

## Remembrance: A Husserlian Phenomenology of Sufi Practice

*Marc Applebaum*

SAYBROOK UNIVERSITY

**ABSTRACT:** The study seeks to answer the phenomenological question: What in essence is religious experience—specifically, the lived experience of “remembrance” (*dhikr*) in Sufi practice within the schools of Sufism shaped by the “Greatest Master,” Ibn al-‘Arabi? The eidetic structure of remembrance is the awakening of the individuated human subject to recollecting the primordial ground of his or her identity as a dynamic instantiation of the Absolute. This is simultaneously experienced as the subject becoming the object of remembrance—that is, being remembered by the Absolute. This transforms the psychological ego’s relationship to its own embodied, affective, and cognitive living, as the “center of gravity” of that ego shifts from an egocentric one—that is, an identification with the natural attitude standpoint of the personal ego—to progressively greater centeredness in the transcendental ego as a locus of ongoing world constitution and primordial self-presence, while nevertheless living as a unique individual.

**KEYWORDS:** phenomenology, Husserl, Sufism, meditation, Islam

Remembrance (*dhikr*) can be understood as “the primary meditative practice” within Islam (Elias 2013, 199); as such, remembrance is most emphasized within the Islamic mystical traditions given the name *Sufism* by European scholars (Ernst 1996). *Dhikr* is centrally important in the

initiatic mystical lineages linked to Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, known as Shaykh al-Akbar ("The greatest sheikh"). My focus will be on the fruitional experience aimed at in *dhikr*—namely, turning from a condition of heedlessness and duality to a unitive experience of *remembering God* and *being remembered by God*. Remembrance will be framed not as a metaphysical doctrine but as a lived experience situated in the practice of classical Sufism, traditionally understood as a lifelong, sapiential path. I will begin with a consideration of the term *dhikr* itself, starting with its lexical meanings and Qur'anic context; situate remembrance within the meditative path of classical Sufism, with an emphasis on Ibn al-'Arabi; provide an overview of Edmund Husserl's and Eugen Fink's egology and account of the Absolute; and finally offer a phenomenological interpretation of remembrance as a lived experience through the lens of genetic phenomenology.

Phenomenology is particularly well suited for the study of religious experience for the following reasons: First, it allows for the open examination of lived experience unburdened by dogmatic presuppositions, be they theological or philosophical, by means of the *epoché*, a methodical bracketing of theoretical assumptions. Held within the *epoché*, the "general thesis of belief in factual existence characteristic of the natural attitude" is suspended (Spiegelberg 1965, 724). Second, the late Husserl's synthesis of static and genetic phenomenology aimed to explore both reflective and pre-reflective consciousness and thereby shed light upon the personal, pre-personal, and primordial layers of conscious life—an approach that is invaluable in investigating a meditative path that can be read as a lived inquiry into precisely these dimensions of consciousness. Third, as Bruzina notes, "at the heart of phenomenology . . . understanding is not tied primarily or exclusively to sheer conceptuality but has living sense in the linkage of the conceptual to the experiential" (2009, 380). Phenomenological findings are always explicitly or implicitly experiential; therefore it is a fitting approach to classical Sufi practice as a path of lived verification and gnosis (*ma'rifah*) realized in sapiential rather than conceptual knowing.

### ***Dhikr* in Sufism**

*Remembrance* in Arabic is *dhikr* (ذِكْر). In Classical Arabic the primary meanings of *dhikr* are to recollect or call something to mind. In the Qur'an a primary meaning of *dhikr* is "to be mindful of" or "to bear in mind" (e.g., Qur'an 2:60, 231); the remembrance of God, *dhikr Allah*, is specifically

mentioned in the Qur'an in connection with prayer (e.g., Qur'an 29:45, 33:35). Regarding the lived experience of remembrance, one of the most important classical meanings of the word *dhikr* is "to remember or be reminded of something after forgetting it," *dhikr* being "a certain quality of the mind, by which a man is able to remember what he cares to know" (Lane 1968, s.v. "ذِكْر"). In Arabic *dhikr* is distinguished from rote memory because *dhikr* relates specifically to remembering as a "calling to mind," whereas a different trilateral root (حَفِظ) is used in Arabic to signify "the preservation of a thing [in the mind]" (Lane 1968, s.v. "ذِكْر"). Hence from a phenomenological perspective *remembrance* signifies the human being's valuing of calling to mind something that he or she knew and which is still a present reality but has been forgotten.

