

**Divine Love in the Moroccan Sufi Tradition: Ibn ‘Ajība (d.
1224/1809) and *His Oceanic Exegesis of the Qur’ān***

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As a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

In March 2018

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Abstract

Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d. 1224/1809) is one of the prominent Sufi mystics who lived in Morocco during the 13th/ 17th century. His importance in Sufi scholarship is a reflection of the fact that he is one of the original Sufi scholars who contributed immensely to elucidating ambiguous Sufi concepts that were, by their very nature, enigmatic and only accessible through Sufi adepts. He also stood out as an intellectual theoretician in the science of Qur’ānic esoteric hermeneutics because he was one of the few scholars who managed to convey theoretical concepts and esoteric theories of Qur’ānic interpretation in a language that could be accessed by those with an average level of intellect. One of these theories is the concept of divine love.

In this thesis, I propose to address the concept of divine love in Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība’s famous exegesis of the Qurān *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd* (Oceanic Exegesis of the Qurān). Over the course of this thesis, I endeavor to show how Ibn ‘Ajība combined what has been extensively written on the subject of divine love by different Sufi saints and mystics with the mystical exegesis of the Qur’ān. Ibn ‘Ajība is one of the early Sufis who connected theoretical works on the concept of divine love and practically applied them to the Qur’ān’s verses on love. This unique combination was an important breakthrough in the Sufi literature which other Sufi scholars then built upon in offering an exegesis of the Qur’ān - Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn Muṣṭafā al-‘Alawī (d.1934) was particularly important in this respect.

Explaining the concept of divine love through his mystical interpretation of the love verses in the Qur’ān ultimately aspire to connect the purpose of creation (which was due to the Creator’s love for His creation), to the turning point (the return of the creation to the Creator). This symphony of love that is an essential component of the story of creation is well-defined, clearly stated and deeply analyzed in Ibn ‘Ajība’s work. He also met the challenge of overcoming the elliptical mystical language of exposition that was used by earlier Sufis; accordingly, he successfully simplified the ambiguous style of writing and decoded their enigmatic mystical doctrines.

I hope that an analysis of Ibn ‘Ajība’s concept of divine love will stimulate the appetite of academic researchers to investigate the scholarly works of this luminary, and thus highlight his significance in the wider Sufi tradition. Ibn ‘Ajība's works have in general not received sufficient attention and deserve deeper and more sustained analysis.

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Acknowledgements

I was once told that the PhD is like a marathon: however, in this instance you compete against yourself to stay motivated, focused and to hold tight at times when you want to give up. As I approach the finishing line my heart is full of gratitude to God for not only allowing me the opportunity to research the topic of divine love but also for indulging me with divine love at every step of the way. At the beginning of this journey I was eager to reach my destination; now I realise that the real pleasure was in enjoying the ride with the beautiful company of God all the way.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude first and foremost to my supervisor, Dr. Leonard Lewisohn. Without his valuable knowledge, outstanding kindness and diligent guidance, I would not have been where I am today. His constant reiteration of the phrase ‘stay happy’ not only lightened my face for three years; it was also a real fuel that kept my heart motivated to continue the journey. His intellectual knowledge and spiritual guidance were the two forces which kept my mind on track when I dove into the sea of divine love. I would also like to thank Dr. Sajjad Rizvi, my second supervisor, who introduced me to the latest book published on Ibn ‘Ajibā in Turkish and thus opened the door for me to conduct a research training on Ibn ‘Ajibā’s works in Turkey. My deep gratitude is extended to Dr. Mahmut Ay, Professor of Islamic Studies in the University of Istanbul, for his kindness in dedicating his time and sharing his precious knowledge of shaykh Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība – this helped me greatly in shaping the final chapters of my thesis. My heartfelt appreciation goes to Shaykh Dr. Ali Jumaa, my spiritual mentor and the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, who supported me to begin my PhD journey. His intellectual and spiritual guidance illuminated my heart and blessed my steps.

I can’t thank my mother enough. She has always been my biggest supporter, my loyal friend and my lovely companion throughout this journey. I also would like to dedicate this thesis to my father’s soul – I know that he would have loved to witness the moment when this dream came true. In conclusion, I would like to thank my family and friends for their warmth, love and gentle support throughout this journey.

All praise is due to God through whose grace righteous acts are completed *al-ḥamdu*

li’l-lāh alladhī bi ni‘mati-hī tatimmu al-ṣāliḥāt الحمد لله الذى بنعمته تتم الصالحات

Introduction

Don't be content with any beloved save God
 And always be in ardent love and yearning
 Only then the unseen matter will become visible to your eyes
 And you will enjoy union and consummation¹

Ibn 'Ajība

Insofar as the central point of spiritual union between the Everlasting Being and what exists in transience (humankind) lies in treading the path which leads to divine intimacy, exploring the metaphysical nature of *eros* is one of the most central themes in Sufi literature both in verse and prose. This thesis engages with this doctrine in its development (as an integral part of the vast heritage of classical Sufi works left by prominent Sufi scholars and mystics) and situates it within the wider context of the Islamic tradition of love mysticism. In this study I conduct a critical analysis of the concept of divine love in the *Oceanic Exegesis of the Qur'ān (al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd)* written by Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība (d. 1224/1809), an erudite Moroccan Sufi scholar whose work expresses the mysteries and gems of the Qur'ān by deploying the metaphor of a sea whose depths are unfathomable and whose breadth is immeasurable.

Ibn 'Ajība made an immense contribution to Sufi Qur'ānic exegesis by clearly elucidating Sufi concepts that are enigmatic by nature and usually only accessible to Sufi adepts. He stands out as a mystical theoretician in the science of Qur'ānic esoteric hermeneutics because he is one of the few Sufi Qur'ānic exegetes who conveys theoretical concepts and esoteric theories in a language accessible and comprehensible to non-specialists. His conceptual framing of divine love thus provides the foundation of the thesis which undertakes the textual analysis of Ibn 'Ajība's mystical interpretation of the verses on love found in the Qur'ān. In this research, I explore how Ibn 'Ajība's great masterpiece came into being and ascertain his wider impact on the field of Qur'ānic scholarship. I also show how Ibn 'Ajība's theory of divine love enhances our understanding of other mystical concepts and enriches the body of Sufi literature.

i) Methodology

This thesis aims to show how Ibn 'Ajība constructed a new approach to divine love, a subject that has received extensive attention from different Sufi saints and mystics, each

¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, ed. Aḥmad al-Qurashī Raslān, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ḥasan 'Abbās Zakī, 1999), vol.1, p. 74.

of whom offered a different mystical exegesis of the Qur'ān. Ibn 'Ajība can be categorized as one of the early modern Sufis who sought to connect theoretical works on the concept of divine love to their practical application (to verses on love in the Qur'ān). This unique combination represented a hugely important breakthrough in the Sufi literature – which is attested to by the fact that other Sufi scholars, such as Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn Muṣṭafā al-'Alawī (d.1934), integrated this method into their own exegesis of the Qur'ān.

The primary source on which I draw is the monumental exegesis of the Qur'ān of Ibn 'Ajība *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd*.² My methodology, as detailed below and throughout each chapter, combines close textual analysis with a comparative approach focusing on several other eminent Sufi commentaries. Special attention was given to two esoteric exegeses on which Ibn 'Ajība depends as main sources of his work, the first being the *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). This was the most important Sūfī *tafsīr* upon which he relied in writing the esoteric section of his Qur'ānic exegesis. The second esoteric exegesis on which Ibn 'Ajība based himself was the Arabic *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* by the renowned Persian Sufi master, Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209).³ This work is a valuable addition to the genre of Sūfī Qur'ānic commentary in large part due to the originality it evidenced in discovering new spiritual meanings that had not been acknowledged by his predecessors. This comparative approach thus situates Ibn 'Ajība's thought in theological and historical perspective.

Over the course of my textual and comparative analysis, I have deeply engaged with Ibn 'Ajība's mystical approach, which integrates his theory of divine love with other Sufi doctrines, within a language that is simultaneously refined and comprehensible. The paradigm of divine love which he outlined (over the course of his mystical commentary on the verses of love in the Qur'ān) is significant because it paved the way for other Sufi exegetes to interpret metaphysical doctrines of divine love rooted in the Sufi tradition in their commentaries on the Qur'ān. This approach made an important and vital contribution to the field of Qur'ānic exegesis, leaving an indelible impact on future

² My research has drawn heavily upon two versions of Ibn 'Ajība's six volumes (*al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd*). In the first four volumes (vol. 1, 2, 3, 4) I drew heavily upon Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, ed. Aḥmad al-Qurashī Raslān, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ḥasan 'Abbās Zakī, 1999); volumes 5 & 6 instead drew upon Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya li'l-Kitāb, 2000, ed. Aḥmad al-Qurashī Raslān.

³ Alan Godlas, "Influences of Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* on Sufi Qur'ānic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's *'Arā'is al-bayān* and the Kubrāwī *al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*" *Journal of Sufi Studies*, vol.2, (2013), pp. 83, 84, ft. 19.

generations of Qur'ānic exegetes both within North Africa and other parts of the Islamic world.

My research stands on the shoulders of the work of John Louis Michon, a leading French scholar in Islamic studies who introduced Ibn 'Ajība to Western academic scholarship by translating his biography (along with a number of his other books) from Arabic to French. I have referred to Michon's works in detail in chapter one of this thesis. Although had Michon not made this vitally important contribution, Western academia would not have been able to gain access to Ibn 'Ajība's valuable scholarly heritage, my own analytical approach in addition aims to clarify, for the benefit of a Western readership, the level of originality of Ibn 'Ajība's works. Although his works were strongly influenced by renowned Islamic scholars of previous centuries, they were themselves highly influential primarily because they clearly articulated enigmatic Sufi doctrines and mystical concepts in an understandable language, which appealed to both the adepts and average readers alike. My research will hopefully provide a resource for academic researchers who wish to explore the vast intellectual heritage that Ibn 'Ajība left, as well as make a contribution to the field of mystical exegesis of the Qur'ān in particular, and to the genre of Sufi literature in general.

ii) An Overview of the Chapters

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter discusses Ibn 'Ajība's intellectual biography, starting with his place of birth in the city of Tétouan⁴ in the Northwest of Morocco, and the early years of his childhood. A thorough analysis of Ibn 'Ajība's commitment to authenticate the genealogy of the nobility of his ancestors and their connection to the Prophetic lineage is then conducted. In this context, an examination of the concept of Sharīfism (venerating the nobility of Prophetic descendants) in Morocco and the reason for its initiation by the Idrīsids (Ibn 'Ajība's ancestors) is explored. In particular, the importance of the concept of Sharīfism in shaping both the religious and political milieu in Morocco is outlined along with its impact on Ibn 'Ajība's scholarship in Islamic studies and his wide spiritual recognition. The discussion is extended to include his educational background both in the exoteric Islamic sciences – in which his scholarship was based on both speculative and discursive knowledge- and the esoteric

⁴ The city's name is not Arabic as it was established before the advent of Islam in North Africa. The name is of Berber origin. Berbers still inhabit some parts of North Africa and are particularly apparent in Morocco. Muḥammad Dawūd, *Tārīkh Tétouan*. (Tétouan: Ma'had Mawlay al-Ḥasan, 1959), p. 37.

sciences where he treaded a path of rigid asceticism and undertook harsh spiritual exercises. Ibn ‘Ajība’s spiritual path which started with his initiation into the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order – as will be seen in detail in chapter one- had an immense impact on the development of his mystical insights and intuitive knowledge. In this regard, the life and teachings of the two most influential Sufi saints (Mawlay Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī (d.1239/1823) and Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzaydī (d.1229/1813)), who left an indelible impact on Ibn ‘Ajība’s spiritual growth, are examined. Furthermore, a historical summary of the establishment of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order and its basic tenets are outlined along with its close ties to the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order out of which it branched. Moreover, the biography of Abu al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), the founder of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order, along with his basic teachings are analyzed in order to compare the degree of his influence on the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order.

In addition, chapter one touches upon the socio-political milieu and how the Idrīsid dynasty (founded in 173/789) succeeded in influencing Moroccan politics through the advancement of several ideas, such as the concept of Sharifism, integrating the Arabs into the political arena, introducing Islam to Morocco and spreading the Arabic language through the establishment of religious schools and mosques that were filled with Islamic scholars teaching different Islamic sciences. The discussion is also extended to the 15th century where the Idrisid dynasty gained huge popularity due to multiple factors (the Arabization of rural society, the political ascendancy of the Arab Sharīfī descendants and the successful leadership of the Sharīfs in their war against the invading Portuguese forces) which are examined in detail to underline the high status of Arab Sharīfs within Moroccan history. All these changes paved the way for the welcoming reception into the Moroccan society of Arab scholars such as Ibn ‘Ajība.

Furthermore, light is shed on the political significance of the city of Tétouan in which Ibn ‘Ajība was born and raised along with the political milieu in Morocco in general during his lifetime. The influence of the two main *Sharīfī* ‘Alawite rulers of the ‘Alawites’ dynasty (1664-present) (Mawlay Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdullāh (reg. 1171/1757-1204/1790) and Mawlay Sulaymān (reg. 1207/1792-1238/1822)) who reigned during the lifetime of Ibn ‘Ajība is thoroughly examined. After analyzing the political milieu, since it is important to address the religious and Sufi milieus, both during the lifetime of Ibn ‘Ajība as well as a century before his birth due to developments that occurred during the Sa‘diyan dynasty (955/1548- 1070/1659) which eventually affected the religious scholarship that Ibn ‘Ajība received in his early years, a study of Morocco’s religious

history in the late classical period is offered. A detailed analysis of the factors which indelibly impacted Morocco's religious history, and had a particularly pronounced influence on Sufi orders that were emerging at the time, is conducted.

In addition, the structure of Ibn 'Ajība's autobiography is carefully examined and the motivating force for his writing an autobiography is detailed. The position of his autobiography within the genre of biographical dictionaries and Sufi hagiographical writings is also examined. Moreover, detailed references to Ibn 'Ajība's works in both Islamic and European languages are listed in order to highlight the serious lack of scholarship concerning his works in the past. Although a substantial amount of scholarship on Ibn 'Ajība has emerged in the Arabic, Turkish and European languages over recent decades, it is quite clear that Ibn 'Ajība's life and works have not been given sufficient attention in either Eastern or Western scholarship.

Chapter two is divided into three sections. The first section examines the historical development of the genre of esoteric Sufi Qur'ānic exegesis in order to situate Ibn 'Ajība's Qur'ānic commentary within the field of Sufi hermeneutics. A close study is presented that examines the salient features and various methodological approaches adopted by various earlier esoteric Qur'ānic commentaries so as to distinguish the methodology of Ibn 'Ajība's exegesis from those of his predecessors.

The second section of this chapter evaluates the methodology that Ibn 'Ajība employed in composing both the exoteric and esoteric sections of his Qur'ānic exegesis compared to other methodological approaches adopted by other esoteric Qur'ānic commentaries. The degree of influence of earlier exoteric and esoteric Qur'ānic commentaries upon Ibn 'Ajība's exegetical work is evaluated. The level of originality presented in Ibn 'Ajība's work is assessed and compared to other Qur'ānic commentaries, in particular the Sufi exegesis of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* and Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī's (d. 606/1209) *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*. This allows us to gain a fuller comprehension of his contribution to the genre of esoteric Qur'ānic exegesis in general and the philosophy of divine love in particular. Other non-exegetical sources (both verse and prose) on which Ibn 'Ajība relied in composing his esoteric section of his exegesis are also thoroughly analyzed.

The third section of chapter two outlines Ibn 'Ajība's methodology in writing both the exoteric and the esoteric parts of his exegesis. The reasons for Ibn 'Ajība's composition of his exegetical work are cited and the underlying significance of the title chosen for his *tafsīr* is examined. An analysis of the weight which Ibn 'Ajība had given

to the exoteric section of his Qur'ānic commentary is conducted and a detailed explication of the different conventional levels of his exoteric interpretation is provided. Then the discussion extends to include Ibn 'Ajība's methodology in writing the esoteric dimension of his exegesis. The various techniques and interpretive tools that he adopted to convey spiritual subtleties and mystical themes are thoroughly examined.

Chapter three presents an outline of the paradigm of divine love in Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric exegesis through evaluating the theme of love in his exegesis in general and examining his approach to the verses of divine love in particular. The first section of this chapter addresses the linguistic origin and Sufi usage of four main terms (i.e. *wudd*, *ḥubb*, *maḥabba*, *'ishq*) which are heavily employed to describe the relationship between God and man. A brief survey of classical Sufi scholars who wrote on the subject of mystical love is also conducted in order to situate the theoretical framework of Ibn 'Ajība's language of divine love within the wider Sufi spectrum. An extensive analysis is carried out of various definitions of love and the underlying causes for the devotee's love for God. In this regard, heavy emphasis is placed on al-Ghazālī's intellectual exposition of the psychology of love insofar as Ibn 'Ajība quoted him heavily.

The second section of this chapter discusses the relationship between divine love and direct witnessing of God (*mushāhada*). It also discusses Ibn 'Ajība's proof for the primacy of God's love and how human beings – due to being endowed with unique qualities and a suitable natural disposition – are held to be the only eligible candidates to become witnesses of God's Oneness, a sublime state that is only achieved by loving God (*maḥabba*). One of the concomitant doctrines which Ibn 'Ajība employed in further explaining the intricate relationship between love and contemplation is the doctrine of divine power (*qudra*) and divine wisdom (*ḥikma*); these two concepts are discussed in exhaustive detail from a theological and mystical perspectives. Ibn 'Ajība's emphasis on creating a balance between recognizing God as the sole Actor who performs all actions, in accordance with His divine power, while realizing that human beings are also accountable for their actions and thus are either rewarded or punished in accordance with divine wisdom, is studied in depth. Once an equilibrium is reached between these two doctrines, divine love is aroused and witnessing divine Oneness can be attained. One of the significant manifestations of divine love is expressed in the Qur'ānic concept of the Trust (*amāna*) which is discussed in detail along with the underlying reason for Adam's

acceptance to bear this Trust at the time when all other creatures refused to bear this burden.⁵

The third section of this chapter discusses the uniqueness of human beings in realizing divine love and addresses how both the body and the spirit are integral factors in fulfilling the Trust of love, achieved through a balance between divine power (*qudra*) and human wisdom (*ḥikma*). The intrinsic relationship between the divine celestial origin of the human being's Spirit -in its total submission to the divine power- and the terrestrial character of the body, which is preoccupied with God's wisdom that is manifested in the realm of practical causes and effects, is the key factor for human beings in maintaining the balance between divine power and human wisdom. Ibn 'Ajība's definition of the Spirit (*rūḥ*) and the different names associated with it, based on various spiritual stages it undergoes, are discussed in this context. The chapter ends with a discussion of the heart's spiritual journey in the path of love and identifies the hindrances which stand as an obstacle to its progress.

The following three chapters (four, five and six) aim to evaluate the paradoxical mystical relationship between love and three associated essential themes: sin, gnosis, and the Unity of Being, in Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric commentary on the Qur'ān. A comparison of his mystical interpretation of these themes with those given by other Sufi writers, mainly al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (who are the two exegetes who Ibn 'Ajība quotes most extensively), is conducted in order to determine Ibn 'Ajība's own contribution to these themes.

Chapter four addresses the intricate relationship between love and sin and the issue of whether sin itself negates a sinner's claim to love God. Before plunging into discussing Ibn 'Ajība's mystical perspective towards love and sin, a brief summary of the views of different theological sects regarding doctrines of sin and the destiny of the grave sinner in Islam is introduced. Also the entangled relationship between faith (*imān*) and works (*a'māl*), and whether works are to be considered an integral part of faith, is discussed. After reviewing all these issues, the moderate approach of the Ash'arite school

⁵ William Chittick discussed the Qur'ānic doctrine of divine love and sought to convey love's central role in the story of creation in Islamic mysticism. He emphasized that the divine Trust (*amāna*) that God gave Adam in particular and humankind in general can be interpreted as the covenant of love between the Creator and the created human beings. Chittick also set out the different spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) that the aspirant must proceed through in his quest for divine love in his *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 238.

of theology to which Ibn ‘Ajība belongs is highlighted and discussed in detail in order to determine the impact of this approach on his mystical views regarding love and sin. Establishing the theological background regarding the issue of sin is necessary to explain Ibn ‘Ajība’s stance on sin in so far as he believes that love should be the bedrock and the starting point of any interpretation of any religious text on sin. An explication of how by the virtue of love the lover does not hurt or offend his beloved is provided and the idea of how, by the same token, God does not punish those whom He loves is reviewed.

An extensive discussion is conducted of Ibn ‘Ajība’s dichotomy between types of sins—the sins of the heart versus the sins of the body—and how the former may lead to eternal banishment whereas the latter may act as a gateway to repentance and proximity to God. The famous example that contrasts Adam’s to Satan’s sin is given along with a thorough explanation of the reason behind their different destinies. This discussion is followed by highlighting the significance of sin as a means of proximity to God and as a way of attaining divine election (*khuṣūṣiyya*). Also the essential role which sin plays in the relationship between servanthood and Lordship is emphasized. Ibn ‘Ajība’s argument regarding the fatality of the sins of the heart and how these can possibly lead to infidelity (*kufṛ*) is thoroughly examined and the examples of the Israelites and Lot’s people are highlighted in this regard. Ibn ‘Ajība’s idea of distinguishing between the sins of the heart and those of the body sets the groundwork for his argument against the validity of the claim of the sinner that he loves God while committing sins of the heart. At this stage, the difference between repetition of sin and insistence on it is clarified.

Turning to the sins of the body, the reason why these sins can be forgiven by God if the heart of the sinner is filled with remorse and humility is discussed by Ibn ‘Ajība in detail. An interesting comparison is conducted between the actions of the heart versus those of the body in drawing near God and the underlying reason for Ibn ‘Ajība’s favoritism towards the former over the latter is discussed. In explaining further the acts performed by the heart and those by the physical body, Ibn ‘Ajība constructed a spiritual-esoteric hierarchy and differentiated between two groups: The first are those who are at the degree of *iḥsān* or doing what is beautifully virtuous and the second normally pious folk (*ahl al-yamīn*); the differences between the actions of these two groups are discussed in detail. The chapter concludes with an exploration of Ibn ‘Ajība’s view about the possibility of the coexistence of sin and obedience in one act and how the one can be transformed into the other.

Chapter five analyzes Ibn ‘Ajība’s position regarding the paradoxical relationship between love and gnosis (*ma‘rifa*), along with determining which of them represents the apex of the Sufi Path - a subject of huge discussion among Sufi scholars. The chapter starts with distinguishing between the meanings of *ma‘rifa* and *‘irfān*, both of which are nouns that can be traced back to the same root of the verb *‘arafa* (to know). The initial reading of Ibn ‘Ajība’s opinion of gnosis makes no room for doubting its placement as the pinnacle of the Sufi Path. In this regard Ibn ‘Ajība adopts the classical position which views gnosis as the ultimate reason for creation, an issue which is discussed in detail. The esoteric interpretation of multiple Qur’ānic verses which deal with different stations of the Sufi Path is carefully examined in order to ascertain Ibn ‘Ajība’s view of gnosis as the climax of the Sufi Path. The discussion is then extended to the question of how Ibn ‘Ajība extensively quotes al-Ghazālī’s opinion on the station of love, yet he differed from his view regarding love being the ultimate aim of all the stations and the pinnacle of all the states. A thorough analysis of Ibn ‘Ajība’s argument for the primacy of gnosis over love is conducted and serious contradictions which undermine the validity of his position are found. Also a detailed examination of Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation of some verses concerning love and gnosis testifies to the fact that the weight of favoritism he gives to gnosis over love as the pinnacle of the Sufi Path is but an appearance. Ibn ‘Ajība’s proposition that love is the route leading to gnosis is analyzed and the example of the divine Covenant of *Alast* along with the significance of love in sealing this Covenant is carefully examined. The chapter ends with determining the real position of Ibn ‘Ajība regarding the paradoxical relationship between love and gnosis and how they both—after a thorough examination of his esoteric interpretation of multiple verses—stand on at equal footing on the pinnacle of the Sufi Path.

Chapter six discusses the degree of influence of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) on Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric Qur’ānic commentary, especially in relation to divine love. This chapter explains how this theory advances that all creation in its multiplicity is a manifestation of God’s divine attributes and thus regardless of their outward diversity, ultimately expresses divine unity. An extended discussion is provided regarding Ibn ‘Ajība’s understanding of the heart and how it must immerse itself in witnessing divinity within all created beings in order not to be distracted by the multiple outer forms of creation. Although the theory of the Unity of Being is a predominant doctrine throughout the esoteric Qur’ānic exegesis of Ibn ‘Ajība, the two polar extremes of this theory which he warned against are highlighted in detail: the first is lacking

perceptive insight to be able to see the subtle spiritual meanings (*al-ma'ānī al-latīfa*) lying beyond the physical materiality of bodies (*al-ajrām al-hissiyya*), and the second is falling into the error of Incarnationism and Unification with God (*ḥulūl wa ittiḥād*) through being overwhelmed with apparition of the divine secrets.

Before discussing Ibn 'Ajība's contribution to the theory of the Unity of Being and its relationship to divine love, a brief historical summary of the theory of the Unity of Being with its basic principles is introduced and the influence of the scholars of the Akbarian school on its development is highlighted. The criticism of the detractors of the theory of the Unity of Being is presented along with the response of Ibn 'Arabī and his disciples, after which Ibn 'Ajība's contribution to the theory of the Unity of Being is extensively discussed. The first theme highlighted by Ibn 'Ajība in this regard is the issue of Unity versus multiplicity in creation which allows us to get past the outer ephemeral existence of created beings and contemplate the unity of the divine Essence within. In this respect he elaborated the necessity to maintain a balance between witnessing the universe with all its transient beings as a manifestation of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) operating in the world of *ḥikma*, alongside its inner core manifesting the secret of the meaning of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) in the world of *qudra*.

The second theme addressed by Ibn 'Ajība is the insubstantial nature of the universe and how it does not have any independent existence on its own as nothing in reality exists save God. Observing the universe with all the transient forms of creation through the lens of divine unity is not achievable except through divine love – which enables the gnostic to see and hear only from God. In explaining this theme, Ibn 'Ajība adds that all the transient forms which act as a locus or vessels containing spiritual meanings, are in essence sublime meanings which in themselves have been congealed and solidified into forms. Gnostics through divine love are able to 'soften' these tangible forms and return them back to their original state of being sublime meanings and spiritual realities.

The third theme is a cautionary section in which Ibn 'Ajība warns us against conflating witnessing the insubstantial existence of the universe with all its multiplicity through the lens of divine unity with the heretical concepts of 'Incarnationism' and 'Unification' (*ḥulūl wa ittiḥād*). Ibn 'Ajība resolves the paradox of this doctrine—by which God reveals Himself in everything yet remains disassociated from all things, and defines the demarcation line between annihilation in God (*fanā'*) and the heresy of incarnationism. In his discussion of this matter, he exonerated renowned Sufis such as

Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn Sab‘īn, al-Shushtarī, and al-Ḥallāj, among others, against accusations that they were proponents of the heresies of incarnationism and unification.

The fourth theme in this chapter is the doctrine of ‘divine Oneness’ and its association with the theory of the Unity of Being. The ability of human beings to transcend apprehension of the tangible forms of creation to perceive the spiritual realities of divine Oneness therein is closely tied to their spiritual aptitude. Satan’s refusal to bow down to Adam versus the angels’ immediate prostration before Adam is a famous example which Ibn ‘Ajība uses to clarify this point. He categorizes people into three categories in respect to their degree of Oneness: the Oneness of divine Actions; the Oneness of the divine Attributes, and the Oneness of the divine Essence (*tawḥīd al-af‘āl*, *tawḥīd al-ṣifāt*, *tawḥīd al-dhāt*). He then postulated that divine Oneness (*tawḥīd*) is the most vital indication that can measure the degree of love one has for the Beloved and elaborated the relationship between the degree of Oneness of God that a devotee has and his degree of love of God.

The last theme of this chapter is the relation of affliction to love. Here Ibn ‘Ajība asserts that refraining from complaining about calamities to anyone save God is a prerequisite for love to blossom in the gnostic’s heart. When the belief in God’s Oneness, power and wisdom reaches its highest state, the gnostic becomes able to submit himself to the afflictions of Providence with utter reliance and trust in God, his heart neither overwhelmed with grief nor seeking help from others. Ibn ‘Ajība here provides us with a blueprint of how we can reach a stage of total absence of witnessing intermediaries in order to direct all our prayers to God. Lastly, Ibn ‘Ajība’s explanation of how love is the motivating force which sweetens the bitterness of affliction is addressed, along with his belief that afflictions are always accompanied by divine grace (*lutf*) and boons and through these graces God protects the heart of the gnostic so he may stand steadfast in the face of calamities that befall him is examined in detail.

The conclusion chapter discusses Ibn ‘Ajība’s intellectual influence on Sufi literature in Morocco and his impact on the rise and popularity of the newly established Darqāwiyya Sufi Order in the region of North Africa. In addition, the reasons underlying the limited impact of Ibn ‘Ajība on the wider Islamic world is extensively analyzed along with the vitality of studying his intellectual Sufi legacy in general and his influence on Sufi hermeneutics in particular. Finally, the impact of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Sufi teachings on restoring the imbalance between the body and the spirit, especially with the advent of

secularization and pushing religion to the sideline in the western world today, is examined.

iii) An Overview of Scholarship on Divine Love in Islam

This overview does not aim to be comprehensive but merely provide a general survey of some important spiritual masters and theorists on divine love. Each of the figures mentioned below is discussed in great detail in various chapters throughout this thesis.

The concept of divine love originates in the Qur’ān in the opening chapter *al-Fātiḥa* “*īyyāka na ‘budu wa īyyāka nasta ‘īn*” (‘it is You we worship, and it is from You we seek assistance’) (1:4).⁶ Inquiries into the nature of divine love can be traced back to two prominent Sufi figures, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d.185/801) and Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d.245/859) who made contributions towards its conceptualization, emphasizing renunciation and the rejection of worldly pleasures, in respect to divine love.⁷

The mystics of the Sufi school of Baghdad⁸ such as Abū Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907), Sumnūn al-Muḥibb (d. 298/910) and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945) played an important role in developing the doctrine of divine love.⁹ In addition al-Sarī al-Saqāfī (d.256/867) and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī (d.243/857), had a particular interest in spiritual stations and mystic growth. The Sufi school of Khurasan had as well a significant contribution to the development of the theory of divine love with prominent figures such

⁶ Shaykh al-‘Alawī (d.1351/1934) is a contemporary Sufi saint whose work complements many other classical Sufi scholars, previously, in his commentary on the fourth verse of *al-Fātiḥa*, he identified the innate nature of the relationship between the Creator and the created. This relationship, al-‘Alawī proposed, is based on love. In explaining that the Arabic orthography is very powerful in explicitly displaying this divine love, he combined the words إياك *īyyāka* (‘you we’). In this formulation, ‘you’ refers to God and ‘we’ refers to human beings. This combination of the two pronouns of the Creator and the created corresponds to an intimate relationship, in which proximity precedes the existence of the issue of servitude which forms the exoteric shape of the relationship conjoining the Creator and the created. Al-‘Alawī suggests that servitude does not represent the ultimate purpose of existence; rather, knowledge of the divine is the sole aim of creation and servitude becomes a secondary concern – that is, a means through which divine knowledge is sought. See Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, *al-Baḥr al-masjūr*, (Algeria: Mustaghānim Publishing House, ND), 1st ed., p. 47.

⁷ Ḥasan al-Shafī‘ī, and Abū al-Yazīd al-‘Ajāmī, *Fī’l-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*. (Cairo: Dār al-Salām. 2007), 1st ed., p. 50. See also Prince Ghāzī, *Love in the Holy Qur’ān*, (Chicago: Kazi publications, 2010). See also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazali on love, longing, intimacy & contentment*, translated by Eric Ormsby, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), p. XX, Leonard Lewisohn, “Divine Love in Islam”, *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, ed. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, vol. 1, p. 164.

⁸ Its beginnings is affiliated with the mystic figure Ma ‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815) Also and a number of erudite scholars were associated with this school such as al-Junayd (d. 298/910), Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899). See Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 48.

⁹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, p. 60. See also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazali on love, longing, intimacy & contentment*, translated by Eric Ormsby, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), p. XVI, Leonard Lewisohn, “Divine Love in Islam”, *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, ed. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, vol. 1, pp. 164-165.

as Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/810) who described those who reach the station of “Love for God” to have attained the ultimate level of sincerity,¹⁰ and Yaḥyā Ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) who advocated the doctrine of intimacy with the Divine.¹¹ All these Sufi mystics among many others provided the Sufi literature with new impetus during the next stage in the conceptualization of divine love.¹²

Some Sufi saints are famous for writing independently on the topic of divine love, yet did not propound any mystical interpretation of the love verses in their Qur’ānic exegesis, most likely because they preferred to treat this difficult topic in separate treatises or chapters of treatises. A few examples are relevant in this regard. The first is the prominent Sufi scholar, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), who did not engage with the theme of divine love in his Qur’ānic exegesis, *Tafsīr al-hidāya ilā bulūgh al-nihāya*,¹³ yet he discussed it thoroughly in his later Sufi work, *Qūt al-qulūb*.¹⁴ Al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1047) wrote an exegesis of the Qur’ān (*Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*)¹⁵ yet did not tackle the issue of divine love, although he did later discuss the spiritual stations of love (*maḥabba*) and longing (*shawq*) in his *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*.¹⁶

Other Sufi mystics dedicated whole or partial treatises to the subject of divine love without writing a separate Qur’ānic exegesis which treated the theme of love. For example, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī (d.378/988) in his work, *al-Luma’*, indicated three types of love – the first type is due to God’s benefaction and bounties, the second type of love stems from contemplating God’s attributes of majesty, grandiosity, power and immense knowledge, and the highest of which is loving God unconditionally without any reason attached.¹⁷ Another study is Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī’s (d. 428/1037) *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’tūf*, which is a widely recognized work that was entirely dedicated to the subject of love.¹⁸

¹⁰ Leonard Lewisohn, “Divine Love in Islam”, *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, ed. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, vol. 1, p. 164.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

¹² Ḥasan al-Shāfi‘ī, and Abū al-Yazīd al-‘Ajāmī, *Fī’l-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*. (Cairo: Dār al-Salām. 2007), 1st ed., p. 51.

¹³ Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Tafsīr al-hidāya ilā bulūgh al-nihāya*, (al-Shāriqa: Jāmi‘at al-Shāriqa, 2008).

¹⁴ Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu‘āmalat al-maḥbūbb wa wasf tarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd*, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm al-Ridwānī, (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 2001), 1st ed., vol. 2, pp.1041.

¹⁵ Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya li’l-Kitāb, 2000), 3rd ed.

¹⁶ Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd Ibn Sharīf, (Cairo: Maṭābi‘ Mu’assasat Dār al-Sha‘b, 1989), p. 517.

¹⁷ Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī, *Luma’*, (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ḥadītha, 1960, Baghdād: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1960), p. 88.

¹⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’tūf*, ed. Ḥasan al-Shāfi‘ī and Joseph Norment Bill, (Cairo: Dar al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 2007), 1st ed., p. 181. For an English translation, see al-

‘Alī Ibn ‘Uthmān Hujwirī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) was another Sufi mystic who discussed the doctrine of divine love in his Persian manual of Sufism, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, in which he emphasized the dichotomy of love, dividing it into love of God’s bounties and love of God’s Essence with a clear preference to the latter. He also elaborated the meaning of divine proximity (*qurb*) and how it requires a total abandonment of sensual passions so as the lover is able to submit himself humbly to love.¹⁹

‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī’s (d. 481/1089) work entitled *Manāzil al-sā’irīn ilā al-ḥaqq al-mubīn* “the Spiritual Stations of the Wayfarers to the Definite Truth” is a prominent work in the tradition of Sufi love mysticism in which he defined divine love as the utter attachment of the heart to the Beloved.²⁰ Another essential treatise of Anṣārī is *Ṣad maydān (The Hundred Fields)* in which an extensive analysis of the mystical journey that the novice undertakes until he reaches the final station (one hundred) of subsistence in God (*al-baqā’ bi’llāh*). He elaborates that the station of *uns* (intimacy) is one of the essential stations (ninety-five) through which the finite (human beings) is dissolved into the infinite (God), with the aim of annihilation in God (*fanā’*) as a final step towards subsistence (*baqā’*). The station of intimacy, he adds, entails proximity to God and this high status is exclusive to gnostics and lovers (*muḥibb*).²¹

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is perhaps the most renowned figure in the conceptualization of divine love in Islam. His *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* in a separate book entitled *kitāb al-maḥabba wa’l-shawq wa’l-uns wa’l-riḍā*, engages with the concept of

Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans Joseph Bell and Ḥasan Shāfi’ī, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Hujwirī, *Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, pp. 306-309, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp. 374-377; L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi’a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 157; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, p. 135-138; Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, p. 166; Derin, *From Rābi’a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, pp. 24-25.

²⁰ Abū Ismā’īl al-Harawī, *Manāzil al-sā’irīn ilā al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*, (Tunisia: Dar al Turkī, 1989), vol.2, p. 389.

²¹ Nahid Angha, An annotated translation and examination of the essential mystical teachings in Abdullah Ansari’s (396-481/1006-1089) *Sad Maydan (Hundred fields)*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Exeter University, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. (Exeter, 2006), pp. 99-100-104. This thesis was later published as: Nahid Angha (trans.), *Ansari’s Hundred Fields: An Early Persian Treatise on the Sufi Way* (London: Archetype 2010). God created the universe for all His attributes to become manifest – this clearly requires an infinite diversity. By virtue of the fact that God created the universe through love and love produces multiplicity, the whole universe is in a perpetual state of transformation and flux. (Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, p. 28). In traveling along the path of love and spiritual realization, the lover undergoes two fundamental experiences: union with the Beloved and separation from Him. Like all sets of opposites, the two terms are relative. At the highest stages, union is equivalent to subsistence in God – this is the other side of annihilation or the negation of the self. Union with God is self-annihilation and separation from Him is self-existence. If man continues to sustain the illusion of the real existence of his own ego, his own selfhood, he is far removed from God. It is only through the negation of himself that he can aspire to unify with God. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 200, 201.

divine love in respect to several categories where the aspirant sees and meets his Lord.²² Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of divine love has been thoroughly examined in a study by Binyamin Abrahamov as well as in Eric Ormsby's translation of *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*.²³ According to al-Ghazālī's concept of love, the human being finds pleasure in knowledge; because this knowledge is a function of the known object, and because God is the highest knowable object, true love is an intellectual knowledge of God.²⁴

Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d.c. 520/1126), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's younger brother, provided an essential insight into the metaphysics of divine love in his book, *Sawāniḥ*, in which he asserts that human beings are self-manifestation of God's divine beauty and identified *'ishq* as God's Essence.²⁵ This position comes in total opposition to the opinion of an array of classical Sufī scholars (which is discussed in detail in chapter three). Joseph Lumbard explains that the metaphysical nature of divine love in the thought of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī works as having both an ontological and soteriological level. The former is related to love as God's Essence, whereas the latter discusses the novice's spiritual journey which aims at erasing the duality of the lover and beloved in order to reach love which is the divine Essence.²⁶

Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) in his treatise on Sufism, *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, differentiated as well between the love of God's Essence and that of God's Attributes with the former being the ultimate aim of the aspirant. He added that loving God's Essence requires a spiritual transformation of the aspirant from a lover to a beloved- a necessary prerequisite for a spiritual union to follow suit.²⁷

Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), wrote extensively on the subject of divine love and provided a particularly erudite contribution in his masterpiece *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyah*.²⁸

²² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, ND), vol.4, pp. 446-447. See also Leonard Lewisohn, "Divine Love in Islam", *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, ed. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, vol. 1, p. 165.

²³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, translated by Eric Ormsby, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011).

²⁴ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazālī and al-Dabbāgh*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p. 190.

²⁵ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady, p. 4, see also Joseph Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," pp. 348, 350, 351. See also *Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, Lama 'āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhrud-dīn 'Irāqī: Divine Flashes* pp. 4, 5.

²⁶ Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 114-116.

²⁷ Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1966), 1st ed., pp. 503-509, see Derin, *From Rābi'a to Ibn al-Fārīdī*, pp. 25-26.

²⁸ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyah*, ed. 'Uthmān Yaḥyā, (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lā, 1983), vol. 9. For studies of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of love see, Ralph Austin, "Meditations on the Vocabulary of

Ibn ‘Arabī has described love as the divine motivating force which animates God’s creative activities. In his commentary on the famous sacred hadith of the Hidden Treasure, Ibn ‘Arabī stated that the ultimate purpose that God’s creative activities sought is to create love. God loves to be known, and so He turns His love towards things in their non-existent state and commands them to ‘be’; thus it came to pass that He might be known by every sort of knowledge.²⁹

William Chittick has also discussed the influence of the mystical writings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) and Rūmī (d. 672/1273) upon the concept of divine love. He contends that while both Sufi figures agreed upon the impossibility of defining love, both retained the belief that it was possible to describe its traces. Chittick’s book on Rūmī and his conceptual understanding of divine love revealed the latter’s belief that God’s love has brought the universe into existence; this original imperative provides the motive force for all activities in the world, from the smallest atom to the stars and heavens. This love finds its fullest reflection in man (in this derivative human love may once again become true divine love).³⁰ Rūmī’s development of the concept of divine love combined the two categories of God’s attributes, mercy and wrath, or gentleness and severity.

‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Anṣārī, who is better known as Ibn al-Dabbāgh (d. 696/ 1296), authored a mystical love treatise (*Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb wa mafātiḥ asrār al-ghuyūb*) in which he asserts that love is the origin of all mystical states and spiritual stations.³¹ He adds that love is always associated with the pain of veiling until the heart is able to fully witness the Beloved and a spiritual union between the lover and Beloved is reached.³²

Love and Union in Ibn ‘Arabi’s Thought”, *JMIAS*, vol. III, (1984), p. 6. Elizabeth Roberts, "Love and Knowledge," *JMIAS*, vol. VII, (1988), p. 63. "On Knowing the Station of Love," poems from 78th chapter of the *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, translated by Ralph Austin, *JMIAS*, vol. VIII, (1989), p. 1. William Chittick, "The Divine Roots of Human Love", *JMIAS*, vol. XVII, (1995), p. 55. Pablo Beneito, "On the Divine Love of Beauty", *JMIAS*, vol. XVIII, (1995), pp.1. Maurice Gloton, "The Quranic Inspiration of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Vocabulary of Love: Etymological Links and Doctrinal Development", *JMIAS*, vol. XXVII, (2000), p. 37. Manfred Halpern, "Rediscovering Ibn ‘Arabi’s Path to Wisdom, Compassionate Love and Justice in Contrast with Our Other Three Choices of Life", *JMIAS*, Vol. XXIX, (2001), p. 45. James Winston Morris, Ibn ‘Arabi’s 'Short Course' on Love", *JMIAS*, vol. 50, (2011), p. 1. William C. Chittick, "The Religion of Love Revisited", *JMIAS*, vol. 54, (2013), p. 37. Maḥmūd Ghurāb, *al-Ḥubb wa ‘l-maḥabba al-ilāhiyya min kalām al-shaykh al-akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī*, (Dimashq: Maṭba‘at al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1992), ed. 2nd.

²⁹ William Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), p. 77.

³⁰ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, (State University of New York, 1983), pp. 200, 201.

³¹ Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb wa mafātiḥ asrār al-ghuyūb*, ed. H. Ritter, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1959), p. 19, see also Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, p. 88.

³² Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, p. 28.

The next section aims to briefly examine early Sufi exegesis of love verses in the Qur'an so as to further contextualize the research conducted in this thesis.

iv) An Overview of Sufi Exegetes' Treatment of the Love Verses in the Qur'an

The conceptualization of divine love evolved over an extensive period of time in Islamic scholarship. Although the idea of divine love originates in the Qur'an,³³ the development of the theme of divine love was not immediately reflected in the Sufi exegesis of the Qur'an (and particularly within the verses on love which are abundantly cited in the Qur'an). Although there is no clear reason for the absence of the early integration of the concept of divine love within the genre of Sufi hermeneutics, as we have mentioned in the previous section, this could be partially due to the fact that most of the Sufi exegetes wrote on the concept of divine love in separate treatises and thus it is likely that they did not find the need to reflect on divine love in their exegetical works.

This section aims at surveying the genre of Sufi exegesis down to the thirteenth century. Two reasons underlie this choice of chronological scope, the first being that the formulation, development and crystalization of the independent genre of Sufi exegesis evolved during these centuries. The second reason is that almost all the Qur'anic exegetes who had the greatest impact on Ibn 'Ajiba's *tafsir* lived during this period.

Three centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Sufi esoteric Qur'anic exegesis had developed into an independent genre that was characterized by its own defining methodology and mystical themes. The nucleus of Sufi exegesis can be traced back to the 2nd/8th century with the writings of Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728), Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765) and Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/778).³⁴ In this initial stage, al-Sadiq's *tafsir* was the most significant commentary,³⁵ especially when it comes to the spiritual station of love (*al-mahabbah*) which he positioned as the 10th and penultimate station of the heart.³⁶ In his *tafsir*, al-Sadiq also emphasized that the most special type of worship in God's sight is love.³⁷ In the aftermath of this primary stage of Sufi *tafsir*, the first extant

³³ Prince Ghazi, *Love in the Holy Qur'an*, (Chicago: Kazi publications, 2010).

³⁴ Alan Godlas, "Sufism", in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 351, see also Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur'an Commentary ascribed to Ja'far al-Sadiq as contained in Sulami's Haqa'iq al-tafsir*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ L. Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love from Rabi'a to Ibn 'Arabi," pp. 153-154.

³⁷ Al-Baqli, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 71-72.

Sufi Qur'ānic exegesis which survives as an independent work is *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, which was written by Sahl Ibn 'Abdullāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).³⁸ The pre-eternal covenant of love between man and God was one of the major Sufi concepts -which finds its base in the Qur'ān- and was first introduced by Sahl al-Tustarī.³⁹ His *tafsīr* is also considered to be the principal Qur'ānic commentary that established the basis for later Sufi *tafsīr*; it therefore assisted in the emergence of a separate genre to which all the Sufi exegetes devoted their energy. Although al-Tustarī's *tafsīr* only consists of one volume, it is rich in both its exoteric and esoteric interpretations.⁴⁰ Tustarī's early attempt at esoteric commentary on the Qur'ān was followed in the 5th/11th century by Abū 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*. Although al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* is not considered to be an original or independent contribution to the genre of Sufi exegesis, it is a valuable historical source that brings together oral testimonies and written opinions of past and contemporary Sufi scholars. These included: Sahl al-Tustarī, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Adamī, known as Ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 309/921), Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945).⁴¹ For example, Shiblī states that *mahabba* was named as such because it erases from the heart any traces of the love of anyone save the beloved. As for Ibn 'Aṭā', he described love to be a state of constant self-reproach.⁴² Al-Kharrāz in his book *al-Sidq* clarifies that although love is initiated in the heart through contemplating God's bounties and blessings, love only takes these bounties as a point of departure and does not continue to be associated with them or measured by them. Love is a perpetual state instilled in the heart and is not affected either by bounties or afflictions. In other words, love should not increase by the number of blessings bestowed or decreased by the calamities befallen.⁴³

The same century also witnessed the emergence of a more developed structure of the genre of Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān. The Sufi exegesis *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* by Abū al-

³⁸ Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 68. See also Annabel Keeler, "Exegesis in Persian," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. IX, pp. 120-121.

³⁹ Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 90.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad Ḥussein al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1976), vol.2, p. 282. See Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl At-Tustarī*, (Berlin, New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1980). See also, al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'ān*, trns. Annabel Keeler & Ali Keeler, (Amman: Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought & Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011).

⁴¹ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, p. 69.

⁴² Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd Ibn Sharīf, (Cairo, Maṭābi' Mu'assasat Dār al-Sha'b, 1989), p. 522.

⁴³ 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *al-Ṭarīq ilā Allāh: kitāb al-sidq lī Abī Sa'īd al-Kharrāz*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2000), p. 81.

Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) was particularly important in this respect as it successfully balanced the literal understanding with the allegorical meanings of the text.⁴⁴ Al-Qushayrī as well emphasized the importance of love as an essential factor in the prostration of the body in worship without which religious rituals turn into merely routine actions devoid of spiritual meanings.⁴⁵

Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. c. 520/1126) composed a significant Qur'ānic exegesis, *Kashf al-asrār wa-‘uddat al-abrār*,⁴⁶ which was a valuable contribution to the Persian Sufi Qur'ānic hermeneutics. Although his *tafsīr* was based on the exegesis of his master, ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī Harawī (d. 482 /1089), Maybudī aimed at elucidating the mystical theories which were briefly addressed by Anṣārī and thus constructing a Sufi manual for novices who wish to tread the Sufi Path. In spite of Maybudī's intention of addressing only the Sufi adepts, the multi-layer structure of his *tafsīr* made it accessible to a wider audience.⁴⁷ When it comes to the concept of divine love, Maybudī believes that the covenant that was sealed at the day of *Alast* was the covenant of love and that all the other creatures shied away from the burden of the covenant except human beings who carried the covenant by the grace of God's love and thus felt no heaviness.⁴⁸

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209) provided one of the earliest attempts to establish a mystical interpretation of the verses on love in his Qur'ānic exegesis, *‘Arā’ is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*.⁴⁹ The significance of his *tafsīr* is due to the original spiritual meanings that had not been acknowledged by his predecessors.⁵⁰ For example, he sought to clearly distinguish human and divine love while indicating the supremacy of divine love. He also maintained that love is one of the attributes of the divine Essence and thus God loved Himself and became both the lover and the beloved.⁵¹ Examining Kazuyo Murata's book on Rūzbihān, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*,

⁴⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, pp. 3-6.

⁴⁵ Ibid, vol. 3, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa-‘uddat al-abrār*, ed. ‘Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran: Intishārāt Amīr Kabīr, 1951).

⁴⁷ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 9-11, 39-40.

⁴⁸ Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, pp. 49, 50, see also Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 63; see also al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur’ān*, trans. by Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler, pp. 58, 219, ft. 6, 248, 249, see also Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’ is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008). See also Alan Godlas, “The ‘Arā’ is al-bayān, the Mystical Qur’ānic Exegesis of Ruzbihan al-Baqli,” Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1991.

⁵⁰ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries*, pp. 75-76.

⁵¹ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’ is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol.1, p. 317, see also Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, (Albany, SUNY press, 2010), p. 75.

indicates that contemplating cosmic beauty and the wonders of creation do not accumulate to God's love and that at this stage only faith is developed. As for God's love, it is attained through contemplating human beauty which serves as a locus for the self-disclosure of the beauty of God's Essence. Rūzbihān adds that the very first encounter between God and the human spirits was at the day of *Alast* in which His divine beauty was revealed and the human spirits fell in passionate love with Him and the covenant of love was sealed.⁵² It is also worthwhile to note that Rūzbihān wrote a beautiful treatise on mystical love and passionate love (*'ishq*) in Persian, which was entitled *Jasmine of the Lovers* (*'Abhar al-'āshiqān*).⁵³

'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) was another prominent Sufī figure who developed the concept of divine love in the Qur'ānic exegesis which was attributed to him (*Tafsīr al-Jīlānī*).⁵⁴ He therefore succeeded in developing a theory on divine love that was entitled "the love of unicity versus human love". Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī (d. 1127/1715) in his Qur'ānic exegesis, *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*,⁵⁵ also referred to the concept of perfection of divine love – here it is presented as overarching, encompassing and guiding every relationship. The source of perfection of love is God; He is therefore the only being worthy of love. The love of all creation follows on from the love of God. Despite the valuable scholarly contribution of Ḥaqqī's esoteric exegesis, as far as I know there was no influence of his work on Ibn 'Ajība's Qur'ānic commentary. I have extensively discussed these and other commentaries and their significance in chapter two.

v) Ibn 'Ajība's Contribution to Sufi Exegesis of Love Verses in the Qur'ān

Centuries later, Ibn 'Ajība, under the oversight of Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzaydī (d. 1229/1813) and Mawlay al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī (d. 1239/1823), wrote his Qur'ānic exegesis. They had both asked him to write a Qur'ānic commentary which combined both exoteric and esoteric interpretations. Ibn 'Ajība outlined his exegetical methodology by

⁵² Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*, (Albany, SUNY Press, 2017), p. 113.

⁵³ Carl W. Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1999), pp. 82, 84, 91, see also L. Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love from Rābi'a to Ibn 'Arabī," p. 172, 173; Omid Safi, "On the Path of Love towards the Divine," pp. 34, 35; Carl Ernst, "Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as 'Essential Desire'," p. 185-186. See also Leonard Lewisohn, "Divine Love in Islam", *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, ed. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, vol. 1, p. 163.

⁵⁴ 'Abdul al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Tafsīr al-Jīlānī*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī, (Quetta: al-Makṭaba al-Ma'rūfiyya, 2010).

⁵⁵ Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī, *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Istanbul: al-Maṭba'a al-'Uthmāniyya, 1911).

observing that in each verse he would initially engage with the linguistic and morphological aspect before proceeding to an exoteric interpretation, and then concluding with an esoteric commentary. He therefore adopts an approach which balances the summative and extensive length of the commentaries.⁵⁶

Although Ibn ‘Ajība’s synthesizing of the theoretical concepts of divine love and their practical application in the Qur’ānic verses on love had clear Sufi precursors, the essential challenge that needed to be addressed was how to make these ideas relevant and accessible. This project was clearly set apart from the ambiguous style of exposition, excessive use of symbolic allusions and the employment of elliptical language integrated by his forebears. In addition, it was also opposed to enigmatic concepts which are used as an aid to explain what is metaphysical in nature (and which therefore extend beyond the realm of conceptual understanding and intellectual realization). Sufi exegetes believed that the extraction of esoteric meanings was a privilege that should only be granted to those who practice incessant and rigorous spiritual exercises – this enabled them to purify their hearts and thus be worthy of the divine gifts of illumination which qualified them to unearth the gems of the Qur’ān. However, many Sufi scholars did not succeed in deciphering enigmatic Sufi terms and mystical concepts or in presenting them in an accessible and appealing language.

Ibn ‘Ajība insisted upon maintaining a balanced approach to the text when attempting to make his esoteric commentary generally understandable and easily comprehensible, so that even those with no previous knowledge of Sufism would be able to understand his key concepts and themes. The fact that his work was greeted with enthusiasm by both exoteric and esoteric scholars alike clearly attests to his success in this regard. Therefore much of my focus throughout the thesis is on the question of how Ibn ‘Ajība’s exegesis of the Qur’ān expressed and explicated divine love in clear and accessible language.

⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 50, 51.



Chapter I

Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d.1224/1809): Life and Times



Chapter 1. Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d.1224/1809): Life and Times

Before the discussion plunges into the depths of Ibn ‘Ajība’s *Oceanic Exegesis of the Qur’ān* (*al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*) and analyses his contribution to the development of the concept of divine love in Sufism, it will first be helpful to introduce the intellectual biography of Ibn ‘Ajība. This part of the discussion will touch upon his background, his formal education and the turning point which guided his transition from an exoteric scholar (who relied on speculative and discursive knowledge) to an adept in esoteric Islam.⁵⁷ This transitional point in the life of Ibn ‘Ajība opened the mysteries of Sufism up to him. It led him to tread a path of rigid asceticism and undertake ardent spiritual exercises. This, along with other kinds of spiritual training, had an immense impact and consequently contributed to the development of his mystical insights and intuitive knowledge. It will also be helpful to dedicate considerable time to the socio-political and religious milieu in which Ibn ‘Ajība was born and raised – this will in turn contribute to an improved understanding of how religious scholarship in Morocco impacted on his life and works.

It will be equally important to discuss Ibn ‘Ajība’s autobiography and to situate it within the genre of Sufi autobiographical writings. In acknowledging the lack of general references to Ibn ‘Ajība (and especially in western scholarship), I will provide a detailed account of the Arabic, English, French and Turkish sources which refer to him. A survey of these topics will contextualize his Sufi Qur’ānic exegesis and will clearly establish his unique contribution to the concept of divine love.

The primary source of Ibn ‘Ajība’s biography that will be drawn upon is his own “Autobiography” (*al-Fahrāsa*).⁵⁸ His autobiography is one of his last written works which was finished in 1222/1807, only two years before his death.

⁵⁷ For my usage of the terms ‘esoteric’ and ‘exoteric’ see below: I.iii.

⁵⁸ *Fahrāsa* is the infinitive form (*maṣdar*) or the noun of the verb *fahrāsa* with the radical *f.h.r.s.* It is linguistically defined according to *al-Mu’jam al-wajīz* (Cairo: Majma‘ al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya, 1989, p. 483) – that is, as a book which contains the listing of book names in a specified order. It can also be defined as the index featured at the beginning or end of a book in which all the topics, biographies, chapters and sections are included in a certain order. Al-Farāhīdī in *Mu’jam al-‘ayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003, vol.3, p. 343) mentions only the definition of the word *fahrāsa* and does not refer to its linguistic origin. Other dictionaries claim a non-Arabic linguistic origin for the word and explain that the word found its way to the Arabic language through the process of Arabicization and do not refer to its origin. (Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 3rd ed., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993), vol. 6, p.167, (al-Azhary, *Tahdhīb al-lughā*,

Jean Louis Michon provided an initial translation of the *Fahrassa* from its original Arabic to French in 1968 – this was entitled *L'autobiographie (Fahrassa) du Soufi Marocain Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība (1747-1809)*. The book was republished in several French editions⁵⁹ and was finally translated into English by David Streight in 1999.⁶⁰

1.1) Birth and Family Background

Ibn 'Ajība was born in the city of Tétouan,⁶¹ which is in the Northwest of Morocco and which is around ten kilometers from the Mediterranean coastal sea line. It is located at the foot of Dersa Mountain which is inhabited by a number of tribes. Ibn 'Ajība belonged to the village of A'jabīsh, which was mainly inhabited by the Anjra tribe.⁶²

Although there is uncertainty regarding the exact year of his birth (1160/1747 or 1161/1748)⁶³, Ibn 'Ajība's "Sharīfī" lineage is incontestable. While most historians claim that his year of death was 1224/1809;⁶⁴ a minority of historians have provided a different date.⁶⁵ Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība was descended from the lineage of Lady Fāṭima, the Prophet

Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyya li'l-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjama, 1964-1967), vol. 6, pp.521. Al-Fayrūzabādī in *al-Qamūs al-muḥīṭ* states that the original non-Arabic word is *fihrist*; however, it does not mention its original language. (Beirut: Risāla publication house, 2005), 8th ed., p. 564. *Al-Mu'jam al-wasīṭ* states that the word *fihrist* originated in Persia and was Arabicized. (Cairo: Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya, Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Dawliyya, 2004, 4th ed., p. 704).

⁵⁹ Jean-Louis Michon, *L' Autobiographie (Fahrassa) du Soufi Marocain Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība (1747-1809)* (Leiden: Brill 1968, 1969, Milāno: Bibliothéque de l'Unicorne, 1982).

⁶⁰ Jean-Louis Michon, *The Autobiography (Fahrassa) of a Moroccan Soufi: Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība (1747-1809)*. (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999: 1st ed, 2011: 2nd ed.).

⁶¹ The city's name is not Arabic as it was established before the advent of Islam in North Africa. The name is of Berber origin. Berbers still inhabit some parts of North Africa and are particularly apparent in Morocco. Muḥammad Dawūd, *Tārīkh Tétouan*. (Tétouan: Ma'had Mawlay al-Ḥasan, 1959), p. 37.

⁶² 'Abd al-Salām Ibn Sawda, *Ithāf al-maṭāli'*. ed. Muḥammad Hajī. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islamī, 1997), 1st ed., vol.1, p. 104.

⁶³ Ibn 'Ajība's mother's account of his birth date suggests that he was born in 1160 or 1161. Mahmut Ay suggests that the birth date is more likely to be the former. He proceeds to note that Ibn 'Ajība was, according to his mother, born when Tetoun was besieged by al-Mustādī. Ay contends that al-Mustādī has been mistakenly depicted as the besieger of Tetoun. In instead ascribing this role to al-Mustāzī Ibn Ismā'īl, he suggests that 1160 and not 1161 is the correct year of Ibn 'Ajība's birth. See İsmail Yiğit, "Endülülüs (Gırnata) Beni Ahmer Devleti ve Kuzey Afrika İslam Devletleri", *Siyasi-Dini-Kültürel-Sosyal İslam Tarihi*, (İstanbul, Kayıhan Yay, 1995), p. 461 and Muhammed Davud, *Tarih Titvan*, (Titvan, Matba'atu'l-Mehdiyye, 1959-1978), vol.2, p. 214 found in Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu: İbn Acibe'nin el-Bahru'l-Medid Adh Tefsiri*, (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2011), p. 96.

⁶⁴ Khayr al-Dīn al-Zarkālī, *al-'A'lām*, (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm le- al-Malāyīn, 2002), 15th ed., vol.1, p. 245, al-Ḥasan al-Kūhīn, *Ṭabaqāt al-shādhuliya al-kubrā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005), 2nd ed., p. 152, 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kittānī, *Fihris al-fahāris wa al-athbāt*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ghad al-'Arabī, 1982), 2nd ed., vol.1, p. 854, Ibn Sawda, *Ithāf al-maṭāli'*, vol.1, p. 104.

⁶⁵ Both Sarkīs and Muḥammad Bashīr Zāfir have claimed that he died in around 1266/1849 – this claim was also noticed by J.L Michon, *Le Soufi Marocain Aḥmad Ibn Ajība et son Mi'rāj*, *Glossaire de la Musique Muslumane*, (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1989), p. 23. Ḥasan Kūhīn (refer to his book *Ṭabaqāt al-shādhuliyya*) also corrects the erroneous year quoted by these two historians. Although Michon claims that the same mistake appears in the Zarkālī's *al-A'lām*, the edition at hand clearly states the correct death year of Ibn 'Ajība. The lexicographer, Muḥammad Makhlūf (d.1360/1941) did not only quote the

Muḥammad’s daughter, and ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet’s cousin. His noble affiliation runs through the Ḥasanī branch – this is clearly stated in his autobiography.⁶⁶

In evidencing clear pride in his noble ancestry, Ibn ‘Ajība committed the very first chapter of his autobiography to establishing and proving his noble lineage – this chapter was entitled “An account of our ancestors and what appertains to our lineage” (*Dhikr aslāfinā wa mā yata’allaqu bi nasabinā*). A long, detailed account which traced his genealogy back to the Ḥasanī faction (see above) appears in the handwriting of Ibn ‘Ajība’s great grandfather, al-Ḥusayn, a Sufi renowned for his numerous miracles. Ibn ‘Ajība mentioned some of his great grandfather’s spiritual powers, the most famous of which is the extraordinary ability to shorten his traveling distance (*tayy al-arḍ*) – this enabled him to perform pilgrimage every year and earned him the name “Ḥajjūjī”. Ibn ‘Ajība claimed that this famous miracle-working power ran through his lineage.⁶⁷

In addition to the documents written by Ibn ‘Ajība’s great grandfather, which demonstrated his noble lineage, Ibn ‘Ajība also sought external authentication of his noble lineage – this was provided by the testimonies of his own learned teachers. He admitted that the issue of authenticating his noble genealogy preoccupied his mind; he therefore evidenced a clear reluctance to mention his genealogy in any of his books: he only did this after fully verifying his noble ancestry through the renowned Sufi master Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī (d.1239-1823) who is the Shaykh of his own spiritual master Shaykh Muḥammad al-Būzaydī (d. 1229/1813). Their testimony provided Ibn ‘Ajība with certitude of his noble lineage and he finally found comfort and peace on this issue.⁶⁸

The nobility of his genealogy was confirmed by his contemporaries and was also indicated by writers (of biographical dictionaries) from following generations.⁶⁹ Although

death date erroneously (1266/1849) – his work also contained a typo error, and was written as 1366/1946 (*Shajarat al-nūr al-zakkiyya fī ṭabaqāt al-mālikiyya*, (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), vol.1, p. 571.

⁶⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība narrates his full name as ‘Abdullah Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Mahdī Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Ajība al-Ḥajjūjī Ibn ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Ajība. Then the affiliation goes back to Saḥnūn Ibn Mawlay Ibrahīm Ibn Mawlay Muḥammad Ibn Mawlay Musa, Ibn Mawlay ‘Abdullah and it continues back to Mawlay Aḥmad Ibn Mawlay Idrīs al-Aṣghar Ibn Mawlay Idrīs al-Akbar Ibn ‘Abdullah al-Kāmil Ibn al-Ḥasan II Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Sibt Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib. See Michon, *The Autobiography*, pp.131, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu: İbn Acibe’nin el-Bahrü’l-Medid Adlı Tefsiri*, p. 93, 96.

⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrassa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Şālih Ḥimdān, (Cairo: Dār al-Ghad al-‘Arabī, 1990), 1st ed., p. 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 18, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 94, ft. 26, pp. 93-94.

⁶⁹ Such as al-Ḥasan Ibn Muḥammad al-Kuhīn al-Fezī (d.1347/1928) who is the author of *Generations of the Shadhuliyya masters (Ṭabaqāt al-Shādhuliyya al-kubrā)* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2005), 2nd ed., p. 152, ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir Ibn Sawda (d. 1400/1979) in his work *Ithāf al-maṭālī*, p. 104, and Khayr al-Dīn al-Zarkalī (d. 1396/1976) who wrote the voluminous work *Renowned Names (al-A’lām)*, vol.1, 15th ed., p. 245. Although Yusuf Sarkīs (d. 1351/1932) succinctly cited Ibn ‘Ajība’s full name in his

Ibn ‘Ajība has long escaped the attention of Orientalists and even specialists in Moroccan Sufism⁷⁰, it is worth noting that the French historian, Evariste Lévi-Provençal (d. 1956), referred to an instance in which Ibn ‘Ajība’s noble ancestry was briefly mentioned (...*était un chérif hasani*...).⁷¹ As if acknowledging that this thorough authentication of his noble paternal lineage was not sufficient, Ibn ‘Ajība also dedicated the last part of the first chapter of his autobiography to discussing the virtuous traits of his great-grandmother, Fāṭima bint Ibrahīm Ibn ‘Ajība, a holy saint renowned for her clairvoyance and numerous miracles. She died around (1100-1110 /1688-1699) and her tomb became a favorite destination for those seeking blessings.⁷² He also mentioned the noble lineage of his mother, Raḥma, who was the daughter of Sīdī Muḥammad- the father of Ibn ‘Ajība’s paternal uncle. He described her as a woman of great piety and devotion who would spend most of her time engaged in invocation of God (*dhikr*); he also presented her as being tender in heart, generous in character and possessed of a true sense of altruism.⁷³

He ended the chapter on his noble lineage by piously stating, as did other authors of similar Sufi autobiographies (such as al-Sha‘rānī), that all the virtuous characteristics and prodigies of his family are better understood if we contemplate their origination within the Creator. Accordingly, he urged his readers not to focus too closely upon the works of created beings, who are but a reflection and manifestation of God’s majesty and beauty.⁷⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība was married to six wives throughout his life and had a total of thirty one children, although only nine of them survived.⁷⁵

1.2) The Concept of Sharīfism

work *Dictionary of the Arabic and Arabicized Publications (Mu‘jam al-maṭbū‘āt al-‘arabiyya wa al-mu‘arraba)*, he did not fail to mention that he is a Ḥasanī. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, ND), vol.1, pp. 169-170. However, a number of authors fail to refer to Ibn ‘Ajība’s honorable ancestry. These include ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kiṭṭānī’s (d. 1382/1962) “The dictionary of Indices and Catalogues” (*Fihris al-fahāris wa al-athbāt*) (Beirut: Dār al-Ghad al-‘Arabī,1982) vol.1, 2nd ed., p. 854; also see Muḥammad al-Bashīr Zāfir’s (d. after 1329-1911) Malīkī biographical dictionary “The Valuable Diamonds” (*al-Yawāqīt al-Thamīna*), (Cairo: al-Malāji’ al-‘Abāssiya, 1324/1906), p. 70.

⁷⁰ Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Evariste Lévi-Provençal, *Les historiens des Chorfa*, (Paris: Emile Larose, 1922), p. 336.

⁷² Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 42.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 47, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 94 & ft. 28 in the same page.

⁷⁴ Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 45.

⁷⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrasat al-‘ālim al-rabbānī al-kabīr sayidī Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-‘Umrānī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya,2013), 1st ed., pp. 94- 96.

While the commitment of an entire chapter to one's own noble lineage may strike some readers as a gratuitous act of self-praise, further exploration of the significance of the concept of Sharīfism in Morocco, which takes into account its use as a matrix for claiming spiritual validation and political authority, helps Ibn 'Ajība's true motivation to become more comprehensible. The Idrīsids (Ibn 'Ajība's ancestors) were the first to introduce the concept of venerating the nobility of Prophetic descendants (*ashrāf*) – these descendants were considered to be the bearers of Prophetic spiritual influence (*baraka*), and this concept was later used to gain political legitimacy. Particular emphasis was placed upon the concept of Sharīfism, which appeared prominently in the writings of Sufī scholars and could be dated back to the twelfth century.

The groundwork for the association between Sufism and Sharīfism in Morocco was laid down by one of the Idrīsīd rulers who, through his descendants, played an essential role in establishing the Sharīfan paradigm of sainthood (*wilāya*) in Sufism. The Idrīsīd Imam, 'Alī Ḥaydara (d. 234/849), who became the ruler of Fez, had died and left behind his infant son, Aḥmad Mizwār. As a result of Ḥaydara's death, the imamate was not passed to Aḥmad Mizwār, the great grandson of Idrīs II, who moved from Fez to northern Morocco and established a fortress for himself among the Berber tribes of Sanhāja, who adopted him as their spiritual leader. With the aim of fostering their relationship with the Sharīfī prophetic descendants, the chiefs of these tribes asked Aḥmad Mizwār to honor them with his *baraka* by delegating a member of his family to reside among them. Aḥmad Mizwār chose his son, 'Abd al-Salām, who was recently married, to become a Sharīfī delegate in these tribes. In honoring the advent of the Sharīf 'Abd al-Salām, the tribe changed their name to "Banū 'Arūs" (sons of the Bridegroom), an epithet by which they are still known today. For seven generations the *sharīfī* family resided among the Berbers of Banū 'Arūs.

The concept of Sharīfism in Morocco was tied to another unique notion called Maraboutism, which was a socio-religious movement that aimed at initiating religious reformation and raising the level of piety of the local population. The *murābiṭs* (marabouts in English) were pious and righteous men who established hermitages within different tribes. With the introduction of Sufism, some of these sanctuaries turned into *zāwiyya* which were presided over by the Idrīsīd *ashrāf* who carried the spiritual grace (*baraka*) by virtue of the fact that he descended from Prophetic lineage. This unique mixture of the three notions: Maraboutism, Sufism and Sharīfism, accentuated the influential status of the *ashrāf*, both in the religious and political arena. Sufism in

Morocco was thus largely led by the descendants of the Prophet and the political scene was dominated by either their direct leadership or implicit influence.⁷⁶

Promoting the nobility of the Sharif Idrīsid Prophetic descendants not only helped to establish political legitimacy and harbor public support; it also left indelible marks on the structure of the Moroccan Sufi orders, by making possession of prophetic pedigree a major characteristic of Sufi scholars and spiritual masters. Perhaps this was the main reason why Ibn ‘Ajība so consistently sought to validate his noble prophetic ancestry.

The concept of Sharīfism, along with its political and religious impact in Morocco, has drawn the criticism of some historians. The rising political and religious power of the *ashrāf* was presented by Abun-Nasr, to take one example, as deeply problematic. He argued that the voices of authentic religious scholars, who were grounded in Islamic scholarship and eligible to influence the intellectual and religious life of Moroccans, were drowned out. This was because the only voices that could be heard and largely obeyed were those of the *ashrāf* and the Sufi shaykhs. Abun-Nasr argued that as the power of the *ashrāf* increased, it became increasingly inconceivable that their political authority, which was grounded within religious influence and prophetic lineage, was increasingly unchallengeable. An atmosphere of unquestioning obedience and blind trust of the ruler prevailed, and this situation was further reinforced by the fact that the preaching of Sufi leaders revolved around these concepts.⁷⁷

Abun-Nasr’s argument inclines towards a distinctive division which divides authentic religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*) from *ashrāf* and Sufi Shaykhs. However this distinction establishes no line of intersection and no room for mutual concordance between both groups. In other words, his argument conveys the assumption that Sufi Shaykhs and *ashrāf* are generally not grounded in Islamic scholarship or advanced in religious sciences – upon this basis they cannot be categorized as “authentic” scholars. In contrast, the history of Moroccan Sufism, and this is a theme that this chapter will later expand, based itself upon the pursuit of religious knowledge and advancement in Islamic studies – these were considered to be the only appropriate gateway to Sufism.

In addition, Moroccan Islam, as Vincent Cornell has expounded, did not sharply distinguish between Sufi saints and religious scholars. Aḥmad Zarrūq, the renowned Shādhulī Sufī scholar, therefore stated that Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is indispensable

⁷⁶ Victor Danner, “The Shādhiliyyah and North Africa Sufism”, *Islamic Spirituality Manifestations II*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (New York: A Crossroad Herder Book, 1997), pp. 42, 43.

⁷⁷ Jamīl M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, 1975), 2nd ed., pp. 230-231.

to Sufism because it enables the exoteric laws to be known. To the same extent, *fiqh* without Sufism is not efficacious because the real value of actions is tightly connected to their esoteric realization, which is the realm of Sufism.⁷⁸ The scholars of the principles of legal theory (*Uṣūl al-fiqh*) played an essential role in spreading Sufism in Morocco. The Sufi legal theorists were interested in advancing a model of the righteous companions of the Prophet who led an ascetic Sharī‘a-bound life – this helped to promote a type of mysticism that was tightly connected to Islamic jurisprudential law and which considered Sufism to be an integral part of the realm of normative Islam. Moreover, many of the Sufi hagiographers (such as al-Tādilī and Ibn Qunfudh) were juristic scholars who gave Moroccan sainthood a juridical flavor; in addition, they also rigorously adhered to the exoteric teachings of Islamic law.⁷⁹

1.3) Ibn ‘Ajība’s Exoteric Education

Before delving into Ibn ‘Ajība’s exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) knowledge and education, it will be beneficial to reflect on the meaning and my choice of translating the terms *zāhir* and *bāṭin* as exoteric and esoteric respectively. Exo means the “outer” or that which appears on the surface level and realized by the intellect. The knowledge of the *zāhir* (*al-‘ilm al-zāhir*) is a kind of purely theoretical knowledge which is achieved by those who possess the necessary intellectual abilities without the need for any spiritual training or mystical knowledge. Ibn ‘Ajība in his autobiography categorized the different sciences of morphology, grammar, jurisprudence, logic, ḥadīth, Qur’ānic exegesis and rhetoric as being part of the exoteric sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-zāhira*). As for the term ‘esoteric’, eso means “inner,” and ‘esoteric knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-bāṭin*) thus epistemologically connotes the use of higher spiritual faculties as theoretical intellectual abilities do not suffice to achieve this sort of knowledge.

The Arabic term used by Ibn ‘Ajība to relate this type of knowledge is *bāṭin* which is a very expressive term that refers to the inner, unapparent knowledge which lies beneath the surface level of exoteric knowledge (*‘ilm al-zāhir*). According to Ibn ‘Ajība, achieving the knowledge of *bāṭin* requires incessant spiritual training and rigorous

⁷⁸ Vincent J. Cornell, “Faḳīh Versus Faḳīr in Marinid Morocco: Epistemological Dimensions of a Polemic,” in Frederick de Jong & Bernd Radtke (ed.) *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill), 1999, p. 297.

⁷⁹ Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 17, 66, 67.

mystical exercises in order for the heart to be purified and thus prepared to be the locus of divine intuition. That being said, a lot of the sciences which Ibn ‘Ajība defined as *exoteric* sciences also possess a deep *esoteric* dimension accessible only to Sufi adepts who practice rigorous spiritual training in order to be granted the gift of divine illumination. The most obvious example of this is the science of Qur’ānic exegesis, in respect to which the linguistic, juristic and the literal interpretation of the apparent meaning of the text belongs to *exoteric knowledge*, whereas the spiritual dimension belongs to the *esoteric understanding* of the sacred text. Another example is the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Here Ibn ‘Ajība mentions how different rituals such as pilgrimage have deeper spiritual meanings aside from their apparent juridical ones, as will be explained later.⁸⁰ In brief, it is possible for a single science to have both broad exoteric and profound esoteric dimensions.

Going back to Ibn Ajība’s autobiography, he clearly states that he was not interested in playful activities and instead favored prayer and solitude.⁸¹ His childhood was spent in a mountainous region which was heavily occupied with shepherds and farmers: taking the sheep out to pasture gave him plenty of time for reading and contemplation. His grandfather, al-Mahdī, was the first influential figure in his life, and from him he originally learnt Qur’ānic recitation. Ibn ‘Ajība described his grandfather as taciturn, virtuous, and with no interest in mingling with people. He learned different Islamic sciences with eminent teachers of his time and studied Qur’ānic recitation under a number of learned reciters who included Sīdī Aḥmad al-Ṭālib, Sīdī ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Kattāmī al-Sanhājī, Sīdī al-‘Arabī al-Zawādī and Sīdī Muḥammad Ashmal. During his early years, he managed to read the *Ajrūmiyya*, which is a compendium of grammar written by Ibn Ajurrūm al-Sanhāj (d. 723/1323), the *Alfiyya* which is a treatise on grammar written by Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Mālīk (d. 672/1274) and *al-Murshid al-mu’īn*, which is a treatise on religious virtues and ethics written by Ibn ‘Āshir (d. 1040/1631).⁸² At around the age of eighteen, he started his formal pursuit of exoteric knowledge – this included study of the sciences of jurisprudence, logic, Arabic morphology, hadith,

⁸⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 100. Likewise in his esoteric interpretation of verse 2:43 of the Qur’ān regarding the spiritual meaning of ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), he glosses it as the submission of the heart to the decrees of Providence, and in his mystical explanation of paying alms (*zakat*), he interprets it as purifying the self through humility and abasement.

⁸¹ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 96.

⁸² Michon, *The Autobiography*, pp. 16, 49-51, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 97, 98, see also Jean-Louis Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, (Cambridge: Archetype, 2010), pp. 20-21.

Qur'ānic exegesis and rhetoric. In noticing Ibn 'Ajība's thirst for knowledge, the jurist Sīdī Muḥammad al-Sūsī al-Samlālī advised him to undertake the study of religious sciences in the school of Qasr al-Kabīr, a city in the Northwest of Morocco.⁸³

He spent two years in the school studying with the jurist Sīdī Muḥammad al-Drīglī.⁸⁴ During this time he was totally immersed in studying and paid no heed to any other matter. Ibn 'Ajība had an intense study program as his day was divided between attending classes, studying and praying. He then returned to Tétouan to continue his studies, and this again accounted for all his time. He had a wide range of teachers who taught him different Islamic sciences. His teachers included Aḥmad al-Rushay (d. 1210/1795), the renowned jurist, with whom Ibn 'Ajība studied the *Alfiyya*⁸⁵ on grammar; *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl*⁸⁶ provided insight into a wide range of subjects, including Mālikī jurisprudence (the *Sullam*⁸⁷ and *al-Sanusī's Mukhtasar*)⁸⁸, logic (the *Sughrā* and the *Kubrā*)⁸⁹, theology (the *Muqni*)⁹⁰, Qur'ānic orthography (*al-Khazrajīyya*)⁹¹ and prosody. Shaykh Ibn Quraysh (d. 1197/1782)⁹² also provided Ibn 'Ajība with further insight into Qur'ānic exegesis and the hadīth collections of both Bukhārī and Muslim. Under his

⁸³ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Fahrāsa*, p. 29.

⁸⁴ This is how Michon writes the name p. 53; in the Arabic version, it is al-Warīklī p. 29.

⁸⁵ Essential didactic poem on Arabic grammar written by the grammarian, Abū 'Abdullah Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1237) Ibn 'Aqīl, *Sharḥ Ibn 'Aqīl 'alā alfiyya Ibn Mālik*, (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1980), 20th ed., vol.1, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Mukhtasar Khalīl* is an essential precis on Mālikī jurisprudence that was written by the renowned Mālikī Jurist, Khalīl Ibn Ishāq Ibn Musa Ibn Shu'ayb (d. 776/1360) known as "al-Jundī". See: Khalīl Ibn Ishāq, *Mukhtasar Khalīl fī fiqh Imām dār al-hijra*, (Beirut: Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2004), 2nd ed., pp. 5,6.

⁸⁷ *Al-Sullam al-murawnaq* is a compendium treatise on Logic written by the eminent scholar, 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Saghīr al-Akhḍarī al-Mālikī (d. 983/1575).

⁸⁸ *Mukhtaṣar al-Sunūsī* is a compendium treatise on Logic written by Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/ 1490) which was well received among scholars and which elicited many commentaries - see Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī (d. 1276/1895). (*Hāshiyat al-Bayjūrī 'ala mukhtaṣar al-Sanūsī*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Taqaḍdum al-'Ilmiyya, 1903), 1st ed.

⁸⁹ These are two treatises on Islamic theology, the *Kubrā* is voluminous in size whereas the *Sughrā* is more abridged. Both treatises are written by Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/ 1490). See: al-Sanūsī, *'Umdat ahl al-tawfīq wa al-tasḍīd fī sharḥ 'aqīdat ahl al-tawhīd al-Kubrā*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Jarīdat al-Islām, 1898).

⁹⁰ *Al-Muqni* is the most renowned treatise on Qur'ānic orthography which was written by Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī (d. 444/1052) See: Ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī, *Al-Muqni 'fī ma'rifat marsūm maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār*, (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Tadmuriyya, 2010).

⁹¹ *Matn al-khazrajīyya fī 'ilm al-'arūḍ wa al-qawāfī* which is known as *al-Rāmīza*, is a didactic poem on the science of rhyme, prosody and meter that was written by Diyā' al-Dīn 'Abdullah Ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī al-Mālikī (d. 650/1252). One of the famous commentaries on the *Rāmīza* is *Raf' hājib al-'uyūn al-ghāmīza 'an kunūz al-rāmīza* by Shams al-Dīn al-Diljī al-'Uthmānī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2011) 1st ed.

⁹² 'Abd al-Karīm Ibn Quraysh (d. 1197/1782) was the first teacher of Ibn 'Ajība in the city of Teteoun. He was an influential orator and a renowned jurist who presided over the judiciary in Tangier. He is frequently referenced in Ibn 'Ajība's *Fahrāsa* (Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd*, editor's introduction, vol. 1, p. 21).

guidance, Ibn ‘Ajība also studied *al-Risāla*,⁹³ Zaqqāq’s *Lāmiyya*⁹⁴ and *Tuḥfat al-ḥukkām*⁹⁵ (on Mālikī jurisprudence) *Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ*⁹⁶ (on rhetoric), al-Subkī’s *Mukhtaṣar*⁹⁷ (on Legal Theory), *al-Shifā*⁹⁸ and *al-Hamziyya*⁹⁹ (on the character traits of the Prophet.)¹⁰⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība had also studied under the auspices of the erudite jurist, Muḥammad al-Janwī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1200/1785)¹⁰¹ who wrote a number of books on legal theory (*Sharḥ al-waraqāt*)¹⁰² and Sufism (*Ḥikam Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh*¹⁰³, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*¹⁰⁴ and *Usūl al-ṭarīq*)¹⁰⁵ on Sufism.¹⁰⁶ After al-Janwī died, Ibn ‘Ajība travelled to Fez to continue his pursuit of knowledge; here he worked with distinguished scholars such as the prominent

⁹³ *Al-Risāla fī fiqh al-Imām Mālik* is a treatise on Mālikī’s jurisprudence that was written by Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullah Ibn Abū Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996). (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, ND), p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Tuḥfat al-Ḥukkām bi masā’il al-tadā’ī wa al-aḥkām* is a didactic poem of 260 verses on Mālikī jurisprudence which is widely known as *Lāmiyyat al-Zaqqāq* (this is due to the letter Lām being the rhyming letter at the end of all the verses). The poem was written by Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Qāsim Ibn Muḥammad al-Tajībī (d. 912/1506), known as “al-Zaqqāq” See: Muḥammad Ibn Mayara al-Fāsī, *Fath al-‘alim al-khallāq fī sharḥ Lamiyyat al-Zaqqāq*, (al-Dār al-Baydā’: Dār al-Rashād al-Hadītha, 2008), 1st ed., pp. 16, 18, 20.

⁹⁵ *Tuḥfat al-ḥukkām fī nukat al-‘uqūd wa al-aḥkām*, a didactic poem on Mālikī jurisprudence written by Abū Bakr Ibn ‘Āṣim al-Ghīrnāṭī (d. 829/1425).

⁹⁶ *al-Talkhīṣ fī ‘ulūm al-balāgha* is an exposition of the renowned book on rhetoric titled *Miftāḥ al-‘ulūm* by Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf al-Sakkākī. *Al-Talkhīṣ* was written by Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāfi‘ī al-Dimishqī (d. 739/ 1338) who is known as “al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī”. (al-Qazwīnī, *al-Talkhīṣ*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2009), p. 5.

⁹⁷ *Jam‘ al-Jawāmi‘ fī usūl al-fiqh* is a compendium on legal theory written by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1369), (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003).

⁹⁸ *al-Shifā’ bi- ta’rīf ḥuqūq al-muṣṭafa* is a renowned treatise on Prophetic manner that was written by al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād Ibn Mūsa al-Maghribī (d. 544/1149).

⁹⁹ *al-Hamziyya fī madḥ khayr al-bariyya* is a poem that was written by Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad al-Būṣhīrī (d. 696/1295) which praises the Prophet Muḥammad.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrāsa*, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Junwī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1200/1785) was one of the most eminent scholars in the city of Teteoun and a celebrated teacher of Ibn ‘Ajība. He was known as an erudite jurist and legal theorist with a grounding knowledge in Sufism. Ibn ‘Ajība accompanied him until his death in 1200/1785.

¹⁰² *al-Waraqāt* is a precis on legal theory that was written by ‘Abd al-Mālik Ibn ‘Abdullah al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). It was commented on by the Mālikī legal theorist and renowned jurist, Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ra’īnī (d. 954/1547) who was known as “al-Ḥaṭṭab” (refer to his book entitled *Qurrat al-‘ayn*, which Ibn ‘Ajība studied).

¹⁰³ *Al-Ḥikam* is a collection of Sufi aphorisms that was written by Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Sakandarī al-Mālikī (d. 709/1309). It had many commentaries, one of which was written by Ibn ‘Ajība himself (which was entitled *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*). Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrāsa*, p. 40. For an English translation of *al-Fahrāsa* see Jean-Louis Michon, *The Autobiography (Fahrāsa) of a Moroccan Soufi: Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (1747-1809)*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999: 1st ed, 2011: 2nd ed.). For an English translation of the *Ḥikam* see Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh, Sufi aphorisms: *Kitāb al-ḥikam*, trans. Victor Danner, (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, the quintessential classical Sufi manual written by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072).

¹⁰⁵ *Risālat usūl al-ṭarīq* is a book of advice that provides guidance to novices traveling along the Sufi Path. It was written by Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad Ibn ‘Issa al-Barnasī al-Fāsī (d. 899/1493) who was known as “Zarrūq”.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 21.

traditionist, Muḥammad al-Tawdī Ibn Sawda¹⁰⁷ (d. 1209/1794). He also worked with al-Ṭayyib Ibn Kirān¹⁰⁸ (d. 1227/1812), Muḥammad Ibn Banīs¹⁰⁹ (d. 1213/1798), Abū al-Ḥasan Ibn Shaṭīr al-Ḥasanī¹¹⁰ (d. 1191/1777) and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alī al-Wurzāzī¹¹¹.

Throughout his study of exoteric knowledge, Ibn ‘Ajība led an intense devotional life. He noted it was rare for him to spend a night without staying awake in prayer.¹¹² Ibn ‘Ajība’s exoteric journey culminated when he received different teaching licenses from a number of renowned scholars, who granted him the status of being a teacher. After becoming an accredited scholar, he returned to Teteoun and began teaching exoteric sciences as an eminent scholar in 1190/1776 or 1191/1777 – he would remain here for sixteen years.¹¹³ Exoteric knowledge was only the beginning of a long journey he was about to embark on.

¹⁰⁷ Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad al-Tawdī Ibn al-Ṭālib Ibn Sawda (d. 1209/1794) was an erudite Moroccan scholar who excelled at many Islamic sciences such as Qur’ānic exegesis, jurisprudence, Sufism, logic, theology and legal theory. Ibn ‘Ajība spoke highly of his scholarship in his biographical dictionary. (Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 22).

¹⁰⁸ Al-Ḥāfiz Abū ‘Abdullah al-Ṭayyib Ibn ‘Abd al-Majīd Ibn Kirān (d.1227/1812) was one of the distinguished teachers of Ibn ‘Ajība in Fez, who was renowned for his contribution to Qur’ānic exegesis and Ḥadīth traditions. (Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 22).

¹⁰⁹ Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Banīs al-Fāsī (d. 1213/1798) was an esteemed Moroccan scholar who specialized in the science of the divisions of inheritance and who was acknowledged by other scholars of this science (Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 23).

¹¹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan Alī Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Shaṭīr al-Ḥasanī (d. 1191/1777) was a notable Moroccan grammarian and jurist who was described by Ibn ‘Ajība to be patient in teaching and as being possessed of an ascetic life and a humbling character. (Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 21).

¹¹¹ Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alī al-Wurzāzī was one of Ibn ‘Ajība’s teachers in Teteoun who instructed him on rhetoric and legal theory. (Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 23).

¹¹² Michon, *The Autobiography*, pp. 52-56, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 99.

¹¹³ Michon, *The Autobiography*, pp. 73-75, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 100.



Map of all the major cities of Morocco. Those where Ibn ‘Ajība studied and lived are given in red.¹¹⁴

1.4) Ibn ‘Ajība and the Sufi Path

Ibn ‘Ajība viewed the pursuit of the exoteric knowledge of religious law as a gateway that would enable him to explore deeper esoteric meanings and achieve higher spiritual realization. His first introduction to the esoteric science of Sufism was through the book of *al-Ḥikam (Sufi Aphorisms)* by Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh, which he first encountered at a friend’s house. The book must have made an instant impression as Ibn ‘Ajība decided to make a copy of it for himself.¹¹⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība would later write one of the most frequently cited commentaries on the book (*Iqāz al-himam*).

Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah (d. 709/1309) was an erudite scholar and a renowned Sufi mystic who would later become a central figure in the life of Ibn ‘Ajība.¹¹⁶ While the *Ḥikam* of

¹¹⁴ This map can be found at this site: <http://www.vidiani.com/large-detailed-political-and-administrative-map-of-morocco-with-all-cities-roads-and-airports/>

¹¹⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrasa*, p. 40, for an English translation of the *Ḥikam* see Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh, *Sufi Aphorisms: Kitāb al-ḥikam*, trans. Victor Danner, (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

¹¹⁶ Being a follower of the Shādhuliyya Sufi Order, Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh undertook Sufi studies with two prominent figures, namely Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī (d. 656/1258) who was the founder of the Shādhuliyya Sufi Order and his direct disciple, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī (d. 616/1220), see Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Ḥikam al-‘aṭā’iyya: sharḥ wa taḥlīl*, (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2003), pp. 8,9.

Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah elicited many commentaries, its spread in Morocco was largely attributable to Ibn ‘Abbād al-Rundī (d. 792/1390), the eminent Spanish Sufi mystic writer whose most frequently cited commentary on the *Hikam* was entitled *Ghayth al-mawāhib al-‘aliyya*.¹¹⁷ Although the book of Aphorisms of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh was not substantial in size, it provided a comprehensive blueprint that enabled readers to realize the true essence of divine Oneness; in addition to introducing the Sufi Path and its different doctrines,¹¹⁸ it also anticipated a purification of the heart and the attainment of higher ethical standards.¹¹⁹

After reading the *Hikam*, along with al-Rundī’s commentary on it, Ibn ‘Ajība turned away from the pursuit of exoteric knowledge and inclined towards solitude. He totally immersed himself in God’s invocation and sent prayer and salutations upon Prophet Muḥammad. Although his father was worried about his son’s new orientation, Ibn ‘Ajība was intent upon continuing to pursue the path of esoteric knowledge. He decided to ascend the mountain of ‘Alam in the Northwest of Morocco, where the tomb of Mawlay ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Mashīsh¹²⁰ (d. 625/1227) stands, and to take it as his sanctuary. However, he changed his mind after Sīdī Ṭalḥa¹²¹ appeared to him in a dream during a night of nocturnal devotion near his tomb, and instructed him to “study science in depth”¹²². In following Sīdī Ṭalḥa’s advice, Ibn ‘Ajība reluctantly returned to the pursuit of exoteric knowledge. However, he struggled to focus on his studies because, as he later described, his heart was preoccupied with the invocation of God. After spending around four years studying and worshipping, Ibn ‘Ajība finally began to teach exoteric knowledge in Tétouan.¹²³

It is important to note that Ibn ‘Ajība inclined towards solitude by nature and preferred to spend his time in worship. After being introduced to the Sufi Path by al-

¹¹⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, p. 38, for an English translation of Ibn ‘Abbād’s letters see Ibn ‘Abbād, *Letters on the Sūfī path: Ibn ‘Abbād of Ronda*, trans. John Renard, (New York : Paulist Press, 1986).

¹¹⁸ Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Hikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya: sharḥ wa taḥlīl*, (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2003), p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Hikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya: sharḥ wa taḥlīl*, (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2003), p. 10.

¹²⁰ Ibn Mashīsh was a renowned mystic, Prophetic descendant and the Sufi master of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī, the founder of the Shādhuliyya Sufi Order. Jean-Louis Michon, *The Autobiography*, ft. 121, p. 73.

¹²¹ Abū Ya‘lī Ṭalḥa Ibn ‘Abdullah al-Durayj al-Sabtī was an eminent scholar and a Sufi mystic of Spanish origin. He was born in Granada and raised in Sibta. After the Spanish capture of the city, he moved to Teteoun. He was known for his ardent zeal to participate in the jihād against the Crusader forces to liberate Sibta. He was buried in Teteoun and his tomb became a famous destination for pilgrims. His exact date of death was not known but historians ascertained that he lived during the first half of the 9th/15th century. (Al-Jam‘iyya al-Maghribiyya, *Mu‘allimat al-Maghrib*, (al-Ribāt: Maṭābi‘ Salā, 1989), vol. 12, p. 3991-3992).

¹²² Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 73.

¹²³ *Ibid*, pp. 73-75.

Rundī's commentary on *Hikam*, this sense of isolation strengthened and he felt a growing desire to retreat to the mountains. It was no wonder that his father expressed concern about this excessive devotional zeal; from his perspective, a balancing of esoteric and exoteric knowledge was needed if equilibrium on the Sufi Path was to be maintained.

This intense worship, ceaseless invocation and efficacious contemplation culminated in his encounter with, and initiation, by Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī, who is better known as the founder of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order¹²⁴ and his disciple Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzaydī (d. 1229/1813) (who became the spiritual master of Ibn ‘Ajība in 1208/1793-94.)¹²⁵ The rigorous spiritual exercises and the ascetic lifestyle that Ibn ‘Ajība underwent were subsequently documented in his *Fahrāsa*,¹²⁶ which provides clear insight into his personal experience in attaining esoteric knowledge.

His initiation into the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order resulted in some drastic changes to Ibn ‘Ajība's life. The fairly comfortable life that he used to live was replaced by a rigid life of asceticism – coarse clothing was the official dress code of the Darqāwiyya. He had taught exoteric knowledge in Teteoun for sixteen years, and he had attained an eminent teaching position and scholarly recognition: however he had to give all of this up to tread the Sufi Path.

Ibn ‘Ajība began wearing the Sufi patchwork frock (*muraqqa‘a*) and was asked by his Shaykh al-Būzaydī to save but the barest necessities for himself, his family and the novices (*mūrīd*) for only couple of days. He was required to give away everything that was not a strict necessity.¹²⁷ In counselling this action, Shaykh al-Būzaydī sought to purify Ibn ‘Ajība's soul of any traces of arrogance and egotistic tendencies. For the same reason, he asked Ibn ‘Ajība to personally attend to the Sufi novices' needs, wash their clothes and serve them food in his home. This purification culminated with the most painful part of the spiritual training: his Shaykh ordered him to beg in shops and at the doors of mosques. After struggling to adjust to this task over a few days, he began to beg. In describing this experience, he noted that “nothing in this world was more painful for

¹²⁴ The Darqāwiyya Ṭarīqa was named after its founder Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī (1737-1823), who was a follower of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī (d. 656/1258). Mawlay al-‘Arabī advocated the renunciation of worldly pleasures and maintained that poverty and asceticism were the *sine qua non* of reaching proximity with God and attaining intuitive knowledge. Thomas K. Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, (Lanham, Md., & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), p. 56, see also see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 101, 102 ft. 67.

¹²⁵ Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 76-78, Michon, Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence, p. 21.

¹²⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrāsa*, pp. 52-56.

¹²⁷ Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 105.

me than that, and nothing has cut deeper into the arteries of my soul".¹²⁸ Ibn 'Ajība worked in the most menial and most humiliating jobs, such as sweeping the *sūq* (market), lifting garbage, and carrying water. These demeaning jobs aimed to extract the love of glory and wealth,¹²⁹ which can be described as the most tenacious habits of the soul.

A closer reading of Ibn 'Ajība's account of the hardships he endured leads the reader to wonder whether this rigid scheme is feasible in modern times. Ibn 'Ajība realized that the treading of the Sufi Path, which is undertaken with the aim of acquiring spiritual realization and gnosis, cannot be achieved without the guidance of the spiritual master who purifies the soul of the aspirant and removes the thick veils which conceal the soul and block the vision of divine unity. He therefore acknowledged his debt to Shaykh al-Būzaydī, his Sufi master who opened the world of intuitive knowledge up to him. Ibn 'Ajība was consequently proud to invoke the chain of the Shaykhs of his Sufi order, when he listed the different teachers who had taught him exoteric knowledge.¹³⁰

This chain begins with Shaykh Muḥammad al-Būzaydī, his direct master, and then runs on to Sīdī Abu al-Ḥasan al Shādhilī before extending to al-Sharīf al-Ḥasan, and culminating with his father, 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Prophet Muḥammad.¹³¹ After receiving the necessary spiritual training and intellectual knowledge, Ibn 'Ajība was ready to lead a Sufi life full of scholarship, enlightenment and guidance. At this point, it will be instructive to consider the influential Sufi teachers of Ibn 'Ajība, with a view to identifying how they impacted upon his Sufi writings.

1.5) Mawlay Muḥammad al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī : Life & Teachings

It has already been noted that Mawlay Muḥammad al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī (d.1239/1823), the founder of the Darqāwiyya Sufi order, was one of the most important influences upon Ibn 'Ajība's Sufism. Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzaydī, his famous disciple, was also Ibn 'Ajība's master. A closer engagement with their lives and Sufi teachings will therefore provide clear insight into Ibn 'Ajība's Sufism. Mawlay Muḥammad al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī's noble lineage can be traced back to Mawaly Idrīs al-Akbar (d. 175/791) through his grandfather Sīdī Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf (Abū Darqa)"¹³² He was born into the Berber

¹²⁸ Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 91.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 89-94, see also Michon, *Ibn 'Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 21-22.

¹³⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Fahrasa*, pp. 60-62.

¹³¹ Figure.1 (p. 74) provides a detailed chart which sets out Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric chain of transmission.

¹³² "Abū Darqa" means "the one with the leather shield" as Sīdī Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf, Mawlay al-Darqāwī's grandfather, used to carry a shield to protect him in wars and this name became famous and ran

tribe of Banū Zerwāl who inhabit the northern regions of Morocco that neighbor the city of Fez. After mastering Qur’ānic recitation in his childhood, he moved to Fez to pursue his education in Islamic Studies, working alongside the most renowned scholars of the time. During his years of study, he described himself as assiduous in worship, ardent in nocturnal devotion, and a constant visitor to the tombs of saints, where he prayed for a Sufi master who would guide his path to God.¹³³ After numerous nights marked by ceaseless supplications, Mawlay al-Darqāwī met the Sufi master, Sīdī Alī Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-‘Imrānī (who was known as “al-Jamal”) (d. 1194/1780).¹³⁴

A closer reading of Mawlay al-Darqāwī’s initiation in the Sufi Path enables us to more clearly observe the differences that emerged between master (Mawlay al-Darqāwī) and student (Ibn ‘Ajība) as they sought to travel in the Sufi Path. While the former was active in his relentless search for a Sufi master, and was clearly motivated by anguish and yearning, the latter was instead more indecisive. The meeting between Ibn ‘Ajība, Mawlay al-Darqāwī and al-Būzaydī therefore appeared to have been a casual occurrence, as opposed to the product of a prearranged plan.

Upon committing to the Sufi Path, Mawlay al-Darqāwī preoccupied himself with devotions, invocation of God and spiritual exercises. He would later describe the struggles that he had to endure in beginning to travel along this path: walking barefoot, wearing coarse clothing, eating dry food, sleeping in the streets and begging were just some of the painstaking instructions that Shaykh al-Jamal had given to him, with a view to removing egoistic tendencies of the lower self.¹³⁵ Shaykh al-Jamal was known for his theoretical grounding in Sufism, which he had gained through long years of companionship and service to renowned Sufi mystics of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order, who included al-‘Arabī Ibn Abdullah and Ibn Aḥmad Ma’n al-Andalusī (d. 1165/1751) – he accompanied the latter for sixteen years until his death. Subsequently, Shaykh al-Jamal headed to al-Ramīla, south of Fez, and established his own *zāwiya*, where he gained many followers.¹³⁶ Mawlay al-Darqāwī was one of the devoted followers, and he remained in his company until Shaykh al-Jamal’s death in 1194/1780.¹³⁷

in the family. (‘Abdullah al-Tālīdī, *Al-Muṭrib bi- mashāhīr awliyā’ al-Maghrib*, (Beirut, Dār al-Amān, 2003), 4th ed., p. 205.

¹³³ Al-Tālīdī, *Al-Muṭrib bi- Mashāhīr awliyā’ al-Maghrib*, p. 206.

¹³⁴ Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī, *Majmū‘at Rasā’il Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī*, ed. Bassām Bārūd (Abū Dhabī: al-Mujamma‘ al-Thaqāfī, 1999), pp. 41-43, see also Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 19-20.

¹³⁵ Al-Darqāwī, *Majmū‘at Rasā’il*, p. 53.

¹³⁶ ‘Abdulla al-Tālīdī, *Al-Muṭrib bi- mashāhīr awliyā’ al-Maghrib*, ft.1, p. 207.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 205- 208.

1.6) The Establishment of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order

After his master's death in 1780, Mawlay al-Darqāwī founded the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order which was based in the Banū Zerwāl tribe in northern Morocco, within the *zāwiya* of Bū Brīh, and later moved to the *zāwiya* of Amadjdjūt in 1863, which also belonged to the same tribe. This newly founded Sufi Order soon became an appealing destination for people from all walks of life, and its teaching gradually became dominant in north and east Morocco, along with the west of Algeria.¹³⁸

His Sufi teachings centered upon renouncing worldly gains and devoting one's life to worship. As ascetic life, low food intake, limited social engagement and the assiduous invocation of God were the hallmarks of his order. In addition, he staunchly and vocally opposed popular superstitions which had become falsely associated with Sufism.¹³⁹ He assiduously sought to restore original Shādhulī teachings which advocated equilibrium between the crust of *sharī'a* and the kernel of the *ṭarīqa*.¹⁴⁰

In order to obtain a better understanding of Mawlay al-Darqāwī's Sufi teachings, it will now be helpful to obtain a portrayal of his personality. Al-Ma'askarī (d. 1271/1854),¹⁴¹ a devout follower of the Darqāwiyya Sufi order and a companion of Mawlay al-Darqāwī for years, vividly embodied his key features and attributes. Al-Ma'askarī cited humility as his key characteristic and suggested that his humility was most clearly evidenced when he was conversing with all people, irrespective of social status or ethical code of conduct. His sense of humility was also clearly evidenced in his preference for coarse clothing, dry food and sitting on dusty floors.¹⁴²

1.7) The Darqāwiyya & the Shādhiliyya Sufi Orders

¹³⁸ Tourneau, R. le. "Darqāwa" EI², vol. II, p. 160. See also Michon, *Ibn 'Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 19, 20.

¹³⁹ Alexander Kynsh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, (Leiden. Boston. Koln: Brill, 2000), p. 248.

¹⁴⁰ Victor Danner, "The Shādhiliyyah and North Africa Sufism," p. 45.

¹⁴¹ Muḥammad Būziyān Ibn Aḥmad al-Ma'askarī al-Gharīsī (d. 1271/1854) is an Algerian scholar and a follower of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order. His hagiographical work (*Kanz al-asrār fī manāqib mawlānā al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī wa ba'ḍ aṣḥābihi al-akhyār*) is incomplete, as only four volumes had been written before the author died. The book's biographies included the founder of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order and famous leaders in both Morocco and Algeria. The book is still in manuscript. (Abū al-Qāsim Sa'dullah, *Tārīkh al-Jazā'ir al-thaqāfi*, 1st ed. (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998), vol. 2, p. 127).

¹⁴² Būziyān al-M'askarī, *Kanz al-asrār*, (Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc). MS. no 2339 D. This copy of the manuscript was graciously posted online by the Moroccan National Library. <<http://bnm.bnrm.ma:86/Arabe/pdf.aspx?IDc=928>> last accessed 15-10-2015. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an 'in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 115-117.

¹⁴² Ibid 51.

By virtue of the fact that the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order is an offshoot of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order, it is now necessary to introduce the founder of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order and his Sufi teachings – this will help to link the Darqāwiyya Sufi teachings to their origin. The Shādhiliyya Sufi Order was, as mentioned above, founded by Abu al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), a descendant of the Prophet, who was born in Northern Morocco in the city of Ghumāra.¹⁴³ After finishing his Islamic studies in Fez, he embarked on a journey with the intention of seeking a spiritual master. After several years of travelling across countries and meeting various Sufi mystics, he was advised to go back to Morocco where he finally met Abd al-Salam Ibn Mashīsh (d. 625/1228), the renowned scholar and Sufi master, who he accompanied for several years.¹⁴⁴

‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Mashīsh was born around the year 559/1164 and belonged to the tribe of Banū ‘Arūs, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. After grounding himself in Islamic scholarship and Mālikī jurisprudence, Ibn Mashīsh dedicated the last twenty years of his life to utter devotional worship and rigid asceticism. He took sanctuary in the heights of Jabal al-‘Alam and it was here that he met Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī, the renowned disciple and Idrīsid descendant who later emerged as a prominent Sufi scholar and eminent spiritual leader.¹⁴⁵

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī introduced the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order into Morocco, which had offshoots and lodges not only in Morocco, but all through North Africa and especially Egypt (where he died).¹⁴⁶ His Sufi teachings called for strict observance of Sharī‘a law and he strongly emphasized the need for internal development and the taming of the lower self (*nafs*) and the overcoming of reprehensible character traits such as arrogance and ostentation. These goals are divided equally between those who seek solitude in mountains and those who maintain profitable businesses in society.¹⁴⁷ His teachings were therefore based upon traditional Sufi doctrines such as the absolute Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) and the practical application of the invocation of God (*dhikr*). Victor Danner argues that these two essential aspects of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order were also evidenced within other Sufi orders such as the Qādiriyya and the Suhrawardiyya.

¹⁴³ Kynsh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 245, see also Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁴⁴ Kynsh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 208.

¹⁴⁵ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, pp. 200-202.

¹⁴⁶ Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁷ Kynsh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 209 – 210.

The outer appearance was the visible feature which served to distinguish the members and masters of the Shādhiliyya from other Sufi orders. The early Shādhiliyya masters, most notably Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī, its founder, were renowned for their ostentatious outfits that reflected their prestigious social status. In disregarding the common distinctive Sufi garments, such as the Sufi patchwork frock (which was popular among other Sufi orders) the followers of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order dressed in casual attire that closely resembled that worn by other Muslims, and it was therefore difficult to distinguish them from others in the public sphere.

This regular attire was rationalized upon the grounds that the early masters of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order had clearly established that it was important for novices to earn their own living by working in different professions. The early spiritual methodology of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order was therefore not conducive to a life of seclusion and wandering. On the contrary, the predominant Sufi doctrine of the Order emphasized, at least during its early phases, that the contemplative spiritual life is developed in social context.

This equilibrium between outer engagement in the world and contemplative devotion was a core component of the early Shādhiliyya as it gently but firmly excoriated the excessive puritanical tendencies and literalism which characterized exoteric Islam in these days. In addition, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī also strongly opposed the practices of Sufi wanderers and ascetics who were neither faithful nor sincere in treading the Sufi Path.¹⁴⁸

The ascetic character of the teachings of both Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī (d. 656/1258) and Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī (d. 1239/1823), was clearly evidenced; this feature co-existed with the emphasis which both masters placed upon the practical side of Sufi spirituality, as evidenced by the rooting of ardent devotion and incessant invocation of God in their teachings. However, Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī adopted an approach which leaned more towards asceticism and reclusive activities. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason why Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī adopted a more austere approach in his Sufi teachings, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the percolation of Western secular values, which gained added momentum after the French Revolution, in addition to the steady decline of Islamic empires in India, Persia and Turkey, may perhaps have influenced him to adopt a more ascetic discourse. In

¹⁴⁸ Victor Danner, “The Shādhiliyya and North African Sufism,” pp. 30-32, 34.

comparison, the spiritual impact of Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī in reviving Moroccan Sufism appears to provide a greater degree of certainty: in restoring equilibrium between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of the Islamic faith, his contribution essentially resembled the earlier teachings of the founder of the Shādhiliyya Sufi order.¹⁴⁹

At this point, it is worthwhile to reiterate that this reestablishment of parity between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of the Islamic faith had also been the aspiration of some of the renowned Sufi scholars of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order, and this was reflected in its pre-eminence prior to the advent of Mawlay al-Darqāwī. Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), the eminent Shādhulī scholar who founded the Zarūqiyya Sufi Order also professed this teaching.¹⁵⁰ It is therefore clear that Mawlay al-Darqāwī’s teachings drew upon a long-standing Shādhulī heritage which stayed true to the letter of Islamic law and faithful to its spirit.

1.8) Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzaydī (d.1229/1813)

Sīdī Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Būzaydī was born into the tribe of Banī Salmān al-Ghimāriyya. He was a descendant of the Prophet. Al-Ma‘askarī would later describe his youthful years as being preoccupied with devotion and invocation. In searching for a life of contemplation, he took refuge in various sanctuaries that would enable him to be isolated from his social surroundings.¹⁵¹

Sīdī al-Būzaydī spent several years travelling and he sought solitude in Tangier. In seeking the advice of a righteous person, he sought out Mawlay al-Darqāwī and became his disciple for sixteen years, undertaking rigorous ascetic training during this period. When he completed his Sufi training, Mawlay al-Darqāwī conferred the title of “shaykh” upon him. Al-Darqāwī asked him to head back to the Banī Salmān tribe (to which he belonged) in order to encourage its people to lead a spiritual life of devotion. Over a short period of time, Sīdī al-Būzaydī gained huge popularity and people flocked to join his Sufi order. As a direct disciple of Sīdī al-Būzaydī, Ibn ‘Ajība often quoted his master in his writings, describing him as an astounding Sufi figure who possessed divine knowledge and intuitive inspiration.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 44, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 41. The Zarūqiyya Sufi Order is another offshoot of the Shādhiliyya, and who represented an important link in the esoteric chain of transmission of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order down to Mawlay al-Darqāwī (as shown in figure 1).

¹⁵¹ Al-Ma‘askarī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Darqāwiyya*, p. 91, see also see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 117-119.

¹⁵² ‘Abdulla al-Talīdī, *Al-Motrib b mashāhīr awliyā’ al-Maghrib*, pp. 216-217.

Sīdī al-Būzaydī's Sufi teachings can be traced back to Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī, his master who took devotional worship and rigorous asceticism as the central tenets of his Sufi doctrine. Ibn ‘Ajība, in describing his first encounter with Sīdī al-Būzaydī,¹⁵³ had also claimed that the latter emphasized love and sincerity. In addition to expounding his doctrine of love, al-Būzaydī always reiterated the essential difference between apparent miraculous powers of the senses (*karāma ḥissiyya*) and miraculous working powers of the spirit (*karāmāt ma‘nawiyya*); in doing so, he expressed a clear preference for the latter.

He proceeded to explain that while the former results from the preservation of the body against acts of disobedience, they do not necessarily reflect the uprightness of the inner domain of the soul. The latter miraculous power is therefore superior as it is the by-product of inner and outer goodness combined. In addition, al-Būzaydī insisted upon equating Friendship with God (*wilāya*) with rectitude, and establishing it as a primary building block.¹⁵⁴ Al-Būzaydī confirmed these foundational beliefs during the course of his first meeting with Ibn ‘Ajība; during this encounter, he informed him that moral characteristics, such as reliance on God (*tawakkul*), patience (*ṣabr*), contentment (*riḍā*) etc are exterior Sufism; they can be clearly contrasted with interior Sufism – this grants the novice the ultimate *wilāya*, and only comes with the inner rectitude that is attained by treading the Sufi Path.¹⁵⁵

While Sīdī al-Būzaydī did not possess a formal religious education, he contributed several valuable writings about the Sufi Path and the science of Sufism, a number of which were commented on by Ibn ‘Ajība.¹⁵⁶ His spiritual prowess was acknowledged by Mawaly al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī, who granted him the epithet “*al-fard*” (the “unique one”).¹⁵⁷ In addition to Ibn ‘Ajība, Sīdī al-Būzaydī also benefitted from the support of several renowned disciples who would later become great Sufi teachers.¹⁵⁸

1.9) The Socio-political Milieu

Idrīs al-Akbar (788-791), the ancestor of Ibn ‘Ajība, is a central figure in Moroccan history because he founded the Idrīsīd dynasty in Morocco in 173/789. This dynasty was

¹⁵³ al-Ḥasan al-Kūhīn, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shādhiliya al-kubrā*, p. 152.

¹⁵⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 26.

¹⁵⁵ Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁶ Muḥammad al-Ḥajī, *Mawsū‘at al-‘lām al-Maghrib*, (Tunus: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1980), 7th ed. p. 2491.

¹⁵⁷ al-M‘askarī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Darqāwiyya*, p. 93.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 93-94.

established after Idrīs al-Akbar successfully escaped from the massacre perpetrated by the Abbasids against the Alawites (the faction of al-Ḥusayn Ibn Alī Ibn al-Ḥasan) which was executed at Fakh, three miles away from Mecca in 170/ 786.¹⁵⁹ During this massacre, al-Husayn Ibn ‘Alī was killed along with some of his family; however, Yaḥya and Idrīs al-Akbar, who were both his uncles, managed to escape from the Abbasids.¹⁶⁰ The latter settled in the Moroccan city al-Walīlī, where he resided until his death in 175/791. He was then succeeded by Idrīs al-Aṣghar, his son who established the city of Fez – this would later become the Idrīsīd central capital in 194/809. The city of Fez is popular in Moroccan history because it was established by Idrīsīd notables who were known for their rectitude, piety, justice and mercy.¹⁶¹

Although the power of the Idrīsīd dynasty waned towards the end of the 4th/10th century (as a result of internal political divisions and occupation by external forces), its historical impact, as the first political dynasty of Morocco governed by descendants of the Prophet, outweighs any political incompetence or military failure.¹⁶² Today, the Idrīsīds are not only remembered for introducing Islam to Morocco at a time when Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism were predominant,¹⁶³ but their heritage extends through their notable descendants who played a significant role in shaping Morocco’s history.¹⁶⁴ In addition, the Idrīsīds were also credited for spreading the Arabic language in Morocco, both through the establishment of religious schools and mosques that were filled with Islamic scholars teaching different Islamic sciences. In addition, a considerable number of renowned jurists and religious scholars who had previously been based in Spain, found Morocco to be a safe haven after their revolution against the rulers of the Rabaḍī dynasty¹⁶⁵ failed in Cordoba in 190/805. Their mosques and teaching centers were destroyed and many of them were forced to flee to Fez. Each of these factors contributed to the Arabization of Morocco.¹⁶⁶

The significance of the Idrīsīds’ descendants peaked during the fifteenth century, largely as a result of drastic social and political changes which deeply impacted upon the

¹⁵⁹ Muḥammad Ja‘far al-Kiṭṭānī, *Salwat al-anfās wa muḥādathat al-akyās*, (al-Dār al-Bayd ā’: Dār al-Thaqafa, 2004), 1st ed., vol.1, p. 72.

¹⁶⁰ Shawqī Dayf, *‘Asr al-duwal wa al-imārāt*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1995), 1st ed., p. 270.

¹⁶¹ al-Kiṭṭānī, *Salwat al-anfās*, p. 72.

¹⁶² Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocc*, p. 113.

¹⁶³ Al-Kiṭṭānī, *Salwat al-anfās*, p. 72, see also Dayf, *‘Asr al-duwal wa al-imārāt*, p. 270.

¹⁶⁴ Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁵ The Spanish scholars rebelled against the Rabaḍī state in response to their indulgence in worldly pleasures and their neglect of Islamic teachings and principles. See Dayf, *‘Asr al-duwal wa al-imārāt*, p. 270.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 272-273.

eighteenth- century society in which Ibn ‘Ajība lived. The initial stage of this development had begun several centuries earlier when rural society began to be Arabized. This was primarily achieved by relocating the Arab tribes of Banū Hilāl to eastern Morocco, in the aftermath of their defeat near al-Qayrawān in 583/1187, which occurred during the reign of Almohad caliph Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr (reg.1184-1199). The Arabization process was entangled with the cultural integration which had been initiated by Berber Marīnids (reg.1248-1465) who were eager to incorporate Arab cultural traditions into their court life. The Marīnids also sought to mix their bloodlines with the Arabs by marrying their daughters to prominent Arab Sharīfs.¹⁶⁷

A further major development was evidenced in the expansion and diffusion of the Arab Idrīsīd Sharīfī descendants. This process had begun in the twelfth century when they, in an attempt to regain the influence which they enjoyed a century earlier during their reign (173/789-375/985), allied themselves with Ismā‘īlī Faṭīmids (reg. 297/909-567/1171). This alliance culminated in the fifteenth century when multiple revolts occurred in Morocco – these led to political disintegration and created an opportunity for the increase of Sharīfan involvement in rural politics. The Idrīsīds therefore succeeded in regaining a prestigious position that they had not enjoyed since the fall of their dynasty in the tenth century. When the Marīnid policy of integrating the Arabs was introduced a new strategy was developed in which Sharif Arabs were appointed as judges – this significantly expanded the Sharif Arabs’ influential role in tribal and regional affairs.¹⁶⁸ The final major development in the fifteenth century was evidenced when the Sharīfs successfully resisted invading Portuguese forces which threatened to conquer Tangier in 841/1437. These three major developments, (the Arabization of rural society, the political ascendancy of the Arab Sharīfī descendants and the successful leadership of the Sharīfs in their war against the invading Portuguese forces) clearly reiterated the high status of Arab Sharīfs within Moroccan history, something which further underlined their political legitimacy as defenders and protectors of the Islamic faith.¹⁶⁹ This positive political atmosphere, in addition to the increased political salience of the Sharīfs, paved the way for the advancement of Sharīf Arab scholars from the fifteenth century onward. As a consequence, Ibn ‘Ajība found circumstances suited to his rise as an exoteric scholar and esoteric spiritual leader.

¹⁶⁷ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. 160.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 161, 162.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 163.

Since Ibn ‘Ajība was born and raised in the city of Tétouan, it will now be instructive to shed some light on the city’s political significance. Although Tétouan was established back in the ninth century,¹⁷⁰ it was demolished by the Spanish in 844/1400 in retaliation for piracy.¹⁷¹ In 898/1492 it became a safe haven and favoured destination for Spanish Muslims after they were expelled from Spain. The city, in addition to Fez, welcomed the new arrivals and helped them integrate into the Moroccan society.¹⁷² Tétouan subsequently enjoyed a long history of Islamic rule which was only briefly interrupted by the Tétouan war (1859-1860) against the Spanish. Islamic rule was once again restored in Tétouan and it lasted for 50 years, up until the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco was formed in 1913. A national government was formed before a regent of the Moroccan Sultan was appointed. He then adopted Tétouan as North Morocco’s official capital.¹⁷³

During Ibn ‘Ajība’s life, the political arena was dominated by the Alawites’ dynasty (1664-present), who were descended from ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalīb.¹⁷⁴ Mawlay Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdullāh (reg. 1171/1757-1204/1790) and Mawlay Sulaymān (reg. 1207/1792-1238/1822) were the two main *Sharīfī* Alawite rulers who reigned during the lifetime of Ibn ‘Ajība. The reign of Mawlay Muḥammad was focused upon re-establishing order after various tribes had revolted following the death of Mawlay Ismā‘īl (reg. 1083/1672-1140/1727).¹⁷⁵ He therefore brought the polity back under the reign of

¹⁷⁰ The historian Muḥammad Dawūd clearly distinguishes Tetouan both before and after Islam. Historical records sporadically reference events within the city which precede Islam by centuries. See Dawūd, *Tarīkh Tetouan*, vol.1, pp. 61-64.

¹⁷¹ Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, p. 190.

¹⁷² C Edmund Bosworth, *Historic Cities of the Islamic World*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 438.

¹⁷³ Dawūd, *Tarīkh Tétouan*, p. 47.

¹⁷⁴ Although they settled in the city of Sijilmāsa in Morocco in the 13th century, the Alawite family did not engage in politics until Sijilmāsa became the center of a heated dispute between Dilā’iyya marabouts and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Samlālī between 1631 and 1646. Mawlay ‘Alī al-Sharīf (d.1070/1659), the grandfather of the Alawite dynasty in Morocco, sided with the interests of the local people which enraged Abū al-Ḥasan al-Samlālī who imprisoned him during a reprisal in 1636. Mawlay al-Sharīf’s sons, Muḥammad (1658-1664), al-Rashīd (1664-1672), and Ismā‘īl (1672-1727), respectively assumed leadership after the imprisonment of their father. Mawlay al-Rashīd succeeded after his father’s death in 1695 to conquer eastern Morocco and finally captured Fez in 1666. He then seized Marrakech in 1669 and managed to establish a stronghold for the Alawite dynasty.

¹⁷⁵ Mawlay Ismā‘īl was one of the two sons of Mawlay ‘Alī al-Sharīf who succeeded in establishing the Alawite dynasty. See the above note. He established a powerful army with the aim of guaranteeing the country’s stability and security. During his reign (1672-1727), he succeeded in bringing the Sufī *zāwiya*s under his tight control and thus undermined their authority. After Ismā‘īl’s death, Morocco suffered for thirty years and its army and economy deteriorated. Although ‘Abdullah Ibn Ismā‘īl was the legal heir, he was deposed five times as a result of the state of disunity. This situation prevailed until Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdullah, his son, assumed power and restored order. See al-‘Arawī, *Mujmal tārikh al-Maghrib*, (al-Dār al-Baydā’: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 1999), vol.3, pp. 88, 89, see also Dayf, *‘Asr al-duwal wa al-imārāt*, p. 297.

the Alawites and his reign produced relative peace and prosperity.¹⁷⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība died in 1224/1809 during the reign of Mawlay Sulaymān, who actively sought to bring his ideas into the reformation of Morocco’s Sufi orders.

1.10) The Religious & Sufi Milieu

Mawlay Sulaymān’s religious education, in addition to his scholarship within the Islamic sciences, made it possible for him to become established as a vocal opponent of certain reprehensible practices which were widespread within some Sufi orders, and which were particularly pervasive amongst ordinary people. Despite being a king, Mawlay Sulaymān himself pursued a life of retreat and asceticism. After receiving his first years of education in a small *zāwiya* far removed from the distractions of the urban cities, he sought to purge Sunni Sufism of the distortions that had been fostered by the illiterate common followers of some Sufi orders.¹⁷⁷ This positive outlook on Sufi orders was not the initial reaction of Mawlay Sulaymān as he was alarmed by the wide influence and the rapid growth of the Darqawiyya Sufi Order and thus repressive policies were applied. Later on when the impact of the Darqawiyya Sufi Order undermined the Turkish authorities in western Algeria, he adopted a more tolerant, lenient and agreeable approach.

The religious atmosphere and the level of educational progress that were present in Morocco around hundred years before the birth of Ibn ‘Ajība (during the Sa‘diyan dynasty 955/1548- 1070/1659) indelibly impacted Morocco’s religious history, and had a particularly pronounced impact upon Sufi orders that were emerging at the time. This accumulated religious knowledge, along with the scholarly output of the Moroccan scholars and spiritual masters, profoundly influenced religious teachings that Ibn ‘Ajība received during his early years, and this would later be evidenced in both his writing and teaching.

During the Sa‘diyan dynasty, Morocco evidenced a significant growth in the field of Islamic sciences, a development which was attributable to a number of factors. In the first instance, there was an ongoing arrival of Andalusian delegations – this included Islamic scholars who sought refuge in Fez after their expulsion from Granada. In addition, Fez also provided safe haven to the scholars of Tlemcen after it was captured by the Turkish forces in 1517. Tunisian scholars, in addition, headed to Morocco after their

¹⁷⁷ Muḥammad al-Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulaymān*, (Cambridgeshire: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1990), pp. 132-135.

country was occupied by the Turks. They in turn offered religious education to Moroccan students who benefited immensely from their religious knowledge. However, it was not only the major cities of Morocco that benefited from the contribution of renowned scholars during the 16th-17th centuries; nomadic and desert areas benefitted from a greater share of knowledge, and this was reflected in the establishment of *madrasas* and Sufi *zāwiyas*. The advancement of the Islamic sciences further accelerated when the Sa'diyan dynasty managed to achieve political stability: this development was particularly clear during the reign of Aḥmad al-Mansur al-Dhahabī (reg.1578-1603) who took great interest in the propagation of the sciences. Many religious educational circles were established, and prominent scholars were encouraged to write books on various Islamic sciences: as a result, stores were packed with books. This progress in Islamic sciences in Morocco was widely acknowledged, and scholars from the East flocked to the land in order to participate in this religious revival. In return, Moroccan scholars traveled to the East to acquire learning in Islamic sciences.¹⁷⁸

The expansion of Islamic sciences and the enrichment of religious education developed even further with the advent of the 'Alawite dynasty (1664-present). During their reign, the advancement of religious sciences was not only limited to Fez but also expanded to include other Moroccan cities such as Marākesh, Meknāsa, Salā, Sijilmāsa and Tétouan. The general elevation of the level of religious education again extended to nomadic areas and tribes in desert areas. It was embodied within the establishment of many *zāwiyas*; these circles of education and knowledge were in turn evidenced in the emergence of renowned scholars from the Berber tribes in the region of Sūs in southern Morocco. Muḥammad Ibn Sūlaymān al-Rawdānī (d. 1094/1683)¹⁷⁹ and Muḥammad Ibn Sa'īd al-Marghaṭī (d. 1089/1678)¹⁸⁰, both of whom were famous for their teaching and writing, were significant individuals in this regard.

This enriching progression of the Islamic sciences combined with the contribution of Eastern and Andalusian scholars, and the genre of biographical dictionaries, along with its subgenre of autobiography, began to flourish. Scholars felt the need to document the names of their teachers and publish their scholarly writings, thus preserving their

¹⁷⁸ 'Abdullah al-Targhī, *Fahāris 'ulamā' al-Maghrib*, (Tétouan: Jāmi'at 'Abd al-Mālik al-Sa'dī, 1999), 1st ed., pp. 25,26.

¹⁷⁹ "Muḥammad Ibn Sūlaymān al-Rawdānī", *Da'wat al-Ḥaqq* (monthly periodical issued by the Moroccan Ministry of Endowments and Islamic affairs), issue no 155, <http://www.habous.gov.ma/daouat-alhaq/item/3991> last accessed 21/10/2015

¹⁸⁰ Al-Kittānī, *Fihris al-fahāris wa al-athbāt*, vol.2, p. 554.

contribution for generations to come.¹⁸¹ This phenomenon will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

With regard to the Sufi milieu, Sufism had gained a firm foothold in Morocco since the eighth/fourteenth century. This was reflected in the rise of institutional Sufism that derived from the spiritual Sufi teachings of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī (d. 656/1258), its central figure.¹⁸² The institutional structure of Sufi Orders in Morocco centred upon small lodges (*zāwiya*), which became centres for the training of novices (*murīd*). Here litanies and invocations of God (*dhikr*), among other ritual exercises, were carried out. Some Moroccan Sufis also volunteered to serve as fighters in military outposts (*ribāt*), with a view to protect the country against invaders. These volunteers led a life of asceticism and renounced worldly gains. Sufism's influence was not merely institutional, and therefore limited to small lodges and outposts. It was also pedagogical – this was reflected in the fact that Sufi teachings became an integral part of the religious sciences which were taught in schools and religious colleges (*madrasa*). Sufism in Morocco therefore became an intrinsic part of the religious and social landscape, and its influence extended to towns and the countryside.¹⁸³ Due to the institutional structure of the Sufi orders in the fourteenth century, the Shādhulī Order corresponded to many branches which were named after renowned Shādhulī scholars in Morocco, two of which became increasingly significant during the fifteenth century.

The Jāzūliyya Order, which was established by Abu ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad Ibn Sulaymān al-Jāzūlī (d. circa 869/1465 or 872/ 1470)¹⁸⁴, is the first. The establishment of this order was historically significant as it coincided with a social immorality and intellectual decadence that had become especially pronounced in rural areas. The initiator of the Jāzūlī Order had a head start in this regard, as he had spent a considerable part of his life in rural Morocco. His influential and charismatic presence attracted people to his Sufi circles. He contributed to the increase of the level of public moral conscience and religious knowledge by introducing his Sufi doctrine of *maḥabba* (love) which he considered to be the pinnacle of the Sufi Path, and which elevated proximity to God as the quintessential fruit of gnosis.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Al-Targhī, Fahāris ‘ulamā’ al-Maghrib, pp.26, see also Dayf, *‘Aṣr al-duwal wa al-imārāt*, p. 337.

¹⁸² Kynsh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 245.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 245.

¹⁸⁴ Ben Cheneb, M.. "al-Ḍjazūlī." EI², vol. II, p. 527.

¹⁸⁵ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, pp. 166, 179, 184.

The second important branch of the Shādhiliyya Order was the Zarrūqiyya Sufi Order, which was founded by the eminent Shādhulī scholar, Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493). The Zarrūqiyya Sufi order grounded itself within the unwavering observance of Islamic law, which it considered to be the indispensable prerequisite of the Sufi Path. In addressing himself to the imperative of restoring the missing balance between speculative and intuitive knowledge, Aḥmad Zarrūq wrote his masterpiece *Qawā'id al-taṣawwuf* (*The Principles of Sufism*) – this outlined the Sufi Path, its guiding principles and its tight connection to the *Sharī'a*.¹⁸⁶

The efflorescence of the Shādhiliyya Order and its branches continued down to the 18th century and extended to the advent of the Darqāwiyya Order to which Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība belonged. It was therefore apparent that the dominant teachings of the Shādhiliyya Order did not only shape the institution of Sufi orders in Morocco; rather, they also played an important role in developing the literature and doctrines of Moroccan Sufism. The rigid ascetic teachings of the Darqāwiyya *Ṭarīqa* appealed to the masses and especially those of lower social strata; however they aroused harsh criticism and strong objections from the political elite and religious scholars.¹⁸⁷

During the early years of Mawlay Sulaymān's rule (reg. 1207/1792-1238/1822), the Darqāwiyya Order did not appear to enjoy great popularity among other Sufi orders; however, within a few decades it had succeeded in spreading its Sufi teachings throughout Morocco and into Algeria.¹⁸⁸ Ibn 'Ajība reported that in the early years after he joined the Darqāwiyya Order, he led a nomadic life wandering among tribes. During this time, people flocked to join the order in masses. In being intoxicated by the remembrance of God, people put rosaries around their necks in order to indicate their devotion to God and repented in large numbers. The people's response was so overwhelming that the governor of Tangier reported the matter to Mawlay Sulaymān, who at this time did not object to the reported Sufi practices.¹⁸⁹ Later on when the influence of the order kept increasing, it became alarming to the ruling authority and thus repressive policies were applied to undermine the popularity and impact of the Sufi Order.

It has already been noted that the Darqāwiyya Order was mostly popular in the countryside, where the teachings of renunciation of worldly attachment found a responsive audience. Its popularity eventually became a source of considerable concern

¹⁸⁶ Victor Danner, "The Shādhiliyyah and North Africa Sufism," p. 41.

¹⁸⁷ Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, p. 56.

¹⁸⁸ Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman*, p. 167.

¹⁸⁹ Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 85.

for the ruling government, who predictably resorted to a policy of repression and subjugation. Several leading Sufi personalities of the *ṭarīqa*, including Ibn ‘Ajība, were imprisoned and asked to renounce the Sufi practices that were associated with it. Despite this, the followers remained steadfast during the turmoil.¹⁹⁰

The opposition of the political elite and the religious scholars to the Darqāwiyya *ṭarīqa*, which largely derived from its ascetic principles, was a major factor that impeded its progression and expansion. Mawlay al-Darqāwī resorted to different, more diplomatically nuanced tactics, with a view to bridging the gap with some of his targeted audience, specifically the political elite and religious scholars. One tactic sought to calm the fears of the ruling government by withdrawing his disciples from towns, thus avoiding their attention. Mawlay al-Darqāwī instead directed his attention to the countryside and to Algeria. This new tactic soon yielded fruit. The *ṭarīqa* attained huge popularity in western Algeria, attaining influence to such an extent that it undermined the Turkish authorities in this area. In acknowledging the rapid success of the *ṭarīqa*, Mawlay Sulaymān changed his repressive policies and adopted a more conciliatory approach.¹⁹¹ The second tactic, which was introduced after the death of Ibn ‘Ajība, was to initiate a new eminent religious scholar. Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq (d. 1261/1845) was a *sharīf* who joined the Darqāwiyya Order and provided it with required weight. Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq sought to make the order more appealing to the elites who regarded the strict ascetic teachings of the order with hostility. Al-Ḥarrāq therefore sought to introduce flexibility by removing some of the rigid ascetic teachings which prevented the elite from joining the order.¹⁹²

The social structure of Moroccan society during Ibn ‘Ajība’s lifetime was largely divided between the *khāṣṣ* (the elite) and the *‘āmm* (common people). The elites usually consisted of the Sharīfs (descendants of the Prophet), religious scholars, government officials and wealthy merchants. The common people were the lower strata of the society who possessed little or no money and worked in menial jobs.¹⁹³ Mawlay al-Darqāwī addressed both social strata with his Sufi teachings with the intention of not favoring one party over the other.

¹⁹⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrasat al-‘ālim al-rabbānī al-kabīr sayidī Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-‘Umrānī, pp. 59-62. Michon, *The Autobiography*, pp. 95-100.

¹⁹¹ Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman*, pp. 167-169.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 167-169.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

1.11) Ibn ‘Ajība’s Autobiography

The writing of a preface informs the reader how the presented text should be perceived, and also warns the reader against any misinterpretation of the written text.¹⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība’s introduction to *Fahrasa* emphasized that it is obligatory to enumerate God’s bounties. Such a pietistic outlook was clearly aimed at anticipating any objections of readers who might be predisposed to question his motivation for writing an autobiography. Witnessing his disciples attempt to write up his life may have provided an additional incentive to give an accurate historical depiction of his life.

The genre of biographical dictionaries has been a valuable source of biographical entries for generations of scholars who include Ibn ‘Ajība. His decision to write his own autobiography, taking into account the fact there are multiple references to him in various biographical dictionaries, might seem unnecessary. This being said, Islamic historiography had been subjected to a school of literary criticism which questioned the accuracy of historical accounts provided by biographical dictionaries. This school therefore refused to unequivocally accept these accounts. The data presented in biographical dictionaries, while valuable to some extent, are likely to be subjected to the author’s creative reworking of the past which draws upon the wider social context and intellectual surrounding.¹⁹⁵

The addition or emission of certain details to a biographical entry therefore emphasizes particular features and underplays others. This is, it should be noted, part of the process of writing and compiling autobiographies and biographies. Mojaddedi cites for instance al-Qushayrī and how he chose not to include al-Ḥallāj in his biographical entries in the first section of his *Risāla*, although he sporadically refers to al-Ḥallāj’s views on various Sufi concepts throughout his book. Al-Qushayrī’s selective approach may have been influenced by the social context, which was characterized by the spread of antinomian practices in Sufism – in attempting to bridge the gap between Sufism and mainstream Islam, he emphasized piety, the strict observance of *Sharī‘a* law and humility. He therefore omitted the biography of controversial figures such as al-Ḥallāj.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 201.

¹⁹⁵ The existence of biographical dictionaries, their value as historical accounts in the writing of intellectual history, along with the theories and methods that are pertinent to them, have previously been examined by Mojaddedi. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), pp. 1, 180, 181.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 122, 123.

Ibn ‘Ajība was aware that a number of downsides potentially might arise from having his biography written by others. In the introduction of his *Fahrassa* he therefore stated that one of his main intentions in writing his own biography was to avoid events being added or omitted from his life by later authors of biographical dictionaries.¹⁹⁷ In his autobiography’s preface, Ibn ‘Ajība cited renowned Sufi scholars who had preceded him in writing their autobiographies. His *Fahrassa* introduced four prominent Sufi figures Al-Sha‘rānī (d. 972/1565), Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), Al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī (d.1239/1823) and Al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī (d. 1103/1691)) who all wrote their independent autobiographies and conceived of them as spiritual manuals for later generations to follow.¹⁹⁸

In structural terms, Ibn ‘Ajība’s autobiography is based upon Al-Sha‘rānī’s¹⁹⁹, which is considered to be the longest known premodern Arabic autobiographical text (its printed edition has over 700 pages).²⁰⁰ Within the sub-genre of Sufi autobiographical writings, one of the main reasons for writing a Sufi autobiography was for the saint to be known. Saints, as Cornell explains, are meant to be recognized by people so as to be followed. In order for this to be achieved, the potential saint has to outwardly manifest traits of excessive piety and excellent ethical conduct. He should also evidence miraculous powers, and these should be combined with a strong background in Islamic scholarship.²⁰¹ All these features were clearly expressed and eloquently presented in Ibn ‘Ajība’s autobiography, and are considered in more depth in the next section.

1.11.1) The Structure of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Autobiography

Ibn ‘Ajība started his autobiography with a short introduction that clearly explained his reasons for writing a personal account of his life. He made it clear that his primary motivation was to express gratitude for God’s grace and bounties, and to provide an authentic biographical account of his life. Michon echoed these sentiments and he

¹⁹⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrassa*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrassat al-‘ālim al-rabbānī al-kabīr sayidī Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Sha‘rānī was very cautious of any claims of self-worth or arrogance, and he therefore stated that the writing of his autobiography was an expression of gratitude for God’s bounties. He noted that the introductory phrase of each bounty he listed is “among the things that God bestowed on me is...” (*wa min mā an‘ama Allāhu bihi ‘alayya*). He also referred to the previous autobiographical writings of pious scholars, which he took as a guide in writing his autobiography. After citing all his reasons for writing his autobiography, he asserted that it would be erroneous for his readers to think that he would trade the love of his Lord and the blessings of servanthood for lust of worldly gains and the illusion of prestigious status. ‘Abd al-Wahāb al-Sha‘rānī, *Laṭā’if al-minan wa al-akhlāq*, (Damascus: Dar al-Taqwa, 2004, 1st ed), pp. 11-15, 41.

²⁰⁰ Dwight F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*. (Berkeley, LA, London: University of California Press, 2001, p. 56.

²⁰¹ Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. 63.

therefore sought to offset any suggestion of self-aggrandizement by citing different examples from Ibn ‘Ajība’s account; this further underlined his sense of humility and scruples. Michon notes that Ibn Ajība did not shy away from discussing openly the hardships he had encountered in the beginning of the Sufi Path when he sought to curb his love for prestige by engaging in the humiliating practice of begging. Moreover, when he narrated the dilemma of his imprisonment, Ibn ‘Ajība did not portray himself as a hero but merely described the incident in a detached tone. He therefore gave secondary value to his miracle-working abilities and his spiritual prowess, and only cited them as minor anecdotes.²⁰²

A table of contents that sets out the different chapters within Ibn ‘Ajība’s autobiography is as follows:

- 1 Ibn ‘Ajība’s Ancestors and his Genealogy
- 2 Birth and Early Education
- 3 Beginning of the Pursuit of Exoteric Sciences
- 4 Chain of Narration of Prophetic Traditions and Jurisprudence
- 5 Teaching Licenses Obtained from Teachers
- 6 Works Composed
- 7 The Station of Devotional Practice
- 8 Pursuit of Esoteric Sciences
- 9 Personal Service to his Shaykh both in Action and Wealth
- 10 Traveling for Practice and Instruction in Dhikr
- 11 Spiritual States Experienced and Trials Encountered on the Sufi Path
- 12 The Dilemma of Imprisonment and Exodus From His Homeland
- 13 His Sufi Chain Down to the Prophet Muḥammad

²⁰² Michon, *The Autobiography*, p. 14.

- 14 Testimonies of his Shaykhs Who Attested to his Special Abilities
- 15 Spiritual & Physical Miracles
- 16 List of Disciples Initiated into the Sufi Path
- 17 Marriages and Children
- 18 Knowledge of both Exoteric and Esoteric Sciences
- 19 Writings in Verse and Prose

In writing his autobiography, Ibn ‘Ajība adopted a chronological ordering within which where his family lineage (ch. 1) and early education (ch. 2) took priority. He then shifted the readers’ attention to his educational journey in pursuit of exoteric sciences and the rigid ascetic life (ch. 3). Ibn ‘Ajība authenticated his scholarly credentials that had been obtained through the rigorous pursuit of exoteric knowledge by listing the scholarly chains of transmission which he received in the sciences of hadith and jurisprudence (ch. 4). This was considered alongside the various teaching licenses that he obtained from renowned teachers of his time which clearly evidenced his mastership of the exoteric sciences (ch. 5). His long years of education culminated in 38 works,²⁰³ which were set out for the benefit of the reader (ch. 6). After finishing his exoteric religious studies, Ibn ‘Ajība embarked on a spiritual journey in pursuit of esoteric sciences which required devotional worship and incessant invocation (ch. 7). His rigorous devotion then led to his initiation in the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order (ch. 8). Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes that being initiated in the Sufi Order implied a complete sacrifice of his self, money, time and effort. This was necessary if he was to serve his spiritual master (ch. 9).

The constant struggle and spiritual trials that he experienced when setting out on the Sufi Path are then expounded (ch.10 & ch.11) before the calamities that befell him and the hardships that he endured are described. (ch.12) After narrating his personal spiritual experiences on the Sufi Path, Ibn ‘Ajība dedicated a separate chapter to listing the chain of his spiritual masters which extended back to the Prophet Muḥammad and explained the importance of finding a spiritual master to serve as a guide in the novice’s way along the Path (ch.13). The testimonies of various spiritual masters, who testified to the mastership of Ibn ‘Ajība in esoteric knowledge and his prowess in spiritual realization,

²⁰³ The list of all the works of Ibn ‘Ajība are found here Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu: İbn Acibe'nin el-Bahru'l-Medid Adlı Tefsiri*, (Istanbul, İnsan Yayınları, 2011), p. 121.

are then set out in more detail in the following chapter (ch.14). Moving on from these testimonies, Ibn ‘Ajība then discusses the different God-given spiritual degrees and lofty morality that he realized through following the Sufi Path, then describes the miracles and the spiritual powers he possesses by virtue of divine grace (ch.15). A concise discussion of the disciples of Ibn ‘Ajība who benefited from his esoteric and exoteric knowledge is next provided (ch.16) before a longer chapter expounds upon the number of Ibn ‘Ajība’s wives and children, along with the question of how wives should be treated (ch.17). A comprehensive account of the sciences that were available at Ibn ‘Ajība’s time, which places particular emphasis upon the Islamic sciences and their different branches of knowledge, is then provided (Ibn Ajība concludes chapter 18 by noting that he acquired a total of sixteen sciences). The concluding chapter 19 of Ibn ‘Ajība’s autobiography provides a collection of poems that he wrote himself, some of which were used for the ecstatic dance (*raqṣ al-ḥaḍra*) in Sufi circles of invocation. Some (written) epistles about the Sufi Path that had been addressed to his disciples were also included in this chapter. Although Ibn ‘Ajība did not leave any detailed account of his actual *dhikr* practices in his *Fahrassa*, we know that he owned two houses in which *fuqarā’* lived and these houses functioned as Sufi lodges *tekkes*. There is no doubt as well that they engaged in the practice of *ḥaḍra* and *dhikr* which still remain as essential practices in the modern Darqāwiyya Order in Morocco. Ibn ‘Ajība further alludes in his autobiography to his ritual of engaging in night vigil, intense practice of *dhikr* along with writing poetry which is read in both *ḥaḍra* and *samā’*.²⁰⁴ The number of disciples who joined the ‘Ajabiyya Sufi Order, which was established after the death of Ibn ‘Ajība to honor his legacy, is counted in thousands and they practice *ḥaḍra* and *samā’* until today.

1.11.2) References to Ibn ‘Ajība in Arabic

Ibn ‘Ajība’s complete autobiography (*al-Fahrassa*) was first published in 1990²⁰⁵ and a recent edition was published in 2013.²⁰⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība’s life, literary works, teachers and his spiritual path are widely mentioned in more than 20 biographical dictionaries. Most of them provide succinct sporadic references that do not extend beyond a few lines²⁰⁷ while

²⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrassat al-‘ālim al-rabbānī al-kabīr sayidī Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-‘Umrānī, pp. 25, 40, 115-141. See also Michon, *The Autobiography*, pp. 18-24.

²⁰⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrassa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sālih Ḥimḍān, (Cairo: Dār al-Ghad al-‘Arabī, 1990), 1st.ed.

²⁰⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrassa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-‘Umrānī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2013).

²⁰⁷ Al-Ḥajī, *Mawsū‘at a’lām al-Maghrib*, p. 2483, ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Sawda, *Dalīl Mu’arikh al-Maghrib al-Aqsā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1997), 1st ed. p. 166, ‘Umar Reda Kaḥāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu’allifīn*, (Damascus, Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1957), vol. 1, p. 300, Yusuf Sarkīs, *Mu‘jam al-maṭbū‘āt al-‘arabiyya wa al-*

others dedicate a considerable number of pages to Ibn ‘Ajība’s biography. It is worthwhile to note that all of the sources which provide a detailed account of Ibn ‘Ajība’s life and works are hagiographies that are either devoted to listing the biographies of Moroccan saints in general or those which specifically belong to the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order.

Al-Ḥasan al-Kūhīn’s *Ṭabaqāt* devoted more than two pages to a eulogistic introduction to Ibn ‘Ajība. He then narrated his transformational encounter with Sīdī al-Būzaydī, after which he led a rigid ascetic life. Ibn ‘Ajība excelled in intuitive knowledge and was renowned for his profound divine inspiration.²⁰⁸ Al-Ma‘skarī provides a further example: his biographical dictionary committed more than five pages to narrating the life, literary works, spiritual path and ethical characteristics of Ibn ‘Ajība. In an enthusiastic introduction loaded with laudatory remarks, he describes Ibn ‘Ajība as a unique scholar whose accomplishments, in both exoteric scholarship and spiritual mastership, were unmatched. He enumerated Ibn ‘Ajība’s scholarly output, which ranged between voluminous works (such as his Qur’ānic commentary) and works which were more limited in size. He quoted parts of Ibn ‘Ajība’s allusively esoteric commentary on the *Fātiha* to confirm his intuitive knowledge and divine inspiration. Al-Ma‘skarī presented an image of outer rectitude and assiduous devotion to worship by describing Ibn ‘Ajība’s state just before his transformational encounter with Mawlay al-Darqāwī and his disciple Mawlay al-Būzaydī – an encounter which left indelible marks and firmly reinforced his intention to tread the Sufi Path. Al-Ma‘skarī also depicted Ibn ‘Ajība’s physical features, which he extracted from a previous personal encounter with him. He described him as having shriveled skin and a gaunt body that had been worn out by rigid ritual exercises and ascetic training, a body which was clothed in a coarse patchwork frock. The apparent feebleness of Ibn ‘Ajība’s body did not detract from his performance during circles of remembrance (*ḥalaqāt al-dhikr*) – here he invoked God phenomenal devotion and zeal.²⁰⁹ Shaykh ‘Abdullāh al-Tālīdī also dedicated five pages to Ibn ‘Ajība’s biography in which he narrated the various transitional phases of his life. This began with his childhood and memorization of the Qur’ān, and then treaded with his path of exoteric scholarship under the auspices of renowned scholars. Al-Tālīdī also mentioned Ibn ‘Ajība’s phenomenal encounter with Sīdī al-Būzaydī, who guided him on the Sufi Path – this entailed various

mu‘arraba. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, ND), vol.1, p. 169, 170, al-Kittānī, *Fihris al-Fahāris wa al-Athbāt*, vol.1, p. 854, Zāfir, *al-Yawāqīt al-thamīna*, p. 70, al-Zarkalī, *al-A‘lām*, vol.1, p. 245, Ibn Sawda, *Ithāf al-maṭāli‘*, vol.1, p. 104, Makhlūf, *Shajarat al-nūr al-zakkiyya fī ṭabaqāt al-mālīkiyya*, vol.1, p. 571.

²⁰⁸ Al-Kūhīn, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shādhuliyya al-Kubrā*, pp. 152-154.

²⁰⁹ Al-M‘askarī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Darqāwiyya*, pp. 97-102.

ascetic exercises he had undertaken to obliterate any traces of love of prestigious position and high status among people. He also recounted the hardships which Ibn ‘Ajība encountered on the Sufi Path, most notably when he was imprisoned. Al-Talīdī included a comprehensive list of Ibn ‘Ajība’s written works (around twenty-three books), some of which are still in manuscript. The last part of al-Talīdī’s section on Ibn ‘Ajība treats his miraculous powers and spiritual influence. It is worthwhile to note that al-Talīdī downplayed the significance of Ibn ‘Ajība’s miracle working when he stated that the greatest miracle of all was his rectitude as he was preserved from committing major sins. Al-Talīdī reiterated Ibn ‘Ajība’s account of leading an assiduous life of worship and nocturnal devotion, which for him were his key and overriding preoccupations.²¹⁰

1.11.3) References to Ibn ‘Ajība in European and Other Languages

In 1968, Jean Louis Michon published the first edition (later republished in several French editions)²¹¹ of *L’autobiographie (Fahrasa) du soufi marocain Ahmad Ibn ‘Ajība (1747-1809)*, the first complete translation into French of the *Fahrasa* from its original Arabic manuscript. Michon single-handedly introduced Ibn ‘Ajība to a wider international audience at a very early stage within Francophone Islamic studies. In the Introduction to his translated biography of Ibn ‘Ajība, Michon took care to address the lacuna in the French literature, which had resulted in French biographical works only making sporadic reference to Ibn ‘Ajība.²¹²

Before Michon translated the *Fahrasa*, the first sustained engagement with Ibn ‘Ajība in French had been provided by Evariste Lévi-Provençal (d. 1956), the French historian who wrote a fifteen-line entry on Ibn ‘Ajība. Here he mentioned his noble lineage, place of birth and also alluded to a number of teachers who had taught him exoteric knowledge in Fez. In addition, Provençal also stated his affiliation with the Darqāwiyya Sufi order, which was significant because Ibn ‘Ajība was its representative in the region of Jeballa. He concluded the entry by referring to some of Ibn ‘Ajība’s

²¹⁰ Al-Talīdī, *al-Moṭrib bi- mashāhīr awliyā’ al-Maghrib*, pp. 220-225.

²¹¹ Jean-Louis Michon, *L’Autobiographie (Fahrasa) du Soufi Marocain Ahmad Ibn ‘Ajība (1747-1809)* (Leiden: Brill 1968, 1969, Milāno: Bibliothéque de l’Unicorne, 1982), see also Jean-Louis Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, (Cambridge: Archetype, 2010), pp. 8-9, 28-29.

²¹² A detailed account of all the French writers who mentioned Ibn ‘Ajība in their sources can be found in Michon’s translation of the *Fahrasa*. The only German source which mentions Ibn ‘Ajība is Brockelmann’s work *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*, Sup. I, p. 483; Sup. II, p. 359. Michon, *The autobiography*, trans. by David Streight, p. 7.

written works, including the *Fahrasa*. Provençal noted that this document provided some interesting information on the city of Tétouan and highlighted its status as an intellectual center in the nineteenth century.²¹³

The French translation of Ibn ‘Ajība’s biography by Jean Louis Michon finally found its way into the English language when David Streight provided a translation of it in 1999.²¹⁴ Another French translation of a work by Ibn ‘Ajība was also translated into English with a brief introduction.²¹⁵ Other books were translated directly from Arabic to English – this included the translation of three excerpted chapters of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic commentary (which was accompanied by a brief introduction to Ibn ‘Ajība’s biography),²¹⁶ and the translation of Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the Burda poem, which was written by al-Buṣṣirī.²¹⁷

Over the last few years, Turkish academia has evidenced a growing interest in Ibn ‘Ajība’s work. Mahmut Ay provided the first Turkish work on this subject when he discussed Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic exegesis.²¹⁸ Ay noted that the reason for the absence of any studies of Ibn ‘Ajība’s work in Turkish academia could be attributed to a lack of communication between Morocco and Turkey – this separation of the academic communities meant that Turkish scholars lacked any access to the Moroccan Sufi scholars and their works. The belated introduction of Ibn ‘Ajība’s works to Turkish academia is not related to Ibn ‘Ajība per se but is instead closely tied to the general lack of knowledge about Moroccan scholars, due to the geographical distance between the two countries. He also stated that he was drawn to Ibn ‘Ajība’s works by his personal interest in the Shādhulī Sufi Order and the esoteric exegesis of the Qur’ān – both of which in comparison to exoteric interpretation, had previously been a mystery to him.²¹⁹

Subsequent to Ay’s introduction of Ibn ‘Ajība’s works to Turkish academia, the voluminous Qur’ānic commentary of Ibn ‘Ajība was fully translated into Turkish in eleven volumes by Dilaver Selvi, along with a separate book on Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary

²¹³ Evariste Lévi-Provençal, *Les historiens des Chorfa*, p. 336.

²¹⁴ Jean-Louis Michon, *The Autobiography (Fahrasa) of a Moroccan Soufi: Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (1747-1809)*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999: 1st ed, 2011: 2nd ed).

²¹⁵ Jean Louis Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, trans. David Streight (London, Archetype, 2010).

²¹⁶ Aḥmad Ibn Aciba, *The Immense Ocean*, trans. Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk & Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald, (Louisville: Fonsvitae, 2009).

²¹⁷ Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība, *The Mainstay, a Commentary on Qasīda al-Burda*, trans. by Abdul Azīz Surāqah, (Keighley, UK, Abū Zahra Press, 2015).

²¹⁸ Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu: İbn Acibe'nin el-Bahru'l-Medid Adlı Tefsiri*, (Istanbul, İnsan Yayınları, 2011).

²¹⁹ This information was given during a personal interview with Mahmut Ay at the University of Istanbul, Turkey in 30/03/2017.

on the shorter Qur'ānic chapters. Selvi also translated *al-Futūḥāt al-ilāhiyya fī sharḥ al-mabāḥith al-aṣliyya*, which was one of Ibn 'Ajība's essential books.²²⁰ This contribution was followed by Süleyman Derin's work on Ibn 'Ajība's Sufism, which was outlined in his allusive Qur'ānic commentary – this is the latest contribution to the study of Ibn 'Ajība in Turkish.²²¹ In each of the aforementioned works, the authors devote separate sections of their introductions to Ibn 'Ajība's biography.

Although a substantial scholarship on Ibn 'Ajība has emerged in the Arabic, Turkish and European languages over recent decades, it is quite transparent that Ibn 'Ajība's life and works have still not received sufficient attention in either Islamic or Western scholarship. This thesis, which provides an examination of Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric Qur'ānic commentary in particular, is therefore intended to shed further light on Ibn 'Ajība's unique contribution to Islamic studies in general.

1.11.4) The Genre of Biographical Dictionaries

It is important to contextualize and situate the *Fahrassa*²²² of Ibn 'Ajība within the broader genre of biographical literature, the subgenre of autobiographical works and the specific genre of Sufi hagiography in order to understand the driving force for writing what comes across to the reader as an exercise of self-glorification. Autobiography and hagiography are in the Islamic context not mutually exclusive genres – instead there are several common features which dominate the writing of autobiographies in general – this is in addition to additional traits which identify and correspond to the nature and purposes of hagiography.

In general, the genre of biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*) comprises an integral part of the formation of the Islamic literary tradition and can be conceptualized as an enriching source of Islamic historiography.²²³ The genre of biographical dictionaries emerged at the beginning of the 9th century with al-Wāqidī (d. 207/ 822), whose *Book of*

²²⁰ İbn Acibe El-Haseni, *al-Bahrü'l-Medid*, trans. Dilâver Selvi, (Istanbul: Semerkand Yayınları, 2012), İbn Acibe, *Kısa Surelerin Tefsiri*, trans. Dilâver Selvi, (Istanbul: Semerkand Yayınları, 2011), Ahmed İbn Acibe El Haseni: *İlahi Fetihler*, trans. Dilâver Selvi, (Istanbul: Semerkand Yayınları, 2014).

²²¹ Süleyman Derin, *Kur'an-ı Kerim'de Seyr u Süluk*, (Istanbul: Semerkand Yayınları, 2012).

²²² The title *Fahrassa*, which Ibn 'Ajība chose for his autobiography, is a famous epithet that is widely used in North Africa (most frequently in Sufi contexts) to indicate literary works which are forms of catalogues concerned with listing the scholarly works of a certain figure; they invariably enumerate teachers, narrate life experiences encountered, state lineages along with education and travels as well as poetry, miraculous experiences and powers. See Dwight F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, p. 38, 43, see also Ch Pellat, "Fahrassa" EI², vol. II, p. 743.

²²³ Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, p. 1.

Conquests, (*Kitāb al-maghāzī*) along with his other works (now lost) left an indelible impact upon early Arabic historiography. The literary historical heritage of al-Wāqidī was used by famous authors of biographical dictionaries to compose their works; authors such as Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/844), Khalīfa Ibn Khayāṭ (d. 240/854) and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1070), in addition to other renowned scholars, can be mentioned in this context.²²⁴ The emergence of this genre can be attributed to the efforts of renowned scholars in different fields of Islamic sciences who sought to keep the prophetic legacy intact by excelling in their respective fields and documenting their knowledge for generations to come. The biographical dictionary genre soon expanded to include legal theorists, jurists and Sufis, along with professions that may have no direct relation to the prophetic legacy, such as physicians, singers and poets.²²⁵

The genre of Sufi hagiography began in Morocco in the seventh /thirteenth century and it became popular during the reign of the Sa‘diyan dynasty and assumed renewed impetus in the years after. Significant examples of hagiographical works include those written by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Fezī (d. 1052/1642) and ‘Abdullāh al-Sharīf al-Wazzānī.²²⁶

The subgenre of autobiographical writing was an immediate offshoot which extended from these biographical compendiums. In this subgenre, the emphasis was on features which showed the religious, literary and scholarly significance of the autobiographer. The chronological sequence of events was not a priority, while genealogical descent and early education were usually placed first.²²⁷ In writing his autobiography, Ibn ‘Ajība was following a long-standing literary genre of autobiographical writings which began around the third/ninth century with the autobiographies of Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (d. 260/873 or 264/877), al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī’s (d. 243/873) *The Book of Advice* (*Kitāb al-nasā’ih*) and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s (d. between 318/936 and 320/938) *The Beginning of the Affair of Abū ‘Abd Allah* (*Buduwsha’n Abī ‘Abdullāh*).²²⁸ It should also be acknowledged that the Sufis were among the very first nucleus of authors of autobiographical writings who paved the way in the following centuries for autobiographers from different fields to follow suit.

²²⁴ Leder, S., "al-Wāqidī." EI², vol. XI, p. 101.

²²⁵ Dwight F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, p. 41.

²²⁶ al-Targhī, *Fahāris ‘Ulamā’ al-Maghrib*, p. 95.

²²⁷ Eickelman, D.F., "Tardjama." EI², vol. x, p. 224.

²²⁸ Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, pp. 38, 43, 53.

In the tenth century, philosophers and physicians²²⁹ began writing their autobiographies. Autobiographical writings were still thriving by the beginning of the twelfth century and two independent significant lengthy works were written by Ibn Buluggīn (d. 488/1095) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and were circulated widely. The early thirteenth century was marked by a wave of noteworthy autobiographies that were written by renowned literati living in Aleppo and Damascus.²³⁰ Muslim scholars in Spain and Morocco made significant contributions to this genre as well - autobiographies of Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghribī (d. 685/1286) and Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. 745/1344) were particularly significant in this regard. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809/1406), a renowned historiographer of Spanish origin, wrote his autobiography only a few years after encountering Līsān al-Dīn al-Khatīb al-Andalusī (d. 776/1374) who wrote his autobiography at the end of one of his most significant works (*al-Ihāta fī akhbār Ghirnāta*).²³¹ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) and al-Ghazālī, two prominent Sufi mystics, also pioneered the writing of their own autobiographies in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In doing so, they showed the wide variations within Sufi approaches to autobiographical writings. In al-Baqlī’s mystical writing (*Kashf al-asrār*), he narrated his spiritual visions and mystical experiences – this formed the essence of his autobiography, although sporadic reference was also made to his family.²³² Conversely, al-Ghazālī’s autobiography (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*) conveyed the inner struggle and spiritual transformation that he had to endure in his search for the Truth.²³³

Juristic scholars in the fifteenth and sixteenth century made significant contributions to the genre of autobiography with their literary writings.²³⁴ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) wrote a substantial autobiography of more than 300 pages that was entitled *Speaking of God’s Bounty (al-Taḥadduth b- ni ‘matillāh)* – in this book, he clearly stated why he had decided to write about himself. Al-Suyūṭī maintained that the enumeration of personal achievements, which were only accomplished through God’s

²²⁹ Such as al-Rāzī (d. 312/924), Ibn al-Haytham (d. 432/1040) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037).

²³⁰ Such as Yāqūt al-Hamawī (d. 627/1229), ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231), Ibn al-‘Adīm (d. 661/1262), Abu Shāma (d. 667/1268) and al-Juwaynī (d.675/1276).

²³¹ Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, pp. 53-55.

²³² Firoozeh Papan-Matin and Michael Fishbein, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Kashf al-Asrār*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), vol. 59, pp. 16, 17, see also Ruzbihān Baqlī, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master*, trans. by Carl W. Ernst, (Chapel Hill, NC, Parvardigar, 1997).

²³³ See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl wa al-muwaṣṣil ilā dhī al-‘izza wa al-jalāl*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Laylā and Nūrshīf ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Rif‘at. (Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001).

²³⁴ Such as of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 853/1449), al-Sakhāwī (d. 903/1497), Ibn Dayba’ (d. 944/1537) and the famous Sufi theorist Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) among many others. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, p. 56.

infinite grace, were, by extension, an expression of gratitude to God. He also cited previous generations of famous scholars who had preceded him in writing autobiographical tracts – by this time, autobiography was a well-established genre. Al-Suyūṭī's autobiography was therefore preceded by a desire to establish an exemplary model of virtuous conduct and scholarly pursuit, along with an intention to establish a historical record for later generations. He was well aware of the fact that the enumeration of his scholarly achievements may still leave him open to the charge of self-aggrandizement; accordingly, he re-emphasized that his primary motivation was to express his gratitude for God's immense bounties bestowed on him – in support of this endeavor, he cited pious scholars who had previously authored autobiographies.²³⁵

The literary flow of biographical writing extended into the sixteenth century, embodied in the contribution of Ibn Ṭulun al-Dimishqī (d. 953/1546), along with Imam al-Sha'rānī (d. 972/1565), the prominent Sufī scholar who wrote a voluminous autobiography entitled *Latā'if al-minan* (which is treated in more depth in the following discussion of the hagiography genre). The seventeenth century witnessed a further expansion in the autobiographical writings of Sufī and Shī'ī scholars.²³⁶

When this brief historical survey of the subgenre of autobiographical writing up until the time of Ibn 'Ajība is taken into account, it is clearly apparent that his *Fahrāsa* followed a well-established pattern of literary writing, and was supported by long-standing works of literature that provided clear guidance to those keen to further contribute to this subgenre.

Closer engagement with the genre of Sufī hagiography (*al-manāqib*), which is a term widely used within Sufī circles to indicate the autobiographies and biographies written about Sufī scholars and saints, highlights that Ibn 'Ajība's *Fahrāsa* inherits and reproduces a number of common features include the stating of his family, lineage, teachers, scholarly works, along with the detailing of his life experiences and poetry. The emphasis upon virtuous nature and the ethical motivation behind writing about the self (so as to pre-emptively fend off any accusation of self-praise) is another common feature of the genre that was reproduced by Ibn 'Ajība. It might be remarked that Muslim biographers and autobiographers across generations shared a sense of historical duty to

²³⁵ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth bi ni'matillāh*, (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Arabiyya al-Ḥadītha, ND), pp. 1-4.

²³⁶ Such as the Sufī scholar al-Yūsī (d. 1103/1691) along with the Shī'ite writings of Zayn al-Dīn Ibn 'Alī al-'Amīlī (d. 966/1558), Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-'Amīlī (d. 1100/1688) and Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-'Amīlī (d. 1104/1692). See Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, p. 56.

set the record straight, so as to provide an accurate account of themselves for the benefit of future generations of writers of biographical dictionaries. In addition, all autobiographical writings sought to put in place an exemplary ethical model of lofty manners and authentic scholarship that could be followed by others.

1.11.5 Ibn ‘Ajība’s *Fahrassa* and the Genre of Sufi Hagiography

At this point, it will be instructive to situate Ibn ‘Ajība’s *Fahrassa* within the literary history of the narrower genre of Sufi hagiography. The tenth century had witnessed the birth of the genre of hagiographical dictionaries with Abu Sa‘īd Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 341/952) *Ṭabaqāt al-nussāk*. Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 430/1038) *Hilyat al-awliyā* later drew heavily upon this book. At this early stage, Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Sulaymān, (d. 342/953) who was the teacher of Abu ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), wrote a hagiography entitled *Akhbār al-ṣūfiyya wa al-zuhhād* which al-Sulamī later referenced extensively when composing his *Ṭabaqāt*. These two preliminary attempts were followed by Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad Ibn Zakariyya’s (d. 396/1005) *Tārīkh al-ṣūfiyya*.²³⁷ The first Sufi hagiographical dictionary that became available is *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* of Abu ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), a voluminous work which Sufi biographers later used to form their own works.²³⁸ In the eleventh century, Sufi biographers sought to position Sufism as a legitimate Islamic science that had strong links to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, the two main sources of Islamic law. Ethical characteristics and the Sharī‘a-based doctrines of major Sufi figures were, as a consequence, heavily emphasized. The *Hilyat al-awliyā*’ by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), along with *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* by Abd-Allāh Anṣārī’s (d. 481/1089) (the latter was a Persian reduction of Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt*), can here be mentioned.²³⁹

Hagiographical dictionaries did however not always take the form of complete books. In some instances, the author would write about various topics pertaining to Sufism before then dedicating a section of the book to hagiography. Relevant examples in this context include Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī’s (d. 465/1072) *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* and Abu al-Ḥasan al-Hujwiri’s (d. between 465/1072- 469/1077) *Kashf al-*

²³⁷ Although some of these initial works in Sufi literature were lost, they were later referenced in subsequent hagiographical dictionaries.

²³⁸ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1986), 3rd.ed., p. 51.

²³⁹ *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* was the first biographical dictionary to be written in Persian. It is based on al-Sulamī’s Arabic work of the same title. (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, trans. Is‘ād ‘Abd al-Hādī Qandīl, (Cairo: al-Majlis al-‘alā l- al-shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyya), p. 145.

mahjūb.²⁴⁰ Moroccan Sufis began to produce their share of hagiographical dictionaries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and contributed three major works which followed the pattern of the *Hilya* in their composition and were restricted to Sufi figures in the biographers' localities.²⁴¹

In the twelfth century, al-Ḥusayn Ibn Naṣr Ibn Khamīs's voluminous (d. 552/1157) *Manāqib al-abrār wa hasanāt al-akhyār* emerged, and would later serve as an important source of reference for later works such as Ibn al-Mulaqqan's (d. 804/1401).²⁴² In the late twelfth century, Farīd-al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. circa 618/1221) wrote his masterpiece *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.²⁴³ The twelfth century also gave rise to the consolidation of Persian hagiography, which is dedicated to individual mystics, such as the *Asrār al-tawḥīd* (devoted to the eminent Sufi figure Abū Sa'īd Ibn Abī al-Khayr, whose hagiography was written by Muḥammad Ibn Munawwar, one of his descendants).²⁴⁴

In the fifteenth century, another major Persian hagiographical dictionary was written by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 892/1492) – entitled *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quds*,²⁴⁵ which is considered to be, despite the fact that it is heavily indebted to previous hagiographical works (most notably those of Sulamī, Hujwirī and Muḥammad Munawwar), one of the essential Persian works on Sufism. During the same century, 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī contributed *Lawāqih al-anwār fī ṭabaqāt al-akhyār*, a voluminous hagiographical dictionary.²⁴⁶ The genre of hagiographical dictionaries culminated in the

²⁴⁰ *Kashf al-mahjūb* is sometimes considered to be the first Sufi manual that was written in Persian. See (Jürgen Paul, "Hagiographic Literature", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. XI, fasc. 5, pp. 536-539).

²⁴¹ Namely, *al-Muṣṭafā fī dhikr al-ṣūlahā' wa al-'ubbad b- Fās wa mā walāhā min al-bilād* (Listing the Selected Righteous and Worshippers in Fez and Its Neighboring Cities) by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm al-Tamīmī; *al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-taṣawwuf* (Exploring the Men of Sufism) by Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Tādīlī (known as Ibn al-Zayyāt) (d. 627/1230), and *al-Maqṣid al-sharīf fī ṣūlahā' al-rīf* (The Noble Objective of the Righteous of the Countryside) by Abū Ya'qūb al-Bādīsī (b. 650/1252). *Mu'allimat al-Maghrib*, vol. 7, p. 2391.

²⁴² Al-Ḥusayn Ibn Khamīs, *Manāqib al-abrār wa maḥāsīn al-akhyār*, (al-'Ayn: Zayed Center for Heritage and History, 2006), p. 11.

²⁴³ *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* has a writing style that can be clearly distinguished from previous hagiographical works, and this can be largely attributed to the author's poetic tendencies. The uniqueness of 'Aṭṭār's literary work is attested to by the fact that it is the first Persian hagiographical dictionary ever written (with the exception of Ansārī's Persian translation of al-Sulamī's work and the hagiographical section of Hujwirī's book)

²⁴⁴ Hūjwirī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 159, 161. *Kashf al-mahjūb* was also translated by Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1936).

²⁴⁵ In the introduction of *Nafahāt*, Jāmī elaborated that his work is based on Ansārī's Persian translation of al-Sulamī's Arabic *Ṭabaqāt*. Jāmī sought to rewrite and update the Persian translation of al-Ansārī (which was written in a classical Harawī dialect), with the intention of presenting it within an accessible writing style ('Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quds*, trans. Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Zakariyya al-Naqshabandī, (Cairo: Mashyakhat al-Azhar, 1989), pp. 18-20.

²⁴⁶ *Lawāqih al-anwār fī ṭabaqāt al-akhyār* included comprehensive entries of major Sufi figures which extended from the Prophet's companions up until the time he was writing 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī,

seventeenth century with Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Manāwī’s *al-Kawākib al-durriya fī tarājim al-sāda al-ṣūfiyya*,²⁴⁷ an indispensable hagiographical work.

This brief historical survey of the development of the genre of Sufi hagiography demonstrates that when Ibn ‘Ajība was writing his autobiography, he was following a well-established genre of hagiographical writings that had been put in place by major Sufi figures across the Islamic world. Needless to say, this writing of the biographies of holy sages was not confined to the Islamic literary tradition; rather, it finds a clear echo in the Graeco-Roman classical traditions of the Late Antiquity. In this instance, godlike divine philosophers also led people to a spiritual contemplative life centered on God, a life which inculcated traits which clearly distinguished them apart from other people. To an extent this clearly recalls the biographies of Sufi saints, the early years of childhood of the divine philosopher being marked like those of many Sufi mystics by sharp intelligence and acute intellectual discernment. The love of wisdom and contemplation is another shared trait which distinguishes Sufi saints and divine philosophers from ordinary people. The pursuit of education was another defining attribute of the holy philosopher, which was intended to sharpen the God-given intelligence usually accompanied with perceptive understanding and outstanding insight,²⁴⁸ qualities that also define sainthood in the Islamic Sufi tradition.²⁴⁹ In both the Islamic and Christian traditions, the possession of godlike qualities was conceived as the imitation of the perfect man: (*imitatio Muḥammadi* and *imitatio Christi*).²⁵⁰

* * *

Lawāqih al-anwār al-qudsiyya fī manāqib al-‘ulamā’ al-ṣūfiyya, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2005), vol. 1, p. 10.

²⁴⁷ In this work, al-Manāwī covered eleven centuries of Sufi figures, which extended from the Prophet’s time up until his own. His work is considered a major historical account of social and cultural significance which provides considerable insight into the fifteenth, sixteenth and (early) seventeenth centuries. See Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Manāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durriya fī tarājim al-sāda al-ṣūfiyya*, (Beirut: Dar Sadr, 1999), vol. 1, p. 31.

²⁴⁸ Patricia L. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, (London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 22, 23.

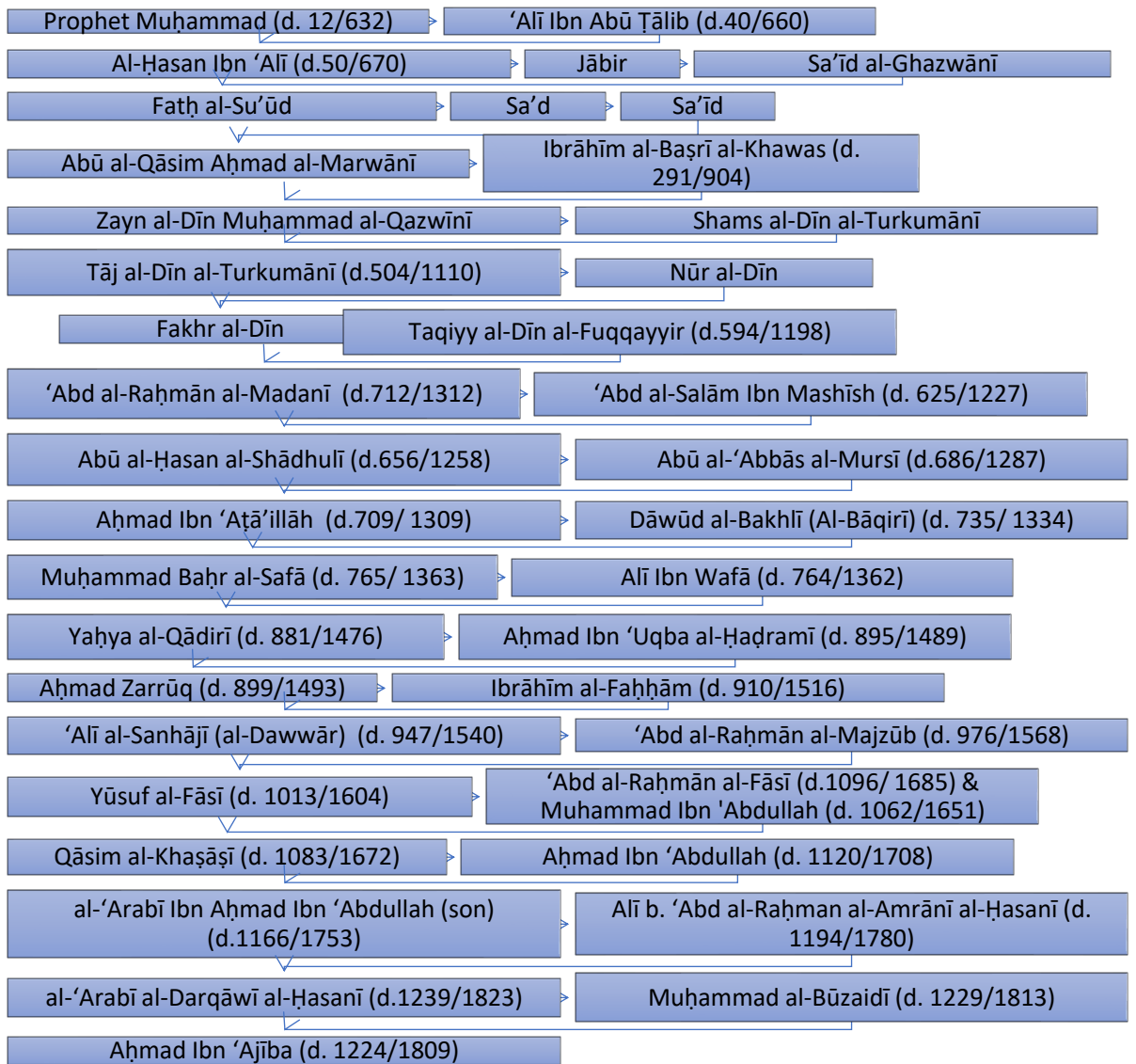
²⁴⁹ The commonalities between the two groups are most clearly evidenced in the common pursuit of an ascetic life with low food intake, a course of action which was strongly advanced by Pythagoras (d. c. 500–490 BC), a Greek philosopher. Freeing the soul from the shackles of the earthly body opens up the realm of spiritual realization, as the teachings of Plotinus (d. 270) and Origen (d.c.253) attest. See *ibid.*, pp. 24–29.

²⁵⁰ Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. 199. Origen, (d. c. 253) who was the founder of Christian philosophical theology, a Christian Biblical exegete and prominent theologian, suggested that accurate scriptural interpretation required a Christ-like mind, a virtue he claimed to possess. See *ibid.*, p. 20.

In this chapter I have sought to introduce Ibn ‘Ajība’s biography and address the major influences that influenced his intellectual approach. This has important implications for his status as an erudite exoteric scholar well-versed in Islamic sciences and an inspirational Sufi leader whose intuitive knowledge of esoteric sciences and spiritual prowess left an indelible impact, both upon the field of esoteric Qur’ānic exegesis and the wider sphere of Sufi literature. In the next chapter, Ibn ‘Ajība’s methodology through which he composed the exoteric and esoteric parts of his Qur’ānic exegesis will be discussed in detail. In addition, the influence of exoteric and esoteric Qur’ānic commentaries upon Ibn ‘Ajība’s work will be examined. The level of originality evidenced within Ibn ‘Ajība’s work will also be assessed against the influence of other Qur’ānic works – which will enable us to obtain a fuller comprehension of his contribution to the genre of esoteric Qur’ānic exegesis in general and the philosophy of divine love in Islam in particular.

Ibn ‘Ajība’s Esoteric Chain of Transmission²⁵¹

Figure One



²⁵¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Fahrāsa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-‘Umrānī, pp. 62-63.



The tomb of Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība in the village of Anjara in the north of Morocco close to the city of Tetoun²⁵²

²⁵² This image can be find at this link <http://www.alalbait.ps/Galleries.aspx?GalleriesCategoryID=16>



Chapter II

The Methodology of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic Commentary

Chapter 2. The Methodology of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic Commentary

The first section of this chapter will examine the historical development of esoteric and Sufi Qur’ānic exegesis, so as to situate Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic commentary within this genre. A thorough analysis will be given to key features, guiding principles and different methodological approaches adopted by various esoteric Qur’ānic commentaries.

The second section will explore the most influential sources utilized by Ibn ‘Ajība in order to form the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of his Qur’ānic commentary. In order to evaluate the extent to which these sources impacted upon the composition of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic commentary, an analysis of salient features and the main methodological approaches of these sources will be conducted. It is also important to analyze why Ibn ‘Ajība chose certain sources over others, and to clarify the extent to which he depended upon these sources in writing the exoteric and esoteric sections of his Qur’ānic commentary.

