

Chapter 18

The Concept of Intuition in Sufism

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Abstract Sufis acknowledge that reason operates within a certain range of perceptions, but once it is called to move beyond its capacity, it becomes bewildered and perplexed. It then tends to seek ways to prove the non-existence of those things it cannot normally perceive. Against such views, Sufis argue that there are incorporeal phenomena, such as the *laṭā'if*, that lie beyond the purview of the senses and reason, yet one cannot deny their existence based solely on sensory perception. To perceive such incorporeal realities, one must awaken the organ of the intuitive faculty, known as the heart (*qalb*). Only then is one able to attain a higher state of consciousness that enables the perception of the spiritual realities of the self and the cosmos. Sufis use various terms such as *kashf*, *shuhūd*, and *dhawq* to describe this mode of perception, in which one has unmediated knowledge of things—a distinction often illustrated by the difference between the “definition” of drunkenness and the actual state of being drunk. This form of unmediated or experiential cognition, as opposed to conceptual knowledge, is best described as the Sufi theory of “intuition,” which has a long pedigree in Sufi epistemology. The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of “intuition” in Sufism before turning to a more focused analysis of the concept in Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762).

Keywords *Kashf* · *Shuhūd* · *Dhawq* · *Hads* · Intuition

18.1 Introduction

Although there is no terminology in Sufi literature that directly translates into the English word “intuition,” Sufism is characterized by its distinctive focus on supra-

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rational mode of perception and knowledge which is rightly called “intuitive.”¹ 25
 Sufis use various terms such as *kashf*, *shuhūd*, and *dhawq* to refer to this particular 26
 mode of perception in which one has unmediated knowledge of things. So, this 27
 idea of unmediated or experiential cognition as opposed to conceptual knowledge 28
 is best described as the Sufi theory of “intuition,” which has a long history in Sufi 29
 epistemology. Before providing a brief overview of the history of intuition in Sufism 30
 and focusing on the concept in Shāh Walī Allāh’s (d. 1176/1762) thought, it will be 31
 helpful to say a word about the relationship between Sufism and philosophy, since 32
 Sufism is often cast aside as “mysticism” with little to do with philosophy. 33

From the earliest period of Islamic history, there was a trend among a number 34
 of leading Sufi figures to actively engage with Islamic theology (*kalām*), either by 35
 way of refuting or accepting theological doctrines. From the eleventh century CE 36
 onward, Sufi authors not only discussed philosophical ideas, but also appropriated 37
 them into Sufi discourse. From the twelfth century onwards, the previously rigid 38
 barriers between “philosophy” (*falsafa*) and “theology” became permeable, at which 39
 point Sufi thinkers began to formulate a synthetic metaphysical and philosophical 40
 discourse aimed at articulating the principal teachings of the Sufi Weltanschauung. 41
 All these developments gradually led to the birth of a new discipline, in which 42
 philosophically trained Sufi authors consistently employed rational methods of 43
 argumentation (within certain limits), alongside the vocabulary of Islamic theology, 44
 logic, and philosophy to articulate complex metaphysical doctrines in both prose 45
 and poetry. Within the matrix of Sufism itself, this new discipline was often called 46
‘irfān-i nazārī (lit. theoretical gnosis) or *al-‘ilm al-ilāhī* (lit. the divine science), 47
 but for our purposes, we can refer to this particular discourse within Sufism as Sufi 48
 metaphysics. As recent studies pointed out, Sufi metaphysical literature is a universe 49
 unto itself, which is much more than a fusion of philosophy and mysticism.² 50

¹ However, there is a word in Arabic, namely *ḥads*, that does translate into “intuition” in English. This term has a complex history in Islamic philosophy, beginning with Avicenna, who defines it as the ability to grasp the middle term in a syllogism (and sometimes the major term) without much effort. Much secondary scholarship debates whether “intuition” in Avicenna carries mystical connotations, with Gutas suggesting it does not, while others such as Gardet and Yazdī, each in their own way, argue that it does. As we shall see later (see pp. 4–5), the term *ḥads* does not play a major role in the Sufi theory of intuition, although in later Sufism, the Avicennan theory of intuition and rationality has been incorporated to form a unified epistemology. But one should not forget that Avicennan epistemology itself affirms the critical role of the Active Intellect in the soul’s quest to realize the universal (*kullī*). For a recent appraisal of the issue, see Peter Adamson and Michael-Sebastian Noble, Intuition in the Avicennan tradition, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 31:4 (2023): 657–67. For earlier debates, see Dimitri Gutas, Intuition and thinking: the evolving structure of Avicenna’s epistemology, in *Aspects of Avicenna*, edited by R. Wisnovsky (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 1–38; Intellect without limits: the absence of mysticism in Avicenna, in *Intellect et imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale*, edited by M.C. Pacheco, and J.F. Meirinhos (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 351–72. Mehdi Ha’iri Yazdī, *The principles of epistemology in Islamic philosophy: knowledge by presence* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Louis Gardet, *La pensée religieuse d’Avicenne* (Ibn Sīnā) (Paris: J. Vrin, 1951).

