

Ritual and Charisma in Naqshbandi Sufi Mysticism

by

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Over the past twenty-five years or so, the post-everything (post-modernism, structuralism, colonialism, positivism), the attempt to portray “how the natives think” (or thought), or even what they are doing when they do what they do, has come in for a good deal of moral, political, and philosophical attack. The mere claim “to know better,” which it would seem any anthropologist would have at least implicitly to make, seems at least faintly illegitimate. To say something about the forms of life of Hawaiians (or anybody else) that Hawaiians do not themselves say opens one to the charge that one is writing out other people’s consciousness for them, scripting their souls.

-Clifford Geertz

As in all intellectual debates, both sides tend to be correct in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny.

-John Stuart Mill

Abstract

*This article is an ethnographic study of an Islamic mystical (Sufi) order based in the tribal area of Pakistan. Fieldwork was conducted in 1996-1997 as a participant-observer of the order and at other sites in and around Pakistan. By using broader methods and theory more appropriate to the analysis of mysticism, the article aims to challenge previous ethnographic studies of the Sufi orders that attributed their existence largely to social, political, and economic factors. By more clearly defining both the nature of saintly charisma and the mystical ritual process, it argues that the *raison d'être* of the orders is the cultivation of deeper states of consciousness. It concludes by calling for a new theoretical framework, a “transcendental anthropology” more appropriate to elucidating mystical states and practices.*

In the Fall of 1991, while working in Pakistan, I met *Pir Saifur Rahman* and his disciples at their hospice in the woolly Khyber Tribal Agency of Pakistan.¹ Saifur Rahman is an Islamic mystic of the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandi order of Sufism. Although I had done academic work on Sufism, I had never actually met a Sufi or visited a Sufi hospice, but I thought I had a pretty good idea of what I would find. I was about to see most of my preconceptions dissolve before my eyes.

¹ The term *pir*, which literally means “old man” in Persian, is an honorific given to Sufi masters. Many other terms are employed to denote spiritual mastery, the most common being *shaikh* (chief) and *murshid* (master).

When I arrived that afternoon at the hospice, I was told that the Pir was resting and would not be out until sunset prayer. In the intervening time, I conversed with several of his disciples under a verandah used for receiving guests. Among the Pir's visitors that day were a businessman from Karachi, two local merchants, two Afghan *mujahiddin* fighters in the war against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul, and some college students. In short, my interlocutors were a cross section of modern Pakistani-Afghan society. In the course of an otherwise intelligent conversation about Sufism, a few would suddenly ejaculate, "Ya'llah!" (Oh, God!). Another's torso would suddenly jerk and twist as if a shiver had run up his spine. Another peculiar thing I noticed was a pronounced beating of their hearts beneath their shirts. Their pupils were dilated as if in trance, yet they were fully alert and articulate. Apart from these strange and bewildering phenomena, my interlocutors were, as far as I could discern, entirely normal, rational, and sane.

Around five o'clock, the Pir entered the courtyard clad in a shimmering turquoise cloak and an immaculate white turban. I expected the disciples to gather for prayer quietly and without fanfare, like monks. Instead, some of the men with whom I had conversed moments before suddenly began weeping, screaming, and shaking uncontrollably. One disciple shook the Pir's hand and recoiled screaming as if he had touched something hot. Another man fell to the ground at the sight of the shaikh, his body writhing violently in the dust. Unmoved by these histrionics, the Pir strolled imperiously about the courtyard, greeting everyone, including myself, warmly and with perfect equanimity.

I was instructed to sit under the verandah until the prayer session ended. When it was finished, I was taken into the hospice library where I was introduced to another Sufi, Pir Habibur Rahman. Habib's sobriquet was *pir-i piran*, signifying he was a master of other Sufi masters. He had flashing green eyes and a mischievous smile. I explained to him that I had a Master's degree in Sufism, considered myself something of an expert on the subject, and had always wanted to visit a Sufi hospice. He seemed genuinely impressed by my assertions. We then embarked on wide-ranging discussion of Sufi literature. At one point, I was quoting a verse from the Turkish mystic poet Jalaladin Rumi's (d.1273) *Divan-i Shams-i Tabriz* when one of the disciples, a university student, leaned over my shoulder to interject something. Habib looked over my right shoulder at him, and the young man was cut short in mid-sentence. He began to shake uncontrollably as if he were having a grand mal seizure. He fell backward on the floor where his paroxysms continued undiminished. Shocked, I turned around and looked askance at Habib. But his smiling countenance had turned sour. He scoffed in Persian, "Sufism! What do you know about Sufism? All you know are books!" Gesturing with his hand toward the disciple now lying in peaceful afterglow on the floor, he added triumphantly, "This is Sufism!"

I had to admit he was right. In terms of living Sufi practice, I had absolutely no knowledge or experience whatever. Habib's assertion carried all the more weight given his impressive knowledge

of the texts and his own Naqshbandi historical antecedents. While a (hermeneutic) reading of Sufi texts would suggest these Sufis were encountering the *mysterium tremendum* that marks the spiritual encounter, I was nonetheless shocked by their dramatic, violent physical reactions, especially in the presence of the pirs. What accounted for the violent nature of this form of Sufi mystical experience and for some of the bizarre somatic phenomena attendant to it such as the beating heart? And what role did the Pir play in precipitating these energetic phenomena, and by what means?

This article is an ethnographic investigation into a contemporary Naqshbandi Sufi *khanaqah* or Islamic mystical community.² Research was conducted under a Fulbright grant in 1996-1997. It is an emic account based on participation in the order as a disciple of Saifur Rahman at his *khanaqah* in the Khyber. Fieldwork was supplemented with archival research at the *khanaqah* and several public libraries, and interviews with local government officials, tribal elders, and religious figures.

As an ethnographic enterprise, this study was undertaken to correct a tendency among ethnographers to focus almost exclusively on the socio-political aspects of the Sufi orders while neglecting—even dismissing—that aspect of Sufism that is its *raison d'être*, the cultivation of spiritual life, a central aspect of which is achieving altered states of consciousness. As a corrective to this reductionism, this study uses broader theory and methods to investigate mystical experience. Methodologically, it combines the strengths of both ethnographic investigation and historical/textual analysis. Recent theories in transpersonal psychology more appropriate to elucidating altered or mystical states of consciousness are used to analyze some of the findings.

The argument set forth in this work is necessarily partial. The difficulty of gathering data, the elusive nature of states of consciousness, and the long-term nature of spiritual development preclude any sweeping conclusions. Rather, this study demonstrates how the use of broader methods and theory to investigate mystical experience can avert the usual ethnocentric biases without sacrificing a necessary critical component. Hopefully, it will provoke some disciplinary reflection in the anthropology of religion and give it the new theoretical direction it needs.

Representing Sufism

Early ethnographic studies of the Sufi order were guided by structuralist/functionalist theory, which explained the workings of the orders largely in social, political, or economic terms. Even native anthropological studies were informed by these theories probably because their authors

² Given the great varieties of religious experience, this study distinguishes “mystical” or “spiritual” religion from other types of religious engagement. As used in this study, the terms “mystical” and “spiritual” refer to those traditions that, by means of a regime of mental exercises and moral purification, seek to transcend normal egoic consciousness. According to practitioners, the process leads progressively through more advanced or deeper states of consciousness, culminating in a state of radical non-duality.

were themselves Western educated.³ Of course, methodological reasons also account for some of the shortcomings. The majority of ethnographic studies were conducted by Western (i.e., non-Muslim) anthropologists who would have been prohibited from attending Sufi ceremonies and other ritual activities. Thus, theories that emphasized ancillary and external aspects of the orders tended to be very much suited to the methods of investigation.

While anthropological hermeneutics attempted to correct the perceived limitations of structuralism/functionalism, it too suffered from an untested assumption: that mystical experience is socially constructed and therefore not “really real,” to quote anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1973: 78-125).⁴ Other ethnographies purporting to focus on Sufi spiritual life have paid too much attention to the role played by symbolic and linguistic structures in informing the Sufi worldview (Trix 1993).

In point of fact, there has been a patent unwillingness to fairly examine Sufi truth claims of spiritual transformation. This bias has engendered a misunderstanding of the nature and function of Sufi spiritual power (*baraka*) and its application in Sufi rituals. By extension, the somatic and psychological experiences of the disciples have been similarly misinterpreted, often viewed as “irrational” behavior of the poor and uneducated.⁵

Anthropologists who studied Sufi spiritual power (*baraka*) have generally followed Weber’s analysis of charisma. Weber defined charisma as the power of holy men over their followers. According to Weber it is,

[A] certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, super-human, or at least specifically exceptional power or qualities...regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual is treated as a leader (Weber 1968: 48-49).

Despite this empathetic definition, Weber was uninterested in the precise nature of the holy man’s exceptional power. A sociologist, he was more intrigued by the *social consequences* of the holy man-follower relationship that grew out of charisma. For this reason, Weber and a generation of anthro-

³ The various works of Akbar Ahmed, for example, employ structuralist/functionalist theory to explain the success of the order’s and their leaders. See the reference section for citations of his works.

⁴ Since the 1970s, the concept of the symbolic basis of experience has been further elaborated. Some anthropologists now go so far as to imply that, apart from the symbol itself, virtually nothing real exists. For an example of this kind of post-modernist argument, see Edward M. Bruner and Victor Turner (1986).

⁵ About Sufism in the tribal areas of Afghanistan, Richard Tapper said that it is the poor and ignorant who pursue ecstatic practices. For this reason, “men with secular power or social claims to religious piety and learning take an ambivalent attitude to Sufi activities.” To the contrary, many Sufis, including Saifur Rahman, are ‘ulama and widely recognized as such. Tapper’s argument fails to account for the fact that many Sufis pursuing “ecstatic practices” are among the educated elite, not to mention the intellectual sophistication of Sufi thought and practice. (Tapper 1984:244-265).

pologists who succeeded him tended to view religious charismatics, not as spiritual educators, but as social revolutionaries:

[C]harismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules...Within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force (Weber 1968: 52).

Subsequent anthropologists who studied Sufism, such as Gellner, Gilson, Cruise O'Brien, and Ahmed maintained the meaning of charisma was to be found in the structure of social relations. All products of the British school of structuralism/functionalist, they stressed the social context shaping belief in the shaikh's charismatic power. In discussing Sufi shaikhs of Pakistan's Swat valley, for example, Ahmed wrote:

Charisma remains largely a function of success; its qualities are both inherent in the person and in the social situation. The charismatic leader is convinced of his 'mission' or 'destiny' but he must convince those around him of his capacity for leadership (Ahmed 1976: 14).

Because Ahmed viewed the shaikh's charisma chiefly as a function of the social situation, when he attempted to explain the nature of the shaikh's "qualities," he runs into difficulty. "Charisma," he says, "creates following and following creates charisma." (Ahmed 1976: 115) At no point does he attempt to explain how one acquires charisma or a following in the first place. In discussing Sufi Miangul Abdul Khaliq's (d.1892) success in establishing Islamic rule in Swat, he wrote:

Funds and followers go hand in hand with a charismatic leader and are a vital index to his fortunes. There is a circular and cumulative causation between funds, followers, and charisma. The relationship with his followers was based on the same principles of redistributive economies that the Akhund [of Swat] had established (Ahmed 1976: 113).

