

Reconstructing 'Irfānī Epistemology: Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and the Philosophical Legitimacy of Mystical Knowledge

Rekonstruksi Epistemologi 'Irfānī: Najm al-Dīn Kubrā dan Legitimasi Filosofis Pengetahuan Mistik

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Abstract. *Contemporary discussions on Islamic epistemology continue to privilege rational and empirical modes of knowledge, while the epistemological legitimacy of mystical intuition remains contested. Existing studies on Najm al-Dīn Kubrā have largely focused on his contributions to Sufism, Qur'anic exegesis, and the Kubrawīyah order, with limited attention given to the philosophical structure of his 'irfānī epistemology. This study aims to reconstruct Kubrā's epistemological framework and examine how spiritual intuition functions as a legitimate source of knowledge within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Employing qualitative library research with a phenomenological approach inspired by William James, the study analyses Kubrā's principal works, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl wa-Fawā'id al-Jalāl* and *al-Ta'wilāt al-Najmīyah*, in dialogue with the epistemological formulations of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Sīnā. The findings demonstrate that Kubrā developed a coherent 'irfānī epistemology in which kashf, dhawq, and mushāhadah constitute valid epistemic modes that complement empirical observation and rational inquiry through spiritual discipline (mujaḥadah). Furthermore, the concepts of Shaykh al-Ghayb, Kitāb al-Ghayb, and Ism al-Ghayb represent Kubrā's original contribution to explaining the process of mystical cognition. This reconstruction offers an alternative perspective to al-Jābirī's critique by showing that 'irfānī epistemology should be understood not as an obstacle to intellectual development but as an expansion of the epistemological horizon within the Islamic intellectual tradition. The study contributes to contemporary discussions on Islamic epistemology, philosophy of religion, and Sufi hermeneutics by demonstrating that mystical knowledge constitutes a systematic theory of knowledge rather than merely a form of personal religious experience.*

Keywords: 'Irfānī Epistemology; Najm al-Dīn Kubrā; Mystical Knowledge; Islamic Epistemology; Sufi Hermeneutics.



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Abstrak. *Perdebatan kontemporer mengenai epistemologi Islam masih didominasi oleh pendekatan rasional dan empiris, sementara legitimasi epistemologis intuisi mistik ('irfān) tetap menjadi isu yang diperdebatkan. Kajian-kajian mengenai Najm al-Dīn Kubrā selama ini lebih banyak menyoroti kontribusinya dalam bidang tasawuf, tafsir isyārī, dan perkembangan tarekat Kubrāwiyah, sedangkan rekonstruksi pemikirannya sebagai suatu sistem epistemologi masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi kerangka epistemologi 'irfānī Najm al-Dīn Kubrā serta menjelaskan bagaimana intuisi spiritual berfungsi sebagai sumber pengetahuan yang sah dalam tradisi intelektual Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kepustakaan dengan pendekatan fenomenologi yang diinspirasi oleh William James melalui analisis terhadap karya utama Kubrā, Fawā'ih al-Jamāl wa-Fawātiḥ al-Jalāl dan al-Ta'wīlāt al-Najmīyah, serta membandingkannya dengan formulasi epistemologi al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī, al-Ghazālī, dan Ibn Sīnā. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kubrā membangun suatu epistemologi 'irfānī yang koheren, di mana kashf, dhawq, dan mushāhadah merupakan cara memperoleh pengetahuan yang sah dan melengkapi observasi empiris serta penalaran rasional melalui disiplin spiritual (mujaḥadah). Selain itu, konsep Shaykh al-Ghayb, Kitāb al-Ghayb, dan Ism al-Ghayb merupakan kontribusi orisinal Kubrā dalam menjelaskan mekanisme kognisi mistik. Rekonstruksi ini menawarkan perspektif alternatif terhadap kritik al-Jābirī dengan menunjukkan bahwa epistemologi 'irfānī tidak bertentangan dengan rasionalitas ilmiah, melainkan memperluas horizon epistemologi dalam tradisi intelektual Islam. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan kajian epistemologi Islam, filsafat agama, dan hermeneutika sufistik dengan menempatkan pengetahuan mistik sebagai suatu teori pengetahuan yang sistematis, bukan sekadar pengalaman keagamaan individual.*

Kata Kunci: Epistemologi 'Irfānī; Najm al-Dīn Kubrā; Pengetahuan Mistik; Epistemologi Islam; Hermeneutika Sufistik.

Introduction

Contemporary discussions on Islamic epistemology have increasingly focused on the relationship between revelation, rationality, empirical observation, and spiritual intuition. While modern academic discourse generally privileges empirical and rational approaches as the dominant foundations of scientific knowledge, the epistemological status of mystical intuition (*dhawq* or *'irfān*) remains highly contested. Within both Islamic intellectual history and the contemporary philosophy of religion, however, religious experience continues to be regarded as an important mode of accessing truth, particularly in relation to metaphysical realities that cannot be fully apprehended through sensory perception or discursive reasoning alone. Recent studies have therefore argued for a more integrative understanding of Islamic epistemology that recognizes the interaction between textual authority, rational inquiry, and spiritual experience rather than treating them as competing domains.¹

One of the most influential modern discussions concerning Islamic epistemology was formulated by M. 'Ābid al-Jābirī through his classification of *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *'irfānī* epistemologies. Al-Jābirī argues that the intellectual progress of modern civilization was achieved through the dominance of demonstrative (*burhānī*) reasoning over textual (*bayānī*) and mystical (*'irfānī*) modes of thought. In his reconstruction of Arab-Islamic reason, Sufi epistemology occupies only a marginal position because intuitive knowledge is considered incapable of producing cumulative scientific progress and is regarded as one of the intellectual factors contributing to the decline of Muslim civilization. Furthermore, al-Jābirī questions the Islamic authenticity of *'irfān*, arguing that many of its doctrines were influenced by external philosophical and esoteric traditions rather than emerging organically from the Qur'an and Sunnah.² His critique has profoundly influenced subsequent discussions on Islamic epistemology and continues to shape contemporary debates concerning the philosophical legitimacy of mystical knowledge.

Nevertheless, al-Jābirī's position represents only one trajectory within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Long before the emergence of modern epistemological debates, Muslim scholars such as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Sīnā had already developed sophisticated theories of knowledge that integrated revelation, rational inquiry, empirical observation, and spiritual intuition. Rather than viewing intuition as an irrational alternative to reason, these scholars regarded it as the culmination of intellectual and spiritual refinement. In particular, al-Ghazālī argued that certainty (*yaqīn*) is attained not merely through demonstrative reasoning but through the purification of the soul and direct experiential knowledge of God. This epistemological synthesis profoundly influenced later Sufi thinkers, including Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, whose intellectual project represents one of the most systematic formulations of *'irfānī* epistemology within classical Islamic thought.³

Existing scholarship on Najm al-Dīn Kubrā has predominantly examined his contributions to Sufism, visionary mysticism, symbolic Qur'anic interpretation, and the historical development of the Kubrawīyah order.⁴ Other studies have explored his influence on later mystical traditions in Central Asia and the Nusantara, particularly through the transmission of Kubrawī spiritual lineages and esoteric hermeneutics. These studies have significantly enriched our understanding of Kubrā's historical role and spiritual legacy. However, they generally approach him as a mystical master or founder of a Sufi order rather than as a philosopher who formulated a coherent epistemological framework capable of explaining the relationship between empirical knowledge, rational reflection, and intuitive cognition. Consequently, the philosophical architecture of Kubrā's *'irfānī* epistemology remains insufficiently explored.

