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Source: *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1/2 (MARCH/JUNE 2007), pp. 1-25

Published by: [Penn State University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20716541>

Accessed: 10/06/2013 03:25

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APPROACHES TO PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE IN EARLY SUFISM

“Proximity to Him is joy, distance from Him is sorrow.”¹

-Abū Madyan

“The Prophet said, ‘My ascension

is not to be preferred over Jonah’s ascension.

Mine was to the heavens and his was a descent [into the whale’s belly],

for proximity to the Real is beyond measure.

Proximity lies not in going high or low.

Proximity to the Real lies in being freed from the prison of existence.”²

-Rūmī

INTRODUCTION

There is a famous tradition in Islam in which an unknown man, fully clad in white and evincing no signs of travel, approaches the Prophet Muhammad and begins to ask him several questions. Prior to his last question, which has to do with eschatology, the man asks the Prophet to define three terms: *islām*, *īmān*, *iḥsān*, meaning “submission,” “faith,” and “doing what is beautiful” respectively. The Prophet tells his interlocutor that *islām* is to bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger, to perform the daily ritual prayers, pay the alms tax, fast during the month of Ramadan, and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca if one has the ability to do so. In response to the second question, the Prophet says that *īmān* is to believe in God, His angels, scriptures, measuring out good and evil, and the Final Day. With respect to the third term, *iḥsān*, the Prophet



succinctly defines it as follows: “It is that you worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, He nevertheless sees you.” We learn at the end of the account that this man was none other than the angel Gabriel, who, as the Prophet explained to one of his closest companions, “came to teach you your religion.” This account is referred to in the classical Islamic sources as the *ḥadīth* or tradition of Gabriel, and is foundational for all of Islamic learning.

The terms encountered in this tradition—*islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān*—constitute the basis of Islamic faith and practice. *Islām* corresponds to the actions expected of Muslims, *īmān* to the articles of faith to which every Muslim must adhere, and *iḥsān* to the inner aspect of one’s actualization of *islām* and *īmān*. Taken together, the terms respectively correspond to the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of the religion, or, from another perspective, one’s body, mind, and soul, or, from yet another perspective, one’s doing, believing, and knowing. Consequently, “religion” from the Islamic perspective must take in all three of these domains, and for each domain there are people proficient in its details. If Muslims want to know how to perform the ritual ablutions for the prayer or how to calculate their alms tax, they would go to the jurists, those concerned with the formal and legal requirements of Islamic praxis (*islām*). If they want to consolidate their belief in God or wish to learn about the details of the Final Day (*īmān*), they would naturally speak to the theologians, and, for those with a philosophical bent, the philosophers of the community. People with deeper spiritual concerns—and, as a precondition, who are sound in their faith and practice—will find their questions answered by visiting those Muslims adept in the inner sciences of Islam (*iḥsān*).³ The people concerned with the inner meanings of Islam’s beliefs, rites, and rituals came to be known as Sufis, or simply Muslim “mystics.” Their central concern always has been, as the Prophet defined it, to worship God as if they see Him, with the caveat that He sees them regardless of whether or not they see Him. For the Sufis—of whom the Prophet must be counted as the first⁴—worshipping God as if they see Him leaves open the possibility and, indeed, the reality, that they can in fact see Him, which is why the practices and doctrines of Sufism are geared towards polishing the eye of the heart (*‘ayn al-qalb*).



