



## KAŠF O ŠOHUD

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**KAŠF O ŠOHUD** (“unveiling and witnessing”), terms commonly used by Muslim mystics to describe the acquisition of esoteric knowledge and the constant first-hand encountering of the divine presence. The two terms *kašf* and *šohud*, sometimes used together to describe a general experience of illuminative discovery and continued inspired perception, have distinct meanings within the Muslim mystical traditions and exemplify the manner in which terms can acquire specialized signification in the Islamic disciplines.

### LEXICAL AND QOR’ĀNIC

*Kašf*. Ebn Manẓur (d. 711/1311-12) describes “al-kašf” as a lifting of something from “that which is concealed or wrapped” (IX, p. 300). Separate from usages in which *kašf* in its various forms signifies “relief” from pain or hardship, this meaning of lifting the mysterious and concealed occurs in verbal form in the Qor’ān (50:22). The verse in question associates the divine lifting of the veil with the human ability to see piercingly clear in the afterlife. Many verses in the Qor’ān employ the images of veils, seals, and other coverings for the heart, which would thereby imply the need for an unveiling (e.g., 2:7, 18:101).

*Šohud*. Ebn Manẓur (III, p. 239) defines “šohud” as meaning “presence” (*hoẓur*). *Šohud* as a verbal noun does not appear in the Qor’ān, while numerous instances of the verb *šaheda* do indeed appear, often in the sense of “testifying” or “being witness” (e.g., 6:130) or “being present” (e.g., 2:185). Usage of the verb in another verse (7:172), in which the unborn children of Adam respond “Indeed, we bear witness (*šahednā*)” to God’s question, “Am I



not your Lord,” would become an important point of deliberation for mystics such as Abu’l-Qāsem Jonayd Baġdādi in the formative years of contemplative Sufism, as can be seen in his *Ketāb al-miṭāq* (pp. 147-51). The Qor’ānic contrast between *ġayb* (unseen) and *šahāda* (seen), as well as its emphasis on knowledge by vision (6:75, 12:24, 17:1), also becomes a theoretical focus in the development of Muslim mystical thought. Lastly, in verse 3:18, God’s bearing witness to His own oneness is tied into that of the angels and people of knowledge (*olu’l-‘elm*). The testimonial emphasis found in the Qor’ān seems to have influenced later descriptions of mystic visionary experience as a perpetual eyewitnessing.

#### HADITH

While Sufi writers do not attribute the terms *kašf* or *šohud*, or their sometimes more technical counterparts *mokāšafa* or *mošāhada*, to any particular Hadith, certain narrations do appear repeatedly in both early and later terminological elucidations. The Hadith in which the Prophet Moḡammad defines “excellent action” (*eḡsān*) as worshipping God “as if you see Him” stands as an important narration for Sufis—in part because it presents this virtual seeing of God as a grade of piety above submission (*eslām*) and, after that, above belief (*imān*), which suits and perhaps helped to shape the Sufi preoccupation with grades of spiritual achievement marked by visionary experience, narrated by Abu Horayra (Boḡāri, no. 50, p. 23, and no. 4777, pp. 1199-1200; see also Majlesi, LVI, pp. 260-61). The Hadith proclaiming that the servant [of God] who through obligatory, followed by supererogatory, actions draws near to and becomes beloved by God, such that God is the “hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he seizes, and the foot with which he walks,” will come to serve as a traditional foundation for the perceived union of human faculties and the divine presence experienced by the mystic, one generated by divine love (Boḡāri, no. 6502, p. 1617; see also Kolayni, II, p. 352). Mentioned often in the context of unveiling and witnessing is an account of Ḥāreṭa b. Mālek b. No’mān Anṡāri (also identified as Ḥāreṭa b. Sorāqa, Zayd b. Ḥāreṭa, and “a young man from the Anṡār”), who announces to the Prophet Moḡammad the signs of his realized belief, among which is his experience approximating a vision of God upon the Throne, the believers enjoying paradise, and the disbelievers undergoing torment. This Hadith does not appear in the most canonical of Sunni collections, but Sufis refer to it repeatedly as an instance of lucid and ongoing vision prompted by spiritual achievement (Kolayni, narrated by Abu Baṡir from Imam Ja’far al-Šādeq, *Ketāb*



