

Fundamentals of *Tasawwuf*

Purification of the Soul

Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani

Preface

In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

All praise to Allah Almighty who has created the universe from absolute nothingness; who has brought all creations into existence and illuminated them with His Light, adorning them with His Names and Attributes; and who reflects them in the mirror of His Reality. He has honored His special servants by letting them behold the splendor of His light; and by manifesting to them His abiding presence He has raised them to an exalted station.

May Allah's blessing and greeting of peace be on our beloved Prophet Muammad (s), who is a Sun from the Unseen Light of the Divine Presence, who came forth and outshone the Light of the sun. As he perceived he informed, and as he discovered, he described. With his Light the Light of Prophecy pierced forth, and the lights of prophets thereby appeared. You cannot find among lights, one more luminous than his. Who can be brighter than the one who dawns forth on all creation? His fervor has preceded all fervors, his existence preceded Absolute Nothingness, and his name preceded the Pen, because he was before all that is. He is the Master of this creation. His name is Muammad (s). His Attribute is One. His word is confirmed. His attributes are most honored. O Wonder at his appearance, at his visions, at his greatness, at his fame, at his Light, at his Purity, at his Godliness, at his Power, at his Visions, at his Reality, at his Essence.

He was and he is from preeternity to posteternity. He was known before the universes. He was known before Creation. He was known in Allah's Divine Presence as the Heart of the Essence, where the Essence was manifesting itself through him. He was the Sincere Servant to his Lord from that time. He was mentioned before there was a Before and he will be after there is an After. He is the Sign (*ayat*) for all signs. He is the pearls of all jewels. He is the Rainbow of all colors. He is connected with Allah, and neither is he nor can he ever be disconnected. All others' knowledge is but a drop in his Ocean granted him by Allah. The centuries are but moments in his time. He is the Root and Basis of Existence--for if not for him there would be no other creation. He is the First in Connection. He is the last in prophethood. He is the Internal in Truth and the External in Knowledge.

Allah sent him as His Representative from His Light and as a Sincere Servant for His Creation, raising him up to His Divine Presence and placing his name beside His Name.

He was a prophet when Adam was between clay and water. Greetings of peace be on his family and illustrious companions -- Allah be pleased with them all -- who were guided by the greatness of his deeds, the clarity of his speech, the light of his guidance, and the perfection of his religion; who drank from the Oceans of his good manners, of his ethics, and of his perfect state; who bathed themselves in the Spring of his secrets of the attainment of Knowledge and Truth.

Tasawwuf is the Path of *Tazkiyya* - Purification of the Self - of the Companions of the Prophet (s) and those who follow them. It consists in continuous worshipping in every action, both external and internal, with complete and perfect discipline according to the Sunnah of the Prophet (s). It consists in maintaining the highest level of conduct and leaving wrongdoing, cleaving to the Sunnah and the Shari`ah. It consists in keeping awareness of the Presence of Allah, Almighty and Exalted, on the way to self-effacement and complete experience of the Divine Presence.

Its root has two branches: if someone receives from both these roots he will gain everything in this life. The first root draws completely from the example of the Prophet (s), and the second root draws from the example of the perfected shaikh, who will direct the seeker to the Presence of Allah subhanahu wa ta`ala. To these shaikhs the reality of *Dhikr* -- Remembrance of God -- is to banish heedlessness and to exist in the Divine Presence.

There are two ways to practice *Dhikr*:

- 1) The seeker may make *Dhikr* on the tongue.
- 2) The seeker may also make the silent *Dhikr*, which is recited in the heart.

Both practices are mentioned often in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah of the Prophet (s), and by means of it one can reach, and be honored by being in, the Divine Presence. Through constant *dhikr*, one trains the heart to be constantly present with the Almighty Lord.

The First Spiritual Inheritors of the Prophet (s) : Abu Bakr as-Siddiq and ʿAli ibn Abi Talib

Imam Amad relates in his *Musnad* the following hadith with a rigorously authentic (*sahih*) chain of transmission:

"Abu Bakr does not surpass you for fasting much or praying, but because of a secret that took root in his heart."

The Prophet (s) alluded to this secret when he said, in the following hadiths mentioned respectively by Suyuti in *al-hawi li-l-Fatawa* and by Bukhari in his *Sahih*.

"Whatever Allah poured into my breast I have poured into the breast of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq."

"Allah has expanded my breast for what He has expanded the breast of Abu Bakr and ʿUmar to receive."

This knowledge is again alluded to in the following authentic hadith related by Tirmidhi:

"I am the City of Knowledge and ʿAli is the Door."

This knowledge is the heavenly knowledge possessed only by prophets and their inheritors, the saints. The latter are defined thus by sayyidina ʿAli (r):

"They are the fewest in number, the greatest in rank in the sight of God. By them does God protect His creation. They are His proof on earth, until they bequeath it to their likes, and plant it firmly in their hearts. By them knowledge has taken by assault the reality of things, so that they found easy what those given to comfort found hard, and found intimacy in what the ignorant found desolate. They accompanied the world with bodies whose spirits were attached to the Highest Regard. They are the vicegerents of Allah, the Exalted, in His land. How one yearns, how one yearns to see them!"

The Raison d'être of Sufism

From its advent, religion was beset with enemies from within and without, who tried to destroy its very foundations and pillars: sometimes through outright atheism but more often through free- thought and corruption. In general, spiritual-minded people today no longer have advisors and teachers who possess the caliber to counsel them and to train them in the teachings of the prophets and saints. Unfortunately, they do not find guides capable of leading them in the teachings of Islam on that high road of morality and ethics that constitute religion's essential character.

On the contrary, today we see cases of would-be scholars (*ʿulama*) who are not only unscholarly, but are also ignorant and sometimes even corrupt. Indeed, in many places, they have gotten the upper hand and now prominently occupy seats of religious authority. Sunk in lives of pleasure and good living, they play at the role of guiding and advising and preaching to the Muslim community but in reality they have cast aside the simple lifestyle and regimen of self-denial practiced by the Prophet (s), his Companions (r) and those of the generation immediately succeeding them.

Confronted with this situation, how can we not ask: In which direction is our Umma (Community) headed?

It is true that timely measures could have been taken by communities to prepare good and wise scholars whose unstained lives would have allowed them to function as models and to undertake the mission of reminding the Nation of the Prophet (s) of the message brought forth in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Way of life of the Prophet (s)). Then, our condition would have been improved and we would have been rewarded and lifted to those stations that Allah ordained for us both in this life and in the Hereafter.

The situation was not always as I have described it. On the contrary, it used to be that this sacred mission, this great service of calling the Umma to remembrance of its proper heritage framed by the Qur'an and set out in the Prophet's Sunnah, was performed by devoted and sincere scholars of spirituality. These individuals, in time, came to be known by the name of 'sufi', a word derived from the Arabic *safa'a* which means "to purify," because of the assiduousness with which they applied themselves to holding firmly to the Sunnah and employing it to purify their character from all defects in behavior and morality.

The Schools of Purification (*tazkiya*)

We know for example, that in the first century after the Hijra, renunciation of the world (*zuhd*) grew as a reaction against worldliness in the society. Derived in principle from the order of Allah to His Righteous Apostle to purify people [Qur'an 2:129, 2:151, 3:164, 9:103, 62:2], the practitioners of this way clove firmly to the Prophetic way of life as it was reflected in the lives of his Companions and their Successors, in the ways they employed to purify their hearts and character from bad manners and to inculcate in their own selves and in those around them the manners and upright moral stature of the Best of Mankind, the Prophet Muhammad (s).

Through slow evolution, this regimen ended up as a school of practical thought and moral action endowed with its own structure of rule and principle. This became the basis used by Sufi scholars to direct people on the Right Path. As a result, the world soon witnessed the development of a variety of schools of purification of the ego (*tazkiyat an-nafs*). Sufi thought, as it spread everywhere, served as a dynamic force behind the growth and fabric of Islamic education. This tremendous advance occurred from the first century after the Hijra to the seventh, in parallel with the following developments:

- Development of the bases of *fiqh* (Law and Jurisprudence), through the Imams (r).
- Development of the bases of *`aqidah* (System of Belief) through al-Ash`ari and others;
- Development of the science of *hadith* (Sayings of the Prophet (s)), resulting in the six authentic collections and innumerable others;
- Development of the arts of *nahu* and *balagha* (Speaking and Writing Arabic).

Tariqat or "path" is a term derived from the hadith of the Prophet (s) ordering his followers to follow his sunna and the sunna of his successors. The meaning of sunna is "path," "way," which is also the meaning of *taraqat* referred to in the Qur'anic verse, **"Had they kept straight on the path (*tariqat*), We would have made them drink of a most limpid water"** [72:16]. *Tariqat* thus came to be a term applied to groups of individuals belonging to the school of thought pursued by a particular scholar or "shaikh," as such a person was often called.

Though these shaikhs applied different methods in training their followers, the core of each one's program was identical. The situation was not unlike what we find in faculties of medicine and law today. The approach in different faculties may be different, but the body of law, the state of art in medicine remains essentially the same everywhere. When

students graduate from these faculties, each student bears the stamp of its character. Yet, none are considered less a lawyer or doctor because their respective affiliations differ.

In a similar way, the student product of a particular shaikh will bear the stamp of that shaikh's teaching and character. Consequently, the names given to various schools of Sufi thought differ according to the names and the perspectives of their founders. This variation manifests itself in a more concrete fashion, in the different supererogatory devotions, known as *awrad*, a *zab* or *adhkar*, used as the practical methodology of spiritual formation. Such differences, however, have nothing to do with the religious principle. In basic principle, the Sufi schools are essentially the same.

The Sufi regimen under which individuals undertook the path to Allah, was a finely-honed itinerary which charted the course of inward and outward progress in religious faith and practice (*din*). Following the tradition of the Companions of the Prophet (s) who used to frequent his company named Ahl as-Suffa ("the People of the Bench"), the practitioners of this regimen lived a communal life. Their dwelling-places were the mosque-schools (*zawaya*), border forts (*ribat*), and guest-houses (*khaniqah*) where they gathered together on specific occasions dedicated to the traditional festivals of the Islamic calendar (*`id*). They also gathered on a regular basis in associations for the conveying of knowledge (*suhba*), assemblies to invoke the names of Allah and recite the *adhkar* (plural of *dhikr*, "remembrance") inherited from the Prophetic Tradition, and circles of study in Islamic law. Yet another reason for their gathering was to hear inspired preaching and moral exhortations (*wi`az*).

The shaikhs exhorted their students to actively respond to Allah and His Messenger (s), to cleanse their hearts and purify their souls from the lower desires prompted by the ego and to reform erroneous beliefs. All this was accomplished by cleaving to the Prophetic Sunnah. The methods of remembering Allah which they instilled in their students were the very same methods passed down from the Prophet (s). In this way, they propagated upright behavior both through word and deed, while they encouraged the believers to devote themselves to Allah Almighty with their whole hearts. The aim of their endeavor then was nothing less than obtaining Allah's satisfaction and inspiring love for His Prophet (s). In short, what they aimed for was a state where God would be pleased with them even as they were pleased with God.

These shaikhs therefore were the radiant beacons that dispelled darkness from a believer's path as well as the solid cornerstones upon which the Ummah could build the foundations of an ideal society. The ideal here was the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness that characterized their every effort. These values, in time, imbued the entire social fabric of Islam.

The guesthouses, for example, were more often than not found in neighborhoods of the poor and economically disadvantaged. Needless to say, for this reason they became remedies for many social ills.

As a result of such teaching and training we find that many students of Sufi shaikhs

graduated from their course of studies fully empowered to carry other people's burdens, even as they strove to illumine the way of Truth. Furthermore, through their training and self-discipline they had developed the manifest and decisive will to do so. Genuine scholars and teachers of tariqat leave no stone unturned in conducting their jihad, a word which means both the physical struggle against unbelief and the spiritual struggle against the unseen allurements that trap the soul.

History books are filled with the names of Sufi *mujahideen* (People Who Struggle) and *shuhada* (Martyrs) that have devoted their lives to confronting the enemies of the faith and calling mankind to the divine Presence of Allah, as well as calling back those who had deviated from the true path and the Sunnah of the Prophet (s). They accomplished this with wisdom and they were effective. Their names and stories are too numerous to list in the span of a single book, even if it had hundreds of volumes.

It suffices to say that the lives of these Sufi Shaikhs are overwhelming evidence that Sufism, far from encouraging escapism and quietism that impedes social progress, upheld the highest values of social consciousness as well as religious inquiry and science. In fact, they provide adequate testimony to an unremitting jihad and struggle against social injustice and social inaction that took place over the centuries.

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Testimony of the Scholars of External Knowledge in Support of the Precedence of the Scholars of Internal Knowledge

شهادة علماء المعرفة الظاهرة

Imam Abu Hanifa (81-150 H./700-767 CE)

Imam Abu Hanifa (r) (85 H.-150 H) said, "If it were not for two years, I would have perished. For two years I accompanied Sayyidina Ja'far as-Sadiq and I acquired the spiritual knowledge that made me a knower in the Way."

The book *Ad-Durr al-Mukhtar*, vol 1. p. 43, mentions that Ibn 'Abideen said, "Abi Ali Dakkak, one of the sufi saints, received his path from Abul Qassim an-Nasarabadi, who received it from ash-Shibli, who received it from Sariyy as-Saqati who received it from

Ma^ʿruf al-Karkhi, who received it from Dawad at-Ta'i, who received the knowledge, both the external and the internal, from the Imam Abu Hanifa (r), who was supporting the Sufi Spiritual Path." The Imam said before he died: *lawla sanatan lahalaka Nu^ʿman*, "Were it not for a certain two years, Nu^ʿman [i.e. myself] would have perished." There were the last two years of his life, when he began accompanying Ja^ʿfar as-Sadiq (q).

Imam Malik (94-179 H./716-795 CE)

Imam Malik (r) said, "Whoever studies jurisprudence [fiqh] and didn't study Sufism (tasawwuf) will be corrupted; and whoever studied tasawwuf and didn't study fiqh will become a heretic; and whoever combined both will be reach the Truth." This saying is mentioned and explained in the book of the scholar 'Ali al-Adawi with the explanation of Imam Abil-Hassan, a scholar of fiqh, vol. 2, p. 195.

Imam Shafi'i (150-205 H./767-820 CE)

Imam Shafi'i said, "I accompanied the Sufi people and I received from them three knowledges:

1. they taught me how to speak
2. they taught me how to treat people with leniency and a soft heart.
3. they guided me in the ways of Sufism."

This is mentioned in the books, *Kashf al-Khafa* and *Muzid al-Albas*, by Imam 'Ajluni, vol. 1, p. 341.

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (164-241 H./780-855 CE)

Imam Ahmad (r) said, advising his son, "O my son, you have to sit with the People of Sufism, because they are like a fountain of knowledge and they keep the Remembrance of Allah in their hearts. They are the ascetics and they have the most spiritual power." This is explained in the book *Tanwir al-Qulub*, p. 405, by Shaikh Amin al-Kurdi.

Imam Ahmad said about the Sufis, as mentioned in the book *Ghiza al-Albab*, vol. 1, p. 120, "I don't know any people better than them."

Imam al-Muhasibi (d. 243 H./857 CE)

Imam al-Muhasibi reported that the Prophet (s) said, "My Nation is going to split into 73 divisions and only one of them will be the Group of Salvation." And Allah knows best that the Group is the people of Tasawwuf. He went deeply into the explanation of that subject, in the book *Kitab al-Wasiya* p. 27-32.

Imam al-Qushayri (d. 465 H./1072 CE)

Imam al-Qushayri said about Sufism, "Allah made this group the best of His saints and He honored them above all of His Servants after His Messengers and Prophets, and He made their hearts the secrets of His Divine Presence and He chose them from among the Nation to receive His Lights. They are the means of humanity. He cleaned them from all connections to this world, and He lifted them to the highest states of vision. And He unveiled to them the Realities of His Unique Oneness. He made them to observe His Will operating in them. He made them to shine in His Existence and to appear as Lights of His Lights." [*ar-Risalat al-Qushayriyya*, p. 2]

Imam Ghazali (450-505 H./1058-1111 CE)

Imam Ghazali, *hujjat ul-Islam*, the Proof of Islam, said about Sufism, "I knew to be true that the Sufis are the seekers in Allah's Way, and that their conduct is the best conduct, and their way is the best way, and their manners are the most sanctified. They have cleaned their hearts from other than Allah and they have made them as pathways for rivers to run receiving knowledge of the Divine Presence." [*al-Munqidh min ad-dalal*, p. 131].

Imam Nawawi (620-676 H./1223-1278 CE)

Imam Nawawi said, in his Letters, *al-Maqasid*, "The specifications of the Way of the Sufis are five:

1. To keep the Presence of Allah in your heart in public and in private;
2. To follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (s) by actions and speech;
3. To keep away from dependence on people;
4. To be happy with what Allah gives you, even if it is little;
5. To always refer your matters to Allah, Almighty and Exalted." [*Maqasid at-Tawhid*, p. 20]

Imam Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi (544-606 H./1149-1209 CE)

Imam Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi said, "The way the Sufis seek Knowledge is to disconnect themselves from this worldly life, and keep themselves constantly busy in their mind and in their heart, with *Dhikrullah*, during all their actions and behaviors." [*I'tiqadat Furaq al-Musliman*, p. 72, 73]

Ibn Khaldun (733-808 H./1332-1406 CE)

Ibn Khaldun said, "The way of the Sufis is the way of the Salaf, the Scholars among the Sahaba, Tabi^ceen, and Tabi^c at-Tabi^ceen. Its origin is to worship Allah and to leave the ornaments of this world and its pleasures." [*Muqaddimat ibn Khaldan*, p. 328]

Tajuddin as-Subki

Tajuddin as-Subki (r) mentioned in his book *Mu'eed an-Na'eem*, p. 190, under the chapter entitled *Sufism*, "May Allah praise them and greet them and may Allah make us to be with them in Paradise. Too many things have been said about them and too many ignorant people have said things which have no relation to them. And the truth is that they have left dunya and are busy with worship."

He said, "They are the People of Allah, whose du'a and prayers Allah accepts, and by means of whom Allah supports human beings."

Jalaluddin as-Suyuti

He said in his book *Ta'yad al-haqiqat al-'Aliyya*, p. 57, "Sufism in itself is the best and most honorable knowledge. It explains how to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (s) and to leave innovation."

Ibn Taymiyya (661-728 H./1263-1328 CE)

In *Majma'a Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya*, published by Dar ar-Rahmat, Cairo, Vol, 11, page 497, *Book of Tasawwuf*, Ibn Taymiyya says: "You have to know that the rightly-guided shaikhs must be taken as guides and examples in the Dan, as they are following in the footsteps of the Prophets and Messengers. The Way (tariqat) of those shaikhs is to call people to Allah's Divine Presence and obedience to the Prophet."

Ibn Taymiyya says on page 499 of the same volume: "The shaikhs whom we need to take as guides are our examples and we have to follow them. As when on the Hajj (the pilgrimage), one needs a guide (*dalal*) to reach the Ka'ba, these shaikhs are our guide (*dalal*) to Allah and our Prophet (s)."

Among the shuyukh he mentioned are: Ibrahim ibn Adham, Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, Hasan al-Basri, Rabia al-Adawiyya, Junaid ibn Muhammad, Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, Shaikh Ahmad ar-Rafa'i, and Shaikh Bayazid al-Bistami.

Ibn Taymiyya quotes from Bayazid al-Bistami on page 510, Volume 10: "...the great Sufi shaikh, Bayazid al-Bistami, and the famous story of when he saw God in a vision (kashf) and said to Him: 'O Allah what is the way to You?' And Allah responded, 'Leave yourself and come to Me.'" Ibn Taymiyya continues quoting Bayazid al-Bistami, "I shed my self as a snake sheds its skin."

Implicit in this quotation is an indication of the need for zuhd (self-denial or abstention from the worldly life), as that was the path followed by Bayazid al-Bistami.

So we see from the above quotes, that Ibn Taymiyya was accepting many shaikhs by quoting them and urging people to follow guides to show the way to obey God and to obey the Prophet (s).

What Ibn Taymiyya Says About the Term Tasawwuf

"The crucible itself tells you, when you are strained, Whether you are gold or gold-plated copper." Sanai.

Following is what Ibn Taymiyya said about the definition of Tasawwuf, from Volume 11, *At-Tasawwuf*, of *Majmu'at Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya al-Kubra*, Dar ar-Rahmah, Cairo:

"Alhamdulillah, the use of the word tasawwuf has been thoroughly discussed. This is a term that was given to those who were dealing with that branch of knowledge (*tazkiyat an-nafs and Ihsan*)."

"Tasawwuf is the science of realities and states of experience. The Sufi is that one who purifies himself from everything which distracts him from the remembrance of Allah and who is so filled with knowledge of the heart and knowledge of the mind that the value of gold and stones will be equal to him. Tasawwuf safeguards the precious meanings and leaves behind the call to fame and vanity to reach the state of Truthfulness. The best of humans after the prophets are the Siddaqaan, as Allah mentioned them in Surat An-Nisa', 69: ***"All who obey Allah and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom is the grace of Allah: the prophets, the sincere lovers of truth (siddiqeen), the martyrs and the righteous; Ah! what a beautiful fellowship."***

He continues about the Sufis, "They are striving to be obedient to Allah... So from them you will find the Foremost in Nearness by virtue of their striving. And some of them are from the People of the Right hand..."

The Sufi Cloak (*khirqah*)

Before proceeding to Imam Ibn Qayyim, it may be useful to say something about the wearing of the Sufi cloak. In the view of the Trustworthy, there are three categories of shaikh:

1. The Shaikh of the Cloak
2. The Shaikh of the Dhikr
3. The Shaikh of Guidance

The first two categories (The Shaikh of the Cloak and The Shaikh of the Dhikr) are really deputies of a shaikh, representing the reality of the shaikh or the tariqat through the intermediary of either the cloak or the dhikr. The Shaikh of the Cloak (*Khirqah*) depends on the power of the cloak to act on the murid. The murid takes his support from the cloak, which a fully realized Shaikh of Guidance has imbued with his blessings.

The murid of the Shaikh of Dhikr is supported by the dhikr, not directly by the shaikh. In these two cases, the shaikh becomes the symbol, because the real support of the murid is the cloak or the dhikr.

The highest of the three categories is the Shaikh of Guidance. He is the one who supports the murid without any intermediary, directly from himself to the murid. He is the real

shaikh because, without any means, he supports and directs the murid directly through his heart. That is why Sayyidina Ahmad al-Faraqi said, "In our tariqat the shaikh guides the murid directly, unlike other tariqats which use the cloak and other means to lift up their murids."

In the Naqshbandi Tariqat only one shaikh, the Shaikh of Guidance, is therefore accepted as possessing real authority. When that shaikh passes away, the murids must renew their initiation with his successor, to whom he has transmitted all his secrets and his inheritance from the Prophet (s) and all his predecessors in the Golden Chain.

Imam Ibn Qayyim (d. 751 H./1350 CE)

Imam Ibn Qayyim stated that, "We can witness the greatness of the people of ta'awwuf in the eyes of the Salaf by what has been mentioned by Sufyan ath-Thawri (d. 161 H./777 CE). One of the greatest imams in the 2nd century and one of the foremost mujtahids, he said: "If not for Abu Hisham as-Sufi (d. 115 H./733 CE) I would never have perceived the action of the subtlest forms of hypocrisy (*riya'*) in the self." (*Manazil as-Sa'ireen*)

Ibn Qayyim continues: "Among the best of people is the Sufi learned in fiqh."

ʿAbdullah ibn Muhammad ibn ʿAbdul Wahhab (1115-1201 H./1703-1787 CE)

Following is a quotation from Muhammad Man ar Nu'mani's book (p. 85), *Ad-ia'at al-Mukaththafa Didd ash-Shaikh Muhammad ibn ʿAbdul Wahhab*: "Shaikh ʿAbdullah, the son of shaikh Muhammad ibn ʿAbdul Wahhab, said about Tasawwuf: "My father and I don't deny or criticize the Science of Sufism, but on the contrary we support it because it cleans the external and the internal of the hidden sins which are related to the heart and the outward form. Even though the individual might externally be on the right way, internally he might be on the wrong way; and for its correction tasawwuf is necessary."

In the fifth volume of the collection of letters by Muhammad ibn ʿAbdul Wahhab entitled *ar-Rasa'il ash-Shakhsiyya*, page 11, and again on pages 12, 61, and 64, he states: "I never accused of unbelief Ibn ʿArabi or Ibn al-Fari for their Sufi interpretations."

Ibn ʿAbidin

The great scholar, Ibn ʿAbidin in his book *Rasa'il Ibn ʿAbidin* (p. 172-173) states: "The Seekers in this Way don't hear except from the Divine Presence and they don't love any but Him. If they remember Him they cry. If they thank Him they are happy. If they find Him they are awake. If they see Him they will be relaxed. If they walk in His Divine Presence, they melt. They are drunk with His Blessings. May Allah bless them."

