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The *Water of Life*: A Symbolic Journey from Epic to Mysticism and Lyricism

Abstract

The concept of the *Water of Life* is commonly encountered in folklore, epic and lyrical literature, as well as in Sufi literature. Each individual who refers to the *Water of Life* presents it in different meanings. Poets employ the *Water of Life* in the same context in which they perceive human beings' attainment of eternal life. Some view it as being achieved through knowledge, others through wisdom, and others again through love, among other things. The approach each author takes toward the concept of the *Water of Life* is also varied. This paper explores the tale of Alexander's search for the *Water of Life*, as depicted in *Shāhnāmeḥ* by Ferdowsī and *Sharafnāmeḥ* by Nizāmī, and how it later entered Sufi literature, taking on a symbolic meaning. In medieval Persian literature, it is impossible to find a work that does not reference the *Water of Life* at least once. In the works of 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Hāfez, Fuṣṣulī, and many other great poets, various versions of this expression can be found. In this article, we attempt to examine the narrative of the *Water of Life* as it transitions from epic poetry to Sufi prose, specifically in the works of Avicenna and Suhrawardī.

Keywords: *Water of Life*, Alexander, Ferdowsī, Nizāmī, 'Aṭṭār, Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Rūmī, Nīshābūrī, Fuṣṣulī



Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilization, people have longed for immortality and have sought various paths to achieve it. Therefore, it is not coincidental that humans have been in search of the *Water of Life* to fulfill this desire. In general, water itself is the source of life, while the *Water of Life* is considered a means to attain immortality. In the works we have examined, the *Water of Life* has been used in the following forms:

آب حیات، آب حیوان، آب خضر، چشمه زندگانی، چشمه زندگی، عین حیات،
عین الحیات، چشمه آب زندگانی، حیات جاودانی، چشمه حیوان

The *Water of Life* the “Life-giving Water”, the “Fountain of Khidr”, the “Water of Khidr”, the “Fountain of Immortality”, the “Fountain of Life”, the “Spring of Life”, the “Eye of Immortality”, the “Fountain of the Water of Immortality”, and “Eternal Life”.

Although the concept of the *Water of Life* is found in many ancient sources, it was first discussed in detail by Abū'l-Qāsim Ferdowsī in his *Shāhnāme* and by Nizāmī Ganjavī in his *Iskandarnāme*. “These two works depict how the world conqueror, Alexander the Great, embarks on a quest for the *Water of Life* toward the end of his life in an attempt to attain immortality”. However, he is unable to achieve this goal. Both works emphasize that even the world’s conquerors are doomed to death. Nevertheless, the phrase *Water of Life* entered symbolic use in Sufi literature and has been employed in various meanings.

The article examines the transition of the concept of the *Water of Life* from epic to mystical poetry in the masnavis of Ferdowsī, Nizāmī, and ‘Attār, its symbolic meaning in the mystical treatises of Avicenna and Suhrawardī, its further semantic expansion in the works of Fuzūlī and Sībak Nīshābūrī, and finally, its application in lyrical poetry. Accordingly, the article is structured around three main directions:

1. The *Water of Life* in masnavis (epic and mystical);
2. The *Water of Life* in mystical prose texts;
3. The *Water of Life* in mystical ghazals.

Part I: The *Water of Life* in masnavis (epic and mystical)

1.1. The *Water of Life* Tale in the *Shāhnāme* (“The Book of Kings”)

It is narrated that when Alexander was in Rum, he led his army towards the West. He subjugated a city whose inhabitants were of large stature, with red skin and blonde hair. An old man tells Alexander that on the other side of the world, in the vastness of darkness, there exists a spring known as the *Water of Life*:

On the other side of the city, there is a pond.
 I have never seen anyone benefit from its water.
 When the bright sun reaches there,
 It disappears into the depths of the sea.
 Behind my fountain, the world darkens,
 The hidden world becomes revealed.
 And there are many words about that dark place,
 I heard that it can never reach the essence.
 A wise, God-fearing learned man
 Tells him that there is a spring,
 A person of clear speech, with thoughts and desires,
 Everyone calls him by the name *āb-e heyvān*.
 One with a bright heart and great intellect,
 For anyone who drinks from *āb-e heyvān* will never
 die.¹

یکی آبگیرست زان روی شهر
 کزان آب کس را ندیدیم بهر
 چو خورشید تابان بدانجا رسید
 بران ژرف دریا شود ناپدید
 پس چشمه در تیره گردد جهان
 شود آشکارای گیتی نهان
 وزان جای تاریک چندان سخن
 شنیدم که هرگز نیاید به بن
 خرد یافته مرد یزدان پرست
 بدو در یکی چشمه گوید که هست
 گشاده سخن مرد با رای و کام
 همی آب حیوانش خواند به نام
 چنین گفت روشن دل پر خرد
 که هرک آب حیوان خورد کی
 مرد²

It is also said that near the spring there is a city where the sun sets.
 The characteristics of the *Water of Life* as described in the *Shāhnāme* are
 as follows:

Beyond the city lies a sea from which no one has ever been able to benefit. Even the radiant sun, upon reaching that place, disappears into the depths of the sea. Beyond the spring, the world is enveloped in such profound darkness that everything once visible turns hidden. A pious man, devoted to God, speaks of a spring in that dark realm, which is known as the *Water of Life*. Whoever drinks from it shall never die.

From this brief account, the following points become clear in a scholarly context:

1. The *Water of Life* is located near a mysterious sea from which no one has ever gained any benefit.
2. It lies in a realm of darkness where even sunlight cannot reach – beyond the boundaries of the known world.
3. Whoever drinks from this spring attains immortality and is freed from the fate of death.

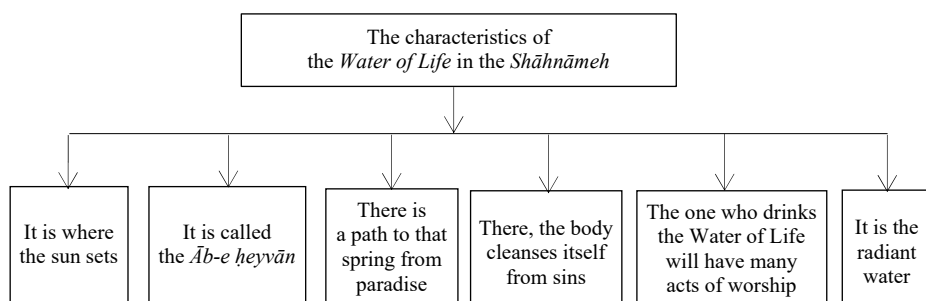
Alexander approaches the spring and sees how the sun sets in the sea. Then, with the guidance of Khidr and accompanied by his chosen soldiers, he heads towards the darkness. After two days and nights, they reach a fork in the road, and Alexander parts

¹ All Persian translations in this work are by Aygun Alizade.

² بخش 32, پادشاهی اسکندر, شاهنامه, فردوسی, Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh32>.

ways with Khidr. With the help of the ring given to him by Alexander, Khidr reaches the *āb-e ḥayāt*” spring. However, since Alexander took a different path, he reaches the light. There, he sees four birds sitting on four columns. These four birds ask Alexander questions, and after answering their questions, he reaches the summit of the mountain with their guidance. There, he sees the angel Israfil, who is waiting for God’s command to blow the trumpet. The angel gives Alexander advice: “O man, how long will you continue to strive without rest? One day, a voice will reach your ears, telling you to abandon your throne and crown, and prepare for the journey”. Alexander responds to Israfil’s counsel, saying that his fate has already been written. If he does not take a stone, he will regret it. When the soldiers emerge from the spring, they see that all the stones have turned into pearls and rubies. Those who took stones regretted not taking more, while those who took no stones at all regretted even more.

Abū’l-Qāsim Ferdowsī, through the voice of Israfil, advises the conqueror of the world, Alexander, saying that just as death will catch everyone, it will eventually catch you as well. There is no meaning in enduring so much hardship in this transient world. From the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, it becomes clear that only those who understand God’s wisdom, not the lovers of the material world, can drink from the *Water of Life*, and one such example is the prophet Khidr.



1.2. The brief summary of the tale of Alexander’s search for the *Water of Life* in Nizāmī’s *Sharafnāmeḥ*

In that gathering, there was an old sage.
When it was finally his turn to speak,
He, like the other elders, kissed the ground
And began his words with amazement:
“Among all lands, that dark region is the best,
For within it flows a water that grants life”.

در آن انجمن بود پیری کهن
چو نوبت بدو آمد آخر سخن
همیدون زبان بر شگفتی گشاد
چو دیگر بزرگان زمین بوسه داد
که از هر سواد آن سیاهی بهست
که آبی درو زندگانی دهست

Do not compare your life to precious treasure,
 For the earth itself is full of treasure and bears its weight.
 If you seek to live a long life,
 Then seek the source of the *Water of Life*.

به گنج گران عمر خود بر مسنج
 که خاکست پر گنج و حمال گنج
 چو خواهی که یابی بسی روزگار
 سر از چشمه زندگانی بر آر³

One day, Alexander hears the story of the *Water of Life* at a celebratory gathering and decides to search for it with his army. They head towards the direction of darkness beneath the North Pole. Due to the large number of soldiers, their movement is difficult. With great effort, they manage to reach a cave in the desert, where most of the soldiers stay behind. The desert, which transforms into a place of prosperity, is named *Bon-e Qar*, and gradually, the place turns into a region known as *Bulgaria*.

Alexander selects many courageous and strong young men and sets off towards the direction of darkness with them. After a month, they arrive at a place where no sign of sunlight is visible. Here, we encounter a young man who, contrary to Alexander's orders, had brought his 90-year-old elderly father with him. At this difficult moment, the old man says that the first foal they encounter, before entering the darkness, should be sacrificed before its mother's eyes. Afterward, they should proceed into the darkness. On their way back, the mother of the foal should lead the way so that Alexander and his companions can reach the place where the sacrifice took place.

Nizāmī narrates the tale of Alexander's entry into darkness based on Persian, Roman, and Arabic traditions. In the Persian version, the prophet Khidr leads the army and when Alexander reaches the *Water of Life* he gives him a shining jewel. Alexander asks Khidr to inform him once he finds the spring and drinks from it. Khidr finds the spring, drinks from it, and washes his body. Further explanation reveals that Elijah and Khidr were one and the same, and both had reached the *Water of Life*. They prepare a meal and set a table upon which lies a piece of dried fish. Remarkably, the fish falls into the water and is miraculously restored to life. Thus, Khidr and Elijah also reach the *Water of Life*. Due to losing their way, Alexander and his army are unable to reach the water.

In the Arabic tradition, unlike the Persian and Roman versions, the spring of the *Water of Life* is mentioned at a different location. According to this version of the narrative, Elijah and Khidr, who drank from the *Water of Life* and gained eternal life, distance themselves from other people. Elijah goes to the sea, while Khidr heads to the desert. Since Alexander reaches the spring but is unable to drink from it, he decides to turn back. At this moment, an angel grabs his hand and tells him that although he has conquered the whole world, his mind is still unsatisfied with vain desires. The angel gives him a stone and asks him to find something of the same weight. When Alexander emerges from the darkness, whatever he measures with the stone turns out to be heavier than anything else. At that point, Khidr appears and tells him that the earth is of the

³ نظامی، خمسه، اسکندرنامه - بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 - افسانه آب حیوان
 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.

1.3. The Water of Life in ‘Attār’s Ilāhīnāmeḥ

7. عطار، الهی نامه، بخش اول (1) حکایت زکریا صالحه که شوهرش به سفر رفته بود. Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkshsh1/sh3>.

According to the father's discourse, falling in love with the Fairy King's daughter represents selfish desire; seeking the *Jām-e Jam* symbolizes an interest in everything; pursuing magic and sorcery reflects becoming a captive to one's desires; longing for the *Water of Life* signifies the length of one's aspirations and love for worldly existence; requesting Solomon's ring denotes a wish for power; and the desire to master alchemy stems from greed.

The first son represents the self (*naḥs*) – the Fairy King's daughter – the contented self.

The second son symbolizes the devil – magic and sorcery – faith.

The third son embodies intellect – the *Jām-e Jam* – universal reason.

The fourth son signifies knowledge – the *Water of Life* – true knowledge.

The fifth son stands for poverty (*faqr*) – Solomon's ring – contentment.

The sixth son represents monotheism (*tawḥīd*) – alchemy – spiritual insight (*ma'rifa*).

As observed, in the 13th section of *Ilāhīnāmeḥ*, the fourth son requests the *Water of Life* from his father:

The fourth son, beautiful and fair,	در آمد چارمین فرزند زیبا
Entered with peace and calm everywhere.	همه آرام و آسایش سراپا
He told his father, "In this vast universe,	پدر را گفت تا در کایناتم
With a hundred hearts, I seek the <i>Water of Life</i> 's course.	بصد دل طالب آب حیاتم
If that water comes within my grasp,	اگر دستم دهد آن آب رستم
I shall grow strong, else wind will clasp.	وگر نه همچنین بادی بدستم
From longing, my soul burned like fire,	ز شوقم آتشین شد جان ازان آب
No food I crave by day or night's tire.	نه خور دارم بروز و نه بشب خواب
With this thought, my heart is restless still,	ازین اندیشه دل پُر تاب دارم
I thirst for the air that waters fill".	شدم تشنه هوای آب دارم ⁸

In the 13th and 14th chapters of *Ilāhīnāmeḥ*, this epic is elaborated in detail. The thirteenth chapter is titled The Story of Roman Alexander and the Wise Man. In this section, Alexander and his quest for the *Water of Life* are mentioned multiple times in various versions. For example, at the beginning of the section, the father rebukes his son, who is searching for the *Water of Life*, and tells a story about Alexander wishing to meet with the sage in order to learn wisdom. However, the sage does not come to meet him and refers to Alexander as "the servant of his own servant", since seeking the *Water of Life* is seen as living with delusions and the conquest of nations as a sign of greed. The sage has enslaved himself to both meaningless desires and greed. In fact, Alexander is a prisoner of these desires. In this legend, Alexander is equated with *Zulqarnayn*.

The topic we will explore is the section titled "Alexander and His Death" in the 14th chapter of *Ilāhīnāmeḥ*. In response to his son's request for the *Water of Life*,

⁸ عطار، الهی نامه، بخش سیزدهم، المقالة الثالث عشر Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh13/sh1>.

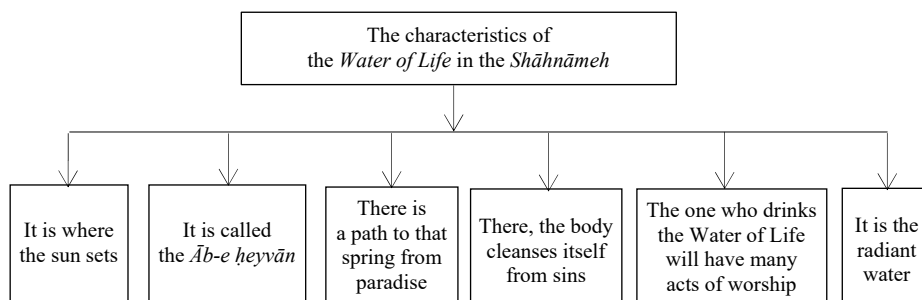
One day, Alexander saw in a book
That the *Water of Life* is a radiant, life-giving water.

