



Divine Love and the Question of Existence: The Sufi Experience of Shaykh Abdelkader al-Jilani

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Abstract:

The question of existence is quintessentially philosophical; its point of departure is the knowing self, the subject of the question, and the world as a speaking existence. To interrogate it in the language of love, with its symbols and allusions, opens up a wide field for a noble and honourable domain of knowledge, namely, Islamic Sufism, which has offered approaches that have breathed life into existence, making it an entity inhabited by divine love, whose identity was determined from preeternity. Shaykh Abdelkader al-jilani (1077–1166 CE) is one of the Sufi scholars of the sixth century AH who succeeded in conveying the meanings of the relationship between divine love and the question of existence in an elevated, engaging, and simple style within an intellectual system that brings together the sharpness of reason and the sweetness of taste, the rigour of the sharī‘a and the vastness and expansiveness of the truth. The knowledge of truth and the longing of the soul to realise annihilation in the divine essence for the sake of subsistence through God and its return to its original abode is the goal of the spiritual experience; thus, human perfection is realised.

Keywords: *divine love; question of existence; Sufi experience; unity of witnessing; unity of being.*

Résumé :

La question de l'existence est par essence philosophique ; son point de départ est le moi conscient, le sujet de la question, et le monde en tant qu'existence parlante. L'interroger dans le langage de l'amour, avec ses symboles et ses allusions, ouvre un vaste champ à un domaine noble et honorable de la connaissance, à savoir le soufisme islamique, qui a proposé des approches qui ont insufflé la vie à l'existence, en faisant une entité habitée par l'amour divin, dont l'identité a été déterminée depuis la prééternité. Cheikh Abdelkader al-Jilani (1077-1166 après J.-C.) est l'un des érudits soufis du VI^e siècle de l'Hégire qui a réussi à transmettre les significations de la relation entre l'amour divin et la question de l'existence dans un style élevé, engageant et simple, au sein d'un système intellectuel qui réunit la finesse de la raison et la douceur du goût, la rigueur de la charia et l'immensité et l'étendue de la vérité. La connaissance de la vérité et le désir de l'âme de réaliser l'annihilation dans l'essence divine pour subsister à travers Dieu et retourner à sa demeure d'origine sont le but de l'expérience spirituelle ; ainsi, la perfection humaine est réalisée.

Mots-clés : *amour divin ; question de l'existence ; expérience soufie ; unité du témoignage ; unité de l'être.*



Introduction:

Before the mihrab of divine love, the meanings of existence, filled with the secret of being, collapse in prostration, seeking divine satisfaction, aspiring to deliverance, and imploring the divine will with a humbled, submissive love, charged with resolve and desiring immersion in the light of transcendent meanings to realise its original spiritual identity, seeking the Beloved with longing and brokenness. At the head of this existence, which plays the symphony of love and beauty with delicate sensibility, stands the human being or rather a select portion of humanity: our elect masters, or the elect of the elect, those of refined taste and subtle feeling, flowing with the tears of passion that raise the ego to the world of spirits as luminous meanings that empty existence of its material content, so that existence ceases to exist, and the ego becomes lost in the ocean of lights and the ocean of meanings, where the letter falls silent and meaning shifts and trembles from the intensity of ecstasy, searching for its own meaning. At that moment, the most eloquent expression before the ocean of meanings and its lights is silence and absence after presence, an absence from existence to enter into an existence in which the ego and all others are dissolved and in which none remains but the one, the all-subjugating. There, the meanings of ecstasy intertwine with the lights, union is realised, and beauty opens its arms to embrace the enrapt lover who stands between majesty and beauty, bewildered and hesitant, advancing in longing and retreating in fear, while the warm breezes of affection gently pat his shoulders,

assuring him against the awe of the beauty of the station in presence and absence.

The ego is an existence with axiological and spatiotemporal dimensions, subsumed into a broader existence; indeed, the greater world may even be folded within it. It imposes a network of relations and is in constant need of course correction by responding, on the one hand, to its material nature and, on the other hand, to its metaphysical depth. It is a fabric of meanings through which civilisational action and reactions are realised. The meanings of human depth that frame the being of the ego are subject to erosion; they may be stricken with weakness and may become pale, in need, from time to time, of one who will cast them into the embrace of the ocean of the lights of the divine realities, the supra-mundane realities whose lights do not shine forth except through the dissolution of that being in the world of divine lights, that is, through casting oneself into the embrace of the world of the malakūt. Islamic sufism, as a noble and valuable epistemic framework, has laid down paths, methods, and instruments that assist in freeing oneself from the world of sensory witnessing and in turning directly to the world of the malakūt in this earthly life; herein lies the paradox. This transformation is nourished by the effusion of divine love, whose supreme aim is to know God and to attain unto Him. Islamic sufism, as a spiritual current, is not merely a religious practice; rather, it is a journey in search of meaning, of the divine reality, so that there is no mystic whose unspoken confession is not, "I wish to attain the Creator; I am seeking God," and whose intellectual point of departure is not, "I love God; therefore, I do not exist."



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However, far off, the quest is precious and the aim nobly valuable, for it is an act of being chosen; nobly, for it requires a sound heart, delicate and responsive to the slightest manifestations of existence, such as a flower stirred by the gentlest breeze, from which drops of dew, intertwined with rays of the sun, pour forth to add light upon light, filling the horizons of the being of this ego, whose inwards parts are consumed by the fire of divine love as a state, and whose greatest fear is rejection and repulsion. The love of God is a raging sea, and the being that ventures into this sea must slough off the world as a snake sloughs off its skin; there is no room for distractions, temptations, or trivialities, whether in deeds or in others, in heart or in outwards form, in image or in meaning. It is the great challenge whose goal is the birth of a new greatness, a challenge by virtue of which what was and what would come to be, in the knowledge of God and by the will of God. Thus, there came to be the bewildered ego, the others, and the realm of possibility with its entailment of freedom of choice, witnessing a path filled with challenges and obstacles that stand between the ego and its aspirations to free itself from its earthly nature by overcoming the forces of discouragement that call for values of immersion in the passions of this world. In this scene, ecstasy takes the lead, causing the world of sensory witnessing to embrace the world of the malakūt and to draw upon its lights, which it scatters wherever it settles and wherever it departs. The true mystic is the truly civilised human being, in heart and in outwards form; there is no place for social hypocrisy or civilisational ostentation. Islamic sufism ranks among the most profound spiritual and philosophical experiences

known to human thought, as it transcends mere asceticism and ritual practices to express an embrace of existence in its most elevated forms, seeking transcendent meanings under the shelter of divine love. The Sufis have viewed existence not merely as a material presence but also as an existential journey towards the divine reality, where divine love ceases to be a mere emotional affect and instead becomes an ontological path in which the annihilation of the ego and subsistence through God are realised, and therein lies wisdom.

This subject raises a fundamental problem: How did the Sufi experience of Sidi Abdelkader al-Jilani embody an existential vision of the human being and of existence through the frame of reference to divine love? From this problem branch, several subsidiary questions remain: What is the true nature of the Sufi experience? What is the intellectual and experiential content that Sufi thought has offered about the question of existence? What is the relationship of this question to divine love? Can the relativity of human love encompass the absoluteness of divine love? Does God, exalted be He, truly love and is He truly loved, or only metaphorically so? What is the difference between human love and divine love? Moreover, what is the dialectic of the relationship between existence and love in the Sufi experience and in human experience?

