

Paths of deduction to knowledge of God Almighty in Sufism - A study of the epistemological starting points and foundations

Dr. Zouhir BENKETFI

University of Eloued- Algeria

E-mail: Benketfi-zouhir@univ-eloued.dz; ORCID: 0000-0001-8794-9371

Received: 12-03-2025 Accepted: 06-05-2025 Published: 20-09-2025

Abstract

This study seeks to analyze the epistemic approaches to the knowledge of God in Islamic Sufism, with a focus on key figures such as al-Ḥallāj, al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Shādhilī, and Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī. It analyzes central Sufi concepts kashf (unveiling), ilhām (inspiration), waḥdat al-wujūd (Oneness of being), and spiritual experience—showing how they establish a distinctive framework of reasoning that transcends conventional rational methodologies. Employing a descriptive-analytical reading of Sufi texts, the study also engages critically with theoretical debates surrounding Sufism. The findings draw attention to the fact that Sufi reasoning rests primarily on direct experiential taste (dhawqī) knowledge, coupled with inner witnessing (shuhūd), wherein the knowledge of God is understood less as a matter requiring rational proofs than as an existential reality to be lived and experienced. The study concludes by recommending further in-depth research comparing Sufi methods of reasoning with philosophical and theological approaches, in order to provide fresh insights into Islamic Sufism.

Keywords: Sufi Reasoning, Islamic Sufism, Knowledge of God, Waḥdat Al-Wujūd (Oneness of Being), Kashf (Unveiling), Dhawq (Spiritual Tasting).

Introduction:

The question of how human beings come to know God has occupied intellectual and spiritual reflection throughout history, addressed in varying ways by philosophies, religions, and doctrines. In Islam, belief in God constitutes the foundation of faith and the most essential doctrinal and practical principle. It is the first religious obligation and the basis upon which belief in the remaining pillars of faith depends. No aspect of faith is valid without first affirming

the existence and oneness of God. From this perspective, belief in God's existence and unity forms the central creed of Islam and its defining hallmark. It is the foundation of all divine laws and the ultimate purpose for which the prophets were sent.

Within Islamic thought, Sufism emerged as a profound spiritual and epistemic tradition that directly engaged with this question. It developed a distinctive vision of reasoning about the knowledge of God that departs from classical theological and philosophical approaches grounded in rational proof and logical deduction.

The significance of this research lies in exploring these Sufi contributions by examining the epistemic foundations of Sufi reasoning about God. Highlighting this dimension reveals the cognitive integration between Sufi spirituality and Islamic theology. It also offers a basis for deeper inquiry into the Sufi approach to divine knowledge. The neglect of this dimension—especially in modern studies that have treated Sufism largely from a critical or sociological perspective—has obscured the depth of its epistemic vision. This study seeks to fill that gap through a systematic analysis of the Sufi paths of reasoning for the knowledge of God, based on the writings of prominent Sufi masters.

Academically, the research aims to enrich both Arabic and international scholarship with an analytical study of an important aspect of Sufi thought. It seeks to open new horizons for examining the relationship between spiritual experience and knowledge, and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Islamic Sufism as a coherent epistemic system. Practically, it aims to assist scholars and readers interested in Sufi metaphysics by clarifying the Sufi methodology for apprehending divine reality and by offering an analytical framework that may inform future studies and intellectual debates.

Research Problem:

The central problem addressed in this study can be formulated in the following question: What are the fundamental concepts that underlie reasoning about the knowledge of God in Islamic Sufism?

Research Objectives:

The study aims primarily to demonstrate the significant contributions of Sufi thought to developing an epistemology of divine knowledge grounded in spiritual experience. Specifically, it seeks to:

a. Analyze the core concepts in Islamic Sufism that form the basis of reasoning about the knowledge of God, such as *kashf* (unveiling), *ilhām* (inspiration), *dhawq* (spiritual tasting), *wahdat al-wujūd* (Oneness of being), and spiritual experience.

b. Identify the distinctive features of Sufi reasoning and illustrate how it transcends traditional rationalist methodologies.

c. Provide a critical analysis of theoretical issues raised by Sufi reasoning, including the relationship between intellect and unveiling, the problem of articulating mystical experience, and the debates surrounding the concept of Oneness of being.

Previous Studies:

Scholarship on the knowledge of God, Islamic theology, and Sufism is extensive.

Despite recognition of the distinctive nature of Sufism's approach to divine knowledge, systematic studies that examine the methodology of reasoning within this tradition remain scarce.