Shaikh Muhammad ʿAbduh (1265-1323 H./1849-1905 CE)

He stated, "Tasawwuf appeared in the first century of Islam and it received a tremendous honor. It cleansed the self and straightened the conduct and gave knowledge to people

from the Wisdom and Secrets of the Divine Presence." [quoted from *Majallat al-Muslim*, 6th ed., 1378 H, p. 24].

Shaikh Rashad Rida

He said, "Sufism was a unique pillar from the pillars of the religion. Its purpose was to cleanse the self and to take account of one's daily behavior and to raise the people to a high station of spirituality." [*Majallat al-Manar*, 1st year, p. 726].

Maulana Abul Hasan ʿAli an-Nadwi

Maulana Abul Hasan ʿAli an-Nadwi is a member of the Islamic-Arabic Society of India and Muslim countries. He said in his book, *Muslims in India*, written some years ago, p. 140-146, "These Sufis initiate people in Oneness and sincerity in following the Sunnah of the Prophet (s) and in repentance from their sins and in avoidance of every disobedience to Allah, Almighty and Exalted. Their guides encourage them to move in the way of perfect Love of Allah."

"In Calcutta, India, everyday more than 1000 people are taking initiation into Sufism."

"Thanks to the influence of Sufi people, thousands and hundreds of thousands in India found their Lord and reached a state of Perfection through the Islamic religion."

Abul ʿAla Mawdudi

He said in his book *Mabadi' al-Islam* (p. 17), "Sufism is a reality whose signs are the love of Allah and the love of the Prophet (s), where one absents oneself for their sake, and one is annihilated from anything other than them. It instructs how to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet (s)."

"Tasawwuf searched for sincerity of heart, purity of intention, and trustworthiness of obedience in all of an individual's actions."

"Shariʿah and Sufism: what is the similitude of the two? They are like the body and the soul. The body is the external shari'ah knowledge and the spirit is the internal knowledge."

In sum, Sufism, in the present as in the past, is the effective means for spreading the reality of Islam, extending the knowledge and understanding of spirituality, and fostering happiness and peace. With it man can find himself and, in so doing, find his Lord. With it man can improve, transform, and elevate himself, and find salvation from the ignorance of this world and its misguided pursuit of some materialistic fantasy. And Allah knows best what he intends for his servants.

ON TASAWWUF: al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110)

One of the early formal Sufis in both the general and the literal sense, as he wore all his life a cloak of wool (suf). The son of a freedwoman of Umm Salama's (the Prophet's wife) and a freedman of Zayd ibn Thabit's (the Prophet's stepson), this great Imam of Basra, the leader of saints and scholars in his day, was known for his strict and encompassing embodiment of the Sunna of the Prophet. He was also famous for his immense knowledge, his austerity and asceticism, his fearless remonstrances of the authorities, and his power of attraction both in discourse and appearance.

Ibn al-Jawzi wrote a 100-page book on his life and manners entitled *Adab al-Shaykh al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri*. In his chapter on al-Hasan in *Sifat al-safwa*, he mentions a report that al-Hasan left behind a white cloak (jubba) made of wool which he had worn exclusively of any other for the past twenty years, winter and summer, and that when he died it was in a state of immaculate beauty, cleanness, and quality.(1)

In the book he devoted to the sayings and the deeds of Sufis, *Rawdat al-muhibbin wa nuzhat al-mushtaqin* (The garden of the lovers and the excursion of the longing ones), Ibn Qayyim relates:

A group of women went out on the day of `Eid and went about looking at people. They were asked: "Who is the most handsome person you have seen today?" They replied: "It is a shaykh wearing a black turban." They meant Hasan al-Basri.(2)

The hadith master Abu Nu`aym al-Isfahani (d. 430) mentions in his biographies of Sufis entitled *Hilyat al-awliya'* (The adornment of the saints) that it is al-Hasan's student `Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd (d. 177) who was the first person to build a Sufi khaniqa or guest-house and school at Abadan on the present-day border of Iran with Iraq.(3)

It was on the basis of Hasan al-Basri and his students' fame as Sufis that Ibn Taymiyya stated: "Tasawwuf's place of origin is Basra" in his essay *al-Sufiyya wa al-fuqara*.(4) This is a misleading assertion tantamount to accusing al-Hasan of having invented tasawwuf. Rather, Basra is chief among the places of renown for the formal development of the schools of purification which became known as tasawwuf, but whose principles are none other than the Qur'an and the Sunna as we have already demonstrated at length.

Ghazali relates al-Hasan's words on Jihad al-nafs in the section of his *Ihya'* entitled *Kitab riyyadat al-nafs wa tahdhib al-akhlaq wa mu`alajat amrad al-qalb* (Book of the training of the ego and the disciplining of manners and the healing of the heart's diseases) that Hasan al-Basri said:

Two thoughts roam over the soul, one from Allah, one from the enemy. Allah shows mercy on a servant who settles at the thought that comes from Him. He embraces the thought that comes from Allah, while he fights against the one from his enemy. To illustrate the heart's mutual attraction between these two powers the Prophet said: "The heart of a believer lies between two fingers of the Merciful"(5)... The fingers stand for upheaval and hesitation in the heart... If man follows the dictates of anger and appetite, the dominion of shaytan appears in him through idle passions [hawa] and his heart

becomes the nesting-place and container of shaytan, who feeds on hawa. If he does battle with his passions and does not let them dominate his nafs, imitating in this the character of the angels, at that time his heart becomes the resting-place of angels and they alight upon it.

A measure of the extent of Hasan al-Basri's extreme godwariness and scrupulosity (wara`) is given by his following statement, also quoted by Ghazali:

Forgetfulness and hope are two mighty blessings upon the progeny of Adam; but for them the Muslims would not walk in the streets.(6)

Notes: (1) Ibn al-Jawzi, Sifat al-safwa 2(4):10 (#570). (2) Ibn al-Qayyim, Rawdat al-muhibbin p. 225. (3) Abu Nu`aym, Hilyat al-awliya' 6:155. (4) Ibn Taymiyya, al-Tasawwuf in Majmu`a al-fatawa al-kubra 11:16. (5) Narrated by Muslim, Ahmad, Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah. (6) In Ghazali, trans. T.J. Winter, The remembrance of death p. 18.

ON TASAWWUF: Imam Abu Hanifa (d. 150)

Ibn `Abidin relates in his al Durr al mukhtar that Imam Abu Hanifa said: "If it were not for two years, I would have perished." Ibn `Abidin comments:

For two years he accompanied Sayyidina Ja`far al-Sadiq and he acquired the spiritual knowledge that made him a gnostic in the Way... Abu `Ali Daqqaq (Imam Qushayri's shaykh) received the path from Abu al-Qasim al-Nasirabadi, who received it from al Shibli, who received it from Sari al-Saqati who received it from al Ma`ruf al Karkhi, who received it from Dawud at Ta'i, who received the knowledge, both the external and the internal, from the Imam Abi Hanifa.¹

¹ Ibn `Abidin, Hashiyat radd al-muhtar `ala al-durr al-mukhtar 1:43.

Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya relates in Madarij al-salikin, and Ibn al-Jawzi in the chapter entitled "Abu Hashim al-Zahid" in his Sifat al-safwa after the early hadith master Abu Nu`aym in his Hilyat al-awliya', that Sufyan al-Thawri said:

If it were not for Abu Hashim al-Sufi (d. 115) I would have never perceived the presence of the subtlest forms of hypocrisy in the self... Among the best of people is the Sufi learned in jurisprudence.¹

Ibn al-Jawzi also narrates the following:

Abu Hashim al-Zahid said: "Allah has stamped alienation upon the world in order that the friendly company of the muridun (seekers) consist solely in being with

Him and not with the world, and in order that those who obey Him come to Him by means of avoiding the world. The People of Knowledge of Allah (ahl al-ma`rifa billah) are strangers in the world and long for the hereafter."²

¹ Ibn Qayyim, *Madarij al-salikin*; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa* (Beirut: dar al-kutub al-`ilmiyya, 1403/1989) 1

² 203 (#254); Abu Nu`aym, *Hilyat al-awliya*, s.v. "Abu Hashim al-Sufi." (2) Ibn al-Jawzi, *op. cit.*

Imam Malik (d. 179)

The scholar of Madina, he was known for his intense piety and love of the Prophet, whom he held in such awe and respect that he would not mount his horse within the confines of Madina out of reverence for the ground that enclosed the Prophet's body, nor would he relate a hadith without first performing ablution. Ibn al-Jawzi relates in the chapter entitled "Layer 6 of the People of Madina" of his book *Sifat al-safwa*:

Abu Mus`ab said: I went in to see Malik ibn Anas. He said to me: Look under my place of prayer or prayer-mat and see what is there. I looked and I found a certain writing. He said: Read it. (I saw that) it contained (the account of) a dream which one of his brothers had seen and which concerned him. He said (reciting what was written): "I saw the Prophet in my sleep. He was in his mosque and the people were gathered around him, and he said: I have hidden for you under my pulpit (minbar) something good -- or: knowledge -- and I have ordered Malik to distribute it to the people." Then Malik wept, so I got up and left him.¹

Just as Abu Hanifa and Sufyan al-Thawri implicitly asserted the necessity to follow the Sufi path for acquiring perfection, Imam Malik explicitly enjoined tasawwuf as a duty of scholars in his statement:

"He who practices Tasawwuf without learning Sacred Law corrupts his faith, while he who learns Sacred Law without practicing Tasawwuf corrupts himself. Only he who combines the two proves true."

It is related by the muhaddith Ahmad Zarruq (d. 899), the hafiz `Ali al-Qari al-Harawi (d. 1014), the muhaddiths `Ali ibn Ahmad al `Adawi (d. 1190) and Ibn `Ajiba (d. 1224), and others.²

Ibn `Ajiba explains:

Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq said: "Tasawwuf has over two thousand definitions, all of which go back to the sincerity of one's self-application to Allah... Each one's definition corresponds to his state and the extent of his experience, knowledge, and taste, upon which he will ground his saying: "Tasawwuf is such-and-such."

It follows that every one of the saints quoted (in Abu Nu`aym's Hilyat al-awliya') who has a part of sincere self-application (sidq tawajjuh) has a part in tasawwuf, and each one's tasawwuf consists in his sincere self-application. As a rule, sincere self-application is a requirement of religion since it forms both the manner and the content of the acts which Allah accepts. Manner and content are not sound unless sincerity of self-application is sound. "He approves not unthankfulness in His servants, but if you are thankful, he will approve it in you" (39:7).

Therefore Islam necessitates deeds, and there is no self-purification (tasawwuf) without knowledge of the Law (fiqh), as Allah's external rulings are not known except by knowledge of the Law; and there is no knowledge of the Law without self-purification, as there is no deed without sincerity in self-application, and there is neither without belief. Hence the Law requires all of them by definition, just as the body and the soul necessitate each other, as one cannot exist or be complete in the world except in conjunction with the other. That is the meaning of Imam Malik's saying: "He who practices Tasawwuf without learning Sacred Law..."³

¹ Ibn al-Jawzi, Sifat al-safwa 1(2):120.

² Ali al-Qari, Sharh `ayn al-`ilm wa-zayn al-hilm (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 1989) 1:33; Ahmad Zarruq, Qawa'id al-tasawwuf (Cairo, 1310); `Ali al `Adawi, Hashiyat al `Adawi `ala sharh Abi al Hasan li risalat Ibn Abi Zayd al musammam kifayat al talib al rabbani li risalat Ibn Abi Zayd al Qayrawani fi madhhab Maalik (Beirut?: Dar Ihya' al Kutub al `Arabiyyah, <n.d.>) 2:195; Ibn `Ajiba, Iqaz al himam fi sharh al hikam (Cairo: Halabi, 1392/1972) p. 5 6.

³ Ibn `Ajiba, Iqaz al-himam 5-6.

Imam Shafi'i (d. 204)

Al-hafiz al-Suyuti relates in Ta'yid al-haqiqah al-`aliyya that Imam al-Shafi'i said:

I accompanied the Sufis and received from them but three words: their statement that time is a sword: if you do not cut it, it cuts you; their statement that if you do not keep your ego busy with truth it will keep you busy with falsehood; their statement that deprivation is immunity.¹

The muhaddith al-`Ajluni also relates in his book Kashf al khafa wa muzil al albas that Imam Shafi'i said:

Three things in this world have been made lovely to me: avoiding affectation, treating people kindly, and following the way of tasawwuf.²

¹ Suyuti, Ta'yid al-haqiqah al-'aliyya p. 15

² al-'Ajluni, Kashf al-khafa wa muzil al-albas 1:341 (#1089).

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (d. 241)

Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Saffarini al-Hanbali (d. 1188) relates in his Ghidha' al-albab li-sharh manzumat al-adab from Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah al-Qalanasi that Imam Ahmad said about the Sufis: "I don't know people better than them." Someone said to him: "They listen to music and they reach states of ecstasy." He said: "Do you prevent them from enjoying an hour with Allah?"¹

Imam Ahmad's admiration of Sufis is borne out by the reports of his awe before al-Harith al-Muhasibi, although he expressed caution about the difficulty of the Sufi path for those unprepared to follow it, as it may not be for all people to follow the way of those about whom Allah instructed His Prophet: "And keep yourself content with those who call their Lord early morning and evening, seeking His Countenance..." (18:28).

¹ al-Saffarini, Ghidha' al-albab li-sharh manzumat al-adab (Cairo: Matba'at al-Najah, 1324/1906) 1:120.

al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 243)

He was one of the earliest author of Sufi treatises and the teacher of al-Junayd. 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Taj al-Din al-Subki, and Jamal al-Din al-Isnawi all reiterate the statement whereby "Upon the books of al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi on kalam, fiqh, and hadith rest those among us who are mutakallim (theologian), faqih (jurist), and sufi."¹ His extant works are:

- Kitab al-ri'aya li huquq Allah (Book of observance of the rights of Allah); Shaykh al-Islam al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam wrote an abridgment of it.²
- Kitab al-tawahhum (Book of imagination), a description of the Day of Judgment;
- Kitab al-khalwa (Book of seclusion);
- Risalat al-mustarshidin (Treatise for those who ask for guidance);
- Kitab al-ri'aya li-huquq Allah (Book of the observance of the rights of Allah);
- Kitab fahm al-Qur'an (Book of the understanding of Qur'an);
- Kitab mahiyyat al-'aql wa ma'nahu wa ikhtilaf al-nas fihi (Book of the nature and meaning of the mind and the differences among people concerning it);
- al-Masa'il fi a'mal al-qulub wa al-jawarih wa al-'aql (The questions concerning the works of the hearts, the limbs, and the mind);
- Kitab al-'azama (The book of magnificence);
- al-Wasaya wa al-nasa'ih al-diniyya wa al-nafahat al-qudsiyya li naf'i jami' al-bariyya (The spiritual legacies and counsels and the sanctified gifts for the benefit of all creatures).

¹ 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Kitab Usul al-Din p. 308-309; Taj al-Din Subki, Tabaqat al-shafi'iyya 2:275; Jamal al-Din al-Isnawi, Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya 1:(#9)26-27.

² al-Subki mentions it in Tabaqat al-shafi'iyya. A copy of it is found at the Chester Beatty Library, ms. 3184

al-Qasim ibn `Uthman al-Ju`i (d. 248)

One of the great saints of Damascus who took hadith from Sufyan ibn `Uyayna. Ibn al-Jawzi relates in Sifat al-safwa that al-Ju`i explained that he got the name al-Ju`i ("of the hunger") because Allah had strengthened him against physical hunger by means of spiritual hunger. He said:

Even if I were left one month without food I would not care. O Allah, you have done this with me: Therefore complete it for me!¹

Al-Dhahabi writes about him in Siyar a`lam al-nubala':

[#506] al-`Abdi, known as Qasim al-Ju`i: The Imam, the exemplar, the saint, the Muhaddith... the Shaykh of the Sufis and the friend of Ahmad ibn al-Hawari. (al-imam al-qudwa al-wali al-muhaddith Abu `Abd Al-Malik Al-Qasim ibn 'Uthman al-`Abdi al-Dimashqi, Shaykh as-sufiyya wa rafiqa Ahmad ibn al-Hawari, 'urifa bi al-Ju'i).

Ibn al-Jawzi also relates that Ibn Abu Hatim al-Razi said:

I entered Damascus to see the transcribers of hadith. I passed by Qasim al-Ju`i's circle and saw a large crowd sitting around him as he spoke. I approached and heard him say:

Do without others in your life in five matters:

1. If you are present among people, don't be known
2. If you are absent, don't be missed
3. If you know something, your advice is unsought
4. If you say something, your words are rejected
5. If you do something, you receive no credit for it

I advise you five other things as well:

1. If you are wronged, do not reciprocate it
2. If you are praised, don't be glad
3. If you are blamed, don't be distraught
4. If you are called liar, don't be angry
5. If you are betrayed, don't betray in return

Ibn Abu Hatim said: "I made these words all the benefit I got from visiting Damascus."²

¹ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa* 2(2):200 (#763).

² Ibid.

ON TASAWWUF Imam al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 297)

The Imam of the world in his time, al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, said defining a Sufi:

*al-sufi man labisa al-sufa `ala al-safa
wa ittaba`a tariq al-mustafawa
athaqa al-jasada ta`m al-jafa
wa kanat al-dunya minhu `ala qafa*

The Sufi is the one who wears wool on top of purity, followed the path of the Prophet, endured bodily strains dedicating his life to worship and reclining from pleasures, and left behind all that pertains to the world.¹

The text of al-Junayd's book *Kitab dawa' al-arwah* (Book of the cure of souls) was edited in Arabic and translated into English by the scholar A.J. Arberry.²

¹ In `Afif al-Din Abu Muhammad `Abd Allah Ibn As`ad al-Yafi`i (d. 768), *Nashr al-mahasin al-ghaliya fi fadl mashayikh al-sufiyya* (Beirut : Dar Sadir, 1975).

² al-Junayd, *Kitab dawa' al-arwah*, ed. & trans. A.J. Arberry in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1937).

ON TASAWWUF al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d. 320)

Abu `Abd Allah Muhammad ibn `Ali al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi al-Hanafi, a faqih and muhaddith of Khorasan and one of the great early authors of tasawwuf whom Ibn `Arabi particularly quotes. [This is not the great hadith master Abu `Isa al-Tirmidhi.] He wrote many books, of which the following have been published:

- al-Masa'il al-maknuna: The concealed matters
- Adab al-nafs: The discipline of the ego
- Adab al-muridin: Ethics of the seekers of Allah, or Ethics of Sufi students
- al-amthal min al-kitab wa al-sunna: Examples from the Qur'an and the Sunna;
- Asrar mujahadat al-nafs: The secrets of the struggle against the ego
- `Ilm al-awliya': The knowledge of the saints
- Khatm al-wilaya: The Seal of sainthood
- Shifa' al-`ilal: The healing of defects

- Kitab manazil al-`ibad min al-`ibadah, aw, Manazil al-qasidin ila Allah: The book of the positions of worshippers in relation to worship, or: The positions of the travellers to Allah
- Kitab ma`rifat al-asrar: Book of the knowledge of secrets
- Kitaba al-A`da' wa-al-nafs; wa al-`aql wa al-hawa: The book of the enemies, the ego, the mind, and vain desires
- al-Manhiyyat: The prohibitions
- Nawadir al-usul fi ma`rifat ahadith al-Rasul: The rare sources of the religion concerning the knowledge of the Prophet's sayings
- Taba'i` al-nufus : wa-huwa al-kitab al-musamma bi al-akyas wa al-mugtarrin: The different characters of souls, or: The Book of the clever ones and the deluded ones
- al-Kalam `ala ma`na la ilaha illa Allah: Discourse on the meaning of "There is no deity but Allah."

ON TASAWWUF Imam Abu Mansur `Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429)

One of those who possessed encompassing knowledge of the multifarious views and beliefs of the groups of Muslims and non-Muslims, he writes in his *Farq bayn al-firaq*:

Know that Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama`a are divided in eight groups of people... the sixth group being the Sufi Ascetics (*al-zuhhad al-sufiyya*), who have seen things for what they are and therefore have abstained, who have known by experience and therefore have taken heed truly, who have accepted Allah's allotment and contented themselves with what is within reach.

They have understood that hearing, sight, and thought are all accountable for their good and their evil and subject to reckoning to an atom's weight. In consequence they have harnessed themselves with the best harness in preparation for the Day of the return. Their speech has run the two paths of precepts and subtle allusions in the manner of the People of Hadith but without the pursuit of idle discourse. They neither seek self-display in doing good, nor do they leave doing good out of shyness. Their religion is the declaration of singleness and the disavowal of similitude. Their school is the committal of matters to Allah, reliance upon Him, submission to His order, satisfaction with what they have received from Him, and shunning all objection to Him. "Such is the bounty from Allah, He bestoweth it upon whom He will, and Allah is of infinite bounty" (57:21, 67:4).¹

Imam `Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi writes in *Usul al-din*:

The book *Tarikh al-sufiyya* (History of the Sufis, more commonly known as *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* or layers of the Sufis) by Abu `Abd al-Rahman Sulami comprises the biographies of nearly a thousand sheikhs of the Sufis, none of whom belonged to heretical sects and all of whom were of the Sunni community, with the exception of only three of them: Abu Hilman of Damascus, who pretended to be of the Sufis but actually believed in incarnationism (*hulul*); Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, whose case remains problematic, though Ibn `Ata' Allah, Ibn Khafif, and Abu al-Qasim al-Nasir Abadi approved of him

[as did the Hanbalis Ibn `Aqil, Ibn Qudama, and al-Tufi]; and al-Qannad, whom the Sufis accused of being a Mu`tazili and rejected, for the good does not accept the wicked.²

¹ `Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, al-Farq bayn al-firaq (Beirut: dar al-kutub al-`ilmiyya, n.d.) 242-243.

² `Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Usul al-din p. 315-16.

ON TASAWWUF Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 465)

A muhaddith who transmitted hadith to pupils by the thousands in Naysabur, in which he fought the Mu`tazila until he fled to Mecca to protect his life, al-Qushayri was the student of the great Sufi shaykh Abu `Ali al-Daqqaq. He was also a *mufasssir* who wrote a complete commentary of the Qur'an entitled *Lata'if al-isharat bi tafsir al-Qur'an* (The subtleties and allusions in the commentary of the Qur'an). His most famous work, however, is his *Risala ila al-sufiyya* or Epistle to the Sufis, which is one of the early complete manuals of the science of tasawwuf, together with Abu Nasr al-Sarraj's (d. 378) *Kitab al-luma`* (Book of lights), Abu Talib al-Makki's (d. 386) *Qut al-qulub fi mu`amalat al-mahbub wa wasf tariq al-murid ila maqam al-tawhid* (The nourishment of hearts in dealing with the Beloved and the description of the seeker's way to the station of declaring oneness), Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi's (d. 391) *al-Ta`arruf li madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf* (Defining the school of the People of Self-purification), and `Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami's (d. 411) *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* (Biographical layers of the Sufis).

ON TASAWWUF Shaykh Abu Isma`il `Abd Allah al-Harawi al-Ansari (d. 481)

A Sufi shaykh, hadith master (hafiz), and Qur'anic commentator (mufasssir) of the Hanbali school, one of the most fanatical enemies of innovations, and a student of Khwaja Abu al-Hasan al-Kharqani (d. 425) the grandshaykh of the early Naqshbandi Sufi path. He is documented by Dhahabi in his *Tarikh al-islam* and *Siyar a`lam al-nubala'*, Ibn Rajab in his *Dhayl tabaqat al-hanabila*, and Jami in his book in Persian *Manaqib-i Shaykh al-Islam Ansari*.

He was a prolific author of Sufi treatises among which are:

- *Manazil al-sa'irin*, on which Ibn Qayyim wrote a commentary entitled *Madarij al-salikin*
- *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* (Biographical layers of the sufi masters), which is the expanded version of the earlier work by Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 411) bearing the same title
- *Kitab `ilal al-maqamat* (Book of the pitfalls of spiritual stations), describing the characteristics of spiritual states for the student and the teacher in the Sufi path
- *Kitab sad maydan* (in Persian, Book of the hundred fields), a commentary on the meanings of love in the verse: "If you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love

- you!" (3:31). This book collects al-Harawi's lectures in the years 447-448 at the Great Mosque of Herat (in present-day Afghanistan) in which he presents his most eloquent exposition of the necessity of following the Sufi path
- Kashf al-asrar wa `uddat al-abrar (in Persian, the Unveiling of the secrets and the harness of the righteous), in ten volumes by al-Maybudi, it contains al-Harawi's Qur'anic commentary

ON TASAWWUF Hujjat al-Islam Imam Ghazali (d. 505)

"The Proof of Islam" Abu Hamid al-Tusi al-Ghazali, the Reviver of the Fifth Islamic century, scholar of usul al-fiqh, and author of the most well-known work on tasawwuf, Ihya' `ulum al-din (The revival of the religious sciences). He says in his autobiography, al-Munqidh min al-dalal (Deliverance from error):

The Sufi path consists in cleansing the heart from whatever is other than Allah... I concluded that the Sufis are the seekers in Allah's Way, and their conduct is the best conduct, and their way is the best way, and their manners are the most sanctified. They have cleaned their hearts from other than Allah and they have made them as pathways for rivers to run, carrying knowledge of Allah.¹

As Ibn `Ajiba mentions in his Iqaz al-himam, al-Ghazali declared tasawwuf to be a fard `ayn or personal obligation upon every legally responsible Muslim man and woman, "as none but Prophets are devoid of internal defects and diseases."²

¹ al-Ghazali, al Munqidh min al dalal, p. 131.

