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Sufi discourse in postmodern approaches

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Abstract:
Sufi discourse is considered the refuge for humanity to shake off the dust of material ambitions that have exhausted it, and to enlighten it with the heartfelt aspirations that can re-establish a new knowledge on the basis of which many opinions, ideas, and theories may be founded, capable of repairing what previous philosophies have corrupted. This discourse is able to establish new promising paths in the sky of politics and international relations, which are spontaneously influenced by the results of the intellectual philosophies that shape the world. From here, Sufi discourse emerges in this context, especially since man, from the twentieth century onwards, has had no option but to return to the spirit or religion, as expressed by many thinkers, philosophers, and writers in the West and East.
Therefore, we cannot identify with nature but with Sufism, which restores to us the brilliance of knowledge after we have fallen into the bondage of materialism that deeply restricts the authenticity of the soul and the values of religion. This

is what we aim for in this article: the necessity of finding a ground on which human thought may stand anew, and there is no alternative but to activate the issue of Sufi discourse as a stage following postmodernism, after the failure of the project of modernity to achieve its aim and after the incapacity of the post-modern stage to reach a similar goal.

Keywords: *Discourse, Sufism, Approaches, Modernity, Postmodernism.*

Le discours soufi dans les approches postmodernes

Résumé :
Le discours soufi est considéré comme le refuge de l'humanité pour se débarrasser de la poussière des ambitions matérielles qui l'ont épuisée et pour l'éclairer avec les aspirations sincères qui peuvent rétablir une nouvelle connaissance sur la base de laquelle de nombreuses opinions, idées et théories peuvent être fondées, capables de réparer ce que les philosophies précédentes ont corrompu. Ce discours est capable d'ouvrir de nouvelles voies prometteuses dans le domaine de la politique et des relations internationales, qui sont spontanément influencées par les résultats des philosophies intellectuelles qui façonnent le monde. C'est dans ce contexte que le discours soufi émerge, d'autant plus que l'homme, à partir du XXe siècle, n'a eu d'autre choix que de revenir à l'esprit ou à la religion, comme l'ont exprimé de nombreux penseurs, philosophes et écrivains en Occident et en Orient.
Par conséquent, nous ne pouvons pas nous identifier à la nature, mais au soufisme, qui nous rend l'éclat de la connaissance après que nous soyons tombés dans l'esclavage du matérialisme qui restreint profondément l'authenticité de l'âme et les valeurs de la religion. C'est ce que nous visons dans cet article : la nécessité de trouver un terrain sur lequel la pensée humaine puisse se reposer à nouveau, et il n'y a pas d'autre alternative que d'activer la question du discours soufi comme étape suivant le postmodernisme, après l'échec du projet de modernité à atteindre son objectif et après l'incapacité de l'étape postmoderne à atteindre un objectif similaire.

Mots-clés : *Discours, Soufisme, Approches, Modernité, Postmodernisme.*

Introduction:

This article seeks to shed light on Sufi discourse in postmodern approaches, especially after the latter reached the peak of the crisis it suffers. After the wager that man sought to achieve in repairing the rupture of modernity—as a project that failed to achieve what was hoped for—postmodernism came as a revolution against previous theories and ideas. Therefore, Copernican transformations occurred in several fields opposing the philosophical predecessors of the modernist phase. Perhaps it pleases us to call the intellectual and philosophical upheaval in the postmodern era the postmodern archipelagos, which were founded on epistemological skepticism.

Yet the results were painful: the ready-made molds changed, and the rules, laws, and systems on which intellectual, artistic, and scientific discourses were based were scattered. As an attempt to find an intellectual ground in which man could recover his essence, Sufi discourse emerged, considered a stage to which postmodern thought withdraws, to return anew to the establishment of laws and systems that harmonize between man, life, and the universe. This was declared by many scientific writings that saw in Sufism a way leading to liberation and escape from the dreadful crisis of skepticism.

And since Sufi discourse achieved a wide resonance in scientific and intellectual circles, as it addressed the spirit that cannot differ among human beings, we can ask:

- What is the wager upon which Sufi discourse relies regarding postmodern ideas?
- What are the characteristics that Sufi discourse possesses?

- What is the concept of Sufi discourse?
- And what is the concept of postmodernism?

To answer these questions, we set out a methodological plan as follows:

- First: A conceptual introduction: the concept of Sufi discourse and postmodernism.
- Second: The impasse of postmodernism and the wagers of Sufism.
- Third: The characteristics of Sufi discourse.

