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Tawwakul and rajāʾ

The Concepts of Trust and Hope (in God) from an Islamic-Mystical Perspective[1]

Abstract

This article illustrates the concepts of trust (*tawakkul*) and hope (*rajāʾ*) from an Islamic-mystical perspective. To do so, I will first reflect on the term »Islamic mysticism« and methodologically question its legitimacy. Given this background I will then approach the term »Sufism« (*taṣawwuf*) and try to briefly highlight its main character as a »spiritual science« and »mystical way«, consisting of different »states« and »stations«, among which »trust«and »hope« occupy important positions. I will next attempt to illuminate trust and hope in the context of Islamic mysticism (Sufism), by referring to some classical Sufi authors and their understandings of both terms. The study will finish with some concluding remarks on trust and hope.

Keywords: Sufism, Islamic mysticism, mystical path, stations, states, hope, trust in God

It could be observed that, due to the current global crisis, negative attitudes, emotions and perceptions like fear, mistrust, doubt, existential disorientation, social isolation, confusion, hopelessness, and even loss of faith have become dominant characteristics of our time. As such, these negative conditions have an inevitable impact and direct effect on our ways of perceiving reality, interacting with others, and dealing with daily challenges. It is therefore even more important to recognize and cultivate positive impulses and capabilities of human psyche, which could help us to transcend or transform the negative aspects of life into positive ones, and at the same time, enable us to adjust existentially and spiritually to the fragile structure of reality with all its unpredictable dynamics and difficulties. Two of such intrinsic and fundamentally positive modes of being are the *principle of hope* and the *principle of trust*, which in religious contexts primarily mean trust in the Transcendent and hope for Divine grace and mercy.

In the present article I aim to investigate the notions of trust and hope from an Islamic mystical perspective. After some critical introductory remarks on the very term »Islamic mysticism«, I will elaborate on its main character as a »spiritual science« and »initiatic way« consisting of different »inner states« and »spiritual stations«, among which »hope« and »trust« occupy essential positions. In the main

1 A much shorter and simplified version of this text with the title *The Concept of Trust from a Sufi Perspective*, will be published in a book *Hope and Trust in Times of Global Despair and Mistrust* (Lit Verlag, 2023) edited by Bojan Žalec from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Ljubljana.

section of the article I aim to provide an overview of various interpretations and understandings of the concepts of *tawakkul* (»trust in God«) and *rajā'* (»hope«) as they are presented in classical Sufi literature. In this way I will try to highlight their multidimensional meanings as well as to demonstrate the overall character of these two terms. The article will conclude with some reflections on the relationship between each state and on their positions in the overall structure of Sufi spiritual teaching and practice. By focusing on the theme of the embodiment of hope and trust in the classical Islamic mystical tradition, I hope that the present study will contribute to a better understanding of these important virtues of Islamic piety and spirituality.

Is there an »Islamic mysticism«?

The main problem with the term »Islamic mysticism« lies in the fact, that it is a designation *from outside* of the original context of its emergence and development.[2] There is no exact word for »mysticism« in the Arabic language. Besides, the adherents or members of mystic-spiritual tradition in Islam would never add the adjective »Islamic« (*al-islāmī*) to explain or even emphasize their domain of thought and way of life. So, what does the term »Islamic Mysticism« convey? It basically stands for the same sphere of activities, experiences, techniques, and endeavours which the original Arabic term *taṣawwuf* encompassed—the term which the generally known English equivalent »Sufism« translates. If »mysticism« is understood in its broader etymological and historical sense, referring to the ascetic-contemplative dimension inherent within each religion characterized by spiritual techniques of self-purification, intensified piety, and especially by supra-rational, unitive experiences, then the term »mysticism« may be very well applied to »Sufism« as the mystical-spiritual way in Islam (*sulūk*), which according to its representatives is generally described by various techniques of spiritual self-improvement (*mujāhada*), such as unveiling of the Divine mysteries (*mukāshafa*), striving for the mystical knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), and even in some cases metaphysical unity with the Divine (*fanā'*).[3] In this regard the expression »mysticism«, interpreted primarily as a way of »knowledge of the mysteries« and »unveiling of the unseen«, can indeed be used as an equivalent term for the Sufism as the *purgative-contemplative tradition within Islam*.[4]

2 For a critical examination of the term Sufism as Islamic mysticism see Sviri, 2012. See also Knysh, 2017, 35–62. For a more general analysis of the term »Sufism« (*taṣawwuf*) see Al-Daghistani, 2017, 9–22; and 2018, 245–248.

3 One of the leading experts on Sufism, Alexander Knysh, notes in his work *Sufism—A New History of Islamic Mysticism* that »the possibility of producing a comprehensive definition of Sufism remains as elusive as ever before«, and that therefore it should be treated primarily as a »discursive field«—to use Michel Foucault's term (Knysh, 2017, 58). Instead of a single, unifying, and universal definition of Sufism, Knysh is rather proposing the so called »list of Sufism's constants« which, although incomplete, tries to include all the main aspects and elements of Sufism regardless its doctrinal-theoretical, historic-cultural, and ritual-practical variations (Knysh, 2017, 60–61).

There is a difference of opinion, not just among contemporary academics, but also among Sufis themselves, when it comes to the question of defining the essence of Sufism. The Arabic word *taṣawwuf* is generally associated either with the word *ṣūf* (which in Arabic means »wool« and refers to the garments worn by the first Muslim ascetics), or with *ṣafā'* (which in Arabic means »pure« and thus refers to the inner, spiritual purity for which the Sufi mystics strive), or with the word *ṣaff* (which means »rank« and refers to the »first rank«, *al-ṣaff al-awal*, of the Sufis regarding their existential position in relation to God) (al-Kalābādhī, 1935, 5). As we can see, the semantic aspect of the word *taṣawwuf* simultaneously demonstrates affinity to the words »wool«, »purity«, and »rank«, which have in turn significant symbolic associations. It is noteworthy, however, that the renowned Muslim Sufi mystic of the 11th century, Abū-l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) recounts in his *Epistle* that when people discuss the meaning of Sufism, everyone speaks from his own experience (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 279; 2007a, 289; 2017, 63).

