

“To-day¹ Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is a name without a reality. It was once a reality without a name.” Commenting on this in the following century, Hujwīri adds: “In the time of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors this name did not exist, but its reality was in everyone. Now the name exists without the reality.”² Similarly, but without being so absolute either in praise or in blame, Ibn Khaldūn remarks that in the first three generations of Islam mysticism was too general to have a special name. But “when worldliness spread and men tended to become more and more bound up with the ties of this life, those who dedicated themselves to the worship of God were distinguished from the rest by the title of Sufis”.³

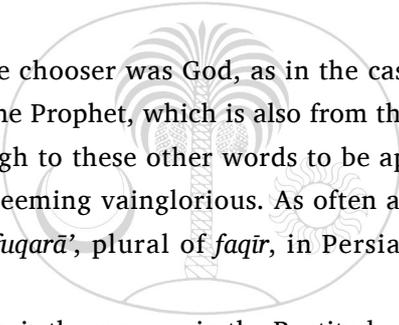
The word *ṣūfī* means literally “woollen” and by extension “wearer of wool”, and there can be little doubt that woollen dress was already associated with spirituality in pre-Islamic times. Otherwise the Prophet would hardly have thought it worth mentioning that Moses was clothed entirely in wool when God spoke to him. Nonetheless, the wearing of wool does not appear to have ever been a general practice among the mystics of Islam. The most likely explanation of the name is that it was first aptly applied to a small group who did wear wool and that it was then indiscriminately extended to all the mystics of the community in order to fill a void; for they had as yet no name, and since they were becoming a more and more distinct class, it was becoming more and more necessary to be able to refer to them. The extremely rapid spread of the name Sufi and its subsequent permanence are no doubt to be explained partly in view of this need and also in virtue of the suitability, in more than one respect, of the term itself. The difficulty which people have always had in explaining it is not the least of its advantages since for the majority Sufism itself, by its very nature, is something of an enigma, and as such it calls for a name that is partially enigmatic. At the same time, its name should have venerable associations and profound implications; and the Arabic root, consisting of the three letters *ṣad-wāw-fā’*, which has the basic meaning of “wool”, has according to the science of letters a secret identity⁴ with the root *ṣad-fā’-wāw* which has the basic meaning of “purity” in the sense of what has been sifted, as grain is sifted from chaff. Moreover this root yields a verbal form which, when written without vowels as is normal in Arabic, is identical to the eye with *ṣūfī* and which means “he was chosen as an intimate friend”,

1. In the tenth century, some three hundred years after the Prophet. The speaker is Abū ’l-Ḥasan Fushanji.

2. *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, ch. III.

3. *Muqaddimah*, ch. XI. The final word stands for two words in the original, *ṣūfiyyah* and *mutaṣawwifah*, the English “Sufi” being commonly used to translate both *ṣūfī* and *mutaṣawwif* (of which the above Arabic terms are the plurals). Strictly speaking, they denote respectively one who is at the end of the path and one who is on the path. There is also a third term, *mustaṣwif*, one who aspires to be a *mutaṣawwif* (see Victor Danner, “The Necessity for the Rise of the Term Sufi” in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Spring, 1972).

4. In virtue of the fact that each letter of the alphabet has a particular numerical value, and the letters of both these roots add up to the same total number.



the implication being that the chooser was God, as in the case of *al-Muṣṭafā*, the Elect, the Chosen, one of the names of the Prophet, which is also from this root. The name given to the mystics of Islam is near enough to these other words to be apt, but remote enough for the mystics to accept it without seeming vainglorious. As often as not, however, they speak of themselves as “the poor”, *al-fuqarā'*, plural of *faqīr*, in Persian *darvīsh*, whence the English “fakir” and “dervish”.

The poverty in question is the same as in the Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”. But the origin of the Sufi term is the verse of the Qur’ān: *God is the Rich and ye are the poor.*⁵

Unlike the Beatitude, it refers to mankind in general, expressing a fact from which none can escape. The Sufis apply the verse to themselves because it is they alone who draw from it, as we shall see, the ultimate conclusions. Indeed, Sufism could almost be defined as an exploitation of the fact in question—the double fact, in what concerns God as well as man. Moreover the name *faqīr* has an operative value in that it serves as a precious reminder; and in ending a letter for example, a Sufi will often precede his name with the words: “from the poor unto his Lord...”

