

**THE SOUND OF SILENCE:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY ON THE SAMA'RITUAL  
IN THE NEMATOLLAHI KANEQAH IN TORONTO**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the Sufi ritual of Sama' as practiced by the Nematollahi order in Toronto and will explore how music induces trance in Sufis during their ceremonies called "Sama'". My approach is ethnomusicological.

Sama', includes poetry and music through which Sufis enter into trance. The "structural coupling" theory may be applied to understand how Sufis participate in ritual and through active faith, undergo physical and physiological changes. The Sufis are coupled to the ritual through a common history, music, or previous participation (conditioning), practiced consciously by a group of individuals.

A Sama's script is never predictable; it is always improvisatory. A good Sama' is when the Sufis' emotional arousal matches the intensity of the music and a transcendent symbiosis occurs. Based on my interviews with the Sufis in the Nematollahi Kaneqah, each experienced the central factors of happiness, which is synonymous with well-being, however subjective this term may be.

“In the Name of He who taught the soul how to meditate;  
And illuminated the heart with the light of the Spirit.” (Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari)

*This work is dedicated to the continuous  
aspiration of love and peace  
in the world.*

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## Chapter 1.

### Introduction

Lo! Hearts and inmost thoughts are treasuries of secrets and mines of jewels... There is no way to extracting of their hidden things save by the flint and steel of listening to music and singing, and there is no entrance to the heart save by the ante-chamber of the ears. So musical tones, measured and pleasing, bring forth what is in it and make evident its beauties and defects... and that it bears as fruit a state in the heart that is called ecstasy; and ecstasy bears as fruit a moving of the extremities of the body, either with a motion that is not measured and is called agitation or with a measured motion which is called clapping of the hands and swaying of the members (al-Ghazzali 1901-02:199).

As John Cage said once, “Music is Everything” (Rouget 1985:63). But what does the word “music” mean? Everything includes the silence, which can, in effect, be heard. This is a very broad description of music. One of the aspects of music that I am trying to study here is the sonic event which is linked to the state of trance, a state which cannot be reduced to language but exhibits rhythmic and melodic pattern. My approach is not music as an art, rather music in the sense of a practice (Ibid: 63-65).

I am writing an ethnography on a “spiritual Concert”, Sama’, which has a goal beyond mundane pleasure. The music in Sama’ is practiced among Sufis to achieve unity with the entire existence and become free from all sufferings of separation from the Source, the Creator, and duality. The magic is done through the combination of music and poetry. Sama’ is a goal oriented musical concert which has been practiced in Sufism since early 8<sup>th</sup> century among Muslim countries.

### Sufism

Sufism is a school of thought. Its teaching is about Unity of Being (*wahdat-i- wujud*). God is the absolute Being and everything else in the world is the manifestation of his Being. Unity of



Being is not a philosophy, because philosophy arises from the mind. It can be called a principle which is based upon love. Shah Ne' Mat Allah Vali (the master and founder of Nematollahi Sufi order who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century) has described the Unity of Being as an Ocean. He says,

Wave sea and bubble- all three are one:  
Though there appear to be many and few,  
In truth, there is but One (Lewisohn 1999: xvi).

Al Maghribi, a Jewish born mathematician, astronomer and physician from the 12<sup>th</sup> century who converted to Islam in 1163, had another analogy of Unity of Being. He compared it to the light and the people to shadows. He explains that the shadow can never know about light as long as it is a shadow. The shadow will always follow the light. Only when the light moves towards the shadow, the shadow will become aware of his shadow-ness and will become the light. Al Maghribi explains,

No one can journey toward God on his own feet:  
To arrive at God's district, one must go with God's feet (Ibid).

The question is whether human beings can perceive the Unity of Being through their intellect? Humans have learned to analyze everything through their logical mind. The approach of the modern man is scientific. In the dualistic world everything is attempted to be understood, and is comprehended through sensory perception. The approach in Sufism is more intuitive. It means that it is not explainable by the analytical mind. It is very personal. It may not happen even when every outer condition is appropriate or it can happen in situations which are totally unexpected (Ibid). This subject will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis.

In regards to the origin of the word Sufism, some scholars believe that it comes from the Arabic word *suf*, which means wool. *Suf* is the woolen garment that the Sufis wore as a symbol

of austerity and abstinence. This symbolic aspect may be derived from Eastern Christianity. The Sufis in Iran were called *pashmina poosh* which means “wearers of the wool”. The companions of Prophet Muhammad would sit on a bench in front of Prophet’s mosque in Medina. Some scholars believe that Sufism comes from *ahl-al- suffah* or people of the bench. The Sufi masters claim that Sufi and *Tasawwuf* (Sufism in Arabic), doesn’t have an etymological root and the word itself has the numerical value as “Divine Wisdom” (Nasr 2007:171). In numerology each letter has a numerical value. Based on numerology, the number assigned to the word” Divine Wisdom” is the same as the number assigned to the word “*Tasawwuf*”.

## **A History of Sufism in Iran**

The first Sufis in Iran rose from Khorasan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with Ibrahim Adham who was a prince in Persia and like Buddha, chose a life of austerity. He became the role model of the Sufi ascetic. He believed in renunciation (*tark*) and above that, renunciation of this renunciation (*tark-i tark*). (Nasr 2007:177). Renunciation or detachment of the mundane material world, itself can be considered a goal to achieve, and having a goal in mind is dependent on thought. Adham was searching for the ultimate state of freedom of thought. That is merging with the essence of the existence or *fana*. *Fana* means become one with Being. Just Be.

Victor Danner debates that Sufism has existed in the Islamic civilization since the 8<sup>th</sup> century and was not considered mysticism as it is today. Everybody was acquainted with it as a common practice in their everyday lives (Danner 1988:95).

Sufism has been divided into two branches in Iran since the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. The first school of Sufism was established in Khorasan in the North Eastern part of Iran, and is mostly associated with the name of Bayazid Bastami, a man who was known as the “intoxicated” Sufi,

one who experiences ecstasy in his practice. He describes his mystical path as a symbolic journey with the flight of spirits, based on the ascent experience of Prophet Muhammad in the Quran. The second school of Sufism was founded by Junayd in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century. He was known as the “sober” Sufi. Junayd is the follower of *sharia* or orthodox religion laws, who writes about the mystical experiences in ellusive language style. After Junayd, in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century Abu Hamid Ghazzali, became the master of this conservative branch of Sufism which was based on *sharia* and followed Ash’arite theology. Ash’arite theology criticizes the rationalism in discerning good and evil. It believes in revelation from God (*vahy*) and rejects anthropomorphic attributes for God. The Sufi path which was derived from Bayazid Bastami, became divided into different paths as well. One path is called Malamatiye. Sufis in this path would speak loudly in opposition to authorities and would confront piety by being disrespectful. The most famous individual in this group in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, was Mansour Hallaj who claimed that he is the Truth (one of the 99 names of God) and was tortured and executed for blasphemy (Avery 2004:3).

The foundation of the teachings of intoxicated Sufis or the ones who experience ecstasy, is divine Love. The first Sufi who was historically known to follow the path of love was a woman named Rabi’ah al- Adawwiyyah who lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> century in Basra. Her life story is mixed with myths of spirituality. She has several shrines that pilgrims visit regularly. She has a famous poem on Selfless Divine Love as,

Two loves I give thee, love that yearns,  
And love because thy due is love.  
My yearning my remembrance turns  
To Thee, nor lets it when’er it please Thee  
To lift the veils for me to see Thee.  
Praise is not mine in this, nor yet  
In that, but Thine is this and that (Nasr 2007:172).

Shaghig al- Balkhi in the 9<sup>th</sup> century was a disciple of Adawwiyyah who lived in Khorasan, Iran and was the first Sufi who talked about “the light of the pure love of God” (Ibid).

The intoxicated Sufis would enter the altered state of their mind in a public setting and would talk about their spiritual experiences, an act that was considered blasphemous. The unusual states of ecstasy would be so blissful that they were considered the manifestations of the Divine Blessing. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, techniques and rituals were developed for entering these kinds of altered states which were mostly condemned by the sober Sufi practitioners. The term “altered state of mind” applies to the physiological and physical behavior changes that occurred in the practitioners. This is not a common trance caused by hearing music as seen in many cultures. It is a more of an intense state where the whole body/ mind will be affected and the effect can last for a longer period of time. It can be compared to epileptic behaviors, Tourettes syndrome, and glossolalia and speaking in tongues (Avery 2004:5). This subject will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

During the Mongol and Timurid occupations of Persia in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, three social institutions permeated Muslim people’s lives: Islamic canon law or *sharia*; the charitable foundations or *waaf*; and the Sufi orders or *tariqa*. Marshal Hodgson writes,

Accordingly, in addition to the ordinary mosque, each Muslim community now had its Kaneqah, where the Sufi *pirs* lived. There they instructed and housed their disciples, held regular *dhikr* sessions (often for a wide congregation), and offered hospitality to wandering Sufis, especially those of the same *tariqah*... The Kaneqahs became the foci of the more private, personal side of worship (Hodgson 1974:214).

By the 11<sup>th</sup> century Kaneqahs existed in many cities of Persia especially in Khorasan. Many leaders or well-known families built Kaneqahs between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, the Bakharzi family built a unique Kaneqah in Bukhara with an attached school, in the

14<sup>th</sup> century (Lewisohn, 1999:14). Kaneqahs were more of a private space for worship and Sufis were not interested in the world of public politics. They emphasized the relationship between the individual and God instead of the relationship between the individual and the government. The worship of the Sufis was different than the worship practiced in mosques based on *sharia* or canon law. The opposition between dogmatic clericalism and Sufism has been in existence since Bayazid Bastami and Hallaj in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Hallaj transformed Sufism into the religion of Love (Ibid). Based on Danner's observation,

Sufism arose to denote the esoteric Path precisely at the time the different schools of exoteric Law arose... The exoteric aspect of Islam soon grew into a body of teachings, practices, and moral legislation, all under the watchful control of the *ulama'*. The rise of Islamic exotericism in an institutionalized fashion provoked the rise of Sufi esotericism, with its own Shaykhs, its own practices, and eventually its own institutions. From that period on down to our time, we will find the two levels of authority in operation throughout the Muslim world, the Sufi Shaykhs and the *ulama'* (Danner 1988:91-92).

Different Sufi orders have emerged throughout the centuries. In the early stages of Sufism, the path was taught by masters to their disciples. The masters would have a group of Sufis who would sit in a circle together called *halqah*. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries due to the changes in society and the increasing number of Sufis and Kaneqahs, a more organized structure was needed. The path or *tariqah* became something more than a brotherhood. Sufi orders were established in the name of their founders (*kutb*) or masters who claimed to have the authority of Heavens to start that order. Each order has their own site as the center or place for gathering. Most Sufi orders in Iran were derived from Bayazid Bastami and from the school of Khorasan. The most famous Sufi orders in Iran are as follows: Qalandariyyah order which was founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Jamal-al-Din Sawaji and later spread to India. They have long hair and beards and possess psychic abilities. The begging bowl of the Sufis called a *kashkoul* is derived from the Qalandriyyah order; a Sufi order that was derived from the Suhrawardiyyah order in the 13<sup>th</sup>

century called Kubrawiyyah. The founder of the Kubrawiyyah order was Najm-al Din Kubra who was initiated into the Suhrawardiyyah order. He became a master himself and founded his own order. Farid al- Din Attar and Baha-al Din Walad, Rumi's father, were both initiates of the Kubrawiyyah order. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Nematollahi order (which is the focus of my research) was founded by Shah Ne'mat Allah Vali. Shah Vali was born in Aleppo, traveled to Persia and lived in Kerman. His tomb in Kerman is one of the most beautiful Islamic architectural sites in Iran. He wrote 130 works on the teachings of Ibn Arabi. Shah Ne'mat Allah was a Sunni but the order became a Shi'ite order and attracted many disciples in Persia. In the Safavid era it became a rival to the dominant Safaviyyah order which led to widespread persecution. Many masters fled from Iran but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the great master of the order, Ma'sum Ali Shah returned to Iran and reestablished the order before he was martyred. The Nematollahi order is considered the most widespread order in Iran today. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, many masters of this order immigrated to Europe and spread the order to Europe as well as Africa. The Naqshbandiyyah order, the Qaderiyya order and the Rifa'iyyah order are also well-known Sufi orders which were all founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Persia (Nasr 2007:177-196).

## **The Revival of Sufism in Iran**

The revival of Sufism in Iran between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries featured various poets and philosophers such as Attar, Najm-al- din Razi, Umar Suhrawardi, Rumi, Shabistari, Hafiz, and Abd al- Karim al- Jili. Sufism declined in the Safavid era and as mentioned above, led to the exile of Nematollahi and Nurbakhshiyya *tariqas* in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century from Iran (Lewisohn 1999:25).

Philosophy and poetry are intertwined in Iran. Persian Sufism has a very unique characteristic in the Islamic world. It has created a sacred language in the form of poetry which has caused the Farsi language to spread all around the world. The great poets in Persia rose through Sufism or Islamic spirituality. Sufi masters were philosophers who would explain mysticism through poetry. The poems have a special role in the Sufi practices which will be explained in detail later in this thesis. The first Sufi poems belong to Baba Tahir who lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and Abu Sa'id Abi'l Khayr in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They wrote simple quatrains which were followed by the Hanbali Sufi order under the leadership of the patron saint of Heart, Khawaja Abdullah Ansari. Ansari is the author of a large body of Sufi literature. In the late 11<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ahmad Ghazzali turned the Persian language into a sacred spiritual language by writing books about mystical concepts of Sufism. Later in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Sana'I Ghaznavi influenced other poets such as Attar (12<sup>th</sup> century) and Rumi (13<sup>th</sup> century) and caused even more developments in Sufi concepts, especially, Divine Love. Sufism through the combination of philosophy and poetry still continued to blossom in Iran with Sa'di (13<sup>th</sup> century), Hafiz and Mahmud Shabistari (14<sup>th</sup> century), and Shah Ne'Mat Allah Vali (15<sup>th</sup> century), the founder saint of the Nematollahi Sufi order. (Ibid) As Seyed Hossein Nasr explains,

Now this vast literature which was produced during the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> centuries-during a period of four to five hundred years... is a literature which deals with what Sufis call both *qal* and *hal*. It is not only a literature of *qal*. For those not acquainted with this expression, it must be mentioned that *qal* is derived from the Arabic word *qala* which means "he said", in reference discursive sciences in which there exists a discourse and dialogue expressed in the form "he said", "you say", "I say". Following this discursive method, the mind tries to approach the understanding of a particular subject. The Sufis contrast *qal* (hearsay) with *hal* (direct spiritual experience and realization) which is the fruit of spiritual practice or a gift from heaven. The Literature of Sufism is composed not only of indirect report, hearsay or *qal*... it is also, and above all, the literature of *hal*. It is a literature which reflects of the deepest longings and yearnings of the human soul for God and communicates the ecstasy of union with the Beloved and nostalgia of separation from that Reality which is the source of all that is beautiful and all that can be loved (Ibid: 3).

As William Chittick explains, Sufism can be considered as a metaphysical knowledge or gnosis (*irfan*). *Irfaan* means “wisdom made of knowledge and sanctity” (Schuon 1963:13). Gnosis can be defined as “love” in Sufism. The reason is that the whole of one’s being knows the object and it is not perceived with the mind. Thus, the spiritual instrument for the discovery of knowledge and gnosis is the heart. Nicholson, one of the most important figures in studying *irfan* and Rumi, insists that Rumi doesn’t differentiate between knowledge and love. Rumi expresses the interrelationship between love and knowledge as below,

By love dregs become clear; by love pain becomes healing,  
By love the dead is made living...  
This love, moreover, is the result of knowledge: whoever sat in foolishness on such a throne?  
On what occasion did deficient knowledge give birth to this love?  
Deficient knowledge gives birth to love, but (only love) for that which is really lifeless (II,1530-1533) (Michon- Gaetani 2006:23).

## **Dhikr**

Al Jilani debates that *tasawwuf* or Islamic mysticism, is derived from four consonants, *t*, *s*, *w*, and *f* which form an esoteric acrostic. The first letter, *t* stands for *tawba* or remorse.

Remorse comes from not only the regret of being away from God but also from turning your back to Him. Remorse is the first step in the Path. *S*, stands for *safa* or joy. In order to reach this stage, the person needs to purify his heart by remembering God at all times. Remembering God happens by reciting his names inwardly. This process is called Dhikr. *W* stands for unity with God or *wahdat-al wujud*, and *F* stands for the “annihilation in God” or *fana* (al- Jilani 1992). These are the steps for the Path in Sufism.

