

# The Dissipation of Emotions and The Transcendent Love in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

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## Abstract

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, translated by Edward FitzGerald, is a collection of quatrains that delve into the contemplation of life and Divinity. Within this work, Khayyam expresses various spiritual states or experiences known as Ahwal in Sufism. This article explores two significant Ahwal present in the Rubaiyat: the Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq) and the Extinction of Emotion (Fana). By analyzing specific quatrains, we provide a glimpse of how Khayyam's poetry reflects these spiritual states and contributes to the world of Sufi literature. This article also briefly provides a glimpse into the impacts of ancient Greek Philosophy which might have a passive signature on expressing these spiritual states.

## Keywords

Omar Khayyam, Dzawq, Fana

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## Contents

1	Introduction	59
2	A Brief Review	59
3	Analysis	60
3.1	The Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq) . . . . .	60
3.2	The Extinction of Emotion (Fana) . . . . .	60
4	Comments on Critical Metaphysics of these two Concepts in Rubaiyat	61
5	Impact of ancient Greek Philosophy on Khayyam's verses	62
6	Conclusion	62
	References	63

## 1. Introduction

Sufism, often referred to as tassawuf, is the path of spiritual purification and mysticism within Islam. It involves seeking a deep connection with the Divine and transcending the limitations of the material world. Abul Qasim Qusairy, a renowned Sufi, describes Sufism as the application of Quranic principles and the Prophet's Sunnah to purify the soul, refrain from sinful actions, and embrace devotion to God.

The Sufi commentator Al-Qushayri eloquently defines Sufism as the journey into exemplary behaviour, detachment from unworthy actions, and a transformation where one dies to oneself to live in God. Sufism emphasizes a profound sense of unity with the Divine, and its sincere practitioners exhibit humility, selflessness, and spiritual awareness.

However, in contemporary times, there has been debate over the place of Sufism within Islam. Many individuals, both Muslim and non-Muslim, question its relevance and even consider it outside the scope of mainstream Islam. This debate arises partly from the use of implicit language in Sufi poetry, which can lead to doubts about Sufism's alignment with Islamic principles. It's crucial to recognize that Sufism is rooted in Quranic teachings and the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad.

Sufi poetry serves as a powerful medium for expressing mystical experiences, often using metaphors and allegorical language to describe encounters with the Divine. Love, both human and divine, is a central theme in Sufi poetry. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, originally composed in Persian and masterfully translated by Edward FitzGerald, is a remarkable work that delves into these themes.

In this article, we will explore two significant spiritual states, Ahwal, expressed by Omar Khayyam in the Rubaiyat: the Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq) and the Extinction of Emotion (Fana). Through a careful analysis of select quatrains, we aim to shed light on how Khayyam's poetry mirrors these spiritual experiences and contributes to the rich tapestry of Sufi literature.

## 2. A Brief Review

Ahwal, or spiritual states, are temporary states of consciousness experienced by Sufis during their spiritual journey towards God. Various Ahwal are recognized in Sufism, but this study focuses on the Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq) and the Extinction of Emotion (Fana) as expressed in the Rubaiyat of

Omar Khayyam.

Dzawq refers to the tasting of the fruits of divine presence and theophany (tajalli). It signifies the experience of unveiling and discovering aspects of God's reality, akin to the taste of something exquisite and profound. Khayyam employs metaphors related to tasting, drinking, and quenching one's spiritual thirst to convey this state.

Fana, on the other hand, represents the annihilation of the self or ego, allowing the Sufi to transcend duality and merge with the Divine. This state entails complete self-surrender, leading to an interior spiritual condition where the individual becomes a clear mirror reflecting the divine light. Fana culminates in the highest stage, known as "fana al-fana", where even the awareness of having attained fana vanishes.

### 3. Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the concept of Ahwal, specifically the Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq) and the Extinction of Emotion (Fana), as depicted in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. The analysis is rooted in an examination of select quatrains that contain metaphorical or allegorical expressions related to these spiritual states.

#### 3.1 The Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq)

In the realm of Sufi spirituality, the concept of "Dzawq," or the taste of divine love, is a profound and transcendent experience that represents the fruits of the Sufi journey, including theophanies (tajalli), unveilings (kushufat), and spiritual inrushes (waridat). This mystical journey is often depicted as a process of tasting, drinking, and ultimately being quenched. These stages of spiritual intoxication are metaphors for the seeker's deepening connection with the Divine.

In the Sufi tradition, one who is characterized by "dhawq" (tasting) seeks to experience the Divine presence in a profound and personal way. This tasting is akin to savoring the sweetness of divine love and wisdom. It is a moment of profound insight and realization. As the seeker progresses, they aspire to become "mutasakir," or intoxicated with this divine taste, losing themselves in the overwhelming beauty of the Divine.

