



## A Comparative Analysis of Al-Hallaj's Hulul and Ibn Arabi's Wahdat al-Wujud: Similarities and Differences

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### ABSTRACT

This article is motivated by the desire to explore two significant concepts in Islamic Sufi thought: Hulul, popularized by Al-Hallaj, and Wahdat al-Wujud, developed by Ibn Arabi. It examines the mystical background within Islam and how these concepts interact with the broader religious tradition. The objective of this article is to identify the similarities and differences between the two concepts and their implications in both spiritual and philosophical contexts. The research employs a qualitative literature-based methodology that systematically analyzes primary classical works—such as *Kitab al-Tawasin* and *Futuh al-Makkiyyah*—and contemporary scholarly interpretations, complemented by semi-structured expert interviews to validate conceptual interpretations. Data were coded thematically to identify doctrinal patterns, ontological assumptions, and epistemological frameworks in both traditions. The population studied consists of the works of Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, along with the opinions of modern scholars. The findings indicate three key areas of convergence—namely experiential mysticism, the pursuit of divine proximity, and symbolic metaphysical language—while also revealing four fundamental divergences, particularly regarding the locus of divine manifestation, the nature of human–divine union, metaphysical ontology, and the epistemology of spiritual knowledge. The analytical techniques used involve qualitative and comprehensive analysis. These findings demonstrate that Al-Hallaj's Hulul emphasizes an existential experience of divine indwelling, whereas Ibn Arabi's Wahdat al-Wujud presents a structured metaphysical framework of existential unity, producing distinct spiritual and philosophical implications. The study concludes that these conceptual differences shape varying Sufi practices and interpretive traditions, influencing both ritual expression and theological discourse. The implications highlight how understanding these distinctions enriches contemporary analysis of Sufi spirituality and offers a clearer mapping of doctrinal development within Islamic mysticism.



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### INTRODUCTION

Sufism represents the inner dimension of Islam, emphasizing direct experience with God through the purification of the soul and spiritual discipline (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). Throughout its history, Sufism has evolved both in practice and in thought. Among the most controversial ideas in Sufi philosophy are the concepts of Hulul and Wahdat al-Wujud. Hulul, which developed through the figure of Al-Hallaj, implies that God can “descend” and “dwell” within certain human beings (Yusri & Zainal, 2025; Zhao & Wang, 2025). In contrast, Wahdat al-Wujud, formulated by Ibn Arabi, asserts that all existence is a manifestation of a single Absolute Being God (Salam & Sari, 2025). These ideas provoked strong reactions from scholars, both those who supported and those who opposed them. Imam al-Ghazali, for instance, although not explicitly endorsing Hulul, acknowledged that the spiritual experiences of Sufis often transcend the boundaries of language and conceptual thought.

Ibn Taymiyyah vehemently rejected the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud, arguing that it contradicted the principles of tawhid (the oneness of God). Meanwhile, figures such as Jalaluddin Rumi and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani adopted a more accommodating stance toward such spiritual dimensions (Okyar, 2023). Even scholars like al-Qushayri and al-Sarraj acknowledged that certain Sufi expressions should be understood esoterically rather than literally (Zhou & Ma, 2025). As noted by Annemarie Schimmel, Sufism is “the path toward existential nearness to God through deep inner experience and self-purification.” The Qur’an alludes to this inner dimension in Surah al-Baqarah (2:186):

عَاوَزَ إِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَا

“And when My servants ask you concerning Me—indeed, I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me.”

This verse illustrates that the closeness between humans and God is a spiritual goal attainable through the Sufi path.

A similar message appears in Surah Qaf (50:16):

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“And We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”

This reinforces the Sufi understanding that God’s presence is profoundly immanent, even while remaining transcendent in His essence.

