

# IBN ARABI'S HERMENEUTICS AS AN ALTERNATIVE RELIGIOUS EXEGESIS FOR CONTEMPORARY URBAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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## Abstract

The understanding of religious texts in contemporary Muslim communities is often dominated by a rigid literal approach that overlooks the inner dimensions and social contexts. In facing the challenges of modernity, pluralism, and the complexities of urban life, an alternative interpretation that is more inclusive and flexible is needed. Ibn Arabi, a Sufi and Islamic philosopher, offers profound hermeneutics through the power of imagination, symbolism, *'irfani* epistemology, and his mystical system of knowledge. This study aims to explore Ibn Arabi's hermeneutical concepts as an alternative religious interpretation relevant to contemporary urban Muslim communities. The method employed is a literature review using a hermeneutical approach, involving an in-depth analysis of Ibn Arabi's major works, such as *al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*, along with modern interpretations of his intellectual legacy. The findings reveal that Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics provide a strong foundation for understanding religious texts more holistically, integrating the inner and outer dimensions through methods such as *ta'wil*, *kashf*, and *mushahadah*. Ibn Arabi's approach is relevant for urban communities as it bridges tradition and modernity, fostering a spiritual, inclusive, and contextual understanding of religion. His intellectual legacy not only addresses the challenges of modern religious interpretation but also opens up spaces for dialogue between Islamic traditions and contemporary societal needs.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics; Religious Exegesis; & Urban Communities.

## A. Introduction

The current religious landscape remains dominated by an understanding of religion that primarily focuses on external (*zahir*) aspects, interpreting religious texts literally without considering social-contextual interpretations or support from other

disciplines. Textual-literalist groups view their interpretations of religious texts as final and absolute, equating their interpretations with religion itself. This perspective leads to a monopoly of interpretation, fostering a sense of superiority in religious practice, which ultimately culminates in absolute claims that other opinions are erroneous. This tendency is a logical consequence of the assertion of a singular truth, which triggers unilateral sanctification in understanding and interpreting religion (Hajam, 2018).

Textual-literalist groups often confront those with differing religious perspectives through violence, vandalism, and accusations of heresy or apostasy, which frequently lead to bloodshed. They perceive such actions as the implementation of authentic religious doctrines, thereby reinforcing exclusivity in religion and amplifying fanaticism. This approach leaves no room for differing views or the possibility of truth in alternative perspectives (Baharudin & Luthfan, 2017). Ultimately, in a social context, this tendency narrows the horizon of religious understanding within the religious community itself.

Contemporary urban Muslim communities, living in dynamic, diverse, and complex urban environments, face unique challenges in their religious practices. Urbanization, modernity, and cultural pluralism compel urban Muslims to seek a more flexible, inclusive, and socially relevant approach to religion (Hidayatulloh & Saumantri, 2024). Exclusive and literal religious interpretations are no longer sufficient to address the realities of a heterogeneous and dynamic social context. Thus, there is an urgent need to offer alternative interpretations that are not only contextual but also capable of bridging tradition and contemporary challenges.

In Islam, hermeneutics serves as a crucial tool for interpreting sacred texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith (Muflihah, 2015). One of the key figures in the field of Islamic hermeneutics is Ibn Arabi, a prominent medieval philosopher and Sufi, who offers a profound approach to religious texts by emphasizing the inner (esoteric) dimension, complementing the outer (exoteric) aspects. Ibn Arabi's intellectual paradigm differs significantly from that of other Sufis. His ideas are broader and more audacious in formulating perspectives on philosophy and mystics (Hajam & Saumantri, 2023). Ibn Arabi developed an epistemological framework that integrates spiritual and rational dimensions, producing not only gnostic doctrines but also concepts encompassing various disciplines such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology, Sufism (*tasawuf*), literature, cosmology, psychology, ethics, and aesthetics (Mukhtar et al., 2023).

Ibn Arabi's thought also offers profound metaphysical insights, paving the way for understanding the collective knowledge network possessed by the saints (*wali*) (Noer, 2015). The grandeur of Ibn Arabi's ideas lies in their ability to be analyzed multidimensionally, making them relevant for study in various contexts, including the challenges faced by contemporary urban societies (Mawi & Rahman, 2015). Ibn Arabi's epistemological paradigm can be identified through three main aspects: the power of imagination, the use of symbols in understanding texts, and his epistemology and sources of knowledge. These three aspects serve as fundamental pillars in constructing his mystical philosophy. Through the creative and transcendent power of imagination, Ibn Arabi bridges the metaphysical realm with concrete reality, creating a hermeneutical approach that is not only relevant to the past but also applicable to contemporary challenges.

