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The Conduct of the Sufi Path: Naqshbandī Meditation in Early Modern India*

Sülûk-ü Tarîkat: Erken Modern Hindistan'dan Bir Nakşbendî Metni

SherAli TAREEN **

Abstract

This article presents the first complete English translation of a major Persian text on Sufi meditation and cosmology: the towering eighteenth century Naqshbandī Indian Sufi master and poet Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān's (d. 1781) *Sulūk-i Tarīqa (The Conduct of the Sufi Path)*. Composed in 1760, at the centerpiece of this text is the encounter between the realm of divine reality, prophetic authority, and the practice and conduct of the Sufi practitioner, especially in relation to the journey through the subtle spiritual centers or *laṭā'if*.

Keywords: Meditation, The Sufi Path, Subtle Centers, Prophecy.

Öz

Bu makale, 18. yüzyılda yaşamış olan Hintli Nakşbendî şeyhi ve şâir Mîrzâ Mazhar Cân-ı Cânân'ın (ö. 1781) Sufi zikir ve kozmolojisi hakkında kaleme aldığı *Sülûk-ü Tarîkat* isimli Farsça eserinin İngilizce dilindeki ilk tam tercümesini sunmaktadır. 1760 yılında telif edilen bu metnin merkezinde, ilâhî hakikat âlemi, nebevî otorite ve sâlikin, özellikle de letâîf usûlü ile gerçekleştirdiği seyr ü sülûkü gibi konular yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zikir, sülûk, tarîkat, letâîf, peygamberlik.

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Introduction and Background

South Asian Sufism has been the subject of excellent and extensive scholarship.¹ This article builds on this body of work with the specific purpose of providing analysis, commentary, and the first complete translation into English of the towering eighteenth century Naqshbandī Indian Sufi master and poet Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān's (d. 1781) Persian text *Sulūk-i ʿTarīqa* (*The Conduct of the Sufi Path*).² Composed in 1760, this brief but dense text represents a detailed manual of Sufi meditation (*dhikr*)³ and psychology that was highly influential in the development of meditational techniques associated with the Mujaddidīya branch of the Naqshbandī Sufi order in early modern India.⁴ It remains the standard reference guide for the Mujaddidīs of South Asia until the present era. Though scholars have written extensively on Jān-i Jānān's more famous contemporary and polymath Shāh Walayullāh Dihlavī's (d. 1762) texts on Sufi practice and psychology,⁵ Jān-i

Jānān, as arguably the most widely followed Sufi master of eighteenth century India whose extensive pool of disciples traversed all parts of India and beyond, represents an important voice on this critical discipline in Islam. By presenting a complete translation of his major text in this regard, I hope this article will further the visibility and accessibility of his voice in the study of Islam and Sufism. The central theme of Jān-i Jānān's text *Sulūk-i ʿTarīqa* (*The Conduct of the Sufi Path*) revolves around the Kubrāwīya [from the Kubrāwī Sufi order founded by the late twelfth/early thirteenth century scholar Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221)] notion of the ten subtle spiritual centers (*laṭāʿif* sing. *laṭīfa*) that serve as the vehicle for the interaction of divine will with the human realm. At stake in this exercise of meditation is the formulation of a psychological and metaphysical apparatus that might allow for the manifestation of the divine will in the realm of humanity.

Before venturing further, it would be useful to pause and briefly describe the concept of *laṭīfa* (pl. *laṭāʿif*), a category that is pivotal to Jān-i Jānān's *Sulūk-i ʿTarīqa*, the text on which this article focuses, and to Sufi thought and practice more broadly. Scholar of Islam Marcia Hermansen has lucidly distilled the meaning and application of this category in Sufism:

The term *laṭīfa* (plural *laṭāʿif*) is derived from the Arabic word *laṭīf* meaning 'gentle', 'sensitive', or 'subtle'. In Sufi terminology the word *laṭīfa* refers to a non-material component of the person which can be influenced or 'awakened' through spiritual practices. The expression may originate in the concept of a subtle body (*jism laṭīf*), which is not Qur'ānic but

them would make for a fascinating project. On the specific theme of Sufi meditation and psychology that is the focus of this article, one finds more overlap than dissonance between these two scholars.

