

***RABITA AS A TECHNOLOGY OF THE SELF AND A SELF-CARE
PRACTICE IN SUFISM: THE CASE OF THE İSKENDERPAŞA
COMMUNITY***

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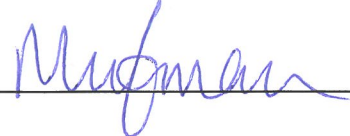
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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Cultural Studies.

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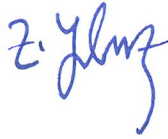
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ABSTRACT

RABITA AS A TECHNOLOGY OF THE SELF AND A SELF-CARE PRACTICE IN SUFISM: THE CASE OF THE İSKENDERPAŞA COMMUNITY

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This thesis examines the Sufi notion *rabita* as a “technology of the self” and a “self-care” practice in Sufism from a Foucauldian perspective. *Rabita* (the full name is *Rabita-i Şerife*) is a kind of meditational practice peculiar to the Naqshbandiyya and is divided into three categories: *rabita-ı mevt* (contemplation of death), *rabita-ı mürşid* (contemplation of/connection with the sheik), and *rabita-ı huzur* (contemplation of/connection with God). Apart from its theological roots, *rabita* as a daily meditation duty is of substantial relevance to Sufi philosophy with regard to the purification of heart, the cultivation of the self as an ethical subject, and the quest for the esoteric knowledge of God through purified hearts. The Foucauldian perspective for evaluating how the self is constructed through certain technologies is beneficial for the insights it offers into the implications of *rabita* as a method of self-cultivation. For this purpose, I benefit from three methods of qualitative research: discourse analysis, deep interviews, and participant observation. The results of this research reveal that *rabita* as a self-care practice is constructed upon certain discursive mechanisms, each of which interacts with the others in a way that forms a discursive unity. Common discursive regularities and strategies constitute the Sufi discourse (in particular the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa discourse) and institutionalize *rabita* as a discursive technology of self-care. Besides these discursive and performative strategies that construct *rabita* as a self-care practice, some further discursive strategies and “modes of subjection” are also significant in transforming disciples into ethical subjects. Accordingly, this study aims to provide a preliminary contribution to

the academic literature by focusing on one of the most recognized notions in Sufi tradition from a different philosophical perspective.

Keywords: *Rabıta*, technology of the self, self-care, İskenderpaşa Community, Sufism, ethics.



ÖZ

TASAVVUFTA BİR BENLİK TEKNOLOJİSİ OLARAK *RABİTA*: İSKENDERPAŞA CEMAATI ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu tez, tasavvuf geleneğindeki rabita kavramını, Foucault'nun kavramsal çerçevesi içerisinde bir "benlik teknolojisi" olarak incelemektedir. Nakşibendi tarikatına özgü, tefekküre dayalı bir terbiye metodu olan rabita (tam adı Rabita-i Şerife); rabita-i mevt (ölüm tefekkürü), rabita-i mürşid (şeyh ile kalbî bağlantı kurmak) ve rabita-i huzur (Allah'ın huzurunda olduğunu tefekkür etmek) olmak üzere üç ana kategoriye ayrılır. Nakşibendi tarikatında müritlere günlük ders olarak verilen bu rabitalar sayesinde müritler nefis tezkiyesi ve kalp temizliği yoluyla Allah'a yakınlaşmaya ve marifetullahı erişmeye çalışır. Kişinin kendini bilmesi ve öznenin etik kurulumu konularında Foucault tarafından kavramsallaştırılan "benlik teknolojileri", Nakşi müritlerin rabita vasıtasıyla inşa ettiği söylemlerin ve etik öznelliklerin anlaşılması açısından önemli teorik açılımlar sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada, üç temel nitel araştırma metodundan (söylem analizi, derin mülakat, katılımcı gözlem) faydalanılarak söz konusu söylem ve öznelliklerin inşa süreçleri -özellikle Nakşibendi-İskenderpaşa cemaati bağlamında- incelenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, rabitanın her biri birbiriyle söylemsel bir bütünlük oluşturacak şekilde etkileşime giren belirli söylem mekanizmalarına dayalı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Rabita, bu söylemsel düzenlilikler ve ortak söylem stratejileri aracılığıyla bir benlik teknolojisi olarak inşa edilmekte ve kurumsallaştırılmaktadır. Araştırmada ayrıca müritlerin benlik inşa süreçleri, etik öznenin kurulumu ve belirli "öznellik formları" temelinde analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, tasavvuf geleneğinde tanınmış kavramlardan biri olan rabita pratiğine farklı bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşarak akademik literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rabıta, benlik teknolojileri, etik, İskenderpařa Cemaati, tasavvuf, etik özne kurulumu.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Indeed, he succeeds who purifies his own self”

(the Quran, 91:9)

1.1. Topic & Rationale of the Thesis

This thesis uses a Foucauldian perspective to examine the Sufi notion of *rabīta*, a kind of meditational practice found in some Islamic Sufi groups, as a technology of self-care in Sufism. *Rabīta* is a kind of meditational/contemplative practice peculiar to Naqshbandiyya. Its full name is *Rabīta-i Şerife* and it is divided into three sub-categories, which are *rabīta-i mevt* (the contemplation of death), *rabīta-i mürşid* (contemplation of/connection with the sheik), and *rabīta-i huzur* (contemplation of/connection with God). Frequently used for the cultivation of Sufi individuals in the Naqshbandi orders, *rabīta* has a certain significance for the Sufi disciples because it is one of the most effective and immediate methods for disciplining and transforming the self. By means of performing *rabīta* practices, disciples can make great progress in purifying their hearts and refashioning themselves in a way that brings them closer to God. Since it is such a crucial notion for Naqshbandi individuals, Islamic literature includes various written and oral sources that discuss it, as examined in more detail below. These sources are substantially devoted to theological descriptions or argumentations, and most of the time they only concern the theological legitimacy of the practice’s existence. However, *rabīta* should not be considered merely as a religious service that can only be understood via theological argumentation.

Apart from its theological roots, *rabīta* is of substantial relevance to Sufi philosophy with regard to the purification of heart, the cultivation of the self as an ethical subject, and the quest for the esoteric knowledge of God through purified hearts. Within this context, *rabīta* as a daily meditation duty emerges as a philosophical practice that aims to go beyond the limitations of ordinary religious services. Thus, its implications for the construction of self in Sufism are open for very enlightening and profound

discussions. The perspective of Foucault is useful at this point, since he puts forward a remarkably illuminative methodological framework for evaluating how the self is constructed through certain technologies. Nevertheless, no studies have addressed the implications of *rabita* as a method of self-cultivation from such a Foucauldian perspective. As a Naqshi disciple who tries to practice *rabita* in my daily life, I was drawn to this gap in the existing literature during my graduate study, and my interest in the subject grew as I worked on it. Hence, I believe this study provides a preliminary contribution to the academic literature on Sufism and cultural studies by focusing on one of the most recognized notions in Sufi tradition from a different philosophical perspective.

1.2. Research Questions

The main research question of the thesis can be formulated as follows: How can we conceptualize the Sufi notion of *rabita* as a technology of the self and a philosophical practice of self-care from a Foucauldian perspective?

While investigating *rabita* in this context, I will initially seek answers to questions on the importance of *rabita* in Sufi philosophy: What makes *rabita* a crucial concept in Sufi philosophy? Then, I will investigate how this practice functions as a technology of the self through certain self-disciplining and self-cultivation methods in the Naqshbandi tariqa. In order to understand this, I will discuss how Foucault conceptualizes “technologies of the self” and “self-care” in the first place. Afterwards, I will examine what kind of parallelisms or differences exist between the Foucauldian conceptualizations and Sufi philosophy with regard to transforming and disciplining the self. In other words, how can we analyze the various *rabita* practices in comparison to the Foucauldian examples of self-care technologies? How can we analyze *rabita* as the ethical work of purifying the heart, the soul, and the *nafs* in order to re-fashion Sufi individuals as ethical subjects?¹

¹ The word *nafs* entails the meaning “soul” yet its meaning is not limited to soul, as discussed in Chapter 3; therefore, I have decided to keep word *nafs* as it is so as to refer to the broad range of meanings.

In accordance with these questions, I will investigate other related topics to be able to present a broader and more comprehensive analytical framework. Some of the prominent questions in this regard are: Is there a common ground between ancient Greco-Roman and Sufi philosophies in terms of the self-care technologies they employ? What are some of the similarities and differences between these two cultures in terms of disciplining the self? How can we analyze the relationship between “knowledge of God,” “knowledge of the self,” and “care of the self”? To what extent are the viewpoints and practices of the Sufi and the Greco-Roman philosophies compatible with each other in this context? After presenting a general historical framework to explain the roots of *rabīta*, I will also investigate how it is practiced by Sufi individuals in contemporary Turkey. For this purpose, I will focus mainly on the contemporary Naqshī disciples who are members of a specific tariqa in Turkey -i.e., the İskenderpaşa Community- to find out the real life experiences about how the members of this tariqa cultivate themselves as ethical Sufi subjects by means of practicing *rabīta* every day.

1.3. Literature Review

Because the thesis deals with the Sufi –more precisely Naqshī- notion of *rabīta* from a Foucauldian perspective, the main literature of the thesis is primarily divided into two broad categories; the Naqshbandiyya and its İskenderpaşa branch, and the *rabīta* on the one hand, and Foucauldian studies, on the other.

1.3.1. The Naqshbandiyya, the İskenderpaşa Branch, and *Rabīta*

Since *rabīta* as a disciplinary method in Sufism is most widely accepted and practiced by the Naqshbandiyya, the first section of this chapter is devoted to a basic account of Naqshbandi philosophy. One of the most significant offshoots of the order in Turkey is the Naqshī-Khalidi branch under the sheik Muharrem Nureddin ibn Mahmud Esad; this branch is generally known as the İskenderpaşa Community, for its center is located in the İskenderpaşa district of Istanbul. My analysis of *rabīta* in this thesis is mostly based upon the sources, practices and members of this branch. Thus the second, more specific, literature in this context concerns the İskenderpaşa

Community. Finally, the literature on the *rabita* needs to be evaluated so as to contextualize the *rabita* analyses of this thesis properly.

The Naqshbandiyya is one of the oldest and most widespread Sufi orders. It was founded in the fourteenth century, and gradually spread all over the world. In the contemporary world, the tariqa has flourished, attracting followers from all around the globe who belong to different offshoots of the same tariqa. Since this is such a widespread and long-lasting Sufi path, there has been a great deal of research on this order and its various branches. Studies on the Naqshbandiyya have been published in many different languages including Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, English, German, French, Uzbek, Pashtu, Bengali, Malay, Chinese, and Russian. However, discussing all these sources is not possible. In what follows, I restrict my focus to evaluating and classifying only the most well known and important of the studies and reference books about this tariqa that are relevant for this dissertation.

There are two basic types of literature on the Naqshbandiyya. The first type deals with the Naqshbandi tariqa from a descriptive perspective. These sources focus on the tariqa's development around the world and its specific characteristics within a historical context. Such descriptive sources introduce the tariqa, its historical background, major movements, offshoots, basic principles, and methods, as well as the tariqa's location within the general body of Sufi traditions. We could further divide these descriptive sources into two groups in terms of their contents and point of view. Among these descriptive sources, the first group consists of books that cover the history of Sufism and the major tariqas in the Islamic world. Many of these books share the same perspective, even the same title, in this sense. Some noteworthy examples of this dominant trend in Turkish include Mustafa Kara (*Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar Tarihi*, 1985), Cavit Sunar (*Ana Hatlarıyla İslam Tasavvufu Tarihi*, 1978), Osman Türer (*Ana Hatlarıyla Tasavvuf Tarihi*, 1995), and Selçuk Eraydın (*Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar*, 1994). After explaining the history and the terminology of Sufism in general, these sources sketch out a basic framework for the Naqshbandiyya and briefly introduce the tariqa in one or several pages. These sources concentrate on

how the tariqa was formed, who its the prominent sheiks and branches are, and what its basic principles are.

The second group of this descriptive literature deals particularly with the Naqshbandiyya order itself. One of the most frequently referenced sources in this regard is the work of Muhammed Hisham Kabbani (*The Naqshbandi Sufi Way: History and Guidebook of the Saints of the Golden Chain*, 1995), where he thoroughly explains and comments on the basic Naqshi principles and highlights the doctrines, development, and primary scholars of the tariqa, with attention to the saints of the chain that links the tariqa to his own path, recently led by Muhammed Nazim Adil al-Haqqani. Kabbani also talks about the Naqshbandi ways of dhikr and other spiritual practices and provides a glossary as well. Another example of one of the more popular books in this body of literature is Itzchak Weissmann's book (*The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and activism in a worldwide Sufi tradition*, 2007), in which he also tries to understand the status of the tariqa within the broader Sufi movement and examines the characteristics of the tariqa's offshoots in various regions across the world, looking at the genealogies and headquarters of these offshoots as well. While looking at the historical development of the tariqa from the beginning, the book also examines the ways its members cope with modernist and postmodernist challenges, and tries to analyze the position of the tariqa in the context of orthodoxy and activism within Sufi movements generally. The distinctive character of this study is that it is based upon fieldwork and onsite observations in addition to printed sources.

Among the other frequently cited sources in Turkey on the Naqshbandiyya in particular are works by Hamid Algar (*Nakşibendilik*, 2007) and Necdet Tosun (*Bahaeddin Nakşibend, Hayatı, Görüşleri, Tarikatı* [Bahaeddin Naqshband's life, views and tariqa], 2002). The book by Hamid Algar, a specialist on Naqshbandiyya, offers comprehensive and detailed information about the tariqa's development in time. After briefly presenting the historical, political, and social context of the tariqa, Algar focuses on the formation of the Naqshbandiyya in the early period, the Naqshbandiyya orders in Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, and the Balkans, and finally

describing some noteworthy sheiks of the tariqa. The second book, by Necdet Tosun, also deals with the Naqshbandiyya, but the book begins with the descriptions of *Hacegan* (or *Khwajagan*) Sufis, who include the early period Naqshi groups. Unlike Algar, Tosun concentrates on Bahaeddin Naqshband, the founder of the Naqshbandiyya, focusing on biographical details of the founding sheiks in the first chapters. Later, Tosun also talks about basic Sufi terminology and the tariqa's social and political relationship with the other Sufi formations as well as governments. As mentioned before, the common outstanding feature of books of this kind is that they are primarily descriptive and most of the time do not go beyond this descriptive approach. Algar and Tosun are something of an exception in this regard, in that they also talk about the tariqa's social and political engagements. In other words, the basic purpose of this literature is to depict the Naqshbandiyya from various aspects. The bibliographies of books of this type can serve as beneficial guides for further information.

While theological studies on the Naqshbandiyya are mostly descriptive accounts that offer introductory information about the tariqa, there is another body of literature that either focuses on regional organizations or adopts some other specific perspective, such as the evaluation of the tariqa in terms of socio-cultural, political, or philosophical problematizations.

Studies that focus on the regional formations of the tariqa include Elisabeth Özdalga's *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia* (1999) and Martin van Bruinessen's articles "The Naqshbandi Order in 17th century Kurdistan" (van Bruinessen, 1990a) and "The Origins and Development of the Naqshbandi Order in Indonesia" (van Bruinessen, 1990b). Another example of this literature in Turkey is *Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumlar* (Verse and slogan: Islamic formations in Turkey) by Ruşen Çakır (1990), which focuses on the tariqa's socio-political engagements within Turkey. Based upon various periodicals, newspapers, and books about the Muslim communities in Turkey, Ruşen Çakır's book examines several leading Islamic formations and leaders in Turkey, such as the İskenderpaşa Community (discussed in more detail below), the İsmail Ağa community, the Nurcular community led by

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, the Süleymancılar community, and the Kadirî community, and tries to distinguish these formations in terms of the contemporary ideological, political, and organizational contexts of Turkey.

Another book by Hisham Kabbani (*Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition*, 2003) also belongs to the body of descriptive literature because of its explanatory content, academic approach, and special emphasis on academic studies that have been carried out until now. After writing about the principles and saints of the Naqshbandiyya, Kabbani presents a detailed coverage of the scientific observations of spirituality in the Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya order in some major universities including Harvard University, University of Birmingham, Howard University, and, most particularly, the University of Berne. In these evaluations, Kabbani focuses on various academic criteria such as literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, basic findings, and discussions of the studies at these universities. Afterwards, he devotes two other sections to the doctrinal foundations Sufi philosophy and to the Naqshbandi way of dhikr and performing spiritual practices. Herein, the focal point might seem to be the Haqqaniyya order, yet this order closely follows the general Naqshbandi principles in a way similar to other orders, including the Halidiyya order and the İskenderpaşa Community.

Aside from these descriptive studies, the second distinguished body of literature about the Naqshbandiyya consists of the studies that approach the tariqa from analytical and/or critical perspectives to contextualize the tariqa in a different context rather than merely giving introductory or explanatory information. These studies are, fewer in number, and include discussions of the tariqa's specific orders, their characteristics, political alignments, socio-economic relations, social contexts, etc. For example, Tayfun Atay (*Batı'da bir Nakşi Cemaati: Şeyh Nâzım Kıbrısî Örneği* [A Naqshi tariqa in the West: the case of Sheik Nazım Kıbrısî], 2011) talks specifically about the Naqshi sheik Nazım Kıbrısî and his followers living in Britain, arguing that this Naqshi group represents an interesting case of the meeting Islam with modernity. Another book translated by Ahmed Hulusi (*Gavsıye açıklaması: Nakşibendilikte Vahdet Görüşü* [Explanation of *Gavsıye*: the understanding of unity in the

Naqshbandiyya], 2014) talks about the Naqshi philosophy regarding the uniqueness of God put forward by esteemed Abdülkadir Geylani, one of the first and most esteemed Naqshi sheiks. The book mainly suggests that the concept of unity (*vahdet*) in Sufism and the Naqshbandiyya should be evaluated in terms of the unity of God and the universe, as regards His name al-Ahad (the One), contrary to the interpretations that consider God as a separate entity beyond the universe.

Some further examples of analytical literature in Turkey include books that discuss the Naqshbandiyya in socio-political contexts, such as Şerif Mardin's books *Türkiye'de Din ve Siyaset* (1991), *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi Olayı: Modern Türkiye'de din ve toplumsal değişim* (1992), and *Türkiye, İslam ve Sekülerizm* (2011). According to Mardin, the Naqshbandiyya is one of the pillars of the formation of modern Turkey, as it nurtures a philosophy and a Muslim community that has transformed and will continue to shape the perceptions of religion and Islam in Turkey by means of its political and social alignments.

In addition, Hamid Algar also discusses the political and social status of the tariqa in his above-mentioned book *Nakşibendilik*, focusing on its formations in the Ottoman Empire, its perception by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, and its socio-political transformations in the Republic of Turkey. Dina le Gall's research (*A Culture of Sufism*, 2005) deals with Sufi philosophy from an analytical perspective. This book starts with an introductory section in which she examines the dissemination of the tariqa, just like in descriptive books. However, the second part of the book is important in terms of its analyses because le Gall tries to understand and evaluate how the Naqshbandi tariqa constructed itself as a tariqa in the Ottoman world. While trying to analyze the formation of this tariqa, she focuses on the politics and culture of the tariqa. Among the most significant aspects highlighted in the book are the construction of orthodoxy via devotional practices, the politics of Sunnism in the Ottoman environment, and the organizational and cultural modes of the tariqa, such as *rabıta*, spiritual authority, travel, language, and network practices.

1.3.2. The İskenderpaşa Community

Having discussed the prominent literature about Naqshbandiyya in general, I now turn to briefly examine the literature about the İskenderpaşa Community in particular. A prominent offshoot of Naqshbandiyya in Turkey, the İskenderpaşa Community is attached to the Gümüşhaneviyye branch of the Khalidiyya order in the Naqshbandi tariqa (Coşan, 2016). The only study that is purely dedicated to İskenderpaşa is that of Brian Silverstein, but several books mention or examine this community as part of larger accounts about the Naqshbandiyya or Islamic communities as a whole.

The İskenderpaşa Community headquarters are located in Fatih, Istanbul. Thus, the majority of literature about the community is related to Turkish contexts. One of the prominent studies that talk about this order is that of Mustafa Kara (*Metinlerle Günümüz Tasavvuf Hareketleri* [Readings from contemporary Sufi movements], 2002). In this book, as the title reveals, the contemporary situation of leading Sufi movements in Turkey are discussed starting from the Tanzimat reform era in the Ottoman Empire until a couple of years ago from now. As it thoroughly examines and analyzes the situation of Sufi movements within the socio-political and socio-economic context of Turkey, with particular attention to the ban on dervish lodges, this work is an enlightening account of the contemporary dynamics of Islamic communities in Turkey. Within this context, the İskenderpaşa Community is also analyzed in the book, specifically in terms of the socio-political stances and ideas of esteemed Mehmed Zahid Kotku and esteemed Mahmud Esad Coşan, two of the most influential and well-known sheiks of the İskenderpaşa Community in recent years.

In a similar fashion, Ruşen Çakır's above-mentioned book (*Ayet ve Slogan*) also examines Islamic movements in modern Turkey. While Mustafa Kara presents a more comprehensive and multi-perspective approach, Ruşen Çakır primarily deals with the political, ideological, and organizational aspects of some leading movements in Turkey from a more speculative approach. In his book, the İskenderpaşa Community is discussed in detail, again with a special focus on esteemed Mehmed Zahid Kotku

and esteemed Mahmud Esad Coşan; Çakır evaluates this order as an example of “modernized tradition” (1990: 17).

This idea of “modernized tradition” is in fact not peculiar to Ruşen Çakır. In the Naqshbandi tariqa literature, the İskenderpaşa Community is portrayed as having a particular emphasis on knowledge, progress, modernization, and active involvement in a number of areas in the society. These areas range from literature to media and from academia to politics, as can be exemplified in their periodicals, newspapers, radio broadcasts, seminar activities, and social and economic initiatives. Brian Silverstein highlights the significance of knowledge and progress in the community, thus:

Knowledge per se is, in fact, something Esad Coşan has cultivated almost as a virtue, and many observers have commented on the disproportional percentage of members who have completed a university education. Indeed, in the eyes of many other orders, the Iskender Pasha group is quite intellectual and scholarly. (*Islam and Modernity*, 2011: 152)

Likewise, Itzhak Weismann states that the İskenderpaşa Community, particularly under M. Esad Coşan, has promoted the development of an “educational, economic, and communications network, while advocating peaceful adjustment to the modern state and the capitalist market” (2007: 153-154). A further example of these observations can be encountered again in Silverstein:

The Iskender Pasha community, and the exceptionally high training and competence of the cadres, their own adherence to Islamic norms in their personal lives, and their attempt to fashion a politically liberal Muslim society can be seen, at least in part, as a legacy of their İskender Pasha experience. (*Islam and Modernity*, 2011: 107)

In addition to these studies on the İskenderpaşa Community, there is also rich literature on *rabita* as well.

1.3.3. Rabita

Many theological or religious sources such as the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad or scholarly books such as *Ölüm* (1994) by Mehmed Zahid Kotku mention the importance of the contemplation of death, since it is something promoted by the

Quran in order to make Muslims aware of their mortality and the ephemerality of this world.² The contemplation of death has a function of keeping Muslims alert in avoiding a sinful life, thus, it is often advised to Muslims as a whole. The practice of *rabita-i mevt* also serves the same purpose, yet the underlying philosophy of this practice in Sufism is multidimensional and deeper than it seems, as will be analyzed in the fourth chapter. Hence, the philosophy of death in Sufism involves more than simply the importance of thinking about death.

Another example might also be given regarding *rabita-i huzur*. In general, it is not difficult to encounter literature that talks about the importance of establishing close connections with God in Sufism; however, studies that deal with *rabita-i huzur* as a systematized Sufi practice for establishing that connection are quite rare. In a book by Hisham Kabbani (*The Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition Guidebook of Daily Practices and Devotions*, 2004), for instance, Sufi practices and philosophy (including *rabita*) are openly and clearly explained; nonetheless, *rabita* is mentioned only within the context of the spiritual connection established with one's sheik. At certain points, closeness to God is highlighted, as in the remarks "*rabitah* is the shortest way to reach to Divine Presence" or "Sit on the knees, meditating on the connection (*rabitah*) to your shayk, from your shayk to the Prophet, and from the Prophet to the Divine Presence" (2004: 167-176). In fact, reaching and being in the Divine Presence is the goal of *rabita-i huzur* (*huzur* meaning "presence" as well as "peace") in the Naqshi Sufi philosophy, yet most Naqshi sources do not explicitly mention or discuss this practice.

There are two basic types of secondary literature concerning *rabita*. The first type deals with *rabita* specifically and scrutinizes its position in Sufi philosophy from either a descriptive or an analytical perspective. The second type considers *rabita* as one of the significant spiritual practices for the Naqshbandiyya and explains or briefly describes this notion as part of other general Naqshi/Sufi principles or practices. One common characteristic of both types of literature is that they evaluate *rabita* only

² "Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'Remember often the destroyer of pleasures,' by which he meant death" (Sunan ibn Majah, 4258).

within the context of binding the heart with the sheik (i.e., *rabita-i mürşid*) ignoring sub-categories of this *rabita* (i.e., *rabita-i mevt* -contemplation of death- and *rabita-i huzur* -connection with God, contemplation of being before Him). Among the sources I have evaluated, only three books (Selvi, Yıldırım, Yıldız, K. & Yıldız Ö, 1994; Selvi, 2012; and Türer, 1995) mention other types of *rabita*, including *rabita-i mevt* and *rabita-i huzur*, yet even then, these latter types of *rabita* are described only briefly or only in passing.

Dilaver Selvi's books are a beneficial and reliable reference for *rabita* studies because he presents a quite comprehensive and objective study regarding this practice. In these sources, Selvi first of all writes about the status of *rabita* within the Quran and Sunnah. Following the development of *rabita* throughout Sufi philosophy's transformation in time, he thoroughly describes various types and manners of practicing *rabita* and the main primary sources about this practice. Selvi's books are distinguished from others in that he gives a wider coverage of *rabita-i mevt*, with references to the Quran, Sunnah, and the teachings of some prominent Sufi leaders such as Imam Ghazali and Fethullah Verkanisi (Selvi, Yıldırım, Yıldız, K. & Yıldız Ö, 1994: 59-62), whereas Türer only describes the three types of *rabita* only in a couple of sentences (1995: 129-133).

As for the literature that deals with *rabita* specifically, one noteworthy study is the master's thesis "Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlarda Rabita" [*Rabita* in Sufism and tariqas] by Yavuz Yücel (1993). Yücel begins with an introduction of Sufism, continues with the development of tariqas in the course of time, and ends with a section devoted to *rabita*. In this section, he describes the term by giving references from the Quran and Sunnah, examines the legitimacy of *rabita* in the Naqshbandiyya tradition, and dwells upon the manners of spiritual connection with the sheik. He focuses on only *rabita-i mürşid* and the ways of it is performed.

Also of the first type, the studies of Aydın (1996) and Butrus Abu-Manneh (1990b: 289-302) are further discussed below within the context of controversies regarding

rabita, as the common and leading features of these bodies of literature are mainly built upon criticisms of this practice.

As for the second type of *rabita* literature, as I have stated above, the sources under this category mostly include theological and descriptive information about the significance, emergence, and general principles of the Naqshbandiyya. Since *rabita* is a significant practice for this Sufi order, some brief information about *rabita* is offered in these sources. However, not all books or studies that introduce the Naqshbandiyya mention *rabita* (e.g., Hulusi, 2011). In Türer (1995: 129-133), and Eraydın (1994: 383-387), the etymological roots of the terms and the leading sheiks who suggested this practice are introduced, followed by other brief descriptions on how to perform *rabita*. However, unlike Türer, Eraydın does not mention the three types of *rabita*.

Another study worth mentioning is Brian Silverstein's *Islam and Modernity in Turkey* (2011: 120-121), where he writes about *rabita* within the context of Naqshi devotional practices and gives reference to all three types of *rabita* as well. His study is important because he defines these *rabita* types based upon the Sufi understanding of the İskenderpaşa Community. Silverstein's focal point is on the *sohbet* (which he describes as "companionship-in-conversation") in the Naqshbandiyya-İskenderpaşa Community; hence, he also makes a comparison between these two notions based upon his research and the ideas of Butrus Abu-Manneh (1990b: 286), and writes:

The environment of generalized hostility toward the orders in republican Turkey, and especially a heightened contempt for charlatanism examined earlier, including among the more observant and pious, may have led to the diminished profile of *rabita* in favor of *sohbet*. If this is the case, it is not the first time the practice has been secondary to *sohbet*. In both Ahmad Sirhindi's *Maktubat* and Fakhr al-Din Kashifi's *Rashahat `Ayn al-Hayat*, the emphasis is on *sohbet* over *rabita*. (Silverstein, 2011: 121)

One simple reason for the visibility and emphasis of *sohbet* over *rabita* results from the nature of these practices: while *sohbet* is open to public access, *rabita* is exercised individually. However, the fact that *rabita* is less visible both in the foundational texts and in Republican Turkey does not decrease its significance as one of the utmost or

closest devotional practice for reaching the presence of Allah (le Gall, 2005:116). *Rabita* is a practice that requires a high degree of discipline and commitment, and fewer disciples are able to practice it continuously when compared to *sohbet*. It is this discrete nature of *rabita* which makes it less visible.

Besides these sources, there are other noteworthy studies in the field. For instance, in John Renard's *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*, *rabita* is introduced in terms of "visualization," a practice through which disciples "see" or visualize their sheiks in a mental and spiritual *tasawwur* (image). Renard explains that the main objective of the practice of *rabita* (mutual binding) is the "conjoining of spirits in companionship" and the "loss of self, or annihilation." Moreover, he briefly mentions the three different ways of practicing *rabita*: "The practitioner can focus on an image of the *shaykh* as though standing before him, or imagine himself actually assuming the form and attributes of the *shaykh*, or imagine the *shaykh* entering into his heart" (2005: 249). Annemarie Schimmel also discusses *rabita* in line with the notion of *tawajjuh* and says:

The strong relationship between sheikh and murid is exemplified in the technique of *tawajjuh*, concentration upon the sheikh, which later orders, mainly the Naqshbandiyya, considered necessary for the successful performance of the dhikr. One speaks in Turkish of *rabita kurmak*, 'to establish a tie' between master and disciple. The sheikh, too, would practice *tawajjuh* and thus 'enter the door of the disciple's heart' to watch him and to guard him every moment. Endowed with knowledge of things that exist potentially in God's eternal knowledge, he is able to realize certain of these possibilities on the worldly plane. (1975: 237)

What is striking in these remarks is that Schimmel draws attention to a very crucial yet mostly ignored aspect of *rabita*, which is the fact that the practice of *rabita* is not unidirectional. In other words, to establish a connection between the sheik and the disciple, there has to be a mutual interaction and the sheik must respond to the disciple's efforts as well. Hence, *rabita* is a mutually binding practice, as also emphasized by Renard above.

With regard to the definition of *rabita* as "binding the heart", the work of Muhammed Hisham Kabbani is also worth mentioning. In several of his books, he comments on

the significance and practices of *rabīta* from various aspects. For instance, in *Classical Islam and the Sufi Tradition*, he talks about “*rabītah*,” defining it as “binding one’s heart with the sheik” (2003: 530). Kabbani describes *rabīta* alongside other expressions like contemplation and meditation, as “meditating and connecting my heart to the heart of the shaykh” (2003: 207). He also distinguishes three ways of acquiring knowledge (*marīfet*), which are contemplation, vision, and reckoning (2003: 216). We could infer from his remarks that meditation in this context corresponds to the *rabīta* practices. In his analyses, Kabbani also underlines that the way of acquiring *marīfetullah* through contemplation and meditation is higher and more perfect than the way of *dhikr*. He mentions that “the seeker, through contemplation and meditation, can reach the internal knowledge and will be able to enter the heavenly kingdom (2003: 241).

Other authors who deal with Sufism in general and briefly mention *rabīta* include Itzhak Weismann (*The Naqshbandiyya*, 2007), Diana le Gall (*A Culture of Sufism*, 2005), Arthur F. Buehler (*Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, 2008), and Chad Lingwood (*Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran*, 2013). The common feature of these sources is that all of them view *rabīta* in terms of the spiritual connection with the sheik and as one of the most significant spiritual practices in the Naqshbandiyya, defining the significance, main philosophy, and characteristics of this practice in their own terms.

For instance, Dina le Gall defines this practice as “the Naqshbandi spiritual technique of fixing the picture of the shaykh in the imagination as a vehicle for the flow of divine energy” (*A Culture of Sufism*, 2005: 238), and she highlights *rabīta* as the “closest” of the spiritual methods in the Naqshbandiyya tradition. She also states that it was considered as “an instrument of the tariqa’s sobriety, both by the dint of its interiorized character and because it enabled practitioners to dispense with the superfluous and inferior *mujahadat* [rigorous austerities or ascetic exercises]” (2005: 116-122). While discussing the emergence and legitimacy of *rabīta*, she also mentions the Naqshbandi belief that this practice is considered to have originated from the love of Abu Bakr for Prophet Muhammad (2005: 129).

Weismann deals with *rabita* within the context of “binding the heart with the master,” considering it as a prominent spiritual practice along with *suhba*, *dhikr*, and *khalwa* (2007: 2). Weismann underlines that “none of the foundational practices and practices of the Naqshbandiyya were fixed and unequivocal”; hence, the Naqshi leaders had the authority to transform the nature of practices, including *khalwa* and *rabita*, according to the needs of their disciples (2007: 29-30). On one occasion, he emphasizes the resemblance of *rabita* to the Hindu spiritual practice of idol worship in that it “involves using an intermediary for the concentration on God” (2007: 66). However, in my opinion, the expression “idol-worship” is misleading in this context because *rabita* in Sufism never entails an act or attempt at “worshipping” someone or something other than Allah, and the sheik only functions as an intermediary whom the disciples never put in the place of God, according to the Sufi and Naqshi principles.

Weismann also pays attention to the changes in *rabita* throughout the evolution of the Khalidiyya-Naqshbandiyya in the course of time. For instance, in the 19th century, Diya al-Din Khalid, the founder of the Khalidiyya, demanded that disciples concentrate only on his figure while they were practicing *rabita* so that he would be able to “consolidate the new offshoot under the leadership of its founder.” However, this had not been the ordinary practice previously, and some disciples contested this order as they felt uncomfortable (Weismann, 2007: 89-90). Furthermore, Siddiq Hasan Khan from the Indian Fundamentalist trend favored the elimination of *rabita*. Nu‘man Hayr al-Din al-Alusi and Da‘ud ibn Jirjis from the Baghdadi Salafi trend also rejected the legitimacy of *rabita*, since they thought it was “an unlawful innovation with no basis in the Quran or Sunna” (Weismann, 2007: 141-143). An earlier representative of modern Salafi thought, Muhammed Rashid Rida, also strongly opposed this practice, writing:

I say that *tawajjuh* [concentration of master and disciple on each other] and *rabita* have nothing to do with religion and it is impermissible that they pass as lawful worship in Islam. I do not hold that every person who practices or will practice them is an unbeliever, but I fear that those who follow this brotherhood [the Naqshbandiyya] without knowing the Law and realizing the truth of the soul are closer to idolatry than to monotheism in what happens between the master and the disciple. (as cited in Weismann, 2007: 145)

In line with these rejectionist approaches, some scholars and theologians, including Mustafa İslamoğlu, Abdülaziz Bayındır, Faruk Beşer, Ferit Aydın, and Nureddin Yıldız, also completely reject the notion of *rabıta*, as they consider it a kind of polytheistic practice. For example, Aydın’s book *Tarikatta Rabıta ve Nakşibendilik* might seem to be presenting a different perspective, as he offers a comparative approach in the last section of his book, in which he compares Buddhist meditation and yoga practices to Islamic *rabıta* practices (2000: 255-289). Nevertheless, his aim is to nullify the concept of *rabıta* in Islamic philosophy; hence, this comparison unfortunately cannot go beyond the attempt of proving the “illegitimacy” of *rabıta*, rather than presenting refined academic analyses. The author’s remarks in the preface of the book clearly express his aim of “clearing Islam from any element of polytheism,” and he believes *rabıta* is one of the elements of polytheistic practices/ beliefs in Sufism and that Sufi disciples who establish a spiritual connection with their sheiks replace God with these sheiks, therefore denying His uniqueness.

