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The Safavid & Mughal Period

EDITED BY LEONARD LEWISOHN & DAVID MORGAN



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the Safavid sage Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1621). Translated by Leonard Lewisohn.

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- The 'tenseless instant' definition whereby "God exists at one instant that is not a part of time. This instant is not present and it is not simultaneous with, earlier than or later than any other instant. The tenseless theory of time is true, so all successive events exist equally and are equally apprehended by God."¹⁶²

None of these definitions directly parallels the cosmology of Mīr Dāmād, with its focus on *zamān*, *dahr* and *sarmad*. But in their preoccupation with the nature of God and the nature of eternity they share in a 'great tradition'.

In this essay I have surveyed the classical elements of the Suhrawardian *Ishraqī* paradigm as they were articulated and extended by Mīr Dāmād. I endeavoured to confirm that the point at which Suhrawardī and Mīr Dāmād part company was in the latter's complex philosophy of time. I have suggested in conclusion that future scholars may wish to re-examine this philosophy of time in greater depth by reference to the development of modern ideas and definitions of eternity. As my notes demonstrate, the philosophy of time is a flourishing sub-specialism in modern philosophy and perhaps ideally suited to the re-examinations and reformulations necessary in any further study of Mīr Dāmād's magisterial *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*

Travelling the Sufi Path *A Chishtī Handbook from Bijapur*

WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

During the reigns of Akbar and Jahāngīr (963/1556–1037/1628), numerous Sufis were writing books and treatises that one might classify as belonging to the school of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240).¹ Indeed, by this time, it was difficult to write anything on Sufi theory without employing the technical terminology of this school. This is not to say that all these authors had necessarily read any of Ibn 'Arabī's works or considered themselves his followers, but rather that this school of thought had played a major role in shaping the intellectual language of the day. The well-known Sufi Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624) is a case in point. Although he was critical of certain ideas that he attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, his own writings are full of the terminology and concepts of Ibn 'Arabī's perspective, as he often acknowledges.

Although Sirhindī may be the best-known Sufi author of this period, this should not lead us to think that he was also the most important or the most representative. 'Importance' depends upon one's choice of criteria. In terms of certain political and nationalistic ideas that have come to play a role in establishing Muslim identity in the present century, Sirhindī may indeed be considered to have special importance. But, if we are to judge by criteria internal to the Islamic tradition in general and the Sufi tradition in particular, we will find many other authors of the same period deserving serious study and perhaps much more worthy than Sirhindī of being considered important. Once the works of these authors have been published and analysed, and once their influence on later Sufis has been traced, we might well find that Sirhindī had little to offer to the tradition and that he was unknown except in a relatively

¹ The term 'School of Ibn 'Arabī' is problematic, and here I use it loosely to indicate a certain theoretical approach to Sufi teachings employing concepts and technical terminology that were highlighted by Ibn 'Arabī and his immediate followers, such as Šadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. See Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabī," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge 1996), I, pp. 510–23.

small circle. In any case, the necessary research has not yet been carried out, so at this point I can offer this only as a hypothesis. I believe it may be true, because I have found many extremely interesting works from this period by authors who, for one reason or another, have been ignored by modern scholarship.²

One of the major reasons that most Sufi writing of India has remained unstudied is that modern scholars have focused on social and political history and have had little interest in the goals and intentions of the Sufi authors themselves. As Carl Ernst has well illustrated, three competing historiographical schools – the British, the Muslim, and the Hindu – with three distinct agendas, have provided us with a diversity of interpretations of the significance of India's past in terms of modern social and political concerns.³ One of the results of the specific preoccupations of these scholars is that, by and large – and with certain obvious and important exceptions – they have made assumptions about the Sufi tradition and ignored the actual works of the authors. Very few have had the interest or the training to situate the Sufi writings in the context of Islamic intellectual history. When statements are made about content, these are typically based not on a study of the works, but rather on a superficial understanding of the Sufi tradition as found in the central Islamic lands.⁴

Among the many important Sufis writing in this period, probably the most careful student of Ibn al-'Arabī's works and the most faithful representative of his school of thought was Shaykh Muḥibb Allāh Mubārīz Ilāhābādī, who died twenty-four years after Sirhindī in 1058/1648. He wrote many works in Persian and a few in Arabic. Several of these works are based squarely on the text of Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, which does not seem to have been much studied in this period; he also wrote two commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, a short commentary in Arabic and a much longer commentary in Persian. Here, however, I would like to look at one of the many other figures of the

² See Chittick, "Notes on Ibn al-'Arabī's Influence in India," *Muslim World*, 82 (1992), pp. 218–41.

³ See Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: SUNY Press 1992), chap. 2. See also Ernst's important discussion of the term Sufism, as it came to be formulated by Western scholars working in the Indian context in his *Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston–London: Shambhala 1997). This formulation, along with the reactions to it by modern-day Muslims, helps explain the peculiar ways in which various attempts continue to be made, both by Muslims and non-Muslims, to detach Sufism from the heart of the Islamic tradition.

⁴ Rizvi's two-volume *History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978–83) is unfortunately no exception to this rule. Although it is an invaluable work for those who want to gain a rough idea of the important Sufi authors in the subcontinent, the statements about content are invariably superficial, and the information about the Sufi learned tradition that the author offers is based on the Western secondary literature, not his own reading of the texts that he enumerates.

period who deserve investigation. This is Shaykh Maḥmūd Khwush-Dahān (d. 1026/1617), who belongs to the Chishtī group that has been studied by Richard Eaton in *Sufis of Bijapur*. Eaton has made clear – if there was any doubt – that Sufism in various forms was flourishing in this west-central Indian province during this period. Among the most active Sufi groups was the Chishtī order to which Shaykh Maḥmūd belonged. It was centred on a famous family of Sufis that traced itself back to Shāh Mirānīj Shams al-'Ushshāh (d. 1499), who was born in Mecca and appears to have been originally a Chaghatay Turk. According to the traditional accounts, as a young man he had a dream of the Prophet in which he was instructed to travel to Bijapur to find one Shāh Kamāl, who turned out to be Kamāl al-Dīn Biyābānī (d. 867/1462–3), the successor, with one intermediary, of the famous Chishtī shaykh Gīrū Darāz (d. 825/1422).