The next stage is characterized by "shurb" (drinking). At this point, the seeker is not merely tasting but fully immersing themselves in the divine experience. This immersion is like being intoxicated (sakran) with the Divine presence. It represents a state of bliss and profound connection with the Beloved, where the boundaries of self begin to dissolve.

Finally, there is "riyy" (being quenched), where the seeker reaches a state of sobriety (sah) but in the spiritual sense. It's a state of deep contentment and satisfaction, having experienced the fullness of divine love and wisdom. The seeker is no longer driven by a thirst for spiritual experiences but has found fulfillment in the Divine.

This spiritual tasting and drinking are beautifully expressed in the following stanza:

*"That ev'n my buried Ashes such a Snare*

*Of Perfume shall fling up into the Air,  
As not a True Believer passing by  
But shall be overtaken unaware. (68)"*

Here, the poet envisions that even their ashes will emit a captivating perfume, a metaphor for the enduring spiritual fragrance of their journey. This fragrance is so potent that it can captivate and envelop anyone, believer or not, who comes into contact with it.

In the Sufi tradition, the experience of divine love is often associated with intoxicating scents and fragrances. The Celestial Drink symbolized as wine, amrita, rasa, dew, or honey, represents the blissful scent that arises from the Divine presence. Perfume, in this context, is not merely a physical scent but a symbol of the Beloved's presence that ignites sacred ardor during the spiritual journey. It is akin to the anointing of the seeker's soul.

To convey the profound sense of divine union, Sufi poets sometimes evoke the scent of musk. Musk, known as an aphrodisiac, symbolizes the intoxication and desire for the Divine. The musk deer, a shy and elusive creature, represents the seeker's quest for the Beloved.

The scent of flowers also plays a significant role in Sufi symbolism. Flowers symbolize enlightenment, the unfolding of awareness, and the opening of the heart. Their sweet perfume represents the sweet nectar of spiritual realization. It is through this fragrance that seekers draw closer to the Divine, much like how the juice of a fruit yields wine.

The following stanza beautifully encapsulates the essence of deep spiritual taste (Dzawq):

*"Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring  
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:  
The Bird of Time has but a little way  
To fly—and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing. (7)"*

In this verse, the poet invites the reader to embrace the transformative power of divine love during the springtime of spiritual awakening. The act of filling the cup and discarding the garment of repentance signifies the readiness to be consumed by the fire of divine love. This fire, symbolic of the passion and longing for the Divine, burns away all worldly thoughts and concerns, leaving only the sense of this living flame - a profound connection with the Divine.

This wondrous fire is often described by mystics as the flame of love, symbolizing the deep and consuming taste of Divine love that leads the seeker to union with the Beloved. It is the culmination of the Sufi journey, where the seeker's heart becomes a burning furnace of love, radiating the fragrance of divine intimacy.

#### 3.2 The Extinction of Emotion (Fana)

In the realm of Sufi metaphysics, the concept of the extinction of the self, known as Fana, is a profound exploration of the dissolution of the ego and the reunion with the Divine. It is important to clarify that Fana is not mere Nothingness but

rather a transcendent state where the self transcends its limited temporal and spatial existence. Within Sufism, the dichotomy between the self and the other is a central theme, and the question of whether the self annihilates the other or vice versa remains ambiguous.

Omar Khayyam's poetic expression encapsulates this enigmatic union:

*“There was a Door to which I found no Key:  
There was a Veil past which I could not see:  
Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE  
There seemed—and then no more of THEE and  
ME (32)”*

This verse portrays the final barrier separating the seeker from the Divine Beloved. Initially, there exists a dualistic perception of “Me” and “Thee”, two separate identities. However, in a moment of revelation, the barrier dissolves, not through any physical action or key but through the profound realization that the separation is illusory. There is no real division, only the ego's false perception of separation, and then, there is no more “Thee and Me,” only the Divine Presence.

The essence of Sufi thought, however, does not fully elucidate whether the self integrates into the other or the other becomes the self. To address this, it can be posited that the other serves as the ontological foundation and condition for the existence of the self. The self is the grounded, and the other is the ground itself. In this ontological framework, the self, as the grounded, cannot annihilate its own ground. To transcend duality, the self must annihilate its state of nonexistence and reunite with the other.

Sufi literature employs various metaphors and symbols to convey this experience of self-annihilation and the deconstruction of the self-other dualism. Beyond the realization of the annihilation of nonexistence, there exists only existence. There is nothing beyond this apparent nothingness but the fullness of life and survival. This annihilation signifies eternal reunion, existence in its pure positivity, and glory.