² Ibn `Ajiba, Iqaz al-himam p. 8.

ON TASAWWUF Abu al-Wafa' Ibn `Aqil al-Hanbali (d. 513)

Like al-Harawi al-Ansari, he was a hafiz and faqih of the Hanbali school who was an ardent defender of the Sunna and of tasawwuf. He is considered a reviver of the school of Imam Ahmad, although he had a number of teachers from different schools. Like other Sufis of his school such as Ibn Qudama (d. 620) and al-Tufi (d. 715), Ibn `Aqil considered al-Hallaj a wali (saint) and did not doubt his sincerity and righteousness. Ibn al-Jawzi reported that he had in his own possession the autograph copy of a treatise of Ibn `Aqil written in praise of al-Hallaj, entitled Juz' fi nasr karamat al-Hallaj (Opusculum in praise of al-Hallaj's gifts). Ibn `Aqil was a polymath and his Kitab al-funun reportedly numbered up to eight hundred volumes of which only one is extant.(1)

(1) See George Makdisi's article in the Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ibn `Akil."

ON TASAWWUF Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (d. 561)

The eminent one among the great saints, nicknamed al-Ghawth al-a`zam or the Arch-helper, he is also an eminent jurist of the Hanbali school. His ties to the Shafi`i school and to Imam Abu Hanifa have been mentioned. He was the disciple of eminent saints, such as Abu al-Khayr Hammad ibn Muslim al-Dabbas (d. 525) and Khwaja Abu Yusuf al-Hamadani (d. 535), second in line after Abu al-Hasan al-Kharqani (al-Harawi al-Ansari's shaykh) in the early Naqshbandi chain of authority.

The most famous of Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir's works are:

- *al-Ghunya li talibi tariq al-haqq* (Sufficient provision for seekers of the path of truth); it is one of the most concise presentations of the madhhab of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal ever written, including the sound teaching of Ahl al-Sunna on `aqida and tasawwuf
- *al-Fath al-rabbani* (The Lord's opening), a collection of sermons for the student and the teacher in the Sufi path and all those attracted to perfection; true to its title, this book brings its reader immense profit and spiritual increase
- *Futuh al-ghayb* (Openings to the unseen), another collection of sermons more advanced than the previous one, and just as priceless. Both have been translated into English;

Due to his standing in the Hanbali school, `Abd al-Qadir was held in great respect by Ibn Taymiyya, who gives him alone the title "my Shaykh" (*shaykhuna*) in his entire Fatawa, while he reserves the title "my Imam" (*imamuna*) to Ahmad ibn Hanbal. He frequently cites Gilani and his shaykh al-Dabbas as among the best examples of latter-time Sufis.

Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir's *karamat* or miracles are too many to number. One of them consisted in the gift of guidance which was manifest in his speech and through which untold thousands entered Islam or repented. Al-Shattanawfi in *Bahjat al-asrar* mentions many of his miracles, each time giving a chain of transmission. Ibn Taymiyya took these reports to satisfy the criteria of authenticity, but his student al-Dhahabi, while claiming general belief in `Abd al-Qadir's miracles, nevertheless affirms disbelief in many of them. We have already seen this trait of al-Dhahabi in his doubting of the sound report of Imam Ahmad's admiration of al-Muhasibi. These are his words about Gilani in *Siyar a`lam al-nubala'*:

[#893] al-Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir (Al-Jilani): The shaykh, the imam, the scholar, the zahid, the knower, the exemplar, Shaykh Al-Islam, the distinguished one among the Awliya... the Hanbali, the Shaykh of Baghdad... I say: There is no one among the great shaykhs who has more spiritual states and miracles (*karamat*) than Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir, but a lot of it is untrue and some of those things are impossible.

The following account of Gilani's first encounter with al-Hamadani is related by Haytami in his *Fatawa hadithiyya*:

Abu Sa'id `Abd Allah ibn Abi `Asrun (d. 585), the Imam of the School of Shafi'i, said: "When I began a search for religious knowledge I kept company with my friend, Ibn al-Saqa, who was a student in the Nizamiyya School, and it was our custom to visit the pious. We heard that there was in Baghdad a man named Yusuf al-Hamadani who was known as *al-Ghawth*, and that he was able to appear whenever he liked and was able to disappear whenever he liked. So I decided to visit him along with Ibn al-Saqa and Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, who was a young man at that time. Ibn al-Saqa said, "When we visit Shaikh Yusuf al-Hamadani I am going to ask him a question the answer to which he will not know." I said: "I am also going to ask him a question and I want to see what he is going to say." Shaikh `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani said: "O Allah, protect me from asking a saint like Yusuf Hamadani a question, but I will go into his presence asking for his *baraka* -- blessing -- and divine knowledge."

"We entered his association. He kept himself veiled from us and we did not see him until after some time. He looked at Ibn al-Saqa angrily and said, without having been informed of his name: "O Ibn al-Saqa, how dare you ask me a question when your intention is to confound me? Your question is this and your answer is this!" Then he said: "I am seeing the fire of disbelief burning in your heart." He looked at me and said, "O `Abd Allah, are you asking me a question and awaiting my answer? Your question is this and your answer is this. Let the people be sad for you because they are losing as a result of your disrespect for me." Then he looked at Shaikh `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, made him sit next to him, and showed him honor. He said: "O `Abd al-Qadir, you have satisfied Allah and His Prophet with your proper respect for me. I see you in the future sitting on the highest place in Baghdad and speaking and guiding people and saying to them that your feet are on the neck of every *wali*! And I almost see before me every wali of your time giving you precedence because of your great station and honor."

Ibn Abi `Asrun continues, "`Abd al-Qadir's fame became widespread and all that Shaykh al-Hamadani said about him came to pass. There came a time when he did say, "My feet are on the necks of all the awliya," and he was a reference and a beacon guiding all people in his time to their destinations.

The fate of Ibn al-Saqa was something else. He was brilliant in his knowledge of the divine Law. He preceded all the scholars in his time. He used to debate with the scholars of his time and overcome them, until the caliph called him to his association. One day the calif sent him as a messenger to the King of Byzantium, who in his turn called all his priests and the scholars of the Christian religion to debate with him. Ibn al-Saqa was able to defeat all of them in debate. They were helpless to give answers in his presence. He was giving answers to them that made them look like children and mere students in his presence.

His brilliance made the King of Byzantium so fascinated with him that he invited him to his private family meeting. There he saw the daughter of the King. He immediately fell in love with her, and he asked her father, the King, for her hand in marriage. She refused except on condition that he accept her religion. He did, leaving Islam and accepting the Christian religion of the princess. After his marriage he became seriously ill. They threw

him out of the palace. He became a town beggar, asking everyone for food, yet no one would provide for him. Darkness had come over his face.

One day he saw someone that had known him before. That person relates: "I asked him, What happened to you?" He replied: "There was a temptation and I fell into it." The man asked him: "Do you remember anything from the Holy Qur'an?" He replied: "I only remember *rubbama yawaddu al-ladhina kafaru law kanu muslimin* -- "Again and again will those who disbelieve wish that they were Muslims" (15:2)."

He was trembling as if he was giving up his last breath. I turned him towards the Ka`ba, but he kept turning towards the East. Then I turned him back towards the Ka'aba, but he turned himself to the East. I turned him a third time, but he turned himself to the East. Then as his soul was passing from him, he said, "O Allah, that is the result of my disrespect to Your saint, Yusuf al-Hamadani." Ibn Abi `Asrun continues: "I went to Damascus and the king there, Nur al-Din al-Shahid, put me in control of the religious department, and I accepted. As a result, dunya entered from every side: provision, sustenance, fame, money, position for the rest of my life. That is what the ghawth Yusuf al-Hamadani had predicted for me."¹

¹ al-Haytami, Fatawa hadithiyya 315-316.

ON TASAWWUF Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597)

This hadith master and historian of the Hanbali school was a fierce enemy of innovators in his time. We have quoted extensively from his writings against anthropomorphists in the the first half of this book. His *Talbis Iblis* (Satan's delusion) is often quoted by "Salafis" against tasawwuf, but he only wrote it against certain excesses which he saw in all groups of the Community, such as among scholars of all kinds and including Sufis.

Talbis Iblis is perhaps the most important single factor in keeping alive the notion of Ibn al-Jawzi's hostility towards tasawwuf. In reality, this work was not written against tasawwuf or Sufis as such at all. It an indictment of all unorthodox doctrines and practices, regardless of their sources, and opposed any which he considered unwarranted innovations in the rule of Shari`a, wherever found in the Islamic community, especially in his time. It was written against specific innovated practices of many groups, including the philosophers (*al-mutafalsifa*), the theologians (*al-mutakallimun*), hadith scholars (*'ulama' al-hadith*), jurists (*al-fuqaha'*), preachers (*al-wu`az*), philologists (*al-nahawiyyun*), poets (*al-shu`ara'*), and certain Sufis. It is in no way an indictment of the subjects they studied and taught, but was an indictment of specific introductions of innovation into their respective disciplines and fields.

Ibn al-Jawzi actually wrote many books of *manaqib* or "merits" about the early Sufis, such as *Manaqib Rabi`a al-`Adawiyya*, *Manaqib Ma`ruf al-Karkhi*, *Manaqib Ibrahim ibn Adham*, *Manaqib Bishr al-Hafi*, and others. His *Sifat al-safwa* (The manners of the elite)

an abridgment of Abu Nu`aym's Hilyat al-awliya' (The adornment of the saints), and his Minhaj al qasidin wa mufid al-sadiqin (The road of the travellers to Allah and the instructor of the truthful) are considered pillars in the field of tasawwuf. He was prompted to write the latter by the success of Ghazali's Ihya' `ulum al-din, and indeed the Minhaj adopts much of the methodology and language of the Ihya' in addition to treating the same subject-matter, self-purification and personal ethics.

The Minhaj was epitomized in one volume by Najm al-Din Abu al-`Abbas Ahmad ibn Qudama (d. 742). Here are some of its chapter titles and excerpts most illustrative of Imam Ghazali's influence on Ibn al-Jawzi and of the latter's adoption of Sufi terminology:

- Fasl `ilm ahwal al-qalb (Section on the science of the states of the heart)
- Fasl fi daqa'iq al-adab al-batina fi al-zakat (Section on the ethics of the hidden minutiae of zakat)
- Fasl fi al-adab al-batina wa al-ishara ila adab al-hajj (Section on the ethics of the secrets of the Pilgrimage)
- Kitab riyadat al-nafs wa tahdhib al-khuluq wa mu`alajat amrad al-qalb (Book of the training of the ego, the upbringing of the character, and the treating of the diseases of the heart)
- Fasl fi fa'idat shahawat al-nafs (Section on the benefit of the appetites of the ego)
- Bayan al-riya' al-khafi al-ladhi huwa akhfa min dabib al-naml (Exposition of the hidden self-display which is more concealed than the treading of the ant)
- Fasl fi bayan ma yuhbitu al-`amal min al-riya' wa ma la yuhbit (Section exposing the self-display which nullifies one's deeds and the self-display which doesn't)
- Fasl fi dawa' al-riya' wa tariqatu mu`alajat al-qalbi fih (Section on the remedy of self-display and the way to treat the heart from its ill)
- Kitab al-mahabba wa al-shawqi wa al-unsu wa al-rida (Book of love, passionate longing, familiarity, and good pleasure) Fasl fi bayan mi`na al-shawq ila allahi ta`ala (Section exposing the meaning of passionate longing for Allah)
- Bab fi al-muhasaba wa al-muraqaba (Chapter on taking account of oneself and vigilance)

al-maqam al-awwal: al-musharata (The first station: commitment)

al-maqam al-thani: al-muraqaba (The second station: vigilance)

al-maqam al-thalith: al-muhasaba ba`da al-`amal (The third station: self-accounting after a deed)

al-maqam al-rabi`: mu`aqabat al-nafs `ala taqsiriha (The fourth station: berating the ego for its shortcomings)

al-maqam al-khamis: al-mujahada (The fifth station: struggling)

al-maqam al-sadis: fi mu`atabat al-nafs wa tawbikhiha (The sixth station: castigating and chiding the ego)

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq said: "Whoever hates his ego for Allah's sake, Allah will protect Him against what He hates."

Anas said: I heard `Umar say as he was alone behind a wall: "Bakh, bakh! Bravo, well done, O my ego! By Allah, you had better fear Allah, O little son of Khattab, or he will punish you!"

Al-Bakhtari ibn Haritha said: "I saw one of the devoted worshippers sitting in front of a fire which he had kindled as he was castigating his ego, and he did not stop castigating his ego until he died."

One of them said: "When the saints are mentioned, I say to myself: Fie on you and fie on you again."

Know that your worst enemy is the ego that lies between your two flanks. It has been created a tyrant commanding to evil, always pushing you towards it, and you have been ordered to straighten it, cleanse it (tazkiyat), wean it from what it feeds on, and drag it in chains, subdued, to the worship of its Lord.¹

¹ Ibn Qudama, Mukhtasar minhaj al-qasidin li Ibn al-Jawzi, ed. M. Ahmad Hamdan and `Abd al-Qadir Arna'ut, 2nd. ed. (Damascus: maktab al-shabab al-muslim wa al-maktab al-islami, 1380/1961) p. 426.

ON TASAWWUF Imam Fakhr al-Din Razi (d. 606)

"A Shafi'i scholar of genius and a mujtahid Imam in tenets of faith, he was among the foremost figures of his time in mastery of rational and traditional Islamic sciences, and preserved the religion of Ahl al-Sunna from the deviations of the Mu'tazilites, Shiites, Anthropomorphists, and other aberrant sects of his era."¹

He wrote in his *Ṭtiqadat firaq al-muslimin wa al-mushrikin*:

The summary of what the Sufis say is that the way to the knowledge of Allah is self-purification and renunciation of material attachments, and this is an excellent way... Sufis are a folk who work with reflection and the detaching of the self from materialistic trappings. They strive in order that their inner being be solely occupied with the remembrance of Allah in all of their occupations and their actions, and they are characterized by the perfection of their manners in dealing with Allah. Verily these are the best of all the sects of human beings.²

¹ Nuh Keller, Reliance of the Traveller p. 1046.

² Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Ṭtiqadat firaq al-muslimin* p. 72-73.

ON TASAWWUF Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 656)

One of the great saints of the Community, he said about tasawwuf:

He who dies without having entered into this knowledge of ours dies insisting upon his grave sins (kaba'ir) without realizing it.¹

¹ In Ibn `Ajiba, Iqaz al-himam p. 8.

ON TASAWWUF Sultan al-`ulama' al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam al-Sulami (d. 660)

His nickname is "Sultan of the Scholars." The Shaykh al-Islam of his time, he took hadith from the hafiz al-Qasim ibn `Ali ibn `Asakir al-Dimashqi, and tasawwuf from the Shafi'i Shaykh al-Islam Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (539-632), whom al-Dhahabi calls: "The shaykh, the imam, the scholar, the *zahid*, the knower, the Muhaddith, Shaykh al-Islam, the Peerless One of the Sufis..."¹ He also studied under Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 656) and his disciple al-Mursi. The author of *Miftah al-sa`ada* and al-Subki in his *Tabaqat* relate that al-`Izz would say, upon hearing al-Shadhili and al-Mursi speaking: "This is a kind of speech that is fresh from Allah."² In his two-volume *Qawa'id al-ahkam fi masalih al-anam on usul al-fiqh* he mentions that the Sufis are those meant by Allah's saying:

"Allah's party" (5:56, 58:22), and he defines tasawwuf as "the betterment of hearts, through whose health bodies are healthy, and through whose disease bodies are diseased." He considers the knowledge of external legal rulings a knowledge of the Law in its generalities, while the knowledge of internal matters is a knowledge of the Law in its subtle details.³

Among his books on tasawwuf are:

- *Shajarat al-ma`arif wa al-ahwal wa salih al-aqwal wa al-a`mal* (The tree of the gnostic sciences and states and pious sayings and deeds) in twenty chapters, the last seven of which are devoted to the various branches of ihsan in one's religion
- *Mukhtasar ri`ayat al-Muhasibi*, an abridgment of al-Muhasibi's book on the Observance of the rights of Allah
- *Masa'il al-tariqa fi `ilm al-haqiqa* (Questions of the Sufi path concerning the knowledge of Reality) in which al-`Izz answers sixty questions regarding tasawwuf
- *Risala fi al-qutb wa al-abdal al-arba`in* (Treatise on the Pole of saints and the forty substitute-saints)
- *Fawa'id al-balwa wa al-mihan* (The benefits of trials and afflictions)
- *Nihayat al-rughba fi adab al-suhba* (The obtainment of wishes in the etiquette of companionship).

In view of his strictness in every matter, he is famous for his fatwa allowing *sama`* or poetry recitals, and the swaying of the body and dancing associated with trances and other states of ecstasy during dhikr. Imam Ahmad related in his *Musnad*:

`Ali said: I visited the Prophet with Ja`far (ibn Abi Talib and Zayd (ibn Haritha). The Prophet said to Zayd: "You are my freedman" (*anta mawlay*), whereupon Zayd began to hop on one leg around the prophet (*hajala*). The Prophet then said to Ja`far: "You resemble me in my creation and my manners" (*anta ashbahta khalqi wa khuluqi*), whereupon Ja`far began to hop behind Zayd. The Prophet then said to me: "You pertain to me and I pertain to you" (*anta minni wa ana minka*) whereupon I began to hop behind Ja`far.⁴

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar al-Haytami mentions that some scholars have seen in this evidence for the permissibility of dancing (*al-raqs*) upon hearing a recital (*sama`*) that lifts the spirit.⁵ al-Yafi'i concurs with him in *Mir'at al-jinan*.⁶ Both of them mention al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam as the chief example of such scholars, since it is authentically reported that he himself "attended the sama` and danced in states of ecstasy" (*kana yahduru al-sama` wa yarqusu wa yatawajadu*), as stated by Ibn al-`Imad on the authority of al-Dhahabi, Ibn Shakir al-Kutabi, al-Yafi'i, al-Nabahani, and Abu al-Sa`adat.⁷

This permissibility of a type of dancing on the part of the Imams and hadith masters precludes the prohibition of *sama`* on a general basis, and that of the dancing that accompanies *sama`* as well, regardless of the reservations of Ibn Taymiyya concerning it which, in the mouths of today's "Salafis," do become cut-and-dry prohibitions.

As for particular cases where the dancing may be prohibited, it regards the worldly kind of effeminate dancing which has nothing to do with the ecstasy of *sama`* and *dhikr*. al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam differentiated the two in his Fatwas:

Dancing is a *bid`a* or innovation which is not countenanced except by one deficient in his mind. It is unfitting for other than women. As for the audition of poetry (*sama`*) which stirs one towards states of purity (*ahwal saniyya*) which remind one of the hereafter: there is nothing wrong with it, nay, it is recommended (*bal yundabu ilayh*) for lukewarm and dry hearts. However, the one who harbors wrong desires in his heart is not allowed to attend the *sama`*, for the *sama`* stirs up whatever desire is already in the heart, both the detestable and the desirable.⁸

He also said in his *Qawa'id al-ahkam*:

Dancing and clapping are a bad display resembling the display of women, which no one indulges except frivolous men or affected liars... whoever apprehends the greatness of Allah, it cannot be imagined that he will start dancing and clapping as these are not performed except by the crassly ignorant, not those who have merit and intelligence, and the proof of their ignorance is that the Shari`a has not cited any evidence for their action in the Qur'an and the Sunna, and none of the Prophets or their notable followers ever did it.⁹

al-`Izz on the Superiority of the Rank of the Awliya' Over That of the `Ulama' Al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam was asked in his *Fatawa* about the correctness of Qushayri's and

Ghazali's saying that the highest level among Allah's servants after Messengers and Prophets was that of saints (*awliya'*), then that of the scholars (*`ulama'*). He replied:

Concerning the priority of the knowers of Allah over the knowers of Allah's rulings, the saying of the teacher Abu Hamid (al-Ghazali) is agreed upon. No reasonable person doubts that the knowers of Allah... are not only better than the knowers of Allah's rulings, but also better than those of the branches and the roots of the Religion, because the rank of a science is according to its immediate object... Most of the time scholars are veiled from their knowledge of Allah and His attributes, otherwise they would be among the gnostics whose knowledge is continuous, as befits the demand of true virtue. And how could the gnostics and the jurists be the same, when Allah says: "The noblest among you in Allah's sight are the most godwary" (49:13)?... and by the "erudite" (*`ulama'*) in His saying "The erudite among His bondsmen fear Allah alone" (35:28), He means those who know Him, His attributes, and His actions, not those who know His rulings... A sign of the superiority of the gnostics over the jurists is that Allah effects miracles at the hands of the former, but never at the hands of the latter, except when they enter the path of the gnostics and acquire their characteristics.¹⁰

It is noteworthy that al-`Izz did not need to include the scholars of hadith, since they are considered below the rank of the scholars of fiqh and are therefore included with them below the saints. Ibn Abi Zayd al-Maliki reports Sufyan ibn `Uyayna as saying: "Hadith leads to misguidance except the *fuqaha'*," and Malik's companion Ibn Wahb said: "Any master of hadith who has no Imam in fiqh is misguided (*dall*). If Allah had not saved us with Malik and al-Layth, we would have been misguided."¹¹ We have already mentioned Malik's warning that religion does not consist in the narration of many hadiths but in a light that settles in the breast.

¹ al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a`lam al-nubala'* [#969].

² Miftah al-sa`ada 2:353; al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-shafi`iyya* 8:214.

³ al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam, *Qawa'id al-ahkam* (Dar al-sharq li al-tiba'a, 1388/1968) 1:29, 2:212.

⁴ Ahmad, *Musnad* 1:108 (#860).

⁵ al-Haytami, *Fatawa hadithiyya* p. 212.

⁶ al-Yafi'i, *Mir'at al-jinan* 4:154.

⁷ Ibn al-`Imad, *Shadharat al-dhahab* 5:302; Ibn Shakir al-Kutabi, *Fawat al-wafayat* 1:595; al-Yafi'i, *Mir'at al-jinan* 4:154; al-Nabahani, *Jami' karamat al-awliya* 2:71; Abu al-Sa`adat, *Taj al-ma`arif* p. 250.

⁸ al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam, *Fatawa misriyya* p. 158.

⁹ al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam, *Qawa'id al-ahkam* 2:220-221.

¹⁰ al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam, *Fatawa*, ed. `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Abd al-Fattah (Beirut: dar al-ma'rifa, 1406/1986) p. 138-142.

¹¹ Ibn Abi Zayd, *al-Jami' fi al-sunan* p. 118-119.

ON TASAWWUF Imam Nawawi (d. 676)

One of the great Sufi scholars, strictest latter-time hadith masters, and most meticulous of jurists, Shaykh al-Islam Imam Muhyiddin Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi is with al-Rafi'i the principal reference of the late Shafi'i school. His books remain authoritative in the methodology of the law, in Qur'an commentary, and in hadith. His commentary of *Sahih Muslim* is second only to Ibn Hajar's commentary of *Sahih Bukhari*. Allah gave his famous compilation of Forty Hadiths more circulation and fame than possibly any other book of hadith, large or small, and has allowed Nawawi to be of immense benefit to the Community of Islam.

Nawawi was considered a Sufi and a saint, as is evident from the titles of some of his works and that of Sakhawi's biography entitled *Tarjamat shaykh al-islam, qutb al-awliya' al-kiram, faqih al-anam, muhyi al-sunna wa mumit al-bid'a Abi Zakariyya Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi* (The biography of the Shaykh of Islam, the Pole of Noble Saints, the Jurist of Mankind, the Reviver of the Sunna and the Slayer of Innovation... al-Nawawi).

Nawawi writes in his short treatise entitled *al-Maqasid fi al-tawhid wa al-'ibada wa usul al-tasawwuf* (The purposes in oneness, worship, and the foundations of self-purification):

The specifications of the Way of the Sufis are five:

1. to keep the Presence of Allah in your heart in public and in private;
2. to follow the Sunna of the Prophet by actions and speech;
3. to keep away from people and from asking them;
4. to be happy with what Allah gave you, even if it is less;
5. to always refer your matters to Allah.¹

He died before he could complete his *Bustan al-'arifin fi al-zuhd wa al-tasawwuf* (The garden of the gnostics in asceticism and self-purification), which is a precious collection of sayings of the early and late masters of tasawwuf elaborating on some of the finer points of self-purification. Here is an excerpt:

Al-Shafi'i said, may Allah have mercy on him: "Only the sincere one (*mukhlis*) knows hypocrisy (*riya*).²" This means that it is impossible to know the reality of hypocrisy and see its hidden shades except for one who resolutely seeks (*arada*) sincerity. That one strives for a long time searching and meditating and examining at length within himself until he knows or knows something of what hypocrisy is. This does not happen for everyone. Indeed, this happens only with the special ones (*al-khawass*). But for a given individual to claim that he knows what hypocrisy is, this is real ignorance on his part.