Sufism as an initiatic way of spiritual »states« and »stations«

Sufism can generally be reasonably interpreted as an *inner, mystical dimension of Islam*.[5] As I already explained, although there is no equivalent Arabic word for »mysticism«, there is, however, the *same* reality in the Islamic context, which includes a variety of states, techniques, rituals and especially experiences, to which the word »mysticism« generally refers, for example, transformation of character traits (*tabaddulu-ṣ-ṣifāt*), spiritual purification (*taṣfiyatu-l-qalb*), meta-rational knowledge of God (*maʿrifatu-llāh, cognitio dei experimentalis*), ecstasy (*wajd*), invocation of God (*dhikru-llāh*) and metaphysical union with Him (*wuṣūl/ittiḥād/fanā'-fī-llāh*).[6] Sufism, interpreted as »Islamic mysticism« is, broadly speaking, a »sphere of spiritual experience which runs parallel to the mainstream of Islamic consciousness deriving from prophetic revelation and comprehended within the sharīʿa and theology« (Trimingham 1998, 1). The ultimate source of this »sphere of spiritual experience« is the Quran, which is—as Éric Geoffroy correctly observes—«strewn with verses which

4 The renowned French Islamic scholar and expert on Sufism, Éric Geoffroy, also holds the view that the term »Islamic mysticism« does have a certain relevance if one understands it (primarily) as the knowledge of the ‹mysteries' and as a communion with the divine through the direct experience of intuition and contemplation. Against this background Éric Geoffroy states that one of the main goals of Sufism is »to contemplate spiritual realities that lie beyond simple faith« and to reach mystical realization of God (Geoffroy, 2010, 2–3).

5 Titus Burckhardt (d. 1984) argues that the »Sufism, *Taṣawwuf*, which is the esoteric or inward (*bāṭin*) aspect of Islam, is to be distinguished from exoteric or ‹external' (*ẓāhir*) Islam just as direct contemplation of spiritual or divine realities is distinguishable from the fulfilling of the laws which translate them in the individual order in connection with the conditions of a particular phase of humanity« (Burckhardt, 2008, 3). See also Al-Daghistani, 2022, 185.

6 For more on these phenomena see Al-Daghistani, 2017.

have an obvious spiritual or esoteric dimension« (Geoffroy, 2010, 36),[7] and which throughout the centuries nourished the meditations and contemplations of Muslim mystics. The renowned English orientalist Reynold A. Nicholson notes correctly that »Sufism, in the sense of ‹mysticism' and ‹quietism', was a natural development of the ascetic tendencies which manifested themselves within Islam during the Umayyad period« (Nicholson, 1906, 329). Although Sufism as a mystical tradition may have been to some extant influenced by external elements of other religious and spiritual traditions, it is a *genuine*, *inner Islamic phenomena*.

In its formative period (from the 10th to the 11th century CE) the great Sufi masters and scholars attempted to systematically establish Sufism as an »initiatic path« (*ṭarīq*/*sulūk*) and »esoteric science« (*ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*/*ʿilm al-bāṭin*),[8] explaining thereby various spiritual concepts, ideas, and techniques for attaining mystical realization (*maʿrifa*), moral perfection (*iḥsān*),[9] and nearness to (and in some cases also union with) God (*qurb*/*ittiḥād*/*ittiṣāl*). Precisely this double character of Sufism as a »way« or »method« (*tarīq(a)*) and »knowledge« or »science« (*ʿilm*), is essential for understanding its status and role in the Islamic religious history.

The Sufi mystical path—a path of spiritual purification, mystical cognition, and moral perfection—consists of different »spiritual stations« (*maqāmāt*) and various »inner states« (*aḥwāl*).[10] Those are two fundamental categories in the Islamic mystical tradition. According to the mainstream opinion among Sufis, spiritual »states« are generally considered to be something that »descends« upon the heart of the meditator, spontaneously, without asking and without endeavour. They signify a personal, subjective condition of a mystic and of his or her relationship with God. Spiritual »stations« are, on the contrary, acquired through one's own inner struggle and »are usually described as a series of progressive stages that the Sufi wayfarer must

7 See for example Quran 2:115; 7:143; 7:172; 8:17; 50:16; 51:20; and 65:12. Titus Burckhardt notes correctly in this regard that the »first Sufis expressed themselves in a language very close to that of the Qurʾān and their concise and synthetic expressions already imply all the essentials of the doctrine. If, at a later stage, the doctrine became more explicit and was further elaborated, this is something perfectly normal to which parallels can be found in every spiritual tradition« (Burckhardt, 2008, 5).

8 Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 990) defines Sufism as a »science of spiritual states« (*ʿilm al-aḥwāl*) (al-Kalābādhī, 2001, 59; 1935, 74). Sufism signifies the »esoteric science« as the science of the inner actions of the heart, spiritual states, and stations, and can be fully learned only through practice and actual experience of the mystical way. For more on Sufism as spiritual science and a way of knowledge and self-purification see also Al-Daghistani, 2018, 245–248.

9 The term *iḥsān* is derived from the Arabic word *ḥusn*, which has a wide range of meanings and generally refers to »praiseworthy«, »magnificent«, »excellent«, »good«, and »beautiful«. The term appears in the Quran that in many verses encourages the human being to be kind and righteous, and to do good (see for example 2:195, 5:93, 10:26, 16:30, 39:10, 53:31), and in the well-known authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) report (hadith) about Jibrīl, in which the prophet defines *iḥsān* as to worship God as if you would see Him or at least to know that He is surely sees you (Muslim, *ṣaḥīḥ*, 8).

