

Sufi Principles of Meditation



Lecture 13: Silence and Serenity

"Silence is the language of God. All else is poor translation." —Rumi



chicago gnosis

“The first stage of worship is silence.”
—Prophet Muhammad, Hadith



Outer and Inner Silence



Silence has two parts, outer quiet and the quiet of heart and mind. Someone who trusts in God stills his heart as a way of laying claim to his sustenance. The gnostic stills his heart in acceptance of destiny through the quality of harmony with God. The one relies upon the fineness of His work. The other is content with the totality of His decrees. With this meaning they have said:

His misfortunes came over you, And the cares of your inner being were relieved.

–Al-Qushayri, *Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism*

The Eloquence of Wisdom

A wise man said that the human being was created with only one tongue, but with two eyes and two ears so that he may hear and see more than he says. Ibrahim bin Adham was invited to a banquet. When he sat down, the guests began to gossip. He remarked, "It is our custom to eat the meat course after the bread, but you have begun by eating the meat!" (He was pointing to the saying of God, "*Would one of you like to eat the dead flesh of his brother? No, you would abhor it*" (59:12)).

A Sufi said, "Silence is the tongue of forbearance." Another said, "Learn silence as you have learned speech. Speech will guide you, and silence will protect you." It is said, "The chastity of the tongue is its silence." And it is said, "The tongue is a beast of prey. If you do not tie it up, it will attack you."

—Al-Qushayri, *Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism*



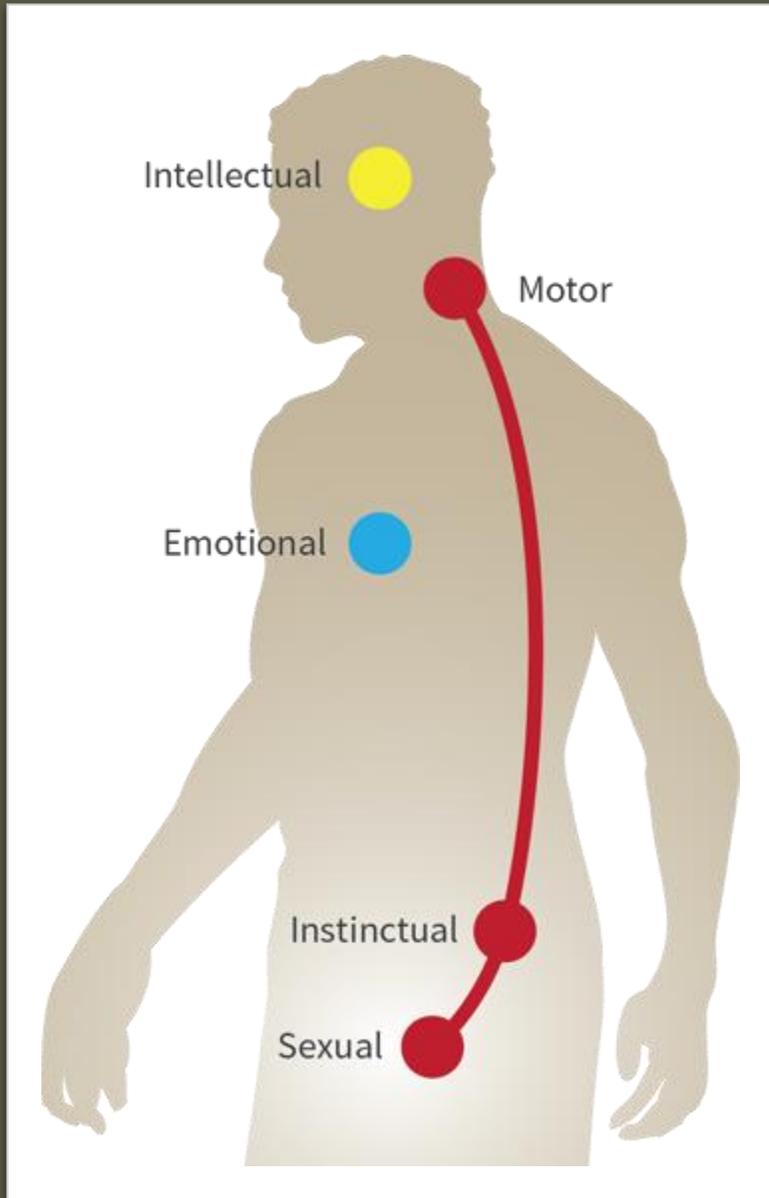
The Degrees of Silence

1. The Carnal Soul (*el-Nafsu-l-Ammara*)
(12:53)—Nephesh: Animal Soul
2. The Blaming Soul (*el-Nafsu-l-Lawwama*)
(75:2)—Ruach: Thinking / Emotional Soul
3. The Soul at Peace (*el-Nafsu-l-Mutma'inna*)
(89:27-8)—Neshamah: Spiritual Soul

It is said, "Silence for the common people is with their tongues, silence for the gnostics is with their hearts, and silence for lovers is with restraining the stray thoughts that come to their innermost beings.