² Muhammad U. Faruque, Sufi metaphysical literature, in *Brill Handbook of Sufi studies*, edited by Alexander Knysh and Bilal Orfali. Leiden: Brill, 2026.

Like the traditions of Islamic philosophy or theology, Sufi metaphysics came to designate a distinct philosophical system containing its own metaphysics, ontology, ethics, and epistemology. It is also important to stress the indebtedness of this tradition to Avicenna and the Avicennan heritage, as can be evidenced from al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) appropriation of many Avicennan concepts and vocabulary, or from the Ṭūsī-Qūnawī correspondence, or from al-Qayṣarī's (d. 751/1350) deep engagement with the Avicennan tradition.³ Yet, Sufi metaphysics/epistemology is distinguished by its unique focus on the direct experience of reality, wherein *dhawq* (tasting) or *kashf* (unveiling) figures as the main epistemic instrument. As such, it exceeds the limits of the philosophers' representationalist theory of knowledge which is bound by a subject-object dichotomy. Moreover, Sufi metaphysics presents novel perspectives on ontology (i.e., *wujūd*) and autology (i.e., selfhood and consciousness) that are not simply traceable to the Avicennan or the Neoplatonic tradition. In a nutshell, Sufi metaphysics aims to express metaphysical doctrines concerning being and selfhood through both rational and supra-rational instruments of knowledge, alongside emphasizing Sufism as a way of life.

18.2 Basic Terminology

With this general background in mind, we can begin to talk about the particulars of the Sufi theory of intuition. As alluded to earlier, the cluster of terms that explain "intuition" in Sufism are *kashf*, *shuhūd*, *dhawq*, and *qalb*. All these terms are derived from the Qur'an and developed over several centuries. Apart from *qalb* which I will explain shortly, *kashf*, *shuhūd*, and *dhawq* (and sometimes also *mukāshafa* and *mushāhada*) form an epistemic cluster with the general meaning of experiential knowing as opposed to theoretical reflection. The word *kashf*, among other things, means a lifting of something from that which is concealed or wrapped.⁴ Its verbal form occurs in many verses of the Qur'an, where the sense of "lifting of the veil" in relation to hidden realities is implied (e.g., Q 50:22, 2:7, 18:101). Similarly, *shuhūd* generally means presence and witnessing.⁵ Its verbal form *shāhida* occurs in many verses of the Qur'an, with the sense of "testifying" or "bearing witness" (e.g., 6:130) or "being present" (e.g., 2:185). Likewise, *dhawq* is the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of the verb *dhāqa* (*dhawāq* and *madhāq* also occur, but very rarely), meaning "to taste" both literally and figuratively. The term has a wide range of meanings in different

³ See William Chittick, *Mysticism vs. philosophy in earlier Islamic history: The al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawī Correspondence*, *Religious Studies* 17 (1981): 87–104; Franz Rosenthal, *Ibn 'Arabī between 'philosophy' and 'pysticism'*, *Oriens* 31 (1988): 1–35; Gudrun Schubert (ed.), *Annäherungen: Der mystisch-philosophische Briefwechsel zwischen Ṣadr ud-Dīn-i Qūnawī und Naṣīr ud-Dīn-i Ṭūsī* (Stuttgart: Štāynar, 1995).

⁴ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, IX (Qom: Adab al-Hawza, 1984), 300.

⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, III, 239.

disciplines.⁶ So, for example, in the Qur'an, the damned "taste" punishment, and, in Hadith, the faithful "taste" the sweetness of *īmān*. Philosophers and physicians endeavour to explain the physiology of taste and what can alter it. In his well-known *Ta'rifāt*, al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 817/1414) defines *dhawq* as having both a physical and spiritual sense, the latter signifying illuminative knowledge that God casts into the hearts (*qulūb*) of His saints through which they can discern the true from the false without the use of books or anything else. In his *Kashshāf iṣtilāḥāt al-funūn*, Muḥammad b. A'lā al-Tahānawī (eighteenth cent.) also explains *dhawq* in line with al-Jurjānī, and states that *dhawq* is above all a beverage that intoxicates those in love with God (al-Tahānawī, 2:320–1). At any rate, *dhawq*, along with *kashf* and *shuhūd*, refers to a direct experience of reality as opposed to having scientific or conceptual knowledge, e.g., knowing the chemical properties of honey as opposed to tasting honey.

As for *qalb*, one finds multiple interpretations concerning it. Similar to *kashf*, *shuhūd*, and *dhawq*, the term occurs in the Qur'an, where one of its meanings refers to "spiritual perception" (e.g., Q 2:10).⁷ In early Sufi writings, Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) provides an analysis of this term in his *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*.⁸ Tustarī discerns two fundamental and opposing forces within the human constitution. The positive force, for him, is represented by the heart or the organ of spiritual perception (*qalb*), while the negative force is called the lower self (*nafs*) that drags the human toward immoral acts.⁹ Al-Ghazālī remarks that few of the leading scholars have a comprehensive knowledge of terms such as *qalb* and *'aql* and their different meanings. He then explains that the term *qalb* has several meanings. Its first meaning refers to the physical heart, while its second meaning refers to a spiritual mode of perception called the *laṭīfa*. This *laṭīfa* is the real essence of

