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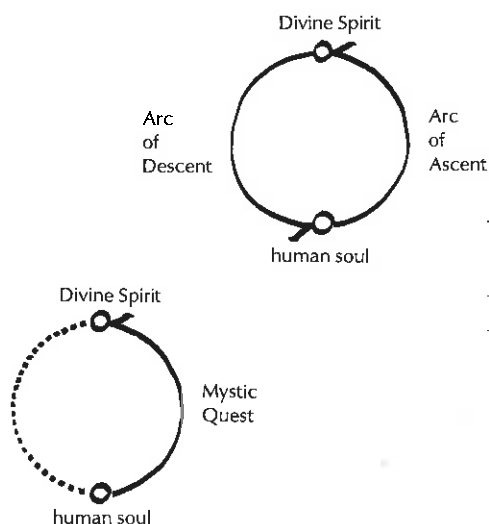
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THE BEGINNINGS OF SUFISM

The Sufi, through creative expression, remembers and invokes the Divine order as it resides in a hidden state within all forms. To remember and to invoke, in this sense, are the same: to act on a form so that that which is within may become known. The Sufi thus re-enacts the process of creation whereby the Divine came to know itself. The receptacle in which the creation is re-enacted may be an external form such as an artifact, or it may be the life form of the mystic which is transformed. Here the very soul of the Sufi-to-be reaches towards the Divine centre through the mystic Quest.

According to the followers of the Sufi path, Sufism in its essence is timeless; but its historical manifestation begins with the descent of the Quran (p. 52). Some sources trace the origin to an incident that occurred to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). One day, while he was teaching the verse, 'God created the seven heavens' (65:12), a special meaning of this verse was revealed to him. Ibn 'Abbas, the great transmitter of his Traditions, who was present, was later asked what the Prophet had said. Ibn 'Abbas answered, 'If I were to tell you, you would stone me to death.' Through this allusion to the inner meaning of things, the meaning which is not comprehensible to all, the inner path to God was opened (p. 38). The Companions of the Prophet were devout men who performed acts of meditation and constant remembrance of the Divine through its Names and through repetition of the text of the Quran; and after the death of the Prophet this group spread and trained disciples. The name of Sufi was still unknown.

At the beginning of the eighth century AD (2nd Islamic century), these ascetics came to be known as Sufis. The derivation of this word is not known for certain. It may come from the word meaning 'wool', referring to the rough woollen garments they wore; it may come from the word meaning 'purity'. Some say the word stems from 'line', referring to the people who prayed in a line directly behind the Prophet. Still others among the Sufis themselves say the word is too sublime to be derived from anything.

In another Tradition of the Prophet, his Ascent or Night Journey (p. 85) is described in part in the following manner:

'On my spiritual ascent I was taken to Paradise. I was placed before the door of a house. Gabriel was at the door. I asked to be let in. Gabriel said, "I am only a servant of God. You must pray to God if you want the door to be opened," and so I did. God said, "I open the door only to those who are most beloved. You and your followers are most dear," and the door was opened. Inside I saw a casket made of white pearls. I asked Gabriel to open the box. He told me only God could do so. I asked it of God, and the box was opened. God said, "That which the box contains will be held for you and your progeny." The box contained two things: spiritual poverty and a cloak. When I descended, I brought the cloak with me and I put it on 'Ali's shoulders, and after 'Ali his children will wear it.'

Special emphasis in Sufism is given to the forty Sacred Traditions, in which the Divine speaks in the first person singular through the Prophet, although they are not part of the Quran. The numerous commentaries made upon the Quran by the individual Sufis, and the Traditions concerning the Prophet, are also essential Sufi sources of doctrine. The books of the sayings of the Shi'ite Imams are important, especially those of 'Alī, the first Imam of Shi'ism, which brings Shi'ite Islam very close to Sufism. Another important source is the great wealth of Sufi poetry, above all the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (p. 53), which has been described as virtually a Persian commentary upon the Quran.

Sufism also assimilated concepts through texts which preceded it in time. The criterion for assimilation was that the foreign element preserved and supported the central doctrine of the Unity of Being. The *Enneads* of Plotinus, for instance, was the most complete metaphysical text to reach Islam from the Greeks; and Plotinus was known to Muslims as the 'Shaykh' or spiritual master. Teachings of the Pythagoreans, especially Niomachus, were also assimilated. The writings of Empedocles on cosmology and the sciences of nature received much attention.

The Hermetic writings of the first to fourth centuries AD, preserving the inner dimension of the traditions of Egypt and Greece, were translated into Arabic; one treatise which appears over and over again is the *Poimandres* attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the founder of Hermeticism. Hermes is traditionally related to Enoch, and appears in the Quran as the Prophet Idris.

Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Iran, also influenced Sufism. The twin concepts 'There is law in Nature. There is conflict in Nature' helped to develop the great Sufi cosmological themes. The Master of Illumination, Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī, extended certain Zoroastrian ideas in his angelology of lights.

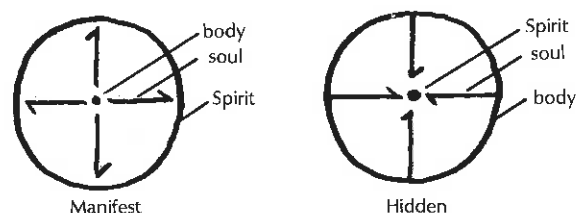
Sufism spiritualized myths and legends from pre-Islamic times, from Persian, Arabic and other sources, by expounding their inner significance. Stories about the Buddha were assimilated: Avicenna based his story 'Salman and Absal' on them.

Returning to Quranic sources, the major Old Testament prophets and the sayings of David and Solomon were very important to Islam in general and to Sufism. The Virgin Mary (p. 82), and the miracle of the virgin birth of Christ, the Word of God, as contained in the Quran, are important Sufi symbols of aspects of the Truth: for the birth of the Word to the Virgin Mary is as the birth of the Word to the unlettered Prophet. The miracle of Islam is the Quran, as the miracle of Christianity is the Christ.

THE CONTAINER AND THE CONTAINED

Every spiritual way emphasizes a particular aspect of the Truth. Christianity, for example, is essentially a way of love; the Christian is tied to Christ through love. To the Sioux, on the other hand, the most important element is self-renunciation. Islam emphasizes knowledge. Sufism begins with the way of knowledge, but carries it to its highest form, knowledge which illuminates.

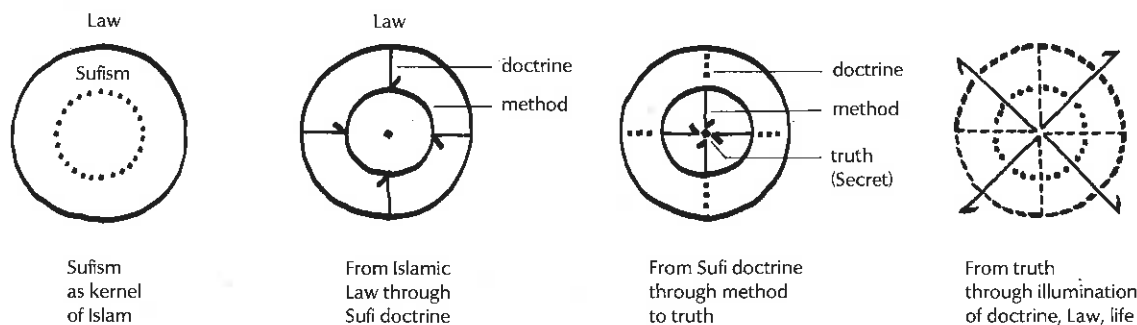
The way to illumination is often described as consisting of three attainments: the Knowledge of Certainty, the Eye of Certainty, the Truth of Certainty. The distinction may be understood by taking fire as the symbol of Truth. To attain the Knowledge of Certainty is to know fire after having heard it described. To attain the Eye of Certainty is to know fire from seeing the light of its flames. The highest attainment, the Truth of Certainty, belongs to those who know fire from having been consumed in it.



Knowledge of Certainty is gained from knowing the doctrine of the spiritual path. This forms the body or *container* of Sufism. The Eye of Certainty consists in the spiritual methods and practices *contained* within the body of Sufism, which lead to the Truth of Certainty, knowledge which illuminates. The relationship of the three attainments may be visualized as that of the circumference, radius and centre of a circle. One who attains the Knowledge of Certainty is in the position shown in the first diagram: the aspect of the Manifest, in which one relates to the world outside through the universe, seen in cosmology as the Universal Soul, to its outer limits where it is encompassed by the Universal Spirit. One who attains the Truth of Certainty is in the aspect of the Hidden, in which one relates inwardly from the body or form through the soul to the inmost centre. The movement is through the contained (which exists between circumference and centre) to the Spirit or Secret (*sirr*), the centre of consciousness which is the point of contact between an individual and the Divine Principle.

The gaining of doctrine is thus a centrifugal learning process, outward from the individual human form; the gaining of method is a centripetal learning process which must be actually experienced in order that the knowledge gained through doctrine may illuminate. Through spiritual practices one gains concentrative contemplation and thereby discovers the inner microcosmic Secret.

By incorporating these two diagrams into one we can describe Sufism. The outermost circumference is as the Law of Islam, the *Shari'at*. All Sufi doctrine originates implicitly and/or explicitly from here. The need for the Divine Law is often compared to Noah's Ark, which one must, like Noah, build out of planks and dowels. The planks are 'knowledges' and the dowels are actions. Without the Ark, one is drowned in the flood of materiality, as was Noah's son who refused the Law brought by his father.



Lā ilāha illa' Llah
There is no god but God

Muhammad rasula' Llah
Muhammad is the Prophet of God

Standing on the circumference of Sufism one relates in an outward direction through the manifest world. The motion inwards is through the spiritual methods which lead to the centre, Secret or Spirit which resides in a state of potentiality in all things. Through an awakening to consciousness of the inner meaning of religious practices and rites, one becomes aware of that which is hidden, for the Spirit exists whether or not we are conscious of it; if we remain unaware, it remains passive and unactivated, only an allusion to the potentiality we contain.