The use of symbols is a hallmark of Ibn Arabi's approach to understanding religious texts. He does not confine himself to literal meanings but delves into deeper esoteric meanings, uncovering the essence behind reality. The symbols he employs often reflect the inner dimension of revelation, which is universal and transcends

traditional boundaries. This approach opens the door to a more inclusive interpretation of texts, relevant to contemporary urban Muslim societies grappling with cultural, religious, and value pluralism.

In the epistemological dimension, Ibn Arabi's knowledge is non-empirical and transcends the limitations of rationality. His insights are derived from profound spiritual experiences, described as the result of direct connection with the divine dimension. In his view, true knowledge is not acquired solely through reason or the senses but through *kashf* (spiritual unveiling) and divine revelation. This places Ibn Arabi as a thinker capable of reaching the depths of revelation without limiting interpretation to the formalistic structure of texts (Bahri, 2015).

However, Ibn Arabi's doctrines are often misunderstood or deemed deviant due to misinterpretations of his ideas. For instance, the claim that Ibn Arabi received direct knowledge from Allah, bypassing intermediaries such as the Prophet Muhammad or angels, has been a point of contention (Goldziher, 2013). This perspective, while controversial, reflects Ibn Arabi's boldness in formulating a unique and personal epistemological approach to uncovering divine revelation.

Several studies have discussed Ibn Arabi's thoughts, including those by Saumantri and Ismail, who argued that the characteristics of Ibn Arabi's knowledge paradigm can be observed through a method of interpretation that relies on the power of imagination, the use of symbols, as well as epistemology and sources of knowledge that are transcendent in nature (Saumantri & Usman Ismail, 2025). A study by (Oktafiani & Rohman, 2020) explains that religious discourse in the context of Ibn Arabi is not limited to a predominantly masculine discourse. Ibn Arabi attempts to deconstruct linguistic structures by using the feminine as a starting point in religious discourse.

Furthermore, Zuherni AB in his research explains that Ibn Arabi's interpretation emphasizes the inner (*batin*) aspect rather than the outer (*zahir*) aspect, though not neglecting the importance of the outward dimension. According to Ibn Arabi, the outer aspect must be understood as a necessary step to enter into the understanding of the inner meaning. In Ibn Arabi's spiritual tradition, to delve into the inner meaning, interpretation is carried out using *ta'wil* (AB, 2017). The thought regarding Ibn Arabi's interpretation is also discussed by (Faizin, 2021), who categorizes Ibn Arabi's tafsir as a sufi nazari tafsir, which is constructed to reinforce and promote the philosophical and mystical theories adhered to by the *mufasir*. Kamaliah in his study, identifies three roles of imagination in Ibn Arabi's *mi'raj* experience. First, Ibn Arabi's creative imagination can create an intermediary realm, referred to as the imaginal realm. Second, Ibn Arabi views imagination as a creative thinking power, combining rational and Islamic gnostic knowledge to generate new insights into the *mi'raj*. Third, this imagination serves a bisociative function, enriching his spiritual understanding (Kamaliah, 2021).

Although previous studies have discussed Ibn Arabi's thoughts, this research offers a new contribution by examining the application of Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics as an alternative interpretation for contemporary urban Muslim society, while highlighting the metaphysical and symbolic aspects that have been less addressed in previous studies, using an interdisciplinary approach to understand its relevance in the context of inclusive and dynamic religious discourse.

This study aims to elucidate the hierarchical methods in Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics while identifying the characteristics of his epistemological paradigm. By integrating symbolic dimensions, spirituality, and transcendent rationality, Ibn Arabi's thought can be positioned as an alternative framework for understanding revealed texts. This is particularly significant for urban Muslim communities, who not only face

the challenges of pluralistic values but also the pressures of modernity and secularization.

Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics offers an interpretative model that not only liberates communities from literalistic exclusivism but also fosters an appreciation for diversity both within religion and in broader societal life. His approach provides a foundation for inclusivity and spiritual depth, addressing the complexities of contemporary urban existence while preserving the essence of Islamic tradition.

## B. Methods

This study uses a literature review with a hermeneutical approach to analyze Ibn Arabi's concepts in relation to contemporary urban Muslim communities. The research focuses on the core principles and methods Ibn Arabi employed in interpreting religious texts, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by Muslims in dynamic, pluralistic urban settings. Primary sources include Ibn Arabi's key works such as *Futuh al-Makkiyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*, as well as secondary sources like books, scholarly articles, and previous studies that provide a broad perspective on his thought. These sources are analyzed to gain insight into Ibn Arabi's interpretations and their relevance to modern issues faced by urban Muslims. The data is analyzed qualitatively through a hermeneutical method. The analysis focuses on both the esoteric and contextual dimensions of Ibn Arabi's writings, using a dialogical framework that connects religious texts with the realities of contemporary urban life (Bakker & Zubair, 2015). This approach helps to identify how Ibn Arabi's interpretations can offer flexible, inclusive, and relevant insights for addressing the spiritual and social needs of modern urban Muslim communities.

