WHEN ALGORITHMS MEET MYSTICISM: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SUFI QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

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Abstract
The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed contemporary research methods, including within the field of Qur'anic studies. AI technologies offer important advantages in processing large textual corpora, identifying linguistic patterns, mapping thematic relationships, and facilitating access to classical exegetical sources. In the context of *tafsīr* studies, these capacities create new opportunities for comparative, thematic, and data-driven approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the application of AI to Qur'anic exegesis also raises important epistemological questions, particularly when interpretation involves the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of the text. This article examines the limitations of AI in understanding the *ishārī* dimensions of the Qur'an as developed in the Sufi exegetical tradition. Using a conceptual-comparative method with textual analysis of classical Sufi commentaries, the study contrasts algorithmic knowledge—grounded in statistical computation, pattern recognition, and data processing—with Sufi epistemology, which emphasizes inward purification, spiritual experience, and *kashf* (unveiling) as pathways to deeper understanding. The article argues that although AI can simulate interpretive language and summarize existing scholarly views, it lacks existential consciousness, transformative experience, and spiritual intentionality. These limitations become especially visible in the interpretation of symbolic verses such as Q. al-Nūr [24]:35, where Sufi commentators read the imagery of light as a representation of inward illumination and metaphysical reality. The study concludes that AI should be positioned as a methodological instrument that supports Qur'anic research rather than as a substitute for human interpretive authority. While AI can enhance access, organization, and textual analysis, it cannot fully grasp the spiritual hermeneutics at the heart of *tafsīr ishārī*.

Kata Kunci :
Kecerdasan buatan; Tafsir al-Qur'an; *Tafsīr Ishārī*; Hermeneutika Sufistik; Epistemologi; Kemanusiaan digital.

Abstrak
Perkembangan pesat Kecerdasan Buatan (Artificial Intelligence/AI) telah secara signifikan mentransformasi metode penelitian kontemporer, termasuk dalam bidang studi Al-Qur'an. Teknologi AI menawarkan berbagai keunggulan penting dalam memproses korpus teks dalam jumlah besar, mengidentifikasi pola-pola linguistik, memetakan hubungan tematik, serta memfasilitasi akses terhadap sumber-sumber tafsir klasik. Dalam konteks studi tafsir, kemampuan tersebut membuka peluang baru bagi pendekatan komparatif, tematik, dan berbasis data dalam menafsirkan Al-Qur'an. Meskipun demikian, penerapan AI dalam penafsiran Al-Qur'an juga memunculkan sejumlah pertanyaan epistemologis yang penting, khususnya ketika proses interpretasi melibatkan dimensi spiritual dan simbolik teks. Artikel ini mengkaji keterbatasan AI dalam memahami dimensi ishārī Al-Qur'an sebagaimana berkembang dalam tradisi tafsir sufi. Dengan menggunakan metode konseptual-komparatif melalui analisis tekstual terhadap karya-karya tafsir sufi klasik, penelitian ini memperbandingkan pengetahuan algoritmik—yang bertumpu pada komputasi statistik, pengenalan pola, dan pemrosesan data—dengan epistemologi sufi yang menekankan penyucian batin, pengalaman spiritual, dan *kashf* (penyingkapan) sebagai jalan menuju pemahaman yang lebih mendalam. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa meskipun AI mampu mensimulasikan bahasa interpretatif dan merangkum pandangan-pandangan ilmiah yang telah ada, AI tidak memiliki kesadaran eksistensial, pengalaman transformatif, dan intensionalitas spiritual. Keterbatasan tersebut menjadi semakin nyata dalam penafsiran ayat-ayat simbolik seperti Q. al-Nūr [24]:35, ketika para mufasir sufi membaca citra cahaya sebagai representasi pencerahan batin dan realitas metafisis. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa AI semestinya ditempatkan sebagai instrumen metodologis yang

mendukung penelitian Al-Qur'an, bukan sebagai pengganti otoritas interpretatif manusia. Meskipun AI dapat meningkatkan akses, pengorganisasian, dan analisis tekstual, teknologi tersebut tidak dapat sepenuhnya memahami hermeneutika spiritual yang menjadi inti dari *tafsīr ishārī*.

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A. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology over the last several decades has significantly transformed the ways human beings produce, access, and distribute knowledge. Among the most consequential developments is the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is capable of processing vast amounts of data, identifying linguistic patterns, and generating text that resembles human authorship. Within the field of religious studies, such technologies have increasingly been employed for various academic purposes, including sacred text analysis, reference retrieval, and the automated generation of explanatory materials. The rise of AI therefore introduces new possibilities for Islamic studies, particularly in the field of Qur'anic exegesis.[1]

At the same time, these developments raise a number of important epistemological concerns. Knowledge produced by AI is fundamentally algorithmic and data-driven, relying on computational processes that extract statistical regularities from large textual corpora. Although such models can identify linguistic and semantic relationships, this does not necessarily imply that they genuinely "understand" meaning in the same way human beings do. Consequently, when AI is used to explain or interpret religious texts, fundamental questions emerge regarding the limits of algorithmic systems in grasping the deeper layers of meaning contained within revelation.[2]

This issue becomes even more complex when considered in relation to the Islamic exegetical tradition, which possesses a broad and sophisticated hermeneutical framework. In the Islamic intellectual heritage, interpretation of the Qur'an involves not only linguistic analysis and historical contextualization, but also spiritual dimensions commonly described as inward meaning (*bāṭin*). The tradition of mystical exegesis (*tafsīr ṣūfī* or *tafsīr ishārī*) maintains that the Qur'an contains layers of meaning that cannot be fully accessed through rational inquiry alone, but require spiritual experience and purification of the soul.

[1] Klaus Schwab, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution: What It Means, How to Respond1," in *Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 29–34, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802208818.00008.
[2] Luciano Floridi and Josh Cowls, "A Unified Framework of Five Principles for AI in Society," *Harvard Data Science Review*, ahead of print, June 23, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1162/99608f92.8cd550d1.

