

## Some Terms of 'Irfan:

In this section we intend to cover some of the special terms used in *'irfan*. The *'urafa'* have coined a large number of these terms, and without an acquaintance with them it is not possible to understand many of their ideas. In fact, one may draw a conclusion quite opposite to that intended. This is one of the characteristics of *'irfan*. However, every branch of learning has its own set of terms, and this is a matter of necessity. The commonly understood meanings of words used are often unable to meet the precise requirements of a science or discipline.

Thus there is no option but that in every discipline certain words be selected to convey certain specific meanings, thus coining for the practitioners of that discipline a special vocabulary. *'Irfan*, too, is no exception to this general rule.

Moreover, the *'urafa'* insist that none but those initiated to the Path should know their ideas, because – in their view at least – none but the *'urafa'* are able to understand these concepts. Thus the *'urafa'* unlike the masters of other sciences and crafts, intentionally attempt to keep their meanings concealed so that the vocabulary they devised bears, in addition to the usual aspects of a terminology, also something of an enigmatic aspect, leaving us to discover the enigma's secret.

Furthermore, there is also a third aspect to be occasionally taken into account, which increases the difficulty. This arises from the practice of some *'urafa'* – at least those called the Malamatiyyah – who adopted an inverted form of ostentation (*riya' makus*) in their discourses by cultivating ill fame instead of good name and fame amongst the people. This means that as opposed to those afflicted with the vice of ostentation (*riya'*) who wish to make themselves appear better than they actually are, the *'urafa'* practising self-reproach seek to be considered good by God and yet appear to the people as bad. In this way they seek to cure themselves of all types of ostentation and egoism.

It is said that the majority of the *'urafa'* of Khurasan were Malamatiyyah. Some even believe that Hafiz was one. Such words as *rindi* (libertinism), *la ubaligari* (carelessness); *qalandari* (mendicancy), *qallashi* (pauperism) and the like signify indifference to creation, not to the Creator. Hafiz has spoken a lot on the subject of giving the impression of doing things that earn for one a bad name, while being inwardly good and righteous. A few examples:

*If an adherent of the path of love, worry not about bad name.*

*The Shaykh-e San'an had his robe in pawn at a gambling house.*

*Even if I mind the reproaches of claimants,*

*My drunken libertinism would leave me not.*

*The asceticism of raw libertines is like a village path,*

*But what good would the thought of reform do to one of worldwide ill fame like me?*

*Through love of wine I brought my self-image to naught,*

*In order to destroy the imprint of self-devotion.*

*How happily passes the time of a mendicant, who in his spiritual journey,*

*Keeps reciting the Name of the Lord, while playing with the beads of his pagan rosary.*

*However, Hafiz, elsewhere condemns the ostentatious cultivation of ill fame just as he condemns sanctimoniousness:*

*My heart, let me guide thee to the path of salvation:*

*Neither boast of your profligacy, nor publicize your piety.*

*Rumi defends the Malamatiyyah in the following verses:*

*Behold, do not despise those of bad name,*

*Attention must be given to their secrets.*

*How often gold has been painted black,*

*For the fear of being stolen and lost.*

This issue is one of those over which the *fuqaha'* have found fault with the '*urafa'*. Just as Islamic law condemns sanctimony (*riya'*) – considering it a form of *shirk* – so does it condemn this seeking of reproach. It says that a believer has no right to compromise his social standing and honour. Many '*urafa'* also condemn this practice.

In any case, this practice, which has been common amongst some '*urafa'*, led them to wrap their ideas in words which conveyed the very opposite of what they meant. Naturally this makes the understanding of their intentions a good deal harder.

Abu al-Qasim Qushayri, one of the leading figures of *'irfan*, declares in his *Risalah* that the *'urafa'* intentionally speak in enigmas, for they do not want the uninitiated to become aware of their customs, states and their aims. This, he tells us, is because they are incapable of being understood by the uninitiated. [1](#)

The technical terms of *'irfan* are many. Some of them are related to theoretical *'irfan*, that is to say, to the mystic world-view and its ontology. These terms resemble the terms of philosophy and are relatively recent. The father of all or most of them was Ibn al-'Arabi. It is extremely difficult to understand them. Amongst these are *fayd al-'aqdas* (the holiest grace), *fayd al-muqaddas* (the holy grace), *al-wujud al-munbasit* (the extending existence), *haqq makhlūq bi hadarat al-khams*, *maqam al-'ahadiyyah* (the station of uniqueness), *maqam al-wahidiyyah* (the station of oneness), and so on.

