

# Heart's Life with God

## *Al-Ma'rifa bi-llāh (Knowledge of God) in al-Qushayrī's al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

There can be no better way to obtain a good idea of the concept of knowledge among Sufis in the fifth century AH than a careful inquiry into the writings of Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-QUSHAYRĪ (d. 465/1072), the author of the *Risāla fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf* (Epistle on Sufism), one of the most important works ever written on the subject, also known as *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*.<sup>2</sup>

The fifth/eleventh century was a time when awareness of the abyss between Sufism and Sunnī Islam began to penetrate into Muslim society. In this century we no longer speak of imposters who distorted the true image of Sufism, but of the appearance of even more dangerous elements, in the form of a considerable Sufi party that called for abandoning the religious observances and the principles of religious law when a state of divine revelation is attained. Al-Qushayrī did not hesitate to express himself quite openly about this problem at the very beginning of his epistle.<sup>3</sup> Already in the Introduction he notes that he wrote it in 473 AH and states explicitly that he wants to address it to the "Sufi community in the lands

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1 Both B. R. von Schlegell and Alexander Knysh translated Qushayrī's term *al-ma'rifa bi-llāh* to "divine Gnosis". In order to make our treatment here closer to the Islamic context and, for the most part, the mediaeval Šūfī context, I prefer to adopt the neutral English term "knowledge of God". In this paper I use Knysh's English translation, but with the word "gnosis" replaced by "knowledge of God". al-QUSHAYRĪ / KNYSH 2007: 319; al-QUSHAYRĪ / VON SCHLEGELL 1990: 316.

2 See al-Qushayrī's biography, for example, in al-SUBKĪ (ed. al-ṬANĀHĪ / al-ḤILW) 1992, V: 155-59; HALM, *EF*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "al-Qushayrī", v: 526-527; al-SĀMIRRĀ'Ī 1969: 259-261.

3 See al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 3. We note here that what al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990) says at the beginning of his *al-Ta'arruf* conceals more than it reveals [see al-KALĀBĀDHĪ (ed. ARBERRY) 1933: 4] and alludes to the existence of this phenomenon since that time. However, al-Kalābādhī refrains from saying so explicitly, since his book is aimed mainly at non-Sufis while al-Qushayrī's intended readership was the Sufi public itself, and he therefore addressed this problem frankly and without concealment. In fact, even if the tendency to abandon religious observances began in the days of al-Kalābādhī and not in al-Qushayrī's times, there can be no doubt that in the latter's lifetime it took on dimensions that were worrying, so much so that such an epistle became necessary (see al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 3).

of Islam.” He adds that he was driven to write it by his concern lest people think badly of the Sufi institution, which was in danger of falling into ruin after the death of the Sūfī leaders who had defined its bounds and managed to combine the *sharī‘a* and moderate Sufi thought.

This article will examine the concept of knowledge as formulated by al-Qushayrī in his epistle, and attempt to understand the theoretical project ascribed to this man within the framework of Sufism in Islam. In order to do this we analyze both the contents and the structure of al-Qushayrī’s ideas on one of the most important concepts developed in Sufism, namely knowledge of God.

A careful perusal of al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla* reveals that it can be divided into the following parts:

- (A) The Introduction, in which the author mentions the year in which he wrote this work and the main motivation for its composition. He states that he wrote it “for the Nūfī community” and bemoans the sad state of Sufism in his days, which was characterized by excesses and a neglect of religious observances.<sup>4</sup> He adds that he wrote the *Risāla* not out of fear of the enemies of Sufism but rather his earnest concern for “this [Sufi] path, for one should not speak ill of its people”.<sup>5</sup>
- (B) The two chapters following the Introduction deal with the way the Sufis view the basic doctrinal principles (*al-uṣūl*) in Islam and the concept of monotheism (*al-tawḥīd*).<sup>6</sup> The reason why these topics are mentioned at the very beginning of the epistle is that in this period there was a growing tendency among Sufis to enhance the Muslim concept of monotheism with meanings that go beyond the original Sunnī concept.<sup>7</sup>
- (C) The two afore-mentioned chapters are followed by a chapter “on the masters of this path and their deeds and sayings that show how they uphold the divine law” which contains the biographies of eighty-three Sufi elders, up to the fourth century AH.<sup>8</sup> In his choice of personalities to include in this chapter al-Qushayrī was dictated by his objective of connecting *sharī‘a* with Sūfism; all the biographies are of people associated with important concepts that bind Sufism and Sunnī Islam. It is thus no coincidence that al-Qushayrī did not include the biographies of al-Ḥallāj.<sup>9</sup>

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4 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 2-3.

5 Ibid.: 3.

6 Ibid.: 3-8.

7 On the Sufi concept of monotheism see NICHOLSON 1946: 117 ff.

8 Ibid.: 8-33.

9 Muḥyī al-Dīn IBN AL-‘ARABĪ in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* notes two important points concerning the *Risāla*, namely the absence of al-Ḥallāj in the biographical section and the fact that the composition begins with a discussion of the Sufi view on monotheism: “Al-Qushayrī in his *Risāla* did the same. He mentioned those people at the beginning of his epistle but did not mention al-Ḥallāj, because of the dispute into which he had been drawn, so that no blame would fall on anyone mentioned in the *Risāla*. He then presented his [i.e., al-Qushayrī’s] doctrine of monotheism at the beginning of the epistle, in order to remove any evil intentions others may have ascribed to him” [IBN AL-‘ARABĪ (ed. YAḤYĀ) 1329 AH, IV: 214].

- (D) In the fourth part of the epistle al-Qushayrī deals with various Sufi terms that were in common use in Sufi circles at the time.<sup>10</sup>
- (E) This is followed by an explanation of the main principles of the Sufi path as perceived by the author, which he divided into stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*).
- (F) The part dealing with stations and states is followed by a number of chapters that treat some general issues in Sufism such as the status of the Sufi masters (Sheikhs) and miracles performed by saints (*karāmāt*), the author's instructions to novices, the relationship between novices and their Sheikhs, and the rules of etiquette that they should absorb.<sup>11</sup>

Before we begin to analyze the concept of knowledge as it appears in the *Risāla* we need to note the method that al-Qushayrī uses to present this topic. He decided to use the term "Sufi science" (*ilm al-taṣawwuf*) in the title of his epistle. This marks a new phase in Islamic mysticism, which consists not merely of general ethical and spiritual ideas and concepts adopted by individuals or even groups that have not yet been transformed into an institution with clear features, nor has it yet become a "school of thought" for its members, as al-Kalābādhī hints in the name of his *al-Ta'arruf* in the fourth/tenth century. According to al-Qushayrī's view, Sufism is an integrated domain of knowledge with well-known features and rules, in contrast to early Sufi thought which opposed all logic and all formal knowledge since these, so it maintained, were opposed to knowledge through illumination, in which there is no room for the mind or its devices.

As a result the way al-Qushayrī treats Sufi knowledge, as well as the way he treats all Sufi concepts, is to apply careful and detailed logic in his attempt to bring together the truth, i.e. Ṣūfism, and the *sharī'a*. He focuses on the need to teach the basics of his way to the younger generation of novices, as represented by the great Sheikhs of the early period of Sufism, despite the basic materials of which the *Risāla* consists, namely a large collection of sayings and traditions transmitted in the name of prominent Sufis who lived in the author's time and before. It is not built on any private opinions of his own, except for very few exceptions. Still, a stylistic analysis of the totality of these quotations can certainly help us to get an idea of al-Qushayrī's own opinions on epistemological issues. His other compositions, such as his commentary on the Qur'ān, entitled *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* and his *al-Taḥbīr*, can also help in tracking the traces of al-Qushayrī's views on knowledge by way of the text of the *Risāla*. We prefer to begin our discussion of the *Risāla* directly with the chapter on Sufi knowledge, since that is where we can expect al-Qushayrī to focus on this topic. Other passages which may enrich his presentation, as well as the part of the composition in which al-Qushayrī deals with a group of meanings and terms that came to be used regularly in Sufi circles, will be considered in a separate section, the fifth in this paper.

