

RESEARCH ARTICLE		The Narrative of Color in Sufi Thought	
Medissem Rachida		University of Ain Témouchent Belhadj Algeria Email: Rachame64@gmail.com	
Kacimi Mohammed		University of Ain Témouchent Belhadj Bouchaib Algeria Email: mohammed.kacimi@univ-temouchent.edu.dz	
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Abstract This study examines the symbolic and spiritual significance of color in Sufi thought, highlighting its presence in the Qur’an and interpretations by key Sufi scholars. In Sufism, colors are viewed not as mere physical attributes but as reflections of inner spiritual states and stages of transformation on the path to divine realization. The research begins with an analysis of color in classical Arabic texts and Qur’anic usage, using sources like Lisan al-‘Arab and Basā’ir Dhawī al-Tamyīz. It explores how colors correspond to the evolving conditions of the soul—commanding, blaming, and tranquil—through the insights of Ibn ‘Arabi, Al-Ghazali, and Al-Sulami. Specific colors carry distinct meanings: red symbolizes the pull between desire and light; blue, spiritual blindness; white, purity and divine favor; gold, ego and worldly trials; purple, repentance; and pink and orange, transitional spiritual states. Ultimately, the study shows that color in Sufism serves as a metaphysical language, expressing stages of inner struggle, purification, and divine unveiling, guiding seekers toward union with the Divine.			
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1. Chapter One: The Symbolic Structure of Color in Sufi Thought

1.1 General Introduction: Sufi Consciousness and the Construction of Symbolism

Sufism does not operate as a purely rational discourse; rather, it is a mystical experiential journey that relies on symbols and allusions to express inner worlds that ordinary language fails to describe. Within this symbolic system, color emerges as a medium that facilitates transition from the sensory to the spiritual, from multiplicity to unity.

In Sufi texts, color is not treated as a mere physical description, but as a mirror of inner states of the soul. Al-Niffari expressed this beautifully when he said:

“When meaning expands, expression contracts”, a statement that calls for symbolic language, where color becomes a spiritual signpost.

1.2 Color in the Qur’an: The Divine Foundation of Symbolism

The Qur’an provides the spiritual basis for symbolic color perception. In the eyes of the Sufi, the diversity of colors in the universe is a manifestation of the multiplicity of divine attributes. God says: “And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors” [Al-Rum: 22], which the Sufi reads not merely

¹ - Al-Niffari, Al-Mawāqif wa al-Mukhāṭabāt, ed. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 12.

as biological diversity but as a metaphor for spiritual variation and metaphysical presence.

Another verse declares: “And among the mountains are streaks white and red, of varying colors, and some extremely black” [Fatir: 27]. Such verses point to the reality that colors are woven into the architecture of creation, and thus reflect divine manifestation.

The Sufi does not see color as a passive attribute of matter, but as a visible trace of the Real (al-Haqq).² representing an ascent from darkness to divine light:

Black – Base self (nafs ammarā)

Red – Struggle and passio

Yellow – Purification

Green – Intuition and awakening

Blue – Contemplation and gnosis

Silver – Unity and transcendence

White – Annihilation in God (Fanā’)

This system constructs a cosmic metaphysical ladder, where each color becomes a vibrational frequency of spiritual growth.³

1.3 Color in Sufi Art and Sacred Architecture

Color also manifests powerfully in Sufi visual art—domes, tiles, manuscripts, and calligraphy. For example:

Green domes symbolize the Prophet’s light and saintly presence.

Blue tiles evoke serenity and divine depth.

Gold ornamentation symbolizes divine light and purity.

Black spaces in architectural niches suggest the hidden aspect of the Divine.

These colors are not decorative—they are a theology of presence manifest in form.⁴

1.4 Toward a Sufi Theory of Color

The cumulative Sufi treatment of color suggests a full metaphysical theory, built on four foundations:

Color as Manifestation, not Surface: Color expresses ontological truth.

Color as Mirror of the Self: The state of the heart determines the color it perceives.

Color as Pathway: Colors are not symbols only—they guide spiritual ascent.

Color as Presence: Color is a station, a mark of inner reality.