1. Conceptual Introduction

1.1 The Concept of Sufi Discourse:

The singular form *discourse* in the language means reviewing speech: *"He addressed him with speech (mukhāṭaba and khuṭāb),"* as mentioned in *Lisān al-ʿArab*. However, the word in the pattern *"fiʿāl/khuṭāb"* as it appeared in the Noble Qur'an has another meaning. Some exegetes said regarding the Almighty's words: *(wa-faṣl al-khiṭāb)* — that it is to judge with evidence or with an oath; and it was said that it means to distinguish between truth and falsehood and to differentiate between a ruling and its opposite; and it was said that *faṣl al-khiṭāb* means *ammā baʿd* ("as for what follows"), and David, peace be upon him, was the first to say *ammā baʿd* (Ahmad al-Turaybiq Ahmad, 1999, pp. 61–62).

Faṣl al-khiṭāb means possessing the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, which makes discourse an effective means to judge between what is acceptable and what is rejected. For discourse to be influential, there must be an interactive dialogue between a speaker who is keen to use clear and agreed-upon language, and a listener who is attentive and capable of grasping the message. Thus, discourse is the speech that aims to convey an idea, or it is the agreed-

upon expression directed to a person qualified to understand it (Ahmad al-Turaybiq Ahmad, 1999, p. 62).

Every discourse carries social functions built upon a specific ideological background. In this context, Sufi discourse may be defined through its comparison with direct discourse, as it is characterized by being an indirect discourse, closer to implicit discourse that resists direct clarity. Its understanding relies on the duality of opposition between the apparent and the hidden, which requires an intuitive ability to decode its signs and comprehend its references.

Implicit discourse — among which Sufi discourse is included — is considered a tool that generates infinite interpretive levels, differing according to the reader and his context. Every implicit discourse is also based on a cultural and social background that reflects the identity of the community producing it, making it an expression of its vision and its own heritage (Ahmad al-Turaybiq Ahmad, 1999, p. 63).

Harris defined it as: "*A long utterance and a sequence of sentences, and every utterance presupposes a speaker and a listener, where the first has the aim of influencing the second in some way.*" (Said Yaqtin, 1997, p. 19).

As for Todorov, he defined it as: "*Any utterance or speech act that presupposes the presence of a narrator and a listener, and the narrator intends to influence the listener in some way.*" (Tzvetan Todorov, 1993, p. 48).

Michel Foucault mentioned that discourse is: "*The texts and sayings as given by the totality of their words and the system of their construction and their logical structure or their organizational construction.*" (Michel Foucault, 1987, p. 31).

Schulters saw discourse as: "*Those evaluative, judgmental, persuasive, or rhetorical aspects of a text, that is, as opposed to the*

aspects that merely name, designate, or convey." (Robert Schulters, 1993, p. 48).

Based on these definitions, the recipient of discourse must grasp the intended purpose and understand the semantic message it carries, since discourse is characterized by a communicative function consisting of three essential elements: the text, the author, and the reader. Thus, discourse is considered a linguistic unit carrying a specific content in the form of interconnected sentences directed from a sender to a receiver, with the aim of influencing him and persuading him of the content of the message. It is, therefore, a direct interaction between the two parties in the communication process (Mahmoud ʿUkāsha, 2005, p. 40).

Sufi discourse, like other literary discourses, is a discursive act that possesses the mechanisms and conditions required for textuality, which enables it to acquire the various dimensions that ensure its coherence and the conditions of communication through its circulation within the general standards of literary communication.

The Sufis produced *"texts that were adequately formed in their morphological formulation, grammatical rules, semantic aspects of their words, and styles of expression and communication."* (Āmina Balʿalā, 2002, p. 19).

The Sufis adopted symbolism because it is impossible to express extraordinary worlds with ordinary language. Thus, in the Sufi experience, language takes on a dual path, where perceptible meanings embody forms of an indicative dimension toward what they allude to. This almost represents a new interpretation, whereby the word no longer carries the same meaning it was known for, but instead takes on other underlying meanings. This almost results in emptying the word of its original meaning and filling it with another, so

that the meaning becomes doubled, surpassing its conventional limit:

> "For this reason, the language of poetry in the Sufi experience takes the method of symbolic indication, which relies on creating a language in which words acquire meanings other than their conventional significance. But these meanings are not a new creation; rather, the context and the artistic vision become the basis of this new semantic dimension. It becomes a verbal equation where one of its two terms is replaced by the other through what the Sufis offered of explanations and interpretations." (Rajaa ʿĪd, 2003, p. 279).