Previous research may be grouped into four categories:

a. Studies on proofs for God's existence in Islamic thought: These works focus largely on theological and philosophical arguments.

b. General studies on Sufism: Many examine Sufism historically, philosophically, or socially, but without addressing in detail its epistemic approach to divine knowledge.

c. Studies on individual Sufi figures: Extensive research exists on figures such as Ibn 'Arabī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Ḥallāj, though often limited to specific aspects of their thought without synthesizing their methods of reasoning about God.

d. Studies on unveiling and inspiration: Some works explore these concepts as sources of knowledge, but rarely connect them systematically to the broader framework of reasoning about divine knowledge.

Research Gaps:

The review of previous studies reveals several gaps. Chief among them is the need for a critical analysis of the theoretical issues raised by Sufi reasoning, particularly the relationship between intellect and unveiling, the challenge of expressing mystical experience, and the debates surrounding Oneness of being. Addressing these gaps is essential for a deeper understanding of the epistemic contribution of Sufism.

Methodological Approach:

This research employs a descriptive-analytical method, examining Sufi texts concerned with reasoning about divine knowledge and situating them within the broader context of Sufi thought. The method involves describing and analyzing the foundational Sufi concepts—unveiling, inspiration, spiritual intuition, Oneness of being, and spiritual experience—as epistemic tools for approaching the knowledge of God.

Structure of the Study:

The study is structured as follows:

- Introduction: Outlines the significance, problem, objectives, methodology, and general plan of the research.
- Section One: The Sufi position on reasoning about the knowledge of God.
- Section Two: Aspects of the Sufi paths of reasoning for the knowledge of God.
- Conclusion: Summarizes the findings and provides answers to the central research question.

1. Sufi Position on Reasoning about the Knowledge of God Almighty:

A survey of the Sufi heritage across its diverse schools reveals that it is rooted in a fundamental quest to affirm pure monotheism, free from impurity and ambiguity. From this perspective, Sufi thought has examined matters central to theology, including the existence and essence of God, the createdness or eternality of the universe, divine unity, the names and attributes of God, divine justice, and the vision and knowledge of God.

Reasoning for the knowledge of God occupies a pivotal place in Sufism, yet its nature and methodology differ significantly from those of kalām theology and philosophy. While the latter emphasize rational proofs and logical deduction, the Sufi approach is grounded in immediate spiritual experience, where God’s existence is perceived as a witnessed and lived reality. Such knowledge, in the Sufi view, requires not external demonstration but rather unveiling (*kashf*) and spiritual tasting (*dhawq*).

Sufis hold that the knowledge of God is too self-evident to require proof. The universe, in its perfection, beauty, and order, manifests divine realities, and thus contemplating creation itself constitutes reasoning for the existence of the Creator. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) states: *“The people of witnessing sanctify the Real in His manifestation, deeming Him too exalted to need proof. How can that which establishes proofs itself require proof?”* (al-Iskandari, 2006). *“If certain created things are so manifest that they need no evidence, then the Creator is even more worthy of such self-evidence”* (al-Iskandari, 2006). This perspective, echoed by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), underscores that divine existence is more apparent than any argument could establish: *“How can He be known by knowledge, when it is through Him that knowledge is known? How can He be known by something whose existence was itself preceded by His?”* (al-Iskandari, 2006) For the Shādhilī tradition, as for Sufism generally, the existence of God is manifest reality rather than a conclusion of reasoning.

In the light of faith and the certitude of inner vision, contemplation of the Divine Reality renders external evidence and rational proof superfluous. In this spirit, Abu al-Hasan al-Shādhilī declares: *“We behold God through the insights of faith and certainty, and this suffices us from the need of evidence and proof. We see no other among creation. Is there, in truth, any existence besides the True King? And if there appears to be, it is but like dust motes suspended in the air; upon scrutiny, they dissolve into nothingness* (al-Iskandari, 2006) Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah al-Sakandarī transmits further words from al-Shādhilī: *“One of the most astonishing things is the suggestion that created beings could serve as a path leading to Him. I ask myself: do they truly possess any existence alongside Him that would qualify them to point toward Him? Or do they hold some clarity of manifestation that He Himself does not, such that they could be the ones to disclose Him?”* (al-Iskandari, 2006) From this perspective, the practitioners of rational speculation, inference, and demonstrative proof—such as the theologians and philosophers—are, with regard to matters of divinity, considered as belonging to the common multitude in the view of “the folk of witnessing” (Ahl al-shuhud), as Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah al-Sakandarī maintains (Arabi)

