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**ABÛ ‘ABD AL-RAHMÂN AL-SULAMÎ (D. 412/1201)  
ON SAMÂ‘, ECSTASY and DANCE**

Toward the end of the formative period of Sufism (10-11th centuries CE) Abû ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sulamî composed several treatises that provide us with precious insights into *samâ‘* and the nature of the ecstatic states that may arise during sessions of *samâ‘*.<sup>1</sup> The present article is based on Sulamî’s *Kitâb al-samâ‘*,<sup>2</sup> and augmented with material from two of his as yet unpublished manuscripts, *Mahâsin al-tasawwuf*,<sup>3</sup> and *Kitâb fusûl fî al-*

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I intend to deal exclusively with Sulamî’s views on *samâ‘* as a Sufî devotional practice. By Sulamî’s times, the term *samâ‘* had come to include music, singing, and the use of musical instruments. In *Kitâb al-samâ‘* Sulamî restricts himself to the devotional aspects of the spiritual assembly in which poetry (no music is mentioned) is recited and the states of grace and ecstasy induced during such assemblies. I have also tried to allow Sulamî to *speak for himself* as much as possible without excessive analysis. For an historical overview of *samâ‘* see J. During, “*Samâ‘*”, *EI*, CD edition and N. Pûrjawâdî, *Du Risâla dar samâ‘*, in *Ma‘ârif* 3 (March: 1989), pp. 3-72.

<sup>2</sup> *Kitâb al-samâ‘* has been edited twice. Both editions depended upon the same manuscript. *Kitâb al-samâ‘*, ed. N. Pûrjawâdî, *Majmû‘a-yi âthâr-i Abû ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sulamî* (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dânishgâh, 1990-1993), 2/14-25 and ed., ‘Alî ‘Aqila ‘Arsân, in *Majallat al-Tawrâth al-‘Arabî* (Kuwait: 1985), vol. 1, pp. 80-94. My textual references are to the edition of Dr. Pûrjawâdî. I have chosen to use N. Pûrjawâdî’s edition because of his excellent introduction to the text and the relative availability of the Tehran edition for those seeking access to the Arabic text. Sulamî indicates that *Kitâb al-samâ‘* is a summary of another work he composed on *samâ‘* that he refers to as *Masalat al-samâ‘*, this work has not come down to us. Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ‘*, pp. 20, 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Kitâb mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, Ms. 1027 Q, fol. 197r. to 212r., Manuscript Library of Rabat, Morocco. I have prepared a critical edition of this and several other manuscripts by Sulamî and hope to see them published soon by Markaz-i Nashr-i Dânishgâh in Tehran. For a summary of this text see: Jean-Jacques Thibon, “La Relation Maître-Disciple ou Les Éléments de l’Alchimie Spirituelle d’après trois manuscrits de Sulamî,” in Geneviève Gobillot, éd., *Mystique Musulmane, Parcours en Compagnie d’un Chercheur: Roger Deladrière* (Paris: Éditions Cariscript, 2002), pp. 105-114.

*tasawwuf*.<sup>4</sup> *Kitâb al-samâ'* was the first monograph dedicated specifically to *samâ'*,<sup>5</sup> and became the model for later works on the subject, either in its form as a judicial defense of the practice of *samâ'*,<sup>6</sup> or in substance as a commentary on the nature of *samâ'* -- its principles, attributes, and etiquette.<sup>7</sup>

The works of 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Sulamî al-Naysâbûrî (d. 412/1021) form the major part of the body of reference for our knowledge of the personalities and paths of the formative period of Islamic mysticism.<sup>8</sup> Although criticized by some, he was highly respected by his contemporaries for his knowledge of hadith and his devotion to the principles of Sufism. Sulamî's heritage not only extends to the books and treatises, but also involves his students, many of whom were well known scholars who played a central role transmitting the teachings of the early Sufis.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Kitâb fusûl fî al-tasawwuf*, Ms. 1204, fol. 195v. to 126r., Ben Yusuf Library in Marrakesh, Morocco. This manuscript is among those mentioned in note 3. For a summary of this text see: J.-J. Thibon, "La Relation Maître-Disciple ou Les Éléments de l'Alchimie Spirituelle d'après trois manuscrits de Sulamî," pp. 114-123.

<sup>5</sup> J. During, *El'*, "Samâ'," Al-Sarrâj, in *al-Luma'* has summarized an early treatise on *wajd* by Abû Sa'îd b. al-'Arâbî (d. 341/952) that predates *Kitâb al-samâ'*. This treatise, however, has not reached us. See *al-Luma'*, ed. 'Abd al-Halîm Mahmûd and Tâhâ 'Abd al-Bâqî Surûr, (Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Hadîtha, 1960), pp. 383-89. For more on Abû Sa'îd b. al-'Arâbî see: Sulamî, *Tabaqât al-sûfiyya* ed. Nûr al-Dîn Shurayba (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khânjî, 1969), pp. 427-30.

<sup>6</sup> For examples of works dedicated exclusively to a more judicial defense of *samâ'* see: *Kitâb al-Samâ'*, Ibn al-Qaysarânî (448-507/1056-1113), ed. Abû al-Wafâ al-Marâghî (Cairo: Muhammad Tawfîq 'Awîda, 1970). In another work, Al-Qaysarânî included *samâ'* in his defense of other commonly criticized conventions of the Sufis, i.e., dance (*raqs*), tearing garments (*tamzîq al-kharqa*), and mirth (*mizâh*). See *Safwat al-tasawwuf*, ed., Ghâda al-Muqaddîm 'Adra (Beirut: Dâr al-Muntakhib al-'Arabî, 1995), pp. 298-349. Muhammad al-Shâdhilî al-Tûnisî (820/1418-882/1478), *Farah al-asmâ' bi rukhas al-samâ'*, ed. Muhammad al-Sharîf al-Rahmûnî (Tunis: Dâr al-'Arabiyya li'l-Kitâb, 1985) is a scholarly defense of *samâ'* and music by a well-known Sufi and Malîkî scholar of Tunis.

