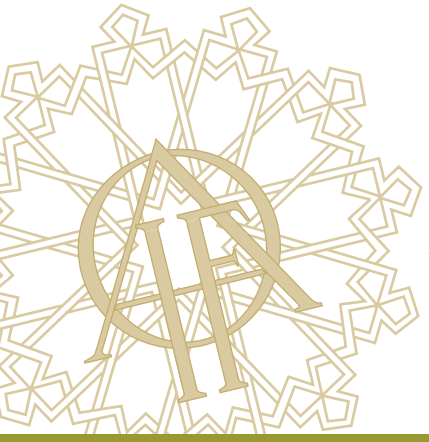
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ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

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Richard McGregor

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Richard McGREGOR

The Existential Dimension of the Spiritual Guide in the Thought of ʿAlī Wafā' (d. 807/1404)

THE MYSTICAL tradition of Islam has expressed itself in a variety of ways, including mystical philosophy, Qur'an commentary, poetry and devotional compositions. Beyond the written word, sufism has developed its own institutions to foster spiritual development. Central among these institutions is the sufi order, or *ṭarīqa*. These orders are based on the saintly model of a founder, and usually have a distinct literary, devotional and ritual tradition. Historically, within the Islamic religion the sufi orders appear only after the 5th/11th century. One essential element within these orders, although certainly predating them, is the more personal institution represented by the relationship between the spiritual guide and his follower. This relationship is the basis of the sufi order, where members are both the followers of the founding saintly figure and, at least in theory, are bound to a living shaykh from whom they receive spiritual guidance. This guidance includes both simple association and explicit direction of the follower's spiritual exercises. One sufi thinker, Ibn ʿAbbād al-Rundī (d. 792/1390), made the explicit distinction between the *shaykh al-taʿlīm* (master of instruction) and the *shaykh al-tarbiyya* (master of training).[1] Both of these elements were understood to be part of the ideal relationship. Azīz-i Nasafī (d. before 700/1300) relates the two in his definition of the very aim of sufism. We are told that,

> The task [of sufism] requires association with a wise man. All the ascetic discipline and spiritual effort and the rules of courtesy and conditions which have been set in the sufi path (*rāh-i taṣawwuf*) are so that the wayfarer becomes worthy of association with a wise man... (With this done) his task is complete.[2]

As straightforward as this explanation seems however, it is not the last word on the role of the spiritual guide. The nature of this relationship from the perspective of one important Cairene mystic, ʿAlī Wafā', is the subject of the present paper. As will be seen, the spiritual

[1] Fritz Meier, "Qushayri's *Tartīb al-sulūk*" in his *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism* ed. and trans. J. O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 94.

[2] L. Ridgeon, *ʿAzīz Nasafī* (Richmond: Curzon, 1998) 126.

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guide can be understood to play a much more important role, one that must be understood at the existential level, in light of the very nature of creation.

The intellectual milieu of ʿAlī Wafā' has been discussed elsewhere in some detail;[3] thus here only brief mention will be made of one particularly relevant development in the history of Islamic mystical thought. This is the rise in the 7th/13th century of the "Akbarian" school. This was not a sufi order, but rather an intellectual school, based on the mystical philosophy of Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d.638/1240), also known as *al-shaykh al-akbar*.[4] The full scope of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings is vast, and thus only relevant parts of it will be treated below.

Although ʿAlī's father Muḥammad Wafā' (d. 759/1358) had been associated with the sufi order of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, known as the Shādhiliyya, intellectually ʿAlī is best identified as a follower of the "Akbarian" school. The affinity between ʿAlī Wafā' and Ibn ʿArabī has even at times led to confusion between the two in the attribution of authorship of certain texts.[5] Both ʿAlī and his father were prolific writers of poetry and mystical treatises, together producing over thirty works.[6]

Beyond ʿAlī's philosophical debt to Ibn ʿArabī, one particularity of his presentation of sufism was his abstract style. He was not concerned with writing "how to" manuals, cataloguing mystical terminology for initiates, or outlining the stages which will be passed through during one's spiritual development. Instead, his concern was to perpetuate the style of inspired writing which had been established by Ibn ʿArabī. ʿAlī Wafā' explored the limits of speculative mysticism, and his readers are left to follow if able.

Contrary to what one might expect, this "elitist" nature of ʿAlī Wafā's mysticism rather than being silent on the topic of the spiritual guide, in fact offers us a novel perspective. It is a perspective which is tied up with his mystical understanding of God and creation. In the following we shall spend a few moments marking out ʿAlī's understanding of existence before taking up his treatment of the spiritual guide.

[3] See chapter six of my *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: the Wafā' Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn ʿArabī*, forthcoming from State University of New York Press.

[4] The essential studies of this thinker are Chodkiewicz, *M. Seal of the Saints; Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn Arabi* L. Sherrard trans. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993, and Addas, C. *Quest for the Red Sulfur; the Life of Ibn ʿArabī* P. Kingsley trans. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993.

[5] Claude Addas has recently confirmed to me the misattribution of ʿAlī's *Nafā'is al-ʿirfān* to Ibn ʿArabī, and Muḥammad Wafā's *Tā'iyya* to Ibn ʿArabī. (I am at present preparing a critical edition and translation of the *Nafā'is al-ʿirfān*, forthcoming from the Ifao press.) See also Addas's "L'œuvre poétique d'Ibn ʿArabī et sa réception" in *Studia Islamica* no. 91, 2000, pp. 26, 27 where she first proposes the *Tā'iyya* misattribution.