The Great Master Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (560–638/1165–1240) spared no effort in clarifying that preoccupation with demonstrating God’s existence, as undertaken by the scholastic theologians, is ultimately without real benefit. His writings themselves bear witness to this, for they do not engage the question in the manner it was treated by the scholastic theologians. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the issue of divine existence scarcely requires protracted investigation or elaborate proof, since the Divine is apprehended through the necessity of reason—or, more profoundly, through the immediacy of intuition and the primordial disposition (fiṭra). In his view, the task of cultivating and instilling tawḥīd within the soul does not rest upon speculative argument for the existence of God. Such inquiry, he maintains, would only be required of the one who denies Him; for the believer who already affirms His reality, proof is neither demanded nor even meaningful (Arabi)

On the basis of this conception, he finds no justification for one who labors incessantly in search of evidence, neither for the knowledge of God, nor for one who denies or rejects the very existence of the Divine. Rather, he marvels at the stance of one who denies the existence of God—precisely because such a denial can never be substantiated. Such a person embodies a profound contradiction: immersed, on the one hand, in the manifold blessings and bounties of God, yet, on the other, condemned to a state of misery through his failure to recognize the Benefactor, the true Giver of these gifts.

From this perspective, it becomes evident that, for Ibn ‘Arabī, the knowledge of the Divine Reality is innate. As he states: “*Know that what the human being is created upon in terms of knowledge is twofold: knowledge of the existence of God, and knowledge of his own need for Him*”; This assertion makes clear that, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s view, authentic knowledge of God does not arise through abstract reason, but rather through direct mystical experience and spiritual tasting rooted in witnessing. The reality of God’s existence, therefore, is not a question in need of proof, but a truth to be lived and unveiled. The Sufi is not concerned with seeking evidence for God’s existence, but with discerning how this existence may be apprehended and how communion with it may be realized. (Arabi, *The Book of Knowledge*, within the *Letters of Ibn Arabi* (4), edited by: Abdul Fattah Saeed, 1st ed)

Yet this innate knowledge, self-evident to Ibn ‘Arabī, became the subject of extensive rational elaboration and argumentative demonstration in the works of theologians and philosophers. By contrast, in his perspective, such proofs were unnecessary, for knowledge of God should not extend beyond its primordial and intuitive affirmation. In this regard, the Qur’anic verse of the primordial covenant stands as a central testimony to this innate recognition—the proof of fitra (natural disposition) and self-evident intuition: “*And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware"*” (Qur’an 7:172).

In general, Ibn ‘Arabī maintains that the Divine Reality is not grasped through rational evidence, but rather through direct witnessing and experiential unveiling. Whoever seeks to comprehend it by means of discursive reasoning falls short, whereas the one who seeks it through contemplative vision and spiritual taste truly attains.

This is precisely what AbūḤāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), had affirmed prior to Ibn ‘Arabī, particularly in his *Deliverance from Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*). There he argued that certainty in the existence of God does not arise from the dialectical proofs of the theologians, but rather from a light that God casts into the heart—a light that unveils the very truths of reality. (al-Ghazali) This indicates that al-Ghazālī, despite being both a theologian and a philosopher, regarded authentic knowledge and true certainty of the Divine not as products of rational demonstration, but as the fruit of an inward experience. It is this “light,” divinely infused into the heart, that enables the mystic to behold the divine realities directly, without recourse to the mediating instruments of reason or logic.

In affirming the primacy of spiritual experience in attaining knowledge of God, the Sufis do not, however, dismiss the role of reason in the epistemic process. Rather, they contend that reason alone is insufficient to grasp the absolute divine realities. Reason may indeed lead one to faith, yet it cannot grant access to direct witnessing (*shuhūd*) or to the experiential taste (*dhawq*) of the Divine. Thus, the Sufi seeks to transcend the limitations of discursive thought in order to attain a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of God.

The Sufi epistemological method for attaining knowledge of the Divine rests upon a fundamental axiom: God is the ultimate Reality, and all other forms of existence derive their being from Him. The entire cosmos, therefore, serves as a mirror reflecting the attributes and names of God. To contemplate the world is not to search for proofs of God's existence, but to perceive the manifestations of the Divine within creation. This vision is encapsulated in the Sufi doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* ("Oneness of being"), which, though the subject of much controversy, essentially conveys a cosmological perspective that discerns the presence of God in all things.

2.Sufi Approaches to Reasoning for the Knowledge of God Almighty:

The Sufi paths of reasoning for the knowledge of God Almighty generally proceed from within outward. The journey begins with the purification and refinement of the self, which in turn opens the way to unveiling (*kashf*) and inspiration (*ilham*). Through this inner transformation, the Sufi perceives divine realities internally and subsequently recognizes their manifestations in the external world.