1. The Sufi Experience According to Shaykh Sidi Abdelkader al-Jilani:

1.1. Introducing Shaykh Sidi Abdelkader al-Jilani (1077-1166 CE) (470-561 AH)

The shaykh lived during a period marked by numerous events and political upheavals. He moved to Baghdād in 488



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AH, after the fall of the Shī‘ī Buyid dynasty and the accession of the Saljūq sultans to power in Baghdād, marking the establishment of their Sunni state. This took place during the caliphate of the ‘Abbāsīd al-Mustazhir billāh, who held the caliphate in name, for only authority was in the hands of the military commanders and tribal chiefs. Shaykh Abdelkader lived through the reigns of five ‘Abbāsīd caliphs: al-Mustazhir billāh, whose caliphate lasted twenty-four years; then al-Mustarshid ibn al-Mustazhir, whose caliphate lasted seventeen years and who was killed by the Bāṭīnites; then al-Rāshid billāh, whose caliphate lasted only eleven months and who was also killed at the hands of the Bāṭīnites after he had been deposed on the basis of a legal opinion issued by the jurists; after him came al-Muqtafī li-amr Allāh, followed by al-Mustanjid billāh.¹ All this left its mark on the shaykh's personality, leading him to withdraw from the world and direct all his efforts to circles of learning, spiritual training, and the enjoining of right and forbidding of wrong. The structure of society² At that time, it may be summarised in three classes: the ruling class, namely, the ‘Abbāsīds in Baghdād, the Fāṭīmīds in Egypt, and some amīrs in Bilād al-Shām, who lived in great luxury; the class of scholars; and then the class of ordinary people, who suffered from wars, harsh living conditions, and widespread corruption. Among the scholars who fought corruption and strove to guide people was our shaykh, Abdelkader al-Jilani.

¹ Said b. Misfir al-Qaḥṭāni, *Al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī wa-Ārā’uhu al-‘Iṭiqādiyya wa-l-Ṣūfiyya* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭāniyya li-l-Nashr, 1997), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 16–18.

This period was exceedingly rich in scholars and shaykhs, who excelled in all branches of knowledge. Thus, there arose a broad cultural movement that expressed the political and doctrinal conflict between Muslims and Christians, between the Sunnis that is, the ‘Abbāsīd caliphates in Iraq and the Shī‘a, that is, the Fāṭīmīds in Egypt, in addition to the juristic madhhab disputes and the resulting fanaticism and conflicts that inflicted grave harm upon scholarly activity and the state of learning in that age. In this climate, the shaykh may God sanctify his secret, having devoted a large portion of his life to knowledge, teaching, spiritual training, guidance, preaching, and calling to God: “He is ‘Abd al-Qādir son of Abī Ṣāliḥ Mūsā Jankī Dūst son of Abī ‘Abd Allāh son of Yaḥyā al-Zāhid son of Dāwūd son of Mūsā son of ‘Abd Allāh son of Mūsā al-Jawn son of ‘Abd Allāh al-Maḥḍ, and he is also known as al-Mujall son of al-Ḥasan al-Muthannā son of al-Ḥasan son of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—may God be pleased with him.”³ He was known by several honorifics: Imām, Shaykh al-Islām, Muḥyī al-Dīn, al-Ghawth al-A‘zam, al-Bāz al-Ashhab, and al-Qaṭb al-Ghawth. “Shaykh al-Jilani was given epithets that attest to the loftiness of his rank in Sufism... Among these epithets are Possessor of the Two Modes of Expression and the Two Tongues; Noble in Both Lineages and at Both Extremities; Master of the Two Proofs and the Two Authorities; Imām of the Two Groups and the Two Paths; Possessor of the Two Lamps and the Two Methods; al-Bāz al-Ashhab. It appears that the duality evident in these epithets points to the combination of

³ Ibid., 28.



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jurisprudence and Sufism, or to what the Sufis call the sharī'a and the ḥaqīqa."⁴

For his spiritual station, "al-Shattanūfī states that the reason for his composing his book *Bahjat al-Asrār*, which he compiled on the virtues of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, was none other than to disclose the meaning of Shaykh al-Jilani's statement in one of his sessions in Baghdād, 'This foot of mine is upon the neck of every saint,' at a time when most of the shaykhs of Iraq were present in his gathering. "⁵ The author cites multiple reports to confirm that this utterance was a divine command with which he had been charged, in order to manifest the station of "al-Qaṭb al-Ghawth." "As for the most famous of Imām al-Jilani's honorifics, it is 'Bāz Allāh al-Ashhab,' and it appears that the Imām preferred this epithet, for he applied it to himself in numerous poetic verses, among them his saying: 'I am the nightingale of joys, filling its bower with rapture, and in the highest heavens a grey falcon.'"⁶

For his style and writings, his mode of expression united the sharī'a and the ḥaqīqa. In the book *al-Ghunya*⁷, we observe a gradation in his compositional method: when he addresses the exposition of the divisions and pillars of the sharī'a, he elaborates at length and selects the simplest words, thereby progressing from a discussion of doctrines to a discussion of acts of worship, ethics, and supererogatory

⁴ 'Umar Salim 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tall, *Mutaṣawwifāt Baghdād fī al-Qarn al-Sādis al-Hijrī: Dirāsa Tārīkhiyya* (Amman: Dār al-Ma'mūn li-l-Nashr, 2009), 111.

⁵ Ibid., 112.

⁶ Muḥammad Ṭaha Zaydān Yusuf, *'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī Bāz Allāh al-Ashhab* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991), 27.

⁷ Ibid., chap. 6, "Uslūb al-Jīlānī wa-Mu'allafātuhu wa-Tarjamātuhu," 86–87.

works. His Sufi writings may be divided into two categories: the first comprises his preaching sessions and his discourse to his disciples, distinguished by powerful and affecting language, not devoid of allusion, suggestion, double entrance, and captivation; the second comprises his poetry and symbolic essays, replete with interpretations that carry the text according to the import of its context without compromising its meaning. Instead, the meaning unfolds, flows, and the transmitted text accords with it without affect, so that the image crystallises for the listener in its rhetorical form and its suprasensory spiritual content smoothly and simply. However, according to some commentaries, the shaykh was the only one who, through his style of writing, was able to bring Sufism, as both a science and a taste, to the ordinary people, precisely that which most Sufis, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, had feared.

The Imām died at the age of ninety-one; the grey falcon took flight on his final journey, bidding farewell to this world and leaving behind forty-nine children, twenty-seven of them male and the remaining female. He also left behind the Qādirī ṭarīqa, which is among the most widespread Sufi orders in the Islamic world, and a rich intellectual and experiential legacy that his followers sought to realise, record, and disseminate.

1.2. His Sufi Experience

1.2.1. The Scientific Character of the Sufi Experience and Its Social Dimension

The term "Sufi experience" applies to the elect and the elect of the elect; it is charged with spiritual meanings that call for transcendence and elevation, and it expresses a tense



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relationship between existence and the knowing self. Every mystic has a unique Sufi experience, and despite this plurality, the Sufi experience, in both its theoretical and practical contexts, assumes a scientific character. Its scientific nature is derived from the transmitted background that validates, elevates, and commends the scholarly character of any theoretical or practical effort that brings the worshipper closer to the one worshipped and acquaints him with the paths of spiritual ascension. Likewise, the multiplicity of paths has but a single aim; in this regard, Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Jilani, and others hold that the paths to God, exalted be He, are as numerous as human souls.

Through his book *Sirr al-Asrār wa Maḥḥar al-Anwār*⁸, Grey Falcon defines "knowledge" by means of his classification of the sciences: "Sciences are confined to four gates: the first gate is the outwards aspect of the sharī‘a, consisting of command, prohibition, and all other rulings; the second is its inwards aspect, which I have called the science of the inwards and of the ṭarīqa; the third is the inwards of the sciences, which I have called the science of gnosis; and the fourth is the innermost of the inwards, which I have called the science of reality."⁹ He then cites¹⁰ The Prophet's ḥadīth,

⁸ Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Sirr al-Asrār wa-Maḥḥar al-Anwār* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Bahiyya al-Miṣriyya, 1374/1955). Based on an old manuscript prepared by Sayyid Muḥammad Najīb Abū al-Barakāt al-Jīlānī, the son of the gnostic and divine guide, Sayyid al-Shaykh Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Jīlānī al-Ḥasanī al-Ḥusaynī. The work comprises twenty-four chapters, corresponding to the number of the letters of “lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh” and to the hours of day and night.

