approach, both the parts and the whole of

the mosque have been placed in the hermeneutic circle and analysed, and the relationship of the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts has been discussed. For example, in looking at each tilework, the colours, the decorative motifs, calligraphic inscriptions and location are first identified and their symbolism is discussed, and in the next step the relationship of these parts with one another, and their symbolism and meaning as a whole has been analysed and discussed, making this study an interpretative study, which contributes constructively to the study of Islamic art in general, and the Gawharshād Mosque in particular.

Bibliography

Ardalān, Nader and Lāleh Bakhtiār (2000) *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*. 2nd ed. Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc.

‘Atārūdī, ‘Azīzallāh (2007) *Tārīkh Āstāan Quds Razavī*. Vol. 2. Tehrān: Enteshārāt-e ‘Atārod.

Blair, Sheila S. and Jonathon M. Bloom (1995) *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250 – 1800*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Blair, Sheila S. and Jonathon M. Bloom (2009) *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*. [e-book] USA: Oxford University Press. Available through School of Oriental and African Studies Library Website: < <http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/>> [Accessed 2 September 2013].

Burckhardt, Titus (2001) *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*. Translated from French by Lord Northbourne. Kentucky: FONS VITAE.

Clarke, Deborah and Michael Clarke (2010) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*. 2nd ed. [e-book] USA: Oxford University Press. Available through School of Oriental and African Studies Library Website: < <http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/>> [Accessed 2 September 2013]. Curl, James Stevens (2006) *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*. 2nd ed. [e-book] Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available through School of Oriental and

African Studies Library Website: < <http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/>> [Accessed 2 September 2013].

Etemād Al-Saltaneh, Muhammad Hassan Khān (1983) *Matle'a Al-Shams*. Vol. 2. Tehrān: Pishgām.

Ghassābian, Muhammad Reza (2005) 'Masjid Gawharshād Pas Az Sheshsad Sāl'. In Vol. 86 (Spring) *Meshkāt*. pp. 97-106.

Golombek, Lisa and Donald Wilber (1988) *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*. Vol. I. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Husseinī, Seyyed Mohsen (2003) 'Iwān Maqsūra Masjid Gawharshād'. In Vol. 80 (Autumn) *Meshkāt*. pp. 107-119.

Jackson, Peter and Laurence Lockhart (1986) *Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*. Vol. 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kiāsari, 'Amer Amīnī (2011) *Boniān hāie Naza'i Hendesī va Tazā'ināt dar Memārī Masjid Gawharshād*. Mashhad: Enteshārāt-e Āhang-e Ghalam.

Michell, George (ed.) (1995) *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.

Mossadeghiān Torghabe, Vahīde (2005) *Naghsh va Rang dar Masjid Gawharshād*. Tehrān: Enteshārāt-e Ketāb-e Ābān.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1987) *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Albany: State University of New York Press (SUNY).

O'Kane, Bernard (1987) *Timurid Architecture in Khurasan*. California: Mazda Publishers in association with Undena Publications.

Pope, Arthur (1965) *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Vol. III. Tehrān-London-Tokyo: Manāfzādeh Group Publications, Oxford University Press and Meiji-Shobo Publications.

Safavi, Hasti (2013) 'A Hermeneutic Approach to the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safī al-Din Ardabili's Shrine Ensemble and *Khaṅqaḅh*' In Vol. 14, *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism*, 7-32.

Sayyedī, Mehdī (2007) *Masjid va Moghūfāt-e Gawharshād*. Tehrān: Boniād-e Pazhūhesh va Tose'eie Farhang-e vaqf.

Shāiestefar, Mahnāz (2010) ‘Tazīnāt va Katībe hāie Qur’āni Do Majmū’ie Gawharshād Mashhad va Herat’. In Vol. 12 (Spring – Summer) *Do Fasl-nāmeie Elmī va Pazshūheshī Motāleāt Honar Islamī*. pp. 73-98.

Zangeneh, Ibrāhīm (2011) *Masjid Gawharshād va Vaqāie’a Mohemme Ān*. Mashhad: Āstān Quds Razavī.

Glossary

Bast: The exit corridors interconnecting the courtyards.

Iwān: “Vaulted hall with walls on three sides and completely open on the fourth side.”³⁹

Mihrāb: “A niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca, towards which Muslims should face when at prayer.”⁴⁰

Muqarnas: “Small pointed niches, used in tiers projecting over those below.”⁴¹

Shabestān: hall or space in a mosque, used for prayer and meditation.

Shamsah: Sun shaped motif

Toranj: It is the Persian name for Bergamot orange. In Islamic art toranj is referred to a design that resembles Bergamot orange, and is filled with geometric, arabesque, floral and vegetal motifs. However, on occasions, the toranj design has no resemblance to the toranj fruit.

Figures

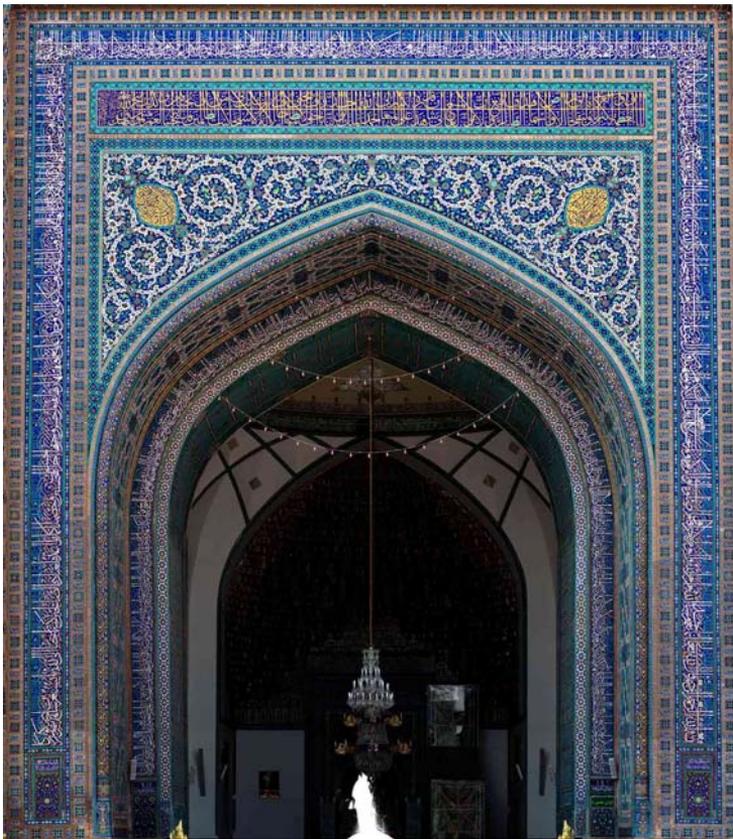


Figure 1 – Outer border of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 2 – Western calligraphic inscription panel at the base of the outer border of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 3 – Eastern calligraphic inscription panel at the base of the outer border of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 4 – Calligraphic inscription panel decorating the top and bottom of the outer border of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 5 – Calligraphic inscription panel situated below the outer border of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 6 – Eastern toranj medallion situated above the outer arch of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 7 – Western toranj medallion situated above the outer arch of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 8 – Eastern calligraphic inscription panel decorating the outer arch's ceiling of Iwān Maqsūra



Figure 9 – Western calligraphic inscription panel decorating the outer arch's ceiling of Iwān Maqsūra

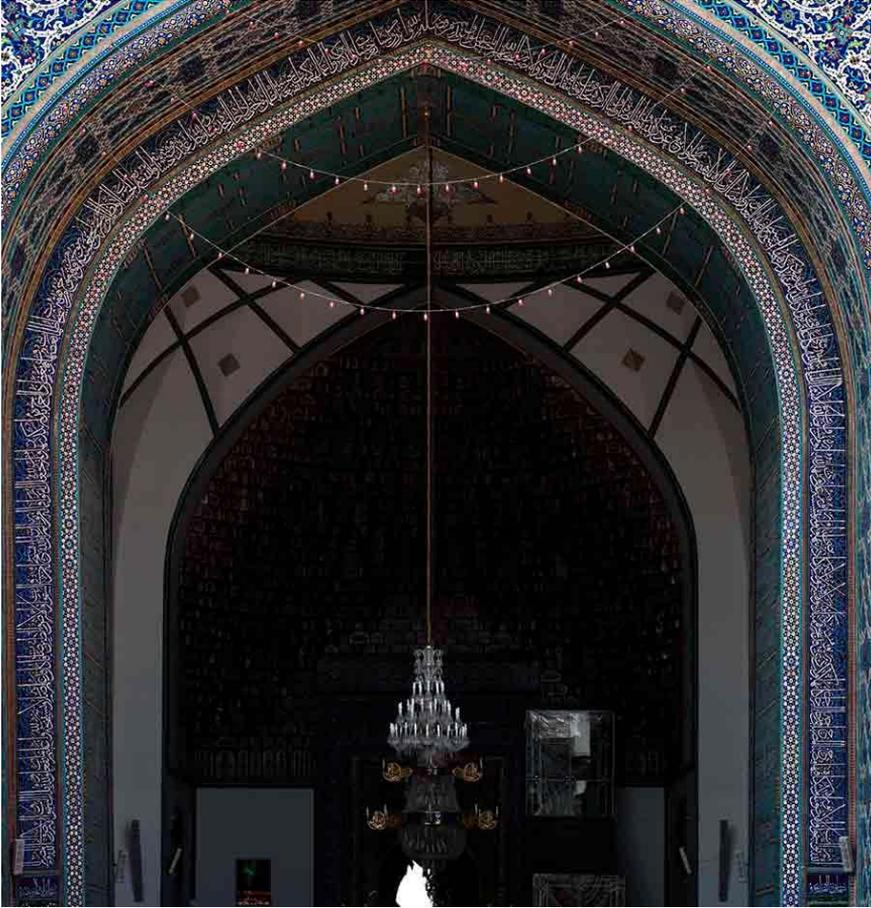


Figure 10 – Inner arch of Iwān Maqsūra

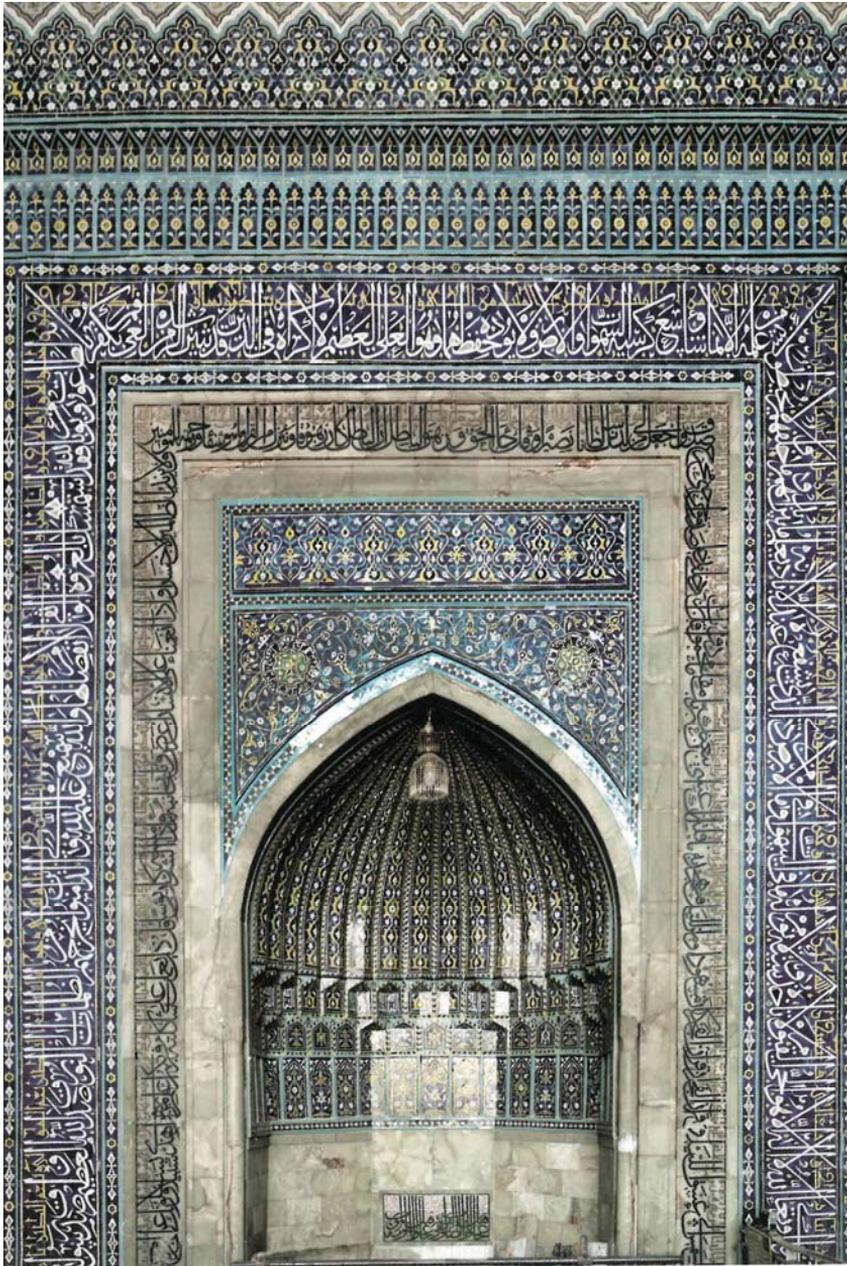


Figure 11 – Outer border of the mihrāb

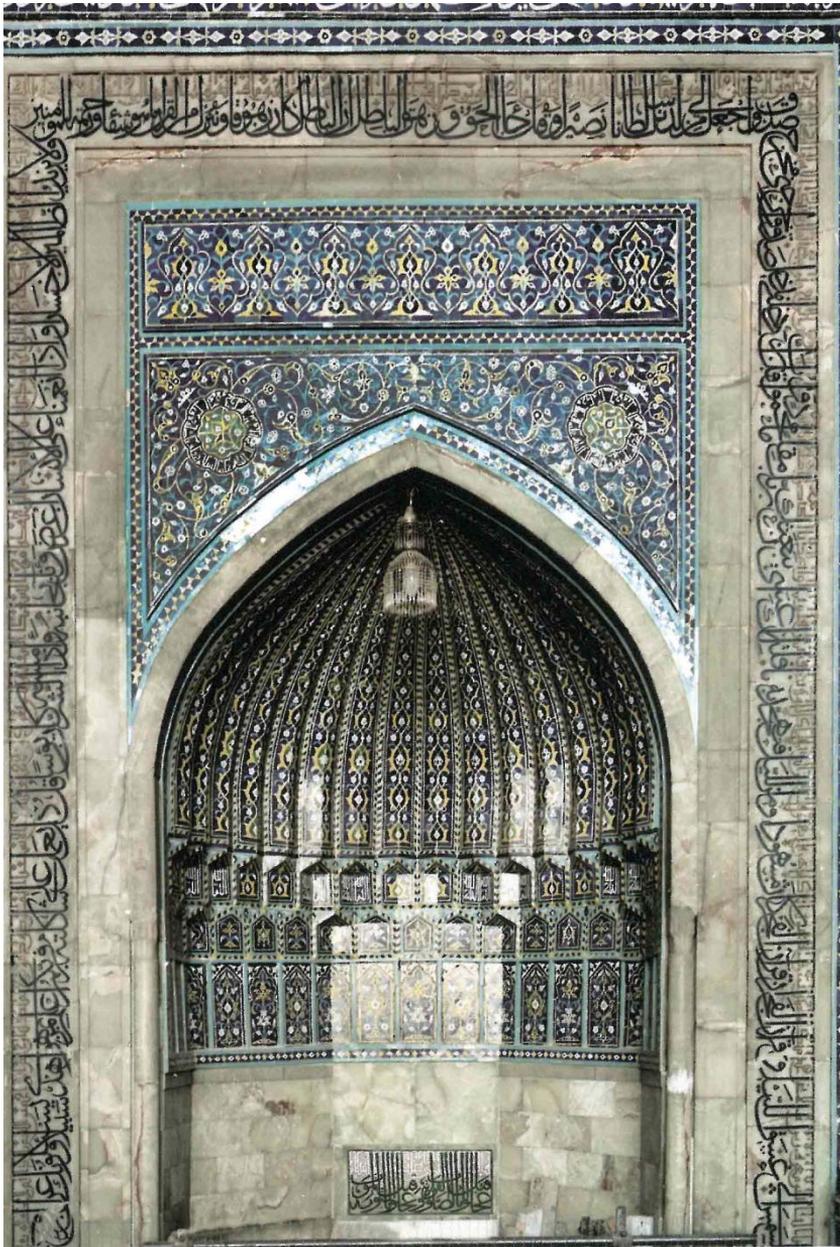


Figure 12 – Inner border of the mihrāb

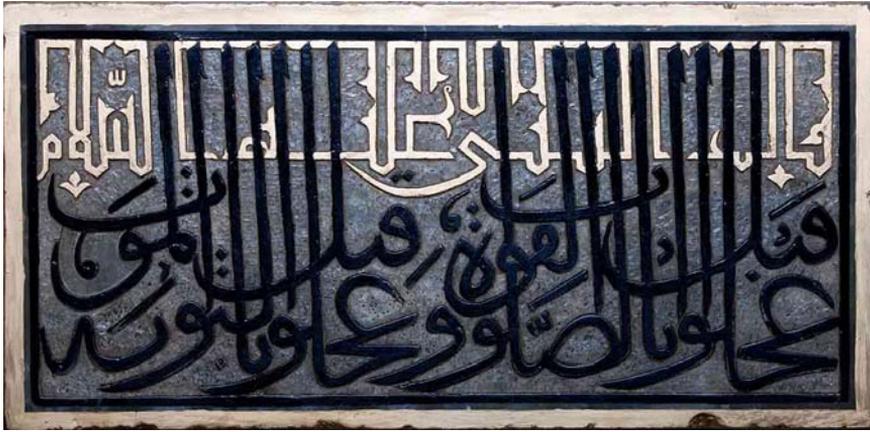


Figure 13 – Calligraphic inscription panel situated at the bottom of the mihrāb

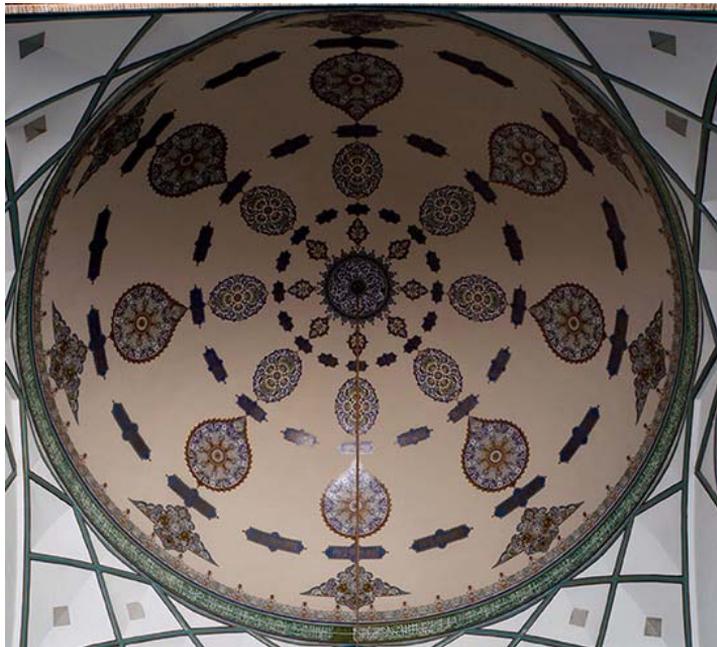


Figure14 – The dome's ceiling

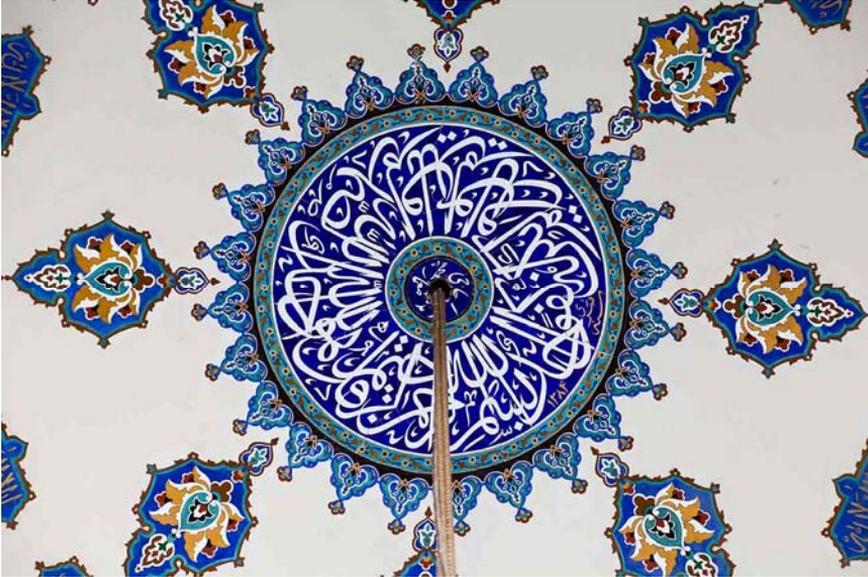


Figure 15 – A shamsah decorating the apex of the dome's ceiling, adorned with calligraphic inscriptions



Figure 16 – Calligraphic inscription panel decorating the exterior of the dome's drum

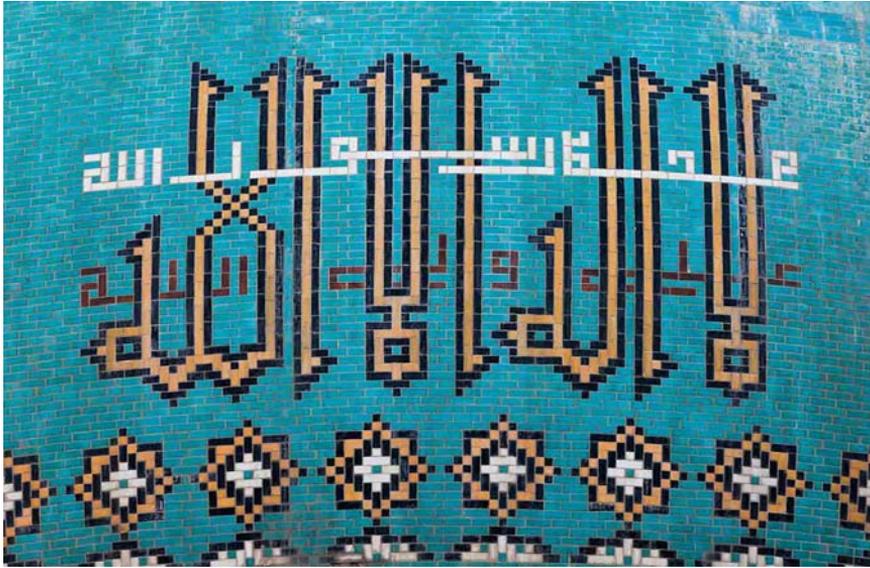


Figure 17 – The dome's exterior

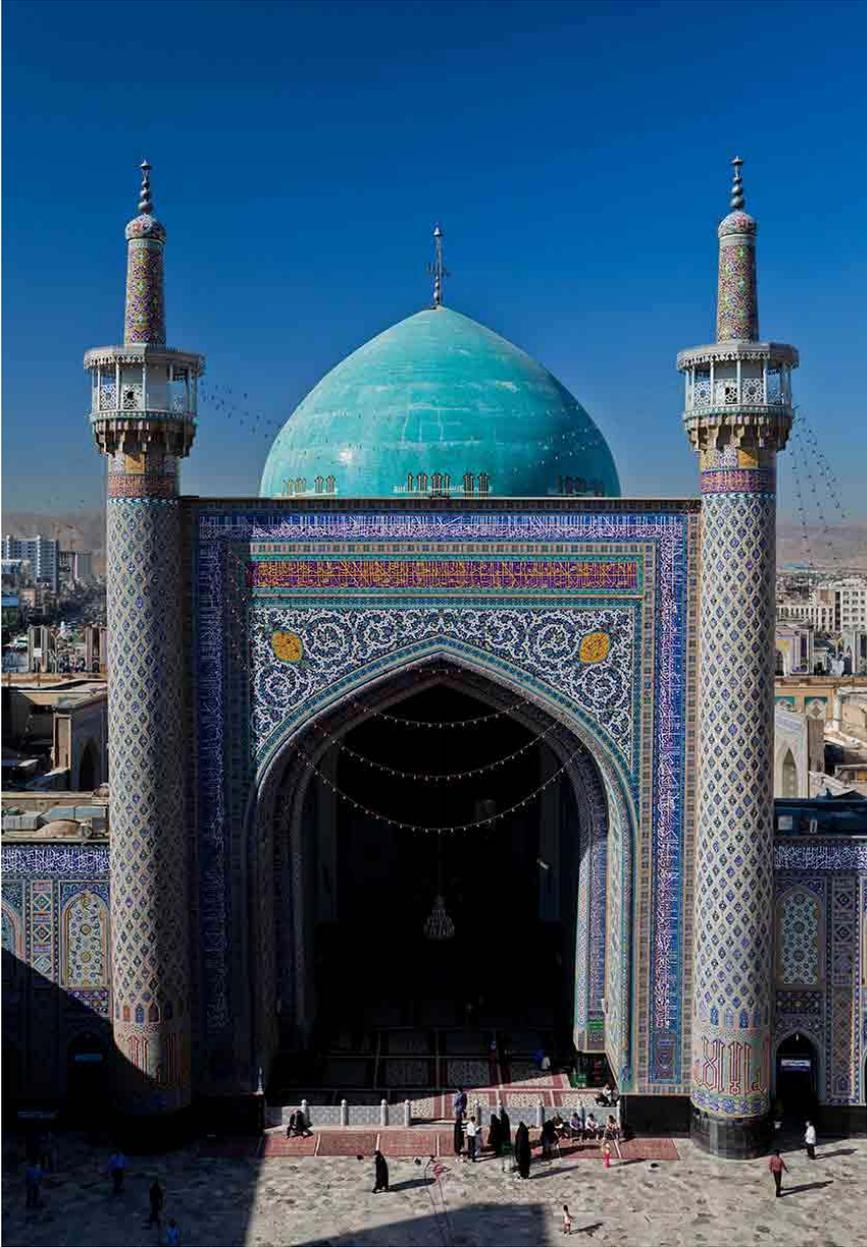


Figure 18 – The two minarets of Gawharshād Mosque



Figure 19 – The calligraphic inscription panel’s first section, decorating the base of the eastern minaret

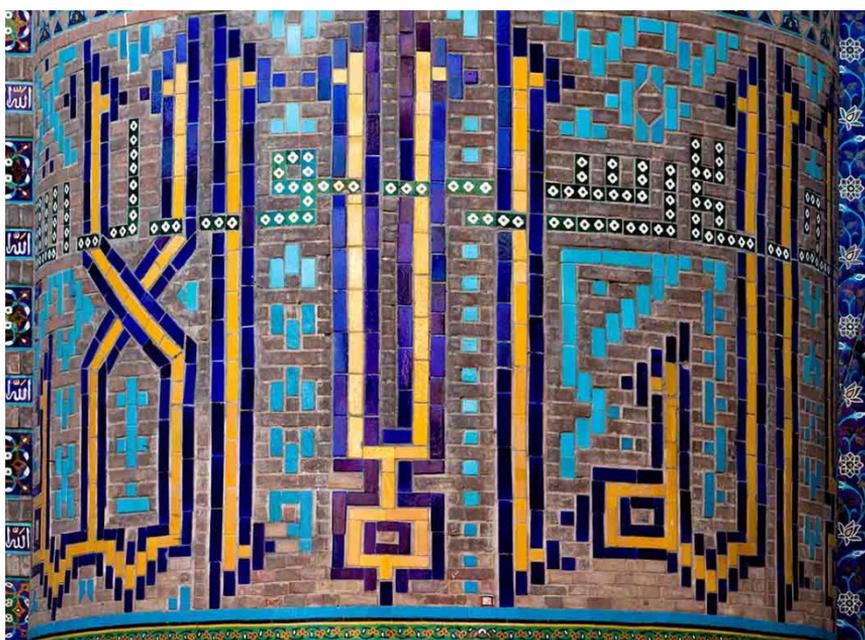


Figure 20 – The second section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minarets



Figure 21 – The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – first hadīth on the eastern minaret



Figure 22 – The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – second hadīth on the eastern minaret



Figure 23 – The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – third hadīth on the eastern minaret



Figure 24 – The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – fourth hadīth on the eastern minaret



Figure 25 - The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – first hadīth on the western minaret



Figure 26 - The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – second hadīth on the western minaret

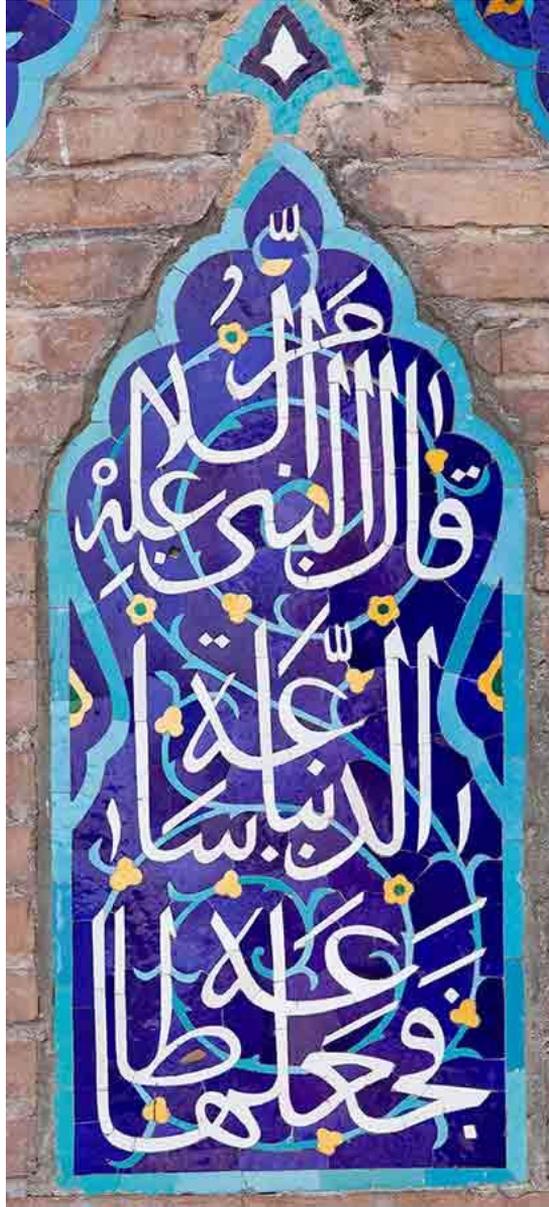


Figure 27 - The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – third hadīth on the western minaret



Figure 28 - The third section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minaret – fourth hadith on the western minaret

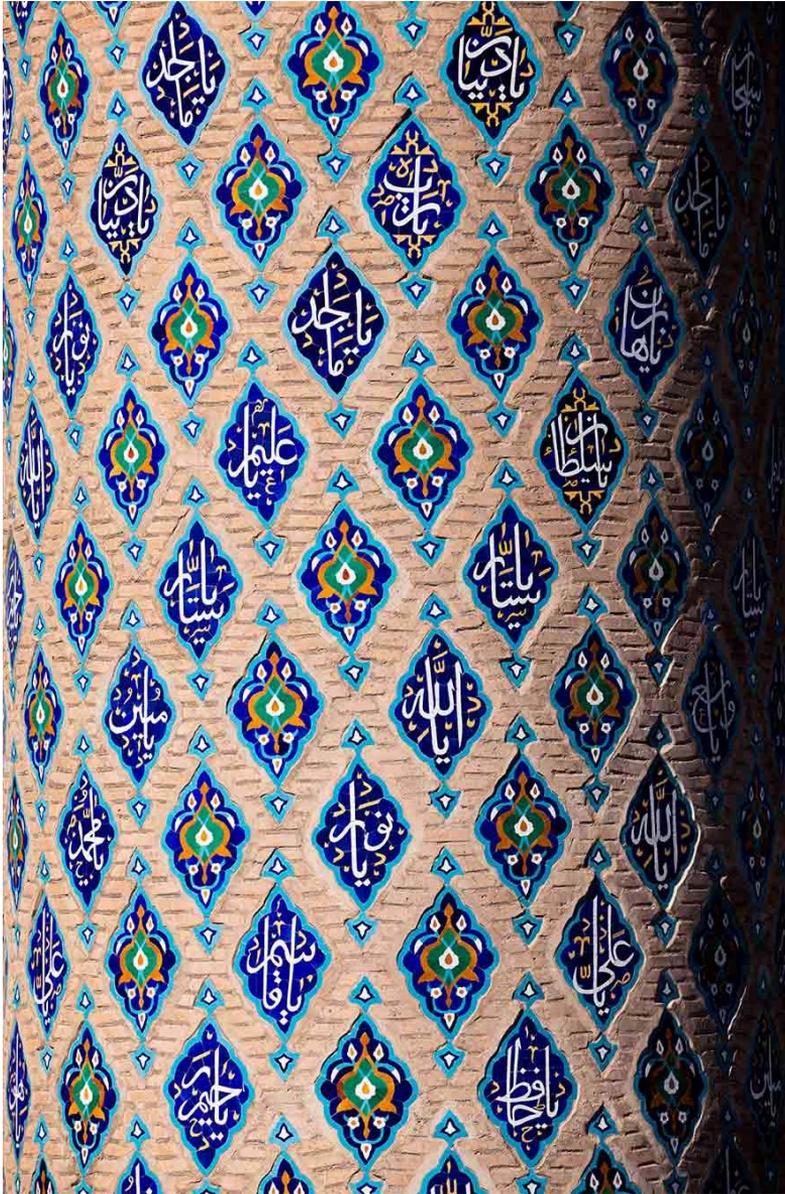


Figure 29 – The fourth section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the minarets



Figure 30 – The fifth section of calligraphic inscriptions decorating the western minaret

Endnotes

¹ This work would not have been possible without the help and corporation of Ayatollah Vaez Tabbasi, Grand Custodian of Āstān Quds Razavī, Mr Mustafa Tabbasi, Counsellor and Office Chief of Grand Custodian of Āstān Quds Razavī, Mr Zahedi, Director of Organisation of Libraries, Museums and Documents Centre of Āstān Quds Razavī, Mr Amirinia, Deputy Director of Organisation of Libraries, Museums and Documents Centre of Āstān Quds Razavī, Ms Habibi, Librarian of Āstān Quds Razavī Library, Mr Aynechian, the great artist and craftsman of Imām Rezā Shrine Complex, and Mr Hassani, Director of Anthropology Museum of Āstān Quds Razavī.