<sup>7</sup> Works dealing with the more experiential elements of *samâ'* may include a judicial defense of *samâ'* but their orientation is more towards the devotee than the scholar. For examples of these works see: al-Sarrâj, *al-Luma'*, pp. 339-382; *al-Hujwîrî, Kashf al-mahjûb*, trans. R. Nicholson, (Gibb Memorial rev. ed. 2000), pp. 393-420; al-Kalâbâdhî, *al-Ta'arruf*, ed. Ahmad Shams al-Dîn (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), pp. 178-179; al-Qushayrî, *al-Risâla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Ma'rûf Zurayq and 'Alî 'Abd al-Hamîd Baltajî (Beirut: Dâr al-Khayr, 1993), pp. 335-350; al-Makkî, *Qût al-qulûb*, ed. Sa'îd Nasîb Makârim (Beirut: Dâr Sâdir, 1995), pp. 119-121; al-Ghazâlî, *Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-dîn*, ed. Muhammad al-Dâlî Balta (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Asariyya, 1996), 2/363-412; Ahmad b. 'Ajîba (1747-1809), *al-Futûhât al-ilâhiyya fî sharh al-mabâhith al-asliyya*, ed., al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Wârith Muhammad 'Alî (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), pp. 151-168.

<sup>8</sup> For detailed accounts of Sulamî's life and works see G. Bowering, "The Qur'ân Commentary of Al-Sulamî," in W. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little, eds., *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Lieden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 41-56; Cornell, Rkia, *Early Sufi Women* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), pp. 15-37. For an in-depth overview of Sulamî's life, times and teachers see Nûr al-Dîn Shurayba's introduction to Sulamî's, *Tabaqât al-sûfiyya*, pp. 11-64.

<sup>9</sup> Among his best known students were Abû al-Qâsim al-Qushayrî (d. 465/1073), Abû Nu'aym al-Isbahânî (d. 430/1038), al-Hakim Muhammad b. 'Abd Allâh al-Naysâbûrî (d. 405/1014), and Ahmad b. Husayn al-Bayhaqî (d. 458/1066).

Sulamî was born in Nishapur in a prestigious family well respected for their involvement in intellectual and spiritual pursuits. From an early age he had contact through his father, Husayn b. Muhammad b. Mûsâ al-Azdî (d. 348/958) and his maternal grandfather,<sup>10</sup> Abû ‘Amr Ismâ‘îl b. Nujayd al-Sulamî (d. 360/971) with a major spiritual tradition of Nishapur, the Malâmatiyya<sup>11</sup> Sulamî dedicated his early years to the study of theology, jurisprudence, and hadîth. In addition, he was initiated into the teachings and practices of Sufism by the leading scholarly figures of Nishapur.<sup>12</sup> Throughout his life he actively participated in the transmission of hadith and the sayings of Sufi authorities from previous generations. In this fashion, he could situate and class the mystical experience of the founding fathers of Sufism within a synthetic vision founded upon his experience as an initiate and heir to the Malâmatiyya tradition of Nishâpûr. His many books and treatises, addressed to a broad spectrum of readers, testify to Sulamî being more than a scholar, Sufi biographer, and mentor; he was a “school” in himself. To a large extent it was through the works of Sulamî that teachings of the Malâmatiyya of Nishapur and the Sufis of Iraq would become integrated, establishing the norms that would determine the character of

<sup>10</sup> Of the four citations that Sulamî attributes to his father in *Tabaqât al-sûfiyya*, Sulamî cites two narrations from Ibn Munâzil (d. 320/932) and one from Abû ‘Alî al-Thaqafî. Sulamî, *Tabaqât al-sûfiyya*, pp. 271, 366, and 361. Al-Qushayrî refers to Ibn Munâzil as *Shaykh al-Malâmatiyya*, al-Qushayrî, *Risâlat al-Qushayrî*, p. 435. Both Ibn Munâzil and Abû ‘Alî al-Thaqafî had frequented Hamdûn al-Qassâr (d. 271/885) and Abû Hafs (d. 270/883), who were considered to be among the founders of the Malâmatiyya of Nishapûr. Ibn Nujayd had been one of the best-known companions of Abû ‘Uthmân al-Hîrî (d. 298/910). Al-Hîrî, a respected scholar of Shâfi‘î law and hadîth, was among the founders of the Malâmatiyya. Sulamî wrote of Ibn Nujayd: “He was among the most illustrious *mashâyikh* of his times. He was unique in his practice of the path, due to his concealment of his interior state and the manner in which he guarded his intimate moments [with God]. He heard, narrated, and dictated hadîth. He was a reliable narrator (*thiqqa*). He died in 360/971.” Sulamî, *Tabaqât al-sûfiyya*, pp. 454-457.