[6] For an overview of their major extant writings see my "New Sources for the Study of Sufism in Mamluk Egypt" *BSOAS* 65: 2 (2002).

Creator and Created, the Necessary and the Possible

ʿAlī Wafā' understands there to be an existential identification of creation with God. This identification within the Akbarian school came to be known as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or the Oneness of Being.[7] This concept was usually not simple pantheism, but rather made a nuanced distinction between levels of existence; it was argued that although only true and necessary existence could belong to God, in some lesser way creation must share in this existence. It will become clear below that ʿAlī Wafā' followed this line of thinking, holding to the oneness of God and creation, yet pointing to a differentiation within this oneness. Yet, our author was not content to propose the rather unconvincing argument that oneness in some way includes differentiation; in the best hermeneutic tradition of the mystics, he proposes an intuitive perspective which reconciles the two perspectives.

One need not look far in the writings of ʿAlī Wafā' to find statements which emphasize the single nature of God and creation. We are told for example, "He (God) encompasses all, as if He were a sea and they (the created entities) are His waves; that is, He is the reality of everything and the essence of everything, and everything is He Himself and His Attribute."[8] From this perspective, there is not much independence for either the Creator or creation. Thus acts such as prayer, which seem to hinge on a distinction between servant and Lord, are in fact a Self-reflexive act on the part of the divine. We read that "Nothing truly thanks God except God; the servant is powerless to do this."[9] Elsewhere we read that the only true praise of God is from God Himself: "Every seeker simply seeks al-Ḥaqq; sometimes he reaches that object in truth, so he worships Him by an unveiling, and sometimes he reaches it by imagination (only), so he worships Him through a veil. Thus no worshipper truly worships, except God (Himself)."[10] This oneness also has implications for creation. The truths which gifted souls may attain are themselves indistinguishable from those souls: "The gnostic is the source of his gnosis, the verifier is the veracity (حقيقة) of what is verified to him..."[11] Thus, with the truth and the searcher being of the same nature, one's search is self-referential, not requiring anything beyond this Oneness.

This perspective of Oneness is also expressed using the vocabulary of being. If God is in the end the only reality, He is also the only true Being. Thus we are told that God is the essential existence of all things in creation.

[7] For more on the development of this terminology see W. Chittick "Sadr al-Din Qunawi on the Oneness of Being" in *IPQ* 21, 1981, pp. 171-184.

[8] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* (Dār al-Kutub; Taṣawwuf 152; film# 33564) 45a. (Please note that in this article I have not edited mansucript quotations.)
«انه بكل شي محيط كاحاطة فيما هو البحر بامواجه معنى وصورة فهو حقيقة كل شي وهو ذات كل شي وكل شي عينه وصفته».

[9] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (2 vols. in one) (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988) II: 29.

[10] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II:51.
«وكان يقول لم يطلب كل طالب إلا الحق لكن تارة يظفر به حقا فيعبد عن مكاشفة وتارة يظفر به وهما فيعبده على حجاب فما عبد عابد فى الحقيقة إلا الله».

[11] ʿAlī Wafā', *Kitāb al-masāmiʿ al-rabbāniyya* (Dār al-Kutub; Taṣawwuf 166) 50a, repeated in *Waṣāyā* 104b.

> God is your existence with regard to your essence, while you are His existence with regard to His entity (عين)... He is the essential Existence determined (specifically) in all existents. All things are His Attributes and Names; and by virtue of (essential Existence's) divine level, the order of (common) existence functions properly, and its standing is completed at every level according to its (that level's) due.[12]

Here the essential existence of all created things is God. Yet from the perspective of the Divine this creation is only an external form. For the created, on the other hand, this existence is essential. Restating concisely: God/existence may extend into creation, but His/its presence there is only His/its external aspect–His Attributes and Names. From the perspective of this aspect itself, this extension is whole and essential.

This existential model may also be approached from the individual's perspective. 'Alī Wafā' tells his reader that the existence of all things is identical to his or her own. He says, "If the existence of all is your own existence, then the "all" is from Him to you and by you."[13] This individual's existence, as he or she experiences it, is the "all." Even the Divine, as it can be known, is from this existence. We read:

> Your existence is your Lord by its lordship, and your God by its divinity, and your Merciful by its mercy. And the same is applicable by analogy to all meanings and attributes. Sometimes (your existence) appears to you by virtue of those levels, or some of them in your perception, from a perspective by which you see them as you; and thus you see it (the Lord, God etc.) by them (lordship, divinity etc.) (as) your existence. Sometimes (your existence appears) from a perspective by which you see them (lordship, divinity etc.) as other than you; and thus you see it (the Lord, God etc.) by them (lordship, divinity etc.) (as) the existence of other than you. In reality it is only your existence, since existence–why, how or wherever it appears–only appears to you because it is your own existence. You do not grasp this nor anything else except by the fact that it is your existence which you have grasped...[14]

Despite the over reliance on pronouns in this passage, the point is clear. The individual's experience is limited to his own sphere of finite existence. Thus "God" for him is simply the divine element of his own existence, or in other words, his "God" is only present to the degree that his existence can portray Him according to its limited divinity. This experience may occur from two perspectives, either one which sees God through its own existence, or one which sees Him through what is understood to be the existence of another. These two perspectives, however, are also both within one's sphere of limited existence. The passage concludes by pointing out that understanding is, in effect, simply the exploration of the dimensions of one's own existence.

