The Door of Mercy: Kenan Rifai and Sufism Today

International Symposium Proceedings

VOLUME 1
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VOLUME 1
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(1867 - 1950)
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Sufism, the tradition of ethical and spiritual practice that has played such a prominent role in Muslim societies, has had a complicated encounter with modernity. The rise of salafi fundamentalism challenged much of the culture and activities associated with Sufism, charging the Sufis with deviation from core Islamic values. From another direction, the secularism that was often a legacy of colonial rule was equally dismissive of Sufism, which was seen as a feudalistic and superstitious obstacle to modern development. The rise of the all-powerful nation state led to suspicions that Sufi groups might pose a threat to its political domination. Yet despite the regulation, condemnation, and even outright suppression of Sufi institutions, popular attachment to the piety and religious ideals associated with Sufism continues to be widespread in Muslim majority countries.

Against this background, it is instructive to examine the case of one particular Sufi leader who chose to adapt his tradition to the conditions of modernity. Kenan Rifai came of age during the last phase of Ottoman society. When Mustafa Kemal Ataturk came to power in Turkey as a secular leader and outlawed all the Sufi orders (1925), Kenan Rifai did not respond by fixating on the past. Instead, he sought a wider role for Sufism in connection to higher education and culture, at the same time expanding the participation of women in parallel with contemporary social transformations. Thus Sufism was no longer identified with private institutions sustained by feudalistic patronage. It could now become the subject of academic research while serving as an ethical inspiration for civil society. It is this combined legacy of the Sufi tradition and its modern deployment which is the chief subject of the essays contained in this volume.

The international character of the contributions in this book is an indication of the intrinsic interest of the subjects they investigate. The
prominent scholars who are represented here connect Kenan Rifai to other contemporary figures, and they reflect on his literary productions that presented Sufi figures and texts to modern audiences. They demonstrate that Sufism had not become a fossilized relic to be discarded, as some had claimed. The potential of Sufism to provide ideals that can continue to motivate society is an important subject that will claim the attention of many readers. In that spirit, it is to be hoped that scholars and students engaged with the study of Sufism will find much worthwhile material in this collection.
A Note on the Titles of Papers and Transliteration

The symposium papers published in this book are the versions that have been submitted by their authors; some of the paper titles may be different from what has been listed on the symposium’s official website as well as the program that has been provided in the Appendix.

Each author’s transliteration preferences were generally accepted and maintained.
Kenan Rifai’s Life and Personality

Mehmet Demirci

I. HIS LIFE

Kenan Rifai’s grandfather was Hacı Hasan Bey, who was a wealthy member of Plovdiv notables. The neighborhood he used to live is still called by his name. His father was Abdülhalim Bey and his mother was Hatice Cenan Hanım. Kenan Rifai was born in 1867 in Thessaloniki, where his family had moved due to his father’s employment.

He spent his childhood years with his grandfather in Plovdiv. Upon the escalation of political turmoil in the Balkans, they immigrated to Istanbul, where they bought a wooden residence in the neighborhood of Hırka-i Şerif. His father left his job in Plovdiv and first took the Registry Manager position in Mail and Telegram Administration. Then he became the Administrator of Telegram.

Kenan Rifai, who completed his education in Imperial Galatasaray High School [Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultânisi] where he started at the age of 9, was smart, wise, well brought up but also a naughty child. He

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1 Born in Konya in 1942, Mehmet Demirci graduated from the Istanbul Higher Islamic Institute in 1965. Following a period of teaching in mid-level schools and completing his military duty, he was appointed to the Izmir Higher Islamic Institute in 1970 and in 1984 received his PhD at the same institute whose name was later changed to Dokuz Eylül University Divinity School through his work entitled “Tasawwuf According to Ghazali”. Aside from his position as a teacher at Dokuz Eylül University on History of Sufism, he has also worked as a member of the faculty board, director of the Divinity Vocational School, and department chair in the Programme of Basic Islamic Sciences. Demirci has written dozens of academic articles and many books. Some of his books are as follows: “Yunus Emre’de İlâhi Aşk ve İnsan Sevgisi” [Divine Love and Love for the Human in Yunus Emre], “Mevlânâ ve Mevlevîlik Kültürü” [Rūmî and the Culture of Mawlawiyya], “Nûr-i Muhammedi” [The Muhammadan Light], “40 Levha 40 Yorum” [40 Panes 40 Comments].
was loved and praised by his teachers. Some of his Turkish teachers in this school were Muallim Naci, Muallim Feyzi, Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem and Zihni Efendi.

While they were in Plovdiv, his mother became a disciple of Edhem Shah of Plovdiv. Edhem Shah was a civilian, in the sense that he had not conducted his sayr al-suluq with a sheikh in a lodge and received caliphate; he was an Uwaysi-Qadiri murshid. Having attained maturity on the spiritual path she embarked, his mother Hatice Cenan Hanım took great care of her son’s spiritual and inner education. This spiritual exchange and infinite love was continuous. Kenan Rifai had great devotion to his mother. For him Hatice Cenan Hanım was not only his mother, but as if the mother of humanity and a Friend of God.

Upon graduation from Galatasaray, Kenan Bey entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Bâb-ı Âlî Hâriciye Kalemi], and became a natural sciences teacher at the Persian School [Acem Mektebi]. After a while, he became an assistant accountant at the Directorate of Mail and Telegram [Posta Telgraf Nezareti] while also continuing his education at the Law School.

After a short period of government employment, Kenan Rifai preferred education as his professional field. He was appointed as headmaster at Balıkesir High School. He was 19 years old. He committed himself to the spiritual guidance of Edhem Shah. He fulfilled all the requirements of his murshid as far as tasks that were given to him as part of his sufi education. He also took lessons of music and reed flute in this city. He said that up until he had committed to Edhem Shah’s guidance, he was familiar with the art, life and philosophy of the West but did not have a strong connection to religion.2

Eleven months later, he was appointed as Principle of Education of Adana and a short while later as Principle of Education of Bitola (Manastır). He spent time together with his murshid who came to Bitola at the same time. Returning after a short time to Plovdiv, his murshid left the caliphate to Kenan Bey and passed away. Following his appointment at Bitola for about three years, he was then appointed to the Directorate of Education in the province of Kosovo. During these years of frequent intrigues and rebellions against the state, Kenan Bey worked day and night with all he had alongside his official duty.

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2 See Kenan Rifai, Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifai, ed. Mustafa Tahraî (İstanbul: Cenan Vakfı, 2015), 259.
After serving three years in Skopje he was appointed to Trabzon. During his appointment as director of education here, he established a close friendship with the governor of the city Kadri Bey, who was the father of Hüseyin Kazim Kadri Bey, the author of the Great Turkish Dictionary [Büyük Türk Lugatı].

A year later he was appointed as Principal of Development [Numâne-i Terakki Müdürlüğü] in Istanbul. After three months, through a spiritual sign from his murshid, he was told to “finish all of the qada namaz that he had not yet completed and then to go to Medina.” Thus, he began to await the day he would visit the Prophet with eagerness and love. Two years later, accepting the position of Headmaster at Hamidi High School in Medina, he went to Medina, which he had been yearning for, and to the station of the Prophet of Allah, to the “hearth of happiness where he was in love with its earth and stone, its humans and animals, its dogs and cats” (1900).

In Medina, Sheikh-ul Mashayikh Hamza Rifai, a descendent of Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifai, gave him caliphate and permission (ijaza). Once, Hamza Rifai said to him, “I do not know who is whose murshid, you mine or I yours?” In this way, Kenan Rifai was bestowed—according to the established customary forms—the “himma” and “baraka” that is accepted as coming with uninterrupted lineage from the Prophet and which has an important place in tasawwuf education.

Kenan Rifai and his mother were shown close relations and much love from both the urban elites and people of the city of Medina as well as the Bedouins. The Bedouins would invite him to their tents in the desert and attend his discourses. He wrote and composed hymns [iłâhiler] and performed them with his beautiful voice and taught them to his students at school. Visiting Mecca, he was able to circumambulate around the Ka’ba.

Returning to Istanbul four years later, he worked as a French teacher at the Male Teachers School [Erkek Muallim Mektebi], councilman of the Scholarly Research Council [Tedkikāt-ı İlmiyye], the Directorate of Darussafaka [Dârüşşafaka] High School, and member of the Department of Education [Meclis-i Maarif]; after retiring, he taught Turkish at the Fener Rum High School for thirteen years.

In 1908, he established a lodge with his own means called Ummu Ken’an Dargah-i Sherif, in the yard of the residence they had bought in Hırka-i Şerif, and started his spiritual guidance (irshad) as a murshid-i kamil.
After the ban on sufi lodges in 1925, Ummu Ken’an Dargah was used as a residency by his family. During the years where all types of religious-sufi education and training were banned, he continued to guide the new generation through spiritual discourses attended only by his family, relatives and close friends. He passed away to the world of eternity on July 7th, 1950, and was buried in the yard of the Merkez Efendi Mosque.3

II. TRAITS OF HIS PERSONALITY

Personality is described as follows in the Dictionary of Kubbealtı: “The entire characteristics of a person, both spiritual and individual.”

“Personality” is a wide concept. One can include numerous things about Kenan Rifai. I will try to expose only some of these, during my presentation.

In the most important book written about him, the parable of the elephant in the Masnavi is given as an example. All things said on the matter would be right but also incomplete. One can describe him as an idealistic educator, composer, a man of poetry and music, a knower, a man of wisdom, a person who raised many distinguished students successful in science, business, art, ideology, who had his students make peace within themselves first and then unite with society.4

As one can see from his photographs, Kenan Rifai was a good looking, elegant person with a beautiful face and was very impressive. One of his admirers and a teacher in St. Benoit High School, Andre Duchemin, described him as follows:

“His clothes without a defect, his vivid and deep looks, masculine voice, his gentleness and generally everything that he had was befitting of him. His outer appearance was a locus of spiritual si-

3 For Kenan Rifai’s life see Kenan Rifâî, “Din kardeşlerime ibret olur ümidiyle yüce târîkate giriş şekline dâîr bir iki söz” [“Some words on my way of initiating to the tariqa with the hope that it will be a lesson for my brothers in religion”], in Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî, ed. Mustafa Tahralı (İstanbul: Cenan Vakfı, 2015), 259-261; Mustafa Tahralı, “Kenan Rifâî”, Sahâbeden Günümüze Allah Dostları, vol. IX (İstanbul: Şule, 1996), 440-444; Mustafa Tahralı, “Kenan Rifâî”, Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam [DİA], XXV, 254-255; Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî ve Yırminci Asrin Işığında Müslümanlık (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2003); Sâmiha Ayverdi, Dost (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 1999); Yılmaz Öztuna, Büyük Türk Müzikisi Ansiklopedisi, vol. I (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990) 167; İsmet Binark, ed., Dost Kapısı (İstanbul: Cenan Vakfı, 2005).

4 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 126-129.
lence.”5 Another person said, “His words would affect one’s heart. He would not do literature or idle talk and he would not say something to hurt others.”6

One can tell that he was a charismatic person. Mahir İz Bey’s following words are interesting: “Abdülaziz Mecdi Efendi was knowledgeable, smart, poet and had a high level of wisdom and foresight; he would deeply affect the people he met. I should also point out that this was also the case for sheikh Ken’an Bey, only it was stronger with him.”7

He had a natural talent toward learning new languages. Three months after he was admitted to Galatasaray High School, he was able to translate and tell Turkish tales to observers.8 When he was in Medina, he learned Arabic in a short time and prepared booklets to teach Arabic to Turks and Turkish to Arabs.9

His heroic side was powerful, he had nationalistic sensitivities. When he was returning to school at the end of vacations in Plovdiv, he would get out of the train at the border, kneel down and kiss the earth, and hug the border soldiers. He understood that the lands he was born and grown up in were lost. The real land was the country, the state. The state, then, was order, peace, mother, father.10

While he was accompanying a British Prince on his city tour, during his appointment as a principle to Educational Administration in Skopje, he encountered a battalion of tired Turkish soldiers dressed in tatters, probably coming back from a clash with the gangs. Kenan Bey who noticed the pitying looks of the prince, told him that the soldiers were dressed up in such a way due to a war tactic, thus saving the nation’s reputation.11

One day, somebody among his friends praised a Bulgarian cigarette, explaining that the quality of the tobacco was high and the price was very inexpensive. Kenan Rifai was very upset with these remarks and said: “No, why would I buy Bulgarian cigarettes when we have the cigarettes made by my people? You shouldn’t either. I would rather use the goods of my people, even though the others are better and cheaper.”

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5 Ibid., 346.
6 Ibid., 350.
7 Mahir İz, Yıllarin İzi (İstanbul: İrfan, 1975) 161.
8 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 25.
9 Ibid., 90.
10 Sâmiha Ayverdi, Dost, 3; Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 555.
11 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 50.
“My feeling is a special and nationalistic feeling. Otherwise all nations are my nation. We should not forget that we should all respect the nation we belong to first and act accordingly.”¹²

He respects the law, even if it is harmful to him. It was 1929; four years had passed since the banning of lodges. One day, one of his close friends, Doctor Server Hilmi Bey, began to whirl after feeling entranced. But Kenan Rifai, quickly catching him from his hem, said:

“It is not possible, sir, not in this time. Since it has been banned, prohibited, it cannot be. We obey the laws of the land!” In this way, even in a room where there were only three people, he did not accept an action that would go against the law, and was the guard in absentia of the orders of the state.¹³

Despite his nationalist sensitivities, Kenan Rifai was not someone who worshipped tradition or lived in constant yearning for the past. But he was aware of the danger of disconnecting from the past. He knew that those who deny their pasts were like rootless plants.¹⁴

He was meticulous in protecting the right of the state. For a while, he is appointed in the opinion commissions set up to pay the damages of minority schools that had been closed down for a while. The friars began giving exaggerated numbers, with the inspectors remaining silent. He does not wish to sign the decisions of a commission that would cause the state millions in losses.¹⁵

Kenan Rifai was proactive, dynamic and successful. During his first appointment as the principle of Balıkesir High School, he notices that there are more teachers than students. The Muslims would not send their kids to school out of fear that they would convert to Christianity, likewise the Christians would not send their kids to school out of fear that they would convert to Islam. In a short time, organising meetings with the prominent people of both sides, he would get more than two hundred students to the school.¹⁶

During his appointment as Educational Administrator in Adana, he would go about all the villages and towns on horseback, trying to

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¹² Ken’an Rifâî, Sohbetler (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2011), 129.
¹³ Sâmiha Ayverdi, Dost, 124.
¹⁴ Ibid., 139.
¹⁵ Ibid., 118.
¹⁶ Ibid., 35.
convince the public to build schools.\textsuperscript{17} We can say that this was a manifestation of his work ethic.\textsuperscript{18}

He would feel sorry for the energy lost in complaining and cursing, when the option of choosing to correct the various wrongs is available.\textsuperscript{19}

He was entrepreneurial and perseverant. He would work very hard to put into action a decision he had come to and would not feel comfortable until he obtained results. He would accept the obstacles that would come one after another, appreciating that these were from God. His following advice is very important:

\begin{quote}
“Do not stay where you are, advance. Advance, even if very little. Otherwise your life would only mean getting closer to the grave.

Walk, always walk… If death seizes you on your way, this is something God knows. Just let it not be while you are at a standstill…”\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Kenan Rifai was an idealist, in love with the Prophet. He delightedly went when offered a position as headmaster in a high school to be opened in Medina. Medina was within Ottoman borders at the time. Yet it was very far, hard to go and come back from Istanbul, and compared to the latter, was not a place of particular comfort. To those who were criticising his decision to leave a good position in the capital he would say: “I would go as a servant, let alone being a head master!” The force that pulled him there was the love of his Prophet and the love of duty.\textsuperscript{21}

This pure and sincere child of Rumeli had no complicated, unclear, or complex feelings. He never alleged that he was superior to anyone and never asked a favor from anyone.\textsuperscript{22}

During the authoritarian period, there were those who were suspicious of him like with many others. While having a strong political perspective, he was never engaged in any political activities as was suspected. This is a truth: in every period, all types of administrative systems have been leery of the sincere Sufi. From his following verses, it is understood that he was subject to accusations from time to time:\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Ibid., 37.
\item[18] Ibid., 192.
\item[19] Ibid., 106.
\item[20] Ibid., 46.
\item[21] Ibid., 111.
\item[22] Ibid., 64.
\item[23] Ibid., 108-110.
\end{footnotes}
\end{flushleft}
The religious call us atheist
Yet the atheist blames us too
We are not from them or the others
Yet we are both from them and the others

Courtesy and compassion predominated Kenan Rifai’s relations with people. Upon his arrival in Medina, the young director adjusted to the life of the city quickly and was loved very much. He came to be known as the “father of Medina”. The Naqib al-Ashraf of the city could not help but say: “How happy for you Kenan Bey, here, those who know you and don’t know you both love you!”

He would help courteously. One day, because he did not think that it was proper behaviour to put money in the hand of a poor person he was visiting, he collected the little coins in front of the person and said, “If you would kindly allow me, I would like to change these with mine” and gave the amount he wanted.

After giving some money to a poor person he saw on the street he says:

“What a huge grace that Allah allows somebody to make a poor happy. This is why I feel like kissing the hand that reaches out to me.”

He was optimistic, tolerant and generous. Once, he ran into the Sheikh of the Topkapi Mevlevihane, Abdülbaki (Baykara) Efendi, in Bayezid Mosque. Abdülbaki Efendi said the following in his great disappointment about the ban on the sufi lodges:

Once we were cheering up with the nay of Mevlana,  
Now we became a whistle

Kenan Rifai replies:

“Why should we become whistles? We are still whatever we were. We were cheering up in the lodge (tekke) of the manifest, now we are enjoying the tekke of the heart (…) Now our body became a tekke and our hearts became maqams.” Then he recites this famous couplet:

At the mosque and the tavern, at the Ka’ba and the temple  
In the house, in the ruins, I call out, friend, friend

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24 Ibid., 90.
25 Ibid., 186.
26 Ibid., 187.
27 Ibid., 123.
28 This couplet by Niyâzi-i Mısri is in the following form in his Divan: “At the mosque and the tavern, at the house and the ruins, At the Ka’ba and the temple, I call out,
One day, they were looking out the window and saw that a person in an altercation with another had raised his hand with the intention of hitting the other; upon his relatives becoming agitated by this scene he said, “Maybe he raised his hand to scratch his head.” When those around him insisted that this wasn’t so, he said, “What can I do, I am tasked with good opinion.”

It must be because he believed in the relativity of goodness and badness in this world that he always accepted people with their crimes and defects, and tried to clean them away with his compassion. Showing utmost welcoming attitude at every opportunity, he said, “There is the beautiful as well as the vapid in this encampment.”

Kenan Rifai had a well-digested morality of tasawwuf; his relations with people were always according to this. In this way, he was able to address people from three different generations over the nearly sixty years of active life during the periods of Absolute Monarchy, the Second Constitutionalism, and the Republic, and directed his affairs with people by meshing well with them.

He was always giving. He offered his experience and knowledge to everyone. He gave away one of his two coats, all of the medicine in his cupboard. From time to time he would share silently in order not to cause his relatives to object. He could not get enough of giving.

He was very advanced in adab and humility. One day, one of his relatives pointed out the discomfort he must feel from sitting with his knees bent for a long time and asked that he put up his feet. In response, he said, “You come and sit with your feet put up over here…” The one who had offered said, “Astaghfurullah, I couldn’t,” to which he replied, “Perhaps I have people to whom I would say astaghfurullah as well.” Eventually, treating it as joke he said, “For example Server Bey, Nazlı Hanım…even if there is nobody else, I would be ashamed of myself.”

His disciples once described him as an exceptional person in a letter to someone who wanted to learn about Kenan Rifai. When he saw this letter, he said: “Woe to your efforts! If I have any attributes at all,
it could only be that I am an absolute nothing. Erase all of this!” On another occasion, when somebody praised him, he lowered his head in sadness and said: “I am a good-for-nothing. I have one, only one thing that I can leave behind in this world” and went on to recite the following verses:

I am a bad wanderer, guilty and rebellious, full of sins
How will I dare to be in the presence looking like this?  

He was compassionate and loyal. Once the coachman of the carriage they took started whipping the horse. He said “Do not hit, my son, do not hit”. Turning to the ones next to him he added “I feel the pain on my own body”. He would never want anybody or any creature to be tormented. He would caress the walnut tree whose walnuts he had eaten for a long time and call it “My Sultan”. For everybody who would confide their hardships, he would have a word that would be encouraging, strengthening and consoling.

It would be wrong to regard these as a morbid sensitivity. What the human is with small things, that is how they are with the big things. For example, throwing away the cigarette butt as if it were something dirty might not be such a bad thing. But there is such a core in this action taken towards something that has fulfilled its duty that this person might throw out someone who finished their work from their lives in the same bad manner.

He was forgiving and never complaining. In his lifetime, there were those who could not handle him and continually attacked him. He was never angry with them. There would even be times when he was cheered up by the slander and rumors that would infuriate those close to him. He thought that it is necessary to regard the mistaken actions of a blind and deaf person who cannot see or hear with mercy and patience.

He would say, “I pretend to be deceived by those who want to mislead me, so that they are pleased.”

During his illness, when the doctors would ask him, “What is your complaint sir?”, even during his toughest times he would reply, “Complaint? I have no complaints, alhamdulillah”.

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34 Ibid., 143.
35 Ibid., 189.
36 Ibid., 349.
37 Ibid., 197.
38 Ibid., 148.
39 Ibid., 192.
He had a troublesome, tiring, and continuous cough that made those who looked after him and came to visit him protest. One day one of the elder folk of him said, “Enough of this cough,” he replied in his most calm and sweet voice as if he weren’t the one suffering, “Why are you saying that? It is my guest, and I greet and keep it as a guest at my house. Would complaining befit us? If it is to go, may it go with pleasantness.”

It is said that Kenan Rifai always stayed a child in some aspects and never grew out of this. He would take shelter under this guise and rest when he was tested with extreme difficulties.

He would also enjoy acting like a child among children. Once, he ran into a group of children of five to ten years old. When they came next to him, they greeted him like soldiers in accordance with the orders of their commander. Kenan Rifai walked in front of them, and they went around for about five minutes. Although people around him looked on in surprise, he greatly enjoyed it.

According to Samiha Ayverdi, Kenan Rifai was someone surpassing humans in his qualities. Due to this, he would be considered lonesome, just like many great men. His following words would be an example to this:

“Even if one person understands me, it would suffice for me. I would gladly talk to only one person, if he was the only person to listen to me among thousands out there. But even if I cannot find that one person, I would not be desperate, I would just speak to myself, since this would mean that there is still one person left.”

We know that Kenan Rifai raised a lot of important people. We understand that he was expecting more, from his following words: “I wrote, I drew, I lectured, I established lodges, I played instruments, I sang with my voice, I told stories, I made you play games, I repeated the same things over and over and always asked for the same thing, yet I could not explain myself to you, I could not make my voice heard.”

We talked mostly about his visible features when we talked about Kenan Rifai’s personality. When describing his “personality”, we saw that his spiritual and intangible characteristics were also relevant. We

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40 Ibid., 202.
41 Ibid., 145.
42 Ibid., 22.
43 Ibid., 138.
can call this the point where words come to an end. Safiye Erol describes her teacher as “Mystic man, wise man and knowing teacher” in her part of the book Kenan Rifai and Muslimhood in Light of the 20th Century. She says:

“What true lovers really do is never known. What kind of experiments do they do in their own existential labs, do they skip out themselves, is something produced, if so, how will it manifest itself and when and in what form? Answers to these questions are beyond prediction.”

For example, no one will ever be able to disclose completely the secrets of his life in Medina.

It must be recorded that Kenan Rifai’s “Hymns of Kenan” [İlâhiyât-ı Kenân], “Discourses” [Sohbetler], and “Commentary of the Masnavi” [Şerhli Mesnevi-i Şerif] works can also be examined and analyzed to present the spiritual aspect of his personality as well. But even this would not suffice to reaching the essence of the matter. At this point, we can repeat what Nureddin Topcu said about Rumi for Kenan Rifai: “He alone dove into the ocean of peace, and we were left with the sound of the cries of his ecstasy.”

Kenan Rifai is also like this. He wrote, said, related, and raised valuable people. This was his observable side. But while there might be signs of his spiritual personality and leaks from his inner world, knowing this side of him in the way it should be known would only be possible by being like him.

CONCLUSION

The son of a wealthy family from Plovdiv, Kenan Rifai, after finishing Galatasaray High School, worked as a director and teacher at various posts of the national education system throughout Anatolia, the Balkans, Medina, and Istanbul. He is also a mutasawwif who was the sheikh of a lodge for 16 years.

He was handsome, capable, and a charismatic person. He had a side that dealt with music and poetry. He was sensitive to nationalist issues;

44 Ibid., 319.
45 Ibid., 89.
46 Nureddin Topçu, Mevlânâ ve Tasavvuf (İstanbul: Dergâh, 1974), 36; see also Mehmet Demirci, Mevlânâ ve Mevlevî Kültürü (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2013), 25.
he was active and dynamic. He was filled with love and compassion, well-seeing, optimistic, loyal, forgiving, and always uncomplaining. It is difficult to reach the essence of his spiritual personality; an in-depth analysis of his poetry and prose is also necessary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Sufi personas preferred the path of discourse [sohbet] in directing the realm of the illuminated hearts of people. Occasionally, writings would accompany this discourse, thus enlarging the discourse circle through the works they wrote.

While discourse is the common path amongst all murshids, only some murshids actually took up a pencil. As is known, Kenan Rifai is a Sufi who used both “instruments” masterfully. He is among the primary ranks of dervishes who left behind heirlooms in the valley of poetry and prose, lyrics and compositions in the last century.

Here, Kenan Rifai’s poem with the “should be known” repeated line comprised of 13 couplets will be considered, with brief explanations of the tasawwuf related concepts that are mentioned. Here, Kenan Rifai’s 13 couplets poem with the ryme “should be known” will be discussed and tasawwuf related concepts that are mentioned in the poem will be explained briefly.

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\[1\] Mustafa Kara was born in Rize in 1951. After elementary school, he completed his education as a hāfiz under his father’s tutelage and graduated from the Kayseri Higher Islamic Institute in 1974. He received his PhD following his thesis on “İbn ʿArabī according to Ibn Taymiyyah” at the Uludag University Institute for Social Sciences in 1983. He is currently a faculty member at the Uludag University School of Divinity Department of Tasawwuf. His research interests generally include history of tasawwuf and tariqas, tasawwuf movements in the Ottoman and contemporary period. “Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar Tarihi” [History of Tasawwuf and Tariqas], “Bursa’da Tarikatlar ve Tekkeler” [Tariqas and Lodges in Bursa], “Metinlerle Günümüz Tasavvuf Hareketleri” [Contemporary Tasawwuf Movements with Texts], “Metinlerle Osmanlılarda Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar” [Tasawwuf and Tariqas in Ottoman Times with Texts], and “Türk Tasavvuf Tarihi Araştırmaları” [Research on the History of Turkish Tasawwuf] are some examples of his publications.
The wayfarer desiring the path of Truth, path should be known
The way to go, in order not to slip should be known

Another name for the journey of the illuminated heart [gönül] the dervish embarks on towards Truth (Haqq) is sayr al-suluq. The person who wants to embark on this road must know the “conditions of the road.” Otherwise, the danger of “unintended consequences” arise. The expression mazlaqa’l-aqdam is used in this sense: the place where the foot slips. It is necessary to pay attention to “slippery slopes”. This spiritual path also has its highwaymen. It is necessary to be awake and alert at all times.

Four stations there are on the path to Truth and four obstructing veils
These veils should be dispelled for the journey, it should be known

On the path to Allah, there are steps/stations/halting places and obstacles. According to our author, there are four stations as well as four veils/obstacles. In order to complete the Sufi education it is necessary to overcome these obstacles and traverse the four stations. In order to win the “obstacle race,” special preparations and trainings need to be done.

Without ablutions is it possible to do prayers
The intended cannot be found without removing the veil, it should be known

Just as ablutions are a must for prayers, these obstacles need to be overcome one by one in order to reach the intended target; the veils in between should be removed. The psychology of preparedness is extremely important for the life of the illuminated heart. All of our faculties and capabilities need to be carefully conveyed in this direction.

It is a must to be beautiful, in our words, deeds, and conduct
It is also a must to be nothing in the existence of Huda, it should be known

First, we must pay attention to our words. Then, our actions and behaviors...Through beautiful conduct and knowing oneself as “nothing” within next to the existence of Allah, the point of perfection can be caught. Our words should not hurt people, our actions should not make Allah’s servants uncomfortable, and we must know to defeat our “ego” by perfecting our beautiful conduct. We must be annihilated in the love of the last prophet sent to complete the beautiful conduct. The station of annihilation in Allah comes after the station of annihilation in the Prophet. Otherwise, we should know that we are only fooling ourselves.
These are the main ranks of the four stations
In order to be a human, these must be studied, it should be known

These are the four main topics. People being sure of our hand and tongue is the beginning point of this education. This is the required course. The dervish should keep searching for the ways to do this. This is the principal study and training. We should know that some things cannot be handled by simple memorization.

Ambition for goods, position, pretending are the veils and bankrupt us
The things that need to be pushed away, they are these, it should be known

Let us consider now the veils... Ambition for goods... Ambition for positions... Pretending... The ambition for property that threatens the world of our illuminated heart actually bankrupts us and tosses around our values. The ambition for position is one of the strongest desires; it does not leave a person until the last breath. Fights over the main seat in the lodge are of a power capable of showing us the seriousness of the disease. It is necessary to know that these “longings” which need to be ripped out of the illuminated heart, drives the journey of the heart to dead end streets.

In relations, words, sleep, and food be moderate
The solutions to get rid of these veils are these, it should be known

How will these obstacles be surpassed? How will these veils be brought down? In order to do this, four topics must first be considered. It is necessary to be moderate on four topics, to catch the point of temperance and balance: relations with people, words, sleep, and food. In other words, to eat less, to sleep less, and to speak less. Otherwise, we must know that encountering reality will not be possible. A life of continual isolation is not correct. Enduring the injustice and torment of people is also a way for growth.

Lovers find Haqq, hidden inside their own nafs
Reaching this desire in the country is ridiculous, it should be known

One of the expressions that is very popular in Sufi thought is the following: “The one who knows their nafs knows their Rabb.” The lovers find Allah “in themselves” through secret and special paths. This has nothing to do with being in the country. The journey begins and ends in the heart. As Niyâzî Mısrî writes, “While I sought for it in the country, that life was within life itself.”
Working by oneself does not take you to the aim
This reality will not occur without a perfected murshid, it should be known

One of the essential principles of this journey is that it should be made by the guidance of a person who is called the perfected murshid. There is a definite need for “one who knows.” The one who does not follow this method does not reach the destination. It is necessary to embark on this journey with someone who knows the conditions of the road, the specialties, the dangerous curves and potholes.

For these words, I saw on a leaf of reality
Being all ears is needed for man, it should be known

What has been said so far are the experiences of men of the illuminated heart. They are not random determinations. Therefore, it is necessary to listen to these well, to read them well, and to evaluate them as very important experiences. It is necessary to know that these are the most valuable properties within the world.

The Qur’an alone is the sole guide for the city of the tariqa
Those who do not turn back from the path of Truth are never remorseful, it should be known

If a question is asked about the source for the principles of this path, the answer is very clear: the Qur’an. The guide to this city is the aforementioned holy book. The one who takes this book in hand can go around the city of tariqa without ever getting lost. They find what they are looking for, and never know remorse. They reach their intended destination. It is necessary to know that without this generous book, the road cannot be walked.

Without the shell of the walnut it is impossible to find its core
The one who does not profit in the world, their ignorance and incapability should be known

While explaining the stages of shari’a, tariqa, haqiqa, and ma’rifà, Sufis use the example of the walnut: the outer green shell, the hard shell, the membrane, and the essence. Without the bitter outer shell, it is not possible for the walnut to form. Therefore the outside, the zāhir, plays a very important role in protection. But what is important is the essence. It is to find “the honey of honeys.”

Do not think that there is anything outside of shari’a in the tariqa for Ken’an!
If there is he is an atheist without a doubt, this too should be known!
While discussing the topics of shari’ā, tariqa, haqiqa, and ma’rifā, some dervishes sometimes step beyond their boundaries and think or imagine that they have reached haqiqa without holding to the conditions of shari’ā. It is obvious that a tariqa separate from shari’ā, and a haqiqa bereft of tariqa will not be possible. Whoever alleges as such, it should be known that they are an atheist (zindiq) and that they have gone too far.
Kenan Rifai’s Understanding of Religion and Shari’a

Osman Nuri Küçük

In this paper, I would like to share with you my evaluations and conclusions regarding Kenan Rifai’s understanding of Shari’a and religion after having read his works and spiritual discourses.

I. THE UNDERSTANDING OF SHARI’A - TARIQA - HAQIQA HIERARCHY IN RELIGION

Shari’a - path (tariqa) - reality (haqiqa), occasionally listed with wisdom (ma’rifa), is a classification pointing out the multidimensional hierarchy of Islam in Sufi tradition. It is a reflection of the Islam, faith (iman), and benevolence (ihsan) stations mentioned in the Gabriel hadith. One’s religious life and perception of religion can be restricted to one single stage just as it can reach a depth that encompasses all of these. Sufi tradition bases itself off of this kind of an in-depth understanding of religion.

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The reason why we start our paper with a hierarchy is the fact that it serves as a criterion to evaluate a thinker’s understanding of religion. Obviously, there is only one Islam according to its sources. However, it is an actual and a historical fact that different levels of understanding exist when it comes to people’s perception of Islam and understanding of religion. Because the debate about the understanding and application of religion is beyond the scope of this article, we will suffice with simply mentioning it here.

The aforementioned hierarchy is an indicator of a pyramid from the general to the specific. Islam is the common principle of all Muslims. As far as obeying these principles is concerned, there is no difference among Muslims. A Muslim believer who has ascended to the level of faith, that is, if faith has penetrated into his/her heart, s/he is at a high level potency of religion. If a believer who has attained the level of benevolence is Benevolent, a Believer, and a Muslim, then s/he is at a much higher rank compared to the other levels because of his/her attitude and potency in seeing Allah everywhere. Based on the rules foreseen by religion, there is no difference among these stations.

Kenan Rifai evaluates Islam over these three stations. According to him, Islam is the most advanced level of all religions with respect to its dimensions of Shari’a – tariqa - haqïqa. Similarly, Sufis that are nourished by the Prophet of Islam constitute the brightest and the most advanced circle of mystical tradition. Kenan Rifai states the following about this:

“Tasawwuf starts with humanity and bears the quality of clearly revealing the essence of religions. Its final changes of forms are realized in Islam, through which it has attained its most enhanced and perfect state. Islam brings together all the other religions and becomes a monument on their grounds. So does tasawwuf. Just as no hand can hold the lava of an exploding volcano, there is no force that can prevent tasawwuf from flowing to the surface of this earth.”

