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Part 1: An Introduction to Irfan by Shahid Murtadha Mutahhari

This short introduction to *irfan* is a part of the author's book *Ashnai ba ulum e Islami* (An Introduction to the Islamic Sciences) written in seven parts:

1) logic,
2) philosophy,
3) *kalam*,
4) *irfan*,
5) *fiqh*,
6) *usul al fiqh*,
7) *hikmat al amali* (ethics).

'Irfan is one of the disciplines that originated within the realm of Islamic culture and developed there to attain a high level of sophistication. But before we can begin to discuss *'irfan*, we must realize that it can be approached from two viewpoints: the social and the academic. Unlike the scholars of other Islamic disciplines – such as the Quranic commentators (*mufassirun*), the scholars of *hadith* (*muhaddithun*), the jurisprudents (*fuqaha'*), the theologians (*mutakallimun*), the philosophers, the men of literature, and the poets – the *'urafa'* are a group of scholars who have not only developed their own science, *'irfan*, producing great scholars and important books, but have also given rise within the Islamic world to a distinct social grouping. In this the *'urafa'* are unique; for the scholars of the other Islamic disciplines – such as the jurisprudents, for instance – form solely academic groupings and are not viewed as a social group distinct from the rest of society.

In view of this distinction the gnostics, when referred to as belonging to a certain academic discipline, are called *'urafa'* and when referred to as a social group are generally called *Sufis* (*mutasawwifah*).

The *'urafa'* and *sufis* are not regarded as forming a separate sect in Islam, nor do they claim themselves to be such. They are to be found within every Islamic school and sect, yet, at the same time, they coalesce to form a distinct social group. The factors that set them apart from the rest of Islamic society

are a distinctive chain of ideas and opinions, a special code governing their social intercourse, dress and even, sometimes, the way they wear their hair and beards, and their living communally in their hospices. (Pers. *Khaniqah*; *Ar-ribat*, *zawiyah*; Turk. *tekkiye*)

Of course, there are and have always been *'urafa'* – particularly amongst the Shi'ah – who bear none of these external signs to distinguish them socially from others; yet, at the same time, they have been profoundly involved in the spiritual methodology of *'irfan* (*sayr wa suluk*). It is these who are the real gnostics; not those who have invented for themselves hundreds of special mannerisms and customs and have brought innovations into being.

In this series of lectures, in which we are taking a general look at Islamic sciences and disciplines, we will not be dealing with the social and sectarian aspect of gnosis, that is to say, *tasawwuf* (sufism). We will limit ourselves to an examination of *'irfan* as a discipline and branch amongst the branches of Islam's scientific culture. To look thoroughly at the social aspects of sufism would require us to examine its causes and origins, the effects – positive and negative, beneficial and detrimental – it has and has had upon Islamic society, the nature of the relations between the *sufis* and other Islamic groups, the hue it has given to the whole of Islamic teachings, and the role it has played in the diffusion of Islam throughout the world. This is far beyond the range of these lectures, and here we will consider the tradition of *'irfan* only as a science and as one of the academic disciplines of Islam.

'Irfan, as a scientific and academic discipline, itself has two branches: the practical and the theoretical. The practical aspect of *'irfan* describes and explains the relationship and responsibilities the human being bears towards itself, towards the world and towards God. Here, *'irfan* is similar to ethics (*akhlaq*), both of them being practical sciences. There do exist differences, however, and later we will explain them.

The practical teaching of *'irfan* is also called the itinerary of the spiritual path (*sayr wa suluk*; lit. 'traveling and journeying'). Here, the wayfarer (*salik*) who desires to reach the goal of the sublime peak of humanness – that is to say, *tawhid* – is told where to set off, the ordered stages and stations that he must traverse, the states and conditions he will undergo at these stations, and the events that will befall him. Needless to say, all these stages and stations must be passed under the guidance and supervision of a mature and perfect example of humanity who, having traveled this path, is aware of the manners and ways of each station. If not, and there is no perfect human being to guide him on his path, he is in danger of going astray.

The perfect man, the master, who must necessarily accompany the novice on the spiritual journey according to the *'urafa'*, has been called in their vocabulary as *Ta'ir al-quds* (the Holy Bird) and Khidr:

Accompany my zeal on the path, O Ta'ir al-Quds,

The path to the goal is long, and I new to the journey.

Leave not this stage without the company of Khidr,

There is darkness ahead; be afraid of losing the way.

Of course, there is a world of difference between the *tawhid* of the *'arif* and the general view of *tawhid.* For the *'arif, tawhid* is the sublime peak of humanness and the final goal of his spiritual journey, while for the ordinary people, and even the philosophers, *tawhid* means the essential Unity of the Necessary Being. For the *'arif, tawhid* means that the ultimate reality is only God, and everything other than God is mere appearance, not reality. The *'arif's tawhid* means that 'other than God there is nothing'. For the *'arif, tawhid* means following a path and arriving at the stage when he sees nothing but God. However, this view of *tawhid* is not accepted by the opponents of the *'urafa'*, and some of them have declared such a view to be heretic. Yet the *'urafa'* are convinced that this is the only true *tawhid*, and that the other stages of it cannot be said to be free of polytheism (*shirk*).

The *'urafa'* do not see the attainment of the ideal stage of *tawhid* to be the function of reason and reflection. Rather they consider it to be the work of the heart, and attained through struggle, through the journeying, and through purifying and disciplining the self.

This, however, is the practical aspect of *'irfan*, which is not unlike ethics in this respect, for both discuss a series of things that 'ought to be done'. However, there are differences, and the first of these is that *'irfan* discusses the human being's relationship with itself, with the world and with God, and its primal concern is man's relationship with God. Systems of ethics, on the other hand, do not all consider it necessary for the relationship between man and God to be discussed; it is only the religious ethical systems that give importance and attention to this matter.

The second difference is that the methodology of spiritual progression, *sayr wa suluk*, as the words *sayr* (traveling) and *suluk* (journeying) imply, is a dynamic one, while ethics is static. That is, *'irfan* speaks about a point of departure, a destination, and the stages and stations which, in their correct order, the wayfarer must traverse in order to arrive at the final destination. In the *'arif's* view, there really is a path before the human being – a path that is actual and not in the least a metaphor – and this path must be followed stage by stage, station by station; to arrive at any station without having traversed the preceding one is, in the *'arif's* view, impossible. Thus the *'arif* views the human soul to be a living organism, like a seedling or like a child, whose perfection lies in growth and maturation in accordance with a particular system and order.

In ethics, however, the subjects are handled solely as a series of virtues, such as righteousness, honesty, sincerity, chastity, generosity, justice, and preferring others over oneself (*ithar*), to name but a few, with which the soul must be adorned. In the view of ethics, the human soul is rather like a house to be furnished with a series of beautiful objects, pictures and decorations, and no importance is attached to a particular sequence. It is not important where one begins or where one ends. It is of no consequence whether one starts at the ceiling or at the walls, at the top of a wall or at the bottom and so

on. On the contrary, in *'irfan* the ethical elements are discussed in a dynamic perspective.

The third difference between these two disciplines is that the spiritual elements of ethics are limited to concepts and ideas that are generally commonplace, while the spiritual elements of *'irfan* are much more profound and expansive. In the spiritual methodology of *'irfan*, much mention is made of the heart and the states and happenings it will experience, and these experiences are known only to the wayfarer of the path during the course of his struggles and his journey on the path, while other people have no idea of these states and happenings.

The other branch of *'irfan* is related to interpretation of being, that is, God, the universe, and the human being. Here *'irfan* resembles philosophy, for both seek to understand existence, whereas practical *'irfan* seeks, like ethics, to change the human being. However, just as there are differences between practical *'irfan* and ethics, so also there exist differences between theoretical *'irfan* and philosophy, and in the following section we will explain these differences.

Theoretical Irfan

Theoretical *'irfan*, as said before, is concerned with ontology, and discusses God, the world, and the human being. This aspect of *'irfan* resembles theological philosophy (*falsafeh-ye ilahi*), which also seeks to describe being. Like theological philosophy, *'irfan* also defines its subject, essential principles and problems, but whereas philosophy relies solely upon rational principles for its arguments, *'irfan* bases its deductions on principles discovered through mystic experience (*kashf*) and then reverts to the language of reason to explain them.

The rationalistic deductions of philosophy can be likened to studying a passage written originally in the same language; the arguments of *'irfan*, on the other hand, are like studying something that has been translated from some other language in which it was originally written. To be more precise, the *'arif* wishes to explain those things which he claims to have witnessed with his heart and his entire being by using the language of reason.

The ontology of *'irfan* is in several ways profoundly different from the ontology of philosophers. In the philosopher's view, both God and other things have reality, with the difference that while God is the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*) and Existing-By-Himself, things other than God are only possible existents (*mumkin al-wujud*), existing- through-another, and are effects of the Necessary Being. However, the *'arif's* ontology has no place for things other than God as existing alongside Him, even if they are effects of which He is the cause; rather, the Divine Being embraces and encompasses all things. That is to say, all things are names, qualities, and manifestations of God, not existents alongside Him.

The aim of the philosopher also differs from that of the *'arif.* The philosopher wishes to understand the world; he wishes to form in his mind a correct and relatively complete picture of the realm of existence.

The philosopher considers the highest mark of human perfection to lie in perceiving, by way of reason, the exact nature of existence, so that the macrocosm finds a reflection within his mind while he in turn becomes a rational microcosm. Thus it is said when defining philosophy that: [Philosophy is] the (final) development of a rational knower (*'alim*) into an actual world (*'alam*).

This means that philosophy is a study whereby a human being becomes a rational microcosm similar to the actual macrocosm. But the *'arif,* on the other hand, would have nothing to do with reason and understanding; he wishes to reach the very kernel and reality of existence, God, to become connected to it and witness it.

In the *'arif's* view, human perfection does not mean having a picture of the realm of existence in one's mind; rather it is to return, by means of treading the spiritual path of progression, to the origin from which one has come, to overcome the separation of distance between oneself and the Divine Essence, and, in the realm of nearness, to obliterate one's finite self to abide in Divine Infinitude.

The tools of the philosopher are reason, logic and deduction, while the tools of the *'arif* are the heart, spiritual struggle, purification and disciplining of the self, and an inner dynamism.

Later, when we come to the world-view of *'irfan*, we shall also discuss how it differs from the world-view of philosophy.

'Irfan, both practical and theoretical, is closely connected with the holy religion of Islam. Like every other religion - in fact more than any other religion - Islam has explained the relationships of man with God, with the world, and with himself; and it has also given attention to describing and explaining existence.

Now, the question inevitably arises here about the relation between the ideas of *'irfan* and the teachings of Islam. Of course, the *'urafa'* never claim that they have something to say that is above or beyond Islam, and they are earnest in their denials of any such imputations. In fact, they claim to have discovered more of the realities of Islam, and that they are the true Muslims. Whether in the practical teaching of *'irfan* or the theoretical, the *'urafa'* always support their views by referral to the Quran, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Imams, and the practice of the eminent amongst the Prophet's Companions.

However, others have held different views about the *'urafa'*, and these may be mentioned:

(**a**) A group of *muhaddithun* and jurisprudents has been of the view that the *'urafa'* are not practically bound to Islam, and that their referrals to the Quran and the Sunnah are merely a ruse to deceive the simple-minded people and to draw to themselves the hearts of the Muslims. This group is of the view that *'irfan*, basically, has no connection with Islam.

(**b**) A group of modernists who do not have favorable relations with Islam and are ready to give a tumultuous welcome to anything that gives the appearance of freedom from the observances prescribed

by the Shari'ah (*ibahah*) and which can be interpreted as a movement or uprising in the past against Islam and its laws, like the first group, believe that in practice the *'urafa'* had no faith or belief in Islam, and that *'irfan* and *tasawwuf* was a movement of the non-Arab peoples against Islam and the Arabs, disguised under the robes of spirituality.