Consider the 19th stanza:

*“And this delightful Herb whose tender Green  
Fledges the River's Lip on which we lean-  
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows  
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen!  
(19)”*

This stanza emphasizes the transient nature of human existence. It underscores the idea that humans are essentially nothing (Fana) in the grand scheme of existence. The act of leaning upon the river's lip, where the river symbolizes life, suggests a dependency on a higher power, God. It signifies the realization of Divinity and the surrender of the self.

The higher consciousness achieved through Fana is akin to Nirvana, characterized by the extinction (Baqa') of lower mental faculties such as the sense of sin, fear of death, and desire for material wealth. This transformation represents

the annihilation of the old self and the birth of a new self, as depicted in Khayyam's poetry:

*“Ah! my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears  
To-day of past Regrets and future Fears-  
To-morrow?-Why, To-morrow I may be  
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.  
(20)”*

This verse alludes to the liberation from the burden of past regrets and future anxieties, signifying a timeless existence where the self transcends the constraints of linear time and renews itself in perpetual spiritual rejuvenation. Fana, in its multifaceted expressions, invites individuals to embark on a profound inner journey toward self-annihilation and reunion with the Divine, transcending the limitations of ego and dualism.

#### 4. Comments on Critical Metaphysics of these two Concepts in Rubaiyat

The Rubaiyat, a collection of quatrains attributed to the Persian polymath Omar Khayyam, serves as a remarkable canvas for exploring critical metaphysical concepts in Sufism. In particular, it provides profound insights into the experiences of “The Taste of Divine Love” (Dzawq) and “The Extinction of Emotion” (Fana) within the realm of Sufi mysticism. This section will delve into the critical metaphysical aspects of these concepts, highlighting their interconnectedness and significance in the mystical journey.

##### (a) Dzawq and Fana: An Interplay of Divine Love and Self-Annihilation

Within the Rubaiyat, Dzawq and Fana are not isolated themes but rather interwoven facets of the Sufi spiritual journey. Dzawq, the taste of divine love, represents the seeker's gradual progression from initial spiritual insight to a profound connection with the Divine. It unfolds as a journey of tasting, drinking, and ultimately being quenched, symbolizing the stages of spiritual intoxication.

Fana, on the other hand, explores the dissolution of the self and the reintegration with the Divine. It grapples with the enigmatic question of whether the self annihilates the other or vice versa. Khayyam's poetic expression emphasizes the collapse of dualism and the realization that the separation between self and other is a mere illusion.

##### (b) The Metaphysical Unity: The Self's Union with the Divine

At a deeper metaphysical level, both Dzawq and Fana converge in their quest for unity with the Divine. Dzawq, with its metaphor of intoxication, mirrors the seeker's passionate longing for union with the Beloved. It is the sweetness of divine love that draws the seeker closer to the Divine. This intoxication symbolizes a transcendence of the ego, much like the self-annihilation in Fana.

In Fana, the self undergoes a profound transformation, shedding its limited temporal and spatial existence to reunite

with the other, which is the ontological foundation and condition for the self's existence. This union transcends duality, leading to a state of eternal reunion, pure existence, and glory.

### (c) Sufi Symbolism: A Journey to the Divine

The Rubaiyat employs rich symbolism to depict these metaphysical concepts. The scent of perfume, the intoxicating aroma of the Celestial Drink, the musk's allure, and the fragrance of flowers all serve as metaphors for the seeker's journey toward divine love and self-annihilation. Perfume, in this context, represents the presence of the Beloved, igniting the seeker's ardour and desire for union.

In the Rubaiyat, the burning fire of divine love consumes all worldly thoughts, leaving only the sense of a living flame - an allegory for the profound connection with the Divine. This fire is synonymous with the flame of love in Sufi thought, symbolizing the deep and consuming taste of Divine love that ultimately leads to union with the Beloved.

### (d) The Timeless Quest: Beyond Regrets and Fears

Khayyam's verses echo the timeless nature of the Sufi quest. The relinquishment of past regrets and future fears, as depicted in the Rubaiyat, signifies a departure from the constraints of linear time. The self transcends the limitations of temporal existence and rejuvenates itself in an eternal spiritual awakening.

In conclusion, the Rubaiyat offers a profound exploration of the critical metaphysical concepts of *Dzawq* and *Fana* within the context of Sufi mysticism. These concepts intertwine in the seeker's journey to taste divine love, experience self-annihilation, and achieve union with the Divine. Through rich symbolism and poetic imagery, Khayyam's verses invite us to contemplate the profound unity and transformative power of these spiritual experiences in our own quest for transcendence and divine connection.