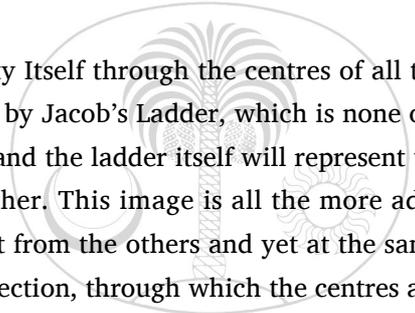
If the Qur’ān does not address the Sufis specifically in the words *Ye are the poor*, it does, as we have seen, refer to the Saints, that is, to the fully realised Sufis, as *the slaves of God* in certain contexts where not only the fact of slavehood (which concerns everyone) but also the full consciousness of it is indicated; and the two concepts of slavehood and poverty are inextricably connected. We have also seen that the Sufis, or rather the best of them, are *the foremost* and *the near*. But of all those Qur’ānic terms which may be said to refer to them and to no one else except *a priori* the Prophets, the most significant as well as the most recurrent is probably the somewhat enigmatic phrase *those who have hearts*; and mention of this has been reserved until now because it is important enough to be the central theme of a chapter. For what indeed is Sufism, subjectively speaking, if not “heart-wakefulness”?

In speaking of the majority, the Qur’ān says: *It is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts.*⁶ This shows—and it would be strange if it were otherwise—that the Quranic perspective agrees with that of the whole ancient world, both of East and of West, in attributing vision to the heart and in using this word to indicate not only the bodily organ of that name but also what this corporeal centre gives access to, namely the centre of the soul, which itself is the gateway to a higher “heart”, namely the Spirit. Thus “heart” is often to be found as a synonym of “intellect”, not in the sense in which this word is misused today but in the full sense of the Latin *intellectus*, that is, the faculty which perceives the transcendent.

In virtue of being the centre of the body, the heart may be said to transcend the rest of the body, although substantially it consists of the same flesh and blood. In other words, while the body as a whole is “horizontal” in the sense that it is limited to its own plane of existence, the heart has, in addition, a certain “verticality” for being the lower end of the “vertical” axis

5. XLVII: 38; and also XXXV: 15: *O men, ye are the poor unto God, and God—He is the Rich, the Object of all Praise.*

6. XXII: 46.



which passes from the Divinity Itself through the centres of all the degrees of the Universe. If we use the imagery suggested by Jacob's Ladder, which is none other than this axis, the bodily heart will be the lowest rung and the ladder itself will represent the whole hierarchy of centres or "Hearts"⁷ one above the other. This image is all the more adequate for representing each centre as separate and distinct from the others and yet at the same time connected with them. It is in virtue of this interconnection, through which the centres are as it were merged into one, that the bodily heart receives Life from the Divinity (according to Sufi doctrine all Life is Divine) and floods the body with Life. In the opposite direction the bodily heart may serve as a focal point for the concentration of all the powers of the soul in its aspiration towards the Infinite, and examples of this methodic practice are to be found in most forms of mysticism and perhaps in all. It is also in virtue of the same interconnection that "Heart" may be used to indicate the topmost rung of the ladder, that is, the Infinite Self, as in the following Holy Tradition:⁸ "My earth hath not room for Me, neither hath My Heaven, but the Heart of My believing slave hath room for Me." Another example is to be found in the poem of the Sufi Ḥallāj which begins: "I saw my Lord with the Eye of the Heart. I said: 'Who art thou?' He answered: 'Thou'."

