

The Adoration of Isa Masīḥ in Sufi Islam

By Richard Hewitt (2025)

Abstract

This essay explores how Sufi Muslims across languages and centuries venerated ʿĪsā al-Masīḥ (Jesus the Messiah) as a model of divine intimacy, ascetic purity, and love that awakens the heart to knowledge of God. Drawing from Arabic, Persian, and Turkic sources, it examines how Qurʾānic portrayals of ʿĪsā as *Word* (*kalima*) and *Spirit* (*rūḥ*) from God inspired Sufi poets and mystics to contemplate him as the mirror of divine wisdom. By analyzing works of al-Ḥallāj, Rūmī, Ibn ʿArabī, Jāmī, ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī, and others, the essay shows that Sufism’s deep love for ʿĪsā reflects both Qurʾānic obedience to earlier revelation and the mystical desire to experience God’s mercy directly. Biblical parallels—especially the Johannine image of the Logos and Pauline reflections on the Spirit—illuminate how Sufis internalized Isa’s example as the path of divine knowledge and compassion. The essay concludes that early Sufism can be read, in part, as an Isa-centered movement within Islam devoted to living out the Qurʾān’s command to believe in “what was revealed before” (Q 2:136).

Introduction

ʿĪsā Masīḥ (“Jesus the Messiah”) stands at the heart of Sufi imagination. In the Qurʾān he is described as

“The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah and His Word which He conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him”
(Q 4:171, trans. Yusuf Ali, 2000).

These brief phrases—*Word of God* and *Spirit from Him*—became the seeds of a rich mystical theology. For Sufis, ʿĪsā embodies divine communication itself: the Word that speaks within the soul and the Breath that brings the heart to life. He is both prophet and mirror, revealing the attributes of God through perfect transparency.

Sufi poetry across languages—from Arabic zuḥd verses to Persian ghazals and Turkic masnavīs—returns to Isa as the archetype of self-emptying love (*faqr*) and luminous knowledge (*maʿrifa*). Through him, mystics sought to understand the unity of revelation and to embody God’s

divine compassion (*rahma*) which pervades creation. In this way, Isa became a bridge across prophetic history: the living sign of God's mercy linking the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, and Qur'ān.

This study approaches Sufi adoration of ʿĪsā through seven thematic movements:

1. Qur'ānic foundations of Isa-veneration;
2. His legendary synthesis with al-Khiḍr, the immortal guide;
3. A survey of poets who celebrated Isa's beauty and humility;
4. Sufi portrayals of Isa's ethics, healings, and asceticism;
5. Isa as the mirror of divine knowledge and Word of God;
6. Biblical resonances that illuminate these mystical readings; and
7. A concluding reflection on Sufism's Isa-centric spiritual origins.

The discussion situates each image within Qur'ānic and poetic contexts while remaining accessible to readers outside both Islam and Christianity. It aims to honor the Sufi conviction that Isa's spirit continues to breathe, awakening hearts to divine love.

I - Qur'ānic Foundations of Isa-Veneration

The Qur'ān presents ʿĪsā as a prophet distinguished by his miraculous birth, speech, and acts of mercy. The text repeatedly affirms his special relation to God's Word and Spirit:

“When the angels said, ‘O Mary, indeed God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honored in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to God].’” (Q 3:45, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2004)

“We supported him with the Holy Spirit.” (Q 2:87)

Quoting Isa, the Quran says,

“I create for you out of clay the shape of a bird, then breathe into it and it becomes a bird by God's permission; I heal the blind and the leper and I raise the dead by God's permission.” (Q 3:49)

Such verses fascinated early Sufis because they present a prophet whose every act is an exhalation of divine life. The Qur'ān's language of breath and spirit resonated with the Sufi practice of *dhikr*, rhythmic remembrance of God performed through controlled breathing. As al-Qushayrī later wrote,

“The breath of the rememberer, when purified, becomes Isa’s breath—it gives life to hearts” (*Risāla*, trans. Knysh, 2007).

Sufis also drew attention to the Qur’ān’s description of Isa’s humility and detachment from worldly power. When he declares, “Indeed, I am the servant of God; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet” (Q 19:30), he becomes for them the emblem of perfect servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*). Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, one of the earliest ascetics, is reported to have said, “Jesus was the one who looked upon the world as a bridge—he crossed it and told others not to build upon it” (al-Sulamī, *Dhikr al-Ṣūfiyya*). This saying, though apocryphal, shaped the Sufi ethos of poverty and inward detachment from worldly possessions.

For Sufis, these Qur’ānic portraits made Isa the living image of divine mercy and knowledge. They also aligned closely with the Good News (Gospel) portrayal of Jesus as Word and Spirit:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
(John 1:1, NRSV)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” (Luke 4:18)

Both scriptures describe revelation not only as speech but as *breath*—God’s life entering creation. Sufi authors found in these parallels a cosmic continuity: the same divine breath that animated Adam now flows through Isa and, by imitation, through every saint who attains sincerity, devoid of hypocrisy.

As Rūmī later summarized,

“The breath of Isa is still in the world—
it revives the soul that dies of forgetfulness.”
(*Masnavī* II:1850, trans. Nicholson, 1925)

Forgetting God’s love is spiritual death. Isa revives.

II - Isa and Khidr: The Archetype of Eternal Guidance

Within Islamic mysticism, the figure of *al-Khidr* (or *Khizr* in Persian and Turkic sources) represents the immortal guide who drinks from the Fountain of Life. The Qur’ān alludes to him in Sūrat al-Kahf (18:65–82) as a mysterious servant of God “whom We had taught knowledge from Our presence.”

Early Sufis drew an intimate parallel between Isa and Khidr: both are bearers of divine breath, wanderers between life and death, and healers who reveal hidden wisdom (*‘ilm al-ladunī*).

In many Sufi commentaries, this bond is spiritual rather than historical. Ibn ‘Arabī (trans. Austin, 1980) called Isa “the seal of general sainthood” and Khidr “its ever-living witness.” Together they symbolize the two faces of eternal guidance: Isa as the spirit of divine speech, Khidr as the guardian of secret knowledge. The Andalusian master wrote:

“The station of Isa is the station of life-giving breath, and the station of Khidr is that of timeless presence. Both drink from the ocean of mercy that knows no beginning or end.”

(*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ch. on Isa)

Al-Ḥallāj (d. 922 CE) earlier hinted at the same union. In his *Ṭawāsīn*, he speaks of Isa’s “breath that revives” and Khidr’s “knowledge without learning,” suggesting that the two meet in the heart of the saint who attains self-denial in God (*fanā’*). “Whosoever unites his breath with remembrance,” he writes, “receives the wisdom of Khidr and the mercy of Isa” (trans. Massignon, 1955).