*al-imān wa'l-kofr*; *Bāb ḥaqīqat al-imān*; Foruzānfar, p. 35; see also, Kolayni, II, p. 54; Ebn Ḥebbān, sec. on Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Abān, I, p. 164-65). Accounts of *al-esrā' wa'l-me'rāj* (the night journey and ascent, alluded to in the Qor'ān, 17:1 and 53:7-18; see [ME'RAJ](#)) often include the Prophet Moḥammad's first-hand beholding of God and would become a paradigm for mystical accounts of witnessing as well as a wealth of sources for narrations concerning divine communication and vision. Lastly, statements attributed to the earliest Muslim community, particularly [Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb](#), appear repeatedly as sources and legitimizing evidence for developing mystical vocabulary. Particularly relevant is a saying attributed to Imam 'Ali that he sees his object of worship, not through the physical eye, but "through the witnessing of belief" (*be-mošāhadat al-imān*; see, e.g., Jonayd, p. 96).

#### EARLY SUFISM

While the developed vocabulary of Islamic mysticism cannot often be found in formative Sufi writings, there are notable exceptions. Numerous references to *kašf o šohud* can be found in the esoteric Qor'ān commentary attributed to [Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq](#) (d. 148/765) by Abu 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Moḥammad Solami (d. 412/1021) in his *Ḥaqā'eq al-tafsir*. Solami reports that Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq describes the witnessing (*yašhadun*) of God's kindness and grace, and indeed the witnessing of the Kind and the Gracious Himself, as a result of the unveiling (*yokšaf*) of the curtains of forgetfulness. He also refers to those who remember God while standing (Qor'ān 3:191) as "arising in the witnessing of Lordliness (*mošāhadāt al-robubiya*)," one of many passages that concern the vocabulary of unveiling and witnessing (Ja'far al-Šādeq [attrib.], pp. 191, 193).

The celebrated Sufi Abu'l-Qāsem b. Moḥammad Jonayd (d. 298/910) serves as a later but considerably pioneering influence on Sufi nomenclature, since the treatises and epistles attributed to him anticipate many of the key concepts that would preoccupy later mystics concerning unveiling and witnessing. His observations generally emphasize the divine as the true actor and perceiver behind the mystic's experiences, as seen in his discussion of the "witness" (*šāhed*) or his definition of ecstasy (*wajd*) as "unveilings (*mokāšafāt*) from the Real" (Sarrāj, pp. 301, 339). Jonayd presents *šohud* (witnessing or being present) as a counterpart to *wojud* (finding or existing) in his treatise *al-Farq bayn al-eḳlāš wa'l-šedq* (Jonayd, p. 130). *Mošāhada* appears in Jonayd's writings as a phenomenon bestowed upon the knower, wherein one loses oneself (Jonayd, p. 94).



In the late 3rd/9th and early 4th/10th centuries, even those mystics who were less likely to use the words *kašf* and *šohud* explicitly as technical terminology with defined and regular meanings often expressed the basic theoretical paradigm of “unveiling” or “illumination” followed by a form of witnessing. Such can be seen in the writings of Ḥakim Abu ‘Abd-Allāh Moḥammad Termeḍi (d. ca. 300/912), who describes a light of *tawḥid* disclosed to the heart that brings with it gnosis (*ma‘refa*) of God. The process of illuminating the heart, followed by continued vision, parallels later accounts of *kašf o šohud*. Also, similar to later accounts, Termeḍi here describes love of God as a result of vision (Termeḍi, 1984, p. 149). His description indicates that the term *mošāhada* refers to the servant’s bearing witness or testifying to the sole divinity of God by means of the senses.

The concept of the “light of *tawḥid*” and many references to *mošāhada* can also be found in the treatise *Bayān al-farq* attributed to Termeḍi but probably composed by Abu’l-Ḥosayn Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Nuri (d. 295/907; see Heer’s notes and tr. in Termeḍi, 2003, pp. 17, 29, 31, 43, 45, 51, 55, 59, 74). Nuri, as described in Solami’s *Ketāb ṭabaqāt al-Šufiyya*, outlines the varieties of the “people of gazing” (*ahl al-naẓar*), a grouping that includes those whose gazing is that of evident unveiling (*al-mokāšafa*) and those whose gazing is that of vying for witnessing (*al-mošāhada*; Solami, p. 157). This attribution, much like many others found in later manuals on Sufism, such as those by Sarrāj, Kalābāḍi and Qošayri, further suggests the emphasis that Nuri placed on visionary experience and his perhaps unparalleled precursory role in the development of terms related to unveiling and witnessing.