## C. Findings and Discussion

### 1. Findings

#### **Imagination as the Pillar of Ibn Arabi's Hermeneutics for Religious Exegesis**

A defining characteristic of Ibn Arabi's thought is the power of imagination. Ibn Arabi himself extensively discusses the role of imagination in his seminal works *Futuh al-Makkiyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*. He regards imagination as a crucial element in the cosmic structure, acting as a bridge between divine reality and the material world. As he states in *Futuh al-Makkiyah*, imagination serves not as mere mental fantasy but as a spiritual faculty that mediates between the divine and the physical realms, facilitating a deeper understanding of the universe and God's manifestation (Arabi, 1980).

Henry Corbin and William C. Chittick regard imagination as the most distinctive aspect of Ibn Arabi's intellectual paradigm, which they refer to as the "realm of imagination" (*mundus imaginalis*) (Rune, 2012). For Ibn Arabi, imagination is not merely a tool of human cognition but a divine creative force (*tajalli*), reflecting God's presence in the universe. This is emphasized in *Fusus al-Hikam*, where Ibn Arabi outlines how divine revelations manifest through symbolic forms, which the imagination is uniquely able to grasp. According to Ibn Arabi, anyone who does not understand the role of imagination in interpreting religious texts and divine signs fundamentally lacks true understanding (Arabi, 1980).

Imagination, for Ibn Arabi, is a conduit for divine knowledge and revelation, not just a human mental construct (Corbin, 2012). It helps individuals comprehend the essence of divine signs, enabling one to experience revelation in ways that transcend the literal, as he discusses in *Futuh al-Makkiyah*. Here, he presents imagination as an

essential means for transcending material reality, suggesting that true comprehension of spiritual matters requires a grasp of these deeper, symbolic truth.

In contemporary urban Muslim communities, Ibn Arabi's emphasis on imagination offers a hermeneutical tool that enhances religious understanding, especially in navigating the plurality of modern values and worldviews. By positioning imagination as a bridge between the spiritual and material realms, Ibn Arabi's framework opens up new avenues for interpreting sacred texts in a way that resonates with the dynamic realities of urban life. This approach not only deepens spiritual understanding but also fosters a more inclusive and adaptive religious discourse.

Ibn Arabi's interpretation of imagination significantly diverges from its treatment in modern thought, where it is often confined to human subjectivity and objective reality (Casey, 2014). In his hermeneutics, imagination is a vital, constitutive element that links the physical and metaphysical worlds, a concept he explores in detail in *Fusus al-Hikam*. This view positions Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics as a relevant model for urban societies seeking a more inclusive and universal way to engage with religious texts (Arabi, 1980).

Ibn Arabi's framework also differentiates the roles of reason ('aql) and imagination (*khayal*). While reason operates through sensory input and rational processes, it is ultimately dependent on the imagination to perceive deeper spiritual realities (Arabi, 1980). This dynamic is highlighted in both *Futuh al-Makiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*, where Ibn Arabi asserts that imagination, far from being mere fantasy, shapes and enriches intellectual and spiritual knowledge. It is through this synergy between reason and imagination that individuals can engage with divine truths, transcending the limitations of purely rational thought (Saumantri et al., 2024).

Imagination, in Ibn Arabi's view, is not static but dynamic and flexible, enabling humans to transcend the limits of logical reasoning and approach spiritual dimensions. As discussed in *Futuh al-Makiyyah*, imagination allows for the creation of an "imaginative world" that serves as a space where divine creativity and human experience intersect, enriching spiritual insight and understanding (Arabi, 1980). Thus, imagination is not simply a fantasy but an active mechanism that allows humans to approach the essence of reality (Burchkhardt, 2013).

By placing imagination as an essential component of human cognition, Ibn Arabi offers a profound epistemological model where imagination enriches reason, allowing it to transcend mundane limitations. This synergy between reason and imagination provides a pathway for individuals to engage with spiritual truths, fostering a holistic understanding of religious texts that bridges the material and metaphysical realms (Arabi, 1980a).

Ibn Arabi emphasizes that true understanding can only be attained through *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), as practiced by the Sufis. While reason and imagination are important, they are inherently limited and incapable of achieving *ma'rifat* (supreme knowledge) without divine assistance. *Kashf* allows humans to transcend the boundaries of sensory perception and reasoning, opening insight into the essence of God, which pure reason alone cannot reach. In the context of Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics, *kashf* becomes a crucial tool for understanding religious texts in a deeper and more spiritual way (Al-Fayumi, 2009). This provides a new relevance for contemporary urban Muslim communities, who seek profound spiritual dimensions amid the pressures of modern life.