1 The literature is too vast to mention comprehensively here; see for instance Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992); Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: the Chishtī Order in South Asia and Beyond* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: the Indian Naqshabandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Shaykh* (Charleston, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

2 Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān, *Sulūk-i ʿTarīqa* in *Kalimāt-i ʿTayyibāt*, ed. Qamar ul-Dīn Murādabādī, (Murādābād: Maṭbaʿ-ī Maṭlaʿ al-ʿUlūm, 1891), 219-223.

3 Literally meaning remembrance, I render *dhikr* here more idiomatically as meditation.

4 See Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*.

5 For instance, see the extensive works of Marcia Hermansen on Shāh Walayullāh, especially her article cited in this essay, and Muhammad Faruque, *Sculpting the Self: Islam, Selfhood, and Human Flourishing* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2021). Indeed, a comparative study of Shāh Walayullāh's and Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān's notions of Sufi piety and authority, and of the overlaps and differences between

seems to have arisen in the third Islamic century. The Sufi concept of *laṭīfa* became increasingly refined and complex and was used to explain psychological and spiritual progress of the spiritual aspirant toward annihilation (*fanā*) or subsistence (*baqā*) in the Divine Essence.⁶

Arthur Buehler, in his magisterial study of the Naqshbandī order in South Asia further elaborates the criticality of the concept of spiritual subtle centers to Sufi practice:

The entire Naqshbandi paradigm of spiritual travel is based upon the Sufi development of a mystical physiology involving subtle centers, which in turn correspond with both Prophetic realities and distinct levels of the cosmos. From the moment of initiation, the spiritual guide begins to activate each disciple's subtle entities, beginning a lifelong process of assisting the aspirant to attract divine grace/energy. Since no mystical experiences can occur without a suitable vehicle, the shaykh [the Sufi master], by enlivening the disciple's *laṭīfas* assists him or her to create the means for the journey.⁷

He helpfully adds:

Disciples learn that spiritual centers correspond to defined places in the human body yet are not part of it because their noncorporeal nature is more subtle than the physical body...The specific correspondences between the human *laṭīfas* and God's names and attributes (*al-asmā' wa'l ṣifāt*) allow divine emanations to reach human beings through the channels

of *laṭīfas*.⁸

In *Sulūk-i Tarīqa*, the major theoretical framework that guides Jān-i Jānān's prescriptive discourse for the followers of the Naqshbandī order is the tripartite schema of the essence-attributes-actions (*dhāt-ṣifāt-aḥwāl*) formalized most decisively among the Naqshbandī order in India by the major sixteenth century Sufi master Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624).⁹ For Sirhindī and as a result for his spiritual successor Jān-i Jānān as well, the manifestation of God in the temporal realm of humanity takes place through God's attributes (*ṣifāt*) as opposed to His essence (*dhāt*). Put simply, it is not the entire being of God that is manifested in this world; rather it is the shadows or adumbrations (*zilāl*) of His attributes through which humans are able to experience the divine and taste divine satisfaction. This kind of a cosmological orientation enabled Sufi masters of the Naqshbandī order to emphasize and establish a distinct wedge between humanity and divinity, even as the realm of divine command (*amr*) actively interacted with that of human experience (*khalq*). Meditation or *zikr* (Ar. *dhikr*) was precisely meant as an embodied exercise of bodily discipline that attempted the materialization of this interaction, with the eventual asymptotic goal [meaning a goal that can only be aspired to but never fully achieved] of the annihilation (*fanā*) of the self.¹⁰ Before further describing Jān-i Jānān's text *The Conduct*

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ For more on Sirhindī, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ For broader studies of the place of the body in Sufi thought and practice, see and compare Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011) and Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁶ Marcia Hermansen, "Shāh Walī Allāh's Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (*Laṭā'if*): A Sufi Model of Personhood and Self-Transformation", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47, 1 (1988): 1-25.

