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A Journey in Search of "I": The Self in Shabistarī's *Rose Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i Rāz*)

"Ben"i Aramak İçin Bir Yolculuk: Şebüsterî'nin Gülşen-i Râz'ında "Ben" Kavramı

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ABSTRACT

Who or what is "I"? Does "I" refer to the soul, body, or something else? This paper aims to clarify the Iranian Sufi Maḥmūd Shabistarī's metaphysical account of the self in *The Rose Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i Rāz*). Some of Shabistarī's commentators-for example, Lāhījī-argue that the "self is the determined Real" without offering a full account. This paper presents Shabistarī's self by examining *Gulshan* in the context of commentaries, secondary sources, and Islamic thought and by presenting opposing interpretations and reasons for the most prominent interpretations. In *Gulshan*, the self is neither the soul nor the body. It is the Real's determination, a face among the eternally manifesting, unrepeated faces of the Real. This paper argues that the self is the human's fixed entity (quiddity, *ʿayn-i thābitah*), whose aptitudes are perpetually unfolding; it is an eternal *becoming* of the Perfect Man. The self is not reified (i.e., it is of no definite content or form) or fully known; it changes every moment; it is the ever-changing "I" of the moment. Shabistarī's metaphysics helps the modern person realize that her self is divine; it teaches her that because the world-including humans, animals, and the environment-is God's manifestation, it deserves care.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Maḥmūd Shabistarī, *The Rose Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i Rāz*), Sufism, Self, Manifestation.

ÖZ

"Ben" kimdir ya da nedir? "Ben" ruhu mu, bedeni mi yahut bunlardan başka bir şeyi mi ifade eder? Bu çalışma, İranlı mutasavvıf Maḥmûd Şebüsterî'nin Gülşen-i Râz'daki "benlik" kavramını açıklığa kavuşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Şebüsterî'nin bazı şârihleri - örneğin Lâhîjî - tam bir açıklama yapmadan "benliğin belirlenmiş (*mutaʿayyan*) Mutlak Hakikat" olduğunu savunur. Bu makale, şerhler, ikincil kaynaklar ve İslam düşüncesi bağlamında Gülşen'i inceleyerek ve bu çerçevede ortaya çıkan karşıt yorumlar ve öne çıkan yorumların nedenlerini sunarak Şebüsterî'nin benlik anlayışını sergilemektedir. Gülşen'de benlik ne ruhtur ne de beden. O, Hakk'ın, sonsuz, tekrarlanmayan tecellilerinden bir tecellidir. Bu çalışma, Benin insanın ʿa'yân-ı sâbite olduğunu ve bununla bağlantılı olarak benin istidadının sonsuz mahiyetini ortaya koyar, bu döngü benin sonsuz yönelimini insân-i kâmil olması çerçevesinde ele alır. Benlik şeyleştirilmemiştir (yani, belirli bir içeriği veya biçimi yoktur) veya tam olarak bilinemez; her an değişir; o anın sürekli değişen "ben"idir. Şebüsterî'nin metafiziği, modern insanın kendi benliğinin ilahi kaynaklı olduğunu idrak etmesine yardımcı olur ve ona Allah'ın tecellisi olması hasebiyle, kâinatı ve içindekileri anlamlandırma noktasında çok yönlü bir bakış açısı kazandırır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Metafizik, Maḥmūd Shabistarī, *Gülşen-i Rāz*, Sufizm, Benlik, İlâhî Tecellî.

INTRODUCTION

که باشم من؟ مرا از من خبر کن چه معنی دارد اندر خود سفر کن

Who am I? Inform me of me,

Of what meaning is it to have a journey in me?

(Herawī, 287)[1,2,3]

Shaykh Sʿad al-Dīn Maḥmūd bin Amīn al-Dīn Abd al-Karīm bin Yahyā Shabistarī, known as Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī, is a renowned Iranian Muslim mystic-philosopher who lived in the seventh century Hijri. His biography is controversial, though according to the generally accepted view, he was born in 687/1288 (H/CE) in Shabistar, a small town near Tabriz, Iran. After his education in Tabriz, he starts traveling and writing. He writes in *Saʿādat Nāmeh*-a famous work from the author-he has visited Egypt, Shām, and Hijāz (Barzegar Khaleqi - Karbasi, 2016, xxi). Later, he (*ibid*., xxi) returns to Tabriz, passing away in 720/1320 (H/CE), when he was 33-though some claim this year to be 740/1339 (H/CE). He is buried in a garden-named "Rose Garden" (*Gulshan*)-in Shabistar next to his master, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Yaʿqūb Tabrīzī (xxi).[4] Shaykh Maḥmūd's philosophy echoes Ibn ʿArabī's *ḥikmah*, and his poetry style reflects that of Rūmī and ʿAṭṭār, the two Persian mystical poetry pillars (v).[5]

At the beginning of *Gulshan-i Rāz*, Shaykh Maḥmūd (33-42) tells us that in 717/1317 (H/CE), a messenger brought a letter from a mystic from Khorasan-Amīr Sayyid Husseinī Herawī-to a gathering where Shabistarī and his spiritual teacher were present,[6] a letter in which the Khorasani mystic asks Shabistarī several philosophical and mystical questions.[7] Interestingly, to show his literary potency, he composed the questions as poems (39).[8] The questions concern different mystical-philosophical topics-the nature of *thought* and *inner journey*; the meaning of commonly used terms in mystical literature, like *wine* and *candle*; and the nature of "I," a question that is the focus of this paper.[9] Upon his master's request (61), Shabistarī wrote a book (in Farsi) answering the questions, all of which he wrote in poetry (61-67);[10] thus, *The Rose Garden of Mystery* was born.

This paper primarily aims to shed light on the metaphysical position of the self in Shabistarī's *Gulshan-i Rāz*. To accomplish this aim, some sub-questions should be examined. What are the lines in which the Shaykh discusses the self in *Gulshan-i Rāz*? What mystical and philosophical meanings do these texts have? What role do these lines play in the immediate context where they appear? What wholistic picture do these lines paint about the self if put together? Where does this picture stand in Islamic thought, and how does it help the modern person?

Shabistarī's commentators-for example, Lāhījī-argue that the "self is the determined Real" without offering a full account. This paper presents Shabistarī's self by examining *Gulshan-i Rāz* in the context of commentaries, secondary sources, and Islamic thought and by presenting opposing interpretations and reasons for the most prominent interpretations. In *The Rose Garden*, the self is neither the soul nor the body. It is the Real's determination, a manifestation among His eternal and unrepeated manifestations. This paper argues that the self is the human's fixed entity (quiddity, *ʿayn-i thābitah*) whose potentials are eternally unfolding, the eternal *becoming* of the Perfect Man. The self is not reified (i.e., it does not have a definite content or form) or fully known; it is the ever-changing "I" of the moment.