This group and the first are united in their view that the *'urafa'* are opposed to Islam. The difference between them is that the first group considers Islam to be sacred and, by banking on the Islamic sentiments of the Muslim masses, wishes to condemn the *'urafa'* and, in this way, to hoot them off from the stage of the Islamic sciences. The second group, however, by leaning on the great personalities of the *'urafa'*- some of whom are of world-renown - wishes to use them as a means of propaganda against Islam. They detract Islam on the grounds that the subtle and sublime ideas of *'irfan* found in Islamic culture are in fact alien to Islam. They consider that these elements entered Islamic culture from outside, for, they say, Islam and its ideas thrive on a far lower level. This group also claims that the *'urafa'*s citations of the Quran and *hadith* were solely due to dissimulation and fear of the masses. This, they claim, was a means for them to save their lives.

(**c**) Besides the above two, there is also a third group which takes a rather neutral view of *'irfan*. The view of this group is that *'irfan* and sufism contain many innovations and deviations that do not accord with the Quran and the traditions; that this is more true of the practical teaching of *'irfan* than its theoretical ideas, especially where it takes a sectarian aspect. Yet, they say, the *'urafa'*, like the Islamic scholars of other ranks and the majority of Islamic sects, have had the most sincere intentions towards Islam, never wishing to make any assertions contrary to its teachings. It is quite possible that they have made mistakes, in the same way as the other types of scholars - theologians, philosophers, Quranic commentators, and jurisprudents - have made mistakes, but this has never been due to an evil intention towards Islam.

In the view of this group, the issue of the *'urafa'*s supposed opposition to Islam was raised by those who harbored a special prejudice either against *'irfan* or against Islam. If a person were to disinterestedly study the books of the *'urafa'*, provided that he is acquainted with their terminology and language, although he might come across many a mistake, he will not doubt the sincerity of their complete devotion to Islam.

Of the three views, I prefer the third. I do not believe that the *'urafa'* have had evil intentions towards Islam. At the same time I believe that it is necessary for those having specialized knowledge of *'irfan* and of the profound teachings of Islam to undertake an objective research and disinterested study of the conformity of the issues of *'irfan* with Islamic teachings.

Shari'ah, Tariqah and Haqiqah

One of the important points of contention between the *'urafa'* and the non-*'urafa'*, especially the jurisprudents, is the particular teaching of *'irfan* regarding the Shari'ah, the Tariqah (the Way) and the

Haqiqah (the Reality). Both agree in saying that the Shari'ah, the body of Islamic laws, is based upon a series of realities and beneficial objectives. The jurisprudents generally interpret these goals to consist of certain things that lead the human being to felicity, that is, to the highest possible level of benefit from God's material and spiritual favors to man. The *'urafa'*, on the other hand, believe that all the paths end in God, and that all goals and realities are merely the means, causes and agencies that impel the human being towards God.

The jurisprudents say only that underlying the laws of the Shariah is a series of benign objectives, that these objectives constitute the cause and spirit of the Shari'ah, and that the only way of attaining these objectives is to act in accordance with the Shari'ah. But the *'urafa'* believe that the realities and objectives underlying the laws of the Shari'ah are of the nature of stations and stages on the human being's ascent towards God and in the process of man's access to the ultimate reality.

The *'urafa'* believe that the esoteric aspect of the Shari'ah is the Way, the Tariqah, at whose end is the Reality (al-Haqiqah), that is *tawhid* (in the sense mentioned earlier), which is a stage acquired after the obliteration of the *'arif's* self and his egoism. Thus the gnostic believes in three things: the Shari'ah, the Tariqah, and the Haqiqah, and that the Shari'ah is the means to, or the shell of the Tariqah, and the Tariqah again is the means to or the shell of the kernel of Haqiqah.

We have explained how the jurisprudents view Islam in the lectures on *kalam*.[1] They believe that the Islamic teachings can be grouped into three branches. The first of these is *kalam*, which deals with the principal doctrines (*usul al-'aqa'id*). In matters related to the doctrines it is necessary for the human being to acquire, through reason, shakeless belief and faith.

The second branch is ethics (*akhlaq*). It sets forth the instructions about one's duty in regard to ethical virtues and vices.

The third branch, *fiqh*, deals with the laws (*ahkam*), which relate to our external actions and behavior.

These three branches of Islamic teachings are separate from each other. The branch of *kalam* is related to thought and reason; the branch of *akhlaq* is related to the self, its faculties and habits; and the branch of *fiqh* is related to the organs and limbs of the body.

However, on the subject of doctrines, the *'urafa'* do not consider merely mental and rational belief to be sufficient. They claim that whatever is to be believed in must be arrived at; one must strive to remove the veils between oneself and those realities.

Similarly, with respect to the second branch they do not consider ethics to be adequate on account of its being static and limited. In place of a philosophical ethics, they suggest a spiritual methodology (*sayr wa suluk*) with its particular composition.

Finally, in the third branch, they have no criticisms; only in specific instances do they express opinions

that could, possibly, be taken as being opposed to the laws of *fiqh*.

These three branches are, therefore, termed by the *'urafa'* as Shari'ah, Tariqah, and Haqiqah. Yet they believe that in exactly the same way as the human being cannot be divided into three sections, that is, the body, the self, and reason, which are not separate from each other and form an indivisible whole of which they constitute inward and outward aspects, so it is with the Shari'ah, the Tariqah, and the Haqiqah. One is outward shell, another is inward kernel, and the third is the kernel of the kernel. There is a difference, however, in that the *'urafa'* consider the stages of human existence to be more than three; that is, they believe in a stage that transcends the domain of reason. God willing, this shall be explained later.

The Origins of Islamic 'Irfan

In order to understand any discipline or science, it is essential to study its history and the historical developments associated with it. One must also be acquainted with the personalities who have originated or inherited it and with its source books. In this lecture, and the fourth one, we will turn to these matters.

The first issue to arise is whether Islamic *'irfan* is a discipline that originated in the Islamic tradition, such as *fiqh*, *usul al-fiqh*, *tafsir*, and *'ilm al-hadith*. That is, is it one of those disciplines that were originated by the Muslims who, having received in Islam the original inspiration, sources and raw material, developed them by discovering their rules and principles? Or is it one of those sciences that found their way into the Islamic world from outside, like medicine and mathematics, which were then developed further by the Muslims in the environment of Islamic civilization and culture? Or is there a third possibility?

The *'urafa'* themselves maintain the first of these alternatives, and are in no way ready to admit any other. Some orientalists, however, have insisted – and some still insist – on the second view that *'irfan* and its subtle and sublime ideas have come into the Islamic world from outside. Sometimes they maintain a Christian origin for it, and claim that mysticism in Islam is the result of early contact of the Muslims with Christian monks. At other times they claim it to be a result of the Persians' reaction against Islam and the Arabs. Then again sometimes they make it entirely a product of Neo-Platonism, which itself was composed of the ideas of Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras, influenced by Alexandrian gnosticism and the views and beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. Sometimes they claim it to be derived from Buddhism. Similarly, the opponents of *'irfan* in the Islamic world also strive to show the whole of *'irfan* and sufism as being alien to Islam, and for this purpose they too maintain that gnosis has non-Islamic origins.

A third view admits that *'irfan*, whether practical or theoretical, draws its primary inspiration and material from Islam itself; having taken this material, it has tried to give it a structure by devising certain rules and principles and in this process has also been influenced by external currents, specially the ideas of scholasticism and philosophy, especially of the Illuminationist school. Now there are a number of

questions which arise in this context. Firstly, to what extent have the *'urafa'* been successful in developing correct rules and principles for structuring their material? Have the *'urafa'* been as successful in carrying this out as the jurisprudents? To what extent have the *'urafa'* felt themselves bound not to deviate from the actual principles of Islam? And, similarly, to what extent has *'irfan* been influenced by the ideas of outside traditions? Has *'irfan* assimilated these external ideas by shaping them in its particular moulds, and used them in its development? Or, contrarily, have the waves of these foreign currents carried away *'irfan* in their flow?

Each of these questions requires a separate study and careful research. But that which is certain is that *'irfan* has derived its basic sources of inspiration from Islam itself and from nowhere else. Let us consider this point.

Those who accept the first view, and to some extent also those who take the second view, see Islam as being a simple religion, popular and unsophisticated, free of all sorts of mysteries and difficult or unintelligible profundities. To them, the doctrinal system of Islam rests on *tawhid* (monotheism), which means that just as a house has a builder other than itself, so the world has a transcendent Creator other than itself. Also, the basis of man's relationship with the enjoyments of this world is, in their view, *zuhd* (abstinence). In their definition of *zuhd*, it means refraining from the ephemeral pleasures of this world in order to attain the everlasting enjoyments of the Hereafter. Besides these, there are a series of simple and practical rituals and laws that are handled by *fiqh*.

Therefore, in this group's view, that which the *'urafa'* call *tawhid* is an idea that goes beyond the simple monotheism of Islam; for the *'arif's* view of *tawhid* is existentialist monism in the sense that he believes that nothing exists except God, His Names, Attributes, and manifestations.

The *'arif's* conception of the spiritual path (*sayr wa suluk*), likewise, they say, also goes beyond the *zuhd* enjoined by Islam, for the spiritual path of *'irfan* involves a number of ideas and concepts – such as love of God, annihilation in God, epiphany – that are not to be found in Islamic piety.

Similarly, the *'arif's* concept of the Tariqah goes beyond the Shari'ah of Islam; for the practice of the Tariqah involves matters unknown to *fiqh*.

Furthermore, in the view of this group, the pious among the Holy Prophet's Companions whom the *'urafa'* claim to be their precursors were no more than pious men. Their souls knew nothing of the spiritual path of *'irfan* and its *tawhid*. They were simple otherworldly people who abstained from worldly pleasures and directed their attention to the Hereafter and whose souls were dominated by mixed feelings of fear and hope – fear of the punishment of Hell and hope of the rewards of Paradise. That is all.

In reality this view can in no way be endorsed. The primal sources of Islam are far more extensively richer than what this group – out of ignorance or knowingly – supposes. Neither the Islamic concept of *tawhid* is as simple and empty as they suppose, nor Islam limits man's spirituality to a dry piety, nor were the pious Companions of the Holy Prophet simple ascetics, nor is the Islamic code of conduct confined

to the actions of bodily limbs and organs.

In this lecture, brief evidence will be produced that will suffice to show that Islam's fundamental teachings are capable of having inspired a chain of profound spiritual ideas, both in the theoretical and the practical realms of *'irfan*. However, the question of the extent to which the Islamic mystics have used and benefited from Islam's fundamental teachings and the extent to which they may have deviated, is one that we cannot go into in these short lectures.

On the subject of *tawhid*, the Holy Quran never likens God and the creation to a builder and a house. The Quran identifies God as the Creator of the world, stating at the same time that His Holy Essence is everywhere and with everything:

Wither so ever you turn, there is the Face of God.... (***2:115***)

... And We are nearer to him than the jugular vein. (***50:16***)

He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; .... (***57:3***)

Evidently, these kinds of verses represent a call to the thinking minds to a conception of *tawhid* which goes beyond commonplace monotheism. A tradition of al-Kafi states that God revealed the opening verses of the Sura al-Hadid and the Sura al-'Ikhlas because He knew that in future generations there will emerge people who will think profoundly about *tawhid*.

As to the spiritual path of *'irfan*, in which a series of stages leading to ultimate nearness to God are conceived, it suffices to take into account the Quranic verses which mention such notions as *liqa 'Allah* (meeting with God), *ridwan Allah* (God's good pleasure), or those which relate to revelation (*wahy*), *ilham* (inspiration), and the angels' speaking to others who are not prophets - for instance, Mary - and especially the verses relating to the Holy Prophet's Ascension (***mi'raj; 17:1***).