Al-Hallaj (858–922 CE), the controversial Sufi martyr, is known for his iconic mystical expression “Ana al-Haqq” (“I am the Truth”). This statement reflects a profound spiritual experience that transcends the distinction between subject and object—between human and divine. According to Louis Massignon, Al-Hallaj did not intend to equate himself with God, but rather to express a state of total fana’ (annihilation of the self) in the Divine Presence (Amirian, 2025). This concept rests on the belief that when a servant reaches the highest spiritual station, their will is completely absorbed into the will of God. The Qur’an supports this idea in Surah al-Hadid (57:4):

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

“And He is with you wherever you are.”

This serves as a foundation for the understanding that God is not confined by space and is always present with His creation. A Hadith Qudsi narrated by al-Bukhari (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Riqaq, hadith no. 6502) states:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ:  
 إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَالَ: مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ آذَنْتُهُ بِالْحَرْبِ، وَمَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُ عَلَيْهِ، وَمَا يَرَاهُ عَبْدِي بِيَّ وَرَجُلَهُ الَّذِي يَتَّقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالْإِخْلَافِ حَتَّىٰ أَحِبَّهُ، فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ، كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ، وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا، وَيَمْشِي بِهَا، وَإِن سَأَلَنِي لَعَنَ طَيْبَتُهُ، وَلَئِن اسْتَعَاذَنِي لَعَنَ يَدِي

“My servant continues to draw near to Me through voluntary acts of worship until I love him. 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 (Mohammed & Khalid, 2025). If he asks of Me, I will surely grant him; and if he seeks My protection, I will surely protect him.”

On the other hand, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 CE), known as al-Shaykh al-Akbar (“The Greatest Master”), formulated a more comprehensive metaphysical framework through his doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud (“Unity of Being”). This doctrine asserts that all reality is a manifestation of a single absolute existence—God. According to Toshihiko Izutsu, Ibn Arabi’s perspective emphasizes that God is not merely the Creator but also the very substance of all that exists; the existence of all creatures is but a reflection of the Divine Existence. The Qur’an in Surah al-Hadid (57:3) declares:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَآلَ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden; and He is, of all things, Knowing.”

This verse illustrates both the transcendent and immanent aspects of God as interpreted by Ibn Arabi.

Though Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi came from different backgrounds and eras, both contributed fundamentally to the development of Sufi thought (Kojima, 2025). They also faced theological challenges and opposition from orthodox scholars who viewed their teachings as deviations from normative Islamic doctrine (Asriadi et al., 2023). Nonetheless, their intellectual legacy endures and remains the subject of ongoing study (Zhai & Li, 2025). As Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out, the mystical insights of thinkers such as Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi continue to serve as central pillars of Islamic spirituality, precisely because of their courage in exploring divine intimacy beyond literalist interpretations.

This research aims to critically explore and analyze the concepts of Hulul and Wahdat al-Wujud within their historical, theological, and philosophical contexts, while highlighting how these ideas interact within the epistemological framework of Sufism (Alzahrani, 2023). The main focus of this study is on their shared spiritual orientation and goal of attaining ma‘rifatullah (gnosis of God), as well as their differences in the ontology and metaphysics of being (Alimni et al., 2022). As emphasized by William C. Chittick, despite their differing approaches, both Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi guide spiritual seekers toward the deepest meaning of tawhid. This notion resonates with the Qur’an in Surah Ali ‘Imran (3:190–191):

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ ۱۹۰  
الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ  
هَذَا بَاطِلًا ۖ سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۱۹۱

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for people of understanding—those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, or lying on their sides and who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, ‘Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You, so protect us from the punishment of the Fire.’”

This verse underscores the importance of deep contemplation of creation and the Divine presence in all things.

The central questions raised in this study are: How can the concepts of Hulul and Wahdat al-Wujud be interpreted within the broader framework of Islamic thought? What are the philosophical and theological implications of these two concepts for the development of Islamic spirituality? And how have they contributed to the formation of Sufi identity (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025), both historically and in modern contexts? According to Harun Nasution, the development of mystical thought in Islam cannot be separated from the contributions of great Sufis such as Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, who provided profound insights into the essential relationship between the Creator and the created.