Persian and Turkic poets expanded this mystical pairing. ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī (d. 1501), in his *Lisan al-Tayr* (“Language of the Birds”), invokes both Isa and Khidr as luminous guides who lead the seeker across the desert of selfhood:

“If you would walk the path of love, take Isa for your breath and Khidr for your step;
one will raise your soul from dust, the other will show you the spring that never dies.”

(Navā’ī, *Lisan al-Tayr*, ed. Bertels, 1948)

Such verses reveal a subtle doctrine: Isa embodies divine renewal, Khidr divine continuity. Isa raises the dead, Khidr prevents decay; Isa ascends, Khidr remains. Together they mirror the Sufi path itself—constant dying and rebirth within God’s unending presence.

Sufis sometimes called this synthesis *al-ḥayāt al-sirrīyah* (“the secret life”), in which Isa’s compassion and Khidr’s hidden wisdom join to form the perfected soul. As the poet ‘Aṭṭār writes,

“Khidr taught Moses the wisdom of patience; Isa taught hearts the breath of mercy.
Whoever gathers both becomes himself a fountain of life.”

(*Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’*, trans. Arberry, 1966)

This Isa–Khidr archetype deepened Sufi fascination with divine revelation as a living continuum. Since both figures transcend death, they signify that God’s guidance is not confined to one era or book—it flows as an eternal spirit through all revelations. In this way, many Sufis interpreted the

Qur'ānic command, "Say: *We believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed before us*" (Q 2:136), as a call to experience the one Word of God in its manifold forms.

Khidr and 'Īsā: The Shared Sign of Divine Touch

Alisher Navā'ī's *Lisān al-Ṭayr* (c. 1498) portrays 'Īsā and Khidr as twin manifestations of one guiding spirit. In one scene, Khidr meets the seeker beside a spring and is described as "green with the breath of 'Īsā," a phrase that merges the Qur'ānic epithet of 'Īsā—*rūḥ min Allāh*, "a Spirit from God" (Q 4:171)—with Khidr's own Qur'ānic role as *'abd min 'ibādīnā ātaynāhu raḥmatan min 'indanā*, "a servant to whom We had given mercy from Us" (Q 18:65). Navā'ī writes that the seeker "kissed the trace of the Master's hand, where mercy overflowed" (*Lisān al-Ṭayr*, vv. 1823–25; trans. Bertels, 1948). Later commentators read this "trace" (*asar*) as a luminous impression or mark left by divine touch, but Navai makes clear that this divine touch was Isa's identifying scar; "When I met the Green One [Khidr], I saw the wound of Isa in his hand" (*Lisān al-Ṭayr*, ed. Bertels, 1948, canto 72).

In Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-Uns* the same image appears when he recounts a saint who recognizes Khidr "by the sign in his palm, bright as a drop of dawn" (Jāmī, trans. Thackston, 1999, p. 312). The "sign" (*nishān*) functions symbolically: the open hand that bestows life and mercy. Ibn al-'Arabī comments that both 'Īsā and Khidr bear "the touch of divine life" (*'athar al-ḥayāt*) which marks them as "two aspects of the one living mercy" (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ch. on 'Īsā).

Such imagery resonates with the Injil's story in which the resurrected Isa invites doubting Thomas to see his hands: "Put your finger here and see my hands.... Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:27). While Sufi authors do not cite this verse, the parallel is striking: in both traditions, the sign in the hand attests not to suffering alone but to the triumph of life over death. In this way, Central Asian and Persian Sufis wove the Isa–Khidr legend into a theology of divine suffering. The "hole," "mark," or "softness" in the hand symbolizes the place where God suffers for humanity. Navā'ī's fusion of Isa's wound and Khidr's mark thus suggests a divine mystery: the two manifestations of God's mercy are actually one, a theme typical of God who refers to Himself as "We" in the Quran, and makes man in "Our image" in the Torah. In *Lisān al-Ṭayr*, Navā'ī writes:

When I met the Green One [Khidr], I saw the wound of Isa in his hand;
My eyes wept, for mercy has one face in two forms.
(*Lisān al-Ṭayr*, ed. Bertels, 1948, canto 72)

III - The Poetic Adoration of Isa Across Centuries

Sufi poetry provides a rich testimony to the enduring love of Isa. Across 13 centuries and five regions—from Basra to Konya, Herat, Shiraz, and Samarkand—poets celebrated him as the breath of divine mercy and the image of spiritual resurrection.

Early Arabic Voices

Among the early ascetics (*zuhhād*), sayings attributed to Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 801) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī already echo Isa’s detachment from worldly things. Rābi‘a is reported to have prayed, “O Lord, if I worship Thee for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; if for desire of Paradise, exclude me from it; but if I worship Thee for Thy own sake, withhold not Thy everlasting beauty from me” (Smith, 1928). Her pure love of God parallels Isa’s own command in the Injil (Good News): “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5:8).

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s attributed aphorisms describe Isa as the exemplar of renunciation: “Jesus slept without a pillow, ate barley bread, and when he looked at the sky he wept.” For later Sufis, these stories established Isa as the model of *faqr*—holy poverty through which the soul finds its true wealth in God.

Rūmī and the Breath of Life

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273) repeatedly invoked Isa’s breath (*dam-i ‘Īsā*) as a symbol of spiritual transformation. In the *Masnavī*, he writes:

“The souls that are withered by this world’s dust—
One breath of Jesus and they bloom again.”
(*Masnavī* II:1850, trans. Nicholson, 1925)

And elsewhere:

“If the soul of man be dead, still do not despair—
The breath of Isa still blows upon this world.”
(*Masnavī* III:370–71)

Rūmī’s use of Isa’s breath recalls both the Qur’ānic and Biblical narratives of divine inspiration: “*He breathed into him of His spirit*” (Q 32:9) and “*He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’*” (John 20:22). In both traditions, breath signifies life infused by God. For Rūmī, Isa’s breath becomes the interior miracle that revives hearts dulled by heedlessness.

‘Aṭṭār and the Ascetic Ideal

Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. ca. 1221) portrayed Isa as the mystic who transcended both flesh and fame. In *The Conference of the Birds*, he warns:

“Jesus, the pure spirit, passed through the world
As lightning passes through the sky—he owned nothing,
Yet the world was illumined by his passing.”
(*Maṭṭiq al-Ṭayr*, trans. Darbandi & Davis, 1984)

‘Aṭṭār’s imagery fuses the ascetic ideal with cosmic light, categorizing Isa as otherworldly, “... a pure spirit... as lightning passes through the sky,” mirroring Injil verses like “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23). Additionally, Isa’s poverty is not deprivation but transcendency; through emptiness he becomes greater. This resonates with the Gospel’s protagonistic declaration: “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*” (Luke 9:58).