Having himself become the successor of Biyābānī, Shams al-'Ushshāh was then succeeded by his own son Burhān al-Dīn Jānam (d. 1005/1597), a prolific author of Persian works on Sufi theory and practice. Burhān al-Dīn was in turn succeeded by Shaykh Maḥmūd Khwush-Dahān, who derived from a well-known Qādirī family in Bīdar. Shaykh Maḥmūd also wrote many Persian works, one of which is *Ma'rifat al-sulūk* (The True Knowledge of Wayfaring). It has been described as "the summary work of all Bijapuri Chishtī teachings and a book upon which scores of later treatises were based."⁵ In it, Shaykh Maḥmūd outlines, in an unusually simple and systematic manner, the basic teachings and practices that were being imparted to disciples by his shaykh, Burhān al-Dīn Jānam, and presumably by himself as well. Not only did this work play an important role in a major branch of Indian Sufism, but it also has a much wider significance, because, as far as I can judge, it is an especially clear presentation of the methods and goals of the later Sufi tradition throughout much of the Islamic world.

It needs to be remembered that Sufi authors had produced a wealth of works on both theory and practice over the centuries, and the Indian authors continued to write prolifically, mainly in Persian. By the beginning of this period, Indian Sufis had access to a plethora of writings and oral teachings, and they could easily become aware of the differing theoretical and practical frameworks of diverse Sufi authors. More than two hundred years had passed

⁵ Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978), p. 146. I have chosen to present this work here not because I think it the most important or the most interesting of the period, but because I happen to have a copy of an adequate manuscript, the work is relatively short and clearly written, and its contents are especially instructive concerning the overall teachings of Sufism. The manuscript I am using is Osmania University 1047. Other manuscripts that I have seen include Osmania University 752; Salar Jung Museum, Tas 232/5 and Tas. 250; and Andhra Pradesh State Oriental Manuscripts Library 30682. The work is reported to have been photographed in Lucknow (Nawal Kishore 1898), but I have not seen the edition.

since the enormous outpouring of Sufi writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Throughout the subcontinent, the more learned Sufis were familiar with the writings of Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī and ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī, not to mention the Persian Sufi poets, especially Rūmī, and the vast range of theoretical works by Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers. Scores of important Sufis of the central Islamic lands and India had produced works of significance, and each of the several Sufi orders flourishing in India had its own favourite authors, as well as shaykhs who themselves wrote many sorts of works on Sufi teachings. Then, as today, it was practically impossible for a single seeker to gain a complete overview of the diverse Sufi teachings that were available. Nonetheless, every seeker who made any attempt to visit Sufi shaykhs, study Sufi writings, and listen to Sufi poetry would have been exposed to a variety of ideas and conceptual schemes that were not always easy to interrelate.

In order to organize the received lore of Sufism and Islam, Sufi authors took different approaches. Even when the teachings of two authors seem to be the same, careful analysis often shows that there are important discrepancies. There is no single ‘Sufi doctrine’ accepted by all the Sufi teachers, other than the basic creed of Islam. What we usually see is that a given author will conceptualize the received wisdom in his own personal terms, on occasion idiosyncratically, and then offer his own theory to his students and readers as a guide to understanding the nature of things. In parallel texts written by philosophers or theologians we may be dealing with pure theory, but in the Sufi texts, the practical applications of the teachings are either stated explicitly or implied by the context of the writings, which are not aimed at ‘thinkers’, but at practitioners and adepts. The Sufis considered theory important – except in moments of rhetorical excess or poetical intoxication – but they always understood theory as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Hence, the theory is constantly being modified to fit the practical circumstances.

From early times, Sufi authors had offered various overarching schemes to organize the Islamic worldview and to situate Muslim practice within this view. In many Sufi works, and in many chapters of these works, one of these schemes is employed as the organizing principle. Typically, as anyone who has looked at the secondary literature on Sufism is well aware, these schemes present us with hierarchies, in keeping with the general Islamic idea that reaching God depends upon following a specific ‘path’ (*sharī‘a*, *ṭarīqa*) or climbing a ‘ladder’ (*mi‘rāj*). This is especially obvious in the many books written on the ‘stations’ (*maqāmāt*) or ‘waystations’ (*manāzil*) of the path, whether these be enumerated as seven, ten, forty, one hundred, three hundred, one thousand, or whatever. One of the most familiar of these schemes is that of *sharī‘a*, *ṭarīqa*, and *ḥaqīqa* – Law, Path and Reality. Another is the ascending degrees of self or soul (*nafs*) – the soul that commands to evil (*ammāra*), the blaming soul (*lawwāma*), and the soul at peace with God (*muṭma‘inna*); often

a fourth is added, the ‘inspired soul’ (*mulhama*). Still another scheme, in a more theoretical realm, is the Five Divine Presences, which are enumerated in various ways. One common version presents us with the terms *nāsūt*, *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, *lāhūt* and *hāhūt*, which can be translated as Humanity, Sovereignty, Domination, Divinity and Ipseity. Another well-known scheme describes the ascending microcosmic degrees, sometimes called the ‘subtle centres’ (*latā‘if*) and often considered to be seven in number. Thus, for example, we find body, soul, spirit, heart, mystery, hidden (*khāfī*) and most hidden (*akḥfā*).

* * *

The great richness of the Sufi tradition in the Mughal period and the variety of conceptual schemes found in Sufi texts may help explain Shaykh Maḥmūd’s intentions in writing *Ma‘rifat al-sulūk*. What he offers is a synthesis of various dimensions of Sufi thought and practice, or a way of correlating all the diverse technical terms that appear abundantly in the texts and the tradition. He makes clear in presenting his synthesis that all this conceptualization has the practical aim of guiding seekers on the path to God.