One way the Sufis envisioned their relationship with God, implied in the Prophet's definition of *iḥsān* in the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, was through the use of spatial referents, such as proximity (*qurb*) and distance (*bu'd*). Like a number of other technical terms in the Sufi lexicon, these two terms were used by the Sufis in order to discuss a cluster of ideas and concepts derived from the Qur'ān and the Prophet's utterances. In the Qur'ān, the root *q.r.b.* is employed some 96 times in various contexts,⁵ while the root *b.ʿ.d.* appears 36 times, excluding the preposition derived from the same trilateral root structure.⁶ The Qur'ān speaks of proximity in such verses as Q. 2:186, "And when My servants ask you about Me, I am indeed near (*qarīb*)—I answer the call of the suppliant when he calls upon Me"; Q. 50:16, "We are closer to him (*aqrab*) than the jugular vein"; Q. 56:10-11, "And the foremost, the foremost! They are the ones brought near (*muqarrabūn*)."⁷ A number of these verses—especially Q. 50:16 and Q. 56:10-11—were common points of reference for the Sufis' teachings on proximity and distance. Amongst the traditional reports, the most significant of them with respect to proximity is a well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* or "sacred tradition" known as the *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* ("The tradition of supererogatory works"), where God says,

My servant draws near to Me through nothing that I love more than what I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks.⁷

In what follows, I will highlight the ways in which seven influential early Muslim mystics spoke of proximity and distance.⁸ It will be shown how each of these early Sufi authors, while often drawing upon the same scriptural sources and taking into account the discussions which preceded them, nonetheless managed to present their unique perspectives on proximity and distance.



Kharrāz: PROXIMITY AS SILENCE

One of the first and most significant contributions to early Sufi discussions on proximity is to be found in the important Sufi Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz's (d. 899 CE) *Kitāb al-ṣifāt* (*The Descriptions of Proximity*).⁹

The book begins with a four-fold classification of the types of human beings, all of whom, in one form or another, “respond” to God’s call.¹⁰ To the first group belong those whose hearts God has veiled as a result of their preferring this world over the next world. They therefore die in a state of grief and sorrow because of their love for the world and its trappings. The second group are those people who fulfill their religious obligations, but are veiled from God because they obey Him not purely out of love for Him, but, rather, out of expectation of His promised rewards. They too leave the world in sorrow for having wasted their lives away. The third group are those people who worship God out of complete sincerity, and who acquire numerous spiritual virtues along the way. Although they long to see God, they are still veiled from Him and thus not “proximate” to Him because they cannot look beyond their spiritual virtues, the preoccupation with which hinders them from gaining true knowledge of God.¹¹ The fourth class of people are selected by God and are His “friends” (*awliyāʾ*). God gives them knowledge of His kingdom (*mulk*) in order to prepare them “so that they may withstand the onslaught of His majesty,”¹² much like Abraham in Q. 6:75, to whom God shows “the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth so that he may be amongst those who have certainty.” This station of “proximity to God” (*maqām al-qurb*) bestowed upon His friends is only possible when God gazes upon them and is therefore proximate to them through some type of intermediary or veil (*ḥijāb*).¹³ In other words, a veil must exist between God and His friends, without which the latter will simply perish because their souls will not be able to sustain the weight of the Divine Presence. In order to prove this point, Kharrāz invokes the famous instance in Q. 7:143, where God reveals Himself to the mountain which consequently crumbles and because of which Moses faints.¹⁴ Yet the veil which exists between God and His friends can be removed for the strongest amongst them, at which time they are thrown into a state of rapture or ecstasy (*wajd*).¹⁵ Since such people can sustain God’s gaze without



an intermediary, they too can look at Him without an intermediary: the more they look at Him, the closer they draw to Him; the closer they draw to Him, the more their ecstasy increases and the more bewildered and awestruck they become. The penultimate stage of proximity results in the mystics' state of ecstasy wherein all that they can comprehend is God, and, therefore, can say nothing but "God."¹⁶ In the final analysis, the proximity of God's friends results in silence due to their bewilderment.¹⁷ At this stage they are unable to even say "God" because He does not leave room for anything else but His Presence.¹⁸

Kalābādhī: PROXIMITY AS OBEDIENCE AND UNION

Turning our attention to the first official manual of Sufism, the *Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (*An Introduction to Sufism*) by Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 990/994 CE), we notice a brief article devoted to proximity. But there is also at least one other section in the *Ta'arruf* in which Kalābādhī discusses this theme. In his treatment on gnosis (*ma'rifa*), he cites the famous Egyptian Sufi Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 859 CE): "Dhū'l-Nūn was asked, 'How did you attain gnosis of your Lord?' He replied, 'Whenever I wanted to commit an act of disobedience (*ma'ṣiyya*), I would remember God's majesty (*jalāl*) and would thus be ashamed before Him.'"