The doctrine and method of Sufism are based on two concepts. Originating from the Quran, these are the two testimonies by which one declares oneself to be a Muslim:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ

'There is no god but God' and 'Muhammad is the Prophet of God'. The first expresses the concept of the Unity of Being which annihilates all multiplicity, all separate entities. It is to see, in a sense, the common denominator in all the multiplicities of forms, to see the 'unity in multiplicity' of flower, tree and bird; to see that all circles have a centre regardless of size. The realization of this concept annihilates multiplicity so that unity subsists.

The second testimony expresses the concept of the Universal Prototype (most often translated as the Universal Man). Through this concept one comes to see 'multiplicity in unity'; to recognize the centre of the circle as a unity containing all the multiplicities and accidents possible in the material world; to know that multiplicity subsists only because the unity within subsists.

*We indeed created man; and We know what his soul
whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than
the jugular vein.*

*Quran 50:16,
trans. A. J. Arberry*

*God
there is no god but He, the
Living, the Everlasting.
Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep;
to Him belongs
all that is in the heavens and the earth.
Who is there that shall intercede with Him
save by His Leave?
He knows what lies before them and what is after them,
and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge
save such as He wills.
His Throne comprises the heavens and earth;
the preserving of them oppresses Him not;
He is the All-high, the All-glorious.*

*Quran 2:256,
trans. A. J. Arberry*

The Unity of Being

Beginning with the statement of belief, 'There is no god but God' and the Quranic verse, 'Say: God is One' (112:1), the doctrine of the Unity of Being is the basis of Sufi metaphysics. Maḥmūd Shabistārī, in his beautiful *Garden of Mystery*, says simply: 'See One. Say One. Know One.'

Sufis recognize both the immanence and the transcendence of God at one and the same time, and express this in their doctrine. At the same time as God is immanent, God is absolutely transcendent. At the same time as God is 'nearer . . . than the jugular vein' (50:16), God is above every form, thought or thing in the universe, as described in the Throne Verse (2:256). There is a coincidence of opposites here which can be known only through the Intellect or Spirit which shows itself to the mystic through spiritual intuition.

The mystic begins with reason, the light of which is a mere candle when placed next to the Intellect, seen as the light of the sun. We need the candle when beginning the journey in the darkness of the wilderness, but once the illumination of the sun rises, we put the candle aside.

Sufism is not a philosophy, in that it is based on the nature of Reality which is transcendent. All purely philosophical systems are necessarily closed, since no mental form can encompass the Infinite: mental form itself is part of the Infinite. It is only the

Come you lost atoms, to your Centre draw
And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw:
Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide
Return and back into your Sun subside.

Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār,
'Mantiq al-Tayr'.

I died from mineral, and plant became;
Died from the plant and took a sentient frame;
Died from the beast, and donned a human dress;
When by my dying did I e'er grow less:
Another time from manhood I must die
To soar with angel-pinions through the sky.
'Midst Angels also I must lose my place
Since 'Everything shall perish save His Face.'
Let me be Naught! The harp-strings tell me plain
That unto Him do we return again!

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, 'Mathnawī',
trans. E. G. Browne.

Know that the world is a mirror from head to foot,
In every atom are a hundred blazing suns.
If you cleave the heart of one drop of water,
A hundred pure oceans emerge from it.
If you examine closely each grain of sand,
A thousand Adams may be seen in it.
In its members a gnat is like an elephant,
In its qualities a drop of rain is like the Nile.
The heart of a piece of corn equals a hundred harvests,
A world dwells in the heart of a millet seed.
In the wing of a gnat is the ocean of life.
In the pupil of the eye a heaven.
What though the corn grain of the heart be small
It is a station of the Lord of both worlds to dwell therein.

Maḥmūd Shabistārī,
'Gulshan-i-rāz'
(The Garden of Mystery).

spiritual Heart, the instrument of intuition, which is above forms and capable of holding the Throne of God.

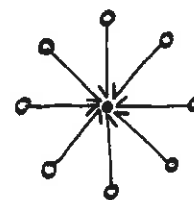
At one and the same time, the Sufi realizes an outer state of knowledge beyond the Divine Law and seeks union with the inner Truth through meditation and invocation of the Divine Name (p. 39). The one who attains is the one who knows *through* God, after travelling *to* God, *in* God. The goal of the Quest is for self to step aside and let the Absolute know itself through itself. As Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār says (pp. 36–37): 'The pilgrim, the pilgrimage and the Way are but a journey from self to Self.'

The goal of Sufism is to gather all multiplicity into unity, with the totality of one's being, in direct contemplation of spiritual realities; to come to know the qualitative unity which transcends the existence it unifies, at the same time as one integrates all aspects of self into a centre.

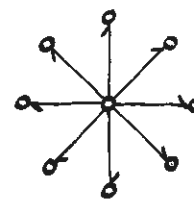
The journey begins with withdrawal from the material world in which one is drowned. To go from multiplicity-in-unity to unity-in-multiplicity, one must first die to self: not a biological death but a spiritual one, where the soul dies, and by dying is transformed, and then returns to this material world.

At this moment the multiplicity of the soul (the sensory and psychic forces) disappears, and the vision of Unity fills the emptied soul. This is when one sees God in Oneness. Then, when one returns to consciousness of multiplicity, the Spirit returns to all things.

The ultimate meaning of the Unity of Being is 'to see things as they really are': to realize that all is reflected in the mirror of one's own being. It is the dissolution of the profane consciousness of man who sees all things as independent of God: to realize that one was never separate from God; that God in His Oneness is both immanent and transcendent.



Multiplicity in unity



Unity in multiplicity

The Universal Prototype

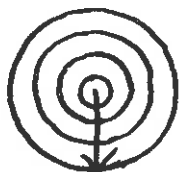
In order to come to know the Unity of Being, to realize the coincidence of its opposite aspects, transcendence and immanence, one needs a spiritual method. The method of Sufism is derived from the second testimony of Islam, 'Muḥammad is the Prophet of God'. The Prophet serves as the spiritual model by which one seeks to achieve the coincidence of opposites within self (p. 35). He serves as the place of gathering of all those universal and particular forms and meanings which are displayed throughout the universe (p. 87).

As the founder of Islam, his role follows that of other Prophets who preceded him in time (p. 97). The founder of every religious tradition is said to be an aspect of the Divine Word, the Universal Logos. Although the Prophet was the last prophet in the present cycle of existence, and is thereby known as the Seal of Prophecy, in essence he was the first. This refers us to a Tradition in which he says: 'I was the Logos when Adam was

Immanence



Transcendence



between water and clay.' In essence, the Divine Idea of the last prophet, Muḥammad (ﷺ), preceded the first to come into actual existence, Adam, as a thought is completed before it is actualized.

The Prophet is an individual who, in form, manifests all the possibilities of humanity. By marrying and having children, he expresses his human nature. Through his receiving the revelation while in an unlettered or virgin state, he is the receptacle of Divine nature. The Prophet, referring to this aspect of himself, has said, 'I am Aḥmad without the *m* [Aḥad means Unity]; I am an 'arab without the 'a [*rabb* means Lord]; who hath seen me hath seen the Truth.' The Prophet is the Universal Prototype who unites the inward, eternal aspect of reality with the outward, phenomenal aspect. The Universal Prototype comprehends all individualities and unites all opposites in the infinite and universal nature of Self. All Divine Qualities are united and displayed. Hence the Prototype becomes the means through which the artisan or architect comes to display the splendour of creation.

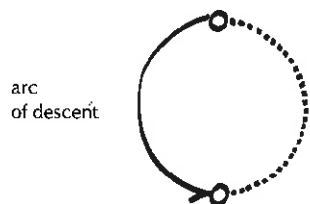
Ibn 'Arabī says: 'The Universal Prototype stands in the same relation to God as the pupil which is the instrument of vision to the eye. Through the Universal Prototype, God becomes conscious of Self in all the Divine aspects. The Universal Prototype is the eye of the world, whereby the Absolute sees Its own works.'

The Universal Prototype or Logos symbolizes four aspects of Divine manifestation. The Logos is the 'uncreated', pre-existent aspect within things: in the move towards creation it is the firstborn of God, the first to contain 'thingness'. The Logos is also Light: when chaos, the abysmal darkness, ended and moved towards order, Light came into being, of which wisdom is only a reflection. The Logos is also the active agent in the work of creation, the creative directing principle of the universe. Finally, the Logos is the prototypical human form. It is God's own image, the centre of the universe and the Spirit of the Absolute. It is the Word made manifest.

The possibility of becoming the Universal Prototype exists potentially for all Muslims. The difference between one who is awakened and one who remains asleep, and the difference in the levels attained by the awakened, depend upon what Sufis call preparedness. This preparedness is one's primordial nature. A comparison with light and with water is often made to further describe this term. All are potentially as unified white light which, when passed through a prism, assumes a variety of colours which existed in potential in the very nature of the light itself. The potential within light or within self, the preparedness of the human form, determines the ability to actualize spiritual intuition. In the same sense: water appears as water, but its taste varies according to the place from which it has been gathered, as primordial nature varies from form to form although outwardly not apparent.

Each Sufi seeks to become the Universal Prototype. The method of attainment is invocation (p. 39), a process which must continue until one can be described by the Sacred Tradition in which God says, 'My servant never ceases drawing nigh unto Me, and when my servant does so, I become the Hearing by which he hears, the Seeing by which he sees, the Hand by which he seizes and the Foot by which he walks.' The Sufi 'witnesses' when in full consciousness of the Divine Presence (pp. 102–3). To do so is to 'worship God as if you saw Him, and if you do not see Him [know intuitively], He sees you'. It is to know that God is always in the direction towards which one prays and invokes.