The third section of this chapter will outline the methodology which Ibn ‘Ajība adopted when he composed the esoteric dimension of his Qur’ānic commentary. In the conclusion, I will attempt to extract salient features which distinguished Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic commentary from his predecessors.

2.1) The Historical Development of the Genre of the Qur’ānic Sufi Exegesis

By the third century, A.H. Sufi esoteric Qur’ānic exegesis had developed into an independent genre that was possessed of its own defining methodology and mystical themes. The nucleus of Sufi exegesis began in the 2nd/8th century with the writings of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778). At this early stage, al-Ṣādiq’s *tafsīr* was the most significant commentary. Because it is one of the earliest attempts at esoteric Qur’ānic interpretation, it is now necessary to examine his work more closely.²⁵³

Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq is highly revered for being the fifth generation grandson of the Prophet, as well as the sixth Shī‘ite Imam. Although the full Qur’ānic *tafsīr* that was

²⁵³ Alan Godlas, “Sufism”, p. 351, Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur’an Commentary ascribed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq as contained in Sulamī’s Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011).

personally written by Ja‘far al-Şādiq is not extant, a vivid picture of his esoteric interpretation and allegorical exposition can be extracted from the *tafsīrs* of al-Sulamī, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī and the Shī‘ī *tafsīr* literary works. Each of these sources extensively quotes Ja‘far al-Şādiq’s *tafsīr* and integrates it into their own writings. Of these works of *tafsīr*, the greatest debt is owed to al-Sulamī’s *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr* – had it not introduced Ja‘far al-Şādiq’s Qur’ānic commentary, it would otherwise have remained unknown.²⁵⁴

The method of Ja‘far al-Şādiq’s *tafsīr* was explicitly stated when he introduced four levels of understanding of the Qur’ān. These were: *ibara* (outward literal meaning), *ishāra* (symbolic allusions), *laṭā’if* (subtleties), and the *ḥaqā’iq* (spiritual realities). Each level of understanding had its corresponding audience, which he maintained would enable them to grasp the Qur’ān’s intended meaning appropriate to them. The elementary level of comprehending different juristic rulings and basic theological principles extends to the general public; in contrast, symbolic allusions are only understood by the elect; the third and fourth levels, meanwhile, are solely accessible and intelligible to the gnostics (*‘arifūn*) and prophets.²⁵⁵

Ja‘far al-Şādiq also developed a framework which would enable the individual to understand the Quran at a deeper level. He emphasized the need to acquire a solid background in different Qur’ānic studies which pertained to matters such as *al-nasikh wa al-mansūkh* (the abrogated and abrogating verses), *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes of revelation of different verses), the revelation of verses in Mecca and Medina, *al-khāṣṣ wa al-‘āmm* (general and specific verses), *al-muḥkam wa al-mutashābih* (clearly understood verses and obscure verses). Each element was conceived as a means through which the reader may gain a more profound understanding of the text.²⁵⁶

Following on from this primary stage of Sufi *tafsīr*, the first extant Sufi Qur’ānic exegesis which survives as an independent work is *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm* written by Sahl Ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896)²⁵⁷. Al-Tustarī was known for being taciturn in nature, thoughtful at heart and possessed of undeniable intellectual abilities.²⁵⁸ His *tafsīr* is considered to be the main Qur’ānic commentary that set the groundwork for later Sufi *tafsīrs* and established the basis for the separate genre of Sufi *tafsīr* to emerge and for all

²⁵⁴ Süleyman Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, (Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, 1974), p. 50.

²⁵⁵ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, p. 1.

²⁵⁶ Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, p. 51.

²⁵⁷ Sands, *Şūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam*, p. 68, see also al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur’ān*, trans. Annabel Keeler & Ali Keeler, (Amman: Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought & Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011).

²⁵⁸ Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, p. 65.

the Sufi exegetes to follow suit. While al-Tustarī's *tafsīr* consists of only one small volume, it is rich in both exoteric and esoteric interpretations.²⁵⁹

An initial reading of Tustarī's text makes it clear that there is no predefined methodology for either his exoteric or mystical interpretation. It could be described as a non-sequential collection that has no clear criteria for arranging the expounded text – this is why Bowering describes it as “an image of patchwork and disjointedness.”²⁶⁰ While some verses are thoroughly elucidated with both exoteric and esoteric exposition, others instead lack one or both kinds of interpretation. Al-Tustarī's unsystematic approach is perhaps attributable to the fact that he did not write down the *tafsīr* himself - the task of compilation was therefore left to Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Baladī,²⁶¹ one of his renowned disciples.

The first distinguishing feature of this *tafsīr*'s methodology (if it may be defined as such) is that it established the basis for a mystical interpretation of the Qur'ān. Al-Tustarī begins by citing the widely quoted Prophetic tradition which was attributed to 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib. This states: “There is no Qur'anic verse which does not have four meanings: an exoteric (*zāhir*), an esoteric (*bāṭin*), a limit (*ḥadd*) and a point of ascent (*maṭla'*)”.²⁶² Al-Tustarī interprets this to mean that whereas the exoteric level relates to oral recitation, the esoteric level pertains to interior understanding: the limit relates to the knowledge of the statutes of both the lawful and unlawful acts, and the point of ascent is the illumination of the heart through apprehension of the intended meaning of the verse, which is revealed through divine inspiration (*ilhām*).²⁶³

It is clear that al-Tustarī's four-level structure of exegesis sought to widen the readers' intellectual faculties with a view to establishing the basis for a multi-layered interpretation of the Qur'ān which could be clearly contrasted to the traditional univocal understanding of the text. A chapter which follows on from the introduction is contributed to the attributes that define those who seek to understand the Qur'ān. Al-Tustarī proposes three categories: the first are those who are interested in deducing legal and jurisprudential rulings; the second are those who seek to memorize the Quran and teach its different recitations to others; the third are those who are concerned with gaining

²⁵⁹ Muḥammad Ḥussein al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1976), vol.2, p. 282.

²⁶⁰ Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Ṣaḥl At-Tustarī*, (Berlin, New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1980), p. 129.

²⁶¹ al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, vol. 2, p. 282.

²⁶² Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li'l-Turāth, 2004), 1st ed., p. 76.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 76.

popularity through excessive rhythmic recitation of the Qur'ān; in al-Tustarī's view, this final category is the worst of the three kinds.²⁶⁴ Although the first two categories of devotee are considered to be worthy of praise if they involve sincere intent, al-Tustarī does not commend either one – this is perhaps because he wishes to encourage inquisitive readers to search for a higher level of comprehension and to challenge their traditional beliefs that relate to a normative method for understanding the Qur'ānic text.

Al-Tustarī's *tafsīr* then introduced three structural levels, the first of which is closely related to his exoteric interpretation of the Qur'ānic text; the second addresses its exoteric aspect and the third structural level corresponds the intervention of the compilers of al-Tustarī's *tafsīr* - their contribution is indicated in anecdotal insertions, exegetical expositions, and additional quotations from various sources which form an essential part of the recorded *tafsīr*.²⁶⁵

The exoteric dimension included Prophetic traditions, adages of the Prophet's Companions, legal rulings and the historical context of the revealed verses.²⁶⁶ The second level is its mystical narrative which embeds sporadic references to the mystical views of earlier Sufi scholars. It also includes al-Tustarī's spiritual doctrine on the Sufi Path and his ascetic views. His mystical perspective is expressed in an allegorical and elliptical fashion. Al-Tustarī often depicts human beings as resembling the whole universe and acting as its reflective mirror. For example, the human body resembles the earth, the heart is similar to the sky, the lights of the heart are those of the sun, and man's knowledge is like fruits of bough of paradise. The lights entering the heart are similar to rain falling. In other words, the intellect (*'aql*), the spirit (*rūh*), the heart (*qalb*), natural disposition (*ṭab'*), desires (*hawā*), and lust (*shahwa*) do have a corresponding equivalent in the macrocosm: these are all propositions that al-Sulamī's *tafsīr*²⁶⁷ would later elaborate.

A dialogue style of exposition is a typical feature of this level – this is a reflection of the fact that the novices who attended al-Tustarī's Sufi lessons would usually pose questions relevant to the Qur'ānic text and his answers would then be written down and compiled.²⁶⁸ Al-Tustarī's *tafsīr* also uses scattered poetic references as an illustrative instrumental device, a feature which finds an echo in al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's *tafsīr*.²⁶⁹ The third structural level incorporates additional explanatory notes and anecdotal narratives –

²⁶⁴ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, trns. Annabel Keeler & Ali Keeler, p. 83.

²⁶⁵ Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, p. 130.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 129.

²⁶⁷ Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, p. 66.

²⁶⁸ Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, pp. 129, 133.

²⁶⁹ Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, p. 68.

these were later inserted by the compilers of al-Tustarī's work with the intention of elucidating the text and providing a spiritual guide to readers and novices who had not been directly exposed to al-Tustarī's teachings.²⁷⁰

The line of mystical thought that is expressed by al-Tustarī's esoteric interpretation does not always reflect a direct logical relationship to the scripture. In al-Tustarī's view, the revealed text was a starting point from which he drew spiritual insights; he therefore basically focused on the mystical meanings which were relevant to the esoteric interpretation of the text. For al-Tustarī, the Qur'ānic text therefore worked at a deeper level – triggerring a flow of mystical experiences and reflections which are largely inspired by, yet sometimes only faintly related to, the Qur'ānic text.²⁷¹

In conclusion, while al-Tustarī's work is characterized by a rather loose structure, his esoteric interpretation represents a mystical synthesis of the scripture that explicitly articulates his Sufi doctrine. This unified esoteric mystical vision established a solid foundation upon which other Sufi exegetes could build.²⁷²

Tustarī's early attempt at an esoteric commentary on the Qur'an was followed in the 5th/11th century by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī's work (d. 412/1021) *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*. While al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* was not distinguished for originality and did not represent an independent contribution to the genre of Sufi exegesis, it was considered to be a valuable historical source that compiled the oral and written sources of previous and contemporary renowned Sufi scholars who included Sahl al-Tustarī, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Abu al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Adamī, known as Ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 309/921), Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899), and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945).²⁷³

While al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* covers all the chapters of the Qur'ān, it does not provide an explicit commentary on every single verse, and some verses are left unexplained. He also confined himself to esoteric interpretations of the Qur'ān and did not therefore refer to the classical exoteric commentaries, a methodology that elicited harsh criticism from exoteric exegetes.²⁷⁴ Al-Sulamī openly admitted that it was his deliberate intention to exclude exoteric commentaries – in his view, they had already been exhaustively

²⁷⁰ al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'ān*, trns. Annabel Keeler & Ali Keeler, p. xxviii.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. xxix.

²⁷² Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, p. 265.

²⁷³ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, p. 69.

²⁷⁴ al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, p. 285.

composed by the exoteric exegetes. His methodology led to the establishment of a distinctive genre of esoteric Qur'ānic exegesis.²⁷⁵

Al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* however, lacked a coherent structure and a unified mystical outline – this was attributable to the fact that its content was a collection of excerpts from different Sufi scholars with no predefined scheme of clear exposition to decipher the complicated Sufi terms and encrypted mystical concepts.²⁷⁶ Al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* therefore suffered from the same problems that afflicted al-Tustarī's *tafsīr*: they both lacked a predefined structure and a unified authorial voice – this in turn produced incoherence with the interpreted text.

The same century also saw the emergence of a more developed structure of the genre of Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān. This was embodied in the Sufi exegesis: *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* (*The Subtleties of Symbolic Allusions*) of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) which succeeded in striking a balance between the literal understanding and the allegorical meanings of the text. In contrast to his predecessors, al-Qushayrī's voice was clearly heard - the originality of his spiritual interpretations forms a major component of Sufi exegesis.²⁷⁷ Al-Qushayrī adopted an approach that sought to connect “spiritual subtleties” to traditional exoteric knowledge.²⁷⁸ This was quite an original approach that was much appreciated by both exoteric and esoteric exegetes. A further reason for the enthusiastic reception of al-Qushayrī's *tafsīr* derived from his avoidance of saturating his exegesis with ambiguous Sufi technical terms or adopting an elliptical writing style²⁷⁹ – these stylistic concessions made his *tafsīr* more accessible to the general public. In addition to establishing a much-needed equilibrium between the spiritual kernel and the literal shell of the scripture, al-Qushayrī's exegesis was also comprehensive - it covered all Qur'ānic chapters, and most verses were subject to both exoteric and esoteric interpretations: this method redressed al-Sulamī's selective approach.²⁸⁰

The 6th/12th century produced three influential Sufi exegeses; the first was produced by Ibn 'Abd al-Salām Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ishbīlī (who was also known as Ibn Barrajjān (d. 536/1141). His Sufi exegesis (entitled *Tanbīh al-afhām ilā tadabbur al-kitāb al-ḥakīm wa al-naba' al-'azīm* or ‘Inciting the Understanding to Reflect on the

²⁷⁵ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, p. 69.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, introduction, pp. 3-6.

²⁷⁸ Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'ān Scholar: Abū'l-Qāsim Al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 138.

²⁷⁹ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, p. 71.

²⁸⁰ Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'ān Scholar*, pp. 126, 127.

Wise and Tremendous Scripture')²⁸¹ combined exoteric interpretation and esoteric meanings. The methodology of the exoteric section emphasized the need to interpret Qur'ānic verses with reference to other Qur'ānic verses that conveyed the same message or expounded similar meanings. His *tafsīr* also drew extensively upon Prophetic traditions and the views of the Companions. Although he did not engage extensively with jurisprudential rulings, he used principles of jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) whenever he needed to support his exoteric interpretations. The esoteric dimension of his exegesis was mostly ambiguous and difficult to decipher for those who were not well-versed in the terminology of the Sufi Path. The apparent complexity of his writing style contributed to, at times, a sense of confusion and incoherence in Ibn Barrajān's mystical exegesis. These weaknesses notwithstanding, the uniqueness and originality of his exegetical analysis and inspired exposition were unrivaled.²⁸² Ibn Barrajān was an advocate of an early version of the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* "the Unity of Being" - he influenced the mystical theories of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240)²⁸³ who cited portions of Ibn Barrajān's Sufi Qur'ānic commentary in various parts of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*.²⁸⁴ While Ibn Barrajān followed al-Qushayrī's approach of integrating both exoteric and esoteric exegesis in his interpretation, his use of encrypted and ambiguous Sufi terms made his exegesis inaccessible to those not grounded in the science of Sufism.

The 6th/12th century also witnessed the rise of Persian mystical commentaries. The first complete work which survived was *Laṭā'if al-tafsīr* or *Tafsīr-e-zāhidī* written by the Ḥanafite scholar, Abū al-Naṣr Darvājākī (d. 549/1154), who was widely renowned for his *zuhd* (detachment from world affairs). His exegesis combined exoteric and esoteric interpretations and was written in an accessible language that was infused with rhyming prose.²⁸⁵

The Persian commentary *Kashf al-asrār wa-'uddat al-abrār*,²⁸⁶ which was written by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. c. 520/1126), was a further source of inspiration for generations of Persian Sufi exegetes. Maybudī's exegetical writing was strongly inspired by the Sufi exegesis of his master, 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī Harawī (d. 482 /1089), which was

²⁸¹ 'Abd al-Salām Ibn Barrajān, *Tafsīr Ibn Barrajān: tanbīh al-afḥām ilā tadabbur al-kitāb al-ḥakīm wa-ta'arruf al-ayāt wa al-naba' al-'aẓīm*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013).

²⁸² Ibid, vol.1, introduction, pp. 30-38.

²⁸³ Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, p. 131.

²⁸⁴ Ibn Barrajān, *Tafsīr Ibn Barrajān*, vol.1, pp. 39-40.

²⁸⁵ Annabel Keeler, "Exegesis in Persian," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. IX, pp. 120-121.

²⁸⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa-'uddat al-abrār*, ed. 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran: Intishārāt Amīr Kabīr, 1951).

rich in spiritual interpretation but which was characterized by brevity - Maybudī thought this feature would make it too challenging for novices in the Sufi Path. Maybudī therefore decided to compose a purely mystical Sufi commentary that was based on al-Anṣārī, with a view to turning it into a Sufi manual for aspirants of the Sufi Path. Although Maybudī was primarily focused upon addressing a Sufi audience, his rhetorical style and the multi-layered structure of his *tafsīr* made it accessible to a larger audience. A further distinctive feature of his work was that Maybudī's methodology of exegesis was based upon combining exoteric and esoteric dimensions, which some scholars maintain that was an "unusual" innovation,²⁸⁷ despite the fact that al-Qushayrī had already established it in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, his Arabic *tafsīr*.

It is instructive to note that al-Qushayrī's *tafsīr* was one of the primary sources which Maybudī consulted when composing his *tafsīr*, but although he both quoted and paraphrased it, al-Qushayrī was not identified by the author. Other Sufi works drawn upon by Maybudī to compose his Sufi exegesis included *Kitāb al-luma'* (by al-Sarrāj - d. 378/988), *Qūt al-qulūb* (by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī - d. 386/ 996) and *Hilyat al-awliyā'* (by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038)).²⁸⁸

Maybudī's exegesis, which combined exoteric and esoteric commentary, was further divided into three sections. The first part is a Persian paraphrasing of the Arabic verses; the second part is dedicated to expounding the exoteric dimension of the verses, with reference to philology, jurisprudence and theology (it therefore follows the same pattern evidenced in other classical exoteric Qur'ānic exegeses). The third and final part is concerned with esoteric interpretation - here spiritual subtleties, symbolic allusions and mystical concepts are explained.²⁸⁹

In the mystical dimension of his *tafsīr*, Maybudī employed two hermeneutical modes which corresponded both to the adepts of the Sufi Path as well as those who the author encouraged to delve into a higher level of spirituality (which lay behind the outward interpretation of the *Sharī'a*). Different techniques were used for the first mode in order to elucidate the intended spiritual subtleties. Poetry and rhyming prose (both in Arabic and Persian) were also instrumental aids. The second mode depended on encrypted

²⁸⁷Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 9-11, 39-40.

²⁸⁸Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, pp. 73.

²⁸⁹Ibid.

language and symbolic allusions, which were intended for the special audience of Sufi adepts.²⁹⁰ Both modes served to accentuate and elucidate each other.

The flourishing of Persian Sufi commentaries continued in the middle of the 6th/12th century, best embodied in *Başā'ir al-tafsīr*, which was written by Mu'īn al-Dīn Nīsābūrī. His Persian commentary was infused with pedagogical and mystical writings and integrated many sources, the most well-known of which is *Ihyā'* of Ghazālī. While his writing style was infused with the use of metaphors, it lacked rhyming prose.²⁹¹

'*Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* (by the renowned Persian Sufi master, Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209)) was another Sufi commentary on the Qur'ān that made a valuable addition to the genre of esoteric exegesis in the 6th/12th century. While the introduction of his *tafsīr* referred to the importance of the exoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān, this was not reflected in his actual exegesis, which was instead limited to the spiritual interpretation and allegorical subtleties.²⁹² In addition to unearthing original mystical interpretations, Baqlī also drew upon the mystical expositions of earlier Sufi scholars with the intention of constructing his own original Sufi hermeneutics.²⁹³ The profundity of the mystical experiences that Baqlī encountered was reflected in his paradoxical writing style, which was loaded with recondite Sufi technical terms and encoded spiritual doctrines.²⁹⁴ In contrast to al-Qushayrī's balance between outer *sharī'a* and inner *ḥaqāqa*, Baqlī adopted al-Sulamī's approach of a purely mystically oriented interpretation which was advanced at the expense of the literal and exoteric meaning of the text.

The 7th/13th century was marked with the birth of the intellectual Sufi school of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), who adopted the concept of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and established it as an essential underpinning of his mystical vision. This concept left indelible marks upon his Qur'ānic exegeses which are scattered throughout his works such as the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*.²⁹⁵ The concept of the Unity of Being advocated by Ibn 'Arabī and members of his school revolved around the unity between God and His creation. Both were depicted as one entity: all creation was in God's knowledge prior to its substantial existence. Because of this, it will find its way back to God once again by death. The possibility of a spiritual union with God was therefore

²⁹⁰ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 57.

²⁹¹ Annabel Keeler, "Exegesis in Persian," p. 121.

²⁹² al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, p. 288.

²⁹³ al-Baqlī, '*Arā'is al-Bayān*, vol.1, introduction, p. 12.

²⁹⁴ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries*, pp. 75-76.

²⁹⁵ al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, p. 304.

advanced.²⁹⁶ God is the only true Reality and the whole cosmic universe is considered to be a locus for God's beautiful Names and divine Attributes; it is a theophany which acts as a mirror and enables us to see God. When we are attracted to other people or objects, we actually admire God's beauty and love, both of which are reflected in them. The theory of the Unity of Being gave rise to a connecting theory which maintains that the Perfect Man is the complete manifestation of all God's divine attributes²⁹⁷ who is characterized by revealing "the Muḥammadan reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), which is a spiritual essence defined as the perfect prototype of creation in God's knowledge.²⁹⁸ The Perfect Man is therefore present in every age and is conceived as the perfect worshipper who exemplifies all God's divine attributes in totality. These Sufi doctrines and mystical theories were further elucidated by (Ibn 'Arabī's disciple) Ṣadr al-dīn al-Qunawī (d. 673/1274) and 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. early 9th /15th century).²⁹⁹

'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kashānī (d. 730/1329) was another famous Sufi exegete who was a follower of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufi school. He wrote a Qur'ānic exegesis entitled *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* (Qur'ānic Interpretations) that was erroneously attributed to Ibn 'Arabī. Al-Kashānī's methodology of exegetical writing used allegorical symbolism to relate Qur'ānic verses to different spiritual stages of the Sufi Path.³⁰⁰ He only used esoteric interpretation, and this sometimes did not correspond to the context of the verse or its intended lexical meaning. The difficulty of deciphering his commentary is further exacerbated by the fact that al-Kashānī virtually ignores the exoteric dimension of the text which sometimes makes it quite difficult to decode his allegorical writing.³⁰¹

During the 7th/13th century, another voluminous esoteric exegesis, which combined spiritual subtleties and legal interpretation, emerged. *Baḥr al-ḥaqā'iq wa al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-sab' al-mathānī* was written by Najm al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ibn Muḥammad Rāzī (who was known as "Dāya") (d. 654/1526). He died before completing his *tafsīr*, and 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1335) assumed responsibility for the completion of *'Ayn al-ḥayāt*. When these two *tafsīrs* are combined, they are entitled *al-Ta'wīlāt al-*

²⁹⁶ "Wahdat al-Wujud," In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Ed. John L. Esposito. Accessed: 04-Feb-2016. <<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2466>>.

²⁹⁷ Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Ibn al-'Arabī, Muḥyī al-dīn," In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. 04-Feb-2016. <<http://0-www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/article/opr/t236/e0338>>.

²⁹⁸ "al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah," In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Ed. John L. Esposito. Accessed: 04-Feb-2016. <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095920105>>.

²⁹⁹ Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Ibn al-'Arabī, Muḥyī al-dīn," In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. 04-Feb-2016. <<http://0-www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/article/opr/t236/e0338>>.

³⁰⁰ Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, p. 77.

³⁰¹ Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, p. 297.

najmiyya.³⁰² While Simnānī's *tafsīr* was a continuation of his predecessor's, the methodology he applied clearly diverged from Dāya's. Dāya occasionally referred to the exoteric meaning of certain verses and their esoteric interpretation. His writing style was neither phrased ambiguously nor did it derive from philosophical notions – both served to make his *tafsīr* more accessible to the public. In contrast to his predecessor, Simnānī's approach only focused upon the esoteric meaning of the Qur'ānic verses, which was treated in an encrypted language that was hard to decipher.³⁰³ While his methodology was heavily biased towards the esoteric dimension of the Qur'ān, he recognized like al-Tustarī four different levels of interpreting the Qur'ān and sought to associate them with the four realms of existence. At this stage it may be helpful to reflect upon this concept, as this may help to clarify why he only chose one level of interpretation. Simnānī believed that the exoteric level of interpretation corresponded with the Human Realm (*al-nāsūt*): the body should therefore comply with the Qur'ānic stipulations (dos and don't's). The esoteric level is associated with the realm of Sovereignty (*malakūt*) – here divine inspiration reveals the inner meanings to purified hearts. The third level is the limit of the Qur'ān (*ḥadd*), which is related to the Realm of Omnipotence (*jabarūt*) - here the heart becomes a direct witness of God's divine attributes. The last realm is the Realm of Divinity (*lāhūt*), which is antechamber for reaching the point of ascent (*maṭla'*), which is the last level on which the Qur'ān is interpreted.³⁰⁴ It is therefore apparent that Simnānī's interpretation of the esoteric dimension focused greatly on the fourth level of *lāhūt*, which meant that his commentary was, for the most part, elliptical and abstruse.

Sufi traditions within the Ottoman Empire and India were, from the 9th/15th century through the 12th/18th century, marked by numerous Sufi exegetes. One of the most influential was Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī (d. 1137/1725), who wrote a famous Qur'ānic commentary entitled *Rūḥ al-bayān*.³⁰⁵ His Turkish background and command of both Arabic and Persian meant that Ḥaqqī's *tafsīr*, which was written largely in Arabic, became interspersed with Turkish and Persian poetry and prose.³⁰⁶ His *tafsīr* succeeded in achieving an equilibrium between exoteric exposition and esoteric interpretation. Ḥaqqī outlined his methodology in the introduction – here he stated that his method would be to

³⁰² Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, pp. 144,145, 150.

³⁰³ Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, p. 292.

³⁰⁴ Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of 'Alā' ad-dawla as-Simnānī*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 107-108.

³⁰⁵ Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, (Istanbul, al-Maṭba'a al-'Uthmāniyya,1911), 10 volumes, Alan Godlas, "Sufism", p. 356.

³⁰⁶ al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-mufasssīrūn*, p. 268.

cite the opinions of earlier Sufi scholars. He therefore intended, for the most part, to focus upon three major Sufi exegeses (*al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* by al-Qāḍī Abū al-Su‘ūd, *al-Ta’wīlāt* by al-Kāshānī and *al-Ta’wīlāt al-Najmiyya*). His *tafsīr* had both a didactic and pedagogical purpose. In attempting to convey the intended meaning, Ḥaqqī at times resorted to allegorical stories and imaginary anecdotes, a method also employed by Rūmī in his *Mathnawī*, stories capturing the imagination and being an excellent way to grab the reader’s attention. Having been deeply affected by Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Ḥaqqī’s *tafsīr* was infused with Akbarian thought and terminology (although the author did not explicitly state this).³⁰⁷

This brief (and by no means comprehensive) survey of the development of the genre of Sufi esoteric exegesis of the Qur’ān has made it clear that Sufi exegetes usually chose between adopting an inclusive methodology (where both exoteric and esoteric interpretation are included) or instead solely confined themselves to esoteric interpretation (a method exclusively suited to Sufi adepts). Within the esoteric level of Qur’ānic interpretation, different techniques existed and corresponded to various levels of complexity of the interpreted verses – they therefore related to the employment of allegorical and metaphorical methods, symbolic allusions, encrypted language, abstruse Sufi terms and other techniques which make Sufi hermeneutics, for the most part, arcane. The skill of combining the eloquence of exoteric interpretation with the charm of mystical subtleties and rendering it in a language accessible to the general public was an art which only a few Sufi mastered.

The next section will review some of the most influential Sufi exegeses and their different exegetical methodologies. It will explore the various sources which Ibn ‘Ajība utilized in composing his Sufi exegesis. The reasons why he selected certain Sufi commentaries over others will also be closely examined; this is particularly important because his approach reflects his own methodology in the science of Qur’ānic exegesis.

2.2) Sources of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Exoteric Qur’ānic Exegesis

Ibn ‘Ajība depended on a wide variety of Qur’ānic exegeses on which he based the exoteric section of his *tafsīr*. He combined *al-tafsīr b’l ma’tḥūr* (exegesis based on Quranic verses, prophetic traditions and adages of the companions) and *al-tafsīr b’l- ra’y* (exegesis based on intellectual reasoning), the two famous schools of Qur’ānic

³⁰⁷ Ateş, *İşari Tefsir Okulu*, pp. 242-244.

exegesis.³⁰⁸ Imām al-Baiḍāwī's (d. 685/1282 or 691/1291)³⁰⁹ Qur'ānic exegesis *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl*, which is extracted from the latter school, was a primary source of reference.³¹⁰ Ibn 'Ajība's selection of Baiḍāwī's *tafsīr* as the bedrock of his exoteric exegesis was attributable to its unique features, which principally depended on its intellectual reasoning and philosophical approach. Ibn 'Ajība must also have been inspired by the methodology that al-Baiḍāwī adopted in his Qur'ānic commentary, which briefly referenced the various Qur'ānic readings, the linguistic origins of ambiguous words and provided the succinct discussions of grammatical and morphological word structures. The allusion to different juristic rulings for verses that included jurisprudential issues, in addition to adages of the Companions and precepts of the generations that followed them were all salient features of al-Baiḍāwī's exegesis. The assertion of the theological positions of the Ash'arī school against the Mu'tazilī's doctrinal beliefs was most clearly evidenced in al-Baiḍāwī's exposition of verses with theological references. His *tafsīr* was also distinguished by its scant references to the *Isrā'iliyyāt*, apocryphal stories from the Old Testament and Torah, which were loosely included in other Qur'ānic exegeses. Al-Baiḍāwī's intellectual discernment combined with his eminence in Islamic scholarship established his commentary as a model of subtle exposition that was presented in an eloquent and concise language.³¹¹

As a renowned legal theorist and eminent judge, al-Baiḍāwī's Qur'ānic commentary can be classified under *al-tafsīr bi 'l al-ra'y* (using intellectual reasoning for Qur'ānic exegesis).³¹² Since it was a major source of reference in Ibn 'Ajība's *tafsīr*, it will be instructive to explore the three primary sources on which al-Baiḍāwī relied – this will also provide insight into elements that are referenced – both directly and indirectly – within Ibn 'Ajība's work.

Al-Baiḍāwī based his *tafsīr* on the *Kashāf* of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143), after first filtering the author's Mu'tazilī theological views.³¹³ The wide fame of al-Zamakhsharī's Qur'ānic commentary was attributable to its eloquent rhetorical style and its enriching linguistic and literary structure.³¹⁴ At times, Ibn 'Ajība also quoted directly

³⁰⁸ Claude, Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval." *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. II, p. 99.

³⁰⁹ J. Robson, "al-Bayḍāwī." *EI²*, vol. I, p. 1129.

³¹⁰ Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 146.

³¹¹ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl*, (Beirut: Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1998), p. 12, 13.

³¹² *Ibid*, p. 5.

³¹³ *Ibid*.

³¹⁴ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybūdī*, p. 13.

from al-Zamakhsharī's exegesis. By virtue of the fact that it was considered as one of the most pre-eminent literary works on *tafsīr* that possessed a Mu'tazilī theological orientation, Ibn 'Ajība opted to cite it. However, in doing so, he ignored the theories of the Mu'tazilī's school that permeated al-Zamakhsharī's work and instead favored the Ash'arite doctrine.³¹⁵

Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606/1209), the celebrated theologian and Qur'ānic exegete, authored a copious *tafsīr* which was composed of a total of eight volumes. It was entitled *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb* and combined the philosophical and "intellectual reasoning" approaches of *tafsīr*,³¹⁶ and was another significant source that fed into al-Baidāwī's Qur'ānic exegesis.³¹⁷ While Ibn 'Ajība did not rely heavily on al-Rāzī's exegesis in forming his own judgements, it was a beneficial source for him – this was particularly apparent in relation to the causes of revelations of different Qur'ānic verses and chapters.³¹⁸

Tahqīq al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) is the final source which al-Baidāwī drew upon when composing his *tafsīr*. Here he committed his introductory chapter to setting down the structural groundwork of the science of Qur'ānic exegesis and to sketching the outlines of its key features. This *tafsīr* later became established as one of the crucial sources in the science of Qur'ānic exegesis.³¹⁹

While al-Baidāwī's *tafsīr* is not considered as a Sūfī Qur'ānic exegesis, its author succeeded in including some subtle allusions and referring to intuitive forms of knowledge in his work. These sporadic traces of esoteric allusions in al-Baidāwī's exegesis were no doubt considered by Ibn 'Ajība to be a more plausible reason to use al-Baidāwī's *tafsīr* as the main reference for his work. Mahmut Ay skillfully draws attention to the fact that Ibn 'Ajība was not blindly copying the opinions of al-Baidāwī; rather he instead sought to include his own views and critical remarks on al-Baidāwī's various perspectives.³²⁰

Ibn 'Ajība also relied upon *al-Tashīl li-'ulūm al-tanzīl* by Ibn Juzayy al-Andalusī (d. 742/1341),³²¹ which is an important source of exoteric exegesis. This Qur'ānic exegesis

³¹⁵ Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 144.

³¹⁶ Nawatī, G.C.. "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī." EI², vol. II, p. 751.

³¹⁷ Al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl*, p. 5.

³¹⁸ Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 149.

³¹⁹ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī*, (Ṭantā: Kulliyat al-Ādāb Ṭantā University, 1999), vol. 1.

³²⁰ Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 146.

³²¹ Ibid.

follows the school of *al-tafsīr bi'l ma'thūr* which derives its bases mainly from Prophetic traditions and the exegetic views of the Prophet's Companions. Ibn Juzayy's *tafsīr*'s richness arises from its brevity and concision. He surveyed all the exegeses written before him in his prolegomenon, which discusses the history of the compilation of the Qur'ān, the differences between Qur'ānic chapters revealed in Mecca and Medina, the various Qur'ānic sciences and also provides an extensive exposition which explains why there are different Qur'ānic exegeses. He also provides an alphabetical dictionary of the most common words that are used in the Qur'ān, along with associated definitions.³²² While Ibn Juzayy's *tafsīr* is primarily used by Ibn 'Ajība for juristic references³²³ he also, in attending to particular verses,³²⁴ compares the interpretations of al-Baidāwī and Ibn Juzayy.

*Irshād al-'aql al-salīm*³²⁵ by the renowned Muftī Abū al-Su'ūd (d. 982/1574)³²⁶ provides the third influential source of reference for Ibn 'Ajība's exoteric Qur'ānic commentary. Ibn 'Ajība greatly appreciated the firm Islamic scholarship that Abū al-Su'ūd had provided and accordingly described his *tafsīr* as an eloquent compendium of the works of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Baidāwī.³²⁷

Madārik al-tanzīl by Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310)³²⁸ is another important source for Ibn 'Ajība's *tafsīr*. His *tafsīr* is distinguished by its moderate length and being infused with the scholarly opinions of famous Sunni scholars of the time and a graceful rhetorical writing style. As a follower of the Ḥanafī School of jurisprudence, al-Nasafī presented a variety of juristic opinions in his *tafsīr*; while however, favoring the Ḥanafite juristic position.³²⁹ Ibn 'Ajība often resorted to al-Nasafī's *tafsīr* when referring to the Ḥanafī School's juristic opinion on different issues.³³⁰

Ibn 'Ajība was also influenced by *al-Kashf wa al-bayān* by Abū Ishāq al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035).³³¹ In referring to a classical Qur'ānic exegesis, Ibn 'Ajība expressed his appreciation of its accessible writing style, lucid meanings and helpful compilation of the

³²² Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Juzayy, *al-Tashīl li 'ulūm al-tanzīl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), 1st ed, vol. 1, pp. 6- 39.

³²³ Ay, *Kur'an'in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 146.

³²⁴ An example can be found in *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, ch. 1, v. 7, p. 65.

³²⁵ Abū al-Su'ūd al-'Imādī, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, ND).

³²⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 35.

³²⁷ Ay, *Kur'an'in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 147.

³²⁸ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 35.

³²⁹ Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqā'iq al-ta'wīl*, (Makkah: Maktabat Nizār Mustafa al-Bāz, ND), vol. 1, p. 1.

³³⁰ Ay, *Kur'an'in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 146.

³³¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 35.

opinions of earlier Islamic scholars; however, he noted that the edition he used was in need of critical review and editing.³³² Other exegetical works which left indelible marks on Ibn ‘Ajība’s *tafsīr* included *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz* by Ibn ‘Aṭīyya (d. 546/1151), *Nawāhid al-abkār* (a commentary on al-Baidāwī’s *Anwar al-tanzīl* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and the *Ḥāshiyat al-Fāsī ‘alā al-Jalālayn* (by Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāsī (d. 1036/1626).³³³

The foregoing survey makes it easy to detect the substantial impact which previously renowned exegetes left upon the exoteric section of Ibn ‘Ajība’s *tafsīr*, largely attributable to profound and rich meanings that have arisen from different Qur’ānic sciences within the pages of earlier commentaries. The attention which Ibn ‘Ajība paid to the incorporation and synthesization of the various conceptual perspectives that underpin the exoteric exegeses of earlier eminent scholars clearly reflect his diligence in giving substantial weight and significance to the exoteric exegesis of the Qur’ān, and thus asserting the vital interdependence of the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Qur’ānic exegesis.

2.3) Sources of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Esoteric Qur’ānic Exegesis

Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm by Sahl Ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Tustarī (d. 896), which was mentioned earlier,³³⁴ is the earliest esoteric *tafsīr* that was accessible to Ibn ‘Ajība and it is also one of the most important esoteric references in his exegesis. This *tafsīr* is one of the two extant writings of al-Tustarī - all his other works have been lost and they are only referenced in Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist*.³³⁵ While al-Tustarī sketched out four levels of Qur’ānic interpretation (the literal (*zāhir*), allegorical (*bāṭin*), moral (*ḥadd*) and anagogical (*maṭla‘*), he only explicitly engaged with the first two levels and only related to the other two when he saw fit.³³⁶ By virtue of the fact that it was a compact document written in easily understandable language and which was rich in symbolic allusions,³³⁷ al-Tustarī’s *tafsīr* became the nucleus of the later genre of Sufī exegesis.

However, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī³³⁸ was the most important Sufī *tafsīr* upon which Ibn ‘Ajība relied when expounding the esoteric section

³³² Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 143.

³³³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 35.

³³⁴ Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 143.

³³⁵ Böwering, G.. "Sahl al-Tustarī." *EI*², vol. VIII, p. 840.

³³⁶ Böwering, G.. "Sahl al-Tustarī." *EI*², vol. VIII, p. 840.

³³⁷ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, p. 66.

³³⁸ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 144.

of his Qur'ānic exegesis. The enthusiastic reception that was given to this *tafsīr* can perhaps be attributed to the success that its author enjoyed in tying down Sūfī praxis to its *Sharī'a*-based origins.³³⁹ He also managed to skillfully avoid the pitfalls which Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī, his predecessor, had committed in his Sūfī commentary *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, which aroused harsh criticism from scholars who were affronted by the fact that al-Sulamī's methodology was mainly composed of allegorical meanings and mystical interpretations that were hard to decipher and which were therefore considered to be incompatible with the *Sharī'a*.³⁴⁰ Al-Qushayrī established his methodology in the introductory section of the exegesis, where he reiterated that the extraction of esoteric meanings is a privilege only granted to those who practice incessant and rigorous spiritual exercises with the intention of purifying their hearts and thus becoming worthy of the divine gifts of illumination which will enable them to unearth the gems of the Qur'ān. He also employed intellectual reasoning in his Qur'ānic interpretation with a view to measuring the extent to which esoteric meanings complied with and corresponded to their exoteric counterparts - linguistic usage, grammar, etymology and the sciences (ḥadīth, legal theory and jurisprudence) were all important reference points in this regard.³⁴¹ It is therefore evident that Qushayrī's balancing of the exoteric dimension of Qur'ānic interpretation and the development of esoteric meanings (that are not opposed to exoteric bases) substantially anticipates the pervasiveness of his *tafsīr* and its usage by Ibn 'Ajība in his own *tafsīr*.

The Arabic masterpiece *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* by the renowned Persian Sufī master, Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī was the second important source for the esoteric part of Ibn 'Ajība's exegesis. This work is a valuable addition to the genre of Sūfī Qur'ānic commentary, in large part due to the originality that its author evidenced in discovering new spiritual meanings that had not been acknowledged by his predecessors.³⁴² This perhaps explains why Ibn 'Ajība chose to cite Rūzbihān's work as one of the major sources of his esoteric exegesis. While Baqlī's work has enjoyed considerable prominence, it has often contributed to confusion among researchers,³⁴³ in

³³⁹ Halm, H.. "al-Ḳushayrī." EI², vol. V, p. 526.

³⁴⁰ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, pp. 4-6.

³⁴¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, pp. 23, 24.

³⁴² Ruzbahān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, introduction, pp. 3,4.

³⁴³ For example, Mahmut Ay after a thorough research and a meticulous comparison of the excerpts that Ibn 'Ajība added to his *tafsīr* under the name of al-Wurtujbī and Rūzbihān's *tafsīr 'Arā'is al-bayān* confirmed that the excerpts are identical to Rūzbihān's *tafsīr* and thus there is no question that al-Wurtujbī's epithet refers to Rūzbihān. That being said, he stated that the reason behind Ibn 'Ajība's usage of the title "al-Wurtujbī" whenever he referred to al-Baqlī remains unknown although he mentioned the possibility of

large part due to the difficulties encountered in establishing an association between Baqlī's name and his epithet "al-Wurtujībī" (which Ibn 'Ajība used whenever he referred to Baqlī's work). At first sight, it is hard to blame researchers for not being able to establish an immediate connection between Baqlī's name and his epithet "al-Wurtujībī", especially so because the latter name is not usually featured in any biographical dictionaries.³⁴⁴ This fact notwithstanding, further research clearly illustrates that the epithet "al-Wurtujībī" was clearly written at the end of Baqlī's full name at the end of a lithography of *'Arā'is al-bayān* extant in the Moroccan Ḥasanid Reservoir of Manuscripts.³⁴⁵ While Baqlī's epithet might be unfamiliar to some of the modern researchers, it was widely used both by scholars at the time of Ibn 'Ajība and also by following generations. In the nineteenth century, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Fāsī (d. 1295/1878) stated, in his biographical dictionary *Tadhkirat al-muḥsinīn*, that his *tafsīr* combined the scholarly opinions of both exoteric and esoteric exegeses and contained a mystical reference which superseded the *tafsīr* of al-Wurtujībī and others.³⁴⁶ This is confirmed by Alan Godlas, who has noted that all the manuscripts of *'Arā'is al-bayān* that he has

a confusion and mixing between Wurtujībī's and Rūzbihān's name in writing. Also Ay asserted that it is rather normal for the editors of Ibn 'Ajība's works not to find any biography under "al-Wurtujībī" in any of the books of biographical dictionaries because there is no scholar to be found with this name. (Ay cited this example in the footnote: *al-Futūḥāt al-Ilāhiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Abdurrahman, el-Uveysi, el-Yemame li't-Tibaati ve'n-Nesr, Dimask 1997, p. 498, ft. 1). Moreover, Ay referred to a book written on Ibn 'Ajība's exegesis by Ḥasan Azūzī and explained that the reason behind Azūzī's choice not to refer to al-Baqlī's exegesis, despite its established importance, is probably due to the author's uncertainty of the identity of al-Wurtujībī (Hasan Azzūzī, eṣ-Şey Ahmed bin Acibe ve Menhecuhu fi't-Tefsir el-Memleketuil-Mağribiyye Vezaratu'l-Evkaf ve'ş-Şuunil-Islamiyye, 2001). (*Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 145-146). The obscurity of al-Wurtujībī's identity was shared by a contemporary writer of biographical dictionaries, Muḥammad Ṭarhūnī, who pointed that though the name "al-Wurtujībī" is written by 'Abd al-Kabīr al-Fāsī in his work *Tadhkirat al-Muḥsinīn*, he could not find a Qur'ānic exegesis under such name and thus suggested a possibility of an alteration done to the original name of the author. (Muḥammad Ibn Rizq Ibn Ṭarhūnī, *al-Taḥṣīn wa al-mufasssīrūn fī gharb Afrīqya*, al-Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2004, vol.1, 1st. ed, p. 191, ft. 4).³⁴⁴ The epithet "al-Wurtujībī" is not cited by some of the famous authors of biographical dictionaries. This includes al-Zarkalī, who cited Baqlī's name as "Ruzbihān Ibn Abī al-Naṣr al-Faswī al-Shīrāzī al-Kāzarūnī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, Abū Muḥammad al-Baqlī" (*al-A'lām*, 15th ed., vol.3, 2002, p. 35), along with Ḥajī Khalīfa, who only cited his name as "Abū Muḥammad Ibn Abū al-Naṣr al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī al-Sūfī" *Kashf al-zunūn*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1941, vol.2, p. 1131).

³⁴⁵ Muḥammad al-Manūnī, *Fahāris makḥṭūāt al-khazāna al-ḥasaniyya ḥasab arqāmihā 'alā al-rufūf*, (al-Ribāt: al-Maṭba'a al-Malakiyya, 1983) vol. 1, no. 247. The author states that only the second half of the manuscript is extant and it extends from Chapter 15 until the end of the Qur'an. It is written in a colored Moroccan calligraphy that does not contain any written dates of the composed work. The manuscript was handcopied by Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Abū 'Ulwa in 1032/1622. A lithographical copy of the book was made in India in 1301/1883. It is worthwhile to note that the author wrote, as a note at the end of his description of the manuscript, that "al-Wurtujībī" was the signed name that was used at the end of the book. The author added a question mark, perhaps with the intention of demonstrating his unfamiliarity with al-Baqlī's epithet. In addition, new excerpts of the manuscript of al-Baqlī's exegesis were discovered in which the epithet "al-Wurtujībī" was attached to his name; the importance of this newly discovered manuscript is attributable to the fact that the only extant copy to be found of *'Arā'is al-Bayān* was the lithographical one mentioned above (*Dalīl jā'izat al-Ḥasan al-Thānī li al-makḥṭūāt*, 34th session, Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, (al-Ribāt: Dār al-Manāhil, 2009), pp. 25, 34.

³⁴⁶ Al-Ḥājī, *Mawsū'at a'lām al-Maghrib*, p. 2483.

personally engaged in Morocco contain the name of Rūzbihān as al-Wurtujbī.³⁴⁷ In line with Ibn ‘Ajība’s critical methodology that was applied when he cited other esoteric exegeses, he evaluates the opinions by Rūzbihān and then provides his own perspective which at times differs from the views of Rūzbihān.³⁴⁸

2.4) Other Sufi References Cited by Ibn ‘Ajība

While Ibn ‘Ajība mainly depended on two esoteric exegeses as the key sources of his work, he enriched his Sufi commentary by drawing upon verse and prose quoted from various prominent Sufi scholars. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d.505/1111) *magnum opus*, which was entitled *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, was sporadically referenced throughout Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary. In acknowledging that this was one of the most influential classical manuals outlining the Sufi Path,³⁴⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība employed the *Ihyā’* as the cornerstone of his exegesis as he endeavored to build his own Sufi paradigm.

Ibn ‘Abbād al-Rundī, the eminent Spanish Sufi mystic, was also an important source of inspiration for Ibn ‘Ajība. His commentary on the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh, which was entitled *Ghayth al-mawāhib al-‘aliyya*,³⁵⁰ had been in fact the first work that had introduced him to Sufism. In addition to providing an edifying source for followers of the Sufi Path, it was indispensable for Ibn ‘Ajība as he sought to engage with the most renowned mystic writer in the 8th/14th century in Morocco. Aside from leaving an indelible mark on Ibn ‘Ajība, the work also helped to spread the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order in Morocco, and here it is important to acknowledge that Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh became the first commentary that introduced the *Ḥikam* to a Moroccan readership.³⁵¹

Another classical work of Sufi literature which also left its imprint on Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic commentary was the work of ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī Harawī (d. 481/1089), which was entitled *Manāzil al-sā’irīn*.³⁵² This was an Arabic manual of the Sufi spiritual stations that enjoyed high regard, which was reflected by the numerous commentaries that were written on it.³⁵³ An additional work that was written earlier in the 4th/10th century, and

³⁴⁷ Alan Godlas, “Influences of Qushayrī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* on Sufi Qur’anic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī’s *‘Arā’is al-bayān* and the Kubrāwī *al-Ta’wīlāt al-najmiyya*,” *Journal of Sufi Studies*, vol. 2, (2013), pp. 83, 84, ft. 19.

³⁴⁸ An example of that would be in Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, ch.1, verse 7, vol. 1, p. 67.

³⁴⁹ Watt, W. Montgomery. “al-Ghazālī.” *EI*², vol. II, p. 1038.

³⁵⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, p. 38.

³⁵¹ Nwiya, P.. “Ibn ‘Abbād.” *EI*², vol. III, p. 670.

³⁵² Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 151.

³⁵³ Beaurecueil, S. de. “al-Anṣārī al-Harawī.” *EI*², vol. I, p. 515.

also influenced Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric commentary was *Qūt al-qulūb* by Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d. 386/998),³⁵⁴ which was praised by Ibn ‘Abbād as an indispensable foundational text of the science of Sufism and its major concepts.³⁵⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība also found it necessary to integrate *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, the essential classical Sufi manual that Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) composed in the 5th/11th century, into his esoteric commentary as an indispensable reference.³⁵⁶ The wide renown of this Sufi work is attributable in part to its author’s desire to purge the science of Sufism of a number of deviations that he thought were aberrant to the letter and spirit of Sufism.³⁵⁷

As a follower of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order, it was of course incumbent upon Ibn ‘Ajība to ensure that its founder, Abu al-Hasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), in addition to one of his renowned disciples, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), were mentioned in his commentary which was appropriate because both mystics had contributed immensely to enriching the classical Sufi literary and spiritual heritage. The biographies of these two eminent scholars would later be codified by Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309), the celebrated Sufi mystic, in his *Laṭā’if al-minan*.³⁵⁸

It was equally important for Ibn ‘Ajība to absorb and synthesize the works of the founder of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order (the renowned Sufi master Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī (d.1239/1823)) and his own spiritual master Shaykh Muḥammad al-Būzaydī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1229/1813), who wrote *al-Ādāb al-marḍiyya li sālik ṭarīq al-ṣūfiyya* (“Praiseworthy Conduct for the Seekers of the Sufi Path,” as an essential manual of Sufi etiquette and a code of conduct that sought to guide novices (*al-murīd*) in their interactions with their spiritual masters.³⁵⁹

While Ibn ‘Ajība did not directly refer to Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, his Sufi commentary is infused with Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Ibn ‘Ajība may have decided against including Ibn ‘Arabī’s name because of the controversies that had been caused by his mystical doctrines - some scholars maintained that they challenged the

³⁵⁴ Ay, *Kur’an’in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 151.

³⁵⁵ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu’āmalat al-maḥbūbb*, vol.1, introduction, p. 3.

³⁵⁶ Ay, *Kur’an’in Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 151.

³⁵⁷ I-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, introduction, p. 14. See also Alan Godlas, “Influences of Qushayrī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* on Sufi Qur’anic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī’s *‘Arā’is al-bayān* and the Kubrāwī *al-Ta’wīlāt al-najmiyya*” *Journal of Sufi Studies*, vol.2, (2013), p. 83.

³⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī, *Laṭā’if al-minan*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 1991), 1st ed., p. 10.

³⁵⁹ Muḥammad al-Būzaydī, *al-Ādāb al-marḍiyya li sālik ṭarīq al-ṣūfiyya*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2006), 1st ed, p. 9.

theological dogma of the transcendence of God and His demarcation from creation.³⁶⁰ One of the most well-known examples in Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary, which reflects his adoption of the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is found in his esoteric interpretation of the verse “[u]nto God belong the East and the West”³⁶¹ Here he said that:

“[A]nd learn that all the places and destinations, and all the creatures which appeared, are sustained by the lights of the divine attributes and annihilated in the oneness of the divine essence. God existed and there was none save Him and now He maintains the same state that He held before and thus nothing in reality exists with God and therefore wherever you turn, it is the direction towards God”....³⁶².

Ibn ‘Arabī’s influence on Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary is further discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.

In the realm of Sufi poetry, Ibn ‘Ajība was mainly influenced by the works of verse of three poets. ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 633/1235), who was renowned for his Sufi poetry of love, is the first.³⁶³ Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetic exposition combined intoxication and sobriety; the former was invoked in his advice to taste the “wine” of divine love that was advanced in *al-Khamriyya*, his classic poem; the latter expressed a well-constructed blueprint of the mystical experiences in the Sufi Path that was sketched in *Nazm al-sulūk*, his most famous work.³⁶⁴ These two modes of expression closely corresponded to Ibn ‘Ajība’s balanced approach, which combined homiletic and pedagogical discourse and ravishing elliptical mystical exposition.

Husayn Ibn Mansūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) is another influential Sufi poet whose works were referred to by Ibn ‘Ajība. He was renowned for his paradoxical theopathic statements and ecstatic utterances (*shaṭḥiyyāt*). Ḥallāj advocated the unification (*ittiḥād*) of love between the Creator and created through God’s witnessing of Himself in the heart of His servant. He was often accused of advocating the heresy of incarnationism (*ḥulūl*); however, a more sustained engagement with his poems negates the notion of ontological union and exposes that he advocated a spiritual union of love.³⁶⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība clearly

³⁶⁰ Knysh, Alexander, “Waḥdat al-Wujūd.” In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Accessed: 04-Feb-2016. <<http://0-www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/article/opr/t236/e1091>>.

³⁶¹ Qur’ān: 2:115.

³⁶² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, pp. 155-156.

³⁶³ Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), pp.155.

³⁶⁴ Nicholson, R.A.; Pedersen, J.. "Ibn al-Fāriḍ." *EI*², vol. III, p. 763. See also Suleyman Derin, *From Rābi ‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Towards Some Paradigms of the Sufi Conception of Love*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds. (online unpublished version), 1999, p. 276.

³⁶⁵ Massignon, L.; Gardet, L.. "al-Ḥallādj." *EI*², vol. VIII, p. 99.

understood the mystical meanings of al-Ḥallāj's poems, as is indicated in the sporadic quotations from him throughout his commentary.

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (d. 508/1114) is the third most frequently quoted Sufi poet in the esoteric section of Ibn 'Ajība's commentary. He was renowned for being the first author of *Zajal*, a strophic poetic form in Arabic which became popular in Spain, Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Al-Shushtarī, in a manner which closely resembled Ibn 'Arabī, advocated a similar Sufi theory of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). He composed *Zajal* poems in a beautiful and understandable language that was widely appreciated by the general public. The eloquent style and profound mystical meanings of these poems would later be extensively praised by Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda.

Now that this brief survey of the most influential Sufi references and authors on Ibn 'Ajība, whether in Qur'ānic exegesis or works of Sufi doctrine or poetry, has been conducted,³⁶⁶ it is easier to understand the nuances of Ibn 'Ajība's selective approach to the classical Sufi tradition. This ranges from an occasional excessive use of symbolic allusions and elliptical language style (that is only suited for the Sufi adepts) to a tendency to interpret enigmatic and mystical concepts in an accessible and appealing language suitable for the general public. Ibn 'Ajība chose to maintain a balanced approach between the two approaches, so as to make his esoteric commentary generally understandable and easily accessible to those who had not previously been exposed to the Sufi Path. This approach, which had previously been adopted by al-Qushayrī in his *tafsīr*, earned his work an enthusiastic reception among exoteric and esoteric scholars alike. This feature notwithstanding, Ibn 'Ajība occasionally adopted a more esoteric and enigmatic approach, which is evidenced whenever he chose to expound Sufi concepts and mystical paradigms only suited to the Sufi adepts. These two modes of expression are discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.5) The Methodology of Ibn 'Ajība's Exoteric Exegetical writing

Before the discussion delves into Ibn 'Ajība's methodology of exoteric exegesis, it is necessary to first provide some insight into the title of his exegesis and its connotations. *Al-Baḥr al-madīd* (literally "The Vast Ocean") was the title that Ibn 'Ajība chose to express the mysteries and gems of the Qur'ān, thus equating the holy book with a sea whose depths are unfathomable and whose breadth is immeasurable. Every exegete, in

³⁶⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī, *Dīwān Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī*, (Alexandria: Mansha'at al-Ma'ārif, 1960), 1st ed., pp. 3,4,7.

accordance with his individual aptitude,³⁶⁷ dives into the depth of this sea to the level of his own knowledge and extracts the pearls of its meanings and the gems of its subtleties.

Ibn ‘Ajība was motivated to write his Qur’ānic exegesis after his masters (Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzaydī, and Mawlay al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī) asked him to write a Qur’ānic commentary which combined exoteric and esoteric interpretations. He outlined his exegetical methodology by mentioning that, in each verse, he intended to initially engage with linguistic and morphological aspects before proceeding to an exoteric interpretation and concluding with an esoteric one. He also balanced the summative and extensive length of the commentaries.³⁶⁸

While Ibn ‘Ajība’s *tafsīr* is better known for its esoteric interpretation and mystical subtleties, the emphasis that he placed upon exoteric interpretation is by no means of secondary importance. In Ibn ‘Ajība’s introduction to his *tafsīr*, he mentioned the importance of exoteric interpretation and its precedence over its esoteric counterpart. He also briefly mentioned the criteria of the Qur’ānic exegete which any individual has to possess as a prerequisite before they delve into exoteric or esoteric Qur’ānic interpretation. It is essential for the individual to have a strong foothold in Islamic sciences such as the Arabic language studies (including morphology, syntax and rhetoric), jurisprudence, ḥadīth sciences and history; in addition, they should also have studied the Qur’ān extensively and contemplated its meanings in considerable depth. These are all essential criteria for the exoteric exegete. In the case of the esoteric exegete, this knowledge should be accompanied by an immersion in the theory and practice of the Sufi sciences. Their understanding should also be enhanced by the companionship of a Sufi spiritual master who provides guidance on the Sufi Path.³⁶⁹

Ibn ‘Ajība endorsed multiple conventional levels of interpretation in the exoteric section, the first of which was historical. A more sustained engagement at this level requires a fuller comprehension of the place of revelation (*makān al-nuzūl*) of a said Qur’ānic chapter (*sūra*) – that is, whether it was revealed in Mecca or Medina. In addition, it also requires a fuller knowledge of the various titles of the chapter, along with an explanation of their signification. The *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (the opening chapter of the Qur’ān) provides a clear example: ten different names having been given as titles to this particular

³⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 49.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 50, 51.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 49.

sūrah.³⁷⁰ The number of verses of each chapter is always cited at the beginning of this interpretive level in addition to the occasion and reason for its revelation (*munāsabat wa aṣbāb al-nuzūl*). A good example of this is provided by *Sūrat Al-‘Imrān*, which addressed the Christians of Najran and reproached them for their excessive exaltation of Jesus Christ and reluctance to embrace Islam.³⁷¹ A further example is found in *Sūrat al-Baqara* where Ibn ‘Ajība employs the concept of the ‘reason of revelation’ to assist him in obtaining a better understanding of the chapter in question.³⁷² It is worthwhile to note that Ibn ‘Ajība was not content to merely state the reason of revelation but rather used it as a departure point to deduce further meanings. In addressing himself to *Sūrat al-Baqara*, where God states, “It is no sin for you that ye seek the bounty of your Lord (by trading)...”³⁷³, Ibn ‘Ajība noted the reason which helps to explain the revelation of this verse is that prior to the advent of Islam, people used to set up markets for trading during the pilgrimage season. However, once Islam was established, people became reluctant and were less predisposed to trade during Ḥajj. This verse was intended to reassure Muslims that there is no sin in seeking the Lord’s bounties through trading during the season of pilgrimage, however this only applies if this trading is accompanied by a sincere prior intention that the primary motive is to perform pilgrimage and not trade. Ibn ‘Ajība drew upon al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’* to expand the horizon of the reader’s mind on matters pertaining to the concept of sincere intention (*al-niyya al-khāliṣa*) of an action, which entails that it is solely performed for God’s sake and is not accompanied by any other intention. The possession of a sincere intention is a theological issue that is the determinant factor in the acceptance or rejection of a certain action in God’s sight. If an action is performed with the intention of being performed for the sake of somebody/something other than God, this intention becomes subject to punishment and remoteness. On the other hand, if an action is conducted with the sincere intention of being for God’s sake, then it elicits both divine reward and proximity to God. With regard to actions which have mixed intentions, the strength of these motives should be weighed against the motives of performing the action

³⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība explained the ten different titles given to *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* such as *al-wāfiya*, *al-kāfiya*, *al-shāfiya* etc.. Further explications can be found in *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. I, p. 52.

³⁷¹ The reproach was also addressed to the Jews for not embracing Islam and the Muslims when they failed to be attentive to the Prophet’s commands – as a result, they were defeated in the Battle of Uḥud. This is why the three revealed books (Torah, Bible and Qur’ān) were mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter. (*al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 321).

³⁷² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 33.

³⁷³ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthal, al-Baqara (2:198). M. M. Pickthal, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’ān*, London: Alfred. A. Knope, 1930.

for the sake of God alone, and upon this basis and the outcome of this measurement, punishment or reward is to be determined.³⁷⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība previously commented on al-Ghazālī’s explanation of the importance of sincere intention by noting that any such concept should be extended to encompass all our dealings, movements and affairs. This indicates his Sufi orientation, which pays extra attention to the necessity of watchfulness of God in every movement we make and every word we utter. Ibn ‘Ajība buttressed his opinion by quoting Abū al-Ḥassan al-Shādhulī, who stated that when God extends His generosity to His servant, the servant finds himself immersed in worship and distanced from his egoistic inclinations and earthly carnal desires.³⁷⁵ In other words, when vouchsafed God’s grace, it is not necessary to determine if one has a sincere intention in every act, since the servant does not need to justify God as his primary and sole motive because, in every act that he performs, he sees nothing other than God. This example clearly establishes that Ibn ‘Ajība does not interpret the ‘reason of revelation’ at its face value of being merely a historical reference, but actually builds upon it and expands its perspective to encompass different meanings. This unique approach earned his *tafsīr* the distinctive position of being one of the major references for specialists of the science of *asbāb al-nuzūl*.³⁷⁶

The second level of exoteric interpretation is related to jurisprudential and legal issues which are relevant to some verses. One example can be found in the jurisprudential debate among the four Sunnī legal schools that relate to whether the *basmala* is part of *al-Fātiḥa* or not and the legal basis for reciting it in the daily prayers. Although he was a follower of the Mālikī school of jurisprudence, Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation encompasses the scholarly opinions of the four major Sunnī legal schools but does not indicate a particular jurisprudential preference.³⁷⁷ While he adopts al-Baydāwī’s *tafsīr* as a major source of exoteric reference, his jurisprudential approach differs from al-Baydāwī’s – the latter, while stating the different jurisprudential perspectives, being a Shāfi‘ī himself, he favors the Shāfi‘ī school of jurisprudence and supports it heavily with legal evidence; in the example of the *basmala*, al-Baydāwī therefore heavily favors the Shāfi‘īte stance and supports it with legal backing.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 228-229.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 229.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 33.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 52.

³⁷⁸ Al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta’wīl*, p. 25.

In order to attain a better understanding of Ibn ‘Ajība’s balanced jurisprudential approach, it will be instructive to consider the exoteric part of al-Qushayrī’s *tafsīr*. This will in turn provide insight into the question of how he deals with jurisprudential issues. In addressing the *basmala*, al-Qushayrī did not provide any legal justification in support of his juristic opinion that the *basmala* is an integral verse of the Qur’ān and should therefore be recited in prayers. This view led the editor of the work to comment on al-Qushayrī’s jurisprudential stance by explaining that, for al-Qushayrī, the *basmala* is a Qur’ānic verse, and is not therefore, as a number of other scholars believe, an opening or doxological statement.³⁷⁹ These examples suffice to demonstrate that although Ibn ‘Ajība is a follower of the Mālikī school of jurisprudence himself, his balanced jurisprudential approach does not aim to favor his school, but rather provides the framework within which readers can enjoy the breadth of the scholarly opinions in different topics in Islamic jurisprudence.³⁸⁰

The third exoteric level is the linguistic level, which embodies grammatical, philological and lexicographical word meanings and their different uses. Ibn ‘Ajība’s linguistic explication of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* provides a clear example of his engagement with this level.³⁸¹ In engaging with this level, Ibn ‘Ajība also made multiple references to poetry, which enabled him to expound the linguistic meanings of some Qur’ānic words.³⁸² The linguistic level of exegesis was also evidenced during a discussion on the shortened and abbreviated letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘a*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine Qur’ānic chapters. Ibn ‘Ajība’s efforts to decrypt the ambiguous letters operate at two levels; the first is the exoteric level (with which this section is concerned). Ibn ‘Ajība’s exoteric interpretation of the three abbreviated letters (*alif- lām- mīm*) at the beginning of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, for instance observes that while deciphering the ambiguity of the letters’ meaning is only accessible to a selected elite, the normal explanation of their usage maintains that their status as an oath indicates their sacrosanctity and

³⁷⁹ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 44.

³⁸⁰ The juristic issue of whether it is an obligation to recite the *basmala* at the beginning of the chapter of *Fātiḥa* provides a clear example of the variety of juristic opinions of different legal schools. In presenting the juristic debate on this issue among legal scholars, Ibn ‘Ajība states the Mālikī opinion which disfavors reciting the *basmala* in the obligatory prayer but not in the supererogatory one. As for both the Shāfi‘ī and the Hanafī’s opinions, reciting it is a necessity without which the prayer is annulled. Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1 p. 52.

³⁸¹ Examples found in Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1 pp. 53-55.

³⁸² *Ibid*, vol.1, p. 34.

venerableness. Ibn ‘Ajība therefore noted that they can be used as a reference to God’s divine attributes or the Prophet’s different names.³⁸³

The fourth level of exoteric interpretation, which is the most dominant of the four levels, seeks to provide explanatory remarks, with the intention of expounding the connotations and nuances of the Qur’ānic text. The author’s independent and original reading is clearly indicated in his exoteric interpretation of a verse in *Sūrat Āl-‘Imrān*. Here God states: “From God, verily nothing is hidden on earth or in the heavens. He it is shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Might, the Wise”.³⁸⁴ In offering his exoteric interpretation of this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība first references God’s omniscience over everything. He then engages with theological issues such as faith (*imān*) and disbelief (*kufīr*), obedience and disobedience, before next depicting the all-encompassing nature of God’s knowledge, which includes everything in the heaven and the earth such as the number of the grains of sands, the weight of mountains, the amount of waters running and the interior converse of the soul.³⁸⁵ It is worthwhile to note that Ibn ‘Ajība’s account of God’s all-encompassing knowledge is not referenced in either al-Baydāwī’s or al-Qushayrī’s works, which further confirms his originality.

At times Ibn ‘Ajība employs the method of explaining one Qur’ānic verse with another (*sharḥ al-Qur’ān b- il-Qur’ān*). This is illustrated when God says:

“Then Adam received from his Lord words (of revelation)...”³⁸⁶, he commented by saying that the words which were revealed to Adam were: “Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost!”³⁸⁷

In applying this method of *tafsīr* at different points, Ibn ‘Ajība not only emphasizes the importance of exoteric exegesis; more significantly, he expounds upon the sufficiency and adequacy of some Qur’ānic verses in explaining others. This explanation is extended, it should be noted, without using any other interpretive tools. In working across each of the four levels of exoteric interpretation, he did not merely reproduce established scholarly wisdom. Rather, on the contrary, he distances his own

³⁸³ Ibid, p. 71.

³⁸⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Yūsuf Alī, *Ā-Imrān* (3:6), other examples are found in Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 81,82, 88.

³⁸⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 323

³⁸⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthal, *al-Baqara* (2:37).

³⁸⁷ Qur’ān trans. Pickthal, *al-A’rāf* (7:14), Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 33.

work from that of other scholars; his extensive use of the phrase *qultu* (I said) implicitly affirms his success in this regard.³⁸⁸

2.6) The Methodology of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Esoteric Exegetical Writing

The esoteric level of Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary is clearly captured by the term *al-ishāra* – the allusive symbolic meaning that conveys mystical and spiritual subtleties. Although Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric commentary is generally known for its precise language and clear explanation, elliptical writing and ambiguous language do nonetheless creep into his work at times (this feature becomes particularly pronounced when he refers to Sufi technical terms and spiritual concepts that are hard to decipher). In contrast to the exoteric section of his commentary, here Ibn ‘Ajība does not espouse a systematic approach that is characterized by multiple levels of interpretation. He instead selectively applies a variety of different interpretive tools, with an emphasis upon Sufi poetry and rhyming prose. Cross references to Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s *tafsīr* are made throughout Ibn ‘Ajība’s *tafsīr*, and they indicate his preference for their ideas relating to esoteric exegesis.

Ta’wīl (hermeneutical exegesis) is one of the essential esoteric interpretive tools of his commentary which has previously been defined as using the literal meaning of the verse as the basis upon which a deeper understanding can be reached and attained. This method uses the linguistic roots of relevant nouns and verbs and draws upon them to create new associations and develop further meanings.³⁸⁹ The Sufi usage of *ta’wīl* does not usually stray far from its linguistic meaning (“returning back to”). Some scholars observe that esoteric hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) concerns the interior meanings of a verse, whereas *tafsīr* is more concerned with its literal expression.³⁹⁰ It can therefore be asserted that Sufi *ta’wīlāt* are concerned with developing new spiritual meanings that are closely associated with the actual literal meaning of the verse.³⁹¹

Ibn ‘Ajība used the interpretive method of *ta’wīl* in his commentary on *Ṣūrat al-Baqara*, when God states: that “[v]erily Ṣafa and Marwa are among the rites of God”. He interprets *Ṣafa* to be the pure soul (*al-rūḥ al-ṣāfiya*) and presents *Marwa* as the refined self (*al-naḥs al-layyina al-ṭayyiba*). They are both purged and thus rewarded by entry into the divine precinct: as a result the soul can make its major pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) through

³⁸⁸ Numerous examples are found in Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 72, 75, 76 etc.

³⁸⁹ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, p. xxxii.

³⁹⁰ Toby Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī’s Esoteric Commentary on the Qur’an*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 106.

³⁹¹ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, 2011, p. xxii.

annihilation in the divine Essence (*dhāt*), and the self can make its minor pilgrimage (*‘umra*) through annihilation in the divine Attributes (*ṣifāt*).³⁹² Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the word *ṣafā’* as soul (*rūḥ*) is directly related to its linguistic root *ṣ-f-w* (which means ‘to be pure’), and *marwa*, which is interpreted as ‘the self’ derives from the linguistic root *m-r-w* (meaning ‘chivalry’ or ‘manliness’). While the meaning of *Ṣafā* and *Marwa* literally refers to geographical features of the Meccan landscape, other spiritual meanings can be derived, as we have seen, through *ta’wīl* from the linguistic roots of the two words.³⁹³

One of the most salient features of Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation is his usage of the device of classification – an interpretive tool that assigns and places people in their respective spiritual degrees. Keeler introduced the “classification” device in her work on Maybudī’s exegesis, explaining that when it is applied within a Sufī context it entails selecting Qur’ānic actions, virtues or states and classifying believers accordingly. This interpretive method is generally subsequent to a recommended action.³⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība skillfully adopts this device to go beyond a basic classification of believers that is accordance with their states, while making extensive use of his own esoteric terminology. In analyzing a verse from the *Ṣūrat al-Fātiḥa* (“it is you who we worship and it is from you we seek assistance”),³⁹⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība classifies people into three categories, each of which corresponds to their level of certitude and understanding. These categories relate to two spiritual realms (the Realm of Wisdom and the Realm of Power - *‘ālam al-ḥikma wa ‘ālam al-qudra*), which Ibn ‘Ajība introduces in order to expound the differences between the three categories of people.

The first category is for the unmindful (*ahl al-ghafla*) who reside at the station of “worship” which corresponds to the realm of wisdom (*‘ālam al-ḥikma*), a realm where religious obligations are fulfilled. The second category pertains to those who are annihilated in the Divine Essence (*ahl al-fanā’*) and immersed in the station of “assistance” which is aligned with the realm of divine power (*‘ālam al-qudra*), a realm where God’s infinite power and capacity flourish. Ibn ‘Ajība criticizes the first category for being veiled by worship and for paying insufficient heed to the One without whom such worship would not have been performed in the first place. The second category is also criticized for being totally immersed in witnessing God’s dominating power over

³⁹² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 188.

³⁹³ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, (2011), p. xxxii.

³⁹⁴ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 88.

³⁹⁵ Qur’ān, al-Fātiḥa (1:5).

everything and thus blinded to the realm of divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) where people's interactions and acts of worship take place. The balanced approach which Ibn 'Ajība advocates is clearly evidenced in the third category which represents "the people of perfection among adepts in subsistence in God" (*ahl al-kamāl min ahl al-baqā'*). This category is praised because its adepts evidence the ability to maintain a fine equilibrium between the realm of wisdom (*ḥikma* - where people's acts of worship are consciously performed), and the realm of power (*qudra* – which overlaps with an unfathomable belief that none of the acts of worship could possibly be performed without God's assistance and superseding power).³⁹⁶

It is worth noting that the two main esoteric commentaries upon which Ibn 'Ajība drew heavily (namely those by Qushayrī and Rūzbihān) applied a comparative descriptive method in order to differentiate categories of people, without however, referring to the spiritual realms (i.e. *'ālam al-qudra wa 'ālam al-ḥikma*) which corresponded to each of these categories. To put it differently, Qushayrī explained that the concept of worship and its significance indicated the essence of seeking God's assistance³⁹⁷ – however he did not refer to the negative consequences of being immersed in only one of these categories, nor did he mention the relationship that should exist between the two realms which encompass these different categories. Rūzbihān extensively followed Qushayrī's descriptive approach in order to show the differences and complementarities between the concepts of "worship" and "divine assistance" –however, he did not seek to take these concepts to a more elaborate level.³⁹⁸ The above quoted example therefore clearly illustrates that Ibn 'Ajība did not merely classify individuals in accordance with their spiritual status; rather, he instead introduced an esoteric terminology with the intention of better explaining the differences between various categories of people.

Another distinguishing interpretive tool that Ibn 'Ajība employed in his esoteric commentary is introducing earlier classical esoteric interpretations along with critical commentary. For example, in *Ṣūrat al-Fātiḥa*, God says: "Show us the straight path. The path of those on whom you bestowed Your grace, not those who incur wrath and those who were gone astray."³⁹⁹ Ibn 'Ajība cited the esoteric interpretation of Rūzbihān when he equated those who incurred God's wrath with those who are expelled from the realm of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*). Ibn 'Ajība commented that: "[I]t would have been better to

³⁹⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 61.

³⁹⁷ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, pp. 12, 13.

³⁹⁸ Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol.1, pp. 23, 24.

³⁹⁹ Qur'ān, al-Fātiḥa (1: 6-7).

interpret them as those whose carnal desires and whims stopped them from continuing their path to God and led them to fall prey to sins and prohibited acts”.⁴⁰⁰

Ibn ‘Ajība also commented upon Rūzbihān’s interpretation that those who went astray were those who possess no divine knowledge; Ibn ‘Ajība instead maintained that those who go astray are those who are bound by the shackles of imitation and thus lack the perspective that enables them to witness God’s pure Unity and Oneness. Instead of directly witnessing God’s Oneness, they resort to evidence and proofs – this method is considered as clear evidence of having fallen into error and wandering astray (*ḍalāl*), in particular in the eyes of the Sufis who instead privilege direct witnessing.⁴⁰¹ These two cited examples clarify Ibn ‘Ajība’s critical approach: he was insistent upon clearly distinguishing those who reach the end of the Sufi Path (and thus become direct witnesses of God’s Oneness) and those who, a high level of righteousness notwithstanding, continue to stumble with evidential proofs.⁴⁰²

Another favorite interpretive method used by Ibn ‘Ajība is symbolic and allegorical interpretation. He used this method to show the relation between the macrocosmic world of nature and the microcosmic world of human beings. Farhana Mayer has previously referred to this approach as the ‘principle of correspondence’ (*taṭbīq*). Mayer explained that external physical elements of the universe find their correspondences in various spiritual factors within the human self.⁴⁰³ Ja‘far al-Sādiq also employed this allegorical method in his *tafsīr* in various verses. In *Sūrat Ibrāhīm*, God says: “My Lord make this land safe”. Ja‘far used the land of Mecca to symbolize the sage’s heart which is the abode of divine secrets and should therefore be kept safe from separation.⁴⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība followed this long Sufi tradition of using allegorical symbols in esoteric commentaries. In *Sūrat al-Baqara*, God says:

“Who has made the earth your couch and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance. Then set not up rivals unto God when you know (the truth)”.⁴⁰⁵

Commenting on this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība associated the earth with the self (*nafs*) which God made fertile enough to receive exoteric sciences and equated the heavens with

⁴⁰⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 67.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, p. xxxi.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 66.

⁴⁰⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthall, *al-Baqara* (2:22).

the heart (*qalb*) which realizes divine secrets. Water from the sky of the heart of the realm of Sovereignty (*malakūt*) falls on the earthly selves, revives them and prepares them for divine manifestations so that they may bear fruits of divine knowledge and spiritual secrets.⁴⁰⁶ Qushayrī's interpretation of this particular verse is mostly related to its exoteric literal meaning – here God enumerates His countless bounties which necessitate that people turn their hearts only to Him for worship.⁴⁰⁷ Rūzbihān's interpretation was also exoteric in nature and extremely brief – it clearly established that sustenance and provision come solely from God Almighty, who should be worshipped alone.⁴⁰⁸

Ibn 'Ajība made numerous symbolic interpretations of natural events, some of which symbolized various spiritual states. In *Sūrat al-Baqara*, God says: "He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth. Then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He is knower of all things",⁴⁰⁹ In analyzing this verse, Ibn 'Ajība interpreted the earth to be the land of servanthood (*arḍ al-'ubūdiyya*) and the sky to be the abode of the divine Truth (*samā' al-ḥaqīqa*); the seven heavens, meanwhile, corresponded to the seven spiritual stations which are patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), reliance (*tawakkul*), satisfaction (*riḍā*), submission (*taslīm*), love (*maḥabba*) and gnosis (*ma'rifa*).⁴¹⁰ These types of symbolic references are also evidenced in Maybudī's *tafsīr*, which also often associates natural events with spiritual stations and Sufi concepts.⁴¹¹

'Edification' (*ta'līm*) is another distinguishing feature of Ibn 'Ajība's interpretive esoteric method. He employs it as an educational tool to expand the reader's knowledge of God and the Prophet and also uses it to expound issues which conceivably have a metaphysical or theological basis.⁴¹² In *Sūrat al-Baqara* God says, "Lo! Allah disdains not to coin the similitude even of a gnat...".⁴¹³ Ibn 'Ajība concludes that all God's creatures, whether they are as small as an ant or as large as an elephant, reflect God's divine manifestations. The sacred lights of His Essence are manifested through God's infinite power in His divine Attributes; these lights are then evidenced in the realm of wisdom (*ḥikma*) where God's creatures reside. Each creature therefore combines the secrets of the hidden divine Essence of *rubūbiyya* (Lordship) with the outward

⁴⁰⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 87.

⁴⁰⁷ Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, p. 28.

⁴⁰⁸ Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol.1, p. 37.

⁴⁰⁹ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthall, *al-Baqara*, (2:29).

⁴¹⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 93.

⁴¹¹ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 84.

⁴¹² *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁴¹³ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthall, *al-Baqara* (2:26).

manifestation of *'ubūdiyya* (servanthood).⁴¹⁴ The reason why there is such variety in God's creation is because this enables the individual, through a process of contemplation, to find Unity in multiplicity and Oneness in diversity.

Al-Qushayrī, in treating the same verse, sought to emphasise God's infinite power in creating both the divine throne (*al-'arsh*) and the gnat with the same level of ease.⁴¹⁵ In contrast to Ibn 'Ajība, he did not use the idea of different divine realms to further explain his exegesis. The existence of the whole creation, when compared to God, is literally less than an atom of dust. Rūzbihān did not mention the gnat or its wider significance. He instead described the Qur'ān as a sea which contains the secrets of Lordship; its divine Attributes are only witnessed by those who possess the inner sight to see the manifestation of God's Essence and Attributes in the Qur'ān.⁴¹⁶ Rūzbihān's encrypted writing style, which expounds this verse, makes it somewhat difficult for the reader to establish an association between his esoteric commentary and the literal meaning of the verse; it also makes his esoteric interpretation hard to decipher. By contrast, Ibn 'Ajība employs a methodology which directly relates the literal meaning of the verse to its esoteric sense, skillfully developing mystical concepts to explain Sufi ideas in a clear and concise manner.

Ibn 'Ajība also draws upon the exegetical tool of extrapolation (*ta'līq*), which is one of the most widespread interpretive tools in Sufi commentaries. This makes it possible to use the literal interpretation as a means through which a more subtle meaning can be obtained. It can also be used to broaden the meaning of the verse beyond its literal iteration. This is exemplified by *Sūrat al-Baqara*, when God says: "And when We said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and so became a disbeliever."⁴¹⁷ Ibn 'Ajība deduced from this primordial encounter between Adam and the angels who prostrated in veneration before him that only when the soul reaches its ultimate purity is its honor revealed and everything submits itself in humility before it: the purified soul now represents the image of purity of Adam's heart. When the heart is filled with arrogance and pride, it is instead expelled from the realm of divine Reality and is deprived of witnessing the lights of Lordship (*al-rubūbiyya*).⁴¹⁸ This level of purity is attained through divine grace (*'ināya ilāhiyya*),

⁴¹⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 91.

⁴¹⁵ Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, p. 30.

⁴¹⁶ Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, p. 39.

⁴¹⁷ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthall, *al-Baqara* (2:34).

⁴¹⁸ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 96.

which purges the heart of all but God and establishes it as the abode of God. Ibn ‘Ajība used the story of Adam to extrapolate new meanings so as to teach the reader to be Adam-like in purity of heart and thus earn him leadership over others.

Analogy (*qiyās*) is the final interpretive tool that Ibn ‘Ajība uses in his esoteric section. In the Sufi context, *qiyās* is used to transfer the literal meaning (which is directly understood from the verbal expression of the verse) to a meaning that applies in a wider social context.⁴¹⁹ One example of analogical interpretation can be found in Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on *Sūrat Ṭaha*. Here God says: “See they not, then, that it returneth no saying unto them and possesseth for them neither hurt nor use?”⁴²⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība explained that whoever depends on anything save God or leans with love towards anyone other than God, this reliance or love becomes like that calf for him. Any distractions or temptations that draw the worshipper’s heart away from reaching his ultimate goal of entering the realm of Reality (*ḥaḍrat al-ḥaqq*) is considered to be a calf which brings no benefit to the devotee.⁴²¹

In conclusion, Ibn ‘Ajība basically utilizes seven interpretive tools in the esoteric section of his commentary to convey Sufi concepts and mystical theories. These are: hermeneutical exegesis (*ta’wīl*), classification (*taṣnīf*), critical commentary on previous esoteric works (*naqd*), symbolic and allegorical interpretations (*tafsīr ramzī wa majāzī*), edification (*ta’līm*), extrapolation (*ta’līq*) and analogy (*qiyas*). These are the key interpretive tools which establish the basis of Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric methodology and which aim to elucidate spiritual subtleties and convey mystical realities. The interpretive tool of *ta’wīl* was also employed by Ibn ‘Ajība to discuss the literal understanding of the verse, while its associated linguistic root was also used as a point of departure through which new esoteric meanings could be reached.

It has already been noted that this subtle link between literal understanding and esoteric interpretation, which Ibn ‘Ajība generally succeeds in maintaining, is sometimes broken when esoteric commentators choose to convey new spiritual meanings that were not consistent with the linguistic root of a word or the verse’s context. Classification was also used as an essential interpretive tool, both for the purpose of classifying people in accordance with their various spiritual degrees (a method adopted by earlier Sufi

⁴¹⁹ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 82.

⁴²⁰ Qur’ān: trans. Pickthall, Ṭaha (20: 89).

⁴²¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 414.

commentators and also by Ibn ‘Ajība, who sought to introduce original Sufi terminology and enumerate various spiritual realms). Ibn ‘Ajība was not however satisfied with merely quoting previous Sufi scholars. Instead he sought to critically review their opinions, an interpretive device which was used to convey new spiritual levels or mystical concepts which were not adequately explained or which were totally absent from earlier works. Ibn ‘Ajība’s use of symbolic and allegorical interpretation as an interpretive tool also served to bring out the relation between the grand (the universe) and the small (humanity) the macro- and microcosm, ultimately, he succeeded in establishing a clear harmony and correspondence between the two. He also sought to use devices of edification and commentary to expand the horizons of the reader beyond confinement at the level of literal meaning so as to enter into the unbounded realm of mystical subtleties. Finally, the tool of *qiyās* sought to transfer literal meanings from their original contexts and thus create new mystical interpretations.

In this regard it would be helpful to cite Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of one Qur’ānic verse in order to highlight how he integrated both exoteric and esoteric modes of interpretation and see how he used the seven interpretive tools in the esoteric dimension of his commentary. The chosen verse is the following:

“Seek they other than the religion of God, when unto Him submitteth whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly and unwillingly, and unto Him they will be returned”⁴²².

“God the Almighty says to the Christians and the Jews - when they sought the Prophet’s judgement and each of them claimed that they followed the religion of Abraham, so the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Both of you do not belong to his religion, and so do I who follow this religion.” So they got angry and replied, “By God we are not pleased with your judgement and we will not take your religion – so God the Almighty rejected their position and said to them: “Do you seek a religion other than that of God’s at a time when God is happy to grant this religion to His chosen one and beloved, and both those in the heavens and the earth complied [to God’s Wish] willingly and reluctantly. The people of heaven complied willingly and of the people of earth, some of them complied willingly through contemplation and by following reason or by other means, and some of them complied reluctantly or through experiencing events which led them to seek refuge in submission to God (Islam) such as earthquakes, drowning, or being at the point of death.

Or (according to another interpretation) “willingly” implies such as the angels and the believers did when they complied with what is desired from them voluntarily; and “reluctantly” implies such as the disbelievers who complied to

⁴²² Qur’ān trans. Pickthal, Āl-’Imrān (3:83)

what is wanted from them reluctantly. And all shall return to Him – as nothing is extruded from the realm of His Providence or fails to return to Him through Resurrection. And God knows best.”

“**The symbolic allusion:** Know that the real religion is compliance to God in both the manifest and inner realms. And complying to God in the manifest realm is through obeying His commandment and avoiding what is prohibited. As for complying to God in the inner realm, this happens through being content with His decreed Providence and surrendering to His subjugation. So whoever falls short in complying in manifest matters or is discontent with [God’s] majestic ordinances in the inner realm, deviates from the perfection of religion. And to him it is said: ‘would you like a religion other than that of God’s at the time when whoever in the heavens and in the earth obeys Him voluntarily and involuntarily, so either you comply willingly or return back to Him reluctantly.’ And in some traditions God Almighty says, ‘whoever is not content with My providence and is not patient to endure the befallen calamity, should give up his place underneath my sky and take another God other than Me’.

The reason for the disgruntlement of the heart against the befallen subjugating ordinances is its sickness and the weakness of its light of certitude. Thus whoever is reluctant to make use of a [spiritual] physician [i.e. master] is to be blamed and is liable to reproach. The saints enjoy the authority of God over the [exoteric] men of learning or scholars, while the scholars bear God’s authority over the general public. Whoever does not follow the straight path in manifest matters is to be reproached for not being diligent in accompanying the men of [exoteric] learning and whoever does not follow the straight path in the inner sense, God reproaches Him for forsaking the companionship of the saints, i.e. the gnostics. Through God lies all success and He is the guide to the straight path”⁴²³

يقول الحق جل جلاله للنصارى واليهود، لما اختصموا إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، وادعوا أن كل واحد على دين إبراهيم فقال لهم -عليه الصلاة والسلام- "كلاكما برئ من دينه، وأنا على دينه، فخذوا به"، فغضبوا، وقالوا: والله لا نرضى بحكمك ولا نأخذ بدينك، فقال لهم الحق جل جلاله- منكرًا عليهم- : أفتبغون غير دين الله الذي ارتضاه لخليله وحببيه، وقد انقاد له تعالى "من فى السموات والأرض" طائعين ومكرهين، فأهل السموات انقادوا طائعين، وأهل الأرض منهم من انقاد طوعًا بالنظر واتباع الحجة أو بغيرها، ومنهم من انقاد كرها أو بمعاينة ما يلجئ إلى الإسلام كنتق الجبل وإدراك الغرق والإشراف على الموت، أو: "طوعًا" كالملائكة والمؤمنين، فإنهم انقادوا لما يراد منهم طوعًا، و"كرها" كالكفار فانقادوا لما يراد منهم كرها، وكل إليه راجعون، لا يخرج عن دائرة حكمه، أو راجعون إليه بالبعث والنشور. والله تعالى أعلم.

الإشارة: أعلم أن الدين الحقيقى هو الانقياد إلى الله فى الظاهر والباطن، أما الانقياد إلى الله فى الظاهر فيكون بامتثال أمره واجتناب نهيه، وأما الانقياد إلى الله فى الباطن فيكون بالرضى بحكمه والاستسلام لقرهه. فكل من قصر فى الانقياد فى الظاهر، أو تسخط من الأحكام الجلالية فى الباطن، فقد خرج عن كمال الدين، فيقال له : أفغير دين الله تبغون وقد انقاد له (من فى السموات والأرض طوعًا وكرها)، فإما أن تنقاد طوعًا أو

⁴²³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 375, 376.

ترجع إليه كرها. وفي بعض الآثار يقول الله تبارك وتعالى: "من لم يرض بقضائي ولم يصبر على بلائي، فليخرج من تحت سمائي، وليتخذ ربا سواي".

وسبب تبرم القلب عن نزول الأحكام القهرية مرضه وضعف نور يقينه، فكل من استنكف عن صحبة الطبيب، فله من هذا العتاب حظ ونصيب، فالأولياء حجة الله على العلماء، والعلماء حجة الله على العوام، فمن لم يستقم ظاهره عوتب على تفريطه في صحبة العلماء، ومن لم يستقم باطنه عاتبه الله تعالى على ترك صحبة الأولياء، أعنى العارفين. وبالله التوفيق، وهو الهادي إلى سواء الطريق.

As can be seen from this passage, in his esoteric interpretation of this verse, Ibn 'Ajība utilized a number of the seven interpretive tools mentioned above. These include: hermeneutical exegesis (*ta'wīl*), through which he changed the literal understanding of the term "God's religion," which in its exoteric sense means the religion of Islam, and instead defined it in an exclusively esoteric sense to mean complying to God both in the outer manifest world through obeying His commandments and eschewing what He proscribed and in the inner realm, submitting willingly to the decrees of Providence.