2.1. Unveiling (*Kashf*) and Inspiration (*Ilham*): Sources of Sufi Knowledge:

Unveiling (*kashf*) is defined as "*perceiving what lies beyond the veil of unseen meanings and ultimate realities in existence and witnessing them directly*". It typically occurs for those who have disciplined their souls until they are purified of sensory impurities, thereby enabling them to grasp hidden meanings, realities, and sciences inaccessible to rational thought. Inspiration (*ilham*), by contrast, is described as "*a form of knowledge cast into the heart, calling one to action without reliance on signs or the contemplation of proofs*"

Both unveiling and inspiration are regarded as the most significant sources of knowledge in Sufism, offering a direct path to perceiving divine realities, including the existence of God Almighty. Through sustained spiritual struggle and discipline, the Sufi attains a state of purity that allows for the reception of knowledge directly from God, without mediation by reason or the senses.

Al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 309/922) famously declared, “*Ana al-Haqq*” (“I am the Truth”). This statement, which provoked considerable controversy, is understood within Sufism as an expression of the highest levels of unveiling (*kashf*) and annihilation (*fana’*) in God. Al-Hallaj was not claiming divinity but articulating a state of self-annihilation in the True Reality. His utterance reflects the depth of an intuitive experience in which the Sufi perceives that their own existence has no independent reality apart from God, since all being subsists through the True Reality.

Most Sufis maintain that al-Hallaj’s words were not intended to signify literal union, but rather the complete annihilation of the self in God—a state where the servant, wholly immersed in divine love, perceives their essence only in relation to the True Reality. Thus, “*Ana al-Haqq*” is interpreted not as a rational proposition, but as an outpouring of inner experience at the peak of annihilation. Nevertheless, many Sufis contend that al-Hallaj erred in openly voicing such expressions, which could be misunderstood as doctrinal deviation from Shari’ah.

In a similar vein, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali argued that the light sparked by God into the heart is the key to most forms of knowledge, especially knowledge of God. He contended that to confine this unveiling to rational proofs is to place undue limits on the vast mercy of God

Ibn Arabi further developed this perspective, asserting that God’s command for humans to believe in Him implies that such knowledge must ultimately come from God Himself. While the Qur’an calls upon humanity to reflect and employ reason, Ibn Arabi interprets this as a call to return to God in all matters—affirming that intellect must remain subordinate to revelation. For him, the true aim of spiritual discipline is to purify the heart from attachments other than God, rendering it receptive to unveiling and inspiration. (Miftah)

He describes this higher mode of knowledge as follows: “When the intellects of those who believed in God Almighty realized that God had commanded them to know Him—after they had already come to know Him through theoretical proofs—they understood that there was another knowledge of God unattainable by intellectual reasoning. They therefore turned to spiritual discipline, seclusion, striving, severing attachments, solitude, and companionship with God through emptying the vessel and purifying the heart from the impurities of thought... For they had heard His words in the sacred Hadith: *‘If he walks his way toward Me, I will run my way toward him* (Al-Bukhari)

Despite his affirmation of unveiling, Ibn Arabi emphasized that any knowledge derived from unveiling or inspiration that contradicts the Islamic Law (Shari’ah) is to be rejected. As he states: “*Any knowledge from the path of unveiling or inspiration that contradicts a well-*

established law cannot be relied upon”. “For the spiritual heir of the Prophet does not bring forth a new law or abrogate an existing one; rather, he clarifies it, for he is upon a clear path from his Lord and possesses clear vision in his knowledge”. (Arabi)

For Sufis, then, unveiling and inspiration constitute essential avenues to attaining certain knowledge of God’s existence—knowledge that surpasses the speculative conclusions of reason. Through unveiling, the Sufi perceives divine realities with the eye of insight, witnessing the presence of God in every atom of creation. This witnessing is not a matter of intellectual assent but of immediate, lived experience, transforming the Sufi’s perception of all existence.

2.2. Spiritual Tasting(Dhawq) and Spiritual Experience: The Path of Certainty:

Because of the intrinsic relationship between unveiling (*kashf*) and spiritual tasting (*dhawq*), the two are inseparably intertwined—there is no unveiling without intuition, just as there is no intuition without unveiling. Intuition thus constitutes a central dimension of the Sufi approach to reasoning about the knowledge of God Almighty.

