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A Conceptual Framework of Longing (Shawq) in the Mystical Tafsīr Attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (A.S)

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Abstract

This study investigates the concept of shawq (longing) in the mystical Qur'ānic exegesis attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S), a foundational yet underexplored source in early Shi'i mysticism. Drawing on over fifty narrations, the study constructs a five-part conceptual system—ontology, epistemology, mystical wayfaring, visionary experience, and monotheistic theology—through a descriptive-analytical method. The analysis shows that shawq functions not merely as an emotional state but as a metaphysical orientation, epistemic bridge, and eschatological criterion. It defines the soul's direction, enables divine vision, and culminates in proximity to the Divine. The tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S) thus offers a distinctive Shi'i mystical theology of longing—one that resonates with classical Sufi treatments but also introduces unique metaphysical and esoteric dimensions. By situating shawq within a structured mystical framework, the article contributes to the broader understanding of Shi'i mystical theology and its influence on later Sufi love theory, vision, and divine intimacy.

Keywords: Shawq (Longing), Imam al-Sadiq, Mystical Tafsīr, Shi'i Mysticism, Divine Vision.

1. Introduction

Longing (shawq) is one of the mystical states that, in its literal sense, means desire, yearning, and aspiration. In mystical terminology, it encompasses a wide range of perspectives. At times, it is described as a fire with which God ignites the hearts of His saints (Sarrāj, 1914, p. 90), and at other times, it is understood as the quest for the vision of the Beloved. In this latter meaning, shawq is a yearning and pursuit to reach the Beloved—a striving undertaken by the seekers to behold the face of the Beloved and hearing His words in Paradise (Isfahānī, 1974, p. 76).

The term shawq (longing) has undergone a complex and evolving trajectory in the historical thought of Sufis and mystics. Its earliest usages date back to the second century AH,

and Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194 AH / 810 CE) likely was the first to popularize the term. During Shaqīq's time, shawq referred to a "spiritual-psychological feeling of yearning," representing part of a sophisticated theory of mystical love. This understanding of shawq was rooted in the internalization of piety within the individual, emphasizing the "inner dimension" or spiritual life of the soul, in contrast to the "outer" and public aspects of faith (Schimmel, 1975, pp. 321-323).

Following Shaqīq al-Balkhī, in the third and fourth centuries AH, the term expanded and was formally classified among the mystical states (aḥwāl). Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, in his definition of maqām (station) and ḥāl (state), includes shawq alongside uns (intimacy) and qurb (proximity) as part of the spiritual states. He writes:

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"If one asks what the meaning of *maqāmāt* is, it must be said: it refers to the servant's halting before God through acts of worship, spiritual struggle, ascetic discipline, detachment from creation, and connection to God. The stations" (Sarrāj, 1914, p. 90). The historical trajectory of the concept of *shawq* (longing), as previously outlined, can also be traced across various mystical texts, including early Sufi Qur'ānic commentaries. Among these early mystical tafsīrs, the highest frequency of the term *shawq* appears in the tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Šādiq (A.S). Within the four major early mystical commentaries, this particular tafsīr holds a distinctive position. Derived from Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr by al-Sulamī, it contains over fifty occurrences of the word *shawq* and its derivatives.

According to Bowering, this tafsīr may have served as a probable source for the development of the concept of *shawq* in the mystical love theory of al-Hallāj and his later followers, such as Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606 AH). The concept also resonates in the mystical commentary of Abū Sahl al-Tustarī, titled *al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, where *shawq* and *ishtiāq* (yearning) are portrayed as reflections of divine love and light (Bowering, 1980, pp. 165–170).

Given the prominence of this term in the tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Šādiq (A.S), a focused study of the concept of *shawq* within this exegetical tradition becomes a scholarly necessity. While scattered narrations reflect a rich tapestry of spiritual insights, there is a lack of coherent analysis that organizes these references into a unified conceptual framework. This gap hinders a deeper understanding of how *shawq* functions not merely as an emotional impulse but as a metaphysical principle, epistemic bridge, and soteriological criterion in the spiritual journey toward divine vision. Therefore, this study aims to construct a comprehensive system of *shawq* based on thematic and structural analysis of the tafsīr, revealing its layered role in ontology, epistemology, mystical wayfaring, visionary experience, and monotheistic theology.