The second interpretive tool which he used is classification (*taṣnīf*). Through this tool he categorized people into the people of heaven and those of earth and then further subcategorized the people of earth into those who willingly comply through contemplation and reason, versus those who unwillingly comply due to adversity or near death experiences. In another interpretation of this verse he characterized those who comply willingly to be angels and the believers, contrasted to those who comply unwillingly as disbelievers.

Ibn 'Ajība also used the interpretive tool of edification (*ta'līm*) through which he equated the perfection of religion to compliance with God's will both in the outwardly manifest sense of obedience to the *Sharī'a*, and in the inner realm of contentment with God. He further associated the outer realm with exoteric scholars and the inner realm with Sufi saints and gnostics. Ibn 'Ajība also used this tool along with the interpretive tool of extrapolation (*ta'līq*) in order to explain the reasons for the disgruntlement of the heart and its refusal to willingly submit to the decrees of Providence.

Thus, from this one small droplet from his *Bahr al-madīd*, we can observe how skillfully Ibn 'Ajība has utilized various interpretive tools in the esoteric section of his *tafsīr*. In summary, it should be underlined that Ibn 'Ajība consistently exhibits an original and independent voice throughout this work, and to this extent, his commentary does not merely echo previous works.

The next chapter will demonstrate how Ibn ‘Ajība drew upon all of these interpretive tools in order to expound the concept of divine love in his Qur’ānic commentary.



Chapter III

**The Paradigm of Love in Ibn ‘Ajība’s
Qur’ānic Commentary**

Chapter 3. The Paradigm of Love in Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic Commentary

3.1) Introduction

This chapter seeks to sketch an outline of Ibn ‘Ajība’s paradigm of love. Drawing multiple themes and concomitant theories, it proposes to closely examine his esoteric interpretation of divine love in general yet place particular emphasis upon the several verses that explicitly discuss divine love. The chapter is divided into three sections.

The first section, entitled “The Language of Mystical Love” addresses the linguistic origin and Sufi usage of four main terms (i.e. *wudd*, *ḥubb*, *maḥabba*, *‘ishq*) that mystical writings have drawn upon in order to describe the relationship between God and mankind. Some of these terms are highly controversial and have accordingly incurred criticism from scholars over the centuries; others, meanwhile, have proven to be more acceptable. I will also briefly review the most influential Sufi writers who have written on the subject of mystical love. This will in turn enable me to position Ibn ‘Ajība’s language of love within this wider Sufi spectrum.

Once a theoretical framework for Ibn ‘Ajība’s language of love is put in place, various definitions of love that he has provided will be discussed in greater depth. At the same time, the causes which underlie the devotee’s love for God will also be treated. Ibn ‘Ajība heavily depended upon al-Ghazālī’s intellectual exposition of the psychology of love when explaining the different degrees of the devotee’s love for God. He also referred to the concepts of selfish and selfless love that originated within the thought of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 162/788 or 176/792), the early Sufi saint who was writing at a time when rigid asceticism and rigorous austerity were accentuated in displays of devotion to God.⁴²⁴ She, in turn, sought to introduce a softer tone to mystical love. She said:

“I want to throw fire into Paradise and pour water into Hell so that these two veils disappear, and it becomes clear who worships God out of love, not out of fear of Hell or hope for paradise.”⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ See Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī” in *The Cambridge Companion of Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2014), pp. 152-53.

⁴²⁵ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 38, 39. See also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 18, issue no. 3, (2007), pp. 348-49.

Another story is equally instructive because it further reiterates her strong devotion to God's love. Rābi'a said (to Sūfyān al-Thawrī),

“I have not served God out of fear of Him then I would be like a bad handmaid who only works if she is afraid and I haven't served Him out of love for paradise then I would be like a bad handmaid who only works if one gives her something, but I have served Him out of love for Him and out of yearning for Him.”⁴²⁶

A closer engagement with the Sufi language of mystical love clearly shows that *qurb* (proximity) is another word that is heavily employed and closely associated with love. In this context, Ibn 'Ajība provides a thorough analysis of the meaning of the devotee's proximity to God and vice-versa. He consciously seeks to negate the literal meaning of proximity. This was clearly appropriate because an emphasis upon physical distance traversed would clearly confine God in a place – an anthropomorphic rendering contradicting the transcendent divine attributes of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*).

The second section (“Love & Contemplation”) discusses the relationship between divine love and the direct witnessing of God (*mushāhada*), along with the concomitant theories that are attached to this relationship. The section begins by citing Ibn 'Ajība's proof of the primacy of God's love, which originates from God long before the mystic bears witness and testifies to His Oneness. He then proceeds to explain that only human beings possess the unique qualities and the natural disposition which qualify them to become witnesses to God's Oneness, which again is a sublime state that is only achieved by loving God (*maḥabba*). The uniqueness of the human being's relationship with God stems from the individual's ability to love God, reflected assertions such as the heart contains the “secret of divinity” (*sir al-ulūhiyya*) and resembles “the abode of Lordship” (*maḥal al-rubūbiyya*). In explaining the sublime position of the heart Ibn 'Ajība referred to the famous *ḥadīth*: “My heavens and My earth encompass Me not, but the heart of My gentle, believing and meek servant does encompass Me.”⁴²⁷

Ibn 'Ajība also discusses with another integral theory which relates to contemplation and love. He sought to identify how a fine equilibrium could be established between witnessing God as the sole doer of all things (due to His divine power or *qudra*) while upholding the cause and effect relationship which establishes that human beings are, in accordance with His divine wisdom (*ḥikma*), held accountable for their actions.

⁴²⁶ Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din 'Attar*. Translated by John O'Kane and Bernt Radtke. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 541.

⁴²⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 39. This *ḥadīth* is cited by Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), 1st ed., *ḥadīth* no. 423, p. 69.

This represents an attempt to reconcile the view that all actions are performed by God (with no room for human interaction) with the assertion that humans are responsible for the choices they make and the actions they take, for it is upon this basis that they are either rewarded or punished. As a follower of the Ash‘arite school of theology, Ibn ‘Ajība suggested that it would be appropriate to adopt an intermediary position between the libertarian Mu‘tazilites,⁴²⁸ who advocate the doctrine of human free will (*ikhtiyār*), and the fatalistic view of the Jabrites,⁴²⁹ who believe that actions are predetermined by God (*jabr*), such that there is no room for either human choice or voluntary actions.⁴³⁰

The Ash‘arites maintained a balanced theological approach that operated between these two extremes by highlighting the existence of two powers which cause the performance of any action. The first power is the eternal divine originating power (*qudra qadīma*) – this establishes that God creates things through His divine will, His power being associated with all actions that bear the possibility or the potentiality of existence (*mumkin*) – this includes the actions of human beings, whose actions are therefore implicated in the divine power. The second power is a temporal human power (*qudra ḥāditha*) through which actions are performed in accordance with human will. This power originates within the palpable distinction between voluntary acts (which are performed by human choice and intention) and involuntary acts (over which human beings have no choice). The Ash‘arites asserted that the divine power has the unique ability to both create an action and the capability of the human being to perform that action. In moving the hand, God created the movement of the hand and also created the capacity of the human being to move the hand. This proves God’s unique power to create both the capacity (*qudra*) to create an action and the ability (*maqḍūr*) of this action to be performed by human beings.⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī explained that the Mu‘tazilites propose a theological doctrine of human free will (*ikhtiyār*) which denies any association (*ta‘alluq*) between God’s divine power and human actions. They also added that all actions produced by human beings are created by them and no divine power (*qudra*) intervenes in either its creation (*iījād*) or extinction (*‘adam*). See al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i‘tiqād*, ed. Mustāfa ‘Umrān, (Cairo: Dār al-Baṣā’ir, 2009), 1st ed., p. 312.

⁴²⁹ The Jabrites (who are also called the “Jahmites” in recognition of their leader, al-Jahm ibn Ṣafwān, who was one of the first advocates of the doctrine of predetermination) adopt the theological position of predetermination (*jabr*). They maintain a fatalistic viewpoint which holds that the human being is incapable of producing any actions and cannot therefore be described as possessing any independent ability (*istiṭā‘a*). God is the sole creator of all actions of human beings; metaphorically these actions are associated with human beings in the same way that actions are metaphorically associated with inanimate objects. To take one example, it has previously been said that the tree bore its fruit and the water is running. See al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i‘tiqād*, ft.1, p. 312.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, p. 312.

⁴³¹ Ibid, pp. 316-318.

The power of human beings to perform an action has previously been called acquisition (*kasb*). This power is only associated with actions that are performed out of choice (*ikhtiyār*), intention (*qaṣd*) and inclination (*mayl*), and in accordance with human will. This being said, it would be a mistake to believe that the divine power has nothing to do with human actions that are performed through choice. On the contrary, God creates the human being's intentions and inclinations in the first instance and also creates the human being's ability to perform an action at the exact time the human being willingly chooses to perform an action.⁴³²

The actions which are outwardly associated with the human being's choice and will are therefore inwardly created by God. Ibn 'Ajība maintains that those who attain the balance of being able to witness God in both the eternal world of *qudra* (in which all actions are performed by Him) and the temporal world of *ḥikma* (in which human beings have a choice to perform or not perform actions) are those who become the true lovers of God.

Ibn 'Ajība understood the difficulty of reaching a fine harmony between divine power and human wisdom. This is why he introduced the factor of divine love as the essential principle which created this balance. The most salient manifestation of divine love is expressed by the Qur'ānic concept of the Trust (*amāna*), which was inspired by one of the most frequently quoted Qur'ānic verses ("We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and feared it and man carried it. Surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant" (33:72)). Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, (d. c. 520/1126), the Persian Sufi exegete, interpreted this verse (in his esoteric exegesis *Kashf al-asrār wa-'uddat al-abrār*) and suggested that the divine Trust described here is the Trust of love, which was offered to all other creatures. However they all shied away from it as they were overwhelmed at the heaviness of the burden of the Trust; in contrast, Adam's or man's aspiration was fixated upon the divine mercy and infinite grace and was therefore able to bear the burden of the Trust.⁴³³ Ibn 'Ajība indicated his overall agreement with this interpretation.

The third section, entitled "Love between Body and Spirit", discusses the fact that the fulfilment of the Trust of love is only made possible by the creation of a fine balance

⁴³² Jamāl Fārūq, *Baṣā'ir azhariyya 'alā sharḥ al-kharīda al-bahiyya*, (Cairo, Kashīda publications, 2013), 1st ed., p. 87.

⁴³³ Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, pp. 49, 50, see also Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 63; see also al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'ān*, trans. by Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler, pp. 58, 219, ft. 6, 248, 249, see also Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermenutics: The Qur'ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, p. 142.

between divine power (*qudra*) and human wisdom (*ḥikma*). It is possible for human beings to achieve this because they intrinsically possess a spirit of a divine celestial origin which is in total submission to the divine power; their body, which is of a terrestrial character, is preoccupied with God's wisdom that is manifested in the realm of practical causes and effects. Human beings, by virtue of the fact that they possess these two natures, potentially have the ability to keep this balance intact.⁴³⁴

We will also discuss Ibn 'Ajība's definition of the spirit (*rūḥ*) and the different names that have been ascribed to it in accordance with the various spiritual states that it assumes in traveling along the Sufi Path. It will be demonstrated that Ibn 'Ajība's understanding of the spirit differs from that of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who establishes a clear distinction between the sublime unique essence (*al-jawhar al-fard*) and the animal spirit (*al-rūḥ al-ḥayawāniyya*).⁴³⁵

The concluding chapter will analyze the heart's journey in the path of love, along with the various obstacles which hinder its progress.

3.2) The Language of Mystical Love

Before the discussion turns to Ibn 'Ajība's paradigm of love by examining *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, his esoteric commentary on the Qur'ān, it will be useful to devote a few pages to an analysis of the basic terms of love (i.e. *wudd*, *ḥubb*, *maḥabba*, *ishq*) that Ibn 'Ajība drew upon when describing the nature of the relationship between God and mankind. This discussion will also help us understand his doctrine of the metaphysics of love which he employed to narrate the cosmic story of love and its intricate theories and intertwined relationships.

3.2.1) The Divine Attribute 'The Loving' (*al-Wadūd*)

Prophetic traditions mention ninety-nine divine names of God (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusna*), one of which is 'the Loving' (*al-Wadūd*) which is repeatedly invoked in the Qur'ān. Al-Ghazālī defined this divine name (*al-Wadūd*) as the Lover of Goodness for all creation

⁴³⁴ This issue will be explained in more detail below. See also: Michon, *Ibn 'Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 52-53.

⁴³⁵ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, ed. Ibrāhīm Amīn Muḥammad, (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, ND), pp.241-243, see also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla al-ladunniya*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Kurdistān al-'Ilmiyya, 1328/1910), p. 241-244, see also Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, pp. 93, 106.

and the One whose kindness is prevalent within all of them.⁴³⁶ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) cited three etymologies of the divine Name *al-Wadūd*. The first is an active participle (*nomen agentis*) which denotes the one who loves; the second indicates His loving nature which leads people to love one another. The third is a passive participle (*nomen patientis*) which ascribes the one who is beloved due to his enormous favors and benevolence.⁴³⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī also used the divine attribute *al-Wadūd* when discussing the spiritual station of love (*ḥubb*), which he defined as a divine station that God ascribed to Himself (and therefore called Himself *al-Wadūd*). With regard to the term that is used in Prophetic traditions to express the loving nature of God, ‘the lover’ (*al-muḥibb*) tends to be emphasized.⁴³⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī further asserted that God’s name *al-Wadūd*, from which *wudd* emerges, is the fountain from which love of God gushes out in human beings’ hearts; this is what provides us with sufficient affection to love whomever God wishes us to love. The term *wudd* linguistically indicates constancy and steadfastness.⁴³⁹ For Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Wadūd* is “the one whose love is constant”.⁴⁴⁰ If human beings are to be worthy of the term ‘the Loving One’ (*wadūd*), Ibn ‘Arabī made it clear that it is important for love to be constant and prevalent in one’s heart (both for God and for the one whom God placed his love in our hearts), regardless of what might be presented by the Beloved.⁴⁴¹ Ibn ‘Arabī reiterated this meaning in verse,

Indeed faithful love (*widād*) consists
in maintaining constancy and persists
even in that state when
disunion agitates and shakes it.⁴⁴²

Although *wudd* and *ḥubb* both denote love, the latter term became more popular in Sufī literature, and was frequently used to describe the intimate relationship between God and mankind.⁴⁴³

Ibn ‘Aḥība’s usage of the Divine Name *al-Wadūd* basically has two meanings which are both closely related to each other. The first meaning can be found in his

⁴³⁶ Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maqṣad alasnā fī sharḥ ma ‘ānī asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusna*, p. 122 cited by Prince Ghāzī, *Love in the Holy Qur’ān*, pp. 419, 420, see also Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābī’a to Ibn ‘Arabī”, p. 174.

⁴³⁷ Ghāzī, *Love in the Holy Qur’ān*, pp. 419, 420.

⁴³⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1999), 1st ed, vol. 3, p. 483.

⁴³⁹ Pablo Beneito, “The Servant of the Loving One: On the Adoption of the Character Traits of *al-Wadūd*”, *JMIAS*, vol. 32, (2002), p. 2.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁴⁴³ William Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam”. In *Divine Love: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*. Edited by Jeff Levin and Stephen G. Post, (Pa: Templeton Press, 2010), pp. 170-171. See also Derin, *From Rābī’a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*. p. 28.

commentary on the verse which states: “And He is the Most Forgiving, the All Loving”.⁴⁴⁴ Here he defined *al-Wadūd* to mean, “The Lover of His friends (*awliyā’ihi*), or the one who deals with those who are obedient to Him in a loving manner, which entails giving them what they want”.⁴⁴⁵ This definition suggests that *al-wadūd* relates to elements of obedience and submission to God. In this instance love is virtually synonymous with the devotee’s will to obey God and it has no transcendental significance in its own right.

The second meaning defines *al-Wadūd* as the lover (*muḥibb*) or the beloved (*maḥbūb*). This is clearly demonstrated in his interpretation of numerous verses, one of which holds that “[t]he Lord knows that thou keepest vigil nearly two-thirds of the night, or a half of it, or a third of it, and a party of those with thee...”.⁴⁴⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on this verse refers to the heart of the lover and how it rejoices in witnessing the presence of the beloved:

“The night vigil’s prayers (*tahajjud*) of the gnostics are defined as the heart’s response in witnessing the beloved King (*al-malik al-wadūd*) and in intimately conversing with Him (*wa munājātuh*) and praising Him (*wa al-tamalluq bayna yadayhi*).”⁴⁴⁷

وتهدج العارفين بعكوف القلب في شهود الملك الودود، ومناجاته، والتعلق بين يديه

He elaborated this definition further by noting that God is *al-Wadūd* vis-à-vis the aspirant lovers (*al-sā’irīn al-muḥibbīn*).⁴⁴⁸ In this instance, love obtains an independent significance in its own right, as it operates independently of the connotations of obedience and devotion. Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric exegesis interchangeably used other Arabic terms which relate to love (such as *ḥubb* and *maḥabba* and passionate love or *eros*, *‘ishq*). In order to arrive at a fuller understanding of his theory of love, it will be necessary to discuss

⁴⁴⁴ Qur’ān, al-Burūj, (85:14). The two translations used for most of the Qur’ānic verses here and elsewhere in the thesis are those of Arthur J. Arberry and Pickthall Marmaduke. Wherever there are no references to any of them, the translation was done by myself.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 426.

⁴⁴⁶ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*, (New York: Touchstone, 1955), al-Muzzamil, (73:20).

⁴⁴⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 300. The same usage of *al-Wadūd* can be found in other examples which indicate the same meaning in *Baḥr*, vol.1, p. 97, p. 232, p. 328; vol. 2, p. 114, p. 275; vol. 3, p. 155, p. 224, p. 340; p. 502; vol. 5, p. 59, p. 394; vol. 6, p. 337. Also, *al-ḥabīb al-wadūd* is mentioned by Ibn ‘Ajība in vol. 1, p. 496.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, vol. 6, p. 428.

the terminology and theory of love that previously existed in Sufism. This is the essential contribution of the following subsection of this chapter.

3.2.2) The Terminology of Love (*ḥubb* and *maḥabba*)

The terms *ḥubb* and *‘ishq* were used to describe the relationship between human beings and God during the early history of Islamic spirituality. In its lexical meaning, *ḥubb* is synonymous with love (*al-maḥabba*) and affection (*al-wudād*).⁴⁴⁹ The term *maḥabba* was popular among early Sufis, such as Abū Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 145/765), who assigned the 10th station of the heart to *al-maḥabba*.⁴⁵⁰ Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī (d. 243/857) also used the same term as the title of his treatise on love (*Book of Love - Kitāb al-maḥabba*).⁴⁵¹ Al-Daylamī (d.509/1037) also used the term *maḥabba* to discuss the different views of the early Sufis on love and its meaning in a separate chapter, which was entitled *aqāwīl al-ṣūfiyya fī nafs al-maḥabba*.⁴⁵² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) *magnum opus*, entitled *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, followed the long tradition of using the term *maḥabba*, in entitling his chapter on love *Kitāb al-maḥabba wa al-shawq wa al-uns wa al-riḍā*.⁴⁵³

The term *ḥubb* has many linguistic derivatives, some of which are related to the ‘purity of affection’ (*ṣafā’ al-mawadda*). Arabs used to name white beautiful teeth as *ḥabab al-asnān* - *ḥubb* could be derived from *ḥabab*, which indicates beauty and purity. It could also be derived from the perseverance and steadfastness of the lover in his love: Arabs used to describe the camel that sits and refuses to get up as *aḥabba al-ba‘īr* – again, *ḥubb* could be derived from *aḥabba* to convey the persistence of the lover in his love and his refusal to let go of his beloved.⁴⁵⁴ It was also said that the lexical root of *ḥubb* could be related to the water vessel which, when filled to the brim, does not have the capacity to contain anything else. The heart likewise, when filled with the love of the beloved, has no room for the love of others.⁴⁵⁵

3.2.3) Origins of Love: *Ḥubb* and *Maḥabba* in the Qur’ān and Prophetic Sunna

⁴⁴⁹ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 1, pp. 289, 290.

⁴⁵⁰ L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” pp. 153-154.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, p. 155.

⁴⁵² al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma‘lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma‘tūf*, p. 84.

⁴⁵³ al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, ND), vol.5, p. 40.

⁴⁵⁴ Ghāzī, *Love in the Holy Qur’ān*, p. 419.

⁴⁵⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*, p. 520, see also, al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, p. 320, see also ‘Alī Ibn ‘Uthmān Hujwirī, *Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. by Reynold A. Nicholson, (London: Luzac & CO, 1936), pp. 305, 306, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī”, p. 160. See also Derin, *From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, pp. 29-30.

In the Sufi context, the use of the term ‘love’ (*ḥubb*) to describe the relationship between God and human beings can be traced back to the Qur’ān, where the term is used in several famous verses. These include, among many others, “He loves them and they love Him” (3:30), “those who believe love God more ardently” (2:165).⁴⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī commented upon these verses and noted that those servants who God loves are the ones who enjoy the presence of the Loving One (*wadūd*); one of the signs of the permanency and constancy of God’s love to the servant is indicated when he becomes the latter’s sight, hearing, hand and foot.⁴⁵⁷

The Qur’ān also reveals that the divine name “the Loving” (*al-wadūd*) is always accompanied by “the Merciful” and “the Forgiving,” which connotes the close relationship between God’s love, mercy and forgiveness.⁴⁵⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) maintains that most Qur’ānic exegetes consider the divine name *al-wadūd* to be synonymous with *al-muḥibb* (the Lover). Other Qur’ānic exegetes such as Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) have interpreted *al-wadūd* to mean “The Beloved” (*al-ḥabīb*). It is also important to note that, within the Islamic scripture, there are at least twelve different divine names that affirm God’s loving nature – these are mentioned ten times more than names that indicate rage and wrath.⁴⁵⁹ By virtue of the fact that God’s simultaneous status as the lover and the beloved may suggest a certain duality, many Sufis (most notably al-Daylamī) found a way out by referring to God as ‘Love’. He states:

“The root of love is that God is eternally described by love which is among His abiding attributes... He loves Himself for Himself in Himself. Here lover, beloved and love are a single thing without division...”⁴⁶⁰

When attention turns to locating the origin of the term *ḥubb* in Prophetic traditions, it becomes apparent that there are substantive references to love in numerous traditions – these included the popular *ḥadīth qudsī* of the ‘Hidden Treasure’ (“I was a

⁴⁵⁶ Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu‘jam al-Ṣūfī*, (Beirut, Dandara Press, 1981), 1st ed., pp. 301, 302.

⁴⁵⁷ Pablo Beneito, “The Servant of the Loving One”, p. 5. This understanding of God’s love corresponds to the *ḥadīth qudsī* related by the Prophet, “My servant will not cease (drawing near to me by supererogatory works) until I love him. And when I love him, I will be his heart with which he understands, his hand with which he grasps, his eye with which he sees, and his ear with which he hears, and I will be a helping hand and support for him”. See al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans by Joseph Bell and Ḥasan Shāfī‘ī, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 136, see also al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma‘lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma‘lūf*, p. 173.

⁴⁵⁸ Examples are found in verses such as: “and He is the Forgiving, the Loving” (85:14) and “Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him repentant, truly my Lord is Merciful, Loving” (11:90).

⁴⁵⁹ Leonard Lewisohn, “Love in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth,” unpublished article, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁶⁰ William Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam,” pp. 171-172.

hidden treasure and I loved to be known so I created mankind and made Myself known to them, and they knew Me”).⁴⁶¹ Ibn ‘Arabī commented on this *ḥadīth* and noted that the “hidden treasure” refers to the countless possible manifestations of divine names which all existed in God’s knowledge prior to any actualization.

From a more general perspective, the treasure can be said to signify God’s knowledge of all things prior to their creation.⁴⁶² Maybudī believed that the *ḥadīth* of the hidden treasure clearly attests to the precedence of love over gnosis⁴⁶³ (a theme that will be treated in more depth in chapter five). Aḥmad al-Ghazālī also quoted this *ḥadīth* at the beginning of his esoteric commentary on *Sūrat Yūsuf*. He said that love is the most beloved quality of God and was the reason for the appearance of all contingent beings (*mumkināt*). God consequently called Himself “the Beloved” (*al-maḥbūb*) and named Prophet Muḥammad as “the lover” (*al-ḥabīb*). Aḥmad al-Ghazālī also added that God revealed *Sūrat Yūsuf* to Prophet Muḥammad because it exposes the mysteries of *mawadda*, *maḥabba*, and *‘ishq*.⁴⁶⁴ Sa‘īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1299-1300) for his part stated that the origin of love lies in “I loved to be known”. He thought of the lover as the Divine Essence and maintained that the beloved is the locus of all the manifestations of the Divine Names. He also stated that the human-being is the perfect reflection of divine reality and the most comprehensive receptacle of divine manifestations.⁴⁶⁵

3.2.4) The Definition and Usage of Ardent Love (*‘ishq*)

The linguistic root of the term eros or ardent love (*‘ishq*) can be traced back to *ashaqa*, which is a type of vine or convolvulus that climbs up the branches of green trees and chokes them. By the same token, when *‘ishq* overtakes the body, the body becomes pale and feeble while the heart is illuminated. *‘Ishq* reaches its fullest point of completion when the lover forgets the existence of both himself and his beloved.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ This *ḥadīth* is one of the foundational doctrines of divine love in Sufi literature. See Ghāzī, *Love in the Holy Qur’ān*, p. 422.

⁴⁶² William Chittick, *Islamic Spirituality, vol. II: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Ḥossein Nasr, (New York: Cross Road Publishing Company, 1991), p. 59, see also William Chittick, “The Divine Roots of Human Love”, *JMIAS*, vol. 17, (1995), p. 55. Ḥadīth scholars such as Ṣuyūṭī (d. 911/1505), al-Ḥāfīz Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1448) and Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) have affirmed that the chain of narration of this *ḥadīth* is weak, and thus its authenticity cannot be confirmed, Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) however, subsequent to the experience of visionary unveiling (*ṣaḥīḥ al-kashf*) declared this *ḥadīth* to be genuine.

⁴⁶³ Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 192.

⁴⁶⁴ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Baḥr al-maḥabba fī asrār al-mawadda fī tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, (India: Maṭba‘at Naṣīrī, 1876), pp. 2, 3.

⁴⁶⁵ Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam,” p. 180.

⁴⁶⁶ Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf isṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān Nāshīrūn, 1996), 1st ed, vol. 1, pp.1181,1182, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *‘Aṭf al-alīf al-ma’lūf ‘ala al-lām al-ma’lūf*, p. 66.

In the Sufi context, *'ishq* or *eros*, as scholars often translate it, usually indicates the supreme degree of love and denotes the ignition of fire in the heart which burns everything else therein save the love of the beloved. It has also been defined as a divine insanity which implies the utter rejection of human reasoning or intellect.⁴⁶⁷ Ibn 'Arabī stated that it denotes excessive love (*ifrāt al-mahabbā*). He also notes that when love takes over the whole human being to such an extent that it blinds him to all except his beloved, and there is no room for the love of others, then love turns into *'ishq*.⁴⁶⁸ The same meaning was also reiterated by al-Daylamī when he defined *'ishq* as “the boiling of love until it pours over its outer and inner limits.”⁴⁶⁹ The controversies which attended the use of *'ishq* did not stop many Sufis from employing the term in their works or using it as a synonym to *ḥubb* (especially when describing a human being's love for God). The intensity of love that *'ishq* denotes is suitably adjusted to the grandiosity of God's nature which requires utmost love.⁴⁷⁰

While the word *'ishq* is not used in the Qur'ān, the basic meaning of ardent love is denoted in the Qur'ānic word *shaghaf*, which describes the degree of Zulaykhā's love for Joseph.⁴⁷¹ A large number of Sufi sources, in directing themselves to this context, cite the following *ḥadīth qudsī* that was relayed by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728):

As soon as My dear servant's first care becomes the remembrance of me, I make him find happiness and joy in remembering Me. And when I have made him find happiness and joy in remembering Me, he loves Me passionately and I love him passionately, (*'ashiqanī wa 'ashiqtuḥu*). And when he loves me passionately and I love him passionately, I raise the veils between him and Me, and I become a cluster of knowable things before his eyes. Such men do not forget Me, when others forget Me. Their word is the word of the prophets, and they are the true

See also Derin, *From Rābi'a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p. 30-31. The term *'ishq* was also used by Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (587/1191) who derived the term linguistically from *'ashīqa*. He observes: “The human body is like a tree in which the seeds of love are planted in the heart and watered by knowledge. Once the tree starts to grow in perfection, love becomes like a vine which revolves around the human body and sucks life out of it. Only then the tree of physical being is transmuted to a soul with no traces of physicality. See Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, *Risāla fī ḥaqīqat al-'ishq / On the Reality of Love*, In *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, translated by Wheeler Thackston, (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda, 1999), pp. 71-74.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Tahānwī, *Kashshāf isṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, vol. 1, p. 1181.

⁴⁶⁸ Su'ād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-Ṣūfī*, p. 303, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism's Religion of Love from Rābi'a to Ibn 'Arabī,” p. 174.

⁴⁶⁹ Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism”, p. 359.

⁴⁷⁰ William Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam,” p. 171.

⁴⁷¹ Ghāzī, *Love in the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 146.

heroes. When I wish to inflict a calamity upon the inhabitants of the earth, they are the ones I remember in time to spare the earth that calamity.⁴⁷²

While this *ḥadīth* was popular among Sufis, Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), after citing it in his *Hilyat al-awliyā’*, asserted that it was transmitted by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī through ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Ibn Zayd and Muḥammad Ibn al-Faḍl – this was significant because they were both considered weak and faulty transmitters; as a consequence, this *ḥadīth mursal* is not considered to be one of the acceptable Prophetic traditions.⁴⁷³ This fact notwithstanding, it is worthwhile to note that al-Daylamī (d.509/1037), in his renowned treatise on mystical love, quoted the aforementioned *ḥadīth* and supported its authenticity by citing a Qur’ānic verse, “But God would not punish them while you, [O Muḥammad], are among them...” (8:33). He elaborated that God had, in the Qur’ān, prevented punishment for the sake of His beloved, Prophet Muḥammad. By the same token in the *ḥadīth qudsī*, punishment is lifted for the sake of His beloved devotees.⁴⁷⁴ It is also worthwhile to note that while Ibn ‘Ajība quoted this *ḥadīth* in his esoteric commentary, he left out “he loves Me passionately and I love him passionately, (*‘ashiqanī wa ‘ashiqtuhu*).”⁴⁷⁵ It was clear that Ibn ‘Ajība deliberately shied away from the vocabulary of passionate love only when citing this Prophetic tradition, which is perhaps attributable to the fact that he had a conservative audience in mind. This consideration notwithstanding, it is instructive to note that Ibn ‘Ajība employed *ḥubb* and *‘ishq* interchangeably in both verse and prose, in spite of the various controversies that existed regarding the use of *‘ishq* to describe the relationship between God and mankind.

3.2.5) Ibn ‘Ajība’s Position on ‘*Ishq*

Ibn ‘Ajība first uses the term *‘ishq* in his esoteric interpretation of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, in relation to the verse where God states, “those who believe in the Unseen and perform the prayer and expend of that We have provided them.”⁴⁷⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary presents

⁴⁷² Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. by Benjamin Clark, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 135, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 152.

⁴⁷³ Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), vol. 6, p. 165. *Ḥadīth mursal* is defined as being directly narrated by the second generation of transmitters who are the followers of the companions such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, without citing the name of the Prophet’s companion (in the first generation) from whom the *ḥadīth* was transmitted.

⁴⁷⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 281.

⁴⁷⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Baqara*, (2:3).

a tripartite division of the characteristics of the believers mentioned in the verse. The first is related to faith, which is defined as an act performed by the heart resulting in ardent love (*ishq*). He beautifully elucidates this issue when he states:

“As long as the devotee is veiled by witnessing his own self existence (*bi- shuhūdi nafsīhi*), confined in engendered forms (*al-akwān*) and in the outer form (*haykal*) of his being (*dhātuhu*), he is a believer in the Unseen (*ghayb*) as he believes in the existence of God Almighty and what He related regarding matters of the Unseen (*ghayb*), and he finds guidance to Him through tracking down His traces (*athār*). But when the devotee becomes annihilated from himself and becomes elevated above (*talaṭafat*) the realm of senses (*dā’irat ḥissuhu*), and his thoughts transcend the realm of created forms, he reaches the stage of direct witnessing (*al-shuhūd*) and contemplative vision (*al-‘ayān*). At this point he has a direct vision (*shahāda*) of the Unseen Realm (*ghayb*) ...”⁴⁷⁷

"فما دام العبد محجوبا بشهود نفسه، محصورا في الأكوان وفي هيكل ذاته فهو مؤمن بالغيب،
يؤمن بوجود الحق تعالى، وبما أخبر به من أمور الغيب، يستدل بوجود أثره عليه، فإذا فنى عن
نفسه وتلطفت دائرة حسه، وخرجت فكرته عن دائرة الأكوان، أفضى إلى الشهود والعيان،
فصار الغيب عنده شهادة..."

Following on from this passage, Ibn ‘Ajība describes this state of direct witnessing (*shuhūd*) to be the result of *ishq*. He eloquently expresses this in the following verse:

Don't be content with any beloved (*hibban*) save God
And always be in ardent love (*ishq*) and yearning (*ishtiyaq*)
Only then the unseen matter will become visible to your eyes,
And you will enjoy union (*wuṣūl*) and consummation (*talāqī*).⁴⁷⁸
فلا ترضى بغير الله حبا وكن أبدا بعشق واشتياق
ترى الأمر المغيب ذا عيان وتحظى بالوصول وبالتلاقي

At another point, where a verse states: “And we brought the Children of Israel over the sea, and they came upon a people cleaving to idols they had. They said Moses, make for us a god, as they have gods. Said he, you are surely a people who are ignorant”,⁴⁷⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība uses the word *ishq* to describe the natural disposition of the spirit that is characterized by an excessive yearning or affection (*ashshāqa*).⁴⁸⁰ He also

⁴⁷⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 74.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-A‘rāf (7:138).

⁴⁸⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 254.

sometimes uses the term *'ishq*' to refer to love between human beings.⁴⁸¹ At other points, he describes God as the only being who is worthy of divine adoration and ardent love (*al-ta'alluh wa al-ta'ashshuq*).⁴⁸² He also describes the adepts of the Sufi Path as being people of passionate love and affection (*ahl al-'ishq wa al-widād*).⁴⁸³ The term 'love' (*maḥabba*) is however dominant in Ibn 'Ajība's mystical language and is used more frequently than *'ishq*'.⁴⁸⁴ He also defines the devotee's proximity to God to mean love (*maḥabba*) and contentment (*riḍā*).⁴⁸⁵ The two terms *ḥubb* and *maḥabba* are used interchangeably, which gives rise to the clear impression that Ibn 'Ajība does not view the two as being divided by any essential difference.⁴⁸⁶ At this point, it will be instructive to provide an overview of the historical development of the metaphysics of both love (*maḥabba*) and *'ishq* prior to Ibn 'Ajība. This will enable a more complete understanding of the influence and originality of his mystical writings on love.

3.2.6) A Review of Sufi Writings on Mystical Love Prior to Ibn 'Ajība

Although many Sufis concur that love is inexplicable and can only be experienced through tasting (*dhawq*), there are nonetheless various definitions of love within the huge corpus of Sufi literature. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, for example, attempted to define love (*maḥabba*) as "intense yearning for unification".⁴⁸⁷ In addressing themselves to the term *'ishq*, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā (in their treatise *Risālat māhiyat al-'ishq*) compared human beings and God as objects of ardent love (*'ishq*) and concluded that it is more appropriate and worthy to direct one's ardent love to God, as He created all the objects of love. They also noted that human love is subject to fluctuation and change – this applied because the lover could be separated from his beloved by choice, boredom, destiny, death or a range of other factors.⁴⁸⁸

Although the term *'ishq* appears in the early classical period of Sufism, the doctrine of mystical love did not gain popularity in Sufi writings until the sixth/twelfth

⁴⁸¹ See Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd* vol. 6, (*ya'shaqaha wa ta'shaquhu*), verse, 56: 36, 37, p. 36.

⁴⁸² Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.5, p. 280.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, vol.2, p. 24.

⁴⁸⁴ Examples are found in Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, pp. 193, 194, 195, 544; vol.2, pp. 52, 53, 54.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 488.

⁴⁸⁶ Examples are found in Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 594.

⁴⁸⁷ Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam," p. 171.

⁴⁸⁸ Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*, (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 144.

century. It will be worthwhile to consider this progression in more depth as it affects the terminology in Ibn ‘Ajība’s metaphysics of love.

Al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) was one of the earliest Sufis who considered *‘ishq* to be one of the attributes of the Divine Essence. It was therefore placed alongside knowledge, power, love, wisdom, majesty, beauty and magnificence, all of which are forms of His Essence (*ṣūrah fī dhātihī hiya dhātihī*).⁴⁸⁹ After establishing that *‘ishq* is one of the attributes of the Divine Essence, al-Ḥallāj indicated that the primary position of *‘ishq* relates to God’s Essence:

“*‘Ishq* is a fire, the light of a first fire. In pre-temporality it was colored by every color and appearing in every attribute. Its essence flamed through its [own] essence, and its attributes sparkled through its [own] attributes. It is [fully] verified, crossing not but from pre-temporality to post-temporality. Its source is He-ness, and it is completely beyond I-ness. The non-manifest of what is manifest from its essence is the reality of existence; and the manifest of what is not manifest from its attributes is the form that is complete through concealment that proclaims universality through completion”⁴⁹⁰

Al-Daylamī commented on this elliptical passage of Ḥallāj by noting that he was unique in maintaining that *‘ishq* was one of the features of God’s Essence. He also noted that Ḥallāj’s insistence that *‘ishq* originated within the essence of God had not been echoed by Sufī scholars of his time (or before).⁴⁹¹ Al-Ḥallāj’s metaphysics of love centered upon the cultivation of love in the heart of the lover until he is united with God’s Essence.⁴⁹² This union is the original state and the point at which the duality of the lover and beloved is dissolved. He further explains his concept:

⁴⁸⁹ Al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’lūf*, pp. 53, 54, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” p. 360-362, see also Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), pp.122-125. See also Carl Ernst, “Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as ‘Essential Desire’,” in *God is Beautiful and He loves Beauty: Festschrift in Honour of Annemarie Schimmel*, ed. A. Geise and J.C. Bürgel, (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 182.

⁴⁹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’lūf*: Livre de l’ inclinaison de l’alif uni sur le lām incline’, (ed. J. C. Vadet, Cairo: L’Institut Français d’Archeologie Orientale, 1962), p. 44, cited by Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” p. 362. Also the Arabic original text is found in Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’lūf*, p. 87. See also Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, p. 123.

⁴⁹¹ Al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’lūf*, p. 88.

⁴⁹² Herbert W. Mason, *Al-Ḥallāj*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), p. 15.

“The dot is the origin of all lines and the line is nothing but dots combined. Thus neither the line can dispense with the dot nor can the dot dispense with the line. Also all lines whether straight or curved originates from the same dot. Therefore, all creation is a self-manifestation (*tajallī*) of the Divine and that is the reason why (I said), I see nothing except seeing God in it.”⁴⁹³

Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī’s *Lama ‘āt* quotes Al-Ḥallāj, who reiterates the same meaning in verse, when he states:

It is you or I,
This reality in the eye?
Beware beware
Of the word “two”!⁴⁹⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība largely adopts al-Ḥallāj’s position as he agrees that *‘ishq* is one of the attributes of God’s Essence which leads the lover to union with God. He also defends al-Ḥallāj’s ecstatic sayings (*shaḥīyyāt*) when he identifies himself with God in sayings such as “I am the Truth” (*anā al-Ḥaqq*). He explains that the reason for his ravishment was his state of drunkenness (*sukr*), along with his incapacity to forbear from revealing the divine secret (an issue that will be treated in more detail below).

In *Kitāb al-Luma’*, which was written by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d.378/988), three types of love are differentiated. The first is the love of God’s bounties and blessings, which is the most general type. Al-Sarrāj associates this type of love with some key virtues such as compliance to God’s will, obedience and ceaseless invocation of Him. The second type of love is generated by contemplating God’s incomparable majesty, limitless power and infinite knowledge. This type is associated with the sincere ones (*al-ṣādiqīn*). The third type of love results from the recognition of God’s infinite love for the devotee in pre-eternity, along with its reciprocity – that is, the devotee loving Him back with no reasons attached. This love is associated with the gnostics (*al-‘arifīn*). When Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/859) was thus asked to comment upon this purest kind of love, he noted:

⁴⁹³ Al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār al-Ḥallāj*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz Ḥāshim, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jindī, ND), p. 27, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī”, pp. 161, 162.

⁴⁹⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama ‘āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 77.

“It is the absence of love from one’s heart and limbs so love no longer possesses any place in them and at this moment all things are performed with God (*billah*) and for God (*lillah*) and this is the characteristic of the lover of God”.⁴⁹⁵

The requirement of the absence of love for attaining unity with the Beloved will be explained in more depth by al-Dabbāgh at a later stage. Abū Ya‘qūb al-Ṭūsī reiterates the same meaning when he states that the Beloved existed in eternity before the lover’s love for Him even existed. This annihilation of love is the transition from the lover’s love of the Beloved (which is finite and temporal) to the love of the Beloved (who existed since pre-eternity). It is only at this point that the lover becomes a lover “without love”. This identifies the lover with the Beloved without the transition of love. It was probably to this meaning that al-Junayd referred to when he defined love as replacing the lover’s characteristics with the Beloved’s ones.⁴⁹⁶ During his discussion of mystical love, al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī did not refer to *‘ishq* at all, and totally ignored the ongoing controversy which related to the question of whether it was appropriate to use this term to describe the relationship between man and God.

Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/ 996), who was writing at the same time as al-Sarrāj, in his Sufi manual (*Qūt al-qulūb fī mu‘āmalat al-maḥbūb wa waṣf ṭarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawhīd*) places love as the ninth and final stage of the stations of certainty (*maqāmāt al-yaqīn*). However, he does not provide any definitions of love nor does he expound any mystical theories that are related to it. He instead emphasizes the dogmatic Qurānic-based relationship between love and faith, and observes that the various degrees of love correspond to one’s level of faith. As a result, love reaches its optimum level with the completion of one’s faith. He explains this dichotomy further by indicating the existence of two kinds of love: the first is the general type which is located in the outer cavity of the heart, called the *fu‘ād*. The second, which is known as the special love, is located in the inner cavity of the heart itself (*qalb*). Al-Makkī then extensively engages the concomitant indications and implications of the special second kind of love, which are manifested in various ways. Here it should be noted that al-Makkī does not significantly diverge from other Sufi scholars, as he reiterates the main features of the

⁴⁹⁵ Al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār al-Ḥallāj*, p. 27, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī”, p. 157; Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, *Luma‘*, (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ḥadītha, 1960, Baghdād: Maktabat al-Muthanā, 1960), p. 88.

⁴⁹⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma‘*, pp. 86, 87, 88, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp. 365-367, see also Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 127-128; Derin, *From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, pp. 22-24.

special love of gnostics which include favoring God's will above all else, complying and obeying His commands. These features extend to the ceaseless invocation of God, finding pleasure in intimate conversations with Him and showing patience in the face of calamities (*balāyā*). Although the majority of al-Makkī's chapter on love is committed to explaining the love which human beings have for God, he did not fail to mention that the first lover is God, whose love is defined as increasing benevolence (*mazīd 'ithār*) toward the beloved servant. He supported this definition by quoting directly from the Qur'ān (12:91) where he notes that the brothers of Joseph stated that God favored their brother (Joseph) over them; the Qur'ān then describes the consequences of favoring Joseph through the blessings and bounties of both prophethood and kingship.⁴⁹⁷ It is worth noting that, during his mystical treatment of love, al-Makkī only uses words such as *ḥubb* and *maḥabba* and there is no trace of *'ishq*. Al-Qushayrī also reproduces this feature in his *Risāla*.

Al-Daylamī (d. after 392/1001-02), while significantly diverging from his predecessors, followed al-Makkī when he dedicated a whole chapter of his treatise to mystical love (*'Atf al-alif al-ma'lūf 'alā al-lām al-ma'tūf*), in the course of which he discussed the issue of *'ishq* and sought to justify his position upon the usage of the term.⁴⁹⁸ He noted the objection of earlier Sufī scholars to the employment of the word largely reflected the fact that *'ishq* was defined as intense love that exceeds the limit. However, he stated that a devotee cannot claim that he exceeds the limit in loving God, and God cannot be described as an ardent lover.⁴⁹⁹ Abū 'Abdullāh Ibn Khafīf (d.371/982) advanced a similar opinion for a period of time; however, he changed his mind after reading a treatise by al-Junayd that directly addressed the permissibility of using the term. Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī and al-Ḥallāj were other Sufī scholars who echoed this position.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalat al-maḥbūbb*, vol.2 , pp. 102, 103, 104, 107, see also Joseph Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," pp. 367, 368, 369; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 120-130.

⁴⁹⁸ Al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, pp. 8,9, see also Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 120-121; see also Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, (SUNY, Albany, 1979), p. 166.

⁴⁹⁹ Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/ 1014) opposed the use of the term *'ishq*. He asserted that if a person's love of God was enclosed in one person, his love would fall short – this would apply because it cannot reach the eminent status of the Divine or express the amount of love He deserves. Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, p. 522.

⁵⁰⁰ Al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, p. 8.

Al-Daylamī concluded that while *ḥubb* and *‘ishq* are synonymous, the first term is widely accepted whereas the latter is a source of dispute.⁵⁰¹

‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) in his *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, in contrast to al-Sarrāj in *al-Luma*, did not outline a systematic theory of love (*maḥabba*) with defined borders. Al-Qushayrī instead originally treated the term “love” (*maḥabba*) from a linguistic perspective and then sought to explain its Sufī usage. He collected various definitions of previous Sufī scholars who had written different descriptions of love. These were then combined under some main themes, some of which related to compliance with God’s will and, as stated by Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad al-Rudhbārī and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī, inclined the heart of the lover towards the Beloved. Some Sufī scholars established a practical relationship between love and obedience, and interpreted it as an act of worship - Sahl Ibn ‘Abdullah’s contribution was particularly important in this regard. Another major theme which arose in the definition of love was to assume the Beloved’s character traits and strip off one’s own – a doctrine clearly enunciated in the writings of al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj.⁵⁰²

It is worthwhile to note that al-Qushayrī took a rather antithetical approach with regard to the integration of the term *‘ishq* into the lexicon of love and in describing God’s relationship with His creation. Qushayrī’s father-in-law Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015) clearly states that describing God with recourse to *‘ishq* is inappropriate by virtue of the fact that the connotations associated with the word imply excessiveness in love, and al-Qushayrī proceeds further to explain that it is not permissible to describe God as exceeding the limit – for this reason, the term *‘ishq* should not be applied to Him. By extension, it is inappropriate to describe the servant’s love of God as exceeding the limit, because if all the love of creation towards God was combined in one man, his love would not reach the level of worthiness that God deserves, so in reality, nobody can exceed the limit in loving God.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, p. 9, see also Lombard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp. 356, 357, see also Joseph Lombard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 119-120.

⁵⁰² Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, pp. 321, 323,324, see also Joseph Lombard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp. 371, 372, see also al-Tūsī, *al-Luma*, pp. 86, 87; Joseph Lombard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 132-134; Derin, *From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p. 24.

⁵⁰³ Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, pp. 322, 322, see also Joseph Lombard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” p. 373; Omid Safi, “On the Path of Love towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics,” *Sufi Journal of Mystical Philosophy & Practice*, issue 78, (2010), p. 29, see also Joseph Lombard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī: Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 134-35.

‘Alī Ibn ‘Uthmān Hujwirī’s (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) Persian manual of Sufism, (*Kashf al-mahjūb*) further reiterated al-Qushayrī’s opposition to the term *‘ishq* and endorsed al-Makkī’s dichotomy of love (the general kind results from seeing God’s bounties and blessings; the special kind seeks God’s Essence and sees all God’s bounties as veils blocking him from reaching the Beloved). He also discusses the issue of God’s love (*maḥabba*) for man, and reiterates al-Makkī’s definition which establishes that God’s love is related to favoring the beloved devotee and conferring upon him lofty states and noble stations. Following on from previous scholars, Hujwirī defines the manifestation of the love of man for God in the heart as taking the form of glorification and restless passion for vision of the Beloved. This impatient desire for proximity (*qurb*) is accompanied by ceaseless remembrance of Him, and the severing of sensual passion, as the lover submits himself humbly to love. Hujwirī quotes in this regard Sumnūn al-Muḥibb (d. 298/910) who asserts that love is the foundation upon which all the spiritual states and lofty stations are established. This point notwithstanding, Hujwirī stated that while all the Sufi shaykhs agree with Sumnūn’s view about the prime position of love, a number are more inclined to hide the doctrine of “Divine love”: accordingly, they evidence a clear preference for the terms purity (*ṣafwa*) or poverty (*faqr*), as both indicate the lover abjuring his own will in compliance with that of the Beloved.⁵⁰⁴

The conservative spirit which Hujwirī clearly expresses in his treatment of divine love clarifies his negative stance towards the term *‘ishq*, which is never once referred to positively throughout his chapter on love. In his explanation of the nature of the controversy that surrounds the application of the term (specifically to the relationship between man and God), he divides the discussion into three main groups. The first group believes that it is permissible for the human being to love God excessively – however, the converse does not apply – this is because excessive love suits the one who is deprived of his beloved. This only applies to human beings in their relation to God. The second group wholly rejects the idea that God is the object of *‘ishq*. This is because the term indicates going beyond limits, and human beings do not have the capacity to love God to the full limit, let alone beyond this point. The third group asserts that excessive love, by its very nature, carries the connotation of human desire reaching the Essence of God, which is

⁵⁰⁴ Hujwirī, *Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, pp. 306-309, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp. 374-377; L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 157; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, p. 135-138; Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, p. 166; Derin, *From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, pp. 24-25.

neither attainable nor perceptible, and therefore the term cannot be justifiably applied to man's love to God. Hujwirī continues to support his position of favoring *maḥabba* over *'ishq* by observing that while there is a possibility of developing love towards God through the faculty of hearing, *'ishq* is only attained through actual vision, which is not applicable when it comes to God.⁵⁰⁵

In contrast to Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq and al-Qushayrī (master and disciple), who both exhibited the same reluctance towards deploying *'ishq* in their writings on mystical love, Maybudī's (d. c. 520/1126) doctrine of love (in *Kashf al-asrār*) fully evidences a clear willingness to use the term. In this respect, he clearly diverges from al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089), who either uses the Arabic term *maḥabba* or the Persian term *dūstī* or *mihr* in his treatises on the spiritual stations in *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* and *Ṣad maydān*. Keeler maintains that al-Anṣārī's conservatism in this respect can be traced back to the Ḥanbalī school's rejection of the proposition to employ *'ishq* to define the relationship between man and God (along with the more general controversies that attended the concept among Sufis).⁵⁰⁶ That being said, al-Anṣārī uses the term *'ishq* in one of his treatises, where he defines it in the following terms:

“[A] burning fire and an ocean without shore. It is the spirit and the spirit of the spirit. It is story without end and pain without remedy... *'ishq* is both fire and water, both darkness and sun... love burns the lover but not the beloved. *'Ishq* burns both seeker and sought.”⁵⁰⁷

Anṣārī (in his *Ṣad madyān*) suggests that the stage of love (*maḥabba*) consists of three levels (truthfulness, drunkenness, nonbeing), and the final level negates any traces of duality of the lover and beloved in the love of the Real. This concept of a negated duality will be set out in more detail in the *Sawāniḥ* of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī.⁵⁰⁸

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) elaborated his position on love in his chapter on mystical love in his *magnum opus* *Ṭḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Here he asserted that knowledge

⁵⁰⁵ Hujwirī, *Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, p. 310, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” p. 376; Omid Safi, “On the Path of Love towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics,” p. 34; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, p. 137.

⁵⁰⁶ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermenutics: The Qur'ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, p. 116, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism's Religion of Love from Rābi'a to Ibn 'Arabī,” pp. 165, 166; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 138-140.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Abdullāh Anṣārī, *Maḥabbat Nāmah*, in *Majmū'ah-yi rasā'il-i farṣī-yi Khwājah 'Abdullāh Anṣārī*, ed. Muḥammad Sarwar Mawlā'ī (Tihiran: Intishārāt-i Ṭūs, 1377/1998), p. 367, translated and cited by Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, p. 140.

⁵⁰⁸ Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 139-140.

is an essential prerequisite of love.⁵⁰⁹ He then divides love into various types; the first is the love of one's own self, as embodied in self-preservation and concern for personal safety. The second type is the love of benefaction from whoever brings benefits to the self. The third type loves something in its own right, and does not therefore seek any benefit or pleasure derived for itself – this is considered to be true love, as embodied by the love of beauty and goodness. The fourth type of love loves beauty in the moral and inner dimensions of the term that is, (loving beautiful ethics and noble characteristics) and not only its outer manifestations. The final kind of love derives from the hidden affinity (*al-munāsaba al-khafīyya*) between the lover and the beloved, which is a compatibility of spirits that has nothing to do with beauty or pleasure.

Al-Ghazālī comments on the last type when he observes that this is the type where love is established between God and man. He interpreted this as only embracing God's Attributes. In the absence of further explanation, he noted it is better to be silent with regard to the full explanation of this stage of love and wait until it is revealed to the aspirants of the Sufī Path, which occurs only after they complete all the necessary stages of the Path and reach the ultimate stage of love.⁵¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī uses the term *'ishq* and defines it as an excessive inclination towards the Beloved. His positive interpretation of *'ishq* clearly departs from many former Sufīs who had rejected using *'ishq* to describe the relationship between God and man.⁵¹¹

It is important to note that opposition to the use of the term *'ishq* was not exclusive to Sufīs. The Ḥanbalite theologian Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzī (d. 751/1350) along with his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) also opposed the usage of the term and maintained that it was not suitable to describe the relationship between God and mankind. Ibn al-Qayyim sought to strengthen his position by maintaining that the Qur'ān did not use the term when describing God's relationship with mankind. He also noted that *'ishq* (like other terms of love) could conceivably give rise to positive and negative meanings –

⁵⁰⁹ William Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam". p. 188.

⁵¹⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, vol.5, pp. 51-61, see also Margret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers, 1983), pp. 175, 176; see also Joseph Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," pp. 377- 382; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 140-148; Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam". p. 188; Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din 'Attar*, p. 521.

⁵¹¹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, vol.5, p. 96, see also Margret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, p. 177; Joseph Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," p. 383; L. Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love from Rābi'a to Ibn 'Arabī," pp. 169, 170; Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 145-146; Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, p. 166.

clearly the latter does not correspond to divine love. In addition, Ibn al-Qayyim notes that the term describes an excess of love and is therefore not suitably adjusted to the relationship between God and mankind.⁵¹²

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 522/1128- 606/1209), in a comparable manner to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, strongly advocated using the term ‘passionate love’ (*‘ishq*) to describe the relationship of love and affection between man and God. While he acknowledged the controversy which the term had aroused among Sufī scholars, he maintained that opposition to the term derived from righteous jealousy and a desire to conceal the secret of love from public exposure. Advocates of the term were, in contrast, ascribed the virtue of boldness. They had after all disregarded detractors in order to disclose their love. It is also worthwhile to note that Rūzbihān wrote a beautiful treatise on mystical love and passionate love (*‘ishq*) in Persian, which was entitled *Jasmine of the Lovers* (*‘Abhar al-‘āsihqīn*).⁵¹³ Here Rūzbihān defines love (*maḥabba*) as an attribute of the Divine Reality or Essence and equated it with ardent love (*‘ishq*). He states that “*‘[i]shq* is the perfection of *maḥabba* and *maḥabba* is the attribute of the Real. Do not be tricked by words, for *‘ishq* and *maḥabba* are one.”⁵¹⁴ Rūzbihān’s mystical theory of love will receive a more extensive treatment in the next section.

The *Sawānih*, which was written by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s younger brother, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d.c. 520/1126) provides a full expression of the metaphysical nature of love. It situates love as *‘ishq* in a primary position, and identifies it as the Absolute which is God’s Essence while defining created beings as the self-manifestation (*tajallī*) of the Divine.⁵¹⁵ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s views on love converge with those of his elder brother, and he therefore asserts the recondite nature of love, which evades any clear-cut explanation or definition. He describes it as a “connecting band attached to both sides (i.e. the lover and the beloved). If its relation on the side of the lover is established, then the connection is necessarily established on both sides, for it is the prelude to Oneness.”⁵¹⁶

Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s theory of love relates to God at both the ontological and soteriological levels. The first level engages with love as the Essence of God and is

⁵¹² Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, pp. 166-167.

⁵¹³ Carl W. Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1999), pp. 82, 84, 91, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 172, 173; Omid Safi, “On the Path of Love towards the Divine,” pp. 34, 35; Carl Ernst, “Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as ‘Essential Desire’,” pp. 185-186.

⁵¹⁴ Carl Ernst, “Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as ‘Essential Desire’.” p. 187.

⁵¹⁵ Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, p. 113.

⁵¹⁶ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānih*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady, (London: KPI Limited, 1986), p. 33, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” pp.151.

supported in this respect by the famous *ḥadīth* of the hidden treasure (“I was a hidden treasure and I *loved* to be known, therefore I created creation in order that I would be known”). This *ḥadīth* suggests that all created beings are nothing but a self-manifestation of God’s divine beauty. The latter (soteriological) level deals with the spiritual journey of the novice to reach love (the Divine Essence). In undertaking this journey, the spiritual novice comes to realize that in his heart he is a lover of God and his heart is the place in which his love of the Beloved is manifested. The ultimate aim of the spiritual path is to traverse beyond the duality of the lover and beloved so as to reach the Divine Essence, which is Love itself.⁵¹⁷ He also differentiates loveliness and belovedness and indicates that the latter requires a lover to thrive.⁵¹⁸ The concept of transforming the duality of love (lover and beloved) into unity is one of the unique theories of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī that will be discussed in the next section.

The conservative spirit respecting the use of the word *‘ishq*, reappears again in *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*, which was written by Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234). In his treatise he establishes the major differences between loving God’s Essence and God’s Attributes – this dichotomy anticipates a division of love into general and special kinds – the latter is the ultimate aim of the aspirant which occurs when the spiritual transformation from lover to beloved takes place and spiritual union ensues. Although al-Suhrawardī died long after the school of *‘Ishq* had been shaped by the two Ghazālī brothers and extensively explained by Ibn al-Dabbāgh, he did not mention the term *‘ishq* at all – his writings only use *ḥubb* and *maḥabba*.⁵¹⁹

In further explaining his concept, al-Suhrawardī states that the purest type of love is the love of God with one’s whole being (*bi-kulliyatihī*): this is the type of love which Prophet Muḥammad asked God for when he said:

“O God, make my love for you (*ḥubbī laka*) more beloved to me (*aḥabba ilayya*) than myself (*nafsī*), and my hearing (*sam‘ī*) and my eye sight (*baṣarī*) and my family (*ahlī*) and my wealth (*mālī*) and cold water (*al-mā’ al-bārid*).”⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 114-116.

⁵¹⁸ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*, pp. 15, 31, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism”, pp. 348, 350; L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 166, 167, 168; Omid Safī, *on the Path of Love towards the Divine*, pp. 32, 33.

⁵¹⁹ Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1966), 1st ed., pp. 503-509, see Derin, *From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, pp. 25-26.

⁵²⁰ Al-Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-kabīr*, ed. Bashshār Ma‘rūf, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), 1st ed., vol.5, chapter on Prayers (*da‘awāt*), section 72, ḥadīth no. 3490, p. 472.

Al-Suhrawardī comments on this *ḥadīth* when he asserts that the Prophet sought to uproot all the different types of love which originate in the heart, the mind, the soul or the self. These are the roots from which love of one's family and money, along with the natural disposition (*al-jibilla*) stem. To put it differently, the Prophet envisaged a situation in which God's love would supersede all the other types of love – this is why he ended up loving God not merely upon the basis of faith (which translates into acts of worship) but with his heart, spirit and whole being. This type of love is known as the love of the Divine Essence (*ḥubb al-dhāt*) and is the result of witnessing (*mushāhada*) God by the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) which resides in the realms of proximity (*mawāṭin al-qurb*). This means that loving God out of faith or obedience or even through acknowledging His bounties and blessings is a general love (*ḥubb 'āmm*). It does not however fall under love of God's Essence (*al-dhāt*) but can instead be defined as a love of the divine Attributes (*al-ṣifāt*). Al-Suhrawardī further clarifies that this general love is detailed in the writings of the Sufi scholars who address the different spiritual stations that the spirit undergoes on the Sufi Path. This type of love is viewed as 'general' because it is acquired through the aspirant's rigorous efforts to ascend from one station to the next.⁵²¹

Ruzbihān also agreed with al-Suhrawardī that it was insufficient to have faith in God if this did not extend to love. However, he diverges from al-Suhrawardī when he seeks to explain the cause of faith and love. He states that faith results from contemplating the cosmic beauty and the wonders of creation – however these do not culminate in a love of God. Human beauty can be said to be the locus of God's self-disclosure of the beauty of His Essence. These attributes were manifest in Adam's face, and they led to a love of God.⁵²²

In attending to the special kind of love (*al-ḥubb al-khāṣṣ*), al-Suhrawardī explains that it stems from loving God's Essence. This in turn is the result of God choosing and singling his servant out for His love. This type of love is a gift from God and the human being does not therefore play any part in it. This form of love pertains to the spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) and is seen by al-Suhrawardī as the kernel of the spirit (*rūḥ*). The general kind of love that results from different spiritual stations (*maqamāt*) acts as the frame (*qālib*) of the spirit or its outer form. The importance of the special type of love can be traced back to its leadership position. When this is instilled firmly in the heart, it opens

⁵²¹ Al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, pp. 503,504.

⁵²² Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*, (Albany, SUNY Press, 2017), p. 113.

the door to the rest of the spiritual states to follow suit, which include annihilation (*al-fanā'*) and subsistence in God (*al-baqā'*), in addition to other states. Al-Suhrawardī reiterates the essentiality of the special love in relation to the general love by drawing a parallel that relates the spirit to the body.⁵²³

The route of the beloveds (*tarīq al-maḥbūbīn*) is where special love is instilled in the heart of the beloved devotee. It unites with the general love, and results from striving in different spiritual stations. At this juncture, the aspirant ceases to traverse through different stations. This had previously been the route of the lovers, a route which sought to strip the spirit of its defiling characteristics and self-centered tendencies. Once the lights of special love shine forth, they purge the spirit of all its egoistic characteristics and the devotee therefore becomes eligible to be among the people of proximity (*ahl al-qurb*). Al-Suhrawardī explains that once the spirit is purified of all its selfish tendencies, and love reaches its maximum level of purity and completion, the aspirant is transformed from being a lover to a beloved.⁵²⁴ Al-Ḥallāj, in addition to other Sufi teachers, built upon this point to state that the essence of love is to unify with the Beloved after being stripped of one's own egoistic characteristics. Al-Sarī al-Saqatī (d. 253/867) reiterates the same point when he states that love is not established among any couple until they say to each other, "O...I" (*yā anā*).⁵²⁵ Al-Ḥallāj had expressed this meaning in a verse,

I am the one who I love and the one who I love is Me
We are two souls in one body⁵²⁶

The theological origin of this doctrine can be traced back to the Prophet's *ḥadīth*, "Take on the character traits/ ethical qualities of God"⁵²⁷ These "ethics" are only realized once the individual purifies himself of passions and defilements in preparation for adopting divine ethics, which is epitomized by love. However, it should be noted that love does not depend on, nor can be considered to be directly caused by purifying oneself from the promptings and the passions of the lower self, for after all, love is a pure divine gift. Al-

⁵²³ Al-Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-ma'ārif*, pp. 504-506.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, pp. 323, 324, see also Joseph Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," p. 372.

⁵²⁶ Al-Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-ma'ārif*, p. 508.

⁵²⁷ This *ḥadīth* was cited by Manāwī in his *al-Ta'ārif*, section of letter *Lām* (1/564), and by al-Jurjānī in his *Ta'rīfāt*, section of letter *Fā'*, no. 1099, (1/2016). These two references are cited by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Ta'yīd al-ḥaqīqa al-'aliyya*, ed. 'Āṣim al-Kiyālī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 1st ed., p. 83.

Suhrawardī adds that purity of the lover’s self is a necessary condition for the lover’s elevation to the beloved’s position, and it is at this point that he takes on God’s divine character traits.⁵²⁸

‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Anṣārī, who is better known as Ibn al-Dabbāgh (d. 696/ 1296), authored a mystical love treatise (*Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb wa mafātiḥ asrār al-ghuyūb*) that built upon the opinion of previous Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj, al-Daylamī, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Hujwirī. They each believed, he states, that love is the origin of all mystical states and spiritual stations. Love is a station that was conferred upon Prophet Muḥammad when he became the master of lovers, a position that was not given to any other prophet.⁵²⁹ This position is clearly stated in the Qur’ān when God associates His love with following the Prophet’s path and makes loving the Prophet a prerequisite for loving Him.⁵³⁰ Al-Dabbāgh reiterates various definitions of love quoted by other Sufis, and adds that the variety of the definitions of love is attributable to the differences in their spiritual tastes (*dhawq*) and distinctions among spiritual stations. He explained that the inexplicable nature of love is attributable to the inability of the aspirant to fully realize what he is spiritually experiencing, let alone translate it into words.⁵³¹

The transition from being preoccupied with love to solely witnessing the beloved is one of the highlights of Al-Dabbāgh’s theory on love. He explains that love is always accompanied by the pain of veiling, which blocks the heart from fully witnessing the Beloved. The lover experiences pain because he witnesses endless manifestations of divine beauty, and yet remains unsatisfied because he continues to yearn for more of the Beloved’s beauty. Love does not lose the pain associated with it until the state of union between the lover and Beloved is attained.⁵³²

Ibn al-Dabbāgh dedicated a whole chapter to discussing the terminology of love (especially *ishq* and *maḥabba*). He divided *maḥabba* into ten stations: the first five relate to *ḥubb* and the last five to *ishq*. He distinguishes the two terms by noting that if the lover is the one who chooses love willingly and freely due to his own choice, then it is *maḥabba* and this lover (*muḥibb*) is the ‘one who desires’ (= *murīd*). The one who chooses love

⁵²⁸ Al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārīf al-ma‘ārīf*, p. 508.

⁵²⁹ Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb wa mafātiḥ asrār al-ghuyūb*, ed. H. Ritter, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1959), p. 19, see also Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, p. 88.

⁵³⁰ Examples of this are found in Qur’ānic verses such as: 4:80; 3:31, and 10: 48.

⁵³¹ Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, pp. 20, 21, see Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, pp. 88, 89; William Chittick, “The Divine Roots of Human Love”, *JMIAS*, vol. 17, 1995, p. 57.

⁵³² Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, p. 28.

and has no free choice from his part, is a passionate lover (*‘āshiq*) - the *‘āshiq* is always the object of desire or ‘the chosen one’ (= *murād*).⁵³³ He also reiterates that the maximum degree of love is *‘ishq*, a term which indicates an exceeding of the limit. He also noted that scholars had failed to define *‘ishq* to such an extent that they had ultimately fallen back to the concept of “divine insanity” – this reflected a prior understanding that its unfathomable nature left it beyond the comprehension of the human intellect.⁵³⁴

In addressing himself to *maḥabba* itself, he noted that love-as-*maḥabba* has three causes. The first is the love of benefaction (*iḥsān*), which is the result of the love of one’s self; the second is due to beauty and perfection, which are both the result of loving the essence of the Beloved; the third and final cause is affinity (*munāsaba*), which indicates proximity between God and man. However, this should not be understood as indicating physical nearness, but should instead be viewed in terms of embracing Divine attributes of mercy and gentleness. The most perfect degree of love is when all three causes of love-as-*maḥabba* are combined together. God Almighty is the sole Beloved who integrates these three causes of love.⁵³⁵

Looking at Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) theories of love in more closely, it becomes apparent that while he deployed both the terms *‘ishq* and *maḥabba*, he maintained that the former is the higher degree of love. He declared that the station of love has four names that are based on the increasing intensity of love: desire (*hawā*), affection (*wudd*), love (*ḥubb*) and intense love or eros (*‘ishq*). The first degree (*hawā*) corresponds to the literal linguistic meaning of falling or descending – in the case of love, it therefore denotes the point at which the heart of the devotee falls in love. The second stage (*al-wudd*) indicates the stability of love in the heart – it is followed by the third stage (*ḥubb*) which marks the purity of love as the lover breaks free of his own will, and only complies with the will of the beloved. The last stage is *‘ishq* – this is the point when love envelopes the heart to a point where the lover is too blind to see anyone apart from the beloved.⁵³⁶

Ibn ‘Arabī supports the opinion that there is no definition of love; the only way of knowing love is by tasting it; whoever claims that he reached his fill of love does not

⁵³³ Ibid, pp. 31, 32, see also Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, p. 117.

⁵³⁴ Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, pp. 96, 97.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, pp. 55, 56, 57, see also Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, pp. 113, 114, 115; Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ‘Attar*, pp. 520-521.

⁵³⁶ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol.3, p.484, cited by L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” pp. 173 – 176, and cited by Pablo Beneito, “The Servant of the Loving One,” p. 6.

understand what love is – this is because it is “drinking without ever being satiated”.⁵³⁷ He sub-divided love into three categories (natural, spiritual, divine). Natural love is placed at the lowest level and it indicates the love of ordinary people who seek the pleasure of their animal spirit (*rūḥ ḥayawāniyya*) and the fulfillment of their desires through sexual union with another spirit. Ibn ‘Arabī also indicated the need for the lover to be from the world of nature, even if the beloved is not – this is attributable to the fact that the reason for natural love is either by seeing or hearing about the beloved. This means that the lover uses his imagination to transfer what he sees or hears about the beloved into an image of the beloved in his mind. One of the main features of natural love, which Ibn ‘Arabī uses as a basis to support his opinion that the creation of the world was an act of love, is that the love that occurs in the imagination of the lover that relates to the beloved is proportional to the capacity of the lover. Accordingly, there is no surplus or shortage in the space of love that the beloved has in the lover’s imagination. To the same extent, the world is formed by all the Divine Names, each of which has its own degree and level of influence in the creation of the world. The world was therefore created out of love. He added that this type of natural love has the power to bring together opposite beings such as the soul and the body. He also clarified that the loving relationship between the soul and the body is so intimate that pain occurs at the point when the two are separated by death. This is so despite the fact that the two possess different natures – the soul has celestial origins while the body originates from a terrestrial, earthly, source. Love helps to create relationships that conjoin the supraformal/spiritual and the formal/material dimensions of reality.⁵³⁸

The second category is spiritual love, which is distinguished from its predecessor by the lack of a material form or a defined shape. It goes beyond the physical world and unites spirits through spiritual affinities that are purely related to spiritual meanings and realities. The pain of physical separation and the yearning for bodily closeness are not the characteristics of spiritual love, which transcends the confines of the physical world.⁵³⁹

The third type of love is divine love. Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that it is formed from the combination of two Divine Names: the Beautiful (*al-Jamīl*) and Light (*al-Nūr*). He explains that creation came about when the prototypical essences (*a’yān thābita*) of the forms of things were in a state of darkness and non-existence – at this stage, they had only

⁵³⁷ James Winston Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘Short Course’ on Love”, *JMIAS*, vol. 50, (2011), p. 5.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 4-7.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 8.

the potential to come into actual being. The Divine Name, ‘Light’, shone upon these essences and removed the darkness surrounding them, and thus enabled them to obtain sight. When these prototypical essences started to see, God manifested Himself with the Divine Name ‘the Beautiful’; once they saw His divine beauty, they fell passionately in love with Him. These predetermined essences therefore became a place in which divine beauty was manifested (*mazhar*). Every lover in his essence loves the divine beauty found in all creation, which means he loves none other than God in reality.

Ibn ‘Arabī explained that when God says that He loves His own manifestations, He was not referring to these essences, which were in a state of non-existence before He cast His Light on them (and thus brought them into a state of existence). God instead meant that He loves the created essences as places of manifestations of His Light and Beauty, which appear within these essences. Because God is the one who appeared with His Divine Names in these manifestations, love is the connection between the One who appears and the places of manifestations of this appearance. This love is a concomitant feature of every essence that comes into existence.⁵⁴⁰

3.2.7) Ibn ‘Ajība’s Mystical Theory of Love

So far this chapter has surveyed influential theories on mystical love and has examined the controversies that arise when *ishq* is used to describe the relationship between God and man. The preceding discussion has also established which ideas and mystics were Ibn ‘Ajība’s forebears in the tradition. The current discussion is now much better positioned to analyze Ibn ‘Ajība’s own theory of love in his esoteric commentary on the Qur’ān. The very first description of God as both Lover and Beloved (*al-ḥabīb wa al-maḥbūb*) can be found in Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation of the first Qur’ānic chapter *al-Fātiḥa*.⁵⁴¹ However, if love is to be defined, it is first necessary to refer to his interpretation of *Surat al-Baqara* in his commentary on the verse: “Yet there be men who take to themselves compeers apart from God loving them as God is loved, but those that believe love God more ardently (*ashadda ḥubban lillāh*)...”⁵⁴² This verse is one of the most important verses on divine love in Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation. Here he outlines the concept of divine love and begins by defining love. He initially quotes Sufi scholars who had associated love with religious virtues such as compliance, continual

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 9-11, see also Pablo Beneito, “On the Divine Love of Beauty,” *JMIAS*, vol. XVIII, (1995), p. 20.

⁵⁴¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 58.

⁵⁴² Ibid, p. 193, Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Baqara*, (2:165).

yearning and constant obedience to the Beloved's will.⁵⁴³ Ibn 'Ajība then defines the true lover (*al-muhibb*) as "one whose heart is not dominated by anyone except his beloved and who has no will save that of his beloved."⁵⁴⁴ He summarizes previous definitions of love by quoting Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī, the master of his Order, who had defined love in the following terms:

"Love is captivating the heart of the devoted believer by God so as to take him away from everything save Him. So the self becomes inclined towards obedience to Him, and the mind is safeguarded with His knowledge, and the spirit is seized by His presence, and the transconscious (*sirr*) is immersed in His witnessing, and he is granted more love upon his request for more. Then the servant encounters what is sweeter than the pleasure of intimate conversation which is the blessing of proximity in the realm of nearness.⁵⁴⁵ And then he can sense virginal truths and confirms the knowledge (he already had in theory).⁵⁴⁶

المحبة أُخَذَتْ من الله لقلب عبده المؤمن عن كل شيء سواه، فترى النفس مائلة لطاعته، والعقل متحصناً بمعرفه، والروح مأخوذة في حضرته، والسر مغموراً في مشاهدته، والعبد يستزيد من محبته فيزداد، ويفتح بما هو أعذب من لذيذ مناجاته، فيكسي حلل التقريب على بساط القربة، ويمس أبكار الحقائق وثيبات العلوم.

3.2.8) Reasons for the Devotee's Love for God

Subsequent to providing various definitions of love, Ibn 'Ajība sought to explain the reasons which underpin the devotee's love for God. The two reasons which Ibn 'Ajība focuses upon are largely drawn from al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā'*. The first cause of love is beauty (*jamāl*) and the second is benefaction (*ihsān*) and gentleness (*ijmāl*). Ibn 'Ajība explained these two causes in the following terms:

"As for beauty, it is loveable by nature as human beings intrinsically love all what is deemed to be beautiful and there is no beauty matching that of God's in terms of His utter wisdom, His marvelous creation and the brilliant beauteous divine attributes which enchant the mind and charm the heart. However, God's beauty is only apprehended through interior insight- not through exterior eye sight".⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴³ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 194.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.* والمحب على الحقيقة من لا سلطان على قلبه لغير محبوه، ولا مشينة له غير مشينته.

⁵⁴⁵ It literally means 'To be dressed in the gowns of proximity on the carpet of nearness.'

⁵⁴⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 194.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

فأما الجمال فهو محبوب بالطبع، فإن الإنسان بالضرورة يحب كل ما يستحسن، ولا جمال مثل جمال الله تعالى، في حكمته البالغة وصنائه البديعة، وصفاته الجميلة الساطعة الأنوار التي تروق العقول وتبهج القلوب، وإنما يدرك جماله تعالى بالبصائر لا بالأبصار.

Ibn ‘Ajība then presented the second cause of love in the following terms:

“As for benefaction (*ihsān*), the heart is inherently inclined to love those who do good to it. God’s acts of goodness and beneficence to His devotees are incessant and His bounties showered upon them both manifest and hidden. God says, “and if ye would count the bounty of God ye cannot reckon it” (14:34). It is sufficient that He extends his beneficence to both the obedient and the sinner and the believer and disbeliever alike. Moreover, all acts of beneficence that are outwardly attributed to others, in reality come solely from Him and therefore He alone is worthy of love”.⁵⁴⁸

وأما الإحسان فقد جبلت القلوب على حب من أحسن إليها، وإحسان الله إلى عباده متواتر، وإنعامه عليهم باطن وظاهر، "وإن تعدوا نعمة الله لا تحصوها" ويكفيك أنه يحسن إلى المطيع والعاصي، وإلى المؤمن والكافر، وكل إحسان ينسب إلى غيره فهو في الحقيقة منه وحده، فهو المستحق للمحبة وحده.

Ibn ‘Ajība also explains how God’s bounties have a psychological and spiritual impact upon His servants, and then proceeds to explain how this impacts upon the individual’s faith and love for the Beloved:

“Whenever the devotee bears witness to one of the countless beauties of God, this acts as a seed planted in the land of his good and pure heart, so he keeps watching the apparition of one blessing after another and beholds each as greater than the one before it. This is because the more he witnesses God’s bounties, the more illuminated his heart becomes and the more his faith increases. Also, tiny details of bounties that were never revealed to him before become evident to him and hidden bounties become manifest to him, and thus his love for God greatly increases.”⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 194.

فكلما طالع منةً مِنْ مِّنْ الله التي لا تقبل الحصر ولا العدَّ، كان ذلك كحبة زُرعت في أرض قلبه الطيب الزكي، فلا يزال يطالع منةً بعد منةً، وكلُّ منةٍ أعظم من التي قبلها، لأنه كلما طالع المنن تنور قلبه وزداد إيماناً، وكشف من دقائق المنن ما لم يكن يُكشف له قبل، وظهر له خفايا المنن، وعظمت محبته.

He brings the discussion to a conclusion by explaining that this first type of love, which results from witnessing God's beauty, is more deserving than the second type of love, because this love is from God to God – there is no meddling or acquisition on the servant's part. In contrast, the other love is earned by the servant and all the actions of the servant are characterized by deficiency and flaws.⁵⁵⁰ This echoes al-Suhrawardī's division of love, who had likewise stressed the unconditional character of God's love, to which the devotee could make no contribution. Ibn 'Ajība supported his opinion by referring to Rūzbihān's view on love of both God's bounties and God's Essence. Ruzbihān believed that the love of bounties and blessings is not real love because it is, by its very nature, deficient. Love that results from witnessing God is real because whoever sees Him loves him passionately ('*ashaqahu*), and once converted, no one can recant from the religion of love.⁵⁵¹

3.2.9) Degrees of Proximity in Love

Ibn 'Ajība defined the proximity (*qurb*) of the devotee to God as the ultimate aim of love. He beautifully conveyed this sentiment in the following terms:

“By proximity is meant nearness in respect to love and contentment (with God), not proximity that is measured with the distance traversed or the nearness of (familial) affiliation. This is because the characteristics of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) are not compatible with those of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*); rather they are at a far distance from each other despite their extreme proximity. This apparent proximity allows the lights of *rubūbiyya* to cast its illumination on the devotee, so he becomes absent from forms and unconscious of beings and all he sees are the lights of his Lord. The lights can become so overwhelming that he may claim [the heresies of] incarnationism and unification [with God]. This claim is excusable for him if he is in an inner state of drunkenness (*sukr*) for no duties can be imposed on the drunkard during the absence of mind, yet if he insists on (continuing in) his

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 195.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, vol. 2, p. 53.

claim after regaining sobriety, according to *Sharī'a* he can be killed — and God Almighty knows best”.⁵⁵²

فالقرب معناه قرب محبة ورضا، لا قرب مسافة أو نسب، إذ أوصاف العبودية غير مجانسة لأوصاف الربوبية، بل هي بعيدة منها مع شدة قربها، وقد تشرق على العبد أنوار الربوبية فتكسوه حتى يغيب عن حسه ورسمه فلا يرى إلا أنوار ربه، فيدعى الاتحاد أو الحلول، وهو معذور عند أهل الباطن لسكروه، وقد رفع التكليف عن السكران، فإذا صحى وبقي على دعواه قتل شرعا. والله تعالى أعلم.

Ibn 'Ajība further comments on this level of extreme proximity when he offers an esoteric interpretation of the verse, “He said: O my Lord! Prison is dearer than that unto which they urge me, and if Thou fend not off their wiles from me I shall incline unto them and become of the foolish”.⁵⁵³ Here Ibn 'Ajība draws a clear distinction between love at the surface level of the heart and the love that is deeply rooted within the heart's core. He said,

“As long as love remains on the surface of the heart without penetrating its inner core, the servant remains wavering between his worldly life and the hereafter, and between remembrance and heedlessness. Once love penetrates the core of the heart and burns up its inner core, the servant forgets both this world and the hereafter and he becomes absent from himself and his desires, and is lost in the love of his Lord”.⁵⁵⁴

الحب إذا كان على ظاهر القلب ولم يخرق شغافه، كان العبد مع دنياه، وأخرته، بين ذكر، وغفلة. فإذا دخل سويداء القلب، وخرق شغافه نسى العبد دنياه وأخراه، وغاب عن نفسه وهواه، وضل في محبة مولاه.

Ibn 'Ajība suggested that this kind of proximity can be described as “being lost in love (*dalāl*)”. It could be applied to Zulaykhā, the lover of Joseph, who was described by the other women in the Qur'ān as “evidently going astray” (12:30), but in fact she was immersed in love to such an extent that she went astray from all things, with the exception of her beloved. Ibn 'Ajība uses the same metaphor to describe Prophet Muḥammad's love for God. He notes that the Qur'ān states: “Did He not find thee lost and guide thee?”⁵⁵⁵ as implying that God found Prophet Muḥammad lost in His love and guided Him to the presence of witnessing Him and being stationed in close proximity to Him “two bows’-

⁵⁵² Ibid, vol.2, p. 488.

⁵⁵³ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthal, Yūsuf (12:33).

⁵⁵⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 594.

⁵⁵⁵ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Doḥa (93: 7).

length away or nearer” (53:9). The attainment of this level of love has four signs: fleeing from the company (*istīhāsh*) of people; companionship (*inās*) with God; remembrance of the Beloved during breathing; and knowing God’s presence in one’s thoughts and desires.⁵⁵⁶ Al-Ḥallāj eloquently expressed this proximity in verse when he said:

I swear to God that the sun has not risen or set
 Except with your remembrance accompanying my breaths,
 Nor have I sat conversing with people
 Except that you are the topic of my conversation with the sitters,
 Nor have I touched water to quench my thirst
 Except I have seen an image of you in the glass.
 If people have obsessive thoughts haunting them,
 Then I swear you are my obsessive thought.
 Were it not for the gentle breeze
 of your remembrance with which I stay awake,
 I would have been burned by the heat of my breaths.⁵⁵⁷

This sentiment is also echoed by Mevlana Rūmī who said:

Your image is in my mind, your remembrance is in my mouth
 Your abode is in my heart, where then can you be absent?⁵⁵⁸

Ibn ‘Ajība then brought his discussion of the different degrees of love to a conclusion by quoting his master Shaykh al-Būzaydī. The latter had suggested that love has three degrees: a beginning, middle and end:

“The beginning is for the people of servanthood: the worshippers, the ascetics, the righteous, and the elite scholars. The middle degree is for the people of spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) who are overwhelmed with yearning to such an extent that ecstatic statements (*shaṭaḥāt*), dancing and marvelous states come into being through them, which may be condemned by those who adhere to the exoteric law (*sharī‘a*). Some of them are overcome by rapture (*jazb*) until they become annihilated from

⁵⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 594.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, see also al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār al-Ḥallāj*, p. 133.

والله ما طلعت شمس ولا غربت إلا وحبك مقرون بأنفاسي
 ولا خلوت إلى قوم أحدثهم إلا وأنت حديثي بين جلّاسي
 ولا ذكرتك محزوناً ولا فرحاً إلا وأنت بقلبي بين وسواسي
 ولا هممت بشرب الماء من عطش إلا رأيت خيالاً منك في الكاس

⁵⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 594. See also the Turkish version of these verses (Senin hayalin benim gözümde. İsmim ağzımda, zikrin kalbimde. O halde nereye mektup yazayım?) by Mevlana Celaleddin-İ Rumi, *Fîhi Mâ Fîh*, trans to Turkish by Meliha Ülker Anbarcıoğlu, (Istanbul, Ataç Yayınları, 2015), ch.12, p. 85.

themselves or are bereft completely of their senses (*isṭilām*). Some of them still have some kind of sobriety and those are the ones in whom miracle working powers and thaumaturgical abilities are manifest. The end degree is for the people of gnosis, who are at the station of direct witnessing and contemplative vision, who have become drunk by intermediary means, were intoxicated by that, and then regained sobriety.”⁵⁵⁹

المحبة لها ثلاث مراتب: بداية ووسط ونهاية، فبدايتها لأهل الخدمة، كالعباد والزهاد والصالحين والعلماء المجتهدين، ووسطها لأهل الأحوال، الذين غلب عليهم الشوق حتى صدرت منهم شطحات ورقصات وأحوال غريبة ربما ينكرها أهل ظاهر الشريعة، فمنهم من يغلب عليه الجذب حتى يصطلم، ومنهم من يبقى معه شئ من الصحو، وهؤلاء تظهر عليهم كرامات وخوارق العادات، ونهايتها لأهل العرفان، أهل مقام الشهود والعيان، الذين شربوها من يد الوسائط وسكروا بها وصحوا.

In further elaborating the prime position of love, Ibn ‘Ajība quoted Ibn Juzayy (d. 742/1341) who had stated that the stations of the righteous devotees, which include fear, hope and contentment, are based on self-interest. In other words, the one who fears is fearing for himself and the one who hopes, envisages a benefit for himself. This clearly contrasts with love, which is performed purely for the sake of the beloved and thus does not entail reciprocity.⁵⁶⁰

In conclusion, as can be seen, Ibn ‘Ajība advances a strong argument that *maḥabba* and *‘ishq* are intertwined. Both are divine Attributes which were initiated by God who planted divine proximity (*qurb*) in the hearts of those who are chosen (*murād*). Ibn ‘Ajība’s interchangeable use of the terms *maḥabba* and *‘ishq* (although here it should be noted that he uses the first term to a greater extent) suggests that the controversies which pertain to the term *‘ishq* were no longer pertinent during his day; thus, he aligned himself with the earlier Sufis who found it permissible to use this term. Ibn ‘Ajība also frequently reiterated the precedence of God’s love of man’s; in this respect he closely resembled previous Sufis such as al-Sarrāj, al-Suhrawardī, and Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī who believed that God’s love is not only antecedent to human love but is also beyond the power of reason to fathom and it is for this reason that it appears to be “causeless”. God’s decision to bestow love upon a servant does not therefore need to be comprehensible to the intellect; this love is, as Ibn ‘Ajība had previously reiterated, pure divine grace.⁵⁶¹ It

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 53.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, vol.1, p. 195.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, vol.2, pp. 52-54.

is also worthwhile to note that while, in contrast to previous scholars, Ibn ‘Ajība preferred the type of love that derives from witnessing God’s beauty, he did not view love based upon benefaction in entirely negative terms. He instead explained that, with the contemplative vision of divine bounties, the level of faith and love can be increased. He also believed, as the preceding passages clearly reiterate, that love is the only means through which the lover can attain a state of self-annihilation (*fanā’*), which permits a contemplative vision (*shuhūd*) of God’s Oneness (*tawhīd*).

3.3) Love and Contemplation

3.3.1) The Origin and Precedence of Divine Love

Ibn ‘Ajība also outlines his paradigm of divine love in his commentary on the opening chapter of the Qur’ān (*al-Fātiḥa*). Here he clarified that God is the origin of love because He is the first and only lover and beloved. He proceeded to explain that when God’s manifestation is revealed from the Realm of Power (*jabarūt*) (which is the Unseen World, *ghayb*) to the Realm of Dominion (*malakūt*) (which is the World of Witnessing, *shahāda*), God praised Himself by Himself, glorified Himself by Himself and testified to the oneness of Himself by Himself.⁵⁶² Ibn ‘Ajība eloquently expressed the origin of divine love within the Godhead in an intimate discourse which he imagined was spoken by God:

“O you who are close to Me, contemplate My secret as it is strange. I am the lover and the beloved, I am the close one and the respondent [to prayers], I am the Compassionate, the most Merciful; I am the King of the Day of Judgement, I am the Merciful with the bounty of existence (*ijād*) and the Compassionate with the blessing of sustaining providence (*imdād*)...”.⁵⁶³

"يقول سبحانه: يا من هو منى قريب، تدبر سرى فإنه غريب، أنا المحب، وأنا الحبيب، وأنا القريب، وأنا المجيب، أنا الرحيم الرحمن، وأنا الملك الديان، أنا الرحمن بنعمة الإيجاد، والرحيم بتوالى الإمداد..."