In the Quran there is mention of the 'commanding self' (***al-nafs al-'ammarah; 12:53***), the 'self-accusative self' (***al-nafs al-lawwamah; 75:2***), and the 'contented self' (***al-nafs al-mutma'innah; 89:27***). There is mention of 'acquired knowledge' (***al-'ilm al-'ifadi***) and inspired knowledge (***al-'ilm al-ladunni; 18:65***), and of forms of guidance resulting from spiritual struggle:

And those who struggle in Us, We will surely guide them to Our paths ... (***29:69***)

Mention is made in the Quran of the purification of the self, and it is counted as one of the things leading to salvation and deliverance:

(***By the self***) ***... verily he who purifies it has succeeded, while he who corrupts it has indeed failed.*** (***91:7-10***)

There is also repeated mention there of love of God as a passion above all other human loves and

attractions.

The Quran also speaks about all the particles of creation glorifying and praising God (***17:44***), and this is phrased in a way to imply that if one were to perfect his understanding, he would be able to perceive their praise and magnification of God. Moreover, the Quran raises the issue of the Divine breath in relation to the nature and constitution of the human being (***32:9***).

This, and much more besides, is sufficient to have inspired a comprehensive and magnificent spirituality regarding God, the world, and man, particularly regarding his relationship with God.

As previously mentioned, we are not considering how the Muslim *'urafa'* have made use of these resources, or whether their utilization has been correct or incorrect. We are considering whether there did exist such great resources that could have provided effective inspiration for *'irfan* in the Islamic world. Even if we suppose that those usually classed as *'urafa'* could not make proper use of them, others who are not classed as such did make use of them.

In addition to the Quran, the traditions, sermons, supplications (*du'a'*), polemical dialogues (*ihtijajat*)* and the biographies of the great figures of Islam, all show that the spiritual life current in the early days of Islam was not merely a lifeless type of asceticism blended with a worship performed in the hope of the rewards of Paradise. Concepts and notions are found in the traditions, sermons, supplications, and polemical dialogues that stand at a very high level of sublimity. Similarly, the biographies of the leading personalities of the early days of Islam display many instances of spiritual ecstasy, visions, occurrences, inner insights, and burning spiritual love. We will now relate an example of it.

Al-Kafi relates that one morning after performing the dawn prayer, a young man (*Harithah ibn Malik ibn Nu'man al-'Ansari*) caught the Prophet's eye. Lean and pale, his eyes sunken, he gave the impression of being unaware of his own condition and of being unable to keep his balance. "How are you?" inquired the Prophet . "I have attained certain faith," the youth replied. "What is the sign of your certainty?" the Prophet asked.

The youth replied that his certainty had immersed him in grief. It kept him awake at night (in worship) and thirsty by day (in fasting), and had separated him from the world and its matters so completely that it seemed to him as if he could see the Divine Throne already set up (on the Judgment Day) to settle the people's accounts, that he together with all of mankind were raised from the dead. He said that it seemed to him that even at that moment he could see the people of Paradise enjoying its bounties, and the people of hell suffering torments and he could hear the roar of its flames.

The Holy Prophet (S) turned to his Companions and told them, "This is a man whose heart has been illuminated with the light of faith by God". Then he said to the youth, "Preserve this condition you are in, and do not let it be taken away from you." "Pray for me," the youth replied, "that God may grant me martyrdom."

Not long after this encounter, a battle took place, and the youth, taking part, was granted his wish and was martyred.

The life, utterances and prayers of the Holy Prophet (S) are rich with spiritual enthusiasm and ecstasy, and full of the indications of gnosis, and the *'urafa'* often rely on the Prophet's supplications as reference and evidence for their views.

Similarly, the words of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A), to whom nearly all the *'urafa'* and *sufis* trace the origin of their orders, are also spiritually inspiring. I wish to draw attention to two passages of the Nahj al-balaghah. In Khutbah No. 222, 'Ali states:

Certainly, God, the glorified, has made His remembrance the means of burnishing the hearts, which makes them hear after deafness, see after blindness, and makes them submissive after unruliness. In all the periods and times when there were no prophets, there have been individuals with whom God - precious are His bounties - spoke in whispers through their conscience and intellects.

In Khutbah No. 220, speaking about the men of God, he says:

He revives his intellect and mortifies his self, until his body becomes lean and his coarseness turns into refinement. Then an effulgence of extreme brightness shines forth for illuminating the path before him, opening all the doors and leading him straight to the gate of safety and the (permanent) abode. His feet, carrying his body, become fixed in the position of safety and comfort on account of that which engages his heart and on having won the good pleasure of his Lord.

The Islamic supplications, especially those of the Shi'ah, are also replete with spiritual teachings. The Du'a' Kumayl, the Du'a' Abi Hamzah, the supplications of al-Sahifat al-Kamilah and the group of supplications called Sha'baniyyah, all contain the most sublime spiritual ideas.

With the existence of all these resources in Islam, is there a need for us to search for the origin of Islamic *'irfan* elsewhere?

This reminds us of the case of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari and his protest against the tyrants of his time and his vocal criticism of their practices. Abu Dharr was severely critical of the favoritism, partisan politics, injustice, corruption and tyranny of the post-Prophetic era in which he lived. This led him to suffer torture and exile, and finally it was in exile, deserted and alone, that he passed away from this world.

A number of orientalists have raised the question of what motivated Abu Dharr to act as he did. They are in search of something foreign to the world of Islam to explain his behavior.

George Jurdaq, a Lebanese Christian, provides an answer to these orientalists in his book *al-'Imam 'Ali, sawt al-'adalah al-'insaniyyah* (Imam 'Ali, the Voice of Human Justice). There he says that he is amazed at those who wish to trace Abu Dharr's mentality to an extra-Islamic source. He says it is as if they see someone standing at the side of a sea or river with a pitcher of water in his hands, and begin to wonder

from which pool he has filled his pitcher, and then, completely ignoring the nearby sea or river, go off in search of a pool or pond to explain his full pitcher of water.

What other source other than Islam could have inspired Abu Dharr? Which source could have the power of Islam in inspiring the likes of Abu Dharr to rise against the tyrants of this world such as Mu'awiyah?

Now we see a similar pattern in regard to *'irfan*. The orientalists are in search of a non-Islamic source of inspiration of *'irfan*, while they completely overlook the great ocean of Islam.

Can we really be expected to overlook all these resources - the Holy Quran, the traditions, the sermons, the polemical dialogues, the supplications, and the biographies - simply in order to give credence to the view of a group of orientalists and their Eastern followers?

Formerly, the orientalists took great pains to project the origins of Islamic *'irfan* as lying outside the original teachings of Islam. Lately, however, such individuals as the English R.A. Nicholson and the French Louis Massignon, after having made extensive studies in Islamic *'irfan*, without being unacquainted with Islam in general, have expressly admitted that the principal sources of *'irfan* are the Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah.

We will conclude this lecture by quoting a passage by Nicholson from the book The Legacy of Islam:

(Though Muhammad left no system of dogmatic or mystical theology, the Qur'an contains the raw materials of both. Being the outcome of feeling than reflection, the Prophet's statements about God are formally inconsistent, and while Muslim scholastics have embodied in their creed the aspect of transcendence, the Sufis, following his example, have combined the transcendent aspect with that of immanence, on which, though it is less prominent in the Qur'an, they naturally lay greater emphasis.)2

***'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth'* (*24:35*);**

***'He is the first and the last and the outward and the inward'* (*57:3*);**

***'there is no god but He; everything is perishing except His Face'* (*28:88*);**

***'Have breathed into him* (*man*) *of My spirit'* (*15:29*);**

***'Verily, We have created man and We know what his soul suggests to him, for We are nearer unto him than the neck-artery'* (*50:16*);**

***'wheresoever ye turn, there is the Face of Allah'* (*2:114*);**

***'he to whom Allah giveth no light hath no light at all'* (*24:40*).**

Surely the seeds of mysticism are here. And, for the early Sufis, the Qur'an is not only the Word of God: it is the primary means of drawing near to Him. By fervent prayer, by meditating profoundly on the text

as a whole and in particular on the mysterious passages (xvii: 1; liii: 1–18) concerning the Night journey and Ascension, they endeavored to reproduce the Prophet's mystical experience in themselves.[3]

... The doctrine of a mystical union imparted by divine grace goes beyond anything in the Qur'an, but is stated plainly in apocryphal traditions of the Prophet, e.g. God said, "My servant draws nigh unto Me by works of supererogation, and I love him; and when I love him, I am his ear, so that he hears by Me, and his eye, so that he sees by Me, and his tongue, so that he speaks by Me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me."[4]

As repeatedly said before, we are not concerned here with the question whether the *'urafa'* have succeeded in correctly utilizing the inspiration provided by Islam; our purpose was to consider whether the main source of their inspiration lay within Islam or outside it.

A Brief History

The previous lecture dealt with the question of locating the principal origin of Islamic *'irfan*, that is, whether there exists in the teachings of Islam and the lives of the Holy Prophet and the Imams a precedent that could have inspired a series of profound and subtle mystical ideas, on a theoretical level, and which could have prompted spiritual enthusiasm and mystical elation on a practical level. The answer to this question was seen to be positive. Now we will continue this discussion.

The genuine teachings of Islam and the lives of its spiritual leaders, so rich with spirituality and spiritual splendor, which have provided the inspiration for profound spirituality in the Islamic world, are not encompassed by that which is termed as *'irfan* or sufism. However, it is beyond the scope of these lectures to discuss other parts of Islamic teachings that do not bear this name.

We will continue our discussion on the branch that is labeled as *'irfan* or sufism, and obviously the limited scope of these lectures does not permit us to go into a critical research. Here we will try to give an outline of the currents and events that have occurred within this branch. For this purpose, it appears to be appropriate that we begin by providing a simple history of *'irfan* or Sufism from the beginnings of Islam until at least the 10th/16th century, before turning, so far as is practical in a venture such as this, to an analysis of the issues of *'irfan*.

What seems certain is that in the early era of Islam, that is throughout the 1st/7th century at least, there existed no group amongst the Muslims known as *'urafa'* or sufis. The name sufi was first used in the 2nd/8th century.

The first person to be called by the name sufi is Abu Hashim al- Kufi. He lived in the 2nd/8th century and he it was who first built at Ramlah, in Palestine, a hospice for worship by a group of ascetically-minded Muslims.[5] The date of Abu Hashim's death is not known, but he was the teacher of Sufyan al-Thawri who died in 161/777.

Abu al-Qasim Qushayri, himself an eminent *'arif* and sufi, states that the name sufi had appeared before the year 200/815. Nicholson also states that the name appeared towards the end of the 2nd century H. From a tradition contained in *kitab al-ma'ishah* (vol. V) of al-Kafi, it appears that a group - Sufyan al-Thawri and a number of others - existed in the time of al-'Imam al-Sadiq (A) (that is to say, during the first half of the 2nd century H.) who were already called by this name.

If Abu Hashim al-Kufi was the first to be called sufi, then, since he was the teacher of Sufyan al-Thawri who died in 161/777, this name was first used during the first half of the 2nd century H., not at its end (as Nicholson and others have stated). Nor does there appear to be any doubt that the reason for the name being *sufiyyah* was their wearing of wool (sufi: wool). Due to their asceticism, the *sufis* abstained from wearing fine garments, and instead followed a practice of wearing clothes made of coarse wool.

As for the date this group first began to call themselves *'urafa'*, again there is no precise information. All that is certain, as confirmed by the remarks quoted of Sari Saqati (d. 243/867)6, is that the term was current in the third century H. However, in the book *al-Luma'* of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi, one of the reliable texts of *'irfan* and sufism, a phrase is quoted of Sufyan al-Thawri which gives the impression that this term appeared sometime in the second century. 7

At all events, there was no group known as *sufis* during the first century H. This name appeared in the 2nd century H., and it seems that it was during the same century that the *sufis* emerged as a particular group, not in the third century as is the belief of some people. 8

However, even though no special group existed in the first century by the name of *'urafa'* or *sufis* or any other name, it does not imply that the eminent Companions were merely pious and ascetic persons and that all of them led lives of simple faith devoid of spiritual depth. Perhaps it is true that some of the pious Companions knew nothing more beyond mere piety and worship, yet a group of them possessed a powerful spiritual life. Nor were they all of the same level. Even Salman and Abu Dharr were not of the same degree. Salman enjoyed a degree of faith that Abu Dharr could not have withstood. Many traditions have come to us telling us:

If Abu Dharr knew what was in Salman's heart, he would (considering him a heretic) have killed him. 9

Now we will list the different generations of the *'urafa'* and *sufis* from the 2nd/8th to the 10/16th century.