In the context of remembering God, "knowing" does not refer to conceptual, propositional knowledge—instead, it refers to the perceiving (witnessing, *mushahada*) of that which is present to the perceiver. In the Qur'an, God is represented as the most intimate of all intimate presences for the human being, as in the verse "We know what his innermost self whispers within him: for We are closer to him than his jugular vein" (Qur'an 50:16). Moreover, since God "never slumbers nor does He sleep" (Qur'an 2:255), He is the very principle of wakefulness. Thus in theological terms, to be forgetful of God is to neglect the most fundamental and intimate of all intimate presences, the principle of awakeness itself. In contrast, heedlessness (*ghaflah*; see Izutsu 2004, 159–60) is viewed as the ordinary human condition, and therefore becoming heedful is framed as the primary ethical challenge in the refinement of relational ethics, *adab*, and the formation of good character, *akhlāq* (Lapidus 1984). Thus, as Izutsu (2004) notes, remembrance as an ongoing returning to mindfulness of God is one of the primary virtues in the Qur'an and is closely linked to human beings making themselves disposable to receiving divine guidance. As a central term in the relationship between human being and God in the Qur'an, *remembrance* is linked, in Islamic theology in general and Sufism in particular, to the question of the immanence versus the transcendence of God. Were God viewed Qur'anically as purely transcendent, how could the Source of revelation be closer to one than one's jugular vein? In other words, does the divine Object of remembrance (the *madhkūr*) have a transcendent or an immanent relationship to the one who remembers (the *dhākir*)?

For Ibn al-'Arabi (1946) and his followers God is simultaneously characterized by both transcendence or incomparability in relation to

His creation (*tanzih*) and immanence in creation (*tashbih*). This seeming paradox defines Sufism's vision of the relational matrix within which remembrance occurs. The Qur'an verse 2:152 is a locus classicus for Sufi commentators' discussions of the meaning of remembrance. In this verse God speaks to the believer, saying: "So remember Me, I will remember you" (Qur'an 2:152). Here, the verb *dhakara* is used both for the human being's remembering God and God's remembering the human being. This verse is classically read as meaning that true remembrance of God is a reciprocal relationship, entailing the experience of being remembered by God. Abu-l Qasim al-Qushayri and Sahl Tustari, eminent Sufi predecessors of Ibn al-'Arabi who influenced him, emphasize this: Qushayri wrote, "One of the characteristics of remembrance is that God always reciprocates one's remembrance of Him, for God Most High said: 'Remember Me and I will remember you'" (2007, 235). Similarly, Sahl Tustari wrote, "The one who observes true remembrance is he who is aware that God witnesses him" (2011, 159). Thus the relationship of the *dhākir* (the rememberer) to the *madhkūr* (the remembered) is characterized by dynamism and mutuality. For this reason the meditative experience of remembrance is not remotely understood as a dry, formulaic, or rote activity. On the contrary: commenting on verse 2:152 Qushayri cites a remark attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "The command to remember much is a command to love for that is in the tradition, 'One who loves something remembers it often,' so this is, in truth, a command to love, i.e., 'Love me, I will love you.' So remember me, I will remember you, i.e., 'Love me, I will love you'" (2017, 115–18).

How does Sufism frame this remembrance-as-mutually-loving-attention? A canonical *hadith qudsi* (a remark attributed to the Prophet in which the Prophet relates God's "words") included in Ibn al-'Arabi's hadith collection *Mishkat al-Anwar* reads in part: "My servant draws near to Me by nothing dearer [lit. "beloved"] to Me than that which I have established as a duty for him. And My servant does not cease to approach Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks" (2004, 70). Since Sufism situates remembrance within intimately loving and protecting relationships, those Sufis revered as most spiritually developed are referred to as God's *awliya*—that is, God's "friends" (Renard 2008). Within traditional Islamic theology Al-Wali, "The Friend," is regarded as one of the Names

of God, so friendship is understood as a divine attribute that qualifies the reciprocal relationship between the divine and the mystic.

### *Dhikr, Fana', and Baqa'*

In examining the meanings of *dhikr* as “meditation” it is critical to emphasize that in classical Sufism *dhikr* is not a self-contained, solitary activity engaged in apart from community, nor is remembrance understood as exclusively individual. Rather, as Ibn al-'Arabi (1992) indicated in a book of guidance for novice practitioners, remembrance is only a single constituent part within a web of interdependent, embodied practices that are relational and place primary focus on one's formation of ethical character and relations both among fellow seekers and within society as a whole (*akhlaq* and *adab*), as well as an ongoing confrontation with and taking responsibility for one's own fallibilities and deficits. Hence solitary remembrance practice, though indispensable, is never envisioned as being adequate in and of itself.

In those Sufi teaching lineages upon which Ibn al-'Arabi had the greatest influence, aspirants' meditative practice of *dhikr* may initially be verbal but is progressively internalized, a directedness toward God and deepening witnessing that becomes increasingly subtle and catalytic, with a progressive altering of the practitioner's experience of the “I” and the presence of God (Buehler 1998; Elias 1995; Shushud 1983). *Dhikr* culminates in ego annihilation, or *fana'*, followed by “abiding” or *baqa'* (Chittick 1998a). In Ibn al-'Arabi's work God is often referred to using the name al-Haqq, “the Real,” and is regarded as ineffable and unrepresentable; therefore His essence or identity (*dhat*) is “unknown and unknowable” and cannot be an object of contemplation (Izutsu 1994, 87). Remembrance requires holding any image of God not as God but as, in Ibn al-'Arabi's words, the “God of belief” (1980, 282–83), meaning the way in which He who is unknowable is represented though any particular credal belief. Regarding the culmination of the meditative practice of remembrance in *fana'* Qushayri wrote: “Remembrance is the immersion of the one who is remembering in the witnessing (*shuhūd*) of that which is remembered, and then it is being consumed in the existence (*wujūd*) of that which is being remembered until no trace (*athar*) remains of you doing the remembering, so that it is said ‘so and so’ once was. So remember me, I will remember you, i.e., ‘be