Like Ibn Sina, Ibn Arabi believes that the power of imagination can only be cultivated through the subjugation of the *nafs* (lower self or desires). The *nafs* often acts as the primary obstacle to achieving spiritual depth, as it disrupts the tranquility of the

soul (*al-nafs al-mutma'innah*) (Arabi, 1980). By subduing the *nafs*, individuals can attain a purified life, avoid worldly temptations, and fully submit to the divine will (Hilal, 2009). This practice is particularly important for urban Muslim societies, who are frequently caught in the materialistic clamour of city life. In this context, wise counsel, art, poetry, and music are also considered effective tools to guide the imagination toward spiritual enlightenment. These mediums offer a pathway to balance the material and spiritual, helping individuals reconnect with divine truths in a manner that aligns with their modern realities while maintaining their spiritual core.

For contemporary urban Muslim communities, the relationship between reason (*'aql*), imagination (*khayal*), and *kashf* as proposed by Ibn Arabi offers a new paradigm for understanding religious texts. Imagination not only serves as a tool to liberate religious understanding from literal interpretations but also enables individuals to explore the symbolic and inner dimensions of revelation. Amid the plurality of cultures and values encountered by urban societies, the ideas in Ibn Arabi's thought can serve as a model for a more inclusive, flexible, and relevant form of religious interpretation.

In Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics, imagination acts as a bridge between reason and the spiritual dimension, providing a pathway to understanding that transcends the confines of materialism and literalism. This concept offers a rich framework for addressing the challenges of modernity while simultaneously reinforcing the spiritual dimension in the lives of urban Muslims. By integrating reason, imagination, and *kashf*, Ibn Arabi's approach facilitates a holistic understanding of religion that resonates with the complex realities of urban life. It fosters a spiritually enriched, contextually adaptive interpretation of sacred texts, enabling individuals to navigate the demands of modernity without losing touch with the essence of their faith.

### **Symbolic Language in Ibn Arabi's Hermeneutics for Religious Exegesis**

One of the essential elements in Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics is the use of symbols. Symbols are a hallmark of Ibn Arabi's interpretative method, particularly in understanding the Qur'an and Hadith. This approach is rooted in his belief that sacred texts and the universe possess deeper symbolic dimensions beyond their outward manifestations. In Ibn Arabi's view, symbols are not merely linguistic embellishments but essential tools for comprehending the ultimate realities hidden behind external phenomena (Dillistone, 2016).

According to Ibn Arabi, symbols represent a universal language used by God to communicate with humanity. Every element of nature, every verse of the Qur'an, and even every human experience contains symbolic meanings pointing to divine truths (Whitehead, 2015). For this reason, Ibn Arabi guides readers of his works to interpret symbols as gateways to the inner dimensions of sacred texts and reality.

By engaging with symbolic language, Ibn Arabi opens the door to an interpretive framework that transcends literalism, allowing individuals to access the esoteric truths embedded within religious texts. This symbolic approach enables a more profound understanding of divine messages, fostering an inclusive and spiritually enriched interpretation that resonates with the complexities of contemporary life.

Ibn Arabi emphasizes the importance of understanding symbolic indications (*isharah*) in texts and the universe. He states: "*Understand my indications and symbols. Pay attention to my symbols, and you will comprehend what I mean*" (Rozi, 2022). This highlights that symbolic comprehension requires the ability to transcend literal meanings and delve into inner meanings. In this regard, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, who also influenced Ibn Arabi, categorized the Qur'an into four aspects: *'Ibarah* (the outward

meaning), *Isharah* (the symbolic meaning), *Lataif* (the hidden meaning), and *Essence* (the essential meaning comprehensible only by the Prophet) (Arif, 2012).

For Ibn Arabi, symbols are not limited to linguistic constructs but also encompass movements, gestures, and natural phenomena. He describes symbols as a form of communication that transcends sensory perception, bridging the inner and outer dimensions. In this context, Ibn Arabi introduces the method of *ta'wil* as a tool to uncover the symbolic meanings behind the outward reality of texts and phenomena.

*Ta'wil*, in Ibn Arabi's view, is an interpretive process that guides the reader from the outward (*zahir*) dimension to the inward (*batin*) dimension of the text. This method is not only applied to the Qur'an but also extends to natural phenomena and the experiences of the human soul. Ibn Arabi states that the outward aspect of a text is *tafsir*, while the inward aspect is *ta'wil*, aimed at uncovering the hidden depths of meaning (Faisal, 2011).

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibn Arabi applies this symbolic hermeneutical method not only to revealed texts but also to the creation of the universe, which he perceives as a manifestation of the Qur'an as a macrocosm. Nasr explains that Ibn Arabi also views the human soul as a microcosm that mirrors the structure of the cosmos (Nasr, 2014). Thus, *ta'wil* becomes a tool to connect the macrocosm (the universe) with the microcosm (the human soul), creating a holistic and spiritual understanding. This approach allows for a deeper interpretation that integrates the divine revelation within texts, the natural world, and the self, fostering a unified vision of existence that resonates with spiritual truths and the complexities of modern life.

