

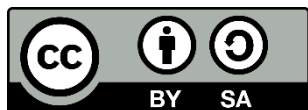


Verstehen: Journal of
Qur'anic Studies and
Exegesis

p-ISSN : xxxxxxxx
e-ISSN : xxxxxxxx

Vol. 01, No. 1 (June
2026), p. 137-162

DOI : xxxxxxxxxx



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AN EXEMPLARY SUFI COMMENTARY: *Latā'if al-Ishārāt* by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (376/986 – 465/1072)

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Abstract

Different from his predecessors, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qusyairi composed a less controversial Sufi commentary on the Qur'an, the *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*. In a moderate approach the book provides glimpses of esoteric understanding resulted from a successful attempt of integrating Sufism into the Sharī'a as the common endeavor of the early Quranic commentators to enroot Sufism into the Qur'an as the core Islamic notions. The question discussed in this piece is, then, how did al-Qushayrī interpret the Quranic verses to produce his mystical understanding in his *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*? The findings show that al-Qushayrī usually conveyed the spiritual significance of the Qur'an in addition to provide its verbal meanings. The clearer the spiritual significances of the Qur'anic verses attached to their literal interpretation, the lesser the need to articulate any allegoric or symbolic way of interpretation. On the contrary, the more obscure the spiritual significances to be disclosed from the formally interpreted literal senses, the more symbolic expressions will be attributed to the verses concerned.

Keywords: Sufi hermeneutics, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qusyairī, *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*, Sunnite Sufism

Abstrak:

Berbeda dengan para pendahulunya, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qusyairi menyusun sebuah tafsir Al-Qur'an bercorak sufistik yang tidak terlalu kontroversial, yakni, *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*. Melalui pendekatan moderat, kitab ini menyajikan wawasan mengenai pemahaman esoteris yang lahir dari upaya memadukan tasawuf dengan syariat—sebuah ikhtiar umum para mufasir awal untuk menanamkan tasawuf ke dalam Al-Qur'an sebagai gagasan inti Islam. Pertanyaan yang dibahas dalam tulisan ini adalah: bagaimana al-Qusyairi menafsirkan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an hingga menghasilkan pemahaman mistis dalam *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa al-Qusyairi lazimnya menyampaikan makna spiritual Al-Qur'an di samping menyajikan makna tekstualnya. Semakin jelas makna spiritual ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an yang menyertai penafsiran harfiahnya, semakin berkurang pula kebutuhan untuk menguraikan penafsiran yang bersifat alegoris atau simbolis. Sebaliknya, semakin samar makna spiritual yang hendak diungkap dari makna harfiah yang ditafsirkan secara formal, semakin banyak pula ungkapan simbolis yang dikaitkan dengan ayat-ayat tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutika Sufi, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qusyairī, *Latā'if al-Ishārāt*, Sufisme Sunni

Introduction

Within the Sunni perspective an un-interrupting endeavor of engaging Sufism into the core of Islamic notions can be seen in the publication of the Sufi Qur'an commentaries as we can see in Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and Muḥammad b al-Ḥusayn al-Sulami.¹ However, such cannot be considered a valid interpretation to the Quran, classified under the method of *tafsīr*.² Different from the usual tendency to name works as *tafsīr*, Ibrāhīm Basyūnī did mentioned his critical edition of the *Laṭā'if al-Isharāt* by the Sufi 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī with an embedded title *Al-Tafsīr ṣūfī kāmīl li al-Qur'an*. Such designation shows how exemplary the commentary was. It bears a sound traditionally mystical interpretation to the Qur'an with a proper naming of the book, resulted from a renowned Sufi of the traditionally Sunnite theologian as well as applying the proper principle of Quranic hermeneutical procedures.

Socio-cultural and intellectual backgrounds showed that al-Qushayrī came up from a renowned Sunnite circumstance. He was a Shafī'ite adherent in Islamic law, as he was an Ash'arite follower in theology. He has genuinely inherited seeds of the spirit of *futuwwa* from his maternal family. His full name is Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Ṭalḥa b. Muḥammad al-Qushayrī al-Naysabūrī. He was born in 376/986 in Ustuwā. His father was an Arab descent from the Banū Qushayr, as the family lineage originated from Qushayr b. Ka'b b. Rabī'a b. 'Āmir b. Ṣa'ṣa'a.³ Meanwhile, his mother was from the Banū Sulaym.⁴

'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī's family was an outcome of the so called an established practice of mixed marriages between Arab clans with indigenous tribes of the conquered areas. Such practice was aimed at preserving social, cultural, economic, and politically Arab descents in the eastern provinces of Persia. The Sulaym and Qushayr families were among the dominant Arab clans holding the position of aristocratic local landlords called by the Persian term *dihqāns*. This social privilege was the result of their contribution to the victory of Islamic expeditions to the eastern regions. Fortified by the tradition of mixed marriages to the occupied Persian regions, the Arabs newcomers then had stronger alliance within the newly established Muslim umma.

¹ Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya al-Kubrā, 1911) also Muḥammad b al-Ḥusayn Sulamī, *Ḥaqqā'iq al-Tafsīr: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz* (ed. Sayyid 'Imrān), 2 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001).

² Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā Shatibi, *Muwāfaqāt*, iii (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr, 1990), 403-405.

³ Abū Sa'īd 'Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad b. Manṣūr al-Tamīmī Al-Sam'ānī, *Al-Ansāb* (with an introd. and notes by 'Abd Allāh 'Umar al-Bārūdī), vol. iv (Beirut: Dār al-Jinān, 1988), 503.

⁴ Qāsim Al-Sāmarrā'ī, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings: a Study of the Theme in Islamic and non-Islamic Writings* (Baghdad: National Printing and Publishing Co, 1968), 31.

There is hardly any information about Qushayrī's childhood except that his father passed away when he was still a young boy. He was, then, entrusted to members of the extended family of his mother, i.e. the family of Sulaym. The closest relative responsible for his upbringing was his maternal uncle Abū 'Uqayl al-Sulamī, who was a *dihqān* of Ustuwā.⁵ Being a dignitary of Ustuwā Abū 'Uqayl al-Sulamī might have provided the young al-Qushayrī with aristocratic habits and circumstances of a wealthy Arab descent. These habits were visible in some chivalrous skills introduced to the young boy: excellent swordsman, skillful marksman, and lance fighter. Those chivalrous skills were related to the high rank as well as social statute of an aristocratic youth (*fatā*), upon whom good moral characteristics were engrafted. The spirit of *futuwwa* inspired the youths to be always ready for helping others.⁶ According to the interpretation of Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, these good qualities of *futuwwa* were trained to the young al-Qushayrī's association with the people of worldly affairs (*ahl al-dunyā*).⁷

More importantly, it was very probable that his maternal uncle Abū 'Uqayl al-Sulamī was also responsible for providing al-Qushayrī's primary education in Ustuwā. Al-Sāmarrā'ī noted al-Qushayrī's primary education was not very different from the basic education of an Arab Muslim in general. This included daily lesson on the Qur'ān in mosques, then gradually moving to hear Hadīth as well as acquiring other basic knowledge about Islam.⁸ Evidence for the highly aristocratic style during his primary education was that he received some courses on Arabic language and its letters since his early ages from a teacher named Abū al-Qāsim al-Alīmānī.⁹

What was the socio-political situation at the time of al-Qushayrī's departure to Nishapur after receiving his basic education at his home country? As observed

⁵ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khalikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān* (Edited by Iḥsān 'Abbās), vol. i (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 205-7.

⁶ The term *futuwwa* is lexically defined to be generosity (*sakhā'*) and nobility (*karam*), whereas for mysticism it is an attitude someone is ready to help other than himself within this world and the world to come, see Jurjānī (1987), 211.

⁷ Al-Sāmarrā'ī, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings: a Study of the Theme in Islamic and non-Islamic Writings*, 33.

⁸ Al-Sāmarrā'ī, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings: a Study of the Theme in Islamic and non-Islamic Writings*, 33.