From this last point of view, "Heart" can be considered as synonymous with "Spirit", which has a Divine as well as a created aspect; and one of the great symbols of the Spirit is the sun which is the "heart" of our universe. This brings us back to the significance of the name Sufi. We have seen that the word means "wearer of wool" and that wool is associated with spirituality. But what is the reason for this association? The answer to this question is clearly to be sought for in the science of symbols and in the knowledge that it gives us of mysterious equivalences; and it emerges, as if by chance, from a remark made by René Guénon⁹ about the profound connection between two symbols of the Spirit, namely the tree and the sun (represented here by its metal, gold): "The fruits of the Tree of Life are the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides; the golden fleece of the Argonauts, which was also placed on a tree and guarded by a serpent or a dragon, is another symbol of the immortality which man has to reconquer."¹⁰ Although he does not mention it, Guénon was certainly aware that this second symbol is solar not only on account of the gold but also on account of the fleece. Like the lion, the sheep has always been especially sacred to the sun;¹¹ and so to wear a woollen garment is to put on the raiment of that "Heart-wakefulness" which is symbolised by the sunlight and which is a central aspect of all that the Sufi sets out to reconquer. The Quranic term *those who have hearts* has thus a relationship even with the name of Sufism as well as being directly expressive of its essence.

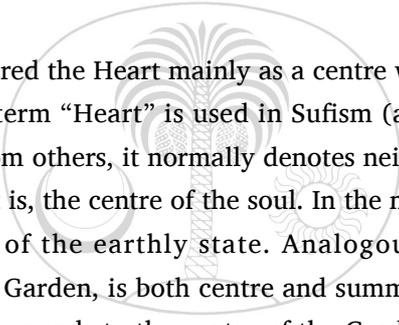
7. For the sake of clarity, this word will be written with a capital letter wherever it denotes a transcendent centre.

8. See p. 23 of the printed edition.

9. Better known in Egypt as 'Abd al-Wāḥid Yaḥyā. He was, by *ṭariqah*, a Shādhilī.

10. *The Symbolism of the Cross*, p. 52.

11. Astrologically, the sun is said to be "in dignity" in the sign of *Leo* and "in exaltation" in the sign of *Aries*.



So far we have considered the Heart mainly as a centre which includes all its “vertical” prolongations. But when the term “Heart” is used in Sufism (as in other mysticisms) of one particular centre as distinct from others, it normally denotes neither the highest nor the lowest but the next to the lowest, that is, the centre of the soul. In the macrocosm, the Garden of Eden is both centre and summit¹² of the earthly state. Analogously the Heart, which in the microcosm corresponds to the Garden, is both centre and summit of the human individuality. More precisely, the Heart corresponds to the centre of the Garden, the point where grows the Tree of Life and where flows the Fountain of Life. The Heart is in fact nothing other than this Fountain, and their identity is implicit in the Arabic word ‘*ayn* which has the meaning of both “eye” and “spring”. The extreme significance of this penultimate degree in the hierarchy of centres is that it marks the threshold of the Beyond, the point at which the natural ends and the supernatural or transcendent begins. The Heart is *the isthmus (barzakh)* which is so often mentioned in the Qur’ān¹³ as separating *the two seas* which represent Heaven and earth, *the sweet fresh-water sea* being the domain of the Spirit whereas *the brackish salt sea* is the domain of soul and body; and when Moses says: I will not cease until I reach the meeting-place of the two seas,¹⁴ he is formulating the initial vow that every mystic must make, implicitly if not explicitly, to reach the lost Centre which alone gives access to transcendent knowledge.

One of the Quranic keys to inner meanings is the verse: *We will show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves.*¹⁵ This draws our attention to the correspondence between outer phenomena and inner faculties, and in considering what is meant by the Heart it is particularly instructive to consider which of “the signs on the horizons” is its symbol. We have already seen that as the Centre of our whole being, the Heart is the inward Sun. But it is so only in virtue of its “conjunction” with the Spirit; in its own right, as centre of the soul and threshold of Heaven, it corresponds to the moon. In a fourteenth-century Sufi commentary¹⁶ on the Qur’ān the sun is interpreted as signifying the Spirit; light is gnosis; day is the Beyond, the transcendent world of direct spiritual perception; and night is this world, the world of ignorance or, at its best, the world of indirect reflected knowledge symbolized by moonlight. The moon transmits indirectly the light of the sun to the darkness of night; and analogously the Heart transmits the light of the Spirit to the darkness of the soul. But it is the moonlight that is indirect; the moon itself, when it shines in the night sky, is looking directly at the sun and is itself not in night but in daylight. This symbolism reveals the transcendence of the Heart and explains what is meant when it is said that the Heart is the faculty of direct spiritual (or intellectual) vision. But in fallen man this faculty is veiled; for to say that when man was compelled to leave the Earthly Paradise he lost contact with the Fountain of Life amounts to saying that he no longer had direct access to the Heart. The soul of fallen man is thus comparable to a clouded night; and this brings us to a question of fundamental importance for Sufism: if it be asked what