The Sufi needs to purify his heart in order to be able to know God. This step starts with remorse and focusing the attention away from the material world and towards God. True knowledge is when God reveals his light to the heart of the Sufi. This is the time when the Sufi



finds the ultimate joy. By illuminating the light of God, the Sufi becomes united with God (*wahdat al wujud*). This is the same concept as *via unitiva* in Christianity. Since becoming united means coming together of two subjects and there is nothing but God and everything is God, the goal of the Sufi is the “annihilation in God” (*fana*). This is possible for a man only when the ego is drawn away from its dominance and the divine presence is in him. *Fana* doesn’t have a passive meaning. A Sufi should be able to live in the society while seeing everything as one with God, thus, the Sufi doesn’t have a judgmental mind, and should be in the service of humanity (Michon- Gaetani 2006:58-60).

To reach this stage in Sufism, the Sufi should participate in different rituals and practice under the supervision of a master or *shaykh*. The serious seeker becomes initiated into the path and will become a regular disciple of the *shaykh*. The first step of the *tarigha* or the Path is remorse and remembering the beloved the entire time. This happens through the utterance of one of God’s 99 names, a practice known as *dhikr* (remembrance). When you love someone you want to repeat his name constantly. The art of teaching the formula of the utterance the *dhikr* is taught by the masters and is an important part of the initiation of the Sufis into the Path. Only the *dhikr* which is taught by the master is effective. Shah Waliullah in his book *Sata’at* has described the *dhikr* as,

The *dhikr* could be learned, if not from a living master, then from Khidr, the mysterious guide of the wayfarers; but it had to be a proper initiation. The formula has to be transmitted through the chain of spiritual leaders that goes back to the Prophet himself or to an angelic inspirer of Muhammad. Sometimes the different techniques of *dhikr* were traced back to the first caliphs: the Prophet allegedly taught Abu Bakr the silent *dhikr* when he was with him in the cave during emigration to Medina, whereas Ali was granted the loud *dhikr* (Schimmel 1975:169).

It’s been well known among the Sufis that the snow around the person who utters the *dhikr* (*dhakir*) will melt because of the heat that he creates. This is similar to the concept of *tapas* in Hinduism. *Tapas* is the ascetic heat of the Hindu practices of burning the sins or bad *karma*.

Although the *dhikr* can be uttered anywhere but the official conduct of it among the different communities, has its own ritual. According to Semnani in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Sufi should sit crossed legged with the right hand on the left and the left hand holds the right leg on top of the left leg. The sitting position can vary among different orders. Similar to Hindu philosophy the disciple should create a circuit for the energy flow in the body and the sitting position has the critical role in creating this energy field. Also the *dhakir* should imagine the image of his *shaykh* in front of his eyes the whole time during his *dhikr*. It is the *shaykh* who decides which *dhikr* is suitable for the disciple. As Ibn Khafif explains,

The recollect object is one, but the recollections are variable, and the places of the heart of those who recollect are different (Schimmel 1975:170).

The *dhikr* may be one of two kinds. One is the recollection aloud (*dhikr jali*) and the other kind, which is superior to the first one, is recollection in the heart (*dhikr khafi*). Kharraz has defined different kinds of *dhikr* as,

A recollection with the tongue, not felt by the heart- that is the usual recollection; a recollection with the tongue in which the heart is present- that is a recollection seeking reward, and a recollection when the heart is wandering in recollection and lets the tongue be silent, and the worth of such a recollection is known only to God (Ibid).

The *dhikr* has miraculous results for Sufis because the first *dhikr* ever was addressed by God to the man's heart as it says in the Quran, "Alastu bi Rabbikum", (Am I not your Lord). It is considered to be the first *dikhr* ever chanted at the time of creation of Adam. Human beings respond to the eternal words by God which created them in *Alast*. *Alast* is the realm before creation and it is where man desires to return. The *dhikr* in time and space, brings back the person to the divine moment of the creation. Sufi responds to this question by repeating the adoration of the creator until the subject is lost in the object and becomes one as they were in the

day before *Alast*. With *dhikr* the Sufi can transcend the time and space (Schimmel 1975:172). As Shibili explains,

True *dhikr* is that you forget your *dhikr*. Since even the word or thought “O God” implies the consciousness of subject and object, the last mystery of recollection is complete silence (Ibid: 172).

The ultimate sound which can be heard in loud *dhikr* is “*hu*” (he) and “*ha*” (the end of the sound Allah). *Dhikr* is conducted on the basis of breath exercises. Sufis believe that any breath which goes out without the remembrance of God is dead. This can also be compared to Hinduism and its *pranayama* (breath exercise). Some Sufi orders such as Naqshbandiyya emphasize breath and directing it through *dhikr*. The branch which executes loud *dhikr* in groups, stand in circles with the *shaykh* in the middle. They put their right hand on the left hand of their neighbors and repeat the loud *dhikr* by repeating the word “Allah” until only its last letter ,*H*, remains or *ha* can be heard which will be exhaled towards the left shoulder, then *hu* will be chanted towards the right shoulder and *hay* will be chanted with lowering the head. This kind of *dhikr* includes rhythmical movements and leads the Sufis into an ecstatic state. The *dhikr* of the Divine Names of God is very important. It’s described in the Quran that God has a hundred Divine names (*asma al- husna*). Only ninety- nine of them are revealed to man. The hundredth one is a mystical name which will be revealed to the heart of the true seekers of the Path and enables them to enter the realm of miracles. The permission for the use of each Divine Name is dependent on the *shaykh*. He is the one who initiates each disciple with a specific name. For example, if a mystic is in seclusion he may be initiated with the name *al Latif* (The Subtle), or the name *al Hafiz* (the Preserver) may be used for a mystic who wants to preserve his mystical state. Some names should not be used by beginners such as *al Fa’iq* (The Overpowering) (Ibid 1975:174-176).

## Sama'

*Dhikr*, when conducted in a group setting, can be a part of a ritual called Sama'. Sama' is a ceremony including aural stimulation through music and poetry.

As Jean During explains,

Sama' which literally means audition, denotes in the Sufi tradition spiritual listening, and more practically listening to the music with the aim of reaching a state of grace or ecstasy or more simply with the aim of meditating, of plunging into oneself, or as the Sufis say, to 'nourish the soul'. It thus operates in a mystical concert, of spiritual listening to music and songs, in a more or less spiritual form (During 1989).

Sama' is a ritual that includes poetry and music where the Sufi enters into a trance state named "*hal*". The Sufi poetry and music are created with the purpose of cultivating inner harmony. *Hal* has three stages: perception, trance (*wajd*), and movement.

Perception is complete when the Sufi overcomes his sensory perceptions and goes beyond time and space. The veil of ego is lifted and the Sufi becomes one with God.

*Wajd* is a kind of trance where the Sufi can channel and receive messages from ascended masters. *Wajd* itself has three stages. A *wajd* is completed when the Sufi is not aware of his own condition.

This ultimate state of *wajd* can lead to a circular motion or whirling (Nourbakhsh, 1992). Paul Nwyia, the author of the "Spiritual Gems", has suggested to call *wajd*, "instasy", instead of ecstasy, because the mystic goes deep into the depths of his soul rather than being carried away from himself (Schimmel 1975:178).

Abu Hamid –al Ghazzali in his book *Ihya Ulum ad- Din* (The Revival of the Sciences of Religion) explains about Sama' as,

Hearts and inmost thoughts, song and ecstasy, are treasuries of secrets and mines of jewels. Infolded in them are their jewels like as fire is infolded in iron and stone, and concealed like as

water is concealed under dust and loam. There is no way to the extracting of their hidden things save by the flint and steel of listening to music and singing, and there is no entrance to the heart save by the antechamber of the ears. So musical tones, measured and pleasing, bring forth what is in it and make evident its beauties and defects. For when the heart is moved there is made evident that only which is contains like as a vessel drips only what is in it. And listening to music and singing is for the heart a true touchstone and a speaking standard; whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which in it preponderates (Macdonald 1901:195).

## **Controversies about Music in Sufism**

Sama' has been known as the alchemy of the soul among Sufis since ancient times and has survived until the present time. Sama' is a ceremony which is intertwined with music. Music has been the most controversial subject in Islam. The debate on the statute (*hukm*) of music in regards to religious law will never end in Islamic society because as Jean- Louis Michon said, "This concerns a domain in which it seems that Providence wanted to give Muslims the greatest possible freedom of choice and of appreciation," (Michon- Gaetani 2006:153). The Islamic spokesmen vary in their opinions about music from condemnation to acceptance. Sufis believe that music can soften the hearts and wake the forgetful souls and guide misguided individuals to the true path of their lives. The problem is that people don't use the music for this purpose. People use music for exciting the senses to enjoy the material world. Thus music itself is not blameworthy but the use of it can become debatable. Sufi Dhu'n- Nun who lived in Egypt in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, explains "Listening (as Sama') is a divine influence which stirs the heart to see Allah; those who listen to it spiritually attain to Allah, and those who listen to it sensually fall into heresy" (Farmer 1929: p.36). In opposition to the philosophers, Islamic jurists since the 9<sup>th</sup> century were considering the evil sides of the music as stronger than its benefits and started to condemn music and even made it legal to destroy musical instruments. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn al- Jawzi in his book *Talbis Eblis* (The Dissimulation of the Devil), writes;

Music makes man forget moderation and it troubles his mind. This implies that man, when he is excited, commits things which he judges reprehensible in others when he is in normal state. He makes movements with his head, claps his hands, strikes the ground with his feet, and commits acts similar to those of insane. Music leads one to this; its actions appear to be like that of wine, because it clouds the mind. This is why it is necessary to prohibit it (Mole 1963:164).

However, these arguments did not apply to the seekers of the truth who had purified themselves enough not to fall into the trap of sensuality through music. They would use music to elevate themselves into universal harmony. The philosophers of this kind were divided into two groups. On the one hand, we can see the sages or *hukama* such as Abu Nasr al- Farabi in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, whose *Kitab al- Musical Kabir* (Grand Book of Music) had a great influence on the making and preservation of Islamic music, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in 11<sup>th</sup> century whose books are still used in universities all around the world. We can also name Ikhwan al- Safa, (The Brethren of Purity), a mysterious brotherhood organization between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries which has left many writings about music. On the other hand, we can see the Gnostics or *urafa* considered as mystics.

The opening of the Epistle of Music by Ikhwan al- Safa is as,

After having completed the study of the theoretical spiritual arts which are of a scientific genre, and the study of the corporeal, practical arts which are of an artistic genre,... we propose in the present epistle entitled "Music" to study the art which is made up of both the corporeal and the spiritual. It is the art of harmony (*talif*) which can be defined by the function of proportions (Shiloah:1966: 126)

According to Ikhwan, what distinguishes music from other arts is the soul of the listener.

In another part of the Epistle of Music by Ikhwan, it is concluded that,

Know my brethren, that the effects imprinted by the rhythms and melodies (*naghamat*) of the musician in the soul of the listeners are of different types. In the same way, the pleasure which the souls draw from these rhythms and melodies and the manner in which they enjoy them are variable and diverse. All that depends on the degree which each soul occupies in the domain of gnosis (*al- ma'arif*) and on the nature of the good actions which make up the permanent object of his love. Therefore, each soul, while listening to descriptions which correspond to the object of his desires and to melodies which are in accord with the object of his delight, rejoices, is exalted and delights in the image that music makes of his beloved... (Ibid:192).

## Music in Sama'

Sama' is known as an important indication of mysticism in Islam. Each Sufi order has their own Sama' ritual performance. Although dancing and whirling have been documented from the oldest religious acts, some orders such as Nematollahis forbid the movement while others such as Chistiyya and Mevlavie perform different kinds of whirling. Those who are more emotional are drawn towards worship through music and movement. Some orders such as Nematollahis perform the ritual in darkness, while others such as Qaderiyyaa and Chistiyya perform their Sama' in light. The only common principle between them is the performance of music and chanting the *dhikr*. In some orders such as Chistiyya, Sufis participate in chanting the *dhikr*, in some others such as Nematollahi, Sufis chant inwardly. Abu Hafs Suhrawardi known as the "Illuminated Master", has defined the role of music in Sama' as below,

Music does not give rise, in the heart, to anything which is not already there: so he whose inner self is attached to anything else than God is stirred by music to sensual desire. But the one who is inwardly attached to the love of God is moved by hearing the music, to do His will. What is false is veiled by the veil of self and what is true by the veil of the heart, and the veil of the self is a dark earthy veil, and the veil of the heart is a radiant heavenly veil.

The common folk listen to music according to nature, and the novices listen with desire and awe, while the listening of the saints brings them a vision of the divine gifts and graces, and these are Gnostics to whom listening means contemplation. But finally there is the listening of the spiritually perfect to whom, through music, God reveals Himself unveiled (Smith 1950: 85).

Rumi, one of the most influential Sufis who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was a Persian mystic poet whose poetries have been translated into many languages in the world. His poetry has led to the ultimate expression of dance in Sama'. Rumi espouses that the House of Love is made of music and songs. The Sufi who does the whirling can be considered as a piece of dust turning around the Sun. If the gravity of Sun did not exist, the dust could not move around it. Rumi has become a great role model for all Sufi orders in using music and movements in Sama'.

The Sama' means to die to this world and to be revived in the eternal dance of the free spirits around a sun that neither rises nor sets. *Fana* and *baqa*, annihilation and eternal life in God, can thus be represented in the movement of the mystical dance as understood by Rumi and his followers:

Sound drum and mellow and flute, resounding Allah Hu!

Dance, ruddy dawn, in gladness bounding Allah Hu!

Sound exalted in the center, o thou streaming light!

Soul of all wheeling planets rounding Allah Hu!

.....

Who knows love's mazy circling, ever lives in God,

For death, he knows, is love abounding: Allah Hu! (Hastie 1903: no.6).

The primary terms which Iranian musicians use to describe their performance is "*eshgh*" (love) and *hal*, (direct spiritual experience and realization). Love is an attribute of God which can be considered the cause of creation, the principle of the maintenance of the creation as well as the cause of all activities (Chittick 1983:194- 231). Human beings are always moving between need, love and desire. All material forms of love are transpositions of the true love. Sufis should bring down the veil of duality and direct their love towards the true love. This is the Path which leads to the union with the Beloved. This movement towards the true love happens through the growth of the levels of consciousness or spiritual stations. The fundamentals of the Iranian music that is played by Sufis are based on the feeling of nostalgia for the union (Simms 2012:108). As Jean During explains,

*Hal* is the ultimate aesthetic goal of Iranian music. From a Sufi perspective, like a genuine mystical experience true *hal* transports one outside of time; it is a state of grace and a "moment" (*vaght*) in the discontinuous flow of temporal atoms in the perpetual renewal of creation. *Hal* is frequently described in terms that allude to a "harmonizing" archetype characteristic of Islamic music; a supernatural balance between the moving immovable, between the hidden and manifested, between the one and the multiple (Ibid: 108).

In regards to the music in Sama', there are two aspects of God to be observed. One is the aspect of Beauty (*al-jamal*) and the other is the aspect of Majesty (*al-jalal*). The Beauty of God will be shown through melody and the Majesty will be interpreted through rhythm. It is the same as the drum which announces the arrival of the King or transcendence or the divine being



manifested outside of the material world while the human's voice or the flute interprets the immanence or the divine presence manifested in the material world (Michon 2006:166). Ahmad Ghazaali in the 12<sup>th</sup> century explained,

The saints of Allah apply the form to the realities (*ma'ani*) on account of their abandoning the ranks of the forms and their moving in the ranks of the branches of gnosis. So among them the drum is a reference to the circle of existing things (*da'irat al-akwan*); the skin which is fitted onto it is a reference to the Absolute Being; the striking which takes place on the drum is reference to the descent of the divine visitations from the innermost arcana within the Absolute being to bring forth the things pertaining to the essence from the interior to the exterior... And the breath of the musician is the form of the degree of the Real (Exalted and Holy is He!), since it is He who sets it [i.e the breath] in motion, brings it into existence, and causes it to vanish. And the voice of the singer is the reference to the divine life which comes down from the innermost arcana to the levels of the spirits, the hearts, and the consciences (*asrar*). The flute (*qasab*) is a reference to the human essence, and the nine holes are a reference to the openings in the outer frame (*zahir*), which are nine, via the ears, the nostrils, the eyes, the mouth, and the private parts. And the breath which penetrates the flute is a reference to the light of Allah penetrating the reed of man's essence. And the dancing is a reference to the circling of the spirit round the cycle of existing things in order to receive the effects of the unveilings and revelations; and this is the state of the gnostic. The whirling is a reference to the spirit's standing with Allah in its inner nature (*sir*) and being (*wujud*), the circling of its look and thought, and its penetrating the ranks of existing things; and this is the state of the seeker of Truth. And his leaping up is a reference to his being drawn from the human station and to existing things acquiring from him spiritual effects and illuminative aids (Mole 1963: 205).