[12] 'Alī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-'aliyya* 98a, 98b.
«هو وجودك بمعنى ذاتك وانت وجوده بمعنى عينه ... هو الوجود الذات المتعين بكل موجود فالكل صفاته واسماوه وبحكم مرتبته الالهية يصلح نظام الوجود ويكمل قوامه في كل مقام بحسبه».

[13] 'Alī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 23b.
«اذا كان وجود الكل هو وجودك فالكل منه وبك واليك».

[14] 'Alī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 101a.
«وجودك هو ربك بربوبيته والهك بالهيته ورحمانك برحمانيته وقس على هذا جمع المعاني والصفات فتارة يظهر لك بحكم هذه المراتب او بعضها في ادراكك من الحيثية التي تراها انت وتراه منها وجودك وتارة من الحيثية لتي تراها غيرك وتراه منها وجود غيرك وما هو في الحقيقة الا وجودك اذ لا يظهر لك الوجود حيث ظهر وكيف ظهر وبمهما ظهر الا من حيث هو وجودك وانت لا تدرك ذلك ولا شيء منه الا بانه وجودك المدرك لذلك بادراكه من حيث انه وجودك المدرك ما ثم شيء خلاف هذا الا انه بكل شيء محيط».

From these quotations scattered throughout the writings of ʿAlī Wafāʾ, we see that the concept of Oneness has more than a single dimension. The first, and most obvious, is that of the Divine as source of all creation. This may be looked at from the perspective of the Creator or creation. For the latter, this reality means that in knowing oneself one knows all else, including the Creator. We saw also that this doctrine may be expressed in terms of existence. Here God is in creation as its existence. From the Divine perspective this is necessary Existence, but for creation, the existence it knows is only contingent.[15]

We have here discussed the "oneness" statements, but we must also take into consideration the related element of Self-disclosure (*tajallī*). As we saw at the start of this discussion, the degree of existential independence accorded to creation is important. An utter denial of creation's existence would lead to charges of pantheism. For ʿAlī Wafāʾ, as for his father and Ibn ʿArabī, a degree of independence is indeed granted to creation. For the most part this is done through the concept of divine Self-disclosure, which functions on the premise that God/necessary existence is meaningfully distinguishable from creation/contingent existence.

ʿAlī Wafāʾ makes it quite clear that God's Self-disclosure is an important, and independent, entity. In a discussion reminiscent of a Gnostic theurgy, we are told that Self-disclosures must be sought out among lesser forms of creation. A picture is painted of *tajallī* hidden among base material existence.

> It is related in the hadith that, "God created the bodies (اجسام) in darkness, and then He sprinkled upon them His light. He upon whom this light is bestowed is guided, but he who misses it goes astray."[16] The meaning of the bodies being in darkness is that they are levels of obscurity and deception. Their condition is due to their corporeality being a dark fancy (الوهم البهيم), while the light scattered upon them is the Ruling-Knowing-Rational-Spirit, which is from the Self-disclosure of the Compassionate-Merciful-Existence. The bodies, which conceal these sprinkled... spirits, are as a black veil covering the happy moon-lit face. He who, from this face, only sees its veil, is not happy, nor does he find joy. This is like he who sees of the saints only their bodies; he does not then remember God by witnessing the (hidden) light to which they point. He who raises the veils is joyful at witnessing the intended.[17]

[15] By ʿAlī Wafāʾs time, this idea had long been established among Islamic philosophers. Al-Kindī (d. 259/873) was probably the first to fully formulate the concept. See J. Pavlin "Sunni *kalām* and theological controversies" in *History of Islamic Philosophy* (2 vols) S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman eds. (London: Routledge, 1996), I: 110. See also the later philosopher ʿAbd Allāh Baidawī (d. 716/1316) *Ṭawaliʿ al-Anwār* section 1, chapter 4, "Necessity and Possibility, Eternity and Temporality" in *Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam* (2 vols) eds. E. Calverly and J. Pollock (Leiden: Brill, 2002), I: 255-299.

[16] This is a variant of the hadith Tirmidhī, *Saḥīḥ*, Imām, 18.

[17] ʿAlī Wafāʾ, *Mafātiḥ al-khazāʾin al-ʿaliyya* 2b, 3a.
جا فى الحديث ان الله خلق الاجسام فى ظلمة ثم رش عليها من نوره فمن اصابه ذلك النور اهتدى ومن اخطاه ضل معنى كون الاجسام ظلمة انها مراتب ابهام وابهام فشانها من حيث جرمانيتها الوهم البهيم والنور المرشوش عليها هو الروح الناطق العليم الحكيم من تجلى الوجود الرحمن الرحيم والاجسام على هذه الارواح المرشوشة على استعداداتها كنقاب اسود اغبر على وجه مبهج اقمر فمن لم ير من ذلك الوجه الا نقابه فلم يبتهج ولم يجد السرور كمن لم ير من اوليا الله الا اجسامهم فلم يذكر الله لشهود نور المذكور ومن كشف الستور ابتهج بالسرور عند مشاهدة المقصود».