⁹ Al-Suyūṭī (1977), vol. ii, 73; also, al-Sāmarrā'ī (1968), 33. However, al-Sāmarrā'ī notes that there was no information about who was this Abū al-Qāsim al-Alīmānī as he was barely unknown except that brief information from bio-bibliographical sources mentioning that he was a friend of the Banū Sulaym. Delving further detail, Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī poses some probabilities that this teacher was presumably Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī b al-Hasan al-Alīmānī, who was coming from Rayy. He seemed to have stayed in Nishapur because he was a friend of Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. 'Isā al-Damaghānī. See editorial notes by Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī to Qushayrī's *Arba' Rasā'il fī al-Taṣawwuf* (al-Qushayrī 1969), 8, upon which he takes his sources from *Tatimmāt al-Yatīmāt*. See al-Tha'ālibī (1934), vol. ii, 36; vol. iv, 93, 106.

by Samarrā'ī, the approximate time of al-Qushayrī's departure to Nishapur was around 394 or 395, which coincided with the arrival of Abū Sa'īd al-Mayhanī (d. 440/1049) at Nishapur, according to al-Qushayrī's account in his *Risāla*.¹⁰ Hence, al-Sāmarra'ī ascertained that al-Qushayrī was about eighteen years old or a little younger when arrived at Nishapur.¹¹ This may be correlated to al-Qushayrī's primary motive of departure, which was a pursuit of advanced education in arithmetic. Considering the contemporaneous socio-political situation, al-Qushayrī's departure to Nishapur can also be seen as a concern of the implementation of social justice. By mastering arithmetic, he might fulfill the hope of his people and aristocratic family to be a fair public accountant capable of recalculating their tributes paid to the new regime.

Agricultural prosperity of the neighboring villages around Nishapur like Ustūwa might have declined since the last half of the Samānid administration due to huge expenses of military expeditions and unstable political situations. These unstable political circumstances were particularly precipitated by the Simjūrid rising in 384/994 against Maḥmūd who took over Nishapur "on behalf of" the Samānids, and by other subordinated dynasties. Both the Simjūrids and the Ghaznāvids eyed for becoming independent rulers over the province of Khurasan leading to warfare for about six years up to 389/999 when Maḥmūd successfully recaptured Nishapur in the name of a new independent dynasty of the Ghaznāvids.

The arrival of the new ruler was accompanied by a seriously degrading economic condition. Al-Qushayrī's posed himself to be a public accountant as his people would have welcome him back to Ustūwa to solve any problems of ruinous and overburdened fiscal regulations. Thus, such showed the spirit of *futuwwa* which was the primary motive of his departure to Nishapur. Evidence for the above analyses is provided by Ibn al-Athīr who commented that in that time some uncultivated lands remained dominant in sub-urban districts like Ustūwa. Another catastrophic blow also came when Khurasanis were to suffer from an acute famine that broke out in 401/1011 which took thousands of lives.¹²

Being a Disciple of the Charismatic Sufi Master: Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq

Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysābūrī's remarks concerning the degrading scholarly atmosphere at the turn to 5th/11th century Nishapur may have also impacted the degrading prosperity to the neighboring towns like Ustūwā. The degrading

¹⁰ Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīyya fī 'Ilm al-Taṣawwuf* (Eds. Ma'rūf Zurayq and 'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Balṭahjī) (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1990). 162.

¹¹ Al-Sāmarra'ī in his editorial note to the publication of several al-Qushayrī's writing titled *Arba' Rasail fī al-Taṣawwuf* (al-Qushayrī, 1969), 9.

¹² 'Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. ix (Cairo: 1965), 84, for the year 401/1011.

scholarly atmosphere certainly can be related to some scenes that Maḥmūd's salient personality incites domination of the Karrāmiyya movement along with their intrigues to help the Sultan against the opposing religious contenders. Against the Karrāmiyya, the best solution to heal people from spiritual degradation and any kinds of social diseases might fall into the field of Sufism as al-Qushayrī saw in al-Daqqāq's spiritual sessions. The young al-Qushayrī came to Nishapur with a new outlook on economic difficulties and socio-political misery. It seems that within Sufism he saw a more important spiritual solution contributing to spiritual tranquility in this world. It was through Sufism that man could achieve peace and tranquility in this world.

Since his early arrival at Nishapur, al-Qushayrī was deeply impressed by the spiritual courses in Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq's *majlis* at every time he intended to go to his class on arithmetic. Basyūnī illustrates this diversion from al-Qusyairī's original intent by saying that the obvious reason behind al-Qushayrī's strong attraction to Sufism was that he was truly amazed by al-Daqqāq, not only by his charisma sparkled from the latter personality, but also because the master's spiritual sessions specifically lead him to tranquil, trust, and satisfy within the new realm of Sufism.¹³

The master had granted him permission of having plunged completely into the Sufi path at that time by his serving al-Daqqāq to be his only spiritual master. However, what the Shaykh wished for the bright future of the young boy was rather following al-Sarī al-Saqatī's instruction to the young nephew al-Junayd at the beginning of his involvement in Sufism, which might have become ideal procedures for embracing Sufism for any beginners. Al-Daqqāq recommended al-Qushayrī to pursue advance studies of several branches of Islamic traditional knowledge under the guidance of other famous teachers in Nishapur, while he could still regularly attend al-Daqqāq's spiritual courses. Looking at this careful treatment of the young boy, we conclude that al-Daqqāq's mystical teaching was strictly following the rigid line of "moderate" Sufism advocated by the Baghdadi circle, strengthened by his mystical genealogy that reached Junayd through the intermediaries of al-Naṣrābādhī and al-Shiblī.¹⁴

Date and place of birth of Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Daqqāq are not so familiar for the biobibliographers. Neither is there much information about the early life of this renowned Sufi master, except that his family background was probably ---as indicated by his surname al-Daqqāq--- was that of a miller. One of al-Qushayrī grandsons, 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī, acknowledged that al-Daqqāq was a native Nishapuri. He explained further that Daqqāq learnt Arabic and theology in the city. He then went to neighboring town of Marw to study *fiqh*

¹³ Ibrāhīm Basyūnī, *Al-Imām al-Qushayrī: Sīratuhu Āthāruhu Madhhabuhu fi al-Taṣawwuf* (Cairo: Majmā' Buḥūth al-Islāmiyya, 1972), 172.

¹⁴ Qusyairi, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīyya fi 'Ilm al-Taṣawwuf*, 297.

under the auspices of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khiḍrī al-Marwazī (d. 380/991)¹⁵ and Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī al-Marwazī (d. 365/976).¹⁶ After having gathered enough knowledge about Islamic law and still pursuing the study of other traditional Islamic subjects, he embraced Sufism under the guidance of Abū al-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādhī (d. 367/978).¹⁷ His attraction to Sufism might already have begun when he was studying *fiqh* and Islamic jurisprudence at Marw, as both al-Khiḍrī and al-Qaffāl were ascetic jurists. As Abū al-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādhī returned in Nishapur only in between 340/951 and 365/976,¹⁸ al-Daqqāq must have embraced Sufism at a period when he had already mastered *fiqh* and *kalām*. Within the path of Sufism, it was notable that al-Daqqāq was leading an ascetic life, leaving aside any forms of luxurious life completely.

Mastering Traditional Knowledge

Following al-Daqqāq's recommendation to pursue further knowledge about Islamic traditional sciences before clinging any deeper to the field of Sufism, al-Qushayrī went to several recommended masters by al-Daqqāq to learn various branches of Islamic traditional sciences in Nishapur and its neighboring regions. In the field of Islamic jurisprudence, he was recommended to pursue advanced studies under the supervision of Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Bakr al-Ṭūsī (d. 420/1029). He was the master of the Shāfi'ite School of Islamic law. Al-Subkī described him as the chief of the Shāfi'ite adherents in Nishapur, where al-Ṭūsī delivered some courses and took disciples as he also held a debate forum (*majlis al-naẓar*). Along with his advanced knowledge in *fiqh*, al-Ṭūsī was a pious ascetic who rejected politics. Al-Subkī attested further that al-Ṭūsī was among people of the best moral conduct and the best personal record.¹⁹ The combination of al-Ṭūsī's recognition as the chief master of Shāfi'ite Islamic law with his asceticism might have been the main reason behind al-Daqqāq's recommendation.

Looking at his decision to send al-Qushayrī to learn *fiqh* under al-Ṭūsī, al-Daqqāq was determined to introduce al-Qushayrī into the moderate Sufism, which was the primary character of the extended "sober" line of Baghdadi

¹⁵ See his biography in al-Subkī (1964), vol. iii, pp. 100-1; Ibn Khallikān (1968), vol. iv, 215-16.

