

THE SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY OF IBN AL-‘ARABI: BETWEEN THE EXOTERIC AND ESOTERIC DIMENSION

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to examine the spiritual philosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabi especially the spiritual stages start from the religious teaching aspects (exoteric) and spiritual (esoteric). The complexity of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s teachings needs to be investigate to respond the accusations from the religious conservative groups that state the practices done by the spiritualists are deviant religious teachings and even are considered as strange behavior and a symptom of mental illness. Through literature study, this research uses descriptive analysis method or content analysis with a normative theological approach to Ibn Arabi's works. The present study first investigated how Ibn al-‘Arabi explained the dichotomy between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions and also its impact on the psychology in his spiritual philosophy. The findings of this study showed that the stages of the spiritual such as repentance, asceticism, austerity, ecstasy, clairvoyance, and so on are the transcendental consciousness which cannot be understood using only the esoteric dimension, but also using the obedience toward the exoteric dimension. A true spiritualist such as the saints and the prophets are the spokesman for God on the earth to give the enlightenment of the life in the world.

Keywords: Exoteric; Esoteric; Ibn al-‘Arabi; Spiritual philosophy; Sufism.

Abstrak

Artikel ini menjelaskan tentang bangunan spiritual filosofis Ibn Arabi dengan mengeksplorasi tahapan-tahapan spiritual dari aspek ajaran agama (eksoteris) dan spiritual (esoteris). Kajian terhadap kompleksitas ajaran Ibn Arabi ini penting dilakukan untuk merespon tuduhan dari golongan konservatif keagamaan bahwa praktek para spiritualis ini adalah ajaran yang sesat dan menyimpang, bahkan dianggap sebagai perilaku aneh dan sakit jiwa. Melalui studi kepustakaan, penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis deskriptif atau konten analisis dengan pendekatan teologis normatif terhadap karya-karya Ibn Arabi. Artikel ini mengemukakan bagaimana Ibn Arabi menjelaskan dikotomi antara dimensi eksoteris dan esoteris, bahkan mempunyai dampak kejiwaan dalam rancang bangun filsafat spiritualnya. Temuan penelitian ini menjelaskan tahapan-tahapan spiritual seperti taubah, asceticism, austerity, ekstase, clairvoyance dan lainnya merupakan seperangkat kesadaran transcendental yang tidak hanya dipahami dari dimensi esoterisme saja, tetapi juga dicapai dengan kepatuhan terhadap dimensi eksoterisme keagamaan. Bahwa seorang spiritualis sejati mulai dari wali sampai nabi-nabi merupakan wakil-wakil Tuhan di bumi yang memberikan pencerahan terhadap kehidupan di dunia.

Kata Kunci: Eksoteris; Esoteris; Ibn al-‘Arabi; Filsafat Spiritual; Sufisme.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic spirituality (Sufism) has contributed greatly to the spiritual and intellectual life in the world. The influence of spiritual life is not only limited to the religious elite group but has reached all levels of society from the upper class to the lower class. Even these alternatives of Islamic spirituality are in great demand in the midst of a crisis that has undermined all dimensions of modern human life¹.

However, in the course of its long history, Islamic spirituality has not escaped from suspicion and criticism of the orthodox and conservative groups in Islam. The conflicts that arise are in the form of pros and cons that occur between the esoteric theologians and the esoteric spiritual experts or conflicts between heterodox and orthodox groups. The contra groups label the Islamic spirituality adhere to infidel (*kufir*) and heresy (*bid'a*) because they are not in accordance with teachings that are guided by authentic religious sources. Furthermore, the extreme accusations state that the experiences of these spiritualists are considered as strange behaviour and a symptom of mental illness².

However, the objective judgement put forward by some experts and the practitioners of Islamic spiritual experience who argue that spiritual experiences are only an expression of personal religious experience. The eccentric behaviour outside of the limits of reasonableness is only the result of personal experiences³. According to them, the mental dimension experienced by a spiritualist is an

extraordinary inner experience when it comes to a certain level in spiritual consciousness. This psychological proof even goes to the level of mental experience which is called transcendental experience or awareness⁴.

Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240.) was the greatest spiritual figure of the philosopher who was said to be the pioneer of the spiritual school that used philosophical analysis in his ontology and epistemology of spiritual knowledge⁵. With this approach, he developed a more open and tolerant spirituality, so that with this high-level scientific spirit, his philosophical mystic approach became unique, attractive and desirable. Ibn 'Arabi emphasized that the spiritual essence which spiritualists and researchers are against is the aspect of worship and morals. He argued that the spirituality of Islam is binding oneself with good behaviour through rituals of religious teachings, both in exoterism (*zahir*) and esoterism (*batin*) because the essence of consciousness is focused on behaviour⁶. In addition, Ibn Arabi elaborated on spiritual awareness with a psychological and mental health approach in which there are psychological symptoms that every spiritual practitioner experiences at every stage of the attainment of their religious experience⁷.

There have been many studies on Ibn Arabi's famous Sufism, such as Palacios (1979)⁸,

¹ Suha Taji Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: ANqa Publishing, 2007).

² Amir Al-Najjar, *Al-Ilm Al-Nafs Wa Al-Shufyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ilmi, 1980).

³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Univ of California Press, 2016).

⁴ William C. Chittick, *Sufism A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

⁵ Idris Danismaz, "Ibn Arabi Thoughts in the Practice of Ordinary Muslims: From the" Ethical

Interpretation" and " Practical Application" Perspective of İsmail Hakki Bursevi," *イスラーム世界研究: Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 11 (2018): 85–94.

⁶ Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1975).

⁷ James W Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," *Studia Islamica* 71, no. 71 (1990): 37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595637>.

⁸ Asian Palacios, *Ibn 'Arabi: Hayātub Wa Madzhabub* (Beirut: Dar Al-Qalam, 1979).