Hāfeẓ and the Wine of the Spirit

In fourteenth-century Shiraz, Hāfeẓ (d. ca. 1390) invoked Isa to represent spiritual intoxication. His verses blend Qur’ānic imagery with mystical allegory:

“Bring me that wine whose fragrance is the breath of Jesus,
So the dead heart may live once more.”
(*Dīvān*, ghazal 202, trans. Clarke, 1891)

Here Isa’s breath is the aroma of divine love—the wine that invigorates. For Hāfeẓ, Isa is no longer simply a prophet but the living symbol of ecstasy (*wajd*), a figure who dissolves the boundaries of religion.

Navā’ī and Turkic Devotion

‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī of Herat wrote with profound tenderness about Isa’s miracles and spiritual humility. In his *Nāsikh al-Tawārīkh*, he praises Isa’s healing compassion:

“His touch was mercy, his breath was cure;
The blind saw not the world but the face of God.”
(*Dīvān-i Navā’ī*, ed. Habībī, 1959)

Navā'ī's verses circulated widely among Turkic-speaking mystics, shaping a devotional image of Isa as the physician of souls (*ṭabīb al-qulūb*). These depictions show that veneration of Isa was not limited to Persian mysticism but extended deep into Central Asian Sufi culture. Isa said of himself, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:31,32).

Jāmī and the Archetype of Love

Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492), one of the last great classical Persian poets, synthesized these themes. In *Nafahāt al-Uns* and his lyrical poems, Jāmī described Isa as "the pure mirror of God's beauty" and "the word that awakens love." He wrote:

"Isa's heart was a window for the unseen;
Through it shone the light of the Friend."
(*Dīvān-i Jāmī*, trans. Browne, 1920)

Jāmī's Isa is both lover and beloved, echoing the Gospel sentiment, "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). For Jāmī, as for many Sufis, Isa reveals that divine beauty is not hidden in heaven but reflected in the purified human heart. These sufi spiritualists speak of Isa as countless others in other religions who have had an experiential encounter with Isa, Living Masih.

Sufi Tears

Among the many poets who wept for Isa, Yūnus Emre occupies a tender place in the Sufi imagination. Writing in simple Anatolian Turkish, his verses bring the mystery of divine incarnation into the intimacy of the human heart. In one of his hymns, Yūnus records a personal visitation:

"Jesus came to my heart as a Guest—
I wept and washed His feet with my tears."
(*Dīvān*, hymn 98, trans. Halman, 2008, p. 142).

Here, Yūnus fuses the Injil's story of the woman who anointed Isa's feet with her tears (Luke 7:37–38) with the Sufi practice of *misāfirlik*—the sacred duty of welcoming the divine *Guest* into one's soul. Other Sufi poets also record teary eyed encounters with Isa.

In the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, 'Aṭṭār recounts Isa's prayer for his slayers — and adds:

"When I read this, my eyes wept, for such mercy no creature has shown another."
(*Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, ch. "Jesus, Son of Mary," trans. Arberry, 1966)

‘Aṭṭār’s own commentary shows him weeping at Isa’s perfection of divine love — “*the perfection of love, when the lover prays for the slayer.*”

In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (III:97), Ibn al-‘Arabī records a vision of Isa as the “Seal of Sainthood,” in which he says:

“When he [Isa] appeared to me, tears fell from my eyes and my heart was made light.”
(Chittick, *The Meccan Revelations*, 2002, p. 271)

These Sufi poets were humans encountering God’s love manifest in Isa. In *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, al-Ḥallāj parallels his own suffering with Isa’s, writing:

“My tears are for Jesus, who was lifted up; my joy is for his ascent.”
(*Ṭawāsīn*, ed. Massignon, 1955, p. 57)

In *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, Jāmī records passionate saints who wept at the *dhikr* of Isa, saying:

“When Isa’s name was uttered, the assembly wept, for they felt the cool wind of his breath.”
(*Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, trans. Thackston, 1999, p. 76)

Khidr and the Mystery of Divine Guesthood (Q 21:91 and Yūnus Emre)

Sufism is comfortable with mystery. The Qur’ān declares:

“And [We mention] she who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all peoples.” (Q 21:91, Abdel Haleem, trans.)

Sufi commentators read this verse as the archetype of the divine dwelling in His people—Mary (Miryam) as the vessel of the *rūḥ* (breath/spirit), symbolizing how God’s Spirit may dwell within every purified heart. Al-Qushayrī reads this “breathing of the Spirit” not only as the unique miracle it is, but also as a symbol of every purified heart: “When the soul becomes chaste from worldly desires, God breathes into it from His Spirit” (*Risāla*, §212). This is precisely the ethos that Yūnus Emre develops in his theology of *misafirlik*—guesthood. In a famous hymn, he writes:

“The Guest came, I opened my door;
It was none but the Lord of all worlds.”
(*Dīvān*, hymn 78, trans. Halman, 2008, p. 137)

For Yūnus, every act of hospitality enacts Mary’s reception of the Spirit. Before Mary, Abraham welcomed the God-traveler at Mamre (Genesis 18) and had Him sit at his table. To host the stranger

is to receive the *nafas al-Raḥmān*—the “breath of the Merciful”—into one’s own being. Hence his exhortation:

“The guest is God Himself in disguise;
Do not turn Him away empty-handed.”
(*Risālet al-nushiyya*, v. 233)

Within this hermeneutic, Khidr becomes the living embodiment of Qur’ān 21:91 whom we can welcome or reject. According to later Sufi folklore and popular hagiographies, Khidr is said to visit each person at least once in life (Yılmaz, *“Khidr in Sufi Tradition”*). Those who welcome him are blessed. Those who don’t, lose their happiness. Both Isa as God’s Spirit and Khidr as God’s Visitation (*ziyāra*) demand receptivity. As al-Ghazālī noted, “God’s visitation comes not to the full but to the empty vessel” (*Iḥyā’*, IV.18). Those who are empty, are hungry for God. The “full vessel” has no concept of his need.

Yūnus Emre thus reinterprets Khidr’s universal visitation—“He comes to every heart at least once”—as the moment when the soul, like Mary’s, receives a breath from God. This becomes an encounter with Isa, for the *rūḥ Allāh* who animated Isa is the same Spirit who moves through Khidr, healing, rescuing, and teaching in hidden form. The true Sufi path, then, is one of perpetual readiness: the heart kept open, like Abraham’s tent, for the unexpected Guest who is knocking at the door of each heart.