Abu Naṣr ‘Abd-Allāh b. ‘Ali Sarrāj (d. 378/988) includes a chapter on Sufi terms in his *Ketāb al-loma‘*, with references to both *kašf o šohud*. Like his contemporaries, Sarrāj makes frequent use of saints from previous generations to define terms, including Nuri, who is cited often on visionary matters. *Kašf*, according to Sarrāj, is “the elucidation of that which is veiled from understanding,” and it is paired with *mošāhada* as a set of endowments attained only through diligent self-vigilance and piety (Sarrāj, p. 346). Sarrāj’s discussion of *šohud* presents God and creation as a dichotomy of Witness and witnessed, Present and absent (Sarrāj, p. 339). The term “absence” (*ḡayba*) is intertwined with *mošāhada*; the heart becomes absent from witnessing creation while constantly witnessing God, without any noticeable change in the exterior of the perceiver (Sarrāj, p. 340).

Abu Bakr Moḥammad Kalābāḍi in his treatise on Sufism includes discussions



of *kašf o šohud*, focusing especially on the sayings of antecedent figures. He sees the sciences of witnessing and unveiling (*‘olum al-mošāhadāt wa’l-mokāšafāt*) as composing an experiential knowledge unique to the Sufis, one resulting from the amalgamation of other types of knowledge (Kalābādi, p. 100). Utilizing primarily the poetry of Nuri, Kalābādi presents a discussion of šohud highly developed in its consideration of ethical and more abstract dimensions. For Kalābādi, like Sarrāj, šohud is closely related to absence (*ḡayba*), for as one becomes less aware and even unconscious of the desires and qualities of oneself, one instead witnesses that which is God’s. This leads Kalābādi to define šohud as “one’s seeing the allotments of the self (*hozuḡ al-nafs*) through God not through the self,” adding to it a higher level of absence in which one becomes absent from “annihilation and the one being annihilated, through witnessing abidingness and the One who abides and no other, as Ḥāreṡa reported about himself [in the Hadith mentioned above]” (Kalābādi, chap. 56, pp. 136-37). While the word *kašf* does appear in the treatise, the concept of unveiling receives its most detailed treatment in chapter 58, wherein Kalābādi discusses divine self-disclosure and divine concealment (*al-tajalli wa’l-estetār*) based for the most part on a saying of Abu Moḡammad Sahl b. ‘Abd-Allāh Tostari (d. 283/896) concerning three self-disclosures of the divine essence (Kalābādi, p. 140). Kalābādi’s consideration of Tostari’s words emphasizes witnessing the Real while being oblivious to the self.

While Kalābādi focuses on *mošāhada* as an experiential ideal, Abu Ṭāleb Moḡammad b. ‘Ali Ḥāreṡi Makki (d. 386/998), the Hadith scholar and ascetic, using šohud and *mošāhada* interchangeably, mostly considers witnessing in contexts supporting his ethically edifying objectives. In his *Qut al-qolub*, concerning the “witnessing (*mošāhada*) of the people of self-surveillance (*morāqaba*),” Makki describes šohud, closely related to presence (*hozur*) as applied to witnessing the blessing (*ne‘ma*) or the One who gives blessings (*mon‘em*), depending on whether circumstances call for thankfulness or patience (Makki, I, p. 165). Another ethical application of witnessing is Makki’s prescription that wayfarers strive to “witness” themselves as being praised and blamed while reading the Qor’ān, an application that ideally culminates in hearing the Qor’ān as if God Himself speaks (Makki, I, p. 93). Yet Makki is also keenly aware of the visionary implications of unveiling and witnessing. He describes witnessing as a type of knowledge, acquired through remembrance (*dekr*), so that the veil of the eye is uncovered (*košefa*) and it “witnesses the meanings of attributes by their lights;” the one whose eye has been unveiled



witnesses the Remembered as a result of certainty, which is the full achievement of belief (Makki, I, p. 271).