In the Sufi tradition, spiritual tasting(*dhawq*) in knowing God is described as “*a gnostic light that the Real casts, through His manifestation, into the hearts of His saints, enabling them to discern truth from falsehood without having acquired such knowledge from a book or any other source*” (Al-Qaysari) for “the folk of Intuition”—the Sufis themselves—they are those “*upon whom the manifestation of His light descends from the station of the spirit and the heart to the station of the self and its faculties, so that they perceive it as though through the senses and grasp it through direct intuition, until it even radiates from their faces*”. (Arabi)

From these definitions, intuition emerges as a distinctly Sufi epistemological category: knowledge that arises not from theoretical reasoning but from an inward, experiential process. The Sufis often liken it to tasting food: one who has not tasted a substance cannot truly know its flavor through description alone. In this sense, Ibn ‘Arabī made intuition the pathway to attaining the “science of states.” He writes: “*A rational person cannot define these states, nor establish any proof for knowing them whatsoever. It is like the knowledge of the sweetness of honey, the bitterness of patience, the delight of intimacy, or the passion and ecstasy of love and longing. None can know these sciences except by possessing and experiencing them firsthand*” (Al-Jurjani) The defining feature of such knowledge is that it can only be attained through intuition, and intuitive experiences differ according to the seeker’s preparedness. Just as things are known by their opposites, among the gnostics “things are distinguished by intuition.”

The intuitive experiences described by the Sufis are the fruit of inner struggle and exertion endured by the seeker on the path to God. They are realities “tasted” only after the heart has undergone spiritual purification. As al-Qāshānī (d. 736 AH) remarks: “*Know that the intuitive experiences to which the Sufis refer are sciences attainable only by one whose heart has been emptied of all attachments and impediments*” (Al-Qashani) Thus, the Sufi spiritual experience represents the cumulative outcome of spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) traversed by the seeker in pursuit of divine knowledge—including remembrance, seclusion, struggle, contemplation, and spiritual disciplines—until unveiling occurs or a divine light bestows upon them unshakable certainty.

In this sense, intuition in Sufism denotes knowledge derived from spiritual experience, as distinct from rational cognition. The Sufi “tastes” the sweetness of faith and the beauty of the divine presence. From this intuitive encounter arises certitude regarding the existence of God. When the great masters of Sufism emphasize the limitations of reason, it is not due to intellectual deficiency or incapacity to grasp rational argumentation. Rather, it stems from spiritual experience itself, which demonstrates that rational methods are ultimately incapable of providing decisive resolution to the problem of existence. A striking example is AbūḤāmid al-Ghazālī, who reflects: “*After I had completed the study of philosophy—mastering it, comprehending it, and refuting what required refutation—I realized that it too was insufficient to reach the ultimate goal, and that the intellect is not self-sufficient in encompassing all truths or in removing the veil from intractable problems*” For al-Ghazālī, intuitive sciences, which cannot be fully expressed in words but are perceived through intuition and witnessing, are superior to rational sciences. They disclose realities directly, without mediation.

Al-Ghazālī’s prioritization of intuitive sciences illustrates how Sufism provides an alternative epistemological path—one grounded in gnostic experience and spiritual intuition. The Sufi does not require external proofs to believe in or to know God; rather, God’s presence is realized within their spiritual experience, tasted in the heart, and confirmed through certainty. This certainty makes the Sufi perceive the Divine in all things. As Sufis generally affirm: “*Unveiling insight can grasp in a single moment what the intellect cannot attain, no matter how long or deeply it reflects*” (Fattah)

Thus, the Sufi spiritual experience is not a fleeting sentiment but an integrated methodology encompassing struggle, discipline, contemplation, remembrance, and retreat. Through these practices, the heart is purified and the soul clarified, enabling the Sufi to attain spiritual serenity and a direct perception of divine realities. This experience grounds the Sufi

approach to reasoning about the knowledge of God, where God's existence is not an abstract hypothesis but a lived and witnessed reality.

In the Sufi perspective, therefore, spiritual intuition and witnessing take precedence over rational speculation. They are regarded as the supreme and most reliable means of attaining certain knowledge of God Almighty.

2.3. Oneness of being: A Cosmological Perspective on Divine Proof:

In general, the philosophical concept of the Oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*), as presented in philosophical dictionaries, refers to the doctrine of those who equate God with the universe, claiming that everything is God. As reported by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī when citing the adherents of this view: "*There is nothing but what you see.*" However, the Sufi tradition—particularly the works of Ibn 'Arabī—actually points to a form of existential oneness in which, at a certain spiritual level, all created beings fade away and only the true existence of the Divine Essence remains.