2. Literature Review

The concept of *shawq* (longing) has been a cornerstone in Islamic mystical thought, particularly within Sufi traditions. Classical mystics such as al-Sarrāj in *Kitāb al-Luma'* (Sarrāj, 1914, p. 90), al-Qushayrī in *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* (Qushayrī, 1995, pp. 458–461), and Ibn 'Arabī in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Ibn 'Arabī, 1911, p. 90), have explored *shawq* as a spiritual state (*ḥāl*) that arises from divine love (*maḥabbah*) and culminates in the desire for union (*ittiṣāl*) and vision (*ru'ya*) of the Divine. In these texts, *shawq* is often portrayed as a transformative force that purifies the soul and intensifies the seeker's journey toward God.

In Shi'i thought, however, the treatment of *shawq* has been less systematically explored. While scholars such as Corbin (1971) and Amir Moezzi (2012, pp. 285–289) have highlighted the esoteric and mystical dimensions of early Shi'i theology, including the role of *ma'rifa* (gnosis) and *wilāya* (spiritual guardianship), the specific articulation of *shawq* within Shi'i tafsīr remains underrepresented. The tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Šādiq (A.S), compiled in later centuries and preserved through mystical circles, offers a unique perspective that blends Qur'ānic hermeneutics with spiritual psychology.

Recent studies on Shi'i mystical exegesis—such as those by Sayyid Haidar Hobbollah and Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour—have begun to uncover the symbolic and

experiential layers of interpretation in early Imāmī traditions. However, these works often focus on broader themes such as *wilāya*, *ma'rifa*, and *ru'ya*, without isolating *shawq* as a distinct conceptual system.

This study fills that gap by offering a thematic and structural analysis of *shawq* in the tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Šādiq (A.S), revealing its layered role across five domains: ontology, epistemology, mystical wayfaring, visionary experience, and monotheistic theology. By doing so, it situates Shi'i mystical thought in dialogue with classical Sufi frameworks while highlighting its unique contributions to the metaphysics of longing.

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive–analytical method designed to ensure methodological transparency. Data collection begins with the systematic identification of all occurrences of *shawq* and its derivatives in the Tafsīr attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (A.S), supplemented by narrations engaging cognate mystical categories such as *maḥabbah* (love), *ru'ya* (vision), *qurb* (proximity), *wilāyah* (guardianship), and *ma'rifa* (gnosis). Each narration is then evaluated using textual and semantic criteria to distinguish authentic material from later conjectural interpretations, thereby grounding the analysis in reliable sources.

The narrations are subsequently organized into five thematic axes: ontology, epistemology, mystical wayfaring, visionary experience, and monotheistic theology. These axes were chosen because they represent the principal dimensions through which *shawq* manifests in Islamic mystical discourse. Ontology clarifies the existential status of desire; epistemology addresses its cognitive and interpretive functions; mystical wayfaring situates *shawq* within the stages of spiritual progression; visionary experience highlights its role in encounters with the divine; and monotheistic theology anchors it in the framework of *tawḥīd*. Together, these axes provide a comprehensive structure that captures both the breadth and depth of *shawq* as a mystical concept. Structural analysis then interrogates the interrelations of *shawq* with adjacent mystical constructs, emphasizing metaphorical registers and symbolic configurations that shape its discursive function. Finally, the findings are synthesized into a systematic conceptual architecture that delineates the hierarchical and semantic relations of *shawq*, thereby reinforcing the scientific validity of the methodological design.

4. Discussion

A review of the commentary reveals that the concept of *shawq* (longing) in the tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Šādiq (A.S) constitutes a multidimensional spiritual system that integrates ontology, epistemology, mystical practice, and eschatological vision. This multidimensionality demonstrates that *shawq* is not merely an isolated mystical sentiment but a structural principle that informs diverse aspects of spiritual life and theological reflection. The documentation of this issue will be examined in detail across these domains.

At the same time, it is necessary to clarify the theoretical boundaries of the research by distinguishing between Imāmiyya mysticism and classical Sufism, both of which employ overlapping vocabularies of longing, love (*maḥabbah*), and gnosis (*ma'rifa*). Imāmiyya mysticism is inseparable from the doctrine of the Imamate, where mystical insight is transmitted through divinely sanctioned authority. As Amir

Moezzi (1994, p. 15) explains, “The Imam is not only the guardian of the law but also the possessor of esoteric knowledge, the spiritual guide whose authority is divinely sanctioned”. He further emphasizes that “Shi’i esotericism is inseparable from the doctrine of the Imamate, which constitutes both its foundation and its horizon” (Amir Moezzi, 1994, p. 22).