consumed in Our existence (*wujūd*) and We will remember you after your annihilation [*fāna*] from yourself” (2017, 115–16). Fana’ (فناء) is the decisive fruition of the practice of remembrance in the ascending phase of the meditative path, often translated as “ego effacement” or “ego annihilation.” The Arabic root of the word *fana’* means “passing away,” “vanishing away,” “becoming spent or exhausted,” “ceasing,” “perishing,” “becoming transitory or evanescent,” or “nonexistent” (Lane 1968, s.v. “فناء”). Hence regarding effacement as the culmination of dhikr, Qushayri attributed the following statement to Dhul-nun al-Misri: remembrance “means the absence of the one who remembers from his act of remembrance” (2007, 235). The starkness of this language is critical: the lived experience of dhikr is that not of a practice but of a tectonic shift in the meditator’s lived sense of identity, the implications of which are simultaneously ontological and psychological. Baqa’ (بقاء), from the root meaning “to remain, continue, or abide” (Lane 1968, s.v. “بقى”), initiates the descending or integrative phase of the meditative path, in which the meditator is returned to his individuated life in the world, fundamentally altered by this recognition of his essence as “He/not He” (Chittick 1998a, 100) and relationship to God as his Source, which is ongoingly reawoken through remembrance.

What “perishes” in fana’? For Ibn al-‘Arabi (1946; Chittick 2007) both the “I” grasped as enduring and self-subsistent and, ego-centered worldly time itself become transparent as the divine becomes all-present: a shift of perceiving from the temporal or *in-time* (*muhadath*) to the boundary of the *timeless* or eternal (*qidam*). Whereas God’s selfhood is timeless, the human being’s selfhood is contingent and time-bound, and Ibn al-‘Arabi writes that knowledge of al-Haqq (the Real) “is in non-time and knowledge of man is in-time” (2005, 6). Hence in fana’ what perishes is my habitual, ordinarily unquestioned, seemingly self-subsisting identity, and with it the conviction that I am the actor who remembers, that I possess the capacity to remember, that in an important sense I “own” the very “I” who remembers. Fana’ is claimed to be all-encompassing in its implications: the personal I is said to disappear in union with the divine, the rememberer dies to her previous self-identity as an enduring entity in time. Afterward, when the personal “I” returns to an experience of relative self-identity and separation in baqa’, it is *provisional* in a literal sense: the aspirant recognizes herself as *provisioned* with a highly contingent capacity for action, with attributes that are transitory, and with an identity that is paradoxically both unique and empty, an endowment from the transcendent source of I-ness. For this

reason Ibn al-'Arabi mentioned an earlier Sufi's words that *fana'* is "the annihilation of him who was not" and *baqa'* is "the subsistence of Him who has always been" (cited in Chittick 1998b, 84).

How, then, to describe the "I" who recognizes him- or herself in *fana'* and *baqa'*? Izutsu wrote: "*Fana* is certainly a human experience. It is man who actually experiences it. But it is not solely a human experience. For when he does experience it, he is no longer himself. In this sense man is not the subject of experience. The subject is rather the metaphysical Reality itself. In other words, the human experience of *fana* is itself the self-actualization of Reality" (1994, 13).

Yet the whole meditative path to the point of *fana'* is, in a sense, only a prologue to the goal of the path aimed at in remembrance, which takes place within the descending arc of *baqa'*, in which human beings are called to ongoing refinement both vertically, in relation to their Source as expressions and servants of that Source, and horizontally, seeking to respond to and fulfill their relationships within the community in new ways. This seemingly paradoxical form of identity has sense only if we appreciate the condition Ibn al-'Arabi refers to as *talwin* (Chittick 1998b, 172). A visual metaphor referring to something of constantly changing color, *talwin* can be translated as "variegation" or "fluctuation" (Chittick 1989, 108). In fact Ibn al-'Arabi differentiated himself from other Sufis, claiming that they typically advocate the pursuit of establishing fixed, laudable states and the avoidance of fluctuation. In contrast, he wrote, the person of no fixed station finds completion in *tamkin fi'l-talwin*, which Chittick translated as "stability in variegation" (1998b, 172). This "oscillatory" conception of the life of the human being after *fana'* entails an opening through remembrance to an ongoing alternation of effacement and abiding (*fana' wa baqa'*), yielding an endless process of refinement in the midst of worldly life. By virtue of having been effaced and returning to the taste and implications of that effacement in remembrance, individuals are freed to a fuller, enriched appreciation and inhabiting of their specificity (*khususiyat*) as unique loci of the Absolute (Todd 2014, 89).