I shall mention in this book a chapter, Allah willing, in which you will see a type of wonder that will cool your eyes. To illustrate the great extent of the concealment of hypocrisy we only need relate the following from the Teacher and Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, may Allah have mercy on him, from his *Risala* with our isnad previously mentioned.

He said: "I heard Muhammad ibn al-Husayn say: I heard Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Ja'far say: I heard al-Hasan ibn 'Alawiyya say: Abu Yazid [al-Bistami], may Allah be well pleased with him, said: I was for twelve years the blacksmith of my ego (*haddadu nafsi*), then for five years I became the mirror of my heart (*mir'atu qalbi*), then for a year I looked at what lay between the two of them and I saw around me a visible belt [i.e. of kufr = the vestimentary sign of a non-Muslim subject of the Islamic state]. So I strove to cut it for twelve years and then looked again, and I saw around me a hidden belt. So I worked to cut it for five years, looking to see how to cut. Then it was unveiled for me

(*kushifa li*) and I looked at creation and saw that they were all dead. So I recited the funeral prayer over them."

I say: That hypocrisy should be as inscrutable as this to the peerless master in this path [i.e. *tasawwuf*] is enough to show how greatly hidden it lies. His phrase: "I saw them dead" is the apex of worth and beauty, and seldom do other than the Prophet's words, Blessings and Peace be upon him, gather up such wealth of meanings. I shall touch upon its meaning briefly. It means that after he had struggled long and hard and his ego had been disciplined and his heart illumined, and when he had conquered his ego and subdued it and achieved complete mastery over it, and it had subjected himself to him totally, at that time he looked at all created beings and found that they were dead and completely powerless:

they cannot harm nor can they benefit;
they cannot give nor can they withhold;
they cannot give life nor can they give death;
they cannot convey nor can they cut off;
they cannot bring near nor can they take away;
they cannot make happy nor can they make sad;
they cannot bestow nor can they deprive;
they possess for themselves neither benefit nor harm,
nor death, nor life, nor resurrection.

This, then, characterizes human beings as dead: they are considered dead in all of the above respects, they are neither feared nor entreated, what they have is not coveted, they are not shown off to nor fawned upon, one does not concern oneself with them, they are not envied nor disparaged, their defects are not mentioned nor their faults pursued and exposed, one is not jealous of them nor thinks much of whatever Allah-given favors they have received, and they are forgiven and excused for their shortcomings, although the legal punishments are applied to them according to the Law. But the application of such punishment does not preclude what we have mentioned before, nor does it preclude our endeavoring to cover up their faults without disparaging them in the least.

This is how the dead are viewed. And if someone mentions human beings in a dishonorable manner we forbid him from probing that subject in the same way that we would if he were going to examine a person who died. We do not do anything for their sake nor do we leave Him for them. And we no more stop ourselves from fulfilling an act of obedience to Allah on their account than we do on account of a dead person, and we do not over-praise them. And we neither love their own praise for us nor hate their insults, and we do not reciprocate them.

In sum, they are as it were non-existent in all the respects we have mentioned. They are under Allah's complete care and jurisdiction. Whoever deals with them in such a way, he has combined the good of the next world with that of the lower world. May Allah the Generous grant us success towards achieving this. These few words are enough to touch upon an explanation for Abu Yazid al-Bistami's saying, may Allah be well pleased with him.²

¹ Cf. Nuh Keller, *Al-Maqasid: Imam Nawawi's Manual of Islam* (Evanston: Sunna Books, 1994) p. 85-86.

² al-Nawawi, *Bustan al-`arifin* (Beirut: dar al-kitab al-`arabi, 1405/1985) p. 53-54.

We mention this wa`iz (preacher) because he is often confused with `Izz al-Din ibn `Abd al-Salam al-Sulami, and a small work of his on tasawwuf is mistakenly attributed to the latter. In this work, entitled variously Hall al-rumuz wa mafatih al-kunuz and Zabad khulasat al-tasawwuf, al-Maqdisi divides the levels of suluk or spiritual wayfaring along three ways which correspond to the Prophet's definition of Religion in the hadith of Jibril:

Islam is the first of the levels of Religion, characterizing the common believers; Iman is the first of the stepping-stones of the heart and it characterizes the elite of the believers; Ihsan is the first of the stepping-stones of the spirit, and it characterizes the elite of those brought near.¹

[23] ON TASAWWUF Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728)

His admirers cite this jurist and hadith master of the Hanbali school as an enemy of Sufis, and he is the principal authority in the campaign of "Salafis" responsible for creating the present climate of unwarranted fanaticism and encouragement to ignorance regarding tasawwuf. Yet Ibn Taymiyya was himself a Sufi. However, "Salafis" are careful never to show the Sufi Ibn Taymiyya, who would severely hamper their construction of him as purely anti-Sufi.

Ibn Taymiyya's discourse on tasawwuf is riddled with contradictions and ambiguities. One might say that even though he levelled all sorts of judgments on Sufis, he was nevertheless unable to deny the greatness of tasawwuf upon which the Community had agreed long before he came along. As a result he is often observed slighting tasawwuf, questioning his Sufi contemporaries, and reducing the primacy of the elite of Muslims to ordinariness, at the same time as he boasts of being a Qadiri Sufi in a direct line of succession to Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, as we show in the lines that follow.

It should be clear that the reason we quote the following evidence is not because we consider Ibn Taymiyya in any way representative of tasawwuf. In our view he no more represents tasawwuf than he represents the `aqida of Ahl al-Sunna. However, we quote his views only to demonstrate that his misrepresentation by Orientalists and "Salafis" purely as an enemy of tasawwuf does not stand to scrutiny. Regardless of the desires of one group or another, the facts provide clear evidence that Ibn Taymiyya had no choice but to accept tasawwuf and its principles, and that he himself not only claimed to be a Sufi, but also to have been adorned with the cloak (khirqah) of shaykhhood in the Qadiri Sufi Order.

We have already mentioned Ibn Taymiyya's admiration for `Abd al-Qadir Gilani, to whom he gives the title "my Shaykh" (shaykhuna) and "my Master" (sayyidi) exclusively in his entire Fatawa. Ibn Taymiyya's sufi inclinations and his reverence for `Abd al-Qadir Gilani can also be seen in his hundred-page commentary on Futuh al-ghayb, covering only five of the seventy-eight sermons of the book, but showing that he considered tasawwuf essential within the life of the Islamic community.¹

In his commentary Ibn Taymiyya stresses that the primacy of the Shari`a forms the soundest tradition in tasawwuf, and to argue this point he lists over a dozen early masters, as well as more contemporary shaykhs like his fellow Hanbalis, al-Ansari al-Harawi and `Abd al-Qadir, and the latter's own shaykh, Hammad al-Dabbas: The upright among the followers of the Path - like the majority of the early shaykhs (shuyukh al-salaf) such as Fudayl ibn `Iyad, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Ma`ruf al-Karkhi, al-Sari al-Saqati, al-Junayd ibn Muhammad, and others of the early teachers, as well as Shaykh Abd al-Qadir, Shaykh Hammad, Shaykh Abu al-Bayan and others of the later masters -- do not permit the followers of the Sufi path to depart from the divinely legislated command and prohibition, even were that person to have flown in the air or walked on water.²

Elsewhere also, such as in his al-Risala al-safadiyya, Ibn Taymiyya defends the Sufis as those who belong to the path of the Sunna and represent it in their teachings and writings: The great shaykhs mentioned by Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami in Tabaqat al-sufiyya, and Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri in al-Risala, were adherents of the school of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama`a and the school of Ahl al-hadith, such as al-Fudayl ibn `Iyad, al-Junayd ibn Muhammad, Sahl ibn `Abd Allah al-Tustari, `Amr ibn `Uthman al-Makki, Abu `Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Khafif al-Shirazi, and others, and their speech is found in the Sunna, and they composed books about the Sunna.³

In his treatise on the difference between the lawful forms of worship and the innovative forms, entitled Risalat al-`ibadat al-shar`iyya wal-farq baynaha wa bayn al-bid`iyya, Ibn Taymiyya unmistakably states that the lawful is the method and way of "those who follow the Sufi path" or "the way of self-denial" (zuhd) and those who follow "what is called poverty and tasawwuf", i.e. the fuqara' and the Sufis: The lawful is that by which one approaches near to Allah. It is the way of Allah. It is righteousness, obedience, good deeds, charity, and fairness. It is the way of those on the Sufi path (al-salikin), and the method of those intending Allah and worshipping Him; it is that which is travelled by everyone who desires Allah and follows the way of self-denial (zuhd) and religious practice, and what is called poverty and tasawwuf and the like.⁴

Regarding `Abd al-Qadir's teaching that the salik or Sufi wayfarer should abstain from permitted desires, Ibn Taymiyya begins by determining that Abd al-Qadir's intention is that one should give up those permitted things which are not commanded, for there may be a danger in them. But to what extent? If Islam is essentially learning and carrying out the Divine command, then there must be a way for the striver on the path to determine the will of Allah in each particular situation. Ibn Taymiyya concedes that the Qur'an and Sunna cannot explicitly cover every possible specific event in the life of every believer. Yet if the goal of submission of will and desire to Allah is to be accomplished by those seeking Him, there must be a way for the striver to ascertain the Divine command in its particularity.

Ibn Taymiyya's answer is to apply the legal concept of ijtihaad to the spiritual path, specifically to the notion of ilham or inspiration. In his efforts to achieve a union of his will with Allah's, the true Sufi reaches a state where he desires nothing more than to discover the greater good, the action which is most pleasing and loveable to Allah. When

external legal arguments cannot direct him in such matters, he can rely on the standard Sufi notions of private inspiration (ilham) and intuitive perception (dhawq): If the Sufi wayfarer has creatively employed his efforts to the external shar'ī indications and sees no clear probability concerning his preferable action, he may then feel inspired, along with his goodness of intention and reverent fear of Allah, to choose one of two actions as superior to the other. This kind of inspiration (ilham) is an indication concerning the truth. It may be even a stronger indication than weak analogies, weak hadiths, weak literalist arguments (zawahir), and weak istisḥaab which are employed by many who delve into the principles, differences, and systematizing of fiqh.⁵

Ibn Taymiyya bases this view on the principle that Allah has put a natural disposition for the truth in mankind, and when this natural disposition has been grounded in the reality of faith and enlightened by Qur'anic teaching, and still the striver on the path is unable to determine the precise will of Allah in specific instances, then his heart will show him the preferable course of action. Such an inspiration, he holds, is one of the strongest authorities possible in the situation. Certainly the striver will sometimes err, falsely guided by his inspiration or intuitive perception of the situation, just as the mujtahid sometimes errs. But, he says, even when the mujtahid or the inspired striver is in error, he is obedient.

Appealing to ilham and dhawq does not mean following one's own whims or personal preferences.⁶ In his letter to Nasr al-Manbijī, he qualifies this intuition as "faith-informed" (al-dhawq al-imani). His point is, as in the commentary to the Futuh, that inspirational experience is by nature ambiguous and needs to be qualified and informed by the criteria of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Nor can it lead to a certainty of the truth in his view, but what it can do is give the believer firm grounds for choosing the more probably correct course of action in a given instance and help him to conform his will, in the specific details of his life, to that of his Creator and Commander.⁷

Other works of his as well abound in praise for Sufi teachings. For example, in his book al-ihṭijāj bi al-qadar, he defends the Sufis' emphasis on love of Allah and their voluntarist rather than intellectual approach to religion as being in agreement with the teachings of the Qur'an, the sound hadith, and the imjā' al-salaf: As for the Sufis, they affirm the love (of Allah), and this is more evident among them than all other issues. The basis of their Way is simply will and love. The affirmation of the love of Allah is well-known in the speech of their early and recent masters, just as it is affirmed in the Book and the Sunna and in the agreement of the Salaf.⁸

Ibn Taymiyya is also notorious for his condemnation of Ibn `Arabi. However, what he condemned was not Ibn `Arabi but a tiny book of his entitled Fusus al-hikam, which forms a single slim volume. As for Ibn `Arabi's magnum opus, al-Futuhāt al-makkiyya (The Meccan divine disclosures), Ibn Taymiyya was no less an admirer of this great work than everyone else in Islam who saw it, as he declares in his letter to Abu al-Fath Nasr al-Munayji (d. 709) published in his volume entitled Tawhid al-rububiyya of his Fatawa: I was one of those who, previously, used to hold the best opinion of Ibn `Arabi and extol his praise, because of the benefits I saw in his books, such as what he said in

many of his books, for example: al-Futuhāt, al-Kānḥ, al-Muḥkam al-marbut, al-Durra al-fakhira, Matali` al-nujum, and other such works.⁹

Ibn Taymiyya goes on to say he changed his opinions, not because of anything in these books, but only after he read the Fusus.

We now turn to the evidence of Ibn Taymiyya's affiliation with the Qadiri Sufi Way and to his own acknowledgement, as related by his student Ibn `Abd al-Hadi (d. 909), that he had received the Qadiri khirqā or cloak of authority from `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani through a chain of three shaykhs. These are no other than the three Ibn Qudamas who are among the established authorities in fiqh in the Hanbali school. This information was brought to light by George Makdisi in a series of articles published in the 1970s.¹⁰

In a manuscript of the Yusuf ibn `Abd al Hadi al-Hanbali entitled Bad' al 'ilqā bi labis al khirqā (The beginning of the shield in the wearing of the Sufi cloak), Ibn Taymiyya is listed within a Sufi spiritual genealogy with other well known Hanbali scholars. The links in this genealogy are, in descending order:

`Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (d. 561)

- Abu `Umar ibn Qudama (d. 607)
- Muwaffaq al Din ibn Qudama (d. 620)

Ibn Abi `Umar ibn Qudama (d. 682)

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728)

Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya (d. 751)

Ibn Rajab (d. 795)(Both Abu `Umar ibn Qudama and his brother Muwaffaq al-Din received the khirqā directly from Abd al-Qadir himself.)

Ibn Taymiyya is then quoted by Ibn `Abd al Hadi as affirming his Sufi affiliation both in the Qadiri order and in other Sufi orders: I have worn the Sufi cloak of a number of shaykhs belonging to various tariqas (labistu khirqata at tasawwuf min turuqi jama'atin min al shuyukhi), among them the Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al Jili, whose tariqa is the greatest of the well known ones. Further on he says: The greatest Sufi Way (ajall al-turuq) is that of my master (sayyidi) `Abd al-Qadir al Jili, may Allah have mercy on him.¹¹

Further corroboration comes from Ibn Taymiyya in one of his own works, as quoted in his al Mas'ala at tabriziyya: labistu al khirqata al-mubarakata li al Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir wa bayni wa baynahu ithan I wore the blessed Sufi cloak of `Abd al-Qadir, there being between him and me two shaykhs.¹²

Ibn Taymiyya thus affirms that he was an assiduous reader of Ibn `Arabi's al-Futuhāt al-makkiyya; that he considers `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani his shaykh -- he even wrote a

commentary on the latter's Futuh al-ghayb; and that he belongs to the Qadiriyya order and other Sufi orders. What does he say about tasawwuf and Sufis in general?

In his essay entitled al-Sufiyya wa al-fuqara' and published in the eleventh volume (al Tawassuf) of his Majmu'a fatawa Ibn Taymiyya al Kubra, he states: The word sufi was not well-known in the first three centuries but its usage became well-known after that. More than a few Imams and shaykhs spoke about it, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Sulayman al Darani, and others. It has been related that Sufyan al-Thawri used it. Some have also mentioned that concerning Hasan al Basri.¹³

Ibn Taymiyya then goes on to deduce that tasawwuf originated in Basra among the generations after the tabi'in, because he finds that many of the early Sufis originated from there while he does not find evidence of it elsewhere. In this way he mistakenly reduces tasawwuf to a specific place and time, cutting it off from its links with the time of the Prophet and the Companions. This is one of the aberrant conclusions which gives rise, among today's "Salafis," to questions such as: "Where in the Qur'an and the Sunna is tasawwuf mentioned?" As Ibn 'Ajiba replied to such questioners: The founder of the science of tasawwuf is the Prophet himself to whom Allah taught it by means of revelation and inspiration.¹⁴ By Allah's favor, we have put this issue to rest in our lengthy exposition on the proofs of tasawwuf in the pages above.

Ibn Taymiyya continues: Tasawwuf has realities (haqa'iq) and states of experience (ahwal) which the Sufis mention in their science... Some say that the Sufi is he who purifies himself from anything which distracts him from the remembrance of Allah and who becomes full of reflection about the hereafter, to the point that gold and stones will be the same to him. Others say that tasawwuf is safeguarding of the precious meanings and leaving behind pretensions to fame and vanity, and the like. Thus the meaning of sufi alludes to the meaning of siddiq or one who has reached complete Truthfulness, because the best of human beings after prophets are the siddiqin, as Allah mentioned in the verse: Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle, they are in the company of those on whom is the grace of Allah: of the prophets, the truthful saints, the martyrs and the righteous; ah, what a beautiful fellowship! (4:69)

They consider, therefore, that after the Prophets there is no one more virtuous than the Sufi, and the Sufi is, in fact, among other kinds of truthful saints, only one kind, who specialized in asceticism and worship (al-sufi huwa fi al haqiqa naw'un min al-siddiqin fahuwa al-siddiq alladhi ikhtassa bi al zuhdi wa al 'ibada). The Sufi is "the righteous man of the path," just as others are called "the righteous ones of the 'ulama" and "the righteous ones of the emirs" ...[Here Ibn Taymiyya denies the Sufis' claim that they represent Truthfulness after the Prophets, and he makes their status only one among many of a larger pool of truthful servants. This stems from his earlier premise that tasawwuf originated later and farther than the Sunna of the Prophet. We have already mentioned that this premise was incorrect. All of the Sufis consider that the conveyors of their knowledge and discipline were none other than the Companions and the Successors, who took it from none other than the Prophet himself. In this respect the Sufis and the great Companions and Successors are not differentiated in essence, although they are

differentiated in name, by which precedence is given to the Companions and the Successors according to the hadith of the Prophet.

Then Ibn Taymiyya arbitrarily separates Sufis and scholars into two seemingly discrete groups, whereas we have seen that all the Sufis were great scholars, and that many of the greatest scholars were Sufis. Al-Junayd anticipated such high-handed distinctions in his famous statement: "This knowledge of ours is built of the Qur'an and the Sunna." Also addressing this important mistake in his *Tabaqat al-kubra*, Sha`rani quotes al-Junayd and goes on to state: Every true Sufi is a scholar is Sacred Law, though the reverse is not necessarily true.¹⁵ Some people criticized the Sufis and said that they were innovators and out of the Sunna... but the truth is that they are exercising *ijtihad* in view of obeying Allah just as others who are obedient to Allah have also done. So from them you will find the Foremost in Nearness (*al-sabiq al-muqarrab*) by virtue of his striving, while some of them are from the People of the Right Hand... and among those claiming affiliation with them, are those who are unjust to themselves, rebelling against their Lord. These are the sects of innovators and free-thinkers (*zindiq*) who claim affiliation to the Sufis but in the opinion of the genuine Sufis, they do not belong, for example, al-Hallaj. [Here Ibn Taymiyya's inappropriate citing of al-Hallaj is far more symptomatic of his own misunderstanding of *tasawwuf* that it is illustrative of the point he is trying to make. In reality, as `Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi said of al-Hallaj, "his case (among the Sufis) is not clear, though Ibn `Ata' Allah, Ibn Khafif, and Abu al-Qasim al-Nasir Abadi approved of him."¹⁶ Furthermore, we have already mentioned that major scholars in Ibn Taymiyya's own school rejected the charges leveled against al-Hallaj, and even considered him a saint, such as Ibn `Aqil and Ibn Qudama. Can it be that Ibn Taymiyya was unaware of all these positions which invalidate his point, or is he merely affecting ignorance?] *Tasawwuf* has branched out and diversified and the Sufis have become known as three types:

1. *Sufiyyat al haqa'iq*: the Sufis of Realities, and these are the ones we mentioned above;
2. *Sufiyyat al arzaq*: the funded Sufis who live on the religious endowments of Sufi guest-houses and schools; it is not necessary for them to be among the people of true realities, as this is a very rare thing
3. *Sufiyyat al rasm*: the Sufis by appearance only, who are interested in bearing the name and the dress etc.¹⁷

About *fana'* -- a term used by Sufis literally signifying extinction or self-extinction -- and the *shatahat* or sweeping statements of Sufis, Ibn Taymiyya says: This state of love is characterize many of the People of Love of Allah and the People of Seeking (*Ahl al irada*). A person vanishes to himself in the object of his love -- Allah through the intensity of his love. He will recall Allah, not recalling himself, remember Allah and forget himself, take Allah to witness and not take himself to witness, exist in Allah, not to himself. When he reaches that stage, he no longer feels his own existence. That is why he may say in this state: *ana al haqq* (I am the Truth), or *subhani* (Glory to Me!), and *ma fi al-jubba illa Allah* (There is nothing in this cloak except Allah), because he is drunk in the love of Allah and this is a pleasure and happiness that he cannot control...

This matter has in it both truth and falsehood. Yet when someone enters through his fervor a state of ecstatic love (ʿishq) for Allah, he will take leave of his mind, and when he enters that state of absentmindedness, he will find himself as if he is accepting the concept of ittihad (union with Allah). I do not consider this a sin, because that person is excused and no one may punish him as he is not aware of what he is doing. The pen does not condemn the crazed person except when he is restored to sanity (and commits the same act). However, when he is in that state and commits wrong, he will come under Allah's address: O Our Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes (2:286), There is no blame on you if you unintentionally make a mistake.¹⁸

The story is mentioned of two men whose mutual love was so strong that one day, as one of them fell in the sea, the other one threw himself in behind him. Then the first one asked: "What made you fall here like me?" His friend replied: "I vanished in you and no longer saw myself. I thought you were I and I was you"... Therefore, as long as one is not drunk through something that is prohibited, his action is accepted from him, but if he is drunk through something prohibited (i.e. the intention was bad) then he is not excused.¹⁹

The above pages show the great extent of Ibn Taymiyya's familiarity with the broad lines of tasawwuf. Such knowledge was but part of the complete education of anyone who had a claim to learning in his day and before his time. It did not constitute something extraneous or foreign to the great corpus of the Islamic sciences. And yet, similarly to his case in ʿaqida which we have unravelled in the previous pages, Ibn Taymiyya's misunderstanding of tasawwuf massively outweighed his understanding of it. This point was brought to light with quasi-surgical precision by the great Sufi Shaykh Ibn ʿAta' Allah in the debate he held with Ibn Taymiyya in the mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo.

¹ The commentary is found in volume 10:455-548 of the first Riyadh edition of the Majmuʿ fatawa Ibn Taymiyya.

² Majmuʿ fatawa Ibn Taymiyya 10:516.

³ Ibn Taymiyya, al-Safadiyya (Riyad: matabiʿ hanifa, 1396/1976) 1:267.

⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, Majmuʿat al-rasaʿil wa al-masaʿil (Beirut: lajnat al-turath al-ʿarabi) 5:83.

⁵ Majmuʿ fatawa Ibn Taymiyya 10:473-474.

⁶ Ibid. 10:479.

⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, Majmuʿa al-rasaʿil wal-masaʿil 1:162.

⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ihtijaj bi al-qadar (Cairo: al-matbaʿa al-salafiyya, 1394/1974) p. 38.

⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, Tawhid al-rububiyya in Majmu`a al-Fatawa al-kubra (Riyad, 1381) 2:464-465.

¹⁰ George Makdisi, "L'isnad initiatique soufi de Muwaffaq ad-Din ibn Qudama," in Cahiers de l'Herne: Louis Massignon (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1970) p. 88-96; "Ibn Taimiya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order," in American Journal of Arabic Studies I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974) p. 118-129; "The Hanbali School and Sufism," in Boletin de la Asociacion Espanola de Orientalistas 15 (Madrid, 1979) p. 115-126.

¹¹ Ibn `Abd al Hadi, Bad' al 'ilqa bi labs al khirqa, ms. al-Hadi, Princeton Library Arabic Collection, fols. 154a, 169b, 171b 172a; and Damascus University, copy of original Arabic manuscript, 985H.; also mentioned in at Talyani, manuscript Chester Beatty 3296 (8) in Dublin, fol. 67a.

¹² Manuscript Damascus, Zahiriyya #1186 H.

¹³ Ibn Taymiyya, Majmu`a al-fatawa al-kubra 11:5.

¹⁴ Ibn `Ajiba, Iqaz al-himam p. 6.

¹⁵ al-Sha`rani, al-Tabaqat al-kubra 1:4.

¹⁶ `Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Usul al-din p. 315-16.

¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, Majmu`a al-fatawa al-kubra 11:16-20.

¹⁸ Op. cit. 2:396 397.

¹⁹ Op. cit. 10:339.