⁹ Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Sirr al-Asrār wa-Maḥḥar al-Anwār* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Bahiyya al-Miṣriyya, 1374/1955), 24–25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26–28.

without a chain of transmission: "The shari'a is a tree, the tariqa its branches, gnosis its leaves, and reality its fruit"; and the Qur'an gathers all of these together, by way of indication and allusion, in exegesis or in interpretation. Exegesis is for ordinary people, and interpretation is for the elect, as they are firmly grounded scholars.

Thus, they are four circles, all of which may be breached: the bearer of the circle of the shari'a is exposed to the whisperings of the self; the bearer of the circle of the tariqa may, by way of delusion, lay claim to prophethood; and the bearer of the circle of gnosis may fall into hidden shirk through luminous matters, such as the claim to lordship of one who has taken his own desire as his God. As for the circle of reality, neither Satan nor the self nor the angels have any access to it, for all other than God, exalted be He, is consumed therein. Here, al-Jilani offers an interpretation whose point of reference is Gabriel's—peace be upon him—saying, "If I were to draw nearer by a fingertip, I would burn." In other words, the people of the circle of reality are in the company of God, who knows their state, their ecstasy, and their bearing of the burden of meanings whose weight is similar to the weight of revelation, as they are imprinted upon the spirit. Yes, it is a revelation of another kind, not the revelation granted to prophets, but akin to God's revelation to the bees to take for themselves dwellings in the mountains and to bring forth from their bellies that wherein there is healing for humankind. That is the wisdom that the gnostic shaykh conveys to the disciple.

Thus, Sufism and shaykh's Sufi experience should be viewed in light of the standards of the sixth Islamic century. Accordingly, one may formulate an epistemological statement concerning Sufism and the Sufi experience, as is



found in some studies. However, the Sufi text cannot be burdened with the aberrations of positivist reason and twisted to make it conform to this or epistemological approach an approach that makes Plato, the author of the theory of Forms and of the term “nirvana” or *kashf* (unveiling), into a mystic; another that elevates Plotinus to the rank of a prophet; an approach that focuses on the psychological and parapsychological dimension; another that rests on the social dimension; and yet another that digs through the wreckage of mythology and anthropology to analyse spiritual worlds that bear no relation to the reality of the authentic Sufi experience under the name of comparative religion or comparative mysticism. Some studies even equate the Buddhist idolater and his ritual practices with the wayfaring mystic, who follows the guidance of the Qur’ān and the Sunna. Such studies, I believe, lack scholarly rigour, for the Sufi text has its own contexts and its own spiritual, epistemic, doctrinal, and devotional climate; wrenching it from its context falsifies its truths and betrays a failure to grasp its nature, its essence, and its particularity.

All Sufi experiences have at their core the monotheism of the heart and sincerity as the principle of a path that unites worship and conduct, that is, the constant striving against the self through austerity, renunciation, and righteous deeds, proceeding therein according to the guidance of the revealed text and the constraints it sets, which protects the disciple from doctrinal deviation and reprehensible excess that disturbs the purity of the spiritual experience, an experience that, in essence, has shed all that is connected to material pleasure and desire. This takes place without neglecting the social dimension because the Sufi experience,

in the absence of its bearer's interaction with society and positive influence upon it, is meaningless. The starting point of the experience is the mystic's metaphysical depth, and its ultimate end is God, exalted be He; between the beginning and the end stand the "others", the other, or society, which constitutes the soil in which the mystic must sow the bounties of the pearls and wisdoms he has acquired on his path towards God, exalted be He. This exalted spiritual experience is not made easy for all people; it is a matter of being chosen, reserved for those who have been granted wisdom and whoever has been granted wisdom has indeed been given much good. Thus, although the Sufi is required to become annihilated from the "others", he is also required to take those others by the hand towards what God has poured out upon him of good and of insights into the true nature of the relationship between the servant and the One worshipped. The mystic is, first and foremost, an educator, for the fruit of his struggle has enabled him honestly to know himself, its byways, paths, and whisperings as well as to perceive what Satan weaves within the soul of his whisperings and stratagems. Accordingly, the Sufi experience is capable of transmission, whether through the relationship between the shaykh and the disciple or through the relationship between the shaykh and society.

1.2.2. The difficulty of formulating a comprehensive and exclusive definition of sufism

The literature of Sufi thought teems with a conceptual apparatus whose terms multiply in accordance with the multiplicity of Sufi experiences. However, these terms may still fail to encompass the meanings lived by the mystic in his individual spiritual journey. This opens the way to



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symbols and allusions and even, at times, to silence and to absence from existence. Here, we may pause at some of the contents of *maqām* (spiritual station), *ḥāl* (state), *mujāhada* (spiritual struggle), *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being), *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing), *kashf* (unveiling), *uns* (intimate familiarity), *dhawq* (tasting), *wajd* (ecstasy), and *ishq* (passionate love). The spiritual experience and its travail, which is the travel of a spirit separating from the body, has as its goal the opening of the eye of inner sight so that vision becomes piercing. This state unfolds by degrees, and a single term may take on multiple meanings according to the state and station of a given wayfarer. The individuality of the experience and its depth, which transcend human *logos*, have made the term "sufism" resistant to precise logical definition, as the life of sufism and the life of the mystic elude rigid logical frameworks. It is a life "here and there": a presence that attends to the outwards only to the extent dictated by the inwards. Moreover, if the outwards world is governed by logic, the inwards world, which is the world of reality, has its own logic. On this basis, the terms circulated within the sphere of Sufi practice or of Sufism as their vessel appear altogether intractable to terminological containment.

The Grey Falcon—may God sanctify his secret—says: "The word *taṣawwuf* consists of four letters: *tā'*, *ṣād*, *wāw*, and *fā'*. The *tā'* is from *tawba* (repentance), and this is of two kinds: repentance of the outwards and repentance of the inwards [...]. The *ṣād* is from *ṣafā'* (purity), and this too is of two kinds: purity of the heart and purity of the secret. Purity of the heart is that one purifies his heart of human impurities [...]. The purity of the secret is attained by avoiding all that is

other than God, exalting be He, and loving Him through constant adherence to the Names of Divine Unity with the tongue of the secret in his secret. For the wāw, it comes from *walāya* (sainthood), which results from purification [...], and the outcome of sainthood is that one takes on the character traits of God, blessed and exalted be He [...]. For the fā', it is from *fanā'* (annihilation) in God; majestic is His splendour. When he annihilates the human attributes, the attributes of oneness remain, and He, exalted as He, neither passes away nor vanishes. Thus, the annihilated servant remains with the abiding Lord..."¹¹ This summarises the course of the Sufi experience and the states and stations that accompany it.

1.2.3. *Foundations of the Sufi Experience with Sidi Abdelkader al-Jilani*

Shaykh Abdelkader al-Jilani mentions these foundations in several places in his works, which have been critically edited, most notably in the book *al-Ghunya li-Ṭālibī Ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq 'azza wa-jall (Fī al-Akhlāq wa-l-Taṣawwuf wa-l-Ādāb al-Islāmiyya)*. The contents of this book depict how a Muslim's life ought to be lived in his acts of worship and in his dealings; they trace the course of a philosophy of life that unites heaven and earth, body and spirit, reason and heart. They translate the Qur'ān and the Noble Hadith into a reading that sometimes stops at the literal sense of the text and at other times interprets it. In my opinion, the book can be described as "The Divine Identity of the Believing Muslim and Its Requisites." In the fifth section, entitled "Sufism," he

¹¹ Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, *Sirr al-Asrār wa-Maḥzar al-Anwār*, 36–38.