CREATION: THE ARC OF DESCENT



Sufis often refer to the saying 'God spreads the scrolls upon the heavens until man learns to read them. Once he can read them, he can roll up the scrolls and put them away.' The cosmos, known to mystics as a veil, as allusion, and as separation, is referred to in the Quranic verse, 'We shall show them our symbols in the horizons and in themselves, until it be made known to them that it is the Truth' (41:53).

The cosmos has two aspects. Known through the Tradition 'God created seventy thousand veils of Light and Darkness', the first is expressed in the statement that the universe is not God. The universe is relative, transient, changing; therefore it is otherness, separateness, a veil which separates us from God. In its other aspect, the universe is none other than God, because it is the universe which reveals the Divinity. Therefore, the cosmos both hides and reveals, veils and makes manifest. To the Sufi, the world is transparent, because the Sufi sees the transcendent significance of physical things, and this is expressed and reflected in art (p. 33).

In a sense, the cosmos falls between the concept of the Unity of Being, expressed as multiplicity in unity, and that of the Universal Prototype, expressed as unity in multiplicity. The cosmos is both container, expression of the Unity of Being, and contained, expression of the Universal Prototype.

The 'Why' of Creation

There is a Sacred Tradition in which the Divine says: 'I was a Hidden Treasure. I desired to be known, so I created the universe.' The drama of creation takes place from Not-Being to Being, from 'desire' to 'being known'. The Divine conceives of the possibilities contained within Itself and then brings them forth. It is, in a sense, the Mystery as it steps out of the primordial darkness into Light.

Why should an Absolute and Infinite Reality express Itself? Hindus say that the question is essentially unanswerable, and therefore they refer to 'Divine play'. Some other religions, including the exoteric traditions of Islam, relate it to the imponderable element of the Divine Will. Sufism answers: 'For Knowledge of Self.' Each form re-expressed, recalled, remembered, is so that It may come to know Self.

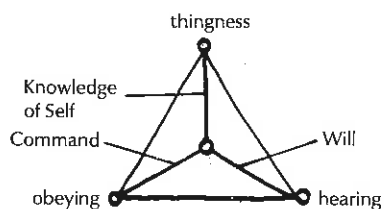
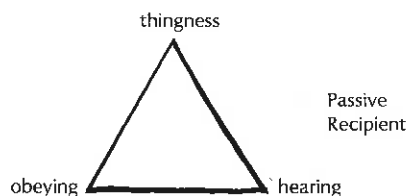
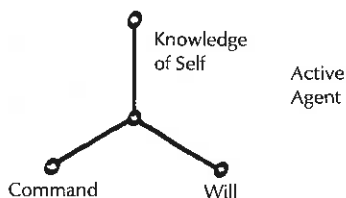
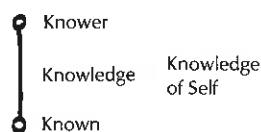
Since the Divine is Infinite, Knowledge of Self is a part of Its Infiniteness. Being Infinite and Absolute, containing the totality of possibilities, It must include the possibility of negating Self and bringing the relative into being. Therefore the world exists because God is Infinite.

The 'How' of Creation

The 'how' of creation is conceived as a triplicity. The number One is perfect and beyond description. It is the principle and origin of all numbers. The first odd number then is not one, but three. Three is conceived of as the level of singleness, which is the Absolute 'with knowledge': being 'with knowledge' necessarily implies three – knower, knowledge and known (a subject, a motion and an object).

Creation begins with the One at the point when It has singleness. This singleness has another three aspects which participate in the process of creation. First, there arises Knowledge of Self within the One as It moves towards manifestation. At this moment,

The 'How' of Creation



the Archetypes (*a'yān thābitah*) or Divine Names and Qualities appear in Divine Consciousness. This marks the birth of multiplicity. Essence, the Hidden Treasure, moves to the level of the Divinity. Subsequent to this, there arises the Will, based on knowledge, to bring the Archetypes from non-existence (phenomenally) to phenomenal existence. On the basis of the Divine Will, the Command 'Be!' is issued and the universe is created.

The above triplicity of Self-Knowledge (itself a triplicity of knower, knowledge and known), Will and Command, concerns the Agent. This alone does not produce any effect. In order for the Agent to be effective, there must be a recognition of the corresponding mode of triplicity on the part of the receiver, 'that which is to become known'. Creation can be actualized only when the two triplicities, active and passive, coincide. Ibn 'Arabī expresses this in the following way:

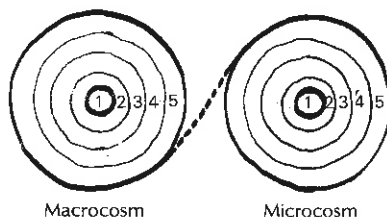
'Looking at an artisan [knower] who is engaged in moulding things out of clay [that which is to be known], one might make a superficial observation that the clay in the hands of an artisan is sheer passivity, sheer non-action. One overlooks the important fact that, in reality, the clay for its own part positively determines the activity of the artisan. Surely, the artisan can make a variety of things out of clay, but, whatever one may do, one cannot go beyond the narrow limits set by the very nature of the clay. Otherwise expressed, the nature of the clay itself determines the possible forms in which it may be actualized.' (T. Izutsu.)

At the moment when the Word 'Be!' is Commanded of a thing, there arises in it a singleness which contains a triplicity. It is this triplicity contained within the receiving form which allows a thing to be qualified by existence. The first element in the triplicity, described as 'the archetypal essence of a thing which is in a state of non-existence waiting to be known', corresponds to Self-Knowledge on the part of the Agent. The hearing on the part of the recipient corresponds to the Will of the Agent. The obedience to what is Commanded corresponds to the Command which issues the Word 'Be!' 'Whenever We decide something,' God says in the Quran, 'We only say to it "Be!", and it comes into existence.' (16:40.) The thing, in response, comes into being through its own act, not the act of God.

The World of Archetypes. Every religion needs a language to express the motion from the One to the many. In Sufism, the language of expression is that of the Archetypes or Divine Names and Qualities.

The Godhead in Its unmanifest quality is above every quality we could ascribe to It. This is the Divine Essence about which one can say nothing, for any description would only serve to limit or bind It. Divine Essence manifests Itself, however, in the direction of Creation through stages, the first of which is the Archetypes, the possibilities contained within the Absolute.

Divine emanation is a twofold process: intelligible and sensible. The first emanation brings the Archetypes into intelligible existence. Known as the Divine Names and Qualities, these Archetypes are the possibilities contained within the Absolute. They occupy a middle position between the Absolute and the sensible world. They are passive in relation to the Absolute, at the same time as they are active in relation to the worlds below them. They are actualized in the sensible, phenomenal world according to the preparedness of the particular sensible form which they take on: Ibn 'Arabī's 'nature of the clay itself'.



Macrocosm

Microcosm

- 1 *Hāhūt*: Essential Nature of God
- 2 *Lāhūt*: Divine Creative Nature
- 3 *Jabarūt*: World of Archetypes
- 4 *Malakūt*: World of Symbols
- 5 *Nāsūt*: human nature

- 1 Essence
- 2 Spirit
- 3 Heart
- 4 Soul
- 5 Body

In Sufism, it is through the Archetypes as Names of God (p. 39) that one invokes, calls upon, the Absolute, whether one is transforming one's own soul or the soul of a particular object. As the Names are the hierarchies of being between us and the Absolute, their existence is essential both to veil the light of the Absolute and to serve as a bridge between us and the Divine Essence (pp. 33, 43).

Revealed through the Quran, itself meaning 'Recite!' – 'To God belong the Names Most Beautiful, so call Him by them' (7:179) – the ninety-nine Names are divided into various forms. Often they are classified as Names of Essence, of Actions and of Qualities. Names of Essence, such as *Ahad*, the One, *Ḥaqq*, the Truth or Absolute, *Nūr*, Light and *Allāh*, God (p. 34), concern the Divinity and would exist whether or not there had been a creation. They are aspects completely independent of us. Names of Actions, such as *Khalq*, Creator, depend upon creation. Names of Qualities include *Karīm*, Generous, *Ḥayy*, Living, and *Shakūr*, Thankful. The Names are also classified as Names of Majesty (*Jalāl*) and Names of Beauty (*Jamāl*) (pp. 66, 67). The mystic invokes God through the Names of Beauty, because they symbolize ascent, whereas the Names of Majesty refer to the descent of creation.

This stage of emanation is conceived of as the One (*Aḥadiyyah*) moving towards Oneness (*Wāḥidiyyah*); the Archetypes are noumena, forms which are outwardly and actually intelligible, but inwardly and potentially sensible.

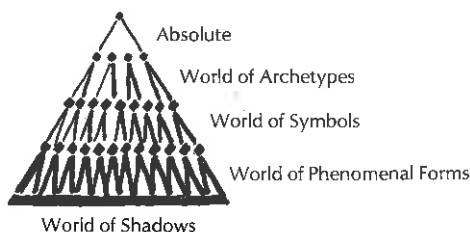
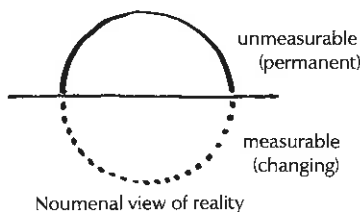
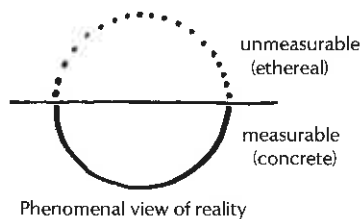
The second stage of emanation occurs when the shadows of the Archetypes reach the world of symbols (*ʿālam-i-mithāl*) and the shadows of the world of symbols reach the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world is a manifestation of these higher worlds and reflects the splendour of multiplicity. The phenomenon is a form which is outwardly and actually sensible: it can be grasped by the five outer senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Outward forms act as sensible containers for the Archetypes, which are in turn intelligible containers for aspects of the Absolute.

The transitional world of symbols is that by virtue of which sensible forms (the measurable) correspond exactly to intellections (the unmeasurable). Form is the philosopher's stone without which there can be no transformation. That is, 'I' can mentally comprehend an idea without a form, but 'I' can actualize my own transformation only by the practice of rites in the presence of symbolic forms.