Similar to Kalābādi's treatise, the comprehensive manual known as *al-Resāla* or *al-Resāla ela'l-Šufiyya* by Abu'l-Qāsem 'Abd-al-Karim b. Havāzen Qošayri (d. 465/1072) considers unveiling and witnessing as part of its larger goal of systemizing Sufi thought and emphasizing its legitimacy via Qor'ānic verses, Prophetic Traditions, and saintly sayings. Unlike Kalābādi, Qošayri discusses these terms in a segment explicitly treating the terminology (*alfāz*) of Sufis. He, like many others, tends to use kašf for unveiling as a general and sometimes even mundane phenomenon of uncovering any indeterminate object, such as the meanings of words (e.g., Qošayri, p. 53), while preferring *mokāšafa* for the heart's "presence qualified by elucidation," that is, a receptive and communicative experience one step above mere attending (*moḥāzara*) and one step below witnessing (Qošayri, p. 75). Witnessing corresponds to the sublime loss of any self-awareness, replaced by constant divine illumination. Qošayri does at times use šohud in place of mošāhada, with little semantic differentiation, while at other times šohud clearly signifies a less lofty experience that, unlike mošāhada, relies on a sense of separation. This separation or "covering" of the realities of divine self-disclosure is common to both the uninitiated commonality and the spiritually elite, but makes šohud possible for the latter (Qošayri, p. 74). Later Sufi writers, such as [Ebn al-'Arabi](#), further emphasize that, for šohud to occur, the mystic must encounter self-disclosures through coverings, filters, and other mitigating means.

['Ali b. 'Otmān Jollābi Hojviri](#) (d. ca. 465/1071-72) shares Qošayri's emphasis on the desirability of mokāšafa, contrasting it with *moḥāzara*, or, attending (Hojviri, pp. 487-88). Both unveiling and attending indicate perpetual awareness of God's evidences, yet they differ greatly, since the recipient of unveiling, whose occupation is witnessing, sees beyond acts and external signs. Unveiling indicates greater divine proximity than attending in much the same way that Moḥammad, God's beloved (Ḥabib), holds a station above Abraham, God's friend (Ḳalil), since unveiling coincides with bewilderment (*taḥayyor*) and love (*maḥabbat*), while attending coincides with contemplation (*tafakkor*) and friendship (*kollat*).

For later mystics, *Manāzel al-sār'in* of [Ḳ'āja Abu Esmā'il 'Abd-Allāh Anṣāri](#) (d. 481/1089) is a paramount contribution to Sufi psychology, presenting the experiential vocabulary of early Muslim mystics in an ordered and intricate



structure. Anṣārī uses the words *kašf* and *šohud* as general terms, along with words such as *wojud*, *‘elm*, or *rasm*, to build a precise vocabulary that traces the stages of progression of the path to spiritual perfection. He refers to the “light of unveiling” (pp. 95, 112), the “morning of unveiling” (p. 85), or a “sea of unveiling” (p. 108), using the term in his definitions of specific spiritual stages, so that his usage of *kašf* broadly signifies the acquisition of esoteric knowledge and is less restricted than *mokāšafa*. Witnessing (*šohud*) appears in the text at least once as a kind of knowledge more elevated than *‘elm* (Anṣārī, p. 136), and more often as intimate first-hand perception. Anṣārī frequently uses *šohud* to define other words, so that the highest level of self-annihilation (*al-fanā*), for example, is “annihilation from witnessing annihilation” (Anṣārī, p. 135). Because his concern is with spiritual stations, Anṣārī applies more detailed terminological consideration to *mošāhada* and *mokāšafa* than to *šohud* and *kašf*. *Mokāšafa* and *mošāhada* receive consideration in the ninth section of Anṣārī’s treatise, concerning realities; the tenth and last concerns the final stages of self-annihilation and unity. Anṣārī defines *mokāšafa* as “the secret’s reciprocal inclination toward two interconnected interiors” as well as “the reaching of that which is behind the veil via encounter,” a complex definition, one that, as Anṣārī states, applies to *mokāšafa* specifically in his chapter on realities; in other words, Anṣārī recognizes variances of meaning for a word dependant on the context in his mystical-ethical system (Anṣārī, p. 123). For Anṣārī, like Qoṣayri, *mošāhada* is a higher level of perception than *mokāšafa*, one that he defines as “the falling of the veil irrevocably” (Anṣārī, p. 124). *Mošāhada* is higher than *mokāšafa*, because *mokāšafa* is “sainthood of the attribute in which remains something of the trace,” while *mošāhada* is “sainthood of the source and essence.” Higher levels of perceptions do exist: for instance, *mo‘āyana* (viewing), which is even more direct than *mošāhada*, as well as those modes described in the tenth section of Anṣārī’s manual (Anṣārī, p. 124-25, 133-144). Pointing to Abu’l-Ḥosayn Nuri’s importance in the development of visionary Sufi terminology, textual critic Moḥsen Bidārfar argues that Anṣārī relies on Nuri’s *Maqāmāt al-qolub* and borrows from it, among many things, the phrase *mošāhadāt al-ḥaqā’eq*, although Anṣārī’s use of Sufi terms exhibits greater clarity and exactitude (Qāsāni, 2006, pp. 12-13).