Understanding the Qur'an, therefore, is not merely an intellectual exercise, but also a process of inward transformation central to the Sufi tradition.[3]

Throughout Islamic intellectual history, numerous Sufi scholars contributed significantly to the development of *tafsīr ishārī*. The exegetical works attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī, for example, demonstrate an interpretive method that emphasizes symbolic and spiritual meanings within Qur'anic verses. Likewise, the commentary of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī illustrates that mystical exegesis was not intended to negate literal meaning, but rather to uncover inner dimensions that complement the outward sense of the text. In later centuries, the metaphysical thought of Ibn ʿArabī profoundly shaped how Sufi thinkers understood Qur'anic symbolism and the relationship between revelation, cosmos, and human spiritual experience.[4]

The distinctive character of mystical exegesis indicates that interpretation is not solely a matter of linguistic analysis or textual structure, but is also deeply connected to the spiritual condition of the interpreter. In Sufi epistemology, deeper understanding of the Qur'an may arise through an inward experience known as *kashf* (unveiling or spiritual disclosure). This concept suggests that spiritual knowledge possesses an epistemological status distinct from rational or empirical knowledge. For this reason, Sufi approaches to the Qur'an often stress the necessity of purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) as a prerequisite for attaining deeper insight into divine revelation.[5]

When the phenomenon of mystical exegesis is examined alongside the rise of Artificial Intelligence, an important question emerges concerning the relationship between algorithmic knowledge and spiritual knowledge. AI can process Qur'anic texts and exegetical literature with remarkable speed, and it may summarize or explain the views of classical and contemporary scholars on particular verses. Yet such capacities remain dependent upon computational procedures that function through pattern recognition within textual data. In

[3] Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics : The Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (2006), http://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:8991/F?func=service&doc_library=BVB01&local_base=BVB01&doc_number=015723342&sequence=000002&line_number=0001&func_code=DB_RECORDS&service_type=MEDIA.

[4] Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (2006), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203019566.

[5] 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism : Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya Fi 'ilm al-Tasawwuf*, 1st ed, ed. Muhammad S. Eissa, trans. Alexander D. Knysh, The Great Books of Islamic Civilization (Reading, UK: Garnet Pub., 2007), 112–18, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=193297.

this sense, AI lacks existential experience, spiritual consciousness, and the inward transformation that underlies epistemology in the Sufi tradition.[6]

There is therefore a fundamental distinction between the way AI "processes" a text and the way a Sufi "understands" revealed scripture. If AI operates through algorithmic simulation of cognition, mystical exegesis is rooted in spiritual experience involving the existential dimensions of human life. This difference suggests that although digital technology may greatly contribute to the organization and analysis of religious data, it remains limited in its ability to apprehend the symbolic and spiritual meanings that characterize *tafsīr ishārī*.[7]

Based on this background, the present article aims to analyze the epistemological limitations of Artificial Intelligence in engaging the *ishārī* dimensions of the Qur'an. It will examine the nature of algorithmic knowledge underlying AI systems and compare it with the epistemology of Sufi exegesis grounded in spiritual experience. Through this analytical approach, the article argues that while AI may function as a valuable tool in Qur'anic studies, it cannot fully replace the spiritual dimension that lies at the heart of Sufi hermeneutics in understanding revelation.[8]

B. Epistemology of Artificial Intelligence Knowledge

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) over the past several decades has generated profound transformations across numerous fields of knowledge, including the social sciences, humanities, and religious studies. AI generally refers to computational systems designed to imitate certain human cognitive capacities such as learning, reasoning, pattern recognition, and language processing. In its more recent forms, AI is not only employed for data analysis, but also for generating texts, translating languages, and offering explanations of scientific as well as religious concepts.[9]

From an epistemological perspective, the kind of knowledge produced by AI differs fundamentally from human knowledge. Human understanding is typically formed through a combination of empirical experience, rational reflection, embodied perception, and

[6] Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 39.
[7] John R. Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3, no. 3 (September 1980): 417–24, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0140525x00005756.
[8] Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam. Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), http://files/457/rethinking-islam-common-questions-uncommon-answers.html.
[9] Stuart J. Russell and Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*, 2nd ed, Prentice Hall Series in Artificial Intelligence (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall/Pearson Education, 2003), 1–25; K. K. Mashood et al., "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE RECENT TRENDS AND APPLICATIONS IN INDUSTRIES," *Pakistan Journal of Science* 75, no. 2 (July 2023), https://doi.org/10.57041/pjs.v75i02.855.

subjective consciousness. By contrast, AI-generated knowledge emerges through computational algorithms that process massive quantities of data. This process commonly relies on methods known as *machine learning*, in which computer systems detect patterns from available datasets without being explicitly programmed for every specific task.[10]

Among the various branches of AI, Natural Language Processing (NLP) is particularly relevant for textual and religious studies. This technology enables machines to analyze, interpret, and generate human language. Through NLP, AI systems can process large textual corpora and identify semantic relationships, syntactic structures, and recurring lexical patterns. These capabilities make AI especially valuable for research involving religious texts—for example, tracing specific themes in the Qur'an, classifying exegetical literature, or analyzing networks of hadith transmission.[11]

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the "understanding" produced by AI is fundamentally simulational in nature. AI systems do not genuinely comprehend meaning in the same sense that human beings do; rather, they predict probable words or sentences based on statistical regularities learned from training data. What appears as understanding is therefore the result of probabilistic processes that exploit mathematical relationships among linguistic elements.[12]

This characteristic demonstrates several core features of algorithmic knowledge. First, AI knowledge is *data-driven*, meaning that it depends heavily on the quality, quantity, and diversity of the data used during model training. The broader and richer the available dataset, the greater the system's capacity to detect patterns and generate sophisticated responses. Yet this dependence also means that AI cannot transcend the informational limits of the corpora on which it has been trained.[13]

Second, AI knowledge is based on *statistical reasoning*. AI systems do not arrive at conclusions through reflective deliberation in the manner of human reasoning. Instead, they

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[10] Tom M. Mitchell, *Machine Learning*, McGraw-Hill Series in Computer Science (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 1–8, WorldCat.