The literal making of sensible forms is important because without the expression of the potentiality, the preparedness (*istiʿdād*), within 'that which is to be known', nature would lie passive and dormant. By acting on this preparedness the artisan brings forth the Spirit within, whether it be in the creation of a carpet, a brass tray or a miniature.

The Shadow of the Absolute. The universe in Sufi terminology is often referred to as the shadow of the Absolute: something which has relative existence by virtue of being a sensible determination of an Archetype.

The relation between a shadow and that which casts it is like the relation of the phenomenon to the cause of its noumenon. In order to have a shadow, one must have three things: first, something which will cast a shadow; second, a place where the shadow may fall; and third, light by which the shadow is made known. In Sufi terminology, it is the Absolute in the relative aspect of Self which casts the shadow. The place is the world of Archetypes, the place of the essences of possible things. If there were no place, the shadow would remain intelligible only, like a seed in a tree. The Light by which the shadow is made known is a manifestation of the Absolute as well. Shining



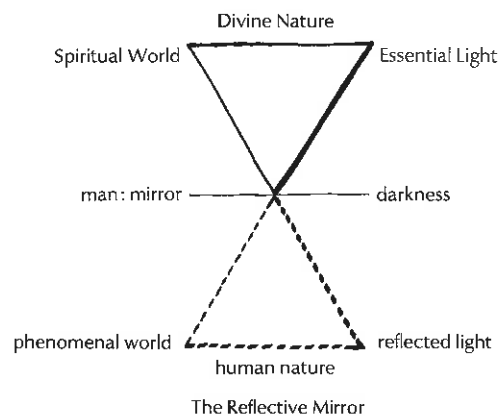
on the world of Archetypes, it casts a shadow on the lower world of symbols which finally reach the phenomenal world. If the upper world did not veil the Light, and cast the shadow which is all that we see, the Light would be blinding.

A shadow is explained as being the extent of the distance between that which has light as its manifested form, like the sun, whose light is of itself, and the light which the moon, in its receptive quality, reflects.

The absence of shadow in Persian miniatures reveals that they spring from the world of Archetypes which reflects the Light from the Divine. Below this world is the world of shadows. It is for this reason that the miniature also ignores perspective, for perspective is a sensible phenomenon far from the world of Archetypes: it creates an artificial imagination by describing a third dimension too clearly, and the sense of personal discovery is removed. Architecture, on the other hand, is devoted to creating shadows, for architecture is part of this phenomenal world, and catches the light and casts shadows, whereas the miniature reflects pure light.

Non-being is a mirror, the world an image, and man
is the eye of the image, in which the person is hidden.
Thou art the eye of the image, and He the light of the
eye.
Who has ever seen the eye through which all things are
seen?
The world has become a man, and man a world.
There is no clearer explanation than this.
When you look well into the root of the matter,
He is at once seen, seeing eye, and thing seen.
The holy tradition had declared this,
and 'without eye or ear' demonstrated it.

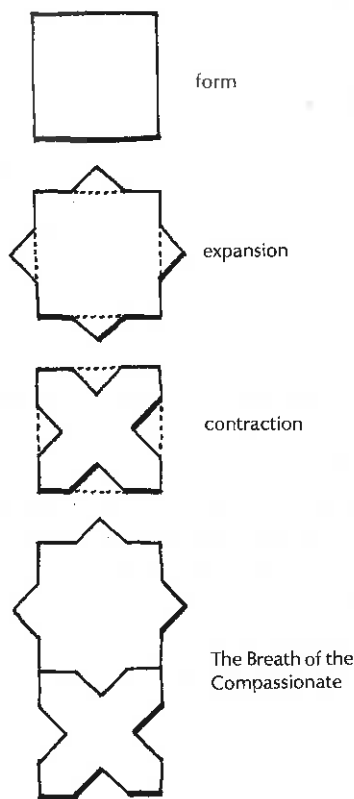
Mahmūd Shabistārī,
'Gulshān-i-rāz',
trans. E. H. Whinfield



The Reflective Mirror. A second concept of creation important to Sufi expression is that of the mirror. Before the creation of human beings, the universe had been brought into being, but it was unpolished, unreflective, unconscious of the Divine Presence. The macrocosmic universe came into being so that the manifestation of Self in the form of a Divine Name would have a 'place'. However, each Name has a particular form, so that there arose a multiplicity of particulars. There was no place for all the particular forms to gather into a unity, so mankind served to polish the mirror. This polishing by mankind occurs through unified consciousness of the Divine Presence as It manifests Itself within all forms. All other beings reflect only single Qualities of the Absolute. Together they form a Unity, but without consciousness the Unity is not perfect and complete.

The mystic aspires to become this reflective mirror. Polishing the mirror in order to make it a place for the Divine Self to see Self depends upon two modes: the first, the 'preparedness' of the place, is the ability to receive, conceive and give birth to the second mode, the descent of one of the Divine Names.

The Sufi thus becomes the instrument by which the Divine can have a vision of Self in another form. The mystic, empty of self, then has the capacity to reflect the Divine to the Divine. The mystic has been unveiled so that Light comes to reflect Light, Presence witnesses Presence, and the 'desire' for the Name to be known is made manifest.



To the Sufi, creative expression which results from *participation mystique* – that is, a state of being one with nature, although not conscious of the Divine Presence – is an expression of one's vision of self within self. It is an expression which is not reflective, not polished, not aware of the total possibilities inherent in the nature of things. It is only through conscious expression that one has the more perfect vision of self reflected in the qualities of something else. The only way that expression can serve in its full capacity is when it is reflective; it becomes reflective only when conscious of the Divine Presence. The reflective surface now reflects something which is contained, a Spirit which is not only one's own. This is the Spirit which is universal to all things: to the Sufi, it is the 'desire' which exists within things 'to be known'.

The Breath of the Compassionate. The preparedness within a thing, its inner Archetype, is actualized in an intelligible form at the moment when its Name flows into it through a Word. The Divine Spirit or Logos flows into a thing through the process of the Divine Breath, the Breath of the Divine Name *Raḥmān*, Compassionate. The Name of the Compassionate (p. 55), manifested through the Divine Breath, is just one of the many symbolic processes which the traditional craftsman emulates. By blowing or chanting the Divine Names upon the form to be transformed, the creative process of the breath, which contains the Divine Presence through a Name, transforms the object in hand. The creator participates as active agent and the object participates as passive recipient.

There is a Tradition of the Prophet in which he says: 'God created the universe through the Breath of the Compassionate.' The Compassionate (*Raḥmān*) is the highest of the Names, Ideas or Archetypes. 'Where was your Lord before creating the visible Creation?' someone asked the Prophet. His answer: 'In a cloud. There was no space either above or below.' This cloud which the Divine Being exhaled, and in which It originally was, receives all forms at the same time as It gives beings their forms. It is the act of making things to exist. The Absolute, appearing in the Name, Compassion, overflowing with goodness, gives existence without limit and without end.

When the desire to be known, the preparedness, arises within a thing, the Divine as Compassion extends Itself as Archetype to the thing and becomes its receptivity, its ability to receive the theophany. This receptivity is actually what the Archetype, in its state of concrete essence, desires. Therefore, the actual effect of Compassion is to give a thing the possibility of receiving sensible existence. Compassion is given without any discrimination; Mercy, the complement, is given only for an act done. Compassion, in a sense, is the universal form of Divine giving; Mercy is the particular aspect.

Through the Name of Compassion, the Absolute breathes out upon the other Names or Archetypes. This breathing out is a means of bringing things into existence. By means of the Command 'Be!' the Absolute through Compassion sends into the external, phenomenal world that which has been compressed within It.

The Divine Breath pervades the Universe. Just as breath is exhaled and so forms syllables and words, the Breath of the Compassionate, in exhaling Words (intelligible forms), brings the sensible form into being.

This Divine Breath is Nature itself. Just as the Breath contains all the forms of the universe in a potential state and actualizes them by exhaling, so Nature holds all forms of expression in a potential state of preparedness in which they await the appearance of the Breath of the Compassionate, the Spirit, the Logos, in order to be known.

This Breath is essentially the initial act of the metaphysic of love. Love is the cause and secret of all creation and thereby the principle of all motion from desire to being known. The creation of the world, in this sense, was the motion of love towards perfection and completion. The Absolute loves to be perfect in both types of forms: intelligible and sensible.

Ultimately, one who wishes to know the Breath of the Compassionate need only know Self, for Self is the Lord who is manifested in the form. One's innermost being is most directly expressed through speech. Speech on the human plane reflects the Divine Word or Logos; it was the Word that created the universe and it is through the Word that it returns to God. Invocation (*zikr*) is the means of reaching the very substance of things within us.

Everything contains the Presence of the Divine. The ideas or intellections in *our* minds are like those Ideas in the mind of the Absolute. A word contains both a meaning and the thing itself, which has a form. The meaning is permanent, the Divine Idea; the form the thing takes is but a shadow, transient. The Ideas are made temporal through the Breath of the Compassionate. In Sufism, Christ symbolizes the particular Divine Quality of the Breath of the Compassionate, for it is through the Breath that all things receive life. 'When the Word of God comes into the heart of anyone and the Divine Inspiration enters his heart and his soul, its nature is such that there is produced in him a spiritual child having the breath of Jesus that revives the dead.' (R. Nicholson, *Mathnawī*.)

The 'What' of Creation

The universe, in the Sufi view, is being re-created at every moment. At every moment what appears to be a time-connected universe returns to God. There is continuous, instantaneous expansion and contraction.