⁶ The various meanings and definitions of *dhawq* can be found in the encyclopedias of Sufi knowledge, such as in the *Jāmi' al-uṣūl* by the Naqshbandī Aḥmad Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Kumushkhānī (d. 1893). Dictionaries dedicated to the technical lexicon of the Islamic sciences deal with *dhawq* both from the medico-philosophical and Sufi points of view. See Muḥammad b. A'lā al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣtilāḥāt al-funūn*, ed. Luṭfī 'Abd al-Badī' (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Miṣriyya al-'amma, 1963–77), 2:320–1; 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, *Iṣtilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, edited by Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Ja'far, (Qom: Intishārāt-i Bīdār 1990), 162; Mīr Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rifāt*, edited by Ṣadiq al-Minshāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, n.d.), 57; 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dār al-Sha'b, 1989), 155; 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārīf al-ma'ārīf*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārīf, 1993), 264ff; Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysics of imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 3, 44, 70, 86, 153, 158, 168, 220. From an altogether different viewpoint, see Bourdieu's analysis of the aesthetic use of "taste" in everyday bourgeois life in contemporary France. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 7, 99, 174–5, 247, 466, 474.

⁷ The root meaning of *qalb* is to overturn, fluctuate, and undergo transformation.

⁸ Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, edited by Muḥammad Bāsil 'Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2002), 81–3.

⁹ See Gerhard Böwering, *The mystical vision of existence in classical Islam: the Qur'anic hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1980), 241ff.

the human being. For al-Ghazālī, the *qalb* is that which perceives, knows, and experiences.¹⁰ As such, its epistemological significance in Sufism is made clear.

18.3 Intuition in Sufi Thought

When one looks at early Sufi writings, one does not find elaborate expositions of terms such as *kashf* and *shuhūd*, although there are some exceptions. Many references to *kashf* and *shuhūd* can be found in the *tafsīr* attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) by Abu 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Sulamī (d. 412/1021) in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*. In the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries, these terminologies became even more widespread, as can be seen in the writings of Ḥakīm Tirmidhī (d. ca. 300/912), who describes loving and knowing God through vision.¹¹ Likewise, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) mentions *kashf* and *shuhūd* in the chapter on Sufi terms in his *Kitāb al-luma'*. The terms *kashf*, *mushāhada*, *dhawq*, and *qalb* occur frequently in the writings of al-Ghazālī, with the general sense of "unveiling as the property of the innermost heart."¹² By the seventh/thirteenth century, the vocabulary of *kashf*, *shuhūd*, *dhawq*, and *qalb* became exceedingly widespread, as can be seen in the writings of Ruzbihān Baqlī's (d. 606/1209) *Abhar al-āshiqīn*, Shihāb-al-Dīn 'Umar Suhrawardī's (d. 632/1234) *Awārif al-ma'ārif*, and Fakr al-Dīn 'Irāqī's (d. 688/1289) *Lama'āt*. The use of these terms took a more philosophical turn at the hands of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his followers. After his death, numerous other thinkers such as Šadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), Sa'd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. ca. 699/1300), Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431), and Mullā Šadrā (d. 1050/1640) both commented on his works and produced original works, dealing with the Sufi theory of intuition.

After Ibn 'Arabī, one can distinguish between two types of *kashf*, namely (1) *kashf šūrī*, and (2) *kashf ma'nawī*. *Kashf šūrī* or formal unveiling refers to mystical illuminations that are received from the imaginal realm (*'ālam al-khayāl*)¹³ and perceived through the five senses.¹⁴ Its examples include seeing

¹⁰ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, edited by Muḥammad Ḥusayn (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Thaqāfi, 1937), 8: 1343–46. For fundamental texts concerning the nature and function of the "heart" in Sufi psychology, see Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: a sourcebook of gender relationships in Islamic thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), Ch. 10. For the "heart" in Ibn 'Arabī's thought in general, see James Morris, *The reflective heart: discovering spiritual intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's Meccan illuminations* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2005), 131–40.

¹¹ Cyrus A. Zargar, *kašf* and *šohud*, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, available at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kasf_o_sohud (accessed on 29 June 2023).

¹² Zargar, *kašf* and *šohud*.

¹³ The imaginal realm is the intermediate world between the physical and the spiritual world.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive treatment of this, see Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, edited by Ḥasanzāda Amulī (Qom: Būstān-i Kitāb), 1: 127–39; Mullā Šadrā, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, edited by Muḥammad Khwājāwī (Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī-yi Šadrā, 2005), 1: 241–7.

spirits (*arwāḥ*) in corporeal form. It also occurs in the form of audition, such as the Prophet Muḥammad's hearing of revelation (*waḥy*) in metered speech. *Kashf ma'nawī* or spiritual unveiling, on the contrary, refers to spiritual meanings and universal realities that are obtained from the fountainhead of the divine names and attributes (*al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*). It occurs in ascending degrees through the following media.¹⁵

- (i) Thought/Thinking (*fikr*): occurs as the manifestation of meanings in the reflective faculty without the use of premises and syllogisms. It can thus be called intuition (*ḥads*) in the philosopher's sense.
- (ii) Reason/intellect (*'aql*): occurs in the rational faculty (*al-quwwat al-'āqila*) in the form of flashing light. Intellect or *'aql* is a spiritual faculty which does not inhere in the body and employs the reflective faculty. Intuition or *ḥads* is a flash of its light because the reflective faculty is corporeal, so it becomes a sort of obstruction for the light that reveals meanings from the higher worlds; this is the lowest form of spiritual unveiling.
- (iii) Heart (*qalb*): occurs in the form of inspiration or *ilhām*.
- (iv) Spirit (*rūḥ*): occurs through spiritual witnessing (*al-shuhūd al-rūḥī*).