سکندر در کتابی دید یک روز
که هست آب حیات آبی دلفروز⁹

The Description of the *Water of Life* in *Shāhnāme*^h

That spring has a path from Paradise;
There, he would wash his body and shed his sins

ز فردوس دارد بر آن چشمه راه
بشوید بر آن تن بریزد گناه¹⁰

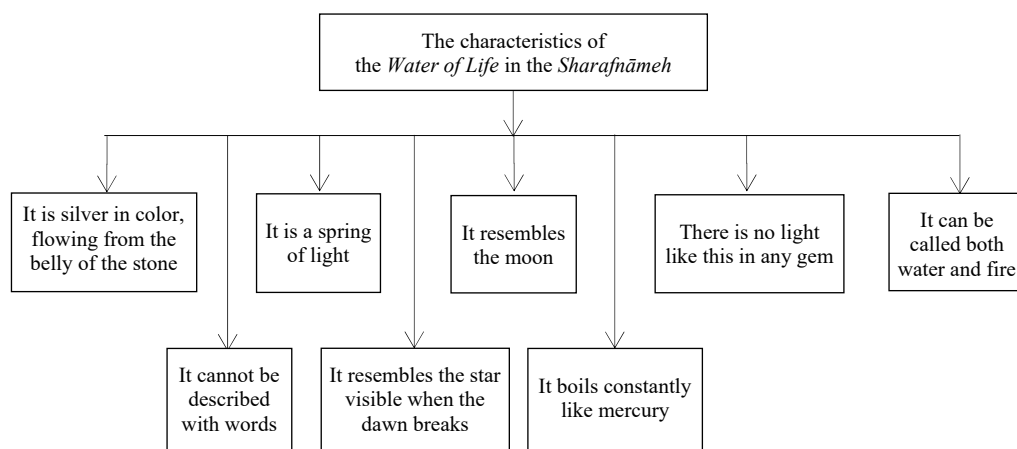


¹⁰ 32 بخش اسکندر، شاهنامه، فردوسی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh32>.

The Description of the *Water of Life* in *Sharafnāme*

In his hand shone the sparkling jewel,
 Finally, the sought-after gem was found.
 A silver-colored spring flowed cheerfully,
 From the navel of the stone, a silver-like gem flowed.
 This spring was far from description, far away,
 A fountain of light, this bubbling spring,
 Like a star that appears in the morning,
 That radiant spring shines in the same way.
 Before the moon is full, it fills with light,
 If it were just a bit bigger, the moon would shine bright,
 It boils and doesn't stay in its place,
 Like mercury in the hand of a paralyzed grace.
 So bright is that delicate jewel,
 No gem in the world compares, so cruel.
 No other gem holds this light, this sun,
 It can be called both water and fire, as one.
 When Khidr found the *Water of Life*,
 A light filled both of his eyes, so rife.

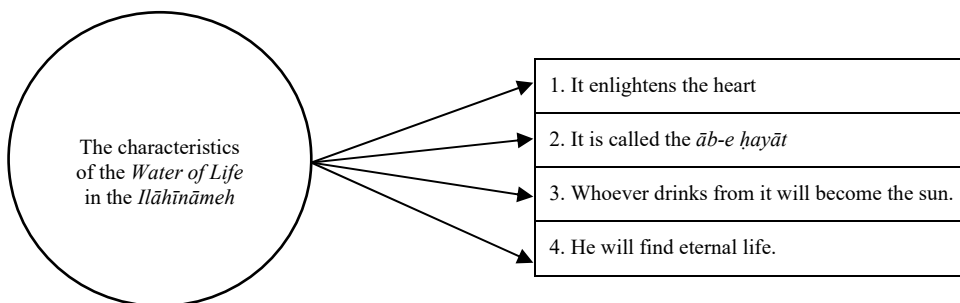
فرزنده گوهر ز دستش بتافت
 فرو دید خضر آنچه می جست یافت
 پدید آمد آن چشمه سیم رنگ
 چو سیمی که پالاید از ناف سنگ
 نه چشمه که آن زین سخن دور بود
 وگر بود هم چشمه نور بود
 ستاره چگونه بود صبحگاه
 چنان بود اگر صبح باشد پگاه
 به شب ماه ناکاسته چون بود
 چنان بود اگر مه به افزون بود
 ز جنبش نبد یک دم آرام گیر
 چو سیماب بردست مفلوج پیر
 ندانم که از پاکی پیکرش
 چو ماندگی سازم از جوهرش
 نیاید ز هر جوهر آن نور و تاب
 هم آتش توان خواند یعنی هم آب
 چو با چشمه خضر آشنائی گرفت
 بدو چشم او روشنایی گرفت¹¹



The Description of the *Water of Life* in *Ilāhīnāme*

One day, Alexander saw in a book
 That the Water of Life is a liquid that illuminates the heart.
 Whoever drinks from it becomes like the sun,
 And their life will last forever.

سکندر در کتابی دید یک روز
 که هست آب حیات آبی دلفروز
 کسی کز وی خورد خورشید گردد
 بقای عمر او جاوید گردد¹²



Unlike the previous two narratives, in the *Ilāhīnāme*, the *Water of Life* is understood as representing knowledge, and it takes on a symbolic meaning.

If you have turned away from
 The life-giving water you were seeking,
 Do not twist yourself too much,
 For that valuable knowledge is nothing else.
 f that knowledge appears in form,
 It would be pure life-giving water.
 If you have acquired it, then you have been granted
 much by truth.
 Knowing this, die free and alert.
 When he heard these words from the master,
 His heart turned to sorrow, and his soul departed
 from joy.
 O son, do not grieve much,
 For it is the water of discovery of knowledge and secrets.
 If it touches your soul,
 Your heart will behold both worlds.
 If you know the path to knowledge and the spring,
 For you, that is the *Water of Life*.

در آن آب حیوان را که جُستی
 اگر چه این زمان زو دست شستی
 تفکر کن مده خود را بسی پیچ
 که آن علم رزینست و دگر هیچ
 اگر آن علم بنماید بصورت
 بود آن آب حیوان بی کدورت
 ترا این علم حق دادست بسیار
 چو دانستی بمیر آزاد و هشیار
 چو بشنید این سخن از اوستاد او
 دلش خون شد بشادی جان بداد او
 مخور غم ای پسر تو نیز بسیار
 که هست آن آب علم و کشفِ اسرار
 اگر بر جان تو تابنده گردد
 دلت گونین را بیننده گردد
 اگر تو راه علم و عین دانی
 ترا آنست آب زندگانی

¹² اسکندر و وفات او Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.

If you do not know its path,
In this regard, you would only be a devil.
Your miracles would appear as devilry,
And all your light would seem like darkness.

اگر تو راه دان آن نباشی
در آن بینش به جز شیطان نباشی
کرامات تو شیطانی نماید
همه نور تو ظلمانی نماید¹³

It is noteworthy that, in addition to its presence in epic poetry, the concept of the *Water of Life* also occupies a prominent place in Sufi-mystical literature. A clear instance of this can be found in Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Ilāhīnāmeḥ*, where the motif acquires profound spiritual and symbolic dimensions.

In Persian literature, works written to guide the perfection of the human soul are often referred to as '*erfānī*' (mystical or spiritual) texts. *Ilāhīnāmeḥ* is one such work that begins with a depiction of the human soul, identifies the obstacles that distance it from the truth, presents the paths to liberation from these hindrances, and ultimately illustrates the soul's return to its original state. As seen, the central figure of the narrative is the soul itself. However, the soul's manifestation in the story takes the form of the father. The father and his six sons together comprise seven individuals – a number that holds symbolic significance in 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre. His famed work *Mantiq at-ṭayr* ("The Conference of the Birds") features the concept of seven valleys of love, a clear testament to the sanctity of the number seven in his thought. Similarly, in *Ilāhīnāmeḥ*, 'Aṭṭār could not relinquish the sacred symbolism of the number seven and thus constructed the narrative around seven main characters. In this allegory, the father and sons represent the soul and its various facets or internal forces: the commanding self (*naḥs*), Satan, reason ('*aql*'), knowledge, spiritual poverty (*faqr*), and divine unity (*tawḥīd*). This interpretation is supported by the poet's own verses at the beginning of the book. After praising the soul in fifteen opening couplets, 'Aṭṭār proceeds with the following verses, which reinforce this symbolic framework.

Each son of yours is a master of a discipline,
And within his own domain, each one is a world.
One is the soul, whose realm is the sensory,
One is Satan, whose domain lies in illusion.
One is reason, which speaks of intelligibles,
One is knowledge, which seeks the known.
One is poverty, desiring what is absent,
One is unity (*tawḥīd*), seeking the essence of all.
When these six follow the path in obedience,
They will then attain eternal presence.

پسر هر یک ترا صاحب قرانیست
که اندر فن خود هر یک جهانیست
یکی نفسست و در محسوس جایش
یکی شیطان و در موهوم رایش
یکی عقلست و معقولات گوید
یکی علمست و معلومات جوید
یکی فقرست و معدومات خواهد
یکی توحید و کل یک ذات خواهد
چو این هر شش بفرمان راه یابند
حضور جاودان آنگاه یابند¹⁴

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ الهی نامه، آغاز کتاب، آغاز کتاب Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh0/sh9>.

Therefore, in the following table, we have summarized the narratives related to this event from the three works in a concise manner.

Table 1. The *Water of Life*: artistic time and space, character system, idea, and plot

Title of the work	<i>Shāhnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Sharafnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Ilāhīnāmeḥ</i>
The storyteller	Old man چنین گفت با او یکی مرد پیر که ای شاه نیک اختر و شهر گیر¹⁵ An old man said to him: “O fortunate one, the king who conquers cities...”	Old man در آن انجمن بود پیری کهن چو نوبت بدو آمد آخر سخن¹⁶ There was an old man in the gathering. When it was his turn to speak, he began	Book سکندر در کتابی دید یک روز که هست آب حیات آبی دل افروز¹⁷ One day, Alexander saw in a book The <i>Water of Life</i> that illuminates the heart
Main characters	Alexander سکندر بپرسید از سر سرکشان که ایدر چه دارد شگفتی نهان¹⁸ Alexander asked the leader of the elders, What strange mystery lies hidden here? Khidr ورا اندران خضر بد رای زن سر نامداران آن انجمن¹⁹ His advisor there was Khidr, The leader of the prominent members of the assembly.	Alexander سکندر بدو گفت کای نیکمرد مگر کان سیاهی بر آن آب خورد²⁰ The king said: “Is there perhaps another wisdom? This darkness in the fountain of life. Khidr پی خضر گفتی در آن راه بود²¹ همانا که خود خضر با شاه بود Khidr had left a trace on this path, Or perhaps he was walking side by side with the king	Alexander سکندر را بغایت آرزو خاست که او را گردد این سه آرزو راست²² Alexander had an endless desire That these three of his wishes may be fulfilled

¹⁵ 32 بخش اسکندر، شاهنامه، پادشاهی اسکندر، بخش 32 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh32>.

¹⁶ 59 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.

¹⁷ 14 بخش چهاردهم، الهی نامه، بخش 14/ش33 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh33>.

¹⁸ 59 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.

¹⁹ 33 بخش اسکندر، شاهنامه، پادشاهی اسکندر، بخش 33 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh33>.

²⁰ 59 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² 14 بخش چهاردهم، الهی نامه، بخش 14/ش33 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh33>.

Title of the work	<i>Shāhnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Sharafnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Ilāhīnāmeḥ</i>
Other characters	Soldiers چو لشگر سوی آب حیوان گذشت خروش آمد الله اکبر ز دشت²³ When the army passed by the <i>Water of Life</i>, A cry of “Allahu Akbar” rose from the desert. Green bird بدو مرغ گفت ای دلارای رنج چه جویی همی زین سرای سپنج²⁴ The bird said to him, “O one who endures hardships, What are you searching for in this palace of three or four days?” Isrāfil سرافیل را دید سوری بدست برافراخته سر ز جای نشست²⁵ He saw Isrāfil with a trumpet in hand, Raising his head, seated in his place.	Soldiers تنی چند بگزید عیاروش کماندار و سختی کش و سخت کش²⁶ A few archers, separated from the army, Had emerged from the heat and cold. Young man نبرده جوانی جوانمرد بود که روشن دلش مهر پرورد بود²⁷ There was a brave young man, wise and great, Pure, with a heart filled with light and compassion. Old father پدر داشت پیری نود ساله‌ای ز رنج تنش هر زمان ناله‌ای²⁸ His father was old, ninety years of age, He moaned and cried from the pain of his body. Sorūsh سروشی در آن راهش آمد به پیش بمالید بر دست او دست خویش²⁹ On the road, an angel appeared, Lifting the king’s hand, guiding him forward.	Amīr امیری بود پیشش ایستاده مگر زد دست بر طبل نهاده³⁰ In front of him stood a commander, He reached for the drum placed before him Plato’s student ز شاگردان افلاطون حکیمی که شه را بود روز و شب ندیمی³¹ A physician from Plato’s disciples, Day and night, he was the king’s advisor.

²³ Ibidem.²⁴ Ibidem. Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eshkandar/sh34>.²⁵ Ibidem. Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eshkandar/sh35>.²⁶ Ibidem.²⁷ Ibidem. Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.²⁸ Ibidem.²⁹ Ibidem. Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh60>.³⁰ Ibidem.³¹ Ibidem. Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.

Title of the work	<i>Shāhnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Sharafnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Ilāhīnāmeḥ</i>
		Isrāfil حدیث سرافیل و آوای صور نگفتم که ده میشد از راه دور³² By mentioning Israfil and the Horn, I said, 'I must not stray from my purpose. Poet (Ferdowsī) چو گوینده دیگر آن کان گشاد اساسی دگر باره نتوان نهاد³³ Another poet has opened this path, rebuilding a foundation is difficult. Elijah که الیاس با خضر همراه بود در آن چشمه کو بر گنرگاه بود³⁴ On this path, Elijah and Khidr were companions, As they approached the spring, friends drew near. Foal یکی مادیان بایش تندرست که زادن همان باشد او را نخست³⁵ The king requires the firstborn, Whose body is robust and healthy, a purebred horse.	
The place of the water of life	Darkness وزان جای تاریک چندان سخن شنیدم که هرگز نیاید به بن³⁶ And there are many words about that dark place, I heard that it can never reach the essence.	Gloom حجابیست در زیر قطب شمال درو چشمه‌ای پاک از آب زلال³⁷ There is a dark corner at the North Pole, A white, silver spring brighter than any water.	India, darkness شد القصه برای آب حیوان به هندوستان و تاریکی چو کیوان³⁸ In summary, for the <i>Water of Life</i>, He journeyed to India, to the darkness, like Saturn.