[11] Tom B. Brown et al., "Language Models Are Few-Shot Learners," *NeurIPS Proceedings* 33 (October 2020): 1877–901, https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2005.14165; Majid Asgari-Bidhendi et al., "Rezwan: Leveraging Large Language Models for Comprehensive Hadith Text Processing: A 1.2M Corpus Development," arXiv, 2025, https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2510.03781.

[12] Emily M. Bender and Alexander Koller, "Climbing towards NLU: On Meaning, Form, and Understanding in the Age of Data," in *Proceedings of the 58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, ed. Dan Jurafsky et al. (Online: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2020), 5185–98, https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2020.acl-main.463.

[13] Luciano Floridi, *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: Principles, Challenges, and Opportunities* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 44–51, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883098.001.0001.

calculate probabilities concerning the likelihood of specific outputs or patterns. For this reason, AI-generated responses are more accurately described as data-based predictions rather than knowledge attained through conceptual insight or existential experience.[14]

Third, AI knowledge is *non-experiential*. Unlike human beings, who develop understanding through lived engagement with the world, AI possesses no direct experience, self-awareness, or inward consciousness. It does not encounter reality through sensation, embodiment, memory, or emotional depth. This constitutes one of the most fundamental distinctions between human knowing and computational output.[15]

Fourth, AI may be described as a form of *cognitive simulation*. It can imitate certain external patterns of human thought—such as answering questions, summarizing arguments, or explaining concepts—but such processes remain at the level of simulation. AI does not possess authentic consciousness or intrinsic understanding of the meanings contained in the information it processes.[16]

In recent years, the application of AI in religious studies has expanded considerably. Scholars increasingly use these technologies to analyze classical texts, identify intertextual relationships, and map the historical development of theological concepts within Islamic intellectual history. In Qur'anic studies, for instance, AI can assist in tracing thematic patterns across verses or linking particular passages to interpretations found in classical and modern tafsīr literature.[17]

At the same time, the use of AI in religious scholarship has generated significant debate. One frequently discussed issue concerns the authority of knowledge produced by AI systems. If AI can generate persuasive religious explanations, questions inevitably arise regarding the extent to which such knowledge can be considered valid within established intellectual and religious traditions. Several scholars therefore argue that AI should be

[14] Zhenyang Lin, "AI Language Models as Role-Playing Tools, Not Human Participants," *arXiv (Cornell University)*, ahead of print, February 6, 2024, https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2402.04470; Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie, *The Book of Why: The New Science of Cause and Effect*, First trade paperback edition (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 23–39.

[15] Robert Godwin-Jones, "Generative AI, Pragmatics, and Authenticity in Second Language Learning," *arXiv (Cornell University)*, ahead of print, October 18, 2024, https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2410.14395; Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason*, Rev. ed., [repr.] (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 287–310.

[16] Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"; Lixiang Yan, "From Passive Tool to Socio-Cognitive Teammate: A Conceptual Framework for Agentic AI in Human-AI Collaborative Learning," *arXiv (Cornell University)*, ahead of print, August 20, 2025, https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2508.14825.

[17] Johann P. Arnason and Armando Salvatore, *The Cambridge Companion to Islam and AI* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 195.

positioned as a research tool rather than as an interpretive authority capable of replacing qualified scholars or religious experts.[18]

In the context of Qur'anic exegesis, this issue becomes even more critical because interpretation of the Qur'an involves more than linguistic analysis alone. It also requires theological sensitivity, historical awareness, legal reasoning, and often spiritual discernment. AI may assist in rapidly accessing and organizing exegetical literature, yet the act of interpretation itself continues to demand complex hermeneutical judgment.[19]

Thus, while AI holds considerable potential for enriching research methodologies in Islamic studies, it remains subject to important epistemological limitations. The algorithmic knowledge generated by AI cannot fully substitute for human understanding shaped by intellectual reflection, existential experience, and spiritual depth. These limitations provide an essential starting point for understanding why AI encounters difficulty when confronted with the *ishārī* dimensions of Qur'anic interpretation, which are inherently linked to spiritual experience and inward transformation.[20]

C. *Tafsīr Ishārī* in the Sufi Tradition

Within the intellectual heritage of Islam, Qur'anic interpretation developed through a wide variety of methodological approaches that reflect the diversity of disciplines within the Islamic scholarly tradition. In addition to linguistic, historical, and theological approaches, there also emerged a spiritual mode of interpretation rooted in Sufism. This approach is commonly known as *tafsīr ishārī*, an exegetical method that seeks to uncover inward, symbolic, or spiritual meanings embedded within Qur'anic verses.[21]

The term *ishārī* derives from the Arabic word *ishārah*, meaning "indication," "gesture," or "subtle sign." In exegetical usage, it refers to meanings that are not immediately visible in the literal structure of the text but may be apprehended through spiritual depth and inward insight on the part of the interpreter. Sufi scholars generally emphasized that *tafsīr ishārī* was never intended to negate the outward (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the Qur'an, but

[18] Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Rulers of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Artificial Intelligence," *Business Horizons* 63, no. 1 (October 2019): 37–50, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2019.09.003.
[19] Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, "Artificial Intelligence and the Islamic Theology of Technology: From 'Means' to 'Meanings' and from 'Minds' to 'Hearts,'" *Religions* 16, no. 6 (June 2025): 796–796, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060796.
[20] Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs."
[21] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*, 1–12; Sema Ünal, "An Ottoman Commentator Karamânî's Approach to Ishari İnterpretation," *DergiPark (Istanbul University)*, July 10, 2022, https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/tafsir/issue/90725/1657592.