It should be clear by now that "intuition" in Sufism involves going beyond the physical senses and the space of reason, while not denying their respective functions. Overall, "intuition" in the Sufi sense signifies gaining awareness of hidden meanings and universal realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) from behind a veil. And it occurs both in meaning and in form. A few textual examples from Mullā Ṣadrā show how "intuition" complements logic and rational thinking, as one seeks to uncover the meaning of God, cosmos, and reality, provided that one is able to incorporate spiritual purification (*tazkiyya*) in the process:

This should be after he has attained some knowledge of the sciences pertaining to literature, logic, physics, and cosmos, which travelers on the way to God the Exalted (*al-sālikīn ila-llāh ta'āla*) should be knowledgeable about, but not so the ecstatic ones (*majdhūbīn*) of God, whose scales become balanced at the first instant of the divine ecstasy. Without one of the two ways mentioned above, how can anyone arrive at the degree of the cognitive unveiling (*al-kashf al-'ilmī*), and direct witnessing of the heart (*shuhūd qalbī*) concerning divine knowledge, the states of the origin and the return, the knowledge of the self, its stations, and ascent to God the Exalted, if one is engaged in worldly matters, its attachments and its snares?¹⁶

For Ṣadrā, philosophy is a "graded" reality in the sense that it allows one to move from one stage of philosophy to another. Thus, "transcendent philosophy" makes room for discursive philosophy but at the same time, it "transcends" the latter by higher modes of "intellection" such as unveiling (*kashf*), illumination (*ishrāq*), and direct witnessing (*shuhūd*). Although by no means against the specific legal concept of *taqlīd* (imitation), Ṣadrā is decisively against blind following of one's tradition

¹⁵ Al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 1: 135–9; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 1: 241–5.

¹⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-muta'aliya fī l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*, edited by Riḍā Luṭfī, Ibrāhīm Amīnī and Faṭḥ Allāh Ummīd (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1990), 9: 159.

or custom, or rehearsal of arguments without an intellectual understanding, which is an oblique reference to the *akhbāriyyūn* (scripturalists) of his time who reject all forms of rational inquiry including philosophy and philosophical Sufism (*irfān*).¹⁷ Ṣadrā says:

And how can one hope to attain guidance who is only satisfied in accepting the traditions (*al-athar wa-l-khabar*) with no proof, and who rejects the rules of thought and reflection?... Also, how can one hope to be guided to truth by merely adopting intellectual proofs, and without illuminating himself by the light of revealed religion (*bi-nūr al-shar'*)? I wish I knew how one may seek refuge in the intellect, when it is afflicted by incapacitation and limitation (*ḥaṣr*)... Surely, one who does not harmonize religion with intellect (*bi-ta'ālf al-shar' wa-l-'aql*) in this manner fails...¹⁸

Ṣadrā thus makes it clear that his philosophical project is a middle ground between Sufism, philosophy, and the Shariah, while not underestimating the significance of any of these. So he urges the reader not to take his statements as “the result of unveiling (*mukāshafa*) and tasting (*dhawq*) or blind imitation of religion (*taqlīd al-shar'*), without going through the process of intellectual proofs (*ḥujaj*) and demonstrations (*barāhīn*) and the rules they entail.”¹⁹ He holds that unveiling without demonstration is an insufficient condition for wayfaring (*sulūk*), just as mere discourse without unveiling is a great deficiency in spiritual wayfaring.²⁰ He ends the discussion on the three-way relationship between philosophy, scripture, and intuition with an autobiographical note:

Earlier I used to engage in [theoretical] discourse and its reiteration and often busied myself in studying the books of theoretically oriented philosophers (*al-ḥukamā' al-naẓẓār*), until I thought I had learned something. However, when my inner eyesight (*baṣīra*) opened a little and I cast a glance at my own state. I saw therein that, although I had attained knowledge pertaining to the states of Origin, His transcendence over contingent and temporal attributes, and of the return of the human self (*al-naḥs al-insāniyya*), I am far from apprehending the science of true realities, which cannot be known except through tasting (*dhawq*) and immediate intuition (*wijdān*).²¹

18.4 Intuition in Shāḥ Walī Allāh

With all the above explanations, let us now offer a full-fledged analysis of “intuition” in Shāḥ Walī Allāh’s thought. Walī Allāh seems to be aware of the worries of the

¹⁷ For the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī dispute, see Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: the history and doctrines of the Akhbārī school of Shī'ī School* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1ff.