Why is this research important? Today, materialistic worldviews aim to convince the modern person to believe that the human is only the physical body to which "I" refers. Offering a significant Sufi account of "I," this research shows that the human self transcends the animal-robot prison. This self-knowledge informs the modern person that she is divine and has unimaginable aptitudes to be actualized. It also creates high respect for humankind, animals, and the environment in the modern person.

Although many translations and secondary sources[11] are written for *Gulshan-i Rāz*, they mainly deal with the *literary* aspect. Readers will not understand the *Gulshan* properly through such works-it is simply too philosophical. The literature lacks critical works focusing on philosophical and mystical concepts. Following the traces of such concepts scattered throughout *Gulshan-i Rāz* and presenting a complete account in the context of commentaries and Islamic thought will give the reader a clear picture of the Iranian mystic's thought; this clarity will motivate more research. A key concept lacking critical examination in *Gulshan-i Rāz* is the concept of the self, "I," a lack that motivated this research.

Among the commentaries written for *The Rose Garden*, this paper uses the following. (1) Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhījī's (2016) *Mafātīḥ al-Iʿjāz fī Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz*. (2) Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī's (1996) *Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz*. (3) Mullā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Sabziwārī Khorāsānī's (2008) *Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz*. And (4) Kazem Dezfoulian's (2010) *Matn wa Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz*.

1 Herawī asks Shabistarī these questions in a letter in 717/1317 (H/CE). Shabistarī cites and answers these questions in *The Rose Garden of Mystery*.

2 This paper cites Shabistarī's *Rose Garden of Mystery* with *line* numbers. The numbers are those of Lāhījī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad. *Mafātīḥ Al-Iʿjāz fī Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz*. ed. Muḥammad Reza Barzegar Khaleqi – Effat Karbasi. (Tehran, Iran: Zawwar Publications, 2016). To avoid redundancy, the year (2016) will not be cited. Additionally, Lāhījī's remarks are cited with page numbers.

3 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are ours. To avoid redundancy, we do not use "own translation." Additionally, given that this is a philosophical-not literature-paper, in the translations of poems, we have aimed for simplicity, not literature beauty.

4 The name of the garden he rests in is an allusion to *The Rose Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i Rāz*).

5 Shabistarī was a follower of a mystical-philosophical tradition established by Ibn ʿArabī and Rūmī; therefore, when this paper says: "Shabistarī's 'cosmology' or 'metaphysics,'" it simply means the metaphysics or metaphysics he discusses-not the one he has *invented*.

6 Scholars differ about the identity of this teacher; some claim it to be Bahāʾ al-Dīn Tabrīzī, and some, Shaykh Amīn al-Dīn, two spiritual teachers who appear to be Shabistarī's masters (Barzegar Khaleqi, 2017, viii).

7 The literature is unclear about the number of these questions. Barzegar Khaleqi and Karbasi sketch the details as follows (2016, vi; Barzegar Khaleqi, 2017, v-vi). Herawī asked 15, 19, or 36 questions. Elsewhere, regarding the number of questions, Barzegar Khaleqi (2016, vi) adds 17 to the list (15, 17, 19, or 36 questions). However, it can be inferred from Lāhījī's commentary, which is the best commentary written for this work, that there were 18 questions. The number of lines in those questions ranges from 958 to 1006. The book contains 12 analogies and 8 principles.

8 As for why Husseinī Herawī sent those questions, there are different views (Barzegar Khaleqi, 2017, vii). One view is that the Khorasani mystic wanted divine secrets to be disclosed, not through his tongue. The most popular view, however, asserts that the mystic sent those questions not that he needed answers-he already answers those questions in his books-instead, it was to open a dialog between the mystics of Khorasan and Tabriz. The latter view seems more plausible.

9 Despite his initial refusal, saying that he has already answered those questions in his writings (44), upon the messenger's request (45), in that meeting, Shabistarī (47; 59-60) answers those questions briefly, as poems, and has the messenger to take the letter to Husseinī Herawī.

10 Shabistarī implies that the content of the *Gulshan-i Rāz* was unveiled to him and that it took him only several hours to write them down (66-67). Then, he says (68), when I asked God about the book's name, the answer came to my heart: "This is our Rose Garden." Thus, the name, *The Rose Garden of Mystery*.

11 About 50 translations, annotations, and commentaries are written for *Gulshan-i Rāz* in different languages, including German, English, Urdu, and Turkish (Barzegar Khaleqi - Karbasi, viii). Among the commentaries, Lāhījī's *Mafātīḥ al-Iʿjāz fī Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz* (*The Keys of Miracles in The Rose Garden of Mystery*) reigns over the literature. The spirit of this commentary is also dominant in this paper.

In what follows, we explain some important terms and concepts in Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysics, then examine Shabistarī's conception of the self. In doing this, we generally cite the poem from Shabistarī and clarify it by contextualizing it in commentaries, secondary sources, other authors' works, Quran, and prophetic sayings.

1. KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

1.1. The Fixed Entities

Before delving into *The Rose Garden*, the reader should understand some terms in Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysics. In the Andalusian mystic's metaphysics (Muwaḥḥid, 2006, 147-148), conceiving the realities of His Names in the "Presence of God's Knowledge," the Real's undetermined Essence became *determined* (*mutaʿayyan*, entified, became thingish and limited), giving intelligible forms to the "fixed entities" (*al-aʿyān al-thābitah*). From one aspect, the *fixed entities* are divine Names' intelligible forms in God's Knowledge; from another aspect, they are the "whatness" or "quiddity" (*māhiyya*) of corporeal existents. This intelligible self-disclosure is called the "Holiest Emanation" (*al-fayḍ al-Aqdas*), "First Determination," and "Universal Intellect."[12] It is the reality of the "Perfect Man," the Prophet Muḥammad, which is why it is also named "Muḥammadan Reality." The reality of the Perfect Man is a mirror on which the Real contemplates all His Names and where all the hidden perfections of the divine Names are realized. This constitution is why the prophet of Islam says (Narāqī, 2012): "One who knows his self, knows his Lord" (28). It is also why the Quran (2/30) refers to the human being as God's vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on the earth.