The manifestation of actualized individual things occurs continually, as in successive waves. At every moment creation is annihilated and re-created. With each heartbeat we die and are reborn. The world is in intense motion, ascending towards the vertical axis within all things to meet the descent of the Absolute in manifested forms. The flow occurs in such an orderly, successive manner, according to definite patterns, that we are unaware of it, and the world appears to us to stay the same. This ever-new creation is a process which only the human form endowed with consciousness of Self can come to know. Arabesque patterns, in rugs or in tiles, witness this concept of constant flux. As Ibn 'Arabī expressed it:

The wonder of wonders is that the human form and all other created things are in a perpetual process of ascending. And yet one is not ordinarily aware of this because of the extreme thinness and fineness of the veil (when one looks at something through a very transparent veil, one does not become aware of the veil between oneself and the object) or because of the extreme similarity between the successive forms. How splendid is God's description of the universe, and of its perpetual renewal with each Divine Breath which constitutes an ever new creation in one single entity! But this is perceived by only a few, as the Quran says: "'Nay, they are in utter confusion regarding the new creation'" (50:15). These people who do not perceive are in confusion because they do not know the constant renewal of things with each Divine Breath.' (T. Izutsu.)

The Sufi, whether or not expressing forms outside of self, is aware of the constantly changing forms of the Divine. We come to know the changing forms by realizing that we are ourselves constantly changing from one form to another. Knowledge of this constant transformation of self into a myriad modes and states leads to knowledge of the Divine as It goes on transforming Itself moment after moment in all the possible forms of the world. This is expressed in the arabesque and in all rhythmic art forms, where, each time one looks, one sees another facet.

THE HUMAN SOUL

It is the soul, the feminine principle between body and Spirit, which undertakes the Quest and is transformed (see pp. 84–92) from its physical and sensible function to its psychic function and thence to its spiritual function. As the soul approaches the second transformation, from sensible to spiritual, it becomes what the Sufi calls the spiritual Heart, the instrument of intuition. It is the Heart which finally unites with the Spirit. It is annihilated and experiences a spiritual death. It is then reborn with the Spirit and attains subsistence: it knows that it exists through the Absolute and was never really separated from It.

The soul has its origin in the spiritual world. When it is attached to the body, it descends from the world of Light to this world of darkness, dark because of its distance from the Source. If the body with its desires proves the stronger, the soul becomes heavier, more materially oriented, dense and opaque. The veils multiply. If, however, this soul becomes aware of its captivity and conscious of its imprisonment within the six directions of the body and the four primary elements of earth, air, water and fire, then and only then can the journey of the feminine principle begin.

Having fallen into the world against its will, it finds itself a stranger, an exile from the world of Light. The soul must raise itself to the level where it feels its chains and bonds to be intolerable, and then, with the aid of its spiritual faculties, which only now realize the bondage, free itself and return whence it came. Thus, the moment of consciousness is awareness of the exile, the moment when the soul realizes the illusion of this life and yearns to return to its Origin where it was one with the light of Unity. Only then does the mystic's soul discover where it is, where it came from and where it is to go.

The human form contains the possibility of uniting the opposites within by means of consciousness. The soul, the feminine principle of the reflective moon within, is united with the Spirit or Intellect, the masculine principle of the sun within (pp. 60–61). Then the 'desire', which sought knowledge, becomes known. Then one has realized the Tradition of the Prophet, 'one who knows self, knows Lord'. The Way of Sufism is to become aware of the possibilities which exist within the human form, to conceive them, and then through spiritual practices to actualize them. Ibn 'Arabī says: 'Remove from your thought the exterior of words; seek the interior until you understand.' (H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*. . .)

The soul consists of a threefold hierarchical structure: sensory, psychic and spiritual. The soul in its sensory and psychic form is the soul existent within the human form. We can, through structural analogy, relate the human form or microcosm to a circle, where the circumference is the physical, the radii are the sensory-psychic area, and the centre is the spiritual. The space between the centre and the circumference is the place to which the soul descends at conception.

It descended upon thee from out of the regions above,
 That exalted, ineffable, glorious, heavenly Dove.
 'Twas concealed from the eyes of all those who its
 nature would ken
 Yet it wears not a veil, and is ever apparent to men.
 Unwilling it sought thee and joined thee, and yet,
 though it grieve,
 It is like to be still more unwilling thy body to leave.
 It resisted and struggled, and would not be tamed in
 haste,
 Yet it joined thee, and slowly grew used to this desolate
 waste,
 Till, forgotten at length, as I ween, were haunts and its
 troth
 In the heavenly gardens and groves, which to leave it
 was loath.
 Until, when it entered the D of its downward Descent,
 And to earth, to the C of its centre, unwillingly went,
 The eye of (I) infirmity smote it, and lo, it was hurled
 Midst the sign-posts and ruined abodes of this desolate
 world.
 It weeps, when it thinks of its home and the peace it
 possessed,
 With tears welling forth from its eyes without pausing
 or rest,
 And with plaintive mourning it broodeth like one bereft
 O'er such trace of its home as the fourfold winds have
 left.

Thick nets detain it, and strong is the cage whereby
 It is held from seeking the lofty and spacious sky.
 Until, when the hour of its homeward flight draws near,
 And 'tis time for it to return to its ampler sphere,
 It carols with joy, for the veil is raised, and it spies
 Such things as cannot be witnessed by waking eyes.
 On a lofty height doth it warble its songs of praise
 (For even the lowliest being doth knowledge raise).
 And so it returneth, aware of all hidden things
 In the universe, while no stain to its garment clings.

Now why from its perch on high was it cast like this
 To the lowest Nadir's gloomy and drear abyss?
 Was it God who cast it forth for some purpose wise,
 Concealed from the keenest seeker's inquiring eyes?
 Then is its descent a disciple wise but stern,
 That the things that it hath not heard it thus may learn.
 So 'tis she whom fate doth plunder, while her star
 Setteth at length in a place from its rising far,
 Like a gleam of lightning which over the meadows
 shone,
 And, as though it ne'er had been, in a moment is gone.

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna),
 'Ode to the Human Soul',
 trans. E. G. Browne.

Having come from the non-physical world, it must first of all become less subtle and more concrete. In this process, it becomes the vegetative soul (*nafs-i-nabāṭiyyah*), allowing the form within the womb to have the same function of feeding and growth that plants have: the ability to transform foreign substances into its own form.

As the form grows in the womb, it develops the animal soul (*nafs-i-ḥayawāniyyah*), in which it acquires the ability of motion. At birth, the animal soul is completed, as the form exhibits various desires. However, not until adolescence does the soul pass from potential consciousness to being able to actualize consciousness with the appearance of the rational soul (*nafs-i-nāṭiqah*). The Quest may begin now. The ability to transform self has come into existence.

The first stage of the journey is to retrace one's steps, to return to one's primordial nature (*fiṭrat*), to become a form without desires. That is, one actively denies self-desires, and exists with the faculties of feeding, growth, motion and the ability to transform foreign substances into one's own form. It is a return to complete potentiality before any masks were assumed. To be awakened is to cross the bridge to one's primordial nature and then enter through the gateway (pp. 42–43).

The Sensory Structure

Once inside the gateway the mystic encounters the five senses, the physical instruments of the sensory structure. Whereas the first stage consists of denial and asceticism, the second is saturation. An eleventh-century commentator upon one of Avicenna's mystical recitals says: 'Know that access to that by which our soul becomes knowing begins by way of the senses; so long as we do not perceive sensible things – the visible, the audible, the sapid, the odorous, and the tangible – knowledge is out of our reach.' (H. Corbin, *Avicenna*. . .)

This is perhaps the most treacherous part of the journey, for one is often waylaid by the sensory pleasures and detained from journeying further. Desires of the carnal soul reappear as the dragon (p. 45), and one must fight one's way forward. Suhrawardī admonishes the mystic to move forward quickly, as these pleasures are only dim lights in comparison with the remainder of the journey.

The Psychic Structure

The psychic aspect of the feminine principle consists of the five internal senses: common sense, imagination, intelligence, memory, and Active Imagination or Intellect. The functions of these internal senses are described according to form (*ḥayūlā*) and meaning (*ma'nā*). That is, common sense is the ability to perceive the forms of things, whereas imagination is the ability to perceive meanings. When one has perceived both form and meaning, both these psychic structures are operative. One who sees only form without meaning, or meaning without form, needs to develop the complement. Intelligence is the ability to preserve forms, and memory is the ability to preserve meanings. These two functions play a very important role in contemplation. The fifth psychic structure is known by many names: it is the intuitive ability to govern both sensible phenomena and intelligible noumena so that a balance is always preserved.

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;
 the likeness of His Light is as a niche
 wherein is a lamp
 (the lamp in a glass,
 the glass as it were a glittering star)
 kindled from a Blessed Tree,
 an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West,
 whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched
 it;

Light upon Light.

*Quran, 24:35,
 trans. A. J. Arberry.*

Sufis call it the **spiritual Heart**. This function, containing both the feminine principle (as manifested in the sensible) and the masculine principle (as manifested in the intelligible), must activate and join the two. It is to this faculty that the Angel Gabriel (p. 76) relates, by bringing either revelation, which was given to the Prophets, or inspiration, which is still given to the Saints.

This psychic structure of the soul has been expressed by Ghazālī in an esoteric commentary upon the Verse of Light (Quran 24:35). The niche, as a place of gathering of both sound and light in the outer world, is also a place of gathering inwardly for all sensory perceptions. A focus point, an aperture in the wall, it symbolizes the first inner aspect of the soul, common sense. The glass symbolizes the second, imagination, which like glass is part of the materiality of this world and has a definite dimension: like glass in its making, imagination is at first opaque to the light of the Intellect which transcends direction, quality and distance. Once the imagination is clarified and refined, it gains a similarity to the Active Intellect, or spiritual Heart, and becomes transparent to the light. Just as a glass is needed to protect the candlelight from being dissipated by the wind, so the imagination is needed to control intellectual knowledge and hold the images together.

The third symbol, that of the light-giving lamp, is related to the intelligence (that is, the thinking function or the function of will), for it is this faculty which recognizes the Archetypes or Divine Names and Qualities.