³² Ibidem.³³ Ibidem.³⁴ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh60>, اسکندرنامه – بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 60 – رفتن اسکندر به ظلمات³⁵ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>, اسکندرنامه – بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان³⁶ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh32>, شاهنامه، پادشاهی اسکندر، بخش 32³⁷ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>, اسکندرنامه – بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان³⁸ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>, الهی نامه، بخش چهاردهم، (1) اسکندر و وفات او

Title of the work	<i>Shāhnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Sharafnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Ilāhīnāmeḥ</i>
		حجابی که ظلمات شد نام او روان آب حیوان از آرام او³⁹ his dark place is called darkness, And within that darkness, there is the <i>Water of Life</i>.	چو شد عاجز در آن تاریکی راه بمانده هم سپه حیران و هم شاه⁴⁰ When in the darkness of the path, when they were helpless, Both the army and the king were astonished.
The first artistic space	A city in the Western direction یکی شارستان پیش آمد بزرگ بدو اندرون مردمانی سترگ⁴¹ A large city appeared ahead, There were strong people in it.	North چو یک ماهه ره رفت سوی شمال گزرگاه خورشید را گشت حال⁴² Galloping his horse towards the north, The king was distant from the sun's rotation.	India شد القصه برای آب حیوان به هندوستان و تاریکی چو کیوان⁴³ In summary, for the <i>Water of Life</i>, He journeyed to India, to the darkness like Saturn.
The last artistic space	Movement towards the West سوی باختر شد چو خاور بدید ز گیتی همی رای رفتن گزید⁴⁴ When he saw the East, he headed towards the West, Choosing the thought of leaving the world.	He returned to the place he came from بر آن خط که روز نخستین گذشت چو پرگار بود آخرش باز گشت⁴⁵ On the first day, he returned again to the line of darkness he had crossed, Like a bird returning to its nest.	Babylon به جای منزلی دو منزل آمد که تا آخر به خاک بابل آمد⁴⁶ Instead of one station, two stations arrived, And finally, he reached the land of Babylon.

³⁹ Ibidem.⁴⁰ Ibidem.⁴¹ 32 بخش اسکندر، پادشاهی اسکندر، فردوسی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh32>.⁴² 59 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 - افسانه آب حیوان Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.⁴³ 14 بخش عطار، الهی نامه، بخش چهاردهم، (1) اسکندر و وفات او Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.⁴⁴ 36 بخش اسکندر، پادشاهی اسکندر، فردوسی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh36>.⁴⁵ 61 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 61 - بیرون آمدن اسکندر از ظلمات Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh61>.⁴⁶ 14 بخش عطار، الهی نامه، بخش چهاردهم، (1) اسکندر و وفات او Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.

Title of the work	<i>Shāhnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Sharafnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Ilāhīnāmeḥ</i>
The beginning of artistic time	Dawn فرود آمد او بامداد پگاه به نزدیک آن چشمه شد بی سپاه ⁴⁷ When the dawn broke, he descended, and without his army, he went close to the spring.	The gathering held after the morning prayer چو آورد شرط پرستش بجای به شغل می و مجلس آورد رای ⁴⁸ Finally, when he gave in to his worship, He adorned the wine gathering once again.	Indefinite time
The end of the fictional time	He reached the mountain سکندر سوی روشنایی رسید یکی بر شده کوه رخشنده دید ⁴⁹ Alexander reached towards the light, And saw a sparkle on top of the mountain.	The king establishes the next assembly یکی روز با خاصگان سپاه چو مینو یکی مجلس آراست شاه ⁵⁰ One day, the king, finding an opportunity with his attendants, Adorned a gathering – as if it were heaven.	He reaches Babylon ز تاریکی برون آمد جگر خون دلش را هر نفس حالی دگرگون ⁵¹ His liver, soaked in blood, emerged from the darkness, And the state of his heart changed with every passing moment.
Special means	Precious stone دو مهره است با من که چون آفتاب بتابد شب تیره چون ببند آفتاب ⁵² I have two stones like the sun, They shine as soon as they see the sun in the dark night.	Gem یکی گوهرش داد کاندر مغاک به آب آزمودن شدی تابناک ⁵³ He gave a gem that illuminates the pits, He gave a guide searching for springs.	Ruby پدید آمد قوی یک پاره یاقوت که بودی از لطافت روح را قوت ⁵⁴ A powerful piece of ruby emerged, Its grace would give strength to the soul.

⁴⁷ 33 بخش اسکندر، پادشاهی فردوسی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh33>.

⁴⁸ 59 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.

⁴⁹ 34 بخش اسکندر، پادشاهی فردوسی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh34>.

⁵⁰ 61 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 61 – بیرون آمدن اسکندر از ظلمات Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh61>.

⁵¹ 3 بخش عطار، الهی نامه، بخش چهاردهم، (1) اسکندر و وفات او Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.

⁵² 33 بخش اسکندر، پادشاهی فردوسی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh33>.

⁵³ 60 بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 60 – رفتن اسکندر به ظلمات Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh60>.

⁵⁴ 3 بخش عطار، الهی نامه، بخش چهاردهم، (1) اسکندر و وفات او Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.

Title of the work	<i>Shāhnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Sharafnāmeḥ</i>	<i>Ilāhīnāmeḥ</i>
	یکی زان تو برگیر و در پیش باش نگه بان جان و تن خویش باش⁵⁵ Take one of them and lead the way, Be the guardian of your soul and body.	Stone بدو داد سنگی کم از یک پیشیز که این سنگ را دار با خود عزیز⁵⁶ He placed a stone, as small as a coin, in his palm, And said: 'Hold this stone, even more than your own life. The shining sand that makes both the one who takes it and the one who doesn't regret دگر هاتفی گفت کای اهل روم فروزنده ریگیست این ریگ بوم⁵⁷ Another voice came, saying: 'O people of Rome! In this beautiful land, there is shining sand.	Drum and surma container دگر طبلیست و با او سرمه دانی کران روشن شود کار جهانی⁵⁸ The other is a drum, and with it a kohl pot, With it, the work of the world shines.
Result	Khidr drinks the Water of Life بخورد و برآسود و برگشت زود سنایش همی بافرین بر فرود⁵⁹ He drank, rested, and quickly returned. He increased his worship to the Creator. Alexander is unable to drink the <i>Water of Life</i> اسکندر سوی روشنایی رسید یکی بر شد کوه رخشنده دید⁶⁰ Alexander reached towards the light, And saw someone on top of the bright mountain.	Khidr drinks the Water of Life وزو خورد چندانکه بر کار شد حیات ابد را سزاوار شد⁶¹ He drank his fill from the water of life. The seeker reached eternal life. Alexander is unable to drink the <i>Water of Life</i> بدانست خضر از سر آگهی که اسکندر از چشمه ماند تهی⁶² Immediately, this matter became known to Khidr. Alexander will be deprived of that water.	Alexander is unable to drink the Water of Life در آن آب حیوان را که جستی اگرچه این زمان زو دست شستی⁶³ He life water that you were searching for, Even though you quickly withdrew your hand from it at this time.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.⁵⁶ Ibidem.⁵⁷ Ibidem.⁵⁸ Ibidem.⁵⁹ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/askandar/sh33>.⁶⁰ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/askandar/sh34>.⁶¹ Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh60>.⁶² Ibidem.⁶³ Ibidem.

Part II: The *Water of Life* in mystical prose texts

2.1. A Comparative Analysis of Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* and Suhrawardī's *'Aql-e sorkh*

In addition to 'Aṭṭār's *Ilāhīnāme*, the expression *Water of Life* frequently appears in various works of mystical prose. These include Avicenna's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's *'Aql-e sorkh* ("The Red Intellect"), *Mūnis al-'ushshāq*, and *Al-Ghurba al-gharbiyya*, as well as Sībak Nīshābūrī's *Ḥosn o del* and Muḥammad Fuẓūlī's *Ṣaḥḥat o maraḥ*. In all these texts, the *Water of Life* functions as a symbol of spiritual illumination, immortality, and union with the divine.

Additionally, works such as Avicenna's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's *'Aql-e sorkh*, *Mūnis al-'ushshāq*, and *Al-Ghurba al-gharbiyya* can also be mentioned. Based on Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's works and Suhrawardī's treatises, which were influenced by Ibn Sīnā's writings, it may be inferred that Ibn Sīnā turned toward mysticism toward the end of his life. This spiritual inclination is also reflected in several treatises he composed during this period. The aforementioned works by Avicenna and Suhrawardī are entirely written in the language of symbolism and mysticism. Therefore, the *Water of Life* used in these works carries different meanings compared to the water that Alexander (Iskander) sought in epic narratives.

As is known, Avicenna's works *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, *Risālat at-ṭayr*, and *Salāmān wa-Absāl* are entirely written in symbolic language and are considered mystical texts. It is possible to observe the initial traces of Illuminationist philosophy in Ibn Sīnā's thought. Perhaps this is why both Avicenna and Suhrawardī describe the Western world in the *Water of Life* narrative as a world of darkness, in contrast to the Eastern world, which represents enlightenment and light.

Ibn Sina's mystical work *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*

Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān is the title of an allegorical tale written by the philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) in Arabic during a brief period of imprisonment at the Fortress of Fardajan near Hamadan.

Although Avicenna was primarily a Peripatetic philosopher and composed most of his philosophical works in the Aristotelian tradition, he also authored several shorter treatises – such as *Salāmān wa-Absāl*, *Risālat at-ṭayr* ("The Treatise of the Bird"), and *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* – in a style influenced by Plato and the Neoplatonists. This observation has also been noted by Ibn Sab'īn (d. 669 AH/1271 CE).

These narratives are essentially philosophical allegories in which Avicenna seeks to convey his metaphysical and philosophical ideas through symbolic language. Both *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* and *Risālat at-ṭayr* present accounts of a spiritual, intellectual, and imaginative journey undertaken by the rational soul. In these journeys, the soul departs

from the physical and sensible realm and ascends to the higher, intelligible world. Along this path, the seeker becomes acquainted with philosophical truths and divine realities.

One of the questions the traveler poses to the old man in the narrative concerns the *Water of Life*. However, it is first necessary to clarify the identities the old man.

In this spiritual and inner journey, the traveler is not alone. Just as a physical and external journey requires a guide or a pathfinder, the spiritual and intellectual journey of the rational soul also necessitates the presence of a mentor or spiritual guide. In *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, this guide is represented as a wise old man who leads the traveler across mountains, plains, deserts, and seas, imparting truths and insights at every stage of the journey.

This guiding figure symbolizes the Active Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*) in Avicennan philosophy – known as the Tenth Intellect – which plays a crucial role in human epistemology and spiritual development. In the treatise, the guide is named Ḥayy, meaning “the living”, while his father is called Yaqzān, meaning “the awakened”. The father, Yaqzān, represents the First Intellect or First Emanation (*aṣ-ṣādir al-awwal*), from which all subsequent intellects and beings derive.

Thus, the *Risālat Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* can be interpreted as a symbolic exposition of metaphysical truths revealed by the Active Intellect to the rational soul on its ascent toward ultimate reality.

When the narrator and his companions approach him, the old man greets them and introduces himself as Ḥayy (“The Living”), the son of Yaqzān (“The Awake”). He says: “My city is the Holy Sanctuary (*Al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*), and my occupation is journeying and traveling the world, so that I may understand the states of existence. My face is always turned toward my father, who is the Awake, and I have learned all forms of knowledge from him”.

When the narrator – representing either Avicenna himself or his rational soul – leaves the city on a spiritual quest, he encounters this angel in the form of a radiant, noble old man. Despite his apparent age, the guide’s face is youthful, his bones are not weakened, and his body shows no signs of decay: “There was no trace of old age upon him – except for the dignity of elders”.

In the work, the old man who answers the traveler’s questions responds to the inquiry “What is the *Water of Life*?” with the following explanation:

The benefit is that, in order to obtain this power, one must wash their head and body in a flowing spring, for it is situated near the *Water of Life*. When the traveler is guided along the path, they will be purified by the water of that spring, drinking from its pure waters, and new strength will arise within them. With this strength, they will traverse long deserts as if they were not even there, walk across the surface of the sea without sinking, and if they were to reach Mount Qāf, they would not experience any hardship. Its rays would not cast them into the deepest pits of Hell.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣehā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, Tehrān 1996/1375, p. 75.

The Epistle of *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* received considerable attention from the time of Avicenna himself. ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Kākuya, the ruler of Isfahan (d. 433 AH / 1042 CE), reportedly ordered one of Avicenna’s disciples – likely Abū ‘Ubayd Allāh ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Jūzjānī – to translate and comment upon the treatise in Persian (Avicenna, p. 2). Another commentary was produced in Arabic by Abū Maṣṣūr Ibn Zayla. Through these commentaries – especially that of Al-Jūzjānī – the symbolic meanings embedded in the work become more accessible.

In the introduction to Al-Jūzjānī’s commentary, it is stated that all forms of knowledge are attained through the mediation of a knowing angel – identified in philosophical terms as the Active Intellect and referred to in religious terminology as Gabriel (Jibrīl). This angel, like all other celestial beings, is described as primordial (i.e., beyond time), and thus unaffected by the passage of temporal existence.⁶⁵

These ideas expressed by Avicenna were interpreted by Al-Jūzjānī in the following manner:

It must be understood that the discovery of all knowledge comes in two forms: one is called ‘imagination’ and the other is called “confirmation. Imagination refers to what people discover through their senses, which gives rise to meaning, whether true or false. As when someone mentions the sky and the Simurgh. However, there is no judgment on whether this statement is true or false. On the other hand, confirmation is when, through the senses, one discovers something and, as we mentioned, creates a representation of it, and knows whether it is true or false. People’s imagination arises or remains within certain limits. Confirmation arises or remains through comparison. Each of them either remains true and correct or false. To recognize whether the limits and comparisons are true or not is what we call “logic”. Whoever knows logic will understand limits and comparisons, the science of truth, and will be freed from ignorance. If there are doubts about it, they can clarify them, and no one can mislead them. Thus, the science of logic is useful for knowing true knowledge. For this reason, Khwaja has said, “Washing the head and body in the flowing stream of water is beneficial”. This means that learning the science of logic is beneficial because it directs one toward another science, which is “flowing”. It is in the proximity of the *Water of Life*. True knowledge is the standing stream, and one seeks it for another science. The one who learns the science of logic will cross the deserts of ignorance, will not drown in the ocean of error, will overcome the mountains of doubt, and the misguided ones will not be able to lead them astray.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ نصر الله پورجوادی، *حی بن یقظان* Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/article/236706/%D8%AD%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%86-%DB%8C%D9%82%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%86>.

⁶⁶ Henry Corbin, *Ibn Sīnā wa tamthīl-e ‘erfānī*. Jild-e Awwal. *Qeṣṣehā-ye Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, Tehrān 1952/1397, pp. 37–38.

Al-Jūzjānī interprets Avicenna's statements as follows: the symbolic significance of the *Water of Life* in mystical traditions, where the *Water of Life* represents both spiritual purification and the attainment of supernatural strength and endurance. The journey of the traveler is metaphorical, highlighting how the acquisition of divine knowledge and enlightenment empowers one to transcend worldly obstacles and dangers.