Then, through the "sacred emanation" (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*),[13] He actualized (manifested) the fixed entities' principles and effects (*aḥkām wa āthār*)-proportionate to these entities' aptitudes-as corporeal existents and, thus, created a second mirror-that is, the cosmos-through which He could contemplate the bodily manifestations of His Names. Therefore, the principles and effects of corporeal existents come from the Perfect Man's reality.

This constitution is what Shabistarī (260) means when he says, "all things in the world are in the human being's reality." Elsewhere in the *Gulshan*, he says (141), "The world became the human being and the human a world." In the latter passage, Ibn ʿArabī (2006, 522; Muwahhid, *ibid*., 144) speaks through Shabistarī. Considering the human's all-inclusive nature, entities in the cosmos mirror the human being's reality. Put differently, the human being is like a world that contains, in his reality, the cosmos. Microcosm mirroring macrocosm.

1.2. Divine Names

Neoplatonism and Islamic metaphysics have much in common as two important mystical-philosophical traditions. Among many points, these similarities circle the creation, the nature of the intelligible entities, and divine emanation and permeation in the world (for a detailed account, see Rahbari Ghazani, 2022).[14] Nevertheless, the divine Names' role in the world is a significant difference between the two thinkers' thought-as discussed in as discussed in Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysics, the fixed entities are the intelligible forms of Names, and the corporeal entities are the bodily manifestations of the fixed entities. Let us examine a passage where Shabistarī (278-286) talks about the Names.

از آن اسمند موجودات قائم بدان اسمند در تسبیح دائم

Existents subsist by that Name,[15]

They incessantly worship [God] by that Name.

به مبدأ هر یکی زان مصدری شد به وقت بازگشتن چون دری شد

In the beginning, each Name became an originating point,

In return, [each] became a door.

According to Shabistarī, the Names step out of the oneness of the divine Essence (280), and, suffering the requirement of the corporeal world, they appear in multiplicity (Lāhījī, 181). Finally, all multiplicity returns to the Essence through the doors whence they appeared-that is, through the Names. Put differently, because corporeal existents are fixed entities' manifestations taking up physical forms, they derive from, subsist through, and return to the Essence through Names.[16]

تو بودی عکس معبود ملایک از آن گشتی تو مسجود ملایک

You were the image of angels' Object of worship,

Because of this, you were prostrated. (Shabistarī, 266)

12 Also called First Intellect, First Intelligence, Universal Intelligence, *Nous*, *Deus Revelatus*, Prime Intellect, Primordial Intellect, *Protokistos* (in Farsi, *ʿaql-i awwal*, *ṣādir-i awwal*, *ʿaql-i kull*).

13 We may also define the two emanations this way. The "holiest emanation" (*al-fayḍ al-Aqdas*) is the Real's manifestation as fixed entities in the World of God's Knowledge. And the "sacred emanation" (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*) is the Real's manifestation through the principles and effects of the fixed entities in corporeal form.

14 The following are some parallels. Concerning the purpose of creation, in *The Enneads*, Plotinus says (1964, III, 8, 7), "Generation is a contemplation. It results from the longing of pregnancy to produce a multiplicity of forms and objects of contemplation, to fill everything with reason, and never to cease from contemplation" (169). In *The Seals of Wisdom*, Ibn ʿArabī (2006, 521-526) points out that the Real created the world as an object to contemplate the external manifestation of His Names. Therefore, Ibn al-ʿArabī and Plotinus believe that the One created the possible beings as objects of contemplation.
Concerning the divine emanation, to Ibn al-ʿArabī and Plotinus, the cosmos emanates from the One uninterruptedly and hierarchically, and the lower world is the image and copy of the higher one (Plotinus, V, 1, 6, 98; VI, 9, 9, 85; Ibn ʿArabī 2015, 161; 2006, 521). To our thinkers, God has permeated the world, which is why He is present in it (Ibn ʿArabī, 2006, 529; Plotinus, 1998, 45, 110).
The intelligible entities are non-temporal, unchanging, mutually inclusive, and one yet separate (Plotinus, 1964, V, 9, 6, 51-54; V, 9, 8, 52-53; V, 9, 10, 54; IV, 8, 3, 65; V, 1, 4, 94-96; 1918, 44; Ibn ʿArabī, 526). Moreover, to Plotinus (V, 1, 2, 92) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (521), the Soul enlightens the corpse of the world.

15 Meaning that each being subsists through a particular divine Name.

16 What is the relationship between Names and Qualities? Lāhījī tells us that because the divine Essence is *named* in terms of certain Qualities, the realities of Names are Qualities (182). The divine Essence nurtures each being with a certain Quality (179).

According to the Quran (38/72), God breathed His Spirit into the human in Creation. In *The Seals of Wisdom*, Ibn ʿArabī (2006, 521) interprets "breathing of Spirit" as God giving the human the aptitude to receive all divine Names and, thus, the eternally manifesting emanation to the highest degree-this interpretation also aligns with the Quran (2/31). Building on this, Shabistarī says in the above poem that because the human manifested all Names, the angels saw their Lord's image in Adam and prostrated before him; "the angels prostrated, all of them together" (Quran, Nasr 38/73).[17] The angels' prostration before Adam can also be taken symbolically (Lāhījī, 172-173): Because the human's reality is the Universal Intellect, the manifestation of which brings about the corporeal existents, if the human submits to his Lord, all existents in the world submit to him and act as his constituents. As the Quran (45/13) tells us, God "made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth-all together." So, when this microcosm submits to his Lord, the macrocosm submits to him.

از آن دانسته ای تو جمله اسما که هستی صورت عکس مسمّا

You are the form of the image of the Named,

That is why you know all Names. (Shabistarī, 281)

First, by "the form of the image" in the second hemistich, Shabistarī means "the form, the image," meaning that the human being is the image of the Named. Now, given that each existent is a Name's locus, and because the human being is the perfect locus and the divine Essence's image-a Center possessing all Names-and since whatever an entity possesses, its image will also possess, the human being not only possesses and reflects all Names[18] but also contains the whole world in his reality.

به اصل خویش یک ره نیک بنگر که مادر را پدر شد باز مادر

Observe your origin carefully,

Which became the mother's father, [and] mother again. (Shabistarī, 259)

According to Lāhījī (167), in this poem, Shabistarī calls us to examine our origin-i.e., the Universal Intellect (the Muḥammadan Reality, though Shabistarī does not use this term here). Because the *universal soul* manifests the Universal Intellect,[19] the latter is the former's father; in another sense, the latter can be considered the former's mother because the universal soul is born *from* the Universal Intellect.

Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī, however, interprets this poem differently. He (1996, 112) argues that the core of all things is their fixed entities. Because they are the intelligible forms of Names, these entities are mothers in that they are influenced, and divine Names are their fathers in that they influence the fixed entities. Concerning the second hemistich, he says there, "nature is also told to be mother, and [it] is the mover in [a] fixed entity, so," nature is "father to the fixed entity, which [in turn] is the mother in that it is moved by nature … and the mover of the mover is the fixed entity of the divine Names … ."[20] Ibn Turka is unclear about what he means by 'the mover of the mover is the fixed entity of the divine Names.' Additionally, considering the context, his use of "nature" here seems random. Therefore, Lāhījī's interpretation is more robust and fits better in the context.

2. THE SELF

2.1. Who am I?

Who or what is the "self" or "I?" Does it refer to the soul, body, or something else? The nature of the self is a long-sought question. Today, unfortunately, instead of examining the nature of "I," psychology studies its *behavior* through the effects, characteristics, and internal and external phenomena of the "*human* I," but these effects, characteristics, and phenomena are imperfect reflections (Jaʿfarī Tabrīzī, 2022, 213-214). Philosophy and mysticism remain to examine the "human I" and the "celestial I."

که باشم من؟ مرا از من خبر کن چه معنی دارد اندر خود سفر کن

Who am I? Inform me of me,

Of what meaning is it to have a journey in me? (Herawī, 287)

Shabistarī's answer (288-310) to these questions is central to this paper. Some rationalist philosophers consider "I" to be the soul or body. According to Shabistarī (293), because such philosophers rely on reason alone, they cannot distinguish their soul from their "I" (294). All things in the cosmos are manifestations of Names, each manifestation being the determination of the absolute Being, a determination which, according to Shabistarī, you call "I." Therefore, "I" is the determination of the Real (289), which includes but is not limited to the soul, body, or even the human.

چو هستِ مطلق آید در اشارت به لفظ من کنند از وی عبارت

When the absolute Being becomes the object of reference,

It is referred to as "I."

17 All Quranic translations in this paper are from Nasr, Seyyed Hossein et al. *The Study Quran. A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015). However, to avoid redundancy, in what follows, we will not use "Nasr et al."

18 Furthermore, according to Shabistarī (263-265), for a mirror to reflect something, one side of it must be a dark surface, and the other side must be smooth and reflective. Building on this line, Lāhījī (167-168) asserts that the human has two sides too: One side is of dark nothingness (i.e., of the fixed entities) and matter, and the other is of the divine Soul, and, thus, smooth. Accordingly, the human being can reflect divine Names and Qualities fully. Although other corporeal existents share the first condition-though some, like air, are not constituted of matter-because they do not have a divine Soul, their nature is not suitable for such an all-comprehensive reflection.

19 Also called absolute soul or cosmic soul (*nafs-i kull*).

20 Persian text: طبیعت را نیز مادر گفته اند، و در عین ثابته محرک طبیعت است، پس عین ثابته را که مادر است طبیعت پدر شده باشد، از جهت آنکه متحرک به حرکت طبیعت است … و محرک محرک، عین ثابته اسما الهی است … .

حقیقت کز تعیّن شد معیّن تو او را در عبارت گفته ای من

The Reality that is determined,[21]

You have called "I." (Shabistarī, 289-290)

"I is the determined Real" (period!). This is where Shabistarī's grand commentator, Lāhījī, stops; he does not examine the case further. Let us see how far we can go.

One may read Shabistarī's definition as "I *is* the Real." This is an erroneous interpretation. True, ontologically, there is nothing other than the Real; however, each level of existence is a manifestation of the Real, *not* the Real Himself in a pantheistic sense. "I," as a determined, limited reference, does not refer to the undetermined, unlimited Essence of the Real. The "determined Real" is different from the "undetermined Real." Determined Real is the Essence limited by Names. Hence, 'The Reality that is *determined* / You have called "I"' (Shabistarī, 290, *emphasis added*). Other parts of *Gulshan-i Rāz* also confirm this. For instance:

من و تو عارض ذات وجودیم مشبّک های مشکات وجودیم

You and I are the predicates of the Essence of Existence,

[We] are the fissures in Existence's niche of light. (Shabistarī, 291)

"You" and "I" are the fissures (molds) through which the Light of Absolute Existence passes. Here, Sabziwārī Khorāsānī's (d. 1358/1939 H/CE) interpretation can shed light on the matter (2008, 280-281): According to philosophers, in a proposition, "quiddity" is the "subject," and "existence" is the predicate-for example, "the human being exists." However, according to mystics, "existence" is the "subject," and "quiddity" is the "predicate." Shabistarī points out this in line 291: You and I-that is, quiddities-are predicated on the absolute Existence-i.e., subject. To mystics, philosophers go wrong because using reason alone, they start from multipolicy (i.e., the plurality of quiddities, which for philosophers are subjects in propositions).[22] (A thorough account of each group's arguments and a discussion of whose arguments stand out is beyond the scope of this paper. For this discussion, see Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 2011, 14-17; Apaydın, 2019, 93-99).

Back to the self. In Arabic, *nafs* is usually used to refer to "soul" or "self," and *rūḥ* to "spirit." Despite this distinction, soul, self, and spirit may sometimes be used synonymously. According to the Quran (17/85), the self is unknowable to humans. This unknowability is also seen in the Islamic mystical and philosophical writings-for instance, Ibn ʿArabī acknowledges this in *The Seals of Wisdom* (2006, 522). "The words *nafs* in Arabic and 'self' in English refer to everything that we are, and that includes both our physical body and our awareness of self and others" (Chittick, 2019, 52). What we are is affected by all the happenings and changes in our lives; thus, "Each 'I' is in the process of unfolding," and "what is being unfolded is simply our self," adds Chittick (*ibid*., 55), and it is unknown because "at every moment of our experience, we are something new. So what is our self? It is the I of the moment and each moment is new."

The picture Chittick paints should be familiar to readers of Ibn ʿArabī-who, admittedly, is the face of Sufism. In the Andalusian thinker's metaphysics, the Real is in an eternal self-disclosure, the overflow of the Essence, the Light that spreads through diverse beams, which are His Names. The Names are eternal, as are the uninterrupted manifestations, that is, the possible beings. Now, the "I of the moment" that Chittick discusses and the "I" Shabistarī points to in *Gulshan*-which he defines as the determination of the Essence-is a face among the eternally manifesting, unrepeated faces (manifestations) of the Real. Nevertheless, in speaking of the human self, we should not point to a particular thing; we should not make the self something it is not, something referential or reified. The self is everything the human being is; it is unfolding, overflowing, and changing every moment. Chittick puts it perfectly, the self "is the I of the moment." Not reified because the self is in an eternal process of changing, progressing on its perfection journey toward becoming the Perfect Man and Unity.