Chittick (1989)⁹ and Afifi (1998)¹⁰ until the latest study of Moradian¹¹. However, studies on the development of Ibn Arabi's Sufism on global humanitarian issues have also been widely studied such as religious diversity and interfaith dialogue which explained by Chittick (1995)¹² and Kakaie (2004)¹³, as well as a study on the relevance of Ibn Arabi's Sufism to human relations which had been studied by Webb (1990)¹⁴. Even the latest environmental issues have been researched by Rozi (2019)¹⁵ who elaborated on Ibn Arabi's Sufism in the formulation of ecosufism. Although there have been studies on religious awareness, from the psychological aspects of religion have been studied by Yiangou (2017)¹⁶, Gorjian (2021)¹⁷ and Nazemian (2022)¹⁸.

This study focuses on the spiritual philosophy of Ibn Arabi especially the spiritual stages start from the religious teaching aspects (exoteric) and spiritual (esoteric). By using library research, this study uncovers the important works of Ibn al-'Arabi such as *Futuh al-makkiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*. The analytical method used was descriptive analysis or content analysis, which describes the human ideas or

ideas contained in his work which are then confronted with other ideas in an effort to make comparisons, relationships and concept development¹⁹. In addition, this study used a theological approach, namely an effort to understand religion by using a theological framework that starts from a belief that the empirical form of a religion is considered the most correct compared to others²⁰. The normative theological approach is still theocentric, even according to Amin Abdullah, it is still dominated by transcendental-speculative thoughts, but it does not address human issues (humanities) which include social life, politics and so on and historical aspects (*tarikhiyat*)²¹.

Based on the dimensions above, it is deemed necessary to elaborate on Ibn Arabi's philosophical spiritual in response to the accusations which state that Islamic spirituality is a deviant religious experience, unreasonable, and is a symptom of mental illness. Besides, this transcendental experience is an ethical implication of those who follow spiritual paths.

⁹ William C Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 32 (SUNY Press, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.32-4426>.

¹⁰ Abul Ela Affifi, *The Twenty-Nine Pages: An Introduction to Ibn 'Arabi's Metaphysics of Unity* (Cambridge: Eng.: Beshara Publications, 1998).

¹¹ Mahmoud Reza Moradian, "Levels of Divine Names and Their Relation with Principles of Ibn'Arabi's Philosophy of Unity of Existence (Wahdat Al-Wujūd)," *Journal Of Islamic Denominations* 7, no. 13 (2020): 277–301.

¹²William C Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 32 (UK: Sunny Press, 1995), p. 21.

¹³Ghasem Kakaie, "The Dialogue Between Islam and Christianity As Viewed by Ibn Arabi and Eckhart," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 14, no. 2 (2004): 177–201.

¹⁴Gisela Goodrich Webb, "The Human/Angelic Relation in the Philosophies of Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (1989): 128.

¹⁵ Syafwan Rozi, "Understanding the Concept of Ecosufism: Harmony and the Relationship of God, Nature and Humans in Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Arabi," *Ulumuna* 23, no. 2 (2019): 242–65.

¹⁶ Nikos Yiangou, "Is a New Consciousness Emerging? Reflections on the Thought of Ibn 'Arabi and the Impact of an Integral Perspective," *World Futures* 73, no. 7 (2017): 427–441, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02604027.2017.1366794>.

¹⁷ Mohammad Mahdi Gorjian, "Mystical Psychology in Ibn Arabi's Thought in the Book Al-Futuh al-Makkiyah with an Emphasis on Temporality or Eternity of the Soul," *Practice of Wisdom* 13, no. 48 (2021): 7–36.

¹⁸ Reza Nazemian, Mohammad Hadi Moradi, and Hadi Azizi, "A Psychological Study of Ibn Arabi in the Novel 'A Small Death' of Hassan Alwan, Based on the Psychological Method Analysis of the Narration of 'A Small Death' on the Basis of Psychological Method (Freud and Lacan's Theories as a Model)," *Quarterly of Arabic Language and Literature* 17, no. 4 (2022): 547–73.

¹⁹ M. Deden Ridwan, *Tradisi Baru Penelitian Agama Islam Tinjauan Antardisiplin Ilmu* (Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia, 2001).

²⁰ Abuddin Nata, *Metodologi Studi Islam* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2000).

²¹ Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama: Normativitas Atau Historisitas* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1999).

THE EXOTERIC AND ESOTERIC DIMENSIONS OF IBN ARABI'S SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

In the perennial philosophy discourse, esotericism is an inward dimension or a core of religion. It is a special and exclusive knowledge that is taught by philosophers to those who are as the chosen students and have certain intellectual talents and abilities to be able to receive special and high teachings on metaphysics²². Meanwhile, exotericism is a formal dimension in religious teachings such as dogma, ritual, ethics and morals in a religion. This exoteric teaching is knowledge that is taught to the wider community²³.

For Ibn Arabi, both exoteric and esoteric dimensions cannot be understood separately because they are a complementary ontological unity: one never exists without the other²⁴. This contradiction is not two separate realities, but is a reality with two different aspects is called by Ibn Arabi as the unity between contradictions and in western philosophy is called the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Based on this ontological structure, Ibn Arabi was one of the mystical philosophers who provoked the discussion and controversy that had never occurred in the previous history of Islamic thought, because he combined two approaches to the truth; *haqiqah* (esotericism) and *syariah* (exotericism)²⁵.