Unlike previous studies, this article reconstructs Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's *'irfānī* epistemology as an integrated philosophical framework that harmonizes empirical observation, rational inquiry, and spiritual intuition. It argues that Kubrā did not merely advocate mystical experience but developed a coherent epistemological system grounded in spiritual discipline, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and Prophetic tradition. Such a reconstruction contributes not only to the study of Sufism but also to broader discussions in Islamic epistemology, philosophy of religion, and contemporary debates on the legitimacy of experiential knowledge.⁵

Accordingly, this article addresses the following question: How does Najm al-Dīn Kubrā construct an *'irfānī* epistemology that legitimizes spiritual intuition as a valid source of knowledge within the Islamic intellectual tradition? Through a phenomenological analysis of his principal works, this study demonstrates that *kashf*, *dhawq*, and *mushāhadah* are presented not as alternatives to empirical observation and rational inquiry, but as their culmination through spiritual discipline and ethical purification.

Method

This study employs a qualitative library research design to reconstruct the *'irfānī* epistemology of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā through a phenomenological approach. Since the object of this study concerns the structure of mystical knowledge as expressed in classical Sufi texts, the phenomenology of religious experience developed by William James provides an appropriate analytical framework. James argues that mystical experience possesses its own epistemic value and should be understood from the perspective of the experiencing subject rather than being reduced solely to empirical or rational explanations.⁶ Accordingly, this approach is used to examine how Kubrā conceptualizes *kashf*, *dhawq*, and *mushāhadah* as legitimate modes of acquiring knowledge.

The primary sources of this research are Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's *Fawā'id al-Jamāl wa-Fawā'id al-Jalāl* and *al-Ta'wīlāt al-Najmīyah*. These are complemented by al-Ghazālī's *al-Risālah al-Ladunīyah* and *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's *Khatm al-Awliyā'*, Ibn Sīnā's epistemological treatises, and recent scholarship on Islamic epistemology and Sufism. Data were analysed through four stages: identifying Kubrā's principal epistemological concepts, interpreting them phenomenologically, comparing them with earlier formulations of al-Tirmidhī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Sīnā, and finally reconstructing an integrated model of Kubrā's *'irfānī* epistemology within the broader framework of Islamic intellectual tradition.

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā: A Harmonizer of Empirical and Intuitive Epistemologies

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā is the well-known title given to Ahmad ibn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad. He was born in the village of Khiwaq, in the region of Khwarazm, in 540 AH. In empirical science, he was recognized as a *muḥaddith* (hadith scholar), a Shafī'i jurist, and a Shaykh fī al-Sunnah. His dedication to jihad earned him the title *al-shahīd* (martyr), as he died in battle in 618 AH. He was respected by contemporary scholars like 'Imād al-Dīn al-Ḥaḍāmī.⁷

In the field of *Hadith*, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā received 'ālī (high-ranking) chains of transmission. He studied under Abū al-'Alā' al-Ḥamadānī of Hamadan, Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Naysābūrī of Nishapur, and most notably under Abū al-Ṭāhir al-Silafī, a central figure in Hadith transmission during Kubrā's journey to Alexandria, Egypt. In *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, he notes that al-Silafī was over a hundred years old when he studied with him. During these studies, Kubrā experienced a profound spiritual unveiling, including a spiritual encounter with the soul of Prophet Muhammad SAW.⁸ This revelation occurred in harmony with his empirical pursuits, such as hadith studies.

It was through this third figure that his chain of knowledge in Hadith matched exactly with that of another great Sufī from Spain, Ibn 'Arabī, the author of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*. Ibn al-Maqarrī detailed that the *ijāzah* (authorization to transmit) received by Ibn 'Arabī was most likely general ('*āmmah*) in nature.⁹ If this assumption is correct, then it differs from Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, who received his *ijāzah* through both direct oral transmission (*samā'*) and formal authorization (*ijāzah*). In terms of authenticity, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's chain of transmission is therefore stronger than that of Ibn 'Arabī, particularly in connection to the network of Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī.

Al-Dhahabī recorded Kubrā's empirical hadith transmissions. He linked himself through his teacher Abū 'Aṣīm Nāfi' al-Hindī to Mawlāy Sa'id ibn al-Muṭahhār, who transmitted from Kubrā in 615 AH. Kubrā himself said, "I studied with 'Alī Abū al-'Alā' al-Ḥamadānī, who narrated from... [a full chain ending in] the Prophet SAW regarding the verse *li-lladhīna aḥsanū al-ḥusnā wa ziyādah*. He SAW said *al-ḥusnā* is Paradise, while *ziyādah* is the vision of Allah's Face."¹⁰

In his tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), Najm al-Dīn Kubrā mentions other names he relied upon for transmitting Hadith. While interpreting the third verse of Surah al-Baqarah, he narrates a Hadith on Islam, Faith (*Imān*), and Excellence (*Iḥsān*) from his teacher Abū al-Muzaffar 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sam'ānī. In another section, he transmits a Hadith concerning the definition of faith (*īmān*) from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Muqrī.¹¹

When interpreting Surah Yūsuf, Kubrā mentioned Shaykh Ibn Abū al-Futūḥ As‘ad al-‘Ijlī, through whom he received teachings via general ijazah, a recognized method in hadith transmission.¹²

In terms of intuitive epistemology, particularly within the Sufi *ṭarīqah* (spiritual path), Najm al-Dīn Kubrā studied under several major Sufi figures of his time. At minimum, he was a disciple of four great saints (*awliyā’*) of his era: Rūzbihān al-Shirāzī al-Miṣrī (d. 606 AH), Ibn al-‘Aṣr al-Dimashqī (d. 585 AH), ‘Ammār al-Badlīsī (d. 590 AH), and Ismā‘īl al-Qaṣrī. In sequence, he first studied with Ismā‘īl al-Qaṣrī, who then instructed him to serve ‘Ammār al-Badlīsī. Afterward, al-Badlīsī directed him to become a disciple of Rūzbihān al-Fārisī, a Persian mystic then residing in Egypt. On his journey to or from Egypt, Kubrā also briefly studied with Ibn al-‘Aṣr in Damascus.