ON TASAWWUF Ibn `Ata' Allah al-Iskandari (d. 709)

The Debate with Ibn Taymiyya

One of the great sufi imams who was also known as a muhaddith, preacher, and Maliki jurist, Abu al-Fadl Ibn `Ata Allah al-Iskandari (d. 709) is the author of *al-Hikam* (Aphorisms), *Miftah al-falah* (The key to success), *al-Qasd al-mujarrad fi ma`rifat al-ism al-mufrad* (The pure goal concerning knowledge of the Unique Name), *Taj al-`arus al-hawi li tadhhib al-nufus* (The bride's crown containing the discipline of souls), *Unwan al-tawfiq fi adab al-tariq* (The sign of success concerning the discipline of the path), the biographical *al-Lata'if fi manaqib Abi al-`Abbas al-Mursi wa shaykhihi Abi al-Hasan* (The subtle blessings in the saintly lives of Abu al-`Abbas al-Mursi and his master Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili), and others. He was Abu al-`Abbas al-Mursi's (d. 686) student and the second successor of the Sufi founder, Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili.

Ibn `Ata' Allah was one of those who confronted Ibn Taymiyya for his excesses in attacking those of the Sufis with whom he disagreed. He never refers to Ibn Taymiyya by name in his works, but it is clearly of him that he speaks when he says, in his *Lata'if*, that Allah has put the Sufis to the test through what he terms "the scholars of external learning."¹ In the pages below are the first English translation of a historical account which took place between the two.

Text of the Debate

From Usul al-Wusul by Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim Ibn Kathir, Ibn al-Athir, and other authors of biographical dictionaries and biographies have transmitted to us this authentic historical debate.² It gives an idea of the ethics of debate among the people of learning. It documents the controversy between a pivotal personality in tasawwuf, Shaykh Ahmad Ibn Ata' Allah al-Iskandari, and an equally important person of the so-called "Salafi" movement, Shaykh Ahmad Ibn `Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya during the Mamluke era in Egypt under the reign of the Sultan Muhammad Ibn Qalawun (al-Malik al-Nasir).

The Testimony of Ibn Taymiyya to Ibn `Ata' Allah: Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya had been imprisoned in Alexandria. When the Sultan pardoned him, he came back to Cairo. At the time of the evening prayer he went to al-Azhar mosque where salat al-maghrib was being led by Shaykh Ahmad Ibn `Ata Allah al-Iskandari. Following the prayer, Ibn `Ata' Allah was surprised to discover that Ibn Taymiyya had been praying behind him. Greeting him with a smile, the Sufi shaykh cordially welcomed Ibn Taymiyya's arrival to Cairo, saying: "as-Salamu alaykum". Then Ibn `Ata' Allah started to talk with the learned visitor.

Ibn `Ata' Allah: "Ordinarily, I pray the evening prayer in the Mosque of Imam Husayn and the night prayer here. But look how the Divine plan works itself out! Allah has ordained that I should be the first one to greet you (after your return to Cairo). Tell me, O faqih, do you blame me for what happened?"

Ibn Taymiyya: "I know you intended me no harm, but our differences of opinion still stand. In any case, whoever has harmed me in any way, from this day on I hereby exonerate and free him from any blame in the matter."

Ibn `Ata' Allah: "What is it you know about me, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya?"

Ibn Taymiyya: "I know you to be a man of scrupulous piety, abundant learning, integrity and truthfulness in speech. I bear witness that I have seen no one like you either in Egypt or Syria who loves Allah more nor who is more self-effacing in Him nor who is more obedient in carrying out what He has commanded and in refraining from what He has forbidden. Nevertheless, we have our differences. What do you know about me? Are you claiming that I am misguided when I deny the validity of calling on anyone save Allah for aid (istighatha)?"

Ibn `Ata' Allah: "Surely, my dear colleague, you know that istighatha or calling for help is the same as tawassul or seeking a means and asking for intercession (shafa`a); and that

the Messenger, on him be peace, is the one whose help is sought since he is our means and he the one whose intercession we seek."

Ibn Taymiyya: "In this matter, I follow what the Prophet's Sunna has laid down in the Shari`a. For it has been transmitted in a sound hadith: "I have been granted the power of intercession."³ I have also collected the sayings on the Qur'anic verse: "It may be that thy Lord will raise thee (O Prophet) to a praised estate" (17:79) to the effect that the "praised estate" is intercession. Moreover, when the mother of the Commander of the Faithful `Ali died, the Prophet prayed to Allah at her grave and said: O Allah who lives and never dies, who quickens and puts to death, forgive the sins of my mother Fatima bint Asad, make wide the place wherein she enters through the intercession of me, Thy Prophet, and the Prophets who came before me. For Thou art the most merciful of those capable of having mercy."⁴

This is the intercession that belongs to the Prophet, on him be peace. As for seeking the help of someone other than Allah, it smacks of idolatry; for the Prophet commanded his cousin `Abd Allah ibn `Abbas not to ask of anyone to help him other than Allah."⁵

Ibn `Ata' Allah: May Allah cause you to prosper, O faqih! As for the advice which the Prophet -- on him be peace -- gave to his cousin Ibn Abbas, he wanted him to draw near to Allah not through his familial relationship to the Prophet but through his knowledge. With regard to your understanding of istighatha as being seeking the aid of someone other than Allah which is idolatry, I ask you: Is there any Muslim possessed of real faith and believing in Allah and His Prophet who thinks there is someone other than Allah who has autonomous power over events and who is able to carry out what He has willed with regard to them? Is there any true believer who believes that there is someone who can reward him for his good deeds and punish him for his bad ones other than Allah?

Besides this, we must consider that there are expressions which should not be taken just in their literal sense. This is not because of fear of associating a partner with Allah and in order to block the means to idolatry. For whoever seeks help from the Prophet only seeks his power of intercession with Allah as when you yourself say: "This food satisfies my appetite." Does the food itself satisfy your appetite? Or is it the case that it is Allah who satisfies your appetite through the food?

As for your statement that Allah has forbidden Muslims to call upon anyone other than Himself in seeking help, have you actually seen any Muslim calling on someone other than Allah? The verse you cite from the Qur'an was revealed concerning the idolaters and those who used to call on their false gods and ignore Allah. Whereas, the only way Muslims seek the help of the Prophet is in the sense of tawassul or seeking a means, by virtue of the privilege he has received from Allah (bi haqqihi `inda Allah), and tashaffu` or seeking intercession, by virtue of the power of intercession which Allah has bestowed on him.

As for your pronouncement that istighatha or seeking help is forbidden in the Shari`a because it can lead to idolatry, if this is the case, then we ought also to prohibit grapes

because they are means to making wine, and to castrate unmarried men because not to do so leaves in the world a means to commit fornication and adultery."

At the latter comment both the shaykhs laughed. Ibn `Ata Allah continued: "I am acquainted with the all-inclusiveness and foresight of the legal school founded by your Shaykh, Imam Ahmad, and know the comprehensiveness of your own legal theory and about its principle of blocking the means to evil (sadd al-dhara'i`) as well as the sense of moral obligation a man of your proficiency in Islamic jurisprudence and integrity must feel. But I realize also that your knowledge of language demands that you search out the hidden meanings of words which are often shrouded behind their obvious senses. As for the Sufis, meaning for them is like a spirit, and the words themselves are like its body. You must penetrate deeply into what is behind the verbal body in order to seize the deeper reality of the word's spirit.

Now you have found a basis in your ruling against Ibn `Arabi in the *Fusus al-hikam*, the text of which has been tampered with by his opponents not only with things he did not say, but with statements he could not even have intended saying (given the character of his Islam). When Shaykh al-Islam al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam understood what Shaykh Ibn `Arabi had actually said and analyzed, grasped and comprehended the real meaning of his symbolic utterances, he asked Allah's pardon for his former opinion about the Shaykh and acknowledged that Muhyiddin ibn `Arabi was an Imam of Islam.⁶

As for the statement of al-Shadhili against Ibn Arabi, you should know that Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili is not the person who said it but one of the students of the Shadhiliyya. Furthermore, in making this statement that student was talking about some of the followers of Shadhili. Thus, his words were taken in a fashion he himself never intended.

"What do you think about the Commander of the Faithful, Sayyidina `Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him?"

Ibn Taymiyya: In the hadith the Prophet, on him be peace, said: "I am the city of knowledge and `Ali is its door."⁷ Sayyidina `Ali is the one mujahid who never went out to battle except to return victoriously. What scholar or jurist who came after him struggled for the sake of Allah using tongue, pen and sword at the same time? He was a most accomplished Companion of the Prophet -- may Allah honor his countenance. His words are a radiant lamp which have illumined me during the entire course of my life after the Qur'an and Sunna. Ah! one who is ever short of provision and long in his journeying.

Ibn `Ata' Allah: Now, did Imam `Ali ask anyone to take his side in a faction? For this faction has claimed that the Angel Gabriel made a mistake and delivered the revelation to Muhammad -- on him be peace instead of `Ali! Or did he ask them to claim that Allah had become incarnate in his body and the Imam had become divine? Or did he not fight and slay them and give a fatwa (legal opinion) that they should be killed wherever they were found?

Ibn Taymiyya: "On the basis of this very fatwa, I went out to fight them in the mountains of Syria for more than ten years.

Ibn `Ata' Allah: And Imam Ahmad -- may Allah be pleased with him -- questioned the actions of some of his followers who were in the habit of going on patrols, breaking open casks of wine (in the shops of their Christian vendors or wherever they find them), spilling their contents on the floor, beating up singing girls, and confronting people in the street. All of this they did in the name of enjoining good and prohibiting what is forbidden. However, the Imam had not given any fatwa that they should censure or rebuke all those people. Consequently, these followers of his were flogged, thrown into jail, and paraded mounted on assback facing the tail.

Now, is Imam Ahmad himself responsible for the bad behavior which the worst and most vicious Hanbalis continue to perpetrate right down to our own day, in the name of enjoining good and prohibiting what is forbidden?

All this is to say that Shaykh Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi is innocent with respect to what those of his followers do who absolve people of legal and moral obligations set down by the religion and from committing deeds that are prohibited. Do you not see this?

Ibn Taymiyya: "But where do they stand with respect to Allah? Among you Sufis are those who assert that when the Prophet -- on him be peace -- gave glad tidings to the poor and said that they would enter paradise before the rich, the poor fell into ecstasy and began to tear their garments into pieces; that at that moment the Angel Gabriel descended from heaven and said to the Prophet that Allah had sought his rightful portion from among these torn garments; and that the Angel Jibril carried one of them and hung it on Allah's throne. For this reason, they claim, Sufis wear patchworked garments and call themselves fuqara' or the "poor"!

Ibn `Ata' Allah: "Not all Sufis wear patchworked vests and clothing. Here I am before you: what do you disapprove of in my appearance?"

Ibn Taymiyya: "You are from the men of Shari`a and teach in al-Azhar."

Ibn `Ata' Allah: "al-Ghazali was equally an Imam both in Shari`a and tasawwuf. He treated legal rulings, the Sunna, and the Shari'a with the spirit of the Sufi. And by applying this method he was able to revive the religious sciences. We know that tasawwuf recognizes that what is sullied has no part in religion and that cleanliness has the character of faith. The true and sincere sufi must cultivate in his heart the faith recognized by the Ahl al-Sunna.

Two centuries ago the very phenomena of pseudo-Sufis appeared which you yourself criticize and reject. There were persons who sought to diminish the performance of worship and religious obligations, lighten fasting and belittle the five daily prayers. They ran wild into the vast arenas of sloth and heedlessness, claiming that they had been liberated from the shackles of the slavery of divine worship. Not satisfied with their own

vile deeds until they have claimed intimations of the most extravagant realities and mystical states just as Imam al-Qushayri himself described in his well-known *Risala*, which he directed against them. He also set down in detail what constituted the true path to Allah, which consists in taking a firm hold upon the Qur'an and the Sunna. The Imams of tasawwuf desire to arrive at the true reality not only by means of rational evidences thought up by the human mind which are capable of being false as well as true, but by means of purifying the heart and purging the ego through a course of spiritual exercises. They cast aside concerns for the life of this world inasmuch as the true servant of Allah does not busy himself with anything else except love of Allah and His Prophet. This is a high order of business and one which makes a servant pious and healthy and prosperous. It is an occupation that reforms those things that corrupt the human creature, such as love of money and ambition for personal standing in society. However, it is an order of business which is constituted by nothing less than spiritual warfare for the sake of Allah.

My learned friend, interpreting texts according to their literal meanings can sometimes land a person in error. Literalism is what has caused your judgments about Ibn `Arabi who is one of the Imams of our faith known for his scrupulous piety. You have understood what he wrote in a superficial fashion; whereas sufis are masters of literary figures which intimate much deeper meanings, hyperbolic language that indicates heightened spiritual awareness and words which convey secrets concerning the realm of the unseen."

Ibn Taymiyya: "This argument is against you, not in your favor. For when Imam al-Qushayri saw his followers deviating from the path to Allah he took steps to improve them. What do the sufi shaykhs in our day do? I only ask that Sufis follow the path of the Sunna of these great and pious ancestors of our faith (Salaf): the ascetics (zuhhad) among the Companions, the generation which succeeded them, and the generation that followed in their footsteps to their best! Whoever acts in this way I esteem him highly and consider him to be an Imam of the religion. As for unwarranted innovation and the insertion of the ideas of idolaters such as the Greek philosophers and the Indian Buddhists, or like the idea that man can incarnate Allah (hulul) or attain unity with Him (ittihad), or the theory that all existence is one in being (wahdat al-wujud) and other such things to which your Shaykh summons people: this is clearly godlessness and unbelief."

Ibn `Ata' Allah: "Ibn `Arabi was one of the greatest of the jurists who followed the school of Dawud al-Zahiri after Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, who is close to your methodology in Islamic law, O Hanbalis! But although Ibn `Arabi was a Zahiri (i.e. a literalist in matters of Islamic law), the method he applied to understand ultimate reality (al-haqiqah) was to search out the hidden, spiritual meaning (tariq al-batin), that is, to purify the inward self (tathir al-batin).⁸ However, not all followers of the hidden are alike. In order that you not err or forget, repeat your reading of Ibn `Arabi with fresh understanding of his symbols and inspirations. You will find him to be very much like al-Qushayri. He has taken his path in tasawwuf under the umbrella of the Qur'an and Sunna just like the Proof of Islam, Shaykh al-Ghazali, who carried on debates about doctrinal differences in matters of creed and issues of worship but considered them occupations lacking in real value and benefit.

He invited people to see that the love of Allah is the way of a proper servant of Allah with respect to faith.

Do you have anything to object to in this, O faqih? Or do you love the disputations of Islamic jurists? Imam Malik, may Allah be pleased with him, exercised extreme caution about such wrangling in matters of creed and used to say: "Whenever a man enters into arguing about issues of creed it diminishes his faith." Similarly al-Ghazali said: The quickest means of drawing near to Allah is through the heart, not the body. I do not mean by heart this fleshy thing palpable to seeing, hearing, sight and touch. Rather, I have in mind the inner most secret of Allah himself the Exalted and Great which is imperceptible to sight or touch. Indeed, the Ahl al-Sunna are the very ones who named the Sufi shaykh al-Ghazali: "the Proof of Islam,"⁹ and there is no-one to gainsay his opinions even if one of the scholars has been excessive in praising his book when he said: "The Ihya' `ulum al-din was almost a Qur'an."¹⁰

The carrying out of religious obligation (taklif) in the view of Ibn `Arabi and Ibn al-Farid is a worship whose mihrab, or prayer-niche indicating the orientation of prayer, is its inward aspect, not merely its external ritual. For what is the good of you standing and sitting in prayer if your heart is preoccupied with something other than Allah. Allah praises people when He says in the Qur'an: "Those who are humble in their prayer" (23:2) and He blames peoples when He says: "Those who are heedless in their prayer" (107:5). This is what Ibn `Arabi means when he says: "Worship is the mihrab of the heart, that is, the inward aspect of prayer not the outward."

The Muslim is unable to arrive at the knowledge of certitude (*`ilm al-yaqin*) nor at certitude itself (*`ayn al-yaqin*) of which the Qur'an speaks unless he evacuates his heart from whatever distracts it in the way of wordly cravings and center himself on inward contemplation. Then the outpourings of Divine reality will fill his heart, and from there will spring his sustenance. The real sufi is not the one who derives his sustenance from asking and begging people for alms. The only one who is sincere is he who rouses his heart and spirit to self-obliteration in Allah by obedience to Allah. Perhaps Ibn `Arabi caused the jurists to rise up against him because of his contempt of their preoccupation with arguing and wrangling about credal matters, actual legal cases, and hypothetical legal situations, since he saw how much it distracted them from purifying the heart. He named them "the jurists of women's menses." May Allah grant you refuge from being among them! Have you read Ibn `Arabi's statement that: "Whoever builds his faith exclusively on demonstrative proofs and deductive arguments, builds a faith on which it is impossible to rely. For he is affected by the negativities of constant objections. Certainty (*al-yaqin*) does not derive from the evidences of the mind but pours out from the depths of the heart." Have you ever read talk as pure and sweet as this?"

Ibn Taymiyya: "You have spoken well if only your master were as you say, for he would then be as far as possible from unbelief. But what he has said cannot sustain the meanings that you have given in my view."¹¹

¹ Ibn `Ata Allah, *Lata'if al-minan fi manaqib Abi al-`Abbas*. on the margins of Sha`rani's *Lata'if al-minan wa al-akhlaq* (Cairo, 1357) 2:17-18.

² See Ibn al-`Imad, *Shadharat al-dhahab* (1350/1931) 6:20f.; al- Zirikly, *al-A`lam* (1405/1984) 1:221; Ibn Hajar, *al-Durar al-kamina* (1348/1929) 1:148-273; Al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-suluk* (1934-1958) 2:40-94; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya* (1351/1932) 14:45; Subki, *Tabaqat al-shafi'iyya* (1324/1906) 5:177f. and 9:23f.; Suyuti, *Husn al-muhadara fi akhbar misr wa al-qahira* (1299/) 1:301; al-Dawadari, *al-Durr al-fakhir fi sirat al-malik al-Nasir* (1960) p. 200f.; al-Yafi'i, *Mir'at al-janan* (1337/1918) 4:246; Sha`rani, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra* (1355/1936) 2:19f.; al-Nabahani, *Jami` karamat al-awliya'* (1381/1962) 2:25f.

³ Bukhari and Muslim, hadith of Jabir: "I have been given five things which no prophet was given before me..."

⁴ al-Tabarani relates it in *al-Kabir*. Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim declare it sound. Ibn Abi Shayba on the authority of Jabir relates a similar narrative. Similar also is what Ibn `Abd Al-Barr on the authority of Ibn `Abbas and Abu Nu`aym in his *Hilya* on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik relate, as al-Hafiz al-Suyuti mentioned in the *Jami` al-Kabir*. Haythami says in *Majma` al-zawa'id*: "Tabarani's chain contains Rawh ibn Salah who has some weakness but Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim declared him trustworthy. The rest of its sub-narrators are the men of sound hadith." This Fatima is `Ali's mother, who raised the Prophet.

⁵ Hadith: "O young man... if you have need to ask, ask of Allah. If you must seek help, seek help from Allah..." (ya ghulam ala u'allimuka...): Tirmidhi (#2516 hasan sahih); Bayhaqi in *Asma' wa al-sifat* p. 75-76 and *Shu`ab al-iman* 2:27-28 (#1074-1075) and 7:203 (#10000); Ahmad 1:307; Tabarani; Ibn Hibban; Abu Dawud; al-Hakim; Nawawi included it in his 40 Hadiths (#19) but Ibn al-Jawzi placed it among the forgeries.

⁶ See al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam al-Maqdisi's *Zabad khulasat al-tasawwuf* (The quintessence of self-purification) (Tanta: al-matba'a al-yusufiyya). Published under the title *Hall al-rumuz wa-mafatih al-kunuz* (The explanation of symbols and the keys to treasures) (Cairo: al-maktab al-fanni li al-nashr, 1961). Note that this is a different author than Shaykh al-Islam al-`Izz ibn `Abd al-Salam al-Sulami.

⁷ From the *Reliance of the Traveller* p. 954-957: "(`Ali Qari:) The Hadith "I am the city of knowledge and `Ali is its gate" was mentioned by Tirmidhi... [who] said it was unacknowledgeable. Bukhari also said this, and said that it was without legitimate claim to authenticity. Ibn Ma`in said that it was a baseless lie, as did Abu Hatim and Yahya ibn Sa`id. Ibn Jawzi recorded it in his book of Hadith forgeries, and was confirmed by Dhahabi, and others in this. Ibn Daqiq al-`Eid said, "This Hadith is not confirmed by scholars, and is held by some to be spurious." Daraqutni stated that it was uncorroborated. Ibn Hajar `Asqalani was asked about it and answered that it was well authenticated (hasan), not rigorously authenticated (sahih), as Hakim had said, but not a forgery (mawdu`), as Ibn Jawzi had said. This was mentioned by Suyuti. The Hadith master (hafiz) Abu Sa`id `Ala'i said, "The truth is that the Hadith is well authenticated (hasan), in view of its multiple means of transmission, being neither rigorously authenticated (sahih) nor weak (da'if), much less a forgery" (*Risala al-mawdu`at*, 26)."

⁸ This is a key equivalence in Ibn `Ata Allah's *Hikam*, for example #205: "Sometimes lights come upon you and find the heart stuffed with forms of created things, so they go

back from whence they descended." Ibn `Ata' Allah, Sufi Aphorisms (Kitab al-hikam), trans. Victor Danner (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984) p. 53.

⁹ As illustrated by Salah al-Din al-Safadi for Ghazali's entry in his biographical dictionary: "Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad, the Proof of Islam, the Ornament of the Faith, Abu Hamid al-Tusi..." al-Safadi, al-Wafi bi al-wafayat 1:274.

¹⁰ Ironically, a similar kind of praise on Ibn `Ata' Allah's own book al-Hikam is related on the authority of the great shaykh Mawlay al-`Arabi al-Darqawi by Ibn `Ajiba in Iqaz al-himam (p. 3-4): "I heard the jurist al-Bannani say: "The Hikam of Ibn `Ata' is almost a revelation (wahy). Were it permitted to recite the daily prayer without the Qur'an, the words of the Hikam would be allowed." He meant by this that there is nothing in the Hikam except what proceeds from the Qur'an and points back to it again, and Allah knows best.

¹¹ In Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, Usul al-wusul (Cairo: 1404/ 1984) 299-310.

ON TASAWWUF Taj al-Din al-Subki (d. 771)

Shaykh al-Islam Taj al-Din al-Subki, the son of Shaykh al-Islam al-hafiz Taqi al-Din al-Subki (d. 756) who was a student of Ibn `Ata Allah, mentioned in his book *Mu`id al-ni`am* under the chapter entitled Sufism:

May Allah give them life and greet them (Sufis), and may He place us with them in Paradise. Too many things have been said about them and too many ignorant people have said things which are not related to them... The truth is that those people left the world and were busy with worship.

Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni (Imam al-Haramayn's father) said:

They are among Allah's people and His elite. His mercy is sought through their remembrance of Allah, and rain descends with their invocation. May Allah be pleased with them and may Allah be pleased with us for their sake.¹

¹ al-Subki, *Mu`id al-ni`am wa mubid al-niqam* p. 190.

[28] ON TASAWWUF Imam Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi al-Maliki (d. 790)

One of the foundational scholars of Usul al-fiqh or methodology of law whose books, like al-Ghazali's, are required reading in that field, he laid great emphasis on the requirement of complete knowledge and erudition in the Arabic language, not merely correct understanding, for those who practice ijtiḥad. In his book *al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-shari`a* (The congruences of the sources of the Divine Law) he held that the language of the Qur'an and the Sunna is the key to the comprehension of such scholars, and that the ijtiḥad of anyone deficient in this respect was unacceptable. Since the opinion of the mujtahid is a hujja or proof for the common person, this degree of authority necessitates direct access to the sources and full competence in Arabic.¹

He writes in his book *al-I'tisam*:

Many of the ignorant think that the Sufis are lax in conforming to Shari`a. Far be it from them to be attributed such a belief! The very first foundation of their path is the Sunna and the avoidance of what contravenes it!

Their chief spokesman and the master of their ways and pillar of their group, Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, declared that they acquired the name of tasawwuf in order to dissociate themselves from the People of Innovation. He mentioned that the most honorable of Muslims after the Prophet did not give themselves, in their time, any other title than Companions, as there is no merit above that of being a Companion -- then those who followed them were called the Successors. After that the people differed and the disparity of level among them became more apparent. The elite among whom prudence in belief was seen to be intense were then called zuhhad and `ubbad. Subsequently all kinds of innovations made their appearance, and the elite of Ahl al-Sunna who observed their obligations with Allah, and preserved their hearts from heedlessness became unique in their kind under the name of tasawwuf. Consider this, you will gain thereby. And Allah knows best.²

¹ al-Shatibi, al-Muwafaqa fi usul al-shari'a (Cairo:al-maktaba al-tijariyya al-kubra, 1975) 4:60

² al-Shatibi, al-I'tisam min al-kutub, quoted in al-Muslim: majallat al-`ashira al-muhammadiyya (Dhu al-qì da 1373).