To extricate himself from his predicament, he resorted to an economic interpretation: in the final analysis, it is really money that lies behind charisma. While continuing to circumvent the central question of charisma, Ahmed merely adds another link in the chain of circular logic, for it begs the question of how money starts flowing to the top of the redistributive system in the first place.

Donal Cruise O'Brien believed the source of charisma lay in a reputation (read: apocryphal) for miracle-working. In unequivocally Weberian terms, Cruise O'Brien believes followers are moved to recognize miraculous powers in a shaikh when in the throes of a social crisis (Cruise O'Brien 1988). In his view, miracles can be as trivial as literacy among an illiterate population. Such, we are to believe, is the ignorance and gullibility of desperate believers driven to desperate measures.

A similar symbolic/structuralist interpretation was advanced by Geertz (Geertz 1968) and Gil- senan (Gilsenan 1982). Sainly charisma, they believed, inheres in the complex of myths, legends, and anecdotes about the shaikh. Mythical tales invariably concern feats of extraordinary power that set the shaikh apart from mere mortals. In Geertz's words, they constitute a "discourse of legitimation" that follows an established processual narrative: 1) initiation through an ordeal; 2) achievement of and access to esoteric knowledge; and 3) triumph over temporal authority. In the same sort of circular logic employed by Ahmed, Geertz says stories become persuasive by virtue of the shaikh's socially powerful position. Geertz's symbolic approach to the analysis of Sufi authority extends to the nature of *baraka* itself. It is nothing more than a concept, a "cultural gloss" on life:

Literally, "baraka" means blessing, in the sense of divine favor. But spreading out from that nuclear meaning..., it encloses a whole range of linked ideas, material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude, and, the aspect most stressed by western writers anxious to force it into a pigeonhole with mana, magical power. In broadest terms, "baraka" is not... a parapsychical force, a kind of spiritual electricity...it too is a "doctrine" (Geertz 1968: 44).

Geertz seems guilty here of 'scripting Sufi souls.' Indeed, as the foregoing indicates, anthropological analysis of Sufi charisma was based on an *a priori* rejection that *baraka* had any reality outside social power relations. There was thus no consideration of the central importance of the shaikh's charisma to the process of spiritual transformation, or of the disciples' profound somatic reactions to it, and an adequate theory of this process is still lacking in the social sciences.⁶ On the whole, there has been a tendency to use theoretical frameworks in ways that confirm—not challenge—epistemological assumptions. Reality so defined becomes, ethnocentrically, our own Western version of it. The competing claims of Sufi mystics, many of whom produced some of the world's most profound philosophical and literary works, are pushed aside by anthropologists as irrelevant or delusional.⁷ The anthropology of Sufism summarily dismisses the very thing it is asked to explain.

This study of the Naqshbandi/Mujaddi order corrects some of the distortions of previous anthropological studies of Sufism occasioned by inadequate theory, ethnocentric biases, or insufficient data. It shows the *raison d'être* of the orders to be fundamentally transcendental in nature and only secondarily and by extension social, economic, and political. Key components of Sufi spirituality are the mysterious nature of the shaikh's charisma, and a ritual process that is dynamic and open-ended. The paper contends that neither of these can be fully explained by

⁶ Michael Washburn has undertaken the first attempt at a psychoanalytic explanation in *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground: A Transpersonal Theory of Human Development* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988).

⁷ See for example the discussion of Emerson's theory of the oversoul in James W. Fernandez (1986).

reference to known or mundane processes, but can only be understood within the context of an expanded view of human nature and human development that Sufism offers.

The Naqshbandi *Tariqa*⁸

The Naqshbandi is one of the largest and most widespread Sufi orders in the Islamic world. Like other Sufis, they trace their origin to the Prophet Muhammad, the mystic exemplar *par excellence*. He is at once the messenger of God who conveyed both exoteric (normative) and esoteric (mystical) practices, the archetype of the ideal man (*insan al-kamal*) whom Sufis seek to imitate in all respects, and the channel for divine grace (*baraka*).⁹ Sufis maintain that this grace is passed down through the Prophet to various generations of spiritual preceptors in an unbroken chain or *silsila*. This grace, first transferred from shaikh to disciple during the ritual of spiritual initiation (*bay'a*), is said to give the disciple access to a transcendent sphere. Sufis maintain detailed biographies of the teachers in their *silsila* who exemplified the Prophetic ideal and serve as repositories, living and deceased, of *baraka*. The accounts of their lives also contain didactic tales and instructive sayings to be applied in everyday life. In these ways, Naqshbandi Sufism constitutes a cumulative tradition, orally, literally, and experientially.

The founder of the Mujaddidi branch of Naqshbandis is Sayyid Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1642). A scholar and mystic, Sirhindi is famous for having rescued Indian Islam from absorption into Hinduism by undertaking a far-reaching intellectual and spiritual revival movement.¹⁰ For his achievement, Sirhindi earned the title of “*Mujaddid 'Alf al-Thani*” or “Renewer of the Second Millennium.” The concept of the “renewer” comes from a saying of the Prophet that Islam would periodically be revitalized by an outstanding religious leader. Appearing at the end of a cycle of spiritual decline that lasted nearly a thousand years, Sirhindi was a renewer not merely of the century but of the millennium. For this reason, even though Muhammad was the last Prophet in Islam, in the eyes of the Mujaddidis at least, Sirhindi assumes near prophetic stature.¹¹

Sirhindi's practice of dispatching khalifas back to their native regions to carry on his missionary work led to the implantation of the Naqshbandi/Mujaddidi teaching in Afghanistan. Fourteen of

⁸ For a brief history of the Naqshbandi order, see Hamid Algar (1976). See also Hamid Algar (1975).

⁹ Naqshbandis have two chains of transmission. A minor one goes back through the Prophet's grandson 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), and is the one used by most Sufi orders. The major line runs through Abu Bakr (d. 634), the first khalifa in Islam. The two chains are said to reflect the twin aspects of Naqshbandi practice: the 'Alid chain represents the esoteric spiritual practices, while the Bakri link signifies strict adherence to the shari'a and the exemplary behavior of the Prophet. The Bakri chain thus marks one of the features that distinguish Naqshbandis from the other orders: a thoroughgoing adherence to Islamic law.

¹⁰ The single best study of Sirhindi's life and work is by Yohanan Friedmann (1971).

¹¹ Friedmann observes that with the advent of Sirhindi, “the perfections regained their splendor to such an extent that the millennial period is barely distinguishable from the prophetic one. The religious situation has been changed for the better, and the Day of Judgment has been postponed again.” Friedmann (1989).

the twenty khalifas he designated were from Afghanistan and Central Asia.¹² Sirhindi's third son and successor, Ghulam Muhammad Ma'sum (d.1668), greatly accelerated its diffusion by designating over seven thousand khalifas. Many of these khalifas were from Afghanistan and, after receiving the khalifate (permission to teach), they returned home to conduct missionary work.¹³ Once implanted in Kabul, the Mujaddidi branch allied itself with the monarchy. In time it supplanted rival Naqshbandi orders, becoming the most influential order in Afghanistan.

Spiritual Theosophy of the Naqshbandi/Mujaddidis

Sirhindi had refined Naqshbandi teachings by elaborating a more precise conceptual road map of mystical states as well as more precise methods for attaining them. According to his cosmology (Fig. 1), the world is created by God's eternal and uncreated formless essence (*'ayn al-dhat*).¹⁴ Sirhindi maintained that although God created the world, there is no relationship between creation and His formless essence. Formless essence gives rise to four levels of manifestation via a transitional realm called the "quality of wholeness" (*sha'n al-jami*). It acts as a bridge between the uncreated and created realms, thereby protecting God's unique nature. The created realms comprise a hierarchy of levels descending from subtle qualities (*latifa*) toward gross material existence (*kathif*). The first level of manifestation is Oneness (*ahadiyya*) or Essence (*dhat*). The second level, Unity (*wahdat*), contains two stages: the "unity of essence" represents the oneness of the divine self because its attributes are still undifferentiated at this stage of unfolding. It is here, according to Sirhindi, where the mystic realizes stable, unitive consciousness (*baqa'*). At the lower level of *wahdat* is the "unity of being," which contains the principles or seeds (*usul*) of the divine attributes (*sifat*). In the third level of manifestation, Uniqueness (*wahidiyya*), the attributes are articulated; eight divine attributes (*sifat-i dhat-i haqiqi*) qualify transcendent being through affirmation, (i.e., life, power, and knowledge). Eight attributes of negation (*sifat-i salbi*) deny imperfection in God while at the same time affirming His unique nature (e.g., He has no equal, no beginning or end); the positive attributes (*sifat-i fi'liyya*) describe Him in terms similar to the eight attributes: merciful, lifegiver, creator, and so forth.

The fourth level of manifestation represents man and the rest of the created world together called the Circle of Contingent Existence" (*da'ira-i imkan*). On the upper level of the circle lies the

¹² Three of his leading Afghan shaikhs were Maulana Ahmad (d.1617), Shaikh Yusuf (d.1624-25), and Shaikh Hassan, all of whom had originally come from Bark south of Kabul, returning there as Sirhindi's khalifas in the early seventeenth century. Shaikh Hassan was particularly active in eradicating religious innovation in the Kabul-Qandahar region. Other khalifas went to Balkh, Kabul, Badakhshan, Kohistan, Laghman, Ghorband, and Logar. Olesen (1995: 48)

¹³ For a detailed discussion of Sirhindi's khalifas, see Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi (1978)

¹⁴ For the elaboration of Naqshbandi/Mujaddidi cosmology, I am indebted to Ahmad Javaid, researcher at the Iqbal Academy in Lahore.

