

THE SUBLIME TRUTHS OF THE SHĀDHILĪ PATH

by Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī

With notes by
Shaykh Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ṣiddīq
al-Ghumārī al-Hasani

Translated by Khalid Williams



THE OUTSTANDING hadith master and Sufi, Imam al-Suyuti writes in this brilliant work explaining the Sufi path:

‘The one who is in awe of Allah is better than the one who loves Him, and the one who loves Him is better than the one who relies on Him, and the one who relies on Him is better than the one who fears Him, and the one who fears Him is better than the one who has hope in Him. These are some of the attributes of the gnostics.’ page

The Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

“Sufism is itself a noble science, centred on adherence to the Sunna, rejection of heretical innovation, disavowal of the lower soul and its desires and habits, and submission to Allah, contentment with His decree, the seeking of his love, and disregard for everything but Him”.¹

1 See page 78

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

ALL PRAISE is for Allah most High and the choicest of peace and blessings be upon His Final and Beloved Messenger – Muhammad.

The science of *taṣawwuf* or Sufism is one of the traditional Islamic sciences; it like other Islamic sciences has its basis in the Qur'ān and the Sunna of the Prophet ﷺ. Towards the end of his life in the famous ḥadīth of Jibrīl, the Prophet ﷺ, defined Islam, Imān and Iḥsān after having been asked by the Angel Jibrīl.

The knowledge of Imān would later develop into the science of Islamic beliefs known as '*aqīda*'; that of Islam into *fiqh* and Iḥsān into *taṣawwuf* the science of (...worshipping Allah as if you see him...). The Ṣaḥāba took the Prophetic way of living – the Sunna – and faithfully passed it over to the next generation who did likewise until the Dīn had been mass transmitted until the present day. A part of that transmission has been the noble science of *taṣawwuf*. The chains of transmission of the Ṣūfī Chains or *silsilas* indicate the highest ranking scholars who carried this knowledge and passed it on.

Despite orientalist and reformist salafist protestations – the schools of '*aqīda*', the schools of *fiqh*, and the schools of *taṣawwuf* developed around the same time, all within the

1 Just as the term *taṣawwuf* has no mention in the ḥadīth literature then neither does '*aqīda*' – the rejection of either term on the basis that it has not been explicitly mentioned is erroneous.

bounds of traditional Sunni orthodoxy. The term 'Ṣūfī' was known by, approved by and used by scholars like the Mujtahid Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal².

No area of Islam has been as vehemently attacked by the reformist movements as *taṣawwuf* has, therefore it is a great pleasure to present this work by one of the most prolific intellectual geniuses of the Umma, who authored nearly a thousand works with many still in print over five centuries after his death. Imam al-Suyūṭī was a Ṣūfī and an adherent of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqa, a fact that not many people may have been aware of. The translation of Imam Suyūṭī's work on the Shādhilī Ṭarīqa into English brings to Western audiences a magnificent book which illustrates, through the pen of a master, what *taṣawwuf* and the Shādhilī Path are about.

We hope by the publication of this translation that it will direct people to traditional Islamic teachings and I am grateful to Sidi Farid Rana for his involvement in this project. We ask Allah to accept this work from all who have had a hand in preparing it through to those reading it and make it a source of comfort in this life and the life hereafter.

Amjid Illahi

² See *The Hanabila and the Early Sufis* by C. Melchert, Arabica, T. 48, Fasc. 3 (2001), pp. 352-367

BIOGRAPHY OF IMAM AL-SUYŪṬĪ

ABU'L-FADL 'ABD al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Kḥuḍayrī al-Suyūṭī³, famous Egyptian scholar, at present recognised as one of the most prolific authors in the whole of Islamic literature.

He was a Shāfi'ī *mujtahid* Imam, Ṣūfī, ḥadīth master (*ḥāfiz*) and historian, a prolific writer who authored works in virtually every Islamic science. Born on the 1st of Rajab 849AH/1445, his father taught Shāfi'ī jurisprudence and served as a *qāḍī* (judge). Sadly his father died while he was still a child and he was raised as an orphan in Cairo. He was naturally gifted and had memorised the Quran by the age of eight, then several complete works of Sacred Law, fundamentals of jurisprudence, and Arabic grammar; after which he devoted himself to studying the Sacred Sciences under some of the foremost shaykhs of the time in each discipline, among them Sirāj al-Dīn Bulqīnī, with whom he studied Shāfi'ī jurisprudence until his death; Sharaf al-Dīn al-Munāwī, with whom he read Qur'ānic exegesis; Taqī al-Dīn al-Shamānī in ḥadīth and the sciences of Arabic; and others including Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī whose ḥadīth class he attended as a young boy with his father.

³ Adapted from *Reliance of the Traveller* by Sh Nuh Keller and "al-Suyūṭī." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014

He studied ḥadīth under the aegis of a dozen women specialising in this discipline⁴. In 867/1463, hardly eighteen years old, he inherited his father's position, taught Shāfi'ī law in the mosque of Shaykhū and gave juridical consultations in which he handled various sciences in a brilliant way⁵. In 872/1467 al-Suyūṭī took up again the tradition of dictating (*imlā'*) ḥadīth in the mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn, where his father had been a preacher. This method had been interrupted twenty years earlier at the death of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. As a result, al-Suyūṭī obtained in 877/1472 the post of teacher of ḥadīth at the Shaykhūniyya having being nominated by his teacher al-Kafyādjī

From 891/1486 he was also in charge of the Baybarsiyya *khānqāh*. These obligations left him time to write his works and to see to their spread outside Egypt. Before he had reached thirty years of age, his works were sought after in the entire Near East, and later circulated from India to Takrūr in Sahilian Africa, where he, from Cairo, played the role of counsellor in matters of Islamisation⁶.

He travelled to gain Sacred Knowledge to Damascus, the Hijaz, Yemen, Morocco, and the lands south of Morocco, as well as to centres of learning in Egypt such as Mahalla, Dumyat, and Fayyum.

When he reached forty years of age, he abandoned the company of men for the solitude of the Garden of al-Miqyas by the side of the Nile, avoiding his former colleagues as though he had never known them, and it was here that

4 See M. al-Shak'a, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Masīratuhu al-'ilmiyya wa-mabāḥithuhu al-lughawiyya*, Cairo 1981, p 35-40

5 An example of a complex *fatwā* given at that early age is reported by S. Abū Djīb in *Hayāt Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī ma' al-'ilm min al-mahd ilā'l-laḥd*, Damascus 1993, 189-93

6 See the *As'ila wārīda min al-Takrūr*, in the *Hāwī* presented below, i, 377-85

he authored most of his nearly one thousand books and treatises⁷. Wealthy Muslims and princes would visit him with offers of money and gifts, but he put all of them off, and when the sultan requested his presence a number of times, he refused⁸. Blessed with success in his years of solitude, it is difficult to name a field in which al-Suyūṭī did not make outstanding contributions, among them his ten volume ḥadīth work *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* [The collection of collections]; his Qur'ānic exegesis *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* [the commentary of the two Jalāls], of which he finished the second half of an uncompleted manuscript by Jalāl al-Dīn Maḥallī in just forty days; his classic commentary on the sciences of ḥadīth *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī* the training of the ḥadīth transmitter: an exegesis of Nawawī's *The Facilitation* and many others. A giant among contemporaries, he remained alone, producing a sustained output of scholarly writings until his death in Cairo at sixty years of age in 911AH/1505.

7 Regarding the number of his works, Arab and Western authors have brought forward different figures, and these go up parallel to our knowledge. A study of 1983 mentions up to 981 works, see al-Khāzindār and M.I. al-Shaybānī, *Dalīl makhtūṭāt al-Suyūṭī wa-amākin wujūdiha*, Cairo.

8 Frequenting worldly rulers, he propounded, was condemned by the first Muslims (cf. his epistle *Mā rawāhu al-aṣāṭīn fī 'adam al-majī' ilā'l-salāṭīn*, Ṭanṭa 1991).

BIOGRAPHY OF SHAYKH AL-GHUMĀRĪ

‘**A**BDULLĀH IBN Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq ibn Aḥmad al-Ghumārī was born in Tangiers in 1328/1910, a descendent of the Prophet ﷺ through Imam al-Ḥasan on his father’s side and through the Moroccan Ṣūfī Ibn ‘Ajība on his mother’s side. He came from a scholarly family with a large number of notable ‘ulamā’. He was considered one of the foremost experts in ḥadīth in recent times. He studied under traditional scholars in Morocco and in al-Azhar. He authored some 150 works and was recognised as an authority by his contemporaries. He died in 1413/1993.

AUTHOR’S INTRODUCTION

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful
PRAISE BE to Allah, and peace be upon those of His servants He has elected. Know – may Allah give grace to you and to us – that the science of Sufism [*taṣawwuf*] is an inherently noble and exalted science. The guiding imams of Islam, both of old and of recent times, have always carried its torch, honoured its standing, venerated its followers and had faith in its masters; for they are the Friends of Allah and the chosen elect of His servants after the prophets and messengers. Yet there have always been those who have infiltrated it and disguised themselves as such masters, when in truth they are nothing of the kind; they have spoken with neither knowledge nor realisation [*taḥqīq*], and thus gone astray and led others astray along with them. Some of them adopt only the name, and use it to amass the ephemeral baubles of this world; others have fallen short of realisation and spoken of ‘indwelling’ and the like; and the result of this has been the besmirching of the reputation of all who profess Sufism. The genuine among them have pointed this out, and made it clear that these evil matters are but the inventions of these imposters; and for my part, I have written this treatise and entitled it *A Defence of Exalted Truth, and a Buttressing of the Shādhilī Path*. I have divided it into sections, and I pray that Allah will accept it as an earnest devotion to Him, and grant us sincerity in our intentions, and security from error, uncouth speech and doubt.

ONE
THE SCIENCE OF SUFISM IS
BASED ON HADITHS AND
TRADITIONS

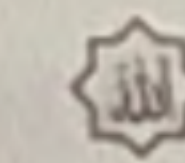
AMONG THESE is the ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, wherein the Prophet ﷺ said: 'Mūsā said to al-Khiḍr, (May I follow you, that from what you have been taught you may teach me with right guidance?) [18:66] He replied: (Verily, you will not be able to have patience with me) [18:67], and then: "O Mūsā, I possess certain of Allah's knowledge, which He has taught me, and which you must not know; and you possess certain of Allah's knowledge, which He has taught you, and which I must not know."

That is, I must not know all of it; and likewise, when he said 'and which you must not know', he meant you must not know all of it. Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar said that we should understand it this way, because of course al-Khiḍr had knowledge of those outward matters which all religiously responsible people need to know, and likewise Mūsā had knowledge of those inward matters which were revealed to him. Shaykh Sirāj al-Dīn al-Balqīnī said of this ḥadīth:

This might be difficult to understand, for how could it be that this knowledge could not rightly be attained

by either party? The answer is that knowledge of inner realities and unveilings can contradict outward knowledge, and thus the scholar whose role is to make exoteric rulings should not seek knowledge of inner realities because of this contradiction; and likewise, the one who has knowledge of inner realities should not seek knowledge of those exoteric matters which are not his concern, lest they contradict the knowledge of inner realities which he possesses.

It is also possible to understand 'knowledge' here in terms of practice: 'You must not know it with a mind to acting upon it, for to act upon it would be to contradict the dictate of the Sacred Law; and I must not know it with a mind to acting upon it, since this would be to contradict the dictate of the inner reality.' Therefore, when the saint who follows the Prophet ﷺ discovers an inner reality, he must not act upon it, but must conform to the outward law.



Another of them is the ḥadīth of 'Umar when Jibrīl asked about spiritual excellence (*iḥsān*), and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'It is to worship Allah as if you see Him; for if you see Him not, He sees you.' This was narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.¹

Al-Harawī said in *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* that this ḥadīth is a comprehensive allusion to the way of the Sufis. A commentator said:

¹ Al-Bukhārī's narration is on the authority of Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه rather than 'Umar رضي الله عنه.

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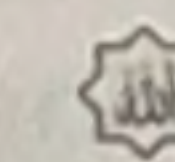
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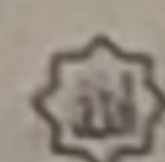


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This is because the basis of this special path is perfect gnosis [*ma'rifa*] and constant awareness of the Real ﷻ in all motion and stillness; indeed with every breath and every moment, until the power of the Real overwhelms the heart entirely, replacing everything else to which it was previously attached, or to which it previously inclined.



Another of them is the ḥadīth narrated by al-Ṭabasī in his *Targhīb* as reported to him by: al-Qādī Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥasan – Abū 'Alī Ḥāmid ibn Muḥammad al-Rafā al-Harawī – Naṣr ibn Aḥmad al-Barzajānī – 'Abd al-Salām ibn Ṣāliḥ – Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna – Ibn Jurayj – 'Aṭā' – Abū Hurayra, who reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Some knowledge is, as it were, hidden: none know it save those who have knowledge of Allah; and when they speak it, none deny it save those who know nothing of Allah.'

Now this chain of narration is weak: 'Abd al-Salām ibn Ṣāliḥ (Abū al-Ṣalt al-Harawī), one of Ibn Mājah's narrators, was a righteous man but also a Shiite, and there is a difference of opinion about him. Abū Ḥātim said, 'He was not honest in my opinion, and Abū Zar'a rejected his ḥadīths.' Al-'Aqīlī said, 'He was a foul *rāfiḍī*.' Al-Nasā'ī said, 'He was not trustworthy.' Ibn 'Adī said he was suspect. Al-Dāraquṭnī said, 'He was a *rāfiḍī*, and suspected of forging the ḥadīth "faith is a spoken acknowledgement."² On the other hand, al-'Abbās al-Dawraqī said, 'I heard Yaḥyā say Abū al-Ṣalt was trustworthy'; and Muḥammad ibn Muḥriz

2 Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Ghumārī states in his notes that this accusation is unfounded, since several more trustworthy narrators also related this ḥadīth, in various versions.

reported that Yaḥyā said that he should not be called a liar; and Aḥmad ibn Sayyār praised him in *Tārīkh Marv* and said, 'He was known for having Shiite leanings, so I debated him to see what his position was, and I found that he was not an extremist; he affirmed the precedence of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and spoke only good of the Companions, and said to me, "This is my way, upon which I stand before Allah."'

The upshot is that this ḥadīth of his is at the level of weakness, but not forgery. Al-Quṭb al-Qusṭallānī relates this ḥadīth in his book in the *taṣawwuf* section, and states that it is supported by a *mursal*³ narration of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab; he also supports it with a ḥadīth with a full chain back to the Prophet ﷺ on the authority of Anas: 'Knowledge is of two kinds: knowledge that is firm in the heart, which is beneficial knowledge; and knowledge that resides on the tongue, which is Allah's proof against His servants.' This ḥadīth was narrated by Abū Nu'aym and al-Daylamī (*Musnad al-Firdaws*).⁴

Al-Harawī also narrated, in *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn*, with a chain of transmission going back to al-Junayd – al-Sarī – Ma'rūf al-Karkhī – Ja'far ibn Muḥammad – his father – his grandfather – 'Alī, that the Prophet ﷺ said: 'The Real [*al-Ḥaqq*] is sought by solitude [*ghurba*].'

This ḥadīth was also narrated by al-Daylamī in *Musnad al-Firdaws* with a chain of Ṣūfī narrators,⁵ and by al-Quṭb al-Qusṭallānī, who commented:

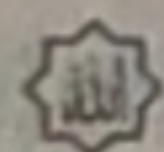
3 A *mursal* narration is one where the Companion who reported the ḥadīth is not mentioned by name in the chain of transmission.

4 It was also narrated by al-Khaṭīb in *al-Tārīkh* with a sound chain according to al-Mundhirī and al-'Irāqī, and by Ibn Abī Shayba (*Muṣannaḥ*), al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (*Nawādir al-Uṣūl*), Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (*al-Ilm*, with a rigorously authentic *mursal* chain) and al-Bayhaqī (as a saying of al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād).

5 Namely: Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Sahl al-Sirāj al-Ṣūfī – Abū Ṭālib Ḥamza ibn Muḥammad al-Ja'farī – 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Aḥmad al-Hāshimī – Aḥmad

It may be that *al-Ḥaqq* here means Allah ﷻ, since He is the Absolutely Real, whilst for all other things the word is used only in a provisional sense; and that *ghurba* means distance from the desires and lusts of the soul. Or it may be that *al-Ḥaqq* means that which is true and sought by means of acts of worship, and that *ghurba* means scarcity and difficulty of obtaining because of the lack of supports for seeking it. [That is, the ḥadīth may be translated 'The Real is sought by solitude', or 'The truth is difficult to seek.'] This calls to mind another ḥadīth, which states: 'Islam began as something strange, and it will become something strange again; glad tidings, then, to the strangers!'⁶

Al-Qutb also narrated the saying of 'Īsā ﷺ: 'There are three kinds of scholars:⁷ those who know Allah and His command; those who know Allah but not His command; and those who know Allah's command but not Allah.' It is also related that Sufyān al-Thawrī said: 'There are three kinds of scholars: those who know Allah and fear Him, but do not know His command; those who know Allah and His command, and fear Him – and they are the perfect scholars; and those who know Allah's command but neither know Him nor fear Him – and they are the wicked scholars.'⁸



ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Yūsuf al-Wā'iz – 'Allān ibn Yazīd al-Dīnūrī – Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Sūfī – al-Junayd – al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī.

6 Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abū Hurayra ﷺ.

7 Or simply 'people who know.'

8 The author relates it in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* as narrated by Abū Ḥātim on the authority of Sufyān – Abū Ḥayyān al-Taymī – a man who told it as a well-known saying.

Another of them is the ḥadīth narrated by al-Daylamī in *Musnad al-Firdaws* with a chain of transmission on the authority of Aḥmad ibn Ghassān – 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd – al-Ḥasan – Hudhayfa – the Prophet ﷺ: 'I asked Jibrīl what inner knowledge is, and he replied that Allah said: "It is a secret between Me and My loved ones; I place it in their hearts."⁹

He also narrated it in another form on the authority of Aḥmad ibn Ghassān with the wording 'I asked Jibrīl about sincerity...'¹⁰ At each link of the chain of the narration, the narrator asked his shaykh that question, and the ḥadīth was the reply. Concerning the chain, al-Dhahabī said in *al-Mīzān*:

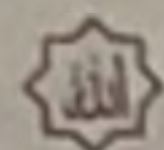
'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd al-Baṣrī: an ascetic and Ṣūfī shaykh and teacher. He met with al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] and others. Some called him a weak narrator: Ibn Ma'īn said, 'He was no kind of narrator'; al-Bukhārī said, 'They have discarded his narrations'; al-Jawzaqānī said, 'He followed a wayward sect, and was not a paragon of sincerity.' ... He had many flaws as a narrator, although his prayers used to be answered, and Wakī' narrated from him, as did Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, who said that he prayed the dawn prayer

9 Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Ghumārī states in his note that this chain contains unknown narrators, and was declared a forgery by al-Ḥāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar. A similar ḥadīth was narrated by Ibn al-Jawzī (*al-'Ilal al-Mutanāhiyya*) and Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (*al-Arba'īn*) on the authority of 'Alī ﷺ, with a weak chain of transmission.