—Al-Qushayri,

Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism



Serenity

Peacefulness

Acceptance

Contentment

Tranquility

Equanimity

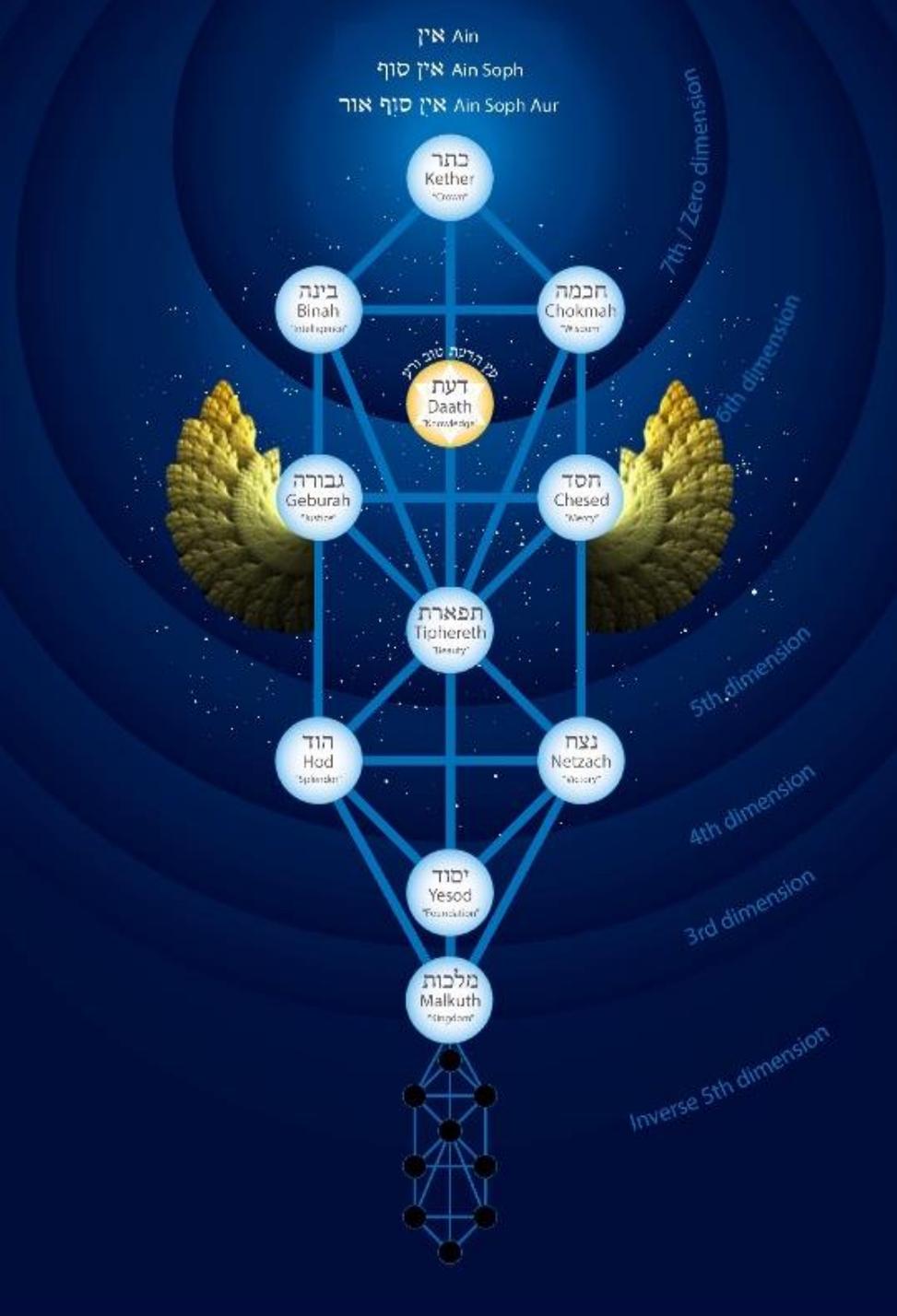
Internal Silence

Tranquility

He it is Who sends down the Tranquility (*sakīnah*) into the hearts of the believers, that they might increase their faith along with their faith—to God belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth, and God is Knowing, Wise. —Al-Fath 48:4

Tranquility is peace that God pours into the heart of His friends so they taste freedom. Tranquility of the heart is found in three things: in devotion to divine unity, in service, and in certitude.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat,
Stations of the Sufi Path



Unity, Service, and Certitude

Tranquility found in the devotion to divine unity brings about three effects in the heart: fear for a day that has not yet come, knowing God who one has not yet met, and loving God who one has not yet seen.

And the tranquility in service brings about three things in the heart. It leads the wayfarer to act according to the Prophetic tradition so that he tastes wealth even in poverty. It helps the heart of the wayfarer to trust the people of this path so he becomes free from obsession and temptation. And it helps the heart of the wayfarer to forget people so he becomes free from hypocrisy.

And the tranquility of certitude also brings about three things in the heart: contentment with what one receives as one's portion from God, so one becomes free from being deceptive; next is valuing gain and loss equally, so one becomes free from being defensive; and third is acceptance of God's guardianship, so one becomes free from all attachments.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, *Stations of the Sufi Path*

Serenity in Capital, Hope, and Love

From the field of Tranquility the field of Serenity is born. God, the Most High, says, '*O soul made serene*' (89:27).

And serenity is peacefulness joined with intimacy. It is of three kinds in the capital with which one is endowed (*naqd*), of hope, and of love.

Serenity in one's capital is of three kinds: the serenity of the neglectful in respect to possessions, the serenity of the wise in respect to experience, and the serenity of the sincere in respect to confidence of being accepted by God.

And serenity in hope is in three things: the reward earned by one who strives with his heart at peace, the reward given to one who waits expectantly for God with his heart in peace, and the reward granted to one who had severed all attachment to the world with his heart at peace.

And the serenity of those in love has three signs: being engaged with God's work rather than one's own, being mindful and aware of God rather than being aware of oneself, and loving God rather than loving oneself.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, *Stations of the Sufi Path*

Practices

1. Each day, develop your self-observation or inner accounting (*muhasabah*) from moment to moment. Also, extend your mindfulness: the length of time you are aware of yourself.
2. Every day, develop your meditative concentration. Adopt a meditation posture, relax completely, then focus 100% attention on your chosen object.