Kubrā’s sufi (spiritual) lineage is most strongly tied to Ismā‘īl al-Qaṣrī and ‘Ammār al-Badlīsī. It is likely that he received labs *al-khirqah* (donning the spiritual cloak) from al-Qaṣrī as a blessing (*tabarruk*),¹³ As for his spiritual lineage (*sanad*) to ‘Ammār al-Badlīsī, it belongs to the category of murshidic and pedagogical transmission, that is, a lineage of spiritual guidance and training (*tarbiyah*). It is this second type of lineage that was recorded by Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Sanūsī in his work *Silsilat al-Mu‘īn fi Ṭarā’iq al-Arba‘in*.¹⁴

In Central Asia, the Sufi *ṭhāriqah* founded by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā developed into several new formulations of Sufi *ṭhāriqah*, such as the Hamadānīyah, developed by ‘Alī al-Hamadānī (d. 781 AH); the *Nūrīyah*, revised by Nūr al-Dīn al-Isfarāynī; and the Ruknīyah, renewed by Rukn al-Dīn ‘Alā’ al-Dawlah al-Simnānī, among others. In the Nusantara archipelago, this spiritual lineage was first identified by J. Edel in his 1938 edition of the manuscript *Sajarah Banten Rante-rante*. It was later explored by Martin van Bruinessen in 1994 and further deepened by Alexander Wain in 2021.¹⁵

In the Arabian Peninsula, the Sufi *ṭhāriqah* of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā spread primarily through the Naqshbandīyah lineage, which was predominantly practiced in the Khālidiyah order, propagated by Khālīd al-Baghdādī al-Dimashqī, and the Muzhariyah, taught by Muḥammad Muzhar. Both of these figures were students of ‘Abdullāh al-Dihlawī, a prominent Naqshbandī master who traced his lineage back to Aḥmad Sirhindī, known as the Renewer (*al-Mujaddid*). Through their teachings, the influence of the Kubrawī order reached the *Ḥaramayn* (Mecca and Medina), and from there, it was carried by returning hajj pilgrims to their homelands, including the Nusantara archipelago. This *ṭhāriqah* teaches the spiritual practice of *rābiṭah* (inner connection) and *tawajjuh* (focused spiritual attention) between the hearts of the master and disciple. It even considers this practice a “spiritual expressway (highway)” (*ṭarīq sari’*) to attain lofty spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*). The spiritual

lineage of Khālīd al-Baghdādī connecting him to the Kubrawī order is well documented by Muḥammad Amīn al-Kurdī in his work *al-Mawāhib al-Sarmadiyyah*.¹⁶

Al-Sakhāwī add that Najm al-Dīn Kubrā later exhibited a tendency toward *wujūdī* (existentialist or ontological) themes. Some were led to believe that he had fallen into the doctrine of *ittihād* (the union of the servant's being with God's being). However, al-Sakhāwī refuted this accusation, pointing out that Najm al-Dīn Kubrā was a Hadith expert, well-versed in the Sunnah and known for his devotion to acts of worship.¹⁷ Al-Sakhāwī's rebuttal suggests that most adherents of *ittihād* or *ḥulūl* (indwelling) typically tend to neglect religious observance and ritual practice, which was not the case with Najm al-Dīn Kubrā.

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā himself denied that he had fallen into the doctrines of *ittihād* (union) or *ḥulūl* (indwelling) by quoting a statement from al-Ḥaḍramī, who had once been similarly accused. Al-Ḥaḍramī said:

"How could I be accused of adhering to the doctrine of *ḥulūl* (the union of two existences, that of God and the servant), when I do not witness anything except His existence alone (while the servant is nothing)? How could I be accused of abandoning the *Shari'ah*, when I have never once neglected my daily litanies (*awrād*) since childhood—let alone the obligatory acts of worship? What I truly said was that His elect servants (*khawwās*) feel no burden in performing acts of worship."¹⁸

The meaning of this statement implies that both *ittihād* and *ḥulūl* arise from a dualist view of existence, whereas the existence of God is the only absolute existence in the universe. This statement aligns with the concept of *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute existence), as well as with the doctrines of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing), although these ideas only gained wider recognition after Ibn 'Arabī extensively discussed them. Followers of the Kubrawīyah order were actively involved in the intellectual debates surrounding the theory of existence, which were often polarized between proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as espoused by Ibn 'Arabī, and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, as promoted by al-Simnānī¹⁹ and Aḥmad al-Sirhindī.

Apart from that, Najm al-Dīn authored several works, among them *Fawātiḥ al-Jamāl wa Fawātiḥ al-Jalāl*, which explores a knowledge structure built upon the harmonization of empirical and intuitive epistemologies. He also wrote a concise and profound treatise on the path of sainthood (*wilāyah*) to God titled *al-Ṭuruq ilā Allāh*, also known as *al-Uṣūl al-'Asharah* ("The Ten Principles"), as it outlines ten primary paths to reach God. In addition, his most renowned work, and the fruit of his epistemological synthesis, is the Qur'anic exegesis titled *al-Ta'wīlāt al-Najmīyah*. This tafsir had a significant influence on Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī, the author of *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, another prominent Sufi tafsir.

The 'Irfānī Epistemology from al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, al-Ghazālī, to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā

In the broader landscape of Islamic thought, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī can be considered the scholar who most comprehensively formulated the abstraction of Islamic epistemology. While many philosophers, theologians, and Sufis had touched upon it earlier, they did not bequeath a systematic and mature epistemological framework the way al-Ghazālī did. For instance, Ibn Sīnā, from the Muslim Peripatetic school, reached rational affirmation and empirical validation through experience.²⁰ However, al-Ghazālī firmly introduced intuition as a fourth epistemological source, following empiricism, reason, and experiential trials that combined both.²¹

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320 AH), although successful in reconciling the divide between empirical hadith scholars and intuitive Sufis, was exiled and even accused of heresy for his views. He convincingly argued that intuitive knowledge was not novel but was directly taught and affirmed by the Prophet SAW himself. In many hadiths, we find references to *nubūwah* (prophethood), *risālah* (messengership), and for those outside that category, terms like *muḥaddathūn* (those who are divinely inspired), *firasah* (spiritual insight), *ilhām* (inspiration), and *ṣiddīqiyyah* (truthful affirmation).²²

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī thus placed intuition as the most vital faculty for sainthood (*walāyah*). He stated that a saint often exhibits signs such as *firasah*, *ilhām*, and dialogue with Prophet Khidr (Khaḍir).²³ Farīd al-‘Aṭṭār noted that al-Tirmidhī studied under Khidr for three years, and al-Hujwīrī quoted al-Tirmidhī as calling Khidr his “brother.”²⁴

The Ash‘arī theologian Ibn Fūrak, in his work *al-Ibānah*, affirmed that the heart (*qalb*) can gain knowledge from the unseen realm when in its most refined state. The ideal condition of the heart is described as *al-qalb al-mashrūḥ al-munawwar*, a heart that is open and illuminated. This state is attained by purifying the heart of arrogance, *shirk* (polytheism), hypocrisy, and anything that obstructs one from beholding God. Ibn Fūrak was inspired by a saying of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib: “How can we worship what we do not see?” Though this “seeing” is not empirical, it is intuitive, experienced within the *qalb*.²⁵

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā opens his work *Fawā’ih al-Jamāl wa Fawātiḥ al-Jalāl* by emphasizing the urgency of intuitive epistemology. He asserts that humanity remains blind to the truth unless the veil (*ḥijāb*) is lifted. This veil is not external—it is internal, what he calls the darkness of existence (*ḡalām al-wujūd*).²⁶ Al-Ghazālī similarly referred to it as a *ḥijāb* (veil).