<sup>11</sup> For the Malâmatiyya see: Abdûlbâkî Gölpınarlı, *Melâmîlik ve Melâmîler* (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931); Sulamî, *Risâlat al-malâmatiyya*, ed. Abû al-‘Alâ al-‘Afîfî (Cairo: Dâr Ihyâ’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1945); Sara Sviri, “Hakîm Tirmidhî and the Malâmatî Movement,” in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi* (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), pp. 583-613; Fritz Meier, “Khurasân and the End of Classical Sufism,” in *Essays in Islamic Mysticism and Piety*, trans. John O’Kane and Berndt Radke, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), pp. 215-217. Alexander, Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism, A Short History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), pp. 94-99. Hakîm Tirmidhî, *Kitâb ithbât al-‘ilal*, ed., Khâlid Zahîrî (Rabat: Muhammad V University, 1998), pp. 24-25; K. Honerkamp, “The Malâmatiyya of Nishapur, Their Origins and Teachings,” in *Three Early Sufi Texts* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003), pp. 91-110. Also see the collected presentations from the International Conference on the *Malâmatiyya* and *Bayrâmî* Orders held in Istanbul in June, 1987 in N. Clayer, A. Popovic, and T. Zarccone, eds., *Melâmîs-Bayrâmîs* (Istanbul: Les Éditions Isis, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Murâd b. Yûsuf al-Dawsî al-Shâdhîfî reports that Abû Sahl al-Su‘lûkî (d. 369/980) a scholar of the Shâfi‘î school, gave Sulamî his first initiation into Sufi invocation practices (*dhikr*) and supervised him in a retreat of forty days. Cited by Kister in Sulamî, *Kitâb âdâb al-suhba*, ed. M.J. Kister, in *Oriental Notes and Studies* 6 (Jerusalem: The Israel Oriental Society, 1954), p 4 of the Arabic introduction. ‘Abdurrahmân al-Jâmî reports that Abû al-Qâsim al-Nasrabâdî (d. 367/977-8), another well-known scholar of Shâfi‘î law, invested Sulami with the Sufi mantle (*khirqâ*). Al-Jami, *Nafahât al-uns*, ed. M. Tawhîdîpûr (Tehran: Kitâfurûshî Mahmûdî, 1959), p. 311.

Islamic mystical thought and practice in the ensuing centuries.

### ***KITÂB AL-SAMÂ'***

*Kitâb al-samâ'* is the earliest example we have of a treatise on the Sufi practice of *samâ'*. Accounts of the Sufis of the mid-3rd/9th centuries onward contain multiple references to poetry and ecstatic states related to the recitation of particular lines of poetry.<sup>13</sup> As testified to by Sulamî's own example, Sufi circles of this period included scholars of jurisprudence and hadith, yet there seems to have been little judicial argumentation on the legal status of *samâ'* until Sulamî's time.<sup>14</sup> Early works dealing with *samâ'* were intended for Sufis (or would be Sufis) and treated the experiential facets of *samâ'* and its inner states and outer requisite behavior (*adab*). For Sulamî the *adab* of *samâ'* protected the devotee, on the one hand, from his more mundane inclinations and lent authenticity to the experiential states of *samâ'*.<sup>15</sup> As Sufism became a recognizable modality of Islamic spirituality, concerts of *samâ'*, like other Sufi rituals, came under attack from traditionalist scholars of hadith who considered these Sufi practices an innovation (*bid'a*). Sulamî composed *Kitâb al-samâ'* in response to this criticism.<sup>16</sup> Employing traditions drawn from hadith,<sup>17</sup> accounts of the Companions, the Imams of the schools of jurisprudence, and early Sufi

<sup>13</sup> In *Tabaqât al-sûfiyya*, Sulamî cites over ninety examples of poetry recited by or for Sufis. Poetry was employed pedagogically to stir emotions of love and longing and to induce ecstatic states.

<sup>14</sup> N. Pürjawâdî, *Du risâla dar samâ'*, p. 22. Even those who avoided *samâ'*, such as the Malâmatiyya of Nishapûr, were not averse to the practice itself. When asked why he did not attend concerts of *samâ'*, a *malâmî* responded: "We have not abandoned the sessions of *samâ'* out of disdain or denial; but out of the fear that the states we hide would be revealed." Sulamî, *Risâlat al-malâmatiyya*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>15</sup> This explains why, in Sulamî's references to *samâ'* in his other works, the *adab* is such a central issue. See Sulamî, *Risâlat al-malâmatiyya*, pp. 112, 117; *Usûl al-malâmatiyya wa-ghalatât al-sûfiyya*, ed. 'Abdalfattâh Ahmad al-Fâwî Mahmûd (Cairo: Matba' al-Irshâd, 1985), p. 184; and *Jawâmi' âdâb al-sûfiyya*, 260-61, *Sulûk al-'ârîfîn*, 405, *Kitâb nasîm al-arwâh*, 419-424, in *Tis'at kutub fî usûl al-tasawwuf wa'l-zuhd li-Abî 'Abd al-Rahmân Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Sulamî*, ed. Süleymân Âtesh (Beirut: al-Nâshir li'l-Tibâ' wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzî' wa'l-I'lân, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> The most vehement criticism of Sufi *samâ'* and Sulamî came a century later at the hands of Ibn al-Jawzî (d. 510/1116). See Ibn al-Jawzî, *Talbîs Iblîs*, ed. Ayman Sâlih (Cairo: Dâr al-Hadîth, 1995), pp. 230-273. Then in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the well known Hanbalî jurist, severely criticized Sulamî for the views expressed in *Kitâb al-samâ'*. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitâb al-samâ' wa'l-raqs* (Cairo: Maktaba Muhammad 'Alî Subayh, n.d.), pp. 321-323. L. Pouzet has analyzed the complex question of the Hanbalî opposition to *samâ'* and the social context in which the debate over the legality of *samâ'* took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. See L. Pouzet, *Prise de position du samâ' en Orient musulman au VIIème/XIIème siècle*, in *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): pp. 193-234. Ghâda al-Muqaddim 'Adra suggests that Sulamî's *Kitâb al-samâ'* may have been one of the reasons that caused the jurists to speak out against *samâ'* after a long silence on the issue. See Ibn al-Qaysarânî, *Safwat al-tasawwuf*, p. 71 of the introduction.

