

On the End of the Mystical Journey: Ibn Arabi and Adi Śankara

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Abstract

This paper will compare two of the most prominent mystics of Islam and Hinduism on what may be called the “end of the mystical journey,” or *mokṣa* in Hindu spirituality and *fanā* in Islamic mysticism. The interpretations of these two mystics are naturally developed according to their own epistemological and ontological bases. Thus, referring to their most significant principles of thought, the author has tried to examine three aspects of those concepts, i.e., the nature of *mokṣa* and *fanā*, how these states can be attained, and whether or not religious obligations still need to be practiced after they have been attained. Having compared and summed up *mokṣa* and *fanā* within the above contexts, the author has shown some striking similarities and considerable differences between them, both in their principles and in the three above aspects relating to their nature, attainment and obligations.

Keywords: *fanā* (annihilation), *baqa'* (subsistence) after *fanā*, *mokṣa*, *jivanmukti*, and the abolition of obligation.

Both Ibn Arabi and Adi Śankara are two prominent monist mystics within two different schools of Islam and Hinduism respectively. Not only have they left invaluable works on the principles of their ideologies, known in Islam as theoretical mysticism, but they were also people of spiritual wayfaring and of mystical experiences and stations. In Hindu

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mysticism, the end of the spiritual journey is usually referred to as *mokṣa* (lit. to release or let loose; normally translated as liberation), which is the ultimate ideal for all Hindu mystical and religious schools. Hindu scholars and mystics, however, have different interpretations of this final aim, with different prerequisites and results which significantly depend on their ontological and epistemological principles. We may come across dissimilar versions of *mokṣa* even within the same school or *darśana*. A celebrated case of this issue can be seen in the school of *Vedānta* which introduces three different accounts of *mokṣa* - the most important of which comes from Śankara, who was the most eminent intellectual of the absolute unity school or “*Advaitā Vedānta*.” In Islamic mysticism and theosophy, this ultimate goal is construed as *fanā* (annihilation or absorption). Despite their description of *fanā* through a set of common characteristics, Muslim mystics have given different accounts of the concept, and have spoken of its different grades. One of the most eminent monist Muslim mystics who has discussed *fanā* is Ibn Arabi, the founder of theoretical mysticism. While studying Śankara’s theory of *mokṣa* and Ibn Arabi’s concept of *fanā*, we may come across some considerable points of similarity and difference between the two mystics. In what follows, I will go on to deal with the issue in its three dimensions: the definitions of *mokṣa* and *fanā*, how they can be achieved, i.e., the phases of the mystical journey, and the consequences of such a station - particularly whether mystics at this station can be exempt from their religious duties, which has been a prolonged dispute among scholars of the two traditions.

1. Bases

Adi Śankara, the founder of *Kevalādvaita* (the school of absolute unity), emphasizes in all of his works that “... only unity is the supreme truth.”² When we ponder the things around us, we notice their continuous change

2. Śankara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, I 1.1.

and their mingling and interaction with the categories of time and place. This shows that they are unstable and dependent in their very essence which in turn demonstrates the existence of one absolute unity which maintains its unique entity through all those various manifestations.

Having referred to a handful of phrases from the Upanishads, such as “This whole world has that as its soul. That is reality. That is *Ātman*,”³ “Being (*Sat*), one only without a second,”⁴ “Aught else than Him is wretched,”⁵ and similar phrases from Hindu holy scriptures, Śankara draws the conclusion that it is only the Absolute that really exists and other things are mere manifestations; therefore distinctions and differences are the results of *nāma* (name), *rūpa* (form) and *upādhi* (any limiting thing), which are the consequences of *māyā* or cosmological illusion, namely *avidyā* or ignorance. This unique truth is not only imperceptible, indefinable, and indescribable but also unreachable through reasoning and argument. This truth, Śankara holds, is *nirguna Brahman* (निर्गुण ब्रह्म, the supreme reality without form, quality or attribute), and is of the nature of *sat* (being), *cit* (cognition), *ānanda* (joy and bliss), and which can only be known through negative phrasing.

Our real self, he says, or the deepest part of our existence - which he calls *Ātman* - is radically different from our other aspects, such as our body or psyche. Like *Brahman*, it is of the nature of *sat* (existence), *cit* (cognition), *ānanda* (joy and bliss). In other words, the real selves of human beings and *Brahman* are consubstantial. Referring to the celebrated phrases of the Upanishads, which have been emphasized by the *Brahmanic* character of *Ātman* and *Brahman*, Śankara expresses this doctrine as his most significant one: “*Tat Tvam Asi*”⁶ (That art thou) and “*Sarvam Idam*

3. *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI, 15.3.

4. *Ibid.*, VI, 2.1.

5. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, III, 4.2.

6. *Ch. Up.*, VI, 9.4.

Brahma”⁷ (This whole world is *Brahman*). Accordingly, the deepest part of our existence is of the same essence as the universe.⁸ Śankara likens the relation between *Ātman* and *Brahman* to the relation between a ray and fire, a river and a sea, or the space of a container and universal space.⁹ To know that *Ātman* is identical with *Brahman* is to know that the supposed duality between the real self and *Brahman* comes from ignorance; this is the key for deliverance and the culmination of knowledge. “He who has realized that he is the very *Brahman* would never belong to this transient world like before.”¹⁰

Ibn Arabi, in his school of thought, analyzes everything - whether speaking about Allah, human beings or the world itself - according to existence and its modes and affairs. As set forth by him on many occasions, real existence is the Truth:

He is the origin of all origins and that is Allah, because these grades [beings] came into appearance by Him and these entities are determined by Him.¹¹

As such, this entity is beyond name, description, absoluteness, condition, particularity or generality; it is at the highest simplicity and unity, unattainable, beyond perception, and is pure good. So within the world of existence, there is only one true entity, which is the very Truth. This pure Truth or pure Existence, however, has different modes, affairs, and manifestations which constitute all beings of the universe whether material or incorporeal. Accordingly, the plurality of all beings in the universe is not but different modes and manifestations of that unique identical Truth, i.e., they are construed as the plurality of Names and infinite perfections of Allah Almighty.