This veil, according to Kubrā, is not due to the object of truth being too distant, but paradoxically too near to the inner eye. Hence, to achieve intuitive witnessing,

one must undergo *tanqīṣ al-wujūd* or *ib'ād al-wujūd*, diminishing or distancing the egoic self. This, Kubrā insists, can only be accomplished through *mujāhadah*.

Kubrā defines *mujāhadah* simply as exerting effort to eliminate the “other” (*aghyār*), anything other than God, especially the ego, the soul (*nafs*), and Satan.²⁷

This spiritual struggle (*mujāhadah*) is carried out in three ways. The first is by gradually reducing food and drink intake. Like al-Ghazālī and al-Suhrawardī, Najm al-Dīn emphasized that the veils of ego, the lower self (*nafs*), and Satan are weakened by diminishing one's consumption of food and drink.²⁸

Secondly, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā advised that a person should have an empirical (external) spiritual mentor before attaining an intuitive (inner) one. He referred to this mentor as a “*shaykh muballigh ma'mūn*”, a trusted and capable guide. In common terms, such a mentor is known as a *mursyid* (spiritual guide). The spiritual seeker (*sālik*) must surrender their personal will under the guidance of the *shaykh*, for the presence of spiritual veils (*ḥijab*) renders one like a child or an ignorant person, in need of direction and mentorship to reach maturity.²⁹

Thirdly, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā recommended following the pattern of spiritual discipline (*mujāhadah*) practiced in the *thariqah* of Imām al-Junayd (d. 298 AH). This pattern (curriculum) consists of eight forms of training: maintaining a constant state of ritual purity (*wuḍū*), fasting, silence, seclusion (*khalwah*), reciting the *dhikr* of *nafy ithbāt* (“there is no god [negation] except Allah [affirmation]”), *rābiṭah* with the *mursyid* (spiritual connection to the guide), absorbing the knowledge of the teacher by aligning one's actions with the teacher's movements, rejecting stray thoughts and not resisting the will of God.³⁰ Practicing *mujāhadah* in accordance with the *thariqah* of Imām al-Junayd is unsurprising, as the spiritual lineage of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā indeed traces back to Imām al-Junayd.³¹

Through the practice of *mujāhadah*, a transformation occurs from empirical epistemology to intuitive knowledge. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā refers to this process as *tabdīl al-dhawq* the alteration of spiritual taste or perception. This intuitive unveiling (*kashf*) takes place in two ways: through *dhawq* (experiential tasting) and *mushāhadah* (spiritual witnessing). *Dhawq* involves a transformation in the perception of being and spirit (*arwāḥ*). *Mushāhadah* is caused by the unveiling of the inner eye (*baṣīrah*) after the lifting of veils of darkness. Its mechanism is comparable to how the senses operate in the physical world, but in this case, they shift into the subconscious realm or the dimension of dreams. However, whereas this kind of sensory shift typically happens during sleep for the general public, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā does not dismiss such experiences as mere dreams or illusions. According to him, a person within this subconscious or dream-like state can hear,

see, eat, drink, burn, fly, and experience various other sensations. Yet all of these are real and true experiences, because sleep is the “sibling” of death.³²

All perceptions within the subconscious realm, such as those experienced in dreams, do indeed occur for the general public. However, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā elaborates that this differs significantly for spiritual travelers (*sayyār*). For earlier predecessor like al-Suhrawardī, such experiences are considered metaphysical faculties granted by God exclusively to the rank of spiritual guides (*mursyid*), not to ordinary seekers (*murīd* or *sālik*).³³ According to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, these spiritual travelers are able to perceive, while fully conscious in the physical realm, what others only encounter in dreams. For the *sayyār*, these experiences manifest in the material world in real time. It is therefore not surprising that they receive unique spiritual knowledge and even undergo phenomena such as flying, walking on water, and other extraordinary states.³⁴

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā’s explanation differs from that of theologians who view such phenomena as *karāmāt* (miracles of saints) or *mu’jizāt* (prophetic miracles) that must be believed on the basis of rational interpretations of sacred texts. For the founder of the Kubrawīyah order, however, such miraculous events can be explained epistemologically. Among philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Najm al-Dīn Kubrā’s views are neither considered strange nor impossible. In his treatise *al-Anmāt* and the concluding section of *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, Ibn Sīnā also affirmed the possibility of such occurrences in the physical world and in conscious states, not merely in the realm of dreams. Ibn Sīnā wrote that if the gnostics (*‘arifūn*) convey knowledge of the unseen, whether in the form of glad tidings or warnings, one should not find it difficult to believe. This is because in some branches of natural science (physics) of that era, there were acknowledged causal principles (*asbāb ma’lūmah*) based on empirical observation (*tajribah*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). In line with Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Ibn Sīnā emphasized this by stating: “Indeed, what the human soul receives from the unseen realm during sleep can also occur while one is awake.”³⁵

According to Ibn Sīnā, intuitive knowledge can be epistemologically justified through both empirical experience (*tajribah*) and rational analogy (*qiyās*). He argues that every sound-minded person has experienced intuitive insights whose validity is confirmed through experience and explained philosophically by his hierarchy of the intellect.³⁶ This provides an important point of convergence between Peripatetic philosophy and Sufi epistemology. While Ibn Sīnā explains supra-rational cognition through rational and empirical arguments, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā grounds it in direct spiritual experience attained through *mujāhadah*. As Kubrā states, spiritual discipline enables one to “witness with clarity that which was previously understood only through reason”.³⁷

For Kubrā, *mushāhadah* (spiritual witnessing) constitutes the culmination of intuitive knowledge. It manifests through symbolic visions whose meanings require spiritual interpretation (*ta'bīr*), forming the basis of mystical cognition.³⁸ Following the Sufi tradition, 'irfān develops through three hierarchical stages: *'Irfān al-Āmmah*, based on the outward meaning of revelation; *'Irfān al-Khāṣṣah*, which integrates the outward and inward dimensions of revelation through faith and certainty; and *'Irfān Khāṣṣat al-Khāṣṣah*, the highest level of direct knowledge of God (*itqān*), corresponding to what Ibn Sīnā calls the station of the *'ārifīn*.³⁹

This highest level is expressed by Kubrā through concepts such as *mushāhadah*, *tajallī*, and *ru'yah*, all of which describe different forms of spiritual disclosure. However, he repeatedly warns that such experiences should not become ends in themselves; rather, they must strengthen remembrance of God (*dhikr*) under the guidance of a qualified *murshid*.⁴⁰

At this stage, the sensory awareness that exists in the physical realm also becomes active and tangible in the spiritual realm. Najm al-Dīn recounts his own experience of being lifted by angels while in seclusion (*khalwah*) during the last part of the night, physically sensing their presence, hearing their *dhikr* and conversations, and seeing their forms.⁴¹

The term *mi'rāj* was also used by other Sufis of the same era, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Lijā'ī (d. 599 AH) from Andalusia. In his book *Qutb al-Ārifīn*, he employs the term *mi'rāj* in the context of the systematic ascent through spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*).⁴²