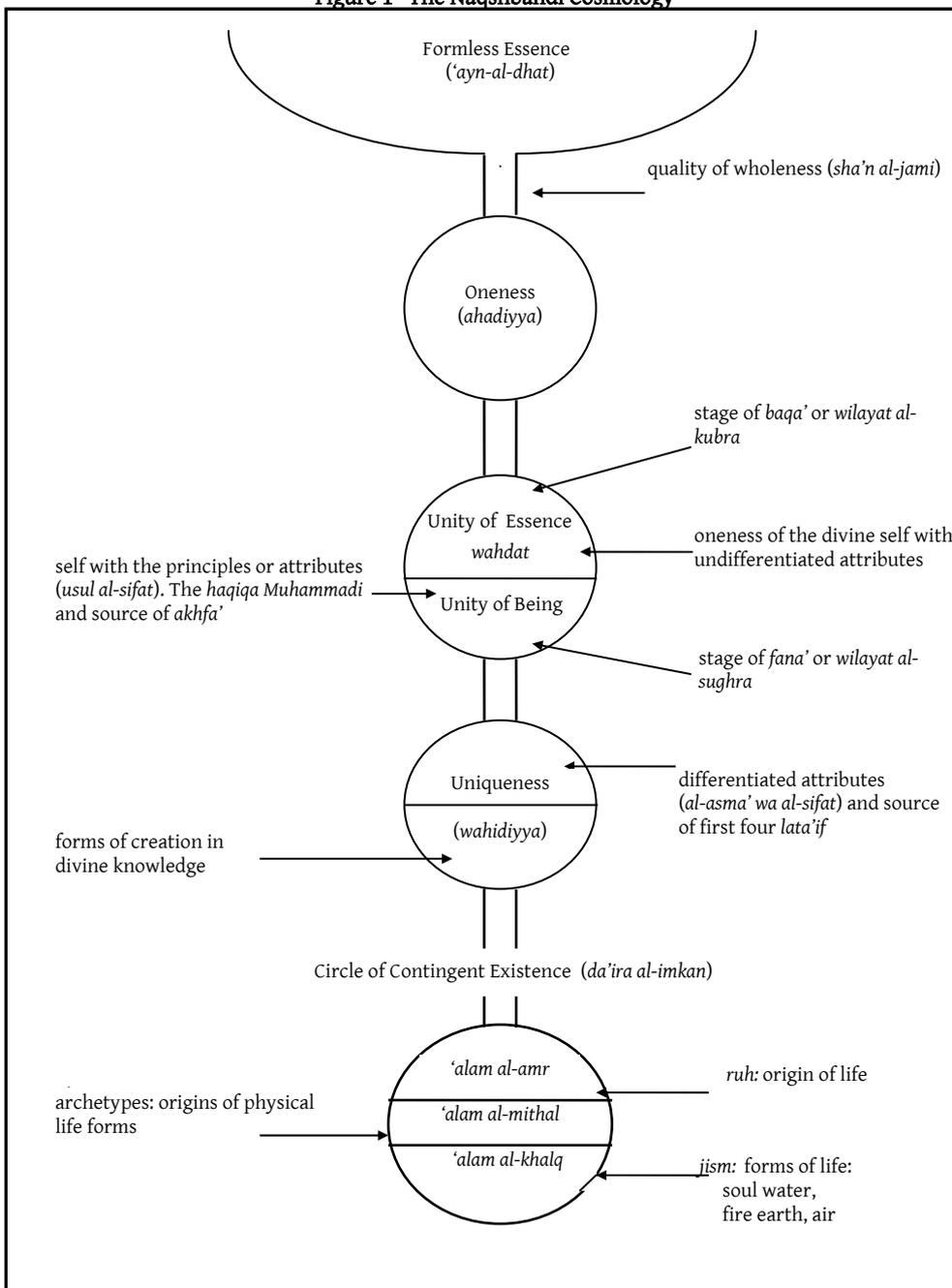
“world of divine command” (*‘alam al-amr*).¹⁵ Insofar as the *‘alam al-amr* is linked to the higher levels of manifestation, it represents the macrocosm. Its direction is one of ascent and God’s unity of essence is the goal or end of the journey. On the lower level of the circle is the “world of creation” (*‘alam al-khalq*), the gross physical world comprising the four elements and man’s *nafs* or lower nature. The *‘alam al-khalq* represents the microcosm, and its movement is one of descent. The world of divine command represents the spiritual domain; the world of creation represents material existence, including mental life.

These two worlds are joined by a transitional realm called “the world of ideas” (*‘alam al-mithal*). Here abstract forms precede their manifestation in the gross material world. These abstract ideas are identical to the Platonic archetypes. They represent a creative, imaginal—not imaginary—realm that gives form to the material world. As a deeper realm of consciousness, *‘alam al-mithal* is also the realm of Sufi visions, dreams, and spiritual contact with teachers, which play such important functions in spiritual life, providing guidance, spiritual commissions and initiations, and directing disciples to their chosen shaikh. In his description of the nature of visions Ibn al-‘Arabi points to the clear difference between the simply imaginary and the imaginal:

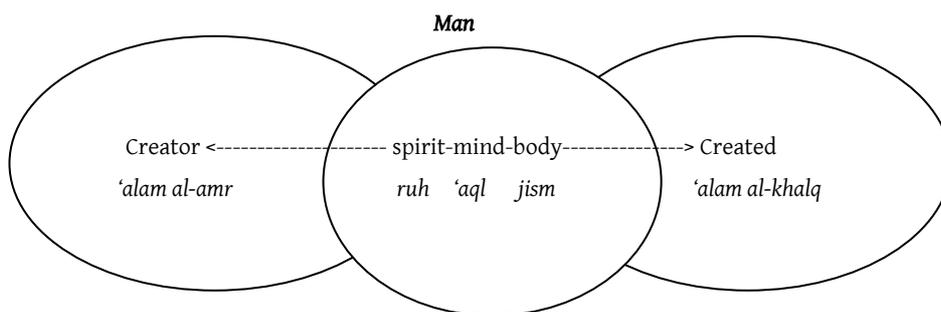
They [dream-visions] are a truth and a revelation. A person does not have to be asleep to see them; they may occur during sleep or they may occur at other times. In whichever state they occur, they are a dream-vision in imagination through sense perception, but not in the sensory realm. That which is seen imaginally may lie on the inside, within the faculty, or it may come from the outside through the imaginalization of a spiritual being or through the self-disclosure well-known to the Tribe [Sufis]—but it is a true imagination (*khayal haqiqi*). (Chittick 1989: 262).

¹⁵ The worlds of creation and command are based on Qur’anic phraseology such as, “The spirit is of the command of my Lord” [17:85].

Figure 1 The Naqshbandi Cosmology



The *'alam al-mithal* is an intermediate world where the two worlds of divine command and divine creation, of ascent and descent, macrocosm and microcosm, coincide. Humankind is poised at the juncture of these two worlds because it comprises all three dimensions of existence: body, mind and spirit. The relationship may be depicted as such:



Each ontological domain has its own modes of perception and interaction between the two worlds. The body, rooted in time and subject to processes of growth and decay, employs the five senses to mediate the material world. Because the mind functions to interpret or attach meaning to what the bodily senses convey, it too lies in the temporal domain. The mind has its own five “senses” analogous to the body: memory, imagination, thinking, hallucination, and desire. Insofar as body and mind are subject to temporality, alone they cannot perceive the transcendental domains. However, they do employ symbols to represent the transcendent.

Like the body and mind, the soul has its own inner senses (*hawas batini*). Najm al-Din Razi (d.1256) warned not to conflate the functioning of these inner senses with their bodily analogues:

In the same way that none of the five outer senses can interfere with the functioning of another, hearing being unable to perceive the visible...so too none of the five inner senses can interfere with the functioning of another. The intelligence cannot perceive that which is visible to the heart.... Thus when those who survey the rationally comprehensible with the gaze of the intelligence (*'aql*) wished to survey the world of the heart, the mystery, the spirit, and the arcane, again using their fettered intelligence in ignorance of that which the heart beholds and the other degrees of perception, inevitably their intelligence fell into the trap of philosophy and heresy (Razi 1982: 138-139).¹⁶

¹⁶ Najm al-Din Razi was an Iranian disciple of the Kubrawi order. He fled Iran on the eve of the Mongol invasion and settled in Anatolia where he wrote his masterpiece on the philosophy and spiritual morphology of Sufism.

Naqshbandis say that the individual who remains in the visible senses and does not partake of the invisible ones is “one of the Mu’tazila,” that is, an arch-rationalist.¹⁷

These inner senses have a somatic analogue in a network of subtle centers in the human torso called *lata’if* (sing. *latifa*), which collectively form the morphological basis for Naqshbandi spiritual transformation.¹⁸

The *lata’if* have been described as subtle centers, sheaths, fields, or bodies. To describe them as subtle centers is misleading, however, for the *lata’if* have no fixed location and could be anywhere in the body. Logically, if they were fixed, say Naqshbandis, they would be bound by the temporal world. The one exception to this may be the heart, which is the one *lata’if* linked to a particular organ of the body. Henri Corbin notes that there is a vital connection between the spiritual heart and the physical one, though the modality is essentially unknown (Corbin 1969: 221). The heart is also unique in being the only *lata’if* not associated with an element.

While dense matter is subject to the laws of time and space, the *lata’if* are subject only to laws of space. The *lata’if* are thus trans-temporal. As Warren Fusfeld observes, the *lata’if* are “local manifestations of identically named parts of a higher realm of the cosmological structure, which is above the realm of created things” (Fusfeld 1981: 91). In their local or bodily manifestation, the *lata’if* facilitate the disciple’s reception of grace by providing, as Arthur Buehler notes, a morphology for the spirit’s descent and attachment to the human frame.¹⁹ Naqshbandis maintain that the *lata’if* constitute the morphological basis for Sufism found in some form in all Sufi orders and without which cannot be Sufism.

The first five *lata’if* (see Figure 2) are located within the world of divine command, the last two are in the world of creation, signifying spirit’s complete descent into the manifest world. The first *latifa* is the heart (*qalb*) located two inches below the left nipple; its color is yellow, and its prophet is Adam, the first man. The second, spirit (*ruh*), is located two fingers below the right breast opposite the heart; its color is red, and its prophets are Abraham and Noah. On the left side of the breast above the heart lies the mystery (*sirr*); its color is white, and its prophet is Moses. On the right side opposite the *sirr* is the arcane (*khafi*); its color is white, and its prophet is Jesus. The vertical passage

¹⁷ The Mu’tazila was a school of Islamic theology that flourished in Iraq during the ninth century. The Mu’tazila stressed the use of human free will, arguing that justice is a necessary feature of any definition of God and that, since God must be just, human beings must be free to choose between good and evil. The principle of God’s justice led them to reject the doctrine of predestination and affirm human free will and an individual’s power and reason over one’s actions.

¹⁸ The term *latifa* derives from the Arabic word *latif*, meaning “sensitive or subtle.” First mentioned by contemporaries of the Iraqi mystic, Ahmad ibn al-Junaid (d. 910), they were more systematically developed by the Central Asian Kubrawi Sufis, especially, Razi, who formulated the first five. Another Naqshbandi, ‘Ala Uddawla Simnani (d.1336) added the last two. Sirhindi articulated this model in greater detail and linked it more closely to practice. For a discussion of the historical development of the *lata’if*, see (Buehler 1998)

¹⁹ Compare the similarity of Sufi morphology with the subtle centers found in the Hindu *chakra* system. There are seven *chakras* arranged along the spinal line. The last *chakra*, the *sahasrara* also occurs at the crown of the head. Naqshbandis believe the *lata’if* are directly analogous to these Hindu *chakras*.

between the four *lata'if* corresponds physically to the sternum and is called the higher arcane (*akhfa'*); its color is green, and its Prophet is Muhammad. Muhammad thus represents the apex of the World of Divine Command, the supreme center. The first four *lata'if* are linked to God's differentiated attributes in *wahidiyya* from which they receive their *baraka*. The fifth, *akhfa'*, originates in *wahdat* (unity). The next *latifa* is the soul (*nafs*) located in the middle of the forehead between the eyes. The origin of the *nafs* is in the last *latifa*, *qalab*. The *qalab* corresponds to the physical body and is composed of the four basic elements: water, air, earth and fire.