7. Ibid., III, 14. 1.

8. See Śankara, op. cit., I. 2. 8; I. 3. 19; Rādhākṛishnan and Charles A. Moore, A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, p.507.

9. Śankara, op. cit., I. 1. 5.

10. Ibid., I. 1. 4.

١١ . هو اصل الأصول و هو الله، إذ به ظهرت هذه المراتب و تعينت هذه الحقائق (ابن عربي، فتوحات المكية، ج ٢، ص ٣٠٩).

Existence is not but the very Truth [identical with the Truth], there is nothing in it except for Him...then within existence nothing appeared except for the Truth, thus existence is the Truth and He is unique.¹²

Although he holds existence to be a single identical truth, Ibn Arabi considers its manifestations to be various and to comprise different grades. The universalities of these grades are those which are known in his school as the Five Presences, which, according to some commentators such as al-Qunawi, are as follows: the First Presence, including the grade of Absolute Unity and of Plural Unity; the Second Presence or the World of Pure Spirits; the Third Presence or the World of Images; the Fourth Presence or the World of Nature; and the Fifth Presence or the World of Perfect Man. Every one of the grades of existence or beings is the epiphanic form of one of the Divine Names, while the Perfect Man is the theophanic form of all His Names, or the All-Embracing Name. Thus, we may consider beings from two points of view, one with regard to their origin, essence, and existence, according to which they may be called Truth:

The essence and nature of the universe is the All-Merciful Breath within [through] which the forms of the world have appeared. Thus the whole world, as to its essence and nature, is noble and there is no difference in that.¹³

The other point of view is in regard to their forms or how they appear in the world, by which they are limited and various, and may be called creatures:

Everything that we perceive is the *wujūd* (being) of the Real within the entities of the possible things. In respect of the He-

٢١. إذ الوجود ليس غير عين الحق، فما في الوجود شيء سواه، ... فما ظهر في الوجود إلا الحق، فالوجود الحق هو واحد (Ibid., pp.516-517)

pp.452-453)

ness of the Real, it is his *wujūd*, but in respect of the diversity of the forms within it, it is the entities of the possible things...¹⁴

2. What is *Mokśa* and *Fanā* ?

Śankara and “*Mokśa*.” Similar to other Hindu scholars, Śankara says the aim of theoretical contemplations and practical asceticism is to reach *mokśa* or salvation which gives rise to the deliverance of human beings from the pains of repeated lives and the fetters of *samsāra*, or transmigration of the soul, and from the imposition of the inevitable rule of *karma*. This need, in Śankara’s view, can only be met through knowing *Brahman*.

The complete comprehension of *Brahman* is the highest end of man, since it destroys the root of all evil such as *avidya*, the seed of the entire *samsāra*.¹⁵

Such knowledge implies the identity of the Self and *Brahman*, and that is the key to salvation, which in more precise phrasing is called *mokśa* or deliverance. *Mokśa* may, therefore, be defined as knowing the identity of the Self and *Brahman*. As implied here, this event, referred to in Śankara’s works as non-dual realization (absolute monism), is not an ontological change but rather an epistemological one happening within the perception of the wayfarer by means of which he becomes aware of his true self which had previously been buried by the shroud of ignorance. In his introduction to the *Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad*, Śankara stipulates that “the non-dual realization [that *Ātman* is identical with *Brahman*] is a mere mental modification.”¹⁶

This true self, in Śankara’s ideology, is identical with *Brahman* or the Absolute Truth, which is usually referred to as “the transcendent Self” (*Paramātmān*). Therefore, the identity of the Self with *Brahman*,

١٤ . فكل ما تدركه فهو وجود الحق في أعيان الممكنات. فمن حيث هوية الحق هو وجوده، و من حيث اختلاف الصور فيه هو أعيان الممكنات (Ibn Arabi, *Fusus-u al-Hikam*, *Fass of Yusuf*, p.104).

15. Śankara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, I. 1, p.14.

16. Śankarācārya, *Commentary on Chandogya Upanishad*, p.5-6.

the knowing of which is *mokśa* or absolute freedom, is not a new state of affairs achieved by the wayfarer, rather it is the knowing of what has already been there, an essential characteristic of the individual buried by the shroud of ignorance or negligence. The analogy proposed is that of a prince who was missing and detached from his royal family and grew up as a hunter unaware of his royal heritage and the royal blood in his veins; however, at last, he realizes the truth. While detecting the truth may not change him into someone else, it makes him know what he really is.¹⁷

Our true Self is like that prince who, in the commotion of material life, has confused his true Self with his body and its accompanying matters and instincts, while ignorant of his true and divine nature. As soon as we discover the truth, all previous illusions fade away, and the Self “appears with his own form.”¹⁸

Another analogy we can use to explain the difference between identity with *Brahman* as a new ontological event and identity with *Brahman* as an epistemological change is the difference between a solar eclipse and a lunar eclipse. In the case of a lunar eclipse, the light of the sun does not reach the moon because of the earth standing between them. A change in the event of a lunar eclipse is indeed a real change in the position of the moon in order for it to receive light from the sun in the darkness. In a solar eclipse, however, the case is different; the light of the sun continuously shines before and after the eclipse. We cannot see the light of the sun, simply because of the moon’s position between the sun and the earth. A change in solar eclipse is not a real change in the position of the sun or of its light, rather it is the removal of the sight of the moon, which is an obstacle that does not let us see the light of the sun. *Mokśa*, in Śankara’s ideology, is similar to the latter case; what a wayfarer needs is merely the removal of the obstacles and veils which

17. Śankarācārya, Commentary on Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, II. 1. 20, p.210; Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy, p.378.

