

# Spiritual Realization (*al-tahqīq*) through Daily Awakening<sup>1</sup>

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To begin with, I focused my research on the incidence and usage of the Arabic word *tahqīq*, or *tahaqquq*, although needless to say my investigations were not exhaustive. When we look through Islamic literature, we notice that during the first few centuries of Islam the word *tahqīq* does not appear as such in Sufi literature but was used much more by Arabic philologists, such as Sībawayh, or Islamic philosophers or theosophists (*falsafa*), such as The Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Safā*), Avicenna or Ibn Tufayl.<sup>2</sup> In these fields *al-tahqīq* was more to do with the wisdom that human beings may acquire during their lives through the enlightenment of the intellect ('*aql*).

It would appear that the first Sufis did not speak of *al-tahqīq* because they were actually in the process of living it. They were the living embodiment of the two divine Names, *Yā Haqq*, *Yā Mubīn* (O Real, O Evident); and we know how 'economical' the Sufi discourse of the early period was, which aimed at going direct to the essential and thus reduced it to its simplest form. And sometimes the meaning is present, but expressed with the use of a different word. As is the case with other Sufi topics, al-Junayd (d.911), the 'Leader of the Sufis' (*sayyid al-tā'ifa*), acted as a pioneer for those who came later, such as al-Ghazālī or Ibn 'Arabī. We know for instance this famous phrase: 'I have achieved *al-tahqīq* by staying in the presence of God for thirty years under these stairs', by which he meant the stairs of his house.<sup>3</sup>

1. First presented at the MIAS Symposium on 'Spiritual Realisation' held at Worcester College, Oxford, 5–6 May 2012.

2. L. Lewisohn, 'Iranian Sufism and Persianate Sufism', in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London, 1992), p.41.

3. Quoted in some Sufi handbooks, such as al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*.

## AL-TAHQĪQ AS 'REALIZATION OF THE REAL'

Spiritual realization implies that you investigate all the levels of Reality (*Haqīqa*), from the highest to the most humble, or from the most humble to the highest, as reported in this Quranic verse: 'Indeed God disdains not to use examples [to teach humankind], not even that of a mosquito, or anything higher.'<sup>4</sup> This means that – from a metaphysical rather than a moral point of view – you should 'verify' the rightness or wrongness of each thing or being, and that you should verify the reality or unreality of each thing or being in the universal Manifestation, so that you can give each thing or being its *haqq*, this rather dense word often used by the Prophet which means simultaneously truth, right, due, etc. Once again this is not a moral question. As Ibn 'Arabī says in Chapter 165 of *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, which deals with the inner knowledge of *al-tahqīq*, it is a matter of consciousness and lucidity: you are a *muhaqqiq* as long as you are aware of the metaphysical rightness of each level of reality, including being aware of the wrongness (*khata'*, *mukhālata*), or the falseness (*bātil*), as for instance in the case of a mirage (*sarāb*). All these are in fact self-disclosures of *al-Haqq (tajalliyāt)*. God shows to His creatures and brings to their mind what He wishes.<sup>5</sup>

But here lies the complexity of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings: indeed, for the one who has realized or verified the Real, 'there is absolutely no falseness (*bātil*) in existence, and all existence is true (*haqq*); falseness (*bātil*) is an allusion to nothingness ('*adam*').<sup>6</sup> The *muhaqqiq* has gone through the cosmic illusion, but who is concerned? As for the wayfarer (*sālik*), he needs to start investigating from duality, even if he has had the taste of (*dhawq*) Unicity from time to time: it is somehow a matter of spiritual politeness or convention with God (*adab*). Furthermore,

4. Q.2:26.

5. *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* (Beirut, Dār Sādir), II:267–269; see also *Fut.* IV:184.

6. *Mawāqif al-nujūm*, quoted by Su'ād al-Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfi* (Beirut, 1981), p.338.