¹⁶ Al-Qaffāl belonged to multi scholarly talent, as he renowned to be a jurist, traditionist, as well as linguist in the Shāfi'ite school of Islamic law. He took traditions from Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, while among traditionists who received his traditions afterwards were Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and al-Ḥakīm al-Naysabūrī. See his biography in al-Subkī (1964), vol. iii, pp. 200-227; Ibn Khallikān (1968), vol. iv, pp. 200-1.

¹⁷ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (Ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥuluw), vol. iv (Cairo: Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964), 329.

¹⁸ Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 150.

¹⁹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 121.

mystical school. The aim of such a traditional choice was certainly that al-Qushayrī would pay attention to the reconciliation of Shari'a and Sufism. As al-Qushayrī had been learning intensely from al-Daqqāq in his *majlis*, he also wanted al-Qushayrī to broaden his knowledge by learning from al-Ṭūsī on how to combine juridical and mystical view for the purpose of legitimating Sufism within the framework of traditional thinking of Sunnism, especially in the field of legal thought.

In the field of Islamic theology, the spirit of balanced reconciliation between Sufism and the Shari'a can also be concluded from al-Daqqāq's recommendation that al-Qushayrī pursue advance knowledge in Islamic theology under the auspices of some contemporaneous Ash'ārite theologians who also belonged to the line of moderate Sufism, such as Ibn Fūrak and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā'īnī. Along with the mystical training provided by al-Daqqāq in his own *majlis*, the master wanted al-Qushayrī to learn from the point of view of Islamic theology how the mystical tenets would be in harmony within the Shāfi'ite-Ash'ārite principles of thought. Among the above mentioned recommended Ash'ārite theologians, Ibn Fūrak was the most prominent one, as 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī asserted that Ibn Fūrak was the only master of Ash'ārite theology at time.²⁰ Hence, when Suyūṭī mentioned that al-Qushayrī was suggested to study with Ibn Fūrak in the field of *kalām*,²¹ we may add that such a recommendation was because despite being a theologian, he was also mastering the field of *fiqh* in addition to his being a pious ascetic.²²

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b al-Ḥasan b Fūrak al-Anṣārī al-Isfahānī was born in Isfahān in 330/941 and died in Nishapur at the age of seventy-six in 406/1015. He began his scholarly career in Basra and Baghdad, where he studied Ash'ārite *kalām* under the guidance of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī al-Baṣrī (d. 370/981), a direct disciple of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'ārī (d. 324/935). Among his contemporaries who studied theology under the same master were Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)²³ and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 418/1027). From Iraq, Ibn Fūrak moved to Rayy, as he then was invited to Nishapur where a madrasa was built for him next to the *khanqa* of the Sufi Abū al-Ḥasan al-Būshanjī.²⁴ The authority that played a significant role in the establishment of his house and madrasa in Nishapur was the Amīr Nāṣir al-Dawla Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm,

²⁰ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 128.

²¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. i, 73-74.

²² Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 127.

²³ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b al-Ṭayyib b Muḥammad, an Ash'ārite theologian and Maliki jurisprudent, a reliable transmitter of hadith (al-Khaṭīb 1970, vol. v, 379).

²⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Būshanjī (d. 347/959), other mentioned his name 'Alī b. Ahmad b. Sahl, see al-Subkī (1964), vol. iii, p. 344. He was a Nishapuri Sufi who had a close relation with al-Ḥirī. For his biography see also Abū Nu'aym (1997), vol. x, 379.

who admired Ibn Fūrak's scholarship as well as his personality.²⁵ As a renowned theologian of the Ash'arite school he was accused by the Karrāmiyya to have committed heresy. Such a counterfeited accusation brought him to Maḥmūd's palace in Ghazna. In front of the Sultan, Ibn Fūrak successfully defended himself against the false accusation. However, political intrigue brought him to face the worst consequence as he was poisoned during his way back to Nishapur.²⁶ His loyalty to the Sunnite scholasticism as well as his contribution to the development of *kalam* can be gauged from his lost work *Ṭabaqāt al-Mutakallimīn*. This work seems to have played a great role as the main source of knowledge about the founder of the Ash'arite school, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, as it was used extensively by Ibn 'Asākir in his *Tabyīn Kadhīb al-Muftarī*.²⁷

Personal experience in pursuing advanced studies made Ibn Fūrak aware that relying only on traditional knowledge within the framework of *fiqh* was not the best way of achieving a satisfying explanation. Hence, he had to move forward to engage with theology.²⁸ A satisfying rational argumentation was needed in addition to merely traditional accounts to explain various kinds of religious doctrines. However, such a rational thinking did not reduce Ibn Fūrak's spiritual reliance on God, as both rational thinking and consistency to adhere to ethical precepts in practical life were commonly believed to be distinctive style of his scholarly and personal nature. Al-Qushayrī reported a very important lesson from Ibn Fūrak that affected much of his spirituality, which he learnt the latter's personal understanding of the Qur'ānic verse, "Is not Allah enough for His servant? But they try to frighten thee with others besides Him! For such as Allah leaves to stray, there can be no guide" (QS. 39:36). From this lesson, al-Qushayrī is said to have become aware of the fact that God will suffice anything that man is in need to fulfill.²⁹

By the demise of al-Daqqāq in 405/1015, al-Qushayrī might have qualified as a master either in one of the traditional sciences or in Sufism as he used to deliver the Friday in the Muṭarriz mosque. However, he may have decided to abstain from such a position as among his contemporaries in Nishapur there remained other respected Sufi masters, whom he might need further for spiritual counsel also. Ibn Fūrak died in 406/1015. It is likely that by a lack of scholarly experience in the field of Islamic theology al-Qushayrī may have felt the need of continued

²⁵ Ibrāhīm Basyūnī, Ibrāhīm (1972). *Al-Imām al-Qushayrī: Sīratuhu Āthāruhu Madhhabuhu fi al-Taṣawwuf* (Cairo: Majmā' Buḥūth al-Islāmiyya, 1972), 31.

²⁶ See al-Subkī (1964), iv, 130. It was probably the Karrāmiyya who poisoned him since putting the responsibility of his death to Maḥmūd's hands would rather impossible (W.M. Watt 1971, "Ibn Fūrak" in *EP* iii, 766b).

²⁷ W.M. Watt, "Ibn Fūrak" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 766b.

²⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 129.

²⁹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 130.

advanced studies. Before his death, Ibn Fūrak had recommended al-Qushayrī to see his colleague Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mihran al-Isfaraʿīnī for an advanced study of the methods of dialectics.

Along with Ibn Fūrak, Abu Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Isfaraʿīnī was the chief propagator of Ashʿārite theology in Nishapur at the turn to the 5th/11th century. As one of the renowned *ʿulamāʾ* of Nishapur, Isfaraʿīnī was in charge of the Nizāmiyya *madrasa* in the city, which had not been built before his era.³⁰ Like Ibn Fūrak, Isfaraʿīnī was forced to involve himself as an Ashʿārite theologian into public debates against his rivals from other Islamic sects, as is illustrated by his controversy with the Karrāmiyya concerning the problem of anthropomorphism. In this matter, the sect adhered to theological doctrines close to those of the Muʿtazila.³¹ Al-Isfaraʿīnī was also involved in an open debate with the famous Muʿtazilite al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025). The latter case as illustrated by al-Subkī in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya Kubrā* shows very clearly that Isfaraʿīnī was a prolific theologian with a profound ability in dialectics. Al-Subkī asserted that al-Isfaraʿīnī was forced to face al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār in a debate about human destiny, as the dialogue went on to an intense dispute when the latter retorted, "Did you see that had [God] prevented me from guidance, and would have destined me on being faithless, were He doing good or bad to me?" The debate ended with al-Isfaraʿīnī's complete triumph as he concluded, "Had God prevented you from anything which belongs to you, then he would have been doing bad for you; but, if God prevents you from something belonging to Him, then [we have to realize that] he privileges with his compassion anybody He wants."³²

An interesting feature represented by the disciple-master relationship between al-Qushayrī and al-Isfaraʿīnī was that al-Qushayrī took advantage on some practical matters. As Ibn Fūrak had previously recommended, he was to see al-Isfaraʿīnī to learn the methods of dialectics. Consequently, al-Qushayrī needed to continue his further study by attending all courses given by the master, even though theoretically al-Qushayrī might have become sufficiently qualified in Ashʿārite theology from previous trainings with Ibn Fūrak. Isfaraʿīnī was not only renowned for mastering Ashʿārite theology but was also an authority in Shāfiʿite Islamic law. It was reported that there were around seven hundred jurists who had attended his *madrasa*. Besides, he had begun to issue fatwas when he was only seventeen, as he had also composed a lot of writings in *fiqh*. In short, both his rivals and colleagues acknowledged his profound scholarship.