He reflects on the distinction between "imagination" and "confirmation" as two ways of acquiring knowledge. It emphasizes that imagination is tied to sensory perception, which may or may not be accurate, whereas confirmation involves rational verification and comparison, which leads to a true understanding of reality. Logic is presented as the tool to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

It is evident from Al-Jūzjānī's interpretation that logic is important as a means of understanding truth and overcoming ignorance and doubt. It draws on the metaphor of the "flowing stream" to symbolize the guidance that logic provides in the pursuit of true knowledge, which is associated with the *Water of Life*. Logic is portrayed as a tool to navigate through challenges and obstacles, such as ignorance, error, and doubt. From Al-Jūzjānī's commentary, it becomes clear that Avicenna's *Water of Life* refers to true knowledge.

In *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*, the spiritual seeker (*sālik*) who embarks on a journey in the realm of meaning asks the old man to provide a more detailed explanation about the *Water of Life*.

I asked him, 'Please explain more about that spring'.

He replied, "Have you heard about the state of the darkness, and that it is said to be near the pole, where the sun shines at certain times of the year? Whoever dares to enter the darkness, without shying away, reaches such an expanse that has no edge and is filled with light. The first thing that appears before him is a flowing spring, whose waters flow backward, rising upwards. Whoever washes their head and body with that water becomes lightened, walking on its surface without sinking, climbing the highest mountains with ease, and from there reaching one of two limits, those broken from this world".⁶⁷

It is also important to note that Ibn Sīnā presents the description of the *Water of Life* in a manner similar to that found in Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme*. Just as in the *Shāhnāme*, the imagery here also involves a sea and a spring flowing into it.

Al-Jūzjānī metaphorically illustrates the concept of the *Water of Life* as a symbol of true knowledge. The *flowing spring* is linked to enlightenment and the path to transcendence, where knowledge allows one to overcome obstacles, reach new heights, and navigate beyond the constraints of the material world. The imagery suggests that by immersing oneself in true knowledge, one can rise above difficulties and

⁶⁷ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, p. 75.

approach a higher understanding, represented by the light-filled expanse. This idea is substantiated in Al-Jūzjānī's following commentary.

It should be understood that everything humans know was once hidden from them, and they were unaware of everything. This is true ignorance, and ignorance is darkness. Not everyone who seeks knowledge will attain it, nor can one who seeks to escape the bonds of ignorance be liberated. Therefore, the person who accepts the difficulty and effort of learning, and does not fear it, will reach knowledge. Knowledge is light, and its limits have no bounds. One of the most challenging sciences is, as we mentioned earlier, matter and form. For this reason, Khwaja has said, "Have you heard of the state of darkness, which is near the pole?" This means that ignorance is its essence. He said, "Whoever enters that darkness will reach an infinite expanse, filled with light", and this light is knowledge. The first thing that appears before them is the flowing spring, meaning that the first thing they must learn is the science of logic. The science of logic, as we have mentioned before, enables one to understand the state of matter and form. These are the two limits we referred to earlier.⁶⁸

In this commentary the emphasis is on the idea that true knowledge dispels ignorance (described as darkness) and that pursuing logic and reasoning is the first step toward acquiring enlightenment. The mention of *the flowing spring* symbolizes the beginning of the journey into understanding, which, in turn, leads to a boundless, illuminated state.

I said to him, "Tell me about the West and show that the West is closer to our cities". He replied, "At the farthest point of the West, there is a large and hot sea, which, according to Allah's decree, is called the hot spring. The sun sets near it, and rivers that emerge from the desolate land flow into this sea, the boundaries of which are invisible, and no one can know its limits, so vast is it".⁶⁹

The ones who restore that land are strangers, coming from other dark and distant places. They stand on that land, and those who head there bring light with them when the sun sets. The land is barren. When a group hears about it, they come and improve the place, but they are not welcomed. They are pushed away so that others may come and bring about improvement, ensuring that the lower part becomes fertile. Once they have restored it, it collapses, the structures they built fall apart. I know that battles have arisen among them, perhaps with the intent to kill, and whichever group wins will take the wives of the others and expel them from the land. They may seek rest there but will not find it. Such is their way: they will never find peace.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Henry Corbin, *Ibn Sīnā wa tamthīl-e 'erfānī*. Jild-e Awwal. *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*, p. 39.

⁶⁹ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, pp. 75–76.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

In this passage, the discussion reflects a symbolic journey into the unknown or mystical. The “hot sea” and “hot spring” may represent spiritual or intellectual challenges, vast and unreachable in their nature, emphasizing the boundaries of human understanding. The idea of the sun setting near it evokes a sense of finality or the end of a cycle, implying that there are limits to knowledge and experience that one cannot cross.

Al-Jūzjānī metaphorically describes the cyclical nature of human efforts, highlighting the continuous struggle for improvement and the instability that often follows. The land, representing perhaps a state of the soul or knowledge, is constantly being rebuilt, only to decay again. The reference to “strangers” coming from “dark and distant places” suggests a new or foreign influence bringing change, but ultimately facing rejection or conflict, symbolizing the inevitable challenges and resistance that arise when new ideas or forces attempt to bring transformation.

According to Al-Jūzjānī’s interpretation, it is important to note that the essence of all created beings lies in non-existence, as they have originated from nothingness. Every substance, whose nature is nothingness, comes into existence due to form, as we have previously mentioned. The corrupted form is corrupted by the substance.

Therefore, the master said, “At the end of the West, there is a hot and dark sea”. That is, the sea of nothingness and the hot sea is a direct example of nothingness, and he said, “The sun sets there”. Such is the absence of form. The form is likened to the sun here because all visible things appear due to the sun’s light, and all existing substances exist due to form. Furthermore, the nature of matter is nothingness, not form. This is why the master said, “The waters of this sea are from desolate lands”. And he said, “This sea has no shore”, which we also recalled.⁷¹

It must be understood that the substance of these created beings, under the celestial sphere of the Moon, does not remain with the form, but rather, the form that creates a part of the substance exists with that form. And due to an external cause, another form is required to remove this one and take its place. And let it be that this form returns and removes the second form, and let another form come in. Therefore, the master said, “This place is desolate, and those who revive it come from afar”. That is, forms come from another place. They are like strangers, and the substance is like barrenness, because the forms do not remain in it permanently, and furthermore, nothingness is the nature of matter, as we clarified earlier. This is why he said, “Darkness has stood upon this place”, because nothingness is its nature. And we said, “The revivers come from elsewhere”, meaning that they are the forms.

Therefore, it is said, “When the revivers come, they take a piece of the sun’s light, because it is near to setting”. This means that existence receives form from existence itself. The place where form is created is

⁷¹ Corbin Henry, *Ibn Sīnā wa tamthīl-e ‘erfānī*. Jild-e Awwal. *Qeṣṣehā-ye Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*, pp. 41–42.

likened to the sun. Furthermore, we recalled that forms are not permanent here. It is also said, “This place is like barrenness. Whenever they work to revive it, the buildings collapse and the structures fall”. We also noted that forms destroy and displace one another. It is as if there is a battle and struggle between them. The nature of form is such that it seeks to remain, yet it is unable to do so. Therefore, it is said, “They wish to stay, but they cannot find a place to do so”.⁷²

This interpretation delves into philosophical and metaphysical ideas about the nature of existence, form, and substance. It presents the notion that everything that exists originates from nothingness, and the form gives structure to this nothingness. The analogy of the sea and the sun emphasizes the contrast between substance and form, suggesting that the visible world is shaped by the invisible (form) just as light allows us to perceive the world around us.

Al-Jūzjānī explores the philosophical concept of the interplay between substance and form. It posits that form is not static but changes and evolves in response to external causes. It also highlights the nature of substance as inherently lacking or “barren”, with form coming from “elsewhere” to give it structure, much like revivers coming from afar to restore or shape the desolate land. The reference to darkness underscores the idea that nothingness, rather than fullness or permanence, is intrinsic to the nature of matter.

He highlights the philosophical idea that forms are not permanent and are in a constant state of flux, struggling against each other. It uses the metaphor of the sun setting to represent the impermanence of form and the ongoing battle between different forms. The analogy to barrenness reinforces the idea that the substance (or matter) is not stable, and that attempts to “revive” or give structure to it are temporary, subject to the cyclical nature of change and dissolution. The struggle between forms and their inability to remain permanent speaks to the transient and elusive nature of existence itself.

Avicenna’s *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, the protagonist embarks on a spiritual journey. One day, he leaves his city to explore the realm of spirituality. During his journey, he meets an elder from the sacred (pure) world of *Al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* – a sage. The elder introduces himself as the “son of the awake”. *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, the protagonist, is taught about various forms of knowledge, and many commentators suggest that the specific knowledge imparted to him is the science of farasat (perception or insight), which many identify as a form of logic.

When *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* asks the elder how to leave the world of nasut (the material world) and enter the world of lahut (the divine or spiritual realm), the elder responds by explaining that *Ḥayy* has three companions, or forces, that have bound him: one is *mukhayyila* (imagination), one is *ghaḍabiyya* (anger), and one is *shahwiyya* (desire). The elder informs *Ḥayy* that he will occasionally be able to travel beyond the confines of the material world, but there will be times when he must return to these forces.

⁷² Ibidem, pp. 42–43.

Ultimately, the journey described in Avicenna's work highlights the spiritual quest of the individual to transcend the darkness of ignorance and reach the light of wisdom, symbolized by the mashriq and the sun. The seeker's path is marked by the purification of the soul and mind, through which one can access the *Water of Life*, the ultimate source of divine truth and spiritual liberation.

This part of the narrative encapsulates the struggle of the soul in its journey towards higher realms. The forces of imagination, anger, and desire often hold the soul captive, creating obstacles on the path to spiritual enlightenment. However, the elder assures Ḥayy that with guidance, he can navigate these forces and progress on his spiritual journey.

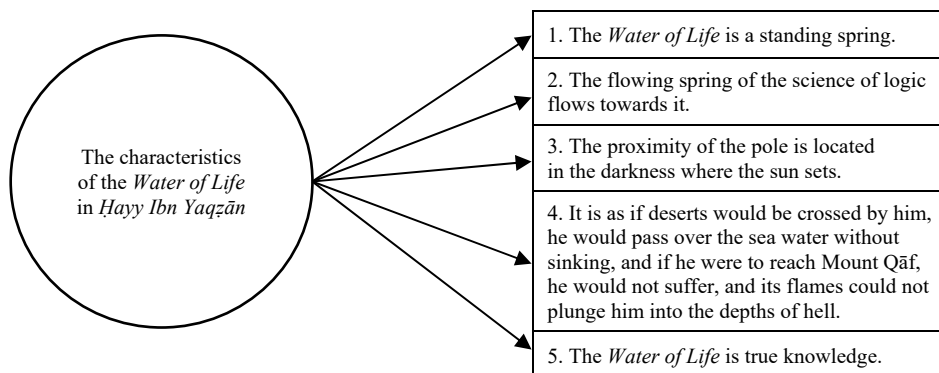
This allegory emphasizes the importance of overcoming worldly attachments and desires, in order to transcend to a higher state of spiritual understanding. The relationship between these forces reflects the challenges faced by the seeker in balancing the inner turmoil of base desires and emotions with the pursuit of divine knowledge.

Indeed, in Avicenna's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, as well as in other philosophical and mystical writings, a rich use of symbolism and metaphors is employed to convey deeper spiritual truths. The terms mentioned – flowing water, the *Water of Life*, The West (*Maghrib*), The East (*Mashriq*), and the sun—are laden with philosophical and mystical meanings that guide the seeker toward higher knowledge and self-realization:

- **Flowing Water:** According to Al-Jūzjānī's interpretation, flowing water symbolizes the science of logic (*manṭiq*), a fundamental tool for the seeker to refine their understanding and clarity of thought. Just as flowing water continuously moves and purifies, logic aids in cleansing the mind, helping one overcome the barriers of ignorance.
- ***Water of Life:*** This refers to the science of truth (*'ilm al-ḥaqīqa*), the ultimate knowledge that transcends the material world and leads to spiritual enlightenment. In many mystical traditions, the *Water of Life* represents the divine wisdom that sustains the soul, and it is through the pursuit of this knowledge that the seeker can attain immortality, in a spiritual sense.
- ***Maghrib* (The West):** In this context, the west symbolizes darkness (*ẓulmat*), ignorance, and the realm of materiality, where the seeker is bound by illusion and error. It is a place of spiritual stagnation and confusion, where the light of knowledge and enlightenment has not yet reached.
- ***Mashriq* (The East):** In contrast to the west, the east represents light, enlightenment, and the realm of spiritual realization (*ishrāq*). It is where the sun rises, symbolizing the dawn of knowledge and awakening. It is the region where wisdom and truth prevail, offering peace, serenity, and order.
- ***The Sun:*** The sun is often used as a symbol of divine illumination and the source of all true knowledge. Just as the sun lights up the world, divine wisdom sheds light on the path of the seeker, dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

As Al-Jūzjānī explains, the world of *maghrib* is associated with constant conflict, ignorance, and turmoil. It is a world where the individual is trapped in the illusions of material existence, subject to the forces of desire, anger, and imagination. In contrast,

the mashriq represents a world of peace, harmony, and enlightenment, where the soul finds solace and tranquility in the light of truth.



Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī⁷³: ‘*Aql-e sorkh* (“The Red Intellect”), *Mūnis al-‘ushshāq* (“On the Reality of Love”), *Al-Ghurba al-gharbiyya* (“A Tale of Occidental Exile”)

Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, who conveyed Avicenna’s ideas in a more refined manner in his works, presents the concepts from *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān* in a more mystical language in his ‘*Aql-e sorkh* (“The Red Intellect”). In Suhrawardī’s mystical treatises, there are fascinating thoughts about the *Water of Life* (*Āb-e Hayāt*). These ideas are explored deeply, with *Āb-e Hayāt* representing a symbol not just for the quest for immortality, but for the spiritual journey and the discovery of the ultimate truth.

We could even say that in his works ‘*Aql-e sorkh* and *Mūnis al-‘ushshāq*, Suhrawardī’s ultimate goal for the *sālik* (spiritual traveler) is to find the *Water of Life*. In these works, the *sālik* leaves the physical world and embarks on a spiritual journey, where he encounters a *pīr* (spiritual guide), and an intriguing dialogue takes place between them. The *pīr* talks to the *sālik* about the seven strange things in the world. First, Mount Qāf, which is our realm; second, the gem that illuminates the night; third, the Tuba tree; fourth, the twelve workshops; fifth, the armor of David; sixth, the blessed sword; and seventh, the *Water of Life*. After explaining each of them, they eventually arrive at *Āb-e Hayāt*.

The conversation goes as follows:

I said: O *pīr*, what should I do to make that hardship easier for me? He said: Obtain the fountain of life, and pour its water on your head, so that this armor will be poured onto your body, and your sword’s wound will

⁷³ Mehdi Aminrazavi, ‘Shihāb Al-Dīn Suhrawardī’, Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0219.xml>.

be healed. For this water constricts the armor, and when the armor is constricted, the sword's wound will become easier to bear.

I said: O *pīr*, where is this life water? He said: It is in the darkness; if you seek it, wear shoes like Khidr's and take the path of trust to reach the darkness.

I said: Which direction should I take? He said: Go in whichever direction. If you follow the path, it will lead you.

