

THE THRONE CARRIER OF GOD

THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF
'ALĀ' AD-DAWLA AS-SIMNĀNĪ

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من ندانم تا چه ام یا خود که ام یا بر چه ام
این قدر دانم که عرش شرع حق را حاملم

*I do not know why I am, or who I am, or how I am;
All I know is I am carrying the throne of God's law.*

—Dīwān-i 'Alā' ad-dawla

SECLUSION AND RECOLLECTION

The pursuit of self-perfection is best undertaken in seclusion (*khalwa*) after withdrawal from society. This form of seclusion, in which Simnānī himself engaged many times during his life, involves isolation of the heart from what is other than the Lord, and attachment to Him, thereby reaching Him and being near unto Him.¹ An individual succeeds in attaining progress through the various stages mentioned above through the pursuit of mystical exercises in seclusion, and refines the subtle substance of I-ness to the point of being a perfect mirror for God. "No one can reach the stage of beauty of submission except in seclusion."² This seclusion is particularly difficult when one first practices it, because at this stage the mystic wages a war against the lower soul and Satan.³ In light of the importance of seclusion in his mystical vision, it is not surprising that Simnānī devoted much attention to its nature and requirements. Similar emphasis is also found in the works of other Kubrawī mystics, in particular Kubrā and Baghdādī, who have listed the conditions of seclusion and elaborated on each one. These are normally the eight principles of seclusion attributed to Junayd al-Baghdādī although, on occasion, two items are added to the list.⁴ Simnānī adheres strictly

1. *Shaqā'iq al-hadā'iq*, 77b.

2. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 34a.

3. *Najm*, 73b.

4. An expanded version of Junayd's list is discussed in Kubrā's *Risāla ila'l-hā'im al-khā'if min-lawmat al-lā'im*, edited in M. Molé "Traité mineurs de Nağm al-din Kubrā," *Annales islamologiques* 4 (1963), 23-37. See also Kubrā's *al-Uşūl al-'ashara* (pp. 15-22 of the same article), and 'Abd al-Ghafūr-i Lārī's Persian translation, edited by Najīb Māyil-i Hirawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1984). Cf. Majd ad-din al-Baghdādī, *Tuḥfat al-barara*, tr. M.B. Sā'idī-yi Khurāsānī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i marwī, 1989), 134ff.; Meier, *Fawā'ih*, 2-3; Muhammad Isa Waley, "Najm al-Din Kubrā and the Central Asian School of Sufism (The Kubrawiyyah)," *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, edited by S.H. Nasr (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 80-104.

to the principles of Junayd and believes that, at the most elementary level, seclusion is useless without these conditions. It is within the parameters of these eight conditions that his teachings regarding mystical experience can best be described:⁵

1. Controlling the external senses.
2. Maintaining a continual state of ritual purity.
3. Continual fasting.
4. Continual silence.
5. Continual repetition of the formula "There is no god but God."
6. Continual banishing of distracting thoughts.
7. Fixing the heart totally on the mystical guide.
8. Ceasing to raise objections to God.

These conditions and the concepts underlying them merit further elaboration. Although seclusion is ultimately an interior process through which one isolates oneself from everything except God, it also consists of physical withdrawal from society. This must occur in a cell (*bayt al-khalwa*) which should only be large enough for one person to pray in, and should possess no windows so as to prevent sunlight from entering it.⁶ This form of isolation helps achieve the desired goal of controlling the external senses. In order to maximize the effects of seclusion, the mystic should not exit the cell except to perform bodily functions, renew the state of ritual purity, and perform ritual prayers.⁷

Maintaining a continual state of ritual purity, fasting and silence also serves to control the external senses with the ultimate goal of subduing the soul. This is the lower soul, identical with the subtle substance of the animal spirit (*laṭīfa-yi rūḥ-i ḥayawānī*), which is the source of evil and the cause of base characteristics.⁸ The lower soul which incites to evil is a companion of Satan and does his bidding in the physical and spiritual realms. This soul continually combats the noble forces of the heart and spirit, wishing to subjugate them and employ them in its own service and that of its faculties.⁹ Even

5. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 34a ff.; *Faḥ al-mubīn*, 4a ff.; *Fuṣūl al-uṣūl*, 49b ff.; *Salwat al-'āshiqīn*, in *Muṣannafāt-i farsī*, ed. N.M. Hirawī (Tehran: Shirkat-i intishārāt-i 'ilmī wa farhangī, 1990), 279ff. The eight conditions do not appear in the same order in all four texts.

6. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 34a.

7. *Faḥ al-mubīn*, 4b.

8. *Sirr bāl al-bāl*, 239b.

9. *Najm*, 157a.

after the individual has advanced along the Sufi path, this appetitive soul retains its hereditary disposition derived from the lower forces which have not been purified of base characteristics.¹⁰ The appetitive soul is not destroyed by voluntary death (*al-mawt al-ikhtiyārī*), otherwise known as annihilation (*fanā'*), but is simply fragmented so that its virulence remains. It is only in the ultimate death of the physical body that it can be exterminated. Mystics must guard against the soul for this reason, and beware of inclining towards the desires of this ruler of the mortal realm as long as they are alive.¹¹

For the novice, the best way to combat the soul is to engage in ascetic practices such as abstaining from food, speech and sleep.¹² Simnānī refers to this as being cruel to one's soul, denying the soul its due and satisfaction except for the minimal amount needed to sustain the body.¹³ Any other sustenance that reaches it from the physical world only increases its eagerness to persist in its base nature.¹⁴ However, one should be wary of forbidding to one's soul what God has made permissible. The only exception to this is when, at the commencement of the mystical quest, the mystic is deprived of the guidance of a *shaykh* and, out of ignorance, abstains from what has been made lawful. But once she knows the path properly or learns it from a guide, the novice Sufi should repent for previous actions and eat just enough of what she had forbidden to herself as to symbolically end the abstention.¹⁵

Ritual purity also serves to combat the lower soul. Maintaining a continual state of ritual purity serves as armor in the stage of war against the lower soul and Satan.¹⁶ "Ablution is a great light which illuminates the darkness of seclusion."¹⁷ Whereas external ablutions

10. *Ibid.*, 72a.

11. *Ibid.*, 72b; 164a.

12. *Ibid.*, 69b.

13. *Ibid.*, 72a. This is referred to in the *ḥadīth*: "Indeed your soul has a right upon you" (*Najm*, 110b; Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, Nasā'ī, Ibn Māja, Ibn Ḥanbal). The attitude of the mystic with regard to the soul changes at later stages along the path. The intermediate (*mutawassit*) should befriend the soul because at this level it becomes the mount of the mystic, serving a purpose in mystical advancement. The advanced mystic should make sure the soul accords God His due, and guide it in the direction of piety and righteousness (*Najm*, 72a).

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 76a.

16. *Fatḥ al-mubīn*, 4b.

17. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, MS. 1105, Carullah Efendi, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, İstanbul, 48a.

serve to cleanse the body of physical impurities, inner ablutions consist of having an attentive heart and a tongue busy with recollection, both of which serve to purify the mystic and combat the lower nature.¹⁸ The entire mystical quest can be seen as a process of inner purification, called the greater cleansing, which parallels the attainment of levels along the path. The novice attains the purification specific to physical manifestation or theophany in the physical realm (*at-tajallī aṣ-ṣuwārī*), the intermediate that of the manifestation of light, the advanced that of spiritual manifestation or theophany in the unseen realm (*at-tajallī al-ma'nawī*). The pole (*quṭb*) is subjected to experiential manifestation of the divine (*at-tajallī adh-dhawqī*) only after the destruction of the created body.¹⁹

So strive, O heedless ones, to cleanse the tablet of your inner selves of the dust of the created world that settles on its face as a result of the wind of passion. [Strive] in noble recollection so that you may read all the revealed and nonrevealed books and ascend to the primordial book which is stored in the Realm of Omnipotence near the Lord.²⁰

A major purpose of seclusion is to engage in recollection, thereby cleansing oneself to the point of being the perfect witness of God. Continual silence is one of the conditions of seclusion, and is useful in negating the outer senses and combating the lower soul. The only mitigating circumstance in which the mystic may break this silence and exit the cell is to consult the *shaykh* for the explanation of a mystical experience which cannot be understood on one's own. Even so, it is better to try and seek the master's guidance mystically within the spiritual state. One should only speak face to face with the guide as a last resort when one is incapable of benefiting from him in the unseen realm.²¹

This notable exception to the requirement of perpetual silence underscores the importance of the mystical guide in Simnānī's ideas. Simnānī did not trivialize the importance of studying books. In fact, he exhorted mystics to study the writings of earlier masters, and

18. *Faḥ al-mubīn*, 4b.

19. *Khitām al-misk*, 142a. In this instance Simnānī is using the term 'purification' (*tahāra*) with the connotation of the annihilation of the self (*fanā'*) which is a desired goal of all mystical exercises (see below, p. 141ff.).

20. *Najm*, 30b.

21. *Faḥ al-mubīn*, 4b.

instructed them to consult Abu'n-Najib as-Suhrawardī's *Ādāb al-murīdīn* for the etiquette of the Sufi path, and to study the *Tuḥfat al-barara fi'l-masā'il al-'ashara* of Majd ad-dīn al-Baghdādī for details regarding the path itself.²² However, knowledge acquired from these books cannot replace the teachings of a living guide.

The guide must be living in the mortal realm in order to lead the mystic on the straight path and explain distracting thoughts and their causes as they are encountered along the path.²³ It is because of this necessity of having a living master that God created Muḥammad, the first mystical guide, as a mortal, and commanded him to say: "I am a mortal like you" (18:110).²⁴ All later mystical guides derive their spiritual authority from Muḥammad through 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb. 'Alī is the saint (*walī*) whom Muḥammad entrusted with spiritual secrets, and whom he taught the nature of attaining the spiritual realm of light and took to the presence of God.²⁵

Simnānī claims that it is not possible to become a Sufi without attaching oneself to a *shaykh*.²⁶ Those who do not attach themselves to a guide but instead pursue the mystical path according to their own wishes and ideas derive absolutely no benefit from their exercises.²⁷ Only if one surrenders oneself to the master and abandons personal volition is it possible to traverse the path to God.²⁸ The tutelage of a guide thus acquires paramount importance in the mystical quest. "The treatment of the sick heart is not possible without a skillful and sympathetic doctor."²⁹

Surrendering oneself to the master implies complete trust in his instructions. The mystic should never question his instructions openly or secretly. That would be tantamount to letting the soul converse secretly with Satan, allowing Satan to enter the soul and fill it with doubt concerning the divine essence and attributes.³⁰ Trust in the *shaykh* should be such that even if the master were to command the

22. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 33b.

23. *Najm*, 107b. Though the guide must be living, he need not be living at the same location as the disciple, as Simnānī knew from his own experience with Isfarā'īnī (*Salwat al-'āshiqīn*, 280).

24. *Ibid.*, 133b.

25. *Ibid.*, 107b–108a.

26. *Ibid.*, 64b.

27. *Ibid.*, 99a.

28. *Ibid.*, 108a; 133a–b.

29. *Ibid.*, 46b.

30. *Ibid.*, 52b.

mystic to engage in activities which seemed to contradict the correct practices of the path, he should perform them without question. The abandonment of supererogatory religious practices at the command of the *shaykh* is better than their performance of one's own volition. Similarly, acts of asceticism are to be abandoned if one is so instructed by the guide: "If the disciple eats a basted chicken and a sweet dessert everyday at the command of his *shaykh*, it is better than eating nothing for an entire week except a scrap of barley bread of his own volition."³¹

Complete and absolute attachment of the heart to the master in this manner is more difficult than the earlier conditions of seclusion mentioned above, but its benefits are greater. If the mystic is weak in this attachment, weakness also appears in attachment to the tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad. "The mystical aspirant should know that one cannot reach one's goal except through the master, in accordance with the verse: 'Each group knew its own drinking place' (2:60). The mystic's drinking place is the sainthood of the *shaykh*."³²

The next condition of seclusion is the continued banishing of all thoughts, be they good or bad. Control of the inner senses, which is a desired result along the mystical path, cannot be accomplished without the banishing of thought. The mystic must recognize the *shaykh* as the explainer of visions and mystical events and should not attempt to understand them on his own. God will ennoble him later on with the light of intellect and justice so that from the light of the intellect he will obtain the ability to discern, and from the light of justice the power of differentiation.³³

The method through which one succeeds in banishing all thought and controlling the inner senses is the recollection of God (*dhikr*). This is the main mystical practice prescribed by Simnānī, and consequently he describes its method and meaning in great detail.

The Rules of Recollection

Simnānī often uses the metaphor of light to explain the function of recollection along the mystical path. Through recollection a light

31. *Ibid.*, 67a.

32. *Fath al-mubīn*, 5a-b. Despite the centrality of the *shaykh* in Simnānī's teachings, he is careful to emphasize that the Sufi should not imitate his master or earlier mystics, but should model his behavior on the Prophet, because what earlier *shaykhs* achieved was a direct result of their following in Muḥammad's footsteps (*Salwat al-'āshiqīn*, 288).

33. *Ibid.*, 5a.

known as the light of love appears. However, if elements of physical human existence remain in the individual, smoke accompanies this light and obstructs the mystic from it. The only way to dissipate this smoke is with the light of Muḥammad. Through following him and performing the fundamental ritual requirements of prayer, fasting, and so forth, the divine secrets which are in the treasure house of the heart are revealed to the mystic.³⁴

According to Simnānī, God commands Muslims to recollect Him: "And remember the name of your Lord by morning and by evening" (76:25). The remembrance of God in the evening of the body (*al-aṣīl al-jismānī*) and the morning of the spirit (*al-bukra ar-rūḥāniyya*) diminishes the power of disbelieving and evil forces.³⁵ On another occasion they are commanded: "And remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself with complete devotion" (73:8).³⁶

People who intentionally do not engage in divine recollection are the party of Satan. "Truly it is the party of Satan that will perish" (58:19).³⁷ In contrast, righteous people are constantly engaged in the recollection of God and cannot be distracted from it by any worldly concerns, being mindful of the verse: "Remember Me and I will remember you" (2:152).³⁸ Such a mystic abandons everything at the command of his guide, and through his constant occupation with the remembrance of God attempts to negate all the blessings bestowed upon him, seeking nothing from God but God Himself.³⁹

"And the places of worship are for Allāh, so invoke no one along with Allāh" (72:18). That is, the mosques of the hearts were built

34. *Sirr-i samā'*, 11. Simnānī justifies the centrality of divine recollection on the basis of several Qur'ānic verses (the imperative form from the root *dh-k-r* appears at least seven times in the Qur'an): "Everything that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God" (57:1; 59:1; 61:1) refers to the heavens of the mind and the earth of the body, implying that all the forces stored in the mind and buried in the body glorify God (*Najm*, 56a).