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defines Sufism and distinguishes between the *mutaṣawwif* and the *ṣūfī*, then proceeds to mention "The Chapter on Spiritual Striving, Reliance upon God, Good Character, Gratitude, Patience, Contentment, and Truthfulness, for these seven givens are the foundation of this path, and all are good." From this, the foundations of Sufism become clear, together with its practical contents, which unite *sharī'a* and *ḥaqīqa* in a way that removes disagreement, by bringing to light the realities of the Sufi states and stations and their meanings for the wayfaring disciple; the "path" intended here is the Qādirī path. The fifth section of the book, devoted to Sufism, was "the seal of completion," as he clarified several problems associated with this unique spiritual phenomenon. He explains the meaning of Sufism and the difference between the *mutaṣawwif* and the *ṣūfī*, saying: "The *mutaṣawwif* is he who affects being a Sufi and, by his own effort, attains to being a Sufi, whereas the *ṣūfī* is derived from *muṣāfāh* (purification), meaning a servant whom the Real, majestic and exalted, has purified. For this reason, it has been said: the Sufi is pure of the afflictions of the soul, empty of its blameworthy traits, traversing praiseworthy paths, constant in the realities, with his heart not resting upon any of creation..."¹² He adduces many qualities to differentiate between the Sufi and the *mutaṣawwif*, the most important of which is that the *mutaṣawwif* is a beginner, journeying on the path of union, whereas the Sufi has reached the end and traversed the path; he is the shaykh,

¹² 'Abd al-Qādir b. Abī Šāliḥ al-Jilānī, *Al-Ghunya li-Tālibī Ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq 'Azza wa-Jall: fī al-Akhlāq wa-l-Taṣawwuf wa-l-Ādāb al-Islāmiyya*, vol. 2, ed. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Šalāḥ b. Muḥammad b. 'Uwayḍa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 160ff.

while the *mutaṣawwif* is the disciple. The Sufi's self has melted away, his caprice has vanished, and his will has dissolved so that he has become pure and is therefore called a Sufi; the *mutaṣawwif*, however, is still treating his inner maladies.¹³

2. Divine Love in the Thought of the Gray Falcon

“The sources and references agree that Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 801 CE) was the first to proclaim a ‘theory’ of divine love....”¹⁴ Thus, the course of Sufism shifted from fear of God, exalted be He, to love of God, exalted be He. The proof on which the promoters of the possibility of the servant's love for God and God's love for the servant relied, up to the point that human nature melts into divine nature and that divine nature melts into human nature, consisted of the transmitted texts found in the Qur‘ān and the Sunna. In the book *Sirr al-Asrār wa Maḥzar al-Anwār*,¹⁵ The author—may God sanctify his secret first points to the current definitions of Sufism, noting that some say they are described as Sufis because they used to wear wool (*ṣūf*), or because they purified their hearts of worldly impurities, or because they purified their hearts of all that is other than God, or because they stand on the Day of Resurrection in the first rank in the realm of nearness.... Second, he classifies the worlds and, on that basis, the sciences previously mentioned; then, he classifies the spirits and the intellect. On

¹³ See Muḥammad Ṭaha Zaydān Yusuf, ‘*Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī Bāz Allāh al-Ashhab*, 22–23.

¹⁴ Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib, *Islām al-Mutaṣawwifa* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī‘a, 2007), 56.

¹⁵ See ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Sirr al-Asrār wa-Maḥzar al-Anwār*, chap. 12, “Fī al-Fuqarā’ wa-Limādihā Summū Ṣūfiyya,” 56–60.



this basis, we understand the meaning of divine love within Shaykh's intellectual system – may God sanctify his secret.

- There are four worlds: the world of *mulk* (the visible world), the world of *malakūt* (the angelic realm), the world of *jabarūt* (the realm of power), and the world of *lāhūt*, which is the world of reality.
- The sciences are four: the science of the shari‘a, the science of the ṭarīqa, the science of gnosis, and the science of reality (“Sufism”).
- There are four spirits: a corporeal spirit, a luminous spirit, a sultanic spirit, and a holy spirit.
- *-There are four types of self-disclosures: the disclosure of effects, the disclosure of acts, the disclosure of attributes, and the disclosure of the Essence.
- There are four types of intellect: the intellect of worldly livelihood, the intellect of the latter, the spiritual intellect, and the universal intellect.

On the basis of this classification of the world, the sciences, the spirit, the self-disclosures, and the intellect, he classifies people according to the criterion of divine love, from those nearer to those nearer, the last of whom are the elect of the elect, the people of "So flee to God." Thus, some people are bound to the first science, the first spirit, the first self-disclosure, the first intellect, and the first world; these are in the first garden, the Garden of Refuge. Others are bound to the second, and they are in the second Garden, the Garden of Bliss. Others are bound to the third, and they are in the third Garden, the Garden of Paradise. The people of truth among the poor gnostics have fled from all of these and have reached reality and nearness, not being bound by

anything other than God Most High. Here, he cites the noble verse, "So flee to God," followed by a hadith without chain of transmission, the saying of the Messenger – may the most perfect blessings and peace be upon him: "This world and the Hereafter are forbidden to the people of God," meaning that they have forbidden themselves to seek them or to become attached to loving them, for both are created; how, then, can the created seek what is created and be heedless of the Originator, the Preeternal, the Everlasting?

In this context, he adduces such traditions as the divine saying, "My love is for the poor," and his – peace be upon him – saying, "Poverty is my pride, and I boast of it." He then turns to defining poverty as neediness before God, majestic and exalted, and the abandonment of all that is other than Him of the delights of this world and the Hereafter, so that none remains to occupy his inwards but God alone. This is what is known as *fanā'* in God, such that nothing remains in his self for his self. The divine saying clarifies this: God Most High said, "Neither My earth nor My heaven contains Me, but the heart of My believing servant contains Me," and what is meant by "believing servant" here is one whose heart has been purified of human attributes and emptied of all that is other than God. He cites the saying of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī – may God have mercy on him: "Were the Throne and what surrounds it to be cast into a corner of the gnostic's heart, he would not feel it. (So whoever loves) These lovers are with them in the Hereafter. (And the sign of loving them is) loving their company and yearning for God Most High and to meet Him – and I am yet more intensely longing for them...." As He, majestic is His splendour, said in the divine hadith: "Long have the



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righteous yearned to meet Me, and I am yet more eager to meet them."

The people of nearness, in this world, are in prison, estrangement, sorrow, choking grief, trial, and hardship; for this world, as he – peace be upon him – said, is "the prison of the believer." In another place, "Trial is entrusted to the prophets and the friends of God, then to those most like them, then to those most like them...." Thus, the mystic, poor before his Lord, from among the people of God, ever has God as his sole quest and Beloved, in whose love he is annihilated and in whose passion he utterly consumes himself. He – peace be upon him – said: "Whoever has no *wajd* has no life," and the *wajd* intended is spiritual ecstasy, strengthened by the power of rapture through recitation of the Qur'ān, or of metered poetry, or of moving remembrance, as well as through the voices of lovers and birds, and through melodies and meanings, until the body retains no strength or choice. In the recitation of verses, poetry, wisdom, love, passionate love, and sorrowful sounds, there resides a luminous power for the spirit.

Divine love is the essential hallmark of Sufis: they are the people of divine love, the people of spiritual aspiration, the people of intimacy, and the people of ecstasy. "Al-Qushayrī enumerates for us several definitions of divine love: it has been defined as the constant inclination of the bewildered heart (the loss of composure out of amazement and perplexity); it has also been defined as preferring the Beloved to all companions, which is the station of uniqueness and annihilation; or as conforming to the Beloved, whether in presence or in absence; and it is further defined as the heart's agreement with the will of the Lord.

Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283 AH) defined divine love as embracing obedience and shunning disobedience, and love for him means that you give your entire self to the one you love, so that nothing of you remains for yourself. Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334 AH) holds that *maḥabba* (love) is derived from *maḥw* (effacement), in that it effaces from the heart everything other than the Beloved.”¹⁶ In this context, it must be emphasised that "love is the root of all spiritual stations and states: it is the root of reliance upon God, gratitude, patience, and contentment; likewise, it is the root of longing, fear, and hope. To be firmly established in divine love, in reality, is a distinction belonging solely to the master of all creation, Muḥammad (peace and blessings upon him), for he is the Beloved of God Most High without rival, the one who holds the station of love in its original form. All who have taken up the means of love after him are dependent upon him therein, and he is their exemplar in it. Concerning him, God Most High has said: “Say, ‘If you love God, then follow me, and God will love you.’” (Āl ‘Imrān 31), and He has also said: “Whoever obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed God.” (al-Nisā’ 80).”¹⁷

The Messenger's share of the divine lights was outstanding, so God described him as "a radiant lamp" and "a mercy bestowed." The path to God, in this sense, transcends reason and the methods of logical inference; its means are the light of inner vision and love, whose abode is the heart. All Sufi paths, in truth, borrow from the lights of our master Muḥammad, blessings and peace be upon him,

¹⁶ Jamāl al-Dīn Fāliḥ al-Kilānī, *Thawrat al-Rūḥ: Istiqrā’āt Tafkīkiyya fī al-Falsafa al-Ṣūfiyya ‘inda al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Zanbaqa, 2014), 125.

¹⁷ Ibid., 122.



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the master of lovers and their guide to the path. He – may God sanctify his secret – holds that divine love has conditions: “First, the realisation of sincerity in acts of worship, dealings, and all kinds of obedience, both outwards and inwards. Second, the lover does not turn with his heart to any other than the Beloved. Third, sleep should be kept at bay. Fourth, the lover should be content with nothing other than meeting his beloved. Fifth, the lover has no will of his own alongside the will of his beloved. Sixth, the condition of nonpossession: the lover has no wealth and no ownership because he is in the company of his Belove. Seventh, clinging to acts of obedience. Eighth, the condition of tawhīd and the absence of shirk in love is a special kind of tawhīd that encompasses the heart, the tongue, passing thoughts, intellects, and all the limbs at once, and to love there is attached one inseparable attribute among its attributes: jealousy.”¹⁸

Each of these conditions requires extended analytical treatment in shaykh's works, ultimately leading to a single result: the attainment of the station of true servitude, whose pillars are three: Islam, īmān, and ihsān. The last of these, according to the sacred hadith, is “that you worship God as although you see Him; and if you do not see Him, [know that] He sees you.” This is the goal of Sufi wayfaring, which is nourished by sincerity and truthfulness, so that nothing remains in the heart but a love nurtured within the folds of divine solicitude: the stronger its trunk grows, the closer the wayfarer draws to the Beloved; and the more this love increases, the purer the affection becomes and the more

¹⁸ Ibid., 135 (“Maqālat al-Ḥubb ‘inda al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī”).

darkness and veils are lifted. This is clearly reflected in Sufi poetry, including the shaykh's own poetry in Persian and Arabic, his sermons of exhortation, and his chants that speak of union and encounter, abandonment and rejection, estrangement and withholding concepts, which, in this context, are outwardly torment yet inwardly delight without equal. Given that the sought-after is precious, the path is thorny, the feet are bare, and the sighs and blood of the wayfarer are ransom. It is an ocean of meaning, brimming with allusions and symbols, which speech cannot contain in its lights and sighs.

Divine love is an act of being chosen, a divine gift, a grace from God, and a seed cast into the servant's heart over which he has no control. According to the shaykh, those who love God are the elect, whom God has favoured with love above others and brought into being in a new creation those lovers who are themselves beloved, whose names have been inscribed in their primordial register, that is, from preeternity; love is a divine matter written in the Preserved Tablet. These are those whose spirits were infatuated with divine beauty in their prior covenant since preeternity. In some of his writings, he links love to the effort exerted by the servant, such as perseverance in remembrance, spiritual vigilance, reflection on the greatness of the Creator, and contemplation of His signs, indicating that knowledge is a condition of love, as previously noted.

3. The Question of Existence and Divine Love

3.1. Philosophical Approach

At first glance, philosophy and love do not appear to meet. The rigour of logic and a rationality steeped in the art of argumentation and in rational inferential methods does



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not seem to converge with love as an emotion nourished by a quiet affect, centred upon a person, a thing, or an idea in which existence is condensed an emotion that ranges and roams through worlds of imagination and may turn the hell of reality into a paradise. It expresses intoxication, a magical means of escape, or a doorway of humanity at which the lover knocks in search of his eroded humanity along the course of existence; it is a life that resists the effacement wrought by death. It is human love, ladies and gentlemen, a secret of human existence, rebellious by nature: it acknowledges neither reason nor rationality, neither logic nor time, and neither law nor limits. It is an existence of indeterminate identity, one that the philosophical mind cannot readily accept; the latter has succeeded in producing philosophical discourse about it but has failed to define its true nature.

The field of values, as formulated by the Socratics, contains only the values of the good, the true, and the beautiful; love did not emerge within philosophical systems as a value in its own right until the modern period, with the "philosophy of values," which sought to treat civilisational ills of the age through feelings, love, and emotions. "There is a prevailing notion that philosophy and love do not go together, that each inhabits its own separate room at least since the modern age. Love is that gladdening feelings, among all other feelings, is steadfast in the face of the vexations that flood the world. [...] Perhaps we had to wait for Kierkegaard for love once again to become a way of understanding life; and although love is the fateful condition of happiness for the majority of human beings, and the constant element in every form of literary drama,

philosophers have approached it with a reserve akin to that of someone entering a lion's cage, fearing he might be eaten alive...."¹⁹

Thus, philosophers have spoken about love but not from within love. They have spoken of the beautiful afflictions of love, of the melancholy of abandonment, of jealousy, and of emotional distress. Some of them were great novelists: for Schopenhauer, love is a sheer submission; Rousseau sees it as absolute exaltation. Voltaire, for his part, directs us to the banquet, where one discovers the white magic of love on the one hand and its black magic on the other. He says in his article "Love" in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: "Whoever wishes to examine 'this somewhat philosophical matter' must certainly reflect upon Plato's *Symposium*, in which Socrates spoke about 'the metaphysics of love'. As for others with a less sensitive temperament, they are inclined towards Lucretius, who spoke of love as a physicist speaks...."²⁰

Thus, there is a pale, wretched, trivial aspect of love whose substance is sensation, that is, the sexual side, and there is a love that takes on a metaphysical dimension, raising the human being into the world of Forms as Plato conceived it. The maladies of modern philosophy were what postmodern philosophy attempted to address through the metaphysics of love, tolerance, and recognition. Contemporary society has reduced love to nothingness; Theodor Adorno holds, in this context, that the wretched, trivial face of love is the victorious one, and this is what has rendered the human being of our age sick. He says, "This separation, which has mechanised pleasure and deformed

¹⁹ Marie Lemonnier and Aude Lancelin, *Al-Falāsifa wa-l-Ḥubb: min Suqraṭ ilā Jān Būl Sārtr*, trans. Dina Mandour (Cairo: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2015), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.



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emotion by describing it as a deception, is such as to strike love at its vital centre. Love has become a purely physiological matter, a 'relation of fluids', as Paul Valéry noted. ²¹

Postmodern philosophy has thus opened a wide field for Sufism as a vital spiritual and epistemological domain that helps address the maladies of the age. Moreover, the philosophers' ultimate goal is to attain happiness. In that case, the mystics believe "that every happiness hoped for as a result of attachment to any beloved other than God Most High is but an illusory image of true happiness, which is not subject to change or disappearance, namely, the happiness that accompanies contemplation of absolute beauty, the beauty of the self-disclosures of the divine presence."²² Knowledge is a condition of divine love. In Murad Wahba's *Philosophical Dictionary* it is stated that divine love is "pure love: it is love of God in Himself, without fear and without hope; with Spinoza, it is an intellectual love of God, by which he means that true love of God is knowledge of God, and our knowledge of God is derived from our true knowledge of things."²³

In this context, there is an affirmation of the organic unity between the concepts of existence and divine love. Ancient Greek philosophy offers several conceptions in this regard: early natural philosophers debated the origin of existence, and among those who made love, a fundamental principle of existence was Empedocles, who lived in the mid-fifth

²¹ Ibid., 10.