¹⁸ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi*, edited by Subḥān 'Kūshā (Tehran: Bunyād-i Hikmat-i Islāmi-yi Ṣadrā, 2007), 5: 5ff.

¹⁹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 7: 326.

²⁰ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 7: 326.

²¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, edited by Muḥammad Khwājawi (Qom: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1987-90), 7: 10.

empiricist for whom anything beyond the reach of the external senses is cognitively inaccessible. In a series of texts below, Walī Allāh examines the nature of our perception through the senses (both external and internal) and the intellect. He writes:

The external senses (*ḥiss-i zāhir*) of hearing and seeing, etc. have their own particular perceptions, such as colors, shapes, sizes and sounds. If one uses these external senses to perceive anything other than their own objects of perception, one will not understand anything at all. On the contrary, [it will appear as though] nothing else exists apart from the senses. For instance, if one used vision (*baṣar*) in order to perceive hunger (*jū*), anger (*ghaḍab*) or shame (*khijālat*), one would take these things to be totally non-existent (*ma'dūm-i maḥq*) and would not be able to gather anything about them. Indeed, one hastens to establish a proof for their non-existence, and say that anything existing (*shay'-i mawjūd*) must be red or green, etc., and since these things (i.e., immaterial realities) are not of this kind (*in ḥiż-hā az in qabīl nistand*), they cannot exist. Thus, by thinking in terms of the coincidence of contradictories (*ijtimā'-i naqīḍayn*) and the negation of contradictories (*raf'-i naqīḍayn*), one would be further removed from the realm of really existing things.²²

That is to say, our immediate grasp of reality is by means of the external senses. For example, in order to perceive that the clock in front of me is ticking, I must employ my senses such as seeing, hearing, etc. to grasp its size, shape and sound. Of course, that is only part of the story, since a fuller account of such perception must also involve the use of the internal senses and the higher faculty of the reason/intellect.²³ But for now let us bracket the part that is related to the intellect and the internal senses. Then Walī Allāh is right to assert that each of the senses has a particular function to perform, and that one will not gain anything if one employs e.g., ears to smell something (the neurological phenomenon of synesthesia where the brain connects two or more senses is an exception that proves the rule). Moreover, emotions such as shame or anger require the use of more than one faculty, which again proves that there must be designated faculties to perceive these phenomena, since we cannot understand shame using vision. But what if I am color-blind? Will it be fair to say that just because I cannot perceive certain colors, therefore these colors do not exist at all? Evidently, this form of reasoning would be unacceptable. By invoking such analogies Walī Allāh wants to establish that there might be incorporeal phenomena that are beyond the purview of the senses, but one cannot deny their existence based on what one can perceive through the senses. He also

²² Walī Allāh, *Altāf al-quḍs* (Gujranwala: Madrasa Nuṣrat al-ʿUlūm, 1964), 139.

²³ The “internal senses” (La. *sensus interiores*) are a collection of mental faculties which ancient philosophers located in the brain, and to which they assigned the various functions which were associated with the imagination (*phantasia*) and the common sense (*koine-aisthesis*; La. *sensus communis*) throughout Aristotle’s *De anima* and *Parva naturalia*. In general, the internal senses refer to the post-sensory faculties that operate without bodily organs. See Muhammad U. Faruque, The internal Senses in Galen, Plotinus and Nemesis: the beginning of an idea, *Ancient Philosophy* 10.2 (2016): 120–1. For an alternative definition of the internal senses (based on first order and second-order perceptions), see Thomas K. Johansen, In defense of inner sense: Aristotle on perceiving that one sees, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (2006): 235–85.

refutes those who use the logical axiom of the “coincidence of contradictories” to deny that anything immaterial exists. To wit, if the “coincidence of contradictories” holds then one cannot both say that “the red apple exists” and “the red apple does not exist” are true at the same time and in the same place. Similarly, the “negation of contradictories” follows from “the coincidence of contradictories,” because it cannot be the case that both “the red apple exists” and “the red apple does not exist” are false at the same time and in the same place. That means one of them must be affirmed. Now extending the analogy of the above logical axioms, the empiricist may argue that if something exists it must be perceivable by the senses, but since immaterial objects are not perceived, they cannot exist. According to Walī Allāh, such reasoning is unacceptable. He further elaborates on this by noting that the inner senses (*ḥiss-i bāṭin*) such as the imagination, estimation, and volition (*mutaṣarrifa*) also have their own perceptibles. He argues that if these faculties were used to perceive anything other than their own objects of perception, they will be in a state of bewilderment (*mutaḥayyir shawad*) and their properties will be misconstrued. Still, he imagines someone coming up with a proof to establish the non-existence (*‘adamiyyat*) of those other things. For example, one might say that if the immaterial existed (*mujarrad agar mawjūd būd*) but is not contained in three-dimensional space (*dar hīch jahat az jahāt-i-sitta nabūd*), then this amounts to a coincidence of contradictories (*ijtimā’-i naqīḍayn*), since existing and non-existing in three-dimensional space is self-contradictory. Walī Allāh rejects such arguments by claiming that intelligent people (*‘uqalā’*), however, know that this is a sophistry (*mughālaṭa*), emanating from judging the invisible (*ghā’ib*) on the basis of the visible (*shāhid*) and confusing the familiar with the unfamiliar.²⁴