The meaning of God’s love for human beings and the precedence of divine love over its human counterpart are both clearly rendered in Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the famous verse, “O believers, whosoever of you turns from his religion, God will assuredly

⁵⁶² Ibid, vol.1, pp. 57, 58.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, p. 58. Al-Ḥallāj rendered this meaning when he said: “In His perfect isolation God loves Himself, praises Himself and manifests Himself by Love. And it was this manifestation of Love in the Divine Absolute that determined the multiplicity of His attributes and Names”. See Derin, *From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p. 159.

bring a people He loves, and who love Him,..."⁵⁶⁴ In this instance, God appears to be, by virtue of the fact that He declares His love first, the initiator of love. Ibn 'Ajība also invoked the eloquent words of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875) in order to reiterate the precedence of the divine actions (*tawḥīd al-af'āl*) and God's love over man's:

"I erred in the beginning in four things. I thought that I was remembering Him, recognizing Him, loving him, and seeking him. Finally I realized that His remembrance preceded my remembrance; His act of recognition preceded my act of recognition; His love was older than my love; He sought me first so that I could then seek Him".⁵⁶⁵

Ibn 'Ajība then defined God's love for His devotee to entail selecting the individual, preserving him, caring for him and bringing him closer. Here Ibn 'Ajība introduces 'Abd al-Salam Ibn Mashīsh (d. 625/1228) who was the spiritual master of the founder of the Shādhiliyya Sufi Order. He also invokes Abu al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), who had defined love as, "captivating the heart of the beloved devotee by God through revealing the lights of His beauty and the sanctity of His perfect majesty....".

Ibn 'Ajība then proceeds to describe the consequences of the manifestation of divine love in the heart of the devotee as bringing about the station of annihilation (*al-fanā'*) – here the devotee becomes absent from his own self-existence and subsists by witnessing God's beauty and majesty.⁵⁶⁶

The question of why Ibn 'Ajība gives God's love precedence over the love of human beings will be easier to comprehend if it is viewed through the lens of Sufis and mystical thinkers who preceded him. Lumbard in his study of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's philosophy of love discusses the precedence to God's love as establishing the basis for the dual relationship between God and His creation, working at a soteriological level in which the heart of the lover plays a central role in the metaphysics of love – this reflects the fact that it is the locus of God's love.⁵⁶⁷ Prior to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā had reiterated the same concept in his *Risāla fī'l- 'ishq*, where he states that love is the original

⁵⁶⁴ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Mā'ida, (5:54).

⁵⁶⁵ Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'ān, Mi'rāj, Poetic and Theological Writings*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 238.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 53. 'Irāqī reiterates the same meaning when he states: "Do you want to be ALL? Then go, Go and become NOTHING". Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, *Lama'āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhrud-dīn 'Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 78.

⁵⁶⁷ Joseph Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," p. 351, see also Joseph Lumbard, *Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 114-115.

reason for human existence and thus everyone is born with the innate desire for love.⁵⁶⁸ He also viewed love as a universal principle and motivational force for all creation.⁵⁶⁹ Attār also emphasized this meaning when he interpreted the movements of the sun and the moon as pure acts of divine love. He said that:

“The sun burns because of love and longing, is one moment red, the next yellow because of pain, and wears a blue garment of mourning because of love’s sorrow. Every evening it falls to the earth in a swoon out of longing for God. The moon wastes away out of love for God and every month throws away its shield out of perplexity. Water wanders restlessly in search of Him, it surges and rages out of longing and consists of nothing but tears of yearning.”⁵⁷⁰

Aḥmad al-Ghazālī himself had also put forward a theory that relates to the pre-eternal existence of divine love expressed in the verse *yuhibbuhum* (“a people whom He loves”). He said that the diacritical dot under the letter *bā’* “ب”⁵⁷¹ is like a seed that was planted in the soil of *yuhibbuna* (“a people who loves Him”). When the seed grows up, flourishes, and ripens into a fruit, the fruit has the same essence of love as the seed. To put it differently, the love that human beings feel towards God is nothing but the same love that God instilled in them in the first place.⁵⁷² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, the older brother of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, clarified the difference between God’s love for man and its human counterpart by reiterating that the former, brings the servant closer in proximity to God, while man’s love for God is “his inclination to grasp the perfection without which he is destitute and lacking...”⁵⁷³

‘Irāqī also clearly reiterated that divine love must take precedence over its human counterpart (man’s love for God):

In those days
before a trace
of the two worlds
no “other” yet imprinted

⁵⁶⁸ Ibn Sīnā, “A Treatise on Love,” trans. by Emil L. Fackenheim, *Mediaeval Studies*, 7 (1) (1945): 208-228, p. 212.

⁵⁶⁹ Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*, pp. 145-146.

⁵⁷⁰ Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ‘Attar*, pp. 530-531.

⁵⁷¹ This letter *bā’* “ب” is the second letter in the Arabic alphabet (it is the Arabic equivalent of the English letter ‘b’). It is marked by an underpinning dot.

⁵⁷² Omid Safi, “On the Path of Love towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics,” p. 31.

⁵⁷³ William Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam,” p. 178.

on the Tablet of Existence
 I, the Beloved and Love
 lived together
 in the corner
 Of an uninhabited cell.⁵⁷⁴

Ibn ‘Arabī also developed his own theory that related to the precedence of God’s love, which elaborated the first moment when human beings fell in love with God. He stated that God should cast His light upon the human spirits so they might see Him; once they did, God asked them to *be* – once they came into existence, they immediately fell in love with His beauty.⁵⁷⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī expounded a similar meaning in verse:⁵⁷⁶

Without this first original love,
 the constancy of love would not be known,
 and were it not for indigence
 the generous one would not be adored.
 We are through him and to Him we belong.
 He is the foundation of my constancy (*wudd*).

Rūzbihān in turn elucidated that God’s love for mankind is pre-eternal and, by the virtue of God’s divine love, human beings are able to love God back. Rūzbihān, who shared Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s opinion, considered love to be the divine Essence, which he added, is characterized by pre-eternal love. God therefore loves His lovers with both His Essence and Attributes – in reciprocating, they love God with their essence and attributes. In this equation of love, actions (*af‘āl*) are not an active consideration. Love at first originates in the devotee’s heart where no actions take place; love was originally instilled in the heart prior to the occurrence of bounties, blessings, actions and so forth. This establishes that God loved human beings when they existed *in potentia* within His knowledge – that is, prior to their actual existence. Rūzbihān therefore concludes that God, in His Essence, loved Himself. God therefore loved His Actions which originated in His Attributes and these in turn refer back to His Essence. He consequently loved Himself and became lover and the beloved, who are both characterized with love.⁵⁷⁷ Rūzbihān rendered this meaning in prose: (“*‘ishq* is one of the attributes of the Real; He Himself is His own lover (*‘āshiq*). Therefore, love, lover and beloved are one...”).⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama‘āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhrud-dīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 74.

⁵⁷⁵ William Chittick, “The Divine Roots of Human Love,” *JMIAS*, vol. 17, 1995, p. 63.

⁵⁷⁶ Pablo Beneito, “The Servant of the Loving One,” p. 7.

⁵⁷⁷ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol.1, p. 317, see also Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, (Albany, SUNY press, 2010), p. 75.

⁵⁷⁸ Carl Ernst, “Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as ‘Essential Desire,’” p. 187.

Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt* echoed the opinion of earlier Sufis by rendering God as both the lover and the beloved. This was shown by his commentary on the verse “He loves them and they love Him” (5:54),

The painter’s fascination
Is with his own canvas
There is no one else about
So... rejoice!⁵⁷⁹

‘Irāqī added that the reason for the unity of both the lover and Beloved may be traced back to the fact that the lover has no real existence: in order to gain the title of “lover”, the Beloved and lover must become one. He states,

Beloved, Love and lover- three in one
There is no place for Union here
So what’s this talk of “separation”?⁵⁸⁰

The idea that God is both the lover and the beloved can be traced back to al-Daylamī’s treatise, where he had categorized love as one of the divine qualities; it was not, to this extent, conceived to be of the divine Essence. He clarified his position by then explaining that the tripartite division of divine love into love, lover and beloved was not its original classification: in pre-eternity God loved Himself by Himself, and thus the oneness of love prevailed in the absence of division. When each of God’s divine Names manifested itself out of “the realm of pre-eternity into the realm of temporal existence, love in turn was divided into the three entities of love, lover and beloved.”⁵⁸¹ So in al-Daylamī’s perspective, love is divided into three entities, which clearly contrasts with its primordial origin, where it had instead been one unified entity.⁵⁸²

Ibn ‘Ajība further reiterates the precedence of God’s love when he asserts that God initiates love by splitting open his servant’s heart and filling it with passion. This then enables him to love God back reciprocally. He states:

“When God loves a servant, he tears his heart open and fills it with His passion (*‘ishq*) and love, and He splits open the kernel of his mind to contemplate the

⁵⁷⁹ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama‘āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 77.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 76, see also p. 26.

⁵⁸¹ al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, p. 60.

⁵⁸² Ibid, pp. 59, 60, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism”, pp. 358, 359.

wonders of His power. Thus, the servant's heart keeps inclining towards the divine presence, and his mind, through contemplating the wonders of His greatness, is illuminated with the divine lights until the sun of gnosis shines upon his heart and erases the darkness of the night of his human existence. At that time, he becomes alive by virtue of divine gnosis after he was dead due to his ignorance and heedlessness. Therefore, God causes him to die from witnessing his own selfhood and breathes life into him through allowing him to witness His Essence"⁵⁸³

"إذا أحب الله عبدا فلق حبة قلبه بعشقه ومحبتة، وخلق نواة عقله بالتبصر في عجائب قدرته، فلا يزال قلبه يميل إلى حضرته، وعقله يتشعشع أنواره بازدياد تفكره في عجائب عظمتة، حتى تشرق عليها شمس العرفان، فيفلق عمود فجرها عن ظلمة ليل وجود الانسان، فيصير حيا بمعرفته، بعد أن كان ميتا بجهله وغفلته فيميتة عن شهود نفسه، ثم يحييه بشهود ذاته..."

Ibn 'Ajība's assertion that God is both the first lover and first beloved raises the prospect that the human factor will be set aside and that man will not be factored into the equation of divine love at all. That being said, he affirms that in spite of the considerable difference between Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) (that is, between God and man), these opposites are nonetheless able to attain unity at the station of love. As the next section explains in more detail, love contributes to a state of self-annihilation (*fanā'*) which makes it possible for man to attain a kind of unity with the Divine.

3.3.2) Love and Divine Unity

The concept of love is of such singular importance for Ibn 'Ajība because it is directly related to divine Unity (*tawhīd*). While human beings are commanded to affirm divine Unity, Ibn 'Ajība argued that God had originally testified to his own Oneness. Those who claim to testify to God's unity effectively deny God's utter Oneness – this is because they wrongly associate themselves (through recognizing their own self existence) with God's existence.⁵⁸⁴ To put it differently, self-annihilation (*al-fanā'*) is a necessary prerequisite for witnessing divine Oneness (*shuhūd al-wahdāniyya*). This sublime meaning the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī beautifully expressed as follows:

When you have become living through Him, you are indeed He.
That is utter Oneness, how could that be companionship?⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 148.

⁵⁸⁴ Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*, ed. Muḥammad Naṣṣār, (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-Kalim, 2005), pp. 258, 259.

⁵⁸⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 184. *Mathnawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, IV: 2767.

The proposition that witnessing God is the pinnacle of the Sufi Path is also strongly emphasized in Ibn ‘Ajība’s paradigm of love: direct witnessing is only attained by the devotee after he becomes a lover of God. Ibn ‘Ajība also asserts that the only way that human beings witness God is through His grace, not by an individual’s merely human efforts. What the seeker needs if he is to witness God’s Oneness is to purge himself of his human earthly qualities and substitute them with divine ones; it is important to reiterate that love (*ḥubb*) is a divine grace that is not based on human efforts.

In order to provide a better understanding of Ibn ‘Ajība’s paradigm of love and its close relationship with divine Unity, the next few pages will briefly cite the classical literature on this issue, and will attempt to demonstrate how the Sufis resolved the paradox of the lover-beloved duality and sought to attain divine Unity with the Beloved. This brief exploration will, in bringing out the various subtleties of divine love in the classical Sufi tradition, enable a fuller comprehension of Ibn ‘Ajība’s concept of divine Unity.

Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd’s (d. 297/910) treatise on God’s Unity (*tawḥīd*) asserted that it is only the self that fully conceals the self from fully appraising itself. By logical extension, it is only possible to fully witness God through Himself, since the witnessing of God (*shuhūd*) is predicated upon the annihilation of our own self-existence.⁵⁸⁶ In support of this assertion, he cited the example of Moses when God said to him: “I have chosen thee for My service.”⁵⁸⁷ In his view, at this spiritual station, which is equivalent to “being chosen for service” (*iṣṭinā’*), the devotee’s entire affairs are bound to God such that he is totally annihilated from himself and then annihilated from his own annihilation. At this stage, his existence only subsists through the reality of the annihilation of his existence.⁵⁸⁸

Rūzbihān’s *‘Arā’is al-bayān* explained the process through which the devotee might aspire to this state of union. He noted that the devotee’s love for God is a manifestation of the divine attribute of love that illuminates his heart and shines upon his spirit. The devotee’s love of God is a reflection of the divine love that shines within him. At this stage, love, lover and beloved are all perceived as an essential unity. Rūzbihān adds that this description is the interpretation of the Prophet’s ḥadīth,⁵⁸⁹ which describes

⁵⁸⁶ Cited by Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 255.

⁵⁸⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Ṭaha, (20:41).

⁵⁸⁸ Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, *Rasā’il al-Junayd*, ed. ‘Alī Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Qādir, (Cairo: Bura’ī Wajday, 1988), p. 60.

⁵⁸⁹ *Al-Sunan al-kubrā li’l-Bayhaqī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 3rd ed., vol. 10, p. 370, ḥadīth no: 20980.

the lover as being united with the Beloved in His attributes, “and if I love him, I become his eyesight, hearing, tongue and hand”.⁵⁹⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī reiterates the same meaning when he explains that the lover (*muḥibb*) reaches a point where he practically identifies himself with God and assumes His attributes by virtue of love. At this point, the lover begins to perceive the world from a unitary perspective: by virtue of the fact that divine beauty is manifested in all creation, he falls in love with everything.⁵⁹¹ Rūzbihān asserts that al-Hallāj was trying to express this meaning of divine unity when he said:

I am the One whom I love and the One whom I love is myself.
We are two souls incarnated in one body.
If you see me, you see Him;
If you see Him, you see us.⁵⁹²

Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s Persian treatise on the metaphysics of love (*Sawāniḥ*) provided the ontological framework within which love returned the duality of the lover and the beloved back to their original divine state of Unity (*tawḥīd*). Love therefore became seen as the final goal of the novice’s spiritual journey. The spirit of the novice and love are therefore the two important factors in Ghazālī’s spiritual journey. The beginning of the journey is characterized by the separation of love and the spirit of the lover – the latter representing the lover, standing apart. By progressing along the path, the spirit of the lover is gradually annihilated. The beloved then becomes a mirror reflecting love manifested in his own image, which marks the pinnacle of mystical knowledge. The final stage of the journey requires, as a precondition, the expiration of the form and attributes of the beloved – this is because love represents the point of unity (*tawḥīd*).⁵⁹³ Al-Ghazālī maintains that love is not a divine attribute; rather it is instead the Absolute Reality, which is identical to God’s Essence.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁰ Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.1, p. 317, see also Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, p. 58.

⁵⁹¹ Claude Addas, “The Experience and Doctrine of Love in Ibn ‘Arabī”, *JMIAS*, XXXII (2002), pp. 25-44.

⁵⁹² Al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.1, p. 317. Al-Wāsiṭī had, in attending to the manifestation of God in all things, previously voiced the same opinion. He maintained that this ultimately returns all manifested forms to a state of divine unity. He said, “He left no self for the creatures after He reported about Himself that He is the First (*al-Awwal*), the Last (*al-Ākhir*), the Manifest (*al-Zāhir*), and the Non-Manifest (*al-Bāṭin*) (Q 57:3).” See Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, p. 64, see also al-Tūsī, *Luma’*, p. 428.

⁵⁹³ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady, (London: KPI Limited, 1986), pp. 86, 87.

⁵⁹⁴ al-Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*, p. 4, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *‘Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp. 348, 350, 351. See also *Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, Lama’āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes* pp. 4, 5.

Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī’s *Lama ‘āt* was one of the essential works which sought to imitate the *Sawānih*. Here he reaffirmed Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s opinion that love is God’s Essence. He further expounded this view: “[L]ove is too holy for non-manifestation and manifestation. It wanted to manifest its own perfection, which is identical with its essence and attributes, so it presented itself to itself in the mirror of Lover and Beloved...”.⁵⁹⁵

In contrast to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s identification of love with the Absolute, Maybudī instead asserted another view which holds that the Beloved not love is the Absolute. In associating the Absolute with the Beloved, Maybudī sought to eliminate all dualities (of lover and love) that might be seen to exist in the view of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī. Maybudī therefore reiterated that the seeking of love is a means to an end which enables the lover to reach the Beloved.⁵⁹⁶ He accordingly states:

Rush on towards love, and then don’t get caught there
Go on beyond love (*‘ishq*) and being in love (*‘āshiqī*).⁵⁹⁷

Maybudī’s attempt to eliminate duality can be traced back to ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī, his teacher, who had eloquently spoken about the unity of divine love. He said: “O God, all love is between two, so there is no room for a third. In this love, all is You, so there is no room for me”.⁵⁹⁸

Aḥmad al-Sam‘ānī (d. 1140) wrote another important Persian treatise on the nature of divine love that commented on the Divine Names. He explains that the verse “He loves them and they love Him” (5:54) is the only verse which explicitly indicates that a divine attribute is shared equally between God and human beings. He proceeds to state that all the other divine qualities mentioned in the Qur’ān counterpose God’s greatness to man’s smallness; God’s omniscience to man’s ignorance; and God’s power to man’s weakness”.⁵⁹⁹

It is important to note that Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical approach towards the issue of divine love had an important influence upon the perception of later Sufi scholars. Ibn Sīnā emphasizes God’s loving nature, which presents Him as both Lover and Beloved. He also, like Ḥallāj, equates love with God’s Essence, and accordingly states that “love is identical with the Essence and with Being, by which I mean the Sheer Good”.⁶⁰⁰ He also, explains

⁵⁹⁵ Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam,” p. 172.

⁵⁹⁶ Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 198.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam”. p. 174.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 173.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 170.

the yearning of human beings to attain a spiritual union with God and refers to it as inborn love with which human beings are endowed. Through this inborn love, the Absolute Good (i.e. God), manifests Himself in those who love Him, in degrees which correspond to the level of connection established with Him. The maximum point of proximity is the point of unification (*ittiḥād*).⁶⁰¹

In a simpler presentation, man's spiritual journey in pursuit of reunion with God has been described by many scholars as "the circle of existence" (*dā'irat al-wujūd*). The journey begins with God and the manifestation of His divine Attributes within human beings, who in turn seek to return to their divine origin. Love is the fuel which ignites and sustains this rigorous pursuit.⁶⁰²

* * *

Now that the views of other scholars upon the relationship between love and divine unity have been summarized, the discussion is better placed to approach and appraise Ibn 'Ajība's own views on this subject. While Ibn 'Ajība does not share Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's view that love is the absolute divine Essence, he concurs that it is one of the Attributes of God's Essence that are manifested in the lover-devotee's heart – this will in turn aid him as he seeks to attain unity with his Beloved.

Ibn 'Ajība's commentary on the Prophet Abraham's address to his father (in which he advises him to abandon the worshipping of idols) further reiterates the importance of love in helping to attain divine Unity. He states in his interpretation of this verse: "(Remember) when Abraham said unto his father Azar: Takest thou idols for gods? Lo! I see thee and thy folk in error manifest,"⁶⁰³ that the concept of idol (*ṣanam*) is not confined to idols that are physically worshipped. Rather, Ibn 'Ajība instead widens the usage of the word 'idol' to refer to anything other than God to which the heart leans towards with love (*maḥabba*) and ardent love (*'ishq*). Ibn 'Ajība therefore declares that the love of anything other than God creates a veil that blocks the heart from witnessing the secrets of divine Unity (*asrār al-tawḥīd*). If the individual is to witness the divine secrets of Oneness,⁶⁰⁴ then he must first purify his heart from the defilement of leaning towards anything other than God; he must remove from his heart the love of anybody but God.

⁶⁰¹ Ibn Sīnā, *A Treatise on Love*, p. 225, cited by William Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam," p. 177.

⁶⁰² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 6.

⁶⁰³ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthall, al-An'ām (6:74).

⁶⁰⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 135.

A further insight on this matter is offered by Ibn ‘Ajība in his commentary on one of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh’s aphorisms, which states: “You have not loved anything without being its slave, but He does not want you to be someone else’s slave.”⁶⁰⁵ Here he states that when the heart loves something or someone, it leans towards it and submits to it; it thus becomes totally obedient to the commands of the beloved. Ibn ‘Ajība clarifies that submission and obedience are the essence of worship. The heart was created to only have one love destination; if it gets distracted by the love of anything other than God, it turns its face away from God and becomes a slave to whatever or whoever it loves. However, if the heart faces towards God, it will not be able to love anything apart from Him, and will accordingly achieve divine Unity.⁶⁰⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība also discusses how the distraction of the heart by multiple beloveds clearly attests to a weakness of love towards all beloveds. In contrast, he who has only one beloved, this then can be taken as a measure of the strength of love within his heart. This is explained in his commentary on the heart of Moses’s mother and her undivided love for her newly-born son, who she had to cast into the sea in order to prevent him being killed. Accordingly, he states: “On the morrow the heart of Moses’ mother became empty, and she wellnigh disclosed him had We not strengthened her heart, that she might be among the believers”.⁶⁰⁷ In this instance, the heart of Moses’s mother was empty of anything but her son. She was about to scream out that the baby boy found in the sea was her son; however, God strengthened her heart and she did not reveal the secret. Ibn ‘Ajība used the undivided love of Moses’s mother for her son as an example for the devotee: he too is required to empty his heart of the love of others (*aghyār*) and to only fill his heart with God’s love; this in turn will lead the heart to witness the secrets of Almightyness (*asrār al-jabarūt*) and not reveal these secrets to others. This is a reflection of the fact that God strengthens the heart to prevent it from witnessing the secrets of the Beloved.⁶⁰⁸ This meaning is beautifully stated in verse:

If the universe disappears from my heart’s sight
The heart witnesses the secrets of the Unseen revealed
so remove the universe away from your sight
And erase the dot upon *ghayn* if you want to see me⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁵ Victor Danner, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s Sufi Aphorisms*, (Leiden: Brill), 1973, p. 53, see also Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*, p. 423.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*, pp. 423-425.

⁶⁰⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Qaṣaṣ, (28:10).

⁶⁰⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.4, p. 234.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

إن تلاثى الكون عن عين قلبى شاهد السر غيبه فى بيان
فاطرح الكون عن عيانك، وامح نقطة الغين إن أردت ترانى

In the last verse of the poem, the poet refers to the letter غ *ghayn* of the Arabic alphabet. It has a dot above it when written; however, when this dot is removed it turns into the letter ‘ayn ع – in Arabic, alluding to the ع of عين (meaning ‘Essence’). The poet here uses imagery derived from the Arabic alphabet to create a metaphor, and employs the letter غ *ghayn* to refer to the *gh* of *ghayr* – this means ‘other than God’ (sing. *ghayr*, pl. *aghyār*); however, he adopts the letter ع ‘ayn to refer to witnessing God who is the Essence.

Subsequent to discussing the essentiality of directing one’s love solely to God in order to witness the divine Unity, Ibn ‘Ajība addresses the signs of God’s love. He states:

And know that when God’s love comes to rest in the heart, its effects become manifest in the outer bodily organs confirming them in obedience, making them active in service, diligent in seeking His pleasure, delighting in supplication to Him, content with His decreed destiny, yearning to meet Him, feeling intimate with His invocation while feeling alienated from all others save Him, fleeing from human society, seeking solitude in sanctuaries, casting the world out of the heart, loving all that God loves and all whom God loves and preferring God over everything else.⁶¹⁰

واعلم أن محبة الله إذا تمكنت من القلب ظهرت آثارها على الجوارح، من الجد في طاعته، والنشاط لخدمته، والحرص على مرضاته والتلذذ بمناجاته، والرضا بقضائه، والشوق إلى لقائه، والأنس بذكره، والاستيخاش من غيره، والفرار من الناس، والانفراد في الخلوات، وخروج الدنيا من القلب، ومحبة كل ما يحب الله، وكل من يحب الله، وإيثار الله على كل ما سواه

At this point, it is worthwhile to refer to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s four signs of God’s love for a devotee. He renders the Prophet Muḥammad as the epitome of God’s love for a human being. He notes that the first sign of God’s love for a devotee is for God to seek the contentment (*riḍā*) of His devotee. God, in the Qur’ān, therefore states to the Prophet Muḥammad that “God will give you until you are satisfied” (93:5). The second sign is swearing by the life of His beloved devotee, which God did when He swore by the life of

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, vol.1, p. 196.

Prophet Muḥammad in the Qur’ān.⁶¹¹ The third sign is to love the lovers of His beloved devotee. In the Qur’ān, God therefore states: “Say if you love God, then follow me and God will love you (3:31)”. The fourth and final sign of God’s love is to detest His beloved’s enemies. God therefore indicated in the Qur’ān that He would change the Qibla to a direction that would meet with the Prophet Muḥammad’s satisfaction although this change of direction was disapproved by the Jews.⁶¹² These indicators of God’s love for a devotee are outer signs that conceal an intimate understanding of the meaning of divine unity and the ways in which it can be grasped by the human intellect and instilled in the heart.

Based on the preceding analysis of Ibn ‘Ajība’s views of love and its relation to divine Unity, when compared with the opinions of earlier Sufi scholars on the topic given above, it becomes relatively straightforward to ascertain the profound influence of the classical Sufi heritage upon Ibn ‘Ajība’s doctrine on love. However it should be noted that most classical scholars, in seeking to explain the metaphysical aspect of love and its intricate relationship with divine Unity, have stopped at the theoretical level. Invariably this course of action has been justified upon the grounds that the lover-devotee can only be united with God - the Beloved – by attaining a state of self-annihilation (*fanā’*), in which the devotee is no longer able to recognize his own existence. Ibn ‘Ajība sought to go beyond this theoretical doctrine of love and divine Unity, and present his own concept as the basis upon which observers could easily comprehend the abstruse relationship between love and divine Unity; in addition, his doctrine was meant to function as a blueprint of ways in which aspirants could seek to reach a state of self-annihilation, wherein true love blossoms and divine Unity is attained.

3.3.3) The Unity of Divine Power (*qudra*) and Divine Wisdom (*ḥikma*)

Ḥikma (divine wisdom) is one of the central concepts which helps the devotee to witness God’s Unity. It is an essential mechanism which enables him to perceive God in both the world of divine wisdom (*ḥikma*), where the laws of cause and effect are the dominant features of human interaction, and the world of divine power (*qudra*), where all actions are solely performed by God with no room for human participation.

⁶¹¹ See the Qur’ān (15:72)

⁶¹² See the Qur’ān (2:144), Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Baḥr al-maḥabba fī asrār al-mawadda fī tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, p. 101.

Ibn ‘Ajība, in offering an esoteric commentary on the verse: “He bestows wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) upon whom He wills...” (2:269) defines wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) as “witnessing the divine Being covered with the lights of divine Attributes and this is the essence of gnosis” (*shuhūd al-dhāt murtadiya b-anwār al-ṣifāt wa hiya ḥaqīqat al-ma‘rifa*).⁶¹³ Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that the Sufīs refer to the secrets of the divine Essence (*asrār al-dhāt*) as the divine power (*qudra*) and to the lights of divine Attributes (*anwār al-ṣifāt*) as divine wisdom (*ḥikma*). He therefore holds that the whole universe subsists through both *qudra*, which reveals destiny and executes decrees, and *ḥikma*, which relates results to their secondary causes (*asbāb*). The individual who only sees *ḥikma*, which ties apparent causes to their immediate results, becomes blind and his sight is unable to perceive God’s divine power (*qudra*).⁶¹⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība concludes:

The perfect gnostic is the one who combines witnessing the divine power (*qudra*) while being acquiescent to the divine wisdom (*ḥikma*). Thus, he gives everyone his due and allotted share with a just measure, but this can only be done through intuitive savor (*dhawq*) and spiritual revelation (*kashf*), not through learning and imitation.⁶¹⁵

"فالعارف الكامل هو الذى جمع بين شهود القدرة وإقرار الحكمة، فأعطى كل ذى حق حقه، ووفى كل ذى قسط قسطه، لكن يكون ذلك ذوقا وكشفا، لا علما وتقليدا."

Ibn ‘Ajība further explains the idea of surrendering oneself to Providence (in correspondence with) *qudra* while abiding by rules of cause and effect (which are associated with *ḥikma*). He associates divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) with the outer rules of the Islamic law (*sharī‘a*) and ties divine power (*qudra*) to the inner truth of divine decrees (*ḥaqīqa*). He clarifies that *sharī‘a* and *ḥaqīqa*, when compared to *ḥikma* and *qudra*, are not contradictory but are instead complementary. Both the Qur’ān and the Sunnah adopt an affirmative position in establishing this complementarity between *qudra* and *ḥikma*. The Qur’ān, for example, indicates the aspect of *ḥikma* in one verse; a ḥadīth, meanwhile, refers to *qudra* in explaining the same verse where *ḥikma* was emphasized. (See below).

⁶¹³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd* vol. 1, p. 303, "شهود الذات مرتدية بأنوار الصفات وهى حقيقة المعرفة"

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 303, 304, see also See also Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 68-80.

⁶¹⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 304.

Ibn ‘Ajība provides a practical example of this complementarity during his commentary on the verse: “Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good. They say: Peace be unto you! Enter the Garden because of what ye used to do.”⁶¹⁶ The cause-and-effect relationship (*ḥikma*) is strongly emphasized in this verse because good actions (cause) anticipate paradise (effect). Ibn ‘Ajība uses this verse (16:32) to associate the performed actions with *ḥikma*, which relates to outer acts and their immediate results – both these factors predominate in the world of *sharī‘a*.

Ibn ‘Ajība also succeeds in bringing about a reconciliation between *ḥikma* (which makes the devotee’s good actions a reason for entering paradise) and *qudra* (which makes God’s mercy, as opposed to righteous actions, the sole reason for the devotee’s admission to paradise). This point is explicitly reiterated in a ḥadīth in which the Prophet states that no one will be admitted to heaven by virtue of his good works (not even the Prophet himself), unless God sees fit to bestow his mercy upon him. Ibn ‘Ajība succeeded in overcoming the ostensible contradiction between *ḥikma* (one’s good works being the reason for admission to heaven) and *qudra* (God’s mercy being the reason for entering paradise) by noting that attributing causal significance to the actions of human beings is an illusion: this is because all actions are nothing but sheer divine grace (*fadl*), since both actions and the ability to perform actions are created by God. The preceding verse indicates the standpoint of the *sharī‘a* or *ḥikma*, while the aforementioned ḥadīth refers to the realm of the *ḥaqīqa* or *qudra*.⁶¹⁷

Ibn ‘Ajība further elaborates the reconciliation of *qudra* and *ḥikma* in his commentary on one of the aphorisms in the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh, who asserted that “an act of disobedience which results [in] humility and helplessness, is better than an act of obedience which results in conceit and pride”. Ibn ‘Ajība approvingly quotes ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, who beautifully rendered the following in verse:

Sometimes He preordains an act of obedience for me;
Other times an act forbidden by law is preordained.
Therefore, you see me abandoning His command
And commit what is forbidden with tearful eyes.
If I am considered by religious laws a sinner,
In fact by the lore of the Truth (*‘ilm al-ḥaqīqa*), I am obedient.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthall, al-Naḥl (16:32).

⁶¹⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, pp. 123-124, see also Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 68-80.

⁶¹⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-ḥimam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*, p. 238. Al-Qushayrī, on the other hand, does not mention at all the concept of divine power and wisdom in his esoteric commentary on the same verse. He rather provided a very brief definition of wisdom and equated it to witnessing none other than God (*shuhūd al-*

فأونة يقضى على بطاعة وحينما بما عنه نهتنا الشرائع
لذاك ترانى كنت أترك أمره وأتى الذى أنهاه والجفن داعم
إذا كنت فى حكم الشريعة عاصيا فإنى فى علم الحقيقة طائع

In his commentary on this highly abstruse poem, Ibn ‘Ajība articulates the doctrine of pre-ordained decrees which originates from the realm of divine power (*qudra*) and which lead the devotee to commit acts that are opposed to religious law. The sins that gnostics committed as a result of their adherence to pre-eternal decrees are not due to the attachment of their hearts to anything besides God; as such, their sins are accompanied with tearful eyes and a remorseful heart. Therefore, when al-Junayd was asked, “Can a gnostic commit adultery?”, he answered with this Qur’ānic verse “the command of God is a decreed destiny.” (33:38)⁶¹⁹ Al-Junayd further clarified that if he was asked if the aspiration (*himma*) of the gnostic can be attached to anything save God, he would answer in the negative.⁶²⁰ The sins of those whose aspirations are not attached to God are characterized by a determined intention, a pleasure and an insistence upon continuing to commit sins.⁶²¹

In order to arrive at a fuller assessment of the originality of Ibn ‘Ajība’s doctrine (of divine power and divine wisdom in relation to the pre-ordained decrees of Providence), it will now be beneficial to briefly examine the positions that classical Sufi scholars and exegetes have taken on this question.

When Maybudī discusses the doctrine of divine power (*qudra*) in his *Kashf al-asrār*, he addresses the classical ontological concept of divine pre-eternal decree (*qaḍā’*), which establishes that all human actions are predetermined before existence.⁶²² This is a particularly important contribution because it raises profound questions about the extent to which a human being can be held accountable for his own actions (*af’āl*). Maybudī further expands this point:

ḥaqq). See al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 208, see also Sahl Ibn ‘Abdullah al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur’ān*, pp. 35-37.

⁶¹⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-ḥimam*, p. 238.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 183.

Ah, the fate that has gone before me. Alas, for what the self-willed has already been dictated. What use is there in my being happy or upset? I am in fear of what the Omnipotent has decreed in pre-eternity.⁶²³

After initially explaining the power of Providence and the pre-ordained divine decree, Maybudī then proceeds to reconcile the opposites of free-will and predetermination by emphasizing the importance of rigorous efforts in worship and ardent spiritual exercises, presenting both as prerequisites of the quest for God. As we have seen above, this realm of individual volition and exertion is known as the realm of divine wisdom (*'ālam al-ḥikma*). However, Maybudī reiterates that the individual who believes that his acts of worship (*tā'āt*) will enable him to reach his destination is deluded. When exerting effort, the individual should not be fixated on his actions and view them as a guarantee for earning God's pleasure; rather, he should always remember that God's acceptance of his acts is a sheer act of divine grace (*fadl*); it is not, by logical implication, the consequence of one's own actions.⁶²⁴

Rūzbihān reiterates the same point that God is the sole protagonist of all actions when he states:

[U]nderstand that everything from the throne to the earth is the creation of God Most High; everything is His Action. He brought them into existence from pure non-being... So it is with whatever is originated in His kingdom for eternity without end. The actions of creatures are also the creation of God Most High, although they are acquired by creatures.⁶²⁵

A closer examination of the terms *ḥikma* and *qudra* in Rūzbihān's commentary reveals that he provides various definitions of divine wisdom (*ḥikma*), one of which includes realizing the secrets and wonders of the Unseen through the lights of the heart. He also defines *ḥikma* as the divine etiquette (*adab rabbānī*) that teaches ethics (*akhlāq*). *Ḥikma* can therefore be seen as a tool of discernment that enables the devotee to, amongst other things, distinguish between the whims of the lower self and the thoughts of Satan. In referring to the concept of divine power (*qudra*), Rūzbihān explained that when gnostics are, in the absence of any mediation, exposed to the sciences of lordship (*'ulūm*

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, pp. 183, 184.

⁶²⁵ Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. 30.

al-rubūbiyya), they realize the reasons that underlie the divine decrees through the attribute of divine power (*qudra*). He further clarifies that the spirit only reaches the station of *ḥikma* after attaining unification (*ittiḥād*) with God; this applies because the divine wisdom is a pre-eternal attribute related to the divine being – this attribute can only be associated with the gnostic when God graces his spirit with it. By the virtue of the divine attribute bestowed upon the gnostic he is able to provide insight into the inner realities of matters decreed by Providence.⁶²⁶

In order to more fully grasp the impact of Ibn ‘Ajība’s doctrine of divine power and wisdom, it will be instructive to consider Satan’s refusal to prostrate himself before Adam, in open defiance of God’s command. It will be equally important to see how different Sufis, taking this doctrine into account, sought to handle this issue. Maybudī states that Satan’s refusal to prostrate to Adam was essentially compliant with the divine will (*mashī’a ilāhiyya*), even though he ostensibly appeared to oppose the divine command.⁶²⁷ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī advanced another perspective when he quoted a saying in which Satan justified his refusal to prostrate before Adam upon the grounds that he would not prostrate himself before anyone apart from God.⁶²⁸ In arguing against this justification, Ruzbihān explained that the reason why Satan refused to prostrate himself was because “he was veiled from the majesty and beauty by his looking at himself, his making analogies (*qiyās*), and his ignorance”.⁶²⁹ When the angels prostrated themselves before Adam, they were not acknowledging Adam’s humanity *per se*, but were instead prostrating themselves before God’s self-disclosure of beauty that was manifested in Adam’s face.⁶³⁰ In extending the same logic, Ruzbihān claimed that the reason why the women of Egypt cut their hands when they encountered Joseph’s beauty was because they experienced a profound state of bewilderment when they were confronted by the beauty of God that was manifested in Joseph.⁶³¹

Ibn ‘Ajība also discussed Satan’s refusal to prostrate to Adam in terms that closely resembled Rūzbihān – he therefore attributed it to Satan’s inability to see beyond physical forms: in regarding Adam, Satan could not see anything apart from his terrestrial

⁶²⁶ Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.1, p. 112.

⁶²⁷ Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, pp. 183, 184.

⁶²⁸ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Baḥr al-maḥabba fī asrār al-mawadda fī tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, p. 37, see also Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ‘Attar*, pp. 556-557.

⁶²⁹ *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, I, 419 (Q:7:11) found in Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*, p. 127.

⁶³⁰ Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*, p. 126.

⁶³¹ *Ibid*, p. 137.

attributes and thus failed to acknowledge the light of divinity that shone within him.⁶³² While the doctrines of *qudra* and *ḥikma* have been mentioned, albeit with recourse to slightly different terminology, by other Sufi teachers, they were rendered in an elliptical prose that is sometimes hard to decipher. Ibn ‘Ajība’s originality lay in his clear articulation of the doctrines of divine power and wisdom and the manner in which he skillfully tied the former to the divine Essence (*al-dhāt*) and the latter to the divine Attributes. He should also receive credit for linking the doctrines of *qudra* and *ḥikma* to the concept of divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), which is the aim of the Sufi Path. The attainment of a perfect equilibrium between divine wisdom and divine power is, in the view of Ibn ‘Ajība, the ultimate fulfillment of the divine Trust, a theme which will be further discussed in the next section.

3.3.4) The Divine Trust (*amāna*) and the Perfection of Divine Love

The concept of the divine Trust (*amāna*), which is better known as the ‘Covenant of Love’ between man and God, plays a direct role in attainment of divine love. Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that the burden of the divine Trust was borne by human beings as a result of three covenants of love to which their spirits pledged themselves. The first covenant of love was taken in pre-eternity in the realm of power (*jabarūt*) – this occurred when a handful of light (*qabḍa nūrāniyya*) was extracted from the core of the Great Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-a‘ẓam*) called the ‘Grand Adam’ (*ādam al-kabīr*). The covenant was not confessed by the tongue at this point as the spirits were undeveloped. The second covenant of love was taken on the day of Alast (Q, 33:72) – this is when the children of Adam were extracted from his loins. The spirits at this stage were more developed and had individual attributes such as hearing, sight and speaking – this enabled them to see God, listen to His speech and affirm his Oneness. The third covenant was taken in this worldly life through the missions sent out by different prophets, who act as reminders of the original two covenants made in pre-eternity.⁶³³ The most relevant Qur’ānic verse in this respect is: “We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and feared it and man carried it...” (33:72). Ibn ‘Ajība extensively discusses the

⁶³² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 204.

⁶³³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 280, see also al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’lūf*, p. 169.

intricate relationship between the divine Trust of love, and the balance between *qudra* and *hikma* along with the contribution of each element to the perfection of divine love.

The establishment of equilibrium between divine power (*qudra*) and divine wisdom (*hikma*) reiterates that the beauty of divine love can only be tasted through an enhanced understanding of the cosmos. It has already been noted that the world of *hikma* is the abode of the outer form of the religious law (*sharī'a*) where rulings are carried out and religious obligations are manifest. The world of *qudra* is instead related to the inner realm of spiritual realities (*ḥaqīqa*), where all matters are executed by God – this is because, ultimately, nothing has any existence except Him. Ibn 'Ajība also believed that those who are loved by God behold both an outer vision of the *sharī'a* (so as to abide by the duties of servanthood) and also have an inner insight which enables them to witness the *ḥaqīqa* – this acknowledges that all actions are performed solely by God as they are unable to see any being except Him. It is essential to retain this equilibrium, because clinging solely to the outer forms of the *sharī'a* without perceptive insight is deviance and perversion (*fisq*) – this applies because the person is prevented from witnessing the beauty of the spiritual meanings which sustain and nurture the outer world of laws – which clearly recalls the proposition that the retention of inner insight in the absence of outer forms of religious obligations is heresy (*zandaqa*).⁶³⁴

Ibn 'Ajība maintains that when the ability to witness God's divine power (*qudra*), which supersedes all direct cause-and-effect relationships, is combined with perception of the divine wisdom (*hikma*), which ties results to their causes, the end product is the true definition of the divine Trust (*amāna*), which combines in its fold both divine gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and divine love (*ḥubb*). Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric commentary on the verse “We had already taken the covenant of the Children of Israel and had sent to them messengers...” (5:70) interpreted the term “Covenant” as related to bearing the divine Trust (*amāna*), a burden which was borne by Adam and all mankind. The covenant of *amāna* entails “the ability to recognize the grandeur of Lordship (*'azamat al-rubūbiyya*) reflected in the manifestations of servanthood (*mazāhir al-'ubūdiyya*)”.⁶³⁵ To put it differently, it is necessary to purify the terrestrial earthly body from the passions of the lower self. This is essential if the spirit, which originates from the heavenly world, is to reunite with its divine origin – this is the ultimate fulfillment of the divine trust (*amāna*). Ibn 'Ajība

⁶³⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, pp. 184, 185.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 64.

clarified that the burden of the covenant can only be fully realized by the prophets and gnostics who have undertaken the necessary spiritual training to purify their spirit.⁶³⁶

However, it should be acknowledged that human beings in general were created with an innate disposition and ability to bear the divine Trust (*amāna*) of gnosis and love; this applies irrespective of the terrestrial nature of the body which, if not purified, becomes dominated by the egoistic tendencies of the lower self. Ibn ‘Ajība elaborates the difference between the nature of both the body and the spirit in his commentary on this verse, “[i]t is he who created you from clay and then decreed a term...”(6:2) where he observed that while the body of human beings is made of clay, their spirit partakes of the divine lights and the divine secrets. It is therefore the case that the body, when considered in relation to the spirit, acts as a locus or a container of the lights of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) that are manifested in the spirit (*rūḥ*). However, the divine lights of the spirit only shine forth when the clay is purified of the defilement of sin and the lowliness of carnal desires. The triumph of the light of divinity over the darkness of the flesh enables the devotee to enter the realm of divine gnosis – henceforth he becomes a true bearer of the divine Trust (*amāna*).⁶³⁷

Ibn ‘Ajība suggests that self-purification is essential if human beings are to fulfill their role as God’s vicegerents on earth. The honorary position of bearing the divine Trust (*amāna*) that has been given to the sons of Adam is accompanied by special characteristics which help human beings to attain gnosis and reach divine love. Human beings, as a manifestation of divine attributes, represent a small prototype of the whole universe and all its concomitant divine secrets. By virtue of man’s role as God’s vicegerent (*khalīfa*), the whole universe acts as an aid and adjunct for the benefit of human beings – this enables them to fulfill their role on earth as God’s vicegerents.⁶³⁸ Ibn al-Dabbāgh reiterates the same concept when he describes the human being as a microcosm which contains all the material and spiritual capacities of the world.⁶³⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība clarifies why human beings have been selected to bear the Trust of love:

The dual nature of human beings that consists of the contraries of light and darkness, turbidity and subtlety, spirituality (*rūḥāniyya*) and the created human condition (*bashariyya*), sensuality (*ḥiss*) and spiritual reality (*ma‘nā*), divine

⁶³⁶ Ibid, see also L. Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” p. 150.

⁶³⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, pp. 96, 97, see also Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ‘Attār*, pp. 641-642.

⁶³⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 217.

⁶³⁹ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh*, pp. 95, 96.

wisdom (*ḥikma*) and divine power (*qudra*), lowly servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) and the mysteries of lordship (*asrār al-rubūbiyya*), and so forth, is the reason why God chose human beings to carry the divine Trust (*amāna*).⁶⁴⁰

" ومنها: أن جعل ذاته مشتملة على الضدين: النور والظلمة، الكثافة واللطافة، الروحانية والبشرية، الحس والمعنى، القدرة والحكمة، العبودية وأسرار الربوبية إلى غير ذلك. ولذلك خصه بحمل الأمانة."

Ibn 'Ajība's doctrine of the Trust is best illustrated in his commentary on the widely acknowledged key verse (also cited above) which pertains to it: "Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it..."(33:72). In his commentary Ibn 'Ajība reveals the secret of God's choice of Adam and his children to bear the divine Trust of love as follows:

"Bearing the divine Trust that God offered to the heavens, the earth and the mountains means to witness the secrets of Lordship (*asrār al-rubūbiyya*) within one's inner being while outwardly remaining steadfast in preserving the etiquette of servanthood (*adāb 'ubūdiyya*). Or you could say that bearing the divine Trust means the illumination of one's inner being with the mysteries of spiritual realities while adhering to the religious laws outwardly, applying these with moderation (*i'tidāl*) so the spiritual realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) do not supplant the religious laws (*sharā'i'*) nor vice-versa, nor allowing drunkenness (*sukr*) to overpower sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) or vice-versa. This secret only belongs to Adam's progeny because Adam combines within himself the opposites of subtlety (*latāfa*) and turbidity (*kathāfa*), light and darkness, the intelligible and sensible realms, Power and Wisdom. So he is celestial-terrestrial, spiritual-yet-human, supersensual-non-formal and sensual at once. Therefore, he was specially chosen by God amongst all the other beings with the divine address, "I created him with My Hands" (38:75). These "Hands" signify the hands of Power and Wisdom, so the very state of being Adam contains two antithetic qualities, belonging to both the physical realm (*mulk*) and angelic realm (*malakūt*) at once. His outer form is Wisdom (*ḥikma*) and his inner meaning is Power (*qudra*)".⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 217, see also Michon, *Ibn 'Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁴¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.4, p. 469.

"الأمانة التي عرضها الله على السموات والأرض والجبال هي شهود أسرار الربوبية في الباطن، والقيام بأداب العبودية في الظاهر، أو تقول: هي إشراق أسرار الحقائق في الباطن، والقيام بالشرائع في الظاهر، مع الاعتدال، بحيث لا تغلب الحقائق على الشرائع، ولا الشرائع على الحقائق، فلا يغلب السكر على الصحو، ولا الصحو على السكر. وهذا السر خاص بالأدمى، لأنه اجتمع فيه الضدان، اللطافة والكثافة، النور والظلمة، المعنى والحس، القدرة والحكمة، فهو سماوى أرضى، روحانى بشرى، معنوى حسى. ولذلك خصه الله تعالى من بين سائر الأكوان بقوله: "خلقت بيدى" أى بيد القدرة والحكمة، فكان جامعاً للضدين، ملكياً ملكوتياً، حسه حكمة، ومعناه قدرة"

In this esoteric exegesis, Ibn 'Ajība reveals the secret of the human condition – that hovers between the body, which is possessed by egoistic tendencies and passions, and the spirit, which is the abode of spiritual realities and sublime meanings. When combined, the earthly and the heavenly elements establish a perfect equilibrium for human beings which enables them to reach their ultimate destination, fulfil the divine trust and realize various spiritual states (of which love is the most elevated).

It should be noted here that as far as our research goes no other exegete had, prior to Ibn 'Ajība, extensively discussed the reasons for Adam's unique status as the bearer of the divine Trust of love. He clarifies that the synthesis of divine and human elements within man confers a special benefit on him that has not been given to any other being. Both the angels and the jinn, to take one example, incline towards witnessing inner meanings, as opposed to outer forms. If the lights of divine secrets were to shine on them, they would always be in a state of drunkenness (*sukr*). Animals and minerals instead incline towards the witnessing of outer physical forms – this leaves them with no scope to witness inner meanings, and no divine lights and secrets are accordingly manifested in them.⁶⁴² Ultimately, human beings are the only candidates that are worthy of witnessing the divine secrets of lordship that lie buried in their heart. These secrets are however only revealed after rigorous spiritual exercises to purge the self of its egoistic tendencies.⁶⁴³

The unique character of Ibn 'Ajība's views can be more fully brought out through examination of the views of al-Qushayrī, Maybudī, and Rūzbihān, three other Sufī exegetes who also expounded the esoteric meaning of the doctrine of the Trust in the Qur'ān.

⁶⁴² It is important to note that Ibn 'Ajība does not deny the fact that the whole world emanates divine lights and is full of divine secrets; rather, he instead emphasizes that the share of all creatures - other than human beings – to receive and reflect divine lights is limited by their constrained natural capacity.

⁶⁴³ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.4, pp. 469, 470.

Al-Qushayrī's esoteric commentary on the same verse of *amāna* (33:72) explained Adam's acceptance of the divine Trust. This was justified upon the grounds that he perceived it to be a manifestation of divine gentleness (*lutf*); the heavens and the earth instead viewed the Trust as a manifestation of the divine attributes of Lordship and majesty and thus shied away from carrying it. Al-Qushayrī also clarified that the betrayal of the Trust (*khyānat al-amāna*) has several different degrees - the severest degree is disbelief, which equates to a betrayal of the essence of the Trust (conceived of here as gnosis); this is then followed by other lesser degrees which vary in accordance with the sin committed.⁶⁴⁴ He also added that Adam willingly shouldered the burden of the Trust because he realized that it is carried in the heart, which was prepared in advance for such a sublime meaning.⁶⁴⁵ Maybudī reiterated the same view when he stated that Adam carried the Trust with the belief that it exemplified divine generosity; in contrast, the heavens and the earth considered the grandiosity of the task ahead and fell short.⁶⁴⁶

Rūzbihān clarified that the divine Trust is characterized by singularity (*infirād*), annihilation (*fanā'*) and drunkenness (*sukr*) in passionate love ('*ishq*). These qualities are associated with Divinity (*ulūhiyya*) and all created beings felt weak and were taken aback by the divine grandeur. The one exception is Adam who stood still; this reflected the fact that these divine qualities, which were already embedded in him, had prepared him to bear the divine Trust. These qualities originated within the divine spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudsiyya*) and were manifest when the light of the divine Essence (*nūr al-dhāt*) was revealed to Adam in pre-eternity (*al-qidam*). Adam was therefore enabled to bear the divine Trust by the will of God, not by his own will. Rūzbihān further clarified that Adam's creation was generated by a combination of the theophany of the divine Essence and Attributes and it was this which enabled him to bear the divine Trust. He concluded that, metaphorically or figuratively speaking (*majāzan*), the divine Trust denotes love (*maḥabba*), passionate love ('*ishq*) and gnosis (*ma'rifa*).⁶⁴⁷

Ruzbihān furthermore observes that the first encounter between God and the human spirits took place on the day of *Alast*, when He revealed for the first time His divine beauty. This led the spirits to fall into passionate love with Him, and the Trust was therefore a covenant of '*ishq*.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.3, p. 173, see also Sahl Ibn 'Abdullah al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'ān*, pp. 58, 249.

⁶⁴⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.3, pp. 173, 174.

⁶⁴⁶ Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, p. 50.

⁶⁴⁷ Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol.3, p. 149.

⁶⁴⁸ Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*, p. 96.

Maybudī's interpretation of the verse of the divine Trust concurred that the Trust consisted of a pact of love which was sealed on the day of *Alast*, when Adam's sons yet unborn were asked, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied in the affirmative. It is therefore the mission of every trustee to preserve the seal of the Trust until it is returned to its owner.⁶⁴⁹

The discussion will now demonstrate, with specific reference to the views of Ibn 'Ajība, how the celestial spirit and terrestrial body may together attain divine love. Over the next few pages we will try to elaborate Ibn 'Ajība's views regarding both issues.

3.4) Divine Love between the Spirit and the Body

3.4.1) The Spirit and its Divine Origin

Ibn 'Ajība attempted to explain the sublime nature of the spirit (*rūḥ*) and sought to demonstrate how it contains the "secret of Divinity". In his commentary on this verse, he seeks to highlight its lofty origin within the world of divine Majesty (*'aẓama*) and Almightyness (*kibriyā'*).

Hast thou not regarded him who disputed with Abraham, concerning his Lord, that God has given him the kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is He who give life, and makes to die" he said, "I give life, and make to die." Said Abraham, "God brings the sun from the east; so bring thou it from the west." Then the unbeliever was confused. God guides not the people of the evildoers.⁶⁵⁰

Ibn 'Ajība notes that when the spirit descends from its divine abode to reside in the body, it yearns to go back to its celestial origins that was characterized by grandiosity and almighty. God designated the path of humility and lowliness of the spirit as the only means through which it could be reunited with its lofty origin. However, some spirits refuse to tread the path of submissiveness and modesty, and instead take the route of conceit and egotism which leads to their expulsion and banishment, as was the case of Pharaoh and Nimrūd, who both claimed Lordship and divinity, (referring to verse 2:258).⁶⁵¹ Al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932), in reflecting upon this point, states: "Whoever says "I"

⁶⁴⁹ William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, p. 50.

⁶⁵⁰ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:258).

⁶⁵¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 291, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 277.

surely contends with the Power.”⁶⁵² The spirits of some other people recognized that the divine secret lay within them, and were thus unable to conceal it from public view. Al-Hallāj for example could not withhold the secret of divinity and tended to expose this mystery. He said:

I saw my Lord with the eyes of my heart
 So I said, “who are you?” and he replied, “I am you”⁶⁵³
 رأيت ربي بعين قلبي فقلت من أنت؟ قال: أنت!

The case of al-Hallāj demonstrates the incapacity of some spirits to withstand the grandeur of contemplation of the divine secret within themselves, which thus leads to their death.⁶⁵⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, in comparing his own state to al-Hallāj’s, sought to expound the different capacities of the spirit to bear divine secrets. He confirmed that al-Hallāj’s inability to conceal the secrets of Lordship led to his death, while he, in contrast to al-Hallāj, was granted even a greater share of divine secrets – however he had the capacity to conceal them from the public.⁶⁵⁵ A Sufi poet clearly expressed this meaning when he said:

If they disclosed the secret (of divinity), their bloodshed becomes lawful
 Thus lawful becomes the blood of those who disclose (the divine secret)⁶⁵⁶

بالسر إن باحوا تباح دماؤهم وكذا دماء البائحين تباح

Al-Qushayrī’s commentary on the same verse (2:258) does not address the sublime nature of the spirit or its yearning to return to its divine abode. He instead states that the spirit’s claims to Lordship results from blindness of spiritual insight (*baṣīra*), a lack of perception of spiritual realities and the subtle meanings of divinity and gnosis.⁶⁵⁷

Ibn ‘Ajība’s treatment of the issue of the divine origin of the spirit makes the reader wonder if the spirit, which belongs to the heavenly world to which it yearns to return, is able to enjoy this union in this earthly world before the body perishes. Ibn ‘Ajība suggests that it is possible for the spirit to return to the divine presence while the body

⁶⁵² Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, p. 47.

⁶⁵³ Qāsim ‘Abbās, *Al-Hallāj: al-a‘māl al-kāmilā*, (Beirut: Riad el-rayyes books, 2002), 1st ed., p. 295, see also Joseph Lumbard, “From *Ḥubb* to *Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” pp.362-364.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 291.

⁶⁵⁵ Claude Addas, “The Experience and doctrine of Love in Ibn ‘Arabī”, *JMIAS*, XXXII (2002), pp. 25-44.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 369. The meaning of this verse derives from the saying of some Sufis, who state that “disclosing the secrets of Divinity is an act of disbelief” إفشاء سر الربوبية كفر” al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 2004), vol.1, p. 100, see also, Ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, pp. 71, 72.

⁶⁵⁷ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 200.

still exists. He believed that this state can be attained only after the spirit is completely purged of its attachment to physical forms, which enables it to reconnect to the spiritual realm while preserving the physical form of the body.⁶⁵⁸

Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that the self (*nafs*) and the spirit (*rūḥ*) are two terms that can be used interchangeably to refer to the same essence. *Al-nafs* is the earthly self which seeks to fulfil its licentious desires. If the self indulges its lusts, it is called an “inciter to wrongdoing” (*ammāra*), but if the self refrains from sin and is overcome by fear, it is called the “blaming spirit” (*lawwāma*). When the self is relieved from the strain of spiritual exercises and the divine veils are lifted, it becomes known as “the spirit” (*rūḥ*). The final stage of the self is attained when the spirit is completely free from the shackles of forms, so that it returns to its original luminous divine state, thus becoming known as “the secret” (*sirr*). Ibn ‘Ajība goes further to challenge Rūzbihān’s claim that the self was created from badness (*sū’*); when the *nafs ammāra* proceeds with an intention to commit a bad deed, it is as if it committed all acts of disobedience – this applies because, if it had the chance, it would commit them all.⁶⁵⁹ But Mahmut Ay explains that, from Ibn ‘Ajība’s perspective, the self was created from holy and sanctified light. From this perspective, it is not inherently bad; rather these are instead accidental qualities and cannot be attributed to its original state.⁶⁶⁰

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī views the issue of the Spirit quite differently, and therefore distinguishes between three spirits. The first is the individual substance (*al-jawhar al-fard*), which is characterized by luminosity and cognizance. This spirit is signaled by contemplation, reflection and pondering, along with a grasp of spiritual realities and abstract meanings. He further clarifies that the Qur’ān refers to this spirit as ‘the peaceful spirit’ (*al-nafs al-muṭma’inna*) – upon which the divine generosity flows (*fayḍ al-jūd al-ilāhī*)⁶⁶¹ - the Sufis refer to it as the heart (*al-qalb*). The sublime status of this spirit gives it clear authority over the other two spirits. The second is the animal spirit (*al-rūḥ al-ḥayawāniyya*) which is dominated by sensation (*ḥiss*). It therefore relates to movement (*ḥaraka*), lust (*shahwa*) and anger (*ghaḍab*). Al-Ghazālī further clarifies that the Sufis, in

⁶⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 451.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 34.

⁶⁶⁰ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 276. The use of “*nafs*” in early Arabic poetry refers to the self or person; in the Qur’ān, *nafs* has the same meaning as soul (*rūḥ*); in the post-Qur’ānic literature both words were, in recognition of their close connection, used interchangeably with each other. See E. E. Calverley. “Nafs”, *EI*², vol. VII, p. 880.

⁶⁶¹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ma’ārij al-quds fī madārij ma’rifat al-nafs*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1975), 2nd ed., p. 15.

accordance with the Qur'ān, refer to this kind of spirit as the lower soul or ego-self (*nafs*); it is also described as a subtle body (*jism laṭīf*) that is instilled in the heart which breathes life into it and equips it with powers of sensation, motion, anger and lust. The final spirit is the natural spirit (*al-rūḥ al-ṭabī'iyya*), which is dominated by the consumption of food.⁶⁶²

The animal and natural spirits are unable to recognize God as they only function as servants, and they expire when the body perishes. Because the divine commands are not addressed to them, they are by their very nature incapable of comprehending the divine speech. The first kind of spirit mentioned by al-Ghazālī has, by virtue of the fact that it comes from the divine world of the Command (*'ālam al-amr*), neither a bodily form (*jism*) nor any contingent attribute (*'araḍ*). In presenting itself as a divine power (*quwwa ilāhiyya*), it appears as an intangible abstract essence that does not perish but instead separates itself from the body after death and returns back to its divine abode.⁶⁶³

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī appears to echo the Platonic division of the soul that was rendered in the *Treatise on the Essence of Love* which was written by the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*). The *Treatise* divides the soul into three types: the first is the Aristotelian nutritive & appetitive soul which seeks to consume food and achieve sexual satisfaction. The second soul pertains to the level of instinct (emotional and animal), and thus seeks to pursue victory and supremacy. The third soul, which is the highest of the three, pursues knowledge and the attainment of perfection. The soul is the locus of love and the body is a means through which the soul can be spiritually unified with its divine origin.⁶⁶⁴

A closer engagement with Ibn 'Ajība's definition of the Spirit indicates the presence of several different spiritual stages that the Spirit undergoes in its journey towards God which require various levels of spiritual exercises. These levels are explained in his commentary on the verse: "Have they not traveled through the earth and observed what was the end of those before them?" (30:9). In this instance, Ibn 'Ajība refers to al-Qushayrī's four stages of the voyage of the spirit on the Sufī Path, which proceed by gradation through different names associated with each stage: lower soul (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūḥ*) and secret (*sir*).⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶² al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla al-ladunniya*, pp. 7-9, see also al-Ghazālī, *Ma'ārij al-quds*, pp. 21, 37.

⁶⁶³ Ibid, pp. 10, 12, 13.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *A Treatise on Love*, p. 210, see also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mishkat al-anwār wa maṣfat al-asrār*, ed. 'Abd al-Azīz al-Sayrawān, (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), 1st ed., p. 122.

⁶⁶⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.3, p. 110.

At the stage of the lower soul (*nafs*), devotional acts of worship are performed in the hope of attaining rewards. The stage of the heart (*qalb*)⁶⁶⁶ is concerned with witnessing the realm of creation – that is, everything apart from God, (*aghyār*) with eyes of contemplation (*i'tibār*) in order to witness the Divine within them. The attainment of *rūḥ* enables the devotee to submerge himself in the realm of divine lights in his quest to realize the divine presence. The last stage is the transconscious secret (*sirr*) which is characterized by continuous elevation and progression in the realm of divine power (*jabarūt*).⁶⁶⁷

Ibn 'Ajība further explains the original state of the Spirit in his commentary on the verse: “And is one who was dead and We gave him life and made for him a light by which to walk among the people like one who is in darkness, never to emerge therefrom?...” (6:122). He clarifies that when the spirit (*rūḥ*) is in its natural state, it is cognizant of God and is submissive to His lordship. However, when it enters the realm of bodies it may be the subject to multiple spiritual deaths as it seeks to find its way back to God.⁶⁶⁸

Ibn 'Ajība follows on from al-Qushayrī who had previously, in his commentary on the same verse, explained that the spirit experiences multiple deaths. He asserts that faith allows life to be breathed into those who are heedless of God (*ahl al-ghafla*). This outcome is achieved through God's invocation (*dhikr*). Likewise, if adepts in invocation are impacted by forgetfulness of *dhikr*, they become dead.⁶⁶⁹ Ibn 'Ajība reiterates al-Qushayrī's interpretation, but in a more exhaustive and comprehensive manner. He states that the spirit (*rūḥ*) may begin its journey with a spiritual death caused by disbelief and then revive again with the light of faith. A second death could then be caused by sin and crime before repentance enables the *rūḥ* to find its way back to life through repentance. Even in the event of a third death, which results from licentious desires and passions, life could again be breathed back into the spirit through asceticism, scrupulousness and spiritual exercises. A further death caused by heedlessness could be overcome through wakefulness and vigilance. The last death may result from a preoccupation with physical forms and being tied down by the shackles of the worldliness, yet its revival may be brought about through the direct witnessing of the divine lights of sublime meanings. Ibn

⁶⁶⁶ This stage was not included by Ibn 'Ajība in his above- mentioned classification.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.4, p. 328.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, vol.2, p. 165.

⁶⁶⁹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 498, see also al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. 'Abdulḥalīm Maḥmūd, (Cairo: Maṭābi' Dār al-Sha'b, 1989), p. 382-387.

‘Ajība maintains that when the spirit reaches this stage, it suffers no further death and lives for all eternity.⁶⁷⁰

Some of the other features of the nature of the spirit in its quest for divine love are explained by Ibn ‘Ajība when he notes that the spirit intrinsically yearns for ardent love (*‘ashshāqa*). This means that it constantly seeks love. If it does not dive into the divine sea of Oneness and is not immersed in the beauty of spiritual meanings, it naturally orientates towards the beauty of physical forms. This attraction annuls the devotee’s sincere love for God because the love of forms functions as idolatrous partners, which is a type of polytheism for gnostics.⁶⁷¹

3.4.2) The Role of the Body in Divine Love

While the spirit possesses a sublime divine essence, the human condition (*bashariyya*) is an essential factor within the progression of human beings towards true gnosis and love. In illustrating this point, Ibn ‘Ajība deploys the metaphor of the mirror, and explains how it captures the image of the person standing before it and reflects it back. He observes that the dull leaden back of the mirror is essential for capturing the image and reflecting it off the polished front of the mirror. The human flesh is like this leaden back layer which captures all the divine meanings and spiritual secrets and reflects them to the outer world. He explains the relation of the physical body and flesh to the spirit, during his commentary on the verse where the angels state: “We are the rangers, we are they that give glory”.⁶⁷² Here Ibn ‘Ajība notes how the angels take pride in their acts of worship and thus are deprived of the ability to progress from one station of gnosis to another. This is because, due to their sublime nature, they lack the capacity to receive and hold the lights of divine unity. In the case of human beings, it is their terrestrial-celestial nature that provides them with the ability to contain and become the manifestation of the divine attributes and secrets. The human fleshly form acts like the leaden back of the mirror which captures the image of the divine secrets of God’s Attributes. The clearer the mirror,

⁶⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 165. When Rūzbihān comments on this verse (6:122), he also discusses the multiple deaths of the spirit. He observes that the first death starts with our non-existence (*‘adam*) and suggests that life was granted to us with the light of pre-eternity (*qidam*). God enabled the spirit to witness Him, gave the heart the light of His divine attributes and provided the secret (*sirr*) with the light of the divine essence (*nūr al-dhāt*). *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 395.

⁶⁷¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 254.

⁶⁷² Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Ṣāffāt (37:165-166).

the higher the level of gnosis that the heart attains.⁶⁷³ Rigorous ascetic training is also essential because it burnishes the mirror of the heart and curbs the sensual desires of the body. This in turn enables the divine Attributes to be captured and clearly reflected on the mirror of the heart.

When it comes to his attitude towards physical desire and human love for one's spouse, based on this verse, "And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmeets from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo! herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect,"⁶⁷⁴ Ibn 'Ajība indicates that he considers *mawadda* to refer to the psychological level of the soul (*nafsiyya*) not to the higher spiritual faculties. He adds that the spirit only yearns to the secrets of the Divine (*asrār al-dhāt*) and thus does not lean with spiritual love except to God. Therefore, loving one's spouse does not undermine one's love for God insofar as the dominant feature of such love is mercy and compassion, rather than simply lust. He adds further that the sign that love for one's spouse is out of compassion is that he does not change by losing this love and he is not saddened by missing it in the first place.⁶⁷⁵

While Rūzbihān's commentary on the same verse did not discuss man's superior ranking over the angels, he would have agreed with Ibn 'Ajība's opinion on the limited capacity of the angels to progress on the path of gnosis from one spiritual station to the next while they remained in the stations of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*), which entails praying and invocation. He further clarifies that the angels' observation of their acts of worship is best suited to the level of servanthood. The station of gnosis requires total immersion in witnessing the lights of divinity, which necessarily implies the complete annihilation of the self from observing anything apart from God.⁶⁷⁶ He added that the ability of the angels to testify to God's oneness can be attributed to their witnessing of God's almightiness and grandiosity. However, they remain in the station of worship and servanthood and so are unable to love God because of their inability to see God's beauty,

⁶⁷³ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, pp. 624, 625. Sam'ānī also asserts that human beings are favored over other creatures. He states: "God created every creature in keeping with the demand of power, but He created Adam and his children in keeping with the demand of love. He created other things in respect of being the Strong, but He created you in respect of being the Lover". See Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam," p. 175. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) *Lawā'ih* also explains that human beings are an essential locus for the self-manifestation of Divine Attributes. He states: "In respect for the Essence, the Unlimited has no need for the contingent. Nonetheless, without the contingent, the names of Divinity cannot become manifest and the attributes of Lordship cannot be realized". See Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam," p. 179.

⁶⁷⁴ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthal, al-Rūm (30:21).

⁶⁷⁵ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 333.

⁶⁷⁶ Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol.3, p. 183.

which is a privilege that was only granted to Adam and humankind in general, which enables them to fall in love with God.⁶⁷⁷

While Rūzbihān indicates the limited capacity of the angels, he does not provide further insight into their natural inability to progress along the path of gnosis. Ibn ‘Ajība, in contrast, provides considerable insight into the reason why the angels’ sublime nature is incapable of grasping the lights of divinity. The heavenly-earthly combination of the human being raises the rank of mankind above all other created beings, which he attributes to the fact that man’s heart is the manifestation of divine secrets and his physical body the abode of servanthood.⁶⁷⁸

Now that the dual nature (spirit & body) of the human being and the contribution of the human condition to the quest for divine love have been explained, it will be instructive to consider the concept of duality in wider perspective, that is, with cosmic reference to the whole universe. This will enable us to have a clearer comprehension of how the cosmic law of duality operates on both the micro (human beings) and macro (the universe) levels. This will also contribute to a clearer understanding of how this duality contributes to the identification of divine love and unity. Ibn ‘Ajība suggests that this dual nature is a tool which assists the seeker in his quest for divine love. Citing this verse “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding” (3:190), he explains that God revealed His Unity in the duality of opposites such as light and darkness, *qudra* and *ḥikma*, meaning and form. God positioned all forms in pairs because this would enable human beings to see beyond the binary polarities of existence and find the underlying unity of meaning in the multiplicity of forms, whose multiple manifestations indicate the singular attributes of their Creator.⁶⁷⁹ (Chapter Six will discuss the attainment of unity through multiplicity in more detail).

He further clarifies that when a devotee realizes the sublime meanings that are hidden beyond the solidified physical forms, he will become totally submerged in

⁶⁷⁷ Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihān Baqlī*, p. 129.

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Attār reiterates this meaning when he states: “What the bearers of the Throne took to be the divine Throne that they were carrying was in reality the light-filled heart of Adam. For Adam was both worlds.” See Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ‘Attar*. p. 644. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Sahrawardī also acknowledges the unique composition of the human being (which combines terrestrial and celestial forms. He states: “Suddenly a voice cried out in to our realm that in the world of earth one had been brought into existence, an amazing thing, both heavenly and earthly, both corporeal and spiritual.” See Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, “*Fī ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq/On the Reality of Love.*” In *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*. p. 68.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 449.

spiritual meanings, and will not heed physical forms. Ibn ‘Ajība therefore took Prophet Abraham’s answer when he saw a star setting “I don’t love those that set” (6:76), to indicate a disregard for temporal sentient forms and the witnessing of their meaning.⁶⁸⁰ Hallāj also conveyed the same opinion when he defined gnosis to be “the obliteration of the outer form in the depth of inner meaning” (*istihlāk al-ḥiss fī’l-ma‘nā*).⁶⁸¹ Gnostics do not therefore perceive forms as independent beings, but rather as emanations of the light of divine Unity.⁶⁸² A Sufi poet expressed this meaning in verse:

Since I knew God, I have not seen others save Him
As all others for us are forbidden⁶⁸³

مذ عرفت الإله لم أر غيرا وكذا الغير عندنا ممنوع

3.4.3) Sight (*baṣar*) and Insight (*baṣīra*)

For the heart to be able to witness God, its beloved, in this world, it must possess perceptive insight (*baṣīra*), that is endowed with the eyes of the heart which enable it to see spiritual realities and envision sublime meanings. This clearly contrasts with the physical eye (*baṣar*), which only perceives physical forms and gross material substances. Insight, however, enables the lover to witness the beauty of the Beloved and it thus places his heart in a state of infatuation. The love of His bounties and blessings, in comparison, is considered to be deficient and insufficient.⁶⁸⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība clearly indicates the superiority of the eye of the heart, that is, insight (*baṣīra*) which enables the lover to witness the sublime meanings and spiritual secrets of the Beloved, over the sight (*baṣar*) that enables solid matters and physical materials to be seen. He develops this line of argument further by asserting that the real value of insight is that it enables the lover to witness his Beloved in this world. Ibn ‘Ajība clarifies that the aspirant’s request to witness God in this world is not impossible or forbidden. He also adds that the request to see God in this world is only denied when the conditions for perceiving the Divine are not met. These conditions include purification from the

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, vol 2, p. 137, see also Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, p. 75.

⁶⁸¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 153.

⁶⁸² Ibid, p. 153.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, p. 153. Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s *tafsīr* also touches upon the divine wisdom that lies behind the dual nature of creation. His esoteric commentary on this verse therefore states: “We created all things in pairs, so you may reflect and ponder” (51:49). Here he clarifies that considering the duality of pairs in creation through a singular perspective leads the thinker to take refuge in divine unity, thus enabling him to escape from the plurality of the created forms. See Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, p. 222.

defilement of forms and the egoistic tendencies of the lower self. Once these conditions are fulfilled, the insight (*baṣīra*) is able to directly witness the Divine.

Ibn ‘Ajība further reiterates the importance of cleansing the spirit in preparation for witnessing the Divine when he cites the Israelites who asked Moses to ‘[s]how us God openly’⁶⁸⁵, a request that was denied. Ibn ‘Ajība explained that the request was turned down because the Israelites lacked the conditions that would make them eligible to witness God. Conversely, once the aspirant is ready to witness the Beloved through his insight or inner vision, his outer vision or physical eyes (which normally only see base contingent forms) are no longer preoccupied with these forms. The overwhelming feeling of bewilderment which results from witnessing the Beloved by the eyes of the heart or the insight (*basīra*) usurps the eyesight (*baṣar*), so the lover no longer sees anyone but His Beloved.⁶⁸⁶

Further recognizing the importance that has been ascribed to insight (*baṣīra*) as a means through which God can be witnessed in this world, Ibn ‘Ajība defines it as the eye of the heart, a means through which the heart is able to recognize sublime meanings; in contrast, the optical eyesight (*baṣar*) is merely the eye of the body which sees physical contingent forms. He further elaborates that insight (*baṣīra*) is very delicate and sensitive by nature – this is why the smallest piece of matter leaves its traces upon it. He divides insight (*baṣīra*) into four degrees. The first degree belongs to the non-believers whose insight is blinded by corrupt theologies. The second degree is the poor insight which individuals heedless of spiritual matters possess. Their inner eye is therefore unreceptive to the light of divine oneness. However, a number of those who possess poor insight but who seek to strengthen it – the ascetics and the righteous (*al-zuhhād wa al-ṣāliḥīn*) – are therefore able to recognize the proximity of God’s light. The third type of insight belongs to the novices (*murīdīn*) who fall into a state of bewilderment when they suddenly encounter divine light. The fourth degree of insight belongs to the gnostics in the state of self-annihilation – they are the only ones who possess sound inner sight and are therefore able to receive the divine lights.⁶⁸⁷

Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that insight (*baṣīra*) plays a vital role in helping to guard the heart from the whims of Satan. If the individual’s insight is active when Satan and his troops approach the gates of the heart, it applies God’s invocation and routs them with

⁶⁸⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Nisā’* (4:153).

⁶⁸⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 586.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*, vol.2, p. 155.

the lights of divine invocation. However, if the individual's insight is not vigilant and alert, Satan will try to find his way to the heart. In this case, when the individual's insight has slumbered due to the accumulation of heedless acts, the heart will be defeated and Satan will take up residence therein. Therefore, Ibn 'Ajība reiterated the importance of safeguarding the heart by sharpening one's insight through the continual invocation of God.⁶⁸⁸

3.4.4) The Heart's Journey on the Path of Love

Ibn 'Ajība repeatedly draws attention to the sublime significance of the heart in God's sight and the associated fact that it is the abode of God's love and divine care. It is therefore important to note that the heart that is continually invoked in Sufi doctrines is not a physical lump of flesh; rather it can more accurately be described as "the ultimate center of man's consciousness".⁶⁸⁹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī defines the heart as a unique sublime perfect substance (*al-jawhar al-kāmil al-fard*) which is not contained in other substances (*jawhar*) nor subjected to accidents (*'araḍ*). Rather, it instead has an independent infinite existence that does not cease to exist with the demise of the body. The divine origin of the heart or the spirit (*rūh*) (both terms are often used interchangeably by Sufis) enables the heart, in the aftermath of death, to separate itself from the body and reunite with God or, in the words of the Qur'ān, "return to your Lord" (89:29). The unique character of human beings can therefore be attributed to an intuition in the heart, which can apprehend spiritual meanings and grasp abstract realities – this is a cardiological faculty that enables human-beings to gain gnosis of God, in comparison to other animals which are not required to know and love God. The Prophet Muḥammad therefore reiterated that the body has eyes which enable it (the physical body) to engage with outer forms, the heart also has eyes which enable it to apprehend the realm of the unseen (*al-ghayb*).⁶⁹⁰ Rūmī eloquently refers to the heart's divine mystery in the *Mathnawī*. He states:

Return to yourself, Oh heart. For from the heart
a hidden road can be found to the Beloved.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

⁶⁸⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 37.

⁶⁹⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla al-ladunniya*, pp. 7-12.

⁶⁹¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 37.

Ibn ‘Ajība explains that the heart of the human being is the abode of God’s love, and then proceeds to explain that the human-being is the most endearing manifestation of God in all existence, for whom the whole world was created. God commanded the revival of hearts in both the physical and metaphysical sense. Heedlessness, ignorance, disbelief, and sin are forbidden by God because they lead to the diminishment and spiritual decay of the heart. This is why the revival of the heart, the abode of God, is required through purification, knowledge, and spiritual exercises.⁶⁹²

In describing the journey of the heart on the path of love and its search to find its way back to God, Ibn ‘Ajība describes two forces which cross the heart’s path: these are the forces of light (which act as supporting forces to the heart) and ungodliness (which belong to the egocentric self or *nafs*). A fierce battle between the two forces ensues because the former seeks to elevate the soul to its original sublime divine state, while the latter seeks to bring the soul down to carnal desires and bind it with forms. The souls that enjoy divine care are reinforced by light and emerge victorious; the heart then opens up and enables the forces of light to take over. The heart then enters the realm of divine secrets and the Divine is directly witnessed.⁶⁹³

Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that ungodly forces (*aghayār*) seek to distract the heart from the journey of love incite the passions (*shahwa*) to block the heart’s contemplative vision and impede the path of love. These passions come in various forms and include the joy of remaining in different spiritual states and being satisfied with the divine knowledge that has been obtained. Ibn ‘Ajība therefore warned against indulging in the sweetness of any of these things – in his view, they are merely a source of distraction which must be avoided.⁶⁹⁴

As a general rule, it can be asserted that whoever finds a relief in anything apart from God or yearns with love for anyone else, creates a veil which prevents the heart from witnessing divine Oneness.⁶⁹⁵ Sufism refers to this blocking as a ‘loss of heart’ (*faqd al-qalb*), which means that the heart returns to seeing forms and recognizing its own existence. However, when the heart is immersed in witnessing divine secrets and the lights of the divine Attributes that shine upon it, it becomes absented from its own being

⁶⁹² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, pp. 544, 545.

⁶⁹³ Ibid, p. 328.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 330.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid, vol. 2, p. 135.

and any other existing forms. This is known as finding or realizing presence of heart (*wijdān al-qalb*).⁶⁹⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība also addresses another source of distraction which is reliant upon anything apart from God. Here he specifically refers to the reliance upon the spiritual mentor who acts as a mediator (*wāsiṭa*) and leads the novice on his path to God. The novice should reach a stage where he does not see the *wāsiṭa* anymore and becomes totally immersed in witnessing the goal (*mawsūṭ*)/God. Ibn ‘Ajība cites the classical example of Prophet Muḥammad’s death – in its aftermath, people were in a state of utter bewilderment and were unable to envisage life without the messenger of God. Abū Bakr, who was aware of the need to witness God directly, therefore addressed people with his famous statement: “Whoever has worshipped Muḥammad, Muḥammad has died. And whoever worshipped God, God is alive and does not die”.⁶⁹⁷

3.5) Conclusion

A closer engagement with the position of influential classical Sufi scholars results in a number of important observations that relate to the application of different terms of love to describe the relationship between man and God. It becomes apparent that some terms, such as *‘ishq*, elicited considerable controversy because of their negative connotations; they clearly contrasted in this respect with other words, such as *ḥubb* and *maḥabba* which were better received among Sufi adepts and the general public alike. It has already been noted that Ibn ‘Ajība positioned himself squarely in this classical debate as he boldly used both terms (*‘ishq* and *maḥabba*) interchangeably, and acknowledged them as divine Attributes that were created by God and planted in the heart of the chosen devotee in order to enable him to love God in reciprocity. His decision to deploy the controversial term *‘ishq* clearly diverged from an array of classical scholars who instead favored the use of *maḥabba*, as it had considerably fewer negative connotations as was discussed earlier in this chapter.

It has also been noted that Ibn ‘Ajība agreed with prominent Sufis, such as al-Sarrāj, al-Suhrawardī and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī upon the primacy of God’s love. Ibn ‘Ajība suggested that the divine love for man is inherently mysterious. It does not appear to possess any understandable reason that can be grasped by intellect and thus appears to be “causeless” and a sheer divine grace (*faḍl*). With regard to man’s love for God, he

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 319.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid, vol.1, p. 416.

indicates two reasons. The first is the love of God's bounties and blessings; the second is loving God for Himself (as opposed to the bounties He bestows). While Ibn 'Ajība concurred with other scholars that the second type of love is superior, he did not totally dismiss its predecessor. Rather, he noted that if divine bounties are viewed with a perceptive eye, it can increase the individual's faith and love for God and significantly aid him in attaining the second type of love (where God's blessings and bounties are not noticed anymore and divine love is the only consideration).

Ibn 'Ajība also attaches the concept of divine love to the ability to witness God – this is particularly significant because this ability is vouchsafed to human beings due to their unique position among all creatures. While there is a significant difference between Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*), the only point of unity is reached through divine love. Love leads to a state of self-annihilation (*fanā'*) and makes unity with the Divine an attainable goal. He also explains that the heart of human beings is the locus for Lordship – because it contains the secrets of divinity, it has the capacity to witness God with the eyes of the heart (*baṣīra*). Ibn 'Ajība adds that if the heart is to be enabled to witness God, the devotee should attain a perceptive insight – this will enable him to attain an equilibrium between two points. Firstly, he will witness God as the sole Doer of all actions and the conductor of all affairs (without any room for human contribution in accordance with His divine power (*qudra*). The second matter is to follow secondary causes through which human beings are held accountable for the choices they make and thus are eventually either rewarded or penalized in accordance with His divine wisdom (*ḥikma*).

In seeking to resolve the tension between human free will and divine predetermination, Ibn 'Ajība (who was an affiliate to the Ash'arite school of theology) sought to maintain an intermediate position between other schools of theology and therefore highlighted the existence of two powers: one eternal (*qadīma*) and the other temporal (*ḥāditha*), both of which are employed in the production of any action by human beings. The first (divine eternal) power is responsible for creating all actions that have the potentiality (*imkāniyya*) of existence, which includes all actions of human beings. The second power, which is temporal, is grounded within human will and relates to the deliberate intention of performing or not performing a certain action. It is worthwhile to note that although Ibn 'Ajība acknowledges the existence of two powers, he negates the independent existence of the temporal human power; because the eternal divine power has the ability to both create an action and the human's ability to perform that action.

While human beings may appear at the surface level to possess volition and will which motivate them to perform a certain action, at a deeper level their specific intentions and inclinations derive from the divine power. The actions that are ostensibly associated with human beings (the world of wisdom) are in reality performed by God (the world of power). Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that divine love is the only way through which a balance can be retained between holding human beings accountable for their actions and maintaining that God is the sole performer of all actions and the only conductor of our affairs.

After establishing the essential need for harmony between the world of wisdom (where secondary causes rule) and the world of power (where divine power is predominant), Ibn ‘Ajība developed the concept of the worlds of wisdom and power further with the intention of bringing the body and spirit closer together in order to reach divine love. He emphasized that the most significant manifestation of divine love is embodied within the Qur’ānic concept of the Trust (*amāna*) of love, which establishes that all human spirits, during the day of *Alast*, pledged to keep their undivided love for God intact. Human beings are only able to fulfill this Trust of love by creating a balance between the celestial origin of their spirit (which functions in accordance with the divine power) and their terrestrial body (which, in accordance with the rule of cause-and-effect, is aligned with the divine wisdom). By purifying the terrestrial body of the lustful demands of the egocentric self, the spirit is enabled to reunite once again with its divine celestial origin – it is at this point that the Trust of love is fulfilled.

Ibn ‘Ajība further elaborates the reason why Adam was designated the honorary position of being the only candidate among all created beings capable of bearing the Trust of love. The combination of Adam’s celestial spirit and terrestrial body was the key qualifying element that enabled him to become worthy of divine love. Rūzbihan’s elucidation of these concepts was less clear as he wrote in a recondite style only befitting the Sufi adepts. Al-Qushayrī and Maybudī both reiterated that Adam carried the divine trust by virtue of having witnessed God’s divine grace. However, they did not develop their ideas further nor elaborate the themes of divine power and wisdom, both of which provide us with an improved understanding of why man was favored over other creatures. In addition, Ibn ‘Ajība’s simile of the human clay-body as the leaden back of the mirror, essential in capturing and reflecting divine attributes and sublime meanings, was original to him and not addressed by previous exegetes in the context of the divine Trust. He was also adamant about moderation and the need to create balance between the terrestrial body

and the celestial spirit – both, he maintained are essential partners in the attainment of divine gnosis and the shouldering of the divine trust of love.

The next three chapter will study the relationship between divine love and three other leitmotifs (sin, gnosis and the Unity of Being) in order to provide a fuller understanding of Ibn ‘Ajība’s theory of divine love and its specific relation to each of these points; in addition, the chapters will also explore the originality of his ideas.



Chapter IV

Love and Sin

Chapter 4. Love and Sin

4.1) Introduction

The following three chapters seek to expound the intertwined relationship between love and various other themes that are closely connected (yet often loosely defined) and associated with love. These chapters study how Ibn ‘Ajība explained the mystical relationship between love and three associated essential themes (sin, gnosis, Unity of Being) in his esoteric commentary on the Qur’ān. I also will compare his mystical interpretation of these themes with other Sufi writers, mainly al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, who are two of the exegetes that Ibn ‘Ajība quotes extensively, in order to determine his contribution to these themes.

This chapter analyzes Ibn ‘Ajība’s discussion of the paradoxical relationship between love and sinning. While some scholars maintain that acting in disobedience to God negates any claims that the devotee may make to God’s love (by virtue of the fact that the lover should always act in accordance with his beloved), Ibn ‘Ajība adopted a different perspective and instead proposed to focus upon the origin and intention of the sin. If the sin originated from the heart – and this is the case with sins of arrogance, objection to the decrees of Providence and so forth – any claim to love has indeed been negated. However sins which originate from the promptings of the passions of the lower self which may lead to deep repentance and a remorseful heart, may draw the individual closer to God.

4.2) The Theological Doctrine of Sin

The theological background of Ibn ‘Ajība’s doctrine of sins can be traced back to the Ash‘arite creed, which takes a moderate approach towards sin and divides them into minor and major (grave) types. This doctrine also advocates the possibility that God may forgive major sins, even if the sinner does not repent. The Ash‘arite creed maintains that physical actions or works (*a‘māl*) do not partake of the definition of faith (*imān*), as faith solely relates to the heart. This moderate theological position departs from the positions of both the Murji’a,⁶⁹⁸ who believe that all sins are minor or small in scale (*saghīra*) as

⁶⁹⁸ Al-Murji’a is one of the Islamic theological sects which believes in the deferred judgment of people’s beliefs. This sect also places faith (*imān*) in high regard; in contrast, actions (*a‘māl*) are held to be a secondary consideration as they are not considered to be part of the definition of faith. This sect was divided into three subgroups, some of whom believed in predetermination (*jabr*) of human beings as all actions are predetermined by God without any intervention of human will. See ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firāq wa bayān al-firāq al-nājiya*, (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Sinā, ND), p. 178.

long as the person committing them is still a Muslim, and the Khawārij⁶⁹⁹ who adopt the position that the doer of major and grave sins (*kabīra*) is an infidel (*kāfir*).⁷⁰⁰ The Khawārij also maintain that the committing of one sin in the absence of repentance annuls the good deeds performed by the person and ultimately culminates in their rejection by God. Consequently, this person when he dies he will necessarily suffer eternal punishment. The Ibāḍiyya sect,⁷⁰¹ one of the Khawārij's sub-sects, believe that the committing of any sin is simply an act of ingratitude for God's bounties and blessings (*kufrān al-ni'am*) – however this does not extend to polytheism (*shirk*). It was the Azāriqa⁷⁰² sect, another sub-sect of the Khawārij,⁷⁰³ who ultimately equated polytheism with sin.

While the Mu'tazilites⁷⁰⁴ aligned themselves with the opinion of the Khawārij about eternal punishment for the one who commits grave sins, they did not equate his act with disbelief (*kufir*) or belief (*imān*). They instead positioned themselves between both points and designated it "perversion" (*fisq*).⁷⁰⁵ They also discussed which acts of disobedience amount to grave sins and which ones can be categorized as venial. They based their distinction of the issue of divine admonition (*wa'īd*) upon the Islamic scripture. Thus, acts of disobedience which do not entail divine threats are 'minor' sins, whereas those which necessitate divine chastisement are 'grave'. A subgroup of this sect

⁶⁹⁹ The *Khawārij* is one of the deviant theological sects in Islam. They are divided into twenty subsects such as al-Azāriqa and al-Ibāḍiyya, amongst others. The subsects converge upon the belief that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, along with those who believed in the validity of the incident of arbitration (*taḥkīm*) between 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Mu'awiyya ibn Abī Sufyān, are non-Muslims. All of the subsects, with the exception of the *Najdāt*, deem the committer of grave sins to be a disbeliever (*kāfir*). See 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, p. 72.