<sup>17</sup> Sulamî augments his response in *Kitâb mahâsin al-tasawwuf* with the Qur'ânic verses 39:18, 50:37, 8:23, and 42:212.

authorities, Sulamî demonstrates that poetry and *samâ‘* have been an accepted aspect of Islamic spirituality from the first generation. He stresses, however, that the question of judicial legitimacy is secondary to understanding the multi-faceted aspects of *samâ‘* as they relate to the states and stations of the aspirants on the Sufi path. I will therefore concentrate, in the following pages, upon Sulamî’s treatment of *samâ‘* as a devotional practice rather than as a set of judicial proofs.

The prelude to Sulamî’s defense of *samâ‘* comprises a brief restatement of the question at hand and a lengthy commentary on *samâ‘* as understood and practiced by the Sufis of his time.

It has reached me – May God bestow His graces upon you – that certain scholars in your region have reproached the people of realized knowledge (*ahl al-tahqîq*) for their practice of *samâ‘*, saying that at best one should regard *samâ‘* as a frivolous pastime (*lahwa*) and repent. Should, however, the person making this allegation examine his reason and look carefully at the traditions of the Prophet (*sunnan*), the accounts of the Companions and Imâms after them, and the practice (*sayr*) of the righteous elders of this community, he would realize the inaccuracy of his statement.<sup>18</sup>

In his initial response Sulamî agrees with these critics’ opinion as it applies to *samâ‘* as practiced by the common folk (*‘awâm*), declaring it blameworthy and deserving repentance. He differentiates, however, this profane *samâ‘* from the devotional *samâ‘* of the Sufis; ascribing to their *samâ‘* a broad range of categories and to the audience (*mustami‘în*) a hierarchy of spiritual states and degrees of experience. The *samâ‘* of the devotees (*murîdîn*) incites them to exemplary comportment and worthy states,<sup>19</sup> while the people of realized knowledge (*ahl al-haqâ‘iq*) find repose and relief in *samâ‘* when their states and stations weigh upon them.

The *samâ‘* of the devotees (*murîdîn*), those who frequent Sufi circles (*tâbi‘în*), and ascetics (*zuhhâd*) is both admonition and good guidance. It is a rebuke, an exhortation, and a cleansing from the impurities that linger from their past misdeeds and indiscretions. *Samâ‘* provokes within them fear, hope, compassion, detachment from the world, patience, and acceptance of God’s decrees. There is no reason therefore [for the critics] to find fault with *samâ‘*. In fact, should they sense hardness in their hearts or indolence in themselves, it behooves

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<sup>18</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ‘*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> I employ the term “devotee” (*murîd*) to refer to those aspirants who are new to the teachings of Sufism. In contrast to the term “devotee,” I use the term “people of realized knowledge” to refer to those Sulamî calls *al-muhaqqiqîn* or *ahl al-tahqîq*. I am employing the terms Sufi and aspirant as generic terms for all those who aspire to follow the Sufi way.

them to listen that their hearts be raised up and enlivened therein to obedience. The *samâ'* of the people of realization and experiential knowledge (*ma'ârif*) is repose for them from the rigors of their states. When overcome by the moment they fear their inability to bear the weight that descends upon them and they seek rest in the states of *samâ'*. Perhaps *samâ'* may lighten their burdens or increase them in states of ecstasy (*wajd*) to find [the Real] (*wujûd*).<sup>20</sup> When relieved of their burdens they are calm and still. When increased in *wajd* they cry out and are agitated. Only one of their number could comprehend their states.<sup>21</sup>

Sulamî, through his Malâmâtiyya heritage, taught that individual human states are reflective of a hierarchy of subtle centers of consciousness.<sup>22</sup> For Sulamî the multifaceted nature of *samâ'* resulted from the disparate states of