10 Al-Qushayrī narrated it in this form in *al-Risāla* on the authority of his shaykh Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī; it was also narrated by al-Qazwīnī, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, and al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Maṣ'ūd al-Aṣbahānī, all with chains including Aḥmad ibn Ghassān, as above.

with the same ablution as the night prayer¹¹ for forty years.

Besides him, the two chains also contain unknown narrators.



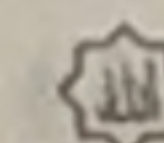
Al-Faryābī narrates in his *Tafsīr* on the authority of al-Ḥasan that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Every verse has an outer and an inner meaning.'¹² Ibn al-Naqīb said in his *Tafsīr*: 'The outer meaning of the verse is that which is apparent to the people of outward knowledge, and the inner meaning of it is the secrets it contains, which Allah shows to the people of inner realities.'¹³

11 That is, he stayed up all night in worship.

12 Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Ghumārī states in his notes that this ḥadīth continues: '**...And every letter has a limit [*ḥadd*], and every limit has a means by which it can be known [*maṭla*]**', and that al-Ḥasan attributed it to the Prophet ﷺ; al-Ghumārī states that its chain is rigorously authentic, and that it has another chain which is sound, although *mursal*, since al-Ḥasan does not state from which Companion he heard it. Abū Ya'lā narrates it in *al-Kabīr* on the authority of Ibn Ma'sūd from the Prophet ﷺ with the wording '**The Qur'ān was revealed in seven modes, each verse of which has an outer and an inner meaning.**' Other ḥadīths with the same meaning were narrated by al-Daylimī, al-Ṭabarānī and al-Bazzār.

13 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: This is one of the opinions concerning the meaning of 'outer' and 'inner.' Another is that the 'outer' is the word, and the 'inner' is the interpretation. A third is that the 'outer' is the literal meaning of the story wherein, for example, Allah tells of His wrath with people and the punishment He dealt them, whilst the 'inner' is the lesson this imparts to the Muslims when they read it or hear it, warning them not to do the same; this opinion was preferred by Abū 'Ubayda, although it only applies to stories and not to everything in the Qur'ān. A fourth is that the 'outer' is the obligation of believing in its revelation, and the 'inner' is the obligation of acting upon it. A fifth is that the 'outer' is to recite it as it was revealed, and the 'inner'

Furthermore, Abū Nu'aym narrated that Ibn Ma'sūd ؓ said: 'The Qur'ān was revealed in seven modes, each one having an outer and an inner meaning; and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib knows the outer and the inner.' Abū Nu'aym also narrated that Ibn 'Abbās ؓ said: 'We used to speak about how the Prophet ﷺ made seventy covenants with 'Alī which he made with no one else...' More will be said about this in a separate section at the end of the book.

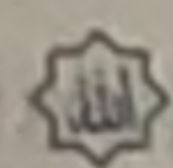


Al-Kalābādhī said in *al-Ta'arruf* that those who spoke the language of the Sufis, proclaimed their teachings, and described their spiritual stations and states in word and deed, after the Companions, included 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn, his son Muḥammad al-Bāqir, his son Ja'far al-Šādiq, Uways al-Qarnī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū Ḥāzim Salama ibn Dīnār, Mālik ibn Dīnār, 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd, 'Utba al-Ghulām, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ, his son 'Alī, Dāwūd al-Ṭā'ī, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Abū

is to reflect and meditate upon it; this is supported by the ḥadīth narrated by Muḥammad ibn Naṣr on the authority of 'Umayr ibn Hānī', stating that the Companions said, 'O Messenger of Allah, we get something from the Qur'ān when you recite it that we do not get when we recite it by ourselves.' He ﷺ answered: '**Of course, because I recite it for the inner, whilst you recite it for the outer.**' 'O Messenger of Allah,' they said, 'what is the inner?' He answered: '**I recite it to reflect and act upon its teachings, whilst you all recite it just like this**'; and he gestured with his hand. There are other opinions besides these, but we have chosen not to mention them because they are weak.

As for the 'limit' [*ḥadd*], it is said that it means those meanings which are hidden, and that the *maṭla* is the means by which they may be known; it is also said that it refers the rulings of the lawful and unlawful, whilst the *maṭla* refers to their respective rewards and punishments; there are other opinions besides these.

Sulaymān al-Dārānī, his son Sulaymān, Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī and Dhun-Nūn al-Miṣrī, among others. Others have said that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the first to travel down the Path, and then his son al-Ḥasan.



As for the words of 'Alī, the most famous of them, mentioned by many Sufis in their books, were those narrated by Abū Nu'aym in the *Ḥilya* on the authority of al-Kumayl ibn Ziyād, who said:

"'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib took me by the hand and led me out to the desert. When we had gone a way out, he sat, took a breath, and said: "O Kumayl ibn Ziyād, hearts are vessels, and the best of them are those that retain their contents the best. Remember what I say to you now. The people are of three kinds: he who has knowledge from his Lord, he who seeks knowledge for his salvation, and then the riff-raff, who go buzzing like flies around everything that attracts their attention." ... He pointed to his heart, and said: "There is knowledge here – would that I had found someone to bear it! Indeed, I have found one who has a sharp mind, but he could not be trusted with it, for he uses the religion as a tool for worldly gain: he uses Allah's proofs as arguments against His own Book, and he uses His blessings against His servants.

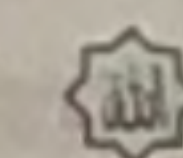
"And I have found one who criticises those who are on the side of truth, though he has not the insight to answer it.¹⁴ Doubt is cast into his heart by the least of suspicions, so he cannot choose between this and that. I have found one who is ruled by pleasure, quick to yield to passions,

¹⁴ Shaykh 'Abdallāh points out that the version in the *Ḥilya* has 'though he has not the insight to revive it.'

infatuated with the pursuit of wealth and treasures.¹⁵ These two are more like grazing livestock than religious teachers.

"See, then, how knowledge dies when those who bear it die. Yet the earth will never be bereft of those who uphold Allah's proofs, lest His proofs and messages be erased. They are the fewest in number, yet the greatest in Allah's sight. By them does He defend His proofs, that they may convey them to their contemporaries and plant them in the hearts of their fellow men. By their means is knowledge made manifest. They find easy what worldly people find impossible, and they are content with what ignorant people cannot abide. They live in this world in their bodies, but their hearts are attached to the Supreme Vision. They are Allah's vicegerents in His land, and the teachers of His religion. Ah, what a thing it is to see them!"...

As for the rest of what 'Alī said, and what others said along with it, a discussion of it can be found in their biographies in the book *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*. I have left it out here for the sake of brevity.

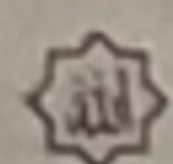


'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī said:

Ustādh Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī took the way of Sufism from Ustādh Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq, who took it from Abū al-Qāsim al-Naṣr Ābādhī, who took it from al-Shiblī, who took it from al-Junayd, who took it from al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī, who took it from Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, who took it from Dāwūd al-Ṭā'ī, who met with people from the Followers [*tābi'ūn*].

¹⁵ Preferring the *Ḥilya*'s *adkhār*, 'treasures', to *awlād*, 'children', as Shaykh 'Abdallāh prefers.

That is how he would give the chain of transmission of his Order.



Al-Shaykh al-Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ Taqī al-Dīn ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, the imam of the Shāfi'is and Hadith scholars of his time, said:

The donning of the patched garment [*khirqā*] is a symbol of nearness. Some scholars cite evidence from the Sunna of the Prophet ﷺ for it, namely the ḥadīth of Umm Khālid bint Khālid ibn Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣ. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was given some clothes which included a black robe with an embroidered border. 'Who do you think deserves this the most?' he asked. The people were silent. He said, 'Bring me Umm Khālid.' She was brought forth, and he put it on her, and then said twice: 'May you keep it until it is worn out.'¹⁶ This was narrated by al-Bukhārī.¹⁷

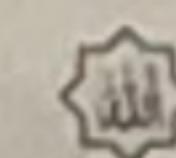
I have a very short chain of transmission for the patched garment: it was given to me by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, who took it from Abū al-As'ad Hibat al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Sa'īd 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Abī al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, who took it from his grandfather Abū al-Qāsim, who took

¹⁶ That is, 'may you have a long life.'

¹⁷ Shaykh 'Abdallāh states in his notes that another pertinent ḥadīth here is that which al-Ṭabarānī narrated with a sound chain on the authority of 'Abdallāh ibn Bishr, stating that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent 'Alī on a mission, first wrapping a black turban around his head and letting the loose end fall down his back [or his left shoulder]. Similar reports are also narrated by al-Baghawī, Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Bayhaqī and Ibn Shādhān. Shaykh 'Abdallāh points out that this ḥadīth is more suited to be used as proof for the patched garment of the Sufis, since it is connected with 'Alī رضي الله عنه.

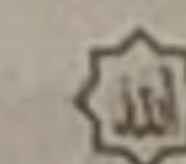
it from Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq, who took it from Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamawayhi al-Naṣr Abādhī, who took it from Abū Bakr Dulaf ibn Jaḥdar al-Shiblī, who took it from al-Junayd, who took it from al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī, who took it from Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, who took it from Dāwūd al-Ṭā'ī, who took it from Ḥabīb al-'Ajamī, who took it from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who took it from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who took it from the Prophet ﷺ.

Now the chain for the patched garment we have just related is not tainted by its being disputed from the point of view of the Hadith scholars,¹⁸ since the point is to illustrate the blessing and spiritual benefit in a chain so filled with masters.

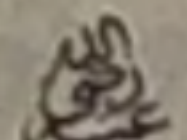


Yahyā ibn 'Ammār al-Taymī al-Sijistānī said:

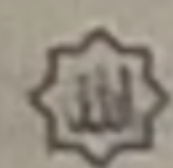
There are five sciences. There is the life of the religion, namely the science of *tawḥīd*. Then there is the nourishment of the religion, namely the science of counsel and remembrance. Then there is the medicine of the religion, namely the science of jurisprudence. Then there is the disease of the religion, namely the history of the civil discord of the early generations. Then there is the destruction of the religion, namely the science of speculative theology.



¹⁸ In that there is a dispute about whether al-Ḥasan took from 'Alī رضي الله عنه, as will be seen later.

Al-Shāfi'ī  said:

I accompanied the Sufis, and learned no more than two things [another narration has 'three things'] from them: 'Time is a sword; if you do not cut it, it cuts you'; and 'If you do not busy your soul with truth, it will busy you with falsehood.' [The other narration adds: 'Poverty is protection.']



Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī says in *Mu'īd al-Ni'am wa Mubīd al-Niqam*:

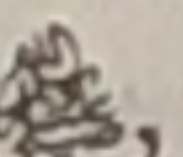
EXAMPLE SIXTY-SIX concerns the Sufis – may Allah give them life and success, and place us in their company in Paradise! Opinion on them differs, and this difference is the result of nothing but ignorance of the truth about them, because of how many people claim to represent it. Al-Shaykh Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī said that religious endowment (*waqf*) cannot be devoted to them, because there is no commonly-accepted definition for them; the stronger opinion, however, is that it possible to do so. They are those who turn away from this world and busy themselves with worship most of the time.

Al-Junayd said: 'Sufism means to adopt every noble quality, and renounce every ignoble quality.'

Al-Shiblī said: 'Sufism means to control your senses, and be vigilant with your every breath.'

Dhun-Nūn al-Miṣrī said: 'The Ṣūfī is he whom, when he speaks, his speech unveils spiritual realities [*ḥaqā'iq*]; and when he is silent, his body speaks in his stead.'

Ibn Bandār said: 'Sufism means to cease seeing created things, both outwardly and inwardly.'

Abū 'Alī al-Rūdhbarī said: 'The Ṣūfī is he who wears wool [*ṣūf*] on top of purity [*ṣafā*], and feeds his passion with the food of harshness, and stays to the path of the Chosen One [*al-Muṣṭafā*] , and leaves the world behind him.'

Al-Shaykh al-Imām¹⁹ used to say: 'The Ṣūfī is he who cleaves to purity [*ṣafā*] with the Real, and good character with His creatures.' He would quote:

The people differed about the word *ṣūfī*,

Thinking it was derived from *ṣūf*,

For my part, I can only say:

He was pure [*ṣafā*], and purified [*ṣūfiya*], until they called him *ṣūfī*!

These statements are all similar in meaning; the upshot is that they are the Folk and the Elite of Allah, by mention of whom His mercy may be hoped for, and by whose supplications His aid is sent down. May Allah be pleased with them, and with us by their means!

The Sufis have described their path in many ways in their books. Ustādh Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī said: 'Allah has made this group the elite of His saints, and favoured them over the rest of His servants, after His messengers and prophets. He has made their hearts the repositories of His mysteries, and chosen them, out of the whole community, to receive His resplendent lights. They are the helpers of all other creatures, who remain with the Real and through the Real in each and every state.'

Among the qualities of the Sufis are compassion,

¹⁹ Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī.

mercy, clemency, forgiveness and forbearance. Their governing precept is what we have described, and their way is as Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd said: 'Our way is determined by the Book and the Sunna.' He also said: 'The way is closed to all of Allah's creatures, save for those who follow the tracks of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.'

One of their rights is to guide the aspirant if he shows signs of spiritual aptitude, and to bolster him with good thoughts and prayers. It is said that a disciple once went to his shaykh as he sat in a gathering at midday. The shaykh's spiritual insight told him that the disciple had committed a sin the night before, so he looked at him wrathfully, being unable to speak to him directly in front of the others; but the disciple answered the shaykh with a reproachful look. Upon this, the shaykh stood and went to the disciple, and kissed his hand. The rest of the company had no idea what had gone on. Later one of them asked the shaykh, and he answered: 'He committed adultery last night, so I gave him a wrathful look, which he answered with a reproachful look, which said: *Had your good thoughts and spiritual support been with me, I would not have fallen into that sin; so you are the negligent one.* So I kissed his hand, because he was right: I was the negligent one.'

Another of their rights is to reveal the hidden things which Allah shows them, and the miracles He vouchsafes them, provided they have His leave to do so; they do not permit them to be revealed without purpose, nor do they reveal them without divine sanction. They reveal them for a religious benefit, or to aid spiritual instruction, or to give a glad tiding, or to give a warning.

An example of this: upon his death, [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq said to 'Ā'isha: 'Alongside you there are your two brothers and your two sisters.' She replied, 'There is only Asmā' – who is the other sister?' He said: '[Ḥabība] bint Khārija is kindled with child, and I see that it will be a girl.' She gave birth after his death, and indeed it was a girl.²⁰ Abū Bakr revealed this in order that 'Ā'isha would be content to give over the share of inheritance that would otherwise have been hers.

Other examples are how 'Umar said, 'O Sāriya, the mountain, the mountain!,'²¹ the story of him and the earthquake,²² and how he caused the Nile to flow, and so on.²³ He only revealed these things for a good

20 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: This story was narrated in full by Mālik in *al-Muwattā'*, with a chain of transmission that is rigorously authentic according to the criteria of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

21 The story, as narrated by Ibn al-A'rābī (*Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*), al-Bayhaqī (*al-Dalā'il*) and others, is that 'Umar sent out an army with a man named Sāriya at its head; and while 'Umar was giving a sermon in Medina, he suddenly cried out 'Sāriya, the mountain!' three times. The army's envoy arrived some time later and reported that they had been on the verge of defeat when they heard a voice call 'Sāriya, the mountain!' three times, whereupon they made for the mountain and protected themselves from attack by the flanks or the rear, and thus Allah gave them victory. The story is related through many chains of transmission, and Ibn Taymiyya deemed it rigorously authentic.

22 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: The story of the earthquake is that during 'Umar's reign, the ground began to quake, whereupon he struck it with his whip and said, 'Be still! Have I not ruled with justice upon you?' It then became still. Ibn al-Subkī mentions it in *Mu'īd al-Ni'am*, but I have not been able to find a chain of transmission for it.

23 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: The story of the flowing of the Nile is that the annual pre-Islamic custom in Egypt was to cast a virgin girl bedecked with fine clothing and jewels into the Nile, in the belief that this would make it flow. After conquering Egypt, 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ forbade them from doing this, and wrote to 'Umar telling him about it. 'Umar sent back a page upon which

reason. 'Umar was vouchsafed miracles beyond count; they show that he was firmly established on earth both outwardly and inwardly, and that he was truly the Commander of the Faithful, and Allah's vicegerent for His land and those who dwell in His land.

Now if you know that the Sufis are the spiritual elite, you should also be aware that some people have pretended to be among them when in reality they are not; and these pretenders have damaged the reputation of them all. It may be that Allah intended this to happen, in order to conceal these people, who prefer obscurity to fame.

...

The shaykh must provide spiritual guidance to the disciple, and bear the harms that come his way, and know his disciples by their hearts, not their outward appearances, and speak to each of them in a way their minds can comprehend and their constitutions can bear. He should refrain from using words for which his interlocutor is not ready, such as *theophany*, *witnessing* and *unveiling*; for it is clear that to mention such things would be damaging for him. Rather, he must train the disciples in prayer, recitation and invocation, and bring them up little by little. My God, there is much danger in the expressions that some of the masters have used, which they did not mean literally, but only

was written: 'From the slave of Allah 'Umar, Commander of the Faithful, to the Nile of Egypt. If you flow by your own power, then do not flow again; but if Allah, the One, the All-Conquering makes you flow, then we ask Him to make you flow.' 'Amr threw this message into the Nile as 'Umar had commanded him, and Allah made it flow until it reached a height of sixteen cubits, and the Egyptians abandoned that evil custom. Narrated by Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam in *Tārīkh Miṣr*, and by Abū al-Shaykh in *al-'Aẓama*, with a weak chain of transmission.

used as symbols for perfectly legitimate things. The shaykh should not mention such expressions to the disciple, for this may send him astray. An example of this is the saying, 'Knowledge is a veil.' This is not meant literally, in the way in which a novice would understand it; its true meaning is not for the novice. There are many other expressions which some of them may have said in a state of spiritual intoxication; such things cannot be taken as guides, and yet we must be careful not to criticise those who said them either. Rather, we must suspend our judgement, and make excuses for whatever falls from his lips during his ecstasy, for the Lawgiver does not hold those who are out of their minds responsible for their actions. This is the case if we cannot find any way at all to interpret his words in a goodly way; but you will not find this to be the case, Allah willing, for anything that the people of true expression say, for Allah has cleansed their speech of all falsehood, and everything they say can be interpreted in a goodly way.