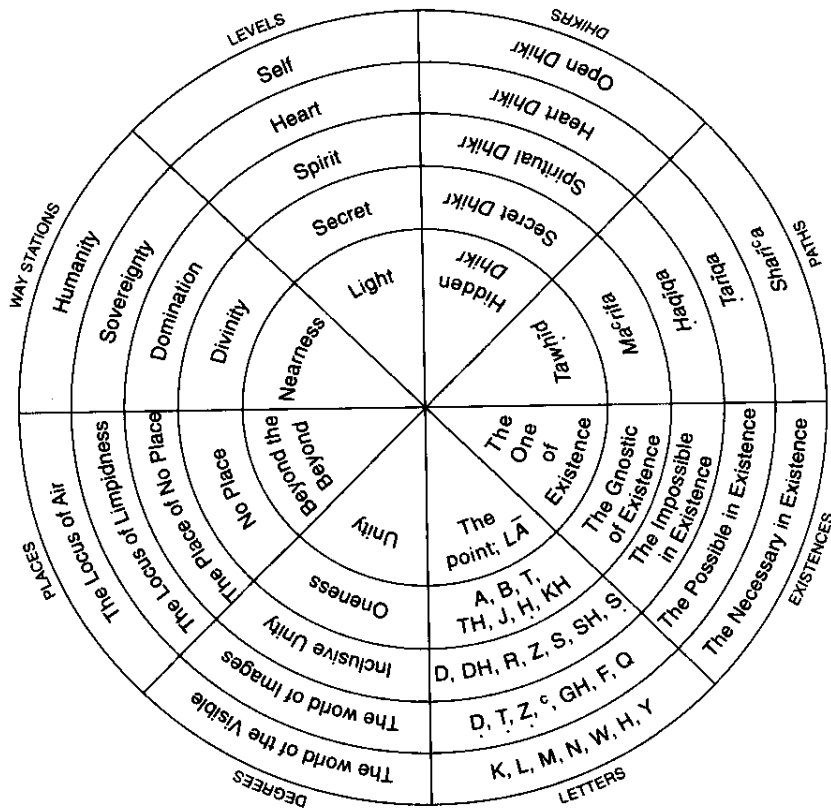
Shaykh Maḥmūd summarizes his book, which is relatively short – about 150 pages – in a circle divided into eight sectors (see Figure 3). The circle represents all and everything: the One and the many, God and the world, Lord and servant, macrocosm and microcosm, and the interrelationships among the various realities that can be conceptualized in the nature of things. Each of the eight sectors has five levels, for a total of forty sections (forty being the number of completion, as Professor Schimmel reminds us⁶). In fact, however, the fifth level is the same reality in each case, but it is given different names depending on the sector from which one enters into it.

The first sector is arranged in terms of *wujūd* – ‘existence’ or ‘being’ – and more particularly, according to the famous distinction between Necessary, Possible, and Impossible Existence. This gives us only three levels, so the Shaykh adds two more, *‘arīf al-wujūd*, ‘the Gnostic of Existence’, and *wāḥid al-wujūd*, ‘the One of Existence’. This last and highest level obviously points to the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, ‘the Oneness of Being’, which by this time was identified with Ibn ‘Arabī – even though this identification does not help us much to understand the actual historical development of the idea and the various meanings that were given to it by diverse authors.⁷ In any case, Shaykh Maḥmūd names the circle and the other diagrams according to the level of existence, and he puts the One of Existence at the highest level. Thus he

⁶ See Anemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993), pp. 245–52.

⁷ See my article “Rūmī and *Wahdat al-wujūd*,” in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, ed. A. Banani, R. Hovannissian, and G. Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp. 70–111.

Figure 3: The One of Existence



demonstrates that he belongs to the mainstream of Indian Sufism in terms of the central importance of *wahdat al-wujūd*.

The second sector of the circle presents five 'paths' (*sabīl*), beginning with the *sharī'a*, then the *ṭarīqa*, then the *ḥaqīqa*, then *ma'rifa* and finally *tawḥīd*.

The third sector is organized in terms of different levels of the remembrance of God, beginning with the voicing of the formula (*dhikr-i jalīf*), and ending with the innermost realization of what is being remembered (*dhikr-i khafīf*).

The fourth sector deals with subtle centres, which the author simply calls 'levels' (*marātib*), that is, levels of the human microcosm – self or soul, heart, spirit, secret, and light.

The fifth presents us with 'waystations' (*manāzil*), four of them clearly inspired by standard terminology for the Five Divine Presences: *nāsūt*,

malakūt, *jabarāt* and *lāhūt*. The fifth, however, which the author calls the way station of nearness (*qurb*) is, according to Ibn 'Arabī, the summit of the path, the highest stage attainable by anyone who is not a prophet.

The sixth sector designates 'places', and here various terms are offered through which one might speak of 'localization' at any level of reality. This particular scheme may be original with the Bijapurī school, though the individual terms are well enough known. The five places are the locus of air (*maḥall-i ḥawā*), the locus of limpidness (*ṣafā*), the 'Place of No Place' (*makān-i lā makān*), 'No Place' itself, and 'Beyond the Beyond' (*warā' al-warā*).

The seventh sector offers us five 'degrees' (*darajāt*), and here the author seems to have taken inspiration from another standard method for explaining the Five Divine Presences: the world of the visible (*shahāda*), the world of images (*mithāf*), inclusive unity (*wāḥidiyya*), oneness (*wāḥda*), and (exclusive) unity (*aḥādīyya*).