The self is the human's *fixed entity* (*quiddity*), with its aptitudes perpetually unfolding, the entity that is *becoming* the Perfect Man.[23] This conclusion is also in line with Sabziwārī Khorāsānī's interpretation (2008, 280). It also seems to align with that of Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī:

Ibn Turka interprets lines 289-290[24] differently from Lāhījī.[25] To Lāhījī (2016, 186-187), the "absolute Being" and 'Reality" in these lines refer to the Real's Essence. However, to Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī (1996, 119), Shabistarī has a dual definition of "I" in mind in these lines: (1) When the absolute Being becomes the object of reference, it is called "I," be it material or non-material-non-material in that the absolute Being may be determined through, say, *imaginal* determination, which is not material. (2) Considering line 290, "reality" does not refer to the Essence; instead, it refers to each entity's reality. 'When each thing's reality, which is its fixed entity, comes into existence through physical determination, this whole is called "I"' (*ibid*.).[26]

21 Literally, "The Reality that is determined by determination."

22 "Existence" and "quiddity" are not identical. The answer to the question, "is it?" concerns the "existence" of something. The answer to "what is it?" is "quiddity." As Ṭabāṭabāʾī (2011, 14) explains, what is understood from quiddity differs from what is understood from existence. The mind can distinguish and examine them separately. Additionally, quiddity can be deprived of existence; were they the same, this would not have been the case. Furthermore, quiddity has the same distance between existence and non-existence-it may exist and not exist. If quiddity and existence were identical, quiddity could not have been related to non-existence because it (non-existence) is opposite to existence (Rabbānī-Golpāyegānī, 1992, 73). However, quiddity can be related to non-existence-for example, "unicorn does not exist." Therefore, quiddity and existence are not identical.

23 How can fixed entities change? These entities are not "fixed" in their capacity; it is not that they possess certain effects and principles that humans can actualize and *exhaust*. People participate in this ocean of potential throughout eternity since the fixed entities are limitless.

24 "When the absolute Being becomes the object of reference / It is referred to as 'I'" (Shabistarī, 289). "The reality that is determined / You have called 'I'" (290).

25 The reader will remember that Lāhījī interprets the "absolute Being" and "reality" in lines 289-290 as the "Real's Essence."

26 Farsi: حقیقت هر شئ که عین ثابت آن شئ است، هرگاه که ... به تعیّن خارجی موجود شود، آن مجموع را در عبارت «من» می گویند.

Both commentators interpret line 289 similarly. They differ only about the word "reality" in line 290. Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī's considering this reality as the fixed entity does not fit well in the context. Additionally, what he means by "this whole" in the above quote is unclear. Does it refer to the "fixed entity" or "fixed entity plus physical existence?" Considering the "I" here as the "fixed entity" aligns with this paper's interpretation; however, taking it as the "fixed entity plus the physical existence" differs from it. The latter case does not fit Shabistarī's thought either-the Shaykh explicitly says, "You and I are *beyond* soul and body / Both these are *constituents* of I" (291, *emphasis added*). "Beyond" and "constituent" means that "I" transcends the two. Thus, considering the "fixed entity and physical existence" as "I" is incorrect.

Let us reconsider our earlier conclusion: "the self is the human's fixed entity that is becoming the Perfect Man." A critic may object that even admitting that the self is the human's fixed entity, ambiguity clouds the ending part of the conclusion. "Perfect" here can mean the *process* or *goal*. In the first sense, "I *am* a Perfect Man," in the second sense, "I am on a journey *to become* a Perfect Man." Since the journey is endless, in the second sense, "I am *not* a Perfect Man and will *never* be one."

This objection's premise is problematic: in this context, "perfect" means the process *and* goal, not the process *or* goal. Because the critic misses this point, her conclusion is incorrect. Reaching the station of the "Perfect Man" (and uniting with the Real) is the journeyer's "goal." Nevertheless, perfection is not exhausted when reaching this station, this cosmic reality. Unlike what the word "perfect" indicates in English, the Perfect Man is not a perfected human; *al-insān al-kāmil* is in the process of eternal perfection, *even after reaching the Perfect Man's station*. This cosmic reality is the perfect locus for divine Names, and because the Names and God's manifestations are endless, the Perfect Man is eternally becoming perfect.

Let us now return to the self's unknowability. Interestingly, the unknowability of the self (and the One, the Real) in the Islamic tradition is like the Neoplatonist theme. For example, to Plotinus (*Enneads*, VI), the self has different levels. The self we are conscious of is limited to our perceptions. Our selves stretch from God to matter; our *real* selves are within the Intellect (Hadot, 1998, 27). As long as the activities of our real selves are not manifest to our senses, we are *unaware* of them (Plotinus, 1964, V, 1, 12, 103). *Awareness* necessitates the duality of knower and known, and thus time-lapse. Our true selves, however, act "in total presence, eternity, and simplicity" (Hadot, 30), which is why when we reach our true selves, we lose self-awareness and consciousness. In the material world, because we are bound by consciousness, we can only achieve spiritual life through intermittent mystical *contemplations* (33).

Considering the points made by Muslim philosophers and Plotinus, it seems that in the spiritual journey, we should not be asking "what is the self?" and expect to discover a "to go" answer-it is a dead end; such truth will not yield to "what" and "how." It is only discovered "experientially" through mystical contemplation, a meditation in which the self-whatever it is and however it works-functions perfectly; it takes the contemplative to the destination. Therefore, we must set aside what and how; we should submit and contemplate. We need not know the self's true nature; it knows the path anyway, and the Light enlightens its way.

I compose [poetry] rhyme, and my Beloved,

Tells me, "*contemplate nothing but meeting Me*."

"*Be*[27] *at ease, my rhyme-thinker,*

In My presence, you are the rhyme of felicity."[28]

"*What are words*[29] *that you reflect?*

What are words [but] thorns on the vineyard fence."

I let go of words, voice, and speech,

So that I speak to You without these three.