Sufi shaykhs and saints have often expressed this ambiguity of spiritual realization, which led them to perplexity (*hayra*). This is why the Algerian shaykh Ahmad al-‘Alāwī (d.1934), commenting on the prayer of the Prophet: ‘I seek refuge in You from You’ (*a‘ūdhu bika minka*), affirms that the supreme aim of *al-tahqīq* lies in this very sentence.<sup>7</sup> ‘He is with you wherever you are’;<sup>8</sup> this verse is usually interpreted by theologians as ‘He is with you through His knowledge’. On this issue Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī quotes Ibn ‘Arabī, stating that this interpretation is more suitable to exoteric conventions (*adab*), but the understanding that ‘He is with you by His essence’ is more suitable to spiritual realization (*tahqīq*). Formal *adab* commands that you should remain in a state of duality, while *tahqīq* demands that you are entirely immersed in Unicity.<sup>9</sup>

Then, by metaphysical evidence, spiritual realization would consist of establishing that there is no real being but the Real Being (*al-wujūd al-haqq*: that is, God),<sup>10</sup> and that which is not God or the Real is mere illusion (*wahm*). Without any compromise Ibn Sab‘īn (d.1270) goes further, expressing the same doctrine in terms of ‘absolute Unicity’ (*al-wahda al-mutlaqa*), as in his famous axiom: ‘God alone’ (*Allāh faqat*).<sup>11</sup> Shaykh al-‘Alāwī writes in a poem:

Seek for the authentic Real (*al-haqq al-haqīqī*)  
Creatures are mere nonexistence (‘*adam*)  
There is only He by verification (*tahqīq*).<sup>12</sup>

We should know that illusion is generated by our own veiling, and that we need to be awakened from this illusion. In this sense, Ibn ‘Arabī often quotes the famous saying attributed

7. *Al-Minah al-quddūsiyya fī sharh al-Murshid al-mu‘īn bi-tarīq al-sūfiyya* (Beirut, 1986), p.162. This text is known as ‘*al-Minah al-quddūsiyya*’.

8. Q.57:4.

9. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, *mawqif* no. 132.

10. *Fut*.IV:263.

11. Abū l-Wafā’ al-Taftāzānī, *Ibn Sab‘īn wa falsafatu-hu al-sūfiyya* (Beirut, 1973), pp.191, 252.

12. This poem (*qasīda*) begins with *Udhkur Allāh yā rafīqī*; see *Dīwān al-shaykh al-‘Alāwī* (Mostaganem, 1993), p.20.

either to the Prophet or to Imam ‘Alī: ‘People are asleep, and it is only when they die that they awaken’.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, we have to be mindful of what is meant by awakening, and to live it in our hearts, in our bones, and in our flesh.

This is the operative and introspective alchemy which al-Junayd refers to when he says that the spiritual Path is based on an individual’s trials and suffering (*al-balā’*). *Al-tahqīq* is therefore a dangerous path, and so tends to be the reserve of spiritual heroes (who are called *fatā*, literally ‘young man’, in the Islamic tradition). It is for this reason that Ibn ‘Arabī retains the use of the term ‘Verifiers’ (*muhaqqiqūn*) for the highest category of the friends of God,<sup>14</sup> including himself. In the same way, he contrasts *tahqīq* with *taqlīd* (servile imitation),<sup>15</sup> as the imitator (*al-muqallid*) prefers to ‘follow’ someone else’s authority rather than actually undertaking the great adventure of spiritual *jihād* himself! However, the wayfarer on the Path (*sālik*) needs a spiritual guide in the process of *tahqīq*,<sup>16</sup> someone who helps him to realize his own illusion and the radical illusion of the phenomenal world. But we should specify here that the Sufi master has to be considered, above all, as a mirror of oneself rather than an external authority.

At this stage, human consciousness should adopt practical methods such as unveiling (*kashf*), as emphasized by Ibn ‘Arabī. Unveiling is very often associated with spiritual realization in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings and those of other Sufis;<sup>17</sup> that is why the Shaykh al-Akbar uses the expression ‘people of unveiling and realization’ (*ahl al-kashf wa l-tahqīq*).<sup>18</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī also refers to

13. William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, henceforth *SPK* (Albany, NY, 1989), p. 119.

14. *Ibid.* p. 389.

15. *Ibid.* p. 166.

16. *Al-Minah al-quddūsiyya*, p. 214; see also Eric Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Egypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels* (Institut Français d’Etudes Arabes de Damas, Damascus & Paris, 1995), p. 192; <http://ifpo.revues.org/2342>.