35. *Ibid.*, 122a.

36. *Ibid.*, 111a. Other frequently cited Qur'ānic references to *dhikr* are: "O You who believe! Remember Allāh with much remembrance" (33:41); "Remember your Lord much and praise Him in the early hours of night and morning" (3:41); "So when you have completed the prayers then remember Allāh standing and sitting and lying down" (4:103); "And remember your Lord within yourself humbly and with awe and under your breath by morning and evening" (7:205); "And remember your Lord when you have forgotten" (18:24).

37. *Ibid.*, 54b.

38. *Ibid.*, 119b.

39. *Ibid.*, 53a.

in the spiritual realm for Allāh, so do not invoke the name of anyone else along with the recollection of God in these mosques. Do not permit harmful thoughts to enter into your heart. Most of the arrogance in *dhikr* occurs because the recollector allows thought to enter during recollection, so guard against extraneous thoughts in the *dhikr* of the heart.⁴⁰

Simnānī began his mystical quest without the guidance of a *shaykh* and designed his mystical exercises on his own. He claimed that, until the arrival of Akhī Sharaf ad-dīn, his *dhikr* consisted of performing three hundred prayer cycles (*rak'āt*) a day and repeating the formula "There is no god but God" 200,000 times.⁴¹ However, he claims to have learnt a more elaborate exercise from his master Nūr ad-dīn al-Isfarā'inī who had received it in an unbroken chain of transmission from Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815–16). From him it was traced back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib through 'Alī b. Mūsā ar-Riḍā.⁴²

Although the *dhikr* formula used by Simnānī is certainly the same one used by Isfarā'inī, the ritual itself is markedly different from Simnānī's description of the *dhikr* practice Akhī Sharaf ad-dīn engaged in at their first meeting. It is possible that Isfarā'inī had instructed Simnānī in a different—and possibly more advanced or efficacious—*dhikr* exercise than the one he had taught Akhī Sharaf ad-dīn. It is also possible that Simnānī modified Isfarā'inī's *dhikr*, retaining his *shaykh's* formula but adding his own breathing exercises and bodily movements.

According to Simnānī's *dhikr* practice, the mystic should sit cross-legged facing the *qibla* and start by reciting a prayer:

Allāh! There is no god but Him! On Him do I rely, and He is the Lord of the majestic throne. O my Lord! I seek refuge with you from the goadings of the demons, and seek refuge from the lord whom they attend.⁴³

After this he must say the credal formula three times, then envision his *shaykh* in his heart as if the master were present before him. Then the *dhikr* itself can commence. The ideal formula for

40. Ibid., 108b.

41. Dār al-kutub, untitled, 145a ff.; cf. above, p. 22; *R. fi-dhikr asāmi mashāyikhī*, 73a–b; 'Urwa, pp. 314–15.

42. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 34b.

43. Ibid., 34a.

recollection is the credal statement: "There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*)."⁴⁴ This formula should be uttered in four beats: (i) With all his strength, the mystic should exhale the *lā* from above the navel. (ii) He should then inhale the *ilāha* to the right side of the breast, (iii) then exhale the *illā* from the right side to the left, (iv) and then inhale the *Allāh* to the physical, pineal heart (*dil-i şanūbarī-i şakal*) which is on the left side of the breast. This causes the energy of the word *Allāh* to reach the heart and burn all desires contained therein. From this pineal heart, which is simply a piece of flesh and the abode of the animal spirit, a window is opened to the real mystical heart. From here the light of faith shines forth. The inner spiritual realm is illuminated by this light and the mystic obtains information about the true nature of the composite parts of the body and which among the bodily forces are benign and which malignant.⁴⁴

While engaging in *dhikr* the mystic must draw his eyes upward toward the eyebrows so that he can observe the manner in which the daily *dhikr* practice ascends from the level of the stomach to that of the liver, from there to the physical, pineal heart, and onward to the head. From here it ascends to the real, mystical heart, after it has been granted light by the physical eyes.⁴⁵ It is in the ascent to this mystical heart that colors and visions are manifested to the person engaged in recollection.

It is imperative that the mystic attempt to control his breath and observe its tempo so that he is engaged in recollection in each moment and with every breath. He acquires a new level of enlightenment with each new breath, because every breath has a right over him just as he has a share from each breath. His share from breath is life, whereas the right of the breath over him is the recollection of God through which he acquires gnosis of the divine attributes and essence.⁴⁶

If the mystic fails to engage in recollection at one of the prescribed times, he should make up for it in the morning or late afternoon. However, it is abominable (*makrūh*) to engage in recollection when it is time for ritual prayer.⁴⁷ It is forbidden for a mystic to pass a single day without occupying himself with *dhikr* from after the morning prayer until sunrise, and from sunset until darkness falls.

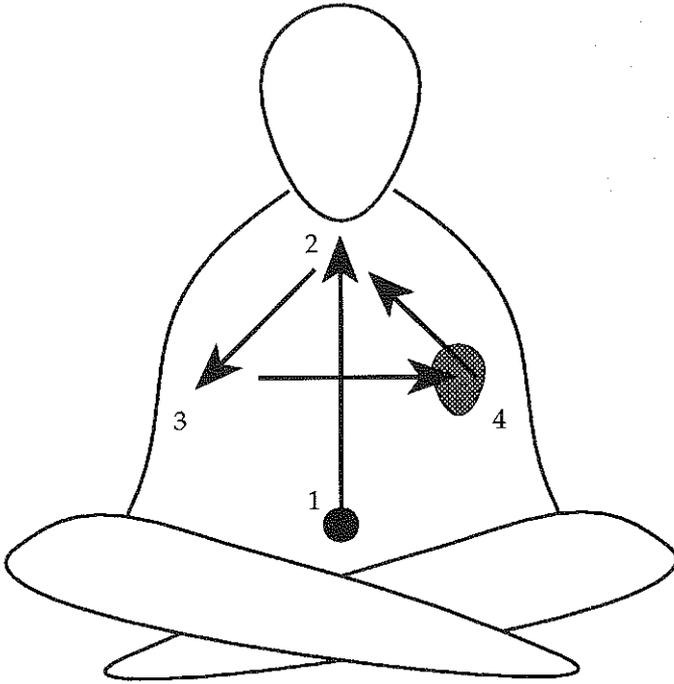
44. *Fath al-mubīn*, 4b. Cf. R. Gramlich, *Die Schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens, Section 2: Glaube und Lehre* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976), 401ff., where a *dhikr* practice attributed to Simnānī is described.

45. *Ibid.*, 5a.

46. *Najm*, 74a–b.

47. *Fuṣūl al-uṣūl*, 74a.