By contrast, classical Sufism privileges experiential spirituality, emphasizing practices such as dhikr and the pursuit of union with God. Schimmel (1975, p. 3) describes it as “the interiorization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice, aiming at the direct experience of God,” and observes that “the Sufi path is characterized by remembrance, love, and the annihilation of the self in God” (Schimmel, 1975, p. 67).

Thus, while both traditions share a common mystical lexicon, their foundations diverge: Imāmiyya mysticism grounds these concepts in theological authority and exegetical precision, whereas Sufism frames them within experiential practice and charismatic guidance. With these distinctions established, the following sections will analyze shawq in detail through its ontological, epistemological, practical, and eschatological dimensions, highlighting how each axis contributes to the coherence of Imām al-Ṣādiq’s mystical vision.

4.1. Ontology of Shawq: Longing as Existential Orientation

Unlike many classical Sufi treatments that emphasize shawq primarily as a transient spiritual state (ḥāl), the Shi’i mystical framework presented here elevates shawq to a metaphysical principle and existential orientation (Asghari, 2020, pp. 65–80). One of the most striking insights is the ontological centrality of shawq as the “qibla of the longing ones” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 98). In this narration, Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S) refers to shawq as the “qibla of the longing ones,” and waṣl (union) as their Ka’ba (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 98). This symbolic language frames shawq as the directional axis of spiritual life, akin to how the Ka’ba orients physical prayer. Just as the body turns toward Mecca, the soul turns toward the Divine through shawq. This metaphorical language suggests that shawq is not merely a reaction to divine beauty but a precondition for perceiving it. The believer’s spiritual identity is shaped by the direction and intensity of their longing, which in turn determines their proximity to the Divine.

In the tafsīr attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S), shawq (longing) is not merely a psychological impulse but a foundational existential force that defines the spiritual identity and orientation of the believer. It is the inner compass that directs the soul toward divine proximity and ultimately, ru’ya (vision) of the Divine (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 7).

4.1.1. Shawq as the Mirror of the Soul

Imam al-Baqir (A.S), as cited in the same exegetical corpus, describes shawq as one of the three mirrors of human faculties: “Let longing (shawq) be the mirror of the soul, knowledge (ma’rifa) the mirror of the heart, and intellect (‘aql) the mirror of the self” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, pp. 347–348). This metaphor suggests that shawq reflects the soul’s deepest orientation—its yearning for the Divine—and that true spiritual perception arises only when the soul gazes into this

mirror.

4.1.2. Shawq as the Condition for Divine Presence

In his commentary on verse 255 of Al-Baqarah, Imam Sadiq (A.S) explains the concept of religion not being compulsory that compulsion is not in the essence of religion but in the absence of shawq: “One who lacks longing for divine vision is removed from the Divine Court, for shawq is the price of vision” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 38). This statement elevates shawq to a metaphysical criterion: without it, the soul cannot enter the realm of divine presence.

4.1.3. Shawq as the Existential Differentiator

In the classification of hearts, Imam al-Sadiq (A.S) distinguishes three types: “hearts of enmity (associated with Jews), hearts of hypocrisy (associated with those who worship falsehood inwardly), and hearts of love and longing (associated with true believers)” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 78). Only the third group—those whose hearts rest on the “carpet of love and longing”—are considered spiritually authentic. This ontological distinction places shawq at the center of spiritual legitimacy.

4.2. Epistemology of Shawq: Longing as a Bridge to Divine Vision

In the Tafsīr attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (A.S), shawq (longing) is not merely a spiritual emotion—it is an epistemic force that mediates between theoretical knowledge (ma’rifa) and experiential vision (ru’ya). It transforms abstract understanding into direct witnessing and serves as the inner propulsion toward divine unveiling. We review the documentation on this issue in the following cases.