17. See for instance Lewisohn, *Legacy*, pp. 41, 386.

18. See for instance James W. Morris, *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn ‘Arabi’s Meccan Illuminations* (Louisville, KY,

the 'people of unveiling and finding' (*ahl al-kashf wa l-wujūd*).<sup>19</sup> The correspondence between *tahqīq* and *wujūd* is absolutely relevant, as the term *wujūd* comes from the Arabic verb *wajada*, which means 'to find'. So you only realize what you have found as being. Shaykh al-'Alāwī states in a poem that he found himself after a process he does not name here as *tahqīq* but as *iqrār*:

I was before the 'iqrār' veiled from my being –  
You [the People of God: *Ahl Allāh*] were with me in  
the house but I did not know.<sup>20</sup>

He found himself in his inner self, but he did not know that he was here for until that time he had not given himself his own spiritual due (*haqq*).

#### FROM SERVANTHOOD TO FREEDOM

Once we have realized in ourselves that everything is vain or false (*bātil*) except Him, we cannot do anything but worship Him; this is what they call 'ubūdiyya'<sup>21</sup> ('ontological submissiveness or servanthood'). As with the Prophet Abraham in the Quran, we verify that we cannot worship what is evanescent. At this moment we practise the simple and humble worship ('ubūdiyya) of the 'Blameworthy' (*al-Malāmiyya*), according to Akbarian terminology.<sup>22</sup> This means that the *Haqīqa*, the ultimate Reality, becomes for us transparent, diaphanous, translucent, in the *Sharī'a* itself, so that gnosis should be understood as complete obedience to *Sharī'a*.<sup>23</sup> In other words, as al-Sulamī (d.1021), who is considered the spiritual translator of the *Malāmiyya*,

2005), p. 60; Chittick, *SPK*, p. 166.

19. *Fut.* II:186, 190, 234, etc.

20. *Dīwān al-shaykh*, p. 68, in a poem which begins with *Yā sāsā'iq al-afkār...*

21. See for instance al-Junayd: S. al-Hakīm, *Tāj al-'Ārifīn al-Junayd al-Baghdādī* (Cairo, 2004), p. 109.

22. Chittick, *SPK*, p. 389.

23. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Un Océan sans rivage* (Paris, 1992), p. 135.

puts it: '*al-tahqīq fī l-Sharī'a huwa l-Haqīqa*': 'Realization in the divine Law is the ultimate Reality'.<sup>24</sup>

Shaykh Khaled Bentounes (1949–), the current spiritual guide of the *tarīqa* 'Alāwiyya, emphasizes that in Islamic teaching, *al-'ubūdiyya* (servanthood) precedes *al-nubuwwa* (prophecy). For example, in this Quranic verse: 'And recall Our servants (*'ibāda-nā*) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, people endowed with mighty faith and full insight',<sup>25</sup> and in this well-known formula of the 'prayer on the Prophet': *Allāhumma salli 'alā Sayyidinā Muhammad 'abdika wa rasūlika*: 'O my God, pray on our lord Muhammad, Your servant and Your messenger'.<sup>26</sup>

Shaykh Bentounes notes that this state of 'servant' (*'abd*) 'may give the impression of being reserved for an elite degree of initiates, given that it refers to the highest degree of spiritual realization'. But he adds that 'this disregards the divine Mercy which makes it attainable by everyone. This inexhaustible energy is like a heavy rain constantly falling without preference upon every creature'.<sup>27</sup>

It is necessary to realize that God is the one and only real existent, and it is He who leads you to the pure and exclusive worship, at the same time as setting you free, and liberating you from all illusions, and from false idols. These idols, as much in former times as in the modern age, may be part of your ego, your nation, your religion, and even your Sufism, your Sufi brotherhood (*tarīqa*), and perhaps even your own Ibn 'Arabī... 'In the realization of worship lies perfect freedom (*hurriyya*)', says an ancient Sufi quoted by al-Sulamī.<sup>28</sup> According to al-Junayd, the last station (*maqām*) of the Gnostic is spiritual freedom.<sup>29</sup> Shaykh Bentounes today shares the same perspective, when he

24. Jean-Jacques Thibon, *L'Oeuvre d'Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī et la formation du soufisme* (Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), Damascus, 2009), p. 342.

25. Q.38:45.

26. Shaykh Khaled Bentounes, *Thérapie de l'âme* (Paris, 2009), p. 115.

27. Ibid. p. 118.

28. Al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-sūfiyya* (Aleppo, 1986), p. 104.

29. Al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī, *Al-Luma' fī l-tasawwuf*, edited by R. A. Nicholson (Leiden, 1914), p. 450.

states that ‘*‘ubūdiyya* is the station of the emancipated ones; it embodies the man who has been liberated from all the different forms of negative temptations (power, money, honours, etc.) and who acts in accordance with the divine will’.<sup>30</sup>

Power, money, honours: let us remember Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, who freed himself from speculative theology, from a mundane reputation, and from the influence of doubt, by passing through an all-pervasive crisis. This crisis led him to his own *tahqīq* on the Sufi path. Everyone is a distinct individual with his own free will, so each spiritual realization differs one from another. However that may be, the people of God (*ahl Allāh*) know each other, and their level of *tahqīq* does not concern us...