²² Jamāl al-Dīn Fāliḥ al-Kīlānī, *Thawrat al-Rūḥ*, 121.

²³ Murad Wahba, *Al-Mu'jam al-Falsafī* (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, 1979), 162.

century BCE. The Socratics then shifted the focus of discussion from the material origin to the transcendent origin: Plato conceived of a creator who employs eternal models, the "world of Forms," whereas Aristotle conceived of a God who is an unmoved mover, separate from the world. In the Christian theological approach, for Augustine and Anselm, God is a perfect creator, participant, and active in the cosmos, which opens a wide field for love as an essential attribute in the relationship between God, the absolute and perfect, and the changing world. There is no doubt that this relationship gives rise to several problems that call for justification in regard to human beings: evils in the world, suffering, human will and freedom, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, and divine providence. However, divine love is self-evident when it concerns material existence, self-evidence articulated by existence in all circumstances. The order, beauty, and harmony manifested in the material universe have driven reason, almost to madness, to ask about the one who brought it into being and about the secret of existence, and philosophical approaches in this field have multiplied. Thus, existence became the primary source of knowledge; Muslim philosophers viewed it as a second book alongside the Qur'ān, and they divided existence into "Necessary Existence"—God Most High, absolute, pure goodness, the One, the Unique and "Possible Existence," the world, including the human being, characterised by change and relativity and combining good and evil.

Several problems have been addressed in this context, such as the relationship between divine love and existence, even though this issue is organically connected to others. We nevertheless find some Islamic groups among the



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theologians and jurists who have denied that God truly loves and is loved, in accordance with their understanding of the meaning of divinity and of the relationship between God and His servants: "God does not love, because love entails concomitants that are not fitting to the divine majesty, such as longing and intimacy and the like among the attributes of created beings, from which He must be transcendent. The utmost they have allowed themselves, by way of figurative interpretation, is to say that what is meant by the servant's love for God is his obedience to Him and his constant service of Him and that what is meant by God's love for the servant is His care for him and His mercy towards him." ²⁴

In light of these considerations, there is, logically, no possibility of union between the finite and the infinite, for the transcendent God cannot be reduced to the human, earthly level; for, according to this analysis, the bond of love presupposes likeness and similarity between God Most High and the servant. The mystics, however, have regarded the relationship of mutual love between God and His servants as a real relationship, not a metaphorical one as the jurists and theologians have maintained, for they have known this relationship, experienced it, and tasted its sweetness: "God yearns for the servant and seeks his nearness, just as the servant yearns for Him and seeks His nearness, and so on with the attributes of love and its concomitants. As for obedience to God and perseverance in His worship, these are not synonymous with love, as the jurists and theologians

²⁴ Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib, *Islām al-Mutaṣawwifa*, 58.

have held; rather, they are, in the view of the Sufis, a branch of love."²⁵

Reflective contemplation of the wondrous manifestations of divine beauty and perfection through existence at whose head stands the human being as the most significant sign gives rise to love, which Ibn al-Dabbāgh (d. 696/1296) defines as "a joy that occurs in the soul upon the conception of a given Presence."²⁶ Moreover, what, then, if this Presence is divine identity? There is no doubt that the joy will be immense, causing its possessor to become absent from existence: it is the intoxicating wine of divine love, which makes the gnostic soar in a luminous existential expanse whose delight the pen is incapable of describing. Most Muslim thinkers have been guided to the view that love is a general principle of cosmic existence, not just human existence; it is the origin of existence. Living creations are communities like ourselves; the rock falls out of fear of God; all things hymn the praise of their Lord, even though we do not comprehend their glorification. Living and inanimate beings alike are as although divine love were the blood coursing through existence, granting it life. Ibn al-Dabbāgh divides love into accidental and essential: the former is connected to that which is other than the beloved's essence, such as love of his beneficence, seeking his advantages, and warding off his harms; the latter is connected to the beloved's very essence. Love is a station that entails ascension, and for this reason, its states are changeable. These ideas are already found among earlier writers, such as Grey Falcon.

²⁵ Ibid., 59.

²⁶ Abū Zayd ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Anṣārī (Ibn al-Dabbāgh), *Mashāriq Anwār al-Qulūb wa-Mafātīḥ Asrār al-Ghayb*, ed. H. Ritter (Beirut, 1959), 26.



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The lover, in all circumstances, remains in one of two states, “a state of union” or “a state of separation.” “In the first, he is annihilated from himself and existent through the existence of his Beloved, for if he has become annihilated from himself, he has become annihilated from the whole world. Thus, the lover sees his Beloved in all things and hears His speech from all things, and the allusion here is to the unity of being. As for the second, that is, the state of separation, the lover is in it looking to himself, that is, he is outside the bounds of the arena of annihilation; it is the state of new existence.”²⁷

“New existence” is a term coined by Shaykh Abdelkader al-Jilani to express “unity of witnessing.” In this context, I offer a philosophical approach to these concepts through ‘Alī Harb, who presents a remarkable analysis of the stages of *fanā*’, drawing on the *Risāla Qushayriyya*: “There are thus three stages through which the lover of the Divine Essence passes: his annihilation from himself and his attributes, together with his subsistence in the attributes of the Real; then his annihilation from the attributes of the Real and his subsistence in the witnessing of the Real; and finally his annihilation from the witnessing of the Real that is, from annihilation itself and his being consumed in his entirety in the Real.”²⁸ From this, it follows that the mystic seeks annihilation for the sake of subsistence in God; this means that he undergoes annihilation for his own sake, not for God’s sake. This is what led the Sufis to speak of a fourth stage that goes beyond “annihilation from annihilation,” or

²⁷ Jamāl al-Dīn Fāliḥ al-Kīlānī, *Thawrat al-Rūḥ*, 130.

²⁸ ‘Alī Harb, *Al-Ḥubb wa-l-Fanā*: *Ta’ammulāt fī al-Mar’a wa-l-‘Ishq wa-l-Wujūd* (Beirut: Dār al-Manāhil, 1990), 151.

the “union of unions,” which al-Ḥallāj expressed in his famous saying, “I am the Real,” and al-Bisṭāmī in his words, “Glory be to me, how great is my station!” This stage removes the suspicion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being), which would strip the mystic of his humanity, for in it, the distinction between God and the human being is realised. This stage is called “the sobriety of union,” and what it comprises, in terms of meaning, is the mystic’s recovery of his self in another mode and his exercise of existence in a quasidivine manner, through which he believes that he possesses existence in its entirety. According to ‘Alī Harb, “The true lover is indeed the one who is annihilated in his Beloved. However, annihilation is not an identity between two selves as much as it is the effacement of one self before another and its striving to erase its own traces and meanings. Separation is will and longing, whereas union is nothing but the fading away of will and desire. From here, one may say that the Sufi experience permits two interpretations, or two readings: a theological reading, in which the human being dissolves in God and becomes His mirror, and an anthropological reading, in which God dissolves in the human being and becomes his mirror.”²⁹

In this sense, and according to ‘Alī Harb’s analyses, love remains a human phenomenon deeply rooted in the human self, with multiple bearers: love of the world, love of woman, love of God, yet its essence is one. Hence, the symbols, allusions, and suggestions employed by the mystic are expressions of the state of divine passion – *wajd*, longing, ardent desire, rapture, love, and absence – the rhetorical content of which is drawn from the relationship of

²⁹ Ibid., 155.