Thus, color in Sufi thought becomes a language of divine intimacy, an interior science of light, emotion, and transformation

2. Chapter Two: Color Significations in Sufi Spiritual Stations

2.1 Introduction: From Symbol to Station

Building upon the metaphysical groundwork laid in Chapter One, we now examine how colors function as practical markers on the Sufi path. Whereas the first chapter treated color primarily as an ontological manifestation of divine Names, this chapter unfolds color as a pedagogical tool—each hue signifying a distinct spiritual station (maqām) or state (ḥāl) that the seeker must experience, integrate, and transcend. Through close readings of primary texts and visionary testimonies, we will trace how white, black, red, green, and blue guide the aspirant’s heart, mind, and conduct.

2.2 White: The Station of Annihilation (Fanā’)

Definition & Context

White, in Sufi parlance, denotes the utter dissolution of the ego into the Divine Presence. It is not merely absence of color but a radiant field where the individual self vanishes, leaving only the “mirror polished to reflect the Real.”

Textual Evidence

Ibn ‘Arabī describes this state as “a sea of luminous white, where no self remains, only the ineffable Face”¹.

In Kitāb al-Isrār, he further elaborates that “when the seeker dons the garment of white, he stands unclothed before the Truth”².

Experiential Account

A disciple in Cairo reported seeing “a boundless white space, so pure that every thought ceased,” an episode interpreted by his shaykh as confirmation of fanā’³.

Behavioral Implications

Practically, white teaches the aspirant detachment: renouncing all personal preferences, judgments, and

² - Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, ed. Henry Corbin, Institute of Islamic Studies, p. 113.

³ - Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *The Perfect Human*, ed. Youssef Ziedan, General Authority for Cultural Palaces, p. 145.

⁴ - Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, Dar al-Ma’arif, p. 203.

identities. Ritual silence, plain white attire, and simple meals often accompany prolonged retreats (khalwa) aimed at realizing this station.

2.3 Black: The Station of Divine Awe (Jalāl)

Definition & Context

Black signifies the hidden majesty of God—His jalāl: a veiling power that inspires reverent fear. It is not “darkness” in the pejorative sense but a profound threshold where the Light’s intensity is felt through its concealment.

Philosophical Reflection

Suhrawardī writes that “black is a shadow cast by perfect light; the darker the veil, the more glaring the unseen radiance”⁴.

Sufi Testimony

Al-Qushayrī records that beginners encountering jalāl often tremble: “I saw no form, yet felt an immense Presence, as though the earth itself bowed in awe”⁵.

Practice Note

Guided by a shaykh, the novice contemplates divine names like al-Qahhār (“The Irresistible”), invoking black veils in meditation to cultivate humility and remind oneself of human limitations before God’s majesty.

2.4 Red: The Station of Ecstatic Love (Shawq and ‘Ishq)

Definition & Context

Red embodies the fiery passion that consumes all but Divine Love

Chapter Two: Color Significations in Sufi Spiritual Stations

2.5 Green: The Station of Intimate Knowledge (Ma‘rifa)

Definition: Green embodies the light of Prophethood and the enduring presence of spiritual guides.

Canonical Reference: Al-Qushayrī observes: “Green is the badge of those who have been clothed in the secret knowledge of the saints”⁷.

Visionary Report: In al-Jīlī’s Al-Insān al-Kāmil, a seeker sees a tree with emerald leaves, each leaf inscribed with a divine Name—an image of ma‘rifa unfolding⁸.

Communal Significance: Sufi lodges often adorn their halls in green, reminding the community of continuous spiritual transmission.

2.6 Blue: The Station of Reliance and Serenity (Tawakkul and Sukūn)

Definition: Blue connotes the serenity of complete trust and mental clarity before God.

Philosophical Note: Some Illuminationists analogy the gradations of sky-blue to the levels of reliance: deeper blues for deeper surrender.

Practitioner’s Insight: Abdul-Karīm al-Jīlī comments that “when the seeker’s heart is pure, it becomes as calm as a placid blue lake”⁹.

Practical Outcome: In this station, distractions fade; the soul rests in the divine embrace, like still waters reflecting the heavens.