18. Ch. Up.VIII, 12.3.

do not let us see the truth and which is nothing but our own selves. In *Brahma Sutra*, the situation is stated thus:

“(On the soul’s) having entered (into the highest light), there is manifestation (of its own nature.”

In his commentary on this phrase, Śankara writes:

It manifests itself through its Self, not through any other attribute.¹⁹

Referring to some phrases from the Upanishads, Śankara describes the opposite state before *Mokṣa* as follows:

Seemed to have become blind...seemed to be weeping...
seemed to have undergone destruction.²⁰

In such a state of achieving unity, or, more accurately, realizing the unity with *Brahman*, all pluralities fade away in the mind of the wayfarer, who is thus liberated from all kinds of miseries and pains of this world, the consequences of ignorance and its various limitations. The Self manifests itself in its true features as identical with the essential features of *Brahman*, i.e., *sat* (pure existence), *cit* (pure cognition), *ānanda* (pure joy and bliss), and all other things disappear as illusions.²¹ As mentioned before, the preparation for this state is to know *Brahman*. At the beginning of its occurrence, this is a state of knowledge of such strong quality and power that it annihilates everything as soon as it appears. Because knowledge is based on the distinction of the knower from what is known, this very state of knowledge itself disappears. What remains is only the absolute infinite *Brahman* who glitters in his true light. It is thus said that it is just like a flare which may set a whole city or forest on fire, destroying them while perishing itself. In its last phase, the knowledge of *Brahman* would annihilate this phenomenal world while at the same time perishing itself.²²

19. Śankarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, IV. 4. 1.

20. *Ibid.*, I. 4. 2.

21. See Dāsgupta, S., *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol.I, p.491; Śankarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, IV. 4. 2.

22. See Dāsgupta, *loc. cit.*

This knowledge, Śankara holds, may be achieved through various means and by different methods and conditions in this life or another. However, when it is obtained, it contains no grade, intensity or moderation:

The state of final release is nothing but *Brahman*, and *Brahman* cannot be connected with different forms...Nor does, in reality, knowledge admit of lower or higher; for it is, in its own nature, high only, and would not be knowledge at all if it were low. Although therefore knowledge may differ in so far as it originates after a long or short time, it is impossible that release should be distinguished by higher or lower degree. And from the absence of difference of knowledge also there follows absence of definite distinction on the part of the result of knowledge (viz. release).²³

Ibn Arabi and Annihilation

Fanā (annihilation) and *baqā* (subsistence), in Ibn Arabi's ideology, as in the majority of Sufi thought, are the ultimate end of the mystical journey. These two concepts, Ibn Arabi says, are two sides of the same coin; *Fanā* means the annihilation of the creational and not-He (لا هو) aspect of man, but *baqā* means the subsistence of the Divine and He (هو) aspect of man. By *baqā*, as a mystical term, Sufis mean what is termed "*baqā ba'd-a al-fanā*" (subsistence after annihilation), "*sahw ba'd-a al-mahw*" (sobriety after obliteration), or "*al-sahw-u al-thani*" (the second sobriety).²⁴

As mentioned before, Ibn Arabi holds that all beings are the manifestations of Being. The true existence is the One Who is *Haqq* (the Truth). Through the Breath of the Merciful, which is the essence and substance of all beings, it is Him Who manifests Himself and is Omnipresent everywhere in everything. To the extent of its capacity,

23. Śankarācārya, *Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya*, III. 4. 52.

24. Qeisari, *Rasail-u Qeisari* (رسائل قيصرى), *Risalat-u al-Tawhid wa al-Nobowwa wa al-Wilaya* (رسالة التوحيد و النبوة و الولاية), p.8-9.

everything represents Him. From among all beings, it is man or rather, the perfect man, who can be actualized as the all-displaying mirror and the perfect epiphany of the attributes of existence. Therefore, all beings, particularly man, have two facets: one, with regard to their origin and essence, which is He (هو) or the Truth, and the other with regard to their determinations, characteristics and earthly limitations, which is untrue and not-He (لا هو). *Fanā* is a process through which all these earthly limitations and characteristics disappear, leaving behind the perfect and pure manifestation of Being. All ascetic disciplines practiced by the wayfarer are indeed the efforts which are made in order to remove such earthly determinations and material realizations, which like dark clouds, have concealed the sun of existence, thus it may come into appearance.²⁵

A wayfarer who has won such a level of spiritual journey cannot see anything but Him:

Shadow cannot be established when there is light. The cosmos is a shadow, and the Real is a light. That is why the cosmos is annihilated from itself when self-disclosure occurs. For the self-disclosure is light, and the soul's witnessing is a shadow, since the viewer for whom the self-disclosure occurs is annihilated from the witnessing of himself during the vision of God.²⁶

Following the Sufis, Ibn Arabi describes seven stages of *fanā* in his *al-Futuhat*:²⁷

1. *fanā* from disobedience and sins.
2. *fanā* from the activity of the creature, and seeing the hands of Allah at work behind the scenes of all events.
3. *fanā* from the attributes of the creatures, and seeing all attributes everywhere as belonging to Allah.
4. *fanā* from seeing oneself by seeing, whether the Truth or other than the Truth, through the evidence of Allah; This in turn may have a

25. Chittick, W. *Imaginal Worlds*, p.61.

26. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat-u al-Makkiya*, ch.198, vol.2, p.466.

27. *Ibid.*, ch.220, vol.2, pp.512-514.

few subdivisions. In the state of *fanā*, the annihilated self is safe from the consequences of that from which one is annihilated .

5. *fanā* from seeing the whole world through the seeing of Allah, just like the previous case in which one is annihilated from seeing oneself.

6. *fanā* from all things except for Allah through Allah. In this state, one is annihilated from everything, from oneself, and even from one's own observation, for nothing has been left of him to be observed by him. The most perfect state of this stage is that one is able to observe Allah, the *Haqq*, in His perfect sufficiency and richness rather than His affairs.