#### FROM METAPHYSICS TO ETHICS: THE ‘TWO-EYED MAN’

As I mentioned above, the giving to each thing or existent its own *haqq* – that which is its truth, its right or due – does not imply *a priori* a moral consideration. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the *muhaqqiq*, the one who is experiencing an expansion of consciousness, is well aware of what is happening at every level of reality: social, psychological and physical... We should not forget that the term *al-Haqīqa* means truth or rightness as well as reality. In his book *The Reflective Heart* James Morris emphasizes the ‘necessary interplay of spiritual realization and right action’ in Ibn ‘Arabī’s point of view,<sup>31</sup> and the same assessment can be made for other Sufis. This attention to that which is the rightful due (*haqq*) of each creature finds its origin in the Muhammadian model (*Sunna*), as is pointed out in several *hadīth*. In this field, as in others, Ibn ‘Arabī and the great Sufis are undoubtedly Muhammad’s heirs or inheritors (*al-wārith al-muhammadī*).

Indeed the challenge for the *muhaqqiq* is to see simultaneously both the Single Reality and the Truth (*Haqq*), as well as the

30. Bentoune, *Thérapie de l’âme*, pp.115–16.

31. Morris, *Reflective Heart*, p.116.

multiplicity and complexity of creatures (*khalq*). Embodying the universal Mercy (*Rahma*), the *muhaqqiq* experiences in himself every state of consciousness that creatures experience: from the very best to the worst, from the most true to the most false. Ibn 'Arabī says: 'What is meant by *al-tahqīq* is the science of what each thing deserves,<sup>32</sup> whether existent or nonexistent; even to falseness he [the *muhaqqiq*] gives its right, or due'.<sup>33</sup> The author of *Latā'if al-i'lām*, who, as Pablo Beneito has established,<sup>34</sup> is not al-Qāshānī but Ibn Tāhir, devoted an entry in his book to '*al-tahqīq*', in which he writes that the *muhaqqiq* should not be absorbed in God to the exclusion of creatures, nor be veiled from God by creatures, because 'he would miss the Real/God insofar as he ignores the creatures'.<sup>35</sup> Therefore 'the one who realizes (*sāhib al-tahqīq*) does not affirm the world as do the veiled persons (*ahl al-hijāb*), and he does not deny it as do those who are totally immersed in God'.<sup>36</sup> We may observe that al-Qāshānī, to whom the *Latā'if al-i'lām* was first attributed, describes the same reality: 'The *muhaqqiq* is neither veiled by the Real/God from creatures, nor by creatures from God'.<sup>37</sup>

Sufis also express this in terms of 'the two-eyed man' (*dhū l-'aynayn*): with his 'right' eye, or interior eye, he sees Unicity, and with his 'left' eye, or exterior eye, he sees the phenomenal world in its multiplicity. Stabilized both in Unicity and multiplicity, he has a view of reality in relief, a unifying view of reality, as the vision of the one eye does not conceal that of the other. It is known that the Prophet Muhammad described the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*) as being one-eyed. According to this

32. *Yastahiqqu*: this verb comes from the same root as *haqq* or *taḥqīq*, meaning, to claim its right, or due.

33. *Fut.*II:268.

34. 'An Unknown Akbarian of the Thirteenth-Fourteenth Century', *Number 3 of ASAFAS special papers* (Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS), Kyoto University, 2000).

35. *Latā'if al-i'lām fī ishārāt ahl al-ilhām* (Cairo, 1996), I, p. 315.

36. *Ibid.* p. 316.