Kenan Rifai’s statement summarizing the aims of religion is in tandem with this hierarchy. Kenan Rifai sees the main aim of religion

2 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık (İstanbul: Hülbe, 1983), 180.
as acquiring the contentment of the Truth (Haqq) and explains it as follows:

“Truth has two types of contentment (rizā). The first is to like everything that Allah does and not to object to anything with tongue or heart. The second is, to not hurt other’s hearts but to please them, for if you break a heart, your exterior (zāhir) will be ruined. The interior (bātin) of the person will be ruined if he/she breaks an illuminated heart [gönül].”

Kenan Rifai distinguishes heart from illuminated heart and explains this difference by way of Rûmî: “The illuminated heart can be found in people who are the manifestation of Truth.” This also reminds us of his “to not hurt and to not be hurt” definition of tasawwuf.

In another definition, he explains the aim of religion as tasawwuf and tasawwuf in connection with adab, like Rûmî:

“Tasawwuf as being the aim of religion is adab, in every state, time, or place.”

He then explains adab in the following way:

“Adab has two parts. One is outer adab which is to do what Allah orders and to stay away from what Allah prohibits, to stay away from the bad deeds that Allah does not want. The second is the inner adab which is to get rid of animalistic attributes and to replace bad habits with good ones, to get accustomed to good habits, to see Allah’s manifestation in every face, to not object to whatever happens, to not hurt anyone whether by hand or tongue, to think of everyone’s rest, to reconcile the offended, to clean and polish the illuminated heart of feelings of enmity and grudge and gossiping, to never take out of the illuminated heart the perfected human beings who are Allah’s beloveds, to see Truth in everything and all that happens, to not see anything as unnecessary, to be away from ambition and rage and to never look at any face or anything with eyes of fury, to know that there is something in good in everything and in every event that happens, to accept them as

3 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 135-136.
4 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’an Rifâî’den Mesnevi Hâtıraları, ed. Arzu Eylül Yağışıkaya (İstanbul: Nefes, 2013), 25.
5 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 181.
6 Ibid.
good, to always ask for forgiveness and mercy from Allah, and to accept everything knowing that they are all manifestations of Truth.”

a. Kenan Rifai’s understanding of religion as a Rûmî-tempered Mathnawi commentator

In the introduction of the Mathnawi, there is an expression about the purpose of this work which is, “This Mathnawi is religion’s principle’s principle’s principle”. Commentators explain the three principles here as the principles of Shari’a, tariqa (path), and haqiqa (reality). In this sense the Mathnawi, by comprising the three principles of religion’s three levels, speaks to people at every level.

Kenan Rifai states that all people are created in three layers connected to the levels of Islam, faith, and benevolence. The first layer is comprised of those who are of the ego, what he refers to as the commoners. Here, the humans are consumed by ego, ambitions, and desires. In religious language they are referred to as ‘lo, those people’. The second layer is made up of those who are of the heart. What wins over them is prayer and taste. In religious language they are referred to as ‘lo, those who believe’. The third layer are those souls whom the love of Subhan has conquered. They are busy with the godly movement. These are the walîs. They are those who are referred to in the following manner: ‘Oh, verily, they who are close to God--no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (Q 10:62)’

We can evaluate thinkers within the history of Islamic thought in accordance to this hierarchy in the following way. The message of those who understand Islam only from a perspective looking at Muslims are only for Muslims. The religious understanding and message of a thinker who has reached the stage of faith is able to respond to Muslims along with those of the book and believers. To those who reach the level of benevolence, their understanding of religion has both the perspectives of Islam and of faith. The religious understanding of only those who have reached this level has attained a level of being as if seeing reality and looking upon Truth. Those at the stage of benevolence have seen the source of beauty, so all that they do is also beautiful. The beauty within them awakens wonder and acceptance in everyone, be they Muslim or not, believers or not.

7 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’an Rifâî’den Mesnevi Hâtralari, 73.
Because Sufis such as Rûmî and Ibn ’Arabî have built their messages and understanding of religion from this level and based on the Qur’ân and the Prophet Muhammad, their messages are more universal compared to those who have built their messages from a lower level. Kenan Rifai explains the interest in the words and behaviors of a gnostic who has reached the levels of benevolence and reality through this anecdote from the Mathnawî in one of his discourses:

“During the time of Bayazid [al-Biştâmî], there was an unbeliever. One day a Muslim offered him to become a Muslim. The unbeliever said to him, ‘O Muslim! If what you mean by belief is that which Bayazid believes, then I know that to be better for me, but I have not the strength for it. Even though on the outside I am not a Muslim, on the inside I am a believer of his faith. But if the faith you want is yours, then I have neither the inclination nor the appetite for it.’”

The following expressions from Kenan Rifai clearly demonstrate the kind of hierarchy from which he viewed religion.

“It must be known that the essence of life is faith. The spirit of faith is deeds. The perfection of faith is love of Allah. The perfection of deeds is love of people. Essentially, people must know that people are not separate from Truth. Some part of humans see people as the outer and Truth as the inner. Another part see the opposite of this. A third party, and they are the true owners of happiness, know that when they address Truth they are actually addressing people and when they address people that it is in fact Truth.”

Based on the above evaluations, we can say that Kenan Rifai’s messages are built upon a perception of religion from the level of benevolence, love, and illuminated heart.

This hierarchical influence in his perception of religion also affects Kenan Rifai’s views and explanations of the concepts he considers. For example, he evaluates the concept of infaq (giving away, in the path of Haqq) in terms of three levels like Rûmî:

“Infaq has three parts. The first is the infaq of devotees, who leave the pleasures of the world to those who want it and are busy with good deeds and sincere prayers. The second is the infaq of those

8 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’an Rifâ’î’den Mesnevi Hâtıraları, 132.
9 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâ’, 135-136.
who love Allah (muḥībān al-Hūdā), and they give whatever has been bestowed upon them to those who ask for Allah. The third is the infaq of the knowers and the capable ones, who give without limit everything that is not the love and compassion of Allah.”

If we are to consider the concept of dhiqr, as in the Mathnawī, Kenan Rifai says that dhiqr is to go from the tongue to the heart. Rūmī says the following about this: “Can you smell roses from the word rose? The word of Allah is like this as well. It is not possible to find Allah through speech. It is necessary to feel its meaning in the heart.” Kenan Rifai says the following about the same topic:

“There is no use in saying ‘there is no God but God’ from morning till night, unless you know its meaning. You might as well have a record player say it, if it’s without meaning.”

b. Kenan Rifai’s understanding of unity

Like all gnostics, Kenan Rifai also considers the concept of unity as one of the fundamental elements which constitute his understanding of religion and Shari’a. We encounter the expressions Rūmī used to define the Mathnawī in Kenan Rifai as well:

Mathnawi-i mā dukkān-i wahdatast
Ghayri wahdat har ça bini ān butast

(“Our Mathnawi is the store of unity. Whatever you see differently within it, it is your idol.”)

Because the understanding of unity takes up an important space in Kenan Rifai’s consideration of religion, we would like to focus on it more.

Throughout history, there was no society that did not need religion. Muhammad Iqbal says: “My God, your love gave birth to thousands of idols.” It is possible to relate this statement to the religious views of many societies, such as totemic belief and mythologies. Religions linked to divine revelations, in their stead, guided the human being to the way and holy virtues of the Creator.

Here, the revelations do not position a particular religion against the other ones. Instead, they express the tradition of eternal wisdom, which includes all religions. This is actually a definition of Islam as given in the Qur’an. According to this understanding, Islam is not just the name of the religion which was established by the Prophet Muhammad in 610.

10 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’an Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtıraları, 59.
11 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 183.
Here, Islam is expressed as an advancing circle, which starts with Adam who is the first person to receive revelation and continues in harmony with the increasing levels of knowledge throughout civilizations, ending with the last religion. Let us remember these verses in this context: “Behold, the only [true] religion in the sight of God is [man’s] self-surrender unto Him” (Q 3:19), “Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion” (Q 5:3).

It would be useful here to remember this particular hadith which can be found in Al-Bukhārī as well as other accepted sources of hadith:

I would like to use an analogy to explain the situation of myself and the Prophets before me. Someone built a house and the whole house is literally beautiful. But one last brick was missing in the corner of it. People regularly visit the beautiful house. Even though they like the house very much, they ask whether the missing brick in the corner is going to be placed or not. Here I am that missing brick of the house. I am the completion of the prophets.12

Accordingly, the need for belief and holy revelation, initiated with Adam, progressed alongside human advancement. In this context Kenan Rifai states the following:

“Fundamentally all religions are one. Thus every religion ranging from the primitive ones to the religions of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are the same. The ultimate purpose is purification of the heart, knowing and finding Allah. Religion has its own path of advancement similar to a student, who starts his/her education from primary school and continues until graduation from university. In the end of this path, religion has found its perfection in Islam.”13 “Every Muslim is at the same time a Zoroastrian, Jew and Christian. But he/she is an advanced Zoroastrian, advanced Jew and advanced Christian...”14 In this vein, one day Kenan Rifai came across someone looking down on Christianity and said the following to them: “What does Christian mean? Do you see him as different from you? You also believe in Jesus and Moses... because otherwise you cannot be a Muslim.”15

13 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 134.
14 Ibid., 143.
15 Ibid., 134.
To some people, these statements by Kenan Rifai may seem unique and ostentatious. However, when regarded closely, it will be understood that this understanding stems directly from the Prophet Muhammad’s sunna and wisdom. It would be useful to give space to two of the Prophet Muhammad’s hadiths here. The first is as follows:

“Two people, one a Jew and the other a Muslim, had insulted each other. The Muslim said, ‘I swear upon the Allah who distinguished Muhammad (pbuh) in this world.’ The Jew said, ‘I swear upon the Allah who distinguished Moses in this world.’ Just then, the Muslim raised his hand and slapped the Jew across his face. The Jew immediately went to the Prophet of Allah and informed him of what had happened between him and a Muslim. Upon this, the Prophet stated,

‘Do not make me more auspicious than Moses, for (on the day of judgement) the people will faint and fall to the ground. I will be the first to wake up. At that point I will look and suddenly see, Moses has taken hold of one end of the Heavens. I do not exactly know, if Moses was among the dead and rose before me! Or was he one of those Allah excepted (in the Qur’an)?’”

The second is the following about Jesus:

“I am the closest one among the humans to the son of Mary. The prophets are siblings from one father. There is no prophet between him and I.”

• The unity he sees in creation

According to Kenan Rifai, just as the essence of religion is the belief of tawhid, creation is also nurtured from unity. He says the following:

“Creation, meaning plurality, is not an obstacle to the unity of Allah. Just like the waves of the ocean are not obstacles to its unity... For example, let us consider numbers--we say 1, 2, 3... But is there actually a two? Two is the repetition of one. Thus, it is understood that the body of numbers which express plurality actually comes from the repetition of one. Meaning there is no number other than One. It is always wahdat al-wujud (unité ab-

solue/absolute unity). When this knowledge of unity arrives, you know the doer and done as only Allah. Abu Bakr said ‘I have seen nothing in which I have not seen Allah’ for this. So when you know, you do not see cat or dog, onion or garlic as bad, nor do you scorn them.”18

He says the following in reference to Niyâzî Mısri of Malatya:

“What a joy it is to regard life from the eyes of Niyâzî who said ‘There is nothing apart from the friend, but only hidden to those without eyes.’”19

Kenan Rifai sees the understanding of the hidden treasure—constantly referred to in Sufi tradition—in the desire of everything wanting to bring forward their own perfection behind the plurality that occurs with existence.20 For this reason, Kenan Rifai frequently refers to Abû Bakr’s words, “I have seen nothing in which I have not seen Allah” in his discourses.21 He explains his understanding of the hidden treasure (kanz al-mahfuz) in the following way:

“The seedsman knows that there are various seeds in the warehouse of reality. Some of these are barley, some wheat, some this, some that. The stalk, leaves, ear, even the seed of future crops are found in that one grain. To explain and bring forward to witness this compendium, it is necessary to sow it in the ground, to bring it about so that whatever seed is present in its origin, it can appear and find form.”22

Thus, according to Kenan Rifai, whatever happens in creation is appropriate to the divine will; whatever is not appropriate to divine will cannot obtain the visa of existence. In this sense, he has the understanding of those unifiers whose actions are at the level of unity, who say, “Let us see what our Lord does, whatever He does will be beautiful.”

In this way Kenan Rifai can be said to enter the class of ahlullah whom Rûmî refers to as the people of contentment, with the caveat that Allah alone knows. Rûmî classifies the walîs as follows: some walîs are like tailors. If they do not like what has been stitched, they rip it up and stitch it again. According to Rûmî, these walîs have power over things

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18 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 182.
19 Ibid., 185.
20 Ken’an Rifâî, Şerhli Mesnevi-i Şerif (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2000), 421.
21 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 185.
22 Ibid., 183.
and this world. The other walis, whom he says to be of a higher level, are those of contentment. They do not see anything to be undone in the world. They do not see anything that needs to be undone in what Truth has willed, they see good in whatever has happened and greet whatever comes their way with contentment and submission. If we are to evaluate according to this classification, Kenan Rifai’s stance in his understanding of religion is of contentment.

II. FUNDAMENTAL FEATURES OF KENAN RIFAI’S UNDERSTANDING OF SHARI’A AND RELIGION

a. His opposition to being a worshipper of the form

The insight, spirituality-based cognition, and distance from paying attention to just the form immediately draw the attention when considering Kenan Rifai’s religious evaluations. This particular aspect is one of the most important subjects that Rūmī also emphasizes. As a worshipper, form is a comprehensive characterization that we confront in every field of life. It is a shallowness that shapes sometimes a material, sometimes a religious person’s observation of incidents and view of life. Even though the matters that are being evaluated seem reasonable to the intellect, they cannot escape from the shallowness that arises from primitiveness. We can give Kenan Rifai’s attitude on this as an example. When asked by someone who, despite being a Muslim, had to maintain his appearance as a monk to his acquaintances, “May I go in public in the vestment of a monk?”, Kenan Rifai replies, “What importance does the dress have? Wear a cap on top of another cap if you want. Allah doesn’t look at your appearance, but at your heart.”

Getting away from being a worshipper of the form provides the individual a vision that shows him/her what is the unchangeable fundamental in religion and the possibility to differentiate between what is considered holy by tradition and social acceptance versus divine acceptance. This allows for the differentiation between what can be changed in religious matters and the truths and what cannot be changed according to the time period in which people live. All religions preach their principles by going through first, individual then social, and finally time-bound processes. In most cases, sacred realities and features that are attributed as sacred by humans are combined during these processes.

23 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 142-143.
In religion, the separation of truths/realities that do not change according to time periods is not as easy as it is thought, as human is at the same time an object of the social process in which he/she lives. In Islamic tradition, the “renewal (tajdid) activity” and the presence of mujaddids who can accomplish this is a revivification brought about by this need. The real activity of the mujaddid, whom we are used to thinking of on the basis of Islamic law, is to endeavor to efface the confusion in religion that is promoted by the social and traditional sanctions through his/her knowledge, and confident and peaceful manner. The mujaddid’s manner in this context also guides other people on how to separate the things that are accepted to be from religion and that are attributed as holy due to a historical and social process from unchanged realities/truths. For sometimes, historical processes sanctify certain acceptances and rituals.

We can say that the religious and Sufi way of life also gets affected by this process, which is valid across all areas of life. Bushanjī’s statement which Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) quotes in his Risāla can be regarded as evidence of the awareness of this situation from the early periods of tasawwuf: “Tasawwuf was previously a reality that didn’t have a name, but now it has become a name without a reality.”

Let us consider an example from the history of tasawwuf. Tasawwuf derives from the word Sufi, meaning “wearing wool”, and came to encompass various traditions and rituals over time. After some time, these rituals came to be regarded as necessary aspects of the Sufi way of living. Wearing wool, rough clothes with patches, dervish’s mantle, and other rituals of the dervish’s order can all be regarded this way. But after some time these kinds of things can replace reality and they are attributed as being holy. Because of this, in certain times, a tajdid and renewal is needed to differentiate the “holy-ish” attributes from truth and reality. The person who would accomplish this should possess the foresight and the potency to distinguish between the reality and the “holy-ish”. The debate of “is the Sufi superior or the Malāmī?” held for some time in Sufi history, which Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) included in his work, can be evaluated in the scope of this tajdid activity. While Suhrawardī chose the Sufi, Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) chose the level of malāmī, stating that it is the highest level, coming after prophethood. Yunus Emre’s couplet on this topic,

“If dervishhood were crown and mantle
We too would buy them for thirty or forty”
is the product of an understanding of tajdid that draws attention to the difference between the reality in the Sufi way of life versus the "holy-ish."

We can talk about one of Kenan Rifai’s concessions about the separation between what is regarded holy and what is religious. His reactions about the new clothing and hat laws during the period when lodges were banned can be given as examples of this. On one hand, he understood that the practices that do not belong to the reality of religion are not related with the core of truths under the conditions of 1925. On the other hand, he lived a life without any compromise about the truths that make up the religious and Sufi way of life and educated his beloveds and friends about them.

It is possible to come upon other examples of this from the previous century. For example in 1847, when the lodge of İbrâhim Halwatı from Kusadasi had burned down, his students wanted to rebuild the lodge. But İbrâhim Halwatı said that it was not necessary, as the entire world had now become a lodge, referring thus to a hadith about the Prophet Muhammad where it is stated that all of the earth had been made a masjid for him. We must also record that when the lodges were banned, it was a serious cause of trauma for many; people experienced the lack of places in which they had learned adab and compassionate love. However, terminologically-speaking, the lodge is not an absolute necessity for the Sufi way of life. It was with the institutionalization of orders that lodges became the main aspect of the Sufi way of life. They were also very useful in the course of history. Many became the places where people with illuminated hearts were raised. But they also suffered like the other institutions of a declining world empire. Kenan Rifai’s reaction when the lodges were banned was similar to İbrâhim Halwatı from Kusadasi. Instead of working to rebuild the lodge, he advised his beloveds to open the lodge as an academy when the time came. This might not sound extraordinary to us in 2015, but for the Turkey of the 1930s, these words are truly forward-looking.

Kenan Rifai’s attitude following the clothing regulations and hat revolution can be given as examples of this visionary outlook. For people of today, this might seem as an ordinary detail and implementation. But we can say that Kenan Rifai had a vision that was very advanced for that time regarding matters that had become almost holy for orders such as wearing a dervish cloth, wearing a mantle, beard, etc. We can see Kenan Rifai’s actions as a renewal activity against the creation of taboos out of matters like wearing pants, ties and hat, even if they do not
constitute any problem for the people of today. While reflecting Ottoman heritage, it is also the behavior of a gnostic with visions of the new.

If we were to wonder to which aspect Kenan Rifai owes this vision, this could be answered in myriad ways. Here, we will touch on the ones we regard as being important. The gnostic is first and foremost the one who has grasped the spirit of the time. Kenan Rifai knew the specifics of the time in which he was living. Here, we can tag the German term “Zeitgeist”, meaning “spirit of the time,” for its proximity to the subject in question. Otherwise, what is said about religion become anachronistic remnants and mythological legends beyond history and actual events. It is generally because of this that the ones who are unaware of the realities of the period they live in, struggle with the study of the unknown.

The gnostic who has grasped the spirit of the time is freed from regionality and local thoughts and reaches an universal level. Kenan Rifai being an intellectual heir of the Ottoman Empire played an important role in his ability to get rid of this locality and carry his message to the universal level. We can mention here the positive effect of his role as head of education in provinces such as Balikesir, Adana, Manastir, Skopje, Trabzon and Medina.

Kenan Rifai’s being raised in the Ottoman capital is another important factor in receiving this tradition as a heritage from first person contacts and places. His graduation from the Galatasaray High School [Mekteb-i Sultânî] is one of the important points in his educational life. During his administrative duties throughout various provinces and Medina, he faced the problems that came with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, he was cooked in the heart of the sacred during his employment in Medina. In this sense, he is a thinker and a man of duty who can use not only his eyes and mind but also his insight and heart.

b. His view on the outer part and Shari’a dimension of religion

In order to set out his views on religion’s dimension of Shari’a, meaning the actions and rules of religion, we can quote the following he said about namaz:

“Such great principles this building of namaz is based on. There are no ends to the greatnesses of Islam, and namaz encompasses such great truths. All the related transformations can be observed within it. But this is only for those who see, who can see…”24

24 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken'an Rifâî’den Mesnevi Hâtralari, 43.
He draws a similarity between the tekbir (saying “Allāhu akbar”/“Allah is the Greatest”) during namaz and the tekbir that Abraham said when he was about to sacrifice his son Ishmael, and says the following:

“It is as if the Spirit of Halil is saying ‘Allāhu akbar’ in order to cut the jowl of Ishmael’s existence, made up of only the desires of the nafs. From this, it is understood that people who do not pray are like animals hazardous to others. Those who pray, on the other hand, are those who are cleansed with ‘Allāhu akbar’ and ‘bismi-llah’ and are thus as if ready to be sacrificed.”

“Some of the angels have been praying standing and some are in prostration. Thus an individual who performs namaz is gathering the praying of all the angels in himself/herself. Now, the augury of faith is namaz. If a Muslim intentionally leaves performing namaz either with a community or alone as an individual, he/she is sentenced to filthiness. This sentence does not change whether he/she knows manners of unity (tawhid) or learned all the issues of Shari’a.”

Evaluating namaz as such, Kenan Rifai does not regard deeds within religion as the aim of the deed. We can thus locate Kenan Rifai within the history of tasawwuf in the following way. Rather than an understanding of religion and tasawwuf put forward by those such as Abū Tālib al-Mekkī emphasizing more supererogatory prayers in works such as Kutu’l-Kulūb, Kenan Rifai has an understanding that is closer to what Qushayrī writes: “The aim of tasawwuf is not to increase dhikr, awrad, or good deeds, but rather to better their quality; to purify the heart.” Additionally, according to Kenan Rifai, worship is not the aim of religion but the means. These means should take the person to the values of beautiful conduct that are based on the compassionate love of Allah.

The prophet Muhammad likens namaz to washing in a river five times a day. As is specified in the verse, namaz should be used in place of dhikr, referring to remembrance. Gnostics wish to continue their togetherness

25 Ibid., 43-44.
26 Ibid., 47.
28 The hadith is as follows: “The Prophet said, ‘What do you say? If one of you had a river that flowed in front of your house, and washed in it five times a day, would any dirt remain on you?’ The Companions replied, ‘No! No trace of dirt would remain on them!’ The Prophet then said, ‘Praying five times a day is just like this. In doing so, Allah gets rid of the sins.’” (Buhârî, “Mevâkitu’s-Salât”, 6; Muslim, “Mesâcid ve Mevâdiu’s-Salât”, 51; Tirmizî, “Emsal”, 5 (2868); Nesaî, “Salât”, 7).
29 See Q 20: 14.
of the illuminated heart with Allah outside of namaz as well. In order to express this, they use the term “zikr-i dāim” (continual remembrance). Rûmî says the following in reference to this state and the likening in the hadith: “It is not enough for the fish to be told to bathe in the water five times a day.” Thus the gnostics, symbolized by the fish, carry out their five times daily namaz, but their illuminated hearts have reached the state of zikr-i dāim due to being continually in contact with the Truth. The Prophet’s hadith of “My eye sleeps but my heart does not” has been commented on thusly in Sufi thought. We see that Kenan Rifai adopts a similar thought as well, saying the following on the topic:

“One should perform namaz, envisaging that s/he in fact sees Al-lah, because Allah sees him/her, even though he/she do not see Allah. There are many who only see the prayer rug and the mihrab and gain naught but tiredness when doing namaz. However, there are such truths in namaz that speaking and writing about them is futile. Even though namaz is only five times for the general public, it is deployed constantly for the lovers of Allah, since they do not content themselves to five times of invocation. Being bound and together with the Beloved in every breath is the nourishment of the lovers.”

On another day, to a relative who said, “Another day has passed and I wasn’t able to do anything that would benefit Allah,” Kenan Rifai said, “Who can do such a thing that you would be able to? The true worship is intibah, meaning to have an illuminated heart that is constantly awake.”

Another example is when one day they were telling Kenan Rifai about a person who is very disciplined and has never missed any of his/her time of namaz, he replies by saying, “That is good, but this is worship based on shape; it remains in the world. Real worship is the worship of the illuminated heart.”

Kenan Rifai sees religion as a reflection of human existence as stated by Ibn ʿArabi. He explains religious hierarchy over the human existence in the following manner:

“The human body is like a ship. The outer part of religion, such as namaz, fasting, pilgrimage, alms, charity, beneficence are the ballast that one puts on the ship for balance. If the ship has all of

30 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’an Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtıraları, 48.
31 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 142.
32 Ibid.
33 Metals, rocks, sand, etc type weights that are put on sea-faring vehicles in order to help it stay balanced. (Kubbealtı Lugatı [Kubbealti Dictionary], “Safra”)
its instruments but lacks this ballast, it would not be able to cruise and would fall over. Just like this, when someone’s body ship lacks the ballast provided by worship and obedience, it won’t be able to traverse the oceans of reality in order to reach the ports of wisdom and buy pearls of ma’rifa (gnosis). But they should also know that just as there is a need for capital in order to conduct commerce, a ship that has embarked on the port of wisdom cannot pick up a load when filled with ballast. Thus, whoever reaches the ports of wisdom with the chest of heart, filled with the Prophet Muhammad’s beautiful conduct, and Lordly compassionate love will be able to purchase those pearls of divine wisdom and jewels of Allah’s contentment.”

Building on this, Kenan Rifai refers to the following couplet by Niyâzî Mısri:

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\text{Don’t assume your duties are over through praying, pilgrimage and fasting} \\
\text{Wisdom is what one needs to become a perfected human being}
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Because according to Kenan Rifai, outer obedience and worship in religion is heavy in weight and light in value. They are like copper. But contentment of Allah, the Prophet’s model of beautiful conduct, and the discourse of the murshid are light in weight but heavy in value; they are like gold and diamond. In other words, these are the pearls of marifa and jewels of Lordly contentment.

We must also add that according to Kenan Rifai, there is a connection between deed and faith that is impossible to sever. Samiha Ayverdi, as one of the names that come at the fore of those who knew Kenan Rifai best, says the following: “Because deeds are the channel through which faith is reflected into life, a sincerely devout person is tasked with obeying the forms of religion as much as its meaning.”

c. "Whoever does not know himself cannot know his religion"

As is known, man in the Sufi tradition is seen as a city and a world. One of Ibn ’Arabî’s works on this matter is named “At-Tadbirāt al-ilāhiyyah fī islāh al-mamlakat al-insāniyyah” (Divine Measures in Amending the City of Man/ Divine Governance of the Human Kingdom). Likewise, Rûmî says, “Is there anything which is not in the illuminated heart but

34 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken'an Rifâî’den Mesnevi Hâtralari, 24.
35 Ibid., 24-25.
36 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 141.
exists in the world?” Sufis also find the idea of micro-macro cosmos inherited from ancient Greeks to be incomplete as well, because in this thought, man and world are evaluated as two opposing worlds. However, according to gnostics like Rūmī and Ibn ‘Arabī, without man, the world is incomplete. Man, however, is a separate world. Therefore, according to Sufi thought, the first condition for peace and order in the world depends on man bringing serenity and peace to their own being. It is only in this way that a person can reach Islam in the real sense. Because according to gnostics, Islam in its truest form is to have salām—coming from the same root as Islam and meaning tranquility and peace—be dominant in the body.

Kenan Rifai expresses his thoughts on this matter within Sufi tradition again. The most fundamental characteristic in Kenan Rifai’s understanding of religion is the feeling of responsibility. According to him, the person would only be able to reach this through the path of love and faith. Thus, a person’s harmony, happiness, and freedom is nourished by such an understanding of religion and Islam. Otherwise, it is impossible for people to have peace in their social lives if they have not established peace and tranquility within themselves. On this matter he says:

“Unless a person has obtained peace and well-being in his own body, he cannot provide peace, well-being and justice in society. And this cannot be achieved by any means other than through improvement of the ego (nafs) and the maturity of the spirit. Unless this is attained, it is unreasonable and vain to expect comfort and tranquility in the world. It is only after a person knows Allah and becomes His friend that he is a gained being for both society and himself.”

“Mankind attains peace and serenity with the world only after making peace within himself; this is freedom.”

He tells one of his students who was in difficult situation,

“The improvement of everything depends on one’s own improvement. If a person cannot resist the uprising of the subjects in his body, how can he provide good social interaction with the public? If one is not beneficial for himself, how can he be beneficial for others? That is the reason why the Prophet of Allah says that

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37 Ibid., 135.
38 Ibid., from the back cover.
everyone is the shepherd of their own body and is responsible for the loss of any flock and its being caught by wolves.\textsuperscript{39}

Kenan Rifai likens Shari’a to the rules and regulations of man’s body. In a country where there are no rules and regulations there will be no peace and order. Likewise, there will also be no peace in a city of self where the rules and regulations of Shari’a are not obeyed. In this matter he states:

“Now then, if a ruler and a sultan does not first bind the forces of his body, his ambition and all his limbs by the rules of Shari’a and tariqa, how can he possibly reign and control the world?”\textsuperscript{40}

d. His understanding of Shari’a and religion is based on love and affection

As is known, compassionate (mahabba) and passionate (‘ishq) love in Sufi tradition is considered as the first seed of existence and therefore, love is accepted to be the essence of everything in “al-Wujūd” (the Being). In this respect Allah’s attribute of mercy is explained by Ibn ’Arabī as “to bestow existence” (ī’tau al-wujūd). Accordingly, there is nothing in the universe to which compassionate love has not spread. Kenan Rifai’s understanding of Shari’a and religion is again nourished by this essence. On this matter, he states:

“Life is passionate love. Passionate love polishes the intellect and it is only passionate love that embraces all of creation. Everything in the universe—whether sublime or servile—came forth from passionate and compassionate love and was created because of compassionate love. It came to this world for compassionate love and is admired because of compassionate love. However, everything stopped at a locus of manifestation suitable to its state and a mirror suitable to its capability and fell in love with the subtlety spread within this entification and with Allah’s beauty attributes and busied itself with them.”\textsuperscript{41}

We can say that Kenan Rifai’s understanding of Shari’a and religion is based on passionate and compassionate love. He explains this hierarchy and base in religion as follows:

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 138-139.

\textsuperscript{40} Kâzım Büyükaksoy, 
\textit{Ken’an Rifâî’den Mesnevi Hâtıraları}, 112.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 36.
“Perfection of deeds is to love the created. Perfection of faith is to love Allah.”

Rather than fear, his understanding of religion is based on the religion of compassionate love which is accepted as a higher state in Sufi tradition. His religious understanding does not deny the principle of “The peak of wisdom is to fear Allah”. However, more than that, it relies on the idea that “The peak of all wisdom is love of Allah”. For example, in one of his statements on this matter, he says:

“The peak of all wisdom is the love of Allah. Love of Allah is only possible by loving the created, every one of which is blessed with the manifestation of Truth in this world.”

In Sufi tradition, the topic of passionate and compassionate love has always been paid attention to, to the extent that it was almost accepted as being supra-religious. Some expressions by Sufis on this topic can cause confusion among the uninitiated. For example, Rûmî says: “The sect of love is outside of the seventy two peoples.” In another statement, he says: “Wherever the distress of love is deepened, neither Abû Hanîfa nor Shâfî can lecture there.” This is not something exclusive to Rûmî—we can also mention the following lines from Yunus Emre:

“Your love has wrested me away from me,
How cute a suffering it is within the remedy
Shari’a and tariqa are paths for those who attain
Truth and wisdom are even deeper than the moment

I have forgotten religion and piety
What if there’s a doctrine deeper than religion?
The works of those who leave the faith are blasphemy.
What a blasphemy that goes deeper than faith?”

Kenan Rifai as a Rûmî-mannered gnostic, accepts everything that brings man closer to Allah who is the real Beloved in the sect of love, as sacred. On this matter he states:

“Whichever medium takes the servant to the Beloved, that medium is an obligation in the sect of lovers. Love is a burning fire that burns whatever it finds and pulls it to itself, paints it to its color. Therefore, the benefit of the man of True path is to find no
consolation other than love and the benefit of the sultans of the right path is not to waste time with anything other than love.”

In the tradition of tasawwuf, the asceticism phase in wayfaring should be crowned by love. Based on this, in time, those who see religion consisting of fanaticism and worship without love, are condemned in tasawwuf literature by “O ascetic! don’t suppose…” Passionate and compassionate love is preached to ascetics. We see that Kenan Rifai’s views are within this tradition. He states the following about this:

“Allah Almighty knows the preparedness of His servants. Therefore, He assigned some of them to His worship, that is, to His service because they are not present and prepared for His love and affection. They are worshippers and ascetics. The ones who are assigned to His love and affection are lovers and the truthful.”

Kenan Rifai considers worshipping Allah for the fear of hell or the desire for heaven as a mere level. However, this state is not the final state. He considers the highest state in the Sufi tradition as Allah’s own contentment, that is, in the affection of the Divine. On this matter he states:

“We should know that, if someone worships and obeys Allah because of the fear of hell or for the ambition to attain the delights of heaven, that person cannot be a lover of Allah. He might be a believer who is looking for the safety of his nafs. Because worshipping either for fear of hell or ambition for the blessings of heaven result in the pleasure of the nafs where one of them is to rescue the nafs from fire and the other is to attain the blessings of heaven.”

We should add here that Kenan Rifai’s understanding of love and affection is not separate from worshipping and asceticism. On this matter he states:

“Although proximity to Allah Almighty is with prayer, how can we abandon it? On the one hand you are saying that you love Allah and on the other, you are not obeying Him; do you yourself actually believe in this affection?”

Kenan Rifai regards the relationship between intellect and love like his predecessors. He likens intellect to a bird with one wing, like Rûmî. He then emphasizes the need for intellect to be completed by love:

44 Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’an Rifâî’den Mesnevi Hâtıraları, 36.
45 Ibid., 41.
46 Ibid., 104-5.
47 Ibid., 46.
“Oh you who keep intellect as your leader, that is, who try to proceed with their intellect in the path of the Truth and who say that they can reach the original state with the wings of intellect! Know that, if someone's heart is not illuminated with passionate and compassionate love and absolute Being, that person is like a bird with no wings. Because a person can fly to his original state and the valley of union only with the wings of love and affection.”48

Therefore, Kenan Rifai’s understanding of religion is to try to unite people within a system of relationships based on love towards each other as well as love towards Allah. Every vehicle and tool that will help achieve this purpose was used and handled at the right time and place by him. From this aspect, this evaluation made by Sâmiha Ayverdi about him is appropriate: “He did not despise knowledge or deny philosophy or disapprove of technology with a blind dogmatism of faith and a one-sided mentality. He knew how to take advantage of every opportunity, address people of different levels and speak the language of every bird just like Solomon.”49 The subject of knowing the languages of birds which Ayverdi mentions is also an attribute of a perfected spiritual teacher (murshid) as described by Rûmî in the Mathnawî. From this aspect, we can tell that Kenan Rifai was a Rûmî-mannered gnostic and murshid.