The statements of Jonayd as well as those of Nuri, Tostari, and Termeḍi suggest that it was during this generation of Sufi thought in the 3rd/9th century that the vocabulary of *kašf* o *šohud* found earliest currency, and it was during the next two centuries (in the generation of Sarrāj, Kalābāḍi, Solami, Qoṣayri, and Anṣārī) that scholars with Sufi affiliations and inclinations took interest in



defining, relating, and codifying these terms and statements. It is also noteworthy that terms for unveiling and witnessing found in the generation of Jonayd seem to derive from more allusive usage in the earlier generation, the one identified with Imam Ja‘far al-Šādeq.

#### THE POST-FORMATIVE PERIOD (12TH-13TH CENTURIES)

In his magnum opus *Eḥyā’ ʿolum al-din*, underscoring the epistemological centrality of the heart, Abu Ḥāmed Moḥammad Ġazāli (d. 505/1111) presents unveiling as a more veracious alternative to knowledge acquired by sensory or rational means. Ġazāli often uses *kašf* and *mošāhada* together to describe an interior process of knowledge acquisition, declaring that true knowledge corresponds to “unveiling and witnessing through the light of insight (*mošāhada be-nur al-bašira*),” a phrase repeated often in this text (Ġazāli, 2004, I, p. 267). Unveiling, an attribute of the innermost dimension of the heart (Ġazāli, 2004, I, p. 97), must be acquired through means, including awakening (*tanbih*), which Ġazāli uses to defend the Sufi practice of *samā’*, since the musical audition of poetry can lead to such awakening (Ġazāli, 2004, II, p. 262). Further verifying Sufism as a spiritual science necessary for the Muslim world, Ġazāli also argues that, in understanding reliance on God, *kašf* is “more beneficial than reports or transmissions,” as ethical traits must be experienced (Ġazāli, 2004, IV, p. 232). As for witnessing, Ġazāli does at times use the word *šohud* but prefers *mošāhada*, which he also uses for simple physical seeing, while employing *šohud* exclusively for spiritual witnessing, often in phrases such as *ʿayn al-šohud* or *molāzamat al-šohud*. The wayfarer experiences witnessing (*mošāhada*) in grades; first witnessing the divine actions (*afāl*), then the divine attributes (*šefāt*), then the divine essence (*dāt*), and lastly the complete annihilation of oneself (Ġazāli, 2004, IV, p. 76). Similarly, the third level of recognizing God’s oneness (*tawḥid*), below the final level of self-annihilation (*fanā’*), is to “witness (*yošāhed*) that there is no god but God by way of unveiling (*kašf*) through the medium of the Real’s light” (Ġazāli, 2004, IV, p. 215). The apogee of unveiling (*kašf*), which is the true vision of God (*roʿya*), is only attained in the afterlife (Ġazāli, 2004, IV, p. 272). Ġazāli frequently also uses the term *mokāšafa*, or the phrases *ʿelm al-mokāšafa* or *ʿolum al-mokāšafa* (the science or sciences of unveiling), in delineating esoteric discovery through the purification of the heart as a separate Islamic science; cleansing the heart leads to the manifestation of light, which unveils spiritual matters and culminates in gnosis (*maʿrefa*) of God (Ġazāli, 2004, I, p. 26). Perhaps responding to criticism about his particular and nontechnical usage