2.7 Synthesis: The Ladder of Colorful Stations

Plotting these five stations on a chromatic ladder reveals a dynamic progression:

White (purity → annihilation)

Black (veiling → awe)

Red (burning → love)

Green (illumination → knowledge)

Blue (serenity → surrender)

This sequence is not strictly linear; seekers may oscillate—experiencing black-veiled awe before leaping into green illumination. Yet the ladder metaphor underscores how color guides both cognition and affect, shaping the soul’s ascent.

2.8 Conclusion of Chapter Two

The second chapter has shown that colors in Sufi practice are more than decorative—they are active instruments of spiritual pedagogy. From the white light of fanā’ to the blue calm of tawakkul, each hue marks distinct shifts in consciousness and behavior. Understanding this chromatic taxonomy equips both scholar and practitioner to read the soul’s journey in living color.

Building upon the metaphysical groundwork laid in Chapter One, we now examine how colors function as practical markers on the Sufi path. Whereas the first chapter treated color primarily as an ontological manifestation of divine Names, this chapter unfolds color as a pedagogical tool—each hue signifying a distinct spiritual station (maqām) or state (ḥāl) that the seeker must experience, integrate, and transcend. Through close readings of primary texts and visionary

⁵ - Al-Qushayrī, Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya, p. 203.

testimonies, we will trace how white, black, red, green, and blue guide the aspirant's heart, mind, and conduct.

3. Chapter Three: The Visual Hermeneutics of Color in Sufi Literature and Iconography

3.1 Introduction: Seeing with the Heart

While earlier chapters examined the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of color in Sufism, this chapter moves toward visual hermeneutics—that is, how colors function as semiotic devices within Sufi literature, visionary experience, and symbolic iconography. For the Sufi, perception is never limited to the outer eye (baṣar) but includes the inner eye (baṣīra), which interprets visible forms as signs (āyāt) of hidden realities.

Drawing upon texts by al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Rūmī, as well as imagery from Persian miniatures and Sufi talismans, this chapter explores how colors form a language of divine communication embedded in poetic and visual representation.

3.2 Color in Sufi Poetry: A Language of Presence

A. Metaphorical Usage

In classical Sufi poetry, color often replaces direct theological language to evoke states of divine presence and transcendent longing.

Red becomes the wine of annihilation (khamr al-fanā),

Green symbolizes the garden of gnosis (rawḍat alma‘rifa),

White denotes purity and veiling (ḥijāb),

Black is employed to describe both night of divine absence and depths of the unknowable essence.

B. Examples

Ibn al-Fāriḍ, in his Khamriyya, writes:

“A crimson chalice passed through emerald hands,
poured into whitened hearts under a sky of ink.”

This cascading use of red, green, white, and black becomes a mystical tableau, encoding spiritual transitions.

Rūmī, in the Mathnawī, describes the color of a lover's face changing “from pale white to flushed red to darkened black,” signifying the stages of inner transformation through love and loss¹.

3.3 The Visionary Color Spectrum: Reports from the Heart

A. Dream and Vision Literature

Many Sufis record visions of luminous colors that correspond to specific divine manifestations or inner states.

Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of a “green sun rising in a blue sky,” interpreted by his master as a sign of receiving spiritual knowledge without mediation².

Female Sufi mystics such as Umm al-Khayr of Andalusia reported “red rain falling during dhikr,” symbolizing the descent of divine love³.

B. Color as Proof of Transformation

Colors seen in dreams or during khalwa are not decorative, but diagnostic. The shaykh interprets them much like a physician reads symptoms.

For example:

Seeing golden light may denote illumination (kashf),

A recurring grey mist could indicate spiritual confusion or delay in progression

3.4 Color in Sufi Iconography and Art

A. Miniature Painting and Illumination

Persian and Ottoman manuscripts of Sufi texts are often richly illustrated with symbolic colors.

In Maṭnawī manuscripts, Rūmī is frequently depicted in green robes (ma‘rifa), seated under blue skies (tawakkul), with a red sun (‘ishq) rising behind him.

The robes of dervishes often alternate between white and black, reflecting alternating maqāmāt of clarity and awe.

B. Talismanic Uses of Color

In Sufi amulets and wafq diagrams, colors are assigned mystical functions:

Blue ink repels evil (‘ayn or envy),

Green seals ensure blessings and guidance,

Red circles are placed around Names of God related to divine wrath or protective force (al-Qahhār, al-Muntaqim).