ON TASAWWUF Ibn Khaldun (d. 808)

Ibn Khaldun said in his famous *Muqaddima*:

Tasawwuf is one of the latter-day sciences of the Law in the Islamic Community. The foundation of tasawwuf, however, is (more ancient, as seen in the fact) that these folk and their way have always been present among the Salaf and among the most senior of the Companions and the Successors, and their way is the way of truth and guidance.

The foundation of the way of the Sufis is self-restraint in the world and utter dependence on Allah; shunning of the adornment and beauty of the world; self-deprivation of pleasure, money, and title in the manner agreed upon by the vast majority of the scholars; and isolation from creatures in seclusion and devotion to worship.

All these aspects were widespread among the Companions and the Salaf, but with the pervasiveness of worldliness in the second century and the next, and the general inclination of the people towards the world, those who remained attached to worship became known under the name of Sufis.¹

¹ Muqaddimat ibn Khaldun, p. 328. Reproduced with permission from Shaykh M. Hisham Kabbani's

ON TASAWWUF Imam al-Sakhawi (d. 902)

The foremost student of Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani and a great jurist, historian, and hadith master, Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi, like Taqi al-Din al-Subki and al-Suyuti, belonged to the Shadhili order founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, as represented by the great Maliki Master Ibn `Ata' Allah, five of whose works al-Sakhawi transmitted to posterity, including the Hikam, from the Shadhili commentator Ahmad Zarruq (d. 899).

In his biography of the famous men of his time entitled *al-Daw' al-lami`* al-Sakhawi reveals that his father Zayn al-Din `Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad (d. 874) was a Cairo-born Sufi of great

piety, and a member of the Baybarsiyya Sufi community where Ibn Hajar, Sakhawi's teacher, taught for forty years.¹

In the section of his *al-Jawahir al-mukallala fi al-akhbar al-musalsala* devoted to the transmission of hadith through chains formed exclusively of Sufi narrators, Sakhawi states that he himself had received the Sufi path from Zayn al-Din Ridwan al-Muqri' in Cairo.²

In the same work Sakhawi also mentions several of his teachers and students of hadith who were Sufis. Here are the names of some of them, together with the words used by him to describe them in his biographical work *al-Daw' al-lami'*:*

Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad al-Hishi al-Halabi al-Shafi'i (b. 848) the head of the Bistamiyya Sufis in Aleppo, the mother trunk of the Naqshbandi Sufi order affiliated with Abu Yazid al-Bistami. He spent two years in Mecca with Sakhawi, who wrote him an ijaza or permission to teach. In this ijaza Sakhawi calls him: "Our master, the masterful Imam of merits and guidance, the Educator of Murids (students in the Sufi path), the Mainstay of Wayfarers in the Sufi path, the Noble Abu Bakr al-Hishi al-Halabi, may Allah preserve him and have mercy on his gracious predecessors (i.e. the chain of his shaykhs in the Sufi path), and may Allah grant us and all Muslims their benefits."³

Badr al-Din Hussayn ibn Siddiq al-Yamani al-Ahdal (d. 903): al-Sakhawi gave him a comprehensive ijaza granting him permission to teach all of his books.⁴

Abu al-Fath Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Madani al-Maraghi (d. 859): Sakhawi took hadith from him. He was head of two Sufi khaniqas in Cairo, the Zamamiyya and the Jamaliyya. He led a life of seclusion for the most part, and wrote a commentary on Nawawi's manual of Law Minhaj al-talibin, and an epitome of Ibn Hajar's Fath al-bari because of his defense of Ibn `Arabi, he was murdered in front of the Ka'ba by a fanatic.⁵

Taqi al-Din Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad al-Qalqashandi (d. 867), also called `Abd Allah. He received the Sufi khirqa or cloak of authority in Cairo. He is said to have read the whole of Sahih al-Bukhari in three days while in Mecca. He lived in al-Quds, where al-Sakhawi met him and took hadith from him.⁶

Thiqat al-Din Abu al-`Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-`Uqbi (d. 861). He taught hadith and tajwid in Mecca, where Sakhawi studied under him.⁷

Kamal al-Din Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahid al-Sikandari al-Siwasi (d. 861). He was a master of all sciences and taught at the Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya in Cairo, after which he headed the Shaykhuni Sufi khaniqa. He authored many books.⁸

Abu `Abd Allah Muhammad ibn `Ali al-Husayni al-Qahiri al-Shafi'i al-Sufi (d. 876). Munawi's deputy judge in Cairo, a student of `Izz al-Din ibn Jama'a, Jalal al-Din al-Bulqini and many others, and a student and friend of Sakhawi's teacher Ibn Hajar whose work Fath al-bari he copied twice. A teacher of fiqh and hadith, he wrote an epitome of Ibn al-Athir's Kitab al-ansab. He was an old acquaintance of Sakhawi's father, and consequently treated Sakhawi himself "with indescribable respect." He was one of the ten students to whom Ibn Hajar gave his authority in teaching hadith after him.⁹

Abu Khalid Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Jibrini (d. 860). He was a writer, archer, horseman, and Sufi shaykh at the zawiya (alcove-mosque) of Jibrin, where al-Sakhawi met him and took hadith from him. Sakhawi says of him: "He was handsome, modest, generous, courageous, and endowed with spiritual strength and virility after the shaykhs of true majesty."¹⁰

Zaki al-Din Abu al-` Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ansari al-Khazraji al-Sa`di al-Muqri' al-Sufi (d. 875). An associate of Ibn Hajar and a prolific writer, he wrote an autobiography in more than fifty volumes, although Sakhawi said he was unaffected, congenial, readily given to tears, and quick of repartee.¹¹

Thiqat al-Din Abu `Ali Mahmud ibn `Ali al-Sufi al-Khaniki (d. 865). Born and raised in Cairo's Khaniqa al-Siryaqusiyya where he taught late in life. He died while at Mecca for the pilgrimage.¹²

Abu al-Faraj `Abd al-Rahman ibn Khalil al-Dimashqi al-Sufi (d. 869). He was a muhaddith. Al-Sakhawi studied under him in Cairo and at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.¹³

¹ al-Sakhawi, al-Daw' al-lami` (Beirut: dar maktabat al-hayat, 1966) 4:124-125.

² A.J. Arberry, Sakhawiana: A Study Based on the Chester Beatty Ms. Arab. 773 (London: Emery Walker Ltd., 1951) p. 35.

³ al-Sakhawi, al-Daw' al-lami` 11:96-97, 74-75.

⁴ Ibid. 3:144-145.

⁵ Ibid. 7:162-165.

⁶ Ibid. 11:69-71.

⁷ Ibid. 2:212-213.

⁸ Ibid. 8:127-132.

⁹ Ibid. 8:176-178.

¹⁰ Ibid. 7:197.

¹¹ Ibid. 2:146-149.

¹² Ibid. 10:140-141.

¹³ Ibid. 4:76.

ON TASAWWUF Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911)

Shaykh al-Islam al-Suyuti, the Renewer of the Eighth Islamic century and Mujtahid Imam said in his book on tasawwuf entitled Ta'yid al-haqiqa al-`aliyya wa-tashyid al-tariqa al-shadhiliyya (The upholding of the lofty truth and the buttressing of the Shadhili path): Tasawwuf in itself is a most honorable knowledge. It explains how to follow the Sunna of the Prophet and to leave innovation, how to purify the ego... and submit to Allah truly...

I have looked at the matters which the Imams of Shari`a have criticized in Sufis, and I did not see a single true Sufi holding such positions. Rather, they are held by the people of innovation and the extremists who have claimed for themselves the title of Sufi while in reality they are not...

Pursuit of the science of the hearts, knowledge of its diseases such as jealousy, arrogance and pride, and leaving them are an obligation on every Muslim.¹

¹ al-Suyuti, Ta'yid al-haqiqah al-'aliyyah wa-tashyid al-tariqah al-shadhiliyyah, ed. 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Siddiq al-Ghumari al-Hasani (Cairo: al-matba'ah al-Islamiyyah, 1934), p. 56-57. Reproduced with permission from Shaykh M. Hisham Kabbani's

ON TASAWWUF Zakariyya ibn Muhammad Ansari (d. 926)

Shaykh al-Islam Zakariyya Ansari was known as the Shaykh of Shaykhs. He was a hadith master, judge, and exegete of Qur'an. He was Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar al-Haytami's teacher and authored many books on tasawwuf, including a commentary on Qushayri's Risala which received several editions.

In his commentary on Qushayri Ansari gives the following definitions for tasawwuf: Tasawwuf is the abandonment of deliberation. It is also said: It is the guarding of your senses and the mindfulness of your every breath; also: it is complete earnestness in the progression towards the King of all kings; also: it is the devotion to works of good and the avoidance of defects; and other explanations... The sufiyyah or Sufis are called thus because the Truth -- Allah -- has made them pure (safahum) and has favored them unreservedly (akhlasa lahum al-ni'am) through what He has allowed them to look upon.¹

¹ Zakariyya al-Ansari, Sharh al-risalah al-qushayriyyah (Cairo: dar al-kutub al-'arabiyyah al-kubra, 1330/1912) p. 126.

ON TASAWWUF Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 974)

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar al-Haytami was a student of Zakariyya al-Ansari. As mentioned before, he represents the foremost resource for legal opinion (fatwa) in the entire late Shafi'i school. He was once asked about the legal status of those who criticize Sufis: Is there an excuse for such critics? He replies in his Fatawa hadithiyyah: It is incumbent upon every person endowed with mind and religion not to fall into the trap of criticizing these folk (Sufis), for it is a mortal poison, as has been witnessed of old and recently.¹

Among many others on the same topic, he gave an important fatwa entitled: "Whoever denies, rejects, or disapproves of the Sufis, Allah will not make his knowledge beneficial." We transcribe it below in full:

Our Shaykh, the gnostic ('arif) scholar Abu al-Hasan al-Bakri (d. 952) told me, on the authority of the shaykh and scholar Jamal al-Din al-Sabi verbatim -- and he is one of the most distinguished students of our Shaykh Zakaria al-Sabiq (al-Ansari), that al-Sabi used to reject and criticize the way of the honorable Ibn al-Farid. One time al-Sabi saw in a dream that it was the Day of Judgment, and he was carrying a load which made him exhausted, then he heard a caller saying: "Where is the group of Ibn al-Farid?" He said: I came forward in order to enter with them, but I was told: "You are not one of them, so go back." When I woke up I was in extreme fear, and felt regret and sorrow, so I repented to Allah from rejecting the way of Ibn al-Farid, and renewed my commitment to Allah, and returned to believing that he is one of the awliya -- saints and friends -- of Allah. The following year on the same night, I had the same dream. I heard the caller saying:

"Where are the group of Ibn al-Farid? Let them enter Paradise." So I went with them and I was told: "Come in, for now you are one of them."

Examine this matter carefully as it come from a man of knowledge in Islam. It appears -- and Allah knows best -- that it is because of the baraka or blessing of his shaykh Zakariyya al-Ansari that he has seen the dream which made him change his mind. Otherwise, how many of their deniers they have left to their blindness, until they found themselves in loss and destruction!

If you ask: "Some eminent scholars, like al-Bulqini and others, the latest being al-Biqā'i and his students, and others under whom you yourself (i.e. al-Haytami) have studied, have disapproved of the Sufis, so why did you prefer this way over another?"

I answer: I have preferred this way for a number of reasons, among them:*

What our shaykh has mentioned in Sharh al-rawd on the authority of Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani (d. 791),² the truthfinder of Islam, the knight of his field, the remover of the proofs of darkness that the latter said, responding Ibn al-Muqri's statement: "Whoever doubts in the disbelief (kufr) of Ibn al-'Arabi's group, he himself is a disbeliever": "The truth is that Ibn al-'Arabi and his group are the elite of the Umma, and al-Yafi'i, Ibn Ata' Allah, and others have clearly declared they considered Ibn 'Arabi a wali, and that the language which Sufis use is true among the experts in its usage, and that the gnostic ('arif), when he becomes completely absorbed in the oceans of Unity, might make some statements that are liable to be misconstrued as incarnation (hulul) and ittihad (union), while in reality there is neither incarnation nor union."*

It has been clearly stated by our Imams, such as al-Rafi'i in his book al-'Aziz, and al-Nawawi in al-Rawda, al-Majmu', and others: "When a mufti is being asked about a certain phrase that can be construed as disbelief, he should not immediately say that the speaker should be put to death nor make permissible the shedding of his blood. Rather let him say: The speaker must be asked about what he meant by his statement, and he should hear his explanation, then act accordingly."

Look at these guidelines -- may Allah guide you! -- and you will find that the deniers who assault this great man (Ibn 'Arabi) and positively assert his disbelief, ride upon blind mounts, and stumble about like a camel affected with troubled vision. Verily Allah has removed their sight and their hearing from perceiving this, until they fell into whatever they fell into, which caused them to be despised, and made their knowledge of no benefit.*

Their great knowledge and utter renunciation of this world and of anything other than Allah testify to their innocence from these terrible accusations, therefore we preferred to dismiss such accusations, because their statements are true realities in the way they expressed them. Their way cannot be denied without knowing the meaning of their statements and the expressions they use, and then turning to apply the expression to the meaning and see if they match or not. We thank Allah that all of their deniers are ignorant in that kind of knowledge, as not one of them has mastered the sciences of unveilings (mukashafat), or even smelled them from a distance; nor has anyone of them sincerely followed any of the awliya, so that he could master their terminology.

If you object saying: I disagree that their expressions refer to a reality rather than being metaphorical phrases, therefore show me something clearer than the explanations that have been given?

I say: Rejecting that is stubbornness. Let us assume that you disagree with what I have mentioned, but the correct way of stating the objection is to say: "This statement could be interpreted in several ways," and proceed to explain them; not say: "If it meant this, then and if it meant that, then"³ and state from the start "This is kufr"! That is ignorance and going beyond the scope of nasiha or good advice that is being claimed by the critic.

Don't you see that if Ibn al-Muqri's real motivation were good advice, he would not have exaggerated by saying: "Whoever has a doubt in the disbelief of the group of Ibn al-'Arabi, he himself is a disbeliever"? So he extended his judgment that Ibn al-'Arabi's followers were disbelievers, to everyone who had a doubt as to their disbelief. Look at this fanaticism that exceeds all bounds and departs from the consensus of the Imams, and goes so far as to accuse anyone who doubts their kufr. "Glorified are You, this is awful calumny!" (24:16) "When ye welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof ye had no knowledge, ye counted it a trifle. In the sight of Allah, it is very great" (24:15).

Notice also what his statement suggests that it is an obligation on the whole Nation to believe that Ibn 'Arabi and his followers are disbelievers, otherwise they will all be declared disbelievers -- and no one thinks likes this. As a matter of fact, it might well lead into something forbidden which he himself has stated clearly in his book al-Rawd when he said: "Whoever accuses a Muslim of being a disbeliever based on a sin committed by him, and without an attempt to interpret it favorably, he himself commits disbelief." Yet here he is accusing an entire group of Muslims of disbelief. Moreover, no consideration should be paid to his interpretation, because he only gives the kind of interpretation that goes against those he is criticizing, for that is all that their words have impressed upon him.

As for those who did not think of the words of Ibn 'Arabi and the Sufis except as a pure light in front of them, and believed in their sainthood -- then how can a Muslim attack them by accusing them of disbelief? No one would dare to do so unless he is accepting the possibility to be himself called a disbeliever. This judgment reflects a great deal of fanaticism, and an assault on most of the Muslims. We ask Allah, through His Mercy, to forgive the one who uttered it.

It has been narrated through more than one source and has become well-known to every one that whoever opposes the Sufis, Allah will not make His Knowledge beneficial, and will be inflicted with the worst and ugliest (diseases/illnesses), and we have witnessed that happening to many deniers. For example, al-Biqā'i (d. 885) may Allah forgive him, used to be one of the most distinguished scholars, with numerous acts of worship, an exceptional intelligence, and an excellent memory in all kinds of knowledge, especially in the sciences of exegesis and hadith, and he wrote numerous books, but Allah did not allow them to be of any kind of benefit to anyone. He also authored a book on Munasabat al-Qur'an in about ten volumes, about which no one knows except the elite, and as for the rest, they have never heard about it. If this book had been written by our Shaykh Zakariyya, or by anyone who believes (in awliya), it would have been written with gold, because, as a matter of fact, it has no equal: for "Of the bounties of thy Lord We bestow freely on all, these as well as those: the bounties of thy Lord are not closed to anyone" (17:20). [Al-Biqā'i is the author, among others, of a vicious attack on tasawwuf and Sufis entitled Masra' al-tasawwuf aw tanbih al-ghabi ila takfir Ibn 'Arabi wa-tahdir al-'ibad min ahl al-'inad (The destruction of tasawwuf, or: The warning of the ignoramus concerning the declaration of Ibn 'Arabi's disbelief, and the cautioning of Allah's servants against the People of Stubbornness).]

Al-Biqā'i went to an extreme in his denial, and wrote books about the subject, all of them clearly and excessively fanatical and deviating from the straight path. But then he paid for it fully and even more than that, for he was caught in the act on several occasions and was judged a disbeliever (kafir). It was ruled that his blood be shed and he was about to get killed, but he asked the help and protection of some influential people who got him out of it, and he was made to repent in Salahiyya, Egypt, and renew his Islam. On the latter occasion he was asked "What exactly do you disapprove of in Shaykh Muhiyyiddin (Ibn 'Arabi)?" He said: "I disagree with him on certain passages, fifteen or less, in his book al-Futuhāt."

Consider well this individual who contradicts his own books, where he mentions that he opposes many parts of al-Futuhāt and other books and declares that they constitute disbelief: is there any reason to this other than fanaticism? He had some distinguished students who listened to his words and believed in them, among them some of my shaykhs, but they did not gain any kind of

true knowledge from it, because some of them did not succeed in writing any books, while some wrote books on the art of fiqh equal to the books of Sa`d al Din al-Taftazani and others in their eloquence, the beauty of their style and the excellence of their diction, but no one paid any attention to them or even noticed them, on the contrary: people ignored them.

It happened to me with one of those, that while I was studying under him, he started to have difficulties breathing, and I did not know at that time that he opposed the Sufis. In one of his sessions, the name of Shaykh `Umar Ibn al-Farid, may Allah sanctify his secret, was mentioned, and he was asked: "What do you think about him?" He said: "He is a great poet"; then he was asked, "and what else after that?" He said "He is a kafir." Then I had to leave, then I came back later to read something to him and I examined carefully to see if he had repented, but I found him seriously ill and oppressed in his breathing to the point that he was almost dying. I said to him: "If you believe in Ibn al-Farid (i.e. in his Friendship with Allah), I guarantee that Allah will cure you of your illness." He said: "I have had this condition for years." I said: "Even so." He said, "All right, then I will," after which he began to feel better and better. One day, while I was walking with him, trying to correct his doctrine (aqida), he said to me: "As far as that man is concerned, I do not judge him to be a kafir, but as far as his discourses are concerned, they do include kufr." I said: "One evil deed out of two," after which I quit studying under him, and that illness stayed with him, but relatively better than before.

One of the students of al-Biqā`i, the scholar Shaykh Nur al-Din Al-Mahalli, also used to say "As far as the man is concerned, I don't judge him to be a kafir, but as far as his discourses are concerned, they do include kufr." [This resort to "one evil out of two" is characteristic of many of today's "Salafis," who do not hesitate to brand Sufis with disbelief, both on the whole and individually, then when they are admonished for their reprehensible act, they answer: "I do not judge them to be kafir, but their words do include kufr"! As Haytami said, criticizing the Sufis is a mortal poison and a pitfall from which one does irremediable damage to one's belief, and we ask Allah's protection.]

If you ask: Has not Allah made the knowledge of some of the deniers of Sufis beneficial?

I say: There are two groups of deniers: in the case of those we mentioned, their intention was not to show pure good counsel to Muslims, but pure fanaticism, which is why they believed whatever they believed. They were overcome by a kind of envy and the desire to be different from others in their time, in order to be distinguished from them by means of these unusual things and to gain the reputation that they disapprove of any reprehensible matter without fearing anyone, and the like of such corrupted intentions which contains not the slightest portion of sincerity.⁴

¹ Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, Fatawa hadithiyya (Cairo: al-Halabi, 1970) p. 331.

² Sa`d al-Din Mas`ud ibn `Umar al-Taftazani, one of the great mujtahid polymaths of the Shafi'i school, he authored books in tafsir, kalam, usul, fiqh, `ilm al-mantiq (logic), grammar, rhetoric, and philology.

³ An allusion to Ibn Taymiyya, who predicated his judgment of Ibn `Arabi on the constant obnoxious assumption that he understood his terminology and meanings.

⁴ al-Haytami, Fatawa hadithiyya p. 52-54.

A Hanafi scholar of comparative fiqh and author of numerous works on Law and tasawwuf, among which al-Tabaqat al-kubra in which he writes, as cited in the Reliance of the Traveller: The path of the Sufis is built on the Koran and sunna, and is based upon living according to the morals of the prophets and purified ones. It may not be blamed unless it violates an explicit statement from the Koran, sunna, or scholarly consensus, exclusively. If it does not contravene one of these, the very most that one may say of it is that it is an understanding a Muslim man has been given, so let whoever wishes act upon it, and whoever does not refrain, this being as true of works as of understanding. So no pretext remains for condemning it except one's own low opinion of others, or interpreting what they do as ostentation, which is unlawful.

Whoever carefully examines the branches of knowledge of the Folk of Allah Most High will find that none of them are beyond the pale of the Sacred Law. How should they lie beyond the pale of the Sacred Law when it is the law that connects the Sufis to Allah at every moment? Rather, the reason for the doubts of someone unfamiliar with the way of the Sufis that it is of the very essence of the Sacred Law is the fact that such a person has not thoroughly mastered the knowledge of the law. This is why Junayd (Allah Most High have mercy on him) said, "This knowledge of ours is built of the Koran and sunna," in reply to those of his time or any other who imagine that it is beyond the pale of the Koran and sunna.

The Folk unanimously concur that none is fit to teach in the path of Allah Mighty and Majestic save someone with comprehensive mastery of the Sacred Law, who knows its explicit and implicit rulings, which of them are of general applicability and which are particular, which supersede others and which are superseded. He must also have a thorough grounding in Arabic, be familiar with its figurative modes and similes, and so forth. So every true Sufi is a scholar of Sacred Law, though the reverse is not necessarily true.

To summarize, no one denies the states of the Sufis except someone ignorant of the way they are. Qushayri says, "No era of the Islamic period has had a true sheikh of this group, save that the Imams of the scholars of that time deferred to him, showed humility towards him, and visited him for the benefit of his spiritual grace (baraka). If the Folk had no superiority or election, the matter would have been the other way around."¹

¹ al-Tabaqat al-kubra al-musamma bi Lawaqih al-anwar fi tabaqat al-akhyar (1374/1954) (Reprint, Beirut: dar al-fikr, n.d.) 1:4. In Reliance of the Traveller p. 863-864.

ON TASAWWUF Mulla `Ali al-Qari (d. 1014)

One of the great Hanafi masters of hadith and Imams of fiqh, Qur'anic commentary, language, history and tasawwuf, he authored several great commentaries such as al-Mirqat on Mishkat al-masabih in several volumes, a two-volume commentary on Qadi `Iyad's al-Shifa', and a two-volume commentary on Ghazali's abridgment of the Ihya entitled `Ayn al-ilm wa zayn al-hilm (The spring of knowledge and the adornment of understanding). His book of prophetic invocations, al-Hizb al-a`zam (The supreme daily dhikr) forms the basis of Imam al-Jazuli's celebrated manual of dhikr, Dala'il al-khayrat, which along with the Qur'an is recited daily by many pious Muslims around the world.

He writes in the foreword to his commentary on Ghazali: I wrote this commentary on the abridgment of Ihya' `ulum al-din by the Proof of Islam and the Confirmation of Creatures hoping to receive some of the outpouring of blessings from the words of the most pure knowers of Allah, and to benefit from the gifts that exude from the pages of the Shaykhs and the Saints, so that I may be mentioned in their number and be raised in their throng, even if I fell short in their following and their service, for I rely on my love for them and content myself with my longing for

them.¹ On the obligation to seek purification of the heart he writes: The greatest of the great (al-akabir) have striven to pray only two rak`at without conversing with their ego about dunya in the midst of their prayer, and they were unable to do this. Therefore there is not any such ambition for us of ever achieving this. Would that one saves only half of his prayer, or only a third, from the whisperings and the passing thoughts turning over in the mind. He is like him who mixes good and bad, like a glass full of vinegar into which water is poured: inevitably vinegar is spilled in proportion to the water poured and the two amounts never coexist. We ask for Allah's help!²

The last chapter of Qari's commentary on Ghazali, perhaps the most valuable of the entire work, is devoted to Ghazali's and Qari's explanations of the verse "If you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you!" (3:31) and is reminiscent of al-Harawi's Kitab sad maydan on the same topic. In it Qari cites al-Hasan al-Basri as saying: "Whoever (truly) knows his Lord loves Him, and whoever (truly) knows the world does without it." Qari begins the chapter with a warning that the various spiritual states of love for Allah described by Sufis in their terminology all proceed from the same Qur'anic source and that it is not permitted to deny them unless one denies the source itself: Love and the discipline of the path (al-mahabba wa al-suluk) mean the path of love and longing, and whoever does not scoop his drink from the ocean of gnosticism does not know the reality of love, even if the genus, examples, and terminology are different. Love has no other meaning than the exhortation to obedience, and whoever denies love denies familiarity (uns) and passion (shawq) and taste (dhawq) and effacement (mahu) and clarity (sahu) and extinction (fana') and subsistence (baqa') and contraction (qabd) and expansion (bast) and all the rest of the necessary characteristics of love and longing, and the rest of the stations of the People of Gnosis.³

¹ al-Qari, Sharh `Ayn al-`ilm wa zayn al-hilm 1:1.