Making a comparison between other meditative techniques and *rabıta* does not always indicate a denigrating approach, since *rabıta* is surely a kind of a devotional and meditative practice. Some psychological approaches also refer to *rabıta* within the context of meditative spiritual techniques without necessarily claiming it to be an act against the rule of God. For instance, Mustafa Merter discusses the similarities and differences between various states of consciousness through *dhikr*, contemplation (*tafakkur*), *rabıta*, *muraqabah*,³ and whirling (*sama*) (2012: 102-112). Likewise, Cheryl Ann Crumpler, another psychologist, writes that Sufism requires that the mind, body, and soul be in harmony with each other so that an individual can move forward in the Sufi path; and this harmony is achieved through meditative practices such as *dhikr*, *rabıta*, and *muraqabah*. As shown in Crumpler’s research, such meditative practices may decrease chronic, short-term, and severe anxieties as well, due to the emotions of harmony, peace, and confidence that arise out of these continuous Sufi meditative and reflective practices (Crumpler, 1989: 29-40).

³ *Muraqabah* literally means “to watch over,” “to take care of,” or “to keep an eye on.” Metaphorically, it implies that with meditation, a person watches over or takes care of his or her spiritual heart (or soul), and acquires knowledge about it, its surroundings, and its Creator (Uludağ, 1996).

To sum up, taking into consideration the studies on *rabīta* in general, one can encounter several kinds of studies that deal with *rabīta* specifically or in general; however, when one analyzes them further, one realizes that a great majority of this literature only pays attention to meditation on the connection with the sheik (*rabīta-i mūrşid*), and evaluates *rabīta* either from a descriptive or an argumentative approach in an effort to explain, justify, or nullify *rabīta* in Islamic theology. Thus, there are few studies that examine *rabīta* by means of different analytical tools other than those of either descriptive or theological frameworks (see Silverstein, 2011).

It should also be underlined that most of these studies focus only on connection with the sheik, without mentioning the other two types of *rabīta* stated above. Some sources come close to these two types, but they lack a detailed focus. For instance, Weismann also mentions “*rabītat al-mawt*” once in his book, yet he mistakenly defines it as the spiritual connection established with the dead masters, which is something completely different than the contemplation of one’s own death as promoted by the Naqshbandi tariqas.⁴ The current thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of all three types of this important practice in terms of its connection to “self-care” analyzing it from a Foucauldian perspective. Let us now turn to a brief review of this perspective.

1.3.4. Michel Foucault: From Subject/Power/Knowledge to Self-Care

The Foucauldian conceptualization of self-care and ethics will be addressed in detail in the second chapter. However, in order to understand how this “self-care” notion fits into the overall literature and philosophy of Michel Foucault and the framework of this thesis, one needs to have knowledge about the bases of Foucauldian thought in the first place.

Judging from the bibliography of Michel Foucault, it is possible to divide his body of work in three basic phases, as distinguished by a great majority of Foucault experts

⁴ Contemplating the dead, respected people, and visiting their graves are practices that are valid in Islam and Sufism, but technically this is not a kind of *rabīta-i mevt* in the sense that one contemplates his/her own death as a disciplinary method prescribed to disciples as a daily practice (Arvasi, 1981).

(Rabinow: 1984). In the first and early period, he mainly focuses on the concept of discourse along with analyses of modern forms of knowledge and experience. The works in this period include *Madness and Civilization* (1988) (which studies the emergence of the modern concept of madness), *The Order of Things* (1994b) (which examines the emergence and formation of modern linguistics, biology, and economics), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1994a) (which deals with the establishment of the modern hospitals, clinics, and medicine), and *Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) (which discusses the development of a certain “theory” of discourse). Foucault lays emphasis on the concept of discourse and discursive formations particularly in the last three books.

For instance, his studies on madness and civilization go deep into the emergence of various modern forms of medical, economic, and linguistic knowledge of madness or the experience of the hospital. In relation with these concepts, Foucault reveals that what we understand from madness is not a stable truth but something that has changed from past to present, especially with modernity (Foucault, 1988). Likewise, the institutions to cure madness have also emerged with modernity in line with modern perceptions of treatment (Foucault, 1994a).

When it comes to the middle period of Foucault, he changes his conceptual framework, shifting his focus to the notion of power and power-knowledge technologies, and shows how these two concepts interact with each other even though they seem at first to be disconnected. An important book of this period is *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), in which Foucault discusses the modern punishment systems and the birth of the modern prison. This idea of the modern prison reveals the shift from the classical/ancient “sovereign power” to the modernized power-knowledge technologies, which are positive and reproductive rather than being negative and repressive. (Foucault, 1975). Foucault’s idea of modern is positive and productive in the sense that it mainly aims at “making better” instead of demolishing or leaving to die. As an example, we could think of modern prisons where prisoners are treated and educated so that they could return to society (Foucault, 1975). Such educating and disciplinary methods of modern power also aim

to transform modern individuals as products of the modern technologies of power-knowledge, and create “docile bodies” by categorizing and reforming them (Foucault, 1975: 135-195).

In line with these discussions, Foucault concludes that power does not only mean a top-down repressive force, but it is also something that is dispersed and pervasive. In other words, “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978: 93), instead of being captured only by certain sovereign people or groups. A well-known example of this “capillary” power (Foucault, 2003) is the “panopticon” model of prison designed by Jeremy Bentham. The watchtower mechanism here makes the prisoners control themselves; hence, it turns into a self-controlling mechanism without necessarily needing the observer (Foucault, 1975: 200-263). Other important notions of Foucault’s middle period are “governmentality,” “pastoral power,” “bio-power,” and “bio-politics,” the last two of which mean “the management or administration of individual and social body” (*The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1879-79*).

Following *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault publishes another groundbreaking book, *The History of Sexuality*, in three volumes. In the first volume of this book, Foucault continues to elaborate his analysis of discourse and modern power; however, in the second and third volumes, he starts discussions on concepts such as “techniques of the self” and “arts of existence,” which relate to the rules of conduct, ethics, and morality that lead to the re-formation of the self. It is in this context that Foucault develops Heidegger’s notion of “care” as “self-care” and its technologies (Foucault, 1997c). In the context of ancient Greco-Roman cultures, he examines such concepts as sexual behavior, pleasure, and *aphrodisia*, and directs his attention to the discussion of ethics and morality in relation to the formation of the self. And this is when the third period of Foucault starts, during which he shifts his main focus from the technologies of domination and power relations to the interactions between oneself and others (Foucault, 1997c: 225).

In the chapter titled “Morality and the Practice of Self” (1985, vol. 2), Foucault draws attention to the distinction between morality and ethics. Accordingly, morality refers to “the field of rules and prescriptions,” whereas ethics refer to “a site of difference where the rule gets actualized” (1986b: 25-27). The notion of “self-care” in Foucault’s texts is mainly based upon the ancient Greek and early Christian culture; however, it is not a concept that is peculiar to these cultures. When we consider Islam, we can see that many fundamental Islamic practices intersect with the Foucauldian understanding of ethics and self-care. For instance, the practice of ablution could be considered as an example of the technologies of the self. Moreover, particularly in the Sufi understanding, such notions as *rabita*, *taqwa*, disciplining the *nafs*, suffering, and some other Sufi practices also constitute a certain “ethics” that leads to the self-formation of Muslim Sufis as ethical subjects, as well as manifesting a “relationship of the self to self.”

Considering the relationship of the self to self in this regard paves the way for a great many different modes of thinking and interpreting various philosophies and practices around the world, including Sufi philosophy and its spiritual practices. Among the body of literature examined so far, Brian Silverstein’s studies on the notion *sohbet* in the İskenderpaşa Community stands out as the only study that deals with the tariqa and its structure from a Foucauldian perspective and with a discursive methodology. Another study that analyzes Sufism in relation with the care of the self is Özkan Gözel’s article “In a Foucauldian Perspective Sufism as an Art of Existence” (2012: 153-164). This research paper is important in that he puts forward a comparative analysis of the ancient Greco-Roman concept of self-care and the basic pillars of Sufism. However, it does not provide an in-depth analysis of everyday life practices in detail (*dhikr*, *rabita*, *khalwa*, etc.). Hence, I hope that this dissertation will contribute to the literature through its distinctive analysis of *rabita* as a “technology of self.”

1.4. Methodological Framework

In order to understand how *rabita* functions as a “technology of the self”, I have used three qualitative research methods which are: interviews, participant observation,

and discourse analysis. For discourse analysis, I have examined the interviews and some foundational texts regarding *rabıta* in the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa order. As regards participant observation, I have closely interacted with the İskenderpaşa Community disciples as an active member of the community and a practitioner of *rabıta* myself.

1.4.1. The Fieldwork

For this thesis, I conducted 10 semi-structured deep interviews with members of the İskenderpaşa Community, consisting of five men and five women all of whom are based in Istanbul, Turkey. Among these interviewees, there are both experienced disciples who have been members of the tariqa for more than 35 years, and also young disciples who are newcomers to the tariqa. The sample group also includes one male (Emir, 32) and one female (Hande, 33) non-members who have joined the rituals of the tariqa, who are familiar with the method of *rabıta*, yet do not practice it as a daily method. Gender difference among the interviewees is equally distributed (5 men, 5 women). The age range of the informants varies between 20 and 60; and I found my informants through personal contact and snowballing. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to all interviewees by using pseudonyms and the years of their experience as a Naqshi disciple will be given in parentheses. The interviews were carried out in Turkish, so the quotes in the thesis are translations made by myself.

In the interviews, I investigated the significance of *rabıta* in Sufi philosophy with a special focus on the İskenderpaşa Community's interpretation and understanding of this practice in the contemporary era. As mentioned in the previous section, the ways of interpreting and practicing *rabıta* might vary according to different Naqshi orders (see Weissmann, 2007). Hence, the definitions and interpretations of *rabıta* revealed in the expressions of these members give us important insights into analyzing *rabıta*. What is more important is that these interviews are quite useful to understand the contemporary status of *rabıta* because these members enable us to examine the transformation of *rabıta* and related concepts within time, and they give us the opportunity to observe the actualized and up-to-date versions of *rabıta*. We are thus able to deal with *rabıta* from a much broader perspective in the sphere of individual

practice and social life rather than only benefitting from written sources about abstract discussions and standardized definitions.

Nevertheless, members of this community and those who are acquainted with Sufism to some extent might come up with a question concerning the interviews: Since *rabita* is quite an intimate, private, and personal practice that opens to realms impossible to describe, how can we rely on the accounts of the interviewees, how can we assess the credibility, and truth value of their expressions? The confidentiality factor in this regard is surely important just like in many other types of other interviews or ethnographies. However, what concerns us here is not the authenticity and truth value of their accounts but the discursive structures and mechanisms that constitute the Sufi system within which they interpret and experience *rabita* based upon numerous constituents varying from written texts to interpretative communities, as discussed in more detail below (Mills, 1997). My other methods include participant observation and discourse analysis.

1.4.2. Participant Observation

Though I have been acquainted with the İskenderpaşa Community for more than fifteen years, I concentrated my observations for this research particularly in the last three years, focusing on how *rabita* is performed and discursively constructed both at individual and social level. Moreover, I have paid attention to the community's other ritual practices, its organizational structure, ways of establishing social relationship among the community members, and the community's socio-political and economic stance both in Turkey and around the world.

The observations I present in this study mainly derive from my interactions with the community members in Istanbul. However, I also travelled to other cities in Turkey (including Adıyaman, Elazığ, Malatya, Siirt, Afyon) and participated in the events where the community practiced collective dhikr (*hatme-i haccgan*) and *rabita*. In Istanbul, I took part in the regular *hatme* and *sohbet* gatherings where women living nearby come together at certain intervals (mostly every 15 days) to perform collective dhikr and *rabita* as part of it. As women and men perform these rituals

separately, I could only join the female-only events. Nevertheless, I had the opportunity to contact and make formal/informal conversations with male disciples.

Finally, being an active member of İskenderpaşa Community since my childhood years, I have had the opportunity to make various observations and develop lots of acquaintances in this surrounding for a long time; hence, I also benefited from my own observations and personal experience to a great extent.

1.4.3. Discourse Analysis

With regard to discourse analysis, this thesis will primarily benefit from the Foucauldian theory of discourse and his methodology of discursive analysis in line with the archeological analysis of the rules of formation that constitute *rabita* as one of the building blocks of the Sufi discourse in the İskenderpaşa Community. By definition and in terms of usage areas, the term discourse has been a very famous yet controversial topic for the researchers in social sciences. Various disciplines deal with discourse from different angles, “yet even within a particular discipline, there is a great deal of fluidity in the range of reference of the term discourse” (Mills, 1997: 3). The fluidity and complexity of the term do not, however, indicate a deficiency. Instead, it is another sign of the multilayered and polysemous structure of the term. Foucault himself also underlines this in *The Archeology of Knowledge*:

Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word ‘discourse’, I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements. (Foucault, 1972: 80)

Especially the third aspect of discourse in this definition is of particular importance because of its implications for understanding Foucault’s methodology and theory of discourse. As the passage above shows, the third aspect of discourse emphasizes the regulated structure of discursive formations and the “rule-governed nature of discourse”, discussed by several scholars including Sara Mills (1997: 1-24) and Barry Smart (1985: 37-41).

While talking about the Foucauldian response to the methods of constructing a history of thought in social sciences, Smart underlines that Foucault argued against the sovereignty of the subject and the idea that presumes a ceaseless continuity, and he proposed to “decenter the sovereign subject and place the emphasis upon analysis of the rules of formation through which groups of statements achieve a unity as a science, a theory, or a text” (1985: 38). In this way, we are able to go deeper in the processes that lie under the formation of knowledge and realize there are discontinuities, changes, and ruptures as well as the regularities, rules and the unity on the surface.

In the first volume of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, where he deals with the discursive regularities, Foucault writes “we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity” (1972: 23-25) emphasizing the necessity to question the existing discourses, relations, statements, practices etc. that are taken for granted in the first place, such as questioning the changing discourses of madness. In his methodology, the initial step to question the ready-made forms and concepts is to treat them as if they merely have close relations to each other. In other words, what needs to be done is to suspend their continuity and unity.

The suspension of unity and continuity “reveals a vast field of spoken and written statements, ‘discursive events’, of these it is those that conventionally define the sciences of man to which Foucault has devoted attention” (Smart, 1985: 38). Therefore, this suspension enables us to realize that a knowledge that seems inherently self-evident is actually constructed based upon various relations between the objects and their discourses. It helps us become aware of the other possibilities and other forms of knowledge that might have been constructed as a result of alternative regularities and rules of formation. In this way, we may uncover there are unities other than the ones we see as natural, unchanging, and everlasting. Therefore, we have to question the existing unities in order “to break them up and then to see whether they can be legitimately reformed; or whether other groupings should be made; to replace them in a more general space which, while dissipating

their apparent familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory of them.” (Foucault, 1972: 29-30). In this regard, it should also be kept in mind that there is no historical continuity in total, but only a partial continuity exists.

When we examine the discursive mechanisms of *rabīta*, initially it seems that there is a commonplace meditative practice with a specific definition and specific rules, yet when we go deeper into analyzing the related discourses and take a closer look at the real practices and texts in detail, we realize there is almost no continuity or unity in its real practices, perception, and definition by different Sufi communities and individuals. If we approach this phenomenon from a Foucauldian perspective, the Sufi notion of self-formation comes up to be also based upon the understanding of breaking/suspending the continuity first and then re-forming it. As will become clearer in the following chapters, the Sufi purpose in-question surely does not aim to create a “scientific theory of discourse” as Foucault aims. However, the same system of thinking applies in the way that the self (or the *nafs*) should be broken apart and melted away in the beginning but this is only to re-form a different self, according to the notions of Sufi philosophy. This notion also shows parallelisms with the idea of “disidentification” by Michel Pecheux, who suggests that “subjects can come to a position of disidentification, whereby we not only locate and isolate the ways in which we as subjects have been constructed and subjected, but we also map out for ourselves new terrains in which we can construct different and potentially more liberating ways in which we can exist.” (Pecheux, 1975; Mills, 1997: 12-13). These phrases very much complement the Sufi idea of renunciation of the self and then re-fashioning ourselves as ethical subjects.

During the process of questioning these unities, however, we must always pay attention not to seek after a “secret origin”. Likewise, we need to avoid the presumption that “all manifest discourse is secretly based on an ‘already-said’” which always entails a “never-said” in itself. On this note, Foucault warns that “We must renounce all those themes whose function is to ensure the infinite continuity of discourse and its secret presence to itself in the interplay of a constantly recurring absence. [...] Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but

treated as and when it occurs” (1972: 27-28). For this purpose, we should first of all understand how statements and discourses form a unity, and find the relevant scientific means to question these unities so as to reveal and analyze their rules of formation.

For Foucault, what constitutes the unity of the discourses or groups of statements is “the presence of a systematic dispersion of elements” rather than common objects, concepts, or themes. The “positivity” of a discourse is crucial as well, since “it reveals that within a discourse reference is being made to the same thing within the same conceptual field, at the same level.” (Smart, 1985: 40). This systematicity also links to the rule-governed and regulated nature of discourses mentioned above, and it does not result from a sovereign subject or an outside force such as the institutional, or socio-economic structures. The systematicity and discursive regularities in question are constructed at the “prediscursive” level (Smart, 1985: 39), which complements the emphasis upon the study of discourses neither in the past nor in the secret domains of the unknown, but “as and when they occur”. Hence, understanding the inner dynamics and the systematic elements of discursive formations are crucial for discourse analysis.

The Foucauldian approach, also makes a distinction between statement and discourse. According to Foucault, a statement is different from a sentence or a proposition for it refers to a “function of existence that properly belongs to signs [...] that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them with concrete contents, in time and space” (1972: 98-99), whereas a discourse refers to a group of statements which belong to a single discursive formation. However, it should be emphasized that “discourses are not simple groupings of utterances or statements, but consist of utterances which have meaning, force and effect within a social context” (Mills, 1997: 11). By the way, talking about discourse, Mills also underlines there is a distinction between the plural and singular version of the term in Foucault’s works, such that while the boundaries of discourse are vague, discourses as plural indicate “sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized

force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think” (1997: 55).

Secondly, apart from the systematicity and the rule-governed nature of discourse, the context-bound aspect of discourse means that we should not think of it as existing by itself and in isolation, since the so-called unity of discourse stems from a state in which all elements co-exist and systematically interact with other. We can say what constitutes the discourse is “the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed *within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving.*” (Mills, 1997: 15, emphasis in original). Therefore, the context in which discourses are formed deserve particular attention, in addition to the systematicity, regularities, and the rules of formation that lay the basis for how discourses are formed. While discussing the constituents of discourse in cultural theory, Diane Macdonnell complements this idea, saying that “dialogue is the primary condition of discourse; all speech and writing is social. Discourses differ with the kinds of institutions and social practices in which they take shape and with the positions of those who speak and those whom they address’ (Macdonnell, 1986: 1, quoted in Mills, 1997: 9). Hence, discourses are not isolated and solid structures which only produce effects upon the objects they form without being influenced by other things. Instead, discourses are very much affected by the forms and objects they produce, as well as their social contexts and other discourses.

For the purposes of this thesis, this social-institutional nature and dialogic formation of discourse are of particular importance because the formation of *rabıta* practices and Sufi discourses in the contemporary İskenderpaşa Community can be better understood only if we pay attention to the discursive regularities and rules of formation shaped within the socio-political conditions, social interactions, changing temporal and spatial features, all of which have a profound impact on determining of the conditions of possibility for *rabıta* in the contemporary Sufi-İskenderpaşa context in Turkey. Apart from textual analysis, the interviews and participant observation I make will therefore serve to better contextualize and analyze the social and institutional aspect of *rabıta*, as expressed before. When we think of the above-

mentioned institutionalized force of the discourse in terms of *rabita*, we can talk about the social, political and cultural contexts of contemporary Turkey that produce various institutionalized forces upon Sufism, which are further examined in the following chapters. Besides, we can also see how Sufi discourse imposes an institutionalized force on the disciples' behaving and thinking profoundly. As it will become clearer in the following chapters, *rabita* is formed and practiced within Sufism, which we can think as part of a discourse and institution in this context as well.

The dialogic characteristic of the discursive formations is also underlined by Michel Pecheux, yet his emphasis is more on the conflicting aspect of their dialogic feature. In *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, he writes "discourses (here, groups of utterances/ texts which have similar force or effect) do not occur in isolation but in dialogue, in relation to or, more often, in contrast and opposition to other groups of utterances" (Pecheux, 1975; Mills, 1997: 10). In this regard, the conflicting nature of discourses, power-knowledge relations, and domination struggles come to the forefront, which are also emphasized by Foucault.

As discussed in the previous section and mentioned above by Pecheux, the formation of knowledge is profoundly related with power struggles, which suggests that the knowledge of discourses is naturally affected by these struggles as well. Accordingly, dominant discursive structures govern certain behaviors and thinking in a constant conflict with other ways of knowledge and practice. The questions of truth and authority need to be further examined to reveal how one discourse becomes dominant over others, and how one might dig under this dominant regime of truth to uncover the other possibilities of knowledge and alternative ways of thinking and behaving. As I have stated above, main concern here is not to decide which knowledge is true and valid, but to understand why a certain discourse is labeled as true and how it continues to be reproduced over and over again. Hence, the real quest concerns trying "to discover how this choice of truth, inside which we are caught but which we ceaselessly renew, was made – but also how it was repeated, renewed and displaced" (Foucault, 1981: 70). While dealing with the conflicts and

power struggles, Foucault argues against the repressive and negative conception of power; it is dispersed in all aspects of life and does not only produce a top-down effect, but is also exercised from bottom to top, more precisely in a rhizomic manner, to use of Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome" concept. Therefore, when we say the production of knowledge and discourses are affected by power struggles, we should take this into consideration.

Herein, we can also think of the "exclusive" character of discourses. According to some cultural theorists (such as Pecheux or Macdonnell), what seems self-evident in the first place actually consists of "what is excluded" or what is "almost unsayable" (Mills, 1997: 10-12). Although Foucault warns that the themes which refer to a "never-said" should be abandoned, it is still beneficial to keep in mind that while a certain discourse is accepted as valid or true in a society, other possibilities or other ways of knowledge might have been surpassed. As we see in the example of menstruation, for instance, while it was seen as something bad and discrete, other approaches transformed the perception of this phenomena into a more positive and natural state in time (Mills, 1997: 11).

The "exclusive" aspect of discourse becomes apparent when "access to those discursive frameworks which circulate in society is not equally available to all" (Pecheux, 1975; Mills, 1997: 12-13). In principle, Sufism is open to all Muslims but practicing *rabita* requires fulfilling certain requirements, such as memorizing the names of the sheiks in the golden chain (the previous sheiks), to repent from all the sins with the help of a sheik or his appointee, to perform the "istihare prayer" and have a lucid dream. For instance, as I have observed during my fieldwork, only tariqa members are entitled to participate in the collective dhikr (*hatme-i hacegan*) and practice *rabita* in the Naqshi order called "Menzil" in Turkey. In the Naqshi-İskenderpaşa Community, though non-members can participate in the collective dhikr, they cannot practice *rabita-i mürşid*. Their knowledge is also governed by the dominant discourse because the definition of truth and the validity or credibility of knowledge is shaped within the rules and regularities structured in the Sufi context. Hence, access to Sufi discourses is not equally available for those who are not the

members of a tariqa. In this way, we can say “Exclusion is, in essence, paradoxically, one of the most important ways in which discourse is produced” (Mills, 1997: 60).

However, we should also keep in mind that an alternative knowledge about other ways of knowing or other discourses do not have the same status all the time, since it might change as their contexts change. With regard to the discourse of *rabita*, the society's changing perception of Sufism is important. As the socio-cultural and institutional dynamics changed in Turkey and around the world, the “regime of truth” (Paul Rabinow, 1984: 73) governing the discursive structures and perceptions about Sufism and *rabita* changed as well, as it will be further analyzed in the following chapters. To exemplify briefly, we could think about the discreteness of Sufi practices in contemporary Turkey. Due to the socio-political developments in Turkey that tried to force a secular system, religious practices are most of the time still perceived as illegal notwithstanding their private and discrete attributes. However, the fact that some part of the religious or Sufi practices (including *rabita*) need to be performed in privacy and secrecy does not necessarily mean they are illegal. This interpretation comes together with the discursive regularities that encode Sufism as something totally mysterious, clandestine, and even dangerous to some extent. Hence, we might be able to realize that “rather than being permanent, as their familiarity would suggest, discourses are constantly changing and their origins can be traced to certain key shifts in history.” (Mills, 1997: 23) To analyze these key shifts and the changing discourses of Sufism and *rabita*, this thesis aims to follow the trails of the interviews and the texts which might lead us through related discursive formations.

Finally, since discourse has different implications and interpretations for different disciplines, so does the methodology they use. Therefore, discourse analysis as a social research method has variations as well. For instance, some linguistics-based approaches or social psychologists deal with discourse within the framework of conversation analysis. Likewise, each social discipline may adopt a methodology peculiar to its own way of thinking and doing research making use of discourse analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of these important approaches towards discourse analysis in linguistics and social sciences. This approach basically

deals with discourse from a socio-political perspective considering the intertwined relation between language, ideology, and power struggles. Herein, discourse analysis and linguistic analysis are carried out together in a systematic way. Although this approach has some problems regarding their methodology, such as the presumption that the texts to be analyzed all have the same meaning, this method still provides beneficial means for discourse analysis.

Norman Fairclough's works can be considered as a good example in this context. Unlike "non-critical" linguists, critical linguists go beyond describing the discursive formations trying to show "how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants" (Fairclough, 1992: 12). From this perspective, two basic features of discourse attract attention in Fairclough's works: one is "the constitutive nature of discourse" and the other is the primacy of inter-discursivity and intertextuality". The first attribute of discourse relates to the fact that "discourse constitutes the social, including 'objects' and social subjects"; whereas the second attribute relates to the fact that "any discursive practice is defined by its relations with others, and draws upon others in complex ways" (Fairclough, 1992: 12).

The second attribute has common grounds with the above-mentioned idea that discourse is dialogic and social. In Fairclough's understanding of CDA, this "relational nature" of discourse is therefore quite important in analyzing the social context, power relations, and the relationships between the texts. The focus on intertextuality and power relations offer beneficial insights into the analyses of *rabita* and Sufism in terms of their discursive formations as well. However, textual analysis by itself falls short for a comprehensive social research as Fairclough underlines suggesting that "to research meaning-making, textual analysis is best framed within ethnography" (2003: 15). In this regard, it is useful to benefit from a systematic yet diversified methodology in a coherent way so as to provide a more comprehensive discursive analysis. Hence, this research uses textual analysis along with field work, interviews, and participant observation. What I plan to do in this research is to reveal the

similarities as well as differences that texts have within the framework of Sufi-İskenderpaşa discourse in the contemporary Turkey, which entails several networks ranging from the political struggles to socio-cultural perceptions and to self-formation.

With regard to texts to be used for this research, if we take what we call text in its broadest sense, this thesis deals with two basic kinds of primary texts: first is the written Sufi texts which try to interpret and clarify *rabıta*, and the second is the verbal texts which talk about the interpretation of the very much "idealized" forms of *rabıta* and the real life experiences of Naqshi/Sufi disciples in the İskenderpaşa Community. Hence, on one hand we deal with what we may call the dominant discourse on *rabıta*, and on the other hand we have the groups of statements of Sufi people and their interpretations/practices of *rabıta* produced mostly within the discursive framework of the former texts, yet also affected by the social context and the conditions of their current society. Literary texts might as well have been used as a source for analyses, but this would necessitate a different analytical approach including references to literary criticism methods etc., thus, this might be the topic for another research as the limits of this thesis do not cover that area.

As regards the primary written sources of analyses, the thesis examines five books: *Mektubat-ı Rabbani* (İmam-ı Rabbani, 1977), *Halidiye Risalesi* (Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi, 1987), *Rabıta-i Şerife* (Abdülhakim Arvasi, 1981), *İslam, Tasavvuf ve Hayat* (Mahmud Esad Coşan, 1999), and *Rabıta: Sorular-Cevaplar* (Şahver Çelikoğlu, 2011). İmam-ı Rabbani (also known as Sheik Ahmed Faruki Serhendi Hz.) is the 23rd of *silsile-i aliyye* (the grand Naqshi chain), therefore, one of most esteemed and significant Nasqhi-İskenderpaşa sheiks, who lived in India in the 16th century. *Mektubat-ı Rabbani* consists of three volumes which have 536 letters in total on various issues regarding İslamic and Sufi principles. The letters specifically about *rabıta* are included in the first volume (Letter no. 187 and Letter no. 260).

Mevlana Ziyaüddin Halid-i Bağdadi Hz. is the 29th sheik of the grand Naqshi chain, who lived between 1779-1826 in Baghdad. Before he was entitled to become a sheik,

Halid-i Baġdadi went to India and was educated by Abdullah-i Dehlevi Hz., who is the successor of Imam-i Rabbani, and upon the permission of Abdullah-i Dehlevi, Baġdadi returned to his hometown and spread Naqshbandiyya in the Iraq-Syria region. Following this period, Ahmed Ziyâüddîn-i Gümüşhânevî Hz. becomes a disciple of Ahmed b. Süleyman el-Ervâdî, the successor of Halid-i Baġdadi; and Gümüşhanevi Hz. moves to Istanbul after being entitled as a sheik here. It is after this transition that the Naqshbandiyya is spread in Istanbul, and the İskenderpaşa order flourishes in Fatih, beginning with Muhammed Zâhid İbni İbrahim-i Bursevî Hz. (a.k.a. Mehmed Zahit Kotku Hz., the 38th of *silsile-i aliyye*) in 1958. *Halidiye Risalesi* by Mevlana Halid-i Baġdadi is important because it is with this book that the pillars and principles of *rabıta* practices as we know it today are introduced for the first time, including its detailed description, rules, and manners (Coşan, 2017).

Seyyid Abdülhakim Arvasi is another prominent Naqshi sheik who lived between 1865 (Van, Turkey) and 1943 (Ankara, Turkey), yet he is not included in the *silsile-i aliyye* of the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa order. His book titled *Rabıta-i Şerife*, however, is highly significant for all Naqshi orders as he provides a comprehensive explanation and justification of *rabıta* in Sufism, discussing both its roots and ways of practice as a disciplinary method.

The fourth primary source is written by Mahmud Esad İbni Halil Necati-i Çanakkalevî Hz. (a.k.a. Mahmud Esad Coşan Hz.), who is the 39th and most recent sheik of the Naqshi-İskenderpaşa chain succeeding Mehmet Zahit Kotku and followed by Muharrem Nureddin İbni Mahmud Esad Hz. (the current sheik of the order), and lived between 1938-2001 in Istanbul Turkey. His book *İslam, Tasavvuf ve Hayat* is a compilation of his *sohbets* or lectures on İslam and Sufism in general, in which he presents a description of how to practice *rabıta* in detail along with other disciplinary methods such as dhikr and supererogatory duties.

In the field studies that have been carried out so far (see Itzchak Weissmann, 2007; Brian Silverstein, 2011), the observations about rituals in İskenderpaşa Community concerns the male surroundings and male perspectives. The narratives and analyses

about public sites, headquarters, rituals, and social or religious gatherings within this framework evolve around the male-dominant areas because they do not have access to the female aspect of the matters. An exception here is the book *Rabita* by Şahver Çelikoğlu (born in 1937, Istanbul,) who is one of the esteemed disciples of Mahmud Esad Coşan Hz. in the İskenderpaşa Community, entitled by Coşan to engage in educating the female disciples and deal with the matters concerning the women disciples of the community. The book is designed in a question-and-answer format, and provides explanatory answers to various abstract and practical questions regarding *rabita*. As mentioned before, sources based upon direct contact to women disciples are lacking in number; hence, my experiences and observations as a participant in various surroundings also enable me to provide a more comprehensive analysis which also takes into account the female-only spaces and the perspectives of women disciples.

1.5. Organization of the Thesis

The dissertation as a whole is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to the thesis including the literature review and methodological framework. Since *rabita*, the main topic of the study, is a method which has flourished within the Naqshi Sufi traditions. Hence, the second chapter initially aims at providing an overview of Sufi philosophy by focusing on particular key concepts of Sufism. These concepts mainly include *marifetullah* (*gnosis of God*), *ihsan*, and *tazkiyat an-nafs*. Afterwards, the chapter examines the basic principles of the Naqshbandi tariqa, so that the philosophical backgrounds of *rabita* practices could be better understood.

In the third chapter, the notion of self-care is scrutinized by means of analyzing the related Foucauldian conceptualizations and some Sufi concepts. In this regard, the issues of ethics and morality are initially discussed. In this framework, the Greco-Roman notions of “ethical substance” and their relationship with the Sufi notion of *nafs* is further examined. Relatedly, another Sufi concept *taqwa* is also analyzed, since it offers a great insight into the discussions of self-protection and self-cultivation in Sufi philosophy. After discussing the issue of ethics and morality, I

continue with the Foucauldian conceptualization of “technologies of the self” because they constitute the basis for the “self-care” idea. At this point, the issues of “the knowledge of the self” (*marifetü'n-nefs*) and “the care of the self” are scrutinized to better understand the idea of self-care. Later on, the renunciation of the self and asceticism are examined comparatively because these notions have fundamental significance for the care and cultivation of the self both in the ancient Greco-Roman and Sufi philosophies. Finally, I mention some of the prominent self-care practices that come forward in the ancient Greco-Roman cultures, in Christian asceticism and in Sufi cultures. Such practices of self-cultivation include certain dietary regimes, fasting, sleeping less, sexual abstinence etc. Other than these practices, there are some meditative practices, which include *rabıta* as well. Some of the leading examples of these self-care practices include listening to the sermons or keeping silent under certain circumstances. All these practices could also be considered as other examples of technologies of the self.

In the fourth chapter, I deal with the *rabıta* concept in more detail and conceptualize it as a philosophical practice of self-care in Sufism based upon its main discursive formations. In this regard, first of all I discuss the emergence of *rabıta* as a method for self-formation and self-purification in Sufism. This part also includes the classifications of *rabıta* and the general manners or rules of performing *rabıta* (*rabıta-i mevt*, *rabıta-i mürşid*, and *rabıta-i huzur*) Afterwards, I go on with the problematization of existence and non-existence within the framework of *fenâ-bekâ* concepts in Sufi philosophy with a special focus on the Sufi discourse of death and *rabıta-i mevt*. Throughout these discussions, the relationship between *rabıta-i mevt* and the Latin doctrine *memento mori* are also examined. Finally, I conceptualize *rabıta-i mevt* as a self-care practice which transforms the “unnamable” and “unthinkable” notion of death into something “namable” and “thinkable”.