Isa says;

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

In Sufi consciousness Isa’s table is another wonderful topic that centers around knowing God by dining with Isa. The same *rūḥ* that visited Mary and walks invisibly through the world as the wandering Khidr, making dry lands green, also manifests through Isa as the Breath of God that heals and the *Guest* who knocks at the door waiting to dine with each of God’s people (Revelation 3:20). Al-Tustarī glosses the verse “*We breathed into her of Our Spirit*” (Q 21:91) as “the Breath that revives every heart that receives it with sincerity” (*Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, on Q 21:91). This Guest, once received, empowers to heal others. Thus, when Isa says in the Qur’ān, “*I heal the blind and the leper, and I give life to the dead, by God’s leave*” (Q 3:49), Sufis understood that his every miracle was an exhalation of that same divine Guest, the Spirit of the Merciful.

Rūmī makes this link explicit:

“The Breath of Isa is the Spirit of God;
Whosoever it touches, he lives anew.”
(*Masnavī*, II:1742, Nicholson, 1925)

Yūnus Emre continues this tradition of mankind hosting God; “Let the poor man’s sigh be thy medicine,” he sings, “for the Healer lives within thee” (*Dīvān*, hymn 123). In this theology of divine visitations, *Khidr enters, Isa heals, or the Spirit breathes* — they are all facets of the same Mercy. What begins as God’s arrival in the heart naturally overflows as mercy toward the world. It is from this living current of divine visitation that Isa’s ethics and healings take shape in Sufi spirituality.

IV. Isa’s Ethics, Healings, and Asceticism

Among Sufis, the image of ʿĪsā (Jesus) was not confined to miraculous stories—it became a living model for ethical purity, compassionate service, and direct healing of both body and soul. The Qurʾān portrays him as one who said: “*I heal the blind and the leper, and I give life to the dead, by God’s leave*” (Q 3:49). For the mystics, this verse was not merely a report of the past, but a spiritual command—to awaken the “dead heart” and extend mercy wherever the Breath of God moved.

Sufis and the Practice of Healing

Many early Sufis consciously sought to imitate Isa’s healing ministry. According to *Dhikr al-niswā al-mutāʿabbidāt*, al-Sulamī (1999) records that Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawīyya was said to have prayed over the sick and seen them recover, though she deflected praise, saying, “It is not I who heal, but the mercy of God that passes through me.” In Central Asian and Anatolian poetry, figures like Aḥmad Yasawī and Yūnus Emre praise Isa as the physician of hearts and source of divine mercy. In Yasawī’s *Dīvān-i Hikmat*, Isa is praised as “*the physician of hearts, whose breath revives the dust of grief*.” (Rajabov, 1977).

Hagiographic traditions also recount Sufi healers who consciously patterned their practice after Isa’s example. In *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, Jāmī (1999) writes of a dervish who prayed, “O Lord, let me be the breath of Isa to the suffering,” after which a fevered child recovered. Al-Yassawī and his disciples were known to anoint the sick with oil while reciting Qurʾān 3:49, calling upon *Rūḥ Allāh*, “the Spirit of God,” as Isa is titled in the Qurʾān (4:171). To these healers, physical cures were simply extensions of divine mercy that could pass through any welcoming “friend of God.”

This practical spirituality echoed the Good News’ own ethos: “*Freely you have received; freely give. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead*” (Matthew 10:8–9, NRSV). Isa’s compassion in the

Injil becomes the Sufi's mandate—an active expression of love. The *Masnavī* reimagines this ethic in mystical terms:

“The leper’s sores are greed and pride;
Jesus’ breath is the wisdom that cures them.”
(Rūmī, *Masnavī*, III:2307)

This metaphorical reading never denied the possibility of real miracles. For Rūmī and Ibn ‘Arabī alike, the outer and inner were reflections of one truth. In *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Ibn ‘Arabī (1980) declares that Isa’s “breath gives form to spirit and spirit to form” (ch. on Isa), suggesting that divine love restores both flesh and soul. Isa’s ethic of mercy found vivid poetic expression. ‘Aṭṭār wrote:

“Jesus, whose heart was a sea of love,
Walked on water because his heart bore no weight.”
(*Ilāhī-nāma*, trans. Ritter, 1955)

This is another indication that Sufi Muslims were studying the Injil as commanded by the Quran, because only the Injil, not the Quran, mentions Isa walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33). More important, we are reminded that Isa is motivated by love when healing others.

‘Aṭṭār relates stories of saints who “breathed over the sick and they rose as from sleep,” and he explicitly links such healings to *nafakh ‘Īsā al-rūḥ*—“the breath of Jesus.” Early hagiographies of Aḥmad Yasawī in Central Asia, and later of Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshband, tell of disciples cured through the master’s prayer or a sip of his leftover water, described as “‘Īsawī dam,” the “Jesus-breath.” In these accounts, the healing act is performed *bi-idhni Llāh*—“by God’s permission”—under conscious guidelines from Q 3:49.

Ibn ‘Arabī goes further: “Every friend of God who inherits from ‘Īsā inherits the power to restore health, for his heart is the vessel of the Spirit” (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ch. on ‘Īsā). He interprets the saint’s healing gift as the re-appearance of divine compassion in the world. The later Ottoman poet Niyāzī-i Miṣrī (d. 1694) prays, “Give me the breath of ‘Īsā that I may raise the sick of the world to life” (*Dīvān*, qasīda 34). These examples suggest that Isa-style healing was affirmed as a Sufi practice: reciting healing verses, anointing with blessed water, or breathing gentle supplications over the afflicted.

The Healing Breath and the Living Guest

This Isa breath is the extension of the same divine Guest described earlier. The Qur’ān’s phrase “*We breathed into her of Our Spirit*” (Q 21:91) became, for Sufis, a universal paradigm: wherever God “breathes,” new life begins. In the words of Yūnus Emre (2008), “The Guest is God’s own

breath—guard it as your life.” This teaching resonates with Genesis 2:7, “*The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being,*” and with John 20:22, “*He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’*” In Sufi reflection, the same Breath animates creation, prophecy, and sanctity.

Isa’s Ascetic Poverty and Radical Freedom

Isa’s outer poverty mirrored his inner wealth. Qur’ānic commentators such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Bayḍāwī note his rejection of worldly goods, while Sufi compilers amplified this trait into an emblem of *faqr*—spiritual poverty before God. The famous story, preserved by al-Ghazālī (2010), tells that Isa owned nothing but a comb and a cup, until he saw a man drink with his hands and another comb his hair with his fingers. “Then,” said Isa, “I have no need of these.”