Ghazzali forbids the use of string instruments because they were normally used for entertainment, but later on many string instruments were used in Sufi circles such as the *tanbur* (pandore), the *rabab* (rebec) and the *qanun* (zither). The Mevlavi order and the Chistayya order later used the *nay* (reed flute). Al Farabi himself was an expert in playing lute. He could put listeners to sleep or make them laugh or cry with his lute. According to al-Kindi this was because the tuning of the four strings of the lute corresponded to the macro and microcosmic quaternaries such as gentleness, anger, intelligence and bravery; the propensities of the soul such as memorable, percipient, creative and cognitive; the elements such as water, air, fire and earth; and

to the seasons (Farmer 1943:9). Today different instruments are used in Sama' which will be discussed more in detail in Chapter two.

The effects of the music on the person is in direct relationship with the modal structure of the music. In contrast to Western music, Eastern music has many different modes, between twenty- four and thirty- two in Persia. Twelve modes are more common. The mode is called *maqam* in Arabic and *dastgah* or *awaz* in the Persian language. The mode is similar to the Western scale but the notes when ascending and descending motion in an octave can vary. Each mode has its name based on its origin such as *nahavand*, *hijaz*, *iraqi*, or its position of the dominant note on the lute; *dugah* (second position, or A), *sigah* (third position, or B). The mode can also be named by the effect it has on the soul such as *saba* (the morning wind), *zemzeme* (the murmur) and *nasim* (the breeze). The musician can move from one *dastgah* to another *dastgah* during his improvisation in Sama'. Depending on his level of detachment and *hal* he may embellish the mode with grace notes and passages. This is the time when he can penetrate into the hearts of the listeners and lift their souls up with himself (Michon 2006:169).

The rhythm holds the melody. Seyed Hossein Nasr has explained the effects of rhythm on the human soul as,

The rhythm, the meter of the music changes the relation of man with ordinary time- which is the most important characteristic of the life of this world. Persian music possesses extremely fast and regular rhythms in which there are no beats or any form of temporal determination. In the first instance man is united with the pulsation of cosmic life, which in the human individual is always present in the form of the beating of the heart. Man's life and the life of the cosmos become one, the microcosm is united to the macrocosm.... In the second case, which transcends all rhythm and temporal distinction, man is suddenly cut off from the world of time; he feels himself situated face to face with eternity and for a moment benefits from the joy of extinction (*fana*) and permanence (*baqa*) (Nasr 1987:163-174).

Jean During, a renowned ethnomusicologist, explains that Sufi music is not a specific distinct music. Its structure is based on Persian music in Iran. It starts from a given point and is inclined towards an end, which is the repetition of the God's name, with the aim of elevating the

soul beyond its earthly condition. Jean During uses the term *mandala in sound and time* for Sufi music because it starts in a slow or moderate tempo and ends in an enthusiastic fast tempo. Sufi music includes short or long motifs with the “progressive concentration of the melodic space” (Lewisohn 1999: 277-287). The music incorporates Sufi poetry, which is quite unique and specific to Sufism, with the chanting of the *dhikr*. Each initiate repeats his own *dhikr* silently and the names of the God such as “Hagh” or “Hay” will be chanted loudly while the tempo gets faster. The Sufi will chant his *dhikr* as an ostinato adapted to the melody. This is one of the most natural ways of active listening. The Sufi listens deeply to the music as he chants with it. He should keep up with the tempo and its increasing pace. The mystical essence of the music depends on the listener. *Dhikr* is a technique which keeps the Sufi’s concentration on his intention of practice. Much Sufi poetry is used in other ceremonies but, depending on the intention of the listener, the quality of the effect will be different. As During explains,

Many Sufi melodies, as we have noted are marked by the form of the *dhikr*. In some of them, the *dhikr* formula provides the basis for a distinct melody. In others, the melody runs independently, but the listener who is attuned may feel a call to recite the *dhikr* inwardly. In other cases, there remains only the taste of the *dhikr*, a recollection and an awareness... It is because the musician himself mobilizes all his psychic energy in an attitude of ‘remembrance’ (*dhikr*) uttering the words and sounds of his song with the same total concentrated consciousness which he invests in his *dhikr*. He is thus investing all his inner energies in the sounds and the words, in turn benefiting from the potential power of the musical forms. This inner energy or force takes shape in the word and the sounds, and is passed on to the listeners who must proceed to decipher the message and decode the spiritual lesson (*ibrat*) hidden in the music (Ibid: 286).

## Summary

Sufism is an ancient spiritual path of Islam that focuses on the transformation of man’s entire being. Islam has two paths for achieving union with God: “*shariat*” or religion’s laws, and “*tarighat*” meaning “the Path.” These are the mystical sacred practices Sufis follow. In the 9<sup>th</sup>

century, Sufis started a new way of worshiping God based on Love that distinguished it from canon law. There were two schools of Sufism in the East. In Iran there was the School of Khorasan, started by Bayazid Bastami, known as the “intoxicated Sufi.” Later on, the Nematollahi order was established by Shah, Ne’ mat Allah Vali in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Sufis of this order were exiled from Iran in the Safavid era, but today, although their Master lives in England, they are the largest group of Sufis in Iran.

The Sufis began establishing their own centers for worship, the Kaneqahs, in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and developed various techniques on how to achieve unity with the Creator, or annihilation in God, *fana*. One of these techniques is Sama’ that involves altered states of mind. Sama’ is a spiritual concert among Sufis that features poetry, music and chanting. The whole concept of music has been controversial in Islam. It is technically banned by canon law but Sufis use it as a means to achieve their highest goal, *fana*. The melody in music signifies the beauty aspect of God while the rhythm is the majestic aspect of God. Iranian music has twenty-four to thirty-two modes. There is no specific rule to use these modes in Sama’. It all depends on the direct spiritual experience of the musician in concert (*hal*). Different instruments are used in different Kaneqahs for conducting Sama’. The only commonality between all Sama’ ceremonies is that they always start slow then get faster, then slow down again. Spiritual poetry is sung throughout and the audience chants a loud *dhikr*, the names of God, in its musical climax. This is the time when Sufis will fall in trance or *hal*. Hal has three stages: perception, trance, and movement. Sometimes the listeners will whirl or move their bodies in altered states of mind and experience *fana*, or annihilation in God.

## Chapter 2.

### Nematollahi Kaneqah

It has been one year since my initial visit to Nematollahi Kaneqah. I was introduced to the Sufi master or ‘Shaykh’ through a friend who runs classes for *Shahname*, “The Epic of the Kings” poetry of ancient Iran. I have been studying Eastern mysticism (*Irfan*) and Hinduism for more than 10 years and have been interested in the Sama’ ritual since my youth, however, due to the deteriorating political situation in Iran, I had very few chances to attend these ceremonies. I was lucky to be introduced to the Shaykh directly and to talk with him about my music research on trance from a healing perspective in this Kaneqah. Fortunately, the Shaykh was very cooperative and accepted me in the Kaneqah as an academic researcher. I have been attending Sunday Sama’ rituals regularly since that first meeting.

In my interview with Mr. S, an initiate of the Kaneqah, I learned that the building which houses the Nematollahi Sufi Centre was constructed eighty years ago in a quiet residential neighborhood in Toronto, Ontario (see figure 1, p.41). Initially a church, the building was designated as a heritage site by the city of Toronto and was purchased by the London, England Kaneqah head office in 1994. Before that, the initiates who are called *akhawan* (brethren) in the Nematollahi order, gathered in their homes. The Shaykh or Sufi master in the Nematollahi order was Mr. Kashani who served both Kaneqahs in New York and Toronto. In 1999, Mr. Zayyani was selected by Dr. Nourbakhsh to be the Shaykh of the Toronto and Montreal Kaneqahs. Mr. Zayyani supervises everything relating to the Kaneqah, from the financial to the spiritual, and is directly involved with the teachings and spiritual journey of the Sufis. This Kaneqah has three tenants who reside in the house. Selected from initiates, they take care of the house and

contribute financially to its operation. In contrast to other Kaneqahs, such as the Sami Mahal from the Chistyia order in California, whose tenants don't participate in the ceremonies, the tenants of the Nematollahi Kaneqah strive to be in tune with the frequency of the their centre.

The Nematollahi Kaneqah is made of wood and is typical of houses in Toronto; a two-storied house with a finished basement. The rooms on the main floor include the entry hall, kitchen (*doodeh*), lavatory, two bedrooms, a parlour or the main living room dedicated to the Sama' ritual (*jamkhaneh*), and a library where guests and the uninitiated can visit and even participate in the ritual. The basement includes a kitchen, lavatory, and a large hall. This is where meals are cooked and prepared for special occasions. The kitchen on the main floor is used primarily for serving tea and pastries during Sama' ritual days.

The meeting rooms on the main floor are covered in Persian rugs. There is a second entrance to the house through the kitchen. The fireplace in the *jamkhaneh* is in the south wall and on its mantle is an altar (see figure 2, p.42) with two photographs: one of Dr. Javad Nourbakhsh, the former head of the Nematollahi order, and the other is of Alireza Nourbakhsh, the current head of the order. There is always a vase filled with flowers (mostly roses) under these portraits. All the walls in the *jamkhaneh* and library are covered with calligraphies, poetry, portraits of previous Sufi masters, and musical instruments, such as the *daf* (see figure 3, p.43). People sit on small sheep skin cushions in the *jamkhaneh*; the sheep skin being symbolic of the material world and the flesh, which should be located under the feet. The windows in the *jamkhaneh* are adorned with thick cotton curtains with beautiful traditional patterns of the *kashkool* (the Sufis' begging bowl) and calligraphies of the various names of God, such as "Hagh" and "Hu." The curtain is a special Iranian traditional fabric called Qalamkar (see figure 4, p.44). Qalamkar is a kind of textile printing technique in Isfahan that uses wooded stamps. These stamps are normally

made of pear wood, which has a good density and flexibility for carving. The stamps are carved patterns of geometric designs, flora and fauna designs, poetries, Islamic designs, hunting scenes, polo games, names of God, and *kashkool*. After the fabric is stamped, it is steamed for an hour to stabilize the print and then soaked in basins in the riverbed (mostly in Zayandeh Rood in Isfahan). Later it will be boiled in large copper pots containing liquid stabilizers for the paint. They are turned upside down the whole time while boiling. After this, it is washed again in the river and spread over the river bank to dry. The entrances from the hallway into the *jamkhaneh* and the kitchen into the library are also covered with Qalamkar curtains. The library is filled with spiritual books, many of them written by Dr. Javad Nourbakhsh who writes in Farsi and English. A book of his poetry is used to start the Sama' ceremonies; they are often sung with musical accompaniment.

The *akhawan* of the Nematollahi Kaneqah are mostly Iranian in heritage, although I have met regular non-Iranians in the Sama': a German initiate on 'the Path' for twenty-five years; an Italian and two Indian seekers who like to sit in the library and attend rituals. Initiations have their own stages and ceremonies. Anyone interested in the path of love should meet with the *pardalil* (proof of the master) who is selected by the Pir. The *Pirdalil* regularly teaches the Path basics and sends students who are ready to the Shaykh who conducts the initiation ceremony. People hear about the group through word of mouth or at Sufi public concerts. As one of the initiates told me, "Anybody who is destined to end up here will find here."

During my several months of visits to the Kaneqah, the number of men and women seem more or less even. Normally there are 20-25 *akhawans* with about the same number of guests. Here, men and women sit together where the women are not required to cover their heads, even though this is mandatory under *shariah* or Islamic law. When I asked one of the *akhawans* about

this, S. told me that Sufism is not derived from Islam. The Nematollahi order, based on Dr. Nourbakhsh's teachings, believes that Sufism existed in Iran before Islam and was called the Javanmardi creed. It was derived from Mithraism and only after the attack of the Arabs in Persia did Persian women begin veiling themselves to keep the ideology alive (Zayyani 2001:26). In most of the other Sufi orders, such as Mevlaviya, the women cover their hair.

Based on the ethnographic research of Jeffrey McCullough Piatt on a Kaneqah in Damascus, Syria, *dhikr* ceremonies are performed by men separately from the women, who are not allowed to participate (Piatt 2015). Although Piatt talks about modernizing the *dhikr* ceremony, still there are no women participating in the ceremony. In regards to modernizing, Piatt refers to Pierre Bourdieu and Martin Heidegger:

Their thought provides a model for my examination on how modernizing pressures effect shifts in the function and significance of traditional techniques, and how preexistent discursive traditions and practices impact in significant ways the adoption of new tools, including for example the use of a synthesizer in *dhikr* composition and the use of cell phone cameras by *dhikr* participants (Piatt 2015:12).

In the Nematollahi Kaneqah, they use modern technology, like CD players, as well.

At the beginning of the ritual, a recording of Dr. Nourbakhsh's teachings is played, which talks about the etiquettes of *tarighah* or 'the Path.' An important etiquette brought up by the Shaykh himself, at a ceremony I attended, is that each person who enters the Sama' room or the library should bend forward, touch the ground with his fingers, put his fingers on his lips and then on his forehead. This should be done while exiting the room as well, with the adherent's exiting backwards. This is a sign of respect to the Kaneqah. Mr. Soli, a musician and one of the main singers of the Sama' said,

"People should bend and touch the ground before entering to remind them of humility and leaving their Ego out and entering raw and receptive. Then they can absorb the frequencies in the Kaneqah. It is an etiquette to remind people that here is a special place to enter. It is different than a mosque where everybody can enter. Kaneqah is for exclusive people not common people.



People should not exit with their back towards the Kaneqah because they should not be ignorant to the Pir and Kaneqah.”

Nematollahi Kaneqah publishes its own journal, Sufi, which is issued bi- annually in London, England. It features articles about Sufism and other paths of spirituality, music, art, as well as book reviews related to spirituality. It always contains articles or poetry by Dr. Nourbakhsh. The current senior editor is Alireza Nourbakhsh, head of the Nematollahi Sufi order. The Sufi journal can be purchased in Canada and other countries. It is published in both Farsi and English and although the articles vary in content, the message conveyed by the Head Master, Alireza Nourbakhsh, is always the same.

Sama’ occurs twice a week in the Kaneqah. On Sunday and Thursday evenings initiates gather to participate in the ritual. The rituals begin at 8:00 p.m. in the winter and 8:30 p.m. in the summer. Participants who arrive early, sit in silence in the library while the initiates sit in the *jamkhaneh* and meditate. There are no chairs, everybody sits on cushions on the floor. Tea is served and each time the server kneels on the floor to hand over the tea, he says, “Ya Hagh,” (Truth Almighty). The people thank him by repeating, “Ya Hagh.” At 8:00 p.m. they turn off all the lights and the ceremony begins. The whole ceremony takes place in the dark, the windows are veiled by thick Qalamkar curtains.

Normally the music is a recording but on certain special occasions, there is a live band. The ceremony normally lasts forty-five minutes to an hour and begins with quotes from the head of the order, played once in Farsi with the voice of the master and then translated into English. The music begins slowly and gradually speeds up to its peak tempo, with participants clapping in *dhikr jali*, or the *dhikr*, chanted loudly without the music. Only percussion remains to accompany the chanting. This is called *bast* or ‘expansion,’ which leads symbolically to *fana*. The next stage is *qabh* or ‘contraction,’ when the music slows down again. This expansion/contraction can

occur a few times during a ceremony depending on the length of the ritual and the *hal* of the musicians and *akhawan*. This is a two-way, interconnected relationship that I will explore more in Chapter three.

In the end, the Sama' prayer is chanted and *akhawans* pay their gratitude to the Kaneqah for providing this opportunity to connect with the Oneness. They sing a poem by Hafiz then everybody remains in silence and darkness for a while until the Shaykh ends the ritual with, "Ya Hagh." The lights are turned on and tea and pastries are served.

### **Methodological Considerations**

My plan for conducting this study was to use a 'participant observation methodology.'<sup>1</sup> I would place myself among the *akhawan* of the Nematollahi order, join with them in their weekly Sama' ritual, and write down my observations. As Daniel Atesh has mentioned in his thesis,

It quickly became evident as I began my field studies that traditional participant observation methodology was insufficient in application to a subject as elusive as mysticism and music. The key problem is that participant observation tends to leave out important subjective (the ethnomusicologist's own inner experience) and inter-subjective elements (the dynamics of relations between the researcher and the other humans involved in the research) (Atesh 1995:9).