In the fifth and final chapter, I firstly present discursive analyses of *rabıta-i huzur* and *rabıta-i mürşid* based upon six discursive strategies and other discursive techniques used by the sheiks and disciples to conceptualize *rabıta*. Secondly, I continue with the modes of subjection for sheiks and disciples in relation with *rabıta* concept. Here, the

chapter provides a discussion of three discursive strategies for the subject construction of disciples; and four strategies for that of the sheik. The thesis is wrapped up by concluding remarks and review of my main findings and suggestions for further research.



CHAPTER II

AN OVERVIEW OF SUFISM AND THE NAQSHBANDIYYA TARIQA

2.1. Introduction

Trying to make a respectable definition of Sufism within only few pages is surely a difficult task because we have a tremendous literature and culture all over the world that has emerged from this concept for centuries. Moreover, Sufism itself is almost impossible to be thoroughly defined because each Sufi individual experience a different path in his or her own way. Hence, many esteemed Sufi masters underline that what can be said is not Sufism. However, a comprehensive basic knowledge of Sufism is essential to understand the worldviews of Sufi people, which will lead us to examine the ways they construct the Sufi subjectivities.

The construction of subjectivities has substantially diverse perspectives in terms of different Sufi spirits and degrees, but in the most general sense, it can be said that each Sufi master and disciple goes through a path of constant training and examination process in a sense, regardless of the style of this training. When we examine the ways of such training in Sufism, a practice called *rabita* emerges by far among the most prominent ways that have key roles in the construction of Sufi self. Thus, I will firstly present a general and basic framework of Sufism, by emphasizing the fundamental and common grounds of Sufi understanding, without going into the details of historical and interpretational differences. Afterwards, I will focus on the distinctive features of the Naqshbandi tariqa, since *rabita* is most commonly practiced in this path. Then, I will examine *rabita* in Sufism in the following chapters, and investigate the ways in which this concept has been perceived and practiced by Naqshi people in Turkey.

2.2. Understanding Gnosis of God (*Marifetullah*)

Sufism could most basically and simply be defined as severing all connections with everything other than Allah (*masiva*) in one's heart and mind. Osman Türer has compiled a variety of definitions in his *Ana Hatlarıyla Tasavvuf Tarihi* (1995: 23- 26).

For instance, Cüneyd Bağdadi says “Sufism is God’s taking your life from you and then bringing you to life with Him” (mentioned in *Kuşeyri Risalesi* by Abdülkerim Kuşeyrî, 1991). According to Ebu Hafs el-Haddad, “Sufism is completely composed of decency”, while Ebu’l Hüseyin en-Nuri defines it as “renouncing all the desires and pleasures of the nafs” (Sülemî, *Tabakatü’s Sufiyye*, 1969).

When one examines the various descriptions regarding Sufism, including the ones quoted above, the general framework of Sufism seems to be focusing on several common grounds in spite of their differences. One of them is severing all connections with everything other than Allah and trying to reach unification with God by obtaining the secret Truth of God (*hakikat sırrı*). The second aspect is purification of the soul and the nafs by means of prayers, dhikr (remembrance of God), and asceticism. One of the esteemed Sufi sheiks in Turkey, Mahmud Esad Coşan also underlines two important goals of Sufism in one of his interviews.⁵ In this interview, he mentions the two pillars of Sufism: One is *marifetullah*, and the other is the purification of the nafs (i.e. *tazkiyat an-nafs*) (Coşan, 1981).

2.2.1. The distinction between *ilim* and *marifet*

The first concept, *marifetullah*, literally means the knowledge of God. The quest for this knowledge is one of the essentials of Sufism, since it is the utmost level of knowledge for humans. It comes from the same root as that of *irfan*, which again means knowledge, wisdom, and comprehension. However, in Sufi philosophy, there is a distinction between the knowledge that is acquired through reasoning and science, and the knowledge that is acquired through heart. In the Islamic terminology, this distinction could aptly be expressed in the words *ilim* and *marifet*. In fact, both *ilim* and *marifet* share the same semantic field, since they refer to knowledge and comprehension. Moreover, in Islam, it is fundamentally Allah, who is al-Alîm, i.e. The All-Knowing, The Omniscient, and The Certain-Knowing (the Quran, 2:158, 3:92, 4:35, 24:41, 33: 40). Thus, Allah is the source for both *ilim* and *marifet* in the last instance, yet the nature and the ways of acquiring knowledge show

⁵ In the interview, he uses the pseudonym “Halil Necatioğlu”, since his father’s name is Halil Necati.

difference in Islam and Sufism. We can clarify these concepts in more detail, so that we will better understand Sufi philosophy.

According to Sufi philosophy, *ilim* is the knowledge that is obtained through human reasoning, rational premises, scientific methods, reading etc. The basic means of achieving this type of knowledge is mind, reason or the human intellect. On the other hand, *marifet* is the knowledge that is acquired through worshipping, prayers, dhikr, asceticism etc. It is the knowledge that is bestowed upon humans by God, and it is only Allah who has the authority to decide the people which deserve this knowledge. Besides, the primary means of acquiring this type of knowledge is heart. William Chittick, a respected scholar famous for his studies on Sufism, also points to this fact: "The direct knowledge of self and God flows freely in the purified heart. In contrast, the other two approaches to faith, Kalam and philosophy, affirm the necessity of *ilim*. They insist that the primary means of gaining knowledge is reason (*aql*), and the theologians add that reason has to submit to the givens of revelation" (Chittick, 2000: 40).

In other words, we can say that *ilim* concerns the knowledge that relies upon the cause-effect relationship among the objects and the subjects; whereas *marifet* concerns the knowledge of virtues. While *ilim* is external, *marifet* is internal. Since *ilim* is acquired through reasoning, it is deterministic and our brains try to leave no open doors for variations or differentiations because of this deterministic knowledge. However, as *marifet* is acquired through heart, our hearts obtain knowledge not through determination, but through indetermination, i.e. by means of experiences; and our hearts are more open to perceive "the other" and numerous differentiations. Nevertheless, the distinction between *ilim* and *marifet* is not a simple distinction. In the previous paragraphs, I have made a basic distinction between two concepts, locating *ilim* on the "rational" side, and *marifet* on the "spiritual" side, but this division does not reflect the whole philosophy. In order to be able to better understand these concepts, we should take into account some other aspects.

In the Ottoman-Turkish dictionary, *marifet* is defined as the synonym of the notion *irfan*. In the Islamic philosophy, *irfan* could briefly be explained as having the insight to the divine secrets, the faith and the Quranic truths. As explained in the *Ottoman-Turkish Dictionary*, *irfan* represents the fragmental knowledge, as *marifet* does the same; however, *ilim* represents the general or total knowledge (2015). If we pay close attention, we realize that there is a completely reverse distinction here. In this case, *marifet* is limited to the rational reasoning and the positive sciences, unlike the above-mentioned descriptions. Accordingly, *ilim* is explained as the total knowledge, which is only possessed by the God. Since the total knowledge of God can never be acquired, what the humans can access is the fragmental knowledge which is obtained through the individual's experiences with "the other"; and this knowledge is best acquired through heart. However, we should underline that this fragmental knowledge is still a part of the total knowledge. Moreover, there are distinctions between *marifet*, *ilim* and *irfan*, yet these are not completely separable from each other. Especially *ilim* and *marifet* do not constitute a clear-cut binary opposition. Just as the total knowledge encompasses everything and each fragment of knowledge, one fragmental knowledge can be the nucleus of the total knowledge.

In the *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü*, a dictionary of Sufi terminology (1996: 347), Süleyman Uludağ describes *marifet* as the knowledge that Sufi people acquire indirectly from God, as a result of their spiritual advancement and their inner experiences. This is the only way that could lead a Sufi disciple to obtain the true knowledge about God, which is *marifetullah*, and the one who possesses such knowledge is called *arif-i billah* in Sufism, which literally means the one who knows Allah. As Uludağ also highlights in his book, the Sufi masters generally do emphasize the reasons, the results and the evidences of *marifetullah*, instead of describing the term itself, because *marifet* is the knowledge that God unveils to the disciple only to the extent that He wishes to do. There is no single and generic definition to be enunciated. The knowledge about God has neither a beginning nor an end, since He is al-Awwal (The Beginning-less) and al-Akhir (The Endless) (the Quran, 57: 3). Thus, it is impossible for someone to have the full knowledge about God in the Sufi understanding. In this sense, the most important thing for the disciples is to become

aware of their weakness and incapability of having full knowledge about anything (including God) without his mercy. On this note, the first caliph Abu Bakr is quoted to say “*marifet* occurs when the disciple understands that (s)he is incapable of having full knowledge about Him” (Uludağ 1996: 348).

2.2.2. The importance of a purified heart for acquiring *marifetullah*

According to Abdülkerim Kuşeyri, one of the highly esteemed Sufi masters, Sufi disciples firstly know the names, actions, and the attributes of God. Then, they purify their nafs by means of withdrawing from worldly desires through prayers, dhikr and suffering (*çile* in Turkish). In this way, the disciples also get rid of any maleficence in their hearts, so that their hearts are pure enough to deserve and apprehend the true knowledge about God. The heart is the place of pure love and pure knowledge, that is why, it needs to be purified in the first place before any divine mercy is bestowed upon it (Kuşeyri, 1991).

With regard to this notion of *marifet*, we could think of some important sayings in the Islamic texts, including the Quranic verse “And [tell them that] I have not created the invisible beings [jinns] and men to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me.” (Surah az-Zariyat, 51: 56). There is also a hadith which reports that Allah says “I was a Treasure unknown then I desired to be known so I created a Creation to which I made Myself known; then they knew Me” (Al-Acluni, 1749:2; hadith no:132). When one looks at these sayings, it could easily be inferred that the knowledge of God constitutes one of the fundamental reasons of the Creation. It is understood from these statements that all Creation has the duty to acknowledge the existence of God and to worship Him. Nevertheless, human beings have a particular place in this Creation because humans are the ones who have been blessed with the ability to reason and the responsibility of being the caliphs of God on earth. This feature of being the caliphs of God on earth as distinguished from other creatures is interpreted from the verses such as the two below:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” They said, “Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare

Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:30)

Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is there a deity with Allah? Little do you remember. (Surah an-Naml, 27: 62)

As a result of their capability to think logically or in a rational manner, human beings need to use this reason to acquire knowledge about God, since it is the purpose of their creation. To know the existence of God, to look for evidences or signs of His existence in the universe, to engage in theological or scientific studies in relation with God and the Creation etc. These are all included in the concept of knowledge which is about God and His acts or wants. Herein, however, it is necessary to underline the previously-mentioned difference between the rational, scientific, and exoteric knowledge about God and His Creation; versus the esoteric knowledge of God Himself, which is obtained through heart. As it is discussed above, the true knowledge of God (*marifetullah*) can only be obtained directly from God via a pure heart. That is why, Sufism distinguishes itself from other disciplines such as Kalam or theology, because it seeks for the esoteric knowledge that could be accessed only through heart.

Another crucial argument holds that human beings have the capability to *think* should not come to mean this privilege is only limited with the rational thinking. Human beings' privileged position in this world derives not only from the rational thinking, but also from the capability to think and understand with their hearts. In relation to this argument, we could refer to the Quranic verse "Have they not traveled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not that eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts." (22:46, trans. Mohammad Habib Shakir).

If we analyze the verse in question, we can see that the text mentions two organs and two activities; the former one relating to the "hearts with which to understand", and the latter one to "ears with which to hear". Firstly, we could analyze this first sentence, and then look at the meaning of the second sentence.

The Arabic word used for “understanding” and “thinking” in the phrase “hearts with which to understand” is the word “عقلا”. In the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane (1863: 2114-2115), this word has more than ten different meanings but the one in this verse basically means intelligence, understanding, intellect, mind, reason, or knowledge. Lane writes that the intelligence meant with this Arabic word is “the knowledge of the qualities of things, of their goodness and their badness, and their perfectness and their defectiveness; or the knowledge of the better of two good things, and of the worse of two bad things, or of affairs absolutely; or a faculty whereby is the discrimination between the bad and the good.” These meanings can be found almost in each dictionary, yet there is another meaning given by Lane, which is very explanatory for better understanding the Quranic verse in question. Lane describes this “rarely encountered” or sometimes “excluded” meaning in these words:

Some say that it is an innate property by which man is prepared to understand speech; the truth that it is a spiritual light, shed into the heart and the brain, whereby the soul acquires the instinctive and speculative kinds of knowledge, and the commencement of its existence is on the occasion of the young’s becoming in the fetal state, [or rather of its quickening,] after which it continues to increase until it becomes complete on the attainment of puberty, or until the attainment of forty years. (1863: 2115)

The characteristics of the property described here perfectly matches with the meaning implied in the phrase “hearts with which to understand”. As Lane also puts forward in his dictionary entry, this innate capability of men covers both rational and spiritual aspects, i.e. a light “shed into the heart and the brain” altogether. But it needs to be underlined that the emphasis on the heart has much more significance in this respect, since it nurtures a much greater capability beyond the limits of reason.

When we analyze the second part of the first sentence, we see the phrase “ears with which to hear”. Initially, this phrase seems to be all clear, yet when we go deeper in our analyses, we figure out that this phrase also has various other denotations. First of all, the Arabic word used for “hearing” in this phrase is “ستماع”; and its meanings are “to hear, to listen, to give ear, to hearken”. However, this word also has the meaning “to understand, to know”. In William Lane’s *Lexicon*, it is explained as “to

understand the meaning of a person's speech"; and Lane gives meanings such as accepting the evidence, (God) paying regard or answering a prayer; and assenting to or complying with a person's speech (1863: 1427).

We can cite a similar example of this meaning in the verse: "The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His messengers." And they say, "We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination" (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:285). In this verse, the word hear indicates not only a physical act of hearing the words or some sounds. It means to think about what the believers hear, and then to understand what their Lord says. It is important to realize that this understanding is not limited to a cognitive process, and it turns into a practice or a performance –which is, in this case, to believe in God in their hearts and minds, and then to obey Him. Hence, we can see the same dualist framework here; that is, the act of hearing appeals to both the brain and the heart; and both phrases ("ears to hear" and "hearts to understand") talks about being the connection and the communication of the believers with the outer world, or the God, or "the other".

If we continue analyzing the second sentence of the verse ("For surely it is not that eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts"), we see the verse focuses on the fact that it is the heart that becomes blind. What does it mean for the heart to be blind? Judging from our previous analyses, we can interpret that being blind actually means being deprived of the capabilities of an awakened and purified heart. The physical eyes of an individual mainly serves for bodily purposes; and the minds of an individual still serves for intellectual purposes but it is limited; yet the eye of the heart is what makes a human being fully aware and capable of the "spiritual light" that lightens his/her whole being. For it is with the eye of the heart by which human beings can reach the truths, and *marifetullah*. That is why the heart is important.

A final significant point in this case regards the emphasis on heart's location. As we read in the verse, the heart's location is emphasized saying "hearts which are in the breasts". This phrase underlines the fact that heart belongs to the body, and the act of thinking and understanding is realized through a bodily act. Since we are making a distinction with the intellectual or spiritual acts of the brain/mind and those of the heart, we can also take our comments to a further step; and interpret this distinction with regard to a different ethics.

What we mean by ethics here is something different than morality; and to explain this difference we could refer to Foucault's "Morality and the Practice of Self" (1985). In the Foucauldian sense, ethics indicates a different level where the rules are put into practice, whereas morality covers the more general field of rules and orders. Thus, we could say that ethics is a field in which the moral principles are carried into a different level of practice. Ethics could also be described as the conducts that are transformed so as to be in consistency with the general moral codes; thus, it concerns the others as well as it concerns the subject itself. That is why the ethical dimension also concerns the others.

Thus, the Quranic verse in question does not only concern the individuals, but also indicates a level of intellect that encompasses the interaction with others. To hear and understand someone, or to think and understand with the heart are all made possible with the existence of others. Hence, we can say that the Quranic verse in question also opens the way to a further level or a different sphere of morality, i.e. ethics, in which the heart is engaged in a process of ethical transformation by means of going beyond the limitations of the eyes or the brain. Sufi philosophy internalizes this kind of an ethical philosophy, and aims to lead the disciples towards such an ethical transformation through purifying and educating the heart in the first place.

The importance of the heart and *marifet* with regard to ethics also concerns the concept of love because the heart is the location or home of love, which is one of the most crucial Sufi concepts. As mentioned before, to understand and think with the heart is only possible by thinking and understanding "the other". Likewise, love again

deeply interests “the other” because it arises from the feelings that are directed towards the others. In this respect, the concepts of love, heart and *marifet* in Sufism belong to the sphere of ethics as they have to do with the “other” as well. The Sufi individuals try to construct their subjectivities within this ethical framework. They strive for acquiring the knowledge of the universe, the knowledge of the self, the knowledge of the God, and the Truth, and they prioritize love above anything – including both humane and divine love. Thus, their subjectivities are built upon understanding and loving “the other”; but the knowledge of “the other” is only possible through the knowledge of the self, just like the knowledge of the self is only possible through the knowledge of “the other”. And reaching divine love is only possible through humane love and finding the love inside in the first place. So, the construction of the Sufi subjectivities through interaction with “the other” can be established via reason and brain only to some extent; the real relationship of the Sufi subjects with “the other” can solely be established by means of love and the heart.

2.3. The Sufi path of love and beauty in the light of *ihsan*

As emphasized in Sufi philosophy, the purified heart is of utmost importance in Sufism since it functions as the only medium that could enable the disciples to reach towards God, in a way that goes far beyond the human mind and physics could go. Herein, another fundamental concept needs to be thoroughly examined so as to be able to understand the basic framework of Sufism, and this concept is *ihsan*, i.e. basically “doing beautiful”.

2.3.1. Defining *ihsan* with reference to the Hadith of Gabriel

In almost each Sufi text which aims at explaining the roots and the objectives of Sufi philosophy, there is a reference to the well-known “Hadith of Gabriel”, which explains the concept *ihsan*. This hadith is as follows:

A narration attributed to Abu Hurairah reports:

‘One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, (The angel) Gabriel came and asked, ‘What is faith?’ Allah's Apostle replied, ‘Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection.’ Then he further asked, ‘What is Islam?’ Allah's Apostle replied, ‘To worship Allah Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly to pay the compulsory charity (Zakat) and to observe fasts during

the month of Ramadan.’ Then he further asked, ‘What is Ihsan?’ Allah's Apostle replied, ‘To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you.’ (al-Buhari, 1:2:48)

In this hadith, three concepts are explained: faith (*iman*), Islam (submission) and *ihsan*. Among these three categories, the first two are more familiar to Muslims because they prescribe the principles and acts that are obligatory for each Muslim. The faith in Allah has six pillars, and the submission to His rules (Islam) prescribes five pillars, which shapes both the ideational and practical aspects of being a Muslim, but the *ihsan* concept concerns the utmost level of religiosity. In the dictionary of Sufi terminology, Süleyman Uludağ points to the three levels that are represented by these concepts. According to this, Islam refers to the exoteric or apparent level; *iman* (faith) refers to the esoteric level; and *ihsan* refers to the reality, the essence or the truth.

The word *ihsan* comes from the Arabic root “husn”, which means “being beautiful”, and the word *ihsan* literally has related meanings such as doing beautiful, doing a favor, giving a present etc. (Nişanyan, 2015). Since these three concepts emerge as the three basic pillars of Islam, Muslims have long centered upon these pillars, trying to figure out their frameworks and their founding principles. Thus, these branches have been analyzed by a great many Muslim scholars and believers. When we look at the Islamic sciences arising from these three pillars, we can come across with three main sciences (*ilim*), and these are Sharia/ jurisprudence, Aqidah/ Kalam and Sufism. As can be inferred from the Hadith of Gabriel, *islam* delineates the basics of Sharia, *iman* delineates the basics of Kalam, and *ihsan* delineates the basics of Sufism. Many great scholars of Islam agree on this classification, including Imam Gazali, who mentions this classification in his book *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences, 1993)*.

If we wish to better understand the interdependent relationship among these pillars in Islamic philosophy, judging from the scholarly works and the Islamic sources, we could observe that there seems to be a hierarchy among these branches. In relation

to this hierarchy, as Gazali and many other scholars express, *ihsan* (and Sufism) could be regarded as the deepest core of Islamic philosophy, since it concerns the most “beautiful” and primary objective of religion, i.e. “to worship God as if you see Him” as indicated by the Hadith. Aside from this hierarchy, we need to evaluate these three pillars as inseparable parts of a greater whole which could become completed only with the co-existence of all pillars.

According to the followers of sunnah (Ehl-i Sunnah), to have faith is to acknowledge faith in the heart, to voice the faith with the tongue, and to act with the limbs in line with this faith. The followers of sunnah who assert this view include respected Muslim scholars such as Imam Şafii, Imam Malik, Imam Evzai and some other theologians. In this definition, we come across with three principles that complements faith as it should be. When we look at these principles, we see that faith is not accomplished only at the ideational level. For faith to be accomplished in Islam, the believers must “act with the limbs” and put their faith into practice by complying with the rules of Sharia. They must voice their faith with the tongue and express their faith as self-conscious rational individuals. The phrase “La ilahe illallah” is a part of this expression of faith and the acceptance of Allah as the only god (tawhid). But the observance of rules and the verbalization or the expression of faith in these ways are not enough for a real faith. The most important thing for the believers is to acknowledge their faith with the heart and this necessitates to “recognize the truth and reality of faith’s objects in the deepest realm of human awareness”, thus, “the faith’s inmost core is found only in the heart” (Chittick, 2000: 8).

Such a tripartite definition could be found in the other concepts in Islamic philosophy. For instance, when William Chittick examines *islam*, *iman* and *ihsan* in more detail, he sets forth a tripartite analytical schema of Islamic tradition based upon this tripartite definition. His analytical tool is beneficial for understanding the concepts discussed in this chapter. This schema will be examined furthermore below; however, we should note that the tripartite definition system that is adopted by Chittick and some followers of sunnah is not accepted by all Islamic scholars. To cite an example,

a highly respected Muslim scholar Abu Hanifa, who is the founder of Hanafi school in Islam, justifies that faith only consists of acknowledging with the heart and voicing with the tongue. Thus, he differentiates the actions from the scope of faith. There are also other prominent Islamic scholars who argue that faith is only acknowledging with the heart or only voicing with the tongue (Furkan, 2012: 133-135). Keeping this diversity of views in mind, we could go on further analyzing the basic notions of Islamic thought and Sufism.

As mentioned above, we have three elements in terms of faith, which concern the body, the tongue and the heart. In the previous pages, I have also examined the Hadith of Gabriel and inferred that we have three basic sciences in Islam: *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*. Now, if we evaluate all of them together, we can see that the same classification applies to both *iman* in particular, and all three Islamic sciences in general. *Iman* (faith) has three elements that concerns the body, the tongue and the heart. Likewise, basic Islamic sciences have also three elements in the same fashion; *islam* relating to the bodily aspect, *iman* relating to the tongue aspect, and *ihsan* relating to the heart aspect. These aspects can also be considered as they are referring to practice, thought, and consciousness.

William Chittick infers from this schema that there are three basic domains of religiosity in Islamic tradition, i.e. body, tongue and the depths of heart.

These are the domains of right doing, right thinking, and right seeing. [...] The three realms can also be called perfection of acts, perfection of understanding, and perfection of self. All three are understood and conceptualized as ideals that must be realized in order to live up to the potentialities that were given to human beings when God created Adam in His own image. (Chittick 2000: 8)

In these words, Chittick also points to the fact that all human acts, thoughts and feelings should strive for reaching perfection and righteousness, since it is a motive and potentiality that is invested in all human beings. Thus, human beings are responsible and capable of reaching perfection in their acts, thoughts and hearts with the help and grace of God; however, a purified heart and a purified nafs is the *sine qua non* for a Muslim to reach the utmost level of religiosity, i.e. *marifetullah*. As a

result of these, we could conveniently maintain that jurisprudence mainly concerns “right doing”; theology concerns “right thinking”, and Sufism concerns “right seeing”, which is only possible through *ihsan* and by means of a purified heart.

The reference to the hadith “God created Adam in his own image” supports this idea as well. Some scholars choose to ground their interpretations on another form of this hadith, i.e. “God created Adam in the image of Rahman”, and “Ar-Rahman” name here means The Most Lovingly Beneficent, The Most Kind and Giving, The Most Gracious, and The Infinitely Good (Wahiduddin, 2015). According to the interpretations of Muslim scholars, both these hadiths suggest that human being is the best creature in the universe which manifests the grandiosity, the compassion, and the grace of God in the best way (Başar, 2015). Hence, there is a strong emphasis on the appreciation of beauty and love in Islam, especially in Sufism. In a great many verses in the Quran, we can come across various means of expressing this emphasis. Among many examples, we can lastly quote another hadith in this respect that says “Allah is beautiful, and He loves beauty” as reported by Abu Hurairah (Al-Buhari, 2005; 111:273). Yet, the emphasis on beauty and love takes on a new or deeper significance in Sufism in particular. It results from the fact that Sufism is the way of seeking for *ihsan*, which truly harbors the meaning of beauty and doing the beautiful, as also explained above. Hence, Sufi masters and disciples everlastingly chase the beautiful. They also try to be beautiful, to do the beautiful, and to see everything beautifully. Hence, it is not a surprise that almost all Sufi philosophy and literature nurtures and is nurtured by music, poetry, aesthetics, and art.

2.3.2. *Ihsan* as the level of utmost proximity to Allah

I have given a basic definition of the concept *ihsan* above, but this concept inevitably needs a deeper analysis to apprehend Sufi philosophy. In his dictionary, Süleyman Uludağ points out two meanings of *ihsan* based upon the views of prominent Sufi masters. The first meaning of *ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him, to so your duties as a servant who is aware of the fact that you are before Allah. The second meaning is to be freed from his self-existence, to see nothing but Allah, and to see everything in this world through the divine vision of Allah. (Uludağ, 1996: 259).

In view of this, we should explain the three different levels of proximity to Allah. In Sufi understanding, there are basically three spiritual types of proximity to Allah, and these are named “ilme-l yakin”, ayne-l yakin”, and “hakka-l yakin”. “Yakin” means proximity and the first level “ilme-l yakin” is the exoteric knowledge of Allah. On this level, the Muslims know Allah by means of the knowledge obtained via the Quran, apparent facts, evidences, sciences etc. As the Sufi disciples move upwards through the ladder of divine stations, they gain ground during their spiritual journey and their spiritual levels arise as their hearts are purified and their nafs is tamed. As a result of this evolution of the souls and the hearts, the disciples begin to see things with the eye of the heart and such a proximity to Allah is the “ayne-l yakin” level. On this level, the disciples are at peace in their hearts, yet this peace still falls short for because it is not everlasting. As the great master Imam Rabbani points out, the state of tranquility on this level is temporary just like a flash of lightning (Rabbani, 1977). According to Imam Rabbani, such a transient tranquility is a deficiency since it could lead to a spiritual drunkenness instead of a spiritual awareness. Therefore, the disciples at the “ayne-l yakin” level seek for a permanent tranquility and proximity to Allah. The level of “hakka-l yakin” is to reach this state of permanent tranquility and be so close to Allah that there is no sign of the disciple’s self anymore. Henceforth, the disciple has reached maturity, and he/she has the divine vision to see Allah’s beauty as it is. It is this situation which relates to the concept *ihsan* in Sufism. In *Mektubât*, Imam Rabbani links *ihsan* with “hakka-l yakin” and permanent peace. In another book about Sufism, İsmail Köksal (1999) writes that *ihsan* is related to “ayne-l yakin”, whereas *marifet* is related to “hakka-l yakin” in the Sufi understanding. Although these two ideas seem different in the first place, we can still see that *ihsan* is essential for reaching maturity or perfection, that is, *marifetullah*, which is among the main objectives of Sufism. Thus, Sufism emerges as a path that seeks for *ihsan* principally.

The disciples who devote themselves to the Sufi path of reaching the level of perfect human (*insan-ı kâmil*) always have the aim of acting as if they are in the presence of Allah, trying to win Allah’s love and affection This path could also be defined as the path of love because the ultimate feeling that lays the basis of relationship between

Allah and the Sufi people is the divine love that surrounds all existence. The well-known hadith narrated by Prophet Muhammad says “Allah said: If it weren’t for you, my beloved, I would not have created the universe” (Al-Acluni, 1749: 2:164; hadith no: 2123)⁶. This hadith also indicates the fact that love is the starting point of all creation. Another hadith which supports this point follows like this: “Allah said: I have created you from my *nur* (light), and then created the others from your *nur*” (Al-Acluni, 1749:1:265; hadith no: 827). This means that the first being in the universe after Allah is the soul and the light of the most beloved Prophet Muhammed, who is the *raison d’être* of existence in this universe in other words. Thus, each Muslim has to accept and love Prophet Muhammad so as to really become a devout Muslim. He is the perfect man in this universe, and all the Sufi devotees try to resemble him in each aspect so that they will hope to be loved by Allah and they will be the true servants of Allah. Herein, it should be underlined that being a servant or subject of Allah is in fact what liberates them from any enslavement in this world, since the Sufi devotees hope to win the eternal love and happiness by means of being freed from depending on their mortal desires. In this way, the Sufi devotees will become unified in God’s existence and will vanish in God’s love. A Quranic verse here could also be given as an example of this unification. The verse “*inna lillahi ve inna ileyhi turceûn*” (*the Quran*, 2: 156) means "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return". This has direct connection with the fact that human souls will unite with Allah, the one who has created them all and the return will be to him, as it is also mentioned in other verses such as the Surah Al-Alaq (96: 8) which says “Unto your Lord is the return”.

A significant point in this regard concerns the difference between the concepts of love and mercy. When we think of mercy in the Sufi context, we could differentiate the divine mercy and love of God from the human mercy and love. Chittick points to this difference saying mercy flows in one direction, from God to the creatures; whereas love could be mutual (2000: 13-14). In the Islamic understanding, it is true that only God can have mercy upon the creatures, and human beings cannot have

⁶ The Arabic version is “Levlâke levlâk lemman halaktu’l eflâk”.

mercy upon God, for He is the most Supreme of all. They can only show mercy towards the other creatures. Thus, on the worldly level, mercy could be mutual among the creatures, but when it comes to God, it is unidirectional. However, we could say that love is bidirectional in the sense that humans can love God, as well as being the ones who are loved by Him. But we should also note here that even though love can be mutual, love in the worldly level is still not at the same degree with that of God because it is He who has created the feeling of love and who loves humans the most. Everything that is worldly can come close to God but never be equal to Him, for He is the Unique and the Single. Besides this, it is mostly mentioned in many verses and hadiths that mercy and wrath both exist, but God's mercy is more comprehensive than His wrath. God's mercy and love indeed lies at the basis of the creation together.

2.4. *Tazkiyat an-nafs* for the purification of the heart and the soul

As explained above, Sufism is the path of love trying to lead the disciples towards *marifetullah* and *ihsan*. Here the question arises: how can a disciple reach these levels?

For an average Muslim, the fulfillment of the necessary requirements such as praying five times a day, fasting, reciting the Quran etc. might be enough and saves him from the wrath of hell. However, this is not enough for the purification of the soul and reaching the level of perfect man. Sufism is clearly a different realm than Sharia or Kalam or other realms in Islam. It is in fact the duty of all Muslims to long and struggle for living in accordance with the Sufi path. "Doing the beautiful" obviously does not possess the same degree of obligation as praying five times a day, but it is more than that. Doing the beautiful and having *ihsan* is not a sin or a prerequisite according to the jurisprudence, yet each Muslim still has the obligation and capacity to do anything they do in the most beautiful way. For instance, praying five times a day is an obligation which would cause humans to commit a sin if they don't pray, but doing the beautiful is the perfection of this pray, and a Muslim should always try to do it in the best way. Muslims are expected to strive for the better all the time, and they need to aim at doing the beautiful in everything. Thus, we could say that Sufism is in

fact an obligation for all Muslims, as it is asserted by other Sufi masters (Coşan, 1981). William Chittick also underlines this point in his book saying “The Sufis do not consider it sufficient for people to have faith and to submit themselves to the Sharia if they also have the capacity of deepening their understandings, purifying their hearts, and doing what is beautiful” (Chittick 2000:18). In Sufism, the only way to achieve this goal is to devote oneself to the Sufi path under the guidance of a devoted master (or sheik). Throughout this path, the disciple will experience a great many changes and transformations but the key point in each step will be the love of Allah and Prophet Muhammad, which encompasses and exceeds all kinds of worldly love. Without this divine love, the Sufism and the progress of the disciple will not be possible.

Furthermore, in the previous paragraphs, I have also underlined that *marifetullah* and *ihsan* can only be granted to the purified hearts. So, we can now develop our first question and ask how a Sufi disciple who is on the path of divine love can purify his heart and *nafs* to be worthy of accessing *marifetullah*? The simple answer to this question is the purification of the *nafs* (i.e. *tazkiyat an-nafs*), which was mentioned as one of the two pillars of Sufism in the beginning of this chapter. *Tazkiyat an-nafs* means disciplining the *nafs* and purifying the soul. The *nafs* could roughly be translated into English as “self”, yet it is a very complicated term which is divided into seven levels in itself. The notion of *nafs* and its major levels will be more thoroughly analyzed in the following chapter, hence these are not explained here in detail.

The manners of *tazkiyat an-nafs*, also include practices and rituals such as praying, preaching, whirling, fasting, sleeping less, silence, or prophecy. These are among the well-known methods that help disciples throughout the path of purifying their *nafs* under the monitoring of their Sufi masters.

Apart from these practices, we can mention ten basic methods for purifying the *nafs* and the soul in Sufism. These are *tawba* (repentance), asceticism (*zühd*), resignation (*tawakkul*), modesty, reclusion, turning away from anything other than Allah (*teveccüh*), patience, submission, dhikr, and introspection (*murakabe*). These ten

methods are peculiar to Sufi philosophy and that is why, they should be treated as concepts of a particular Sufi terminology. Thus, they have deeper meanings beyond their literal descriptions. Keeping this in mind, we could briefly mention their meanings in the Sufi terminology.

To summarize these terms briefly, *tawba* is to repent all the sins, accept being imperfect as human subject and to take refuge only in God, *just like one does when he dies*. *Zühd* is to renounce everything other than God in this world. *Tawakkul* is the trust in God, i.e. putting oneself in God's hands, trusting that He will arrange things for the best, and to submit to His will. *Kanaat* (modesty) is to be content with what one has or what God has given. *Uzlet* (reclusion) is to feel estranged from other people and from life, getting closer to God at one's heart. *Teveccüh* means turning only towards God, not seeking the favor of anybody else but Allah. Patience is to show patience in giving up all the desires of the *nafs*. Submission means submitting to God's eternal will, by rejecting to surrender to the desires of the *nafs*. Dhikr is to be engaged only in the remembrance of God, taking other things out of one's mind and heart. *Murakabe* is the introspection that aims the make disciples renounce all the power in themselves and accept the fact that it is only the God who has all the power and capability (Eraydın, 1994: 30-31).

As we can see, all these principles are directed towards the transformation of imperfect Sufi subjects into the perfect human subjects. At first glance, they might seem to be no different than other religious doctrines. However, there is a highly crucial aspect here which needs particular emphasis. This significant point concerns the acceptance of death as the motive for all this transformation process. All the principles which are explained above are constructed and performed in accordance with the fact that each Sufi is mortal and can die at any moment. The phrase "just like one does when he dies" constitutes the ideal scene for each Sufi disciple when they appropriate all of the above-mentioned principles. In other words, the reality of death is, in fact, the underlying motive for each and every Sufi practice. Hence, we could easily say that the lives of the Sufi individuals are constructed upon the acceptance of their mortality.