The reliance of the Sufis on symbolism can be analyzed through the unusual nature of the Sufi experience itself, as the spiritual worlds experienced by the Sufi transcend the limits of ordinary linguistic expression, which obliges him to adopt a dual form of language. In this context, language does not perform its direct semantic function but transforms into an indicative tool aiming to embody what cannot be expressed explicitly.

Here emerges semantic deviation (*inzīyāḥ dalālī*) as a central concept; the word separates from its conventional denotation to carry new meanings shaped according to the Sufi context. The word's original meaning is not abolished but rather multiplied to include symbolic levels that transcend the literal meaning. This deviation is not an invention of a new meaning from nothing, but a reshaping of meaning through the Sufi context and the interpretive vision provided by the Sufis.

Sufi language, in this sense, resembles a semantic equation subject to substitution, where one side of the meaning (the apparent meaning) is replaced with another (the inner

meaning) through the explanations and interpretations offered by the Sufi. This is what makes the Sufi text an open text, receptive to multiple readings, where the symbol transforms from being a mere sign into a threshold leading to a chain of meanings transcending linguistic directness.

Thus, the symbol in Sufi discourse is not merely a rhetorical style but an existential mechanism that enables the Sufi to transcend the limitations of ordinary language in order to approach expression of the Absolute, which cannot be described by familiar words.

1.2. The Concept of Postmodernism: The Impasse of Postmodernism and the Stakes of Sufism

1.2.1. Postmodernism and the Search for Sufi Emancipation:

Since postmodernism declared the end of the triads — such as the death of God with Nietzsche, the end of history with Fukuyama, and the death of man with Foucault — that declaration caused a spiritual crisis that cast its shadow over the world, affecting man's relationship with himself, then with the universe, and then with his Creator. As man is the prominent link and the precious jewel among existents, who cannot be separated from his kind in influence and interaction, many pens emerged declaring that we are in need of a qualitative shift and a light that allows us to look with penetrating insight into the "*where*" in the gnoseological sense and the *present self* that saves us from the crisis that led to what is called alienation.

One prominent pen among them is Huston Smith, who explains the spiritual malady that accompanied the era of modernity and postmodernity and handed it over to alienation because "*it began by rejecting the existence of something called the whole picture from the start.*" (Huston Smith, 2005, p. 31).

The postmodern era began successfully when it criticized the truncated worldview of the Enlightenment era, but it recklessly rushed from that logical beginning to an illogical conclusion, namely that the diverse worldviews are, in principle, a misguided concept (Huston Smith, 2005, p. 31).

In his book *The Postmodern Condition,* François Lyotard believed that "*the postmodern age is the age of doubt,*" and he divided it into:

- The first model: the model of the moderation line in the postmodern age, which was content with indicating that today we do not have a comprehensive worldview agreed upon.
- The second model: the model of the mainstream line of the postmodern age.
- The third model: the hardline of the postmodern age (al-Sayyid Weld Abah, 2010).

> "And here lies a strange paradox: the postmodern age, which denies the possibility of the existence of a comprehensive humanistic worldview, is itself working to create such a worldview through the revolution of social justice, i.e., its insistence on giving every human being his just and equal share of life's blessings." (Huston Smith, 2005, p. 32).

Meanwhile, Sufism offers reconciliation between the comprehensive worldview that depicts man's relationship with God, the universe, life, and humanity, while also achieving man's psychological balance in accordance with his innate nature.

The contemporary French philosopher Eric Geoffroy published a controversial book titled *"Islam Will Be Spiritual or Will Not Be."* The title is clearly inspired by the famous phrase attributed to the French businessman, minister, and

writer André Malraux: *"The twenty-first century will be a religious century or will not be."* (al-Sayyid Weld Abah, 2010).

Although we have known Geoffroy as a meticulous researcher in his field, namely the history of Islamic Sufism and the study of its schools and paths, in this book he goes beyond this descriptive academic approach, as well as beyond the personal esoteric experience, to present a complete and integrated project to revive the sciences of Islam and renew the approach to religiosity through the model of *"spiritual ijtihād."* He presents it as an alternative to the limited juristic ijtihād and sees it as the appropriate path for the current postmodern era (al-Sayyid Weld Abah, 2010), especially since the latter did not find its solution in the positivist method it adopted as its path and was unable to answer all the questions that were believed, under the prevailing view, that the scientific method was sufficient to put an end to metaphysics, whose coffin had its last nail struck when the death of God was declared.