Those are all the words of al-Subkī; and he says elsewhere in the same book:

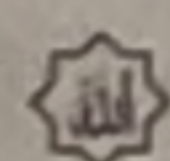
Among the jurists, there is an unfortunate group who obey the Law in all its outward manifestations, and are dutiful and obedient to all Allah's commandments and prohibitions, and yet mock the *fuqarā'* and the Sufis and deem them worthless, and criticise them for their use of *samā'*²⁴ and many other things; now the difference of opinion regarding *samā'*

²⁴ *Samā'* means Ṣūfī music, which might be solely vocal, or accompanied by instruments, depending on the *ṭarīqa*.

is well-known. The people who criticise these things do not even understand most of them; their duty is to suspend their judgement, for we do not have the right to accuse anyone unless he has committed an obvious crime. If it is possible to interpret their speech in a goodly way, then we are duty bound to do so. This is true especially of those we know for their goodness and adherence to the Path who then make rare utterances of a questionable nature; we must not let this destroy their previous good standing. In our experience, we have not found a single jurist who criticised the mistake or slip of a Ṣūfī, save that Allah destroyed him and gave him a bad end.

The Sufis cannot be judged by outward appearances, for all that counts with them is the inner reality, and absolute purity. They are Allah's people and His chosen elite – may He benefit us by them! Most of those who criticise them are themselves not righteous.

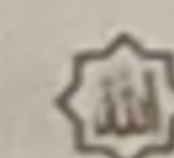
These are the exact words of al-Subkī.



Al-Nawawī says in *Rawḍat al-Ṭālibīn*:

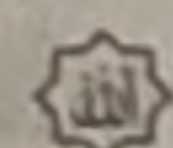
Concerning whether a religious endowment (*waqf*) can be devoted to the Sufis, Shaykh Abū Muḥammad said that it cannot, because there is no accepted definition for 'Ṣūfī.' The correct opinion, however, is that it can: the Sufis are those who busy themselves with worship most of the time, and turn away from this world. Al-Ghazālī discussed the matter in detail in *al-Fatāwā*, saying: 'The Ṣūfī [who is qualified to

receive an endowment] must be just, and must not engage in a profession, save for papermaking, sewing and the like from time to time – in a lodge, not a shop. His right [to the endowment] is not disqualified even if he is able to earn a living, or if he is engaged in preaching and teaching, or if he owns a small amount of wealth which is less than that upon which the *zakāt* is owed, such that his income does not exceed his expenditure. His right [to the endowment] is indeed disqualified if he is obviously wealthy. He must wear the costume of the Sufis, unless he lives in a Ṣūfī lodge, such that his dwellings and the company he keeps make it clear [that he is a Ṣūfī] without the costume being necessary.... It is not necessary that he wear the traditional patched garment given by a shaykh.' Al-Mutawalli said the same.



Al-Ghazālī says in *Jawābir al-Qur'an* that the intents (*maqāṣid*) of the Qur'an are six, the sixth of which is to define the stages of the Path; this is alluded to by His words in the *Fātiḥa*: «You we worship, and from You we seek aid» [1:4]. Al-Ṭayyibī says in *Hāshiyat al-Kash'shāf* that the sciences that constitute the essence of the religion are four in number, all of which are found in the *Fātiḥa*: The science of legal fundamentals, the science of branches, the science of history, and the science of that by which perfection is attained, namely the science of ethics; the highest of these is to arrive at the abiding divine Presence, and to take refuge in the divine Oneness, and to follow the path to it, remaining straight upon it. This is alluded to by His words «And from You we seek help. Guide us to the straight path» [1:4-5]. The rest of the *Fātiḥa* alludes to the fact that there

are other paths which deviate from the straight one, which we must be careful to avoid; namely, the paths of those upon whom is wrath and of those who are astray.



Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, one of the great scholars of our school, says in his book *al-Talkhīṣ fil-Fiqh* that one of the unique distinctions of the Prophet ﷺ which no other Muslim shared was that he was required to constantly behold the Real even when interacting and speaking with people. This was also mentioned by al-Qaḍā'ī in his *Sīra* and Ibn Saba' in his *Khaṣā'is*. This allows us to understand what he ﷺ meant when he said: 'My heart becomes covered [*yughān*], and I ask Allah's forgiveness seventy times a day.'²⁵ Ibn al-Mulaqqin also mentioned this unique distinction in *al-Khaṣā'is*. Al-Bayhaqī said in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*:

Ghayn [as in *yughān*] means something that covers the heart and blocks it somewhat, veiling it from what it sees. It is like the fine cloud that appears in the sky and almost conceals the sun without quite blocking out its light. This is what the Prophet ﷺ meant when he said his heart would be covered; he also said that he asked forgiveness of Allah one hundred times a day.

Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥāfiẓ [that is, his shaykh, al-Ḥākim, author of *al-Mustadrak*] told me that Ustādh Abū Sahl Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān [al-Ṣā'lūkī, a Shāfi'ī scholar and the *mujaddid* of the fourth century according to some in the school]²⁶ said: 'His words 'my

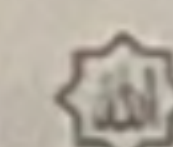
²⁵ Narrated by Muslim on the authority of al-Aghar al-Muzanī.

²⁶ The words in parentheses here are those of Imam al-Suyūṭī.

heart becomes covered' bear several interpretations. The people of spiritual allusion take it to mean the cover of that intoxication which is truly sobriety, and they take the plea for forgiveness which follows it to be an expression of regret at its disclosure. The exoterists take it to mean the thoughts and impulses that come to the heart and distract it, thus covering it.'

Al-Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī said:

I heard this ḥadīth and could not understand what it meant. Then I had a vision of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and he said to me: 'O blessed one! That is the veil of light, not the veil of contingent things!'



The commentator of *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* said:

According to the people of this Path, the reality of a thing is judged by the signs that point to it. An example of this was when the Prophet ﷺ said to Ḥāritha, 'How are you this morning?', and he replied: 'This morning, I am a true believer.' He said, 'Every statement has its reality: what is the reality of your faith?' He said, 'My soul has forsworn this world...'²⁷ telling him the signs of his true faith.

²⁷ He continued: '...I have spent my nights awake, and my days thirsty. It is though I were beholding the Throne of my Lord; it is as though I were looking upon the denizens of Paradise flitting about therein, and as though I were hearing the wails of the denizens of Hell.' The Prophet ﷺ replied: 'A believer! May Allah illuminate his heart.' Shaykh 'Abdallāh states in his notes that this ḥadīth was narrated by Ibn al-Mubārak, 'Abd al-Razzāq, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Bazzār and al-Bayhaqī in various versions.

It occurred to me that the reason the people of this Path call their science 'the science of Reality' [*ilm al-ḥaqīqa*] is that they took the expression from this ḥadīth. It also occurred to me that the science of Reality is to the science of Sacred Law what rhetoric is to grammar: it is the secret at the heart of it, and it is built from it. Anyone who wishes to penetrate the depths of the science of Reality without first knowing the Law is simply an ignorant person, and he will have no success, just as he who wishes to delve into the secrets of rhetoric without first mastering grammar will be bound to fail. How could he understand the different forms of co-reference, and the anaphor and antecedent, and the attachments of the verb when he does not yet know the difference between subject, predicate and object? Everyone can see this. The Reality is the secret and the innermost core of the Law, just as rhetoric is the secret and the subtle manifestation of grammar. Sufism is *fiqh*, without any doubt, since much of it pertains to religious responsibilities: obligations, recommendations, prohibitions, and discouraged things. Many of the scholars of Islamic fundamentals (*uṣūl*) have declared that the doors to Sufism are found in *fiqh* when speaking of the limit of *fiqh*. Ibn al-Subkī concurred with this view in *Jam' al-Jawāmi'*, and attached to it several issues pertaining to the fundamentals of the religion which must be believed; and he concluded that 'for me, it is *fiqh*.'

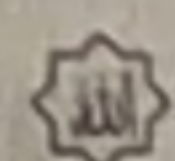
Know that if the subtle points of Sufism are presented to the jurists using the language that they use in their own sciences, they would approve of them entirely and would be the first to uphold them. The reason they have been put off is that these teachings have been presented in unusual language with which they are not familiar. For this reason, someone said: 'The Reality is the best thing that can be learned, and the worst thing that can be spoken.'

Let me give you an example to show you the truth of this. In *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn*, we find: 'The reality of repentance is three things: to be free of all pride, to forget the sin, and to repent of repentance always.' When the jurist hears these words – 'to repent of repentance' – he finds it very strange, and says: 'How can one repent of repentance, when it is a righteous deed, and only sins require repentance?' The meaning of these words, however, is that when the servant turns back to Allah completely, he sets no store in his deeds, and relies not on them with his heart, whether they be acts of repentance or anything else; he repents from his reliance on his repentance. This becomes even clearer when we consider that although repentance is the servant's acquisition, it is Allah's creation and His grace. Thus the repentance is from Allah; and had Allah not turned to the servant, the servant would not have turned to Allah.²⁸ He says: «Then He turned unto them [in forgiveness], that they might turn unto Him [in repentance]» [9:118]. So what did the servant really do when he repented, or when he did anything else, since it was only by Allah's grace that he did it? For the servant to see his repentance as being his own deed is itself a sin for which he should ask forgiveness. Rather, he should bear witness to the fact that it is a pure gift and a grace from Allah, and apportion no share of it to himself whatsoever. This is the station of extinction [*fanā*] in repentance, which is the first stage of the spiritual wayfarers, comparable to that of extinction in the divine Oneness, wherein one does not see his own recognition of Allah's Oneness as any kind of achievement on his own part, but rather as a pure gift and a grace from Allah.

If the issue is explained to the jurist in this conventional way, he will be the first one to accept it and propagate it,

²⁸ The word *tāba*, 'to repent', literally means 'to turn.'

because the doctrine the Sunni jurist strives to uphold is that of the ascription of all actions to Allah and not to the servant, in contrast to the Mu'tazila, the Qadariyya, and other like-minded groups who hold that the servant creates his own actions.



Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī used to say, 'If you need something from Allah, seek an intermediary to Him through Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.' He would also say, 'The *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*²⁹ will give you knowledge, and the *Qūt al-Qulūb*³⁰ will give you illumination.' He would also say, 'Read the *Qūt*, for it truly is nourishment.'³¹ He revered Imam Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Tirmidhī,³² and considered him to be one of the four *Awtād*,³³ and had the utmost respect for his teachings.

Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām was asked about the scholars' opinion of the *Iḥyā'* and what it says about gnosis and knowledge of Allah, since the author states that the highest level therein is that of the prophets, and then the gnostic saints, and then the firm scholars, and then the righteous, putting the saints before the scholars and holding them superior to them. Likewise, Ustādh al-Qushayrī says at the beginning of his *Risāla* that Allah ﷻ has made the Sufis the cream of His saints, superior to all but the prophets and messengers. The questioner asked if this outlook is correct, since some people say that the saint

29 Of Imam Ghazālī.

30 Of Abū Ṭālī al-Makkī.

31 *Qūt al-Qulūb* means 'The Nourishment of the Hearts.'

32 Better known as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, and not to be confused with Abū 'Isā al-Tirmidhī, author of the *Sunan*.

33 'The Pegs', saints of a high rank.

is not superior to the scholar as superiority is only attained by increased reward as a result of pious action, and it is well-known that knowledge is superior to action; this is because knowledge can be passed on, whilst action cannot, and that which can be passed on is superior to that which cannot, and has a greater reward, and thus the one who possesses it is superior. The questioner then said that the gifts and spiritual talents that Allah chooses to bestow upon a person do not in themselves raise his rank or make him superior to anyone else, but that he can only become superior by the rewards for his many righteous actions, which he undertakes to perform despite their difficulty. Without this undertaking, these gifts and talents do not make him superior to anyone. He then asked the Shaykh to comment on this.

Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn answered that as for the superiority of those who know Allah over those who know Allah's Law, Ustādh Abū Ḥāmid [al-Ghazālī's] view of it is the correct one as all agree; and no intelligent person doubts that those who know Allah's necessary Attributes of Majesty and Qualities of Perfection, and are aware of the impossibility of His being deficient or lacking in any way, are superior to those who know the rulings of His Law. Indeed, those who know Allah are superior to the scholars of branches and fundamentals, because knowledge is as noble as its object and its fruits. Knowledge of Allah and His Qualities, then, is nobler than knowledge of anything else, because its Object is the noblest and most perfect thing that could possibly be known, and because its fruits are the best of all fruits.

The knowledge of each of the divine Qualities brings a certain state, and this state leads to the attainment of virtues and the avoidance of vices. The one who knows the vastness of the divine Mercy attains unto vast hope; and

the one who knows the severity of the divine Wrath attains unto severe fear, and this fear in turn leads to avoidance of sin and evil, and to weeping, holy sadness, scrupulousness and obedience. He who knows that all delight is from Allah will love Him, and the fruits of this love are well-known. Likewise, he who knows that all benefit and harm is from Allah will rely on nothing but Him, and will resign his affair to no one but Him. He who knows Allah's greatness and majesty will have awe of Him, and this awe will lead him to conduct that is obedient, humble and so on.

These, then, are some of the fruits of knowledge of the divine Qualities; and there is no doubt that knowledge of the Law does not lead to any of these states, nor any of these words and deeds. The reality of life is a testament to this, for wickedness is prevalent in many scholars of the Law; nay, most of them are bereft of piety and righteousness, and many of them even busy themselves with the teachings of the philosophers concerning prophecy and divinity; some of them leave the religion altogether, and others go back and forth between truth and falsehood: «In their doubt, they go this way and that» [9:45]. The difference between the scholars of theology and legal fundamentals on the one hand, and the gnostics on the other, is that the theologian forgets about his knowledge of the divine Essence and Qualities most of the time, and his cognisance of them is not constant – if only it were constant, he would be a gnostic himself, because he would share with them the constant knowledge which leads to the states of true righteousness. How could anyone see the gnostics and the jurists as equal? The gnostics are the best of people, and the most reverent of Allah, and Allah ﷻ says: «Surely the noblest of you in the sight of Allah are the most reverent of you» [49:13]. The praise He bestows in His manifest Book is the best praise that can be given.

As for His words «None fear Allah, among His slaves, but they who have knowledge» [35:28], He means those who have knowledge of Him and His Qualities and Acts, not those who know His Laws. This verse cannot be interpreted to mean the scholars of the Law, since most of them do not fear Him, and Allah's Word is the truth. It can only mean those who know Him and fear Him. This has been narrated from Ibn 'Abbās ؓ, the Interpreter of the Qur'an.

Now the scholars of the Law are of several types. The first are they who study for the sake of other than Allah, and teach for the sake of other than Allah; the knowledge and teaching of such people is but a curse for them. The second type are they who study for the sake of other than Allah, but then teach for the sake of Allah; they are among those who «have mixed a righteous deed with another evil» [9:102], and I do not know if their goodness will make up for their evil or not. The third kind are they who study for the sake of Allah, and teach for the sake of other than Allah; they are no better than the first kind, or perhaps even worse. The fourth kind are they who study for the sake of Allah and teach for the sake of Allah; they in turn are of two kinds: the one who does not act upon his knowledge and is thus a wretch, superior to none of Allah's saints; and the one who does act upon his knowledge. As for him, if he has knowledge of Allah and of His Laws, then he is one of the blessed; and if he is one of the people of spiritual states and gnosis of Allah, then he is one of the best of the gnostics, since not only does he have what they have, but he is superior to them in that he knows the Law as well, and teaches it to the Muslims.

Now as for those who say that actions that benefit others are superior to actions that only benefit the doer, they are ignorant of the Laws of Allah; for actions that only benefit the doer are of many kinds, and some of them are better

than those that benefit others, such as the doctrine of divine Oneness; surrender to Allah; faith in Allah and His angels, scriptures, messengers, and the Last Day; and indeed all of the Five Pillars except the *zakāt*. Another is the act of glorifying Allah after the prayer, which the Prophet ﷺ said was better than giving charity from one's spare wealth,³⁴ although the latter is an act which benefits others. He ﷺ also said that the servant is closer to Allah when he prostrates than he is at any other time,³⁵ and that the best of all actions is prayer.³⁶ He ﷺ was asked which action is best, and replied, 'Faith in Allah.' When asked what came next, he said: 'Struggling in Allah's cause.' When asked what came next, he said: 'A sincere pilgrimage.'³⁷ These are all acts which benefit the doer alone, and the Sacred Law states that they are superior.

In other situations, the acts that benefit others may be better; dutifulness to one's parents is an example of this, for the Prophet ﷺ was once asked which act is best and answered, 'Dutifulness to one's parents.'³⁸ Prayer, too, is not better than every act which benefits others, since if a person in prayer sees someone drowning and is able to save them, or sees a believer being killed wrongfully, or a woman being raped, or a child engaged in wickedness and is able to put a stop to it, he is obliged to do so even if the time for prayer is running out, for such things are better in Allah's sight than prayer. Moreover, even if a prayer is annulled, it can be repeated later. The matter is determined by where the benefit is: if the benefit of the personal act is

34 Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abū Dharr ؓ.

35 Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abū Hurayra ؓ.

36 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in various version, which Shaykh 'Abdallāh describes as weak in his notes.

37 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Abū Hurayra ؓ.

38 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd ؓ.

more than that of the act which affects others, the personal act is better, and vice versa. Sometimes we can determine which is better; other times the Law makes clear which is better if we cannot determine it; and other times we cannot determine which is better, nor does the Law stipulate it. We cannot make a blanket statement about which is better, acts which benefit the doer alone or acts which benefit others, because each individual case is determined by the proof of the Sacred Law. We cannot say something about Allah that we do not know for certain, or that we do not strongly suspect based on the evidence of the Law.

Now if people are equal in their knowledge, such that we cannot say which of them is superior to the other therein, their superiority lies in the constancy of their knowledge; for constancy in knowledge is where the nobility is, and some people fall short of it while others succeed in it. Likewise, the spiritual states that this knowledge brings do not remain unless the knowledge itself remains constant, and the obedience that results from these states does not remain unless the states remain. If the heart remains sound because of the constancy of the knowledge and the spiritual state, the body remains sound in the form of goodly speech and righteous action. If heedlessness overcomes the heart, however, the states produced by the knowledge will be spoiled, and the heart will in turn be spoiled, and the speech and action will in turn be annulled. The virtue and nobility of knowledge is judged by the virtue of the states it produces, and in turn by the virtue of the speech and action it produces. The state produced by knowledge of the divine Majesty and Perfection in turn produces the best of actions, namely the magnification and glorification of Allah. Awareness of the severity of Allah's wrath produces the best of actions, namely magnification and fear of Allah. Awareness of the vastness of Allah's mercy produces longing

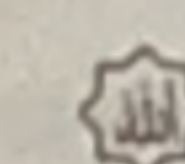
and hope. Awareness that He is the only One who gives benefit and harm produces reliance on Him at all times. The one who is in awe of Allah is better than the one who loves Him, and the one who loves Him is better than the one who relies on Him, and the one who relies on Him is better than the one who fears Him, and the one who fears Him is better than the one who has hope in Him. These are some of the attributes of the gnostics.