7. *fanā* from Divine attributes and their relation therein. This is the observation of the world as appearing from Allah; this is not possible by means of reasoning, such as causal relation, i.e., regarding Him as the cause and the world as His effect, but rather by seeing Him as the Truth appearing in His epiphanic forms. Such an observation would make one annihilated from Divine attributes.

Having introduced some modifications in his other works, such as *Risalat-u al-Anwar*²⁸ (رسالة الأنوار), Ibn Arabi refers to some stages of *fanā* which he called *mahw* (obliteration), *ghaibat* (absence), *fanā* (annihilation), *sahq* (perdition), and *mahq* (effacement). Ibn Arabi in *al-Futuhāt*²⁹ and *Istilahat-u al-Sufiyya* (اصطلاحات الصوفية), and his pupil 'Abdu al-Razzaq of Kashan in *Lata'if-u al-A'lam*, (لطائف الأعلام) have defined those terms as the following:

Mahw (obliteration): the removal of one's normal features and qualifications and usual awareness.

Ghaibat (absence): that one is unconscious of what is happening to the creatures because one is busy with the inspirations coming to him from Allah.

28. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa'il-u Ibn Arabi*, *Risalat-u Anwar*, p.129.

29. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhāt*, ch.73, pp.129-135.

Fanā (annihilation): that one considers nobody but Allah as the cause of everything, including one's own actions.

Sahq (perdition): the perdition of one's figure and entity as a result of the Divine overwhelming sovereignty.

Mahq (effacement): the effacement of the wayfarer in the very existence of Allah Almighty.

It seems as if, in this order, that *fanā* in one narrow sense is used as one of the grades of *fanā* in its broad sense.

From what has been said so far, it has become evident that *fanā* is a relatively gradual process of grades through which the wayfarer progressively becomes annihilated from his selfishness, personal identity or his nature of servitude, to the extent that Divine Attributes and *Forma Dei*, upon whom man is created, are manifested in him.

What is noteworthy here, however, is Ibn Arabi's particular definition of *baqā* (subsistence) and its role. As mentioned above, Ibn Arabi holds that these two concepts (*fanā* and *baqā*) are two interdependent facets of the same coin. In another words, every grade of *fanā* requires a relative grade of *baqā*. At every phase of *fanā*, the wayfarer is subsisting by virtue of something that has annihilated him from its opposite. On one side, we have not-He, creation, everything other than God, and the inferior grades from which the wayfarer becomes annihilated through the process of *fanā*. On the other side, there is He, Truth, and the superior grade with which the wayfarer is subsisting. Unless one is annihilated from the former facet, one cannot be subsisting upon the latter one. The annihilated wayfarer has thus two relations: one to the untrue and earthly facet from which he is being annihilated, and the other to the Truth upon which he is subsisting. The latter is superior to the former which becomes valuable only through its accompanying correlative facet of *baqā*:

It is to be known that in Sufism the relationship of subsistence (*baqā*) is more valuable with us than that of annihilation..., subsistence is your relationship with the Real..., but annihilation is your relationship with the engendered universe...Your relationship to

the Real is higher. Hence, subsistence is a higher relationship, since the two are interrelated states. In the relationship of subsistence is the witnessing of the Real, while in the relationship of annihilation is the witnessing of the creation...Hence the state of subsistence is higher than the state of annihilation...This is so because when you see the cause of every sort of annihilation which has annihilated you from the previous grades, you will realize that that cause is the same thing on which you are subsisting...³⁰

This journey, in Ibn Arabi's thought, is to reach the station of no station, or of being characterized by the characterization of no characteristic, a station above beauty and glory.³¹

3. The Way of Spiritual Journey

Śankara. One can reach *mokṣa*, Śankara holds, only through perfect knowledge or, the total realization of unity. This knowledge, which is a certain kind of immediate intuition, is the only provision for *mokṣa*. No practical ascetic discipline, theoretical contemplations, ethical values or religious practices lead to such deliverance. However necessary, these are merely the means for reaching knowledge, or *jñāna*, rather than for *mokṣa* itself to come into being. This means that a morally impure man cannot seriously be in search of such deliberate knowledge.³²

Knowledge having once sprung up requires no help towards the accomplishment of its fruits, it does stand in need of something else with a view to its own origination.³³

These other factors, referred to by Śankara here, are a set of disciplinary rules, practical austerities, and theoretical contemplations

30. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, ch.221, vol.2, p.515: See also Chittick, W. *Imaginal Worlds*, pp.61-62.

31. *Ibid.*, ch.73, p.133.

32. See Hiriyan, pp.378-379.

33. Sankarācārya, *Brahman Sutra Bhāṣya*, III. 4.26, vol.2, p.307.

to be precisely practiced by the wayfarer until the sun of knowledge rises within him and leads him to deliverance.

This set of disciplinary rules or oughts and ought-nots, which a wayfarer in the school of Śankara is required to embrace, is indeed the practical mysticism of this school. It is divided into two stages: first is the preliminary stage, which, upon passing through, the wayfarer is well qualified to enter the next stage, a serious research of the non-dualist school of *Vedanta* (*Advaita Vedānta*), or of Śankara himself. This stage is parallel to the way of practice (*Karma yoga*) mentioned in the *Gita*. Second is the main stage, which begins with entering the non-dualist school of *Vedanta*, and ends in perfect knowledge and deliverance after one has committed oneself to certain conditions and passed through both stages. Each of these two stages has some obligations and provisions:

In the first stage, the wayfarer is expected to observe a few preliminary practices by which he can create certain virtues within himself. The preliminary practices are:

1. The acquisition of the *Vedas* and perfect knowledge of its related studies, such as grammar and the like.
2. The observance of all *Vedic* obligations, including daily duties such as prayer, reciting prayers, or rites on different occasions like the birth of a child, marriage, and so on, as well as the abstinence from anything related to carnal desires and from religious prohibitions such as lying, murder, etc. Thus he must cleanse his mind from all actions, whether good or evil, leaving no trace of *karma* and no room for new *karma* to originate.
3. The virtues to be acquired in this stage are:
 4. Knowing what is permanent and what is temporary and transient.
 5. Showing no interest in the enjoyment of this life or in the heaven of the next life.
 6. Hating all kinds of pleasure, but longing for the acquisition of sound knowledge.