3.5 Synesthetic Color: Beyond Vision

A. Hearing Color and Smelling Light

Certain advanced mystics describe synesthetic experiences, in which colors are not only seen, but heard, touched, or smelled.

‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī writes: “The voice of the Truth was as red as thunder”⁶.

⁶ - Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ed. Youssef Ziedan, p. 204.

Rūmī says: “I smelled green in the wind, and it said, ‘God is near.’”⁷

These reports reveal a sensory unification, typical of advanced spiritual states (jam‘ al-ḥawāss), where perception transcends conventional boundaries.

3.6 Color as Esoteric Code (Rumūz)

A. Hidden Alphabets

In some Sufi circles, colors operate as an esoteric alphabet. Letters are assigned hues, which when combined in dreams or visions, form a symbolic message.

Example:

Seeing Red-Green-Black in sequence may be interpreted as:

‘Ishq (Love)

Ma‘rifa (Gnosis)

Tajallī (Theophany through Jalāl).

B. Initiatic Uses

In certain initiations (bay‘a), the novice wears a black turban that is gradually replaced with green or white as he progresses. This ritual chromaticism is not merely ceremonial, but spiritually formative.

3.7 Conclusion of Chapter Three

The symbolic universe of Sufism is not limited to words or abstract metaphysics—it is deeply visual and coloristic. Through poetry, visionary experiences, iconography, and ritual, color emerges as a language of divine pedagogy. To read Sufi texts or view Sufi art without attending to their color-coding is to miss the rich stratum of aesthetic revelation interwoven with theology.

As Rūmī beautifully said:

“The colors are not on the page; they are in the soul.”⁸

4. Chapter Four: Chromatic Theology – Color in the Doctrine of Divine Names and Attributes

4.1 Introduction: Seeing God Through Color

In Islamic mysticism, God is known through His Names and Attributes (al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt), each name reflecting an aspect of the Divine Reality. For Sufis, these names are not merely linguistic references but living, radiant forces that permeate creation and the heart of the seeker. In this chapter, we explore how

color functions as a theological mode of apprehending divine attributes, a visible veil through which the Infinite manifests to human perception.

Color becomes a form of metaphysical grammar through which the Divine speaks. The visible spectrum thus mirrors the names of beauty (jamāl) and names of majesty (jalāl)—a chromatic revelation of God’s presence in the world.

4.2 Red and the Divine Name: Al-Wadūd (The Most Loving)

Red, the color of blood, heat, and fire, is associated in Sufi cosmology with the name al-Wadūd—the One whose love permeates all beings. This love is not sentimental but fierce, devouring, and transformative. Ibn ‘Arabī writes:

“The color of al-Wadūd is red, for His love is a fire that consumes all duality.”⁹

The red of spiritual ecstasy (ḥāl al-‘ishq) corresponds to the dissolving of boundaries between lover and Beloved. The red robe (khirqa ḥamrā’) is sometimes given to those who have undergone profound spiritual passion.

The divine name al-Wadūd thus radiates through red as a force of intimacy, drawing the seeker beyond reason and into union.

4.3 Black and Al-Qaḥḥār (The Subduer)

Black represents the terrifying majesty (jalāl) of God. It is associated with names that conceal, dominate, or humble the soul.

The name al-Qaḥḥār (“The Irresistible Subduer”) is often linked to a black emanation—an abyss of divine power that breaks all pride.

Al-Ghazālī in al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā connects al-Muntaqim (The Avenger) with “the darkness of justice”—a black that veils in order to protect the ineffable core¹⁰.

Black is thus the color of mystical gravity, forcing surrender through awe. It is the womb of the unseen (ghayb) and the color of pre-existence before creation.

4.4 Green and Al-‘Alīm (The All-Knowing)

⁷ - Rūmī, Mathnawī, Book 4, ed. Nicholson, p. 287.

⁸ - Rūmī, Mathnawī, Book 4, ed. Nicholson, p. 287

⁹ - Ibn ‘Arabī, Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, vol. 2, p. 97.