• **Comparison of his understanding of religion with a contemporary intellectual**

We need to first note the following with respect to the comparison we will talk about. As Ibn ʿArabi states, no true friend of Allah is preferred over another. Ibn ʿArabî describes being a true friend of Allah like the senses. When touch is compared to the sense of sight, sight seems to be superior to touch. But we do not give up our sense of touch just because we have sight. True friends of Allah sense the divine inspirations and manifestations coming to their hearts differently from each other, just as the spirit senses through different forces and reflects them differently. However, it is a fact that despite being nourished from the same source, it would be a mistake to regard everyone as being repetitions of each other; it would be contrary to what has been recorded.

48 Ibid., 58.
49 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Kenän Rifäi, 140.
Contemporaries Bediuzzaman (d. 1960) and Kenan Rifai (d. 1950) appear as representatives of two different traditions according to their lives and discourses. One represents the theological school and theology, intellect and faith; the other the lodge, tasawwuf, and passionate and compassionate love. Of course it would not be appropriate to say that these two are separated from each other with a definite line.

When communicating faith and religion; Kenan Rifai embraced the method of Sufis which addressed the illuminated heart rather than the knowledge of theology, dialectic and intellectual reasoning. Rather than seeing faith as something to be proven by intellect, Kenan Rifai saw it as a reality, a faith and belief that did not need any proof. For him, faith is not a case to be proven by an intellectual argument depending on the strength and weaknesses of two people’s evidence. The argumentation and proof that would be done in this would simply form the base for a new doubt.

We can see this difference more clearly when comparing his attitude and style to the manner in his contemporary Bediuzzaman’s works. Kenan Rifai never engaged in any attempts to prove Allah’s existence and oneness through intellectual reasoning.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to state the factors that shaped Kenan Rifai’s understanding of Shari’a and religion as follows:

1. His conception of tasawwuf that is reliant on divine love and illuminated heart as in Sufi traditions, especially in Rūmī: In this regard, his understanding of Shari’a and religion bears the disposition of Rūmī-like gnostic.

2. The deep influence of the manifestation of compassion and compassionate love he saw in woman; in the most perfected appearance of the manifestation of beauty in this world, shown to him through the vessel of his mother, Cenan Hanım, on his understanding of religion and tasawwuf.

3. We must count his artistic identity as among influencers on his understanding of religion and Shari’a. We should note here his genuine interest in literature and art.

50 Ibid., 140.
4. His avant-garde vision transcending the evaluations of his time. His correct and discreet reading of the social changes. His attitude regarding the hat and other revolutions as well as the abolishment of dhikr and lodges can be shown as examples.

5. His graduation from Galatasaray High School and his competence in French language contributed to his intellectual identity and familiarity with the intellectual circles of his time. This is another important factor that shaped his understanding of religion and Shari’a.

6. His teaching Turkish Language in Fener Rum High School for long years and being in close contact with members of other religions can be counted among the factors to influence his views on religious plurality and why he is not a fanatical Muslim.

7. We can mention the fact that his traveling across many provinces in the Ottoman Empire and performing his duty as a state officer contributed positively to deepening his understanding of Shari’a and religion.

8. Regarding religious matters, he did not quarrel with the state or official ideology and simply focused on his duty.

9. He did not bother about what was said about him. He was busy only with training his students and doing his job. This can be considered as a factor shaping his understanding of religion and life.

10. Lastly, we can say that his vision about what is religious and what is holy for religion surpassed that of his time.

Thus, Kenan Rifai as a Mathnawi commentator is a gnostic with a Rūmī-like disposition, and an attained man of passionate and compassionate love. Kenan Rifai is a religious gnostic that deals with religion from the level of benevolence based upon the understanding of gnostics such as Rūmī. Such a perception of religiousness contains degrees of Islam and Faith, however, he is not restricted with previous degrees as he has attained the level of benevolence. That is why he sometimes has such potency and competence transcending his time, which may not be understood by those at lower degrees as what he says is said from the level of absolute Beauty. Every era has its recipients of the beautiful and the Beauty.

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ON WOMANHOOD

Simnānī (d. 1336), while commenting the surah of Tabbat, tells that the kindling of the hell fire of the continually cursed Abū Lahab is carried by his wife, who represents the ego’s base desires and wishes. Just as the ego puts obstacles in the path of the human circumambulating the Ka’ba of the heart, so did Abū Lahab by use of his wife put up thorns and thickets around the Ka’ba in order to prevent the Prophet Muhammad from circumambulating.²

Al-Ghazzālī also compares this world to a cunning, insidious, and man-deceiving woman; while she seems to be an arrogant and beautiful woman walking about in pride on the outside, she is in fact an ugly, scornful old woman on the inside.³

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Alongside these examples, Ibn `Arabī reminds us that the first oddness (fardiyye), intrinsic (dhâti) manifestation of God the Truth that is the source of creation, and the word “dhât” which signifies the Muhammadan Reality (haqqa Muhammadiya) wherein all realities are gathered, is feminine.\(^4\) In the Gabriel Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad explains ihsân (beneficence) as “worshipping as if seeing Allâh”, meaning the person is placed right in front of Allâh through the use of the second person pronoun. Here Ibn `Arabī, means that next to the masculine ‘you’ pronoun, “I can sometimes use the feminine pronoun, taking into account the femininity of the Essence (dhât)”.\(^5\) According to him, “If the only superiority of femininity had been the giving of words; essence and attributes (dhât and ṣifât) (both of which are feminine) to Allâh, this situation would have been enough to mend the hearts of women broken by men who do not know the truth.”\(^6\) As a matter of fact, Sufis have used the term umm al-kitâb (the mother of the book) synonymously with the Muhammadan Reality.\(^7\) Al-Ghazzâlî also reminds us of the Prophet Muhammad’s words where he had said that the mercy Allah has towards His servants is greater than the mercy of a mother to her child.\(^8\)

Within these comparisons ranging from the most negative to the most positive, woman becomes sometimes the world, sometimes the ego, sometimes the perfected human being and love, meaning the joint symbol of these seemingly opposite tellings, all of which have been created as mirrors of the form (sura) of Truth. As Kenan Rifai also states, in the hadith al-qudsî Allâh ordained, “I was a secret treasure and I wanted to be known” and thus created the mirror of the world in order to contemplate His own beauty and saw His Beauty (jamâl) in the mirror of the universe. The spirit of this mirror of the world is the perfected human being.\(^9\)

\(^4\) Najmuddîn al-Kubrâ also relates the level of dhât as the mother of all attributes and the level which brings them all together, cf. Fritz Meier, *Die Fawâîî al-ĝamâl wa-fawâîî al-ĝalâl des Naĝm ad-dîn al-Kubrâ* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1957), 46.


\(^7\) The mother who gathers the realities of all of the created within herself, the reality of realities, see Henrik Samuel Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-`Arabî*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1919), 33.


\(^9\) Cf. Ken‘ân Rifâî, *Sohbetler* (pleasurel man), my homeland, my ecific or imagined beauty (İstanbul: Kubbealtî Neşriyâtı, 2000), 188.
Kenan Rifai uses the concept of womanhood by giving all these opposite meanings to it and tells that the concept of womanhood which is being used in relating Truth’s appearance and manifestation in the history of *taṣawwuf* is twofold: just as in the world one side is day, the other side is absolute night; just like the world, one side of womanhood is light while the other is darkness. In other words, one side is the animalistic side while the other side is the true face of womanhood, its spirit, its meaning.\(^\text{10}\) Cemalnur Sargut explains this distinction through the concepts of femininity representing the immature state of the soul (nafs), and maternity or true womanhood representing the soul who, through maturity, has given birth to the child of meaning, and thus met the meaning within herself.\(^\text{11}\)

**WORLD (ÂLEM)**

The Qur’an also speaks of the world as being two sided with one light and one dark; through expressions that seem opposites at first glance. In many verses, while on one hand the world is simply a deception and life on the world is just a game and a place of loitering, on the other, Allah says that the heaven and the earth and everything in between was created through the Real and calls out to the (His) Beloved, “turn thy vision [upon it] once more: canst thou see any flaw?” (Q 67:3)

In his discourses, Kenan Rifai sometimes compares the world to a woman who is coquette, heart-captivating, someone who has not fulfilled her role in a husband-wife relationship; who has she not shopped with but then shaken off? What joy has she given that was not followed by sigh and moan? In *Kenan Rifai and Muslimhood in Light of the 20th Century*, Kenan Rifai is reported to have said, “The world is cheating you as well. Those bow-shaped eyebrows, the arrow-like dimples, they all sink into you as well and subjugate you to her.”\(^\text{12}\) Another passage states, “The world is such a hussy woman that she has not carried out the duties of a husband-wife relationship, and like a cat, eats what it births.”\(^\text{13}\)

On another occasion, however, he speaks of life on this world as being the greatest blessing. When one of his students complained by saying

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10 Cf. *Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler*, 13, 268, 482.
12 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., *Ken’ân Rifâî ve Yırminci Asırın Işığında Müslümanlık* (İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyatı), 2003, 442.
“life is torture” he responded by saying: “Why? On the contrary, life is a very beautiful thing, it is the greatest thing given to humans.” When his student continued with his claim by saying, “But everyone is complaining about their lives”, he responded by saying, “This is true for those who are not with Allah. But for those who carry that joy in their hearts, there is nothing more beautiful than life.”

In one of his poems he writes:

*Adem is the image of the God the truth in the world of possibilities  
Where did you think the more beautiful would be, in heaven?  
How beautiful everywhere is, the source of beauty, human beauty  
Did you think that this beauty was in the heavenly beauties and youths?*  

Thus saying, he states that this world of possibilities, meaning this world was created in the image of God the truth, and thus has the most beautiful image and that each and every drop of it is a source of beauty. According to him, the only thing that shows the beautiful as ugly or bad is only his/her ego, his/her being of the human. He writes, “Giving up on worldly ambitions means happiness showing its face. When ambition leaves, worldly life also dies down. What the dervishes mean when they say one mantle one morsel is contentment and surrender, not going hungry or going about naked... Eat, drink, travel, walk, dress... If you find that morsel in all that you eat and wear the mantle of nothingness beneath those clothes, why should you give them up? Suffice it that you see the manifestation of God the Truth in them.”

**THE SOUL (NAFS)**

Kenan Rifai says that the *nafs* is a great blessing that has been given to humans. In the Qur’an, it is stated, O mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate.” (Q 4:1) If Eve had not been created and man settled with woman, he would only have dove into divine manifestations and could not have been settled with anything else. Just as Eve appeared and Adam found solace in seeing her in front of him, the abstract spirit

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14 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., *Ken’ân Rifâî*, 446.
came to the heart and birthed the *nafs* through matrimony, and thus the spirit became subject to the *nafs*.

He writes: “When Allah ordained, „O thou human being that hast attained to inner peace!, Return thou unto thy Sustainer, well-pleased [and] pleasing [Him]” (Q 89:27-28), it is in reference to the feminine (female) *nafs*. Just as with everything, the reality of *nafs* is Allāh. The *nafs* in it is bad conduct. When it has shed these, the spirit takes pity on the *nafs* it has tormented and is saddened by what it has done. In other words, if it is perfected, of course it respects its female. But if it is ignorant then it becomes the dominant one. Woman is essentially man’s fellow traveller, someone who shares his mood, his confidant, his very self.”

Kenan Rifai, when noting the difference between the perfected person who recognizes womanhood’s real face and meaning and the ones who look at a woman with the immature and desirous state of their nafs, writes: “Ibn ʻArabī says: Whosoever shows affection towards woman as of his knowledge, his familiarity with the light and the reality of the Beloved, then this person has shown affection towards Allāh. But whosoever shows affection to woman because of his natural desire, that woman becomes a dry and spiritless form for this affection; the true spirit cannot be seen or known in that form. The Prophet Muhammad’s saying should also not be forgotten: I have not left you a greater fitna after myself than woman; their tricks are enormous/vast. What we are talking about is womanhood’s real face, its spirit, its meaning.”

Qur’an talks about love’s power of perfecting the human’s soul through the persona of Zulaikha in the Chapter of Yūsuf (Joseph). As Qushayrī relates in his Risāla, Zulaikha had at first slandered Yūsuf by saying to her husband: “What ought to be the punishment of one who had evil desires on [the virtue of] thy wife - [what] but imprisonment or a [yet more] grievous chastisement?” (Q 12:25), but later confessed when her love had reached its ultimate peak (Q 12:51). Abū ʻAlī interprets this state as “love choosing the beloved over the self?” Kenan Rifai speaks of the exalted station Zulaikha reaches through her love, which makes

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20 Ken’ân Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 482.
her forget herself and shows her the beauty of her beloved wherever she looks in the following way: “Zulaikha had named everything from below to above Yūsuf and only found solace in remembering this while among her confidants and hid her Yūsuf within them...Thus whatever she said of praise was because of her reaching Yūsuf, and whatever she said of disparagement was because of his distance and separation. If she was hungry, she would be filled by reciting his exalted name, if cold, she would warm up by remembering him, if she had troubles they would turn into contentment and joy, gladness. In this way Zulaikha was Zulaikha.”

In another instance he speaks of the nafs reaching spiritual life by comprehending its nothingness and powerlessness through commenting on another story of Zulaikha’s: “Zulaikha had gotten old and wasted away from her separation from Yūsuf. One day she could not bear it anymore and sat with complete helplessness near a spot where Yūsuf would pass. And indeed, when Yūsuf was passing by, he looked at her with eyes of compassion and affection. After this incident, Zulaikha became beautiful again and found freshness and liveliness. Thus to those who recognize their nothingness by knowing their helplessness, spiritual Yūsuf and the spiritual beloved look upon them with compassion and affection, they are revived with the good life and that person is then forever and in both worlds in the shadow and protection of the Friend.”

Kenan Rifai says that he regards the entirety of the universe as the result of Allāh’s manifestation through the desire found in “I was a hidden Treasure and I loved to be known” and that the point of coming to this world is to learn humanity and beautiful conduct (edep), and that whatever we gain, we will gain from this school of gnosis, that is this world. The knowledge that will be studied here is that of “Lā ilāha illallāh”, there is no god but God, meaning the knowledge of knowing that there is nothing/no existence other than God the Truth, that this is the only doer and the only purpose, and to see God the Truth everywhere and to know that everything comes from Him.

“...this world is a book full of wisdom and meaning. It is a holy book. To those who see the meaning and wisdom hier, this world is a para-

22  Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 264.
23  Reference to Q 16:97: As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds, and is a believer withal - him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life and most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did.
24  Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 267.
dise but for the hearts of those which are deprived of seeing this, it is a dungeon of troubles and place of worries and sorrow for their hearts.

To those who are duped by the passing joys, the fortunes, the pomp and rank of this world, this world is a house of tribulations. But for those who—even if it is not physically passable—pass by it with their hearts, it is a place of blessing.

To those who see Allah’s majesty and grandeur everywhere, who know that Allah is the one who has the order, the power, and the strength, and that humans are weak helpless and who fixate their hearts only on Allah, it is a place of happiness. To those who see what happens everywhere with an eye of learning lessons and knowledge, it is a house of wisdom.”

Ibn ‘Arabi says that woman is made beloved to perfected human beings and that beautiful smell is attached to the name of Raḥmān (the Merciful) as in the hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad, “I am finding the breath of the Merciful.” The person who truly senses the beautiful smell in anything is truly an inheritor of the Prophet Muḥammad, because even if that smell is naturally perceived as bad and ugly by others, it is beautiful due to its divine quality.

According to Kenan Rifai, there are no enemy in this world, only opposites. “How happy for the eye, that it has passed through the opposition of things and dove amazedly into contemplation of the grandeur and glory of unity.”

THE MANIFESTATION IN WOMAN AND LOVE

Like Ibn ‘Arabi, Kenan Rifai also suggests that the feminine nature actually comprises both femininity and masculinity: “Just as nature is the doer (active) in terms of its true reality, that nature is also passive due to the manifestation and establishment of the divine names in it.” Ibn ‘Arabi also indicates that Eve was created from Adam and thus has dual provisions: These are masculinity due to her origin and indirect femininity. In this sense, Eve is counted as being metaphorical (mutashābih: having more than one meaning). Because humanity is

25 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 376, 510-511.
27 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 227.
28 Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 249.
the sum of masculinity and femininity.\textsuperscript{29} If humans who have deepened their knowledge learned the commentary of metaphorical verses (Q 3:7), this learning is not through their own thought and work, but through Allāh’s proclamation. Because knowing the metaphorical is not something the intellect can achieve by itself without there being divine declaration.\textsuperscript{30}

Speaking about the concept of womanhood in general and the manifestation in woman reveals the direct relationship with the understanding of “seeing God the truth in the created” in taṣawwuf. Rūmī states that only the sound eye will see the principle. (asl) while the cross-eyed one will see the consequence of the principle (fer) and not the principle.\textsuperscript{31} This keen and true sight is the reason for the creation of the world. If there were not eyes that saw the divine sovereignty, there would neither be the heaven nor would the earth smile. The meaning of the “If it were not for you” (law lāka) hadith informs that the matter is for the sharp eye that sees the principle of everything.\textsuperscript{32}

Although all of the created are with Allāh’s names and attributes, it is not for every eye to see this. The eye that cannot see God’s Beauty (jamāl) cannot be called an eye. It is blind. Seeing Jamāl can only happen by not covering the light of discernment with the finger of ego. This is the purpose of coming to the world. If this could have happened in the other world, what need would there have been to come to this one?\textsuperscript{33} The mirror of the heart should be cleaned of the rust of differentiation and everything other than Allāh, of Truth, so that the images of divine attributes can show themselves through this mirror.\textsuperscript{34}

Kenan Rifai describes this state through the concept of manifestation of attributes\textsuperscript{35}: “As the wayfarer travels on his/her path and contemplation, he/she comes to understand that he/she is a mirror and that all of creation is also a mirror; that the attribute which is seen from him/her

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya, IV:84.
\textsuperscript{31} Cf. Masnavi, volume 5, couplet 1709.
\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Masnavi, volume 6, couplet 1660-61.
\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 481.
\textsuperscript{34} Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’ân Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtıraları, ed. Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya (İstanbul: Nefes Yayıncılık, 2003), 85.
is from Truth Most High, but that this attribute manifests depending on the color and capability of what is seen. For example, the polished, rusty, broken, black, white, green mirrors reflect an exceptional beauty depending on their own abilities. Likewise, just as water takes on the color of the cup into which it is poured, so does manifestation appear in colors and varieties, like water poured into red or green cups. This means that the original truth is one, single, but becomes many and varied depending on the capability, predisposition, shape, and color of those favored with manifestation.”

When asked by one of his students about Yunus Emre’s verse, “Come from the facade to the attribute, you will find purity on the journey”, he answered in the following way: “Allah created man in His own image. But this does not mean the outer form. It means that Allah created man with His attributes. So pass on from that outer form so that you can reach purity on the road.”

According to Kenan Rifai, this view can only be won through love of Allah, and the person who cannot reach this true love is condemned to stay in the prison of their body forever on this world. Love is the only teacher on the path of transforming human beings into real humans. “Love is above everything, above dhikr and prayer. If prayers are done without love they are useless. What a grand difference there is between the prayer done with love by seeing the beauty of God (Jamāl) as opposed to the one done because of Allah’s orders.” Kenan Rifai indicates what Ibn ’Arabi points out when saying, “Love is what manifests in all the beloved which is apparent in the eyes of all the lovers”, that the entire universe, whether sublime or inferior, has been created from love and for love, but that everyone loves the beautiful attributes that are reflected onto the mirror appropriate to their state and capability and busy themselves with that one. Just as how whoever looks into the mirror sees their own reflection, the lover’s pull towards their beloved also turns back into their own form. He calls the love of those who cannot understand that their love goes from themselves to themselves in reality, meaning that this love actually belongs to God the truth and the created, as metaphoric love. Every

36 Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 439; cf. Kâzım Büyükkaksoy, Ken’ân Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtrraları, 49.
37 Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 617.
38 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 233.
39 Ibid., 232.
40 Ibn ’Arabi, al-Futûhât al-Makkiya, II:326.
41 Cf. Kâzım Büyükkaksoy, Ken’ân Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtrraları, 36.
water searches for a path to the sea, but they do not always find it.\textsuperscript{42} It is only through a perfected human being’s guidance that it is possible to abandon worldly restrictions and love of its provisions, to turn from the partial to the whole, that is, to Allah who is the possessor of all names. Such people “have known that this relative beauty (jamal-i mukayyed) is the veil of the face of the Beloved.”

According to him, the feature of men on the path of Truth is that of not finding solace in anything but the love of Mawlâ and to not be busy with anything other than Him.\textsuperscript{43}

Love is a teacher that separates the human from the world’s passing joys\textsuperscript{44} and shows that what s/he sees is an imagination.\textsuperscript{45} By saving humans from their individual and passing existences and raising them towards maturity, love is the “binoculars of the eyes of the intellect, and there is no beauty that cannot be arrived at with eyes that have been empowered with love.”\textsuperscript{46} What sees Beauty (Jamāl) is not the light of intellect, it is the light of love.\textsuperscript{47} Love of Allāh leaves nothing besides its essence and love within the body and thus that person no longer has any relations left with egoistic desires, and this state cannot be found through metaphorical intellect or understanding.\textsuperscript{48} The more perfect a person is about outer sciences, the less their ignorance is; however, their doubt is not lessened, and instead, possibly increased. Inner knowledge occurs through the eye of certainty (‘ayn al-yaqīn).\textsuperscript{49} Kenan Rifai also describes gnosis (ırfān) as seeing the body as one. Seeing the body as one means to reach that “light”. And the one who reaches that “expanded light” [the light that has spread everywhere] can no longer see their body. Gnostic means to be someone who has ripped through all the dark stages who has left conceit and became a witness to God and who no longer has anything of themselves left.\textsuperscript{50} Creatures and all of this created world are like a curtain to (God’s) absolute beauty. In order

\textsuperscript{42} Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 204.
\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’ân Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtıraları, 36.
\textsuperscript{44} Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 230.
\textsuperscript{45} “Love is the universal teacher, the union of beloveds for humans/Love informs them that all these existences they see are a fantasy” (Ken’ân Rifâî, İlähiyât-ı Ken’ân, 105).
\textsuperscript{46} Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 234.
\textsuperscript{47} Cf. Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 615.
\textsuperscript{48} Cf. Kâzım Büyükaksoy, Ken’ân Rifâî’den Mesnevî Hâtıraları, 387.
\textsuperscript{49} Cf. Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 387.
\textsuperscript{50} Cf. Ibid., 565.
to have the good manners of Abū Bakr as he stated when this curtain opened for him: “I have seen nothing in which I did not see Allāh,” can only happen by dying before dying.\textsuperscript{51}

Kenan Rifai says the following: “Prophets and saints witness God through appearances. Whatever beauty they see, they see the manifestation and beauty of God in in the mirror of their bodies. As Ibn al-Fārīdh states, ‘the beauty of each beauty has been borrowed from the beauty of that Revered One.’ When it is like this, those of knowledge see God’s absolute beauty in the relative beauty, and find it to be the manifested light of God’s brilliancet. Rūmī explains this state in the following ways in the Masnavi: ‘Women prevail over men of intellect. Ignoramuses defeat women’, and also, ‘Woman is a light reflecting the beauty of God on earth, virtually, she is not created, she is the Creator (Hâlik)’. In another place he states: “God is supposedly seen through this thin veil’.”\textsuperscript{52}

Kenan Rifai says that the concept of “those who believe without associating partners to God ” in the Quran, express this kind of view and lovers,\textsuperscript{53} “faith without associating partners to God means; what I see is one, what I love is one, what I worship is one. And this is only the purview of lovers.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{UNDERSTANDING OF WOMAN AND TASAWWUF}

Samiha Ayverdi’s determination of the fact that Kenan Rifai’s understanding of woman was not very far from his understanding of tasawwuf in terms of its essence, can easily be understood from all these statements.\textsuperscript{55} His understanding of tasawwuf is based on the principle of seeing God the Truth in all of the created and thus, loving all. Samiha Ayverdi describes him as a sufi who is in transaction with a name of Allah in each particle and who ascribed this transaction to his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Cf. Ibid., 249.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 481.
\item \textsuperscript{53} “And why should I fear anything that you worship side by side with Him, seeing that you are not afraid of ascribing divinity to other powers beside Allah without His ever having bestowed upon you from on high any warrant therefor? [Tell me,] then, which of the two parties has a better right to feel secure--if you happen to know [the answer]? Those who have attained to faith, and who have not obscured their faith by wrongdoing--it is they who shall be secure, since it is they who have found the right path!” (Q 6:81-82)
\item \textsuperscript{54} Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., \textit{Ken’ân Rifâî}, 488.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., \textit{Ken’ân Rifâî}, 228.
\end{itemize}
daily life.” He speaks of tasawwuf as the third type of glasses which is useful for both the near-sighted and the far-sighted because it combines them. While using the near-sighted glasses to see the far and the far-sighted to see the near spins the head, the third glasses are not like this: “Those who only want to see the world, the shape, the material are not able to see the afterlife, the meaning, the spirit. And for those who want to see only the hereafter, it is not possible for them to see the world. But the human should have such glasses that viewing the world, meaning the outside, should not prevent them from seeing the meaning, and seeing the meaning should not prevent them from seeing the shape.” According to him, the basis of love and faith are to unite God the Truth with the created, to see God the Truth through the created, and to love people as God the Truth.

In the Masnavi, Rûmî relates these three states through the verses, “One man sees the moon clearly, another sees the world in complete darkness, while a third sees three moons in one place.” According to Kenan Rifai, the first person sees the moon in the sky, clearly, just as it is. The second person, however, cannot even see the world because for them it is in complete darkness, let alone see the moon, because there is sickness and disasters within their eyes. Thus they are bereft of the blessing of seeing. The third one has such sharp eyes that they are able to see the three moons all at the same time. Ones who are of this sight are at the level of jam al-jam and are those who have reached the secret of seeing God in three states at once. These three states of God are Essence (dhât), Creator (Ḫâliq), and created (maḫlûq).

Every material being has come into existence to allude to spirituality. Kenan Rifai says that love which is the attribute of God first manifested in woman, in this polarization—which Qur’an in a few verses draws attention to—the creation of the human being as a pair with man and woman—which exists since the beginning of creation. Adam fell in love with Eve because he saw the appearance of love in her and thus the Prophet Muhammad said: “Woman has been made beloved to me.” Man’s pull toward her is also because she has been blessed with love.

56 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 165.
57 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 220.
58 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi, Dost (İstanbul: Ayverdi Enstitüsü Neşriyatı 2007), 93.
60 Cf. Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 82.
61 Cf. Ibid., 322.
62 Cf. Ibid., 13.
Rūmī’s acceptance by saying “woman is the light of God the Truth, she is not created but more like a Creator” is due to woman distinctively reflecting the creative force that is the meaning of life and the universes. It is as if God the Truth has manifested through a very thin curtain.63

As Ibn 'Arabī states, before the Prophet Muhammad no other prophet had said “woman has been made beloved to me.”64 The person who knows the value and secret of woman does not act like an ascetic in loving them. To the contrary, loving them is part of the maturity of a knower. Love for woman is a prophetic inheritance and a divine love. Prophet Muhammad, by saying “woman has been made beloved to me”, has attributed his love to coming from Allah.65

“Just as seeing woman as just a tool to satisfy sexual pleasures and desires and thus to regard her as sinful is the result of a simple and primitive mindset, regarding her as a medium or a bridge to reach the essence, the reality of the true Beloved and thus to respect her is the expression of a mature view, and it is this view that has found its perfection in Islam.”66

SEMIHA CEMAL

Kenan Rifai says that every created is a mirror to an image of Allah’s power, majesty, and any one of His names, and that the perfected human being--albeit seeming to be a small universe--is actually an immense and grand universe who has gathered everything within themselves in meaning. This human is a mirror to the light of the sun of the Muhammadan reality and is a locus of manifestation of Allah’s essence and attributes. Whether lofty or lowly, the greatest desire of all created is the Muhammadan light found in the heart of the perfected human being.67 While the existence of a perfected human being is a perfected mirror within which everyone can see their own capability, the perfected humans yearn and ask for the lightened mirrors wherein their own meaning which is God’s light, is reflected. In Sultan Veled’s words, the Prophet Muhammad had also said, “I miss speaking with my brethren so much” and, pointing to Uways al- Qarānī in Yemen, also said, “the

63 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 237.
64 Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya, I:145
66 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 238.
67 Cf. Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 518.
breath (smell) of the Merciful is coming to me from Yemen”. Just like this, Junayd, Shiblī, Bayazid were also seeking for such a hidden man of God. Because seeking them meant in reality to be seeking Allah... What this person is searching for is not a place of light and heat but the very sun that is diffusing that light. Kenan Rifai says, while expressing his yearning for the beauties that will reflect his own love wherever he looks and the beautiful illuminated hearts: “I like instruments, if they sing of me, I like words, if they speak of me, I like the beautiful, if it tells of me, if it loves me! What would I do with the beauty that is not my meaning, that does not speak of me? I must see my meaning in front of me, and I love it wherever I see it. I love the uncloaked love.”

He wants to see mirrors who reflect what they have learned by living it, and calls out, “Even the sun and the moon look at themselves in still waters. Is it not my right to search for polished and pleasant illuminated hearts?” However, just as, not all beauty is for all eyes, everyone receives a different kind of pleasure from the beloved; as stated in the expression “everyone looks and sees a beauty”, everyone admires whatever amount of beauty they can see within it. It cannot be expected that the water a thimble can hold to be the same as that of a cup, a pitcher, a pool, a lake, and finally, a sea.

The book Kenan Rifai and Muslimhood in Light of the 20th Century was published in 1951, a year after the passing away of Kenan Rifai in 1950, wherein Samiha Ayverdi describes her teacher. Right after the section “Tasawwuf and Understanding of Love”, Samiha Ayverdi also has another section about his understanding of women and has combined this section with Semiha Cemal, whom she characterizes as “an abstract spirit more than a human”. For Samiha Ayverdi, “she was a passionate lover spreading the smell from the fragrance of the Merciful to her beloved. It is not always Uways al-Qarānī of Yemen who trickles the fragrance of the Merciful from their beauties. When necessary, this young and beautiful girl also fulfilled the necessity of this privilege from where she stood.”

69  Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 231.
70  Sâmiha Ayverdi, Dost, 65-66.
71  Cf. Ken’ân Rifâî, Sohbetler, 96.
72  Cf. Ibid., 391.
73  Sâmiha Ayverdi, Küplüce’deki Köşk (İstanbul: Ayverdi Enstitüsü Neşriyatı, 2006), 120-2.
Semiha Cemal was not the only woman whom Kenan Rifai raised to maturity as a spiritual teacher. In his experience, woman was a more available intermediary, a more productive source for the give-and-take of thoughts, feelings and faith and womanhood, for those who could truly find that level of womanhood, was a truly great level and the one who found it was at a very high state. As Semiha Cemal explains, for him, woman did not have a specific or imagined beauty; Kenan Rifai’s exaltation of woman was because of her being love’s place of appearance. Kenan Rifai states: “I am not the slave of a beautiful face, perhaps all beauties are a light of my Beloved’s. I am enamored of that light. Otherwise, my grandfather is a breaker of idols.” He also says: “Everlasting, real love is what has pulled me away from the passing joys of this world since I began to feel myself and is the beloved who has kept me from giving my heart to anyone other than myself.”

Prior to entering Kenan Rifai’s tutelage and teaching, Semiha Cemal had been withdrawn, imprisoned within individual and small happinesses and pains, unaware of the points where she was employed as a human, and who was a beautiful, haughty, indifferent and typical aristocratic child. After her training, she became a bright mirror who showed him himself through her love and kept him aware of his existence and, as Samiya Ayverdi explained, “she became, throughout her life, her teacher’s most competent and brightest but always humblest interpreter”. As an expression of this identification, Kenan Rifai says the following when he comes to Semiha Cemal’s house one day: “I ask myself: where are you going? And I reply: To the idea within myself; just as I feel joy with my own thoughts when left alone with them, that is the joy I feel from you.” “I saw you, and I thought of the reflection of my expression.”

Ibn ‘Arabî states that seeing God the Truth in the Muhammadan faces and with the eyes of Muhammad is the most complete and best degree.
of seeing God the Truth; this level belongs to those who do not ascribe Divinity to aught beside God. One day, Kenan Rifai shows her a tree with great branches but whose every point has been surrounded by a green vine, to such a point that no emptiness remained and whose own leaves could no longer be seen, and said that this was the love tree. Love had completely surrounded it and left nothing of its own body behind; “the perfection of love is death.” According to Semiha Cemal, “love accepts no duality to such an extent that it cannot even tolerate the presence of the lover.” She says that she entered the world of love by “separating from the ones I love, my friends, my homeland, myself; anyone who can do away with themselves, let them come.”

In one part of her book called “Rose Bouquet” [Gül Demeti], a compilation of her essays published in various magazines, Semiha Cemal writes the following about her teacher whom she describes as the pupil of both worlds, “You, you do not belong to air, earth, water, or fire...you are not created.” This reminds us of Kharaqānī’s much-debated words, “The Sufi is not created.” In the verse from the Qur’an, the Egyptian women had become so enraptured by the details at Yūsuf’s sight and beauty that the previously dominant human nature within them had flipped and the women had looked with the annihilation of their humanity and said, for Yūsuf, “he is not no mortal man (bashar).” According to Hujwirī, while pointing to Yūsuf in this way the women had actually informed of their own states; it is because of this that the sheikhs of tasawwuf have said “Purity? (ṣafā) is not the attribute of the human being”. Hujwirī states, “Purity is the attribute of lovers. They are sun without clouds.” For this reason, Samiha Ayverdi described her cousin Semiha Cemal by saying “she was of love and pleasure (purity), and

85  Semiha Cemâl, Gül Demeti, 54.
86  Ibid., 27.
87  Ibid., 53.
88  Ibid., 52
89  Q 12:31: “Thereupon, when she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them, and prepared for them a sumptuous repast, and handed each of them a knife and said [to Joseph]: “Come out and show thyself to them!” And when the women saw him, they were greatly amazed at his beauty, and [so flustered were they that] they cut their hands [with their knives], exclaiming, “Allah save us! This is no mortal man! This is nought but a noble angel!”
“a spirit that took up form, or form that became spirit.”