'Urafa' of the Second/Eighth Century

1. Al-Hasan al-Basri

The history of what is termed as *'irfan*, like *kalam*, begins with al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728). He was born in 22/642 and lived for eighty-eight years, having spent nine-tenths of his life in the first century H.

Of course, al-Hasan al-Basri was never known by the term sufi, but there are three reasons for counting

him amongst the sufis. The first is that he compiled a book called *Ri'ayah li huquq Allah* (Observance of the Duties to Allah) 10, which can be recognized as the first book on sufism. A unique manuscript of this book exists at Oxford. Nicholson has this to say on the subject:

The first Muslim to give an experimental analysis of the inner life was Harith al-Muhasibi of Basrah ... 'The Path' (*tariqah*), as described by later writers, consists of acquired virtues (*maqamat*) and mystical states (*ahwal*). The first stage is repentance or conversion; then comes a series of others, e.g. renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, each being a preparation for the next.11

Secondly, the *'urafa'* themselves trace their orders back to al- Hasan al-Basri; and from him to 'Ali (A), such as the chain of the shaykhs of Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr.12 Similarly, Ibn al-Nadim, in his famous *al-Fihrist*, traces the chain of Abu Muhammad Ja'far al-Khuldi back to al-Hasan al-Basri, stating that al-Hasan al-Basri had met seventy of the Companions who had fought at Badr.

Thirdly, some of the stories related of al-Hasan al-Basri give the impression that he was in fact part of a group that in later times became known as sufis. We will relate some of these stories when appropriate later on.

2. Malik ibn Dinar

He was one of those who took asceticism and abstinence from pleasure to the extreme. Many stories are told about him in this regard. He died in the year 130/747.

3. Ibrahim ibn Adham

The famous story of Ibrahim ibn Adham resembles that of Buddha. It is said that he was the ruler of Balkh when something happened that caused him to repent and enter the ranks of the sufis.

'Urafa' attach great importance to this man, and a very interesting tale is told about him in Rumi's Mathnawi. He died around the year 161/777.

4. Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah

This woman is one of the wonders of her time (d. 135/752 or 185/801). She was named Rabi'ah because she was the fourth daughter of her family (*rabi'ah*: fem. gender of fourth). She is not to be confused with Rabi'ah al-Shamiyyah, who was also a mystic and a contemporary of Jami and lived in the 9th/15th century.

Lofty sayings and soaring mystical verses are recorded of Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah,' and she is noted for amazing spiritual states (*halat*).

5. Abu Hashim al-Sufi of Kufah

The date of this man's death is unknown. All that we can say is that he was the teacher of Sufyan al-

Thawri; who died in 161/777. He appears to be the first person to have been called sufi. Sufyan says about him: "If it were not for Abu Hashim I would not have known the precise details of ostentation (*riya'*)."

6. Shaqiq al-Balkhi

He was the pupil of Ibrahim ibn Adham. According to the author of *Rayhanat al-'adab*, and others quoted in *Kashf al-ghummah* of 'Ali ibn 'Isa al-'Arbili and *Nur al-'absar* of al-Shablanji, he once met al-'Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (A) and has given an account of the Imam's great station and miracles. Shaqiq died in 194/810.

7. Ma'ruf al-Karkhi

He is one of the famous *'urafa'*. It is said that his parents were Christian and that he became a Muslim at the hands of al- 'Imam al-Rida (A), learning much from him.

The lines of many orders, according to the claims of the *'urafa'*, go back to Ma'ruf, and through him to al-'Imam al-Rida, and through al- 'Imam al-Rida to the preceding Imams and thus to the Prophet himself. This chain is therefore termed the 'golden chain' (*silsilat al-dhahab*). Those known as the Dhahabiyyun generally make this claim.

8. Al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyad

Originally from Merv, he was an Iranian of Arab descent. It is said of him that at first he was a highwayman, and that as he was preparing to carry out a robbery one night he heard the voice of his potential victim, reciting the Quran. This had such an effect on him that he experienced a change of heart and repented. The book *Misbah al-Shariah* is attributed to him and it is said to consist of a series of lessons that he took from al-'Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A). This book is considered reliable by an erudite scholar of traditions of the last century, the late Hajj Mirza Husayn Nuri, in the epilogue to his *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il*. Fudayl died in 187/803.

'Urafa' of the Third/Ninth Century:

1. Abu Yazid al-Bistami (Bayazid)

One of the great mystics, it is said Bayazid was the first to speak openly of 'annihilation of the self in God' (*fana fi 'Allah'*) and 'subsistence through God' (*baqa' bi 'Allah*).

He has said "I came forth from Bayazid-ness as a snake from its skin."

His ecstatic ejaculations (*shathiyyat*) have led others to call him a heretic. However, the *'urafa'* themselves consider him one of those given to mystical 'intoxication' (*sukr*), that is, he uttered these words when he was beside himself in ecstasy.

Abu Yazid died in 261/874 or 264/877. Some have claimed that he worked as a water carrier in the house of al-'Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A). However, this claim is not supported by history; Abu Yazid was not a contemporary of the Imam.

2. Bishr ibn al-Harith al-Hafi

One of the famous sufis, he was another who led a corrupt life and then repented.

In his book *Minhaj al-karamah*, al-'Allamah al-Hilli has related an account that depicts Bishr's repentance as being at the hands of al-'Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (A), and because at the moment of his repentance he was barefoot in the street, he became known as '*al- Hafi*' (hafi=barefooted). However, others have given a different reason for his being known as al-Hafi.

Bishr al-Hafi (born near Merv c. 150/767) died in 226/840 or 227/841 in Baghdad.

3. Sari al-Saqati

One of the friends and companions of Bishr al-Hafi, Sari al-Saqati was one of those who bore affection for the creatures of God and of those who preferred others above themselves.

In his book *Wafayat al-'a'yan*, Ibn Khallikan writes that Sari once said, "It is thirty years that I have been seeking forgiveness for one phrase, Praise be Allah's, that I allowed to pass my lips." When asked to explain he replied, "One night the bazaar caught fire, and I left my house to see if the fire had reached my shop. When I heard that my shop was safe, I said, 'Praise be Allah's'. Instantly I was brought to my senses with the realization that, granted my shop was unharmed, should I not have been thinking about others'?"

Sa'di is referring to this same story (with slight variations) where he says:

One night someone's chimney kindled a fire, And I heard that half of Baghdad had burnt down. One said, thank God that in the smoke and ashes, My shop has not been damaged. A man who had seen the world replied, O selfish man, Was your grief for yourself and no other? Would you be satisfied that a town should burn down by fire, If your own dwelling were left unscathed?

Sari was the pupil and disciple (*murid*) of Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, and the teacher and maternal uncle of Junayd of Baghdad. Sari has many sayings on mystical unity (*tawhid*), love of God and other matters. It was also he who said: "Like the sun, the *'arif* shines on all the world; like the earth, he bears the good and evil of all; like water, he is the source of life for every heart; and like fire he gives his warmth to all and sundry." Sari died in 253/867 at the age of ninety-eight.

4. Harith al-Muhasibi

He was one of the friends and companions of Junayd. He was called '*al-muhasibi*' due to his great

diligence in the matter of self-observation and self-reckoning (*muhasabah*). He was a contemporary of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who, being an opponent of *'ilm al-kalam*, rejected Harith al-Muhasibi for entering into theological debates, and this led to the people avoiding him. Born in Basrah in 165/781, he died in 243/857.

5. Junayd of Baghdad

Originally from Nahaw and, the *'urafa'* and *sufis* have given Junayd the title Sayyid al-Ta'ifah, just as the Shi'ah jurisprudents call al-Shaykh al-Tusi Shaykh al-Ta'ifah.

Junayd is counted as one of the moderate mystics. The kind of ecstatic ejaculations uttered by others were never heard from his lips. He did not even put on the usual dress of the sufis, and dressed like scholars and jurisprudents. It was suggested to him that for the sake of his associates he should wear the sufi dress. He replied: "If I thought clothes were of any importance I would make an outfit of molten iron, for the call of truth is that:

There is no significance in the (sufi) cloak, Importance lies only in the (inward) glow.

Junayd's mother was the sister of Sari Saqati and Junayd became his pupil and disciple. He was also the pupil of Harith al-Muhasibi. It seems that he died in Baghdad in 298f910 at the age of ninety.

6. Dhu al-Nun al-Misri

An Egyptian, he was the pupil in jurisprudence of the famous jurisprudent Malik ibn Anas. Jami has called him the leader of the sufis. He it was who first began to use symbolic language and to explain mystical matters through the use of a symbolic terminology which only the elect could understand.

Gradually this became the standard practice, and mystical concepts were expressed in the form of love-poetry (*ghazal*) and symbolic expressions. Some believe that Dhu al-Nun also introduced many Neoplatonic ideas into *'irfan* and sufism.[13] Dhu al-Nun died in 246/860 in Cairo.

7. Sahl ibn 'Abd Allah al-Tustari

He is one of the great *'urafa'* and sufis. A sect of gnostics who consider the main principle of spirituality to be combating the self is named 'Sahliyyah' after him. He associated with Dhu al-Nun of Egypt at Mecca. He died in Basrah in 282/895. [14]

8. Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj

Now famous simply as al-Hallaj, he is one of the most controversial mystics of the Islamic world. The *shathiyyat* uttered by him are many, and he was accused of apostasy and claiming divinity. The jurisprudents pronounced him an apostate and he was crucified during the reign of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir. The *'urafa'* themselves accuse him of disclosing spiritual secrets. Hafiz has this to say about

him:

He said, that friend, who was raised high on the cross,

His crime was that he used to reveal secrets.

Some consider him no more than a juggler, but the *'urafa'* themselves absolve him and say that the statements of al-Hallaj and Bayazid that gave the impression of unbelief were made when they were beside themselves in the state of 'intoxication'.

Al-Hallaj is remembered by the *'urafa'* as a martyr. He was executed in 309/913. 15

'Urafa' of the Fourth/Tenth Century:

1. Abu Bakr al-Shibli

A pupil and disciple of Junayd of Baghdad and one who had met al-Hallaj, al-Shibli is one of the famous mystics. He was originally from Khurasan. In the book Rawdat al-jannat, and in other biographies, many mystical poems and sayings have been recorded of him.

Khawajah 'Abd Allah al-'Ansari has said: "The first person to speak in symbols was Dhu al-Nun of Egypt. Then came Junayd and he systematized this science, extended it, and wrote books on it. Al-Shibli, in his turn, took it to the pulpit." Al-Shibli; died in 334/846 at the age of 87.

2. Abu 'Ali al-Rudbari

He traced his descent to Nushirwan and the Sasanids, and was a disciple of Junayd. He studied jurisprudence under Abu al-'Abbas ibn Shurayh, and literature under Tha'lab. Due to his versatile knowledge, he was called the 'collector of the Law, the Way, and the Reality' (*jami' al-Shari'ah wa al-Tariqah wa al-Haqiqah*). He died in 322/934.

3. Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi

Abu Nasr al-Sarraj is the author of the book *al-Luma'*, one of the principal, ancient and reliable texts of *'irfan* and sufism. Many of the shaykhs of the sufi orders were his direct or indirect pupils. He passed away in 378/988 in Tus.