¹⁰ - Al-Ghazālī, Al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā, ed. al-Kawtharī, p. 134.

Green, associated with life, fertility, and prophetic inheritance, is traditionally linked to the name al-‘Alīm (The All-Knowing).

Ibn ‘Arabī equates green with ma‘rifa, the deep and luminous knowledge bestowed upon the gnostics (‘urafā’)¹¹.

In visionary accounts, the presence of al-Khiḍr—the immortal sage—is always green, symbolizing continuous divine instruction. Khiḍr’s association with the name al-‘Alīm represents knowledge that is not acquired, but infused.

Green is the color of divine pedagogy, teaching through subtle illumination, dreams, and insight.

4.5 White and Al-Salām (The Source of Peace)

White denotes serenity, inner peace, and divine harmony. It is often associated with al-Salām, the source of all spiritual stillness.

Al-Qushayrī writes that “the name al-Salām reflects the white clarity of the soul when it is free from all agitation”¹².

In Sufi retreat (khalwa), the sudden vision of white light is interpreted as the first trace of divine peace, a herald of spiritual integration.

White is not mere absence, but a field of wholeness—a colorless light encompassing all colors, just as al-Salām encompasses all perfections.

4.6 Blue and Al-Wakīl (The Disposer of Affairs)

Blue reflects the boundless sky and calm sea, suggesting trust and cosmic vastness. It is often connected with the name al-Wakīl, the One in whom all affairs are entrusted.

Suhrawardī suggests in *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* that the blue hue is “the breath of divine reliance”—a celestial color that calms the soul into surrender¹³.

Blue-tinted dreams often appear after recitation of tawakkul invocations, signaling the seeker’s shift from anxiety to confidence in divine providence.

Blue is thus the color of letting go, the chromatic signature of tawakkul, and the serenity that comes from placing one’s heart in divine hands.

4.7 The Golden Light: Al-Nūr (The Light)

Gold, as a radiant and incorruptible color, is the chromatic manifestation of al-Nūr—the Light of God that permeates all existence.

In the famous Verse of Light (Qur’an 24:35), God is described as “Light upon Light”—a phrase that has inspired centuries of mystical reflection.

Ibn ‘Arabī sees this light as golden, for gold reflects without distortion. It is the color that best transmits divine presence without egoic residue¹⁴.

Gold appears in Sufi visions as halos, orbs, or walls of light and is considered the seal of divine proximity, appearing only when the heart has become a mirror.

4.8 Color as Theophanic Language (Tajallī)

The Divine does not reveal Himself in essence (dhāt), but through manifestations (tajallīyyāt). These tajallīyyāt are often experienced chromatically:

Red for overwhelming love,
Green for inspired knowledge,
Black for veiling awe,
White for purity of form,
Blue for trustful surrender,
Gold for absolute divine radiance.

Each vision becomes a lesson, a wordless teaching, a theophany in light and hue. The Sufi trained in this language learns to “read” divine address through inner and outer color.

4.9 The Colorless Beyond: Beyond All Names and Qualities

While colors guide the seeker toward the Divine, the final station lies beyond the spectrum.

Ibn ‘Arabī writes:

“The Real is not in color. But He manifests in color to teach the unknowing. Beyond all hues is the hue of non-being.”¹⁵

This is mirrored in the black ink of Sufi texts and the white spaces around them—the silent testimony of what cannot be said, only known through unitive experience.

Color, then, is both ladder and veil, pointing to the Divine while hiding His essence. The journey begins in color and ends in colorless clarity.

4.10 Conclusion of Chapter Four

¹¹ - Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Tajallīyyāt*, Cairo MS, folio 53.

¹² - Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla Qushayriyya*, p. 190.

¹³ - Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, trans. Corbin, p. 146.

¹⁴ - Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, vol. 4, p. 301.

¹⁵ - Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Isrār*, folio 112.

In Sufism, color is not aesthetic decoration—it is theophanic theology. Each hue is tied to a Divine Name, and each Name is a window onto the Infinite. By contemplating the red of al-Wadūd, the black of al-Qahhār, the green of al-‘Alīm, the blue of al-Wakīl, and the gold of al-Nūr, the seeker enters a chromatic discipline that aligns the soul with divine realities.