FIGURE 6
Simnānī's *dhikr*



Simnānī states that whosoever does not engage in recollection at these two times, yet claims to be a Sufi, is an impostor who cannot become a true Sufi even if he were to complete a thousand retreats.⁴⁸

Do not be conceited about your seclusion and gnosis. . . . Recollect God at all times and combat your soul so that it is not occupied with worldly desires. Call [your soul] to accounts five times every day and night, and be critical in your examination. Persevere in recollection, especially from the time of the morning prayer until sunrise, and from sunset until nightfall, lest you be heedless of the recollection of God at these two times. You will then be written into the register of the mystics who

48. *Najm*, 74b.

strive for the good and recollect God, not [the register] of those who are lazy, indolent and heedless.⁴⁹

The mystic's tongue cannot be purified except through recollecting God's name, as is stated in the Qur'ān: "Glorify the name of your Lord, most high" (87:1). The highest name of God is "Allāh." But, according to Simnānī, the credal formula "There is no god but Allāh" is a better *dhikr* formula than "Allāh," because the latter is contained in the former which has the additional advantage of negating plurality and affirming divine unity.⁵⁰ Simnānī declares that it is for this reason that the most knowledgeable masters of the Sufi path, all of whom belong to the school (*ṭabaqa*) of Junayd al-Baghdādī, chose this credal statement as the ideal *dhikr* formula for individuals who embarked on the Sufi path and strove to purify their hearts so that the power of recollection of God would descend upon them.⁵¹

God has collected all blessings and benefits in this credal formula,⁵² and whosoever recites it with sincerity and true belief will be among the companions of the right hand. Such people will be successful in their endeavors and Satan will be unable to obstruct them from the path. Simnānī quotes a tradition of Muḥammad in order to emphasize the importance of this formula: "Whosoever says 'There is no god but God' with sincerity enters paradise."⁵³

The weight Simnānī gives to the credal statement as the ideal form of *dhikr* underscores the importance he attaches to adherence to normative Islamic belief on the Sufi path. This importance in no way diminishes as one progresses along the esoteric stages towards the final goal:

Blessings upon whoever follows him [Muḥammad] in the law; and blessings upon blessings for whoever follows him in the law and the path; and blessings upon blessings upon blessings for whoever follows him in the law and reaches knowledge of certitude in the form of *dhikr*, then follows him in the path and reaches the essence of certitude in the meaning of *dhikr*; then follows him in reality and reaches the reality of certitude with

49. *Ibid.*, 74b-75a.

50. *Salwat al-'āshiqīm*, 288.

51. *Ibid.*, 140a.

52. *Ibid.*, 36a.

53. *Ibid.*, 42b. The heavenly garden to which such a mystic is admitted is the one nearest the Lord (*al-janna al-muḍāfa ila'r-rabb*) (36a).

the reality of recollection; then exalts the course of his hidden recollection above the outward form of recollection, its meaning and its reality so that he deserves to have true recollection flow over him.⁵⁴

If one says the credal profession of faith just once with sincerity, one steps from the circle of disbelief into the sphere of Islam, and vanquishes the physical icons of disbelief. However, there are other inner, metaphorical icons which are the idols of one's own desire to which the Qur'ān refers in verse 45:23: "Do you see one who takes as his god his own desire?" These idols cannot be defeated except through constant *dhikr* with perfect concentration and complete understanding and observance of the statement "I wish for nothing except God." Such a mystic must strive so that no thought remains within him after the long vowel (*madd*) of the word *lā* has been pronounced. Under no circumstances should any distracting thoughts be harbored when the end of the formula is uttered, because nothing can be associated with the name of God.⁵⁵

Simnānī differentiates between audible (*adh-dhikr al-jahrī*) and silent recollection (*adh-dhikr al-khafī*), and firmly maintains the superiority of the latter, going so far as to state that audible, outward *dhikr* is forbidden both on religious and intellectual grounds.⁵⁶ To support his position on religious grounds Simnānī provides several quotations from the Qur'ān: "Recollect you Lord in your soul with humility and in reverence, and without loudness of words, in the mornings and evenings" (7:205); "Call on your Lord with humility and in private, for Allah loves not those who trespass beyond bounds" (7:55); "Neither say your prayer aloud, nor say it in a low tone, but seek a middle course" (17:110). In addition, he also provides several quotations from prophetic tradition such as this one related by Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī (d. 412/1021): "The best recollection is the silent one, and the best sustenance is that which just suffices."⁵⁷

54. *Ibid.*, 42b.

55. *Faṭḥ al-mubīn*, 5a.

56. *Mawāriḍ ash-shawāriḍ*, MS. 11-mīm, Majāmi' fārsiyya, Dār al-kutub, Cairo, 147b.

57. *Ibid.* Another relevant tradition quoted by Simnānī is from the day at Khaybar when Muḥammad came upon a group of Muslims who were raising their voices in prayer. Upon seeing them the Prophet said: "Control yourselves, because you are not calling the deaf nor someone who is absent, but He is listening and near; indeed, He is with you" (Bukhārī, Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Māja). Simnānī also quotes from the *Manfa'at as-sālik* of 'Ammār al-Bidlīsī and the *Tuḥfat al-barāra* of Majd ad-dīn al-Baghdādī in support of silent recollection.

In addition to these religious reasons, there are ten intellectual proofs supporting the superiority of silent *dhikr*.

1. One of the benefits of seclusion is controlling the external senses so that the inner senses might develop. Audible *dhikr* does not aid in repressing the external sense of hearing.
2. Breath control is primarily obtained through inner light; this cannot be attained through audible recollection.
3. Sincerity is required in all religious practices. Audible recollection results in showmanship which overshadows sincerity.
4. Complete obliteration of desire is necessary on the mystical path for the *dhikr* to reach the heart. This desire cannot be destroyed except with the heat of strong, silent *dhikr* which reaches the real, mystical heart. On the other hand, when a mystic continues to engage in audible recollection, his breath ascends and most of the heat escapes from his mouth, preventing him from reaching the esoteric level.
5. Audible recollection confounds the brain and confuses the intellect.
6. Audible recollection contains the wine of the soul and causes the desire of the soul to overwhelm audition of the recollection.
7. Audible recollection confuses the heart during divine conversation, prayer, and the mystics' presence with their Lord.
8. Unlike audible recollection, silent recollection is the opening of the door to the unseen.
9. Audible *dhikr* constitutes the abandonment of appropriate behavior in the presence of God, and makes the mystic deserving of punishment.
10. Through audible recollection, mystics are deprived of listening to the recollection of the Recollected Who is the goal of the recollector.⁵⁸

I have translated *adh-dhikr al-jahrī* as audible rather than vocal recollection in order to avoid confusion regarding the various levels of *dhikr* which are mentioned by Simnānī. In addition to audible recollection, he refers to a form of silent *dhikr*, generally called the strong, silent recollection of the tongue (*adh-dhikr al-lisānī al-qawī al-khafī*), but occasionally also referred to as the bodily recollection of the tongue (*adh-dhikr al-lisānī al-qālabī*). This form of recollection is similar to audible *dhikr* in that it is external and requires the

58. Ibid., 148b-49a.

conscious attention of the recollector as it flows over the tongue. However, unlike audible *dhikr*, the silent recollection of the tongue is inaudible, and does not distract the mystic from the quest in the manner mentioned above with regard to audible *dhikr*.⁵⁹

Vocal *dhikr*, or recollection of the tongue (*adh-dhikr al-lisānī*), is best for mystics at early stages of the quest because it gets rid of impurities obtained through preoccupation with acquisition in the temporal realm. Deliverance from this preoccupation is obtained through purification which cannot be achieved except through the strong, silent, and vocal recollection of the credal profession of faith.⁶⁰

Although this form of recollection is to be practiced silently, great care should be taken in its repetition. The formula should be said forcefully and all syllables must be pronounced properly, because the strength of the heart derives from correct pronunciation.⁶¹ "When [the mystic] takes the breath of the bodily recollection of the tongue, the mortal earth and physical mountains are raised from their places."⁶²

In the early stages of the mystical quest, when the mystic is still easily distracted by his desires, he must observe the occurrence of recollection. At this stage he must consciously occupy himself with the banishing of passions. This is not possible except through the negation of all volition and the affirmation of God as the Master of volition in this world and the next.⁶³ One purpose of consciously

59. Cf. an untitled treatise by Sa'd ad-dīn-i Ḥamūya in which he states that *dhikr* has seven stages: (i) *dhikr* of the tongue; (ii) *dhikr* of the tongue along with the heart; (iii) *dhikr* of the heart without the tongue; (iv) *dhikr* of the heart with the spirit; (v) *dhikr* of the spirit without the heart; (vi) *dhikr* of the spirit with the inmost being (*sirr*); (vii) *dhikr* of the inmost being without the spirit (MS. 706, Köprülü Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, 120a).