10 For the closer analysis of those two terms see e.g. Al-Daghistani, 2017, 22–75.

conquer in order to reach the terminus of mystic path« (Knysh, 2010, 304). Therefore, the »stations« are firm and last longer, whereas »states« are constantly changing (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 78). If the »station« presents an achieved level on the spiritual path, then the »state« signifies a kind of existential feeling or an inner mood that appears as a result of the mystic's own engagement and effort. One can reach a »station« mostly by means of their own actions and by acts of self-discipline, whereby the precondition of advancing from one station to the next lies in fulfilling the requirements of the former. In short: *aḥwāl* are spiritual states, mystical experiences, existential moods, feelings, and perceptions; *maqāmāt* are outcomes of spiritual techniques, practices, exercises, methods, and virtues of the Sufi mystic way (see al-Qushayri 2007, 78; see also Al-Daghistani, 2017, 26–34; and Al-Daghistani, 2020, 62–63).[11]

»Hope« and »trust« from a Sufi perspective

Let us note: Sufism as a purgative-contemplative stream in Islam is a »mystical path« (*ṭarīq*/*sulūk*) and a »spiritual science« (*ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*/*ʿilm al-bāṭin*), dealing with various inner »states« (*aḥwāl*) and »stations« (*maqāmāt*) of the Sufi wayfarer toward God. The question of the very nature of each state or station as well as of their conditions, impact and mutual relationship will be left aside at this point. For our purpose it is important to know that among fundamental states and stations—i.e., those which are usually found on the list within classical Sufi manuals—are »hope« (*rajāʾ*) and »trust« (*tawakkul*), with the latter playing a more important role in Sufi discourse.

Both terms are mentioned in several places in the Quran, which serves the Sufis as a foundation of their reflection and meditation on spiritual verities and religious virtues.[12] Almost every classical text on Sufism contains a chapter, in which the deeper meaning, psychospiritual function, and various types of hope and trust are discussed. But what exactly do the Sufi mystics mean when they refer to »hope« and »trust«? Is there a single uniform definition of these two concepts or rather multiple understandings of the phenomena? If so, are there some common elements underlying those different approaches and doctrines? Which status and role do *rajāʾ* and *tawakkul* have in the overall structure of Sufi mystical-spiritual teaching and practice, especially in

11 There is no clear agreement on the number and order of the *stations* that the seeker must reach in his ascent, nor on the *states* which he thereby experiences. For example, in his *Book of Flashes of Sufism* Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj stresses the following spiritual *stations*: (1) Repentance (*tawba*), (2) abstinence (*waraʿ*), (3) renunciation (*zuhd*), (4) adopted poverty (*faqr*), (5) patience (*ṣabr*), (6) trust in God (*tawakkul*) and (7) spiritual satisfaction (*riḍā*). As inner *states* he considers the state of: (1) nearness to God (*qurb*), (2) love (*muḥabba*), (3) existential fear (*khawf*), (4) hope (*rajā*), (5) passionate longing (*shawq*), (6) intimacy (*uns*), (7) tranquility (*iṭmaʾnina*), (8) spiritual vision (*mushāḥada*), (9) certainty (*yaqīn*), and (10) mindfulness (*murāqaba*) (see As-Sarrāj, 1914, 41–72).

12 See the Quran e.g.: 2:218; 3:159; 4:104; 7:56; 13:12; 7:89; 8:2; 9:51; 10:84; 11:123; 15:3; 19:48; 29:5; 33:22; 39:9; 25:58; 42:10; and 65:3.

the context of the notion of *ḥāl* and *maqām*? What are the important »outcomes« of hope and trust in the context of Sufi spirituality? What is the exact relationship between »absolute trust in God« and »existential action«? And what is the relationship between »hope« and »trust«, and how are they connected with other important dimensions of the Sufi path to God? In the following I will attempt to outline some of the dominant Sufi positions regarding these two concepts, illuminating their main features, and illustrating the relationship between them. First, we will take a brief look at the concept of hope, and then we will pay attention to the concept of trust.

Hope (rajā')

Regarding the two basic categories of mystical path in Sufism mentioned above: *ḥāl* and *maqām*, »hope« is clearly assigned by the majority of Sufis to the »spiritual states«.[13] In Sufi manuals, the »spiritual states« are often treated as opposite but complementary pairs, for example, »contraction of consciousness« (*qabḍ*) and »expansion of consciousness« (*basṭ*); »ecstatic drunkenness« (*sukr*) and »cognitive sobriety« (*ṣaḥw*); »mystical annihilation in God« (*fanā'-fī-llāh*) and »transcendent subsistence through God« (*baqā'-bi-llāh*); »fear« (*khawf*) and »hope« (*rajā'*). The Sufi mystics regard fear of God's wrath or punishment,[14] and hope for His mercy or bounty as being two wings of a believer's devotion which balance his or her religious-spiritual life.[15] There is a Sufi saying which declares, »that love is not perfect without fear, nor fear without hope, nor hope without fear« (as-Sarrāj, 1914, 18). To realize this spiritual attitude is therefore to take a middle ground between fear of God and hope for His mercy (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2003, 95). It is thus not surprising that precisely this dual impulse of fear[16] and hope, which causes a person to repent for his mistakes, evil

13 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī argues, however, that hope can be regarded as both »state« and »station«, depending on whether it is merely a transitory feeling or a firm reality of the heart (al-Ghazālī, 2004).

14 While according to the general Sufi view the »common believers« (*al-'āmmat*) normally fear the anger and vengeance of God, the »spiritual adepts« and »mystics« fear separation from God and the occurrence of anything that might impair their mystical experience of the Divine (see as-Sarrāj, 1914, 18).

15 Abū 'Alī al-Rudhābārī teaches: »Fear and hope are like two wings of a bird. When they are balanced, the bird's flight is straight and balanced, whereas if one of them is deficient, the flight becomes deficient, too. And when both are missing, the bird enters the precinct of death« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 150). The same opinion is also held by Ibn 'Ajība (d. 1809) who states that fear (of God) and hope (for His mercy) are »like the two wings of a bird: it cannot fly except with both« (Ibn 'Ajība, 2011, 5).