In Ibn Arabi's ontological structure, the exoteric aspect is very important, so it is not just the experience of exposure in the esoteric dimension. In fact, according to Ibn Arabi, the exposure does not provide deep understanding and the clarity of vision besides carrying out religious deeds and commandments such as

regulations and other legal provisions²⁶. Ibn Arabi stated that religious teachings are a physical dimension, while spiritual awareness is an inward dimension of religious teachings. The exoteric religious life exists in a world of forms, but it originates from the formless essence or the esoteric one. In several statements, he rejected the opinion that distinguish between exoterism and esoterism. Some people think that the exoterism only deals with things that are naturally outward, and what one must do to get to God²⁷. Ibn Arabi explained:

"A spiritualist sees that both the chosen people and the common people practice exoterism. However, only the chosen people can understand the esoterism and are able to distinguish between exoterism and esoterism. They make exoterism compatible and in accordance with its hidden esoterism"²⁸.

Besides, one of the main tasks of spiritual teachers is to guide their students to avoid the dangers and traps that are ready to ensnare them when they encounter error. The realm that spiritualist students first enter is the endless realm of imagination. It is the residence of other supernatural beings with all their evil powers so that one might say that the exposure is capable of direct experience of the world of the imagination.

"A Saint (*wali*) never recommends following an esoteric knowledge science that is against Allah's rules. Even so, he tries to compile a general ruling based on exoteric provisions which are specific in relation to problems faced by humans"²⁹

Therefore, a person who is on a spiritual journey to God needs a clear mind during the

²² Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (P. Townsend, Trans.), *Pantheon* (New York, 1953).

²³ Muhammad Maroof Shah, "The Discourse Of The Beyond And Nondualism: Reflections On Astāvakra Śankara And Ibn Arabi," *The Journal of East West Thought* 8, no. 2 (2018): 77–104.

²⁴ Nurhayati Abd Rasyid, "The Concept Of Al-Wihdatul Wujud Ibnu Arabi (A Sufistic Philosophical Study)," *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 17, no. 1 (2020): 72–87.

²⁵ Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*.

²⁶ William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Suny Press, 2010).

²⁷ Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority."

²⁸ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyyah*.

²⁹ Ibn Arabi.

journey in order to escape from misleading forces. Thus, for spiritualists, the religious orders in exoteric teachings provide a very useful guide to enter the world of imagination. In fact, at the stage of acceptance of theophany, an awareness of the presence and unity with God as mystical goals and Ibn 'Arabi examined and explained the stages in detail to get to the highest level.³⁰

THE PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF IBN ARABI'S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Islamic spirituality is the science of the esoteric dimension in Islam which discusses the mental structure, the mental dynamics, the process of mental development, the mental illness and its therapy as well as the process of forging and purifying it. This analysis is in accordance with the opinion of Calvin S Hall who argued that Islamic spirituality is an applied psychology which makes valuable contributions to the problems of the human soul³¹. Not only from the material aspect, spiritual teaching practices are also mental experiences that are attained through a spiritual process that can be understood and applied. According to William James, the inner experience is a set of psychological experiences as a manifestation of religious awareness and experience³².

The problems of the soul can only be achieved with a higher dimension, namely the inner side. Only the spiritual knows the soul and can light the nooks and crannies of darkness. Islamic spirituality tries to develop and direct both human potentials to achieve the main goal for the realization of a perfect human³³. The

deeper the awareness that is achieved in this experience, the ability of the soul will be able to grasp the true truth and indirectly has implications for the development of a healthy personality and mental. Thus, this spiritual experience has a psychological dimension in order to perfect the personality and mentality. This conclusion is in accordance with Nasr's opinion that Islamic spiritual teachings contain four objects; metaphysics, cosmology, psychology and eschatology³⁴.

The psychological dimension in spiritual experience has been developed by contemporary thinkers, by arguing that Islamic spirituality contains the substance of psychological studies, namely the soul or psyche. It is no longer for psychology to only study the soul from the physical aspect. Ideally, psychology is the science of human nature, human tendencies, human development and human thought. The deeper a person understands this knowledge, the more stable the enlightenment he gets. According to Amir al-Najjar, by understanding the soul content, we will be able to know its reaction to behaviour.³⁵ Meanwhile, Javad Nurbakh tried to see from a methodical perspective that the efforts to discuss the Islamic spirituality with a psychological approach can be pursued by purifying the soul in order to achieve certain consciousness such as high level of consciousness which not everyone can achieve it³⁶.

Ibn Arabi was one of many spiritual philosophers who have elaborated the psychological dimension through the journey of

³⁰ Fredrica R. Halligan, "The Creative Imagination of the Sufi Mystic, Ibn 'Arabi," *Journal of Religion and Health* 40, no. 2 (2001): 275–87, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012557708145>.

³¹ Robert E. L. Faris, Calvin S. Hall, and Gardner Lindzey, "Theories of Personality.," *American Sociological Review*, 1957, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2089174>.

³² Eugene Taylor, *William James on Consciousness beyond the Margin* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

³³ James M. Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, Springer, vol. (New York: Springer US, 2009).

³⁴ Sayyed Hossein Nasr, "Tradition Muslim in the Modern World," *Kuala Lumpur: Foundation For Traditional Studies*, 1988.

³⁵ Al-Najjar, *Al-'Ilm Al-Nafs Wa Al-Shufiyyab*.

³⁶ Ğawād Nūrbaġš, *The Psychology of Sufism: (Del Wa Nafs); a Discussion of the Stages of Progress and Development of the Sufi's Psyche While on the Sufi Path* (Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 1992).

stations (*maqâm* and *hâl*). There is a special special characteristics of Ibn 'Arabi's thought which is famous for this philosophical sufism. In studying the soul, the epistemology is not only from a scientific level but also touches the dimensions of religious practice and ritual. Philosophically, he examined the essence and existence of religious experience which must be achieved by a spiritualist.

In Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual teaching, the spiritual levels in the religious consciousness make a potential contribution to mental development. This great spiritualist is very comprehensive in elaborating the sides of humanity, nature, and God as the cosmic center. The collaboration of the three brings a complete understanding in understanding the divinity dimension. This potential contribution is known as new age, return to the center, the sacred self, which is the deepest side of humans by examining the soul³⁷.