² Ibid. 1:78.

³ Ibid. 2:354-355.

ON TASAWWUF Ibn `Abidin (d. 1252)

Nicknamed the Seal of Self-Realized Scholars (khatimat al-muhaqqiqin), the great scholar and faqih Ibn `Abidin said in his fatwa on the permissibility of loud dhikr in assembly entitled Shifa' al-`alil wa ball al-ghalil fi hukm al-wasiyya bi al-khatamat wa al-tahalil: The Imam of the Two Groups (Sufis and fuqaha') our master al-Junayd was asked: "A certain people indulge in wajd or ecstatic behavior, and sway with their bodies?" He replied: "Leave them to their happiness with Allah. They are the ones whose affections have been smashed by the path and whose breasts have been torn apart by effort, and who are unable to bear it. There is no blame on them if they breathe awhile as a remedy for their intense state. If you tasted what they taste, you would excuse their shouting"...

The Seekers in this Way don't hear except from the Divine Presence and they don't love any but Him. If they remember Him they cry, and if they thank Him they are happy; if they find Him they cry out, and if they witness Him they rest; if they walk in His Divine Presence, they melt; ... some of them they are drunk with His Blessings and lose sight of themselves...

Their assemblies for dhikr and recital (sama`) give fruit to divine knowledge and spiritual realities, which only takes place upon hearing the description of Allah, exhortations to wisdom, and praises of the Prophet. Nor do we have one word of reproach to those who follow them in their method and find in themselves the expressions of passionate longing (`ishq) for Allah characteristic of some of their states.¹

¹ Ibn `Abidin, Seventh Letter in Shifa' al-`alil fi hukm al-wasiyya wa al-tahalil p. 172-173.

ON TASAWWUF Abu al-`Ala' al-Mawdudi (d. 1399)

The most famous contemporary Islamic thinker of the Indian subcontinent and author of a Qur'anic commentary in Urdu and English, he wrote in his Mabadi' al-islam (Principles of Islam): Fiqh addresses only external actions: did you perform them according to what is required? The condition of your heart is not taken under consideration. As for the science that investigates the states of the heart and its conditions: this is tasawwuf. The questions asked by fiqh are: Did you complete your ablution correctly? Did you pray towards the Qibla? Did you fulfill the pillars of prayer? If you did all this your prayer is correct according to the ruling of fiqh. As for tasawwuf, it asks questions about your heart: Did you repent and turn to your Lord in your prayer? Did you empty your heart of the preoccupations of the world in your prayer? Did you pray in fear of Allah and knowing that He sees and hears you?... If you did all this and other things, then your prayer is correct according to tasawwuf, otherwise it is defective... Tasawwuf is the establishment of the Law of Islam to the utmost point of sincerity, clarity of intention, and purity of heart.¹

¹ Abu al-`Ala' al-Mawdudi Mabadi' al-Islam p. 114-117. Reproduced with permission from Shaykh M. Hisham Kabbani's *The Repudiation of "Salafi" Innovations* (Kazi, 1996) p. 400.

ON TASAWWUF Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi

The Necessity of a Measure of Proper Sufi education: A measure of proper Sufi education based on the Quran and Sunna is in order here, as it would help in shaping a religious character whose owner would put Allah before Allah's creation, the Hereafter before earthly life and the motives of religion before the motives of desire. Not all Sufism is evil as some would imagine. Neither are all Sufists misled as claimed by those who lack in knowledge or fairness. Sufists are like other groups, as Sheikh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya said in his treatise entitled [the Poor]. He said about them, "Among them you find the straightforward the deviant; the one who wrongs his own soul, the one who follows a middle course, and the one who is, by Allah's leave, foremost in good deeds". Of course, we reject all the fallacies of philosophical Sufism (including such tenets as: *hulul* "divine incarnation" and *ittihad* "mystic communion with God"), ecstatic utterances of heretic Sufists and the deviations of money-oriented Sufism. What we really seek is the pure, quintessential Sufism of the pioneer Sufists, such as Al Hassan Al Basri, Al Fudayl Ibn lyad, Ibrahim Ibn Adham, Abu Sulayman Al Darani, Abul Qasim Al Junayd and others like them. We seek the Sunnite Sufism that follows a balanced line of Quran and Sunna, the Sufism that cares about the "piety of hearts" before it concerns itself with the "acts of the organs of the body". It is said in the sound hadith that "Allah shall not look at your bodies or your faces, but rather into your hearts." [Muslim]. We seek the Sufism that addresses the ailments of the heart, plugs the holes through which Satan can steal into hearts, and resists the desires of the human soul, so that it may have proper morals and virtues and abandon sins. Someone described Sufism in a nutshell, saying, "Sufism is being true to Allah and good to mankind". This is what Allah the Almighty means by saying, *"For Allah is with those who restrain themselves and those*

who do good" [Surat Al Nahl: 128]. The Sufists are with Allah by being pious, and with people by doing good. Allama Ibn Al Qayyim quoted the early Sufists as saying, "Sufism is good manners, and anyone who surpasses you in manners should be better than you in Sufism". Ibn Al Qayyim comments on that by saying, "No, religion is good manners, and anyone who surpasses you in good manners should be better than you in religion". True ! And we need only to quote the Prophet's hadith, "I have been sent [with the Message] to make manners perfect." [Bukhari].

Importance of Taking a Shaikh

أهمية إتباع الشيخ



Allah said in the Holy Qur'an, "Fear God and accompany Trustworthy people" [9:119]. Allah's Word is for all time, for every era and for every century. It is an ongoing order, from which we understand the importance of keeping company with the Trustworthy. Allah orders all human beings to accompany them, because by keeping their company one will see how they live their lives, how they deal with people, how they address their companions, how they eat, how they sleep, how they worship. By accompanying them, one will learn all their good manners, and their ways of life.

Another way too understand this verse, is that one should accompany a trustworthy person, because to be trustworthy is very rare and not many people achieve it. Everyone, however, can find a trustworthy person and accompany him, in order to be guided. Following a Trustworthy One is essential to our spiritual path. Such a one is needed to lead us and guide us and to be a beacon for us on that way. In the Naqshbandi Order, the living presence of a connected shaikh is essential. Through his physical and spiritual linkage to the Prophet (s) he establishes the murid's connection. The murid's obligation is to maintain his connection to his shaikh, to hold tightly to the hand of the one within his reach. The shaikh maintains the further connection to the previous shaikhs and to the Prophet (s).

From what has been said above, and in the biographies of the Masters, the importance of accompanying a True Master has been clearly demonstrated. It provides the seeker with the opportunity to learn the essentials of ethics and good conduct, to discover the hidden defects of his heart, and to be lifted to the states of perfection. There are two requisites for entering upon such an endeavor: when the seeker feels the need to seek in this way he must purify his intention and ask his Lord to connect him to a Truthful One; and he must look in his own country for someone who will point him in the direction of the Perfect Master.

The Need for a Living Guide

If one is separated from his shaikh by death or other circumstances, it becomes necessary to find a living guide, who can complete the work of the first master. The path itself is not the Goal, but the means to reach the Goal. Holding onto the attachment to a master who is no longer present, usually represents an unrealistic expectation and a false hope. It may also be a manifestation of pride. Although they had already pledged themselves to the Prophet (s), the Companions had to take initiation with Sayyidina Abu Bakr (r) after the passing of the Prophet (s), and as they renewed their pledge to the successive khalifs, Sayyidina 'Umar, Sayyidina 'Uthman and Sayyidina 'Ali, so too does a sincere seeker need to put his hand into the hand of a living shaikh, and renew his initiation, in order to complete his journey to the Divine Presence.

Qualifications of a Master

مؤهلات المعلم



The master must have four qualifications:

- He must be a scholar in all the obligations of the religion;
- He must be a Knower (*ʿarif*);
- He must be an expert in the way of purifying the Self;
- He must be authorised by his shaikh to give guidance.

1. Being a Scholar in the Obligations of the Religion

The master must be a scholar in all religious obligations, such as the conditions of prayers, the conditions of fasting and the conditions of zakat (obligatory charity). He must be knowledgeable in the Jurisprudence of Islam and all necessary matters of Islamic Shari'ah. He must be a scholar in the Science of Tawhid (Oneness) according to the *Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama'at*, and all the and all the other conditions of faith (*iman*).

2. Being a Knower

To be a Knower means the master or murshid must have the knowledge of the conditions of the state of *Ihsan*, as mentioned by the Prophet (s) in the hadith, "Worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, and if you are not seeing Him, know that He is seeing you." A Knower must bear witness in his heart that Allah is the Unique One in His Essence, and in His Attributes, and in His Actions. He must know about His Attributes through Vision and Taste, by experiencing self-effacement in the Divine Presence.

3. Being Sanctified

The Master must have already purified or sanctified himself as a seeker under a master of his own. He will have come to know the different stages of the ego, its illnesses and its defects. The Master must be fully aware of all the methods Satan uses to enter the heart. He must know all the ways to sanctify others and the methods to heal his followers in order to raise them up to reach the State of Perfection.

If a seeker comes to the shaikh with perfect sincerity and truthfulness, asking to be initiated in the order, the shaikh must not hurry to initiate him, until he knows that he will remain trustworthy when he reaches the Goal. He must look at his capability. If his capability corresponds to the capability of the Close Ones (*muqarrabin*), then he will show him the way, as it is the way of the Trustworthy.

That way is built on killing one's own will, and connecting and submitting oneself to the will of one's shaikh. One must do as the Prophet (s) said, "Die before you die!" He must leave his natural will, which causes him to move according to his mind, and leave all his affairs to the will of his shaikh. The shaikh will lift him up through a path filled with difficulties, train him through worship, and guide him to a state of complete Self-Effacement. Only this will elevate him to the Divine Presence.

That is why Khwaja Ubaidullah al-Ahrar said: "Who is the shaikh? The shaikh is the one who can know, through the vision that Allah has granted him, the capability of his murid. From the day he meets him to the day of his death, he will know which state the murid will attain, and in which way he will taste, and in which way he will reach the Divine Presence. If the shaikh cannot summon that knowledge, it is forbidden (*haram*) for him to give the seeker initiation."

He continued, "The shaikh must avoid the wealth of his murid. If the murid wishes to help the shaikh it is his choice. The states of guidance are above all states, and the master must not ask except from the Divine Presence."

"It is said that one time a murid of Junaid came to him and wanted to give him all his money. Junaid refused and said, 'No.' When that same murid reached the State of Perfection and was lifted up to the Divine Presence, he came to Junaid and again wanted to give all his money to him. At that time he said, 'Yes. Now, I accept, because when you give now, you will not regret later.'

"That is why we don't like our murids to give all their money to the shaikh. When they haven't reached the state of perfection, they might regret later and be in doubt, and they will be harmed. But when the murid reaches that state he will give sincerely and will never regret it later. The evidence of this is that Sayyidina Abu Bakr and Sayyidina 'Umar came to the Prophet (s) and from the first Sayyidina Abu Bakr gave all his money. The Prophet (s) asked, 'What have you left for your family?' He replied, 'I have left them Allah and his Prophet (s).'

reaches the state of real generosity and real perfection, then the shaikh may accept what he gives. If he has not reached that state his gift must not be accepted."

The shaikh must not order any of his followers to do something he himself cannot do or would not do. He must know all the obligatory and forbidden actions according to the Shari'ah. Similarly, he must know all the States of spirituality, and must have tasted all Tastes, so that he is an example, and when he speaks he speaks with real knowledge.

An example of this is a lady who came to a perfect shaikh one time with her son, saying, "My son is always asking for sweets. Please pray for him to leave that desire, as I don't always have sweets to give him." He said, "Be patient for three days and then bring him back to me." After three days she brought him back and the shaikh told him, "O my son, don't eat candies, because it is harmful for your stomach." From that day the child never ate sweets again. Some time later someone asked the shaikh, "Why did you wait three days to give the child that advice?" The shaikh replied, "When the lady came to me, she asked me to prevent her child from eating sweets. I couldn't do that for him because I myself was under that temptation of eating sweets. So I stopped eating sweets for three days. When I had stopped, I was able to make a du'a for him, and that du'a was acceptable."

Qushayri relates in his *Letter* that allaj was once asked to talk about poverty. He said, "Wait a minute." He entered his house, went out somewhere and came back. Then he sat and spoke, saying poverty consists of this and this and that. One murid asked him, "O my shaikh, why didn't you speak like this from the beginning?" He said, "When I was asked, I had one dirham in my house. I couldn't speak about poverty while I still had something. So I went took that dirham, went and spent it in Allah's way, and then I could speak on poverty."

4. Having His Master's Authorization

The Shaikh must have authorization from his Master for training and uplifting his followers and showing the Way of this Path. That *ijaza* (permission) must reach him through the chain of the grandshaikhs from one to another, all the way back to the Prophet (s). As the wise person will not go to a doctor who has no license in healing, so the seeker in this way must find a perfect guide who has received the license, the *ijaza*, from his shaikh.

Imam Muslim said, "This great knowledge [the knowledge of the self] is by itself the religion. So you have to know from whom you take your religion." In the book of Hafiz ibn Ali *Kanz al-Ummal*, the following hadith is found. The Prophet (s) said, "O Umar, your *din* is your flesh and blood. Look at those from whom you take your *din*; take it from those who are on the right path and don't take from those who deviated." A knower said, "Knowledge is a spirit which is

blown into the hearts, not philosophy or pretty tales to be written. So be very careful from whom you take it."

5. The Signs of Mastery

The main indication of mastery is that when you sit with a master you feel a breeze of faith, spiritual pleasure. He doesn't speak except for Allah. He is always advising the good. You will benefit from being in his company as you benefit from his words. You will benefit when you are far from him as you benefit when you are near him. You must see among his murids the picture of faith, sincerity, humbleness and *taqwa* (God-consciousness), and you must remember, when you are mixing with them, the highest state of love and truth and deference to others. You must see that his followers represent all different kinds of people in the community. That is how the Companions of the Prophet were.

Taking Initiation (Bay'ah)



The seeker must follow a perfect Master able to guide him to the way of Allah, Almighty and Exalted, and to illuminate for him that way until he reaches the State of Annihilation. The seeker must give his oath and his promise to his guide, to learn from him how to leave his bad manners and to lift himself to better conduct in order to reach the Perfect Knowledge of Spirituality.

The meaning of initiation and its conditions have been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, in the Sunnah of the Prophet and in the life of the Companions.

1. In verse 10 of Surat al-Fath, "Verily those who swear allegiance to thee indeed swear allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands. So whoever breaks his oath, breaks it to his own loss; and whoever fulfills the covenant that he has made with Allah, He will surely give him a great reward." [48:10]
2. In verse 91 of Surat an-Nahl, "And fulfill the Covenant of Allah when you have made it; and break not your oaths after making them firm, while you have made Allah your surety. Certainly, Allah knows what you do." [16:91]
3. In verse 34 of Surat al-Isra', "and fulfill the covenant, for the covenant shall be questioned about." [17:34]

We see the Qur'an encouraging the people to give their oath and to keep their oath to the Prophet (s), who leads them to the presence of Allah, Almighty and Exalted. That initiation was done in the time of the Prophet (s) and after the time of the Prophet (s).

According to the Sunnah of the Prophet (s), the oath was taken from men, as a group, or as individuals; from women, as a group or as individuals, and even from children. Bukhari and Muslim narrate that ʿUbadah ibn as-Samit said, "The Prophet (s) said, 'Give me your pledge and oath not to associate anything with Allah, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to kill your children, not to backbite, not to fall into sin; and who keeps his promise, then his reward is from Allah, Almighty and Exalted.' And then we gave our pledge to the Prophet (s) and our oath."

The Prophet (s) used to give initiation (*bay'ah*) to all people and urged them to take it. Bukhari and Muslim narrated in their books that 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said, "When we pledged to the Prophet (s) to listen and obey, the Prophet (s) used to say, 'To the limit that you can carry.'"

Initiation of Women

The Prophet (s) gave *baya'h* to women many many times. It is narrated by Imam Ahmad in the *Musnad* that Salma bint Qays said, "I came to the Prophet (s) with many people from the Ansar, and we gave him our *bay'ah*, our pledge that we would not associate anyone with Allah, we would not steal, we would not commit adultery, we would not kill our children, we would not backbite and we would not disobey. We gave him our *bay'ah* and we went."

Initiation of Children

The Prophet (s), according to the books of Nisa'i and Tirmidhi gave initiation to Umaymah bint Ruqayyah. It was narrated by Tabarani that 'Izza bint Khayyil took initiation from the Prophet (s) when they were not yet seven. It was also narrated by Tabarani in an authentic hadith that the Prophet (s) gave *bay'ah* to al-Hasan, al-Hussain, ʿAbdullah ibn ʿAbbas and ʿAbdullah ibn Jaʿfar when they were 7 years of age.

The Companions of the Prophet (s) gave *bay'ah* to the khalifs of the Prophet (s) after his passing. It is narrated through the books of Sirah of the Sahaba that the Sahaba gave *bay'ah* to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, to ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab, to ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan, to ʿAli, to Muʿawiya, and to all the khalifs who came later, as they had given it to the Prophet (s).

The Prophet (s) said in a hadith related by Abu Dawud and Ahmad, "Whoever imitates a group of people will be of them." So the inheritors of the Masters of the Sufi orders, especially the Naqshbandi Sufi Order, inherited the initiation in every century. As it was an obligation in the time of the Prophet, and in the time of the Sahaba and in the time of the Tabi'in and Tabi'at-Tabi'in, and in the times of the Umayyads, Abbasids, Seljukids, and Ottomans, so it is also an obligation to give our *bay'ah* to a perfect guide, who guides

us to the Way of Allah, Almighty and Exalted. And who is a better guide than the Sufi Masters who are inheritors of the Prophet (s) and inheritors of the Divine Presence?

The scholar Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi wrote in his book *Rijal al-Fikr wa-d-Da'wah* رجال الفكر والدعوة , page 253, "Abdul Qadir Jilani, the Ghawth of the Sufi Orders, Shaikh Muhiyideen ibn Arabi, and all the Masters of the Naqshbandi Golden Chain, opened the door of initiation as wide as possible, for every individual who has good and true belief, to find something that will be of value to him spiritually, and for everyone to renew his bay'ah with Allah, Almighty and Exalted. These Sufi Masters of the Naqshbandi Golden Chain and all Sufi orders lifted their followers to a station of Truthfulness, to feel the responsibility of their initiation and to renew their faith."

Thus we see that it is an important factor in every Sufi Order for one to take bay'ah with the shaikh, in order to sanctify oneself and to be lifted up to the Divine Presence. These guides are the revivers in every century, to connect our hearts with the heart of the Prophet (s), who in his turn connects our heart to the Divine Presence. These guides are the beacon of the light of the Prophet (s) and the light of the Divine Presence and they are the true examples for all nations to follow.

The Conduct of the Murid with His Shaikh

أدب murid مع شيخه

[\[Behasu Indonesia\]](#)  [\[Francais\]](#)  [\[Espanol\]](#) 

There are two categories of conduct of the murid with his shaikh: internal conduct and external conduct.

Internal Conduct of the Murid

1. The seeker must submit to the will of the shaikh and to obey him in all his orders and advice, because the shaikh has more experience and more knowledge in haqiqat, in tariqat and in shari'ah. As the sick person gives himself to his doctor to be cured, so too does the murid, sick in his conduct and behavior, submit to the shaikh's experience in order to be healed.
2. The seeker must not object to the way the shaikh instructs and controls the murids. Each shaikh has his own way, which he has been permitted by his own shaikh to use. Imam Ibn Hajar al-Haythami said, "Whoever opens the door of criticism against shaikhs and their behavior with their murids and their actions will be punished and will be isolated from receiving spiritual knowledge. Whoever says to his shaikh, 'Why?' will never succeed." [al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyya, p. 55]
3. The seeker must know that the shaikh might make some mistakes, but that these will not prevent him from lifting the murid up to the Divine Presence. So the murid must excuse the shaikh, as the shaikh is not the Prophet (s). Only the Prophet (s) was free of error. Although it is rare, just as the doctor might make a mistake in treating a patient, so too might the shaikh make a mistake in treating his murid's spiritual illness, and that must be excused.
4. The seeker must respect and honor the shaikh in his presence and his absence, if only because the shaikh can see with the eye of the heart. It is said that whoever is not

happy with the orders of the shaikh, and does not keep good conduct and adab with him, will never keep good conduct with the Qur'an and with the Sunnah of the Prophet (s). Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani said, "Whoever criticised a saint, Allah will cause his heart to wither."

5. The murid must be sincere and loyal to the company of his shaikh.
6. He must love his shaikh with an extraordinary love. He must know that his shaikh is going to take him to the Presence of Allah, Almighty and Exalted, and to the Presence of the Prophet (s).
7. He must not look to any other than his shaikh, though he must keep respect for all other shaikhs.

External Conduct of the Murid

1. He must agree with the opinion of his shaikh completely, as the patient agrees with the physician.
2. He must behave well in the association of the shaikh, by avoiding yawning, laughing, raising the voice, talking without authorization, extending the feet, and always sitting in a respectful manner.
3. He must serve his shaikh and make himself as useful as possible.
4. He must not mention from the speeches of his shaikh what listeners cannot understand. This might harm the shaikh in a way that the murid is unaware of. Sayyidina Ali said, in a hadith narrated in Bukhari, "Speak to people at a level they can understand, because you don't want them to deny Allah and His Prophet (s)."
5. He must attend the association of the shaikh. Even if living far away, he must make an effort to come as often as possible.

Ibn Hajar al-Haythami said, "Many people, when they see their guide is firm on the matter of obligations and the Sunnah of the Prophet (s), accuse him of being strict. They say that he is praying too much or keeping the Sunnah too firmly. These people don't realize that they are falling to their own destruction. Beware of believing your ego's complaints about the firmness of the shaikh's adherence to the shari'ah." [al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyya, p. 55.]

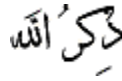
Abu Hafsa an-Nisaburi is quoted in Shaikh as-Sulami's book *Tabaqat as-sufiyya*, p. 119, as saying: "Sufism is composed of *adab* [good conduct]. For every state and station there is an appropriate adab. For every time there is a proper conduct. Whoever keeps the adab will reach the Station of Manhood, and whoever discards adab is very far from acceptance into Allah's Divine Presence."

The Conduct of the Murid with his Brothers

1. He must keep respect for them in their presence and in their absence, not backbiting anyone.
2. He should advise them when they need it with the intention of strengthening them. His advice to them must be in private and it must be with leniency and free of arrogance. The one advised must accept the advice, must be thankful, and must practice the advice.
3. He must think only good about his brothers and not search out their bad manners.
4. He must accept their apology if they apologize.
5. He must make peace between them.
6. He must support them when they are attacked.
7. He must not ask to lead them, but to be brothers with them.
8. He must show humbleness with them as much as possible. The Prophet (s) said, "The master of a people is the one who serves them."

The good conduct of the murids really has no end. He must always be striving and making progress with his shaikh, with his brothers, with his community, and with his Nation, because Allah is seeing him, the Prophet (s) is seeing him, the shaikh is seeing him, and the Masters who went before are seeing him. With constant improvement, day by day, he will reach with the shaikh's guidance and support, the State of Perfection.

Dhikr - Remembrance of God



[\[Francais\]](#)



[\[Espanol\]](#)

Dhikr is the means by which Stations yield their fruit, until the seeker reaches the Divine Presence. On the journey to the Divine Presence the seed of remembrance is planted in the heart and nourished with the water of praise and the food of glorification, until the tree of dhikr becomes deeply rooted and bears its fruit. It is the power of all journeying and the foundation of all success. It is the reviver from the sleep of heedlessness, the bridge to the One remembered.

The shaikhs strive to remember their Lord with every breath, as the angels are always in the state of dhikr, praising Allah. One of our shaikhs said, "I remembered You because I forgot You for a moment, and the easiest way for me is to remember You on my tongue." If the seeker will mention his Lord in every moment, he will find peace and satisfaction in his heart, he will uplift his spirit and his soul, and he will sit in the Presence of his Lord. The Prophet (s) said in an authentic hadith mentioned in Ahmad's Musnad, "The people of Dhikr are the people of My presence." So the gnostic is the one who keeps the dhikr in his heart, and leaves behind the attachments of the lower worldly life.

Mention of Dhikr in the Qur'an

Dhikr is mentioned in many places in the Holy Qur'an, and in most verses, what was meant by the word dhikr is *tasbih*, glorifying; *takbir*, exalting; *tahmid*, praising; and praising and praying upon the Prophet (s).