16 Despite its negative connotation in everyday language, the term »fear« in the context of Sufi spirituality is generally understood as an (immanent) positive inner state with profound religious and moral implications, functioning primarily as a kind of »ethico-spiritual immunization« against impulses of the lower self and one's own inclinations toward sinful and blameworthy deeds. It is precisely this spiritual function in which the fear (of God) mixed with reverence, awe, and veneration must be understood in the present context. In

ways, and sinful deeds and enables him to purify himself by transcending his ego and strengthening his awareness of the Divine lies at the centre of al-Muḥāsibī's theory of »pious self-examination«. For al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī[17] —a leading religious psychologist and mystic of the 9th century—the fear of God (*khawf*) and hope for His mercy (*rajāʾ*) serve as the main »defence mechanisms« of a believer against temptations, sins, and any kind of morally blameworthy acts. As »long as man holds fast to fear of God, while pinning his hope on his limitless mercy, he is assured success in reaching his goal« (Knysh, 2010, 45), which in the context of Sufism is always connected with the moral improvement (*iḥsān*) and mystical realization (*maʿrifa*). In general, the *aḥwāl* are not one-sided, one-dimensional, and isolated feelings, but rather complex experiences, connected with or corresponding to different moods and spiritual states. In this sense, a renowned 10th-century Sufi master from Baghdad, Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910), associates »fear of God« (*khawf*) with »contraction« (*qabḍ*), and »hope« (*rajāʾ*) with »expansion« (*basṭ*) of consciousness (as-Sarrāj, 1914, 89).

Sufi mystics have extensively discussed the meaning and role of hope, trying to formulate a proper definition or at least to frame its existential, religious, and spiritual scope. al-Qushayrī, for example, connects the state of hope with a directedness of the heart toward the future. In this sense he defines hope in a more general way as »the heart's attachment to something it loves that is expected to take place in the future« adding that therefore hope is like »the sustenance and freedom of the heart« (al-Qushayri, 2007, 149).[18] In this context al-Qushayrī further explains the main difference between hope and longing, stating that the latter produces indolence and is therefore blameworthy in comparison to hope, which does not exclude self-exertion and serious determination on the part of the person who experiences it (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 149). A famous Moroccan scholar and Sufi master from the 18th century, Aḥmad Ibn ʿAjība (d. 1809), takes the same view, when he argues, that hope without personal effort »is but vanity and self-deception« (2011, 5). He therefore defines hope as tranquility of the heart »awaiting the object of its love, along with effort made to accomplish the means which lead to that object« (2011, 5).

Many Sufi authors often also try to differentiate different »degrees«, »forms« and »qualities« of hope. Abū Bakr al-Warrāq—an early Sufi mystic, whose statements are often cited in the great works of later Sufi scholars—distinguishes among three fundamental types of hope: (1) hope in God, (2) hope in the abundance of God's mercy, and (3) hope in God's recompense (*thawāb*) (as-Sarrāj, 1914, 18). The first

this sense ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Khubayq states that, »the best kind of fear is one that shields you from [committing] sins, that which fills you with sorrow over [the good works] that you missed and that which makes you think about the rest of your life. The best kind of hope is one that renders good works easy for you« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 41).

17 For more on his life, work, and teaching see Picken, 2011.

18 Almost exactly the same definition of hope is to be found in the *Kitāb at-taʿrīfāt* (»Book of Definitions«), written by famous Muslim scholar, theologian, and linguist, ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 1413): »Hope is the attachment of the heart to something it loves and that is in the future« (al-Jurjānī, 2012, 179).

type represents the highest rank of religious-spiritual consciousness, since »he whose hope is in God desires nothing of God except God Himself« (as-Sarrāj, 1914, 18). Another Sufi, ʿAbdullāh Ibn Khubayq, takes a different approach, offering the following threefold classification of hope: First, hope that one's actions will be accepted by God; second, when one repents after committing a sin and begins to hope that one will be pardoned; and finally, the »false« or »hypocritical« hope, expressed by a »liar, who engages in sinful acts, while saying: ‹I hope for forgiveness.'« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 149). One of the greatest representatives of Hanbali legal-theological school of Islam, ʿAbdullāh Anṣārī (d. 1089), the author of two subtle treaties on the Sufi way, *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* (»Stations of the wayfarers«) and *Ṣād maydān* (»The hundred stations of the Sufi path«), also elaborates on the state of hope, distinguishing three levels of its realization that correspond to the three degrees of self-improvement and spiritual awareness peculiar to a mystic. After a striking observation that without the practice of spiritual self-examination and cultivation of fear of God hope would be nothing but carelessness, Anṣārī outlines three levels of its manifestation. On the first level hope inspires the believer or spiritual adept to diligence, which creates »pleasure in service and awakens magnanimity of character by abandoning the forbidden.« Hope on the second level is the hope of those who practice asceticism and self-discipline (*arbāb ar-riyāḍāt*), in order to reach a spiritual station »of pure resolution by rejecting pleasures«, abiding by requirements of knowledge and »exploring the boundaries of fervour«. Finally, the third level is »the hope of the good-hearted« (*arbāb ṭayib al-qulūb*), which is the hope of the encounter with God and thus the higher form of hope in the religious-spiritual context (Anṣārī, 2011, 78–79). In his Persian work on spiritual »states« and »stations«, *Ṣād maydān*, Anṣārī explains that hope arises from the field of »fleeing to God« and that it is the »carrier of servanthood« and an »instrument of devotion and worship« (2010, 104). Here Anṣārī undertakes another threefold classification of hope, corresponding to three different existential situations regarding a person's position with respect to God: (1) the hope of the oppressor who hopes that his offense may be forgiven and his faults overlooked, (2) the hope of someone who is striving on the spiritual path and hopes that his errors and sins may be forgiven and his obedience may be accepted, and finally (3) the hope of one who is nearest to God and hopes »that the eternal bounty may be completed« and that the purity of his heart may increase, and his spiritual moment may be preserved (Anṣārī, 2010, 104). A three-stage classification of hope—just to give one last example—is to be found also in Ibn ʿAjība's *Book of ascension to the essential truths of Sufism* in which he discerns between three classes of people regarding their level of religious consciousness and spiritual realization. Concerning the common believers (*al-ʿāmma*), hope consists in reaching »the best of destination as reward«. For the »elect« (*al-khāṣṣa*), hope means »to attain God's pleasure« and to draw near to Him. But for the »elect of the elect« (*khāṣṣatu-l-khāṣṣa*), hope is to attain spiritual firmness through the mystical vision of God (*al-shuhūd*) and to »progress ever higher in knowledge of the mysteries of the worshiped Sovereign« (Ibn ʿAjība, 2011, 5).