² Safavi, Hasti (2013) 'A Hermeneutic Approach to the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili's Shrine Ensemble and *Khaṅqāh*' In Vol. 14, *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism*, 8.

³ Direction of prayer

⁴ The collection of photographs included in this assignment is from the Āstān Quds Razavī's collection, which they have kindly allowed me to use for my work, as it is not permissible to take photographs in the Shrine Complex due to security reasons.

⁵ Golombek, Lisa and Donald Wilber (1988) *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*. Vol. I. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 24.

⁶ Kiāsarī, 'Amer Amīnī (2011) *Boniān hāie Nazaī Hendesī va Tazīnāt dar Memārī Masjid Gawharshād*. Mashhad: Enteshārāt-e Āhang-e Ghalam, 18.

⁷ O'Kane, Bernard (1987) *Timurid Architecture in Khurasan*. California: Mazda Publishers in association with Undena Publications, 4-6.

⁸ Mystic

⁹ Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 45.

¹⁰ Household of Prophet Muhammad

¹¹ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1987) *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Albany: State University of New York Press (SUNY), 38.

¹² The journey of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina

¹³ Blair, Sheila S. and Jonathon M. Bloom (1995) *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250 – 1800*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 37.

¹⁴ Shāiestefar, Mahnāz (2010) ‘Tazīnāt va Katībe hāie Qur’āni Do Majmū’ie Gawharshād Mashhad va Herat’. In Vol. 12 (Spring – Summer) *Do Fasnāmeie Elmī va Pazshūheshī Motāleāt Honar Islamī*, 75.

¹⁵ School or educational establishment

¹⁶ Blair and Bloom, *Art and Architecture of Islam*, 40.

¹⁷ ‘Atārūdī, ‘Azīzallāh (2007) *Tārīkh Āstāan Quds Razavī*. Vol. 2. Tehrān: Enteshārāt-e ‘Atārod, 756.

¹⁸ Ablution: washing parts of the body, in preparation for prayer

¹⁹ Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 329.

²⁰ Sayings of Prophet Muhammad and his household

²¹ Etemād Al-Saltaneh, Muhammad Hassan Khān (1983) *Matle’a Al-Shams*. Vol. 2. Tehrān: Pishgām, 139.

²² Sayyedī, Mehdī (2007) *Masjid va Moghūfāt-e Gawharshād*. Tehrān: Boniād-e Pazshūhesh va Tose’ie Farhang-e vaqf, 52.

²³ Jackson, Peter and Laurence Lockhart (1986) *Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*. Vol. 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 142.

²⁴ Building created for Sufī gatherings

²⁵ Kiāsarī, *Boniān hāie Nazaī Hendesī*, 69.

²⁶ Burckhardt, Titus (2001) *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*. Translated from French by Lord Northbourne. Kentucky: FONS VITAE, 136.

²⁷ Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 144.

²⁸ Nasr, *Islamic Art*, 49.

²⁹ Nasr, *Islamic Art*, 50-55.

³⁰ Ardalān, Nader and Lāleh Bakhtiār (2000) *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*. 2nd ed. Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc, 47-56.

³¹ Kiāsarī, *Boniān hāie Nazaī Hendesī*, 107-113.

³² I have a detailed discussion on this topic, in the section titled “Decoration” in my article: Hasti Safavi (2013), ‘A Hermeneutic Approach to the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili’s Shrine Ensemble and *Khaṅqaḅh*’ In Vol. 14 (December), *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism*, 7-32.

³³ Pope, Arthur (1965) *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Vol. III. Tehrān-London-Tokyo: Manāfzādeh Group Publications, Oxford University Press and Meiji-Shobo Publications, 1124.

³⁴ Invocation of God's name

³⁵ Sayyedī, *Masjid va Moghūfāt-e Gawharshād*, 47.

³⁶ Husseinī, Seyyed Mohsen (2003) 'Iwān Maqsūra Masjid Gawharshād'. In Vol. 80 (Autumn) *Meshkāt*, 109.

³⁷ Pope, Survey of Persian Art, 1124.

³⁸ Call to prayer

³⁹ Blair, Sheila S. and Jonathon M. Bloom (2009) *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*. [e-book] USA: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Clarke, Deborah and Michael Clarke (2010) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*. 2nd ed. [e-book] USA: Oxford University Press.

⁴¹ Curl, James Stevens (2006) *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*. 2nd ed. [e-book] Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Islamic Spirituality and the Needs of Humanity Today
- in commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the
death of the founder of the Safaviyyah Sufi order,
Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili ¹**

Seyyed Hossein Nasr
George Washington University, USA

Transcribed by Pedram Emrouznejad

Introduction:

Rabbi yassir wa la tu'assir [My Lord, make it easy for me, and do not make it difficult].

My dear friend, Dr. Safavi, who is like my brother, asked me to come here to London, the subject of this talk - *Islamic Spirituality and the needs of Humanity today, in commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the death of the master of Gnostics and the founder of the Safaviyyah Sufi order, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili*, was chosen actually by Dr. Safavi and his assistants.

Sheikh Safi ad-Din Ardabili is one of the most important figures of Islamic history:

I would like to begin by mentioning the 700th anniversary of Sheikh Safi ad-Din Ardabili (1252–1334 CE) the founder of Safaviyyah Sufi order and the origin of the later Safavid dynasty (1501–1736 CE) in Iran. Although he is not as well known in Western Orientalism as he should be, he is one of the most important figures

of Islamic history, not only in *tasawwuf*, but also in history itself, because it was he who founded the seminal and extremely important *silsilah/tariqah of tasawwuf* two centuries before the rise of the Safavid period (1501–1736 CE)²; that in turn led to a transformation of Iran into a state for the first time after 900 years; and so all Persians, and Persians of that time included all of Afghanistan and much of Central Asia and Caucasia and for a while of Iraq, owe a great deal to this remarkable man whose spiritual heritage is very much alive in Iran today.

The Safaviyyah Sufi order is of great importance in the recent centuries of Iranian history. Not only did this Sufi order completely transformed Iran's political and social history, and for the first time after the demise of the Sassanid's unified Iran, but it also from the very beginning was a Shi'a Sufi order and had a fundamental role in transforming Iran into a Twelver Shi'a country. Throughout Islamic history there has been no other instance in which a Sufi order has such a great and continuous political influence in a large country such as Iran.

Near the end of the Safaviyyah dynasty there was opposition to Sufism in general and the Safaviyyah Sufi order in particular by some of the literalist clerics, the result of which was not only the exile of Mulla Sadra from Isfahan to Kahak, but also resulted in the spiritual weakening of society, as it caused social conditions which made the attack of the Afghan's successful in ending the reign of the Safavid dynasty. This catastrophe marked the end of the political life of the Safaviyyah Sufi order, but the Twelver Shi'a Iran that they had established remained. Although the Safaviyyah Sufi order was removed from Iran's political landscape, its spiritual heritage continued its life, and as such this heritage is of great importance even today.

The Safaviyyah Sufi order is being revived fortunately during the last few years, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Safavi³ and his colleagues and friends within the country. We are all grateful to him. I believe

that the revival of the Safavid order will play an important role in the future of Iran itself and the areas around it.⁴

Definition of spirituality:

What do we mean by spirituality? The term spirituality is a newcomer to Western languages. In the 16th/17th century, you never saw this word. When there was so much spirituality in the West, no one in English spoke about spirituality, you will not find a single text during those periods for example. The word began to be used actually in the late 18th, early 19th century in French – *la spiritualité* - and gradually came to the English language. It is both a very important term, and a very ambiguous term for many. In America, where I teach now, and much of Europe, many people are interested in spirituality but not religion. It's like saying they all love walnuts, but they don't like the shell that contains the nuts. That is unfortunately one of the characteristics of our day to which I stand extremely opposed. There is also a great deal of pseudo-spirituality that is going around. Let's just remember the word spirituality comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means *ruh* in Arabic. In Arabic and Persian we have two words for it, *ruhaniyah* and *ma'nawiyah* in Arabic, but we use *ma'nawiyat* mostly in Persian, the Arabs don't use it in this sense always. These two terms, the word *ma'nawiyat* - from the word *ma'na* in Arabic meaning - the meaning of things, the inner meaning of things. Of course, *ruhaniyah*, coming from the *ruh* itself, is a Quranic term, used several times in the Quran, especially in the famous phrase “*ar-ruh min amri rabbi*”. So technically anything spiritual, should be “*min amri rabbi*” (from God). It should deal with the spirit. It is in this light I should discuss Islamic spirituality.

There is so much pseudo spirituality going on in our world that one needs to emphasise this at the very beginning. There is no possibility of access to the spirit except through the forms the spirit has revealed to us in the various religions of the world. Therefore the sacredness of the shell, of the outward aspect, is very important

to remember. Islamic spirituality can be defined as, in a more general sense, anything having to do with the spirit. The *ruh*. Of course that makes it a very very vast subject and starts with the Quran itself. We just heard the tilawah (recitation) of some verses of Surah Hadid, and you all, especially of those who are Muslims, felt that it was exuded with spirituality. The Quran is the source of all Islamic spirituality. Complimented by the *sunna* and the hadith of the Prophet^[S], the being of the Prophet^[S] and the presence of *walaya* in his being which is later on transmitted over the generations in various ways and through various channels. It creates Islamic spirituality in the technical sense.

That channel is two-fold as far as religion is concerned. But also has ramifications in the field of poetry, art and other fields I will get to in a moment. The two-fold is, first the crystallisation of Islamic spirituality in Sufism, which cuts across the Sunni-Shi'ite divide. There are Shi'ite orders like the Safavid order itself and there are Sunni orders and there are those which have both Sunni's and Shia's in them. It cuts across the whole spectrum. Secondly it is crystallised in the spiritual esoteric dimension of Shi'ism itself. Shi'ism itself has *fiqh* and law and so forth of course but I'm talking about the inner teachings which are very close to *tasawwuf* and issue from the same source and complement each other in many ways, to the extent that for example Imam Ridha^{5[A]} (765–818 C.E) the eighth Shi'ite Imam is also one of the poles of the Sunni Sufi orders; as with Imam Jafar As-Sadiq^{6[A]} (702–765 C.E) the Sixth Imam. His Quranic commentary is the first esoteric commentary which has survived. We do not have the Quranic commentary of Sayyidina Ali. They say he wrote a commentary but nobody has seen it. But that of Imam Jafar As-Sadiq^[A], at least part of it has survived and it is a great source of inspiration for both Sunni's and Shi'ites. So in a sense, Islamic spirituality cuts across the Sunni Shi'ite divide and in fact it is the most profound bridge between the two. There is no way really of being able to create an accord between these two major branches of Islam except through Islamic spirituality.

Now where does Islamic spirituality manifest itself? Let me say that first it manifests in the sharia itself. The daily prayers are both external forms of spiritual practice and inward forms of spiritual practice. The prophet who was the *insan kamil*, the Universal or Perfect Man, never stopped saying his daily prayers until he died. He died shortly after the last time he made ablution and said his prayers; so all the rights of the sharia, not only the salat, but all the other rites of course possess a spirituality of their own level. But I'm not going to deal with those tonight because of the limitation of time.

What I wish to deal with are the specific fields of Islam and civilisation which are the bedrock for the flow of spirituality over the centuries throughout the Islamic world and these include as I said first of all Sufi and Shi'ite esotericism. What is the goal of Sufism? The goal of Sufism is to go from the outward to the inward. We just read that "Huwal-'Awwalu wal-' Akhiru waz-' Zahiru wal-'Batin : wa Huwa bi-kulli shay-' in 'Aliim." (He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is knower of all things.) Sura Hadiid- Verse-3. Paradoxically God is also the *zahir* of things, the exterior of things; otherwise there would be no world. And that's the most difficult Divine thing to understand. How can God be *zahir* when we cannot see him? The Sufi's try to understand this by gaining access to the *batin*, and through the *batin* be able to understand that even the *zahir* is the *zahir* of the *batin*. That is, every outwardness is really a manifestation of an inner reality - of an inwardness. That is the goal of the Sufi life. To be able to first of all realise this within oneself. To live inwardly, to live from the centre, from the heart, where the Divine throne resides according to the famous hadith, "*qalb 'l-momin 'arsh ar-rahman*". God resides at the heart of all of us. Except many of us are ourselves alien to our own hearts. That is the source really of all spirituality and what tasawwuf tries to do is open up the doors of the heart to melt this crust. The Prophet^[S] referred so often melting of the heart, saying that the dhikr is the *dawa* [healing] for the heart to open the heart to the realities within it. One does not require to go anywhere else,

God is already right here within us. It is not only Christ that said the kingdom of God is within you. That is the exact parallel in the Quran and in the hadith of course.

Then of course there is the practices of the Prophet, which guides us how to reach this inner life, and all the authentic Sufi orders go back to him. The word Sufi was not used until the second century, but neither was the word Hanafi, Shafi'i or Jafari or many other very important religious terms. But the reality was there. In a sense, if there are no Taliban around, I can say that the Prophet was the first Sufi, in the deepest sense of the term. It is that Sufi that we try to emulate and follow. Follow the *sunnah* [way] of the Prophet, the *uswa hasana* [good example]. We try to live like him as much as we can, emulate his virtues and try to embellish the soul with the perfections which in their ultimate limit was given by God to the Prophet.

There is a living presence of *wilayah* through the 12th Imam who has never died:

In Shi'ism, this perfection is extended through the Imams. Through Sayyidina Ali who was the gate of this *wilayah*, this inner power of the Prophet. *Nubuwwah* – the prophecy – ended with the Prophet. He is the *khatam al-anbiya* [seal of the messengers]. But *wilayah* continued after him, and shall always be until the end of the world. The world cannot exist without the presence of *wilayah*. This is the belief of Sufi's in one way. In Shi'ism it is concretely embedded in the 12 Imams, the twelfth of whom of course for us is living - I am a 12th Imam Shi'ite, and although I write about Sufi'ism and Sunnism but I was born in Iran, I am a Seyyed [descendent of the Prophet]. So as a confessional aspect of what I present to you from myself is of course a belief that there is a living presence of *wilayah* through the 12th Imam who has never died and so there is always a spiritual guidance available in this world. There is no man and women who lives in any age who has the excuse that there was no spiritual guidance in my age; therefore I did not follow a path. There is

always a path that is open for those who wish to follow it. God always opens a path to them; this is one of the conditions of accepting the power of *wilayah*. The power of *wilayah* is also its presence. Not only is it guidance toward God, it is presence. To be human, I once wrote, is to live under the sky – and the sky always represents transcendence. There is no place on earth where there isn't a transcendent dimension. Wherever you are on earth from Borneo to cloudy London if you look up you'll see the sky, at least once in a while in London, other place in the world more often. You have to compensate for it inwardly, I don't know how you do it, but more power to you! The transcendence is always there. What *tasawwuf* tries to do is make us aware of this reality; to change our way of living. Our way of living is based on forgetfulness, *ghiflah*. What the Sufi's call *ghiflah*, negligence or forgetfulness. We forget; if we could only remember. If we'd only remember we'd all be saints. The Quran itself is *dhikrollah* [remembrance of God]. The whole Quran. It is there in order to allow us to remember. The greatest prayer that one can ask God, is God help us to remember to remember. The first remembrance is our remembrance, the second remembrance is the remembrance of God. That is the heart really of *tasawwuf*. Everything else is secondary. All the various movements. The *award* [spiritual practices], the sacred dancers, the sacred music, the great poetry, the great art that has been produced, all has one goal: the remembrance of God. To remember God at all times. That is the heart of Islamic spirituality, which Sufism has tried to preserve and despite all the ups and downs, especially in the last few centuries. The attacks made against it from two sides: the modernists and the so called fundamentalists, whether it be Wahhabi or Salafi, or whoever they are, who think that the walnut is there only to have a shell. They don't want to pay attention to what is inside, nevertheless it has survived and remains a living force within the Islamic world, with all the opposition that comes against it, and this opposition has resulted in catastrophes which we see in the Islamic world today. A pure outwardness which in the name of Islam destroyed all that is spiritual and beautiful in the tradition and in the civilisation.

The living esoteric presence in certain Shi'ite prayers:

In addition to that, you have within spirituality within Shi'ism, and I wish I had time to talk more about Shi'ite spirituality per se but I have to cover the whole field. In Shi'ism, in addition to the Sufi orders you have orders which are Shi'ite like the Safavid order, the Nimatullahi order and so forth, the Zahabi order in Shiraz. But you also have the living esoteric presence in certain Shi'ite prayers. In recitations, in intercession of the Imams, in contacts with the Imams and of course the Prophet who is the origin of the chain of the Imams and many other practices which are kind of eso-exotericism. So even ordinary Shi'ites are not aware of some of the deeper meanings of the prayers that they perform, like *Jawshan Kabbeer* (The Thousand Divine Names) or Dua Arafah which Sayyidina Hussein (after which I was named because I was born on his birthday) performed and which Dr. Safavi performed for me when we he went to Arafah a few years ago. That prayer itself is not just an ordinary religious prayer, it is a gnostic mystical esoteric prayer which contains almost all the truths of Islamic spirituality within itself, and there are many prayers of this kind. But human beings, being what they are, they need a whole civilisation in which this spirituality is present and the guarantee of tradition is to provide that. As far as Islam is concerned even the field of philosophy and science, which certainly in England we do not associate with spirituality. I would say jokingly the main export of England in the mid-20th century onwards is atheism. I don't know why all atheists seem to be born in this island, very few in France and Germany. They did in the 19th century, now it's the turn of England – I don't have to name names, you all know who I am referring to.

Philosophy and spirituality:

What do philosophy and spirituality have to do with each other? In Islam, philosophy especially as it grew after Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, every century it became more and more immersed in Islamic spirituality. We get a person like Suhrawardi in the 12th century (6th

Islamic century) whose philosophy is really a spiritual philosophy. It exudes the remarkable metaphysical and spiritual insights throughout even when dealing with the nature of substances, what we call matter of forms in this world. When we get to Mulla Sadra, Sabzawari and others like that later on in the 10th Islamic century, with Sabzawari in the 13th Islamic century (19th Western century), you have a complete fusion of Islamic spirituality and philosophy. This is one of the greatest gifts Islam can give to the world today. A world in which thinking and being are separated from each other. If we talk about being in the existentialist sense, it's really an animal being. It is the ordinary consciousness of human being, a little more than the level of their animality. That's why most of these existentialists are atheists. Jean Paul Sartre. Simone de Beauvoir. You all know their names. But for us, philosophy was always combined, at least always in the last 700 years, with spirituality. Many of the Islamic philosophers are great saints, Agha Mohammad Reza Ghomshei during the Qajar period whom I consider the greatest philosopher of that period, along with Zunuzi's son, Agha Ali Modarres. These were the two greatest philosophers of Persia in the 19th century. They are men of very great spiritual stature. Even when we talk about science, we talk about mathematics, astronomy, physics which were transferred from the Islamic world to the West. This made possible the late medieval renaissance and against it the scientific revolution came, but it came against that heritage. A heritage which in the Islamic world related a large extent to spirituality. With Islamic science depicted in universe, which was then depleted from spiritual substance, the spiritual presence was everywhere. That is why Nasir Din Tusi considered to be one of the 10 greatest mathematicians of history, also writes *Awsaf Al-Ashraf*, a beautiful little book on Islamic Spirituality. The two were never separated. This is again a very important lesson. For many of the young Muslims studying in England. Because as you know Muslim parents, if their children do not study medicine or engineering then their mother faints in the kitchen and the father commits suicide, so all our young people are stuck studying these subjects. But these subjects were not always

like this. Even these subjects were always combined with spiritual presence.

Islamic art and Islamic spirituality:

But Islamic spirituality manifests itself much more directly in other forms of creativity in Islamic civilisation. Let me begin with Islamic art. Islamic art of course is one of the grand manifestations of Islamic civilisation. Again one of the greatest tragedies that has occurred in the Islamic world is the ugly cities in which we live which compete with any city of the world in ugliness. Worse than that some of the ugly mosques in which we worship are uglier than most factories in London from the Victorian period. I am sorry I am being so severe, but this is a very important point. The loss of the sense of beauty amongst many modern Muslims is as great a tragedy as not saying your prayers in the morning. I can say that because it gradually makes the Divine unreal. God is Beauty. *“Allahu Jamil wa yuhibul jamal”* - God is beauty and loves beauty. Everywhere Islam went in the world it created a beautiful civilisation; from Indonesia to Morocco and everything in between. It was a hallmark of Islamic civilisation and what a catastrophe for us as a civilisation, that we produce so much ugliness, indifference to beauty, we think it doesn't matter if you pray on the asphalt or anywhere else. Of course if there is no space in the mosque you can pray on the asphalt. God has allowed that. But to create places of beauty which reflect the Divine presence was one of the great roles of Islam. As the great metaphysician, Frithjof Schuon once said, religion is both truth and presence. Without presence the truth becomes abstract, it becomes unreal, and without truth, presence has no significance. Every religion must have both elements. In classical Islamic civilisation, Islamic art presented the presence of the divine whereas metaphysics, the prayers, the theology, all the other sciences represented the truth in its abstract or cerebral sense. You see this in the two great sacred central arts of Islam: in architecture and in calligraphy. Everywhere Islam went from the earliest period, imagine only 100 years after the rise of Islam, the

Masjid Sakhra in Jerusalem was built, the Dome Rock was built, the Qarawiyyin was built shortly thereafter, and the Kairouran mosque in Tunisia. These are all mosques that go back to the first couple centuries of Islam. Very rapidly, before anything else, before producing books of *fiqh*, Islam created sacred architecture. Everybody must understand that. The books of *fiqh* came 100 years later. These are all among the greatest masterpieces of world art; every single one of them. There are also some in Yemen I haven't mentioned them. There are 7 or 8 mosques that belong to the first century of Islam. The most famous of course is the Dome of the Rock. You see pictures of it of course unfortunately for Israeli tourism but at least everybody sees the picture, one of the great artistic achievements of mankind. That belongs only to 100 years after the arrival of Islam. You consider that when Christianity came to Europe, the first important architectural work that is Christian is 400 years after the birth of Christ, the Santa Maggiore church in Rome or one or two old churches. This is very different. Islam very quickly developed a sacred architecture. It created sacred space and gradually extended it to the whole Islamic city. In the same way that in Islam you can pray anywhere, your home is a mosque, the floor of the mosque became the floor of all homes. The ceilings of the mosque in those traditional ceilings were all connected together – you could walk over the whole city on roofs, it became really the roof of your house. The extension of the sacred space of the mosque beautified the whole tradition of the Islamic city. This monstrosity that is built today in the name of cities is really an affront to the whole message of Islam in a certain sense. Nobody thinks about it in these terms but somebody should talk about it. Maybe somebody would listen here and there. I am very pleased since for 50 years I have been talking about this the number of wonderful architects now in the Islamic world, many of them my own students, are trying to do this as much as possible. But it is not possible everywhere I know that there economic considerations, technological challenges and all kind of things which I will not go into. But it is important to understand why Islam emphasised so much the sacred quality of architecture. That's where the word of

God reverberated. The space of the mosque is for us, what the icon is for Christians. That is the face of the word of God, since we do not have figurative art in Islam for very profound reasons I will not go, the spiritual space which was based on emptiness was the great achievement of Islamic art and presenting Islamic spirituality. You cannot go into one of the great mosques without feeling the Divine presence. That emptiness is emptiness viz a viz the world. The fullness viz a viz the spirit. The emptiness of the mosque in fullness in a sense. It's like "*la illah ha illallah*" [There is no God, but God]. You take the *la illah* to be fullness, the *illallah* is then emptiness. But if you take Allah to be fullness then *la illah* is emptiness. That's why you negate it with the *la*. Islamic architecture is based on this principle.

Complemented of course by Islamic calligraphy, which again is the depiction of the word of God. Because all calligraphy in Islam begins with the Quran. Pre-Islamic Arabs as you know drew a few lines here and there they had no calligraphy as art. The art of calligraphy is traditionally considered to be invented by Sayyidina Ali^[A]. The Kufic script is sacred and first used by him. He is a great calligrapher, an unbelievable man, he could be a warrior, a great saint, poet, write. The most eloquent text in the Arabic language after the Quran is the *Nahjul Balagha*. Yet at the same time a calligrapher. It cannot be beyond our care how God gave so many gifts to one person. But that art from the very beginning was associated with the Quran and all extension of that art throughout the Islamic civilisation came from the Quran.

I remember as a child when we walked in the streets there was a piece of newspaper that had fallen in the street, pious people would fold it up and kiss it and put it inside the hole in the walls, which were *kahgel* at that time. That is, they were made up of mud so they had holes in them. They did this because they thought it was from the Quran.⁷ Probably some profane story from *Etela'at* or something like that. But in the minds of the people every written word was God's word and it was like that throughout the Islamic

civilisation for centuries on end. Now of course we have trivialised writing but nevertheless the central role of calligraphy remains.

It's an art which connects the hand to the heart to the concentration of the mind and therefore it is also a very spiritual discipline. To be able to draw one single *sheen* or *seen* like that needs tremendous concentration. You have to be able to pull from the right to the left and the form goes back into your heart. A good calligrapher takes everything back into the heart and centre of his own being. So calligraphy complemented architecture as a great source of Islamic spirituality and many Muslims feel that even today even in London they try to have one good piece of calligraphy on their wall. It is something that exudes Divine Presence, even if they are not Arabs and they don't understand the word that's written – likely some verse of the Quran or some prayer. But the beauty of the form speaks very much to the Muslim heart and the Muslim eye. One cannot underestimate that.

Then there are all the other arts into which I will not go. Such as the art of the dress, the traditional Muslim dress both male and female brought out the spirituality in the human stature of the human body. Whereas Western dress brings out the animality of the body. I'm sorry I have to wear this kind of suit I have no other choice. Otherwise I wouldn't wear it for one day. But the beautiful traditional dresses whether Arab, Malay, Indonesian, doesn't really make a difference, are different forms of bringing the spirituality of the body as God has created it. God said we created the *ahsan al-taqwim*, we created the best of stature. We read about something stature and there is a great deal of spirituality related to that. The loss of the traditional dress in the Islamic world is a very major catastrophe almost as bad as the loss of the alphabet by the Turks who changed their alphabet to the Latin alphabet. It's almost as serious as that. It's a very important matter.

Then there are all the so called minor arts which are not minor in the Islamic world. The division of major arts and minor arts is a Western contraption for Islamic art. In fact these are a very major

art. The arts in the national art gallery you only see once a year but the plate on which you eat, your wife puts your food on in front of you every day, that's the art that affects your soul. Not the painting of Rembrandt you see only once a year, yes that's great art on its own I'm not trying to denigrate it. But the art that surrounds human beings Islam has spent all its spiritual artistic effort in trying to beautify the immediate surroundings of human life. Things which we consider to be minor arts like the said plate, a fork, a piece of cloth, wherever you sit on, of course the carpet, which is one of the greatest form of Islamic art. It came from Persia originally but it became a major Islamic art and it went from the Islamic world to China and to the west almost at the same time in the 13th century, or a little bit before that. During the Mongol rule of China, when two cousins were ruling, one over china one and the other over the Islamic world the first Muslim carpet was sent to Beijing and the first Chinese carpets were produced at that time and then they spread and then to the rest of China.