Finally, Shaykh Maḥmūd describes the five levels in terms of the Arabic alphabet, whose symbolism was often made use of in various contexts, such as delineating the twenty-eight degrees of the Breath of the All-Merciful that gives birth to the cosmos. The Shaykh ascribes seven letters to each of the four outer levels, beginning from the end (and following the *alif-bā*, not the *abjad* order). Thus, the outermost level is made up of the seven letters beginning with *yā* and ending with *kāf*. The fourth level ends with the first of the twenty-eight letters, *alif*. As for the fifth and highest level, this is identified both with the point, from which the *alif* is often said to be generated, and with the *lām-alif*, which is sometimes considered the twenty-ninth letter of the alphabet. More importantly, of course, *lām-alif* spells *lā* or 'no', so it can denote the utter undifferentiation and 'nonentification' (*lā ta'ayyun*) of the Divine Essence – just as, mathematically, the point designates that which has no dimensions whatsoever.

To prepare the reader for the circle, which is the summation of his teachings, Shaykh Maḥmūd first offers four tables corresponding to the four outer levels of the circle (see Tables 2–5). In the tables, however, he does not offer exactly the same scheme as he provides in the circle. He presents each table as having thirteen levels, not eight, and only five of the eight sectors are mentioned in the table, leaving eight other ways of conceptualizing the four outer levels of the circle. (The tables in the manuscript I have seen have thirteen levels. However, the twelfth level is the same in each case – *ḥafī shughl* or 'seven occupations'. I do not think that this is meant to be a level of its own, but rather the designation for the significance of the seven letters that are mentioned in the thirteenth level, given that each letter designates a specific 'occupation', that is, ritual form or duty, that the Sufi should employ).

In the four tables (Tables 2–5), Shaykh Maḥmūd first mentions the level of existence, then the archangel who is entrusted with the level. Then he turns to the levels of the human microcosm. In the circle (Fig. 3), he mentions the five

Table 2: The Necessary in Existence

The Knower	alim	The Necessary in Existence	wajib al-wujud
Watchfulness	muragaba	Entrusted angel: Michael muwakkal: Mikā'il	The growing spirit rah-i namī
Disengagement	tafrit	Open remembrance dhikr-i jalī	Tawhid through words tawhid-i aqwālī
Witnessing	mushahada	Understanding: comparison fahm-i qiyās	Path of the Shari'a rah-i shari'atī
Lover	'ashiq	The commanding soul qalb-i mudgha	Way station: Humanity manzil-i nasī
		Martyrdom of origin shahadat-i mabda	State
		Seven occupations hafi shughl	Arriver
			wasil

Table 3: The Possible in Existence

The Knower	The Possible in Existence	mumkin al-wujud
Annihilation	Entrusted angel: Seraphiel muwakkal: Isra'ilī	The motile spirit rah-i mutaharrik
Disengagement	Remembrance of heart dhikr-i qalbi	Tawhid through acts tawhid-i af'ali
Witnessing	Path of the Tariqa rah-i tariqa	Way station: Sovereignty manzil-i malakuti
Lover	Martyrdom of ecstatics shahadat-i wujada	Seven occupations
		q, f, gh, ' , z, i, d
		Arriver

Table 4: The Impossible in Existence

The Knower	The Impossible in Existence	munani' al-wujud
Watchfulness	Entrusted angel: Azra'il muwakkal: Azra'il	The rational spirit rah-i natiqa
Disengagement	Remembrance of the spirit dhikr-i rahi	Tawhid through states tawhid-i ahwali
Witnessing	Understanding: conjecture fahm-i gumān	The path of the reality rah-i haqiqa
Lover	Martyrdom of intenders shahadat-i umada	Seven occupations
		s, sh, s, z, r, dh, d
		Arriver

Table 5: The Gnostic of Existence

The Knower	The Gnostic of Existence	'arif al-wujud
Annihilation	The entrusted angel: Gabriel muwakkal: Jibrā'il	The holy spirit rah-i qudsī
Disengagement	Remembrance of the secret dhikr-i sirri	Tawhid through essence tawhid-i dhawī
Witnessing	Understanding: the aware fahm-i aghā	The path of gnosis rah-i ma'rifa
Lover	Martyrdom of witnesses shahadat-i shuhada	Seven occupations
		kh, h, j, th, t, b, a
		Arriver

subtle centres as self, heart, spirit, secret, and light. But in the four tables (Tables 2-5), instead of this hierarchy, he provides four levels for each of spirit, heart, and soul. Thus, if the subtle centres can be viewed as specific realities from one point of view, from another point of view, each can be differentiated into levels. The four levels of spirit are the growing or vegetable spirit, the motile or animal spirit, the rational or human spirit, and the holy or prophetic spirit. The four levels of heart are the lump of flesh (*muḍgha*), the repenting heart (*munīb*), the healthy heart (*salīm*), and the witnessing heart (*shahīd*). The four levels of soul are the commanding soul (to evil), the blaming soul, the soul at peace, and the inspired soul.

Next the Shaykh turns to the path leading to God in broad terms. First, he mentions four ascending levels of *tawhīd* – in words, acts, states, and essence. Second, he mentions the mode of understanding (*fahm*) that corresponds to each level: understanding by comparison (*qiyās*), by imagination (*wahm*), by conjecture (*gumān*), and by awareness (*āghāh*). These levels correspond to the four levels of the path, as mentioned in the circle, beginning with the *sharīʿa*. The appropriate mode of remembrance and the corresponding waystations are the same as those mentioned in the circle. Finally, Shaykh Maḥmūd mentions four levels of ‘bearing witness’ or ‘martyrdom’ (*shahāda*). Although the discussion and terminology here are not completely clear to me, he seems to be saying that at each level there is a specific mode of dying in the path of God, a martyrdom through which one is reborn on the next higher level.