Critics like Nettl (1983) and Gourlay (1978) have explored this issue at length but it remains unresolved. Inter-subjectivity is a huge topic that is outside the scope of this paper. As Charles Seeger points out:

Musical discourse is not speech-discourse nor does it follow the same "rules" as speech-discourse (Seeger 1961: 80).

He believes the ethnomusicologist must account for his or her own world view (Seeger 1971: 397).

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<sup>1</sup> As required by York University's research policy involving live participants, ethics approval for this thesis was obtained in January 2018.

To be able to understand the participants' explanations about their experience during Sama', I needed to experience *their* context directly, to become that which I was studying. Especially challenging is that the whole ceremony in this Kaneqah is conducted in the dark. There is nothing to observe. My experience of it was limited and heightened at the same time. The difficulty for the scholar between participating and observing, as Atesh explains, is,

Participation is immediate experience, with little intellectualization and less analysis until the participation is over, observation offers opportunity for intellectual analysis but does not attend sufficiently to the immediacy of experience. By participation engagement, I mean that observation had to be combined with deep reflection on what was occurring in the realms of inner experience (Atesh 1995:11).

The observer has a significant effect on the situation while being affected by the situation observed. According to Turner and Bruner, the challenge in the social sciences is to understand the value of the personal experience of the field worker (Turner and Bruner 1986). There is scholarly support for being subjective in my observations in the writings of James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 1-26). I have been looking for a scientific method for my study in order for it to be academic, but the more I studied Sufism the more I understood that Sufism is not about the intellect. It's not something to be found, it's something to be realized. I have tried to combine subjectivity together with objectivity through my interviews with the *akhawans*. Interviews were recorded using a cell phone, although at times I had to write notes because my interactions were impromptu. All this data is stored on a Mac book.

## **A Typical Live Sama' Ceremony**

I chose the Sama' on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, because it was more than a regular weekly ritual. On the one hand, it was performed in honour of one of the Sufis who had recently passed away; on the other hand, because it was a live performance, there was a dimmed light for the singer, which enabled me to observe the performers and a few people around the singer during certain parts of the ritual.

Tonight the ceremony started as usual, with recordings of quotes by Dr. Nourbakhsh in Farsi, then translated live into English. Afterwards, the Shaykh reads a poem from Dr. Nourbakhsh's Divan. He reads it at first in Farsi then in English. While the poem is being chanted, a *setar* (see figure 5, p. 45) is playing. I closed my eyes, finding the music soothing and meditative.

### **“The Name of the Friend**

Say always the name of the friend,

Slowly-slowly.

With this alchemy change the copper of the heart into gold

Slowly-slowly.

Drink from the wine of unity in the tavern of Oneness

So that “I and you” will be taken from your mind

Slowly-slowly.

Stamp your foot on the head of existence, empty your hands of both worlds,

Thus you'll become a confident of God's secrets,

Slowly-slowly.

Seek a road from that king who has the “wealth of Allah” and sooner or later he will separate  
you from yourself,

Slowly- slowly.

In love’s district impatience brings loss,

For difficulties will be made easy by surrender and contentment,

Slowly- slowly.

There are thousands of tests in store for a sincere lover,

All so that he will come to know love’s secret,

Slowly- slowly.

The knowing traveler who truly strives will pass through the stations of the way,

Travelling the road of *baqa* after the road of *fana*,

Slowly- slowly.

In the school of lovers, silence is better than speech.

O Nourbakhsh this statement was made clear,

Slowly- slowly.” (Nourbakhsh 1980:207)

The tempo of the music increases in a 4/4 meter. A *daf*, frame drum (see figure 3, p.43), starts accompanying the *setar*. The tempo continues to accelerate. Two other *dafs* join in. The singer sings with excitement. He moves elegantly, conducting with his right hand. The music becomes intense and fast. I watch everyone with their eyes closed, moving their upper bodies with the rhythm. The music suddenly halts. The singer sings now in a slow tempo, accompanied

once again by only the *setar*. The *setar* player later identified the mode as *homayoun*<sup>2</sup>. (Eqb G Aqb B C D Eb or Eqb F). The “q” denotes an approximate quarter tone flat. People chant along with the singer. The *dafs* join in as the singer sings softly. I can hardly hear the words. He seems to be in a trance. The only word I can discern is, “slowly, slowly.” Now the singer sways his upper body to the right and left, while the others drop their heads to their chests. It appears that they are all in deep sleep. I begin to discern that he is singing the poetry of Dr. Nourbakhsh. The music stops again, absent of any *ritardando*. The Shaykh starts chanting, “Al hokmo le-Allah” (The command is for God). Everybody repeats after him, “Allah.” *Dafs* accompany this *dhikr*. One of the *daf* players stands up and people start clapping as they repeat the *dhikr*. They move back and forth. The lights are turned off and I am in complete darkness. People almost scream, “Allah, Allah.” I feel myself move back and forth as well. The energy stream of sound is animating me; the uniting sound of everyone calling the name of God. Men chant, “Al hokmo le-Allah.” The women respond, “Allah, Allah” with an accented first syllable on each iteration<sup>3</sup>. They clap two beats in 4/4 rhythm and the tempo of the *dhikr* reaches 120 bpm. They chant in 2/4 beats and clap with the same tempo. I don’t know how long this *dhikr* lasted but to me it felt very long, as if time had been stretched out. I couldn’t even distinguish the word “Allah.” I was clearly under the spell of the rhythm movements. The *daf* suddenly stops along with the

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<sup>2</sup>- Homayoun Mode



<sup>3</sup>- Allah Allah, Al Hokmo Lellah



chanting. How do they know when to stop on that intense forte, chanting in the darkness? It seems to me that there is an invisible conductor directing this orchestra beyond the darkness, from heart to heart. A woman cries out and everyone sings in unison two verses from Hafiz without instrumental accompaniment. It is sung quite lyrically. This is in the *homayoun*. People continue their singing in the same scale or mode: “As long as wine and tavern are around, before the master I bow to the ground” (Shahriari ed. 1999: Ghazal# 205). They repeat these two verses two times then stop. The Shaykh ends the ritual by saying, “Ya Hagh,” and the ceremony ends.

Tonight something different happened. Since it was the memorial of a Sufi, they asked everyone to stay for dinner. The dining itself was a kind of musical ritual. I was blessed to be invited, to move into the *jamkhaneh* and sit close to the Shaykh for dinner. The Shaykh was dressed all in white and sat in front of the fireplace, below the altar. Three servers, a woman and two men (one of them was the singer), all in white, bring white tablecloths (*sofreh*), which they lay on the floor to serve the food in front of the Shaykh. The woman kneels in front of the Shaykh, with her forehead on the floor, and receives permission to spread the tablecloths on the floor. Three servants all in white start chanting “Ya Hagh” continuously in a 4/4 beat at 80 bpm (two quarter notes, two rests). Everyone chants along and this continues until everything is set on the floor for dinner.

The first thing they put on the *sofreh* is salt. The Shaykh starts his meal with a little taste of this salt. The food is traditional Iranian food, *adas polo*, which is made of lentils, raisins, rice, and minced meat, although there is a vegetarian option as well. The *sofreh* is filled with traditional raw herbs and yogurt and traditional kimchi. It is not a simple dinner. The dishes and cutlery are not disposable. The Shaykh starts taking the food and before he eats, he passes the tray along so that everyone in the room takes from this same tray the Shaykh started. Nobody

talks as they eat. Dining in the Persian culture normally includes robust conversation, but tonight it is done in complete silence. After everyone is done eating, which is simultaneous with the Shaykh, the white dressed servers stand up and start chanting “Ya Hagh” again in the same rhythm and everybody joins in as they clean up.

I didn’t clue into this coordination until after when I reflected on the event and recalled the startling synchronicity. It seems that everything is coordinated, or conducted by some invisible hand. The dining ceremony is a beautiful concert in and of itself. It starts with the rhythmic chanting of God’s name and after a long rest, or active silence, it finishes in the same rhythmic chant. Clearly in A B A form, I don’t know how I was so in synch with everyone throughout this ritual, as it was my first time attending this particular ceremony. We were a perfect orchestra in which no one played a bad note.

Silence is a big part of this ritual where it does not denote nothingness or isolation. The wife of the Shaykh, Mrs. N, talked to me after the ceremony. I offered to help with the dishes but she refused, saying,

“Every initiate is assigned to a specific job in Kaneqah. Thus not everyone can enter the kitchen. Only initiates are allowed in there. Because the food is cooked in complete silence while each person is chanting their own *dhikr* inwardly.”

So the meaning of silence in Kaneqah has a different quality. It is a focused silence. Human beings cannot stop thinking. The brain is always working. Each thought has a frequency. Each frequency has an energy level. *Akhawan* believe that the energy of our thoughts influences our actions, thus our thoughts will influence the food we cook. That’s why they focus their minds on their sacred *dhikrs* that connote the positive attributes of God and pour that good energy into the food they cook. In Mevlavi’s teachings, cooking is a symbol of spiritual transformation, turning the raw into the cooked.



KG: What is the reason that everyone is assigned to a specific job? For example, why can't all initiates help in the kitchen?

*Mrs. N: It helps the initiates to understand that they should not interfere in the universal law. Everybody should mind their own business.*

KG: How do we know what our duty is in the world?

*Mrs. N: By not comparing ourselves with anybody. We should do our best in whatever we are doing. Our best is the ultimate effort that we can use. The musicians should perform and sing their best because they are assigned to this position.*

KG: Are the musicians being paid for their performance?

*Mrs. N: Of course not. Every initiate works here free of charge. They serve the Kaneqah for free to learn that everything is done for the satisfaction of God.*

I completely understood this sentiment. To me the singer was not singing perfectly, sometimes even singing out of tune, but through his performance, he could elevate the energy of the group. I talked to another initiate, Reinhard, who is of German origin. His talk had a beautiful impression on me:

*R: The first time I came here, I didn't know what to expect. I've read something about Sufism but I had never experienced the music. I heard the music and it touched me right to the core. I knew that I was home in a way that really I've never experienced before. It's maybe the tonal scales or I don't know much about the music but the half tones (microtones) and the quality of the minor keys and stuff, it just touched me to the core. Now the other thing about this music is that I don't*

*understand Farsi and I am grateful that I don't, because it would distract me from the quality of the music itself.*

KG: Do you have the same feeling every time you come to the ceremony?

*R: Generally, the same feeling. Sometimes I have to generate it to get distant from my ordinary life. You know the thoughts come and interfere but sometimes the music is so profound. I can't describe it, of course. It's an experience, and having this meditation and at the same time in the dark, I think it's a profound experience every time.*

KG: Have you read about the Sufi Path and ultimate goal of Sama'?

*R: Yes, yes.*

KG: Are you seeking that or are you just fine with the meditation?

*R: No this is the center of my life. This Path is what I am committed to and we will see if I can make progress or not (laughs). It's been a long time so far but I've certainly received many many blessings. The other spiritual paths that I've explored, they all have the same intent but you come to get something, you come to get enlightenment or establish some higher self that you are not in contact with, what I've learned here is to lose. I come here to give everything away, to become nothing. This is totally different and it works. It's in general not a Path for me. First of all, I am German, I have a very practical nature and (I'm) not the mystical type (laughs). It's not what I've got here, it's what I've lost. I've lost addictions, I've lost my ego to some extent, and some kind of—I don't know, arrogance that I carried through life that was kind of a shield for me. Just a kind of arrogance and rudeness that was not to my benefit and kept me from real contact with people. So mostly I've been losing (laughs). Losing bad habits and losing my kind of thinking that I know everything and that I can figure everything out. I can't. I know it's all a mystery and it's ok.*

KG: So why do you come here? Is it about the music or the community?

*R: No. I've seen many of these people for over twenty years every week. I don't even know their names. Some of them I've never talked to. But I feel connected to them I know them spiritually and their qualities you know are pretty visible to me. But I don't care about them in their lives. So I don't come for the community and I am not Persian and I'm grateful because I don't have to have their phone numbers and be invited to their events. No no no, I'm not interested.*

KG: So I don't understand. Why do you come to Kaneqah? Why can't you do your meditation at your home?

*R: Well, generally I do meditation at home too. They are beautiful people but it's not the sense of the community that I come for. I come more or less to be reminded of the central importance of the mystical Path. Really I can't say even mystical path. It is the Path of love and I try to regenerate that connection with that spirit of love and generosity. It's hard to do that in daily life with normal people and society and when dealing where money matters and politics. I see the horror everywhere else and to a large extent it's a position of shelter for me.*

KG: Do you think music is a tool to take you in this deep state of mind?

*R: Yes, absolutely, absolutely. It feels like, let's say like an animal that I can ride. So are you familiar with the dhikr? Well, I do that in rhythm with the music and with my breathing of course and they work together, I find in this room in particular it becomes a whirlpool, but upward, upward spiral ruining your desires. The music has a structure, of course you know more than I do, but I know how it builds and I sense it and then there are some notes, some musicians hit some notes, I don't know what it is, but I lose it all together. It's not that I want those moments to come but when they do I am all, "Oh my God, what happened here?" I don't know what that's about. It's magical, it's magic for me.*

KG: Do you still say your *dhikr* or are you totally lost?

*R: I forget. I forget all the time (laughs). You know I have to bring myself back all the time. Especially when I am in an ecstatic state, sometimes I don't know what I am doing. It's rare that I go that far. This is very practical and not bragging aspect of Sufism. Its not even humility. To be humble you're going to be bragging on humble, you know, become of much of a nobody (sic). So you (are) left with nothing but to be authentic. To have an authentic reaction. I know that during the music many times, particularly women, start to make noises. You have noticed?*

KG: Yes.

*R: Yes, they may be overwhelmed. They may be. But this is frowned upon, too. You know you are to remain quiet and to be experiencing your connection with the divine, but if you are expressing something it better not be you expressing it. In other words, don't be histrionic or try to disturb others with your movements or with our sounds. You try to sing along and sometimes it's encouraged but generally it's not like that.*

KG: Do you participate in clapping as well?

*R: I don't generally clap.*

KG: Why do they clap?

*R: I don't know, maybe it's something for the rhythm, it's for vocalizing and to keep the rhythm of your dhikr. I don't really know. Personally, I think it's kind of disruptive because it's quite a sharp sound. If someone is clapping right next to you. It's quite disturbing. I don't like to do it.*

Ibrahim, another attendant at the Kaneqah, who attends other Sama' ceremonies such as Qaderiya, talked to me about the *dhikr* in other Sufi orders. He has been attending this Kaneqah for three years. Contrary to Reinhard, Ibrahim comes from an orthodox Islamic/Indian

background. He told me that he was raised with the belief that music is for evil, but as he grew up and studied more about Sufism, he reached the point where not every kind of music is satanic. There are poems written for the love of the Prophet (*nashidh*) and poems written for the love of God (*nat*) that Sufi orders use for their ceremonies accompanied by music. Thus, he agrees with the kind of music that is gentle to the soul.

*IB: My purpose of coming to Kaneqah is purification. My personal (intention) is to cleanse yourself from the nafs (ego). So when you come with these intentions then there will be effect.*

KG: Do you think music is necessary for this purpose?

*IB: I think it's on an individual case by case. In some Kaneqahs there is very loud music, in some there is silent music, and in some there is no music.*

KG: But there is *dhikr* and it's rhythmical.

*IB: There is dhikr. In some there is loud dhikr and in some there is silent dhikr. For me, I like music. It really soothes me. Sometimes in this very fast paced environment, in this very busy city that we live in, during the week I work, we get exhausted, and overwhelmed, and your thoughts start going all over the place, so when I come here, actually it really calms me.*

KG: But you don't know Farsi and don't know what they say. Are you still ok with that?

*IB: Yes. Even though I don't understand the language somehow my spirit connects. I get relaxed and I feel this joy. By the end of the session I am very clear, my mind is very clear, the body is clear, I am in a clear state of mind. So I think there is a connection. There has to be something. It works better than medication (laughs).*

KG: Do you have a *dhikr* yourself?

*IB: I am not initiated with this Kaneqah. I have my own dhikr. Mainly it is la illaha il Allah, or “Allah Hu,” which I breathe in and breathe out. Internally I breathe in “Allah” and externally I breathe out “Hu.”*

KG: Does it ever happen that you forget saying your *dhikr* or are you aware of if you are saying your *dhikr* or not?

*IB: No I am not because there is music at the background so sometimes I stop and focus on music.*

KG: Do you stop your *dhikr* intentionally?

*IB: Yes. I stop intentionally.*

KG: Do you think of anything else at that time?