of Sufi terminology in the *Ehyā'*, Ġazālī includes a section on Sufi terms (*alfāz*) in his defense of the *Ehyā'*, *Ketāb al-amlā' fi eškālāt al-Ehyā'*. His definitions for the most part acknowledge what would by that point fit a range of standard definitions, but, contrary to Qoṣayri and Anṣāri, for Ġazālī, *mokāšafa* is a higher level of spiritual achievement than *mošāhada*. As a Sufi term, *mošāhada* has three ascending applications: “witnessing through the Real, which is seeing things through the proofs of recognizing oneness; witnessing for the Real, which is seeing the Real in things; and witnessing of the Real, which is the reality of certainty without any misgiving” (Ġazālī, *Ketāb al-amlā'*, p. 16). Unveiling (*mokāšafa*) too has three grades: “unveiling through knowledge, which is the realization of the affliction by understanding; unveiling by state, which is the realization of sight over and above the state; and unveiling of recognizing oneness, which is the realization of the veracity of the allusion” (Ġazālī, *Ketāb al-amlā'*, p. 16). The phrases used here, along with the threefold structure reminiscent of Anṣāri, are echoed in later Sufi writings.

By the 7th/13th century, the vocabulary of unveiling and witnessing became so commonplace in Sufi writings that a detailed discussion exceeds the limits of this entry. Considerations of the terms *kašf* and *šohud* and the questions surrounding them, as well as the sometimes synonymous *mokāšafa* and *mošāhada*, can be found among most post-formative works of contemplative Sufism in prose, including Ruzbehān Baqlī's (d. 606/1209) *Abhar al-āšeqin*, Šehāb-al-Din 'Omar Sohrawardi's (d. 632/1234) *Awāref al-ma'āref*, and Faḳr al-Din Ebrāhim 'Erāqī's (d. 688/1289) *Lama'āt*, and a good deal of poetry as well, including that of 'Omar b. 'Ali b. Fāreż (d. 632/1235) as well as those mentioned below.

**Ebn al-'Arabi** (d. 638/1240) had significant influence in the formation of Sufism's theoretical language. Like Jonayd, he contemplates the relationship between existence (*wojud*) and witnessing (*šohud*), but, unlike Jonayd, his cosmological system does often engage philosophical interpretations of existence. Witnessing serves not only as the primary function of all created things, but also as their mode of existence, one that is entirely receptive (Ebn al-'Arabi, 1997, III, p. 352). While the term *mošāhada* sometimes refers to a specific application of *šohud*, a rank of esoteric knowledge granted to the mystic, often the two are synonymous. When *mošāhada* does refer specifically to one type of witnessing, Ebn al-'Arabi, like Ġazālī, places it below *mokāšafa*, because witnessing necessitates forms, whether traces of divine self-disclosure



left in the heart (*šāhed*) or external forms, while unveiling strips away forms, such that “unveiling makes subtle (*latīf*) that which is gross (*kaṭīf*), while witnessing makes gross that which is subtle” (Ebn al-‘Arabi, 1997, II, p. 486). The highest form of vision is that which is most receptive, involving the least interference from the receiver and his or her knowledge, and thus most direct: namely vision (*al-ro’ya*), which “is not preceded by knowledge of the seen, while *šohud* is in fact preceded by knowledge of the witnessed” (Ebn al-‘Arabi, 1997, II, p. 557). An emphatic point for Ebn al-‘Arabi is that the divine self-disclosure (*al-tajalli*), which is the most basic unit of divine self-manifestation to both mystic and cosmos, must be received in matter, in some sort of form-compliant medium, for *šohud* to occur (Ebn al-‘Arabi, 2001, p. 217). Aside from his own definitions, Ebn al-‘Arabi also offers more technically Sufi definitions of *mošāhada* and *mokāšafa*, which parallel almost identically Ġazālī’s definitions in his *Ketāb al-‘emlā’*, and upon which Ebn al-‘Arabi expands at some length (Ebn al-‘Arabi, 1997, II, pp. 484-87). Ebn al-‘Arabi offers these definitions of *mokāšafa* and *mošāhada* in a short treatise known as *Eṣṭelāḥ al-Šufiyya*, as well. Throughout his writings, the word *kašf*, which is distinct from *mokāšafa*, signifies the esoteric manner of knowledge acquisition, used often in phrases such as *ahl al-kašf* (the people of unveiling, who are the achieved mystics), with the important distinction that in Ebn al-‘Arabi’s thought *kašf* does not occur through the reception of light, which is itself a veil, but rather through “light’s illumination” (*be-ziā’ al-nur*; Ebn al-‘Arabi, 1997, I, p. 326).