According to Kenan Rifai, şafâ is a high station for those of reality, it is the level of those who see nothing but God the Truth in all that exists. But Semiha Cemal wrote in one of her essays, “Is there anything more awful than there being a feeling that does not look anything like truth or reality in a human? Is there still a smell of existence in me? While both stone and iron burn whenever, why am I still in this state?” “If those created who have been bestowed with the most blessings and yet are least deserving of these but still have not been able to erase their existence, they are more wretched than anything else. Their greatest wretchedness is their ego. In the divine power that covers my ears, eyes, all of my pores, my form and my spirit, is there still a voice that cries: ‘I’!? Oh Allâh! Crush it, destroy it!” Thus saying, she voiced the need and desire to continually go forward.

Rûmî compares a body that has not gotten rid of its ego to a warehouse within which is a mouse and thus where all of the grains of faith and sincerity are continually wasted. Kenan Rifai, in reference to Semiha Cemal says, “I have one pleasure, and that is to teach you wisdom (knowledge?). If wine is poured into a jug with a hole, it trickles and ends. I am not pouring these beautiful things into a broken jug, I am filling up your illuminated heart. You can rise up from under this burden with love; only love, always love.” Semiha Cemal asks, “What should I do in response?” He replies: “I do not ask for much from you, just know to throw your ego into the back. Do not be of those who are full after one sip! God’s messenger said, “O Allâh (O Lord?), we could not know your feats in the manner they deserved.” So you also never stop, keep going forward. Love me, love me so that I can love you too. But understand well what this “love me” means. Love me means to love all that I love, all humans, love, and Allâh.”

Semiha Cemal, expressing that the love for meaning which the human meets and loves through their murshid will carry them to immortality, writes, “A body that loves like mine cannot become earth; maybe I love so much in order to save my body from becoming earth. Even if I die,

91 Sâmiha Ayverdi, Râtîbe (İstanbul: Ayverdi Enstitüsü Neşriyatı, 2002). 63.
92 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 407.
93 Cf. Sâmiha Ayverdi, Dost, 44.
95 Semiha Cemâl, Aşk (İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1936), 84.
96 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’ân Rifâî, 214.
my love is strong enough to resonate throughout the centuries. I also received it from others; this is not something that began with me! I am connected to it with a spiritual wealth, a spiritual gentility that has been left to me as an inheritance from all of humanity that has come before. I will take this trust and convey it to future generations by enriching and nourishing it with my love.”

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97 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., *Ken’ân Rifâî*, 246.


An Evaluation of the book "Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî" in terms of the History of Sufi Literature

Ercan Alkan

In the history of sufi literature, the amount of works on the states and feats of the masters (the pīr) of tariqa takes an important place. In this writing style, not only the biography of the Pīr, but also the practical and theoretical matters of sufism are taken into consideration. By this way, these types of works come forward with the encompassing qualities of their contents and principles of the tariqa. The book named Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî published by Kenan Rifai in 1340/1924 carries almost all characteristics related to this style and has a big importance in recognizing and transferring the heritage of sufism. In this paper, we will briefly talk about the books written about the state and feats of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī, and then we will evaluate the mentioned book by Kenan Rifai in terms of its place in literature and its sources. Thus, we will try to put forth the content of the work in light of the theoretical and practical tasawwuf.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE LITERATURE ABOUT THE SUFI HAGIOGRAPHIES

The inspiration behind the publication of independent works on the states and feats of Tariqa founders plays a key role in understanding their

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content as well. Especially revealing in this regard is the introduction (sebeb-i te’lîf), the prologue, a regular feature in ‘tablākāt’ (biographical literature) and ‘manākib’ (hagiographical literature), the two exemplars of historiography. Among this type of work, Farîd al-dîn ‘Attār’s Tadh-kirat al-Awliyâ stands out with its comprehensive prologue, which provides a semi-theoretical framework of the genre. In the prologue, ‘Attâr contends that, except for the verses and the tradition, nothing compares in worth to the spontaneously uttered words of the Wise (Ārif):2

Because their words are not the results of rote memorization or “He said” but rather the yield of deeds and “state;” it is not from speech but from manifestations; it is not from repetition but from secret; it is not from acquired knowledge but from divine knowledge; it is not from listening but from enthusiasm; it is not from the realm of “my father taught me ( علممني أبي)” but from the realm of “my Lord educated me (أدبني ربي).”

After explaining in a sufi manner the nature and source of the words of gnostics, ‘Attâr then proceeds to give detailed and at times quite personal reasons that motivated him to pen Tadhkirat al-Awliyâ. Indeed, ‘Attâr’s statement of motivation essentially consists of statements that pinpoint the benefits of reading Sufi master’s words and deeds. To illustrate his point, ‘Attâr incorporates two questions posed to two Sufi masters. The first of these is directed to Abû ʿAlî al-Dakkâk, and asks: “is there a benefit to listening to saints (awliyâ)?” 3 The response to this basic question is as follows:

Certainly! There are two benefits: Firstly, if the listener is a seeker (tâlib), his/her aspiration (himma) gets stronger and his/her inquiry rises. Secondly, if the person sees selfhood in himself/herself, s/he breaks this pride and selfhood. S/he throws away this issue and the passion. These words show what the good and the bad is. If the person is not blind, then s/he witnesses himself/herself by this way.

The other question was directed to Junayd al-Baghdâdî, the sayyid al-tâifa, the leader of Sufis: “What is the benefit of stories and nar-

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2 Ferîdüddîn Attâr, Tezkiretü’l-evliyâ, trans. Süleyman Uludağ, (İstanbul: Kabalcı, 2007) 45. ‘Attâr explains why he gives such importance to the words of the Sufis through these sentences: “First, it weans off the human from this world, secondly it allows for keeping in mind the hereafter at all times, thirdly it brings forth the love of Allah in the heart of the human, and fourth, the one who listens to these words procures supplies for the infinite road to come.” Ibid., 48.

3 Ferîdüddîn Attâr, Tezkiretü’l-evliyâ, 46.
ratives, tales and feats about the sufis for the disciple (murīd)?" The response is as follows: 4

Every word they speak is a soldier in the army of Allah, who is mighty and majestic. 5 If the murīd’s heart becomes constricted, it is relieved and finds strength and help through that soldier. Almighty Allah’s verse of, “We tell you the news of prophets that will give perseverance to your heart” (Q 11:20), meaning, “O Muhammad! We tell you of the stories and feats of previous ones so that your heart can find peace and strength” is evidence of this.

As it is mentioned above, generally ʿAttār observes kalām (word) in three degrees: kalām Allāh (the Word of God, Qur’an), kalām Rasūl Allāh (the word of Prophet, hadiths) and kalām Ricāl Allāh (the word of Man of God). According to ʿAttār, the word of the spiritually arrived must be considered as the commentary of kalām Allāh and kalām Rasūl Allāh. From this aspect, both the commoners or the elites can benefit from these words. And he is also of the opinion that in the spiritual journey, on the spiritual path (sulūk), a certain amount of these works—that compiles their states and words—must be read like consistent daily prayers in order to advance through the stages, to reach the contentment of the illuminated heart and the coast of peace. 6 Because as is valid in the hadith ‘when the righteous are mentioned, mercy [and tranquility] arrives [in the illuminated heart].’

The history of the writings in tasawwuf—because of the reasons mentioned by ʿAttār and many like it—witnessed a gigantic literature compiling the states and words of the masters of Sufism. 7 Among them, it is possible to mention encyclopedic-biographical works in translation style, tariqa monographs, as well as independent works on the im-

4 Ibid., 47.

5 Alludes to the verse, “It is He who from on high has bestowed inner peace upon the hearts of the believers, so that - seeing that God’s are all the forces of the heavens and the earth, and that God is all-knowing, truly wise they might grow yet more firm in their faith.” (Q 48:4)

6 Feridüddin Attār, Tezkiretü’l-evliyâ, 48.

7 See Mustafa Aşkar, Tasavvuf Târihi Literatürü (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2006), 49-65; 145-174; 196-235 for a wider evaluation of the relevant literature based on type and period.

8 al-Sulamî’s Arabic, al- Harawi’s Persian works entitled Tabakât al-sūfiyya are among the earliest two examples of the tabakât genre in sufî literature. For a more general evaluation of the aforementioned works and their writers, see Aşkar, Tasavvuf Târihi Literatürü, 51-54; 57-58.

9 In general, we can give Sefine-i nefise-i Mewlewiyye which is more about the sufis of the Mawlawiyya, and Lemezât-i Hulviyye of the sufis of Halwatiyya as examples
portant personas\textsuperscript{10} and tariqa masters\textsuperscript{11}. As a matter of fact, Ahmad al-Rifāʾī is one of the masters (pīr) about whom many works have been written in terms of hagiography and and his feats.

I. THE WORKS ABOUT THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF AHMAD AL-RIFĀʾĪ AND LITERATURE OF RIFĀʾIYYA

In order to determine the content of Ahmad al-Rifāʾī’s feats in general and Kenan Rifai’s Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî in particular in literature—while keeping out general sources of history and biographies—we would like to mention two works belonging to the early period focusing independently on the hagiography of Ahmad al-Rifāʾī. The first work that belongs to the early period of writing is Sawād al-ʿaynayn fī manāqib Abī al-ʿAlamayn written by ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Rāfiʿī\textsuperscript{12} (623/1266) ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Rāfiʿī who is one of the authorities of the Shāfiʿī sect. This pamphlet, known as the oldest Ahmad al-Rifāʾī biography, was written in 588 (1192) ten years after the passing of Ahmad al-Rifāʾī, and was broadcast with the promotion and support of Abū l-Hudā al-Sayyādī in 1301(1884) in Egypt. The preface, which also includes the reason for writing this work starts with the following sentences:

A wise, pious, and friend of Allah, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Rahīm Ibn Bāwazīr al-Hadramī—may Allah benefit me with his prayers—asked me to write a succinct book about the feats of the revered Ahmad al-Rifāʾī. But this was a very interesting and surprising request, in the sense that I had already begun to compile portions of the feats of Ahmad al-Rifāʾī in the month of Rajab. But before the month of Rajab ended, I had postponed writing to be finished in the month of Shawwāl, with Allah’s permission. Before a week had

\textsuperscript{10} Ibn ʿArabī’s al-Kawkab al-durrī fī manākib Dhiʾl-Nūn al-Misrī and Muḥammad b. al-Munawwar b. Abī Saʿīd’s Asrār al-Tawhīd fī Makāmāt al-Shaykh Abī Saʿīd are among the beautiful examples of the mentioned type.

\textsuperscript{11} Bahdjat al-Aṣrār can be provided as an example, written about ʿAbd al-Kādir al-Djīlānī. See Aşkar, Tasavvuf Tārihi Literatürü, 202-203.

\textsuperscript{12} For his life and works see Bilal Aybakan, “Abdülkerim b. Muhammed Râfî”, Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam [DİA], XXXIV, 394-396. There is not much information on his Sufi side in the sources. In Idāh al-maknûn he is mentioned with al-Rifāʾī; despite being from a later period, it is worth mentioning as showing his belonging to the Rifâʾiya. For his Sufi side, see Mustafa Tahralı, “Ahmad Al-Rifâʾî Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre et Sa Tariqa” (PhD thesis, Paris-Sorbonne III, 1973), 47.
passed—may Allah’s grace fall on him bounteously—I saw the revered Ahmad al-Rifāʾī in a dream. In the realm of meaning, he said to me, “Fidelity in love exalts aspiration (himma).” I understood what was meant by these words. In the morning, ‘Ibn Bā-wazīr’s [request] letter reached me. I thus learned my lesson and spent all of my favors and time on this. And thus I compiled this condensed book on the feats and character of Ahmad al-Rifāʾī.”

After this paragraph-long introduction, there is place given respectively to Ahmad al-Rifāʾī’s lineage reaching back to the Prophet and the virtue of his lineage (p. 3); Ahmad al-Rifāʾī’s ancestors going back to Iraq-Basra and making it their home in 450 (1058) (p. 5); birth of Ahmad al-Rifāʾī in 512 (1118) (p. 6); his teachers and shaykhs from whom he learned the knowledge of the manifest (zāhir) and the knowledge of the hidden (bātin) (p. 6); his gnostic activities (p. 7); the sermons and meetings he managed (p. 7-8); the incident of kissing the Prophet Muhammad’s hand in Medina in 555 (1160) and the names of the people who were there with him (pp. 10-11); some of his miraculous deeds (p. 14); the reason behind his reputation as ‘Abu’l-ʿĀlamayn’ (p. 15-17), the announcement of the good news of his birth by the Prophet Muhammad in his uncle Mansūr al-Batāʾīhī’s dream forty days before his birth and his being taken to Shaykh ‘Alī al-Qārī al-Wāsīṭī for his spiritual education by the command of the Prophet (p. 18); literary value of his work al-Burhān al-muayyad (p. 23), some of his utterances (pp. 22-23); his will which he had written to ‘Abd al-samīʿ Hāshimī (p. 23); his pamphlet named Tarīk al-sāirīn ilallāh which contains some of his words about the characters of a wali (friend of God) (p. 23), and lastly, his transition to the realm of permanence in 578 (1182).

The second hagiography is the work Gāyat al-tahrīr fī nasabi qub al-ʿasr sayyidinā Ahmad al-Rifāʾī al-kabīr which was compiled by ‘Abd al-Azīz ibn Ahmad al-Dirīnī (d. 694/1295). The purpose of this work was to

وبعد فقد طلب مني الأخ الوالي العارف الشيخ عبد الرحيم بن باوزير الحضرمي تفعلي الله بدعواته أن أكتب له كتاباً مختصراً في مناقب الشيخ الأكمل، والغوث المبجل، فطلب الدوائر، أول الأقطاب الأمئة الأكبار، أوحد الائلاء، إمام الصلحاء، واحد الأمئة، سنده الأمئة، الذي يغزو إليه في المهمة ولي الله المغيث ب إذن الله، مولانا السيد الشريف أحمد أبو الغليمي رضي الله عنه، فكان هذا الطلب من أعجب العجب لأني شرعت في رجب الأصم بجمع بعض مناقب هذا الإمام الجليل، السيد الصناد الأصول، وقبل مضي شهر المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّثت وأخبرت الأمير إلى شوال إن أذن الله قلم يمر أسبوع حتى رأيت السيده المبارك المذكور علّة...
evaluate and correct the claims about Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s ancestors (generation), the following is written in the preface of the book:

Now, [speaking this and that about others and] maligning them, is not washed in Allah’s waters of repentance and contrition and if its marks are not erased through Allah’s forgiveness and fear, it will cause addiction. Speaking tactlessly of Allah’s true servants, His close friends, and wise walīs in this manner is especially part of this. This—may Allah protect us—is utter disappointment. Some people in the town of Nahariyya—may Allah’s forgiveness be upon that town and its inhabitants—who were caught up in the mischief of chairmanship and who spoke through delusions, claimed that Qutb al-Aʿzam Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s pure ancestry and noble lineage did not reach the ahl al-bayt (family of the Prophet). This claim was due to be his membership in the tribe of Banī Rifā. It was after I heard this in the year 631 that I wrote this booklet. Nevertheless I also tried to make sure that this was also a succinct pamphlet.¹⁵

Other than the information about Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s lineage which reach the Prophet and his family members (pp. 10-14), the pamphlet also include: Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s obeisance to the sunna of Prophet Muhammad (pp. 4-5); the incident of getting the Prophet’s hand out of his tomb and Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s kissing the Prophet’s hand; the names of the people who witnessed this incident and their narratives about this event (p. 6-9, 24-25); the characteristics of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s tariqa and this tariqa being on Junayd al-Baghdādī’s tariqa and natural disposition (p. 19-20); the passing of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī (p. 27).

With respect to their contents Sawād al-ʿaynayn and Gāyat al-tahrīr are texts of tariqa or belonging to a tariqa—meaning they both mention a definite pattern of the feats of a master of a tariqa—However, in our opinion they carry literary importance because of the writers being authoritative names in the fields of Islamic law and hadith. As a matter of fact, the writers coming from an academic environment appears to be reflected in the writing style of their works. In this respect, for instance, we can give the example of the mention of the narration chain of a feat,

¹⁵ أما بعد فإن عثرات اللسان من موجبات الهوان، إن لم تغسل بماء التوبة والإبادة إلى الله، وتمحى أثاره بالاستغفار والخوف من الله، سببا أن أطلق اللسان في عباد الله الصالحين، وأحببه المقربين، وأوليائه العارفين، فإن ذلك والعبادة لله من الخسران المبين، ولما بلغني عن بعض المتقنين برأساتهم الناطقين بيراساتهم سنة أحادي وثلاتين وستمئة سنة، صب الله عليها وعلى سائرها سجال العفو والغفران، أنه يقول نسبة الفتح الأعظم السيد أحمد الرفاعي في بني رفاعة القبيلة بورى بقطع نسبه الظهر، وحسبه الشريف الزاهر عن البيت النبوي، والمجد العلوي، عن غير علم ومن دون فهم فكتب هذه الكراسة، وجعلتها خلاصة كافية وزبدة وافية al-Dirini, Gāyat al-tahrīr, Cairo, 1315 [1898], 3-4.
an incident, or a word in both *Sawād al-ʿaynayn* and in *Gāyat al-tahrīr*. Even though their contents and narrations correspond to each other, Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s masters and teachers are mentioned more in *Sawād al-ʿaynayn* while in *Gāyat al-tahrīr* the ancestors of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī and the incident of the Prophet’s hand reaching out of his tomb is expounded on more. And both pamphlets have an important place as the main sources of the more than forty feats of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī.

Writings on the feats of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī go back to the beginning of the 12th century, and continued increasingly throughout various geographies and myriad languages in the following centuries. For instance, it is seen that the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century witnesses the feats of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī written in Ottoman Turkish and Rifāʿīyya literature being translated to this language. Alongside Kenan Rifai’s work, which we are presenting here, the works of Hocazâde Ahmed Hilmi, Hâfiz Nuri—teacher in the *Numune-i Terakki Mektebi*—and Kudsızade Kadri are among the principal pamphlets of this literature. Kudsızade Kadri’s contribution to the related literature must be mentioned. He is an important Ottoman bureaucrat who took on various tasks close to the Palace during the reign of Abdulhamid II and he is from Abû l-Hudâ al-Sayyâdî environment.


20 There is also an anonymous publication entitled *Manâkıbu man atâallâhe [atâ'a] lahu’l-usdu va’l-afâî Hazrat-i Sultân Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifâî* dated 1287/1870 on feats as well. For information on this feast and the pamphlet’s translation-writing see Ahmet Kaya, "1287 Tarihli Matbu “Seyyid Ahmed Er-Rifâî Menâkıbı”: Metin ve İnceleme” (master’s thesis, Marmara University, 2010).

21 In the *Sicill-i Osmâni*, the following has been recorded about his life: “Kadri Efendi, Abdülkâdir: From Aleppo. Became famous as Kudsızade and was municipal president there. He later came to Istanbul and was Bursa mektubcu (mektûbcu, chief provincial secretary) for some time, serving as “kâim-makâm” and “mutasarrif” afterwards, and becoming second kâtib of Mâbeyn-i Hümâyûn. Rising until “rutbe-i bâlâ”, he died in Shawwalali in 1309 when he was 66 due to intestinal tuberculosis. He is buried at Yahya Efendi’s lodge. His knowledge of poetry and mastery of it was perfect, and desiring of the publication of certain works, was litterateur and researcher.” Mehmed Süreyyâ, *Sicill-i Osmâni*, Istanbul, 1308, IV, 56.
contributed to Rifâ’iyya literature through translations of *al-Burhân al-muayyad, al-Macâlis* and *Rahîk al-kawthar*. He also translated Ahmad al-Rifâ’ī’s *Hikam* and *Nizâm al-khâṣ fi ehl al-îhtisâs* into Ottoman Turkish in the same period.

One of the figures who will doubtlessly be of interest to those who would write Ahmad al-Rifâ’ī’s biography and the history of the Rifâ’iyya is Abû l-Hudâ al-Sayyâdî (1850-1909). He was a well-known name in academic environments because of his closeness to Abdulhamid II and his activities in some political-social events in his period. But his contributions to Rifâ’iyya history have not been evaluated through the lens of literature of sufi history. From the end of the 19th century, through the effort of Abû l-Hudâ al-Sayyâdî and his environment, a wide literature about Rifâ’iyya Pîr (master) and the method and the spiritual courtesy of the tariqa was formed. For nearly all of the works published about Rifâ’iyya in this century, it is possible to see Abû l-Hudâ’s efforts in encouragement, protection, or support. As a matter of fact, between 1880-1908, nearly two hundred works were published in Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul, part of which belonged to Abû l-Hudâ. This number is quite high when considering the history of Ottoman publication. This situation can be seen as an indicator of Abû l-Hudâ’s political influence or charisma while also demonstrating the field of activity of the tariqa throughout Ottoman geography.

Literary value of the works written by Abû l-Hudâ al-Sayyâdî must be sought in his role in the compilation and transmission of the

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23 For partial translation and commentary see Ahmed er-Rifâî, *Hikemû’r-Rifâî*, trans. Muallim Nâçi, (İstanbul, 1304 [1887]), 64 p.


accumulated works related to Rifāʿiyya that had been scattered through seven centuries. The content that had been compiled and transmitted to those coming after contain hagiography and feats of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī26, compilation of his works and sayings27, an evaluation of his views on tasawwuf, the main rules of Rifāʿiyya28, the detailed history and primary people of the tariqa29, a sub-branch of the tariqa called the al-Sayyādiyya and biographies, sayings, and views30 of the shaykhs in this branch. One of the most effective texts31 on the literature by Abū l-Hudā al-Sayyādī is his book about Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s feats named Kilādat al-djawāhir. Abū l-Hudā al-Sayyādī says that his book is unique and that no other exists like it; when compared with similar books, he seems correct. This must be the reason that this book takes place among the main sources of Kenan Rifai’s related work. In order to show the place and the value of the revered Ahmad al-Rifāʿī in the chain of spiritual authority of the friends of Allah, the writer gives him the name ‘kilādat al-djawāhir’, meaning the valuable jewel on the necklace.32 And again as showing the value he confers to Ahmad al-Rifāʿī, he gives an introduction to his work by adding some characteristics before Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s name to bring to light his manner and conduct such as, ‘the unique ghawth [الغوث الأوحد], the only prominent qutb [القطب], the only prominent qutb [القطب]’
II. KENAN RIFAI AND HIS WORK ENTITLED
SEYYID AHMED ER-RIFÄI

Kenan Rifai published his work named *Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifäi* in 1340 (1924). This work is the most voluminous Ahmad al-Rifäi hagiography which was compiled in Ottoman Turkish in these years and has conserved this characteristic. The writer’s identity is written as “Ümm-i...”

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33 Ibid., 4-5. Abû l-Hudä al-Sayyädî considers the virtue and value of Ahmad al-Rifäi by his being fully obedient to the Prophet Muhammad: “It is established among all Sufis that he was the most perfected one in terms of following the Prophet Muhammad on beautiful conduct and path. This was such that his name, his state, his poverty, and his perfection were all in complete agreement with that of the Prophet.” Ibid., 6.

34 Hüseyin Vassaf’s eyewitness account of the writer and the work is important in terms of revealing the impact the work had during the time it was published: “An acceptable work on the Ahmad al-Rifäî was published with broad explanation in
Kenân Hankâh-ı Şerifi Seccâde-nişîni ve Maârif Nezâret-i Celîlesi Terakkiyât-ı İlimiyye Encümeni A'zâsından Kenan Rıfai” on the outer cover of the book which was published in Matbaa-ı Âmire in Istanbul, whereas on the inner cover, it is “Ümm-i Ken’ân Hankâh-ı Şerifi Secâde-nişîni Abdulhalîm Kenân”.35 This book starts with a short preface which also contains the names of reference books:

Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifâ‘î, ruler of the inner and outer worlds, has superior degrees made ever greater by the sharif and sayyid coming from the Revered Husayn. Because he is constantly granted boons coming from Allah Most High, he is never kept from spiritually rising at any moment. He is the foremost of the qutb in the world, the heart-opening crown of the great masters and the owner of two flags. It is in representing his name and to be of specific service to my religious and tariqa brothers that I was able to publish this book. I organized this book by both translating from and quoting the books *Kilâdat al-djawâhir* and *Kitâb al-Sayr va’l-masâi fi ahzâbi va awrâd al-Sayyid al-Ghawth al-Kabîr al-Rifâ‘î* and *Nizâm al-khâs fi abl al-ibtiasâs and al-Burhân al-muayyad.*

As can be understood from the statements above, the book has four main sources. The first of them is *Kilâdat al-djawâhir* which was written by Abû l-Hudâ al-Saâyâdî and we have mentioned its content in detail. As previously stated, the reason for preferring *Kilâdat al-djawâhir* as a reference text was due to its being the most voluminous Ahmad al-Rifâ‘î hagiography that had been written until that day. The second of the references is *Kitâb al-Sayr* which was written by İbrâhîm Efendi el-Râví al-Rifâ‘î who is pöst-nîshîn of the Baghdad Rifâ‘î lodge.36 In general, *Kitâb al-Sayr* is organized around two main themes, the first is on the 52 hizb and wind37 from Ahmad al-Rifâ‘î’s awrâd and the second is about subjects of spiritual discourse (suhba), dhikr (invocation), bîat (initiation as a discipline of a religious guide), riyâdât (mystico-ascetic


35 See Ken’ân er-Rifâ‘î, *Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâ‘î* (İstanbul: Matbaa-ı Âmire, 1340 [1924]). The work has been published after being transliterated to the Latin alphabet. See Ken’ân er-Rifâ‘î, *Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâ‘î*, ed. Mustafa Tahralî and M. Demirîci (İstanbul: Cenan Eğitim Kültür ve Sağlık Vakfî Neşriyatî, 2015). The quotations made in this paper are from this publication.


37 See ibid., 20-136.
practices), and khalwa (seclusion). The two other reference books for Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî written by the Kenan Rifai are the pamphlets which belong to Ahmad al-Rifâ’î and called al-Burhân al-muayyad and Nizâm al-khâs.

Briefly, the main topics of the book are as follows: the first part is Ahmad al-Rifâ’î’s lineage family, birth; the second part is his becoming initiated to the tariqa and his sulûk; the third part is his conduct, state and behaviors; the fourth his meetings, questions asked him during these meetings and his wise answers to these questions; the fifth is the important people from his family and well-known people who were in his meetings; the sixth about the manners and discipline in sulûk (spiritual journey) in tariqa; seventh part conversations, stages of sulûk, dhikr (invocation), riyâdât (mystico-ascetic practices), khalwa (seclusion); eighth part ceremonies in Rifâ’î tariqa; ninth part nicknames of Ahmad al-Rifâ’î; tenth part some poems of Ahmad al-Rifâ’î; eleventh part branches of Rifâ’îyya; twelfth part hymns and poems of Kenan Rifai; thirteenth part Kenan Rifai’s initiation to the tariqa; fourteenth part 52 werd and hizb belonging to Ahmad al-Rifâ’î. Leaving out the twelfth and the thirteenth parts, the book’s compiling style is compatible with Kilâdat al-djawâhir and Kitâb al-Sayr. In the related parts the quotations and the translations from both works are same in writing level but they are not the total translation of the mentioned parts. Kenan Rifai constituted his work’s main structure of the first six, ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters with translations and quotations from Kilâdat al-djawâhir and the main structure of the seventh, eighth and fourteenth chapters with translations and quotations from Kitâb al-Sayr. In this way, the book can be mentioned among the most beautiful samples of compilation-translation style in Ottoman Turkish, as mentioned by the writer himself. In this sense, in order to provide grounds for comparison, we would like to provide an example of a translation done by Kenan Rifai from Kitâb al-Sayr. In this way, the reader will also have an idea on the style of the work:

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38 See ibid., 137-189.

39 For a general evaluation about the sources of the work see Mustafa Tahralı, “Tak-dim”, in Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî, 9-12.

40 This part has been separately published as Ilâhiyât-ı Ken’ân with the music of the composed ones.

41 Although it has been placed in the same volume, the last part can be considered as a pamphlet independent from Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî. In point of fact, this chapter is composed by exactly quoting the relevant part of Kitâb al-Sayr.
Although it is not binding, the conditional and habitual riyādāts in this tariqa - in the opinions of the ahlāllah - for the cleansing of the nafs is nine. Four of these come once the wayfaring murīd reaches the level of “sergeant” and the remaining five is after entering the level of “leader”. It is necessary for the murīd to do dhikr by obeying the following types of conditions: by never leaving the dhikr of kalima al-tawhīd and always remembering its sacred meaning, with complete peace and removing thoughts from the heart, through a purification of clothes and the body and by renewing their ablution and closing their eyes to all but the vision of the qibla and sitting in a free space, by raising their voice so that only they can hear and to remove themselves from all but the Truth, by getting rid of all desires to show off and flinging themselves into the ocean of sincerity, by asking for favor from their shaykh and through binding their heart to the shaykh.42

Undoubtedly the most striking samples of the writing/ translating style are those where the author transfers the matter in question to their own language, that is, to sayings specific to the literature of Ottoman Sufism:

Folk of tahqīq state the following: what is meant by ‘tariq’ (path) is the illuminated heart. The traveller on this road, even the ‘murīd’, is the wayfarer on the path to the divine; meaning you! What is meant by this journey and search is to find oneself, and that is you as well! ‘To be on the tariq’ and to cover ground means to cover the self, meaning yourself. What is meant by ‘arrival’ is to arrive at yourself without the self. What is meant by ‘knowing’ is to know and understand your reality. What is meant by ‘finding’ is to see it through witnessing and to do so manifestly. What is meant by ‘being’ is to reach unity without duality, without any seams and any possibility of leaving; arriving at these happens

through the seeker asking for themselves within the existence of a murshid, meaning by leaving behind their own will and to submit themselves to the murshid in full, as a dead body in the hands of a washer (ghassāl).\textsuperscript{43}

Additionally, when considering the matters at hand, it can be said that there are instances where the oft-repeated phrases we previously mentioned are included within the translated text. As a matter of fact, in the part which talks about the benefits of seclusion, Kenan Rifai quotes and explains Niyāzī Miṣrī’s words beginning with the couplet, “If you want to be saved from the darkness of this nature / Come melt this form and life like lead with riyādāt”. The references made to Ismā‘īl Anqarawi’s \textit{Minhāc al-fuqarāʾ} in the work should also be evaluated in this context.

If we move from style to content, the matters mentioned in the work are about the sufi attitude of Ahmad al-Rifā‘ī and the main rules of tariqa. Along with this, while similar narrations are relayed about the same person in works of hagiography and feats, these narrations are mostly presented within the framework of technicalities and concepts put forward by the author. Thus, it must be kept in mind that when we are reading the work Ahmad al-Rifā‘ī written by Kenan Rifai, we are looking at a portrait of Ahmad al-Rifā‘ī that has been drawn within the scope of matters considered important to and preferred by the author. Kenan Rifai has given place to the theoretical and practical subjects of tasawwuf with the words and thoughts of the person in the biography. In this context matters that are at forefront can be classified as follows:

1. The definition of sufism\textsuperscript{44}, and the root of the word ‘sufi’\textsuperscript{45}, evaluations about the relation between sufism and faqr (poverty).\textsuperscript{46}

2. The relation of apparent (zāhir) - hidden (bātin), sharī‘a–haqīqa (reality ), tariqa - haqīqa;\textsuperscript{47} comments on the Qur’ān as having both zāhir and bātin.\textsuperscript{48}

3. Comments on some states and degrees of sufism such as asceticism\textsuperscript{49}, wara‘ (abstinence)\textsuperscript{50}, confiding intimacy\textsuperscript{51}, murāqaba (introspec-

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 163.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 119, 182.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 54, 57, 78.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 44, 61, pp. 117-121.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 123.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 50, 64, 83, 110.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 39, 43.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 43-44, p. 50.
tion)⁵², mushāhada (witnessing)⁵³, ‘ubūdiyya (servanthood)⁵⁴, mā’rīfa (wisdom)⁵⁵, mahābbat and ‘ishq (compassionate and passionate love)⁵⁶, tark (abandon) and vuslat (Union)⁵⁷, malāma (blaming self)⁵⁸, tawhīd (Unity)⁵⁹.

4. Proximity (qurbiyya)⁶⁰, the relationship between qurb al-farāiz and qurb al-nawāfil⁶¹, and explanations about the nafs and its stages.⁶²

5. The quality of the walāya (sainthood) and the views about characteristics⁶³ of the perfected human beings.

6. Comments on al-Husayn b. Mansūr al-Hallādj’s “I am the (divine) truth” (anā al-hakk)⁶⁴, Abū l-Ḥasan Kharaqānī’s “The sufi is not created”⁶⁵ and other approaches to shathiyya type utterances.

7. The subject and the content of Samāʾ; debates about Samāʾ.⁶⁶

8. Some matters about tariqa practices such as the meaning of tariqa, the manner of initiation to a tariqa⁶⁷, wirk and hizb⁶⁸, the mark of a dervish, the ādāb of being a dervish⁶⁹, the need felt for a shaykh⁷⁰, and being well-mannered in the presence of the shaykh.⁷¹

9. Some important statements for the history of tariqa such as; the masters (Pīr) of three tariqas which reach to Rifāʿiyya, namely Abu’l-Hasan

⁵² Ibid, 43.
⁵⁴ Ibid, 44.
⁵⁵ Ibid., 58.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 40, 61.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 49.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 105.
⁵⁹ Ibid., 50.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 51-52.
⁶¹ Ibid., 50.
⁶² Ibid., 78.
⁶³ Ibid., 40-41, p. 96.
⁶⁴ Ibid., 110-111.
⁶⁵ Ibid., 130, 163.
⁶⁶ Ibid., 46, 55, 66, 88, 89, 90, 91.
⁶⁷ Ibid., 36, 49, 93, 104.
⁶⁸ Ibid., 40, 42, 43, 54.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 46.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 112.
Al-Shādhilī, Ibrāhīm al-Dasūkī and Aḥmad al-Badawī, their chains of spiritual authority and their relations with Rifāʿiyya.72

While not considered in a systematic method through a certain classification and under headings connected to each other, in the matters mentioned, the author makes evaluations around the personality of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī while also reflecting the fundamental factors of the sufi environment and culture into which he was born. If we are to say it succinctly, in this work and in the texts which act as references for this work, the subtleties of the Sufi beautiful conduct took up form in the personality of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī; issues specific to the doctrine of tasawwuf found life in Ahmad al-Rifāʿī’s statements; the practices of the tariqa became visible through the state and actions of Ahmad al-Rifāʿī. In an environment of political and social tides in the agenda of the 19th century, where a search for tasawwuf was reviving, Kenan Rifai made a noticeable addition to the literature in this respect. His work is exemplary as an example of the translation style, yet also original by way of the connections drawn between the topics and the imagination of Ottoman Sufis.

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72  Ibid., 148-154.


Ken’ân er-Rifâî. *Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî*, İstanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1340 [1924].