To convince the reader further, he goes on to examine the nature and limitation of the intellect, which enables one’s perception of the intelligible. Walī Allāh writes:

The intellect is the tongue of the Spirit (*rūh*), and its control extends to whatever is similar in subtlety like the Spirit. How true is the saying that an entity cannot perceive other than itself or what is like itself . . . It lies within the scope of the intellect to comprehend the relation of unity and distinctiveness between the external world and the particular entities it comprises, and also between the material (*mutaḥayyiz*) and the immaterial (*mujarrad*). For instance, when the intellect sees individual human beings, horses, or donkeys, it can perceive the features shared by the individuals of each of these species (*naw’*). From this, it can progress further and determine the specific form (*ṣūrat-i naw’iyya*) of each species. What permits it to arrive at this understanding is, on the one hand, the differences (*taghāyurāt*) among entities such as color, shape, size, and sound etc., and on the other, their underlying unity (*ittiḥād*). But when multiplicity (*ta’addud*) is cast aside and the unity within unity should be perceived (*waḥdat dar waḥdat bāyad idrāk kard*), the intellect becomes helpless. For example, it is the function of the intellect to discern forms (*ṣūrat-hā*) from the perceptible (*umūr-i maḥsūsa*), the essence (*‘ayn*) of which is not in the external world but is rather the source from which the form is extracted. Then by a process of analysis and combination (*taḥlīl wa-tarkīb*), it calls to mind a variety of distinct qualities. For instance, when it observes the sky, it

²⁴ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 139–40.

conceives the concept “above,” when it looks at the earth, it abstracts the notion “below,” 283
and when it sees Zayd with his father, it derives the quiddity (*māhiyyat*) of “son.”²⁵ 284

What Walī Allāh seems to be belaboring above is that the intellect has a certain 285
range of perceptions within which it can freely move and act. But once the intellect is 286
called to move beyond its perceptive capacity, it becomes bewildered and perplexed. 287
Then it tends to seek ways to prove the non-existence of those things it cannot 288
normally perceive. So for instance, the intellect has the power to form second- 289
order concepts such as genus or species, even though they do not have extra-mental 290
correspondence like the first-order concepts. According to Walī Allāh, the intellect 291
does this by noting the differences among entities such as shapes, size or color and 292
their underlying unity. That is to say, when the intellect observes different animals 293
such as tigers, lions, and human beings, it ascertains “animality” as being the feature 294
by which they are all united, while among species it further picks out “rationality” as 295
being the feature by which human beings are distinguished from everyone else. Yet 296
both genus (*jins*) and specific difference (*faṣl*) are features that are not directly found 297
in the external world. From another angle, it can be said that the intellect observes 298
an individual human being; then by a process of analysis and combination it forms 299
the concept of a universal human form. After closely scrutinizing individual species 300
of human beings, donkeys, camels, and cats, it reduces them to an animal form. 301
Then further scrutiny of animals and plants leads the intellect to have a conception 302
of organic life. All this is rather uncontroversially Aristotelian. But, as the passage 303
below suggests, Walī Allāh’s main point seems to be that the intellect is a faculty that 304
grasps both primary and secondary intelligibles, but there are still *supra-sensible* 305
realities that escape its gaze and that it can only grasp, as it were, from behind the 306
veil: 307

In short, we may describe the intellect (*‘aql*) as a faculty which contains the primary and 308
the secondary intelligibles (*ma’qūlāt-i awwalī wa thāniyya*). It is here that the teachings 309
and proofs (*burhān*) of the Shariah belong. The intellect can comprehend certain realities 310
directly, while certain others only behind a veil (*pas-i parda*).²⁶ 311

In other words, the teachings of the Shariah pertain to what is rationally perceivable 312
and conceivable, i.e., within the reach of a normally functioning intellect. Walī Allāh 313
does seem to grant that what normally escapes the attention of the intellect (i.e., 314
immaterial entities) can still be comprehend by it, but only from behind the veil. 315
That is, since the intellect is the “tongue of the Spirit” and has a higher function 316
known as *sirr* (secret), it can perceive the immaterial. But in Walī Allāh’s view, it 317
would be much more apropos to describe such a faculty or perception as “*dhawq*,” 318
rather than intellect, since that would be unconventional.²⁷ Indeed, as mentioned 319
earlier, the word *dhawq* (along with *kashf* and *shuhūd*) which is used to describe 320

²⁵ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 142–3.

²⁶ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 145.

²⁷ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 145.

“experiential or direct knowing,” has a long pedigree in Sufi epistemology going back to al-Ghazālī and others.