The inner experiences that are attained when a person undergoes the stages in stations (*maqâm* and *hâl*) are simply called religious experiences³⁸. Changes in belief or changes caused by certain religious experiences are not things that happen by chance nor do they grow naturally, but they are events that are preceded by various processes and conditions that can be researched and studied³⁹. Even Ibn 'Arabi was able to explain the high level religious experience of unions (*wahdat al-wujud*) as the experience of understanding the reality of divinity⁴⁰. The psychiatric symptoms can be investigated by observing the changes that occur when a Sufi arrives at certain experiences. Scientists agree to consider the importance of

the experience achieved by a Sufi as a pure perception of one aspect of reality eventhough they perceive it differently⁴¹.

Thus, the religious experiences in the stages of station (*maqâm* and *hâl*), from the perspective of psychology and mental health, have created positive religious attitudes, behaviour, thoughts and feelings and been actualized in changing attitudes. The spiritualists are classified as mentally healthy because their hearts always feel calm, safe, and at ease. A mentally healthy person has main characteristics such as a good personality attitude towards oneself, self-integration, self-autonomy and perception of reality. This positive attitude is more likely to be possessed by people who carry out religious teachings in an integral and comprehensive manner and have religious experiences that are not owned by ordinary people.

THE MYSTICO-PHILOSOPHY STAGE OF STATIONS (*MAQÂM* AND *HÂL*) OF IBN 'ARABI

The principles of Ibn 'Arabi's teachings that use the mystico-philosophical method are not only concerned with the esoteric and transcendental metaphysical dimensions, but also the exoteric dimensions such as ritual, ethics and personality as a result of spiritual experiences and consciousness. This indication can be proven when Ibn 'Arabi talked about stations (*maqâm* and *hâl*), 560 chapters in *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyyah*, 250 of which talked about these spiritual attainments or stages⁴². So far, the discussion about stations (*maqâm* and *hâl*) tends to be found in Sufi thought in the circle of orthodox Islamic spirituality. In fact, Ibn 'Arabi also emphasized ritual and moral

³⁷ Yiangou, "Is a New Consciousness Emerging? Reflections on the Thought of Ibn 'Arabi and the Impact of an Integral Perspective Is A New Consciousness Emerging?"

³⁸ Andri Azis Putra, Arqom Kuswanjono, and Misnal Munir, "Sufistic Consciousness as A Foundation of Religious Well-Being in Ibn 'Arabi's Teaching to Understanding Existential Uncertainty," *Jurnal Theologia* 32, no. 2 (2022): 173–92.

³⁹ Robert H Thouless, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 526 (CUP Archive, 1971).

⁴⁰ Ali Akbar, "Looking at Ibn 'Arabi's Notion of Wahdat Al-Wujud as a Basis for Plural Path to God," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2016): 45–51, <https://doi.org/10.15640/jisc.v4n1a6>.

⁴¹ Thouless, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion*.

⁴² Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futûhât Al-Makkiyyah*.

teachings. According to Titus, the sufism of Ibn 'Arabi was a direct contemplation about the reality of the divinity and spirituality in personal life and also its relationship with certain conditions in the humanity stage ⁴³.

Ibn Arabi in *Fusus al-Hikam* distinguished three stages of spiritual attainment; first, *takballuq* means to eliminate human natures and embraces divine attributes. Second, *ta'alluq* is a stage in which the human continues to be firmly attached and never separated from the divine attributes. Third, *tabaquq* is to negate his essence or substance and realizes in himself that he is one with the Absolute ⁴⁴. On another occasion, Ibn 'Arabi also described the paths to God consisting of five paths; *first*, the path of Allah (*sirat Allah*), namely the general path which contains all the paths that connect him to God, either in the form of divine law or the result of the construction of rational thought. *Second*, the noble path (*sirat al-'izqab*) or the path of a noble person is the path of purifying (*tanzih*) those who have undergone self-purification. *Third*, the path of God (*sirat al-rabb*) is the path of the syaria in which a servant lives all aspects of his life. *Fourth*, the path of favors (*sirat ni'am*) is the path of the giver of blessings, namely the path that is bestowed after living a spiritual life. *Fifth*, the special path (*sirat al-khas*), which is the special path for the Prophet Muhammad ⁴⁵.

In discussing the exoteric aspect and the psychological dimension, the author justifies and groups the general phases of the spiritual stages based on the stages of Ibn Arabi above. Among the stations (*maqâm* and *hâl*) to be classified are repentance (*taubat*), abstinence (*ward*), asceticism (*zuhd*), spiritual poverty (*faqr*), trust (*tawakkal*), steadfastness (*istiqamah*), remembrance dhikr (*dzikr*), slavehood (*'ubûdiyyah*), concentration of felicity (*kimyâ al-sa'adah*), sainthood (*wilayah*), annihilation (*fanâ*),

clear sight through faith (*firâsat al-imâniyyah*), chivalry (*al-futuwwah*) and miracle (*al-mu'jizah*). The grouping of stations (*maqâm* and *hâl*) is broken down into:

The Stage of Repentance (*Taubat*)

The spiritual stage of repentance (*taubat*) is the awakening of the soul from ignorance and indifference, so that those who were once full of sin become more aware of their bad actions and regret for all their past shortcomings. In general literature, a person is still considered a sinner and has not repented until; (1) immediately leave the sins that have passed, (2) promise not to repeat them, and (3) accompanied by good deeds.

Ibn 'Arabi defined repentance as going from evil (non-existence) to goodness (existence). The experience of repentance is the toughest level because it changes something that has been used to, especially in the being-rid-of process which is preventive. By doing repentance, a spiritualist experiences drastic changes after experiencing certain awareness in his life.