4.2.1. Shawq as a Prerequisite for Ma’rifa and Mushāhada

In his interpretation of verse 6 of Surah al-Fatiha, “Guide us to the straight path” he interprets “guide us” (Ihdinā) as show us (Arinā), (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 7). He places longing (shawq) alongside repentance (tawba) and gratitude (shukr), suggesting that after repentance, union, and drawing near to divine satisfaction, divine vision (ru’ya) follows: “That is, show us the path of gnosis and witnessing... and show us the path of turning to You, longing, and gratitude, so that we may repent to You, find intimacy in reaching You, and draw near to Your satisfaction and vision. And when we see You, we have found the path to abiding with You through the remembrance of Your love...” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 7). Here, shawq is placed alongside tawbah (repentance) and shukr (gratitude) as a necessary condition for mushāhada (divine witnessing). This indicates that longing is not a passive yearning but an active epistemic state that enables vision.

4.2.2. Shawq as the Fruit of Divine Knowledge

In the exegesis of verse 22 of Surah al-Baqarah “We made the sky a canopy”, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) interprets the sky as the spiritual sovereignty of the saints and states: “And he adorned the hearts of his saints by bringing forth the fruits of longing.” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 12)

The “fruits of longing” are described as the inner manifestations of divine knowledge (ma’rifa) that blossom in the hearts of the elect. This metaphor suggests that shawq is both the product and the proof of true gnosis.

4.2.3. Shawq as the Medium of Crossing the Sea of Knowledge

In verse 50 of Surah al-Baqarah, “And [remember] when We parted the sea for you, and saved you and drowned Pharaoh’s people while you were looking on”, he interprets the word “sea” (baḥr) as gnosis (maʿrifa), suggesting that this knowledge and recognition is attained through longing (shawq) (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 17). This statement positions shawq as the epistemic vehicle that allows the seeker to traverse the depths of divine knowledge. Without longing, the sea of maʿrifa remains impassable.

This mystical reading transforms the historical event of the parting of the sea into a metaphor for spiritual awakening. The “sea” becomes a symbol of divine knowledge, and crossing it represents the soul’s journey from ignorance to illumination—driven by the force of shawq.

4.2.4. Shawq as the Inner Light of Revelation

Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S), in his commentary on the verse “Our Lord, do not place upon us a burden...” (al-Baqarah/286), interprets it as follows: “O Lord, place the lights of Your generosity upon us in proportion to our capacity, in such a way that bearing them does not cause us to burn. And if You place the light of Your longing (shawq) in our hearts, then grant us the patience to bear it, for we do not have the strength to endure the light of Your longing” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 44).

Here, shawq is described as a divine light (nūr) that requires spiritual endurance. This indicates that longing is not merely emotional—it is a form of illumination that reveals divine realities, but only to those capable of bearing its intensity. Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S) portrays shawq not just as a beautiful emotion, but as a powerful divine light—so intense that it can overwhelm the human heart unless tempered by divine mercy and patience. It is a plea for balance between divine attraction and human endurance.

4.3. Mystical Practice of Shawq: Longing as the Final Threshold of Wayfaring

In the Tafsīr attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (A.S), shawq (longing) is not merely a spiritual sentiment—it is a structured stage within the mystical journey (sulūk) that marks the culmination of inner transformation and the gateway to divine proximity. The narrations present shawq as both a path and a station, interwoven with prayer, repentance, love, and annihilation.

4.3.1. Shawq as the Final Stage of Ṣalāh (Prayer)

Imam al-Sadiq (A.S), in his commentary on verse 63 of Surah al-Jumuʿa, divides prayer (ṣalāh) into three categories: the prayer of the self (ṣalāh al-nafs), which is the abandonment of sins—whoever performs it will be saved; the prayer of the heart (ṣalāh al-qalb), which is the expression of virtues—whoever performs it will be answered; and the prayer of the spirit (ṣalāh al-rūḥ), which is steadfastness—whoever performs it will rejoice with longing (shawq) in the presence of the Beloved, with remembrance, on the Day of Resurrection (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 352). This indicates that the highest form of prayer is spiritual constancy (istiḳāmah) in shawq, which leads to joy in the presence of the Beloved on the Day of Resurrection.

This layered interpretation of prayer reflects a spiritual ascent in which the stages of devotion move progressively from the ethical to the mystical. At the level of the “self,” prayer is understood as a discipline of purification and moral restraint, shaping the believer’s conduct in accordance with divine law. At

the level of the “heart,” it becomes an act of inner refinement and moral excellence, cultivating sincerity and spiritual awareness. At the level of the “spirit,” prayer is experienced as mystical constancy and divine joy, a state in which the worshipper is sustained by the presence of God. The culmination of this ascent is ṣalāh al-rūḥ, the prayer of the spirit, which links longing (shawq) with eschatological bliss. In this final stage, prayer is no longer merely ritual or ethical practice but the ecstatic union of the soul with the Divine, anticipating the joy of eternal proximity in the hereafter.