This, however, does not imply any unification or ontological fusion between Creator and creation. Rather, it affirms the non-existence of creation in and of itself and the sole, absolute existence of the Creator—exalted be He. The existence of created beings is relative, contingent upon God's existence, and wholly dependent on Him. He alone is the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting, while creation exists only through Him. Were creation to subsist independently, it would imply self-sufficiency and separation from God, which is impossible, for all beings are in constant need of Him. (Youssef)

The notion of "Oneness of being" (*wahdat al-wujūd*), as articulated by Ibn 'Arabī, thus stands in sharp contrast to its purely philosophical formulation. He clearly distinguishes between God—utterly unique, without likeness, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, the Creator of all things, perfect in His attributes and beautiful in His names—and everything else, which is contingent, dependent, and limited. In discussing divine transcendence and immanence, Ibn 'Arabī emphasized that those who claim "*There is nothing but what you see have deviated from true realization, for they equated God with the universe and the universe with God, as though they were one and the same*" (Arabi, *The Book of Questions*, in *Ibn Arabi's Letters*, annotated by Muhammad Abd al-Karim al-Namri)

In this context, Ibn 'Arabī declares: "*Glory be to Him who manifested things while being their very essence*". This statement encapsulates the heart of his doctrine of the oneness of being. The enlightened Sufi perceives the Divine Reality (*al-Ḥaqq*) in all things, even as their

very ground of existence. Such perception does not mean that the created being is identical with the Creator. Rather, it signifies that the existence of created beings is derived from the Divine, and that the cosmos as a whole is a manifestation of God's names and attributes. Thus, when Ibn 'Arabī states that God is “the very essence of everything,” the meaning is that nothing subsists independently of Him: (Jahangiri) “*He, exalted be He, is the essence of all things in manifestation, yet He is not the essence of things in themselves; rather, He is He, and things are things*”. Elsewhere, he draws a sharp distinction: “*The Truth is the Truth, the human is a human, and the world is the world*”. Accordingly, the form of Oneness of being espoused by Ibn 'Arabī remains fully within the bounds of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). It affirms that “*the Divine Essence neither descends to the level of creation, nor unites with it, nor becomes its essence. Rather, the Truth remains the Truth and creation remains creation; the Manifest is the Manifest, and the manifestations are manifestations. Without the Divine Reality, the world—like a shadow—could not appear; and without the manifestation of the One, multiplicity would not exist*” (Arabi)

All realms of being, “*with their genera, species, and individuals, come forth from non-existence solely through God's existence. They persist at every moment only by His sustaining presence. If so, their existence at each instant is not their own, but a reflection of God's*” (al-Nabulsi). From the Sufi perspective, the cosmos and its phenomena are manifestations of the Divine Names. Every ruling, property, or attribute of a thing ultimately points to a Divine attribute, and every aspect of creation is connected to one or more of the Names of God. Thus, the entire universe functions as a mirror reflecting the multiplicity of divine self-disclosures: “*The world is the locus of diverse manifestations of the Divine Names, and every ruling concerning it necessarily refers back to them*” (Ajhar). Consequently, contemplating any aspect of existence becomes itself a proof of God's existence, for nothing subsists except through Him.

The doctrine of the oneness of being is therefore among the most distinctive and profound contributions of the Sufi tradition, particularly in Ibn 'Arabī's vision. Despite the controversies it has sparked, it represents a unique cosmological perspective for affirming God's existence. According to this doctrine, only God possesses true existence; all else is but a manifestation of His Names and Attributes.

Within the framework of Sufi reasoning, the oneness of being provides a comprehensive cosmological vision in which God is present in every moment and place—not as an identity with creation, but as its sustaining ground and ultimate reality. The cosmos is not merely a created realm detached from its Creator; it is a mirror reflecting His beauty and majesty. Thus, every phenomenon in existence becomes a sign and proof of the Divine—not in the sense of abstract rational argument, but as existential witnessing (*shuhūd*). The Sufi does not seek proofs

outside of existence, for existence itself, in its entirety, is a disclosure of the Truth, exalted be He.

2.4. Symbolic Proof: The Language of the Sufi Experience

The Sufi experience is marked by a unique depth—spiritual, existential, and cognitive—that resists straightforward articulation. By its very nature, it defies the ordinary capacity of language, for words falter when attempting to capture the subtleties of mystical perception and states of being. Thus, when Sufis seek to express what they witness inwardly, ordinary discourse becomes inadequate, and they turn instead to symbolic language.

In this symbolic register, the Sufi employs tangible images to communicate abstract and ineffable realities. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali illuminates this necessity when he remarks: “*Know that the wonders of the heart are beyond the perceptions of the senses... and what is not perceived by the senses is difficult for the intellect to grasp except through a tangible example*” (Al-Ghazali) The symbol, therefore, is not a mere ornament; it is an epistemic medium, almost inherent to the mystical mode of expression.

As Abu al-‘Ala Afifi observes, “*it is not impossible to convey the Sufi feeling through symbolism, (Afifi) for “symbolism works like magic; it does not address the intellect directly, except by stirring imagination and emotion, but it touches the heart immediately. Its effect deepens, and its meanings grow clearer with repetition*” The symbol functions, then, as a bridge between the ineffable interiority of mystical vision and the realm of human communication.