⁷ Ibid. 105.

of the Sufi Path (*Sulūk-i ʿTarīqa*), some brief biographical notes on him are in order.¹¹

The Author

Born in 1699, Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān was a major Sufi master who served as the leader of the Naqshbandī Sufi order in India, and lived for most of the eighteenth century, dying in 1781. Jān-i Jānān's life of eight decades corresponded with a time of tremendous political tumult in Northern India that saw as many as twelve Mughal Emperors rule and perish as the pendulum of political sovereignty gradually but decisively shifted from the Mughals to other communities such as the Marathas and Sikhs, and eventually to the British. Jān-i Jānān was the most prominent figure on the spiritual chain (*silsila*) of the Naqshbandi order after the preeminent late sixteenth-/early seventeenth-century Sufi Aḥmad Sirhindī. And as previously mentioned, he was also a contemporary of the towering eighteenth-century scholar—also based in Delhi—Shāh Walyullāh Dihlavī. In addition to being a Sufi master, Jān-i Jānān was also a renowned Persian and Urdu poet. His scholarly corpus includes extensive writings, preserved in treatises and letters, on various aspects of Sufi practice, psychology, and metaphysics, such as *Sulūk-i ʿTarīqa*, the main focus of this article. Jān-i Jānān had also composed a short but very consequential treatise (written in the form of a letter) on Hinduism and its key doctrines and practices, in an attempt to present Hinduism as a monotheistic religious tradition to his Muslim audience.¹²

Boasting a Sayyid lineage (i.e., descendants of the Prophet) of Afghan nobility, Jān-i

Jānān's family enjoyed intimate ties with the Mughal imperial elite. His father, Mirzā Jān, served as both revenue collector (*manṣabdār*) and judge (*qāzī*) under the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Upon resigning from these posts, Mirzā Jān was traveling back to Agra from the Deccan when Mirzā Maẓhar was born in Kalabagh, in the district of Malwa. According to hagiographic sources, it was none other than Aurangzeb who had suggested the name “Jān-i Jān” (the life of the beloved) for his prized officer's son. The name eventually morphed into the pluralized form Jān-i Jānān, by which he is best known today, and hence I use this name as well while referring to him in this article. Jān-i Jānān received his initial education under the tutelage of his father while living in Agra. Later, he was educated in Sufi thought and practice and received extensive training in other religious disciplines, such as the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, from among the most prominent scholars of his time. Most notably, these included Nūr Muḥammad Badāyūnī (d. 1722), who initiated Jān-i Jānān into the Naqshbandī order and trained him on the Naqshbandī path from 1717 to 1721; and the prominent Meccan scholar of Ḥadīth ʿAbdallāh ibn Sālim al-Baṣrī (d. 1722), who had also taught Shāh Walyullāh, Shāh Ḥāfiẓ Saʿd Allāh (d. 1739) and Muḥammad Aḥmad Sunāmī Gulshan (d. 1747). Though trained primarily as a specialist Sufi master, Jān-i Jānān was comfortably familiar with Ḥanafī law and identified as a Naqshbandī-Ḥanafī scholar with Māturīdī theological leanings. After completing his basic and higher education, at the age of thirty Jān-i Jānān shifted to Delhi where he established his own center of learning, aptly named Khānqah-yi Maẓharīya (Mazhari Lodge). He stayed in Delhi until he died in 1781.¹³

11 These biographical notes are adopted from my book *Perilous Intimacies: Debating Hindu-Muslim Friendship after Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 40–43.

12 see Ibid. 35–78.