Repentance functions to repair the damaged soul, correct the wrong or cover the defect, because things that are damaged, wrong or defective cannot return well except by repenting. This repentance is called as true repentance (*taubat khâlisah*), which is pure from mixing or tainted from the tendency to things that contain sin to the position he repents ⁴⁶.

In addition, repentance is an external psychological condition that controls the conflict between goodness in humans, in which previously a person has split personality, the conflict between his values and other values ⁴⁷. The split personality is caused by conflicts that occur, such as social conflicts and personal conflicts. Before a person experiences self-

⁴³ Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, vol. 1 (Granite Hill Publishers, 2001).

⁴⁴ Ibn al-'Arabî, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, ed. Abul Ela Affifi (Dar al-kitab al-'Arabi, 1966).

⁴⁵ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futûbât Al-Makkiyyah*.

⁴⁶ Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah* (Beirut, 2006).

⁴⁷ Al-Najjar, *Al-'Ilm Al-Nafs Wa Al-Shufiyyah*.

awareness, he is faced with a conflict. This conflict is considered as one of the factors for determining religious attitudes. This happens because of a clash between the forces of good and evil in a person⁴⁸.

In a psychological and mental health approach, repentance is akin to a conversion experience. If it is not said to be identical, at least there are the same symptoms in the form of consciousness which are achieved through a change in one's consciousness. According to Walter Houston Clark, religious conversion is a spiritual growth or development that contained a significant change in attitudes towards religious teachings and actions⁴⁹. This conversion leads to the acceptance of a religious attitude that includes changing beliefs on several religious issues. This search will be accompanied by changes in motivation, behaviour and reactions to the social environment.

Thus, repentance is an essential change in attitude to accept a new view of life which is reflected in changes in behaviour. These changes have various implications for behaviour and social loyalty. No one can change his social loyalty in the field of religion or the behaviour motivation, without a change in the area in which he believes. From this emphasis, it can be concluded that religious experience and awareness can be analysed through their implications in a person's life. A person who is aware and repent is reflected in the attitude and behaviour of his personality.

The Stage of Self-Adornment (*Tahalluq*)

According to Ibn Arabi, self-adornment (*taballuq*) is the negation of human natures and becoming adorned with divine attributes⁵⁰. This stage is a continuation of a spiritual experience of repentance by emptying oneself of despicable nature and adorning oneself with praiseworthy

natures such as abstinence (*warāʾ*), asceticism (*zuhd*), spiritual poverty (*faqr*), trust (*tawakkal*), and steadfastness (*istiqamah*). In Islamic spiritual practice, with this awareness process, a student is led to empty his soul in the form of reducing overeating and practicing a lot of the praiseworthy natures that are recommended. The essence of this station is the initial training for someone who has undergone a change. Usually spiritual beings are shunned from anything that breaks their concentration so that their devotion increases.

In his explanation of the first station of abstinence (*warāʾ*) in the spiritual stage of adorning oneself (*taballuq*), Ibn 'Arabi strongly emphasized this abstinence attitude in the form of restraint and caution from not only sinful deeds but also even doubting actions that must be shunned. This attitude is recommended for spiritual practitioners to reflect on the process of his creation from various processes. Abstinence (*warāʾ*) is sought as a self-correction and a place for self-introspection according to the quote:

“Dust and soil are the origin of human creation and this is the evidence of human servitude and abstinence. Then he also becomes aware of his existence Therefore he is ordered to purify himself using the dust and dirt of pride. So that he returns to the origin of the creation ...”⁵¹

As for the second station, asceticism (*zuhd*), according to Ibn 'Arabi is an attitude of distance and avoidance from something other than God, based on the quote:

“Station asceticism (*zuhd*) involves the absolute nature of oneness because its essence is prevention and relies on a side other than God, even if the person who owns it is unknown or not recognized. State (*hal*) is in relation to what he practices through asceticism. The name of

⁴⁸ Al-Najjar.

⁴⁹ Walter Houston Clark, “The Psychology of Religion,” *Pastoral Psychology* 9, no. 4 (1958): 49–55.

⁵⁰ al-'Arabī and Affifi, *Fusus Al-Hikam*.

⁵¹ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futūbāt Al-Makkiyyah*.

God settles in him and the ascetic is able to actualize the results in his actions”⁵².

Meanwhile, the third station is spiritual poverty (*faqr*). Ibn Arabi associated it with God because a poor person always feels inferior to God. He emphasized that this station is an ethical and corrective basis for the spiritualist because it is a proof of the weakness of the servant before God⁵³. Through this nature, they are able to project or position their servitude or poverty in the midst of God's wealth. The implication of this attitude creates the servants who are grateful and serve their Lord.

The next station is trust (*tawakkal*). Ibn 'Arabi argued that this station is a determined heart to God along with the absence of ability and no possible cause. The background for determining attitudes in this station is because not all phenomena that occur in this nature can be understood by humans, therefore Ibn 'Arabi advised people to put their trust in God⁵⁴.

The last station in this stage is steadfastness (*istiqamah*). According to Ibn Arabi, steadfastness is a praiseworthy nature of consistently doing good deeds and spiritual behavior that is being and has been followed. The non-steadfastness of anything makes it insignificant. Like the following quote:

"Because everything is in its steadfastness (*istiqamah*). The steadfastness of a tree is when it sticks to the ground. While the steadfastness of an animal is to moves straight. If this is the case, no one can benefit from it. If a tree does not stick into the ground to drink water through its roots, then it is nothing”⁵⁵

In the psychological and mental health approaches, the process of undergoing abstinence (*warā'*), asceticism (*zuhd*), spiritual poverty (*faqr*), trust (*tawakkal*), and steadfastness (*istiqamah*) behaviors is known as meditation and even can be called contemplation and

asceticism. A spiritualist undertakes the practice of meditation in the form of concentrated thought that is focused on the visuals, the adjustment of the position of the body and breath which aims to change and increase awareness with the ultimate goal of extinguishing lust by realizing the impermanence of everything.