³⁰ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 256.

³¹ W. Madelung, "Al-Isfarāyīnī" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 107b.

³² Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 261-62.

People even commented that had al-Shāfi'ī seen him, he would have been very happy.³³

Al-Qushayrī's profound listening ability significantly supported the developing of his talent to deliver a rational argumentation as needed in theology. In the end, he did not need to attend the master's lecture anymore but only needed to observe the master's works and methodology. However, the master continued to give him a chance of direct counsels in case al-Qushayrī was facing difficulties in discerning the master's ideas.³⁴ Besides attending regularly to al-Daqqāq's *majlis*, al-Qushayrī had become a talented student of the Shafi'ite school of Islamic law under the guidance of al-Tūsī as well, as on Ash'arite theology under the scrutinizing guidance of Ibn Fūrak and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā'īnī. It was also mentioned that al-Qushayrī had previously studied the works of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī in Ash'arite theology, probably under the supervision of al-Daqqāq.³⁵ He followed the method of al-Bāqillānī in dialectics, from whose method of rational argumentation he also seems to have adopted.³⁶

Embedded Theological Approach in al-Qushayrī's Writings

As the disciple of both Ibn Furāk and al-Isfarā'īnī, in addition to his reading Baqillānī's works al-Qushayrī was capable of handling almost all the necessary elements of the Ash'arite theology, because these three scholars were among Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'ārī's direct disciples in Baghdad, who had greatly contributed the development of the Ash'arite theological system. He also mastered various branches of Islamic traditional sciences proven by the fact that al-Daqqāq assigned to al-Qushayrī a *majlis* at the Muṭarriz mosque. Al-Daqqāq himself replaced al-Qushayrī once a week, when the latter had to be absent to travel to Nasā' to pursue his studies of the Ash'arite theological system. This early emphasis in theological studies formed the foci of al-Qushayrī's later works in the field of Islamic mysticism and explained the influence of the theological discourse in his mystical views. His works within the field of Sufism such as the *Risāla*, the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, the *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj*, and the *Tartīb al-Sulūk* were dominated by his approach in Islamic theology following the line of al-Ash'ārī, including his consistent attempts to harmonize the mystical tenets within the boundaries of the Sharī'a in the continuing project of the formation of mystical theology.

³³ Ibn al-Imād (1931), vol. iii, 320.

³⁴ Al-Subki, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. v, 155.

³⁵ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. v, 156.

³⁶ Basyūnī (1972), p. 32. In this case, al-Qushayrī was mentioned to have adopted al-Baqillānī's method of rational argumentation, i.e. *buṭlān al-dalīl yu'dhin buṭlān al-madlūl* or "an invalid argument leads to an invalid meaning". See W.M. Watt (1971), "Ibn Furāk" in *IEP* vol. iii, 766b).

The approach of Islamic theology towards Sufism had been visible in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, the masterpiece of his Sufi manuals that has become available in so many reprints and critical editions. This treatise represented the main nature of al-Qushayrī's intellectual capacities as a mystical theologian. This treatise served as a Sufi manual exploring the theological foundation of Sufism as well as providing elementary knowledge about Sufism. Hence, themes of discussions within the treatise circle around the basic principles of Islamic mysticism as well as the exploration of spiritual stations to be accomplished by a person engaging into the path of Sufism, as well as the miraculous experiences (*karāmāt*) granted to wayfarers on their spiritual path. Besides, the treatise also provided brief biographies on several Sufi figures who were of the precursors of al-Qushayrī, along with their selected sayings and accounts of mystical traditions.

Al-Qushayrī's most significant contribution to the development of mystical thought was perhaps that he provided analytical discussions of the accounts of traditions he quoted from the previous Sufis, systematically arranged according to themes and subjects. While previous generations simply put any traditional accounts in unarranged collections, al-Qushayrī would not simply follow such a traditionalist approach but used the traditions as tools for supporting his arguments wrapped within profound analytical expositions. His *Risāla* begins with a brief introductory remark on mystical theology, in which he formulated the basic principles of Islamic mysticism concerning some theological issues like the concept of the oneness of God.³⁷ This principle serves as the basis argument for the problem of mystical union in God within the Sufi mystical experience. Within the *Risāla* we observe the broad lines of the Baghdadi sober type of Sufism as the main sources of the mystical traditions quoted. He had to quote al-Junayd and most of the proponents of the mystical school of Baghdad like al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), Abu al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī, Ruwaym (d. 303/910), Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890), Abū 'Alī al-Ruḍbārī (d. 322/934), and even al-Ḥusayn b Manṣūr (but not with his populous attribution of al-Ḥallāj) to represent the ideas promulgated by his precursors. In additions, several citations were also attributed to renowned mystics and revered mystics like Sahl b 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/861) and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765).³⁸ These non-exclusively Baghdadi traditional sources may have aimed, not only at strengthening the

³⁷ Among the examples that al-Qushayrī's view on *tawḥīd* followed the Ash'ārite theological system can be seen in his doctrine on divine attributes that are not separated from Himself and on the distinction between the attributes of the Essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and the attribute of creation (*ṣifāt al-fi'l*) (see Qusyairi (1990), p. 42; *Taḥbīr*, p. 18; Qusyairi (1971), i, 64-65; cf. al-Ash'arī (1929), 178-179).

³⁸ See Qusyairi (1990), 41-49.

mystical view, but also at reaching a universally much wider acceptance among the people.

The treatise was written in 437/1046³⁹ when al-Qushayrī had already matured as a Sufi master raising disciples himself. It is quite probable that this treatise was written against the extant danger of antinomianism⁴⁰ within the mystical sphere of Nishapur precipitated by a mystic like Abū Saʿīd Faḍl Allāh b. Abī al-Khayr al-Mayhānī (d. 440/1049).⁴¹ Al-Qushayrī desired to secure the position of Sufism within Islam.⁴² In his introduction, al-Qushayrī asserted that most scholars who had devoted themselves to the field of Sufism had perished. Only a few of them were left in his own time. Many weaknesses had crept with Sufism, and even with darker circumstances, where the masters who used to bring about guidance had passed away. At the same time, young men who took lessons from their heritage had also decreased in number. Piety had also gone, but ambition had remained to strengthen its tie. The sanctity of the Sharīʿa was no longer firmly established in people's heart. Hence the attention to religion was decreasing, and difference between the lawful and the unlawful increasingly rejected.⁴³ The degrading scholarly atmosphere mentioned by the chief exegete of Nishapur Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī at the beginning of the 5th/11th century continued a generation later. What had conducted al-Qushayrī in composing his *Risāla* was to give a convalescence of the demeaning scholarly atmosphere, which was specifically due to a similarly demeaning spiritual life. Al-Sāmarrāʾī noted that there had been two distinctive groups of Sufis in the 5th/11th century,⁴⁴ those of the antinomian tendency like the one led by Abū Saʿīd b. Abī al-Khayr (d. 440/1049) and the group led by al-Qushayrī. In fact, both might have represented two different types of mysticism, viz. the intoxicated type of the Khurasani and the sober type of the Baghdadi mystical schools.⁴⁵

The principles of Sufism that were provided by al-Qushayrī in his *Risāla* were based on the fundament of the Sharīʿa religious observances and the profound reality (*ḥaqīqa*) representing the moral quality in Sufism. To reach an agreement

³⁹ Qusyairi (1990), 36.

⁴⁰ Antinomianism is a belief related to the Christian theology that faith alone, not obedience in religious law, is necessary for salvation. In Islam, this belief is related to mystical ideas of monism in al-Ḥallāj (see Douglas Pratt 2005, p. 72), in whom Ibn Khafīf's mystical thought was in similar fashion with al-Ḥallāj. The later development of antinomian tendency in Sufism was also found in Ibn ʿArabī's existential monism (*wahdat al-wujūd*) (see W.C. Chittick 1989, p. 79).