Driven by remembrance in *baqa'*, the envisioned dynamic condition of fluctuating self-identity, a shifting back and forth between the negation of relatively separate identity, immersion in unity, and reemergence into the field of multiplicity in response to the needs of the moment, relies upon the person's capacity to be what Ibn al-'Arabi terms "a possessor of two eyes," *dhu'l-'aynayn* (Chittick 1989, 362). The expression can be read as wordplay

due to the double meaning in Arabic: *‘ayn* (عين) is the root of the words for “I-ness” (identity) and “eye” (Lane 1968, s.v. “عين”). Possessing two eyes signifies the ability, in remembrance, to perceive one’s relative individuation as a unique entity while also perceiving one’s underlying emptiness. As unending discovery and alternation, this condition is said to be characterized by “bewilderment” (*hayrah*) that is not only lived but invited (Chittick 1989, 380). The aim is unending disposability: hence any potentially fixed spiritual station (*maqam*) requires what Ibn al-‘Arabi terms “abandoning the *maqam*” (*tark al-maqam*); as Chodkiewicz observes, “Un *maqām* n’est pas autre chose que l’*habitus* d’une vertu” [a *maqam* is nothing other than the *habitus* of a virtue] (2005, 257; my translations), and “abandonner un *maqām* n’est pas abandonner l’exercice de la vertu à laquelle il est associé” [To abandon a *maqam* is not to abandon the exercise of the virtue with which it is associated]. Hence for the inheritors of Ibn al-‘Arabi, *fana’* is not conceived of as a “once and for all” phenomenon, or as representing the achievement of a final, fixed state of enlightenment, but, rather, as signifying passage to a renewed form of humanity in servanthood. Having outlined remembrance in Sufism, I will turn to a Husserlian account of consciousness that will set the stage for a phenomenological interpretation of the experience of *dhikr*.

## Husserl’s Egology

Husserl (1989) described consciousness as composed of dynamic, inter-related strata. The life of consciousness is an ongoing flow of acts that are ordinarily understood as intentional—that is, “stretching out” to grasp objects. In the pre-personal layers of individual consciousness—a phenomenological alternative to the Freudian “unconscious”—consciousness is described by Husserl (2001) as displaying *passive* intentionality, meaning that pre-egoic consciousness, not yet the consciousness of a reflecting “I,” ongoingly grasps itself, its states, and objects in bodily and affective ways. This layer is an anonymous flow of living and can be called pre-egoic in the sense that it is prior to the constitution of the personal or psychical ego with one’s reflective life and narrated identity. The transcendental egoic layer is the layer of consciousness within which the full range of bodily and affective vitality, attraction, and aversion are born. When the impacts of ongoing embodied and felt experiences stimulate the pre-personal locus of



consciousness to shift to a *reflective* grasping and thematizing mode, there is an awakening of a personal “I” who, as a psychical ego, recognizes itself in shifting to an active intentional grasping of objects of consciousness.

The primordial origin point of the personal and pre-personal layers of consciousness is named *Absolute subjectivity* by Husserl. Remembrance as the ascending path toward effacement will be framed as the effort, by means of continued and deepening bracketing, to witness and retrace the flowing of one’s conscious life from its absorption in everyday life and psychical identity to the pre-personal ego and to the very origin point of consciousness itself. At this point a radical alteration in the meaning of the locus for itself occurs, to be followed by a returning to inhabiting personal identity in the world, now engaged in remembering its transcendent ground within the field of multiplicity, discovering one’s *telos* as an ongoing expression of Being itself.

In the natural attitude of everyday life, according to Husserl (1989, § 21), a human being is for the most part absorbed in a factual relationship to the world and him- or herself, regarding the world as a field of factual objects and others in which everything is taken as what it appears to be, unquestioningly. Thus the natural attitude yields a profoundly unexamined—or more literally, *unexamining*—life in the sense expressed by Socrates in the *Apology* with the words  $\square\nu\epsilon\xi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  βίος, *anexetastos bios* (Plato, *Apology* 38a5). This unexamined life, in phenomenological terms, can be understood as a truncated life in which one’s flowing bodily and affective responses to the world are lived naively and one’s reflection and imagination are characterized by instrumental responses to pragmatic, immediate needs or transitory desires, resulting in a neglect of deeper needs and more profound desires. Thus for Husserl, a life absorbed in the facticity of the psychical ego fails to fulfill human possibility because it remains caught in an attitude of “transcendental blindness” (in Fink 1995, 130).

Husserl (1970, 264; 1973a, 37) never tired of reminding his readers that the manifold layers of conscious life arise within the human person. Thus for Husserl, the strata of conscious life constitute an essential unity within an embodied locus of consciousness, a “unity of personhood” (Moran 2017, 18, translating Hua XIII:244). In his notes Husserl also named this expansive vision of the human being the *transcendental person* of which “factual human life is but one instantiation” (Luft 2011, 140). However, in the natural attitude this transcendental unity is not yet livingly integrated: That is to say, in the normal human condition the relationship

between the reflective and pre-reflective layers of an ego are experienced as largely or even drastically and problematically split off from and alien to each other; even more so, the primordial constituting source of both the pre-personal and personal layers of the ego is almost entirely unknown and unrecognized. Indeed, depth approaches to clinical psychology seek to assist the client in attaining a degree of integration between these layers, opening up a living relationship between the reflective, narrative life of the psychical ego and its transcendental, pre-reflective, bodily, and affective layers. For Husserl *both* layers are characterized by habitus: that is to say, a complex of habitualities shaped by experiences, repeated practices, and attitudes that are laid down or *sedimented* through the person's embodied history. He wrote: "The Ego always lives in the medium of its 'history'; all its earlier lived experiences have sunk down, but they have after effects in tendencies, sudden ideas, transformations or assimilations of earlier lived experiences" (1989, 350).