(Rūmī, *Mathnawī Maʿnawī*, I, 1727-1730)

2.2. The *Fanāʾ fi-llāh*

What happens to the self when it reaches the Essence? Let us examine this. Purify your heart of otherness, says Shabistarī (399), and prepare it to host the Friend because

چو تو بیرون شدی، او اندر آید به تو بی تو، جمال خود نماید

When you exit, He enters,

To you, [but] without you, He shows His Beauty. (400)

Until the wayfarer (*sālik*) has reached the "annihilation in God" (*fanāʾ fi-llāh*), the Beautiful will not manifest Himself in his heart. Does "annihilation" here mean "destruction?" Does the wayfarer perish "essentially" and "absolutely" at this stage? In Islamic metaphysics, the word *fanāʾ* has a technical meaning other than what the English word "annihilation" suggests. *Fanāʾ* does not mean *absolute destruction* or *nothingness*. As Yasrebi (1991) puts it, *fanāʾ* is moving from one stage to another in the wayfarer's perfection path. It results

27 Literally, "*sit* at ease."
28 Karim Zamani (2021, 587) interprets this hemistich this way. *For Me, you are the wayfarers' felicity's modulator*.
29 Literally, "letter, word, or speech."

from the mystical journey, and because this journey is a movement, the *fanāʾ* has gradations and different stages (450-451). To better understand this term, let us examine these stages.

The annihilation of the will. The wayfarer should submit his will to God in everything; this is a station called "contentment" (*riḍā*) (Malekī Tabrīzī, 2007), in which the wayfarer wills everything *per* God's will. This submission and contentment is the wayfarer's "annihilation of the will" (*fanāʾ-i irāda*); however (Yasrebi, 1991), it does not mean that his will perishes, without identity, in that of God, neither does it mean that the wayfarer's and God's will unite into one (third) will, nor does it mean that the two wills converge in the sense that they will the same things despite their being distinct (453). The *fanāʾ-i irāda* means that after long, arduous practices (to discuss), the wayfarer *knows* what contents God and what He wills and acts accordingly.

Concerning this contentment, Shabistarī (334) says that the wayfarer should tie his will to God's satisfaction, and, like the Prophet Moses, he, too, walks through the grand door. The wayfarer submits himself to *God's contentment*-signified by the *grand door*-and does not complain in the face of misfortunes with which God may test him (Lāhījī, 223-224).

> We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits; and give glad tidings to … those who, when affliction befalls them, say, "Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return." (Quran, 2/155-156)

The annihilation of qualities and essence. In his famous commentary, *Naqd al-Nuṣūṣ* (1992, 150-151), on Ibn ʿArabī's *Naqsh al-Fuṣūṣ*, Jāmī (d. 898/1492 H/CE) asserts that *fanāʾ* does not mean the *absolute* and *essential* perishing of the wayfarer's self in the divine Essence, rather it means the "annihilation of the human *qualities*" (*fanāʾ-i ṣifāt*). Contemplating[30] the Real, the wayfarer's human aspect weakens, and his lordly aspect strengthens, dominating the former aspect. The wayfarer loses human qualities and attains lordly qualities-this *losing* is *fanāʾ,* and the *attainment* is "subsistent in God" (*baqāʾ bi-llāh*).

Do human qualities *absolutely* perish in the *fanāʾ-i ṣifāt*? Not "absolutely." Yasrebi (1991) sheds light on this matter using two terms: "absorption" (*istighrāq*) and "nearness" (proximity; *taqarrub*). (i) In *fanāʾ-i ṣifāt*, qualities do not perish; reaching this stage, the wayfarer is so *absorbed* in the divine Light that he loses awareness and consciousness of these qualities. Therefore, in this sense, the annihilation of qualities is epistemic, not ontological. (ii) Apart from this, in the spiritual journey, the wayfarer crosses different stages, *nearing* the Real, and, in each stage, he attains *new* perceptions. There are different narrations and specifications of these stages; commons are the worlds of nature (*ʿālam-i ḥiss wa shahādah*), imagination (*ʿālam-i khayāl, barzakh, malakūt*), intellect (*ʿālam-i ʿaql*, *jabarūt*), and Divine (*ʿālam-i Rubūbī, Lāhūt*). Considering this hierarchy, *fanāʾ-i ṣifāt* does not mean the perishing of qualities; but rather that the perceptions and qualities that hold in a certain stage do not hold in the next; not that the wayfarer is not attentive to them, but rather they do not exist in the new stage-for example, what holds in the world of nature does not necessarily hold in, say, the world of imagination (458-459)-"punctuality" holds in the first but *not* in the second; not that punctuality perishes in the new stage, but rather that it belongs to the former world, it has no place in the higher worlds. The higher the wayfarer reaches in the mystical journey, the more he loses human traits and the more intensely he obtains divine traits.

Yasrebi's discussion of "awareness" seems to have been nourished by Jāmī's work (1992, 151, *emphasis added*):[31]

> The annihilation of the possible in the necessary is the annihilation of the effects of the possible, not the perishing of its reality-like the annihilation of the beams of light in the Sunlight. … And the annihilation of the effects of the possible concerns the *awareness* and *perception* of the gnostic's I-ness, not his body, soul, or humanity … .

Therefore, the wayfarer does not lose his reality in the *fanāʾ*; rather, he loses his *awareness* of his self at this stage-ontologically, he *is*; epistemically, he is not aware that he is; he is, as Rūmī often puts it, *drunk*. Another interesting point, this time ontological, about this quote concerns the first sentence-specifically, "the effects of the possible." In Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysics, the cosmos does not have a *real* being (i.e., being qua being); rather, it has an *engendered* being, which is the corporeal manifestation of the *effects and principles of the fixed entities*. In other words, corporeal entities are the bodily manifestations of the effects and principles of fixed entities. Reaching the divine Essence, the wayfarer loses his *engendered* being, not his fixed entity. The annihilation of the engendered being is what Jāmī means in "The annihilation of the possible in the necessary is the annihilation of the effects of the possible, not the perishing of its reality … ."

Arguing for the wayfarer's fixed entity's annihilation has another epistemic problem. Ibn ʿArabī (2004, 36) rejects most gnostics' approach in that they relate attaining the knowledge of God to the essential annihilation. According to the Andalusian Sufi, to speak of annihilation, first *existence* should be proved; however, possible entities do not have *real* existence-being qua being-therefore, holding their annihilation is a mistake. Al-ʿArabī (*ibid*.) puts this discussion in the context of a famous saying from the Prophet Muḥammad, One who knows his *self*, knows his Lord, and building on his earlier conclusion-that possible entities do not have real existence-concludes that one who knows his self to have *no existence* or *annihilation* knows his Lord truly. The observant reader will realize that by putting together Ibn ʿArabī's defense of fixed entities' survival in annihilation with his discussion of knowledge of God, concerning "One who knows his *self*," he equates the *self* with the *fixed entity*. This equation confirms this paper's claim that the self is the fixed entity.