4. Abu Fadl ibn al-Hasan al-Sarakhsi

He was the pupil and disciple of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj, and the teacher of Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr. He was a mystic of great fame. He died in 400/1009.

5. Abu 'Abd Allah al-Rudbari:

He was the son of Abu 'Ali al-Rudbari's sister. He is counted as one of the mystics of Damascus and

Syria. He died in 369/979.

6. Abu Talib al-Makki

The fame of Abu Talib al-Makki rests largely on the book he authored on *'irfan* and sufism, *Qut al-qulub*. This book is one of the principal and earliest texts of *'irfan* and sufism. He passed away in 385/995 or 386/996.

'Urafa' of the Fifth/Eleventh Century:

1. Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Khurqani

One of the most famous *'urafa'*, the *'urafa'* relate amazing stories about him. Amongst these is one according to which he would go to the grave of Bayazid and converse with his spirit, taking his advice in solving his difficulties. Rumi says:

After many years had passed since the death of Bayazid Bu'l-Hasan appeared. Now and then he would go and sit By the side of his grave in his presence, Until came the spirit of his shaykh, And as soon as he uttered his problem, it was solved

Rumi has remembered Shaykh Abu al-Hasan a lot in his Mathnawi, which shows his devotion and attachment to him. It is said that he met with Abu 'Ali Sina, the philosopher, and with Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al- Khayr, the famous *'arif.* He died in 425/1033-34.

2. Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr

One of the most famous of all mystics, Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr is also one of those most noted for their spiritual states (*halat*). When once asked the definition of *tasawwuf,* he replied: "*Tasawwuf* is that you give up whatever is on your mind, give away whatever is in your hand, and to give over yourself to whatever you are capable of."

He met with Abu 'Ali Sina. One day Abu 'Ali participated in a meeting at which Abu Sa'id was preaching. Abu Sa'id was speaking about the necessity of deeds, and about obedience and disobedience to God. Abu 'Ali recited these verses (*ruba'i*):

We are those who have befriended your forgiveness,

And seek riddance from obedience and disobedience.

Wherever your favor and grace is to be found,

Let the not-done be like the done, the done like the not-done.

Abu Sa'id immediately replied:

O you who have done no good, and done much bad,

And then aspire after your own salvation,

Do not rely on forgiveness, for never

Was the not-done like the done, the done like the not-done.

The following ruba'i is also of Abu Sa'id:

Tomorrow when the six directions fade away,

Your worth will be the worth of your awareness.

Strive for virtue, for on the Day of Retribution,

You shall rise in the form of your qualities.

Abu Sa'id passed away in the year 440/1048.

3. Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq al-Nishaburi

He is considered one of those who combined in himself the expertise of the Shari'ah and the Tariqah. He was a preacher and an exegete (*mufassir*) of the Quran. To such an extent did he use to weep while reciting supplications (*munajat*) that he was given the title 'the lamenting shaykh' (*shaykh-e nawhahgar*). He passed away in 405/1014 or 412/1021.

4. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Hujwiri

He is the author of *Kashf al-Mahjub*, one of the famous sufi books and one which has recently been published. He died in 470/1077.

5. Khwajah 'Abd Allah al-'Ansari

A descendant of the great Companion of the Prophet, Abu Ayyub al-'Ansari, Khwajah 'Abd Allah is himself one of the most famous and pious of all *'urafa'*. His fame rests largely on his elegant aphorisms, *munajat*, and *ruba'iyyat*.

Amongst his sayings is this:

When a child you are low, when a youth you are intoxicated, when old you are decrepit; so when will you worship God?

He has also said:

Returning evil for evil is the trait of a dog; returning good for good is the trait of a donkey; returning good

for evil is the work of Khwajah 'Abd Allah al-'Ansari.

The following ruba'i is also his:

It is a great fault for a man to remain aloof,

Setting oneself above all the creation.

Learn thy lesson from the pupil of the eye,

That sees everyone but not itself.

Khwajah 'Abd Allah was born in Herat where he died and was buried in 481/1088. For this reason he is known as 'the Sage of Herat' (*Pir-e Herat*).

Khwajah 'Abd Allah authored many books, the best-known of which, *Manazil al-sa'irin*, is a didactic manual on *sayr wa suluk*. It is one of the most well-written works of *'irfan*, and many commentaries have been written on it.

6. Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali

One of the best-known scholars of Islam whose fame has penetrated the East and the West, he combined in his person the knowledge of the rational and traditional sciences (*ma'qul wa manqul*). He became head of the Nizamiyyah Academy in Baghdad and held the highest position of his age accessible to any scholar. However, feeling that neither his knowledge nor his position could satisfy his soul, he withdrew from public life and engaged in disciplining and purifying his soul.

He spent ten years in Palestine, far from all who knew him, and it was during this period that he became inclined towards *'irfan* and sufism. He never again accepted any post or position. Following his period of solitary asceticism, he wrote his famous *Ihya' 'ulum al-Din* ('Reviving the Sciences of Religion'). He died in his home city of Tus in the year 505/1111.

'Urafa' of the Sixth/Twelfth Century

1. 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani

Of the most enthusiastic of mystics, 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani was the disciple of Ahmad al-Ghazali's, younger brother of Muhammad, who was also a mystic. The author of many books, he also composed some brilliant poetry that, however, was not altogether free of theopathetic exclamations (*shathiyyat*). Charges of heresy were brought against him; he was executed, and his body burnt and his ashes cast to the winds. He was killed around 525-533/ 1131-1139.

2. Sanai Ghaznawi

A famous poet, his verse is loaded with profound mystic sentiments. Rumi, in his Mathnawi, has cited some of his sayings and expounded them. He died around the middle of the 6th/12th century.

3. Ahmad Jami

Known as "Zhand-e Pil", Jami is one of the most celebrated of *'urafa'* and sufis. His tomb lies at Turbat-e Jam, near the border between Iran and Afghanistan, and is well-known. Following lines are among the verses he composed on fear (*khawf*) and hope (*raja'*):

Be not haughty, for the mount of many a mighty man

Has been hamstrung among rocks in the desert;

But neither despair, for even wine-drinking libertines

Have suddenly arrived at the destination by a single song.

Similarly, on moderation between generosity and thrift he offers the following advice:

Be not like an adze, drawing all to yourself,

Nor like a plane, gaining nothing for your work;

In matters of livelihood, learn from the saw,

It draws some to itself, and lets some scatter.

Ahmad Jami died around the year 536/1141.

4. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani

He is one of the most controversial figures of the Islamic world. To him is attributed the Qadiriyyah order of sufis.

His grave at Baghdad is well known and famous. He is amongst those from whom many supplications and high-flying sayings have been recorded. He was a sayyid descended from al-'Imam al-Hasan (A). He died in 560/1164 or 561/1165.

5. Shaykh Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi

He is known as Shaykh-e Shattah on account of his prolific theopathetic exclamations. In recent years some of his books have been published, mainly through the efforts of the orientalists. He died in 606/1209.

'Urafa' of the Seventh/Thirteenth Century

This century has produced some mystics of the highest stature. We will mention some of them in a chronological order:

1. Shaykh Najm al-Din Kubra

One of the greatest and most celebrated of mystics, the chains of many orders go back to him. He was the pupil and disciple of Shaykh Ruzbihan, and was also his son-in-law. He had many pupils and disciples, amongst whom was Baha' al-Din Walad, the father of Jalal al-Din Rumi.

He lived in Khuwarizm (in the present day USSR) at the time of the Mongol invasions. Before his city was attacked, he was sent a message informing him that he could lead a party of his family and disciples out of the city to safety. Najm al-Din's reply was that, 'Throughout all the days of comfort I have lived alongside these people. Now that the day of difficulties has come I will not leave them.' He then manfully strapped on a sword and fought alongside the people of the city until he was martyred. This happened in the year 624/1227.

2. Shaykh Farid al-Din al-'Attar

One of the foremost of mystics, al- 'Attar has works both in verse and in prose. His book *Tadhkirat al-'awifya'* on the lives and characters of the *sufis* and mystics - which begins with al-'Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) and ends with al-'Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A) - is considered a source book of documentary significance, and great importance is attached to it by the orientalists.

Similarly, his work *Mantiq al-tayr* ('The Speech of the Birds') is a masterpiece of mystical literature.

Rumi, commenting about al-'Attar and Sana'i, says:

'Attar was the spirit and Sana'i his two eyes,

We are following in the steps of Sana'i and 'Attar.

Rumi has also said:

'Attar passed through seven cities of love,

While we are yet in the bend of a single lane.

What Rumi means by the 'seven cities of love' are the seven valleys of which al-'Attar speaks in his *Mantiq al-tayr*. Muhammad Shabistari in his *Gulshan-e raz* says:

I am not ashamed of my poetry,

For, the like of 'Attar a hundred centuries will not see.

Al-'Attar was the pupil and disciple of Shaykh Majd al-Din of Baghdad, who was amongst the pupils and disciples of Shaykh Najm al-Din Kubra. He also benefited from the company of Qutb al-Din Haydar, another of the shaykhs of the age and one after whom the town in which he is buried, Turbat-e Haydariyyah, was named.

Al-'Attar lived during the time of the Mongol invasions, and died - some say at the hands of the Mongols - around 626-28/1228-1230.

3. Shaykh Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi

He is the author of the celebrated *'Awarif al-ma'arif,* an excellent text of *'irfan* and sufism.

He claimed descent from Abu Bakr. It is said that he went each year to visit Makkah and al-Madinah. He had met and conversed with 'Abd al- Qadir al-Gilani. Amongst his disciples were the famous poets Shaykh Saidi and Kamal al-Din Isma'il al-'Isfahani. Sa'di had this to say about him:

My wise shaykh the murshid, Shihab, gave me two advices:

One, not to be egocentric,

The other, not to regard others with pessimism.

This Suhrawardi is not the same as the famous philosopher known as Shaykh al-'Ishraq, who was killed around 581-590/1185-1194 in Aleppo, Syria. Suhrawardi the gnostic died around the year 632/1234.

4. Ibn al-Farid al-Misri

He is considered one of the mystics of the first rank. His mystical poetry, in Arabic, reaches the loftiest summits and is of the greatest elegance. His *diwan* (collection of poems) has been published several times and has been the subject of many distinguished commentaries. Of those who wrote a commentary on his work was 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, a well-known mystic of the ninth century.

The poetry of Ibn al-Farid in Arabic is comparable to that of Hafiz in Persian. Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi once suggested to him that he should write a commentary on his poems. Ibn al-Farid replied that the commentary of his poems was Ibn al-'Arabi's own *al-Futuhat al- Makkiyyah*.

Ibn al-Farid is of those who went through abnormal 'states' (*ahwal*). More often than not he was in an ecstatic state and it was in such states that many of his poems were composed. He died in the year 632/1234.

5. Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi

One of the descendants of Hatim al-Ta'i, Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi was originally from Spain. Most of his life, however, seems to have been spent in Makkah and Syria. He was a pupil of the sixth-century

mystic Shaykh Abu Madyan al-Maghribi al-'Andalusi. Through one intermediary link, the chain of his order goes back to the Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani mentioned above.

Muhyi al-Din, also known by the name Ibn al-'Arabi, is certainly the greatest mystic of Islam. No one else has been able to reach his level, neither before nor after him. Thus he is known by the sobriquet 'al-Shaykh al-'Akbar' (the Greatest Shaykh).

Islamic mysticism, from the time of its first appearance, has made progress one century after another. Each century, as indicated above, produced great mystics who have developed *'irfan*, always adding to its heritage. This advancement had always been gradual. But in the 7th/13th century with the appearance of Ibn al-'Arabi *'irfan* made a sudden leap and reached the summit of its perfection.

Ibn al-'Arabi took *'irfan* to a stage it had never reached before.

The foundations for the second branch of *'irfan*, that is theoretical *'irfan* and its attendant philosophy, were laid by Ibn al-'Arabi. In general, the mystics who came after him ate the crumbs from his table.