For the psychical layer of the ego, habitus is composed of reflectively lived positions, stances, or position-taking in relation to self, other, and world—a position-taking situated in the person's narrative about his or her life *as a life unfolding in time*. Hence for Husserl, *psychological* inquiry strictly defined is limited to the psychical ego layer, and therefore its ability to inquire is limited to the realm of "the lived experiences . . . of subjects who are precisely as such already subjects of our world—of a world which is already overlaid with idealizations and always apperceived in accordance with the sense of this overlaying" (1973b, 47). In contrast, for the transcendental egoic layer, habitus is a realm of the complex of embodied and emotional habits sedimented pre-reflectively and hence in a sense timelessly, which shape the way the person *finds him- or herself in the world in time as someone* with this or that temperament, attractions, and aversions.

As noted above, depth clinical psychological praxes aim to open up greater felt connection between the pre-reflective and reflective layers of being-an-I, yielding greater alignment of one's pre-reflective bodily and emotional life with one's reflective life. In psychoanalytic terms this process is framed as the client's gaining greater access to and integration of unconscious content, which is accompanied by relief and greater aliveness. Full transparency of the pre-reflective layer to reflective consciousness is in principle impossible; phenomenologically this is so because the pre-reflective realm of constitution is inexhaustibly generative. As Ferrarello (2015) has explored, ethical striving is a striving to properly name in practical

intentionality that which is already being lived pre-reflectively in passive intentionality. The personal, psychical ego, according to Husserl (1989, 288–89), can be viewed as itself having two layers: an ego of free acts and an unfree ego. Choice, including whether or not to seek a condition of greater integrity, belongs to this freely acting ego, and it is a choice about whether and how to take a position in encountering one's own ever-flowing pre-reflective bodily/affective life, which for Husserl means whether to be driven blindly by the impulses, reactions, and habits sedimented in one's passive life or to seek to bridge to it reflectively and, by so doing, add new or altered layers of meaning that themselves are laid down in passive sedimentations.

When we turn to the primordial source of both the pre-reflective and reflective layers, however, we are no longer in a realm centered on the individuated locus of consciousness, be it personal or transcendental. This is the realm referred to as the Absolute by Husserl. The motivations for seeking a questioning back to this absolute primordially in Sufism or other unitive mystical traditions are not essentially psychological in a phenomenological sense—such motivations do not belong to, nor are they centered on, the psychical ego. On the contrary, they imply a thoroughgoing bracketing of the facticity of the psychical ego and precisely for this reason have powerful psychological implications, presenting the threat of ego death. This questioning back is not psychological, because its aim is not to fine-tune the natural attitude experiences of a psychical I; its primary aim is not to strengthen or harmonize the self-experience of one's psychical ego. Instead, remembrance is driven by the conviction that one's psychical ego and its ongoing narrative identity are fundamentally empty in relation to its constituting, life-giving Source. But the individual ego's emptiness is not a negative emptiness: rather, by discovering its essential emptiness the individuated person finds his or her authentic being as a locus of primordial I-ness, and not solipsistically or incarnationally but, rather, relationally, because that Source transcends the individual locus while giving life to it.

### **A Phenomenological Interpretation of *Dhikr***

The following is an interpretation of *dhikr* in dialogue with Husserl's and Fink's investigations of temporality, egology, and constitution. As a phenomenological interpretation, it is offered within a strict epoché with respect to the truth claims embodied in the experience of *dhikr*.

When captivated by the natural attitude, the psychical ego is absorbed in the forward flow of time as the protagonist of its own narrative. The meditative practice of remembrance begins for the psychical ego as a chosen response to a motivating call that is felt to originate on a horizon that intimates its transcendent relation to the psychical ego while simultaneously conveying a truth more fundamental than the psychical ego's own narrated identity. The practice of remembrance begins with a progressive bracketing of the intentional content of consciousness in which the meditator directs him- or herself toward the source of that call at the origin of the flow of conscious content.

The capacity to bracket the natural attitude is something the personal layer of the ego is, *sensu stricto*, incapable of doing (Fink 1970). Employing the epoché relies upon the witnessing capacity inhering in the layer of the transcendental onlooker (Fink 1970, 1995). Therefore the practice of remembrance is from its inception the ego's awakening from dispersion in the natural attitude and turning, by means of witnessing, toward the layers making up its transcendent ground. Remembrance seeks to progressively break through the entrancement of the natural attitude through a constant bracketing and returning-to-presence in witnessing the flowing content of consciousness, directed back toward the source of consciousness itself.