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passionate love between man and woman and from the cup of wine. It is as although 'Alī Harb wishes to say that the *wajd*, love, and passion a man harbours for a woman are of the exact nature as divine love, by way of comparison, not identity; that is, the content of the meanings of passion, rapture, and love, and the suffering bound up with these meanings, are of the same kind as the gnostic's suffering, even if the degrees and ends differ. This is evident from his inclusion, in the course of his analyses, of lovers' tales that do not stop at the wretched face of love, that is, the sexual aspect, but rather transcends it to the world of spirit: that unbridled emotion resistant to explanation or analysis, which is described as chaste love, or love of the soul.

Metaphysical depth is indeed challenging to grasp, yet philosophical approaches have sought to penetrate it byways. The philosopher is a human being who loves and hates, and there is no doubt that what he says about love is, in the end, nothing but an expression of a personal experience, with all its afflictions and delights. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that love and reason do not meet; were it otherwise, we would find the arena of philosophy teeming with women philosophers, and the history of philosophy denies this. Therefore, to avoid displeasing women, it remains the case that love is stronger than reason because it is the secret of existence and the guide of conduct. The real challenge in the civilisational project is to sweep away what positivist reason, under the banner of material science and materialist positivist philosophy, has left behind in terms of filth that has deformed the lineaments of the human being and of humanity along the path of a civilisation still searching for its beauty and its human identity.

3.2. The Sufi Approach According to Sidi Abdelkader al-Jilani

The Sufi approach of the shaykh—may God sanctify his secret—may be treated through the concept of *tajallī* (self-disclosure) already mentioned, which is confined to four types of disclosure: the disclosure of effects, the disclosure of acts, the disclosure of attributes, and the disclosure of the essence, in addition to the distinction between “unity of being” as a controversial term and the term “unity of witnessing.” Awareness of the meanings contained in these concepts sheds light on the nature of the relationship between divine love, whose ultimate aim is eternal happiness, and annihilation for the sake of subsistence and existence as a material given that ascends, in terms of knowledge, until it becomes an accidental abstract meaning whose essence is the divine will. Thus, knowledge of existence is not knowledge for its own sake, as Socrates held; rather, knowledge is synonymous with worship. About the human being: "Whoever does not know, how can he worship Him? For knowledge is attained only by lifting the veil of the self from the mirror of the heart, as God Most High said in the sacred hadith: 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created creation that they might know Me.' Hence, it has become clear that God Most High created the human being for the sake of knowing Him, and knowledge is of two kinds: knowledge of God's attributes and knowledge of His Essence. Knowledge of the attributes is the portion of the body in the two abodes, and knowledge of the Essence is the portion of the holy spirit in the Hereafter, as He Most High said: 'And We supported him with the Holy Spirit.' These two forms of knowledge are attained only through two kinds of knowledge: the



knowledge of the outwards (*shari'a*) and the knowledge of the inwards (*taṣawwuf*). As he—peace be upon him—said, 'There is a knowledge upon the tongue; that is God's proof against His servants. In addition, there is a knowledge in the heart; that is the beneficial knowledge.'"³⁰

According to his interpretation, the human holy spirit is that which has been deposited in the core of the heart; he also describes it as the "child of meanings," which does not appear except through repentance, spiritual initiation, and constant adherence to the testimony that there is no god but God. This begins with the tongue first and then passes to the heart, breathing life into it so that the veils fall away, and it sees what it sees of worlds with the eye of inner sight. It is the tree of tawhīd, the goodly word whose root is firm and whose branch is in heaven; the holy spirit trembles to climb its branches in the world of the malakūt and to witness what it witnesses of the greatness of God—"Light upon light; God guides to His light whom He wills." The holy spirit is born from the heart just as a child is born from its mother, and the father raises it and tends it with care until its frame grows strong and becomes independent of him; such is the relationship of the shaykh to the disciple. Attaining the holy spirit, which is regarded as the "most excellent of forms," and setting it free through initiation and spiritual struggle to return to the actual human being, who has an affiliation with God Most High, constitutes the basic function of the shaykh in relation to the disciple.

The people of God have an identity radically different from personal identity because what is individuated is

³⁰ Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Sirr al-Asrār wa-Maḥzar al-Anwār*, 10.

nothing but a passing accident, whereas what remains is the true essence of the human being. This spiritual identity loves and is loved in the expanse of love. They are people who know one another even if they have never met in outwards reality because their actual reality has transcended material reality; it is a spiritual reality in which spirits meet, recognise one another, and confide in one another. It is the reality of Muhammadan presence and divine presence. "Love, in the shaykh's view, is a complex feeling sensed by all who have experienced and tasted it. It cannot be measured by reason or by wisdom and its instruments because it is an intoxication untouched by sobriety. It is an absolute gift and a total turning towards the Beloved with spirit, heart, and limbs, both secretly and in public."³¹

The implications of this definition bring us to the shores of the term *fanā'*, which encompasses the two concepts of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing), bearing in mind that *waḥdat al-wujūd* appeared in its clear form approximately a century after Shaykh Abdelkader al-Jilani. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is "a Sufi doctrine that emerged relatively late in the history of Islamic mysticism, and it took its clear and fully articulated form with Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638 AH) and those who came after him. The construction of this doctrine rests on the principle that there is no existent in reality except God Most High: He alone is the truly existent in this cosmos, and all other than He, in their true nature, are but entities whose existence is merely possible, by way of dependence. Thus, existence comprises God Most High, or the Real, on the one hand, which is true existence; all that is other than God Most High,

³¹ Jamāl al-Dīn Fāliḥ al-Kilānī, *Thawrat al-Rūḥ*, 135.



or creation, on the other hand, which represents possible existence. This does not entail affirming a duality of reality, for existential reality is one, whereas the multiplicity evident to perception is nothing but manifestations and determinations within that single reality."³²

It is regarded as a theory of existence with philosophical and theoretical dimensions, whose contents are highly complex, controversial, and open to suspicion, and it is agreed that, as a mode of inner, spiritual apprehension, it appears as a fruit of divine love. For *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing), it "means seeing the Real through the Real; in other words, it means seeing things by the proofs of divine unity. It is also used to denote the reality of certainty without any doubt. Thus, with unity of witnessing, or the state of *mushāhada* (contemplative vision), we move away from theoretical constructions and intellectual edifices and enter the practical sphere of experiential knowledge more precisely; we move within the domain of Sufi spiritual states."³³

Thus, the essential difference between the two terms is that *waḥdat al-wujūd*, whose concise expression is "I have never seen anything whatsoever except God," is a philosophical doctrine apprehended inwardly and spiritually as a fruit of divine love. In contrast, *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, whose concise expression is "I have never seen anything whatsoever without seeing God in it," is a practical formulation that expresses a state reflecting divine love. In this state, the mystic witnesses God in existence; that is, he sees God's act in existence because the divine essence is

³² Ibid., 152.

³³ Ibid., 153.

transcendent above existence. "Unity of witnessing, or the state of contemplative vision, is an affective state attained by the disciple at the end of his spiritual struggles and exercises; it is not a doctrine, nor a creed, nor a philosophical claim that can be demonstrated. Thus, the person of witness does not say that 'the All is God,' as might be understood from the proponent of 'unity of being'; rather, he says, 'There is no truly witnessed reality but God Most High,' and that he meaning the one who beholds 'sees nothing without seeing God Most High along with it.'"³⁴

The mystics employ several meanings as synonymous with the term "unity of witnessing," such as true *tawhīd*, the reality of *tawhīd*, or absolute divinity; all of these are concepts that, to some extent, express existential annihilation, which is not realised except after the realisation of all Sufi states and stations. At that point, it may be described as annihilation in witnessing, true *tawhīd*, or the unity of witnessing.