The heads of *ilmiyya* organizations in the Ottoman Empire, *Sheikh-al-Islams*, have always been in close contact with the discipline of tasawwuf whether through their intellectual interest or through their initiatives. Accepted as the first sheikh-al-Islam, Molla Fenârı being a *pir* of especially the Rifaiyya order (Fenariyya) compared to other orders can be regarded as the beginning of the appearance of this situation.²

In our paper, we will begin by propounding on the concept of sheikh-al-Islam and summarizing the dimensions of the relationship between Ottoman sheikh-al-Islams and the world of tasawwuf and tariqas. Having set this out, we will then consider the Ottoman sheikh-al-Isl-

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1 Semih Ceyhan was born in Istanbul in 1973. He graduated from Marmara University Divinity School in 1995 and completed his graduate studies with his thesis called “Abdullah Salahi Uşşaki’s Wujud Risalas” in 1998. He received his PhD in 2005 with his study, “Ismail Anqaravi and His Commentary of the Mathnawi”. He engaged in language and area studies in Tunisia and the UK. He worked as a researcher at the TDV Center for Islamic Studies (ISAM) from 2005 to 2013. Beginning his work as an associate professor at the Marmara University Divinity School in 2013, Semih Ceyhan has a number of publications on the history of tasawwuf. These inlude: “İsmail Ankaravi, Hadislerle Tasavvuf ve Mevlevi Erkânsı” [Ismail Anqaravi, *Tasawwuf through Hadiths and the Mawlawi Way*], “Köstedilli Süleyman Şeyhi, 1001 Sufi (Bahrü’l-velâye)” [Sheikh Suleyman of Kostendil, 1001 Sufis], “Mesnevî’nin Sırrı [The Secret of the Mathnawi -with Mustafa Toptan]”, “Türkiye’de Tarikatlar, Tarih ve Kültür” [Tariqas, History, and Culture in Turkey].

lams who were initiated to an important persona of Istanbul tasawwuf life, Kenan Rifai. There are three sheikh-al-Islams who are mentioned in Kenan Rifai and Muslimhood in Light of the Twentieth Century and Sohbetler I: Sheikh-al-Islam Haydarizâde İbrahim Efendi (1864-1933), Dürrizâde Abdullah Efendi (1869-1923), Sheikh-al-Islam Nesîmî Efendi (?).3

There are three different anecdotes in the aforementioned sources. The first two are about the initiations of two of the sheikh-al-Islams, while the other contains information about the arrival of the news of the death of Haydarizâde to the Ummu Ken’an Dargah. The narratives are as follows:

“Sabiha Hanım (Dr. Server Hilmi Bey’s wife) was speaking about memories from when the semahane was open: This universe has seen what and whom! Those who came, and then those who left. How many sheikhs al-isams, how many chelebis, how many intellectuals, poets, even priests and patriarchs…They all came towards the end of their life and got initiated. They changed their worlds, and quickly too. Sheikh-al-Islam Nesîmî Efendi, Abdullah Efendi, Haydarizâde İbrahim Efendi, later the Ministry of Education accountant Şükrü Bey, the author of ‘Gülzâr-i Hakikat’ Râhimî Efendi, Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Paşa, poet Yusuf Ziya Bey, sheikhs, gentlemen, generals…There were numerous wonderful people, impossible to count.

The door opened just as Sabiha Hanım was finishing her sentence and our teacher walked in and tied everything up neatly by saying, ‘Those who took took, and those who found found.’ We mentioned patriarchs and sheikh-al-Islams. Yes, let us, from among the fortunate crowd who have put their lips on the knowledge and faith potion of Kenan Rifai and shown commitment and admiration, now consider the representatives of two different masses, one Muslim and the other a Christian, for example Sheikh-al-Islam Haydarizâde İbrahim Efendi and Chaldean Deputy Patriarch Monseigneur Abid as symbols. When Haydarizâde decided to enter among the circle of students around Kenan Rifai, some of his friends asked him, ‘Why do you want to initiate yourself to such a civilian, when there is someone like Esat Efendi (Esat Efendi was his time’s most knowledgeable and known Naqshi sheikh. Revered Sheikh Es’ad Erbili of the Kelami Dargah) who inherited the divine knowledge from his forebears?’ He answered this

3 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2003), 114; Ken’an Rifâî, Sohbetler I (İstanbul: Hülbe, 1992), 394.
question in the following way: ‘Yes, due to my position all sheikhs come and ask for obeisance. But I am going to Revered Kenan in order to offer obeisance. The information and knowledge that many sheikhs have, I already have. The knowledge of kal that Esat Efendi has I also have. But the person who has enchanted me, his knowledge neither Esat Efendi nor I have. His spirituality is what pulled me. And that part is an entirely separate issue.”

“When the news of former sheikh-al-Islam and our Teacher’s student Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi’s passing came, who had been in Baghdad for many years, someone from the assembly said, ‘For many years he had been away. Now he has rejoined the Truth. But still, one feels pain after the one who goes.’ Our Teacher said the following: ‘He rejoined wherever his essence is. The great man!’”

SHEIKH-AL-ISLAM

It is the title given to the head scholar of the learned class in the Ottoman Empire. In Mehmed the Conqueror’s decree on organizations, the sheikh-al-Islam is regarded as the president of the ulama. Installed as the Bursa judge for many years and also known as the pir of a branch of Rifa’iyya, Molla Fenâri’s appointment in 828 (1425) as mufti of Bursa is generally accepted as the beginning of muftis and sheikh-al-Islams in Ottoman history. Also called the “mufti al-anam”, the office of sheikh-al-Islam was also referred to as “mashihat” and “mashihat al-Islamiyya”. Zenbilli Cemâlî Ali Efendi’s (initiated to the Zeyniyya tariqa) period as sheikh-al-Islam during the reigns of Bayazid II and Selim I at the beginning of the 16th century for 23 years was a turning point in the authority and responsibilities of a sheikh-al-Islam; from this point on, tending to the religion and world of both Ottoman sultans and the people became the main duty of sheikh-al-Islams. In protocol, sheikh-al-Islams were equal to the grand vizier; they took on the responsibility of judges, muftis, teachers, etc., essentially the judiciary and ilmiyya institutions in the Ottoman Empire; had the authority to appoint people to important positions in the bureaucracy. In the later periods, they also became members of the cabinet.

During the five-century long history of the institute, approximately 131

4 For the first two narratives that complete each other in terms of content, see Şâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 114, 394.

5 Ken’an Rifâî, Sohbetler I, 340. For similar narratives to the first two in Sohbetler, see Ken’an Rifâî, Sohbetler I, 194; Ken’an Rifâî, Sohbetler II (İstanbul: Hülbe, 1992), 138.
sheikh-al-Islams were employed. The institution was abolished in 1924. The last sheikh-al-Islam was Medenî Mehmed Nuri Efendi. Later, the Religious Affairs Chairmanship was established, with lodges and zawiyas connected to it. In 1925, these institutes were abolished as well.6

OTTOMAN SHEIKH-AL-ISLAMS AND TASAWWUF

Be it due to their intellectual interest or through being initiated, sheikh-al-Islams have always been in close contact with the discipline of tasawwuf. Accepted as the first sheikh-al-Islam, Molla Fenârî being a pir of especially the Rifaiyya order (Fenariyya) compared to other orders can be regarded as the beginning of the appearance of this situation. Among the last sheikh-al-Islams, Haydarîzade and Dürrîzade being Rifai through their initiation to Kenan Rifai can be seen as an interesting fit. Sheikh-al-Islam during Selim I’s reign and initiated to the Halwati order and becoming an example by way of recording his thoughts on the principles of the institute of sheikh-al-Islam for those after him, Kemalpaşazâde writes in his Risala al-munira that shari’a is something that must be lived not just on the outside but internally as well, that this being lived internally is tariqa, that profit, inspiration, and wisdom will be given to those who are of shari’a and tariqa, and that it is not possible to speak of walaya or karama otherwise.7

Ottoman sheikh-al-Islams, with their identities as ulama, who took up this principle, always benefited from sheikhs of lodges. According to our observations, 54 of 131 Ottoman sheikh-al-Islams were ahl al-tariq. I believe that the Table 1 can lengthen through a more concentrated study of resources.8

6 On the institution of sheikh-al-Islam in the Ottoman Empire, see Mehmet İpşirli, “Şeyhülislâm”, Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam [DIA], XXXIX, 91; Abdulkadir Altunsu, Osmanlı Şeyhülislâmları (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1972); R. C. Repp, The Müfti of Istanbul: A Study in the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy (London: Ithaca, 1986); Murat Akgündüz, XIX. Asır Başlarına Kadar Osmanlı Devleti’nde Şeyhülislâmlik (İstanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 2002); Esra Yakut, Şeyhülislâmlik: Yenileşme Döneminde Devlet ve Din (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005).

7 İbn Kemal Ahmed Şemseddin Kemalpaşazâde, Risâletü’l-münire (Matbaa-i Cemâl, 1890), 9

8 On Ottoman sheikhs al-Islam’s relations with tasawwuf and tariqas see Reşat Öngören, Osmanlılar’da Tasavvuf (XVI. Yüzyıl) (İstanbul: Íz Yayıncılık, 2000) 342-355; Necdet Yılmaz, Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf (17. Yüzyıl) (İstanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2001), 453-456; Ramazan Muslu, Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf (18. Yüzyıl) (İstanbul: İınsan Yayınları, 2003), 599-602;
**TABLE 1**

OTTOMAN SHEIKH-AL-ISLAMS BELONGING TO AN ORDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Period of Service</th>
<th>Tariqa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Molla Fenârî</td>
<td>1424-1430</td>
<td>Awhadiyya, Abhariyya, Rifaiyya, Zayniyya, Kazeruniyya</td>
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<td>Çelebi Alâeddin Arabî (Molla Arab)</td>
<td>1495 - 1496</td>
<td>Rifaiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Halwatiyya</td>
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<td>Ibn-i Kemâl (Kemâlpaşazâde)</td>
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<td>Çatalcalı Ali Efendi</td>
<td>1674-1686</td>
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<td>Paşmakçızâde Ali Efendi</td>
<td>1703</td>
<td>Naqshbandiyya, Hamzawiyya-Malamiyya</td>
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KENAN RIFAI AND OTTOMAN SHEIKH-AL-ISLAMS

Between 1908-1925, when Kenan Rifai was postnishin at the Ummu Ken’an Dargah, Pîrizâde Mehmed Sâhib Molla (Mawlawi), Çelebizâde Hüseyin Hüsnî Efendi (Mawlawi), Musâ Kazım Efendi (Naqshbandi), Abdurrahman Nesib Efendi (Jalwati, Rifai, Halwati), Mustafa Hayrî Efendi (Qadiri), and Kenan Rifai initiate Haydarîzâde İbrahim Efendi and Dürrîzâde Abdullah Beyefendi were the ahl al-tariq sheikh-al-Islams. We had mentioned three sheikh-al-Islams who had pledged to Kenan Rifai: Haydarîzâde İbrahim Efendi (1864-1933), Dürrîzâde Abdullah Beyefendi (1869-1923), and Sheikh-al-Islam Nesîmî Efendi (?). The name Sheikh-al-Islam Nesîmî does not come up in the literature. It is possible that this person was an upper-level authority working in the institute of sheikhs. Due to the similarities in their names, Abdurrahman Nesip Efendi (1842-1914) comes to mind, but he is recorded as being a Rifai initiated to Sheikh Mehmed Resmi Efendi in Lipova (west Romania).9

The exact date of Haydarîzâde and Dürrîzâde’s initiation to Kenan Rifai and the dimensions of the two sheikhs al-Islam’s dervishness (in other words, their being sheikh-al-Islam does not necessarily mean that they were equally high among the ranks of dervishes) are not known. If their initiation came after their terms as sheikh-al-Islam, this would mean that this date would have to be sometime after 1918-1920. Haydarîzâde served as sheikh-al-Islam twice, in 1918 and 1919, while Dürrîzâde was sheikh-al-Islam in 1920, during the Turkish National War of Independence. Dürrîzâde does not have any writings on tasawwuf, but there are memoranda he wrote on the caliphate. According to these, in a time of land loss throughout northern Africa and the Balkans, he consistently emphasized that the caliphate was a religious persona that could not accept division and that the caliph was not just the caliph of the Muslims within the borders of Turkey but of all the Muslims of the world.10

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9 Hür Mahmut Yücer, Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf (19. Yüzyıl) (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2003), 748-755.
10 Mehmet Emin Gerger, Bilinmeyen Yönleriyle Osmanlı Şeyhülislâmları (İstanbul: Gerger, 2013), 292.
HAYDARÎZÂDE İBRAHİM EFENDİ (1864-1933)

Haydarîzâde was born in the Erbil district of Mosul. He belonged to a Kurdish tribe. Like Kenan Rifai, he served at many levels of the Ottoman education system and in many provinces. Between 1918 and 1919, during the administrations of Tevfik Pasha, Ali Rıza Pasha, and Salih Pasha, he served four times as sheikh-al-Islam. Haydarîzâde passed away in Madina in 1933, where Kenan Rifai had received the tariqa from his murshid al-aziz, reis al-mashayikh Hamza Rifai. The following anecdote is written in Kenan Rifai’s *Sohbetler*:

“Upon receiving news of the passing of former sheikh-al-Islam and the murid of our teacher Kenan Rifai Haydarîzâde Ibrahim Efendi, who had been in Baghdad for some time, someone from the assembled said, ‘For some time he had been away. Now finally he has been united with Truth. But still, one feels pain after the separation.’ Our teacher said the following: ‘He rejoined wherever his essence is. The great man!’”

While Haydarîzâde was not a jurisprudent, he was proficient in the Islamic sciences and Eastern literature. He was a poet. The class notes from the history of orders and paths in Islam class he gave at the *Madrasa al-vaizin* in 1916 were compiled and published under the name of “Mezâhib ve Turuk-ı İslâmiyye Târihi” (Istanbul 1335, *History of Islamic Orders and Paths*), and then re-published as “İslâm Mezhepleri ve Tarîkatlari Târihi” (Istanbul 1981, *History of Islamic Orders and Paths*) after being simplified by Rekin Ertem. He did not, however, give space for the history of tariqas in the work. He had poetic works such as “Rüya”, “Terkiib-i Bend” and “Irak Ordusuna Hitâb” [*Calling out to the Iraqi Army*]. In these works, he speaks of the weakness that the Ottomans and the Islamic world find themselves in faced with the Western world with many sad verses. He writes some of the prescriptions of salvation from this weakness in *Sebil ar-rashad* and the journal *Tasawwuf*, of which Sheikh Safvet was the head author. Two factors are

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at the forefront in his articles: the unity of Islam and beautiful conduct. His conviction that the caliphate being with the Ottoman dynasty making the caliphate far from any doubt and hesitation in terms of its authenticity based on shari‘a; that this is an issue being brought up at a time when the Ottoman Empire was breaking apart and used as an effective weapon; his emphasis on the drawbacks of bringing forward sectarian differences during troubled times; his insistence on the unity of Islam and that a Muslim awakening will only be possible through a correction of their beautiful conduct are all important in terms of demonstrating the nature of his thoughts.

KENAN RİFAI AND SHEIKH-AL-ISLAM
HAYDARİZÂDE İBRAHİM EFENDÎ: İTTIHAD AL-ISLAMIYYA
AND BEAUTIFUL CONDUCT (AHLAQ)

The reason behind Haydarızâde penning his work History of Islamic Orders and Paths was that the existence of myriad Islamic sects should not cause divisions among Muslims. In this sense, he gives space to Sufi understanding of the unity of Islam and quotes from Ibn ’Arabi, Ali al-Havas, and Rumi. Ali al-Havas states, “If someone claiming to be of the station of wisdom attempts to disprove one of the religious faiths belonging to one of the sects of Islam, that person is a liar in terms of their claim. The condition of being a knower of God (arif-i billah) is to be included in the holy circle of the station of divinity. Those who are within that holy circle have understood through kashf (unveiling) and mushahada (witnessing) that the faiths, in certain instances, of all of those different groups are still sourced by that holy divinity.” In conclusion, Haydarızâde states, “This view of the Sufis about the groups in Islam is the better choice to follow and worthy of appreciation for removing the differentiation and disunion among Muslims and for serving the unity of Islam.”

In truth, according to Kenan Rifai, the actual matter here is not the allowance of different groups. The real matter is that of irfan (gnosis) and everyone coming to life in accordance with the leadership of their own name. The revered Kenan Rifai says the following, speaking from the station of wisdom:

“All of creation, whether an infidel or a believer, inferior or superior, there is not a single essence that does not manifest without either a partial or full name of the Almighty Truth. Every crea-

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13 Haydarızâde İbrahim Efendi, Mezâhib ve Turuk-ı İslamiyye Tarihi (Dârülhilâfet-i-laliyye: Evkâf-ı İslamiyye Matbaası, 1335), 111.
ture, every essence, every name possessor invites the original of their name, allures it, and is swept up in the beauty of that name which becomes its straight path (sirat al-mustaqim). Seeing that every creature is pulled to their own Rabb, their own nurturer by their a’yan al-sabita, and you question the use for the invitation of prophets and murshids—the purpose of that invitation is to go from the name al-Mudil to the name al-Hadi, to invite to good from evil...Thus, there is nothing unnecessary in this world. To be succinct, what manifests in even the tiniest drop to the entirety of the created, is Allah.”

Haydarizâde foresaw the need for the resolution of political and social issues for the actualization of the unity of Islam along with the need to get rid of disruptions in the beautiful conduct of Muslims. The 16 articles he wrote on the topic—which I argue would be beneficial if published—he published especially in the Tasawwuf journal brought out by Sheikh Safvet in the 1911s. This journal, much like most of the other journals published in the period following the second Constitutional era, conducted “praise of Constitutionalism”. In fact, Haydarizâde himself, in the article he published in the third number of the journal, writes, “Tasawwuf and the order of Constitutionalism—just as tasawwuf will not find a greater servant to the actualization of the spiritual enlightenment of Sufis in this material world, neither will Constitutionalism find a better conduit for its affirmation and establishment than tasawwuf.”

In this sense, he thanks the sheikh-al-Islam of the period, Musa Kâzım Efendi—who was also the leader of the religious community—for his understanding of the importance of tasawwuf and tariqas for the resolution of political matters. Haydarizâde’s other articles in the journal are on ethical matters such as jealousy, slander, justice, ihsan, personal attempts, the refusal of debates and disputes, loyalty, and the protection of language. According to him, tasawwuf is simply the revivification of the human’s beautiful conduct and in this frame, he thinks that it has much to offer the unity of Islam and the regime of Constitutionalism. Kenan Rıfai’s thoughts were not in a structure that formed in the face of the political state of affairs. However, he is of the same opinion as

14 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 458.
16 Ibid., 114.
Haydarîzâde when he states that the fundamental problems among the public are due to ethical corruption and lack of wisdom. He states, “The desires of the nafs within the Ad tribe rose up within them in the shape of a hurricane and destroyed their shapes. The politics, blows, and vileness in this world, they are all the result of the desires of the nafs. This means that be it for a tribe or for an individual, the sadnesses, pains, politics, and calamities that befall them are all the appearance of the desires of their nafs or their carnal appetites that is buried deep within them against them.”

Haydarîzâde does not set sail for the deep issues of tasawwuf. In fact, during these years (1911), he states that he is not a member of a tariqa. However, he is in close contact with the Kurdish meshayikh of the time, including the dargah of Abdurrahman Halis Talibani, a Qadîrî sheikh from Kerkuk who is also Haydarîzâde’s countryman. At the same time, Haydarîzâde does expound on certain matters, stating that tasawwuf separates the human’s life into two as the life of the nafs and the life of the spirit: the life of the nafs should be to busy itself with righteous deeds such as to pray to the Haliq (Creator), mercy to the created, obedience to the law of the land, service to the establishment of justice, stopping oppression, enduring in the face of troubles, and helping those who are weaker. The life of the spirit is to be cognizant of the knowledge of the asma and divine realities. Without the nafs’ life being lived correctly, it is not possible to influence the life of the spirit. The areas and experiences of wisdom and truth depend on the area and experience of shari’a and tariqa. But with what strength and capacity is this experience going to occur?

Haydarîzâde is aware that this will only happen not through the partial intellect or saying, but through the universal intellect, love, and state. But where is that intellect and love? Haydarîzâde and Dürrîzâde would later declare that they would find that privilege of intellect and love, that spirituality—as pointed out in the beginning of our paper—in Kenan Rifai.

Let me finish through the following words of Reverend Kenan Rifai, who presents this prescription to save not just sheikh-al-Islams but the whole of humanity:

“In sum, what is meant by Noah’s ark is this ecstasy, this attributed spirit (ruh al-izafa) that the perfected human being has breathed. Before that comes to being, the human has no possibility of jour-

17 Sâmiha Ayverdi et al., Ken’an Rifâî, 437.
neying to the ocean of spirit and realm of truth with their own partial intellect. Security and quarter, meaning rescue, can only occur through taking refuge in that ship of love and ecstasy.”

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18 Ken’an Rifâi, Sohbetler I, 194.


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There has already come to you—all a messenger from your own souls: dear to him is what troubles you, deeply concerned for you, cherishing and loving those who have faith.

(at-Tawba 9/128)

It is difficult to form a clear picture of such an important intellectual and spiritual figure as Kenan Rifai on the basis of the few English translations of his work that are as yet publicly accessible. Fortunately, Victoria Holbrook’s beautifully sensitive recent translation of his lessons on all of Book I of Rumi’s Masnavi\(^2\) now provides an immense and wide-ranging introduction to many dimensions of his spiritual teaching, so I have naturally chosen to rely on that extensive source for this initial study. Since I have been regularly studying and teaching students about this opening Book of Rumi’s masterpiece for several decades, it is not hard to discern how the truly distinctive features and personal emphases of Kenan Rifai’s teaching readily stand out throughout this lengthy work.

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1 James Morris was born in the US in 1949. He received his PhD degree in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University with a thesis on Mulla Sadra. He received his B.A in Civilizational Studies from University of Chicago. Morris has taught Islamic and religious studies at Boston College, and also at the universities of Exeter, Princeton, and Oberlin. He lectures widely on Islamic philosophy and theology, Sufism, the Islamic humanities, and the Qur’an. Recent books include Ostad Elahi’s “Knowing the Spirit” (2007); “The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘Meccan Illuminations’” (2005); and “Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation” (2004); together with the forthcoming “Openings: From the Qur’an to the Islamic Humanities”.

2 Kenan Rifai, Listen: Commentary on the Spiritual Couplets of Mevlana Rumi (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011). Translated from the Turkish by Victoria Holbrook. [536 pages.]
To begin with, since there have been so many kinds of “commentary” on this notoriously challenging spiritual epic over the centuries, it is quite revealing to compare Rifai’s uniquely personal approach with other types of Masnavi commentary—each of which has its own particular usefulness for students and other newcomers to this extraordinary poem. First of all, Rifai’s approach does not offer a line-by-line elucidation of difficult passages, technical terms, unfamiliar historical and cultural background, and the like, as was partly provided in Nicholson’s pioneering English commentary volumes that accompanied his Persian critical edition. Secondly, Rifai’s approach does not focus on clarifying Rumi’s complex rhetorical structures, shifting and multiple “voices” (and audiences) and perspectives, or his mysterious mirroring of the Qur’an’s characteristic structural elements of scattering, ambiguity, and the like. Nor does Rifai restrict himself to simply providing a clearer, more accessible overall paraphrase and summary elucidation of each section, though he usually does begin with that—and in the process, he often reveals his close acquaintance with the extensive earlier Ottoman-era commentaries, including especially the famous comprehensive work of the Mevlevi shaykh Ismail Anqaravi. Instead of those more familiar literary, philological, and historical approaches, Kenan Rifai’s work remains faithful throughout to the original spiritual aims and governing intention of Rumi’s masterwork, to its role as a constantly shifting “mirror of our present state.” Mevlana’s Spiritual Masnavi is a work whose reading and study is an unavoidable individual task of ever-renewed discovery and recognition of insights, pitfalls, challenges, and learning experiences that can only be revealed by its constant juxtaposition with the actual unique and highly particular realities and experiences of each reader’s life. Building on that necessarily individual and dynamic inner relationship with Rumi’s teachings, Rifai’s work constantly assumes—and carefully constructs—an operative context of spiritual pedagogy that focuses at every stage on the practically indispensable guiding and transformative spiritual role of the “Friends of God” (awliyā’, erenlar, anbiyā’, “Perfect Human beings” [insân], and so on), in all their unfolding manifestations of divine proximity, guardianship and guidance (God as al-Walī).

Given the limits of this symposium contribution, I have focused here on the remarkably subtle and effective ways that Kenan Rifai, in his personal teaching of Book I of the Masnavi, carefully orients his stu-

dents and readers toward a spiritually dynamic approach and context for their own ongoing engagement with Rumi’s masterpiece. That unique work itself is beautifully constructed—like its Qur’anic model and inspiration—in such a way that each successive story or larger “dis- course” only reveals its intended meanings and new lessons through active, participatory interaction with the relevant personal illustrations and real-life lessons that gradually arise in each reader’s life, everywhere in the world around us. And that unfolding personal interaction, if it is to be fruitful, depends on the impetus of a lasting, persistent inner motivation. So how can a teacher or guide awaken that actively ongoing engagement? How can they help to bring out that illuminating dimension and far-reaching aims of this mysterious work? In particular, how can that decisive relational context be established today, without the ongoing supportive traditional framework of the initiatic, pedagogical relationship between a seeker and accomplished spiritual guide?

Kenan Rifai’s responses to this basic pedagogical challenge involve very different emphases at different stages of Book I, such as his stress in the central sections of his commentary on the aims and proper practice of the spiritual disciplines (riyāda/riyāzat) that are largely assumed by Mevlana. But his opening orientation, in the first hundred pages of this remarkable English translation (= Prologue and first three longer stories), relies above all on a careful, stage-by-stage introduction of various facets of that underlying relationship of walāya—i.e., of intimate, ever-present divine “Friendship,” closeness, guidance, testing, and spiritual instruction in all its infinite forms—a relation which teachers like Rumi insist secretly informs each person’s life here on earth and beyond. For most readers, as we know, are likely to start their journey with only intermittent glimmers of recognition of this all-encompassing reality of divine compassion, caring, guidance, and beauty. Following Rumi’s own lead—which throughout the Masnavi usually surfaces in the recurrent form of impassioned direct addresses or ecstatic allusions to his own autobiographical Wali-figures of Shams and Husamuddin—Kenan Rifai carefully introduces at the start of his lessons some fourteen essential aspects of this fundamental human-divine relationship, highlighting that ever-present metaphysical context of walāya in ways that usually stand out boldly from the broad flow of his simpler ongoing paraphrase of Rumi’s stories and teaching. (Here we also note the way that he almost always turns to a few telling lines of Turkish poetry from Yunus Emre whenever he wishes to highlight
particular facets of this inner relationship with the Wali/Friend.) So let us follow briefly his own introduction to this relationship of walāya, step by step:4

- Taking up the “reed” of Rumi’s famous Prologue (p. 2), Kenan Rifai begins by introducing the divine “friends” (awliyā’ Allāh) or “arrived ones” (erenler), highlighting in particular the countless transformative experiences of loss and separation—the telling signs and effects of Love, of the deeper metaphysical reality of our temporary earthly situation—that eventually enabled them to reach their spiritual goal. His purpose, again echoing Rumi, is to awaken the transformative power of intense inner longing (niyāz) in students and readers who might otherwise be complacent, as the “first step of the ascending arc” of the human soul’s gradual process of perfection.

- Next, alluding to the transformational influence of Mevlana’s own fateful meeting with Shams of Tabriz (p. 3), Rifai stresses the illuminating role of encountering a fully human being (insān, or “Perfect Human” in this translation) as the treasured initial transformative experience of theophany (tajallī), of divine presence and manifestation, through which a person may first “come to recognize his own [divine spiritual] substance.” Here one essential caution is in order, equally applicable to all that follows: as throughout each stage of this introduction of walāya, his aim here is clearly to oblige the attentive reader to seek out and begin to re-examine more closely the actual range of their own previous experiences of this divine presence, whether in dreams, nature, traveling, meditation, or all the other endless theaters of revelation. Those are the essential raw materials for each succeeding stage of the initiatic spiritual journey. So without them, his readers would immediately be lost in the traditional terminology and metaphysical, theological schemas meant to situate and clarify the role of those treasured experiences.

- Rifai then moves on (p. 4) to point out the ways each initial theophanic encounter with such a divine “Friend” (walī)—together with the sentiment of loss or separation that normally follows that unforgettable event—readily leads us on to seek out other such fully human persons and to struggle to attain their inner states. As Rifai puts it here, the “path of the arrived,” in its infinite outward forms and expressions, naturally arises from such fateful moments. Those transformative en-

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4 Page references in the following discussion are always to the recent Holbrook translation. (note 2 above)
counters, he emphasizes, often come from within (or from beyond our everyday world), as in Rumi’s opening account of the love-sick King’s desperate prayer and its initial answer in an imaginal, dreamlike reality (khiyāl), which only subsequently unfolds over time in the ensuing events and appearances of the outward, manifest world.

- Like so many earlier Sufi teachers and writers, Rifai often compresses complex metaphysical insights into a single dense epigrammatic formula, as in his following observation (p. 5) that Spirit and Being alike are the divine Beauty in itself, both outwardly and inwardly. Again, his purpose in doing so is not to turn his readers toward the familiar thickets of abstract metaphysical and theological discussion, but rather to challenge them to recollect and re-examine their own manifold experiences and illustrations of that provocative (and spiritually productive) insight.

- Once that far-reaching observation has been assimilated, he notes (p. 5) that passionate, transforming Love (‘ishq) is the natural response to this divine Beauty, especially in the wali or fully human being who “sees divine wisdom and beauty wherever he looks.” Here Rifai already introduces the central spiritual pedagogical role of the fully realized human as the poetic “wine-pourer” (sāqī) whose words—or artful communications, in any domain of life—evoke this Beauty and awaken this Love in those with the necessary inner preparedness. Again, these brief opening remarks are not just pointing to history’s familiar prophets, saints, and great artists. Instead, as one readily discovers in introducing the Masnavi and similar spiritual or philosophical classics to college students, it is not easy, at this first encounter, to get past the students’ understandable—but inherently limited—obsession with their own personal, individual dimension of spiritual growth and learning. But this immense final work of Rumi is also (far more than his better-known lyrical poetry) a mature book intended for “teaching teachers,” so that much of Kenan Rifai’s own teaching here—apparently in oral lessons for his own advanced and close adult disciples—can only be properly appreciated in that wider perspective.

- Building on these preceding points, Rifai goes on to remark (pp. 9-10) that fully human beings “reveal wisdom and consciousness only to the prepared”: for these mysteries of love are the divine “Trust” mentioned in the Qur’an as being uniquely bestowed on the fully human being. Here he also stresses the deeper importance of Rumi’s citing

5 We have already noted the way Rifai repeatedly uses one or two telling poetic lines of Yunus Emre to illustrate and drive home each key point in the course of these lessons on the relationship of walāya.
Plato as one of the first and foremost “physicians of divine Love.” This is one of Mevlana’s many passages where he insists on the full human universality and the primordial nature of these spiritual realities and corresponding teachings of the Masnavi, intimately accessible to all human beings as such (and thus in no way restricted only to particular historical situations and cultural or religious traditions). The experienced teacher’s stress already here on the pedagogical need for proper individual preparedness and contextual wisdom in order to receive (and then appropriately convey) higher spiritual teaching and “unveiling” is of course more fully developed in his remarks on Rumi’s account of Zayd and the Prophet, near the end of Book I.

• One of Kenan Rifai’s more poignant observations here (p. 11) is his comment that each soul’s purification depends on that person’s love for those divine “friends” who fully reflect God’s Beauty. Implicitly, this remark points to the way these intimations of beauty underlie our growing awareness of the ever-deeper presence and activity of the Friends as guides and teachers. However, this primordial dimension of walāya is something that we can only discover through actual experiences of the phenomena in question, which initially appear fragmentary, discontinuous, or even apparently absent for some people. More obviously and pointedly, this single reflection immediately puts in their proper context the spiritual role and efficacy of such familiar discrete actions and “techniques” as the outward performance of religious practices, feats of ascetic purification or meditation, deeds of merit, and so on. Much of the rest of the Masnavi (not just Book I) is devoted to revealing the universally tempting, but often disappointingly illusory appeals of such purportedly simple and self-sufficient methods and practices whenever they are taken as ends in themselves.

• In discussing the role of the Shams-like “doctor of souls” in the famous opening story of the Masnavi (pp. 30-31), Kenan Rifai focuses directly on some key features of the distinctive art of the spiritual guide or physician. Here he mentions specifically finding the deeper roots of our inner “weak spots” and defects of character; always preserving our hope and motivation; and strictly respecting the inherent secrets and mysteries of the path. As one example of such “secrets,” he had just emphasized a few pages earlier (pp. 26-27) that the most comprehensive metaphysical realities—such as the workings of the divine Spirit, the cosmic Intelligence or “Muhammadan Reality,” and even the divine “Sun” (shams)—can’t be effectively described or usefully spoken of except to the true spiritual knowers (the ‘urafā’) and the “arrived ones.”
• A few pages later (pp. 38-39), he mentions one of the most palpable and commonly experienced features of encounters with the Friend or Wali, already emphasized in so many earlier classics of Islamic spiritual literature. That is the way the focused attention or spiritual “gaze” (nazar) of the wali or arrived one “transforms someone who believes in him,” thereby restraining the carnal impulses of the lower soul and helping that person to sense and awaken to true love, while more readily recognizing and assimilating life’s unfolding lessons.

• Only late in this introductory section (pp. 43-44) does Rifai introduce a brief preliminary sketch of the many different types and educational duties and functions of the “arrived” or the Friends/awliyā’: for him, these salvific figures include the prophets, divine messengers, their “successors” (khalīfa), ranks of “substitutes” (abdāl), and so on. Clearly this slightly expanded set of allusions is raised here not as a theological or philosophic doctrine in itself (as in the many earlier Islamic spiritual writers whose elaborate teachings he is alluding to here), but instead as an initial, suggestive pointer to the multitude of available forms and expressions of spiritual guidance (walāya) that we all encounter in the different realms of our spiritual experience and within different cultural and religious traditions.

• With the famous short tale of the parrot and the similarly bald qalandar dervish—and in much greater detail, in the long following story (pp. 49-68) of the king and his crafty, destructive and cunning missionary vizier—Rifai turns to what is perhaps the most unavoidable and recurrent practical question involving the essential spiritual relationship of walāya. On the outward plane, how can we discern misguided, self-deluded and unknowingly ignorant claimants to authority and guidance from the genuine divine Friends/awliyā’ and their sound guidance and instruction? And more inwardly, how can we ourselves avoid all the temptations of unconscious “spiritual hypocrisy” and self-delusion by the subtle idols of our own creation, exemplified throughout this long story in the bountiful persuasive gifts of the satanic vizier? Formally, of course, the “only way to acquire the Truth is to know and serve the (divine) Friends.” But this painful story is full of relevant warnings, as with the scrolls of twelve spiritual partial truths that this evil vizier so persuasively proclaims as a “whole Truth” to each warring sect: pitfalls which can still be readily found on the internet or in the self-help section of any bookstore. The mysterious symbolic events of this second long discourse clearly allude (among other cases) to the bloody intra-Muslim civil wars (fitan) that
so memorably marked the era immediately after the Prophet’s death (not to mention the dramatic examples from our own day). And they even more painfully and immediately reflect the tragic disruptions involving Rumi’s rebellious oldest son and some disciples following the tumultuous arrival of Shams. Yet the familiarity of such endlessly recurring outward illustrations only reflects more pervasive, unavoidable inner struggles and “learning experiences” that are Mevlana’s real subject here.