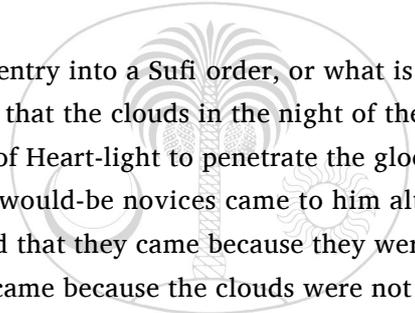
12. As such it is often represented as being on top of a mountain.

13. As for example XXV: 53.

14. XVIII: 60. The Fountain is here replaced by the celestial sea whose waters are the Waters of Life.

15. XLI: 53.

16. By ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, wrongly attributed also to Ibn ‘Arabī.



qualification is necessary for entry into a Sufi order, or what is it that impels anyone to seek initiation, the answer will be that the clouds in the night of the soul must be thin enough to allow at least some glimmer of Heart-light to penetrate the gloom. A Shaykh of this century, when asked how it was that would-be novices came to him although his disciples made no attempt to proselytise, replied that they came because they were “haunted by the thought of God”.¹⁷ In other words, they came because the clouds were not thick enough to keep out the awareness of spiritual reality. We may also reflect, in this context, on the phrase “to have a presentiment of one’s higher states”. This presentiment was mentioned by Guénon as a valid motive for seeking to embark on a spiritual path and as a criterion of qualification for the path. The higher states are the spiritual degrees which are centred in hierarchy, one above the other, along the Axis of the World which is none other than the Tree of Life, the Ray of Light which connects the inward Sun with the inward Moon, the Spirit with the Heart; and the crown of this presentiment is the sense, however remote it may be, of what the same author translated as the “Supreme Identity”¹⁸—in other words, a foretaste of the truth expressed in the lines which have just been quoted from Ḥallāj.

The word “foretaste” enters in here with a view to the Arabic *dhawq* (taste), a term much used by the Sufis following the Prophet to denote the directness of Heart-knowledge as opposed to mind-knowledge. Ghazālī in fact defines Sufism as *dhawq*; and in order to understand how this knowledge which belongs to the summit of the soul and the threshold of Heaven can have need of a term borrowed from the knowledge which is experienced at the soul’s lower boundary, the threshold of the body, it is necessary first to understand the universal law of which this “need” is a particular application.

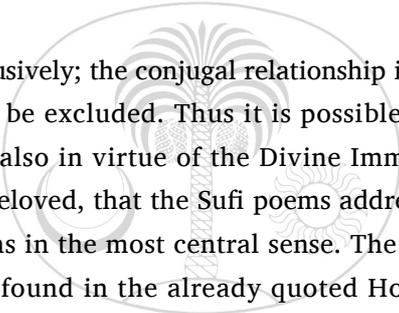
When it is said that God is Love, the highest meaning this can have is that the Archetypes of all the positive relationships—conjugal, parental, filial and fraternal—are Indivisibly One in the Infinite Self-Sufficing Perfection of the Divine Essence.¹⁹ A less absolute meaning is that the central relationship, namely the conjugal one on which the others depend and in the background of which they are already present, has its Archetype in the polarisation of the Divine Qualities into Qualities of Majesty and Qualities of Beauty. It results from this Archetype that mutual concord depends on likeness and unlikeness, affinity and complementarity. Both the Majesty and the Beauty are Infinite and Eternal, whence their affinity. But one is Active Perfection and the other is Passive Perfection,²⁰ whence their complementarity. On earth the human pair have affinity through their vice-regency for God, and they are complementary through being man and woman. The harmony of the universe depends on analogous samenesses and differences not only between individuals but also between worlds. The relationship may be “horizontal” where both poles are on the same plane as in the examples already given, or it may be “vertical” as between a higher world and a lower world which is its manifestation or symbol. In this latter case the parental-filial relationship is

17. Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Alawī. See *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, p. 21.