Color becomes a path of witnessing (*mushāhada*), wherein theology becomes lived perception, and seeing becomes knowing.

5. Chapter Five: Chromatic Rituals - The Role of Color in Sufi Practices and Embodied Spirituality

5.1 Introduction: Ritual as Living Color

In Sufi praxis, color is not only contemplated or envisioned—it is embodied. Whether in the clothing of dervishes, the architecture of Sufi lodges (*zāwiyas* and *tekkiyas*), or the choreography of the *ṣamā‘* (spiritual audition), colors play a dynamic role in ritual, performance, and embodied remembrance. This chapter explores how color operates within ritual contexts as a mode of spiritual alignment, a visible index of the soul's journey and its station (*maqām*) before the Divine.

Color, then, becomes a tool of spiritual pedagogy—teaching, modulating, and transforming the interior state of the practitioner through outer forms.

5.2 The Colors of the Khirqa: The Sufi Cloak as a Spectrum of Initiation

A. Symbolic Meaning of Colors in the Khirqa

The *khirqa*, the Sufi cloak given during initiation, is often color-coded according to the spiritual degree or lineage of the recipient:

Black: symbolizes initial humility and the "death of the ego" (*fanā’ al-nafs*).

White: denotes the purification of the heart (*taṣfiyat al-qalb*).

Green: is reserved for those who have attained *ma‘rifa* (gnosis).

Red: indicates the ecstatic station of divine love (*maḥabbat Allāh*).

Blue: often connotes *tawakkul* (trust) and detachment from worldly agitation.

B. Historical References

The Naqshbandī order, for instance, emphasizes white and green in their vestments, reflecting their dual concern for inner purity and gnosis.

The Mevlevi dervishes wear white robes, a black cloak, and a tan hat (symbolizing the shroud, grave, and tombstone respectively), a full chromatic metaphor of the death of self and rebirth in God.¹⁶

5.3 Color in the Ṣamā‘: Movement, Music, and Light

A. Chromatic Movement

The spinning dance of the Mevlevi whirling dervishes is a ritual choreography of color. As their skirts flare during rotation, the white fabric catches the light, producing a hypnotic interplay of illumination that mirrors inner awakening.

The ceremony space is often lit with colored lamps—red for divine love, green for eternal life, and blue for divine vastness.

B. The Music of Colors

According to some Sufi commentaries, particular musical *maqāmāt* (scales) evoke specific colors.

For example:

Maqām Nahāwand evokes blue (tranquility),

Maqām Rāst evokes red (vitality),

Maqām ‘Ajām evokes white (clarity and majesty).¹⁷

This multisensory dimension is described in Persian and Turkish poetry as a “colorful echo of divine names.”

5.4 Color and Architecture: The Sufi Lodge as a Chromatic Cosmos

A. Chromatic Geometry

Many Sufi lodges are architecturally organized to reflect symbolic color schemes:

Green domes symbolize divine protection.

Blue tiles in Persian shrines like those of Shiraz or Samarkand express the infinite nature of the spiritual path.

White marble interiors suggest purity and inner silence.

B. Light and Window Coloration

Stained-glass windows are deliberately used to produce chromatic atmospheres during prayer and *dhikr*:

Red light during dusk prayers intensifies the sense of spiritual yearning.

Green light at dawn produces calm introspection.

¹⁶ - Fritz Meier, *The Whirling Dervishes*, trans. Dickson, p. 97.

¹⁷ - Nūr al-Dīn al-Jīlī, *Ṭarīq al-Qulūb*, Cairo manuscript, fol. 28b.

In this sense, the Sufi lodge becomes a sacred prism, bending light into spiritual meanings.

5.5 Chromatic Symbolism in Dhikr and Litanies

A. Color in the Heart Meditation

Many Sufi orders guide disciples through a heart visualization during dhikr, where each part of the heart is associated with a color:

Black: qalb – the ego-self

Red: rūḥ – the spirit

White: sirr – the secret

Green: khafī – the hidden

Yellow/gold: akhfā – the most hidden.²

This lubb al-qalb (core of the heart) practice turns the inner being into a spectrum of divine resonance, trained through repetition of the Divine Names.