The purpose of this research is to systematically and scientifically compare these two concepts, identify the conceptual elements that differentiate or unify the views of Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, and analyze their influence on Sufi practice and understanding in the Islamic world. In this context, the Hadith Qudsi which states, : ۚ َعَرَفَ ِرَبَّهُ ِمَنْ َعَرَفَ ِنَفْسِهِ ۚ “Whoever knows himself knows his Lord” (man ‘arafa nafsahu faqad ‘arafa rabbahu), is often cited in Sufi discourse as the foundation for the search for self and divine essence—central themes in both thinkers’ philosophies.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to recontextualize the ideas of Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi within the current socio-religious dynamics of an increasingly pluralistic and secular world (Ayoub & Wani, 2025). In modern realities marked by existential alienation and spiritual fragmentation, Sufi concepts such as Hulul and Wahdat al-Wujud can offer an alternative worldview that is holistic, transcendental, and ethical. As Abd al-Karim al-Jili, a successor to Ibn Arabi’s thought, stated, true

spiritual reality can only be understood through inner experience that penetrates beyond outward forms (Choi, 2025; Jansen in de Wal et al., 2020). Thus, this research is not only significant in the academic context but also holds practical relevance in strengthening spiritual awareness, interreligious tolerance, and the meaning of life within an inclusive and profound Islamic framework.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method, as it aims to analyze the sufistic thoughts of classical Islamic figures, namely Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, through the examination of available primary and secondary textual sources. According to Lutz & Knox, (2014; McNabb, 2015), the qualitative approach is used to understand phenomena within their scholarly context through in-depth description, rather than through statistical figures. Meanwhile, Hillman & Radel, (2018; Migdal, 2018) defines library research as a method for collecting data and information from various relevant and authoritative sources to answer the research questions.

The research was conducted between February and May 2025. The data collection took place at the Library of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu, as well as through online access to international academic repositories and journals such as SpringerLink, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Iosifides, 2016) note that qualitative research is not confined to a specific physical location, but rather includes any setting that facilitates the exploration of accountable and scholarly literature sources.

The population of this research consists of all literature discussing the concepts of *hulul* and *wahdat al-wujud*, including books, journal articles, dissertations, and primary works of the key figures. The sample was selected using the purposive sampling technique, which involves choosing the most relevant and authoritative sources based on specific criteria. Daly, (2007; Longhofer et al., 2012) explains that purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on particular purposes and considerations closely related to the research focus. The criteria for the selected sources include:

- a. Written by scholars specializing in Sufism or Islamic philosophy;
- b. Containing direct discussions on Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi;
- c. Published by academic publishers or indexed journals;
- d. Free from excessive bias or polemical tendencies.

The main instrument in this study is the researcher, as in qualitative research, the researcher acts as the key instrument in data collection, interpretation, and analysis. As emphasized by Fife, (2020; Kawamura, 2020), “the key instrument is the researcher” because only humans are capable of understanding the social context, values, and meanings embedded in texts. To support objectivity, a text analysis guide was also used in the form of a thematic-conceptual table and theoretical indicators developed based on the foundations of Sufi theory.

The data analysis techniques applied were content analysis and comparative thematic analysis. Content analysis, was used to systematically and objectively interpret the meanings within the texts of Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and meanings within the two Sufi concepts, allowing the researcher to highlight their philosophical and theological similarities and differences. Finally, comparative analysis was conducted to construct a comparison of both concepts across the dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and spirituality.

To strengthen analytical rigor, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic procedure: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) theme development, (4) theme review, (5) theme naming, and (6) reporting. Coding was conducted manually using a predefined Sufi-theoretical coding frame, which ensured consistency in interpreting key ontological, epistemological, and spiritual constructs.