As the aspirant freely chooses, through repeated position-taking commitments, to direct him- or herself in witnessing toward the source of consciousness, there is an increasing shift in the locus of perceiving from the psychical ego to the transcendental onlooker. As Husserl put it, "<I> lay bare the transcendental onlooker in <me, I> pass into him" (in Fink 1995, 40 n. 112). As this witnessing strengthens, the content of consciousness as well as the complex habitus of the reflective and pre-reflective layers of the ego increasingly stand out to witnessing consciousness and are thematized from a disengaged position, rather than being reflexively lived and reaffirmed. The established habitualities "loosen" incrementally; or one could say that a new habit is fostered: namely, to bracket and turn toward ever more witnessing. This bracketing of the natural attitude becomes, as a new feature of one's habitus, a witnessing disengagement from the aspirant's self-narrative and the habitual flow of worldly time. This perceiving, increasingly freed from attachment to the psychical ego's narrative and its temporality, yields an experience of presence that is in a sense anonymous and begins to open to a felt sense of timelessness. When the transcendental epoché is affected fully, the ego (as a unity) stands out to the witnessing I,

now revealed as a transcendental I. Through this condition of knowing-oneself-as-transcendental-ego, which takes root as a newly clarified standpoint through the aspirant's practice of remembrance over time, there is a first coming-to-fruit of radical shifts that are not merely cognitive or reflective but also implicate the embodied and affective meanings of being an individuated I. These shifts, all interrelated, are instances of finding oneself liberated from a reflectively and pre-reflectively sedimented, habitual sense of being-an-I, to discovering oneself freshly in the same capacities but from a different locus of I-ness, which renews and revivifies the meaning of the multiple layers of being-an-I.

When this bracketing reaches a tipping point, the gravitational pull that bound the I to its facticity as I-the-person has been temporarily escaped and yields perceptual opening: as Hart has noted, "The *epoché* disengages our doxastic allegiance to the world," and thus "the appearances of the world are enabled to come to light" (2009, 96). This is precisely what free witnessing entails: perception disengaging from doxastic entanglements with the lived world. This witnessing is characterized by an increasing sense of timelessness—a timeless flow of now-moments standing out to the witness, attending to the arising of the now. Whereas previously in the natural attitude the forward flow of time was indistinguishable from the psychical ego's self-narrating as the protagonist of its own story, now the I-as-object is bracketed, time dilates, and in presence the witnessing I is awoken to itself in its anonymity.

As Hart (2001) noted, just how we understand this anonymity or anonymizing—the shift Fink called "un-humanizing" (1995, 120)—is a critical question for phenomenology. The anonymity of transcendental egoic experience should not be envisioned as a stripping down that flattens the uniqueness of this locus of transcendental consciousness; on the contrary, the transcendental *epoché* frees the locus to a wavelike pulsation of passive content shot through with awakening, the sheerness of recognition ongoingly recognizing itself, having been relieved of the compulsion to rush into psychical forms. Indeed the relief here—which could theologically be expressed as a sense of grace—is relief at being released from what Fink referred to as "captivity in the world" in the natural attitude (in Bruzina 2009, 404). The factual layers of the I may be present but held in suspension; or they may have receded entirely as background to witnessing. And it is at this point in remembrance that the witnessing I again becomes a question for itself. Putting it another way, the transcendently awakened I now

asks, in remembrance, “Who is the rememberer?” Psychological selfhood and its habitus have been bracketed; now transcendental selfhood and its habitus will be bracketed as well, shifting to reveal the absolute ground of transcendental subjectivity. That ground is never to be objectivated, never rendered into an object, hence questioning back toward the origin is not an ego’s attempt to actively intend, objectivizingly grasp, its source, for that falsifies the origin itself. As de Warren writes, “‘Absolute’ designates the sense in which transcendental subjectivity is the ‘foundation’ of constitution, or, in other words, absolute in the sense of constitution, as itself the activity, or performance, of constitution” (2009, 29). This “foundation” or originative layer is not a being; it is constitutive of beings: it is not ontic but, rather, meontic (nonbeing). This ongoing returning can be described as repeatedly orienting oneself in meditation to what stands out, in pulsatory fashion, as the now. In this pulsation, the psychical I as witnesser and a disengaged locus of witnessing Itself begin to alternate as foreground and background.

Whereas awakening to the transcendental required a bracketing of the habitus of the psychical ego, awakening to the meontic requires a bracketing of the habitus of the transcendental ego; as the first epoché revealed the natural attitude as an attitude that required the already-present immanence of the Onlooker in or alongside psychical egocentricity, this second epoché, which Fink (in Bruzina 2009, 428) named a *meontic* epoché, reveals the transcendental ego as a contingent locus of a primordial I. In this epoché the already-present immanence of the originating source of the now displaces what I would call *transcendental egocentricity*. What is discovered is that one’s essential I-ness and the full range of transcendental intersubjectivity—multiplicity—belong to a You, but a You that can never be objectified, because it is simultaneously pure self-presence and an unobjectifiable, endless generativity. So as Hart wrote, Husserl’s work implies that “there is an ineluctable ‘self’ presence in primal presencing’s ‘self-communalization and . . . that this is ambiguously egological . . . in the light of the backward and forward movements of the reduction” (Hart 1992, 179). This self-presencing “enables the constitution (presencing, identification, etc.) of an Other (*Leib*, face, etc.),” namely, the *me* (Hart 1992, 179).