Ebn al-‘Arabi’s thought marks the most significant post-formative change in the language of unveiling and witnessing. Hence, writers in later centuries, influenced by him, would return to the earliest Islamic sources, as well as the treatises of earlier Sufis, markedly impressed by Ebn al-‘Arabi’s ontological-cosmological vision. An excellent example is Kamāl-al-Din ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Qāšāni (d. 730/1329), who, in his *Eṣṭelāḥāt al-Šufiyya*, offers definitions of *mokāšafa* and *mošāhada* that follow closely the definitions of ‘Abd-Allāh Anṣāri, including the placement of those words in a section on “realities” (*al-ḥaqā’eq*), and the ordering of *mošāhada* above *mokāšafa*, while also applying the distinctive cosmology of Ebn al-‘Arabi, including his emphasis on the “identities” (*al-a’yān*), for instance defining *mokāšafa* as “witnessing (*šohud*) the identities” (Qāšāni, 2005, p. 152).

#### CLASSICAL PERSIAN POETIC USAGE

Persian Sufi poetry tends to concern itself less with the specifics of spiritual stations found in Arabic and Persian prose, so recurrence of the term *kašf*



greatly exceeds that of the often more technical *mokāšafa*. Ḥakim Majdud b. Ādam Sanā'i (d. 525/1131) makes marked use of the word *kašf* in its variant meanings, including the mystical, but usage becomes far more apparent in the poetry of Farid-al-Din 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221) and, following him, Mawlānā Jalāl-al-Din Moḥammad Rumi (d. 672/1273). Both mystics frequently pair *kašf* with words equivalent to secret (*serr*, *asrār*, *rāz*), and both contrast the term with words equivalent to veil (*ḥejāb*, *ḡeṭā*), in addition to other thematic contexts. Šohud and mošāhada, as terms, are far less prevalent than *kašf*; nevertheless, the concept of witnessing pervades their poetry, often signified by the word *tamāšā* (watching) in the poems of 'Aṭṭār, for example. Indicative of the tendency among later Sufi writers, both *kašf* and *šohud* occur repeatedly in the poetry of Nur-al-Din 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmi (d. 898/1492), as seen in the poet's *Selselat al-dahab*, where he refers, for example, to the "light of *kašf o šohud*" and the "people of *kašf o šohud*" (Jāmi, I, pp. 121, 136, ll. pp. 1200, 1542).

#### LATER DEVELOPMENTS

The term *kašf*, as well as the phrase *kašf o šohud*, receives particular importance among Shi'ite mystics and mystically inclined philosophers after Ebn al-'Arabi, such as Bahā'-al-Din Ḥaydar Āmoli, who not only uses the two terms frequently, but also whose tripartite division of knowledge into reason (*'aql*), revealed tradition (*naql*), and unveiling (*kašf*) comes to alter the discourse of Shi'ite mysticism after him (Gardet, p. 698). Āmoli's assertion that only *kašf* leads to the pinnacle of knowledge, which is gnosis of God, becomes a key part of the mystical philosophy of Mollā Šadrā Šadr-al-Din Moḥammad Širāzi (d. 1045/1635-36), whose realization of the primacy of existence, as opposed to the primacy of essence, was a result of unveiling (*enkešāfan*; see Šadr-al-Din Širāzi, I, p. 73). Mollā Šadrā, like Āmoli, consistently designates achieved mystics as the people of *kašf o šohud*. Lastly, the Naqšbandi shaikh and theorist Aḥmad Serhendi (d. 1034/1624) has offered the "Oneness of Witnessing," or *waḥdat al-šohud*, as a rectification of the doctrine of the "Oneness of Being" (*waḥdat al-wojud*) associated with Ebn al-'Arabi. While the pertinence and originality of his statements might be debated, Serhendi's assertion, differentiating between existence and the divine essence, merits mention, because it reconsiders the subjectivity of both witnessing and the knowledge that results from it (see Serhendi, pp. 120, 174, letters 122 and 43, as well as Chittick, p. 39).



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