Kalābādhī then offers his own comments on this statement: "He took his knowledge of God's nearness to him to be the proof of his gnosis of Him."¹⁹ Here, Kalābādhī understands nearness to be the overwhelming presence of God, which inhibits the servant from sinning. This view of proximity resembles—with obvious differences—the last stage of earthly proximity spoken of by Kharrāz in his *Kitāb al-ṣifāt*, where, as we saw, the mystic is utterly bewildered by God's Presence.

In keeping with his treatment of the other important questions of the spiritual life, Kalābādhī's chapter on proximity proper contains quotations from the Sufis of the past—furnished with his occasional comments—and several significant poems. Kalābādhī begins his chapter on proximity with a saying attributed to the famous early Sufi al-Shiblī (d. 945 CE),²⁰



who says that proximity is “obedience.”²¹ The quotation which follows Shiblī’s definition is ascribed to an anonymous author who defines proximity as one’s “being attached to Him and humble before Him because of His saying—Great and Glorious is He!—‘prostrate and draw near!’” (Q. 96:10).²² Ruwaym (d. 915 CE),²³ a companion of one of the pillars of Sufism, Junayd (d. 910 CE), defines proximity as “getting rid of those things that oppose Him,”²⁴ while a more gnostic interpretation of proximity is attributed to an anonymous author as “your witnessing His actions through you.” Kalābādhī’s explanation of this statement yields nothing new. Then a poem by Nūrī (d. 907 CE)²⁵—famous for his preoccupation with divine love—is cited:

He showed me my union in my annihilation, as I drew near.
Nearness to You is impossible apart from You.
I have neither grasp of You nor ruse against You,
I have neither escape nor refuge from You.
People draw near by their hopes—thus do You grant them arrival.
But, were all they to perish, I would never be distant from You.²⁶

While this poem reiterates a notion which was seen in Kharrāz—namely proximity to God as a result of God’s will—it also underscores the important connection between proximity to God and the fading away of the human ego, a theme which we shall explore in more detail in the following section.

Makkī: THE ROLE OF THE EGO IN PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

Another way in which discussions on proximity and distance were cast in the early period of Sufism is to be found in Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 996 CE) *Qūt al-qulūb* (*The Hearts’ Sustenance*), a work of central importance to the Sufi tradition. In chapters 28 and 29 of this book he devotes attention to the aforementioned *muqarrabūn*, that is, those who are “brought near.” Chapter 28 does not tell us much about Makkī’s views on proximity, dealing as it does with the vigilant self observance of those brought near.



In chapter 29, however, Makkī deals with what he calls in the heading of this chapter “The folk of the stations amongst those brought near,” who are to be distinguished from “The folk of heedlessness who are distant (*mub‘idīn*).”²⁷ Already in the title of this important chapter we are told that some of those made proximate to God can be characterized with reference to the spiritual stations (or virtues), whereas those who are distant are considered to be heedless of God. Makkī does not elaborate on the contents of this title until several pages into the chapter. The pages preceding the heart of the discussion appear to be a reexamination of the previous chapter, followed by a brief discussion on love for God. Makkī then proceeds to juxtapose those who are characterized by proximity with those who are characterized by distance. He highlights the difference between those who witness none but God and are most proximate to Him, and those only concerned with God’s creatures and are proximate to them.²⁸ Then Makkī explains why the former group are referred to as “those brought near,” whereas the later are referred to as “those who are distant”:

This [latter group] is distant from Him because distance is their characteristic. The dominance of the ego and the control of its authority upon them is the ‘locus of distance,’ by which distance is brought about. The first [group] is brought near to Him because proximity is their characteristic. Their withdrawal from and subjugation of the ego is the ‘locus of proximity,’ by which proximity is brought about.²⁹