I said: What is the sign of the darkness?"

He said: "You are in the darkness, and you yourself are in darkness, but you do not know it. The one who walks this path will see himself in the darkness, just as he was once in darkness before and has never seen light with his own eyes. Thus, the first step of those who walk this path is in the darkness, and from here, progress is possible. Now, if anyone reaches this stage, they can move forward. The seeker of the fountain of life will experience much wandering in the darkness.

If he is one of those destined for the fountain, he will eventually see light after the darkness. Therefore, he should not chase that light, for it is a ray from the heavens above the fountain of life. If he reaches it and bathes in that fountain, he will be safe from the wound of the Blade of Balarak".

Be killed by the sword of love so that you may find eternal life,

For no one is resurrected by the sword of Yaḥyā.

Whoever bathes in that fountain will never be soiled. Whoever finds the meaning of truth, they have reached the fountain. When they emerge from the fountain, they gain skill, Like oil from a blade, which, if you hold your palm before the sun, a drop of it will fall into your hand and emerge from the back of your hand.

If you are like Khidr, you can easily pass over Mount Qāf.

In Suhrawardī's view, the *Water of Life* is knowledge.

I asked, "Which direction is the way?"

He replied, "Wherever you go".⁷⁴

This sentence refers to verse 115 of Surah *Al-Baqarah*:

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوا فَتَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"To Allah belongs the East and the West. Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. Surely Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing" (2:115).

⁷⁴ Sayyid Ja'far Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā'il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, Tehrān 1997/1376, p. 52.

And the second reference is to verse 69 of Surah *Al-‘Ankabūt*:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

“And those who strive in Our cause – We will surely guide them to Our ways” (29:69).

These references highlight the importance of direction in one’s spiritual journey. In both Quranic verses, the guidance is universal, no matter the physical direction one takes. As Suhrawardī mentions, the way is always open, and the path is illuminated for those who are truly seeking.

In general, Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī placed great emphasis on the science of gnosis (*ma‘rifa*). One of his famous treatises, *Safīr-e Sīmurgh* (“The Sīmurgh’s shrill cry”), dedicates the first chapter of the first section to the superiority of the science of gnosis.⁷⁵

Chapter One of the First Part On the Superiority of This Science Over All Others

It is not unknown to the discerning minds that the superiority of one science over another may be established on several grounds. First, a science may be deemed more noble – for example, the superiority of goldsmithing over saddlery is evident, as the former deals with gold and the latter with wool. Second, one science may possess stronger and more decisive proofs than another. Third, its engagement may be of greater significance and its benefits more extensive. When compared with other sciences, this discipline possesses all the aforementioned marks of superiority. As for the object and the known aim of this science, it is evident that it concerns the Ultimate Truth – lofty, desired, and sought. The dignity of this object far surpasses that of all other existents, and nothing can be compared to the majesty of the Real (*Al-Ḥaqq*). In terms of evidence and proof, it is clear that direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) is more powerful than mere inferential reasoning (*istidlāl*). The theologians (*mutakallimūn*) consider it permissible that God, the Exalted, may bestow upon the servant a necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*) of His essence, attributes, and so forth. If such knowledge is permissible, it is indeed possible that it be granted to some.

Undoubtedly, the endurance of hardship – particularly the difficulty associated with rational demonstration and intellectual uncertainty – must be reconsidered. It is reported that someone once asked a Sufi, “What is the proof of the existence of the Creator?” To which he replied:

⁷⁵ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, pp. 49–50.

”ما الدليل على وجود الصانع؟“ فقال: ”قد أغنى الصباح عن المصباح“

“What is the proof of the existence of the Maker?” He replied, “The morning light renders the lamp unnecessary”.

Another Sufi remarked, “The one who seeks knowledge of the Truth is like someone searching for the sun with a lantern”.

Among spiritual investigators, there have been decisive methods that affirm God, the Exalted, will create for His servants in the Hereafter a mode of perception within the faculty of vision, through which the Truth will be seen without need for any proof or demonstration. For the people of gnosis, rational evidence is not a necessary condition; rather, through alignment with certain spiritual principles, it is possible for one to perceive the Divine in this world without recourse to discursive reasoning.

Hence, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have said:

”رأى قلبي ربي“

“My heart saw my Lord”.

And the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī (may God be pleased with him), said:

”لو كشف الغطاء ما ازددت يقينا“

“If the veil were lifted, my certainty would not increase”.

In this sense, there are such profound mysteries concealed here that it is not fitting to discuss them in detail. However, it is beyond doubt in terms of importance that nothing is more significant than the bliss of human faith; indeed, all matters can ultimately be summarized by it. The greatest cause is knowledge (*ma‘rifa*), and it has been conclusively demonstrated from all perspectives that the science of knowledge is nobler than all other sciences.

Junaid (may God be pleased with him) said: “If I knew of a science beneath the heavens nobler than knowledge, I would devote myself solely to it and strive to attain it through its teacher”.⁷⁶

In his work *Mūnis al-‘ushshāq*, he writes:

Immediately, the *pīr* (spiritual guide) greets him, honors him, and calls him to his side. There is a spring there called the *Water of Life*, and he is instructed to perform a ritual ablution (*ghusl*) there. Upon gaining eternal life, the Divine Book is taught to him.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

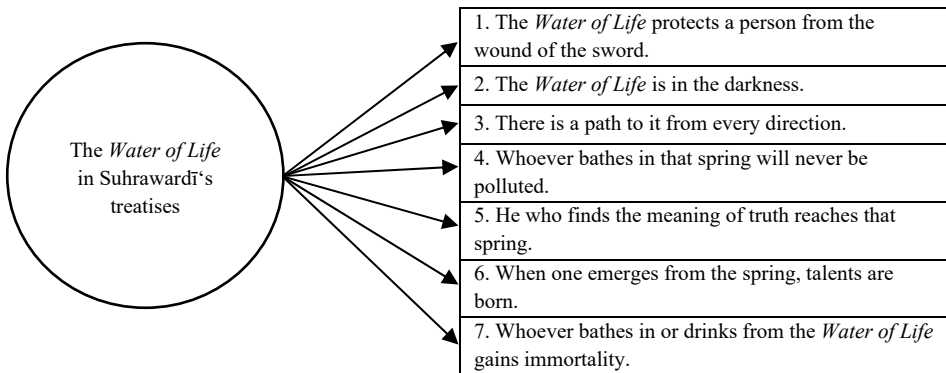
In Suhrawardī's view, those who perform ablution in or drink from the *Water of Life* achieve immortality. The *Water of Life* refers to gnosis or divine secrets.⁷⁷

Through these passages, Suhrawardī emphasizes the essential role of gnosis as a key to attaining the ultimate spiritual life and wisdom. The *Water of Life* symbolizes a transformative spiritual experience that leads to divine knowledge and eternal life.

In his work *Al-Ghurba al-gharbiyya* we read:

And the situation was such that the cloud dispersed and childhood was torn apart. I emerged from the cellar paths, from the caves, and descended from the chambers, heading towards the *Water of Life*. Then I saw a large stone, like a hill, at the peak of a mountain. I asked the fish gathered around the *Water of Life*, benefiting from the shadow of that great hill. 'What is this hill? And what is this great stone?'⁷⁸

Suhrawardī uses symbolic imagery to describe a journey toward spiritual enlightenment, with the *Water of Life* being the central element. The imagery of emerging from "cellars" and "caves" may suggest a transition from ignorance or lower states of being to a higher, more enlightened state. The "great stone" at the peak of the mountain, along with the fish benefitting from its shadow, may symbolize profound truths or spiritual wisdom that one must seek and understand in the journey toward enlightenment. The focus on the *Water of Life* further reinforces its significance as a symbol of gnosis, eternal life, and divine wisdom.



⁷⁷ Ja'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā'il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, p. 243.

⁷⁸ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, p. 86.

Avicenna's mystical works, including *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, also discuss the concept of the *Water of Life*. To understand the meaning of the *Water of Life* in this context, it is necessary to examine both Avicenna's own writings and the commentary of his disciple, Al-Jūzjānī. One important note is that the plot lines of Avicenna's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* and Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's *ʿAql-e sorkh* are structured in a very similar way. To better understand this, we can refer to the following table:

Table 2. A Comparative analysis of *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* and *ʿAql-e sorkh*

The title of the work	<i>Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān</i>	<i>ʿAql-e sorkh</i>
Spiritual traveller	Avicenna	Suhrawardī
Intellect	The son of the waking one is alive.	Red intellect.
Artistic time and space	Journey	Journey
Description of the spiritual guide	A distant old man appeared, beautiful, joyful, and good. In his youth, none of his bones had weakened, nor had any part of him been harmed, and there was no sign of old age, except for the grandeur of the elderly. ⁷⁹	When I looked at the man, his beard, complexion, and face were red; I imagined him to be young. I said, "O young man, where do you come from?" He replied, "O child, this address is mistaken; I am the first offspring of creation. You call me young?" I asked, "Why hasn't your beard turned white?" He answered, "My beard is white, and I am a luminous person; however, the one who has entrapped you, who has placed these various bonds upon you and designated these duties for you, has, for ages, thrown me into a dark well. The redness you see in me is because of that. Otherwise, I am white and luminous, and when light, which belongs to it, mixes with any whiteness and darkness, it appears red. The redness of the evening twilight or the fading whiteness of dawn comes from the sun's light. The side facing the light is white, and the side facing the night is dark. Therefore, it appears red". ⁸⁰
The name of the master (<i>pīr</i>)	My name is Alive, and I am the son of the Awakener. ⁸¹	O child, this address is mistaken; I am the first offspring of creation. ⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 71.

⁸⁰ Jā'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā'il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, p. 46.

⁸¹ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣehā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, p. 72.

⁸² Jā'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā'il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, p. 46.

The master's (<i>pīr</i>) place	My city is the Holy House. ⁸³	Then I said: "Old man, where do you come from?" He replied: "From behind Mount Qāf, where my station is. Your home was there too, but you have forgotten." ⁸⁴
The master's (<i>pīr</i>) profession	My profession is to travel, to roam the world, so that I may understand all of its conditions. And my face is towards my father, and my father is awake, and I have learned all sciences from him. He gave me the keys to all sciences, and he showed me the way around the world – the paths that are traversed. It is as if the entire world has been laid before me through my journey around it. ⁸⁵	I said: What were you doing here? He said: I am a traveler, constantly roaming the world and witnessing its wonders. ⁸⁶
What the master (<i>pīr</i>) said to the traveler	Having friends named imagination, anger, and lust. ⁸⁷ The existence of three climates: the West, the East, and the space in between them. ⁸⁸	He said: Seven things: First, the Qāf mountain, our domain; second, the gem that illuminates the night; third, the Tuba tree; fourth, the twelve workshops; fifth, David's armor; sixth, the Balarak sword; seventh, the life-giving water. ⁸⁹
The place of the <i>Water of Life</i>	He said: "Have you heard of the state of darkness, and that it has reached a point near the pole, where the sun shines at a specific time of the year? Whoever goes into the darkness with difficulty, will not avoid going there, and will reach an expanse that has no boundary and is filled with light". ⁹⁰	I said: "O <i>pīr</i> , where is the <i>Water of Life</i> ?" He replied: "In the darkness, if you seek it, wear shoes like Khidr, and follow the path of trust so that you may reach the darkness". ⁹¹
The purpose of the <i>Water of Life</i>	Knowledge of Truth ⁹²	Wisdom, truth (' <i>Aql-e sorkh</i>)

As we can observe, in both Avicenna's and Suhrawardī's narratives, the ultimate aim of the spiritual seeker (*sālik*) is to attain the *Water of Life*, a metaphor often interpreted as the attainment of divine knowledge or spiritual illumination.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ Ibidem.

⁸⁷ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, pp. 72–73.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, p. 74.

⁸⁹ Ja'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā'il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, p. 75.

⁹¹ Ja'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā'il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, p. 52.

⁹² Henry Corbin, *Ibn Sīnā wa tamthīl-e 'erfānī*. Jild-e Awwal. *Qeṣṣeḥā-ye Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, p. 38.

In general, when studying the mystical works of Avicenna and Suhrawardī, it becomes evident that the *Water of Life* used in epic literature carries a different meaning. Many elements from the epic narratives about Alexander, as written by Ferdowsī and Nizāmī, have been incorporated into these mystical works. These elements include the *Water of Life*, The West (*Maghrib*), darkness, Khidr, light, the sun, Mount Qāf, and so on.

This blending of motifs suggests a symbolic transformation of the *Water of Life* from its literal meaning in epic tales to a more philosophical and metaphysical interpretation in mystical writings. In these works, the *Water of Life* represents not just immortality but the attainment of spiritual enlightenment and divine wisdom, signaling the *sālik*'s progress on the path of spiritual realization.

Table 3. Motifs Transmitted from Epic Literature to Mystical Literature

poet	West, North Pole	gloom	Khidr	East	glimmer
Ferdowsī	بپرسید هر چیز و دریا بدید وزان روی لشکر به مغرب کشید ⁹³ He asked every- thing and saw the sea. From that side, the army retreated to the West.	وزان جای تاریک چندان سخن شنیدم که هرگز نیاید به بن ⁹⁴ In a place of dark- ness, I heard so much speech That I never heard it reach its end.	ورا اندر آن خضر بدرای زن سر نامداران آن انجمن ⁹⁵ Within there, the misguiding Khidr speaks, The head of the renowned ones in that gathering.		بران آب روشن سر و تن بشت نگهدار جز پاک یزدان نجست ⁹⁶ He washed his head and body in the clear water, Guarded, none but the pure God rema- ined untainted.
Nizāmī	خط استوا بر افق سرنهاد میانجی به قطب شمال اوفتاد ⁹⁷ The equator was placed on the horizon,	حجابی که ظلمات شد نام او روان آب حیوان از آرام او ⁹⁸ The veil that be- came darkness, its name is	پی خضر گفتی در آن راه بود همانا که خود خضر باشاه بود ⁹⁹ The veil that be- came darkness, its name,		نه چشمه که آن زین سخن دور بود وگر بود هم چشمه نور بود ¹⁰⁰ Not a spring, for it was far from this speech,

⁹³ بخش 32 اسکندر، پادشاهی شاهنامه، فردوسی Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh32>.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ بخش 33 اسکندر، پادشاهی شاهنامه، فردوسی Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/eskandar/sh33>.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 59 – افسانه آب حیوان Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh59>.