Finally, the Shaykh mentions in each table the words “the seven occupations,” and these are followed by seven letters of the alphabet. In the text, he explains that at each level, the seeker has an appropriate supplication or short prayer, each of which corresponds to a letter of the alphabet. Hence, there are twenty-eight “occupations,” with a twenty-ninth pertaining to the centre of the circle. I have arranged the twenty-nine levels in Table 6. Most of the supplications begin with the letter to which they pertain and address the bodily member or attribute that is mentioned in the table. For example, the supplication for the second level, pertaining to the letter *hāʾ* and to the knees, reads *Hadhdhib jalsatanā yā Allāh*, that is, “Refine our sitting, O God!” Shaykh Maḥmūd translates the saying into Persian and adds some commentary as follows: “O God, keep our knees sitting in this station so that they will not stand to worship anything else.”

The supplication for the letter ‘ayn, which corresponds to hearing, reads ‘*alimna l-ḡurʿān yā Allāh*, “Teach us the Koran, O God!” The Persian translation reads, “O God, teach us the Koran, which is Thy Speech, through our hearing, so that knowledge of Thee may be achieved.”

The supplication for the letter *zāʾ* and the attribute of adornment is *Zayyinnā fi zīnatika yā Allāh*, “Adorn us with Thy adornment, O God.” Shaykh Maḥmūd renders it, “O God, bestow upon our existence an adornment from Thy existence.”

Table 6: The Twenty-Nine Occupations

LETTER	REALITY
Yāʾ	Feet
Hāʾ	Knees
Wāw	Navel
Nūn	Breast
Mīm	Throat
Lām	Forehead
Kāf	Nose
Table 2	
Qāf	Speech
Fāʾ	Smell
Ghayn	Eyesight
ʿAyn	Hearing
Zāʾ	Intellect
Ṭāʾ	Heart
Ḍād	Satisfaction
Table 3	
Ṣād	God’s decree
Shūn	Intercession
Sīn	Journey
Zay	Adornment
Rāʾ	Mercy
Dhāl	Tasting
Dāl	Path
Table 4	
Khāʾ	Viceregency
Hāʾ	Love of God
Jim	Beauty
Thāʾ	Laudation
Tāʾ	Blessing
Bāʾ	God’s Name
Alif	God’s Essence
Table 5	
Lā	Nonentification

Circle

Besides the mention of seven occupations, the four tables (Tables 2-5) have other common features. They begin with one sort of existence, and the order in each case is the same. Each has a centre column divided into thirteen levels. Each also has two side columns in which the same pair of terms is mentioned in the same position. Each of these pairs represents a basic relationship that has different connotations in the context of each table. The term on the left represents a lower stage on the spiritual journey, and the term on the right a higher stage. The left-hand term, in other words, represents a preparation for what is designated by the right-hand term.

In the first case, we have the knower and the gnostic. The learned knowledge of the knower will eventually turn into the tasted, witnessed knowledge of the gnostic. Second are watchfulness and annihilation. Through the practice of watching one's own inner states in keeping with the instruction of the spiritual guide, one eventually achieves the annihilation of all individualized and self-centred attributes and the subsistence (*baqa'*) of the divine attributes, in the form of which human beings were created.

Third are disengagement and solitude. One disengages one's self from the world and the body and achieves a state of being alone with God.

Fourth are witnessing and state. Through witnessing the divine influxes within oneself one is transported into an altered state of consciousness.

Finally, at the bottom of the table, in the highest stage of realization for each level, are the lover and arriver. The adept who is transported by love for God achieves the station of arrival at or union with his Beloved.

The book is divided into two main sections. In the first section, Shaykh Mahmud offers the four tables as depictions of ascending stages on the path to God. Then he presents the circle as the culmination of the journey and the realization of *wahdat al-wujud*. The circle is the end of the first journey – the journey to God beginning from the world, or the ascending arc, the upward climb on the ladder of the *mi'raj*. The circle is also the beginning of the second journey, which is the return from God on the descending *mi'raj* to the world from whence one began. In the second part of the book, Shaykh Mahmud reviews the stages of the ascending journey, in reverse order from those of the descending journey, inasmuch as all the stages represent different dimensions of what the seeker realizes through the One of Existence.

Finally, I offer a few examples of Shaykh Mahmud's commentary on the four tables and the circle. I follow his discussions of the term *wujud* as he moves through its various stages. As is obvious from the arrangement of the tables, Shaykh Mahmud considers *wujud* – 'existence' or 'being' – as the primary reality, in terms of which everything else needs to be understood, and in this he is in perfect harmony with the later intellectual tradition in general.

Shaykh Mahmud calls his first three tables (Tables 2-4) *wajib al-wujud* (the Necessary in Existence), *mumkin al-wujud* (the Possible in Existence)

and *mumtani' al-wujud* (the Impossible in Existence). This classification of *wujud* into three basic categories was, of course, standard in Islamic thought from Avicenna onwards. The fourth table (Table 5) is that of '*arif al-wujud*, 'the Gnostic of Existence' or the 'Knower of Existence', and this reflects the fundamental Sufi quest for the type of knowledge that is designated as *ma'rifa* (often '*irfan*' in late texts from Persia), and which can best be understood as 'self-knowledge'. Shaykh Mahmud makes the primary importance of this self-knowledge completely explicit in his introduction to the work, immediately after citing his own *silsila* back to Gisu Daraz. Here, he explains the purpose of the Sufi Path in terms of knowledge of the self, referring to the famous prophetic dictum, "He who knows (*arafa*) himself, knows his Lord." This knowledge is not '*ilm*, or learned knowledge, but *ma'rifa* – tasted and realized knowledge of one's own self and one's own Lord, or, to use an English term, 'gnosis'. And, of course, this is the very word that the Shaykh employs in the title of his work, *Ma'rifat al-suluk*, 'The Gnosis of the Wayfaring', or 'The Self-Knowledge Achieved by Travelling the Path'. He writes:

O traveller, the path and method mentioned [in this work] was threaded on the string by a *silsila* such as this, and this blessing was passed down, hand to hand, until it reached our own shaykh. If the seeker wants God's path and the way of the Muhammadan *sharifa*, he should study this treatise. Hopefully, he will lift the veil from the beauty of the object of his quest and his beloved . . .