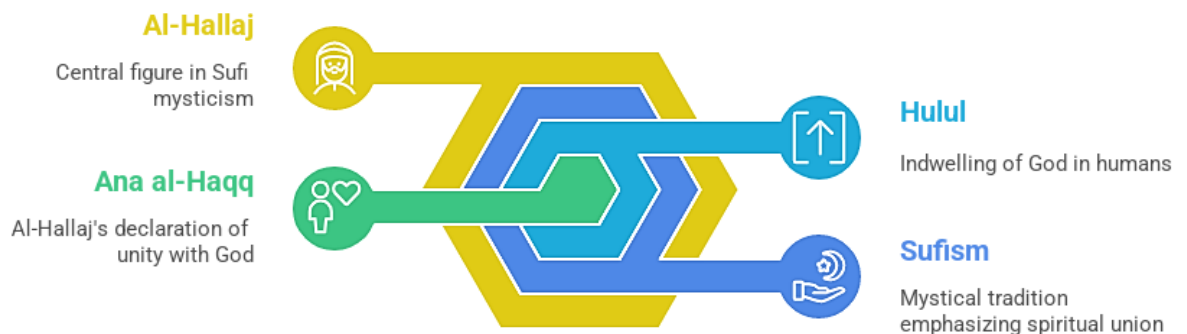
Validation strategies included (a) triangulation of sources by comparing classical manuscripts, modern academic interpretations, and expert commentaries; (b) peer debriefing with two scholars of Islamic mysticism to verify coding accuracy and eliminate interpretive bias; and (c) audit trail documentation to ensure transparency in analytical decisions throughout the research process.

Themes were derived through an iterative reading of primary texts—such as *Kitab al-Tawasin* and *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*—which were then compared across matched categories (e.g., divine-human relationship, metaphysics of existence, nature of spiritual experience). This procedure provided a clear and traceable pathway from textual evidence to thematic interpretation and ultimately to the comparative synthesis of the two doctrines.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Husayn ibn Mansur Al-Hallaj (858–922 M), a controversial Sufi mystic, is widely known for his famous mystical declaration: “Ana al-Haqq” (I am the Truth). In the Sufi context, *hulul* literally means “indwelling” or “inhabitation.” Terminologically, it refers to the belief that God can “dwell” within a human being who has attained the highest level of spirituality

### Sufi Mysticism and Hulul



Al-Hallaj expressed this state of mystical ecstasy as a form of *fana'* (annihilation of the ego) and *baqa'* (subsistence in God), wherein human will and attributes are completely dissolved into the Divine will. The statement “Ana al-Haqq” originated from the concept of Nur Muhammad “*Awalu ma khalaqallahu nuri*” (“The first thing that God created was my light”) the Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadiyyah*), which represents the primordial essence of creation and the source of all beings, even before the universe came into existence.

Al-Hallaj understood Nur Muhammad as the first manifestation of the Divine Will a light serving as an existential intermediary between the Absolute God and His infinite creation. For Al-Hallaj, Nur Muhammad was not merely a spiritual entity but the very essence of divine consciousness pervading the cosmos. In his *Tawasin al-Nubuwwah*, he wrote that the prophethood of Muhammad existed before the creation of the world, indicating that Muhammad is not merely a historical figure but the existential representation of Divine Truth itself.

In Al-Hallaj’s mysticism, the spiritual journey (*suluk*) toward God is a path of annihilating the self (*fana'*) within the Nur Muhammad, representing complete love and union. Through this Light, creation can witness Divine Beauty without losing its spiritual identity (Titihalawa et al., 2025). Al-Hallaj believed that knowing God must be attained through love and light, not mere intellect. Nur Muhammad serves as the bridge of *ma‘rifah* (gnosis), being the first emanation of the Divine Essence approachable by humans.

Thus, the declaration “Ana al-Haqq” can also be interpreted as *fana fi Nur Muhammad* the state in which Al-Hallaj no longer saw himself but only the Divine Light radiating through the Muhammadan Reality. According to him, Nur Muhammadiyah is the primordial light and the first metaphysical reality created by God, serving as the medium of Divine manifestation and as the existential reality guiding humanity toward true knowledge (*ma‘rifah*). *Fana'* within Nur Muhammad is, therefore, the deepest essence of spiritual experience.