Last but not least, we could mention *rabita*, as another means for purifying the *nafs* and the soul. Since it is the main subject of this thesis project, this concept will be further analyzed in the following chapters. For the time being, we could briefly state that *rabita*, is basically a meditative practice that enables the disciples to accept the idea of death, to spiritually connect with the sheiks, and to feel closer to God. Being one of the most important disciplinary methods in Sufism, particularly in the Naqshbandi tariqa, it is considered a highly effective method for the purification of the *nafs*.

Before going into the details of *rabita*, it might be beneficial to give some information about the Naqshbandi tariqa, since the concept *rabita* in this thesis will be analyzed within the framework of Naqshbandi philosophy.

2.5. Brief introduction to The Naqshbandiyya and its founding principles

Being one of the largest Sufi orders in the world, the Naqshbandi tariqa is also quite strong in Turkey. The founding sheik of the tariqa is Bahauddin Naqshband, whose full name is Muhammed bin Muhammed al-Buhârî Bahauddin Naqshband. He lived in Kasr-ı Ârifan (near Buhara) in the 8th century, between the years 718- 791. In his early childhood, he was brought to a *Hacegân* sheik, Muhammad Baba Semmâsî, and one of his disciples (Emir Külal) was appointed for his education. Although Emir Külal was his master, the sources say that his real sheik was Abülhâlik Gücdevânî. Although they were not together corporeally, they could be in contact via spiritual means, and this type of disciplining is called *üveysîlik* in Sufism. Bahauddin Naqshband was entitled to be the Sufi caliphate of Emir Külâl. Additionally, he was spiritually and scholarly educated by Sufi masters such as Kasım Şeyh, Halil Ata and Mevlana Arif. Naqshband lived his life mostly in Semerkand and Buhara regions, and passed away in Buhara on March 3, 1389. Following Bahauddin Naqshbandi's death, the Naqshbandiyya turned into a fairly widespread tariqa and spread through numerous regions in the world, including countries in the Central Asia, the Balkans, Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Australia and China. Istanbul met this tariqa during the period of Fatih Sultan Mehmed, and this tariqa was widely accepted by the Ottomans in the 18th century with the help of the Sufi sheik Mevlana Halid-i

Bağdadi. In the following century, this *tariqa* preserved its respected status in Anatolia thanks to another sheik, Ahmed Ziyauddin Gümüşhanevi.

The Naqshbandiyya *tariqa* has founded on the basis of four main objectives which have their roots in the basic philosophy of Sufism in general (Kara, 1985: 295-296). The first objective is to purify the external by means of the sharia; the second objective is to purify the internal by means of the *tariqa*; the third objective is to establish an intimacy with Allah by means of the truth (*hakikat*); and the last objective is to reach Allah by means of the *marifet*.

It is a path that sticks to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. The rituals for praying and remembering God is done silently, which is called *hafî dhikr*, and *hafî* means hidden or confidential. The disciples do not exhibit ecstatic behaviors. The permanent state of awareness is much more promoted, rather than transient moments of ecstasy. Annemarie Schimmel points out a similar characteristic in these words: “The center of Naqshbandi education is the silent dhikr, as opposed to loud dhikr, with musical accompaniment, that attracted the masses to the other orders. The second noteworthy characteristic is *suhbat* [or *sohbet*], the intimate conversation between master and disciple conducted on a very high spiritual level. [...] The Naqshbandiyya is a sober order, eschewing artistic performance –mainly music and *sema*” (Schimmel, 1978: 365-366). Nevertheless, she elaborates on her latest claim and manifests that this *tariqa* has nurtured lots of literary productions and men of letters –such as Ali Şir Nevai or Nureddin Abdurrahman Cami- and other artistic activities in line with the general principles of the path (ibid.). Along with *sohbet*, *rabîta*, the individual dhikr, and the collective dhikr -which is called *Hatm-i Hâcegan*- are the cornerstones of this path.

The disciples who join this *tariqa* are expected to be in accordance with the following principles beforehand and afterwards: To repent all sins in the past; to stick to the Sunnah of the Prophet; to avoid from anything that is against the sharia; to strive for fulfilling each religious duty, without paying attention to the liberties; to avoid from

oppression and injustice; to pay all debts; to re-perform all the salats that one did not perform in time; and to remember Allah a lot (Türer, 1995: 176-182).

For the Naqshbandiyya, the spiritual training is realized through the purification of the heart and the soul without leading a completely solitary and stoic life. Annemarie Schimmel comments on this and says:

It has been said that the Naqshbandiyya begin their spiritual journey where other orders end it—the "inclusion of the end in the beginning" is an important part of their teaching, though it is an idea that goes back to early Sufi education. It is not the long periods of mortification but the spiritual purification, the education of the heart instead of the training of the lower soul, that are characteristic of the Naqshbandiyya method. "'Heart' is the name of the house that I restore," says Mir Dard. They were absolutely sure, as many of their members expressed it, that their path, with its strict reliance upon religious duties, led to the perfections of prophethood, whereas those who emphasized the supererogatory works and intoxicated experiences could, at best, reach the perfections of sainthood. (Schimmel, 1978: 366)

Herein, we come across with crucial notions that serve as the keys to grasping the fundamentals of Sufism and the Naqshi path. First of all, we see again that she differentiates sainthood from prophethood. In this way, Schimmel refers to one of the basic distinctions we can come across almost in each Sufi text. This distinction concerns piety and asceticism. As I have also mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Sufi individuals fulfill their religious duties but what makes them Sufi is the fact that they go far beyond these duties and abstain from the world. They do not give up devoutly fulfilling their religious obligations, yet they strive for a greater purpose, i.e. purifying their nafs and their heart. This distinction is explained and named differently by various scholar. For instance, Ahmet Karamustafa mentions renunciants (*zahid*) and pietists (*abid*) (Karamustafa, 2007: 1-7). As we see in the quote above, Schimmel uses the terms prophethood and sainthood; prophethood referring to the perfection of the human being (*insan-i kamil*) and purification of the heart, whereas sainthood referring to the piety. Asceticism, as a method for the purification of the nafs, is another term that is mostly used by many scholars. Keeping all these in mind, we can assert that the Naqshbandiyya, one of the most deep-rooted tariqas, attaches great importance to the prophethood (or renunciation) as well.

Nonetheless, this renunciation has never gone to extremes. As Schimmel aptly puts it, the Naqshbandiyya is a “sober order” that preaches moderation and propriety instead of transient ecstatic modes, or living as outcasts in the society in a shabby look. It is true that this path requires some strict disciplining methods for the education of the disciples as much as other tariqas do, yet it does not favor very long mortification processes that would cause the disciples sever all ties with their environment. This can be summarized in the Naqshi principle *halvet der encümen* (solitude in society), which will be more clearly explained below.

The difference between “long periods of mortification” and the “spiritual perfection/ education of the heart” is also important because of the emphasis on “the heart”. In the beginning of this chapter, I have asserted that we could basically mention two objectives of Sufism, one is the purification of the nafs, and the other is reaching *marifetullah*. These objectives have still validity for the Naqshbandi tariqa, since purification of the nafs (or “the lower soul”) is a prerequisite for the purification of the heart/soul, and for reaching *marifetullah*. Having said this, we should underline the fact that the Naqshbandiyya gives priority to the purification of the heart as its utmost goal. To purify the nafs is necessary but not enough for maturation in this path. The “heart” must be purified and educated so as to be granted with *ihsan* and *marifetullah*, as it was discussed above. That is why, Mir Dard says “heart is the name of the house that I restore”. The heart is the key location of this path. It is the house of love –which is the cause of all creation-; it is the house of wisdom, knowledge, and truth. Most importantly, it is the house of *ihsan* and *marifetullah*. The Prophet Muhammed says in one hadith: “Verily, there is a piece of flesh in the body, if it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart” (Nevevi, 1988; hadith no: 588). Hence, the purification and the education of the heart takes place at the core of the Naqshbandi understanding.

Other than this fundamental philosophy and the above-mentioned four main objectives, there are several more constitutive principles of the tariqa which are inherited from the Naqshi sheik Hâce Abdülhâlik-ı Gucdüvâni. Annemarie Schimmel mentions only eight principles in her book (Schimmel, 1878: 364), but Selçuk Eraydın

(1994: 375-380) lists eleven principles, which are briefly explained below; the first three ones are listed only by Eraydın, but the other ones are listed by both of the scholars.

Vukuf-i zamani is to be aware of the time and its needs. A disciple should never waste his/her time and should always try to spend time in accordance with God's will. The disciple should know when to praise God or when to repent. *Vukuf-i adedi* is to be aware of the dhikr's numbers. In fact, the main purpose of the dhikr is to enable the disciples come closer to God, thus the quantity of the prayers or the dhikr phrases do not matter for that purpose. However, it has been suggested by Bahauddin Naqshband that being aware of the numbers could help the disciples to concentrate only on the dhikr. *Vukuf-i kalbi* is to be fully aware of the dhikr, i.e. remembrance of God. The disciple needs to keep their hearts awake so that their love for anything other than Allah would fade away. *Hûş der dem* is to be awake and show no negligence while breathing (Nevevi, 1988; hadith no: 588) [*hûş* means mind or reason (*akıl*), and *dem* means breath]. Being awake while breathing refers to remembering Allah all the time, not forgetting Him even for a second or even for a single breath-time. Since this is a highly difficult task, the disciple should always pray for forgiveness at the same time.

Nazar ber-kadem is "watching over one's steps" or to look down one's feet, not looking around. It has both literal and figurative meanings for the disciples. Literally, the disciple should always look down while walking because this will protect them from being engaged in the others other than Allah, and this will also help them become humbler. Spiritually, the disciple should always be concerned with their own path; they should not be concerned with the other disciples' situation, and thank God for their own status. *Sefer der vatan* means "internal mystical journey" or the transformation of evil characters into good ones; that is, the transformation of the human characters into divine characters. This phrase is also used for the disciples who wander around until they find a true sheik for themselves.

Halvet der encümen means “solitude in the crowd” and indicates always remembering that the disciples are in the presence of Allah internally, although they seem to be engaged in the worldly affairs externally or physically. Bahauddin Naqshband underlines that the Naqshbandi tariqa has been founded upon the principle of *halvet der encümen* (Eraydın, 1994: 375-380). Solitude in the crowd refers to being secluded *within* the society, not *from* the society. In other words, a complete seclusion is not favored by the Naqshbandiyya, and this is among the significant principles that differentiate the Naqshbandi tariqa from many others. The seclusion should be practiced in the disciples’ hearts and minds in such a way that they should be together with Allah all the time, even when they are together with the other people, or when they are doing something else. Dhikr and the remembrance of God should reach such a level that the disciple can no more need to be secluded from the world in order to remember God. Bahauddin Naqshband says that “The benevolence is found in the community, and the community is found in conversation (*sohbet*)” (Eraydın, 1994: 375-380). In this phrase, conversation refers both to the religious preaches, and to the communication among the tariqa members for God’s sake.

This *halvet der encümen* principle might be among the significant reasons why this tariqa has been so widespread throughout the world, since the emphasis on community and conversation has led the tariqa members to be fully active in all the worldly matters and to serve people’s needs, while trying to reach God through this rough path at the same time. This is a rough path because the challenges are greater when you struggle in a society, compared to the struggle when you are only by yourself.

John Renard also draws attention to this specialty by mentioning the social and political activism of the tariqa. He also describes the Naqshbandiyya tariqa in the *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*:

The organization has played a major role in the history of Sufism in China as well. During the 14th/19th century, the order’s resistance to foreign domination of Central Asia and the Caucasus resulted in disastrous losses at the hands of Russian forces. [...] One of its main branches, the Mujaddidi, or “renewer,” suborder was a particularly influential reform movement in India.

The order was far more politically active than the Qadiriyya and members typically were married and had active family lives. Leaders of the order have traditionally been very concerned with maintaining a strictly observant compliance with all strictures of Islamic Law while still allowing some latitude of spiritual practice within the organization. One of the order's more distinctive ritual exercises involves visualizing one's shaykh while meditating [this refers to the *rabita-i mürşid*]. (Renard, 2005: 168)

As shown in the quote, aside from political activism, social activism is significant as well. The tariqa members in Naqshbandiyya refrain neither from business or education, nor from marriage and family life. Such and active participation has crucial impacts on all spheres of the disciple's life, as well as the organization of society in general.

The last four principles of the Naqshbandiyya are *yâd kerd*, *bâz geşt* or *bâz kerd*, *nigâh daşt*, and *yâd daşt*. *Yâd kerd*, or "recollection", involves dhikr or remembrance. In Naqshbandiyya, this type of remembrance is done in a special way. The disciples firstly establish a connection with their sheik at their heart. They think of themselves in the presence of their sheik; close their eyes and their mouth, sticking their tongues to their palates. Then, they begin to recite the phrase "La ilahe illallah (There is no God but Allah)", which is the expression of faith and the uniqueness of God. The aim of this dhikr is to reach the true awareness of the uniqueness of God by heart.

Bâz geşt or *bâz kerd* is "restraining one's thoughts", that is, to recite and contemplate on the phrase "îlahi ente maksudi ve rızake matlubi (Oh Allah, You are my wish, and my only desire is to have Your consent)". In this way, the true meaning and the insight of the confession of tawhid –i.e. "La ilahe illallah"- is granted to the heart, so that the heart has no connection with the outer world.

Nigâh daşt is "to watch one's thought" and to maintain this above-mentioned state of mind and heart. When the disciple recites "La ilahe ilallah" disconnecting with the outer world, they need to protect their hearts against any kind of solicitude or any kind of carnal thought. Sadeddin Kaşkari explains this principle as contemplating *only* on the confession of *tawhid* during a couple of hours (Eraydın, 1994).

Finally, *yâd daşt*, or “concentration upon God, is one step further than *nigâh daşt*. It necessitates that the disciple contemplates on Allah all the time, and not think of any other thing other than Him. On this level, the disciple is able to see the divine uniqueness of Allah and His creation in the infinite multiplicity of the universe.

In the Naqshbandi tariqa, the disciple has various duties to be performed both in public and in private. For instance, a disciple should surrender to the sheik, just like a deceased body surrenders to the person who washes and cleans him/her for the funeral.⁷ The disciples should behave decently both in the presence and in the absence of the sheik. They should not argue against their sheik in any case and they should tell their sheik what happens to them, no matter it is good or bad, because the sheik is like a doctor for the disciples in the tariqa. In addition, they should try to fulfill all the religious duties in the best way and stay away from all bad behaviors. When they cannot achieve this, they should repent.

The rituals and the extra religious duties can change in the Naqshbandiyya according to the necessities and conditions of the time, as well as the particular conditions of the disciple. But the disciples are given daily or periodical supererogatory duties under any circumstances. These duties include fasting, daily dhikrs of certain numbers, recitations of the Quran, and some other supererogatory duties such as the extra prayers other than the compulsory five-time prayers. *Rabita* and the *Hatm-i Hacegân* dhikr –the collective dhikr circle consisting only of the tariqa members- are among the most important duties in this tariqa. However, Ubeydullah Ahrar, one of the highly esteemed Naqshi caliphs, underlines that dhikr and the self-disciplining duties are practiced during the times that remain after the public service duties are finished. In this path, the benevolent public service duties are prioritized, when they conduce towards the pleasure and consent of other people. Obviously, this does not mean that the self-disciplining practices or religious duties are neglected. On the contrary, such a principle shows the degree to which this tariqa is concerned with the well-being of others in the world.

⁷ This notion comes from the Turkish phrase “gassalın elindeki meyyit gibi olmak”.

To better understand these disciplinary techniques and locate *rabita* as a method of self-formation in its proper theoretical context, it will be useful to discuss the concept of “self-care” and “technologies of the self” from both from Foucauldian and Sufi perspectives.



CHAPTER III

THE NOTION OF “SELF-CARE” IN FOUCAULT AND SUFISM

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which “self-care” can be conceptualized in comparison with some principal concepts in Sufi philosophy through analyzing some of the basic Foucauldian and Sufi texts. The chapter primarily focuses on the Foucauldian contextualization of “the knowledge of the self” and “the care of the self” in relation with the concept of *marifet*, which was introduced in the previous chapter. Throughout the chapter, I touch upon some basic parallelisms and differences that one can detect between the Sufi tradition and the Greco-Roman Christian tradition. In this regard, the concepts of *taqwa*, *zūhd*, asceticism and renunciation are also discussed more thoroughly so as to examine the ways they function as a technology of self-formation and self-fashioning. I will begin my analyses with the Foucauldian understanding of self, ethics and morality.

3.2. Conceptualizing self-care as a work of ethics

During his late academic life, Foucault shifts his focal point of research from power-knowledge technologies to the technologies of the self and care of the self. The texts he produces in this period deal with the issues of ethics, morality, sexual behavior, pleasure etc. In the chapter on the technologies of the self, he explicitly states that his primary interests have shifted from the technologies of domination and power relations to the interactions between oneself and others (Foucault, 1997c: 225).

Foucault makes a distinction between “ethics” and “morality” while discussing the rules, conducts, manners and technologies that produce or construct subjectivities. He looks at the ways how human subject or “self” is constructed through certain ethical or moral ideas and practices. At this point, “aesthetics of existence” and the “relationship of the self to self” emerge as crucial notions in the discussions of the self-formation as an ethical subject. Throughout this self-formation process, two other major principles are also scrutinized by Foucault, and these are the principles

that say “know yourself” and “take care of yourself” or “take care of the self” (Foucault, 1997b).

In this regard, one should pay attention to the fact that, when we talk about the care of the self, we do not simply mean being concerned with the physical or bodily matters, but rather, being concerned with the perfection, salvation or clarification of human soul and human mind, which has close ties with asceticism. Moreover, it needs to be underlined that the forms and conceptualizations of self-care vary in different cultures and philosophies.

The notion of the “self-care” in Foucault’s texts is mainly based upon the ancient Greek and early Christian culture; however, it is not a concept that is peculiar to these cultures. When we consider Islam, we could see that many fundamental Islamic practices intersect with the Foucauldian understanding of ethics and self-care. For instance, the practice of ablution could be considered as an example of the technologies of the self. Moreover, particularly in the Sufi understanding, the notions such as *rabita*, *taqwa*, disciplining the *nafs*, suffering, and some other Sufi conducts also constitute a certain “ethics” which lead to the self-formation of Muslim Sufis as ethical subjects, as well as manifesting a “relationship of the self to self”.

Before going into the details of this “relationship of the self to self”, the difference between “ethics” and “morality” in the Foucauldian terminology should be further discussed in order to be able to establish the link among Sufi philosophy, the early Christian philosophy, and the ancient Greco-Roman cultures.

In the chapter titled “Morality and the Practice of Self” (1985, vol. 2), Foucault draws attention to the distinction between morality and ethics. According to this difference, morality refers to “the field of rules and prescriptions”, whereas ethics refer to “a site of difference where the rule gets actualized” (1985: 25-27). Foucault describes this as “a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth” (1985: 25). But the moral

codes or morality should not be considered only in the framework of abstract conceptualizations. Morality has a very important behavioral aspect because the moral codes continue to be (re-)produced in an interaction with the receptions and reactions of the ones who choose either to obey or resist them.

Having said that, Foucault underlines an important point while describing morality, that is, rules and values are not always put forward explicitly, and they might stand in a scattered way rather than having a clearly defined system. Hence, there exists a flowing and dynamic interaction among the rules and their constituents, which leads to the emergence of “compromises or loopholes”. The compromises or loopholes are crucial because they could serve as the key elements in understanding the transformation of morality into ethics. Since the moral rules and values are almost always in an interaction with each other, the system of values is bound to alterations and it is in a constant flux. So we can say that the system of morality is never a closed system that has strictly designated borders. And the gaps in the system allows or stimulates the individuals to question and transform these codes.

In other words, while morality presents us the cultural codes that govern our behaviors or manners in certain rules, the ways of conducting these rules vary to a great extent, and this is when the notion “ethics” gets involved. When the individuals try to conduct themselves in accordance with these moral codes, they shape and choose their own “ethical” manners, and in this way, they become not only the agents of a particular act, but also the ethical subjects of their acts.

3.2.1. The *nafs* as the ethical substance of Sufism

The differences underlying various ethical dimensions of morality and forms of subjectivation concern five issues in the Foucauldian conceptualization. The first one is “*the determination of the ethical substance*; that is, the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct” (1985: 26, emphasis in original). Foucault gives examples from fidelity between couples. The individuals might choose to focus on the practical obligations and their real acts towards each other; yet they might also focus on their desires and

feelings. In this case, they have determined different ethical substances for themselves.

In accordance with the formation of ethical subjects and the relationship of the self to self, Foucault also underlines that the disciplining or transforming the “ethical substance” has great significance in the Greco-Roman ethics. From this perspective, the ethical substance could also be described as “the material that is going to be worked over by ethics” (1997c: 263). In this regard, the ethical substance is concerned with the acts linked with the concepts of pleasure and desire. Sexuality, for instance, serves as a third kind of ethical substance, and when we examine the Greco-Roman ethics in more detail, we come across with the notion of *aphrodisia*, which simply means “sexual desire” and illustrates the concept of ethical substance in the ancient Greek culture within this context.

If we give an example from Islam and Sufism here, we could illustrate *nafs*, which might be translated as “self” to English, as the substance over which the Sufi does the ethical work. Controlling and taming the *nafs* is considered to be of great significance in Islamic moral code. An ordinary Muslim might observe the code by means of fulfilling the obligatory prayers five-times a day, fasting for 30 days in a year and performing other religious practices; however, a Sufi might choose to conduct himself/herself by a more intense focus on ways of purification, such as the purification of the soul via seclusion and asceticism. Either way, they perform an ethical practice as they conduct themselves according to a specific moral code. As they remain within the everyday, mundane, ritualistic working of religion, they are ordinary, pious believers, whose major preoccupation is not the religious text or the moral code itself, which they simply follow. There might be differences in adapting the code in different cultural and historical contexts. These differences concern the ethical dimension of self-formation. To the extent the texts and the codes are subjected to an interpretation, we enter the domain of ethical practice *per se*. When we pay further attention to the moral codes of Sufism, it appears that all Sufi paths embraces the rule of knowing, educating and purifying the *nafs*, regardless of their differences in methodologies and interpretations.

When we analyze Sufi philosophy within this framework, we see that what Foucault calls substance in human soul, which directs or motivates the desires (including the sexual desires together with all other desires) is embedded in the concept of *nafs*. In Sufi philosophy, it is the *nafs* over which the ethics must work, and thus, the *nafs* might be regarded as the ethical substance in Sufi tradition, which needs to be transformed and purified so that one could construct oneself as an ethical subject (Mutman, 2014:179). So, Sufi individuals determine the *nafs* as their ethical substance upon which they construct their moral conduct; which leads them towards the notions of “knowledge of the self” and “disciplining the self” in order to be able to cultivate themselves as ethical subjects.

3.2.2. The problematization of *taqwa* in the sense of self-protection and self-cultivation

At this point, another concept in Sufism that should be included in the discussions of ethical practice is called *taqwa*. *Taqwa* is important because it has a fundamental significance for Sufi individuals’ subjectivation through ethical work. Hence, if we focus on this concept and its underlying connotations, we can both gain insight into the subjectivation process of the Sufi individuals, and we can also broaden our perspectives on the Foucauldian concept of self-care in this regard.

The word *taqwa* comes from the Arabic root W-Q-Y from the 8th stem verb *ittaqá* “to protect oneself” or “be wary” (Ambros & Prochazka, 2004: 294). Those who practice *taqwa* are called *muttaqeen* (the singular form of the word is *muttaqi*). In Sufi philosophy, *taqwa* has been explained in various ways but it could most basically be defined as protecting oneself from the sins, evil acts and all extravagancies by being faithful to Allah’s commands. However, such a brief definition is not enough to understand the underlying philosophy here. To fulfill the obligatory duties and to abstain from forbidden things is not *taqwa*. The proper *taqwa* shows itself not in the illegitimate domains but in the legitimate and suspicious domains. What is meant here is that only fulfilling the basic obligations of religion is not enough for being a *muttaqin*. To be a real *muttaqin* an individual has to carefully observe *all* the decrees completely and continually. Such an individual should follow all the rules in depth,

without ignoring even the tiniest details. Hence, their practices may sometimes conflict with the *fatwas* or decrees of the other Muslim judges; while some Muslim judges might act in accordance with jurisprudence and allow certain things –which is also quite acceptable and legitimate for the Islamic law-, the *muttaqin* individuals might disagree with them and choose not to behave according to these permits, since they strive for the best under any circumstance (Uludağ, 1996).

However, this does not mean just “more” intense religious attitude. It is not merely more worship and pray; rather than this, it concerns getting deeper in the worship. Since the Sufi individuals try to reach perfection in their worship, they develop a strong interest in learning all the existing decrees and then begin to scrutinize them all along the line and to the full extent, which brings together a thorough contemplation and awareness. Thus, *taqwa* adds a deeper intellectual dimension to living a religious life. In this regard, we can say that the Sufis problematize *taqwa* in their life and this is definitely much more than simply intensifying the religious services. As a result of this problematization, Sufis begin to get engaged in various self-care practices (particular rituals such as meditation, dhikr, *rabita* etc.). This attitude also coincides with the ethical work that is mentioned above because problematizing *taqwa* as a Muslim concerns the ethical dimension of the existing moral and religious system.

In the meantime, we should emphasize that the *muttaqi* individuals never think of themselves as practicing *taqwa* because this would go against the humbleness and the aim of disciplining the *nafs* (Uludağ 1996: 508-509). In other words, it is like a self-awareness in which the individual is not aware of its existence and degree. Such an awareness that is meant by *taqwa* includes both a self-awareness and an awareness of God because the *muttaqin* ones always keep in mind that they are before Allah in any second. It is in fact the level of *ihsan* whereby the individuals worship Allah as if they see Him and always consider that He sees them.

Going back to the problematization of *taqwa* in Sufi philosophy and its relation to self-care, we could examine this concept in more detail by including the discussion of

its etymological roots. As mentioned above, the *ittiqā*, the root of *taqwa*, means “to protect oneself” and this protection can directly be linked to the self-care in the Foucauldian sense, since the protection meant by *taqwa* in Sufism is all about caring and cultivating the self in a way that would lead towards perfection as a Muslim. However, one should clarify that this cultivation is not a unidirectional caring activity which merely cares for the individual himself. The *taqwa* notion has a community-focused understanding of self-care. The protection of oneself from the sins and evils outside surely concerns the self itself, yet the basic ground for self-protection still relates “the other”. As I have written, in the Foucauldian conceptualization, the ethical substance to be transformed is *aphrodisia*, which emphasizes sexuality. Nevertheless, the ethical substance of Sufism, i.e. the *nafs*, signifies much more than just sexual desires. It concerns both the physical body and the self (or ego) -shortly all the bodily and worldly desires no matter what- and the protection from the sins altogether goes beyond the egocentric purposes (Mutman, 2014:179).

The basic aim of the *muttaqin* is to have God’s consent. In the Quran, God clearly and frequently announces that His consent can be acquired only by means of caring for the other; which is the very reason why *taqwa* goes beyond egocentrism. The multi-dimensional attribute of *taqwa* is highlighted by a great many Sufi masters from various perspectives. For instance, in the *Risale*, Kuşeyri quotes Ebu Hasan Farisi saying “*Taqwa* has one external and one internal dimension. The external dimension concerns observance of the God’s rules; the internal dimension concerns pure intention and *ihlas* (i.e. sincerity and asking only for God’s consent, not anything else) (1991: 244). As we can also infer from this quote, *taqwa* relates both the inside and the outside of the individual. If we think over this statement, we will see that the sins and evil desires of the *nafs* not only harms the individual, but more importantly harms the other; so, the *muttaqins* have the need to protect themselves in order to be able to care for the other as well, and gain God’s consent in return. Hence, *taqwa* (in the sense of self-protection or self-care) embraces both external and internal protection from various perspectives.

3.2.3. Mode of subjection, elaboration of ethical work, and telos of the ethical subject

To continue with Foucault's understanding of ethics, besides the determination of the ethical substance, *mode of subjection*, *elaboration of ethical work*, and *telos* of the ethical subject are the other important concepts, which concern the ethical differences of moral conduct according to Foucault. The *mode of subjection* refers to the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice (1985: 27). Once the ethical substance is determined, the ways of working over that ethical substance may differ for each individual. Foucault continues to give examples from conjugal fidelity; in this case the couples' motives and justifications for being loyal to each other might differ from preserving the customs to fulfilling a spiritual obligation. If we also continue to give examples from Sufism, we could think of different motives lying under the Sufi practices of purifying the *nafs*; for instance, one could try to tame his/her *nafs* according to a certain path because he/she considers himself/herself was born into this path and feels obliged to continue this tradition, or he/she might follow this path's ruling system because it is his/her individual choice to go along this path for the best spiritual transformation.

Similarly, the ways for the *elaboration of ethical work*, that is, the real practices individuals perform to conduct themselves as ethical subjects might differ from each other. One might choose to practice sexual austerity or spiritual transformation by means of practicing long-term controlling mechanisms, or he/she might choose to refrain from everything with a sudden and decisive detachment, and choose to live accordingly. These kinds of real practices that concern the elaboration of ethical work might include certain dietary regimes, fasting practices, periods of seclusion, and abstinence from sleep or choosing to perform other meditative practices. Finally, the *telos* –the Greek word for “purpose” or “goal”- of the ethical subject might differentiate from each other. Foucault's examples in this section can be used for both conjugal fidelity and Sufi practices of taming the *nafs*. The main purpose in both cases might be to transform into a fully mature self, to feel peaceful and tranquil at heart, or to deserve salvation from the pains of death and afterlife.

What is important to note here is that an action is not moral in its singularity, but it is moral “in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct” (1985: 28). In other words, we need to evaluate the moral and ethical dimensions of an action by taking into account the conditional or contextual properties of that action. The reason, the purpose and the ways of practicing an action altogether shape the ethical work over an ethical substance. More importantly, it is true that all “moral” actions relate to the rules and values in reality and the outer world, but these actions also concern the relationship of oneself with oneself, not only in the meaning of self-awareness but also in the meaning of constructing the self as an ethical subject by working over a specific ethical substance in himself/herself. Such a process of self-construction or self-formation necessitates certain practices for monitoring, educating, examining and transforming the self, which will be further discussed in the following pages.

3.2.4. Ethics-oriented moralities versus code-oriented moralities

To sum up, for Foucault, “every morality, in the broad sense, comprises two elements: codes of behavior and forms of subjectivation” (1985: 29). However, as also discussed above, each morality does not function in the same way; although there might be codes of behavior, these codes cannot be fulfilled in the same strict manner, which leads to the differentiations in the forms of ethical subjectivation and practices of self-formation. In other words, while there might occur instances in which the strict observance of rules is possible and necessary, there might occur other instances in which the varying forms of subjectivation are much more essential and desirable. In this latter scenario, the observance of rules and behavioral codes can be considered of secondary importance. Rather than this, different technologies and practices of the self comes forward as pioneers of the ethical subjects. “These ‘ethics-oriented’ moralities (which do not necessarily correspond to those involving ‘ascetic denial’) have been very important in Christianity, functioning alongside the ‘code-oriented’ moralities.” (1985: 30)

In such a Foucauldian understanding, ethics-oriented moralities which concern the practices of the self-care are conceptualized in a way that sometimes conflicts and

sometimes compromises with the code-oriented moralities. For this, he gives the example of the Christian penitential system in the thirteenth century; from the beginning of this century up until the Reformation, this penitential system led to a strict “codification” and lots of spiritual movements flourished in order to resist this. From this point of view, it is also possible to illustrate sharia (Islamic codes of behavior) as a code-oriented morality, and tariqa (the Sufi path) as an ethics-oriented morality. However, although we might agree on the claim that each morality consists of codes of behavior and forms of subjectivation, we should underline the fact that these two elements of morality might not necessarily operate in the same manner in each system.

Since our primary concern is Islam and Sufi philosophy, I would like to underline that Sufism should not be viewed as a spiritual philosophy which resists the codes of behavior in Islam. It might be verily true that Sufism as an ethics-oriented morality can resist many other moralities -whether code-oriented or ethics-oriented- in the Islamic systems; however, its founding principles are not based upon resisting the Islam as a religious code-oriented morality, because the main principles of Sufism are based upon compromising with the basic Islamic codes (sharia) in the first place. The Sufi terminology dictionary says that if sharia is defined as the external religious provisions, whereas the *hakikat* (or *haqiqa*) is defined as the internal or divine provisions, then these two might differentiate from each other (Uludağ, 1996: 493). However, if sharia is defined as all religious provisions, then the two are actually the same. So, relations between these two moralities might change at some instances, just as Foucault also explains. Such differentiations enrich and explain the active and interrelated nature of moral codes and ethics; yet they do not justify the ignorance of the code-oriented laws when the subject matter is Islam. As Kuşeyri states in his *Risale*, no sharia law which is not confirmed by the divine provision is acceptable; likewise, no divine truth (*hakikat*) which is not bounded by the sharia is acceptable (1991: 216).

That said, the common ground for the discussions above is the fact that the different conducts of interpreting the codes in one’s behavior is made possible by means of an

ethical transformation process, and the result becomes the construction of different subjectivities or “ethical subjects”, who apply the rules of morality in different conducts. Thus, the manners which construct an ethical subject give way to various subjectivations, and the manners or techniques of the self which create these subjectivations are also depicted as an “aesthetics of existence” by Foucault (1986b).

Obviously, the formation of ethical subjects is closely linked to the various technologies of the self examined by Foucault. The relationship of oneself to oneself, i.e. self-care, is crucial as well, since it constitutes the basis for the cultivation or the formation of self. At this point, Foucault writes that “There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without ‘modes of subjectivation’ and an ‘ascetics’ or ‘practices of the self’ that support them.” (1985: 28) Hence, the practices for constructing an ethical subject lead us towards a deeper analysis of the technologies of the self and the self-formation practices.

3.3. Technologies of the self as preliminary to self-care practices

In the preface to the second volume of the book *Ethics, Truth and Subjectivity*, Foucault emphasizes the technologies of the self within the context of sexual interdictions. He draws attention to the fact that the interdictions about sexuality are mostly related with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself, and aims at studying the link between this obligation and the bans imposed on sexuality, by focusing on the notion of asceticism (1997c: 223-224).

In the second volume of his work on the history of sexuality, Foucault concentrates his attention on the issues of self-writing and technologies of the self besides other ethical matters. The chapter on self-writing mainly deals with the ancient Greco-Roman culture, studying “the arts of oneself” within the framework of aesthetics of existence together with the government of oneself and of others. The following chapter, which is also linked to the discussions in the previous chapter, dwells upon the technologies of the self in greater depth. Before examining the technologies of

the self in more detail, it would be helpful to mention three other major types of technologies discussed by Foucault, so as to better contextualize technologies of the self.

According to the Foucauldian framework, one can talk about four basic technologies, which function jointly most of the time, and each of which leads to certain ways of thinking and behaving. These four types are: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and finally technologies of the self. Foucault explains the scope of the technologies of the self as such:

Technologies of the self [...] permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (1997c: 225)

A more comprehensive understanding of these technologies of the self requires and examination of the ways they develop in certain cultural and historical contexts. Since, Foucault concentrates on the Greco-Roman and early Christian cultures, we can initially look at the development of these technologies in these contexts so as to be able to better illustrate how these technologies operate on the “self”.