For this purpose, Geoffroy employs a broad cultural and methodological arsenal, including the ancient Sufi heritage, such as the writings of Ibn ʿArabī (but also some references to Ibn Taymiyyah, whom he considers a complete Sufi), modern Islamic reformist literature (especially Muhammad Iqbal), as well as the works of modernist Arab and Muslim thinkers (Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Soroush, al-Jabri…), with abundant references to contemporary Western philosophical writings (al-Sayyid Weld Abah, 2010).

It is not our concern here to present this important book, which will undoubtedly provoke wide debate, but suffice it to raise the three main problems that we believe it presents with much originality and clarity.

The first problem relates to what he called the paradox of *"the inversion of values"* in the Islamic experience, i.e., how

the fertile and rich promises carried by the message of Islam were narrowed down and turned into their opposite in the Islamic historical context. Among these promises are the values of freedom, responsibility, Islam's openness to the universal and the different, its elevation of human rights and women's freedom… which fall within what he called *"Islamic spiritual humanism,"* which differs from modern European humanism in that it places man at the center of God's divine project of creation, where man is honored and seeks completeness and perfection, and not the center of the universe dominating it as Western modernity conceived. The latter ended up with the evils of ethnocentrism, material nihilism, and the destruction of nature. For this reason, Sufi discourse comes to provide an alternative to what postmodernism offered.

Although the subject is not new in contemporary Islamic thought, the originality of Geoffroy's approach lies in overturning the prevailing approach in current literature by arguing that the crisis of medieval Islamic thought resulted from its neglect of the Sufi reform model, which strongly crystallized after the fall of Baghdad and al-Andalus, and instead choosing the limited juristic ijtihād of analogical reasoning, restricted by the social and cultural customs of Arab tribal societies. The prevailing view is that the decline of philosophy (the failure of the Averroist project in al-Jabri's terms) or the elimination of Muʿtazilite rationalism was the reason for the failure of Muslim societies to move toward the Renaissance and modernity, which translated into a drift toward Sufi ṭarīqas that *"disabled reason."* Geoffroy strongly rejects this reading, showing that Islamic Sufism provided a rationality more rigorous and precise than philosophical and theological rationalism, in line with the most modern epis-

temological and hermeneutical conceptions. The obstacle that prevented the assimilation of Sufi rationality was the reduction of Sufi concepts and perceptions to the aesthetics of taste and the esotericism of spiritual experience, instead of viewing them as complete philosophical systems. Without doubt, Geoffroy's hypothesis deserves calm scholarly discussion rather than hastiness in refuting it (al-Sayyid Weld Abah, 2010).

The second problem relates to the possibility of extracting Sufism from its esoteric mold to normalize its epistemological status within the theoretical field hermeneutically and epistemologically. The idea that Geoffroy defends is that Sufism is not, as is usually thought, a symbolic poetic language reserved for the elite, but rather it is founded upon a set of theoretical and methodological tools that can be formulated in a language comprehensible to all, provided that we move beyond the veil of abstract causal logic to which reason is usually reduced. It is clear that Geoffroy, in supporting his thesis, refers to contemporary philosophical writings that, since Nietzsche and Heidegger, have undermined the systematic concept of philosophy and the logic of presence and identity, and confirmed the interweaving of the rational with the irrational, the poetic with the demonstrative, and intuition with understanding. From this perspective, Geoffroy focuses on the methods of *"inspiration"* and *"unveiling"* (*ilhām* and *mukāshafa*) to show that they are two complementary epistemological methods developed by the Sufis to reach spiritual truths. These are methods that are used today in the exact sciences and in hermeneutical philosophies and should not be viewed as mystical aberrations. Geoffroy sees spiritual ijtihād according to Sufi standards as the only one qualified to reform and renew Islam, instead of limiting oneself to the restricted juristic ijtihād. He proposes

a new concept of reading and interpretation, emphasizing that the text continuously descends, and that the divine meaning is never attained absolutely but is rather shifting states reflected by changing legitimate understandings for man, who is entrusted with the text as a divine sign and call, and not as a rigidly fixed code of meaning. It is clear that Geoffroy was influenced in this thesis by the metaphysics of movement of the Pakistani philosopher and Sufi Muhammad Iqbal (al-Sayyid Weld Abah, 2010).