Simnānī also refers to audition (*samā'*), or listening to music, in the context of his discussions on *dhikr*. He considers audition to be not without merit, but maintains that it contains serious pitfalls which render it dangerous for most mystics. "Audition is a drug which, if eaten by itself without being prepared together with other good medicines, becomes a deadly poison" (*Fuṣūl al-uṣūl*, 80b). To support his argument, Simnānī refers to the positions of Abū Ḥanīfa and ash-Shāfi'ī regarding audition, Abū Ḥanīfa having said that it was forbidden whereas ash-Shāfi'ī that it was permissible. In explaining the latter position, Simnānī states that ash-Shāfi'ī was thinking of the elite among the mystics for whom it does not constitute a danger (*Sirr-i samā'*, 14).

60. *Najm*, 71a.

61. *Fuṣūl al-uṣūl*, 74a.

62. *Najm*, 98a.

63. *al-Warid ash-shārid*, 34b.

engaging in *dhikr* is to avoid making religion an automatic or habitual act since true worship consists of the abandonment of habit.⁶⁴ To affirm one's faith and then ignore the true nature of religion by turning it into something that is habitual or inherited is as reprehensible as being a disbeliever.⁶⁵

Strive so that you are present in recollection, humble in recitation, submissive in your obedience to Him, as if you were listening to the Qur'ān from God and recollecting Him as if you were sitting in His presence.⁶⁶

Although such constant attention is necessary at the early stages of recollection, eventually the mystic should attain a stage in which he loses awareness both of the recollection and of himself. It is through this loss of his own existence that the mystic attains the essence of the reality of certitude (*ḥaqīqa ḥaqq al-yaqīn*).⁶⁷

Have you ever had a time in recollection when you were not a thing remembered? If this is not the case, then you will never perfect true recollection (*adh-dhikr al-ḥaqīqī*), because one of the characteristics of *dhikr* is the forgetting of everything besides God as He says in His book: "And remember your Lord when you have forgotten" (18:24), that is, forgotten everything but the Lord. So read the Lord's Word when He says: "Was there not a time in the life of man when he was not even a mentionable thing" (76:1). This is the state (*ḥāl*) which appears to the recollector who has travelled to the level (*martaba*) of Adam whereupon the power of the recollection of God overwhelms the clay of his body. The clay vanishes from his clayness, and the light of true recollection penetrates all parts of his body.⁶⁸

Simnānī mentions three kinds of recollection which are hierarchical in nature such that a mystic progresses from one to the next over the course of the mystical quest. The first is the repetition of the formula *lā ilāha illā Allāh* in the manner outlined above. This

64. *Najm*, 66b.

65. *Ibid.*, 59a, 46b.

66. *Ibid.*, 46b.

67. *Ibid.*, 100b.

68. *Ibid.*, 119a.

form of recollection is of the human realm (*nāsūtī*), because inhabitants of this realm believe in the existence of a multitude of deities and are veiled from the "God of gods and Lord of lords." The negation of deities and the affirmation of the sole existence of Allāh contained in this *dhikr* formula helps deliver novice mystics from polytheism.⁶⁹ The second form of recollection is of the Realm of Sovereignty and consists solely of the name "Allāh," as God commanded Muḥammad: "Say 'Allāh!' Then leave them to plunge in vain discourse and trifling" (6:91). The name of God is sufficient at this stage because in the Realm of Sovereignty—in the absence of plurality—there is no need for the negation of other deities.⁷⁰ The third formula of recollection in the Realm of Omnipotence is simply the word *huwa* (He), because God gives it precedence over the name "Allāh" in describing divinity (*bayān at-tawḥīd*). Simnānī supports the primacy of this formula on the basis of a prophetic saying: "When the servant is established in the quiddity of the Lord, he knows oneness with his heart."⁷¹

While engaging in recollection the mystic undergoes a series of experiences which constitute a systematic annihilation of the self, and sees a progression of colors and visions which function as signs or milestones marking advancement on the path. Simnānī describes these mystical visionary experiences in such vivid detail that they constitute one of his major contributions to Sufi thought. However, before describing these visions, Simnānī gives two points of warning to those engaged in mystical exercises. The first is that, while engrossed in *dhikr*, the mystic must never enter among ordinary people because his speech in the mystical state is based on knowledge which is not commonly known, its real meaning lying beyond the comprehension of most human beings who would most likely consider him mad.⁷² The second is that all experiences and visions must comply with Islamic orthodoxy. Any mystical experience which is not in accordance with the Qur'ān and the Prophet's tradition is deception and temptation thrown in the mystic's path by Satan.⁷³

69. *Qawāṭi' as-sawāṭi'*, 176b.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 177a. There is a fourth formula which relates to the Realm of Divinity. This is the supreme name of God which is unpronounceable, exalted above any form which would be comprehensible in the Human Realm and the Realm of Sovereignty.

72. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 35a; *Najm*, 156a; *Salwat al-'āshiqīn*, 281.

73. *Farḥat al-'āmilīn*, 53ff. To underscore this point Simnānī reproduces a non-canonical *ḥadīth* tradition: "Any action not in accordance with my

The Hierarchy of Visions and Colors

When the mystic strives towards God she produces the light of recollection within herself, and sees various colors according to her degree of advancement. As she progresses through the hierarchy of seven subtle substances, the flow of light increases as does the purity of its colors.⁷⁴ These colors and visions are displayed to her by God in accordance with His saying: "Out of them come pearls and corral" (55:22). The pearls are the lights of the mysteries of the inmost being (*al-asrār as-sirrī*) which are extracted from the celestial ocean, while the corral, which is brought forth from the lower sea, constitutes the fires of the love of the heart.⁷⁵

The colors that appear to the mystic in the beginning are from the Realm of Sovereignty, constituting the colors of the mystical states. The lights that shine in the heart of the mystic in the intermediate stage are the lights of the Realm of Omnipotence. The secrets which descend upon the subtle substance of I-ness and manifest themselves to the inmost being are from the Realm of Divinity.⁷⁶ In light of the nature of these manifestations, it must be understood that the visions witnessed in the mystical state are not outside the human being but exist within the kingdom of the soul.⁷⁷

The mystic must traverse the climes of the seven hierarchical subtle substances of the mystical body as part of the journey culminating in the attainment of divine knowledge. In this journey the mystic must remove a succession of curtains, each of the seven climes having a curtain consisting of ten thousand veils, and having a color specific to it. In describing these curtains and veils and the means of their removal, Simnānī emphasizes the fact that it is the

tradition is disobedience before Allāh, Most Majestic." He also quotes extensively from the sayings of earlier mystics, among them Junayd al-Baghdādī, Shibli, Abū Bakr [probably Abū 'Alī] ad-Daqqāq, Abū Sulaymān ad-Dārānī, Sahl at-Tustarī, Sarī as-Saqāṭī, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, Abū 'Uthmān al-Maghribī, Aḥmad b. Abī'l-Ḥawārī and Majd ad-dīn al-Baghdādī. The quotation from Junayd is as follows: "No one has ever reached Allāh, may He be exalted, except through Allāh, and whosoever makes his path to God, Most Majestic, other than through following the tradition of the Prophet (al-Mustafā) goes astray."