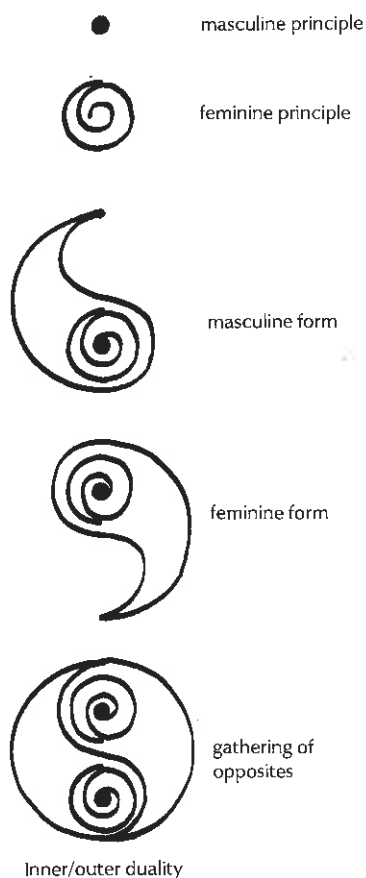
The function of meditation (formed by memory) and reflection is symbolized by the fourth symbol, the tree. Meditation begins with a thought and branches out into others: its conclusions become seeds producing the further growth of thought. The tree is not a fruit tree but the olive tree, the oil of which feeds the lamps; and as opposed to other soils, the oil of the olive increases radiance. This is not any tree, any meditation, but rather meditation upon that 'which is neither of the East nor the West'.

The fifth symbol, the oil, relates to the faculty that is sacred within the human form, the spiritual Heart, or Active Imagination, or Active Intellect: the Spirit of God within us. Existing in potential in all human beings, it is actualized and made luminous in but a very few. For most people, the acquisition of knowledge must come from without. The Active Intellect, on the other hand, is self-luminous with no external source: the oil which 'would shine, even if no fire touched it'.

Thus the psyche (the inner senses) is just one part of a larger totality of the feminine principle or soul, incorporating the outer senses, which moves on the mystic Quest towards spiritual becoming and union with the Spirit. It is in this phase of the journey that one meets with the *jinn* (p. 44), the psychic forces within. They constantly intrude with temptations and inclinations which one must actively put aside, or, once again, one will be hindered from continuing the journey.

The Spiritual Becoming

The soul, the feminine principle, the sensible and psychic structure within the human form, is of Divine origin; for God breathed His Spirit into it. Once this feminine principle has been **awakened** to the realization that it came from some 'place' other than the



physical world, that the physical world is, in a sense, only an illusion, it is overcome with an ardent desire to be known and in doing so goes through three spiritual stages.

The first stage is the awakening to consciousness of the existence of the passionate, egoistic soul, the soul which commands (*nafs-i-ammārah*). At the second stage, the feminine principle's becoming is called the accusing, reproaching soul (*nafs-i-lawwāmah*), the soul aware of its own imperfections and blaming self. Here the struggle between good and evil is enacted. Finally, the feminine principle reaches the spiritual stage of peace (*nafs-i-muṭa'innah*), when it is reintegrated with the Spirit, the masculine principle, and at rest in certainty. The Quran calls out: 'O soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing. Enter thou among My servants! Enter thou My Paradise!' (39:29.)

The Gathering of Opposites

The human form is the place of gathering (see p. 102). It gathers two separate dualities: an inner and an outer. The inner duality exists *within* the form, and is essentially the vision one has of oneself. The outer duality exists *between* forms; it is the vision one has of oneself as reflected in another form.

In the inner duality, men and women are the same. The meaning of the form does not differ: the masculine and feminine principles of Spirit and soul exist in both, irrespective of the outer form. The differences are between individuals, depending upon capacity and preparedness.

The outer duality consists of the physical forms of man and woman. Concerning the role of the physical forms in spiritual reintegration, Rūmī says: 'The physical form is of great importance; nothing can be done without the consociation of the form and the essence. However often you may sow a seed, stripped of the pod, it will not grow. Sow it with the pod, it will become a great tree. From this point of view, the body is fundamental and necessary for the realization of the Divine intention.' (R. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī*.)

Thus it is only through the form that the gathering of opposites may be accomplished. The form of woman holds the highest essence, and therefore Ibn 'Arabī says: 'Woman is the highest form of earthly beauty, but earthly beauty is nothing unless it is a manifestation and reflection of the Divine Qualities.' It is by means of the symbolic understanding of this feminine form that spiritual transformation is achieved. Ibn 'Arabī continues: 'Know that the Absolute cannot be contemplated independently of a concrete being, and it is more perfectly seen in a human form than in any other, and more perfectly in woman than in man.' (R. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī*.)

The creation of concrete forms, in which one can come to contemplate the Divine, is the very reason for the existence of art. The material in the form created by the artist, and the creative process itself, are aspects of the feminine principle. The maker must play two roles: as a passive recipient to the idea which is conceived and an active agent towards that which is to be born.

As to woman being both active and receptive, Ibn 'Arabī explains further the point that the Absolute is contemplated more perfectly through a woman (p. 69). In the first place, man exists between two feminine principles. The Quran states: 'And He created from Adam his mate and out of the two He spread innumerable men and women' (4:1). Commentators, referring to this verse, say: 'The wife of Adam was feminine, but the first soul from which Adam was born was also feminine.' (T. Izutsu.) That is, Adam (p. 84) exists between two feminine principles: the soul he was born from, and the soul which was born from him.

Secondly, one contemplates the Absolute either in Its aspect of Agent (expressed in poetry as the Lover) or in that of Recipient (expressed in poetry as the Beloved), or both at the same time (p. 92). Thus, when a man contemplates the Absolute in his own form, he sees that the feminine soul was born of the masculine Spirit; this is to contemplate the Absolute as active. Otherwise he may contemplate the Absolute in its passive aspect, because his own form, as a creature, is absolutely passive in relation to the Absolute. But when a man contemplates the Absolute through a woman's outer form, or in a state of meditation upon her inner form, he contemplates both these aspects simultaneously. Ibn 'Arabī describes the process:

'The Absolute manifested in the form of woman is active agent because of exercising complete control over man's feminine principle, his soul. This causes man to become submissive and devoted to the Absolute as manifested in a woman. The Absolute is also passively receptive because, inasmuch as It appears in the form of a woman, It is under man's control and subject to his orders. Hence to contemplate the Absolute in woman is to see both aspects simultaneously, and such vision is more perfect than seeing It in all the forms in which It manifests Itself. That is why woman is creative, not created. For both qualities, active and passive, belong to the Essence of the Creator, and both are manifested in woman.' (R. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī*.)

Active and passive are essentially equal, and one's preparedness to be awakened, and to begin the journey, depends upon both. Preparedness is the ability to conceive of the possibilities inherent in Being. It is being receptive in order to conceive. This receptiveness is not total passivity but rather 'the power of receiving'. Ibn 'Arabī continues:

'There is no distinction between the two qualities, because the receptivity which is the power to receive is perfectly equal to the power to act, the former being in no way inferior to the latter.' (T. Izutsu.)

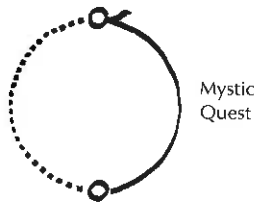
They are complements which participate in the gathering together. When the artisan is actively conceiving of the possibilities in the transformation of his clay, the material remains receptive; and yet the clay determines the activity of the artisan.

To return to the analogy of the circle: the circumference is the outer form, which may be either masculine or feminine. The 'process' of reaching centre in either case (the radius) constitutes the feminine principle within all things: it is the soul, the motion, love. The centre itself is the Spirit, the Intellect, the Logos, and is the masculine principle which exists in a state of potentiality within all things and is actualized only in the human form, the place of gathering.

Thus, it is the feminine principle, the soul, which is active, and the masculine principle lies within, as Christ, the Spirit, lay within the Virgin Mary. Transformation takes place when the container is first made ready to receive through spiritual

practices, and the possibilities, the preparedness, the Archetypes within, are conceived, develop and grow. After suffering the pains of birth, the Mary within gives birth to the spirit (p. 82). The process is the feminine principle; that which is first born is the masculine. This is why, in spiritual transformation and rebirth, only the masculine principle can be born, for the feminine principle is the process itself. Once birth is given to the spirit, this principle remains as Fatima (p. 83), the Creative Feminine, the daughter of the Prophet, in a state of potentiality within the spirit reborn.

THE QUEST: THE ARC OF ASCENT



The process whereby the soul enters the Arc of Ascent and undertakes the mystic Quest lies in the techniques and methods of Sufism, which are centred upon the ability one has to *concentrate*. The object of concentration becomes the Divine and we become Divine-centred. Concentration is a very difficult act: it is harder to give oneself than to give the fruit of one's action. One's urges are stronger towards outwardness, and thus all the methods of Sufism seek the centre. Without the ability to meditate or contemplate, it is impossible to control the urges of the soul. You must seek a certain stillness; you cannot hear the voice of God until you are still.

The method is one of spiritual alchemy. Through transformation, the substance of the soul is changed. The liquid in the cup becomes transparent, so that the container and the contained become one.

There is a saying of the Sufis: 'Knowledge without practice is like a tree without fruit.' Up to this point we have essentially spoken of the process and the doctrine. Now we turn to the method; but it is important to remember that practice is never the same for all people, whereas the doctrine is.

The first step is to seek a Shaykh (pp. 40–41); for although there have been Sufis who have been initiated without a living spiritual master, it is very rare. (Known as *uwaisi*, most of these Sufis have been guided by the Prophet Khizr, who corresponds to the Biblical Elijah.) The purpose of the Shaykh is to cleanse the heart of the disciple so that the disciple may then come to reflect the rays of the beauty of Divine Unity. The awakening begins with expansion, for that is the centrifugal motion away from the contracted ego. (Once awakened and conscious, one must learn a new form of contraction.) The awakening may occur in one of two ways: one either has an extraordinary experience which enables one to overcome one's habits – such as a dream, an illness or a great love – or seeks a spiritual retreat (*khalwat*, pp. 94–95), where one is forced to cut oneself off from everyday experiences. Spiritual practices need the support of external forms – ritual artifacts such as the Quran (p. 52), the place of prayer (p. 53), the mosque (p. 42), the niche (p. 47), and calligraphy (p. 103).