*IB: I am absorbed mostly in the music because it is generally very dark, you don't see anybody. That's very good, in that way you keep focused, there is no distraction. Sometimes I prefer the soft and gentle music, it can get a bit loud sometimes, which I will switch off a bit and go to my own *dhikr*.*

KG: What about clapping?

*IB: Clapping is generally to wake somebody up from the trance state. There are some people that I can notice through my observation or hearing that towards the end of the session, I guess they are crying, they are completely in trance state, and I think that clapping might help bring them back to their consciousness.*

## **Summary**

The Sama' ritual happens twice a week in the Nematollahi Kaneqah. The ritual has a specific etiquette for the participants. The whole ritual is conducted in complete darkness. A

typical Sama' starts with instructions from Dr. Nourbakhsh and will continue with music. The music begins in a slow tempo and accelerates during the ritual. When it reaches its peak tempo and loudness, *akhawan* will start chanting the loud *dhikr* which is initiated by the Shaykh. The music stops abruptly and everyone remains for a while in silence before the ritual ends. The silence has a specific meaning. It is not emptiness or nothingness. Participants should be chanting their personal *dhikr* inwardly the whole time. The ritual lasts about forty-five minutes to one hour each time. The dining in the Kaneqah is another kind of ritual. It has an orchestral character with symbolic meanings for each and every action, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4. According to my interviews with initiates and non-initiates, Sama' is not a religious practice. They participate in Sama' in order to feel lighter, to have a clearer mind and less ego. The practice helps them to overcome the emotional burdens of daily life and music has the most important role in this regard. They experience an altered state of mind, trance, through music, which should be conducted in a community or with a group of people.

## Nematollahi Kaneqah



Fig. 1



# Altar



Fig. 2

## Daf



Fig. 3

<https://dracocha.deviantart.com/art/Iranian-Daf-501238341>

## Qalamkar Fabric



Fig. 4

<http://www.ogetravel.com/en/?p=3055>

## Setar



Fig. 5

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:سَه\\_آر\\_۱.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:سَه_آر_۱.jpg)

## Chapter 3

### Sama' Music

What is Sama'?

“I will not say, my brother, what Sama' is before I know who the listener is.” (Sa'di, Bustan: line 1970).

The ultimate goal of Sama' is the annihilation into God (*fana*). Music is used to focus the listener onto the divine attributes and as a means to reach ecstasy. The initiate can experience *fana* in a state of ecstasy. Critics debate that the main goal of Sama' has changed and the concept of *fana* is no longer contemplated. At the same time, other communities practice Sama' as a form of orthodox obligation (Piatt 2014:35). *Fana* itself should be followed by *baqa* for the Sufi to be able to continue his life on Earth in the realm of duality. As Nasr explains beautifully, the Sufi Path of Love is the alchemical conversions of the soul through a progression of contraction-expansion union (*qabdh'-bast-fana/baqa*) (Nasr 1987:167). Contraction means emptying one from the ego (*nafs*), desires, and attachment to the material. By practicing asceticism, one may fill this emptiness with expanded consciousness, called the “The Breath of the Compassionate” or the symbolic name of “Rahim” or Allah. In Islamic ideology, the universe was created through the Divine Breath. Breath is the symbol of life and possesses significant spiritual implications for the singers (Simms 2012:109).

*Dhikr* is the repetition of a word or a short phrase, which is universal in all Sufi practices. It is considered the primary spiritual tool for achieving *fana*. It is a controlled repetition of a formula that combines word, sound, breath, and rhythm. It can be seen as a group practice, silent, loud, sung, with or without body movements, slow and sustained, fast and successively accelerated, etc. “It is a potent means of focusing one's attention and reintegrating oneself through sympathetic vibration with the “Breath of the Compassionate” (Ibid).

Jeffrey Piatt explains:

While *dhikr* is not considered music per se, it remains the case that they are governed by conventions regarding the display of effect, its forms of discursive articulation, and the types of emotional content deemed productive of good ends. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Deschenes points out that musical acculturation involves not only “the learning of tonal structures” but also an “acculturation of listener’s response to and views about music” (Piatt 2014:76).

*Dhikr* is an important part of the Sama’. As Jean During mentions, “Sama’ is to bathe in or fill oneself with artistic rhythm and archetypal beauty, through which one experiences the ecstasy of cosmic rhythm and beauty itself. Sama’ is a venue for ecstatic, visionary contact with the imaginal world” (During 1982:78).

Jean During has done a vast study on the music of all Sufi orders, especially in Iran. He explains that one cannot look at Sufi music from a Western point of view. Western musicians tend to analyze Sufi music through the Pythagorean science of modes and intervals, the science of vocal techniques, the priority of the melody over rhythm and text, and by considering the contemplation of sacred texts in a slow tempo. Based on his comparison between the Sama’ music of different orders, I witnessed that the music is different for each order. For example, the Sama’ music comparison table in Mevlevi order and Qawwali (the music of Chistiyya order) is as below: (Lewisohn 1999:279).

Mevlavi Music	Qawwali Music
Limited musical specificity	Musical specificity
Derived from Sama’	Fusion of Sama’ and <i>dhikr</i>
Entirely composed	Partly improvised
Collective expression (except in taqsim)	Individual and collective expression
Fixed text	Adaptable text
Slow tempo	Fast tempo
Complex, long and varied rhythms	Simple, short, limited rhythms
Closed repertoire	Open repertoire
Continuous mandala- like structure	Succession of separate pieces
Traditional instruments	Modern instruments
Mental <i>dhikr</i> by the participants	Verbal <i>dhikr</i> by the musicians
Prearranged dance by a set type and figure	Informal dance
Discretion, moderate expression	Exaltation, enthusiasm
Calm, meditation	Extraversion, emotion
Communion	Communication, interchange

Symbolic space and sequence	Limited symbolism
Ritualization	Limited ritualization
Closed circuit, State sponsoring	Private sponsoring, donation
Official performances	Public performances
Classical. Learned, elitist	Semi-classical, great popular impact

Qawwali and Mevlavi Sama' are two different parts of the Sama' music spectrum among the Sufi orders. Each order adapts their own musical style based on the folk musical forms of their time and place. Normally the music is flavoured by the native culture of the teacher who brings it with him. In the Sami Mahal Kaneqah in California, the musicians are initiates as well. Since one of them is a pianist, the Shaykh of Sami Mahal added the piano to the Sama' music of that order. Idris Shah, a modern Sufi scholar, explains that the purpose of the music in Sufism is not the mere enjoyment of the music. Music is applied to "develop consciousness" (Shah 1971a: 343).

The structure of the music that is performed in the Nematollahi Kaneqah is very similar to Qawwali, although the nature of the music is quite different. Mr. Soli, the main singer of the Kaneqah, introduces his work as Qawwali. He has more than five hundred hours of Qawwali recordings in the Nematollahi Kaneqah and revived Qawwali music in Iran before the Islamic Revolution. Based on the detailed research of ethnomusicologist Regula Qureshi on Qawwali music, the music in Sufism serves the presentation of mystical poetry to elevate the mystical emotion in order to change the listeners who are seekers of spirituality. Qureshi prepared the table below to show the three basic components of this explanation (Arousing, Text, Diverse listeners) (Qureshi 1986:59).

### Functional Constraints and Distinctive Features

Functional Components and Requirements		Musical execution: distinctive features
1. Spiritual <i>arousal</i>	a) Supply strong rhythmic framework	<i>Duration:</i> - Meter with regular and frequent stress repeat
	b) Supply strong stress pattern	<i>Acoustic presentation:</i> - stress intensified by handclaps and open-hand drumming
2. Text <i>Priority</i>	a) Clarify text acoustically (clarity of words)	<i>Acoustic presentation:</i> - high volume through voice quality - high volume through group reinforcement - sharp enunciation - continuous text presentation through group alternation
	b) Clarify text structurally (clarify or syntax)	<i>Duration:</i> - poetic meter represented in durational arrangement of melody (rhythm of tune) - poetic meter reflected in musical meter <i>Formal structure:</i> - strophic form in musical structure - rhyme scheme represented in sectioning of tune <i>Pitch:</i> - units of strophe and poetic meter represented by melodic phrasing and contour
	c) Clarify text semantically (clarity of content)	<i>Visual presentation:</i> - content emphasis through gestures
3. Listeners requirements	a) Provide flexible structural framework for text manipulation	<i>Formal structure:</i> - all kinds of text units represented by musical units - manipulability of all musical units within overall structure through directional movement, manifested principally in alternative endings of musical units.

As Qureshi explains, spiritual arousal occurs through the beat of the drums and the hand clapping in Qawwali. She describes how the beats of the drums synchronize with the heartbeat



while God’s name is repeated. The rhythm is always simple in Qawwali and the music favours a durational pattern coherent with consistent and recurring stresses. All Qawwali meters are either 3+3 or 4+4 and all the groupings begin with a stressed beat. The drum is played with an open-hand or flat-hand strokes. Qawwals believe that the listener’s head moves involuntarily with the downbeat of every stroke. Another means to spiritual arousal is by increasing the tempo. Near the end of the ritual the tempo decreases which calms the emotions. The music in Qawwali is to serve the text so it should not be so loud that the listener can’t hear the poem. The poetic construct is the main goal. The most salient statements of the text are mostly sung by the group of musicians. The structural clarification of the text is made apparent through its poetic meter and form. The singer uses the rhythmic pattern of the poem (*wazn*) when choosing a musical mode or setting. Thus as Mr. Soli explains, the singer is the leader of the musical ritual. As Qureshi describes:

Musically the poetic meter is represented by the rhythm of the tune, both at the level of the durational units (long-short, etc.), and the durational framework (musical meter). At the level of the durational units, this means that the long-short arrangement of the poetic meter forms the basis for the long-short arrangement of Qawwali melody, whether in a literal 2:1 proportion (one long=two short), or in a various asymmetrical arrangements (one long>short). That is to say, in the standard rhythmic representation of Qawwali verse patterns, the durational unit representing a short syllable is doubled in length to represent a long syllable. Asymmetrical arrangements are characterized by long syllable units of varying duration, always multiples of the short durational unit. Alternatively, stress is sometimes used to mark a long syllable musically, even though its duration may be short; this occurs mainly at the beginning of the verse line (Qureshi 1986:61).



Since the music in Sama’ is completely improvised, the singer has the freedom to repeat, rearrange or delete any part of the song text in regard to the listeners’ “*hal*.” The singer maneuvers with the pitch for completion or insertion of a statement of the text. He will change

the pitch downwards for the completion of a statement and upwards for the repetition or insertion of the text (Qureshi 1986:60-65). Mr. Soli explains:

*Soli: The music which is played in this Kanegah is in the same form of Qawwali. Our expertise is traditional Iranian music but we don't follow the traditional music as its purpose and rules are to go from one gushe (melodic figures which organize the modes or tonal spaces) to another gushe. We move towards the text (poetry). We become empowered by the text and improvise the melody upon that.*

KG: So there is no transcription for your performances?

*Soli: No. there has never been any transcription. It starts based on a theme. One of the musicians starts in a mode (dastgah). Sometimes we decide on a mode beforehand such as Mahoor, Esfahan, or sometimes we give the choice to the musician who starts playing. He starts playing, then I enter with the words. At first I sing an introductory avaz (a cappella), then slowly slowly different rhythms come into play. The poems are from Rumi, Dr. Nourbakhsh, Pir, Hafiz, and ancient poets such as al Maghribi, etc.*

KG: Is the text chosen beforehand?

*Soli: Not necessarily. Sometimes if there is a special occasion like Digjoosh or the Prophet's birthday or Rumi's birthday or Dr. Nourbakhsh's birthday, the poems which are suitable with that occasion will be chosen by the Pir beforehand. Although still the music is in our hands. For special occasions we may decide on the dastgah together with the musicians in order to make the best out of the words in regards to the meaning of the text, and after that again everything will be improvised.*

KG: Is the form of the music mandatory as slow, fast, slow?

Soli: *We normally follow this pattern but it's not mandatory.*

KG: What is the purpose of this form?

Soli: *It starts slow as an introduction so that we warm up and decide how to continue, but sometimes the energy of the group is so high that the rhythm follows it.*

KG: Should it become fast at a point?

Soli: *The goal is if possible to reach to Sama' (trance).*

KG: Does the tempo get fast because you have reached to that state or you make the tempo fast to lead the listener to that state?

Soli: *You should know better. If I am not in that state myself, I can't transfer it to the listener. I should be moved myself to be able to move others. I should have been under influence of something to be able to get respond.*

KG: How do you know how long you should play or what should you play if you are in trance or *hal* yourself?

Soli: *We are mutrib (musicians devoted to spiritual path) of Kaneqah. Mutrib is a part of the group of the servants in the Kaneqah. The servants can build up any emotional excitement for others but they are not allowed to become mast (trance). They should watch others as well. (For example), Pirdalil can fall in trance up to a limit. He should watch others not to pass out.*

KG: So *hal* has stages and the consciousness should be present at all time?

Soli: *Yes. But when we get to the Sama' where we all chant the dhikr jali (loud collective chanting), everybody loses control (daman az kaf dadan, which is a special mystic kind of losing control).*

KG: Is your personal experience with the *hal* different when you listen to your own recordings in the Sama' than when you perform live?

Soli: *Sometimes when I listen to my own recordings during Sama', I become surprised that how did this performance happen. It moves me. These are the times when I can freely fall into trance and lose control (daman az kaf dadan).*

KG: Do you prefer to do Sama' through recordings than performing live?

Soli: *It's not the matter of preference. The fact is sometimes when you hear something twice, you understand the concept better. Sometimes (when I listen to my own recordings in Sama'), I wonder how in the universe could I have thought about that poem and how could I have sung it at that time! How did this come to the domain of my thoughts?*

KG: Do you lead the music as a singer?

Soli: *Yes. I lead and they accompany.*

KG: This is a very difficult subject that I have chosen to write about.

Soli: *You cannot write about an event. You can just write about the impressions of that event. You can write about the impressions of that hal. Time is always limited. Everything happens in the frame of time, in a day, few minutes. It is limited and only a few events can happen in a time frame, in this five or ten minutes. You may have many questions but you can ask only a few of them, five of them in this ten minutes. What happens in this time is "Hagh." It is what should be.*

Ethnomusicologists have been struggling with the subject of improvisation since the late 1930s when Ernst Ferand's *Die Improvisation in der Music* was published. Bruno Nettl debates on the subject that it is the presence or absence of notation that is the characteristic feature of improvisation (Nettl 1974:2). As Ferand points out, improvisation is as old as music itself, while musical notation is a relatively modern invention.

The lack of written music resulted in a continuous recreating and re-working of known vocal or instrumental tunes, often from material handed down from the past, from melody-models that lived on in the musical subconsciousness of a race of people like the ragas of the Indians, the

nomoi of the Greeks or the maqams of the Arabs... there is scarcely a single musical technique or form of composition that did not originate in improvisatory practice or was not essentially influenced by it. The whole history of the development of music is accompanied by manifestations of the drive to improvise, though the element of improvisation retreats to the background in some phases, while in others it reveals a strikingly rich flowering (Ferand 1961:5).

The improvisation of *avaz* (non measured vocal rendition of traditional poetry) and music, which is a natural impulse in Iranian art, is also the root of its complexity in musicology studies. Improvisation in Iranian music has interested many Western scholars such as Dering, Blum, and Nettl. Laudan Nooshin, with a PHD in music and expert in traditional Persian music, describes how improvisation can have many different meanings in Persian music. The Farsi synonym for improvisation is *bedahe navazi*, derived from the term *bedihe sara'i*, or oral poetry. This shows the integral relationship between poetry and music in Iran. Based on Simms, improvisation in Persian music is a function of the musician's inspiration at a specific time, under the influence of the environment and the response of the listeners. It is a dynamic flow of the energy between the artist and the audience (Simms 2012:199). I experienced this attending live performances of Sama' rituals at Nematollahi Kaneqah.

In another interview with Mr. Ahmad, who plays *daf* in the Sama', I heard another point of view regarding the music in Sama' and its effect on the musicians and audience.

*A: Each human being's body consists of 75% of water. The vibration of the sound moves the molecules of water and this vibration causes different sensations in different people.*

KG: Is that the reason to use *daf* in Sama'?

*A: Daf moves the hearts.*

KG: Do you enter into *hal* or trance state while you play *daf* in Sama'?