74. *Qawāṭī' as-sawāṭī'*, 179b.

75. *Najm*, 33a.

76. *Qawāṭī' as-sawāṭī'*, 160a.

77. *Farḥat al-'āmilīn*, 41.

mystic who is veiled by them, not God, since nothing can veil God.⁷⁸ The first curtain is that of the physical realm or of Satan and is dark and turbid. The second is that of the soul and is blue on the outside and green on the inside. The third curtain is of the unseen of the heart and is red or ruby colored. After this comes the white and very fine curtain of the unseen of the inmost being and then the yellow one of the spirit. These are followed by the veil of the unseen of the mystery, which is of a luminescent black of the utmost clarity. The final curtain is of the Hiddenmost Hidden, corresponding to the realm of the subtle substance of the "real." This curtain is described either as being green, or else as being pure light and having no color on account of its extreme purity, brilliance, subtlety, grandeur and majesty.⁷⁹ After the removal of these seven curtains consisting of seventy thousand veils, the mystic reaches the greatest veil (*hijāb-i kibriyā*). At this stage one must "place one's head in humility on the threshold of supplication" so that one may be overcome by a mystical experience (*jadhba*) from the divine realm and be transported to the divine presence.⁸⁰

Simnānī devoted an entire treatise to the description of the colors and visionary experiences which the mystics undergo in their quest for perfection. Known as the *Risāla-yi nūriyya* or *Risālat al-anwār*, this treatise is both poetic and allegorical. However, despite its somewhat flowery style, the *Risāla-yi nūriyya* systematically and exhaustively conveys the most salient features of visionary mystical experiences encountered along the Sufi path. In light of this, I have closely followed Simnānī's argument as presented in this treatise in the description of these visions given below.⁸¹

When the mystic turns his face from the visible dimension of the physical realm he should also turn away from the visible dimension of the spiritual realm and face the invisible of the spiritual realm. The first curtain that appears before him is turbid until he strikes the stone of his heart with the flint of the credal formula "*lā ilāha illā Allāh*." Suddenly, the hidden fire which is placed in him becomes apparent, and he stands in the fireship of the soul (*ḥarrāqa-yi nafs*). He feeds this hidden fire with the firewood of the body until it becomes ignited and that turbid curtain is transformed to dark blue.

78. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 48b.

79. *Shaqā'iq al-ḥadā'iq*, 77a; *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 48a-b.

80. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 48b.

81. I have translated this treatise in its entirety in "A Kubrawī Treatise on Mystical Visions: The *Risāla-yi nūriyya* of 'Alā' ad-dawla as-Simnānī," *Muslim World* 83:1 (1993), 68-80.

As he dries the firewood of existence and the remaining pieces or morsels of delight, the colors become purer and the smoke decreases. When the morsels are purified so as to be composed entirely of that which is just, then no smoke remains and a pleasant odor reaches the nose. In addition, colorful lights appear, and one has visions of spiritual people. All of the above experiences result from the blessing of the strength of recollection and from guarding the morsel from the moisture of sensual delight.⁸² The novice mystic witnesses these visions as a result of the subtle substance of beauty which is placed in his breast after his escape from the darkness of the body.⁸³

The differences between the colors red, white, yellow, black and blue in this stage are a result of the strength of the fire of *dhikr*. It is possible that the essence of the fire of recollection may come out from behind the curtain and shout: "I am everything" (*hama manam*). It is imperative that the person not be arrogant at this point since this is the stage of the beginners in recollection. If he were to be arrogant he would be forbidden entry into higher stages of the path.⁸⁴

The second fire which appears to the mystic on the path is undefined, but insofar as it can be described it is the fire of reality, of recollection, love, longing, desire, anger, deviltry (*shayṭanat*), and of the physical body. It is possible to differentiate between all these fires with signs that occur along the path, but the novice should not attempt to differentiate between them without the guidance of the *shaykh* because, tricked by Satan, the mystic may grow arrogant and leave the path. It is therefore necessary that the disciple report everything to the *shaykh* so that he may explain the mystical experiences and visions.⁸⁵ If the guide commands the mystic to repel these thoughts at this stage, he must do so regardless of how difficult it proves to be. The guide's command to repel these thoughts serves to counteract the mystic's excessive attachment to experiences. If one were not to obey the *shaykh* in this matter one would not ascend any further on the path, but rather meet with the gravest of consequences.⁸⁶

After this, when the existence soiled by the morsels of sensual delight and tarnished by the filth of disobedience is completely burned, and annihilation has been obtained as a result of the fire of recollection, then the light of the soul becomes apparent, the curtain of which is a pleasing dark blue.

82. *Ibid.*, 44b.

83. *Najm*, 114b.

84. *Ibid.*, 103a; *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 44b.

85. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 44b-45a.

86. *Najm*, 57a.

Subsequently the light of the heart appears, the curtain of which is ruby red. Upon seeing this light the individual experiences a great mystical 'taste' in his heart and obtains permanence on the path.⁸⁷ Sometimes, in the early stages of purifying the heart, the mystic sees the tablet of his heart blackened with different patterns (*nuqūsh*); then he sees that it has been wiped clean and purified of these images. After this he observes it completely covered with the word "Allāh"; then the tablet is polished clean and only the singular name of God—"Allāh"—remains. After this he sees that this name is written with an ink of red light, then with white light, and then with green. Finally he sees a tablet of light which has neither color nor images upon it. At that very instant, the images (*nuqūsh*) of direct knowledge of the divine (*al-'ilm al-ladunī*) appear upon it. This constitutes the stage of the unveiling of secret knowledge.⁸⁸

After this stage the light of the inmost being shines forth, the curtain of which is white. In this stage he acquires knowledge of the delight of unveiling. This is followed by the light of the spirit which shines forth with an extremely pleasing yellow color. The lower soul is weakened and the heart strengthened by seeing it. After this the light of the mystery, to which the holy spirit is a reference, is manifested. Its curtain is of such a pure and awesome blackness that the mystic is annihilated by the fear of seeing it.⁸⁹

The water of eternal life is arrayed in this darkness. Whoever gives himself a cup in the luminescence of the light of the Prophet. . . and remains in the shadow of obedience to him, like Khidr that person reaches the spring of the water of life which is the source of the lights of the attributes. There he drinks a cupful of love from the heavenly river of grace, and becomes deserving of that which the Lord, Most High, manifests to him through the attributes of beauty and majesty.⁹⁰

When the subtle substance of mystery announces the coming of the subtle substance of the "real," the forces of the body and soul disbelieve it. This state appears to the mystic after he has traversed the veils of the substances of the body, soul, heart, inmost being and spirit, and has abided in their abodes (*mawāṭin*) until God sends to

87. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 45a.

88. *Najm*, 55a.

89. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 45a.

90. *Ibid.*

him the subtle substance of mystery in order to lift him up from this stage and admit him into the realm of mystery. The mystic must abandon all his supererogatory religious practices at the command of his guide in order to make transcending this level easier.⁹¹ The mystic should abandon physical activity and vocal recollection at this point, because physical activity is simply a means for reaching this state.⁹²

In addition to abandoning nonessential religious practices, the mystic must not incline himself towards the jewels that are placed in this darkness, but should travel with sincere steps and a strong heart. He must not fear any of the dreadful forms and sounds he experiences, so that the light of the mystery might become apparent from its potentiality in the invisible dimension. If this occurs, then fear is transformed into intimacy. And when he has fulfilled the requirements of this stage, absolute light, which is a particular attribute of God, is manifested.⁹³ It is green in color, this greenness being a sign of the life of the tree of existence.