As for the third problem, it concerns the transition from modernity devoid of spirituality to postmodernism regaining spirituality. In fact, "Geffroy" was not the first to propose this conception, but he was preceded by some philosophers and thinkers, perhaps the most prominent being the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, who considered that the collapse of metaphysics inaugurates a new horizon for spirituality instead of eliminating it: *"For metaphysics is not cast off as a garment is cast off, because it constitutes our destiny, and we cannot yield to it or recover from it, but retrieve it as one of our affairs"* (Gianni Vattimo, p. 59).

If modernity was founded on the idea of empirical certainty, then the postmodern age ended positivist certainties and deterministic definitions, opening a new horizon for spiritual intuition. And if modernity declared the centrality of man and turned him into an absolute god, then postmodernism declared the end of man, imposing upon his consciousness his finitude and limitation, compelling him to renew his connection with the Absolute. Moreover, globalization provided contemporary man with a wide spiritual marketplace to draw from that was not previously available. The outcome is that Geffroy's book compels the reader to a strict review of many entrenched assumptions and presents

an ambitious project for reform and renewal from Sufi foundations formulated in a rigorous philosophical style.

2. The characteristics of Sufi discourse:

2.1. Mechanisms of concealment, delight, and interpretation

The early Sufis left behind a vast reserve of knowledge and concepts, expressed through terms that function as symbols referring to the Sufi experience. Authority in the third century opposed these symbols and weakened their strength by executing al-Hallaj. Therefore, the Sufis chose to employ mechanisms of concealment and secrecy, which serve as objective substitutes referring to those mysteries, and from among them is the mechanism of interpretation, of great depth, to uncover them. It is the mechanism of interpretation that contributes without doubt to integrating the receptive self within the process of meaning construction (Amina Belala, 2002, p. 61).

Second: Femininity and the pleasure of writing

The essence of the act of femininity transformed the act of love from a cognitive subject—as among the early Sufis—into a poetic subject. Undoubtedly, we find with Ibn Arabi indications of these meanings in his saying:

I follow the religion of love wherever its mounts turn … Love is my religion and my faith.

We may connect this feature to postmodernism, for the literary Marxist Fredric Jameson set out the main axes of postmodern culture as follows:

- **First: The replacement of scientific literatures with sharp parody.**
- **Second: The tendency toward nostalgia (yearning for the past).**

- **Third: The focus on the present moment and sanctifying it above all else. (Fredric Jameson, 2018)**

These axes do not differ at all from the Sufi discourse that employs symbolism to express the contents of the soul. We find this with Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn ʿArabi, Ibn ʿAfīf al-Tilimsānī, al-Hallaj, and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi. It is a stage where mere indication becomes insufficient. If we consider the first axis, namely the replacement of scientific literatures with sharp parody, we find this in Sufi discourse, for example in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's saying:

I abandoned the passion for Layla and Saʿda in their dwelling… And returned to rectify the first abode.

This is evidence of parody regarding what the soul desires, linking it to the passion for Layla and Saʿda, following the path of ancient poets in love preludes at the beginnings of their odes. Not only this, but he criticized in this symbolic satirical way a method followed by the Nizamiyya school.

The Sufi experience carries features different from the philosophical experience, but it also carries philosophical wagers and transcends them. This enables us to examine and approach it through what the Sufis produced. The Sufi's personal experience is distinguished as a method or mode of knowledge to reach a higher, different state. The book *Philosophical Wagers of Sufism* pointed to the extent of the blending between Sufism in its medieval tradition, poetic work, and German Romanticism (Abd al-Wahhab Belghrass, 2016).

Sufism, in a purely philosophical view, is a site of ontological experience announced on the basis of the dialectic of the inner and the outer. "Sufi rationality," or the rationality of the one brought near, or supported reason, as Taha Abderrahmane names it, is a rationality connected to a living experience through which the Sufi transcends scientific af-

flictions such as abstraction and politicization, and moral afflictions such as pretension and imitation, as he is supported by God (Abd al-Wahhab Belghrass, 2016).

Third: The inadequacy of human language in expressing the Sufi experience

Human language is incapable of expressing and encompassing the Sufi states and ecstatic utterances that escape rigid, cold linguistic molds. Sufism is "a unique subjective experience difficult to repeat or re-experience by a thinker other than the one who tasted it, felt its sweetness, and became absorbed in its flavors" (Naji Hussein, 2006, p. 16). And in the words of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar al-Niffari: "*Whenever the vision expands, expression narrows*" (Muhammad al-Khallawi, 2008, p. 20).