A: *I started this job assigned by the Pir as a servant of Kaneqah. I was told that Qawwals should try their best not to fall in trance. Because we are the performers and should serve others. Thus we should have the control of the event in our hands. But when I think about it, you know, each daf weighs between 700-800 grams. If you consider its displacement during each Sama' ritual, it feels like you have lifted about two tons of weight. There is no possibility for my physical state to do this. I can't normally play daf nonstop for twenty to twenty-five minutes. I only start but it's not me who finishes. The energy of the environment helps me.*

KG: Do you improvise your performance or practice beforehand?

A: *It's completely improvised. The frequency of the group of musicians is completely in synch with each other. Daf has a grand staff. It has three main notes and a few notes in between. But playing in Kaneqah is beyond all this.*

Jean During has a detailed study on Persian instruments. He believes that *daf* has entered the Sama' ritual only recently through the Qaderiyya order. *Daf* can be found in different sizes with a diameter between thirty-five to fifty centimeters. Some of them have small metal chains around them. Normally there are forty of these small chains around each *daf*. The body of the *daf* is made of the wood of a poplar tree or grape vine and it is covered with a goat skin. He states that the best *daf* player is the one who can play in *hal* and transfer the *hal* to the listener. The best technique is to move the power from the belly into the fingers. This power is called "Qi" or "Chi" in Eastern martial arts (During 1989:78).

The *setar* player, Mr. Shoaienian, explains his perception of Sama' and his performance as well as the importance of "Qi" in a different way.

Sh: *Everything in the world is vibrating. Sama' is to make direct connection to the Sound of Origin, which is eternal vibration. This connection is made through the ears. If you are sitting in a train reading a book (and fall asleep), first the hands become loose and the book falls, then you lose your sense of taste, then you lose your sense of smell, little by little the eyes get closed and the last sense which will be lost is the auditory sense. The first sense which wakes up again is the auditory sense. Auditory is the mother of all senses. Thus, the connection through the ear is a closer connection than other kinds of senses. The one who is detail oriented, falls in love through the ears. The one who is result oriented falls in love through the eyes. The one who falls in love through the eyes is normally a hunter, because he has focus and looks at the subjects from above, like if you see a train from above a mountain versus watching it from inside the train. It's about observing vertically or horizontally. They both see the train but the angle of the observation is different. In Sufism, falling in love should be through the ears but the divine sight (God) should have passed on you. Forough Farokhzad (Iranian poet, 1935-1967) says: "Only sound remains." It means the only thing which exists is the vibration which is the Sound. Hafiz has another poem which says, "Found nothing more joyful than the sound of words of love, in this turning Merry-Go-Round that you rewind" (Ghazal 178). Sama' is not whirling. It is audition.*

KG: Can you please explain about the *qabdh* and *bast* in the Sama' music?

Sh: *I will talk in English right now and please write these sentences exactly as I say, because these are mine only.*

KG: That's great.

Sh: *Are you all ears?*

KG: Yes of course, I am all ears!

Sh: *There is a play and there is a pray. There is difference between play and pray. When you play, you try to attract astonishment, people say wow. That is the wow effect of the sound. But when you pray, you are touching somewhere else that we call it "hal" in Sufism. Hal means "newness." (If) you ask a child where are you going? They laugh at you. They don't believe in any horizontal movement. They don't go to the future; they don't go to the past. They just jump. There are two kinds of music, one is to play and the other is to pray. What we do is exactly the activity that a child does. Just jumping, not going. We are not trying to attract the astonishment, we are trying to attract, the pray, pumping the energy of the Absolute Being. (sic)*

KG: Can you explain about the music you played on February 4<sup>th</sup> in Kaneqah? Do you bring in the concept of *fana* and *baqa* in your music and does the mode of *homayoun* have anything special in regards to praying?

Sh: *It's all about the child I explained. The children until sixteen years of age can learn all the languages easily and without any accent. The reason is that they know how to breathe correctly. They breathe through their belly. It's similar to when you are asleep. In the sleep no muscle is contracted. As soon as the muscles contract, you start breathing from the chest, the guilty feeling and social pressure pops out. The reason that we can not learn new languages (without accent) is that we don't breathe correctly. Sufism teaches you to have a camera in your shop. When you have a camera in your shop, 80% of the thieves don't dare to come there. You should watch your thoughts. How do you watch your thoughts? You do it through your dhikr, remembrance. You watch your thoughts with each breath. Thus we just confront with 20% of negativity around us.*

*There are different ideas about dastgah. "Gah" means space and time. There is a very rich word in Farsi which you can explain the time and space within that word: "jaygah." Dastgah means*



*the place of “dast” (hand). We have dugah, segah, chargah. They are the symbols of the location of the hands on the instrument. Setar is a mother instrument. All Iranian radifs (traditional melodic repertoires that organize the melody in different modes or dastgah) are written based on setar. Each dastgah can be started from a different note.*

KG: What was your main note in *homayoun* on February 4<sup>th</sup>?

Sh: *I don't remember. I adjusted it with the voice of the singer. I waited for him to sing first. I found his voice on the tuner and based on that. We can tune our instrument on different notes of a tetra chord. We normally tune the instrument based on the singer's voice so that he can sing easier in that range. There are four important notes in our traditional music. Starting note, final note, pause note (ist) and shahed (‘witness’ or emphasized pitch). We also have a note called moteghayer which gives taste to the music. It can make the music bitter, sweet or sour. Spanish musicians also have these taste notes.*

KG: I haven't heard about the taste of a note before (laughs). Did you improvise your performance on February 4<sup>th</sup>?

Sh: *Yes. I don't know any other way to play. Our subject is “hal.” It is not performance. We create “hal.”*

KG: Do you ever experience “hal” when you play?

Sh: *Normally not. I have a duty to fulfill, like a server who should serve people. He cannot eat the pastries. The “hal” may happen sometimes.*

KG: Is the form of slow, fast, slow a rule for Sama'?

Sh: *Not necessarily. The best Sufi music that I have heard is Qawwali.*

KG: Does the change of tempo have any relationship with *qabdh* and *bast*?

Sh: *Fana and baqa don't have any significance, but the flight itself has. Qabdh and bast (contraction and expansion) are for the flapping of the wings. It's not about the flapping, it's about the flight. The bird is mortal, remember the flight.*

## **Summary**

Sama' music from different Sufi orders have different characteristics. The one that is played in Nematollahi Kaneqah is called Qawwali. Different instruments based on the culture of the community can be used for Sama'. Poems that are sung are normally spiritual poems. The music is always improvised in Nematollahi Kaneqah. Nothing is planned beforehand. The modes are chosen from traditional Iranian modes called *dastgah*. There is no transcribed music in Sama'. The concepts of *fana* and *baqa* are expressed through the rhythm and tempo of the music. The music always starts in a slow tempo and through *accelerando* reaches its peak tempo and *crescendo* back to the slow tempo or *adagio*. *Dhikr jali*, or loud collective utterance of the names of God, are chanted at the peak of the music. Spiritual arousal occurs through *dhikr jali* and clapping. The musicians are not allowed to enter into trance. Their role is to lead the audience into trance, however, they may experience trance during *dhikr jali*. Based on my interviews, the musicians of Sama' consider their performance to be a prayer rather than simply playing music (pray over play).

## Chapter 4

### Hal and Music

Gilbert Rouget, a French ethnomusicologist (1916-2017), spent much of his life with many Asian and African cultures where he researched trance and music and wrote many books and articles on the subject. His book *Music and Trance* is an excellent resource on this subject. Within the ever-growing field of neuroscience, other musicologists, such as Judith Becker (1932), introduced new ideas into the domain of music and trance. In this chapter I am going to examine *hal* and the music in Nematollahi Kaneqah primarily through the lenses of Rouget and Becker.

*Hal* is the ultimate state of mind for Sufis to attain and its vehicle is music. Identifying this state of mind is difficult in an academic sense. Antonio Damasio, a professor of philosophy and neuroscience at the University of Southern California, explains that knowing the mind of the person in trance is impossible because his consciousness is “opaque” even to himself. We can create a hypothesis based on our observations, what we are told by the people who experience trance, and from what we already know scientifically about the mind (Damasio 1999: 83). It is an ethnographic fact across many cultures that trance can be attained through music. Judith Becker borrows the term “deep listening” from composer Pauline Oliveros when she explains:

Deep listening involves going below the surface of what is heard and also expanding to the whole field of sound whatever one’s usual focus might be. Such forms of listening are essential to the process of unlocking layer after layer of imagination, meaning, and memory down to the cellular level of human experience. In my own definition, ‘deep listeners’ is a descriptive term for persons who are profoundly moved, perhaps even to tears, by simply listening to a piece of music (Becker 2004:2).

Since trance is a process, Judith Becker suggests using the term “trancing” (Becker 2004:8). As we know, people enter trance, continue, and come out of it. Thus, we can say that

trance is a process, not a state. *Hal* is a process too. It starts with perception, continues with *wajd*, and ends with movement. It is very difficult to translate the esoteric meaning of the word *hal* into other languages. Some scholars such as Nasr and Dering have used the term ‘ecstasy’ to denote *hal*, while other scholars have used the term ‘trance.’ Gilbert Rouget, ethnomusicologist (1916-2017), differentiates trance from ecstasy in the following lists: (Rouget 1985:11)

**Ecstasy**

Immobility  
 Silence  
 Solitude  
 No crisis  
 Sensory deprivation  
 Recollection  
 Hallucination

**Trance**

Movement  
 Noise  
 In company  
 Crisis  
 Sensory over stimulation  
 Amnesia  
 No hallucination

It is difficult to determine a complete form for each state. Sometimes people are in solitude, fall into ecstasy, and don’t remember anything afterwards, or may experience a crisis in the ecstasy. Trance and ecstasy are the two ends of a spectrum that are connected by a steady series of intermediate states. Rouget adds the term “possession” to the characteristics relating to trance. The person can be possessed by the spirit of a doctor and in the role of a doctor heal a sick patient, but it is always followed by amnesia. Trance is usually followed by a loss of consciousness and a physical collapse. None of these characteristics happen in *fana* with Sufis. Saint Teresa of Avila, the great Christian mystic, writes, (1949, 500) “I was so gripped by it that my hands stiffened despite all my efforts...” adding, “The suffering now so intolerable...forced me to utter loud cries that I was powerless to repress.” Her ecstasy is accompanied by sensory stimulation and crisis. In regards to possession, a person in trance embodies another character,

such as a spiritual entity or deceased person. Sufis never embody God. They can find God or *wajd*, but they are not possessed by him (Ibid: 8-26).

Rouget distinguishes three types of mystical trance:

The first is characterized by the fact that, during trance, the subject is thought to have acquired a different personality: that of God, spirit, genius, or ancestor, for which we may use the general term “deity” who has taken possession of the subject, substituted itself for him, and is now acting in that subject’s place. . .using the *bori* of the Niger Hausa as an example, there is one soul that “the gods send away during possession in order to take its place.” For a longer or shorter period, the subject then becomes the god. He *is* the god. We can call this possession in the strict sense of the word.

In the second category, rather than having switched personalities, the subject is thought to have been invested by the deity, or by a force emanating from it, which then coexists in some way with the subject but nevertheless controls him and causes him to act and speak in his name. The most frequent example of this relationship is that found in trances attributed to the Holy Ghost. I shall refer to this category of trance not as possession but as inspiration.

In the third category the relationship between divinity and subject is seen as an encounter which, depending upon the individual, is expressed as a communion, a revelation, or an illumination. Unlike the previous two relationships, this one does not involve embodiment of any kind. I shall therefore refer to the trance state brought about by *wajd*, and achieved by the practice of *dhikr* . . . which will be described as communion or “communal trance.” For a Sufi or for any Muslim, there can obviously be no question of embodying Allah, or of identifying oneself with him (Rouget 1985:26).

In chapter 3, Mr. R told me that Sama’ is about losing, not gaining. Rouget talks about his experiences with the musical repertoire of initiation in the *vodun* cult of West Africa, Benin, which is very similar to Sama’. Although *vodun* is a spirit that possesses the body of the initiate, the effect of the music is the same as in Sama’. Rouget explains that the initiation ceremony is divided into two parts. One part consists of an a cappella song which will be sung by the initiate and no one else (similar to *dhikr khafi*), the other part consists of drum music accompanied by singing (similar to Sama’). As with Sufis, each *vodun* has his own particular chant. The difference here is that the songs that are sung loudly by all initiates together have a totally different vocal sound than the ordinary singing voice which is normally heard in this region. The

voices are very light, high pitched, and disembodied. Rouget calls it “seraphic music, suspended between heaven and earth” (Ibid:59). Rouget describes the song as:

The strangeness of this singing, its formal perfection, its impassibility, the disembodied timbre of the voices, the atemporality of the melodic development, the total absence of meaningful words—all that give the music an abstract, almost a geometric character. What does this mean? Obviously, nothing could be less gratuitous than this sort of Greek temple, as it were, of African religious song. For me—and here we inevitably enter the realm of total subjectivity—this music is the very expression of the zero state of the self, of depersonalization, in short of dispossession. This is the music of a being somehow floating between essence and existence, and it succeeds admirably in its purpose, which is to express the experience of dispossession (Ibid: 60).

According to Mr. R., Sama’ takes you to the zero state of the self. He claimed that he has become a person of less ego, depersonalized. Although the *vodun* prepare themselves to fill this dispossession with a new possession, Sufis prepare to merge into a greater realm of essence, and the process through the music is the same. An important difference between these two trance experiences is that the music in *vodun* is different than the music played in other social contexts. This doesn’t apply to the music in Nematollahi Kaneqah. The mode of *homayoun* or other modes played are the same as in ordinary traditional Iranian music. The poems are selected from famous poets. Although the subject matter leans towards more spiritual poems, these can be heard in ordinary, non-ritual gatherings as well. According to Rouget, any music can be considered from three different aspects: First, as an independent object, from its composer and the audience; second, created as a subject; third, as a perceived object, something that is listened to (Ibid:65).

Roman Jakobson, a Russian-American linguist (1896- 1982) stated:

Music can be considered from the viewpoint of the message it constitutes, from that of the addresser who transmits it, and from that of the addressee who receives it—or if one prefers, from that of the transmitter and the receiver. In normal conditions of musical communication, the transmitter and the receiver share a common code, so that the message sent by the former refers to a context understandable by the latter, and communication is established between them by the action of a certain contact (Ibid:65).

Listening to music is a part of spiritual training that a Sufi receives from his Pir. I witnessed a few times during the Sama’ that the Pir instructed the *akhawans* to accompany the

musicians in *dhikr jali*, loud collective chanting. Once he directed the *akhawans* to chant the *dhikr* louder and more actively. Interestingly, one of the *akhawans*, Mr. S., told me something different in my interview with him.

KG: Have you ever got close to the state of *fana* during Sama'?

S: *Not yet.*

KG: What do you mean, "not yet?" Do you mean that you are expecting to reach that state by practicing more?

S: *No. It is not something to learn. It is something to happen. We don't go to Kaneqah to become anything. We are there to Be. My personal experience is that there is no procedure for it. The goal is not to experience the hal. It will happen by itself.*

KG: Then why do you need to go to Kaneqah?

S: *Going to Kaneqah is to meet with the other akhawans and to remind ourselves of the commitment that we have in our mission. The goal is not achieving the hal. We have learned not to look for achievement, but to look for detachment.*

KG: What is the role of music in detachment?

S: *Music magnifies the emotional state: joy to ecstasy, sadness to misery. Music is not the goal. It is a complementary means of elevating the hal.*

KG: Can you explain *hal*?

S: *It is a kind of lifted feeling. It is a feeling of lightness, and music helps me to experience this feeling.*

KG: Do you consider it as trance?

S: *I have experienced trance a few times, but not all the time.*

KG: Were you listening to the texts of the poems on those times and did you remember them after the Sama'?

*S: No. I don't remember the texts and even the music at all. In the trance state I am only the listener, I don't memorize. I am in the moment.*

KG: Do you have body movements during Sama', or do you clap?

*S: Not necessarily.*

KG: Do you control yourself not to move, or are you aware of your stillness?

*S: Yes. But movement or clapping will happen by itself. You can't apply it. If it happens, it happens.*

KG: Do you ever experience "selflessness" in your trance?

*S: I don't think so. Not everybody can experience that state. It's a long path.*

KG: So do you think it can happen through time?