Allah said in Surat al-Baqara, 152: "Remember Me and I will remember you." [2:152]

He said in Surat ali 'Imran, 41, "...and remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and in the early morning." And again, 191, "Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides..." [3:41, 191]

He said in Surat al-Ra'd, 28, "Those who believe, and whose hearts find their rest in the remembrance of Allah--for, verily, in the remembrance of Allah hearts do find their rest." [13:28]

And He said in Surat al-Ah zab, 35, "...and men who remember Allah much and women who remember Him..." And again, 41,42, "O you who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance; and glorify Him morning and evening." [33: 35, 41-42]

There are many, many other verses of Qur'an mentioning dhikr. Imam Nawawi said in his book, "*Futahat ar-Rabbani ʿala-l- Adhkar an-Nawawiyya*," vol. 1, p. 106-109, "All scholars of Islam have agreed on the acceptance and permissibility of Dhikr by heart and by tongue, for the adult men and women, for children, for the one who has ablution, and for the one without ablution; even for the woman during her menses. Moreover, dhikr is allowed by all scholars in the form of *tasbih*, *tahmid*, *takbir* and praising and praying for the Prophet (s)."

Dhikr polishes the heart and is the source of the Divine breath that revives the dead spirits by filling them with the Blessings of Allah, decorating them with His Attributes, and bringing them from a state of heedlessness to the state of complete wakefulness. If we keep busy with Dhikrullah, happiness and peace will be granted to us. Dhikr is the key to happiness, the key to joy, and the key to Divine Love.

Mention of Dhikr in the Sunnah

According to Bukhari, Abu Musa al-Ashʿari related that the Prophet (s) said, "The difference between the one who makes dhikr and the one who doesn't make dhikr is like the difference between the living and the dead."

Tirmidhi narrated from Anas (r) that the Prophet (s) said, "If you pass by the Paradises of Heavens stay there." They asked, "Ya Rasul-Allah, what are the Paradises of Heavens?" He said, "The associations of Dhikr!"

Bukhari narrated in his book from Abu Huraira that the Prophet (s) said, "Allah, Almighty and Exalted, has angels who seek the people of Dhikr. If they find the people of Dhikr they encompass them until they reach the first heaven. And Allah asks his angels, 'What are my servants doing?' The angels say, 'O Allah, they are praising You and glorifying You and they are making Dhikr.' Allah says, 'Did they see Me?' The angels answer, 'No, they didn't see You.' Then Allah asks, 'How would it be if they were to see Me?' The angels reply, 'O Allah, if they were to see You, they would be making more praise of You and more glorification of You and more Dhikr of You.' And Allah asks 'What are they asking for?' The angels say, 'They are asking for Your Paradise.' Allah asks, 'Did they see My Paradise?' The angels answer, 'No, Our Lord.' Allah continues, 'How would it be if they saw My Paradise?' The angels reply, 'They would be more attracted and more eager to reach it.' Then Allah asks them, 'Of what are they afraid?' And the angels say, 'They are afraid of hellfire.' and Allah asks, 'How would it be if they saw my Hellfire?' and they reply, 'They would be running more and more away from it and asking more and more protection from it.' Then Allah said, 'I am making you all My witnesses: that I am forgiving them of all their sins.' Then one angel asked, 'O our Lord, there is among these people one who is not from them, he came only to ask for something

from one of them.' Allah said, 'Those are my beloved ones who are making My Dhikr. Anyone who comes into their circle will be forgiven, and I am forgiving him.'"

In Bukhari and Muslim it is narrated from Abu Huraira that the Prophet (s) said, "As my servant thinks about Me so will I be for him. I am with him if he will remember Me. If he calls on Me in himself I will call him in Myself, and if he calls on Me in a group of people, I mention him in a better group in My presence. If he approaches Me one handspan, I will approach him one arm's length; if he approaches Me one arm's length, I will approach him by a cubit; if he comes to Me walking, I will come to him running."

Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah narrated on the authority of Abi Darda that the Prophet said, "Do you want me to tell you of your best deeds, and the most honored and praised and sanctified to Your Lord, and the highest in its reward; better than spending gold and better than meeting your enemy and cutting their necks in the jihad?" They said, "Yes, Ya Rasulallah." He said, "Dhikrullah."

The Prophet (s) said, "Everything has its polish and the polish of hearts is dhikrullah."

Mu'adh bin Jabal (r) said, "Nothing saves you from Allah's punishment except Dhikrullah."

There are many, many other hadith about the benefits and blessings of Dhikr such that it is impossible to quote all of them here.

From the Sayings of Imams and Scholars about Dhikr

Ibn ʿAbbas (r) said "Allah, Almighty and Exalted, put a limit on all the obligations that He ordered human beings except for Dhikr. For it there is no limit."

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya said in his book, *Al-Wabil as-Sa'ib*, p. 52, "There is no doubt that the heart oxidizes, just as copper and silver oxidize. Its polishing is the dhikr, which will make it like a white mirror. The oxidation of the heart is due to heedlessness and sin. Its polishing is by means of two actions: repentance and dhikr. If someone's heart is cloudy, the reflections of images will be unclear, he will see falsehood as truth and truth in the image of falsehood (*batil*). When there is too much oxidization on the heart, the heart will be darkened, and in the darkness the images of the Truth and Reality never appear. The best way to polish it is through Dhikrullah."

Ibn ʿAta'illah as-Sakandari said, "By Dhikr you leave behind heedlessness and forgetfulness, and you keep your heart Present with Allah, Almighty and Exalted. The best way to approach His Presence is by reciting the name 'Allah,' in the heart or on the tongue, or by reciting any of His Names." [*Miftah al-Falah*, p. 4]

Abul Qasim al-Qushayri said, "Dhikr is the strongest support in the way of Allah, 'Azza wa Jall. No one can reach the Divine Presence except by continuing to recite Dhikr." [*Risalat al-Qushayriyya*]

Mulay al-^cArabi ad-Darqawi said, "Do not say, 'I am nothing'; neither say, 'I am something.' Do not say: 'I need such and such a thing'; nor yet: 'I need nothing.' But say: '*Allah*,' and you will see marvels." [*Letters of a Sufi Master*]

We see from what has been mentioned that all guides and perfect shaikhs advised the seeker in the Way of Allah to make continuous dhikr in all states of their lives and to keep the company of the people in associations of Dhikr. We see that the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (s) and the scholars are all in accordance on this matter.

The Types of Dhikr

Dhikr can be done both silently or aloud. The Prophet (s) encouraged people to do both kinds. Among the scholars of shari'ah and the Sufi shaikhs, some preferred the loud dhikr and some preferred the silent dhikr.

Loud Dhikr

Bukhari narrated that Abu Huraira (r) reported that the Prophet (s) said, "If My servant mentions Me in himself, I will mention him in Myself. If he mentions Me in a group, I will mention him in a group in My presence." We understand from this hadith that to mention Allah in a group indicates loud dhikr. Some scholars determined from this that using loud dhikr is permitted.

Bukhari narrated in his book of hadith, that Ibn 'Abbas (r) said, "In the time of the Prophet (s) the people used to raise their voices in Dhikr."

Bukhari narrated in his book of hadith, that Abu Ma'bad (r), the freed slave of Ibn 'Abbas (r), said: "Ibn 'Abbas told me, 'In the lifetime of the Prophet (s), it was the custom to celebrate Allah's praises aloud after the obligatory congregational prayers.'" Ibn 'Abbas (r) continued, "When I heard the Dhikr, I would know that the congregational prayer had ended."

Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi related that as-Sa'ib (r) reported that the Prophet (s) said, "Jibril came to me and ordered me to order my Companions to raise their voices in takbir."

It is narrated by Bukhari and Muslim and mentioned by Jalaluddin as-Suyuti, from other collections, that 'Ali bin Abi Talib (r) said, "I asked the Prophet (s) one time, 'O Messenger of Allah, guide me to the shortest way to Allah's Presence, and the easiest way to worship, and the best way for Allah, Almighty and Exalted. The Prophet (s) said, 'O 'Ali, you have to be continuously making Dhikrullah, silently and aloud.' I replied, 'O Prophet (s), all human beings are making dhikr. Give me something special.' The Prophet (s) said, 'O 'Ali, the best of what I, and all prophets before me, said is, *la ilaha illallah*. If all the heavens and earth were placed on one side of the balance and *la ilaha illallah* were placed in the other, *la ilaha illallah* would be heavier. Judgment Day will never come as long as there are people on this earth saying *la ilaha illallah*.' Then I said, 'How should I

recite.' The Prophet (s) said, 'Close your eyes and listen to me reciting *la ilaha ill-Allah* three times. Then you say it three times and I will listen to you.' Then the Prophet (s) said it and I repeated it in a loud voice."

In the narration of Imam Ahmad and Tabarani this hadith is continued, describing how the Prophet taught his Companions the dhikr. "'Ibada bin Samit said that the Prophet (s) said, 'Is there any stranger among you?' And we said, 'No, Ya Rasul-Allah.' He said, 'Close the door.' Then he said, 'Raise your hand and repeat after me *La ilaha illallah*' We raised our hand and said, *la ilaha illallah*. Then the Prophet (s) said, 'Praise be to Allah that He sent me to this world with this kalimah, and He ordered me with it, and He promised me the Paradise with it, and He never changes His Promise.' Then the Prophet (s) said, 'Be happy! Allah has forgiven you.'"

Jalaladin as-Suyuti mentioned in an article called "*Natijat al-Fikr fi Jahri-dh-Dhikr*," the *Benefits of Loud Dhikr*, twenty-five authentic hadiths which mention doing loud dhikr.

Silent Dhikr

Allah mentioned in Surat al-A'raf, 205, "And remember thy Lord in thy self with humility and fear, and without loudness of speech, in the mornings and evenings; and be not of the neglectful." [7:205]

Imam Ahmad narrated, "Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet (s) said that Allah says, 'I am with my servant when he remembers Me and by his remembrance of Me his lips move.'" Commenting on this hadith, Imam Nawawi said, "Allah is with the one who remembers Him and calls Him in his heart, and calls Him on his tongue, but we must realize that the dhikr of the heart is more perfect. The rememberer made dhikr of the tongue in order to reflect the occurrence of the dhikr in his heart. When the love of Allah and His Remembrance overwhelms the heart and the spirit, the tongue is moved and the seeker brought near."

Sheikh Amin al-Kurdi said in *The Enlightenment of Hearts (Tanwir al-Qulub)* p. 522: "The *dhikr* by tongue, which combines sounds and letters, is not easy to perform at all times, because buying and selling and other such activities altogether divert one's attention from such *dhikr*. The contrary is true of the *dhikr* by heart, which is named that way in order to signify its freedom from letters and sounds. In that way nothing distracts one from his *dhikr*, as the poet says:

With the heart remember Allah, secretly from creation, wordlessly and speechlessly.

That remembrance is best of all: out of it flowed the sayings of the saints.

"That is why our Naqshbandi masters have chosen the *dhikr* of the heart. Moreover, the heart is the place where the Forgiver casts his gaze, and the seat of belief, and the receptacle of secrets, and the source of lights. If it is sound, the whole body is sound, and

if it is unsound, the whole body is unsound, as was made clear for us by the chosen Prophet (s).

"Something that confirms this was narrated on the authority of °A'isha (r): 'Allah favors *dhikr* above *dhikr* seventyfold (meaning, silent *dhikr* over loud *dhikr*). On the Day of Resurrection, God will bring back human beings to His account, and the Recording Angels will bring what they have recorded and written, and Allah Almighty will say: See if something that belongs to my servant was left out? The angels will say: We left nothing out concerning what we have learnt and recorded, except that we have assessed it and written it. Allah will say: O my servant, I have something good of yours for which I alone will reward you, it is your hidden remembrance of Me.' Bayhaqi narrated it.

"Also on the authority of °A'isha: 'The *dhikr* not heard by the Recording Angels equals seventy times the one they hear.' Bayhaqi narrates it."

THE STAGES OF DHIKR AND ITS FULFILLMENT

مرقات الذكر



In the understanding of the people of *Tasawwuf*, *dhikr* is essential because it is the primary means for conveying the seeker to the Presence of Allah. It is of three gradations reflecting the stages of the journey to the Divine Presence:

1. the *dhikr* of the common people by the tongue;
2. the *dhikr* of the special people by the heart;
3. the *dhikr* of the Elect of the Special by their Annihilation in their *Dhikr* [Fana'un `an dhikrihim], when they see the One they are Remembering and are annihilated in His Presence.

Imam Ghazali said, "You must know that Allah removed all the veils of ignorance and brought people to the state of vision through their continuous *Dhikr*. The first stage of *Dhikr* is the *Dhikr* of the Tongue, then the *Dhikr* of the Heart, then the Appearance of the Divine Presence in the reciter of *dhikr*, making him no longer need to do *dhikr*." ¹³

Shaikh al-Munawi said, "For the seeker in Allah's Way, the thing of highest benefit to him is *dhikr* with the name, 'Allah,' whereby he will taste and see the Love of the Divine Presence [*adh-dhawq wal hubbu fillah*]." ¹⁴

Imam Junaid said, "Whoever made *Dhikr* with the all- encompassing Name, 'Allah,' is the one who left himself behind, connecting to His Lord, existing in His presence, looking at Him through his heart, where the Light of Allah has burned away his physical body." ¹⁵

Therefore, it is the practice of the grandshaikhs of the Naqshbandi Order to initiate their murids in dhikr with the Unique Name encompassing All Attributes, 'Allah,' and by negation and affirmation of the *affirmation of faith, la ilaha illallah*. Through these two forms they will be able to reach the State of *Ihsan*, Perfection, which was mentioned by the Prophet in the hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, "*al-Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him."

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya said, "If a person wants to be guided, he must look for a person who is from the People of Dhikr. If he found one who is from the People of Dhikr, keeping Dhikr continuously, and following the Sunnah of the Prophet (s), he must stick to him."¹⁶

Ibn Hajar al-Haythami said, "The seeker in the first stages, before reaching to the stage of Knower, must obey the orders of his shaikh, who is carrying both knowledges, the Divine knowledge and the knowledge of the Shari'ah, because he is the Great Physician who has tasted and sensed all the Heavenly Wisdom through keeping the Dhikr in his heart."

Notes

13. Imam Ghazzali, *Kitab al-arba in fi usul ad-din*, pp.52-55.

14. Shaykh al-Munawi, *Fayd ul-qadir*, vol.2, p. 309.

15. Farid ad-Din Attar, *Mystics and Saints*, p.102.

16. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Wabil as-sa'ib*, p.53.

Seclusion

الخلوة



Seclusion [*khalwat*] is better than isolation [*‘uzlat*] العزلة. It is a kind of isolation, that can only be prescribed by the shaikh. Its shortest time limit is 40 days, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an about Sayiddina Musa (s), "And remember We appointed forty nights for Moses" (Surah al-Baqarah, 51). Muslim narrated that the Prophet (s) made seclusion in the cave of ara for one complete month. Its aim is to clean the heart of connection to this world of material pleasures, and to bring it to a state of remembrance of Allah, Almighty and Exalted. In it countless visions occur, and it elevates the murid to a state of knowing the self, and from there to a state of knowing Allah.

Seclusion requires the seeker to disconnect himself from people and to disengage himself from all material interactions for a set period of time. His heart must be engaged only in God's Remembrance, and his mind relaxed from daily concerns. All this must take place

under the guidance of a gnostic shaikh, to teach us if we forget, and to remind us if we are heedless, and to throw out of the heart all gossip and whispers of the ego.

The shaikh orders the murid to seclude himself in a room where he will be served every day only with what is necessary for survival. Then he will teach his tongue the way of reciting Dhikr, until he will be engaged with that recitation. The shaikh will support his murid in opening the Vision of the Divine Presence in the heart (*surat al-mushahada fil-qalb*). Whatever happens to the murid during the seclusion, he must tell his shaikh, and he must conceal it from anyone other than the shaikh.

Seclusion is not an innovation but is an order of Allah, Almighty and Exalted, in his Holy Book and in the example of the Prophet (s). The Prophet (s) used to make seclusion in the cave of Hira in the mountains of Makkah, remembering Allah, Almighty and Exalted. It is indicated in the Qur'an, in Surat al-Muzzamil, (73, 8): "So remember the name of thy Lord, and devote thyself to Him with full devotion."

Allama Abu Sa'ad in his commentary on the explanation of the Qur'an by Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi, volume 8, p. 338, says, "The meaning of this verse is to keep secluding yourself from anyone other than Allah, Almighty and Exalted, remembering Him day and night, by *tasbih*, *tahmid* and *tahlil*, and to disconnect yourself, by all the power you have, and approach Him through the meditative stations such that you will not see anyone except Him, and be away from connections to other than Him through that meditation."

Meditation here rests on seclusion. The proof for this in the Qur'an can be found in the story of Maryam (s), the mother of Jesus (s): "So her Lord accepted her with a gracious acceptance, and caused her to grow an excellent growth, and made Zakariyya (s) her guardian. Whenever Zakariyya visited her in her seclusion he found with her provision. He said, 'O Maryam, whence hast thou this?' She replied, 'It is from Allah. Surely, Allah gives to whomsoever He pleases without measure.'" (Ali Imran, 37)

Allah said in the Qur'an, in Surat al-Kahf (ayat 16), mentioning the story of the companions of the cave, they were ordered, "Betake yourself to the Cave: your Lord will shower His mercies on you and dispose of your affair towards comfort and ease."

Similarly, seclusion has a proof in the sunnah. Bukhari reports that Ayesha said, "The Prophet loved to make seclusion. And he was secluding himself in the Cave of Hira."

Imam Nawawi, explained the hadith of Ayesha, "To be alone with the one you love is the real seclusion. It is the way of the pious and it is the way of knowers."

He said, in his explanation of Sahih Muslim, "The Prophet (s) said, 'Seclusion was made to be loved by him,' because with it the heart will be empty of all this materialistic life, and it will be in peace. It helps to deepen the meditation on Allah's Divine Presence, and with it his attachments to dunya will decrease, and with it his reverence will increase."

Imam Zuhri said, "I wonder at people, that they have left seclusion. The Prophet (s) was doing some things and then leaving them, yet he never left seclusion until he died."

Abi Jamra said in explanation of this hadith, "The Prophet, when he secluded himself and left people behind and disconnected himself from this world, received revelation from Jibril in the Cave of Hira. Anyone who will imitate the Prophet in doing seclusion, under the order of his shaikh, will be lifted to the state of sainthood.

"The proof of seclusion is that the Prophet (s), through his seclusion in the Cave of Hira, was lifted up to the state in which he received revelation. During his seclusions the first fruit was true dreams, and from that state he was elevated to the state in which he received revelation, to the state where he could receive revelation from the angel Jibril. Then he was lifted up more and more until he reached, during the Night of Ascension, the Divine Presence, to the station of two bows' length or nearer."

"All these stations were the fruit of his seclusion in the Cave of Hira. We see from this, that if we follow the footsteps of the Prophet (s), we will be lifted from one state to another, until we reach the high states of sainthood, and we will find ourselves in the Divine Presence."

Shaikh 'Abul Qadir said, "From the cave of Hira, where the Prophet (s) used to make seclusion, the light emanated, the dawn shone forth, and sunrise came. The first sparks of the luminescence of Islamic Sufism were struck. Never did the Prophet (s) leave his seclusion, even when he left the cave of Hira. All his life he was making seclusion, in the last ten days of Ramadan every year."

Imam Qastallani, in explaining this hadith, in his book "*Rashad us-Sari*" vol. 1, p. 62, "Seclusion will put the heart in peace and open in it fountains of wisdom, because it will disconnect the murid from the materialistic life and enable him to remember Allah, Almighty and Exalted. In his seclusion he must also isolate himself and seclude himself from himself, to see only Allah, Almighty and Exalted. At that time only will he receive Unseen Knowledge, and his heart will be a foundation for it."

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani said, in explaining the hadith of 'Ayesha, "The seclusion is emptying the heart of everything except Allah." [Fath al-Bari, v.1, p. 18]

Abul Hasan ash-Shadili said, "There are ten benefits from seclusion:

1. Safety from all misconduct of the tongue, because there is no one to talk to in seclusion
2. Safety from all misconduct of the eyes, because there is no one to see from human beings
3. Safety of the heart from all kinds of show, and other like illnesses
4. It will lift you to the state of asceticism
5. It will save you from accompanying evil people
6. It will give you free time to do dhikr
7. It will give you the sweet taste of worship, and prayers and supplication to the Divine Presence
8. It will give satisfaction and peace to the heart

9. It will keep your ego from falling into bad manners
10. It will give you the time to meditate and make account of yourself, and to make your goal the Divine Presence.

That is what the Prophet mentioned in his hadith, narrated by Bukhari, in the book of Riqaq. Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet said (s), "There are seven who will be kept under Allah's Shadow, on the Day when there is no shadow other than Allah's Shadow... One of them is a man who makes dhikr in seclusion, and the tears are coming from his eyes."

Explanation of Seclusion by Shaikh 'Abdullah ad-Daghestani

Once a famous French orientalist came to grandshaikh Abdullah Daghestani in Damascus and said, "O my master, I am coming to you after studying the Psalms, the Torah the Bible and the Holy Qur'an. I have studied all kinds of philosophy, all the religions, and many other systems of knowledge. But still, I feel nothing in my heart. I feel no satisfaction. On the contrary, it is as if I were standing on the edge of a cliff and were about to fall. I have become so shaky that I am going from one center to another, seeking what is real. Where can I reach that reality and gain satisfaction in my heart? Where can I find my Lord?"

"I have been everywhere. I have asked famous philosophers, orientalists, people whom I considered saints. I have read everything I could. Yet, when I have asked any scholar a question, I felt as if they were giving me an answer I already knew. They were not giving me anything new. I am confused."

"I heard your name and I have finally come to you. After you I am not going anywhere. Will you give me an answer to my question? Whatever you say I will follow and believe. But if you do not give me an answer, I shall remain as I am, confused and uncertain for the rest of my life."

Grandshaikh said, "My son, if you take the seed of an apple or any fruit and leave it there dry, for hundreds of years, it will remain dry. But if you take that seed and put it in a field and plant it, then come back after one month, you will find that a green sprout has come out. If you dig and try to find that seed you will not find it anymore, it has vanished, replaced by something new. If you continue to water that plant it will become a tree and that tree will give fruit. But where is the original seed? It has disappeared. There is no original seed anymore. The seed has become a large tree now, with fruit coming forth, giving people fruit to eat."

"Similarly, if you take an egg and put it under a chicken for 21 days, after exactly twenty-one days that egg disappears and a new chick comes. Something new comes into being. If you look under the chicken you will no longer find the egg there. The egg has vanished. It was the twenty-one days under that chicken that turned it into a new generation."

"Something similar happens with human beings when they are in their mother's womb for about nine months and ten days. Inside that womb they are without any connection to

anything outside, alone. Yet after those nine months and ten days of loneliness there will come forth a new generation, a new creation. My son, in everyone of these three examples there was something that went into seclusion. The seed cut itself off from the material world above the ground and went into seclusion for several weeks, then a new plant emerged. The egg went into seclusion under its mother, with no connection to the material life outside its shell and came out a new generation. The sperm went into seclusion in the egg within the mother's womb for nine months, without connection to the external world of their materialistic life, but after the seclusion it emerged a new generation."

"My son, if you do not enter into seclusion, then never say to yourself, as the seed says to itself, 'I want to cut myself off from the materialistic life of this world and vanish from it for the love of God and for the benefit of other human beings.' For the seed begets fruit. If you do not experience a retreat like this, if you don't cut yourself from the materialistic life, forsake your ego and complete sacrifice and vanish into nothingness to exist only in God, never will you find your ultimate reality, your true self. Never will you be like that tree that gives fruit for people to eat. If you will not be like that egg and sever yourself from materialism, retreating into the shell of seclusion and existing only in the presence of your Lord, meditating, concentrating on Him, worshipping Him in your heart, keeping His Presence always in your heart, never will you find that satisfaction and happiness you seek."

"Why must you imitate that sperm that enters into seclusion for nine months? The mother's womb consists of three layers. This was mentioned 1400 years ago in the Holy Qur'an in Surat az-Zumar, 6:, at a time when no microscopes existed. The Prophet (s) also said, 'The womb of a mother is composed of darkneses, i.e. of layers.' You must enter into this loneliness, severing your bond to everything external, cutting yourself off from the material things of this world, to be alone with your Lord, and thus make connection to your ultimate reality, by fitting that image you wear here to its original in the Divine Presence."

"Never will you know satisfaction, no matter how many books you read, for when you read, you only hear the books. The knowledge they contain is only hearsay knowledge, and not real. Yet in seclusion, you not only hear but you feel. You will not only see, but you will smell. It is then that the eyes of the heart open. My son if you don't enter into seclusion, your heart will never feel the contentment you have been so long seeking."

Immediately the scholar said, "You have given me an answer to my question and a solution to my problem that I have never yet received from anyone. My heart is open. Show me the way." Grandshaikh gave him permission to enter into seclusion in a designated place, cutting himself off from everything. He entered that place an ordinary man, but after one year he left it a saint."