⁴¹ For his biography, see al-Subkī (1964), vol. v, pp. 206-8. In additions, his encounter with al-Qushayrī was elaborated in Ibn al-Munawwar (1899), p. 55 as cited in al-Sāmarrāʾī (1968), pp. 34-36; See also T. Graham (1999), pp. 83-136.

⁴² Al-Sāmarrāʾī, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings*, 36-37.

⁴³ Qusyairi (1990), 36-37.

⁴⁴ See al-Sāmarrāʾī, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings*, 37.

⁴⁵ See T. Graham (1999), 110-11.

between the Shari'a and the ḥaqīqa, al-Qushayrī defined the Shari'a to be an ordinance to persevere worship (*amr biltizām al-'ubūdiyya*), whereas the ḥaqīqa was defined to be the vision of God (*mushāhadat al-rubūbiyya*), which was actually a sort of notification (*inbā'*) about the affairs of God, the Truth. The ordinances were designed as a solid fundament to achieve a vision of God. To sum up, al-Qushayrī noted that every canonical ordinance that was not endorsed by ḥaqīqa would not be accepted; similarly, every ḥaqīqa that is not bound by the canonical ordinance would not come to its ends. Al-Qushayrī reached the conclusion that the Shari'a had to be considered as ḥaqīqa as the commanded obligation, whereas ḥaqīqa was canonical as because knowing God was also obligatory.⁴⁶

Some Thematic Sufi Manuals

As the *Risāla* can be classified as a treatise that comprises theoretical underpinnings of Sufism arranged in a wealth of mystical expositions, al-Qushayrī also composed several treatises or chapters on complete books covering thematic issues like the *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj*, or specific manuals for the Sufi practices of *dhikr* represented by his other books, such as *Tartīb al-Sulūk* and the *Shikāya*. A blatant theological approach within those books remained dominant establishing al-Qushayrī's fame as the profoundly mystical theologian of his time. The *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* represented a separate chapter concerning the issue of prophetic ascension to heaven. The "scriptural" approach was applied to elaborate a collection of prophetic traditions explicating the prophet highest mystical experience from the beginning of the nocturnal journey, including its preparation, up to his extra-terrestrial journey to the utmost point (*sidrat al-muntahā*) and beyond to see God and receive the divine command of obligatory prayers. Some traditional accounts related to the ascension of prophets before Muhammad, derived from biblical sources, were also given as an outline the link between Muhammad's ascension and the ancient traditions of ascension among the Israelite prophets. These biblical sources linked Islam with the Jewish and Christian traditions. We may say that al-Qushayrī had composed his *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* as a proof of his theological approach in both a scriptural and an analytical exposition. This bifold approach was necessary to legitimate his mystical tradition. Here the Islamic theological system was integrated with other aspects of Islam, including Sufism. Hence, the knowledge about ḥaqīqa could be compatibly accorded within the boundaries of the Shari'a.

For a more practical suggestion of dynamic spiritual experiences of the performance of *dhikr*, we may look at his *Tartīb al-Sulūk*, as a representative of al-Qushayrī's writing using the approach of theology in Sufism. In this manual a delicate and complicated explanation about the possibility of man's encounter,

⁴⁶ Qusyairi (1990), 82-3.

or even his union with God is elaborated in a quite lucidly practical solutions that mainly relied on his Ash'ārite theological principles. This short treatise serves as a manual on how *dhikr* should be performed by a slave or servant ('*abd*) in a mystical exercise. According to al-Qushayrī, the basic requirements that should be fulfilled by one who wants to perform *dhikr* is that he must be away from worldly affairs, not attached to anything, possesses sufficient knowledge of his regular duties within Islamic theology and law.

In addition, al-Qushayrī's works written during the period of his being a master in Sufism was certainly influenced by the taste of his profound scholarly capabilities and by his connection as an adherent of the Ash'ārite theological school. The controversial instruction issued by the Ḥanafite vizier al-Kundurī made al-Qushayrī the target of religious persecution (*miḥna*) on the basis of his zealous defense to the Ash'ārite theological system, as appears clearly from autobiographic essay *Shikāya Ahl al-Sunna bi Ḥikāyati mā nālahum min al-Miḥna*.⁴⁷

From al-Qushayrī's consistent using of Ash'ārite approach a new trend towards the formation of mystical theology had begun to grow. If we compare al-Qushayrī's work with al-Sulamī's writings, it appears that the latter are merely full of traditional quotations without sufficient explanations from the author. Al-Qushayrī put the traditional accounts within a more sophisticated approach by inducing theology along with the need of a more rational elaboration of dogmatic notions. We may say that al-Qushayrī had reached a harmony between the Sharī'a and Sufism. The project of integrating the Sharī'a and Sufism had been the most crucial concern for mystics in the beginning of 5th/11th century. As a younger contemporary, al-Qushayrī inherited the spirit of unification between Sufism and other Islamic traditional sciences under the banner of the Shāfi'ite legal school and the Ash'ārite theological school representing the people of the prophetic traditions (*aṣḥāb al-sunna*). The scholarly milieu of Nishapur in particular, and Khurasan in general, suited the needs for the formation of such a Sunnite (lit. traditional) Sufism as this project was continued within the attempts of the new generation of Khurasani mystics like the mystical theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111).

Composing a Convalescing Mystical Commentary

The emerge of an early critique by al-Sulamī's contemporary Nishapuri as well as Shafiite colleague al-Wāḥidi to the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* may have instigated other Sufis to publish their mystical interpretations to the Qur'an in a more moderate approach. Al-Qusyairī composed his *Latā'if al-Isyarat* in a more carefully chosen title terms as well as substance of his symbolic interpretation in order not to instigate a much more confusing reception among people. Such was

⁴⁷ The full text of the writing is in al-Subkī (1964), vol. iii, 399-427.

important as considering the growing schism within the wider Islamic community. Fulfilling the need of his continuing project of the proliferation of mystical theology, al-Qushayrī composed his *Laṭā'if al-Isyārāt* with a much more moderate title than his senior contemporary Muḥammad b al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī. The role of Qushayrī was to lead the Sufis' literature out of previous failure as well as from accusation of conducting wrong hermeneutical procedures. It was quite clear that the title of the book shows a less controversial issuance as he did not use the term of *tafsīr*, as he established a more appropriate term *isyāra*, which was more familiar for the genre of esoteric interpretation. Such a new approach in naming the compilation of mystical interpretations of Qur'ānic verses gained a lot of success in introducing *isyāra* as an alternate exegetical term, which is excluded from the method of *tafsīr*. The *Laṭā'if al-Isyārāt* by al-Qushayrī represents a continuing attempt of inducing the Sharī'a into Sufism by choosing an appropriate exegetical method of the mystical interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Al-Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-Isyārāt* underlines varieties of much more specific exegetical ways subsumed within the methodological framework of *ta'wīl*. It was in the hands of al-Qushayrī that a valid exegetical method of *ta'wīl* could be achieved, not only as an addition to the extant use in theology, but also to gain the spiritual significances needed for the ethical dimension of faith. Al-Qushayrī was much less criticized than al-Sulamī, whose *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* triggered heated responses from many critiques. As a result of his moderate approach in his *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* Qushayrī was addressed with much more appraisal. Some considered him to be a perfect personality. Ibn Sam'ānī (d. 562/1166),⁴⁸ for instance, bore witness that there was no perfect and skillful person like Abū al-Qāsim [al-Qushayrī] in integrating Sharī'a and Sufism (*ḥaqīqa*).⁴⁹ On the basis of such an appraisal, we may conclude that Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* might have represented the most exemplary esoteric commentary on the Qur'ān, highly esteemed for tracing the spiritual significances of the Qur'ānic verses, and far removed from the accusation of having applied wrong hermeneutical procedures.