18.5 The Epistemic Significance of Intuition

Before analyzing the texts that shed light on Walī Allāh’s own treatment of the epistemic role of *dhawq* as intuition, let me cite from al-Ghazālī’s *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* that provides a graphic account of *dhawq*. Describing his journey and conversion to Sufism, al-Ghazālī narrates:

The aim of their (i.e., Sufis) knowledge is to lop off the obstacles present in the self and to rid oneself of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant invocation (*dhikr*) of God. Theory was easier for me than practice. Therefore, I began to learn their lore from the perusal of their books . . . As a result, I came to know the core of their theoretical aims and I learned all that could be learned of their way by study and hearing. Then it became clear to me that their most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by *dhawq* and the state of ecstasy and the exchange of qualities. How great a difference there is between your knowing the definitions and causes and conditions of health and satiety and your being healthy and satiated! And how great a difference there is between your knowing the definition of drunkenness—viz. that it is a term denoting a state resulting from the predominance of vapors which rise from the stomach to the centers of thought—and your being drunk!... I knew with certainty that the Sufis were masters of states (*ḥāl*), not purveyors of words, and that I had learned all I could by way of theory. There remained, then, only what was attainable, not by hearing and study, but by *dhawq* or experiential knowing and actually engaging in the way.²⁸

That is, *dhawq* or intuitive knowing refers to a mode of perception in which one has unmediated knowledge of things, which is captured well by al-Ghazālī’s example of the definition of “drunkenness” and being “drunk.” With this background in place, let us now quote Walī Allāh, as he writes of *dhawq*:

If anyone uses the word intellect instead of the word *dhawq*, his speech will not accord with convention, but there is no harm in it. According to us, the word *dhawq* is used to describe perceptions (*idrākāt*) in which there is no room for abstraction of intelligible (*intizā-ī ma’qūlāt*) or teachings and proofs of the Shariah. Such perception is in fact the presence of a thing by itself, for itself, in itself, and from itself (*bi-ḥudūr-i shay’ bi-dhātihi li-dhātihi fī dhātihi min dhātihi*). It comes into existence with whatever forms the surface of these various bubbles (*ḥabāb*) produce and attaches itself externally to the first part which emerges from them. Thus, when the visible qualities (*ṣifāt-i shāhid*) appear, and one searches for the invisible qualities, they no longer exist.²⁹

²⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, edited by Jamīl Ṣalībā and Kāmil ‘Iyād (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1967), 100–02, trans. with modification, Richard McCarthy, *Deliverance from error: an annotated translation of al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and other relevant works of al-Ghazālī* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), 77–8.

²⁹ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 146.

In the above Walī Allāh attempts to forge a connection between *dhawq* and presence (*ḥudūr*). So, making use of the example of “drunkenness” from al-Ghazālī, one may say that when one is drunk one has a direct knowledge of one’s intoxicated state and the “presence” of intoxication is inseparable from the perceiving subject at that time. That is, when one is drunk, one does not first “think” or “conceptualize” whether or not one is drunk or what the definition of “drunkenness” is, since one has a direct experience or presence of being drunk and what it feels like. Moreover, unlike an acquired concept of “drunkenness” which remains in the mind, the state of drunkenness conceived as “presence” is a like a “bubble” that evaporates as soon as one comes to one’s senses. With the epistemology of *dhawq* in the background, Walī Allāh goes on to affirm how the invisible realities of the *laṭā’if* that form the matrix of one’s given subjectivity (i.e., *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ*, etc.) should be perceived. He says:

It should be known that whereas the actions of the limbs and organs are manifest, clear and perceptible, the states of the *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ* and *sirr* are concealed (*ḥamchinnānkih a’māl-i jawāriḥ ṣāḥir wa rawshan wa maḥsūs ast, wa aḥwāl-i nafs wa qalb wa rūḥ wa sirr kāmin*). The former belongs to the physical world (*ālam-i shahādat*) and the latter to the invisible (*ghayb*). By the same token, whatever the visible *laṭā’if* manifest is clear, while whatever the invisible *laṭā’if* manifest is latent and concealed that cannot be perceived either theoretically (*‘aqlan*) or emotionally. In order to perceive [their effects], there is a subtle and delicate [faculty], which the Sufis called *dhawq* or experiential knowing.³⁰

He then goes on to criticize why many people fall into error regarding the immaterial entities, i.e., *laṭā’if*. According to Walī Allāh, people are only familiar with what can be grasped by the intellect and emotions; hence they do not entertain the thought of something which is comprehended by means of a finer sense (*ḥāssa-yi bārik*). But he also notes that some people can in fact comprehend these higher realities, and yet they choose to deny them. The reason, he opines, is that the aspirations of the majority have sunk so low that they can only appreciate sensual pleasures (*himmat-i jam’ dar ghāyat-i pasit’ uftāda bāshad bi-juz ladhdat-i maḥsūs na-shināsad*). If something transcends the senses, they deny its existence.³¹ After such criticism, he recommends the following solution:

The remedy for this mental malady (*marḍ-i nafsānī*) is, first, to find out about this sensory faculty (*ḥāssah-yi har chīzī bāyad dānast*) and recognize the scope and quality of this type of comprehension (*qadr wa-ṣifat-i ān idrāk bāyad shinākht*). After that habitual attachment to familiar things should be cut off, and one should cultivate the habit of acquiring this subtle form of comprehension (*mudrak-i bārik*). The intuitive faculty (*ḥāssah-yi wijdāniyyat*) is an imaginative power (*quwwat-i wāhima*),³² which is not the faculty of the imagination

³⁰ Walī Allāh, *Alīṭaf al-quds*, 132.