The manifestation of absolute light (*nūr-i muṭlaq*) is not possible except in paradise, when it is accompanied by certain effects. First the mystic experiences her own annihilation. After that she experiences visions of eschatological events, such as standing on the boundary (*barzakh*); splitting of the sky; transformation of the earth; flying of the mountains; dispersal of the fixed stars; the changed rising of the sun and the moon; the dimming of the planets; judgement of accounts on the balance; traversing the path; being thrown into the abyss; and being lifted up by levels. When the mystic sees these signs, she should know herself to be in the eternal garden. Then she should pay complete attention to the beauty of God's presence, not inclining to anything else, so that the holy essence (*dhāt-i muqaddas*) may be manifested, illuminating the nature of everything that the mystic has seen before.⁹⁴

The manifestation of the light of God is exalted above everything and has no similitude. The light of the mystery is manifested above the head and has no similitude in the visible realm and is such that it annihilates the mystic at the very onset of its manifestation. The

91. *Najm*, 66b.

92. *Ibid*, 70b.

93. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 45a.

94. *Ibid.*, 45b; *Najm*, 132b. The visions described by Simnānī at this stage correspond to eschatological events which are referred to in the Qur'an and widely elaborated upon by Islamic theologians.

light of the spirit is greater than that of the sun, and is generally manifested behind the back, although sometimes it appears from the left and right. The light of the inmost being resembles that of the spirit, but is brighter and subtler. Its manifestation occurs opposite the mystic and strikes his eyes, enters his body and annihilates him. When the mystic returns from that state of annihilation, he finds much knowledge within himself which he did not possess before. When this light falls on his eyes it permeates all parts of his body and he sees himself like illuminated, limpid water, since both his skin and clothes are illuminated.

The light of the heart resembles that of the moon. This light is manifested on the left side of the mystic and annihilates him. In this state, effort in the heart is decreased, and strange lights and states appear to the mystic.

The light of the soul surrounds the individual. It resembles a polished door or window on which the sun is shining and from which the reflection is falling on the wall. This light of the soul does not possess the power to annihilate (*quwwat-i ifnā'*), but simply helps to illuminate visible things. The mystic also sees other lights at this stage, such as that of a candle, lamp or lantern, which represent the lights of the spirits of classes (*tabaqāt*) of humans and Jinn, according to their differing levels of attainment.⁹⁵

The sparks of fire that the mystic sees in the beginning are signs of having traversed the element of the fire of one's own existence. Traveling through the air is a sign of passing the element of air. Swimming in the sea or in rivers, and walking on water are signs of the mystic's passing the element of water. Levitating above streets, houses and walls is a sign of the mystic having traversed the earthy portion of himself which is the fourth and final element in the physical composition of a person. Each time the various parts of the mystic's body are purified of the darkness of the morsels of sensual delight, pure, swiftly moving and beautifully colored fires become visible, as do clean, bright air, crystal clear waters, wide streets, clean and majestic palaces, beautiful carpets and wonderful feasts.⁹⁶

If parts of the mystic's body are sullied by morsels of sensual delight and soiled by selfish desires, he sees the opposite of this, such as frightening, smoldering fires, swirling with smoke, into which he falls and is burned. In addition, he may see a crucible into which he is hurled, or turbid winds, lightning, frightening predicaments, and

95. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 45b-46a.

96. *Ibid.*, 46a.

terrifying darkness in which he is imprisoned. Other awful visions may be manifested, such as turbid, filthy waters in which he drowns, or narrow, dark streets, and ruined, waste-filled palaces. Whenever the mystic tries to escape this desolation he is surrounded on all sides by high walls. He sees hills of sand on which he walks with great difficulty, and deep, dark pits into which he falls. In this stage dangerous beasts such as the snake, scorpion, lion, leopard, bear and boar become apparent and torment him.⁹⁷

Escape from this state is dependent upon transcending the attributes of the soul which incites to evil. To the degree that the mystic exchanges the darkness of the morsels of sensual delight for the purity of the morsels of truth, blameworthy attributes are transformed into praiseworthy ones, and the fearsome, detestable images described above are transformed into noble or pleasing ones, such as deer, and colorful, melodious birds. In order to realize this transformation the mystic must comprehend the reality underlying the frightening visions such as the scorpion, fire and rubble. Within these frightening, worldly forms there lie beautiful and positive things such as the reality of the heavenly nymph and of eternal life (*ḥaqā'iq al-ḥūriyya wa'l-khuldiyya*), as well as eternal blessings.⁹⁸

After the mystic progresses further along the path, there comes a time when the animal forms are discarded and the human form is assumed. The seeker then sees himself as the mystical traveler that he is, and suddenly the purity of the morsel of reality is greater, as is its beauty. The outward sign of the beauty of the invisible form in the visible realm is the good conduct of the mystic. After transcending this state, the dark, hidden personality of the human being becomes illuminated, and the mystic becomes light personified. At this stage the mystic ascends to the reality of the subtle substance of I-ness (*laṭīfa-yi anā'iyyat*) and the acquired body (*badan-i muktasab*) abides with him eternally.⁹⁹

Annihilation and Resurrection

A significant feature of the mystical visionary journey described above is the experience wherein the individual is annihilated and is subsequently resurrected. Simnānī uses the terms 'annihilation' (*fanā'*)

97. Ibid.

98. *Najm*, 37b; *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 46b.

99. *Risāla-yi nūriyya*, 46b.

and 'resurrection' (*qiyāma*) interchangeably in this context. Nevertheless, the phenomena which they describe are not always identical.

He uses the term *fanā'* to connote annihilation of the self in a manner consistent with its meaning in Sufi thought in general. This loss of self occurs at four levels: (a) at the beginning of the path as a result of recollection; (b) in the middle of the path as annihilation *from* the recollection; (c) annihilation *in* recollection which occurs at the end of the path; and (d) annihilation in the object of recollection which is the beginning of attainment of the divine realm. After this the mystic abides with God (*baqā'*), having attained the stage of servitude which is the noblest of stages and most splendid of levels.¹⁰⁰

This particular description of the varieties of annihilation is in the context of *dhikr* practice. In all other references to the destruction and subsequent resurrection of the individual, Simnānī uses the term *qiyāma* to the virtual exclusion of *fanā'*. Occasionally he also defines this experience as death (*mawt*), especially when referring to the three primary forms of annihilation in human experience, these being voluntary death (*al-mawt al-ikhtiyārī*), compulsory death (*al-mawt al-idtirārī*), and the great and awesome promised day (*al-yawm al-maw'ūd al-kabīr al-'azīm*) marking the collective death of all human beings. These forms of annihilation are accompanied by resurrections. The first of these is the lesser resurrection obtained through voluntary death, as referred to in a saying attributed to the Prophet: "Die before you die." The second is the intermediate resurrection which is also mentioned in a non-canonical *ḥadīth*: "Whoever dies, his resurrection has occurred."¹⁰¹ The third is the greater resurrection which is the collective or general one. The nature of reality and of the mystical endeavor will be made apparent to everyone after physical death and resurrection, be it the individual intermediate one or the final one. However, truly virtuous individuals seek this state before they die, and engage in mystical and ascetic exercises in this life in order to annihilate themselves. This is what is known as voluntary death, and is greatly rewarded by God both in this world and in the next.¹⁰²

The attainment of voluntary death, or annihilation before the occurrence of physical death, is the immediate goal of all mystical exercises. It is only once this has been attained that the ultimate goal of true knowledge and admittance into the divine presence can be achieved. According to Simnānī, voluntary death is attained through

100. *Shaqā'iq al-ḥadā'iq*, 77b.