In this spiritual reality, there also occur descents of inspiration (*wārid*), along with passing thoughts (*khāṭir*), satanic whisperings (*waswas al-shayṭān*), whispers of the ego, angelic suggestions, and divinely inspired thoughts (*ilhām*), or what are called *khawāṭir ḥaqqānīyah* (truth-bearing intuitions). It is this inspired insight that is referred to as *'ilm ladunī* (divine knowledge). Although termed *khawāṭir ḥaqqānīyah*, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā explains that they are not mere passing thoughts, but in fact the primordial knowledge (*'ilm azalī*), knowledge that God once and continually imparts to the soul in the spiritual dimension, as narrated in Qur'ān 7:172, "Am I not your Lord?" (*alastu bi-rabbikum*), a favorite verse repeatedly referenced throughout his Sufi exegesis (*tafsīr ishārī*). The validity of knowledge acquisition in this context depends on the purity of the seeker's soul, and the extent to which they have subdued or effaced the physical elements of their being.⁴³

Thirdly, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā frequently uses the term *ghaybah* (absence, state of spiritual rapture) in the past-tense verbal form. This is one of the most commonly used expressions found throughout his works. He is considered quite "bold" in openly narrating his spiritual experiences, often using the word *ghibtu*, which can be

loosely translated as “I entered a state of trans-consciousness.” In one part of his spiritual journey, he carefully documents a spiritual encounter to validate empirical data. For example, he describes the following:

“I experienced a state of trans-consciousness (*ghaybah*), and suddenly I saw the figure of the Prophet Muhammad SAW together with ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. I rushed toward ‘Alī and took his hand in order to perform *muṣāfaḥah* (a handshake). In that moment, I was inspired as though I empirically heard the *Hadith* that the Prophet SAW said: ‘Whoever shakes hands with ‘Alī shall enter Paradise.’ I then asked ‘Alī about the authenticity of that narration, and he replied: ‘Yes, the Messenger of Allah SAW truly said that whoever shakes hands with me shall enter Paradise.’”⁴⁴

The validation of Hadith data obtained empirically from the *muhaddithūn* (Hadith scholars) is, in fact, not a new phenomenon. It had previously occurred with *al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Ṭabarānī*, the compiler of *al-Muʿjam*, and also with Ibn ‘Arabī, a contemporary of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā.

Based on his experience, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā states that the following souls (*arwāḥ tābi‘ah*) are indeed capable of learning from noble souls, such as the Prophets and saints (*awliyā’*). He affirms that these souls are now, and have always been, learning from them, though not in the physical realm, but within the dimension of the unseen (*ghayb*). However, he also emphasizes that only spiritual seekers who have dissolved the physical elements of their being are able to truly perceive this. As for the indicators of the truthfulness of such spiritual experiences, they can be recognized by: tranquility of the heart, spaciousness of the chest, compliance of the soul, and the submission of the bodily faculties.⁴⁵

Unlike intuitive interactions with angels, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā characterizes such encounters by noting that they come as inspirations toward praiseworthy actions. However, the soul initially resists accepting and acting upon them, due to its lack of purity. Once the soul attains purity, it becomes easier for the spiritual seeker to distinguish and accept such divine inspirations. When these inspirations descend into the heart (*qalb*), they differ from those inspired directly by angels, because there is a conflict between the purity of the heart and base desires (*shahwah*). This, according to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, is precisely why the believer is given a rank higher than the angels.⁴⁶

Quite different, however, are the inspirations that originate from Satan (*shayṭān*). Subtly, Satan can resemble the angels by suggesting acts of obedience and goodness, but with the hidden intention of pushing a desire for power or spiritual privileges (*karāmāt*). Satan manipulates evil in the guise of good. He encourages people to perform good deeds, but in order to be seen and praised by others. Satan can approach the human being from all directions, except those who have reached the station of sincerity (*ikhhlās*). And even *ikhhlās*, according to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, is

marked by the absence of any sense of being sincere. For, he adds, to feel sincere is itself a form of satanic manipulation. He advises the spiritual traveler to remain vigilant against these subtle manipulations as long as any opening for them still exists.⁴⁷

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā recounts an experience in which satanic whisperings (*khāṭir shayṭānī*) sought to divert him from his spiritual discipline during *khalwah* and *dhikr*. After receiving an inspiration to write a book, he deliberately suspended his judgment and sought spiritual verification through *rābiṭah* with his master, 'Ammār al-Badlīsī. Through this spiritual connection, his shaykh advised him to disregard the inspiration because it originated from Satan and would distract him from the remembrance of God. This episode illustrates that, in Kubrā's epistemology, intuitive knowledge is not accepted uncritically but must be validated through spiritual discipline and the guidance of an authorized *murshid*.⁴⁸

Later on, *rābiṭah*, as previously mentioned, became a foundational practice in many Ṣūfī orders (*ṭharīqah*). This represents one of the most significant contributions of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā to the field of Ṣūfism in particular, and to Islamic epistemology more broadly.

Scholar	Main Source of Knowledge	Epistemological Approach	Key Concept	Distinctive Features
Al-Ghazali	Empiricism, reason, experience, intuition	Integrative (rational–empirical–spiritual synthesis)	Intuition as the fourth epistemological source	Systematically integrates revelation, reason, and intuition
Al-Tirmidhī	Intuition (<i>ilhām, firāsah</i>), Prophetic teachings	Sufi intuitive epistemology	Inspiration, spiritual insight, <i>muḥaddathūn</i> , sainthood (<i>walāyah</i>)	Emphasizes intuition as a central source of knowledge for saints
Najm al-Dīn Kubrā	Intuition (<i>kashf</i>), <i>mujaḥadah</i> , <i>dhawq</i> , <i>mushāhadah</i>	Experiential-intuitive Sufi epistemology	Veil (<i>ḥijāb</i>), unveiling (<i>kashf</i>), transformation of perception (<i>tabdīl al-dhawq</i>), ascent (<i>mi'rāj</i>)	Knowledge gained through direct spiritual experience and disciplined practice
Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)	Reason, empiricism (<i>tajribah</i>), analogy (<i>qiyās</i>)	Peripatetic philosophy (rational–empirical)	Hierarchy of intellect, empirical experience, logical analogy	Explains spiritual phenomena through rational and empirical frameworks

Table 1: Comparative Table of Islamic Epistemology

The ‘*Irfānī* Epistemological Achievement: Shaykh al-*Ghayb*,
Ism al-*Ghayb*, and *Kitāb al-Ghayb*

As discussed earlier, even a philosopher like Ibn Sīnā accepted truths originating from the unseen realm. However, he acknowledged them primarily through logical analogy (*qiyās mantiqī*) and empirical reports. His approach blended empirical epistemology with reason, allowing for a tiered understanding of the intellect’s operations.