The method of Shaykh Abdelkader al-Jilani, as practice, embodies the unity of witnessing as a term whose outwards aspect is "sharī'a" and whose inwards aspect is "ḥaqīqa." All his exhortations and sermons insist most emphatically that attainment and union require spiritual striving and discipline, through which the disciple effaces his own existence, that is, becomes annihilated from his self and his share so that he exists only for his Master and his Master's commands. The state of witnessing has degrees: first, the degree of intimacy; second, the degree of *tawhīd*, in which the servant, in his innermost secret, his ecstasy, and his heart, is as although standing before God, majestic and

³⁴ Ibid., 154.



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exalted; third, the degree of individuality, in which the individual loses his identity and becomes annihilated from his self and its attributes, from his strength and power, his will and desires, his world and his Hereafter. At that point, new existence is realised, which, according to Grey Falcon, is finally realised at the station of subsistence in God Most High, that is, when the state of witnessing takes firm hold of him, and this is the ultimate end of Sufi states: "Witnessing, according to Shaykh Abdelkader, means seeing the Real through the Real, that is, seeing Him, exalted is He, by His power and His will, not by the servant's capacity and will, for the reality of the Real is bounded by no limits and is not perceived by eyesight. Accordingly, contemplative vision is a gift and a grace of the kind of divine *karāmāt* that the Lord Most High pours forth upon the hearts of His lovers."³⁵

The sum of all this is specific knowledge that unites theory and practice. To clarify this, the shaykh says: "When the first gleams of the dawn of the light of divine unity appear upon hearts from the horizon of the easts of '*By the dawn when it breathes*' and the suns of the eye of certainty stand fixed in the constellation of the spheres of '*And the sun runs on to its appointed resting-place*', the darkneses of human existence are hidden away in the radiance of the flashing of '*Their light will run before them*', and the secret of '*He makes the night enter into the day*' becomes manifest."³⁶ The first verse signifies the attainment of the state of contemplative witnessing; the second signifies the acquisition, through witnessing, of the rank of the knowledge of certainty; the

³⁵ Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī wa-l-Fayḍ al-Raḥmānī* (Baghdad: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2008), 223.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

third signifies the attainment of the station of existential annihilation; and finally, the fourth signifies the realisation of new existence, in which new divine attributes arise. This, according to Shaykh Abdelkader—may God sanctify his secret, is the meaning of purity and of Sufism in its true sense.

When purity is realised in the disciple's heart, *tajallī* is realised, the self-disclosure already mentioned as being of four kinds: the self-disclosure of the names, the self-disclosure of the attributes, the self-disclosure of the essence, and the self-disclosure of the acts. In the notion of *tajallī*, the correspondence between existence and divine love is realised through existential annihilation or witnessing: every part of this existence has a share in this self-disclosure and a portion of the secrets of its lights, and in proportion to this share, a being draws near, or recedes from, the supreme reality of existence. The most beautiful statement of transcendence I have encountered, according to my reading, is the shaykh's—may God sanctify his secret—saying: "Praise be to God, who has determined 'how-ness' and is exalted above modality; who has delimited 'whereness' and is too mighty for spatiality; who is found in everything and is hallowed beyond containment; who is present with everything and is exalted above 'with-ness'; for He is the first of every thing, and to Him no finality belongs."³⁷

The content of this elevated description precisely reflects the meanings of *tajallī*, which spur the servant to seek God in existence and within himself, after he has abandoned his

³⁷ Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Tādifi, *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir fī Manāqib 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kitāb, n.d.), 61. The main text is *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, while the notes contain al-Jīlānī's *Fatūḥ al-Ghayb* in seventy-eight essays.



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own self and the world of “others” and soared from the world of sensory witnessing to the world of the *malakūt*, where unity of witnessing is realised, the servant becomes annihilated from all that is other than God, and he casts himself into the ocean of lights, thereby realising human perfection by freeing the holy spirit the child of meanings from the prison of matter.

Conclusion:

We can conclude that divine love is the essence of both worship and existence. Worship is a concept ingrained in the very artistry of the Maker; all existence is a love poem whose phrases and meanings have been woven by pure love. It consists of signs that speak of the oneness of the One, the Unique, which glorifies Him and expresses the manifestations of His majesty and omnipotence, just as they reveal the aspects of beauty that permeate existence, whispering of oneness and uniqueness. Thus, the cosmos is captive to God's beauty and His might: it hymns His praise at every moment, without pause or weariness, compelled and not free to do otherwise.

Similarly, the human being, as an existence placed at the head of the kingdom of the cosmos, is captive to God's beauty and His might; however, he is distinguished from the rest of existence by his will, his freedom, and his choices. These may become a veil if they are not tamed by knowledge and taste that strengthen their metaphysical depth and overpower desire. Empty of transcendent orientation, the orientation that liberates the self from the

filth and density of matter, pulling it down to the dust, veils the lights of heaven. The ark of salvation in the ocean of God's love is "Lā ilāha illā Allāh," the vessel of love from which whoever sips a draught finds the beauty of existence diminished before him and begins to seek the beautiful one who brought this beauty into being.

For God's attributes, names and acts are scattered throughout existence, pressing upon human hearing, sight, and heart so that he may attend to the self-disclosure of the transcendent essence and strive to discover it within himself. This cannot be realised unless he takes flight with the twin wings of *sharī'a* and *ḥaqīqa* through the worlds of existence, where "whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God," the One, the Unique. Thus, the Sufi experience of Sidi Abdelkader al-Jilani is rich in meaning and mystery, which he eloquently presents to the reader in a captivating and straightforward style. This experience, whose essence is divine love and the paths of ascent through its degrees within this vast expanse of existence, is presented straightforwardly.

I believe that the intellectual and experiential content offered by Sufi thought in general, and by the Sufi intellectual system of Shaykh Abdelkader al-Jilani in particular, is more potent in its approach in regard to answering the question of existence than the philosophical approaches that have emptied existence and the human being of their metaphysical content. These latter have, on the one hand, proclaimed the "death of God," and, on the other hand, enslaved the human being and declared war upon him in the name of "asserting existence," resulting in the crisis of a defeated human being searching for safety and reassurance in an unsafe world filled with illusory conflicts



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and challenges. Experience has shown that safety and reassurance will not be realised unless the human being returns to the embrace of metaphysics. Accordingly, postmodern philosophy calls for this orientation, which digs into the depths of the self to discover the self. It is a philosophy that seeks to tame difference and to spread the values of love, tolerance, and mutual recognition among human beings.

According to mystics, God is truly loved and loves, not metaphorically. Philosophical thought, however, rejects this, for, in its view, the relativity of human love cannot encompass the absoluteness of divine love. Suppose that the philosopher, jurist, or theologian can adduce proofs in support of his refuting claim. In that case, the mystic has no proof but the states in which he lives, some of which are communicable, while most elude expression in tongue and speech. Human love for God remains, in any case, a human love; in expressing its pains and sighs, the mystics have resorted to symbols such as wine to signify intoxication and absence from existence under the force of *wajd* and the symbol of the woman whom the lover adores to the point of drunkenness, effacing his own existence and affirming hers, together with the tales of lovers, and so forth. For God's love for humanity and for existence, this notion can be conceived only through the experiential conceptions offered by Sufi; it has been said that "Whoever has tasted, knows," and love is indeed knowledge. If the Sufi experience is a human, individual, personal experience, the philosopher likewise offers a human, individual, personal experience; hence, we cannot strip the Sufi experience of its human dimension because the mystic experience is a human being, even if he

regards himself as the centre of the cosmos. Both seek perfect human beings: one in the language of the heart and the other in the language of reason. The reference point of divine love remains, for every scientific, philosophical, or religious endeavour, a firm foundation and a point of departure for realising human humanity. On this basis, how can the human being of this age interact with these Sufi concepts, practically and spiritually, to transform his defeated reality despite enormous scientific development? Moreover, is that possible?

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