In the context of contemporary urban Muslim communities, Ibn Arabi's symbolic approach offers a relevant hermeneutical paradigm to address the dominance of literal interpretations, which are often inadequate for navigating the plurality and complexity of urban life. The use of symbols allows urban communities to interpret religious texts more inclusively by creating space for flexible and contextual interpretations.

Furthermore, Ibn Arabi's symbolic language can help urban Muslims bridge the tension between tradition and modernity. In a life filled with cultural and technological symbols, Ibn Arabi's method enables individuals to discern spiritual meanings behind modern realities. Symbols in religious texts can serve as guides to finding harmony between material and spiritual life.

The use of symbols in Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics is a fundamental element for understanding religious texts and reality. In Ibn Arabi's view, symbols serve as a bridge between the outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*) dimensions, allowing individuals to delve into deeper spiritual meanings. This approach is highly relevant for urban Muslim societies, which require religious interpretations that are contextual, inclusive, and flexible to meet the demands of modern, pluralistic environments.

### **Ibn Arabi's 'Irfani Epistemology for Contemporary Religious Exegesis**

Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* epistemology offers an integrative approach to knowledge that transcends the limitations of rational and sensory perception. The term *'Irfani*, meaning "gnostic" or "direct knowledge," reflects Ibn Arabi's methodology for achieving profound understanding through *kashf* (spiritual unveiling). This type of knowledge is not obtained solely through intellectual or sensory means but through a deep, personal engagement with the divine realm. According to Ibn Arabi, such understanding comes only after a purification of the soul and spiritual alignment with divine realities. His framework intertwines the spiritual, rational, and sensory realms to offer a pathway for accessing higher consciousness and a deeper comprehension of religious texts

(Bagir, 2016). This epistemological framework is deeply rooted in the idea that true understanding of divine reality cannot be confined to empirical or intellectual domains alone. Instead, it requires a direct and personal engagement with the spiritual dimension, facilitated by purification of the soul and alignment with divine truths. Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* approach integrates the spiritual and rational realms, providing a pathway for individuals to access a higher level of consciousness and a deeper comprehension of religious texts and universal truths (Abshor, 2018).

In his works, such as *Futuhat al-Makiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*, Ibn Arabi develops a structured framework of theosophy using the *'Irfani* approach to understand the essence of revelation. This epistemology sets him apart from the *bayani* method, which is text-based, or the peripatetic (*masha'iyah*) method, which prioritizes deductive logic. Ibn Arabi not only emphasizes the inward dimension but also presents a holistic way of thinking that integrates reason, sensory perception, and spiritual intuition (Farhan & Arafat, 2021).

To illustrate how Ibn Arabi's epistemology can be applied to the interpretation of religious texts, consider the Qur'anic verse: "And He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days" (Qur'an, 7:54). A traditional textual interpretation might focus on the literal meaning of the verse, explaining the creation process in a physical sense. However, using Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* epistemology, one would approach this verse through the inner dimensions of *kashf* and *mushahadah* (Farhan & Arafat, 2021).

In this interpretive approach, the focus would not just be on the material creation but on the divine *tajalli* (manifestation) within the creation. The verse could be seen as symbolizing the inner process of spiritual transformation in which the soul ascends through various stages, much like the creation of the universe itself. As the individual progresses through spiritual stations (*maqamat*), they witness the unfolding of divine reality in a more profound and personal way. The process of "six days" could metaphorically represent the stages of the soul's purification, with each "day" symbolizing a different stage in the journey of self-realization and divine unveiling. This deeper understanding of the verse could offer spiritual guidance to contemporary urban Muslims navigating their own journeys of inner transformation (Chittick, 2011).

Similarly, in the interpretation of a hadith, such as "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord," Ibn Arabi would suggest that true knowledge of God comes only through a direct, spiritual encounter, facilitated by the unveiling of the inner self (Chittick, 1989). In the context of urban Muslim communities, this interpretation moves beyond theoretical knowledge of God to an experiential, lived understanding that aligns with the spiritual dimensions of the *'Irfani* epistemology.

Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* epistemology offers significant benefits for urban Muslim communities, particularly in addressing the complex dynamics of modernity. In contemporary urban environments, where rationality and materialism often dominate, this epistemology serves as a vital reminder of the importance of spiritual knowledge and experiential wisdom. It helps bridge the gap between intellectual understanding and personal, transformative experiences of the divine.

Urban Muslims, frequently navigating the pressures of modern life, can find solace in the integrative nature of Ibn Arabi's framework. By embracing *maqamat* (spiritual stations), *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), and *mushahadah* (inner witnessing), individuals can foster a deeper connection with their faith, transcending the alienation caused by materialistic pursuits. This allows them to approach religious texts not as mere rules to be followed but as living, dynamic revelations that speak to their contemporary struggles and experiences.