Makkī therefore views proximity to God as resulting from one’s subjugation and conquering of the ego, whereas he views distance to be its polar opposite. But distance may also characterize God’s pious servants who have subjugated their ego. Amongst the three types of people belonging to the rank of “those brought near” are (1) people who have knowledge of God, (2) people who love God, and (3) people who fear Him. All three members of this group of those brought near are “His select friends.”³⁰ Apart from this special class of believers are the commonality of the devout believers, such as the Qur’ān reciters, the worshippers, and the people of spiritual struggle, asceticism and the performance of litanies.³¹ Their proximity to God is distance for those brought near,³² since these com-



mon believers are bound to the exoteric aspects of the religion and do not necessarily engage in the spiritual life and practice of the mystics, whereas those brought near are mystics who are concerned exclusively with the religion's esoteric or inner dimension. What such a group of believers consider to be spiritual attainments are, according to those brought near, the exact opposite.³³ This is because the element of duality with the common rank of believers still obtains: they first see themselves and then see God, who, out of His mercy and compassion, consequently looks towards them and grants them proximity to Him.³⁴ So long as one has an ego one may be proximate to God, but in relation to the proximity others have attained by destroying their egos, such proximity is actually considered to be distance. On the other hand, those brought close to God only see God, and He therefore grants them proximity to Him in ways which could not be realized by the commonality of believers. This sophisticated treatment of proximity harks back to Kharrāz's understanding of proximity as God's looking at the servant by virtue of the impossibility of the servant's attaining proximity to God unless He turns towards him.

Niffarī: GOD AS PROXIMATE AND DISTANT

The enigmatic figure, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī (d. 965 CE), devotes a section of his *Mawāqif* (*The Spiritual Halting Places*) to proximity. The language is quite abstruse, but some interesting distinctions concerning proximity and distance are drawn out here. In one *mawqif*, God informs Niffarī,

I am the proximate, not in the sense of the proximity of one thing to another. I am the distant, not in the sense of the distance of one thing from another.³⁵

In this *mawqif* God presents Himself as both proximate and distant, but not in the ordinary senses of the term. There is a perfect balance of His transcendence and immanence emphasized here, but which leaves room for a degree of subtlety which cannot be captured by simply stating that God



is both proximate and distant. Rather, God is proximate/not proximate, distant/not distant.

The above point is finely illustrated by the following two passages, where God says to Niffarī:

The proximity which you know is distance, and the distance which you know is distance. I am the proximate/the distant without distance.³⁶

I am more proximate to the tongue of the speaker when he speaks. Whoever witnesses Me cannot speak of Me. And whoever speaks of Me cannot witness Me.³⁷

The spatial barrier between the servant and the Served does not break down as such. Insofar as there is a barrier between the two, there will always be distance, even when there is proximity. God is proximate to the servant insofar as He is not characterized by distance, yet is distant from the servant even when there is no distance between them. God's proximity is such that the minute we speak of Him, He is no longer proximate. Human articulation can only distance us from God, since all speech is a delimitation, and so long as there are delimitations of the Divinity, there will be distance between the delimiting and the Delimited. Silence is the only mode which can capture God's proximity, for it is what allows God to present Himself in His fullness, which is pure proximity. Once again, this calls to mind Kharrāz's teaching in the *Kitāb al-ṣifāt*, where he says that the highest station of proximity is silence.

Sarrāj: PROXIMITY AS DISTANCE

The first relatively systematic discussion of both proximity and distance is to be found in Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj's (d. 988 CE) *Kitāb al-luma' fī al-taṣawwuf* (*Gleams into Sufism*). His treatment of these concepts is to be found in the section on proximity in the book's chapter devoted to the stations and states of the Sufi path.³⁸



After citing a number of verses from the Qurʾān which deal with proximity (such as Q. 50:16), Sarrāj goes on to provide a general definition of proximity as a state in which the servant “witnesses, with his heart, nearness to God, thus drawing closer to God—Exalted is He!—with his acts of obedience, while [placing] all of his concerns before God by virtue of his perpetual remembrance of Him, both openly and in secret.”³⁹ This definition is then followed by a three-fold categorization of the types of people proximate to God:

(1) Those who are drawn near to Him through acts of obedience which is a result of their knowledge of God’s knowledge of them, and their knowledge of His proximity and His power over them.⁴⁰

(2) Those who are proximate to Him by virtue of their realization (*taḥaqquq*) of God’s proximity to them. Here Sarrāj provides an instructive statement by an early Sufi master on the theme of proximity: “‘Āmir b. ‘Abd al-Qays [al-‘Anbarī]—God have mercy on him—said, ‘I did not look at anything except that I saw God—Exalted is He!—closer to it than myself.’”⁴¹ Sarrāj also cites Junayd, who says that God’s proximity to His servants is in accordance with what is proximate to their hearts,⁴² which can be taken to mean that God will draw closer to His servants by virtue of how much they remember Him.

(3) Those whom Sarrāj calls “the great ones” (*al-kubarā*) and “the folk of the end affairs” (*ahl al-nihāyāt*). Here, Sarrāj significantly calls on the authority of Nūrī, whose poem we encountered in Kalābādhi’s treatment of proximity in his *Taʿarruf*. Nūrī instructs a visitor from Baghdad, telling him that when he returns to his spiritual companion Abū Ḥamza al-Khurāsānī (d. 903/911), the visitor should let him know that “The proximity of proximity (*qurb al-qurb*)—according to what we mean by the term—is the distance of distance (*buʿd al-buʿd*).”⁴³ This statement as it stands is quite obscure. It can be taken to mean that the state of proximity, according to Nūrī, is equivalent to or results in being distant from distance. If one is distant from being distant from God then one



may be close to Him. Yet it can also be understood to mean that that proximity which is characteristic of proximity is, in actuality, the same as that distance which is characteristic of distance. In other words, if one is proximate to God, one is, in actuality, distant from Him. The following statement attributed to Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sūsī (d. ca. 900) clarifies what Sarrāj had in mind when quoting Nūrī:

Insofar as the servant is ‘proximate,’ it is not ‘proximity’ until he becomes absent to [his] proximity on account of [His] proximity. When he no longer sees [his] proximity on account of [His] proximity, that then is proximity. That is, [when he no longer] sees his proximity to God—Great and Glorious—on account of God’s proximity to him.⁴⁴

It thus becomes clear that this third type of proximity envisioned by Sarrāj is a state in which Nūrī’s declaration must be taken to mean that the *knowledge* of one’s proximity to God is, in reality, distance from God.⁴⁵ In other words, what separates a servant from God is the fact that they are two separate entities. They are different, distinct from one another, and therefore “distant.” But, if as al-Sūsī says, the servant no longer sees his proximity to God because of God’s proximity to him, this is because there is nothing for the servant to see but God. In such a case the distinction between the servant and the Served breaks down so that no traces of duality remain. And, as long as no traces of duality remain, true proximity obtains. Such an understanding of proximity can then be called “union,” which would explain Nūrī’s identification of union with proximity in his above-cited poem from Kalābādhī’s *Ta‘arruf*.

Qushayrī: THE *Hadīth al-nawāfil* AND THE THREE CATEGORIES OF PROXIMITY

Turning our attention to the *Risāla (The Treatise on Sufism)* by the famous Sufi Abū’l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1074 CE), we find an entire chapter de-



voted to proximity and distance. One of his standard ways of discussing proximity is as follows: “The servant cannot be proximate to the Real except that it entails his distance from created things.”⁴⁶ As was the case with both Kalābādhī and Sarrāj, proximity “comes about by [performing] acts of obedience to Him and [having] one’s every moment characterized by worship of Him (*al-ittiṣāf fi dawām al-awqāt bi-‘ibādatihi*).”⁴⁷ Distance comes about by opposing God’s commands and disobeying Him,⁴⁸ resulting in “distance” from success in one’s religious life (*tawfīq*) and from attaining spiritual realization (*taḥqīq*).⁴⁹