Let me turn to another form of art, which for Muslims is very important still today and which exudes Islamic spirituality: poetry and music. The Quran is not poetry. The word "poet" is said in Surah Shua'ra. The Quran denigrates the poets because these were people who in pre-Islamic times would get paid to compose poetry like some modern scholars, you pay them and they write anything. I'm sorry to say this, I'm supposed to be a humble scholar myself. But they've sold their pen. Let me put it this way. The Prophet was very much against this. He was also accused of being a poet by his detractors, by the Quraish, before they accepted Islam and so I don't mean poetry in a negative sense of course. In Persian even today when something is nonsense we say *shereh* which means "it's poetry". It means it doesn't make any sense. It is used in a pejorative sense.

However in the positive sense everywhere Islam went it strengthened the art of poetry. Arab poetry was so strongly molded in the pre-Islamic poetry, the *jahilliya* poetry that it took some time for Arab poetry to become Islamicised. The first poetry that became

totally Islamicised was Persian, because the Persian poetry began with Islam. That's why Persian is so rich in Sufi poetry and mystical poetry, like no other Islamic language. I don't want to get too chauvinistic, I happen to be a Persian but this is really a truth. It made poetry the main vehicle actually for Islamic spirituality over the centuries and throughout it all the languages of India, even Sanskrit, were influenced by it. Certainly the Islamic languages, Gujarati, even Malayalam in the south a little bit, Sindi, Punjabi and later on Urdu. In all these languages poetry plays a remarkably important role. Where is it in the world that even today you can conclude a political debate in parliament by just quoting a poem? Once you've quoted a good poem you've won the day. It still goes on in the Islamic world and poetry is a very important art, although we do have epic poems we even have *rajaz*, which is poems of war, and things like that. But most Islamic poetry Persian and otherwise, except the *jahilliya* poetry that continued during the Ummayad period like the poetry of Yazid, are imbued with Islamic spirituality. The greatest Persian poets are the Sufi poets. Who has heard in this room of the Khaqani, the great Khaqani? But everybody has heard of Rumi and Hafez. These people transformed the life of Asia and the Ottoman world. It is truly amazing. Without Rumi what would our civilisation be? Where would all the literature in the southern part of India and indirectly the Malay world be, without someone like Hafez or Sadi? So poetry is a very important instrument or means of conveying Islamic spirituality and it still continues to play a very important role. Even among the Arab nationalistic Palestinian poets there are many who composed Sufi poetry. In fact in the Arab world there has been a remarkable return to Ibn Arabi and his poetry in the last 40 to 50 years. Almost all the famous Arab poets of today are trying to go back to the Tarjumān al-ashwāq, the Diwan of Ibn Arabi and the 20,000 verses of poetry in the Futuhat Al-Makkiyah. If they were to be pulled out it would be a very large volume of poetry, several volumes as a matter of fact. In addition to other great poets, like Ibn Al-Farid and others.

As for music, many people think that Islam is against music. Of course that is totally untrue. It depends what you mean by music. The recitation of the Quran is music. But it is not called music in Arabic. It's not called *musiqa*, or *ghina*, but nevertheless it's the highest form of music. Just the recitation you heard today you can take its notes down. You can write down its musical notes. But in addition to that, by banning lascivious music or music that simply leads to sensual passion (I mean external passion, not the passion for God), Islam interiorised music. What happens especially through the Sufi orders is a vast musical tradition was developed - in fact several in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, later on North Indian, Malay, Sudanese in Java and so forth. These traditions of music are remarkable, all of which in their classical form really derive from the spiritual presence of the Quran and Islamic spirituality. I can hardly over emphasise this. It is amazing, so many Arabs and Persians living in London and New York when they have a nostalgia for things Islamic they put on some classical music of their own tradition. Even some singers who try to modernise Arabic music, like Abdul Wahab, they couldn't do it. After the first few notes he went back to classical Arabic music. And still you here more Umm Kulthum today in Egypt than you hear any modern crooner. We do now have phenomenon of these modern Muslim sorts of crooners or pop singers and so forth trying to imbue even this music with a certain amount of Islamic presence. But I'm talking about really serious music of the Islamic people's. It is one of the greatest heritages of Islam spiritually and it has a very special role to play in our day and age.

We are living in a day where in Europe there is a tremendous wave of islamophobia. There is a hatred against Islam and in no country more than France. But if you go to the Fes festival of sacred music held in Fes every year in North Africa, over half the population are French. They travel all the way from France to hear sacred music. I remember once Shahram Nazeri, the great classical Persian singer of Iran and friend of mine was giving a concert in Paris. It was after the terrible earthquake of Bam which killed over

10,000 people. They were trying to collect money to rebuild the town and it was held in the municipality hall which seated several thousand people. I went there. About 4/5 of the population were French men and women who most probably considered themselves to be atheist. You know 40% of France considers itself to be atheist. Another 20% agnostic or something like that. 60% either don't believe in God or don't know whether they believe in God. They were all listening to the poetry of Rumi and Hafez and going like this, as if in the 7th heaven. So sacred music of Islam has a very important role to play today. As an ambassador of Islam to a world which has closed itself so much to anything that is Islamic. And I think it is going to play an even greater role. We had a concert in Washington recently which shows that the same kind of interest exists there.

How Islamic spirituality can cater to humanities present needs:

Now having said all of this, I want to turn to how Islamic spirituality can cater to humanities presents needs. Of course I am not going to talk about social or economic needs and things like that. That's a story for another day. But even there it plays a role. I'm going to talk mostly about human spiritual needs. I've chosen only four fields actually because it can play a role in so many different things.

Islamic morality and good without God or secular morality:

First of all morality; you have a lot of people in the west who consider themselves to be moral but who are atheists. They want to prove to God that they can be good without God. There is a dynamic within the human soul that has fallen to try to tell God: see I can be good without you. Often at times they are more moral than religious people for that reason. Because they are trying to prove something. It's not that they are better people but they are trying to prove something to themselves and to the people around them. But actually morality cannot have a basis without spirituality. Morality

without spirituality can become hypocrisy and there are the hadiths of the Prophet and Imams about that. Spirituality is the foundation of morality. The reason that our world is collapsing whenever one talks about morality is the loss of spirituality. It isn't that there weren't wars before, there were wars before. It is not only Daesh that is beheading people in Syria, the British army beheaded thousands of people in India in the 19th century but people have forgotten that. The French army were even worse in Algeria – the things that they did nobody can match. They used to cut off the ears of people for just two francs. Any soldier who brought the ear of a Muslim would get two francs. Can you imagine that? It was the same French who were trying to carry out the *la mission civilisatrice*, the civilising mission in North Africa. But what we see before us today even within the Islamic world is a kind of pseudo-morality devoid of spirituality. What we see in the world at large when people talk about humanity and so forth, and there are wars all over the places, a million Iraqis get killed, then Syria is torn apart and Afghanistan 600,000 people die, figures which are astronomical – the blame is on both sides. Both those who come to other countries to kill people and those who make an excuse for them to come to those countries to kill people. Both of them are trying to talk about a morality which is without spirituality. So morality without spirituality may be a very dangerous thing. It can become bigotry of the worst kind: considering yourself to be holier than thou and ordering people around, and if you have force, you force them to do your will in the name of morality. This has not disappeared. It is not only missionaries doing this in late 18th century in India. It is still very much a part of our world and the Islamic world is as much to blame as the Western world. You cannot just put the blame on one side. All of us are to blame for this.

Spirituality and the relationship between religions:

Then there is a very important issue which is related to what I was doing in the Vatican last week (10-15th of November 2014); the

relationship between religions. We all know that we are in deep need of having good relationships between religions. Almost all the issues that face one religion face other religions as well. From child pornography to theft to murder, all the evil things that go on in society, different religions face it in different ways, and no religion has a monopoly on that. Unfortunately we all share in this. And it's most important for religions to be able to get together even for expediency. But expediency is not enough. It is not enough to be polite towards other religions. One has to accept the Quranic message that *kulli ummatin rasūlan*. God has sent a messenger to every people; to have respect for other religions. Now it is not easy to have respect for other religions. But religions have forms and forms are very different in different religions. If you only look at forms there is nothing but opposition. I always give this example: the Christian when he goes into a church takes off his hat, the Muslim and the Jew when they go to the synagogue and mosque put on their hat. They are both doing the same thing. Both putting on your hat is a sign of humility and taking your hat off is a sign of humility in different ways. But since we are dealing with the world of relativity the relative axioms are opposite but the inner intent is the same. It is time for us to be able to realise that we all belong to God, we come from him and we return to him. The Quran says *inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajeoon*. It doesn't only mean Muslims. All creatures. Even that little mosquito that bites you during the summer comes from God and ultimately returns to God. All creation comes from God and returns to God. The Quran says this over and over again. *Yu'id* – you're always going back, every creation goes back to God. So the whole field of the relation between religions is a field which cannot be only really approached diplomatically. But it has to be approached spiritually. I'm a veteran of this war of 50 years. I led the first Muslim delegation to the Vatican when I was a very young man and it's been 50 years since I participated in the first Christian-Islamic dialogue. Later on with Judaism and I've had relationships with India and Hindus often at times.

It's a very sad thing. That because we play with the word spirituality everything is going backwards. It was easier for Muslim and Christians to talk together in London 30 years ago than it is today. There was much less bigotry in Europe at that time against Islam than there is today. We've gone back to the middle ages, minus the spiritual element in the middle ages which always held Islamic civilisation in respect. St Thomas Aquinas was trying to learn Arabic in order to be a good Christian theologian. You don't have Christian theologians trying to do that at the Gregorian University right now. They try to learn Arabic to try to convert the Muslims which is quite something else. So unfortunately in this field things are going backwards. There is no possibility of hope for us in the future without paying attention to the spiritual dimension of religions.

So this is a field of very great importance which I feel Islamic spirituality should address itself and I am very happy to say it is one field where at least there have been a lot of efforts made in the last few decades in certain parts of the Islamic world. For example in Lebanon, in Iran, in Morocco and in Egypt before the Coptic-Islamic strife began then the situation detonated and almost all dialogue stopped. It is a tragic situation in Egypt which goes on, but there are many Islamic countries like Indonesia which now has a very wonderful policy of amity between religions. 10% of Indonesia is Christian, a few are so called old religions of their islands and about 88% are Muslims. A very good policy has been followed there in the last few years and there good signs here and there, and there also very bad signs. All the way from Sudan to what happened in Iraq as a consequence of the invasion of Iraq. Christians have lived there peacefully with Muslims in Iraq for centuries. Not one Christian received a bloody nose through the whole 400 years of Ottoman rule over Iraq and the same in Syria. There is a story that perhaps not all of you know. In the 19th century when Amir Abdelkader El Djezairi was exiled first to France they were going to kill him and then French officers protested because he was such a noble warrior. So they exiled him to Syria. Once there was a riot

between the Jews, the Muslims and the Christians and a number of Christians were killed and the others came and took refuge in Amir Abdelkader's house, so he gave them protection. He gave the Christians protection. Later the Ottoman caliph sent I think it was Ibrahim Pasha the prime minister to Syria and they put on trial all the people that killed the Christians; They were all Muslims and they were all hanged. Since then you didn't have one bloody nose because they were Christians until what you see today. With money paid from outside of Syria to destroy this wonderful country. There was a remarkable peace between the Druze, the Christians and the Muslims for a very long time. So we live in very difficult times from this point of view and I think it is incumbent on anybody who speaks about Islamic spirituality to speak globally. It is like speaking about your environment and only speaking about your city. And this is the next issue I want to turn to.

Islamic Spirituality and the question of the environmental crisis:

There is no issue that is as crucial besides the religion itself, and our soul and where it goes after death, than the question of the environment. It's strange that people think that it is some kind of banking policy that can be debated in three days at the G20 summit in order to decide whether to even include the environmental issues or not and finding Mr. Cameron at the very last day says yes, yes we are going to support the environmental fund. The environmental issue is actually a crucial matter of life and death for those who do not believe in heaven and hell. That's why they are the people that most understand the environment. Most people who are trying to defend the environment are agnostics. They are not people of religion. It took a very long time for Christianity to even become aware of this. When I gave the Rockefeller series lecture in Chicago and predicted the environmental crisis in the book *Man and Nature*, I received scathing commentaries against it from many bishops, churchman the Church of England. All because I criticised post-medieval Christianity for being impervious to the importance of

nature. Now 50 years later all Christian seminaries are trying to teach about the environment. In the Islamic world it is even worse. Out of all my books, and I've written 50 books many in English and some in Persian, my book *Man and Nature* was the very last book to be translated into Persian. The environmental movement in the Islamic world is just getting off the ground now. About thirty years late, it should have begun actually when this whole movement began. I was giving talk after talk in Iran even on television, but nobody listened. And the other countries are even worse. At least Iran was the first country to have a park system in the 1950's. We had the first national park system in Gorgan and one or two other places; in Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq, in North Africa, nothing. In Pakistan, how many talks have I given on this issue? Nobody was really interested unfortunately in these issues. But the environmental crisis is a major issue and it is not really a question of bad engineering. It is a question of spirituality. Unless you are able to see the spiritual quality of nature, all UN plans and national plans are nonsense. They are not going to get anywhere. We have to be able to understand that all creatures are God's creatures. That tree has a right of its own, *al-huquq*. It's not only our right to cut it when we want, do whatever we want to do it with it. We have to keep the balance of nature. Yes we feed upon nature. But you cannot transgress against nature. I've always said nature should be treated as one's wife and not as a mistress. She has her rights and her rights have to be given to her. These are all issues which without Islamic spirituality will never get us anywhere. Anyway, this is one amongst many.

Conclusion:

How do we gain access to Islamic spirituality? There are two ways. One is on the theoretical level. Many great works of Islamic spirituality, of Sufi and Shi'ite spirituality have now been translated into English or French. They are accessible and many people make use of them. Many Christians will go back to Christianity by reading Rumi or some other book of Sufism.

The second way of course is to try to participate in Islamic spirituality, and to do that one has to be a Muslim. I'm totally against this pseudo-Sufism that is going around in Los Angeles and now here also in London and other place which people get together and say *dhikr* without even being a Muslim. That is singing like Abdul Wahab. That is not real *dhikr*. The condition of Islamic spirituality is to take the walnut as a whole; to have the crust as well as the interior. To be able to benefit from the *baraka muhammadiya*, the Muhammadan *baraka*, without which one is not able to practice Islamic spirituality. One cannot talk about it. One cannot practice it. You need the succour of the Prophet in order to be able to take one single step on the spiritual path. And once we do that, we have to apply it. And where do we apply it? We first of all have to apply it to ourselves. The famous Chinese saying a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step has many meanings, one of which is this, we cannot start any spiritual journey except with ourselves. We have to start with ourselves. Each person could be a lamp that at least illuminates its immediate environment. You cannot change the course of the Yangtze River in China, but you can change your immediate ambience. Not by talking, but by being. By being, that is what is most important. And that is not possible without access to the tradition. Tradition as we understand it, people like myself, the late Dr. Lings, and others, not tradition as simply custom. Not the shop in Piccadilly Circus that says tradition and sells old buttons from the British army in India. I don't mean that. I mean tradition as a reality which descends from God, which is encapsulated and informed in various religions and which alone gives access to the Divine. You cannot invent your own religion; you cannot invent your own spirituality. Nothing that does not come from God can lead to God. Only that which comes from him can lead back to him.

Let us conclude with a sad note. Is anyone listening? That is the great question. Again to quote Christ, many are called, but few are chosen. In our day and age, there are a lot of messages going around. The internet is full of all kinds of things. The question is

anyone listening really? And there are some people who are listening.

I will conclude with the famous hadith *la takhwal ardhan hujjatullah* - the earth shall never be empty of the proof of God, the *hujjatallah*. This can be all the way from the 12th Imam to the people who bear actually the presence of God in themselves in this world. Let's hope and pray that in a humble lecture like this at least some people will be awakened to the significance of the spiritual dimension of life without which life is not really worth living.

Keywords: Islam, Islamic art, Shi'a, spirituality, Iran, Safaviyyah Sufi order, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili.

Endnotes:

¹ In commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the founder of the Safaviyyah Sufi order Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili (1252–1334 CE), London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) hosted a seminar by the eminent scholar Prof Seyyed Hossein Nasr, titled *Islamic Spirituality and the Needs of Humanity Today*, on Monday 17th of November 2014, in the Imperial College London. This seminar was held by the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) in conjunction with the Muslim Student Council (MSC) and Imperial College Ahlulbayt Society.

- See more at: <http://iranianstudies.org/events-2/commemoration-700th-year-anniversary-sheikh-safi-al-din-seminar-prof-seyed-hossein-nasr-london-539#sthash.BN1joacU.dpuf>.

² The Safavid dynasty had its origin in the Safaviyyah Sufi order. The Safavid period is considered as the golden era of Iranian-Islamic culture and civilization.

³ Seyed Salman Safavi (1959-), is a descendent of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabil, the great Iranian spiritual leader (*'Arif*).

⁴ See Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, The Foreword in *the Thaqaalain Irfan (Mysticism): Theoretical and Practical Principles of 'Irfan and Safaviyya Spiritual Path* (author: Safavi, Seyed Salman, London Academy of Iranian Studies Press, London, 2013);

<http://www.nlai.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=7199>; <http://sheikh-safialdin.com/>.

⁵ Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (29 December 765 – 23 August 818) was the seventh descendant of the prophet Muhammad and the eighth of the Twelve Imams.

⁶ Imam Ja`far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq (702–765 C.E. was a descendant of Imam Ali from his father's side and a descendant of Fatimah and Prophet Mohammad from his mother's side.

⁷ I once told this story 50 years ago in London when I first lectured on Islamic calligraphy here. This city is by the way the city which produced the most Beautiful work on Islamic calligraphy that has ever been written in the English language by the late Sheikh Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din Martin Lings. God bless his soul, my very close friend. I don't come to England ever since he has died. I was so close to him, something of England left for me when he left the world. His beautiful work on Islamic calligraphy explains the following story.

SHI'ITE 'IRFAN

Mohammad Faghfoory
Georg Washington University

Abstract

In this article I shall trace the origins of Islamic spirituality and demonstrate that what later became known as Sufism started with the Prophet of Islam who initiated Imam Ali into divine mysteries. Then Shi'a Imams inherited and elaborated the doctrine and practices of the inner life based on the Qur'an, the tradition of the Prophet, and teachings of Ali. Thus long before the establishment of the first Sufi orders Islamic spirituality found expression in the oral teachings and writings of the Shi'a Imams. It was their legacy that was transmitted to their disciples and students many of whom became undisputed masters of their time and gradually their efforts resulted in the establishment of the first formal Sufi orders. In fact, during the first three centuries of Islam, Shi'a Imams represented and defined Islamic spirituality and the inner meaning of revelation for the entire Muslim community.

Keywords: mi'raj, 'irfan, the Ahl al-bayt, Imamate, Imam, wilayah, wali, Imam Ali, Imam Sadiq, Imam Mahdi Shari'ah, tariqah, haqiqah, Wilayat-i Fati,yyah, Particular Pole, AbsoluteUniversal Pole, Muhammadan light zahir, batin ,invocation, tasawwuf, Sufism,

Introduction:

Shi‘a Islam is not simply a political movement that emerged as a result of the dispute over the succession to the Prophet, a school of jurisprudence commonly known as the Ja‘fari school of law, or a theological current that was able to answer questions that other theologians raised but could not answer. Such a perspective reduces Shi‘ism to a current among many others that emerged during the early years of Islamic history and found a small number of followers within the community. It also diminishes the status of Imams to legal scholars and theologians or opposition figures like many others, without any particular function or charisma in the firmament of Islamic religious and spiritual life.

Indeed, many differences that emerged between Shi‘a and Sunni communities after the 3d/9th century in the political, legal, theological, and spiritual domains and developed further especially after the 10th/16th century were not defined during the first two centuries of Islamic history neither in the exoteric realm nor in the esoteric domain.

For example in relation to law until the establishment of the first two Sunni school of law it was the Shi‘a Imams who were the sole interpreters of the Qur’an and law. Indeed both Abu Hanifah (d. 150/767) and imam Malik (d. 180/796) were students of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (d. 148/765). This argument holds true in relation to the realm of Islamic spirituality (‘*irfan*) as well. In fact, during the first three centuries of Islam, Shi‘a Imams represented and defined Islamic spirituality and the inner meaning of revelation for the entire Muslim community. This is reflected in the respect for the *Wilayah* of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. The famous Prophetic hadith “*I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate,*” is a direct reference to this function of the Imam and his two-pronged sword, the *Dhulfiqar*, alludes to his exoteric and esoteric authority. Another evidence that proves the validity of this argument is the recognition

of the first eight Imams as the spiritual masters and Poles of their times by Shi'a s and Sunnis alike. The line that separated Shi'a and Sunni spirituality later was not drawn until after the death of Imam Reza in 203/817 and as a result of certain theological and political developments in the Islamic world. It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to say that until the beginning of the 3d/9th century Islamic spirituality among Shi'as and Sunnis was one and the same, rooted in Islamic revelation and more accurately in its esoteric knowledge and inner teachings of the Qur'an that the Prophet taught to Imam Ali and through him it was transmitted to later generations of the Imams.

In this article I shall argue that Islamic spirituality and what later became known as Sufism started with the Prophet of Islam who initiated Imam Ali into divine mysteries. Shi'a Imams inherited and elaborated the doctrine and practices of the inner life based on the Qur'an, the tradition of the Prophet, and teachings of Ali. It was their legacy that was transmitted to their disciples and students. Some of these students became undisputed masters of their time and gradually their efforts resulted in the establishment of the first formal Sufi orders.

While the legal, theological, and intellectual dimensions of Islam have their own significance, they were open to interpretation and subject to historical and intellectual environments. The more important inner dimension of Islam however, is the reality that is out of time and space and started with the nocturnal journey (*mi'raj*) of the Prophet. The reality that later became known as Sufism was born when the Prophet returned from his ascension to heaven and initiated Ali ibn Abi Talib to inner dimension of Islamic revelation. Such individuals as Salman Farsi (d.33/654), Oways Qarani (d.37/657), Maytham Tammar (80/681), Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari (d.78/697), Kumayl ibn Ziyad Nakhai (d. 83/702), Habib ibn Mazahir (d. 80/861) and a few others who attained high stations and became known as the People of [Divine] Mysteries (*Ashab al-sirr*) were indeed students and disciples of Ali. They were recognized as

the undisputed masters in the firmament of Islamic spirituality that later became known as Sufism.¹ It is this elect group of individuals that the Qur'an says, '*We shall give them to drink the water* [the elixir of Divine knowledge, (*marifah*) *in abundance*].'²

Thus long before the establishment of the first Sufi orders Islamic spirituality found expression in the oral teachings and writings of the Shi'a Imams. Some of the earliest writings that appeared in the Islamic world and dealt with the inner life are the sermons delivered by Imams in the form of supplications, instructions, and prayers and are extremely rich in esoteric discussions that later became sources of inspiration of Sufi masters and scholars. The most important examples of this category of sources, after commentaries on the Qur'an and Hadith, are the *Nahj al-balaghah* of Imam Ali followed by Husayn ibn Ali's sermons, and Zayn al-Abidin Ali ibn Husayn's (d.38- 95/658-712) *Sahifah Sajjadiyah*.³ To these writings and sermons of the Imams, we must add the treatise written later by those Shi'a scholars who had mastered the exoteric sciences, yet were not known as philosophers or jurists per se, but rather were recognized more for their function as spiritual masters and Poles of their time.⁴ These writings include treatises on theoretical as well as practical aspects of the spiritual life, details of wayfaring, etiquette, and manners in the spiritual life and the like.⁵ Indeed the time of the Prophet and the Imams is the period that an eminent master called as "*the period when Islamic spirituality was a reality without a name*."⁶

As the Messenger of God, Muhammad's mission⁷ was to promulgate divine law (the *Shari'ah*) that provided a framework for Islamic way of life and a guideline for Muslims to put the injunctions of the Qur'an into practice. The cycle of prophethood came to its perfection with Muhammad as Muslims believe that he is the last Prophet of God (*khatam al-nabiyyin*). The other important function of the Prophet was that which was concerned with guidance on and initiation to inner spiritual life (*Wilayah*). The term denotes physical or spiritual nearness. *Wilayah* is the inward

essence of prophethood (*Nubuwwa*). It is the spirit of religion and love is its quintessence and is defined as the spiritual authority and power of initiation into and guidance on the path of wayfaring towards God and attaining friendship with Him. *Wilayah* is the authority that enabled Moses to perform the miracle of turning his staff into a snake, granted healing and reviving power to Jesus Christ, and enabled Muhammad to ascend Heaven and stand in Divine presence “*drew nigh and came down till he was (distant) two bows’ length of even nearer (fa kana qab qawsayn ow adna)*.”⁸ Indeed, *Wilayah* originates from God and ultimately belongs to Him.⁹ According to the Qur’an, God is the Supreme *Wali* (*Huwa’l-Wali al-Hamid*).¹⁰ Without the power of *Wilayah* embarking on spiritual journey is impossible. On the practical level, *Wilayah* constitutes a framework within which the principles of the inner life are taught and practiced. He who possesses this authority is called a Friend of God (*Waliullah*).

Wilayah contains the truth and that is the Absolute Invisible (God). God is One but His manifestations are multiple. Multiplicity of the outward is manifested in immutable entities. These entities symbolize Divine Names and qualities. Only in God all names and attributes find absolute perfection inwardly and outwardly. The Prophet and through him the Imams are the theophony of qualities hidden in Divine Names and attributes, hence the famous saying of Imam Sadiq:

We are God’s Names. Through us God is known, and through us God is worshipped.¹¹

When one reaches the station of *Wilayah* one’s words and deeds are like those of God, because he subsists in God and sees nothing other than God all the time and everywhere, as Imam ‘Ali said in his sermon,

By God! I saw no single thing unless I saw God before it, with it, and after it¹².

The reality of Islamic spirituality and what later became known as Sufism (*tasawwuf*) began with the Prophet's ascension to Heaven (*mi'raj*) that took place a year or two before his migration (*Hijra*) from Mecca to Medina in 622. There is a vivid description of this event as the Prophet narrated to his companions:

“The night that they took me to my nocturnal journey and I entered heaven, I saw a palace made of red ruby in the center of paradise. Gabriel opened the gate of that palace for me and I entered. I saw a house made of white pearl. I entered the house and in the center of that house I saw a trunk locked with a lock made of light. I said ‘O! Gabriel! What is this box?’ He said: ‘O master! There is a mystery in that box that God would not reveal to anyone except whom He loves’.”

I begged Gabriel to open it but he declined and said that I should ask God for His permission to open the box. I asked for God's permission whereupon He commanded Gabriel to open the box. I saw a cloak and [spiritual] poverty in the box and asked what they are. A call came from Divine Throne that ‘I have chosen these two things for you and your community. Since I created them I have not created anything that I love more, and I will not grant these to anybody but the one whom I love’.”¹³

Thus, on the night of *mi'raj* the Prophet received from God the power of *Wilayah* and the cloak that symbolized the esoteric authority and knowledge. When he returned from this journey, he gave his cloak to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib and initiated him into the inner life.¹⁴ Indeed, through this symbolic act the Prophet transmitted the power of *Wilayah* to Ali. This incident marked the birth of Islamic spirituality (*‘irfan*, Sufism). The Commander of the Faithful then passed on the that cloak to Imam Hasan (3-50/624-670), who in turn passed it to Imam Husayn, and through him it passed to all Imams. Shi‘as believe that the cloak now rests with the Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam who is in occultation and guides the Shi‘a community. He is the Pole with whom all masters are inwardly connected and to whom they turn for guidance¹⁵ and by whose authority *Wilayah* will

continue until his reappearance, which will mark the beginning of the end of time. Thus the first channel of transmission of *Wilayah* was from the Prophet to Ali and through him to his descendents who succeeded him as the Shi'ite Imams and who possessed exoteric as well as esoteric authorities and functions.

In addition, Imam Ali also initiated a few of his close disciples such as Kumayl ibn Ziyad Rashid al-Hajari, Salman Farsi, and Ammar Yasir into spiritual life.¹⁶ These individuals were instrumental in creating the first systematic circles of prayer and other ascetic practices that were introduced to Sufi circles later. By the middle of the 4th/10 century Shaykh Saduq known as Ibn Babuyah (d. 381/991)¹⁷ spoke of circles (*halqah*) among Shi'as in which invocation (*dhikr*) is performed and Sayyid Sharif Murtada (d. 436/1044) called the Sufis "*real Shi'ites*."¹⁸

The second channel of transmission of *Wilayah* was through a small number of students and disciples whom Imam Ali taught the mysteries of the inner life and trained and initiated them into spiritual life. These students became the channel of transmission of esoteric knowledge in the Sunni world. Among the first were Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728)¹⁹ and Uways al-Qarani (d. 37/657)²⁰ and a little later, Ibrahim Adham²¹ (d. 162/778) who associated with Imam Sajjad, Imam Baqir (57-114/677-734), and Imam Sadiq and received *Wilayah* from them. Bishr al-Hafi²² (d. 227/841) was initiated by Imam Musa al-Kazim (128-183/745-799) and served Imam Rida. (148-203/765-818). Abu Mahfuz known as Maruf ibn Firuz Karkhi (d. 200/816) was a disciple and companion of the eighth Imam. Ali ibn Musa al-Rida was the last member of the household of the Prophet who openly guided aspiring seekers in their spiritual lives, hence his epithet the Imam of Initiation (*Imam al-Irshad*) and the scholar of the progeny of the Prophet ('*Alim Ahl al-bayt*).²³ Bayazid Bastami (d. 877-8) was a contemporary of Imam Muhammad Taqi (d.835 CE) and Imam al-Hadi (d.868 CE). Although the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and the twelfth Imams did not openly speak of the mysteries of the inner life due to restrictions

placed on them by the Abbasid caliphs, this does not mean that their interest in inner life came to an end as they never spoke or wrote anything against ‘*irfan*.

The years between 193-279/808-892 that started with the Caliphate of Ma'mun (170-218/786-833) and ended with the rule of al-Mutaaz (247-296/861-909) coincided with the Imamate of the ninth, tenth, eleventh and the twelfth Imams. These decades marked the darkest and most suppressive years for the Shi‘a community. It has been reported that during those decades the Imams practiced *taqiyah* outwardly, but in fact pursued an active spiritual life as indicated by the number of students and disciples they trained.²⁴ It was at the end of this period that the Occultation took place in 329/941.