Reading annihilation in the Essence as the human's losing his reality has further ontological problems. Ḥusseinī Ṭehrānī (d. 1416/1995 H/CE) is one of the philosophers who advocate the *essential* annihilation of the human being (2005, 244-245). He argues that because there is absolute oneness in the divine Essence, it suffers no plurality; therefore, when the wayfarer reaches this stage, he loses everything, including his *reality*. If the wayfarer loses his reality in the Essence and nothing remains of him, then *who* or *what* exactly "subsists"

30 This contemplation, adds Jāmī (1992, 150), follows the divine Love in the wayfarer's heart, and this love follows piety.

31 Original text in Farsi: فنا ممکن در واجب به اضمحلال آثار امکان است، نه انعدام حقیقت او، چون اضمحلال انوار محسوسه در نور آفتاب. … و اضمحلال آثار امکان در لطیفهٔ انانیت عارف باشد در هوش و ادراک او، نه در جسم و روح و بشریت او … .

in God? *No one*, in this reading, because *everything* has already perished. As discussed, the step following annihilation is subsistence; however, subsistence has no meaning if the human is essentially and absolutely annihilated. Additionally, the wayfarer contemplates the Real in annihilation and subsistence after annihilation. If the human's reality-that is, his fixed entity-perishes, then who or what contemplates the Real? In this (problematic) reading, nothing remains but the Real; thus, He contemplates Himself; however, this way, the wayfarer's contemplation is not his contemplation anymore because there is no "he" at this point (contradiction!).

One philosopher who opposes Ḥusseinī Ṭehrānī's view is his master, ʿAllāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥussein Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981).[32] According to the master (*ibid*.), annihilation in the divine Essence does not necessarily mean the essential perishing of the wayfarer. There must be something of the human he refers to after annihilation, which is his "fixed entity" (243). Furthermore, because this annihilation is a perfection in the human journey, if the wayfarer perished essentially, there remains no one or nothing to claim this perfection-what or who has had this achievement (244)? Moreover, the essential and absolute perishing of the human necessitates that God creates a new reality for the individual in the subsistence stage; if so, this is a *new creation*, not *subsistence* after annihilation (248). Therefore, reaching annihilation in the Essence, the wayfarer does not step into absolute non-existence; his fixed entity remains.

Importantly, fixed entities' survival does not cause plurality in the Essence. In Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysics (Sadafi and Hosseini Shahroudi, 2014), fixed entities are eternally and essentially non-existent; they are not qualified by being qua being or corporeal or imaginal existence. Since existence is not one of Zeyd's (a male name in Arabic) reality's attributes, it (i.e., existence) cannot be qualified by perishing or non-existence. The corporeal beings have *engendered* existence-that is, the absolute Existence's determined existence formed by the principles and effects of the corporeal beings' fixed entities. *This* engendered existence is annihilated in the divine Essence, not the fixed entities (136). And, because the fixed entities are essentially non-existent, their survival in *fanāʾ* does not threaten God's essential Oneness.

2.3. I Am the Truth

In his letter, Herawī (435) asks Shabistarī about Mansūr Ḥallāj's famous statement, "I am the Truth," an assertion that brought a bitter end to his life. Shabistarī (436-454) answers the Khorasani mystic this way. "I am the Truth" points to the secret of oneness; there is none other than the Real to utter this (436). Like Ḥallāj, every particle in the world says, "I am the Truth" in divine ecstasy (437), in the selflessness one experiences in the divine unveiling.

> The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is nothing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. (Quran, 17/44).

In what sense do things make this utterance? Existents utter "I am the Truth," says Lāhījī (315), in the sense that they subsist with the Real's existence, without Whom they stay in nothingness. When does the wayfarer hear, "I am the Truth?" After purification of the heart, the wayfarer loses his determination and imaginal being, which veil divine Beauty, and without himself, he sees himself as the Real, and through the Real's tongue utters, "I am the Truth" (Shabistarī, 440-441; Lāhījī, 315). According to the Quran,

> when Moses had … set out with his family, he perceived a fire on the side of the Mount. … And when he came upon it, he was called from the right bank of the valley, at the blessed site, from the tree, "O Moses! Truly I am God, Lord of the worlds!" (28/29-30)

Alluding to these verses, Shabistarī writes (443),

درآ در وادی اَیمن که نگاه درختی گویدت اِنّی اَنَا اللّه

Enter the right site where suddenly,

A tree tells you, "Truly, I am God."

This poem may be interpreted this way (Lāhījī, 51; 316). The "right site" implies the "purification of the heart," and the "tree" exemplifies the "reality of the mystic." Thus, through the purification of the heart, the mystic should discard the otherness and duality in his heart that cover the Real; doing so, the Light will appear in his heart, uttering, "I am the Truth," as He did so to Moses.

روا باشد اَنَا اللّه از درختی چرا نبْوَد روا از نیک بختی؟

The utterance of "I am God" is admissible from a tree,

Why is it not admissible from a well-destined? (444)

Some complain that although the Real utters "I am the Truth" through the wayfarer's tongue, Ḥallāj's pronouncing it so openly and loudly was not courteous in servanthood. Granted that all particles in the world utter this statement, one would hear it only through unveiling, which means that this utterance is covert, and it is to stay so, even when one realizes it. Ḥallāj made it overt. Not everyone has the necessary educational or spiritual preparation to hear this secret, so it is to be veiled and only heard by those who are prepared. "*Self-assertion*," says Shabistarī himself (446), "*is fitting only to God*" and Him *alone*.

32 Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥussein Ṭabāṭabāʾī was an Iranian Muslim scholar, theorist, philosopher, mystic, jurisprudent, and Quranic commentator. His most famous philosophical books are *Uṣūl-i Falsafe wa Ravesh-i Realism*, *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah*, and *Nihāyat al-Ḥikmah*. Ṭabāṭabāʾī followed Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical theosophy, but his argumentation style was like Ibn Sīnā's-that is, he used rational arguments *heavily*; he even avoided poetry in his philosophical works (Rabbānī-Golpāyegānī, 1992, 8-13).

2.4. Human, the Eye

What is the relationship between the human being, the world, and God? Shabistarī answers this question through a unique analogy (139-142).

عدمْ آیینه، عالَم عکس و انسان چو چشم عکس در وی شخصْ پنهان

Nothingness [is] the mirror, the world [is an] image, and the human being,

[Is] like the image's eye, in which a Person is Hidden. (Shabistarī, 139)

Let us first start with the terminology. As used in this poem, says Lāhījī (95), the term ʿ*ālam* is the name for that which makes known another thing. The cosmos is called ʿ*ālam* since it is an intermediary and tool for knowing the Real. Another critical term in this poem is ʿ*adam*, or nothingness, by which Shabistarī means the world of fixed entities already discussed. They are called nothingness because they exist in the Presence of God's Knowledge; they do not set foot in the corporeal world; their principles and effects assume created existence and appear corporeally.