The others are related to practical *'irfan*, i.e. the *sayr wa suluk* of *'irfan*. These terms, being of necessity related to the human being, are similar to the concepts of psychology and ethics. In fact they are part of a special type of psychology, a psychology that is indeed empirical and experimental. According to the *'urafa'*, philosophers – and for that matter psychologists, theologians and sociologists, let alone another class of scholars – who have not entered this valley to observe and study the self at close hand, have no right to make judgements on this subject.

The terms of practical *'irfan*, as opposed to those of theoretical *'irfan*, are ancient. They can be dated as early as the 3rd/9th century, from the time of Dhu al-Nun, Ba Yazid and Junayd. Here follows an exposition of some of these terms, according to definitions ascribed to them by Qushayri and others.

### **1. Waqt (Moment):**

In the previous section we came across this word in a passage from Ibn Sina. Now let us turn to the *'urafa'*'s definitions of it. The summary of what Qushayri has to say on this subject is that the concept of *waqt* is relative. Each state or condition that befalls the *'arif* requires of him a special behavioural response. The particular state which calls for a particular kind of behaviour is termed the Moment of a particular *'arif*.

Of course, another *'arif* in the same state may have a different Moment, or the same *'arif* in other circumstances may have a different Moment that will require of him a different behaviour and a different responsibility.

An *'arif* must be familiar with these Moments; that is, he must recognize each state that descends upon him from the unseen, as well as the responsibilities which accompany it. The *'arif* must also count his Moment as precious. Thus it is said that “the *'arif* is the son of the Moment”. Rumi says:

The sufi is to be the son of the Moment, O friend;

Saying 'tomorrow' is not a convention of the Way.

The Arabic *waqt* has the same sense as *dam* (breath) and *'aysh-e naqd* (cash of life or cash pleasure) of Persian poetry. Hafiz especially makes much mention of 'the cash of life' and 'counting the moment as precious.' Some of those who are either uninformed or who wish to exploit Hafiz as an excuse for their own perverseness, suppose or pretend that Hafiz's use of such words is an invitation to material pleasures and indifference to the cares of the future, to the Hereafter and God – an attitude which is known in the West as Epicureanism.

The notions of 'counting the moment as precious' or 'ready pleasure' is of the recurring motifs of Hafiz's poetry. Perhaps he mentions it thirty times or more. It is obvious that since in his poetry Hafiz observes the *'urafa's* practice of speaking in enigmas and symbols, many of his ambiguous verses may appear, on the surface, to present perverse ideas. In order to clear away any such delusions, one may count the following verses as throwing light on others like them.

*Whether I drink wine or not, what have I to do with anyone?*

*I am the guard of my secrets and gnostic of my moment.*

*Get up, let's take the sufi's cloak to the tavern,*

*And the theopathic ravings to the bazaar of nonsense;*

*Let's be ashamed of these polluted woolens,*

*If the name of miracle be given to this virtue and skill;*

*If the heart fails to value the moment and does nothing,*

*Now much shame will the moments bring in for us.*

*In a land, at morning time, a wayfarer*

*Said this to a companion on the way,*

*O sufi, the wine becomes pure*

*When it remains in its bottle for forty days.*

*God is disdainful of that woolen cloak a hundred times*

*That has a hundred idols up its sleeve;*

*I see not the joy of 'aysh in anyone,*

*Nor the cure of a heart nor care for religion;*

*The inners have become gloomy, perhaps perchance,*

*A lamp may be kindled by some recluse.*

*Neither the memorizer is alone (with God) during lessons,*

*Nor the scholar enjoys any knowledge of certainty.*

*Hafiz's ambiguous verses on this subject are many. For example:*

*Grab the pleasure of the moment, for Adam did not tarry*

*More than a moment in the garden of Paradise.*

Qushayri states that what is meant by the sufi being the 'son of his Moment' is that he performs whatever has upmost priority for him in the 'state' (*hal*) he is in; and what is meant by 'the Moment is a sharp sword' is that the requirement (*hukm*) of each Moment is cutting and decisive; to fail to meet it is fatal.