Thus, long before Junayd Baghdadi (d. 298/910) and the establishment of the School of Baghdad, or Abu Said Abulkhayr (d. 440/1049) and the emergence of the School of Khorasan, the Imams were recognized as the Pole (*Qutb*) of their time by friends and foes. Indeed it was only after the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam in 329/941 that gradually the first important Sufi masters began to appear and within two centuries the first orders such as the Chishti order of Abu Ishaq Chisti (d. 356/967), the Qadiriyyah order of Abd al-Qadir Gilani (d. 562 /1166) and the Rifai order of Shaykh Ahmad al-Rafai (d. 578/1182) came into being. It is for this reason that all Sufi orders connect their origin to Ali ibn Abi Talib, except one branch of the Naqshbandi order that connects to Abu Bakr through Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr.²⁵ The degree of devotion, respect, and love these masters expressed toward the Ahl al-bayt--regardless of their adherence to one school of law or the other--indeed is a testimony to their recognition of Imams as the precursor of Islamic spiritual tradition that became known as Sufism later.

Shi‘a ‘*irfan*: Doctrine

The most important principle of Islamic spirituality in general is the emphasis on both the exoteric as well as the esoteric and inner

dimension of Islamic revelation. The science of the is like the shell that protects the kernel. One must do one's utmost effort in observing the command of the *Shari'ah* and fulfill one's duties before God, the Prophet, and the Imams before one can understand, much less start the inner journey. A contemporary Shi'a master has described those who combine the outward (*zahir*) and the inward (*batin*) of religion and observe both as the *middle nation* (*ummatan wasatan*).²⁶ The ideal Shi'a traveler on the path to God asks Him 'to illuminate his outward with the light of obedience to Him and his inward being with His love, fill his heart with [His] knowledge, and his spirit with His vision.'²⁷

At the center of the doctrine of Shi'a '*irfan* is the recognition of the position of Imam as the inheritors and possessor of the inward and the outward knowledge of the Qur'an and the possessor of the power of *Wilayah*,²⁸

"Verily, We gave the Book as inheritance to those whom we selected from among our servants."²⁹

The Qur'an has a manifest meaning and an inner and non-manifest one. Imam Sadiq said

The Book of Allah is of four natures: *al- 'ibarah*, that is to say, the text, that is for the common people; allusions (*al-Isharah*) and that is for the selected ones (*khawass*), fine mysteries (*al-lata'if*) that is for friends of God (*awliya*); and finally, the truth (*al-haqa'iq*) which are for the prophets (*anbiya*)."³⁰

Its manifest meaning can be understood and its commands and injunctions observed by all- Muslims. As to the inner meaning of the Qur'an, '*no one knows it but God and those who are steadfast in knowledge.*'³¹

In the *Sunan* of Abu Abi Dawud (201-274/817-888) we read that one day Ali ibn Abi Talib asked the Prophet “*O Messenger of God, How would I spread your message to people after you?*” whereupon the Prophet replied,

“Inform people of the non-manifest meaning (*ta’wil*) of the Qur’an, that is difficult for them [to understand] because only God knows its reality and reveals it only to the Pure (*mutahharun*) and those who are steadfast in knowledge (*rasikhun fil ilm.*”³²

And when Ali was asked who are the steadfast in knowledge he said. “Those steadfast in knowledge are the progeny of Muhammad.”³³

In a sermon Imam Jafar al-Sadiq said,

“Verily God taught His Messenger the science of *tanzil* and *ta’wil*, then he taught that science to Ali, and by God, Ali taught us that science.”³⁴

And,

Those who carry the Qur’an [in their heart] are gnostics and paradise is their abode. They are the masters of the people of paradise.”³⁵

they dealt with the most complicated spiritual and metaphysical issues and by doing so paved the way for the discovery of infinite treasure house of Islamic esoterism. Indeed, Ali’s statement is a testimony to this claim as he said,

“No verse was revealed to the Prophet that he did not read to me, and did not have me write it with my own handwriting and taught me its meaning and interpretation.”³⁶

And:

“Ask me about the Book of God. By God, there is no verse in the Qur'an that I do not know [the time and place of its revelation] whether it was revealed at night or during the day, in the desert or in the mountains. There is no verse that I do not know where it was revealed and what subject it pertained to. Verily my God has granted me an inquiring mind and a tongue which asks questions, and a soul that comprehends.”³⁷

Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, one of the most outstanding contemporary Shi'i-Iranian scholars and a commentator on the Qur'an elaborated on the philosophical and metaphysical explanations of the status of the Imam in a profound manner in the following passage:

“The Qur'an is Divine knowledge and its descent in the material world is in the form of words. Its beginning and its body manifest in the realm of externality in *beings which are free of accidents and material necessities*. The descent of the Qur'an on the plane of Unity is the same as the manifestation of the Truth in the Divine Names and Attributes. The plane of *Muhammadan Reality* is the plane of Unity, and is the same as the realm of Divine Names and Attributes. All qualities contained in the *Muhammadan Reality*, is also possessed by special friends [of God] (*awliya'-i khass, i.e.*; the Imams). The difference between the two is that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) possesses those qualities and stations by way of principiality (*bi'l isalah*), whereas for 'Ali and his descendents possession is through inheritance (*bi'l wirathah*). The station of *Wilayah* that contains *Muhammadan Reality* and is extended to the members of his progeny is nothing other than the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*) and the Blessed Night (*Laylat al-mubarakah*). Since Archangel Gabriel and other angels do not descend in time and space, therefore, the place of the descent of the Qur'an is none other than *the heart of the Taqi al-naqi al-ahadi wal'ahmadi*, for it has been said that “*the True Spirit brought it down upon your heart so that you become one of the Warners*”.”³⁸

In other words, the Imam is the manifestation of the Name *Allah*. By virtue of the unity that exists between the symbol and that which is symbolized, the reality of the Perfect Man and the absolute

Guardian (*wali-yi mutlaq*) is the theophany of the Being of the Logos, for it has been said, “*Verily, I am the remembrance of the Good, and you are the beginning of It and the end*” (*ana dhikr al-Khayr antum awwalahu wa akhirahu*). The Inerrant Imam is considered the Universal Pole (*Wali-ye Kull*), whose grace flows through the Particular pole (*Wali-ye juz*) or individual spiritual master of each Sufi order.³⁹

There is also a less discussed feminine dimension in the doctrine of Shi‘a *‘irfan* symbolized by Fatimah who indeed participated in receiving *Wilayah* from her father alongside her father, her husband, and her two sons. According to *Hadith al-Kisa*, when the Prophet returned from his nocturnal journey he called Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, and placed the cloak he received in such a way that it covered all of them. By doing so, the Prophet indeed acknowledged *Wilayah Fatimiyyah* and demonstrated the possibility of initiation and transmission of spiritual authority through qualified women as well.⁴⁰

The Imam is considered the rightful owner of divine trust for “*God commands you to return the Trust to its rightful owner*.”⁴¹ He who acknowledges Imam’s authority as the *Wali*, acknowledges God’s authority. He who fails to acknowledge him fails to know God. He who loves him loves God and he rebels against him disobeys God.⁴² This trust, which is none other than divine knowledge (*ma‘rifa*) must be given to the right people who can protect and teach it. It is narrated on the authority of Imam Rida who said,

“Indeed our affair is difficult and demands [acceptance of] hardship. No one can bear it except the angel brought nigh or a messenger, or a believer whom God has tried and tested (*mumin al-mumtahan*) before he believes.”⁴³

Therefore, not just any soul has the capacity to understand and protect this trust, as Ali said, ‘If Abudhar knew that which Salman knows, he would have killed him.’⁴⁴ Each Imam transmits this

esoteric knowledge to the next Imam who in turn transmits that through his disciples to future generation of seekers of divine knowledge.

In addition to the knowledge that the Prophet taught the Imams, they also inherited from him the quality of infallibility (*ismah*). The implication of the belief in Imamate and the infallibility of the Imams for Shi'a *'irfan* is too obvious to discuss here. Suffice it to mention that in the opinion of the Shi'as the infallibility of the Imams, like that of the Prophet enables them to understand the spirit of *Wilayah* and practice it in the most perfect manner. This is particularly important in relation to the guidance they provided and the legacy they left behind as their words and deeds are perfect and free from errors.

According to Sayyid Haydar Amuli ((720-787/1319-1385), religion of Islam is composed of three dimensions, which are the *Shari'ah*, *Tariqah*, and *Haqiqah*. The *Haqiqah* is the inner reality of the *Shari'ah*, and the *Shari'ah* is the outward expression of the *Haqiqah*. Shi'as are composed of two groups. One group that is generally called *mu'min* is concerned with exoteric sciences such as the law and the *Shari'ah*. Another group is concerned with the science of the inward, that is, *tariqah*, *Haqiqah*, and *Certainy (iqan)*. This group of Shi'as are those whom Imam Ali calls believers whose faith has been tested (*al-mu'min al-mumtahan*). They include the Shi'a Gnostics (*'urafa*) as well as the [non-Shi'a] Sufis because both Shi'ites and Sufis lead to the same reality which is called the *Muhammadan Reality (haqiqah Muhammadiyah)*. Thus, a Sufi is indeed the true Shi'a. They are only known by different names but their reality is one and the same and that is the religion of Muhammad. They carry the secrets of Prophet and Friends of God (*awliya*) outwardly and inwardly.⁴⁵

The ideals spiritual model of a Sufi like a *mumin al-mumtahan*, in his personal and spiritual life is the Universal man the supreme example of which are the Prophet and after him the Imams. Their

authority is delegated to Sufi masters through initiation.⁴⁶ The Imams are themselves both the possessor as well as the repository of that knowledge. There is no *ma'rifah* that does not originate from the Imam, and no mystery exist that he is not its repository. The Imams are the masters of the *Shari'ah*, the people of the *tariqah*, and the poles of *Haqiqah*.⁴⁷ They are God's vicegerent on earth and in heaven and the theophany of God's majesty in world of the Kingdom (*mulk*) and the world of Dominion (*malakut*).

The next important principle of the doctrine of Shi'a *ifan* is the primacy of the faculty of Intellect (*isalat-i 'aql*). This *aql* is not reason-intellect (*'aql- juzi*) that is veiled from the Universal or Supreme Intellect (*'aql-i Kulli*). It is, as defined by Imam Musa al-Kazim as "the interior proof (*hujja batinah*)" a faculty for apprehending the divine, a faculty of metaphysical perception identified with *basar* (insight) and a light (*nur*) located in the heart, and through which one can discern and recognize signs from God."⁴⁸ He who possesses '*aql* possesses faith, and is capable of establishing direct and vertical relationship with God and attain salvation.⁴⁹ According to this definition '*aql* is the means by which knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*) is attained. According to the Imam, the prophets and the Imams function as the "outward proof" (*hujja zahirah*) of God while '*aql* is the inward proof (*hujja batinah*). As Imam Sadiq described in a narration, it is by virtue of '*aql* that the primordial light or the light of *Wilayah (Nur-i Muhammadi)* that originated from the Divine illuminates the being of Imams.⁵⁰

Closely associated with this light is the initiatory knowledge (*ma'rifah*) that the Prophet gave Imam Ali. In a Hadith, the Prophet said, 'I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate.' In another Hadith, known as the "hadith of the two pomegranates" (*rummanatayn*) the Prophet said,

Gabriel brought two pomegranate fruits from heaven for him. He ate one and cut into two halves the second one. He ate one half and gave Ali the other half to eat. He then said to Ali 'O my

brother do you know what these two pomegranates were? The first was prophecy (*nubuwwah*) that is not of your concern. The second was Knowledge, and that I share with you.⁵¹

This is knowledge that is transmitted from the Prophet to the Imams. It is not intellectual or theoretical knowledge but one that is placed in the chest of the Imam and is part of his being. It is the highest degree of knowledge by virtue of which all veils are removed before the eye of the Imam, as Ali said, '*If all veils are removed before my eyes, nothing shall be added to my certainty.*'⁵² That is the reason that the Imam is called as the '*Repository of God on earth*' and his breast (*sadr*) is said to be the '*Repository of God's Knowledge.*'⁵³ This knowledge includes the general knowledge that God teaches to His angels, prophets, and Imams, and the Particular initiatory Knowledge that pertains to the inner life.

Shi'i 'irfan: Practices

The origin of all spiritual practices in Shi'a '*irfan* as in Sufism is found in the tradition (*sunnah*) of the Prophet who is indeed the first Sufi and the prototype of inner spiritual life in Islam.⁵⁴ There is no practice in '*irfan* nor in Sufism that is not rooted in the actions of the Prophet. Many of these practices such as expression of humility (*tazarru*), supplication (*munajat*), night vigil (*sahar*), retreat (*khalwah*), proper manner (*adab*), constant attention (*muraqibah*), and invocation of Divine Name (*dhikr*) were introduced to aspiring seekers by the Imams and later were adopted by formal Sufi orders. The purpose of these practices was to inculcate in the soul of the seeker such qualities and virtues as devotion, purity of intention, detachment, concentration, and the like. Since many studies on Sufism deal with these practices in detailed manner although without mentioning the pioneering role of Imams, there is no need to discuss them here.⁵⁵ Suffice it to mention that practices that Imams introduced and thought their disciples became indispensable part of Sufi tradition and have remained so until the present time.

Here we shall discuss a few of those practices which are uniquely Shi'a or have a particularly Shi'a coloring.

There are some practices which Imams particularly emphasized on and asked their disciples to observe. The first is self-accounting (*muhasabah*), that is, every disciple must assign time at the end of the day to scrutinize his actions. This practice is emphasized to the extent that the seventh Imam said, "He who does not examine his account once a day is not from us."⁵⁶

The next principle of practice is safeguarding the mysteries and secrets of the spiritual life, of the Master, of fellow travelers, and other aspects of the doctrine (*kitman-i sirr*).⁵⁷ In the exoteric domain of Shi'ism this practice manifested itself in the form of Prudent Dissimulation (*taqiyyah*)⁵⁸ defined as one hiding one's faith, property, and honor in the face of danger and threat. Its observance becomes even more important in spiritual life as one's inner state is a treasure that cannot be exposed to strangers who cannot understand and appreciate the values of that treasure. Hence the famous saying of Christ that "*Do not cast pearls before the swine.*"

Imam Sajjad said,

"I hide the treasure of my knowledge so that the ignorant could not see it and cause sedition, as did Abulhasan (Imam Ali) before us, and Husayn and before him Hasan. Had I revealed this knowledge in all likelihood people would have said that you have become an idol-worshipper and would have shed my blood".⁵⁹

To make protection of mysteries of the path easier, the Imams also emphasized upon silence and avoiding indulgence in vain talks.

Imam Sadiq said,

“Silence is the motto of the lovers of God and in it lays the Lord’s pleasure. It is the virtue of the prophets and the motto of the pure ones.”

And Imam Rida said, “Silence is the gate of wisdom and it guides to all good.”⁶⁰

The Imams were the supreme example of love and tolerance (*rifq wa mudara*) and proper conduct (*adab*) and set an example for their disciples as well as ordinary people of how an ideal spiritual traveler must behave.

Finally, the significance of night vigil (*sahar*) is highlighted in the sayings of Imams as an important element in spiritual advancement. Night vigil is particularly accompanied by recitation of the Qur’an and various prayers and supplication especially during Ramadan and Muharram. Imam Sadiq said,

“Sleep but like the people who worship, and avoid sleep like the forgetful people avoid worship. Indeed, wise worshippers sleep to rest for the next round of worship, while the forgetful sleep for comfort and rest.”

And Imam Musa al-Kazim said,

“God, Most High, dislikes His servant who sleeps excessively and is negligent of the Hereafter.”⁶¹

The purpose of spiritual practices prescribed by the Imams was to help the aspiring wayfarer to attain awareness and knowledge of his soul (*ma’rifat al-nafs*) which is a prerequisite to acquiring knowledge of the Lord, as the Prophet said, ‘*He who knows his self knows his Lord.*’⁶² The ‘*Ultimate knowledge for man is for him to know his own self*’ and the *greatest ignorance is man’s ignorance of his self and the greatest wisdom is man’s knowledge of his self.*’

⁶³ This would not be possible to attain unless the traveler seeks to

know God by means of God as Imam Sadiq said, ‘*Surely he alone knows God who knows Him by means of God (billah).*’⁶⁴

The first step to attain knowledge of the self (*marifaht al-nafs*) is purification of the soul from vicious habits and traits such as pride, backbiting, bigotry, jealousy and hatred or other poisonous characteristics. This would become possible through repentance and making an intention to embark on the path of spiritual journey followed by invocation of divine Name that starts after one is initiated. As a result of concentration, slowly the wayfarer would gain [spiritual] strength and virtues and all thoughts and other mental preoccupations would disappear from his soul. This is a science unto itself.

In his book titled *Nahj al-Mustarshidin (Path for Seekers of Guidance)* ‘Allamah Hilli (d. after 802/1399) states that all fields of knowledge such as the science of theology, [Qur’anic] commentary, grammar and *other sciences* have been attributed to Imam Ali . In his explanation of ‘*other sciences*’ the commentator of the text states that,

“Other sciences’ include [the science of] purification of the inward, which is one of the most secret of all sciences. Indeed all spiritual masters learned these sciences from Ali or from his descendants or from their students.”⁶⁵

Such a traveler worships God not out of fear or for the expectation of rewards in the Hereafter, but out of love and knowledge of Him for he finds God alone worthy of worship, as Imam Sadiq described,

“Worshippers are of three categories: Those who worship God out of fear, and that is the worship of slaves and bondsmen; those who worship Him out of greed for rewards. This is the worship of merchants. And those who worship Him out of love, and that is the worship of men of free spirit.”⁶⁶

The Case of Imam Husayn:

The martyrdom of Imam Husayn in Karbala in the year 80/681 is a supreme example of spiritual poverty, that is, nothingness before God. Indeed, long before tragedy of Karbala and by virtue of his station, Imam Husayn had responded to the call of the Prophet “die before you die (*mutu an qabla tamutu*,” and in Karbala he only perfected his covenant by willingly accepting physical death as well. As a *wali*, he just fulfilled his destiny and perfected his function in Karbala according to the will of his Beloved (*mawla*). Like a lover who runs to hold his beloved in his arms he broke the cage and flew to his Beloved with open arm.

Imam Baqir once said that ‘[At the time of the battle of Karbala] God, Most High, had victory descend upon Husayn such that victory filled up [the space] between heaven and the earth. Then the Imam was placed between two choices; either worldly victory or meeting God. He chose to meet God, Most high.’ Imam Reza defined Husayn’s act as ‘The Grandiose Sacrifice (*al-dhibh al-‘azim*) of messianic dimensions.’⁶⁷ His martyrdom gave new meaning to such terms as love, longing for union, annihilation in God and subsistence in Him, and taught future friends of God (*awliya*) to express their states and stations in those terms. Sufis gave him honorific titles such as King of religion, Friend, pioneer of spiritual journey and the like. By accepting death he found eternal life, as the Qur’an said, ‘*consider not dead those who were killed in the path of God; Nay, they are alive and have their sustenance with their Lord.*’⁶⁸ That is the reason that in Shi‘a orders pleading to Imam Husayn and seeking his intercession is so graciously instrumental in lifting the veil and removing the obstacles on the path of the wayfarer.⁶⁹

The candle of Muhammad’s household, detached from the world, Husayn was the master of his time, and the pivot of the people of affliction, martyred in the desert of Karbala. As long as the truth prevailed he was in obedience and once it was compromised he

took his sword and did not rest for a moment till he sacrificed his life for God, Most High.⁷⁰

Remembering the name of Husayn illuminates the eye of the prophets. He was the son of the Pure Ones and friends of God and the Legatee of his messenger. There was nobody like him in the two engendered world. His physical root was on the earth but his soul in the highest abode of Heaven (*mala ' illiyin*) and his spirit in the firmament of certainty.⁷¹ Husayn is not the Master of the Martyrs (*Sayyid al-Shuhada*) just for the exoteric followers of Shi'ism, but his glorification by Sufi orders, Shi'a and Sunni alike, makes him Master of the Martyrs among all Friends of God (*awlia*) as well. It is not, therefore, accidental or a purely emotional reaction that even today we find constant references to the tragedy of Karbala in the literature of Shi'a and Sunni Sufi orders,

We shall leave behind life and lover
Let us not forget the blood of Karbala
We shall pass through the Gardens of Paradise
Let us not forget the blood of Karbala
This wound still bleeds in our heart
We are of the *Haydar*
Let us not stray,
Even if they drag us to the gallows,
Let us not forget the blood of Karbala
Haydar-i karrar is our leader
We shed tears for Husayn
If only one companion remains
Let us not forget the blood of Karbala.⁷²

Shi'a 'irfan After The Occultation

With the advent of the Greater Occultation (*ghaybat-i kubra*) in 329/941 a period of the eclipse of Shi'a 'irfan began. Between the middle of the 4th/10th and 6th/13th centuries the mainstream Shi'a 'ulama and *mujtahids* adopted a legalistic approach toward Shi'ism

and strongly opposed philosophy and gnosis, while those engaged in inner life kept a low profile.

During the three centuries between the Mongol invasion on the Islamic world and the establishment of the Safavid state (1220-1501) Shi'ism encountered many challenges from different directions and several important developments took place in the Islamic world that had profound impact on the spiritual life in the Shi'a world.

The Mongol invasion had a devastating impact on the Islamic world and civilization. Major intellectual centers like Nayshabur, Rayy, and Baghdad were destroyed completely and prominent scholars and Gnostics were killed in the process. Ironically, after the initial storm was settled, an intellectual renaissance began in the Shi'a world that resulted in the revival and growth of Shi'i sciences. There appeared such luminaries as Nasir al-Din Tusi, (597-672/1201-1274) the statesman and the Sufi who founded the Shi'a school of theology and who wrote the famous treatise on *'irfan* titled *Awsaf al-ashraf* (Descriptions of People of Nobility). Other important figures of this period included Maytham Bahrani (636-799/1238 – 1299), Sayyid Haydar Amuli (720-787/1319-1385), Allamah Husayn ibn Sulayman Hilli, (d. after 802/1399), Husayn Wa'iz Kashifi (820-910/-1417-1505) and Muhammad Taqi Majlisi (1003-1070/1599-1659). These individuals were outstanding jurists, theologians, philosophers, and most importantly Gnostics who wrote on Shi'a *'irfan* and practiced it openly.⁷³ They also paved the way for full blossoming of Shi'a sciences during the Safavid period.⁷⁴

The second important event was the establishment of the Ottoman Empire around 1283 as the champion of Sunni Islam. The Ottomans showed great interest in spiritual life as was demonstrated by the establishment and growth of numerous Sufi orders, especially in Anatolian proper. Several Sultans were in fact initiated into Sufism and patronized Sufis. Interestingly, many of these orders had great

interest in Shi‘ism or were Shi‘a. The most powerful of all Sufi orders in Anatolia until the early 1800s was indeed the Shi‘a Bektashi order and its founder Haji Bektash Wali (approx. 1209 to 1271) became the patron-saint of the ottoman state and its most important military organization, the Janissaries (Yeni Cheri) elite corps. All recruits for this corps entered Shi‘ism first and then initiated into the Bektashi order. The Janissaries and the Bektashi order both became the most powerful military and spiritual organizations in the Ottoman state and played a leading role in Ottoman political and social life until the corps’ destruction by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826.⁷⁵

The third and in some ways the most important event of this period was the rise of the Safavid dynasty in Persia in the 16th century. The impact of this development on Persia and Shi‘a tradition is too well-known to repeat here. Originally a Sufi order, in driving to power the Safavids entered Shi‘ism and once in power they declared it as the official religion of the state. This development resulted in the institutionalization of religious establishment and the integration of Shi‘a clergy into the state apparatus.⁷⁶

The Safavid Period (1500-1722) also marked a period of flourishing of Shi‘i sciences and the emergence of prominent scholars and masters such as Muhammad Taqi Majlisi, Mir Damad (d. 1041/1631), Mir Fendereski (d.1050/1640), Mulla Sadra (979-1050/1571-1640), Muhsin Fayd Kashani (1007 -1091/1598-1680), , Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji (d.1072/1662), and last but not least, Baha al-Din Amili (953-1030/1547-1621) who was a scholar, philosopher, architect, and a Sufi.

Ironically the Safavid rise to power and their patronage of Shi‘ism and Sufism also marked the beginning of the decline and degeneration of Sufism. This process that may be called the *popularization of Sufism* resulted in the emergence of pseudo-Sufi groups and many corrupt elements and practices entered into existing Sufi orders. It is for these reasons that by the end of the 16th

century the term Sufi and *tasawwuf* acquired a pejorative connotation. Many serious practitioners of Sufism began to use the term *'irfan* instead of *tasawwuf*, which by then had become closely identified with the unorthodox individuals, the mob and vagabonds. This situation created backlash and led to hostility and conflict between Sufi orders and the exoteric clergy who wrote treatises in refutation of Sufism. Already Muhaqqiq Karaki (d. 1533) had written *al-matain al-mujrimiyah fi radd al-sufiyah*, and his son Shaykh Hasan had produced *Umdat al-maqal fi kufr-i ahl al-dilal*. With the appointment of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1699) as the Mulla Bashi and Shaykh al-Islam of Isfahan more restrictions were placed on Sufi orders and many more treatises were written in refutations of Sufism. By the end of the 17th century the anti-Sufi measures of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi facilitated the suppression of Sufis by the government as a result of which pseudo-Sufi groups as well as genuine spiritual masters were indiscriminately suppressed. Many left Persian and those who stayed secluded themselves and kept a low profile. Even eminent philosophers and Gnostics such as Mulla Sadra fell out of favor despite his connection to the court and Allahverdi Khan, the powerful governor of Shiraz. He left Isfahan and retreated to his village in Kahak near the city of Qom where he passed away in 1050/1640.⁷⁷ *It is important however, to read the anti-Sufi literature of those decades within the context of their time and in light of the developments that took place and resulted in degeneration and decline of genuine spirituality.*

Conclusion:

The preceding discussion demonstrated that Islamic spirituality started with the Shi'a Imams preoccupation with the inner life and their efforts to initiate a few close disciples into *'irfan*. It also showed that their activities laid the foundation for the emergence of Islamic esoteric movements and paved the way for the establishment of the first formal Sufi orders within a century after the Occultation of the 12th Imam. What appeared after the 4th/10th century was indeed a natural and logical fruit of the seeds that the

Prophet had planted in Imam Ali 's chest and expanded greatly and openly by other Imams until the passing of the 8th Imam in 203/817. In the subsequent centuries their efforts inspired and continued by some Shi'a scholars on the one hand and Sunni Sufi masters on the other hand. Indeed, the close identification that exists between Shi'ism and Sufism owes its existence to their common origin. Although they used different vocabularies and language of discourse in the Shi'a and Sunni world, their doctrinal and spiritual expression remained essentially the same, as we can be seen in classical Sufi texts.

Six centuries after Sayyid Haydar Amuli's death, another prominent Shi'a 'arif, namely, 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai reiterated what Amuli had said regarding Shi'ism and Sufism as the expression of a single reality by two different names; "Sufi masters are Shi'a s from the point of view of spiritual life and in connection with the source of *Wilayah*, although from the point of view of the external form of religion they follow the Sunni schools of law."⁷⁸

Further Readings

- Burckhardt, T., *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D.M. Matheson, (Northamptonshire, 1976).
- Chittick, William. *Sufism, A Short Introduction*, (Oxford: One world Publications, 2000).
- Chittick, W., *The Sufi Path of Love*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1983).
- Ernst, C. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, (Boston, Shambhala Publications Inc 1987).
- Al-Ghazzali, Abu Hamid, *The Path of Worshippers to the Paradise of the Lord of the Worlds*, translated, annotated and introduced by Mohammad H. Faghfoory, (Lanham (MD) University Press of America, 2012).
- Ibn Ata' Allah al-Iskandari, *The Book of Wisdom*, trans. V. Danner, (New York, 1978).
- Lewisohn, L. (ed.), *The Heritage of Sufism*, 3 vols., (Oxford: OneWorld Publication, 1999).
- Lings, Martin. *What is Sufism?* (London: Islamic Text Society, 1995).
- Mu'adhdhin Khuraisaini, Mohammad. *Tuhfeh-yi 'Abbasi: Golden Chain of Sufism in Shi'ite Islam*, translated by Mohammad H. Faghfoory, (Lanham (MD) University Press of America, 2007).
- Nasr, S.H. (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, (Crossroad/Herder and Herder, 1991).
- Nasr, S. H. *The Garden of Truth*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).
- Nurbakhsh, J., *In the Tavern of Ruin - Seven Essays on Sufism*,
- Pourjavady, H. and Wilson, P.L., *Kings of Love*, (London, 1978).
- Safavi, Seyed Ghahreman (ed.), *Rumi's Spiritual Shi'ism*, Philadelphia, 2008.
- Schimmel, A.M. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).
- Schuon, F. *Sufism-Veil and Quintessence*, World Wisdom Books.

- Siraj ed-Din, Abui Bakr. *The Book of Certainty*, London: Islamic Texts Society, 1996.
- Tabataba'i, S. Muhammad Husayn, *Kernel of the Kernel (Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect)*, translated by Mohammad H. Faghfoory, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

Endnotes

¹ Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Risalah al-wilayah*, (Qom, n.d.), p. 26.

² Quran, 72: 16.

³ Chittick, W. C. *The Psalms of Islam: al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiya*, (2006, trans.), London: The Muhammadi Trust, 2006.

⁴ The lives and contributions of these scholars have been studied extensively. See for example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Oliver Leaman, (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2 vols., London, 1996; I.H. Kuhasri, *Tarikh-i falsafeh-ye islami*, Tehran, 1382/2003, Nasrullah Pourjavadi, *Danishmand-i Tus*, Tehran, 1375/1996, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. By S.H. Nasr, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975, Tabataba'i, *Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journeying of the People of Intellect*, translated and annotated By Mohammad H. Faghfoory, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. xxi-xxxiii.

⁵ Among this group of sources we can mention Sadr al-Din Shirazi's *Asfar Arba Ah*, Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-'ulum, *Risah dar Sayr va Suluk*, edited and annotated by Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni (Tehran, 1417/1997). See also Allamah Seyyed Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Kernel of the Kernel: A Shi'i Approach to Sufism (Lubb -i Lubab dar sayr wa Suluk-i ululalbab)*, translated, annotated, and introduced by Mohammad H. Faghfoory (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), Muhammad Mu'adhdhin Khurasani, *Tuhfa-ye Abbasi*, trans. & annotated by Mohammad H. Faghfoory, Lanham: University Press of America, 2008, and, Amir Moezzi, Ali, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esoterism in Islam*, State University of New York Press. 1994.

⁶ So described an eminent Sufi masters of Khurasan, Abulhasan Bushanji (467/1074)⁶ the reality of Sufism during the time of the Prophet of Islam and his early companions and how it had degenerated by his time in the 5th/11th century. As narrated in *Kashf al-Mahjub*, the first Persian treatise on Sufism, See, Abul-Hasan Ali ibn Uthman Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, edited by D. Zhukovski & Qasim Ansari, (Tehran, 1378/1999), p. 49.