The guiding light concealed in levels of obscurity is the divine Self-disclosure. The aim of the individual is to avoid the gross bodies and to find the light. Here ʿAlī Wafā' is certainly far from his previous statements on the Oneness of existence. Elsewhere we read that God's Word may enter the world, taking on various forms. This remains in essence God, yet it is a distinct Self-disclosure. We read,

> The Name is the identity (عين) of the Named at every level according to its due.[18] ... The Speech is the identity of the Speaker in the auditory realm. It was said: "We came to them with a Book (of guidance as a mercy upon those who believe)" (7:52), so He is the Speaker and He is the Speech. The Qur'ān is His rational identity, and the Discernment (فرقان) is His imaginary identity,[19] and that which is read, which is referred to by the pronoun "it" in "you read it" is His sensible identity. So the recited is a descent of the Discernment, which (itself) is a descent of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the descent of the Speech, and the Speech is the Speaker (Himself); and all are its diversified Self-determinations of the sum of His Self-disclosure referred to as "Speech."[20]

Although the identification of God with his Speech is clear, for our purposes the important point is that divine Attributes are present among creation, with a certain degree of independence. This Speech is a Self-disclosure of God, operating simultaneously on three levels, that of the rational, the imaginal and the sensible.

ʿAlī Wafā' also describes the levels of existential differentiation, which appear as divine Attributes. In the following passage he makes this point clearly:

> Reality is a single essential existence particularized by its own principles, which are its attributes and existences. Creation is the levels of proportion which are fixed within their limits... As al-Ḥaqq said... according to the reading of *ḍamma* over the *lām* of the word "*kull*": "Verily, We are all things We have created in proportion." (54:49)[21]

The essential point here is the distinction made between elements of an otherwise unified existence. The Qur'anic passage notes that "all things" are created in proportion, that is, according to their established limits. ʿAlī Wafā's unusual Qur'anic reading emphasizes the common identity of "all things" with their original source, rather than their independent existence, as is assumed in the common textual reading.

One might wonder as to what the purpose of Self-disclosure is at all. If there is Oneness, then why is there differentiation? ʿAlī Wafā' does not pose the question as such, but in effect he does answer it for us. In short, there are two things to be said. The first, which will be dealt with in detail below, is that these two realities must be grasped simultaneously if one is to attain the highest mystical insight. The second is that differentiation plays an important

[18] ʿAlī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 20b «... الكلام عين المتكلم في الدايرة السمعية كما قال وقد جينا هم بكتاب الآية فهو المتكلم وهو الكلام والقرآن عينه العقلي والفرقان عينه الخيالي والمقروء المعبر عنه بضمير تقراه عينه الحسي فالمقروء تنزل الفرقان والفرقان تنزل القرآن والقرآن تنزل الكلام والكلام عين المتكلم والكل تعيناته التفصيلية من مجمل تجليه المعبر عنه بالكلام».

[19] Ibn ʿArabī used "Qur'an" and "Furqān" (both names for Scripture) to explain the at once uniting and differentiating function of God's word. See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* 363.

[20] ʿAlī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 21b. «الاسم عين المسمى في كل مقام بحسبه».

[21] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 22b.

teleological role. The point here is that creation is a mode of communication between the limited contingent souls and the Ultimate Necessary. Creation serves as a sign, directing searchers to the Truth beyond. ʿAlī Wafā' makes this teleology clear in the following passage:

> The realm of creation was actualized simply for the recognition of al-Ḥaqq through the differentiation of His Names and His Attributes in the manifestations of His signs. "I was an unknown treasure, so I created creation, and made Myself known to them; so by Me they know Me."[22] Another confirmation of this is (the Qur'anic passage 51:56) "I created jinn and man only to worship Me" that is, to know (Me).[23] The more one knows the state of the signs, the more one knows of the manifestations (مظاهر) of the Names and the Attributes; and the more one knows the manifestations of the named and attributed, the more one knows of realities of these manifestations, according to one's gnosis of the external realities.[24]

Another version of the same hadith is quoted elsewhere to much the same effect. Here ʿAlī Wafā' comments quite directly:

> He said of the hadith "I was an unknown treasure", the meaning is the level of abstraction (تجرد). (The meaning of) "And I wanted to be known, so I created creation" is I ordained an elite (قدرت اعيانا تقديرية), I made Myself known to them and guided them to all of it (i.e. level of abstraction) by all of it (i.e. creation). "And by Me they know Me", since I am the All...[25]

Thus, the goal of the divine act of creation is that God becomes known. The creation which may know Him, according to ʿAlī Wafā', is the spiritual elite who will be guided to Him by creation. This guiding is possible thanks to creation's essence, which is itself divinity (i.e. He is the All). This elite may be the immutables we met earlier, but more likely it is the "elite" (مخصوص), according to Muḥammad Wafā', to whom God has given a "measure (مقدار) of all things."[26]

At this point in our discussion we have seen first the idea of the Oneness between the Creator and the created, and second the conditional independence of existence (usually represented as a Self-disclosure). For ʿAlī Wafā', these concepts are well established. Let us turn now to his resolution of this apparent opposition, that is, his synthesis of these two perspectives. The most obvious resolution of the two perspectives is to point out that one defines the other. To know what oneness means, we must by implication know what differentiation is. This is made clear in the following passage:

> If it were not for the necessary, then the possible would not appear possible; and if it were not for the possible, then the necessary would not appear necessary. However, the one affects the other, like the cause upon the effect, and the doer upon that which is done, and the knower of the known.[27]

[22] This seems to be a version of another hadith, popular among sufi thinkers, which many hadith scholars have considered a forgery. See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* 391 n. 16.