3.3.1. The relationship between “the knowledge of the self” and “the care of the self”

When we look at the practical and the theoretical framework which concern the technologies of the self, we come across the term “*epimeleisthai sautou*”, meaning “taking pains with oneself” or “to take care of the self” in the ancient Greco-Roman culture (1997c: 230). For examining self-care during antiquity, Foucault looks at various sources, including the Socratic dialogue named *Alcibiades I*, where the notion of self-care emerges as a result of the political desires of Alcibiades and the philosophical love of Socrates towards him. This dialogue is crucial in the sense that it is the first to mention the concept “concern for self” or “taking pains with oneself”, i.e. *epimeleisthai sautou*.

Throughout the discussion of this ancient text, Foucault mainly points out three major themes about self-care, the first two of which regard the political and pedagogical dimensions, and the third of which refers to the relationship between care of the self and knowledge of the self. The last theme presents more enlightening perspectives for the purposes of this chapter, thus it will be beneficial to articulate this relationship in more detail.

With regard to this relationship, the first thing to be highlighted is that there seems to be hierarchical relation between these two principles, yet the superior-subordinate relationship does not mean that they are completely separate from each other. On the contrary, they should almost always be considered as functioning together or in relation with each other. Foucault's remarks herein present quite an explanatory overview about the hierarchical relationship in question:

There is the problem of the relationship between the care of the self and the knowledge of oneself. Plato gave priority to the Delphic maxim "Know yourself." The privileged position of "Know yourself" is characteristic of all Platonists. Later, in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods, this is reversed: the accent was not on the knowledge of self but on the concern with oneself. The latter was given an autonomy and even a preeminence as a philosophical issue. (1997c: 231)

As it is explicated above, although this notion of being concerned with oneself constitutes a fundamental significance in the ancient Greek philosophy, Foucault underlines the fact that there has been an inversion of the hierarchies, causing the notion of self-care (*souci de soi*) to be forgotten and lose its significance in the later understanding of this philosophy.

Based upon the Delphic tradition that is uttered by Foucault –a tradition which is related with the period of the Greek God Apollo and his oracles- the principle “know yourself” carried a meaning against being presumptuous, not going beyond the human being's limitations, trying to reach the status of God. According to another comment, this principle advised the human subjects to be aware of their demands and expectations when they asked something from the God.

While trying to comprehend the interrelation between knowing oneself and taking care of oneself, one might initially assume that it is the need to acquire knowledge of oneself which constitutes the basic ground of Greco-Roman culture; and the care of the self emerges as a subordinate principle, compared to the quest for knowing oneself. However, when one analyzes the Greek and Roman texts, it is clear that the Delphic principle “know yourself” –i.e. *gnōthi seauton*- was in fact the subordinate principle, and the main principle was to take care of the self, be concerned with oneself, i.e. to occupy oneself with oneself (1997c:226). Thus, in fact “knowing oneself becomes the object of the quest of concern for self” (1997c: 231), instead of the self-care’s being the object of the quest for knowing oneself.

Foucault comments on this hierarchical inversion saying “‘know thyself’ has obscured ‘take care of yourself’ because our morality, a morality of asceticism, insists that the self is that which one can reject.” (1997c: 228). Such perceptions about morality have also links with the renunciation of the self and asceticism. According to Foucault’s critique, the morality that has led to this inversion and to the subordination of self-care results from a conception of morality based upon asceticism in the early Christian tradition, which prescribes the renunciation of the self as a condition for salvation. At this point, I would like to pay further attention to the notions of asceticism and renunciation as they have great significance for better understanding the philosophy of self-care.

3.4. The renunciation of the self in Sufism

Asceticism in Greek philosophy derives from the term *askēsis*, which means strict self-discipline or self-control, for religious or meditative purposes. As Foucault, explicates in more detail, asceticism in Christianity “always refers to a certain renunciation of the self and of reality because most of the time the self is a part of that reality that must be renounced in order to gain access to another level of reality” (1997c: 238). The motive to reach the level of “renunciation of the self” is what structures Christian notion of asceticism, and the asceticism discussed in this context also shows similarities, as well as differences- with the notions in Sufism. Thus, the issue of

renunciation deserves deeper contemplation, particularly with regard to the Sufi traditions in Islam.

The asceticism and renunciation notion in Sufi philosophy is expressed in the concept of *zühd*. As a means of disciplining the *nafs* and cultivating the self, *zühd* has meanings such as “to renounce”, “to abandon”, “to be indifferent”, “to abstain or avoid from”, and “to have no desire for or inclination towards the world’s benefits” (Uludağ 1996:593). Kuşeyri quotes Ebu Süleyman Darani saying “one of the signs of *zühd* is to wear wool” (1991: 254). This link between the wool and asceticism is important because the Arabic expression for the wool is *sûf*. Among the different opinions regarding the roots of the terms Sufi and Sufism, many scholars accept the one that there is a close relationship between wearing *sûf* and Sufism. The importance of wearing wool is made explicit in the idea of renunciation, as it is also mentioned by Darani because wearing wool (the cheapest and less valuable fabric type compared to others) symbolizes the refusal of wearing silk and other expensive or fancy clothes. By means of refusing the silk and cotton with this motive, Sufis also refuse the world and all its wealth. Accordingly, the notions of *taqwa* and *vera* (or *wara*) can also be used in relation with renunciation; however, they are not identical. *Taqwa* could be described as refraining from things that are contrasting with God’s consent; whereas *wara* could be described as refraining from not just the forbidden things, but also anything that is suspicious. *Zühd* (renunciation) refers to a higher level symbolizing cleansing the heart from anything that intervenes between the individual and God. It is the renunciation of the world which is felt at the heart (Eraydın 1994: 177).

Other sources present variant classifications and definitions of *zühd*. For instance, Ahmet Karamustafa (2007: 1-7) and Annemarie Schimmel (1975: 110-120) point out the differences between being an *âbid* (pietist) versus being a *zâhid* (renunciant), where being a pietist refers to observing all the religious duties without necessarily purifying the heart from the worldly desires; yet, being a renunciant refers to refraining from anything in the heart that would prevent the individual from thinking Allah. In relationship with the notion of heart, Şahver Çelikoğlu, an esteemed Naqshi scholar, writes in the book *Rabita* that

Heart has two windows. One is lower, the other is higher. The lower window opens up to the devil, the higher one to Allah. *Zühd*, *taqwa*, *wara* and other benevolent acts open the way for Allah's mercy; but the malevolent acts that follow the desires of the *nafs* open the way for being deceived by the devil. (2012: 92)

Likewise, while talking about the historical evolution of Sufism, Osman Türer points out that the period before the full emergence of Sufism as an Islamic science as we know today can be called the period of renunciation, which encompasses the first and second years of the year of hegira. The renunciants during this period conceptualizes Sufism based upon an understanding of renunciation and asceticism which derives from the fear of God. The masters in this period emphasizes the importance of contemplation, meditation, fear of God and asceticism. A prominent renunciant figure in this period is Rabi'atu'l Adeviyye, who has transformed the nature of the fear from God. She has left the fear of hell behind, and has transformed her fear into the fear of being separate from her beloved Allah. In this way, she is the first person to use the notion of "divine love" in Sufi terminology, and this is highly crucial for the construction Sufi philosophy, which is founded upon the principles of reaching "divine love". (Türer, 1995: 78-82) This transition in the *zühd* notion is also significant in the sense that it links together with the fact that renunciation does not completely refrains from existence, yet it aims at transforming the self's relationship with himself, the other, and the God. In the Naqshī philosophy, *zühd* does not require a complete isolation from the world; hence, it embraces a "worldly asceticism" just like the Protestant ethics/asceticism, rather than the Catholic "renunciation of the world" as Weber described (Weber, 1958).

On the other hand, Ahmed bin Hanbel mentions three levels of *zühd*: the first one is to renounce the forbidden things –which is compulsory and done by common people; the second one is to renounce the superfluous but halal things- which is done by the cultivated people; and the third one is to renounce anything that prevents the individual from being concerned with Allah, and that is performed by the wise people (the people who have *irfan*) (Kuşeyri 1991: 256). A very similar –almost identical- classification is also written by Selçuk Eraydın (1994: 175). A different classification

regarding *zühd* is provided by Süleyman Uludağ in the Sufi Terminology Dictionary. According to this classification, *zühd* has three levels again. The first level is to renounce the world when you still feel the love of the world in your heart. The second level is to renounce the world upon realizing the fact that it is insignificant in comparison to the afterworld. Finally, the third level is to renounce even the thought of renouncing, which means having no desire for the world and not overestimating this renunciation. At this point, it makes no difference for the Sufi people whether the world exists or not. Since the existence and non-existence of the world is equal to each other, the only reality that is left is the existence of God, and this thought aptly links with Sufi ideal that promotes unity of existence (*vahdet-i vücüt*) (1996: 593).

In this regard, it also needs to be mentioned that self-renunciation has primary importance in Islamic tradition as well; and to know oneself actually functions as a means of renunciation because the better you “know yourself”, the more you begin to realize your “nothingness”, realizing the fact that it is only Allah which exists, and it is only by means of the self-renunciation process that one will be able to denunciate his/her self or *nafs* to reach salvation. This belief can also be encountered in the early Christian tradition, which indicates that “to know oneself [is] paradoxically a means of self-renunciation” (Foucault, 1997c: 228).

This paradoxical relationship should be understood well, for renunciation of the self actually paves the way for a new cultivation of the self, besides serving as a method of being prepared for the afterlife. What I mean by this new cultivation is the aim of “gaining access to another level of reality” that was mentioned above; and such a new self-construction process first of all necessitates the protection of the self, i.e. self-care. This means caring the self in such a way that you would be able to re-fashion yourself in the light of a new reality. If we approach this from the Sufi perspective, you will first renounce this world and its world-centered structure (that is, the way it has shaped your existence); afterwards, you will reconstruct yourself in a new fashion which is God-centered. In this sense, it should be underlined that renunciation from the world does not mean renouncing the self completely, for this could go as far as

suicidal attacks and this is something which is strictly forbidden in Islam. On the contrary, you have to protect your “self” via asceticism, so that you would have something to reconstruct later on. However, the process of cultivating the self in a new fashion flows over a blurred path and the transformation process in question does not have clear-cut borderlines among the levels. This dynamism should not be overlooked while examining asceticism. The cultivation of the self does not follow a linear line, but it evolves through a cyclical path.

Judging from all these statements, it might seem impossible to combine a regular life at a minimum level with a life that is built upon renunciation. Nevertheless, it is in fact not impossible because the main purpose of renunciation is to clear the heart from things that concern anything but Allah. This purification aims to lead the Sufi individual to realize the fact that there is no agent but Allah in the universe. The renunciation enables the disciples to reach this awareness by means of cutting their ties with the world. As a result of this process, the Sufi individual does not attribute any agency to the created things, as the only creator is Allah. This situation surely does not necessitate the termination of one’s life; rather than this, it enables the individuals to change their perspectives on life in a way that is coherent with the Islamic and Sufi ideals. An individual with this consciousness only desires the love of Allah; he/she neither feels sorry for what is lost, nor feels happy for what is gained. This is the state of total submission (Eraydın 1994: 179).

The basic difference between the Catholic monks and Naqshi disciples regarding renunciation comes forward at this point. The continuation of life is crucial in Sufi philosophy. There are obviously various ways of performing renunciation in many cultures, but my concern here is the conceptualization of *zühd* by the mainstream Sufi masters. “Renunciation from the world” and “renunciation of the self” do not prescribe a total withdrawal and isolation in the Naqshi philosophy. Renunciation in this philosophy surely has a physical and bodily aspect similar to other cultures, but the main purpose of the renunciation concerns the disciplining and purifying the heart. The essence of the renunciation lies in the intellectual and emotional awareness. When one owns a tremendous wealth in this world, the main point of

renunciation is not to let this wealth rule his heart, for being a man of property is one thing, but being possessed by this property is another. And this is one of the most important aspect of renunciation (*zühd*) in Sufi philosophy which has links with the care of the self that is discussed in this chapter.

3.5. Marifetü'n-nefs as a technology of self-formation

To continue with the notion of self-care and self-knowledge in this light, I would like to underline that although Foucault discusses the issues of self-care and self-knowledge within the framework of Christian and Greco-Roman traditions, as we have seen above, we could expand the scope of our discussions by taking into account the perspective of Sufi philosophies. At this point, the Sufi notion of *marifetü'n-nefs* (knowledge of the self) -*gnōthi seauton* in Greek- indicates a clear parallelism with the precept of “know yourself”, which is promoted in the Greco-Roman philosophy.

In the previous chapter, we have examined *ilim* and *marifet* in Sufism. In this chapter, I dwell upon the meanings of these concepts in the Islamic and Sufi philosophy, yet I do not deal with the details of the notion *marifet* in terms of its relation with the knowledge of the self and the care of the self. Hence, in this chapter, I will focus on the Sufi perspective on these matters.

I have mentioned above that the “self” in self-care and self-knowledge concerns not only the physical body, but also the soul. On this note, we could think of the notion *nafs* in Sufi philosophy, because of the fact that the “self” of the self-care in Foucault corresponds to the idea of *nafs* in Sufism. As it is discussed above, *nafs* could be considered as the ethical substance of Sufism over which the ethical transformation and purification is practiced. As it was briefly introduced in the beginning of the chapter, what is called *nafs* has in fact lots of various definitions in the Islamic texts, and we could contemplate more on the concept of *nafs* before going into the details of its relation with the self-care.

In the *Risale* by Kuşeyri, as in many other Sufi texts, the *nafs* is basically defined as the evil manners and actions of a subject, as well as his/her malicious attributes. This

malign *nafs* is divided into two parts: the first part concerns the forbidden things and the will to commit sins, which are inherent in the human nature; the second part concerns the lower characteristics or attributes of the subjects, which could be transformed and eliminated through a gradual process of struggle. That is why, this second part of the *nafs* is sometimes called the lower soul. According to this framework, Kuşeyri and other Sufi masters classify the *nafs* as representing the malignant and lower attributes of human nature, whereas the *ruh* (or the soul) represents the good and benign attributes of the human nature. The heart also represents another part of the human nature, and these three parts constitute a whole (i.e. “the human”) altogether (1991: 222- 223). So, the *nafs* as the ethical substance of Sufi individuals involves this malign nature of human self, which needs to be worked over by ethics in order to constitute a purified whole with a pure soul and a pure heart. Herein, the other parts of human being –the soul and the heart– must be purified as well, yet as Kuşeyri (1991) also states, it is the *nafs* in the first place that represents the malicious parts of the human being, so it is the *nafs* again which needs purification in the first instance. Since these three parts constitute a whole, as the *nafs* is transformed and cleansed from evil gradually, the pureness of the heart and the soul will eventually come to light at the same time.

In addition to this definition, the *nafs* divided into seven major levels in itself, all of which concern a different state of mind and soul, and thus, to a different subjectivation. For instance, the lowest status of the *nafs* is *nafs-al-ammarah*, which is the source of all “evil” desires that would diverge oneself from reaching the Truth, and deserving the love of Allah. The following status is the *nafs-al-lawwama*, which means the “blaming *nafs*” in the sense that the self is never content with oneself. Going through the phases of “the *nafs* at peace”, “the inspired *nafs*”, “the pleased *nafs*”, “the pleasing *nafs*”, the self reaches up to the highest status, which is the state of *nafs-as-safiyyah* (the pure *nafs*) (Uludağ, 1996). Throughout these phases, the proximity of the disciple to Allah and the intimacy of oneself to oneself gradually increases and reaches its highest point, where the disciple completely surrenders to and is “in-spired” by Allah. This is the situation in which the disciple’s heart and soul is completely purified and open to the divine grant of the truth (*marifet*). From then

on, the disciple is at permanent peace and he has reached the capability of “right seeing” with the will of God. In all this process of reaching the status of *insan-ı kâmil*, i.e. the perfect human subject, what we realize is the fact that this purification and the perfection of self is nothing but the previously discussed “relationship of oneself to oneself” and the “care of the self”, which is discussed by Foucault.

Having said these, we could continue to examine the Sufi perspective on the knowledge of the self and the ways they relate to the care of the self. On the way to *marifetullah* -which is one of the principal goals of Sufi disciples- the purification of the heart and the *nafs* is essential; and what is essential for this purification is the knowledge of the self (and the *nafs*). The knowledge of self is best understood in the hadith “Men arefe nefsehû, fekad arefe Rabbehû” (“He who knows himself, knows his Lord”) (Al-Acluni, 1749:2:262). Ibn Arabi also quotes this saying in his book *Futûhât al-Makkiyah* (1990: 101) and explains that to know oneself is to become aware of the fact that one can never truly fulfill himself and reach a complete closure in this world, and that he will always remain in his possibilities of “becoming”.

An interpretation of this above-quoted hadith is also reflected in the verse by Şeyh Galip saying “Care for your self gently, for you are the essence of the universe” (1994), which emphasizes the fact that human being is the core of the universe and all creation. According to Sufi philosophy, this verse means that human being is like the micro-cosmos which possesses all the potentials of the universe. The phrase of an early Christian philosopher St. Augustine expresses this view in other words, saying “Don’t lose yourself, return to you, inside of you lives the truth”.⁸ Similarly, Clement of Alexandria (2015) also quotes “The most beautiful learning and the greatest is to know yourself, for whoever knows himself knows God and whoever knows God becomes like Him.” All these ideas as a whole nourishes the idea that human being, human self or human *nafs* contains in itself all the possibilities, potentials and the plurality of being. The truth, or the “*homine veritas*” is harbored within the self or *nafs*, which is the key to understand the meaning of existence. Furthermore, this

⁸ The Latin phrase says “Noli foras ire, in teipsum reddi; in interior homine veritas”, Saint Augustine.

understanding indicates a clear parallelism with the precept of “know yourself”, which is also promoted in the Greco-Roman philosophy, as it is discussed above.

When we consider the knowledge of self and conceptualize the relationship of oneself to oneself in this fashion, all clear-cut fragmentations or essentialized dichotomies between the I and the Other(s) become vaporized into a cloud of possibilities in the end, since a person do not possess a finite, omnipotent and completed existence in this world, and cannot exist or continue to “be” in this world without the others and without the mercy of God. The “I” contains all the possibilities; yet only some possibilities come to surface through interaction with the others. However, the other possibilities do not vanish and human beings continue to live in this cloud of possibilities, for this is how God’s designed the existence. Thus, the knowledge of the self in the end is designed to lead to the knowledge of God by means of realizing the fact that it is only God that exists. In the end, these two knowledge types go hand in hand during the process of reaching the *marifet*. The more you know yourself, the more you come close to God, but you can “only know *that* he is, not *what* he is” as mentioned by Plato in Plutarch, 391 F. (Bentwich, 1913).

The knowledge of the self in Sufism is expressed as *marifetü’n-nefs* –“gnosis of self”- ; and as I mentioned above, one cannot have *marifetullah* (“gnosis of God”) without *marifetü’n-nefs*. These two principal ideas are based upon the hadith quoted above, and they serve as the key principles of Sufism, differing greatly from the principles of *ilim*. As Ekrem Demirli writes in one article, this principle is based upon the scholastic theologians’ method that claims “a human being can know God and everything other than himself only by means of himself”, and this doctrine can be summarized as “arriving at the invisible by means of the visible” (Demirli, 2013:363-374). Thus, the knowledge of the “visible” self leads towards the knowledge of the “invisible” God in this sense. The interpretation that sees the human being as the micro-cosmos of all the creation is another dimension of this principle as well, since the knowledge of the micro-cosmos could lead a human being to the knowledge of the macro-cosmos.

The importance of the concern for the self or the care of the self comes into prominence right at this point because the gnosis of self is made possible through the

practices of self-care in terms of the ethical transformation and self-formation processes that we mentioned above. In the meantime, however, we should not forget the fact that the gnosis of self is only possible by means of the gnosis of “the other” because the selves are not created and constructed in isolation from the others. There is a plurality of dimensions in the existence, and this existence is maintained / reproduced through the answerability among all beings that have been created by God. When we take it further with a Sufi perspective, all this plurality and answerability are actually the tools or paths that lead the disciple towards the knowledge of self in the first place (by means of the knowledge of others), and then, towards the knowledge of God (*marifetullah*) and the divine truth (*hakikat*). And since the knowledge of the self is not separable from the knowledge of the others, so is the care of the self not separable from the care of the other as well.

All these considered, we could remember the previous discussion of the self-care within the scope of morality and ethics; that is, the ethical work of the subjects on their ethical substances (the self or the *nafs*) goes beyond the boundaries of code-oriented moralities towards a higher ethics-oriented morality; and this changes the level of self-care from a merely corporal and external practice towards a mainly spiritual and internal practice. At this point, we could also recall the distinction between *ilim* and *marifet* explained in the previous chapter. In Sufi philosophy *ilim* is considered as the external knowledge that is obtained through scientific reasoning, while *marifet* is considered as the internal knowledge that is obtained through a purified heart; and the means of achieving this *marifet* (including both *marifetullah* and *marifetü'n-nefs*) are the means of disciplining and purifying the self or the *nafs* – in other words, the practices of self-care. Hence, we could also conclude that the ethical transformation of the subjects through self-care practices takes *ilim* to a higher level (the level of *marifet*) as well, just like it transforms the code-oriented moralities into ethics-oriented moralities.

3.6. What are the self-care practices and how are they performed?

In analyzing the scope of self-care activities, we could initially focus on two very basic questions that come forth in the first place: what is the “self” and what constitutes

the “care” or concern which is emphasized here? Yet, it is important to firstly note here that the concern for the self in this regard always refers to a real activity, rather than only being an attitude, and this is related with the practical side of the self-caring processes along with the ideational side.

3.6.1. Understanding the “self”

Obviously, the semantic field of the word “self” is boundless. That is why, I will here briefly look at two different conceptualizations of self in the thought systems that concern this chapter, rather than going into the details of other definitions. First of all, it should be stated that the Foucauldian texts and the Sufi texts examined in relation with self-care clearly seem to be focusing on varying themes. While dealing with the human subject, Foucault’s arguments are founded upon the self, the body, and the soul. In this framework, when he describes the self, he mentions that it is much more than the flesh, and that it belongs to the soul rather than to the body. From this perspective, it also shows a parallelism with the Sufi understanding, since the *nafs* is considered to be belonging more to the soul than to the body. As a matter of fact, it is sometimes described as the lower soul in Sufism. Nevertheless, the concept of the *nafs* is undoubtedly much more comprehensive than the self alone. This concept will be more scrutinized in the following pages, but for the time being it would suffice to say that it has a wide range of semantic field, including meanings such as life, spirit, soul, self, ego, eye, evil desires, sensuality, bodily senses, breath, blow, nature, and zeal (*Osmanlıca-Türkçe Sözlük*, 2015) Hence, it would be deficient to translate the *nafs* as the self, since it is neither translatable nor decidable.

Another crucial difference in this regard is related with the term heart. As we can see, the Foucauldian understanding (based upon the ancient Greco-Roman philosophies) and the Sufi understanding partly coincides with each other in their definition of the self. However, Sufi philosophy has a more distinctive perspective on human being when dealing with self-care, and that distinction comes from the concept of heart. As it was thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter, Sufi philosophy places a great importance on the heart as one of the basic components of the human being because it is the home for divine love and divine knowledge. The Sufi way of understanding

human being could as well be summarized in the statement that says “Human being is made of soul and body. The body has the *nafs*; and the soul takes its *nûr* (divine light) from the heart” (Çelikoğlu 2012: 92). That is why, when we talk about the self in terms of Sufi philosophy, it should be understood that this self refers to a whole being that consists of the body, the *nafs*, the soul, and the heart.

3.6.2. Understanding the “care”

Within the context of self-care, we basically come across two levels of care. The first one concerns the more widely known and anticipated dimension of self-care, which includes all the practices aimed at enhancing the physical well-being of the individuals. From the non-religious aspect, these practices can vary from all kinds of body-cleaning acts to sports activities for keeping oneself healthy and in well-being. From the religious aspect, they concern fulfilling the religious duties (no matter which religion) -such as periodically going to the church or to the mosque- at the optimum level by complying with the established rules. All these practices are directed at the self-care at some point, since they promise the well-being of the individuals.

However, the second level of self-care is much deeper than these practices because it pertains to the caring of the soul. For instance, in relation with the Socratic dialogue examined by Foucault, to be concerned with the self does not only regard the body. To be able to take care of the self properly, one needs to take care of his or her soul, not just the body. The “self” in this context is not composed of the physical being, the flesh, or the clothes, tools and other sorts of properties. As also mentioned in the previous paragraph, the self that is meant here “is to be found in the principle that uses these tools, a principle not of the body but of the soul” (1997c: 230). Hence, the primary activity of caring for the self is to be occupied with the soul, rather than the body; and the ethical work of the subjects on their ethical substance carries self-care to a higher (or deeper) level in this way.

To engage in the care of the self in this way, the soul must first and foremost know the soul, i.e. it must have the knowledge of itself. Foucault frames this relationship as:

How must we take care of this principle of activity, the soul? Of what does this care consist? One must know of what the soul consists. The soul cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror. Thus, it must contemplate the divine element. In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior. (Foucault, 1997c: 231)

The knowledge of the self is accessible only by means of deep contemplation of the divine element, which can be considered as “Allah” or “God” in the Christian and Sufi philosophy for instance. More importantly, Foucault points to a highly significant issue in this quote, that is, the soul cannot know itself unless it looks at itself in a mirror. This sentence aptly summarizes the fact that the knowledge of the self and the soul is possible only by means of the knowledge of “the other”. Accordingly, the care of the self cannot be thought inseparably from the care of the other. In order to have a better understanding of these two notions (“self” and “care”), we could pay more attention to the Foucauldian conceptualization of the technologies of the self by looking at some examples.

3.6.3. Some examples of self-care practices

Taking these into consideration, we could first of all look through some self-care practices that relates with transformation and purification of the self in the ancient Greco-Roman cultures, in Christian asceticism and in Sufi cultures.

The first things that come to mind regarding the self-care practices have connections with the various practices of abstinence. Such practices include certain dietary regimes, fasting, sleeping less, sexual abstinence etc., all of which designated for self-training and self-purification. Other than these practices, the meditative practices are equally -even further- crucial for self-care since they operate at a deeper intellectual level together with the physical practices, just as *rabita* does.

As for the practices of self-care in the antique cultures, I will initially embark upon the practices of the ancient Greco-Roman cultures. When we examine these ancient cultures within the framework of self-care, the relationship between the care of the self and pedagogy takes attention in the first place. As Foucault points out in his

writings, for instance, to occupy oneself with oneself is depicted as the duty of a young man according to Socrates; however, when we come to the Hellenistic period later on, it is observed that self-care comes to be viewed as the permanent duty of each subject and it turns into a lifetime practice (Foucault, 1986b: 48-49). If we compare this to the Sufi traditions, we see that the Sufi notion of self-care is in parallel with the Hellenistic period on the grounds that the care of the soul, or *tazkiyat an-nafs* must be a permanent activity as well, which goes on until one dies. In other words, the need for self-care in Sufism is never ending (Kotku, 2012).

But it is different than the medical care that is promoted in the Hellenistic period. The medical model which substitute Plato's pedagogical model –in the sense that it transforms into a permanent activity- advises that “one has to become the doctor of oneself” (1997c: 235). Nonetheless, the care of the self in Sufism, the perfection of one's soul is not something that could be achieved without a master, according to the commonly accepted principles. The well-known Sufi expression of Beyazid-i Bistamî that says “One who has not surrendered to a master is mastered by the Devil” (Selvi, 2000) could be given as an example of this doctrine. Moreover, the aim of self-care practices in the Hellenistic period is not directed at the achievement for the afterlife, but it is rather concerned with the achievement of the life that goes on until the moment of death; whereas the self-care practices in Sufism concern both life on earth and afterlife. The practices basically aim at promoting the principle “to die before one actually passes away”, which carries the same meaning as the renunciation of the self, together with the renunciation of anything that belongs to this world, in relation with the notions of asceticism and *zühd* that were discussed in the previous chapter.

If we take a closer look at some of the major different perspectives during the times of the Platonic period and the Hellenistic period, based upon Foucault's accounts on self-care, we can readily draw some other parallelisms between the Greco-Roman philosophies and Sufi philosophy. For instance, in the philosophy of Stoicism, the dialogue (as a Socratic method of cultivating the self) is substituted with silence and

the art of listening. These two concepts (silence and listening) come forward as the most common methods for transforming the self.

As for the art of listening, for instance, we could illustrate the Philo of Alexandria's description of silent groups who listen to a teacher talking about the interpretations of the Bible. While describing this scene, Foucault highlights the fact that the disciples listen to the monologue in silence and even in a certain fixed posture. Via such listening in silence, the disciples both listen to the voice of their preacher and the "voice of reason", which they reach through contemplation on the self (Foucault, 1997c).

Listening to the voice of reason, while listening to the master is crucial in this regard. As Foucault states in his book: "For Plato, one must discover the truth that is within one. For the Stoics, truth is not in oneself but in the *logoi*, the teachings of the masters." (1997c: 238). Thus, while listening to the master and performing deep contemplation about the divine element, one is in fact listening to the voice of "reason", i.e. the *logoi*. We see a similar emphasis in the chapter titled "The Care of the Self" in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1986b), where the cultivation of the self is pronounced to be possible only by virtue of the reasoning ability which is granted to human beings by the Gods. Nevertheless, when we analyze the Sufi texts, it is explicitly uttered that the cultivation of the self in Sufism is based upon or made possible only by means of the voice of heart, not only by means of reason (Chittick, 2000).

Both the Socratic dialogue and the Stoic listening are among the primary methods for training the disciples on the Sufi path as well. Being in conversation or listening to the sermons of Sufi masters (i.e. *mürşid*) is a well-known method for the cultivation of the self. This dialogue and listening method emerges from Prophet Muhammad's dialogues with his companions. In Sufi sources, it is written that Prophet Muhammed used *sohbet* (dialogue or conversation) as a method for "healing and purifying the hearts of his companions" (Eraydın 1994: 133). In a similar fashion, it is believed in Sufism that the masters' dialogues with the disciples are like a spiritual cure. The

sohbet method functions as a means of purifying and cultivating the disciples' *nafs*, heart and soul, as well as disciplining their self. From this perspective, *rabita* -basically defined as a meditative practice- is also a method of *sohbet* (dialogue) in the sense that it establishes a connection firstly between the disciple and the sheik, secondly between the disciple and God.

Another example that catches one's attention about the above-mentioned art of contemplation and listening is the method of keeping silent. For instance, the Pythagorean cultivation of the self prescribes the pedagogical rule that the disciples keep silent for five years (Foucault, 1997c: 236). This cultivation method is also found in some of the major Sufi traditions as well. To illustrate, we could mention the Mevlevi disciples, who keep silent for at least forty days, besides applying a very strict dieting regime as a cultivation method (Gölpınarlı, 1963:11).

Likewise, Ebu'l-Âlâ Afifi also mentions that silence is one of the important methods of disciplining and purifying the *nafs*. However, he underlines the fact that the manners of keeping silent in Sufism differs from the Christian mysticism. Sufi philosophy prioritizes a permanent vigilance and control in speech, rather than prescribing certain periods of absolute silence as we see in Christian mysticism. Such vigilance also involves to weigh one's words, to avoid demagogy, and prefer not to speak unless it is absolutely necessary. More importantly, the silence in Sufism has two kinds; one concerns the silence of the tongue, and the other concerns the silence of the heart. For Sufi disciples, the latter has much more significance, since this type refers to "the silence of the enlightened ones (*âriflerin sükûtu*)" (2015: 131-132).

When we continue to examine the technologies of self-care, we come across some other methods and principles that are related with the contemplation of self. Various meditative practices can be given as examples here. For instance, when we look at the ancient Greco-Roman traditions, we see that Stoics used "consideration of the self" as a means of meditation and cultivation of the self. As will be elaborated in the following pages, a similar "consideration of the self" is also practiced in Sufism as a method of self-care (that is, *rabita*). At this point, it would be beneficial to highlight a

difference between these two philosophies. In Stoicism, the consideration of the self for meditative purposes means not renunciation of the reality, but the assimilation of it to reach the reality or truth of “this world”.

Nevertheless, the meditative practices in Sufism (including the other training methods) fundamentally concern the preparation for afterlife, although they inevitably affect the life on this world. The main concern of the exercises in the Greek philosophy (basically composed of meditation and gymnasia) is to confront and assimilate the reality of the world so that the subject would be able to create an ethics according to which he or she would apply the rules of conduct to oneself. In Sufi philosophy, this level of ethics is crucial and has direct relationship with the reality of this world as well, yet the underlying concerns are always directed towards afterlife because this world is temporary. Herein, it should be underlined that this afterlife is not only the simple desire for acquiring a position in the heaven or in the hell, or a high status in this world. By means of reaching a high level of ethics through self-care, self-formation and self-perfection, the Sufi subjects aim to deserve the love of their masters (*sheiks*), Prophet Muhammad, and Allah, which should be the end goal of each disciple.

On the other hand, despite this difference, the philosophies in question show some enlightening similarities in terms of the cultivation of the self. For instance, the exercises of meditation have significance in Sufi practices as well. Based upon his readings and researches, Foucault explains that meditation in Greek philosophy is a way of imagining real life occurrences and developing behavioral strategies for these predictable events, and this is done through creating dialogues in one’s mind.

The philosophical meditation [...] is composed of memorizing responses and reactivating those memories by placing oneself in a situation where one can imagine how one would react. One judges the reasoning one should use in an imaginary exercise (‘Let us suppose ...’) in order to test an action or event (for example, “How would I react?”). Imagining the articulation of possible events to test how one would react-that is meditation. (Martin, Gutmann, Foucault & Hutton, 1988)

When we consider the ancient practices and Sufi practices of meditation from this perspective, imagining death, for instance, could be given as a perfect example for this kind of meditative self-care practice. The contemplation of death in this sense can be thought as the imaginary exercise which urges the subject to monitor their lives, as well as get prepared for their death-to-come. The notion of *rabīta* practice (in particular the *rabīta-i mevt*) is among these kinds of meditative exercises that lead to the cultivation of the self, just like the notion of *memento mori* does in the Greco-Roman philosophy. These concepts are more thoroughly analyzed in the following chapter.



CHAPTER IV

RABITA AS A CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE OF SELF-CARE

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have introduced the concept of self-care in the Foucauldian sense and elaborated on the conceptualization of self-care both in the ancient Christian and in Sufi philosophies. I have also focused on the primary self-care activities that come forth in both cultures. In this chapter, I will pay closer attention to the notion of *rabita* as a self-care practice in Sufism and present a discussion of this concept within the framework of self-formation with a special focus on the disciples of the İskenderpaşa Community, which was introduced in chapter two. Here, I will explore the ways we can evaluate the practices of *rabita* as a means of self-care which have both metaphysical and practical dimensions. The chapter will provide a discussion of three basic types of *rabita*, and focus on how *rabita* is constructed and performed as a technology of the self or as a practice of self-care through various discursive strategies and techniques. I will further elaborate on the concept of *rabita-i mevt*, or the contemplation of death, in terms of the existential implications of Sufi philosophy in a way that would link the interpretations of death to the fundamental modes of thought in Sufism.