This view is not rational-philosophical but experiential (*syathahat* and *kasyf*), best understood within the framework of *irfani* (gnostic) Sufism. The essence of Al-Hallaj’s *hulul* is beautifully expressed in his poetry:

*I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I;  
If you see me, you see Him, and if you see Him, you see me.  
I am the secret of the Truth, and the Truth is not I;  
I am but one of the Truth, so magnify Us as one.*

*Glory be to the One who manifests His humanity through His Divinity,  
Radiant and united together.  
His presence is revealed in His creation,  
So that the drinker and the eater behold His form,  
Until all creation sees Him  
As the meeting of two eyelids.  
I am the one who wills, and the one who wills is I;  
We are two souls dwelling in one body —  
When you see Him, you see Us both.*

This is not a literal claim to divinity but a symbolic expression of tajalli (Divine manifestation) a spiritual illumination in which human subjectivity is annihilated in the presence of God (Chittick, 1989). This understanding aligns with the Qur’anic verse in Surah Al-Hadid (57:4):

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

“And He is with you wherever you are.”

This verse forms the basis of the understanding that God is not confined by space and accompanies His creation in every state (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Likewise, Surah Qaf (50:16) states:

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”

This verse expresses God’s immanence within the human being. A hadith qudsi narrated by Al-Bukhari (No. 6502) reinforces this:

قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: وَمَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا أَفْتَرَضْتُهُ عَلَيْهِ، وَلَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالتَّوَافُلِ حَتَّىٰ أَجِبَهُ، فَإِذَا رَأَىٰ لَعُنُّ طَيْبُهُتِ يَدِي يَنْطِشُ بِهَا، وَرِجْلُهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا، وَإِنْ سَأَلَنَاهُ حَبِيبُهُ، كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ، وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْذُرُ بِهَا، وَلَئِنْ اسْتَعَاذَنِي لَعُنُّ يَدِي،

“When I love My servant, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks...”

This hadith establishes a spiritual foundation that, at the highest level of Divine love, human faculties operate under Divine will—not by literal union of essence but by spiritual alignment.

Classical Sufi scholars like Al-Qushayri in Risalah Qushayriyyah emphasized that Divine nearness is inward and metaphorical, not corporeal (Al-Qushayri, 2002). Al-Ghazali also affirmed that the soul can be flooded by Divine light, though he rejected the notion of ontological union between the Creator and creation (Warsah et al., 2021). Conversely, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Jawzi vehemently rejected hulul, considering it contrary to the principle of tawhid.

In irfani Sufism, as developed by Mulla Sadra and Abdul Karim al-Jili, hulul is not viewed as a substantial union but as the manifestation of Divine attributes within the insan kamil (Perfect Human) (Nasr, 2006). Thus, the experience of hulul represents not blasphemy but a metaphorical and symbolic attainment of the highest spiritual realization.

Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 CE), known as Shaykh al-Akbar, developed the metaphysical doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being), a cornerstone of philosophical Sufism. According to him, all existence has no true reality except through the Absolute Being of God (Arief et al., 2022). Only God possesses true existence (al-Wujud al-Haqiqi), while all created beings are mere reflections or manifestations (tajalliyat) of His essence.

In *Fusus al-Hikam* and *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah* (vol. II–III), Ibn Arabi emphasized that the universe is a mirror reflecting the Divine attributes emanating from al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023). He regarded Nur Muhammad not merely as the spiritual light of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but as the first and most comprehensive cosmic reality.

Within his metaphysical system, Ibn Arabi described Nur Muhammad as:

“Awwalu ma tajalla bihi al-Haqq li-dhatihi” —

“The first manifestation by which God revealed Himself.”

Thus, al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah represents the first self-disclosure (tajalli) of the unknowable God, serving as the intermediary between the Divine and all creation. Ibn Arabi equated this Nur Muhammad with the ‘Aql Awwal (First Intellect) in Islamic philosophy — the source of all beings, the medium through which God creates, and the perfect mirror reflecting the Divine Names and Attributes. In short, through Wahdat al-Wujud, Ibn Arabi viewed all existence as Divine self-disclosure, with Nur Muhammad being the first theophany. Everything in creation is, therefore, a form of Divine manifestation — the means by which God is known through His creation (Chittick, 1989). He cited Surah Al-Hadid (57:3):

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ ۗ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.” and Surah An-Nur (24:35):

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالرُّضَىٰ ۗ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِثْلَاكِ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ح...