In line with the Sufi tradition, which emphasizes spiritual transformation, Ibn Arabi divides the *'Irfani* method into stages that describe the journey toward divine knowledge. The first step involves the purification of the inner self through *maqamat* (spiritual stations), such as repentance (*taubah*), piety (*wara'*), asceticism (*zuhud*), poverty (*faqir*), patience (*sabar*), reliance on God (*tawakal*), and contentment (*ridha*) (Saliyo, 2017). These stages serve as an initial preparation for receiving the flow of divine knowledge.

The second stage involves experiencing *kashf*, a direct and illuminative form of knowledge attainable only through absolute self-awareness. In this phase, *mushahadah* (inner witnessing) becomes the pinnacle of spiritual experience, allowing individuals to directly comprehend divine reality (Saduddin, 2018). The final stage involves sharing mystical experiences through speech or writing. Ibn Arabi exemplifies this phase through his prolific writings, which depict divine realities using symbols and indications (Kulsum, 2020).

Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* knowledge is often referred to as *huduri* (knowledge by presence), a form of direct understanding without mediation by rational or sensory means. It is akin to the experience of tasting honey, where the sweetness can only be truly understood through direct experience (Abrari, 2012). Ibn Arabi bridges rational logic (*mantiq al-'aql*), sensory logic (*mantiq al-hiss*), and the logic of taste (*mantiq al-zauq*), forming the foundation of his thought to unify intellectual and spiritual aspects. This integration reflects his holistic epistemology, which harmonizes the physical, intellectual, and spiritual realms, enabling individuals to engage deeply with divine truths and navigate their spiritual journeys with profound insight.

Ibn Arabi's thought is highly relevant for contemporary urban Muslim communities, who often face a disconnect between spirituality and rationality in navigating the dynamics of modernity. The *'Irfani* framework offers a paradigm that enables individuals to find harmony between these two aspects, legitimizing spiritual experience as a valid source of knowledge.

Unlike some other Sufis, such as Abu Yazid al-Bustami and al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi avoids using concepts like *shatahat* (ecstatic expressions), which are often viewed as excessive or overly subjective. He rejects claims such as *Ana al-Haq* ("I am the Truth") and the concepts of *hulul* (divine indwelling) or *ittihad* (total union with God). Ibn Arabi criticizes such views as deviations from the essence of true Sufism, which should maintain a balance between submission to God and a deep understanding of His will (Devi Umi Solehah, 2021).

Instead, Ibn Arabi views mystical experience as a means of bridging the relationship between humans and God without obscuring the essential distinction between the two. This perspective sets him apart from many earlier Sufi figures while providing a more universal framework for understanding divine reality. By rejecting overly subjective or extreme expressions, Ibn Arabi offers a balanced and holistic approach to spirituality that resonates with the needs of urban Muslims.

For urban Muslim communities navigating the dynamics of modernity, Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* epistemological approach offers highly relevant insights. In an era where modern rationality often dominates urban life, Ibn Arabi demonstrates that spiritual knowledge remains vital and can provide solutions to the complexities of life. Through *maqamat* (spiritual stations), *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), and *mushahadah* (inner witnessing), individuals can discover deeper meaning in their lives, transcending materialism and the pressures of modern cultural norms.

### **Ibn Arabi's Sources of Knowledge: Relevance for Contemporary Urban Exegesis**

The primary source of Ibn Arabi's mystical knowledge is believed to come directly from God through the enlightenment of the heart, guided by prophetic grace. This knowledge does not rely on external influences but is realized through inner experience and deep reflection on divine revelation. As explained by (Nasr & Leaman, 2010), Ibn Arabi attained his knowledge through divine manifestations, which led to an intuitive and profound understanding of sacred texts. In his monumental works, such as *al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*, Ibn Arabi asserts that the principal source of his teachings is direct inspiration from God, mediated through prophetic revelation or the Angel of inspiration (*Malak al-Ilham*) (Schimmel, 2015).

Ibn Arabi's knowledge system emphasizes the importance of inner experience and *kashf* (spiritual unveiling) as primary methods for understanding ultimate truths. While earlier Sufi traditions largely focused on practical guidance and spiritual experiences, Ibn Arabi introduced a significant transformation by integrating dimensions of philosophy, cosmology, and psychology into the Sufi doctrine, creating a system that is both theoretical and practical (Chittick, 2009).