rather to complement it by revealing deeper spiritual dimensions. In this sense, mystical exegesis remained grounded in reverence for the literal meaning of revelation.[22]

The foundational concept underlying Sufi exegesis is the belief that the Qur'an possesses multiple layers of meaning. Classical mystical literature frequently distinguishes between the *ẓāhir* (outward) and the *bāṭin* (inward) dimensions of revelation. The outward meaning concerns the literal sense accessible through linguistic analysis and historical context, whereas the inward meaning refers to spiritual truths related to the soul's journey toward intimacy with God. This perspective demonstrates that the Qur'an is understood not merely as a text of legal rulings or theological doctrines, but also as a source of spiritual inspiration guiding inner transformation.[23]

In the Sufi exegetical tradition, access to the inward meanings of the Qur'an is closely connected to the spiritual condition of the interpreter. Sufi thinkers maintain that profound understanding of revelation depends not only upon intellectual competence, but also upon purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and depth of spiritual experience. Through devotional disciplines such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *mujāhadah* (spiritual struggle), and *riyāḍah* (ascetic discipline), the seeker may attain a state of inward awareness in which deeper meanings of Qur'anic verses become unveiled.[24]

This process of spiritual disclosure is often described by the term *kashf*, meaning the lifting of inner veils through which one gains deeper insight into spiritual realities. In Sufi epistemology, *kashf* is regarded as a legitimate mode of knowing that transcends purely rational or empirical forms of knowledge.[25] Nevertheless, mainstream Sufi scholars generally insisted that such experiences must never contradict the foundational principles of the Sharīʿah or the outward meaning of the Qur'an. Mystical exegesis therefore remained, in principle, within the framework of Islamic orthodoxy.[26]

These epistemological assumptions were later embodied in classical Sufi commentaries. One of the figures often identified as a pioneer of mystical Qur'anic

[22] Lahouari R. Taleb, *Sufi Tafsīr* (2021), 291–302, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315885360-30; Ignác Goldziher and Wolfgang H. Behn, *Schools of Koranic Commentators* (Wiesbaden: In Kommission bei Harrassowitz, 2006), 263–70.
[23] Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics : The Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, 14–29.
[24] Aleksandr Dmitrievič Knyš, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 115–30, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004194625.i-358; Benaouda Bensaid, Salah Machouche, and Fadila Grine, "A Qur'anic Framework for Spiritual Intelligence," *Religions* 5, no. 1 (February 2014): 179–98, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel5010179.
[25] Rihab Said Aqil and Abdul Mujib, "Intuition in Islamic and Contemporary Psychology," *JURNAL INDO-ISLAMIKA* 12, no. 1 (July 2022): 12–34, https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v12i1.24693.
[26] Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism : Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya Fi 'ilm al-Tasawwuf*, 210–23.

commentary is Sahl al-Tustarī. The commentary attributed to him offers interpretations that emphasize the spiritual significance of Qur'anic verses. In many instances, scriptural passages are read as symbols of the soul's inward journey toward God. This method demonstrates that for early Sufis, the Qur'an spoke not only of historical events or legal rulings, but also of the spiritual dynamics through which human beings draw nearer to the Divine.[27]

This symbolic tendency was further refined by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī. In his celebrated work *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, he developed an interpretive approach that combined textual scholarship with spiritual reflection. Al-Qushayrī sought to show that the inward meanings of the Qur'an should be understood as extensions of its outward meanings rather than as separate or contradictory interpretations.[28] Through this method, Sufi exegesis maintained continuity with the broader discipline of Qur'anic commentary within Islam.[29]

In later centuries, Ibn ʿArabī expanded this hermeneutic into a comprehensive metaphysical framework. In his numerous writings, he articulated a sophisticated metaphysical vision concerning the relationship between revelation, the cosmos, and human spiritual experience. For Ibn ʿArabī, the Qur'an was not merely a text conveying legal or moral teachings, but also a symbolic manifestation of divine reality accessible through spiritual realization.[30] This perspective transformed Sufi exegesis into one of the richest forms of spiritual hermeneutics in the Islamic tradition.[31]

One of the defining characteristics of Sufi hermeneutics is its extensive use of symbolic and metaphorical language in interpreting Qur'anic verses.[32] Sufi commentators often understand various elements of the Qur'anic text as symbols of inner human states. Narratives concerning the prophets, for example, may be read as allegories of the soul's spiritual journey, while cosmic events described in the Qur'an may symbolize processes of

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[27] Gerhard Böwerıng, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sahl al-Tustarī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 45–67, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110837056.

[28] Annabel Keeler, "Sūfī Tafsīr as a Mirror: Al-Qushayrī the Murshid in His Latācif al-Ishārāt," *Journal of Qur Anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (April 2006): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2006.8.1.1.

[29] 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, trans. Ibrāhīm Basyūnī (al-Qāhirah: Markaz Taḥqīq al-Turāth, 1983), Vol. 1, 5-9.

[30] Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina, "Ibn 'Arabī, Fiqh, and a Literal Reading of the Qur'an: Approaching the Outward Divine Commands as a Spiritual Realization," *ESENSIA Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 2 (October 2018): 161–70, https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v19i2.1135; Ismail Lala, "Muḥammad as the Qur'an in Ibn 'Arabī's Metaphysics," *Sophia* 63, no. 2 (May 2023): 195–213, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-022-00941-0.

[31] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1989), 112–46.

[32] Moh. Mauluddin et al., "Sufi Hermeneutics and Symbolic Tafsir in the Javanese Manuscript Hakikate Bismillah," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (July 2025): 413–43, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6315.

inward transformation in the believer's life. Such symbolic interpretation allows the Qur'anic text to remain spiritually relevant across different times and circumstances.[33]

Accordingly, *tafsīr ishārī* may be understood as a mode of interpretation that emphasizes the spiritual depth of revelation. It does not seek merely to explain the literal meaning of verses, but also to disclose symbolic and inward dimensions capable of guiding the human being in the spiritual path. This characteristic reveals that Sufi exegesis is grounded in a distinctive epistemology—one that combines intellectual reflection with spiritual experience.