18. In Arabic *tawḥīd*, literally “realisation of Oneness”.

19. The Divine Name which expresses this Self-Sufficiency is *al-Ṣamad*.

20. Active and Passive Perfection are the Taoist equivalent of the sufi terms Majesty and Beauty.



stressed, but by no means exclusively; the conjugal relationship is always there inasmuch as the Divine Immanence can never be excluded. Thus it is possible to speak of “the Marriage of Heaven and Earth”; and it is also in virtue of the Divine Immanence, which puts the Lover virtually on a level with the Beloved, that the Sufi poems addressed to the Divinity under the name of Layla²¹ are love poems in the most central sense. The all-embracing example of the vertical relationship is to be found in the already quoted Holy Tradition “I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known and so I created the world”. There is nothing in the world which has not its Divine Archetype. But harmony demands also that the world shall be a complement, and complementarity implies invertedness. Thus man, whose Archetype is the Divine Being Itself from which everything derives, is the last of all created things, the finality towards which all creation tends. It is this precedent that causes, on the lowest plane of all, the reflection of an object to be a faithful yet inverted image of the object itself. The mountain whose top appears to be at the bottom of the lake which reflects it is a natural prototype of the Seal of Solomon, the world-wide symbol of the Union of the Active and Passive Perfections and by extension the symbol of all the pairs which are the images of this Union throughout the worlds of the universe.²²

The perfect balance of the primordial soul depends on the harmonious union of the domains of inner and outer man. If we take the apex of the upper triangle of the Seal of Solomon to represent the Heart’s direct experience of Spiritual Truths which are the fruits of the Tree of Life, the down-turned apex of the lower²³ triangle will represent taste in the literal sense, whereas the two interpenetrating bases will represent the indirect mind-knowledge which derives from the two direct experiences. The Seal’s message here is that if we want to know what Heart-knowledge is like we must consult the senses rather than the mind, at any rate as regards directness. But our symbol also figures the gulf which separates the senses from the Heart: sense-knowledge, being the lowest mode of perception, is the most deeply submerged in space and time and other earthly conditions and is therefore narrower and more fleeting than mind-knowledge, whereas the inner “taste” escapes from these conditions in virtue of its exaltation and is thus of all experiences the vastest and most enduring.

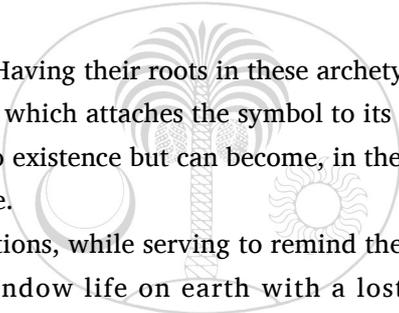
The Seal of Solomon is a key to the interpretation of many texts which have eluded the comprehension of those who are ignorant of the laws of symbolism, and amongst such texts are the Quranic descriptions of Paradise. It is true that spiritual bliss is often indicated simply by an affirmation that there is no common measure between earthly and heavenly joys, or by such words as *Verily thy Lord shall give and give unto thee and thou shalt be satisfied*.²⁴ But in descriptive passages, the Qur’ān speaks in terms of the pleasures of the senses, because these direct pleasures are in fact the earthly projections or shadows of the Paradisal archetypes

21. This name of one of the greatest heroines of the Near East has the literal meaning of “night” and is used by the Sufis to denote the Mystery of the Divine Essence.

22. See in this connection Abū Bakr Ṣirāj ad-Dīn, *The Book of Certainty* (The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), ch. 13.