4.3.2. Shawq as the Third ‘Aqaba (Spiritual Obstacle)

In a narration attributed to Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, three spiritual obstacles (‘Aqaba) are described: ‘Aqaba al-Wafā’ (loyalty), ‘Aqaba al-Faqr (poverty and detachment), and ‘Aqaba al-Shawq (longing). The third is considered the most difficult, and Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S) explains, “The third stage is shawq, which necessitates divine proximity” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 415). This positions shawq as the final threshold in the spiritual ascent, a stage that can only be traversed through divine proximity (qurb).

Similarly, in the interpretation of Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ, the concept of sharḥ (expansion) is articulated in three dimensions: sharḥ al-ṣadr by divine light, sharḥ al-qalb through love, and sharḥ al-wilāya through union. Together, these interpretations situate shawq within a broader mystical framework that links longing to the expansion of the soul and the realization of union with the Divine.

Imām al-Ṣādiq (A.S) identifies three manifestations of divine expansion, stating, “The expansion of the chest by the light of God is threefold: longing (shawq), union (wusla), and conversation (muḥādatha)” (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 443). In this formulation, shawq emerges as the first expression of divine illumination, preceding union (waṣl) and intimate conversation (muḥādatha). This progression outlines a mystical path of spiritual awakening in which the heart becomes illuminated by divine light through three transformative stages.

Longing represents the initial spark, a deep yearning for the Divine that arises when the soul becomes aware of its separation and desires reunion; in mystical literature, it is often described as the fire that purifies and propels the seeker forward. Union follows as the fulfillment of longing, a moment of closeness or intimacy with God in which the seeker experiences divine presence. Although not permanent, such flashes of union profoundly transform the soul. Finally, conversation constitutes the highest stage, where the seeker enters into intimate dialogue with the Divine, evoking the Qur’ānic image of Moses speaking with God (kallama Allāh Mūsā taklīmān). In this state, the heart becomes a vessel for divine wisdom, receiving inspiration and guidance, thereby completing the cycle of expansion through divine illumination.

This triad—shawq, wusla, muḥādatha—maps a mystical journey from desire to union to communion. It reflects the soul’s transformation as it moves from seeking God, to experiencing Him, to conversing with Him. Each stage deepens the expansion of the chest (sharḥ al-ṣadr), a Qur’ānic metaphor for spiritual openness and enlightenment (Attributed Tafsīr, 2013, p. 125).

4.3.3. Shawq as the Nourishment of the Divine Banquet

Imam al-Sadiq (A.S) identifies three manifestations of divine expansion, stating, “The expansion of the chest by the light of God is three fold: longing (shawq), union (waṣl), and

conversation (muḥādatha)” (*Attributed Tafsīr*, 2013, p. 443). In this formulation, shawq emerges as the first expression of divine illumination, preceding union (waṣl) and intimate conversation (muḥādatha). This progression outlines a mystical path of spiritual awakening in which the heart becomes illuminated by divine light through three transformative stages. Longing represents the initial spark, a deep yearning for the Divine that arises when the soul becomes aware of its separation and desires reunion; in mystical literature, it is often described as the fire that purifies and propels the seeker forward. Union follows as the fulfillment of longing, a moment of closeness or intimacy with God in which the seeker experiences divine presence. Although not permanent, such flashes of union profoundly transform the soul. Finally, conversation constitutes the highest stage, where the seeker enters into intimate dialogue with the Divine, evoking the Qur’anic image of Moses speaking with God (kallama Allāh Mūsā taklīmān). In this state, the heart becomes a vessel for divine wisdom, receiving inspiration and guidance, thereby completing the cycle of expansion through divine illumination.

4.4. Eschatology of Shawq: Longing as the Currency of Divine Vision

In the Tafsīr attributed to Imam al-Sadiq(A.S), shawq (longing) is not only a force in the present spiritual journey—it is also the decisive criterion in the eschatological destiny of the soul. The narrations emphasize that shawq determines one’s eligibility for divine vision (ru’ya) in the Hereafter, and that the Day of Resurrection is, for the true lover, the “Yawm al-Ru’ya al-Mawlā” (Day of the Vision of the Master).