The above line means that the world of fixed entities is the mirror that reflects *al-Nūr* (the Light), the image projected is the cosmos, and the human being is the eye in this image. The human being is the eye whence the Real contemplates the world and Himself; an eye in which dwells a Hidden Person-God is concealed in the human being (Barzegar Khaleqi, 2019, 106). Shabistarī elaborates on this matter in the following line (140), a passage that encapsulates a profound metaphysical truth despite being notoriously complex.

تو چشم عکسی و او نور دیده است به دیده، دیده ای را دیده، دیده است[33]

You are the image's eye, and He [is] the eye's Light,

Through the eye, the Eye sees the Seen.[34]

One interpretation of "*He [is] the eye's Light*" used in the first hemistich is this. As the light makes seeing possible, the Light, that is, God, makes the seeing of the eye-that is, the human-possible. Some interpret "the eye's Light" differently, however. For instance, according to Lāhījī (95-96), by "the eye's Light," Shabistarī means "Pupil." Interestingly, the Arabic word for "pupil" means "man inside the eye." With this interpretation, the first hemistich reads this way: "You are the image's eye, and He is the Pupil." Then this commentator takes a further step there and, explaining what he means by "Pupil," interprets this line more elegantly.

Imagine, he suggests, that someone is standing in front of a mirror-let us call him "the original form." Whatever the person has, so will the reflection. Contemplating himself in the mirror, a reflection of the form in the mirror will appear in his eyes. Similarly, the eyes of the form on the mirror will have a reflection of the original form. Let us name this reflection "the luminous image." Now, this luminous image's *eyes*, which this paper names "the contemplating eye," are contemplating the original form.

Let us rephrase the second hemistich ('*Through the eye, the Eye sees the Seen*.'). Through "the eye," i.e., the human being, "the Eye," that is, "the contemplating Eye" dwelling in "the luminous image," sees "the Seen," i.e., the original Form. Here, the reader will realize that the luminous image is what Shabistarī refers to as "the eye's Light," the Pupil, in the first hemistich. In this masterfully crafted line, the Shaykh says, standing before the mirror of nothingness (fixed entities), through the human being, the Real's "Eye" is contemplating Himself. Despite his elegant interpretation, Lāhījī makes a mistake, maybe unwittingly, in his explanation. He writes (96-97),[35]

> through the eye, that is, through the human being ..., the Eye, i.e., the Eye of the Pupil ... , has seen *the Seen*, i.e., *the Pupil*, *which is the Real* and [which] is the eye's Light ... . (*Emphasis added*)

To rephrase this text, "the contemplating Eye" contemplates the "luminous image." This statement is incorrect. Because the contemplating Eye dwells within the luminous image and contemplates the original Form, the Face of Which the luminous image is a reflection. Additionally, even when he says, 'the Seen, i.e., *the Pupil, which is the Real* and [which] is the eye's Light,' he makes a contradictory statement. Even if we take the Pupil as That which is seen, as he suggests, the *Pupil* is not the Real; instead, it is the *reflection* of the Real. Therefore, the Seen is not the Pupil. This reading also aligns with Dezfoulian's (2010, 177-178) and Ermiş's (2017, 172-173) interpretations.

چو نیکو بنگری در اصلِ این کار هم او بیننده هم دیدَه است و دیدار

If you look at the core of this matter carefully,

[You will realize that] He is the Seer, the eye, and the Face.[36] *(Shabistarī, 142)*

In the second hemistich, "the eye" refers to the human being, and "the Face" refers to the original Form standing in front of the mirror Whose reflection appears on the mirror of the fixed entities (Lāhījī, 98). Everything is the Real's manifestation in different forms, "the Seer, the eye, and the Face."

33 Interestingly, in this poem, Shabistarī uses the word *dīdeh*, which in Farsi means "eye," five times, but, amazingly, in four different senses, a skillful play that makes the line hard to decipher, but rich in content.

34 The literal translation of this hemistich is, "*Through the eye, the Eye has seen the Seen*." However, I use "sees" instead of "has seen" because the former makes better sense in English.

35 Original text: . ... دیده است ... انسان العین را که حق مراد است و نور دیده است، دیده، یعنی دیده انسان العین ... ، دیده ای را، یعنی، انسان العین ... به دیده، یعنی، به انسان

36 Although the word *dīdār*, in Farsi, means "meeting", here its secondary meaning is used, "face, sight".

To see this oneness, you should *not* see yourself. The world becomes your veil when you are preoccupied with yourself (Shabistarī, 523). "The more elegant a soul becomes in the … mystical journey, the wider the Perfect Man's divine radiance extends on other humans" (Jaʿfarī Tabrīzī, 2022, 120).

If you expel the Pharaoh of egoism from the Egypt of your body,

You would then see your Moses and Aaron from within.

(Rūmī, Kulliyyāt-i Shams Tabrīzī, 1247:4)[37]

CONCLUSION

This paper has primarily aimed to clarify and contextualize the metaphysical position of the human self in Shabistarī's *Gulshan-i Rāz*. The self is neither the soul nor the body. It is the Real's determination. This paper has shown that the self is the human's fixed entity, with its aptitudes eternally unfolding towards *becoming* the Perfect Man. The self is the ever-changing "I" of the moment, not reified or fully known.

Shabistarī's account of the self rests upon introspection and psychology but is not limited to metaphysics alone. It has a powerful element of ethics since morality is the door leading to the true self. So, although the poet encourages us toward spirituality and esoterism, he also puts us at the doorstep of ethics. Because our "I" is the determination of the Essence, sharing the same reality and origin, we are pulled out of self-centeredness and led toward caring about others. This "others" is not limited to humans alone; because all beings are the Real's manifestations, we should treat everything and everyone-including animals and the environment-respectfully. Furthermore, Shabistarī helps the modern person realize that she is divine and should live up to this position, a life worthy of her reality: self-respect that the dominion of the materialistic worldview has made her lose, convincing her that she is either an animal or a robot. Shabistarī's metaphysics heals the modern person's soul by reconciling her with her true self.

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37 Self-centeredness is like Pharaoh who rebels within your Egypt-that is, within your body-and veils your true potential. As long as you are stuck in this self-absorption, you will not hear the messengers from within-your inner Moses and Aaron.

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