Sufi poetry and discourse abound with such symbolic language. “Wine” becomes a metaphor for divine love, the “cupbearer” for the spiritual guide, and the “tavern” for the Divine Presence itself. These are not casual poetic embellishments but hermeneutical devices through which profound experiences of the Divine are rendered communicable. In this way, symbolism constitutes a form of *proof*—not logical in the rationalist sense, but existential and experiential, affirming the reality of divine knowledge in an indirect yet no less profound manner.

Symbolic proof, therefore, reflects the very nature of the Sufi path: it embodies the tension between direct encounter with divine realities and the limitations of human speech. The Sufi, who directly beholds truths inaccessible to the intellect alone, is compelled to translate them through symbols and allusions. These symbols serve as keys, unlocking doors of understanding for those attuned to the mystical path, allowing them to glimpse realities that reason by itself cannot attain.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates—by way of response to the central problem posed in the introduction—that Sufi approaches to proving and knowing God are marked by a profound distinctiveness that transcends the conventional boundaries of rational and logical discourse. Whereas theologians and philosophers ground their arguments in rational demonstration, Sufis embark upon an existential and spiritual journey, where the reality of God is apprehended as a self-evident truth directly perceived by the heart and verified through spiritual tasting (*dhawq*). For them, divine existence is so manifest that it requires no proof; rational arguments serve, at best, as provisional aids for beginners who have yet to attain intuitive certainty, but they are not the ultimate means of realizing the Divine Reality. The Sufi path thus offers a distinctive and holistic vision of how the Divine is to be known.

The principal conclusions of this inquiry into the epistemological foundations of Sufi approaches to divine knowledge may be summarized as follows:

Primacy of Spiritual Experience over Rational Proof: The foremost conclusion concerns the Sufi insistence on privileging experiential knowledge over discursive reasoning. Figures such as al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn ‘Arabi, Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, and Ibn Ata’ Allah al-Sakandari consistently affirm that authentic knowledge of God does not arise from abstract argumentation but from direct spiritual experience, expressed in concepts such as *taste (dhawq)*, *unveiling (kashf)*, and *witnessing (shuhūd)*. This does not entail a negation of reason, but rather situates it within its proper limits: intellect remains a useful tool, yet one insufficient to penetrate the absolute truths of the Divine.

Existence as Mirror of Divine Manifestation: The Sufi worldview conceives of the cosmos as a theophany the manifestation of God’s names and attributes. Creation does not exist independently of the Creator; rather, it subsists through Him, deriving its being from His Being. This vision, articulated with particular clarity in Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of the “Oneness of being” (*wahdat al-wujūd*), transforms every particle of existence into a sign and testimony of the Divine. The enlightened mystic is thus one who perceives the Truth (*al-Haqq*) in and as the very essence of all things. This should not be misunderstood as an identification of Creator and creation; rather, it affirms that the created order has no existence save through God. In this existential vision, proof is no longer a process of logical inference but of contemplative witnessing, whereby the Divine is directly realized as the ground of all being.

Symbolic Language as the Vehicle of the Ineffable: Because the Sufi experience transcends the capacities of ordinary language, symbolism and allusion become indispensable. Poetry, metaphor, and symbolic utterance allow the mystic to convey truths inaccessible to abstract intellect. Such language is not ornamental but necessary: it is the only medium through which the unbounded may be intimated. Expressions like al-Hallaj’s “I am the Truth” (*ana al-Haqq*), though apparently transgressive when judged literally, must be understood as uttered from within the state of mystical annihilation in the Divine (*fanā’ fi al-Haqq*). They exemplify the need to penetrate beyond the literal surface of words in order to grasp their inner, symbolic meaning, which alone reveals the experiential core of Sufi proof.

In sum, the Sufi approach to knowing God is not grounded in the accumulation of rational demonstrations but in the immediacy of lived experience an existential witnessing in which God is encountered as the very reality of being. Divine existence is not posited as a proposition to be proven but unveiled as a truth to be realized by the heart. To appreciate this approach requires moving beyond superficial readings of Sufism and engaging its texts and practices on their own terms. In doing so, one gains access to a vision that opens new horizons for contemplating the relationship between the human being, the Divine, and the cosmos.

It is our hope that this study will contribute to opening new horizons for inquiry and contemplation within this profound dimension of Islamic thought. May it, moreover, serve as a foundation for further research that is both deeper and more comprehensive.