Giving a compliment to al-Qushayrī's Quranic commentary Rashid Ahmad underlined a bold spiritual aspect of the spiritual interpretation of Qur'ānic teaching conducted by Qushayrī, as he attacked the Ulamā' for being fanatic about their traditional knowledge. However, he did not repudiate the obvious meaning of the Qur'ān, and his mystical interpretation does not go against the philological rules. In fact, Ahmad emphasized that Qushayrī had successfully

⁴⁸ Abū Sa'd 'Abd al-Karīm b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. Abī al-Muẓaffar al-Manṣūr al-Tamīmī al-Marwazī al-Shāfi'ī was an important Arab biographer. Among his magnificent compilation are *al-Ansāb*, *al-Taḥbīr fī Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, *Muntakhab Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh*, and *Dhayl Tārīkh Baghdād*. See also R. Sellheim (1995), "al-Sam'ānī" in *EP*, viii, 1025a-b.

⁴⁹ Al-Suyūṭī (1977), vol. i, 74.

kept a balance between the obvious meaning of the Qur'ān and the spiritual aspect of its teaching. It was on the basis of this harmonious nature of interpretation that al-Qushayrī's mystical commentary was a happy fusion of both the *sharī'a* and the *ḥaqīqa*.⁵⁰ In a rather similar tone, al-Qushayrī's moderate interpretation was also praised by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd as he gave his credit to the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* that such an interpretative attempt was above the ordinary interpretation to the Qur'ān due to reasons: that it illuminated sensitivity and accentuated perception as a result of a struggle in attacking desire and passion, upon which divine blessing came forth to let the fountains of comprehension flow.⁵¹ Thus, instead of receiving negative responses, the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* by al-Qushayrī, in contrary to the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī, was highly appreciated as an exemplary mystical commentary on the Qur'ān, up till the present day.

His Principles of Interpretation to the Qur'an

A brief explanation of al-Qushayrī's introductory section of the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* may clarify his principles of interpretation. He said, "This book of ours mentions part of the symbolic expression of the Qur'ān on the basis of the language of the people of profound knowledge" (*ahl al-ma'rifa*) either by [conveying] the meanings of their sayings (*ma'ānī maqūlihīm*), or propositions of their principles (*qaḍāyā uṣūlihīm*)."⁵² With the "people of profound knowledge" al-Qushayrī certainly meant the group of the Sufis as is obvious in the preamble of his book,

"Praise be to Allāh who expanded the hearts of His beloved (*awliyā'*) with his profound discernment (*'irfān*)... descended the Qur'ān... consigned profound knowledge and its interpretation to the chests of the 'ulamā', upon which He honored them by the knowledge of its stories and revelation, He fed them with belief in its clear verses (*muḥkamihi*), obscure passages (*mutashābihī*), its abrogating passages (*nāsikhī*), as well as the promises and the threat contained therein (*wa'dīhi wa wa'īdīhi*); whereas He honored his pure servants with the understanding of the subtleties of secrets (*asrār*) and rays of light (*anwār*) [of the Qur'ān] he had stored [for them] in order to envision the subtle indications, and its hidden signs he had included into it, by making them understand their innermost secrets. Thus, by the privileges they had been given, there were able to reach the lights of concealed world (*anwār al-ghayb*) that were covered for others. Then they would speak, in accordance with their ranks. God the Truth honors them by His inspiration.

⁵⁰ Ahmad (1969), 58.

⁵¹ Mānī 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (1978). *Manāhij al-Mufasssīrīn*. Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 89.

⁵² Qusyairi (1971), i, 53.

Thereby they are speaking about it, they inform [us] about its subtleties and refer to it..."⁵³

By this preamble al-Qushayrī clearly expounds who the Sufis are supposed to be and how they can gain divine knowledge concerning the spiritual significances of the Qur'ānic verses. However, the introductory section of the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārat* is very brief and only comprises a general outline of Qushayrī's principles of interpretation. By looking into Ja'far's fourfold division of the Qur'ān as exposed by al-Sulamī in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*,⁵⁴ we may conclude that subtle indications and concealed signs were capable of being reached by the Sufis because of their chosen status. The "lights of the hidden world" were revealed to them, as a result of which they could speak about them. Such an attainment was a lofty degree of understanding, conceived as the degree of the gnostic state (*ma'rifa*) above the ordinary people's comprehension. In his *Risāla* al-Qushayrī elaborates this kind of mystical state further, along with all requirements to achieve its utmost spiritual condition:

"*Ma'rifa* is a quality of somebody who knows God with His names and attributes. Then God verifies him in his daily activities. Then he purifies his bad habits and his neglectful acts. Then he prolongs his standing by His gate, and within his heart he abides uninterruptedly near Him. He wins from God His good response, upon which God verifies his entire condition. The *hawājis*⁵⁵ of his self are cut off and his heart is no longer incline to anyone else than Him. He becomes a stranger for the people, cleansed from any evil affection (*āfa*) of his self, purified from living near and paying attention to [creatures], always being in secret conversation with God. He is certain at any moment that he will return to Him, and becomes a speaker before God by knowing His secrets, on the limits of what he is capable to discern. On this spiritual condition he will be called a gnostic (*'arif*), his spiritual state is called intuitive knowledge (*ma'rifa*), in short, the more he is a stranger from himself, the better his intuitive knowledge will reach his Lord."⁵⁶

Such was also al-Qushayrī's spiritual attainment of gnostic understanding in the name of *ma'rifa*, by which he as well was "opened" for the glimpses of divine secrets within the Qur'ānic verses. A Sufi was thus capable of telling concealed indications (*ishārat*) of a Qur'ānic verses through gnostic understanding gained in his spiritual state of *ma'rifa*. However, such a spiritual understanding was certainly based on a solid semantic discernment as well as on philological

⁵³ Qusyairi (1971), i, 53.

⁵⁴ Sulami (2001), i, 23.

⁵⁵ *Hawājis* is a plural from of *hājis* meaning a thing coming at random into the mind. It is synonymous with *khāṭir* (Lane 1877, 2882; cf. 705).

⁵⁶ Qusyairi (1990), 311-312.

analyses within the boundary of the traditional meanings. Hence, the concealed indications that the Sufi was able to expose within his mystical interpretation should not have been in opposition to what was clearly defined by literal meaning. Based on such a profoundly analytical interpretation, the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* was an exemplary piece of work, in which the author kept the harmony between the Sharī'a and Sufism.

It is an amazing project that Qushayrī attempted to keep in harmony with the method of semantic interpretation and its technical interpretation by way of analogy and association. Consequently, when interpreting the Qur'ān, he had to explain the literal understanding of the verse before bringing that meaning further into its hidden or *bāṭin* indication articulating spiritual and moral significances. Compared to al-Sulamī who interpreted the Qur'ānic verses while he was standing behind renowned Sufi sources, al-Qushayrī put his own analytical *ta'wīl* before presenting his own interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses. In some cases, like al-Sulamī, he was urged to mention other Sufis' opinions concerning an issue, but without any obvious references to sources as if he put such an anonymous opinion ---with terms *yuqālu*, *qīla*, or *'inda qaṭm*--- to be unquestionably correct because they were all the people of Gnosis who were capable of speaking from their spiritual experience. As a result, al-Qushayrī had moved from only providing esoteric traditions concerning the mystical interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses to a more analytical interpretation of his own. By way of associating the literal meaning of verses to its spiritual understanding, indications of the spiritual significances of the Qur'ān could be uncovered. The way leading from the basic philological comprehension to the spiritual significance was obvious as al-Qushayrī employed various sorts of proof from either traditional argumentations or semantic analyses using eloquent Arabic expressions.