37. *Istilāhāt al-sūfiyya* (Cairo, 1981), p. 156.

perspective, Muslims might or should follow the Muhammadian path in order to realize this synthesis.<sup>38</sup>

In Sufi terminology *al-baqā'* means 'subsistence in God' while living fully in the world: so is this any different from 'the two-eyed man'? We know that Sufis apply this part of the following celebrated *hadīth qudsī* to *al-baqā'*: '... Then when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks'. In the station of *fanā'* (annihilation), man cannot see anyone else but God; in *baqā'*, he sees Him in everything. This is precisely what Ibn 'Arabī alludes to, when he writes: 'For the one who owns this station (*sāhib hādihā l-maqām*) the Real/God should be his hearing, his sight, his hand and his foot and all the abilities provided to him, so he behaves only by *haqq*, in *haqq* and for *haqq*':<sup>39</sup> here I have intentionally chosen to keep the Arabic word *haqq*. A little further on Ibn 'Arabī explains this experience of universal consciousness which leaves no place for ostracism, intolerance, prejudice, or any kind of judgement on others: 'He (*al-muhaqqiq*) is the one who sees his Lord in every belief, in every essence, in every form.'<sup>40</sup>

From metaphysics to ethics: through his agreement to God acting in him as God wishes, he realizes his ontological submissiveness or servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*), while at the same time he serves humankind.

## IMMEDIACY OF SPIRITUAL REALIZATION

We are now, according to the terminology of René Guénon (d.1951), talking about the process of 'descending realization': from metaphysics to practice and everyday life... Sufism is not a philosophy, but a *praxis*, a 'tasting' (*dhawq*): *Man dhāqa 'arafa*: 'Only the one who tastes can know'. Keeping in mind many of the historic and contemporary debates within the Sufi milieu

38. Eric Geoffroy, *L'Islam sera spirituel ou ne sera plus* (Paris, 2009), p. 95 (English translation forthcoming).

39. *Fut.* II:268.

40. *Ibid.*

about whether it is possible or not to obtain spiritual realization merely by reading the works of Ibn ‘Arabī, the Shaykh al-Akbar himself points out that gnosis (*ma‘rifa*) is an initiatory path, ‘which can be actualized only through practice (*‘amal*), godfearingness (*taqwā*) and wayfaring (*sulūk*)’. This operative knowledge, ‘which derives from a verified unveiling which is not seized by darkening’ is for him obviously in contrast to mental reflection (*al-nazar al-fikrī*).<sup>41</sup>

Since *al-tahqīq* means in fact to ‘realize the Real’ (*tahqīq al-Haqq*) in oneself, it leads *a priori* to ‘realize the Real’ at each moment, in every spatio-temporal context, for each instant testifies to the presence of God, and each context testifies to His will. Here we can see that Sufism is in phase with today’s reality: is Sufism anything other than trying to live each instant (*waqt*) in the divine – or at least spiritual – Presence?

The aim of the Sufi is to be ‘the son of the instant’ (*ibn al-waqt*), or ‘the son of his time’ (*ibn waqtihi*), which echoes the Quranic allusion: ‘Each day He is upon some task’.<sup>42</sup> Without considering the past or the future, the realized one observes the effect of the divine Presence in the ‘here and now’, whatever form this Presence may take. A *hadīth qudsī* warns: ‘Don’t insult time, for God is time!’ Thus every time or instant is the time of God, and the trace of His wisdom. One current Sufi shaykh says that materialists have realized that ‘time is money’, but Sufis have not. Commenting on the Moroccan Sufi Ahmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d.1809), Jean-Louis Michon remarks accurately that

What may vary along the centuries is not the content, the *haqīqa*, of the doctrine of Sufism, but the way of realizing it (*tahqīq*) and explaining it (*ta‘rīf*); these two modalities constitute the ‘path’ or the spiritual method, the *tarīqa*. Hence the Sufi saying, according to which: ‘Reality is one, but the ways of realization are many’ (*al-haqīqa wāhida wa l-turuq kathīra*).<sup>43</sup>

41. *Fut.* II:316.

42. *Q.* 55:29.

43. J.-L. Michon, *Le soufi marocain Ahmad Ibn ‘Ajība et son Mi‘rāj* (Paris, 1973), p. 160.

The consciousness that immediacy (instantaneity) is the trace of God's wisdom 'here and now' is no doubt a main source of continuous awakening. Ibn 'Arabī's teaching that self-disclosure never repeats itself (*lā takrār fī l-tajallī*) is particularly relevant in our time of computer revolution, perpetual change and 'time acceleration'. Such a consciousness should lead us to more simplicity about our human experience of spiritual realization, to more care of pedagogy towards others, and to more humility, which is precisely the experience of the 'Blameworthy' (*al-Malāmiyya*).