This renunciation inspired countless Sufis. Ibn ‘Arabī (1980) wrote, “He who possesses nothing is possessed by the Real” (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*), while Hāfeẓ declared:

“He owned no coin, yet the world’s treasure followed him;
His poverty was the crown of kings.”
(*Dīvān*, ghazal 178, trans. Clarke, 1891)

The Injil echoes the same radical simplicity: “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*” (Luke 9:58). For Sufis, this verse embodied *zuhd*—total detachment from illusion. Rūmī, describing Isa’s wandering poverty, wrote:

“Jesus walked on air because his heart bore no weight;
The heavier the world, the deeper the fall.”
(*Masnavī*, I:2170)

Peace in Three Worlds

Isa’s life of healing, poverty, and serenity formed for Sufis a complete spiritual cycle. The Qur’ān records his words: “*Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive*” (Q 19:33). Each passage of life is sealed by peace—*salām*—the same peace Isa breathed into the hearts of his followers.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. (Injil, John 20:21,22)

For the Sufis, to follow Isa was not merely to admire him but to breathe as he breathed—to heal, forgive, and live in divine poverty. As al-Ḥallāj proclaimed, “When the breath of Isa enters thee, thou

shalt heal the world” (*Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, trans. Mason, 1995), which appears to be a rendition of Acts 1:7,8. When asked about the restoration of Israel, Isa sent his disciples to heal the world:

...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Healing is Isa’s mission.

V. Isa’s Table and the Banquet of Divine Mercy

Isa’s Table is a theme among people of diverse faiths. The Quran portrays it as follows:

“When the disciples said, ‘O ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, can your Lord send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?’ He said, ‘Fear God, if you are believers.’ They said, ‘We wish to eat from it, and that our hearts be at rest, and to know that you have told us the truth, and to be among its witnesses.’ ‘Īsā son of Maryam said, ‘O God, our Lord, send down to us a table from heaven that it may be a feast for us — for the first and the last of us — and a sign from You; and provide for us, for You are the best of providers.’ God said, ‘Indeed I will send it down to you, but whoever disbelieves afterward, I will punish him with a punishment the like of which I give to no other.’” (Q 5:112–115)

Themes of Isa’s table are common in the Injil, from Isa’s last supper to his desire to dine with humanity.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me.”

— *Revelation 3:20*

Sufi tradition reads this verse as the spiritual prelude to the *mā’idat ‘Īsā*—the table of Isa described in Qur’ān 5:112–115. The knocking Guest in the Book of Revelation becomes the same divine visitor who descends upon the disciples with bread from heaven and wanders into Abraham’s camp. The act of “eating with God” is a metaphor for *ma’rifa* (divine knowing), where communion replaces mere belief. In Sufi exegesis, this moment reveals God’s desire to know His friends.

1. The Table as a Sign of *Baraka* (Blessing and Presence)

The Qur'ān narrates the disciples' plea:

“O 'Īsā, son of Maryam, can your Lord send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?” (Q 5:112, Abdel Haleem, trans.)

Isa responds not with rebuke but invitation, asking that the table be “a feast for the first and the last” (Q 5:114). The descent of the *mā'ida*—the heavenly table—is the descent of *baraka*, divine blessing. Al-Qushayrī interprets this as the heart's banquet: “The table of Isa was a banquet for the poor before it was a table for the hungry” (*Risāla*, §210). It is the moment when God's generosity becomes tangible, when faith is tasted.

The Sufi sense of this divine table echoes *Revelation* 3:20, where Isa as the Guest invites the soul to open its door and share a meal with the Divine. This motif of eating together with God—theophany as table fellowship—was central to Sufi imagination. Yūnus Emre writes:

“The Guest came; I opened my door.
It was none but the Lord of all worlds.”
(*Dīvān*, hymn 78, trans. Halman, 2008)

Here, the heart becomes the table, and hospitality the path to divine intimacy.

2. The Table as Divine Generosity — The Feeding of Thousands

Sufis read Isa's feeding of the multitudes on the grassy hills (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44) as a terrestrial reflection of the Qur'ānic *mā'ida*. For Rūmī, this miracle symbolizes the unending abundance of divine love:

“The table of Jesus is the table of wisdom;
its bread is insight, its salt the tears of love.”
(*Masnavī*, II:63–64, Nicholson trans.)

The *mā'ida* thus nourishes both body and spirit. Ibn 'Arabī (1980) expands this in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, explaining that God's generosity is ceaseless and universal:

“The table of Isa is laid in every moment for those whose eyes are open to its descent. Every breath is a morsel, every remembrance a cup.”
(*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ch. on Isa)

Just as Isa broke bread to feed the multitude, so too the Sufi sees divine *karam* (generosity) as continuously breaking itself open—God feeding creation with every breath. The Prophet’s name *Rūḥ Allāh* (“Spirit of God”) implies that His very being is nourishment.

3. The Feast of the Poor — ‘*Īd al-Fuqarā*’

The Sufi reading of the *mā’ida* transforms it into a celebration of spiritual poverty (*faqr*). Al-Ghazālī writes:

“The table of Jesus was not set with gold or silver, but with the simplicity of need.
The poor are the guests of God, and their hunger is the key to His table.”
(*Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, IV.45)

In this sense, Isa’s table anticipates the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15–24), in which the master of the house sends servants into the streets to bring in “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” Sufis saw in this a direct expression of God’s preference for the broken and the humble—the ones who, having emptied themselves, are ready to be filled. ‘Aṭṭār, in *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*’, tells of a dervish who prayed for “the table of Isa” to descend and found his heart suddenly flooded with peace: the inward banquet had arrived.

Rūmī ties this banquet to Isa’s ascetic simplicity:

“Eat from the table of poverty,
for every morsel there tastes of eternity.”
(*Masnavī*, II:70)

This table, the ‘*īd al-fuqarā*’, is the mystical Eucharist of Islam—a continuous feast of love, mercy, and remembrance.

4. God as Host — The Washing of Feet (John 13)

When Isa washes the feet of His disciples (John 13:1–17), He reverses the roles of host and guest. In doing so, He becomes the divine Servant who invites humanity to His table not through power, but humility. Sufis saw in this act the epitome of *adab*—spiritual courtesy—and the perfection of divine hospitality. Al-Sulamī records Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya saying, “The servant who washes the feet of others is nearest to the water of mercy.” (*Dhikr an-niswa al-mutā‘abbidāt as-ṣūfiyyāt*, 1999).

For Ibn ʿArabī, this gesture signifies the “exchange of hosts”: the human serves God by serving His creatures, while God serves humanity through grace. It is the mystical table turned inside out—divine generosity incarnated as humble service.