⁷ For biographies of the Prophet, see, Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the earliest sources*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, (1st.ed.) 1983.

Nasr, *Muhammad: Man of God*, Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007; Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*, New York:

HarperColinsPublisher, 2006, and Omid Safi, *Memoires of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters*, New York: arperColinsPublisher, 2009.

⁸ Mu'adhhdhin Khurasani, *Tuhfa-ye Abbasi*, pp. 10. See also Qur'an, 53: 9.

⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, (2d.ed.), State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 107-108.

¹⁰ Quran, 42: 28

¹¹ As quoted in Tabatabai, *Kernel of the Kernel*, (Lubb al-Lubab), pp. 109

نحن اسماء الله. بنا عرف الله و بنا عبد الله .

¹² Muhammad Taqi Jafari, *Tarjumah wa Tafsir-i Nahj al-Balaghah*, Vol. 1, as quoted in, Habibullah Jalaliyan, *Tarikh-i Tafsir-i Quran Karim*, 4th ed., (Mashhad, 1378L/1999), pp. 49-50.

¹³ Ibn Abi Jumhur Ahsai, *Ghawali al-Laali* ,4: 130-131 and *Tafsir al-Muhit al-Azam*, 1: 518. As quoted in, Mu'adhhdhin Khorasani, *Tuhfah-ye Abbasi*, pp. 129

¹⁴ Imam Ali wore this cloak all his life. He always said that 'I have patched it so many times that I am ashamed of the one who made it.' See, *Tuhfah-ye Abbasi*, p. 170.

¹⁵ Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, p. 66.

¹⁶ Nasr, in Seyed Ghahreman (Salman) Safavi, *Rumi's Spiritual Shi'ism*, London: London Academy of Iranian Studies, 2008, p. 16

¹⁷ Lughat nameh-ye Dekhoda, (Tehran, 1324/1946, continuous)

¹⁸ Kamil Mustafa al-Shibi, *Fikr al-Shi'i wa al-naza'at al-Sufiyah hata matla' al-qarn al-thani ashar al-hijri*, Baghdad: Maktabatal- Nahdah, 1966, as quoted by Nasr, in Safavi, Rumi's Spiritual Shi'ism, p. 16. See also his, *al-Silah bayn al tasawwuf wa-al-tashayyu*, Cairo: Dar al-ma 'arif, 1969.

¹⁹ On Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) see, Farid al-Din Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, Tehran, (4th ed.), Tehran 1375/2006, 35–57. See also Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, pp. 101–03.

²⁰ Uways al-Qarani Uways al-Qaranī (d. 37/657) was an outstanding figure in Islamic spirituality from Yemen who dreamt of the Prophet and entered Islam but never met the Messenger of God. Following the death of Muhammad in 10/632, Qarani joined Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib and was martyred in the Battle of Siffin. See Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, pp. 50, 99, 100, 102.

²¹ Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 161/777) was born in the city of Balkh and was the king of Balkh Province. One night he had a dream. He abandoned the throne and entered the path. He is one of the most celebrated figures of Sufism. See, Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, pp. 125-155.

²² Ibid., pp. 156-167.

²³ Mu'adhhdhin Khorasani, *Tuhfah-ye Abbasi*, pp. 122 and 129. See also, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Shi'ism and Sufism: "Their Relationship in Essence and in History" in, Safavi, *Rumi's Spiritual Shi'ism*, pp. 15-16.

²⁴ For information on these Imams and their lives and practices see, Shaykh Abbas Qumi, *Muntahi al-amal fi dhikr tawarikh-i al-Nabi wa' al-Al (Muntahi al-Amal: Zindegani-ye Chahardah Ma'sum)*, Tehran, 1377. See also Allamah Husayn Tabatabai, *Shi'ite Islam*, translated and edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2d. ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977, pp. 190-214.

²⁵ Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, pp. 84-85.

²⁶ Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tehrani, "Introduction" in Allamah M.H. Tabataba'i, *Kernel of the Kernel*, pp. 2-3.

²⁷ Imam Ali, *Nahj al-balaghah*, as quoted in M. J. Kabudar Ahangi (Majdhub Ali Shah) *Rasa'il-i majdhubiyah*, edited with an introduction by Hamid Naji Isfahani, (Tehran: 1377/2008), p. 67.

اللهم نور ظاهري بطاعتك وباطني بمحبتك وقلبي بمعرفتك وروحي بمشاهدتك وسري باستقلال
اتصال حضرتك يا ذا الجلال والاکرام
knowledge of the truth (*'ilam al-yaqin*), the traveler must struggle to see (*'ayn al-yaqin*) to attain certainty of the Truth (*haqq al-yaqin*). This is the kind of knowledge that is the goal of seekers. See. Kabudar Ahangi, *Rasail-I Majzubiyah*, pp. 67-69.

²⁸ On the role and contributions of the fourth Imam to the development of "irfan see, Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, pp. 89. See also, Allamah Tehrani,

Imam Shinasi, vol. iv, (Tehran, 1405/1989), pp. 11-12.

²⁹ Quran, 35:32

³⁰ See Muhammad I. Ayati, (ed.) *Tafsir-i Sharif-i Lahiji*, by Baha' al-Din Muhammad Lahiji, (Tehran, 1340/1961), introduction to vol. 4, pp. 11. See also, Mukhtari, "Ali dar manzar-i Quran" in *Payam-i Hawzah*, Qum, pp. 29.

³¹ Quran, 3: 7

³² Quran, (4:162, and 3 :7). Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, (ed.), *Sih Risalah*, by Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Mashhad, 1980, pp. 76-78. Passages are also taken from Ashtiyani's introduction. pp. 210-214. See also Tabataba'i, *Tafsir-i Kabir-i al-Mizan*, (Qom, 1393h/1970), vol. 3, pp. 52-55; and 'Abbas 'Amidi Zanjani, *mabani wa ravish-ha-yi tafsir-i Quran*, Tehran, 1368/1989, pp. 97-112. Quotations from Abi Dawood and *Kitab al-Basa'ir [al-Darajat]* of Abu Ja'afar Muhammad ibn Hasan, as they appear in Arabic in Amidi Zanjani, pp. 122.

³³ Tabatabai, *Quran dar Islam*, (10th ed., Qum, 1379/1999 pp. 27-32. See also, Ali Mukhtari, "Ali dar manzar-i Quran" in *Payam-i Hawzah*, Qum, 1379/2000. pp.17-19.

³⁴ Sayyid Hashim Bahrani, *al-Hidayah al-Quraniyah*, pp. 33-34.

(Manuscript copy, Marashi Library, Qum.). See also Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, pp. 89-94.

³⁵ Mirza Abulqasim Raz Shirazi (ed.), *Manahij anwar-i ma'rifah fi sharh-i Misbah al-Shari'ah wa miftah al-haqiqah*, (Tehran, 1384/2005), pp. 744. Also quoted in Muhammad Khajavi, "Introduction to the translation of the Noble Quran," (Tehran, 1369/1990, p. Thirty.

³⁶ Ibid., See also Abu Ja'afar Muhammad Shaykh Saduq, known as ibn Babuyah, *Kitab al-Khisal*, pp.214. as quoted in Tehrani, *Nur-i Malakut-i Quran*, 4 volumes, (Mashhad, 1368/1989).

³⁷ See Muhammad I. Ayati, (ed.) *Tafsir-i Sharif-i Lahiji*, by Baha' al-Din Muhammad Lahiji, Tehran, 1340/1961, introduction to vol. 4, pp. 11.

³⁸ Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, (ed.) *Sadr al-Din Shirazi Mutishabihat al-Quran*, See the introduction by, pp. 211.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 213-214.

⁴⁰ *Sufi Essays*, p. 109.

⁴¹ Quran, 4: 58. اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ اَنْ تُؤَدُّواْ الْاِمَانَاتِ اِلٰى اَهْلِهَا

⁴² . Hajj Shaykh Abbas Qomi, *Mafatih-al-jinan*, (Tehran: Kitabchi@ Publishers), n.d., pp. 708. From the prayer known as *Jamiah Kabirah*.

من عرفكم فقد عرف الله و من جهلكم فقد جهل الله و من احبكم فقد احب الله و من ابغضكم فقد ابغض الله.

⁴³ Raz Shirazi (ed.), *Manahij anwari marifah*, pp. 655.

إِنَّ أَمْرَنَا صَعْبٌ وَ مُسْتَعَصَبٌ لَا يَحْتَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مَلِكٌ الْمُقْرَبُ أَوْ نَبِيٌّ الْمُرْسَلُ أَوْ مُؤْمِنٌ امْتَحَنَ اللَّهُ قَبْلَهُ لِلإِيمَانِ

See Husayn ibn Sulayman Hilli, (d. after 802/1399), *Mukhtasar al-Darajat*, vol. I, pp. 126, Qom: Muassisah nashr al-islami, 1421/2000.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Tabatabai, *Risalah al-wilayah*, pp. 24.

° فنقول: اعلم أنّ الفرقة «الامامية» على قسمين: قسم قائم بظاهر علومهم، التي هي عبارة عن الشريعة و الإسلام و الايمان و قسم قائم بباطن علومهم التي هي عبارة عن الطريقة و الحقيقة و الإيقان ص. ٨٤ و الاول موسوم بالمؤمن فقط. و الثاني ب «المؤمن الممتحن»، و الشيعة و الصوفية عبارة عنهما، «٥» لأنّ الشيعي و الصوفي اسمان متغايران) يدلان على حقيقة واحدة، و هي الشريعة المحمدية... . بأنهما حاملا أسرار الأنبياء و الأولياء- عليهم السلام- ظاهرا و باطنا، لأنّ الأنبياء و الأولياء كانوا جامعين لجميع الاسرار الإلهية ظاهرا و باطنا. و ان كانت الصوفية بالحقيقة أيضا هي الشيعة، كما عرفته عند بحث المؤمن الممتحن و غير الممتحن.

⁴⁶ Sayyid haydar Amuli, ⁴⁶ *Jami al-asrar wa manba al-anwar*, edited and introduced by Osman Yahya, (Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1368/1999), see in particular, pp.14, 81-85.

⁴⁷ Henri Corbin & Osman Yahya, “Hakim-i arif Allamah Sayyid Mir Haydar Amuli,” introduction to *Jami ‘al-asrar* pp. 19, trans. Into Persian by Sayyid Javad Tabataba’i, (Tehran, 1347/1968), reprinted in 1368/1989.

⁴⁸ Kulayni, *Rawda min al-Kafi* vol. 1, p. 274, Ibn Babuyah, *llal al-sharai‘*, vol. 1, pp. 98 and 107-108, as quoted in Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, *The Divine Guid in Early Shi‘ism*, pp. 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ As quoted in Amirmoezzi, pp. 10-11.

⁵¹ Al-Saffar al-Qumi, *Basair al-darajat*, edited by Mirza Kuchebaghi, (Tehran, 2d.ed. n.d.), section 3, Chapter 3, pp.377-378, quoted in Amirmoezzi, pp. 75.

⁵² Muhammad Taqi Jafari, *Tarjumah wa Tafsir-i Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol. 1, as quoted in Habibullah Jalaliyan, , pp. 49-50

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 76.

⁵⁴ Mohammad H. Faghfoory, “Muhammad the Prophet: The First Sufi,” in, *Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Publishers, 2013).

⁵⁵ See for instance Abd al-Karim Qushayri, *Risalah al-Qushayriyah*, translated into Persian by Abu Ali ibn Ahmad Osmani, ed. By Badi al-zaman Foruzanfar, 3d.ed., (Tehran, 1367/1988); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi essays*, William Chittick, *Sufism, A Short Introduction*, (Oxford: One world Publications, 2000), Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (London: Islamic Text Society, 1995).

Nasr, S. H. *The Garden of Truth*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).

Schimmel, A.M. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, 1975, Siraj ed-Din, Abu Bakr. *The Book of Certainty*, (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), Burckhardt, T. *Introduction to Sufism*, (London: Thorsons Publications).

Chittick, William (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Islamic Tradition*, (Parabola Anthology series, n.d.) 2007, Ernst, C. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc. 1997, Muadhhdhin Kurasani, *Tuhfeh-yi 'Abbasi*, Nasr, S.H. (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, (Crossroad/ Herder and Herder, 1097-1999), Schuon, F. *Sufism-Veil and Quintessence*, Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1981. Tabataba'i, *Kernel of the Kernel*.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 93. **أَيْسَ مَيْتًا مَنْ لَمْ يُحَاسِبْ نَفْسَهُ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ مَرَّةً.**

⁵⁷ Imam Ali said, "It is incumbent upon you to keep and protect divine mysteries." See Hujwiri, pp. 86.

⁵⁸ For a definition of *taqiyyah* and its implications in Shi'ism see, Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 223-225.

⁵⁹ As quoted in Amuli, ⁵⁹ *Jami al-asrar*, pp. 81.

أنى لأتكم من علمى جواهره
 كيلا يرى الحق ذو جهل فيفتتنا
 و قد تقدّمنا «١» فيها أبو حسن
 مع الحسين و وصى قبلها الحسن
 يا ربّ جوهر علم لو أبوح به
 لقليل لي: أنت ممن يعبد الوثنا!
 و لاستحلّ رجال مسلمون دمي

⁶⁰ As quoted in Tabataba'i, *Kernel of the Kernel*, pp. 103.

⁶¹ Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, 5: 79/41/2. See also Raz Shirazi (ed.) *Manahij Anwar al-marifah*,

⁶² Raz Shirazi, *Manahij anwar-i marifah*, pp. 442.

⁶³ Narrations by Imam Ali as quoted in Tabatabai, *Risalah al-Wilayah*, pp. 34.

⁶⁴ Reza Shah Kazemi, "The Notion and Significance of Ma'rifah in Sufism," in, Seyed Ghahraman Safavi (ed.) *Sufism ('irfan)*, (London: London Academy of Iranian Studies, 2009), pp. 176.

⁶⁵ As quoted in *Tuhfah-yi 'Abbasi*, pp. 123.

⁶⁶ *al-Kafi*, 2: 90/5, as quoted in *Tuhfah-yi 'Abbasi*, pp. 213.

⁶⁷ Kulayni, *Usul al-kafi*, vol. 1, pp. 387, and Ibn Babuyah, *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, as quoted in Amir Moezzi, pp. 66-67.

⁶⁸ Quran, 3: 169.

⁶⁹ Tabatabai, *Kernel of the Kernel*, pp. 123.

⁷⁰ Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, pp. 88-89.

⁷¹ Sanai, *Diwan*, edited with an introduction by Mudarres Razavi, (Tehran, n.d.). See also ghazal # 2707 in Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Kulliat-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, edited with an introduction by Badi al-Zaman Foruzanfar, (Tehran: Amir kabir Publishers, 1372/1993), pp. 1004.

⁷² Shaykh Muzaffar Ozak al-Jarrahi, *Ashiki's Divan*, (Westport: Pir Publications, 1991), p. 100.

⁷³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism: Seyed Salman Ghahreman Safavi (ed.) *Sufism ('irfan)*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁴ See Sai'd A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, (London & Chicago, 1988); Michael Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safawids*. (Wiesbaden, 1972), Roger Savory: *Iran Under the Safavid*. (London, 1980).

⁷⁵ For an account of this order, see John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of the Dervishes*, (Luzac Oriental, 1996, rev.ed.).

⁷⁶ See, Iskandar Bayk Turkaman, *Tarikh-i Alam Ara-yi Abbasi*, edited by Iraj Afshar, (Tehran, 1350/1971), and Rasul Jafariyan, *Din va siyasat dar dawra-yi Safavi*, (Tehran, 1370/1991).

⁷⁷ For other works against Sufism and the Sufis written during the Safavid period see, Jafariyn, *Din va siyasat dar dawra-yi Safavi*, pp. 226-267. See also, Mohammad H. Faghfoory, "Sadr al-Din Shirazi in the Context of Safavid History: The Historical and Social Milieu of Mulla Sadra (979-1050/1571-1640)," in, *Proceedings of the Conference on Sadr al-Din Shirazi*, (Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1991).

⁷⁸ Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 115.

The Knowledge of Unity (*'ilm al-wahdah*): Comparative Reflections on Ibn 'Arabī and Persian Kubrawī Mystics in Their Approach to the Concept of Unity

Seyyed Shahabeddin Mesbahi
Visiting Fellow-Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, UK

Abstract

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a flourishing time for Islamic mysticism, several Islamic mystics of Iran and Central Asia found their way to the ideas and thoughts of one of the most important and influential schools of Islamic mysticism; that of the Master Maximus Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn 'Arabī (638 A.H. /1240 C.E.). Among the major Sufi orders which thrived at this time was the Kubrawīyyah. The Kubrawīyyah which originated in Central Asia is named after its founder, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), one of the most eminent Persian mystics, also known as the *shaykh-i walī tarāsh* ("saint-producing shaykh").

Despite the important works of prominent Kubrawīs and their contributions in the dissemination of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī's *weltanschauung*, no major study of this topic has hitherto been available. In the present paper, I will reflect on the central concept of the Absolute's Unity (*wahdah*) in the views of the great theoretician of Islamic mysticism, Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), and major Persian Kubrawī mystics by taking into account the important affinities and correlations between the key concept of *wahdah* and other essential mystical concepts such as

asmā' (Absolute's Names) and *al-insan al-kamil* (perfect human being/perfect man), as referred to by Ibn 'Arabī and the Kubrawīs. I will rely mostly on works by Ibn 'Arabī, and major Kubrawī mystics such as Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Sa'd al-Dīn Hamūyah (d. 650/1253), 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. 700/1300), 'Alā' ad-Dawlah Simnānī (d. 736/1337) and Mīr Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385).

Keywords: Islamic mysticism, Ibn 'Arabī, Kubrawī order, school of Ibn 'Arabī, *wahdat al-wujūd*, the unity of existence, *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfect human being, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, Sa'd al-Dīn Hamūyah, 'Alā' ad-Dawlah Simnānī, Mīr Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī

I. *Maqām al-Munāzalah* and the Completed Circle

In his description of *Wujūd al-Wāhid* ("Existence of One"), the cardinal interpreter of the school of Ibn 'Arabī and his Persian disciple Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1273-4), refers to the three dimensions of outer, inner and the mediator (isthmus). The outer dimension is *'ālam* ("the world"), the inner represents the *asmā'* ("Names"), and the *al-barzakh al-jāmi'* ("comprehensive isthmus") which separates the outer from the inner, is the perfect man. Qūnawī concludes that the outer dimension (or the world) is the mirror of the inner dimension (or the Absolute's Names), in the same way that the outer is the mirror for the inner dimension.¹ Whatever is situated between these two realms (i.e, inner and outer) is the mirror of both, *jam'an wa tafSīlan* (in the way which unites and explains them).² In the stage of being a comprehensive isthmus, the perfect man, as Qūnawī states, functions in a reciprocal method as *martabah tanazzul* ("descending stage").³

This stage consists of two allied levels of mutuality. The first is *tanazzul rabbānī* ("descending the Absolute [through the Names]"). At this level, the Absolute is named *Sifāt al-'abdānī* ("characteristics similar to that of the servant"). At the second level, the perfect man through his ascending spiritual journey towards the

Absolute is named *iritiqā’ al-rabbānī* (“the Absolute’s attributes”).⁴ Qūnawī’s description of this process, which takes place within the bounties of the Absolute’s manifestations (or the Names), is another method of invoking *barzakhiyyah* (“the mediating role”) of the perfect man. By being the interpreter of the descending Names (in *martabah tanzzul rabbānī*) and also through *iritiqā’* (“journeying towards the Origin of the Names”), the perfect man as the par exemplar of the Names, experiences both the descending and ascending stages on the everlasting path towards perfection.

The Kubrawī master ‘Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī also refers to these two stages of “descend and ascend,” through which the perfect man returns to his Origin:

...the Perfect Man, who in his descent and ascent, will have passed three heavens and three earths and then is firmly established upon the Throne; that is he will have come from and returned to the First Intelligence. Thus the circle, is completed, the First Intelligence is firmly established upon the Throne and the Perfect Man is also firmly established upon the Throne.⁵

Nasafī’s “completed circle” pinpoints the combination of the two semi circles of *nuzūl* and *Su’ūd* in Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical expressions. The *qaws-i nuzūl* (descending stage), stems from the essential and constant *mahabbah* (“love”) of the Absolute for His servants. This love reaches its eminent culmination within the heart of the perfect man and will return him, via *qaws-i Su’ūd* (“ascending stage”) to his Source. Borrowing a Qurānic verse (2:165), Ibn ‘Arabī, in one of his prayers, conveys the burning desire of the perfect man for journeying through the complete circle of this essential love. As Ibn ‘Arabī suggests, the very outcome of the *qaws-i su’ūd* is attaining the realization of unity.

In this journey towards the One, the moderating position of the perfect man as the *barzakh* brings these two semi-circles into “one complete circle” which will be everlastingly renewed. The descent of the Absolute’s love upon his servant, marks the beginning of the

qaws-i nuzūl in the same way that “coming into loving union” resembles the beginning of *qaws-i Su‘ūd* or ascending stage of the perfect man. In his constant standing between *ghayb wa shahādah* (“the unseen and seen worlds”), the perfect man becomes the sole interpreter of the Absolute Love. In his prayer, Ibn ‘Arabī recites as follows:

Burning down upon me, O You who are Eminent in Affection, the Constant in Love, love [extended] from You, so that through it the hearts of Your servants will be guided to me, yielding to me with love, affectionate and unwavering, from the filling with love, the softening of hearts and the coming into loving union in *They love them as if it were love for Allāh, but those who believe are more ardent in love for Allāh.*⁶

Also in his *Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah*, Ibn ‘Arabī refers to the mutual harmony between the stages of ascent and descent in the process of envisioning the Real. In this journey of *munāzalah*, the perfect man experiences a circle of perfection in returning to the Real.

When the vision of the Real takes place, it only takes place in a mutual waystation (*munāzala*) between an ascent and a descent. That ascent belongs to us and the descent to Him. To us belong “drawing close” (*tadānī*) and to Him belongs “coming down” (*tadallī*), since coming down must stem from the high. It is ours to climb (*taraqqī*) and His to receive (*talaqqī*) those who come to Him. All of this gives us knowledge of the form in which He discloses Himself to His servants...⁷

The founder of the Kubrawī Order, Najm al-Din Kubrā in a creative elucidation of what he refers to as *sirr al-sayr* (“secret of the mystical journey”), makes a significant correlation between the descending and ascending lights. This vigorous reciprocation, as Kubrā defines it, occurs between the ‘*arsh* (“Throne”) and the perfect man’s *qalb* (“heart”). In his description, *nūr* (“light”) becomes the real substance of both what is *in* Heaven and *in* the perfect man’s heart. From this light stems the mutual longing

between sources of ascent and descent. When this mutuality is nurtured, each particle of the mystic's being finds its counterpart in the Heaven, with which he becomes one.

Each time the heart sighs for the Throne, the Throne sighs for the heart, so that they come to meet...Each precious stone...which is in you brings you a mystical state or vision in the Heaven corresponding to it, whether it be the fire of ardent desire, of delight or of love. Each time a light rises up from you, a light comes down toward you, and each time a flame rises from you, a corresponding flame comes down toward you...If their energies are equal, they meet half-way (between Heaven and Earth)...But when the substance of light has grown in you, then this becomes a Whole in relation to what is of the same nature in Heaven: then it is the substance of light in Heaven which yearns for you and is attracted by your light, and it descends towards you. This is the secret of the mystical approach...⁸

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā also describes how “lights” in the mutual realms of descent and ascent, become one body of lights through which light appears upon light perpetually. In this description, when the veil of corporeal being is lifted, one might witness a type of *wahdat* (“unity”) which occurs between the lights, as well as the Throne and the heart (or between the Real and the perfect man).

There are lights which ascend and lights which descend. The ascending lights are the lights of the heart; the descending lights are those of the Throne. Creatural being is the veil between the Throne and the heart. When this veil is rent and a door to the Throne opens in the heart, like springs toward like. Light rises toward light and light comes down upon light, “*and it is light upon light*” (Qur’ān 24:35).⁹

Referring to the concept of *tajallī* (“the Absolute’s manifestation”), Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, elaborates upon a direct reciprocation between the heart and the Absolute’s attributes:

The heart participates in every divine Attribute, and therefore in the divine Essence. This participation does not cease to grow, and the mystic differ from each other according to the extent of their participation. Since each Attribute has its seat in one of the places or abodes in question, and since the heart participates in each of the divine Attributes, they are epiphanized in the heart to the extent that the heart participates in these Attributes. *The Attributes revealed to the Attributes, Essence to Essence...* On the one hand, the Attributes (or places) contemplate the heart (cause it to be present to them). On the other hand, the heart contemplates the places of the Attributes (makes itself present to them). Theophany is brought about first by theoretical knowledge, later by visionary apperception, whether the Attributes make themselves witnesses present to the heart, or whether the heart makes itself a witness and present to the *places* of the Attributes.¹⁰

The reciprocation between the heart and the Absolute's attributes seem to constitute a circle in which the *kathrat* of the attributes sees its unifying place within the seeker's heart. Also as seen above, Kubrā speaks of a realm in which "attributes are revealed to the attributes. As mentioned above, Kubrā also refers to a realm in which the "Essence is revealed to the Essence."

In his *Futūhāt*, Ibn 'Arabī also utilizes a similar but more lucid expression *al-haqq al-makhlūq bihī* ("the Real through whom creation takes place").¹¹ As William Chittick mentions, Ibn 'Arabī considers this term to have the same meaning as *habā'* ("Cloud") and *nafas al-Rahmān* ("Breath of the All-Merciful").¹² He refers to the "Cloud" as "identical with the Breath of the All-merciful"¹³ and states that "it is a breathing (*nafkh*) in the Being of the Real, so through it creation takes shape (*tashakkul*) within the Real."¹⁴ The term *al-haqq al-makhlūq bihī* explains that "The Cloud is the Real through whom takes place the creation of everything. It is called the "Real" since it is identical with the Breath, and the Breath is hidden within the Breather..."¹⁵

In another place, Ibn ‘Arabī, describing the *tajallī* (“manifestation”) of the Breath of the All-Merciful, seems to pave the way towards defining the concept of *tawhīd* in the realm of *wahdat* (“Unity”). We might be able to claim that, in the following passage, he discloses the *secret of the circle* in the *wujūdī* understanding. This circle defines the ties between the Real and the perfect man. In this circle, the perfect man goes perpetually through both the experiences of being manifested and being returned to the Real. The more he is aware of being *muhīt* (“encompassed”) within the circle of the Real’s *hadra* (“Presence”), the more elevated becomes his perfection. Considering his elevated awareness of the Real’s encompassing presence, the perfect man becomes the witness of the Perfect Real while experiencing an incessant perfection in His encompassing circle. This circle contains the entire existence which is un-delimited in its nature, because of the un-delimited Essence of the Real. Shaykh al-Akbar states the following:

This is the *tawhīd* of the Real, which is the *tawhīd* of the He-ness...Hence, “There is no God but He” is a description of the Real. That within which the existence of the cosmos has become manifest is the Real; it becomes manifest only within the Breath of the All-merciful, which is the Cloud. So it is the Real, the Lord of the Throne, who gave the Throne its all-encompassing shape, since it encompasses all things. Hence the root within which the forms of the cosmos became manifest encompasses everything in the world of corporeal bodies. This is nothing other than the Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place (*al-haqq al-makhlūq bihi*). Through this receptivity, It is like a container within which comes out into the open (*burūz*) the existence of everything it includes, layer upon layer, entity after entity, in a wise hierarchy (*al-tarīb al-hikamī*). So it brings out into the open that which had been unseen within It in order to witness it.¹⁶

Comparing Kubrā’s description of the function of the Essence mentioned above with Ibn ‘Arabī’s words, it seems that from the Akbarian standpoint, the fully unique outcome of the reciprocations

in which the “Essence is revealed to the Essence,” is the appearance of the perfect man. One might assert that in the view of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, the constant mutual circle of interaction and wedding between the Absolute’s attributes, both governs and ensures the very being of existence, as well as its everlastingness. On the other hand, the perfect man is presented to existence as the essential souvenir of the Essence’s internal modes. Thus, the perfect man, as the summation of the entirety of existence in a nutshell, becomes the perfect outcome of the circle through which “Essence is revealed to the Essence.”

Another Kubrawī master, a well-known critic of Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Alā ad-Dawlah Simnānī¹⁷ also stresses the definite role of the whole “circle” in the spiritual journey towards the One. In his *Khumkhāna-yi Wahdat* (“The Winehouse of Unity”), which appears to be very different from his much more orthodox and seminal work *al-‘Urwah*, Simnānī defines the role of *dāyirah* (“the circle”) in the seeker’s path of perfection. In Simnānī’s worldview, without the very *nūqtah* (“dot”) of the Real’s Love, which has to turn into a complete circle (*mustadīr shud*) for its perfection, the shallow line (*khatt*) of our borrowed being has no share of existence and thus, it falls into the abyss of absolute non-existence (*‘adam*).¹⁸ Simnānī affirms:

This line of our existence (*īn khatt-i wujūd-i mā*) has its surface in non-existence (*‘adam*), it has no pen, paper and writing on it. When the circle of existence (*dāyira-yi wujūd*) comes into being, know that the root of the dot (*aSl-i nūqtah*) is eternal (*qīdam*). Every moment which is not [i.e., does not belong to] Him is a worthless moment, [and] every entity (*har chīz*) which is not [for] Him is certainly non-existence. When that dot becomes a complete circle (*mustadīr shud*), be cheerful (*khush mībāsh*). When the circle is completed (*dāyirah muttaSil shud*) there remains no place for sorrow.¹⁹

The dot of the Real’s love (i.e., the human being) becomes perfect in the everlasting “circle” of perfection, which begins with the

Real's manifestation of the Names (*asmā'*), and then continues in each return to Him. The perfect man finds his real place in existence within the eternal and encompassing circle of the Real's Existence.

II. *Wahdah* and the Absolute's Names

In one of his elucidations of the characteristics of the perfect man, Ibn 'Arabī identifies the reason for *wujūdun li'l-'ayn* ("the appearance of existence"), as the perfect man's *hubbun lil-asmā'* ("love for the Names"). This love causes the Names to manifest their realities.²⁰

The Kubrawī master, Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī also refers to the perfect man's prepared heart for love of the Names, which causes both the Names of Beauty (*jamāl*) and Majesty (*jalāl*) to descend upon him.²¹ The bounty of *asmā'*, in the perfect man's lofty experience, results in his contemplation of *wahdat* ("unity"). Here, the Kubrawī master, makes use of a well-known mystical allegory, *sham' wa parwānah* ("candle and moth"). In the higher realms of his mystical experience, the perfect man's "moth of fictitious existence" (*parwāna-yi hastī-yi mawhūm*) embraces the lights of the Unity's majestic candle (*sham'-i jalāl-i ahadiyyat*).²² As a result of the perfect man being held close within the manifestation of unity, his *wujūd-i fānī* ("fading existence") will join the *haqiqat-i bāqī* ("perpetual Reality").²³

Hamadānī utilizes the two important Akbarian terms of *jalāl* and *ahadiyyat* in one single combination (i.e., *sham'-i jalāl-i ahadiyyat*), in order to refer to the *tanzīhī* ("peerless") Names of the Absolute in their relation to the level of inclusive unity or the Essence. The candle which symbolizes the manifestations of the Essence at the level of *wāhidīyyah* ("exclusive unity"), provides the mystic with the Names which illuminate the Path towards the One. In the eminent levels of mystical experience, as Hamadānī mentions, the perfect man goes through constant *fanā'* ("annihilation") and *baqā'* ("subsistence").