The superiority of the gnostics over the jurists is further indicated by the miracles Allah sends to them; the jurists never experience this, unless they tread the path of the gnostics and adorn themselves with their qualities. 'Abū Bakr did not outstrip you by fasting or praying; he outstripped you by something that was cast into his heart.'³⁹ Some people say that the Messenger of Allah's ﷺ superiority was a result of all the difficult things he did; now this is incorrect, because the superiority of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was based on the fact that Allah spoke to him, sometimes through Gabriel and sometimes directly, and based on his knowledge and spiritual states. He said, 'I hope to be the one, among all of you, who knows and fears Allah the most.' Likewise, when someone claimed that he prayed more than the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, he ﷺ denied this and affirmed that his superiority over them was by his gnosis of Allah. This was the primary reason for the superiority of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, despite the fact that it was not difficult for him. How could it be otherwise, when Allah said to Moses: «I have chosen you above all mankind by My messages and My speaking unto you» [7:144].⁴⁰ How could

³⁹ Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: This is a saying of Bīkr ibn 'Abdallāh al-Muzanī, and not a ḥadīth [as is sometimes thought].

⁴⁰ A sentence immediately following this verse is unclear in the manuscript, and Shaykh 'Abdallāh cannot shed any light on it, so it has been omitted here.

the Messenger of Allah's ﷺ superiority be drawn from the difficult things he did, when his deeds, patience and the persecution he endured were not comparable to what Noah had to endure from his people? How quick people are to speak about things of which they have no knowledge! Were they to ask about things when they knew them not, it would be better for them!⁴¹



Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī says in *Qūt al-Qulūb*:

Know that if the servant invokes Allah with gnosis and knowledge of certainty, he will not be content to follow any one scholar rigidly. This is how they used to be; when they reached this station, they would go against the opinions of those from whom they had obtained knowledge, because of their increased certitude and understanding. Ibn 'Abbās ؓ said that everyone's words can be taken or left, save for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; he learned jurisprudence from Zayd ibn Thābit, and recitation from Ubayy ibn Ka'b, and ended up differing with them both. Some of the scholars of the early generations would say, 'We accept all that comes to us from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ just as it is; we accept some of what comes from the Companions, but not all; and as for the Followers, they are men and we are men; they had their views, and we have ours.' Because of this, the jurists used to dislike *taqlīd* [following the learned opinion of another], and say that a man should not give a ruling until he first acquaints himself with the different opinions of the

⁴¹ The author indicates that this is the end of Ibn 'Abd al-Salām's response.

scholars on the matter, after which he can choose the way of greater precaution and the opinion in whose strength he has the most certainty. Had they wanted the scholar to simply give the opinion of another, they would not have deemed it necessary for him to be aware of the different opinions, and they would have deemed it enough for him to know the opinion of his own imam. In this regard, it has been said:⁴² 'The servant will be questioned on the morrow, and will be asked how he applied his knowledge, not how he applied the knowledge of others.'

Allah says: «Those who have been given knowledge and faith shall say...» [30:56], linking the one to the other and showing that those who are given faith and certitude are given knowledge, just as those who are given beneficial knowledge are given faith. This is one of the meanings of His words «He has written faith upon their hearts, and He has aided them with a spirit from it»⁴³ [58:22]; that is, He has strengthened them with the knowledge of faith. The knowledge of faith is its spirit, and the pronoun here ['it'] refers to 'faith'. Such is the way of the scholar who can derive rulings and teachings from the Qur'an and Sunna: he has the power to do this because he is endowed with reason

42 Shaykh 'Abdallāh mentions in his notes that this is similar to a ḥadīth narrated by al-Tirmidhī on the authority of Abū Barza al-Aslamī, who reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'A servant's foot will not fall [at the Resurrection] before he is asked about his life and how he used it, his knowledge and how he applied it, his wealth and how he earned and spent it, and his body and how he wore it out.' A similar version was narrated by al-Bayhaqī.

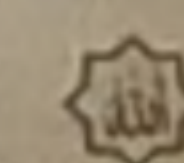
43 Usually this would be rendered 'a Spirit from Himself'; the interpretation given here is that the antecedent of the pronoun *hu* is 'faith'.

and spiritual insight, and is given to contemplation and profound reflection.

...

An aspect of the guidance of the people of knowledge is that they sit with their bodies drawn in tightly and their knees raised. Some of them sit on their feet with their elbows on their knees. This has been the way of all those who have spoken about this science ever since the time of Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd. Thus it is related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to sit with his knees up and his arms wrapped about them.⁴⁴ The first to sit upon a chair was Yaḥyā ibn Mu'adh al-Rāzī and, in the time of al-Junayd, Abū Ḥamza al-Baghdādī, but the shaykhs criticised them both for it. This was never the way of the gnostics who discoursed on the science of gnosis and certitude; they would sit with their knees up. It was ever the grammarians, linguist and worldly muftis who would sit cross-legged; it is how haughty people sit.⁴⁵ The modest way to sit is to draw one's body in close.

He then states that the fundamental stations of certitude are nine in number: repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, detachment, reliance, contentment, and love. Here ends what I have quoted from the *Qūt*.



44 Shaykh 'Abdallāh notes that this was narrated by Abū Dāwūd, al-Bukhārī (*al-Adab*), al-Tirmidhī (*Shamā'il*) and al-Ṭabarānī.

45 Shaykh 'Abdallāh objects to this, and cites a ḥadīth narrated by Abū Dāwūd with a rigorously authentic chain on the authority of Jābir ibn Samura: 'After praying the dawn prayer, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would remain in his place, sitting cross-legged, until the sun was fully risen.'

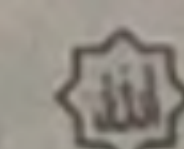
Al-Kalābādhī says of the Sufis in the introduction to *al-Ta'arruf*:

Allah has placed among them His elite and His chosen ones. Kindness has gone forth from Him to them, and fastened them to the word of reverence, and turned their souls away from this world. Their efforts have proven true, and so they have attained unto the sciences of their study. Their conduct has proven sincere, and so they have been given the sciences of spiritual inheritance. Their inner beings are pure, so He has ennobled them with true vision. Their feet have been planted firm, their minds cleansed, their beacons lit. They have understood what Allah has said to them, and set forth towards Him, and turned away from all besides Him. Their lights have burned away the veil. Their inner hearts have circled about the Throne, and their thought are focused on the Lord of the Throne, and their eyes are blind to all else besides the Throne. They are bodies of pure spirit: upon earth they are heavenly, with all creation they are lordly. Silent and watchful. Absent, and yet present. Kings in rags. Strangers to all tribes. Men of virtue. Beacons of guidance. Their ears are attentive, their inner hearts pure, their countenances fearful. The Sufis, the elite (*ṣafwa*), the men of pure (*ṣafi*) illumination! Allah's investments among His creatures, and His elite among His servants, and the heirs of His Prophet ﷺ, and his hidden treasures. In his life, they were the People of his Ledge; after his passing, they became the best of his community; those who came first continued to call out to those who came after, speaking with their actions and not with words.

Yet desire then abated, and the search was abandoned, and it became nothing but a matter of questions and answers, books and epistles, although these precious meanings remained near to those who mastered them, and hearts continued to seek understanding of them. Finally, the meaning departed and the name remained: the reality vanished, and the form was left alone:

As for the tents, they are the same tents,
But the women are not the same women.

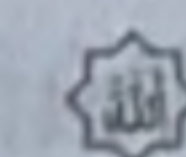
Mastery of reality became a garment to be worn, and sincerity became a trinket, and people who knew nothing of it laid claims to it, and people dressed themselves in the garment without earning it. Those who proclaimed it with their tongues denied it with their actions; those who displayed it with their words concealed it with their insincerity. People added things to it which were not from it, and ascribed things to it which did not belong to it. Its truth was made false, and those who had knowledge of it were called ignorant. As for those who truly had mastery of it, they kept themselves to themselves and guarded it jealously. Thus did hearts become averse to it, and souls turned away from it, until it disappeared in knowledge and in practice.



Hāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym al-Aṣbahānī – one of the great ḥuffāẓ of ḥadīth and a scholar of *fiqh* and Sufism as mentioned by Ibn al-Subkī and al-Asnawī in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya* – says in the introduction to his book *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*:

After seeking Allah's aid, I answered your request for a book containing the names of a great many luminaries and imams of the Sufis arranged in chronological order from the time of the Companions and Followers and those who came after them; they who had knowledge of proofs and spiritual realities, and traversed spiritual states and paths, and resided in meadows and gardens, and renounced contingent objects and ties. The book forswears all those extremists, pretenders and idlers who ape them in their dress and speech, and those who differ with them in doctrine and conduct. You have surely heard from us and from the scholars of *fiqh* and tradition, in all lands, of those people who pretend to be among them though in fact they are wicked, or licentious, or heretics, or unbelievers; yet this lying, falsehood and denial does not harm those who are truly righteous in the least, nor decrease the ranks of the spiritual elite. Rather, the act of forswearing these liars and refuting these traitors serves to acquit those who are truthful, and raise up those who have attained spiritual realisation. Even were we not to reveal the infamy of these purveyors of falsehood and their ilk for the sake of the religion, we would be obliged to make it known for the defence of our own honour, since our ancestors were known and reputed Sufis. My grandfather Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Bannā was well-known to those who journey toward Him, and a beneficial guide for those who seek Him. How, in any case, could we allow the Friends of Allah to be attacked, when Allah has declared war on those who offend them?⁴⁶

46 Allusion to the Sacred Ḥadīth: 'Whoso offends a Friend of Mine, I



Shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad 'Alī al-Qusṭallānī was an imam of the Shāfi'ī school, of the ḥadīth sciences and of Sufism, who took from al-Suhrawardī and met al-Shādhilī; his entry in al-Asnawī's *Ṭabaqāt* states: 'He was one of those who combined knowledge, action, awe, scrupulousness and generosity. He was asked to come from Mecca to head the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Kāmiliyya in Cairo, a post he held until his death in Muḥarram 686 AH.' He said in his book on Sufism, *Iqtidā' al-Ghāfil bil-Āqil*:

In His wisdom and generosity, Allah has made people in every time who have the ability to speak about spiritual realities and mysteries, thus cutting the chain of ignorance, extinguishing the flames of folly, illuminating souls that had been darkened, and correcting capricious views. Since our time is marked by the ascendancy of wicked people over virtuous people, and heed is paid to the words of the unqualified, it has become our duty to explain things to those who seek answers, and clarify what has become unclear to those who seek virtue, making the truth clear to those who have turned away from it because of their ignorance of it, and showing the path to those who wish to tread upon it.

...

Since Allah has commanded us to follow the people of virtue and guidance, and I have seen how in our times people pay heed only to the people of false claims and capriciousness because they have lost the illumination of that knowledge which allows

declare war on him.' (Narrated by al-Bukhārī.)

them to distinguish the ranks of the spiritual elite, I have done my best to proffer sincere advice to the ignorant, and endeavoured to provide a final word on the matter, clarifying what has become unclear regarding the distinction between the knowledgeable and the ignorant, and the virtuous and the deficient. We also explain the distinction between the ways of truth and the ways of falsehood as manifested in the lives of those who have worn the garb of the Sufis both literally and figuratively without living up to its meaning, concerned only with engaging in their own frivolous pastimes and wallowing in their error, all the while neglecting its responsibilities and duties. Our time is a time of turmoil, filled with errors and misdeeds, especially when it comes to the field of Sufism and the name of the Sufis; for this is one of the most precious names, and those who truly merit this name have a tremendous standing in the sight of their Lord. Yet in those who lay claim to it now, these virtuous qualities have been turned on their head, and these praiseworthy attributes have become ignoble, and most of them – nay, even the best of them – claim to follow the Path when they have taken not even a single step upon it. They know not the meaning of the terminology of the Sufis, nor the stories of their lives. «Surely we belong to Allah, and surely unto Him we shall return!» [2:156] They resemble them in their outward appearance, yet are completely distinct from them in their inner states. They evoke the words of the poet:

As for the tents, they are the same tents,
But the women are not the same women.

They imagine that spiritual poverty and Sufism is all about well-known litanies, secret dreams,

and imaginations to be discussed. They won over supporters with limited minds who were fascinated by them; but because these followers did not keep the company of truly valiant men, nor drink from the font of pure wisdom, they lost their footing and fell under the spell of delusion. These people used the symbols of poverty to fill their bellies, yet the holy invocation of Allah was for them a nuisance, and endeavouring to obey Him was for them a burden; anyone who reflects on this can see what a dire state and a terrible mischief it is. But Allah set a seal on their hearts so that they were heedless, and covered over their ears so that they accepted no advice and paid no heed to those who dissuaded them from error and called them to guidance. My father, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Qusṭallānī, told me that Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Qurashī said: ‘Had I not met with any true shaykhs, I would have imagined that the Ṣūfī way was the thing that the people of today are following, although they have no way at all, save for the name left behind by those who went before them.’ If he said that in his day, then what about these times?

...

Know that Allah has established this religion and aided this purified Law with two groups: the scholars of the outward, and the scholars of the inward. Because of the faults that we see in this latter group in our times, we have been driven to proffer advice and understanding to those who seek guidance, by explaining what the status of the preacher is, and what the intent of those who strive towards Allah is. As for the status of the preacher, it is one of the highest, for it is the status of the prophet, saints and sages, as Allah said: «Call unto the way of your Lord

with wisdom and beautiful counsel» [16:125]. This group strove to call unto Allah and saw that this way a way of bringing more goodness into existence; and another group refrained from doing so, because they were busy with their own souls in doing that which is more important. The best way to look at it is to say that if one's aspiration is consumed with Allah so that a call comes to him without any outside influence, this call must be answered. If his aspiration is to preach in and of itself, however, it is veiled and ignorant, and simply wishes for prominence.

There is ignorance in our time concerning the status of the preacher, yet it is important for one's religion to look into this matter, so that the way of the folk of truth is not confused with the way of the folk of falsehood. This means that the ability to distinguish between preachers is highly beneficial. There are four kinds of preachers: he who calls to Allah by Allah; he who calls to Allah's Way by Allah; he who calls to Allah's Wisdom; and he who calls to his soul's desires by utilising the Path of Allah.

He who calls to Allah is the one who is brought near to Him, and who lives under His watchful eye, and who has forsworn all his soul's desires. He calls unto truthfulness and sincerity in action, and guides those who are astray to the path of gnosis in Allah and spiritual excellence.

He who calls to Allah's Way – meaning knowledge of His Laws, and the lawful and unlawful – is a guide for those who travel upon the path of those rightly-guided people who went before.

He who calls to Allah's Wisdom is the one who calls to knowledge of both outward and inward laws – knowledge of the Law and the Reality – by explaining

the science of passing thoughts [*khawāṭir*] and their causes, and the attributes and diseases of the soul and how to diagnose its maladies.

The one who calls to Allah has the least followers of all of them, because of the hardship inherent in what he calls to. The one who calls to Allah's Way has many followers, because the soul is happy to do things for which it will receive reward. The one who calls to Allah's Wisdom has less followers than he does, because of how difficult it is to attain what he calls to, since it requires the purification and growth of the soul.

As for the fourth, he who calls to his own soul's desires by utilising the Path of his Lord, his inner being is infested with diseases, and his secret heart is filled with ignorance.

...

There are many kinds of preachers. One of them calls to Allah by richness, inasmuch as He took the care to bring him into existence in the first place, as He says: «I created you aforetime, when you were nothing» [19:9]. Another calls to Allah by poverty, for this the duty of servitude. A third calls to Allah by merciful attributes, as it is said: 'Adorn yourselves with the attributes of Allah', meaning mercy, forbearance, generosity, forgiveness and the like; and this is the highest form of preaching.

...

When the substance of the Ṣūfī way faded and its name remained, its proponents spread out in the world alone, isolated in their efforts and struggles. They are Allah's elite among His servants, and the ones He has chosen in His land to uphold His right. He has purified their inner hearts and illuminated

their minds. They call to His door, and guide others to knowledge of His Glory; they are the keepers of the science of the Path which has become unclear to many of its adherents. Allah has guarded this group from any hand that would seek to work mischief on it by giving it leaders who know it well, and can neutralise the wickedness of the wicked and the ignorance of the ignorant, and distinguish between those who are disconnected from Allah and those who are connected to Him, and who know how to guide aspirants down the path and correct those who err from it. They pay no heed to the objections of the ignorant man nor of the scholar, and no criticism can dissuade them from Allah.

The sciences of the Sufis are like the other sciences in that they are drawn from reasoning and textual support [*al-'aql wal-naql*]; and they are distinct from all the others in being supported on the experiential plane by taste [*dhawq*], spiritual station [*munāzala*] and experience [*wajd*].

Know also that the Sufis have been tested by three groups who bar the path to Allah and seek to divert it: by those who deny their Path and their states; by those knowledgeable people who acknowledge their Path, but use their silver tongues and attractive rhetoric to add things to it which are alien to it, imagining that these additions are the very essence of realisation; and by those people who acknowledge the Path but are ignorant of its etiquettes and requirements, amassing followers and telling them to do all kinds of things.

The first group, those who deny the sciences of the Sufis and uphold only the delusions of their own souls, are open enemies and thus easy to avoid.

The second group are those knowledgeable people

who openly profess the Path, and believe themselves to be immersed in the ocean of realisation. They occupy themselves with the teachings of the ancients, imagining them to be part of the teachings of the Folk and holding them to be higher than the teachings of the Sacred Law. They are endowed with eloquent tongues which allow them to express their views and give voice to what is in their minds, and they create for themselves and their followers special vocabularies to describe it. They tell their followers that they are the unique masters of their age, and that the greatest of all knowledge is in their grasp, and that everything that can be known is derived from their knowledge. As a group, they claim that they have penetrated the inner sanctum of gnosis; and by this, they corrupt the doctrine of those who follow them. They believe that spirits and bodies are eternal, and that all things in existence are intermixed from pre-eternity to perpetuity, and that all things which have a certain form are identical to things with other forms, so that an elephant is identical to a gnat, and other such drivel which no person of true knowledge would ever say, nor would anyone aware of the difference between truth and falsehood countenance. They imagine that this is what 'unity' means, and that it is the essence of realisation, and that it is the universal knowledge which is only rejected by those who have deficient intellects, or are subject to many delusions, or are veiled from divine knowledge and mysterious unveilings. Yet this claim of theirs is baseless, supported by neither evidence nor faith. Those who hear these teachings may be deluded by them, yet those who are firm in truth reject them. In truth, these people show what the science of realisation is *not*, and their teachings

only take them further away, because of their lack of divinely-granted success. With their pretty words, they stamp upon the necks of the true masters of spiritual stations and states, deeming them to be ignorant and errant. They are a blight upon those who hear them, and a mischief for those who truly follow the path.