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10 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 33-49.

11 See al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 164-203.

## 2. A reading of the “chapter on knowledge of God”

The chapter on “Knowledge of God” according to al-Qushayrī concerns a state that is located just before the summit of the path, since it follows the chapter on “how some Sufis behaved at the time of their departure from this world” and precedes the two chapters on love (*maḥabba*) and passionate longing (*shawq*). We thus conclude that for al-Qushayrī Sufi love is more sublime than knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Since al-Qushayrī used the division into chapters as the main structural device for giving expression to his ideas about the unification of *sharī‘a* and Sufism, as we will show below, it is only appropriate that we begin our discussion of the epistemological views in this chapter with a survey of its structure and parts.

## 3. An analysis of the structural elements in the chapter on “knowledge of God”

The chapter on knowledge of God in al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla* can be divided as follows:

- (A) The chapter opens with a quote from a Qur’ānic verse (Q 6:91): “They measured God not with His true measure” This is followed by a commentary which al-Qushayrī copied from the writings of an exegete, who uses the word “knowledge” in his explanation: “They have not known God as He should be known”.<sup>13</sup>
- (B) A *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet: “The support of the house is its foundation and the support of the faith is the knowledge of God Most High, certitude, and a restraining intelligence” When ‘Ā’isha asked the prophet: “What is the restraining intelligence (*al-‘aql al-qāmi*)?” he answered: “Refraining from disobedience to God and eagerness to obey Him”.<sup>14</sup>
- (C) Al-Qushayrī’s own definition of Sufi knowledge:

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12 Sufis are not all of one mind on the question of whether love or knowledge takes precedence. But despite this it cannot be denied that the two complement each other as features of the Sufi end of the road. With respect to this dispute al-Qushayrī states in the chapter on love that Samnūn b. Ḥamza (died before al-Junayd, i.e., before 297 AH, as al-Qushayrī notes: al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 23) “considered love comes before knowledge [in the sense of anteceding it, since knowledge is superior to it in his view], while most place knowledge before love” (ibid.: 161). It is also worth noting that al-Sarrāj does not list knowledge among the states that he enumerates in his book, where we find that love antecedes the states of intimacy (*uns*), serenity (*ṭuma’nīna*), witnessing of God (*mushāhada*) and certitude (*yaqīn*). In other words, for him love was a prerequisite for knowledge as expressed by the latter terms (see Abū Naṣr al-SARRĀJ, *Kitāb al-luma’ fī al-taṣawwuf*, ed. R.A. NICHOLSON, Leiden: Brill, 1914: 54-72). Compare this also with al-Kalābādī, who places love before knowledge in al-KALĀBĀDHĪ 1933, where the chapter on “What they say on love” appears on pp. 79-80, while “What they say about the truths of knowledge” is on pp. 101-102. In fact, al-Kalābādī deals with love at the end of his book, after all the other stations and states.

13 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 154, line 20.

14 Ibid., lines 23-25.

According to scholars (*'ulamā'*), *'ma'rifa'* means 'knowledge' (*'ilm*) [...] Each person who is cognizant of God (*'arif*) is a knower (*'ālim*). In the usage of this folk, knowledge of God is the attribute of one who is cognizant of God—praise be to Him—and His names and attributes, and of one who has put his trust in God Most High in his everyday behavior and who has rid himself of bad morals and transgressions. He then proceeds to reside at the door [of God's mercy] with his heart toiling constantly, whereupon he becomes endeared to God Most High and trusts Him in everything he experiences; the whispering of his [low] self abandon him and thoughts about anyone else [but God] never enter his heart. Thus, when he becomes a stranger to all other creatures, completely innocent of any faults of his [lower] soul, and free from any recourse to or concern for other [than God], he enters into an uninterrupted intimate conversation with God Most High and accepts nothing except what is true. After that, he begins to speak on behalf of God—praise be to Him—who imparts to him (*ta'rīf*) the mysteries of the dispensations of His foreordained decrees. It is then that he is called a *'arif*" and his state is called *'mārifa'*. In brief, the more estranged he is from his own self, the more he knows his Lord.<sup>15</sup>

(D) A series of utterances which al-Qushayrī takes from the Sufi Sheikhs. This part constitutes the largest portion of the chapter, as is the case in the other chapters as well. In his *Risāla* al-Qushayrī does not follow the method used in *al-Taḥbīr*, for example, in which nearly all the materials reflect the author's own views and only here and there are the sayings of Sufi Sheikhs used.<sup>16</sup> In the *Risāla* al-Qushayrī seems not to want to do anything but to collect and collate what others have written.<sup>17</sup> He certainly did this quite intentionally, especially in light of the fact that the composition does contain the author's views on a number of philosophical matters which, if examined more closely, concern especially two main issues which we believe are of great importance for clarifying these views:

- The first concerns the nature of the utterances and traditions which al-Qushayrī chose to put in the "traditions" section of every chapter, and the identity of the Sufis in whose name he transmits them.
- The second issue is reflected in the special structure to which al-Qushayrī adhered through the *Risāla*. He goes beyond the stylistic aspects of the given text that he considers important and deals with the basic concept that lies at the center of the discussion on the opinions and conceptions that can be perceived through the text.

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15 Ibid., lines 25-33. The English translation is provided by A. Knysh in al-QUSHAYRĪ / KNYSH 2007: 320.

16 See al-QUSHAYRĪ (ed. 'ALI) 1999.

17 NICHOLSON distinguishes between this general characteristic of the *Risāla* and the characterization that appears in al-Hujwiri's *Kashf al-mahjūb*. The latter author seems more gratifying than the former because he chose to include his own personal experiences in his treatment of various issues in Sufism [see al-HUJWĪRĪ (ed. NICHOLSON) 1976: VII (Introduction)].

- (E) This is the chapter's ending, which al-Qushayrī chose with care. Here he defines knowledge for Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl:<sup>18</sup> "Knowledge of God is the heart's life with God Most High" For more on this ending, see below.

We now discuss each part of the chapter in greater detail.

(I) – As we noted above, al-Qushayrī begins the chapter with a passage from Q 6:91. The passage was chosen not for itself but because the word "knowledge" and the verb "know" appear in the commentary to it. In fact, the original context of the verse is God mentioning the refusal of the Prophet's own nation to accept his status as prophet since, so they claimed, God does not give such tasks to human beings. God's decree according to this verse bears witness to His greatness, and as a result anyone who does not recognize the prophets' mission does not believe in divine power. Thus we find al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 604 AH) explains the phrase "They measured God not with His true measure" in the verse in the name of al-Akhfash al-Naḥwī (d. 292 AH), who understood the words as referring to knowledge and understanding ("they did not know Him in the truth of His knowledge").<sup>19</sup> This latter interpretation itself provided al-Qushayrī with the original motivation to choose this verse, not its actual content, which concerns those who refused to recognize prophecy, and the facts associated with this.<sup>20</sup> This meaning of the term *iḥāṭa* is mentioned by al-Qushayrī in his commentary of the Qur'ānic text, entitled *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, in his exegesis of this very verse.<sup>21</sup>

This means that al-Qushayrī adheres to the position that humans are incapable of understanding God. On the other hand, we must point out in this connection that al-Qushayrī uses the word *al-'ulūm* in the text of *al-Laṭā'if* instead of the word "knowledge" (*al-ma'rifa*) which he uses at the beginning of the chapter on knowledge in his *Risāla*. This, we believe, indicates that the meaning of "knowledge" in the last-mentioned place must be understood in the sense of limited mental understanding, similarly to the way it is treated by al-Hārith al-Maḥāsibī and al-Kalābādhī before al-Qushayrī's time. Now although both al-Maḥāsibī and al-Kalābādhī reject the possibility of comprehending God with the mind completely and without contradictions, they do not claim that the other kind of comprehension is impossible, namely that which is achieved through the heart and internal confirmation. We can thus expect that al-Qushayrī, too, will agree with this conception. However, before we proceed into a discussion of the structural foundations of the chapter on knowledge, we would like to analyze the way the word *ma'rifa* is used in the Qur'ānic text, since al-Qushayrī himself decided to begin with a Qur'ānic verse that does not in fact con-

18 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 157, lines 16-17.