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ بخش اول: شرفنامه، بخش 60 – رفتن اسکندر به ظلمات Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/sharafname/sh60>.

poet	West, North Pole	gloom	Khidr	East	glimmer
	The mediator fell towards the North Pole.	The soul of the <i>Water of Life</i> flows from its calm.	The flow of the life-giving water comes from its calm.		And if it were, it would have been a spring of light.
‘Aṭṭār		چو شد عاجز در آن تاریکی راه بمانده هم سپه حیران و هم شاه¹⁰¹ When he became helpless in the darkness of the path, Both the army and the king were left bewildered.			
Avicenna	The next place is the west.¹⁰² “I said to him, ‘Inform me about the West and show that the West is closer to our cities’.”¹⁰³	He said: ‘Have you heard about the state of darkness, and has it reached you that it stands near the pole, where the sun shines at certain times of the year?’¹⁰⁴		The place on the other side is the East.¹⁰⁵	“Whoever enters that darkness will reach an endless expanse filled with light, and this is knowledge.”¹⁰⁶
Suhrawardī	Here is the story: as soon as I traveled with my brother Asim from the land of Mavarannahr to the western lands, to hunt a flock of birds on the shore of the Green Sea.¹⁰⁷	I said: “Oh, master, where is this life-giving water?” He said: “In the darkness”.¹⁰⁸	Put on shoes like Khidr, take the path of trust, so that you may reach the darkness.¹⁰⁹		If one is among the people of that spring, they will see the light after the darkness. Therefore, it is not necessary to chase after that light, as it is a radiance from the sky over the spring of life.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ عطار، الهی نامه، بخش چهاردهم، (1) اسکندر و وفات او Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahiname/ebkhsh14/sh3>.

¹⁰² Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣehā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, p. 74.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Corbin, *Ibn Sīnā wa tamthīl-e ‘erfānī*. Jild-e Awwal. *Qeṣṣehā-ye Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Qeṣṣehā-ye Shaykh Ishrāq*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁸ Ja‘far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Sharḥ-e Rasā’il-e Fārsī-ye Suhrawardī*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

The thoughts on the *Water of Life* in mystical works can be summarized as follows: In these texts, the terms *maghrib* and *mashriq* do not refer to the geographical east and west that we understand. Instead, *maghrib* represents the world of darkness, where there is no light, and *mashriq* symbolizes the world of light and illumination. The world we live in, in a broader sense, is the *maghrib*, the world of darkness and shadows, while our body is a narrower frame within this world. The *Water of Life* is found within this *maghrib*, the world of darkness. Whoever reaches this water will come to know the science of truth, will recognize God, learn the divine scripture, and ultimately comprehend the meaning of truth. Therefore, the purpose of the *Water of Life* is to grasp the essence of truth. The paths to reaching the *Water of Life* are presented in various forms in mystical works, each illustrating a different approach to spiritual enlightenment and understanding the divine.

2.2. Muḥammad Ibn Yaḥyā Sībak Fattāḥī Nīshābūrī¹¹¹ and his major work *Ḥosn o del*

Sībak Fattāḥī Nīshābūrī in his work *Ḥosn o del* offers intriguing interpretations of the *Water of Life* (*Āb-e Ḥayāt*). In his time, this concept was explained through various symbolic meanings. The definitions are as follows:

First Definition:

شبی ندیمان در مجلس او تواریخ می‌خواندند و در اثنای آن چنین بر زبان
راندند: که خدای تعالی، از بهشت جاودان درین جهان چشمه‌یی آب دارد که
آنرا «آب حیات» خوانند و کسانی که از آن آب بیاشامند زنده جاوید مانند.

One night, during a gathering of companions, historical texts were being read, and during this, it was mentioned that Allah, from the eternal paradise, has a spring on this earth that is called the *Water of Life*. Those who drink from this water will remain alive eternally.

In this version, the *Water of Life* is presented as a literal source of eternal life, originating from paradise.

Interpretation by Honor:

ناموس گفت: حکایت آب حیات تمثیلی است و از روی معنی تأویلی است. بدان
که مراد از آب حیات آبرویست (آبرو است) که واسطه حیات هر نامجویست؛
هر که را ازین آب برخوردار است تا قیامت نام او بر افواه جاریست.

Honor said: The story of the *Water of Life* is a metaphor and should be interpreted symbolically. Know that the *Water of Life* refers to reputation

¹¹¹ Tahsin Yazıcı, 'Fattāḥī Nīshābūrī, Moḥammad', Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/fattahi-nisaburi>.

(honor), which is the means of life for anyone who seeks a name or fame. Whoever benefits from this water, his name will be carried by the tongues until the Day of Judgment.

همت گفت: ای جوانمرد! چشمه‌ی آب حیات در عالم آشکارست اما به سر آن چشمه رسیدن دشوارست، چون کسی را به سر این چشمه راه نیست کس از منبع او آگاه نیست.

Himmah said: "O brave soul! The fountain of the *Water of Life* is manifest in the world, but reaching the source of that fountain is difficult. No one has the way to the mouth of that fountain, and therefore, no one is aware of its origin.

همت گفت: بدانک در دیار مشرق پادشاهیست «عشق» نام او و پری و آدمی مُسَخَّر احکام او و عشق را دخترِ یست در غایت کمال و به زیبایی بی‌مثال؛ آوازه‌ی خوبی او در مشرق افتاده و پدر او، او را «حُسن» نام نهاده و به جهت او در دامن کوه قاف شهری عالی‌پرداخته و در وی باغی چون بهشت ساخته. نام آن شهر «دیدار» ست و لقب آن باغ «گلشن رخسار» ست؛ در آن باغ چشمه‌یی مخفی است که نام آن «چشمه فم» است و آب حیات در آن چشمه، مدغم است و مدام حُسن در شهر دیدار و گلشن رخسار با امرا و سپاهی بی‌شمار در عیش و کامرانی کوشد و مدام آب زندگانی به جام شادمانی نوشد؛ و کسی را از بنی آدم به شهر دیدار رسیدن دشوارست زیرا که در راه مخاوف و متالف بسیارست.

Himmh said: "Know that in the land of the East, there is a king named *Love*, to whom both jinn and humans are subject. Love has a daughter whose beauty is unmatched. Her goodness has spread across the East, and her father has called her *Beauty*. For her, he has built a magnificent city at the foot of Mount Qāf and created a garden there, resembling paradise. The city's name is *Meeting*, and the garden's title is *The Garden of the Rukhsar*. In that garden, there is a hidden spring called the *Mouth Spring* and the *Water of Life* has mixed with this spring. In this garden, the beauty of the meeting and the Rukhsar garden, countless leaders and armies enjoy pleasures, constantly drinking from the cup of joy, the *Water of Life*. However, it is difficult for any of the children of Adam to reach the city of Meeting because the path is fraught with many dangerous and perilous places.

As we can see, Sībak Fattāhī Nishābūrī also provides various meanings for the *Water of Life*: a spring from paradise, the tears of a weeping eye, a spring that no one can reach, the lover's mouth water, and so on.

Here, the *Water of Life* is seen as the concept of honor or reputation – something that sustains a person’s name and legacy throughout time. It symbolizes the power of one’s reputation, which ensures their enduring presence in the world even after death.

What the hypocrite says is very interesting and meaningful. He states that “the source of the *Water of Life* is in the gardens of paradise”, symbolically linking paradise and the *Water of Life*. This refers to spiritual elevation, truth, and the path of righteousness. Paradise is also a place of spiritual purification, truth, and the correct path.

“Finding a weeping eye in this world is its sign” – this phrase indicates the spiritual state of a person on a quest for meaning. The weeping eye symbolizes sorrow, struggles, and pain, implying that in the face of life’s difficulties, there is an inner unrest and search. The *Water of Life* in this world is about finding these weeping eyes and progressing through them.

Finally, “In the barren land, you must work in the tears of cunning to drink the sweet syrup of the people’s faith delight” – here, the hypocrite speaks about the importance of using strategies in worldly matters and struggles. This means that, in the spiritual world, sometimes it is necessary to engage in certain tactics to reach one’s goal. The tears and barren land represent the trials and hardships one faces on the spiritual journey.

This statement reflects a deep spiritual insight – the *Water of Life* (a symbol of ultimate wisdom or truth) is available to all, but the path to truly understanding and experiencing it is not easily found. It suggests that the search for deeper meaning, wisdom, and spiritual enlightenment is not simple and requires great effort and inner strength to reach the ultimate source.

This narrative represents a symbolic journey toward spiritual enlightenment and the pursuit of ultimate truth, where “Love” is the ruler of the heart, and “Beauty” is the ideal the seeker strives to attain. The *Water of Life* in the garden represents wisdom or spiritual nourishment, with the city of Meeting being the destination where true understanding or enlightenment can be reached. However, the journey to this spiritual state is difficult and fraught with challenges, symbolizing the inner struggles one faces when striving for higher truths.

2.3. Muḥammad Fuẓūlī: *Ṣaḥḥat o maraḏ* (“Health and Disease”)

Although Muḥammad Fuẓūlī drew upon Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī’s *Mūnis al-‘ushshāq* as a source in composing his work *Ṣaḥḥat o maraḏ*, he did not merely replicate its plot, but rather incorporated his own creative additions, thereby endowing his work with a distinctive originality.

In Suhrawardī’s narrative, the central objective is to attain the *Water of Life*. As stated in the text, “There is a spring known as *āb-e zendegānī* (*Water of Life*), where he

is commanded to perform the ritual ablution. Upon attaining eternal life, the Divine Book is revealed to him”.¹¹²

In our view, while the main plot of Fuḏūlī’s *Şahhat o maraḏ* appears to be inspired by Suhrawardī’s *Mūnis al-‘ushshāq*, he also seems to have drawn from another significant source: Sībak Nīshābūrī’s *Hosn o Del*. It should be noted that Sībak Nīshābūrī also based the core structure of his narrative on Suhrawardī’s *Mūnis al-‘ushshāq*. However, while the ultimate goal in both Suhrawardī’s and Nīshābūrī’s texts is the discovery of the *Water of Life*, Fuḏūlī does not emphasize this motif to the same extent in his own composition.

It should be noted that Fuḏūlī does, at one point, make reference to the *Water of Life*. However, it appears that in this instance, he draws not from Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, but rather from Sībak Nīshābūrī.

They arrived at a pure and sweet spring. It brought joy to sorrowful hearts, and its grace surpassed even the water of Khidr. It was named Lab-e Jānpirvar (the lip that nourishes the soul). There, they discovered a casket filled with pearls. The casket was metaphorically named ‘Mouth,’ and the pearl was named ‘Tooth’. Although they obtained the casket, they lost it again in confusion. Then, they proceeded toward a garden and settled in a rose grove. The flowers of this garden were completely thornless and were called the ‘Garden of the Face’. After spending some time there, they set off for another destination. They encountered a joyful place, filled with exquisite delights and fresh greenery that brought happiness and joy.¹¹³

From this brief passage, it becomes evident that Fuḏūlī’s symbolic representation of the *Water of Life* is associated with the lips. The interpretation of the lips as the embodiment of the *Water of Life* can also be observed in the third section of this article, where it is analyzed in the context of Ḥāfeẓ and Fuḏūlī’s ghazals in greater detail.

Part III: The *Water of Life* in mystical ghazals

3.1. The Water of Life in Rūmī’s *Dīvān-e Shams*

One of the poets who most frequently uses the concept of the *Water of Life* in his ghazals – perhaps the foremost among them – is Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī. In his *Dīvān-e Shams* (*Divan of Shams*), various forms of the term *Water of Life* appear, including:

¹¹² A. Alizade, ‘Şehabəddin Söhrəvərdinin “Fi Həqiqətül-Eşq Ya Munisul-Uşşaq” Əsərinin Tərcüməsi və Şərhi’, *Akademik Tarih Ve Düşünce Dergisi*, 11/2 (2024), p. 1051.

¹¹³ Muḥammad Fuḏūlī, *Safarname-ye ruh ya Şahhat o maraḏ*, Tehrān 2010/1389, pp. 67–99.

آب حیات، آب حیوان، چشمه حیات، چشمه زندگی، چشمه زندگانی، چشمه
خضر، آب خضر

*āb-e ḥayāt, āb-e ḥayvān, chashma-ye ḥayāt, chashma-ye zendegī,
chashma-ye zendegānī, chashma-ye Khizr, āb-e Khizr.*

All these expressions are employed in Rūmī's ghazals with diverse connotations. However, it is evident that the predominant meaning associated with the *Water of Life* in his poetry is love. This is largely due to the fact that the *Dīvān-e Shams* is entirely devoted to the praise and celebration of divine and spiritual love.

عمر که بی عشق رفت، هیچ حسابش مگیر
آب حیاتست عشق، در دل و جانیش پذیر¹¹⁴

Life spent without love – do not count it as life at all.
Love is the *Water of Life* – let it fill your heart and soul.

Rūmī, who does not consider a life without love to be a true life, calls love the *Water of Life*, emphasizing that it must be embraced wholeheartedly. His poem by Rūmī, taken from the *Divan-e Shams*, conveys the idea that a life spent without love holds no real value and should not be counted as part of one's true existence. Love is portrayed as the *Water of Life* – an essential, life-giving force that must be accepted and internalized within the heart and soul.

“The life that passed without love – count it as nothing”:

This verse expresses that a life devoid of love is meaningless and unworthy of recognition. In Rūmī's view, love is the very essence and purpose of existence. Without it, life is empty and without substance.

“Love is the *Water of Life* – let it be received in heart and soul”:

Here, love is metaphorically likened to the *Water of Life*, symbolizing something that brings eternal vitality and spiritual awakening. Rūmī emphasizes that in order to truly benefit from this divine force, one must open both heart and soul to it.

The poem emphasizes the centrality of divine love in spiritual life. Rūmī regards divine love as the essence that gives meaning, purpose, and vitality to human existence. By equating love with the *Water of Life*, he underscores its transformative power – capable of reviving the soul, leading one out of spiritual emptiness, and guiding them toward a deeper, eternal reality.

¹¹⁴ 1129 شماره غزل، غزلیات، دیوان شمس، مولانا، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams/ghazalsh/sh1129>.

Importance of Love:

This ghazal broadly emphasizes the vital role of love in human life, presenting it as an essential and fundamental need. Love is portrayed not merely as an emotional experience but as a necessary force that sustains and enriches the human spirit.

Divine Love:

In Rūmī's poetry, love often refers specifically to divine love – the profound, all-encompassing love for God. This form of love transcends ordinary affection and symbolizes a spiritual connection and union with the divine essence.

Transformative Power of Love:

Love in this ghazal is described as a transformative force capable of elevating an individual from weakness and inertia to strength, vitality, and spiritual perfection. It is not static but a dynamic energy that propels the seeker toward self-realization and enlightenment.

Encouragement to Embrace Love:

Rūmī encourages the reader or listener to wholeheartedly accept and internalize love in both heart and soul. By doing so, one can attain true fulfillment and spiritual nourishment. This acceptance is depicted as a conscious choice that leads to inner renewal and a deeper awareness of life's ultimate meaning.

The ghazal articulates a vision where love is foundational to human existence and spiritual growth. It positions love as a gateway to transcendence, whereby embracing divine love allows the individual to overcome the limitations of the material world and temporal existence. Rūmī's emphasis on love as *Water of Life* metaphorically suggests that love is a source of eternal vitality, cleansing and rejuvenating the soul. The poem's message is a call to awaken to this life-giving force, recognizing love as the path to immortality – not in a physical sense, but as an enduring spiritual state. Thus, love serves both as the means and the goal of the soul's journey toward unity with the divine.