<sup>20</sup> *Wajd*, *wujûd*, and *tawâjud* are terms that have long been employed by early Sufi authors in their discussions on *samâ'*. *Wajd* (pl. *mawâjîd*) is traditionally defined as an “unexpected encounter on the level of the heart that induces states that are neither sought after nor striven for.” See al-Sarrâj, *al-Luma'*, “*Kitâb al-wajd*”, pp. 375-389 and p. 418; al-Kalâbâdhî, *al-Ta'arruf*, p. 132; al-Qushayrî, *al-Risâla al-Qushayriyya*, p. 62; al-Hujwîrî, *Kashf al-mahjûb*, pp. 413-15. *Wajd* may or may not be accompanied by movement, sighing, or crying out. The early writers did not regard it, however, as a trance state. *Tawâjud* refers to striving to attain a state of *wajd* or even emulating a person in a state of *wajd*. *Wujûd*, is by far the most difficult term to grasp. Ibn al-'Arabî defines it as “Finding (*wijdân*) the Real (*al-haqq*) in ecstasy,” *Futûhât al-makkiyya* (Cairo: 1911), 2/538; trans. W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 212. For an in-depth look at these three terms see: W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 212-13. In the follow discussion I will employ the Arabic terms within the bounds of the above definitions. Al-Qushayrî contextualized these three terms saying, “*Tawâjud* is the outset, *wujûd* the end; and *wajd* is the center, between outset and end.” See al-Qushayrî, *al-Risâla al-Qushayriyya*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ'*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> For the Malâmâtiyya, individual human spiritual states were reflected within a hierarchy of subtle centers of consciousness. These centers were referred to as the *rûh*, *sirr*, *qalb*, and *nafs*. These centers resonated with certain levels of reality. At the summit of the hierarchy was the Divine made manifest to the *rûh* (spirit). The *sirr* (innermost mystery) resonated to the spiritual or angelic realm. The *qalb* (heart) resonated to the intermediate realm between the mundane and spiritual realms and the *nafs* (ego-self) resonated to the worldly or mundane realm. Within this hierarchy each subtle center was aware of the realms that were below it, but not vice versa. The *ruh*, being the highest, is the only center that encompassed the totality of multi-leveled spiritual reality, while the *nafs*, defined by the mundane realm, was imprisoned upon itself, forced to reside in a state of unawareness (*ghafla*). An interesting aside to this discussion of these centers of consciousness and their affinities within a multi-leveled scheme of reality is to be found in the words of the eighteenth century Moroccan Sufi, Ibn 'Ajîba, who said, “As long as the *rûh* is imprisoned in a state of *ghafla* it is called the *nafs*.” Ibn 'Ajîba, *Kitâb sharh salât al-qutb Ibn Mashîsh*, ed. 'Abd al-Salâm al-'Imrânî (Casablanca: Dâr al-Rashâd al-Hadîtha, 1999), p. 29-30. This hierarchical view of the subtle centers of the soul is a salient aspect of the manner in which Sulamî treats *samâ'* as a means in which the spiritual realities of each realm resonate within the subtle centers of the *murîd*, inducing in him states of *wajd*. For more on these centers of consciousness see: Sulamî, *Risâlat al-malâmâtiyya*, p. 100. Also see Richard Hartmann, “As-Sulamî's *Risâlat al-Malâmâtîja*,” *Der Islam* 8 (1918): pp. 164-165 and Sulamî, *La Lucidité Implacable: Épître de Hommes du Blâme*, trans., R. Deladrière (Paris: Arléa, 1991), pp. 16-17, 58-67.

the aspirants, as he explains, “*Samâ‘* is one, but the color varies according to the audience.”<sup>23</sup> The ego-self (*nafs*) of some aspirants may revert to its capricious self-seeking nature under the influence of *samâ‘* while others may find release from their bondage to the *nafs* through their intimacy with God. Sulamî underscores the reciprocal nature of the listener’s inner state and the very manner in which he “hears” in the following citation ascribed to Junayd:

*Samâ‘* corresponds to the [state of] the listener. The most exalted thing one can hear is the Qur’ân. It is a restorative remedy, a mercy, good guidance, and a clear message, while the basest thing that one may hear is poetry. The Qur’ân, however, may be a punishing rod to one who hears it, despite its being a remedy and mercy, while poetry may instill wisdom in the heart of hearer, though it is but vain speech.<sup>24</sup>

Beyond these diverse states of the devotees are the states of those who have attained to the state of realized knowledge (*al-muhaqqiqîn*). They may hear falsehood or vain speech as the truth,<sup>25</sup> while those who have not attained to this station may listen to the truth and hear falsehood. Sulamî concludes the discussion, returning full circle, as he classifies the listeners according to a hierarchy of subtle centers from which each “hears.”

Among the categories of listeners are those who listen by individual inclination (*hazz*) and whim (*zann*), those who listen with their inward state, present in the moment (*waqt*), and those who listen with *wajd*, *wujûd*, and *tawâjud*. There are also those who are *heard for* (*yusma‘u lahu*) and those who are *heard from*.<sup>26</sup> They all differ according to their states, graces and state of the narrator.<sup>27</sup>

Sulamî also categorizes *samâ‘* in accordance with the hierarchy of the stations attained by the aspirants themselves.

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<sup>23</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ‘*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Sulamî cites here the example of a man of the early community who fell unconscious upon hearing a seller of wild thyme cry out “*yâ sa‘tarâ al-barrî*.” When asked, upon regaining consciousness, what had occurred he replied, “My heart was present [with God] and I thought heard him say “*al-sâ‘a tarâ al-Bârî*.” (The Last-day you will see the Maker).

<sup>26</sup> This is reminiscent of the Hadith Qudsi known as the *hadith al-walî*, “... I am his hearing by which he hears and his sight by which he sees ...”. al-Bukhârî, ed. Mustafâ Dîb al-Bughâ (Beirut: Dâr Ibn Kathîr, 1990), *Kitâb al-riqâq, Bâb al-tawâdu‘*, pp. 5/2384-2385. Al-Shawkânî (d. 1250/1834) devoted an entire work to this hadith. In a long section he cites various interpretations of scholars of hadith and Sufis shaykhs for the term *samâ‘* as employed in this hadith. See al-Shawkânî, *Qatr al-walî ‘alâ hadîth al-walî*, ed. Ibrâhîm Ibrâhîm Hilâl (Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Hadîtha, 1979), pp. 428-440.

<sup>27</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ‘*, p. 17.