7. Concentration, in such a way that he becomes unmindful of anything but the means of acquisition of knowledge. This in turn has a few aspects:

8. Acquiring such mental power that it no longer allows him to be mindful of anything within the realm of worldly pleasures.

- a) Acquiring the ability to bear maximum levels of heat, coldness and so on;
- b) Directing the mind towards the acquisition of knowledge;
- c) Belief in the master and in the *Upanishads*;
- d) Ardent desire for reaching deliverance.³⁴

In the second stage, a wayfarer who has observed the above provisions and acquired its virtues, and may thus be well qualified for the study of *Vedānta*, may now deal with the other stages:

The first stage is listening, or audition (*śravaṇa*), by which the wayfarer is to listen to the instructions of a master or Guru in order to understand the true meanings of the *Upanishads*. This helps to achieve two objectives: one is the insistence that one can only learn the Ultimate Truth from the revealed texts, or *śruti*, and the other is to remind the wayfarer that he must follow a qualified master who has already passed all the stages. This means that he cannot achieve anything solely by his personal study and without the instructions and guidance of the master.

The second stage is thought (*manana*), i.e., to consolidate ones beliefs about the accuracy of what the *Upanishads* propose. This includes monologue and arguing with oneself in relation to the perfect knowledge of the doctrines of the *Upanishads*. The objective in this stage is not to discover the ultimate aim, for it has already been seen in the previous stage. The aim is, nonetheless, to achieve firm beliefs in these doctrines and to eliminate any doubt or hesitation regarding their inaccuracy. Concerning the aim of this stage, the wayfarer is expected to adapt what he has learnt as his own personal belief.

34. See Dāsgupta, op cit., vol.I. pp.489-490; Sankarācārya, *Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya*, I. 1. 1.

The third stage is to contemplate the identity of the Self with *Brahman*, which is part of Śankara's key doctrines. The objective of this stage is to remove whatever hindrances are in front of the wayfarer, which may be left as a result of earlier psychological relics in the unconscious mind, and which appear from time to time to contradict the new doctrines. All the rules and principles of yoga meditation are used in order to reach such an objective. This stage goes on until the sun of knowledge rises from inside the wayfarer, who then experiences his identity with the transcendent Self (*Brahman*). When the illuminating sun has risen in his spirit, he has indeed reached the stage of deliverance, or as Śankara puts it, he has become *jivanmukta* (a free living one).³⁵

A *jivanmukta*, or a mystic who has reached the stage of union, is living in two different states. One state is referred to as *samādhi*, or rapture and absorption, in which he is free from himself, as well as everything else, while absorbed by *Brahman*. The other state is called *vyutthāna*, or returning back to the usual life. In such a state, contrary to the others in his midst with whom he is accompanying in the world, in dealing with the plurality of things and the world of illusionary phenomena, the wayfarer may not be deceived by them because he knows for certain that they are illusions. This is like the *prima facie* movement of the sun in the eyes of someone who knows for sure that it never moves. Like other people, a *jivanmukta* experiences both pain and comfort, however, he believes that they are not real. It is not necessary for a *jivanmukta* to abandon the requirements of daily life, as Śankara continued to exert himself in effort and activity up to the last days of his life. The works and activities of a *jivanmukta*, however, do not stem from his personal motives or from his obligation and duties towards others; rather it is general affection and all-inclusive love that motivates him to work.³⁶

35. See Hiriyanna, pp.379-380; Dāsgupta, loc. cit.

36. See Hiriyanna, p.381.

The base of such all-inclusive love is the same doctrine of the *Upanishads* where it says, “This whole world is *Brahman*,”³⁷ or where it says, “Now, he who on all things looks as just in the Self (*Ātman*) and on the Self as in all beings, He does not shrink away from Him.”³⁸ Performing good works and (acquiring) virtues, for such a person, implies no conscious effort, for it has become part of his second nature to be so.

When, at the end of this earthly life, a *jivanmukta* leaves his body, he will not be born again and will be annihilated in *Brahman*; in this state, Śankara calls him *videha mukta*. Śankara thus differentiates between *jivanmukta* and *videha mukta*, however they are identical in their expression of the principle of freedom from worldly attachments.

Ibn Arabi. In his various works, such as *al-Futuhāt-u al-Makkiya*, *Risalat-u Hilyat-i al-Abdal*, and *Risalat-u al-Anwar*, Ibn Arabi has discussed the method of the spiritual journey, its requirements, the different stations of the wayfarers, and the variety of gifts and intuitions which occur at each station. Because of different interlocutors, Ibn Arabi’s recommendations are not entirely consistent and well-compiled; however, the above-mentioned works provide rich references to infer some generalities about his preferred method of journey.

From the very beginning of their coming into existence, Ibn Arabi holds, human beings are wayfarers³⁹ of a spiritual journey that aims at the annihilation of one’s human name or characteristics in order for them to be exposed to divine epiphanies. “Allah will manifest Himself only to those who are annihilated from their names and characteristics.”⁴⁰ (إنما يتجلى الحق لمن انمحي اسمه و رسمه). Reaching the Truth and achieving human perfection is a journey which may be passed through by awareness of God and obtaining spiritual stations of cognitions and experiences. As mankind is “the totality of the world,

37. Ch. Up., III. 14.1

38. Iśa. Up., 6.

39. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa’il Ibn Arabi*, *Risalat-u al-Anwar*, p.124.