*S: It can happen with a glance of the Pir (who is the manifestation of God on earth).*

*Forty retreats, forty retreats, forty retreats.*

*One glance of a master is worth a hundred retreats.*

Contrary to Mr. S's explanation, who has been participating in Sama' for several years, Qureshi explains that spiritual arousal and reaching the point of trance is a process which happens gradually under the guidance of the Pir. Spiritual arousal has three stages: First, when the Sufi is hearing only the name of God inwardly, it is shown through experiencing enthusiasm and emotional arousal. The second stage is when the Sufi is deeply moved and cannot overcome his emotions, but still retains his consciousness. The third stage can be called ecstatic and happens when the Sufi experiences the mystical union, and outward responses appear as physical



movements (Qureshi 1986:120). In one of the Sama' rituals in Nematollahi Kaneqah, I could see the shadow of a woman beside me swaying her torso counter clockwise while seated. At some point her upper body got very close to the floor, demonstrating remarkable flexibility. She was complaining of knee and back pain before the ritual and had an extra cushion to sit on. Where did the knee pain go during Sama'? I asked her about her state of mind during Sama'. She told me:

*Mrs. N: Music is a significant part of almost all gnosis rituals around the world. Our heart is a part of existence of the universe and it has a pulse. When the pulse of our heart becomes in sync with the rhythm of Being we become connected to the universe. Music has a rhythm too. When we listen to a soft music we become calm. There is epic music, which is used in war. It has the effect of moving forward. In tarigha (the Path), the goal of listening to music is to become one and in sync with Being. The music makes the mind empty so there is no need to consume energy over thought. It is a special music. The rhythm should be of even number, because it should become in sync with the inhalation and exhalation. The poems also have the same wazn, (rhythm) based on the breath. Rumi would not sit and write his poems. He would chant them in his Sama' while whirling. All spiritual poems are musical. The singer and the musicians of Kaneqah, especially the ones who play daf and setar, synchronize their breath with the rhythm of their music. This synchronization will be seen in the breath of the dhakir, and the whole harmonious process is called wahdat (union).*

KG: What about the body movement?

*Mrs. N: Movement is not deliberate. Even a two-year old will move with rhythm. When there is no thought, music can cause movement. There is no decision in movement, it happens. Each*

*Kaneqah music, when in sync with the breath—I mean the meter shouldn't be 5/6—can lead to movement. The range of movement can vary based on the music. The brain's frequency normally is in the range of 17-21 Hz. In deep sleep state, the learning ability increases a lot. Many people learn English language in their sleep. They listen to CDs in sleep and this helps them to learn faster. During Sama' with the help of synchronization of the music and breath, the brain's frequency reaches to the range of deep sleep state (1-4 Hz) and the poems which are all spiritual lessons will be learned faster. Body is awake but brain is in deep sleep state. My personal experience is this. I absorb the meaning of the poems during Sama'.*

KG: Have you ever experienced trance?

*Mrs. N: This is a difficult question. If I know that I am in trance, it means that I am totally aware, so it's not trance, and if I am in trance, I don't know about it.*

KG: Do you remember the poems after you are out of *hal*?

*Mrs. N: I can't explain this to you. Everybody should experience this state of mind herself. When you are asleep, you are totally unconscious and the brain's frequencies are lower than the waking state. In *hal* you get into that state while you are awake.*

KG: Are you conscious at that time?

*Mrs. N: It's difficult to say. It is the state of perception. You enter a state of no time and no space.*

KG: Why should Sama' be conducted in the Kaneqah?

*Mrs. N: Because the transferring of the energy increases with the group. It is like when you are reading a book with a candle. If I bring another candle with my own book, you will have a stronger vision. When forty people bring their candles, it feels like everybody is reading his book with the light of forty candles. This is the same in group meditation. When fifty people are*

*chanting their inward dhikr, one sound of daf with one pulse magnifies everybody's energy at the same time. Everybody is receiving that big amount of energy.*

KG: Why do they clap?

*Mrs. N: Sometimes a word, a musical note will reveal a piece of truth to you. The joy of this perception leads to clapping. It is involuntary. Sama' is very similar to making love. Do any of the men or women decide what to do next? Everything happens, there is no planning. Sama' is a kind of making love with the Hagh (The Truth). Two frequencies coincide. The frequency of music and you oscillate and it's the time that hal happens. You will feel short in breath. It is not conscious perception. The source of perception is from beyond. If the percipient is a musician, he will perform music, if he is a poet, he will sing.*

KG: Do you learn to reach *hal* in time?

*Mrs. N: It is not something to learn. Everybody has his own unique experience. The only thing that your body learns is the timing for your inward chanting or dhikr khafi. After repeating the utterance, your body knows exactly how long it should stay in that state. It is the same with meditation. I became acquainted with meditation through Rumi's poems and Rumi's poems connected me to the Kaneqah.*

Karim Crow, in his book, *Sama'*, also explains that the tunes played by musicians are the vehicles for the texts. Each Sufi listens attentively to the texts in hope of being touched somewhere relating to his own condition and asserts his spiritual presence at the ritual. Crow believes that listening is a spiritual skill (Crow 1984:33).

As mentioned, the use of musical instruments and song either simultaneously or alternatively is compulsory for entering into trance. The function of the instruments is either

melodic or rhythmic. The rhythmical function normally accompanies the melodic one. Different instruments for melodic function, are being used in different rituals. The violin is being used in tarantism in Italy. In Africa they use fiddles for Songhay of Niger; Flute is used among the Hausa in Western Africa. Ney, an oblique-blown reed flute, is used among Mevlevi Sufis. In ancient Greece, they would use double clarinet (aulos). In Nematollahi kaneqah, they normally use *setar* and *santoor*, which are both traditional string instruments.

All kinds of drums and percussions are used for the function of the rhythm as well. Rouget concludes that all the instruments can lead into trance. There is no rule. The variety is so vast that we cannot even find any similar acoustic criteria to produce the same effect at the level of auditory physiology. One may trigger trance through its sonority while another may not have that ability at all (Rouget 1985: 75-78).

Rouget explores the rhythms of different music relating to trancing. There is no accurate study to compare the time signature of different music. There are different rhythms used in different rituals. In India and Africa and the Middle East, the meters used are sometimes of 5, 7 or 11 beats. Simple meters like 3/4, 4/4 and 2/4 are common almost everywhere in the world. The only universal technique in all trancings is the acceleration of tempo. Acceleration of tempo goes hand in hand with crescendo (Ibid: 78-82).

As noted in chapter 3, the *dafs* fall into silence abruptly during the Sama'. Jane Belo, an anthropologist (1904-1968), who has written ethnographies on Balinese cultures, explains the sudden silence during a ceremony of the "official entrancing of the god" in Bali. People sing loudly while the orchestra plays forte and each doubles its intensity to facilitate the medium entering his trance state (Belo 1960: 20-50). In Madagascar, among the Vezo, to excite the *rab* (spirit possessing the sick person), drummers play faster and louder in order to inspire a trance

that results in speaking the name of the spirit. The strategic use of silence punctuates this as “the drums abruptly fall silent” (Rouget 1985:83). Rouget concludes that trance usually happens when the music is at its dramatic climax and emotions are at their highest state. However, we can find some exceptions in the world. He also believes that the relation between rhythm and trance is cultural:

Contrary to what we found out about instrumentation, which as we saw, revealed no particularities, the rhythmic of such music have two frequently recurring characteristics: on the one hand breaks or abrupt changes of rhythm, on the other an *accelerando* crescendo, which recurs so frequently one might view it as a universal of possession music. Second, again contrary to what we found to be the case for instrumentation, which we examined only in and of itself, or, if one prefers, from the point of view of acoustics, rhythmic must be considered from a double view point: in and of itself, that is, as a message reformed by the person in trance, or preparing to enter it... One is tempted to say that it means “acting” the music rather than simply undergoing it. At any rate it certainly means substituting a totally or partially passive relationship to music with an overtly active one (Ibid:91).

As we see in the Sama’ at Nematollahi Kaneqah, the *akhawans* accompany the rhythm with clapping. Their clapping is accelerated with the *dafs*’ tempo and simultaneously becomes gradually louder. The Sufi teachings demand awareness the whole time unless *fana* happens, which can last seconds while the trancer is unaware of its duration. As Mr. IB explained, the clapping can act as a tool for bringing back the consciousness or *baqa*, while simultaneously inducing trance. I believe that Sama’ is a journey into *fana* and *baqa* on the vehicle of melody and rhythm.

With regards to the musical modes, Rouget explains that all ancient civilizations, like the Greek, Chinese, Indian, and Islamic empires, related different modes of music to the cosmos that both affect emotions and health (Ibid: 92). According to many different trance or possession rituals that he witnessed, there is no specific mode that can be marked as the mode for entering trance. In the Nematollahi Kaneqah, musicians play different modes every time. On January 14,

2018, they played *bayat Esfahan*. The mode played on January 21, 2018, was *mahoor*. On January 28, 2018, they played Turkish music, the songs written in the Turkish language. As Mr. Soli, the main singer of the Kaneqah explained in his interview, whatever mode is chosen is completely improvised by the musicians.

As I understand, the process of inducing trance in Sama' ritual in the Nematollahi Kaneqah isn't any different than any other spiritual ritual involving music. To understand the effect of music and trance in Sama' first we should understand the concept of "trancing self."

Judith Becker wrote:

The person who becomes entranced, enters into a special kind of narrative, not of his or her invention. The roles in these dramas are more specified, more particularly detailed, than the role of either quotidian existence, or of the dramas into which we enter while listening to music as an activity in itself (Becker 2004:88).

To participate in a spiritual ritual, the person enters a narrative not invented by himself but rather by the community. The person should be ready to surrender a part of his self.

According to Mr. R., he is participating in Sama' in order to lose his ego. Western identity is explained by the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1926-2006):

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures (Geertz 1983:59).

Western mentality of the self is based on control and the control is applied by the self that resides in the frontal lobe of the brain (Becker 2004:90). Since Decartes' time (1596-1650), rational thinking has become the identifier of the self. In cultures that practice trance or possession, the identity does not depend on rationality. As Mr. S. explained, the loss of identity or ego can happen with a glance of Pir. Becker introduces the Director of the government

Institute for Arts in Den Pasar, Bali, who participates in *bebuten* trance. He explains that whenever he is in the ritual, he feels himself floating, and whenever they pick up the music he goes crazy. There is no conflict between his job status and surrendering into trance in front of others. Becker concludes that,

Trancers must necessarily *not* experience their selves as disengaged. To feel oneself at one with the music and the religious narrative enacted there must be no distance at all between the event and personhood: no aesthetic distance, no outside perspective, no objectivity, no irony. Later perhaps, the trancer may reflect on his or her experience, but to do so at the moment of trancing is to introduce the very disengaged subject that will break the enchantment (Becker 2004: 92).

This is exactly what happens in *fana* or annihilation in God. It is remarkable how the vast range of trance traditions share similar essential characteristics. And music plays an important role. Music organizes the time. Although everybody thinks that the mottos of the Sama' are repetitive, they are highly melodic and each time can be ornamented differently, which renews the music. By transforming our consciousness of time and space, music alters our "being in the world" and deeply affects the emotions. As Rouget said,

Finally, as art, when it is a success, music creates the feeling of total adhesion of the self to what is happening. In this sense it again brings about a transformation in the structure of consciousness, by effectuating a particular and exceptional type of relation of the self to the world (Rouget 1985:123).

The interview with Mr. R. and Mr. S. both confirm Rouget's statement. Contrary to what Mr. S. and Mrs. N. confirmed, Rouget believes that trancing is something that can be learned. He believes that Sama' is a communal trance and happens in two forms, either induced or conducted (Ibid:286). Induced trance is when the trancer experiences the trance under the influence of music. Conducted trance occurs when the trancer is performing music himself, such as the time of *dhikr jali* or loud utterance of the names of God. Music has the capacity to take a person into trance and keep him in trance. These two effects of music are through words and rhythm. When the trancer sings the *dhikr jali*, the body moves too. Although they are not dancing, the dancer

and singer become one. *Dhikr* requires a special breathing technique. The words play an important role as well. They trigger the emotions, especially feelings of love, which are ambiguous. This process creates hyperventilation and auto excitation. Activation of the vocal cords, the movement of the neck or upper body, which leads to cerebro-spinal congestion, and the elevation of the emotions under the influence of the *accelerando* and *crescendo* of the *dhikr*, consumes a lot of energy. Exhaustion of the body leads to the excretion of certain hormones, which prepares the body to enter trance. Marcel Mauss, a French sociologist (1872-1950), explains that “underlying all our mystic states,” there are “corporeal techniques,” and “biological methods of entering into communication with God.” However, the technique works only with the existence of belief, and trance occurs only in a specific familiar culture (Rouget 1985: 320).

Not everyone in the Sama’ ritual necessarily goes into trance. Mr. S. told me it has happened to him only a few times. Thus the music and the corporeal technique cannot take the person in trance. Rouget mentions that emotional trance or induced trance may happen unexpectedly, but conducted trance should be done deliberately. The Sama’ ritual in Nematollahi Kaneqah includes both sections of listening and singing. Still, trance doesn’t happen every time for everyone. Although Mr. Soli, the singer, said he experiences *hal* only through the *dhikr jali*, Rouget suggests a hypothesis similar to Mauss. He states that for entering into trance two factors are needed: the first is the practice of *dhikr*, which gives rise to a physiological disturbance, that makes one vulnerable to enter trance; the second is the acceptance of the person, consciously or unconsciously, that trance is the end result of his practice (Rouget 1985:301-309). Deliberate transition into trance doesn’t mean being conscious. As Mr. S. mentioned in his interview, entering into *hal* depends on how his day is going. Rouget’s hypothesis and Mauss’s theory explain the reason why the musicians do not fall into trance in Sama’ ritual. Mr. S. told me that



experiencing “selflessness” is not for everyone. Mr. R told me that he experiences selflessness in the same Sama’ ritual. It is his intention or belief that he can enter that state through Sama’.

Rouget adds that the *dhikr khafi* or the solitary *dhikr* falls under the same rule and can deliberately lead to ecstasy (Ibid: 301- 309). What I observed on February 4, 2018, in the Nematollahi Kaneqah at the dinner ceremony confirms this. The silence during dinner was the active solitary *dhikr*. Its aim is to maintain *hal* while eating.

As Rouget states,

Let us say, to sum up, that music, words, and dance create at the same time a great physical effervescence and a state of “monoideism” that, in combination, create psychophysiological conditions apparently very favorable to the occurrence of trance. In this case trance is quite deliberately sought for, and if it occurs—which is not always the case, for the mechanism is not automatic, even though it is certainly very efficacious—it is only very rarely that it does so in an unexpected manner, unlike emotional trance, which very often does occur unexpectedly (Ibid: 317).

Rouget compares sama’ to a theater. He believes that Sama’ needs the presence of an audience (Ibid: 317). It is a group practice divided into two sections, musicians and audience. In order to examine Rouget’s assertion, I will bring more detail to the dining ceremony on February 4, 2018, in the Nematollahi Kaneqah. The dining ceremony after Sama’ on February 4 was more like an opera. Each movement was designed with specific roles and customs. It was a complete metaphoric musical ritual called “*sofreh-e faqri*” meaning the table of the pauper. The Sufi, dressed all in white, bows with the *sofreh* (tablecloth) in her hands in front of the Pir before she chants “ya Hagh.” Folded *sofreh* is the symbol of the life before birth. It is put before the Pir who is the manifestation of the “Hagh,” the Truth, and the Sufi bows to it. Then it is spread all around the *jamkhane* with communal rhythmic chanting “ya Hagh.” It is the metaphor of God’s mercy to all beings. The *sofreh* is white, which is a symbol for the purity of our newborn Being. Chanting “ya Hagh” reminds us of the Absolute who blesses us with all these gifts. Some salt is poured

onto the *sofreh*. Salt symbolizes both the inanimate stage of creation and is the symbol of friendship.

The chanting continues and the second item placed on the *sofreh* is bread, which symbolizes the vegetation stage of creation. The next item is green herbs, which symbolize seed transforming into vegetable. The chanting reminds us of the union of seed with the soil, water, air, and sunshine in order to grow and evolve. It is a metaphor of Union or becoming one with existence, a prerequisite of evolution. Mrs. N. says chanting for her feels like the heart of the Sufi wants to break out of the cage of his flesh and fly towards “Him.” After bread, water is placed on the *sofreh*. Water is a symbol of purification and fluidity. Chanting in this moment is God saying, “See me in each drop that I become one with you and give you life. You too imagine yourself as a drop and the moment you feel yourself one with me, you have found the true life.”

Finally, the main dish is served, which includes meat. Meat symbolizes the animal stage of creation. Chanting “ya Hagh” in this moment evokes that the animal should die and be cooked in order to eat. The Pir chants the last “ya Hagh” and the chanting stops and becomes active silence. This is when everyone chants inwardly their *dhikr khafi*. The tray is passed on by the Pir. Each person takes food from it and passes it on to show that the blessing is flowing and we don’t keep anything to ourselves. We should serve others. The tray is returned to the Pir and the circle is closed, which symbolizes the circle of life. Nobody talks while eating because they are chanting inwardly. When everyone finishes, the a cappella chanting starts again and the *sofreh* is put away while chanting “ya Hagh” in reverse order to how it started (Nabavian 2001:21).