The third group are those who are ignorant of the sciences of the Sufis but adopt their symbols in order to obtain their worldly desires and achieve their ends. They have not studied the sciences of the soul and its maladies and their sources and channels, nor have they worked to purify their souls. As far as the science of spiritual wayfaring goes, they are ignorant, and they have no share in the inheritance of this Path.

These three groups, then, are a trial for both ordinary people and the elite, and a mischief to be avoided at all costs, especially in these times. Now if the intelligent person can recognise the attributes of these people, he must also be able to recognise the attributes of the perfect man. He it is whose heart has been opened to receive penitence, and who has passed through the door of repentance to divine acceptance, and then struggled against his soul in solitude, and then adopted God-consciousness, scrupulousness and detachment in his way of life, and the ascended through the stations and states, finally reaching the station of gnosis, and then worked to renounce his desires and pay no more attention to his wishes. Thus he has become a true servant of Allah, preferring Him to everything else, in private and in public, and no longer relying on his caprice at any time. These are the ones who followed the path with the proper etiquette,

and were thus protected from injury, and did not go chasing after ranks. They did not adopt this way while being ignorant of it, but rather did so with a basis of knowledge and proof, following in the footsteps of great shaykhs and imams who combined outward and inward knowledge, in branches and in fundamentals.

...

In sum, the essence of this Path is losing and finding: finding Allah, and losing all besides Him. It is curious: how can an ignorant person who taught himself and only kept the company of his equals, neither fulfilling the proper etiquette of the outward (the Law) nor the inward (the watchful monitoring of thoughts and impulses) – how can he imagine that he is fit to call unto Allah and educate Allah's servants? The shaykhs of the Path who came before us have already spoken of those who chose to follow a way other than their way, and acted in such a way that disqualified them from their Path.

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Marūzī said that he heard Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Wāsiṭī say: 'They have deemed their own bad etiquette to be ethics, and deemed the evil of their souls to be joy, and deemed the vileness of their aspirations to be rectitude. Thus have they erred from the Path, and gone down a blind alley.'

Abū Bakr al-Ṭamsatānī said: 'The Path is clear, and the Book and the Sunna are here before us, and the virtue of the Companions is well-known, because of how they were the first to emigrate, and because they were Companions. Whoso among us keeps the company of the Qur'an and Sunna, and becomes a stranger to his own soul and to others, and emigrates to Allah in his heart – it is he who is truthful and successful.'

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Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Daynūrī said: 'They have knocked down the pillars of Sufism, destroyed its paths, and changed its meanings with names they have invented: they have called greed "sincerity", deviance from truth "mystery", enjoyment of depravity "power", stinginess "stoicism", begging "work", and foul speech "rebuke." This was never the way of the Folk.'

And were we to quote all that the shaykhs have said about this, we would be a long time doing it.

...
The scholars of the Sufis have written books containing their chains of transmission, such as Abū Naṣr ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAlī al-Sarrāj in *al-Lumaʿ*, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī in *Maqāmāt al-Awliyāʾ*, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī in *al-Risāla*, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Ghāzī al-Maṭūʿī in *al-Maqālāt*, and others. They did this to refute those who oppose their teachings, and to rebut those who claim that this science is not supported by the Book and the Sunna. They showed that they were just as concerned with the science of transmission as the folk of outward knowledge, and that they had exceeded them therein be attaining knowledge of which the exoterists had no understanding: the knowledge of the Folk of divine nearness and love.

...
Know also that knowledge can be praiseworthy or blameworthy. Praiseworthy knowledge is that which leads to the purification and growth of the soul; Allah says: 'Successful is he who purifies it; and failed has he who sullies it' [91:9-10]. Blameworthy knowledge is that which leads to pride, self-satisfaction, love for prestige, envy and so on.

The knowledge we are commanded to seek is divided into two categories: knowledge of Allah, and knowledge of Allah's Laws. The former means knowledge of His Names, Qualities and Acts, and all that is necessary, possible and impossible for Him. As for the latter, it is again divided into two categories: knowledge of the laws of this world, meaning the laws of religious responsibility; and knowledge of the laws of the next life, meaning that of the beatified and the damned. Then the laws of religious responsibility are of two kinds: outward and inward. The outward are the laws of commandment and prohibition, namely the science of *fiqh*. As for the inward, it is the science of thoughts and impulses and how to distinguish the true of them from the false and the good from the bad. The science of the inward is centred on fear: the more fearful the heart is, the more outward knowledge it amasses, and the more tranquil it becomes; the Almighty says: 'None fear Allah, among His slaves, but they who have knowledge' [35:28]. As the fear becomes firmer in the heart, the knowledge of Allah increases, as the Prophet ﷺ said: 'By Allah, I know Allah more than any of you, and fear Him more than any of you.'⁴⁷ No one fears Allah but those who know Him. Fear produces seriousness in action, interrupts hope, and increases the heart's dread. Sahl [al-Tustarī] said: 'All the world is ignorance, save for knowledge; and all knowledge is a testimony against one, unless it is put into action; and all action is fruitless, unless it is sincere; and all sincerity is rejected unless it accords with the Sunna.'

Inward knowledge, then, has two foundations:

⁴⁷ Narrated by al-Bukhārī on the authority of ʿĀ'isha.

knowledge of Allah and His actions and laws for His creations, and knowledge of human souls and their levels, perfections, flaws, virtues and faults. This is why the Almighty says: «And in your own souls – will you not, then, see?» [51:21]. The science of human souls can be summarised by two qualities: the first is removing flaws, such as avoiding envy, arrogance, anger, viciousness, cheating, greed, jealousy, laziness, stinginess, covetousness, ostentation, deception, avarice, slyness, ingenuousness, treachery, harshness, boorishness, heedlessness, hastiness, impetuosity, pride, snobbery, exultation, competitiveness, high-handedness, bad manners, bad character, love for praise, desire for the gratitude of others, artifice, capriciousness, oppression, excessive hope, evil, vanity, transgression, injustice, stubbornness, back biting, tale-bearing, seeking power wantonly, speaking about the faults of others, having no sorrow in the heart, exulting in ephemeral success, grieving for material loss, objecting to Allah's planning, and other similar blameworthy qualities and ugly acts. It is the duty of every Muslim to rid himself of such things, for they lead to perdition and spoil righteous deeds.

The second aspect of the science of the human soul is to attain perfection by means of such things as the struggle against the soul, God-consciousness, scrupulousness, detachment, gratitude, patience, satisfaction, contentment, certitude, reliance, resignation, surrender, virtue, honesty, sincerity, intention, recognition of Allah's blessings, hoping the best from one's deeds, generosity, compassion, inner calm, dutifulness, piety, humility, self-awareness, self-reckoning, thinking the best of Allah, obedience,

good character, kindness to others, knowledge of Allah, and similar qualities of perfection.

If one gets rid of these bad qualities and attains these good qualities, he will move on from them to repentance from sins, then self-reckoning for errors, then awareness of one's hazardous conduct, then meditation on Allah in His Qualities of Action [*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*] and Qualities of Essence [*ṣifāt al-dhāt*], then adoption of these Qualities – one will adopt mercy from the Name 'the Merciful', and virtue [*iḥsān*] from the Name 'the Virtuous', and benefit for others from the Name 'the Beneficent'; and he will deal harm to those who deserve it, whether the unbelievers by fighting and capturing, or the sinful Muslims by lawful punishment, or the like, from the Name 'the Giver of Harm'; and so on, for the rest of the Names, adopting each Name as is fitting. Once he has adopted the Qualities in this way, he will move on to meditation on how they are manifested in all created beings, and how their mysteries are found in all Allah's works. He will then move on to extinction in the beholding of the Essence from which all created beings are issued, and then to vision of divinely-inspired thoughts and the trial of misgivings. He will then throw himself down before the Controller of all this, as though he is but an inanimate object; this is the end of all desires.

What we have just said was explained by those who came before us. Sahl ibn 'Abdallāh said: 'The first thing the disciple must do is renounce all blameworthy acts, and then adopt praiseworthy acts, and then devote himself solely to Allah's command; then comes reliance, then guidance, then extinction [*fanā'*], then proclamation, then praise, then proclamation, then nearness, then intimate discourse, then harmony,

then divine friendship. This will not settle in his heart unless he first turns back to his faith. Knowledge and Providence must be his provision, contentment and surrender his desire, resignation and reliance his state. Allah will then bless him with gnosis, and his station in Allah's sight will be the station of those who renounce all power and strength; this is the station of the angels who bear the Throne, and there is no station, beyond it.'

Yahyā ibn Mu'ādh said: 'The bridges of the gnostics are seven: repentance, then detachment, then fear, then longing, then contentment, then love, then gnosis. With repentance, they cleanse themselves from sin; with detachment, they renounce the world; with fear, they cross the bridge over Hell; with longing, they enter Paradise; with contentment, they don the robes of servitude; with love, they experience the taste of bliss; and with gnosis, they arrive at what they sought from this world and the next.'

If the aspirant takes to heart all the states we have described, he will amass knowledge of the spiritual states and stations. These states are sometimes reached by divine attraction, whereby Allah casts this into the aspirant's heart without any effort of study on his part; for others, they are attained by following the path of gnosis under the guidance of one who knows the rules of the Path and the science of differentiation. If Allah chooses to give someone spiritual aid, He inspires in him consciousness of his thoughts and impulses, so that he can guard himself against the bad ones and keep hold of the good ones, and thereby be an obedient servant to his Lord. He who neglects his soul and is heedless to it, following its impulses and acting in accordance with its desires, will be ruined.

To be self-satisfied with one's opinions, knowledge and actions is the worst blight that can afflict those of spiritual ranks. Abū 'Uthmān al-Hīrī said: 'Self-satisfaction is caused by looking to oneself and mentioning it, and looking to other people and mentioning them.' Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥusayn said: 'Satisfaction with your own actions is a result of your forgetting that you only did them because Allah gave you the grace to do so.'

Know also that those who came before us wrote about the necessary etiquettes for those who follow this Path, and their duty to go against social and material conventions, and the spiritual benefit that occurs from this. Were any spiritual wayfarers to be guided to what is right, they would read these books and pay heed to these teachings; yet instead, some of them say: 'For the aspirant to read books, and seek knowledge, is one of the greatest veils.' This saying of theirs is nothing but a true word used for false ends, and a deficiency worn proudly by one who is far from perfection. In truth, the Sufis only say this about those who have attained that knowledge of the Law and the Reality which makes them distinct from the rest of those who follow this way, such that they no longer have any need to pay heed to anything but their own essence, and such that they have been shown mysterious proofs of their own success. They exist through Allah and with Allah, and pay no heed to their own attributes. They are purified from paying regard to the impurity of all that is other than Allah, and protected from passion because of how their time is free of all turbidity. As one of the wise has said, all that is other than Allah is a distraction like the buzzing of flies and the chirping of crickets for those

who have pure hearts. One who has such a rank is busy enough with his own state and has no need to read books. As for one who is bereft of knowledge, both outward and inward, he must seek the knowledge he needs to tread the Path. If he haughtily refuses to do so, he will never be able to follow the path of felicity.

Know that just as sciences such as jurisprudence, grammar and medicine are divided into knowledge and practice, the same is true of the science of the Sufis: it is divided into knowledge of the technical terms of its practitioners, and practice of its ethics. The practitioners of the Path differ about the terms 'poverty' [*faqr*], 'Sufism' [*taṣawwuf*], *faqīr* [literally 'pauper'] and 'Ṣūfī.' Do they all mean the same thing, or is one more complete than the other? Some say they are the same, whilst others say that 'poverty' is higher, because the Qur'an and Sunna speak of it. 'Sufism' on the other hand is a new coinage which was unknown to the righteous early Muslims, so is it right to use it? Most of the imams of this science – including our shaykh, al-Shihāb al-Suhrawardī – say that the terms 'Sufism' and 'Ṣūfī' are higher in rank and more fitting, and best express the intended meaning. This is because the word *faqīr* is used generally to mean one who is materially poor and only metaphorically for one whose being is marked by a dire and total need for Allah. 'Sufism', on the other hand, is only used to refer to this special meaning of 'poverty', and implies other attributes besides it. Moreover, the *faqīr* is the one who clings to his poverty and seeks recompense for it in the form of rewards for his patience and gratitude, hoping that Allah will raise his rank of account of it, and accepting both its benefit and its harm. The Ṣūfī, on the other hand, is the *faqīr* who has no desire for

recompense, and turns away from created beings in substance and in accident, and cuts off his links to all but Allah, and in his extinction pays no heed to anything but the Creator, and separates himself from all beings and times both in heart and in body, and subsists in Allah both in vision and in expectancy. He sets his own self to one side, and maintains beautiful comportment with all beings, and is not restricted to any station or state lest his pledge be spoiled.

When one knows the difference between the two groups, he is able to distinguish the two paths. Now in our times, the two groups have become confused, and few are they who can tell the difference between the two approaches. There are those whose external actions resemble them, while their inner realities are opposed to them. They seem on the outside to be detached from the world, whilst on the inside they are attached to it. They go after their pleasures and passions, and neglect the laws of the Path in all that they do, and they corrupt those who associate with them with their worldliness.

Then there are those who go beyond Ṣūfī terminology when they speak, and make people think that their words are the most perfect of teachings, and write numerous books which are alien to the true Path of the Sufis, and which cause those who read them to join the ranks of the reprehensible and the condemned. These books contradict sound doctrine, advance plain falsehoods, and utilise unsound arguments. They are based on principles which were adopted by blind following, and therefore they led to decrease even while promising increase. Yet these people imagined that all this was the very thing the Sufis teach. Though they did not understand the

terminology, they were certain that they did. They took their knowledge from the philosophers, and then called it realisation and universal knowledge; yet this was only delusion and guesswork, not knowledge and certitude. They diverged from Sufism, and amassed no true knowledge whatsoever.

...

The end of the science of Sufism is to cast aside conventions and go against desires, in surrender to Him to whom all things belong. The one who attains this is extinct to the vision of all things, seeing only their Maker; he is even extinct to his own extinction. He subsists through Allah, and is truly loved, protected and watched over by Him. It is as the Prophet ﷺ said, relating from his Lord: 'My servant continues to draw nigh unto Me with supererogatory acts until I love him...' ⁴⁸

...

Another aspect of the Ṣūfī Path is that they have an intention for every action, so that their hearts are present in all that they say and do, until this becomes habitual and the soul is trained to do it always, never transgressing, forgetting or becoming heedless.

Know also that every group concerned with a particular science will create vocabulary for it to distinguish it and facilitate their discussion of it. This is also the case for professions like business,

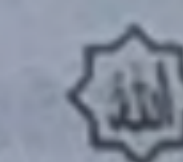
48 The ḥadīth continues: 'And when I love him, I am his hearing wherewith he hears, his sight wherewith he sees, his hand wherewith he grasps, and his foot wherewith he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would assuredly give it to him; were he to seek My refuge, I would surely give it to him. I hesitate about nothing I do as I hesitate to take the believer's soul. He hates to die, and I hate to offend him.' Narrated by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayra.

weaving and so on. The Sufis also required vocabulary to allow them to speak about their science, so that the distinction could be made between those who ascribe to it and follow its ethics, etiquettes and teachings, and those who reject it and follow other ways, or those who incline to it and wear its uniform without actually aspiring to acquire its knowledge or understand its vocabulary, lest those who see them mistake them for true scholars of it. Yet the evil-inclined soul never perceives the true meaning of expressions and allusions, but only reads into them the scorn and disrespect it already harbours.

One of the theologians said to Abū al-'Abbās ibn 'Aṭā': 'Why do you Sufis have all these strange and unusual expressions, which people cannot fathom?' He replied: 'We only use them because of our jealous love for it, because of how dear it is to us, so that no one but us will speak of it.'

Some of the technical terms they have adopted are: moment [*waqt*], station [*maqām*], state [*ḥāl*], passing thought [*khāṭir*], inspired thought [*wārid*], witness [*shāhid*], inner being [*sirr*], soul/ego [*nafs*], irresistible force [*ghalaba*], contraction [*qabḍ*], expansion [*bast*], integration [*jam'*], dispersion [*farq*], extinction [*fanā'*], subsistence [*baqā'*], among other expressions which are explained in the books of the Sufis.

Here ends the passages I have quoted from al-Qusṭallānī's book.



Al-Ghazālī says in the *Iḥyā'*, in the section on delusion and the different kinds of deluded people:

The third kind are the Ṣūfī aspirants – how often they can be deluded! They are deluded in different ways; some of them – the Sufis of this age, save for those whom Allah protects – are deluded by the garb and the external form. They resemble the true Sufis in their garb, appearance, speech, etiquette, recitation, technical terms, and external states such as music, dancing, purity, prayer, sitting on carpets with heads bowed and hooded as though in deep thought, sighing, speaking with a low voice, and similar characteristics and external forms. Having adopted all these things and imitated them in this way, they come to imagine that they are Sufis, even though they have not engaged their souls with any kind of struggle, or monitored their hearts, or purified their inner and outer beings from sins both hidden and open. They have not done any of these things, even though they are the first steps of the Ṣūfī way; and even if they had done them all, they would not yet be fit to call themselves Sufis. What, then, can one say about them, seeing that they have not got anywhere near to achieving these things? Rather, they pounce upon and quarrel over wealth that is unlawful, doubtful or from rulers. They compete with one another over morsels of food and small change, and envy one another for trifles and baubles. One of them will happily destroy the honour of another if he stands between him and some desire of his. The delusion of such people is obvious.

Then there are others who are even more deluded, who find it difficult to follow the true Sufis in their lowly dress and contentment with little, yet still wish to appear to be Sufis. Finding no way out of donning their garb, they cast aside their silk and then get robes made of patches of fine fabric, and

buy dyed rugs, wearing clothes than are even more valuable than silk! One such as this imagines that he is a Ṣūfī simply because of the colour of his clothes and the fact that they are patched, forgetting that the Sufis darken their clothes so that they will not have to waste time in washing them constantly, and they wear patches because when their clothes wear out they patch them rather than buying new ones. As for the notion of buying fine fabric piece by piece and making patched robes out of it, what on earth does this have to do with the practice of the Sufis? The stupidity of these people is more obvious than that of any other deluded people. They enjoy fine clothes and delicious food, seeking the good life, and they take money from rulers, and they do not even bother to avoid open sin, never mind secret sin; yet they think the best of themselves. The evil of such people is passed on to others, for those who follow them are ruined, and those who do not follow them end up with a bad opinion of all Sufis, thinking that they are all the same, and speaking ill of the true Sufis as well. All this stems from the curse and evil of these imitators.