4.2. Definition of *rabita* in the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa philosophy

The term *rabita* etymologically derives from the Arabic root “rbt”, meaning to connect or to tie (*Nişanyan Etymology Dictionary*, 2014). It has other similar meanings such as “relationship”, “reunion”, “affiliation with love”, “being courageous”, and “being strong”. In some Sufi or philosophical texts, the heart is likewise named *ribât* (which comes from the same Arabic root as *rabita*) because the heart connects the soul and the body. In the Sufi terminology, *rabita* simply means to connect one’s heart with a refined and mature sheik whose soul has reached the level of perfection (Selvi, et al., 1994), yet this definition is not sufficient to fully understand this concept. *Rabita* is a method of meditation and dialogue at the same time, as discussed in the previous chapter. Due to being among the most effective

ways of training the disciples, as analyzed in detail below, it is one of the important self-care methods in many Sufi orders that sprang from the Naqshbandi philosophy; however, not all Sufi orders prescribe this method for disciplining the disciples and moving forward on the Sufi path. For instance, while it is a highly fundamental element of the Naqshbandi order, it is not adopted by the Shadhili *tariqa*, another large, world-wide Sufi order.

4.2.1. Classifications of *rabita*

The practice of *rabita* is mostly described and analyzed in terms of connection with a sheik, yet it actually consists of three major themes or levels, and its full name in the Naqshbandi *tariqa* is *Rabita-i Şerife*. These three types of *rabita* include *rabita-i mevt*, *rabita-i mürşid*, and *rabita-i huzur*. *Rabita-i mevt* literally means to connect with death. In the Sufi orders, it is a philosophical practice, which prescribes the disciples to contemplate on their own death. *Rabita-i mürşid* is to contemplate on the master (*mürşid* or sheik) in a way that would connect their souls to each other by the divine mercy of Allah. In this type of *rabita*, the disciple prays to Allah and imagines that he or she is benefitting from the divine light of his sheik, and tries to be alert all the time as if he or she is together with the sheik any moment. Lastly, *rabita-i huzur* is to contemplate on Allah, imagining oneself before Him. This type of *rabita* makes the disciple aware of the fact that he or she is in fact together with Allah all the time, even if he or she is not aware of it through the daily routine, so it leads to a permanent state of vigilance (Uludağ, 1996). Hence, these types of *rabita* emerge as means of technology based upon the contemplation and the cultivation of the self, since the disciples try to be aware of being under the constant monitoring of his or her master (as well as the God) all the time; and this awareness shows its effect in each section of their life and being (Coşan, 1999).

In addition to this specific conceptualization of *rabita* in the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, there is another and slightly different version of understanding *rabita* in Sufism. According to this classification, *rabita* in Sufism is again divided into three categories. The first is “natural or instinctive *rabita* (or contemplation)”. It is a natural urge like the connection with one’s family, from which one cannot avoid, as it refers to the spiritual

and intellectual connection with the beloved ones, which resembles Ibn Khaldun's concept of "asabiyya". The second category is "corrupt contemplation"; whereby the disciples connect their hearts to evil and malicious things, and to contemplate on illegitimate things. Finally, the third category is "divine contemplation" whereby the Sufi disciples connect their hearts to those of Prophet Muhammad and God's other beloved ones. In other words, it is contemplation on good things (Arvasi, 1981).

Apart from these classifications, there are some other types of *rabita* mentioned in Sufi texts. For instance, there is a daily *rabita-i mürşid*, which is performed only between the evening prayer and the night prayer. While some Naqshi leaders particularly decide on this time period as a daily lesson for the disciples, other Naqshi leaders favor different time periods. For instance, one might perform *rabita* every day after the evening prayer (the evening *salah*). But some Sufi masters advise that it could be performed during other time periods such as after the morning prayers or between the midafternoon prayer and the night prayer during Ramadan (Selvi, et al. 1994: 53).

Another type of *rabita* is the one that is performed during the collective dhikr (called *Hatme-i Hâcegân*). Finally, there is the *rabita* that is performed by establishing spiritual connection with the dead masters. Since the souls are believed to be eternal and alive after the bodily death, connecting with the souls of the deceased sheiks or other esteemed dervishes is an acceptable practice in some Sufi orders (Selvi, et al. 1994: 53-59). The important point in this connection is to know that, although it is possible to connect with the deceased sheiks, the purification and transformation process of the Sufi path is made possible via connecting with the sheik who is in charge at that moment. Thus, the disciples should be aware of this fact in order to be able to move forward (Çelikoğlu, 2012: 19-21).

In addition to the above-mentioned ways of performing *rabita-i mürşid*, there are several other types of *rabita-i mürşid* that are also classified according to the instances in which they are performed. These *rabita* practices could be performed in any of the above-mentioned manners. In brief, there are two main types of *rabita-i*

mürşid. One is the *rabıta* performed in the presence of the sheik; the other in his absence. The first type of *rabıta-i mürşid* is performed during the collective dhikr (*hatme-i haccgân*) in which the disciples are altogether and in the presence of the sheik. In this case, the *rabıta* is no longer an imaginative practice because the spiritual connection with the sheik and his disciples are established while they sit face to face. The second type of *rabıta-i mürşid* is divided into categories in itself.

According to one classification, the *rabıta* in the absence of the sheik has two categories. The first concerns the daily-practiced *rabıta-i mürşid*, which is mostly performed after the evening *salah*. The second concerns the *rabıta* that permeates all existence around the disciples. This *rabıta* is free from any spatial or temporal limitation, and the *rabıta* (i.e. the spiritual connection) with the sheik supposedly shows its effect in each thought and action of the disciple (Haşimi 2007: 82- 84). From this perspective, this sub-category seems to represent and explain the fundamental purpose of the whole *rabıta* practices, that is, to transform the transient *rabıta* states into permanent virtues and manners of existence. Hence, this is one of the most effective and important modes of cultivating ethical subjects in Sufism.

Other types of *rabıta* in the absence of the sheik include two more sub-categories. The first sub-category concerns the spiritual connection with the saints or holy people who have passed away. In the Naqşhi philosophy, the spiritual connection in the *rabıta-i mürşid* with the deceased sheiks is not allowed. It is compulsory that the disciples connect with a living sheik so that they could move forward on the Sufi path and transform themselves. However, it is also believed that the souls are immortal; hence, it is possible to spiritually connect with the deceased sheiks as well for the purposes of praying (see Arvasi, 1981). The crucial point here that the disciples could advance in their cultivation process only with the disciplining of their living sheik. The connection with the deceased sheiks is only for the purposes of praying and reverence. That being said, they might visit the graves of the passed-away sheiks in order to pay their respects and love to their souls. The accepted and appropriate manner of paying such visits to the graves necessitates the spiritual connection with the living sheik in the first place. The disciple should never disregard the fact that any

kind of spiritual prosperity during these visits are conveyed to his/her heart via the heart of their current sheik (Dilaver Selvi et al. 1994: 53-59).

The second sub-category concerns the spiritual connection in times of disease and trouble. The Naqshi philosophy explains this type of *rabita* in this way: Whenever a disciple runs into a trouble, he/she should consider this trouble occurring because his/her sheik has asked God for it. In these cases, the sheik realizes that the disciples have a tendency to forget Allah and grow away from the right path; hence, they ask Allah for a trouble which would eliminate the disciples' bad manners and stimulate them to get closer to Allah by means of struggling to discipline and purify their *nafs* (Haşimi 2007: 87-88).

Based upon the fundamental sources of prominent Naqshi leaders, the ways of performing *rabita-i mürşid* could be summarized in three versions (Arvasi, 1981: 19-39).

In the first version, the disciple imagines him/herself vis-à-vis their sheik's face. Here the disciple connects with their sheik by heart, and focus on the area between his two eyebrows because this area is the center of the divine light of Prophet Muhammad (*Nûr-u Muhammedî*). When the disciples look at this area and connect with their sheik, the light in the hearts of their sheik will flow into the hearts of the disciples; and they will be gradually enlightened by the divine light of Prophet Muhammad. One of the prominent Naqshi sheiks, Ahmed Ziyaüddin Gümüşhanevi, explains that the disciples should imagine their sheik while he is sitting side by side with the predecessor sheiks including Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi. While they are focusing on the area between the sheik's eyebrows, they should simultaneously contemplate the "Name of Allah" (*Lafza-i Celal* or *Lazfatullah*, i.e. the word **الله**). They should imagine this "Name of Allah" as if it is written on a board composed of divine light.

In the second version, the disciple imagines themselves with the same appearance and outfit as their sheik. In this state, the disciples aim at losing their "self" in the

“self” of their sheik, and losing their own attributes by means of replacing them with the supreme virtues of their sheik, which is called *fenâ fi’ş-şeyh*. As a result of this practice, the disciples gradually internalize the fact that they are always together with their sheik spiritually; and monitor themselves and behave as if they are in the presence of their sheik all the time. The objective here is that this would eventually lead them towards internalizing the feeling of togetherness with Allah. Finally, in the third version, the disciples again imagine themselves vis-à-vis their sheik’s face and spiritual presence. In this state, the disciples imagine their hearts as a long and wide tunnel in which their sheik walk towards themselves (Çelikoğlu, 2012: 65-69).

In all these three versions, the disciples are supposed to continue the practice of imagining and establishing spiritual connection until they become entranced and lose themselves. The purpose of these practices is to make the disciples feel loving, decent and spiritually connected to their sheik even when they are not physically together with them. In this way, they will be able to “care” for themselves and purify their *nafs* by means of cultivating and disciplining themselves even in the absence of their sheik. During this process, the sheik’s soul functions as a mediator through which the divine light of God and Prophet Muhammad is bestowed upon the disciples.

With regard to this mediator function, the Naqshi sources make reference to the hadith that says “Whatever God has poured into my heart, I poured into the heart of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq” (Kabbani, 2005: 159) Based upon this hadith, the primary mediator between the disciples and Prophet Muhammad is Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. The line of descents in all Naqshi *tariqas* originate from this relationship; and the Naqshi sheiks inherit the divine light that was poured into Abu Bakr’s heart in the first place. This is also the reason why *rabita-i mürşid* is advised to last longer because the connection with the sheik acts as an intermediary for the divine light of God, which is necessary for the purification of the heart and the *nafs* (Çelikoğlu 2012: 65-69).

4.2.2. General manners and rules of performing *rabita*

These *rabita* exercises, which operate as a means of self-introspection, are practiced by the disciple (*murid*) every day in order to be alert anytime. As a daily practice, the

above-mentioned three *rabitas* are performed subsequently in the following order: *rabita-i mevt*, *rabita-i mürşid*, and *rabita-i huzur*. The duration of *rabita* might differ for each disciple, yet the minimum duration of the practice is prescribed to be five minutes (Haşimî, 2007: 81-82) for each type. The medium duration is mostly advised to be 10-15 minutes, but it is also commonly advised that the longer it is, the better and more effective the *rabita* becomes. For instance, Şahver Çelikoğlu, a respectable Naqshi scholar, emphasizes that five minutes is not enough for *rabita*; it should last minimum one hour but could be longer because the longer it lasts, the more beneficial it becomes for the disciple (2012: 69). Likewise, the Naqshi sheik Mehmed Raif Efendi (also known as Abdülhakim Arvasi) suggests that the duration of *rabita* should be minimum a quarter hour (Yücel, 1993: 61-62). Particularly the *rabita-i mürşid* needs to last much longer as it takes place at the center of the challenging Sufi path towards purification and maturity.

Before performing *rabita*, the disciples perform ablution. They find a calm and clean place where they could stay alone. As mentioned above, *rabita* could be practiced during the collective *dhikr* rituals; hence, the disciples might perform *rabita* in the presence of others. What is crucial here is to find peace in one's mind and heart. When the disciples are ready for *rabita*, they kneel down and tuck their legs under. In this position, the disciples are advised to give their weight to their right so that their heads could be closer to their hearts. Afterwards, they close their eyes and repent all sins and offenses, saying "Astagfirullah" (I seek forgiveness of Allah) for 25 times. Then, they recite the Surah Al-Fatihah once, and Surah Al-Ikhlâs three times. They bestow these prayers on the souls of Prophet Muhammad and the descendant masters that have lived up until now. The first of these masters is Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (the first caliph of Islam), followed by other caliphs, the great spiritual masters/sheiks (*mürşid-i kamil*) and *ulema* (scholars) who have worked for leading people to the right path in Sufism. Most Sufi genealogies derive from Abu Bakr Siddiq but have branched off in the course of time; thus, the line of descent for each *tariqa* has undergone a change at some point. Each disciple accepts all the righteous *tariqas*, yet they become affiliated only with one *tariqa* and the *rabita* practices are

performed accordingly; that is why, each disciple separately prays for his/her own tariqa's line of descent, in addition to praying for the other masters (Coşan, 2014)

The key point of all these manners and rules is to increase the effectiveness of *rabıta*. Certain rules and manners are surely necessary for the disciplining of the Sufi disciples, yet they are not always fixed to a specific time and space. Even though there are prescriptions with regard to the ways of performing *rabıta* within certain temporal and spatial restraints, the ultimate goal of these practices is to internalize these practices in such a way that all the temporal and spatial restraints lose their relevance. At this point, the disciples reach a permanent and peaceful state in which they unconsciously perform *rabıta* at any moment.

Just as there are certain rules for performing a valid and acceptable *rabıta*, there are also rules to avoid a null *rabıta* in Sufism. First and foremost, the disciples should never mistake the means for the end; that is, they should always be aware that *rabıta* is the means for reaching God, not the final destination in itself. Thus, they should not become too much engrossed in the *rabıta* practices –particularly in the *rabıta-i mürşid-* in a way that would diverge them from their real path. Besides this very important rule, Şah-ı Hazne (Ahmed El-Haznevi) -one of the esteemed Naqshi leaders- mentions four conditions that invalidate *rabıta*. The first is to have doubts about the sheik. The disciples should frequently refresh their commitment to their sheik so as to overcome their doubts. The second is to become careless and to be engaged with gossips. The disciples could overcome their careless behaviors when they persist in gathering with their benevolent Sufi companions, and when they intensify their love towards the benevolent people (especially their Sufi masters and companions). The third situation is to become under the influence of people other than the sheik, or to lose their hearts to someone else. The cure for this situation is found in abstaining from anything which comes between the disciple and the sheik. If possible, the disciples should try to visit the sheik in person; if not, they should imagine being with him and try to connect with the sheik spiritually. Finally, the idleness (or indolence) and despair that come forth as a result of committing cardinal sins invalidates *rabıta* as well. The cure to overcome these feelings is to be engaged

in a constant struggle with the *nafs*. Even if the disciple cannot stop committing a sin, it is essential that he/she does not give up the struggle, and that he/she should continue seeking forgiveness of God (Selvi et al. 1994: 46-47).

Since the three types of *Rabita-i Şerife* are performed in an order, beginning with *rabita-i mevt*, let us now analyze this practice in more detail, which also has deeper philosophical implications.

4.3. Existence or Non-existence: *Rabita-i mevt* and the idea of death in Sufism

What matters the most in Sufism is the struggle to reach the unity of God's existence, and this could only be achieved by means of reaching non-existence, or learning *not to exist* in the first place. Therefore, the notion of death is one of the central pillars of Sufi philosophy, and its contemplation is the *sine qua non* of each Sufi path. Keeping this in mind, we could now analyze the first type of *rabita*, i.e. *rabita-i mevt*.

4.3.1. *Rabita-i mevt*: The contemplation of death

Rabita-i mevt entails on the contemplation of death as a means of self-purification and self-transformation. As mentioned above, the contemplation of death has a highly crucial place among Sufi self-care practices because death could be considered as the key notion of Sufism. This key importance arises from the fact that "death and life" or "existence and non-existence" lie at the basis of Sufi philosophy, as we can see in almost all philosophical quests. When we broadly look at Sufi philosophy's conceptualization of existence and non-existence, we see that it is grounded on the acceptance of Allah as the only Beginning-less and Endless One in the universe, who is the omnipotent creator and possessor of all that exists. Since human beings bear a part of God's soul as God gave humans a part of His own soul while creating them⁹, and everything in the universe is a revelation of God's eternal existence; the abundance and multiplicity of the creation in fact contains in itself the unity of existence, which was also mentioned in the other chapters (Başar, 2015). As a result

⁹ This is based on the verse that states: "Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His [created] soul and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful" (*the Quran*, 32: 9).

of this acceptance, the main purpose of Sufi individuals is to become aware of this truth, and apprehend the real spirit of the “unity of existence” (*vahdet-i vücüt*); i.e. *fenâ fillâh* and *bekâ billah* (Uludağ, 1996).

From this perspective, Sufis initially view this world and their body as a block or jail-like cages, which separate them from God, because they sever their soul’s connection with God. In this sense, death comes forth as the means to ending this break, as the souls will unite in the afterlife when the bodies are dead. This is the reason why Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi defines his death as the wedding night (*şeb-i ar’us*). However, the fact still remains that life on earth should be sustained as well, until this final day comes; and the renunciation from the world does not mean suicidal acts, as clarified before. Hence, Sufi individuals pass on to a further level through which they seek to unite with God before they physically die. But how is it possible to die before one actually passes away?

The answer is embedded in all the discussions made until this point. In other words, death in this context could be thought as another name given to the struggle for reaching *fenâ fillâh- bekâ billah* and living as a renunciant in this world. According to Sufism, when an individual dies, all the bodily functions come to an end; however, the soul is immortal and continues to live in the afterlife. Here, we should note that death in this context is not equal to non-existence in the physical sense as the soul continues to live after death. And when Sufism talks about “dying before one actually dies”, what is meant is the death of the *nafs* and all the bodily desires. In other words, this idea primarily signifies to keep the desires of the *nafs* under control, and have no strings attached to this transient world. Furthermore, and most importantly, this idea aims at the *fenâ fillah- bekâ billah* through the annihilation of the self and to let one’s self melt in the eternal existence of God; thereby merging it with the boundless ocean of God’s divinity. Then, the immortal soul could find everlasting peace both in this world and in the world after (Coşan, 1999).

Therefore, disciplining and purifying the *nafs* is essential for Sufi individuals in order to move forward towards unification with God. In this regard, Sufism conceptualizes

death in a particular manner, dividing it into four types in terms of their significance for the purification of the *nafs*. The first type is the “crimson death” (*mevt-i ahmer*) by a struggle to weaken the *nafs* through relentless opposition against its desires. The second type is the “white death” (*mevt-i ebyez*) via the purification of the *nafs* by means of eating less and fasting frequently. The third type is the “green death” (*mevt-i ahder*) by sustaining a humble and simple lifestyle, although the *nafs* may not like it. Finally, there is the “black death” (*mevt-i esved*), which represents the struggles to endure oppression and torment in the world, knowing that anything –either good or bad- comes from God, and it makes no difference for a Sufi to experience something good or bad, since he/she sees nothing but Allah in the universe (Uludağ, 1996: 363-364; Eraydın, 1994: 179). In this sense, *rabita-i mevt* emerges as a highly important contemplative practice, which embodies the quintessence of Sufi philosophy. Therefore, we need to examine this practice more closely, so that we could gain more insight into the Sufi perspectives on death and life.

Rabita-i mevt literally means “connecting with death”, and is sometimes called *tefekür-ü mevt*, i.e. the contemplation of death, or to think over death. Just like the other two types of *rabita*, contemplating death is also assigned to the disciples as a daily practice; in fact, it is the first *rabita* that needs to be performed by the disciples. When we look at the explanations for performing *rabita-i mevt* in the basic Naqshi disciplines, we come up with a certain general description of this practice. According to this definition, Sufi disciples think of themselves as if they are about to die any minute. In this visioning, they think that Azrael, the angel of death, comes to end their life; and they pass away as a true believer. This visioning continues with the imagination of all the procedures concerning one’s death as detailed as possible. For instance, funeral procedures over the dead bodies, the process of burying the deceased body etc. are all envisioned. After that, the disciple also contemplates on the doomsday, the resurrection of the dead bodies, the Armageddon, interrogations at the doomsday, and determination of the final destinations (heaven or hell) are envisioned as well (Uludağ, 1996).

This is the first aspect of contemplating death, based upon the punishments and rewards foreseen in this world, thinking over death functions as a method of self-examination or auto-control, in terms of being prepared for the afterlife and the doomsday. Secondly, when the Naqshbandi disciples conceptualize death, they also emphasize the Day of Judgment; nevertheless, their focal point is not the doomsday, but the unification with Allah. In other words, the Naqshi philosophy prioritizes the love of God over the fear of God, which leads to envisioning death as a pleasant and joyous event, rather than a creepy and horrifying end (Selvi et al., 1994: 61). Hence, the Naqshi disciple does not think over death as a frightening event. It is normal that each individual might have a fear of death, and the *nafs* could radically be transformed via this fear. However, the main purpose of Sufism is to connect the disciples with God via the strings of divine love; thus, the love of God has much more efficiency in transforming and purifying the *nafs* in the Naqshbandi orders. In relation to this, the contemplation of death is expected to transform the Sufi individuals in a way that would awaken them to the love of God and the unifying power of His existence. One of my interviewees, Feyza (55; disciple for 23 years) underlines this saying:

The visible result of *rabita-i mevt* is that you get used to the idea of dying and mortality. But there is also an invisible result: your perspective on life changes. There is an end to this life. This is an inward purification. When you become aware of your mortality, you accept everything as they come from Allah. This is a feeling, not something you can see. The real purpose of *rabita* is the purification of heart. What happens then? You always remember you are with God; you are in presence of God. You are with the ones whom you keep in mind. So, you awake from a dream to the reality, and you are able to establish a real connection with Allah. What is important is this connection, not the feeling for the feelings are transient.

When *rabita-i mevt* is performed with this consciousness, the Sufi disciple could gain more insight into their transient existence, and move forward on the Sufi path, towards reaching unification with God, i.e. *fenâ fillah* and *bekâ billah*. Contemplating on the idea of mortality and death leads people to question the meaning of life and existence, and such contemplation is not a practice peculiar to Sufism. In the ancient cultures, we can see similar practices. At this point, it might be useful to compare

rabita-i mevt with the Latin concept *memento mori* to see how different cultures deal with the idea of death.

4.3.2. Remembrance or Connection: *Rabita-i mevt* and *Memento Mori* as self-care practices

The Latin doctrine of *memento mori* and contemplation of death are important for ascetic disciplines, due to their key function in cultivating the self by means of helping the perfection of the soul and the pursuit of a decent life, just like the *rabita-i mevt* in Islamic Sufi orders. For instance, according to Pythagoreans, remembering the death [*memento mori*] was an exercise for the memory (1997c: 236). It is the memory of what one has done and what one has to do. Moreover, it is an “administrative” conscience, rather than a “juridical” one. Thus, it functions as a permanent self-examination activity, which leads the disciple to always monitor one’s own actions and representations, while remembering or keeping in mind that he or she might die at any moment.

On the other hand, a critical aspect which needs to be emphasized is the fact that *rabita-i mevt* does not only concern the remembrance of a forthcoming death; but also, it aims at the *connection* with death or *dying right at this moment and in this place*. Hence, this philosophical practice functions by disconnecting with the outer world, and connecting with what lies beyond that world on the very instant and place of thought. This emphasis on temporality and spatiality can also be interpreted in relation with the Bakhtinian notion “chronotope” (2000: 43- 70), since this emphasis on the “now” evokes the idea that there is always the possibility of another form of “being” other than the forms of our existence at the moment. In this regard, there is always a plurality and the co-existence of different spatialities and temporalities in one chronotope. Through the process of *rabita-i mevt*, the disciple in a way finds himself/herself right at the center of these chronotopes, in which many spatialities, temporalities and identities merge into one other. Thus, ideationally imagining death in this manner allows disciples to realize the multidimensional and both finite and infinite aspects of being in terms of the mortality of human beings in contrast with

the eternity of God, and the endless possibilities of being and the potential of unification with God respectively.

Rabita-i mevt could also be linked to the previously-mentioned Sufi doctrine of dying before physically passing away. Such a conceptualization of death is also found in Plato's *Phaedo*, which narrates Socrates' final days and his death, revealing the great importance attributed to the contemplation of death. In this dialogue, Plato argues that "the proper practice of philosophy is about nothing else but dying and being dead" (*Phaedo*, 1983). If one thinks deeply and evaluates this statement from a broader perspective, it would not be difficult to realize "dying and being dead" in this context does not merely concern the bodily death. This statement might be interpreted in a way that promotes the disconnection with all the presence in the world at the moment, and engage in the *proper practice of philosophy*. As well as the scope of this "practice of philosophy" is far-reaching and widespread, within the context of this paper, it could primarily be claimed that this practice of philosophy is also closely linked to the quest for "the knowledge of the self" and "the cultivation of the self", since the knowledge and cultivation of the self are among the greatest concerns for many classical philosophers.

Accordingly, when one links all these concepts with each other, one may realize that *memento mori* and *rabita-i mevt* are important both for the practice of philosophy in general, and for the cultivation (or care) of the self in particular. Hence, the concept *rabita-i mevt* comes forth as a more comprehensive notion than the "remembrance" of a future death, inasmuch as it aims at a proper practice of philosophy by means of disconnecting with the outer world, and connecting with what is beyond that right at this moment and in this place. In this way, the disciple engages in constantly active and enriching practices of contemplation by means of these *rabita* practices; hence, the self is constructed and re-constructed again and again with the aim of perfecting and purifying the soul. As a consequence, the relationship of oneself with oneself gradually reaches to its most intimate level, and the self-care or the cultivation of the self is maintained via this philosophical practice of connecting with death.

4.3.3. *Rabita-i mevt* as a means of naming “The Unnamable”:

Since it is a daily activity, *rabita-i mevt* could also be analyzed as an everyday life practice, which might be useful to see how *rabita-i mevt* constructs various subjectivities, who treat death in a different manner than most of other people. In this sense, we could initially say that the multidimensional implications of *rabita-i mevt* transform not only the Sufi individuals, but also the existing discourses on death and life, or existence and non-existence. Since *rabita-i mevt* challenges the exclusion of death, it comes forth as a concrete act of naming what is “unnamable”; and deeply transforms any kind of ideology which is constructed and systematized based upon an everlasting and existential fear of death.

Michel de Certeau discusses how death is treated by people, arguing that “the dying are outcasts because they are deviants in an institution organized by and for the conservation of life” (1984: 190). The dying human loses his or her subjectivity, enters into a phase of nothingness with no means of productivity and progress, if we think in terms of the modern paradigms that praise continuous progress, production and reproduction. The dying people present a terrible threat to this ideal of a “unified” machine-like system, in which everything is built on the concept of constant working and “there is always something to do” (de Certeau, 1984). Yet, the dying man totally hinders and challenges this discourse since he has no life, no ability to work and produce, no subjectivity, no language etc., and he is thus “wrapped up in a shroud of silence: the unnamable” (de Certeau, 1984: 191).

In the article “Of Other Spaces”, Michel Foucault highlights the issue of the old age and the dying men with a similar approach. Based on a distinction between utopias and heterotopias in the modern world, he argues that the old-aged and the dying men or women in the rest houses have become the deviants in our society, just like the people in psychiatric hospitals and in prisons. He classifies these spaces as heterotopias of deviation, and old age, the dying phase and death itself become a deviation as well as a crisis because “in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation” (1986a: 25). The change in the locations and the perceptions of cemeteries might be given as a concrete example at this point. Foucault also

examines cemeteries as heterotopias, and states that until the eighteenth century, the cemeteries were located at the heart of the cities. Although the time periods and locations might differ, we could mention and remember there has been a similar change in the location of cemeteries in Turkey, too. We can thus conclude that the dying men and death are pushed beyond the confines of “social life” under the norms of modernity today. In other words, death is considered “unnamable” and “unthinkable” in our modern societies. Having said that, we should also note that this “unnamable” character of death is not peculiar to the modern times, as the exclusion and denial of death is something that also existed prior to modernity.

Finally, going back to the philosophy of *rabıta-ı mevt*, we could say that it is a practice that internalizes death; and leads to perception of death different from many other philosophies. As mentioned before, the *rabıta-ı mevt* practices also challenge the modernist discourses which deem death as unnamable; and turn what is “unthinkable” into something “thinkable” by means of repetitive and continuous contemplation acts. Instead of being a taboo under modernity, death is placed right at the center of the everyday life for Sufi people, who live both as if they will die any time, and both as if they will live forever, just like Prophet Muhammad said (Münavi, 1972)¹⁰ Through *rabıta-ı mevt*, a disciple inserts the idea of death into his/her everyday life as a “normalized” part of the daily routines and relationships.

¹⁰ The Turkish version of the hadith says “Kendini hiç ölmeyecek zanneden kişinin çalışması gibi (dünya için) çalış, yarın öleceğini zanneden kişinin korkması gibi (günahlardan) kork.” Its English translation is “Work for this world as if you will never die, beware of the sins as if you will die tomorrow” (Münavi, 1972, II/12).

CHAPTER V

DISCURSIVE AND PERFORMATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF *RABITA*

5.1. Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapters, *rabita* as a self-care practice is constructed upon certain discursive mechanisms each of which interacts with one another in a way that will form a discursive unity. However, this unity is not as homogenous as it seems; as we further analyze the real-life practices and textual (re-)productions of *rabita*, we come to realize that what constitutes the self-formation process of Sufi disciples through *rabita* is based upon “the systematic dispersion of elements” and “breaking/suspending the unity first and then re-forming it” (Foucault, 1972: 29-30). So, first of all, we need to understand the common mechanisms/systems that constitute the Sufi discourse (in particular the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa discourse) and institutionalize *rabita* as a discursive technology of the self, by means of looking at the discursive regularities and systematicity of ways of thinking and practicing *rabita* within the context of the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa tradition. The institutionalized and contextualized aspects of *rabita* are of great significance here; hence, the socio-institutional nature and dialogic formation of the discursive formation of *rabita* should also be analyzed.

In line with this approach, the use of verbal and written sources simultaneously is significant for these analyses because this variety of analytical sources allows us to track the power relations among different discursive productions. Changes in the written/verbal statements of noteworthy sheiks and real-life practices/interpretations of contemporary disciples display the context-bound and socio-institutional nature of *rabita* discourse.

The textual analyses, in-depth interviews, and my long-lasting interactions and observations demonstrate that *rabita* as a technology of self is constructed upon six main “discursive strategies” (Foucault, 1972) each of which have different yet interconnected insights. These strategies include:

1. Conceptualizing *rabıta* through metaphors,
2. Defining *rabıta* as a medium towards reaching the ultimate goal,
3. Legitimizing *rabıta* with reference to sacred texts,
4. Framing the ultimate goal of *rabıta* based on a tripartite schema,
5. Identification of *rabıta* with *rabıta-ı mürşid*,
6. Emphasizing the centrality of heart for *rabıta*: *vukuf-i kalb*.

We also observe some sub-strategies that support and strengthen the formation of *rabıta* while making use of these common discursive mechanisms. Throughout the analyses in the chapter, these sub-strategies will be referred to as “discursive techniques”, a term introduced by Nurullah Ardiç (2012: 35). I will analyze these strategies and techniques as both discursive and performative methods of the sheiks and disciples.

Besides these discursive and performative strategies that construct *rabıta* as a self-care practice, we also need to consider the discursivity and performativity of *rabıta* in terms of transforming the disciples into ethical subjects by means of other discursive strategies and “modes of subjection” (Foucault, 1985: 27) in relation to *rabıta*. These modes of subjection are also analyzed in this chapter from two different aspects, i.e. the subject formation of the disciples and that of the master/sheik. Let us now take a closer look at these strategies and modes of subjection.

5.1.1. Conceptualizing *rabıta* through metaphors

When we analyze the texts of prominent Naqshi leaders and the remarks of the contemporary disciples of İskenderpaşa Community, the use of certain metaphors emerges as a widespread discursive strategy to define the nature, significance and impact of *rabıta* for disciples. In this context, the most commonly used metaphors include “mirror”, “slide projector”, “simulation/virtual reality”, “rope”, “radio frequency”, and “road”. At this point, it should be underlined that these metaphors are mostly uttered by the disciples during the interviews, and are not often registered in the written documents (pamphlets or books by the sheiks) which I have analyzed,

except the remarks by Mahmud Esad Coşan, who compares *rabıta-ı mürşid* to tuning the right radio frequency (1999: 349).

As regards the relation of these metaphors to *rabıta*, the mirror is used in respect to the purifying, reflective and introvert features of *rabıta*. For instance, one of the interviewees said “*rabıta* is something that polishes the mirror so that it shines brighter” referring to the heart as the mirror (Tuba, 38; disciple for 36 years). In other words, it helps the purification of heart so that it becomes more and more shiny to absorb and then reflect the divine light and love of God. Another similar metaphor is the slide projector, which is also related to the concept of simulation or virtual reality. For some disciples, the metaphor of slide projector refers to the imaginary aspect of *rabıta* in a way that presents a simulation of the real-life and after-life experiences in the best setting for them. For instance, Hasan (28; disciple for 10 years) says:

Things we contemplate during *rabıta* are not impossible. We know that they will happen someday. It seems to me as if we are designing what we will live in the future. Let it not be misunderstood, we are of course not the scriptwriter of life, but it is like we are projecting a scenario onto the screen as a director. We keep contemplating on things we will experience one day. When that day comes, we may even say ‘hey, I have already lived that’ and that’s all.

In this sense, *rabıta* can be thought of as a virtual reality experience whereby disciples reproduce or simulate their life as a mature Sufi who tries to reach God by means of purifying their hearts from anything that is worldly. If we contemplate further on the simulative feature of *rabıta*, it is possible to approach this metaphor from a dual perspective, as well.

From the first perspective, during the *rabıta-i mevt*, the disciple simulates a life-like scene that human being is mortal and death can happen to anybody at any time, including themselves. This kind of thinking involves the imagining of the real life scenes of the disciple’s death and all the procedures that precedes and proceeds this event as described by Islamic sources. Such scenes include the very moments of death, the burial procedures, the enquiries by the angels in the grave as to deeds in the world, and so on. In detail, the disciple imagines:

He is placed on the bench [where the corpses are washed before burial] as naked dead person, then washed and enshrouded. Some disciples even feel the touch of the one who wash them and feel they are really being enshrouded for burial. In this state, he contemplates that he is put into the coffin and then buried into the grave. His acquaintances leave him in the grave after they bury him, and he is left all alone in the grave. At that point, he thinks that neither any possessions nor authorized people can make him any good to save him from that grave. Finally, he imagines himself before God in shame and repent. (Bağdadi, 1987:42-43)

Therefore, being vigilant and prepared for death and the afterlife by way of sticking to God's rules and trying to be a perfect Muslim all the time are emphasized. The simulation of death scenes everyday through *rabita* trains the disciples' mind towards this mode of thought besides enabling them to get used to the fact that they will die and have to live accordingly (Coşan, 1999).

From the second perspective, as it is further discussed in the following pages, *rabita* is not only an act of imagining that the disciple will die someday in the future, but it also aims to make them aware of the fact that this life is transient and nothing but an illusion compared to the real life beyond death. Therefore, what happens in the virtual reality experience of *rabita* is in a way just the opposite of what it initially means in the popular context. In other words, *rabita* changes the perception of reality for the disciple since what is virtual is the life in this world, while what is real is the after-life. So, the disciples try to simulate both their *physical* and spiritual presence in the real environment settings created both in this world and in the after-life (Bağdadi, 1987:42-44). If we ask how this simulation experience function in both ways, we may look at the practice of *rabita-i mürşid* as well. Through the connection with the sheik via seemingly imaginary and spiritual means, the disciples in fact simulate a setting in which they feel the physical presence of their sheiks and they believe this physical connection really happens through the connection of souls and hearts. Such a connection might be invisible to the human eye but it is visible to the eye of the purified hearts, as the soul and heart (*ruh*) are still not fully grasped by the

human mind¹¹ and are not bound by the physical boundaries for the mature sheiks and the disciples for “the soul is infinite and when it reaches the levels beyond this world, it can be visible in seventy different shapes at the same time” (Arvasi, 1981:35).