“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.”

These verses illustrate that Divine Being encompasses all aspects of existence. Wahdat al-Wujud does not imply a literal union between God and creation but affirms that there is no independent existence apart from the Divine Being. As Surah Al-Baqarah (2:115) states:

فَأَيُّهَا تَوَلَّوْا فَنَّمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ

“Whichever way you turn, there is the Face of Allah.”

The Prophet’s hadith:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ آدَمَ عَلَىٰ صُورَتِهِ

“Indeed, Allah created Adam in His image” (Muslim, No. 2612) is interpreted esoterically by Sufis as meaning that the human being mirrors the attributes of God — aligning with the concept of insan kamil as the locus of Divine manifestation in the world. Ibn Arabi also highlighted maqam al-mahabbah (the station of Divine love), where through total proximity to God, man becomes the instrument of His will — a state again affirmed in the hadith qudsi:

“When I love him, I become his hearing, his sight...” (Bukhari, No. 6502).

Thus, Wahdat al-Wujud underscores the existential interconnectedness between God and creation within the framework of absolute monotheism (Kim & Kim, 2025). Similarities and Differences between Hulul and Wahdat al-Wujud Both doctrines emerge from profound mystical experiences emphasizing fana’, ittihad (union), and ma’rifah (gnosis). Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi alike

believed that true knowledge of God arises through *dhawq* (inner experience), not mere rationality. This perspective is supported by the Qur'anic verses such as Qaf (50:16):

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“We are nearer to him than his jugular vein,” and Al-Baqarah (2:186):

“I am near. I respond to the call of the caller.” These verses express God’s existential nearness. Both mystics interpreted such texts esoterically “He is with you wherever you are” (Al-Hadid 57:4) and “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth” (An-Nur 24:35) as affirming Divine immanence within creation. While *hulul* and *wahdat al-wujud* share this mystical foundation, they differ in scope and ontology. Al-Hallaj emphasized personal mystical union within individual experience an elite and ecstatic state accessible only to those who have reached *fana’* and *baqa’*. In contrast, Ibn Arabi proposed a universal metaphysics: all reality is a manifestation of the One Divine Being, without implying any literal union.

*Hulul* thus refers to a spiritual indwelling within the human self, while *Wahdat al-Wujud* is a cosmic and metaphysical doctrine portraying God as the singular reality encompassing all (Nismawati, 2025). Both, however, aim to bring the human being nearer to the Divine, albeit through differing theological and philosophical frameworks.

### Scholarly Commentary

Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 H) – In *Talbis Iblis*, he regarded Al-Hallaj’s ideas as deviant and his utterance “*Ana al-Haqq*” as audacious blasphemy, the result of satanic delusion.

Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) – The historian and hadith scholar harshly criticized *hulul*, stating that many scholars agreed Al-Hallaj had deviated and that his execution was justified under Sharia for claiming divine attributes.

Al-Ghazali (d. 505 H) – Though he did not endorse *hulul*, Al-Ghazali in *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din* warned against hastily condemning mystics, noting that such utterances may arise from ecstatic states (*syathahat*) beyond rational comprehension.

Al-Qushayri and Al-Sarraj – In *Risalah Qushayriyyah* and *Al-Luma’*, they distinguished between *hal* (temporary spiritual states) and *maqam* (spiritual stations), explaining that extreme mystical expressions may be symbolic rather than heretical.

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) – He rejected *Wahdat al-Wujud* as akin to pantheism, arguing that it violates *tawhid* and derives from Greek philosophical influence (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025).