*Samâ'* is the practical experience (*tajriba*) of the devotees, the clarity (*bayân*) of the *muhâqqiqîn*, the arousal of desire of the people of divine love (*al-muhibbîn*), solace for the hearts of the righteous (*al-sâdiqîn*) and the rending the veil [of self-deception] from those engrossed in vain discourse (*mubtilîn*).<sup>28</sup>

Sulamî's defense of Sufism stresses the integral nature of *samâ'* within Sufi methodology. The derivation of a "legal ruling," although important, is too simplistic to be compatible with the intricacies of *samâ'*. Primary to the permissibility of *samâ'* for Sulamî is the spiritual state and station of the aspirant. The judicial status of *samâ'* depends upon the station of the aspirant; as Sulamî relates from Abû Sahl Muhammad b. Sulaymân.<sup>29</sup>

*Samâ'* is a laudable practice (*yastahibbu*) for the people of realized knowledge, permitted (*yubâhu*) for the pious people of scruples and ritual worship, and reprehensible (*yukrahu*) for those who listen as entertainment."<sup>30</sup>

The diversity among aspirants and the capacity of the *nafs* to follow its own caprices led the Sufis to prescribe prerequisites for those wishing to attend sessions of *samâ'*.<sup>31</sup> Only those who fulfilled these conditions were considered to be the *people of samâ'*, for them *samâ'* was licit. Sulamî describes one of them:

He is who has sought to perfect himself outwardly, through spiritual training and striving while inwardly he seeks perfection through reflection and self-appraisal. He occupies each moment with behavior in accordance with the example of the Prophet (*sunnan*). There is no portion left for him in his *nafs*, nor has he any claims upon creation and that which it comprises. As I heard my grandfather Abû 'Amr Ismâ'îl b.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad b. Sulaymân al-Su'lûkî (d. 369/980) frequented Abû Bakr al-Shiblî (d. 334/946) and was a scholar of jurisprudence and among the most knowledgeable of the Sufis of his age. See Ibn Mulaqqin, *Tabaqât al-awliyâ'*, ed. Nûr al-Dîn Shurayba (Cairo: Matba' Dâr al-Ta'lîf, 1973), p. 215 and the references cited there.

<sup>30</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ'*, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Sulamî refutes a mistaken notion many claimants to Sufism had concerning *samâ'*. He states: "[Among the Sufis] a group has mistakenly assumed that *tasawwuf* is making utterances (*qawl*), ecstatic dancing (*raqs*), participation in sessions of listening to the melodic recitation of poetry, and making pretentious claims and exaggerated expenditures on gatherings. [They have come to this conclusion] because they saw some of the worthy elders enjoying sessions of *samâ'* from time to time. Such as these are mistaken for they do not know that every heart is polluted with something of the mundane. [Therefore] *samâ'* is not permissible advised for any frivolous heedless ego-self (*nafs*). Moreover, it is forbidden, and latter opinion is the most authoritative. Junayd – May God be pleased with him – said to someone who has asked him about *samâ'*, 'When you see a devotee attracted to *samâ'*, know that there remains in him (*fî nafsihi*) something of frivolity.'" See Sulamî, *Usûl al-malâmatiyya wa-ghalatât al-sûfiyya*, p. 184.

Nujayd say: “*Samâ’* is only licit (*halâl*) for one whose heart is alive and his *nafs* is dead; as for one whose heart is dead and his *nafs* is alive, *samâ’* is not licit for him.”<sup>32</sup>

These prerequisites or *adab* were an aid to the realization of the inner states of *samâ’*. As a general principle *adab* provided a normative basis of conduct for the devotee upon the spiritual path. The *adab* of *samâ’* required an attitude of detachment from one’s ego-self (*nafs*) and individual inclinations (*tab’*). For Sulamî the *adab* of *samâ’* represented a methodology that opened the individual to experiential knowledge of God and insured the authenticity of the ecstatic states (*mawâjîd*) that may arise during *samâ’*.

### WAJD

In the same manner that the character of *samâ’* corresponds with the station and experience of the aspirant, the intensity of *wajd* induced during a concert of *samâ’* depends on his state, knowledge, love, and ardor. In *Kitâb al-samâ’* and *Mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, Sulamî alludes to *wajd* within the context of his discourse on *samâ’* but does not go into detail.<sup>33</sup> In another work, *Fusûl fî tasawwuf*,<sup>34</sup> however, he devotes two lengthy passages to *wajd* bringing to the discourse his distinctive awareness of the hierarchical nature of spiritual experience. Sulamî affirms that sound ecstatic states (*mawâjîd*, pl. of *wajd*)<sup>35</sup> have signs and characteristics that are discernible in the inner attitudes and outward comportment of the Sufi. These inner attitudes are founded first and foremost upon experiential knowledge of God (*ma’rifâ*), His names and attributes. As the aspirant assimilates these divine attributes they manifest inwardly in him as fear, hope, awe, compassion, patience, contentment with God’s decrees, certainty, veracity, love, and fervor. Outwardly he watches over his inner disposition, conforms to the law in permitted things and shuns the prohibited, his sustenance is licit and he regards all his actions as blameworthy.

When he listens to invocation (*dhikr*) or *samâ’* he experiences *wajd*, and through this *wajd*, induced by his experience of

<sup>32</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ’*, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Both these works, given their polemical methodology, seem directed to a Sufi community attracted to erudite intellectual discourse.

<sup>34</sup> This work is a collection of short discourses, most probably delivered in the small Sufi lodge (*duwayra*) where Sulamî taught in Nishapur. It represents a rare example of the intimate mentor/student dialogue that marked Sufism before the formation of formal Sufi orders. *Wajd*, when seen as an aspect of *ma’rifâ*, pertains to the domain of the teachings directed to experienced aspirants, which in the case of *Kitâb al-fusûl* are Sulamî’s own students.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Qusharyrî cites, on the authority of the early mentors (*mashâyikh*), that, “*Al-wajd* comes unexpectedly, while *mawâjîd* are the fruit of recited litanies (*awrâd*). Whoever augments his daily practices increases in his blessings from God.” See Al-Qusharyrî, *al-Risâla al-Qushayrîya*, p. 62. Sulamî uses the plural here within the context of his discourse on *samâ’*, I have therefore treated *mawâjîd* in this instance as the plural of *wajd*.