⁷⁰⁰ Al-Bayjūrī, *Tuḥfat al-murīd 'ala jawharat al-tawḥīd*, (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2002), 1st ed. p. 318; see also Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Imān and Islām*, (Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, 2006), pp. 46-53.

⁷⁰¹ Al-Ibāḍiyya sect is one of the sects of the *khawārij* that follows 'Abdullah Ibn Ibād. This sect further divided into four subsects who all believed that whoever disagrees with them among Muslims is no longer a believer, yet he is not seen as a polytheist. Rather he is instead considered to be a disbeliever (*kāfir*). See 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, p. 95.

⁷⁰² The Azāriqa are the followers of Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq al-Ḥanafī. He had the greatest number of followers and his group was deemed the strongest among all the other subsects of the Khawārij. Their main belief was that any Muslim who disagreed with their opinion was a polytheist (*mushrik*). See 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, p. 78.

⁷⁰³ al-Juwaynī, *Kitab al-irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1950), pp. 385, 386.

⁷⁰⁴ The Mu'tazilite sect emerged during the time of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.110/728) who disagreed with the Mu'tazilite leader, Wāsil ibn 'Aṭā' upon the punishment of the committer of grave sins and the question of whether he is a believer or not. Ibn 'Aṭā' adopted a new position that the grave sinner is in a state of *fisq*, which stands between faith and disbelief. He also believed in the eternal punishment of grave sinners in hell. See 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, p. 108.

⁷⁰⁵ Al-Juwaynī, *Kitab al-irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, p. 386, see also Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Imān and Islām*, pp. 59,60.

has developed this idea even further and stated that determining whether a sin is grave or minor can be deduced through analogy. Sins which are analogously at the same degree of grave sins for which divine threats have been issued are considered grave; in contrast, sins that are similar in degree to minor counterparts (to which no divine chastisement was addressed) are also considered to be minor.⁷⁰⁶ Other sects believe that all sins are grave ones in relation to the One who is disobeyed; however the one committing such grave sins is not deemed to be a non-Muslim – this only applies to acts of sheer disbelief, such as prostrating before an idol (*ṣanam*).⁷⁰⁷

In addressing themselves to the issue of the sinner's persistence in committing sins without repentance before death, the Ash'arites again adopted a moderate position; in contrast to other sects, they did not deny the possibility of forgiveness. Instead, they referred the whole matter to God, as He is the one who decides whether to treat the sinner with mercy and thus forgives him or renders justice and thus punishes him. This opinion contrasts with a substantial number of the Mu'tazilite scholars who believed that forgiveness is not permissible because God is obliged to extend eternal punishment to the persistent sinner.⁷⁰⁸ Although the Mu'tazilites were, by virtue of a lack of supporting legal evidence, reluctant to adopt a more moderate position, a considerable number of their scholars grounded themselves within intellectual reasoning, and permitted forgiveness for grave sins without repentance.⁷⁰⁹

In setting themselves apart from the aforementioned extreme positions upon the destiny of sinners, the Ash'arites expressed their belief that the forgiveness of minor sins is agreed upon by scholars; this extended to the belief that grave sins are forgiven in instances of repentance. This fact notwithstanding, scholars of different theological sects, as has already been noted, have debated whether it is possible to forgive grave sins (*kabā'ir*) in the absence of repentance. The Ash'arites, however, converge in common agreement in recognizing this possibility: in doing so, they base themselves on verses such as, "Indeed God forgives all sins,"⁷¹⁰ and "and He forgives bad deeds"⁷¹¹. Al-Baqillānī (d. 402/1013), one of the most renowned Ash'arite scholars, proceeded further to explain that forgiveness and clemency are highly recommended virtues and

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 47.

⁷⁰⁷ Al-Bayjūrī, *Tuḥfat al-murīd 'ala jawharat al-tawḥīd*, p. 318.

⁷⁰⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, pp. 392-393.

⁷⁰⁹ Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, ed. 'Abulrahmān 'Umayra, (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1998), 2nd ed. vol. 5, p. 148.

⁷¹⁰ (Qur'ān, al-Zumar, 39:53)

⁷¹¹ (Qur'ān 42: 25), Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, vol. 5, p. 148.

praiseworthy qualities of believers – by extension it is even more fitting for God to forgive the sinners unconditionally – God himself had said “and if you forgive, it is closer to piety”⁷¹². He ended his discussion by noting that there is no legal evidence that proves the necessity of punishing the sinners or the impermissibility of God forgiving them.⁷¹³

Al-Baḳillānī also discussed the relationship between faith (*imān*) and sins and addressed the question of whether faith is removed from the sinner who falls into deviance (*fisq*) as a result of sins committed. He maintained that sin and disobedience (*ma‘ṣiyya*) do not negate the state of faith in God for the sinner.⁷¹⁴ In other words *fisq* and *imān* are not considered to be diametric opposites that are impossible to reconcile. Impossibility only relates to two opposite things coexisting together in one place. This is not the case of *imān* and *fisq* as the latter is not equivalent to disbelief (*kufr*) - and furthermore the sins which lead to *fisq* are committed by the bodily organs (*jawāriḥ*) whereas *imān* dwells in the heart. Therefore, the faith that is in the heart is not invalidated due to what is committed by the body because they are not fundamentally opposites; the former is in the heart, whereas the latter is merely in the body.⁷¹⁵

Imām al-Juwaynī, one of the foremost scholars of the Ash‘arite school, further clarified that faith (*imān*) is an act of heart-conviction (*taṣḍīq*) and is thus not subject to lower and higher degrees – as a consequence, it is not related to either obedience or sinning. Its variant degrees of perfection are rather associated with the continuity of belief that is evidenced during one’s lifetime without interruption due to doubts. With regard to those who measure the degree of *imān* in accordance with acts of obedience, it would be appropriate to say that one’s faith decreases by committing sins; although this is the opinion of some scholars, it is not endorsed by al-Juwaynī himself. He also explained that the *fāsiq* is still called a believer (*mu‘min*) because of his belief in God; the proof of the validity of including the *fāsiq* among the believers is that the legal rulings addressed to the believers apply indiscriminately to the *fāsiq* without any apparent distinction.⁷¹⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība, in addressing the issue of associating faith with works, referred to the following verse: “Those only are believers who, when God is mentioned, their hearts quake, and when His signs are recited to them, it increases them in faith, and in their Lord

⁷¹² Qur’ān, al-Baqara (2:237).

⁷¹³ al-Baḳillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957), p. 352.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, p. 354.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid, p. 349, see also Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Imān and Islām*, p. 57.

⁷¹⁶ al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād ilā qawāḥi‘ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i‘tiqād*, pp. 397-400, see also Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-maqaṣid*, vol. 5, pp. 210-210.

they put their trust.”⁷¹⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība noted that while the verse ostensibly refers to the increase and decrease of faith in accordance with the level of obedience, works are not included as they do not relate to faith; however, the light of a good action reinforces one’s faith, whereas the light of faith dims with committing sins. He elaborates his position further by dividing faith into three categories. In the first instance, faith neither increases nor decreases - this is the faith of angels. In the second, faith increases and decreases – this is the faith of Muslims in general. In the third, faith increases and never decreases - this is the case of the prophets and the gnostics, whose spirit is in a continual state of elevation in knowledge – this applies to both obedience and sins; the latter always result in repentance followed by humility and thus culminate in a higher state of gnosis.⁷¹⁸

The aforementioned Ash‘arite theological doctrine, which disregards any absolute relationship between the degree of faith and the sins committed, was rejected by other theological sects such as the Khawārij; the latter defined *imān* as obedience (*tā‘a*), an opinion that was also shared by the majority of Mu‘tazilites.⁷¹⁹ The *Murji‘a* on their part, not only placed *iman* in a higher degree than works; but also asserted that sins are not seriously harmful wherever there is *imān*; however all acts of obedience have no weight if the person is in a state of *kufr*.⁷²⁰

A closer review of the main theological differences that divide various Islamic sects upon the issue of sin, further clarifies the moderation of the Ash‘arites in three respects. Firstly, they divide sins into minor and major types, both of which have the potential to be forgiven by God; secondly, they acknowledge that it is permissible for God to forgive unrepentant sinners; finally, they clearly distinguish between the degrees of faith from acts of obedience or disobedience. This brief review of Ibn ‘Ajība’s theological background in respect to the Ash‘arite creed which he followed establishes the basis for a more sustained engagement with his mystical views on sin, which will now be elaborated.

4.3) Ibn ‘Ajība’s Mystical Perspective on Sin & Divine Love

This section will explore Ibn ‘Ajība’s mystical doctrine of sin and its relationship with divine love. Ibn ‘Ajība’s dichotomy of sins of the body vs. those of the heart will be

⁷¹⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Anfāl (8:2).

⁷¹⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Bahr al-madīd*, vol. 2, pp. 304, 305.

⁷¹⁹ *al-Juwaynī, Kitāb al-irshād ilā qawā’i‘ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i‘tiqād*, p. 396.

⁷²⁰ see also Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Imān and Islām*, pp. 56-57.

explored, along with the phenomenon of turning sins to acts of obedience and vice-versa. The discussion will also further elaborate the proposition that sinning enables the individual to come closer to God, which is a particularly important reference point because it so clearly diverges from the classical understanding, in which sins set the individual apart – in the form of banishment and remoteness - from God. After Ibn ‘Ajība’s views on these subjects are broached, the perspectives of classical Sufī scholars will be set out in more detail, with particular emphasis upon ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, two of the most heavily quoted scholars in Ibn ‘Ajība’s mystical commentary. This comparison will bring out the originality and influence that Ibn ‘Ajība’s mystical Qur’ānic commentary evidences when it discusses themes of sin and divine love.

Ibn ‘Ajība initially elaborated his doctrine of sin by noting that the concept of divine love must provide the foundation of any religious interpretation of sin. One of the concomitants of love is that the lover does not wish to hurt or offend his beloved. In expounding this concept, Ibn ‘Ajība referred to the Christian and Jewish claim that they are God’s beloved ones. God’s response was provided in verse: “The Jews and the Christians said: “We are the sons of God and His beloved ones. Say: “then why does He chastise you for your sins?”....”.⁷²¹ This verse clearly establishes that, by virtue of the presence of love, the lover does not torment or irritate his beloved due to committing sins. Upon turning to the commentaries of the two most quoted exegetes by Ibn ‘Ajība, the reader finds that al-Qushayrī, in his commentary on this verse (5:18), reiterated that the folk of love (*ahl al-maḥabba*) are safeguarded from punishment and torture.⁷²² Rūzbihān stated that whoever reaches the state of prophethood through gnosis and love is relieved of the trials of the passions of the lower self and the egoistic tendencies of the physical body.⁷²³ In contrast to al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān, Ibn ‘Ajība emphasized that just because God does not punish those whom He loves, this does not entail that individuals, in citing the name of love, can, so to speak, ‘get away with sin’.⁷²⁴ He presented his opinion in the following terms:

“When God loves a devotee, He makes him immaculate or preserved from committing sins. If He decreed a sin for him, He would inspire him to repent from

⁷²¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Mā’ida (5:18).

⁷²² Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 258.

⁷²³ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 307.

⁷²⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 23.

that sin, which would wipe it away, for the one who repents is loved, God says, "Indeed God loves those who repent".⁷²⁵

ولكنه لما أحبه عصمه أو حفظه، وإذا قضى عليه بشيء ألهمه التوبة، وهي ماحية للذنوب،

وصاحبها محبوب، قال تعالى: "إن الله يحب التوابين".

This establishes that God's call for the sinner to immediately repent is one of the concomitants of love. By virtue of repentance, not only all sins are forgiven, but also the act of repentance brings the repentant sinner closer to God and His love.

4.4) Sins of the Body vs. Sins of the Heart

Ibn 'Ajība discusses the issue of sin further in his commentary on the verse, "and Adam disobeyed His Lord and so he erred".⁷²⁶ He observes that the real sin pertains to the heart – such sins encompass displays of vanity and contemptuousness towards others and being discontented with the decrees of Providence. With regard to the sins of the body, if they are not committed persistently (*isrār*) they can become a means of drawing closer to God. If the sinner's heart is full of remorse, he can be granted God's love which leads him back to repentance. Ibn 'Ajība supports his views about the seriousness of the heart's sin by referring to the example of Satan who was expelled from heaven due to the sin of arrogance, which he contrasted to with that of Adam, who was forgiven and earned proximity to God because he had merely committed a sin of the body.⁷²⁷ Satan's dialogue with God was recorded in this verse:

"Said He, 'Iblis, what prevented thee to bow thyself before that I created with My own hands? Hast thou waxed proud, or art thou of the lofty ones?' Said he, 'I am better than he; Thou createdst me of fire, and him Thou createdst of clay.' Said He, 'Then go thou forth hence; thou art accursed. Upon thee shall rest My curse, till the Day of Doom.'"⁷²⁸

In referring to Adam and Satan, Ibn 'Ajība clearly distinguishes sins of the heart from those of the body. In this regard he states:

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, Ṭaha (20: 121).

⁷²⁷ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, pp. 430, 431.

⁷²⁸ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, Ṣād (38: 75-78).

Whatever draws the devotee closer to God and drives him to a state of servanthood and humility ennobles him and leads him to perfection. By the same token, whatever strengthens the existence of the self and its egoistic tendencies is a source of deficiency and distance (from God). Therefore, 'finding immaculate purity' and being 'preserved from sin' only stems from 'sins of the heart', or from persistence in this regard. Sins of the body were in general decreed for the devotee by Providence: they do not demote him, but rather contribute to his perfection. In this sense, you can understand that what had occurred from the prophets (peace be upon them) which outwardly appeared to be a sin, on closer inspection is not a deficiency in reality, but rather perfection.⁷²⁹

كل ما يرد العبد إلى مولاه، ويحقق له العبودية والانكسار، فهو شرف له وكمال، وكل ما يقوى وجود النفس ورفعتها فهو نقص وإبعاد، كائنا ما كان، فالعصمة والحفظه إنما هي من المعاصي القلبية، أو من الإصرار، وأما معاصي الجوارح فيجرى على العبد ما كتب، ولا تنقصه، بل تكمله، فالتنزيه إنما يكون من النقائص، وهي التي توجب البعد عن الحق، لا مما يؤدي إلى الكمال، وبهذا تفهم أن ما وقع من الأنبياء-عليهم السلام- مما صورته المعصية، ليس بنقص، إنما هو كمال.

Now that Ibn ‘Ajība’s perspective upon the relativity of sins of the body vis-à-vis those of the heart have been set out, it will be instructive to compare his views to those classical scholars who he cites extensively, which will in turn provide us with an insight into the level of originality that is evidenced within his work. It is instructive, for example, to note that Ja‘far al-Şādiq’s esoteric commentary on the same verse “and Adam disobeyed His Lord and so he erred”⁷³⁰ closely resembles that of Ibn ‘Ajība. While Adam’s heart was not distracted by the bounties of heaven, his eyes did indulge in admiring its beauty. Thus, God rebuked Adam for making the error of contemplating the bounties of heaven with his physical eyes. However, Ja‘far adds that if Adam had observed the beauties of heaven with the eyes of his heart, he would have been banished forever.⁷³¹ To put it differently, if Adam’s heart had been attached to heavenly beauties and its lofty rewards, he would have never been forgiven by God. This interpretation indicates the gravity of sins committed by the heart in comparison to those which originate within the passions of the lower soul.

⁷²⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, pp. 430, 431.

⁷³⁰ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Taha (20: 121).

⁷³¹ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, p. 210.

Al-Qushayrī's commentary on the same verse (20:121) explains that Adam's sin enables the reader to realize that the seriousness of sins does not relate to their number, but instead relates to the sacrilegious affront that has been given to God's majesty and august dignity (*'izami qadrihī*). Al-Qushayrī further clarifies that God chose Adam for vicegerency (*khilāfa*) despite his sin. He adds that this choice is not surprising because Adam, prior to sinning, had been chosen to be God's vicegerent for no apparent reason: thus, Adam's election after slipping into sin should not occasion wonder.⁷³² To put it differently, falling into sin is not, *per se*, a sufficient reason for expulsion or banishment, as long as the sin does not relate to the heart.

Rūzbihān, adopts the same approach as al-Qushayrī when he states that 'being of the Elect' (*al-iṣṭifā' iyya*) does not necessitate being free of sins.⁷³³ This proposition that an individual can be a member of the Elect irrespective of the sins committed first appeared in the exegesis of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in his commentary on the following verse:

“Then We bequeathed the Book on those of our servants We chose; but of them some wrong themselves, some of them are lukewarm, and some of them are outstrippers in good works by the leave of God; that is the great bounty”.⁷³⁴

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq explains that God divides the believers into three categories and then connects them to Him by addressing them, through His grace, as “Our servants”. The selection of some individuals to be members of the Elect occurs despite God's knowledge that the believers differ in their spiritual states; furthermore, He is well aware that some of them transgress by committing sin; however, this again serves to reiterate that falling into sin does not negatively affect God's selection of believers in pre-eternity.⁷³⁵

Ibn 'Ajība concurs with al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān that Adam's sin did not negatively impact God's (pre-eternal) choice of Adam to be His vicegerent on earth. However, their approach to handling the issue of Adam's sin is largely dependent on the perspective of the decrees of Providence – this relates to God's divine knowledge in pre-eternity of His choice of Adam for vicegerency regardless of his sin. Ibn 'Ajība however differed in going beyond the concept of divine pre-eternal decrees (which uphold the principle that individual's destinies are decided irrespective of sins committed); he

⁷³² Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.2, p. 280.

⁷³³ Ruzbahān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 507.

⁷³⁴ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, Fāṭir (35:32).

⁷³⁵ Farhana Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, p. 218

therefore sought to explore why one sin can result in eternal banishment, whereas another sin can serve as a means that brings about a closer proximity to God. The answer can be found in his doctrine which distinguishes sins of the heart from those of the body.

4.5) Sin and Proximity to God

The committing of a sin can become a reason for the attainment of divine election (*khuṣūsiyya*). In his commentary on the verse “Then came a man from the furthest part of the city, running, he said, “Moses, the Council are conspiring to slay you. Depart, I am one of the sincere advisers to you”,⁷³⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība referred to Moses’s sin in killing the Copt, which was the reason for his departure from Egypt and his subsequent travel to Madyan, where he met Prophet Shu‘ayb and attained the spiritual training needed for prophethood. By the same token, despite Adam’s sin of eating from the forbidden tree he still could assume the role of God’s vicegerency on earth. These examples further reiterate that all matters, including sin, which cause a state of humility and submissiveness, ultimately bring about a closer proximity to God.⁷³⁷

Earlier scholars also offered their opinion about sins providing a means for divine elevation. It is therefore significant to note that al-Qushayrī’s commentary on this verse (28:20) does not acknowledge that Moses’s sin served as a means of elevation to a higher spiritual status; his view contrasts in this respect with that of Rūzbihān, who states that God made Moses seek refuge in Him by causing him to sin, thus bringing him closer to God’s proximity. Maybudī also concurs with Ibn ‘Ajība’s opinion about the need for self-abasement in preparation for divine proximity when he comments on the verse: “Satan caused them to slip” (2:36). He indicates that the perfection of Adam required his exile to earth in order for him to feel helpless and weak before God. Adam’s slip was therefore necessary for the full manifestation of God’s love and mercy. Maybudī quoted this sacred tradition in this content, “The sobbing of the sinner is dearer to Me than the chanting of those who praise Me”.⁷³⁸

This vision of sin, which renders it as a prelude to humility, self-abasement and a higher spiritual status, is emphasized by Ibn ‘Ajība in his commentary on God’s command to both Adam and Satan to descend to earth after Adam had, with the active

⁷³⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Qaṣaṣ (28: 20).

⁷³⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 240.

⁷³⁸ Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, pp. 136-138, see also al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur’ān*, trans. Annabel Keeler & Ali Keeler, p. 18.

encouragement of Satan, eaten from the forbidden tree “and We said, get you all down, each of you an enemy of each...”.⁷³⁹ He comments that whatever casts the soul down to the abasement of servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*) causes its elevation to the witnessing of the light of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*), “*kul mā yanzil bil-rūḥ ilā qahriyyat al-‘ubūdiyya fa huwa sabab ilā al-taraqqī li-shuhūd nūr al-rubūbiyya*”.⁷⁴⁰

Examination of Al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s views of the same verse (2:36) in their Qur’ānic commentaries, clearly demonstrates the fact that both exegetes did not mention the doctrine of the abasement of servanthood as being a means of witnessing the grandiosity of Lordship, and in this respect, as has already been noted, they clearly contrasted with Ibn ‘Ajība.

This spiritual rule which guides the relationship between servanthood and Lordship, and in which sin plays an essential role, is also emphasized by Ibn ‘Ajība in his commentary on verse “Certainly, We tried Solomon, and We cast upon his throne a mere body; then he repented.”⁷⁴¹ Ibn ‘Ajība writes that every sublime state comes after a trying calamity that befalls one’s body, possessions or faith; however if this sublime state is to be realized, the calamity must be accompanied by remorse and penance. When God wills a devotee to rise to a great spiritual state, He first brings him down to the abasement of servanthood in order to then prepare him for being elevated to witness the grandiosity of Lordship.⁷⁴²

After commenting on earlier scholars’ interpretation of the same verse (38:34), Rūzbihān, to take one example, did not consider the calamity which befell Solomon as a preparatory stage for kingdom and prophethood. He instead identified the reason underlying Solomon’s calamity as being his admiration of the beauty of the king’s daughter and falling in love with her. In other words, Solomon’s sin was due to his distraction with her outer physical beauty, as opposed to the spiritual meanings of divine beauty reflected on her; this explains why he was deprived of his kingdom until he repented.⁷⁴³ Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse, enumerated several possible reasons for Solomon’s sin; however he did not, in noticeable contrast to Ibn ‘Ajība, comment on its mystical connotation.⁷⁴⁴

⁷³⁹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2: 36).

⁷⁴⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 97.

⁷⁴¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Sād (38: 34).

⁷⁴² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 31.

⁷⁴³ Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 194.

⁷⁴⁴ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, pp. 104, 105, see al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, p. 168.

4.6) Infidelity and the Sins of the Heart

Ibn ‘Ajība explained how sins of the heart can lead to infidelity in his commentary on the following verse: “[A]nd when We said to the angels, bow yourselves to Adam, so they bowed themselves save Iblis, he refused and waxed proud and so he became one of the unbelievers”.⁷⁴⁵ He further elaborates that God’s rebuke to Satan was not caused by mere sinning – this applied because sins by themselves do not amount to disbelief. Satan’s disbelief instead came from his heart, which rejected God’s commands and belittled His rulings; it was his arrogance that led him to infidelity (*kufr*), and not merely his unwillingness to bow down before Adam.⁷⁴⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība provides another example of sins of the heart that lead to infidelity in his commentary on the verse relating to the Israelites’ objections to Moses: “He (Moses) said, would you have in exchange what is meaner for what is better? Get down to Egypt and you shall have what you demanded. And abasement and poverty were pitched upon them and they were laden with the burden of God’s anger...”.⁷⁴⁷ He explains that the main sin of the Israelites was their discontent with God’s eternally decreed destiny (*al-qisma al-azaliyya*) and their open challenge to divine power (*al-qudra al-ilāhiyya*) by not being satisfied with divine Providence and provision. The belief that one’s own plans, wishes and demands for oneself are better than those provided by God is a major sin of the heart which results in infidelity.⁷⁴⁸ While both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān presented the Israelites’ sin (their dissatisfaction with God’s preordained decrees), they did not, in the same terms as Ibn ‘Ajība, suggest that this sin of the heart leads to infidelity.⁷⁴⁹

Ibn ‘Ajība further provides another example to prove his point that the real sins that cause distance and punishment are the sins of the heart through his commentary on the following verse: “And Lot, when he said to his people, “What, do you commit indecency with your eyes open?”.⁷⁵⁰ He states that Lot’s reproach to his people was due to their indulging in lusts that encompassed their hearts; accordingly, they did not feel any remorse or need to repent. In contrast to the sins of the body, which are accompanied with humility and penance and can therefore be converted back to obedience, sins of the heart cover up the lights of the unseen (*anwār al-ghuyūb*) and therefore produce rejection

⁷⁴⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Fātiḥa (1: 34).

⁷⁴⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 96.

⁷⁴⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2: 61).

⁷⁴⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 114.

⁷⁴⁹ See al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 49, see also Ruzbahān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 53.

⁷⁵⁰ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Naml (27: 54).

and remoteness from God.⁷⁵¹ While al-Qushayrī did not mention that the sin of Lot’s people is related to the heart and thus leads to banishment and remoteness from God, he did offer an important observation in relation to his interpretation of the verse before the one in question, “Those are their houses, all fallen down because of the evil they committed, surely in that is a sign for a people who have knowledge.”⁷⁵² Al-Qushayrī explained that the corruption of spirits occurs through prevalence of lusts; the corruption of the hearts through heedlessness and harshness (*qaswa*); the corruption of the soul through veiling (*al-ḥajb*); and the corruption of the transconscious interior being (*asrār*) through absence and loneliness (*al-waḥsha*).⁷⁵³ Rūzbihān followed al-Qushayrī’s approach as the latter also discussed the corruption of hearts in relation to the same verse (27:52); observing that hearts are corrupted by heedlessness, whereas the transconscious interior being is corrupted by indulging in sensual lusts.⁷⁵⁴ Neither al-Qushayrī nor Rūzbihān, in reflecting upon the verses 27: 52-54, mentioned the significance of the Lot’s people’s sin or its relation to the heart, and in this respect, they both diverged from Ibn ‘Ajība.

After citing multiple examples of sins of the heart, Ibn ‘Ajība sums up the issue by referring to one of the greatest sins of the heart in his commentary on the following verse: “So glory be to Him, in whose hand is the dominion of everything, and unto whom you shall be returned.”⁷⁵⁵ Here he clearly establishes that defying the divine will and objecting to the divine Providence is a great sin. He proceeds to argue that when the servant believes that his plan to arrange his own affairs is wiser or better than God’s, he appears to claim that his level of knowledge is equal to God’s and thus puts himself in direct rivalry with God. This frowardness negates any belief in God’s wisdom and knowledge and constitutes a grave sin.⁷⁵⁶

A closer engagement with the commentaries of both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān on this verse (36: 83) clarifies that their views do not reflect the gravity of defying God’s will or challenging His eternal decree. They instead contented themselves with the traditional interpretation of this verse, which emphasizes the grandiosity of God’s divine

⁷⁵¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 206.

⁷⁵² Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Naml (27: 52).

⁷⁵³ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 422.

⁷⁵⁴ Ruzbahān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 3, pp. 70, 71, see also al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, p. 144.

⁷⁵⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Yāsīn (36: 83).

⁷⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība emphasized the gravity of challenging divine Providence when he cited the story of one of the righteous people who kept crying in remorse for forty years over an event that he wished had never happened. This clearly reiterated the seriousness of rejecting God’s pre-eternal decrees, a sin directly related to the heart.

power by which all creation comes to existence;⁷⁵⁷ this clearly contrasted with Ibn ‘Ajība, who went beyond the classical interpretation of the verse to reflect upon the inner meaning of challenging divine Providence.

The argument of Ibn ‘Ajība, which defines a real sin as one committed by the heart is lent further credence by his esoteric interpretation of the act of prostration of the forehead, which is invoked in the verse: “Only those who believe in Our signs, when they are reminded, fall down, prostrate and proclaim the praise of their Lord, not waxing proud”.⁷⁵⁸ He considered the act of prostration to be a symbolic act that indicates the submission of the heart to God’s grandeur and majesty. If the body prostrates in worship while the heart remains arrogant and resistant to surrender, worship is merely a means without end, an empty formality devoid of reality.⁷⁵⁹ Al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān rendered precisely the same interpretation when they maintained that the true prostration of the body can only take place if the heart’s humility and love are present.⁷⁶⁰

Ibn ‘Ajība also discussed the prostration of the heart and its distinction from the prostration of the body in a commentary which addressed the following verse: “Be watchful over the prayers, and the middle prayer and stand obedient to God”.⁷⁶¹ Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that the body prostrates in prayer in order to fulfill the obligatory devotional acts of worship; in contrast, the heart’s prayer gives witness to the greatness of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*). Once the heart submits itself to God’s majesty in prostration, it will never rise again. Ibn ‘Ajība also associated the prostration of the body with compliance with the *sharī‘a*; in contrast, the prostration of the heart corresponds to divine Reality (*ḥaqīqa*).⁷⁶² Rūzbihān renders precisely the same meaning in his commentary on the same verse, which Ibn ‘Ajība evidently followed here.⁷⁶³

4.7) Committing Sins While Claiming God’s Love

If God, for His part, forgives the sins of those who He loves, this still leaves the sinner who deliberately sins while loudly asserting his love for God. Ibn ‘Ajība discusses this issue in his commentary on the following verse: “Say if you love God, follow me and

⁷⁵⁷ See al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 85, see also Ruzbahān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.3, pp. 173-174.

⁷⁵⁸ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Sajda, (32:15).

⁷⁵⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 393.

⁷⁶⁰ See al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 26, see also Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 130.

⁷⁶¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara, (2:238).

⁷⁶² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 266.

⁷⁶³ See Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 94.

God will love you and forgive your sins and God is the Most Forgiving”.⁷⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība asserts that disobeying God while claiming His love is inherently an unsound position. The individual who fails to honor the invocation of God in practice renders what is essentially a lie because whoever professes God’s love or the Prophet’s love without obeying and embodying their ethics, is not authentic in his claim.⁷⁶⁵ In reiterating this point, Ibn al-Mubārak observed:

You disobey the Lord yet pretend to His love
 This is impossible and logically strange
 If your love was sincere you would have obeyed Him
 For the lover is submissive before the one whom he loves⁷⁶⁶

تعصى الإله وأنت تظهر حبه هذا محال فى القياس بديع
 لو كان حبك صادقا لأطعته إن المحب لمن يحب مطيع

A number of the scholars who Ibn ‘Ajība quotes also discuss the issue of sinning while professing God’s love. Al-Qushayrī, for instance, briefly references the issue of sinning and reasons that because God’s love for His devotee takes precedence over the devotee’s sin, it is possible for God to love a devotee despite his sins, insofar as one of the concomitants of love is the forgiveness of sins.⁷⁶⁷ While Rūzbihān’s commentary on the same verse (3:31) extensively discusses the features and meaning of love, he – in contrast to al-Qushayrī and Ibn ‘Ajība – does not discuss sinning and the associated question of whether it negates any claims of divine love.⁷⁶⁸

Ibn ‘Ajība’s adamant refusal to associate the sinner’s claim of loving God with true divine love may ostensibly appear to be contradictory. In large part, this is due to his perception of the sins of the body, and more specifically his claim that they do not negate the sinner’s love for God because they do not originate from the heart. It should also be remembered, as has been noted above, that sins of the body, when accompanied with remorse and repentance, may also culminate in God’s forgiveness of the sinner. It is however possible to reconcile the two views by asserting that if the sinner evidences an appropriate level of remorse and the heart enters a state of awe and yearning for forgiveness, this sin in reality can enable the sinner to move closer to God’s love.

⁷⁶⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Ā-Imrān (3:31).

⁷⁶⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 345

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 142.

⁷⁶⁸ See Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 142-143.

However, if the sin does not leave any traces of anxiety and sorrow in the heart, the sinner's claim of God's love is merely a lie.

Ibn 'Ajība points to another aspect related to sins by referring to sins committed by some people who indulge themselves in lust under the false pretense that they are protected from punishment due to their association with a certain gnostic who will intercede with God in order to ensure their salvation. Ibn 'Ajība asserts the contrary in his commentary on the following verse: "Not so, whoso earns evil and is encompassed by his transgression, those are the inhabitants of the fire, there they shall dwell forever",⁷⁶⁹ Ibn 'Ajība clearly and concisely summarizes the attitude of those who freely and carelessly indulge in sins in the belief that a certain holy man will intervene on their behalf. According to Ibn 'Ajība such claim is both false and arrogant. In supporting his position, he quotes a ḥadīth in which Prophet Muḥammad advises Fāṭima, his daughter, to remain steadfast in worship as he cannot protect her from God's wrath. Ibn 'Ajība adds that the role of the gnostic is not to provide false protection to the devotee who freely indulges in sins; rather it is instead to grant safety and protection to those who are vigilant in upholding God's decreed laws and who perform required acts of obedience while refraining from forbidden actions. Those who align themselves with divine commands become the lovers of God. Divine love protects the devotee from sins and insisting on repeating them. Ibn 'Ajība adds that this is the meaning of the following Prophetic ḥadīth: "When God loves a devotee, sins do not hurt him". This establishes that sins do not leave traces in his heart because God inspires him to repent immediately and those who repent are beloved by God. The repentant sinner is therefore loved by God.⁷⁷⁰

Ibn 'Ajība's strong opposition to indulging in sins while depending on the intercession of a gnostic or a Sufi mentor for the sins to be forgiven, should not leave us under the impression that Ibn 'Ajība dismisses the importance of the issue of intercession (*shafā'a* and *tawaṣṣul*) of the gnostics and Sufi shaykhs all together. On the contrary, in his interpretation of verse (5:35), he emphasized that the closest and greatest means (*wasīla*) to God's proximity is the companionship of the gnostics (*ṣuḥbat al-'arīfīn*), sitting with them and serving them.⁷⁷¹ He clarified further in his commentary on verse (19:87) that intercession is granted to the people of obedience (*ahl al-ṭā'āt*), the people of certitude (*ahl al-yaqīn*) and finally to the people of gnosis (*ahl al-ma'rifa*) (those being

⁷⁶⁹ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara, (2: 81).

⁷⁷⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 126.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 37.

the highest degree).⁷⁷² Ibn ‘Ajība reinterprets the issue of intercession from a literal understanding that views it as being admitted to heaven, to its spiritual connotation of being permitted to enter the divine precinct and enjoy the divine presence (*al-ḥadra al-ilāhiyya*). This spiritual admission requires the intercession of a gnostic or a Sufi shaykh who guides the devotee’s way to God’s proximity through rigorous invocation of God (*dhikr*).⁷⁷³

A closer examination of the commentaries of both Al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān clearly demonstrates that the commentaries of both exegetes upon the same verse (2:81) did not discuss the issue of a devotee indulging in sins while counting on his association with a certain gnostic to protect him from God’s wrath. Rather they briefly mention that whoever views his acts of obedience as a means of proximity to God should relinquish this thought because there is no way to God except through Him.⁷⁷⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība’s originality as a commentator is once again here in evidence.

Ibn ‘Ajība elaborates the meaning of repeating a sin after repentance and explains how it is different from insisting on committing sin without repentance; both points are conveyed in his commentary on the following verse:

“[W]ho, when they commit an indecency or wrong themselves, remember God, and pray forgiveness for their sins-and who shall forgive sins but God? -and do not persevere in the things they did wittingly”.⁷⁷⁵

Ibn ‘Ajība defines persistent sins as occurring in the absence of any attempt to remorsefully seek forgiveness. In support of this definition, he cites the following ḥadīth: “whoever seeks forgiveness (for his sins) is not persistent (in committing them) even if he returns (to sins) seventy times a day”.⁷⁷⁶ God’s wrath is not therefore focused upon the sin itself, but rather the arrogance of the sinner, which leads him, in the pronounced absence of an aching repenting heart which yearns for forgiveness, to continuously sin.

Al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s commentaries on the same verse do not address the question of repetition versus persistence in sin; rather, they instead reiterate that the sins referenced in this verse are related to observing one’s acts of obedience with smugness and conceit, which clearly embodies remoteness from the divine presence, and

⁷⁷² Ibid, vol. 3, p. 364.

⁷⁷³ Ibid, vol. 3, p. 422.

⁷⁷⁴ al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 54, see also Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 55.

⁷⁷⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Ā-Imrān* (3:135).

⁷⁷⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 409.

is itself a sin worthy of repentance.⁷⁷⁷ Rūzbihān adds that the sin that is referred to in this verse might be the sin of attending the mystical circle of *samā'* while pretending to be in a spiritual state of *wajd*. This state results from the descent of divine manifestations in the heart of the sincere novice. Such a state is to be distinguished from that of the novice who in reality still struggles with his own lower self and worldly attributes yet pretends to be the locus of such divine manifestations.⁷⁷⁸

4.8) God's Forgiveness of Sinners

Ibn 'Ajība cites many passages from the Qur'ān in order to draw attention to God's compassion, forgiveness and magnanimity when addressing Himself to repenting sinners. One reference point is the story of Joseph's brothers who conspired to kill him because of his favored position in their father's (Jacob) heart. They therefore threw Joseph in a well and mixed his shirt with blood in an attempt to convince their father that he was killed by a wolf. Jacob in turn responded to their heinous act by saying, "... He said: Nay, but your minds have beguiled you into something. (My course is) comely patience. And Allah it is Whose help is to be sought in that (predicament) which ye describe".⁷⁷⁹

Ibn 'Ajība observes that this verse brings great hope to sinners who seek high spiritual stations after being in a state of forgetfulness and wrongdoing. He went further in expounding the story. He noted that Joseph's brothers' heinous act of attempting to kill Joseph and throw him in the well, was followed by their remorseful repentance, indicated in this verse, "They said, 'Our father, ask forgiveness of our crimes for us; for certainly we have been sinful.'"⁷⁸⁰ Their repentance was accepted by God and He brought them into His close proximity.⁷⁸¹

In contrast to Ibn 'Ajība's commentary which extends hope to repenting sinners, Rūzbihān's commentary on the same verse focused on the false blood in Joseph's shirt which was brought by his brothers in an attempt to convince their father that the wolf killed Joseph. Rūzbihān explains that the false blood in the shirt alludes to the hypocrisy of those who pretend to be lovers of God and who claim that they would shed their blood

⁷⁷⁷ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 172.

⁷⁷⁸ Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 196, 197.

⁷⁷⁹ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthall, Yūsuf (12:18).

⁷⁸⁰ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, Yūsuf (12: 97).

⁷⁸¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 581.

for the sake of His love; however, when their sincerity is tested, the blood shed turns out to be fake and their claims mere lies.⁷⁸²

Ibn ‘Ajība cites another example of God’s forgiveness of sins which are accompanied by a remorseful heart when he provides a commentary on the story of the Battle of Uḥud. Muslim forces committed a number of sins during the battle, which included disobeying the Prophet’s commands and evidencing an over-eagerness to collect the spoils of war, both of which were serious offences. This event was described in this verse: “Those of you who turned away the day the two hosts encountered -Satan made them slip for some of what they have earned, but God has pardoned them; God is All-forgiving, All-clement.”⁷⁸³ Ibn ‘Ajība therefore reiterates that, although the sins were numerous and grave, they approached God with hearts full of awe; as a consequence, their repentance was accepted.⁷⁸⁴

A further example of an instance in which sin led to repentance and proximity to God was provided by Ibn ‘Ajība when he referred to the story of Prophet David, who admired the beauty of another man’s wife and thus asked the husband to forsake her, so he would then, in accordance with the customs of the Israelites, be able to marry her. God’s rebuke of David is clearly explained in the following verse:

“He (David) said, assuredly he has wronged you in asking for the ewe in addition to his sheep and indeed many intermixers do injury one against the other, save those who believe and do deeds of righteousness- and how few they are. And David thought that We had only tried him; therefore, he sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he fell down bowing, and he repented. Accordingly, we forgave that, and he has a near place to Our present and a fair resort”.⁷⁸⁵

Ibn ‘Ajība explains that Prophet David sinned by admiring the sensual beauty manifested in forms (e.g. a woman). He had exclusively fixated his attention at this point on outer forms, rather than engage with the eternal and spiritual beauty of transcendent meanings that lie beyond the limitation of ephemeral forms and substances. Once he realized his mistake, David turned to God with a remorseful heart, and it was said that he kept crying in prayer for forty days until God granted him forgiveness. Ibn ‘Ajība stated

⁷⁸² Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 153, 154.

⁷⁸³ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Ā-Imrān* (3:155).

⁷⁸⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 424.

⁷⁸⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Ṣād* (38: 24,25).

that whoever turns to God with humiliation, crying, remorse and repentance after sinning, will gain God's forgiveness. This is because a sin decreed for a devotee by Providence can lead him back to God if he has remorse.⁷⁸⁶ The commentaries of both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān which are addressed to the same verse make exactly the same point.⁷⁸⁷ Ibn 'Ajība also explains how the sinner should be treated in his commentary on the following verse:

“[A]nd when those who believe in our signs come to you, say “peace be upon you. Your Lord has prescribed for Himself mercy. Whosoever of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents and makes amends, He is All-forgiving, All-compassionate”.⁷⁸⁸

He explains that the sense of humbleness which fills the broken soul of the sinner elicits warmth and empathy from the gnostics, who comfort the lamenting sinners by drawing their attention to God's vast mercy and limitless compassion. He also cites a practical example by the Sufi gnostic, Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, who used to greet repenting sinners with open arms; significantly, he did not extend the same attention to scholars or ascetics who came to visit him. Al-Mursī explains that the sinners come with broken hearts as they see no spiritual rank or status for themselves; in contrast, those who are “obedient” depend on their “obedience” and therefore have no need for additional care or support.⁷⁸⁹ Al-Qushayrī reasserts the same point in his commentary on this verse – here he briefly discusses the general meaning of forgiving of sinners without, however, alluding to the gnostics' treatment of sinners.⁷⁹⁰ Rūzbihān similarly comments that the sins of those who were selected through God's mercy in pre-eternity are accidental and contingent, and do not affect God's ongoing mercy and love for them.⁷⁹¹

Ibn 'Ajība explains that the subtlety of God's mercy towards sinners extends even to the Qur'ān's linguistic choice of verbs. In his commentary on the verse, he states: “Seek help in patience and prayer, for grievous it is, save to the humble ones who reckon that they shall meet their Lord and that unto him they are returning”,⁷⁹² Ibn 'Ajība observes

⁷⁸⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 19.

⁷⁸⁷ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, pp. 102, 103, see also Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 3, pp. 189-191, see also al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, p. 168.

⁷⁸⁸ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-An'ām (6: 54).

⁷⁸⁹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 124.

⁷⁹⁰ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 297.

⁷⁹¹ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 366.

⁷⁹² Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2: 45-46).

that God prefers to use the verb “reckon” or “think” (*yadhun*) instead of “believe” or “assure” (*yūqin*) - this indicates a high level of certitude and suggests that He did not wish to exclude sinners whose hearts are not fully certain, but instead wanted to comfort them with His mercy and compassion.⁷⁹³

Ibn ‘Ajība also states in his commentary on the verse, “Forgiver of sins, Acceptor of penitence...”⁷⁹⁴ that God’s mercy for repenting sinners has two elements. The first indication of God’s mercy is the acceptance of the sinner’s repentance, which is considered to be an act of obedience; the second mercy is using this accepted repentance to wipe away all sins, so that the sinner can start over with a clean slate as if he had never sinned before.⁷⁹⁵ Al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān both provide a similar interpretation in their commentary on this verse.⁷⁹⁶

4.9) Actions of the Heart vs. Actions of the Body

A sin, in and of itself, is not something repulsive that negates God’s love. This is so as long as the heart of the sinner is filled with yearning for God and remorse for the committed sin. The heart, for Ibn ‘Ajība, possesses a prime state. He therefore emphasizes the uniqueness of the actions performed by the heart to draw near God and clearly contrasts them with the actions of the physical body. This is evidenced in his commentary on the following verse:

“[T]he likeness of those who expend their wealth in the name of God is as the likeness of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. So God multiplies unto whom He will; God is All-embracing, All-knowing”.⁷⁹⁷

In his interpretation, Ibn ‘Ajība explains that the reward for physical devotional actions, including those performed by the tongue, is multiplied numerous times. Financial devotional acts, for example, elicit a reward that is multiplied by a factor of seven hundred. In the case of acts performed by the heart, the reward exceeds quantitative measurement. In other words, patience, fear, hope, submission, reliance, gnosis and love, in addition to other lofty stations are not rewarded by material gains (e.g. heaven and its

⁷⁹³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 102.

⁷⁹⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Ghāfir (40: 3).

⁷⁹⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 110.

⁷⁹⁶ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 129, see also Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 228.

⁷⁹⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:261).

palaces) but rather by the acquisition of God's contentment, love and proximity.⁷⁹⁸ Al-Qushayrī provided a similar interpretation in his commentary on the same verse.⁷⁹⁹

In explaining the differences between acts performed by the heart and those fulfilled by other means, Ibn 'Ajība refers to two groups. The first are those who are at the degree of *iḥsān* or beautiful-doing, which is the third dimension of religion after *islām* (submission) and *īmān* (faith). The main purpose of *iḥsān* doing 'what is beautiful' or acting 'fairly', which is to perfect the soul and purify the heart in order for it to become a locus for the divine attributes.⁸⁰⁰ At this stage, the devotee's love for God and being loved by Him reaches perfection – this is consistent with the ḥadīth in which the Prophet defines *iḥsān* as "worshipping God as if you see Him".⁸⁰¹ The second group is normally pious folk (*ahl al-yamīn*) who are still at the stage of *islām* or *īmān* and are not elevated to the highest level (*iḥsān*). He presents the distinction between the two groups in the following terms:

"The actions of the people at the stage of *iḥsān* are heart-related (*qalbī*), featuring (virtues such as) generosity, forgiveness and restraining anger (*kazm al-ghayḥ*). As for the *ahl al-yamīn*, their actions are physical (*badanī*) and hover between obedience and disobedience, heedlessness and wakefulness. And if they commit a sin they repent and ask for forgiveness, and if they perform an act of obedience, they are happy and cheerful. As for those at the stage of *iḥsān*, they are absent from taking notice of both their acts of worship performed and their very own existence, unlike the *ahl al-yamīn* who are fixated upon their acts and become hopeful when performing acts of obedience, whereas sins bring their hopes down. Conversely, those at the stage of *iḥsān* are annihilated from their own selves and subsist solely with God. On the other hand, the self-existence of the *ahl al-yamīn* remains intact and they still pay regard to their own acts. Thus, those at the stage of *iḥsān* are beloved, whereas the *ahl al-yamīn* are lovers. Those at the stage of *iḥsān* are annihilated from outer forms and customs as their eyes are fixated upon witnessing God, Almighty and Transcendent, whereas for the *ahl al-yamīn* the created things (*akwān*) still exist and the suns of gnosis are hidden from their hearts. Those at the stage of *iḥsān* worship God through direct contemplation and

⁷⁹⁸ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 296.

⁷⁹⁹ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 123.

⁸⁰⁰ William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*, p. 212-213.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid* p. 4.

witnessing, in contrast to the *ahl al-yamīn* who worship God through the veils of rational proof and reasoning”.⁸⁰²

أهل مقام الإحسان عملهم قلبي، كالسخاء والعفو وكظم الغيظ، وأهل اليمين عملهم بدني، بين طاعة ومعصية وغفلة ويقظة، إذا فعلوا فاحشة تابوا واستغفروا، وإذا فعلوا طاعة فرحوا واستبشروا، أهل مقام الإحسان غائبون عن رؤية أعمالهم ووجودهم، وأهل اليمين معتمدون على أعمالهم، إذا فعلوا طاعة قوى رجاؤهم، وإذا زلوا نقص رجاؤهم، أهل مقام الإحسان فانون عن أنفسهم باقون بربهم، وأهل اليمين أنفسهم موجودة وأعمالهم لديهم مشهودة، أهل مقام الإحسان محبوبون، وأهل اليمين محبوبون، أهل مقام الإحسان فنيت عندهم الرسوم والأشكال، وبقي في نظرهم وجود الكبير المتعال، وأهل اليمين: الأكوان عندهم موجودة، وشموس المعارف عن قلوبهم مفقودة، أهل مقام الإحسان يعبدون الله على نعت الشهود والعيان، وأهل اليمين يعبدون الله من وراء حجاب الدليل والبرهان.

Here it is possible to observe Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric spiritual hierarchy, in which *ihsān* is placed at a higher level than *ahl al-yamīn*. He further expands his position by comparing the type of acts performed by the two groups. For example, the acts of those at the stage of *ihsān* are related to the heart whereas those of the *ahl al-yamīn* are related to the body. Whereas the first group is immersed in witnessing the Beloved, and thus pays no attention to the acts performed; the latter group is instead fixated upon their deeds, whether good or bad, and their mental state consequently vacillates between hopefulness and sadness.

Ibn ‘Ajība proceeds to provide further insight into the different meanings that the two groups (those at the stage of *ihsān* and those at the stage of *ahl al-yamīn*) ascribe to the word ‘obedience’. He expounds the distinction in his commentary on the verse, “whosoever obeys God and the Messenger are with those whom God has blessed from prophets, just men, martyrs, the righteous and indeed they are good companions”.⁸⁰³ He explains that the formal physical, sensible obedience (*al-tā‘a al-ḥissiyya*) leads to a state of togetherness in those physical, sensible forms (*ma‘iyya ḥissiyya*) – this is the characteristic of the *ahl al-yamīn*. The inner obedience of the heart (*al-tā‘a al-bāṭiniyya qalbiyya*) produces a constant state of spiritual togetherness (*ma‘iyya rūḥiyya*), and no separation occurs among lovers.⁸⁰⁴

A closer examination of the aforementioned verse - “[T]he likeness of those who expend their wealth in the name of God is as the likeness of a grain of corn that sprouts

⁸⁰² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 410.

⁸⁰³ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Nisā’* (4:69).

⁸⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 525.

seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. So, God multiplies unto whom He will; God is All-embracing, All-knowing.”⁸⁰⁵ - in al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s commentaries indicates that neither author addresses the issue of physical acts of worship performed by the body versus those done by heart. Al-Qushayrī makes brief reference to the fact that all the elevated spiritual states granted to the devotees are not attributable to a certain reason or caused by specific acts, but are instead a sheer gift and grace from God.⁸⁰⁶ Rūzbihān adds that the essence of obedience is love and love does not occur until God is truly witnessed. It is only at this point that the lover is deemed to be worthy of enjoying the company of the prophets and the Sufī gnostics.⁸⁰⁷

After discussing the elevated status of acts of worship performed by the heart (of gnostics) over the ones of the body (performed by the normal and pious individuals) Ibn ‘Ajība turns to the issue of sinning. He draws an essential distinction between sins committed by people of proximity (*ahl al-qurb* – e.g. gnostics) and those committed by individuals estranged from God. This theme is further elaborated in his commentary on the following verse: “God shall turn only towards those who do evil in ignorance, then shortly repent; God will return towards those; God is All-knowing, All-wise”.⁸⁰⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība explains that God commits a great amount of time to the generality of people (*al-‘awāmm*), with the intention of encouraging them to repent. The Elect (*al-khawāṣ*), in contrast, are punished in case they delay their repentance – the degree and force of rebuke depends on their level of proximity to Him.⁸⁰⁹ Rūzbihān’s commentary on this verse extensively discusses how a sinner who falls into disobedience can only repent through God’s grace and mercy – however, he does not distinguish between the repentance of the general public and those of the advanced spiritual state.⁸¹⁰ Al-Qushayrī, briefly mentions that no forgiveness can be extended when sins are persistently committed. However, he does not, in contrast to Ibn ‘Ajība, define the precise meaning of ‘persistent’. Al-Qushayrī refers to the sin of the Elect (*khawāṣ*) and defines it as their desire to attain advanced spiritual states, possess miraculous works (*karāma*) and count upon their acts of obedience. This understanding is considered to be a sin and a reflection of their low status; they clearly contrast in this respect with gnostics, who understand that there is no way to

⁸⁰⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:261).

⁸⁰⁶ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 214.

⁸⁰⁷ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 259, 260.

⁸⁰⁸ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Nisā’ (4: 17).

⁸⁰⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 480.

⁸¹⁰ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 236.

reach God except through Him. This is why no one should depend on his acts of worship as a means of obtaining proximity to God.⁸¹¹

After establishing the high status of acts of worship of the heart, Ibn ‘Ajība established a connection between the state of the heart and the physical forms of devotional acts. This connection was clearly conveyed in his commentary on the following verse:

“And the likeness of those who spend their wealth in search of God’s pleasure, and for the strengthening of their souls, is as the likeness of a garden on a height. The rainstorm smiteth it and it bringeth forth its fruit twofold. And if the rainstorm smite it not, then the shower. God is Seer of what ye do”.⁸¹²

The reward of devotional acts is thus in proportion to the degree of purity within the mystical state (*aḥwāl*) of the heart. If the novice is advanced in the path of God and has an elevated spiritual station (*maqāmāt*), his acts will be amplified and rewarded in due proportion. Ibn ‘Ajība reiterates this argument by noting that even saying “Glory be to God” (*subḥān Allāh*) once is commensurate to the whole existence; its significance, along with all the acts of the gnostics, henceforth becomes immeasurable. The reason for the greatness of the gnostic’s acts is because they are done by God, from God and to God. They are therefore characterized by perfection and involve no deficiency. The gnostics therefore maintain that all their contemplative moments of meditation (*awqāt*) are as special as the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*). Furthermore, all of their places are as blessed as Mt ‘Arafat and all of their breaths are purified.⁸¹³ Al-Qushayrī, in his commentary on the same verse (2:265), briefly contrasts the sincere (who spend their money for God’s sake) and hypocrites (who spend their money on vanities).⁸¹⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība provides a practical example to further explain the essentiality of acts performed by the heart. This is rendered through his commentary on the following verse: “...[A]nd pilgrimage to the House (Ka‘ba) is a duty upon mankind owed to God for those who can afford it...”.⁸¹⁵ He explains that the performance of Ḥajj has two meanings; the first is physical and the second is spiritual. The hearts of gnostics provides the Ka‘ba around which divine lights and sublime revelations circulate. Because Divine lights reside in their heart, they have no need to go to the physical Ka‘ba to seek out lights; they directly

⁸¹¹ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 199.

⁸¹² Qur’ān, trans. Pickthal, al-Baqara, (2: 265).

⁸¹³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 299.

⁸¹⁴ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 123.

⁸¹⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Āl-‘Imrān (3:97).

contrast with those whose heart is void of divine light and who therefore continually yearn to attend the physical Ka'ba.⁸¹⁶ Al-Ḥallāj eloquently expressed this meaning in verse, when he said:

O you who blame me, don't blame me for my love to Him
 If you had witnessed what I did, you would not have blamed me
 People go on pilgrimage and I have mine in my residence where
 Sacrifices are offered and I sacrifice my heart and blood
 The mystics circumambulate the house that has no forms
 They circumambulate by God so He suffices them from pilgrimage to the sacred
 House⁸¹⁷

يا لائمی لا تلمنی فی هواه فلو عاينت منه الذی عاينت لم تلم
 للناس حج ولی حج إلى سکنی تهدي الأضاحی، وأهدی مهجتی ودمی
 يطوف بالبيت قوم لا بجارحة بالله طافوا فأغناهم عن الحرم

The sanctity of the lover's heart is viewed as a sacred place within which God resides. This impression is reproduced within the story of Majnūn when he was asked about the direction of prayer. He said: "If you are an ignorant clod of earth, then it is the stone of the Ka'ba. For the lovers it's God, for Majnūn the face of Laylā".⁸¹⁸

4.10) Conclusion: The Coexistence of Sin and Obedience

This chapter has demonstrated Ibn 'Ajība's belief that obedience and sin can coexist together – this logically applies by virtue of his position that sin and obedience are interdependent, and one cannot exist without the other. He eloquently explains this in his commentary on the following verse: "That is because God makes the night to enter into the day and makes the day to enter into the night; and that God is All-hearing, the All-great".⁸¹⁹ He clarifies that, in the presence of pride and conceit, the darkness of sin can

⁸¹⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 385.

⁸¹⁷ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 385, Some people might argue against Ibn 'Ajība's position, which ostensibly appears to suggest that the gnostic does not need to undertake pilgrimage, which is one of Islam's obligatory rituals. Ibn 'Ajība attempts to defend his position by arguing that the essential purpose of pilgrimage is to purify the heart in order to enable divine lights to manifest. Gnostics, however, no longer need to seek these lights by going to the physical Ka'ba to perform pilgrimage: their elevated spiritual status means that the divine lights already shine in their hearts. In my view, Ibn 'Ajība was misinterpreted in this regard. It is clear that he does not seek to deny the obligation of the ritual of pilgrimage, as established by the *Sharī'a*. Rather, he instead addresses a higher level of the Truth (*ḥaqīqa*), and therefore expresses the belief that the utter purity of the gnostic's heart institutes the abode of God on which divine secrets are descending. By virtue of the continual witnessing of the divine lights, the gnostic does not need to acquire these lights by traveling to other locations, such as the Ka'ba.

⁸¹⁸ Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din 'Attar*, p. 539.

⁸¹⁹ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Ḥajj (22:61).

easily infiltrate an act of obedience and turn it into sheer sin. To the same extent, if a sin is followed by humility and remorse, it can become transformed into an act of obedience.⁸²⁰ He provided further insight into this concept by adding a quotation from Abu al-‘Abbās al-Mursī to his commentary on the following verse “He makes the night to enter into the day and makes the day to enter into the night and He has subjected the sun and the moon, each of them running to a stated term”,⁸²¹

Here al-Mursī explains that whenever the protagonist of an act of obedience looks at his act with admiration (while belittling those who did not perform the same act of obedience and requesting God’s compensation for it), this act of obedience becomes a sin. On the contrary, whenever the sinner commits a sin and then takes refuge in God and asks God to forgive him and feels shame at his sinful act while thinking highly of those who were preserved from falling into the abasement of his sin, then this sin can turn into obedience. Al-Mursī proceeds to ask which of these two acts is the real sin and which is quickly turned into obedience?⁸²² Here we notice how Ibn ‘Ajība combines theological and jurisprudential meanings of a term with their mystical counterparts. Al-Qushayrī, in discussing the aforementioned verse (22:61) does not, in comparison to Ibn ‘Ajība, allude to the possibility of the coexistence of obedience and sin; rather he instead refers to different spiritual states such as contraction (*qabḍ*) and expansion (*bast*), while associating the former with night and the latter with the day.⁸²³

In this section I will conclude by highlighting two types of sins which are associated with creation in general and humankind in particular. In Rūzbihān’s view, all created beings are sinful because they lack complete knowledge of God’s grandiosity. Commenting on the following verse: “And vie with one another, hastening to forgiveness from your Lord...”,⁸²⁴ Rūzbihān observes that no created being is excluded from such sin, even the angels who are infallible by nature – this applies because they also lack the complete gnosis of God. This verse is therefore addressed to all beings because they need to seek forgiveness for their insufficient knowledge of God.⁸²⁵

The second type of sin is the sin of one’s very “being” or “existence” which Ibn ‘Ajība elaborated on in his commentary on the following verse: “Surely, we have given you a manifest victory, that God may forgive you the former and the latter sins, and

⁸²⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 549.

⁸²¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Fāṭir (35: 13).

⁸²² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 528.

⁸²³ al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 329.

⁸²⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Āl-‘Imrān (3:134).

⁸²⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 408, 409.

complete His blessings upon you, and guide you on a straight path, and that God may help you with mighty help”.⁸²⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība states that the grand victory in this verse refers to overcoming the duality of exesistence between God and man through revealing the secrets of the divine Essence and the light of Attributes along with the beauty of divine Actions in order for the devotee to become absent from his own being and distanced from his image and form. He also quotes al-Qushayrī’s view that ‘the sin of self-existence’ is due to the self’s co-existence with God. This sin is forgiven by God by covering one’s existence with the divine lights of Oneness which this dispels the darkness of duality. Ibn ‘Ajība believed that when this stage of Oneness is established, the devotee is able to combine witnessing the grandeur of Lordship with performing the obligations of servanthood.⁸²⁷

In conclusion, after analyzing Ibn ‘Ajība’s doctrine of sin the current chapter has arrived at the conclusion that sin, in essence, does not negate loving God. The incorporation of the two most-frequently cited Sufi Qur’ānic exegetes (al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān) among previous Sufis has paved the way to provide additional insight into Ibn ‘Ajība’s specific stance on this subject. This stance reflected Ibn ‘Ajība’s concern with balancing God’s forgiveness of sins of sinners who repent due to His love for them, and the sins of sinners who do not repent, maintaining the pretense that their love for God will save them from His punishment. This balance between these two opposite outlooks on sin was less clearly defined by both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān as we have seen. For instance, when it comes to the famous example of Adam’s sin of eating from the forbidden tree, both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān focused entirely on the pre-eternal divine decree according to which Adam was chosen in pre-eternity to be God’s vicegerent on earth despite his sin. Unlike these two exegetes, Ibn ‘Ajība focused on the idea of sin as a means and symbol of the abasement of servanthood and the virtue of humility that prepare the heart to witness the grandeur of Lordship. This mystical perspective places such a strong emphasis upon sin because sin plays an indispensable role in the transformation of the human being from a creature restricted by a physical body to an angelic being defined by heart consciousness.

It was also noted that Ibn ‘Ajība made a clear and sharp division between sins of the body and those of the heart. He stressed that the former may lead to God’s proximity if accompanied with remorse; in direct contrast, the latter may lead to remoteness and

⁸²⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Fath (48: 1-3).

⁸²⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 385.

banishment due to the veiling by the sin of one's heart and thus obscuring the light of divinity within. In clearly distinguishing himself from other Sufi exegetes, Ibn 'Ajība also refers to numerous examples of the two types of sins, and thus brings out the key and essential distinction in fuller perspective.

Ibn 'Ajība also emphasizes the importance of the heart and expounds the type of sins related to it, along with the type of good deeds associated with it to emphasize its unique status as the abode of God (*bayt al-rabb*). He therefore clearly distinguishes between the good deeds of the people at the stage of *ihsān* and those at the level of the *ahl al-yamīn* – this is particularly important because it indicates the central position of 'actions springing from hearts' (*a'māl al-qulūb*).

In addition, the chapter also clarifies that Ibn 'Ajība's mystical commentary continually points to the danger of defying God's will and challenging divine power – this, he notes, is a grave sin of the heart which led Satan to be subjected to God's wrath and banishment. Ibn 'Ajība's views on this issue were again far clearer than the other two exegetes. It is also important to note that Ibn 'Ajība succeeded in establishing a clear distinction between repeating sins while possessing a remorseful heart and sacrilegiously persisting in committing sins without feeling regret at heart: this was particularly important because these two major concepts were not clearly elaborated by the other two exegetes.

Finally, Ibn 'Ajība provided insights which clearly demonstrate how both sin and an act of obedience can coexist together: accordingly, one can lead to the other and vice-versa. This presents a formidable challenge to the classical understanding of sin, understood almost exclusively as generating distance from God, whether in the form of banishment or remoteness. Ibn 'Ajība's insistence that the inner state of the heart is the only criterion which establishes whether an act is a sin, is particularly important because it further reiterates the requirement that we must not pass moral judgements with undue haste. The outer crust of an act of obedience which conceals a heart full of conceit and defiance to God's will, is but a sin in disguise. To the same extent, an outer act of sin which conceals the internal breaking of a remorseful heart, is frequently an act of obedience in disguise.



Chapter V

Love and Gnosis

Chapter 5. Love and Gnosis

This chapter will analyze the relationship between love and gnosis and will seek to position Ibn ‘Ajība within the classical scholarly debate which attempts to identify which of the two concepts represents the pinnacle of the Sufi Path. A closer engagement with Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric commentary on various Qur’ānic verses, along with a more sustained engagement with the issue of gnosis, will leave this thesis in a better position to provide insight into the place of gnosis within his paradigm of love. It will be equally important to conduct an analysis of his commentary that brings in al-Qushayrī’s & Rūzbihān’s writings on gnosis. This will help to ascertain the influence of earlier scholars, along with the degree of originality that is evidenced within his work.

The choice of translating *ma‘rifa* as gnosis relates to its Greek origin which literally means knowledge and is commonly used to refer to the esoteric knowledge gained by spiritual realization and mystical intuition.⁸²⁸ Before engaging with Ibn ‘Ajība’s view of gnosis (*ma‘rifa*), it is first essential to distinguish *ma‘rifa* and *‘irfān*, both of which are nouns that can be traced back to the same root of the verb *‘arafa* (which means to know). The term *‘irfān* indicates the human element in gaining divine knowledge, which is subjective to personal experience and the spiritual taste of the knowledge received. Privileged human beings who receive divine knowledge are known as gnostics or *‘arifūn*, whereas the objective body of divine knowledge (*‘irfān*) is known as *‘ilm* or *ma‘rifa*. While *‘irfān* was not a popular term amongst medieval Islamic thinkers, it has grown in importance within Islamic theosophy in modern times.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁸ My translation of *ma‘rifa* as gnosis follows its usage of numerous scholars, including E. Blochet, R.A. Nicholson, A.J. Arberry, Louis Massignon, Farid Jabre, Henry Corbin, M.A. Amir-Moezzi, and Reza Shah-Kazemi. As Antoine Faivre explains: “The Greek word *gnōsis*, as also the related Sanskrit *jñāna*, means both ‘learning’ and ‘sapiential wisdom’, a double meaning that it tends to lose in late Greek thought and patristic Christianity. Its root, which also appears in the word *genesis*, in fact implies both learning and coming into being. ...By giving birth to us—or rather rebirth—gnosis unifies and liberates us. To know is to be liberated. It is not enough to know symbols and dogmas in a merely external fashion; one must be engendered by them. Gnosis is thus not mere knowledge; between believing and knowing there is the knowledge of interior vision proper to the *mundus imaginis*. These various types of knowledge have been clearly distinguished within Islamic gnosis as intellectual knowledge (*‘aql*), knowledge of traditional facts that are the object of faith (*naql*), and knowledge through inner vision or intuitive revelation (*kashf*). It is this last that opens up the world of the *imaginal*.” See Antoine Faivre, “Esotericism,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan 1987), vol. 5, pp. 156-63 [pp. 157-58]. Cited by Leonard Lewisohn, *Esoteric Traditions in Islam* (forthcoming London: 2020).

⁸²⁹ For further details on the development of the concept of *‘irfān* in Islamic theosophy, see Gerhard Bowering, “Erfan”. *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. VIII, pp. 551-554.

Ibn ‘Ajība introduced the concept of gnosis in his commentary on the following verse: “I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”⁸³⁰ Here he indicated that God created the jinn and human beings in order to be known and recognized. Ibn ‘Ajība also mentioned the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: “I was hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, so I created my creation that they might know Me”. This indicated his view that God used creation as a mirror to manifest His lordship, thus enabling the glory of Lordship to manifest within contingent forms of servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*). Both God’s power (*qudra*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*) would be manifested in equal proportion.⁸³¹ Ibn ‘Ajība maintains that the purpose of creation is to gain gnosis of God; in issuing this statement, Ibn ‘Ajība establishes the foundation for his view that gnosis is the pinnacle of the Sufi Path. However, closer analysis of his esoteric commentary on other verses of the Qur’ān reveals that Ibn ‘Ajība implicitly considers love to be the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path.

It is worthwhile to note that Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation that worship is equal to gnosis derives from the classical interpretation of Ibn ‘Abbās, the Prophet’s companion. Ibn ‘Arabī, meanwhile, asserts that worship is equivalent to extreme love and, upon this basis, maintains that love is the purpose of creation.⁸³²

A comparison of Ibn ‘Ajība’s position on gnosis (which viewed it as the pinnacle of the Sufi Path and the purpose of creation) with the views of al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān is highly instructive. Upon engaging with their commentaries on the same verse (51:56), the reader will note that al-Qushayrī did not interpret worship as being gnosis,⁸³³ while Rūzbihān al-Baqlī explains that when God created human beings, He cast a glimpse of His Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) upon their existence, which left them in a state of drunkenness due to the pleasure experienced; some human beings were inebriated to the extent that they claimed Lordship. God warned human beings against making such grave claims and stated that the purpose of creation is to worship Him. This is why Rūzbihān defines worship as human submission to the pre-eternal divine will (*al-mashī’a al-azaliyya*): every breath we take, every thought that passes by the mind, every word we utter and every move that we make is a manifestation of the divine will with no human

⁸³⁰ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Dhāriyāt* (51:56). The term *‘irfān* does not originate within the Qur’ān; rather it was instead used in Qur’ānic interpretation to describe the knowledgeable (3:7) and righteous (57:19).

⁸³¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.5, p. 483, see also William Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam”. p. 175.

⁸³² See Suleyman Derin, *From Rābi’a to Ibn al-Fārīd*, p. 221.

⁸³³ Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007), 2nd ed., vol. 3, p. 240.

involvement. In making this assertion, he, like Ibn ‘Ajība, quotes the scholarly opinions which tie worship to gnosis.⁸³⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība differs from Rūzbihān, however, because he asserts that human beings are the perfect manifestation of the conjunction of Lordship and servanthood – this applies because God’s power and wisdom are equally manifest in them.

5.1) Gnosis: The Pinnacle of All Spiritual Stations on the Sufi Path

In attempting to emphasize the prime position of gnosis, Ibn ‘Ajība outlines a blueprint of twelve spiritual stations of the Sufi Path, through which the novice is required to graduate through each one on his path to God’s gnosis. This is made clear in his commentary on the following verse, “It is He who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined it by stations, that you might know the number of the years and the reckoning.”⁸³⁵ In his esoteric commentary on this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība refers to twelve spiritual stations, the pinnacle of which is gnosis (the thirteenth stage). He states:

It is He (God) who made the sun of direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) shine in the hearts of the people of gnosis through time without (the sun of gnosis) setting, and made the moon of the Unity (through) proof and evidence as a light guiding to the path of direct witnessing. And He determined stations along the path. These are the stations of certitude and the stages of the Sufi wayfarers, who reside in each station on their way to ultimate gnosis (*ma’rifā*). And they (these stations) are repentance (*tawba*), fear (*khawf*), hope (*rajā’*), scrupulousness (*wara’*), asceticism (*zuhd*), patience (*ṣabr*), thankfulness (*shukr*), contentment (*riḍā*), submission (*taslīm*), love (*maḥabba*), vigilance (*murāqaba*), witnessing (*mushāhada*). God did not create this (these stations) except with truth in order for them to lead to the Truth. The differences seen in the night of contraction and the daylight of expansion of the heart of the aspirant are indicative signs on the path for those who avoid all else except God or (those who avoid) being occupied with sensual distractions.⁸³⁶

⁸³⁴ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008), 1st ed., vol., pp. 347-348.

⁸³⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Yūnus (10:5).

⁸³⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 452. It is worth noting that some of the twelve spiritual stations of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Sufi Path are repetitive; in Ja’far al-Sādiq’s commentary on verse (25:61) in which he alluded to twelve spiritual stations which included reliance on God (*tawakkul*), fear (*khawf*), hope (*rajā’*), love (*maḥabba*) and yearning (*shawq*). For further details see ‘Abdul Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr: tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīz*, ed. Sayyid ‘Umrān, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001), pp. 65, 66.

هو الذى جعل شمس العيان مشرقة فى قلوب أهل العرفان، لا غروب لها مدى الأزمان، وجعل قمر توحيد الدليل والبرهان نورا يهتدى به إلى طريق الوصول إلى العيان، وقدر السير به منازل – وهى مقامات اليقين ومنازل السائرين- ينزلون فيها مقاما مقاما إلى صريح المعرفة، وهى التوبة والخوف، والرجاء والورع، والزهد والصبر، والشكر والرضى والتسليم والمحبة، والمراقبة والمشاهدة. ما خلق الله ذلك إلا بالحق، ليتوصل به إلى الحق. إن فى اختلاف ليل القبض ونهار البسط على قلب المرید لآيات دالة له على السير، لقوم يتقون السوى أو شواغل الحس.

It is instructive to note that while Ibn ‘Ajība did not count gnosis as one of the spiritual stations that the novice has to pass, he claimed that it was the ultimate aim, the result of traversing all the spiritual stations (including the station of love, which he placed as the tenth spiritual station).⁸³⁷ He also referred to gnosis as the sun which shines in the heart of the gnostics and the light of the moon, thereby reiterating that it is a guide that assists the aspirant as he treads the Sufi Path and proceeds through its different spiritual stations.

A closer engagement with the commentaries of both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān on the same verse (10:5), clarifies that they did not refer to any of the spiritual stations in their esoteric commentaries.⁸³⁸ This fact notwithstanding, Rūzbihān interpreted the radiance of the sun as being God’s Essence, and the light of the moon as God’s Attributes - this light was cast upon the hearts of ardent lovers (*al-‘āshiqīn*), thus enabling them to witness God’s Attributes of Beauty (*jamāl*) and Majesty (*jalāl*). Henceforth, the heart fluctuates in the light of the divine attributes.⁸³⁹ It is noticeable that there is clear difference between Ibn ‘Ajība’s and Rūzbihān’s description of the movement of the heart in the moonlight of the divine attributes. Ibn ‘Ajība alludes to the divine lights as different spiritual stations through which the novice has to pass on the Sufi Path in order to reach the sun of gnosis.

At this point, it is also worthwhile to note that although Ibn ‘Ajība extensively quoted al-Ghazālī’s position on the station of love, he did not agree with his view that the spiritual station of love is the ultimate aim of all the stations and the pinnacle of all the states (al-Ghazālī sought to justify this view by observing that all the stations which come after love branch out of love or one of its offshoots).⁸⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī also notes that the gnostic is a lover because whoever knows his Lord loves Him – to the one who loves,

⁸³⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 452.

⁸³⁸ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 6.

⁸³⁹ al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 67.

⁸⁴⁰ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, book no. 6, vol.5, p. 40.

greater knowledge of the Beloved is revealed.⁸⁴¹ This means that love increases in accordance with the degree of gnosis and gnosis is also a cause for greater love to develop.⁸⁴² For al-Ghazālī, love stems from knowing and understanding the Beloved. He said:

“True gnosis is to abandon this world and the next and to be set apart unto the Lord: it is to be intoxicated by the wine of Love and not to recover therefrom except in the vision of the Beloved, for the gnostic dwells in the light of his Lord”.⁸⁴³

Ibn ‘Ajība repeats his previous allusion to the twelve stations of gnosis where the station of love still holds the tenth position. His commentary related to the following verse:

“He sendeth down water from the sky, so that valleys flow according to their measure, and the flood beareth (on its surface) swelling foam - from that which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments and tools riseth a foam like unto it - thus Allah coineth (the similitude of) the true and the false. Then, as for the foam, it passeth away as scum upon the banks, while, as for that which is of use to mankind, it remaineth in the earth. Thus Allah coineth the similitudes”.⁸⁴⁴

In drawing upon this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība elaborates these twelve stations and states that, prior to reaching any of the spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*), a tripartite purificatory process of knowledge (*‘ilm*), action (*‘amal*) and spiritual state (*ḥāl*) should take place. Starting with knowledge, this purification is attained through a sincerity in which all desire for leadership and authority is washed away. With regard to actions, this purification requires sincerity at the beginning, excellence in performance (*itqān*) and presence (*ḥuḍūr*) of the heart; in addition, discretion is also required as a precondition for traces of conceit and self-admiration (*‘ujb*) to be removed. The purification of spiritual states is based upon solely seeking God as one’s final destination: when the divine manifestations (*wāridāt*) take their toll on the novice, he can ignore their effect on his ego and thus become purified from seeking worldly gain or miraculous powers in the realm of the senses (*karāmāt ḥissiyya*). After passing through these three required stages and

⁸⁴¹ Margret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, p. 173.

⁸⁴² Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love from Rābi‘a to Ibn ‘Arabī”, pp. 169-170.

⁸⁴³ Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, p. 185.

⁸⁴⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthal, al-Ra‘d (13:17).

after completing the twelve necessary spiritual stations, the novice becomes ready for the sun of gnosis to dawn in his heart.⁸⁴⁵

Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse (13:17) diverges from Ibn ‘Ajība when he addresses the different types of heart upon which various divine manifestations are cast, and cites the heart’s various degrees of strength and weakness in the process.⁸⁴⁶ Rūzbihān follows al-Qushayrī’s lead on this verse and elaborates the various kinds of divine manifestations that the heart receives: this is ultimately dependent upon its capacity for love and gnosis, which allow it to be the locus of the lights of God’s Essence, Attributes, Names, or Actions.⁸⁴⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība noticeably differs from the other two exegetes because he chose to focus on the novice’s journey to God and the question of how the heart can be purified to receive the lights of God’s Essence and Attributes; he engages at these points rather than describing the different divine manifestations that enhance the capacity of the heart to sustain love and gnosis.

The twelve spiritual stations that Ibn ‘Ajība refers to in the context of this verse are not always consistent with his commentary on other verses. For example, he observes that there are eight spiritual stations in his commentary on the verse, “and the angels shall stand upon its borders, and upon that day eight shall carry above them the Throne of your Lord”.⁸⁴⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība clarifies that gnosis is the pinnacle of all divine manifestations, which raises the question of why he did not include it as one of the eight mentioned spiritual stations. He clarifies that the heart is the throne which bears God’s gnosis, and also establishes that it is the locus for eight virtues which are divine manifestations: patience (*ṣabr*), thankfulness (*shukr*), scrupulousness (*wara’*), asceticism (*zuhd*), reliance (*tawakkul*), submission (*taslīm*), love (*maḥabba*) and watchfulness (*murāqaba*).⁸⁴⁹ Once again, Ibn ‘Ajība places the spiritual station of love at a penultimate stage: this clearly diverges from the ingrained tendency to present gnosis as the summit of the Sufī Path.

While Ibn ‘Ajība does appear to be slightly inconsistent in his account of the number of the spiritual stations, the position of love remains the same in his commentary on the verse, “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth. Then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He is knower of all things”.⁸⁵⁰ He interprets this verse to refer to seven spiritual stations, which are patience (*ṣabr*),

⁸⁴⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 20.

⁸⁴⁶ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 105.

⁸⁴⁷ al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 233-234.

⁸⁴⁸ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Hāqqa (69:17).

⁸⁴⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.6, p. 244.

⁸⁵⁰ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthal. al-Baqara (2:29).

thankfulness (*shukr*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*), contentment (*riḍa*), submission (*taslīm*), love (*maḥabba*), and gnosis (*ma'rifa*). It is worthwhile to note that this categorization places the station of love within a penultimate position, and situates gnosis as the apex of all the spiritual stations.⁸⁵¹ Ibn 'Ajība is insistent in reiterating the superiority of gnosis over love; thus, despite his high regard for love, he consistently places gnosis at the pinnacle of all the spiritual stations. Mahmut Ay maintains that Ibn 'Ajība's inconsistency in determining the number of the spiritual stations should not be seen as embodying any contradiction. Ay makes the important observation that Ibn 'Ajība, in composing his exegetical work, was not concerned with the creation of a systematic theosophical doctrine, but was instead more concerned with identifying the spiritual meanings behind each of the different stations.⁸⁵²

Al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān, for their part, did not refer to any of the spiritual stations mentioned in Ibn 'Ajība's commentary.⁸⁵³ At this point, it should also be noted that placing gnosis at the apex of the spiritual stations is not consistent with the tradition followed by earlier Sufi scholars such as al-Qushayrī and Ibn 'Arabī, both of whom placed gnosis at the penultimate station, right before love.⁸⁵⁴

On the other hand, Ibn 'Ajība continued to maintain that it is appropriate to place gnosis at the top of all the spiritual stations. This was made clear in his commentary on the following verse:

“They ask thee, (O Muḥammad), of new moons, say: They are fixed seasons for mankind and for the pilgrimage. It is not righteousness that ye go to houses by the backs thereof (as do the idolaters at certain seasons), but the righteous man is he who wardeth off (evil). So go to houses by the gates thereof, and observe your duty to God, that ye may be successful”.⁸⁵⁵

In interpreting this verse, Ibn 'Ajība indicates that there are three houses: the law, the path and truth (*sharī'a*, *ṭarīqa*, *ḥaqīqa*) that the novice has to enter during his spiritual journey, each of which has three doors. Beginning with the house of the *sharī'a*, the first door that the disciple (*murīd*) encounters is the door of repentance (*tawba*) which leads to the door of uprightness (*istiḳāma*) in which the disciple follows the footsteps of

⁸⁵¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 93.

⁸⁵² This information was provided during a personal interview with Mahmut Ay that was conducted in the University of Istanbul, Turkey on 13/04/2017.

⁸⁵³ al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol.1, p. 40, al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 33.

⁸⁵⁴ See al-Qushayrī, p. 311, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, p. 447.

⁸⁵⁵ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthal, al-Baqara (2:189).

Prophet Muḥammad in his sayings, actions, and states. The disciple enters the last door of the *sharī‘a* which is piety (*taqwa*). After successfully passing through these three doors, the disciple is ready to enjoy his stay in the house of the *sharī‘a*.

The disciple then makes his way to the house of *ṭarīqa* which also has three doors, the first of which is sincerity (*ikhhlās*) – this is defined as performing acts solely for God’s sake without any personal interest or potential gain. The second door of the *ṭarīqa* is emptying the self (*takhliya*) – this relates to a process in which the spirit is purified of its inner deficiencies; the disciple is then ready to enter through the last door of the *ṭarīqa* which is beautification (*tahliya*). In progressing through this door, the disciple comes to embody a range of virtues, which include altruism, generosity, gentleness and patience.

Ibn ‘Ajība then refers to the last house, *ḥaqīqa*, which also has three doors. The first door is watchfulness (*murāqaba*) which entails preserving the heart from bad thoughts, after which the novice encounters the door of witnessing (*mushāhada*) in which the forms of possible beings are obliterated in the presence of the divine lights of God. The pinnacle of all doors is the door of gnosis (*ma‘rifa*) which is the abode of the divine presence and the locus of elevation to infinite spiritual realities.⁸⁵⁶ In situating gnosis as the alpha and omega of the Sufi Path, Ibn ‘Ajība clearly indicates his high regard for gnosis as the pinnacle of the mystical way. Significantly, there is no reference at all to love.

Al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s commentaries on the same verse (2:189) do not adopt Ibn ‘Ajība’s gradual approach of detailing the separate features of the Sufi Path. Al-Qushayrī instead refers to the importance of purifying the spirit and not being content with observing the formalities of worship.⁸⁵⁷ Rūzbihān focuses upon the need to break loose from the shackles of the laws of servanthood which form a veil and conceal God’s Attributes from view.⁸⁵⁸ It is noticeable that Ibn ‘Ajība, in contrast to the other two exegetes, clearly outlines the different stages that the novice has to traverse in order to reach the pinnacle of the Sufi Path.

Ibn ‘Ajība’s view of gnosis as the summit of the Sufi Path is also reiterated by his commentary on another verse: “[A]nd vie with another, hastening to forgiveness from your lord, and to a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the Godfearing.”⁸⁵⁹ From this perspective, gnosis is considered to be a starting point that

⁸⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 221, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 263.

⁸⁵⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 92.

⁸⁵⁸ Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 78.

⁸⁵⁹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Āl-‘Imrān* (3:133).

anticipates infinite elevation to higher realities. In his interpretation of this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība indicates that the inability of human beings to reach full gnosis of God is due to their limited capacity to fully grasp the gnosis of God. This reiterates that elevation in the path of gnosis is eternal and infinite.⁸⁶⁰

Ibn ‘Ajība further expounds the station of gnosis and its distinguished status in his commentary upon the following verse: “[T]oday I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion”.⁸⁶¹ In his esoteric interpretation of this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība elaborates the concept of the perfection of gnosis (*kamāl al-ma‘rifā*) and reiterates that he considers it to be the ultimate sign of reaching the station of stability (*tamkīn*) – in its aftermath, divine secrets are revealed and spiritual realities are unfolded. When gnosis is perfected, the novice traverses through different stations, with his progress being dependent upon what the Divine Power (*qudra*) reveals to him. In other words, the novice finds himself vacillating between different stations, accompanied with different states including fear, hope, contentment, submission or reliance on God and so on and so forth without being attached to any of these stations and this is the state of vacillation (*talwīn*) after stability (*tamkīn*).⁸⁶²

The infinite realities disclosed before the eyes of the gnostic after reaching the station of gnosis do not grant him full gnosis of God – this is a fact which Ibn ‘Ajība refers to in his commentary on the following verse: Say God, then leave them to their play of cavilling”.⁸⁶³ In reflecting upon this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība states that even if the gnostic travels for all eternity in the path of gnosis, he will still not be able to gain full gnosis of God. To the same extent, if the devotee worshipped God for eternity he wouldn’t fulfil God’s right over him.⁸⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the three aforementioned verses (3:131, 5:5, 6:91) clearly indicates that the perfection of gnosis is the ultimate condition for divine realities to be disclosed; however, the “perfection” of gnosis does not entail “full” gnosis of God, a limitation which is attributable to the unfathomable nature of God’s Essence which cannot be encompassed by intellectual realization and conceptual understanding.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 409.

⁸⁶¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Al-Mā’ida* (5:5).

⁸⁶² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁸⁶³ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthall, *Al-An’ām* (6:91).

⁸⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 144.

Now that Ibn ‘Ajība’s reasons for placing gnosis as the apex of the spiritual stations and as the supreme aim of the Sufi Path have been set out, the next section will present love as both an integral part of the composition of the Sufi Path and also its very summit.

5.2) Ibn ‘Ajība’s Implicit Favoritism of Love Over Gnosis

After setting out a position that favored gnosis over love as the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path, Ibn ‘Ajība acknowledged the ongoing debate among Sufi scholars which related to the relative positioning of love and gnosis (*ma‘rifa*), and with the wider theological significance of this debate. He refers to this issue in his commentary on the following verse, “Yet there be men who take to themselves compeers apart from God loving them as God is loved, but those that believe love God more ardently (*ashadda ḥubban lillah*)...”.⁸⁶⁵ Prior to stating his own views on this issue, Ibn ‘Ajība quoted other scholars, such as Ibn Juzayy, who believed that love is the highest station and the final destination of the gnostic. Ibn Juzayy stated:

All the rest of the stations of the righteous ones such as fear, hope, reliance and so forth are all based on self-interest. Don’t you see that the one who fears, fears for himself, and the one who hopes, hopes for a benefit for himself. This is unlike love which is done purely for the sake of the beloved without expecting anything in return.⁸⁶⁶

Immediately after quoting Ibn Juzayy’s position on love, Ibn ‘Ajība adopted Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s view which contends that gnosis is the reason for God’s love. This suggests that love is strengthened upon the level of gnosis one has for God and vice-versa.⁸⁶⁷ This statement may be perceived as implicitly indicating Ibn ‘Ajība’s preference for love as the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path (a preference which in turn designated gnosis as a subordinate station which causes love to blossom in the heart of the devotee).

In his commentary on the preceding verse (2:165), Ibn ‘Ajība also quoted al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī’s definition of love, which was presented in the following terms: “yearning wholeheartedly towards your Beloved, and favoring Him over your spirit and soul and complying with Him covertly and overtly while realizing the shortcomings of

⁸⁶⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 193, Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:165).

⁸⁶⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 195. Sumnūn al-muḥib of Baghdad Sufi (10th cent.) similarly favoured love over gnosis - see al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, p. 327.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 195.

your love for Him.”⁸⁶⁸ He interpreted this definition as affirming the superiority of gnosis over love. Closer inspection however reveals that al-Muḥāsabī’s view on love does not define it in relation to gnosis; rather, love is instead defined in relation to the beloved. Therefore, Ibn ‘Ajība’s use of this quote as a basis of his argument against the superiority of love over gnosis may seem irrelevant. That being said, Ibn ‘Ajība’s earlier quote of Ibn Juzayy’s opinion on love, in which Ibn Juzayy clearly stated his preference for love over gnosis, would have been better suited if Ibn ‘Ajība’s argument had advocated the superiority of love over gnosis.

After quoting the views of various Sufi scholars and their positions on love, with specific reference to verse (2:156), Ibn ‘Ajība openly stated his belief that gnosis was superior to love and should accordingly be installed as the highest station of the Sufi Path. He observed:

On the surface, love is superior to gnosis, but after investigating the matter further, it turns out that gnosis is the highest of all stations because with the presence of gnosis no veils remain, unlike love, with which some veils still remain. Can’t you see this (in the fact) that the lover is distant from all human company (save his Beloved) while the gnostic is not distancing himself from anything because he recognizes God in everything.⁸⁶⁹

ظاهره أن المحبة أعلى من المعرفة والتحقيق أن المعرفة أعلى من جميع المقامات، لأنها لا تبقى معها بقية من الحجاب أصلاً، بخلاف المحبة، فإنها تكون مع بقية الحجاب، ألا ترى أن المحب يتوحش من الخلق، والعارف لا يستوحش من شيء لمعرفته في كل شيء.

This highlights two key features within Ibn ‘Ajība’s argument that gnosis is superior to love. Firstly, he asserts that the station of love is, to some degree, associated with some degree of veiling – this clearly distinguishes it from the station of gnosis, where all veils are lifted. In Ibn ‘Ajība’s opinion, the gnostic is more disciplined than the lover as love could be attained before the perfection of character. However, it can be argued that when love reaches perfection, no veiling remains. Thus, when love reaches its full potential, the refinement of the character reaches perfection as well. At this stage, gnosis will not be pre-eminent in relation to love. Ibn al-Dabbāgh supports this argument when he refers to the same issue:

قال الحارث المحاسبي: (المحبة ميلك إلى المحبوب بكليتك ثم إيثارك له على نفسك وروحك، ثم موافقته سرا وجهرا، ثم علمك بتقصيرك في حبه) Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 196

⁸⁶⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 196, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 263.

God's existence in everything. Should they recognize God in everything, they wouldn't feel at distance from anything.⁸⁷⁴

Here it should be noted that this quote does not actually convey or support Ibn 'Ajība's argument for favoring gnosis over love – this is because the inability to see God's manifestation in all things, and thus the sense of alienation from everything, is said to be the characteristic of worshippers and ascetics as opposed to lovers. Even in Ibn 'Ajība's own commentary on the *Hikam*, he did not state that Ibn 'Aṭṭā'illāh was referring to lovers, nor did he include any reference to love in his commentary. The two categories of persons—the worshippers and the ascetics—upon whom Ibn 'Ajība commented (thereby placing gnostics in a higher degree over them), are the worshippers immersed in physical worship, who pray at night and fast during the day, and are too distracted by the sweetness of worship (*'ibāda*) to enjoy the pleasure of witnessing the One worshipped (*al-ma'būd*). The second category, the ascetics, are characterized by their zeal to abandon the world and escape from people and thus feel at distance from everything due to their inability to see God in anything.⁸⁷⁵ Ibn 'Ajība's argument that gnosis should be elevated over love juxtaposed lovers on the one side against worshippers and ascetics on the other. The proposition that lovers and worshippers can be included in the same category does not seem sound: lovers hold different characteristics to worshippers and ascetics and it therefore seems questionable to consider the two as equals.