In the context of the present study, the epistemological character of Sufi exegesis becomes particularly significant when compared with the epistemology of algorithmic knowledge in Artificial Intelligence. Whereas AI derives knowledge through computational processes based on data and statistical patterns, Sufi interpretation derives understanding through spiritual experience and inward transformation.[34] This fundamental difference provides the basis for examining the limitations of Artificial Intelligence in apprehending the *ishārī* dimensions of the Qur'an.[35]

D. Comparative Analysis of the Epistemology of Artificial Intelligence and Sufi Exegesis

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the field of textual analysis has created new possibilities for religious studies, including Qur'anic exegesis. Recent AI systems have shown a remarkable capacity to process extensive textual corpora, detect recurring linguistic patterns, and generate plausible explanatory responses regarding concepts found in religious literature. Yet these capabilities also raise significant epistemological questions regarding the extent to which algorithms can truly engage the meanings of religious texts that contain symbolic, metaphysical, and spiritual dimensions. To address this issue more adequately, it is necessary to compare the epistemology of algorithmic knowledge in AI with the epistemology of interpretation in the Sufi tradition.

Such a comparison reveals fundamental differences in the ways these two systems of knowledge understand and generate meaning. Artificial Intelligence acquires knowledge through computational processes grounded in data analysis and statistical pattern

[33] Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 301–15.
[34] Boumediene Hamzi, "Redefining Reality: An Islamic Metaphysical Critique of AI's Data-Centric Worldview," *Philosophies* 11, no. 1 (February 2026): 18–18, https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies11010018.
[35] S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, in *Gifford Lectures* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 301–20.

recognition. It operates through algorithms designed to identify relationships among linguistic elements within massive textual datasets. Through machine learning, AI can predict words, sentences, and semantic structures based on recurring patterns discovered in training corpora.[36]

By contrast, within the Sufi tradition, knowledge of the inward meanings of the Qur'an is not attained solely through rational analysis of the text. Sufi thinkers maintain that understanding revelation also involves spiritual experience emerging through purification of the soul and the inward journey toward God. Consequently, the epistemology of mystical exegesis depends not only on intellectual ability, but also on the interpreter's inner transformation as a prerequisite for deeper insight into divine revelation.[37] These differences may be examined through three interrelated dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and hermeneutics.

From an ontological perspective, Artificial Intelligence is a computational system designed to process information through mathematical algorithms. AI possesses no consciousness, subjective experience, or existential being in the human sense. It functions entirely through computational mechanisms that manipulate linguistic symbols in digital form. [38]

Sufi exegesis, however, is rooted in the existential reality of the human being as a spiritual subject. In the Sufi tradition, understanding the Qur'an is not merely an intellectual activity, but is inseparable from the spiritual condition of the interpreter. Inward experiences such as *kashf* (unveiling), *ilhām* (inspiration), and *mushāhadah* (spiritual witnessing) are regarded as dimensions of knowledge through which deeper meanings of revelation may be accessed.[39] There is therefore a fundamental ontological distinction between AI as a computational system and the human being as a spiritual subject capable of inner transformation in the process of understanding revelation.

Beyond ontology, the contrast becomes sharper at the level of epistemology. The knowledge generated by Artificial Intelligence is *data-driven*, meaning that it depends upon the datasets used in the training of the model. AI systems acquire "knowledge" through statistical analysis of relationships among words, phrases, and sentences within extensive

[36] Russell and Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence*, 25–48; Godwin-Jones, "Generative AI, Pragmatics, and Authenticity in Second Language Learning."
[37] Knyš, *Islamic Mysticism*, 115–32.
[38] Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs."
[39] Mutawali Mutawali, "'Irfānī Epistemology: Revealing the Inner Meaning of the Qur'Anic Verses in the Classical Interpretation," *ULUMUNA* 20, no. 2 (December 2016): 353–72, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v20i2.887.

textual corpora. This enables AI to generate coherent explanations, but such outputs remain, at their core, probabilistic predictions based on linguistic patterns.[40]

By contrast, the epistemology of Sufi exegesis regards spiritual experience as a valid source of knowledge. Sufi scholars argue that deeper understanding of the Qur'an may be attained through purification of the soul, which allows the possibility of spiritual disclosure (*kashf*).[41] Within this framework, knowledge is derived not only through rational inquiry, but also through inward experience arising from proximity between the human being and God.

This distinction may be summarized as follows:

Epistemology of AI	**Epistemology of Sufi Exegesis**
Algorithm-based	Spiritually grounded
Data and statistics	*Kashf* and *ilhām*
Cognitive simulation	Inner transformation
Probabilistic	Intuitive and spiritual

This comparison demonstrates that the two systems of knowledge operate within profoundly different epistemological frameworks.

A further contrast emerges at the hermeneutical level—that is, in the manner texts are understood and interpreted. Artificial Intelligence approaches texts through the analysis of linguistic patterns and statistical relationships among words within a dataset. This allows AI to recognize semantic and syntactic structures, but it does not imply existential or spiritual comprehension of meaning.[42]

By contrast, Sufi hermeneutics views the Qur'anic text as a spiritual symbol capable of disclosing multiple layers of significance related to the soul's journey. Sufi commentators frequently interpret Qur'anic verses as symbols of inner states, stages of spiritual progress, or the relationship between humanity and the Divine. In this approach, revelation is understood not merely as a source of information, but also as an instrument of spiritual transformation.[43]

[40] Louise Vigeant, "Generative AI and Argument Creativity," *Informal Logic* 44, no. 1 (March 2024): 44–64, https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v44i1.8258; Bender and Koller, "Climbing towards NLU: On Meaning, Form, and Understanding in the Age of Data."
[41] Taleb, *Sufi Tafsīr*.
[42] Adil Hussain and Khursheed Ahmad Qazi, "Textual Alchemy: AI, Authorship and the Shifting Paradigms of Interpretation," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 15, no. 4 (December 2023), https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n4.08.
[43] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*, 77–104.