Some detailed interpretations in the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* show how al-Qushayrī tried to carefully grasp anything coming out of the glimpses of hidden significations. In the case of the interpretation of the *muqatta'āt*, the loose letters at the beginning of certain chapters of the Qur'ān, al-Qushayrī remained slightly influenced by the traditions of *jafr*, in which the letters were interpreted as symbolizing God's most beautiful names derived from accounts originated among some of the Prophet's Companions. Such an interpretation will also be found in general works of *tafsīr*. Interesting in al-Qushayrī's approach was that he approached the letters to combine them with spiritual significances dealing with the secrets of divine discourse within the Qur'ān. There are at least three categories of symbolic meanings concerning the *muqatta'āt*: first, that these letters are initials of divine names and attributes (*asmā' Allāh wa ṣifātih*), like the letter *ṣād* in the beginning of the Qur'ānic chapter (*sūra*) 38 *Ṣād* was interpreted by al-Qushayrī as an initial of divine names *al-Ṣādiq* (the Sincere), *al-Ṣabūr* (The

Patience), *al-Ṣamad* (The Everlasting), and *al-Ṣāni'* (the Creator);⁵⁷ second, these letters indicate to certain sacred objects or moments, as for example the letter *nun* in the Qur'ānic chapter 68 *al-Qalam* (the Pen) is the ink, or the letter *qāf* is mount Muḥīt, *hā mīm* is the preserved tablet (*lawḥ mahfūz*);⁵⁸ and third, these letters are symbolic forms comprising deep spiritual significances by looking into their alphabetical structures.⁵⁹ The first two categories are commonly considered as an oath (*qasam*), by which God articulates the beginning of His decree, whereas the third category, according to a more analytical interpretation, expresses certain symbols. All of the categories are secret indications, which are derived by way of communication with God, either by the Sufi interpreter himself, or passed over the Muslim generations through authoritative sources.

In his mystical interpretation, al-Qushayrī used Qur'ānic stories and similes to convey the spiritual significances indicated behind the literal understanding of a verse. The same cases also happened with the interpretation of the acts of worship (*'ibādāt*), in which the interpretation is not stressed upon what the verse contains within its literal understanding, but a deeper spiritual dimension of the ritual is linked for the Sufis. Very different from any other mystical interpretations is that al-Qushayrī provided a unique interpretation to the Basmalah of every chapter of the Qur'ān. If there is any correlation between various interpretations of Basmalah, we may say that it might have come in the form of an extended interpretation. The deep significance of the Basmalah formula seems to have been as inexhaustible for Qushayrī, as mystical understanding itself.

The exclusion of mystical interpretation from the category of *tafsīr* was almost complete, as appears from the reaction against the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī. Those who defended the technical definition of the term *tafsīr*, rejecting the claims of symbolical interpretation, restricted the term *tafsīr* to its narrowest definition, valid only for the method of *'ibāra*, which locks the meaning derived from a Qur'ānic verse when it reaches full scope to be the desired meaning of a verse.

Any other meanings derived from a verse by way of other processes than *i'tibār* cannot, in their view, be classified under the framework of *tafsīr*, but might fall under the category of *ta'wīl* ("allegoric interpretation"). If *tafsīr*, according to the Sunnī view, refers to a general explanation, *ta'wīl* is something special.⁶⁰ *Tafsīr*

⁵⁷ See Qusyairi (1971), v, 245.

⁵⁸ See Tustari (1911) 83, 92, 106.

⁵⁹ See for example the symbolic interpretation of God's independence and His absolute power based on the alphabetical character of the letter *alif*, which is separated from any other letters when it was placed in the beginning of a word, but it connects all letters in other positions. See Sulami (2001), i, 30.

⁶⁰ See al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī's opinion in al-Suyūṭī (1967), vol. iv, 167.

refers to an interpretation of clear verses that produce only a single meaning of a Qur'ānic verse, while *ta'wīl* tends to be an understanding of the ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān that refers to its equivocal meanings, upon which an exegete is to choose which is the desired one among various possible senses.⁶¹ Accordingly, *ta'wīl* was considered reprehensible (*makrūh*) as compared to *tafsīr*, which was considered praiseworthy. Such an indictment leads into a dichotomic valuation, in which *tafsīr* was classified as a traditionally formal interpretation, but *ta'wīl* as "a new invention deviating from the line of the people of tradition (*ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*)?" The worst accusation, as noted by Abū Zayd, related to the use of *ta'wīl* might lead to the status of infidelity (*kufr*) in contrast to "veracity" (*sidq*) and "belief" (*īmān*), within the perspective of *ahl al-sunna*.⁶² However, such a heretical accusation has been mainly directed against two groups from among the Muslim intellectuals: first the Mu'tazilites, who were accused to have conducted erroneous hermeneutical procedures as well as mistaken meanings they could produce from their process of interpretation (*al-khaṭa' fi al-dalīl wa al-madlūl*); and second against the Sufis, in a lesser degree, as they were only accused of having conducted wrong hermeneutical procedures, whereas the meanings they could gain might be true, certainly in the eyes of the Sunnī.⁶³

Consequently, it was the Sufis' interpretation that became the target of the disapproved exegetical framework of *ta'wīl*, even though this view cannot be claimed to represent the unanimous opinion of all factions of the Sunnites. Along with the formation of orthodoxy within Sunnism, there remained an extant consideration that not all the Sufis had conducted wrong hermeneutical procedures. Such a view had previously been expressed by Ibn Taymiyya, saying that despite criticism addressed at the book, it still contained valid opinions quoted from high quality authoritative sources.⁶⁴ Besides, the reputation of mystical interpretation was also strengthened by certain appraisals of the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* by al-Qushayrī. All this formed part of attempts to legitimate the mystical interpretation into Sunnite compendia, just like a late medieval Malikite jurist, al-Shāṭibī, formulated the basic principles of the validity of symbolic interpretation in his *Muwāfaqāt*. Stressing the importance of the *ẓāhir* indication, al-Shāṭibī asserted that every meaning derived from the Qur'ān that was not in accordance with the Arabic language would not be categorized as Qur'ānic knowledge at all."⁶⁵ On the basis of QS 26:192-195, that the Qur'ān was revealed

⁶¹ Al-Suyūṭī (1967), vol. iv, 167.

⁶² Abū Zayd (1993b), 248.

⁶³ Abū Zayd (1993b), 248.

⁶⁴ Ibn Taymiyya (1995), vol. xiii, 243.

⁶⁵ Al-Shāṭibī (1990), vol. iii, 209.

in perspicuous Arabic,⁶⁶ al-Shāṭibī concluded that understanding by the Arabs (*mafhūm al-'arab*) was the *ẓāhir*. Hence, in case of deriving the esoteric or *bāṭin* indication, al-Shāṭibī said that bringing a Qur'ānic verse to this deeply spiritual understanding should follow two primary procedures: first, it should be in conformity with the *ẓāhir* as assigned in Arabic as well as in accordance with the "ultimate purposes" indulging the evident meaning in Arabic (*al-maqāṣid al-'arābiyya*); second, it should be based on an evidence either textually or another outward sense (*ẓāhir*) mentioned in other places serving the proof of its validity without any contradiction."⁶⁷ It was on the basis of such standard that al-Shāṭibī criticized mystical interpretation conducted by Sahl al-Tustarī in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm*.⁶⁸

Looking back to the development of mystical thought in its formative period, we observe the growing trend of the sober type of Sufism in the establishment of the Sufi circle of Baghdad that generated the Junaydian line of mysticism down to the era of al-Qushayrī in the mid 5th/11th century. It is obvious from what had been done by al-Qushayrī in his *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* that he was aware of the risk of attaching the mystical into the borderline concept of *tafsīr*, as had been previously by al-Sulamī and to some extent, previously also in the *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm* by Sahl al-Tustarī, most of whose mystical interpretations were inserted by al-Sulamī into his collection. Hence, al-Qushayrī gave the title of the book comprising a typically mystical interpretation introducing the genre of *ishāra*. This was a most important contribution to the rehabilitation of the mystical interpretation, which resulted in a well-reputed exegetical method. Accordingly, the exegetical framework of *ta'wīl* cannot be reduced to its pejorative image as a disrepute exegetical methodology, because there always good and bad sides within a single scientific methodology. It will also be quite inappropriate to exclude the method of *ishāra* from the framework of *ta'wīl* as suggested by Ibrāhīm Basyūnī merely due to the pejorative sense attached to *ta'wīl* that has been widely applied within the Muslim rationalizing scholasticism. Basyūnī asserts that the symbolic interpretation (*al-tafsīr al-ishārī*) is widely different from the framework of *ta'wīl* conducted by any other groups of Muslim intellectuals other than the Sufis. For the Sufis, their mystical understanding is closely related to spiritual rehearsals and any other spiritual efforts that lead to the purity of vision (*ṣafā'u al-baṣīra*). Spiritual knowledge attained by the Sufis is closely attached to their actions. Thus, according to Basyūnī, symbolic interpretation is

⁶⁶ QS 26:192-195, "Verily this is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds [192], comes down with the Truthful Spirit [193], to your heart in order that you become of the admonishers [194], in the perspicuous Arabic tongue [195]." Another expression, as referring to QS 16:103, is mentioned, "This is pure Arabic language".