Qushayrī is the first of the Sufis we have considered thus far to draw on the previously-quoted *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* in his treatment of proximity, although he does not offer a detailed analysis of its implications.⁵⁰ The version he cites is as follows:

Those seeking to draw near to Me approach Me with nothing [more beloved to Me] than carrying out what I have made incumbent upon them. The servant continues to draw near to Me through [the performance] of supererogatory works until he loves Me and I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing and sight. Through Me he sees and through Me he hears.⁵¹

Significant to Qushayrī’s treatment of proximity and distance are the clear parallels with Sarrāj’s discussion on proximity. Like Sarrāj, Qushayrī also says that one’s recognition of his proximity is in fact distance: “Seeing [one’s] proximity is a veil from proximity.”⁵² He even gives a slightly different version of the report cited by Sarrāj, where Nūrī tells Abū Ḥamza’s student to tell his master that “The proximity of proximity, according to us, is the distance of distance.”⁵³

Qushayrī also discusses the different ways in which God is proximate to His servants, pointing out that there are levels of nearness, the highest being reserved for the friends of God—here directly equated with intimacy (*ta’nīs*), as we have seen is the case with Sarrāj—while God is proximate to the common lot of believers through His knowledge and power, and



the select believers (*khāṣṣ bi'l-mu'minīn*, who are below God's friends but above the commoners) through His grace and assistance.⁵⁴

Using the well-known tripartite division of reality employed by Muslim theologians and philosophers, Qushayrī says that proximity to God can either be (1) necessary (*wājib*), (2) possible (*jā'iz*), or (3) impossible (*muḥāl*).⁵⁵ The type of proximity that is “necessary” is the proximity entailed by obeying God and being utterly sincere towards Him, which results in the “proximity of knowledge”—this also being the case with Sarraj—and “vision.”⁵⁶ “Possible” proximity comes about by God's “selecting whomsoever He wills amongst His servants, which is ‘the proximity of generosity’ on account of [God's] kindness.”⁵⁷ As for “impossible” proximity, Qushayrī refers to it as the proximity between the Divine Essence and the human essence (*tadānī al-dhawāt*).⁵⁸ The reason this is impossible is because God cannot be delimited—and therefore temporal—while originated things cannot in any way be joined to Him.⁵⁹ Here, Qushayrī makes explicit what is already implied by his predecessors' treatment of proximity: God qua God is completely inaccessible to anyone other than Himself. What we can be proximate to is God's manifest “face” and not His non-manifest face, which remains eternally veiled behind the tresses of His manifest face.⁶⁰

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NOTES

1. 'Alawī, *Mawādd*, 158. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.
2. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, 3:4510-4513 (book 3, verses 4510-4513, Persian text).
3. My exposition of the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel is based on Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam*, 1-23, also available in his forthcoming book, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, edited by Mohammed Rustom, et al.
4. See Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 33-44.
5. 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Mu'jam*, 686-688.
6. *Ibid.*, 159-163.
7. Cited in Chittick, *Sufism*, 38. It should be kept in mind that "sacred traditions" are not a part of the Qur'ān, nor are they treated as the Prophet's sayings. They are extra-Qur'ānic inspirations in which God addresses humankind in the first-person through the Prophet. For more on this body of literature, see Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*.
8. In this article my focus is specifically on some early Sufi approaches to proximity and distance with reference to the most important technical expressions used to denote them, namely *qurb* and *bu'd*. But it should be noted that in Sufi literature, terms such as "expansion" (*bast*), "union" (*jam*), "love" (*maḥabba*), "intimacy" (*uns*), and "friendship/sainthood" (*walāya*) may replace or qualify *qurb*, and terms such as "contraction" (*qabḍ*), "longing" (*shawq*), "separation" (*farq*), and "estrangement" (*wahṣha*) may replace or qualify *bu'd*. Some of the cognate terms for proximity will naturally come up in this article, al-



though my concern is not with their technical development as such. For the different terms used to describe the phenomena of proximity and distance (*qurb* and *bu'd*) in the Sufi tradition, see, amongst others, Anṣārī, *Manāzil*, 96-97 (Arabic text) and Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 6:235. With respect to proximity in particular, I have not taken into consideration the teachings of the famous Sufi al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, since his notion of proximity is intimately related to his sophisticated theory of "sainthood," and is thus beyond the scope of this article. For more on Tirmidhī, see Radtke, "The Concept of *Wilāyah* in Early Sufism," 1:483-496; Radtke, Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidī; Sviri, "Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and the *Malamātī* Movement in Early Sufism," 1:583-613; Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*; and Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*.