Spiritual Methods

Initiation. In Sufism, initiation (p. 38) symbolizes the death and rebirth of the individual ego. It connects the seeker spiritually to the Infinite; it is the attainment of the covenant with God.

The power to bestow initiation comes from the Prophet. Muḥammad (ﷺ) received, as one of his functions, the power to initiate individuals into the Divine Mysteries, so

that mankind could see things in a new way. The various orders of Sufis, each associated with a Saint who received great powers along the spiritual Way, extend to the present through a continuous chain of transmission which goes back to the time of the Prophet. This chain of transmission is the only guarantee of the authenticity and regularity of the spiritual Presence. The Presence must come from God, and begins with revelation; initiation is a means of opening the door. Going in depends upon one's will.

Meditation. The function of meditation is to prevent the mind from going astray while the heart concentrates on God. The psyche is like a battlefield, or like the sea which never ceases creating waves. It has to be stilled and made to look inward.

Invocation. In Sufism, meditation (*fikr*) is the passive counterpart of active invocation (*zikr*). The human form cannot cease to think, but it can transcend thought. In activities such as the making of music, chanting and the spiritual dance (pp. 90–91), the resistance of the restless psyche is gradually worn down, and the body becomes the temple of God, empty of self and filled with Self.

However, one cannot transcend will through an act of will; and there is no meditation possible without an invocation, a Name of God, given through a spiritual master who carries the chain of transmission. This brings the Divine Presence into the sound. Human speech is in a special relationship to the soul: we are restored to our original state, as we were created, through the Divine Word. God's invocation of us is the whole of existence.

The word *zikr*, invocation, has really three meanings: to mention, to invoke, to remember. When we mention God, we invoke His Name; when we invoke His Name, we remember Him. The symbolism of this is a mystery. God is present in His Names because of His love for us.

Within invocation there is a pattern of meditation, which varies according to the master and the order. The fibre of the universe is the word breathed through the Breath of the Compassionate. By invoking God, we give our existence back to Him. There is a Divine Substance in the air, and God takes our breath and light and integrates it into His being. Most people do it unconsciously. If we can become aware of our breathing and the spiritual substance of the breath, then we gain the spiritual energy that resides in the air.

As a bridge between the daily prayers and the invocation, the Sufi begins by performing the *wird* or litany. Every order chooses a verse of the Quran or a prayer of the Prophet which is repeated a certain number of times: it is, in a sense, a magical formula peculiar to the order. In the *wird* there are three stages: purification (death), expansion (love) and union with God. The repetition continues, either alone or in assembly, aloud or silently, until the Sufi identifies the heartbeat with the Divine Presence.

Contemplation. In contemplation (*shuhūd*), one concentrates on a visual image or on an idea which must have a Divine Quality, that is, one of the positive qualities in the cosmos such as the virtues of charity, humility and truthfulness. One either isolates this in the mind or puts it in a formula. The contemplation is often performed with bodily motion, so that the soul may dissociate itself from the body.

Spiritual Virtues

There are three basic spiritual virtues, stemming from the Quran, which the Sufi internalizes. The three are humility (*khushūʿ*), charity (*karāmat*) and truthfulness (*ṣidq*).

The first, humility, corresponds to one's being and not to one's actions. It is the realization that God is everything and we are nothing. All manifestation returns whence it has come. Ibn ʿArabī said that humility is too profound a virtue for God to have given it to any creature fully. Essentially, it is awareness of two things: first, that, we are non-existent, for actually only God exists; and second, that every human being has something to teach us, because, although the human form is limited, the limitations are never the same in two different people.

Charity is a virtue very closely connected to nobility. At the highest level it is giving self to God, and therefore the supreme charity is to invoke the Name of God. Charity is to realize that we have nothing; everything comes from and belongs to God.

Truthfulness lifts us from the plane of existence to the plane of knowledge. It is to see things in their transparent state: to see things as they really are.

The three virtues are internalized when we see the universe as symbolic of the Divine Presence; once internalized, and reflected in the form, the virtues lead us to spiritual union with the Source from which we came.

SYMBOLISM

It is through symbols that one is awakened; it is through symbols that one is transformed; and it is through symbols that one expresses. Symbols are realities contained within the nature of things. The entire journey in God is a journey in symbols, in which one is constantly aware of the higher reality within things. Symbols reflect both Divine transcendence and Divine immanence; they refer to both the universal aspect of *creation* and the particular aspect of *tradition*.

Symbolism is perhaps the most sacred of Sufi sciences, for it is through seeing symbols that one continues to remember, to invoke. Each time one forgets, and is pulled back into the sea of the unconscious psychic forces, one must struggle again to remember; and it is only through an understanding of the symbolic that one can do so.

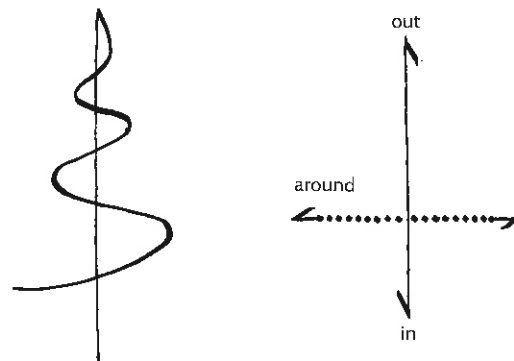
Symbols are vehicles of transmission of Divine realities, which transform us by carrying us to the higher states of being from which they originate. Known as a world unto themselves (*ʿālam-i-mithāl*), they are the place of encounter between the world of Archetypes or intelligibles and the sensible, phenomenal world. The world of symbols is a reflection of the world of Archetypes. It gathers these universal essences and then reflects them down upon this world. The further a thing moves away from the intelligible world of illuminated knowledge, and the closer to the sensible world of phenomena, the more particularity it outwardly exhibits. Its universal essence moves inward, into a state of potentiality.

Everything in creation is a symbol: for everything perceived by the *outer* senses may be conceived through the *inner* senses as a sign of a higher state of reality. However, this symbolic vision takes place, for the Sufi, only when the symbol is seen in the presence of the theophanic light. This light is the knowledge of illumination, which arises after the mystic has passed through the Divine Law, gained the Knowledge of Certainty through knowledge of the doctrines of Sufism, seen through the inner

meaning of practices and rites with the Eye of Certainty, and reached the centre to gain the Truth of Certainty. This theophanic light is not seen; it is that which makes one see as it makes itself seen in the form through which it shines.

As to the attitude of the individual creator who gives the symbol its concrete form, it may be a completely unconscious one, in which case one could call it *participation mystique*: oneness with nature. Tradition, for such a creator, has ensured that there has been no separation from the sacred, from the Divine order. The expression is one with the image created. The creator has never been separated actively from the tradition, and rites and practices allow a rhythmic and harmonic transformation which flows into the form created.

Alternatively, the artist's image may be an extension of a super-conscious attitude. In this case, there has been a break with primordial nature: a stepping-aside, an objective reflection of the natural processes. This may be termed a spiritual awakening. The next step is the retracing of the steps, descending back to the point where one was at one with nature. By doing so, one unveils one's ego-oriented attitudes, and each unveiling removes a darkness which allows more light to shine through. After this process, one rebuilds the container, through rites and practices particular to the tradition to which one has been awakened. One is inspired by universal forms, but inspiration finds expression only in one's particular tradition.



Permanence and change

Three primary motions

A tradition is a Divine norm which maintains the permanence and continuity of the particular people who hold it. It relates the whole of life to certain principles which transcend the human plane. It repeats, recalls, recollects the Divine Ideas or Archetypes. It is religion in its most universal aspect. In its aspect of continuity or permanence, it continues a chain of oral transmission which relates it through the Vertical Cause to the Source from which all things emanated. Continuity is not simply a horizontal line of human history. Continuity pierces the horizontal line with the vertical axis of revelation, and thereby relates the tradition to a transhistorical time. It is tradition, sanctified by revelation, which creates and preserves the universe of forms, ideas and institutions. The forms appear in art and in the crafts; the ideas are reflected, expressed and recalled in the intellectual development of each tradition; and its institutions retain the forms and ideas for future generations. However a symbol has been expressed, the Sufi knows that 'man cannot create symbols: he is transformed by them'.

To describe or organize or categorize symbols will not exhaust them, for they exist whether or not one refers to them. The process is far more complex than this; for if one remains at this level of description, one becomes absorbed in immanence, which is only one aspect of the Divine. At the same time as one comes to know immanence, one must come to know transcendence, for only then is a transformation possible; and the goal of the Quest is transformation.

Universal and Particular Symbols

There is an essential division in the science of symbolism. Universal (or natural) symbols are symbols as they appear in the nature of things. They are primordial to mankind, and in this sense they are trans-cultural. Particular symbols, or even particular interpretations of universal symbols, differ according to the various traditions. They are sensible or intelligible forms consecrated by God through revelation to become vehicles of Divine Grace. They possess, in a sense, the theophanic light which confers a dimension of transcendence on the particular tradition in which they are revealed.

In Sufism, universal metaphysical symbols – expressed particularly in architecture, music and calligraphy – stem from the Quran, the Word; and the Word contains the Names and Qualities. Symbols connected to sound, light and the Intellect are among the most profound expressions in Sufism. The Word is both a sound and a light, for the light is the meaning of the Word. The Word is as a mirror where the Divine reverberates outwardly. It is through sound that the world will be re-absorbed at the Day of Judgment. The niche (*miḥrāb*, p. 47), which directs one towards Mecca and towards the Ka'bah (p. 46), and the porch (*iwān*, p. 79), which waits patiently to catch the light, symbolize the Presence of the Divine Name *Nūr*, Light.