Besides bringing *'irfan* into a new phase, Ibn al-'Arabi was one of the wonders of time. He was an amazing person, and this has led to wildly divergent views about him. Some consider him *al-Wali al-Kamil* (the Perfect Saint) and the *Qutb al-'Aqtab* (the Pole of Poles). Others degrade him so much as to regard him a heretic, calling him *Mumit al-Din* (the Killer of the Faith) or *Mahi al-Din* (the Effacer of the Faith). Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Mulla Sadra), the great philosopher and Islamic genius, had the greatest respect for him, considering him far greater than Ibn Sina or al-Farabi.

Ibn al-'Arabi authored over two hundred books. Many of his works, or perhaps all of those whose manuscripts are extant (numbering about thirty), have been published. Of his most important books, one is his *al-Futahat al-Makkiyyah*, a colossal work that is a veritable encyclopedia of *'irfan*. Another is his *Fusus al-hikam* which, although brief, is the most precise and most profound text of *'irfan*. Numerous commentaries have been written on it, yet perhaps there have been no more than two or three persons in any age who have been able to understand it.

Ibn al-'Arabi passed away in 638/1240 in the city of Damascus, where his grave is still well known even today.

6. Sadr al-Din Qunawi

He was the pupil, disciple and son of the wife of Ibn al-'Arabi. He was a contemporary of Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi. He corresponded with Khwajah Nasir, who paid him great respect. Similarly, at Qunyah(in present day Turkey), there was perfect friendship and cordiality between him and Rumi. Qunawi used to lead the prayers and Rumi would pray behind him, and it has been said that Rumi was his pupil.

There is a story that when one day Rumi came to join Qunawi's circle, he raised himself from his special

masnad and offered it to Rumi. Declining, Rumi said that he would have no excuse before God for taking Qunawi's seat. At which Qunawi threw away the *masnad*, saying, if it did not suit Rumi it would not suit him either.

Qunawi provided the best exposition on the thought and ideas of Ibn al-'Arabi. In fact, without Qunawi it is possible that Ibn al-'Arabi would never have been understood. It was also through Qunawi that Rumi became acquainted with Ibn al-'Arabi and his school, and it seems that the reason for considering Rumi as having been Qunawi's pupil is that Ibn al-'Arabi's ideas are reflected in Rumi's Mathnawi and in his Diwan-e Shams.

Moreover, students of philosophy and *'irfan* have used Qunawi's books as textbooks for the last six centuries. His three famous books are: *Miftah al-ghayb*, *al-Nusus* and *al-FuQuk*. Qunawi passed away in 672/1273 (the year in which both Rumi and Khwajah Nasir al-Din died) or in 673/1274.

7. Mawlana Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi Rumi

Known in the East as Mawlawi and in the West as Rumi, author of the world famous Mathnawi, this man is one of the greatest geniuses the world and Islamic *'irfan* have ever seen. He was descended from Abu Bakr. His Mathnawi is an ocean of wisdom and full of precise spiritual, social and mystic insights. He ranks amongst the foremost Persian poets.

Originally from Balkh, he left it with his father when still a child. Together they visited Makkah, and at Nishabur they met with Shaykh Farid al-Din al-'Attar. On leaving Makkah his father went to Qunyah and there they settled down. At first Rumi, being a scholar, engaged himself, like the other scholars of his rank, in teaching, and he lived a respectable life. Then he met the famous mystic Shams-e Tabrizi. Rumi was magnetized by this man and at once gave everything up. His *diwan* of *ghazal* is named after Shams, and he has repeatedly made ardent mention of him in his Mathnawi. Rumi passed away in 672/1273.

8. Fakhr al-Din al-'Iraqi al-Hamadani

A well-known poet of *ghazal* and a mystic, he was a pupil of Sadr al-Din Qunawi and a *murid* and protégé of Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi. He passed-away in 688/1289.

'Urafa' of the Eighth/Fourteenth Century

1. 'Ala' al-Dawlah Simnani

He began as a secretarial official; then he gave up his post to enter the path of the *'urafa'*, giving up all his wealth in the way of God. He wrote many books, and held special beliefs in the field of theoretical *'irfan*, which are discussed in several important texts of *'irfan*. He passed away in 736/1335. Amongst his disciples was the well-known poet Khwajawi Kirmani, who describes him thus:

Whoever flourishes upon the path of 'Ali,

Like Khidr, finds the springs of life.

Getting relief from the whisperings of the Devil,

He becomes like 'Ala ' al-Dawlah Simnani.

2. 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani

Of the scholars of the eighth century *'irfan*, 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani wrote commentaries on the *Fusus* of Ibn al- 'Arabi and the *Manazil al-sa'irin* of Khwajah 'Abd Allah. Both of these have been published and are referred to by scholars.

According to the author of *Rawdat al-Jannat*, in his account of Shaykh 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani was eulogized by al-Shahid al-Thani. He and 'Ala' al-Dawlah Simnani had heated discussions on theoretical issues of *'irfan* that had been raised by Ibn al- 'Arabi. He passed away in the year 735/1334.

3. Khwajah Hafiz Shirazi

Despite his world-wide fame, the details of Hafiz's life are not altogether clear. What is known is that he was a scholar, an *'arif,* a *hafiz* of the Quran and an exegete of the Book. He himself has repeatedly indicated this in his verses:

I haven 't seen more beautiful lines than yours, Hafiz,

By the Quran that you have in your breast.

Your love shall cry out if you, like Hafiz,

Recite the Quran memorizer with all the fourteen readings.

Of the memorizers of the world none like me has gathered,

Subtleties of wisdom with Quranic delicacies.

In his poetry Hafiz speaks much of the *pir-e tariqat* (spiritual guide) and of the *murshid* (master), yet it is not clear who was the teacher and guide of Hafiz himself.

Hafiz's poetry attains to lofty mystical heights, and there are few people who are able to perceive his mystic subtleties. All the *'urafa'* who came after him admit that he had indeed practically covered the lofty stages of *'irfan*. Several important scholars have written commentaries on some of his verses. For example, a treatise was written by the well-known philosopher of the ninth century, Muhaqqiq Jalal al-Din Dawwani, on the following verse:

My teacher said: the pen of creation was subject to no error,

Bravo the pure eyes that hide all defects.

Hafiz passed away in 791/1389.[16]

4. Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari

He is the creator of the sublime mystic poem *Gulshan-e raz* (The Garden of Secrets). This poem is counted as one of the loftiest works of *'irfan*, and has immortalized the name of its author. Many commentaries have been written upon it, perhaps the best of which is that written by Shaykh Muhammad Lahiji, which has been published and is available. Shabistari passed away about the year 720/1320.

5. Sayyid Haydar Amuli

One of the erudite mystics, Sayyid Haydar Amuli is the author of the book *Jami' al-'asrar* (Collector of the Secrets), which is a precise work on the theoretical *'irfan* of Ibn al-'Arabi. This book has lately been published. Another book by him is *Nass al-nusus*, which is a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabi's Fusus al-hikam.

He was a contemporary of the famous jurisprudent Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqin al-Hilli, but the date of his death is not known.

6. 'Abd al-Karim Jilani

He is the author of the well-known book *al-'Insan al-kamil* ('The Perfect Man'). The concept of the perfect man is a subject first raised in its theoretical form by Ibn al-'Arabi, and has ever since occupied an important place in Islamic *'irfan*. Ibn al-'Arabi's pupil and disciple, Sadr al-Din Qunawi, has discussed it fully in his *Miftah al-ghayb* and, as far as we know, at least two mystics have written whole books on the subject. One is 'Aziz al-Din Nasafi, a mystic of the latter half of the 7th/13th century, the other being 'Abd al-Karim Jilani. Jilani passed away in 805/1402 at the age of thirty- eight.

'Urafa' of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century

1. Shah Ni'mat Allah Wali

He claimed descent from the house of 'Ali. He is amongst the most famous of *'urafa'* and sufis. The current Ni'mat- ullahi order is one of the most famous of sufi orders. His grave near the city of Kirman is still a sufi shrine.

It is said that he lived until the age of ninety-five, and died in the year 820/1417, 827/1424 or 834/1430. He lived most of his life in the seventh century and associated with Hafiz Shirazi. Much of his mystical

poetry has survived.

2. Sa'in al-Din 'Ali Tarakeh Isfahani

He is one of the most erudite of *'urafa'*. He was deeply acquainted with the theoretical *'irfan* of Ibn al-'Arabi. His book *Tamhid al-qawa'id*, which has been published and is available, is a tribute to his profound learning in *'irfan*, and has been used as a source by the scholars who have succeeded him.

3. Muhammad ibn Mamzah al-Fanari al-Rumi

One of the scholars of the 'Uthmani empire, he distinguished himself in several fields. Author of many books, his fame in *'irfan* is due to his book *Misbah al-'uns*. This is a commentary on Qunawi's *Miftah al-ghayb*. Although it is not every- one who can write a commentary and exposition on the books of Ibn al-'Arabi and his disciple Sadr al-Din Qunawi, the authorities in *'irfan* to have followed him have all confirmed the value of this work. A lithograph print of this book with the *hawashi* of Aqa Mirza Hashim Rashti, a mystic of the last century, has been published from Tehran.

Unfortunately due to bad print parts of the *hawashi* are unreadable.

4. Shams al-Din Muhammad Lahiji Nurbakhshi

The author of a commentary on the *Gulshan-e raz* of Mahmud Shabistari, and a contemporary of Mir Sadr al-Din Dashtaki and 'Allamah Dawwani, he lived in Shiraz. These two, who were both outstanding philosophers of their age and, according to what Qadi Nur Allah Shushtari has written in his *Majalis al-mu'minin*, both accorded Lahiji the greatest respect.

Lahiji was the disciple of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh, himself the pupil of Ibn Fahd al-Hilli. In his commentary on the *Gulshan-e raz* he traces his chain back from Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh to Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, thence to al-'Imam al-Rida and the preceding Imams and thus to the Holy Prophet himself (S). This he calls the 'Golden Chain' (*silsilat al-dhahab*).

His fame rests largely on his commentary on the *Gulshan-e raz*, a commentary that itself is one of the loftiest of mystic texts. He began his writings, according to what he himself relates in the introduction to his commentary, in the year 877/1472. The year of his death is not precisely known. It seems to have been before 900/1494.

5. Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Jami

Jami claimed descent from the well- known jurisprudent of the second century, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani. A powerful poet, he is considered the last great mystic poet of the Persian language.

At first he assumed the *takhallus* "Dashti", but since he was born in the locality of Jam, in the vicinity of

Mashhad, and traced his spiritual descent to Ahmad Jami (*Zhand-e Pil*), he changed this to Jami. In his own words:

My birthplace is Jam and the drops of my pen

Are the draught of the cup of Shaykh al-Islam, 17

Thus in the pages of my poetry

In two ways my pen-name is Jami.

Jami was an accomplished scholar in the various fields of Arabic grammar and syntax, law, jurisprudence, logic, philosophy and *'irfan*. His many books include a commentary on the *Fusus al-hikam* of Ibn al- 'Arabi, a commentary on the *Luma'at* of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi, a commentary on the *Ta'iyyah* of Ibn al-Farid, a commentary on the *Qasidat al-Burdah* in praise of the Holy Prophet (S), a commentary on the *Qasidah Mimiyyah* of Farazdaq in praise of al-'Imam 'Ali ibn al- Husayn, a book entitled *al-Lawdyih*, his *Bahdristan*, written in the style of Sa'di's *Gulistans* and a book *Nafahat al-'uns* on the biographies of mystics.

Jami was the disciple of Baha' al-Din Naqshaband, the founder of the Naqshabandi order. However, as in the instance of Muhammad Lahiji, who was a disciple of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh, his academic standing is above that of his peer. Jami, even though he is counted as one of the followers of Baha' al-Din Naqshaband, achieved an academic standing several degrees higher than that of Baha' al-Din.