Thus, human language—whose origin has been debated, whether convention and agreement, or revelation and stipulation, or imitation of natural sounds—cannot transmit the Sufi experience, which is lived and endured, not narrated through verbal channels. The Sufis are masters of states and mysteries, not masters of sayings. Yet the later Sufis could not abide by this rule or similar ones, so they divulged secrets that escape logical systems (Muhammad Ait Hammou, 2010, p. 68). The history of Sufis tells us that divulging the secret is not without dire consequences, as happened to some emblematic figures such as al-Hallaj, who was crucified and dismembered because he uttered the famous phrase "I am the Truth," which people did not understand.

The implication of the incarnationist current is that God incarnates in man at a moment after spiritual struggle, speaking with his tongue, meaning that the Sufis cannot be judged, for what they say is God's speech at that moment, performing miracles at a certain time. We must not forget that when Sufi terms take on an incarnationist meaning, they

are not speaking of man at all. This is the effacement of the self that dissolves completely (Muhammad Ait Hammou, 2010, p. 75).

In truth, Sufi writings are rich and fertile, nearing encyclopedic breadth, and resist all delimitation (Achrif Mazour, 2014).

Fourth: The humanistic orientation in Sufi discourse Humanity, undermined by the death of God and then the death of man in the postmodern era, could not pass unscathed until Sufi discourse came to provide humanity with the refuge that ensures deliverance from this crisis, namely the crisis of alienation or skepticism. Postmodernism went to extremes in providing stimuli for society and eliminating the cultural deprivation that persisted for decades. Myths were eliminated, and critique became the central axis around which many ideas revolved. Therefore, the Sufi discourse is considered the sole refuge that restores dignity to man without restricting him to a specific religious orientation.

This orientation cannot be denied in the old Islamic heritage, as some Sufis spoke of humanism, as we pointed out earlier. However, this tendency toward interpretation that regards this philosophy as significant is the actual troubled reality to which modernity arrived, especially when some fundamental scientific assumptions, once deemed sacred by many philosophers and thinkers, were shaken.

The humanistic orientation is the only one that restores balance to this world filled with postmodern ideas. Jalal al-Din al-Rumi embodied this orientation in his wondrous symbolic works, considered the firm foundation of universal humanistic Sufism, along with the heritage of Ibn Arabi and others who spoke of meanings of humanity translated in Sufism.

A thorough reading of the meanings of the Qur'an and the purpose of the final message makes clear the normative formula of revelation: mercy. The Almighty says: *"And We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds."* This mercy encompasses all kinds of people of different orientations and creeds. And He says: *"Were it not for God's repelling some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is much mentioned, would have been destroyed."* This verse uses the term "repelling" instead of "conflict," which implies annihilation. The use of "repelling" is in fact a blessing, ensuring that synagogues for Jews, churches for Christians, and mosques for Muslims remain, all of them places where God is remembered.

Without doubt, this verse represents sociological unity, which can spread and broadcast the unity of coexistence we seek in this vast world. If we return to our history, we find a shining example of coexistence: Amr ibn Maymun and Ata ibn Abi Rabah said that when the Prophet entered the Kaaba, he found an image of Mary and her son and said: "Erase everything except this" (Al-Azraqi Muhammad ibn Abd Allah, 2003; Al-Dhahabi Muhammad Shams al-Din, 1996).

Love as an Ideal Image for Achieving Coexistence among Humanity:

There is no doubt that man is the cause of the existence of the universe, and he is the sole divine breath. God Almighty says: *"So We breathed into him of Our Spirit."* He is the unique being in the sky of witnessing with the characteristic of the divine lofty spirit without rival. Therefore, we did not find among the creations of the higher or lower worlds any being singled out with the divine breath, except man alone, who stands capably on common ground in this world to say: the divine breath represents the universal image of God's love for mankind. Consequently, there must be a unifying princi-

ple to achieve what the outward forms of religions in their legislative structures failed to accomplish, namely love and coexistence among human beings.

Among the images of love in Buddhism is the saying of His Holiness the Dalai Lama: *"World civilization depends on the expressive dialogue among all the religions of the world, and such coexistence we expect to be shared in by all segments of society with their various intellectual and religious backgrounds."* (Aleksendar Berzin, 2007, p. 61). Likewise, from Judaism and Christianity we derive expressions of mutual love among human beings, and the outcome of love has been depicted in texts that narrate creative experiences. In these experiences, the divine self is sometimes manifested: the manifestation of the divine throne in the mysticism of the god "Shar" in the Judaism of ancient times, then the heavenly ascension like the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, in the Mi'raj. Whoever contemplates human action will realize that the importance of human existence arises from the centrality of the light inherent in his being, and by virtue of this light, man reasons and perceives. Hence, the luminous breath has a purely divine source.