Then there are those who claim to have gnosis and contemplative knowledge of the Real, and to have passed through spiritual stations and states, and to be firm in the station of witnessing, and to have arrived to the divine proximity; yet all they know of these things is their names. They have simply heard things from the Sufis which they then repeat, imagining that they are privy to the loftiest knowledge that there has ever been. They come to view the jurists, exegetes and Hadith scholars with contempt, to say nothing of how they view the masses. Even a farmer or a weaver

can leave his trade for a few days and sit with the Sufis and learn these words from them, and then repeat them as though he is speaking pure revelation and divulging the most mysterious of mysteries, looking with disdain at scholars and worshippers. He then holds the worshippers to be no more than fettered beasts at toil, and the scholars to be veiled from Allah's speech. He claims that he has arrived to the Real and that he is one of those brought nigh, yet to Allah he is but a wicked hypocrite, and to those truly endowed with hearts he is but an ignorant fool. He neither attained knowledge, refined his character, offered any action, or kept watch over his heart; all he has done is follow his caprice, and chanced upon some mystical expressions and memorised them.

Then there are those who fall into licentiousness, folding up the carpet of the Law and disdaining its rules, equating the lawful with the unlawful. One of them might claim, 'Allah has no need for my works, so I will not bother with them.' Another might say, 'People have undertaken to purify their hearts and souls from desires and love for this world, yet this is not possible, and they have undertaken to do something that cannot be done. Only those who have not tried it are deluded by it; we, on the other hand, have tried it and found it to be impossible.' This ignoramus does not understand that people have not undertaken to uproot desire and anger altogether from their hearts, but rather to end their dominance, so that each of them is subjected to the will of the intelligence and the Law. Another of them might say, 'The deeds of the body are worthless; what matters is what is in the heart, and our hearts are aflame with love for Allah and gnosis. Though we indulge in the world with our

bodies, our hearts are secluded in the divine Presence. We give in to our passions outwardly, but not in our hearts.' They claim that they have gone beyond the level of the ordinary people, and no longer have any need to refine their souls with physical devotions, and that their passions do not distract them from the Path of Allah because of their great spiritual power. Thus they hold themselves to be above the prophets, who would weep and grieve for years on end over the slightest thing. The different kinds of deluded licentious pseudo-Sufis are beyond count; this is the result of the errors and misgivings Satan sends their way, to which they are open because of how they have begun the spiritual struggle without having the requisite knowledge, and without having the guidance of a qualified and knowledgeable shaykh. To speak about every kind of them would take too long.

Then there are those who go further than these, performing good works, cleaving to what is lawful, and searching their hearts; yet they claim to have reached the stations of detachment, reliance, contentment and love, but are deluded therein and have no real knowledge of what these stations are or what their requirements, signs and blights are. One of them might claim to have ecstasy and love for Allah, and say that he is mad with love for Allah; and he might even imagine things about Allah that amount to heretical innovation [*bid'a*] or unbelief, claiming to love Allah before knowing Him. Moreover, he is not beyond engaging in things which Allah dislikes, and putting his own caprice before Allah's command; and he abstains from some sinful thing simply because he is shy of people – if only he abstained from them because he was shy of Allah!

Then there are those who withhold nourishment from themselves until they desire nothing but what is pure and lawful, yet neglect to keep watch over their hearts and bodies in any other way. Another might neglect to keep his food, clothing and income lawful, yet pay obsessive attention to some other matter. These poor fools do not realise that Allah is not pleased by a servant who seeks lawful income alone, nor by another servant who pays attention to all other deeds except the search for a lawful income; He is only pleased by the servant who pays attention to all aspects of obedience and avoids all sins. Anyone who imagines that taking care of only some obligations will suffice him and guarantee his salvation is deluded.

Here end the words of al-Ghazālī; and if you reflect on those who claim to be Sufis in this time, you will find that they fit into the categories he describes, save for a few. One of them might claim he has reached the pinnacle of Sufism, yet when you sit down and converse with him the first thing he does is complain to you of his poverty; thus right away he displays displeasure with Allah, and ignorance of Allah. The displeasure is that were he content with what Allah has apportioned for him, he would not complain, for the contented man does not complain. The ignorance is that he is complaining to someone who is powerless to help him; if he truly knew Allah, he would know that all things are in His hand, not in anyone else's. Perhaps the person he is complaining to is connected to the ruler or someone in a position of power, so that he imagines that his complaint might do him some good in that this person will take up his cause with the ruler. This is even more ignorant, for by thinking this he is making distinctions between created beings; if he really knew Allah, he would

know that all creatures are equally powerless, and that Allah alone distributes provision to whom He will, and however He will. If, in his ignorance, he says, 'Then what about material means? The Law does acknowledge them, after all', we answer: The one who complains to have attained the station of withdrawal (*tajrīd*) does not speak of material means. Allah has divided humanity into two groups: those who live in the world of means, and those who live in the world of withdrawal. Anyone who claims to have reached the level of withdrawal, and then starts talking about means, is nothing but a liar and a pretender. Moreover, means are not restricted to the petition of kings or anyone else. If he is sincere, let him go and gather firewood to sell and buy his provisions from the income, as the ḥadīth enjoined.⁴⁹ Nothing prevents him from doing this but pride and the ego's haughtiness, whilst Sufism is all about breaking the ego – may Allah be our aid.

Then there are those who go seeking out the faults of others and speaking about them, as though they have no faults of their own. This is only allowed for those who have been given permission to mention them, in which case they should speak of them allusively without mentioning the person in question, just as the doctor speaks of the illness and diagnoses it, and then prescribes treatment for it. The only circumstance in which the given individual may be mentioned is if the purpose is to give counsel and warn others about him, solely for the sake of Allah's right, and not for one's own gratification.

Then there are those – and these are the strangest of all

⁴⁹ Anas reported that the Prophet ﷺ gave this advice to a man of the Helpers who came to him begging, as is narrated by Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī, and al-Tirmidhī. A similar ḥadīth is narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Abū Hurayra.

of them, in my view – who think that Sufism is all about reading Ṣūfī books. This is a grave error, for Sufism is about striving to rectify the heart and purify it from vile diseases, and to refine the soul and seek out its flaws. I have never seen anyone come along and mention a disease of his heart and ask for the cure; and no one ever says, 'I find it difficult to engage in worship – how can I attain vigour therein?' Or: 'I only incline to this world – how can I get it out of my heart?' Or: 'All I see in my soul is pride, envy, covetousness, hatred, ostentation, or self-satisfaction; and all I see in my tongue is vileness or gabble – so how can I get rid of it?' Or: 'I used to say a regular litany [*wird*], but my soul became weary and I stopped – how can I go back to it?' Or: 'Allah always protected me from sin, but then I sinned – how can I mend my ways?' You never see anyone asking these questions, even though they are the basis of Sufism, and the first thing one must take care of. Yet when they come to you, the first thing they want to talk about is the Spirit, the illumination of the heart, outpourings of light, hidden mysteries – things that do not concern them, nor are required from them, nor expected from them, nor suitable for them. These are things for which they are unqualified; they concern only the spiritual giants who have reached the level of true sincerity, who speak about them with their peers, for whom it is clear and unproblematic.

Such a person as I am describing is like an uncouth slave whom the sultan has sent to a teacher to learn archery, yet who neglects his duty and begins to quiz the teacher about the affairs of the kingdom and how it is run – a question only a sultan needs to ask – and then starts asking for advice about whom he should appoint in government and administrative posts! For such people, there is no answer except to turn away from them and ignore their questions. Or, if it seems that one of them has the wit to accept advice

and heed counsel, the teacher should forbid him from asking such things, and explain to him that this is not what he should be concerning himself with.

Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Tirmidhī al-Ḥakīm said that people are of two kinds: there are those who worship Allah with piety and God-consciousness, who are in need of the good fortune that time brings them; and there are the folk of certitude, who worship Allah with pure *tawḥīd*, going behind the veil and beyond material means, and thus pay no heed to the good and ill fortune time brings them. This is the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words: 'Allah has servants whom He nourishes with His mercy, and causes them to die with His clemency; calamities pass them by like moments of a dark night, and harm them not',⁵⁰ and his ﷺ words: 'There will be calamities in my community from which no one will be spared save for those to whom Allah gives life in knowledge.'⁵¹ Al-Tirmidhī said that in his opinion this means knowledge of Allah. He also said that anyone who claims sainthood [*wilāya*] should be asked to describe the levels of the saints, and listed some things by which the claim to sainthood may be tested. Likewise, Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī said that the *qutb* is given fifteen miracles by which he can be known, and listed them.

Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn said in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*:

Know that it is the way of the enlightened Sufis to raise their aspirations above created beings. Al-Junayd was asked, 'Could a gnostic commit adultery?' He

50 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī, Abū Ya'lā and Abū Nu'aym on the authority of Ibn 'Umar with a weak chain.

51 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: Narrated by al-Dārimī on the authority of Abū Umāma with the wording: 'There shall be calamities wherein a man will arise a believer and be an unbeliever by afternoon, save for...' Its chain is weak.

replied: «Allah's commandment is certain destiny» [33:38]. Upon my life, had he been asked whether a gnostic could desire anything but Allah, he would have said no. The will of the Real is that His servants are devoted to Him alone in all things: in love, trust, reliance, fear and hope – His Oneness deserves this.

One raises his aspiration by having sincere trust in Allah. Their faith gives them glory in Allah – for Allah says: «Unto Allah belongs glory, and to His Messenger, and to the believers» [63:8], and succour from Allah – for Allah says: «It is incumbent upon Us to succour the believers» [30:47], and salvation from all that bars them from Allah – for Allah says: «Thus is it incumbent upon Us to save the believers» [10:103]. The way of the true Ṣūfī aspirants is to be sufficed with Allah, and to raise their aspirations above all else besides Him, and to guard their faith from being despoiled by inclination to created things and desire for anything other than the Sovereign Judge. What makes you raise our aspiration above all else besides Allah is your knowledge that He only brought you into His dominion after sufficing you and giving you all that you need, so that you have no need for anything but Him. Now if the Sufis understand that they can suffice themselves with His knowledge without having to ask anything of Him, then how could they not understand that they can suffice themselves with His knowledge without having to ask anything of His creatures? When the Real gives a spiritual opening to someone, as He does to His beloved ones, it is all the more essential that he respond by raising his aspiration to Him.

In this regard, the Almighty says: «We have given you seven of the Oft-Repeated, and the Mighty

Qur'an; stretch not your eyes to what We have given certain pairs of them to enjoy» [15:87-88]. How could the blessing, gifts, openings and tokens of friendship He gives you not be enough to keep you from attachment to anything but Him? If this is true for the level of created beings, then it is equally true that He does not like that you ascribe the levels of giving and withholding, friendship and estrangement, to anyone but Him. Beware, then, of being one of those about whom Allah says: «Most of them believe not in Allah, without associating other things with Him» [12:106]. It would be obscene of you to direct your desire towards anything other than Allah while you were a guest in His Presence, and make a request to one distant from you and not from the Lord who is closer to you than your jugular vein. Have you not heard His words «I am Near; I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me» [2:186], or His words «Ask Allah of His bounty [4:32]», or His word «Call to Me; I will answer you» [40:60], or His words «Nor is there anything but with Us are the treasures thereof» [15:21]? All these words are meant to direct the aspirations of His servants towards Him, so that they seek their needs only from Allah.

He also said:

Know that sainthood is built on finding one's sufficiency in Allah, and being content in His knowledge and His awareness. Allah says: «Whoso puts his trust in Allah, He shall suffice him» [65:3], and: «Will Allah not suffice His servant?» [39:36], and: «Does he not know that Allah sees?» [96:14],

and: «Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things?» [41:53].

In the beginning, the saints base themselves on fleeing from creation and keeping to solitude with the True Sovereign, and hiding their deeds and concealing their states, in order to lessen their hardships, strengthen their detachment, safeguard their hearts, and make their actions sincerely devoted to their Master. Later on, when they have attained perfect certitude and mastery, realised the truth of extinction, and been sent back to the station of subsistence, if Allah wills He might reveal them as guides to His servants; and if He wills, He might conceal them and cut them off from everything but Him. If the saint is made known to the people, this is not his own will for himself, but Allah's will for him. The desire of the saint – if he has a desire – is to be hidden, not to be known. Now since they do not wish to be known, but He wishes for them to be known, He makes them known and then gives them His aid and His inspiration. The Prophet ﷺ said in this regard: 'O 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Samura, do not seek leadership; for if you are given it without requesting it, you will be helped with it; but if you are given it after requesting it, you will be left to it.'⁵² Now as for those of them who truly realise servitude to Allah, they desire neither renown nor obscurity, but desire only what their Master chooses for them.

He also said:

One of the finest gifts Allah can give to His saints

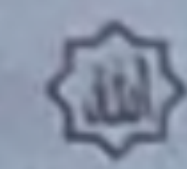
⁵² Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

is the gift of expression. I heard our Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās say: 'The saint may be filled with knowledge and gnosis, and may have experiential knowledge of spiritual realities; and when he is given the gift of expression, this is like a permission from Allah to speak.' When someone is given permission to express spiritual realities, his words find receptive ears, and his allusions are given esteem. I heard our Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās say: 'The speech of those who have been given permission to speak is clothed in beauty and grace, whilst the speech of those who have not been given permission to speak is bereft of illumination. Two men might speak about the same reality, and find it accepted from one and rejected from the other.'

Know that if Allah wants one of His saints to call other unto Him, He has to reveal him to His servants, for otherwise he cannot call them unto Him. He also has to clothe him in two things: majesty and splendour. Majesty is needed so that the people hold him in high esteem and stay within the bounds he sets for them. Allah places awe of him in their hearts, and succours him thereby so that his commands and prohibitions are heeded. Allah puts this awe in their hearts in order to establish him firmly and help him to fulfil his task: «Those whom, if We establish them on earth, perform the prayer, and give the poor-due, and enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong» [22:41]. This is one way in which Allah gives glory to His believing servants: «Unto Allah belongs glory, and to His Messenger, and to the believers» [63:8].

The awe of His saints which Allah places in the hearts of His servants is, in reality, an overflowing of the glory of the one whom they follow; as well you know, he ﷺ said: 'I have been given victory by

dread, for the span of a month's journey.⁵³ The Real has clothed them in His own awesomeness, and manifested in them His own majesty; the further they lower themselves in servitude, the higher He raises them in spiritual standing. They are the true kings, though no banners fly for them; they are the true mighty ones, though no armies fight for them.



Concerning the doctrine upon which the Sufis are agreed, the author of *al-Ta'arruf* states:

The Sufis are agreed that Allah is One, Unique, Singular, Unsurpassable, Eternal, All-Knowing, All-Powerful, Real, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, Unending, Mighty, Immense, Majestic, Great, Generous, Kind, Grand, Irresistible, First, God, Master, Sovereign, Lord, Compassionate, Merciful, Willing, Wise, Speaker, Creator, Provider. He is described by every Quality with which He has described Himself, and named by every Name with which He has named Himself. His Names and Qualities have always been His. He in no wise resembles anything in creation: no essence resembles His essence, no quality resembles His Qualities, and no attribute of any created being applies to Him. He always existed: before any contingent thing was, He was. Nothing is eternal but He. He is not a body, a figure, a person, an image, a substance or an accident. He is neither gathered nor divided. He neither moves nor remains still. He neither

53 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Jābir and Abū Hurayra.

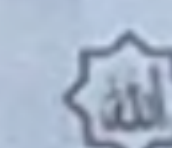
increases nor decrease. He is not composed of parts, pieces, limbs or organs. He has no direction. Blights do not afflict Him, nor does slumber overcome Him, nor does time pass by Him, nor can He be pointed to. No space contains Him, and no time encloses Him. He is neither attached, nor separate, nor indwelling. No mind can encompass Him, no veil can cover Him, no vision can perceive Him. Nothing came before Him. No distance separates Him. Nothing departs 'from' Him, nothing emerges 'out of' Him, nothing attaches 'to' Him, nothing resides 'in' Him, no 'if' gives Him consent, no 'when' commands Him. There is nothing above Him, or below Him, or opposite Him, or beside Him, or behind Him, or in front of Him, or before Him, or after Him. He is not combined by 'all', or given being by 'is', or absented by 'not.' Nothing conceals Him. His ancientness came before all that is contingent, and His being came before His ancientness, and His beginninglessness came before the very first. If you say 'when?', His Being came before time; if you say 'before?', then even 'before' came after Him. If you say 'He?', then the letters which compose this word are His creations; if you say 'how?', then His Essence is veiled from description; if you say 'where?', then He existed before space did; if you say 'what is He?', then His Identity is distinct from all things: nothing but Him can have two opposite attributes at the same time, yet He is hidden despite His outward manifestation, and outwardly manifest despite being hidden. He is the Outward and the Inward, the Near and the Far; and so created beings cannot resemble Him. His act requires no contact, His teaching requires no meeting, and His guidance requires no gesturing. Cares do not disturb Him, and

thoughts do not bother Him. His Essence requires no qualification, and his Act requires no effort. They agree that eyes cannot see Him, and that uncertainty does not occur to Him. His Qualities do not change, nor are His Names replaced. Thus is He, and thus has He ever been. He is the First, the Last, the Outward, the Inward, and He knows all things. (Nothing is like unto Him, yet He is the Hearing, the Seeing) [42:11].

There is a difference of opinion concerning the divine Qualities of Act. The Ash'arīs say that they are contingent, whilst the Ḥanafīs say they are eternal, which is also the opinion of many Sufis; they say that He is still Creator, and prove this by saying that if this Quality were contingent, this would mean that He was lacking in pre-eternity, and was then completed afterwards. Al-Qūnawī says in his commentary on the *Ta'arruf* that they may be answered thus: This would mean that creation is also pre-eternal, since your words 'He is still Creator' mean that creation was with Him in pre-eternity; this resembles the philosophers' claim that the world is eternal. They say that someone once ascended the pulpit and said to the people, 'What do you say about two men, one of whom believes that Allah remains Sovereign of all, Creator, Provider, Rich, Generous, Ever-Giving, and that to Him belong creation and command pre-eternally and eternally, and the other of whom believes that Allah was alone in pre-eternity and had nothing with Him, and that He possessed neither creation nor command at all, but then acquired them? Which of them is better to follow?' The people immediately said that the former man was the best one to believe and follow. Now this is a bit of philosophical trickery, to which you must pay attention in order to guard yourself against it. The response to it is

that nothing was ever lacking, because Allah always had the complete power to do as He willed both pre-eternally and eternally; it was the divine Wisdom that deferred the act of creation until Allah willed for His pre-eternal power to manifest it. It is impossible for a contingent thing to exit in pre-eternity; the divine power did not refrain from the creation of contingent things in pre-eternity because of any deficiency in that power, but rather because the divine power cannot make the impossible possible.

The upshot is that the Ash'arīs say that 'the Creator' is He from whom creation comes; if this Quality were eternal, this would mean that creation was eternal. On the other hand, if by 'Creator' we mean 'He who has the power to create', there is no dispute about this being an eternal Quality.



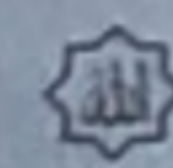
Again from *al-Ta'arruf*:

The Sufis agree that Allah cannot be seen in this world with the eyes, nor with the heart, save by way of certitude; that is, certitude in His existence. This is because this is the greatest of favours and best of blessings, and such a thing is only permitted in the best of places. Were they given the best of all blessings in this world, there would be no difference between this ephemeral world and the unending Paradise. If Allah denied it in this world to Moses عليه السلام, to whom He spoke directly, then of course He denied it to those of a lower level.