Hope as a spiritual state, existential mood and profound awareness is in the Sufi literature identified or at least connected with several further different religious-spiritual experiences, for example, deep gratitude, trust in the bounty of the Divine, the heart's proximity to its Lord's Benevolence, and even the vision of God's majesty, generosity, and His all-embracing mercy (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 149–150). It is a constitutive part of a believer's attitude and conduct that can bring him closer to spiritual fulfilment and to God. In this sense, hope is related to further inner states, virtues, and techniques of self-improvement like mindfulness, self-examination, good attention, sincerity, trust, and especially, repentance. One of the most prominent Muslim theologians and mystics of the 11th century, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), ascertains in this light that »even if the quantity of one's sins should stretch to heaven, God will forgive the believer who both hopes and asks for forgiveness« (Schuon, 2006, 54).

Overall, it can be said that from a Sufi point of view hope is more than just an affect, an emotion, or a simple feeling. It is a complex *psychospiritual state* which is connected to various existential, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive elements of the human being—among which the most important are »fear of God« (*khawf*) on the one hand and »trust in His providence« (*tawakkul*) on the other. As such it can profoundly affect one's perception, awareness, conduct, and belief. In this regard, hope is often regarded by the Sufis as a *positive impulse of the soul* and as a *spiritual capacity*, which can decrease or increase, depending on a variety of internal as well as external factors in one's life.

Trust (tawakkul)

»Trust in God« (*tawakkul*), which lies at the heart of the Quranic message,[19] occupies a very specific place in the spirituality of Sufism. It signifies the highest form of belief, insofar it implies certainty of faith, perfection of devotion, and complete surrender to the Divine will.[20] For ʿAbdullāh Anṣārī trust in God arises from the field of spiritual insight and designates »the bridge toward certainty, the pillar of faith, and the place of sincerity« (2011, 89), while for the Sufi scholar Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. 932) the very foundation of *tawakkul* is modesty and cultivated poverty (as-Sarrāj, 1914, 52). According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī trust in God presents one of »the dwelling places of religion« (*manzil min manāzil ad-dīn*) and one of the stations of those who are absolutely certain and firm in their faith (2004, 304). The famous theologian and linguist ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 1413) further defines trust as »reliance on that which comes from God and doubt in that which comes from man« (2012, 133).[21] Trust is thus not simply a »blind faith« or »overreliance«, but rather an acquired »state of mind« which goes hand in hand with doubt,

19 The term *tawakkul* is mentioned in the Quran about 60 times (see Lewisohn, 1999, 28).

20 Numerous passages in the Quran show that trust in God (*tawakkul*) is inseparably connected with faith in God (see e.g. 5:11, 8:2, 9:51, 10:84, 29:5, 65:3). See also As-Sarrāj, 1914, 51.

reflection, and scrutinizing. But first and foremost, *tawakkul* designates perfection in worshipping God, which in turn presupposes knowledge of God's providence and mercy on the one hand, and deep understanding of the existential and metaphysical dependence of human being on his Creator as the ultimate source of all being, on the other hand. Trust in God is thus closely linked with various inner states, virtues, and practices of the Sufis, like deliberate poverty,[22] asceticism, gratitude,[23] humility, devotion, spiritual retreat, and humbleness.

One of the first Sufi mystics who emphasized the importance of *tawakkul* is supposed to be Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 810), a Muslim saint and an ascetic from northern Khorasan. He seems to have practiced »the stringent version of *tawakkul*«, consisting not only of a complete trust in God, but also in »a total abandonment, or reduction to a minimum, of gainful employment« (Knysh, 2000, 33). This form of *tawakkul* was, however, rejected by most of the later Sufis in favour of a more moderate version (Knysh, 2000, 33). To put one's own trust in God and to fully rely on His will, providence, and mercy, has been seen from the very beginning of Islamic devotional practice as a clear sign of sincerity, truthfulness, and strong faith.[24] Indeed, one of the first extensive definitions of trust in God is given by the famous 9th-century Sufi scholar from Baghdad, Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 899). In his treatise *Kitāb al-ṣidq* (»The Book of Truthfulness«)—which is regarded as one of the earliest systematic presentations of spiritual »states« and »stations« in Sufism (al-Kharrāz, 1937)—al-Kharrāz identifies trust in God with the very believe in God itself, which includes further important aspects such as taking rest and assurance in God, expelling from the heart all anxiety over worldly affairs, and knowing with inner certainty, that God is the absolute ruler and provider in this as well as in the next world (1937, 28). In this sense *tawakkul* can indeed be regarded as above all, a spiritual attitude rather than an external practice (Lewisohn, 1999, 29).