5.1.2. Defining *rabita* as a medium towards reaching the ultimate goal

Both in the writings of the noteworthy Sufis and by the disciples of the Naqshī-İskederpaşa Community, the ultimate goal of *rabita* is designated as “reaching God and the level of *ihsan*”. Emphasizing this intermediary aspect of *rabita* is one of the fundamental discursive strategies used to conceptualize and legitimize *rabita* as a method of self-care.

In all the primary and secondary sources, it is clearly and repeatedly stated that *rabita* is *only* a medium towards reaching God. As a further strategy (see also below) a Quranic verse frequently quoted in this context so as to legitimize *rabita* is “O you who believe, fear Allah and seek the means [of nearness] to Him and strive in His cause that you may succeed” (the Quran, 5:35). The Naqshī scholars/sheiks interpret this verse in relation to *rabita* because it is also a “means” of seeking nearness to God. For instance, Arvasi says:

When He orders us to ‘seek the means’, we have to seek the most superior means to reach Him and this is Prophet Muhammad or the seniors of the ummah –who are still the regents and successors of Him... Hence, *rabita* becomes the most superior means. (1985:31)

Similarly, other distinguished Naqshī leaders pay attention to this intermediary nature of *rabita* saying that when the disciples increase their awareness, purify their hearts from the worldly desires, and establish a close connection with their sheiks, they move forward on the Sufi path with the help of God and their sheiks. As they progress on this path, they first come closer to Prophet Muhammad and then to God in the end, which is described as *fenâ fillâh* (Imam-i Rabbani, 1977:392-393; Mevlana

¹¹ A Quranic verse states: “And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, “The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little.” (*the Quran, Surah al-Isra, 17: 85*).

Halid-i Bağdadi, 1987:13-14; Coşan, 1999:346-350). This ultimate level can also be thought at the same level with *rabita-i huzur* because the disciples aim at directly connecting with God during this *rabita*, as explained above.

The remarks of the disciples who practice *rabita* reproduce this discursive strategy as well. When asked about their main purpose and expectation from practicing *rabita*, all interviewees said that *rabita* is an essential medium that helps them being closer to Allah by enabling them to become a person as He wants them to be, to love and be loved by Him, and to live in peace. For example, Ayşe (43), who have been continuously practicing *rabita* every day for 22 years- says: “To me, *rabita* is like a long white rope that reaches to Allah. The more I hold on to this rope, the closer I feel to Allah and the better I know myself.” Likewise, all the other interviewees who have been practicing *rabita* acknowledge and underline the fact that *rabita* is only a means of being closer to God.

At a closer inspection, we come across three important discursive techniques that support the conceptualization of *rabita* as a fundamental means towards reaching God on the Sufi path. The first is emphasizing the importance of knowing oneself though *rabita* in order to reach God. An interesting point here is that this technique is widely used by the interviewees; however, we do not encounter the emphasis on self-knowledge in the written sources, except for the indirect emphasis on the importance of getting to know and disciplining the nafs/soul (Coşan, 1999; Kotku, 2012). However, the disciples I have interviewed makes it very clear that “*rabita* is all about discovering yourself: ‘Turn to yourself’... This is the main principle of *rabita*” (Tuba, 38; disciple for 36 years). As a disciplinary technology of the self, *rabita* surely entails self-control mechanisms that make the disciples monitor themselves, as further discussed below; but, in fact, it goes beyond this controlling mechanism as a practice that leads the disciples to turn to themselves, get to know their self-hood, and strengthen the “relationship of the self to self” (Foucault, 1985). In other words, it is an inward-oriented and self-questioning practice: “Think of it like a walnut; it goes deeper and deeper at each layer. As such, *rabita* is an introversion that goes deeper inside you. *Rabita* definitely reminds you of your servitude [to God] and your

nothingness. You are created as the most superior creature of the universe as a human yet you are capable of nothing unless He lets you to do so” (Feyza, 55; disciple for 23 years).

The second technique entails is signifying *rabīta* as the most effective means of reaching God. The written/verbal statements of sheiks clearly express that *rabīta*, when properly practiced, is much more effective than the individual dhikr. Abdulhakim Arvasi writes that “*Rabīta* by itself is enough to reach your goal; but dhikr is not.” (Arvasi, 1981: 10, 17). The goal mentioned here is the goal of moving forward on the Sufi path and spiritually reaching God. Nevertheless, Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi emphasizes that this is only the case for the newcomer disciples (1987: 43). In fact, both *rabīta* and dhikr are ways of connecting with and contemplating God, but *rabīta* is accepted as more effective because it disciplines the human mind and heart at the same time as a whole. During the *rabīta* practices, the disciples are at a state of complete concentration at a state of mind and heart that is different than normal. However, during the dhikr practices, the disciples mostly engage in a verbal practice, only verbally reciting the certain religious statements and prayers. Undoubtedly, dhikr also includes the mental and spiritual inclusion of the disciples, yet this can be thought of a less intensive practice when compared to *rabīta*.

The third discursive technique entails framing *rabīta* as an indispensable and integral part of *seyr-i sūluk*, i.e. the Sufi path. As *rabīta* by itself is such an effective means of reaching God, it is deemed an indispensable practice which needs to be embraced by the disciples so as to be a mature disciple and move forward on the Sufi path. The Naqshī sheiks assert that “a disciple is dependent on *rabīta* until s/he reaches the level where s/he is able to benefit from the divine enlightenment of God directly or without any intermediary” (Arvasi, 1981; Bağdadi, 1987).

When we look at the disciples’ interpretation of these three techniques, we see that they all acknowledge *rabīta* as an indispensable condition for the Sufi path; however, their remarks on the hierarchical order of dhikr and *rabīta* vary in this regard. For some interviewees, both dhikr and *rabīta* are of equal importance and affect them at

the same level. For the majority of the disciples, *rabıta* is much more effective than regular dhikr practices because there is a spiritual connection with the sheik and God, in addition to the contemplation of death. For instance, Hasan (28) -who has been practicing *rabıta* for 9 years at certain intervals- underlines that when his *rabıta* is strong and regular, his dhikr and other prayers are much more influential. Likewise, Feyza (55) -who has been continuously practicing *rabıta* for 23 years- also states that *rabıta* is much more influential and helps you to improve yourself when you properly do it, adding “When *rabıta* is proper, the dhikr follows automatically.” These statements also imply that *rabıta* is significant for every disciple in the Naqshı-ıskenderpařa Community, regardless of the number of years to practice *rabıta*.

5.1.3. Legitimizing *rabıta* with reference to sacred texts

The conceptualization of *rabıta* is a debatable issue for the Islamic scholars. As discussed in the previous chapters, while some Sufi scholars believe it is an essential and valid method in Islamic philosophy, some Muslim theologians strongly condemn *rabıta* because they believe it risks a polytheistic belief, and is therefore against Islamic principles. When we analyze the Quranic verses, hadiths and other Islamic sources, we see that the term *ribât* is used in five verses in the Quran (Yücel, 1993: 43). Other than the Quran, most well-known Sufi sources (such as Kuřeyri, 1991; Hucviri, 1982; Suhreverdi, 1988 etc.) do not mention *rabıta* or when they do, they do not describe it in the way it is performed today by the Naqshı disciples. The primary sources on *rabıta* are mostly pamphlets written by the well-known Naqshı leaders, such as Imam-ı Rabbani (1977), Mevlana Halid-i Bađdadi (1987), Abdulhakim Arvasi (1981), and Mahmud Esad Cořan (1999). These texts mostly explain the philosophical and religious grounds of the concept, as well as describing the ways it is performed. The secondary sources on *rabıta* include both complementary and critical texts. Although not abundant, we do have a sufficient number of noteworthy sources which discuss *rabıta*, and when we analyze these sources, we see that making references to sacred texts (verses and hadiths) is one of the most common discursive strategies used to legitimize *rabıta* as a valid and essential method of Sufism.

The most frequently quoted Quranic verses in this context are as follows in descending order according to the frequency of reference:

1. "O you who have believed, fear Allah and seek the means [of nearness] to Him and strive in His cause that you may succeed" (*the Quran*, 5:35)
2. "O you who have believed, fear Allah and be with those (*ittiba*) who are true" (*the Quran*, 9:119)
3. "Say, [O Muhammad], 'If you love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.'" (*the Quran*, 3:31).

In addition to these verses, some hadiths are also cited to prove the basis of *rabita* in Sufism, such as "Where the saints are remembered/mentioned, God's mercy and grace are bestowed upon that place" (Arvasi, 1981: 9).

Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi interprets the "means" in the first verse as an umbrella term that includes *rabita* as well because of its efficiency and supremacy as a means towards reaching God (1987, 13). Likewise, he interprets the second verse from the same perspective claiming that the term "*ittiba*" (be attached/subject to) requires that disciples/Muslims need to see or at least imagine the true and virtuous ones to whom they will be attached, and he asks "how will it be possible to be attached to them otherwise?" (1987: 14). These two verses are also repeatedly quoted (for 10 times within 31 pages) by Arvasi to legitimize *rabita* as an indispensable means to come closer to God (1981: 8-39). Such a high recurrence of the same verses reveals a systematic dispersion of Quranic references as recurrent discursive elements used for constructing a coherent discursive strategy of *rabita* as a legitimate method of training the disciples on the Sufi path, against the claims that severely criticize and reject *rabita*.

Moreover, drawing on a dialogue between the Prophet Muhammad and Hz. Abu Bakr is used as a discursive technique as well. According to this anecdote, Hz. Abu Bakr always kept the vision of Prophet Muhammad in sight, even at some unfavorable times and places. One day, he explained this to the Prophet and he did not warn or

said anything negative about his remarks. In the Islamic tradition, when Prophet Muhammad keeps silent when something is asked to Him, it is considered as His approval. As for this case, since He did not say to Hz. Abu Bakr “do not picture/imagine”, scholars accept and interpret this as an approval of the *rabita* and use this narration as part of their discourse while legitimizing *rabita* (Bağdadi, 1987, 14; Arvasi, 1981: 31).

On the other hand, in the remarks of contemporary disciples of the Naqshīskenderpaşa Community, the frequency of referring to sacred texts is not as high as in the primary sources. Only 3 out of 10 disciples interviewed directly referred to the above-mentioned verses and hadiths (mostly to the first one). When asked about their views on the legitimacy and necessity of *rabita*, some of them said they never questioned its legitimacy because they find it extremely beneficial and necessary to become better Muslims, adding that they had trust in their sheiks’ sincerity and commitment to Prophet Muhammad and God’s rules. As for the other disciples who questioned the legitimacy and necessity of *rabita* at certain times, they expressed that they found the answers to their questions in time as they continued practicing *rabita* and saw the changes in their personality and behaviors. For instance, Ömer (35; disciple for 20 years) says that his questions regarding the legitimacy of *rabita* “faded away with the trust and love” he had in his sheik and in Allah as he kept practicing *rabita* because he “deeply felt their companionship”.

5.1.4. Framing the ultimate goal of *rabita* based on a tripartite schema

Parallel to the tripartite schema of *iman – islam – ihsan* used by Chittick (2007:8) to analyze the structure of Islamic tradition, *rabita* and the connection to God are conceptualized based upon tripartite schemas connected to each other, including:

Rabita-i mevt – rabita-i mürşid – rabita-i huzur

Fena fi’şeyh – fena fi-resul – fena fi’llah

The Sheik – the Prophet – God

The lexical meanings of *fenâ* are “to vanish”, “to disappear”, “to get lost”, “to be transient”, “to pass by”, and “absence”. *Bekâ* is the opposite of *fenâ*, meaning “to continue”, “to keep up the previous state of mind”, “perseverance”, and “permanency”. In the Sufi terminology, these two concepts are closely linked and have a great significance for moving forward on the Sufi path.

According to Sufi philosophy, *fenâ* mainly refers to the disappearance of malevolent habits and attitudes; whereas *bekâ* refers to the replacement of those malevolent habits with the benevolent ones (Eraydın, 1994: 196-197). When the bad manners of an individual disappear, the good manners will flourish, or vice versa. Regarding the good and bad manners of human beings, Kuşeyri points out that each individual possesses either one or the other. That is, when the malevolent manners do not exist, they will be replaced with the virtuous and benevolent manners; similarly, when an individual is deprived of virtuous manners, they will be replaced with the malevolent ones. From this perspective, we could view these attitudes as if they are in a constant battle so as to seize the power of ruling the human soul and body (1991: 196).

Fenâ and *bekâ* concepts are divided into various sub-categories that are related to *rabita* discourses. In the first place, we see *fenâ fi’ş-şeyh*, *fenâ fi’r-Resul*, and *fenâ fillâh*, which were introduced in the previous chapter. In addition to these well-known categories, some Sufi tariqas add *fenâ fi’l-ihvan* (vanishing among the disciples) to the beginning of this list. For instance, Abdullah Dehlevi, a prominent Naqshi sheik from India, mentions in his *Mekatib-i Şerife* that *fenâ fi’l-ihvan* chronologically comes before *fenâ fi’ş-şeyh*. It means Sufi disciples initially love their companions more than they love themselves and their family. Hence, the disciples must give priority to their companions when they need something, and should pay utmost attention to please their companions, and not to break their hearts. As a result of this close relationship, the disciples begin to experience what it is like to sacrifice from themselves, and to experience the disappearance of the self gradually.

Fenâ fi’ş-şeyh refers to a state of mind and soul in which the disciples “get lost in their sheiks”. This means that the disciples exterminate their own desires and willpower,

and then, they replace it with those of the sheik. A well-known expression used to illustrate this relationship is “to be like a deceased person under the control of a mortician” (*Gülzâr-ı Hâcegân*, 2009).¹² (In this way, the disciples try to get rid of their sensual and worldly desires, so that they could only desire the love of God in the end. A very important note here is that the sheik’s desires in this context signify the heavenly, immaterial and religiously proper desires, all of which are directed towards the love of God. *Fenâ fi’ş-şeyh* may primarily be experienced as a result of the regular practice of *rabîta-i mürşid*, and it is also the starting point for reaching *fenâ fi’r-Resul* and then *fenâ fillâh*.

The next level is *fenâ fi’r-Resul*, which literally means “vanishing in Prophet Muhammad”. Throughout the transformation process between *fenâ fi’ş-şeyh* and *fenâ fi’r-Resul*, the love for the sheik in a way takes on a different dimension; the love disciples feel at their hearts becomes much deeper and more encompassing. Most importantly, their love towards Prophet Muhammad extends to such a degree that they do not care or perceive anything other than him. The disciples on this level should love The Prophet much more than they love themselves and their properties, including all beloved people and things in the world. The external sign of this love is to completely observe all the sunnahs of The Prophet, and to abstain from anything found reprehensible by the Islamic law. They should also pay attention to comply with the licit and allowable manners all the time. In other words, the whole being of a disciple should be in a perfect harmony with that of the Prophet. Only in this way can the disciples make their worldly-self vanish in the divine selfhood of Prophet Muhammad. Finally, the disciples cannot reach the level of *fenâ fillâh* without passing through the level of *fenâ fi’r-Resul* (Arvasi, 1981).

The third level of *fenâ* concept is *fenâ fillâh*, which basically means “vanishing in God”. On this level, all mortal attributes and worldly desires fade away; and the disciples possess only the divine virtues. When the mortal and worldly “self” vanishes in this way, the disciples reach a state of mind in which they are no longer conscious

¹² The Turkish expression for this is “gassalın elindeki meyyit gibi olmak”.

of themselves and their surroundings. In other words, the disappearance of the mortal desires concerns the *fenâ* concept; whereas, the possession of the eternal and divine virtues concerns the *bekâ* concept. A disciple cannot acquire the divine virtues eternally, unless he/she gets rid of all worldly attributes. This is the level on which the disciples access unification with God (Bağdadi, 1987).

Nevertheless, unlike the popular assumptions, *fenâ fillâh* is not the highest level of *fenâ* on the Sufi path. There is a further level which is the highest point on the Sufi path, and this is *fenâ ender fenâ* or *fenâu'l-fena*, which may literally be translated as “the vanishment of the vanishment”, i.e. the very state of vanishment itself vanishes into the blue. On this level, the disciples cannot even perceive that they have vanished in the divine unity of existence. The real unification with God is realized in this situation, and the Sufi individuals in this state are called “vanished in God” (*fâni fillâh, bâki billâh*) (Uludağ, 1996: 92).

There is also a slightly different categorization of the *fenâ* concept, which divides *fenâ* into three sub-categories again: *fenâ fi'l-kusûd*, *fenâ fi's-şuhud*, and *fenâ fi'l-vücut*. These levels show similarities with the above-mentioned phases; however, all of them concern the vanishment of the self in the unity of God's existence, regardless of the disciples' relationship with the sheik or the companions. These levels represent a transformation process in which the disciples gradually reach *fenâ fillâh* in three steps. Within this framework, *fenâ fi'l-kusûd* means that the disciples get rid of their own willpower, acting completely in accordance with the willpower of God. *Fenâ fi's-şuhud* means that the disciples experience such a deep love towards God that they cannot feel or perceive anything independently from Him. Finally, *fenâ fi'l-vücut* means that the disciples have reached a complete unification with God's unity of existence, this level is the same level as *fenâ fillâh* (Uludağ, 1996: 188).

When we talk about the vanishing of the subject, the *nafs* and the people in God, this does not mean that they physically die or vanish from the world. Kuşeyri exemplifies the *fenâ-bekâ* issue using an expression that means the Sufi subject has got rid of

his/her self and the people around (Kuşeyri, 1991),¹³ which basically means that the subject has been freed from his/her *nafs* and the people around; i.e. they have vanished. However, this does not mean they cease to exist completely. The vanishment in this case refers to a state of being absentminded and blind to their existence; the subject has no knowledge, no consciousness, and no interest regarding his/her own being, the *nafs*, or the people. He/she is completely absentminded in this sense, and cannot feel or perceive their existence, including his/her own existence, since there exists nothing but God for him/her (Kuşeyri, 1991: 197).

Thus, Sufi philosophy emphasizes *fenâ* and *bekâ* together in almost each Sufi text because they are complementary for each other, where *fenâ* is the level that precedes *bekâ* in the Sufi terminology. For it concerns temporariness which evolves into permanency, it concerns the extermination of bad manners so that the good manners could come to surface and become continuous. More importantly, it concerns the annihilation and vanishment of the mortal self, so that it could be unified with God, and reach eternity. In this way, the self aims at the eternal existence by means of ceasing to exist in the first place. This principle is highly important for grasping Sufi philosophy, which is founded upon the idea of ceasing to exist in the world, before one actually dies.

Fenâ and *bekâ* notions in Sufism are also closely linked to the concepts of asceticism (*zühhd*) and renunciation, which were examined in the previous chapter.¹⁴ Sufi disciples cannot cultivate themselves and reach the unity of existence without internalizing the Sufi principle that promotes *fenâ fillâh* and *bekâ billah*, in other words, the notion of spiritual death, based upon the hadith which suggests “dying before one dying” (Al-Acluni, 1749:2:29)¹⁵. In this sense, the renunciation of the self

¹³ The Turkish expression for this phrase is “Kul nefsinden ve halktan fâni oldu”.

¹⁴ I have previously argued that the renunciation of the self in Sufism does not refer to the extermination of life totally, as we see in suicidal attempts. Rather, the renunciation of the self aims at challenging the relationship of oneself with oneself, and transform this relationship in a way that would enable disciples to re-fashion themselves. Within this framework, the self cannot acquire a new form of existence, unless it renounces its older forms of existence. Only in this way can the disciples re-fashion themselves on the path towards the unity of existence (*vahdet-i vücüt*).

¹⁵ The Turkish expression is “Ölüm gelip çatmadan evvel, şehvanî ve nefsanî hislerinizi terk etmek suretiyle bir nevi ölüünüz”.

in fact comes forth as a result of the underlying philosophy, which says one must be aware of his/her temporary existence in the first place, if he/she wants to reach eternity. Accordingly, the importance of the *rabıta* practices becomes evident in the light of these discussions, because these practices help the Sufi individuals move forward on the Sufi path and pass through the *fenâ-bekâ* levels. In relation to the significance of *rabıta* for reaching these levels, Şahver Çelikođlu also refers to this tripartite scheme:

There are three maqams in the Naqshbandi tariqa: A disciple must firstly do *rabıta* to his/her sheik, the grand sheiks of the tariqa successively in the name order, then to Hz. Abu Bakr Siddiq, then to our Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), then to Hz. Gabriel, and then to Allah (*Zât-ı İlâhî*). [...] While practicing *rabıta* to *Zât-ı İlâhîyye*, the disciple must contemplate Him free from any shape, form, and view. This first step of *rabıta* is the first maqam. Reach the maqam of *fenâ* is the second maqam. Reaching the maqam of *bekâ* after this second step is the third maqam. At this last maqam, there is the divine knowledge and His [God's] manifestations. Anything other than Him is characterized by absence. He is the only one who has no beginning and no end. (2012: 89)

The type of *rabıta* invoked here relates to the connection with the sheik in the first place, then comes connection with God at the later steps. Hence, it is also possible to say that while *rabıta-i mürşid* leads to *fenâ fi's-şeyh* and *fenâ fi'r-Resul*; *rabıta-i huzur* leads to *fenâ fillah* and *bekâ billah* as the disciple moves forward on the Sufi path to reach higher levels and maqams.

5.1.5. Identification of *rabıta* with *rabıta-i mürşid*.

When one examines the literature on *rabıta*, one sees that *rabıta* is often reduced to the *rabıta-i mürşid*, i.e. connection with the master, the most debated and known version of *rabıta* practice due to its perception as an attempt to attribute a partner to God (polytheism). Those who reject and criticize this practice claim that the sheik intervenes between the disciple and God, acting as an intermediary and even putting himself in lieu of God (see e.g. Ferit Aydın, 1996). However, in the Naqshi philosophy, *rabıta-i mürşid* is designated as a means of spiritual guidance with the mercy of Allah. The *mürşid* in this sense is not seen as a Godly figure, but as a guide who has reached spiritual maturity and who has been gifted with the blessings of Allah in a way that would help the immature disciples follow the right path. Besides, *rabıta-i mevt* and

rabita-i huzur are as crucial as *rabita-i mürşid*, since these three practices together constitute the basics of *rabita*. While *rabita-i mevt* shapes the disciple's stance towards life and death, *rabita-i huzur* strengthens the disciple's connection with God.

When we analyze the primary texts and interviews to better understand the discursive strategies of constructing *rabita-i mürşid* as a prioritized and well-methodized version of self-formation and self-care, we come across a varying pattern and different discursive techniques. On the one hand, most primary texts identify *rabita* with *rabita-i mürşid*; on the other hand, we have varying remarks of the disciples of the Naqshbandi tariqa which either share this identification discourse or challenge it by prioritizing *rabita-i huzur* instead.

Almost all pamphlets and books that discuss *rabita* define it in relation with *rabita-i mürşid* and sometimes never mention the other types. This does not indicate that they do not accept the latter types since these sources do not say anything that would reject or contradict with the other types of *rabita*. On the contrary, these sources include information that complements all three types. However, the dominant discursive strategy in these texts is to focus on *rabita-i mürşid* and de-emphasize the other two types. For instance, in a letter where Imam-ı Rabbani underlines that *rabita* is a more virtuous medium than dhikr for the disciple; he conceptualizes *rabita* as “the love bond and full connection between the sheik and the disciple” (1977: 392). The other types are not directly mentioned thereafter. In a quite similar yet slightly different manner, Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi also focuses on *rabita-i mürşid* throughout his explanations and discussions, defining it as: “*Rabita* is to connect one's heart to a mature sheik and keep the image/being of the sheik in his mind/heart both before the sheik and in his absence” (1987: 13). However, when he starts to define the way of practicing *rabita*, he explains a tripartite practical schema where the disciple engages with *rabita-i mevt*, *rabita-i mürşid*, and *rabita-i huzur* successively. The focus on *rabita-i huzur* is expressed in relation with the dhikr of “Allah” by focusing on the heart (1987: 42-44). Yet, the main explanation in the book emphasizes the concept of *rabita-i mürşid*, where the others seem to be its sub-categories. Likewise, Arvasi constructs a discourse by focusing on the connection with the sheik; only once, he

mentions the contemplation of death by using the term “*tezekkür-ü mevt*” (the remembrance of death). The rest of the discussion revolves around the concept of *rabita-i mürşid* (1981: 10-12). The tripartite schema becomes evident in the discourses of the two modern leaders, Mahmud Esad Coşan (1999: 347-357) and Şahver Çelikoğlu (2012), both of whom conceptualize *rabita* by explicitly referring to all three types mentioned above under the heading of *Rabita-i Şerife*, the umbrella term used by Naqshi communities to refer to all *rabita* practices as a whole. Thus, a clear distinction between the three types seems to be a modern addition to the general *rabita* discourse in its textual construction.

When this textual evidence is compared to the discursive strategies of the contemporary disciples as reflected in my interviews, the dominant discursive strategy of the disciples in the contemporary Naqshi-İskenderpaşa Community is to identify *rabita* with *rabita-i huzur* rather than *rabita-i mürşid*; nevertheless, it is possible to track the effect of the above-mentioned strategy upon some disciples, i.e. to identify *rabita* with *rabita-i mürşid*. From this perspective, all of my interviewees made it clear that they prioritized *rabita-i huzur* as their initial definitions covered remarks that define *rabita* as “to (directly) connect with Allah”, “to strive for being close to Allah”, “to find peace in Allah” and so on. Therefore, we come across two differentiated discursive strategies in terms of their focal points while conceptualizing *rabita*. From the general viewpoint, both written texts and verbal expressions acknowledge all three types of *rabita* as legitimate and necessary means, yet their emphases differ from each other.

5.1.6. Emphasizing the centrality of heart for *rabita*: *vukuf-i kalb*

To place the heart at the center of *rabita* is also a common discursive strategy upon which the *rabita* is constructed in Sufi philosophy. Notably in the Naqshbandi tradition, the emphasis on heart is much more prominent. I have already discussed the implications of heart and its link to the main Sufi concepts in the previous chapters. Herein, I would like to focus on the centrality of heart with respect to *rabita* in particular, and to examine how it functions as a discursive strategy in the case of Naqshi-İskenderpaşa Community.

The heart is at the center of all *rabıta* practices, yet the main emphasis is manifested through *rabıta-i huzur*. *Rabıta-i huzur* is basically to contemplate on one's being in the presence of Allah and together with Him all the time, even if one cannot see Him. It is named in some other texts as *rabıta-i kalb* (connection with the heart) or *tefekür-ü kalb* (contemplation of the heart) (Bağdadi, 1987; Arvasi, 1981; Rabbani, 1977). *Kalb* means heart and it is highly significant that this *rabıta* is described via the words *huzur* and *kalb*, for, in addition to the meaning of "heart", the word *kalb* has some other relevant meanings which are worthy of examination. These meanings are "to transform", "to convert from one situation to another", "to turn inside out or outside in", "the center of everything", and "the locus of faith" (*Osmanlıca-Türkçe Sözlük*, 2015).

From the Sufi perspective, to turn one's inside out/outside in, and to transform someone's situation are highly important. As I have emphasized in the first chapter, one could argue or write about Sufism, yet it is not the same thing as *living* Sufism. It is an art of living, which is constructed upon certain experiences, and each Sufi subject undergoes the Sufi experiences in a way peculiar to himself or herself. Furthermore, the feelings, thoughts and experiences of Sufi subjects are in constant state of evolution and change. As a result of the various self-care and purification practices, the Sufi subjects evolve into better states; and these better states or moods (such as joy, gloom, *kabz*, *bast*, zeal, solemnity etc.) always evolve for the better as long as the disciple keeps struggling on the path. By means of *dhikr* and *rabıta* practices, the transient moods transform into permanent features. The *dhikr* here means both prayer and remembrance; thus, the *rabıta-i huzur* practice (like other *rabıta* practices) is also a method of *dhikr* because the disciples perform an act of remembering God and being in His presence all the time in their hearts (Eraydın 1994: 187-189). The various moods of the heart are directed by Allah, and it is He who transforms the hearts after all. In this sense, the main purpose of *rabıta-i kalb* is to enable the disciples to work for purifying and transforming their hearts, so that they would reach the level of *ihsan* and utmost proximity to Allah. This level would also be the level at which the Sufi subjects find eternal peace and tranquility (i.e. *huzur*).

The word *huzur* in this context has meanings such as peace, tranquility, comfort, evenness etc. In this regard, the *rabita-i huzur* signifies the connection with God, which brings peace of mind and soul to the disciples. This is one aspect, and this signification is quite justifiable. But this word also means “presence” in the sense that it signifies being present or in the presence of someone. From this perspective, *rabita-i huzur* signifies the awareness of being in the presence of God, and this has relations with the notions of *ihsan* and *hakka’l yakin* that were discussed in the first chapter.

As might be recalled from the previous discussions, the level of *ihsan* represents the level of being fully aware that Allah sees you anywhere and anytime, even though you cannot “see” Him. He is visible only to the purified hearts, and it is the heart, and not eyes, which has the potential to see Him. This again reveals how significant and appropriate it is to conceptualize *rabita-i huzur* as *rabita-i kalb* at the same time. Furthermore, the concept of *ihsan* is based upon the verses and hadiths that say God is with you all the time, and He is closer to you even than your jugular vein.¹⁶ Since reaching this level requires a tremendous effort and struggle with the *nafs*, the Naqshbandi disciples practice contemplating on these things so as to get closer to Allah gradually. Throughout this process other purification practices (including *rabita-i mürşid* and *rabita-i mevt*) help disciples move forward towards this goal. In this sense, these latter types of *rabita* are believed to be designated so as to refine and bring the disciples to the level of *rabita-i huzur*. Hence, *rabita-i huzur* is considered the most precious *rabita* among the others in the Naqshbandiyya (see. Bağdadi, 1987; Arvasi, 1981; Rabbani, 1977). Imam-ı Rabbani clearly highlights this central position of the heart:

O Son! You should know that as the journey of the disciples in the Naqshbandi Tariqa begins from the heart (*kalb*), which is accepted as the *âlem-i emir* [the center/commander of the body], we began our remarks with the *âlem-i emir*. However, the tariqas of other sheiks are not like this. They begin the journey from the purification of the *nafs* and the body [*tazkiyat an-nafs*]. Only after completing these, they transfer to *âlem-i emir* and then go upwards until the status [*maqam*] as Allah wishes. (1977: 591)

¹⁶ “And indeed We created man and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than even his jugular vein.” (the Quran, Surah Al-Qaf, Verse 16).

Imam-ı Rabbani thus distinguishes the Naqshbandi Tariqa from the others by means of its emphasis on the heart in training the disciples on the Sufi path. The concept of *âlem-i emir* as the commander of the body/mind is crucial as well because it reinforces the centrality of the heart for the technologies of self in the Naqshbandiyya.

Likewise, Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi defines the process of *rabıta-i huzur* as *vukuf-i kalbi* by means of which the disciple tries to connect directly with Allah. In this state, the disciples have to be distanced from all worldly thoughts/feelings and turn towards Allah by focusing all their attention to the center/middle or the depths of the heart. Throughout this state, they keep the dhikr of “Allahu Ahad”, which means “Allah is the One”. This mode of concentrated thought has to sustain for at least 15 minutes or more. After this process, the disciples continue to the dhikr of “Allah” in their hearts silently. At this point, Bağdadi warns that the disciples’ have to keep as calm as a dead person, and should not try to count the number of the dhikr. In other words, the heart must be set free and released from the bodily thoughts. The focus on the heart shall never be lost (1987: 45-53).

Arvasi also draws attention to the importance of heart while performing *rabıta* arguing that the disciples are not considered to have fully practiced *rabıta* unless they turn to Allah with their hearts. Herein, he also mentions *kalb-i sanûberî*, which refers to a certain part of the heart which is like a hearth and home to the real heart. Arvasi defines this:

A heavenly luminous part of the heart as a piece of flesh located at the place of the third finger, two fingers below the left breast... This piece of flesh is just like an egg. Its sharp head is under the left rib, whereas its wide head turns inward. (1981: 10-25)

Although Bağdadi and Arvasi does not clearly name it as *rabıta-i huzur*, we see that their definition of this concept is the same as those of the other sheiks (see. Coşan, 1999: 350-355), and they all share a discourse with regard to the centrality of heart in case of *rabıta*.

This discursive regularity through which the centrality of the heart is emphasized in relation to *rabīta* becomes manifest in the discourses of the contemporary disciples in the Naqshi-İskederpaşa Community. Not all interviewees emphasize the heart as primarily and frequently as the written texts in the first place. The initial emphasis is much more on the disciples' inner world, their relationship to themselves and the people in their surroundings, which is further discussed in the following sections. The heart is still at the center of their practices, yet I needed to "push" them during the interview towards thinking it before they openly and automatically utter their opinions and definitions regarding the centrality of heart for *rabīta*. The contemporary disciples' ideas on the status of the heart in their discourse of *rabīta* are similar to those in primary texts.

When asked whether their thought/mind or feeling/heart were involved in the practice of *rabīta*, the majority of the interviewees express that they cannot differentiate between these two. However, this is not this much explicit from the interviews in the first place as the disciples sometimes use complicated statements. At some point, they acknowledge the connection in *rabīta* is established via heart; yet, they also mention thought comes prior to feeling, so they start with a mental activity, yet it transforms into a spiritual practice governed by the heart. For instance, Dilek (21; disciple for 10 years) states that she starts practicing *rabīta* with certain thoughts, but then continues to practice it with focus on her emotions and feelings that come from her heart. Nevertheless, she also underlines that these two are closely interrelated as "the clearer your mind is, the clearer becomes your heart, and vice versa but it is really hard to differentiate". Another interviewee gives priority to the thought which is followed by the emotions, but also adds that the heart is the center of both emotions and thoughts, which has common grounds with the centrality of the heart as discussed by Rabbani above. Among these interviewees, only Feyza (55; disciple for 23 years) was clear from the very start:

The heart is what governs us, not the mind/brain. The brain creates thought according to the feeling/emotion that comes from the heart. Hence, the purification of heart is important. Through *rabīta* and dhikr, the disciples need to train themselves so as to keep their heart open. The hearts of the *awliya* [friends of Allah] is always open, even when their eyes are asleep.

These final remarks are significant both in terms of the centrality of heart for *rabita*, and in terms of the importance of *rabita* as a technology of self in training the disciples and purifying the heart. Therefore, we could say that acknowledging the centrality of the heart is still a dominant discursive strategy in forming a certain structure of *rabita* both for the sheiks and the disciples in written or verbal texts although they are produced in quite different times and contexts. *Rabita* is considered as a philosophical practice, like a daily and mental meditation; but at the same time it is a technology of self whereby the disciples develop a certain lifestyle for themselves shaped by the vision and love of their sheik, Prophet Muhammad, and Allah. In other words, it is both a mental and spiritual connection. However, the implications of modernist thinking are also reflected through their remarks as they prioritize mind during the exercise of *rabita*. My informants seem to have a fragmented perception of human body based upon the dichotomy of mind and heart, instead of the holistic view embraced by the elite Sufis.

I have so far analyzed the six main discursive strategies and various techniques associated with them in the formation of the discourse of *rabita* by the leaders and members of the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa Community. The second dimension of my discursive analysis entails examining the different modes of subjection in the construction of both masters (sheiks) and disciples as “ethical subjects” (Foucault, 1985).

5.2. Modes of subjection and the formation of ethical subjects through *rabita*

With regard to the discursive regularities that construct certain frameworks regarding the formation of “ethical subject” (Foucault, 1985) through *rabita* according to Naqshi-İskenderpaşa philosophy, we mainly come across two subject positions in the first place: the disciple and the sheik. However, the processes of subject formation are not as simple as it seems, especially when we take into account the previously explained Sufi philosophy which evaluates each human being as a complex micro-universe. A “formation” refers to a certain process of transformation/construction that is constantly going under change in certain contexts. In our case, *rabita* as a technology of self is among the central concepts in

this transformation/construction process for Sufi subjects in the Naqshbandiyya. In the sections above, discursive strategies of *rabita* are analyzed in detail, yet the subject-related aspects need to be developed to better understand how we can evaluate the subject formation process in Sufism in relation with *rabita* as a self-care practice.