### **2 & 3. Hal (State) and Maqam (Position):**

Well-known amongst the terms of *'irfan* are *hal* (state) and *maqam* (position). The State is that which descends upon the *'arif's* heart regardless of his will, while his Position is that which he earns and attains through his efforts. The State quickly passes but the Position is lasting. It is said that the States are like flashes of lightning that quickly vanish. Hafiz says:

*A lightning flash from Layla's house at dawn,*

*Goodness knows, what it did to the love-torn heart of Majnun.*

*And Sa'di says:*

*Someone asked of he who had lost his son,*

*O enlightened soul, O wise old man,*

*All the way from Egypt you smelt his shirt,*

*Why could you not see him in the well of Canaan.*

*Said he, my State is like a lightning flash,*

*A moment it's there, another moment gone;*

*Often it lifts me to the highest sky,*

*And often I see not what is at my feet.*

*Should a dervish in his State persist,*

*The two worlds will lie in his hands.*

Above we have already quoted the following sentence from the Nahj al-balaghah which is relevant here too:

He has revived his intellect and slain his self, until his (bodily and spiritual) bulkiness shrunk and his coarseness turned into tenderness. Then an effulgence, like brilliant flash of lightning, shone into his heart and illuminated the path before him.... (*Nahj al-balaghah*, Khutab, No. 220, p. 337)

The *'urafa'* call these flashes *lawai'h*, *lawami'* and *tawali'* depending upon their degree of intensity and length of duration.

#### **4 & 5. Qabd (Contraction) and Bast (Expansion):**

These two words are also amongst those to which the *'urafa'* apply a special meaning, They refer to two contrasting spiritual states of the *'arif's* soul; *qabd* (contraction) refers to a sense of desolation felt by it, while *bast* (expansion) is a state of expansion and joy. The *'urafa'* have discussed these two states and their respective causes extensively.

#### **6 & 7. Jam (Gatheredness) and Farq (Separation):**

These two terms are much used by the *'urafa'*. According to Qushayri: 'That which is on the part of the creature and acquired by the creature and worthy of the station of creaturehood is called *farq*; while that which is on the part of God- such as inspiration - is called *jam'*. He whom God makes halt at the station (*maqam*) of obedience and worship is at the station of *farq*; and he upon whom God reveals His favours is at the station of *jam'*.

Hafiz says:

*Listen to me with the ear of awareness and for pleasure strive,*

*For these words came at dawn from the caller unseen;*

*Stop thinking of 'separation' that you become 'gathered'*

*For, as a rule, the angel enters as soon as the Devil leaves.*

#### **8 & 9. Ghaybah (Absence) and Hudur (Presence):**

Ghaybah is a state of unawareness of creation that occasionally descends upon the *'arif*, in which he forgets himself and his surroundings. The *'arif* becomes unaware of himself due to his presence (*hudur*) before God. In the words of a poet:

I am not so occupied with you, O of heavenly face,

For the memories of bygone selfhood still flash within my heart.

In this state of 'presence' with God and 'absence' from himself and his surroundings, it is possible that important occurrences take place around him without his becoming aware of them. In this connection the *'urafa'* have many famous stories. Qushayri writes that Abu Hafs al-Haddad of Nishabur left his trade as a blacksmith because of one incident. Once as he was busy working in his shop, someone recited a verse of the Holy Quran. This put al-Haddad in a state that rendered him totally heedless of his sensible surroundings. Without realizing it he removed a piece of red-hot iron from the furnace with his bare hand. His apprentice cried out to him and he returned to his senses. Thereupon he gave up that trade.

Qushayri also writes that al-Shibli once came to see Junayd while Junayd's wife was also sitting there. Junayd's wife made a movement as if to leave, but Junayd stopped her saying that al-Shibli was in a 'state', and heedless of her. She sat a while. Junayd conversed with al-Shibli for some time until al-Shibli slowly began to cry. Junayd then turned to his wife telling her to veil herself for al-Shibli was returning to his senses.

Hafiz says:

*As every report that I heard has led to perplexity,*

*From now on it is me, the cupbearer, and the state of heedlessness.*

*If it is presence you want do not be absent from Him, Hafiz*

*When you meet what you desire, abandon the world and forget it.*

It is along these lines that the *'urafa'* explain the states of the *awliya'* during their prayers, in which they became totally heedless of themselves and of their surroundings. Later we shall see that there is a level higher than 'absence', and it was this that the *awliya'* were subject to.

