“Wherever the delusion of your selfhood appears – there’s hell. Wherever “you” aren’t – that’s heaven.” —Abū Sa‘īd

Sufi Principles of Meditation

Lecture 17: Gnosis, Subsistence, and Love
When the seeker realizes the station of contemplation (mushāhida), which is witnessing God’s Essence comprehending and encompassing all phenomena – “Does not your Lord suffice, since He is witness over all things” (41:53) – he continually witnesses lights from the mundus invisibilis. From such a mystic's perspective, this world and the hereafter are one and the same. This can only be realized by a vision that is all heart and spirit, not a view bound by mere mud and mire.

–Ibn Karbalā‘ī, Rawdāt al-janān, II 164
Worship God, and ascribe not partners unto Him.

—Al-Nisa 36

In general, it is to the measure of one’s alienation from one’s own ego that one attains direct knowledge of one’s Lord... I heard Abu Ali al-Daqqaq say, “One of the tokens of the gnosis of God is the achievement of deep awe and reverence for God. If someone’s realization increases, his awe increases.” And I heard him say, “Gnosis requires stillness of heart, just as learning requires outward quiet. If someone’s gnosis increases, his tranquility increases.”

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
The Definition of Love and Will

In scholarly usage, love, *mahabbah*, means will, *iradah*, but the Sufis do not mean will when they speak of love. For human will does not connect to the Eternal—unless one understands it as the will to draw close to Him and glorify Him.

Some say that *hubb*, love, is a name for purity of affection, because the Bedouins when speaking of the pure whiteness and regularity of someone’s teeth use the expression *habab al-asnan*. Others say that since *hubab* is a word for the excess water that results from a heavy rain, *mahabbah* came to mean the heart’s boiling and stirring with the thirst and excitement of meeting the Beloved. Still others say the word is derived from *habab al-ma*, the greater part of a body of water, because love is the object of most of the heart’s concerns.

Another derivation draws the word from necessity and fixity, for one says *ahabba al-baghir* of a camel that kneels and refuses to stand. In just this way the lover’s heart refuses to leave the remembrance of his Beloved. *Hubb* is also said to come from *hibb*, an earring. The poet says:

> The snake showed its flicking tongue at the place of his earring;
> Stealthily listening to secrets.

—Al-Qushayri, *Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism*
The Three Gates of Gnosis

From the field of Wisdom the field of Gnosis is generated. God, the Most High, says, ‘[And when they listen to the revelation received by the Apostle] You will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth’ (5:83)

Gnosis is recognition and knowledge, comprising three categories, three ranks, in three sequences. The first gate is knowledge of being, its unity and unique peerlessness; then comes the second gate which is the knowledge of (God’s) Power, Omniscience, and Beneficence; and then the third gate, which is knowledge of charitable works, loving and close intimacy.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, Stations of the Sufi Path
Gnosis of the first gate is the foundation of Islam; gnosis of the second gate is the foundation of faith, while gnosis of the third gate is the foundation of sincerity.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat,
*Stations of the Sufi Path*
The Three Pillars

The Knowledge of the Truth (Haqíqat) has three pillars—
1) Knowledge of the Essence and Unity of God.
2) Knowledge of the Attributes of God.
3) Knowledge of the Actions and Wisdom of God.

The Knowledge of the Law (Sharíát) also has three pillars—
1) The Koran.
2) The Sunna.
3) The Consensus (ijmd‘) of the Muslim community.

—Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
Knowledge of the Divine Essence involves recognition, on the part of one who is reasonable and has reached puberty, that God exists externally by His Essence, that He is infinite and not bounded by space, that His Essence is not the cause of evil, that none of His creatures is like unto Him, that He has neither wife nor child, and that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that your imagination and intellect can conceive.

—Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
Knowledge of Divine Attributes requires you to know that God has attributes existing in Himself, which are not He nor a part of Him, but exist in Him and subsist by Him, e.g. Knowledge, Power, Life, Will, Hearing, Sight, Speech, etc.

—Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
Knowledge of the Divine Actions is your knowledge that God is the Creator of mankind and of all their actions, that He brought the non-existent universe into being, that He predestines good and evil and creates all that is beneficial and injurious.

—Al-Hujwiri, *Revelation of the Mystery*
The Three Ways to Gnosis

The way that leads one through the first gate is envisioning the Creator’s providence in the opening and closing of (human) handiwork.

The way that leads through the second gate is the contemplator’s own interior recognition of the wisdom of divine Providence within himself.

The way that leads through the third gate is the perception of God’s Mercy that recognizes [the worth of] praiseworthy works and overlooks sins. This final and last gate is the field of the gnostics, the alchemy of lovers, and the way of the Elect; it is the way that beautifies the heart, increases one’s joy and expands the feeling of love.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, Stations of the Sufi Path
Subsistence in God (*baqā*)

From the field of Annihilation the field of Subsistence in God comes. God, the Most High, says, ‘*God is the Best, the most long-lasting and Subsisting*’ (20:73).

God is the Most High, and that is all: [over time] attachments will end, means will vanish, customs will be voided, limits will be broken, understandings will be eliminated, history will fade away, allusions are transient, expressions are negated, information will be wiped out, but God eternally exists, and He exists in His ultimate Unity.

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, *Stations of the Sufi Path*
And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, “Am I not your Lord?” they said, “Yea, we bear witness”—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “Truly of this we were heedless,” or lest you should say, “[It is] only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God beforehand, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?” Thus do We expound the signs, that haply they may return. —The Heights, Al-ʿAʾrāf 172-174
Dissolution within Love

All these one hundred stations are dissolved in the field of love (mahabbat); the field of friendship is the field of love. God, the Most High, describes how He will produce a ‘people whom He loves and who love Him’ (5:54), and ‘Say: if you love God, follow me’ (3:31). But friendship has three stations: it begins with truthfulness, its middle is drunkenness, and it ends in non-existence.

Praise be to God, the Beginning (al-awwal) and the End (al-ākhar).

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, Stations of the Sufi Path
No matter what I say to explain and elucidate Love, shame overcomes me when I come to Love itself. Love cannot be contained within our speaking or listening; Love is an ocean whose depths cannot be plumbed.

Would you try to count the drops of the sea? Before that Ocean, the seven seas are nothing. Love cannot be found in erudition and science, books and pages. Whatever is discussed by people—that is not the way of lovers.

Whatever you have said or heard is the shell: The kernel of Love is a mystery that cannot be divulged. Enough! How long will you cling to these words of the tongue? Love has many expositions beyond speech. Silence! Silence! For the allusions of Love are reversed: The meanings become hidden from much speaking.

Someone asked, “What is Love?” I replied, “Ask not about these meanings. When you become like me, then you will know. When He calls you, you will recite its tale.”

Oh you who have listened to talk of Love, behold Love! What are words in the ears compared to vision in the eyes? What is Love? Perfect thirst. So let me explain the Water of Life.

—Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi, *The Sufi Path of Love*
1. Adopt a meditation posture and completely relax. Withdraw from the senses and enter a state of equanimity and internal silence.

2. Pray to your Being to grant you illumination, wisdom, and inner experience.

3. While falling asleep, maintain vigilance (*muraqaba*) and attentiveness, concentrating upon the presence of your Innermost to grant you the comprehension you seek. You can utilize one of two powerful mantras:
The Prajnaparamita Mantra