4.4.1. Shawq as the Price of Divine Vision

In the attributed commentary, shawq (longing) is described as a key concept—regarded as the very platform of divine unity. This idea is intriguingly interpreted in connection with the verse “There is no compulsion in religion” (*Al-Baqarah/256*). The compulsion mentioned in this verse is not about the essence of religion itself, but rather about divine longing. A person who lacks the longing for divine encounter is removed from the divine presence. Indeed, there can be no compulsion for someone who does not sit upon the platform of divine longing, for shawq is the price of witnessing and beholding the Divine (*Attributed Tafsīr*, 2013, p. 38). This statement frames shawq as the existential currency for ru’ya in the Hereafter. Without longing, the soul is excluded from the divine court.

Though not a formal tafsīr, Rūmī’s Mathnavi often functions as a poetic exegesis. He interprets lā ikrahā fī al-dīn as a call to love, not law (*Rūmī*, 1957, p. 163). For Rūmī, shawq is the proof of divine presence—if you feel it, you are already near.

4.4.2. Shawq as the Soul’s Joy on the Day of Resurrection

In this tafsīr, shawq is not merely an emotional yearning—it is the spiritual qualification for entering the Divine Presence. On the Day of Resurrection, those who cultivated shawq in this life are rewarded with: Serenity (sakīna) in the presence of the Beloved, Joy (farh) from fulfilled longing and Witnessing (ru’ya) of divine beauty (*Attributed Tafsīr*, 2013, p. 352).

4.4.3. Shawq and the Vision of the Prophet in the Mi’rāj

In the story of the Prophet’s Mi’rāj (ascension), the theme of shawq (longing) emerges as one of the central discussions. In the attributed tafsīr, the Mi’rāj is described as unfolding in

three stages: from Mecca to the malakūt, the spiritual realm; from Medina to the jabarūt, the realm of divine power; and from birth to the Presence of the Exalted Lord. Within the malakūt, the Prophet witnessed divine wonders and the reality of wilāya (spiritual authority), while in the jabarūt he beheld his community and the station of shafā’a (intercession). Finally, in the Presence of the Exalted Lord, God drew him near, bestowed upon him His light, nourished him with the food of security, and offered him the wine of intimacy (sharāb al-uns). This layered depiction situates the Prophet’s ascent as a journey of longing and intimacy, culminating in divine proximity and union.

He became intoxicated with divine love, was filled with longing (shawq), and was honored with the vision (ru’ya) of God. While still drunk in love, he beheld the Divine. And when he emerged from the intoxication of love, he found himself back in his home, and his people were safe from all punishment. According to this narration, the divine vision granted to the Prophet during the Mi’rāj occurred in the realm of Jabarūt, and its nature was not physical sight but a form of spiritual, intuitive, and heartfelt witnessing (*Attributed Tafsīr*, 2013, p. 173).

This passage presents a deeply mystical reading of the Mi’rāj, emphasizing shawq as the spiritual force that draws the Prophet into divine intimacy and situates his ascent within a framework that resonates with classical Sufi teachings. The journey unfolds in three stages: the malakūt, the realm of symbols and spiritual mysteries, where the Prophet perceives divine wonders and the reality of wilāya (sainthood); the jabarūt, the realm of divine power and decree, where he witnesses the fate of his community and the station of shafā’a (intercession); and finally, the Divine Presence, the ultimate ascent in which he is intoxicated by love, filled with longing, and granted vision. This tripartite structure mirrors the Sufi path of fanā’ (annihilation in God), baqā’ (subsistence through God), and ru’ya (spiritual witnessing). Within this mystical framework, shawq is not portrayed as a passive emotion but as the active catalyst of vision, propelling the Prophet toward divine encounter. The vision attained is spiritual and intuitive rather than physical, echoing Ibn ‘is not assertion that ru’ya is a witnessing of the heart, not the eye (*Ibn ‘Arabi*, 1911, 3, p. 367). This experience is further symbolized by the sharāb al-uns, the wine of intimacy, through which the Prophet drinks, becomes intoxicated with love, and is drawn into longing, culminating in the gift of divine vision. Upon his return, he finds himself at home and his people safeguarded from punishment, suggesting that his mystical journey is not only a personal union with the Divine but also a source of mercy and protection for the entire community. In this way, the Mi’rāj is presented as a journey of love, longing, and divine intimacy, where the Prophet’s shawq leads him through realms of mystery and power into the heart of divine presence, and his vision is revealed not through the eye but through the soul—an intuitive unveiling granted through love.