13 For a comprehensive biography of Mirzā Maẓhar in Urdu, see Shāh Ghulām ʿAlī Dihlavī and Muḥammad Iqbāl Mujaddidī, *Maqāmāt-i Maẓharī: Aḥvāl o*

In *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa*, Jān-i Jānān follows a model of meditation most strongly influenced by the eleventh century thinker and Kubrawī Sufi master ‘Alā’ al-Dawla al-Simnānī (d. 1336) and his widely followed system of the seven subtle centers (the body, soul, heart, conscience, spirit, mystery, and reality).¹⁴ By 1760 when Jān-i Jānān wrote *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa*, the Naqshbandīs in India, had already evolved al-Simnānī’s system into new directions by advancing their own arrangement of the six subtle centers that included the heart (*qalb*), the soul (*naḥs*), the spirit (*rūḥ*), the secret (*sirr*), the arcanum or the hidden (*khafī*) and the super-arcanum or the most hidden (*akhfā*). The adoption of al-Simnānī’s model of the spiritual subtle centers by the Mujaddidī Naqshbandīs in India was particularly facilitated by Aḥmad Sirhindī who was deeply influenced by al-Simnānī’s thought.¹⁵ As Carl Ernst nicely describes the contours of this discursive interaction between these two major Sufi orders:

...drawing upon the ancient cosmological symbolism of the seven climes, the Kubrawīs favored an account of seven subtle substances associated with the body, each of which was linked with a type of human being and with a particular prophet mentioned in the Qur’an. The system of seven subtle centers developed by Simnani underwent further evolution in India in the Naqshbandi order, from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century, into a new arrangement assigning six subtle centers to particular parts of

the body.¹⁶

In his text, while retaining five of the seven subtle centers [except the body or *qālab* and the soul or *naḥs*] in the Kubrawī scheme of al-Simnānī’s, Jān-i Jānān adds to this system the four earthly elements namely earth, fire, air and water, what he calls the ‘*anāṣir-i arba’a*’ (literally the four elements). As highlighted by the quotation from Ernst I just cited, the hallmark of this system is the assigning of a color and an Abrahamic Prophet to each subtle center, as the wayfarer’s or the Sufi practitioner’s journey from one subtle center to the next and to eventual annihilation in God is described in vivid detail. Moreover, Jān-i Jānān’s scheme of meditational progression maps onto a cosmology of prophecy whereby through the act and process of bodily discipline and practice, the Sufi practitioner also affirms a hierarchy of prophethood with Prophet Muḥammad at its apogee. The wayfarer’s (*sālik*) journey on the Sufi path, as he/she travels through progressive subtle centers corresponding with a particular prophet (Abraham, Moses, Jesus) culminates in the green colored subtle center of the super-arcanum or the most hidden (*akhfā*) which is associated with the seal of all prophets, Prophet Muḥammad. This is how the practice of Sufi meditation confirms and reaffirms the finality and exceptionality of Islam and Muḥammad’s prophecy. As Jamal Elias helpfully sums up while explaining ‘Alā’ al-Dawla al-Simnānī’s conception of Sufi cosmology:

The progression of prophets in the physical realm corresponds to the seven prophetic figures of the *laṭā’if* in the spiritual realm. Just as the prophets in the physical world guide their communities with laws and revelation, so too do the inner prop-

Malḥūzāt o Maktūbāt-i Ḥazrat Mirzā Maḥzar Jān-i Jānān Shahīd (Lāhore: Urdu Science Board, 2001).

14 For an extensive study of al-Simnānī’s thought and career, see Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: the Life and Thought of ‘Ala’ al-Dawla al-Simnani* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 1995).

15 see Hermansen, “Shāh Walī Allāh’s Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (*Laṭā’if*)”, 7.

16 Carl Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston, MA; London: Shambala, 2011), 107.

hets of the spiritual world.¹⁷

In what follows, I present a complete translation of this Persian text, *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa*, into English; for the benefit of readers conversant in Persian, I have added extensive transliterations from the original text as well. Following that, I will provide a brief comparison through tables between Jān-i Jānān's model of Sufi meditation and the system of Sufi psychology advanced by al-Simnānī and by the earlier South Asian Naqshbandī thinkers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries such as Khwāja Baqī Billāh (d. 1603) and Aḥmad Sirhindī. My hope is that other than specialist scholars of Islam, South Asia, and Sufism, this translation would also be useful as a primary text in undergraduate courses on these topics. Here below is a complete translation of *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa* (*The Conduct of the Sufi Path*) by Mirzā Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān.

Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa (The Conduct of the Sufi Path)

This [Sufi] path is patterned on the path of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, the resuscitator of the second millennium (*mujaddid-i alf-i thānī*). A concise account of the practice connected with this path pivots on the idea that humanity is composed of ten parts that have been named the ten spiritual subtle centers (*laṭā'if-i 'ashara*). Five of these are from the world of creation (*'ālam-i-khalq*) and they are the soul, and the four earthly elements [namely earth, air, fire, and water]. The other five are from the world of divine command (*'ālam-i-amr*), meaning that world which is free and detached from all bodily descriptions and necessities (*'ālamī keh az awṣāf wa lawāzim-i jismānī munazza wa mubarra ast*) and they are the heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūḥ*),

the secret (*sirr*), the hidden (*khafī*) and the super-arcane/most hidden (*akhfā*). God almighty, after creating the structure of the human body (*haykal*), which was composed and ordered by the ingredients of the world, bestowed upon each of the five elements of the world of divine command—all of which are characterized by the transcendental (*lā makān*) beyond the canopy (*fawq al-'arsh*)—a connection with that part of the human body with which they were related (*bi mawzi'ī az mawāzi' -yi jismānī -yi insānī keh munāsabatī bi-ān dāsht ta'alluq bakhshīd*). This so that humans would come to coalesce the divine and the created. And they thus became deserving of the designation of the lesser world (*ism-i 'ālam-i ṣaghīr*).¹⁸

Therefore, first the wayfarers [Sufi practitioners] engage that subtle center of the heart which is under the fleshy part of the left breast. And that subtle center is called the “pineal heart (*qalb-i sanobarī*).” And the method of this practice is that the wayfarer should focus his meditation towards the pineal heart and he should regard the flesh as a chamber (*ḥujra*) that is connected to the subtle center. And he should get the blessed name “Allah” to flow on that subtle center [the heart] like a current (*wa ism-i mubārak-i Allāh rā bar an mazgha jāri gardānad*). At this time, he should stop his breath under his navel and fix his tongue on his palate and direct all his senses towards concentration on the pineal heart. And he should contemplate the aforementioned name of Allah with the attributes that transcend quality and relationship; the attributes of without what sort (*bi-chigūnī*) and without how (*bi-chūnī*). And he must refrain from imagining the form of the heart (*ṣurat-i qalb*), the path of God (*naqsh-i Allāh*), or God's attributes such as the one who hears everything (*samī'*), sees everything (*baṣīr*), is omnipre-

17 Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of 'Ala' al-Dawla as-Simnani*, (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 1995), 87.

18 Jān-i Jānān, *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa*, 219.

sent (*hāzir*) and overlooking (*nāzir*). And he should keep a close watch on his breath so that he experiences no interruption or interval in his presence (*keh dar huzūrī fuṭur wa khalf niftad*). The wayfarer should aim at acting according to this way continuously such that the cognizance of this practice subsists at all times- while getting up or sitting, while eating or drinking or while talking or sleeping. If this practice is carried out with complete commitment, then of course with the grace of God one acquires warmth (*garmī*), enthusiasm (*harārat*), experiential desire (*shawq*) and the taste of ecstasy (*zawq*). At this point the effects and illuminations of this practice start becoming ordered. The light of the heart (*nūr-i qalb*) has been designated as yellow in color. Through this practice the wayfarer attains annihilation and absence.¹⁹