Ibn Arabi's knowledge is rooted in the foundational teachings of Islam—the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He asserts that every concept he articulates in his works is grounded in the hermeneutics of the Qur'an. In his view, true understanding can only be attained through divine inspiration (*ilham ilahi*), which reveals the inner meanings of sacred texts. Ibn Arabi frequently employs the method of *ta'wil* to interpret the Qur'an at a profound level, uncovering esoteric meanings that transcend literal interpretations. This approach distinguishes him from philosophers and *kalam* theologians, who rely more on rational arguments or textual literalism in their understanding of religion (Chittick, 2011).

In the context of contemporary urban Muslim communities, Ibn Arabi's approach to the Qur'an as a source of divine knowledge is highly relevant. His emphasis on *kashf* as a hermeneutical method offers a pathway for urban societies to engage with religious texts in a more spiritual and contextual manner, bridging the tension between the literal interpretation of texts and the complexities of modernity.

Ibn Arabi's mystical knowledge, often referred to as *'irfani*, represents direct knowledge obtained through spiritual illumination. Unlike exoteric knowledge, which relies on logic or sensory perception, *'irfani* knowledge is *huduri* (immediately present in the soul), requiring no external intermediary. Ibn Arabi describes this knowledge as a divine grace bestowed through self-purification and deep spiritual practice. He highlights the importance of *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), *mushahadah* (inner witnessing), and *mukashafah* (revelation) as essential steps toward attaining profound divine understanding (Mustamain, 2020).

Ibn Arabi frequently critiques what he terms "descriptive scholars" (*ulama al-Rusum*), who focus solely on the literal understanding of religion without exploring the inner meanings of texts. In his view, such an approach blocks access to the spiritual dimensions of revelation. He asserts that true knowledge is granted only to those blessed with divine grace and capable of discerning God's secrets in His creation (Afif Anshori, 2015). This critique is especially relevant in the context of urban Muslim societies, where rigid interpretations of religion often dominate, leaving little room for symbolic or contextual interpretations.

Ibn Arabi's thought has had a profound impact not only within the Islamic world but also beyond geographical and ideological boundaries. His works, such as *Futuhat al-Makiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*, became the foundation of philosophical Sufism, particularly the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the Unity of Being). Through disciples

such as al-Qunawi, al-Jami, and Rumi, his ideas spread widely to regions like Persia, Turkey, India, and Southeast Asia (Dahlan, 2009). This influence even extended to Western intellectuals who studied Sufism as part of a global mystical tradition (Azra, 2012).

In South Asia, Ibn Arabi's thought was adopted by figures such as Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, and Abdul Samad al-Falimbani, who integrated his Sufi concepts into local traditions (Azra, 2010). In the context of contemporary urban settings, this intellectual legacy provides a relevant alternative for interpreting religion in ways that address pluralism and modernity. In a modern world often dominated by rational logic and textual approaches, Ibn Arabi's system of knowledge offers a pathway to integrate spirituality into daily life (Hajam & Saumantr, 2024). For urban Muslim communities, Ibn Arabi's thought can help interpret religious texts not merely as literal rules but as spiritual guides that are contextual and dynamic.

His emphasis on the symbolic and esoteric dimensions of religious texts helps bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, offering a hermeneutical framework that enriches spiritual engagement while remaining relevant to the complexities of contemporary life. Ibn Arabi's thought thus serves as a beacon for urban Muslims seeking a deeper connection with their faith amidst the challenges of modern existence.

## 2. Discussion

### **Ibn Arabi's unique conceptualization of imagination as a vital epistemological tool in religious interpretation**

The findings highlight Ibn Arabi's unique conceptualization of imagination as a vital epistemological tool in religious interpretation. Imagination, for Ibn Arabi, is not a passive faculty; rather, it actively participates in the uncovering of spiritual truths. In contemporary urban Muslim communities, where religious engagement is often challenged by modernity and secularism, this framework offers a potent counter-narrative to literalist and reductionist approaches to religious texts.

Urban environments, marked by their pluralistic values and materialistic culture, present an arena where religious understanding often becomes fragmented or superficial (Hidayatulloh & Saumantri, 2024). Ibn Arabi's assertion that imagination is a bridge between the spiritual and material realms offers urban Muslims a way to navigate these challenges. The power of imagination allows them to reinterpret sacred texts not merely as static, historical documents but as living, dynamic sources of spiritual guidance. By embracing imagination as a tool for deeper religious engagement, urban Muslims can foster an interpretative approach that resonates with their daily realities, moving beyond the confines of a literalist understanding of religious practice (Halligan, 2011).

A critical finding of this study is Ibn Arabi's reliance on symbolic interpretation (*ta'wil*) as a tool for understanding divine reality. Symbols, according to Ibn Arabi, are not mere linguistic or decorative features but profound manifestations of divine wisdom (Arabi, 1980). This symbolic approach is especially relevant for urban Muslim communities, where religious texts and spiritual practices are often perceived through the lens of rationality and practicality.