19 See al-RĀZĪ (ed. al-MAYS) 1993, XIII: 77.

20 On the use of the verb *qadara* (literally: to decree) with the meaning of *iḥāṭa* (= comprehension), see Ibn Manẓūr: "*qadartu li-amrin kadhā aqdiru lahu wa-aqduru qadran, idhā naẓartu fīhi wa-dabbartu wa-qāyastuhu* = when I say *qadartu* etc. I mean 'I observed it, managed it and compared it'" [IBN MANẒŪR (ed. Dār Ṣādir) 1994, v: 76].

21 al-QUSHAYRĪ (ed. BASYŪNĪ), no date, II: 183.

tain any word derived from the root *'rf*; this, of courses, raises the question of verses that do contain such words and how these were interpreted by the Sufis.

The verb *'arafa* appears in the Qur'*ān* in more than twenty different places, and in addition the root *'rf* also appears in other verbal forms. A perusal of the passages in which these occur shows that the words have a variety of meanings: pure comprehension, distinction, faith and affirmation.<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya notes that God chose to describe himself as *'ālim* and not as *'ārif*, and that the Qur'*ān*ic text, too, associates God and the attribute of *'ilm* ("knowing"). Indeed, the word *ma'rifa* ("knowledge") does not appear at all in connection with God; in most of its occurrences the word is associated with believers, especially from among the People of the Book, those whom Ibn Qayyim describes as people who very much prefer "knowledge (*ma'rifa*) to knowing (*'ilm*)".<sup>23</sup> However, Ibn Qayyim subsequently points out that the concept of "knowledge" among Sufis differs from that of ordinary language and from its usage in the Qur'*ān*. The word *ma'rifa* is only used in conjunction with the thing itself and not its state, in contrast to *'ilm*. The former is thus a description of what disappears from the heart after it has been comprehended; among the Sufis it evokes the meaning of *'ilm* as compared to God and not of *'ilm* by itself.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that al-Qushayrī thought that this verse was the most appropriate for his purposes, if to the fact that the commentary on the verse contains the word *ma'rifa* we add that the knowledge it denotes is knowledge of God that humans cannot attain. Therefore al-Qushayrī decided to use it to begin a chapter dealing with knowledge of God in preparation for that part of the *Risāla* which is the furthest removed from the Sunnī view, namely the part in which he quotes traditions and sayings of the Sufi Sheikhs.

(II) – After this opening Qur'*ān*ic verse al-Qushayrī quotes the above mentioned *ḥadīth*.<sup>25</sup> This *ḥadīth* states that there are three basic foundations of religion, (1) knowledge of God, (2) certitude, and (3) "the restraining intelligence" (*al-'aql al-qāmi*). It is the last of these three that appears to constitute the focus of the *ḥadīth*, since the Prophet takes care to explain it after 'A'isha asked him about it. The expression "the restraining intelligence" casts its shadow over the two other elements. Indeed, if we were to consider the two ex-

22 See, for example, Q 2:89, 5:87 and 16:93.

23 See IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA (ed. 'ABD AL-ḤAMĪD) 1375 AH, III: 335. al-Tahānawī notes that God is called *'ālim* and not *'ārif* "because His understanding is neither through inference, nor preceded by negation, nor given to confusion" [TAHĀNAWĪ (ed. Maktabat Lubnān) 1996, II: 1584]. From this we can conclude that according to the latter *ma'rifa* is based on inference, while God does not need to infer his knowledge from anything; His knowledge is preceded by ignorance and can arouse confusion upon its attainment, but God is untouched by all these.

24 See IBN AL-QAYYIM (ed. 'ABD AL-ḤAMĪD) 1375 AH, III: 337-38.

25 This *ḥadīth* is not mentioned in the canonical collections. However, it is found in other sources, for example al-DAYLAMĪ (ed. ZUMMALĪ/BAGHDĀDĪ) 1987, II: 344 (where it is presented in the following form: "The house's support and foundation are knowledge of God, certitude and a salutary intelligence (*al-'aql al-nāfi*), which means refraining from sinning against God") as well as in: Abū al-Ḥasan al-KINĀNĪ, *Tanzīh al-sharī'a al-marfū'a 'an al-akhbār al-shanī'a al-mawḍū'a*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1979, I: 222 (where the expression "salutary intelligence" also occurs).

pressions “knowledge of God” and “certitude” and the clear Sufi associations they evoke, and then continued to read the *ḥadīth*, these associations would then become confused and a new semantic space would be created, one with features closer to *sharī‘a* and the *sunna*. We believe that what was uppermost on al-Qushayrī’s mind throughout the *Risāla* was to detach the reader from Sufi inspiration as reflected in the sayings of the Sufi Sheikhs. The reason for this is that the concepts of “knowledge of God” and “certitude” came to possess features that gradually moved away from the moderate Sunnī conceptions in al-Qushayrī’s days. Thus, for example, some Sufis pronounced themselves in favor of abandoning religious observances, based on Q 15:99: “*Wa-i‘bud rabbaka ḥattā ya‘tiyaka l-yaqīn*” which was interpreted to mean “Perform the observances until you have reached the degree of *yaqīn* or knowledge, at which stage you become exempt” (in this interpretation the Arabic word *ḥattā* is taken to mean “until” and not “in order to” the difference between the two meanings is clear).<sup>26</sup>

It is very likely that this far-fetched interpretation of the connection between certitude/knowledge and religious observances provided the main motivation for quoting the *ḥadīth* in question, where the meaning of “the restraining intelligence” towards the end is taken as proof that the performance of pious deeds must not be neglected.<sup>27</sup>

(III) – Al-Qushayrī’s definition of Sufi knowledge can be said to cover the following points:

- (A) He makes a clear distinction between *‘ilm* knowledge and *ma‘rifa*. *‘Ilm* denotes understanding the foundations and ordinances of religion with one’s mind, and their observance in full. According to Muslim jurists and transmitters of traditions the concept of *ma‘rifa* does not extend beyond that of knowing religious duties, and absolute faith in God. Al-Qushayrī points out, however, that among Sufis this concept has a special meaning; this special type of knowledge is a divine grace that is given to a man who purifies himself and practices asceticism.
- (B) Al-Qushayrī insists that the knower must first be able to move outside of himself and all other creatures.
- (C) According to al-Qushayrī’s definition a person who reaches the rank of knowledge is one to whom God confides his secrets. The fact that knowledge means acquaintance with divine secrets led Arberrry to claim that knowledge as defined in the *Risāla* marks the completion of the transition of the Sufi wayfarer from the stage of stations to the stage of states.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, al-HILĀLĪ 1994 I: 177.

<sup>27</sup> In the English translation of the *Risāla* B.R. VON SCHLEGELL claims that the knowledge of God mentioned in the *ḥadīth* is “direct knowledge” (see VON SCHLEGELL, *Principles of Sufism*, 1990, p. 316). In our opinion, however, this is too literal a translation, which does not point to the inner impression which deprives the concept of knowledge in this passage of its Sufi meaning, which involves immediacy. Therefore the translator would have done well to refrain from using the word “direct”, for the reason we gave above.

<sup>28</sup> See ARBERRY 1963: 78.