Of all the shaykhs of this Path, we do not know of any, nor have we read in any of their books or epistles, or heard in any authentic stories about them, or heard directly from those of them whom we have met, that

any of them ever claimed that Allah can be seen in this world, or that any created being ever saw Him.⁵⁴ The only exceptions to this are certain extremists [*ghulāb*] with no real spiritual knowledge. Indeed, some people claim that certain Sufis have claimed to have seen Him themselves; yet all the shaykhs have affirmed that those who make such claims are errant liars. Some of them have written on this subject, including Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz and al-Junayd; they have stated plainly that those who make this claim are errant liars, and that they have no knowledge of Allah, and their books attest to this.

Al-Qūnawī added: 'It may be that Satan showed himself to those who claim this, calling them to him and fastening them to error.'



Concerning the attributes of the Sufis, *al-Ta'arruf* says:

They consider the pursuit of knowledge to be the best of all actions; meaning the vital knowledge of all that is required of them both outwardly and inwardly. They are the most compassionate of people towards all of Allah's creatures. They are quicker than any to spend what they possess [in Allah's cause], and more disinterested than any in what other people possess. They are more eager than any to turn away from this

⁵⁴ Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: Except for our Prophet ﷺ, who indeed saw his Lord according to the strongest opinion; the proof of this is too long to give here, but can be found in elsewhere.

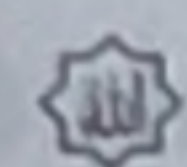
world, and keener than any to seeking out the Sunna and the tradition and following them.

Al-Qūnawī explains that this is because all goodness comes from following the Messenger ﷺ. Allah says: «Say: if you love Allah, then follow me, and Allah will love you» [3:31]; one of them said of this: 'The love is determined by the following.' This refutes the claim of those heretics who say that the servant can reach a position where he no longer requires any intermediary between himself and Allah; for the highest level of the gnostics is love, and love is determined by following the Messenger ﷺ, which must be equally true for all the lower levels.

Again from *al-Ta'arruf*:

Those of them with the purest intentions and highest stations are the most vigilant, sincere and fearful; in those matters wherein the jurists differ, they choose the way of greater precaution and stronger evidence, and they try to stay within those areas where there is general agreement wherever possible. They see that the different opinions of the jurists are all correct, and do not object to one another's views, since they hold that every qualified *mujtahid* is correct.

They agree on the lawfulness of earning income from trade, commerce, agriculture and so on, with diligence and care to avoid doubtful matters. They hold that one must work in order to contribute to society and meet one's needs, with the intention of giving to others and being kind to one's neighbours. They hold that such work is obligatory for those who have dependents, and permissible to those who are alone, though it is better for the latter to have more concern for their Lord's business.

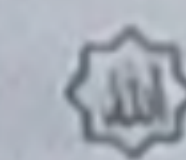


Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh says in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*:

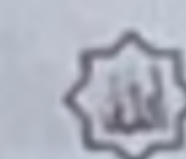
Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī took the Path from Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh, who took it from Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī, and so on back one by one to al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first *quṭb*. The reason why the shaykhs of the Path of Ṣūfī initiation have to be listed in this way is because it is a matter of transmission, and transmission requires a chain. This Path of ours is a matter of guidance. Allah might also draw someone to Himself without the means of any master; and He might grace him with a direct meeting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. It is said that Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qanā'ī used to say, 'I took from no one but the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.' If Allah wishes to grace His servant, He allows him to take directly from him ﷺ – and what a perfect grace this is! Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar said to me, 'No one gave me spiritual instruction except the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.' If Allah wishes to grace His servant and suffice him of need for any human masters, so that he does not take from any of them, He can do so.

Then Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn said:

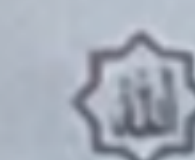
I heard Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās [al-Mursī] say: 'By Allah, no two masters of this science ever existed at one time; it is always one after another, back to al-Ḥasan.' Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās was asked about a famous man who did not attend the Friday prayer. His mood darkened, and he said: 'Do you sit in the presence of saints, and speak about heretical innovators?'



If you ask how al-Ḥasan could be the 'first *quṭb*' even though Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī all came before him, my answer is that it is said to mean that al-Ḥasan was the first person to have the inward caliphate but not the outward one. The *quṭb* is the caliph of the Prophet ﷺ and his spiritual inheritor. It seems that when al-Ḥasan forwent the exoteric caliphate for the sake of Allah and to spare the blood of the Muslims, Allah compensated him with something far more precious, namely the esoteric caliphate. When one forgoes something for Allah's sake, He compensates one with something better than it. As for the Four Caliphs (Allah be pleased with them), they presided over both caliphates together, the exoteric and the esoteric, something that no one else after them ever did, save perhaps 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz.



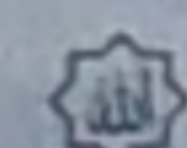
Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh said: 'It was the opinion of Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās that the *quṭb* does not have to be a descendent of the Prophet ﷺ through al-Ḥasan, but could be from any bloodline.



Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh says:

A man's spiritual heir is the one who manifests his knowledge and state, and guides others along his Path, explaining and expounding it, and carrying its torch, and shining its light. He conveys to the people what the knowledge and state of this man was, and

the gnosis, divine protection and illumination he was given, so that if the people did not love and revere him enough in his lifetime, they can at least do so after his passing; for they ignored all his gifts and were interested only in his deficiencies. Shaykh Abū al-Abbās said: 'When the man is among them, they pay no attention to him; yet after he dies, they make a legend out of him.' It is often the case that more people enter a man's *ṭarīqa* after his death than did during his life.



If you have understood the passages of the imams we have quoted above, you will recognise that Sufism is itself a noble science, centred on adherence to the Sunna, rejection of heretical innovation, disavowal of the lower soul and its desires and habits, and submission to Allah, contentment with His decree, the seeking of his love, and disregard for everything but Him. As al-Ghazālī said, 'Sufism means to empty the heart for Allah, and disregard everything else.' This is what they mean by 'arrival unto Allah.' Ibn 'Abbād says in his commentary on the *Hikam*:

Know that as long as you have an aspiration and a will, you are still on the Path and have not yet arrived. Once you have become extinct to your aspiration and will, you will have arrived. One of the early ones said that to arrive means to see nothing but one's Creator; one who has any thought for anything but his Maker has not yet arrived.

You will also recognise that Sufism is plagued by many impostors who seem to be Sufis but in reality are not, and

who have introduced things into it which are alien to it. This has given the whole thing a bad reputation. It is for the people of knowledge, therefore, to distinguish between the two groups, so that they can tell the people of truth from the people of falsehood.

I have looked at all the things for which the jurists have criticised the Sufis, and have not found a single true Ṣūfī who espouses them. They are only espoused by those heretics and extremists who claim to be Sufis when they are not. Of these matters, four pertain to fundamental doctrine. The first of them is the doctrine of 'indwelling and union with God' [*al-ḥulūl wal-ittiḥād*], which is plain unbelief and manifest error. No true Ṣūfī espouses this – and far be it for them to do so! Rather, the true Sufis have always been keen to point out the error and unbelief of those who espouse this doctrine, and warn against it. Al-Ghazālī does so in several passages in the *Iḥyā'*. In *Bāb al-Samā'*, he says:

The fourth situation is the *samā'* [ecstatic utterance] of one who has passed through the spiritual states and stations and gone beyond his understanding of anything besides Allah, even beyond his understanding of his own self and its states and interactions. He is so startled by the splendour of what he witnesses that he is like the women who cut their hands when they saw the beauty of Joseph, so dazzled that they took leave of their senses. The Sufis say that such a person has become extinct to his own self, and all the more extinct to everything else. He has, as it were, become extinct to everything but the One he witnesses, and also extinct to his own act of witnessing. If his heart notices his witnessing and recognises that he is engaged in the act of witnessing, its attention is thereby drawn away from the witnessing itself. The

one who is truly engrossed in the object of his vision pays no attention to his own engrossment, nor to the eye with which he sees, nor to the heart with which he experiences it. The drunken man does not know he is drunk, and the ecstatic man does not know he is ecstatic; he is only aware of the object of his ecstasy.

This has its counterpart in knowledge: to know something is not the same as having knowledge of the knowledge of it. As soon as the one who knows something becomes aware of his knowledge of it, he turns his attention away from the object of the knowledge.

Just as this can be true of one's vision of created beings, it can also be true of one's vision of the Creator; although in the latter case, it is usually fleeting like a bolt of lightning and does not remain for long. If it did remain, it would be too much for the human power to bear, and it might altogether crush the soul under its weight. This is the level of those who experience the utmost sincerity of understanding and ecstasy, which is the highest of all levels. Those ecstatic utterances that give voice to ephemeral spiritual states are below the levels of perfection, and are intermixed with human attributes, which is a kind of imperfection. Perfection is to be totally extinct from one's own self and its states; that is, to forget them and pay no heed whatsoever to them, just as the women paid no heed to their hands or the knives they held. The one in such a station hears for Allah, and through Allah, and from Allah, and by Allah. This is the level of those who dive deep into the pool of realities beyond the shore of spiritual states and deeds, and realise pure *tawhīd* and true sincerity. For one such as this, none of his person remains, but rather his whole

humanity vanishes and he becomes extinct to all his human qualities. I do not mean that his body becomes extinct, but that his heart does; and by 'heart', I do not mean the flesh and blood, but a subtle mystery in him which is symbolised by the physical heart.

...

From this emerged the confusion of those who espouse 'indwelling and the union with Allah', and say 'I am the Real' and the like; this parrots the words of the Christians who claim that the divine became unified with the human, or became incarnate in it, or indwelt in it, according to their different expressions, which is a pure error.

Al-Ghazālī also said in *Bāb al-Maḥabba*:

When a person has strong insight and unflagging strength, he is in a state of equilibrium, and sees only Allah and knows no one but Him. He knows that nothing exists but Allah and His Acts, and that his actions are but the effects of His Power, and thus have no real being of their own without Him; being belongs only to the One Real, in whose hand is the being of all actions. When someone has this state, in every action he beholds he sees only the Actor. Whatever the action is, whether it involves the sky, the earth, an animal, or a tree, he sees right through it and perceives it only as a product of its Maker. He is like someone who sees a man's poetry, handwriting or authored work and sees only the poet or the author, viewing his handiwork as his handiwork and not as a separate entity composed of paper, ink and written characters. He sees nothing but the author. Likewise, the world is the authored work of Allah;

whoso sees it as an act of Allah, knows it as an act of Allah, and loves it as an act of Allah, thereby looks at nothing but Allah, knows nothing but Allah, and loves nothing but Allah. This is the true monotheist, who sees nothing but Allah; even when it comes to his own self, he sees it not as his own self but as a servant of Allah. This is the one said to have become extinct in *tawhīd* and to be extinct from his own self; of this, someone said: 'We used to be with us, then we became extinct from us, and now we subsist without us.'

These things are obvious to the people of insight, but they have become problematic because minds are too weak to understand them, and those who know them are incapable of expressing them in a way that makes them clear and easy to understand, or because they prefer to work open themselves and feel that it is not their business to explain these matters to others.

The people are divided between two extremes: some incline towards anthropomorphism and literalism, whilst others are extreme, fall into doctrines of pantheism and 'indwelling.' Some of the latter say, 'I am the Real'; and the Christians developed false beliefs about Jesus, saying that he was God, or that the divine was incarnated in the human, or that he became one with Him. As for those who see that anthropomorphism is impossible and that indwelling and union are also impossible, they have found the truth; yet they are the minority.

See – may Allah give us all success – how he makes it clear that 'extinction from all besides Allah' and 'the vision of the Real' are meant symbolically and not literally, and that what they mean is to cease paying heed to anything

but Allah so that it disappears from one's consciousness, and that 'seeing Allah everywhere' means that when one sees anything, the remembrance of Allah is the first thing to come to the heart. One of the gnostics said, 'The first thing to come to his heart is remembrance of his Lord.' Look at how al-Ghazālī, in two passages, clearly states that the espousers of 'indwelling' and 'union' are guilty of error and unbelief, and how he likens them to the Christians. Al-Ghazālī is the prime authority for this matter, since he was a scholar and master of jurisprudence, legal fundamentals, theology and Sufism.

Al-Qutb al-Qastallānī says in his aforementioned book:

Love is the first step towards extinction, and the highest level of it is the love of the elite's elite, namely the beholding of His love for them and their love for Him, which is unconditional; they get lost in the labyrinths of that notion, and the waters of mystery flow over them and cleanse them of the taint of attachment to anything besides Him. Thus the remainder of their worldly desires are erased, and they no longer turn their attention in any other direction. This is the love of the truly sincere.

Al-Junayd said: 'Love means intense inclination without any expectancy'; that is, the heart inclines to the Lord and his commandments, which draw one closer to Him, without hoping for any reward for it.

Abū Yāqūb said: 'Love is not complete unless one renounces his free will, and ceases to pay regard to any other, and bears no resentment towards any part of his fate. The lover is absorbed with the Real and has no time for anything else, and his state is never interrupted.'

Al-Junayd also said: 'Witnessing is of three kinds:

witnessing that comes from the Lord, witnessing of the Lord, and witnessing for the Lord. It is also of three levels: witnessing by the Real, which means to intuit the divine Oneness from the proofs inherent in creation; witnessing for the Real, which means to observe the Real in His works and their brilliance and flawlessness; and witnessing of the Real, which means to see the Real before anything else, and before any creation. This last witnessing is beyond all description, and too precious to be revealed.'

Sahl ibn 'Abdallāh said: 'Witnessing means to behold one's own servitude to Allah, and to be oblivious to everything else.'

'Extinction' and 'subsistence' are two attributes which a soul can experience, the one following the other. In the language of allusion, they mean the extinction of blameworthy qualities and the subsistence of praiseworthy qualities; and when the servant becomes extinct to qualities, states and acts, he rises to the level of extinction from his own self and from all creation, which is the result of his being overwhelmed by his witnessing. In such a situation, his soul and all creation still exist, but he is so dazzled by what he sees that he is unaware of their existence. Extinction means to be so engrossed in what one witnesses that he no longer feels any desire for contingent things; he does not even recognise anything has left his consciousness, since he is concerned only with what remains in it. He is extinct to the vision of all objects and images. It is related that 'Āmir ibn 'Abd Qays, one of the Followers, said: 'It is the same to me whether I walk past a dishonourable woman or wall.' Such a person's activities are consigned to the care of Allah, who performs his tasks for him and protects him in

all his dealings, and keeps him from sin. This can be inferred from His words in the Sacred Hadith 'I am his hearing and his sight...'⁵⁵

As for subsistence, which follows extinction, it means to be concerned only with what Allah wills from one, instead of the desires one had before experiencing extinction. All things become for him like a single thing, and he thenceforth remains in obedience, and never strays into disobedience. 'He who subsists in the Real' means someone who has become extinct to his own self; whatever he perceives, he seeks neither to benefit from it, nor to use it to ward off harm; that is, he has no personal desire at all concerning it. Even when he performs an act of worship, he intends thereby only to obey Allah, not to earn any pleasure for himself or to seek any reward for the action.

...

The one who is ignorant of the Sufis should not imagine that extinction means to cease differentiating between the reality of things and their rulings, so that all things become one, and disobedience becomes one with obedience, and prohibitions becomes one with commandments for the person who experiences extinction. This concept is flawed, and alien to Sufism, and is only espoused by those who seek to do away with the Sacred Law and religious responsibility. It is the way of licentiousness. The true meaning of extinction is what we have just described: that one becomes extinct to his own attributes and desires, and subsists with the attributes of the Real; thus everything he does, he does for someone else, not for

⁵⁵ See note 49 above.

himself, since he no longer has any regard for benefits or harms.

Ibrāhīm ibn Shaybān said: 'Extinction and subsistence are centred on the sincere affirmation of Allah's Oneness and servitude to Him; anything other than this is error and heresy.' It is reported that Abū Ya'qūb al-Nahrajūrī⁵⁶ said essentially the same thing.

Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz said: 'The sign of it is that one ceases to have desire for anything in this world or the next, save for Allah; and then Allah inspires him to renounce his desire to see that this has happened, so at last all that remains with him is what is from Allah and for Allah. To cease having desire for this world is to renounce all worldly goals; to cease having desire for the next world is to refrain from seeking reward; and to cease having desire for one's own success in renouncing desire is to become invisible to oneself and see oneself as worthless when compared to Allah's greatness, and to be so engrossed by Allah that one does not see any of this. In this way, there remains only what is for Allah and by Allah, and one becomes extinct to everything besides Allah. Thus he becomes what he was in Allah's knowledge, before he was created.'

...

Tawhīd applies to the Essence, Qualities and Acts. For the Essence, it means to negate that the Qualities are parts; for the Qualities, it means to negate that the Names are resemblances; for the Acts, it means to negate that He has a partner in anything. Al-Junayd

⁵⁶ Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: His biography is given in the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī.

said that the best thing ever said about *tawhīd* was the statement of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ؓ: 'Glory be to Him who has not given any way for His creatures to know him, save by the acknowledgement that they cannot know him.'

Integration [*al-jam'*] means to see nothing but the Real and to be extinct to everything else, renouncing all desires and abounding all interest in conventional matters.

Here end our selections from al-Qusṭallānī's text. See, then, how he explains these words, which are so often misunderstood, in a way that is clear and plain, showing that they are in conformity with the Sacred Law and centred on consigning all things to Allah alone and disregarding all else besides Him: (His are the creation and the command) [7:54]; and on renouncing one's wishes and choices; and on ceasing to resist one's fate; and on renouncing the desires of the soul; and on holding to Allah's commandments and prohibitions for Him alone, not for earning reward or avoiding punishment. This is the state of the one who worships Allah for Allah's sake, as opposed to the one who worships Allah for reward or through fear of punishment, and thus only worships for his own sake; now such a person is also one of Allah's beloved, but he is on the level of the pious, while the other is on the level of those who are nearest to Allah.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates in his *Tafsīr* that Mūsā ibn al-Ṣabāḥ said: 'On the Day of Resurrection, all those who were dutiful to Allah will be brought forth and set before Him in three groups. A man from the first group will be brought forward, and He will say: "My servant, for what did you work?" He will reply, "Lord, You created Paradise and its trees, fruits, rivers, maidens, bliss, and everything

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else therein which You prepared for those who obeyed You. Because of my desire for it, I spent my nights awake, and my days hungry." He will say: "You only worked for Paradise, so enter it; it is by My grace that I have saved you from Hell." He will then enter Paradise along with the rest of his group.

"Then a man from the second group will be brought forward, and Allah will say to him: "My servant, for what did you work?" He will reply: "Lord, You created Hell and its flames, smoke, torment, and everything else therein which You prepared for those who disobey You. Because of my fear of it, I spent my nights awake, and my days hungry." He will say: "My servant, you only worked for fear of Hell, so I have saved you from it; and by My grace I have admitted you into Paradise." He will then enter Paradise along with the rest of his group.