In contrast, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī made this kind of knowledge central to the status of sainthood (*walāyah*) without tying it to philosophical constructs. He reconciled the rigidity of hadith scholarship with the openness of Sufi intuition. He detailed four types of knowledge that saints can attain through intuitive epistemology: First, ‘*Ilm al-Bad*’: knowledge of origins and cosmic elements. Second, ‘*Ilm al-Mithāq*’: knowledge of the primordial covenant (the universe’s testimony). Third, ‘*Ilm al-Maqādīr*’: knowledge of fate and future predictions. Forth ‘*Ilm al-Ḥurūf*’: esoteric knowledge of letters and sacred texts.⁴⁹

In this regard, Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā builds upon the work of his predecessors by introducing at least three terms that may be considered new and innovative, as they had not been previously articulated by earlier philosophers or Sufi masters, including al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī. These three original concepts introduced by the founder of the Kubrāwīyah order are: *Shaykh al-Ghayb* (The Unseen Shaykh), *Ism al-Ghayb* (The Unseen Name), *Kitāb al-Ghayb* (The Unseen Book).

In relation to these, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā refers to a spiritual traveler (*sālik*) who embarks on the journey of the soul as a *sayyār*. The term *sayyār* is an intensified form (*mubālaghah*) of *sā’ir*, meaning “traveler.” It is the *sayyār* who ultimately attains access to metaphysical faculties.

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā explains that *sayyārs* are divided into three levels: The beginner (*mubtadi*) *sayyār* is like a child in the spiritual path, having reached only the states of fear and hope (*khawf* and *rajā*). The intermediate (*mutawassīṭ*) *sayyār* is like a mature adult, having attained the *tajallī* (manifestation) of divine attributes. The advanced (*muntahī*) *sayyār* is a shaykh in the path, having reached the *tajallī* of the Divine Essence (*tajallī al-dhāt*).⁵⁰

Level of Sayyar	Level Name	Analogy	Main Characteristic
Beginner	<i>Mubtadi</i> ’	Like a child	Has only reached the states of fear (<i>khawf</i>) and hope (<i>rajā</i>)
Intermediate	<i>Mutawassīṭ</i>	Like a mature adult	Has attained the <i>tajallī al sifāt</i> (manifestation) of divine attributes
Advanced	<i>Muntahī</i>	A spiritual master (<i>syaykh</i>)	Has reached the <i>tajallī</i> of the Divine Essence (<i>tajallī al-dhāt</i>)

Table 2: Stage of *Sayyārs* According to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā

He states that when the spiritual face of a *sayyār* has been illuminated, there will be an overflowing of divine light, much like water gushing forth from a spring. This abundance of light will be felt before the *sayyār*, causing the sensation of a face appearing before him. That face, in fact, is the *sayyār*'s own face, now radiant like the sun, illuminating his entire body. When this light encompasses the whole self, the *sayyār* will witness a form emerging from the light (*shakhs tatawalladu min al-anwār*). Some may perceive this form fully, equivalent in size and shape to their own physical body. Others may perceive it incompletely, depending on the extent to which the veil of ego has been lifted from the *sayyār*.⁵¹

After that, he describes the stages of unveiling the veils (*hijāb*) that occur along the spiritual journey. First, the *sayyār* witnesses the unveiling of the inner eye (*baṣīrah*) at the level of the eyes, then the face, descending to the chest, and eventually encompassing the entire body.

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā explains that the “figure of light” that appears during this process is referred to among some Sufis by various names, including: The Forerunner (*Muqaddam*), The Unseen Shaykh (*Shaykh al-Ghayb*), The Unseen Scale (*Mizān al-Ghayb*).⁵²

“The first to be unveiled is the inner sight (*baṣīrah*) at the eyes, then the face, descending to the chest, and finally spreading to the entire body. The figure of light that appears before you is referred to among Sufis as the Muqaddam, the Unseen Shaykh (*Shaykh al-Ghayb*), and the Unseen Scale (*Mizān al-Ghayb*). Know that the *sayyār* possesses a witness (*shāhid*), known as the Unseen Shaykh, who elevates him to the sky.”⁵³

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā explains that the Unseen Shaykh (*Shaykh al-Ghayb*), acting as a witness (*shāhid*), may be interpreted as a spiritual mentor for the *sayyār*. Through this connection, the *sayyār* is elevated to the celestial realms. The evidence that the Unseen Shaykh serves as his mentor lies in the fact that the *sayyār* does not move except by his movement, remains still by his stillness, and receives spiritual effusion from his effusion. The *sayyār* feels spaciousness and clarity in his presence, and constriction or unease in his absence. In reality, the Unseen Shaykh is nothing other than the radiant reflection of the *sayyār* himself. He also functions as the *Mizān* (Scale) by which the *sayyār* makes decisions and judgments.⁵⁴

As for the *Kutub al-Ghayb* (The Unseen Books), books that exist within the metaphysical realm, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā affirms that such writings do indeed exist. However, the explicit terminology and naming of these books were only introduced clearly in his work *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*. He describes several types of forms in which these unseen books appear: books written in the form of connected dots (*al-nuqāt al-maktūbah*), books written using letters without diacritical marks, books written

in a complete form, with dots, letters, and vowel signs. He refers to these as books with strange and mysterious titles. Among the titles he mentions are: *Yanbū‘ al-Abrār* (The Spring of the Righteous), *Majmū‘ al-Asrār* (The Collection of Secrets), *Kitāb al-Mahd* (The Book of the Cradle), *Kitāb al-Falakī* (The Astral Book), *Farḥat al-Abrār* (The Joy of the Righteous), *Nuzhat al-Asrār* (The Garden of Secrets), *Kitāb al-‘Azā‘im* (The Book of Resolute Powers), *Kitāb al-‘Ishq* (The Book of Love), *Kitāb al-Baḥr* (The Book of the Ocean), *al-Burhā al-Kabīr* (The Great Proof), *Kitāb al-Ashkāl* (The Book of Forms).⁵⁵

In the centuries prior to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, it appears that only al-Ḥallāj was openly willing to speak about such books of the unseen. He referred to them as the *Ṭawāsīn*, which were divided into several titles such as: *Ṭawāsīn al-Dā‘irah* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of the Circle), *Ṭawāsīn al-Tanzīh* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of Divine Transcendence), *Ṭawāsīn al-Nuqṭah* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of the Dot), *Ṭawāsīn al-Azal wa al-Ittibās* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of Pre-Eternity and Ambiguity), *Ṭawāsīn al-Mashī‘ah* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of Divine Will), *Ṭawāsīn al-Tawḥīd* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of Divine Unity), *Ṭawāsīn al-Asrār fī al-Tawḥīd* (The *Ṭawāsīn* of Secrets in Divine Unity).⁵⁶ Later, this theme was further developed by Muḥammad al-Ghawth in his work *Jawāhir al-Khams* (The Five Jewels), which became an important reference in later studies of the doctrine of the Seven Levels of Being (*Martabat Tujuh*). It is highly probable that these figures were able to retain their inner visions even upon returning to physical consciousness, due to the purity of their inner selves.