[23] An interpretation traditionally ascribed to the Prophet's companion Ibn ʿAbbās. See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* 150.

[24] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 55.
«يقول ما حققت دائرة الخلق إلا لتعرف الحق بتفصيل أسمائه وصفاته في مظاهر آثاره ... فكل من كان أعرف بحال الآثار كان أعرف بمظاهر الأسماء والصفات وكل من كان أعرف بمظاهر المسمي الموصوف كان أعرف بحقائق تلك المظاهر علي قدر معرفته بالحقائق الظاهرة».

[25] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 32.

[26] Muḥammad Wafā' himself claims to be this elite. See Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 22.

[27] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 23.

Our author goes on, however, to a more interesting explanation of the reason for both oneness and differentiation. He points to two simultaneous yet distinct realms of truth. We are told, "(He) is both the First and Last, the Apparent and Hidden (57:3); all of this is in the circle of discerning differentiation (دايرة الفرقية الفرقانية). However, in the dominion of His encompassing level, He is simply the Essence and the necessary Existence..."[28] Thus, in the realm of differentiation God may be all things at once, yet He is also the one single necessary thing–this from the perspective of encompassing. God is all things; on the one hand these are differentiated things, while on the other that thing is only One. Elsewhere these two realms are described in different terms. ʿAlī Wafā' enjoins the reader to consider simultaneously his existence and his existent being. We read, "Look at al-Îaqq before He created creation, and look at what you see (انظر ماذا ترى), and you will not see other than Him... Your existence and your existent being (وجودك وموجودك), while two by distinction, are one in truth."[29] The insight presented here is one which tries to break down the conceptual barrier between the categories of Oneness and differentiation. Our inclination is to think in one mode to the exclusion of the other, in order to avoid logical inconsistencies, but here we are challenged to take both into account simultaneously. In the following passage the reader is told that both of these realms must be properly seen:

> Existence is one in essence, and many according to its existences. The existences are (only) various by the limits of their intellected or perceived quiddity, and not in the reality of their existence. So when you look upon the reality of existence and you return command of its existences to Him, then you are an upholder of Oneness. When you look upon the limits of the intellected quiddities and you return the command of their existence to them, then you are an upholder of plurality. When you have done in each circle what wisdom requires be done of the necessities of the two views in that circle, with your verification of them, then you are the proper perfect Sayyid.[30]

Thus, if we can look upon reality, without its existential clothing, we may attain union. If we look upon the entification of entities, beyond their existence, then we have reached a state of differentiation. The circles of both difference and union each entail a particular verification. Perfection requires that both verifications be made.

This insight, achieved by the perfect Sayyid, may also be described as a knowledge of both the realities of creation and the hidden divine Reality. ʿAlī Wafā' calls those who have attained this insight the elite:

> The elite (مخصوص) of God is he who penetrates, in every way, both His secret and what is commonly known of Him (جهره). None but God encompasses him, and none but he encompasses God. However, the non-elite are fettered to things like the world, heaven, the intermediary world, hell, and the afterlife.[31]

[28] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 85b.

[29] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II:44.

[30] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 21a, 21b.
«الوجود واحد بالذات كثير بالنسبة الى موجوداته والموجودات متغايرة بحدود ماهياتها الحكمية الادراكية لا بحقيقة وجودها فمتي نظرت الى حقيقة الوجود ورددت امر موجوداته اليه كنت موحدا و متى نظرت الى حدود الماهيات الحكمية ورددت امر وجودها اليه (اليها) كنت معددا ومتى علمت في كل دايرة بما تقتضي الحكمة ان يعمل به من مقتضيات النظرين في تلك الدايرة مع تحقيقك لها كنت كاملا سيدا مسددا».

[31] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II:33.

The elite are not simply those who have attained to esoteric insights. They have "penetrated" both the perspective of the esoteric and that of the exoteric. This is the resolution of what we described earlier as the opposition between divine Oneness and its Self-manifestation/ plurality. It is an answer which requires the synthesis of two logically distinct (and self-consistent) modes of divine Reality.[32]

The Teacher and Oneness

ʿAlī Wafā's discussions of the role of the sufi shaykh describes neither the stages of the mystical way nor the various unveilings received along that way. Instead, a picture is drawn in which the teacher represents an existential reality to his follower. The discussion is not about the positive content of any mystical teachings to be passed on, rather it is about the proper understanding the student must have of the nature and role of the shaykh. The message here is that the teacher is at once simply a part of contingent, differentiated existence, yet he serves to those following him as a sign pointing to the necessary divine Existence. All creation lacks necessary existence, but some manifestations are more important than others. Spiritual guides, saints, prophets and messengers obviously have the most important roles to play amongst creation. In his discussion of the shaykh, ʿAlī Wafā' centres on his existential role; an existence which must be understood in light of his doctrine of oneness and Self-disclosure.

ʿAlī Wafā's statements on the spiritual guide do include some fairly traditional insights, such as the need of the aspirant for guidance. For example, in an echo of a popular sufi saying, we are told, "He who has no teacher, has no protector. He who has no protector has Satan taking care of him."[33] Predictably, allegiance to one's guide is also noted: "The aspirant is he who is realised in his (spiritual) goal through the essence (عين) of his teacher."[34] We also find descriptions of the relationship between the aspirant and his shaykh which use terminology usually reserved for the Divine. We are told that, "The true follower is a throne for the Mercy (*raḥmāniyya*) of his teacher".[35] Elsewhere ʿAlī Wafā', in a description comparing weak spiritual insight among common sufis to a barren womb, notes that it is by an effusion (*fayḍ*) from ones teacher that such insight is gained.