A closer engagement with al-Qushayrī's and Rūzbihān's interpretations of the verse (2:165) which were cited at the beginning of this section, reiterates that neither of them explicitly refers to gnosis and its position in relation to love in the Qur'ān. Al-Qushayrī, for example, praises the station of love and states that falling in love with another human being in the realm of senses causes no astonishment; however loving someone who is not from his own kind and who is concealed behind the veils of divine majesty is considered to be the true definition of love.⁸⁷⁶ Rūzbihān places love in a high position in his interpretation of the same verse. For example, he directly quotes Ja'far al-Ṣādiq who states that the most special type of worship in God's sight is love.⁸⁷⁷ Rūzbihān also lists both love and gnosis as direct results of following the teachings of Prophet

⁸⁷⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 197, قال في الحكم "إنما يستوحش العباد والزهاد من كل شئ لغيبهم عن الله في كل شئ، ولو عرفوا الله في كل شئ ما استوحشوا من شئ" see Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*, ed. Muḥammad Nassār, (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-Kalim, 2005), p. 271, see also Victor Danner, *Ibn 'Aṭṭā'illāh's Suḥb Aphorisms*, p. 40. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 263.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibn 'Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam*, p. 271.

⁸⁷⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 32.

⁸⁷⁷ Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 71-72.

Muḥammad. This lends further credence to the proposition that one does not take precedence over the other. He also quotes Abū ‘Amr Ibn ‘Uthmān's definition in which he defines love as equivalent to the gnosis of God. Rūzbihān also combines both love and gnosis together and renders them as two requirements that lead the straight path towards God (see his commentary on verse 5:8).⁸⁷⁸ His commentary on a separate verse (5:18), also suggests that God does not seek to punish those who worship Him through love and gnosis.⁸⁷⁹ A closer examination of Rūzbihān's commentary on these different verses clearly demonstrates that Ibn ‘Ajība's explicit favoritism of gnosis as the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path was not derived from Rūzbihān's position, who clearly did not favor gnosis over love here.

In order to gain a better understanding of Ibn ‘Ajība's position on the debate between gnosis and love, it will be instructive to study his view on the spiritual station of vigilance (*murāqaba*). Ibn ‘Ajība's discussion of the spiritual station of vigilance (*murāqaba*) can be best understood with reference to his commentary on the following verse:

And thou (Muḥammad) art not occupied with any business and thou recitest not a Lecture from this (Scripture), and ye (mankind) perform no act, but We are Witness of you when ye are engaged therein. And not an atom's weight in the earth or in the sky escapeth your Lord, nor what is less than that or greater than that, but it is (written) in a clear Book.⁸⁸⁰

Ibn ‘Ajība maintains there are three levels of vigilance (*murāqaba*). The first level is outer vigilance (*murāqabat al-zawāhir*), which is defined as the devotee's belief that God is watching him everywhere and that God's knowledge is all-encompassing. The devotee is therefore reluctant to perform any act that may be construed as an affront to God's sight. The second level is vigilance of the heart (*murāqabat al-qulūb*), which is defined as the devotee's belief that God is watching over his heart – for this reason, he renounces bad and useless thoughts. The third level is vigilance of the transconscious (*murāqabat al-sarā'ir*), which is defined as unveiling the spirit, thus enabling God to come closer than all else; ultimately, the individual becomes reluctant to witness anything other than God within contingent forms. Ibn ‘Ajība further clarifies that even if the spirit

⁸⁷⁸ Al-Baqī, *‘Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 303.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 307.

⁸⁸⁰ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthall, Yūnus (10:61).

falls in the trap of witnessing anything apart from God, it readily turns to repentance and seeks forgiveness. Repentance never departs from gnostics who have attained this level. This stage leads to the last station of the Sufi Path, the station of witnessing (*mushāhada*), which is the key to gnosis. Ibn ‘Ajība added that at this level gnosis equals ‘Friendship with God’ (*wilāya*).⁸⁸¹

As observed, Ibn ‘Ajība places gnosis at the pinnacle of the Sufi Path and equates gnosis (*ma‘rifa*) with ‘Friendship with God’ (*wilāya*). A closer engagement with the meaning of *wilāya* may enable a deeper and more nuanced understanding of his true position on love. His commentary relates to the following verse: “Lo! verily the friends of God are (those) on whom fear (cometh) not, nor do they grieve? Those who believe and keep their duty (to God).”⁸⁸² Ibn ‘Ajība clarifies that there are two levels of Friendship with God, the first of which is general Friendship with God (*wilāya ‘amma*) – this is associated with the degree of faith and piety that the devotee attains. The higher the individual’s level of piety and faith, the stronger the state of friendship with God (*wilāya*).

The second level is a special friendship with God (*al-wilāya al-khāṣṣa*) - this only belongs to devotees who combine both the state of annihilation (*al-fanā’*) and subsistence in God (*al-baqā’*). This second type of friendship with God is associated with complete annihilation of the self and utter love, the realization of the pinnacle of the Sufi Path. Ibn ‘Ajība maintained that in the absence of annihilation, love cannot be reached; in the absence of love, friendship with God (*wilāya*) cannot be attained.⁸⁸³ Ibn al-Fāriḍ reiterated this beautifully in verse when he said:

For you never loved me so long as you were not lost in me
And you will never be lost without my form in you revealed ⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, pp. 483, 484.

⁸⁸² Qur’ān, trans. Pickthall, Yūnus (10:62-63).

⁸⁸³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, pp. 484, 485, Ibn ‘Arabī explained the concept of *wilāya* in the following terms: prophethood was sealed with the advent of Prophet Muḥammad; accordingly, the strict and special meaning of prophethood, which entails legislative authority and revealed laws, was no longer available, the general prophethood (*nubuwwa ‘amma*) still stands and equates friendship with God (*wilāya*). He adds that the term (*wilāya*) comes from God’s divine Name (*al-walī*). See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 50- 51. Al-Hujwirī defines the term Friend (*wālī*) to be “the heirs of the Prophets and God’s representatives, and through their spiritual blessing (*baraka*), they are instrumental in ensuring the happiness and success of the faithful”. See John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Image of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood*, (London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 265.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 485, see also ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Sufī Verse, Sainly Life*, trans by. Th. Emil Homerin, (New Jersey: Paulist Press), 2001, p. 103. This verse is part of a famous poem by Ibn al-Fāriḍ titled, (Ode in T Major) “*Nazm al-sulūk: al-Ṭā’iyya al-kubrā*”.

فلم تهونى ما لم تكن فى فانيا ولم تفن ما لم تجتل فيك صورتى⁸⁸⁵

The aforementioned explanation suggests that, for Ibn ‘Ajība, the pinnacle of the Sufi Path was implicitly love rather than gnosis. This conclusion can be derived from his admission that annihilation cannot be attained without being utterly in love with God – this affirms that it is only through love that the Sufi Path can come to an end. Gnosis, in the view of Ibn ‘Ajība, is a term that can be used interchangeably with Friendship with God (*wilāya*); again, it may be concluded that gnosis cannot be attained except by love and it is not perfected except through love – it appears that gnosis is only reachable with love. This makes love not only the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path, but also the means to its end – this is a subject that will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

5.3) Love as the Means to Gnosis

Ibn ‘Ajība further explores the proposition that love is the route that leads to gnosis in his commentary on the following verse:

Those that sell God’s covenant and their oaths for a little price, there shall be no share for them in the next world, God shall not speak to them, neither look on them on the Resurrection Day, neither will He purify them and for them awaits a painful chastisement.⁸⁸⁶

As the previous chapter explains, Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of this verse reiterates that the key aspect of the Sufi Path of gnosis is divine love, which sealed the divine Covenant of *Alast*.⁸⁸⁷ He states:

God took the Covenant from the spirits not to worship other than Him, and not to yearn towards anything save Him, so whoever longs for something or leans with love towards other than God, has broken his Covenant with God and thus neither has any share of the station of gnosis nor reaches witnessing or conversing (with God) until he returns to God wholeheartedly.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵ ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, (Beirut: Dār Sādir) ND, p. 55.

⁸⁸⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Āl-‘Imrān* (3: 77).

⁸⁸⁷ This covenant was considered to be the first encounter of human beings with divine knowledge. It was the point at which they first recognised God as the one Lord. For further details see Gerhard Bowering, “‘Erfān”. *Encyclopedia Iranica* 8:551-554.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 372.

قد أخذ الله العهد على الأرواح ألا يعبدوا معه غيره، ولا يميلوا إلى شيءٍ سواه، فكل من مال إلى شيءٍ أو ركن بالمحبة إلى غير الله، فقد نقض العهد مع الله، فلا نصيب له في مقام المعرفة، ولا تحصل له مشاهدة ولا مكاملة حتى يثوب ويتوجه بكليته إلى مولاه.

This statement indicates that God's Covenant with human beings was based on their exclusive love for Him. Therefore, whoever breaches this sacred Covenant by loving anything except God is deprived of gnosis. In other words, it is only through love that the devotee can attain both gnosis and the vision of God.

Another passage that demonstrates that love forms the essence of the Sufi Path can be found in Ibn 'Ajība's commentary on the following verse: "Say: to God belongs intercession altogether. His is the kingdom of the heaven and the earth; then unto Him you will be returned".⁸⁸⁹ Ibn 'Ajība indicates that those who deserve God's intercession (*shafā'a*) are the people of prestigious spiritual status (*ahl al-jāh*) – the attainment of this status depends upon the intensity of their focus upon God (*tawajjuh*). To the same extent, *tawajjuh* depends upon God's love for the devotee, a concept which encompasses pre-eternal divine grace (*ināya sābiqa*). This means that the stronger the light of attention to God (*tawajjuh*), the lights of encountering God become more intense (*al-muwājaha*); with the light of encounter, the breadth of gnosis is amplified. In addition, the higher the level of gnosis attained, the greater the level of one's prestige and status (*jāh*) – this in turn increases the likelihood that the intercession (*shafā'a*) will be accepted.⁸⁹⁰ The attainment of gnosis depends totally upon God's love for the gnostic – love is therefore the determining factor of the level of gnosis attained, and it significantly influences the degree of prestigious status that the gnostic enjoys in God's sight. It is also worthwhile to note that the pre-eternal love or divine grace (*ināya azaliyya*) that is mentioned here corresponds to the originality of divine love of God to the servants, which was discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

A comparison of Ibn 'Ajība's, al-Qushayrī's and Rūzbihān's commentaries illustrates that al-Qushayrī does not reference either love or gnosis in his interpretation of the same verse (39:44).⁸⁹¹ Rūzbihān only mentions that God is the source of intercession for the one who intercedes (*shāfi'*) and the other who seeks intercession (*mushaffi'*); this further reiterates that the gnostic should always return to God in all his affairs.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁹ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Zumar (39:44).

⁸⁹⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 85.

⁸⁹¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 122.

⁸⁹² Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 215.

After showing in this and the foregoing section how love forms the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path for Ibn ‘Ajība, in the next section I discuss how love and gnosis are seen by Ibn ‘Ajība as equal partners at the summit of the Sufi Path.

5.4) Love and Gnosis: Equal Partners at the Pinnacle of All Stations

My analysis strengthens my argument that love is the pinnacle of all the spiritual stations in Ibn ‘Ajība’s blueprint of the Sufi Path. I will examine some of the many verses which reveal that Ibn ‘Ajība places love on an equal footing to gnosis.

Ibn ‘Ajība categorized people into three categories, as can be seen in his commentary on the verse: “If they had desired to go forth, they would have made some preparation for it; but God was averse that they should be aroused, so He made them pause and it was said to them, tarry you with the barriers”.⁸⁹³ The first category consists of those who are entangled by worldly gain and burdened with self-interest - thus God confined them to worldly affairs (*‘ālam al-ḥikma*). The second category is for people of service (*ahl al-khidma*) who are concerned with worshipping God but are not prepared for His gnosis. The third category concerns seekers of God’s love and gnosis (*ahl al-tawajjuh ila maḥabatihī wa ṣarīḥi ma’rifatihī*). It is instructive to note how Ibn ‘Ajība places love and gnosis alongside each other. He distinguishes those who belong to this category by the receipt of God’s love.⁸⁹⁴

As for al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān’s commentaries on the same verse, in contrast to Ibn ‘Ajība, did not address the different categories of people in terms of gnosis and worship. Both instead limited themselves to a brief discussion that states that the will of human beings stems from divine Providence; thus they emphasized sincerity as a prerequisite for having a strong will which would sustain them when traveling along God’s path.⁸⁹⁵

The issue of equating love with gnosis as if they are two sides of the same coin is a repeated theme by Ibn ‘Ajība in his commentary on the verse, “God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves. Whensoever God desires evil for a people, there is no returning it; apart from him, they have no protector”.⁸⁹⁶ In interpreting this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība indicates the superior position of those who occupy the station of belovedness (*maqām al-maḥbūbiyya*), and those who are strongly grounded in

⁸⁹³ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Tawba, (9:46).

⁸⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 388.

⁸⁹⁵ al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 424, al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 22.

⁸⁹⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Ra’d, (13:11).

gnosis (*al-tamakkun fī'l-ma'rifa*), with their hearts being preserved by divine grace (*'ināya ilāhiyya*). Because of this, they are not exposed to the threat of falling from their high rank as a result of errors, unlike others. Ibn 'Ajība went further to assert the supreme degree of those who enjoy love and gnosis when he contrasted their eminent state against those who slip and err and thus are degraded from their designated stations; he maintained that the latter had been deprived of their blessings due to a lack of etiquette (*sū' adab*). Ibn 'Ajība suggested that the deprivation of blessings can either extend to overt (such as abandoning an act of obedience or committing an act of disobedience) or covert (such as disregarding inner watchfulness (*al-murāqaba al-bāṭina*) or inner witnessing (*al-mushāhada al-bāṭina*) of the blessings of God.⁸⁹⁷ Ibn 'Ajība therefore linked love and gnosis together at the head of the Sufi Path.

Al-Qushayrī's interpretation of the same verse is also instructive because he briefly refers to those in the state of love and gnosis whose sins do not detract from their eminent state in God's sight – he clearly contrasts them with others who do not enjoy the state of love and gnosis. The core of his commentary focuses on blessings and bounties that are taken away from those who cease to perform acts of obedience. When individuals change their attitudes of gratitude towards God for His countless blessings, they are also deprived of these bounties.⁸⁹⁸ Rūzbihān instead adopted a theological approach that was addressed to comparing the relationship between the divine and human will, along with their relation to divine power.⁸⁹⁹

Ibn 'Ajība also provides a commentary on the following verse: “God chooses of the angel messengers and of mankind; surely God is All-hearing, All-seeing.”⁹⁰⁰ In addition to Ibn 'Ajība's noticing the association between the station of love and gnosis in his esoteric commentary on some verses, he also describes the symbol of wine in Sufi terminology as combining true love (*maḥabba ḥaqīqiyya*) and perfect gnosis (*ma'rifa kāmila*). In elaborating this position, Ibn 'Ajība emphasizes that drinking the wine of love and gnosis is generally done through mediums such as angels who are agents for prophets.⁹⁰¹ The concept of mediums and intermediaries can be traced back to Rūzbihān, whose explanation of this verse interprets the existence of angels as mediums who relate God's divine names and attributes to prophets; prophets are in turn rendered as the

⁸⁹⁷ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 14.

⁸⁹⁸ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 102.

⁸⁹⁹ Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 224.

⁹⁰⁰ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Hajj, (22:75).

⁹⁰¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 556.

mediums for the general public, while saints are presented as special mediums for godly people.⁹⁰² In his commentary on the same verse, al-Qushayrī briefly clarifies that God’s selection of messengers is a question of sheer divine grace – it is not related to the elect status (*khuṣūṣiyya*) of the person sent. Accordingly, he did not emphasize gnosis and love as factors in the selection process.⁹⁰³

Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the verse, “and He Himself gives me to eat and drink” introduces not only the symbol of wine to describe the combination of love and gnosis, but also alluded to the food consumed to be the food of gnosis; the drink tasted, meanwhile, is the drink of love.⁹⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība describes the nature of the drink of love by quoting Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī:⁹⁰⁵

The drink of love is the best drink and all other drinks are mere mirage

شراب المحبة خير شراب وكل شراب سواه شراب

He also quotes Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, who refers to the drink of love (*sharāb al-maḥabba*) as being saved by God for the most elite of His devotees - it is a drink that leads to drunkenness and proximity to God. Ibn ‘Ajība comments on Biṣṭāmī’s reference when he asserts that the drink of love is “the wine of annihilation and absence in God” (*sharāb al-maḥabba huwa khamrat al-fanā’ wa al-ghayba fi’llāh*).⁹⁰⁶ He adds that it is possible for the individual who eats the spiritual food of gnosis and drinks the spiritual drink of love to be surfeited with them and thus feel no need for physical food and drink. He cites the Prophet Muḥammad as an example, and notes how he used to fast continuously without breaking his fast. He said: “I spend the night over at God’s so He provides me with food and drink”.⁹⁰⁷ The reference to the food of gnosis and the drink of love was taken from al-Qushayrī’s commentary on the same verse in which he briefly

⁹⁰² Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 546.

⁹⁰³ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 333.

⁹⁰⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Shu’arā’, (26:79).

⁹⁰⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 142.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid. Ibn ‘Arabī elaborated at some length upon the symbol of the cup of love and the drink of love. He explains that the cup of love is the heart of the lover which is in a state of continuous change and fluctuation as the Beloved is “everyday in a (new) affair.” (Q. 55:29). Just as the color of the pure glass cup is transformed in accordance with the color of the liquid poured into it, the state of the heart of the lover is also transformed by changes of the divine manifestations of the Beloved residing in the lover’s heart. The drink of love is the divine manifestations of the Beloved in the cup (the heart) of the lover. Ibn ‘Arabī refers to the place of manifestation, which is the cup or the lover’s heart, as ‘the essence of manifestation’ (*‘ayn al-mazhar*); he calls the drink of love, which is the One who is manifesting, ‘the essence of the Manifest’ (*‘ayn al-zāhir*). James Winston Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabī’s ‘Short Course’ on Love”, *JMIAS*, vol. 50, (2011), pp. 13-14.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 142.

alludes to both.⁹⁰⁸ Rūzbihān does not make any references to the drink of love, and only alludes to God's grace, which allows the novice to traverse different spiritual stations that include, amongst others, contentment and submission.⁹⁰⁹

In the preceding verses, Ibn 'Ajība equates love and gnosis and explicitly places them on an equal footing and at the pinnacle of the Sufi Path. In other instances, Ibn 'Ajība does appear to ascribe love a higher status than gnosis. The following verse provides an example:

He who created the heavens and earth, and sent down for you out of heaven water, and We caused to grow therewith gardens full of loveliness whose trees you could never grow. Is there another god with God? Nay, but they are a people who assign to Him equals.⁹¹⁰

Ibn 'Ajība's interpretation of this verse alludes to the heavens as the souls (*arwāḥ*) which God prepared to witness His lordship (*rubūbiyya*), and he symbolizes the earth as the spirits (*nufūs*) which God created to abide by the courtesies of servanthood (*adāb al-'ubūdiyya*). Ibn 'Ajība further associates the water of rainfall that descends from heaven with the flow of divine manifestations (*al-wāridāt al-ilāhiyya*) penetrating the hearts of the gnostics which then leads the tree of gnosis (*shajarat al-ma'rifa*) to sprout and grow, and the fruits of love (*thimār al-maḥabba*) to blossom.⁹¹¹ This quote was largely derived from Rūzbihān's commentary on the same verse.⁹¹² Al-Qushayrī briefly alluded to the inner fruits as the light of the heart and expressed his concern that they should not be veiled or otherwise absented from God.⁹¹³

Ibn 'Ajība's view of love as the fruit of gnosis is a frequently repeated theme and it is found in his commentary on the following verse: "No, indeed, but you love the transient world, and leave the Hereafter".⁹¹⁴ Here, Ibn 'Ajība quotes Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's assertion that the love of God and the experience of His fellowship (*uns*) are essential conditions if the individual is to attain the state of happiness of meeting God in the hereafter. He proceeded to explain that it is impossible to attain love without gnosis, and love is in turn unreachable without constant contemplation (*dawām al-dhikr*). The pleasure of God's fellowship, he maintains, is the result of both love and ceaseless

⁹⁰⁸ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol.3, p. 402.

⁹⁰⁹ Al-Baqī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 50.

⁹¹⁰ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Naml, (27: 60).

⁹¹¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, p. 207.

⁹¹² Al-Baqī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 72.

⁹¹³ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 422.

⁹¹⁴ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Qiyāma, (75: 20-21).

invocation. It is also key to extract the love of worldly life from one's heart – this is of course unachievable if the individual does not abandon the sensual pleasures of this world through the burning fear of God.⁹¹⁵ Ibn 'Ajība's invocation of al-Ghazālī's text affirms that love is the end result of the Sufi Path and the fruit of gnosis.

The preceding interpretations reiterate that Ibn 'Ajība thought of love as the fruit which ripens from the tree of gnosis. It is thus naturally positioned to a greater degree than gnosis. However, he offered an opposing interpretation in his commentary on the following verse: "Have you considered the seed you spill? Do you yourselves create it, or are We the creators?"⁹¹⁶ Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric interpretation of this verse alluded to the seeds planted in the heart of the aspirant (*murīd*) by the gnostic (*'arif*) to be the seeds of willingness (*irāda*) – these in turn grow into the tree of love and blossom into the fruit of gnosis.⁹¹⁷ His commentary on another verse ("Have you considered the fire you kindle? Did you make it timber to grow, or did we make it?"),⁹¹⁸ clarifies that Ibn 'Ajība quotes al-Qushayrī's interpretation in which he alludes to fire as the fire of love which is kindled out of the tree of divine grace (*al-'ināya al-ilāhiyya*). Ibn 'Ajība supports this interpretation when he quotes al-Ḥallāj, who was once asked about the truth of love (*ḥaqīqat al-maḥabba*). In response, he stated: "[I]t is the eternal divine grace" (*al-'ināya al-ilāhiyya al-sarmadiyya*).⁹¹⁹ Ibn 'Ajība further clarifies that this divine grace is the spiritual food for the lover's spirit who continuously fasts day and night without any food.⁹²⁰

5.5) Conclusion

In bringing these seemingly opposed points of view together, the reader can observe contradicting interpretations; at some points, love is described as the tree and gnosis its fruit; at other times divine grace is the tree and love is the spiritual food and drink for the fasting lovers. Love, in other instances, is the spiritual drink and gnosis is the spiritual food for the lovers. Each of these points leads into the conclusion that, for Ibn 'Ajība, love and gnosis are explicitly placed on an equal footing (although there is an ambiguity at times, with a clear preference being alluded to or elliptically invoked to place love over

⁹¹⁵ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 325.

⁹¹⁶ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Wāqī'a, (56: 58-59).

⁹¹⁷ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 42.

⁹¹⁸ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, al-Wāqī'a (56: 71-72).

⁹¹⁹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 43.

⁹²⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 43.

gnosis), with both presenting themselves as the ultimate aim of the aspirant in the Sufi Path.

Ibn ‘Ajība’s discussion of gnosis and its relation to love continually emphasizes that human beings are the perfect manifestation and the designated locus for Lordship to manifest in the form of servanthood, thus enabling human beings to gain a glimpse into the gnosis of God. It was also noted that Ibn ‘Ajība largely focused upon ranking gnosis at the highest level within the blueprint that he sketched of the Sufi Path to God – he chose this course of action over contextualizing it within the wider paradigm of the spiritual stations. This approach was clearly evidenced when he alluded to the spiritual stations in his esoteric commentary on four verses where he placed gnosis at its peak.⁹²¹

In contrast, al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s commentaries on the same verses did not refer to any of the spiritual stations that Ibn ‘Ajība had emphasized. Ibn ‘Ajība’s outline of the Sufi Path did not only seek to place gnosis at its pinnacle; rather, it also sought to provide a manual for novices who wished to tread the Sufi Path through an explanation of the “three houses” (*sharī‘a*, *ṭarīqa*, *ḥaqīqa*); accordingly, detailed descriptions enabled individuals to pass through the doors which separate one house from the next. This aim was not clearly stated in the commentaries of al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān – instead, both adopted a rather transcendental top-down approach in which the focus was not on the novice *per se*.

Although Ibn ‘Ajība departs from al-Ghazālī’s view that love is the pinnacle of all stations, he clearly indicates that gnosis is the effective cause for love whose degree is strengthened in proportion to the degree of gnosis and vice-versa. To the same extent, the perfection of love equals that of gnosis - this means that no veils are left to conceal the gnostic lover from being a true witness to God’s divine beauty and majesty. In addition, Ibn ‘Ajība assimilated gnosis and guardianship (*wilāya*) and stated that the latter cannot be obtained without love; this in turn suggests that gnosis cannot be achieved without love. The conclusion is therefore that love, in the Sufi paradigm of Ibn ‘Ajība, is not only the pinnacle of the Sufi Path but also a means to its perfection.

⁹²¹ The four verses are, (10:5), (13:17), (69:17), (2:29).



Chapter VI

Love and the Unity of Being

Chapter 6. Love and the Unity of Being

6.1) A Brief Introduction to the Theory of the Unity of Being

This chapter focuses on a dominant theory in Ibn ‘Ajība’s paradigm of love, which is the theory of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). According to this theory, all created beings are but a reflection of the divine power (*qudra*) of their Creator and thus hold the secret of divinity within themselves. In other words, all creation acts as a tapestry manifesting divine attributes and thus all beings, regardless of their outward multiplicity in colors and shapes, reflect in essence the unity of divinity. Seeing created beings through the lens of eternal divine Unity is the only way for the heart not to be distracted by the multiplicity of created forms. According to Ibn ‘Ajība, through progression in the Sufi Path, the lover of God will cease to notice the existence of forms, which are in reality but insubstantial, due to his immersion in witnessing God in all created beings. Ibn ‘Ajība’s understanding of the Unity of Being is largely derived from Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion which views the universe as a mirror reflecting God’s Oneness and Attributes which are both manifested in the material world.⁹²²

Ibn ‘Ajība, however, warned against the two extremes of the theory of the Unity of Being. The first involves the inability to have a perceptive sight that might see beyond the surface level of physical materiality (*al-ajrām al-ḥissiyya*) and ephemeral forms to delve into the realm of spiritual meanings (*al-ma‘ānī al-laṭīfa*) lying behind the evanescence of existence’s plurality, and the second is to claim Incarnationism and Unification with God (*ḥulūl wa ittihād*) through being overwhelmed with apparition of the divine secrets. The concept of the Unity of Being is closely tied by Ibn ‘Ajība to the issue of God’s Oneness (*tawḥīd*) which he placed as the determinant factor of the degree of love that the devotee has for God. Having a multiplicity of beloveds reduces the share of love one can allot to each beloved, whereas having undivided attention towards only one beloved, that is, God, naturally increases the intensity of love.

Being an integral part of the concept of divine love, the principle of the theory of the Unity of Being was widely discussed by prominent Sufis such as Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d.245/859) and al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). Traces of the theological background of the theory can also be found in the writings of a number of earlier Sufis such as Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī

⁹²² kynysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, p. 168.

(d. 200/815) and Abū al-‘Abbās Qaṣṣāb (d. 4th/10th century) as well.⁹²³ We also find an articulation of the concept of the Unity of Being in the works of ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089) who defined the five levels of oneness (*tawḥīd*), the highest of which is “the absorption of that which never was into That which ever is”.⁹²⁴ His writing was a source of inspiration for later Sufi speculation about the Unity of Being. There are also glimpses of the theory of the Unity of Being in the works of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). In his *Mishkāt al-anwār* and *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, al-Ghazālī explained that when the gnostic reaches the end of the Sufi Path he witnesses that in reality there is no other existence but God.⁹²⁵

However, it was with the advent of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his Akbarian school that the culmination of the theory of the Unity of Being in Islamic thought was attained.⁹²⁶ In *al-Futūḥāt*: he wrote “Nothing has become manifest in *wujūd* through *wujūd* except the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), since *wujūd* is the Real and He is one”.⁹²⁷ The actual term (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) was introduced by Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī (d. 673/1274), Ibn ‘Arabī’s son-in-law and disciple, as well as al-Qunawī’s own disciple, Sa‘īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 699/1300), who used the term to better promote and define Ibn ‘Arabī’s theories.⁹²⁸

Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of the Unity of Being revolves around the idea that the only one who has, and is, a real Being in Himself – a Being that forms His very Essence – is God. As for the rest of beings, their existence is transient and not real but may be conceptualized as being on loan from the real Being. This means that in essence no creature possesses being and therefore all are totally dependent in their existence on the real Being.⁹²⁹ In addition, the creatures’ dependence on God does not end with their borrowed existence, but rather God continues to lend them their being with every breath they take—without this, they will immediately vanish and fall into a state of non-being.⁹³⁰

⁹²³ William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” in Banani et al., *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 71. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 403, 404.

⁹²⁴ Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” p. 71, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 403.

⁹²⁵ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 403, 404, see also Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” p. 71.

⁹²⁶ Su‘ād Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabī: A Humanist Perspective,” *JMIAS*, Vol. XXXVI, (2004), p. 18.

⁹²⁷ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, (Beirut, n.d.), II, p. 517.2, found in William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” p. 72, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 404.

⁹²⁸ Su‘ād Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabī: A Humanist Perspective,” p. 31. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 404.

⁹²⁹ Su‘ād Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabī: A Humanist Perspective,” p. 18, 19.

⁹³⁰ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 407.

Ibn ‘Arabī explained that since the only real Being is God, thus the whole universe is a manifestation of God reflecting the Divine Names and the whole of creation becomes a locus of the effects of these Names. When it comes to the story of creation, Ibn ‘Arabī stated that all creation is in a state of non-existence and only through borrowing being from God may any become existent and apparent in the world of creation. Therefore, for Ibn ‘Arabī, to make creation apparent (*izhār*) is an act of God bringing it from a state of nonexistence to a state of existence in order that it might become a locus reflecting the Divine Names.⁹³¹

At this juncture, it is important to note that although the whole world is considered by Ibn ‘Arabī to be a manifestation of the divine Attributes, the distinction between the attributes of the Creator and those of the created being must be discerned and maintained. Ibn ‘Arabī explained that created beings are a mirror of the Attributes of the Creator, yet the attributes of the created differ from those of the Creator because the attributes of the created are marked with deficiencies that God transcends. Another difference is that when God’s Attributes manifest themselves in a created being, these Attributes do not originally belong to it, but are rather, as mentioned above, ‘on loan’ from God.⁹³² Metaphorically, the existence of the world with all its variety of created beings is more like a shadow, or images in a mirror, that reflect the divine Attributes.⁹³³ The function of the mirror is to reflect images, yet the images reflected in the mirror are but versions copied from the original entities and thus are not identified as one. By the same token, the divine Attributes and the images reflected in the mirror of creation are not the same thing.⁹³⁴

God’s existence is usually alluded to as a light that has a single reality and multiple manifestations. ‘Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. before 700/1300), a disciple of Sa’d al-Dīn Ḥammūya (d. 649/1252), and a mystic of the Akbarian school, explained the concept of light in respect to the theory of Unity of Being in detail. He said that there is only one true being in this world and that is God whose inner reality is light and from this light comes all the multiplicity of the divine Attributes and Actions. Further, he stated that this light

⁹³¹ Su‘ād Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabī: A Humanist Perspective,” pp. 19, 20. Suleyman Derin, *From Rābī‘a to Ibn al-Fārīd*, p. 218.

⁹³² Su‘ād Ḥakīm, *al-Mu‘jam al-Sūfī*, (Beirut: Dandara Publication, 1981), 1st. ed., p. 1216, 1217.

⁹³³ Bakrī Aladdin, “Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*): The Term and the Doctrine,” *JMIAS*, vol. 51, (2012), p. 22.

⁹³⁴ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 406, see also William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” pp. 75, 76.

represents a single entity and forms one unity, a unity manifested in all living creatures.⁹³⁵ William Chittick, elaborating this same metaphor of light, likewise stated that it is possible to believe in the existence of different colors without that belief negating their dependence on light for existence. By this it is implied that if one looks at colors through the lens of their original source, that is, the full spectrum of light, they are seen as one unity, whereas if one observes the existence of each color individually, they are perceived as multiple entities.⁹³⁶ Therefore, the apparent diversity in this world reflects divine unity. ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289) expressed this idea in verse as follows:

Light has no color
 Its rays shine through the glass
 and only then
 do hues and tints appear.
 Don't you understand?
 Come then into my eyes
 and...look!
 and you will see
 a sun shining
 through a thousand bits of glass
 beaming to plain sight through each
 a ray of color.
 why should any difference appear
 between this one and that?
 All light is one
 but colors a thousandfold.⁹³⁷

This idea was also expressed by Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), a student of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kashānī (d. 730-6/1329-35), in prose as follows:

Because of his [the Sufī mystic's] witnessing the Unity in the core of multiplicity and multiplicity in the very essence of Unity, he witnesses the creation with the Real and the Real with the creation without one veiling the other. At this point, if he says, “All is the Real”, he is right, or if he says, “All is created things,” again

⁹³⁵ Nasafī, *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq*, ed. H. Nāṣirī (Tehran 1985), p. 75; cited in *An Overview of Ibn ‘Arabī's Theory of Waḥdat al-Wujūd in the Context of Other Key Akbarian Concepts*, unpublished paper cited by Leonard Lewisohn, p. 3. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 405.

⁹³⁶ William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” pp. 75, 76. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 405.

⁹³⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama'āt*. English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, pp. 93-94.

he expresses the truth; or again, if he utters the Real and creation together, namely, if he says, “It is both the Real and the creation”, then he also speaks the truth.⁹³⁸

Using a metaphysical metaphor, Osman Yahya further explained that Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of God is as an unconditional absolute Being (*mawjūd la-bi-sharṭ*), one in His existence and creative acts. The existential theophanies manifested through creation represent the multiple degrees and levels of Being, without affecting the oneness of His existence although they reflect the multiplicity of His manifestations.⁹³⁹

Ibn ‘Arabī further articulated the concept of the Unity of Being versus the multiplicity of creation in theological terms through explaining the doctrine of the transcendence (*tanzīh*) and immanence (*tashbīh*) of God. According to this doctrine, God possesses the divine Attribute of incomparability that makes Him unparalleled vis-à-vis all created beings, and thus He transcends the reach of creation as He is also the Non-manifest One (*al-bāṭin*). At the same time, God has properties of similarity with creation, which act as theophanies that reflect the multiple divine Attributes through which God becomes the Manifest One (*al-zāhir*). In this sense, Being is one at the level of non-manifestation – that is God’s Essence – yet many at the level of creation wherein the divine Attributes become manifest. It is for this reason that Ibn ‘Arabī sometimes refers to God as the One/Many (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*).⁹⁴⁰

Unfortunately, detractors of the theory of the Unity of Being tend to take only one of the above aspects of the theory, that is, either transcendence or immanence, and highlight it at the expense of the other. Some people thus only look at the “immanence” aspect of the theory and suggest that Ibn ‘Arabī simply proposes that God and creation are one, that is to say, equates *waḥdat al-wujūd* with pantheism. This claim of pantheism was leveled against Ibn ‘Arabī by the Ḥanbalite jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) who wrote books on the “heresy” of the theory of the Unity of Being. For example he said,

⁹³⁸ Davud el-Kayseri, *er-Resail*, ed. Mehmet Bayraktar, (Kayseri, Kayseri büyük şehir belediyesi kültür yayınlar, 1997), p. 128. Cited by Turan Koç, “All- Comprehensiveness according to Daud Qaysarī and its Implications,” *JMIAS*, XXVIII (2000), p. 60, see also Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 147, cited by Leonard Lewisohn, *An Overview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Theory of waḥdat al-wujūd*, p.1.

⁹³⁹ Osman Yahia, “Theophanies and Lights in the Thought of Ibn ‘Arabī,” *JMIAS*, X, (1999), p. 37, cited by Leonard Lewisohn, *An Overview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Theory of Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, p. 6.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, (Beirut, n.d.), II, p. 420.15, cited by William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” p. 76.

“The reality of the words of those who speak of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is that the *wujūd* of the engendered things is identical with the *wujūd* of God; it is nothing else and nothing different.”⁹⁴¹

Ibn Taymiyya’s claim that Ibn ‘Arabī perceived God and creation as one entity exposes his failure to understand the two aspects of Being, which, on one level, are transcendent beyond any similarities with creation, and, on the other level, manifest themselves through the divine Attributes as reflected in creation.⁹⁴²

The other misunderstanding of the theory of the Unity of Being is to claim that “All is not He”, that is to say, to equate *waḥdat al-wujūd* with transcendence but completely disassociate the universe from any relation to God and grant creation an independent existence to rival that of the Divinity.⁹⁴³

Such an uninformed understanding of the theory of the Unity of Being grossly misrepresents its doctrine. Ibn ‘Arabī was keen to stress that the Unity of Being does not indicate that God and His creatures have a single essence, and was determined to make the distinction between God and man very clear and to keep this duality intact through repeatedly stating that creation is the manifestation of God’s divine Attributes and Names, but not His Essence.⁹⁴⁴ In many parts of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* Ibn ‘Arabī emphasized that God and the world are two separate entities. In the introduction of *al-Futūḥāt* for instance, he wrote: “All praise is due to God who created things out of non-existence”.⁹⁴⁵ More importantly, Ibn ‘Arabī was a strong opponent to employing the term ‘ontological unification’ (*tawḥīd al-wujūd*) which denotes a unity of the Creator with the created. He also advised those Sufis who fell into the error of adopting the doctrine of ‘ontological unification’ to review the Qur’ānic texts which clearly distinguish between immanence and transcendence. Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabī condemned the materialistic understanding of the theory of the Unity of Being and said, “Here the feet of some people have slipped from the path of realization, so that they say: ‘There is nothing but what you see’, making the world God, and God the same as the world, not something else.” Ibn ‘Arabī then

⁹⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘a*, IV, p. 4, cited by William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” p. 86, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 408.

⁹⁴² William Chittick, “Rūmī and Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” p. 86.

⁹⁴³ Ibid, p. 77.

⁹⁴⁴ Su‘ād Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabī: A Humanist Perspective,” pp. 23, 24.

⁹⁴⁵ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 406, see for further details Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 409, 410.

comments: “But how could the property of the possible ever unite with the Necessary through Himself?”⁹⁴⁶

Ibn ‘Arabī also discussed the purpose of the creation of the world, stating that the whole universe was created so that God could be known and served, but only man is capable of combining divine knowledge and servanthood. Man is therefore the most perfect locus for the manifestations of the divine Names. Ibn ‘Arabī further explained the uniqueness of human beings by saying that they were created to reflect two images: the interior image in the heart as the locus for the divine Names, and the exterior image of the body to reflect worldly images and various forms. Therefore, man, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, is the axis of existence and the vicegerent of God on earth.⁹⁴⁷

According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the theory of the Unity of Being which is also based on and connected to the idea of divine love since love generates the desire “to annihilate and be annihilated, to sustain and be sustained”.⁹⁴⁸ The concept of divine love assumes some kind of affinity between the lover and beloved, that is, God and man. This affinity is only in place due to the existence of some sort of commonality or a shared meaning between the lover and beloved, based on which all obstacles for separation can be removed and unification reached. Ibn ‘Arabī stated that this meaning shared between God and man are the Divine Attributes which take man as their locus of manifestation so that man in his servanthood becomes the place of self-disclosure of Lordship.⁹⁴⁹ This explanation was reiterated by Farghānī when he defined love as being: “an inward inclination toward reaching a perfection. Its reality is a unifying relation between the seeker and the sought, its meaning is the domination of that which brings about unification and sharing, and its effect is the disappearance of that which brings about differentiation and diversity between the seeker and the sought.”⁹⁵⁰

Unification between the lover and beloved can be reached through the reflection of the Divine Attributes within human beings who act as an outward manifestation of these Attributes. In this way, God becomes manifest in the world of forms. For this reason

⁹⁴⁶ K. al-Kutūb, in *Rasā’il Ibn ‘Arabī*, p. 402 cited by Bakrī Aladdin, “Oneness of Being (waḥdat al-wujūd),” p. 20. For further elaboration see *Futūḥāt*: III, p. 161.16. Cited by Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, p. 352, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 21.35. Cited by Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, p. 89-90, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 484.23. Cited by Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, p. 90, found in Leonard Lewisohn, *An Overview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Theory of Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, p. 2.

⁹⁴⁷ Su‘ād Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabī: A Humanist Perspective,” pp. 24, 25.

⁹⁴⁸ R. W. J. Austin, “Meditations on the Vocabulary of Love and Union in Ibn ‘Arabī’s Thought,” *JMIAS*, Vol. III, (1984), p. 18.

⁹⁴⁹ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama’āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 19.

⁹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 17.

Ibn ‘Arabī defined “the hidden treasure” in the famous *ḥadīth* to be the Divine Attributes which God loved to be known through their manifestation in the world of creation.⁹⁵¹ Al-Qunawī explained the reason for God’s love for man as follows, “the Beloved loves the lover because he is the cause of His Distinct-Vision of His own Perfection within him and the locus within which the dominating-force of His Beauty exercises its influence and spreads its properties. Therefore (man is also) the beloved and (he is) the mirror of the Lover.”⁹⁵² In other words, God loves Himself and loves to see the beauty and perfection of His Divine Attributes manifested in the world of forms. Therefore the lover and beloved are one.⁹⁵³

6.2) The Unity of Being and Ibn ‘Ajība’s Concept of Divine Love

Although Ibn ‘Ajība never actually refers to the term ‘Unity of Being’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) in his *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*’s, the doctrinal principles and concomitants of this theory described above are an essential component of his paradigm of divine love.⁹⁵⁴ That being said, Ibn ‘Ajība used the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* as part of a title of two separate treatises on the Oneness of Being.⁹⁵⁵ Interestingly enough, throughout his treatises on the Unity of Being he neither referred to any of the technical terms related to the Akbarian school nor mentioned the name of Ibn ‘Arabī.⁹⁵⁶ These treatises consolidated Ibn ‘Ajība’s perspective on the Unity of Being spread out in his exegetical work. In this section, we aim to trace Ibn ‘Ajība’s degree of adoption of the concept of the Unity of Being in general and its impact on his esoteric exegesis, especially in relation to the concept of divine love.

Ibn ‘Ajība believed that the ultimate aim of the gnostics is to become able to recognize the insubstantial nature of all created beings and to see the whole universe as nothing but a theophany of the Divine Attributes. The manifestation of various divine Attributes requires the presence of multiplicity and diversity in the transient forms of ephemeral existence, all of which serve as a mirror reflecting God’s Attributes of majesty

⁹⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 19-22.

⁹⁵² Ibid, p. 25.

⁹⁵³ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama’āt*, English translation by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 26.

⁹⁵⁴ Michon (trans.), *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, (Cambridge: Archetype, 2010), pp. 8-11.

⁹⁵⁵ The title of the two treatises is *Taqyīdān fī waḥdat al-wujūd*.

⁹⁵⁶ Jean-Louis Michon (trans.), *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 8-11.

and beauty. According to Ibn ‘Ajība, the real gnostic, however, should see unity behind the diversity of creation, as in reality nothing exists but God.

Ibn ‘Ajība stated that love reaches its full potential when a complete realization and witnessing of God’s oneness is achieved, for only through love is witnessing God attainable. Thus not only is love the pinnacle of the Sufi Path, it is also the road leading to it. Ibn ‘Ajība’s adoption of divine love as an essential element in reaching divine unity is explicitly stated in his commentary on the verse:

Those that sell God’s covenant and their oaths for a little price, there shall be no share for them in the next world, God shall not speak to them, neither look on them on the Resurrection Day, neither will He purify them and for them awaits a painful chastisement.⁹⁵⁷

Here Ibn ‘Ajība refers to the divine covenant between God and man that was taken at the day of *Alast*. On this day the spirits pledged themselves always to be lovers of God and not to deviate from the path of love in order to reach a stage of direct witnessing and unity with the Divine. Divine love was used to seal this covenant and whoever breaks the seal of love by yearning to anything other than God, loses his way to witnessing the Divine. He elaborated on this by stating:

God took a covenant from the spirits not to worship other than Him, and not to yearn towards anything save Him. So whoever longs for something or leans with love towards other than God, he breaks his covenant with God and thus neither does he have any share of the station of gnosis, nor can he reach witnessing or conversing (with God) until he returns wholeheartedly to God.⁹⁵⁸

قد أخذ الله العهد على الأرواح ألا يعبدوا معه غيره، ولا يميلوا إلى شئ سواه، فكل من مال إلى شئ أو ركن بالمحبة إلى غير الله، فقد نقض العهد مع الله، فلا نصيب له في مقام المعرفة، ولا تحصل له مشاهدة ولا مكاملة حتى يثوب ويتوجه بكليته إلى مولاه.

This statement denotes that importance of divine love as a seal to the sacred covenant between the Creator and creation. Therefore, whoever breaches this covenant by loving anything other than God is deprived of witnessing God as he is distracted by

⁹⁵⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Imrān* (3: 77).

⁹⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 372.

the ephemeral existence of created beings and thus becomes absent from seeing the eternal existence of the one and true Being.

After this brief introduction of Ibn ‘Ajība’s adoption of divine love as an essential element in reaching divine unity, in the following sections I will examine in detail Ibn ‘Ajība’s understanding of the theory of the Unity of Being and its integral relation to divine love. But in order to understand how influential and original Ibn ‘Ajība’s work is, and to gain a deeper understanding of his integration of the concept of the Unity of Being in his esoteric commentary, it is important to conduct a comparative analysis of his writing to the Qur’ānic commentaries of al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān. These scholars are two of the most heavily quoted exegetes in Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric commentary, as we have seen in previous chapters, and the comparative analysis, discussed in more detail in the next section, will be extremely helpful in illuminating Ibn ‘Ajība’s own views on divine love and unity.

6.3) Unity Versus Multiplicity of Creation

An interesting introduction to the concept of the Unity of Being is found in Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the separate letters (*al-hurūf al-muqatta‘a*) at the beginning of *al-Baqara*, (*alif, lām, mīm*).⁹⁵⁹ Here he articulates the relationship between the three worlds of Power, Sovereignty, and Dominion (*jabarūt, mulk, malakūt*) which are referred to throughout his esoteric commentary:

The apparent meaning is that these three letters refer to the three worlds (i.e. Power, Dominion, Sovereignty). The letter *alif* refers to the Unity of the divine Essence (*waḥdat al-dhāt*) in the World of Power (*jabarūt*), the letter *lām* refers to the manifestation of its (i.e. the Divine Essence’s) secrets in the World of Dominion (*malakūt*), the letter *mīm* refers to the flowing of its (i.e. the Divine Essence’s) effects in the World of Mercy (*raḥamūt*), the letter *ṣād* refers to the manifestation of its (i.e. the Divine Essence’s) power in the World of Sovereignty (*mulk*). Each letter indicates the effective manifestation of the Divine Essence on the visible world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*). Thus the letter *alif* indicates the flowing of unity into ephemeral contingent forms, the letter *lām* alludes to the streaming light of Dominion (*malakūt*) which stems from the Sea of Power (*jabarūt*), and the letter *mīm* symbolizes the King’s control of the World of Sovereignty (*mulk*). It is

⁹⁵⁹ Qur’ān: al-Baqara (2:1).

as if God Almighty is saying: “O Muḥammad, this book which you recite is floating from the sea of Power (*jabarūt*) to the World of Dominion (*malakūt*) and from the world of Dominion (*malakūt*) to the World of Mercy (*raḥamūt*), and is then sent down by the Holy Spirit to the World of Sovereignty and Witness, so there should be no doubt about it”.⁹⁶⁰

والأظهر أنها حروف تشير للعوالم الثلاثة، فالألف لوحدة الذات في عالم الجبروت، واللام لظهور أسرارها في عالم الملكوت، والميم لسريان أمدادها في عالم الرحموت، والصاد لظهور تصرفها في عالم الملك، وكل حرف من هذه الرموز يدل على ظهور أثر الذات في عالم الشهادة، فالألف يشير إلى سريان الوحدة في مظاهر الأكوان، واللام: يشير إلى فيضان أنوار الملكوت من بحر الجبروت، والميم يشير إلى تصرف الملك في عالم الملك، وكأن الحق تعالى يقول: هذا الكتاب الذى تتلو يا محمد- هو فائض من بحر الجبروت إلى عالم الملكوت، ومن عالم الملكوت إلى الرحموت، ثم نزل به الروح الأمين إلى عالم الملك والشهادة، فلا ينبغي أن يرتاب فيه.

This passage reveals Ibn ‘Ajība’s concept of the Unity of Being as manifested in the unity of the divine Essence with all its various divine Attributes reflected in all created beings and in the existence of the universe with its transient forms.

Ibn ‘Ajība further elaborates on God’s Unity of Being in his commentary on the verse:

And they say, “God has taken to Him a son. Glory be to Him! Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; all obey His will -- the Creator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees a thing, He but says to it ‘Be,’ and it is.”⁹⁶¹

In his interpretation, Ibn ‘Ajība referred to an insight (*baṣīra*) which perceives the whole universe with all its created forms as one consolidated entity (*dhātan wāḥida*), the forms of which have the same equal relationship to God, so all beings manifest the light of God’s wisdom (*ḥikma*) while concealing the inner secrets of God’s power (*qudra*). In other words, it can be understood that the outer shell of the universe is a manifestation of servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*), whereas its inner core contains the secrets of the meaning of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*). To further support this opinion, Ibn ‘Ajība quoted Ibn ‘Arabī’s reference to the Unity of Being:

⁹⁶⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 72.

⁹⁶¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Baqara* (2:116-117).

Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Ḥātimī states: “whoever realizes that the created beings do not perform any actions, he has succeeded, and whoever sees that they have no life, then he has passed (the hurdles of created beings), and whoever looks at them with eyes of non-existence, then he has reached (a full understanding of the Unity of Being)”.⁹⁶²

قال محي الدين الحاتمي: من رأى الخلق لا فعل لهم فقد فاز، ومن رآهم لا حياة لهم فقد جاز،
ومن رآهم بعين العدم فقد وصل.

Ibn ‘Ajība followed this with his own comment: “and whoever recognizes the created beings through God, then he is utterly connected (to God).”⁹⁶³ This comment indicates that seeing the diversity of created beings through divine unity is the path that leads to union with God and divine love.

Examining the exegesis of this verse (2:116-117) in al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s esoteric commentaries illustrates that in a single sentence al-Qushayrī stated that all created beings are proof of God’s unity.⁹⁶⁴ Rūzbihān briefly touched upon the concept of the Unity of Being when he explained that God covers the heavens and the earth with the light of His majesty to comfort the hearts of His lovers, thus allowing them to witness the Creator in created forms.⁹⁶⁵

In a similar vein, Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes that one should regard created beings as a mirror reflecting divine theophanies. In his commentary on this verse:

And God hath given you, of that which He hath created, shelter (shadow) from the sun; and hath given you places of refuge (caves) in the mountains, and hath given you coats (shields) to ward off the heat from you, and coats (of armour) to save you from your own foolhardiness. Thus doth He perfect His favour unto you, in order that ye may surrender (unto Him).⁹⁶⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība states that created beings are no more than shadows that have no real existence save through God. The reason for the creation of diversity in the universe with all its multiple forms and various colors is so the aspirant may enjoy witnessing the divine

⁹⁶² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 158.

⁹⁶³ Ibid, see also Mahmut Ay, p. 412. “قلت: ومن أثبتهم بالله فقد تمكن وصاله”

⁹⁶⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007), 2nd ed., vol.1, p. 64.

⁹⁶⁵ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008), 1st ed., vol. 1, p. 59.

⁹⁶⁶ Qur’ān, trans. Pickthal, al-Naḥl (16:81).

light of the Creator shining within them.⁹⁶⁷ We find the same meaning was also expressed by ‘Irāqī in verse,

His loveliness owns
 a hundred thousand faces;
 gaze upon a different fair one
 in every atom;
 for He needs must show
 to every separate mote
 a different aspect
 of His Beauty.
 “One” is the fountainhead
 of all numbers:
 each split second wells up
 a new perplexity.⁹⁶⁸

Later on in his esoteric interpretation of this verse (16:81), Ibn ‘Ajība also maintained a balance between multiplicity and unity, that is, between keeping an outer eye to comply with the rules of the *sharī‘a*, while the inner eye, he believed, can witness spiritual realities (*ḥaqīqa*). He alluded to the light of the intellect, that is the *sharī‘a*, as a “mountain” which acts as a “refuge” sought by the aspirant for protection from the overwhelming divine lights encountered, which may then lead to a state of bewilderment. In other words, the *sharī‘a* is thought of as a protective shield blocking the heat of divine realities. By the same token, Ibn ‘Ajība maintained that the divine truth (*ḥaqīqa*) is also a “shield” which preserves the aspirant from feeling the ailments and afflictions of Providence and suffering the decrees of destined misfortunes, because whoever truly is immersed in witnessing God finds himself at ease with the trials resulting from divine decrees, whether good or ill.⁹⁶⁹ Here we see Ibn ‘Ajība’s intention of creating harmony between both the *sharī‘a* which keeps the mind protected from being overwhelmed by the divine realities presented, and the *ḥaqīqa* which makes the heart intact and at peace with the calamities of Providence, being immersed in witnessing God and thus not feeling

⁹⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 154. For further examples see also: Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 421, 422.

⁹⁶⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama ‘āt*, trans by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 81.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 154. For further examples see also: Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, pp. 421, 422.

any suffering from the adversities. In both al-Qushayrī's⁹⁷⁰ and Rūzbihān's⁹⁷¹ interpretations of the same verse, the concept of the unity of being was not highlighted and the insubstantial existence of the universe with all its created beings not alluded to.

Ibn 'Ajība cited Prophet Abraham as an example to teach us how to see behind the multiplicity of contingent forms so as to perceive the divine unity and the subtle meanings behind those forms. In his interpretation of the verses:

“So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith. When night outspread over him he saw a star and said, “This is my Lord.” But when it set he said, “I love not the setters.” When he saw the moon rising, he said, “This is my Lord.” But when it set he said, “If my Lord does not guide me I shall surely be of the people gone astray.” When he saw the sun rising, he said, “This is my Lord; this is greater!” But when it set he said, “O my people, surely I am quit of that you associate. I have turned my face to Him who originated the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith; I am not of the idolaters”.⁹⁷²

Ibn 'Ajība elaborated that Abraham's statement that he “love[s] not the setters” (that is, everything: sun, moon, the stars, etc..) that perishes, was said out of fear of remaining tangled within the outer forms of creation without perceiving their subtle meanings that reflect the divine realities. Ibn 'Ajība noted as well that the outer forms of creation are considered as vessels or containers and the divine realities are seen as an overflowing sea which fills up these vessels. Although the state of the flowing sea of divine realities remains unchangeable regardless of the vessel containing it, the vessels, that is the outer forms of created beings – the state of the sun, the moon and the stars – themselves are in a state of flux and movement. Therefore, Ibn 'Ajība draws the reader's attention to the importance of not paying much heed to the ephemeral existence of created

⁹⁷⁰Al-Qushayrī alluded to the shadows as the shadows of divine care that protect gnostics both in good times and bad. He also interpreted the protective shield as one that kept the gnostic from committing acts of disobedience. In addition, he observed that the garments that people wear for protection allude to proximity, and promote union with God, thus bringing the gnostic closer to his Lord. See al-Qushayrī, *Latā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 166.

⁹⁷¹ Rūzbihān's commentary on the same verse alluded to the shadows as being those gnostics in whom aspirants seek refuge against actions of evil doing and injustice. He also interpreted the caves of the mountains to be the heartland of His elite gnostics in which those who disassociate themselves from people and dedicate themselves to worship reside. In addition, Rūzbihān considered gnosis and love as protective shields that protect the gnostics in their battle against Satan and their lower self. Finally, he stated that the utmost divine blessing upon the gnostics is divine care which allows them to remain in a state of proximity to God. See Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 329-330.

⁹⁷² Qur'ān, Arberry, al-An'ām (6:75-79).

beings, but to rather shift our focus to the divine realities within them so as to be able to witness God in all the manifest forms of creation. That being said, Ibn ‘Ajība quoted another esoteric interpretation in which Abraham initially looked at the stars, the sun, and the moon with his optical eyesight (*baṣar*) that blocked him from seeing the subtler divine meanings behind them. Then he was directed to perceive them with his spiritual insight (*baṣīra*) and only then he was able to see the multiplicity of creation through the lens of divine oneness (*aḥadiyya*).⁹⁷³

Mahmut Ay commented on Ibn ‘Ajība’s two commentaries on this verse and suggested that they seem contradictory. One, he believed, referred to Abraham’s immediate recognition of God in all things, whereas the other indicated that recognition of the separate existence of the stars, the moon, and the sun, which directed him to turn to the sublime meanings in them in order to reach divine unity.⁹⁷⁴ In al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of the same verse, he spoke of the gradual unveiling of divine realities to Abraham, beginning with the stars, the moon, and finally the sun. The stars allude to the ‘intellect’ (*‘aql*), with which he began to witness the divine lights through the light of rational proofs and reasoning. Then, with the increase of divine illumination, the moon of ‘knowledge’ (*‘ilm*) appeared, which brought Abraham in closer proximity to divine realities. Finally, the sun of ‘gnosis’ (*‘irfān*) shone in Abraham’s heart and washed away witnessing anything save God. At this stage, the multiple transient forms of beings were seen by Abraham with the eyes of divine unity.⁹⁷⁵ Rūzbihān also adopted a similar gradual approach to the understanding of divine realities unveiled before Abraham, associating the stars, the moon, and the sun with the lights of divine Actions, Attributes and Essence, respectively. He added that once Abraham had been exposed to the lights of the divine Essence, the ephemeral existence of all beings was annihilated before the grandiosity of divine primordially (*jalāl al-qidam*).⁹⁷⁶

In his commentary on the verse, “The eyes attain Him not, but He attains the eyes; He is the All-subtle, the All-aware”,⁹⁷⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība elaborates on how one should identify Oneness in multiplicity and how to realize divine Unity within plurality. He stated that God manifests Himself in opposites, such as subtle spiritual meanings vs. rigid physical forms, or the unrestricted power of Lordship vs. the shackles of servanthood. He

⁹⁷³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 137. See also: Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 421

⁹⁷⁴ Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 421.

⁹⁷⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, (Cairo: al-Hay’at al-Miṣriyya li’l-Kitāb, 2000), 3rd ed., vol.1, p. 301.

⁹⁷⁶ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 376, 377.

⁹⁷⁷ Qur’ān, Arberry, al-An‘ām (6:103).

articulated that God manifests Himself in both the vessels of created beings, which are containers for abstract meanings, and within the secrets of inner meanings equally, so that while the optical eyesight (*baṣar*) is the means whereby ephemeral existent beings and transient images are seen, subtle meanings and spiritual realities are perceived through insight (*baṣīra*). Once the novice witnesses the inner realities, his eyesight ceases to act as a veil that blocks him from perceiving the beauty of subtle meanings. This leads to a state of self-annihilation wherein the witnessing of outer forms is eliminated due to the gnostic being submerged in contemplating their secret spiritual meanings. Only then will the gnostic be able to witness God through God, since his eyes are no longer led to perceive anything except these inner realities.⁹⁷⁸

Rūzbihān's interpretation of this verse elaborated that the aspirant's insight witnesses God only through immersion in the lights of the divine Attributes. Therefore, God illuminates the aspirant with the lights of His Attributes in order to allow him to witness divine realities.⁹⁷⁹ Rūzbihān added further that the gnostic's mystical experience is in a constant state of fluctuation between annihilation and subsistence: "Annihilation (*fanā'*) is the annihilation of existence in the essence of Unity, the annihilation of creaturehood in Lordship and the annihilation of humanity in taking on the Qualities of God. As for Subsistence, it is the Subsistence of the Spirit in witnessing without disturbance, the Subsistence of the innermost conscience in Unity, and the Subsistence of creaturehood with the departure of the animal soul."⁹⁸⁰

In conclusion, throughout this section we have seen how Ibn 'Ajība in explaining his concept of perceiving multiplicity of created beings through the lens of divine Unity was persistent in maintaining a balance between outer transient forms of creation which operate in the world of *ḥikma* and reveal the state of servanthood of the human condition (*bashariyya*), and the inner realities manifested within these outer forms which reveal divine Unity and Lordship in the world of *qudra*. Ibn 'Ajība also, unlike both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān, alluded to the ephemeral existent beings and how they operate according to the rules of the *Sharī'a*, whereas the inner reality manifested in them indicates that all actions are solely performed by God with no contribution from human beings in accordance with the *ḥaqīqa*. Therefore, those who understand this reality find their heart at ease with whatever calamities befall them as their eyes are fixed upon the Doer and not

⁹⁷⁸ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 153.

⁹⁷⁹ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 388, 389.

⁹⁸⁰ Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, pp. 34, 35.

the actions done. Such views were not emphasized by both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān as they only mentioned the gradual revelation of the unity of being in their commentaries (particularly on the story of Abraham) without addressing any of the above-mentioned concepts related to the theory of the Unity of Being.

6.4) Unity of Being and the Insubstantial Nature of the Universe

Another essential aspect of Ibn ‘Ajība’s theory of the Unity of Being is the insubstantial nature of the universe and how its transient existence is created by God in order for us to realize the everlasting existence of the true Being vis-à-vis contemplation of the ephemeral forms of creation. Ibn ‘Ajība compares the insubstantial existence of the universe to a kind of magic trick. In his commentary on this verse which refers to magic performed by the Pharaoh’s magicians: “Then, when they had cast, Moses said, ‘What you have brought is sorcery; God will assuredly bring it to naught. God sets not right the work of those who do corruption’,”⁹⁸¹ he explained that for gnostics the universe with all its beings is nothing more than a sleight of hand—something lacking substance—explaining this as follows:⁹⁸²

The universe is more like a shadow, and shadows do not have an independent existence by themselves, but rather act as followers of the bodies of created beings. That is why they said, “the shadows of trees do not prevent the ship from sailing”. By the same token, the shadows of the universe and its created beings do not prevent the ships of ideas from sailing into the seas of the secret meanings. The ships of ideas rather become absent from witnessing the shadows of the forms, as they delve into the realm of witnessing the inner meanings. Thus, nothing conceals the gnostic from God, as his perceptive sight enables him to witness the secrets of Lordship in everything.⁹⁸³

الكون أشبه بالظلال، والظلال لا وجود لها من ذاتها، وإنما تابعة لشواخصها، ولذلك قالوا: ظلال الأشجار لا تعوق السفن عن التسيار، فظلال الأكوان وأجرامها لا تعوق سفن الأفكار عن التسيار في بحار معانى الأسرار، بل تغيب عن ظلال حسها إلى فضاء شهود معانيها، فالعارف لا يحجبه عن الله شيء، لنفوذته إلى شهود أسرار الربوبية في كل شيء.

⁹⁸¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Yunus (10:81).

⁹⁸² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 491. Al-Qushayrī’s commentary does not mention the concept of the Unity of Being. See: Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, pp. 26, 27. Rūzbihān did not comment on this verse. See: Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 96.

⁹⁸³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, pp. 491, 492.

Realizing the ephemeral nature of the universe is an essential pre-requisite, according to Ibn ‘Ajība, for divine love to achieve its full *potential* in the heart of the gnostic and for divine Unity to be reached. Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes this in his commentary on the verse:

And they that know not say, “Why does God not speak to us? Why does a sign not come to us?” So spoke those before them as these men say: their hearts are much alike. Yet We have made clear the signs unto a people who are sure.⁹⁸⁴

Here, Ibn ‘Ajība observed that whoever sees the universe with eyes of special Oneness (*al-tawḥīd al-khāṣṣ*) will not see anything save God, and so ceases to notice the independent existence of created beings. In other words, he will finally realize the insubstantial nature of all created beings, seeing them as subsistent solely through God, or more accurately, that they have no existence at all vis-a-vis God. Once a gnostic reaches such realization, God purifies his heart in order for him to hear only from God and to listen only through God. This kind of gnostic is one who says, “I speak through God and I hear from Him”. Here, Ibn ‘Ajība quoted al-Junayd as an example of such a perception of God’s Oneness: “I have been conversing with God for forty years, and people think that I am conversing with them”.⁹⁸⁵ Therefore, he concludes that while God speaks to His created beings all the time, only gnostics are capable of hearing God directly.

Al-Qushayrī’s commentary on the same verse (2:118) does not address the doctrine of the Unity of Being.⁹⁸⁶ As with Rūzbihān’s commentary on the same verse, he discussed how hearts that are misled and astray are not ready to witness God through the medium of created beings, let alone see Him directly.⁹⁸⁷ In contrast, Ibn ‘Ajība was clear about the importance of recognizing God’s Oneness as the prerequisite to perceiving God’s Existence behind created forms, and that this understanding will lead the heart to direct contact with God with no outside medium.

Ibn ‘Ajība’s advocacy of the doctrine of the Unity of Being is again reiterated in his commentary on this verse: “To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God; God is All-embracing, All-knowing”.⁹⁸⁸ In his

⁹⁸⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara, (2:118).

⁹⁸⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 159, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 414.

⁹⁸⁶ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 64.

⁹⁸⁷ al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 59.

⁹⁸⁸ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:115).

interpretation, Ibn ‘Ajība emphasized that all directions and dimensions along with all created beings subsist solely through the lights of the divine Attributes, yet they are snuffed out before contemplation of the lights of the Oneness of the Divine Essence (*aḥadiyyat al-dhāt*). He wrote: “There was God and nothing was with Him, and His state now has always been like it was”.⁹⁸⁹ He quoted Shaykh Abū Madyan to illustrate this:

Everything save God in reality is naught—both part and whole.
Whoever has no essential existence of his own from his own self,
Without God it is impossible that he should exist.⁹⁹⁰

عدم على التفصيل والإجمال	فالكل دون الله إن حقيقته
فوجوده لولاه عين محال	من لا وجود لذاته من ذاته

Ibn ‘Ajība here suggests that the only way to properly regard transient beings is, while admitting their existence, regard their reliance and dependence upon God. This will lead to a comprehensive understanding of divine Unity once the gnostic realizes that beings do not have any existence save through God.⁹⁹¹

Turning to al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s esoteric commentaries on the same verse (2:115), al-Qushayrī discussed how the heart falls into a state of bewilderment and annihilation from self once the sun of the Divine Attributes shines on it, a state that makes the gnostic subsistent through God.⁹⁹² Rūzbihān refers directly to the corollaries of the Unity of Being when he cites the example of Prophet Abraham who immediately recognized the Creator in the manifested forms of the universe.⁹⁹³ In my opinion Ibn ‘Ajība’s originality here lies in his underlining the transformation from witnessing the independent existence of transient forms to only seeing the sole existence of God behind those forms so that divine love might dwell in the heart of the gnostic—an issue much less clearly explained by the other two exegetes.

The importance of realizing the insubstantial existence of the universe with all its created forms is also reiterated by Ibn ‘Ajība in his interpretation of the verse:

⁹⁸⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 155, "كان الله ولا شئى معه وهو الآن على ما عليه كان"

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 156.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 158, 159.

⁹⁹² Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 63.

⁹⁹³ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 59.

To God belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and of the earth; and God is powerful over everything. Surely in the creation of the heavens and earth and in the alternation of night and day there are signs for men possessed of minds who remember God, standing and sitting and on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord, Thou hast not created this for vanity. Glory be to Thee! Guard us against the chastisement of the Fire.⁹⁹⁴

Here Ibn ‘Ajība comments that although the creation of the heavens and the earth is according to the divine purpose, everything save God in creation is a sheer mirage as it lacks independent existence. A spiritually balanced outlook on creation should perceive existence as subsistent solely through God.⁹⁹⁵ Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on this verse added that whoever looks at creation through God, will not recognize that it has any independent existence outside God. Conversely, anyone who perceives God solely through the lens of creation has gone astray as he has failed to recognize the true meaning of God’s Oneness.⁹⁹⁶

After establishing the insubstantial nature of transient beings, Ibn ‘Ajība further develops this concept by explaining the sublime origin of the contingent forms of the universe. Commenting on this verse: “Say: ‘Behold what is in the heavens and in the earth!’ But neither signs nor warnings avail a people who do not believe”,⁹⁹⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība explains that the transient forms of “what is in the heavens and in the earth” act as vessels or containers (*awānī*) for sublime meanings (*ma‘ānī*) and these forms are in essence meanings (*ma‘ānī*) in themselves, albeit transformed into tangible (*taḥassasat*) and congealed (*takaththafat*) forms. The gnostics are those who can dissolve and ‘soften’ these congealed forms and reconvert them back to their original sublime meaning. It is only then that forms themselves cease to exist and the whole universe becomes a mirror of spiritual realities reflecting Divine Unity. This idea is reiterated by Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh when he stated that God allowed us to look at the transient form, without engaging with it,

⁹⁹⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Āl-‘Imrān (3:190-191).

⁹⁹⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 453.

⁹⁹⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, pp. 188, 189.

⁹⁹⁷ Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Yunus (10:101), this is similār to his commentary on Qur’ān, (6:103) discussed on page 267.

indulging in it or becoming distracted by it.⁹⁹⁸ At this point Ibn ‘Ajība quotes this verse by Ibn al-Fāriḍ:⁹⁹⁹

The sublimity of vessels (transient forms) is – in fact – a result of the sublimity of the meanings (spiritual realities hidden in the transient forms) and due to meanings (spiritual realities), they (the vessels) are softened (and transformed into a sublime condition).

ولطف الأواني-في الحقيقة- تابع للطف المعانى، والمعانى بها تسمو¹⁰⁰⁰

Comparing Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on verse 10:101 to al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s, it is observable that al-Qushayrī did not provide a mystical commentary on the verse¹⁰⁰¹ whereas Rūzbihān stated the importance of cutting through the surface of created forms to witness the Creator.¹⁰⁰² However, unlike Ibn ‘Ajība, Rūzbihān did not refer to the sublime origin of created forms and how they can be softened into spiritual realities in order for divine love to fully manifest in one’s heart.

After establishing the importance of witnessing the insubstantial nature of created beings with eyes of Unity, Ibn ‘Ajība touched on the reasons for the imprisonment of the spirit in the illusionary world of forms. This is elaborated in his interpretation of the story of Moses and the Israelites, who after being saved by God from persecution by Pharaoh, asked Moses for an idol to worship:

And We brought the Children of Israel over the sea, and they came upon a people cleaving to idols they had. They said, “Moses, make for us a god, as they have gods.” Said he, “You are surely a people who are ignorant”.¹⁰⁰³

Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on this verse discusses the underlying reasons which leads the spirit to fall into polytheism by observing the transient nature of beings rather than witnessing God’s Oneness behind those beings. He explains that if the spirit is not

⁹⁹⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 501 قال ابن عطاء الله "أباح لك أن تنظر ما في المكونات، وما أباح لك أن تقف مع 501. "He has permitted you to reflect on what is in created beings, but He has not allowed you to stop at the selfsame creatures. "Say: Behold what is in the heavens and the earth (10:101)" Thus, with His words "Behold what is in the heavens" He opened up the door of instruction for you. But He did not say, "Behold the heavens," so as not to lead you to the mere existence of bodies". See Victor Danner, *Ibn ‘Atā’illāh’s Sufī Aphorisms*, p. 44. See also Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, p. 321.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 501.

¹⁰⁰⁰ ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p. 142, this verse is part of the poem “*sharibnā ‘alā dhikr al-ḥabīb*” (‘We Drank in the Memory of the Beloved’).

¹⁰⁰¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰² Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 101.

¹⁰⁰³ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-A‘rāf (7:138).

drawn toward the beauty of spiritual realities and subtle meanings of the divine Essence, it turns to find comfort in the sensual beauty of ephemeral beings. Therefore, the longing of the heart for anything except God is seen as polytheism by Sufi gnostics, and by extension, purifying the heart from attraction to anything save God prepares the spirit for immersion in the sea of Oneness.¹⁰⁰⁴

Unlike Ibn ‘Ajība, al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s exegesis of this verse does not discuss the nature of the spirit nor tackle the reasons for its attraction to contingent forms. Al-Qushayrī explains that the degree of divine Oneness that one can reach is directly related to the degree of sincerity of the heart in seeking divine Unity. Thus, the yearning of the spirit to worship anything other than God is a sign of the spirit being trapped in the shackles of transient forms.¹⁰⁰⁵ On the other hand, Rūzbihān briefly discusses the eminent status of human beings as God’s vicegerents versus the subordinate status of animals.¹⁰⁰⁶ Reaching the state of total absence from created beings, and consequently, the witnessing of the insubstantial nature of intermediaries, requires a perceptive insight that can see God directly without intermediaries. In Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the verse:

Muḥammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? If any man should turn about on his heels, he will not harm God in any way; and God will recompense the thankful.¹⁰⁰⁷

He explains that reaching a stage of witnessing God as the sole Doer of all things enables the gnostic to leave all intermediaries behind. Witnessing mediums, in Ibn ‘Ajība’s perspective, is compared to observing bounties without paying heed to the Grantor of those bounties, which becomes a veil blocking the gnostic from witnessing God. Therefore, the truly thankful gnostic is one who passes beyond witnessing the blessings granted and bounties bestowed and moves directly towards the source of those graces. Ibn ‘Ajība here cites an example of how people reacted towards Prophet Muḥammad’s death. Most people who heard the news of the Prophet’s death were astonished, being submerged in the blessings of the Prophet’s presence without witnessing the Grantor of this blessing: God. This state was prevalent among the Prophet’s companions with the exception of Abū Bakr who had passed beyond

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 254.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, pp. 350-351.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.1, p. 458.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Āl-‘Imrān (3:144).

intermediaries and had witnessed God. Thus he made his famous statement which was mentioned earlier.¹⁰⁰⁸ By the same token, Ibn ‘Ajība added that being attached to one’s shaykh and being unable to pass beyond him is a veil which blocks the aspirant from witnessing God. In this context he cites a Sufi story in which a novice was crying very hard. A gnostic inquired why and the novice answered that his shaykh died. The gnostic replied: “and why did you make your teacher die; why don’t you make him alive and never die?”¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība thus commented that the real shaykh is the one who makes students pass beyond witnessing mediums to directly perceiving none other than God.¹⁰¹⁰

To further elaborate on the essentiality of bypassing intermediaries in order to attain a real understanding of the Unity of Being, Ibn ‘Ajība draws a comparison between the state of the spirit before and after attainment of the divine vision in the context of his interpretation of the verse: “But if they separate, God will enrich each of them of His plenty; God is All-embracing, All-wise”.¹⁰¹¹

This verse tackles the issue of separation and divorce of spouses and how God will comfort and compensate both parties with more compatible life partners to sort out their affairs in His infinite generosity and perfect power. In his commentary Ibn ‘Ajība states that as long as the spirit is imprisoned within the lowly terrestrial nature of the human condition (*bashariyya*), it will be barred from witnessing the divine realities and will continue to yearn for created forms and their ephemeral existence. But once the spirit is ‘divorced’ and released from the shackles of contingent forms it will encounter the spacious world of divine witnessing where God suffices the spirit with a vision of His own Essence. Thus, the spirit no longer pays any heed to the transient forms.¹⁰¹²

Turning to al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of the same verse, he comments that all beings in reality are only in dire need of God, a fact which makes the need for any other beings a mere illusion.¹⁰¹³ Unlike Ibn ‘Ajība, al-Qushayrī does not discuss the nature of the spirit as an ardent lover (*‘āshiqā*) and how, if not guided to seek spiritual realities, it will yearn for contingent forms. He also did not mention how the spirit should be liberated

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 416. The same meaning was reiterated by al-Qushayrī. See: al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 174 and Rūzbihān, see Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 201.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 416.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Nisā’ (4:130).

¹⁰¹² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, pp. 570, 571.

¹⁰¹³ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 230.

from paying heed to transient beings in order to immerse itself in witnessing God. Rūzbihān did not comment on this verse at all.¹⁰¹⁴

Ibn ‘Ajība explained the transformational process of the novice as he reaches the stage of the Unity of Being, no longer lingering in the shackles of confinement to his insubstantial existence, in his commentary on this verse:

With Him are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. Not a grain in the earth's shadows, not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is in a Book Manifest.¹⁰¹⁵

Ibn ‘Ajība here commented that the keys of the Unseen (*ghayb*) are the secrets of the divine Essence and the lights of the divine Attributes known only to God. He added that so long as the novice is struggling and bound by the terrestrial bonds of existence, he will be unable to taste any of these unseen realities. The transformational point comes when God wills the heart of His devotee to be opened in order to taste some of these divine realities. It is only then that God's Attributes may prevail over the devotee's, such that the devotee becomes absent from his own existence. At that point God becomes the devotee's hearing, sight, heart, and soul and the devotee begins to be aware of the divine realities by God, not of himself. This means that these divine secrets in reality are unknown to anyone save God, and at this point the servant will realize the secrets of all things in land and sea and become God's vicegerent on earth.¹⁰¹⁶

Al-Qushayrī's interpretation of the same verse did not address the question of how the devotee can gain access to higher realities and spiritual secrets, the keys of which belong solely to God.¹⁰¹⁷ In contrast, Rūzbihān emphasized that, in reality, no one knows God's Essence and Attributes save He. He added that "the keys of the Unseen" allude to the lights of eternal divine grace through which the gates of the mysteries of the divine Essence and Attributes are opened to elect devotees.¹⁰¹⁸ Here, although Ibn ‘Ajība has evidently reiterated part of Rūzbihān's understanding of the nature of the divine Essence and Attributes, he also has addressed the issue of the necessity of purification of the spirit in preparation for becoming a locus for divine realities.

¹⁰¹⁴ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 282.

¹⁰¹⁵ Qur’ān, Arberry, Al-An‘ām (6:59).

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 127.

¹⁰¹⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 298.

¹⁰¹⁸ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 368.

At this juncture it is important to note that one might get the impression that once God's divine Attributes dominate over the servant's, the latter no longer possesses a self which abides by servanthood and which can be described as flawed. In his commentary, Ibn 'Ajība provided a different interpretation of the state of the gnostic that contradicts such an assumption. Citing the verse in which God addresses Prophet Muḥammad to keep reminding people to contemplate the Qur'ān: "lest a soul should be given up to destruction for what it has earned; apart from God, it has no protector and no intercessor; though it offer any equivalent, it shall not be taken from it..."¹⁰¹⁹ —Ibn 'Ajība explains that the gnostic should not give up reminding aspirants to purify their spirit, regardless of the high degree of their spiritual purity and their level of advancement on the Sufi Path, because the spirit is always defiled by sins. He added that the perfect gnostic is the one who maintains a balance between annihilating himself through witnessing God and perishing before His mighty Being (which is a state known as Unity or *jam*'), and the state of Separation (*farq*) where the gnostic realizes his own existence is full of flaws and shortcomings. Therefore, the perfect gnostic is the one whose absence from himself, due to the majesty of being immersed in God, does not prevent him from seeing the flaws and pitfalls of his human nature. In other words, when the gnostic is in a state of self-annihilation due to being in the divine presence, his perfection is endless, but once he returns to the state of realizing his self-existence, his deficiencies are countless.¹⁰²⁰

Following Ibn 'Ajība's explanation of the Unity of Being and how it is realized outwardly, while preserving the rules of the holy law (*sharī'a*), and inwardly, through witnessing the grandiosity of Lordship, he discusses the qualities of devotees who reach the stage of divine Unity and encounter divine love. One of their attributes is stated in the following verse: "Surely over My servants thou (Satan) shalt have no authority. Thy Lord suffices as a guardian".¹⁰²¹ Being preserved from Satan's incitement is the result of God's selection of the devotee to become among those who belong to Him and enjoy His divine care. Those are the ones who incessantly invoke Him and take refuge in no one but Him due to their submission in worship to God. He in turn prevents them from falling into the

¹⁰¹⁹ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, Al-An'ām (6:70).

¹⁰²⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 133, neither al-Qushayrī nor Rūzbihān made any relevant comments on this verse: see al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 300, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 374.

¹⁰²¹ Qur'ān, Arberry, al-Isrā' (17:65).

traps of Satan.¹⁰²² The same meaning is reiterated by al-Qushayrī, whereas Rūzbihān does not comment at all on this verse.¹⁰²³

Those aspirants who are selected for admission into the divine Presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-qudsiyya*), Ibn ‘Ajība informs us, are able to perceive the illusory nature of created beings, seeing them as a mirage without real existence. They also lose their own sense of self-existence as they are annihilated from themselves and find subsistence in God. This meaning is emphasized in his commentary on the verse: “He knows what is before them and behind them, and they comprehend Him not in knowledge”.¹⁰²⁴ Here, Ibn ‘Ajība argues that although the aspirants are continuously being elevated to higher spiritual states where they encounter divine realities, they find themselves incapable of encompassing God’s Essence or truly apprehending the grandiosity of divine knowledge. Therefore, the process of their elevation to greater spiritual realities is ceaseless both in this world and the next, as God’s mightiness transcends our intellectual realization.¹⁰²⁵ Exactly the same interpretation is given by both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān.¹⁰²⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība underlined the importance of the Unity of Being in the aspirant’s experience of God’s presence in his interpretation of this verse: “Only he shall inhabit God’s places of worship who believes in God and the Last Day, and performs the prayer, and pays the alms, and fears none but God alone; it may be that those will be among the guided”.¹⁰²⁷ One of the main features of the heart that enters the divine Presence, according to Ibn ‘Ajība, is its refusal to rely on secondary causes due to being totally directed towards the Cause of all causes which is the one and only Being. It is thus that the heart is cut off from any distractions caused by secondary causes and it only at this point, when the lights of realities are cast upon the heart, is the mystic permitted to enter the sacred divine precinct.¹⁰²⁸

In al-Qushayrī’s commentary on this verse (9:18), he says nothing about the essentiality of discarding secondary causes and makes criteria of entering the divine precinct solely a matter of the degree of faith of individual devotees.¹⁰²⁹ Unlike al-Qushayrī and Ibn ‘Ajība, Rūzbihān alluded to the mosque as the gathering place of the

¹⁰²² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 215.

¹⁰²³ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, pp. 194-195, Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 369.

¹⁰²⁴ Qur’ān, Arberry, Ṭaha (20:110).

¹⁰²⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, pp. 421, 422.

¹⁰²⁶ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 275, Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 502-503.

¹⁰²⁷ Qur’ān, Arberry, al-Tawba (9:18).

¹⁰²⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, pp. 366, 367.

¹⁰²⁹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 412.

gnostics and the lovers, and not as the divine precinct. He also listed some main attributes of those who are allowed to join the gnostics in their gatherings, one of which is purifying the heart from all else save God, while having sincerity of intention.¹⁰³⁰

The state that is needed, according to Ibn ‘Ajība, for the gnostic to become eligible to enter the divine precinct where he can witness the lights of divine beauty and majesty is that he must have a complete disregard for the transient existence of the world’s sensible forms. This is reiterated in his commentary on the following verse about the Day of Judgment:

And they shall be presented before their Lord in ranks—“You have come to Us, as We created you upon the first time; nay, you asserted We should not appoint for you a tryst.” And the Book shall be set in place; and thou wilt see the sinners fearful at what is in it, and saying, “Alas for us! How is it with this Book, that it leaves nothing behind, small or great, but it has numbered it?” And they shall find all they wrought present, and thy Lord shall not wrong anyone.¹⁰³¹

Reflecting on this verse which concerns events in the life hereafter, Ibn ‘Ajība makes an argument for the possibility of witnessing God in this world, thus contradicting those who claim that encountering God is only possible in the hereafter. In fact, whoever disregards the sensual world and ceases paying attention to his own self-existence reaches a state of self-annihilation where he becomes subsistent in God and thus becomes eligible to enjoy contemplation of Him. The gnostic who reaches this state will no longer be held accountable on the Day of Judgment because he did not pay any regard to his own self-existence nor acknowledge any independent capacity to perform actions, having apprehended that no one has power to perform any acts but God. Conversely, on the Day of Judgment, those who will be brought to account are those who failed to regard the multiplicity of created beings through the lens of divine Unity and who beheld the universe as having a substantial existence in itself apart from God.¹⁰³² Unlike Ibn ‘Ajība, al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s interpretations of only this verse referred to the possibility of encountering God on the Day of Judgment without reference to its possibility in this world.¹⁰³³

¹⁰³⁰ Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 6.

¹⁰³¹ Qur’ān, Arberry, al-Kahf (18:48-49).

¹⁰³² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 278.

¹⁰³³ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 222, Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 426-427.

In conclusion, throughout this section I have repeatedly underlined how Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes the importance of looking beyond sensible existence so as to realize that the only real existence belongs to God alone, and how he considered the existence of transient beings only as granted to us on loan from the Real Being. That being said, the insubstantial existence of the universe and its multiplicity and how that should be seen through the lens of divine Unity may lead to a misunderstanding where one can mix the idea of perceiving unity in multiplicity with the heretical concepts of ‘Incarnationism’ and ‘Unification’. This is the subject of our discussion in the next section.

6.5) Unity of Being Versus Incarnationism and Unification

Being aware that the concept of the Unity of Being might be falsely associated with the heresies of incarnationism and unification (*ḥulūl wa ittihād*), Ibn ‘Ajība resolved the paradox of this doctrine—by which God reveals Himself in everything yet remains disassociated from all things—through his commentary on the following verse:

And when My servants question thee concerning Me—I am near to answer the call of the caller when he calls to Me; so let them respond to Me, and let them believe in Me; happily so they will go aright.¹⁰³⁴

Here he explains that the proximity of God to His devotees is similar to the closeness of the spiritual meanings (*ma ‘ānī*) to sensible forms (*maḥsūsāt*), or the nearness of attributes (*ṣifāt*) to the self (*dhāt*). But this interpretation only holds true as long as the devotee remains aware of his self-existence; once self-annihilation takes place, destination and proximity, separation and detachment vanish.¹⁰³⁵ This meaning was eloquently expressed by ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Mashīsh when he said to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhulī: “sharpen the sight of faith and you will find God in everything, at everything, with everything, before everything, after everything, close to everything, surrounding everything ...”.¹⁰³⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība added that although God transcends being contained in a specific place or confined in a distinct shape, due to His plasticity He flows in everything, and due to His illumination He becomes apparent in all things, and due to His non-confinement in anything, He encompasses all things.¹⁰³⁷ Ibn ‘Ajība composed these

¹⁰³⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2: 186).

¹⁰³⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 214.

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid, p. 214.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur’an’ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 418.

verses to refute the heresies of incarnationism and unification vis-à-vis the Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being, which he compares to a coquettish woman:

Her (the Unity of Being's) is beyond being characterized by the quality of 'incarnationism',

For she can't be conditioned by any form and shape.
 She displayed herself like a bride ravishingly beautiful,
 Then concealed herself in majesty under the veil of hauteur;
 For naught in the universe is manifest but her radiant charm
 And she is not veiled save to hearts that are veiled.¹⁰³⁸

تنزهت عن حكم الحلول في وصفها فليس لها في سوى شكله حلت
 تجلت عروسا في مرآي جمالها وأرخت ستور الكبرياء بعزة
 فما ظهر في الكون غير بهائها وما احتجبت إلا لحجب سريرة

These verses describe the transcendence of the Godhead, depicted as the Unity of Being beyond any relation or comparison with creation, although the divine beauty is still revealed through the manifestation and beneath the thin veil of the divine Names in the universe.

Commenting on the same verse (2:186), al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān reiterated that God's proximity is not measured by distance traversed as He transcends being confined by place.¹⁰³⁹ However, both masters, unlike Ibn 'Ajība, did not discuss the issue of proximity and distance in reference to the fact that this issue is only relevant so long as the aspirant is in a state of self-existence. In other words, once the selfhood is annihilated and the devotee subsists in God alone, proximity and distance become irrelevant and the full manifestation of divine love overwhelms the gnostic's heart.

The demarcation line between annihilation in God and incarnationism was elsewhere clearly defined by 'Attār when he said, "Everyone who becomes He is an immersed one (*mustaghriq*). Far be it from you to say he is God. If you become transformed into that which was said, you are not God, but you are continually immersed

¹⁰³⁸ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, p. 157.

¹⁰³⁹ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 90, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 76, 77.

in God. How could an immersed man be a Ḥulūlī?... If you realize whose shadow you are, it makes no difference to you whether you die or live”.¹⁰⁴⁰

Ibn ‘Ajība was determined to defend renowned Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn Sab‘īn, al-Shushtarī, and al-Ḥallāj, among others, against accusations that they were proponents of incarnationism and unification (*ḥulūl wa ittiḥād*). He exonerated them all in his commentary on this verse in particular:

They are unbelievers who say, “God is the Messiah, Mary’s son.” Say: “Who then shall overrule God in any way if He desires to destroy the Messiah, Mary’s son, and his mother, and all those who are on earth?”¹⁰⁴¹

Here, Ibn ‘Ajība referred to some Christian sects who suggested that the divinity of God had been “incarnated” in the humanity of Jesus. Conversely, Ibn ‘Ajība clarified that this was not the belief of Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn Sab‘īn, al-Shushtarī, and al-Ḥallāj whose writings were misunderstood by some due to their attempt to express divine meanings that are, literally speaking, inexplicable. Ibn ‘Ajība added that these gnostics dived into the sea of divine unity where the secrets of sublime realities were revealed to them. There they discovered the secret of divine Unity encompassing and vanquishing all things. This secret meaning is called the eternal wine (*al-khamra al-azaliyya*) which is lofty and sublime in nature and comprises the secrets of the divine Essence and Attributes. When the lights of the divine Essence and Attributes are revealed all of existence becomes unified in divine Unity.¹⁰⁴² Ibn ‘Ajība further elaborated on the characteristics of this eternal wine prior to God’s self-disclosure and manifestation in the world of forms and described it as purely spiritual with no corporeal form, being too sublime to be perceived as it has no visible substantial form. It simply consists of purely intangible meanings and sheer divinity with no room for humanity which is bound down in the figures and forms of creation. Ibn ‘Ajība described the eternal wine as having been poured into receptacles or cups for the gnostics to drink, emphasizing that the divine Essence contained in the eternal wine after being manifested in forms is not subject to change or multiplicity.¹⁰⁴³

¹⁰⁴⁰ Cited by Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ‘Attar*. Translated by John O’Kane and Bernt Radtke. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 609.