A comprehensive survey of al-Qushayrī's definitions in the part of the *Risāla* that deals with states, reveals that the most extensive definitions which he gives at the beginning of the chapters on states are the following four: the chapter on love (in which al-Qushayrī defines this concept in twenty-one lines);<sup>29</sup> the chapter on oneness of God (*tawhīd*) (with a definition of twelve lines);<sup>30</sup> the chapter on Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) (with a definition of eleven lines);<sup>31</sup> and the chapter on knowledge of God (in which al-Qushayrī's definition takes up ten lines).<sup>32</sup> The fact that al-Qushayrī probably feels the need to provide a comprehensive definition of Sufism in the chapter on *taṣawwuf* because the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* are devoid of anything on this subject. He therefore felt a great need to discuss this matter at some length, thus providing him with an opportunity to express also his own views. As for his definition of oneness of God, this is due to the prominent place which the concept of *tawhīd* has in Sufi circles, especially in light of the fact that it had come to possess meanings that were quite far removed from the simple original Islamic sense of the term. It would thus seem that conceptions that developed during the fourth and fifth centuries AH, some of which contradicted the ideas of the early phases of Muslim Sufism, motivated al-Qushayrī to highlight the concept of *tawhīd* in its reconciliatory sense, by way of devoting an entire section at the beginning of the *Risāla* to it, or in the chapter in which he presents the concept as one of the most salient of Sufi states. Furthermore, the obscurity of the concept of divine love among Sufis drove al-Qushayrī to give it such a lengthy definition, in addition to devoting a long chapter to it, most of which consist of quotes of Sufi utterances and traditions about love.

To conclude the preceding discussion, al-Qushayrī puts the concept of being outside of oneself and of others (*al-ajnabiyya 'an al-nafs wa-'an al-ghayr*) at the center of his definition of Sufi knowledge. He sees a causal connection between Sufi asceticism and coming into possession of divine secrets. Knowledge of God's names and attributes would appear not to equal the highest degree to which an adept can attain, namely coming into possession of secrets. The former is a preliminary stage in which corresponds to believing the attributes and names that have been revealed by God in His book. For this reason al-Qushayrī at the beginning of the definition states: "Knowledge of God is the attribute of one who is cognizant of God and His names and attributes" The latter, on the other hand, consists of transcendental concepts about God, which go beyond the plainly visible attributes and names. Therefore al-Qushayrī at the end of the definition says: "He [i.e. the knower] begins to speak on behalf of God, Who imparts to him the mysteries of the dispensations of His foreordained decrees".

(IV) – The sayings of the Sufi masters, whoever reads this part of the chapter on "knowledge of God" sees a form of Sufi knowledge that is preceded by remoteness from creation and followed by silence mixed with perplexity (*dahsh*) and bewilderment (*hayra*). Al-Qushayrī in many passages stresses the need to perform religious observances, but in

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29 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 155, line 34; p. 158, line 20.

30 Ibid.: 148, lines 5-10.

31 Ibid.: 138, lines 19-29.

32 Ibid.: 154, lines 25-34.

others he emphasizes the spiritual aspects, as in the following passage, which he quotes from Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysābūrī (d. 270/883-884): “Since I acquired the knowledge of God Most High neither truth nor falsehoods have ever entered my heart”.<sup>33</sup> In the extreme case this can be interpreted as a rejection of observances altogether. Before we set down these results in detail we shall have a brief look at the structure of this part of the chapter.

#### 4. The section on the sayings of the Sheikhs in the chapter on knowledge of God: Structure

The section devoted to sayings of the Sufi Sheikhs varies greatly in form and length in the various chapters of al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*. All the chapters are clearly divided structurally into a Qur'ānic opening, followed by a passage from the *ḥadīth*, then al-Qushayrī's own definition, and lastly the part in which he collects the sayings of the Sheikhs. While this structure is unvarying throughout the *Risāla*, the part containing the sayings of the Sheikhs seems to be disarranged and disordered. The question we must ask therefore is whether al-Qushayrī in this part did in fact arrange the rich materials he quotes in a manner that is discoverable upon reading about the stations and states in the various chapters?

To examine every individual tradition and saying in this part and to analyze the hypothetical motive for its appearance in a particular place (if such a motive could be found at all) would be a very complex undertaking, and of doubtful utility, since any results would be no more than guesswork. We shall therefore deal with the traditions after dividing them into adjoining groups, in order to derive their common features. In this way all the traditions can be investigated thoroughly so that their inner connections can be established and related to the way their contents are associated with the topics that the chapter deals with. After a careful scrutiny of the sayings and traditions we were able to divide them into the following semantic units:

##### 4.1 The introductory semantic unit: Trepidation before God (*hayba*) and Tranquility (*Sakīna*): Traditions 1-3<sup>34</sup>

The first three traditions follow the definition. Their purpose is to provide support for the introductory presentation of the topic that al-Qushayrī has provided in the Qur'ānic verse, the passage from the *ḥadīth*, and his own definition. The first and second traditions are taken from his teacher and father-in-law Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1014). In them he tells of the growing awe and trepidation before God that is felt as one attains more knowledge, and the tranquility that accompanies the discovery of the light of knowledge. The feeling of trepidation before God, or exaltation of God, takes us back once more to the concept of restraining intelligence that appears in the *ḥadīth*. These two traditions by al-Daqqāq are followed by one related by al-Shiblī, in which he states that the knower is devoid of all

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33 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 155.

34 Numbers of the traditions were determined in accordance with the appearance of the traditions in the Arabic edition of al-QUSHAYRĪ's *Epistle* published in Cairo 1940.

manifestations of connections to the outside world, as a necessary consequence of the sense of tranquility that his attainment of knowledge gives him; this is in fact the most salient feature of the knower, according to al-Shiblī. These three traditions thus form a consistent semantic framework and constitute one of two boundaries that encompass the chapter's specific contents and pull them back to their proper place whenever they threaten to exceed the bounds of reconciliation.

#### 4.2 The second semantic unit: Traditions 4-9

After quoting the above-mentioned saying by al-Shiblī al-Qushayrī surprisingly quotes another of his sayings that contradicts the former and goes against the tendency towards reconciliation. The fourth saying in this section, in al-Shiblī's name, is the following: "It [knowledge of God] begins with God Most High, and the rest of it has no end".<sup>35</sup> According to this saying God is only the beginning of knowledge, whereas the end is something that cannot be foreseen, that is, it is not subject to understanding by the mind. This is the first time in which al-Qushayrī modifies the semantic course that he has followed from the beginning of the chapter, of maintaining a balance between knowledge and obedience to God. In fact, what al-Shiblī's saying seems to go beyond just obedience and faith, since its attainment is not dependant on the restraining intelligence mentioned above.

Further support for the tendency reflected in the previous saying, to move away from the reconciliation with which al-Qushayrī began this chapter, comes from the following saying that he quotes in the name of Abū Ḥafṣ: "Since I acquired the knowledge of God, neither truth nor falsehood have ever entered my heart" Indeed, if one reads this saying in isolation from its original context cannot help but interpret it as follows: Ever since I attained the state of knowledge I no longer distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. When the knower loses his ability to make distinctions he of necessity ceases to perform good deeds and commits sins. It appears that al-Qushayrī realized the inherent ability of this saying to take him beyond his conciliatory views. He therefore commented on it immediately after quoting it in order to turn it in his favor.

What al-Qushayrī has done here appears to benefit those who would view these traditions from a purely Islamic perspective. However, any who desires to search for Sufi contents concerning illumination and proximity will no doubt find it here, as well as in similar passages which al-Qushayrī may have quoted without commentary.