> Doctors say that coldness of the womb is the cause of barrenness. Likewise, the soul of the student, when there is no anguish of passion or burning of desire for the goal, there is not born in it (his soul) the form of his (teacher's) command, by the effusion of his teacher upon it. In this he is like wet fuel–the firebrand produces nothing but

[32] This insight is also described in Ibn ʿArabī's *Futuḥāt* as the "Possessor of the Two Eyes". See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* 361-363.

[33] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 33. See al-Qushayrī, *Das Sendschreiben al-Qushayrīs über das Sufitum* R. Gramlich trans. (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1989) 538.

[34] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 33.

[35] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 33.
«المريد الصادق عرش لاستواء رحمانية أستاذه ...»

> smoke in him. This is like the frivolous claims which occur to the souls entering among the general sufis (*qawm*), who are without the fire of desire and sincerity...[36]

Thus the spirit of the student must desire its spiritual goal in order for his teacher to effuse his command upon it. This is rather peculiar language, but the message itself is clear.

The epistemological role of the shaykh, in short, is that to truly know him is to truly know God–as much as He may be grasped through creation. Links are repeatedly made between the self, the teacher and God. "Your knowing your own reality," ʿAlī Wafā' tells us, "is commensurate with your knowing your teacher."[37] Knowing this teacher is key to knowing oneself and thus to knowing God. We are told that,

> ... if you find your true teacher, you have found your reality. If you find your reality you have found God. If you find God, then you have found everything, so everything desired is simply in the love of this teacher.[38]

The aim of the student is thus to grasp the Divine, by finding his own reality, which itself may only be reached through his teacher. As mentioned above, ʿAlī Wafā' is not concerned with describing the details of the sufi path, and here the specifics of loving the teacher or following his command are left unexplored.

The role of the shaykh is a transforming one. First it is as a guiding will to which the student must submit himself, second it is a manifestation of God. In the following passage ʿAlī Wafā' explains the stages:

> The teacher is the manifestation of the secret of Lordship for his follower. The follower must be attentive to the command of his teacher and not turn away, to the left or the right, from this teacher. Have you not heard the word of the older son Jacob, "I will not leave this land until my father allows it" (12:80), then he said, "or Allah commands me"; he also said to them, "turn ye back to your father." It is clear that the follower has no direction to turn towards except that of his teacher, so much so that (even) when he has realized (in himself) the reality of his teacher, and the difference between their two stations is resolved, God (still) is his direction by way of the direction of this teacher, by which the follower becomes certain.[39]

This "realizing" of oneself in the reality of the teacher is tantamount to an existential identification, or in other words a transformation. Interestingly, the point is made that in approaching the teacher, the student is approaching the direction of the divine manifestation. Another description of the function of the teacher provides more detail. We are told:

[36] ʿAlī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 39a.
«قال الاطبا ان برد الرحم سبب في عدم الحمل هكذا نفس التلميذ متي لم تجد لوعة الوجد وحرقة الطلب و الشوق الي المقصود لم يتولد فيها من فيض استاذه عليها صورة امره ويكون ايضا مثل الوقود البارد لا يوثر فيه القبس الا دخانا كالدعاوي والرعونات الحاصلة للنفوس الداخلة بين القوم بغير حرقة شوق ...»

[37] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 104a.
«معرفتك بحقيقتك على قدر معرفتك باستاذك».

[38] ʿAlī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 3a.
«... ان وجدت استاذك المحقق وجدت حقيقتك وان وجدت حقيقتك وجدت الله وان وجدت الله وجدت كل شي فليس كل المراد الا في وجد هذا الاستاد».

[39] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 49.
«الأستاذ مظهر سر الربوبية لمريده فعلي المريد أن يقف عند أمر أستاذه وأن لا يلتفت عن أستاذه ... فتبين أن المريد ما له وجه يتوجه إليه إلا أستاذه حتي إذا تحقق بحقيقة أستاذه وسقط حكم المغايرة بين مرتبتيهما كان الله وجهه من حيث وجه ذلك الأستاذ الذي تحقق به ذلك المريد ...»

> The starting point for the aspirant is that his intentions be endowed with the signs of the People of prosperity and sanctity. And [1] if the form of his (own) piety and sanctity is unveiled in his vision of his teacher, in the clarity that is the form of his teacher, then he says that it is his teacher who is the pious saint; and so he asks for the blessings of his insights and... his noble ideas. He seeks his favour until the angel of solicitude, Isrāfīl, blows the form of the spirit of Adamic designation into the Trumpet of the form of his heart.[40] [2] So here he sees his teacher as the Adam of the Time, the king of the reigns of becoming, and he exalts him as a son exalts his revered father. [3] This occurs to the point that the veil of his Adamic form is removed from the beauty of what bestows honour on him from the Muhammadan Spirit. So here he sees his teacher as a Muhammadan Sayyid, to whom he is servant... and when he looks upon his teacher he sees only the One Self-disclosing in every aspect, according to the capacity of the witness. So he becomes non-existent in the face of being, and erased in a presence of witnessing. So his first matter is conformity, the middle (matter) is sincerity, and the last is realization.[41]