Similar to Hamadānī, ‘Alā al-Dawlah Simnānī, utilizes the same allegories to elaborate upon the perfect man’s *‘ishq* (“steadfast love”) for the Absolute. He makes use of terms such as *sham‘-i ahadiyyat*, in the course of his discussion of the Names of *jalāl wa jamāl* (“Majesty and Beauty”). On one occasion, he refers to perfect human beings as *‘ashiqān-i jānbāz* (“self-sacrificing lovers”) who like butterflies (*parwānah Sifat*), burn their *ithnaynīyyat* (“duality”) within the heart of *sham‘-i ahadiyyat* (“Unity’s candle”).²⁴ These lovers, as Simnānī states, prepare their *khāna-yi wujūd* (“house of existence”) for the *Sultān-i tajalliyāt-i ulūhiyyat* (“King of Divinity’s manifestations”), in order to receive the manifestations of His Essence and attributes in both forms of Majesty and Beauty (*jamālī wa jalālī*).²⁵ Simnānī also elaborates upon the concept of *fanā’* in its relation to these devout lovers, as they become annihilated in the *asal-i fadl-i īzādī* (“honey of God’s bounty”). He refers to this experience of annihilation as the *nihāyat-i safar-i awwal* (“end of the first journey”) which is the stage to “those who...strive in the way of Allah” (Qur’ān, 2:218).” On the other hand, *bidāyat-i safar-i thānī* (“the beginning of the second journey”), as he suggests, is the stage of “strive for Allah with the endeavour which is His right. He hath chosen you (Qur’ān, 22:78).”²⁶

Simnānī confirms that there is no end to the perfect man’s mystical journey and as he states, *aqṣ al-amānī* (“furthest destination/end of journey”) is not reachable.²⁷ Although, on this particular occasion, he does not mention the term *baqā’* (“subsistence”), the phrase *bidāyat-i safar-i thānī* (“beginning of the second journey”) along with its indication of *fi-Allah* (“in Allah”) in Simnānī’s chosen Qur’ānic verse-in contrast with the Qur’ānic term *fi sabīl-Allāh* (“in the Path of Allah”) for the stage of *fanā’* (annihilation)- seems to manifest his understanding of *baqā’* (“subsistence”). The perfect men, in Simnānī’s view are the seekers of the *miyān* (“the middle path”) who have two *bāl* (“wings”) of God’s *lutf* (“gentleness”) and His *qahr* (“severity”).²⁸ Through these elucidations, Simnānī seems to confirm the status of the perfect man as the *barzakh*, fully

enabled to combine both aspects of the Real's Beauty and Majesty (or *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* in the school of Ibn 'Arabī).

The Kubrawī master indicates that those seekers who attempt to fly only with the wing of *lutf* ("gentleness") will end up in *bihisht* ("Paradise"), and those who try to fly with the wing of *qahr* ("severity") will join *dūzakh* ("Hell").²⁹ The most prominent characteristic of perfect men which distinguishes them from both groups of *muridān-i ākhirat* ("seekers of the hereafter") and *muridān-i dunyā* ("seekers of the corporeal world"), as Simnānī states, is their *i'tidāl* ("seeking the middle path"). The seekers of the hereafter, in his view, are those who resemble *magasān* ("flies") who stayed aside. By mentioning this characteristic (i.e., staying aside), Simnānī perhaps refers to the limitation of these seekers' goal which puts them out of the Middle Path (or aside of it.) Only perfect men who fly with the *two wings* of the Absolute, *qahr wa lutf* ("severity and gentleness"), are honored with the title of *muridān-i wajh-Allāh* ("seekers of Allāh's Face").

Simnānī's focal stress upon the vital need of the perfect man for both *wings* of the Real, His Beauty and Majesty (or His Names of gentleness and severity), manifests striking proximity to Ibn 'Arabī's realization of the perfect man's essential need for *both eyes* (*dhu'l 'aynayn*)³⁰ in order to witness the Absolute's *tashbīh* (similarity) and *tanzīh* (peerlessness) on the perilous path towards perfection.

One of the well-known Persian Kubrawī masters, Sa'd al-Dīn Hamūyah (d. 649/1252), who referred to Ibn 'Arabī as *daryā-yi mawwāj wa bī-nihāyat* ("endless and fluctuating sea"), and whom Shaykh al-Akbar called in turn *kanzun lā yanfad* ("an unending treasure"),³¹ has referred to the symbolism of *bahr-i wahdat* ("the sea of unity"). He explains that the very source of the sea of unity *dar talātum ast* ("perpetually creates new waves"). Each *mawj* ("wave") causes the creation of several *fawj* ("waves"), and every *fawj* brings different contrasting patterns (*ashkāl-i mukhtalifah wa*

mutabāyinah).³² Here, Hamūyah mentions two groups with different realizations of these patterns (or shapes). Among these two, the group of *birūniyān* (“outsiders”) becomes *mutahayyir* (“bewildered”) by *kathrat-i ashkāl* (“the multiplicity of these shapes”). Every one of the “outsiders” is bewildered and entrapped by one of the shapes or patterns produced by the appearance of multiple waves.³³ The Kubrawī master affirms that each of these shapes (*shikl*) functions as a level or stage (*darakah*) of *jahīm* (“Hell”). On the other hand, the second group, *darūniyān* (“insiders”) are those whose ‘*ayn al-yaqīn* (“eye of certainty”) is fixed upon the concept of *wahdat* (“unity”). Hamuyah’s description of the “insiders” who “do not tremble with every wind (*bād*), and do not look at [i.e. pay no need to] every dust particle (*khāk*),”³⁴ manifests the characteristics of perfect men.

The continuation of this description provides us with a more comprehensive understanding of Hamūyah’s chosen group. As the Kubrawī master states, the *ātash* (“fire”) of the insiders is *āb-i hayāt* (“the water of life”). This water of life runs through the desert of *fu’ād* (“inner realm of the heart”), the lands of *qulūb* (“hearts”) and *nufūs* (“selves”).³⁵ Therefore, Hamūyah concludes that these “insiders, [are able to] view the spiritual states in their totality [*ishān dar kull-i ahwāl nāzir*].”³⁶

In order to pinpoint the essential characteristic of the perfect man in his realization of the concept of *wahdat* (“unity”), Hamūyah chooses a set of creative allegorical combinations. As mentioned above, he states that the “outsiders’ fire” represents the “water of life.” This seemingly contradictory combination of “fire and water” perhaps manifests the unique characteristic of these perfect men. The qualities distinguished by the “insiders,” in Hamūyah’s words, begin with their “eye of certainty, which is fixed upon the concept of unity.” This type of *wahdat*, with its practical realization, based on elevated *yaqīn* (“certainty”), provides the perfect man with the quality of dissolving paradoxical multiplicities into a single vision of unity. For perfect men, the *ilm al-yaqīn* (“knowledge of

certainty”) turns into one unifying vision of existence, through the *'ayn al-yaqīn* (“eye of certainty”). In other words, because of the clarity of mystical vision provided through the eye of certainty, as Hamūyah explains, *darūniyān* are able to look into *kull-i ahwāl* (“all states”) of the Path at once. This unifying, collective and *kullī* (“universal”) vision of existence is the outcome of dissolving multiple and partial understanding of existence through experiencing the qualities of *wahdat* (“unity”).

Therefore, as seen above, “unity” takes place between paradoxical elements such as *ātash* (“fire”) and *āb* (“water”). The perfect man’s fire becomes *āb-i hayāt* (“the water of life”) which runs through the valley of *fu’ād* (“the inner heart”).³⁷ The fire seems to take upon the duty of burning partial multiplicities into a unifying and clarified manifestation of the water which is the elixir or the source of existence or *āb-i hayāt*. The unified drops of water (which have been turned from multiplicities to unity), will renew the very inner heart of existence.

Being able to *nazar* (“look at”) the entire states of the Path (or experiencing the entire existence) in one single experience becomes possible through the *'ayn al-yaqīn* (“eye of certainty”). In Hamūyah’s view, in order for the perfect man to accomplish this unique task, the crucial eye of “certainty” has to be fixed upon “unity.” Ibn ‘Arabī also explains how this “eye of certainty” provides a clarity through which perfect men are able to correct their realization of existence.

In other words, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding, the eye of certainty seems to nurture the perfect man with a more genuine awareness of reality. This awareness, as Ibn ‘Arabī seems to suggest, stems from a certain type of knowledge with certain outcomes, different from that which is detected by sense perception.

Imagination follows the authority (*taqlīd*) of that which sense perception gives to it. Reflection considers imagination and finds

therein individual things (*mufradāt*). Reflection would love to configure a form to be preserved by the rational faculty. Hence it attributes some of the individual things to others. In this attribution it may be mistaken concerning the actual situation, or it may be correct. Reason judges upon this basis, so it also may be mistaken or correct. Hence, reason is the follower of authority, and it may make mistakes. Since the Sufis saw the mistakes of those who employ consideration, they turned to the path in which there is no confusion so that they might take things from the Eye of Certainty (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) and become qualified by certain knowledge.³⁸

This type of knowledge seems to both “surpass and contain” sense perception, imagination, reason and reflection, all at the same time. In other words, the outcome of all these “authorities,” when seen through the “eye of certainty,” turns into a type of sheer knowledge which leads to the One. That is why Ibn ‘Arabī tells us that “this is the knowledge of the prophets, the friends, and the possessors of knowledge among the Folk of Allah. They *never transgress their place* with their reflective powers.”³⁹ Therefore, one might state that this is the knowledge of perfect men which appears in different non-delimited levels and depths.

Through this knowledge, which we might call *'ilm al-wahdah* (“knowledge of unity”), perfection becomes the substantial, organic and renewing characteristic which provides the perfect man with the knowledge of his place in existence as well as perfecting his ties with the One. In other words, this knowledge puts the perfect man’s whole awareness, within the Absolute’s *hadra* (“Presence”), in a perfect poise and balance. Thus, as Shaykh al-Akbar states, “they [i.e., perfect men] never transgress their places.” The perfect man’s spiritual certainty, entwined with a unique realization of “unity,” offers him a collective awareness through which all multiplicities dissolve in the peerless and surrounding Presence of the One.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to the perfect men as those whose unique knowledge enables them to safeguard their perfect place by

avoiding any transgression, also reminds us of Simnānī's aforementioned chosen prodigies, *muridān-i wajh-Allāh* ("seekers of Allāh's Face") whose main characteristic is to stay in the *miyān* ("the middle path"). One might suggest that seekers of the "middle path" are those who do not transgress their perfect place (and thus, do not lose their status as perfect men) by journeying along the path of *i'tidāl* (i.e., "the middle path").

As Hamūyah states in his account of the group of *darūniyān*'s characteristics; "The multiplicity of *Suwar* ("forms") does not deprive them of *ma'nā* ("meaning"), and colors and [the multiple] realms [of the world] do not become barriers to their *tamkīn* ("stability") [in the Path]."⁴⁰ As a result of this assured recognition of "unity" put into constant practice, multiplicities are guided towards a unifying reservoir in the perfect man's awareness. In Hamūyah's creative elucidation, multiplicities are "swallowed" by the perfect man. The Kubrawī master utilizes similes such as "whale" and "ghoul" in order to describe the grave perils of the Path along with the perfect man's encounter with multiplicities, which appear as threats to and thieves of his precious awareness of unity.

Perfect men, or *darūniyān* to use Hamūyah's term, need to safeguard the endurance of this awareness by swallowing all multiplicities of the Path, through spiritual perseverance and stability. Hamūyah, by utilizing the expression *furū khurdan* ("swallowing") might be referring to the vast capacity of perfect men in their encounter with the limitless perils of the Path. This unique capacity enables them to move from the unlimited arrays of multiplicity towards unity in every step of the Path, as if they "swallow" all multiplicities at once and thus experience "unity" in each approach to existence: "The whale can't swallow them [i.e., *darūniyān*] and the ghouls of desert are not able to capture them, on the contrary, they swallow them all and place them in nothingness."⁴¹

III. Hamūyah on the Symbolism of *Alif*

In another section of his masterpiece, *al-MiSbāh fi'l-TaSawwuf*, Hamūyah returns to the concept of *wahdat* and its reciprocation with characteristics of the perfect man. In this instance, the Kubrawī master refers to the concept of “unity” by focusing on one of his favorite symbolisms, i.e., the letters of the alphabet. He considers the letter *Alif* (A) as the most essential letter, which represents unity. *Alif*, as Hamūyah explains, “exists and is secluded (*muzmar*) in each letter both in its meaning (*ma'nā*) and form (*lafz*)”⁴² Here, Hamūyah seems to refer to two essential types of unity (i.e., *ahadiyyah* and *wāhidiyyah*) as employed in the favorite expressions of Ibn ‘Arabi and his advocates. One might claim that in Hamūyah’s view, *Alif* by itself corresponds to the Absolute at the level of *ahadiyyah* (“inclusive unity”), or the level of *Dhāt* (“Essence”). All other letters in Hamūyah’s understanding, represent the concept of *kathrat* (“multiplicity”), or the level of *wāhidiyyah* (“exclusive unity”).

Thus, Hamūyah concludes that the Essence (which by itself is absolute *terra incognita*) is manifested throughout “existence.” Thus, multiplicity is represented in Hamūyah’s symbolism by all the letters of the alphabet except *Alif*. He states clearly that “from [the letter] *bā'* [i.e., the second letter of Arabic alphabet] to the letter *yā'* [or the last letter of the Arabic alphabet] are all the letters which utilized in form (*Sūrat*) to manifest the expansion (*bast*) of the Essence of *Alif*.”⁴³ Although these letters (i.e., from *bā'* to *yā'* or from second to the last) are limited in number, he seems to view them as the metaphors for boundless and infinite “signs of multiplicity in existence.” Each of these characters of multiplicity or existence in general, represent or manifest the *Alif* (Absolute or *Ahad*) both in its form and meaning.⁴⁴ Hamūyah’s symbolism of *Alif*, and its substantial reciprocation with the concept of multiplicity (i.e. the rest of the letters), manifests a proximity to Ibn ‘Arabi’s description of affinity between *wahdah* and the Names. This proximity discloses itself more clearly where Hamūyah delves

into the very essential and entwined ties between “*Alif* and everything else.” He explains that “everything came into existence from *Alif*, and It exists in every thing, and it is *in* everything and *out* of every thing, [rather] this whole [existence] is *Alif*.”⁴⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates on the relationship between the Names and existence, especially human beings, as follows:

In respect of Itself the Essence has no name, since It is not the locus of effects, nor is It known by anyone. There is no name to denote It without relationships, nor with any assurance (*tamkīn*). For names act to make known and to distinguish, but this door [to knowledge of the Essence] is forbidden to anyone other than God, since “None knows God but God.” *So the names exist through us and for us. They revolve around us and become manifest within us. Their properties are with us, their goals are toward us, their expressions are of us, and their beginnings are from us. If not for them, we would not be. If not for us, they would not be.*⁴⁶

In the same way that Names become manifest within us, revolve around us and exist through us as the *tajallīyāt* (“manifestations”) of the Absolute, the letters function as the expansion of the Essence of the *Alif* which exists inside and outside of everything. Shaykh al-Akbar also reveals the content of one of his dreams, in the year 597/1200⁴⁷, in which he weds with all the letters of the alphabet and becomes conjoined with the stars.

One night (in a vision) I saw myself conjoined with all the stars of the heaven, being united to each one with a great spiritual joy. After I had become joined with the stars I was given the letters (of the alphabet) in spiritual marriage. I told this vision of mine to one who would take it to a man versed in visionary lore, bidding him conceal my name. When he related my vision to the man he said, “This is a measureless ocean and the one who has seen the vision shall have revealed to him knowledge of the highest things, of mysteries, of the properties of the stars, such as will be shared by no one in his time...”⁴⁸

In a symbolic usage of “marriage” here, the manyness of letters (or Names) disappears in the unifying Essence of the One. In order to advocate the concept of *wahdat* in returning to the One, the letters or the Names are wedded together to remove any signs of *kathrah* (“multiplicity”) by becoming unified in the being of the perfect man. Although every one of the letters or the Names, points to the Oneness of the Absolute, they become one with the perfect man to manifest the unity of the One in their collectedness as well. The very kernel of the “knowledge of highest things” in the above interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s dream, which is the knowledge brought to the prodigies among perfect men, seems to be the eminent realization of “unity” through which the perfect man, as the chief envoy of such realization, experiences the “highest mystery of the Path” (i.e., *tawhīd*.) In other words, the return of the perfect man to the One, through his eminent realization or knowledge of unity, is tantamount to the return of the entire existence to the Absolute One.

In his description of the ties between *Alif* and everything else (or the rest of the letters), Hamūyah views the combination of the letters (from second to the last), or existence in its totality, as the *mazhar* (“loci of manifestation”) for *Alif* (i.e., the Absolute). He also considers *Alif* as the Source which makes the manifestation of everything else [or every other letter] possible (*muzhir*). Every letter (or any form of multiplicity) reveals the principles (*mabānī*) through which the Existence of *Alif* is manifested. *Alif*, as he states, is also *bānī* (“the Founder/Foundation”) of all letters.⁴⁹ Hamūyah seems to define the relationship of ‘*ayniyyah* (“sameness”) between “the letters and *Alif*” as the uniformity between *anhār* (“streams of water”) and *bahr-i hayāt* (“the Sea of Life”).⁵⁰ Although he mentions that the streams of water (or letters) are the same as the Sea of Life (or *Alif*), this “sameness” does not appear to suggest an exact type of uniformity or likeness in their essence. Hamūyah further explains that “the letters (*hurūf*) function as the arteries (*urūq*) of *Alif* and the meaning of *Alif* flows through the letters like [their] spirit.”⁵¹

IV. *Wahdah* and *Wahdāt*: Ibn Arabī on Unity and Unities

In his *Kitāb al-Ma'rifah*, under the heading of *mas'alah* (“question”) 281, Ibn ‘Arabī offers a certain category of *tawhīd* (“Absolute’s oneness”) through which one might grasp the mystical method of envisioning *wahdah* (“unity”) within a limitless manifestation of *kathrat* (“multiplicity”). He divides the concept of *tawhīd* into three phases.⁵² The first is *'ilm* (“knowledge”), the second is *hāl* (“spiritual state”) and the third phase is *'ilm* (“knowledge”) again. The *al-'ilm al-awwal* (“first type of knowledge”) corresponds to *tawhīd al-dalīl* (“oneness proved by reasoning”) which, as Ibn ‘Arabī explains, is an understanding of *tawhīd* by *'ulamā al-rusūm* (“exoteric scholars”), considered by Ibn ‘Arabī as common people who practice *tawhīd al-āmmah* (“unity of God as understood by common people”).

In the second phase of *tawhīd*, which seems to be a major transitional phase in understanding the Absolute’s unity, *tawhīd al-hāl* provides the mystic with an awareness of the Absolute’s oneness through entering into an effective *hāl* (“spiritual state”). In this phase the Absolute becomes the *na't* (“attribute”) of the mystic (*an yakūna Haqq ta'ālā na'tak*).⁵³ This phase is assigned to the perfect man who is aware of the surrounding presence of the Absolute.

In order to manifest a unifying concept between the reality of the Absolute’s attribute and the perfect man’s attribute, Ibn ‘Arabī utilizes the well-know Qur’anic verse of “...thou (Muhammad) threwest not when thou didst throw, but Allāh threw...”⁵⁴ (8:17). By citing this verse, Shaykh al-Akbar concludes that the perfect man’s attribute is “not his or inside him, but is Him (...*fatakūna Huwa*).”⁵⁵ He seems to suggest that the Absolute’s attribute dwells within the very being of the perfect man and thus occupies it.

The third phase of *tawhīd*, or *al-'ilm al-thānī* (“second type of knowledge”), is *tawhīd al-mushāhadah* (“the unity of

witnessing”).⁵⁶ In Ibn ‘Arabī’s view, in this phase of *tawhīd*, the perfect man is able to witness all things (*al-ashyā’*) based on the level of exclusive unity (*min haith al-wahdāniyyah*). Thus, as Ibn ‘Arabī states, “he [the perfect man] sees nothing but the One (*falā tarā ill-al-wāhid*).”⁵⁷ This statement shows the unique capability of the perfect man in his move from *kathrat* (“multiplicity”) towards *wahdah* (“unity”) in the phase of unity of witnessing. From here on, Shaykh al-Akbar manifests a doctrinal creativity, based on which the perfect man is also able to witness a substantial *wahdah* within an infinite array of *kathrah*. In order to show the consistency of this phase, Ibn ‘Arabī utilizes the term *maqāmat* (“spiritual stages”) to reveal its spiritual endurance compared to the second phase which was referred to by the term *hāl* (“spiritual state”).⁵⁸

As mentioned above, Ibn ‘Arabī affirmed that in the phase of *tawhīd al-mushāhadah* (“unity of witnessing”), the perfect man does not see any but *wāhid* (“the One”). In a statement which immediately follows his previous elaboration, he mentions that “*wāhid* (“the One”) through His manifestations becomes *wahdāt* (“many ones/unities”) in [the multitude] of spiritual stages (*wa bi-tajallī-hi fi’l-maqāmāt-i takūn al-wahdāt*).”⁵⁹ In Ibn ‘Arabī’s model, “the very entirety of the world (or existence) is the [multitude of] many ones/unities (*fa’l-‘ālam kulluh wahdāt*).” These *wahdāt*, as he states, are added to each other and thus, turn into *murakkabāt* (series of compounds) which through the act of being *idāfah* (“added to”) each other, are transformed into *ashkāl* (“patterns”).⁶⁰

Ibn ‘Arabī seems to conclude that in order to realize *tawhīd al-mushāhadah* (“unity of witnessing”) in this world (*hādih al-‘ālam*), these limitless combinations of “unities” need to become “one” *mashhad* (“locus of witnessing”) for the perfect man. In other words, this profound mystical experience (i.e., the unity of witnessing) which offers the perfect man with the authentic and supreme knowledge of unity (or *‘ilm al-thānī* in Ibn ‘Arabī’s term) occurs only in one locus of witnessing, which is the realm of multiplicity or *wahdāt* (“multitude of ones/unities”). Therefore, we

might be able to assert that this world contains within itself “one” locus of witnessing which consists of boundless “ones/unities.” Thus, the one locus of witnessing is nothing but the world itself.

The creative approach of Shaykh al-Akbar in the above *mas’alah* (“question”), to the problem of multiplicities manifests his distinctive ingenuity in portraying an essential move from *wahdat* (“unity”) towards *wahdāt* (“unities”). His concise but effective model reveals a very substantial reciprocation between the two concepts of *wahdah* (“unity”) and *kathrat* (“multiplicity”). Through this approach, both “unity and unities” seem to divulge no contradiction, but rather they complement each other in every respect. In Ibn ‘Arabī’s words, the unities (*wahdāt* or the world/existence itself) seem to function as the most perfect realm for the “most elevated mystical experience” (i.e., unity of witnessing intertwined with the authentic knowledge of unity).

The perfect man who carries the essential faculty to experience such an extensive awareness of unity, realizes the core inner-ties between the exclusive unity (*wahdaniyyah/wāhid*) and its manifestation (*bi-tajallīhi*) which appears as *wahdāt* (“unities”), and thus, provides him with the perfect *ilm* (“knowledge”) of *tawhīd al-mushāhadah* (“unity of witnessing”). In his dialectical depiction of “unity and unities,” Ibn ‘Arabī also seems to both introduce and safeguard the significance of understanding “multiplicity” as the most essential match for understanding “unity.” Here, Shaykh al-Akbar, instead of using the term *katharāt* (“multiplicities”), creatively takes advantage of the expression *wahdāt* (“unities”), in order to highlight the absence of any zone of conflict between the two concepts of unity and multiplicity.

Unities, which constitute the entirety of the world itself (*hādih al-‘ālam*, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s term), become the only realm for the most elevated mystical experience of the perfect man. Thus, for the perfect man, multiplicities (i.e. unities) become the most essential asset for reaching the most prominent awareness of unity. In the

above approach, Ibn ‘Arabī also seems to remind us of a dialectical comradeship between the two aspects of *tashbīh* (“Absolute’s similarity”) and *tanzīh* (“Absolute’s peerlessness”). *Wāhid* (“the One”) through His manifestation (*bi-tajllīhī*) is seen as *wahdāt* (unities). Within the infinite array of these manifestations, the mystic is able to see multiplicities or *ashyā* (“entities/things”) as *wāhid* (“the One”), because they point to the exclusive unity (*min haith al-wahdāniyyah*, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s words). Thus, without having these “unities,” there would be no understanding of “unity.”

In the next *mas’alah* (question 282), Ibn ‘Arabī explains the place of the Names (*asmā*) in his understanding of multiplicity.⁶¹ Here, instead of the term *wāhid* (“the One in the level of exclusive unity”), he refers to *ahadiyyah* (“inclusive unity”). He also employs the expression *āhād* (“individuals”) instead of *wahdāt* (“unities”). *Ahadiyyah* (“inclusive unity”) is manifest (*zāhirah*) through individuals and concealed within their compound totality (*al-majmū’ fi’l-murakkabāt*).⁶² This “manifest and concealed” unity, as Ibn ‘Arabī states, is called the *asmā* (“Names”) in the language of *shar‘* (“revelation”). He then mentions that through exclusive unity (*wāhid*), numbers come into existence. In this process, based on *al-tartīb al-tabī‘ī* (“natural ordering”), numbers are spread from the “second to infinity” (*mā-lā yatanāhī*). As Ibn ‘Arabī concludes, if *wāhid* vanishes, numbers will disappear too.⁶³

Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to the concept of *wahdah*, detailed above, might explain Hamūyah’s elaborations on the letter *Alif* and its correlation with the rest of the letters. As mentioned earlier, the Kubrawī master sees the locus of the manifestation for the letter *Alif*, between the second (*bā*) to the last letter (*yā*). *Alif* is also the foundation of all letters. Without *Alif*, any other “letter” joins non-existence, in the same way that none of the “numbers” (in Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach) remains if *wāhid* fades away.

Conclusion

I have tried to elaborate on the reception of some of the focal tenets in Ibn ‘Arabī’s world-view and his school by the prominent members of the Kubrawī order and different methods whereby the Kubrawīs supported, adopted, or otherwise manifested their awareness of or interest in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought.

The Kubrawī master, Sa‘d al-Dīn Hamūyah made a remarkable endeavor in his writings, such as his *al-MiSbāh fi’l TaSawwuf*, to explicate the essential Akbarian concepts like *wahdat al-wujūd* and *al-insān al-kāmil*. The well-known Kubrawī figure, ‘Azīz al- Dīn Nasafī, has also written extensively on the favorite Akbarian notions of the unity of existence and the perfect human being. For example, his numerous and creative elaborations on *ahl-i wahdat* (“people of unity”) with their detailed characteristics, in his essential works, such as *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, seem to assign a unified function to the two aforementioned Akbarian notions of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *insān al-kāmil*. One might assert that through his exceptional clarity, uncomplicated and articulate style of writing, which characterizes all of his works, he has provided one of the most accessible depictions of the major themes related to the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, and contributed greatly to Ibn ‘Arabī’s popularity.

Another eminent Kubrawī figure, Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī, who wrote an important Persian commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *FuSūs*, and displayed a comprehensive understanding of the central Akbarian concepts in his works, played a significant role in propagating Shaykh al-Akbar’s world view, particularly in India and the subcontinent.

Another distinguished Kubrawī master, ‘Alā ad-Dawlah Simnānī, although known as a critic of Ibn ‘Arabī, often demonstrated depictions of concepts comparable to those of Shaykh al-akbar.

Renowned Kubrawīs, such as Hamūyah, Nasafī, and Hamadānī, created vital links between the two schools of Ibn ‘Arabī and Kubrawī. They have manifested an expansive and meticulous comprehension of Ibn ‘Araī ‘s world-view and played major roles in its diffusion and popularity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Addas, Claude. *Ibn ‘Arabī: The Voyage of No Return*. Translated by David Streight. Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2000.

_____. *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī*. Translated by Peter Kingsley. Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2000.

Austin, R.W.J., trans. *Sufis of Andalusia: The Rūh al-Quds and al-Durrat al Fākhirah of Ibn ‘Arabī*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971.

Chittick, William C. *Ibn ‘Arabī Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

_____. *Ibn ‘Arabī Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Corbin, Henry. *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Translated by Nancy Pearson. Boulder: Shambhala, 1978.

Hamadānī, Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī. *Risālat al-Sab ‘īn fī Fadā’il Amīr al-Mu’minīn*. Edited by Muhammad Yūsuf Nayyerī. Shiraz: Navīd Publishers, 1375/1996.

_____. *Chihil Asrār: Ya Ghazaliyāt-i Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī*. Edited by Sayyidah Ashraf Bukhārī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Wahīd, 1347/1969.

- _____. *Mashārib al-Adhwāq*. Edited by Muhammad Khwājawī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1384/2005.
- _____. *Risālah Dhikriyyah*. Tehran: Cultural Studies and Research Institute, 1370/1992.
Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1362/1983.
- Hamūyah, Sa‘d al-Dīn. *al-MiSbāh fī’l TaSawwuf*. Edited by Najīb Māyil Heravī.
Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1362/1983.
- Ibn ‘Arabī, Muhyiddīn. *The Meccan Revelation*. 2 vols. Edited by Michel Chodkiewicz. New York: Pir Press, 2002.
- _____. *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994.
- _____. *FuSūs al-Hikam*. Edited by Abu’l ‘Alā ‘Afīfī. Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1400/1980.
- _____. *The Bezels of Wisdom*. Translated by R.W.J. Austin. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.
- _____. *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifah*. Edited by Sa‘īd Abu’l Fattāh. Beirut: Dār al-Mutanabbī, 1993.
- _____. *Rasā’il*. Beirut: Dār al-Sādir, 1997.
- _____. *A Prayer for Spiritual Elevation and Perfection: al-Dawr al-a‘lā (Hizb al-Wiqāya)*. Translated by Suhā Tajī Faroukī. Oxford: Anqā Publishing, 2006.
- Kubrā, Shaykh Najm al-Dīn. *Fawā’ih al-Jamāl wa Fawātih al-Jalāl*. Edited by Yusuf Zaydān. Cairo: Dar Sa‘d al-Sabāh, 1993.