Within *qalab* are four additional *lata'if*, which have their origin in the four major *lata'if*. Water derives from *ruh*, fire from *sirr*, air from *khafi* and earth from *akhfa'*. Each successive *lata'if* both incorporates and transcends the previous one. Thus, the first four centers are enfolded and completed in the fifth or *akhfa'*. Each *latifa* is associated with a particular color and prophet who is said to have specialized in that particular *latifa*.²⁰ The dominant color of each can be perceived when the eyes are closed. When two centers are activated at the same time, a mixture of their respective colors is perceived. Not all disciples experience these colors, and it is thought to be an experience in a realm inferior to the spiritual called the "psychic." Each *latifa* has a particular set of moral injunctions and contemplative practices required for its mastery, to "brighten" it. *Qalb* requires the disciple to cultivate humility, perform long prayers, and prayers of repentance (*istighfar*). The stage of *ruh* enjoins the disciple not to be distracted or enticed by the manifest world (*tashbih*) and to fast. At this stage, the disciple may experience visions (*mushahadat*). In the domain of *sirr*, the disciple follows the law (*shari'a*) and is morally steadfast (*mustaqmi'*) within. In *khafi* one must be God-fearing and avoid things which are permissible for other Muslims. The disciple should also recite the divine negation and reject all doubts (*mushtabahat*). One feels the love of God at this stage. In *akhfa'* one follows not merely the outward sunna but an inner sunna as well and regularly recites personal prayers (*du'a*).²¹ At this stage, the disciple gains *ma'rifa* or gnostic wisdom. The *akhfa'* stage in *wahdat* marks the stage of a *wali* or *pir*, signifying the mastery of the transcendent domains. In *nafs* the individual's base instincts are completely cleansed. This stage is the highest level of sainthood for it signifies the moral and spiritual purification of the saint in both thought and action. Beyond these dimensions, lies God's Essence, which is ontologically unattainable but conceivable. Formless Essence, on the other hand, is even beyond man's ability to conceive of. Humans can come

²⁰ Compare the similarity of the Naqshbandi color scheme to that of the Moroccan Gnawa order. During their all-night ritual, the adepts are possessed by seven genies or colors, signifying their spiritual transport through the various realms. The process culminates in the mystic union with God depicted as white (Paaques 1991).

²¹ The term "sunna" refers to the sayings and behavior of the Prophet recorded in the *hadith*. The "inner sunna" aims to go beyond mere outward actions by interiorizing the deeper intention or disposition behind them.

to know only the divine self but never God's Formless Essence.²² While Naqshbandi theorists distinguish many more subtle stages between these, this is the basic map of spiritual ascent.²³

Figure 2: Spiritual Morphology of the Naqshbandi/Mujaddidi

World of Divine Command ('alam al-amr)				
latifa :	Location	Domain	Prophet	Color
<i>qalb</i> (heart)	left breast	Divine actions, Divine attributes	Adam	Yellow
<i>ruh</i> (spirit)	right breast	Affirmative attributes	Abraham Noah	Red
<i>sirr</i> (mystery)	left breast	Essential attributes	Moses	White
<i>khafi</i> (arcanum)	rightbreast	Negative attributes	Jesus	Black
<i>akhfa'</i> (higher arcanum)	sternum	Divine self	Muhammad	Green
World of Creation ('alam al-khalq)				
<i>nafs</i> (soul)	center of forehead	egoic self, passions or soul		
<i>qalab</i> (physical body)	crown of head	the four elements: air, fire, water, earth		

²² Once again, this issue is one that has been debated for centuries in Sufism and may owe more to theological than mystical differences (i.e, the concern of Sufis such as Sirhindi and al-Junaid to ward against antinomian tendencies engendered by the public admission that they are not merely communing with the divine but are united with it).

²³ For a more detailed elaboration of these, see (Fusfeld 1981: 94-103).

Naqshbandis believe that each *tariqa* or spiritual path has its own unique principle or method for ascent to the transcendent via the *lata'if*. The Chishti method, for example, is based on the principle of going beyond “I am-ness,” or the sense of a separate self. Accordingly, it emphasizes activities that provoke ecstasy (literally: “out of body”) such as the all-night spiritual concert (*sama'*) and dancing. The Qadiri technique, on the other hand, seeks to undermine self-structures with rigorous ascetic practices such as fasting and long prayer vigils.

Despite the grace inherent in these orders, Naqshbandis believe that such methods are less effective for they entail a struggle with one's *nafs* or lower nature, an activity that takes place in the World of Creation. While Sirhindi believed that self-mortification could cleanse the *nafs*, alone the practice cannot lead the disciple to the World of Divine Command. Naqshbandis eschew such practices, believing theirs is the best and fastest method for self-transcendence. Whereas mystical experience is the end-point of the other orders, the Naqshbandi disciple receives a taste (*dhawq*) of mystical experience at the outset of apprenticeship. Sirhindi called this *indiraj-i nihaya dar bidaya* (“inclusion of the end in the beginning”). It is one of the hallmarks of Naqshbandi mysticism. This “taste of the transcendent” occurs through the conjunction of two elements that form the cornerstones of Naqshbandi mystical practice: the shaikh's projection of divine grace (*baraka*) and the disciple's effort to attract it called, “the permanent remembrance of God” or *dhikr*. It is through the synergy of these two practices that the *lata'if* are activated.

In the Naqshbandi order typically the shaikh first bestows *baraka* at the time of initiation (*bay'a*) by placing his four fingers on the heart and pronouncing the name “Allah” three times. Sirhindi claimed that the significance of the heart in spiritual discipline was affirmed by Baha' al-din Naqshband (Sirhindi 1984: 104-137). The term “Naqshband” itself signifies the shaikh's imprinting or fixing (*band*) the sign (*naqsh*) “Allah” in Arabic in the disciple's heart. Symbolically, the heart signifies intentionality, something that is ardently desired or sought after. At the time of initiation the disciple learns to perform *dhikr* in order to attract and become more sensitive to the shaikh's *baraka*. Later, the initiate receives guidance in observance of the Prophetic behavioral norms (*sunna*) with the aim of subduing or controlling the *nafs*). Subsequently, the disciple performs progressively more advanced contemplative exercises in order to open each *latifa* and to strengthen those opened already. The shaikh always begins his work with the heart *latifa*, and one cannot advance on the spiritual path until it is first opened. As the locus of intentionality and sincerity (*ikhlas*) on the part of the disciple, the *qalb* is the first and most important *latifa*. (For this reason, many Sufis consider sincerity the first step in Sufism.) Thereafter, the shaikh initiates each *latifa* when he deems the disciple is prepared to undertake the next step. Not all such initiations are in the teacher's physical presence, however. One Pakistani received *akhfa'* initiation after his first initiation. Surprised his teacher had forgotten the first three *lata'if*, he pointed this out to the Pir. The Pir replied, “Don't you remember I gave them to you in a dream.” Upon hearing this, the Paki-

stani recalled the dream and was launched into a state of ecstasy (*wajd*). Such initiations occur in the aforementioned imaginal realm, the *'alam al-mithal*.

While many Sufi manuals adduce the specific qualifications of a true shaikh, none is more important than the possession of *baraka*, for it provides the catalyst for the disciple's spiritual transformation. Originally the term *baraka* appeared in the Qur'an but only in the plural signifying "blessings." Other terms Sufis use to describe this blessing power are *faiz* (divine effulgence), and *tawajjuh* (facing). Although these terms have slightly different meanings, they refer essentially to the spiritual power of shaikhs, as well as khalifas, and their ability to project that power. In addition to its presence in the body, *baraka* is also found in varying degrees in the tomb sites of saints and holy men.²⁴

Without the shaikh's *baraka* the aspirant progresses slowly through self-effort, for such action lies within the created world. For this reason, the dominant value in the Naqshbandi order is *tawajjuh*, the ability to project *baraka*. Obtaining *baraka* is the reason for visiting and residing at the hospice and in other hospices or with khalifas. It accounts largely for the authority and reverence the shaikh commands among his disciples. As important as *baraka* is to the mystical process, no one, not even the shaikh, lays claim to actually possessing *baraka*. Rather, *baraka* emanates from its transcendent source; khalifas and shaikhs merely serve as conduits for its transmission to others.

Not all *baraka* experiences are confined to Muslims (viz., believers) as evidenced by an extraordinary case of *baraka*-induced awakening in a German male. While in Germany, he chanced to hear a cassette tape of Saifur Rahman reciting poetry. Upon hearing his voice, he fell into a state of ecstasy (*jadhba*). Determined to meet the divine who had such a profound effect on him, he traveled to the shaikh's hospice in Pakistan. When the shaikh walked into the mosque and came into the German's physical presence, the latter again went into ecstasy, tearing so violently at his clothing that he ripped his flesh in the process. He stayed at the hospice for several weeks during which time all the *lata'if* were opened. Within two weeks, he was invested with the khalifate in the Naqshbandi order and initiated in the other three orders of South Asia: the Suhrawardi, Qadiri and Chisti.

The act of forcefully projecting *baraka* is called *tawajjuh*. The term *tawajjuh* comes from *wajh* or face in Arabic and means "facing" or "confronting." It was originally used to denote the act of facing the qibla during prayer (Trimingham 1973: 213). The Qur'anic basis of the term is the statement by Abraham, "I have turned my face towards Him who created the heavens and the earth" [6:79]. In the Naqshbandi system, *tawajjuh* signifies the khalifa's projection of *baraka* in order to awaken the

²⁴ In Hinduism the term used to describe this power is *shakti*. Note here anthropologists' faulty assumption that only shaikhs project *baraka* as an affirmation of their authority. Khalifas are also able to project it; indeed, anyone in whom the transformational process has begun can do so.

disciple's *lata'if*. *Tawajjuh* is the principal exercise for awaking *dhikr* in the disciple's heart. Not only do Sufi shaikhs perform *tawajjuh*, but also khalifas and even advanced disciples do. As an aid to *tawajjuh*, the khalifa may envision his own heart filled with the Muhammadan light via the *silsila* of Naqshbandi saints, which in turn is directed outward toward the disciple. Others simply focus intensively on the disciple's heart *latifa* or whatever *latifa* the latter is working on.