Rouget doesn’t give us any reason for the theatricality of Sama’. Mrs. N’s explanation of the magnification of energy in the group is certainly coherent but unconvincing in a scientific

way. I was still questioning the whole thing, when I considered the concept of “structural coupling.”

Structural coupling was first introduced by two biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in 1987. The theory is very complicated but to summarize, it is based on the autopoietic or self-creating of organisms. It means that every organism will accept only changes that do not interrupt its systemic integrity. Every organism’s most important duty is to maintain its structural integrity. Most of our brain and body functions keep our inner consistency maintained, thus stabilizing our life. Unconscious monitoring is done continuously to keep the internal organs working. Damasio calls this unconscious monitoring of the body-state the “proto-self.” “Proto-self is a coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions” (Damasio 1999:154). Each organism is under the influence of an external environment, which is subtly changing. Thus the organism, in order to adjust, will be forced to change subtly with the environment. The organism decides which changes are to its benefit and how and to what degree a perturbation should be adapted. It’s important to understand that the perturbation never causes the change in an organism, it can only trigger change.

The organism is “autopoietic,” “self-creating,” and the process of its changes are “autopoiesis,” or “self-creation.” It is not the environment or the interaction but the organism itself that “creates” itself. If interaction between two organisms is recurrent, and if the changes in the two organisms are congruent, if they are similar, then the two organisms become involved in shared ontogenetic change—they change one another, together, and become complementary. Over time, cumulative change leads to “structural coupling” between two organisms as their internal milieu (including human brains and bodies) become linked through repeated interaction, “co-ontogenies with mutual involvement through their reciprocal structural coupling, each one conserving its adaptation and organization (Maturana and Varela 1987:180).

Some may propose that change through interaction with other people or environment is called “learning” but the concept which is represented here is different than the scholarly

cognitive model. Becker believes that, “The biological notion of structural coupling is more helpful than the model of traditional cognitive studies in understanding the phenomena of rhythmic entertainment, of the emotional affect of musical performance, musical listening, and trance” (Becker 2004:121).

The trancer experiences the ritual and through faith experiences physical changes in both the brain and body (secretion of hormones such as serotonin). The mind and body of the trancer becomes structurally coupled with the ritual. As Mr. S. said, they go to Kaneqah to remind themselves of their commitment to their mission. Mr. R. states the same thing. As Mr. S. emphasized: they don't learn anything, it happens by itself.

## Conclusion

It is at this point that meaning enters the analysis of music, for it is meaning that puts consistency into the selection and correlation of variables, contextual and musical. The process whereby a performer makes musical choices on the basis of contextual clues is a process of translation; he is translating meaning. And the meaning, as clearly emerges from the Qawwali analysis, is essentially non-musical, perceived by the performer in the context of performance, and expressed or responded to, in the musical performance. To understand this translation process is to know the meaning system, at the level of both context and music. Obviously this goes beyond the traditional scope of music analysis. The fact is that the semantic content, even that of music, appears to be found outside music, for the dynamic that ultimately motivates the context-to-music input can only be understood with reference to the socio-cultural framework of which the musical tradition and the actors in it are a part (Qureshi 1986:232).

In the Nematollahi Kaneqah, I saw the path of love, I witnessed the gatherings, I became the “deep listener,” I sat in *dhikr* and *Sama'*, and ultimately experienced *wajd* or *hal*, which took me beyond the conventions of music. I came to understand the musical socio-cultural framework of *Sama'* by studying Sufism and by participating in the Nematollahi Kaneqah. The music of *Sama'* brings even secular listeners into its fold and is a blessing to all. In every interview, the same sentiments came up; the participants felt lighter, clearer, blissful. Becker asserts that

trancing and music emphasize our phenomenological need for understanding and oneness. Even when only one person achieves trance, those who witness through listening are impacted. Maturana and Varela state clearly that Sama' is absorbed by the whole community (Becker 1985:122).

According to Mrs. N. "The initiates who sit in *jamkhane* act as an electrical circuit that conducts the energy in that space" (personal communication 2018). Although this is a metaphorical interpretation, it is an effective explanation of "structural coupling."

People in a group, when sharing a similar musical experience, and a common history of that event, act and think in a similar way without losing their individual identities. Sufi body movements, like crying, sighing, or clapping, influence the musicians whose intensification of the music elevates the *wajd* in Sufis. The musicians and Sufis are in symbiosis. A Sama's script is never predictable; it is always improvisatory. A successful Sama' is when the Sufis' emotional arousal and the musical intensification synchronizes perfectly. When the "structural coupling" of the Sufis and the musicians is subtle and gradual, the listener is prone to fall into trance. My interview with the Pir of Kaneqah, who asked me to call him "Sheikh," sums up nicely my research on Sama'.

KG: What is the urge for achieving *wajd*?

*Sheikh: I can't answer this question in one sentence. Reaching to the state of wajd means to cut from all mundane and daily life's limitations and become united with Being. The Being, which is devoid of ego and nafs and "I-ness." This union gives the person a great joy. The goal is to become united with the Existence. (cf. "dasein" of Heidegger or "Will of life" of Schopenhauer). Wajd happens for a very short time and ends at a point, but for a Sufi Vaseel, a Sufi who is*

*connected to the Absolute, wajd is permanent. The wajd will be permanent for the “over-man” who has passed the stages of tarigha successfully. (Over-man “Übermensch” is a term coined by Nietzsche, a German philosopher (1844-1900), which means the perfect embodiment of man. “Man is to ape as the over-man is to man”).*

KG: What is the role of music in this achievement?

*Sheikh: The music normally starts with a slow tempo, and gets faster and more excited close to the end of the ritual. The excitement is at peak with the communal or collective dhikr. This explosion of emotions can lead the Sufi into an excessive joy. This hal should be achieved under the supervision of the Sheikh. It should not be practiced at home. It’s better to practice inward dhikr at home or in solitary in order to learn about silence which is very important, and also to be safe from falling in ecstasy and experiencing crisis without help. The words or texts which are sung in Sama’ and the act of clapping are also other tools for (the) Sufi to elevate the heart beat and take him to the verge of the wajd. The combination of music and poems and collective chanting help the Sufi to experience wajd.*

KG: Do you experience hal with the music in Sama’ as well or do you just supervise the others?

*Sheikh: Both situations could happen. If the Sufis’ number in a Sama’ is large and the age range is broad, I should supervise the ritual. Otherwise I would like to enter hal and it will happen.*

KG: So you allow yourself to enter hal. Is it deliberate?

*Sheikh: 100 percent. If I feel that there is no need for supervision on the ritual, I let go and will experience hal. There is no need to be aware of the surroundings.*

KG: Can people learn how to enter the trance state or not?

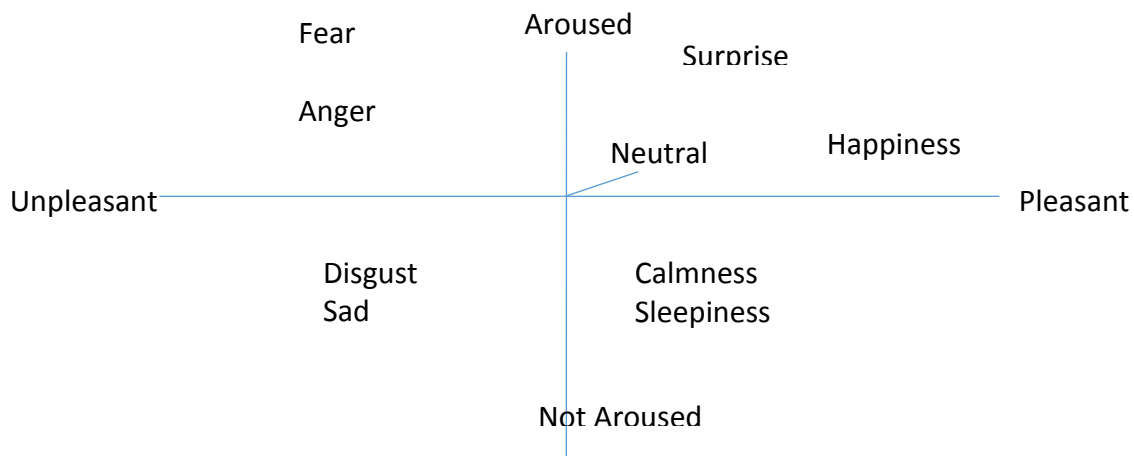
*Sheikh: It is not something to learn. It should happen. We give the tools to the Sufis and with the help of them (music, dhikr, breathing and clapping) hal will happen.*

KG: What is the meaning of *wahdat* or union?

*Sheikh: The Sufis sit in a circle and start with their inward dhikr together with the music. They synchronize their breath with the rhythm of the music by chanting their inward dhikr. When they are in a circle, the rhythm of their breath and the rhythm of the music and ultimately the rhythm of their dhikr jali will all become united as one. The amount of bliss becomes magnified in a group.*

The explanations of Sheikh confirm the theory of “structural coupling.” *Wajd* is not taught, but it is deliberate and should happen naturally. It is an unconscious process.

Paul Ekman, an American psychologist and pioneer of studying the emotions uses a two dimensional chart by Anderson. He divides the basic emotions, like negative and positive ones, in the following chart. On one side is fear, anger, disgust, and sadness. On the other is surprise, happiness, calmness, and sleepiness (Anderson 2014:187-200).



Basic emotions indicate evolved adaptive values for “fundamental life tasks.” These emotions are essential for human beings (Ekman 2008:183).

If emotions are viewed as having evolved to deal with fundamental life-tasks in ways which have been adaptive phylogenetically, then it is logically consistent to expect that

here will be some common elements in the contexts in which emotions are found to occur. This is not to presume that every social context which calls forth an emotion will be the same for all people within or across cultures. Clearly there must be major differences attributable to social learning experiences. Ohman describes well how both evolution and social learning contribute to the establishment of those events which call forth one or another emotion. Evolutionary economy has left to environmental influences to inscribe the exact characteristics of dangerous predators... Learning is critically involved in selecting which stimuli activate the predatory defense system. But this learning is likely to be biologically primed or constrained in the sense that the responses are much more easily attached to some types of stimuli than to others. In other words, it is appropriate to speak about biologically prepared learning (Ibid:183).

Feelings are reactions to emotions. *Hal* is a feeling that occurs through happiness as seen in the chart of basic emotions. People who attend Sama' have learned to induce happiness to counteract negative emotions. Daily life brings us negative emotions that we need to defend against. As I heard in my many interviews, Kaneqah and Sama' are a shelter from negative emotions. All other positive emotions seen in Anderson's chart, like calmness, sleepiness, and surprise, can be attained through *hal*. Entering *hal* is a process one gets to through different tools. Music has a salient role in this process. Music is the means for achieving *hal*. The inward chanting of the Sufi is the sound of silence. It is the sound of the heart, in synch with the pulse of Being. From this philosophical point of view, Sufis believe that the ultimate goal of humans is to free themselves from suffering. The material world is suffering. In duality, pleasure has no meaning without suffering. Thus, in order to evade suffering, one should move towards unity.

Unity should be the emergence with that which is not mundane. I wonder if this is the "zero point" which Mr. R. mentioned in his interview and if we can relate it to the neutral point on Anderson's chart (which is a research in itself). In mysticism, they call it the Whole, the Absolute, the Universal energy, or God. The name is not important. The Whole cannot be reduced to words so we need another language in order to communicate it. Music starts when the words end. Simply put, it is a language that transcends, resonating inwards even when there is no



light and no sound outside. Music illuminates the heart. The texts that accompany the music have a specific impact on the emotional state. According to Mrs. N., each word can trigger an ‘Aha!’ moment for the deep listener. In a state of deep listening, the frequency of brainwaves falls dramatically and as Mrs. N. says, she feels fully rested after Sama’.

Bent Greve, a Danish professor in social sciences, in his book, *Happiness*, explains that “the central factors for defining happiness are: the experience of pleasure; the avoidance of negative experience; self-development and contribution to others” (Greve 2012:18). He also refers to Easterlin when stating that happiness can be used synonymously as “subjective well-being.” In my many interviews with participants in Sama’, I learned that everyone experiences all the central factors of happiness in various degrees. This musical ritual, either in sound or silence, leads to well-being in its practitioners and participants.

“Ya Hagh”

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## Glossary

*Adas polo*: a traditional Iranian dish made of rice and lentils.

*Ahl-al-suffah*: people of the bench who would sit on a bench in front of the Prophet and listen to his teachings.

*Alast*: the realm before creation.

*Al- Fa'iq*: (One of the God's names), The Overpowering.

*Al- Hafiz*: (One of the God's names), The Preserver.

*Al- Jalal*: (One of the God's names) the aspect of majesty.

*Al- Jamal*: (One of the God's names) the aspect of beauty.

*Akhawan*: brethren.

*Al- Latif*: (One of the God's names), The Subtle.

*Al- ma'arif*: gnosis.

*Asrar*: secretive realm.

*Avaz*: non measured vocal performance of traditional poetry based on a mode.

*Baqa*: eternal life in God, permanence.

*Bast*: expansion.

*Bayat Esfahan*: a Persian mode (F G Aq B C D Eb).

*Badahe navazi*: improvisation.

*Bedihe sara'i*: oral poetry.

*Daf*: frame drum.

*Da'irat al- akwan*: circle of existing things.

*Daman az kaf dadan*: mystic kind of losing control.

*Dast*: hand.

*Dastgah*: mode.

*Dhakhir*: the person who chants dhikr.

*Dhikr*: purifying the heart by remembering God.

*Dhikr- jali*: loud utterance of the dhikr.

*Dhikr- khafi*: utterance of the dhikr inwardly.

*Doodeh*: kitchen.

*Eshgh*: love.

*Fana*: become one with Being, annihilation.

*Gah*: space and time.

*Gushe*: melodic figures which organize the modes or tonal spaces.

*Hal*: direct spiritual experience.

*Hagh*: The Truth.

*Halghe*: sitting in a circular form.

*Homayoun*: a Persian mode (Eqb G Aqb B C D Eb or Eqb F).

*Hukm*: the statute.  
*Hukuma*: sages.  
*Ibrat*: spiritual lessons.  
*Irfan*: Gnostics, wisdom made of knowledge and sanctity.  
*Ist*: pause.  
*Jamkhaneh*: main room for conducting the Sama' ceremony.  
*Kaneqah*: meeting place for Sufi groups.  
*Kashkool*: Sufis' begging bowl.  
*Kutb*: the founder of each Sufi order.  
*Ma'ani*: reality.  
*Maqam*: scale or mode.  
*Mahoor*: a Persian mode (C D E F G Aq Bq C).  
*Moteghayer*: a note which gives taste to the music.  
*Mutrib*: musicians devoted to a spiritual path.  
*Nafs*: ego.  
*Naghamat*: melodies.  
*Nat*: poems written for the love of God.  
*Nashidh*: poems written for the love of the Prophet.  
*Ney*: reed flute.  
*Pashmineh poosh*: wearers of the wool.  
*Pir*: Sufi master.  
*Pirdalil*: representative and the proof of the master.  
*Qabdh*: contraction.  
*Qal*: heresay  
*Qanun*: zither.  
*Qasab*: flute.  
*Qawwali*: Sufi devotional music.  
*Qawwal*: Sufi musician.  
*Rabab*: rebec.  
*Radif*: traditional melodic repertoires that organize the melody in different modes.  
*Safa*: joy.  
*Sama'*: the use of music in Sufi ceremonies for spiritual development.  
*Santoor*: an Iranian string instrument.  
*Setar*: an Iranian string instrument.  
*Shahed*: emphasized pitch in music.  
*Sharia*: orthodox religion law.  
*Sir*: inner nature.  
*Sofreh*: tablecloth.  
*Sofre-e faghri*: table of the pauper.  
*Suf*: wool.  
*Talif*: art of harmony.  
*Tanbur*: pandore.  
*Taqsim*: melodic musical improvisation.  
*Tariqah*: the path of Sufis.  
*Tark*: renunciation.  
*Tasawwuf*: Sufism.

*Tawba*: remorse.

*Ulama*: heads of orthodox law.

*Urafa*: Gnostics.

*Vaght*: moment.

*Vahy*: revelation from God

*Waaf*: charitable foundation

*Wahdat-i-wujud*: unity of Being

*Wajd*: trance

*Ya Hagh*: Truth Almighty