Almost all Muslim mystic writers have intensively dealt with the concept and reality of *tawakkul*, exposing its numerous merits and positive features regarding one's own attainment of moral, religious, and spiritual perfection. One of the early Sufi masters and exegetes, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896). noticed that one who truly trusts God is distinguished by three signs: he does not ask, he does not refuse when he is given something, and he does not hold on to what was given to him (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 178). Given this background, certainty of faith, patience, selfishness, steadfastness,

21 See above: »Tasawwuf is to grasp the verities and to renounce that which is in the hands of men.« (Maʿrūf al-Karkhī).

22 Cultivated poverty, *faqr*, is one of the most important »stations« on the Sufi path to God. For more see al-Kalābādhī, 1935, 86–88; as-Sarrāj; see also al-Qushayrī, 2007, 280–288. There is even a narration of the Prophet, which says *faqrī fakhrī*, meaning »My poverty is my pride«.

23 On the meaning of gratitude in Sufism and its implications for the ethics, see Khalil, 2016, 159–178.

24 Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) the well-known Muslim theologian and the founder of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, defines *tawakkul* as »confidence in God, that He will provide thy daily bread« (al-Hujwīrī, 2000, 177).

and inner independence of material things are one of the main features distinguishing the one who has realized and internalized trust in God in the sense of a firm belief in His mercy and justice. Trusting in God and having confidence in His guidance means to honestly believe with the innermost certainty that God as the Creator and Sustainer of the Cosmos has set for everything a measure, means, and limit (al-Kharrāz, 1937, 32). Trust in God is often expressed in Sufi literature through statements which indicate a tremendous reliance on the transcendent providence and protection of the Divine as a complementary and necessary dimension of one's own existentiality in the sense of being and acting in the world. One of these statements is to be found in al-Qushayrī's *Epistle on Sufism*, where a Sufi was asked about *tawakkul* by the celebrated mystic Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 874/75), to which he replied: »Even if wild beasts and poisonous snakes were all around you, your innermost heart would still not be perturbed!« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 178–179).[25]

Sometimes complete trust in God is even associated with the mystical annihilation of the individual consciousness in the Divine (*fanā' fī-llāh*), which represents the ultimate experience in Islamic mysticism[26] and serves as a spiritual precondition for the absolute reliance on God's guidance and total commitment to His will.[27] This means that the utter surrender to the Transcendent presupposes self-transcendence, i.e., total liberation from one's own lower impulses, desires, selfish needs, and ego.[28] Trust in God thus finally means to *learn* to take refuge in God—refuge in a sense of spiritual training and cultivation of deliverance from one's own self. This »refuge in God«[29]

25 A similar statement from which can be derived the notion of total trust in God is to be found in the New Testament: »Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you« (King James Bible, Luke 10:19).

26 *Fanā' fī-llāh* is one of the most important technical terms of Sufism. It signifies the metaphysical annihilation of the individual self of the Sufi mystic in the divine Self. This ultimate state can usually be reached through the meditative-contemplative practice of ritual invocation of God (*dhikr*), which often leads to ecstatic experience (mystical ecstasy), and metaphysical union with the Divine. *Fanā'* is generally regarded as a fruit of an overwhelming and all-consuming experience, produced by the direct inner, supra-sensual vision of the numinous »object« (God, Godhead, Divine Light etc.). The one who dedicates themself to the practice of invoking God's Name with an outmost commitment and succeeds in penetrating deeper into the contemplative states of consciousness, gradually becomes »completely imbued with the Named to the point of being extinguished in Him«. This phenomenon in Sufism is known as *al-fanā' fī-l-madkhūr*, »the annihilation in the Remembered/Invocated One« and signifies the mystical experience, in which the created being »is returned to the state of non-differentiation with God« (Geoffroy, 2010, 164; see also Al-Daghistani, 2017, 60–74; and Al-Daghistani, 2022, 192–193).

27 The prominent Muslim scholar and Sufi mystic Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 896) notes in this regard that the beginning of trust in God (*tawakkul*) is when the believer places himself before God Almighty »as a dead corpse is placed before the washer of the dead, who turns it however he wishes, while the body has no moves nor will of its own« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 179).

28 »In trust, all desires and trepidation must depart form the heart…« (al-Kharrāz, 1937, 28).

should not, however, be interpreted as a kind of a flight to the »comfort zone« as a totally passive reliance by which true trust is superseded by naïve hope, pure inaction, or selfish expectations.[30] It is therefore important to note in this context, that total trust in God—as understood by the Sufi mystics—does in no way exclude, negate, or even underestimate the active role and engagement of the subject. *Tawakkul* therefore has nothing to do with conscious resignation of one's own actions or even with fatalism as a philosophical or personal worldview.[31] It is rather a profound realization of the absolute power and providence of the Divine as the ultimate Reality and final Source of all being, all actions, and all events. In this regard al-Qushayrī explains that outward actions do not contradict trust in God, which is placed in believer's heart (2007, 179).[32] Humans should realize their own createdness and dependence on the Transcendent, but at the same time, as an active, cognitive, and spiritual being, an individual has existential, moral, and religious obligations and tasks to fulfil. From a religious-spiritual perspective, to act out of *free will* and at the same time, to believe in the Divine absoluteness, is not a contradiction.[33] To emphasis the compatibility between both of these dimensions and the necessity of their mutual existence in the context of religious consciousness, Sufis often cited the famous prophetic tradition, which clearly shows that trust in God and a man's actions goes hand in hand. It is narrated that a certain man came to the Prophet riding his camel and asked the Messenger of God, if he should leave her loose and put his trust in God. The Prophet responded: »First, tie her up, and then, trust in God!« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 179), meaning simply: first, take care of your affairs, and then turn yourself to God—in hope and trust.[34]

That *tawakkul* is not just a matter of one's own intimate relationship with God, but also includes a social dimension of interaction with other people, is clearly attested in a statement of Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ (d. 903), an early Sufi master, known for his vast

29 Taking refuge in God implies certain knowledge, »that the matter will not be accomplished, save on the part of God, Who by His own power gives and withholds« (al-Kharrāz, 1937, 32).

30 al-Kalābādhī is crystal clear on this point: »…putting one's trust in God for one's own sake [is] merely a way of guarding against some unpleasantness that might befall« (al-Kalābādhī, 1935, 93).