101. *Najm*, 103b, cf. 157a-b.

102. *Ibid.*, 45a, 47b. Cf. figure 7.

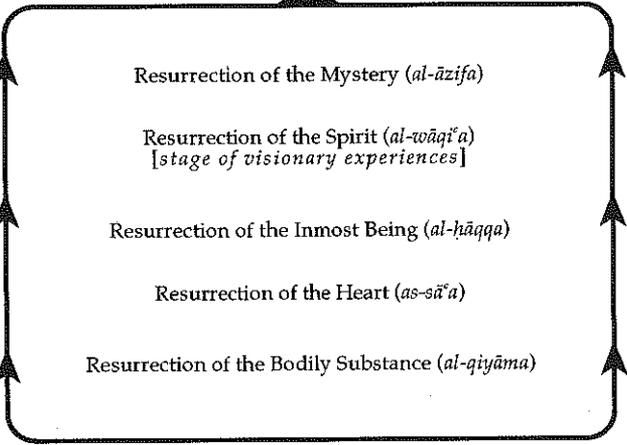
FIGURE 7

Levels of Death and Resurrection

Kind of Death	Corresponding Resurrection
The Promised Day <i>(al-yawm al-mawʿūd)</i>	Collective Resurrection <i>(al-qiyāma al-ʿāmma or al-kubra)</i>
Compulsory Death <i>(al-mawt al-idṭirāri)</i>	Intermediate Resurrection <i>(al-qiyāma al-wuṣṭā)</i>
Voluntary Death <i>(al-mawt al-ikhtiyāri)</i>	Lesser Resurrection <i>(al-qiyāma aṣ-ṣuḡhrā)</i>



Inner levels
of Death and
Resurrection



a series of annihilations and resurrections. The Qur'an refers to this plurality of resurrections through multiple terms such as *al-qiyāma*, *aṭ-ṭamma*, *aṣ-ṣākhkha*, *al-ḥāqqa*, *al-ghāshiya*, *as-sā'a*, and *al-wāqi'a*.¹⁰³ These resurrections correspond to the hierarchic levels of the spiritual body.

The first resurrection is that of the body which is referred to by the term *al-qiyāma*.¹⁰⁴ This is followed by the resurrection of the heart (*as-sā'a*) and of the inmost being (*al-ḥāqqa*).¹⁰⁵ The next resurrection is that of the spirit and is known as *al-wāqi'a* (the event). This is the level at which the most dramatic visionary experiences occur, as have been described above in some detail. Due to the power of this resurrection the mountains move and the earth shakes, and the gale winds of grace fan the fires of longing and love, making the waters of wisdom sink into the earth and thereby admitting the mystic to previously unknown knowledge.¹⁰⁶

The final resurrection is that of the mystery and is known as *al-āzifa*. The intensity and dread of this experience are such that none other than God can reveal it.¹⁰⁷ This is the resurrection which lies closest to the divine presence. The mystic attains the level of the subtle substance of the "real" after its occurrence and abides eternally in the divine presence.

Conclusion

Simnānī was highly aware of the difficulties involved in following the mystical path. Not only did he warn his readers about the pitfalls they might encounter, but he also discussed the very real possibility that many people might lack the ability or resolve to complete this perilous journey. The difficulties one might encounter stem from two main sources, the overpowering nature of mystical experience, and the physical and spiritual demands of the path.

In this chapter I have described at length both the pleasant and fearsome visions encountered on the path as discussed by Simnānī.

103. Ibid., 154a.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid., 98b, 36b. There is no resurrection of the soul because the lights and visions manifested at that level are not powerful enough to cause annihilation (see above, p. 137). The resurrection of the inmost being is further divided into three levels which Simnānī names but does not explain (*Najm*, 97a).

106. Ibid., 36b-37a.

107. Ibid., 23a.

These constitute the complementary facets of mystical experience which are generally described in Sufism as expansion (*bast*) and contraction (*qabd*). The former connotes the state of ease or expansion in which the mystic is released from the overpowering aspects of mystical experience, while the latter constitutes the sense of overpowering and constriction which frightens the mystic and tempts him to abandon the quest.

Simnānī lays great emphasis on the importance of giving equal weight to these two states. The mystic should not be pleased with one of them and discouraged by the other, but rather should remain steadfast in his recollection of God in either event.¹⁰⁸ At such times as he is contracted he should recall the non-canonical *ḥadīth*: "The heart of the believer is held between two of God's fingers."¹⁰⁹ He should realize that the state of contraction, like that of expansion, is from God and should put complete trust in Him. This constitutes the eighth and final condition of seclusion, that of ceasing to raise objections to God in *qabd* and *bast*, and being content with whatever happens.¹¹⁰

The second major source of difficulty on the mystical path is the lack of aptitude or resolve. If, for some reason, the individual does not attain the experience of mystical "taste" through recollection, he should attempt to reaffirm his commitment to the purpose of the exercise by declaring: "Indeed, I recollect God for God's sake, not for mystical experience." He should also take comfort in the fact that even if he does not attain this taste in this world he will surely do so in the afterlife.¹¹¹ However, if he lacks the opportunity or capacity for proper recollection, he should know that God is forgiving and has mercy on the mystic's weakness, just as He has mercy upon him for his inability to abandon his physical activities. If he is unable to persist on the mystical path, he should at least continue with his external acts of obedience which are the five pillars of the faith, and abide by all the commandments of God and His prophet.¹¹² In this manner,

108. *Ibid.*, 144a, 47a.

109. *Ibid.*, 41b.

110. *al-Wārid ash-shārid*, 34a.

111. *Najm*, 66a. Simnānī provides a list, attributed to Abū Sa'īd b. Abī'l-Khayr, of ten qualities to look for in a potential disciple: he must be intelligent, obedient, keen of hearing, spiritually perceptive, truthful, trustworthy, young, capable of guarding the confidence of his *shaykh*, receptive to advice and criticism, and artful (*Salwat al-'āshiqīn*, 286).

112. *Ibid.*, 53b.

he will be able to follow the path of righteousness, even though he will never be among the possessors of direct knowledge of the divine (*al-'ilm al-ladunī*) since the only manner of its attainment is through perseverance on the mystical path and fulfillment of all its requirements:

If you rid yourself of the world and its bondage in the stage of divestment, then following the path is possible for you. However, you cannot attain your subtle substance of the "real" as long as there remains within you any false content of the subtle substances of the body, soul, heart, inmost being, spirit or mystery. When you have isolated your soul in the stage of isolation, you will be able to attain your subtle substance of the "real", but you will not witness God. . . . Once you have declared God to be one in the stage of unification (*maqām at-tawhīd*) you will be able to witness Him, but you will not be informed of the secrets of the singular essence as it deserves to be known so long as there remains within you the awareness of unification (*tawhīd*). But when you have rid yourself of the awareness of unification and established divine unity in the stage of oneness (*maqām al-wahda*), firmly in the stage of servitude, then God. . . informs you of the secrets of His holy essence, His glorified attributes, and His exact, perfect and harmonious effects, and makes you honor His secrets, treasure His lights, and mirror His effects.¹¹³

113. *Ibid.*, 168a.