23. The outer is “below” the inner.

24. XCIII: 5.



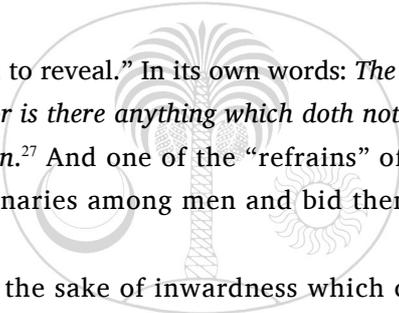
which it is seeking to convey. Having their roots in these archetypes, the sensations have power to recall them, for the “tether” which attaches the symbol to its reality not only traces the path by which the symbol came into existence but can become, in the opposite direction, a vibrating chord of spiritual remembrance.

These Quranic descriptions, while serving to remind the soul that Paradise is intensely desirable,²⁵ serve also to re-endow life on earth with a lost dimension; and here lies a significant aspect of Sufism, already hinted at in connection with Islam’s claim to be a restoration of the primordial religion. It goes without saying that this claim is above all justified—we might even say only justified—in virtue of Islamic mysticism. Every form of mysticism begins with a quest for the “primordial state”, since this state means human perfection which is the only basis for the spiritual ascent. But the perfection envisaged, although essentially always the same, is not always “primordial” in its details. What distinguishes Islamic mysticism from many others is that it looks for its ideal to man as he was created, that is, to a perfection which would accord with the Earthly Paradise. As an image of the primordial soul, the Seal of Solomon with its two triangles pointing in opposite directions figures an intense extroversion balanced—and dominated—by an intense introversion, the pull of the outer world being balanced by the pull of the Heart. We have already seen how the Prophet of Islam personifies this harmonious resolution of opposites. The “pull of the Hour” which was mentioned in this connection may be said to coincide with the magnetism of the Heart inasmuch as consciousness of both lies in the Heart. Moreover it is the Hour which actually reintegrates symbols into their archetypes, and one of the functions of Heart-knowledge is to anticipate this reintegration by continually referring outward objects back to the inner realities they symbolise. Typically representative of the primordial religion is one of the best known utterances of the Prophet: “Perfume and women have been made dear to me, and coolness hath been brought to mine eyes in the prayer”.²⁶

An analogous inward outwardness is characteristic of the Message which as Messenger he received and transmitted. Coming at the end of the cycle of time, it holds out to mankind once more the Book of Nature, the Primordial Revelation whose hieroglyphs are man and the animals, the forests and the fields, the mountains, seas and deserts, sun, moon and stars. One of the Qur’ān’s most central teachings is: “Do not look on the things of this world as independent realities, for they are all in fact entirely dependent for their existence on the Hidden Treasure

25. Fallen man, if left to his own resources, is in something of a quandary between mind-knowledge and sense-knowledge: he knows that mind knowledge is higher than sense-knowledge and that it must be rated accordingly; but he knows also that the lower knowledge has an intensity and directness that the higher knowledge lacks. The doctrine of Heart knowledge explains everything; but failing this, and failing its prolongation, faith, and the virtues that go with faith, in particular patience at what one does not understand and unpretentious trust in Providence, something appears to be wrong; and the soul finds itself at the brink of a dilemma between hypocrisy and sensuality.

26. “Coolness of the eyes” is a proverbial Arabic expression signifying intense pleasure. The passive tense is important here; it is as if the Prophet had said: It has been my destiny to love perfume and women and prayer.



whose Glory they were created to reveal.” In its own words: *The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein extol Him, nor is there anything which doth not glorify Him with praise; yet ye understand not their glorification.*²⁷ And one of the “refrains” of the Qur’ān is to address the visionaries or potential visionaries among men and bid them meditate on these or those wonders of creation as “signs”.