The first goal for the aspirant (not unlike that Azîz Nasafî advised us of at the beginning of this paper) is to associate with proper teachers, here the "People of prosperity and sanctity." Then, if he sees his own sanctity in the form of the teacher, he will benefit from specific spiritual insights. Once his heart receives its angelic inspiration, he sees the teacher as the engendering figure of Adam. The next step has the aspirant perceiving the Muhammadan nature of the teacher. Finally, the insight is reached that this teacher is a catalyst for the unlimited possibilities of God's unveiling through creation–and that the only limitation lies in the viewer of this Self-disclosure. The student, through his witnessing of his teacher, is able to transcend his particular and contingent existence. ʿAlī Wafæ' then summarizes neatly for us these levels of insight: the first is his "conformity" to the ways of the saintly teacher; the second is a "sincerity" which inspires insight into the higher mystical elements of the teacher's nature; and "realization" is the final insight grasping at least the beginning of the Necessary existence beyond the shaykh and all contingent creation.

Another element of our writer's concept of spiritual direction is the shaykh's role as a mirror to the aspirant's condition. We are told that "The reality of the special aspirant in relation to his teacher is like what one sees in the mirror of oneself, corresponding to the mirror's capacity."[42] In the same vein, elsewhere it is said, "Knowing (معرفتك) your reality is commensurate with your knowledge of your teacher."[43] How the aspirant sees his shaykh

[40] A sign of the Last Day is a blast on this Trumpet, (69:13). The famous al-Ḥallāj said, "By God! it is the breath of the uncreated Spirit that breathes into my skin a thought, the very one that Isrāfīl will blow into the Trumpet." L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj* H. Munson trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) I:285. Massignon then adds the following quote from Ibn Bākhilā: "When the Trumpet sounds, the sincere mystic will say, I heard it a long time ago!"

[41] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II:32.
«... فأول مبادىء المريد أن تتحلي طويته بسمات أهل الفلاح والولاية فاذا كشف لبصيرته عن أستاذه رأي صورة صلاحه وولايته في صفاء صورة أستاذه فينطق أن أستاذه هو الصالح الولي فيستمد من بركات ملاحظته المتوالية و[همه العالية ولا يزال مطلبه من الأستاذ دعواته المنيفة و] خواطره الشريفة فيتودد إليه تودد المتأنس حتى ينفخ إسرافيل العناية في صور صورة قلبه روح التخصيص الآدمي فهناك يشهد أستاذه آدم الزمان ومالك أزمة الأكوان فيعظمه تعظيم الشاب لأبيه المهاب الى أن يسفر حجاب صورته الآدمية عن جمال ما خصه من الروح المحمدية فهناك يشهد أستاذه سيدا محمديا ويكون له عبدا ... فينظر الى أستاذه فلا يرى إلا الواحد يتجلى في كل مشهد على قدر وسع الشاهد فيصير عدما بين يدي وجود ومحوا في حضرة شهود فأول أمره توفيق وأوسطه تصديق وآخره تحقيق ...»

[42] ʿAlī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 12b.
«حقيقة المريد المخصوص من استاذه بمنزلة ما يراه الناظر في المرآة من نفسه مطابقا بواسطتها».

[43] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II:32.

is the essential element in his definition of himself. ʿAlī Wafā' tells us, "You are in the form which you see your teacher as... If you witness him as creation, then you are a creature; if you witness him as Truth, then you are a truth."[44] The point is made even more clearly in the following: "The image of the speaking shaykh is a mirror of the secret of the sincere aspirant. When he (the student) looks into it (the mirror) with perspicacity, he sees in it the form of his (own) soul."[45] Thus the shaykh is not only a window to a reality beyond creation, he also serves as the aspirant's only true insight into himself. The point of how one can only know oneself through another is unclear until we remember that for ʿAlī Wafā' the role of the shaykh is existential, that is, his function is to offer access to (or a presence in) the realm of Necessary existence. This is not done by the passing down of a mystical secret, rather it is presented as an occasion within contingent existence, an occasion which is a key to the eternal Necessary. As we saw above in our discussion of "Oneness and the many," creation, or differentiation, does contain a seed of its unified source. It is this seed which allows the many contingent beings to know at least the possibility of a higher necessary realm. Thus the shaykh is the mirror to the aspirant; his origin is divine, and so the aspirant may see himself in him in any number of forms. The Self-disclosures are infinite in possibility. The teacher allows him to see his unlimited self, and thus to see his Lord.

This existential function of the shaykh is clearly pointed to. ʿAlī Wafā' tells us that the aspirant's very existence is derived from his shaykh. We read, "The existence of the sincere aspirant, whereby he is truth, is only with his teacher, who speaks the clear Truth..."[46] This existence seems to be transferred to the aspirant in much the same way classical sufism spoke of a mystic soul extinguishing itself in the Divine. In another passage we read, "The tongue of the state of every teacher speaking the clear Truth says to each sincere aspirant, 'Approach me until I love you, for when I love you I see you as kin to me, and I am manifested in you to the degree you are prepared for it.'"[47] ʿAlī Wafā' makes it clear that the aspirant's only source of necessary existence is the shaykh. In the following passage he first describes imagination as the possible of the cognitive reality, and this reality as the necessary to that imagined. The aspirant and his teacher have a similar relationship.