*samâ'*, his being (*wujûd*) is transformed to true being (*haqîqa*). When *dhikr* and *samâ'* encounter his inner-self (*sirr*) they find it resonating with spiritual states. When they encounter his outward aspect they find him adorned with worthy demeanor and right conduct. The states of *wajd* that rush in upon him conform with his state. If his *samâ'* is by God, his being is by God, and if his *samâ'* is by the attributes of God, his being is God's preservation of his *sirr* from the awareness of any other than God. When his *samâ'* is from God, He effaces him from his own attributes, so that there remains of him neither attribute nor trace. When his *samâ'* is by his human nature, experiential moment, or discrete state he is between one who errs and one who hits the mark, all in accord with his moment, states, and attributes.<sup>36</sup>

Sulamî remains largely exegetical in this part of his discourse, depicting *wajd* and its attendant states as the consequences of a process of spiritual training and transformation. *Wajd*, as understood by Sulamî and the Sufis of his time, however, was more than cognitive phenomena on the part of the aspirant. It often induced intense emotions, cries of joy or sorrow, physical agitation, and movement.

Sulamî's treatment of these tangible consequences of *wajd* affords us a rare view of the experiential component of *samâ'*. Sulamî regarded any overt display of *wajd*, such as agitation (*inzi'âj*) or movement (*haraka*), as blameworthy in those who "hear by God, and in God since this is the station of reverent awe and extinction in God."<sup>37</sup> For one who had attained to experiential knowledge of God (*'arif*), however, it was excusable in the case that he should become distraught over the passing of a fleeting vision of the divine perfection in creation or be overcome by a state he has no capacity to bear. Agitation at times may be praiseworthy in a devotee focused upon his own discrete attributes and states. During *samâ'* "his past lapses, poor choices, and indiscretions may be disclosed to him. This is a state particular to devotees (*murîdîn*)."<sup>38</sup> Sulamî sees movement and agitation that emanate from the habits of the ego-self as blameworthy in the devotee, but not for the common folk. *Samâ'* and the reactions it brings about in the common folk may have positive consequences such as admonition and purification. It may

<sup>36</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb fusûl fî tasawwuf*, fol. 206v.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. In this passage Sulamî echoes the Malâmâtiyya viewpoint concerning *wajd*: "Among the foundations of the Malâmâtiyya is the principle that when *samâ'* acts upon one of realized knowledge (*mutahaqqaq*), his reverent awe would prohibit him from movement or crying out. I heard Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Khashshâb say, 'I heard 'Alî b. Hârûn al-Husrî say, When true *samâ'* finds harmony in the heart of one of realized knowledge it adorns him with diverse divine favors, the first being that his reverent awe overcomes all those present until they neither move, cry out, nor are distraught, his state is manifest in theirs.'" Sulamî, *Risâlat al-malâmâtiyya*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>38</sup> Sulamî, *Fusûl fî al-tasawwuf*, fol. 206v.

provoke laudable attributes in them as well. In devotees, however, these states of agitation may cause them to make claims to lofty degrees of intimacy with God when in reality they are “the capricious whims and the self-deception of the ego-self.”<sup>39</sup>

In another section Sulamî categorizes those who are induced to movement (*al-mutaharrikûn*) during *samâ’*. Among them are those who naturally enjoy elegant melodies and beautiful voices, the penitent sinner who listens in sorrow, fear and regret, the devotee moved by the mention of God’s bounty and compassion, the ‘*ârif*’ moved by the names of God and His attributes, and the lover moved by his yearning for the beloved. These movements, however, are ephemeral and do not last. Then there are those who have arrived (*wâsil*), who listen, lost to themselves having attained to the Divine presence. They may move according to their experiential state, but only as the frailty of servanthood dictates. Then there are those who are well established in the way (*mustaqîm*). For these latter Sufis, *samâ’* in itself has no influence upon them. In all they hear there is wisdom, in all they see there is admonition. They hear the Real (*al-Haqq*) at all times through their innermost secret (*sirr*) and their heart. Their hearing is perception, as in the Quranic verse, **Indeed in that is a reminder for one who possesses a heart or hears while being a witness. [Q 50: 37]**. Sulamî completes this section with the mention of those whose outer and inner aspects are so jealously guarded by God that he possesses no state by which he is known or even noticed. He is unique, his state and moment are uniquely with God. Sulamî says, “his *samâ’* is a play of illusion and appearances” (*al-talbîs wa’l-ashkâl*).<sup>40</sup>

### ADAB

The behavior incumbent upon those who attend a concert of *samâ’* are summed up in the well-known statement of Junayd: “The requirements of *samâ’* are three in number: [suitable] brothers, [a suitable] place and [a suitable] time.”<sup>41</sup> These articles of *adab* became the foundational precepts for the regulation of *samâ’* concerts from Sulamî’s time and are reflected in all the earlier cited works dealing with *samâ’*. Of particular interest in *Kitâb al-samâ’* and *Mahâsin al-tasawwuf* is the role of the shaykh as the axis around which the participants’ states revolve. Concisely put, the prerequisites of

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., fol. 207r.

<sup>40</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb fusûl fî al-tasawwuf*, fol.221v – 222r. At the end of this passage Sulamî alludes to the hidden or unrecognized friends of God living among his fellows. This is a concept central to the teachings of the Malâmatiyya of Nishapûr to whom anonymity was a sign of God’s favor. See Sulamî, *Risâlat al-malâmatiyya*, pp. 98, 105, 110, 112-114, 117. This archetype comes from the earliest Islamic times, an example being the hadith, “There are many disheveled dust covered men, [that would be] shoved away from peoples’ doors, that if they made an oath on God, He would make it so.” Al-‘Ajlûnî, *Kashf al-khafâ’*, ed. Ahmad al-Qalâsh (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risâlat, 1988), 1/512.