This symbolic method grants mystical exegesis a hermeneutical depth that cannot easily be reduced to linguistic analysis alone. Many symbolic meanings in the Qur'an are linked to spiritual experiences that cannot be fully articulated through literal language.

One of the central concepts of Sufi exegesis is that the inward meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Qur'an is closely related to existential human experience. In this perspective, understanding the deepest meanings of revelation is not simply the result of intellectual analysis, but the fruit of a spiritual journey undertaken by the interpreter.

For this reason, mystical commentators often stress that one cannot access the inward meanings of the Qur'an without undergoing purification of the soul and spiritual transformation. Such understanding emerges through inner experience that connects the human being with divine reality.[44]

When this concept is compared with the operational logic of Artificial Intelligence, a substantial epistemological gap becomes evident. AI can process texts and summarize the opinions of scholars concerning a given verse, yet it lacks the existential experience through which spiritual understanding of revelation might arise.

The comparison between the epistemology of Artificial Intelligence and that of Sufi exegesis demonstrates that the two operate within fundamentally different frameworks of knowledge. AI functions through algorithmic cognitive simulation, while mystical exegesis is rooted in spiritual experience and the inward transformation of the human subject. This foundational difference explains why Artificial Intelligence faces intrinsic limitations in apprehending the *ishārī* dimensions of the Qur'an.[45]

E. The Limitations of Artificial Intelligence in Grasping the *Ishārī* Dimensions of the Qur'an

While the previous section outlined theoretical differences, the following discussion focuses on their practical consequences. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language analysis has opened new possibilities for the study of religious texts. AI systems are capable of processing vast amounts of textual data, identifying linguistic patterns, and generating explanations concerning concepts found in religious literature. In the context of Qur'anic studies, such technologies can assist researchers in tracing thematic connections between verses, accessing exegetical literature more efficiently, and mapping scholarly interpretations of particular passages. Nevertheless, these capacities remain subject to

[44] Taleb, *Sufi Tafsīr*.
[45] Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 301–20.

important limitations, especially when confronted with the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of Qur'anic interpretation known as *tafsīr ishārī*.

The *ishārī* dimension of Qur'anic exegesis involves far more than linguistic analysis of the text. It is also related to the spiritual experience of the interpreter and the depth of inward reflection upon revelation. Consequently, when Artificial Intelligence is employed to explain or interpret the Qur'an, a critical question arises: to what extent can an algorithmic system apprehend such spiritual dimensions? To address this question, this section outlines several major limitations of AI in engaging the *ishārī* aspects of the Qur'an.

The first limitation concerns the realm of experience. Artificial Intelligence possesses no existential experience comparable to that of human beings. AI acquires "knowledge" through computational processes that analyze patterns in data rather than through direct engagement with reality. What AI fundamentally lacks is not merely data, but the forms of inward awareness, lived spiritual experience, and existential striving that occupy a central place in Sufi accounts of knowledge.[46]

In the mystical tradition, understanding the inward meanings of the Qur'an is often associated with spiritual practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *riyāḍah* (discipline), and *mujāhadah* (spiritual striving). Through these practices, the seeker may attain a level of inward awareness that makes possible *kashf*, or spiritual unveiling, through which deeper meanings of Qur'anic verses become manifest.[47] Such experiences cannot be reduced to computational processes or statistical analysis of language.

Because AI lacks spiritual experience, it cannot truly undergo the unveiling of inward meaning described in the Sufi tradition. At most, it can reproduce descriptions of such experiences based on available textual sources, but it cannot participate in them directly.

The second limitation concerns ontology, namely the basic mode of being of AI as a computational system. At its core, Artificial Intelligence remains a computational architecture that operates by processing symbolic representations encoded as digital data rather than by inhabiting the world as an experiencing subject. It has no self-awareness, free will, or existential capacity for spiritual transformation.[48]

[46] Knyš, *Islamic Mysticism*, 115–32; A. M. Khalili, "Artificial Intelligence: A Kalam and Sufi Perspective," *Preprints.Org*, ahead of print, June 6, 2023, https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202306.0363.v1.
[47] Mutawali, "'Irfānī Epistemology: Revealing the Inner Meaning of the Qur'Anic Verses in the Classical Interpretation."
[48] Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs."

By contrast, within the Sufi tradition, understanding the Qur'an is often regarded as part of the broader spiritual transformation of the human being. Sufi thinkers emphasize that the seeker's inward journey influences the manner in which revelation is understood. Purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and spiritual discipline are believed to open deeper layers of Qur'anic meaning.[49]

Because AI lacks existential being as a spiritual subject, it cannot experience the inner transformation associated with the Sufi path. There is therefore a profound ontological distinction between AI as a computational entity and the human being as a spiritual subject undergoing purification and transformation.

The third limitation relates to hermeneutics, or the manner in which texts are understood and interpreted. Artificial Intelligence approaches texts through analysis of linguistic patterns and statistical relationships among words within a corpus. This method allows AI to recognize semantic structures, but it does not fully capture the symbolic and spiritual dimensions frequently encountered in Sufi exegesis.[50]

In mystical hermeneutics, the Qur'an is often read as a symbolic text reflecting the dynamics of the relationship between humanity and God. Sufi commentators interpret various elements of revelation as symbols of the spiritual journey, inward states of the soul, or particular experiences of divine proximity. Such symbolic interpretation requires a hermeneutical sensitivity that depends not only upon linguistic competence, but also upon spiritual depth.[51]

AI may recognize, on the basis of prior literature, that a verse has been read symbolically. Yet recognition of interpretive patterns is not identical to participation in the depth of meaning such symbolism is intended to disclose. Its understanding therefore remains descriptive rather than participatory; it can report symbolism, but not inhabit its experiential meaning.