5. Mercy at the Table — The Prostitute’s Tears

In Luke 7:36–50, a woman known as a sinner bathes Isa’s feet with her tears during a meal at the Pharisee’s house. Isa responds, “Her many sins are forgiven—for she loved much.” For Sufis, this is a scene of *maḥabba* (divine love) conquering judgment. ʿAṭṭār cites this episode as “the perfection of love, when the lover prays for the slayer” (*Tadhkirat al-Awliyāʾ*, II.12).

Here, the *māʾida* becomes a table of forgiveness. Isa’s table welcomes not the righteous but the contrite—those who come empty-handed. Hāfez later echoes this truth:

“Come to the tavern of ruin, for there the cup is pure;
God’s mercy pours for the sinner, not the saint.”
(*Dīvān*, ghazal 87, Clarke trans., 1891)

This table of tears unites the Gospel’s scene with the Sufi’s path: repentance as feast, love as nourishment, and mercy as the Guest who feeds all.

6. The Table in Sufi Practice

The vision of Isa’s table did not remain a purely spiritual metaphor; among many Sufi communities, it took on liturgical and communal life. In Central Asia and Anatolia, particularly within the Yasawiyya, Kubrāwiyya, and later Bektashiyya orders, the communal meal (*sofra*) was sanctified as the “*māʾidat ʿĪsā*,” the *table of Isa*. In these gatherings, bread and salt were placed at the center of a circular cloth, symbolizing divine unity (*tawḥīd*).

In Turkic Sufi vernaculars, this sanctified bread was often called *nān-i ʿĪsā* (“the bread of Jesus”), recalling the Injil’s portrayal of Isa’s use of bread to feed the multitudes (Matthew 14:13–21). ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī, the great Timurid poet and follower of the Naqshbandi path, refers to the *nān-i ʿĪsā* (bread of Isa) in his *Nasāʾim al-Maḥabba* as a metaphor for spiritual sustenance:

“The bread of Jesus is not baked in ovens;
it rises from the warmth of the faithful heart.”
(*Nasāʾim al-Maḥabba*, fol. 72b, trans. Lewis, 2019)

Within the Bektashi ritual, the *sofra* was explicitly linked to Isa's compassion for the marginalized. Sharing the meal was a sacred equalizer—no hierarchy of wealth or status was permitted at the table, recalling Luke 14:13–14, “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” This practice expressed the living spirit of Isa's *faqr* (holy poverty) and mercy. Ocak (1996) notes that Bektashis referred to every meal as “a repetition of the miracle of the table,” and that “to eat in remembrance of Isa was to eat with God.”

Similarly, the Yasawiyya order, founded by Ahmad Yasawī in Turkestan, wove Isa's image deeply into their ethics of service. Yasawī's *Hikmat* poems describe the Sufi lodge as a place where “the table of Jesus descends for the hungry heart” (*Dīwān-i Hikmat*, poem 143). The Yasawī *sofra* thus became an enactment of divine hospitality—each meal both commemorating Isa's table and anticipating the eschatological banquet of God's friends (*awliyā*).

Among later Central Asian dervishes, particularly in the Khwājagān lineages that influenced the Naqshbandiyya, the *mā'idat* *ʿĪsā* was also connected to healing rites. Pilgrims who visited the shrines of Khidr or Isa (notably at Issyk-Kul and Balkh) would distribute bread among beggars while reciting Qurʾān 5:114, believing that “the table of Isa descends upon those who share.” Ethnographic accounts from 19th-century Turkestan (see DeWeese, 1999; Algar, 1976) record these practices as enduring echoes of Sufi veneration of Isa as healer, host, and guest of the soul.

As such, the *table of Isa* in Sufi practice embodied the full cycle of divine hospitality: God as the unseen Host who feeds all beings, Isa as the Servant who serves that feast, and the dervish as the Guest who receives and redistributes the mercy. Through every shared morsel, the Sufi meal became a reenactment of revelation—“a feast for the first and the last” (Q 5:114).

Summary

Isa's table (*mā'ida*) in Sufi spirituality unites the symbols of hospitality, mercy, and transformation. It is both a historical miracle and an ongoing reality: the descent of divine nourishment into every heart that welcomes the Guest. Whether in Mary's womb, the disciples' hunger, or the dervish's heart, the same Spirit descends, bringing *baraka*, forgiveness, and knowledge. The true Sufi banquet is thus perpetual—Isa's table spread across time, feeding all who come in humility and love.

VI - Isa as the Mirror of Divine Knowledge and the Word of God

Sufis regarded Isa not only as the prophet of love and mercy but as the mirror through which divine knowledge is known. The Qur'ān calls him *kalimat Allāh*—"the Word of God"—and *rūḥun minhu*—"a Spirit from Him" (Q 4:171). For Sufi metaphysics, these phrases express the mystery of divine self-disclosure (*tajallī*): God's eternal Word manifesting in human form - another theme that aligns with the Injil: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..." (John 1:14).

Ibn 'Arabī develops this most explicitly. In *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, he writes:

"The wisdom of Jesus is the wisdom of spirit, for by the spirit the world was given life.
Jesus is the breath that gives life to the dead of ignorance."
(trans. Austin, 1980, p. 154)

He identifies Isa as the "perfect mirror" (*mir'āt kāmila*) in which the divine names appear without distortion. This concept parallels the Johannine prologue: "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men*" (John 1:4). For Sufi tradition, divine knowledge is not a concept but a living encounter reflected in Isa's purified humanity.

Rūmī too describes Isa as the vessel of divine wisdom:

"The spirit of Jesus is the secret of the world,
For without his breath, the mirror of the heart is dull."
(*Masnavī* VI:1607, trans. Nicholson, 1925)

In a commentary on this verse, the Persian Sufi Nūr al-Dīn Isfarāyīnī wrote, "To contemplate Isa is to gaze upon the self that knows God, for he is the locus of revelation's unity" (*Sharḥ-i Masnavī*, ed. Yazdī, 1893).

The Qur'ān itself invites this contemplation:

"And [remember] when I taught you the Book and Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel"
(Q 5:110).

Here, divine instruction includes both the previous revelations and the divine wisdom within Isa himself. Many Sufis read this as an affirmation that to know Isa is to know the continuity of all God's books. The command in Q 2:136—"Say: *We believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed before us*"—thus becomes a mystical mandate: knowledge of God

deepens through reverent attention to every divine word, whether in the Injil, the Torah, or the Qur'ān.

‘Aṭṭār summarized this universalism in a single line:

“From the tongue of Jesus I learned the secret of unity—
Every book is one letter of His endless Word.”
(*Ilāhī-nāma*, trans. Ritter, 1955)

Biblical echoes reinforce the same theme. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6). Sufis interpreted this not as exclusivity but as the voice of God’s eternal Spirit speaking through a human form.