And during this absence, the wayfarer may also experience certain unveilings if he were to possess the required capacities. The amazing aspect of the expansiveness of this subtle center (*kamāl-i kashāyish-i īn laṭīfa*) is that in it one becomes annihilated in the attributes of God and then subsists thereafter through this practice [of meditation]. At this time the wayfarer feels robbed of his actions and feels completely inactive and begins conceiving of all his actions as if they were those of God (*pas sālik dar īn waqt khud rā maslūb al-fi'l wa baykār khwāhad yāft wa tamāmī af'āl-i khud rā af'āl-i haqq-i ta'ālā khwāhad dānast*). And no one remains his knower and witness except God the transcendent (*jal*) and glorious (*'alā*). And he forgets everything except the 'other', i.e., God (*muṭlaqan mā siwā farāmosh khwāhad shud*). And this state of forgetfulness sticks with some for a few days, with some for a long period of time and with some the entirety of their lives (*wa īn farāmoshī kasī ra chand roz, kasī rā tā*

mudat-i darāz wa kasī rā tamām 'umar mī mānad). To the extent that even if one tries to remind him to enter back into the world of consciousness, he does not remember. At this moment the wayfarer enters the circle of sainthood (*sālik dar īn waqt dākhil-i dā'ira-yi wilāyat mī shawad*). This stage is called the manifestation of action (*tajalī'-yi fi'lī*) and the annihilation of the heart (*fanā'-yi qalb*). The sainthood of this subtle center is under the feet of Adam (upon him be peace and blessings); whoever is of the Adamic teaching achieves divine union (*wusūl*) through this subtle center. Its journey does not pass through all the subtle centers. However, through the effort and concentration of the perfect [Sufi] master (*Murshid-i Kāmil*), a journey through all the subtle centers is possible.²⁰

After this, the practice of the spirit (*rūh*) takes place. This stage is connected to the region below the right breast. This subtle center receives the honors of annihilation and subsistence through the attributes of the glorious and transcendent God. In this journey, the wayfarer finds his attributes separated (*maslūb*) from himself and considers them as associated with God; whether it be listening or seeing. And he considers all the attributes in this same way, as within God and as not having a form of existence on their own. As if it is God who listens and sees and as if the wayfarer lacks the capacity to either listen or to see. The acquisition of the aforementioned condition is called the manifestation of attributes (*tajalī'-yi shifāt*). The light of this subtle center is red in color. The sainthood of this subtle center is under the feet of Abraham (upon him be peace and blessings). Therefore, whoever is of the Abrahamic teaching will after traversing the subtle center of the heart, attain divine unity from this subtle center.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid. 219-220.

²⁰ Ibid. 220.

²¹ Ibid. 221.

After this, the practice of the subtle center of the secret (*sirr*) takes place. This subtle center is connected to the chest and the center of the heart. It attains annihilation and subsistence from the degrees of the essential and the supreme metaphysical characteristics of God (*wa ʾin laṭīfa ra tajalīʾ-yi shuyyūnāt-i dhātīya fanā wa baqā hāṣil mī shawad*). The light of this subtle center is white in color. The sainthood of this subtle center is under the feet of Moses (may blessings and peace be on him) and the wayfarer of the 'Mosaic' teaching will, after traversing all the previous stages, attain union with God from this subtle center.

Then the practice of the subtle center of the arcanum (*khafī*) takes place which is connected to the region between the spirit and the center of the chest (*keh mā bayn-i rūḥ wa wasaʾ-i sīnah taʾalluq dārad*). The annihilation of this subtle center lies in the negative attributes (*ṣifat-i saʾīyya*) and the light of this subtle center has been designated as black in color. The sainthood of this subtle center lies under the feet of Jesus, upon whom be peace and blessings. The wayfarer of the Jesuit way (*ʾīsawī al-mashrab*) will attain divine unity through this subtle center after he has traversed all previous gradations.²²

Afterwards the practice of the subtle center of the super-arcanum/most hidden (*akhfā*) takes place. This subtle center is connected to the center of the chest. The annihilation of this subtle center is isolated in three degrees or stages: 1) the isthmus bridge/intermediary (*martaba-yi barzakhīya*) 2) transcendence (*martaba-yi tanzīhīya*) and 3) absolute unity (*martaba-yi aḥadīyat*). The light of this subtle center has been declared as green in color. The sainthood of this subtle center is under the feet of the best of all Prophets, the seal of all Prophets, Prophet Muḥammad (may peace and blessings be upon him and upon

his Companions) and whoever is of the Muhammadan path (*muḥammadī al-mashrab*) will attain divine and holy union through this subtle center.