Mulla Sadra (d. 1050 H) – A philosopher of the *Hikmah Muta‘aliyah* school, he deeply appreciated Ibn Arabi and reconciled *Wahdat al-Wujud* within a rational-intuitive framework through his doctrine of *ashalat al-wujud* (primacy of existence).

Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 672 H) – Although he did not use the term *Wahdat al-Wujud*, his *Mathnawi* is imbued with the same spirit of mystical union: “I belong to the Beloved, and the Beloved is I,” expressing unity through love and poetry.

Abdul Karim al-Jili (d. 832 H) – In *Al-Insan al-Kamil*, he systematized Ibn Arabi’s doctrine of the Perfect Man as the complete reflection of Divine attributes, manifesting Divine reality without being identical to the Divine Essence itself.

### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of *Hulul* proposed by Al-Hallaj and the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* developed by Ibn Arabi represent two distinct spiritual approaches in describing the relationship between human beings and God. Although both emerged from the Sufi tradition and aim to express existential closeness to the Almighty, their ontological and epistemological differences are

highly significant. The concept of Hulul emphasizes a literal union between God and human beings, leading to the interpretation that God “dwells” substantially within certain individuals who have attained the highest level of spiritual realization. This idea drew severe criticism from many scholars, such as Ibn al-Jawzi and Al-Dhahabi, who regarded it as a deviation from the core tenets of tawhid (the oneness of God).

In contrast, Wahdat al-Wujud, as formulated by Ibn Arabi, offers a metaphysical understanding that everything in existence is a manifestation of the One Absolute Being—God. According to his view, God does not unite physically with His creation; rather, all existence merely reflects the ultimate divine reality. This approach was supported by prominent figures such as Mulla Sadra, Abdul Karim al-Jili, and Jalaluddin Rumi, though it continued to receive criticism from theologians like Ibn Taymiyyah. Both concepts share similarities in their expression of mystical experiences, the use of symbolism, and the esoteric interpretation (ta’wil batin) of Qur’anic verses and Hadiths. However, differences in methodology, theological aims, and historical influence make each concept occupy a unique position and exert a distinct impact on the history of Islamic thought.

Within the framework of modern Islamic theology, a critical and contextual understanding of these two concepts can enrich the body of knowledge and foster a Sufi approach that remains consistent with the principles of tawhid. Therefore, rather than rejecting them outright or accepting them uncritically, it is essential to engage in deep reading, inter-school dialogue, and scholarly reflection when studying concepts such as Hulul and Wahdat al-Wujud.

The concept of Hulul has been largely rejected because it is seen as implying a substantial union between man and God, thus threatening the purity of tawhid. Meanwhile, Wahdat al-Wujud, although also criticized, has been defended and further developed by many eminent scholars and Islamic philosophers, as it is viewed as a philosophical and metaphysical symbolization of God’s unity that remains aligned with the principles of tawhid.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest in the preparation of this article. However, within the academic framework that upholds scientific integrity and objectivity, it is important to outline potential points of sensitivity that may influence the interpretation of the two major figures in the history of Sufism.

### **Theological and Sectarian Inclinations.**

This research may be influenced by theological affiliations, particularly in understanding philosophical Sufism doctrines such as hulul and wahdat al-wujud. Some circles categorize Al-Hallaj’s views as deviating from mainstream creed, while Ibn Arabi is accepted by others through interpretive (ta’wil) approaches. The author strives to maintain an objective distance from such tendencies by prioritizing an epistemological framework that is fair and balanced.

### **Institutional and Academic Interests.**

This article is written in an academic context without any institutional or external intervention that could influence the direction, substance, or conclusions of the study. All evaluations of the doctrines of hulul and wahdat al-wujud are entirely based on authentic primary and secondary sources, verified through accountable scientific methods.

### **Influence of Personal Spiritual Traditions.**

Given that this study touches upon the subtle and subjective aspects of Islamic mysticism, there exists a potential bias stemming from the author’s personal spiritual experiences or preferences. Therefore, the author affirms that all analyses are conducted within an academic framework, with the utmost effort to avoid mixing personal affective elements with the scientific construction presented in this article.

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