• Within this same section (at pp. 55-56, 59), Rifai rephrases this fundamental practical dilemma more positively and constructively. How can we “wake up” our spiritual vision and hearing in order to recognize the presence of the genuine Friends/arrived ones—and even more deeply, to witness directly the illuminating “rays of Light” of the Spirit that pervade all of creation? Citing the immediate examples, within the Masnavi and Mevlana’s own life, of Shams and Husamuddin, Rifai emphasizes our fundamental need for the Friends themselves to begin to open our eyes and vision. Without the awakening to their guidance and intercession, our seeking—like that of the cunning vizier here and all his multitudinous victims—intrinsically risks falling into the idolatrous pitfalls of the carnal self and its hidden desires, fears, and insecurities. This poignant observation may well be the most important spiritual touchstone introduced in these opening pages, and it immediately takes the reader back to the decisive role of profound surrender and hard-won true humility, of the intensely needful inner pleading (niyāz) that is so strongly accentuated in Rumi’s prologue to his entire work, the famous opening “Song of the Reed.”

• Rumi’s following, third story of another wicked king and the paradoxical longer-term effects of this life’s “fires” and struggles (pp. 69-93), in Kenan Rifai’s discussion, continues to reveal how providence (and our own devotion and patient perseverance, sabr) help us to overcome the constant dangers of the manifold forms of unconscious blind conformity (taqlīd) and hypocrisy loudly proclaimed by so many self-styled authorities and “mystics.” In his interpretation, life’s ongoing spectacle of the different human reactions to these inescapable earthly fires—sometimes at first destructive, sometimes purifying and liberating—eventually allows each person to witness directly, through their heart, the same single “sweet taste” and “light” and “joy” that are convincingly awakened by the presence and example of the true Friends and Arrived ones. From the perspective Rumi dramatizes so fiercely here,
“dying” to one’s lower self is not only a familiar religious injunction, but ultimately the deeper liberating consequence of our intrinsic earthly human situation.

Finally, at the end of Rumi’s story of this second wicked king and the consuming “fires” of this world (pp. 95-96), Kenan Rifai turns his students’ attention to contemplate the ways the One “Light of the ‘Muhammadan Reality’” becomes visible and manifest through all the different, endless “stars” of the Friends/Knowers/and fully human beings. As with Dante’s parallel vision in his Paradisio, Rifai’s emphasis here is on the relevance of this vision to practical spiritual instruction: the providential diversity and radically different roles and personalities of the awliyāʾ offer appealing, concrete facets of spiritual attraction and illumination that Rumi goes on to illustrate and expand here in the remainder of Book I, as indeed throughout all the remaining tales of his Spiritual Masnavi.

From this point on, beginning with the famous fable of the lion and the brave, wise hare, Rumi’s pedagogical focus—and Kenan Rifai’s corresponding emphasis—turns from the initial challenge of spiritual awakening, motivation, and recognition to the ongoing, lasting demands of realization and practical enactment. From the paramount task of finding, discerning and recognizing the constant guiding presence of the divine Wali, all the hidden providential workings of the “Friends,” he now moves on to the more practical daily individual struggle of overcoming (or better, of integrating) all the inner obstacles and distractions that stand in the way of our actively fulfilling the Friends’ promptings and appropriately responding to their call. From here on to the end of Book I, each tale has its own key positive protagonist—silently persevering and quietly heroic, even in the exemplary, famous concluding story of Ali—who represents the mature presence and inspiration of the divine Friends, of all those “arrived” and fully human actors whose lessons and examples still invite each reader’s freely loving and creative response.

Following their ever-guiding thread, Rifai suggests in the remainder of his richly insightful lessons on Book I, already makes clear why, at the very end of Mevlana’s immense Spiritual Epic, in the difficult long concluding tale of the three brothers (at the end of Book VI), it is the paradoxical “laziness,” the patient, unflagging and ever-attentive devotion (sabr and ‘ibāda) of the third son that ultimately “wins the
prize,” bringing to its full intended, fruitful fulfilment all of life’s more outwardly dramatic tales of passionate Love and hard-won lessons of awareness.

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It has indeed been a blessing to sit with the great Kenan Rifai’s commentary upon book one of Mevlana’s *Mesnevi*. Spending time with this book naturally led me to Kenan Rifai’s explanation of a famous tale in the *Mesnevi* centered around ‘Ali b. Abi Talib. The tale is retold from Islamic tradition and is cast in Mevlana’s unique terms and worldview.

The long and short of the story is as follows: in the heat of a one-on-one encounter with an enemy of Islam, ‘Ali gained the upper hand and thrust his opponent to the ground. Just as he was about to finish him off with one blow from his sword, the enemy spat at ‘Ali’s face. When this happened, ‘Ali immediately dropped his sword and walked away. This perplexed his enemy, and led him to ask ‘Ali in earnest why he had not killed him at that very moment. ‘Ali then speaks, telling the enemy that he only fights for the sake of God. But, when the man insulted him by spitting at him, the possibility that it would become a personal affair had presented itself to him. So he walked away from the situation. ‘Ali then explains that he never acts out of self-interest, but only for, in, and through God.

In Kenan Rifai’s explanation of this account, it is clear that he understands the exact meaning of this story by way of learning and *dhawq* or dhawk, which is a form of learning and insight through direct experience and immediate understanding.
“tasting.” As the ancient doctrine tells us, only the like can know the like. And there is no doubt that Kenan Rifai and Mevlana were kindred souls. Two passages from Kenan Rifai’s commentary on this tale from the *Mesnevi* shall suffice as evidence. In both instances, he explains ‘Ali’s words in the first person:

In reality, I am not I. I am one of those who has attained the degree of annihilation of his soul in the path of God. For me there is no other being, including myself, other than God. The power and invincibility of my sword is not due to my skill. Is it not my sword, it is God’s sword, and that is why I use God’s sword only for those purposes God wishes.3

I bear no resentment toward anyone nor have I any hidden self-interest. I am free of that malady special to mankind. This means that you are speaking with a free spirit. You are hearing his testimony. As you know, the testimony of people who are not free, or prisoners or slaves, especially if they are slaves to their own souls, is not worth two grains of barley.4

The implications of these noble words are very clear. Only when we act without self-interest and egoism are our actions worthy in the site of God. In other words, real action in the world is commensurate to the degree to which we relinquish our own self-contrivance (*tadbir*) and allow God to do His work. We thus “act” by giving up the illusory sense of self that gives us a false notion of “our” agency in “our” actions. To phrase it differently: we truly only “act” when God is the actor. This then explains the title of my article, “Actionless Action,” which incidentally also refers to a famous Taoist doctrine, namely that of *wu wei* or “acting without acting.” The Qur’anic basis for this position, which Mevlana also cites in the story in question, is al-Anfal, 8/17, where God tells the Prophet that he did not throw the dust at the Quraysh at the battle of Badr when “he” threw it, but that it was God who threw it.

At this point, I would like to shift focus and take the teachings being discussed here in a seemingly different, though intimately related, direction. One of the things that stands out in Mevlana’s re-telling of this story and Kenan Rifai’s commentary upon it is their emphasis on the degree of detachment from any ulterior motive and worldly gain that characterizes the soul of the person who subsists in God (*al-baqi bi’llah*). This then leads to a deep respect for the other, even at one of

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3 Kenan Rifai, *Listen*, 496.

4 Ibid., 497-498.
the most intense moments of human experience, namely war.⁵ Pondering about this idea led me to inquire into an additional “other” which we as human beings face every day of our lives, and which we constantly harm on account of precisely our own selfish desires and ego-centered aims and aspirations. The “other” I have in mind here is the environment. What follows, therefore, is an exposition of the environmental crisis based on the same perspective through which Mevlana and Kenan Rifai have explained the meaning of ‘Ali’s actions, or, shall I say, his “actionless actions.”

An important point to keep in mind is that one of the words in Arabic for “environment” is muhit, namely that which “surrounds” or “encompasses” something.⁶ Interestingly, in the Quran God Himself figures as the “surrounder” or “encompasser.”⁷ Thus, God is our “environment” because He surrounds us.⁸ Such a standpoint lends full support to the idea that nature is “sacred.” That is, the environment is nothing other than where God is to be found, but in His manifold modes of manifestation and not as He is in Himself.

Let us also call our attention to a key Qur’anic theme, namely the custodianship given to human beings over nature (taskhir). It is figured in such passages as al-Hajj, 22/65, *Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you?* and Luqman, 31/20, *Have you not considered that God has made whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you and has poured His blessings upon you, both outwardly and inwardly?* But human beings, who are the custodians of nature, have unfortunately destroyed their natural surroundings, thanks to their own actions.¹⁰ Al-Rum, 30/41

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5 This point is inspired by a point made by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the context of his own commentary upon the same story from the Mesnevi. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 87-89.


7 See the astute remark in Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 292.

8 Ibid.


alludes to this very phenomenon: Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of that which men’s hands have earned, so that He may let them taste some of that which they have done, that haply they might return.\textsuperscript{11} Yet this verse also implies a sense of hope as it seems to indicate that if people are given a small window into the kinds of catastrophes against nature that they themselves have initiated, it is possible that they will take heed and change their ways.

One of the surest ways people can begin to rectify their distance from and obscure relationship to nature is by first coming to understand themselves. This will only happen when they awaken from their state of being blind, and subsequently read the signs on the horizons and deep within. I am, of course, alluding here to a well-known Qur’anic verse which sets up the basic picture of the human-nature relationship: We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, the more we come to know of ourselves, the more we come to know the book of nature, namely the cosmos. And the more we come to know the book of nature, the more we come to know ourselves.

At the same time, if we remain ignorant of our true state, if we consume nature by devouring it, our souls will remain distant from God. In Islamic metaphysical teachings, the closer we are to our transcendent source, the more characterized we are by luminosity, subtlety, and “spirituality.” On the other hand, the further we are from our transcendent source, the more we are characterized by darkness, density, and “materiality.”\textsuperscript{13}

That is to say, the more realized we become in the signs that lead us back to God, the more intense is our awareness in accordance with our ascent in the levels of being, which is graded by nature, proceeding from most intense and undifferentiated to least intense and most differentiated. The further we fall away from God’s signs, the less aware we become on the scale of being. Put differently, the more dense we become, the more “heavy” our nature, and the less likely we are to participate in higher grades of awareness.

\textsuperscript{11} Consider the question also asked by when God announces to them that He will create man: “Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood…?” (al-Baqara, 2/30).

\textsuperscript{12} Fussilat, 41/53. See also al-Dhariyat, 51/20-21: Upon the earth are signs for those possessing certainty, and within your souls. Do you not then behold?

It has already been stated that humans are the custodians of nature. But why was this trust placed upon their shoulders? The answer is alluded to in al-Baqara, 2/30, where God tells the angels that He will place a vicegerent (khalifat) on the earth. A vicegerent is technically someone who stands in place of another, carrying out the function that the latter has assigned to him. Thus, on earth, human beings are God’s representatives, meaning they are to carry out the charge and duty of God’s will. Yet if the treatment of nature today is any measure of our success in being God’s vicegerents on earth, then we are certainly doing a very poor job. This is why any talk in Islamic thought of people as God’s vicegerents really refers to their being the potential vicegerents of God on earth.

How, then, does one realize this vicegerency? It has everything to do with the assumption of divine qualities. This statement is in accordance with the famous Prophetic injunction to “Take on the character traits of God” (takhallaqu bi-akhlaq Allah). Every virtue that a human being can take on is only a possibility because that virtue already belongs to God in its full actuality and goodness. Thus, human beings can, to the measure allowed by the human condition, only be merciful in imitation of the All-Merciful (al-rahman), and can only be loving in imitation of the Lover (al-wadud). This teaching has some very important implications for the ontological (and hence objective) roots of ethical categories, but the main point to come away with at this juncture is that the Muslims of the past have seen the human project as a totally worthwhile one only insofar as human beings attempt to conform to the divine Norm.

As for “where” these qualities are, the Sufis tell us that they are already contained within the human being, in accordance with a saying of the Prophet to the effect that, “God created Adam in His form.” One key insight to be gleaned from this teaching in the context of the human relationship to nature is that whereas in us the divine names are undifferentiated, in the cosmic order, which discloses God qua manifestation, they are also to be found, but in a differentiated manner.

Thus, if we are merely content to consume, then this act of squandering our own selves and the natural environment will result in our inability

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14 See also al-An’am, 6/165 and Fatir, 35/39.
15 See also Chittick, In Search of the Lost Heart, 298-297 for a statement that is most apt in this context.
to actualize the divine qualities potentially contained within ourselves and within nature, resulting in an even greater divide between ourselves and the natural order. Now, it can be asked why human beings have the potential to actually harm nature. Why not, in other words, simply be created in such a way that this harmonious balance would always exist and everyone could then be God’s vicegerent on earth? The answer has to do with God’s divine qualities that are already configured in human beings. Since one of God’s qualities is will, human beings, who derive their positive qualities from God’s positive qualities, must have the real freedom to choose things for themselves. This freedom can lead to an ever-increasing view of things in which subject and object are seen as distinct. This can result in a highly reified and overly-scientized vision of things that pushes the world into the realm of pure exigency and human control, thus further-widening the gap between subject and object. Then follows an inconsequentialist view of nature whereby the harm done to the object “out there” is not seen as in any real way affecting the subject “in here.” If we take on the divine qualities properly, we will simply be bidding our own nature, and to the extent that this happens, the world of nature, being the same as ourselves, will also be brought into harmony with the divine order.

Those who realize this teaching can see nature with crystal clarity, since the subject and object dichotomy which characterizes the usual human interaction with the natural world is nothing but illusion, characterized as are all things by the veil of forms which surround them. For the self-realized person, the divine qualities to be found within the cosmos are brought about into an undifferentiated form, and this parallels the actualized undifferentiated form of the divine qualities that are already configured in his own soul. We can call this “sympathy” with nature, which denotes the mutual convergence of one with the other to the point that they are no longer on opposing ends of the spectrum, or two parts of a false polarity.

There is a saying of the Prophet to the effect that “The believer is the mirror of the believer.” This is normally understood to mean that what a Muslim sees of the good or bad in his brother is also a reflection of what is in himself. Yet, as has been pointed out by Ibn ‘Arabi and others, “believer” is also a name of God (al-mu’min). Since everything in the cosmos prostrates to God (in accordance with al-Ra‘d, 13/15), each thing in the cosmos is in reality a “believer.” If the believer is a mirror of God, who is the Believer, then the cosmos and all that it contains is a mirror of forms in which God sees Himself.
The Prophet also said that “God is beautiful and He loves beauty.” This explains why the cosmos is beautiful, because it is a mirror of beauty divine. The teaching that God’s Face—which is beautiful of course—is everywhere is be found in al-Baqara, 2/115: *To God belong the East and the West. Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God. God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.* Since God’s Face is everywhere, it is reflected in the mirror of the cosmos, which is nothing but a display for the traces of God’s beauty. Having transcended the forms themselves, God’s true vicegerents can see beyond them, moving with great ease from the symbol to the Symbolized without negating the symbol as such. Rather, they see, *in* the symbol the very Face of the Beloved, which is beyond all space and time. This is, in some sense, what it is like to fall in love. Just as when someone falls in love, the subject-object dichotomy is prone to vanish between the lover and beloved (especially in the act of union), so too is the case when one falls in love with the cosmos, which is the Face of God.

Since such a person who sees through God cannot be described as a separate “I” over and against the cosmic order, this person’s Face can be said to be God’s Face. This station in Sufi texts is referred to by many names, amongst which are union (*jam‘*) and proximity (*qurb*). Yet who is doing the witnessing at this stage? In order to answer this question, let us look at Fussilat, 41/53, a part of which we have already cited: *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things?* With respect to the last part of this verse, what is implied here is that it is God Himself who sees Himself in the myriad forms of creation, as these forms act as loci for His own Self-seeing. God is thus sufficient as a witness since He is the supreme Witness of all things, each of which in turn testifies to His oneness and beauty.

The person whose Face is now God’s Face thus beholds God in everything, and the implications of such a person being God’s vicegerent then become clear: such an individual will not harm the environment since it is actually all witnessed as sacred to him, reflecting as

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17 See also al-Rahman, 55/26-27: *All that is upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* and al-Qasas, 28/88: *There is no god but He! All things perish, save His Face. Judgment belongs to Him, and unto Him will you be returned.*

18 See also Al ‘Imran, 3/18: *God bears witness that there is no god but He.*

19 God is thus His own greatest “proof.” For this point, see Ibrahim Kalin, *Mulla Sadra* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 76.
it does his own face, which is nothing other than the divine Face in whose contemplation he is annihilated. There is thus nothing for him to aspire towards, no gain to receive from nature, and no action to perform, since nature itself is God’s gift to him. Nature thereby presents him with all that he loves, as it is the context in which God, his true Beloved, is the sole agent and actor.

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One of the most arresting narratives in the life of the Prophet Muhammad concerns his ascent to Heaven \textit{(miraj)}, after his journey from Mecca to Jerusalem \textit{(isra)}. The vertical ascent is evoked in Surat al-Najm, from the Noble Book, the Holy Quran:

\begin{quote}
By the star when it sets,
Your companion neither worries nor frets
Nor does he ever speak with regrets.
It is only revelation that he begets,
It is One mighty in power who projects,
And propels him upward to what perfects,
Far beyond the horizon where the sun sets,
Nearer and nearer to the source he trajects,
So close that a mere bowline between them intersects.
\end{quote}

Q 53:19 (translation by Shawkat Toorawa)

At the first level many angels and the Prophet Adam greeted him. At the second level of heaven it was other prophets, Jesus and John the Baptist, who hailed him. At the third level he met Joseph and Solomon, while at the fourth level he encountered Moses, his mother, and Pharaoh’s wife, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Arriving at the fifth level, he met

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the prophets Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Lot, then the prophets Idris and Noah at the sixth, until finally at the seventh level he was dazzled by yet another chorus of angels. In their midst was the Prophet Abraham. Abraham greeted Muhammad warmly before bidding him farewell as the Prophet journeyed on alone to his furthest destiny, the lote tree.²

While the narrative is taut, the differences in its interpretation are manifold. Between Sheikh Muzaffer and Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn ‘Arabi there is even a disagreement about which prior prophets, and which prophetic relatives, the Prophet Muhammad met at each level.

It is to James Morris that we must be grateful for providing a concise yet moving exposition of the stages of Prophet’s miraj from three sources, all penned by Shaykh al-Akbar: Kitab al-Isra, Risalat al-anwar, and most importantly, Al-Futuhat al-Makkiya, chapter 167. The sequence of the earlier prophets whom the Prophet Muhammad encountered are:

- Adam – First Heaven
- Jesus and John (Isa and Yahya) – Second Heaven
- Joseph (Yusuf) – Third Heaven
- Idris (Enoch) – Fourth Heaven
- Aaron (Harun) – Fifth Heaven
- Moses (Musa) – Sixth Heaven
- Ibrahim (Abraham) – Seventh Heaven.

As Morris notes, Ibn ‘Arabi’s list, like his analysis, reflects his own sense of the inner spiritual journey signified by each of these prophetic encounters. It is an experience that resembles the sequence of chapters in Fusus al-Hikam.³ And the listing of Shaykh Al-Akbar most closely resembles the account of the miraj that is found in the Sahih Muslim, where the above prophets in ascending order greet the Prophet Muhammad before he arrives at sidrat al-muntaha, the lote tree.⁴

Differences between various accounts of the miraj are less important, finally, than the recurrent focus on the Prophet’s experience as one that anticipates and facilitates the spiritual journey of each believer.⁵

⁵ Morris, op. cit.:575, makes the point with telling clarity when he observes: “Rather than focusing on the external differences or apparent contradictions among
In his own metaphysically intense journey, Ibn ‘Arabi anticipates the approach that exceptionalizes Kenan Rifai’s account: to etch, then evoke the correspondence between the Prophetic ascent and ascent in the heart of each believer. If we take but a small sample from *Semai/Listen*, the luminous translation of Victoria Holbrooke, surveying Kenan Rifai’s commentary on the *Masnavi*, we find startling, explosive examples of the *miraj* at play in the heart and pen of this esteemed master.6

The first passage comes in response to the story of the padisah meeting the divine physician (*Masnavi* 1:104-143). Kenan Rifai interprets it as “a silent, wordless meeting”, itself an attempt to wrestle with the tension between metaphorical love (ishq-e mejazi) and true love (ishq-e haqiqi).

The intellect becomes impotent: “he is ashamed of the incapacity and insufficiency of what he has said and prefers to remain silent”. (*Listen*: 24) Here we face the irony and limits of the human intellect: “it understands and describes all beings, but when it comes to love, it’s as if tongue-tied.” (*Listen*: 25) In the words of the poet:

*Kasi sirash namidanad.*

*Laban dar kash! Zaban dar kash!*

None can speak his secret:
Keep silent! Keep silent!

And the spiritual insight of Kenan Rifai then pivots in a novel way to explain this age-old conundrum: he compares the stunted intellect with the Archangel Gabriel, underscoring how instrumental beauty can be – and inevitably will be - coupled with ontological futility. The intellect, like Gabriel, can only go so far:

That is why the Angel Gabriel, who accompanied Hazret Muhammad as far as the Sidret tree during the Miraj, said when they passed the frontier of intellect and came to the frontier of love: “O Messenger of God! I cannot go on, if I take one step further I will catch fire and burn up!” (*Listen*: 25)

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6 All citations that will follow come from Kenan Rifai, *Listen: Commentary on the Spiritual Couplets of Mevlana Rumi*, trans. Victoria Holbrook (Louisville, KT: Fons Vitae, 2011). For ease of reference, they will be given within parenthesis in the actual text.
This image of Gabriel on fire conjures a couplet from Rumi:

Hasl-e ishq az in se sukhan pesh nist
Sukhtam-o-sukhtam-o-sukhtam

The sum of love is but three words:
I-burn, and I-burn, and I-burn.

The same threat of annihilation through fire stops Gabriel later in Listen. Kenan Rifai once again explains the miraj as a spiritual experience epitomized by the Prophet yet open to all seekers of Truth:

Earlier [for the seeker of Truth] it was [his heart which was] teacher of intellect to him and conducted his training by way of intellect. But when the knowledge of God the Truth [Han ilmi], intellect becomes student to him, and this person whose heart has been occupied by love of God accomplishes the spiritual Miraj. (Listen: 131)

And how do we understand this transition, how do we achieve the spiritual miraj? Again, it is with reference to the experience of the Prophet Muhammed:

To transcend the limit of the intellect is to go beyond the point where Gabriel stopped. While Gabriel was ascending to God with Hazret Muhammed on the Miraj, they came to a point where he said, “O Muhammed! If I take one step further, the light of self-disclosure will burn me, destroy me, this is my limit”, and he remained behind while Hazret Muhammed continued on the path to reach God. (Listen: 131)

As brilliant and evocative as are these two citations from Listen, they do not prepare the reader/seeker/lover for what occurs in two later stories.

First is the commentary on a tale about the attributes that distinguishes the wings of the birds of divine intellects (Masnavi 1:1602-1612). It plays on the oxymoron: what happens when we collectively arrive at the place that is no place - makan la-makan? It is the secret of Solomon, that great prophet-lover of birds. It alludes to each lover who, like the parrot, “wants to flap its wings and fly in space to the realm of Not-place” (Listen, 196)

Again, I am reminded of a poem, this one from Amir Khusrau:

Nami danam chi manzil bood shab jaay ki man boodam;
Baharsu raqs-e bismil bood shab jaay ki man boodam.
Pari paikar nigaar-e sarw qadde laala rukhsare;
Sarapa aafat-e dil bood shab jaay ki man boodam.
Khuda khud meer-e majlis bood andar laamakan Khusrau;
Muhammad shamm-e mehfil bood shab jaay ki man boodam.
I do not know what place it was,
that place where I was last night,
On all sides dancing were bismil (victims of love),
in that place where I was last night.
A nymph-like beauty, with cypress-like form and tulip-like face,
Ruthlessly wrought havoc in the hearts of lovers,
in that place where I was last night.
God Himself was the Master of the assembly,
in that Not-place, O Khusrau,
And (the face of) Muhammad was the candle for that gathering,
in that place where I was last night.

Kenan Refai not only takes us to this place of no place (makan la-makan)
but reminds us that we never fly alone to Not-place. Whether a bird or
a person, we never fly by ourselves without others. Instead we always be-
come – and remain – part of a flock of those soaring higher and higher:

And such lovers have a Miraj, an ascension to God, every instant.
They have the wings of the lights to which they ascend and the
pleasure of divine witness in the realm of spirits. Crowns of light are
placed upon their heads by the hand of divine power. (Listen: 197)

Neither the intellect nor the ‘ordinary’ believer can imagine, much less
experience, such a state. It erases not just space but also time, as the
following commentary makes clear:

On that Day spirits purified of worldly filth will like angels ‘as-
cend unto Him in a day the measure of which is fifty thousand
years’ (Q 70:4). On that Day they will rise to God the Truth. But
while the angels cannot approach God beyond a certain degree,
beyond the Sidre tree, the miraj of the spirits will pass beyond that
degree as Hazret Muhammed did. This ascension of God’s friends
will make the heavens tremble. (Listen: 445)

This last image – the ascension of God’s friends, the miraj of the spirits,
the heavens trembling – comes toward the end of Listen in the com-
mentary on Masnavi I: 3466-350. It occurs in a passage explaining that
one must keep one’s inner state and spiritual inebriation hidden from
the ignorant. This same radiant image of collective exuberance in the
Divine Presence also presages the final message of Listen. Listen, not
just to hear and absorb, to learn and love, to learn to love, to run and
to burn. Listen, in silence and patience, beyond the sophistry of the
tongue or the insight, however keen, of the intellect.

Be silent until the waters are purified and display the sublime mys-
teries beneath. For God who clouds waters will purify them again.
...Patience is half of faith and the way to the greatest of victories…
Let us know that only God knows and performs the best and the most righteous of works. (*Listen*: 522-523)

“Only God knows and performs the best and the most righteous of works.” So if the angelic host is great, its chorus fulsome, greater still and beyond all reckoning is the miraj of the spirits, the ascension of God’s friends, its force so great that even the heavens tremble. Another Sufi giant, Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya (d. 1325) also urged caution, humility, and awe in imagining the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad:

He came to me, wrapped in the cloak of night,
Approaching with steps of caution and fright.
Then what happened, happened; to say more fails.
Imagine the best, ask not for details.7

In skipping the details, Kenan Rifai, like Shaykh Nizamuddin, leaves the best for God the Absolute, the One, the All-Merciful, Ever Merciful, the Gate of Mercy beyond reckoning or imagining, “for only God knows and performs the best and the most righteous of works.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

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The School of Love and Knowledge: Reflections on Kenan Rifai (1867-1950) and Bülent Rauf (1911-1987)

Stephen Hirtenstein

“When a human being dies, his doings come to an end except in three cases: [if he leaves behind] an ongoing charity, or beneficial knowledge, or virtuous offspring who pray for him.”

First of all, my heartfelt gratitude must go to the organisers for inviting me to this conference in honour of Kenan Rifai. The only personal contact that I have had with Kenan Rifai has been necessarily ‘indirect’, that is, through the people gathered here today and with whom I have some contact over the years, Cemalnur Sargut and others, who are committed to and embodying the teaching that Kenan Rifai transmitted – as well as through a small number of writings available in English via the internet and the book *Listen*, his commentary on the first book of Rumi’s *Mathnawi*, so ably translated by Victoria Holbrook. Words on a page, however, require to be ingested and digested in order to become food and nourishment: as the great 20th-century English poet W. H. Auden so eloquently put it in his elegy to W. B. Yeats, “the words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living.” In this sense, Kenan Rifai is both a source of inspiration, whose actions can inspire and educate us today, and a modifier of prior inspiration. As Borges

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2 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ 1631.

puts it in his essay on Kafka, “every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.” The same can equally be said with regard to those who educate others in divine knowledge. The real education of a human being is not in particular subjects or specialised studies but in how to live the fullest life based on love and knowledge of the Divine. This paper will explore some of the ways in which two late Ottoman figures built bridges between the deepest traditions of spirituality and the modern secular world, and will reflect on how Kenan Rifai and Bülent Rauf have both made this legacy relevant to people today.

Although almost all of you here have also only had an indirect physical contact with Kenan Rifai, i.e. mediated by one of his direct students, one can savour the taste of past masters in the guts of the living. Likewise, I am perhaps the only one here today who knew Bülent Rauf directly, who spent time in his physical presence and benefited from his instruction. Yet how is it possible to convey to you what it was like to be with Bülent, to be in his presence? All I can say is that something was implanted in me as a kind of imperishable light or touchstone which has helped me navigate my way through the difficulties and asperities of this life, despite being aware of my innumerable shortcomings and all too evident faults. As the great Mehmed Üftade once said to his student Aziz Mahmud Hudayi, “capability is not a prerequisite for beneficence”. In other words, it is not necessary to be worthy or feel able to respond properly or be in a “good” state of appreciation or any other form of self-judgment - all that is real is pure beneficence, it showers down upon us whether we are aware of it or not, whether we think we deserve it or not.

So I want to explore here some brief thoughts on how these two great ‘late Ottomans’, immersed in Beauty, reinterpreted traditional teachings in ways that are suitable and appropriate to us in this very modern world.

A few words about Bülent Rauf to begin with: born in Istanbul in 1911, he was the great grandson of Ismail Pasha, the khedive of Egypt, and his family had close connections to the imperial house as well as to the great Celveti master, Aziz Mahmud Hudayi. He was educated at Yale and Cornell universities, and after his marriage to the sister of the king of Egypt and subsequent divorce, he moved to England where he settled. He devoted the later part of his life to the establishment of

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the Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education in Scotland and the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society in the UK and elsewhere. His chief literary work was the translation into English of one of the greatest Ottoman commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-hikam*, written by Abdullah Bosnevi.

Like Kenan Rifai, he was fluent in several languages, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, English, French, but the second half of his life was spent primarily in the UK, rather than in Turkey. He became familiar with the western mindset, especially among the babyboomers, and was thus able to tailor what he had to say to suit an English-speaking audience.

Growing up in the late Ottoman milieu so saturated with dervish orders, Bülent Rauf foresaw that the old traditional-style teaching methods had had their day and that a new kind of world was opening up, one in which a more direct form of teaching would take place. Thus, for example, he did not refer to himself in any way as a ‘teacher’ because he said, “the only teacher is God”. By introducing us to the famous hadith “I was a hidden Treasure and I loved to be known”, Bülent envisioned a different form of learning in the School of Love and Knowledge – a learning that would be each person’s direct responsibility, unmediated by an ordinary student/teacher relation. He recognised that a very different kind of world was arising, one in which older forms of training would no longer work or be appropriate (and today one sees the same or similar recognition in every genuine spiritual tradition throughout the world). He used to compare our situation to the step-change we make when we move from secondary or high school, where children are taught piece by piece, subject by subject, by a particular teacher (whose knowledge is necessarily somewhat general), and where the focus is on the relationship between pupil and teacher, and we move on to a university, where the student is expected to study in depth, to discuss with others of like intent, evaluate the available literature and form their own view with the help of a specialist tutor or professor, who is there simply to guide and open up different ways of looking. Bülent saw this as a fundamental general characteristic of today’s globalised world-view, in fact a sea-change in human development. Just as Kenan Rifai accepted the changes brought by Ataturk in Turkey as divinely appointed, so did Bülent welcome globalisation as the necessary concomitant of a universal perspective. As Kenan Rifai put it, “from the now on the lodge is under the sky/heaven”.

Both Kenan Rifai and Bülent Rauf grew up in an Ottoman imperial milieu, unfettered by notions of the nation-state (though these were
beginning to take hold), multilingual and multicultural and multifaith, tolerant of difference, steeped in a spirituality founded on the twin towers of Ibn ‘Arabi and Rumi – a long tradition that speaks of Love and Knowledge as the very essence of what it means to be a human being.

And here let me say something about the School of Love and Knowledge: a school that has been in existence since the dawn of humanity, the school where people and all life-forms learn how to live life in its fullness as a wholesome goodness, the school whose awesome motto is inscribed over its entry gate “I was an unknown Treasure and I loved to be known”, the school where Love is the sole motivation and Knowledge, i.e. direct experiential knowing, is the only desired outcome. Shaykh Galib referred to this school as the School of Right Conduct or Spiritual Courtesy (Mekteb-i Edeb), and its teacher as Professor Madness (Molla-yi Cünun). It is the place where all spiritual virtues and divine characteristics are learned and put into practice: here one does not simply learn by repetition or intellectual appreciation (virtuous though that may be) – one learns by ‘mimesis’ initially, i.e. imitating with one’s whole attention and being as far as possible, not simply through the intellect. Mimesis is how we all learned as babies, imitating and absorbing what our parents and teachers said, the way they behaved, etc, until we became formed as what we take as our individual self. In the School of Love and Knowledge this mimesis is equally necessary to unlearn self-building, to dismantle the illusions of self-existence which have been so carefully constructed – for the purpose of the school is to realise the truth of what is passed down by tradition, to verify for oneself in one’s own moment-by-moment awareness or knowing (ma’rifâ) and in the core of one’s being, beyond all trace of individual selfhood.

In the words of Ahmad al-Rifai: ‘the true knower (ārif) is annihilated in the vision of the exalted Truth, and remains without an individual self or any intermediary cause on the carpet of Reality.’ For Abû Yazîd al-Bastâmî: ‘the lowest degree of the ārif consists of walking on water and flying through the air; the highest degree of the ārif consists of walking in the two worlds without turning one’s gaze to any other than Him.’ In modern parlance, as Bülent put it, ‘the degree of evolution of a person is measurable by the constancy of his/her awareness [of Him].’