The same is found among the Sufis in Islam, which confirms the cultural commonality among religions, and this calls for the necessity of human construction.

Love is evident to the observer in the abundance of the Sufi heritage. For example, al-Hallaj says:

> "The Truth manifested to Himself in pre-eternity before He created creation, and before creation knew, and He held with Himself in the presence of His Unity a discourse without speech and without letters, and He beheld the radiances of His essence in His essence. And in pre-eternity, when the Truth was and nothing was with Him, He looked upon His essence and loved

> it, and praised Himself. Thus this was a manifestation of His essence in His essence in the form of love transcendent of every description and every limit. And this love was the cause of existence and the reason for the multiplicity of beings. Then the Truth, exalted is He, willed to see that essential love manifest in an external form that He beholds and addresses, so He looked in pre-eternity and brought forth from nonexistence an image from Himself, having all His attributes and names, and that is Adam, whom God made His image for all eternity." (al-Hallaj al-Husayn ibn Mansur, 2004, p. 129).

In the beginning was love, and in the beginning was knowledge, and these two values the Sufi man will strive to discover through his spiritual experience, for they represent the secret of his creation and the cause of his existence. There is an intimate relationship between the Creator and the creature, and an eternal bond between God and man, represented in the secret of creation and the cause of existence. Ibn Arabi depicted this relationship by saying: *"We are in need of Him as regards our existence, and He is in need of us as regards His manifestation to Himself."* (Nicholson, 1956, p. 86). This poverty is the elixir of divine love that overflowed upon mankind with their kinds and orientations. Therefore, Abu al-Qasim the Sufi describes:

> "The Sufi is one whose heart is as free from the world as was the heart of Abraham, who obeyed the commands of God; and one whose submission is like the submission of Ishmael; whose grief is like the grief of David; whose poverty is like the poverty of Jesus; whose longing is like the longing of Moses in his supplication; and whose sincerity is like the sincerity of Muhammad, peace be upon him." (Nicholson, 1956, p. 31).

In the same manner, the Ikhwan al-Safa coined an expression that strengthens the bonds of human love, saying: *"The perfect man is Persian in lineage, Arab in religion, Hanafi in school, Iraqi in manners, Jewish in character, Christian in conduct, Syrian in devotion, Indian in insight, Sufi in way of life."* Thus, the Sufi seeks truth, uses the law as a means, and aspires to human harmony and coexistence.

Pure love in the Sufi man combined with the refined sense of beauty made of him a truly creative human being. This creativity manifested in its most wondrous forms in Sufi poetry, in sama' (listening) and what it involves of dance and melodies, as witnessed in the eyes of Sufi poetry with Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, Umar ibn al-Farid, Ibn Arabi, Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, and others. This creativity was not manifested only in poetry, but also excelled in narrative prose, such as the story of Layla and Majnun, the story of Salaman and Absal, and the stories of the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din al-Rumi.

Love is the foundation of the spiritual, heartfelt, revelatory state in the Sufi experience. It is the first degree of the ladder of Sufi ascent toward knowledge of God and union with Him, as Sufis devote themselves to the One they love, leaving nothing of themselves behind. The literature in which Sufis express their love for God—especially poetry—was known as *"divine ghazal."* Their poems and prose texts therein almost coincide with human ghazal, were it not for the symbolic style that distinguishes them. Thus, the divine ghazal is only a symbol of Sufi love.

The degree of Sufi love before entering into philosophy is "ecstasy" (*ihtiyam*), and to this ecstasy was attributed a kind of Sufism called "ecstatic Sufism." It may be directed toward God, or it may be directed toward human beings. Hadi al-

'Alawi considered ecstatic Sufism a third line running alongside philosophical and social Sufism (Hadi al-'Alawi, 1997, p. 161).

It is worth mentioning that 'Udhri love is what nourished this Sufism when it mythologized the stories of impossible Arab love, as happened with Qays and Layla, turning them into two stars in the sky.