Particular symbols may be divided into many categories, according to the means of expression. There are cosmological (pp. 56–57) and psychological (pp. 68–71) symbols, and symbols of revelation (pp. 72–83), as well as particular interpretations of universal symbols. Each one of these areas in Sufism is traditionally a science based on the Quran and interpreted through *ta'wīl*, the art of spiritual hermeneutics.

The best example of a good word, 'Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn tells us, 'is a Divine Name, recalled, remembered, invoked in an upward aspiration towards the Truth. The firm set root of the tree is the [*zikr*, invocation], itself uttered with firm set purpose. The Heaven-reaching branches represent the tremendous import of the [invocation] as it passes upwards throughout the whole of the universe; and the fruit of the tree is the Reality in whose remembrance the invocation is performed.'

As to cosmological symbols, the cosmic mountain, *Qāf*, refers to the renewal of the world, the rejuvenation of the cosmos (p. 56). The mountain symbolizes the infinite expanse of the sky, the single and highest point in space. It is the Source of the whole of the cosmos, and yet only a point in the Divine Infinity. As one descends towards the lower states of being, the horizontal dimension expands. The further from origin one is, the more one has a sense of expansion; but one is moving away from the centre.

Mountain climbing corresponds to the inner aspects of life. The Divine Law is the horizontal base. One needs a guide to climb: one can climb a mountain by many paths, but one needs to follow one made by experienced people. The higher one climbs, the

Hast thou not seen how God citeth
a symbol? 'A good word
is as a good tree –
its root set firm,
and its branches in heaven;
giving its fruit at every season
by the leave of its Lord.'
So God citeth symbols for men
that they may remember.

Quran 14:29–31,
trans. A. J. Arberry

smaller things below become, but the further one can see. The higher one moves spiritually, the more vision one gains. Only at the peak can one see the other peaks.

The mountain has trees and plants and is full of natural forms; then one passes the tree-line and enters the world without forms. One passes from form to formlessness, from sensible to intelligible. The name of the person who reaches the top of the cosmic mountain is Simurgh (p. 36).

The Pen and the Guarded Tablet are also cosmological symbols. From the ink of Divine Knowledge God wrote the essential existence of all things through the Pen, the masculine principle operative in creation; existent things are words inscribed upon the Guarded Tablet, the Universal Soul or feminine principle operative in the universe. The Pen and the Guarded Tablet stem from the Tradition: 'If all the oceans were turned to ink, one would still not be able to describe all the Qualities of God.' Another Tradition which refers to them is: 'God wrote the Quran upon the Tablet. The first drop of ink was the dot under the letter *b* which begins *Bismi 'Ulah* . . . [In the Name of God. . . p. 55].' The Pen produces the point; the point is the centre; the centre is the Divine Source.

One of the most beautiful of all symbols, which has found unexcelled expression in Islamic architecture, carpet design and poetry, is that of the Gardens of Paradise. Paradise is described in the Quran (55:45-75) as being four gardens. These are interpreted esoterically as four stages through which the mystic travels on the inward journey. The four gardens are called the Garden of the Soul, the Garden of the Heart, the Garden of the Spirit, and the Garden of Essence.

As the mystic begins the ascent through the Gardens of Paradise, the point of encounter is the Garden of the Soul. This is the feminine principle within, structured by gateways of sense. In order to enter, the mystic must gather together the inner senses or faculties of intuition. The object sought by these faculties is the spiritual Heart, which is the abode of intuition. The mystic encounters perils in entering this garden, as the soul is pulled away from centre by physical desires. The mystic is in a state of receptivity, with a readiness to be satisfied; but if the soul is actually satisfied, the mystic is expelled from the garden much as Adam was expelled from Eden.

The mystic perseveres and steps beyond the gateway into the Garden of the Soul proper. The garden contains three things: a fountain, flowing water and the fruit of trees. The fountain symbolizes perceptions of particulars: forms and ideas. Having reached this fountain, the mystic gains Knowledge of Certainty.

The water which is found here symbolizes Light: knowledge which gushes from the Fountain of the Spirit, flows to the Garden of the Heart, and from there feeds the faculties of intuition which are partially veiled by psychic forces here in the Garden of the Soul.

The waters give full flavour to the fruits grown from trees (thoughts) of meditation. Particular objects of perception are no longer outward-directed: the mystic, in a sense, seals the gateways and then in the Garden of the Soul, through meditation, is able to refer the particular objects of perception beyond their particular meaning to their Archetypes in the Garden of the Heart. The mystic makes use of the thinking function in its highest form.

The mystic knows further that even the Archetypes are but shadows of higher realities. The Archetypes, as universal forms, flow to the Garden of the Soul and to its fountain or source which then feeds its fruit.

But such as fears the Station of his Lord,
for them shall be two gardens –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny? . . .
therein two fountains of running water –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny?
therein of every fruit two kinds –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny? . . .
And besides these shall be two gardens –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny?
green, green pastures –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny?
therein two fountains of gushing water –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny?
therein fruit
and the date palm, and the pomegranates –
O which of your Lord's bounties
will you and you deny?

Quran 55:46-66,
trans. A. J. Arberry

The mystic then turns towards the next garden, the Garden of the Heart. These two gardens, that of the Soul and that of the Heart, together symbolize the totality of the perfection of human nature.

The Garden of the Heart is structured by the feminine principle's spiritual becoming. It is the abode of intuition, ruled by the spiritual Heart or Active Intellect, known traditionally as the instrument of gnosis, or illuminated knowledge. To enter, the mystic must leave reason behind.

As the mystic enters this second garden, further perils present themselves. Until the mystic reaches the fountain of this garden and eats of the fruit of the tree, there is a danger of falling, due to the potency of psychic forces.

The mystic enters the garden and finds a fountain, water which flows, a tree and fruit of this tree. The fountain is the Fountain of Life or Immortality. By drinking of this fountain, the mystic attains to the Eye of Certainty, that is, reaches direct contact with the Spirit; for the water of this fountain originates from the Garden of the Spirit.

The water which flows in this garden is the Intellect, knowledge which has been illuminated by revelation. Having left reason behind, which relates to the sensible world, the mystic's soul is fed by the Intellect which rules the intelligible or spiritual world.

The tree in this garden is the Tree of Life or Immortality: its fruits are universal meanings which relate all forms and images to the inner sameness existing within all things. Universal meanings may be taken by the mystic, however, only when there has been a phenomenal image, an imprint upon the soul.

Having gathered particular and universal meanings from these first two gardens, the mystic moves inward to the Garden of the Spirit. This garden is structured by a higher and a lower part. The lower part contains the seven Prophets of one's being, one's seven subtle forms which correspond in the macrocosm to the seven visible planets (see p. 97). At the division between the lower and upper parts of the Garden is the flowering of the Tree of Knowledge. Its roots are in the lower part, but its fruit grows in the upper regions. The higher part of this garden is known as the Garden of Refuge. Here, structurally, the feminine principle is reaching towards completion in the masculine principle.

To enter this Garden of the Spirit, the mystic's preparedness or potentiality has been reabsorbed in primordial nature. The mystic is on the verge of union with the Secret, the spiritual centre or mystery within.

Perils still present themselves. The mystic is reabsorbed in the light of Muḥammad (ﷺ), the Logos, the Spirit, which was 'when Adam was between water and clay'. At this point, the mystic sees with the eye of this light and sees all lights unveiled. If not fully prepared, the mystic slips back to ordinary vision and loses the direct contact with the Spirit.

The mystic enters the Garden of the Spirit and finds a fountain, water which gushes forth, a tree and fruit of that tree. The fountain is the Fountain of Knowledge which is illuminated by the Spirit. It is the contemplative Truth of Certainty, the knowledge of Illumination, knowledge of the Oneness of all Divine Qualities. The Fountain of Knowledge appears like veils of light, not darkness, behind each of which shines the Light of Essence Itself. The water in this garden gushes forth of Itself; it is like the oil in the Verse of Light which burns 'though no fire touched it'.

The Tree of Knowledge grows next to the fountain; it stretches itself to the uppermost boundaries of the Spirit. The fruit of this garden is the date from which the Virgin Mary nourished herself after giving birth to the Spirit. This fruit symbolizes contemplation of Divine Light and the appearance of Divine Majesty and Beauty. It is the fruit of the station of the Spirit, where only a kernel of individuality of the mystic remains; in this garden the kernel receives nourishment and delights from the fruit of contemplation.

Finally, the mystic enters the Garden of Essence. Its form consists of the masculine and feminine principles uniting in the stage of annihilation, being reborn in the illuminated knowledge of the Unity of Being.

To enter, the mystic must lose all traces of individuality. The Divine Self can now see Self reflected in the 'polished' mirror of the Sufi, empty of human self. The only peril in this garden is to the mystic's individuality, for it dies a spiritual death.

Upon entering this Garden, the mystic finds the Fountain of Knowledge of the Unity of Being; the water which gushes forth is pure Light. The fruit of this Garden is the pomegranate, the symbol of integration of multiplicity in unity, in the station of Union, conscious of Essence. Consumed in the Light, no individuality remains; the mystic has reached the goal of the Quest, the Truth of Certainty.

Now the mystic redescends through the Arc of Descent back to the phenomenal world in a state of subsistence. Seeing the gardens in reverse order, the mystic completes the circle in knowing the Garden of Essence as Light, where the Knowledge of Unity gushes forth; the Garden of the Spirit, symbolized by the sun, where Knowledge of the Oneness of all Divine Qualities gushes forth of Itself; the Garden of the Heart, whose waters flow from the Intellect and whose Fountain of Life is fed by the Fountain of the Spirit as the moon receives the light of the sun; and finally the Garden of the Soul. The Garden of the Soul is as moonlight, reflecting the Unity of Being, the Spirit and universal meanings into all particular forms. Subsisting through God, the mystic, now Sufi, has returned from the Quest.