40. Ibid., *Risalat-u Hilyat-i al-Abdal*, p.388.

divine copy of the Presence of Allah, and endowed with His Essence, Attributes, and Actions,”⁴¹ the journey across different worlds, and seeing their wonders and knowing their secrets and mysteries, is an internal and subjective voyage in the course of *shari'ah*.⁴²

Ibn Arabi has defined the spiritual journey:

In its meaning, the spiritual journey is to move from one rank of worshipping to another, and in its form it is to move from one lawful act to another in the course of proximity to God by means of doing and undoing..., and as a technical term it is to move from one station to another, from one name to another, from one manifestation to another, from one self to another. The traveler is a wayfarer of bodily austerity and spiritual asceticism who refines his morals...⁴³

The right path is one - however, in viewing the different states of the wayfarers, their lofty or low aspirations, and the perversion or restraint of their temperaments, it may appear in different guises and various facets. What, nevertheless, a wayfarer is expected to know is that this journey entails adversities, tribulations, and great dangers; There is no room for security nor for usual pleasure along its course.⁴⁴

The first step in the spiritual journey is to learn the rules of *shari'ah*, such as those of ritual purity, prayers, fasting, and so on, in order to observe them and be God-conscious.

In the next step, the wayfarer ought to find a qualified master or sheikh to guide him to the right path. If he can manage to find such a master, he should follow his instructions and obey him so as to get the proper result. If, however, he could not obtain a suitable master, he ought to bind himself to nine instructions which are as many as the simple numbers (1 to 9) and 9 heavens. These are: seclusion, silence, vigilance, hunger, honesty, trust in God, patience, resolution, and

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., ch.189, vol.2, p.380.

44. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa'il Ibn Arabi*, Risalat-u al-Anwar, p.124.

certitude. The first four instructions deal with esoteric acts while the remaining five deal with exoteric ones.⁴⁵

According to a report from *al-Futuhat* and some other *Rasa'il*, Ibn Arabi seems to have borrowed the first four instructions from Abu Talib Makki's *Qut-u al-Qulub* (قوت القلوب). These four instructions constitute Ibn Arabi's base of practical journey; he considers them to be the waystation of his sound and original Sufi way.⁴⁶ There is no temporal priority among these instructions and thus they can be taken into consideration and practiced simultaneously. If we look at these instructions two by two, however, we discover that they are interrelated; hunger and seclusion are active but silence and vigilance are passive, for seclusion paves the way for silence and hunger for vigilance.

Seclusion. This principle stands at the apex of the four instructions. In order to enter the phase of seclusion, Ibn Arabi specifies two prerequisites: first one must be dominant over his fantasies, rather than vice versa. If the situation is otherwise, he must reconcile the issue under the supervision of a knowledgeable master or sheikh. Second, before choosing seclusion, he must have experienced austerity for a while - in the form of purification of his morals, abstinence from selfishness and carnal desires, and being able to bear the disturbances of others.⁴⁷

Seclusion has two parts: the first part relates to isolation from the body, by which they mean isolation from low people and vices; this is the seclusion of the willful (مريدین). The second part concerns the seclusion of the heart, which is actually the superior seclusion, and by which they mean isolation of the heart from worldly affairs, including properties, social status, children, or anything that separates the wayfarer from God. There must be no room in the heart of the

45. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, Chap.53, vol.1, p.277.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa'il Ibn Arabi*, *Risalat-u al-Anwar*, p.135.

wayfarer for anything but knowing God; this is the seclusion of verifiers (محققين).⁴⁸

The condition of seclusion, particularly in the beginning, can be met by remaining in the house or by going to the mountains or to the coasts, as an act of isolation from people or from anything to which one has become accustomed.⁴⁹ The person in isolation must consider a few points: First, one should not let any visitor in the house, keeping his door locked to everyone - for receiving visitors may expose him to an immense error or blight. Second, one should be watchful of false illusions lest they overcome him and separate him from the mindful heart of God. One is expected, by utilizing any means necessary, to have a continuously mindful heart of God. Third, he should be determined to seek nobody but Him.⁵⁰ Seclusion provides for the knowledge of the world.

Silence. As a result of seclusion, silence or reticence is of two kinds: verbal silence, and that of the heart. By the former, we mean talking to no one but God and by the latter, which is one characteristic of those brought near to Him, we mean allowing nothing in the heart but God. As a whole, silence means the preoccupation of the heart with the evocation of God and with the speech of the mind instead of the tongue. The wayfarer, however, must watch out lest his silence evokes what he may expect from God, for such an evocation may prevent him from a true remembrance and theophany.⁵¹ The wayfarer ought to content himself with the rosaries and invocations said in the prayers and the recitation of one sixtieth of the Qur'an each night. He should not extravagagate with the invocations, but he may keep his heart busy with secret evocations. Silence brings about knowing God.⁵²

48. See Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, loc. cit. and *Rasa'il Ibn Arabi*, *Risalat-u Hilyat-i al-Abdal*, p.390.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa'il Ibn Arabi*, *Risalat-u al-Anwar*, pp.125-126.

51. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, ch.53, vol.1, p.277.