Thus in this brief history in which we are concentrating upon the academic side of *'irfan* and not upon the development of the various orders, special mention has been made of Muhammad Lahiji and 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, rather than of the founders of their orders. Jami died in 898/1492 at the age of 81.

This ends our brief history of *'irfan*, covering the period from its beginnings until the close of the 9th/15th century. We chose to end at this point because, in our view, from the 10th/16th century onwards *'irfan* took on a different form. Up until this time the learned and academic figures of *'irfan* had all been members of regular sufi orders and the poles (*aqtab*) or masters of the sufi orders were great academic figures of *'irfan*, to whom we owe the great mystic works. Around the beginning of the 10th/16th century, however, this began to change.

Firstly, the masters of the sufi orders were no longer possessed of the academic prominence of their forerunners. It may be said that from this time onwards formal sufism lost itself in customs, outward aspects, occasionally of an innovative nature (*bid'ah*).

Secondly, scholars who were not members of any formal sufi order began to show profound learning in the theoretical *'irfan* of Ibn al-'Arabi, such that none from amongst the sufi orders could match them. Examples of such scholars are Sadr al-Muta'allihin of Shiraz (d. 1050/1640), his pupil Fayd Kashani (d. 1091/1680), and Fayd's own pupil Qadi Sa'id Qummi (d. 1103/1691). The knowledge of each of these of

the theoretical *'irfan* of Ibn al-'Arabi exceeded that of the poles or masters of any sufi order of their times, while they themselves were not attached to any of the sufi orders. Moreover, this is a development that has continued down to the present day, as can be seen in the examples of the late Aqa-Muhammad Rida Qumsheh'i and the late Aqa Mirza Hashim Rashti. These two scholars of the last hundred years were both experts in the field of theoretical *'irfan*, yet they too were not members of any sufi order.

On the whole, it can be said that it was from the time of Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi, who laid the foundations of theoretical *'irfan* and philosophized *'irfan*, that the seed of this new development was sown.

The above-mentioned Muhammad ibn Hamzah Fanari perhaps represented this type. But the new development that produced experts in the field of theoretical *'irfan* who were either not at all devoted to practical *'irfan* and its spiritual methodology, or, if they were - and to some extent most of them were - had nothing to do with any formal sufi order, is perfectly discernible from the 10th/16th century onwards.

Thirdly, since the 10th/16th century there have been individuals and groups devoted to the spiritual methodology of practical *'irfan*, who had attained a very lofty spiritual standing indeed and yet they were not members of any of the formal sufi orders. They were either indifferent to the formal *sufis* or regarded them as being partially or totally heretical.

Amongst the characteristics of this new group of theoretical and practical *'urafa'* - who were also learned in law and jurisprudence - was a perfect loyalty to the shari'ah and a harmony between the rites of the path of progression and the rites of jurisprudence. This development has also its own history, but here we have no opportunity to enter its details.

The Mystic's Stations (Maqamat)

The *'urafa'* maintain that in order to arrive at the stage of true gnosis, there are stages and stations that must be covered. Unless covered, the *'urafa'* hold, to arrive at the station of true gnosis is impossible.

'Irfan has a facet that it shares with theosophy (*hikmat ilahi*), while many of the facets of these two disciplines differ. The facet common to them both is that the aim of both is knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allah*). They differ in that theosophy does not aim solely at knowledge of God but rather aims at knowledge of the order of being.

The knowledge that is sought by the theosophist (*hakim*) is of the system of existence, of which, naturally, knowledge of God is an important pillar. The goal of *'irfan*, on the other hand, is exclusively knowledge of God.

In the view of *'irfan*, knowledge of God is total knowledge. Everything must be known in the light of knowledge of God and from the point of view of *tawhid*; such knowledge is a derivative of knowledge of God.

Secondly, the knowledge sought by the *hakim* is intellectual knowledge and can be likened to the knowledge acquired by the mathematician after thought and reflection on a particular mathematical problem. However, the knowledge sought by the *'arif* is experienced and witnessed; it can be likened to the knowledge acquired by an experimental scientist in his laboratory. The *hakim* seeks certain knowledge (*'ilm al-yaqin*), while the *'arif* seeks the certainty of direct vision (*'ayn al-yaqin*).

Thirdly, the means employed by the *hakim* are his reason, deductions and proofs, whereas those employed by the *'arif* are the heart and the purification, disciplining and perfecting of the self. The *hakim* seeks, through the telescope of his mind, to study the order of existence, while the *'arif* seeks to prepare the whole of his being so as to arrive at the core of reality. He seeks to reach reality like a drop of water in the search of the sea. In the view of the *hakim*, the perfection expected of a human being lies in understanding reality, while in the *'arif's* view it lies in reaching reality. In the *hakim*'s view an imperfect human being is one who is ignorant, while in the *'arif's* view the imperfect human is one who has remained distant and separated from his origin.

The *'arif* therefore sees perfection in reaching rather than in understanding. And in order to reach the principal goal and the stage of true gnosis, he views the traversing of several stages and stations as being necessary and essential. This he calls *sayr wa suluk*, the science of inward wayfaring.

These stages and stations have been discussed in great detail in the books of *'irfan*. Here it is not possible to explain, even briefly, each and every one of them. However, in order at least to give a general impression, I believe that we can do no better than to turn to the ninth section of Ibn Sina's *al-'Isharat*. Although Ibn Sina is mainly a philosopher, not a mystic, he is not a 'dry' philosopher, and especially towards the end of his life he developed mystic inclinations. In his *al-'Isharat*, which appears to be his last work, he has devoted a whole section to the 'stations' of the gnostics. This section being extraordinarily sublime and beautiful, we consider it more suitable for our purposes to present a summary of this section, rather than citing or translating suitable passages from the books of the *'urafa'*.

Zahid, 'abid & 'arif

He who abstains from the enjoyments of the world, even its wholesome ones, is called a *zahid* (ascetic); and he who is careful to perform worship, prayer and fasting and the like, is called an *'abid* (devotee); and he who keeps his thought turned perpetually towards the realm of light in order that the light of the Real shine in his breast is called an *'arif*; and sometimes two or more of these epithets may apply to the same person.

Although Ibn Sina defines here the *zahid*, the *'abid* and the *'arif,* yet at the same time he is defining *zuhd*, *'ibadah,* and *'irfan*. This is because a definition of *zahid*, *'abid*, or *tarif* per se includes implicitly a definition of *zuhd*, *'ibadah*, or *'irfan*. Thus the conclusion to be drawn from this passage is that *zuhd* is abstinence from worldly enjoyments; *'ibadah* is the performance of specific acts like prayer, fasting, reciting the Quran and the like; and *'irfan* is turning away the mind from everything but Allah and paying complete

attention to the Divine Essence so that the light of the Real may shine on one's heart.

The last clause indicates an important point. One or more of these characteristics may occur in combination. Thus it is possible for an individual to be an *'abid* and a *zahid*, a *zahid* and an *'arif,* an *'abid* and an *'arif,* or an *'abid*, *zahid*, and *'arif* at one and the same time. Ibn Sina has not elaborated this, but he implies that although it is possible for one to be a *zahid* or an *'abid* and not be an *'arif,* it is not possible for one to be an *'arif* and not be a *zahid* and an *'abid*. One may be both a *zahid* and an *'abid* without being an *'arif,* but an *'arif* by definition is also a *zahid* and an *'abid*. So, although not every *zahid* or *'abid* is an *'arif,* every *'arif* is a *zahid* and an *'abid*.

In the next passage we will see that the *zuhd* of an *'arif* differs in its goal from that of a *non-'arif.* In fact, the spirit and essence of the *'arif's zuhd* and *'ibadah* are different from those of the *non-'arif*:

The *zuhd* for the *non-'arif,* is a transaction by which he gives up the pleasures of the world for the pleasures of the Hereafter, whereas for the *'arif* it is something through which he dissociates himself from everything that keeps him from attention towards God and he looks down on everything except God. Whereas worship for the *non-'arif* is a transaction by which he performs actions in the world for a reward (*ajr*, *thawab*) to be received in the Hereafter, for the *'arif* it is a kind of exercise that is aimed at strengthening his self's intellectual and imaginative faculties, and which, by repetition, draws away the self from the realm of illusion to the realm of the Real.

The 'arif's Goal

The *'arif* desires the Real (God) not for the sake of something else, and he values nothing above his knowledge of the Real, and his worship of Him is because He is worthy of worship and it is a worthy way of relating himself to Him; it is not out of desire (for rewards) or fear (of chastisement).

The meaning of this is that in terms of his aims the *'arif* is a *muwahhid*. He seeks only God, yet his desire of God is not on account of His gifts in this world or in the Hereafter. Were such to be the case, the real object of his desire would be the gifts, God being only the preliminary means by which the desired gifts are sought. In such a case, in reality, the final object of worship and desire would be one's own self; for the purpose of seeking those gifts is the pleasure of the self.

However, the *'arif* desires whatever he desires for the sake of God. When he desires the gifts of God he does so because they are from Him, and are His favors. They represent His Grace and Magnanimity. So, while the *non-'arif* seeks God for the sake of His gifts, the *'arif* seeks the gifts of God for the sake of God.

Here the question may arise, if the *'arif* does not seek God for the sake of anything, then why does he worship Him? Is it not true that every act of worship must have a purpose? Ibn Sina's passage contains the answer. He states that the goal and motivation of the *'arif's* worship is one of two things. One is the

inherent worthiness of the Worshipped to be worshipped, meaning that one worships God simply because He is worthy of worship. It is rather like someone who upon noticing some admirable qualities in a person or a thing praises that person or thing. If asked what motivated him to utter such praise, or of what benefit was it to him, he will reply that he sought no benefit from his praise, but simply saw that person or thing as being genuinely deserving of praise. This is true of the praise accorded to the heroes or the champions of each and every field.

The other motivation of the *'arif's* worship is the worthiness of worship itself. It bears intrinsic nobility and beauty of its own, for it is a connection, a tie, between oneself and God. Thus it has a worthiness of its own, and there is no reason why worship should necessarily entail desire or fear.

'Ali (A) has some famous words on this subject:

My God, I do not worship You in fear of Your Fire, nor in desire for Your Paradise, but I find You worthy of worship so I worship You.

The *'urafa'* place great importance on this issue, considering it a kind of *shirk* (polytheism) for one's goal in life and particularly in worship to be something other than God Himself. *'Irfan* totally rejects this kind of *shirk*. Many have written elegantly and subtly on the subject, and we will look at an allegory from Sa'di's *Bustan* which takes the outward form of a story of Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah and his close confidant Iyaz:

One with the Shah of Ghaznah found fault, saying,

What charm has he, the Shah's friend Iyaz.

A flower indeed with neither color nor smell,

How strange of the nightingale to set its heart upon such a thing.

Someone conveyed this remark to Sultan Mahmud,

Who, on hearing it, was besides himself with anguish.

'I love him for his disposition and character,

Nor for his pleasing gait and stature. '

Heard I once that in a narrow defile,

The king's treasure-chest broke open after a camel fell.

The king, after signaling his bequest,

Spurred on his steed to get ahead hastily.

The riders now fell upon the pearls and corals,

Their thoughts now turning from the king to the treasure.

None of the proud lads remained that day

To follow in the king's train except Iyaz

Looking out, the king saw him, and beholding Iyaz,

His face like a flower bloomed with delight.

'What booty have you brought along, ' the king inquired.

'None, 'said, Iyaz. 'I hurried after you,

Preferring your service to treasure and bounties.

Sa'di then turns from this story to the point he wishes to make, which he expresses thus:

If you look to your friend for his favors,

You are tied to yourself not to your friend

A breach of the Way it was if the saints

Desired of God aught other than God.

The First Station: the first level of the *'arif's* journey is what they call 'resolution' (*al-'iradah*), and this is a fervent desire to catch hold of the Firm Tie (*al-'urwat al-wuthqa*) that catches hold of one who is perceptive of true proofs, or who has settled his self through the covenant of faith, so that it impels his heart towards the Holy in order to attain the spirit of connection (with Him).