In urban settings, where life is fast-paced and heavily influenced by technological advancements and modern ideologies, the symbolic approach of Ibn Arabi offers a deeper mode of engagement with religion. It allows individuals to transcend the surface-level meanings of religious texts and engage with their spiritual essence. The symbolic language Ibn Arabi uses in his hermeneutics acts as a bridge that connects the material world with the divine, offering urban Muslims a means to reinterpret both the

Qur'an and Hadith in ways that resonate with the complexities of modern existence (Arrozy Hasyim, 2012).

Another significant finding from Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics is the complementary relationship between reason (*'aql*), imagination (*khayal*), and *kashf* (spiritual unveiling). In his framework, reason operates as an essential cognitive tool for navigating the material world, but it is imagination that enables one to perceive deeper spiritual realities. Together, these faculties prepare the individual to experience *kashf*, or direct, spiritual insight into divine truths.

This epistemological synergy has profound implications for contemporary urban Muslim communities, where intellectual engagement often eclipses the spiritual and emotional dimensions of religious practice. Urban Muslims, frequently bombarded by the pressures of modern life, often experience a disconnect between their rational understanding of religion and their lived spiritual experiences (Saumantri, 2023). Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics, which advocates for a balanced integration of reason, imagination, and spiritual insight, offers a pathway to re-establish that connection.

In a world where spiritual life is often relegated to the margins, Ibn Arabi's model offers a framework that encourages a more balanced, integrative approach to religious practice (Arif, 2012). By engaging with religious texts and experiences through the interplay of reason and imagination, urban Muslims can experience deeper spiritual transformations. This process also emphasizes the importance of *kashf* in bridging the gap between intellectual understanding and experiential spirituality, offering a new paradigm for contemporary religious engagement.

For contemporary urban Muslim communities, where rationality and materialism often dominate discourse, the concept of *kashf* offers a powerful antidote to the disenchanting view of religion that prevails in secular society. By practicing spiritual unveiling, urban Muslims can access a more profound and transformative understanding of their faith. This knowledge is not merely intellectual; it is an experiential, lived knowledge that speaks to the heart and soul.

Finally, Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* epistemology offers a compelling model for contemporary urban religious exegesis. In an era dominated by intellectualism, rationalism, and scientific inquiry, Ibn Arabi's holistic approach provides a space for spiritual knowledge to flourish. His model integrates reason, sensory perception, and spiritual intuition, offering a pathway for individuals to engage with religious texts on multiple levels (Abshor, 2018).

For urban Muslim communities, Ibn Arabi's *'Irfani* epistemology offers a way to reconnect the spiritual and rational aspects of life. It encourages individuals to go beyond purely intellectual or materialistic interpretations of religion and seek a more integrated, dynamic understanding of sacred texts. This model of interpretation provides an inclusive framework that can accommodate the diverse and complex experiences of contemporary urban Muslims.

#### D. Conclusion

Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics offers a profound and relevant framework for religious interpretation, particularly for contemporary urban Muslim communities navigating the dynamics of modernity and pluralism. Through the power of imagination, the use of symbolism, *'irfani* epistemology, and his mystical knowledge system, Ibn Arabi creates a hermeneutical structure that integrates the inward (*batiniah*) and outward (*lahiriah*) dimensions of religious texts. This approach enables an understanding of sacred texts that is not only literal but also transcendental, uncovering spiritual meanings that are contextual and inclusive.

Ibn Arabi emphasizes *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), *mushahadah* (inner witnessing), and *mukashafah* (spiritual revelation) as methods to comprehend divine truths. He grounds his knowledge in the Qur'an and Sunnah, remaining aligned with the principles of Sharia while drawing on divine inspiration and the logic of spiritual experience. This makes Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics a valuable alternative for bridging tradition and modernity. Its relevance lies in its ability to provide holistic spiritual guidance, addressing the needs of urban communities striving to navigate complex and dynamic lives.

Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics contributes not only to theoretical discourse but also creates space for more flexible and harmonious religious practices. His intellectual legacy continues to inspire both Eastern and Western scholars, solidifying his role as a central figure in the traditions of Sufism and Islamic hermeneutics. As an alternative approach, Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics stands out as a significant framework for understanding religion in a deeper, more spiritual, and contextually relevant manner, making it a vital resource for addressing contemporary challenges

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#### F. Author Contributions Statement

This research is the result of collaboration between authors from different universities. The first author, Taufik Hidayatulloh, is from Paramadina University Jakarta, while the second author, Hajam, and the third author, Theguh Saumantri, are from Syekh Nurjati Cyber State Islamic University Cirebon. Taufik Hidayatulloh was responsible for the conceptualization of the research, literature collection, and initial analysis. Hajam contributed to the critical analysis and drafting of the main sections of the article. Theguh Saumantri played a role in data processing, verification, and manuscript editing. All authors actively contributed to discussions, revisions, and improvements until the manuscript was completed.

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