O friend, in the path of realization, the traveller must find these four levels of existence in his own existence and he must arrive at them. He must pass, level by level, until he reaches the gnosis of the Essence of the Real – glory be to Him; high and exalted is He!

However, each existence has conditions and necessities. Therefore, each existence has been written down in a table and each has been explained. The traveller must know all the conditions and put them into practice so that he may reach his goal.

Now, if God gives success, let me elucidate the existences and explain their conditions. Thereby the reality of 'He who knows himself knows his Lord' will be clarified for the seeker in the most beautiful manner.

I will depict the four existences of 'He who knows himself' in four rectangular tables to indicate directions, place, and time. Then the fifth table will be the circle of 'knows his Lord'. This is the circle of nonentification, non-directionality, no-place, and no-time. This is the One of Existence, which is the absolute Essence of the Creator.

Although the terms 'necessary', 'possible', and 'impossible' pertain to standard philosophical and theological vocabulary, they are redefined in the work. Clearly, the Bijapur Sufis wanted to appropriate familiar terms, but they were not especially concerned to use them in the usual meanings. Thus the term 'Necessary in Existence' normally refers to God, who is and cannot not be, but in the first table and in the circle, it has a completely different sense. Shaykh Mahmud himself explains the two meanings of the term. First, he tells

us, the Necessary in Existence is God, who "abides through Himself for all eternity. He has no changing, no alteration, no new arrival, and no annihilation. He is 'the Living, the Self-Abiding'" [Koran:254], while the existence of all existent things abides through Him.' Then he explains that his master, Burhān al-Dīn Jānam, applied the term to "the earthy, human existence (*wujūd-i khāki-yi insāni*)," and he explains the rationale for this as follows:

This earthly, elemental, human existence is the necessary in existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), which is to say that it is the indispensable in existence (*lāzim al-wujūd*), because this corporeal existence is necessary and indispensable for the existence of the spirit. After all, without this corporeal existence, the spirit could not depart from the world of the absent (*‘ālam-i ghayb*) to become manifest in the world of witnessing (*‘ālam-i shuhūd*). If there were no corporeal existence, the spirit would remain hidden in the world of the absent. This is because, although the spirit was created on the Day of the Covenant, before this corporeal existence – for, as the *ḥadīth* tells us, 'God created the spirits 40,000 years before the bodies' – without this earthly existence, the spirit would not be able to gain a gnosis through which it knows the Real with all His attributes and perfections.

Thus, for example, although the receptivity for the whole tree is found in the seed, if the seed is not planted in the ground, the receptivity will not become manifest and the tree will not come to exist. Hence, God created the frame of Adam and made the spirit of the Covenant descend into it. When the spirit and the frame were paired, the true existence became manifest from their junction as a receptacle for the divine Essence and attributes. This is the reality of the heart's substance.

After explaining that Adam's reception of knowledge from God – when God taught him all the names – was made possible only by the heart, the Shaykh concludes this discussion by repeating that this usage of the term 'necessary in existence' pertains specifically to his Shaykh's technical terminology. Otherwise, he says, if someone were to say that the earthy body is the necessary in existence, meaning the Essence of God, this would be blatant unbelief.

Shaykh Mahmud's second table (Table 3) pertains to *mumkin al-wujūd*, the 'possible in existence'. Normally, this term is applied to everything other than God that is not strictly impossible. In this sense, the term indicates that nothing but God has any claim on existence. When we consider any given thing, in and of itself, we cannot say that it must exist, only God has that attribute, because only God is identical with *wujūd* itself. The things, in terms of their own realities, may or may not come to exist. Their coming to be depends absolutely upon the necessary in existence. Here, however, Shaykh Mahmūd applies the term 'possible in existence' to the second level of the ascending arc to God. Although he refers to it as 'spiritual existence', in fact it corresponds to the lower realms of the absent world, or to what many Sufis call the 'world of imagination', which lies between the world of bodies and the world of spirits. I quote Shaykh Mahmūd's own explanation of why his Shaykh, Burhān al-Dīn, employed the term *mumkin al-wujūd* in this meaning:

O friend, let me tell you the whole of the true knowledge and the reality of the possible in existence so that this existence will become plain to you. Through it you may set out on the path of the *ṭarīqa* and through this possible in existence you may give indications of the waystation of the Sovereignty (*malakūt*) with all its conditions.

O traveller, the term 'possible in existence' is used for that which does not abide through its own existence. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it is not, within the [creative] command of the Real. It is the existence of everything in the cosmos, from body to spirit and from [earthly] carpet to [divine] Throne. This possible in existence abides through the Essence of the Real, but the Necessary in Existence that is God's abides through its own Essence, and He does not change, neither in His Essence nor in His attributes.

Then, O friend, in his technical terminology, our Shaykh named spiritual existence 'the possible in existence'. Within this earthy body, this spiritual existence takes the form and the shape of this same earthy body. It is this that becomes separate from the body during sleep. It is also called the 'flowing spirit' (*rūḥ-i jāri*). Thus it has been said, "The spirit is two – the flowing spirit and the abiding spirit." This flowing spirit is precisely the possible in existence that I mentioned. It was created at the time of the Covenant. The question, "Am I not your Lord?" [Koran VII:172], reached this very spirit, and the answer, "Yes indeed," was heard from this spirit. ...

This spirit is called 'the possible in existence' because it also does not abide through itself, but rather through the abiding spirit, and the abiding spirit is the holy spirit. The holy spirit is the ray of God's Essence, and it came to be settled at His command, as will be explained. The holy spirit abides through itself. Like the ocean, it is infinite; it does not slip and does not move. This [holy] spirit, which is the ray of the Necessary's Essence, is just like the Necessary. Hence, the possible in existence is the connection to that holy spirit.