5.3. Discursive Strategies of Forming Ethical Sufi Subjects

Based on the primary, secondary and tertiary written sources; the interviews I have conducted with some contemporary disciples; and my observations in the last three years, I distinguish the following discursive strategies and techniques adopted to construct ethical Sufi subjects through *rabita*.

a) *Strategies of Subject Construction for the Disciples:*

- i. Constructing the disciples as a mature Muslim who fulfills all the requirements of the sharia law,
- ii. Establishing obedience and commitment to the sheik as a prerequisite,
 - a. Emphasizing the love bond and ceaseless connection,
- iii. Disciplining the disciple as a broader technology of self-care,
 - a. Emphasizing the importance of the continuity of rituals, dhikr and *rabita*,
 - b. Encouraging supererogatory religious duties,
 - c. Emphasizing taming of the soul and the *nafs* for inner purification and avoiding this-worldly indulgence,
 - d. Emphasizing the practical reflections of the ethical work in the disciple's everyday life.

b) *Strategies of Subject Construction for the Sheiks:*

- i. Distinguishing the authority of the sheik for the *rabita*,
- ii. Elevating the sheik's spiritual status by connecting it to prophethood and God,
- iii. Contextualizing different styles/discourses of the sheiks.

5.3.1. Modes of Subjection for Disciples

As mentioned in chapter 3, the *mode of subjection* refers to the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice (Foucault, 1985: 27). Through various modes of subjection, individuals interpret and apply the codes and conducts of behavior in different ways. This differentiated process of relating to the ethical codes leads to the construction of different subjectivities or “ethical subjects”, who apply the rules of morality in different conducts. Technologies of self are also crucial here, as Foucault argues: “There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without ‘modes of subjectivation’ and an ‘ascetics’ or ‘practices of the self’ that support them.” (1985: 28) For Sufism, there are different modes of subjection that disciples and sheiks might choose to transform themselves and purify their souls/heart by means of being attached to different tariqas or orders, each of which might have distinct methods, rituals, and practices. In the case of *rabita*, the modes of subjection are mainly based upon a meditative-contemplative practice by which the disciple aims to establish a spiritual/mental connection with the sheik, the Prophet, and God successively.

As regards the first discursive strategy (forming the disciple as a mature Muslim), the first and foremost criterion is that the disciples have to stick to the rules of the Islamic sharia by default. All the disciplinary techniques and methods to transform them have to be in accordance with sharia rules. A leading Naqshi figure Imam-ı Rabbani defines such disciples as “fully apt” (*istidadı tam*) (1977: 592). Likewise, recent Naqshi sheik Mahmud Esad Coşan requires that:

The disciples on the Sufi path have to repent all their sins and pay attention to fully and perfectly perform all their obligatory religious duties such as praying five times a day, fasting through Ramadan and so on. [Moreover, they] must try to clear their debts for such obligatory duties if they haven’t done them all in the past. (1999: 334-366)

We see that the disciples, too, are aware of this fact for they also underline this requirement during the interviews. The disciples who intermittently perform *rabita*

point to the relationship between *rabīta* and the obligatory religious duties, expressing that they feel more enthusiastic and eager to fulfill these duties during the times they continue to perform *rabīta*. For instance, Hasan (28; disciple for 10 years) underlines that he sometimes finds it hard to pray five times a day properly due to daily tasks, and may abandon the sunnah (less obligatory) parts of the prayers. However, he says: “I can urge myself to regularly and properly pray five times a day when I pursue doing *rabīta* regularly”. I have also observed in *sohbet* groups of the İskenderpaşa order that the disciples who practice *rabīta* pay attention to fulfill their obligatory and supererogatory duties, organizing their everyday life in accordance with these duties. Herein, we see an example of how *rabīta* functions as a technology of the self that disciplines the Sufi subjects by urging them to regularly and properly perform both their obligatory and supererogatory religious duties.

In terms the self-care practices from a Foucauldian perspective, a purpose of the *rabīta* practices is to make the disciples get to know themselves and to increase the intimacy between oneself to oneself. Particularly *rabīta-i mūrşid* reveals this relationship much better. In some ancient cultures, too, we come across with types of relationships between a master and his disciples similar to the notion of *rabīta-i mūrşid* in Sufism. For instance, a connection might be illustrated through the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades in the antiquity. However, the *mūrşid-mürīd* relation in Sufism seems to be more in line with the Senecan notions of self-examination, rather than the Greco-Roman style, judging from Foucault’s accounts. As Foucault asserts in his article, the Senecan type of master-disciple relation “differs from the Greco-Roman type of relation to the master in the sense that obedience is not based just upon a need for self-improvement but must bear on all aspects of a monk’s life” (1997c: 246). Likewise, the relationship in Sufism is supposed to affect all aspects of one’s life, as well as his/ her soul or “self” (or the *nafs* more accurately).

The second strategy is emphasizing obedience to the *mūrşid* (master) as a prerequisite for moving forward on the Sufi path. According to this technology of the self (both in monastic and Sufi traditions), what is important is the sacrifice or renunciation of the self as a result of the disciple’s own will to be obedient and

respectful to the master. For the case of *rabita*, this obedience and commitment is a significant discursive strategy to train the disciples, so much so that “the disciples shall never forget their sheiks in their mind and hearts even though they forget themselves” (Bağdadi, 1987: 13). However, this obedience-based connection between the disciples and the sheik is construed upon a love bond, rather than a formal hierarchy (Arvasi, 1981: 22-23). Therefore, the subjections of the disciples and the sheik are constructed upon love; the Sufi subjects (both the sheiks and the disciples) are supposed to love and be loved by each other for God’s sake, in line with the hadith “You will not enter Paradise until you believe and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I show you something that, if you did, you would love each other? Spread peace among yourselves.” (*Sahih Muslim*, 54). Therefore, the love bond between the sheik and/among the disciples does not only discipline their individual relationship, but also shapes their relationship with all other disciples, the Muslims, their family, friends, and other members of the society. From this dialogical and socially constructed perspective, *rabita* also emerges as another frequent discursive technology that leads to constructing the Sufi subjects who are supposed to love each other and spread peace on earth.

A related discursive technique here is the constant emphasis that the disciples should seek the means to establish a ceaseless connection with the sheik, as the first step towards reaching the level of ceaseless connection with the Prophet and God. The principal aim of the master/sheik is to enable the “permanent contemplation of God” or “uninterrupted connection with God” as expressed by one of my interviewees, (as in the case of *rabita-i huzur*). Similarly, the other interviewees who practice *rabita* approximately for 10 years and above say that the aim of *rabita* practices is to discipline each moment of the disciples’ lives, rather than constraining it to a monotonous daily practice. Another elder interviewee says: “If we think of *rabita* as a contemplative practice, it is a session that needs to continue every day. However, if we think of it as a life style, I can say it is a psychological state that needs to be remembered always and which leads someone to change his behaviors” (Süleyman, 30; disciple for 10 years), which reinforces this discursive construction by differentiating between *rabita* as a daily action versus “*rabita* as a lifestyle”.

Rabıta as a lifestyle is in relation with the third discursive strategy, i.e. disciplining the disciple as a broader technology of self-care through *rabıta* for the purposes of constructing ethical Sufi subjects. The mostly referred discursive techniques here include the endurance and steadiness of performing *rabıta* incessantly as one the most important technologies because if the performance is not regular it has no effect on the disciples (see Bağdadi, 1987; Arvasi, 1981; Çelikoğlu, 2012). Furthermore, the disciple should not suffice with the obligatory religious duties, but always seek the means of coming closer to God through performing supererogatory duties such as prayer, fasting, dhikr, *rabıta*, social aid etc. (Coşan, 1999: 343). As a third discursive technique, self-control and inner purification, i.e. *tazkiyat-an-nafs* are attributed a crucial role in the Sufi formation of the disciple. As a result of these disciplinary technologies exercised through *rabıta*, there are some common feelings and attributes shared by disciples, which concern both the relationship of the disciples with themselves and with others (family, friends, society etc.).

The final discursive technique in accordance with this purification process is emphasizing the practical aspect of this ethical work which is supposed to be reflected in the everyday life of the disciple. We can summarize the feelings/attributes expected from the disciples as a result of this ethical work as follows: Having self-control and self-awareness; knowing who you are and what you want from this life; being at peace with oneself; feeling secure and sense of confidence; accepting people as they are, and not trying to change or own them; getting used to the idea of death and mortality, which leads the disciples not to attribute greater values to insignificant and temporary worldly matters; learning to love and being much more loving; avoiding unnecessary conflicts; being more tolerant, forgiving, softhearted, compassionate, patient, and understanding. As they move forward on this path by properly doing *rabıta* and fulfill other disciplinary practices, their status also rise to higher levels, starting from being *mübtedi* (which corresponds to the level of *fenâ fi'ş-şeyh*), to *mutavassıt* (which corresponds to the level of *fenâ fi'r-Resul*), and *müntehî* (which corresponds to the level of *fenâ fillâh*) (Çelikoğlu, 2012: 93).

Through *rabita* “a disciple remembers death/afterlife, which leads him to control his actions in order to do good deeds and be good Muslims. He also connects with his sheik trying to resemble him and obey the rules of God so as to come closer to and be loved by God” (Coşan, 1999). For instance:

A true disciple shall never lie, walk around without ablution, disagree or argue with anybody under any circumstance. If he knows he is right, he just keeps silent. If a disciple roars with laughter, gets angry, or argues with someone; then you shall expect no good from him. (Çelikoğlu, 2012: 308)

These are only some of the behavioral codes and attributes that are expected from Sufis, and they come with strict discipline. Hence, both the sheiks and the disciples underline this self-disciplinary importance of *rabita*, encouraging the disciples to regularly perform *rabita* to purify their nafs. These discursive techniques are among the mostly referred technologies of self both in the written and verbal sources, yet it should be kept in mind that the disciplinary techniques are not limited with these ones.

5.3.2. Modes of Subjection for the Master/Sheik

The principal discursive strategy concerns the authority of the sheik. This authority entails the idea that the sheiks should possess certain features so as to be entitled to a training mission through *rabita*. First and foremost, he should be a *mürşid-i kâmil* (literally meaning “the perfect/mature sheik”). In other words, he should have reached the level of *bekâ-yı ekmele* after having passed the level of *fenâ-yı etemmel*, which are further analyzed above. The perfection of the sheiks at these levels occurs when they firstly “lose their existence”, and then “reach eternity via unification with God”. In the Naqshî sources, there are certain idealized forms of ethical subjection for the sheiks which require moral maturity, counselling, compassion, mercy, and avoiding bad or misleading behaviors, as well as having a good command of Islamic scientific knowledge. These idealized subject forms can be divided into three; consisting of “the *sohbet* sheik, the *dhikr* sheik, and the cloak (*hırka*) sheik. However, in the Sufi terminology, the true meaning of the sheik is the *sohbet* sheik, as he is able to train and refine the disciple through connection of hearts without needing any

other intermediary” (Çelikoğlu, 2012: 130). The idealized portrait of a Naqshîskenderpaşa sheik has nine qualities:

1. Observing the rules of sharia completely.
 2. Urging people to obey the rules of God and to remember God in peace of heart.
 3. Counselling people for the better and urging them to avoid unethical thoughts and behaviors.
 4. Showing kindness, respect, and affection to all beings.
 5. Having enough knowledge on theological matters to guide the disciples in the best way.
 6. Keeping the secrets of the disciples to themselves, and waiting for the right time and place to warn them.
 7. Understanding the states of mind and heart of the disciples to discipline them in accordance with their spiritual needs.
 8. Avoiding extremism in any case; keeping even-tempered all the time.
 9. Being ethically justified in the best way; not being sullen or short-tempered when talking with a disciple, unless it is for the sake of God’s willing.
- (Çelikoğlu, 2012: 130-132)

There is also a warning that a sheik who possesses some of these properties might experience some divine feelings and moods which could mislead him into believing he has reached perfection. Therefore, for a sheik to prove his maturity, it is necessary that he is approved by other righteous persons who have reached the level of perfection. The sheik must also be authorized by his own sheik before enabling his disciples to perform *rabîta* and connect with him spiritually. Some sheiks might have reached these levels; however, this does not necessarily mean that they are granted the right for *rabîta*. Unless their authority is verified upon the unanimous written and verbal testimonials of the mature sheik or the other virtuous and mature saints who have reached the same levels, they cannot be authorized to guide disciples perform *rabîta*. (Rabbani, 1977: 606; Arvasi, 1981: 25-27; Selvi et al. 1994: 42-45).

The second discursive strategy here is elevating the sheik’s spiritual status by connecting it to prophethood and God. As discussed in the previous chapter, the clear-cut dichotomies -such as the private-public self or the mind-body dichotomies- do not exist in the more holistic Sufi philosophy. The aim of practices such as *rabîta*, dhikr, pray, and fasting is to purify the *nafs* and to reach maturity or perfection, i.e. to reach the level of being “*insan-ı kâmil*”, meaning the most mature and perfect

human. But the ultimate goal of Sufism is to be unified with God, by being lost in God's existence (i.e. *fenâ fillâh*). This is a complex and deep process in which the disciple can exist only when he completely forgets his own selfhood.

The exercise of *rabîta-ı mürşid* comes into prominence at this juncture. During the exercise of *rabîta-ı mürşid*, the disciple possesses all particularities of his identity (being a man, woman, teacher, student, worker, Turkish, Kurdish, Muslim etc.). However, the aim of *rabîta-ı mürşid* is to make the disciple realize there is no single and infinite form of being in this world. *Rabîta-ı mürşid* in fact aims at a three-step improvement of the disciple, in a similar fashion to the tripartite schematic organization that is discussed in the previous pages. These are subsequently *fenâ fi'ş-şeyh* (being lost or to vanish in the sheik), *fenâ fi'r-Resul* (to vanish in Prophet Muhammad), and *fenâ fillâh* (to vanish in Allah) (Eraydın, 1994: 383- 387). In addition to the master's aim of "training" and transforming the disciples in Sufism, the connection with a sheik has particular importance in this sense, since it is considered almost impossible to reach the state of *fenâ fillah* before going through the phases of *fenâ fi'r-Resul* and *fenâ fi'ş-şeyh*.

When we look at this hierarchical three-step process -the hierarchical ordering of the Sheik-the Prophet-God- we can understand why this practice is so crucial for some Sufis because *rabîta-ı mürşid* enables the disciple (with the help and mercy of God) to lose his selfhood in God's existence. By this means, the disciple reaches the totality desired by his soul, and becomes one with God. This idea is better understood with the term *vahdet-i vücüt* in Sufism, which prescribes that all beings are one and whole. For example, it is this philosophy which makes Hallac-ı Mansur utter the sentence "Ene-I Hak" (I am God), because this phrase symbolizes that all beings are created from Allah's soul, thus they are all united.¹⁷ Another example of this understanding might also be seen in the words of a Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, who says "I pray God to save me from God" (2012: 9). These examples and the idea of *vahdet-i*

¹⁷ This idea is based upon the verse: "Then, He fashioned him in due proportions, and breathed into him out of His Spirit; and He appointed for you (the faculty of) hearing, and eyes, and hearts (for understanding, feeling and insight). Scarcely do you give thanks!" (the Quran, 32: 9).

vücut also coincide with the notions of *fenâ-bekâ*, which were explained and discussed above as the milestones of the Sufi transformation process and connection with God. Through *rabîta* -particularly *rabîta-ı mürşid* as the first step- the disciples go through a process whereby they question the meaning of existence and become aware of their selfhood, which leads them to grasp and feel the truth that lies behind the holistic expression “I am God”.

The third strategy concerns the context-bound nature of *rabîta* and dialogic formation or social aspect of its discursive formation, as well as the individual characteristics of each sheik. Yet, change in the discourses of sheiks cannot be explained solely by means of their individual characteristics because the subjectivities are constructed in a dialogic process with the society and contexts in which they exist. In this regard, the changing contexts of *rabîta* and the temporal/spatial subject-object formations need to be understood in the first place.

For such analysis, the experiences/ideas of the living disciples are of great importance rather than the old-dated written texts we have analyzed so far. For instance, the emergence of social media and new technologies affect the disciple’s performance of *rabîta* in the way that is traditionally preached in the previously written sources. While the previous sources require that *rabîta* should last for minimum 15-30 minutes (see. Bağdadi, 1977; Arvasi, 1981), the contemporary young disciples express that it is almost impossible for them to concentrate during *rabîta* for more than five minutes, let alone 15 minutes (Hasan, 28; disciple for 10 years).

With regard to the contemporary Naqshi-İskenderpaşa Community in terms of other implications of the changing contexts, it might be useful to look at changes in the styles of the last two sheiks. The first is the assignment of Mahmud Esad Coşan as the sheik following the death of Mehmed Zahit Kotku in 1980, and the second one is the

assignment of Muharrem Nureddin Coşan as the sheik in 2001 following his father's death¹⁸.

Mehmed Zahid Kotku Hz. pursued the traditional method of preaching to disciples at the İskenderpaşa Mosque, the headquarters of the tariqa; however, upon transition to Mahmud Esad Coşan Hz., the tariqa gained momentum as a result of Coşan's activity in all domains ranging from academia to media and press. He traveled around the world, as well as in Turkey, which helped globalize his order into the Muslim world and across different countries from US to Australia. In addition to his own academic career as a theology and literature professor, he continued traditional preaches in and out of Turkey, as well as initiating and participating in lots of educational, social, cultural, and civic projects such as radio/TV broadcasting; publishing newspapers, periodicals; institutionalizing the tariqa/disciples through various associations and organizations, and so on. Nevertheless, when Muharrem Nureddin Coşan Hz. recently took over the duty. Unlike his antecedents, he chose being out of sight and spread his messages through other media, e.g. the official website of the radio station of the tariqa (Akra Fm). Though he has also been actively involved in the community affairs, M. Nureddin Coşan Hz. emphasized personal spiritual and intellectual improvement more than social activism. Upon requests and questions from the disciples, he made the following explanation which was verbally spread through the reliable disciples near him: "My father said everything that needs to be said; now is the time to take action and realize what he has said".

Hence, we come across two distinct modes of subjection for these two subsequent sheiks of the same tariqa. The contemporary disciples' opinions and interpretations on this matter underline these differences in the subject constructions of these sheiks. The remarks of the interviewees who have witnessed the transition from M.

¹⁸ Mahmud Esad Coşan Hz. (1938-2001) was a professor of Islamic Studies and Turkish Culture and Literature. He had good command of Persian, Arabic, English. In addition to significant academic studies, he also took active part in various social activities mobilising and actively engaging in his entire community from youth to women. His son Muharrem Nureddin Coşan Hz. was born in 1963 in Ankara, Turkey. He received his B.A and M.A degrees from the College of Saint Rose in New York in Management, and he has good command of English and Arabic (*Silsile-i Şerif*, 2015).

Esad Coşan to M. Nureddin Coşan underline that the change of sheiks led to a change of discourses as well. According to their observations and experiences (including mine), Nureddin Coşan stands out as prioritizing more personal development in a “modern” manner by his emphasis on the issues related to healthy-quality life and critical thinking. For instance, an interviewee says: “When I contemplate on our previous sheik [M. Esad Coşan] my feelings come to the fore. To me, he appeals to more emotional and religious side of mine. However, when I think of our present sheik, issues such as physical well-being, reasoning, and health come to my mind” (Dilek (21; disciple for 10 years). In fact, I have observed that Muharrem Nureddin Coşan Hz. pays attention to his diet himself and preaches his disciples to do so by means of raising awareness on genetically modified foods, non-consumption of sugar, salt, processed food etc. Furthermore, he emphasizes disciplining the body of the disciples and urges them to be engaged in sports and arts activities to live a healthy life -very late modern themes. An anecdote cited by an interviewee is an example here:

A friend of mine was having difficulties in properly fulfilling his religious duties and concentrating on the prayers due to lassitude. So, he consulted our sheik M. Nureddin Coşan Hz. for advice with a deep-down expectation that he would suggest him to pay attention to stay away from sins, pray more, read the Quran etc. However, our sheik’s first advice to him was to start a regular sports activity right away so as to overcome this feeling. (Ömer, 35; disciple for 20 years)

This anecdote exemplifies Coşan’s mode of subjection both for himself and for his disciples not only at the spiritual/religious level but also at the physical one. In addition to this physical disciplinary techniques, he lays emphasis on the intellectual and spiritual disciplining of the disciples by means of analytical readings of the Quran, particularly in the native language of the disciples. For this purpose, he led the initiative of establishing “Critical Analytical Thought Platforms” all over Turkey and the world, trying to understand and interpret the messages of the Quran from an analytical perspective; critical examination of everything that is taken for granted in light of the Quranic and Islamic perspective by making comparative analyses from scientific approaches.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The focus of this thesis has been the Sufi notion of *rabıta*, a contemplative practice performed by the Naqshbandi orders and the İskenderpaşa Community in particular. Thorough the lens of discourse of prominent Naqshi sheiks and their contemporary disciples, and with a special focus on the İskenderpaşa order, I have explored *rabıta* as a technology of self-care in Naqshbandi Sufism. For this purpose, began by offering some general and historical background information on the fundamentals of Sufism, the Naqshbandiyya, and the İskenderpaşa Community, and by presenting a survey of the main concepts, traditions, historical figures, and the historical development of Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa communities in Turkey. I also examined the second literature on *rabıta*, which is a contentious topic in Islamic theology.

Secondly, I focused on the Foucauldian conceptualization of technologies of the self and self-care practices in ancient Greco-Roman culture, and discussed the theoretical implications of Foucauldian thinking in terms of Sufi technologies of the self. The analytical framework of the thesis has been shaped by the discussions on the fundamentals of Sufi philosophy and the Foucauldian concept of self-care. For a detailed analysis of *rabıta* as a self-care practice, I analyzed five written texts *Rabbani* (İmam-ı Rabbani, 1977), *Halidiye Risalesi* (Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi, 1987), *Rabıta-i Şerife* (Abdülhakim Arvasi, 1981), *İslam, Tasavvuf ve Hayat* (Mahmud Esad Coşan, 1999), and *Rabıta: Sorular-Cevaplar* (Şahver Çelikoğlu, 2011), and conducted semi-structured deep interviews with ten Naqshi-İskenderpaşa disciples living in Istanbul, Turkey. Additionally, I drew upon my three years of research as a participant observerin the community.

The key concepts of Sufi philosophy when viewed through the lens of self-care include *marifetullah* (gnosis of God), *ihsan*,¹⁹ and *tazkiyat an-nafs* (purification of the soul/*nafs*). Sufi disciples use certain technologies of the self to achieve the goal of becoming closer to Allah and purifying the *nafs*/soul. *Rabıta* is among the most effective and immediate of these methods for disciplining and transforming the self, and is one that disciples use to purify the heart and helping to refashion themselves in a way that brings them closer to God. The practice of *rabıta* is divided into three categories consisting of *rabıta-i mevt* (contemplation of death), *rabıta-i mürşid* (contemplation of the sheik), and *rabıta-i huzur* (contemplation of God). Initially, it starts as a daily contemplation practice, yet its main purpose is to urge the disciple to further self-introspection and introversion in a way that would completely transform his/her perception of the self and the others. Therefore, it entails a philosophical strenuousness that pushes the limits of self-formation.

Throughout this process of self-formation on the Sufi path (*seyr-i sülûk*), and firstly during *rabıta-i mevt*, the disciple questions all the identities he possesses and the meaning of life and death. He realizes that Allah is the one who gives him life, and that Allah is the one who can take it. He or she could die just at any time, and many others pass from this world to the after world at any given moment. Then, the disciple continues his daily practice with *rabıta-i mürşid*; this leads to a questioning of the meaning of all existence and his own identity. Such a deep contemplation and questioning of life serves as a means of overcoming all dichotomies and differences, and of realizing that all beings are united because it is Allah who created all beings.

Nonetheless, this does not mean the denial of differences in being, and I think this is one of the significant aspects of the Sufi approach. The concepts of plurality and answerability come to mind in this regard. The notion of *vahdet-i vücüt* acknowledges that the source of all existence is Allah and that all beings are engaged in a struggle to unite with God. However, this unification can only happen if the disciple can

¹⁹ As explained in the second chapter, it basically means “doing good / doing beautifully” and is also related to the level of *hakka’l yakin*, i.e. the closest distance to Allah that only the most mature Muslims can reach.

succeed in being unified with the universe and with the others in this world. The source of all beings is one (Allah), but the beings in this world are not uniform or homogeneous. From the creation of Adam and Eve up until now, there has been a plurality of beings, and their selves are not constructed in isolation from those of the others. There is a plurality of dimensions in existence, and this existence is maintained and reproduced through the answerability among all beings that have been created by God. From a Sufi perspective, all this plurality and answerability are actually the tools or paths that lead the disciple towards the knowledge of self in the first place (by means of the knowledge of others), and then, towards the knowledge of God (*marifetullah*) and the divine truth (*hakikat*).

The Foucauldian conceptualization of subjectivity, truth and self-care is relevant here to better understand how *rabita* functions as a technology of self in Sufism. Foucault primarily focuses on the ancient Greco-Roman and the early Christian periods; especially the Platonic age, and the Socratic dialogue *Alcibiades I* which is the first ancient text in which we encounter the notion of “self-care” (1997). In this context, we come across a distinction between the two basic precepts of “know yourself” and “take care of yourself”. As the care of the self is closely interrelated with the knowledge of the self, the intersection and differentiation between these two precepts are also important. I have compared the Sufi way of self-care with that of the Greco-Roman and Christian traditions in this context, highlighting their similarities and as well as differences (see Chapter 3).

A further aspect of self-care and the technologies of the self concerns the ethical dimension, and the Foucauldian perception of ethics and morality becomes important in this sense. Based on a distinction between these two concepts, Foucault points out that an “ethical substance” is fundamental for the technologies of the self, and that *aphrodisia*, for instance, functions as the ethical substance in the Greek culture. The ethical substance in this case is worked over by ethics and, in the end, human beings acquire certain subjectivities through a process of self-formation and self-perfection. When we compare this to the Islamic tradition, we see that in Sufi philosophy, the concept of *nafs* emerges as the ethical substance, over which the

master and the disciple carry out ethical work so as to purify and perfect the self (or soul) by means of various care activities such as *rabıta*, fasting, and sexual abstinence.

Rabıta as a self-care practice is constructed through certain discursive strategies, each of which interacts with the others in a way that produces a discursive unity (as I examine in Chapter 5). Common discursive regularities and strategies constitute the Sufi discourse (in particular the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa discourse) and institutionalize *rabıta* as a discursive technology of self-care. Applying this approach to the primary Naqshbandi written sources and my interviews with Naqshbandi disciples, I came across six main discursive strategies, each of which includes various sub-strategies called “discursive techniques” (Ardıç, 2012: 35):

1. Conceptualizing *rabıta* through metaphors,
2. Defining *rabıta* as a medium towards reaching the ultimate goal,
3. Legitimizing *rabıta* with reference to sacred texts,
4. Framing the ultimate goal of *rabıta* based on a tripartite schema,
5. Identifying *rabıta* with *rabıta-ı mürşid*,
6. Emphasizing the centrality of heart for *rabıta*: *vukuf-i kalb*.

Besides these discursive and performative strategies that construct *rabıta* as a self-care practice, some further discursive strategies and “modes of subjection” (Foucault, 1985: 27) have emerged as significant in transforming the Sufi members into ethical subjects. These strategies can be divided into two categories according to whether they concern the subject formation of the disciples or that of the master/sheik.

Strategies and technologies of subject construction for disciples include:

1. Constructing the disciple as a mature Muslim who fulfills all the requirements of sharia law,
2. Establishing obedience and commitment to the sheik as a prerequisite,
 - a. Emphasizing ceaseless connection and the bond of love,
3. Disciplining the disciple as a technology of self-care,

- a. Emphasizing the importance of the continuity of rituals, dhikr and *rabita*,
- b. Encouraging supererogatory religious duties,
- c. Emphasizing the taming of the soul and the *nafs* for inner purification and avoiding this-worldly indulgence,
- d. Hierarchically ordering the spiritual states through *rabita* to encourage disciples.

On the other hand, strategies of subject construction for sheiks include:

- 1. Distinguishing the authority of the sheik for the *rabita*,
- 2. Elevating the sheik's spiritual status by connecting it to prophethood and God,
- 3. Contextualizing the different styles/discourses of the sheiks.

An important aspect of the technologies of self-care in Sufism that I have not emphasized enough in my main discussion is the connectivity of the mind and body, and of discourse and practice, in disciplining the disciple, which is something that I also observe in the Naqshi- İskenderpaşa Community.

6.1. Simultaneous Disciplining of the body and the mind: Placing the Sufi self at the juncture of the intellect and performance

The relationship between thought and practice is important because the self-care strategies outlined above exemplify how the intellectual and practical dimensions of Sufism function together in the subjectivation of individuals. In this regard, the self-care activities, particularly the *rabita* practices, aim at cultivating the self by means of successfully connecting the ideational and practical dimensions. The self-care activities in Sufism are not merely habitual or routine practices. These ritualistic practices constitute an important part of the self-care activities, yet rituals always nourish and keep alive intellectual transformation as well. Hence, the relationship between one's thought and action needs more contemplation in this context.

For Foucault, "thought" establishes the play of true and false and constitutes the human being as "a knowing subject". It is also "what establishes with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject" (1997c: 200). Thus, from such a broad perspective, thought inevitably goes beyond mere conceptual

knowledge or theoretical thinking. Since we deal with the construction of human beings as “knowing subjects” or “ethical subjects,” I must underline that this formation process is not solely composed of concepts; it concerns the praxis aspect at the same time. In other words, “thought” must be analyzed in terms of manners, behaviors, or speech, in addition to its theoretical and philosophical aspects. Thus, the performative aspect of the formation of the self should be examined more thoroughly.

With regard to the emphasis on praxis, one could also refer to the Althusserian discussions about ideology and practice as well. Similar to Foucault, Althusser, in his essays, places great emphasis on the material and practical aspect of “ideology,” which is rooted in Karl Marx’s concept of “praxis.” Arguing that “ideology has a material existence” (1971: 165), and viewing the religious beliefs in this context, Althusser argues that belief is impossible without practice. When a “free” individual believes in God, he “acts according to his ideas” and engages in certain practices such as going to church, kneeling down, praying, confessing his or her sins, praying five times a day, etc. IF he or she does not engage in such practices, it is as if his ideas are not proven, valid, or honest.

Like Althusser, Foucault underlines the principle that “there is no experience that is not a way of thinking” (1997c: 201). From this point of view, both display a common emphasis on the material and practical aspect of belief. However, the Althusserian arguments are mostly rooted in the Marxist tradition and accordingly focus on such issues as ideology, class consciousness, or false consciousness. The Foucauldian discussions are more thus relevant in terms of revealing the intertwined relationship between thought and practice during the formation of subjects who are “conscious” of themselves and others. From the Foucauldian perspective, “thought” itself becomes an action and a practice, since it leads to all sorts of different experiences in the human mind and life in general, such as the choices between what is true or false, the acceptance or refusal of the rules, the decisions of believing or not believing in things/people, and one’s relation to oneself and to others.

From this perspective, those who engage in Sufi practices of self-care in the sense of practices for *tazkiyat an-nafs* (purification of the *nafs*) also engage in a certain “Sufi” way of living; but these practices also operate as ways of *thinking*, rather than merely ways of unthinkingly copying or automatically performing what the sheiks order the disciples to do. Of course, Sufi forms of life obviously do show variations. We see different institutionalizations in the Sufi tradition, in the sense that there are lots of different *tariqas* around the world, each of which has its own features and rituals. Without deviating from the fundamental Islamic rules, most of them have interpreted the Islamic rules of conduct and have developed their own forms of transforming the human beings into “ethical Sufi subjects.” In due course, they have been institutionalized in different ways and established varying forms of commonly accepted Sufi practices to enable their disciples to engage in the Sufi process of subjectivation.

In light of the previously mentioned purification methods in Sufism, including fasting, sexual abstinence, collective or individual *dhikr*, *zühd* (asceticism), patience, and *tawakkul*, we see that they all share the same philosophy but that their actual practices might vary from one *tariqa* to another. For instance, the duration of fasting, the number of the *dhikrs*, or the prayers recited throughout the rituals might be different in each *tariqa*. Nevertheless, the common ground for all these practices is that they aim to raise the intellectual and spiritual awareness of the disciples, besides disciplining the body in a certain form of life. Each Sufi experience of purification and transformation is an intellectual act in this sense. The self-care practices are designed neither to automatize the disciples, nor to paralyze their ability to think, to interpret, and to question life. On the contrary, they aim at raising the intellectual capacity and awareness of the disciples (Coşan, 1999). With this motive, each self-care practice in Sufism is made possible and continuous via the very act of thinking and feeling both with the heart and with the mind. Hence, when we analyze the self-care practices in Sufism (particularly *rabita*), we should keep in mind that these practices are positioned on a line that effectively connects the ideational/intellectual and the practical/performative dimensions.

6.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The discursive strategies and techniques of self-care I have explored here can be further developed by increasing the number and extent of primary sources and interviewees. Also, the discussion on the contemplation of one's death can be elaborated for further research. One way of doing this would be to adopt a psychoanalytical perspective as regards the impossibility of imagining one's own death, an argument put forward by Freud, who argues that one can picture being dead only from outside, but not from inside, as nobody believes they are going to die; thus, every time someone tries to picture himself being dead, he positions himself as an outside spectator who imagines his body as dead, yet continues to survive his self as a spectator of the scene (Kaufmann, 1959). Analyzing this argument in line with the Sufi practice of *rabita-i mevt*, which urges disciples to imagine their self as dead, would add a useful dimension to these discussions.

This research could be further enriched by extending its historical dimension so as to see the effects of modern lifestyle factors on Sufi communities and the İskenderpaşa Community. The study could also be expanded by comparative analyses. For instance, the technologies of the self constructed by other Naqshbandi orders or the other Sufi traditions within Islam (such as the Shadiliyya, Qadiriyya, Kubraviyya, Mawlawiyya, etc.) in Turkey and abroad. Within the Naqshbandi orders, the discursive strategies and techniques of *rabita* could be further examined, in addition to other technologies of the self. When comparing the Naqshbandi-İskenderpaşa tradition to other Sufi traditions, the other self-care practices and technologies of the self could be analyzed so as to see the similarities and differences between various Sufi traditions regarding the cultivation of the self as an ethical subject. In addition, one could further expand this research by comparing and contrasting the Islamic-Sufi cases with the cases of self-care and subjectivation in Christian and other belief communities more comprehensively than I have done in this thesis.

Finally, the discussion of *rabita* as a self-care practice is open to more extensive research, yet I believe this study stands as a beneficial preliminary foray into the vast fields of the deeply rooted Sufi-Naqshi philosophy and of the ancient Greco-Roman

culture as well, in terms of its analytical approach to notions related to technologies of self, self-formation, self-knowledge, and self-care. In conclusion, I would like to underline that Sufism is an art of non-existence as much as it is an “art of existence”; in other words, it is an art of living that is rendered possible only by means of learning the art of dying. Hence, we could view *rabita* as one of the most crucial and fundamental technologies of self, one that enables Sufi disciples to re-fashion themselves as individuals who have learned the long-forgotten art of dying.



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