## 5. Impact of ancient Greek Philosophy on Khayyam's verses

The impact of ancient Greek philosophy on the verses of Omar Khayyam, particularly in his Rubaiyat, is a subject that requires careful examination. While Khayyam was a Persian polymath who lived during the Islamic Golden Age, he was certainly exposed to various intellectual currents of his time, including the works of ancient Greek philosophers. Here are some ways in which Greek philosophical ideas may have influenced Khayyam's verses, especially these two spiritual states discussed in this study:

### 1. Influence of Stoicism

The Stoic school of philosophy, founded by Greek philosophers like Zeno of Citium, emphasized self-control, rationality, and acceptance of fate. Khayyam's verses often reflect a sense of fatalism and an acceptance of life's uncertainties. He frequently contemplates the impermanence of life and the idea that human existence is subject to the whims of fate, which aligns with Stoic themes of accepting one's destiny.

### 2. Epicurean Elements

The philosophy of Epicureanism, as expounded by Epicurus, is centred on the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain through moderation and the cultivation of simple pleasures. While Khayyam's verses often caution against excessive indulgence in worldly pleasures, they also celebrate the enjoyment of wine and companionship. This duality may reflect an Epicurean influence, as he seeks a balanced approach to life's pleasures.

### 3. Skepticism and Questioning

Greek philosophy, especially the works of philosophers like Socrates and the Socratic method of questioning, encouraged critical thinking and skepticism. Khayyam's verses often pose deep existential questions and engage in philosophical contemplation. His probing inquiries into the nature of existence and the Divine may be influenced by the spirit of inquiry found in Greek philosophy.

### 4. Cosmological Ideas

Khayyam, in his capacity as a mathematician and astronomer, made significant contributions to our understanding of the universe. Greek philosophers like Pythagoras and Aristotle also made notable contributions to ancient cosmology. Khayyam's verses sometimes contain references to the cosmos, celestial bodies, and the mysteries of the universe, which could reflect his exposure to Greek cosmological ideas.

### 5. Ethical Reflections

Greek ethics, particularly the works of Aristotle and his discussions on virtue ethics, may have influenced Khayyam's moral reflections found in his verses. He often contemplates issues of virtue, righteousness, and the nature of a good life, although these considerations are typically intertwined with his broader philosophical themes.

It's important to note that Khayyam's verses are multifaceted and draw from various intellectual traditions, including Islamic mysticism (Sufism). While Greek philosophy may have left some traces in his work, it is just one of many influences that shaped his philosophical and poetic worldview. Khayyam's unique synthesis of diverse philosophical, scientific, and mystical ideas has contributed to the enduring appeal and complexity of his poetry.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, brilliantly translated by Edward FitzGerald, serves as a profound gateway into the realm of Sufi spirituality, encapsulating two pivotal themes: the Taste of Divine Love (*Dzawq*) and the Extinction of Emotion (*Fana*). Khayyam's poetic quatrains, adorned with metaphor and allegory, offer a unique perspective on the mystical underpinnings of Sufism while remaining firmly rooted in the foundations of Islamic thought.

Through the metaphorical journey of tasting divine love, Khayyam beckons readers to abandon the confines of conventional reasoning and immerse themselves in the rapture of spiritual intoxication. The act of drinking wine transcends the physical realm to become a symbol of profound divine communion, marking the seeker's path with heightened awareness

and an unceasing sense of divine presence.

Conversely, the concept of Fana, the annihilation of the self in the divine, finds eloquent expression in Khayyam's verses. The dissolution of the ego and the merging with the Beloved epitomize the ultimate aspiration of Sufi mysticism. Here, the seeker's identity becomes a clear mirror, reflecting the radiant light of the Divine.

While the Rubaiyat may seem to revel in worldly pleasures, it conceals a treasury of spiritual wisdom. It invites readers to contemplate the ephemeral nature of existence, the yearning for spiritual enlightenment, and the relentless pursuit of a profound connection with the Divine. Khayyam's poetry transcends the boundaries of time and culture, exemplifying how the art of verse can convey profound spiritual truths while enriching both literature and spirituality.

As readers engage with Khayyam's verses, they are not only witnesses but active participants in their own spiritual odyssey. They are encouraged to embark on the quest for the Taste of Divine Love (Dzawq) and to strive for the Extinction of Emotion (Fana), recognizing that these states are not the exclusive domain of Sufi poets but rather universal aspirations of the human soul. In their pursuit of transcendence and union with the Divine, they follow in the footsteps of countless seekers throughout history, finding resonance and inspiration within the timeless verses of the Rubaiyat.

**Declaration of competing interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, personal relationships or any religious views that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this manuscript.

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