O friend, the possible in existence is in the inner domain through form, for you will be correct to see it along with all the organs. The earthly existence has motion from this [possible] existence, and it constantly flows in a journey, without your command, going in accordance with the ancient habit.

O traveller, whatever form appears in your own inner domain – whether it is your form or the form of another – is the possible in existence. This is because the possible thing has two aspects, since it both comes into being and it turns into nothing, while it does not abide through itself. Thus it abides through the holy spirit. The holy spirit stands in the place of the Necessary, while the form stands in the place of the Possible.

The place of the 'possible in existence' is the heart, by which I mean every passing thought (*khayāra*) that assumes form in the inner human domain, and this inner domain will be the heart, since the form appears in the heart.

This place is also called 'limpidness' (*ṣafā*), for our Shaykh said, "The elemental, 'Necessary in Existence' is in the air, and the spiritual, 'possible in existence' is in the limpidness." So, O friend, the spiritual, possible in existence journeys in the world of limpidness, just like wind, which goes through the power of Seraphiel.

At the beginning of his third table (table 4) Shaykh Mahmūd discusses 'the Impossible in Existence'. The usual example given by the theologians for an

impossible thing is an associate for God. Shaykh Maḥmūd explains that the specific meaning he has in mind for the term corresponds with what is often called the 'world of the spirits' – the highest of the three created worlds – though the rationale for his use of the term in this sense is not as clear as it was in the two previous examples:

O traveller on the path, the literal reality of 'the impossible in existence' is that in which nothing has existence. In other words, it withholds forms from the things. This impossible in existence is an associate for the Creator, just as has been written in the books.

It is well known that the existences are of three sorts: first, the Necessary in Existence; second, the possible in existence; and third, the impossible in existence. The first two were explained briefly earlier. As for the impossible in existence, it is the fact that, in eternity without beginning, nothing except the Essence of God had existence. In other words, there was only the Essence of God.

So, you should know that the Being (*ḥaṣīf*) of the Real's Essence demands non-being (*nāsif*) since, other than God's Essence, there is nothing. This 'non-being' is the impossible in existence, which is the existence that abides neither through itself nor through the other. It has no mode (*i ṭibār*).

It is the impossible in existence that is called 'No Place' (*lā makān*), and that is neither the Essence nor the relation of the attributes. It is the place of all things, since all the existent things and all the possible things of both worlds appeared within this Impossible in Existence.

So understand, O traveller, what this impossible in existence is within yourself, in keeping with 'He who knows himself knows his Lord', for our Shaykh explained it after having explained the possible in existence. You must find it within yourself, while it is not. Once you have heard the explanation of the possible in existence, which is the moving force within the earthly body, you must cast it far from your gaze. Instead, you must gaze until you give no movement to any of your own outward or inward passing thoughts. You must remain steady, as a still witnesser (*shāhid-i sākin*). Once this state has been turned over to you, you will have joined with the impossible in existence of yourself, which is a ray of the impossible in existence of the Real. Within this existence is the holy spirit, and this being is the ray of the Real's Being.

O traveller, the impossible in existence and the being of the spirit are not separate from each other. On the contrary, the impossible in existence is identical with the holy spirit's being, just like, for example, fire and the heat of fire, for these two are not separate from each other. Understand this, for the heat of fire does not allow anything to arrive in the fire – such as scorpions, gnats, flies, ants, and various crawling things – without burning it as soon as it arrives. So, know that the heat is the majesty (*jalāliyyat*) of the fire, or rather, it is identical with the fire.

O traveller, the holy spirit has a majesty such that it lets no passing thought of the heart come into it. It is said that this majesty that belongs to being is the impossible in existence. The being of the holy spirit stands in the place of the Real's Being, while this [majesty] stands in the place of the impossible. Understand this, for it is a marvellous, subtle intimation and the allusion of the perfect spiritual guide (*murshīd*). Grasp it well within yourself, for "He who knows himself knows his Lord."

In such a way does the Essence of the Necessary abide in itself through itself, and through its own impossible in existence it has made all the existent things appear within this impossible in existence. Understand!

The fourth table (table 5) pertains to fully actualized self-knowledge and self-awareness, above even the world of the spirits. Perhaps it corresponds to what, in Ibn al-'Arabī's terms, would be the self-knowledge gained by the greatest of the Sufis when they know their own immutable and uncreated entity, just as it is known by God for all eternity. It is this immutable entity that responds to God's command to come into existence. Then spirit, imagination, and body represent its three basic levels of manifestation. Shaykh Maḥmūd writes as follows:

The term 'Gnostic of Existence' is used for him who knows his own existence. In other words, it is the being (*ḥaṣīf*) that knows itself. This is the being that is knowing and free from all beings. This being itself abides in God's command, while the mentioned Necessary, Possible, and Impossible beings abide through the Gnostic of Existence. They have need of it, but it is totally independent of them ...

This existence is like and similar to the non-delimitation of the Being of the Real, which is free and holy beyond all the possible existences. ... O traveller ... find in your own existence the Gnostic of Existence, and recognize it, so that you may find and recognize God as non-delimited (*muṭlaq*). This level consists of "He who knows himself knows his Lord."

In explaining the circle (Figure 3), which summarizes his previous four diagrams and adds the all-inclusive level of unity, or *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Shaykh Maḥmūd begins as follows:

The fifth diagram is named 'the One of Existence'. In other words, the diagram of the previous existences was drawn from this diagram in respect of the descent and manifestation of the One Existence of the Real. This diagram is the centre and circumference of all the circles, and all the circles go back to it. This is because the Necessary in Existence abides through the possible in existence; the possible in existence abides through the impossible in existence; the impossible in existence abides through the Gnostic of Existence; the Gnostic of Existence abides through the One of Existence, and the One of Existence abides through itself. Hence, the reality of all the circles goes back to it.