Tawajjuh can take place at any time or place and there is nothing intrinsically formal about the process. Typically, khalifas perform *tawajjuh* with disciples during all sorts of mundane activities from work to casual conversation, in places public and private. The khalifa may alternate his concentration from one *latifa* to another in an effort to stimulate them. Usually, the practice occurs without either the khalifa or disciple making reference to what is occurring. Whenever possible, the disciple should focus his gaze on the khalifa's eyes or face, relax, and eliminate (distracting) thoughts.²⁵

An integral part of activating the *lata'if*, *tawajjuh* also cleanses the disciple of impurities in the form of destructive habits or undesirable behavior, that is, actions not in conformity with the shari'a. The khalifa cannot absorb the disciple's destructive habits during *tawajjuh*. However, insofar as *baraka* is projected outward from khalifa to disciple, it is possible for the disciple to absorb lingering impurities in the khalifa. Notwithstanding the one-way nature of the transference, khalifas sometimes experience symptoms of nausea, intense headaches, or fatigue after *tawajjuh*. The shaikh, too, is said to suffer from these unpleasant side effects. In fact, some of his chronic health problems are attributed to the negative by-products of *tawajjuh*. For the novice, *tawajjuh* is both mentally and physically exhausting, necessitating long periods of rest after an hour's practice. It also stimulates ravenous levels of hunger.

For his/her part, the disciple attracts *baraka* through the practice of *dhikr*.²⁶ There are two types of *dhikr*: *dhikr jali* (vocal) and *dhikr khafi* (silent). Naqshbandis perform only silent *dhikr*, a practice that makes them unique among the orders. They believe the Prophet instructed his companion Abu Bakr in this method while he and the Prophet were secluded in a cave during the migration from Mecca to Medina (Algar 1971: 188). The practice was later regularized by Baha' al-Din Naqshband, who claimed to have received silent *dhikr* directly from the disembodied spirit of al-Ghudjuwani. Mujaddidis employ two basic *dhikr khafi* formulae. The first, *dhikr-i ism-i dhat*, entails pronouncement of one of the names of God alone, "Allah," or "Hu," (He) considered the essence of the divine name. The second, *nafi wa ithbat*, is a more advanced practice discussed below.

²⁵ In his discussion of Naqshbandi practices, Michel Chodkiewicz fails to mention the active role the disciples take in *tawajjuh* (Chodkiewicz 1990: 69-82).

²⁶ The term *dhikr* derives from the Arabic root *dhakara*, which occurs frequently in the Qur'an, enjoining believers to "remember" God. Among the many Qur'anic verses cited by Sufis to support this practice is: "Remember God with frequent remembrance and glorify Him morning and evening" [33:41]. Although used by early Sufis as a means of avoiding distractions and drawing nearer to God, with the development of the orders in the twelfth century it became an established ritual (Trimingham 1973: 194).

Dhikr seeks to bring awareness to a white-hot point of concentration. The disciple must sit cross-legged, his hands joined together, the left hand clasping the right wrist. One must not recline against anything or rest on one's hands.²⁷ One must relax, clear the mind, and open oneself to the shaikh's *faiz*. Ideally, *dhikr* is performed in the physical presence of a shaikh or khalifa emanating *faiz*. When not in the shaikh's physical presence, however, one may focus on a mental image of him. Representations of the shaikh in photos or drawings are eschewed.²⁸ The optimum position is to sit directly across and as close as possible to the shaikh. One must gaze at his visage (*tasawwur-i shaikh*) while silently repeating the divine name "Allah, Allah, Allah," concentrating on the heart *latifa*. Alternatively, one may envision the name "Allah" inscribed in Arabic on the heart.

As in most other Sufi orders the organized séances of the Naqshbandis are completely separate from the ritual *salat*. (However, ecstasies produced during *dhikr* often spill over into ritual prayer with disruptive consequences.) In the hospice, formal *dhikr* séances are held two or three times every day for one to two hours at a time. The only exception to this is during the month of Ramadan when, because of the rigors of fasting, the schedule is substantially reduced. The shaikh is always present at these sessions. In fact, during the nine months I visited the hospice, he did not miss a single *dhikr* or prayer ceremony. Apart from formal sessions, *dhikr* is considered a constant process, and disciples must endeavor to be constantly in *dhikr*, as the shaikh himself is said to be. The reason for this is that *dhikr* is an ongoing process designed to overcome the appetitive self (*nafs*) and activate the *lati'if*, thereby bringing the disciple closer to God (i.e., one's essential nature).

In keeping with the precepts of their lineage, Naqshbandis forswear the use of musical instruments or dancing during *dhikr*, injunctions that distinguish it from many other orders. The only voluntary movement permitted is a rocking from side to side, or other subtle, rhythmical movement of the body used to attune one to the *dhikr*'s inner rhythm. Strictly speaking, there is no *sama'* or spiritual concert. However, during the Thursday evening *dhikr*, disciples chant recitations of the Qur'an and hymns of praise to the shaikh. Over a microphone a lead voice intones, "Hu, Hu, Hu!" backed by a chorus of five disciples. Despite the absence of musical instruments the chanting very much simulates a concert. The rhythmic exuberance generated by such activities notwithstanding, they are simply supports to *dhikr*, as evidenced by the fact that many *dhikr* séances are completely devoid of them.

A formal *dhikr al-hadra*, or communal séance in the presence of the shaikh follows a customary course.²⁹ After noon prayer (*zuhr*), he takes his seat facing the congregation with his back to the qibla. With the shaikh at the apex, disciples form an oval extending out from him. The khalifas (i.e.,

²⁷ This position is analogous to those used in Hindu Yoga and Zen Buddhism, the difference lying mainly in the position of the hands and their emphasis on a perfectly erect spine.

²⁸ The rejection of such images stems from an Islamic proscription against visual representation of the Prophet.

²⁹ This session occurred on 9 February 1997. Compare this with the somewhat sedate performance in Algar's account of a *dhikr* seance in Bosnia (Algar 1971: 168-203)

those with the most *faiz*) sit closest to the shaikh. This circular formation does not signify a turning away from the world, as Gilsean believed in his study of the Hamidi/Shadhili order in Cairo (Gilsean 1971). Rather, disciples face (*tawajjuh*) khalifas in order to obtain the full force of their *faiz*. Marbles are distributed to the advanced disciples and the shaikh as a device to aid in the counting of Naqshbandi prayers, the *khatm-i khwajagan*.³⁰ The reciter (*qari*) sits at some remove to the left of the shaikh. He begins his melodious chant of Qur'anic verses as disciples begin the *dhikr*. For their part, khalifas shift their gaze from one disciple to another, usually those whom they know or are instructed by the shaikh or another khalifa to assist. In a few minutes shouts erupt in the silence: "Ya'llah!" or "Hu! Allah!" Others begin hissing, weeping, or laughing or emitting ecstatic cries (*shahadat*). As the intensity of the séance builds, some disciples are now on their feet. One is in the corner biting his nails, nervously pacing back and forth, his fist held tight to his mouth as if to suppress some overwhelming inner pain. Another is on all fours. He begins crawling toward the shaikh, moans and rolls sideways over and over until he reaches the perimeter of the circle where he finally subsides. One disciple standing in the middle of the circle picks himself up and drops his body sharply onto the hard floor. He does this repeatedly, seemingly oblivious to the pain. Some disciples have cast off their coats and are now running full bore around the mosque. Despite the apparent pandemonium, many are still seated in their cross-legged position, alert, heads nodding rhythmically. Virtually all the khalifas are seated. Occasionally their arms will fly up abruptly into the air or their torso will jerk suddenly, but apart from this, they are sedate and sober. From time to time, disciples shift position by drawing their feet beneath them to recite the Naqshbandi prayers silently. (Those who are in ecstasy (*wajd*), of course, are excused from this.) The session continues for an hour at more or less the same pace. It does not necessarily build to a crescendo, nor are all sessions dramatic. The shaikh will signal closure by raising his palms and leading disciples in prayer. If it is not time for the formal prayer, some disciples leave while others stay for an additional hour of practice.

Another type of *dhikr* occurs in the mosque usually on Thursday evenings when many khalifas attend expressly for the benefit of disciples. For this reason, Thursday *dhikr* is the longest and most intense of the week lasting between two and four hours. Khalifas form a long row at the head of the mosque with the shaikh at its center. The senior most khalifas sit next to him. The optimal position for obtaining *faiz* is to sit directly facing and as close to a khalifa as possible or about a meter away. Since there are usually more than one hundred disciples in the mosque at this time, the others cluster behind the first row of disciples to get as close as possible to the khalifas. During the session,

³⁰ The *khatm* or recitation signifies the complete recitation of the Qur'an. The *khatm-i khwajagan*, or "recitation of the masters" is used by Naqshbandis to designate a partial recitation of those chapters viewed as embodying the essence of the Qur'an. These were not part of early Naqshbandi practice and vary considerably from one order to the next.

the shaikh constantly supervises this session, moving disciples about so that everyone has an opportunity to sit with khalifas. The shaikh always gives priority to those whose heart *latifa* has not yet been activated. For this reason, he makes certain to seat novices with the most powerful khalifas or himself. The shaikh's relaxed behavior clearly reflects the informality and ecstasy of this *dhikr* séance. As several disciples chant over a microphone set on one side of the *qibla*, he is tapping his foot and snapping his fingers to the rhythm, smiling broadly. It is the shaikh at his most animated. From time to time, he or his khalifas make a showering motion with their arms to dispense *baraka* in greater abundance. Disciples swoon in response. Once, the shaikh did this while a blind man was seated with his back to him. I was astonished to see him react instantly with a cry that bordered on pain.

The practice of *suhba* is a special feature of the Naqshbandis. *Suhba* signifies companionship and refers to the benefits the early companions received from being in the Prophet's company. *Suhba* is a more informal setting for the practice of *dhikr* during which the shaikh may be conversing with disciples and visitors. As with formal *dhikr*, in *suhba* disciples repeat the name of God while gazing at the shaikh's face. He may be discussing a particular aspect of the teaching with visitors or disciples, answering questions, or discussing the problems he is having with Islamic radicals. Rarely does the conversation take the form of idle chatter but always centers around a particular religious problem or topic. Novices are expected to attend all of these sessions in order to hasten the awakening of the *lata'if*.

A major *suhba* session occurs every Thursday evening. About a dozen disciples gather in the larger room (*langar*) adjoining his house. They are seated on mats along the perimeter of the room. They sit facing each other but are angled slightly toward the front of the room where the shaikh will sit. If khalifas are present, novices sit across from them. Within a few minutes the shaikh enters and takes his place in his cushioned chair at the head of the room. He is fastidious about the seating, and if someone is facing too far toward the front or is leaning against the wall, he will instruct him to adjust himself accordingly. The atmosphere is relaxed, the shaikh usually conversing with those sitting nearest to him. All the while disciples are in *dhikr*, silently repeating "Allah, Allah, Allah," as they gaze at the face of the shaikh. Some disciples may suddenly shout, "Ya 'llah!" or "Hu!" so violently as to send shock waves through the room. Others may begin rolling on the floor or heaving suddenly. No one pays any attention to these outbursts, and the conversation continues in complete disregard of them.