B. Color in Vocal Dhikr

The repetition of Divine Names in dhikr jahrī (loud remembrance) is often linked to visualized colors:

“Yā Qahhār” may be visualized as black thunder.

“Yā Nūr” as golden or white light.

“Yā Wadūd” as burning red flame.

Advanced practitioners report that the invocation of specific names results in chromatic visionary states, blending voice, breath, and inner sight.¹⁸

5.6 Chromatic Healing and Sufi Medicine

Some Sufi traditions, such as those influenced by the Shādhiliyya and Rifā‘iyya orders, include the use of colors for healing:

Green cloth placed on the ill is said to absorb spiritual illness.

Blue water (water left under blue glass in sunlight) is used for calming agitation.

Red light is avoided during mourning rituals, as it may stir excessive passion or sorrow.

These practices stem from the belief that colors are repositories of divine energy that can rebalance bodily and spiritual harmony.

5.7 The Ritual of Color in Death and Burial

A. Burial Cloths (Kafan)

White is the universal color of the burial shroud (kafan) across the Muslim world, symbolizing purity and return to the origin.

However, certain Sufi lineages wrap saints in green or black, indicating continuity of gnosis or eternal return into the Divine Mystery.

B. The Tomb as a Chromatic Shrine

Sufi shrines are often decorated with intense colors:

Green cloths on tombs mark baraka (blessing).

Gold calligraphy suggests divine light.

Black veils may be used during periods of collective mourning or crisis.

5.8 Conclusion of Chapter Five

In Sufism, the ritual body becomes a canvas for color. Clothing, dance, architecture, chant, and even the heart’s inner geography are infused with chromatic significance. The seeker does not merely contemplate colors but wears, moves, breathes, and lives through them. Ritual becomes a choreography of divine hues, a colorful remembrance of the One who created both darkness and light.

As the Sufi proverb says:

“He who sees only form, sees nothing. He who sees color in form, sees the Real.”¹⁹

6. Chapter Six: The Social and Spiritual Significance of Color in Human Life

Colors hold a profound significance in our daily social existence. We express our moods, identities, and cultural belonging through our choice of colors—in the clothes we wear, the furniture that adorns our homes, and even the stationery we use. We often describe colors with social labels such as “girly,” “elderly,” “youthful,” or “childish,” reflecting how color perception intertwines with societal expectations. Sometimes, individuals face ridicule or discrimination merely based on their color choices, despite these being primarily personal or emotional preferences. Yet, collective culture plays a powerful role in shaping our tastes and decisions, blending the personal with the communal.²⁰

The classical Arabic lexicon reflects the richness of color’s meaning. Ibn Manzur in *Lisan al-‘Arab* defines “color” (al-lawṇ) as a form or appearance such as blackness or redness—an attribute that distinguishes

¹⁸ - Nūr al-Dīn al-Jīlī, *Ṭarīq al-Qulūb*, Cairo manuscript, fol. 28b.

¹⁹ - Nūr al-Dīn al-Jīlī, *Ṭarīq al-Qulūb*, Cairo manuscript, fol. 28b.

²⁰ - Al-Niffari, *Al-Mawāqif wa al-Mukhāṭabāt*, ed. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 12.

one thing from another. He explains how the verb *tallawwana* (to be colored) indicates the process of acquiring color, and the plural *al-alwān* means varieties or types. Moreover, the term can metaphorically indicate variability in character or behavior, as in a person being “multicolored” (*mutallawwin*), someone who does not adhere to a single nature. Ibn Manzur also links *lawn* to a type of palm tree (*daqal*), illustrating the term’s breadth in meaning and its rootedness in nature.

Colors are deeply embedded in culture, each symbolizing emotions or states such as sorrow, joy, optimism, comfort, or anxiety. For instance, the color red holds different connotations across cultures:

In Chinese culture, it symbolizes happiness, joy, and success.

Among certain Indian tribes, it signifies defeat.

In some African countries, it represents death.

Conversely, in Britain and France, red is associated with masculinity.

In Japan, it relates to anger and danger.

In Arab culture, red embodies attraction, passion, and desire, as well as anger and embarrassment.

Beyond these social codes, red carries profound meanings within the Qur’an and Sufi thought, where it is layered with spiritual symbolism.