Asín Palacios sees that "the origin of this delicate and mysterious literary device, which uses worldly erotic words to express the spiritual effusions of divine love, goes back to Christianity and Neoplatonism at the same time, for it originates and proceeds from the *Song of Songs*, understood on the basis of the interpreters' symbolic exegesis, who saw that God is the supreme ideal and the source of absolute beauty." (Asín Palacios, 1979, p. 244).

This generated a confusion between divine spiritual love and human love that is not free from bodily desire, which made Sufism subject to criticism, defamation, and accusations of unbelief, without taking esoteric theories as a justification for the symbolic style in divine ghazal. This led to bloody conflicts and tragedies such as the crucifixion and burning of al-Hallaj. In the hands of al-Hallaj in the third century, the theory of divine love developed greatly, and then the modes of expression of this love developed. Al-Hallaj says in *Tasin al-Azal wa-l-Iltibas*:

His remembrance is my remembrance, and my remembrance is His remembrance. Can there be two rememberers except together?

And it is reported in the Sufi tradition as well:

> "My service now is purer, and my time freer, and my remembrance sweeter. For I used to serve Him formerly for my share, and now I serve Him for His share. We have lifted desire for withholding and giving, harm and benefit. He singled me out, brought me into existence, then expelled me so that I would not be

> confused with the sincere. He withheld me from others out of jealousy for me, altered me into bewilderment, bewildered me into estrangement, estranged me into service, deprived me for companionship, disfigured me for praise, deprived me for migration, forsook me for unveiling, unveiled me for union, joined me for severance, severed me for preventing my death. By His right, I did not err in planning, nor did I reject destiny, nor did I care about changing form, nor am I by any means powerful over these measures. If He tormented me with His fire forever and ever, I would not prostrate to anyone, nor humble myself to a person or body, nor recognize an opponent or a child. My claim is the claim of the truthful, and I am in love among the foremost. How could I not be?" (Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, 1998, pp. 307–308).

In this text, the relationship between the lover and the beloved, and between the rememberer and the remembered, is a relationship of union that develops into equality: *"I used to serve Him formerly for my share, and now I serve Him for His share."* This is boldness in declaring his precedence to a new kind of love in which he was unique. For God willed that he not be confused with the sincere believers in a traditional sense. Al-Hallaj freed himself from attachment to the world and devoted himself to the service of his Beloved—God—and His remembrance. God, in turn, reciprocated with love, even distinguishing him from the sincere.

Conclusion:

Sufism, in its spiritual and ethical essence, represents a fundamental pillar in building balanced societies capable of facing contemporary civilizational challenges. In a world swept by intellectual crises and fabricated conflicts, Sufism emerges as an educational method capable of calming souls, consolidating the values of tolerance and love, and extinguishing the flames of fanaticism and takfir that threaten social peace. It is a path that restores for the human being spiritual and psychological balance, making him able to deal with the complexities of life with a reassured soul, liberated from the captivity of material instincts and futile conflicts.

The role of Sufism is not limited to the individual aspect alone; rather, it extends to building safe societies founded on mercy and cooperation instead of dispute and division. A society whose individuals are raised on the principles of genuine Sufism is a conscious society, aware that true security emanates from the purity of the heart and the integrity of the conscience, not from material power alone. From here, Sufism contributes to dissipating the alleged civilizational conflict, affirming human unity under the umbrella of shared values that call for goodness, justice, and beauty.

Sufism also provides a radical solution to the crisis of spiritual identity suffered by modern man, as it reformulates his relationship with his Creator and with the universe around him, on the basis of pure servitude to God, far removed from hollow formalities and false appearances. True Sufism is the realization of servitude in its comprehensive sense, which drives man to righteous action and to call others to God with wisdom and good exhortation, without coercion or fanaticism. This method guarantees the achieve-

ment of inner peace first, which then reflects on the social and universal surroundings.

Therefore, it is one of the most urgent duties of Sufi sheikhs and their followers today to deepen these values and work on translating them into tangible reality by spreading spiritual awareness founded on love and peace, and by combating all forms of extremist thought that threaten collective security. If the world suffers from civilizational divisions and religious conflicts, Sufism possesses the spiritual and intellectual tools to build bridges of understanding and revive human values that unite rather than divide.

We can say that Sufism is not merely an individual path of asceticism and worship, but rather an integrated civilizational project aiming to establish a society characterized by mercy, filled with security, and in which pure servitude to God is achieved—the foundation of all goodness. In a troubled world where materialistic and violent slogans collapse, Sufism remains a beacon of hope and a clear path to saving humanity from the claws of crises and guiding it to the shore of peace and stability.

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