This outwardness for the sake of inwardness which characterises Sufism²⁸ can be figured by a line joining the two apexes of the Seal of Solomon. The faculty of direct outward perception must be connected with the faculty of direct inward perception, and this connection is the already mentioned “chord of spiritual remembrance” which must be made to vibrate in order that the inward faculty may be awakened and that the “glorification” may be “understood”; and beyond that faculty, represented by the upper apex, the “chord” may be prolonged indefinitely, for the vibration does not stop short at the threshold of Heaven but is aimed at the Infinite. We are here once again at the very centre of our theme, for Sufism is the doctrine and method of this aim, nor is the vibration anything other than a variant of the ebbing wave which was our initial image. We may take up once more at this point the question “What is it that ebbs?”, for the answer already given, that it is the centre of consciousness that ebbs, will now be clearer in the light of what has been said about the Heart, which always denotes the centre but which, because subjectively this centre is not stationary, may refer to the inward Moon or to the inward Sun or beyond this even to the Essence Itself.

Since everyone has always a centre of consciousness, everyone may be said to have a “heart”. But the Sufis use the term on principle in a transcendent sense to denote a centre of consciousness which corresponds at least to the inward Moon.

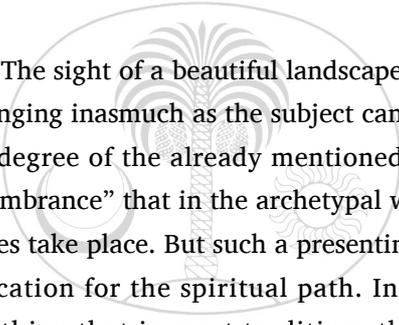
This principle has its roots in the Prophet’s definition of *ihsān* (excellence) which is directly related to Heart-knowledge: “Excellence is that thou shouldst worship God as if thou sawest Him; for if thou seest Him not, yet He seeth thee.”

“As if thou sawest Him.” As if man were still in full possession of his primordial faculties. The whole of one aspect of Sufi method lies in the word *ka’ annaka* “as if thou...”; and this rule of idealism has many applications, some of which we shall see later. But it needs to be combined with the rule of actualism, the rule of “but in fact”. No one is more acutely conscious of the fall of man than the mystic—so much so that a thing counts for him as positive according to the measure in which it is capable of setting up a vibration towards the Heart and clearing an access to it.

In principle, since *there is nothing which doth not glorify Him with praise*, everything has this capability. *Yet ye understand not their glorification*. It has to be admitted that the symbols which could penetrate the Heart of primordial man are prevented from being fully operative for fallen man by his obstructedness. In other words he cannot react to them powerfully enough to effect the necessary vibration; and if left to his own resources he would be impotent

27. XVII: 44.

28. This distinction, like many others made throughout this book, is relative and must not be exaggerated. It is a question of accent—as if each mysticism pronounced the same formula with a different intonation and different stresses.

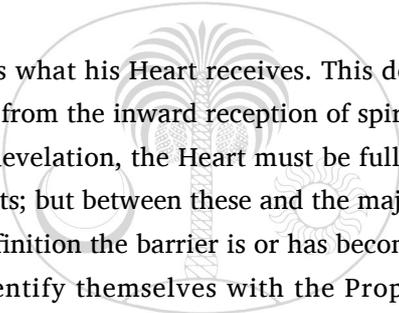


to achieve access to the Heart. The sight of a beautiful landscape, for example, arouses not only wonder and delight but also longing inasmuch as the subject cannot merge with the object; and this longing is no less than a degree of the already mentioned presentiment of one's higher possibilities, a degree of "remembrance" that in the archetypal world of the Spirit a merging of subject with object actually does take place. But such a presentiment would be, in almost every case, no more than a qualification for the spiritual path. In itself it would be hopelessly outmeasured. It is not for nothing that in most traditions the obstacle to be overcome is represented as a gigantic monster with supernatural powers. Nothing will serve short of a sword that has been forged and tempered in Heaven; but as an auxiliary to such a sword, the presentiment will be a precious strength in the soul; in other words, it needs to be consecrated by some Heaven-sent incantation, above all by the Divine Name itself.

It is important to remember here that *Dhikr Allāh* (Remembrance of God or Invocation of God) is a name of the Prophet, and that according to the Qur'ān this invocation is "greater" even than the ritual prayer. The word in question could also be translated "greatest", without the comparison, for both interpretations are linguistically possible; and in the present context it can be affirmed that calling on the Name of God, whether it be accompanied by some other experience or not, is the most positive thing in all the world because it sets up the most powerful vibration towards the Heart. The Prophet said: "There is a polish for everything that taketh away rust; and the polish of the Heart is the invocation of Allāh."