After traversing the previous stages and the five subtle centers, the world of divine command (*ʿālam-i amr*) receives a share in the manifestation of the adumbration of divine attributes (*tajalīʾ-yi zilāl-i ṣifāt*). And a journey in the shadows of lesser sainthood (*wilāyat-i ṣuḡhrā*), which is the sainthood of the friends of God (*awliyāʾ*) takes place. And the subtle center of the soul (*laṭīfa-yi nafs*) participates in the manifestation of divine attributes. Then the journey in the circle of the attributes of greater sainthood (*wilāyat-i kubrā*), which is the sainthood of the Prophets, takes hold.²³

Of the four earthly elements, all elements with the exception of earth (*khāk*) achieve a share in the manifestation of divine attributes through the inner form (*rasm al-bāṭin*). However, the soul achieves a share in the manifestation of divine attributes through the outer form (*rasm al-zāhir*). The journey of this supreme sainthood is equivalent to a journey of the angelic sainthood (*wilāyat-i malāʾika*). And the element of earth receives a share of the manifestation of the essence (*tajalīʾ-yi zāt*) which represents the perfections of prophethood (*kamālāt-i nabuwwat*).

And after the attainment and annihilation of the ten subtle centers, the ecstatic manifestation of the essence (*tajalīʾ bar hayyʾat-i waj-dānī*) takes form because when the five subtle centers are done with the world of divine command, they become connected with the world of creation, comprising the soul and the four earthly elements. First, the soul returns to the Lord, is honored with divine satisfaction, and hence attains the real Islam (*Islām-i ḥaqīqī*). After that, the journey in the roots

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid. 222.

(*uṣūl*) of the earthly elements takes place. After that, the perfections of prophethood (*kamālāt-i nabuwwat*), the separate unveilings (*kashf-i muqaṭa'āt*), the resemblances and perfections of prophecy (*mutashābihāt wa kamālāt-i risālat*) and the perfections of the possessor of greatness (*kamālāt-i ulū al-'aẓm*) are achieved.²⁴

One should know that in order to attain the annihilation of the subtle centers, one must partake in negation and affirmation of the proclamation of faith (*lā ilāha*-negation) and *ill-Allāh*-affirmation). This practice should be undertaken as stated previously-by pulling the word “*lā*” (no) from the navel such that it reaches all the way up to the brain, which is the abode of the subtle center of the soul (*nafs*). And after bringing the word (*Allāh*-God) to the right side of the body, the proclamation (*ill-Allāh*-Except God) should be pounded and struck on the body such that this proclamation passes through and becomes actualized in all the subtle centers located in the chest (*ill-Allāh rā bar qalb zarb mī kunand bar wajhī-keh guzār-i ū bar laṭā'if keh dar sīnah jā dārad wāqī 'shawad*). At this time, the wayfarer contemplates that there is no object of worship and servitude except the essence *bi-chūnī* (without how), i.e. God. And this practice is called *bāz gasht*. When the wayfarer enters the stage at which in each breath, the quantity of this complete cycle of remembrances (*dhikr*) is twenty-one; then he should repeat this cycle every day, to the extent that he should strike his heart a thousand times on a daily basis (*chūn dar yak dam 'adad-i zikr bīst o yak 'adad rasad, ān qadar har rūz bi-kunand keh yak hazār zarb bi-hisāb āyad*). But this practice must be performed according to the established rules of meditation; then the fruits of annihilation will be attained (*ammā bi-sharṭī-keh maqrūn*

bi-sharāyī bāshad; samra-yi fanā mutarattab bar ān khwāhad shud).²⁵

We gave you a sign of the hidden object (*dādim tu rā bi gunj-i maqṣūd-i nishān*)
If we did not reach (it), then maybe you will (*mā gar na rasīdīm tu shāyad bi-rasī*)²⁶

Conclusion

To summarize, the table below displays the schematization of the five subtle centers as propounded by Mirzā Mazhar Jān-i Jānān:

Table 1.1: Naqshbandī Sufi Psychology in Jān-i Jānān's *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa*

Subtle Center	Bodily Location	Associated Prophet	Designated Color
Heart (<i>qalb</i>)	Under the fleshy part of the left breast called Pineal heart (<i>qalb-i sano-brī</i>).	Adam	Yellow
Spirit (<i>rūh</i>)	The region below the right breast	Abraham	Red
The Secret (<i>sirr</i>)	The chest and the center of the heart	Moses	White
The Arcanum (<i>khafī</i>)	The region between the spirit and the center of the chest	Jesus	Black
Super-Arcanum (<i>akhfā</i>)	The center of the chest	Muhammad	Green

²⁵ Ibid. 222-223.

²⁶ Ibid. 223.

²⁴ Ibid.

Here, it is useful to note that Jān-i Jānān's exposition of Sufi psychology and meditation is quite different from the standard Naqshbandī system in relation to the subtle centers. For purposes of comparison, let me reproduce a simplified Naqshbandī system of Sufi psychology and spiritual subtle centers as presented by Carl Ernst in his well-known introductory book titled *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam*.²⁷

Table 1.2: Standard Naqshbandī Meditation Scheme

Subtle Substance	Location	Color
Heart (<i>qalb</i>)	Two fingers below left breast	Red
Spirit (<i>rūh</i>)	Two fingers below right breast	White
Soul (<i>nafs</i>)	Beneath navel	Yellow
The Secret (<i>sirr</i>)	Center of breast	Green
Arcanum (<i>khafī</i>)	Above eye-brows	Blue
Super-Arcanum (<i>akhfā</i>)	Top of brain	Black

Apart from the conspicuous absence of the soul or *nafs* from Jān-i Jānān's list of subtle centers, we also see that none of the subtle centers and their designated colors corresponds with each other when the two systems are compared. This should not be necessarily seen as an internal contradiction for as Arthur Buehler has shown and argued,

although Mujaddidis agree upon the correspondences between prophets and the individual *latīfas*, almost every shaykh ascribes different colors to each subtle center. Sufis examining these different configurations of *latīfas* among Mujaddidis stress that each shaykh describes what is revealed to him. All seemingly contradictory results are valid, just as the process of divergent independent legal judgments (*ijtihad*) of qualified jurists are equally valid in the interpretation of Islamic law: all of these paths lead to the goal.²⁸

Nonetheless, it is instructive to observe that there is greater similarity between Jān-i Jānān's schemata and the seven subtle substances in the Kubrawī system of 'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simnānī²⁹

²⁷ see Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam*, 107.

²⁸ Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, 110.

²⁹ Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God*, 85-88.

Table 1.3: Kubrāwī Meditation Scheme³⁰

Subtle Substances	Human Type	Associated Prophet	Designated Color
Body (<i>qalb</i>)	Barbarian (<i>āfāqī</i>)	Adam	Dark
Soul (<i>nafs</i>)	Infidel (<i>kāfir</i>)	Noah	Blue
Heart (<i>qalb</i>)	Submitter (<i>muslim</i>)	Abraham	Red
The Secret (<i>sirr</i>)	Faithful (<i>mu'min</i>)	Moses	White
Spirit (<i>rūḥ</i>)	Saint (<i>walī</i>)	David	Yellow
Arcanum (<i>khafī</i>)	Prophet (<i>nabī</i>)	Jesus	Black
Real (<i>ḥaqq</i>)	Seal of prophets (<i>khātim al-anbīyā'</i>)	Muḥammad	Green

Here, too, however there are certain minor differences between al-Simnānī's and Jān-i Jānān's respective systems such as the discrepancy in the names of the Prophets and the difference in the colors associated with the subtle centers of the heart and the spirit.

Tracing the reasons and genealogy of these differences would make for an interesting research project which is however beyond the scope and purpose of this article centered primarily on making available a complete translation into English of Jān-i Jānān's Persian text *Sulūk-i Ṭarīqa* (*The Conduct of the Path*).

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³⁰ cited in Ernst, *Sufism*, 107.

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