⁶⁷ Al-Shāṭibī (1990), vol. iii, 211-212.

⁶⁸ See al-Shāṭibī (1990), vol. iii, 214-218.

not a kind of interpretation produced from any sorts of intellectual analysis, but from both spiritual experience and the bestowed divine knowledge.⁶⁹

However, in my opinion the pejorative sense of the term *ta'wīl* cannot be fully derived from Qur'ānic usage. A prevailing example of Qur'ānic usage of the term *ta'wīl* comprising the esoteric understanding of an action shows that the use of the term *ta'wīl* for something not necessarily reprehensible. On the contrary, it shows a good quality of understanding that might have come from another horizon beyond the normal comprehension of humanity. This can be clearly observed from the story of Moses as a temporary associate to a pious servant of God, whose name was supposed to be Khidr to whom God had bestowed His direct knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) mentioned in QS 18:60-82. In that story, Moses was granted permission to follow Khidr in his journey as long as he remained patience and would not pose any questions about the actions of the servant until he explained their "real intention" indicated by the term *ta'wīl*. Several incidents happened to them: Khidr damaged the boat that just had been used for traveling, killing a young boy, and repairing a wall without asking for payment in a town inhabited by rude people. All might have been unusual in the eyes of a legist like Moses, and after every incident Moses could not resist raising his objection to what Khidr had done, a farewell between the two could not be avoided after the third occasion. Khidr finally explained what lied behind his seemingly odd actions, if not the first two actions should be categorized right away as injustice and crimes. On the contrary, Khidr explained his reasons revealing his hidden purposes: securing fishermen from a tyrant, who used to seize their ships; saving a pious parent for having a son who would have become an ogre; and preserving the buried wealth of two orphans from being found by discourteous townspeople. Thus, such concealed understanding comprising Khidr's "real intention" is categorized under the term *ta'wīl*. This might be compared to the mystical understanding ---primarily concerning the spiritual significance--- of the Qur'ānic verses, where which the Sufis are granted "direct divine-knowledge" like what God has bestowed to Khidr among His pious servants.

The genre of mystical interpretation was attached primarily to spiritually bestowed divine knowledge, comes close to a *faydī* or gnostic process of exegesis. This is evident in some explanations of the method of mystical interpretation, as the question discussed in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's fatwā implied a compliment expressed by another Muftī saying that the Sufi interpretation to the Qur'ān contained only spiritual significances (*ma'ānī*) that the Sufis were able to gain during the act of recitation (*tilāwa*).⁷⁰ Such inspirational understanding was also conceived by Gerhard Böwering to have been the basis of Sahl al-Tustarī's method of

⁶⁹ Basyūnī (1972), 109-112.

⁷⁰ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (1929), 29.

interpretation. Böwering also mentioned the symbolic expression in the form of association made by the Sufis in relation to certain Qur'ānic keynotes, which was believed to have occurred to them through their recitals of the Qur'ānic verses. Thus, accordingly the mystical interpretation does not employ Qur'ānic verses as the justification of ideas, but the process of interpretation uses the recitals of the Qur'ānic verses as the impulse that generates the mystical inspiration.⁷¹ By looking at such an inspirational interpretation it is quite hard to find any analytical observations stating that mystical commentaries are an exegetical genre out of its gnostic methodology, far away from intellectual interpretations.

It was the diffusion of the *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* by al-Qushayrī that ameliorated the exegetical method employed within the genre of mystical interpretation to become more than a merely gnostic process. To this must be added that any kinds of spiritual significances derived from the Sufis' mystical experiences were apt to rationalized, as well. The genre of mystical interpretation comprised not only inspirational interpretation, to the inward understanding (*bāṭin*) that is everything but rational, it also involves some sorts of attempts of elaborating a basic comprehension based on the literal senses of the Qur'ān (*ẓāhir*). If we look at the mystical interpretation conducted by al-Qushayrī in his *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, we will find that he firstly employed an exoteric interpretation, which was put side by side with an esoteric understanding. This method is consistently performed by al-Qushayrī supported by his bold nature of keeping a balance between the Sharī'a and Sufism in a harmonious parallel. Al-Qushayrī's exegetical method is classified into the method of *ishāra*, in a sense that the verse is put out of the actual context of the Qur'ān for the purpose of gaining the spiritual significance of the Qur'ān based on its verbal meaning.

As early as the 7th/13th century, in his answer to the requested fatwā Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ significantly contributed to inserting the method of *ishāra* into the genre of mystical interpretation, even though he did not mentioned the exact term of *ishāra*. However, from the nature of mystical interpretation defined as "analogical understanding of the Qur'ānic verses". He argued that such an "interpretation" could not be classified as a *tafsīr*, but was "meditation" (*dhikr*) from the Sufis on a parable (*naẓīr*) found in the Qur'ān, for a parable is remembered only by the like of it.⁷² Thus, according to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, it was clear that the mystical interpretation aimed at gaining allegoric or symbolic meanings of a verse. This is what we may call spiritual significance considering the distinction between meaning and significance in current hermeneutical theory.⁷³

Observing more closely the context of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's fatwā, we may say that the concept of mystical remembrance evokes the Sufis' primary concern to

⁷¹ G. Böwering (1979), 137.

⁷² Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (1929), 29.

⁷³ See E.D. Hirsch (1967) pp. 8, 38, 57, 127, 141, 216, 255.

divulge the spiritual significance of the Qur'ān by way of making an association with certain key concepts derived from the Qur'ān with the purpose of finding analogies thereof in the form of the ethical prescriptions in Sufism. Hence, judging the nature of mystical interpretation described in his fatwā, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's answer was not an apology of the Sufis' inspirational expressions comprised in the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī. He rather reacted to the exegetical method of *ishāra* comprised in the well-reputed *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* by al-Qushayrī. Concerning the mystical interpretation of the Qur'ān, it was preferred to refer to the method of *ishāra* as promulgated by al-Qushayrī and to leave aside the contentious nature of the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī. The reason for such alternation was threefold: first, both mystical works were produced in a consecutive period of the shared scholarly milieu of Nishapur; second, the nature of analogical understanding conceived by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ as the "remembrance" or as meditation of the Sufis suits al-Qushayrī's method of *ishāra*, which is also in line with al-Jurjānī's (d. 816/1412) later definition on the concept of *ishāra* as "something existing within the text but out of the context of the speech";⁷⁴ third, among the later criticism Ibn Taymiyya was the first critic who included al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* into the method of *ishāra*,⁷⁵ even though there were only obscure references of what he meant with the term *ishāra*. In fact, there were great differences between the method of *ishāra* conducted by the Sufi contributors of the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* and that of al-Qushayrī in his *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*.

Conclusion

We classify the mystical interpretation generally conducted by the Sufis into a genre distinct from the central tradition of *tafsīr*. There has been a growing tendency to marginalize Sufis' position against the strictly traditionalist approach within the mainstream of Sunnism. However, we cannot judge the Sufi interpretation to have been solely conducted in a way like the inspirational process of *ḥaqīq*. There are other exegetical methods incorporated into the genre of mystical interpretation. Mystical interpretation, as well, can result from either literal or symbolic interpretation to Qur'ānic verses. We may also conclude that the main nature of mystical interpretation is to convey the spiritual significance of the Qur'ān in addition to its verbal meanings. The clearer the spiritual significances of the Qur'ānic verses attached to their literal interpretation, the

⁷⁴ 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Al-Ta'rīfāt* (Ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra), (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub (1987), 46.

⁷⁵ Accordingly, there are two kinds of *ishārāt* as indicated by Sufi masters: first, *ishāra ḥālīya*, that is their indication by heart (*qulūb*); second, *ishāra* that is connected with varieties of opinion (*aqwāl*), like what they derived from the Qur'ān. This last category called *al-ishārat al-i'tibārīyya*, which is accepted as long as derived from a valid analogy (*al-qiyās al-ṣaḥīḥ*) (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, vol. vi, p. 376-377).

lesser the need to articulate any allegoric or symbolic way of interpretation. On the contrary, the more obscure the spiritual significances to be disclosed from the formally interpreted literal senses, the more symbolic expressions will be attributed to the verses concerned.

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