### **10,11,12 & 13. Dhawq, Shurb, Sukr and Riyy:**

The *'urafa'* believe that mere conceptual knowledge of anything has no attraction; the attractiveness of a thing and the ability to inspire passion is subsequent to 'tasting'. At the end of the eighth section of his *al-Isharat* Ibn Sina mentions this; he gives the example of a man who is impotent. He says that however much one may describe sexual pleasure to a person devoid of the sexual instinct, who has never had the taste of this pleasure, he will never be sexually aroused. Thus *dhawq* is the tasting of pleasure. In the terminology of *'irfan* it means the actual perception of the pleasure derived from manifestations (*tajalliyat*) and revelations (*mukashafat*). *Dhawq* is the beginning of this, its continuance is called shurb (*drinking*), its joy *sukr* (intoxication) and being satiated with it *riyy* (thirst-quenching).

The *'urafa'* are of the view that whatever is derived from *dhawq* is 'an appearance of intoxication' (*tasakur*) and not 'intoxication' (*sukr*) itself. Intoxication, they say, is obtained from 'drinking' (*shurb*). That which is obtained by 'becoming quenched' (*riyy*) is 'sobriety' (*sahw*), or the return to the senses.

It is in this sense that the *'urafa'* have talked much about *sharab* and *mey* that would ordinarily mean wine.

#### **14, 15 & 16. Mahw, Mahq, and Sahw:**

In the *'urafa'*'s discourses, the words *mahw* (effacement) and *sahw* (sobriety) are very common. What is meant by *mahw* is that the *'arif* reaches such a stage that his ego becomes effaced in the Divine Essence.

He no more perceives his own ego as others do. And if this effacement reaches such a point that the effects of his ego are also effaced, they call this *mahq* (obliteration). *Mahw* and *mahq* are both higher than the stage of *ghaybah*, as indicated above. *Mahw* and *mahq* mean *fana'* (annihilation). Yet it is possible for an *'arif* to return from the state of *fana'* to the state of *baqa'* (abiding in God). It does not however, mean a retrogression from a higher state; rather it means that the *'arif* finds subsistence in God. This state, loftier even than *mahw* and *mahq*, is called *sahw*.

#### **17. Khawatir (Thoughts):**

The *'urafa'* call the thoughts and inspirations cast into their hearts *waridat* (arrivals). These *waridat* are sometimes in the form of states of 'contraction' or 'expansion', joy or sadness, and sometimes in the form of words and speech. In the latter case they are called *khawatir* (sing. *khatirah*). It is as if someone inside him is speaking to the *'arif*.

The *'urafa'* have much to say on the subject of *khawatir*. They say that they can be *rahmani* (i.e. from God), *shaytani* (inspired by the Devil) or *nafsani* (musings of the self). The *khawatir* constitute one of the dangers of the path, for it is possible that due to some deviation or error the Devil may come to dominate the human being. In the words of the Quran:

***Verily the satans inspire their friends ... (6: 121)***

They say that the more adept should be able to discern whether the *khatirah* is from God or from the Devil. The fundamental criterion is to see what a particular *khatirah* commands or prohibits; if its command or prohibition is contrary to the dicta of the Shari'ah, then it is definitely satanic. The Quran says:

***Shall I inform you upon whom the Satans descend ? They descend upon every lying, sinful one. (26:221-222)***

## 18.,19. & 20. Qalb, Ruh and Sirr:

The 'urafa' have different words for the human soul; sometimes they call it *nafs* (self), sometimes *qalb* (heart), sometimes *ruh* (spirit) and sometimes *sirr* (mystery). When the human soul is dominated and ruled by desires and passions they call it *nafs*. When it reaches the stage of bearing Divine knowledge, it is called *qalb*. When the light of Divine love dawns within it, they call it *ruh*. And when it reaches the stage of *shuhud*, they call it *sirr*. Of course, the 'urafa' believe in levels beyond this, which they call *khafi* (the 'hidden') and *akhfa* (the 'most hidden').

1. al-Qushayri, Risalah, p. 33

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