When dinner is served, those in ecstasy quickly recover. Dinner consists of bread, rice, and a little beef. After copious glasses of sweet green tea, *Suhba* resumes, this time more intensely. Within several minutes, someone begins chanting, "Hu, Allah!" Soon others join in. Those who are responding to the shaikh's *faiz* are now on their feet chanting "Hu, Allah! Hu, Allah!" moving toward him and back again in unison like an undulating wave. Others not so inclined continue to sit placidly on the

floor. The shaikh is smiling now, his head gently inclined to his heart side. From time to time, he jerks strenuously to his left to project his *faiz* more forcefully. Both sides of his chest, the heart and spirit, are beating so vigorously that it is plainly visible through his tunic. Ninety minutes into the *suhba*, the shaikh rises unceremoniously to prepare for the night prayer.

The intense mental effort required in *dhikr* at the beginning is temporary. When *dhikr al-qalbi* becomes activated, it is said to operate automatically with little effort required on the disciple's part. Disciples say that it is the shaikh who places the *dhikr* in the heart; the disciple need only open his heart in order for the process to occur.

Once activated *dhikr* manifests as a beating of the heart so pronounced that it appears to be beating on the outside of the body. In the shaikh's case, both sides of his chest beat alternately, *qalb*, then *ruh* and back to *qalb*. Virtually every disciples and khalifa in whom the *dhikr al-qalbi* is activated exhibits this distinct sign. Its origin is attributed to Baha' al-din Naqshband. The name "Naqshband" denotes one who embroiders, and Baha' al-Din himself is said to have woven the embroidered Bukharan cloaks known as *kinkha*. But in the spiritual sense, Naqshband signifies the shaikh's imprinting (*band*) in the disciple's heart, the sign (*naqsh*) of the divine name, "Allah."

In some cases, even non-disciples experience the opening of the heart *latifa* sometimes from a distance as in the case of a European woman. According to her husband:

I came here not knowing anything about Sufism. I knew little about Islam. I was simply looking for a place to pray in the company of others. The day after taking *bay'a*, I phoned my wife, who was in Germany, to tell her that I had become a Muslim. Although she was not Muslim and had never met the shaikh, she described how the previous night she had become alarmed when her heart began beating right through her clothing.³¹

The early stages of the *dhikr* experience evince the most dramatic somatic reactions. In particular, the opening of the heart *latifa* is often an abrupt break from normal waking consciousness that completely overwhelms, as indicated by the following account of a European physician:

When I first came here I was repulsed by the conditions. They were much worse than they are now. We had no bathrooms and we had to go out into the fields to go to the bathroom. The *khanaqah* was small in those days, and it was so crowded you couldn't even sit on the floor. At night we slept shoulder to shoulder on the floor. I awoke in the morning covered with insect bites. I was so repulsed by the conditions—not to mention the food—that I went back to Pakistan resolving never to return. But I came back...six times in all. Each time I felt close to a nervous breakdown from the stress of these conditions. But nothing happened. Everybody seemed to be getting it but me. I began to doubt I would ever get it. Then one day I was sitting

³¹ This is the same woman who believes her conversion to Islam was presaged in a dream years before. Since she became a disciple, the number and intensity of her dreams and visions have increased.

in a small room performing *Suhba* with a few khalifas and all of a sudden the next thing I knew I was thrown to the floor in *wajd* (ecstasy). Once you get someone's else's *tawajjuh* all you want to do is share it with someone else.

Whether communal or individual *dhikr*, disciples may experience a number of involuntary reactions from vocal outbursts to sudden physical movements. Naqshbandis distinguish between voluntary sounds and movements and involuntary ones. The former are forbidden, the latter permissible. Vocal reactions cover a range of sounds from monosyllabic utterances to intelligible words: “*Hu!*” or “*Ya'llah!*” They may also groan, sigh heavily, laugh, weep, hyperventilate, or scream. One disciple always laughed hysterically during the formal *séance*, an act sober Naqshbandis would consider sacrilegious under any other circumstance. Equally dramatic are the physical reactions such as uncontrollable jerking of the limbs or sudden spasms in the torso, weeping and shaking. When asked why some disciples responded more violently than others, a Pakistani khalifa replied, “It is their way of responding to the magnitude of what they are witnessing.” No one takes much notice of these displays, and any attempt to discuss them is flatly dismissed. Occasionally, the shaikh will evince a smile of amusement when a disciple who had shaken his hand would be thrown violently to the floor, rolling backwards so uncontrollably that he seemed as if he were a leaf born on the wind. The shaikh's smile conveys his pleasure at this outward validation of his spiritual power and authority.

Sufis attribute the nature of one's response to the opening of the *lata'if* to one's spiritual character (*mashrab*). Generally, it is one's spiritual nature, which determines whether a disciple experiences violent ecstasies, none at all, or a sudden correction of undesirable or destructive behavior. Only in rare cases does a disciple become so uncontrollable that he must be restrained. Apart from the visible flutter of the heart, neither the shaikh nor his senior khalifas exhibit any dramatic physical reactions. Senior khalifas often utter, “*Ya'llah!*” or emit a heavy sign, but such generally is the extent of their involuntary reactions during *dhikr*. The lack of involuntary movement among khalifas suggests that the opening of the *lata'if* initiates a purgative process in the body that stabilizes with maturing practice. Indeed, wild movements are considered indecent, a sign the disciple is undergoing a transition from self to spirit.

As a rule of thumb, those who are most demonstrative during *dhikr* sessions are the less educated. By comparison, khalifas evince little movement beyond a bobbing of the head, spasm of the torso, or occasional vocal outbursts. Western disciples are the least demonstrative of all, rarely emitting cries, ejaculations, or wild behavior. Structural theorists would readily interpret this as an indication that those low in social status and self-esteem engage in such extreme displays to gain status within the hospice that they lack in the wider community. While this is likely the case, such

histrionics do not negate the fundamental somatic nature of the opening of the *lata'if* and related claims of spiritual awakening.

When two or more *lata'if* become activated, *dhikrat* borrowed from the Qadiri order are used to stimulate them. In the first, the Naqshbandi disciple silently recites the name “Allah” while focusing attention on the heart *latifa* then “Hu” while focusing on the *ruh latifa*, alternating vigorously and so rapidly that the two words merge together as one. A more advanced Qadiri *dhikr* employs “Hu,” which is circulated vigorously in a circular motion around the *lata'if* one hundred times.³² When all of the subtle centers are opened, a more advanced Naqshbandi *dhikr* technique is used to stimulate all of them simultaneously called *nafi wa ithbat* or “the recollection of God through negation and affirmation.” According to Naqshbandi mythology, the mysterious figure Khidr is alleged to have instructed al-Ghudjuwani in this technique while the latter was submerged in water.³³ The disciple may not undertake this practice until instructed to do so by the shaikh. While there are a number of variations on this technique, it consists essentially of the following: the disciple must set aside at least one hour of solitude in the morning or evening for this practice. The disciple places his tongue on the roof of his mouth and is not to exhale through the mouth. Silently pronouncing the divine negation, “la” the disciple then draws the sound from the area of the navel to the crown of the head. Then, while pronouncing “*ilaha*,” concentration is directed in a line running from the crown of the head to the right shoulder cap. From there the disciple drives the final refrain, “*illa'llah*” forcefully into the heart. The formula is repeated one hundred times, closing with “*Muhammad rasul Allah, rasul Allah wa salam 'alaihi*” (“Muhammad is the messenger of God, the messenger of God, and peace be upon Him”). Naqshbandis employ other Qadiri variants of *nafi wa ithbat*. One such practice calls for the disciple to pronounce “la” while focusing attention on the heart; from there “*illaha*” is taken to the right shoulder. The final refrain, “*illa'llah*,” is taken from the right shoulder over the crown of the head with the final syllable directed toward the heart.

According to Shah Wali Allah, a seventeenth-century Naqshbandi reformer, having completed his journey through the *lata'if*, the disciple is then dominated by the *latifa* that is strongest in his nature (Hermansen 1988: 20). As each *latifa* corresponds to a particular Prophet, the disciple’s spiritual character or *mashrab* will be said to be *adami mashrab*, or *Muhammadan mashrab*, as the case may be. One whose heart *latifa* is dominant, for instance, will experience feeling states of ecstasy and longing, *Issawi mashrab*.

³² There is a variety of these Qadiri *dhikrat*: e.g., “*Allah, jala-jalala-hu*” (May God His majesty be exalted) recited one hundred times followed by “*jala jalala-hu*” (Exalted is His majesty) one thousand times.

³³ *Khidr*, meaning “the green one,” is a mysterious figure in Sufi mythology who represents the esoteric source of wisdom. He appears to Sufis in those moments when their souls bear witness to the transcendent.

Once the seven *lata'if* are opened through *dhikr* and completely cleansed through *nafi wa ithbat*, with the teacher's permission the disciple undertakes the last stage of practice: repetition of the *Muraqabat* or Naqshbandi contemplations. Originally twenty-four, Shah Rasul Taloqani, the teacher of Saifur Rahman's teacher, expanded them to thirty-six. The *muraqabat* are advanced contemplative exercises designed to lead the disciple through the higher realm of *wahdat*. They are performed for an hour usually after the afternoon prayer ('*asr*') often in the presence of the shaikh. They may also be performed alone at night. For this reason the *muraqib* is cautioned of the pitfalls of falling asleep during the exercise. As with obligatory prayer, the disciple must perform ablutions before *muraqabat*. The *muraqib* remains on a particular contemplation for a number of days determined by the shaikh and may not lessen the time required for each. Nor can he proceed to the next one without the shaikh's permission (Balkhi 1989:19). At each stage he is obliged to inform the shaikh as to his experiences.

In the first contemplation, the disciple contemplates oneness (*ahadiyya*), then proceeds to contemplate the differentiated attributes. In contemplating the various qualities and attributes of *wahidiyya*, the *muraqib's* task is to invite *baraka* from the source of each *latifa* by way of the Naqshbandi *silsila*. The objective is to return each *latifa* to its origin, thereby achieving annihilation in it. When the first four *lata'if* are returned to their origin, the disciple enters the stage of *wilayat al-sughra* or lesser sainthood. This is the stage of the Pir. It is here in the "unity of being" that the Sufi temporarily loses interest in the manifest world and experiences the annihilation of the ego or *fana'*. It is important to note here that a Pir does not become one solely by virtue of fulfilling consensually validated standards. Pirhood is above all a spiritual stage, attainment of which is first confirmed by the teacher, not society at large. Whether or not the saint is publicly recognized as such in no way detracts from the inner reality and depends largely on the type of role the saint chooses to adopt.

Sirhindi maintained that *wilayat al-sughra* is an unstable condition marked by uncontrollable fits of ecstasy. When the remaining *akhfa' latifa* is annihilated in the unity of being, he then enters the stage of *wilayat al-kubra* or unity of essence. The state of *wilayat al-kubra* is one of calm and quiet union with God's unity of essence (*baqa'*). Buehler notes that *wilayat al-kubra* "is the station (*maqam*) of 'the expanded breast' (*shar-i sadr*), indicating the perfection of the *akhfa' latifa*, which expands to fill the entire chest, forming a single unit of light" (Buehler 1993: 152). As Warren Fusfeld notes, the contemplations performed in *wilayat al-kubra* produce benefits in the *nafs* leading to a total elimination of bad habits and desires (Fusfeld 1981: 99) The state is analogous to that of the Buddhist *bodhi-sattva*: the Sufi saint returns to the world transfigured to serve as a moral exemplar and spiritual guide to awaken others.