<sup>41</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, fol. 209v.

*samâ'* are as follows:

– Only attend a concert of *samâ'* with *ahl al-samâ'* and those aspirants whose spiritual states augment your own state.<sup>42</sup>

– It is generally regarded as reprehensible (*makrûh*) for devotees and youths to assemble for *samâ'* without a shaykh being present or someone who has exemplary presence and companionship.<sup>43</sup>

– When there is a shaykh present you should focus your attention on him, not on your own transient state. Whatever elevated states of *samâ'* emanate from him, their blessing (*baraka*) will descend upon you.<sup>44</sup>

– A shaykh that attends a gathering of *samâ'* where devotees and youths are present should inform them that his presence among them is for reasons of companionship and as an example, not out of obligation [as a necessity of Sufism].<sup>45</sup>

– When shaykhs associate in *samâ'* with their peers, let each of them concentrate on his own state without blaming any of their companions whether they move or are remain motionless.<sup>46</sup>

– Do not accede to doubt of the words recited in *samâ'* and do not blame anyone who becomes agitated or transported in *tawâjud*, whether you comprehend their intent or not.<sup>47</sup>

– Refrain from making suggestions to the reciter.<sup>48</sup>

– Do not allow *samâ'* to become mere emulation (*taqlîd*).<sup>49</sup>

– The best of those who attend a concert of *samâ'* are those who discern between their *wajd*, *wujûd*, and *tawâjud* during *samâ'*. For them *samâ'* does not become a routine or natural proclivity.<sup>50</sup>

– Do not force yourself to cry out or become agitated except in the case of intense emotions.<sup>51</sup>

## DANCE

One of the issues that *wajd* gave rise to was rhythmic movement, or

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<sup>42</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ'*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, fol. 210r.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 209v.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 210r.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 209v.

<sup>48</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ'*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, fol. 209v.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

dance. In *Mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, within the context of *samâ‘*, Sulamî includes dance, keeping rhythm with a baton, and wearing the patched frock as being among the admissible practices (*rukhas*) of Sufism. Sulamî writes, “Dancing is among the admissible things; it is not, however, considered among the essential aspects of Sufism.”<sup>52</sup> He cites two Qur’ânic foundations for dance. **We strengthened their hearts and they stood up and said, Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, we will never call upon any deity other than He. [Q 18:14]. Strike with your foot, herein there is cold water to drink and wash in [Q 38:42].**

Sulamî also cites Mâlik b. Dînâr as saying: “It is written in the Torah: ‘We called out to you in fervor and you did not respond with fervor; we played the flute for you and you did not dance.’”<sup>53</sup> In the following curious citation from Wahb b. Munabbih, dance is a divinely endowed human attribute from the time of Adam:

When Adam was created, God molded him in the best semblance and adorned him with the ornaments of the Garden (*al-janna*). He put rings on his fingers, anklets on his ankles, bands on his forearms, and around his neck he placed necklaces. He crowned him and adorned his forehead with a wreath and called him by the most beloved of surnames to Him, “*Yâ Abâ Muhammad*, wander about the Garden and see if you find anyone comparable to you or if I have created anyone more wondrously than yourself?” Adam turned about the Garden and not seeing anyone more wondrous than he, began to swagger (*zahâ*) and stride proudly (*khatar*) through the Garden. God looked well upon this and called out to him from the Throne, “Swagger on, O Adam, one such as you has the right to swagger; I have cherished something and created it without equal.”<sup>54</sup>

Sulamî amends this citation with, “From this time on God passed down this swaggering walk to the descendants of Adam. In the ignorant this manner of walking is arrogance; in kings it is disdain; and in the friends of God (*al-awliyâ‘*) it is ecstatic joy (*wajd*).”<sup>55</sup> Sulamî also held that keeping a beat to the rhythm with a baton was a permissible distraction (*mubâh*) similar in legal status to archery, training horses, and a man’s enjoying himself with his family.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 210v.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew 11:17 and Luke 7:31. It is of interest that Mâlik b. Dînâr cites this as being from the Torah.

<sup>54</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb mahâsin al-tasawwuf*, fol. 211r. I have not found a second reference to this citation in the works available to me.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

I would like to conclude here, reaffirming that the principles, attributes, and etiquette of *samâ'* as portrayed by Sulamî are as relevant today as they were in Sulamî's time. The concert of *samâ'* has made its way from the traditional Islamic world to Europe and North America and taken on many new guises and permutations. The critics of *samâ'* have continued to publicize their polemics against *samâ'*, even through the innovation (!) of the internet. The audience, however, is as reflective today of the multi-faceted human state as in the times of Sulamî. People still attend concerts of *samâ'* seeking purification, inner peace, and repose. In his treatment, Sulamî has contextualized *samâ'* within the human condition, from the music lover to the people of realized knowledge. If the comprehension of an issue is the prerequisite to judging it, *Kitâb al-samâ'* has provided us with the key. Note Sulamî's suggestion to the critics of *samâ'*:

There is no reason therefore [for the critics] to find fault with *samâ'*. In fact, should they sense hardness in their hearts or indolence in themselves, it behooves them to partake of *samâ'* so that their hearts be raised up and enlivened therein to obedience.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sulamî, *Kitâb al-samâ'*, 14.