In addition, these spiritual experiences are more advanced than meditation behaviour that is similar to contemplation and asceticism. These experiences are akin to a state of consciousness, in which the mind remains in imageless concentration on a single target. Contemplation can be understood as a state of consciousness at a certain level at which the mind has reached the spiritual maturity. Contemplation is a continuation or a result of the meditation process although there are still efforts for further refinement. This stage is unlike the experience of meditation which is still in its initial effort.

Meanwhile, in relation to mental health, the experience of asceticism in psychiatric symptoms in abstinence (*warā'*), asceticism (*zuhd*), spiritual poverty (*faqr*), trust (*tawakkal*), steadfastness (*istiqamah*) attitudes are an advanced awareness in the form of rejection of the opponent's attitude, namely avoiding greed, anxiety and inconsistency. From a technical sense, asceticism is a rule of attitude and a refusal to take instinctive action⁵⁶. By the experience and awareness gained in living these stations, the spiritualists experience mental enlightenment which has an impact on inner calm. They have transcended changes in themselves and of course they are still strengthened by undertaking religious rituals of worship.

⁵² Ibn Arabi.

⁵³ Ibn Arabi.

⁵⁴ Ibn Arabi.

⁵⁵ Ibn Arabi.

⁵⁶ Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1914).

The Stage of Connection (*Ta'alluq*)

Connection (*ta'alluq*) is a spiritual stage in which a spiritualist feels the awareness that continues to be firmly attached and can never be separated from God⁵⁷. It is an advanced stage of awareness of meditation, contemplation and even asceticism that a spiritualist tries to tie his consciousness to God. This spiritual experience can raise awareness of the heart and mind to always remember God wherever and whenever. This spiritual stage can be achieved with remembrance (*dzikir*), slavehood (*'ubûdiyyah*), concentration of felicity (*kimyâ al-sa'adah*), and annihilation (*fanâ*) stations.

According to Ibn Arabi, the first station at the connection (*ta'alluq*) stage is remembrance (*dzikir*) which is the most important medium and spiritual behavior among spiritualists in an effort to increase spiritual awareness. At the time of doing remembrance, spiritualists are carried away and their souls go out into the feeling realm. Spiritually, remembrance (*dzikir*) is not only a temporal activity in the soul and not as a medium for repeated chanting or mental entertainment, but it is a substantive awareness and universal recognition of the presence of God⁵⁸.

Remembrance (*dzikir*) is the key to explore the spiritual realm and uncover a very broad basis that explains the relationship between human beings and their creator. The psychologists tend to interpret remembrance (*dzikir*) as more oriented towards the change of consciousness which is in contrast to the psychiatric symptoms in meditation and contemplation above. Consciousness in meditation and contemplation is more oriented towards the change of mental attitudes while remembrance (*dzikir*) is about the change of spiritual awareness after repentance.

Sincere remembrance (*dzikir*) is a treatment for mental illness because it provides inspiration in building good qualities, appreciation and inspirational power. A calm heart can turn fear into peace and change anxiety to calm and quiet. Remembrance (*dzikir*) is also a suggestion in the form of affirmation of the truth that is done repeatedly with full confidence which has a major effect on behavior.

The next station is slavehood (*ubudiyah*). According to Ibn 'Arabi, the human effort to get closer to their God is by obedience. It is because the obedience is the manifestation of God's will. Slavehood (*ubûdiyyah*) in Arabic comes from the word '*abd*' (servant). This term is applied to everything other than God, especially to humans⁵⁹. Ibn 'Arabi expressed the meaning of servant in a very philosophical way, which is one that shows the destitution, dependence and submission of all creatures before God. This is explained by Ibn 'Arabi in the quote below:

"Slavehood is the servant's attachment to God. After that servitude acts as a locus of manifestation of God. By means of servitude, he is to submit to orders without having the possibility of detaching himself from God. When God declares "so be", he manifests immediately, for nothing but an immortal entity is representative of his essence as a creation. Then when the locus of manifestation is actualized, God says "do this and stay away from that". If he defies the orders, this is due to his existence as the locus of manifestation ..."⁶⁰

Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabi described the next station as concentration of felicity (*kimyâ sa'adah*). *Al-kimyâ* is a special science that is able to change by considering everything in nature, whether secret or real⁶¹. The station of concentration is a privilege given to people who go through the spiritual path by being able

⁵⁷ Ibn'Arabî, *The Wisdom of the Prophets: (Fusus Al-Hikam)* (Beshara Publ., 1975).

⁵⁸ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futûbât Al-Makkiyyah*.

⁵⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*.

⁶⁰ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futûbât Al-Makkiyyah*.

⁶¹ Ibn Arabi.

to change everything. This dimension creates the concentration of mind to change the view of one object to another.

In order to attain the experience of concentration as associated with Ibn Arabi, according to Inayat Khan, a spiritualist must go through the following stages; (1) Ordinary concentration, namely focusing the mind on one object in the form of action. (2) Contemplative, namely focusing the mind in the form of ideas, (3) Communicative meditation, namely the continued process of focusing the mind that is able to communicate and (4) Realization, namely mystical concentration, a type of expansion of consciousness, the appearance of the soul and deep immersion with oneself⁶². Based on the levels of concentration above, there is a long way that a spiritualist must take to arrive at a level of mystical concentration, in order to change something real.

The ecstasy mystical experience or annihilation (*fanâ'*) is the last station at this stage of connection (*ta'alluq*). Annihilation (*fanâ'*) is divine revelation for the spiritualists. Ibn Arabi gave two definitions of annihilation (*fana'*), namely in the mystical and metaphysical terms. Annihilation in the mystical term means the disappearance of ignorance and remaining true knowledge obtained through intuition about the essential unity of the whole. These spiritualists do not eliminate their existence, but they realize that essential non-existence as a form. Or loss of consciousness or feeling, a person no longer feels what is happening in his organism nor does he feel himself and the surrounding nature.