Bibliography

- Al-Qāshānī, L. a.-A.-I.-R.-S.-ā.-Q. (Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2005, Vol 2, p386.).
- Abdel BaqīMeftah, a.-H. a.-W.-K.-S.-A. , Irbid-Jordan: ‘Alam al-Kutub al-Hadith, 2013, p15.
- Abū al-‘Alā’ Afifī, a.-Ṭ. a.-T.-R.-I. (1st ed, al-Iskandariyya, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1963, p249.).
- Afifi, A. A.-A. Sufism: The Spiritual Revolution in Islam, 1st ed., Alexandria, Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1963.
- Ajhar, A. a.-H. Questioning the Two Scholars Ibn Arabi and Ibn Taymiyyah: From the Thought of Unity to the Thought of Difference, 1st ed., Casablanca, Arab Cultural Center, 2011.
- Al-Bukhari, S. a.-B. Chapter on the statement of Allah the Almighty: {And Allah warns you of Himself} [Al-Imran: 28] and His statement. Chapter on the Encouragement to Remember Allah, Hadith No. 2675, Vol. 4, p. 2061. In the Chapter on the Virtue of Remembrance, Supplication, and Drawing Closer to Allah the Almighty, Vol. 4, p. 2067. In the Book of Repentance, Chapter on the Encouragement.
- Al-Ghazali. The Revival of Religious Knowledge, Beirut, Dar Al-Ma'rifa (n.d.), vol. 3, p. 20. See also: Naji Hussein Joda, Sufi Knowledge.
- al-Ghazali, A. H. The Savior from Error, edited by: Abdul Halim Mahmoud. 2nd ed., Beirut, Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1985 AD.
- al-Iskandari, I. A. (2006). Lata'if al-Minan. 3rd ed., Cairo, Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Al-Jurjani. Kitab al-Ta'rifat. edited and introduced by Ibrahim al-Abyari (n.d.), Dar al-Rayyan for Heritage (n.d.).
- al-Nabulsi. Idah al-Maqsid min Ma'na Wahdat al-Wujud, edited and introduced by Sa'id Abd al-Fattah, 1st ed., Dar al-Afaq al-Arabiyya, 2003.
- Al-Qashani. Lata'if Al-A'lam fi Isharat Ahl Al-Ilham, edited by Ahmed Abdel Rahim Al-Sayeh and others, 1st ed., Cairo, Library of Religious Culture, 2005, vol. 2.
- Al-Qaysari. Sharh Fusus al-Hikam, edited by Ayatollah Hasan Hasanzadeh Amoli, 1st ed., Qom, Bostan Kitab Foundation (Islamic Media Office), 1424 AH, vol. 1.
- Al-Qaysarī, S. a.-Ḥ. (1424 H). ĀyatAllāhḤasanḤasanZādah al-Āmulī,, Arabi, I. he Meccan Revelations, vol. 3, p. 58. vol. 1.
- Arabi, I. Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyya, edited by Othman Yahya, First Volume.
- Arabi, I. Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya, edited by Othman Yahya, Cairo, Arab Library, 1972, fourth volume.
- Arabi, I. Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyya, read and introduced by Nawaf Al-Jarrah. 1st ed., Beirut, Dar Sadir 1424 AH - 2004 AD, vol. 3.

Arabi, I. (edited by: Abdul Fattah Saeed, 1st ed). The Book of Knowledge, within the Letters of Ibn Arabi (4). Beirut, Arab Diffusion Foundation, 2001 AD.

Arabi, I. The Book of Questions, in Ibn Arabi's Letters, annotated by Muhammad Abd al-Karim al-Namri.

Fattah, I. A. The Rise of Sufi Philosophy, 1st ed., Beirut, Dar Al-Jeel, 1993.

-Ibn 'Arabī, a.-F. a.-M.-Q.-M.-'. Arabiyya, 1972, Vol 4, pp321-322.

Ibn 'Arabī, K. a.-M.-F. Mu'assasat al-Intishār al-'Arabī, al-Intishār al-'Arabī: al-Intishār al-'Arabī.

Ibn 'Arabī, R. i.-ḍ.-K.-N. (2007). 1st ed, Bayrūt, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.

Jahangiri, M. Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, translated by Abd al-Rahman al-Alawi, 1st ed., Beirut, Dar al-Hadi, 2003.

Kitāb Akhbār al-Ḥallāj, t. (2006). Louis Massignon wa-Paul Kraus, , al-Takwīn li-l-Ṭibā'awa-l-Nashr. Dimashq.

Miftah, A.-B. The Great Existential Truths,. Damascus, Dar Al-Ninawa, 1434 AH - 2013 AD.

Youssef, M. A. Shams Al-Maghrib, 1st ed., Aleppo, Fassilat for Studies, Translation, and Publishing, 2006.