These books will be seen by the *sayyār*, such that their script becomes visible and intelligible, just like reading the Qur’an. However, when interpreted by the intelligence (*‘aql*) located within the spiritual faculty known as *sirr*, some parts may be understood while others remain obscure. This is due to the presence of impurities within the self. If the *sayyār* is able to both see and comprehend the writings, then he will have accessed a portion of divinely bestowed knowledge (*‘ilm ladunnī*). Yet upon returning to physical consciousness, the *sayyār* may forget the details, while still retaining the taste of sweetness that came from that understanding. As a result, the *sayyār* will continue to believe in the truth of that knowledge, but at the same time, he will experience yearning, longing, and love to return to that spiritual dimension.⁵⁷

The third term introduced by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā is *Ism al-Ghayb* (the Unseen Name). This may also be referred to as the name of the soul (*ism al-rūḥ*). Discussions about the *Ism al-Ghayb* or name of the soul are rarely found in the works of classical Qur’anic commentators, let alone in other disciplines, except in Sufism. However, not all Sufis have addressed this topic either. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find any elaboration on this matter within the literature of theology (*kalām*) or Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This indicates that the issue of the name of

the soul does not belong to the domain of creed or legal rulings. While *aqidah* and *fiqh* are filled with diverse, often contradictory interpretations, this subject lies even further beyond the scope of those debates. Why, then, does this concept appear in the writings of some Sufis? It is because Sufis believe that knowing one's true self is the only way to truly know God. Based on this principle, the study of the soul's name is essentially a mystical interpretation by certain Sufis within the broader field of *ma'rifah*, gnosis or experiential knowledge of God. At its core, this subject belongs to the realm of intuition, filled with spiritual nuance. Yet when expressed and written down, it is inevitably received and treated like any other field of discourse, subject to contradiction, misunderstanding, rejection, or alternatively, acceptance and fascination.

In this context, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā first refers to the name of the soul (*Ism al-Rūḥ*) in general terms by correlating it with the diacritical marks (*ḥarakāt*) in the Qur'an. However, the concept of the name of the soul is broader, as it also relates to the symbolic meaning of certain letters in the Divine Name of Allah. He once explained that the letter "*wāw*", which represents the *ḍammah* vowel mark ("u" sound), is a symbol of the soul's name. The letter "*alif*", corresponding to the *fatḥah* vowel ("a" sound), symbolizes the Name of Allah. The letter "*yā*", representing the *kasrah* vowel ("i" sound), symbolizes the name of the created being (*makhḷūq*).⁵⁸ Elsewhere, he also stated that the "*wāw*" in the Divine Name "*Huwa*" (He) represents the name of the soul.⁵⁹

Based on this, the soul (*rūḥ*) is regarded as the repository of the secret that connects God and His servant. This is the meaning and interpretation of the phrase *amr rabbī* ("the affair of my Lord") found in Surah al-Isrā' [17:85]. For this reason, the Sufi scholars, as acknowledged by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, differ in their views regarding the ontological status of the soul: whether it is eternal (*qadīm*) or created (*makhḷūq*). However, Najm al-Dīn tends to side with the opinion of al-Junayd (d. 297 AH), who stated: "We do not say that it is eternal (*qadīm*) nor do we say that it is created (*makhḷūq*)."⁶⁰

More specifically, the name of the soul (*Ism al-Rūḥ*) associated with spiritual travelers (*sālikūn*) is not limited to a single letter, such as the letter *wāw*. Rather, these names consist of groupings of letters that form a word, or even a combination of multiple words, each carrying its own distinct meaning.

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā explains that the naming of a *sayyār* (spiritual traveler) with a hidden or unseen name (*ism al-ghayb*) can occur when the individual is accepted in the Divine Presence. At that point, the *sayyār* will be granted a name, a title, or an honorific designation.⁶¹ Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's explanation seems to refer to the teachings of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, the author of *al-Ghunyah*.⁶² The difference is

that while ‘Abd al-Qādir does not explicitly disclose the spiritual names he received in that book, although he may allude to them in other writings or separate treatises, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā openly reveals such names. These include not only spiritual names, but even the name of Satan, and the Greatest Name of God (*al-Isim al-a‘ẓam*). In fact, at least four names are explicitly mentioned in his work *Fawā’ih al-Jamāl*.

The first two names he mentions as *ism al-ghayb* (The Unseen Names) are *Qinṭarūn* and Abū al-Jannāb. *Qinṭarūn*, which means “ready to receive spiritual gifts (*wāridāt*)”, was a name he received during his spiritual journey as a *sayyār*. As for Abū al-Jannāb, it was bestowed directly by the Prophet Muhammad SAW when Najm al-Dīn experienced a state of trans-consciousness while attending a spiritual gathering (*majlis*) of Abū al-Ṭāhir al-Silāfi. In that moment, he felt an intimate interaction with the Prophet, even to the extent of reciting his *wird* (invocations) in the Prophet’s presence. He later narrated the experience in detail.

Then, I was inspired at that moment to ask about my *kunyah* (honorary title or nickname). I said, “O Messenger of Allah, is my *kunyah* Abū al-Janāb or Abū al-Jannāb?” I was inclined toward the former, without the emphasis (*tashdīd*). The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, “No, indeed you are Abū al-Jannāb.” Then one of his companions said: “Yes, O Messenger of Allah, he is Abū al-Jannāb. Between these two names lies a secret of the world and the Hereafter. If you were Abū al-Janāb, it would mean you are a man of the world. But being Abū al-Jannāb means you will be distanced from the world.”⁶³

As for the name of the devil he came to know, it was *Yūnāq* (يوناق), which means “a deceiver who tempts subtly.” He learned this name during a state of spiritual absence (*ghaybah*), during which he saw the devil introducing himself with that name.⁶⁴ In contrast, the Great Name of God (*al-ism al-a‘ẓam*) was revealed to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā during a spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) at the Shunīziyah Mosque in Baghdad. Spiritually, he saw a scroll with the name “*Iftahḥaḥanīn*” (افتححنين) written on it, which means “Open [the gate] with compassion.”⁶⁵ He also once encountered a woman he admired, whose apparent (external) name was *Banfasyah*, while her hidden (esoteric) name was *Istaftīn* (استفتين). The meanings of these names cannot be determined purely through linguistic analysis; rather, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā emphasized that such knowledge is accessed through *dhawq* (direct spiritual taste) and *ḥāl* (spiritual state).⁶⁶

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā’s emphasis on the role of intuitive epistemology appears as a recurring theme throughout his works. The common reliance on empirical data as a point of reference is renewed by the introduction of intuitive data that has been empirically recorded. He consistently uses specific key terms to describe the reality of such spiritual attainments. Moreover, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā contributes

significantly by offering guidelines and indicators to validate knowledge obtained from the realm of intuition.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Najm al-Dīn Kubrā developed a coherent 'irfānī epistemology in which spiritual intuition (*kashf*, *dhawq*, and *mushāhadah*) functions as a legitimate mode of knowledge alongside empirical observation and rational inquiry. Rather than positioning intuition as an alternative to reason, Kubrā integrates textual authority, empirical learning, intellectual reflection, and spiritual discipline into a unified epistemological framework. His concept of *mujāhadah* serves as the methodological foundation through which intuitive knowledge is attained, while the notions of *Shaykh al-Ghayb*, *Kitāb al-Ghayb*, and *Ism al-Ghayb* represent original epistemological contributions that explain the process of mystical cognition within the Sufi tradition.