³¹ Walī Allāh, *Alīṭaf al-quds*, 132–3.

³² This is most likely referring to the cosmological power of the imagination that Ibn ‘Arabī made so famous. In Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology, imagination (*khayāl*) implies inherent ambiguity, hence it escapes “either or” categorization. On whatever level it is considered, it is always an isthmus or inter-worldlike between two other realities (*barzakh*). Five general meanings of the imagination can be discerned in Ibn Arabi: (1) the cosmos, i.e., existence itself, (2) the illusory nature of the world or life is also called imagination, (3) the *imaginal world* which is the intermediate world

(*khayāl*) of the inner senses, and the characteristic of this form of comprehension is that it is devoid of any connection with shape and magnitude (*'adam-i iqtirān bi-shakl wa-miqdār*).³³

Anticipating that talk of *dhawq* and *laṭā'if* may not sit well with the exoteric-minded jurists, Walī Allāh acknowledges that there are those for whom anything other than the course laid down by the outward form of the Shariah (*zāhir-i shar'*) is undesirable. Thus, in their view, Walī Allāh notes, "to mention the knowledge of the *laṭā'if* is some kind of heresy (*zandaqa*)."³⁴ That is to say, a common objection voiced by the exoteric-minded jurists is that if knowledge of the *laṭā'if* or immaterial entities were so important, why did the Prophet never mention anything about them? Walī Allāh responds by arguing that "the lawgiver (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad) intends to conceal these secrets and maintain silence regarding them (*kitam-i īn asrār ast wa tan zadan az ān*), so that whoever is capable will understand (*har kih musta'idd-i ān bāshad*), and whoever is not capable will remain in his natural way of thinking and will thus be saved from compound ignorance (*jahl-i murakkab*)."³⁵ He then provides his reasons for disclosing such secrets about the *laṭā'if*:

[T]he cup has fallen from the roof, and it has become impossible nowadays to conceal these things any longer (*chūn ʔasht az bām uftād wa kitam-i ān dar īn bārah zamān muta'assir shud*), so a divine impulse (*dā'iyā-yi ilāhiyya*) has stimulated an inclination in my heart to rectify the correct meaning of these things.³⁶

However, it is important to note that Walī Allāh does not intend to suggest that one should only concern oneself with the realization of the *laṭā'if*, and consequently withdraw from the world altogether. On the contrary, even though one finds detailed rulings of the Shariah regarding every aspect of Muslim life, it does not mean there is no higher reality that transcends the purview of the Shariah. Walī Allāh writes:

Some people say that the fundamental purpose (*aṣl-i maṭlūb*) is total annihilation in the realm of divinity (*lāhūt*) and complete withdrawal from the world of particularization (*insilākh az 'ālam-i ta'ayyun*)—in short, the requirement of the *laṭā'if*... The close

between the two fundamental created worlds, the spiritual and corporeal worlds, (4) The human self or soul itself, which acts as an intermediary between the luminous and immaterial divine spirit and the dark and dense body, and finally, (5) the faculty of the soul in humans. On the one hand, imagination "spiritualizes" corporeal things that are perceived by the senses and stores them in memory. On the other hand, it "corporealizes" spiritual things known in the heart by giving them shape and form. It stores "sensible" images and perceptions, and manipulates them, i.e., combine or separate those images. It is different from the word "imaginary," which means things that we imagine in our mind. The word "imaginal" does not mean idle imaginations; rather it pertains to the world of imagination or the imaginal world that is ontologically above the physical world. See Chittick, *Sufi path of knowledge*, 14–16, 116–7, 100, 113, 115–24, 169, 204, 267, 338–9, 38; *idem.*, *Imaginal worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the problem of religious diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 70–88.

³³ Walī Allāh, *Alīṭāf al-quds*, 133.

³⁴ Walī Allāh, *Alīṭāf al-quds*, 135.

³⁵ Walī Allāh, *Alīṭāf al-quds*, 137–8.

³⁶ Walī Allāh, *Alīṭāf al-quds*, 138.

attention shown to matters of lifestyle (*ma'āsh*), and the establishment of bodily acts of devotion (*iqāmat-i ṭā'āt-i badaniyya*) have been introduced in the Shariah because not everyone is able to fulfil the fundamental purpose (*haman kas ān āsl rā namī-tawānad bi-jā āvard*). However, it does not follow that just because “one cannot comprehend the whole thing one has to give it up *in toto* (*mā lā yudriku kullahu lā yatruku kullahu*).³⁷

As for his own views, Walī Allāh affirms that the desired objective with regard to human flourishing is nothing other than the purification of the limbs and organs through one's actions, and purification of the *latā'if* through of mystical states (*ḥāl*) and stages (*maqām*).³⁸ However, he warns the reader at the same time by mentioning that “the writings and books of the Sufis (*ṣūfiyya*) may be a wonderful alchemy (*kīmīyā-yī ast 'ajīb*) for the elite (*khawāṣṣ*), but for the masses they can be a deadly poison (*samma-yi qātil*).”³⁹

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³⁷ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 134–5.

³⁸ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 135.

³⁹ Walī Allāh, *Alīf al-quds*, 137–8.

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