_____. *Aqrab al-Turuq il-Allāh*. Translated by Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī. Tehran: Nashr-i Safā, 1361/1983.

_____. *USūl al-‘Asharah*. Translated by ‘Abd al-Ghafūr Lārī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1363/1984.

Landolt, Herman., ed. *Mukātibāt: Correspondence spirituelle échangée entre Nurodīn Esfarāyenī et son disciple ‘Alā’oddawleh Semnānī*. Teheran: Department D’Iranologie De L’Institut Franco-Iranien, 1351/1972.

_____. “Der Briefwechsel swischen Kāšanī und Simnānī über *Wahdat al-Wuğud*.” *Der Islam* 50 (1973): 29-81.

_____. “Simnānī on Wahdat al-Wujūd,” in *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and mysticism*. Edited by Mehdī Mohaqqiq and Herman Landolt. Tehran: The Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University, Tehran Branch, 1971.

Nasafī, ‘Azīz ibn Muhammad. *Bayān al-Tanzīl*. Introduction by Alī Asghar Mīr Bāqirī Fard. Tehran: Anjoman-i Āthār wa Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1379/2000.

_____. *Kashf al-Haqā’iq*. Edited by Ahmad Mahdawī Damghānī. Tehran: Bongāh-I Tarjoma wa Nashr-i Kitāb, 1344/1965.

_____. *Kitāb-i Insān al-Kāmil*. Edited by Marijan Molé. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tahūrī, 1377/1998.

Parsā, Khwājah Muhammad. *Sharh-i FusūS al-Hikam*. Edited by Jalīl Misgar Nijād. Tehran: Markaz-ī Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, 1366/1987.

Pickthall, Muhammad M. *The Glorious Qur’an: Text and Explanatory Translation*.

New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1996

Qūnawī, Sadr al-Dīn. *Nafahāt al-Ilāhiyah (Mukāshīfat-i Ilāhī)*. Translated by Muhammad Khwājāvī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1375/1996.

_____. *Kitāb al-Fukūk: Ya Kilīd-i Asrār-i FuSūS al-Hikam*. Edited and Translated by Muhammad Khwājāvī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1371/1992.

_____. *Mirāt al-'Arīfīn*. Translated by Najīb Māyīl Heravī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1387/2008.

_____. *Miftāh al-Qayb al-Jam' wa'l-Wujūd: li Abī Ma'ālī Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Ishāq al-Qūnawī wa Sharhuhū MiSbāh al-Uns li Muhammad Hamzah al-Fanārī, ma' Ta'liqāt-i Mīrzā Hāshim Ashkiwarī*. Edited by Muhammad Khwājāvī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1426/2005.

Ridgeon, Lloyd. *'Azīz Nasafī*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998.

Simnānī, 'Alā Ad-Dawlah. *al-'Urwah li Ahl al-Khalwah wa'l Jalwah*. Edited by Najīb Māyīl Heravī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1362/1983.

_____. *Chihil Majlis yā Risāla-yi Iqbāliyyah*. Tehran: Shirkat-i Mua'liffān wa Mutarjimān, 1358/1980.

_____. *MoSannafāt-i Fārsī*. Edited by Najīb Māyīl Heravī. Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1383/2004.

_____. *Diwān-i Kāmil-i Ash'ār-i Fārsī wa 'Arabī*. Edited by 'Abd al-Rafī' Haqīqat. Shirkat-i Mu'allifīn wa Mutarjimīn-i Irān, 1364/1985.

_____. *Khumkhāna-yi Wahdat*. Edited by ‘Abd al-Raḥī‘ Haqīqat. Shirkat-i Mu’allifīn wa Mutarjimīn-i Irān, 1362/1983.

Uludag, Suleyman. *Ibn ‘Arabī*. Translated into Persian by Daūd Wafā’ī. Tehran: Nashr-ī Markaz, 1387/2008.

Endnotes

¹ Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *Mirāt al-‘Arifīn*, trans., Najīb Māyīl Heravī (Tehran, 1387/2008), 37.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 45.

⁴ See ibid.

⁵ Nasafī, *Insān al-Kāmil*, cited in Lloyd Ridgeon, ‘*Azīz Nasafī*. (Richmond, 1998), 175.

⁶ Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *A Prayer for Spiritual Elevation and Perfection: al-Dawr al-a’lā (Hizb al-Wiqāya)*, trans., Suhā Tajī Faroukī (Oxford, 2006), 86.

⁷ *Futūhāt*, I, cited in William C. Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabī Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufī Path of Knowledge* (Albany, 1989), 342.

⁸ Kubrā, *Fawā’ih*, cited in Henry Corbin, *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, trans., Nancy Pearson (Boulder, 1978), 73.

⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹¹ See Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, 133.

¹² See ibid.

¹³ See ibid., 134.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ On Simnānī’s criticism of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Herman Landolt, “Simnānī on Wahdat al-Wujūd,” in *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and mysticism*, ed. Mehdī Mohaqiq and Herman Landolt (Tehran: The Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University, Tehran Branch, 1971), and “Der Briefwechsel swischen Kāšanī und Simnānī über *Wahdat al-*

Wuğud.” *Der Islam* 50 (1973). See also, *Mukātibāt Correspondence spirituelle échangée entre Nurodīn Esfarāyenī et son disciple ‘Alā’oddawleh Semnānī*, ed. Herman Landolt (Teheran: Department D’iranologie De L’Institut Franco-Iranien, 1351/1972).

¹⁸ Simnānī, *Khumkhāna-yi Wahdat*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rafī‘ Haqīqat (Tehran, 1362/1983), 82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, my translation.

²⁰ See Ibn ‘Arabī, *Rasā’il* (Beirut, 1997), *Kitāb al-Manāzil al-Qusb wa Maqāmuh wa Hāluh*, 319.

²¹ Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī, *Risālah Dhikriyyah* (Tehran, 1370/1992), 11.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Alā Ad-Dawlah Simnānī, *Mosannafāt-i Fārsī*, ed. Najīb Māyil Heravī (Tehran, 1383/2004), 361.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.* For translation of the two Qur’ānic verses (2:218&22:78), I have used their English translation by M. Pickthall.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 362.

³¹ Simnānī, *Chihil Majlis*, cited in Heravī’s introduction to Sa’d al-Dīn Hamūyah, *al-Misbāh fī’l Tasawwuf*, ed. Najīb Māyil Heravī (Tehran, 1362/1983), 20.

³² Hamūyah, *al-Misbāh*, 107.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Futūhāt*, II, cited in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 166.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁰ Hamūyah, *al-Misbāh*, 107.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Futūhāt*, II, cited in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 62. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷ See R.W.J. Austin, trans. *Sufis of Andalusia: The Rūh al-Quds and al-Durrat al-Fākhīrah of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Los Angeles, 1971), 35.

⁴⁸ *Futūhāt*, IV, cited in Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, 35. This dream has often been quoted or referred to by contemporary scholars. See, for example, Suleyman Uludag, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans., *Dā’ūd wafā’ī* (Tehran, 1387/2008), 27. See also Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, trans., David Streight (Cambridge, 2000), 68.

⁴⁹ Hamūyah, *al-Misbāh*, 61.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifah*, ed. Sa‘īd Abu’l Fattāh (Beirut, 1993), 180.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For translation of the verse (8:17), I have used its English translation by M.Pickthall.

⁵⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifah*, 180.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 181.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Farabi and the Invention of Post-Secular Social Theory

Seyed Javad Miri

Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies

Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Farabi has played a vital role in the world history but very few scholars have conceptualized him within the parameters of social theory. In other words, his social theoretical significance has not been yet realized by scholars and thinkers in global academia due to various reasons which I have tried to catalogue three of the most common interpretative strategies which exist in contemporary research programmes toward Farabi- and argued the underlying reasons which have obstructed the reemergence of Farabi as a key social theorist in the context of post-secular context. Needless to state that the collapse of secularization theories within academia has created an intellectual space for the recreation of unmodern as well as undisciplinary paradigms which could assist us in conceptualizing the world, society and human reality in alternative fashion. It is in this context that I think Farabi could be of great significance for critical social theory provided we choose an appropriate interpretative strategy toward undisciplinary philosophers, theorists and thinkers.

Keywords: Farabi, Eurocentric, social theory.

Introduction

It is no exaggeration if one would state that the disciplinary social theory has been dominated by a single master narrative, i.e. secularization theory since its institutional inception within academia since late 19th century. Although there have been great many theoretical changes and post-secularistic attempts by innovative social thinkers and philosophers in a global scale but *alternative* modes of engaging with social reality have not emerged in the realms of politics and *polis* yet. How could we change the parameters of secularistic social institutions in *Earthly City*? The question of earthly city has been deeply intertwined with capitalism and ideologies such as socialism, communism, anarchism, nationalism, communitarianism and environmentalism which have been constructed to counter capitalistic mode of leben seem to be profoundly indebted to capitalism as a modality of being rather than being its *wholly other*. I think we should look for other alternatives which are outside the parameters of eurocentric vision of reality and this could not emerge if we confine our inquiries solely within eurocentric paradigms of modernity. In other words, we should revive other civilizational modes of being and living which are authentic and historically real. This is to argue, alternative modes are possible but their possibilities should be recreated where novelty exists but modernism has not touched its soil. It is in this context that I think we could look at novel paradigms as presented in the philosophies of Farabi or Shankara and Allama Tabatabai. However I think the project of recreation is a complex task and need careful reconsideration as reappropriations of premodern paradigms within modern frames of references are herculean undertakings which could not easily be accomplished due to conflicting modes of beings. In other words, if we are serious about alternative modes of beings then we should find appropriate interpretative strategies for recreating premodern modalities as re-presented in the works of classical philosophers such as Farabi. In this study, I am going to look at three different interpretative strategies on Farabi and shall argue that we cannot treat all of them in the same fashion. In other

words, although all three could be informative as far as Farabi is concerned but it is futile to assume that we can treat them similarly as far as the reappropriative project of post-secularism is concerned.

There is no doubt that Farabi has played a significant role in the history of world philosophy. However what is not very clear is the nature of Farabi's significance in the context of philosophy as it seems opinions about his contributions vary dramatically and profoundly. In other words, how should we conceptualize different discourses on Farabi? Is his importance of archaeological nature? Is Farabi's significance of historical importance? Does he possess any contemporary meaning for post-secular social theorists today? In answering these questions, I have come up with a classificatory scheme which may be of use in conceptualizing contradictory streams on Farabi's intellectual legacy.

In an introductory manner, I have enumerated three different but certainly interconnected discourses on Farabi which are surely important but they do not occupy similar position within the parameter which I am going to develop in relation to Farabi in the fashion which has been conceptualized by the contemporary Iranian philosopher, i.e. Reza Davari. When looking at the literature we can discern three forms of researches on Farabi, i.e. Farabi as Alfarabius; Farabi as Al-Farabi and Farabi as Farabi without any Latinized format or any Arabized form but in an Iranic sense which could be used for what I have conceptualized as House Mentality versus Field Mentality. Let me explain my viewpoint in some details so the audience will get a better understanding on where I am heading to. In my view, there are three different interpretative strategies on Farabi's legacy, i.e. the archaeological, the historical and the alternative discourse which I would explain them in some details respectively.

The archaeological discourse on Alfarabius

By archeological discourse on Farabi I refer to a particular interpretative strategy which is based on a linear approach to history of ideas that starts in Greece and ends in the modern West. In other words, the importance of Farabi is to play the role of a ring in a long-standing chain of ideas which should be read in an accumulative frame of analysis that stretches from Hellas to Paris and Oxford or Chicago. Within this archaeological frame of interpretation, Farabi is considered as a significant figure as far as his position in the great chain of eurocentric historiography of philosophy is concerned. The fundamentals of archaeological discourse is based on the assumption that the West has an unbroken line of progress which for a short while it rested on a non-western category which took care of unfolding of ideas based on the activities of reason. In other words, in the eurocentric vision of the history of ideas, Farabi was solely essential in the “handing down” of Aristotle’s thought to the Christian west in the middle ages. (Hammond, 1947) To put it otherwise, the importance of Farabi is conceptualized as much as he contributed to what is assumed to be the eurocentric paradigm of ideas. In this reading, Farabi is turned into a new medium which is symbolized by the Latinized form of his name, i.e. Alfarabius. This is to argue that Farabi has no significance in the world of ideas as such but one should consider him in relation to another master-narrative which Farabi had played an *intermediary role* as Alfarabius. In sum, within this discourse, one should not think of Farabi in contemporary sense or even attempt to think through his categories and concepts in relation to reality as such due to the fact that Farabi had a function which he fulfilled in the larger picture of the western history of ideas. In other words, the function which Farabi had is not of contemporary importance but it could be studied as one studies archaeological relics and artifacts of the bygone cultures and civilizations. This is to argue, one needs to understand the function which Alfarabius had in the past as this would assist us in understanding where we stand today in the frame of modernist world of ideas but it would be

a mistake to replace archaeological significance of Alfarabius with epistemological importance of his ideas in terms of *contemporaneity*. This distinction is a very pivotal in terms of philosophical reflection as it has to do with the question of authenticity and inauthenticity or the matters of possibility and impossibility.

The historical discourse on Al-Farabi

There is another discourse on Farabi which is, first and foremost, focused on him in a historical sense. Although it is hard to distinguish between the historical and archaeological as both seem to be concerned with the past rather than the present or future but it would be wrong to equate both of these readings as similar. Because those who are interested in Farabi within the historical discourse do not conceptualize him *in relation to the west* as though he is only of importance if he fulfils the intermediary function of ‘handing-down’ the wisdom of the Hellas to the modern Europe. On the contrary, in this reading, Farabi is considered as Al-Farabi, i.e. as a unique philosopher who belongs to a particular civilization with all its complexities and peculiarities without reducing these civilizational paradoxes to fit a particular eurocentric vision of history. This is to argue that within this form of interpretation Al-Farabi is conceptualized as a political philosopher who teaches how to think anew about politics but his significance for contemporary thought, political, cultural, or social, is more intellectual than practical. (Butterworth, 2001) This is to argue that although Farabi is conceptualized on his own terms but the *terms* which Farabi worked through are not practical for the epoch we live in, i.e. in the world of ontological insecurity, risk society, late modernity, liquid modernity or the disenchanting world of modernity. To put it otherwise, in this reading, the master narrative is modernity and by modernity one should understand the eurocentric vision of the world and by extension it would be a mistake to think of multiple forms of modernities as European vision of reality has transcultural value if not universal significance. However, it would be a grave

mistake to think in the modern context through the categories of Al-Farabi which belongs to a premodern world. But why then bother to engage with Al-Farabi? Well, the answer is that one could see the intellectual brilliance of reestern civilizations but the limit should be always in mind that the brilliance has an expiry date which if not realized then one may fall into romantic traps of the so-called discontents of the Euro-Atlantic World Order. The architects of historical interpretative strategy are interested in Al-Farabi in a manner that one may be interested in a brilliant novel such as *The Brothers Karamazov*. (Dostoevsky, 2009) This is to argue that it would be a mistake to expect from a novel a report of reality as one expects from a 'scientific essay' things about the constitutions of reality in all its complex dimensions. Although these distinctions have become very redundant in the context of "postmodern turn" but current approaches toward non-western categories, reestern concepts, or non-eurocentric paradigms and philosophies have not internalized the postmodern turn yet and as a consequence it is bizarre to turn to Al-Farabi to get practical directions or employ him to find practical solutions for serious political problems in the modern and postmodern world.

The alternative discourse on Farabi

I have chosen three different styles in describing the contributions of Farabi; in the first mode, I have employed the term Alfarabius which is attempted to design a particular reading strategy of Farabi, i.e. as an intermediary medium in a linear historiography of philosophy; in the second mode, I chose the Arabic form of Farabi's name, i.e. Al-Farabi which is meant to signify the intellectual significance of Farabi without having any practical importance in the context of modernity today. Although these two prevailing strategies of interpretations are important but do not exhaust the potentials which one may be able to find in Farabi's intellectual frame of reference. In other words, what is of interest for me is the contemporary significance of Farabi as a source of concept-formation in overcoming eurocentric pitfalls of modernity by being

able to craft new modes of creating forms of post-eurocentric possibilities of being in the world. For this end, I have chosen the Persian form of Farabi's name, i.e. Farabi without any reference to its Arabic or Latin styles which have been used in archaeological and historical models of conceptualizing philosophical contributions of Farabi.

In order to expand the alternative mode of understanding Farabi, I would like to introduce two concepts of 'House Mentality' and 'Field Mentality'. (X, 1966) These two concepts have been coined by Malcolm X in describing two models of subjectivity, i.e. submissive mentalité and emancipative mentalité. He argues that a 'house human being' is an alienated person i.e. someone who has lost his/her own sense of subjectivity and incessantly attempts to identify him/herself with the master, master-narrative or dominating mode of being. On the other hand, a 'field person' is someone who musters all her/his powers to distance from the master narrative and knows that he is not similar to the master and as long as he defines her/himself in terms of the master-narrative s/he shall remain enchained. In other words, a field person has her/his own subjectivity and this sense of distance shall provide her/him with a possibility to emancipate her/himself from tutelage. If this argument makes sense then I would like to argue that the first two interpretative strategies would make us to settle with a 'house approach' while the alternative approach would be a 'field mentalité', namely strategies which would enhance field subjectivity. (Miri, 2015) It is in this context that I think Davari's contributions on Farabi would come useful as he does not approach Farabi either in an archaeological or a historical fashion. One of the most important questions in social theory and philosophy is the relation between 'religion' and 'philosophy' or the locus of religion in relation to modernity. The dominant view is conceptualized as thesis of secularism which either does not recognize any substantial significance for religion as an intellectual category or consider a peripheral position for religion as a category both in terms of

philosophy and society. But this is not the fashion which Davari conceptualizes the philosophical legacy of Farabi. He argues that

... one of the most pivotal aspects of Farabi's philosophy is on the relation between religion and philosophy. In my view, Farabi has contemplated seriously on this relation and one may be able to assume that by doing so he has occupied a very important place in the history of ideas. When philosophy, in Farabi's view which is a task for the elites, could be compatible with the religious act, then it should be realized that philosophy is not only about abstract questions ... because in Farabi's view, the question of Polis is intertwined with revelation ... (Davari, 1982. 5).

In other words, Farabi's concern with philosophy and religion is not only of intellectual significance but it has practical importance which is why I think neither the archaeological nor historical approaches could make justice to Farabi's legacy. To put it differently, it seems Davari's engagement with Farabi has a contemporary dimension which he summarizes in the following fashion,

... the eurocentric vision of reality and the twilight of sacred thought and the exile of humanity are approaching their ends and a new dawn is heralding upon us (Davari, 1982. 21).

Davari wrote these lines around the beginning of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 which promised a new interpretative strategy toward religion as an intellectual category and a political question. This is to argue Farabi's philosophy is important for reconfiguration of a republic which is premised upon the 'religious' rather than the 'secular'. If this assumption is correct then reappropriation of Farabi's legacy cannot have only intellectual significance. On the contrary, if we are determined to overcome the eurocentric vision of reality then we should turn to Farabi or other non-eurocentric philosophers for empowering the paradigms of 'field subjectivity' and multiple forms of modernities which are not in enslaved

positions toward eurocentrism. In other words, in the age of ‘republicity’ of religion in the public square and in the context of a religious republic Farabi could be deeply instrumental in reconfiguration of the Polis in a critical fashion as

... Farabi was of the opinion that the head of the polis should be a philosopher ... who obtains his knowledge from the source of revelation ... as a matter of fact, the head of Farabi’s Good City is prophet and this means that authentic religion is what philosophy truly is (Davari, 1982. 5).

In other words, in the context of religious republic, Farabi’s concerns cannot be treated either in archaeological or historical fashions as the question of governmentality is a *contemporary* problem- which requires practical solutions. Needless to argue that any feasible praxis should be premised upon a clear theoretical vision of the order of things: be ethical, political, social or religious. These realms are differentiated in modern philosophy as the Great Chains of Being has been relegated to the periphery but Farabi conceptualizes them in a hierarchical fashion and as such he presents a different after-morrow rather than a bygone yester-day.

Sources

- Butterworth, C. *Alfarabi, the political writings: Selected aphorisms and other texts*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Davari, R. A. *Farabi: The Founder of Islamic Philosophy*. Published by the Institute of Research and Cultural Studies, Tehran, 1982.
- Dostoevsky, M. F. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Translated into Persian by Moshfegh Hamedani. Published at Badraqueh Javidan, Tehran, 2009.
- Hammond, R. *The philosophy of Alfarabi and its influence on medieval thought*. Hobson Book Press, 1947.
- Miri, S. J. *Reimagining Malcolm X: Street Thinker versus Homo Academicus*. University Press of America, 2015.
- X, Malcolm. *Malcolm X Speaks*. Edited by George Breitman. Merit Publishers and Betty Shabazz, 1966.

A Critical Assay of the Answers of Theosophers Concerning the Dilemma of Gratuitous Evils (Relying on William Rowe's Reading)

Rubabeh Jalili Bahabadi
Isfahan University, Isfahan, Iran
Mohammad Bidhendi
Isfahan University, Isfahan, Iran

Abstract

One of the falsities that have continuously challenged theistic views in various forms since long ago is the falsity of existence of evil in the world. Among the most significant modern readings of evil problematique that have been mooted contra theism since Hume's time and been harbored by such contemporary western atheist philosophers as John L. Mackie and William Rowe is the so-called evidential problem of evil. The present essay firstly outlines one of the most important readings of William Rowe which is based on gratuitous evils, then after making a critical assessment of various major views and responses in this regard, it demonstrates that the answers of past theosophers that have largely been issued from a purely religious point of view cannot be responsive to the contemporary fallacies that are mostly extra-religious and anti-theistic. Finally, some instances of the best answers that uncover the irrationality of Rowe's argument are listed in the essay and also the author proposes an answer to the dilemma based on Islamic philosophy. **Keywords:** evidential problem of evil, logical problem of evil, gratuitous evil, supreme good, William Rowe.

Introduction

The problem of evil is one of the most significant philosophical issues and among the enigmas that have puzzled human mind from immemorial times and given rise to quite a large number of doubts against religious and metaphysical beliefs in a way that all followers of the religions and various schools of thought have sought to provide an account of it. The problem of death has always been declared by human beings as a colossal evil and many people's faiths have broken down in the face of large-scale natural disasters. Upon this very reason major works have been devoted to analysis of the problem of evil and a considerable number of brilliant minds from Greek philosophers to Muslim theosophers have dedicated themselves to the examination of this dilemma. Among the most significant difficulties that have continuously imposed themselves to men of ideas has been the issue of inconsistency of evil with the unity of God and his attributes. Thus traditional answers are mainly concerned with the resolution of dilemma of duality and demonstration of divine attributes of perfection and most of philosophical answers revolve around the negativity of evils. In nineteenth century by the ascension of empirical sciences, which were intermingled with philosophy and natural theology, a revolution occurred in western thought. Human actions obtained a natural and evolutionary quality, moral good and evil that had their origins in human actions were replaced by natural good and evil as in modern mode of thought no sin or evil is being imputed to human action. For this very reason today we are faced with new and multiform readings of evil dilemma by atheists as an evidence against the belief in God insofar as the problem of evil has been christened the harbor of atheism. The central question of this essay is that whether traditional answers of the problem of evil can be responsive to the contemporary challenges concerning the issue of evil? Or this issue needs new accounts and readings?

The present essay, to begin with, outlines one of the readings of William Rowe (1931) of evil problem which is based on the thesis

of gratuitous evils, then after a critical review of the major ideas and responses sketched with regard to this challenge it shows that the traditional theosophers' answers that have majorly been developed within the primordial parameters of religion per se cannot be responsive to the contemporary challenges leveled against theism in a convincing manner. Having reviewed the past answers, thus, the author casts a glance on some instances of the best answers that have been provided by the application of modern methods and reveal the irrationality of Rowe's argument. Critical examination of these views could be effective in the invention of new methods and proliferation and precision of arguments.

Definition and Types of Evil

Although various definitions have been proposed of evil but the debate on true nature of problem of evil requires a lengthy discussion. Nevertheless, the majority of human beings are agreed upon the extensions of evil and when a dispute is being triggered of this issue they refer to the same examples such as illness, suffering, war, famine, ignorance and so on and so forth.

Some categorizes the evil as a type of sin and some consider it a kind of deficiency and limitation. A number of contemporary philosophers are of the belief that what catches human attention is good while what results in aversion is evil. Some has taken a further step and considered good the desired object of every sensible being and evil their undesired one. And some have more expanded the span of issue and applied it to the whole gamut of creatures and argued:

Whatever challenges a being's nature and its natural perfections is called evil and whatever is desired for and causes a being's perfection is christened good. Generally speaking, evil is something reason prefers its non-existence (Mutahari, 1999, vol. 3: 489).

Instead of defining evil according to a theological theory, Hick argues, it is better to define evil with regard to its verbal connotations. Then he continues, evil is being applied to pain, bodily and spiritual sufferings and moral iniquity. Moral iniquity is one of major causes of the two former evils because a considerable portion of human sufferings are resulted from the savagery and wickedness of mankind. This suffering includes such large-scale disasters as famine, oppression and repression, injustice, war, humiliation, disdain and the like, that happen in human societies (Hick, 2002: 95).

Some have divided evils into four types:

1) Metaphysical evils: those beings that have existential defects are extensions of metaphysical evils like physical, spiritual and moral deficiencies of creatures.

2) Sensational or emotional evils which consist of unpleasant states that occur to human beings or other creatures such as pain, grief, suffering and so on and so forth.

3) Moral evils comprise those affairs that are morally disagreeable like murder, theft and others. The probability of this type of evil is the prerequisite of free will and is conducted by free-willed creatures.

4) Natural or physical evils stand for those events that happen inside the nature like hurricane, earthquake and so on and so forth.

Of course, some believe that the distinction between moral and natural evils is not always clear and there might be evils that have their roots partly in amoral activities of humanity and partly in natural processes.

Since Rowe's argument is founded on the notion of gratuitous or groundless evils we need to have an allusion to its meaning.

Gratuitous evil is an evil that in the eyes of *homo sapiens* (rational beholder) implies no wisdom or at least we humans cannot find any wisdom for it and the example that Rowe offers in his discussion demonstrates that he does not restrict evil to human being and ascribes it to all creatures.

Roughly speaking, our prospect of universe and the man is too closely related with our evaluation of objects based on good and evil. However, it is a matter of consensus by all thinkers that in judging objects upon good and evil the anthropocentric judgments must be abandoned since a phenomenon would be useful for a number of creatures or human beings and be harmful for some others.

Problem Background

In Hindu and Buddhist traditions there is a particular emphasis on the dilemma of evils and trace its roots back to soul and the connexion between material body and eternal soul.

Moreover, this problem is among the most basic issues of Zoroastrianism according to which Ahuramazda (God) is the eternal source of good and Ahriman (Devil) is the fountain-head of evil. Thus dualism has turned into an insoluble dilemma in Zoroastrianism.

Philosophers have answered the falsity of dualism through defining evil as non-existence which does not need to any source whatsoever. The negative theory of evil dates back to Greece and Plato is seemingly the first philosopher who has touched upon the illusive nature of evil (Mutahari, 2012: 125).

The classic works, whether Islamic or Western, on the problem of evil are almost unanimously concentrated on the issue of inconsistency of evils with God's unity and justice. But by the dawn of modernity in the occident this problem was revolutionized along

with other developments in the domain of human knowledge and the problem of evil was approached as an evidence against theism.

Until the Middle Ages the earth was declared the center of universe and so the man was considered the greatest of all creatures in a way that every human individual believed to be in possession of power of moral action as well as the potency for recognition of good and evil. In nineteenth century along with the rise of empirical thought a deep revolution took place in the current conception of man and human actions and human being was no longer seen as the most noble of all creatures, rather s/he was taken to be one of natural animals who live based on instincts and struggle for existence and following the evolution of universe an evolution is also taken place in the domain of human life and social sphere and the society moves towards a more perfect community. In modern thought, human being is an organism that moves along a natural course and no behavior is the extension of sin and evil and whatever exists there is adaptation with environment and community. Then there is no room for surprise as to the fact that in modern thought we do not encounter with the concept of evil as sin.

In the age of enlightenment such properties as rationality and independence possess the utmost value but in modern individualistic existentialism the man is seen as a being that lives in a valueless and disorganized world. According to this group of thinkers, mankind possesses a well potentiality for goodness but what impedes the realization of this latent power is the restriction that is imposed by society. Thus society and culture are being considered evil because they diminish the individual liberties by imposing restrictions.

Paying earnest attention to the point that how individual values took the place of social values and how moral ends were replaced with biological ends helps us to understand the West's aberrant tendency toward a narcissistic culture, a culture that is wholly concerned with self-contentment. According to this perspective, the values of

human existence consist of rationality, individuality and liberty and human beings as natural organisms do not have any properties of good and evil but rather they only possess various degrees of power of survival or adaptation (Cf. Patison Mancel, 2003).

The problem of evil has occupied major portion of contemporary philosophy of religion and though this dilemma has been discussed since times immemorial but past answers cannot address the contemporary challenges in a meaningful fashion because, as we mentioned earlier, due to the scientific and cultural developments during modern times and the conflict triggered between science and religion, many notions including evil have undergone a semantic metamorphosis as well as the contemporary atheists have used the dilemma of evil for weakening the foundations of theism and an evidence against the existence of God.

J. L. Mackie, British atheist philosopher, is one of those figures who have presented one of the most renowned theories in this regard and examined this problem from a logical point of view. He believes that there is logical inconsistency between the existence of evil and parts of religious beliefs. William Rowe is another thinker who arranges an argument based on the idea of gratuitous evils to show that the existence of this type of evils is an evidence of the irrationality of belief in an omnipotent, omniscient and purely good God.

New Readings of Evil Dilemma

The hypotheses of contemporary philosophers of religion are mainly relied on a particular group or aspect of evils such as gratuitous evils, plurality of evils, inexhaustible evils and so on and so forth. To begin with, we review one of the most current of these readings and then turn to one of the most significant readings of William Rowe.

New readings of the problem of evil that are typified according to the popular taxonomies as follows:

A) Logical Reading of Problem of Evil

Some hold that there is a sheer discrepancy between evil and a number of religious claims and the analysis of problem of evil demonstrates that religious beliefs lack any rational basis because there is inconsistency between the following two propositions: "evil exists" and "a benevolent and omnipotent God exists".

Some has argued that even if there is a contradiction it is implicit. On the other hand, the critics add some auxiliary propositions to the abovementioned propositions so as to show that believers have made a logical blunder. These auxiliary propositions are as follows: an omniscient being knows how to remove the evil, an omnipotent being is able to remove the evil and an all-benevolent being wants to remove the evil. Nevertheless, the believers themselves admit the existence of evil and this is an explicit contradiction. Of course, some believe that there is a contradiction between the existence of such a God and the intensity of evil and some others insist on the inconsistency between natural evil and the existence of God. Among the contemporary philosophers of religion Alvin Plantinga has made efforts to rebut this claim through his so-called liberty-based defense.