Re-interpreting the Ritual Process

Dhikr is a ritual in the sense that it consists of stereotypic, repetitive behavior. It constitutes a harmony of patterned rhythms in sound (internal in this case), combined in some instances with movement. If, in the view of mainstream anthropology, religion is a human invention, then by extension, the *dhikr* ritual would likewise be grounded in the everyday world, explainable in terms of known, mundane processes. Gilsenan has rightly noted that Van Gennep's analysis of ritual is not applicable to *dhikr*, for it is neither a rite of passage nor a transition from one social state to another (Gilsenan 1973: 181-182). Nor does *dhikr* necessarily take place in the liminal context of a formal setting. In his own analysis, Gilsenan chose to focus on the symbols of authority [e.g., cloak, seating arrangements] in the *dhikr* ritual. While these elements are often present in the *dhikr*, these symbols are not central to it as evidenced by the fact that many *dhikr* rituals are completely devoid of them.

Geertz's viewed ritual as serving as meaningful or symbolic action that reinforces the hidden logic of the cultural system underlying religion. Ritual is the mechanism whereby the models of the world are authenticated, made to seem "uniquely real." The basic unit of the ritual is the symbol, which serves as a template of information about the world. In Geertz's view, the ritual is static, conveying information that confirms cultural beliefs about the world. The main elements of *dhikr* practice are the concentration on the shaikh's physical form, the repetition of the name of Allah, and attention on the heart (or another *latifa*). Of the three elements, repetition of the name of Allah is the one activity present in both communal and individual *dhikrat*. If we are to accept Geertz's explanation of ritual, how does the name of God, for example, serve as a template of information in that momentary context? Robin Horton notes that the symbolic approach erroneously attempts to assign a *representational* function to the ritual and its symbols:

Defining religion as structural symbolism comes to much the same thing as defining the substance of "linen" in terms of its occasional use as a flag: the symbolic function is incidental to the nature of the first as it is to the second (Horton 1993: 23).

Indeed, there are no other clues provided as to the nature of the *dhikr* experience and discussion of it is strictly prohibited. If the *dhikr* ritual does not convey information as to what is to be experienced then how does it function? More recent studies of ritual that have attempted to answer this question stress the fluid, open-ended quality of ritual. Victor Turner conceived of ritual as having the capacity to bring into existence radically new images, ideas, and values. He believed ritual has the power subvert existing cultural ideas and move the group in an entirely new direction:

[R]itual symbols are not merely signs representing known things; they are felt to possess ritual efficacy; to be charged with power from unknown sources, and to be capable of acting on persons and groups coming

in contact with them in such a way as to change them for the better or in a desired direction (Turner 1967: 54).

According to Turner, in its ability to generate new modes of experience, ritual is a form of anti-structure, a liminal region replete with new possibilities.

Liminality is usually a sacred condition protected against secularity by taboos and in turn prevented by them from disrupting secular order, since liminality is a movement between fixed points and is essentially ambiguous, unsettled, and unsettling (Turner 1974: 273-274).

Turner, however, conceived of liminality in terms of the social structure: Ritual is enacted in response to social needs, providing release of social tensions in the momentary *communitas* of the ritual. While a sense of *communitas* may indeed be present in the communal *dhikr*, it is nonetheless ancillary to the individual's subjective experience as evidenced by the fact that *dhikr* is practiced more in solitude than in a formal communal setting. Furthermore, according to Turner's analysis of ritual what is intended to be new or radical—*communitas*—is in fact little more than increased social cohesion à la Durkheim. As Morton Klass observes, there is tendency on Turner's part to conflate social marginality and peripherality with liminality in the broad sense of the term (Klass 1995: 134). Upon closer examination, the newness Turner believed to be inherent in ritual turns out to be merely a temporary catharsis from social roles and pressures.³⁴ Thus, while Turner believed ritual to be a form of anti-structure, his conception of it ultimately offered little that was truly new or radical.

Edith Turner subsequently attempted to reconcile her husband's intellectual impasse: that ritual is a form of anti-structure but does not provide truly new modes of experiencing the world. Having witnessed a bizarre spirit manifestation in her research among the Ndembu of Zambia, she says ritual must be seen as more than an orchestrated act for achieving commonplace ends. In ritual, she notes,

We are not dealing with a written text or spoken myth. We are dealing with matters *beyond language* [my ital.], born in the everyday world of anti-structure and liminality, a world of which the processes of ritual are the language (Turner 1992: 14).

As the core element of ritual, Turner says symbols should be seen as more than mere representations of things or statements about the world in the Geertzian sense. She argues symbols must be

³⁴ Performance studies have moved away from the social aspects of ritual, focusing greater attention on psychological transformation brought about by the ritual. However, these transformations serve in a circumscribed manner as a kind of healing therapy or release from stress.

seen in an entirely a new light. They are “triggers,” *openers to the unknown*. The repetition of the name of God, the concentration on the heart, the act of contemplating the form of the shaikh, these are all symbols, to be sure, but symbols that provide an opening to the unfamiliar and unknown, the transcendent. Yet, how can the anthropologist, as outsider, know the experience to be transcendental in nature?

In his work on knowledge and human interests, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas shows that the three principal domains of knowledge-inquiry can be linked to three types of cognitive interest: the empirical-analytic sciences employ a *technical* cognitive interest; the social sciences use a *practical* one, and the critically-oriented sciences employ an *emancipatory* cognitive interest.³⁵ Emancipatory interest is concerned with clearing up the distortions or problems of labor, language, or communication. Although himself a structuralist, Habermas applied emancipatory inquiry to redress distortions within a given level of knowledge (e.g., empirical sciences), not between them.

Transpersonal psychological theorist, Ken Wilber, has applied Habermas’s basic model to the analysis of spiritual experience by adding two levels of knowledge beyond those recognized by Habermas: the *soteriological*, or mind’s attempt to represent spirit in order to orient itself to the transcendental domain; and the *gnostic* whose interest is liberational, i.e., spirit’s direct and unmediated apprehension of itself. Wilber points out that because forms of knowledge are actually grounded in the levels of structural organization themselves, (e.g., body with senses, mind with symbols), emancipatory inquiry can be used in a “vertical manner” to clear up distortions between different levels of structural adaptation.

According to Wilber, each level of human development is marked by two basic processes, *translation* and *transformation*. Translation is the fleshing out of a particular level of the developmental hierarchy. For example, at the rational or mental-egoic level, a translation activity necessary for the maintenance of self-identity is:

[A] constant sub-vocal chatter which unceasingly translates and edits his reality according to the symbolic structures of his language-and-thought as well as the major syntactic rules and premises of his membership reality (and secondarily, his own philosophic bands) (Wilber 1980: 41).

Transformation, on the other hand, is the act of moving to a higher (or lower) level by surrendering to the translation of the current level. The objective is to eliminate the tension or distortion between different levels,

³⁵ For this analysis I am indebted to Ken Wilber (1984).

[T]o free awareness...from the relatively limited perspective offered by that level...by opening awareness to the next higher level of structural organization...This interest cannot be allayed by clearing up distortions within a level but only by the emergence of the next higher level... All in all, the interest of horizontal-emancipation [Habermas] is to clear up *translation*; the interest of vertical-emancipation is to promote *transformation* (Wilber 1980: 38).

Wilber points out that the particular symbol is grounded in the particular structural level of development that emerges at each stage in the growth of consciousness.³⁶ The symbol thus embodies some of the characteristics of that particular level of development. For example, the symbolic structure of language allows consciousness to transcend the passing present of time experienced in the pre-egoic stage of human development, i.e., infancy:

The infant's temporal world, at this image-body level, thus consists of an extended present or series of juxtaposed (parataxic) present moments. The growing world of time is thus slowly and painstakingly being constructed, and the concrete image plays a decisive role at this stage. The image itself, however, cannot represent or constitute in awareness an extended serial duration or sequence of *events* in time. But the development of language—the symbolic structures of word-and-name—brings with it the ability to recognize series of events and sequences of actions, and thus to perceive the salient non-present world. In other words, the symbolic structures of language *transform* the present moment into a *tensed* moment, a moment surrounded by the past and the future (Wilber 1980: 38).

In applying emancipatory inquiry to the spiritual domains, one must first disengage from translation of verbal thoughts, concepts, and their emotive content essential for the maintenance of egoic consciousness. In its single-minded focus on a word or name, *dhikr* performs this function. By concentrating on a single word or phrase, the disciple enters a liminal state that disrupts the (translation) activity of the socially-constructed self. Here Victor Turner's concept of liminality, in the sense of anti-structure, is applicable, not in terms of social structure but psychological/ontological structures. In Sufi mystical experience, anti-structure is a liminal moment when patterned egoic activity is suspended or interrupted. Transpersonal psychologist Michael Washburn notes that repetitive rituals have the effect of "demobilizing the ego" (Washburn: 1988: 147).

The *dhikr* ritual does more than merely relax the seemingly fixed assumptions about the world; it leads to entirely new and cognitively more advanced modes of experiencing the world. Insofar as these ontological structures are already present in human consciousness, symbols are used to evoke the higher levels of one's own ground unconscious. The term *dhikr* means "remem-

³⁶ Wilber distinguishes between *sign* and *symbol*. A sign is that which represents any element *within* a given level. Translation uses signs and transformation uses symbols.

brance,” for it is a matter of consciousness *reverting to or remembering* its original (and higher) identity. Naqshbandi contemplative practices are a kind of excavation of consciousness taking awareness down through the levels of the psyche, through the dream state to the state of deep sleep and beyond. Naqshbandis discourage prior discussion of the *dhikr* experience precisely because it cannot be conveyed by symbolic reference to it, i.e., *translation*. Because the *dhikr* experience is a direct apprehension with no prior analogue in human experience, it can only be grasped via *transformation*, i.e., through direct apprehension. Sufis call the momentary glimpse of a transcendent domain a *hal*, or “state,” the permanent integration of that state into the self-structure is a *maqam* or “station.” Structure and anti-structure thus may be seen as an ongoing dialectic leading the Sufi disciple toward deeper or higher levels of human consciousness.

What do the transcendent levels look like? In the psychic or transitional stage, perceptual capacity leads to an observing self as distinct from an empirical ego. Cognitive ability allows for thinking about rationality and its limitations, an act Wilber calls vision-logic. Wilber explains how vision-logic operates:

Precisely because this awareness transcends (but includes) so much of the verbal-mental-egoic dimension, that entire dimension itself becomes increasingly objective, increasingly transparent, to consciousness. Where previously the verbal-mental-egoic self used those structures as something with which to view (and co-create) the world, now those structures themselves increasingly become an object of awareness and investigation by...consciousness. It is not just the mind looking objectively and “representationally” at external objects...but the mind looking at the mind intersubjectively (Wilber 1995: 189).³⁷

Is this not one of the “inner senses” to which Naqshbandi writers refer that are similar to—but distinct from—their normal counterparts? In this case, attention is directed not to the external world of objects but to the internal activity of the mind. It is an activity not mediated by language or reason, processes of the mental-egoic level, but by contemplation.