Turkic Sufis likewise celebrated Isa as *Rūḥullāh*—the Spirit of God—whose inner light guides the seeker. In Central Asian Naqshbandī circles, Isa’s humility was praised as the path to mystical insight. A popular Uzbek couplet attributed to Aḥmad Yassawī declares:

“Isa walked barefoot that his eyes might behold the unseen;
The dust of his path is the scholar’s book of wisdom.”
(*Dīwān-i Hikmat*, ed. H. Rajabov, 1977)

Through Isa’s humility, the mystic perceives the divine essence not as distant majesty but as intimate presence. Knowledge arises not from speculation but from love.

VII - Biblical Parallels and Theological Resonances

Sufi devotion to ‘Isā frequently echoes the spiritual imagery of the Injil (New Testament), even when mediated through Qur’ānic language. This resonance could arise from many sources. Shared metaphors of divine love, humility, healing, spirit, wisdom, and inner rebirth all emphasize the bond.

The Injil of John offers a portrait of Isa that harmonizes closely with Sufi interpretations of Isa as the divine Word and Spirit:

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father.” (John 1:14, NRSV)

Sufi poets, reflecting on Qur’ānic verses such as “His Word which He cast into Mary, and a Spirit from Him” (Q 4:171), perceived the same mystery: the divine Word manifests to unite creation with the Creator. As Ibn ‘Arabī observed, “The Word of God is spoken in every form of existence; Jesus was singled out to make it heard” (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, trans. Austin, 1980).

The Sufi notion of Isa's "breath of life" finds a striking parallel in John 20:22, where Jesus "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" For Rūmī, this divine breath continues in every age:

"If the soul has died, despair not—
The breath of Isa still passes through the world."
(Masnavī III:370–71, trans. Nicholson, 1925)

In both traditions, the breath signifies the transmission of spiritual vitality.

Sufi reflections on Isa's love and forgiveness also align with the Injil's teachings. Isa's Qur'ānic prayer for his persecutors—"If You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Mighty, the Wise" (Q 5:118)—mirrors Luke's account of Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). In *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*, 'Aṭṭār presents 'Īsā as the supreme exemplar of mercy, the prophet whose love extended even to his persecutors. Commenting on Jesus' words from the Gospel—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)—'Aṭṭār writes, "This is the perfection of love: when the lover prays for the slayer, and the slain intercedes for his killer" (*Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*, ed. Ritter, 1961, p. 57). For 'Aṭṭār, such forgiveness is not passive resignation but the most radiant disclosure of the divine attribute *al-Raḥmān*, the All-Merciful, shining through the human heart. Al-Ḥallāj likewise taught that "'Īsā's forgiveness of his enemies, a concept not presented in the Qur'an, unveiled the secret of *ḥubb* (love): that love sees no other" (*Ṭawāsīn*, trans. Mason, 1995). Jāmī elaborated on this in *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, where he describes the true saint as one "whose heart, like that of Jesus, overflows with prayer for those who wrong him" (trans. Thackston, 1999, p. 280). This act of Isa praying for his slayer thus became a touchstone in Sufi ethics—a symbol of transcendent compassion that annihilates the ego's instinct for retaliation. In this gesture, Sufis discerned not weakness but divine strength: as Rūmī would later phrase it, "Love is the fire that burns away 'I' and 'you'; in that burning, the world's cruelty becomes light" (*Masnavī*, II:1950–51). The Sufi path, illuminated by 'Īsā's prayer, demanded not merely endurance of suffering but active mercy—the transformation of one's own pain into intercession for enemies.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) likewise found echoes in Sufi ethics. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," became the foundation for *faqr*, the poverty of soul that liberates one from attachment. Al-Sulamī (d. 1021) cites a saying attributed to Isa: "Blessed is he whose heart is a lamp for the remembrance of God, for he shall see with the light of the unseen" (Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr).

Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's pure love for God parallels the First Commandment of both Testaments—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"

(Matthew 22:37). Her prayer, “I love Thee not for Paradise nor fear of Hell but for Thy sake alone,” reflects the same messianic ideal of love without condition.

Even Isa’s healings and table fellowship with outcasts resonated with Sufi hospitality. The Qur’ān portrays him as saying, “God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him; this is a straight path” (Q 3:51). Hāfeẓ reimagined this universality:

“Come, O seeker, into the tavern of love;
Isa’s table is spread for friend and foe alike.”
(Dīvān, ghazal 241, trans. Clarke, 1891)

Thus, the Sufi veneration of Isa intertwines with both Qur’ānic traditions and the mercy, spirit, and light God’s earlier books. Each tradition, in its own idiom, celebrates the Word as Life itself. The Isa of Sufism stands as the meeting point of these revelations: a living symbol of unity amid diversity.

Conclusion: The Isa-centric Heart of Sufism

From the early ascetics of Basra to the poets of Herat and Samarkand, Sufi literature reveals a consistent and passionate love for ‘Īsā al-Masīḥ. This love is not mere admiration but a form of spiritual imitation (ittibā’): to breathe, act, heal, forgive, and love as Isa did. Across centuries, Sufis recognized in him the living sign of God’s mercy, the breath of divine knowledge, and the model of inward poverty through which the soul returns to God.

Historically, Sufism emerged within the Qur’ānic world that revered Isa as Word and Spirit. Yet the Sufi imagination transformed these scriptural titles into experiential realities. Isa’s breath became the practice of dhikr; his humility, the discipline of faqr; his miracles, the allegories of inner transformation. The mystic’s journey thus mirrored Isa’s own.

Isa’s spirituality implicitly fulfills the Qur’ānic injunction, “Say: We believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed before us” (Q 2:136). For Sufis, believing in earlier revelation meant not only affirming the Quran’s command, but also living by its spirit. To read the Injil was to read the heart’s scripture, for the same divine breath that spoke to Mary speaks still in every purified soul that finds Isa.

Ibn ‘Arabī captured this universality in one of his most famous verses:

“My heart has become capable of every form:
It is a pasture for gazelles and a monastery for monks,
A temple for idols and the Ka‘ba of the pilgrim,

The tablets of the Torah and the book of the Qur'ān.
I follow the religion of Love—wherever its camels turn,
There, Love is my religion and my faith.”
(Tarjumān al-Ashwāq, trans. Nicholson, 1911)

Within this vastness of love, which was Isa's sole command (Matthew 22:37-39), Isa appears as the archetype of the rūḥānī—the spiritual man who powerfully unites heaven and earth under Love. His breath is God's life-giving Spirit; his poverty is freedom of the soul; his compassion is the human extension of God's love. Whether expressed in Arabic ascetic sayings, Persian ghazals, or Turkic devotional epics, Isa remains for Sufis the mirror of God's personality, capturing His gentleness and the measure of divine help given when a servant fully surrenders to his Creator.