This reconstruction also provides a different perspective from the epistemological critique advanced by al-Jābirī. Rather than viewing 'irfānī epistemology as an obstacle to intellectual progress, the findings suggest that Kubrā's thought illustrates a complementary relationship between rational, empirical, and spiritual forms of knowledge. In this sense, 'irfānī epistemology should be understood not as a rejection of scientific rationality but as an expansion of the epistemological horizon within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Its influence on later Sufi orders, particularly through the practice of *rābiṭah*, further demonstrates that Kubrā's epistemological legacy extends beyond mystical experience into the formation of enduring intellectual and spiritual traditions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to contemporary discussions on Islamic epistemology and the philosophy of religion by reconstructing 'irfānī epistemology as a systematic theory of knowledge rather than merely a form of mystical experience. Nevertheless, this research is limited to the epistemological thought of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and does not examine the historical transformation of his ideas within later Kubrawī, Naqshbandī, or Qādirī traditions. Future studies may therefore explore the reception, development, and practical implementation of Kubrā's epistemology across different Sufi traditions and contemporary Muslim intellectual contexts.

Endnotes

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7. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 22/112; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah al-Kubrā* tahqiq: Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā' (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2012), 250; al-Sakhāwī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā' al-Mukramīn* tahqiq: Muḥammad Adīb al-Jādir (Oman: Dār al-Faṭḥ, 2020), 127-128; *Muhammad Isa Waley*, "Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and Central Asian School of Sufism (Kubrāwīyah), in *Islamic Sprituality; Manifestations ed.* Syed Husein Nasr (New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 81.
8. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl wa-Fawā'id al-Jalāl*, Kairo: Dar al-Misriyah al-Lubnaniyah, (1998), 251.
9. Ibn al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-Ṭib min Ghaḍn al-Andalus al-Ṭayyib* tahqiq: Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1968), 2/162.
10. Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 22/112.
11. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *al-Ta'wilāt al-Najmiyah*, 1/107-109.
12. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *al-Ta'wilāt al-Najmiyah*, 3/349.
13. Rather than functioning merely as a ceremonial initiation, labs al-khirqah represents an epistemological commitment. By accepting the authority of the murshid, the disciple enters a structured process of spiritual education through which intuition (kashf) becomes disciplined, verifiable, and protected from subjective illusion. al-Suhrawardi, *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, (Damaskus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2022), 1/330-338.
14. Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Sanūsī, *Silsilah al-Mu'in fi Ṭarā'iq al-'Arba'in*. Tripoli: Wizārah al-I'lam wa al-Thaqāfah (1969), 71-72. However, it is written as Ghammār bin Yasir, which appears to be a copyist's error.

15. Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning; Pesantren dan Tarekat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 223-245; Wain, A. (2021). The Kubrāwī and early Javanese Islam: re-assessing the significance of a sixteenth-century Kubrāwī Silsila in the Sejarah Banten Ranté-Ranté. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 49(143), 42-62. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2021.1875658>
16. Al-Kāsifi, *Rashahāt 'Ayn al-Hayat* tahqiq: al-Kayālī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2009), 141-145; Muḥammad Amīn al-Kurdī, *al-Mawāhib al-Sarmadīyah* (Mesir: Matba'ah al-Saādah, 1329 H.), 143 dan 266.
17. Al-Sakhāwī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*, 1/127.
18. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 171-172.
19. Karbalaee, M. (2020). "Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī's Critique of Ibn 'Arabī's Theory of the Unity of Existence". *Journal of Naqd va Nazar (Philosophy and Theology)*, 25(99), pp. 128-148. Doi: 10.22081/jpt.2020.55875.1670
20. Ibn Sīnā, "Risālah Anmāt al-Thalāth al-Akhirah min al-Tanbihāt wa al-Ishārāt" in *Rasā'il al-Syaykh al-Ra'īs Ibn Sīnā* (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 2023), 24-41.
21. Al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl wa-al-Muḥḥib bi-al-Aḥwāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Minhaj, 2015), 111-116; al-Ghazālī, *al-Risālah al-Laduniyah* (Kairo: Dār al-Muqattam, 2014), 57-66.
22. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, "Sirat al-Awliyā'" *Thalathah Muṣannafāt li-al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī* tahqiq: Birand R. (Beirut: Dār al-Nashr, 1992), 46-54
23. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Khatm al-Awliyā'* (Kairo: Maktabah Thaqafah Diniyah, 2013), 184
24. A. 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Sā'ih, "muqaddimah" *Khatm al-Awliyā'*, 40; al-'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* tahqiq: M. Adīb al-Jādir (Damaskus: Dār al-Maktabī, 2009), 622; al-Hujwayrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb* tahqiq: Is'ād Qindil (Beirut: al-Majlis al-A'lā, t.t.), 1/254.
25. Ibn Fūrak, *al-Ibānah 'an Ṭuruq al-Qāsidī wa-al-Kashf 'an Manābij al-Sālikīn* tahqiq: Salim 'Adil A.J. (Kairo: Ihyā' Center, 2023), 142.
26. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 150.
27. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 150.
28. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 150; al-Ghazali, *Kimiya Sa'adat* (Persia) (Tehran: Mu'assasah Intisharat Nagah, 1389 H.) 173-174.
29. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 151.
30. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 152.
31. Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Sanūsī, *Silsalat al-Mu'in*, 89.
32. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 173.
33. Al-Suhrawardī, *Awārif*, 1/338.
34. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 173.
35. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Anmāt al-Thatāth al-Akhirah min al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt* suntingan M.A.F Mehren di Leiden tahun 1889, dipublis kembali (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 2023), 25.
36. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Anmāt al-Thatāth al-Akhirah*, 26-27.
37. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 156-157.
38. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 174-175.
39. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 214; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Anmāt al-Thatāth al-Akhirah*, 10-25.
40. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 157, 160, 195, 197, 161
41. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 162-163.
42. Abū al-Qāsim al-Lijā'i, Quṭb al-'Arifin (Beirut: Dar Sādir, 2009), 80-100.
43. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl*, 163-164; As can be seen from his fondness for quoting that verse when explaining Surah al-Baqarah:6, which he repeats again in the commentary on

- Surah al-Baqarah:28, 63, and others. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *al-Ta'wilāt al-Najmīyah*, 117, 139, 172.
44. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 164.
 45. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 165.
 46. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 165.
 47. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 166-167.
 48. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 168-169.
 49. Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Khatm al-Awliyā'*, 185.
 50. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 213
 51. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 192.
 52. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 193.
 53. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 193-194.
 54. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 194.
 55. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 195.
 56. Al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāsīn* dalam *Dīwān al-Hallāj* (Dar al-Sādir, t.t.) 97-110.
 57. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 195.
 58. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 219.
 59. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 220.
 60. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 219.
 61. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 251.
 62. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, *al-Ghunyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2001), 1255.
 63. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 251-252.
 64. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl*, 252.

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