In this couplet, the poet metaphorically likens love to the Fountain of the *Water of Life* – a mythical and spiritual source believed to grant immortality to those who partake of it. By equating love with this legendary spring, the poet implies that true, divine love has the power to transcend the temporal and material dimensions of existence. Whoever drinks from this metaphorical fountain – i.e., whoever embraces and internalizes love – attains a form of eternal life, not in the physical sense, but as a state of spiritual fulfillment and union with the divine. In this framework, love is not merely an emotion but a transformative, life-giving force that sustains the soul and leads the seeker toward the ultimate truth.

آب حیات عشق را در رگ ما روانه کن
آینه صبح را ترجمه شبانه کن¹¹⁵

Let the *Water of Life* – love – flow through our veins,
And turn the morning mirror into a nightly reflection.

This poem is by Rūmī, the great Iranian mystic and poet. Its general meaning is a plea for divine love, which is likened to the *Water of Life* that must flow through one's veins. It also calls upon the Beloved – symbolized here as the “morning mirror” – to reveal its essence and truth even in the darkness of night. In essence, the poem expresses a deep yearning for inner transformation and spiritual insight through the experience of love.

“Let the *Water of Life*, which is divine love, flow through our veins”:

Here, love is metaphorically described as the *Water of Life*. The verb “to flow” (روانه کن) indicates a request for this love to be made active and present in the speaker's being. Rūmī appeals to the Beloved – interpreted as either God or the Perfect Spiritual Guide – to make divine love permeate his entire existence.

“Reveal the morning mirror through the night's interpretation”:

The “morning mirror” symbolizes the clarity, beauty, and truth of divine love as it manifests in times of spiritual illumination. By asking for its “nightly interpretation”, Rūmī expresses a desire to perceive and understand this truth even in moments of darkness and hardship. The verse conveys a profound yearning to always remain connected to divine presence and insight, regardless of external or internal conditions.

3.2. The instances of the use of the *Water of Life* in the ghazals of Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī

After conducting a brief investigation into the concept of the *Water of Life* in Persian literature, it is also intriguing to examine its usage in the ghazals of Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī and to understand the significance of how this expression is employed by the mystical poet. In Ḥāfeẓ's poetry, five different expressions are used to convey the meaning of *Water of Life*:

آب حیات (*āb-e ḥayāt*), آب حیوان (*āb-e ḥayvān*), آب خضر (*āb-e Khidr*),
آب زندگی (*āb-e zendegānī*) and آب زندگانی (*āb-e zendegī*).

¹¹⁵ 1821 شماره غزل، غزلیات، دیوان شمس، مولانا، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams/ghazalsh/sh1821>.

The verses in which these expressions appear can be categorized into two groups:

- 1) Instances where the *Water of Life* functions purely as a mystical symbol or Sufi term.
- 2) Instances where it carries both mystical and material connotations.

As is well known, each couplet in Ḥāfeẓ's ghazals often opens a window onto a specific aspect of spiritual thought. It should be noted that the use of the *Water of Life* reaches its highest poetic and mystical expression in Ḥāfeẓ's work. Compared to earlier poets, he employs the term with greater passion and spiritual depth. The importance of this expression in his oeuvre can be clearly observed in the following couplet:

دوش وقتِ سحر از غصّه نجاتم دادند
واندر آن ظلمتِ شب آبِ حیاتم دادند¹¹⁶

Yesterday at dawn, I was granted relief from sorrow;
In the darkness of night, they gave me the *Water of Life*.

We can infer that the *Water of Life* lies within darkness, and that one who attains it is liberated from sorrow. As is well known, the spiritual seeker (*sālik*) in this world is constantly engulfed in grief and yearns to break away from the material realm and journey toward the world of meaning. In this ghazal by Ḥāfeẓ, the *Water of Life* symbolizes ma'rifat (spiritual knowledge). It is well established that the ultimate aim of Islamic mysticism (*'erfān*) is the knowledge of God. Hence the well-known dictum: "Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord". All philosophers and mystics have made tremendous efforts to attain the knowledge of God.

In another couplet, Ḥāfeẓ writes:

حافظ ار آبِ حیاتِ ازلِ می‌خواهی
منبعش خاکِ درِ خلوتِ درویشان است¹¹⁷

O Ḥāfeẓ, if you seek the eternal *Water of Life*,
Its source lies in the dust at the doorstep of the dervishes' retreat.

Here, the *Water of Life* is portrayed as a timeless, divine truth, found only through humility and in the spiritual sanctity of the dervishes' seclusion.

In this verse, Ḥāfeẓ elevates the concept of *āb-e ḥayāt-e azālī* (eternal *Water of Life*) beyond its literal or even mythological meaning. It becomes a metaphor for divine truth, eternal wisdom, and spiritual immortality. The phrase *khāk-e dar-e khalwat-e darwīshān* (the dust at the doorstep of the dervishes' retreat) suggests humility, devotion, and submission to spiritual masters as the path to enlightenment. By placing the source of this exalted truth in such a humble place, Ḥāfeẓ implies that true

¹¹⁶ 183 شماره غزل، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh183>.

¹¹⁷ 49 شماره غزل، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh49>.

knowledge and immortality are not found in external power or scholarship, but in the spiritual purity and simplicity of the mystic path.

In this couplet, the expression *Water of Life* is employed once more; however, here it is uniquely combined with the adjective “eternal” (*azalī*), imbuing it with a deeper metaphysical significance. As noted by scholars such as Ja’farī, the term *azal* denotes that which has no beginning and is exclusively attributed to God. It is considered one of the divine attributes, signifying God’s pre-eternity, while *abadi* refers to that which has no end. Thus, the phrase “eternal *Water of Life*” (*āb-e ḥayāt-e azalī*) symbolizes a form of divine knowledge or truth that is uncreated and timeless.¹¹⁸

This association underscores the Sufi understanding that true knowledge of God (*ma’rifā*) is not merely an intellectual pursuit but an experiential realization of the Divine’s eternal nature. In this context, the *Water of Life* transcends its literal meaning, representing the soul’s immersion into the infinite and unchanging reality of God.

The couplet further emphasizes that the source of this eternal life-giving knowledge is found in the “dust at the doorstep of the dervishes’ retreat” (*khāk-e dar-e khalwat-e darwīshān*). This imagery conveys the Sufi ideal that spiritual enlightenment is attained through humility, self-effacement, and detachment from worldly desires. The “dust” signifies the lowest and most humble state, suggesting that one must humble oneself completely to receive divine wisdom.

Prominent mystics like Avicenna and Suhrawardī have similarly highlighted the material world’s distractions as significant obstacles to divine realization. Ḥāfeẓ, aligning with this tradition, implies that the path to eternal truth requires turning away from the ephemeral pleasures of the material world and seeking the company and guidance of those who have renounced it – the dervishes. Their secluded retreats symbolize spaces of spiritual discipline and contemplation, where the seeker can purify the soul and attain the eternal *Water of Life*.

This interpretation aligns with the broader Sufi perspective that emphasizes the necessity of inner transformation and the shedding of the ego to achieve union with the Divine. As noted in discussions on Sufi symbolism, such as those by Peter Booth, the journey towards God involves traversing the path of love and humility, often symbolized through metaphors like the *Water of Life* and the “dust at the doorstep” [Tech of Heart] .

لب چو آبِ حیاتِ تو هست قُوتِ جان
وجودِ خاکی ما را از اوست ذکرِ رَواح¹¹⁹

Your lip, like the *Water of Life*, is the vitality of the soul;
The nightly remembrance that nourishes our earthly being comes from it.

¹¹⁸ Ja’far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Farhang-e eṣṭelāḥāt wa ta’birāt-e ‘erfānī*, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ 98 غزل شماره Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh98>.

In this couplet, the poet employs the metaphor of the *Water of Life* (*āb-e ḥayāt*) in conjunction with the motif of the “lip” (*lab*), a term rich in symbolic meaning within Sufi literature. According to Sufi lexicons, the “lip” is often interpreted not merely as a physical feature but as a symbol of the “word” or “speech” (*kalām*), and, in certain contexts, as an allusion to the “Divine Breath” (*an-naḥas ar-Raḥmānī*) that bestows existence upon creation. This breath, emanating from the All-Merciful, is considered the animating force that brings entities from non-existence into being.

In this context, the “lip” serves as a metaphor for the Divine Breath, the creative force that imparts vitality to the soul. The *Water of Life* is thus likened to this breath, suggesting that the soul is invigorated through the Divine’s merciful exhalation. Conversely, the “earthly existence”, representing the corporeal aspect of humanity, is rejuvenated through nocturnal remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Divine.

This interpretation aligns with the Sufi understanding that the soul’s true sustenance is derived from the Divine’s breath, while the body requires spiritual practices, such as night-time remembrance, to attain harmony and strength. The juxtaposition of the soul’s nourishment through the Divine Breath and the body’s through devotional acts underscores the holistic approach in Sufism, where both the spiritual and physical aspects are nurtured through connection with the Divine.

Such metaphors are prevalent in Sufi poetry, where the interplay between the Divine and the human is often depicted through symbols like the “lip” and the *Water of Life*, emphasizing the transformative power of Divine love and remembrance in the journey towards spiritual realization.

In Hāfez’s ghazals, the metaphor of the *Water of Life* serves as a profound symbol for spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifat*), divine wisdom, and the life-giving Breath of the Merciful. This motif is intricately woven into his poetry, reflecting a deep engagement with Sufi metaphysics and the symbolic language of Persian mystical literature.

Here, Hāfez suggests that true immortality and enlightenment are not found in the physical realm but through the divine speech or breath emanating from the “beloved’s lips”. In Sufi terminology, the “lip” symbolizes both the divine word and the Breath of the Merciful, both of which are sources of spiritual vitality. The implication is that Khidr, traditionally associated with discovering the *Water of Life*, may have only encountered an illusion if he sought it in the material world.

This interpretation aligns with the Sufi perspective that the quest for eternal life and divine knowledge transcends physical endeavors. Hāfez’s portrayal serves as a critique of literal interpretations of spiritual quests, emphasizing that true understanding and immortality are achieved through inner realization and connection with the divine essence.

By recontextualizing the legend of Khidr and the *Water of Life*, Hāfez underscores the importance of inner spiritual awakening over external pursuits. His poetry invites readers to look beyond the surface and seek the deeper, esoteric meanings that lead to true enlightenment.

In the realm of Sufi thought, the concept of the *Water of Life* transcends its literal interpretation, symbolizing the profound spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifa*) and eternal

life that can only be attained through divine proximity. This metaphor underscores the belief that true immortality is not a product of material wealth or power but is achieved through spiritual enlightenment and unity with the Divine.

فیض ازل به زور و زر ار آمدی به دست
آب خضر نصیبیه اسکندر آمدی¹²⁰

As the verse suggests:

If perpetual grace could be obtained by force or gold,

Then the *Water of Life* would have been Alexander's share.

It is evident that this *Khidr's Water* is not at all related to power or wealth. If it were, all the rich and powerful people in the world would have attained immortality by now. However, there are distinctions between the immortality discussed in mystical works and the concept of immortality in the material world. In mysticism, to attain immortality and unite with the eternal and timeless Being, one must choose voluntary death in this world, meaning one must die while still alive. Once the seeker follows this path, they can step toward their ultimate goal and achieve union with it. It is clear that immortality can only be found in the eternal Being, that is, in God.

Therefore, the *Water of Life* symbolizes the ultimate spiritual goal in Sufism: the attainment of eternal life through the realization of divine truth and the annihilation of the ego. It is a reminder that true immortality is not found in the physical realm but in the depths of spiritual awakening and unity with the Eternal.

انفاس عیسی از لب لعلت لطیفه‌ای
آب خضر ز نوش لبانت کنایتی¹²¹

Jesus' breath from your ruby lips is a subtle grace,

The Water of Khidr, a metaphor for the nectar of your lips.

In this verse, Ḥāfeẓ employs the metaphor of the "ruby lips" of the beloved to signify the life-giving breath of Jesus, while also alluding to the water of Khidr as a symbol. The "ruby lips" represent the divine word or the breath of the beloved, which, in mystical interpretation, is akin to the breath that revives the soul. Just as Jesus is believed to have resurrected the dead with his breath, the poet suggests that the spiritual breath emanating from the beloved's lips has the power to enliven the soul. This breath is not merely a physical phenomenon but a metaphor for the divine inspiration or knowledge that brings spiritual awakening. The reference to Khidr's water further emphasizes that true immortality and spiritual vitality are granted by divine grace, not by worldly means.

¹²⁰ غزل شماره 439، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjooor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh439>.

¹²¹ غزل شماره 437، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjooor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh437>.

Thus, the verse underscores the idea that eternal life and spiritual enlightenment are bestowed through divine intervention, symbolized by the breath of the beloved.

گَرَت هواست که با خِضرِ هم‌نشین باشی
نهان ز چشمِ سِگندرِ چو آبِ حیوان باش¹²²

If you wish to keep company with Khidr,
Be hidden from Alexander's eyes like the *Water of Life*.

As we know, in the tale of the *Water of Life*, Alexander and Khidr are presented as opposing characters. Alexander is a figure who desires to conquer the world, to invade as many lands as his power allows, in short, he aims to own the world. Khidr, on the other hand, is a figure who distances himself from the world, believes in the transience of worldly pleasures, and only guides people to the right path. Therefore, Hāfez presents two choices to his readers: either choose the world like Alexander, or turn away from the world like Khidr. Those who befriend Khidr and drink from the *Water of Life* (meaning they gain gnosis) can achieve spiritual wisdom. Those who choose Alexander's friendship, however, will be deprived of such wisdom.

Hāfez's message underscores the idea that true enlightenment and immortality are not achieved through force or wealth but through spiritual devotion and the renunciation of material desires. By choosing Khidr's path, one embarks on a journey of inner transformation, leading to the ultimate union with the divine.

آب حیوان تیرمگون شد، خضر فرخ‌پی کجاست؟
خون چکید از شاخ گل، بادِ بهاران را چه شد؟¹²³

The *Water of Life* has turned murky – where is the blessed-footed Khidr?
Blood dripped from the rose branch – what happened to the spring breeze?

Hāfez Shīrāzī's extraordinary poetic talent, in addition to his mysticism, is also noteworthy. In this verse, it is impossible not to notice the profound meaning concealed within. Usually, when one hears of the *Water of Life* legend, the reader envisions that this water exists, and those who drink it can attain immortality. However, Hāfez approaches the matter from a higher perspective. It becomes clear that the meaning of the *Water of Life* does not lie in its existence, but in the presence of those who seek to drink it. If Khidr did not exist, the *Water of Life* would have no meaning. The reason for its immortality is revealed through the figure of Khidr. The transparency of the *Water of Life* is due to individuals like Khidr drinking from it. Thus, it becomes evident that the existence of God, the desire to know Him, and the aspiration to unite with Him is the seeker's aim and longing.

¹²² غزل شماره 273، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh273>.

¹²³ غزل شماره 169، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh169>.

صبا به چشم من انداخت خاکی از کویش
که آبِ زندگیم در نظر نمی‌آید¹²⁴

The morning breeze cast dust from her lane into my eyes,
So that the *Water of Life* no longer appears to my sight.