Meanwhile, *fana'* in a metaphysical term means the disappearance of world forms of phenomena and the taking place of one universal substance. The disappearance of a form is the *fana'* of that form when God manifests (*tajalli*) Himself in another form.

Fana' is the disappearance of human awareness of all natural phenomena, and even of the names and attributes of God so that what really exists intrinsically and eternally (*baqa'*) in its essence is absolute form.

The psychological dimension that is encountered when a spiritualist reaches the annihilation stage or ecstasy is a physiological condition of the body and the state of the soul which is very different. Fischer showed that the spectrum of this highest state is achieved after undergoing meditation and the increased consciousness. Saint Teresa, as quoted by Robert Thouless, explained that the psychological symptoms of ecstasy are similar to those of loss of consciousness. The empirical symptoms that occur are both hands and body are cold as if his soul has drifted, sometimes even his breath cannot be detected, but logically ecstasy is expected to get something he wants⁶³.

In addition, another physiological symptom that is commonly observed from this extraordinary experience is the regular involvement of all nerve cells, especially the temporal lobe, through positive activity. This experience has a positive effect on behavior. In the term of psychological symptoms displayed by the spiritual accepts the transcendental exposure, a kind of enlightenment towards oneself and his environment. This is certainly different from schizophrenics, epilepsy and chemical drug users in which the work of the brain which involves these nerve cells is stimulated forcedly and irregularly. Nerve cells are not intact in oscillating. The excess behavior that is displayed is strange and unnatural⁶⁴.

Therefore, a spiritualist who reaches this level will be in harmony with the surrounding environment. Besides that, they experience integration and harmony in their habits, awareness, and beliefs with their daily activities. His mind gains high realization, his feelings find

⁶² Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan: The Unity of Religious Ideals*, vol. 1 (Library of Alexandria, 1963).

⁶³ Thouless, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion*.

⁶⁴ Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall, *Spiritual Capital: Wealth We Can Live By* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004).

infinite happiness and his will comes true. All consciousness dissolves in a material-spiritual state. This level seemed to tend to be practical, effective and mesomorphic. They also live a social life and constituted one of the most important categorical class differences. That difference is very important for social life because the person who manifests himself and reaches the peak experience will probably be the social people who will fix the world. They can be politicians or social workers. Meanwhile, in the field of art they are poets, musicians, spiritualists and philosophers.

The Stage of Realization (*Tahaqquq*)

The stage of realization (*tahaqquq*) is the stage of negating his essence or substance and realizing in himself his being one with the Absolute⁶⁵. This stage is the ultimate ability to actualize his awareness and capacity as a human being dominated by the attributes of God so that it is reflected in his all-holy and noble behavior. Even at this level, a spiritualist has attained the dignity of being very close to God. These stations consist of sainthood (*wilayah*), power of spiritual perspicacity (*firâsat al-imâniyyah*), chivalry (*al-futunwah*) and miracle (*al-mu'jizah*)

In Ibn 'Arabi's spirituality, the station of *wilayah* is God's referral to the chosen servant to take control of revelation. Ibn 'Arabi explained that those who get this privilege are prophets, saint and spiritualist⁶⁶. This opinion is supported by A.J. Arberry, according to him, Ibn 'Arabi really focused on the power of spiritual perspicacity function of a representative chosen human as a manifestation of Muhammad light (*nur al-Muhammad*)^{67 68}. Even further analysis according to J.S

Trimingham, the concept adopted by Ibn 'Arabi from al-Tirmizi is actually referred to last prophet (*kbâtim al-anbiya'*), namely the ordination function of the Prophet Muhammad⁶⁹.

The station of Sainthood (*wilayah*) in the term of a psychological context is a process of ordination personified in the form of transferring a teacher's robe to his spiritual student. This emphasis is deliberately used to better popularize station *wilayah* which is originally understood as an abstract process of revelation from God to the prophet as the implementation of the term last prophet (*kbâtim al-anbiyâ'*). The ordination in the form of changing the teacher's robe is the transfer of truth or the process of a student receiving the truth from his teacher.

The next station is clear sight through faith (*firâsat al-imâniyyah*), a type of saintly wonder, including the ability to read the thoughts of others and have knowledge of events occurring at a great distance. Usually called *firasa*, it is a gift given to many Friends of God as described in hagiographic sources⁷⁰. *Firâsat al-imâniyyah*, according to Ibn 'Arabi, is the light of divinity which is given to a spiritualist through his eyes of vision. This gesture is according to the hadith of the Prophet "Beware of the *firasa* of the believer, because he sees the light of Ilahi". The *firasa* of faith serves as the differentiator between good and evil. The principle of evil is as explained earlier, that there is nothing but good in existence and therefore all paths can lead to God. Therefore, the consequence is that every action is blameless, because reprehensible action includes only the good. To be able to understand this difference, humans need the

⁶⁵ Ibn'Arabî, *The Wisdom of the Prophets: (Fusus Al-Hikam)*.

⁶⁶ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futûhât Al-Makkîyyah*.

⁶⁷ Shigeru Kamada, "Mulla Sadra's Imama/Walaya : A n Aspect of His Indebtedness to Ibn Arabi," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2010): 67–78.

⁶⁸ Arthur John Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, vol. 2 (Courier Corporation, 2002).