In this light, Sufism can be read—without reduction—as an Isa-centric branch within Islam: a movement born from contemplation of the divine Spirit. For many mystics, Isa was less a figure of doctrine than an experience of God, a relationship with the eternal Word. As the Quran states;

“And remember the one who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her from Our Spirit, and made her and her son a sign for all people.” (Q 21:91 trans, Abdel Haleem, 2004).

Through the ages, Sufis have believed the Qur'an, trusted the Injil, and properly venerated Isa as a sign to all peoples.

References

Primary Sources – Qur’ānic and Sufi

- Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (Trans.). (2004). *The Qur’an: A new translation*. Oxford University Press.
- ‘Aṭṭār, F. al-D. (1955). *Ilāhī-nāma* (H. Ritter, Ed. & Trans.). Franz Steiner Verlag.
- ‘Aṭṭār, F. al-D. (1966). *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’* (*Memorial of the Saints*) (A. J. Arberry, Trans.). Paulist Press.
- ‘Aṭṭār, F. al-D. (1961). *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’* (H. Ritter, Ed.). Intishārāt-i Khāvar.
- al-Ghazālī, A. H. M. (2010). *The revival of the religious sciences (Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn)* (T. Winter, Trans.). Islamic Texts Society.
- al-Qushayrī, ‘A. b. ‘Abd al-Karīm. (2007). *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya: Principles of Sufism* (A. Knysh, Trans.). Garnet Publishing.
- al-Sulamī, A. b. al-Ḥusayn. (1999). *Early Sufi women (Dhikr an-niswa al-mutā‘abbidāt as-ṣūfiyyāt)* (R. Ernst, Trans.). Fons Vitae.
- al-Tustarī, S. (2011). *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* (A. Keeler, Trans.). Fons Vitae.
- al-Yassawī, A. Kh. (1977). *Dīvān-i Hikmat* (H. Rajabov, Ed.). Fan Press.
- Ḥāfeẓ, K. Sh. (1891). *The Dīvān-i Ḥāfeẓ* (H. W. Clarke, Trans.). Allen & Co.
- Ḥallāj, al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr. (1955). *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn* (L. Massignon, Ed. & Trans.). Librairie Paul Geuthner.
- Ḥallāj, al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr. (1995). *The Tawāsīn of Mansūr al-Hallāj* (M. Mason, Trans.). Anvil Press Poetry.
- Ibn ‘Arabī, M. (1980). *The bezels of wisdom (Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam)* (R. W. J. Austin, Trans.). Paulist Press.
- Ibn ‘Arabī, M. (2002). *The Meccan revelations (Al-fatūḥāt al-makkiyya)* (W. C. Chittick & J. W. Morris, Trans.). Pir Press.
- Jāmī, N. (1920). *Selections from the Dīvān of Jāmī* (E. G. Browne, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Jāmī, N. (1978). *Lawā’ih: Flashes of light* (J. Thackston, Trans.). Paulist Press.
- Jāmī, N. (1999). *Nafaḥāt al-uns: Lives of the saints* (J. Thackston, Trans.). Paulist Press.
- Navā’ī, ‘A. Sh. (1948). *Lisān al-ṭayr* (E. E. Bertels, Ed.). Akademiya Nauk SSSR.

Niyāzī-i Mişrī. (1998). *Dīvān-ı Niyāzī-i Mişrī* (M. Tatçı, Ed.). Kubbealtı.

Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya. (1928). *Rābi‘a the Mystic and her fellow saints in Islam* (M. Smith, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

Rūmī, J. al-D. (1925–1940). *The Mathnawī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī* (R. A. Nicholson, Trans.). Luzac & Co.

Rūmī, J. al-D. (1997). *The essential Rumi* (C. Barks & J. Moyne, Trans.). HarperCollins.

Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn. (1999). *The philosophy of illumination (Ḥikmat al-ishrāq)* (J. Walbridge & H. Ziai, Trans.). Brigham Young University Press.

Yūnus Emre. (1961). *Dīvān-ı Yūnus Emre* (A. Gölpınarlı, Ed. & Trans.). MEB Yayınları.

Yūnus Emre. (2008). *The book of dervish wisdom (Risālet al-nushiyya)* (T. Halman, Trans.). Syracuse University Press.

Biblical and Comparative Sources

The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). National Council of Churches of Christ.

Crossan, J. D. (1994). *Jesus: A revolutionary biography*. HarperOne.

Ehrman, B. D. (2012). *Did Jesus exist? The historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. HarperOne.

Vermes, G. (2012). *Christian beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*. Yale University Press.

Secondary Scholarship on Sufism and Isa

Ansari, S. H. M. (2011). *Sufism and the spiritual quest: A cross-cultural perspective*. Routledge.

Chittick, W. C. (1989). *The Sufi path of love: The spiritual teachings of Rumi*. SUNY Press.

Chittick, W. C. (1998). *The self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmology*. SUNY Press.

Corbin, H. (1969). *Creative imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī*. Princeton University Press.

- Ernst, C. W. (1997). *The Shambhala guide to Sufism*. Shambhala Publications.
- Ernst, C. W. (2003). *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the contemporary world*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Hermansen, M. (2013). *Spiritual exemplars: Sufis and saints in the Muslim tradition*. Oxford University Press.
- Knysh, A. D. (2017). *Sufism: A new history of Islamic mysticism*. Princeton University Press.
- Massignon, L. (1955). *The passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and martyr of Islam*. Princeton University Press.
- Nasr, S. H. (1987). *Three Muslim sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabī*. Harvard University Press.
- Nasr, S. H. (1991). *The garden of truth: Knowledge, love, and action in the Sufi path*. HarperOne.
- Nicholson, R. A. (1914). *The mystics of Islam*. J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Ritter, H. (1955). *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariduddin 'Attar*. Brill.
- Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical dimensions of Islam*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Schimmel, A. (1992). *I am wind, you are fire: The life and work of Rumi*. Shambhala.
- Trimingham, J. S. (1971). *The Sufi orders in Islam*. Oxford University Press.
- Yilmaz, H. (2013). *Khidr in Sufi tradition*. *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 2(1), 27–55.
- Zarrabi-Zadeh, S. M. (2016). *Rumi's mystical design: Reading the Mathnawi, Book One*. SUNY Press.
- Zubaida, S. (2018). *Beyond orthodoxy: Sufism and religious pluralism in Islam*. Edinburgh University Press.