9. Kharrāz, *Rasā'il*, 22-28. A French translation and summary of this treatise may be found in Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 252-267. Karamustafa reads the title of the treatise as *Kitāb al-ṣafā'* (which he renders as *The Book of Serenity*), in keeping with the reading offered by Sammarā'ī and at least one other scholar (see Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 31, n. 39). But it seems that Nwyia's rendering of the title as *Kitāb al-ṣifāt* (*The Descriptions of Proximity*) is correct, since the treatise is styled as an exposition of proximity in the form of answers by Kharrāz to a series of questions posed to him by his disciple, with a number of his queries beginning with the words, "Describe for me..." (*ṣif lī*). For Kharrāz's treatment of *qurb* in his *Kitāb al-ṣifāt*, see also Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 8-9. For Kharrāz's discussion of "proximity" (*qurb*) in the context of his treatment of "intimacy" (*uns*)—where he draws on the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel in this regard—see his *The Book of Truthfulness*, trans. A.J. Arberry, 46-49. See Saab, *Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz* for Kharrāz's life and teachings.
10. Kharrāz, *Ṣifāt*, 22.
11. *Ibid.*



12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 23.
16. Ibid., 26. Cf. Kharrāz's statement in the most comprehensive collection of early Sufi interpretations of the Qur'ān, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī's (d. 1021) *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* (*The Inner Realities of Scriptural Exegesis*), translated in Rustom, "Forms of Gnosis in Sulamī's Sufi Exegesis of the *Fātiḥah*," 341. In the article just cited, I inadvertently failed to acknowledge properly the assistance of Professor Walid Saleh of the University of Toronto. Apart from his helpful feedback as I was writing the paper, useful comments on its earliest draft, and subsequent encouragement to publish it, Professor Saleh graciously provided me with the manuscript upon which the study was based.
17. Kharrāz, *Ṣifāt*, 26. In this context, Kharrāz cites a *ḥadīth* which, although Nwyia was unable to locate, he notes in his French translation of this treatise in his *Exégèse*, 264, n. 1, that it is to be found in Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq*, but is not cited as a *ḥadīth*. The passage in Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq* has the state of bewilderment as the result of saying "God." See Rustom, "Forms of Gnosis," 334.
18. Kharrāz, *Ṣifāt*, 26. For an English translation—based on Nwyia's French translation—of Kharrāz's treatment of the final stages of proximity, see Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 9.
19. Kalābādhi, *Ta'arruf*, 82. For an English translation of this treatise, see *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, trans. A.J. Arberry. For a translation of Kalābādhi's treatment of "experiential knowledge" in the *Ta'arruf*, see Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism*, 100-111. For a com-



- plete French translation of the *Ta'arruf*, see *Traité de soufisme*, trans. Roger Deladrière. Dhū'l-Nūn's statement cited by Kalābādhī can also be found in Sarrāj, *Luma'*, 104; Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 475. For more on Dhū'l-Nūn, see Böwering, "Du'L-Nun Mesri," 7:572-573; Ibn 'Arabī, *La vie merveilleuse de Dhū'l-Nūn l'Égyptien*, trans. Roger Deladrière; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 39-42; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 42-47.
20. For this early Sufi, see Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums*, 1:513-665.
21. Kalābādhī, *Ta'arruf*, 127.
22. *Ibid.*, 128.
23. For Junayd, see Abdel Kader's problematic study, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, and Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 251-265. For Ruwaym, see Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums*, 1:447-482.
24. Kalābādhī, *Ta'arruf*, 128.
25. For Nūrī, see Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums*, 1:381-446.
26. Kalābādhī, *Ta'arruf*, 128.
27. Makkī, *Qūt*, 1:201. For translations of Makkī's treatment of knowledge in the *Qūt*, see Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism*, 112-263. A complete (and monumental) German translation of the *Qūt* is available: *Die Nahrung der Herzen*, trans. Richard Gramlich.
28. Makkī, *Qūt*, 1:204.