Next al-Qushayrī quotes a saying by al-Wāsiṭī (d. after 320/932) that seems quite remote from reconciliation: "Man's knowledge of God is imperfect as long as he is content with God and is in need of Him".<sup>36</sup> This is followed by a conciliatory commentary in which

35 Ibid.: 155.

36 Ibid.: 155, lines 16-17. Also note that al-SARRĀJ devotes an entire chapter to the sayings of al-Wāsiṭī as part of his *Kitāb tafṣīr al-shaḥīḥiyāt wal-kalimāt allatī zāhiruhā mustashna' wa-bāṭinuhā ṣaḥīḥ mustaqīm*: al-SARRĀJ 1914: 375 ff. Although this chapter contains only two problematic sayings by al-Wāsiṭī (the first says that one should not heed the prophets when attaining the truth: "Do not heed a dear one, a spokesman of God or a friend of God if you find a way to heed the truth"; the second also deals with the status of the prophets: "Pray for them with strings, and do not limit the measure [of your prayer] in your heart"), at the end of the chapter he states that this must be compared with al-Wāsiṭī's other sayings. The insertion of al-Wāsiṭī's sayings here demonstrates the problematic nature in which

both features, being satisfied with God alone and needing him, are said to lead to the obliteration of the knower's self, so he does not feel anything. Being satisfied with God is one of the attributes which are lacking in the state of self-annihilation in God (*fanā*). The meaning of this saying, in our opinion, may be understood differently, namely that knowledge is useless in the absence of two elements, one of which possesses glory and power (God) while the other (man) is weak, stands in a lowly place and is subjugated to the former. It is useful only if the great and the lowly become equal; only then can the mystic idea be achieved of the knower and the known becoming one thing, when the human essence rises towards God.

Al-Qushayrī now intervenes once more and introduces an interpretation of his own to al-Wāsiṭī's saying. He does not deny such sayings, but attaches to them meanings that are consistent with Islamic canonical law. In this he adopts a method for which we found evidence in more than one place in his text: he follows al-Wāsiṭī's first text with another saying by the same person (here it is the ninth saying in this section) that gives al-Qushayrī's interpretation the legitimacy it needed.

This semantic unit ends with a *ḥadīth* that says "I cannot count your praises" ("*lā uḥṣī thanā'an 'alayk*").<sup>37</sup> It is found in al-Tirmidhī's *Sunan*, in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in Ibn Māja's *Sunan*<sup>38</sup> and elsewhere. Its original meaning is that no man can count the blessings that God bestows on him, and can never do enough to pay this debt. The mention of this specific *ḥadīth* here clearly has the objective of providing support for the concept developed through al-Wāsiṭī's two above-mentioned sayings, according to which the strong bond with God makes Sufis lose their human attributes and their power of speech: "Whoever knows God falls silent, because he becomes mute and subdued" (the ninth saying). In the same way God's abundant grace makes man incapable of praising the giver (God) according to his due.

At the end of this semantic unit al-Qushayrī makes the following comment on the sayings and traditions he quoted before: "These are the characteristics of those who have attained the furthest reaches. As for those who have not yet reached this limit, they have discoursed profusely about knowledge of God".<sup>39</sup> This commentary appears immediately after al-Wāsiṭī's saying "Whoever knows God falls silent, because he becomes mute and subdued" as an indication that true knowledge will impose silence, even muteness, on the knower. Al-Qushayrī's comment in all likelihood refers to al-Wāsiṭī's latter saying, which he takes as meaning that knowers of God, who are struck silent when they receive the light

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his sayings are used. This has encouraged some groups to declare him an unbeliever, as can be seen from al-Sarrāj's text.

37 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 155.

38 See Muḥammad b. 'Īsā al-TIRMIDHĪ, *al-Jāmi' al-kabīr*, ed. Bashshār MA'RŪF, Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1998, v: 474-475 (this *ḥadīth* was related by 'Ā'isha: "I was asleep next to the Messenger of God. I noticed he was not there at night and put my hand out to him. My hand fell on his feet as he bowed and prayed: 'Let your good will protect me from your wrath, and your dispensation from your punishment. I cannot enumerate your praise. You are like you praise yourself'"); also IBN MĀJA, *Ṣaḥīḥ sunan Ibn Māja*, ed. Muḥammad al-ALBĀNĪ, al-Riyāḍ: Maktab al-tarbiya al-'arabī, 1988, II: 327.

39 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 155, lines 21-22.

of knowledge, are firmly established in their state, while those who describe their experiences in words are less so.

### 4.3 Traditions of the third semantic unit: Traditions 9-57

A close perusal of the traditions in this group reveals that most of them describe the ethical aspect of knowledge, i.e. everything that has to do with the knowers' attributes and features, as well as the totality of qualities that are expected of them, in comparison to ascetics and those who trod the path. Even the quoted sayings of al-Ḥallāj (nos. 19 and 20) change nothing in the semantic framework of this unit when all of his sayings on Sufi knowledge in other books and collections are taken into account.<sup>40</sup> Al-Ḥallāj's two afore-mentioned sayings describe the Sufi's heart as empty of everything except for God, in keeping with the ethical aspect as noted above.<sup>41</sup>

The third unit begins by associating knowledge with fear (saying no. 10). While this saying says practically nothing about the Sufi aspect of the experience of coming to knowledge, it does contribute to enveloping it with ethical contents that are consistent with the canonical law. In this respect it can be compared to al-Qushayrī's introductory remarks to what we have called his second semantic unit. We would like to draw attention here to two consecutive sayings (nos. 11 and 12) at the beginning of the third unit, which are clearly contradictory. While the first saying stresses the idea that this world is inadequate and insufficient, the second creates a causal connection between the attainment of knowledge and a happy life in this world. Of course, the reader may interpret the second saying as stating that knowledge can make one enjoy life with God, that the good life it mentions is one that is close to God and not filled with earthly pleasures. In this way the seeming contradiction between the two sayings can be avoided. We prefer this interpretation, since it is the one which is emphasized throughout in connection with the other sayings.<sup>42</sup>

Perplexity and dismay are mentioned repeatedly in this unit. These are concepts that for Sufis who have attained the rank of knowledge are directly connected to the ethical aspect, as can be seen in the following saying of Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896): "Knowledge of God has two goals: perplexity and bewilderment" (saying 21), as well as that of 'Ālī al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/860): "The person who knows God Most High is the most bewildered of all in regard to Him" (saying 22).

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40 See, for example, al-ḤALLĀJ, *Dīwān al-Ḥallāj*, Köln: Manshūrāt al-jamal, 1997: 53, as well as al-ḤALLĀJ, *Akḥbār al-Ḥallāj*, ed. L. Massignon & Kraus, Paris: Maṭba'at al-qalam, 1936: 28.

41 We may ask in this context whether al-Ḥallāj would in al-Qushayrī's view be considered one of those who "have not yet reached this limit", especially in light of the fact that he confirms these sayings after his commentary noted above.

42 See, for example, the following sayings: "Whoever knows God loses desire for things of this world; he is neither attached nor detached"; "the knower takes no notice of anything other than Him; nor speaks anything that God has not spoken, nor does he see his protector in anyone but God Most High"; "the knower finds intimacy in the recollection of God, and God estranges him from [the rest of] His creatures; the knower needs God, and God makes him independent from His creatures; he shows humility toward God Most High, and God gives him a high position among His creatures"; and the statement at the end of the chapter: "knowledge is the heart's life with God".

In addition to meanings associated with ethical aspects of Sufism we also find traditions that stress the need to perform religious observances. The most notable character in this connection is al-Junayd, whose sayings al-Qushayrī quotes in five places in this unit.<sup>43</sup> In three of these al-Junayd's sayings appear next to another saying, by Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī (d. 261/874), which confirm the thought expressed by the former. We may thus say that what al-Bastāmī and al-Junayd share is that despite the sayings that deviate from Sunnī thought the two of them have remained within the bounds of Sunnī Islam. The "ecstatic utterances" (*shaṭaḥāt*) attributed al al-Bastāmī are famous in this regard.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the above, al-Qushayrī quotes Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī eight times in this unit alone.<sup>45</sup> Now since a number of scholars have claimed that Dhū al-Nūn played an important role in formulating the concept of *ma'rifa bi-llāh* among Sufis and in consolidating its foundations, it behooves us to take a look at some of his sayings that were chosen by al-Qushayrī. Saying no. 17 is one of these: "Friendship with the knower is like friendship with God Most High. He treats you with gentleness and shows kindness to you, thereby imitating God's moral qualities".<sup>46</sup> Here clearly God and the knower are put in a relation of symbolic parallelism, for the latter takes God's attributes as his model, as confirmation of his ego's disappearance in God. Doubtless this saying has semantic content that is open to extreme interpretations, especially the possibly perceived symbolic comparison of the knower and God. However, al-Qushayrī clearly decided to place this saying in the present semantic unit because it contains a clear indication of the moral qualities of discernment and magnanimity.