B) Evil Dilemma as an Evidence against God

This reading is based on unacceptability and not inconsistency of religious claims. No logical argument is being afforded in this reading but this group holds that religious beliefs cannot provide a rationally convincing account for the existence of evil in the universe. One of this type of evidentialistic proofs has been sketched by Wesley Salomon who claims that the existence of believers' God is improbable and many empirical processes are justifiable according to mechanistic interpretations and it is hardly

probable that the universe to have been projected and designed by an intelligent and all-benevolent creator.

Plantinga and Nancy Cart Wright have demonstrated that probability-based proofs are not valid form of reasoning which leads to a conclusion logically warranted and have many points of weakness, since statistical and frequency methods are not proper for the study of metaphysical issues.

Many critics hold that the mere existence of evil does not enfeeble religious beliefs but there are evils that do not find a convincing account within the framework of religious beliefs. If there exists a God, they argue, we would quite reasonably expect that there should not be any gratuitous or baseless evil in the world. Upon certain reasons, however, gratuitous or baseless evils exist.

Religious minds have developed various theories to prove that those evils that seem pointless at first sight in fact lead to the superior and higher goods and thus critics cannot make decisive claims of the existence of gratuitous evils. However, critics insist on their stance by ostensible exemplifications (Peterson et al, *ibid*: 185-188).

The proponents of evidential problem of evil hold that the concrete existence of evils and their diversity enfeeble the probability of veracity of the belief in God and demonstrate its unintelligibility. This significant point, however, had not been explained in clear terms earlier that how evil's existence is an evidence against the rationality of belief in God and this task was undertaken by William Rowe (Rowe, 1996).

Many contemporary philosophers of religion consider Rowe's reading the most powerful type of evidential argument that has the greatest chance for success. In what follows first of all one of the most important readings of William Rowe of problem of evil which is based on the idea of gratuitous evils¹ has been examined and then

the major traditional answers have been appraised so as to find a path to a better answer to this dilemma.

William Rowe's Reading of Gratuitous Evils Dilemma

William Rowe begins his debate by distinguishing between various types of theism and atheism and indicates that theism and atheism are being applied in two broad and narrow senses. Theism in its narrow sense consists of the belief in a divine, eternal, everlasting, omnipotent, omniscient, all-benevolent and purely good being who is the creator of universe while theism in its broad sense is the belief in a divine entity. Rowe argues that his evidentialistic reading targets theism in its narrow sense (Rowe, 1979: 127).

Rowe's atheistic argument highlights the intense suffering of animals and human beings that continuously occurs in a large scale in the world and insists that the idea that these sufferings lead to a higher good does not cover their evilness. There are examples of extreme suffering that an omniscient, omnipotent and all-benevolent could prevent them without losing a higher good or prescribing an equal or worse evil.

Rowe's argument can be summarized as follows:

- 1- There is gratuitous evil
- 2- If God existed there would be no gratuitous evil

Conclusion: God does not exist

The believers say that God hinders or removes gratuitous evil and this is agreed upon by both theists and atheists that the success and failure of evidential argument from evil is contingent on its premise concerning reality, i.e. "gratuitous evil exists", and believers can discredit evidential argument only if they could uncover some flaws of the premise concerning reality. In defense of his argument's first

premise, that we christened as the premise concerning reality, Rowe alludes to the following case:

Thunder triggers a massive fire in a jungle and a dear calf burns in flames and finally after days of pain and unbearable suffering dies. In Rowe's view God could help the dear calf not to be burnt into ashes inside truculent blazes or at least spare it not to suffer much pain and die in peace. According to Rowe, there is seemingly no rational justification for brute suffering of a dear calf (Ibid: 128-132).

Rowe himself confesses, however, that since we are not in possession of an infinite insight we cannot say decidedly that the suffering of a dear calf lacks an rational justification and although this belief is not logically demonstrable but it could still be an rational belief.

It is necessary to be taken into consideration that finding-not does not logically imply non-existence though here the debate is concerned with rationality not with truth, that is to say, finding-not X is the sufficient reason for rationality of belief in this proposition that "X does not exist".²

To state the matter otherwise, Rowe believes that if there is a rational justification for evils at all we shall find it by all odds. Thus Rowe concludes that regarding the rationality of two above mentioned premises the belief in conclusion shall be rational.

Analysis of Traditional Ideas Concerning Evil

Aristotle offers a quintuple rational determination of the possible makeup of good and evil as follows: 1- pure good 2- dominant good 3- good and evil paralleled 4- pure evil 5- dominant evil. He believes that two former possibilities have been realized in the outside world but the other three alternatives are in conflict with divine graciousness and wisdom.

The third hypothesis requires the preponderance of one of the equals and the fourth alternative leads to the preponderance of preponderated to the preponderant both of which are impossible with regard to the all-wise origin. The fifth thesis is also improbable due to the cognation of cause and effect because nothing would require its non-existence (Avicenna, 1996: 133).

In the wake of Aristotle, Avicenna has considered necessary the emanation of contingent pure good (incorporeal entities) and dominant good (nature) from the All-Wise Creator since the Lord is pure good and absolute existence.

He argues, evils are essential requirements of the lowest levels of beings, i.e. corporeal beings, and every being's ontological status is identical with its essence and causal order is unbreakable. Incorporeal beings have no potential and contingent state and thus there is no contradiction and friction in them as they are not exposed to any movement or evolution and evils are merely the products of natural motions and the collision of material beings (Avicenna, 1404, Essay 4th, Chapter 3rd: 189).

Having demonstrated the pure goodness of Necessary Existence, he proceeds to prove the Best of all Possible Worlds and the fact that whatever is being emanated from God is good. Then, he argues, it is impossible in such an order of beings that is depicted as the Best of all Possible Worlds we do not come across evils. Moreover, goods and evils are considered in the view of whole constitution of ontological order of the world not as compared to the elements of that order. Therefore, he regards the whole makeup of the objects good.

Furthermore, Avicenna considers such affairs as ignorance, poverty and the like, which are non-existential, essential evils, on one hand, and declares existential objects accidental or relative evils, on the other. He believes that relative evils are few in number and at the same time are among the prerequisites of multiple goods and it is

for their association with multiple good and not due to their nature that they have come to be subjected to divine providence. Thus, their dismissal leads to the dominance of multiple evils because when a being is created its essentials are created too and evil is not an effect of the activity of the agent but it has its origin in the potentiality of the potential.

Suhrewardi has dealt with this issue in more details and argues:

If there was no contradiction, the emanated forms from Divine Essence would have no receptive principle and this in turn leads to the suspension of emanation from All-Emanating Source that is a rational impossibility. Since if there be no genesis and corruption or difference and connection in material world all phenomena should either remain in potential state or they all must possess all actual perfections. Such be the case, nothing new would ever spring into existence and inertness shall dominate everywhere and this would not amount to anything but the suspension of eternal emanation of Divinity (Suhrewardi, d, 1: 466-467).

In his voluminous magnum opus *al-Asfar*, Mulla Sadra ascribes the shortcomings and evils in contingent beings to the potentiality of the potential on account of the collision and contradiction that exist in the terrestrial world and traces the differences of contingent realities back to the their natures and requirements of their quiddities and finally argues that mystics have provided the best interpretation of evils and in *Mafatih al-Gheyb* he has challenged philosopher's account of evils and appreciated the mystics' stance (Mulla Sadra, 1985: 197-202).

According to mystical principles, there is no more than one existence in the whole gamut of reality and other beings are his impressions and manifestations. The universe is beauty through and through and no inelegance and evil is discernable in the general scheme of existence. The veiled minds declare those things the beauty of which is hidden from their views imperfection and

deficiency but when the truth to be revealed to them they will behold the Majesty of God (Ibn Arabi, 2001, vol. 4: 172).

However, this debate is still confronted with the challenge that what does make natural world liable to divine grace? Couldn't the world be purely good and free from all evils? Whether God was not able to avert some evils? The above-mentioned perspectives are based on the negative and relative nature of evils and the idea of Best of all Possible Worlds and require the acceptance of existence of an All-Wise, Benevolent and All-Good Creator that is refused by atheists. Of course, Muslim philosophers have proposed other solutions to evil dilemma besides the previously indicated answers that will be mentioned in coming parts.

Assaying Other Types of Answers to Evil Dilemma

Before turning to other types of answers given to evil dilemma it is better to hint at a position that is common among Muslim and Christian philosophers and is called Free Will-based defense.

This position is grounded in the existence of free-willed creatures that could act rightly or wrongly and evil is the requirement of free will which is a supreme good and what makes the man a distinct creature.

John Hick believes that major amount of evils is resulted from misapplication of human freedom although there are also other sources of pain and suffering that are independent from human free will. Nonetheless, we cannot in general distinguish between the pains that fall on humanity from outside and those sufferings are resulted from human malfeasance. The claim that God should not have created the creatures who commit sins, Hick argues, is like saying God should not have created free willed creatures or human beings (Hick, 2003: 98-107).

Christian answers to the problem of evil can be categorized in two general groups as follows:

- 1- Augustine's answer that revolves around the notion of "human fall from primordial cleanliness and sincerity".
- 2- Irenaean answer that rests on the idea of "gradual creation of ever-developing humanity during his life time in an incomplete world".

Saint Augustine regards the universe and its creatures good and believes that evil is not the essence of the world but rather it is the lack of good. Since the world is contingent and ever-changing its original goodness has disappeared due to human misuses of free will.

Saint Irenaeus' theodicy one of the defenders of which is John Hick can be summarized as follows:

When the universe was created by Divine Power was in complete order and harmony. Human fall has resulted to moral evil and evil is the requirement of evolution and culture of human soul in a particular environment where moral agents interact with each other in a world within which an order is at work that is independent from our wills. God's objective is human salvation that if it is not reached in this world it shall be achieved in afterlife world (Peterson et al, 2000: 203-206).

Besides the above responses other answers have also been given to the problem of evil the most important of which can be outlined as follows:

- 1- Evil is the source of good. The proponents of this solution are of the view that evils are the source of nobler goods in this world and they substantiate their claim by alluding to the individuals who have scored salient achievements after bearing various hardships. Moreover, it is various difficulties such as illness, poverty and the

like that have led to the flourishing of human beings, scientific development and human evolution.

2- Evil is the prerequisite of transcendence of human soul. This world is the ladder of ascension of humanity to an eternal bliss in another world since if the man does not bear difficulty such properties as remission, patience and the like would not be manifested in him.

3- Evil is the effect of ignorance. The advocates of this position hold that the man hastily judges some affairs as evil because they measure everything as compared to their interests.

4- Evils are recompensed in other world. Some theosophers believe that this world's pains and sufferings are being repaired in another world. Muslim theologians also solve the problem of evil by invoking to the principle of reimbursement and the recompensation of evil in this world or an other world.

5- Evils are abstracted from non-beings and existence is tantamount to good and no existence would be found that is not essentially evil and evils consist of the absence of existence.

6- Nature is based on natural laws. God has forced an order upon the world that is associated with great goods and the man can pursue his/her voluntary and free actions within its framework and natural evil is essential to this system (Cf. Sadeghi, 2003: 168-169). The above positions are among the most important answers that theosophers have given to the problem of evil. However, today although believers regard their articles of faith the best interpretations of world and human life but critics hold that these interpretations are not sufficient for the explanation of problem of evil as the theists and atheists do not have common grounds and for this very reason rational consensus is not reached since the architects of above-mentioned ideas have founded their views upon the beliefs that are mostly useful within religious traditions.

Critical Assessment of Traditional Answers

Among the most important answers that philosophers have given to the problem of evil was the idea that this world is purely good and evils are nothing but non-existences. Nonetheless, this thesis came across a dilemma called perceptual evil, which reveals itself in pain, grief and suffering, and changes evil to an essential entity. Theosophers believe that perception is an existential matter since it is a kind of knowledge and the latter is identical with existence.

Muslim theosophers have given answers to perceptual evil and each one has somehow explained it and here we suffice to point out that if the theosophers' responses regarding the issue of pain to be taken convincing the problem still remains untouched as to the double ignorance and also even if we accept that evil is a relative and contingent reality again this question is being raised that why God has not created the world in a way that contingency and relativity become pointless in it.

According to Allama Tabatabaei, in analytical terms this implies that why God created the matter and nature, because the indicated analogy is inhered in the meaning of matter for if a being does not have the possibility of perfection it shall not be material (Tabatabaei, 1999: 209).

By this justification Muslim philosophers in fact declare the evils good and not delusional or non-existential.

However, some believe that the existence of evils is necessary for the understanding of goods as well as the Supreme Good but critics respond that the latter purpose can also be met by lesser amount of evils.

Muslim philosophers believe in the best of all possible worlds and slim evil and upon their theological principles they demonstrate the best of all possible worlds. But this position has also encountered

many critiques including the objection that this approach involves the impossibility of natural evolution and is in contradiction with moral judgments why does God acquiesce to a world filled with suffering and pain?

Moreover we mentioned earlier that theosophers divided contingent beings into five groups and then demonstrated that only two groups of them exist, i.e. beings which are purely good (incorporeal beings) and beings whose goods dominate their evils.

This position which has its roots in Aristotle's philosophy has been embraced by Muslim philosophers and they afford arguments for it based on perennial philosophy. But the critics have leveled a number of objections against it one of which is that why has the second group of beings whose good dominate their evils been created? Moreover if someone not to accept the principles of perennial philosophy upon which basis will you demonstrate that the other three groups of beings do not exist? Furthermore many critics put their fingers on the huge amount of oppression, corruption, illness, massacre and the like, that exists in the world and believes that evil outnumbers the good in reality.

It has been argued that everything is eventually good and the man lacks the ability of judgment due to the deficiency and limitation of human knowledge but this is not also a convincing answer since according to the same philosophers God has equipped the man with the power of discernment. Theosophers believe that in otherworldly life all human individuals reach to their perfection and Muslim theologians believe that many evils in this world shall be recompensed in the other world. The critics, however, opine that the belief in Otherworldly life does not justify the existence of evils in this world.

Grace Jantzen argues, one can say that God is just only if there is an otherworldly life.... But this is a horrible theodicy since it is as if someone brutally bits his pet so as to give it a delicious dish of food

in return. Whatever happens after death does not turn the present evil into good (Talia frau, 2003: 524).

As we aforementioned, this type of answers is valid within religious framework and expands a religious individual's vision and strengthens the believers' faith as most of them are grounded in religious beliefs. Some religious western philosophers of religion like Plantinga hold that with these answers the believers only could demonstrate that how their beliefs give a meaning to evil and thus they afford arguments for their beliefs. He holds that the theory of theodicy is impossible and unnecessary. Since we cannot have a religious understanding of evil dilemma with our limited human mind and rational persuasion is reached when the believers and despisers have common grounds upon which they may provide an authentic argument for this problem (Peterson et al, 2000: 190-194).

Thus the best way is that to refute the atheist arguments through their own principles. Then the application of logical and inductive methods that are being applied by the atheists themselves is the best way to rebut their claims.

Criticism of Rowe's Argument

William Rowe claims that theists can falsify his argument in two ways:

I) The theist may allude to a good that would be missed if an evil avoided. Then Rowe says it is for sure that the believers cannot show such goods in all cases in addition to the fact that many theists believe that the divine reasons of many evils are not clear in this world and some of them only become unearthed in the Otherworld.

II) The alternative way to the first route is falsification of the argument by means of logical methods.

For example, to form an argument by the opposite of conclusion plus the second premise which yields the opposite of first premise as follows:

- There is an omniscient, omnipotent and purely good being.
- Such a being prevents from the occurrence of intense suffering unless that would lead to the omission of good.

Conclusion: There is no instance of intense suffering and gratuitous evil (Rowe: 132-135).

Of course, Rowe confesses that he would like to accept the first argument and provides no reason for his preference (Saeedi Mehr: 40).

Now we turn to the criticism of Rowe's argument. Some believe that theists are not obliged to find a parallel good for every evil and if they could demonstrate the underlying wisdom of major evils that atheists highlight then the evils remained cannot be declared a rational evidence against the existence of God (Ibid: 44).

To state the matter otherwise, as Rowe believes that since we do not find any justification for some evils then the belief in God's non-existence is rational, by the same token, the believers can claim that since we find wisdom for the majority of evils so the belief in God's existence is rational.

Stephanie Wykstra is one of the critics of Rowe's argument. Wykstra's critique targets Rowe's this claim that the evils which seem to have no justification allows us to conclude that these evils lacks any justification in reality too. In Wykstra's view, if there is a nobler good for the incineration of dear calf at all how much is it probable that this would be revealed to us? According to Wykstra, regarding our limited knowledge as compared to Divine Wisdom we do not have epistemic access to the whole gamut of reality so

that to claim that this evil lacks rational justification (Wykstra, 1984: 155-156).

In response to Wykstra, Rowe admits that God could be aware of a number of goods to which we are ignorant but this cannot bring us to the conclusion that there exist goods that are nobler than some pains and sufferings and do not realized without the latter pains and we are unaware of them until they occur but we have no reason to remain ignorant to them even after they occurred.

Here the basis of Rowe's claim is not clear again as he does not determines what is the difference between the moment before and after occurrence of goods in respect of our epistemic capability and access (Ibid: 47).

Modern Answers

One of the anti-evidential evil argument philosophers of religion is William Hasker. He affords an argument against evidential argument from evil based on causal necessity and personal identity. To begin with, he asks a question to the effect that whether I am happy for my existence? Said differently, if I am pleased with my existence and those who I love? This question exposes this subject to a personal turning.

The second step in this debate is that what is necessary for human beings as particular individuals? Then he argues that if the major and remarkable events of world history in past were different than what they are now quite likely neither me nor those who I love them never would exist. Since the existence of any particular individual is an effect of many circumstances most of which have been disastrous and we always deplore about. But we are still happy to have been born and if I am in all pleased with my existence and those of my relatives and friends, then I should be also glad that world history is the same that it must be. Now we can understand

the relationship between individual existence of person and all evils that have resulted into his/her existence.

Hasker continues his debate by distinguishing between truth and rationality and between logical regret and psychological satisfaction and regret and their synthesizability so as to provide an answer to evil dilemma. He believes that there are states that are expressed by such statements as "being pleased with" and "being regretted about" and are like moral assertions and cannot be rationally right or wrong as someone might be both pleased and regretted.

In the same spirit Robert Merrihew Adams (1937) argues, the more we dip into the past the more colorful become the role of evils that we owe our existence to them since the causal sequence resulted in our individuality gets expanded. We are almost sure that if those evils did not exist as a part of human history we would have not existed too (Peterson, 1998: 117).

Sketching Polemical Argument a la Rowe

Martyr Mutahari believes that the other effect of evil dilemma reveals itself in philosophical pessimism. However, according to Islamic philosophy, existence is identical with good contrary to the materialist worldview which regards the man and the universe void of perception and purpose. According to materialistic point of view, human struggle for happiness is not heartening as when the existence is grounded in oppression there remains no point of justice-seeking anymore. The men of faith have psychological tranquility as they see the world purpose-built.

Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and many pessimist philosophers take suffering as the nature of world and materialists see the world void of all kinds of purpose. This group of thinkers depicts a gloomy picture of the world. As the icon of all pessimists, Schopenhauer states, this world is the worst and most wretched of all worlds and the will that has created this universe does not have any regard for

good and evil and its tendency to evil is respectively more than its leaning toward good as selfishness and egotism is rooted in its nature, and since life is suffering and struggle and the latter causes pain, if the man is seeking for happiness then s/he has to abandon will to life as this will is evil and its all aspects are associated with pain and suffering (Frughi, 2000, 3 vols, 1, 90-91).

William James describes these philosophers' words as babbling. The pitiful groans of these two German philosophers, James argues, call to one's mind the squeaks of a mouse that is in the throes of death. In the words of these writers is absent the sense of ecstasy that religion gives to life's hardships and troubles. Without belief a kind of inequilibrium is brought about and inequilibrium leads to agony, discomfort and pain. Faith turns the throe and grief into joy and happiness (Mutahari, 2012: 76).

The counterpoint of this perspective is the view assumed by theosophers. The man, in mystics' view, is the source of joy, pleasure and happiness, only if s/he wills it, there is no evil in the world that is not changeable into joy and happiness (ibid: 78).

Leibniz has been known as the greatest representative of optimism in philosophy. He believes that this world is the best of all worlds and in the universe good dominates the evil and this world is the best of all possible worlds.

Every philosopher who believes that existence is better than non-existence and every item of this world has been created in an exquisite manner and it has been composed in the best form and happiness is more than suffering, s/he is an optimist philosopher and optimism is not in contradiction with the claim that there is particular evils in the world, since this is a perspective that is directed toward the totality of world not its elements.

Among the features of optimist persons one can count the following: their certainty is strong, their lives are joyful and their

patience is extreme. These people do not deny the very existence of evil in the world but at the same time they have high hope to overcome it by divine benevolence. When the man believes in God's power to good creation, s/he attains the right understanding of things through the power of reason (ibid).

Having said these, now we ask William Rowe: which one of the abovementioned perspectives of life is better and more useful? One perspective tells us that the world is dominated by evils and misfortune and there are gratuitous evils that have no justification while the other perspective instills the view that God is the supreme good and evils are wise-some. Which one of these perspectives is good (particularly for the one who has been inflicted by an evil)? Whether optimistic perspective or atheistic view fosters pessimism? It is beyond any doubt that no sound mind would ever denounce hope and optimism and hail pessimism, despair and despondence. Psychologists always try to kindle hope inside their patients. Jung believes that no one would be treated unless s/he recovers his/her religious belief. The lack of religious spirit leads to psychological disorders and religion is one of the most important effective factors in the psychological process of adaptation with environment (Morno, 1997: 99).

Dostoyevsky holds that the only way of adaptation is flying toward God. He believes that those who have a gloomy and melancholic vision of world have no hope to light.... Such individuals are confused and miserable and take themselves and the society to the verge of extinction (Dostoyevsky, 1960, vol. 2, 727-745).

Our second question from Rowe is that why he insists on the first option? We should say that he is either not interested in goodness or he cannot select good or he does not know which one is good. If he judges about the goodness and evilness of objects and states his views freely then he already assumes himself well-versed on the nature of good and evil and at the same time he is not compelled or unable. Such be the case, Rowe is not a pro-good thinker. In any

event, each one of these triple options has equal potency to dismantle Rowe's argument.

Rowe would respond that his position is good and more useful. Again this question is being raised that upon which criterion he considers his position useful and good? Since its wisdom is not clear and he has to unearth its wisdom for us while he admits his tendency to accept the atheist argument and perspective and does not mention any reason for his preponderance and this is a kind of imposing one's personal taste and thus a preponderance without preponderant.

Moreover, Rowe may answer that his action cannot be compared with divine action as conceived in theism in its narrow sense as human action is limited and defected. Then we shall remind him that firstly here we are not concerned with comparing human actions with divine action but rather our argument is a persuasive reasoning that has been made upon the accepted premises of opponent and the above answer implies the confession to the limitation of human actions, thoughts, knowledge and its requirements. Secondly, the picture that Rowe has depicted of theism in its narrow sense is a Christian conception which is based on an anthropomorphic and incarnated God while Islamic version of theism envisages God as an entity who stands beyond the limits of realm of matter and is free from material accidents and is not a defeated and crucified God. He is a God that besides attributes of beauty has such attributes of majesty as Almighty, Vengeful and All-Dominating. These attributes, according to Islamic theism, are not in contrast with pure goodness of God. Therefore, according to Rowe's definition of theism in its narrow sense which is an incomplete and vague definition Islam is not an extension of theism in latter sense and Rowe's generalization is a pointless generalization.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that providing a comprehensive list of solutions that have been proposed by the believer as to evil dilemma requires a space that goes beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, it can be said that most of the offered answers have a common point which consists of the fact that evil's existence is necessary for the fulfillment of supreme good and for the reason being God allows the evil to have a place within the whole ontological scheme. Indeed the believers conclude that no evil is gratuitous and thus evils cannot be invoked as an evidence against the existence of Divine Presence. However, as believers dispose various solutions the critics also are benefited from different reasons and possibilities for denial.

Furthermore, it is necessary to be noted that according to logical rules as the atheists cannot insist on the gratuitousness of those evils for which we cannot find a reason, by the same token, theists cannot dogmatically insist on their purposefulness. However, believers can believe in recompensation of evils in the Otherworld based on the principles of monotheism and their own articles of faith and their belief is not irrational but they need to remember that this belief is meaningful within the framework of their belief system. But within the framework of philosophical issues the answers are valid insofar as the epistemic access is rationally and empirically possible.

On the other hand, in the study of religious issues and their related dilemmas and doubts, we should draw a clear line between theological and philosophical domains. Sometimes the critic has a theological point of view and his question is meaningful within theological framework and the answers must be theological and intra-religious. Unfortunately these two domains have been confused in the debates of Muslim philosophers and theologians. Sometimes theologians have posed theological questions while they have been answered in philosophical terms and sometimes philosophical problematiques have been answered based on theological methods and principles.

In author's view most of the traditional answers that have been given to the problem of evil are theological and mostly based on religious articles such as theodicy, the best of all possible worlds and the like, except the non-existential view of the evils that has been broached in Greek philosophy and latter been expanded by Muslim philosophers. However, we need to admit it as a fact that it is not rationally consistent to answer atheists' philosophical and logical questions by reference to religious beliefs and theological theorems such as theodicy, otherworldly life, the best of all possible worlds and the like, as such answers are only fathomable for those who believe in the same beliefs and theorems. Thus the explanation of evil dilemma as well as other philosophical doubts in Islamic intellectual world requires a serious revision. Then it is incumbent upon the theosophers and believer to provide proper answers for the questions of new generations and solve them by the application of modern methods as atheists renew and expand their arguments upon the findings of modern sciences.

Sources

- 1- Avicenna (1996): *al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Qom, Nashr ul-Balaghah.
- 2-(1404): *al-Elahyat al-Shifa*, Qom, Maktabat al-Ayatullah Marashi.
- 3- Ibn Arabi (2001): *Fusus al-Hikam*, Tehran, Al-Zahra.
- 4- Talia Frau, Charles (2003): *Twentieth Century Philosophy of Religion*, translated into Persian by E. Rahmati, Tehran, Nashri Suhrewardi.
- 5- Mancel Patison, E (2003): *Psychoanalysis and Evil*, translated by Omid Mehregan, Organon, 22, 229-258.
- 6- Peterson et al (2000): *An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*, translated by Sultani and Naraqi, Tehran, Tarh e-No.
- 7- Dostoyevsky, Feodor (1960): *The Brothers Karamazov*, 2nd vol, translated by Moshfeq Hamedani, Tehran, Jawidan.
- 8- Saeedi Mehr, Muhammad (2009): *Theosophy and Evidential Problem of Evil*, Qabasat, Fourteenth Year, Summer, 30-52.
- 9- Suhrewardi (d): *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, translated by Seyed Jafar Sajadi, Tehran, Tehran University Press.

- 10- Sadeghi, Hadi (2003): *An Introduction to Modern Theology*, Qom, Kitabi Taha wa Nashri Maaref.
- 11- Sadruddin Shirazi (1981): *al-Hikmat al-Mutalyah fi Asfar al-Arbat al-Aqlyah*. Beirut, Dar al-Ehya al-Turath al-Arabyah.
- 12- (1984): *Mafatih al-Gheyb*, Tehran, Muassessyih Tahqiqati Farhangi.
- 13- Tabatabaei, Muhammad Hussein (2008): *Principles of Philosophy and the Methodology of Realism*, Tehran, Sadra Publishers.
- 14- Frughi, Muhammad Ali (2000): *The History of European Philosophy*, Tehran, Safi Alishah.
- 15- Mutahari, Murtiza (1999): *Glossing Elahyat al-Shifa*, Collected Works, Tehran, Sadra.
- 16- (2012): *Theodicy*, Tehran, Sadra.
- 17- Morno, Antonio (1997): *Jung, Gods and Modern Men*, translated by Darius Mehrjuee, Tehran, Nashri Markaz.
- 18- John Hick (2011): *Philosophy of Religion*, translated by Beza Saleki, Tehran, Entesharat Almahdi.
- 19- peterson, Michael , 1998 *Westview, God and Evil* ,ASBURY COLLEGE
- 20- Rowe,1979:*The problem of Evil and some Varieties of Atheism*

Endnotes

¹ Prof. Muhammad Saeedi Mehr has examined one of Rowe's readings in *Theosophy and Evidential Problem of Evil* (2009)

² One of the key debates of epistemology is the definition of knowledge. According to a current view in modern epistemology, knowledge is a justified true belief. Accordingly, there is difference between the truth of a belief and its justification or rationality in the sense that all rational and justified beliefs are not necessarily true; it is possible that in certain conditions the belief in a proposition that is false ipso facto to be rational.

According to evidentialism, we consider a belief rational when we have sufficient reasons and evidences in favor of it. Nevertheless, there are different views concerning the limit of sufficiency. A famous idea reads that reasons should be so much that make the truth of a belief (or in a more precise terms, the truth of object of a belief) more probable than the truth of its antithesis.

Instructions for Contributors

Submissions

Submitted articles should not be previously published or being considered for publications elsewhere. Authors of the accepted articles will be asked to sign a copyright form. Authors are responsible for obtaining the permission to use any material for which they do not possess the copyright. They would also be responsible for including the appropriate acknowledgements in the articles.

Articles

All articles should be sent to the Editor, Dr S. G. Safavi, Journal of Transcendent Philosophy, 121 Royal Langford, 2 Greville Road, London NW6 5HT, UK
E-mail: philosophy@iranianstudies.org
Fax: (+44) 020 7209 4727

Two copies of the typescript of the articles along with a copy on floppy disk (Microsoft Word) should be submitted. Articles (including main text, notes, tables, etc.) should not exceed 40 double-spaced A4 pages. Text must be in legible, 12-point font and clear English. The title of the article and author's full name should be typed at the top of the first page followed by a brief abstract. The institutional affiliation, postal and e-mail addresses as well as fax and telephone numbers of the author should be submitted in an attached covering letter.

Book Reviews

Books for review and completed reviews should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Dr Sajjad H. Rizvi, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, Stocker Road, Exeter EX4 4ND, ,United Kingdom, E-mail : s.h.rizvi@ex.ac.uk

Two copies of the typescript of reviews along with a copy on floppy disk (Microsoft Word) should be submitted. Reviews should not exceed 6 double-spaced A4 pages. The reviewed author's full name, book title and other specifications (place of publication, publisher, date and number of pages) as well as the reviewer's full name and affiliation should be typed at the top of the first page.

Endnotes

Endnotes should be typed double-spaced at the end of the article rather than at the bottom of each page and numbered in a single sequence. Acknowledgements should be the last number in the article and placed in the endnotes accordingly. Endnotes are for the citation of the sources.