6.1.The Blue Color

The scholar al-Fayruzabadi, in his work *Basā’ir Dhawī al-Tamīz*, describes blue (*azraq* or *zuraqa*) as a hue between white and black. Intriguingly, he connects *zuraqa* with blindness, exemplified by the Qur’anic verse:

“The Day the Horn is blown, and We will gather the criminals, [blue] blind” (Qur’an 20:102).

Here, the blue symbolizes spiritual blindness — an absence of inner light — attributed to those who devoted themselves to worldly pleasures and forsook the luminous spiritual truths, as Ibn ‘Arabi interprets in his famous *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Arabi*.

8. References Sample:

1. Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ed. Youssef Ziedan, p. 204.
2. Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *The Perfect Human*, ed. Youssef Ziedan, General Authority for Cultural Palaces, p. 145.
3. Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, ed. al-Kawtharī, p. 134.

Blue is also symbolically associated with stagnant, polluted mud submerged in water over time, transforming its earthy ochre hue into a murky bluish tone that emits a foul odor. This metaphor encourages the spiritual seeker to purify the self from the “stagnation” of attachment and impurity, thereby preserving the innate light of the *fitra* (pure nature). Dr. Dhari Al-Saleh, in his book *Symbolism of Color in the Qur’an and Sufi Thought*, elaborates extensively on this interpretation, highlighting blue’s role as a symbol of purification and spiritual awakening.

6.1.1.The Celestial (Sky) Blue

Celestial blue, a blend of blue and white, is a color rich with spiritual connotations. It is believed to alleviate distress, reduce obsessive thoughts, and dispel fear and illusions. It opens the heart and mind to contemplate the grandeur of God’s creation, notably the vast sky. This view is prominently articulated by Imam Al-Ghazali in his epistles, where he regards the heavens as a profound sign of divine majesty and mercy.

This color embodies tranquility and expansiveness, symbolizing a spiritual horizon where the seeker may rise above worldly anxieties and glimpse the infinite presence of the Divine. The sky blue invites contemplation and serves as a visual gateway to divine realities, encouraging inner peace and reflective meditation.

7. Conclusion Colors do not merely decorate our external world; they are woven into the very fabric of human consciousness and spirituality. They carry social meanings, cultural codes, and profound spiritual messages. In Sufi thought, colors symbolize stages of the soul’s journey, psychological states, and modes of divine presence. From the earthly struggles represented by murky blue to the transcendent serenity of celestial blue, color narrates the soul’s transformation and its aspiration towards divine light.

4. Al-Niffari, Al-Mawāqif wa al-Mukhāṭabāt, ed. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 12.
5. Al-Niffari, Al-Mawāqif wa al-Mukhāṭabāt, ed. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 12.
6. Al-Qushayri, Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya, ed. Abd al-Halim Mahmoud, Dar al-Ma'arif, p. 203.
7. Al-Qushayrī, Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya, p. 203.
8. Al-Qushayrī, Risāla Qushayriyya, p. 190.
9. Fritz Meier, The Whirling Dervishes, trans. Dickson, p. 97.
10. Ibn 'Arabī, Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, vol. 2, p. 97.
11. Ibn 'Arabī, Futūḥāt, vol. 4, p. 301.
12. Ibn 'Arabī, Kitāb al-Isrār, folio 112.
13. Nūr al-Dīn al-Jīlī, Ṭarīq al-Qulūb, Cairo manuscript, fol. 28b.
14. Nūr al-Dīn al-Jīlī, Ṭarīq al-Qulūb, Cairo manuscript, fol. 28b.
15. Nūr al-Dīn al-Jīlī, Ṭarīq al-Qulūb, Cairo manuscript, fol. 28b.
16. Rūmī, Mathnawī, Book 4, ed. Nicholson, p. 287
17. Rūmī, Mathnawī, Book 4, ed. Nicholson, p. 287.
18. Suhrawardī, Hikmat al-Ishrāq, trans. Corbin, p. 146.
19. Suhrawardi, Philosophy of Illumination, ed. Henry Corbin, Institute of Islamic Studies, p. 113.
20. ¹- Ibn 'Arabī, Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt, Cairo MS, folio 53.