In order to explain the first stage of the spiritual path - which in one respect potentially embraces the whole of *'irfan* - we are obliged to be somewhat elaborate. The *'urafa'* primarily believe in a principle which they sum up in the following phrase:

The ends are the return to the beginnings.

Clearly, for the end to be the beginning there are two possibilities.

One is that the movement is in a straight line, and that once the object in motion reaches a certain point it changes its direction and retraces exactly the same route that it came. In philosophy it has been proved that such a change of direction would entail an interval of motionlessness, even if imperceptible. Furthermore, these two movements would be opposite to each other. The second possibility is that the

movement is on along a curve all of whose points are equidistant from a certain central point, in other words a circle. It is clear that if the movement takes the form of a circle, naturally the path will end at the point of commencement.

An object moving in a circle will continually move farther from the point of beginning until it reaches the point farthest from where it began. This is the point diametrically opposite to the point of commencement. It is also from this point that, with no pause or interval, the return journey (*ma'ad*) to the point of departure (*mabda'*) commences.

The *'urafa'* call the first part of the journey, i.e. from the point of departure to the point farthest from it, 'the arc of descent' (*qaws al-nazul*), and the journey from there back to the point of departure, 'the arc of ascent' (*qaws al-su'ud*). There is a philosophical view associated with the movement of things from the point of departure to the farthest point which the philosophers call the 'principle of causality' (*asl al-'illiyyah*), and which the *'urafa'* call the 'principle of emanation' (*asl al-tajalli*); in either case objects travelling along the arc of descent are as if driven from behind. Similarly, the movement of objects from the farthest point to the point of departure also has its own philosophical theory.

This is the principle of every derivative being's desire and passion to return to its origin. In other words, it is the principle of the flight back of everything estranged and stranded to its origin and homeland. This tendency, so the *'urafa'* believe, is inherent in each and every particle of existence, including the human being, though in man it can often be latent and hidden.

Man's preoccupations prevent the activity of this tendency, and a series of stimuli are required before this inner inclination will surface. It is the appearance and surfacing of this inclination that the *'urafa'* term as 'resolution' or 'will' (*iradah*).

Thus in reality this resolution is a type of awakening of a dormant consciousness. 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, in his *Istilahat*, defines *iradah* as:

A spark in the heart from the fire of love that compels one to answer the summons of the Real (*Haqiqah*).

Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari in his *Manazil al-sa'irin* defines *iradah* as follows:

It is the voluntary answer (in actions) to the summons of the Real (*Haqiqah*).

Here it is necessary to point out that the meaning of *iradah* being the first stage is that it is the first stage after a chain of other stages has been passed, stages that are called 'preparations' (*bidayat*), 'doors' (*abwab*), 'conduct' (*mu'amalat*). and 'manners' (*akhlaq*). Thus *iradah* is the first stage in the terminology of the *'urafa'* in the sense that it signifies a genuine gnostic awakening.

Rumi describes the principle that 'the end is the return to the beginning' as follows:

The parts are faced towards the Whole,

Nightingales are in love with the rose's face;

Whatever comes from the sea to the sea returns,

And everything goes back to its source;

Like the streams rushing down from mountain tops,

My soul, burning with love, longs to leave the body.

Rumi opens his Mathnawi by inviting the reader to listen to the plaintive cries of the reed, as it complains of its separation from the reed bed. Thus in the first lines of his Mathnawi Rumi is actually bringing up the first stage of the *'arif,* that is *iradah*, a desire to return to one's origins that is accompanied with the feeling of separation and loneliness. Rumi says:

Listen to the reed as its story it relates

And of its separation it complains.

Since the time that from the reed bed was I taken,

At my strains have lamented man and woman.

O, a heart I seek that is torn with the pain of separation

That it may hear the tale of my longing for return.

Whoever remains distant from his origins,

Seeks again the life of reunion.

To sum up, Ibn Sina, in the above passage, means that *iradah* is a desire and longing that, after deep feelings of alienation, loneliness and estrangement, makes its appearance in the human being and motivates him to seek reunion with the Real, a union which puts an end to the feelings of alienation, loneliness, and helplessness.

Exercise and Self-Discipline

Then what is certainly required is exercise (*riyadah*), and it is directed towards three ends – the first is to clear the path of all but the Real; the second is to subjugate the 'commanding self' (*al-nafs al-'ammarah*) to the 'contented self' (*al-nafs al-mutma'innah*); the third is to render the heart subtle for awareness.

After having commenced the journey at the stage of *iradah*, the next stage is that of exercise and

preparedness. This preparedness is termed *riyadah*. Nowadays this term is generally misunderstood and it is taken to mean self-mortification. In some religions the principle of mortifying the self is hallowed. Perhaps the best examples of this are to be seen in the Yogis of India.

In the terminology of Ibn Sina, however, the word is not used in this sense. The original meaning of this Arabic word is 'to exercise', or 'to break in a colt.' Thereafter the word was used for physical exercise, a sense which the word still bears today. The *'urafa'* borrowed this word, and in their terminology it is used to mean exercising the soul and preparing it for the illumination of the light of knowledge (*ma'rifah*). It is in this sense that the word is used in the passage above.

Ibn Sina then declares this exercising and preparing of the soul to be directed towards three aims. The first of these is related to external matters and entails the removal of distractive occupations and the causes of negligence (*ghaflah*). The second is related to the balance of the inner forces and the removal of agitations from the soul, which he has described as the submission of the 'commanding self' to the 'contented self'. The third relates to qualitative changes in the soul, which he calls 'rending subtle of the heart'.

And the first [of the three aims of *riyadah*] is aided by true *zuhd* (i.e. *zuhd* removes the impediments and the hindering preoccupations, which cause neglect, from the path). The second is aided by several things: worship infused with (presence of heart, concentration and) reflection; melody that serves to strengthen the self through which the accompanying words have an effect on the heart (such as melodious reciting of the Quran, supplications and litanies, and the singing of mystic poetry); the instructive speech of a pure, eloquent speaker who speaks gently and effectively in the manner of a guide.

As for the third goal, it is aided by subtle thoughts (contemplating subtle and delicate ideas and meanings which lead to spiritual refinement) and a chaste love (a love that is spiritual and not physical and sensual) which is directed by the virtues of the beloved and not ruled over by sensuality.

Then, when *iradah* and *riyadah* reach a certain degree, flashes (*khalasat*) of the dawning light of the Real will descend upon him, delightful as they are, they are momentary like flashes of lightning appearing and instantly vanishing. These they call 'moments' (*awqat*), and these flashes increase in frequency with greater diligence in *riyadah*.

As he advances deeper into this, they descend upon him even when he is not exercising. Now often he will glance at something and his glance be deflected from it towards the Holy, bringing to his attention some aspect of the Divine, and a state of trance (*ghashyah*) descends upon him, in which, as if, he sees God in every thing.

Perhaps it is at this stage that his states overwhelm him, disturbing his equanimity, a change that would be noticed by anyone near him.

Then, he reaches a point in his exercises when his 'moments' change into stable tranquility, the brief snatches become familiar and the flashes become a prolonged blaze. Then he achieves an enduring gnostic state which permanently accompanies him from which he derives an ecstatic delight. And when it departs him he becomes sad and bewildered.

And perhaps it is at this stage the state in which he is in will make itself apparent (to others); but as he progresses deeper into this gnosis, its appearance will be less detectable in him and he will be absent when (appearing to be) present, and travelling when (appearing to be) still.

This passage calls to mind a sentence spoken by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (A) to his disciple Kumayl ibn Ziyad about the 'friends of God' (*awliya' al-Haqq*), who exist in every age:

Knowledge has led them to the reality of insight, and they are in contact with the spirit of certainty. They find easy what is regarded as rough by those who live in comfort and luxury. They are intimate with what terrifies the ignorant. They are in the company of people with their bodies, yet their souls are lodged in the highest realm. (*Nahj al-balaghah*, Hikam, No. 147).

Until this stage, perhaps, this state of gnosis will occur to him only occasionally. Thereafter it will gradually become such that it is available to him whenever he wants.

Thereafter, he advances further than even this stage until his affair no longer depends on his own wish. Whenever he observes a thing he sees other than it (i.e God), even if his observation is not for the sake of reflection. So, the opportunity presents itself to ascend from the plane of false appearances to the plane of Truth. He becomes stabilized upon it, while (in the world) he is surrounded by the heedless.

Up until this point we have been dealing with the stage of exercise, self-discipline, struggle and the spiritual itinerary. Now the *'arif* has reached his goal.

When he crosses from the stage of *riyadah* to that of attainment, his inward becomes like a clear mirror facing in the direction of the Real. Sublime delights shower upon him, and he rejoices at his self for what is there of the Real. Now (like one viewing an image in a mirror, who looks either at the image or at the mirror reflecting the image) he is perplexed by two views: the view of the Real and the view of his own self.

Then, he becomes oblivious to his own self and views only the Holy. And if he notices his self it is for the reason of its being the viewer, not for the sake of its own beauty (like one who when looking at an image in a mirror, views the image only; although he does not pay attention to the mirror itself, nevertheless the mirror is seen while viewing the image, though the mirror is not viewed for its own beauty). It is at this point that the wayfarer attains union (and his journey from *khalq* to Haqq becomes complete).

Here ends our summary of the ninth section of Ibn Sina's Isharat and his account of the journey from creation (*khalq*) to God (*Haqq*). A point that must be added is that the *'urafa'* believe in four journeys:

sayr min al-khalq ila al-Haqq, *sayr bi al-Haqq a al-Haqq*, *sayr min al-Haqq ila al-khalq bi al-Haqq*, *sayr fi al-khalq bi al-Haqq* (the journey from creation to God; the journey with God in God; the journey with God from God to creation; and finally, the journey in creation with God).

The first journey is from creatures to the Creator. The second is in the Creator; it means that in the course of it the *'arif* becomes acquainted with His Qualities and Names and himself becomes adorned with the same. In the third journey, he returns towards the creation, without becoming separated from God, in order to guide the people. The fourth journey is amongst the people while still united with God. In this journey the *'arif* is with and amongst the people and seeks to guide their affairs so as to lead them towards God.

The summary from Ibn Sina's *al-'Isharat* given above is related to the first of these journeys. He also gives a brief account of the second journey, but it is not necessary for our purposes to include it. Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, in his commentary on *al-'Isharat*, says that Ibn Sina has explained the first journey of the *'arif* in nine stages. Three stages are related to the beginning of the journey, three to the journey from its beginning to its end, and three are related to the arrival or the union. Some reflection on Ibn Sina's account makes the point clear.

By '*riyadah* ' which is translated as 'exercise', Ibn Sina means the exercises in self-discipline that the *'arif* undergoes. There are many of these, and the *'arif* must follow a chain of stations in these exercises too. Here Ibn Sina is brief in the extreme, yet the *'urafa'* have discussed this matter in detail, and one may seek these details in their works.

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' ma'kus*) 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'* practicing 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 honor. 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.[18]

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 makhluq 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 judgments 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 behavioral response. The particular state which calls for a particular kind of behavior 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 behavior 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 theopathetic 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 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 *lawa'ih*, *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 creature hood 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 favors 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').

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3. Ibid
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6. Farid al Din al Attar, Tadhkirat al-awliya
7. Abu Nasr al Sarraj, al-Luma, p. 427
8. Dr. Qasim Ghani, op. cit
9. Abbas al Qummi, Safinat al Bihar, under s-l-m
10. Harith al Muhasibi, not Hasan al Basri
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12. Dr. Qasim Ghani, op cit p. 462
13. Ibid, p. 55
14. Abu Abd al Rahman al Sulami, Tabqat al sufiyyah, p. 206
15. Authors work Ilal e girayeh be maddehgari
16. Hafiz is the most beloved figure of Persian poetry in Iran
17. Ahmad Jami was known as Shaykh al Isma
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