52. Ibid.

Hunger. By hunger, we mean temperance in eating only as much food as necessary for performing our religious obligations.⁵³ It is of two kinds: one is voluntary, for those wayfarers who willingly choose to abstain from food, and the other is involuntary, for the verifiers whose food may vary instinctively in proportion to their spiritual states of intimacy and dread. When used in moderation, hunger can leave a decisive influence on the journey of the wayfarer, providing the discretion of sheikh. Hunger brings about knowing Satan.⁵⁴

Vigilance. As a product of hunger, vigilance is of two kinds: The vigilance of the eyes and the vigilance of the heart. By the latter, we mean watchfulness of distractions and carelessness in seeking for mystic vision. The former, along with its provisions, may help the heart with the acquisition of insight. Keeping vigil leads to self-knowledge.⁵⁵

The wayfarer who has retained the correct observance of these four exoteric pillars, while actualizing the above five characteristics, may gradually, in the course of the spiritual journey, enjoy divine gifts, diffusions, and unveilings. If he does not content himself with any of those gifts at each stage, he may receive more transcendent and extensive and deeper bestowals, until at last he may reach the stations of *mahw* (obliteration), *ghaibat* (absence), and different stages of *fanā*, such as *sahq* (perdition), and *mahq* (effacement), ending in “subsistence after annihilation.”⁵⁶

In his various works, Ibn Arabi considers the above instructions to be the provisions which help the wayfarer achieve the station of *Abdal* or the Substitutes (Advanced Saints). These Substitutes are the Advanced Seven Saints, who, in the hierarchy of saints, come after the *Qutb* (Pole), or the deliverance; the two *Imams*; and the *Awtad-u al-Arba’a* (the Four Pillars); having passed the above chain of stages, one

53. Ibid.

54. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa’il Ibn Arabi, Risalat-u Hilyat-i al-Abdal*, p.391.

55. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, ch.53, vol.1, p.278; and *Rasa’il Ibn Arabi, Risalat-u Hilyat-i al-Abdal*, p.392.

56. Ibn Arabi, *Rasa’il Ibn Arabi, Risalat-u al-Anwar*, pp.126-129.

of them may ultimately ascend to the station of Pole, i.e., one single individual who, in each era, may become the “Divine viewpoint in the world.”⁵⁷

4. *Mokṣa*, *Fanā* and Religious Obligations

From among the issues which have long since been under discussion by both Hindu mystics and Muslim Sufis is the relation between *shari’ah* (divine law) and *tariqa* (mystical way) or *haqiqa* (truth). More precisely, is there, in the course of the mystical journey, a station or position for the wayfarer where he can be exempt from religious obligations? In other words, does reaching Truth, or whatever it may be called, exempt the wayfarer from the obligations of *shari’ah* law thus making him able to dispense with its restrictions? This is one of the points of dispute between Śāṅkara and two rival movements within the *Vedānta* school. It is also one of the cases in which Muslim Jurists have raised objections against the Sufis because of their strange conduct and the esoteric meaning of their words.

Śāṅkara. As his many descriptions imply, Śāṅkara seems to believe that the observance of religious obligations, i.e., the commandments and prohibitions of the holy scriptures, is a necessary provision for the mystical journey, thus when the wayfarer reaches the ultimate destination of liberating knowledge, he will no longer be in need of those obligations. They may apply to the wayfarer as far as he suffers from the illusionary duality of his self and *Brahman* because of his ignorance or *avidya*. When such an illusion disappears and the wayfarer realizes his identity with *Brahman*, he will go beyond the sphere of the commandments and prohibitions of the holy scriptures, thus leaving them behind as they may not apply to him any longer.

For him who has obtained perfect knowledge, injunctions and prohibitions are purposeless...since to him who has obtained

57. Ibid., *Risalat-u Istilahat-u al-Sufiyya*, pp.408-409.

the higher aim no obligation can apply. For obligations are imposed with reference to things to be avoided or desired; how then should he, who sees nothing, either to be wished or avoided, beyond the universal Self, stand under any obligation?⁵⁸

In his introduction to the *Commentary on Chandogya Upanishads*, Śankara has solved this issue by explaining the difference between ordinary believers and those wayfarers who have reached the knowledge and state of deliverance. In regards to the observance of religious rites and the rewards of the hereafter, he writes:

The objects with which a man competent for rites is occupied and the natural ideas about being an agent and an enjoyer, are demolished by texts like “existence alone, only one, without a second” and “All this is but the Self.” Therefore, rites are enjoined only for those who have such defects as ignorance, etc., but not for one who is possessed of non-dual knowledge. Hence, the *Upanishads* will declare, all these become attainers of the virtuous worlds, but the man established in *Brahman* will attain Immortality.⁵⁹

Upon examining the reasoning, frankness, and generality of Śankara’s words cited above, and in similar cases, he seems to hold that the mystics of union are out of the sphere of *shari’ah* commandments and prohibitions. In regards to these statements, he does not differentiate between the state of *samādhi* and *vyutthāna*.

Ibn Arabi. Like other Sufi Muslims, Ibn Arabi holds that the wayfarer in the stage of *fanā* may be in one of these two states: the state of *mahw* (obliteration) and unconsciousness, or the state of *sahw* (sobriety) and consciousness. The former state is either temporary, by which the wayfarer may be restored to the state of consciousness, or permanent, by which he may be deprived of his consciousness and reason by a sudden rapture or theophany so that he cannot be restored

58. Sankarācārya, *Brahman Sutra Bhāṣya*, II. 3. 48, pp.66-67.

59. Sankarācārya, in “Introduction” to *Commentary on Ch. Up.*, p.5.

to his normal state. In both cases, the unconscious wayfarers are divided into two groups: the secure wayfarers and the insecure ones. A secure wayfarer is the one who, while unconscious, is protected by God so that he can perform his religious obligations in their due times; an insecure wayfarer, however, is one who is totally deprived of his faculty of reason so that he is not able to do anything for himself.⁶⁰ Concerning the latter group, whom they call *muhayyamin fi jamal Allah*, “the ecstatic with beauty of God,” or *walihan-e tariqat* “the love-mad of the journey,” and *majazib*, “enraptured,” Ibn Arabi and his followers says that they are exempt from *shari’ah* rules, just like animals and the insane, or, rather that their particular *shari’ah* rule is permission. This is the fatwa of all jurists and saints regarding the insane - “Anybody who is deprived of the faculty of reason like animals, the insane, and the enraptured are not to be responsible for any case of courtesy unlike the wise and sane who are required to follow rules of courtesy.”⁶¹

Ibn Arabi’s words may apply to both those who are permanently deprived of their reason and to those who have been deprived of their reason temporarily as long as they are not restored to their normal states. Nonetheless, as it appears from the above phrases, and their parallels in chapter 44 of his *al-Futuhāt*, he does not seem to believe in the same rule for the people of sobriety whose consciousness is secured at this stage. They are thus required to observe religious obligations and courtesy, however they might have reached the highest spiritual stations, that of *fanā* or subsistence after annihilation.