In the lexicon of mysticism, *Saba* is described as the divine breezes coming from the spiritual east. It is also said that *Saba* refers to that which leads to goodness.¹²⁵

This verse can be interpreted as follows: The *Saba* wind (divine breaths) poured so much dust from the kuy (the world of meaning) into my eyes that the *Water of Life* no longer appeared in my sight. This points to Hāfez's ascent to higher spiritual levels as a mystic. In this world, one must drink from the *Water of Life*, meaning one must attain gnosis. However, Hāfez has reached such a high spiritual station that the *Saba* wind from the east has filled his eyes with the dust from kuy (the divine realm) to such an extent that he can no longer see the *Water of Life* in the material world.

لبش می‌بوسم و در می‌کشم می
به آبِ زندگانی برده‌ام پی¹²⁶

I kiss your lips and drink the wine,
I have realized the *Water of Life*.
"They say the wine increases love".¹²⁷

Since Hāfez has realized the *Water of Life*, he kisses the divine breath and drinks the wine of love. After knowing God, all the winds and breaths that come from Him are so soul-refreshing that the mystic kisses them and becomes His greatest lover.

As we mentioned earlier, in Hāfez's ghazals, the phrase *Water of Life* does not only carry an esoteric meaning. While reading his ghazals, it becomes clear that Hāfez was deeply attached to the place he lived. In his poems, locations such as Ruknābad, Zāyanderūd, Shiraz, Isfahan, the *Allāhu Akbar* hill, and other toponyms are remembered with great love. Paying attention to the following couplets can prove the truth of this:

فرق است از آبِ خضر که ظلمات جای او است
تا آبِ ما که مَنبَعش الله اکبر است¹²⁸

There is a difference between the water of Khidr, whose place is in darkness,
And our water, whose source is *Allāhu Akbar*.

¹²⁴ 237 غزل شماره، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh237>.

¹²⁵ Ja'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Farhang-e eṣṭelāḥāt wa ta'birāt-e 'erfānī*, Tehrān 1991/1370, p. 520.

¹²⁶ 431 غزل شماره، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh431>.

¹²⁷ Ja'far Sayyid Sayyādī, *Farhang-e eṣṭelāḥāt wa ta'birāt-e 'erfānī*, p. 751.

¹²⁸ 39 غزل شماره، حافظ، غزلیات، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh39>.

As we can see, this couplet indicates that the *Water of Khidr* in the realm of darkness is very different from the water flowing from the *Allāhu Akbar* hill. It becomes clear that the *Water of Life* here does not carry an esoteric meaning.

By “our water”, the reference is to the water of Ruknabad. This water is named after Seyyed Ruknaddīn, who built buildings around the source of this water. In the past, it was a common practice to name places after the person who developed them in their honor.

The city of Shiraz is located at the foot of the *Allāhu Akbar* hill, and those coming from the direction of Hamedan cannot see the city until they reach the top of the hill. Upon reaching the top and seeing the city, they inevitably exclaim “*Allāhu Akbar*”. This is why the hill is called the *Allāhu Akbar* hill.

اگر چه زنده رود آب حیات است
ولی شیراز ما از اصفهان به¹²⁹

Although Zāyanderūd is the *Water of Life*,
Yet our Shiraz is better than Isfahan.

Other phrases used by Ḥāfeẓ in a non-mystical sense, as seen in his own verses, can be shown in his own praise:

آب حیوانش ز منقارِ بلاغت می‌چکد
زاغِ کلکِ من به نام ایزد چه عالی مشرب است¹³⁰

The water of life drips from the beak of eloquence,
The raven of my pen is of a blessed nature, by God’s name.

Here, the poet tries to showcase the beauty of his poetry, which he truly has the right to do.

در قلم آورد حافظ قصهٔ لعلِ لبش
آب حیوان می‌رود هر دم ز اقلام هنوز¹³¹

Ḥāfeẓ wrote the tale of the ruby of his lips,
The *Water of Life* still flows from my pens.

¹²⁹ 419 شماره غزل، حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 419 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh419>.

¹³⁰ 31 شماره غزل، حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 31 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh31>.

¹³¹ 265 شماره غزل، حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 265 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh265>.

حافظ از آب زندگی شعر تو داد شربتم
ترک طبیب کن بیا نسخه شربتم بخوان¹³²

Hāfez, from the *Water of Life*, gave me a drink,
Abandon the physician and come, read the prescription of my drink.

آب حیوانش ز منقار بلاغت می چکد
طوطی خوش لهجه یعنی کلک شگر خای تو¹³³

The *Water of Life* drips from the beak of eloquence,
The sweet-tongued parrot is your pen, adorned with sugar.

کلک تو بارک الله بر ملک و دین گشاده
صد چشمه آب حیوان از قطره سیاهی¹³⁴

Your pen, by God's grace, has opened kingdoms and religions,
A hundred springs of the *Water of Life* flow from a drop of darkness.

حجاب ظلمت از آن بست آب خضر که گشت
ز شعر حافظ و آن طبع همچو آب خجل¹³⁵

The veil of darkness was lifted by the water of Khidr,
From the poetry of Hāfez and his nature, like the *Water of Life*, shyly.

In his ghazals, Hāfez Shīrāzī employs the concept of the *Water of Life* with remarkable versatility, intertwining both mystical and worldly interpretations. This duality reflects the rich tapestry of Persian literary tradition, drawing from predecessors like Ferdowsī and Nizāmī, who often depicted the *Water of Life* as a tangible source of immortality, and philosophers such as Avicenna and Suhrawardī, who imbued it with profound spiritual significance.

Hāfez's nuanced treatment of this motif underscores his mastery in elevating the ghazal form to unparalleled heights within Persian literature. By seamlessly blending Sufi metaphors with vivid imagery of his native Shiraz, he bridges the temporal and the eternal, the corporeal and the divine. His poetry not only honors the legacy of his literary forebears but also transcends it, offering readers a profound exploration of love, knowledge, and the human quest for transcendence.

In essence, Hāfez's invocation of the *Water of Life* serves as a testament to his ability to harmonize the spiritual and the sensual, solidifying his position as a luminary in the canon of Persian poetry.

¹³² 382 غزل شماره حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 382 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh382>.

¹³³ 31 غزل شماره حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 31 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh31>.

¹³⁴ 489 غزل شماره حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 489 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh489>.

¹³⁵ 305 غزل شماره حافظ، غزلیات، غزل شماره 305 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh305>.

3.3. The *Water of Life* in Fuzūlī's Persian *Dīvān*

“Reaching a pure and sweet spring, it gave joy to sorrowful hearts, its grace was better than the water of Khidr, and it was named *life-giving lips*. The *Water of Life* was hidden in a spring, and it was called lips, as it spoke of the divine”.

The renowned poet Muḥammad Fuzūlī's Persian *Dīvān* contains various poetic forms such as *qasida*, *ghazal*, *rubai*, and others. In his *Dīvān*, we encounter the concept of *Water of Life* in the following combinations: آب حیات (*āb-e ḥayāt* – *Water of Life*, 7 times), آب زندگانی (*āb-e zendegānī* – life water, 4 times), آب حیوان (*āb-e ḥeyvān* – life water, 1 time), چشمه حیوان (*Chashma-ye ḥeyvān* – life-giving spring, 4 times), چشمه حیات (*Chashma-ye ḥayāt* – spring of life, 1 time). It should be noted that the phrase *Water of Life* is rarely used alone, as this water exists in darkness, and when consumed, a light emerges in the heart of the person, leading them to eternity. Therefore, *Water of Life* is often associated with terms such as darkness, radiance, light, and Khidr. The legend mentions that whoever drinks from or bathes in that water becomes like the Prophet Khidr. In Fuzūlī's *Dīvān*, through the occurrences of *Āb-e Ḥayāt*, we can infer that the poet holds his love in such high regard that he even declares:

زنده آب حیات و دم عیسی سهل است
زنده آنست که او اشکی و آهی دارد¹³⁶

To be revived by the *Water of Life* and by the breath of Jesus is easy,
But the true living one is he who has tears and sighs.

Here, Fuzūlī suggests that the act of resurrection or spiritual awakening (symbolized by the *Water of Life* and the “breath of Jesus”) is not merely about an external force granting life; true life comes from internal suffering, emotion, and love. The “tears” and “sighs” signify the deep emotional experiences that purify and transform the soul. In Sufism, love, sorrow, and longing are seen as essential components of spiritual elevation. Bu ümumi məlumat deyil. The tears symbolize the soul's yearning for the Divine, while the sighs express the inner pain of separation from the Beloved.

Thus, Fuzūlī is conveying that while external forces like the *Water of Life* or divine breath may grant life, it is the internal suffering – particularly the pain of love – that ultimately leads to true spiritual rebirth and immortality.

¹³⁶ شماره 169، غزلیات، دیوان اشعار فارسی، فضولی، Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/fozooli/divan/ghazal/sh169>.

آب حیات من بزمین قطره قطره ریخت
صرف ره محبت آن گلزار شد¹³⁷

My *Water of Life* dropped, drop by drop, onto the earth,
It was spent on the path of the love of that rosy-cheeked one.

In this poem, Fuzūlī speaks of the *Water of Life* as a metaphor for the essence of his being, which he willingly gives away, drop by drop, in his devotion to his beloved – the “rosy-cheeked one”. This phrase signifies someone beloved, often an idealized figure in Sufi poetry representing the Divine or a spiritual truth. The drops symbolize the sacrifices, struggles, and emotional devotion poured out on the path of love.

Here, the *Water of Life* is not only a symbol of spiritual sustenance but also of the intense devotion and longing that define Fuzūlī’s mysticism. His ultimate goal is not to keep the life-giving water for himself but to offer it, symbolizing the selfless nature of true love and the willingness to sacrifice one’s essence for the beloved.

Thus, Fuzūlī conveys that real life – both spiritual and emotional – is not preserved selfishly but is spent in the pursuit of love, whether that love is directed toward a human lover or, in the deeper mystical sense, toward God.

In these two couplets, Fuzūlī’s use of *āb-e ḥayāt* refers to tears. Fuzūlī is a poet of love, and he calls the tears he sheds on his path of love the *Water of Life*. In the following couplets, however, Fuzūlī uses the *Water of Life* to refer to love itself.

فضولی ره بخاک درگه پیر مغان بردم
بیا تا سوی آب زندگانی رهبرت گردم¹³⁸

Fuzūlī laid his path at the sanctuary of the wine-*pīr*.
Come, let me guide you towards the path of the *Water of Life*.

نیستم از خاک پای او فضولی بی خبر
خضرِ وقتم ره به آب زندگانی می برم¹³⁹

O Fuzūlī, I am not unaware of the dust of his feet.
I am the Khidr of the era, guiding towards the *Water of Life*.

¹³⁷ شماره 165 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/fozooli/divan/ghazal/sh165>.

¹³⁸ شماره 282 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/fozooli/divan/ghazal/sh282>.

¹³⁹ شماره 301 Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/fozooli/divan/ghazal/sh301>.

می کنم پرهیز اگر فرمایی از آب حیات
می خورم از زهر قاتل گر کنی تعیین غذا¹⁴⁰

If you command, I will abstain from the *Water of Life*,
If you provide it, I will drink the poison of your assassin.

Based on these examples, we can say that Muḥammad Fuẓūlī has reached such a high station in his love that, for him, even the *Water of Life*, which many seek, holds no meaning. He is ready to turn away from not only this worldly life but from any *Water of Life* that promises eternity, all for the sake of his love.

3.4. Evolution of the Symbolism of the *Water of Life* in Persian and Islamic Literature

The concept of the *Water of Life* has undergone a profound evolution throughout the history of Persian and Islamic literature, reflecting shifting philosophical, mystical, and poetic perspectives.

Author	Lifespan	Symbolic Meaning of the <i>Water of Life</i>
Abū'l-Qāsim Ferdowsī	940–1020	Immortality
Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)	980–1037	Logic, the science of truth
Nizāmī Ganjavī	1141–1209	Immortality
Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār	1145–1221	Heart-illuminating water – Knowledge
Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī	1155–1191	Gnosis (<i>ma'rifa</i>)
Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī	1207–1273	Love
Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī	1326–1389	Divine love
Sībak Nīshābūrī	d. 1448	Spring of Paradise, tears, unreachable spring, beloved's saliva
Muḥammad Fuẓūlī	1449–1556	The lip, love

Initially, for poets such as Abū'l-Qāsim Ferdowsī and Nizāmī Ganjavī, the *Water of Life* symbolized immortality in its most literal sense. Avicenna's interpretation reflects a philosophical shift, associating it with logic and the science of truth, indicating a movement from mythic to intellectual symbolism.

Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār introduced a more mystical dimension, portraying the *Water of Life* as knowledge that illuminates the heart, a motif later expanded by Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī through the concept of gnosis (*ma'rifa*).

The 13th and 14th centuries saw the motif further spiritualized by Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and Ḥāfeẓ of Shiraz, who redefined it as love and ultimately divine love, thus emphasizing an internal, experiential quest for eternal life.

¹⁴⁰ ستایش قاضی رکن الدین بغداد 3 – شماره 3 – سبکهای فارسی، قصاید، شماره 3 – ستایش قاضی رکن الدین بغداد 3
Viewed: 19 October 2025, <https://ganjoor.net/fozooli/divan/ghaside/sh3>.

By the 15th century, Sībak Nīshābūrī enriched the symbolism with elements such as the spring of Paradise, tears, and the beloved's saliva, blending sensory and spiritual imagery. Muhammad Fuḏūlī, meanwhile, personalized the metaphor further by associating the *Water of Life* with the lip and love, merging the physical with the metaphysical.

This trajectory from external quests for literal immortality to an inward journey marked by love and divine knowledge illustrates the complex and layered nature of the *Water of Life* as a symbol across centuries of Persian and Islamic intellectual and literary tradition.

Conclusion

The concept of the *Water of Life* has appeared in the works of many authors since the beginning of humanity's quest for it. The narrative of Alexander's search for the *Water of Life* entered mystical literature with deep symbolic meanings. Among these meanings, one may list: knowledge, the science of truth, logic, divine knowledge, the Divine Book, a spring from Paradise, the tear of sorrowful eyes, an unreachable fountain, love, tears, lips, and divine love. Based on our research, it can be concluded that the desire for immortality has always existed within the human spirit, and various means have been employed in the pursuit of this goal. As we can observe, the expression *Water of Life*, which initially symbolized immortality in epic literature, ultimately evolved into a metaphor for divine love. Each author uses the term *Water of Life* in reference to what they perceive as the true path to immortality. The journey of spiritual seekers (*sāliks*) also reflects this development. In the early mystical texts, great emphasis was placed on knowledge, as it was believed that immortality could be attained through learning. With the contributions of philosophers like Avicenna and Suhrawardī, this path evolved from empirical knowledge and logic to *ma'rifā*, or divine gnosis. The transformation of the meaning of the *Water of Life* further progressed in the works of Sībak Nīshābūrī and Muḥammad Fuḏūlī, where it began to take on new interpretations such as "lip" and "tear". The lip, in particular, came to symbolize the pathway to divine love. Poets such as Ḥāfeẓ and Rūmī confirmed this transformation by asserting that the true *Water of Life* is divine love itself, and that immortality can only be achieved through union with the Divine Beloved.

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