[44] ʿAlī Wafā', *Waṣāyā* 3b.
«انت على الصورة التي تشهد استاذك عليها ... ان شهدته خلقا فانت خلق وان شهدته حقا فانت حق».

[45] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 32.
«صورة الأستاذ الناطق مرآة سر المريد الصادق إذا نظر فيها ببصيرته شهدها على صورة سريرته ...».

[46] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 60.

[47] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 60.
«لسان حال كل أستاذ ناطق بالحق المبين يقول لكل مريد صادق تقرب إلى حتى أحبك فإذا أحببتك رأيتك أهلا لي فظهرت فيك بما أنت مستعد له».

Apparently sincere aspirants were not very common. In 804/1401 ʿAlī Wafā' wrote, "To date I have not found an aspirant who approaches the reality of his truth in me (حقيقة حقه عندي) by supererogation so that I love him. If I found him, I would fulfill him in his truth, then (I would say) "I love you" and I would be him (فكنت هو). How my aspirant would excel in conformity (to me) and perfection!" (*Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 11a, 11b and *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 60) This passage echoes the hadith in which the servant draws near to God by acts of supererogation until God loves him, and becomes his hearing, sight etc. (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Riqīq 38).

> Cognitive reality is necessary existence to its actual image (imagination), and the actual image is possible existence to the cognitive reality. O sincere aspirant, your necessary existence, by which you are true, is only with your teacher speaking by the clear Truth. If you are realized in him, then it is as if you will not cease in truth, otherwise you remain (merely) created.[48]

The existential relationship is described rather briefly here, but the point is clear that the shaykh is the aspirant's way out of possible or contingent existence into necessary existence. This may also be described as the relationship between the necessary and the possible. ʿAlī Wafā' writes:

> Truly the aspirant is one of the entities of his teacher, in relation to his teacher, while the teacher is the reality of the existence of the aspirant, in relation to the aspirant. Existence in all (cases) is single and comprehensive. Thus the aspirant realizes himself in his teacher in the meanings of perfection through existence. And the teacher is realized in his aspirant in the discernment of the gnostics through witnessing. Thus the perfect Sayyid said to his perfect aspirant, "You are from me, and I am from you, O ʿAlī."[49]

The follower is here described as a possible entity, extended from its source, the teacher. This follower attains to the "meanings of perfection" through an existentiation from his teacher. The teacher himself is realized through the form of witnessing by those who follow him. This understanding of the aspirants as entities of the teacher is echoed in a discussion of the lights of both the former and latter. We are told,

> The tenuities of each day are its hours and its instants and moments. The lights of the aspirants are tenuities of the lights of their teachers. These lights of the teachers are the realities of their aspirants' lights. These tenuities are for the aspirants their grade, which is according to their encounter (وجده). So the perfect moonlike tenuity is the perfect grade, and the accepting of its receiver is *Laylat al-qadrī* (the night of Power or Destiny)... There is nothing in the perfect aspirant except his teacher.[50]

It must be noted here that these presentations of the teacher as existentially distinct from, yet accessible to, his follower are in structure similar to the conception, explored above, of the One and creation. Creation, lacking necessity, has only possible existence. Yet this possible existence is derived from necessary existence. Further, this possible existence gives form and differentiation to the necessary. Likewise for the aspirant, his necessary, immutable existence is drawn from his teacher. In turn, he himself serves as an entification of the shaykh.

[48] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 11a.
«الحقيقة العلمية لمثالها الفعلي وجود وجوبي والمثال الفعلي لحقيقته العلمية وجود امكان فيا ايها المريد الصادق ما وجودك الواجب الذي انت به حق الا عند استاذك الناطق بالحق المبين فان تحققت به كنت كما لم تزل حقا والا فيها انت لا تزال خلقا».

[49] Al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II: 55.
«إن المريد عين من عيون أستاذه بالنسبة الى أستاذه والأستاذ حقيقة وجود المريد بالنسبة الى المريد والوجود في الكل واحد محيط ولذلك يتحقق المريد بأستاذه في معاني الكمال وجودا ويتحقق الأستاذ بمريده في مدارك المتعرفين شهودا ومن ثم قال السيد الكامل لمريده الكامل «أنت مني وأنا منك يا علي».
A similar passage, using the terms "servants" and "masters", is *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 8a, 8b. It ends with the following: "Just as the servant is from his master in existence, likewise the master is from his servant in witnessing. "You are from me, and I am from you." Various Shia hadiths report Muhammad saying, "'Alī, You are from me and I am from you." See *A Concordance of the Beḥār Al-Anwār* Alī-Reza Barazesh ed. (30 vols) (Tehran: Ministry of Culture, 1994) 20: 14474. Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (Cairo: 1972) vol. 1, bāb 2, p. 44, no. 119 runs, "I am from ʿAlī and ʿAlī is from me."

[50] ʿAlī Wafā', *Mafātiḥ al-khazā'in al-ʿaliyya* 2a, 2b.
«رقايق كل يوم هي ساعاته واوقاته واحيانه وانوار المريدين رقايق انوار استاذيهم وانوار الاستاذين حقايق انوار مريديهم وهذه الرقايق هي اقدار المريدين وقدر كل منهم بحسب وجده فالرقيقة الكمالية البدرية هي القدر الكامل وقبول قابلها ليلة القدر ... كذلك ليس في المريد الكامل الا استاذه.»