In his other descriptions, where he discusses different kinds of spiritual stations, Ibn Arabi considers the station of repentance and the observance of religious obligations as the station enduring up to death whereby they disappear; ...“and there from among the stations is that

60. See Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhāt-u al-Makkiyya*, ch.44, vol.1, pp.247-250.

61. Ibid., for further information, see also Ibn Arabi, loc. cit., pp.247-250; Qeisari, *Rasail-u Qeisari* (رسائل قيسري), pp.33-34; Lahiji, *Sharh Golshan Raz* (شرح گلشن راز), pp.253-254.

which may endure up to death, and thereby it disappears, such as repentance and the observance of religious obligations...”⁶²

Ibn Arabi's view on the issue is further stipulated by his followers, as his pupil, Badr Ibn Abdullah Habashi, writes on the issue:

Sheikh (peace be with him) says:

Despite reaching the highest station possible, a servant is not exempt from *shari'ah* texts on the religious obligations, unless one is predominated by a state that makes him like the insane or the unconscious people. In such a state, religious obligations are suspended pending a normal state, when he ought to say: O Lord, Glory be to Thee. I now return back to Thee. But he who consciously claims that he has reached a station exempting him from *shari'ah* duties, is talking nonsense which may lead him to Hellfire.⁶³

Ibn Arabi regards *shari'ah* and *haqiqah* as two sides of the same truth, with *shari'ah* being the exterior and the latter as the interior. In his *al-Futuhāt*, when explaining the reason why *shari'ah*, according to the Sufis, is distinguished from *haqiqah*, and quoting from their ideas, Ibn Arabi writes:

They have used (the phrase) *shari'ah* for the exterior rules of *haqiqah*, but (the phrase) *haqiqa* for the interior rules of *shari'ah* ...⁶⁴

Accordingly, Ibn Arabi does not seem to exempt the wayfarers from *shari'ah* obligations in the highest stages of their journey of reaching the Truth unless they are in a state of unconsciousness – a fact which is agreed by all jurists and scholars.

62. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhāt-u al-Makkiyya*, ch.193, p.386.

63. Badr Ibn Abdullah Habashi, *al-Inbā' an Tariq-i Allah* (الإنباء عن طريق الله), (a hand written text), quoted in Mohsen Jahangiri, *Mohy-e al-Din Ibn Arabi*, p.551; and see also Sheikh Makkie, *al-Janib-u al-Gharbi* (الجنب الغربي), p.218; Dawood Qeisari, *Rasā'il Qeisari*, *Risalat-u al-Tawhid wa al-Nobowwa wa al-Wilaya*, pp.33-34; Lahiji, *Sharh Golshan Raz*, pp.253-254.

64. Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhāt-u al-Makkiyya*, ch.244.

Conclusion

From what has been discussed in the summary and in the comparison of the two mystics, the following points are worth mentioning:

1. The *essentia* of man and the world in Śankara's view is *Brahman*, *Ātman* or *sat* (truth or pure existence), but in Ibn Arabi's view, it is seen as *Nafas-u al-Rahman* (the Breath of the Merciful) which is called *al-wujud al-munbasit* (expanded existence) and second determination. It is the manifestation of existence rather than existence itself. This is one important difference between the two mystics.
2. *Mokṣa* according to Śankara and *fanā* according to Ibn Arabi are both realized when individual desires and identities are removed. However, what remains in the process, says Śankara, is *Brahman*, *sat*, or pure existence, but for Ibn Arabi, what remains is only the appearance of pure existence.
3. Śankara's concept of *mokṣa* is an epistemological event, but Ibn Arabi's theory of *fanā* is an ontological-epistemological development.⁶⁵
4. To abide by *shari'ah* - particularly at the beginning of the journey - holding fast to the Holy Scriptures, and following a guru or sheikh, are common elements of the two mystics' methods of practice. In Śankara's method, Karma yoga is somewhat comparable to Ibn Arabi's four principles. Nonetheless, in his practical methodology, Śankara's insistence on *manana* (contemplation) cannot be seen in Ibn Arabi, although Ibn Arabi's concept of *nutq al-naḥs* (invocation with the soul), or *secret invocation*, may suggest some sort of contemplation.
5. The states of *samādhi* and *vyuttāna*, which emerge for a dedicated *jivanmukta*, can be compared to those of *mahw* (obliteration) and *sahw* (sobriety).

65. For further study on this issue, see the introduction of Qaisari on *Fusus al-Hikam*, chap.11, with commentary by Sayyid Jalal-u al-Din Ashtiyani.

6. Contrary to Ibn Arabi and other Sufis who state that there are different grades of *fanā*, Śankara explicitly denies the existence of grades of *mokṣa*, however, an individual, or *mukta*, may reach salvation in terms of life or death, which, in the context of Hinduism, is divided into *jivanmukti* and *vidhamukti*; yet we cannot observe such a thing in Ibn Arabi's works.
7. Śankara stipulates that the state of *jivanmukti* is beyond religious obligations, i.e., *shari'ah* commands and prohibitions; however, we fail to witness such a thing in Ibn Arabi's works for the mystics who have attained union and who may reach the highest level of *fanā* and *baqa* (subsistence) after *fanā*. Rather, there are signs in the works of Ibn Arabi and his followers that acknowledge a position opposite to Śankara, unless, of course, if a person has become insane or lost control of their senses, then, in this case, the ruling would be different.

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