Of considerable interest is the comparison that Dhū al-Nūn makes between the knower and the ascetic: "The ascetics are the kings of the Hereafter, while they themselves are but the poor [in the service of] the knowers". Al-Bastāmī in another saying makes a similar observation (saying no. 26). The ascetic's wayfaring is an image that invokes the end of the road, as an intimation of recompense in the afterworld, while the knower's flight has no

43 See, for example, al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 156, lines 3-6. The same saying is also mentioned in al-Junayd's biography (see *ibid.*: 20, line 23).

44 The Arabic word *shaṭḥ* literally means movement, but as a Sufi term it expresses what the soul feels as it comes into the divine presence. Usually this occurs in a state of uncontrollable ecstasy which causes the one who experiences it to be torn between announcing his secret and his weakness in face of this strong ecstasy that drives him to announce it. This term is first mentioned by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj in his *al-Luma'*, where he defines it as follows: "*al-shaṭḥ* is an unusual term for describing an overwhelming passion, one that blazes with the violence of its heat and strength": al-SARRĀJ 1914: 375. Not surprisingly, this term is treated in one of the most important Sufi conciliatory compositions. After all, the need to reconsider some of the more extreme Sufi sayings and to make them consistent with the harsh nature of spiritual experience without falling into disbelief or claims of incarnation and other defamatory Sufi manifestations, were one of the most important tasks with which moderate Sufis occupied themselves in their compositions. For more on the meaning of this word and the approaches to it among the various groups of Sufis, philosophers and jurists, see C. ERNST, "Shatḥ", *ET*, IX: 361-362.

45 See traditions no. 16, 17, 22, 33, 41, 44 and 52.

46 al-IṢFAHĀNĪ quotes this saying in the following version: "Friendship with a knower is like friendship with God; he carries away your woes on the pattern of imitating God's attributes" (Abū Nu'aym al-IṢFAHĀNĪ, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1997, IX: 363).

clear end or, as al-Shiblī says in the second semantic unit in his definition of knowledge: “It [knowledge of God] begins with God, and the rest of it has no end” Then comes al-Dārānī’s saying and once more focuses attention on being connected to God through knowledge rather than religious observances, and other manifestations of asceticism. It fits in with previous sayings intended to modify the general trend that predominates in this unit, in that it highlights the importance of performing one’s religious duties, which are closely united with the attainment of knowledge.

Here we would like to point out that the sayings that we discussed in the previous paragraph would have voided the conciliatory meaning which al-Qushayrī worked to impose in this as well as in other parts of the *Risāla*, had he not realized this and therefore ordered the sayings in such a way that the extremism that is reflected in some of them could be hidden. He was able to do so thanks to the flexible nature of this kind of text. It is hardly likely that the reader, upon reaching these sayings, will have forgotten the preceding quotes from the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* or al-Qushayrī’s definitions, which are followed by sayings in favor of performing religious observances. In fact, the many conciliatory passages will have continued to accompany the reader to the end of the text, even if he will also have read some texts that do not favor reconciliation. And in any case the latter would not remain long in his memory, surrounded as he would be by consecutive expressions of conciliation. It is this method, in fact, which constitutes the structural arrangement we have discovered in these sections, consisting of a certain way of ordering the sayings of the Sufi Sheikhs in the *Risāla*’s various chapters.

As we pointed out above, the third semantic unit begins with a statement that compares fear with knowledge. At the end of the unit we see that once more the importance of preserving the *sharī‘a* is stressed. This part can be considered as completing the unit and does not need to be taken as an independent unit, since the importance of the *sharī‘a* is also stressed at the unit’s beginning. This part contains the following saying by Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890-91) (no. 54), and one by Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (no. 52).

#### 4.4 The epilogue: Knowledge is life

Al-Qushayrī ends the chapter on knowledge with a saying that has made a strong impression on those who search for conciliation. This saying, with which the author brings closure to everything that he wrote in the body of the chapter, is attributed to Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl: “Knowledge is the heart’s life with God”.<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to remember that al-

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47 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 157, lines 15-16. Compare this to what God is said to have revealed to David: “O David, do you know what knowledge of me is? He said: No. He [God] said: The life of the heart in seeing me” (al-TAHĀNĀWĪ 1996, II: 1584); and also the following saying by Dhū al-Nūn in ‘AṬṬĀR’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*: “Fear made me ill and passion set me on fire / love put me in fetters and God revived me” (Farīd al-Dīn ‘AṬṬĀR, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, ed. R. NICHOLSON, Leiden: Brill, 1905, I: 134). — It is worth noting that al-Qushayrī quotes the same saying in a previous passage, al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 157, lines 12-13. However, in the Beirut edition of the *Risāla* the chapter on knowledge ends in al-Kharāz’s saying that is quoted after the first place where Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl’s saying is quoted; there al-Kharāz speaks about the knowers’ crying (saying no. 57). See al-QUSHAYRĪ, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, Beirut edition, ed. ZURAYQ and BALTAJĪ, 1990: 317. But the old Egyptian edition seems

Qushayrī at the beginning of the chapter stated that knowledge leads the knower to adopt God's attributes and to live with God in everything. The epilogue is consistent with this view. Furthermore, the equivalence claimed for knowledge and life can also be understood as a call to perform the religious observances, since these are at the heart of a true Islamic life. This interpretation is made the more likely by the fact that the speaker uses the word *ḥayāt* "life" instead of some other word that he could have used to convey the meaning of happiness in general, for example *na'īm* "happiness" *qurb* "proximity" *tawāṣul* "connectedness" or the like.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the word "life" and its associations can be understood as bearing the meaning of the perfect Sufi life, consisting of an amalgamation of *sharī'a* with Sūfism, both of which together constitute the core of both inner and external life with God.<sup>49</sup> This interpretation is certainly a useful way to link these two concepts, especially at the end of a discussion on one of the most sensitive issues with which Sufi esoteric science grapples.

This epilogue is clearly in contradiction to a saying quoted above in the name of Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysābūrī: "Since I acquired the knowledge of God Most High neither truth nor falsehoods have ever entered my heart" Al-Qushayrī's own commentary on this saying contains an allusion to the meaning of life with God:

If he has been preoccupied with nothing but his Lord, he has not turned to his heart. So, how can a certain idea enter the heart of someone who has no heart? This is the difference between someone who lives through his heart and someone who lives through his Lord.<sup>50</sup>

We see that the contradiction has its source in the Sufi idea according to which a particular state can exist without being sensed, as in the act of mentioning God's name (*dhikr*) without sensing it, or loving without the lover sensing that love because his sensing the beloved comes to dominate him.

The experience of knowing, including its attendant ethical and practical manifestations, in addition to its teleologically ill-defined substantive consequences, are all nothing but a full life that the heart lives with God. Lest it be thought that our attempt at delving into the meanings of this saying/epilogue and at understanding the significance of its location lacks a solid factual basis, we remind the reader of our hypothesis concerning a general structural scheme that determines the order in which traditions are related in the sections on sayings

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to be more reliable, since in the later edition the editors changed the order of the topics. It must therefore be used with reservations, and always compared to other editions.