4.4.4. Shawq as the Fire of the Righteous

In his commentary on the verse “Do not kill yourselves” (*Al-Nisa/ 29*), Imam al-Sadiq (A.S) states, “Whoever slays his ego in divine love and his heart in the fulfillment of God’s covenant is immersed in the fire of divine longing (shawq) and acquires divine light” (*Attributed Tafsīr*, 2013, p. 75). This “fire of longing” is not destructive but purifying and illuminating, preparing the soul for divine encounter in the Hereafter. The passage offers a mystical reinterpretation of a

Qur'anic legal verse, transforming it into a spiritual metaphor for self-annihilation in love and union through longing. To "slay the ego in divine love" recalls the Sufi concept of fanā' al-nafs, the annihilation of the lower self, for in Sufi literature the ego (nafs) is the veil between the seeker and God, and its death in love is the surrender that opens the way to divine presence. Al-Ghazālī captures this idea when he writes, "The death of the ego is the life of the heart" (Al-Ghazālī, 1961, pp. 12–25). Likewise, "slaying the heart in the fulfillment of God's covenant" suggests radical submission to divine will (qaḍā' wa qadar), where the heart—often seen as the seat of longing—is sacrificed in loyalty to the divine promise. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī expresses this in his Hikam: "The heart that dies in surrender is reborn in light" (Iskandarī, 1978, pp. 62–63). To be "immersed in the fire of divine longing" situates shawq as a transformative force, a fire that purifies rather than destroys. Rūmī frequently employs fire as a metaphor for love, declaring, "Love is the flame that burns away all but the Beloved" (Nicholson, 1957, pp. 163, 645). The culmination of this mystical death is the acquisition of divine light (nūr), illumination that signifies nearness to God. In Sufi cosmology, divine light is the reward of longing, and the Qur'an itself proclaims, "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (Al-Nur/35), a verse interpreted by mystics as the radiance that fills the heart of the lover.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the concept of shawq (longing) in the mystical tafsīr attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (A) constitutes a richly layered and multidimensional spiritual system. Far from being a mere emotional impulse, shawq emerges as a metaphysical orientation, epistemic bridge, mystical station, and eschatological criterion—deeply embedded within the architecture of Shi'i mystical theology. By organizing over fifty narrations into five thematic domains—ontology, epistemology, mystical wayfaring, visionary experience, and monotheistic theology—the article reveals how shawq functions as the soul's compass, directing it toward divine proximity and vision. Ontologically, shawq is the qibla of the soul, shaping its existential identity and distinguishing authentic spiritual hearts from those veiled by hypocrisy or enmity. Epistemologically, it serves as the inner propulsion that transforms abstract gnosis into direct witnessing (mushāhada), enabling the seeker to traverse the sea of divine knowledge and bear the light of divine revelation.

In the domain of mystical practice, shawq is portrayed as the final threshold of spiritual wayfaring—preceding union (wasl) and intimate conversation (muḥādatha) with the Divine. It is the culmination of prayer, the most difficult spiritual obstacle ('uqba), and the first spark of divine expansion (sharḥ). The narrations present shawq as both a path and a station, interwoven with repentance, love, and annihilation of the self. Eschatologically, shawq is elevated to the status of spiritual currency—required for entry into the Divine Court and for beholding the face of the Beloved in the Hereafter. It is the fire that purifies the righteous, the wine that intoxicates the Prophet during the Mi'rāj, and the joy that fills the soul on the Day of Resurrection. In this framework, longing is not a passive yearning but an active force that shapes the soul's destiny and proximity to the Divine.

The tafsīr attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (A.S) thus offers a distinctive Shi'i mystical theology of longing—one that resonates with classical Sufi treatments but also introduces unique metaphysical and esoteric dimensions. By situating

shawq within a structured conceptual system, this study bridges early Imami spirituality with broader Islamic mystical traditions, contributing to a deeper understanding of the metaphysics of love, vision, and divine intimacy. Ultimately, shawq in this tafsīr is not merely a state to be experienced—it is a transformative principle that defines the seeker's journey, illuminates the path of gnosis, and culminates in the vision of the Divine. It is the soul's cry, the heart's mirror, and the spirit's rejoicing—an eternal flame that guides the lover home.

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