⁶⁹ J Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁷⁰ John Renard, *The A to Z of Sufism, The Scarecrow Press*, vol. 53 (Lanham, Toronto, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.

existence of a law in the form of *firasa* like a quote:

“Station of clear sight through faith (*firāsāt al-imāniyyah*) cannot be separated from the fact that the *firasa* of faith is attributed to God, namely the names that include the entire treasury of those names. It is a light that envelops both the praiseworthy and the reprehensible action, both the inclinations toward happiness and towards misery in the future life...”⁷¹

With a clear sight (*firasa*) of faith, a person who has reached a certain level in the spiritual journey is able to distinguish good and bad, is able to know secrets, tells fortunes and searches for lost items.

The next station is chivalry (*al-futumwab*). According to Ibn 'Arabi, *al-futumwab* is the disclosure of something that can provide a power or a deep understanding of the clarity of vision and spaciousness, as the following quote:

“A person who is on a journey to God wants to feel safe in achieving his goal and avoids the stray that always gets in his way. After reaching a certain phase, the spiritualist will get the privilege of divine disclosure ... ”⁷²

In the psychological dimension of chivalry (*al-futumwab*), in the light symptoms of the soul fully enlighten the mind and are able to clearly understand the past, present and future images. Actually, a spiritual person is able to see what is happening from a distance and what has happened in the past. Inayat Khan argued that chivalry (*futumwab*) can be described as the language of God which is not only expressed in the form of words, but can be in the form of pictures, something that cannot be heard and cannot be touched⁷³. Vision can convey the appearance of a wise or spiritual teacher in incomprehensible symbolic forms such as

sounds and words, song compositions, poetry and letters.

Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabi explained the last station in this realization (*tabaqquq*) stage, namely miracle (*mu'jizah*). The station of miracle (*mu'jizah*) is derived from *i'jāz* (word of God). It means the privilege given to the prophet of God to convey the word of God. So the prophet functions as the “spokesman” for God. Like the following quote:

Because the prophet has all-encompassing features. This means that he has been awarded marvel (*mu'jizah*), namely the word of God and through that he acts as a spokesman for God. Hence his *i'jāz* is that he speaks in the name of God. People cannot grasp the meaning of “*mu'jizah*” through a substance because *mu'jizah* is a relationship between meaning and the form of reality through events⁷⁴.

Ibn 'Arabi implied that ordinary people cannot reach the level of the station of miracle (*mu'jizah*). This station is only for the prophet who is a representation of God's caliph on earth. Miracle (*mu'jizah*), according to Ibn 'Arabi, is the highest station that only the prophet and especially the Prophet Muhammad have. Even Ibn 'Arabi privileged the position of the Prophet Muhammad as a prominent perfect man (*insan kamil*), with the closing or complementary revelations of the revelations that have been revealed before, like the following quote:

“The station of the prophet in terms of knowledge includes all knowledge possessed by those who know God, both the previous prophet and the Saint (*walī*) after him. He (Muhammad) has six features that the prophet never had before. These qualities are because he has a revelation that includes all revelations”⁷⁵

The spiritual awareness and experience that the prophets attained is a universal

⁷¹ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futūbāt Al-Makkiyyah*.

⁷² Ibn Arabi.

⁷³ Khan, *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan: The Unity of Religious Ideals*.

⁷⁴ Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futūbāt Al-Makkiyyah*.

⁷⁵ Ibn Arabi.

consciousness which is only achieved through a complete integrality of one-self. The Prophet had experienced the horizontal hierarchy consciousness and the unity of human consciousness, the unity of the God realities through the unity of metacosmic of society, the unity of macrocosmic of the universe, the unity of supra-cosmic of the universe. These three layers of integrality protect and coat human beings and God. The unity of consciousness achieved by the prophet is the unity of reality which is seen in the peak of the consciousness of a mystic including two integralistic dimensions, namely the horizontal and vertical dimensions.

Ibn Arabi concretely elaborated the positive mental traits of the prophets in the form of a more perfect tolerance than the previous level. According to him, this characteristic is born without understanding the differences in the perspective of unity. Thouless himself limited or objected to the meaning of tolerance with emotional meanings of agreeing or disagreeing. Tolerance, according to him, is a psychological attitude that determines behavior. It is also reflected in various ways of thinking religiously. To a certain extent, Thouless argued that tolerance does not mean acknowledging or accepting the statement that tolerant teachings are equally true⁷⁶.

CONCLUSION

The principles of Ibn 'Arabi's teachings that use the method of mystico-philosophy are not only concerned with the esoteric and transcendental metaphysical dimensions, but also the exoteric dimension such as ritual, ethics and personality as the result of spiritual experience and awareness. In Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual teachings, the spiritual levels in religious consciousness make a potential contribution to mental development. The inner

experiences that are attained when a person undergoes the stages in stations are simply called religious experiences. In fact, scientists agree to consider the importance of the experience achieved by a spiritualist as a pure perception of one aspect of reality even though they perceive it differently.

Religious experiences in the stages of Ibn Arabi's stations such as repentance (*taubah*), abstinence (*warâ*), asceticism (*zuhd*), spiritual poverty (*faqr*), trust (*tawakkal*), steadfastness (*istiqâmah*), remembrance dhikr (*dzikir*), slavehood (*'ubûdiyyah*), concentration of felicity (*keimyâ al-sa'adah*), sainthood (*nilayah*), annihilation (*fanâ*), clear sight through faith (*fîrâsat al-imâniyyah*), chivalry (*al-futuwwah*) and miracle (*al-mu'jizah*). From the perspective of psychology and mental health, all these stages have created positive religious attitudes, behaviours, thoughts and feelings and actualized in the change of attitudes. The spiritualists, Saints and Prophets are classified as mentally and spiritually healthy because their hearts always feel calm, safe and peaceful. A mentally healthy person has main characteristics such as a good personality attitude towards oneself, self-integration, self-autonomy and perception of reality

⁷⁶ Ghasem Kakaie, "The Dialogue Between Islam and Christianity as Viewed By Ibn Arabi And Eckhart," *Studies In Interreligious Dialogue* 14, no. 2 (2004): 177–201.

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