Now we should be aware that there is a curious paradox here: there is an aim, a goal, a target, which implies that wherever we find ourselves to be, we have not reached the destination – there is a gap between our current position and our goal. Yet the stated aim is to realise here and now, to remove an imagined ‘distance’ between how we find ourselves to be and the destination we are striving to reach. Ibn ‘Arabi speaks of
this conundrum in the chapter of Noah in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* when discussing two kinds of people: those who find themselves in wonderment and bedazzled perplexity (*hayra*) and those who see themselves as travelling on a linear path (*ṭarīq*):

“For the people of dazzlement there is rotation and circling around a central point, from which they never depart. The people of the path, which is linear, incline away from the goal, looking [elsewhere] for what is already within them, and creating it as a destination in their imagination. For them there is a ‘from’ and a ‘to’ and all that lies inbetween. For people of circular movement, there is no beginning that would require a ‘from’, and no end that would demand a ‘to’. They possess the most complete attainment (*wujūd*)…”

This turning, this circling around the pivotal point from which one never departs, is the meaning of the affirmation of Unity (*tawḥīd*). The ‘central point’ here does not designate a human being who serves as the axis or pivot of the age – it refers to the Unity of God and the no-otherness of all else, that all ‘other’ is in fact God’s Self-revelation according to the various Names and places of manifestation. “Unity is the summit, the last step, of this excellence”, as Kenan Rifai said. Such *tawḥīd* was for Bülent the most essential point to understand, and his viewpoint on it was as fresh and direct as anyone’s. Near the end of his life, while staying on the Bosphorus at Beylerbeyi near where he was born, he once asked us: “what is the single most important point that must be understood by a person who wants to know? It is that there is only One, Unique, Absolute, Infinite Existence. It must be more than an idea. One has to be so completely certain of it that one adopts it through reason and intuition as the basic unshakeable fact of one’s existence... then every possible ramification that occurs to one is seen as not being outside The Existence, but as being an aspect of It.”

“Essentially”, he wrote, “there is no other existence or existent than the One and Only... This way of understanding the Unity of Existence with special emphasis on the non-existence of anything but the Existence of Only the One should be indelibly printed before our eyes and stressed in our thoughts at all moments and under all considerations.”

This non-existence or no-otherness is equally a pointer to the perfect human being or pole (*quṭb*), whose will is so indissolubly tied to the Divine Will that they are totally empty of themselves – as Ahmad al-Rifai put it, ‘a dead man who is truly living and a living man who is truly

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dead’. This was always emphasised by Bülent when speaking of our true potential as human beings: “The Perfectibility of Man seems that promise in which hope and comfort, not only psychological but as a true practical possibility, draws one on, helping one round the asperities of life and living…”

He spoke of human destiny in terms of God’s Beshara, i.e. the ‘good news’ that was first announced by Gabriel into Mary and the in-breathed mystery of the appearance of Jesus as the Perfect Human Being. In particular he described this ‘Beshara’ as an omen of joy in relation to the Second Coming of Jesus, an omen of “what will happen in the future, not in your future, not in anybody’s future, but in the Order of Things to Be, as He has set the lines for it to happen”. This he depicted as “to prepare, through people attaining each their own ‘goal’, the universal esoteric platform for the coming of Christ for the second time”.

To have even a breath of what this signifies is truly transformative. To realise that there is only One Infinite Existence is to be liberated from otherness. This is why Bülent used to stress the implications of Unity in every aspect and in every dimension, so that one never turns the gaze to anything other than Him – after all, once the premise of Unity is truly accepted, what ‘other’ is there to turn to? It was to this that Bülent alluded when someone in Konya, at the celebration of Mevlana’s ‘nuptial night’, said to him: “You come here year after year. You must love Mevlana very much”. “No”, he replied, “we love what Rumi loved and what loves him”.

Bülent dedicated his life to the service and exposition of Love and Knowledge. In everyone he met and interacted with, he sought to implant a real taste for that same Love and Knowledge, which is intrinsic to every human being. I remember very well one afternoon when I asked him about the ordinary Darwinian worldview that we are all trained in these days, according to which life evolves through the process of natural selection and the primary motive of all life-forms (including genes) is the preservation of life at all costs. I said that to me this view seemed unsatisfactory and partial, and I felt there was much more. His answer was direct and simple: yes, he said, at the level of the ordinary human being this is how life appears to be, but for the one who truly knows, the ārif, the primary motive is always Love and the work of the ārif is to preserve Love, to nurture Love, to manifest Love.

What I have tried to convey here is not the memory of a great man who died in 1987, but something of this great impulse and teaching that

7 Rauf, Addresses II, 79.
was tenderly planted in the soil of my soul. Here let me quote from a piece that Bülent wrote on how one can respond to and serve the sheer Divine Beauty, that which speaks of Itself as ‘an unknown Treasure that loves to be known’.

“Response to Sheer Beauty, Universal, all-pervading, has to be in the same way universal, all-pervading etc. If not, then the response does not fit or suit the original uniqueness of the premise which Sheer Beauty expresses. From an individuated reality, a response in consequence of that individuation is expected. However, this depends on the possibility and receptivity of the individual. Yet the response should be as general and as Universal and as Sheer, just as the origin of that which requires the response is Unique, Universal and Sheer… Only the perfect servant of that Sheer Beauty can respond in that way… If one asks oneself ‘Am I capable of this?’, the answer is general and universal. There is no man who is in the image of He who has fashioned man in His own image who has not been given, in potential, that ability. What then hinders each or any, is the choice so to do or not, or in other words, the resolve to serve or not, without in that service there being any odour of an intention of serving oneself even marginally or accidentally. Finally, all depends on the individuated individual.”8

I’d like to end these all too brief reflections by noting that while “all depends on the individuated individual”, at the same time “capability is not a prerequisite for beneficence” and hence one can never make valid comparisons between one spiritual master and another. The light of guidance is one, however they may appear, and God is the only Guide (ḥādī). The value and validity of human masters lies in their servanthood and their realisation of non-existence in the face of Him who is the only Truth. Hence whatever they appear to accomplish is due to the fact that He orders them in such and such a manner. For they know that they are nothing but Him manifesting His Love to be known. As Kenan Rifai once expressed it, “we are all together in Him”.

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8 Rauf, Addresses II, 5.
The world around us is changing rapidly, and the pace of change continues to accelerate. If we are to model dervishes, we have to be dervishes who keep one foot, the one closest to the heart, stationary, with the other foot circling the world. This combination of transmission and adaptation is necessary if we are to keep the timeless teachings of Tassawwuf relevant to each and every generation in a timely fashion. Fewer teachers have had to undergo a more turbulent process of adaptation that the Ottoman/Republic period Sufi master, Kenan Rifai.

Sufis have often found themselves living through turbulent periods before, whether it is giants like Attar and Mawlana Rumi living through the Mongol assault or Amir Abd al-Qadir Jazairi living through the colonial period. We have lived through trauma, and even many have been a part of restoring a sense of Baraka to a world gone mad with conflict. Kenan Rifai’s age, likewise, saw first the rapid modernization of the Ottoman Empire, followed by World War I, the ascendancy of Ataturk, and the destruction of centuries old models of Sultanate and Caliphate. Let us take some time to ponder first his Sufi teachings, and then a few of the ways in which Kenan Rifai adapted his Sufi practice to this rapidly changing world.

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KENAN RIFAI AND RUMI’S MASNAVI

The American Mevlevi teacher, Ibrahim Gamard, has called Kenan Rifai’s *Listen* “the most significant contribution to understanding the *Mathnawi* to be published in the English language in over seventy years”, in other words since Nicholson’s majestic translation and commentary. All scholars, students, and seekers of the Path of Love are indebted to Cemalnur Sargut and TURKAD for having subsidized the translation and publication of Kenan Rifai’s *Listen*, arguably the most relevant and helpful commentary on Rumi’s works available in English.

Typically, the Masnavi has been read as a journey. At least in the first *daftar* (volume), it is seen as a journey from the state of the *Ney* to the state of Imam Ali. Masnavi’s narrative recreates the path that we all have to walk, from the state of the reed flute Ney, feeling cut off and isolated from God, till we get to the lofty station of the perfected human being, Imam Ali. The story of the reed flute is well-known: we are cut off and isolated from our origin, and we yearn to return back to that original home. The primordial experience is one of being cut, and then experience suffering through the fire of love: holes are burnt into us. Before the kiss of the musician can breathe spirit/air into us, we have to be made hollow of our ego, made empty of our selfishness. In short, there is suffering to endure on this path of love. We start with loneliness, agony, and feeling cut off because the Prophet told us to speak with people at the level of their understanding. We start with isolation and brokenness, because that is where most human beings are. As Mawlana Rumi says of his own ugly, crude, and unrefined disciples: “If they were already beautiful, I myself would have become their disciple.”

The *Masnavi* is a journey from Ney-ness, brokenness to becoming who and what we already are, and must become again. The story of Imam Ali is of course so well known that it hardly needs repeating: Ali defeats a mighty warrior in battle, and sits on his chest to finish him. The defeated and dispirited warrior spits on the face of Imam Ali in sheer disgust, the face that Mawlana says was the pride of every prophet and every saint. Ali immediately sheets his sword and gets off from the man’s chest. The warrior, puzzled, wonders why Ali would relinquish at the very moment of victory. Ali reveals that he is truly God’s lion, “moved only by God’s face”, not by anger. He is truly the one who has conquered his own ego, he is the real mountain (kuh), not some

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straw (kaah) who is going to be blown here and there by some wind of emotion.

The transition from Ney to Ali is conventional enough, well covered in many Masnavi commentaries and oral traditions. But here Kenan Rifai does something unexpected. He sees the end in the very beginning, prefiguring the perfected human being already present in the ney. Even while addressing the tale of the Ney and the separation, he also sees what awaits at the end of the path: the fully realized human being.

**THERE IS INSIDE ME AN “I” WITHIN MY “I”**

This is not unlike Attar, telling us about the Simurgh before the bed have set out, but of course we won’t know the secret until we set out on the path.

“But the reed is also a symbol of the spiritually arrived [erenler]. The arrived are people united with God. But they are also people who have experienced the countless suffering of exile in distance from God and countless torments of loss before arriving at their station. The arrived, also called “the friends” communicate their torments of loss in burning tones like the reed flute in order to awaken people who are complacent.”

In Kenan Rifai’s reading, it is love as the power of Divine Love that propels the seeker beyond the love of material worlds and bodily existence.

“It is when a person attains the secret of dying prior to death (mutu qabîl an tamutu), that is, when he matures enough to annihilate the bad and ugly states of his soul, that the veil of heedlessness of God is removed. Love of God is the force that brings a person such maturity and superiority.” This is when the heart is filled with this greatest love.

Just as Kenan Rifai sees the end prefigured in the beginning, his reading of the Ali narrative is likewise startling:

In talking about Imam Ali, he has Ali say:

*But since I am not a black, dark shadow but the shadow of oneness, I am illuminated and a shadow made of light. My function is to raise*

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the veils between the bondsman and God, and for that reason I am not a veil but a remover of veils.

I am a sword of God encrusted with jewels, and I quicken, I do not kill, those who meet me in battle. My removal of the selfhood pertaining to the soul and the world of those who war with their souls in the path of God appears to those viewing it from outside to be a kind of death. But those aware of the reality of the situation see that those freed by my hand from selfish and satanic qualities attain eternal life when they shed their bodies.5

Kenan Rifai shows how the end is prefigured in the beginning by citing the same poem of Yunus Emre in the Ney and the Imam Ali story. In ending the commentary by the story of Ibn Muljam, he states:

You will not kill the real me. You will tear apart the cage of my body and free my spirit. That is your task. You will kill my form, not me. For do not forget that in fact you cannot kill the me expressed by: There is inside me an “I” within my “I”.6

We set out on the path to find out the truth that we already know to be true, but when we go on the path we see the truth through the eye of the heart. We see things not as they are, but as we are. And the seeing self is not the same after the journey as it was in the beginning.

KENAN RIFAI’S ADAPTATION
OF THE MODERN WORLD

Kenan Rifai beautifully translates timeless Sufi teachings in a way that is timely for the contemporary world. I’d like to mention three themes in which Kenan Rifai take historical themes and adapts them for an audience in the 20th and 21st centuries:

1. Clarification of the Nafs not merely as the “self” or “ego-self”, but more specifically as one’s selfish traits.

One of the common criticisms of the historical tradition of Sufism, particularly from feminist scholars, has been that it has a propensity to adopt a tendency to denigrate the body, and that the “negation” of the self language can actually be a distraction from the desire to leave a whole and holistic existence.

5 Kenan Rifai, Listen, 496.
6 Kenan Rifai, Listen, 515.
It is not so much that Rifai says what has not been said before. It’s more the subtlety, and if the irony may be granted, the directness, with which he states it.

A perfect place to explore the rephrasing of the classical Sufi tradition is in his commentary on the famed story of the Chinese and the Greeks:

> Here the works of the painters of Rome are the Sufis who have no interest
> in lessons to be repeated, in books, or in showing off their art.
> That room is the heart of the Sufi which is pure of all dust and rust like the most brilliant of mirrors. It is in such mirrors, that is, in the hearts of such advanced Sufis, that the divine self-disclosure occurs.
> If you ask what it is they clean away to bring their hearts into such a state, it is rage, arrogance, selfishness and hypocrisy, lust and passion.7

Now, this theme of course is an old one, that everything is taking place inside the heart of the faithful lover of God. In reading the *Masnavi*, we are the hare, we are the lion, we are the well we leap into, and we ourselves are the redemption. It’s all from us, it’s all in us, and it is all for us. The “us” is not a mere humanist self, but a human being fashioned in the image of God, perpetually refreshed and recast through the breath of God.

But if you go back to Kenan Rifai’s gloss on this well-known and oft-discussed story, we see that he is advocating not the cleansing (or negating) of something called the human self, but most specifically the egoist qualities inside us. It’s not that the self has to die, not that the human has to die, but rather that greed, ego, hypocrisy, lust, passion, and selfishness have to vanish. And when they do, oh what glory emerges in their place.

Here is what happens after the selfishness has vanished:

> It is only the heart’s mirror divested of all worldly filth which can be a mirror, a reflector, of that self-disclosure of essence and attributes without limit. For the mirror of the heart, like the beauty reflected in it, has no limit […] Only the heart is eternal with Him.
> The hearts of God’s arrived are mirrors of both unity and plurality.
> The only mirror to reflect all these images is the mirror of the heart.

That is why, from pre-eternity to post-eternity, every image reflected in the heart appears there divested of all veils.

Those who polish their hearts with the love of God see a different kind of beauty shining there each instant; each instant they are witness to another of God’s infinite beauties.8

2. Women

We are living through an extraordinary period of female leadership in many different layers and regions of Muslim societies. In both individual and communal formats, Malala Yousefzai of Pakistan, Shirin Ebadi of Iran, our own Cemalnur Sargut and TURKKAD here in Turkey, and Amina Wadud in the United States in addition to scholars such as UNC’s own Juliane Hammer, Kecia Ali, Sachiko Murata, and so many others have both widened and deepened our sense of where to look to for understanding of Islam.

In this way, Kenan Rifai, along with his contemporary Hazrat Inayat Khan of South Asia were pioneers. The key practice here is fellowship with the complete human being, the fully human one who has wiped the mirror of her own heart so that the beauty (jamal) of the light of God (nur) shines on through. It is this magical and mystical fellowship that hearkens back to the sweet presence of sitting in the presence of the Prophet (Suhba, sahaba).

And here Kenan Rifai was remarkable among his peers: his first teacher was his mother, Hatice Cenan, who initiated him on the path of Sufism, along with her own murshid Adham Efendi. In this case, his early experience with a female murshida (not unlike Ibn ‘Arabi) prepared him for a life of deep spiritual fellowship with women. She is remembered as having tenderly said to him: “You are not alone. I am with you.” And towards the end of his earthly life, Kenan is remembered as yearning for the company of his blessed mother.9 In visiting the Dergah of Kenan Rifai, we saw how his own room used to be that of his mother, and her maqam was still marked and set aside.

Rifai was known for having significant female disciples, including Nazli Sultan, Semiha Cemal, Samiha Ayverdi, Safiye Erol, Cemalnur Ho-

8 Ibid.,451.

ca’s mother Meskure Sargut, Zehra Sultan, Nezihe Araz, and others.10 His welcoming of female murids also crossed religious lines: one of his murids, Sofi Huri, was the daughter of a priest. She famously described him as combining the majestic personality of an Old Testament prophet combined with a waterfall of compassion and kindness.

In Kenan Rifai’s view of women in the context of a spiritual fellowship, “affection for women comes from being able to witness God in the mirror of their existence.”11 Importantly, his appreciation of the feminine was connected to real friendship and fellowship with women. It’s easy to speak of the feminine and remain ignorant of the daily trials and tribulations that society—and men—place on women. Kenan Rifai seems to have been an exception here. In fact, his own relationship with Semih Cemal seems to have echoes of the relationship of the Prophet with Hazrat Khadija: “She was a friend with whom to share his ideal and a human on whom his tired head could rest.”

He expressed his greatest joy as sharing spiritual knowledge with her. When she asked how she could mirror this joy back to him, he said: “Love me! Love me so that I can love you too. However, know the meaning of this ‘love me’ very well. ‘Love me’ means to love all that I love, all the humans, love itself, and God.”12

His most prominent disciple was a female disciple, Samiha Ayverdi, who has left her own indelible mark on Turkish Sufism. She was the main gateway for the late and great Annemarie Schimmel to the lived world of beauty. Her own companions, Safiye Erol, Nezihe Araz and Sofi Huri and Samiha Cemal were other significant women around Kenan Rifai. It is in the Dost (Friend) work, a great work of spiritual sensitivity, that Samiha Ayverdi compared Kenan Rifai to the great Sufi poetic sages, Mawlana Rumi and Yunus Emre.

This legacy was transmitted from Kenan Rifai to Samiha Ayverdi, to Cemalnur’s mother Meskure Hanim, to now Cemalnur Sargut. In it, we have a multi-generational model of spiritual leadership that is hard to replicate in many other Muslim societies. We see this as a love that surpasses death, in Kenan Rifai’s burial grounds. He is trusted to the mother, Earth, next to his own mother, surrounded by female murids like Meskure Hanim and Samiha Ayverdi.

10 Ibid., 17.
11 Ibid., 24.
12 Ibid., 26.
Kenan Rifai offers a subtle gendered reading of human relationships, one that is based less on contemporary feminist discourse and more on classical Sufi teachings of Rumi, Ibn ‘Arabi, and others. According to Kenan Rifai, echoing Rumi, women embody the divine quality of Khaliq (the creator). Expanding on Rumi’s famed verse in the Masnavi (“do not call her a creature, but a creator”), Rifai emphasizes that women are blessed with immense capacity for love. He cites a prophetic tradition to the effect that “men and women are two halves of a whole”, and works to realize such a spiritual model of fellowship in the community around him.

3. University and independence from the state.

If we take a look at the trajectory of Kenan Rifai’s life, which spans from 1867–1950, we get a better sense of the full turbulence that the Ottoman Empire (and later on the Turkish Republic) has gone through during the lifetime of this great shaykh. Rifai was born during the Tanzimat period. The Tanzimat reforms are generally seen as having started in the 1839 Gulhane proclamation and ending in 1876. The year after Kenan Rifai was born, the Imperial Ottoman Lycée at Galatasaray was established in 1868. A young Kenan began studying at this Lycee at a tender age, which also meant being exposed to European as well as Islamic sciences. We see the full trajectory of Ottoman society in Kenan’s life: He graduates from Galatasaray High School, works as a science instructor in the Iranian school; he is appointed as an Assistant Secretary to the German Supervisor in Ministry of Postal Services. He studies law, and is later appointed as Principal of Education in a number of cities such as Balikesir, Skopje, Trabzon, and also Medina. He teaches Turkish at Fener Greek High School for 13 years.

The communities he comes across are a microcosm of Ottoman cosmopolitanism. Let us remember that Istanbul, the capital of the largest and at times wealthiest Muslim Empire had a Muslim minority until 1900. The interaction with a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community made sure that Kenan Rifai cultivated a sense of cosmopolitanism that reflected his Sufi ideals:

“To serve a person, no matter what religious background he or she comes from, means to serve Allah.”

13 Ibid., 13.
It is one thing to utter theologically pluralistic statements, quite another to do so when you are teachings Jews and Christian for a period of 12 years.

“All religions are one in essence. Ranging from the primitive religions to that of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Islam, they are all one in terms of meaning.”

We see the impact of introduction of Western languages and sciences in the elite parts of Turkish society, and Kenan Rifai himself championed the learning of Western sciences, including famously continuing to learn new languages up to age 80. He knew Turkish, French, German, Arabic, Persian, Greek, Circassian, and English (his last).

The 1839 Gulhane and the subsequent 1856 Hatt-e Humayun re-established Ottomanism, and stated the goal of extending equal protection to all the citizens of the Empire. While scholars continue to debate whether the Tanzimat were inspired by Sufi sources or simply an aping of the West, Kenan Rifai seemed to combine remaining in a thousand year old Sufi tradition while continuing to adapting to the changing post-Tanzimat and post-Ataturk period.

The turbulence continued with the Great War and the attempt to carve out the remnant of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk’s nationalist rescue had serious consequences for the functioning of Islam and Sufism in the public arena. In 1922 the Sultanate was formally abolished, soon to be followed in 1924 by abolishing the Caliphate. In April 1924 the madrasas were banished, followed by the February 1925 uprising by the Naqshbandi Shaykh Sa’id. The independent tribunal that followed led to the public execution of Shaykh Said and 46 Sufis.

The nail in the coffin of Dergah-based model of Sufism came (or at least, seemed to come) on December 13th, 1925 with the passing of Law 677, which stated:

“prohibits and abolishes the profession of tomb-keeping, the assigning of mystical names, and the closing of tekkes (dervish lodges), zaviyes (central dervish lodges), and tombs……All the tekkes (dervish lodges) and zaviyes (central dervish lodges) in the Turkish Republic, either in the form of wakf (religious foundations) or under the personal property right of its sheikh or established in any other way, are closed.”

14 Ibid., 6.
15 Ibid., 14.
This was the turbulent world in which Kenan Rifai came to adulthood. What a turbulent world, and what a profound transformation of both the religious and the political landscape. Tasawwuf had been woven into the very fabric of Ottoman scholarly, mystical, popular, and political life. Many different Sufi tarikats had received political patronage, with great prominence being given to Mevlevis, Naqshbandis, and others. If Tasawwuf were to survive in Republican era period, it would have to find new roots in this new soil.

It was this turbulent context that led Kenan Rifai to undertake the decision that in retrospect has proven to be a powerful visionary insight. He made the decision to shift the focus of Sufi life from the tradition Dergah (Sufi lodge) to the university: “Ama akademi olarak açılacaktır.”

We see the continuation of this practice under Cemalnur’s vision. TURKAD has been among the most active NGOs in promotion of scholarship on Sufism, ranging from the establishing of the professorship at University of North Carolina (filled by Professor Juliane Hammer, who is the Co-chair for the study of Islam at the American Academy of Religion) to the chair of Beijing University. In addition, TURKKAD has operated some of the most visible conferences for the study of Sufism, on figures and topics ranging from Mawlana Rumi, Rumi and Women, Sultan Valad, Shams-e Tabrizi, Abu’l-Hasan Kharraqani, and many others.

These conferences, professionally run, well-attended, and featuring many of the leading scholars in the world such as Professors Carl Ernst, Bruce Lawrence, Mehmud Erol Kilic, and others, continue Kenan Rifai’s mission of bringing the Sufi tradition from the Dergah to the Academy.

In short, the life of Kenan Rifai, whose Dergah marked the last Dergah to be established in Istanbul in 1908, traces the life of a dervish, with one foot remaining firmly planted in the richness of the ancient path of overflowing Divine love (mazhab-e eshq), and another foot whirling around the world, keeping up with the rapidly changing universe that we find ourselves in. The skill and grace with which Kenan Rifai carried out this dance has made him one of them most relevant Sufi masters of the 20th century, even as his own legacy continues to spill over to the 21th.

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What has been the educational and cultural legacy of Kenan Rifai? His impact is evident today, in a rich collection of programs that have been supported by the Kerim Foundation and the Turkish Women's Cultural Association (TÜRKKAD) over the past decade, with the help of a number of municipalities and other crucial supporters. Having participated in a number of these programs, I would observe that one of their key themes has been the linkage of two important forces: first, the teaching tradition of Sufism (tesavvuf), which was both maintained and transformed by Kenan Rifai in the turbulent years of the early twentieth century; and second, the humanistic institution of scholarship on religious studies in the modern university. These forces have intersected for some time. My own teacher in the academy, the late Professor Annemarie Schimmel, had a strong connection to Turkey and its spiritual culture. It is noteworthy that her engagement with the world of Turkish Sufism came about with the help of Samiha Ayverdi, a key figure in the line of Kenan Rifai, and a founder of TÜRKKAD. Indeed, Annemarie dedicated her book, *My Soul Is a Woman*, to the

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1 Carl W. Ernst was born in Los Angeles in 1950. He is a specialist in Islamic studies, with a focus on West and South Asia. Ernst received his PhD degree from Harvard University in 1981 and worked at Pomona College between 1981 and 1992. His published research, based on the study of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, has been mainly devoted to the study of three areas: general and critical issues of Islamic studies, premodern and contemporary Sufism, and Indo-Muslim culture. He received the DOST Service to Islam Award in 2005 for his book “Following Muhammad” which has been translated into Turkish. He is William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

2 A list of conferences sponsored by TÜRKKAD is available at http://turkkad.org/default.asp?PG=YTR_0201&NWS00_CODE=SEMPZUA&NWS01_ID=&tPARAM=. 
memory of Samiha Ayverdi. At the same time, she was internationally renowned in the scholarly world for her work on the phenomenology of religion.

Kenan Rifai as a teacher had an impact through his personal contact with numerous students, and also through a number of literary productions, principally his poems (ilahis), his conversations [sohbetler], his biography of Ahmad al-Rifai, and his commentary on the Masnavi of Maulana Rumi. As an example of his thinking, I would like to reflect here on some characteristic passages in the Masnavi commentary that reveal important insights into his philosophy of teaching. I would then like to connect these texts to the professorial chairs that have been established in the name of Kenan Rifai in North Carolina and Beijing. These academic positions, named after this modern Sufi leader, are new initiatives in international education that aim to connect people and cultures in ways. In short, the legacy of Sufi ethics combined with the spirit of open inquiry in the modern university has the potential to open up new possibilities of community that are not constrained by narrow concepts of nationality, ethnicity, or religion.

The first text to consider is Kenan Rifai’s commentary on the Masnavi, which covers the first book of that text. In this great classic of Sufi literature, there are several passages that contain dramatic dialogues between Rumi and his leading disciple Husamuddin Chelebi. In fact, it was Husamuddin who evidently inspired Rumi to compose this massive collection of Sufi wisdom, so much so that Rumi considered the idea of calling it the Husami Nama. While there are a number of remarkable exchanges between Rumi and Husamuddin in book one of the Masnavi, two have special relevance for the concept of pedagogy.

As is well known, Rumi had a special relationship with Shams-i Tabrizi, so much so that he sometimes became distant and refused to answer when questioned about Shams. Yet on other occasions he

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softened, and he even pointed to Husamuddin as the next model of the spiritual path.

*Don’t enter this valley without evidence*  
*like God’s friend say: “I do not love the things that set”*  
*go by the shadow and find yourself a sun*  
*grab the skirt of Shah Shams of Tabriz, hold firm*  
*if you don’t know the way to this wedding feast*  
*learn it from Ziya al-Haqq Husamuddin.*

Kenan Rifai’s comment on this passage is the following:

“The sun in the sky may bring an understanding person to know God, but if you find a sun like Shams of Tabriz, you will learn the realities from closer up. Bind yourself tightly to his commands and warnings. Shams of Tabriz brings one to union with God the Truth, but if you cannot find him, ask the Ray of God Husamuddin.”

What is striking here is the recognition of a student of the next generation, Husamuddin Chelebi, as a spiritual leader in his own right. The process of education is not intended as a glorification of the teacher, but as a process of sharing and increasing knowledge.

The same technique is signaled in Rumi’s dialog with Husamuddin about the composition of the *Masnavi*, when Rumi comments,

*Dawn is here, O safekeeper of the morning!*  
*Ask pardon from my master Husamuddin.*

Here is Kenan Rifai’s comment:

(Hazret Mevlana often composed the Spiritual Couplets at night, and Dawn would break while he improvised verses and Chelebi was the one who wrote them down, but the raging overflow of that city of gnosis and wisdom could not be stopped. On the morning of yet another such night, Hazret Mevlana, again fired up with such ecstasy and passion, requested the honor, respect and reparation he showed his great disciple from God the Truth, and thus declared to all the world the value of his great disciple.)

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What Mevlana meant to say here is: My God, I don’t have the strength to thank Husamuddin for such service, to ask his pardon. Just as You forget the flaws in worship of You and take Your believing bondsmen into the city of Your mercy, take on the request of pardon for this too.10

Here too Rumi makes his student a partner in his teaching, and worthy of respect. These passages are revealing, because they are prominent examples of a Sufi teaching technique, occurring in a key text that Kenan Rifai wanted to explain to his own students. Education must focus on its audience, rather than merely asserting the authority of the teacher. What, indeed, are the educational needs that have to be addressed?

Kenan Rifai lived at a time of immense cultural and political upheaval, which witnessed the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a secular Turkish republic. The Sufi tariqats were abolished and their tekkes were closed in 1925. His reaction to this transformation was not despair at the end of the old order, however. He saw the situation as an opportunity to apply the ethical teachings of Sufism to a wider world. This may be understood as the development of a post-tariqat form of Sufism. This is not to say that the traditions of the great Sufi orders of the past had become irrelevant; rather, it was necessary to reformulate the teachings of Sufism in a changed social and political milieu, where the old institutions no longer existed.

In some respects this “post-tariqat Sufism” is a return to the earliest phase of the Sufi tradition, in which figures like Rumi and Shams inspired each other, rather than adhering to a rigid concept of the master-disciple relationship. Although the institutionalization of Sufism formalized and solidified spiritual authority in simplified metaphorical constructions as a “tree” (shajara) or “chain” (silsila), the testimony of Sufi leaders from the pre-Mongol era indicates that in those times Sufi teaching was a process of spiritual interaction that was fluid and less structured.11 Such also seems to be the case with Kenan Rifai in his own Sufi training. We are told that once, his teacher Hamza Rifai said to him, “I do not know who is whose murshid, you mine or I yours?”12 This self-effacing statement signaled a recognition that Sufism was not

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10 Ibid., 225–6.
to be the assertion of the teacher’s superior position, but instead an openness to a dialogical relationship that was mutual and beneficial.

In any case, the focus of Kenan Rifai’s activity as a teacher was unmistakably a new response to drastically changed conditions, in two chief areas. First, in distinction to the strongly patriarchal tendencies of previous generations, Kenan Rifai saw the need to bring capable women into prominence as some of his leading students. This open acknowledgment of the spiritual potential of women was a major shift of emphasis from the premodern situation. Second, throughout his life Kenan Rifai was dedicated to education in modern establishments that had a global and cosmopolitan perspective. Both of these features are indicative of a response to the changing conditions of modernity that takes account of the need to reformulate the teachings of the past.

This brings me to the important subject of the Kenan Rifai professorial chairs established at the University of North Carolina and Peking University. The creation of these chairs, which is due to the generosity of many dedicated supporters here in Turkey, is a momentous and transformative development. It is not easy to find parallels for this admirable commitment at the international level, for an initiative that is so clearly dedicated to the ethical ideals of Sufism.

I frame the significance of the Kenan Rifai chairs in terms of the much larger context of education in the modern world. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, in his book *After Virtue*, has persuasively argued that the contemporary age has faced a crisis in the field of ethics, as previous moral orders linked to traditional religious authority have been eroded and marginalized by the emergence of the nation state. The secular space of the nation state, which privatizes religion and claims a monopoly on legitimate violence, holds a dubious position when it comes to morality. Considerations of state security and strategy take absolute priority, with the result that ethical judgments become a luxury for the few, and necessity is invoked in such a way as to make justice secondary; MacIntyre regards this as the failure of the Enlightenment project. In this situation, he recommends as a remedy the formation of communities based on tradition, specifically on the ethical teachings of Aristotle. When critics questioned the viability of asserting Aristotle’s ethics as a universal framework, MacIntyre proposed the possibility of accepting multiple concepts of justice: “since there are a diversity of tra-

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ditions of enquiry, with histories, there are, so it will turn out, rati-
onalities rather than rationality, just as it will also turn out that there are
 justices rather than justice.”\textsuperscript{14} It may also be observed that this concept
of diverse ethical communities is in consonance with key texts from
the Qur’an, which specifically recognizes the multiplicity of religious
traditions, while calling on people of different faiths to “strive to be first
in doing what is best” (\textit{istabaqu al-\textit{khayrat}}, Qur. 2:48 and 5:148) – that
is, to compete on the field of ethics.

How does this insight apply to modern education? The modern uni-
versity is barely 200 years old. A product of the Enlightenment, the
university was famously defined by Immanuel Kant as an educational
institution that would be free from political or religious control. The
public university, particularly in the US, has become a location that
is favorable to the free development of critical inquiry about the role
of religion in human societies, and in principle the discussion can be
joined by anyone who is willing to engage in scholarly argument, re-
gardless of religious background. The space of the university is therefore
especially appropriate for the development of new ethical communities
as envisioned by MacIntyre, with the provision that they should not be
defined by nationality, race, or religion. The Kenan Rifai chairs in the
USA and China aim to be centers for such ethical communities.

The Kenan Rifai Distinguished Professorship of Islamic Studies at Uni-
versity of North Carolina at Chapell Hill (UNC), launched in 2009
with the inaugural appointment of Prof. Juliane Hammer, plays a vital
role in Islamic studies scholarship in the US. UNC’s program in Is-
lamic studies, which has been developing for over 20 years, has gone
through a rigorous process of developing a clear sense of mission and
strategic planning. With valuable collaboration and partnership with
colleagues like Bruce Lawrence at Duke University, we articulated the
project of taking Islamic studies out of the narrow confines of Ori-
entalism, and connecting it with the full range of disciplines of the
humanities and social sciences. In a country like America, which is
unfortunately afflicted by strong anti-Islamic prejudice or Islamopho-
bia, it is important to create an engagement with humanistic and social
science research. This engagement is designed to make Islamic studies
accessible to non-specialists, and to bring the study of Islam into the
normal curriculum which is now dominated by Eurocentrism. Juliane
Hammer’s research and teaching, which focuses on Islam and gender,

\textsuperscript{14} Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{Whose Justice? Which Rationality?} (Notre Dame: University
Islam in America, and Sufism, directly addresses the important challenges faced by Islamic studies today. As the co-chair of the Study of Islam section of the American Academy of Religion (a position to which she has been elected by colleagues), she is a national leader in the field of Islamic studies. We are proud to say that twelve scholars of Islamic studies have graduated with the PhD from UNC since 2003, and we currently have eight more studying with us at various stages; the undergraduates who have studied with us are numbered in the hundreds every year. Our graduates now teach in religious studies departments at distinguished colleges and universities around the US.