¹⁰⁴¹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Mā’ida, (5:17).

¹⁰⁴² Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴³ Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 36-39.

This concept of the Unity of Being differs from incarnationism and unification (*hulūl wa ittihād*) because the divine lights are not a substance might be mixed with, or integrated into, anything. Therefore, the one who experiences the Unity through imbibing the eternal wine is unable to see anything alongside God's being.¹⁰⁴⁴ In this regard, Ibn 'Ajība quoted one of the gnostics: "If I was asked to see anything save God, I would not be able to do it, because there is nothing beside Him for me to witness".¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibn 'Ajība further commented that even if idolaters, who worship something other than God, would worship God in reality were the secrets of the eternal wine ever once revealed to them.¹⁰⁴⁶ In this context, to illustrate his views, he cited Ibn al-Fāriḍ who eloquently elucidated this concept in a verse:¹⁰⁴⁷

They aim only for me,
though they do not show
a firm resolve
as they seek another.¹⁰⁴⁸

فما قصدوا غيري وإن كان قصدهم سواي وإن لم يظهروا عقد نية¹⁰⁴⁹

The same meaning was reiterated by 'Irāqī when he said,

Whether they know Thee or not
all creatures of the world
now and forever without end
bend but toward Thee
All love for someone else is but a whiff
of Thy perfume:
none else can be loved.¹⁰⁵⁰

Comparing Ibn 'Ajība's detailed explanation of the doctrine of the Unity of Being and how it differs from the heresies of incarnationism and unification with al-Qushayrī's and Rūzbihān's commentaries on the last-cited Qur'ānic verse (5:17), the latter did not

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 22. See also Michon, *Ibn 'Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, pp. 21, 22. See also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 426, commenting on the same verse, (5:17), see also Pablo Beneito, "The Servant of the Loving One: On the Adoption of the Character Traits of al-Wadūd", *JMIAS*, vol. 32, (2002), pp. 12-13.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴⁸ 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Sufi Verse, Sainly Life*, trans by. Th. Emil Homerin, p. 285. This verse is part of a famous poem by Ibn al-Fāriḍ titled 'Ode in T Major' (*Nazm al-sulūk/ al-Ṭā'iyya al-kubrā*).

¹⁰⁴⁹ 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, *Lama'āt*, trans by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 85.

provide any commentary at all on this verse,¹⁰⁵¹ and the former did not refer to any of these concepts and only briefly mentioned the difference between the Creator and created beings.¹⁰⁵²

Sanctifying God's unity from being associated with incarnationism and unification is elaborated in Ibn 'Ajība's commentary on this verse: "Praise the name of thy Lord the Most High",¹⁰⁵³ where he states that God is transcendent, above and beyond the possibility of any being existing alongside Him and so is beyond being reproached for incarnationism and unification.¹⁰⁵⁴ The errors of incarnationism and unification according to Ibn 'Ajība are best revealed in the story of Noah and his son. The son refused to follow Noah's advice to board the arc and so was drowned in the flood, as told in these verses:

And it sailed with them amid waves like mountains, and Noah cried unto his son—and he was standing aloof—O my son! Come ride with us, and be not with the disbelievers. He said: "I shall betake me to some mountain that will save me from the water". [Noah] said: "This day there is none that saveth from the commandment of Allah save him on whom He hath had mercy". And the wave came in between them, so he was among the drowned.¹⁰⁵⁵

In his commentary on these verses, Ibn 'Ajība stated that diving into the sea of divine Essence without the guidance of a spiritual master leads the novice to either drown in an erroneous belief in incarnationism and unification, or to slip into the heresy of rejecting secondary causes altogether.¹⁰⁵⁶

In conclusion, as can be seen from our discussion in this section, Ibn 'Ajība is very keen to exonerate the doctrine of the Unity of Being from association with any heretical beliefs insofar as this doctrine represents the gateway to a full realization of divine love and thus divine union. In the next section I will study the entangled relationship between divine Oneness and the Unity of Being along with impact of both notions on the concept of Divine love. I will also look at Ibn 'Ajība's discussion of why some people are unable to see beyond the rigid outer layer of creation so as to witness the

¹⁰⁵¹ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 305-306.

¹⁰⁵² al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 258.

¹⁰⁵³ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthal, Al-A'lā (87:1).

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 436, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 425.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Qur'ān, trans. Pickthal, Hūd, (11: 42, 43).

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 531, see also Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 426.

light of divine Unity, and why this consequent short-sightedness has a negative effect on their realization of divine love.

6.6) Divine Oneness (*Tawhīd*) and the Unity of Being

The intricate relationship between divine Oneness and the Unity of Being is clearly explained elsewhere in Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the Qur’ān where he emphasizes that the ability to transcend beyond the outer shell of creation to perceive spiritual meanings and mystical realities of divine Oneness therein is necessary to understand the Unity of Being. Since people’s capacity to pass beyond the solidified forms of created beings and realize the sublime meanings within them varies, he categorized people according to their respective spiritual aptitudes. In his commentary on the verse concerning Satan’s refusal to bow down to Adam:

Then the angels bowed themselves all together, save Iblis; he refused to be among those bowing. Said He, “What ails thee, Iblis, that thou art not among those bowing?” Said he, “I would never bow myself before a mortal whom Thou hast created of a clay of mud moulded”.¹⁰⁵⁷

Ibn ‘Ajība explains that the person who tends to look at outer forms without perceiving their inner realities finds it difficult to submit to anyone from his own kind, or to anything else for that matter, as he cannot see the light of divine Unity shining through them. As for the one with perceptive insight, it is easy for him to readily submit to other beings as he perceives these beings subsistent only through God and reflecting nothing but the light of divine Lordship. The reason why angels prostrated themselves before Adam according to Ibn ‘Ajība is that the angels understood Adam to be an abode of the divine presence, and so they prostrated to Adam in form while prostrating to God in reality. Satan, on the other hand, could not see beyond Adam’s outer form, and thus failed to recognize the light of divine Unity shining forth from him and hence refused to prostrate himself to Adam’s form.¹⁰⁵⁸

According to Ibn ‘Ajība’s understanding of the doctrine of the Unity of Being, those who have the capacity to see beyond the outer shell of created forms perceive the divine Unity within the multiplicity of creation and thus the whole universe becomes an

¹⁰⁵⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Ḥijr (15:30-31-32).

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 89. The same meaning is reiterated by al-Qushayrī: *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 137 and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī: *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 289.

expression of the Unity of Being. This meaning was further explained in Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s aphorism that cited in his commentary on the latter’s *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*:

The Cosmos (*al-akwān*) is all darkness. It is illumined only by the manifestation of God (*zuhūr al-ḥaqq*) in it. He who sees the Cosmos and does not contemplate Him in it or by it or before it or after it is in need of light and is veiled from the sun of gnosis by the clouds of created things (*al-āthār*).¹⁰⁵⁹

Likewise, according to Ibn ‘Ajība, since gnostics see only God, they acknowledge the existence of the universe with all its created forms only through God.¹⁰⁶⁰ This idea was reiterated by one of the Sufi poets:¹⁰⁶¹

Since I knew God, other than Him I knew not
For other than Him for us is forbidden.

مذ عرفت الإله لم أر غيرا وكذا الغير عندنا ممنوع

The same meaning was conveyed by ‘Irāqī when he said,

Everywhere veiled
By your own face
You are hidden from the world
In your every manifestation
Look where I will
I see your face alone;
In all these idols
I see only You
Jealous lest You be recognized
at every instant
You dress your Beauty
in a different cloak.¹⁰⁶²

Ibn ‘Ajība’s elaboration of the reason for the angels’ prostration to Adam and Satan’s refusal to prostrate to Adam was largely adapted from al-Qushayrī’s and Rūzbihān’s commentaries on the same verse.¹⁰⁶³ However, Ibn ‘Ajība differed from both exegetes in how he articulated the various degrees of people in their capacity to embrace

¹⁰⁵⁹ Victor Danner, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s Sufi Aphorisms*, p. 25, see also Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid, p. 74.

¹⁰⁶² Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lama ‘āt*, trans by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson as *Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁶³ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, pp. 137, 138, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 289, 290.

the doctrine of the Unity of Being. The first category is the general public who witness the created universe without witnessing God—neither before, nor after, and thus they prove God’s existence through observing the traces of created forms. Thus, they were blocked from witnessing God the sun of gnosis by the clouds of traces of created beings. He assigned the second category to novices who witness the universe first through created forms, and then through the Creator; only then does the universe vanish from their sight as they become immersed in witnessing God. As for the third category, Ibn ‘Ajība designates them to be at the station of annihilation (*ahl maqām al-fanā*)—and describes them as those who witness the Creator before all created beings. This latter group does not see created beings at all because for them creation does not exist. Ibn ‘Ajība added that this state is the result of a state of ecstatic drunkenness, which blinds the gnostics from seeing creation due to being plunged into the sea of lights of divine Unity. They are therefore annihilated from witnessing the world of wisdom (*‘ālam al-ḥikma*) – that is, the world of ephemeral created forms.¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība’s categorization of people according to their capacity to adopt the doctrine of the Unity of Being also provides an insight into the different degrees of divine love. As focusing on only one lover intensifies the degree of love, it follows that the stronger the devotee’s belief in God’s oneness, the more intense the degree of love which is attained.

Ibn ‘Ajība emphasized this issue when he based his paradigm of love on the degree of Oneness (*tawḥīd*) that the devotee has realized. He did this in his commentary on the verse: “Your God is One God; there is no god but He, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.”¹⁰⁶⁵ The first category of Oneness is the Oneness understood by the general public (*tawḥīd al-‘amma*), which negates the existence of any partners – including a wife or a child, or similar beings vis-à-vis God. This type of Oneness is the one that saves the believer from hellfire. The second category is the Oneness of the elite (*tawḥīd al-khāṣṣa*) that is associated with the Oneness of divine Actions (*tawḥīd al-af‘āl*), which entails seeing all actions performed solely by God. The source of this type of knowledge is divine revelation (*kashf*) that instills a certitude in the heart of the believer and enables him to rely wholeheartedly on God. Thus the believer rests his hopes only in God and does not fear anyone save Him. This state is due to the believer’s inability to see any Actor save God and thus he pays no heed to apparent intermediaries and secondary causes.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, pp. 35, 36.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:163).

The third category pertains to the gnostic who sees no being in existence except God, and witnesses only Him. In other words, the contingent forms of the universe fade away and are vanquished from his sight due to his eyes being solely fixated on witnessing the Creator—which is the spiritual station of annihilation (*maqām al-fanā*). Ibn ‘Ajība further explained these three categories by categorizing them into two types: the first, the general type associated with the people who depend on evidence and proofs in order to believe in God’s oneness; the second, where people endowed with contemplative vision dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to God and thus are in no need of rational proofs to enable them to testify to God’s Oneness. Ibn ‘Ajība stated that gnostics who witness God through direct revelation (*kashf*) consider those who know God through reasoning and proofs to be among the commoners, since God’s existence for gnostics is quite obvious and beyond need of proof.¹⁰⁶⁶

Ibn ‘Ajība further elaborated the different categories of divine Oneness (*tawhīd*) in relation to the Unity of Being in his interpretation of the verse: “Say: ‘Do you serve, apart from God, that which cannot hurt or profit you? God is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.’”¹⁰⁶⁷ In his esoteric interpretation of this verse, he divided *tawhīd* (divine Oneness) into three categories: the Oneness of divine Actions; the Oneness of the divine Attributes, and the Oneness of the divine Essence (*tawhīd al-af‘āl*, *tawhīd al-ṣifāt*, *tawhīd al-dhāt*).

The first category (*tawhīd al-af‘āl*) is the degree of righteous people and scholars, and entails believing that all actions are independently performed by God. The fruit of the vision of the Oneness of divine Actions is that the devotee’s heart develops total devotion to God and full reliance upon Him with no room for fear of created beings. This is because he apprehends that created beings are but instruments working by divine power; all created beings are seen to be helpless creatures unable to either benefit or harm themselves, let alone others. Thus, the devotee abandons relying on secondary causes and binds his hopes to the Cause of causes.¹⁰⁶⁸

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 192, in al-Qushayrī’s commentary on the verse he did not refer to the issue of the Unity of Being, see al-Qushayrī, *Laiṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol.1, p. 81. Rūzbihān did not have any commentary on this verse, see Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.1, pp. 69, 70.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *al-Mā’ida*, (5:76).

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.2, p. 66. See also Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, p. 68-80. Rūzbihān reiterated the same meaning of God being the sole doer of all actions when he said, “understand that everything from the throne to the earth is the creation of God Most High; everything but his existence is his Action. He brought them into existence from pure non-being... So it is with whatever is originated in his kingdom for eternity without end. The actions of creatures are also the creation of God Most High, although they are acquired by creatures.” See Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, p. 30.

The second degree (*tawhīd al-ṣifāt*), which is associated with worshippers and ascetics, is characterized by total immersion in God's seven divine Attributes, viz.: the Powerful (*qādir*); the Desirer (*murīd*); the All Knowing (*‘ālim*); the Alive (*ḥayy*); the All-Hearing (*samī‘*); the All- Seeing (*baṣīr*), and the Speaker (*mutakalim*). The result of this degree of Oneness (*tawhīd*) is the devotee feels estranged from the company of common people, finds solace with God and enjoys intimate divine supplications and sweetness in works of devotional obedience and worship.¹⁰⁶⁹ At the third and highest degree (*tawhīd al-dhāt*) that is associated with gnostics, the mystic is totally absent from seeing the intermediaries of created beings and captivated in contemplation of the Creator. This is the degree of annihilation (*al-fanā‘*).¹⁰⁷⁰

As for al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān's commentaries on the same verse, the former did not mention the Unity of Being at all, whereas the latter altogether dispensed with commenting on the verse.¹⁰⁷¹ In contrast, as we have seen above, Ibn ‘Ajība had a clear understanding of the categorization of the degrees of divine Oneness based on which the devotee's degree of divine love is determined. He supported this view by quoting an aphorism by Ibn ‘Aṭā‘illāh: “The Universe (*al-akwān*) is permanent through His making it permanent (*bi-ithbātih*), and it is annihilated (*mamḥuwwa*) by the Unity of His Essence (*bi-aḥadiyyat dhātih*).”¹⁰⁷² Ibn ‘Ajība's comments that the created forms which appear in the visible world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*) exist only due to God's grace in bestowing existence upon them, so that through created forms and beings He might be recognized. At the same time, these created forms are naughted before God's divine Oneness as He is the one who solely exists. Therefore, whoever recognizes the ephemeral existence of the created forms

¹⁰⁶⁹ See also Michon, Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence, pp. 80-83.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, al-Baḥr al-madīd, vol.2, p. 66. See also Michon, *Ibn ‘Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 82-91.

¹⁰⁷¹ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*, vol.2, p. 275. See Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā‘is al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 324-325. That being said, Rūzbihān in his *Kashf al-asrār* expressed his definitions of both God's Essence, Attributes and Actions. As for God's Essence he described God to have an eternal existence, “The Essence of him who is exalted does not enter things or depart from them, nor is it a state inhering in something or imposed on it. Rather, he transcends any relation with temporality, for he is one in every respect.” He also explained further that although the divine Essence remains a mystery that no one can solve, the divine Attributes provide us with knowledge about the unknowable divine Essence, explaining: “He is knowing, powerful, hearing, seeing, speaking, living, willing. These Attributes are eternal without beginning or end in his Essence. It is likewise with all the names and qualities by which He has described Himself. He speaks by His speech, knows by His knowledge, wills by His volition, lives by His life. These Attributes are an augmentation to the Essence, though not in the sense of division, joining or separation.” Cited by Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷² Victor Danner, *Ibn ‘Aṭā‘illah's Sufi Aphorisms*, p. 44. See also Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, p. 325.

independently – that is, without witnessing God through them – is considered to be heedless.

In his commentary on Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*, explaining the idea of divine unity and the Unity of Being, Ibn ‘Ajība identified the term Unity (*aḥadiyya*) as being an exaggerated form of Unicity (*waḥda*), which indicates the ultimate degree of the perfection of God’s Oneness, one that determines all created forms are non-existent. In other words, God’s utter Oneness leaves no room for duality or plurality.¹⁰⁷³ This meaning was eloquently expressed in these verses that he cited:

Is there a God and is there a servant?
 And negation (of God) and what is contrary to that?
 I said to him, “such is not the way it is for me,”
 So he said, “what does that mean for you?” and I said:
 “Existence itself is all loss and loss itself is blissful Being.
 Divine unity in truth is an abandonment of phenomenal truth
 And there is no truth (in reality) except mine alone”.¹⁰⁷⁴

قلت له ليس ذاك عندي	أرب وعبد ونفى وضد
وجود فقد وفقد وجد	فقال ما عندكم فقلنا
وليس حق سواي وحدي	توحيد حق بترك حق

These elliptical verses are associated with two Sufi concepts, viz: the concept of separation (*farq*) where differentiation exists between the majesty of Lordship and the shackles of servanthood, and the concept of union (*jam* ‘) where the demarcation line between Lordship and servanthood disappears due to the fact that the ephemeral existence of created beings vanishes in face of the primordial existence of God and thus in essence nothing exists except God. Ibn ‘Ajība interpreted these verses by saying that the poet denies the possibility of observing the state of separation (*farq*) wherein one realizes the ostensible independent existence of servanthood apart from the eternal existence of Lordship. Although the definition of divine oneness according to the state of union (*jam* ‘) negates the existence of any opposites, observing servanthood through the lens of separation (*farq*) proves it to be in total opposition to the attributes of Lordship. However, the poet rejects to look at created beings and their state of servanthood through the lens of separation (*farq*) and thus denies the separate independent existence of the devotee, whose attributes of servanthood are ostensibly in total opposition to that of Lordship. Ibn

¹⁰⁷³ Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, pp. 323, 324.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 324

‘Ajība further explained that God manifested His Lordship in created forms, and thus, in essence, nothing exists except Him. This state is attained through the existence of the absence of all save God, along with the absence of self. In other words, the way to testify to the truth of God’s oneness is through denying and abandoning the truth of existence of anything save Him, as the poet concludes: “And there is no truth (in reality) except mine alone”. Ibn ‘Ajība’s comment on this last verse was that the poet was in a state of total annihilation (*fanā*) and thus referred to his own self ‘Me’ when he meant to speak about God.¹⁰⁷⁵

Ibn ‘Ajība introduced the Sufi doctrine of separation (*farq*) and unification (*jam*)¹⁰⁷⁶ and how to maintain a balance between the two concepts in order to reach an equilibrium between witnessing the secrets of Lordship while abiding by the laws of servanthood. He did this in his commentary on the verse:

None is there in the heavens and earth but he comes to the All-merciful as a servant; He has indeed counted them, and He has numbered them exactly. Every one of them shall come to Him upon the Day of Resurrection, all alone.¹⁰⁷⁷

Here, Ibn ‘Ajība addresses the relationship between the degree of Oneness of God that a devotee has and his degree of love of God, asserting that purging one’s heart of attachment, fear, or yearning for anything save God is a pre-requisite for the purity of faith in God’s oneness. Only when the servant reaches this level of purity does he become a true servant (devotee) who is able to maintain a balance between divine power (*qudra*), according to which all created beings in the heavens and the earth are seen to partake of the divine lights and divine secrets, and divine wisdom (*ḥikma*), according to which all that is in the heavens and the earth are mere servants subject to divine power and dominion (*qahriyya*). Divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) is thus found in servanthood as the outer layer, the layer that conceals the secrets of Lordship, whereas divine power (*qudra*) is manifest in the servant who becomes absent from his own existence and immersed in witnessing the secrets of Lordship.¹⁰⁷⁸ The only point of unity between the polar opposites of

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 183.

¹⁰⁷⁶ These two concepts were previously discussed in this chapter in p. 277.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, Maryam (19:93-94-95).

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.3, p. 366, al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse did not mention the concept of the Unity of Being, see al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 250. Rūzbihān’s commentary on the same verse reiterated the concept of the Unity of Being, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 471.

servanthood and Lordship is divine love, through which a balance between these two contrary forces is reached.

After examining Ibn ‘Ajība’s understanding of divine Oneness (*Tawhīd*) in relation to the Unity of Being and divine love, in the next section I will highlight the relationship between love and affliction and the essentiality of divine Unity as an integral element in relation to both.

6.7) Love and Affliction

According to Ibn ‘Ajība, one of the associated attributes to the Unity of Being which leads to the blossoming of love in the gnostic’s heart is refraining from complaining about calamities to anyone save God. This was clear in his interpretation of the verse: “From God nothing whatever is hidden in heaven and earth. It is He who forms you in the womb as He will. There is no god but He, the All-mighty, the All-wise”.¹⁰⁷⁹

Apropos of this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība stated that believing in God’s Oneness should be accompanied internally with a feeling of total submission and utter reliance on Him, such that no sorrow overwhelms the heart.¹⁰⁸⁰ He elaborated on this as follows:¹⁰⁸¹

Whoever reaches full realization that God is the one [Actor] in His kingdom, with no partners associated with His Essence, Attributes or Actions, and that He encompasses (His kingdom) with His knowledge, hearing, and sight, and that His command is between *al-kāf wa al-nūn*, (that is, “His command when He desires a thing, is to say to it ‘Be’ and ‘it is’), how can one complain about what befalls him to anyone save Him? Or how can he alleviate his needs [by referring] to anyone save his Lord? Or how can he be concerned with any matter while His master has not neglected to bestow His goodness on him? Whoever handled your affairs in the darkness of the womb and formed you in the wombs howsoever He willed, and granted you everything that you asked and wished for, how should He [now] forget to bestow [his boons upon] you from His beneficence and goodness? Or how should He [now] expel you from the realm of His grace and protection?”

مَنْ تَحَقَّقَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ وَاحِدٌ فِي مَلَكِهِ، لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ فِي ذَاتِهِ وَلَا فِي صِفَاتِهِ وَلَا فِي أَعْمَالِهِ، وَأَنَّهُ أَحَاطَ بِهِ عِلْمًا
وَسَمْعًا وَبَصْرًا، وَأَنَّ أَمْرَهُ بَيْنَ الْكَافِ وَالنُّونِ، { إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ } كَيْفَ يَشْكُو مَا نَزَلَ
بِهِ مِنْهُ إِلَى أَحَدٍ سِوَاهُ؟ أَمْ كَيْفَ يَرْفَعُ حَوَائِجَهُ إِلَى غَيْرِ مَوْلَاهُ؟ أَمْ كَيْفَ يَعُولُ هُمَا، وَسَيِّدُهُ مِنْ خَيْرِهِ لَا

¹⁰⁷⁹ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, *Āl-’Imrān* (3:5-6).

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 323.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 323.

ينسأه؟ من دبرك في ظلمة الأحشاء، وصوِّرك في الأرحام كيف يشاء، وأتاك كل ما تسأل وتشاء، كيف
يُنسأكَ من بره وإحسانه؟ أم كيف يخرجك عن دائرة لطفه وامتنانه؟

This statement is indicative of the highest state of Oneness, in which the devotee has firm belief that the sole Doer of all actions is God who is characterized by utter mercy and infinite compassion. Ibn ‘Ajība thus wonders how one should perceive anyone save God let alone so as to lament and bemoan one’s calamities or seek help from others, especially when divine care and gentleness always accompany His actions.

Comparing Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the above-cited verses (3: 5-6) to al-Qushayrī’s, it can be observed that the latter discusses in a similar fashion how God is the one who answers all prayers, secures all needs and takes away all calamities.¹⁰⁸² Likewise, Rūzbihān states in his commentary that the divine power and magnificence of Lordship are manifest in creation which serves as a mirror for God’s august greatness.¹⁰⁸³ That being said, it is worth noting that both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān did not reflect on the concomitants of creation, which entail, as Ibn ‘Ajība elaborated, being solely depending on God to handle one’s affairs such that no complaint should be expressed except to God alone. This reinforces his view that the gnostics cease to observe any intermediaries and secondary causes between themselves and God.

Throughout Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary he identifies the state of being absent from recognizing intermediaries as guiding the gnostic to direct all his needs, calamities and prayers to the One. This is a dominant theme in his commentary on verses such as the following:

Say: “To whom belongs what is in the heavens and in the earth?” Say: “It is God’s. He has prescribed for Himself mercy. He will surely gather you to the Resurrection Day, of which is no doubt. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe. And to Him belongs whatsoever inhabits the night and the day; and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing”.¹⁰⁸⁴

In his commentary on this verse, Ibn ‘Ajība elaborated that one of the key mental practices which allows the novice to pay no heed to people as intermediaries is developing a firm conviction that all creation is in God’s Hand (*qabḍati Allāh*) and all one’s affairs are controlled and handled only by Him. Only then may the novice feel that there is no

¹⁰⁸² al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 132.

¹⁰⁸³ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 126.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-An’ām (6:12-13).

room left in his heart for blaming others for any transgression or wrongdoing committed against him, and, as Ibn ‘Ajība added, this feeling should be accompanied with total submission to and contentment with God’s revealed Providence.¹⁰⁸⁵ Therefore, one can see how Ibn ‘Ajība connects the ideal of contentment with the decrees of Providence to the devotee’s vision of the Unity of Being in general, and *tawḥid al-af‘āl* in particular.

Al-Qushayrī’s commentary on the above verse explained that divine Providence is the determinant factor in respect to all afflictions and calamities that befall the devotee but does not develop this idea further or refer to the doctrine of the Unity of Being (by the virtue of which a devotee should not seek to remedy his affliction from anyone but God).¹⁰⁸⁶ Rūzbihān briefly commented on this verse and said that it emphasizes God’s Lordship, but added no further details.¹⁰⁸⁷ Therefore, it is noticeable how in his reading of the verse Ibn ‘Ajība skillfully tied the doctrine of the Unity of Being to divine love, and contentment with God, and the traditional Sufī view that no lover should complain about afflictions brought upon him by his Beloved.

Ibn ‘Ajība asserted the importance of submitting willingly to God’s Providence by quoting Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s proverb: “He who wishes that at a given moment there appear other than what God has manifested in it, has not left ignorance behind at all”.¹⁰⁸⁸ On this adage, he commented that there are two types of ignorance: simple ignorance that denotes a lack of knowledge, and compounded ignorance, which indicates the person’s unawareness of his own ignorance. The perfect gnostic is one who has contentedly submitted himself to the decrees of Providence, believing that all God’s acts to be perfectly correct and just. Ibn ‘Ajība also quoted Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī in this regard who stated that what God demands from His creation is whatever state the devotee finds himself in at a given moment. In sum, Ibn ‘Ajība emphasized that the gnostic should always fully accept whatever state God decreed for him, without any aversion. While if a devotee contravenes the Sharī‘a through engaging in a forbidden act, the gnostic should advise and encourage him to abandon the illicit acts; yet the gnostic should then wait and see what God has decreed for this devotee in terms of either guiding him to repentance or enabling him to continue indulging in sins. In other words, all people are subject to the decrees of Providence, and all their acts are divine acts, and so they must be first kindly

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 103.

¹⁰⁸⁶ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 288.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 348.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Victor Danner, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah’s Sufī Aphorisms*, p. 26. See also: Ibn ‘Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, p. 86

advised, and then if they fail to follow one's advice, always be excused in heart. As for the one who contests the decrees of Providence and challenges the divine will, he is deemed to be in sheer ignorance.¹⁰⁸⁹

The underlying reason for the gnostic's submission to the decrees of Providence is his love, and thus the pain of calamities and afflictions becomes sweetened through the love he feels for God, which is in a sense a consequence and concomitant of the doctrine of the Unity of Being. In Ibn 'Ajība's interpretation of this verse concerning the story of Joseph (who was thrown in a well as a child, but then granted both prophethood and rulership):

He that bought him, being of Egypt, said to his wife, "Give him goodly lodging, and it may be that he will profit us, or we may take him for our own son". So We established Joseph in the land, and that We might teach him the interpretation of tales. God prevails in His purpose, but most men know not.¹⁰⁹⁰

He explains that whoever thinks that the calamities of fate are devoid of divine grace (*lutf*) lacks perceptive sight, and for those who are seeking God and have knowledge of Him are always accompanied by divine grace. Furthermore, when Ibn 'Ajība explains how gnostics react to calamities and embrace the decrees of Providence, he underlines that their viewpoint is tightly connected to the concept of the Unity of Being.¹⁰⁹¹

Whatever befalls them is nothing but the ongoing decrees of destiny, continual divine assistance, resplendent lights and hidden graces. Since the divine lights precede affliction by the decrees of Providence, calamities do not change and darken the states of their hearts, so seeing what is ungodly cannot distract their hearts. God preserves the secrets of divine Oneness in their hearts even when terrible misfortunes of Providence rain down upon them, and He showers them with the lights of divine assistance at the time when severe calamities and grave afflictions befall them.

فكل ما ينزل بهم فإنما هو أقدار جارية، وأمداد سارية، وأنوار بهية، وألطف خفية، تسبق لهم الأنوار قبل نزول الأقدار، فلا تحول حول قلوبهم الأقدار، ولا تغير قلوبهم رؤية الأغيار، عند نزول شدائد الأقدار، يحفظ عليهم أسرار التوحيد، وينزل عليهم أنوار التأييد، عند نزول القضاء الشديد، والبلاء العتيد

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibn 'Ajība, *Iqāz al-himam fī sharḥ al-Hikam*, pp. 86-88.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Qur'ān, trans. Arberry, Yusuf (12:21).

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 585.

Elaborating on this matter, Ibn ‘Ajība commented that since the grace of God’s beauty (*jamāl*) always follows upon the experience of His majesty (*jalāl*), afflictions are always accompanied with hidden graces and boons. In this fashion God protects the novice’s and the gnostic’s hearts with divine Oneness so they may stand steadfast in the face of calamities that befall them. The devotee immersed in witnessing God’s Oneness ceases to feel the pain of the affliction that he is subjected to, so his poverty turns to richness, and deprivation to advantage and self-sufficiency. In other words, the stronger the severity of an affliction, the greater the divine grants will be that follow it.¹⁰⁹²

This same meaning was briefly reiterated by al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse (12:21).¹⁰⁹³ Commenting on the same verse, Rūzbihān did not address the issue of the transformation of the bitterness of afflictions to sweetness when the devotee witnesses God as the source of both, but rather discussed the divine manifestations of beauty and love in the face of Joseph and how he represented a theophany of divine gnosis.¹⁰⁹⁴

The idea that submitting oneself to and feeling contentment with the decrees of Providence is a challenge that can only be met through perceiving God’s Oneness in respect to His Essence, Attributes and Actions, is elaborated in Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary on the verses:

O believers, enter the peace, all of you, and follow not the steps of Satan; he is a manifest foe to you. But if you slip, after the clear signs have come to you, know then that God is All-mighty, All-wise.¹⁰⁹⁵

Here, Ibn ‘Ajība interprets the term ‘peace’ as reconciling oneself with the decrees of Providence and finding solace in submission to the mysterious ways of His wisdom as follows:

God the Almighty commanded all people to reconcile themselves with Him and surrender to His rulings, so that they do not challenge His rulings nor reject His Actions. They rather should regard what appears from the element of divine Power and receive it with contentment and submission or with seeking patience, whether these divine actions are manifested through intermediaries or not, as there

¹⁰⁹² Ibid.

¹⁰⁹³ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 72.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 156, 157.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Baqara (2:208, 209).

is no Actor (in reality) save God and everything comes from Him. Thus, if you slipped into the error of making objections (to God's rulings) or of feeling aggrieved (at God's ways) after the clear signs of God's Oneness of His Essence, Attributes and Actions became evident to you, know that God, the Pre-eminent, the All-Wise, does not lack the ability to punish and cast you out (of His mercy), yet due to His utter wisdom God graciously gives you respite but does not let you off. God prevails over all affairs and whoever repents will find God relenting towards him.¹⁰⁹⁶

أمر الحق جلّ جلاله جميعاً بالصلح معه والاستسلام لأحكامه، بحيث لا يصدر منهم نزاعٌ لأحكامه، ولا اعتراض على أفعاله، بل ينظرون ما يبرز من عنصر القدرة، فيتلقونه بالرضى والتسليم، أو الصبر والتصبر، سواء ظهرت هذه الأفعال على أيدي الوسائط أو بلا وسائط، إذ لا فاعل سواه، وكلّ من عند الله، فإن زلتم واعترضتم، أو سخطتم، من بعد ما جاءكم الآيات البينات الدالة على وحدانية الحق في ذاته وصفاته وأفعاله، فاعلموا أن الله عزيز حكيم، لا يعجزه عقوبتكم وإبعادكم، لكنه من حكمته يُمهّل ولا يهمل، والله غالب على أمره، ومن تاب تاب الله عليه.

Therefore, applying the concept of the Unity of Being in one's daily life creates a sense of serenity and contentment at heart, as one no longer defies divine rulings or rejects God's actions, but rather trusts in God's wisdom in conducting affairs and contemplates people only as mediums for divine manifestations, leading, as Ibn 'Ajība observes, to a sense of inner peace.¹⁰⁹⁷

Al-Qushayrī's commentary on the same verse takes a different approach, one that emphasized seeking peace and reconciliation – with everyone except one's lower self. He added that for the aspirant to give in to egoistical tendencies and passions is a deviation

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.1, pp. 235-236.

¹⁰⁹⁷ In Mahmut Ay's commentary on verse (2:208), he stated that Ibn 'Ajība's interpretation of this verse is an indication of his adoption of the doctrine of utter predestination (*jabr maḥd*) according to which human will does not play any role in one's actions or decisions performed. He argued that this understanding contradicts the Qur'ānic system of rewards and punishments which is based on people's choice and free will. See: Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 420. As a matter of fact, Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric interpretation does not belittle the role of human free will in performing actions according to the *Sharī'ah*, at least in regard to actions that operates in the 'Realm of Wisdom' (*ālam al-ḥikma*). That being said, what Ibn 'Ajība attempted to emphasize in his commentary is the interior reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of divine Providence according to which all actions performed are originally created by God with no human involvement or influence and this reality operates in the World of Power (*ālam al-qudra*). Creating a balance between the doctrine of divine wisdom and power is essential according to Ibn 'Ajība in order for the novice to be able to abide by the rules of *Sharī'a* in which realm he observes secondary causes, while realizing that according to the ultimate reality (*ḥaqīqa*), the only Cause of all actions is God the Almighty. Furthermore, the doctrine that all actions are done by God, who is their sole Doer relates to the Oneness of Actions (*tawḥīd al-af'āl*), which was thoroughly elaborated in the previous section. Therefore, I believe Ibn 'Ajība did not adopt the doctrine of Predestination in his commentary on this verse. More details on the doctrine of divine wisdom and power are found in Chapter 3.

from the Sufi Path.¹⁰⁹⁸ Rūzbihān on the other hand combined both Ibn ‘Ajība’s approach of reconciling oneself with the decrees of God’s and al-Qushayrī’s approach of continuous struggle against one’s lower self.¹⁰⁹⁹ That being said, it is worth noting that Rūzbihān’s commentary on this verse is brief and he does not provide the reader with any detail on how one might adapt oneself to and surmount the pitfalls of Providence.

After establishing the importance of seeing God’s handiwork everywhere, that is, actually realizing the Unity of Being through comprehending *tawḥīd al-af‘āl*, Ibn ‘Ajība instructed his readers as to how one might reach the spiritual stage where intermediaries become irrelevant, since one has become absent from all created beings and taken refuge in God. In his commentary on this verse: “Say: ‘Naught shall visit us but what God has prescribed for us; He is our Protector; in God let the believers put all their trust,’”¹¹⁰⁰ he listed three ways that may assist the novice in realizing the degree of submitting willingly to God’s Providence, and enable him to disengage himself from directing his own affairs and entanglement with created forms.

The first method is for the novice to instill in his heart a firm belief in the eternal predestination and inevitability of God’s decrees. That is to say, the novice should believe that whatever happens to him was bound to occur, that it would not ever have befallen him if it were not meant to be.¹¹⁰¹ Ibn ‘Ajība expressed this eloquently in these verses:

Whatever Fate has not decreed, no ruse
Of yours can never make it come to pass
And whatever is meant to be shall happen:
What’s meant to be, in its own good time
Shall come to pass – even if the unwise
And foolish may be harried by grief and woe.¹¹⁰²

أبدا وما هو كائن سيكون ما لا يقدر لا يكون بحيلة
وأخو الجهالة متعب محزون سيكون ما هو كائن في وقته

The second method is the novice should realize that God’s gentleness and mercy pervades all His actions, and thus he should deem them to be perfect. Therefore, when the novice encounters some fair deed of God’s (*jamāl*) he should be thankful, and when

¹⁰⁹⁸ al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, pp. 100-101.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Rūzbihān al-Baqī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 85.

¹¹⁰⁰ Qur’ān, trans. Arberry, al-Tawba (9:51).

¹¹⁰¹ Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 390.

¹¹⁰² Ibid.

an act of God's wrath (*jalāl*) occurs he should remain patient because both acts are ultimately meant purify the novice and to bring him closer in proximity to God.

The third method pertains to comprehending the Unity of Being, with the novice confident and convinced in God's Oneness (*tawhīd*), which entails the acknowledgement that God is the only Doer of all actions in this world, and therefore content with the actions of His Beloved.¹¹⁰³ This was eloquently exposed in verse by 'Abdul Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 826/1424) cited by Ibn 'Ajība:

There is sweet delight in all the pains you assign me
And what art I find in tribulations you send me!
Whatever your wont may be, judge me—as for me
I'm but a pauper, obedient in Love's kingdom¹¹⁰⁴

تَلَدُّ لِي الْأَلَامَ إِذْ كُنْتُ مُسَقِمِي وَإِنْ تَخْتَبِرْنِي فَهِيَ عِنْدِي صَنَائِعُ
تَحْكَمُ بِمَا تَهْوَاهُ فِيَّ فَإِنِّي فَقِيرٌ لِسُلْطَانِ الْمَحَبَّةِ طَائِعُ

Both al-Qushayrī's and Rūzbihān's commentaries on the same verse referred to the importance of reliance on God and contentment with the decrees of Providence, but neither provided a blueprint on how this stage was to be achieved, unlike Ibn 'Ajība, whose commentaries did.¹¹⁰⁵

The foregoing section aimed at giving an overview of Ibn 'Ajība's concept of divine Unity, while illustrating the relevance of – the practical application of – the theory of the Unity of Being in facing afflictions, and highlighting how divine love may transform the sourness of the mishaps of Providence into sweetness. While realizing the difficulty of accepting hardships and afflictions with a content heart, as we have seen, Ibn 'Ajība provides us with a blueprint for aspirants to actualize the presence of God through bearing calamities with love.

6.8) Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I aimed to illustrate the degree of influence of Ibn 'Arabī's theory of the Unity of Being on Ibn 'Ajība's esoteric Qur'ānic commentary, especially in relation to divine love. After conducting an analysis of relevant passages and themes from Ibn 'Ajība's commentary, I have concluded that the impact of Ibn 'Arabī's theory of the Unity of Being can clearly be traced throughout the commentary despite the fact that he does

¹¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 391.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 426, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 23.

not use the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in his Qur'ān commentary, nor indeed any other technical terms of the Akbarian school—such as immutable entities *al-a'yān al-thābita* and *al-ḥaḍarāt al-khamsa*—to expound this theory.¹¹⁰⁶ Although there is no historical record as to why Ibn 'Ajība shied away from using the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, his choice might be related to two reasons; the first one has to do with the conservative audience which he was keeping in mind as his *tafsīr* (exoteric and esoteric) aimed to target both the Sufi adepts and the general people alike. Therefore, he was keen not to saturate his work with ambiguous terminologies to ensure the well reception of his exegesis. In this regard he was following the footsteps of al-Qushayrī (one of the two Sufi exegetes which he quoted heavily) who was eager to avoid all the pitfalls and shortcomings of loading his exegesis with elliptical writing style and enigmatic terms that were found in al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* and thus was frowned upon by the general public. This issue was discussed in detail in chapter two. It is also worth noting that Ibn 'Ajība's approach of not openly discussing the concept of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) is but following the attitude of a long line of Shādhulī scholars in the 15th and 16th century.¹¹⁰⁷ For example we find the 16th century Sufi scholar, 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī discussing creedal theology in his magnum opus, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir fī bayān 'aqā'id al-akābir*, and actively engaging with the Sufi theories of Ibn 'Arabī and his universal vision of the world, yet shies away from citing controversial works such as *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.¹¹⁰⁸ Thus the distinguished contribution of Ibn 'Ajība is that although he did not name the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he outlined a complete blueprint for the theory of the Unity of Being with emphasis on the importance of witnessing the whole universe as one consolidated entity (*dhātan wāḥida*) that functions as a theophany that reflects the divine Names and Attributes.

To elaborate this idea further, Ibn 'Ajība skillfully deployed his particular doctrine of divine wisdom and power, the former representing the outer crust of created beings and the latter reflecting the kernel of divine realities concealed within them. The rigid forms and the outer shell of the universe (that is, 'divine wisdom') is the realm of the manifestation of the 'servanthood' of the devotee, whereas its inner core (that is, 'divine power' which is predestined) conceals the secrets of divine Lordship. Contemplating the

¹¹⁰⁶ Mahmut Ay, *Kur'an'ın Tasavvufi Yorumu*, p. 427, see also Michon, *Ibn 'Ajība: Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence*, pp. 10-11.

¹¹⁰⁷ Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 270, 313

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

multiplicity of created beings with an eye of divine Unity, he believed, is the only way to reach the full potential of divine love. As Ibn ‘Ajība explains, the ephemeral forms of creation act as vessels harboring the inner realities of divinity; these vessels were originally sublime spiritual meanings that were later congealed and transformed into rigid material forms. One must melt down the hardened *materia* of these rigid forms, he believed, to return them back to their original sublime spiritual state; only then the universe may become a theophany reflecting the divine secrets of Lordship.

Ibn ‘Ajība’s elaboration of the doctrine of the Unity of Being addressed the psychology of the human spirit, describing the spirit as an ardent lover who yearns for love. He argued that if the spirit is not attracted and attached to the sublime spiritual meanings that reveal the secrets of the divine Essence to it, it resorts to the sensual ephemeral beauty of mortal beings to console itself. The imprisonment of the spirit in the shackles of the material Adamite nature of the body is the key impeding factor that prevents the spirit from perceiving the universe as a theophany reflecting the divine realities. The alienation and struggle of the spirit ends when God opens the heart of the devotee and illuminates him with His divine Attributes. Only then are the divine secrets revealed to him and he ceases to be distracted by the temporal, transient existence of the universe.

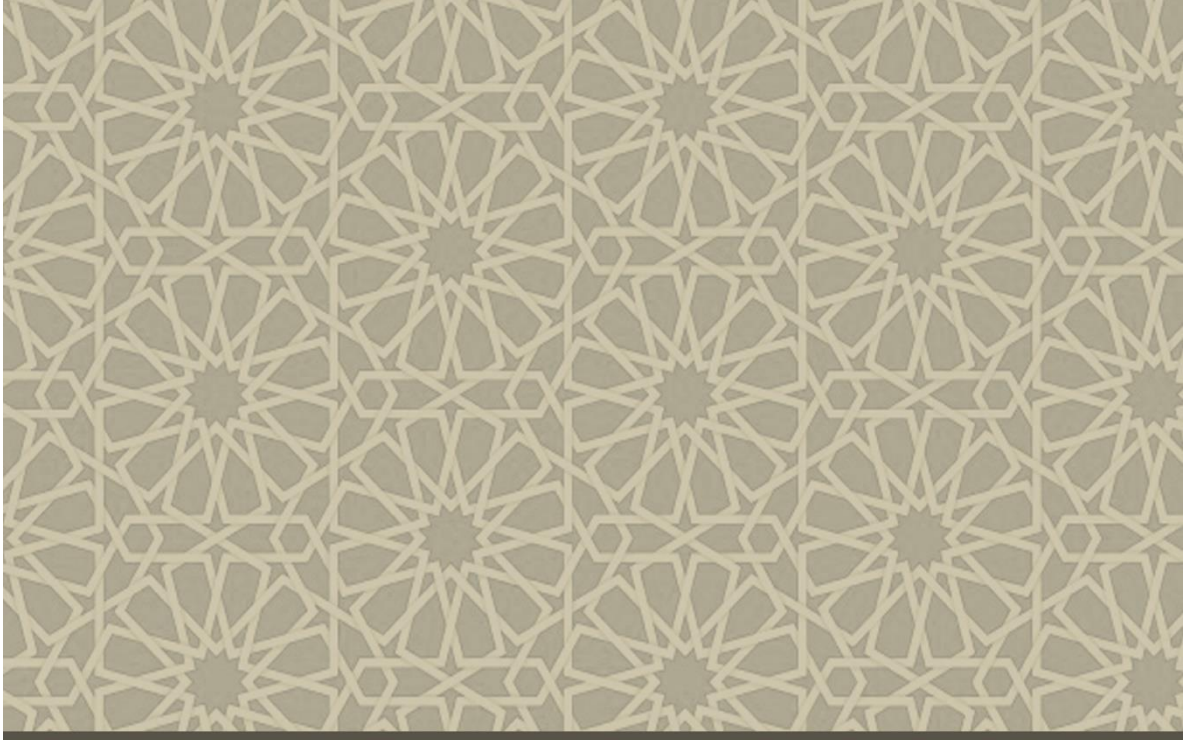
Ibn ‘Ajība contended that attaining to such a contemplative degree can very well happen through disengaging oneself from the sensual world and annihilating from one’s self-existence. In explaining such abstruse spiritual experiences, Ibn ‘Ajība was adamant to maintain a balanced view, such that the realities of Lordship that are revealed to the gnostic do not prevent him from keeping the ordinary laws pertaining to the condition of his servitude and devotion of God. Whilst in the intoxication of the state of self-annihilation (*fanā’*) when the gnostic encounters divine realities, his spiritual perfections appear to be endless, yet once he returns to his original state of self-existence, his deficiencies and shortcomings are revealed to be countless.

In postulating his own theory of the Unity of Being, Ibn ‘Ajība divided people into three categories that represented their various capacities to realize the doctrine. The first comprised ordinary people who apprehend God’s existence through the transient existence of the world. The second is that of the novice who witnesses material forms initially but afterwards envisions the formless divinity, at which point the whole world vanishes from the novice’s sight. The third and last category are the people of annihilation who witness the Creator before created beings and thus do not see any intermediaries.

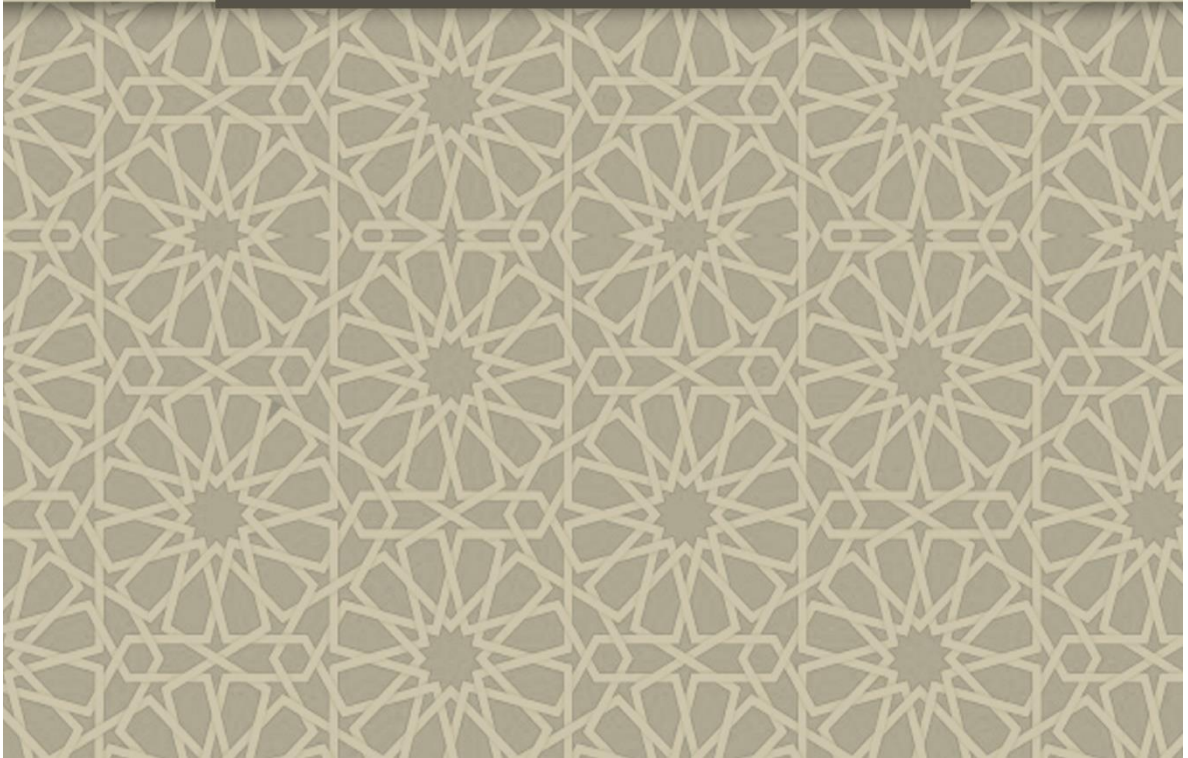
Ibn ‘Ajība then assigned these categories to levels of realization of divine Oneness (*tawhīd*) and exposed how the three degrees of Oneness (respectively, the divine Essence, Attributes, and Actions) represent the gradual ascension of the novice to the state of directly witnessing God. One of the practical applications of the doctrine of the Unity of Being is that it enables the devotee to reach a state of serenity and peace, where he reconciles himself to the misfortunes of decrees of Providence due to the blossoming of divine love in his heart. The devotee thus ceases to complain about afflictions befallen him, seeing them as issuing from the Beloved.

A comparative analysis of Qur’ānic verses in Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary with the commentaries on the same verses by al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān indicates the occasional absence of addressing the issue of the Unity of Being by the latter two authors. They also appeared not to be keen to maintain a balance between witnessing the secrets of Lordship while abiding by the laws of servanthood in light of the doctrine of divine power and wisdom. In addition, both authors did not discuss the psychology of the spirit and its nature as an intimate lover. Both briefly addressed the doctrine of divine Oneness, but without providing a detailed description of the different degrees of Oneness and their relationship to divine love. Moreover, although the relationship between love and affliction was outlined by both Sufi authors, neither gave guidelines for the novice to reconcile himself with the decrees of Providence. Finally, while Ibn ‘Ajība’s commentary rejected the existence of any relationship between the theory of the Unity of Being and Incarnationism, neither of the other two scholars addressed this issue in their commentaries on the same verses.

In conclusion, Ibn ‘Ajība’s theory of the Unity of Being comprised a complete blueprint of the theory that was closely tied to his particular doctrine of divine wisdom and power, and which showed the necessity of maintaining a balanced outlook between witnessing the secrets of Lordship and keeping the duties of servanthood intact. He also introduced the issue of divine Oneness with its different categories and linked it to the concept of divine love. This, he maintained, was essential in light of the close relationship between divine love and the Unity of Being. Finally, Ibn ‘Ajība’s exposition of the theory of the Unity of Being was not expressed in complex and elliptical terms. This simple but innovative approach has made his esoteric commentary appeal to general readers as well as advanced Sufi adepts.



Conclusion



Conclusion

The significant rise of Europe in the sixteenth century from a state of utter isolation and disintegration to a global power left an indelible impact on the Islamic world, with Morocco in the frontline.¹¹⁰⁹ The European expansion took its toll on Morocco through the continuous attacks of the Portuguese which remained a constant danger both for the Sa‘diyan dynasty and the ‘Alawite dynasty alike, threatening Morocco’s political independence and economic growth.¹¹¹⁰

Ibn ‘Ajība lived during the reign of the ‘Alawī Sharifan dynasty which ascended to power in Morocco in the second half of the seventeenth century and continues to rule down to modern times.¹¹¹¹ As mentioned in chapter one, two ‘Alawī Sharīfs assumed power during the life of Ibn ‘Ajība: Mawlay Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdullāh (reg. 1171/1757 – 1204/1790) and Mawlay Sulaymān (reg. 1207/1792 – 1238/1822)¹¹¹² and the latter’s reign witnessed the establishment of the Darqāwiyya *tariqa* to which Ibn ‘Ajība belonged.¹¹¹³ The time period in which Ibn ‘Ajība lived witnessed great political instability not only in Morocco but also in Egypt and Syria due to the French campaign (1798-1801) led by Napoleon Bonaparte. On the religious front, the time of Ibn ‘Ajība witnessed the rise of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1703-1792) and his Wahhābī movement which was one of the biggest challenges to Sufism known for centuries and the effect remains today. Although this period was important for the above-mentioned reasons, Ibn ‘Ajība does not make reference to either events.

Moreover, the time period during which Ibn ‘Ajība lived was not marked with any significant development in Sufi literature nor by the rise of any outstanding scholars in Morocco. Aside from Ibn ‘Ajība himself, the impact of none of the other Moroccan men of learning went beyond their own time. Living during this troubled time, neither did Ibn ‘Ajība stand out in a sense of establishing his own Sufi theories – as al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī had centuries earlier – but rather was simply considered as one of the great

¹¹⁰⁹ During the reign of the Sa‘dyan dynasty, Morocco was subjected in the 15th century to a significant increase of threats from the Portuguese who carried out raids and campaigns so as to occupy the coastal Moroccan cities and harbors. In Algeria, Tunisia and Libya the political situation was not any better as the Spanish king, Ferdinand, decided to continue his crusade by seizing the Algerian coast line which in turn threatened both Libya and Tunisia. See Shawqī Dayf, *‘Aṣr al-duwal wa al-imārāt*, pp. 43, 291.

¹¹¹⁰ Stephen Cory, *Reviving the Islamic Caliphate in Early Modern Morocco*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), p. 29.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid, Glossary under ‘Alawī.

¹¹¹² ‘Abdullah al-‘Arawī, *Mujmal tārikh al-Maghrib*, vol.3, pp.88, 89.

¹¹¹³ Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, p. 56.

scholars who had a significant influence on the rise and popularity of the newly established Darqāwiyya Sufi Order in the region of North Africa.

Although the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order had a humble start with a limited number of followers at first, it quickly gained momentum and its teachings spread all over Morocco and Algeria. The influence of Ibn ‘Ajība on the expansion of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order did not go unnoticed. During his early years of wandering among tribes to spread the teachings of his Sufi order, people flocked in large numbers to join the order. The rising popularity of the Darqāwiyya Order especially in the countryside became a source of concern to the ruling government and policies of repression to undermine its public appeal were soon applied. Ibn ‘Ajība and his followers stood their ground in this turbulent period against their oppressive policies which contributed to the even wider spread of the order.¹¹¹⁴ His critical influence on the expansion of the teachings of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order yielded its fruit through the establishment of the A‘jābiyya Sufi Order after his death so as to honor his legacy and spread his teachings – an order whose followers are currently counted in thousands all over Morocco.¹¹¹⁵

Although Ibn ‘Ajība had a great influence on Sufi literature in Morocco and North Africa in general, as just mentioned, he was not one of the Sufi scholars who immediately had a wide impact upon the Islamic world. One of the reasons for his limited effect was his being located in the backwater of Morocco, which is geographically distant from all the important cultural centers in the Islamic world, such as Cairo, Istanbul and Tehran. Also, Ibn ‘Ajība’s Sufi master, Shaykh al-Būzaydī and his master’s master, Shaykh al-Darqāwī, both died after Ibn ‘Ajība and this further limited his potential wider influence. According to Mahmut Ay, if Shaykh al-Darqāwī had died during the life of al-Būzaydī, most certainly al-Būzaydī would have become the master of the Darqāwiyya Order and if al-Būzaydī had died in Ibn ‘Ajība’s life, most likely Ibn ‘Ajība would have had become the master of the order and thus would have gained much more popularity due to the position he would have assumed as a leader of one of the influential Sufi orders in North Africa.¹¹¹⁶ In addition, if Ibn ‘Ajība had had the chance of becoming the master of the Darqāwiyya Sufi Order, most probably the order would have carried his name which would have helped him in gaining more popularity and allowed his teachings and works to become more widely spread. Another reason for the limited influence of Ibn ‘Ajība and

¹¹¹⁴ Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman*, pp. 167-169.

¹¹¹⁵ This information was given during a personal interview with Mahmut Ay at the University of Istanbul, Turkey in 30/03/2017.

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the confinement of his fame only to the region of North Africa was his disengagement from debates and discussions with opponents of Sufism, and, as history demonstrates, such debates generally help a scholar in gaining wider popularity.¹¹¹⁷

The question that might arise here is that if Ibn ‘Ajība’s writings did not have a wide impact during his lifetime and he was not seen as an influential Sufi theorist, what lies behind his popularity in recent times? As we now know, Ibn ‘Ajība was a prolific author who wrote more than thirty books on the science of Sufism which had their impact on later Sufi scholars. The fact is that a writer’s impact is not exclusively related to creating original theories or establishing new systems, but rather is also affected by explaining already established theories and systems in an original manner.¹¹¹⁸

In regard to this impact, one of the most significant writings of Ibn ‘Ajība is his six-volume Qur’ānic exegesis *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd* – *The Oceanic Exegesis of the Qur’ān*. The importance of Ibn ‘Ajība’s Qur’ānic exegesis lay in the original balance that he made between esoteric and exoteric modes of interpretation, and in this respect his explanation of divine love was of particular significance. Ibn ‘Ajība constructed a new approach to the subject of divine love that had already been extensively elaborated by different Sufi saints and mystics, connecting theoretical discussions of divine love to their practical application in respect to verses concerning love in the Qur’ān. As has been shown throughout this thesis, this unique combination formed a breakthrough in Sufi literature which later Sufi scholars, such as Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn Muṣṭafā al-‘Alawī (d. 1934), followed and expanded on in their interpretations of the Qur’ān.

Through my examination of the historical development of various esoteric Qur’anic commentaries in chapter two,¹¹¹⁹ I demonstrated how the methodological approaches of different classical scholars made their works largely only accessible to the Sufi adepts and unapproachable to the general public, a fact which makes one even more appreciative of Ibn ‘Ajība’s contribution to the genre of Sufi exegesis. Famous examples of classical Sufi exegesis include al-Tustarī’s *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, which was the first extant esoteric exegesis and formed the nucleus for the genesis of the subsequent genre of Sufi *tafsīr*, although it lacked a solid structure and defined methodology. Another example is the renowned *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr* of Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī, which is

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁹ In the section on “The Historical Development of the Genre of the Qur’anic Sufi Exegesis.”

a rich source filled with excerpts of the *tafsīr* of previous scholars, although on the downside it lacked a unified authorial voice and a systematic method of interpretation and was confined solely to only esoteric exegesis. Al-Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, however, managed to avoid all the problems found in the esoteric Qur'ān commentaries of his predecessors. His authorial voice as well as the originality of his esoteric commentary is clear and audible. He also adopted a systematic structure which combined spiritual subtlety and exoteric interpretation. Moreover, al-Qushayrī also took care not to saturate his *tafsīr* with ambiguous Sufi concepts, nor express his views in an elliptical writing style, as a result of which it was readily accessible and comprehensible by both exoteric scholars and the general public. For this reason, Ibn 'Ajība took al-Qushayrī's *tafsīr* as a model and heavily depended on it in writing his own *tafsīr*.

Although al-Qushayrī's methodology of combining both esoteric and exoteric commentary was followed by later Sufi scholars such as Ibn Barrajān in his commentary: *Tanbīh al-afhām ilā tadabbur al-kitāb al-ḥākīm wa al-naba' al-'azīm*, Ibn Barrajān's writing style of the esoteric section of his *tafsīr* was largely incomprehensible and hard to decipher. Thus the level of originality of his analysis and refined exposition were only appreciated by the most elect Sufi adepts and the general public were unable to appreciate the gems in his work. A major influential *tafsīr* work, *Kashf al-asrār wa-'uddat al-abrār*, was written in Persian by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī and was an adaptation of his master's ('Abdu'llāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī's) Sufi exegesis which was marked with brevity. Thus Maybudī took upon himself the task of expanding his master's brief Sufi exegesis into both an exoteric and esoteric interpretation. Although the latter part was primarily meant to address a Sufi audience, the multi-layered structure of its composition made it accessible to a wider audience. It is worth mentioning that Maybudī was largely inspired by al-Qushayrī's *tafsīr* and often quoted him without mentioning his source. Ibn 'Ajība likewise quoted al-Qushayrī's work heavily, but made no mention of Maybudī's *tafsīr* due to his own unfamiliarity with the Persian language.

Another valuable work that belonged to the genre of Sufi exegesis which was heavily quoted by Ibn 'Ajība is the Arabic exegesis by Rūzbihān Baqlī entitled '*Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*'. In his exegesis, Rūzbihān departed from an array of Sufi scholars who combined in their works both exoteric and esoteric commentaries. On the contrary, Rūzbihān preferred to address only esoteric interpretation in his *tafsīr*, which was written in a recondite style and saturated with elliptical and highly hermetic terminology. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kashānī, a disciple of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, followed

Rūzbihān's method of addressing only the esoteric dimension of the Qur'ān and adopted the same encoded writing style and the heavy usage of ambiguous Sufi terms in his exegesis.

This trend of all-exclusive Sufi exegesis was reversed by a voluminous esoteric exegesis which combined spiritual subtleties and legal interpretation, that is, the *Baḥr al-ḥaqā'iq wa al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-sab' al-mathānī* written by Najm al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ibn Muḥammad Rāzī, known as "Dāya." Dāya died before completing his exegesis, but the task of finishing his *tafsīr* was accomplished by 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī who adopted an easy writing style accessible to the general public and free from recondite spiritual terminology, although in regard to the esoteric aspect of the Qur'ān, Simnānī did use a language difficult to decipher. The equilibrium between spiritual subtleties and traditional literal interpretation (*ishārāt* and *'ibarāt*) was restored by Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī who wrote a famous Qur'ānic commentary titled *Rūḥ al-bayān* in which he adopted a pedagogical and didactic approach to both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Muslim scripture's interpretation.

When composing his own Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān, Ibn 'Ajība was quite well versed in the historical background and all the difficulties which faced the genre of Sufi exegesis. He well understood how most of the other works in this field had been written to address only the esoteric dimension of the Qur'ān and thus were only fit for Sufi adepts. Even when *tafsīr* works had been written to address both exoteric and esoteric levels of the Qur'ān, the latter aspect had been largely phrased in abstruse language and with an encrypted style inaccessible to the general public. Ibn 'Ajība's particular impact on the field of Qur'ān commentary was thus to reverse this hermeticizing trend in Sufi exegesis by structuring his entire *tafsīr* work on two levels: exoteric and esoteric, adopting a clear methodology in the esoteric section of his *tafsīr* where he avoided coded terminology and abstruse symbolism. He also integrated seven essential interpretive tools (hermeneutical exegesis (*ta'wīl*), classification (*taṣnīf*), critical commentary on previous esoteric works (*naqd*), symbolic and allegorical interpretations (*tafsīr ramzī wa majāzī*), edification (*ta'līm*), extrapolation (*ta'līq*) and analogy (*qiyas*) in order to explain the spiritual subtleties and allegorical meanings of the scripture. He constantly struggled to convey highly abstruse Sufi concepts into an understandable language so as to appeal to Sufi adepts and the non-specialists alike. As his two major Sufi references in esoteric exegesis, Ibn 'Ajība quoted both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān. However, he did not blindly follow

their opinions and often had a critical understanding of their views that included both objection and refutation.

Another aspect of Ibn ‘Ajība’s “impact” on the field of Qur’ān commentary, which was elaborated in chapter three, was to foster his own theological contribution in terms of turning the issue of the polarity of divine power and wisdom into a theosophical discussion and tying it closely to the notion of the divine covenant of the Trust (*amāna*). He followed the doctrine of the Ash‘arite school of theology, which took an intermediate position regarding this polarity and advocated the existence of two powers: eternal and contingent. The eternal divine originating power is responsible for actualizing all actions that bear the possibility or the potentiality of existence based on the divine will, which also includes all actions associated with human beings. The second power is the temporal human power, by the virtue of which actions are performed according to human will. Although the Ash‘arites recognized the *existence* of the temporal human power, they maintained that the *origin* of this human power is, ultimately speaking, divine. In other words, the divine originating power has the capacity to create both an action and the capability of human beings to perform this action.

Ibn ‘Ajība advanced this theological doctrine of the dual divine and human powers and integrated it into the concept of divine wisdom and power. He elaborated that divine wisdom is related to actions that on the surface level appear to be performed according to human will but being subjected to secondary causation, abide by the laws of cause and effect. As for divine power, it is related to the divine realm where in reality all actions are performed by God. Creating an equilibrium between the divine and human realm or between divine power and wisdom is the key, according to Ibn ‘Ajība, for the human being to become eligible to bear the divine Trust of love. Reaching this balance is only achievable through divine love.

Human beings, Ibn ‘Ajība continued, are thus the perfect candidates to bear and fulfill the divine Trust of love. The reason for the human being’s honorary position is related to man’s original nature (*fiṭra*) that integrates his spiritual celestial origin with his terrestrial earthly body, which together constitute the factors necessary for realizing divine love. In this respect, Ibn ‘Ajība’s unique contribution to the on-going debate on divine love was his elaboration of the essentiality of the so-called ‘Adamite clay nature’ of human beings as being the determinant factor in realizing divine love by creating the balance needed so the spiritual nature not dominate the earthly one, citing the simile of the leaden backside of the mirror – that is, the human clay-body – which is responsible

for capturing and reflecting sublime meanings and spiritual secrets. In this respect, human beings have an advantage over angels and are pre-eminent over other created beings. Neither al-Qushayrī nor Rūzbihān had commented on the special status of human beings in a language so appealing to the general public.

Likewise, in his discussion of the themes relevant to love, such as sin, gnosis, and the Unity of Being, Ibn ‘Ajība contributed many original insights to the discussions of these themes by previous Sufi authorities. For example, he adopted love as the bedrock for his theory of sin, and advanced the – Qur’ānic – principle that the lover does not torture or banish his beloved due to sins he has committed. Although this opinion had been previously reiterated by al-Qushayrī, Ibn ‘Ajība differed from him in explaining that God’s love for His servant does not mean that he becomes thereby infallible and does not commit sins, but rather indicates God’s preservation of the servant from committing sins related to the heart, while inspiring the heart to seek repentance immediately once bodily sins are committed. This means that the sinner turns into one who repents of sin and whose sins are wiped away by the virtue of his repentance, thereby meriting God’s love.

We also have seen how Ibn ‘Ajība refuted the views of an array of scholars who dogmatically associated sins with disobedience and utterly denied the validity and the possibility of a disobedient devotee’s love for God, dismissing this as preposterous. Ibn ‘Ajība rather adopted a more nuanced approach in which he divided sins into sins of the body and sins of the heart. He elaborated that bodily sins do not negate divine love in the sinner’s heart as the sin committed was done with the body, whereas love of God still remains and resides in the heart. As for the sins which are committed by the heart – such as discontentment with the decrees of Providence and showing vanity towards others – he maintained that this type of sin leads directly to God’s wrath and banishment, and so negates any claim to divine love by the sinner.

Ibn ‘Ajība developed this subtle dichotomy further and discussed the possibility that the bodily sins may even turn into acts of obedience if they are accompanied by sincere remorse from a broken heart, insofar as regret and remorse vouchsafes the sinner God’s love, leading him towards repentance. In other words, Ibn ‘Ajība posited that bodily sins could actually become a means of drawing closer to God, an approach which departs from the classical understanding of sin by traditional exoteric scholars who view it simply and solely as a cause of remoteness from God. Ibn ‘Ajība supported his opinion by quoting the Qur’ānic story of Satan and Adam in which the former was expelled from heaven and banished due to his sin of arrogance – which was a sin of the heart – whereas

the latter's sin of eating from the forbidden tree was met by forgiveness and proximity to God, being simply a sin of the body. Although this story was also commented upon by both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān, the reason why commitment of one sin led to eternal remoteness and damnation, whereas another sin became a source of proximity to God was not explained by them.

This nuanced theory of the difference between types of sin (those committed by the heart versus those by the body) advanced by Ibn 'Ajība cast an entirely new light on the meaning of sin. According to Ibn 'Ajība, whatever draws the servant closer to God and stimulates a state of humility in his servanthood is a means for his perfection and elevation. Similarly, whatever strengthens the sense of selfhood and reinforces its egoistic tendencies is a source of deficiency and remoteness from God. This means that a bodily sin committed with a remorseful heart is a means for proximity to God. This exposition actually explains how the sins committed by the Prophets such as Adam, Solomon and Moses which led them to a state of humility and submissiveness were a means to divine selection and proximity. The doctrine of the abasement and humility through servanthood as a means to witness the grandiosity of Lordship was not discussed by al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān.

After discussing the sins of the body, Ibn 'Ajība turned to the sins of the heart and exposed their gravity, insofar as these type of sins can very well lead to infidelity. The leading example of this type of sin is Satan who was expelled from heaven due to his arrogance which resulted in belittling God's command and rejecting His ruling. It was his arrogance that led him to infidelity (*kufṛ*), not merely his refusal to bow down to Adam. The importance of the heart as the essential factor in gaining proximity to God is elaborated by Ibn 'Ajība in the comparison he made between the prostration of the body vs. that of the heart. When the body prostrates in worship but the heart refuses to submit in humility and remains arrogant, worship becomes merely a shadow without substance, an empty formality devoid of reality. Furthermore, I demonstrated how Ibn 'Ajība underlined the importance of acts of worship performed by the heart versus those performed by the body, and maintained a very high regard for 'acts of the heart' as they are done by God, from God and to God.

Ibn 'Ajība also discussed the issue of claiming God's love while committing sins. Adopting a similar nuanced approach to this matter, he differentiated between the 'repetition' (*tikrār*) of sins after repentance with a remorseful heart from them each time

they are committed, and ‘insistence’ (*iṣrār*) on committing sins without repentance. The former does not negate the validity of divine love in the sinner’s heart as he is continually seeking God’s forgiveness with a sincere heart regardless of the repetition of sins, whereas the latter negates any claims of God’s love because what drives the person away from God is not the sin committed in and of itself but the arrogance that fills his heart and which allows him to continue sinning without a heart torn apart of guilt.

Ibn ‘Ajība concluded his discussion of divine love and sin by affirming the possibility of the coexistence of obedience to God with sin. The act of obedience which leads the heart to be in a state of arrogance and conceit is actually a sin in disguise as it leads to God’s banishment and wrath. By the same token, if a sin is followed by humility and remorse, it turns out to be an act of obedience. In other words, the only valid criterion for determining if the committed act is a sin or not is the state of the heart, reminding us of the importance of not passing moral judgments arbitrarily based on outer appearances.

The second theme which was thoroughly discussed by Ibn ‘Ajība is the relation between love and gnosis and which of them should be seen as the ultimate aim of the Sufi Path and the pinnacle of all the spiritual stations. Ibn ‘Ajība equated worship with gnosis and believed that human beings are the perfect manifestation of Lordship in the form of servanthood and this manifestation is the key to gnosis. He also took the explicit position of favoring gnosis over love and placed the former as the pinnacle of the Sufi Path unlike al-Ghazālī who designated love to be the optimum of all the spiritual stations. Ibn ‘Ajība’s placement of gnosis at the summit of the Sufi Path and putting love at the penultimate station is due to his view that gnosis indicates that all veils of separation from God have been removed so that the gnostic is able to recognize God in everything and thus does not feel distant from anything. Before the perfection of gnosis, the lover on the other hand is likely to feel at distance from everything due to his inability to recognize God in all things. Paradoxically however, in Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of many Sufi verses, love is placed as the origin of gnosis. For example, God’s covenant with humankind during the day of *Alast* was sealed with divine love and revealed the human being’s exclusive love for Him. Therefore, whoever breaches this covenant by loving anything other than God is deprived of gnosis.

Therefore, although Ibn ‘Ajība did favour the pre-eminence of gnosis over love, a closer analysis of his esoteric exegesis of verses related to gnosis shows that gnosis is the underlying cause of love whose degree in turn is strengthened based on the degree of

gnosis and vice versa. This view indicates the possibility that love and gnosis might be placed on an equal footing as partners at the summit of the Sufi Path. We can also notice how Ibn ‘Ajība was adamant in structuring the hierarchy of the stations of the Sufi Path with gnosis being its apex, with all the twelve different spiritual stations included therein. At the same time, the perfection of gnosis was held to be the starting point to an infinite elevation to higher realities. That being said, Ibn ‘Ajība indicated that perfection of gnosis does not equate with full gnosis of God as the full disclosure of God’s Essence is impossible to be fathomed by our limited intellectual capacities. Both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān, unlike Ibn ‘Ajība, did not outline a blueprint of the Sufi Path in their interpretation of the Qur’ānic verses related to gnosis.

The third theme repeatedly emphasized by Ibn ‘Ajība is the relationship between love and the Unity of Being. Although the term “Unity of Being” was not used *per se* throughout his esoteric interpretation, the doctrinal principles of this theory play a preponderant role in the formation of his concept on divine love. Ibn ‘Ajība succeeded in drawing a complete blueprint of the theory of the Unity of Being and fully integrating it into the theme of divine love. He put emphasis on the importance of witnessing the world as one consolidated entity which functions as a locus for the divine Attributes and Names to manifest and be reflected. He further added that the human being is the most perfect manifestation of the divine Attributes. In explaining the unique position of human beings vis-à-vis the rest of creation, he skillfully integrated the doctrine of divine power and wisdom. He elaborated that the divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) is reflected in the outer form of human beings which constitutes the crust, whereas the kernel is identified with the inner realities in the heart and thus reflects the divine power (*qudra*).

On an even larger scale, he added that the contingent crust and the outer shell of the universe is the manifestation of servanthood whereas its inner core and kernel conceals the secrets of Lordship. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to see the multiplicity in the world with an eye of unity as such realization is essential if we are to realize the full potential of divine love. He developed his idea of seeing unity in multiplicity even further and stated that God discloses Himself through opposites – the might of Lordship versus the shackles of servanthood. Ibn ‘Ajība added that all forms of creation are seen as vessels carrying in their core the inner realities of the divine Names and these outer forms are in essence sublime meanings which were ‘thickened’ and thus only through ‘softening’ these solid forms and turning them into their original sublime reality, can the

whole creation be seen as a theophany reflecting the divine Names and the secrets of Lordship.

The key for seeing the reality of the world as a theophany of the divine Attributes is purifying the spirit from the shackles of the Adamite clay nature that coagulates the refined nature of the spirit. Ibn ‘Ajība explained further that the spirit by nature is an ardent lover which yearns for love and so if it is not occupied with witnessing the beauty of spiritual realities, it indulges in viewing the sensual beauty of the engendered world. Witnessing the beauty of divine realities is granted to those whose hearts are filled with divine Attributes and thus are able to see with their insight (*baṣīra*) the divine secrets of Lordship. This stage is called ‘self-annihilation’, where the heart is submerged in witnessing inner realities and thus the mystic’s optical sight (*baṣar*) ceases to witness outer forms.

Another aspect of the Unity of Being equally emphasized by Ibn ‘Ajība is the insubstantial existence of the universe when viewed through the eye of divine Oneness. The world is thus seen as a shadow which does not have any independent existence of its own, and hence does not form an obstacle to witnessing the inner sublime meanings lying behind it. Reaching the stage of being absent from witnessing the outer forms of creation means that the gnostic is finally able to recognize God and the secret of Lordship in everything.

Being well aware that people differ in their ability to witness inner realities and to be exposed to divine secrets, Ibn ‘Ajība categorized people into three types according to their degree of witnessing the divine Unity. The first type are those who trace God’s existence through studying the ephemeral existence of the world. The second are those novices who witness first transient and sentient being, which they then transcend to witness God’s Unity. The third type are those who witness God before witnessing His creation and thus contemplate God without intermediaries. Ibn ‘Ajība then assigned these three categories to levels of divine Oneness (*tawḥīd*) and elaborated how the three degrees of Oneness (the divine Essence, Attributes, and Actions) represent the gradual ascension of the novice to the state of directly witnessing God.

Since Ibn ‘Ajība was aware of the controversies surrounding the theory of the Unity of Being and its association with the heresies of incarnationism and unification (*ḥulūl wa ittihād*), he clarified his position on this issue and rebutted any connection between it and both heresies. He further added that discovering the divine secret which encompasses all things is called the ‘eternal wine’ and forms the core of the divine

Essence and Attributes. Before God's self-disclosure and manifestation in the world of forms, this 'eternal wine' existed as a sublime meaning with no formal structure or visible substance. Once the 'eternal wine' entered the realm of manifestation in created forms, those forms acted as vessels filled with that wine to be drunk by the gnostics. Only when the essence of divine Unity becomes manifest in forms which are, however, not lost in the distracting multiplicity of creation, can gnostics witness the multiplicity of created beings with the eyes of Unity.

In addition, in regard to the theory of the Unity of Being, he exonerated the renowned Sufi mystics, such as Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn Sab'īn, al-Shushtarī, and al-Hallāj, among others, who were wrongly accused of integrating incarnationism and unification into their theories of the Unity of Being. However, what is essentially unique in Ibn 'Ajība's understanding of the Unity of Being and his exposition of its principles within his paradigm of divine love is that when explaining the essentials of the theory of the Unity of Being and how it is closely tied to the concept of divine love, he employed an easy language and used comprehensible terms which augmented the appeal of his writings to both the Sufi adepts and the non-specialists alike.

Although Ibn 'Ajība did not widely engage in public debates (*munāẓara*), he was always keen throughout his *tafsīr* to add an element of refutation to false concepts adopted by those who are misguided. We briefly touched on this aspect in Ibn 'Ajība's interpretation of verse (2:81) in chapter four in which he warned against indulging carelessly in sins without having a remorseful heart due to the sinner's dependence on the intercession of a Sufi shaykh to whom he is associated. Another example is in his interpretation of verse (2:8-10) in which he warned those who falsely claim that they have entered the divine precinct and enjoyed witnessing the divine presence, whereas in reality they are lingering in the abasement of selfhood. And those who pretend to have reached the highest degree of certitude (*yaqīn*) and gnosis (*'irfān*), whereas they are submerged in doubts and uncertainties. And those who dress themselves as gnostics yet are satisfied with their shortcomings and pitfalls (*'uyūb*). Ibn 'Ajība commented that those people are not deceiving anyone but their own selves as they deprived themselves from being truly connected to God and thus their hearts suffer from the disease of separation and abandonment.¹¹²⁰

¹¹²⁰ Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 78.

In conclusion, throughout my textual and comparative analysis, I have aimed to highlight Ibn ‘Ajība’s mystical approach in which he integrated his theory of divine love with other Sufi doctrines in a language that is both highly refined yet easily understandable at the same time. Although Ibn ‘Ajība’s successful attempt at synthesizing the theoretical concepts of divine love and their practical application to the Qur’ānic verses on love had been anticipated by centuries of famous precursors among the Sufis, the challenge that remained was one of making their ideas relevant and accessible. This contrasts with the ambiguous style of exposition, excessive use of symbolic allusions and the employment of elliptical language along with enigmatic concepts used by the previous Sufis as an aid to explain what is metaphysical in nature and so goes beyond the realm of conceptual understanding and intellectual realization. Sufi exegetes have a firm belief that transcending the apparent literal meaning of the text to reach a deeper spiritual one is only available to those who undergo rigorous spiritual training to purify their hearts so as to earn the ability to realize divine realities. But explaining these divine realities and deciphering enigmatic Sufi terms and mystical concepts in an accessible and appealing language for the general public was a challenge that had, before Ibn ‘Ajība, not been adequately met by any Sufi scholars. Ibn ‘Ajība chose to maintain a balanced approach to his esoteric commentary, so as to make it generally understandable and easily accessible by those who had no prior exposition to Sufism. This approach earned his work a generous reception among both exoteric and esoteric scholars.

Moreover, the paradigm of divine love which he outlined through his mystical commentary on the verses of love in the Qur’ān, such as “Say if you love God, follow me and God will love you and forgive your sins and God is the Most Forgiving” (3:31), “He loves them and they love him” (3:30), “those who believe love God more ardently” (2:165) among many others, paved the way for later Sufi exegetes to apply the metaphysical doctrine of divine love found in the vast Sufi heritage to their commentaries on the Qur’ān. In respect to the mystical exegesis of the Qur’ān, Ibn ‘Ajība’s approach constituted a breakthrough as it contributed immensely in enriching the field of Qur’ānic exegesis and left an indelible impact on the next generations of Qur’ānic exegetes not only in North Africa but in further parts of the Islamic world.

One of the essential sources of teaching ethical standards and human virtues is religion. The core teachings of all major religious traditions revolve around clearer perception of the world and our role in it, self-purification, ethical standards, social organization and intellectual contemplation.¹¹²¹ In the classical western Christian education, the youth were raised to uphold morals and manners which instilled in them that the source of happiness comes from educating the mind and refining the soul. However, the process of secularization in western societies wherein religion is dismissed from public life led to the absence of the supernatural and thus almost nothing has remained 'holy'. Pushing religion to the sideline of people's life meant that an important source of guidance for ethical conduct and spiritual values was cut off and as a result the equilibrium between the body and the spirit is today no longer intact.

Restoring the balance between the body and the spirit necessitates attaining self-knowledge as Boethius (c. 480-524/525), the influential medieval philosopher, who beautifully stated, "In other living creatures ignorance of self is nature; in man it is vice".¹¹²² The essentiality of self-knowledge was emphasized by the scholars of all great religious traditions¹¹²³ who argued that gaining self-knowledge is the route of spiritual growth. This knowledge does not yield any benefit if it remains in its theoretical form, as the real impact of knowledge on restoring the balance between body and spirit is only realized through personal experience.¹¹²⁴

The psycho-physical human condition by nature allows every one of us to be born in a certain position in the vast territory of the human spectrum. This spectrum is wide enough to engulf the two antithetical extremes of the human experience such as feeble weakness and excessive power, extrovert sociability and introvert seclusion, salacious lewdness and diligent celibacy. The human being has the freedom and the choice to move along this spacious horizontal sphere either up towards higher spiritual realities of the Divine or down to the abasement of pure materiality.¹¹²⁵

Narrowing the perspective of man's journey to reach the Divine to see it through the lens of Sufi literature, one of the major Sufi concepts which finds its base in the Qur'ān is the pre-eternal covenant between man and God which was first introduced by Sahl al-

¹¹²¹ Eric J. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 26.

¹¹²² Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 185.

¹¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 185.

¹¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 187.

¹¹²⁵ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 168.

Tustarī.¹¹²⁶ This covenant could be seen as the manifestation of the original affinity between humanity and God. Human beings are bestowed with a unique position among all other creatures by the virtue of which they are enabled to know and love God. This unique position is the result of ‘original affinity’ (*munāsaba aṣliyya*) between lover and beloved, that is, God and man.¹¹²⁷ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī illustrated that the source of this secret affinity is the existence of a divine element in human beings, that is, the Spirit (*rūḥ*). He further divided this secret affinity into two kinds: the first is drawing near God through adopting and resembling His Attributes (*ṣifāt*), and the second is the type of affinity which was left unspoken of and undefined in the Qur’ān, “Say: the spirit is of the command of my Lord” (17:85). Al-Ghazālī believes in the original divine nature of the spirit of human beings whose make-up remains a mystery far beyond our limited understanding and intellectual ability. This divine secret instilled in Adam was the reason why the angels prostrated themselves to him when he was created.¹¹²⁸

This concept of original affinity was clearly explained by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī (d. 672/1273 or 673/1274), a student of Ibn ‘Arabī, who writes:

“They turn to God with the attribute of pure absolute love and seek nothing other than him. They do not love him and seek him out of their knowledge of him or because someone has informed them of him. Indeed, they do not know why they love him, and they have so specific request of him. Rather their turning to him is caused by an original, essential affinity (*munāsaba aṣliyya dhātiyya*)....”¹¹²⁹

According to this Sufi perspective, restoring the balance between earthly bodily desires and spiritual heavenly realities is attained by seeking to strengthen the original affinity between man and God which was sealed by the divine covenant of love. This is where the contribution of Ibn ‘Ajība comes into play through contemplating his voluminous Qur’anic exegesis wherein the rich legacy of the Sufi philosophy of love is disseminated throughout his esoteric interpretation. Love is a word that unfortunately lost its genuine meaning in our world today which has witnessed great technological progress, yet suffers from a huge moral and spiritual decay.

¹¹²⁶ Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi‘rāj, Poetic and Theological Writings*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 90.

¹¹²⁷ Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 75.

¹¹²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 110, 111.

¹¹²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 75, 76.

Ibn ‘Ajība in his outstanding interpretation of the Qur’an two centuries ago discussed all these universal ailments and underlined that the main remedy for the Spirit’s egoistic tendencies is for the heart to be filled with divine love. Only then can the human being be purified from blind pursuit of money, power and self-interest. Also filling the heart with divine love teaches us the value of compassion and empathy to our fellow human beings who are manifestations reflecting the divine Attributes.

Ibn ‘Ajība’s message of love has both relevance in intra– and extra–Islamic contexts and cultures. When specifically addressed to a Muslim audience per se, his fresh treatment of the issue of sin establishes new moral grounds and new bases on which to evaluate the real meaning of sin, based not on legal texts and scriptural evidences, but solely on the state of the heart. In other words, if a sin was committed with a remorseful heart, then such sin turns into an act of obedience, whereas if an act of obedience comes out of a conceited heart, then it is sin. Ibn ‘Ajība thus does not simply hastily pass moral judgments based on outer appearances. We can develop this concept even further and say that such understanding in the extra-Islamic context, resolves the long-standing debate of who will go to heaven and who will be thrown at hell. These issues cannot be determined or judged by human beings, as such critical judgment is only left to the Creator.

In my opinion, the core message of Ibn ‘Ajība to our modern world is his provision of guidance in restoring the missing balance between bodily passions and spiritual refinement which would be hard to attain unless we connect to a higher Reality. Once this connection is in place, we will be able to better understand the reality of the ephemeral existence of the world with all its creatures and thus not be totally preoccupied with or wholeheartedly attached to it. For the Muslim believer, creating a balance between pursuing secondary causes while recognizing that all actions are solely performed by God puts one’s heart at ease and reassures us that we are not left stranded, but rather are being taken care of by a higher power.

Lastly, considered in the context of past and present scholarly studies of Ibn ‘Ajība’s life and works, this study has aspired to make a substantial contribution to the initial introduction of Ibn ‘Ajība to Western academic scholarship by John Louis Michon who translated his biography from Arabic to French along with some of his other books. Without the work of Michon, the leading French scholar in Islamic studies, Western academia would have been left deprived of the unique contributions of this 18th-century Moroccan scholar whose enriching works have not really been given its due attention up to the present.

However, the value of the present research does not stop simply at the surface level of picking up where Michon left off through an analysis of the Sufi doctrines and ideas found within Ibn ‘Ajība’s erudite commentary on the Qur’ān. The analytical approach of my work has, more importantly I hope, exposed to a Western readership the level of the real originality of Ibn ‘Ajība’s exegetical work, which though influenced by renowned Islamic scholars of previous centuries, had a huge impact on subsequent specialists in *tafsīr* due to his ability at elucidating enigmatic Sufi doctrines and concepts in an understandable language.

But the impact of Ibn ‘Ajība’s contribution goes beyond the genre of Sufi Qur’ānic exegesis and extends to influence of the science of Sufism in general.

Throughout his exegesis he was keen to discuss and integrate the concept of various spiritual stations of the Sufi Path, explaining the role of the Sufi shaykh and his relationship with his disciples, which are essential in the discussion of Sufism.¹¹³⁰ His entire exegesis or commentary is an exposition of Sufi teachings in the guise of a Quran commentary, as I think has been shown above throughout this thesis.

One can also safely say that Ibn ‘Ajība’s *tafsīr* is the best example of the genre of Sufi *tafsīr* in the 18th century in North Africa. His balanced approach was echoed in other Sufi works such as Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn Muṣṭafa al-‘Alawī’s *tafsīr, al-Baḥr al-masjūr fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān b- maḥd al-nūr*.¹¹³¹ For other academic researchers who wish to dive into the vast intellectual heritage left by this luminary and explore further his valuable contribution to the field of mystical exegesis of the Qur’ān in particular and to the genre of Sufi literature in general, perhaps this research may furnish a helpful start.¹¹³²

¹¹³⁰ See Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation of verse (3:110). Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, p. 394.

¹¹³¹ See Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, *tafsīr, al-Baḥr al-masjūr fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān b- maḥd al-nūr*, (Mustaghānim: al-Maṭba‘a al-‘Alawīyya, ND). See also, Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy*, (Cambridge, Islamic Text Society, 1993), 3rd ed. See also, Omneya Ayad, *The Contemporary Sufi Heritage of Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn Muṣṭafā al-‘Alawī: The Seven Spiritual Stages of the Sufi Path*, unpublished MA Thesis, The American University in Cairo. <http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/3800/Final%20Thesis%20Omneya%20Ayad.pdf?sequence=1>

¹¹³² I think it would be interesting as well for further studies to make a comparative analysis of Ibn ‘Ajība’s *tafsīr* with *Ruḥ al-Bayān* of Isma‘īl Ḥaqqī (d. 1127 /1715) and explore the similarities and differences in the esoteric and exoteric modes of interpretation as they both were produced at relatively the same era. As far as modern scholarship knows, the commentary of Ḥaqqī was not available to Ibn ‘Ajība and according to my research the latter did not know the former. It would also be of added value to conduct a research on *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī* of Maḥmūd al-Alūsī al-Baghdādī (d. 1270/ 1854) and see the level of influence and impact that Ibn ‘Ajība might have left on the latter’s work. I also recommend a comparative study to be conducted with another contemporary to Ibn ‘Ajība, Aḥmad al-Dardīr (d. 1715/1786) who is an Egyptian Sufi and Mālikī jurist. Although he did not write a separate Qur’ānic exegesis, his works were an integration between Sufism and jurisprudence. A PhD thesis on the life and works of al-Dardīr titled “*The Transmission of the Islamic Tradition in the Early Modern Era: The Life and Writings of Aḥmad Al-Dardīr*” was done by Walead Mosaad in the University of Exeter.

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