We are here anticipating the theme of the chapter on method; but like the unity which it aims at establishing, Sufism is so closely knit that it is impossible to isolate, in altogether separate chapters, the doctrine, the method, and the spiritual and psychic substance to which doctrine and method apply. To continue anticipating for a moment, it may be mentioned that although the invocation of the Supreme Name *Allāh* takes precedence over all the other practices of Sufism, the term *Dhikr Allāh* is also extended to other rites and in particular to the recitation or audition of the Qur'ān which is, as we have seen, of one substance with God; and in the context of causing vibration and of the passage from the outward to the inward, it is relevant to quote what the Revealed Book says of itself in virtue of the power of its own verses in this respect: *It causeth the skins of those that fear their Lord to thrill. Then their skins and their hearts grow pliant (or supple) unto the remembrance of God.*²⁹ The Sufis have here all the authority they need for using outward movement, such as the swaying of the body in the sacred dance, as a means to inward concentration. The words *their hearts grow pliant* or, as it could be rendered, *their hearts soften*, can be glossed "their Hearts grow less hard". The barrier in question may be spoken of as hardness of heart or rust on the heart or clouds over the Moon or as a dragon that guards the access to the Fountain of Life. If it were not for this barrier, which is the direct result of the fall of man, there would be no need of religion in the ordinary sense, for Revelation could come directly to each man in his Heart which would then refract the Message to the mind and to the rest of the psychic substance. There would thus be a perpetual flow and ebb between the Self and the self. But as things are, a special Messenger has to be sent

29. XXXIX: 23.



that he may transmit to others what his Heart receives. This does not mean however that all other souls are entirely cut off from the inward reception of spiritual light. It means that for so tremendous a descent as the Revelation, the Heart must be fully operative as is the case only with the Prophets and the Saints; but between these and the majority is the minority of mystics —“travellers” for whom by definition the barrier is or has become relatively transparent. They seek, as we have seen, to identify themselves with the Prophet and to ebb as he ebbs in response to the Revelation. In other words, it must be for the traveller as if the Revelation has come directly to him, in his Heart; and this *ka’anna*, like all the other “as ifs” of Sufism, is only possible on the basis of certainty.

What then is certainty? Or what is the difference between certainty and conviction? Conviction is indirect and belongs to the mind, being the result of purely mental processes such as argument. But certainty, being always direct, belongs to “the apex of the triangle”. As such it can be the result of sensory perception; hearing or touch or sight can give certainty. But in its spiritual sense, when it has for object the Transcendent, certainty is the result of Heart-knowledge. Moreover, failing this knowledge in its fullest sense, those elements which are nearest the Heart at the summit of the soul must also be considered as faculties of direct perception, albeit in a fragmentary way; and through the light which these faculties of intuition receive in virtue of the transparency of the barrier, a soul may claim to be possessed of a faith which is no less than certainty.

Before closing this chapter, and as a preface to the doctrine which like all mystical doctrines presupposes at least a virtual certainty in the soul—otherwise the seed would “fall on stony ground”—let us consider the three degrees of certainty as Sufism defines them.³⁰ The Divine Truth is symbolised by the element fire. The three degrees, in ascending order, are the Lore of Certainty (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*), the Eye of Certainty (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*) and the Truth of Certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). The Lore is the certainty that comes from hearing the fire described; the Eye is the certainty that comes from seeing its flames; the Truth is the certainty which comes from being consumed in it. This last degree is the extinction (*fanā’*) of all otherness which alone gives realisation of the Supreme Identity. The second degree is that of Heart-knowledge, for the Eye which sees is the Heart. As to the Lore, it is a mental understanding which has been raised to the level of certainty by the faculties of intuition which surround the Heart; and it is one of the functions of the doctrine to awaken these faculties and make them operative.



Original publication by the
Islamic Texts Society.
All rights reserved.
No reproduction or redistribution without
written consent of the publisher.

30. *The Book of Certainty*, already mentioned, is based on the doctrine of these three degrees.