Peking University is unquestionably one of the leading universities in China and a peer to UNC (the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for 2016-17 lists UNC-Chapel Hill as number 56, and Peking University as number 30). The study of religion has a particular challenge in China after the Maoist revolution, since official policies toward religion, combined with the distinctive cultural history of China, have left many Chinese intellectuals without the tools to understand religion from an academic perspective. (Let me add parenthetically that I hosted a visiting scholar from China at UNC last year, who is now teaching in Xinjiang at the principal university for the Muslim Hui people; he came to UNC precisely to gain familiarity with the field of religious studies). It is therefore quite appropriate that the Kenan Rifai chair in Beijing has been devoted to bringing in visiting scholars to showcase the results and methodologies of research in Islamic studies.

UNC’s approach to Islamic studies aims not only at integration with the humanities and social sciences, but also at reaching larger audiences though the arts and cultural performances. I have been working for several years with Emil Kang, Executive Director of Carolina Performing Arts, on the programming of a dozen performances taking place at UNC in the 2016-17 season. The theme inspiring this portion of the arts season is “Sacred/Secular: A Sufi Journey.” Together Emil Kang and I visited Indonesia and Senegal to audition performers. As a complement to the performing arts season, we organized two international conferences. The first conference was held in the fall of 2016 at UNC, bringing scholars from different fields to discuss the changing concepts, classifications, and boundaries of religious identities in the modern era. The second conference is scheduled for June 2017 in Senegal, on the topic of “ZIKR: Sufi Performance and Culture,” dealing with Sufism as mediated through the arts and local cultures from dif-
The conference will include a significant participation by Turkish scholars and is cosponsored by TÜRKKAD. It would be appropriate to plan similar events that include the other Kenan Rifai chairs and programs. This would be a fitting implementation of the educational missions of all these institutions, collaborating at the highest level of international cooperation. It would also be in harmony with the global and cosmopolitan vision of education formulated by Kenan Rifai, which would highlight the resources of Sufi tradition without the authoritarian overtones of earlier times.

I would like to close by invoking another model of early Sufi ethics, from a treatise on “The Ethics of Companionship” (adab-i suhbat) by Shaykh Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1209):

Companionship is the way-station of the purification of secrets, and it is also the place where the suns of illumination rise. That is where they remove natural misfortunes from the clay of the children of Adam.

They are rare princes who go into the exile of annihilation with each other. They raise up everything other than sheer servanthood in pure lordship, with the hand of sincerity, to the paths of divine knowledge. They are the dwellers of the realm of “those who give ear” (Qur’an 50:37), and they are the knights of the hidden world. Those who are prophets for each other from God—if you see them, in form they are different, but they are “single in soul.” You see them all, and you see no other, for you will find no otherness with them.

They are the spies of hearts, and the mirrors of the hidden. They are born of the mother of compassion, and therefore they are tender with each other. They are helpers of God, since they assist each other. They take turns in all things from their equality, and they pray for each other in their supplications. From uprightness they are straight with their friends and crooked with themselves. Their secrets are open to each other, since they are not strangers to each other. They are the sources of the caravan of scented breezes, and they are the ones who inhale the wind of holy fragrance. In their market they sell rare wonders of the angelic realm, and no one buys but those who sell. They are each other’s prayer direction when they are in isolation. Their only weapon is contention, and in contention they find harmony. As the Master Muhammad said (God bless him and grant him peace), “Difference among scholars is a mercy.”

Programs for these conferences are at http://islamworkshop2016.web.unc.edu/ and http://islamworkshop2016.web.unc.edu/.
Their attribute is preferring others, and sincerity is their garment. They are the soul of each other, and when they are apart they are lifeless. They are agreeable in their association, speaking without the carnal soul and listening with the heart. They appoint the realities of their inner secrets to reckon up the number of each other’s breaths. They are attentive to meeting with each other. At the time of conviviality they are all sober. Friendship is their profession, truthfulness is their pasture, and sincerity is their meadow. In their favorite company they do not wound each other, for they know that injuring each other is injuring themselves. They are in union at the time of separation, and separation is banished among them.

From truthfulness and sincerity, they do not merely tolerate each other, nor do they flee each other when they hold conversation. All are servants of each other, and all are teachers of each other. All are disciples of each other, because they are in essence one. When companionship appears, it brings stability; even when it is disturbed, in all conditions it is to be chosen. It is the trace of God, for it is the representative of God to his creation.

Whoever becomes more perfect through companionship becomes on his own account the representative of his time. “Abraham was a nation” (Qur’an 16:120). One becomes the guide and the guided one when one has the inheritance of the prophets. If there were no companionship, man would not be rooted in the commands of lordship, would not be at rest in the flow of fate and destiny, and would not be literate and learned in the assemblies of intimacy. Their meal companion is someone who eats the bread of wild herbs, and who consumes hunger with them. One who sleeps with them shares their breath both day and night in meditation’s breathing. They are the people of God’s house, among whom there is no stranger. This is because they are the brides of the hidden way-station, and they have the precious jewels of wisdom. No one but themselves should hear their words, for if others hear, they will be tempted. The condition of companionship is the condition of divine knowledge. Those who go within themselves become more knowing, and more truthful, in companionship.

I don’t know if it is possible to imitate such an ideal. But it would indeed be admirable if the Kenan Rifai chairs could serve as the basis for an international community that would be worthy of imitation.

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The Importance of Sufism in Chinese Islam

Sachiko Murata¹
William C. Chittick²

Cemalnur Sargut Hocam asked us to say something about the significance of the Kenan Rifai Chair of Islamic Studies at Peking University, which we inaugurated in the Spring of 2012. As many of you know, the Kenan Rifai Chair is housed in The Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies. The Institute was founded by Professor Tu Weiming in 2010,

¹ Sachiko Murata, born in 1943, completed her BA in family law at Chiba University in Japan, worked for a year in a law firm in Tokyo, and then went to Iran to study Islamic law. She completed a PhD in Persian literature at Tehran University in 1971, and then transferred to the faculty of theology, where she was the first woman and the first non-Muslim to be enrolled. She finished her MA in Islamic jurisprudence in 1975, and while continuing work on her PhD dissertation in law she became a research associate at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. Her work on her second PhD was cut short by the revolution. Since 1983 she has taught religious studies at Stony Brook. She taught “Muslim Confucius” and other Islamic Thoughts classes at Peking University, Kenan Rifai Islamic Research Chair, which was established by Turkish Women’s Cultural Association (TURK-KAD) since 2012. In this class, she used a book on a Chinese scholar Huiru from Ibn Arabi School, which she prepared with William C. Chittick and Weiming Tu.

² Born and raised in Milford, Connecticut, William C. Chittick did his B.A. in history at the College of Wooster (Ohio) and then went to Iran, where he completed a Ph.D. in Persian literature at Tehran University in 1974. He taught comparative religion in the humanities department at Aryamehr Technical University in Tehran and, for a short period before the revolution, was assistant professor at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. He returned to the United States in January, 1979. For three years he was assistant editor at the Encyclopaedia Iranica (Columbia University), and from 1983 he has taught religious studies at Stony Brook. He served as Kenan Rifai Islamic Research professor at Peking University in 2012. Chittick is author and translator of thirty books and one hundred-fifty articles on Islamic thought, Sufism, Shi’ism, and Persian literature. Chittick regularly teaches Islam, Islamic Classics, and other courses in religious studies. On occasion he directs qualified students in the reading of Arabic or Persian texts. He is currently working on several research projects in Sufism and Islamic philosophy.
shortly after he retired after thirty years at Harvard. During our time in China we taught one course at Peking University, another at Minzu University, and we participated in several conferences and workshops. We met many of the foremost Chinese scholars of Islam and we had a number of talented students.

From the outset it was our understanding that the first task of the Kenan Rifai Chair would be to help Chinese Muslims re-establish links with their own intellectual tradition. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that the twentieth century was disastrous for Islam in China. Muslims had lived in China for fifteen hundred years and had founded flourishing communities in many parts of the country. Today there are at least thirty million Chinese Muslims. Many belong to ethnic minorities, but many more are indistinguishable from non-Muslim Chinese.

After the communist revolution of 1949, all forms of religion and tradition were treated as the enemy, in practice if not in theory. Islam was singled out for special persecution, not least because it had always been considered a foreign import. Still today many Muslims hide their Islamic identity because of the prejudice against them. One of the results of persecution was that a generation of scholars was lost and the intellectual links with the past were broken.

When China opened up to the outside world thirty years ago, Muslim communities were able to send students abroad with the aim of regaining Islamic knowledge. A new generation of scholars and ulama appeared, but they have received their learning in places like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. They have some knowledge of Qur’an, hadith, and Shariah, but they tend to be indoctrinated with the ideologies of the Islamist movements. Moreover, they have no training in the traditional intellectual fields like Sufism and philosophy. And it is the Sufi and philosophical dimensions of Islam that had determined the nature of the Islam of their Chinese forefathers. In other words, the new ulama come back to China without the Islamic learning that would allow them to understand the teachings of the great Chinese Muslims of the past.

Perhaps the best way to grasp the difference between the new forms of Chinese Islam and that of the past is to observe the difference between the traditional and the modern architecture of Chinese mosques. Whenever there are sizable Muslim populations, new mosques are sprouting up like mushrooms. Financed mostly by Saudi money, these are gaudy concrete monstrosities. In contrast, the few mosques that were not de-
stroyed during the Cultural Revolution are barely distinguishable from Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist temples. They are beautiful examples of traditional Chinese architecture, seamlessly integrated with their natural and social surroundings. They illustrate the Far Eastern ideal of balance and harmony—an ideal that is of course displayed in old mosques throughout the Islamic world. In the Chinese case, you can only recognize the traditional mosques as mosques from up close, when much of the apparently Chinese calligraphy turns out to be Arabic. The insides of these mosques are unquestionably Muslim places of prayer, even if the general ambience is fully harmonious with traditional Chinese forms.

The contrast between traditional and modern Chinese mosques is reflected in the intellectual discord between traditional and modern Chinese Islam. The old style Islamic thought fits seamlessly into Far Eastern civilization, and the new style attacks traditional Chinese and Islamic forms like noxious and destructive weeds. Traditional Chinese Islam harmonizes with Chinese civilization for one main reason, which is that it is thoroughly imbued with the inner dimensions of Islamic teachings—what is commonly called Sufism. This rootedness allowed the Chinese Muslims to see the splendor of the truth resonating in Chinese civilization. They took seriously the teaching that God sent prophets to all peoples, and they saw prophetic wisdom in Chinese cultural and literary forms, even if they thought that most Chinese had lost touch with the real meaning of that wisdom. The ability to see into and beyond external forms is of course a hallmark of Sufi teachers throughout Islamic history.

We were introduced to traditional Chinese Islam in 1994 when the two of us attended a conference on dialogue between Islam and Confucianism at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. One of the Chinese presenters at the conference, a scholar from Singapore, gave a paper on Wang Daiyu, who wrote the first book on Islam in the Chinese language, which was published in 1642.3 We were fascinated by the paper, and upon returning to the United States, Dr. Murata found several books by Wang Daiyu and other Chinese Muslims in the Yenching library at Harvard. We decided to study one of the books of Wang Daiyu, and Professor Tu Weiming, who had also attended the conference

in Kuala Lumpur, agreed to read the text along with us.

As we gradually discovered, Wang Daiyu stood at the beginning of a movement that lasted into the beginning of the twentieth century, though it was largely eclipsed by the political and social turmoil that followed. Modern scholars have commonly called this movement the “Han Kitab,” using a Chinese-Arabic compound meaning “the Chinese Books.” Dozens of Muslim scholars after Wang Daiyu published Chinese-language books on Islam, and these scholars came to be known as the Huiru, the “Muslim Confucians.” They were called “Confucian” because of their firm grounding in the Confucian classics and their remarkable ability to express the teachings of Islam in the language that had been familiar to the intellectual elite of China for centuries.

Professor Tu agreed to assist us in our study of Wang Daiyu because he, like us, recognized in the Muslim-Confucian texts an example of religious dialogue much more profound and meaningful than the sort of discussions that usually go on today. We found this especially true when, after five years of studying Wang Daiyu, we turned our full attention to a second Muslim scholar, Liu Zhi, who began publishing at the beginning of the eighteenth century. He is a perfect example of a Muslim Confucian. He was thoroughly versed in Neo-Confucianism, the school of thought that has dominated East Asian intellectual history over the past one thousand years. This is a form of Confucianism that addressed the challenges of its two main rivals, Daoism and Buddhism, and developed extensive teachings about the nature of the universe and the human self—topics that were not highlighted in the Confucian classics. Liu Zhi, on the basis of his profound Neo-Confucian and Islamic learning, wrote a trilogy about Islamic teachings. The first volume deals with the overall Islamic worldview, the second with the rationale behind Islamic rituals and social practices, and the third with the life of the Prophet, who is the embodiment of Islamic theory and practice.

In order to understand the significance of the Muslim-Confucian synthesis developed by Wang Daiyu, Liu Zhi, and others, we need to keep in mind the manner in which Islamic thought developed over history, especially in the Persianate lands of Islam, which extend from Albania to China. For example, although al-Ghazālī was widely known and universally recognized as a great synthesizer of the various branches of Islamic learning, his influence was overshadowed by later figures who wrote books addressed to a wider audience. Some of the best examples of these later authors are poets like ʿAṭṭār, Mawlānā Rūmī, and Ḥāfiẓ,
who were among the most influential propagators of the mature Islamic worldview. Their poetry is permeated with explanations of the key themes of Islamic thought, but it is readily accessible to any Persian reader. Throughout most of the Persianate lands, Mawlānā was a far more influential teacher of Islam than al-Ghazālī—even if we have not yet found much evidence that the Persian poets were widely read in China.

For that matter, al-Ghazālī was also largely unknown in China. The most influential author among the Confucian Muslims seems rather to have been Ibn 'Arabī, as seen through the filter of Persian books written by ’Azīz Nasafī and ’Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, two of the three scholars whose books were translated into Chinese before the twentieth century. The third scholar was Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, the author of *Mīrṣād al-‘ibād*. This book became one of the most popular textbooks of Islamic teachings among the Chinese Muslims.

Ibn 'Arabī’s popularity throughout the Persianate world derived from the fact that he offered a vision of God, the universe, and the human soul that was far more comprehensive than that offered by any other Muslim thinker before or after him. The major characteristic of the worldview that he developed—the broad outlines of which were shared by most Muslim scholars—can be called anthropocosmism. Professor Tu Weiming uses this word to describe the Far Eastern worldview as developed by the great Neo-Confucian thinkers. An anthropocosmic vision is one that looks on the universe and human self as two sides of the same living reality.

The Muslim Confucians recognized that this Islamic anthropocosmic vision translated easily into Confucian terminology because of its parallels with Chinese thought. If they based their major teachings on specific texts by Nasafī, Jāmī, and Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, it was not because of some accident of history, but precisely because these texts provided clear and systematic examples of the anthropocosmic vision.

If you ask Muslims today which Arabic texts should be translated into other languages, most would respond with Qur’an, Hadith, and various works on jurisprudence, perhaps some Kalam, and maybe al-Ghazālī. The Confucian Muslims, however, did not translate any Arabic works. Of course they themselves read Arabic because they were trained in the Islamic sciences. But the issue for them was not what you need to know to be a scholar of Islam. The issue was rather what the Muslim community needs to understand in order to accept the Islamic worldview and
to live accordingly. It is good to teach people how to say their prayers, perform the other rituals, recite the Qur’an, and observe Islamic law. But how do you explain to them, in their own language, the necessity of doing these things? In other words, you cannot simply tell people that you must do x, y, and z “because God says so”—even if most mulas tell people precisely this. If people are to accept and follow certain guidelines, they must have good reasons for doing so. Given that the Islamic guidelines shape every dimension of human life, their rationale needs to be stronger than the rationale for anything else. This was the quandary faced by the Confucian Muslims: how do you explain convincingly, in the Chinese language, the worldview lying behind Islamic ritual and social teachings.

The Huiru solved their quandary by writing and translating books that explained the meaning of existence, the role of human beings in the cosmos, the consequences of human action, and the necessity of prophetic guidance. In order to carry these ideas over into the Chinese language, they had to be masters of Chinese thought, and that meant thorough familiarity not only with Neo-Confucianism, but also with Daoism and Buddhism. In the Islamic sources such issues were addressed precisely by the Sufi teachers.

Let us conclude by saying that the four hundred years between the death of al-Ghazālī and the death of Jāmī was one of the most creative and productive periods in Islamic intellectual history. Practically all of the great philosophers, theologians, Sufis, and poets who appeared during this period saw reality in terms of an anthropocosmic vision, and it was this vision that they expressed in their works. They understood the goal of human life to be the achievement of a transformed perception of reality, in which man and the universe function in perfect harmony. They saw the road leading to this vision as embodied in the prophets, beginning with Adam and culminating with Muhammad.

Without knowledge of the manner in which these Muslim sages and thinkers expressed this unitary, anthropocosmic vision and how they understood it as the very vision of the Koran, it is impossible to see that the line of transmission of Islamic thought from al-Ghazālī down to the Muslim Confucians is in fact unbroken. If Chinese Muslims today cannot grasp that the principles and most of the details of their ancestors’ thought are drawn directly from sophisticated expositions of the Islamic vision written by great Muslim scholars, they will imagine
that they must reject their own intellectual heritage. They will try to re-invent the Islamic vision on the basis of information imported from the West and the various politicized forms of Islam that dominate so much of contemporary discourse in the Middle East. It is the task of the Kenan Rifai Chair in China to remind the Chinese world of the rich Islamic resources for understanding the human situation that are present in their own language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I am very happy; my love, my dream of sixty-three years is coming true today and, I am being very serious now, I feel truly honored being at the same table as four people\(^2\) serving Islam as mujahids in the world. These friends are working for Islam. They have dedicated their lives to Islam, like me.

I do not know if Carl Ernst will remember, but our friendship began in the 2000s. He approached me after I had read a poem from Anne-

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\(^1\) Born in 1952 in Istanbul, Cemalnur Sargut completed her BSc in Chemical Engineering and taught Chemistry for 20 years. Born into a mutasawwif family, Sargut began studies of the Qur’an and comparative studies of the Masnavi as per her teacher Samiha Ayverdi’s wishes; she has continued with these studies and served for more than thirty years in the area of tasawwuf. Among her publications are her studies of the Qur’an done based on the commentaries of great mutasawwifs and commentaries of Fusus al-Hikam. She continues to give open to the public classes on the Masnavi and Fusus al-Hikam and has been on television programs on the same subject. She regularly gives seminars in Germany, the US, and India at various universities and institutions on Islamic tasawwuf. She is currently the President of Turkish Women’s Cultural Association (TURKKAD - established in 1966), Istanbul Branch. She has been the leading figure in establishing the “Kenan Rifai Distinguished Professorship on Islamic Studies” at the Religious Studies Department of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2009) and Peking University Advanced Humanistic Studies Institute (2011). She was given an honorary PhD from the Baku Eurasian University in 2014. Cemalnur Sargut led the initiative to establish the Kenan Rifai Center of Sufi Studies at Kyoto University, Japan, in 2016. She established the Kerim Education, Culture and Health Foundation in 2013 in order to help support academic studies done on tasawwuf. Through a partnership between Uskudar University and Kerim Foundation, she established the Institute for Sufi Studies along with President Prof. Dr. Nevzat Tarhan. She continues to give classes at the graduate and certificate programs held at this institute.

\(^2\) Carl Ernst, William Chittick, Sachiko Murata, and Cangüzel Güner Zülfikar.
marie Schimmel and asked, “Where did you get this poem?” When I told him that it was from a book inscribed to my teacher, from the book *My Soul Is a Woman* which Annemarie Schimmel had inscribed to Samiha Ayverdi, he became teary-eyed; the same year, at a meeting in which Kenan Gürsoy was also present, I believe in Milan, he spoke of my teacher in front of the priests. After our first meeting towards the beginning of the 2000s, what had crystallized in Carl’s thoughts was the following: Kenan Rifai is a great mutasawwif and only his understanding of tasawwuf would be able to spread the true Islamic tasawwuf to the world. This is what I understood in him. My teacher’s words seem to corroborate Carl’s view…my teacher says: “Tasawwuf is a structure that begins with humanity but is also independent from religious restrictions. It is the condition of exposing the essence of religions. It has found its perfection with Islam. Just as the religion of Islam encompasses all religions, so does Islamic tasawwuf.” This part is very impressive: “Just as there is no palm capable of holding an erupting —meaning exploding— volcano, so there is no power that can obstruct tasawwuf from spreading all around the globe.” As we see today, tasawwuf is spreading from China, from the furthest East to the furthest West in various ways in order to spread the meaning of Allah.

China was truly my dream. Because it was the furthest East. The US was the furthest West. Why the furthest East? Because of course our Prophet’s hadith included China: “Search for knowledge, even if in China.” But at the same time, Ibn Arabi’s statement of, “The last perfected human being will come from China” greatly affected me as well. I give thanks every day for having friends like the Chitticks. They are great teachers who understand, know, and explain Islam and who present it through the vessel of Ibn Arabi. They have spread the joy of Confucius and Islam. They began in China with the help of Professor Tu Weiming throughout China. They do not know this, but in the program we organized in China this year, Chinese students came up to me and said the following: “You cannot even begin to imagine the importance of what is being done. In China, it was thought that Islam was only about praying the five daily prayers and fasting; unfortunately the Wahhabi understanding of Islam was spreading here. But now, through the classes that the Chitticks have begun and both the Ibn Arabi commentaries and Rumi’s *Masnavi*
readings that are being carried out by Aavani, we have begun to learn the true meaning of the religion. Chinese Muslims have begun to learn their religion through this chair. In this way, such a future has been drawn for us that we want to study under William Chittick and spread throughout China to speak of Islam.”

These were comments that brought tears to my eyes. On the other hand, there were also the pleas of the Turkish Muslims, the Uyghur Turks, that Chittick had also spoken of: “Send us the Masnavi, we speak Turkish…We will read the Masnavi… Are we not going to get our rights?” They asked this in the Islamic Study Program at Peking University. Professor Tu Weiming told me, “This is a miracle! For the first time, the Uyghur Turks are protecting their rights.” This is happening through the Islam chairs that have been established. We are not the ones who have established these chairs. They were established through Kenan Rifai’s tremendous vision. It was his inconceivable vision and spiritual awareness affecting centuries.

My beloved son, Omid Safi spoke of a story. The story of the Turks, meaning the Turks living in Anatolia and the Chinese… In his Mawāid al-Irfān, Niyāzī Mısırî comments on this story in the following way: “The Chinese painted an unbelievable painting. This painting was like material knowledge. It carried an infinite beauty. Material knowledge influences the person, it strikes at them. This work was beautiful like that. The Turks living in Anatolia, on the other side, chiseled their wall. What was this wall? It was the illuminated heart containing spiritual knowledge. Thus, when the material knowledge became reflected in the illuminated hearts containing spiritual knowledge, a masterpiece appeared.” The knowledge of the heart that my teacher tried to teach in French, Arabic, Persian and all languages was of a kind that would appeal to the voices of all birds. He, like the Solomon of his time, was the possessor of the ring. He was the manifestation of the hadith, “Allah is dahr [absolute time].” Allah is time…This mould-breaking hadith of the Prophet said, “Time is Allah.” Yes, why does this statement of time being Allah surprise us? Is not Allah the One who speaks to us from a tree saying, “Am I not your Allah?” Who is it that manifests from within time? Allah’s names and attributes. It is therefore perfected human beings that create time. They are the fathers of time. Their time is infinite. They are the people of all times.
The most beautiful example of this was the first notebook Kenan Rifai had my mother write—it was about Confucius. The first notebook’s content is all on Confucius’ teachings, done in tandem with comparisons to Rumi. When I first told this to Professor Tu Weiming, he, with great surprise said, “What kind of a chair is being established, it is unbelievable!” As can be seen, while keeping one foot steadfastly on the meaning of the law of Islam encompassing all religions, and being one and together with the other foot with seventy two other peoples - just like Rumi, Kenan Rifai is directing us to serve in establishing chairs everywhere around the globe.

I am sixty-three years old and weigh thirty-four kilos; for many people, I am a miracle. But being filled with the love of Allah truly becomes something that activates the person at all times. Kenan Rifai is the one who does this, it is the energy He gives us. It is this energy that sent Eyüp Yalçınkaya with no money, that took Cangüzel Güner Zülfikar to the US without her knowing what she was to do, that had my dear Fahir Zülfikar working in many jobs but at the same time fueling him to serve Islam, that has the numerous students you see here dressed all in black and purple serving without thinking of anything but the love of Allah. If this energy established two chairs there yesterday, it will undoubtedly do more tomorrow.

What do we want to do in the way that Kenan Rifai taught us? First, we want to establish a chair at Oxford. This will not just be a chair. It will be one where young researchers who have finished their PhDs will be employed in a “fellowship” program of sorts for three years, much like an institute. These students will both conduct research and, different from other post-doc programs, will be able to teach. Their classes will be both for masters’ and PhD studies. It is Oxford University who has proposed this to us. In the two-and-a-half page memorandum on why Oxford University wants us to be the ones establishing this, wide-ranging details have been given. They want a space where it is not the Wahhabi ideology that is presented, but rather true Islamic tasawwuf.

I have a belief. If Allah wants something, it is Allah who is successful there. For Oxford, we are waiting for the time that Allah wants it to happen. We are experiencing the joy of having established an institute that is not involved with divinity schools for the first time.
in Turkey. The Institute for Sufi Studies was established at Uskudar University. This institute works towards three main goals. One: to spread the beautiful conduct of the Prophet Muhammad, something that has been mentioned since before and which is Islam’s main aim and which Carl Ernst also spoke of beautifully, and which is our day’s greatest problem. For this reason, certificate programs that are open to the public were begun. These programs continue with the history of tasawwuf, tasawwuf classes, the meaning of tasawwuf, and readings of the Masnavi and Ibn Arabi. There is an inconceivable amount of favor that is being demonstrated. Our programs are full to the brim. Our teachers, may Allah be pleased with them, are serving. By opening the second part of the same programs that have continued since September and by re-opening the first parts, we want to serve the groups that have already filled up the quotas. Maybe this is not a PhD or a master’s, but with the purpose of serving greater masses, it is spreading throughout a much larger frame.

The second thing we want to do is to begin graduate studies. Our greatest aim here is to provide this opportunity to those who come from different branches in Turkey, who have not been through the divinity school. A psychologist, for example—how can they help someone improve through psychology or psychiatry without learning Ibn Arabi or Rumi and without understanding the fineness of Arabic and Persian? I do not think this is possible. Psychiatrists themselves also believe that it is not possible to help a person without knowing Rumi. Thus, it is our main goal to open the path to teach psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, and powerless engineers like us how to be human. The secondary purpose here is to teach them enough Persian and Arabic to ensure they at least achieve reading comprehension so that they have a greater grasp of the topics. These courses will be continually open—spring and fall—and will teach everyone who wants to learn Persian and Arabic. Having some mastery of Persian and Arabic is important, but we know that the Qur’an cannot be learned by knowing only Persian and Arabic. The Qur’an is the language of Allah. The language of the illuminated heart can be learned through knowing. The people who thought that James Morris knew no Turkish just a while ago, should have understood now just how much of a grasp he has over the language of the illuminated heart, having observed where he nodded and smiled during
the Turkish presentations, and just how much of a need we have for this language.

The third is extremely important, my friends…Turkey is a hearth of sources. Yes, every work by Kenan Rifai, every one of his poems—which have been translated by Asuman Kulaksız and Aylin Yurda-can—are important sources that can be used for a doctorate program. But alongside this, there are myriad manuscript sources that still have not been opened to the public at the Suleymaniye Library. Only twenty percent of them have been seen so far. We want to have the understanding of Islamic tasawwuf as lived through Ottoman culture by having these manuscripts be read in universities and commented on with the help of our western friends. This is the vision-mission that Kenan Rifai has set for us.

I cannot see all of these; or just how much of them I will be able to see I do not know. It was said wonderfully just a while ago—even if we have been able to do nothing perhaps we have been able to do this: we tried to raise tasawwuf students that are of higher quality. After listening to a couple of their speeches today, I opened my hands and thanked Allah just like Samiha Anne. In the days to come, they will do what I have done times a thousand, a million. I believe that we will establish a chair in Japan under Kenan Rifai’s name. God willing, through Sachiko Murata’s help and her staunch but always humble support for me, we will establish a chair in Japan. This is my red apple. Spreading religion and Islam will be granted there as well.

On those who say that we are unacademic… I answer them, “We are not academic. We are trying to explain Kenan Rifai’s understanding of academia.” We are nothing. We are powerless; that success, those beauties belong to our teacher. Our teacher is a true perfected human being. Just as in the examples related by Asuman Kulaksız and Yekta Zülfikar and the wonderful speech by Turgut Alsır on the true perfected murshid Samiha Anne, we want to relate the passionate love of Allah, the love of the Prophet, and the beautiful conduct of the Prophet to the world, as they did. It is this understanding of tasawwuf that will rescue the world.

Truly, we are indeed servants, and we will serve. May those who taught us to serve be in peace. May Allah be pleased with the Western professors, friends, and all the listeners and my students who have fought
with me hand-in-hand, just as Turgut Alsırı said, within a unity of sources, by closing the ranks. I owe my mother deep gratitude. I bow with respect in the presence of her meaning. Thank you.
Appendix

“Door of Mercy”
International Kenan Rifai Symposium
29-31 May 2015, Istanbul

Program
OPENING REMARKS

Orhan Büyükaksoy
Grandson of Kenan Rifai

Esin Çelebi
Associate Director of the International Rumi Foundation
Rumi’s 22nd generation granddaughter

Cemalnur Sargut
President of TURKKAD Istanbul Branch
Founding member of KERIM Education, Culture and Health Foundation

Emine Bağlı
President of TURKKAD
Founding member of KERIM Education, Culture and Health Foundation

SESSION 1 (OPENING SESSION)

Chairperson:
Süleyman Uludağ, Prof.
“Tasawwuf in Kenan Rifai’s Time”

Mehmet Demirci, Prof.
“Life and Character of Kenan Rifai”

Mustafa Kara, Prof.
“Kenan Rifai’s Understanding of Tasawwuf”

SESSION 2

Chairperson:
Mustafa Tahralı, Prof.

Osman Nuri Küçük, Prof.
“Kenan Rifai’s Understanding of Sharia and Religion based on His Commentary on Maimonides”

Semih Ceyhan, Assoc. Prof.
“Ottoman Sheikhs al-Islam Initiated by Kenan Rifai”

Hatice Dilek Gündüz, MD
“Kenan Rifai and Woman as Mirror Reflection of Allah, the Truth”
SESSION 3

Chairperson:
Bruce Lawrence, Prof.

Omid Safi, Prof.
"Kenan Rifai: Bringing Mawlana Rumi to the 20th Century"

F. Cangüzel Güner Zülfişar, Asst. Prof.
"Kenan Rifai’s Teaching and Training Methods"

Juliane Hammer, Assoc. Prof.
"On Women’s Bodies: Gender, Islamophobia, and Resistance in America"
[Due to her health condition she was not able to participate]

SESSION 4

Chairperson:
Emin İşik, Asst. Prof.

Yusuf Ömürulu
ve Vasfi Emre Ömürulu, Assoc. Prof.
"Ilahiyyat-i Kenan"

Hakan Alvan
"Hazrat Kenan Rifai"

Sadık Yalsızcu análar
"Kenan Rifai's Adventure with Names"

PRESENTATION ABOUT DARGAH OF UMMU KENAN

Gürbüz Ertürk
"Architect, National Palaces Directorate of Turkish Parliament,
Deputy Director, Retired"

SESSION 5

Chairperson:
Turan Koç, Prof.

Mohammad Rustom, Assoc. Prof.
"Actionless Action"

James Winston Morris, Prof.
"Kenan Rifai as Teacher: Insights From His Lessons on Rumi’s Ma’nawi"

SESSION 6

Chairperson:
Erhan Yetik, Prof.

Erkan Alkan, Asst. Prof.
the Literature of Tasawwuf History"

Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya
"Kenan Rifai’s Commentary on Ma’nawi"
SESSION 7

Chairperson:
Kenan Gürsoy, Prof.

Mustafa Taşçı, Asst. Prof.
ve Melike Türkân Bağlı, Assoc. Prof.
"Anatolia and Rumelia’s Conquest and “Rifa’i” Sart Saltuk"

Stephen Hirtenstein
"The School of Love and Knowledge: Reflections on Kenan Rifai (1867-1950) and Bulent Rauf (1911-1987)"

Bruce Lawrence, Prof.
"The Prophet’s Ascent: Ibn ‘Arabi, Sheikh Muzaffer and Kenan Rifai"

SESSION 8

Chairperson:
Mustafa Kara, Prof.

Türkân Erkmen
"A Pen that Writes with its Teacher: Nezihe Araz"

Eren Bayar
"Semiha Cemal: Heart of Divine Love (Ashk)"

Turgut Alsır, MD
"Mother Samiha"

Fahruşnisa Bilecik, Asst. Prof.
"İlan Ayverdi: An Honored Perfected Human Being from the Pre-Eternal to Eternity"

Asuman Kulaksız, MD
"Mother Meskure Enlightening her Time"

SESSION 9

Chairperson:
Cangüzel Güner Zülfikar, Asst. Prof.

Sachiko Murata, Prof.
ve William C. Chittick, Prof.
"The Importance of Sufism in Chinese Islam"

Carl W. Ernst, Prof.
"Teaching Methods of Kenan Rifai in the Masmavi Commentary"

Cemalnur Sargut
"Evaluation of Past, Present and Future through Kenan Rifai’s View"
One of the greatest Sufis of this age, in fact of the centuries, the sultan of the understanding of tawhid, a wayfarer on the path of the Prophet, a great perfected murshid, Kenan Rifai...If we are to listen to his understanding of the world in his words, “Just as there is no palm capable of holding an erupting - meaning exploding- volcano, so there is no power that can obstruct tasawwuf from spreading all around the globe.”

CEMALNUR SARGUT

...These academic positions, named after this modern Sufi leader, are new initiatives in international education that aim to connect people and cultures in ways. In short, the legacy of Sufi ethics combined with the spirit of open inquiry in the modern university has the potential to open up new possibilities of community that are not constrained by narrow concepts of nationality, ethnicity, or religion.

CARL ERNST

...Kenan Rifai’s Listen the “most significant contribution to understand the Masnavi to be published in the English language in over seventy years”, in other words since Nicholson’s majestic translation and commentary. This commentary is arguably the most relevant and helpful commentary on Rumi’s Masnavi available in English.

OMID SAFI

It is the task of the Kenan Rifai Chair in China to remind the Chinese world of the rich Islamic resources for understanding the human situation that are present in their own language.

SACHIKO MURATA & WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

...Kenan Rifai wrote, said, related, and raised valuable people. This was his observable side. But while there might be signs of his spiritual personality and leaks from his internal world, knowing this side of him in the way it should be known would only be possible by being like him.

MEHMET DEMIRCI