31 Lewisohn correctly notes that from the earliest days of Islam, heated debates were conducted about the respective virtues of »personal earning« (*kasb*, *takassub*, *iktisāb*) versus pure »trust in God« (*tawakkul*) (1999, 30), although for the Sufis »trust in God« itself is regarded as a *personal action*.

32 For an extensive analysis of the meaning, role, and function of the heart in Sufism see Al-Daghistani. Köln, 2017.

33 »Once the servant [of God] has ascertained that determination comes from God Most High, he realizes that any hardship he experiences is pre-determined [by God] and any success he may have is also facilitated by God« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 179).

34 There is a beautiful verse in the Quran that concisely illuminates the relationship between God's intervention in His creation and man's autonomy and duty to act: »Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves« (Quran, 13:11).

knowledge of trust in God and spiritual self-discipline. al-Khawwāṣ argues, that »he who trusts in God when dealing with himself will also trust God when dealing with others« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 179).[35] Overall, trust in God is associated either with the perfection of worshipping God, or with the awareness of one's own existential and metaphysical dependence on the Creator. But the true essence of *tawakkul* for the Sufis is realized only when anxiety about the things of this world does not prevail over a person despite his or her need for these things, and when the reliance upon God prevails despite one's dependence on worldly things (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 180). In this sense the true trust in God is when abundance and shortage become one and the same to a believer (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 181).[36] Such a degree of devotion and trust in God may in general be characteristic only of a sage or a saint, e.g., someone who reached the state of total selflessness or egolessness. But it is nonetheless important to note that by the virtue of trust, the intimate relationship and the inner connection between an individual and God can be grasped in their true nature, reinforced, and made stable. This is eloquently expressed by Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, who states that the reality of trust in God is, »that a man should be God's in a way he has never been, and that God should be his as He has ever been« (al-Kalābādhī, 1935, 92).

Just as in the case of »hope«, the Sufi scholars also distinguish different types, qualities, and forms in the context of »trust«, which usually correspond either to the different degree of realization of religious consciousness or to the different groups of people regarding their position in proximity to God. A threefold gradation of *tawakkul* is already found in *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* of Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj, where he distinguishes between (1) the trust of the »common believers« (*al-muʾminūn*), (2) the trust of the »spiritual elect« (*ahl al-khuṣūṣ*), and finally (3) the trust of »the elect of the elect« (*khuṣūṣ al-khuṣūṣ*) (1914, 51–52). This tripartite topology of *tawakkul* became a basic scheme of Sufi contemplation on the topic of »trust in God«. Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (d. 1015), a well known Sufi ascetic of Nishapur and the teacher of al-Qushayrī, refers to another three-step classification of *tawakkul* as a complex and dynamic phenomenon that contains three different intrinsic moments of its manifestation: (1) the initial stage which consist in the very act of trust in God, (2) the middle stage which consist in the self-surrender to God's providence and will, and (3) the final stage which consists in relegating one's affairs completely to God as the only true Reality. al-Daqqāq adds: »The one who practices trust in God relies on His promise [of sustenance]; the one who surrenders himself [to God] is content with his knowledge [of God]; and the one who relegates his affairs [to God] is satisfied with His decree« (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 181).[37] After defining *tawakkul* as

35 In this regard *tawakkul* is not merely a subjective attitude concerning one's own religious-spiritual growth and connection with God, but a wholistic positioning in relation to the others and to the world as a whole.

36 Thus, for a disciple of Sufism it is generally not even permissible to »exercise« and »cultivate« trust in God without first renouncing material goods and commodities as well sensual pleasures and comforts. This renunciation is a precondition for trust in God (al-Hujwīrī, 2014, 181).

an absolute »assurance in God« based on the certain knowledge that God »is the knower of all things« and that what is in His hand is more certain than what is in the hand of man, Aḥmad Ibn Aḥmad also outlines the threepart hierarchy of trust in God, characteristic for his analysis of spiritual states and stations (2011, 8).[38] The lowest degree of *tawakkul* is that the believer is with God »like someone who has entrusted his affairs to a kind and caring confidant«, whereby »there may still be glimmers of doubt«. The middle degree is that the believer is with God »like a child with its mother who turns only to her for its every need«. Here there is admittedly no longer any suspicion, but trust on this level is fundamentally conditioned only by human need. The highest degree of *tawakkul* is, however, that the believer is »like a body in the hands of the one who washes it for burial«, whereby there is neither any doubt nor attachment.[39] This stage of *tawakkul* presupposes complete self-transcendence and even the mystical annihilation of the individual self in the Divine, which enables not only absolute transparency between man and ultimate Reality, but also total surrender to the Divine. Then, as Ibn ʿAjība claims »someone at this degree is effaced from himself, and sees at every moment what God is doing with him« (Ibn ʿAjība, 2011, 8).

In the Sufi literature there are numerous attempts to categorize and differentiate *tawakkul*, but the above examples should be enough to convey a general idea. The very fact that the Sufi authors were trying to differentiate and classify types of trust in God, demonstrates that *tawakkul* is not something static and that it cannot be reduced to the unambiguous duality of »either/or«, but that it is rather a dynamic inner reality of the human being, which can be strengthened or weakened, cultivated or neglected, depending on one's own will, spiritual effort and religious-mystical experiences. It could be observed that trust in God, which includes or at least refers to various others spiritual experiences and virtues, represents a totality of religious consciousness—unlike hope, which is generally regarded as just one among the inner states of the Sufi path, closely interrelated with fear as its existential counterbalance.

If »hope« (*rajāʾ*) according to Sufi teachings principally designates an »inner state« (*ḥāl*) of the wayfarer, »trust« (*tawakkul*) generally signifies a »spiritual sta-

37 From Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq the following narration is also related regarding *tawakkul* as an umbrella term containing three immanent moments corresponding with three different classes of religious consciousness: »Trust in God is the characteristic of the [ordinary] believers; surrendering oneself to God is the characteristic of the elect; and relegating [one's affairs to God] is the characteristic of those who have achieved unity [with God]. « (al-Qushayrī, 2007, 181).