Although AI faces serious limitations in grasping the *ishārī* dimensions of the Qur'an, it nonetheless possesses considerable value as a supporting instrument in exegetical research. AI can assist scholars by organizing large bodies of tafsīr literature, identifying

[49] Taleb, *Sufi Tafsīr*.
[50] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*, 77–104.
[51] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*; Ross Woodman, "Metaphor and the Language of Revelation," *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 1997): 1–27, https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-8.1.1(1997).

relationships among concepts in the Qur'an, and accelerating data analysis within Islamic studies.[52]

In this sense, AI should be positioned as a methodological tool that supports interpretation rather than replacing the human role in the interpretive process. Genuine engagement with the spiritual meanings of the Qur'an still requires the participation of human subjects endowed with consciousness, lived experience, moral responsibility, and inward reflection.

The limitations of Artificial Intelligence in apprehending the *ishārī* dimensions of the Qur'an do not imply that such technologies are without benefit for Islamic studies. On the contrary, these limitations clarify the importance of maintaining a balance between the use of digital tools and respect for the intellectual and spiritual traditions through which revelation has historically been understood.

AI may greatly enhance access, organization, and comparative analysis of textual materials. Yet the deepest symbolic and spiritual meanings of revelation remain tied to dimensions of human existence—consciousness, transformation, devotion, and inner experience—that cannot be replicated through algorithmic computation. For this reason, AI can assist the study of the Qur'an, but it cannot fully replace the spiritual hermeneutics at the heart of *tafsīr ishārī*.[53]

F. Case Study: The *Ishārī* Dimension in the Interpretation of Q. al-Nūr [24]: 35

One of the Qur'anic verses most frequently discussed in the Sufi exegetical tradition is the celebrated Verse of Light (*Āyat al-Nūr*), found in Q. al-Nūr [24]: 35. The verse begins:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ...

Allāhu nūru al-samāwāti wa al-arḍ. Mathalu nūrihī ka-mishkātin fīhā miṣbāḥ...

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp…

This verse contains an exceptionally rich metaphorical structure and has therefore attracted the attention of exegetes from numerous interpretive traditions. In classical linguistic and theological commentaries, the verse is commonly understood as a parable of divine guidance illuminating the hearts of believers. Within the Sufi tradition, however, it is

[52] Muhammad H. Bashir et al., *Arabic Natural Language Processing for Qur'anic Research: A Systematic Review*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.36227/techrxiv.14381891.v1.
[53] Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 301–20.

frequently interpreted as a symbol of the human spiritual journey toward inward illumination.

In the commentary attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī, the metaphorical elements of the verse are interpreted as symbols of the spiritual constitution of the human being. The term *mishkāt* (niche), for example, is understood as representing the human breast or chest, while *miṣbāḥ* (lamp) symbolizes the light of faith placed by God within the heart. Accordingly, the verse is not merely about cosmic light, but also about the spiritual light that illuminates the inner being of the believer.[54]

This symbolic approach demonstrates that the Qur'anic text may be read as a representation of the inner dynamics of spiritual life. Light in this verse is not simply a linguistic metaphor; it is also an experiential reality encountered by the seeker on the path toward nearness to God.

While early Sufi interpretations focused on the psychology of faith, later thinkers such as Ibn ʿArabī extended the verse into metaphysical cosmology. Within his metaphysical framework, "light" in this verse symbolizes the manifestation of divine reality throughout the cosmos. For Ibn ʿArabī, all existence is fundamentally a *tajallī* (self-disclosure or manifestation) of divine light. Thus, the verse not only addresses the relationship between God and humanity, but also describes the metaphysical structure of existence itself.[55]

From this perspective, the symbolic elements of the verse—such as the niche, lamp, glass, and oil—represent various degrees of spiritual and ontological reality. Such interpretations reveal that the inward meanings of the Qur'an are often connected to profound metaphysical reflection concerning God, the human being, and the universe.

The examples above demonstrate that Sufi exegesis operates through a hermeneutical method that emphasizes spiritual symbolism within the Qur'anic text. The verse is not understood merely as a literal statement, but as a symbolic disclosure containing deeper spiritual meanings. In this framework, understanding revelation requires more than linguistic analysis; it also demands spiritual sensitivity to the symbolic truths embedded within the text.[56]

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[54] Böwerıng, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sahl al-Tustarī*, 89–97; Saeid Khanabadi and Mahdi Dehghani Firouzabadi, "The Notion of 'Light' Interpreted in 'The Niche of the Lights' of Ghazali," *SHILAP Revista de Lepidopterología* 7, no. 24 (December 2020): 49–58, https://doi.org/10.22034/imjpl.2020.8773.1003.

[55] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 146–65.

[56] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*, 101–18.

This hermeneutical dimension makes mystical exegesis one of the most sophisticated forms of Qur'anic interpretation. Meaning is generated not only through language, but also through the interpreter's spiritual experience and the metaphysical worldview informing his understanding of reality.

When this Sufi approach is compared with the operational logic of Artificial Intelligence, a significant epistemological gap becomes evident. AI systems may recognize that the verse contains metaphorical structures and may even summarize a range of scholarly interpretations associated with it. Yet such capacities remain confined to the level of textual analysis.

AI can explain that *mishkāt* symbolizes the heart or that light signifies divine guidance, but it lacks the spiritual experience through which inward understanding emerges in the Sufi tradition. In other words, AI can describe symbolism, but it cannot participate in the spiritual reality symbolized by the text.