29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 1:205.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Niffarī, *Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt*, 2-3 (Arabic text). For some excellent English renditions of Niffarī's *Mawāqif*, see Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 284-300. For Niffarī and Ibn 'Arabī on the "paradox of the veil", see Chittick, *Sufism*, 137-153. A French translation of the *Mawāqif* is available: *Le livre des stations*, trans. Maati Kabbal.
36. Ibid., 3.
37. Ibid.
38. For English translations of Sarrāj's understanding of the Qur'ān and the character of the Prophet Muhammad, see Ernst, *The Teachings of Sufism*, 2-14; 21-39. Translations from the *Luma'* dealing with the Sufi understanding of following the Prophet and listening to poetry can be found in Calder, et al., *Classical Islam*, 234-236. For Sarrāj's exposition of the stations of the Sufi path, see Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 199-211. For Sarrāj's treatment of the Sufi approach to knowledge, see Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism*, 65-99. A complete German translation of the *Luma'* is available: *Schlaglichter über das Sufitum*, trans. Richard Gramlich.



39. Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 53.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid. This point calls to mind the frequently cited saying of Abū Bakr (d. 634 CE), the famous Companion of the Prophet: “I did not look upon anything without seeing God before it.” See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 102, 178, 215, and 348.
42. Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 53.
43. Ibid. Cf. Nwyia, *Exégèse*, 262, n. 3.
44. Ibid.
45. This idea receives its most extensive treatment in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī. See Rustom, “Ibn ‘Arabī on Proximity and Distance” (forthcoming). Cf. this discussion to a passage in the *Kashf al-mahjūb* (*The Uncovering of the Veiled*), 36—one of the earliest manuals on Sufism in Persian—by Hujwīrī (d. ca. 1071 CE), where it is said that the failure to observe the proper courtesies of the path results in being distant when one thinks himself to be proximate. In this passage—and many other Sufi texts—Sufism itself is defined as “courtesy” (*adab*): “All of Sufism is courtesy.” Hujwīrī’s *Kashf* is available in English: *Revelation of the Mystery*, trans. R.A. Nicholson.
46. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 158. There are two complete translations of the *Risāla* in English: *The Risalah: Principles of Sufism*, trans. Rabia Harris, and *Al-Qushayri’s Epistle on Sufism*, trans. Alexander Knysh. For English translations of Qushayrī’s treatment of the technical expressions employed by the Sufis (amongst which are proximity and distance), see Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 99-149. For translations of his treatment of mystical knowledge, see Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism*, 286-293. A complete German translation of the



Risāla is available: *Das Sendschreiben al-Qushayrī's über das Sufitum*, trans. Richard Gramlich.

47. *Ibid.*, 157.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. This task would be left to Ibn 'Arabī. See Rustom, "Ibn 'Arabī on Proximity and Distance." For Qushayrī's influence on Ibn 'Arabī's magisterial *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Illuminations*), see Chodkiewicz, "*Mi'rāj al-kalima de la Risāla Qushayriyya aux Futūhāt Makkiyya*," 248-261.

51. *Ibid.*, 157-158.

52. *Ibid.*, 158.

53. *Ibid.*, 159. Cf. the last lines of the poem cited at the top of this page, which says that our proximity is similar to our distance.

54. *Ibid.*, 158.

55. *Ibid.*, 159.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*



59. Ibid.

60. I would like to thank Todd Lawson, Atif Khalil, and MQ's anonymous reviewer for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. Thanks also go to Gerhard Böwering and Ahmet Karamustafa for providing me with several important references.

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