38 In his Persian treaties on states and stations of the Sufi mystical path, ʿAbdullāh Anṣārī differentiates between three fundamental degrees of trust in God: (1) trust, gained through personal experience, (2) trust as the outcome of necessity (which is intrinsically connected with the profound notion that, in the last instance, nothing is in one's power and that »no secondary cause bears fruit«), and (3) the highest level of trust, which is the trust in the Divine reality itself (as the only necessary and absolutely existing reality) (Anṣārī, 2010, 89).

39 See above fn. 35; see also al-Qushayrī, 2007, 179.

tion« (*maqām*), i.e., a »standing place« from where a Sufi mystic actively tries to improve his or her spirituality and relationship with God. *Tawakkul* is thus rather a sphere of intentional action, spiritual endeavour, and initiatic exercise, than simply a given condition or a »gift of Transcendence«. In this manner the realization of trust is much more directly dependent on one's own will, commitment, and effort than hope, which is normally understood as something that appears in the heart of the believer, suddenly and regardless of his or her intention or attainment. While hope is basically a dimension of experience, subjective condition, and sensation, trust is—according to the predominant Sufi understanding—rather an *attitude* and a *virtue*, which can (and *must*) be cultivated, strengthened, and refined.

Conclusion

In the present study I have tried to illuminate two fundamental dimensions of religious-spiritual life in Islamic mysticism or Sufism: »hope« (*rajā'*), which is normally classified as a »spiritual state« (*ḥāl*), and »trust in God« (*tawakkul*), which is generally regarded as a »spiritual station« (*maqām*). *Tawakkul*, according to the Sufi mystics, is considered to be an attitude and action, which can be cultivated and strengthened through concentration on God (*murāqaba*) and contemplation (*tafakkur*) of His attributes and »beautiful Names« (*al-asmā' al-ḥusna*) manifesting both in the creation and in the innermost core of our own soul.[40] While »hope« is mostly treated together with its complementary component of »religious fear« in the Sufi literature, sincere and complete »trust in God«—although connected with various others inner states and religious virtues—is seen as the highest level of religiosity and as one of the most important stations of the mystical path in Islam. It is neither related to pure passivity and inaction of the subject nor reduced to a simplistic »hope for a better future«. On the contrary, trust in God as a state of mind, practice, and virtue is both associated with deeper awareness of God's omnipotence and mercy and with one's own fundamental createdness and metaphysical dependency on the Divine transcendence and absoluteness. Therefore trust-in-God principally pertains to those matters that are outside of a person's authority and full control, without abrogating or nullifying human intention, will, action and effort, but rather in order to positively motivate and encourage action and engagement. In this sense, trust-in-God accompanies the believer on the way ahead and assures the person that his or her actions are resourceful (Ghanbari 2010).[41] *Tawakkul* therefore brings to the one who relies on the divine Transcendence inner peace, hope, and confidence. This *Sufi hermeneutics of trust* thus corresponds with Schleiermacher's idea of the very essence of religious feeling as »the feeling of absolute dependence«, i. e., »as the sum of all acts of pious devotion« (Lewisohn, 1999, 27). As such, *tawakkul* as an internalized

40 »We will show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that this (Quran) is the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a Witness over all things?« (Quran, 41:53).

41 See Ghanbari, 2010, 8. See also J. S. Fadardi and Z. Azadi, 2015.

and vitalized »trust in God« does not paralyze one's own earning capacity or action —despite the fact that it is often accompanied by profound existential feelings such as awe, serene calmness, or pure submission to the divine Providence. It rather mobilizes one's own responsibility and ability to act according to religious-spiritual values and deepest personal convictions. The important fact from the psycho-religious point of view is that despair and mistrust decrease according to the degree to which hope and trust in God increase. For this reason, *tawakkul* and *rajāʾ* have a profound psychological and existential effect on the believer, whose hope and trust are firmly grounded in his or her heart. It could be argued that *tawakkul* and *rajāʾ* are fundamental constituents of Islamic belief in general and of the Sufi spiritual path in particular—even to the extent that for some Sufi masters *taṣawwuf* itself equals *hopeful trust* in God and *trustful hope* in His mercy and compassion. When Abū Saʿīd Abū-l-Khayr was asked what Sufism is, he responded: »To lay aside what thou hast in thy head, to give what thou hast in thy hand, and not to recoil from whatsoever befalls thee« (Nicholson, 1906, 348).

In summary, hope and trust are closely interrelated aspects of Sufi spirituality that together shape the religious consciousness and attitude of a spiritual wayfarer on his or her path to God. Both, *tawakkul* and *rajāʾ* cultivate one's spiritual capacity and provide motivational energy for the believer in dealing with challenging (internal as well as external) circumstances of his existence in general, and of his spiritual wayfaring in particular. As such, trust-in-God and hope in His grace are treated in almost every handbook on Islamic mysticism, constituting thereby an important part of religious discourse in Islam and, in particular, of Sufi knowledge about the »states« and »stations«. However, the fundamental relationship between trust and hope from a Sufi-mystical perspective can be finally summarized by precisely the opposite observation which Victoria McGeer made in her article on »Trust, Hope and Empowerment« (McGeer, 2008, 237), namely that, while hope can and does feed our trust, it is our empowering capacity to trust that significantly underwrites our capacity to hope.[42] By focusing on the concepts of »hope« and »trust in God« in the classical purgative-mystical tradition of Islam, and by examining their most important aspects and features, it is hoped that the present article will not only contribute to our current knowledge about these two fundamental components of Sufi psychospiritual interpretations and practices, but also to our understanding of the very conditions of belief in and relationship with God in Islamic piety.

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42 McGeer argues on the contrary that, »even though trust can and does feed our hopes, it is our empowering capacity to hope that significantly underwrites—and makes rational—our capacity to trust« (McGeer, 2008, 237–254).

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