This limitation indicates that the *ishārī* dimension of Qur'anic interpretation cannot be fully reduced to linguistic or statistical analysis. The inward meaning of revelation is linked to spiritual experience involving consciousness, moral refinement, and inner transformation. Therefore, although Artificial Intelligence may greatly assist in accessing and organizing exegetical literature, it remains limited in apprehending the depth of spiritual meaning that lies at the core of Sufi hermeneutics.[57]

G. Implications for Tafsīr Studies in the Digital Age

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language analysis and data processing has brought significant changes to research methodologies across many academic disciplines, including the study of Qur'anic exegesis. Digital technologies enable researchers to access classical sources more efficiently, process vast amounts of textual data, and identify thematic relationships that were previously difficult to detect through manual methods. In this context, AI holds considerable potential to enrich methodological approaches within tafsīr studies in the digital age.[58]

One of the most important implications of this development is the transformation in the way exegetical literature is accessed. Traditionally, research in tafsīr relied heavily upon close manual reading of classical commentaries, many of which are extensive in size and

[57] Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 301–20.
[58] Rinda ʿAbd al-Raʾūf ʿAlī Ḥamad, "The Utilization of Artificial Intelligence in the Service of the Noble Qurʾān and Its Sciences," *Al-Idah | Shaykh Zayed Islamic Centre University of Peshawar* 43 (January 2026), https://doi.org/10.37556/al-idah.043.02.0958.

dispersed across diverse intellectual traditions. With the assistance of digital technologies, these texts can now be organized into searchable databases that allow keyword retrieval, concept mapping, and rapid comparison of scholarly opinions. This development creates new opportunities for more comprehensive and systematic studies of Qur'anic interpretation.[59]

Beyond facilitating access to sources, AI technologies can also be employed for thematic analysis of the Qur'an itself. Through techniques of Natural Language Processing (NLP), researchers may identify recurring patterns within the Qur'anic text, such as relationships among verses dealing with similar themes or connections between theological concepts across different chapters. Such methods may significantly expand the scope of thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*), which has become an important trend in modern Qur'anic studies.[60]

Yet these methodological advantages must be accompanied by awareness of the epistemological limitations of AI. As discussed in previous sections, AI functions through computational processes based on data and statistical patterns. While such systems can identify linguistic structures and semantic relations within texts, they do not possess existential experience or spiritual consciousness—both of which have played important roles in traditions of mystical hermeneutics. Consequently, the use of AI in Qur'anic interpretation must be situated within an appropriate methodological framework so as not to create misunderstandings concerning the nature of the knowledge produced by these systems.[61]

For this reason, Artificial Intelligence should be understood primarily as a research tool rather than as a substitute for intellectual authority in interpreting the Qur'an. The act of interpretation still requires human participation as a hermeneutical subject endowed with critical reflection, historical awareness, ethical judgment, and spiritual depth. Without these dimensions, Qur'anic interpretation risks being reduced to a merely linguistic exercise that loses much of its theological and spiritual richness.

Closely related to this issue is the growing need to integrate technological approaches with classical scholarly traditions in *tafsīr* studies. Such integration may be achieved by using

[59] Thon Thowi Hamdi and Masruhan Masruhan, "The Role of Digital Tools in Qur'anic Research and Tafsir: Improving Methodology and Interpretation," *AT-TURAS Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (March 2025): 124–36, https://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v12i1.9895.
[60] Bashir et al., *Arabic Natural Language Processing for Qur'anic Research: A Systematic Review*.
[61] Ḥamad, "The Utilization of Artificial Intelligence in the Service of the Noble Qur'ān and Its Sciences."

AI to organize, classify, and map the vast corpus of exegetical literature, while the interpretive process itself remains grounded in methodologies developed within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Used carefully, AI may strengthen contemporary *tafsīr* research while leaving intact the intellectual disciplines and spiritual sensibilities that have historically shaped the field.

At the same time, the rise of AI provides Muslim scholars with an opportunity to reconsider the role of spirituality in understanding revelation. If modern technology becomes increasingly capable of imitating many cognitive functions associated with human intelligence, then the spiritual dimension of religious experience becomes all the more important to preserve. Within Qur'anic interpretation, the Sufi tradition offers a perspective that reminds scholars that understanding revelation is not limited to rational analysis, but also involves the depth of human spiritual experience.[62]

Taken together, the development of Artificial Intelligence presents not only challenges for *tafsīr* studies, but also valuable opportunities to formulate new approaches that combine digital innovation with Islamic hermeneutical traditions. Through a balanced engagement between methodological advancement and respect for intellectual and spiritual heritage, tafsīr studies in the digital age may continue to develop without losing the depth of meaning that lies at the heart of understanding the Qur'an.

H. Concluding Remarks

This study has demonstrated that the encounter between Artificial Intelligence and the Sufi tradition of Qur'anic interpretation reveals a fundamental epistemological divide. On the one hand, AI offers substantial benefits for contemporary *tafsīr* studies through its ability to process large corpora of texts, identify linguistic patterns, organize exegetical materials, and support comparative research. In this sense, AI represents a valuable methodological development for Qur'anic scholarship in the digital age.

On the other hand, the *ishārī* tradition of interpretation operates within a framework of knowledge that exceeds computational logic. Sufi exegesis is rooted not merely in linguistic analysis, but in inward purification, spiritual discipline, existential transformation, and the experiential unveiling of deeper meanings. Because AI lacks consciousness, lived experience, and spiritual intentionality, it cannot genuinely participate in the epistemic

[62] Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 301–20.

processes through which such meanings are disclosed. It may describe mystical interpretations, but it cannot experience the spiritual realities to which they refer.

The comparative analysis therefore indicates that AI should be understood as an assistive tool rather than an interpretive authority. Its greatest contribution lies in enhancing access to sources, accelerating textual analysis, and expanding methodological possibilities for scholars. Yet the deepest symbolic and spiritual dimensions of revelation remain inseparable from the human condition—reflection, devotion, moral struggle, and inner transformation.

Ultimately, the rise of AI does not diminish the relevance of classical hermeneutical traditions; rather, it highlights their continuing importance. As technology becomes increasingly capable of simulating cognition, the uniquely human capacities central to spiritual understanding become even more significant. For future Qur'anic studies, a balanced integration of digital innovation and inherited intellectual-spiritual traditions offers the most promising path forward.

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