48 Despite this the use of the word "life" is quite widespread among later Sufis to refer to one of the more advanced stages on the Sufi path. According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, for instance, it ranks before knowledge and immediately follows observation (see IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, al-Imārāt: Wizārat al-'ulūm wa-l-shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1981: 593-615).

49 Ibn al-Qayyim links the concept of life as he understands it with morals: "The more perfect are these morals in their possessor, the stronger and more complete is his life. The trait of *ḥayā'* 'shyness' is thus derived from *ḥayāt* 'life' in name and in fact" (ibid.: 597).

50 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 155, lines 11-12.



in this chapter, in addition to similar hypotheses concerning the function of the epilogue in other chapters of the *Risāla*.<sup>51</sup>

It is worth noting here that the use of the expression “heart’s life” instead of “man’s life” for instance, indicates the author’s desire to argue against those who believe that killing or physically tormenting the body can be a means for achieving life with God, despite the existence of a number of Sufi sayings quoted by al-Qushayrī in the *Risāla* which, at least if we accept their overt meaning, insist that it is necessary to kill one’s body physically, and not only metaphorically.<sup>52</sup> The saying/epilogue of the chapter on knowledge, thus, has a deeper meaning, which plays an essential role in modifying the conception that only suicide can bring one into absolute contact with God. This is a conception that began to take shape in the days of al-Kalābādhī and al-Sarrāj, as the latter clearly demonstrates in his *Kitāb al-Luma*.<sup>53</sup>

In summing up al-Qushayrī’s treatment of the topic of knowledge of God in the chapter on knowledge in his *Risāla*, we would like to raise the following question: What motivated the *Risāla*’s author to quote a considerable number of sayings that clearly appear to contradict his conciliatory approach? Why did he not limit himself to sayings that served his objective? Towards the end of our discussion on the *Risāla* we would like to answer this question.

## 5. The concept of knowledge of God in the other parts of the *Risāla*

### 5.1 Knowledge/worship

In the two chapters that follow the *Risāla*’s Introduction al-Qushayrī repeatedly uses the term *ma’rifā* which he treats as equivalent in content to *’ibāda* “worship” and *īmān* “faith” or compares to *tawhīd* (oneness of God) in its overt Islamic sense.<sup>54</sup> In fact, after these two chapters al-Qushayrī clearly treats all manifestations of Sufi life as connected to religious observances, even when he speaks of the most exalted states of love, passionate longing (*shawq*) and God’s oneness, although at times his predicament in this matter can be perceived.

In his treatment of the two terms *al-jam’* (the state of being in the presence of God) and *al-farq* (the state of detachment from God), he states that there exists a third state that follows being consumed by God and losing the feeling for anything except Him. He calls this state “the second state of separation” (*al-farq al-thānī*); in it one returns to one’s original

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51 See R. SNIR’s treatment of the epilogue of the chapter on love in al-QUSHAYRĪ’S *Risāla*: SNIR 1999: 157-159.

52 As in al-Qushayrī’s quotation of the following saying by al-Naṣr’abādhī: “One love demands that blood be spared and another that it be spilt”: al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940, chapter on love, p. 159; see also *ibid.*: 161. There can be no doubt that this idea, which was quite widespread in Sufi works, was associated with stories of suicide in the literature of love.

53 See, e.g., al-SARRĀJ 1914: 427.

54 See, e.g., al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 4, lines 4-5, 9-10.

life at the time when one's religious experience was limited to performing the observances. It is a temporary state of separation necessitate by the requirement to protect the *sharī'a*.<sup>55</sup>

## 5.2 Knowledge/*Mushāhada* (direct witnessing of God)

Does a Sufi need long periods of ascetic austerities before he can attain illumination and revelation? According to al-Qushayrī, knowledge may be obtained without hard ascetic austerities; however, those that do attain it presently persevere in their ascetic austerities. He also states that ascetic austerities should follow the divine revelations.<sup>56</sup>

## 5.3 Features of the Sufi experience of knowing God

***Mushāhada*:** Al-Qushayrī speaks of three grades that describe the Sufi's journey towards his ultimate goal, namely *muḥāḍara* (presence), *mukāshafa* (unveiling) and *mushāhada* (witnessing).<sup>57</sup> The rank of *mushāhada* differs from its predecessors in that it relies on something that cannot be explained rationally, as in the case of *muḥāḍara*; it also differs from the science (*ilm*) which resides in the intellect, too, like in the case of *mukāshafa*. If both *muḥāḍara* and *mukāshafa* prepare one for proximity to God, God remains in both cases "*warā' al-sitr*" (lit. behind the veil) as al-Qushayrī says. This makes it possible to attain the complete revelation, unalloyed by any interruption that is achieved when one rises to the rank of *mushāhada*. The place where *mushāhada* occurs, however, is the secret (*sirr*), according to al-Qushayrī, as compared to the place of love, which is the spirit (*rūḥ*), and the place of knowledge, which is the heart (*qalb*). Al-Qushayrī states that the secret is more exalted than the spirit, while the spirit is more exalted than the heart.<sup>58</sup> In other words, he places *mushāhada* at the apex of these states, followed by love and then knowledge. Knowledge in this context is not the same as *mushāhada*, just as secret is not the same as the heart. We do not regard these distinctions as more than hints that touch the meanings of their appellations, since the Sufis disagree among themselves concerning the definitions of the various spiritual elements such as heart, soul (*nafs*), breath (*nafas*), secret and what they called *shāhid* (lit. witness). These disagreements themselves indicate that Sufi thought in general lacked an integrated theory that would clarify the differences between these elements and the specific function of each.

***Yaqīn*** (certitude): Al-Qushayrī devotes a separate chapter to the concept of *yaqīn* among the stations that he enumerates.<sup>59</sup> However, he does not give a definition of *yaqīn* after the quoted *ḥadīth*. Interestingly, he counts *yaqīn* among the stations and not among the states, contrary to al-Kalābādhī, who presents it as part of a group of concepts associa-

55 Ibid.: 39.

56 Subsequently Abū Hafṣ al-SUHRAWARDĪ, author of *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, developed a complete system in which he divides Sufis into various types and determines which of these are qualified to be masters. The best type is what he calls *majdhūb mutadārak bi-l-sulūk* (this is a person who is effortlessly attracted to God and his attraction is followed by treading the Ṣūfī path). For more on this topic see: SALAMAH-QUDSI 2011: 11ff.; see also IDEM 2009: 386-390.

57 See al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 43.

58 Ibid.: 48.

59 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 90-92.

ted with union and illumination and defines it as the science of the heart in contrast to the science of the intellect.

Al-Qushayrī's discussion of certitude in the afore-mentioned chapter is followed by a three-way division of this concept in the part of the *Risāla* devoted to terminology, where he mentions the terms *'ilm al-yaqīn* (the science of certitude), *'ayn al-yaqīn* (the essence of certitude); and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (the truth of certitude);<sup>60</sup> all three of these terms are taken from the Qur'ān.<sup>61</sup> al-Qushayrī provides a three-way division similar to the way he divides the state of revelation into *muḥāḍara*, *mukāshafa* and *mushāhada*.<sup>62</sup> We made this comparison due to the fact that both *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* and *mushāhada* are preceded by states based on learning and intellect, while those two concepts, which are in fact two descriptions of a single state, are associated with taste and an inner view of the divine essence.

Perhaps it was the meaning of the term *'ilm al-yaqīn*, which may be deemed equal to intellectual religious faith, that drove al-Qushayrī to put the chapter on *yaqīn* among the stations and not the states, while the term *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* possesses meanings that if they were compared to states would regain their original sharpness, which al-Qushayrī did all in his power to dampen.