The rememberer now opens to what Bruzina terms a “cosmogonic” horizon (2009, 427)—that is to say, the horizon upon which the genesis of cosmos unfolds. In theological terms, the transcendental epoché broke the idol of the psychical ego; the meontic epoché breaks the idol of the fixed God concept: “In human being lies the opening to the meontic originative

source that cannot be encompassed within the actuality-horizon of the world” (Bruzina 2009, 436–37). To open toward that originary source via remembrance, any fixed God concept still retained by the transcendental I must be bracketed, held as one’s own rather than as the Divine Itself. Bruzina writes that the “Absolute is neither some self-sufficient originary power nor the sum total of being, with either taken alone, but rather their unity in the condition of constitutive originatedness” (2009, 428). Simultaneously, the standing out of the “I” who is a not-I, the unobjectifiable, absolute subject or origin point of I-ness, is fully transcendent to the flow of time—rather, it is the very origin of temporality. As de Warren notes, “Absolute consciousness is not ‘in’ time in the manner in which constituted objects are ‘in time.’ Instead, absolute consciousness is the ‘self-temporalizing’ of consciousness itself, as the difference between ‘objective’ (constituted time-objects) and ‘subjective’ (constituted immanent time-objects)” (2009, 206).

What is this Absolute? The meontic can only be pointed toward: Husserl (1991, 79) wrote that the originary source of constitutive flow cannot be predicated with anything that can be ascribed to objects of temporal processes or objects that exist in worldly time; as de Warren observes, for Husserl it is “a constant flux or continuous self-differentiation” (de Warren 2009, 205). Husserl wrote: “We can say nothing other than the following: This flow is something we speak of *in conformity with what is constituted*, but it is not ‘something in objective time.’ It is *absolute subjectivity* and has the absolute properties of something to be designated *metaphorically* as ‘flow’; of something that originates in a point of actuality, in a primal source-point, ‘the now.’ . . . In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation. For all of this, we lack names” (1991, 79). The Absolute as originating source cannot be named, because it is not an I or an it. Husserl wrote: “It is not a ‘being,’ but the antithesis to all that is, not an object . . . but the proto-stand . . . for all objectivities. The I ought not to be called an I, it ought not to be called anything, since it would then already have become an object; it is the ineffable nameless, not standing, not floating, not existing above everything, but rather ‘functioning’ as apprehending, valuing, etc.” (in Zahavi 2003, 92–93, quoting Hua 33/277–78). For this reason framing the Absolute as “a deity” would be the same type of category error: objectifying something that in principle defies objectification—the philosophical equivalent of idolatry. Representing the simultaneously immanent and transcendent Source

of human being as an “existent deity,” Fink wrote, “could only be considered a basically mundane representation by which one attempted naively to capture conceptually the true radically phenomenological Absolute, the meontic Absolute” (in Bruzina 2009, 446).

## Conclusions

A provisional account of the eidetic structure of remembrance follows. Remembrance is fulfilled in the inquirer’s discovery that the origin and home ground of the “I” is in a primordial You. The Sufis claim that this experience is a transformative process of awakening contact with the timeless, constituting the source of “one’s” contingent identity and of temporality itself, such that this recognition is felt to permeate and permanently alter the meanings of “one’s” I-ness from its passively intended embodied/affective layers to its actively intended reflective layers. This recognition heralds the call to lovingly value the endowment of selfhood as a bestowal that is simultaneously fulfilling and emptying: fulfilling in human beings’ authentic gratitude and love for their Origin as a unique locus for the manifestation of that intimate Absolute, with their own personal telos as a reflection of the Absolute, and empty in that the relationship is one of ontological dependence and *kenosis* in returning to their Source. Exemplifying the most primordial form of relatedness, the quality of relationality verified in remembrance is *the opposite of an abstract one*. Whereas remembrance was initiated as the person’s response to a call to his or her immanent and transcendent Source, with Its own implicit telos, the fruition of remembrance confirms that telos as individuated in this unique person, who finds him- or herself situated in the world of others as a unique representative of the Absolute. Hence remembrance yields a confirmation of the specificity and contingencies of the individual human being in a relationship of gratitude and service to that Source as expressed in the world of others, as one among many individuated representatives of the Absolute within worldly time, in felt continuity with that transcendent source. On the horizontal plane this manifests as increased awareness of coextensiveness with others in ethical relationship. On the vertical axis the first You and the first I are discovered to have an oscillatory relationship, an oscillation in which human beings’ remembrance is so to speak returned to them after ecstasy in the sobriety of daily life as a self-aware locus of the divine, engaged in



an ongoing ascetic clarification, renewal, and endless completing of the implications of the telos immanent in their relationship with their Source. Transcendental awakening initiates a “higher station”; hence the individual’s integral task in *returning*, so to speak, to daily individuated living is to express his or her freshly grasped timeless origination within the temporality of a personal egoic life: as Husserl puts it, “to find every acquisition made into something human [*vermenschlicht*], historically objectivated,” in which “everything transcendental [is] projected back into mundaneness and determining worldly life in this new mundaneness” in “a new life” (in Fink 1995, 130). While Fink described the awakening from the psychical ego as a shift in which he “un-humanizes himself” (1995, 120); Husserl countered by affirming the situatedness of everything falling under this discussion of dhikr as occurring *within* the human locus, as an opening to a “new, higher humanity” through which one must find oneself anew in the world of everyday life (in Fink 1995, 130 n. 469).