According to Wilber, the next major level, the subtle, is the level of the dreaming mind.³⁸ This subtle level corresponds roughly to the *‘alam al-mithal*, the realm of mythical images and ideas that well up from our unconscious in dreams. At this level of spiritual development, the dream-vision function is activated. Michael Washburn theorizes that visions are a creative process that occurs when the ego begins to master contemplative practice (Washburn 1988: 222). According to Washburn, the Freudian act of primal repression in infancy reduces the spontaneous process of

³⁷ For specific examples of the way in which emergent vision-logic may work in daily situations, see Kegan (1994). Kegan calls this higher function “fourth order consciousness.”

³⁸ Note here the correspondence of this level with a remark of Saifur Rahman’s “awakening of the *lata’if* brings awareness (*tawajjuh*) during deep sleep and the practice of *dhikr*.”

image formation, an act he calls the autosymbolic, to the primary process of the unconscious, hence the act of dreaming.

As such the autosymbolic process [dreaming] operates in a way that, although richly creative, is heedless of the class boundaries and logical relationships that govern the secondary process. The products of the primary process, consequently, are logically wild; they are subject to unlimited condensations and displacements, transformations according to which anything can metamorphose into virtually anything else. Because this wildness of the imagination is a consequence of the dualistic disconnection of egoic and non-egoic spheres, it cannot be surmounted until dualism is overcome and the autosymbolic process is brought under the discipline of the secondary process (Washburn 1994: 307-308).

Vision formation, is qualitatively different for it is a synthesis of pre-egoic primary process and egoic operational cognition, a synthesis he calls *tertiary process*. Tertiary process differs qualitatively from primary autosymbolic functioning in being a *higher cognitive function*. “Visionary symbols, rather than being incomplete concepts, particulars attempting to be universals [such as occurs in dreams], are instead completely instantiated concepts, universals succeeding in being particulars” (Washburn 1988: 222). An activity of spontaneous ideation, the vision supports and guides the ego in the service of transcendence. The vision has the same materials at its disposal as the dream: images, voices, and other sensory input. In fact, visionary symbols, Washburn believes, draw creatively upon the wealth of meanings contained in the complex theoretical systems established by the mental ego.

Wilber, too, views the dream-vision or the “vision-image,” as he calls it, as an advanced cognitive function. Like Washburn, Wilber distinguishes between three modes of cognition: the pre-verbal, primary process of infancy, the secondary process of verbal reasoning, and “vision-image.” Vision-image is a higher mode of cognition beyond both primary and secondary processes. Because of the complexity of the vision-image (e.g., it can contain paradox), Wilber emphasizes its function as deep imagery and visualization, not abstract conceptualization. Wilber and Washburn both believe that, like the normal dream, the vision is a spontaneous occurrence. However, in Sufism the vision may also be an intentional act of the shaikh used to communicate with, instruct, or initiate disciples.

According to Wilber, the subtle realm is “the seat of actual archetypes, of Platonic forms, of subtle sounds and audible illuminations...of transcendent insight and absorption” (Wilber 1984: 29). Here the vision-image produces a deep-structure form of the deity. In Sufism, this is expressed in the form of visions of prophets and messengers. These visionary symbols are our own archetype, an image of our own essential nature.

The causal level (*wahidiyya*) is the unmanifest source or transcendental ground of all lesser structures. In the causal these deity forms, indeed all manifest forms, dissolve. Through practice of the Naqshbandi contemplations, the individual encounters that which is prior to mind, self, world, and body. Typically, it is experienced as subtle, audible light, the source of the deity form. At the higher reaches of the causal (*wahdat*), consciousness deals with the very subject who is experiencing these subtle forms, eventually dissolving into formless consciousness. At that point, that which sees and that which is seen are one and the same. One becomes radically free of the separate self-sense, abiding in a state of non-dual consciousness. It is this state that defines Sufi sainthood and which impels Sufis to boldly declare themselves to be God. Like Ibn ‘Arabi, Wilber believes God is not some ontological other, set apart from human consciousness, but the very apex of it. By contrast, Washburn cautiously maintains that it is not possible to know whether the non-dual stage is some ontological other or merely an underlying basis of the psyche.

The Nature of Sufi Charisma

As we have seen, Sufi experience exhibits energetic aspects, and somatic phenomena are attendant to the entire process of spiritual awakening in varying degrees. It is in this energetic or physical aspect of the ritual process—not in social relations—where a better understanding of the nature and function of Sufi charisma lies.

Washburn theorizes that rituals such as *dhikr* have the effect of undoing original repression in the Freudian sense. The undoing of original repression, often a long and difficult process, releases both the power of the pre-personal unconscious and the energy of what he calls the “Dynamic Ground” (i.e., spirit).³⁹ The sudden release of this dormant energy is manifested in a variety of sometimes bizarre physical reactions including, surges of energy through the body, sudden alterations of breath, and involuntary movements and vocalizations. Indeed, the effects of mystical practice are often wildly disruptive to the body, producing fits of shaking, weeping, heavy sighing, screaming, and the like. Such involuntary physical responses are apt to occur in novices as the awakened energy encounters obstructions of one sort or another as it is released in the body. Conversely, these somatic responses explain why khalifas and more advanced practitioners exhibit few physical reactions. Washburn writes:

³⁹ Unlike Wilber, who conceives of spiritual development as hierarchical and structural, Washburn views the process as a dynamic dialectic between egoic and non-egoic poles of the psyche. The latter contains both the pre-personal unconscious and the transpersonal Dynamic Ground both sealed off from the ego during original repression in infancy. Wilber disagrees with this notion, arguing that it is logically not possible at the *pre-personal* stage to seal off *transpersonal* spirit, which occurs long before bodily manifestation. Clearly, these model are the first real attempts in the social sciences to explain spiritual transformation. Future models can be expected to address these and many other questions, building on the insights and strengths of both.

I suggest that these phenomena occur because the energy released from the Dynamic Ground is inhibited in its ascent by what remains of the physical infrastructure of original repression. The movement of the power of the Ground is impeded by a multitude of petrified tensions and constrictions...The long-term results of this process of physical opening are probably entirely beneficial. They include a dismantling of body armor, a straightening of posture, and a development of atrophied muscles and occluded nerve pathways (Washburn 1988: 179).

Washburn outlines some of the salubrious effects of the release of this energy:

These bizarre experiences indicate that the body is undergoing a process of derepression and “resurrection.” The “tingly” sensations indicate the recharging of bodily tissue (especially erotogenic tissue); the fluidic currents indicate the energy has begun to circulate in the body; the twinges and tics indicate the dissolution of somatic blockages or armors or the stimulation of new nerve centers; and the muscle contractions and relaxations, if they occur, indicate that a process of derepression and reopening is in progress. Needless to say, these unusual sensations and bodily responses are disconcerting and can be misperceived as symptoms of a pathological process (Washburn 1994: 251).

Washburn provides an insight into why so many somatic reactions of disciples to this process seem to have a sexual complexion:

Resurrection of the body entails intensification of the most bodily of instincts: sexuality. The derepression of the body involves a release of energy from its genital organization. Psychic energy, which had been accessible primarily if not exclusively by means of sexual-genital arousal, is now permanently activated and begins being released from the sexual system without sexual-genital stimuli or stimulations. At first this release is intermittent and has the distinct character of a sexual discharge...In time, however, as the release of energy becomes more constant and the flow of energy reaches more of the body, the connection with the sexual system recedes into the background and what began, apparently, as an awakening of sexuality becomes an awakening of somatic experience generally: polymorphous sensuality. As more of the body is energized, the sexual system ceases defining the character of the awakening process and begins serving only as the point of release of an energy that is not specifically sexual in nature (Washburn 1994: 252).

Washburn notes that when the process of mystical development reaches its full completion, the energy of the Dynamic Ground becomes *embodied* in the saint:

Spiritual awakening, as we know, is also a bodily awakening. The opening of the ego to the non-egoic core of the psyche is at the same time an opening of the body to the energy that issues from the non-egoic core. This energy, in rising from the core and breaking through physical knots and blockages, gradually reanimates the body...after the awakening process is complete and the ego is fully integrated with bodily life,

the energy of the non-egoic core begins to express itself somatically as *embodied spiritual power* (Washburn 1994: 309).

This essay shows that this embodied spiritual power is synonymous with charisma. Charisma is a dynamic physical manifestation of the spiritually realized person or one in whom the process of awakening has begun. Charisma is intentionally projected and intentionally—and sometimes unintentionally—received. Charisma accounts for the existence of the orders and is the rationale for association with the shaikh. In conjunction with prescribed rituals such as *dhikr*, *sohba*, *tawwajuh*, and the like, charisma is the catalyst for mystical experience and development. Moreover, charisma can be sustained and transmitted over centuries as the Naqshbandi/Mujaddidi demonstrate and is not necessarily subject to rationalization over time as Weber believed.

Conclusion

A recent issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* is devoted to the question, “Who speaks for Hinduism?” A similar question may be asked concerning Sufism: Who, in the ethnographic literature, speaks for it? The answer, of course, has been Western anthropologists trained largely in the positivist tradition. Western authorship need not be an impediment to accurate representations of Sufism, however, as long as we are willing to give the native perspective its due. In examining Sufi mystical philosophy and practice, aspects largely overlooked in ethnographic fieldwork, this article demonstrates that a non-reductive approach is not only possible but fruitful. The philosophical sophistication of Naqshbandi doctrine, the compelling correspondence between mystical doctrine and practice, the energetic manifestations, and most important of all the testimony of practitioners themselves all support the Naqshbandi contention that what is being cultivated is not merely some post-modern ‘subjective world among other worlds’ but deeper structures of human consciousness that are part of the spiritual realm of creation-at-large.

A truly transcendental anthropology, developed and refined across disciplines, can open up exciting new areas of research into Sufism and other mysticisms. In this endeavor, anthropologists and religious scholars need not be rivals, but collaborators, each bringing their particular disciplinary methods and insights to the many questions that beg investigation. Does charisma have electro-magnetic or other measurable aspects? Why are some individuals more predisposed to it than others? How does this subtle energy circulate within the body and what effects does it have? What is the relationship between psyche and soma? A view of human development that incorporates the spiritual may afford a better understanding of the mind/body dualism. What explains the fact that some orders have retained charisma while others have become completely “rationalized” over time? Put another way, what is the relationship between the normative and the spiritual? Finally,

in an age of increasing secularism, just how much can a discipline like Sufism change without losing the remarkable and profound grace inherent in it?

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