**Tawḥīd:** Although al-Qushayrī does not link *tawḥīd* and knowledge in his definition of the former, the numerous sayings that he quotes in the sections on sayings of “the chapter on *tawḥīd*” clearly demonstrate the existence of such a link. But in this section we also read a paragraph which he composed himself, in which he presents a saying by Junayd: “The best thing one has ever said about *tawḥīd* is the words of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq—may God be pleased with him: ‘Praise be to Him Who has granted His creatures access to the knowledge of Himself only through their inability (*'ajz*) to know Him” and discusses as part of his commentary on it the Sufi concept of knowledge. He says:

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq—may God be pleased with him—did not mean that God cannot be known. [...] the inability [to know God] can only pertain to something that exists; it cannot apply to something that has no existence. Thus, for a paralyzed person sitting (*qu'ūd*) is not possible, for it requires of him neither an assumption [of this state], nor any action, because the state of sitting already resides in him. Likewise, one who knows God (*'ārif*) is incapable of [the act of] knowing God, for this knowledge Already resides in him, since, in his case, it is a necessity (*darūriyya*). [...] At the beginning, knowledge of God, even if it is true, is acquired (*kasbiyya*). However, al-Ṣiddīq—may God be pleased with him—counted it for nothing in regard to the necessary knowledge. For him, it was like a lamp at the rise of the sun, when its rays encompass it.<sup>63</sup>

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60 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 47.

61 The word *yaqīn* appears eight times in the Qur'ān, twice in the phrase *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (Q 56:95, 69:51), once in the phrase *'ayn al-yaqīn* (Q 102:7) and once in the form *'ilm al-yaqīn* (Q 102:5).

62 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 47.

63 al-QUSHAYRĪ 1940: 149.

The example used in the passage is that of an invalid, in whom sitting, in this sense, “exists in him” while on the other hand he is incapable of seating himself, since he cannot move his body either standing or sitting. In the same sense knowledge of God exists in the Sufi, as a necessary attribute,<sup>64</sup> since God Himself made him acquainted with it, under the apparent assumption that Sufis are incapable of attaining such knowledge on their own. In order to clarify this comparison between the knowing Sufi and the invalid, concerning which al-Qushayrī presents his discussion on the nature of necessary knowledge and its attributes, we present the elements of this comparison below:

	<i>State</i>	<i>Cause</i>	<i>Nature of Inability</i>	<i>Result</i>
1	Invalid	State of sitting, resulting from a cause	The invalid is incapable of any movement	The invalid is incapable of sitting (by himself)
2	The knower of God	Knowledge derived from the divine will, impossible to obtain through the human will	The Sufi is incapable of obtaining knowledge of God through his own powers	Inability of obtaining knowledge (on one's own); “Necessary knowledge”

This “necessary knowledge” is given to the Sufi when he achieves the final destination of the path, in contrast to the “acquired knowledge” that he has already “at the beginning” that is, when he sets out on the path, when the concept of knowledge does not exceed the bounds of strong faith and a spiritual readiness to meet the divine beloved. As for al-Qushayrī's statement at the end of the above-quoted passage that “at the beginning, knowledge of God, even if it is true, is acquired (*kasbiyya*) [...] like a lamp at the rise of the sun, when its rays encompass it” its purpose is to distinguish between the two types of knowledge, “acquired” and “necessary” the latter being superior to the former: “Acquired knowledge” which one has at the outset, may be considered fundamental, although Abū Bakr does not consider it as such in comparison to “necessary knowledge” (here we must understand his use of the Arabic phrase *bi-'l-idāfa* [literally: in addition to] as possessing the meaning of “in comparison to” “as an equivalent for” or the like). His preference for the latter kind of knowledge is evident when he compares the “acquired knowledge” to a lamp and “necessary knowledge” to the sun. Thus just as a lamp is important in a time of darkness, when it provides the only light, but loses all significance the moment the sun disperses the darkness with its light, so also does “acquired knowledge” lose all meaning the moment it is illuminated by the rays of “necessary knowledge”.

64 “Necessary knowledge” is an important term in Islamic theology. The knowledge that humans are said to have is divided into “necessary” and “acquired”. See, e.g., al-Baghdādī's (d. 1037 CE) definition (al-BAGHDĀDĪ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, Istanbul 1928: 8). On “necessary knowledge” and its role in Islamic theology see: ABRAHAMOV 2010: 1-14.

#### 5.4 What lies beyond knowledge and *mushāhada*

After a Sufi has attained the state of knowledge or witnessing of God (*mushāhada*) what happens? Do this knowledge and the attendant disappearance of human attributes remain fixed or are they but a passing moment, after which the knower returns to the state in which he was before? Al-Qushayrī adopts the view of those who say that a knower who has attained the degree of *walāya* (friendship with God) soon reverts back.<sup>65</sup> At the moment of “arrival” the mystic ceases to take pains to perform religious observances, since he is being led totally by the divine will. And despite the effacement that makes this knower completely unaware of the results of his actions, God protects him from any inappropriate behavior.

### 6. Conclusion

In this paper we have investigated the concept of knowledge of God in the text of al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*, as it is dealt with first in the “Chapter on Knowledge of God” and then in the *Risāla* as a whole. An examination of this aspect of the *Risāla* is important, especially because it is a “hot” and complex topic that has proved a considerable challenge for Sufi authors who tended towards moderation and conciliation between Sufism and Sunnī Islam. An understanding of the range of devices and elements of content used by the author to present this topic can help us gain insight into the rhetoric of conciliation among Sufis in the early stages of the emergence of Islamic mysticism.

Two things are worthy of note is his treatment of the issue of knowledge of God in the chapter dedicated to this matter. First of all, he clearly desires to bring about reconciliation and a closer association between Sufi ideas on knowledge and related aspects in Sunnī thought. Secondly, he does not refrain from presenting Sufi conceptions that may appear extreme and far-removed from the Muslim consensus. Still, he demonstrates an extraordinary ability to avoid polemics in his text, at least from a purely formal perspective, through the use of a unique structural arrangement that helps him to “dampen the effect” of some of the sayings which he did include in the “traditions” section of the chapter in question, in addition to the other parts of the book.

From a structural perspective, our examination of the section on Sufi sayings in the particular chapter led revealed the existence of semantic units which al-Qushayrī formulated in a way that was certainly not haphazard. The internal structure of these semantic units contributed to his goal of conciliation. Although the reader can only with great effort identify al-Qushayrī’s own opinions, the many passages in which these are expressed prove that he did not restrict himself to presenting moderate or conciliatory views but was able to convey the Sufi concepts that were current in his day. He was very careful in the way he did this. As an example of his approach to the issue of knowledge we may take what he says in his “spiritual advice for Sufi novices” (*waṣīyya li-l-murīdīn*) at the end of the *Risāla*, where he describes the knowing Sufi as one who does not “disagree with their outward behavior—be

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65 See *ibid.*: 176, lines 1-3. Compare this to al-Kalābādhī’s view, according to which those who attain knowledge cannot return to their previous state (al-KALĀBĀDHĪ 1933: 98-99).

it food, fasting, rest, or movement. If he feels disagreement with them in his innermost self and his heart, he should keep his heart”,<sup>66</sup> or his statement: “Know that one must give precedence to the knowledge of the Lord of the [sacred] House [*the ka'ba*] over visiting the [Sacred] House”.<sup>67</sup> Al-Qushayrī thus alludes to the existence of a contradiction of sorts in the essence of Sufism, and at the same time he also insists on a superficial agreement with non-Sufi Muslims with respect to the issue of observances. With the exception of religious observances disagreements are possible.

Al-Qushayrī's treatment of knowledge of God is interconnected with the various Sufi doctrines with respect to the experiences of revelation and direct witnessing of God. This is what sets his *Risāla* apart from previous Sufi texts such as al-Kalābādhi's *Kitāb al-ta'arruf*, for example. In contrast to al-Kalābādhi's closed or “repressed” Sufi discourse, in which concepts of knowledge of an extremist nature are avoided, al-Qushayrī's presentation is more open, even towards Sufi concepts that are quite far removed from the Sunnī line.

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