#### WORKS CITED

- Bruzina, Ronald. 2004. *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink: Beginnings and Endings in Phenomenology, 1928–1938*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Buehler, Arthur. 1998. *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Shaykh*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Chittick, William. 1989. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Chittick, William. 1998a. “Between the Yes and the No: Ibn al-'Arabi on *Wujud* and the Innate Capacity.” In *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy*, edited by Robert Forman, 95–110. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chittick, William. 1998b. *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Chittick, William. 2007. “The View from Nowhere: Ibn al-'Arabi on the Soul's Temporal Unfolding.” In *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life*, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, 3–10. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Chodkiewicz, Michel. 2005. “*Mi'rāj al-kalima*: De la *Risāla Qushayriyya* aux *Futūhāt Makkiyya*.” In *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy, and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, edited by Todd Lawson, 248–61. New York: I. B. Tauris.
- de Warren, Nicolas. 2009. *Husserl and the Promise of Time: Subjectivity in Transcendental Phenomenology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Elias, Jamal. 2013. "Sufi *Dhikr* Between Meditation and Prayer." In *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Cultural Histories*, edited by Halvor Eifring, 189–200. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ernst, Carl. 1996. "Preface." In *Early Islamic Mysticism*, edited by Michael Sells, 1–4. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.
- Ferrarello, Susi. 2015. *Husserl's Ethics and Practical Intentionality*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Fink, Eugen. 1970. "The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism." In *The Phenomenology of Husserl: Selected Critical Readings*, edited and translated by R. O. Elveton, 73–147. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Fink, Eugen. 1995. *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method, with Textual Notations by Edmund Husserl*. Translated by Ronald Bruzina. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hart, James. 1992. *The Person and the Common Life: Studies in a Husserlian Social Ethics*. Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Hart, James. 2001. "Parts of the Fink-Husserl Conversation." In *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, edited by Burt Hopkins and Steven Crowell, 279–300. London: Routledge.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1973a. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1973b. *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*. Edited by Ludwig Landgrebe. Translated by James Churchill and Karl Ameriks. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1989. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1991. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*. Translated by John Brough. Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Husserl, Edmund. 2001. *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Translated by Anthony Steinbock. Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhyiddin. 1946. *Fusus al-Hikam*. Edited by Abu-l'Ala 'Afifi. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi.
- Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhyiddin. 1980. *The Bezels of Wisdom*. Translated by Ralph Austin. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.
- Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhyiddin. 1992. *What the Seeker Needs: Essays on Spiritual Practice; The One Alone; Majesty and Beauty. With Ibn 'Arabi's Glossary of 19 Sufi Technical Terms*. Translated by Tosun Bayrak and Rabia Harris. Chestnut Ridge, N.Y.: Threshold Books.

- Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhyiddin. 2004. *Divine Sayings: 101 Hadith Qudsi, Mishkat al-Anwar*. Translated by Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt. Oxford: Anqa.
- Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhyiddin. 2005. *The Seals of Wisdom*. Translated by Aisha Bewley. Ramsey, N.J.: Madinah Press.
- Izutsu, Toshikiho. 1994. *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy*. Ashland: White Cloud Press.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko. 2004. *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.
- Lane, Edward. 1968. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols. Beirut: Librarie du Liban.
- Lapidus, Ira. 1984. "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of Adab and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam." In *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, edited by Barbara Metcalf, 38–61. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Luft, Sebastian. 2011. *Subjectivity and Lifeworld in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Moran, Dermot. 2017. "Husserl's Layered Concept of the Human Person: Conscious and Unconscious." In *Unconsciousness Between Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Dorothee Legrand and Dylan Trigg, 3–24. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Plato. *Apology*. Tufts University, accessed December 18, 2017, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Apol.+38a&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0169>.
- Qushayri, Abu 'l-Qasim. 2007. *Epistle on Sufism*. Translated by Alexander Knysh. London: Garnet.
- Qushayri, Abu 'l-Qasim. 2017. *Subtle Allusions: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an, Suras 1–4*. Translated by Kristin Sands. Louisville: Fons Vitae.
- Renard, John. 2008. *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shushud, Hasan. 1983. *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*. Translated by Muhtar Holland. Moorcote, U.K.: Coombe Springs Press.
- Spiegelberg, Herbert. 1965. *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 2 vols. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Todd, Richard. 2014. *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi's Metaphysical Anthropology*. Boston: Brill.
- Tustari, Sahl. 2011. *Tafsir al-Tustari: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an*. Translated by Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler. Louisville: Fons Vitae.
- Zahavi, Dan. 2003. *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.