Every allusion written in those diagrams is also explained in this circle in keeping with the technical terminology of each sort. In order to explain in each case these technical terms, which are the language of the Sufis, the technical term of each level has been explained in eight sorts, in keeping with the eight paradises. In each term, five levels are explained, similar to the five treasures that become manifest from the storehouse of "I was a Hidden Treasure" ...⁸ Know

⁸ I am not yet sure what he has in mind by the term "five treasures" (*panj ganj*). Perhaps he means those enumerated in a short treatise of this name by Muḥammad Maḥdūm Sāwī, a prolific Qādirī author, also from Bijapur, whose dated works were written between 1108/1696 and 1123/1711. Sāwī explains these five treasures as the treasure of Eternity and the Absent; the treasure of the created, non-delimited light, which is Muḥammad; the name Allah; the knowledge of self; and the Koran.

also that each technical term is found in the path of a road through which one can reach one's own root, in keeping with "The paths to God are in the number of the breaths of the creatures." Thus each term and each road that is mentioned leads to the fifth circle, and the fifth circle is named 'the One of Existence', since nothing except the Holy Essence can be called 'the One of Existence', given that He is One through His own existence and He abides through His own Essence. He is One with no associate. . . .

[Once the traveller passes beyond the first four circles], he reaches the fifth diagram, which is the One of Existence and which has no direction, no time, and no place. It is undelimited by any sort of binding and nonidentified by any sort of entification. This is why the diagram was drawn as a circle, but those four diagrams, since they are connected with time, space, direction, and entification, were drawn as rectangles. However, when one looks at the first four diagrams from the last diagram with a gaze of nonentification, those four diagrams also appear as circular and nonentified. This is why those four circles have been drawn around the circle of the One of Existence, just like the circle of the One of Existence. Thus the traveller will be able to find the One of Existence in each circle. After all, when the traveller passes beyond the levels of the entifications and reaches the level of nonentification, he sees all the levels as nonentification. Since the form of nonentification cannot be understood save as a circle, all five tables have been drawn as circles.

After having explained why the central circle is called by eight different names, Shaykh Mahmūd proceeds to explain each of the eight sectors in terms of the descent from the centre to the circumference. Thus, concerning 'existence', he writes as follows:

Know, O traveller, that if the fifth circle is considered in terms of the technical language of existence, then it is called 'the One of Existence'. This is because the traveller, after wayfaring through the four existences, will arrive at the fifth existence, which is the Essence of the Real. . . . There, he will not see anything as present. All the external things, which are outside the Essence, will appear as obliterated in obliteration, annihilated in annihilation, and non-existent in non-existence. [Nothing will appear] save the Essence, which abides through Itself and causes all things to abide through Its attributes – whether this is called the One of Existence or the Necessary in Existence. After all, the Essence is One Being that abides in Itself through Itself, and this perfection of attribute is worthy for It.

Then, through the ray of His own One Existence, the One brought the Gnostic of Existence into existence. It is the Muhammadan Light, as defined earlier. Then, through the being of the Gnostic of Existence, a non-being appeared, and that non-being, which is the impossible in existence, made the possible in existence manifest. From the possible in existence, the necessary in existence appeared.

Thus the necessary in existence is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for the possible in existence, the possible in existence the locus of manifestation for the impossible in existence, the impossible in existence the locus of manifestation for the Gnostic of Existence, and the Gnostic of Existence is the locus of manifestation for the One of Existence.

O traveller, whenever someone finds the One of Existence, by the same token he will find the locus of manifestation that is the earthly, necessary in existence, as explained earlier.

Know also that although we discussed the necessary in existence that pertains to earth in terms of the human being, the verified truth is that everything included among the kinds of corporeal things is necessary in existence in keeping with the existence of that thing. This necessary in existence then entails a possible in existence, which entails an impossible in existence. Within the last a Gnostic of Existence is concealed – however, it is concealed in the thing in keeping with the thing's entification. Whether things be plants, inanimate objects, or animals, these four existences are within them. However, they do not become manifest save in the existence of the human individual, who is a receptacle for the Essence and attributes of the Divinity. . . .

O traveller, it was said that "The paths to God are in the number of the breaths of the creatures." This is a meaning of which nothing's existence is empty. In each thing, these four existences are concealed. When God gives this existence awareness and self-knowledge, it finds the One of Existence, which is God, in its own existence. It has no need for any other existence, for it will not see God's Essence in anything else, only in its own existence. This is the reality of "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Everyone must seek God in his own self so that he may find Him – whatever sort the seeker may be, whether jinn, human being, plant, or animal. 'The paths to God are in the number of the breaths of the creatures.' In every existence, there is a path to God by which it can reach God.

Know, O traveller, that the encompassing of all existences by the One of Existence will be gained when the traveller reaches and recognizes the One of Existence. Just as he is the gnostic of his own existence and sees himself as encompassing all his parts, so he will see the Real as encompassing the whole universe, while no veil appears in the midst. He will gaze on nothing but the Essence of the existence of perfection, which has permeated the existence of the things through the self-disclosures in the species. Sometimes he will see the One of Existence identical with the Gnostic of Existence and the Gnostic of Existence identical with the One of Existence. Sometimes he will witness the Gnostic of Existence in the One of Existence; sometimes the possible in existence in the impossible in existence; the impossible in existence in the possible in existence; the possible in existence in the necessary in existence, and the necessary in existence in the possible in existence. Sometimes he will see all this as identical with the One of Existence, and sometimes he will see the One of Existence identical with all this. . . . Such is gazing upon the unity of the Essence – majestic is His majesty and all-inclusive His gifts!

This then is a brief introduction to the elaborate and coherent synthesis of Sufi teaching offered by Shaykh Mahmūd Khwush-Dahān. I hope that before long the opportunity will arise to provide a complete translation and analysis of the treatise, but even more strongly, I hope that other scholars will take a closer look at some of the riches of the Persianate Sufi tradition that are now mouldering in the libraries of the subcontinent.