"Then a man from the third group will be brought forward, and Allah will say to him: "My servant, for what did you work?" He will reply: "Lord, I worked because of my love for You and my longing for You and Your glory. Because of my love for You adoration of You, I spent my nights awake, and my days hungry." He will say: "My servant, you only worked because of love for Me and adoration of Me." The Lord will then reveal Himself to him and say: "Here I am; look upon Me. By My grace, I have saved you from Hell and admitted you into My Paradise; and I have sent My angels to you, and I greet you Myself." He will then enter Paradise along with the rest of his group.'

The commentator of *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* says, concerning the mind's inability to perceive the Holy Essence, and how it is better not to think about it:

The servant knows that his mind is unable to perceive all created beings, never mind their Creator. The mind cannot perceive the property by which

magnets attracts iron, or scammony purges yellow bile, and so on, although it is certain that they exist. Now if the servant recognises his own inability [to perceive the Essence], and gives up the search for this goal, this causes him to be ever firmer in lauding the magnificence and majesty of Allah, and saves him from falling into confusion.

Concerning the meaning of gnosis, the commentator of *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* says:

The reason this level [of knowledge] is greater is that its Object is higher, being that it is beyond the knowledge of the Quality. By his words 'it is developed by the science of integration [*ilm al-jam'*], the author means spiritual teachings [*ma'ārif*]. The reason they are connected to the Essence is that whosoever comes to know with certainty that the Almighty Real is One in Act, Quality and Essence, and in the sustenance of all beings by means of the attributes and life with which He endows them, will be led by this to the integrating of his aspiration towards Him and its devotion to Him. This gnosis will lead him into extinction from the remembrance of anything but Him and the vision of anything but Him. When the servant becomes extinct to everything but Allah, his gnosis is perfected by his subsistence with the Real and the infrequency of his moments of heedlessness from Him – nay, the total absence of such moments. This is the science of subsistence; when his gnosis reaches this point of stability, he becomes aware of the essence of integration [*ayn al-jam'*]; that is, gatheredness becomes a constant state for him, since the essence

of integration is not the same as the science of integration.

Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh says in the *Hikam*:

Be connected to the attributes of His lordship, and realise the attributes of your servitude. He has forbidden you from laying claim to those attributes of created beings which are not rightfully yours; do you imagine, then, that He might permit you to lay claim to those attributes which rightfully belong to the Lord of the worlds?

Ibn 'Abbād says, commenting on this:

To be connected to the attributes of His lordship means to view your own existence and its concomitants as being in no way your own possessions or your own works, and to be aware that they have only been lent to you. It is to see your own existence as subsisting entirely though His, and to see your glory as entirely His, and your power as entirely His, and your wealth as entirely His, and so on for all your attributes. Now you can only achieve this if you realise the attributes of your servitude, namely your poverty, lack, humility and incapacity.

What he says next serves as a proof for this; the servant has no hope of doing any more than attaching himself to his Lord's attributes, and for him to lay claim to any of them is one of the most heinous enormities of the heart, and tantamount to the servant seeking to share the dominion of the Lord, and an affront to His jealous pride. There is nothing so monstrous to the gnostics as for the servant to have pretension to a

share of Allah's dominion in his heart by laying claim to any of the attributes of Lordship, whether he says it out loud or only thinks it to himself. To do so is to make a challenge to His dominion, for as He says: 'Pride is My garment and greatness is My cloak; and whoso challenges Me in either one of them, him I will destroy.'⁵⁷ The meaning of 'challenge' here is to make either a spoken claim, or a subtle suggestion or thought.

The meaning 'jealous pride' [*ghayra*] for Him is that He is not pleased to share with another those attributes of Lordship that are His alone, or the religious acts which should be devoted to Him alone. Now if the Real has forbidden you from laying claim to the things which He has given to other creatures and not to you, such as wealth, and if He has called this 'injustice' and 'transgression', then how could He permit you to lay claim any attribute which is His, when He is the Lord of the worlds? He has no partner in any of this, not you or anyone else; and to suggest such a thing would be the worst kind of injustice and transgression.

The concept here advanced by the author is the exact point of view of the Sufis. All that they have ever written, composed, commanded, or prohibited, whether in words, deeds or states, are but means of reaching this noble purpose and this exalted station. Their way is to endeavour to cause the death of their lower selves, and to renounce all of their desires. Now this is not their ultimate purpose, exactly; they seek

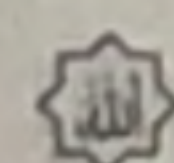
⁵⁷ Narrated by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Hibbān and al-Hākim on the authority of Abū Hurayra, on the authority of the Prophet ﷺ, who narrated it on the authority of Allah Almighty.

it because it leads to the realisation of Allah's sole possession of being and the concomitants of being, which are His alone and which they do not share in any way. This is the alchemy of happiness, which most people sorely need, but which they can only attain by giving up everything; for in doing this, one earns the status of a true servant of Allah, and one can hope for no higher station than this. Because of this, the Sufis hold all hidden desires and caprices – all that leads to the subsistence and affirmation of the lower self, such as love for spiritual stations, subtleties and miracles – they hold them to be grave sins and heinous traits which vitiate the sincerity of servitude and devotion to Allah. They repent to their Lord from all of this, and seek refuge from its evil.

Ibn 'Abbād also says in his commentary on the *Hikam*:

[Aphorism:] 'All the universe is darkness; it was only illuminated by the manifestation of the Real in it. So whoever sees the universe and does not see Him in it, with it, before it or after it, has missed out on the presence of these Lights.'

Now these prepositions [in, with, before, after] do not refer to time or space, because time and space are among the created beings. Knowledge of the details of this manifestation as it really is, and differentiation of these realities as they really are, is extremely difficult to express, and many people have lost their footing attempting to do so.



Among the Sufis who have declared the unbelief of those

who espouse 'indwelling' and 'union' are Ḥāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym al-Aṣbahānī in the introduction to the *Hilya*, as we have seen, and also Qāḍī Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī, the imam of exegesis, jurisprudence, theology, legal fundamentals and Sufism – look at his famous *Tafsīr* and you will find that it is full of Sufism. In his commentary on *sūrat al-Mā'ida*, he states that those who espouse 'indwelling' and 'union with God' are unbelievers. Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ says in *al-Shifā* that there is consensus among the Muslims of the unbelief of the proponents of 'indwelling' and all who claim that the Almighty Creator indwells in any person, as some Ṣūfī aspirants, esoterists, Christians and Qarmatians have said. Note that he said 'some Sufis', meaning the extremists among them and not all of them – far be it for them to say such a thing! Likewise, the theologians only relate this from *some* of them. Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'a said in *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Waqqād*:

It is obligatory to declare Allah's transcendence beyond any indwelling, in opposition to the Christians and some Sufis, whose claims fall far beneath Allah's lofty transcendence.

Al-Qūnawī says in *Sharḥ al-Ta'arruf*, concerning the ḥadīth 'I am his sight...':⁵⁸

The correct interpretation of this ḥadīth is that Allah looks after the one He loves at all times, just as the parents look after their baby at all times, so that he only goes where their feet carry him, and only eats what their hands feed him; it is like his own attributes are extinct, and the attributes of his parents take their

⁵⁸ See note 49 above.

place because of how concerned they are to look after him, and how dearly they hope for Allah's aid in caring for him. Another ḥadīth says: 'O Allah, [give me] care like the care given a baby!'⁵⁹ The words 'I am his sight...' mean 'My care and kindness encompass him so that his actions and perceptions become, as it were, My actions and My perceptions.'

As for those people who espouse 'union with God' and interpret this ḥadīth literally to mean that the Real ﷲ was always the servant's hearing, sight, and hand in reality because He says *kuntu* [which literally means 'I was'], and that what happens is that the servant becomes aware of something that was always the case, this is clearly an erroneous interpretation, because the eternal cannot be an attribute of the contingent.

Al-Fākihī, a Mālikī scholar, Ṣūfī and companion of Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, said about this ḥadīth:

To me it seems like there is elision here, and that what is really being said is 'I am the Protector of his hearing wherewith he hears, so that he only hears what is lawful for him to hear, and the Protector of his sight,' and so on. Another more subtle meaning is possible, which is that the meaning of 'his hearing' is 'what he hears', for a gerund can function as a passive participle, such as when one says 'So-and-so is my hope', meaning 'he is what I hope for.' Thus the

⁵⁹ Shaykh 'Abdullāh says in his note that this ḥadīth was narrated in similar versions by al-Shihāb and al-Haythamī (*Majma' al-Zawā'id*, where it is attributed to Abū Ya'lā), and that there are some problems with its chain of transmission.

meaning would be: 'He hears only My remembrance, and enjoys only the recitation of My book, and is comforted only by intimate discourse with Me, and looks only at the wonders of My dominion, and only stretches out his hand to what pleases Me,' and so on.

Both these interpretations have been narrated from Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar in his commentary on al-Bukhārī; he also mentions that in *al-Zuhd*, al-Bayhaqī relates that Abū 'Uthmān al-Jīzī, an imam of the Path, said that it means 'I rush to fulfil his needs in all that he hears, sees, touches and walks towards.' This interpretation is good and plausible, and it is the opinion of a Ṣūfī imam.

Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar then states that some of the later Sufis interpret this ḥadīth to refer to their concept of the station of spiritual extinction and annihilation, beyond which there is no higher goal. It means that one exists by Allah's sustenance, loving by His love, seeing by His sight, without anything of one's own self remaining. This means that he sees the Real's sustenance of him and so subsists, and sees what He loves and so loves it, and sees His regard for a servant and so regards him with his heart. There is no problem with this interpretation, either.

Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar then states that some errant people interpret the ḥadīth to refer to their belief that if one adheres to inner and outer worship until he is purified from all turbidity, he becomes at one with the Real – yet Allah is far exalted above such a thing. They say that he becomes totally extinct to his own self so that he sees that Allah invokes Himself, declares his own Oneness, and praises Himself, and that all material means becomes pure nothingness in his view even if they still exist for others. Now the proponents of pantheism and 'union with God' can be rebutted by the remainder of the ḥadīth: 'Were he to

place because of how concerned they are to look after him, and how dearly they hope for Allah's aid in caring for him. Another ḥadīth says: 'O Allah, [give me] care like the care given a baby!'⁵⁹ The words 'I am his sight...' mean 'My care and kindness encompass him so that his actions and perceptions become, as it were, My actions and My perceptions.'

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ask something of Me, I would assuredly give it to him; were he to seek My refuge...' This by itself is enough to refute them, since it affirms that there is an asker and an Asked, and a seeker of refuge and a Provider of it.

We have shown, then that the doctrine of 'indwelling' and 'union with God' is false, and that the true Sufis do not hold to it, and that they are innocent of it. Another thing that proves their innocence is that the imams of jurisprudence and theology, and the great scholars of Islam, have always kept the company of the Sufis, attended their circles, praised them highly, and passed on their teachings. Had they seen them do anything that suggested any of this, they would have been the first to reject them and criticise them.

The great Shāfi'ī Imam Abū al-'Abbās ibn Surayj, one of the greatest scholars of the school who has even been called superior to al-Muzanī (according to Shaykh Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī), used to attend the circles of al-Junayd and hear his teachings, and say: 'I testify that these words have a force which is certainly not the force of falsehood.' Ibn al-Subkī relates in *al-Ṭabaqāt* that Ibn Surayj was speaking one day and said something which impressed his companions, whereupon Ibn Surayj said: 'This is by the blessing of the time I spent with Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd.'⁶⁰

Ibn al-Subkī also narrates in *al-Ṭabaqāt* on the authority of Ibn al-Sam'ānī that Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī went on the pilgrimage one year when four hundred Muslim judges and imams from all around the world also attended. They wanted someone to give a speech in Allah's Sanctuary, and all were agreed that Ustādh Abū al-Qāsim should be the

⁶⁰ The original has 'Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, author of *al-Risāla*.' Shaykh 'Abdallāh says in his note that this is a mistake and should be Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, which is what Ibn al-Subkī has in *al-Ṭabaqāt*; the story is actually told by al-Qushayrī in *al-Risāla*.

one to do it, which he did. His son Abū al-Naṣr 'Abd al-Raḥīm would also be visited frequently by scholars; Ibn al-Subkī said that scholars such as Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, the main jurist and speaker of Iraq of his time, would come to visit him, and they were all of the opinion that he was unmatched in the depth of his teachings. Ibn al-Subkī also said that the greatest sign of Abū Naṣr's worth was that Imam al-Ḥaramayn [al-Juwaynī], who was twice his age, quoted him in his book *al-Waṣiyya min al-Nihāya*, which was a tremendous honour. Al-Rāfi'ī and al-Nawawī (in *al-Rawḍa*) also quoted him.

Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī would also be visited by scholars, such as Sulṭān al-'Ulamā' Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām and Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-'Īd. It is well-known that Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd was fiercely critical of the proponents of 'union with God.' Had he seen any trace of it in al-Shādhilī's teachings, he would have been the first to criticise him for it. Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh says in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*:

I heard Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-'Īd say: 'I have never encountered anyone who knows Allah better than Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī.' Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar told me that he was at a camp in al-Manṣūra at which were present Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, Shaykh Majd al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Wahb al-Qushayrī, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Akhmīshī and Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. The *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī was read to them, and they commented on it, but Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan remained silent. When they had all finished speaking, they said, 'Sidi, we would like to hear you speak.' He replied, 'You are the masters and the great ones of the moment and you have spoken.' They insisted on hearing him

speak. He was silent for a moment, and then gave a talk filled with wondrous mysteries and exalted teachings. Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn, who had left his place in the middle of the tent, said: 'Listen to these unique words, which have come fresh from Allah!'

Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, the disciple of Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, would also be visited by scholars. His own disciple Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh says in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*:

The great scholars of the time would defer this science to him; even our great teachers 'Allāma Shams al-Dīn al-Aykī and al-Aṣfahānī would sit before him like pupils, receiving his teachings. One of them asked him if he knew a certain renowned shaykh of the time, and he replied: 'I know him here,' pointing at the earth, 'but I do not know him there', pointing at the sky.

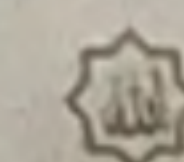
Had al-Mursī's order or teachings contained any kind of pantheism, al-Aṣfahānī would not have gone anywhere near him – al-Aṣfahānī, whose high standing in the fields of theology and legal fundamentals is well known.

The circles of Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh would also be attended by great scholars such as Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, the imam of his time in exegesis, ḥadīth, jurisprudence, theology, legal fundamentals, narration and logic – nay, the *mujtahid*, who for a long age both before and after him was without equal. Al-Subkī mentions in one of his books that he took knowledge from Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn, attended his circles, and passed on some of his teachings. He called him 'spokesman for the Shādhilī path of Sufism.' Subkī's *Mu'jam* states that he read Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn's book

al-Ḥikam under his tutelage and quotes some of it; and we have a transmission of it with al-Subkī in the chain. Now if the Shādhilī order had even a trace of impropriety to it, al-Subkī would not have praised it, nor would his son, nor would the other scholars of his time or those who followed them.

Alien elements have entered some of the Ṣūfī paths, but the path which is firm, heresy-free and in conformity to the Sacred Law is that of al-Junayd and his followers. Ibn al-Subkī says in *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* that the path of Shaykh al-Junayd and his companions is a straight path; now of the latter generations, the path of the Shādhilīs is the path of al-Junayd, for as those who contemplate the transmitted sayings of al-Shādhilī and the books of Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn will see, it is centred on the Qur'an and Sunna and in conformity to the Law, free of the taint of anything out of balance with the Sacred Law. Some of this will be quoted later, in the fourth matter. Sidi 'Alī ibn Wafā (Allah have mercy on him and grace the Muslims with his *baraka*) said:

Hold fast to love for the Shādhilīs,
And you will attain what you hope for.
Do not remove your eyes from them,
For they are the suns of guidance.⁶¹



OBJECTION: Many of those who are known for their uprightness and righteousness made statements which seem to contain these false doctrines such as Ibn al-Fārid, Ibn 'Arabī and Sidi Muḥammad Wafā and his father Sidi 'Alī.

⁶¹ Shaykh 'Abdallāh says in his notes that these lines are attributed in *al-Qāmūs* to Ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh.

ANSWER: One should make excuses and offer rational interpretations for this, because to think the best of every individual Muslim is obligatory, and all the more so for those considered by many to be saints; for the praise of the people in this regard is a proof, as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said.⁶² 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb g said: 'Do not think badly of anything your brother says, if you can find a good way of interpreting it.'⁶³

Now Ibn al-Fāriḍ lived at the time of Shaykh Zakī al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Mundhirī, who met him and heard his poetry, and then mentioned him in his *Mu'jam* without saying that his doctrine was incorrect. He was also praised by Shaykh 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Yāfi'ī, an imam of the Shāfi'is and a great saint, in, his book *Kifāyat al-Mu'taqid wa Nikāyat al-Muntaqid*. Ibn 'Arabī was praised by al-Yāfi'ī in the same book, and by Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*; now these two men are honourable witnesses whose testimony on such matters is accepted, for they are both jurists and Sufis. Now I say this in order to avoid wrongfully criticising anyone, and to guard my own tongue; I am not recommending the books attributed to him, or giving everyone permission to read them – far be it for me to decide who has permission to read them!

Another scholar who has mentioned Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Ibn 'Arabī in his writings is Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, a Shāfi'ī

62 Shaykh 'Abdallāh says in his notes that this is a reference to the ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Anas: 'Whomsoever you speak well of, Paradise is his; and whomsoever you speak ill of, Hell is his. You are Allah's witnesses on earth.' Another ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī on the authority of 'Umar g states: 'If four people can attest to the good of a Muslim, he will enter Paradise.' The Shaykh adds that there are many similar ḥadīths.

63 Shaykh 'Abdallāh says in his notes that this was narrated by al-Maḥāmili, Abū al-Qāsim al-Aṣbahānī and al-Khaṭīb.

imam and commentator on *al-Hāwī*, a jurist, expert of legal fundamentals, Ṣūfi, theologian and rightly-guided scholar.

That is the short answer, which can be expounded on with several points. As for the excuses which can be made, there are two things to consider: firstly, it is possible that these statements could have been uttered in moments of spiritual intoxication, as we saw in the words of Ibn al-Subkī above. Since Allah has removed religious responsibility from those who are out of their minds, they cannot be condemned or criticised for this; the condemnation is rightly aimed at those who receive these words at face value and believe in their literal import, who should be criticised in the strongest possible terms. This is why Ibn Surayj, when asked about al-Ḥallāj, replied: 'I do not know the state of this man, so I will say nothing about him.' It seems that he was not sure whether al-Ḥallāj said those things in a state of spiritual intoxication.

Secondly, these words may not have even been spoken by the people concerned, and may have been falsely attributed to them or added to their works, either by a jealous enemy seeking to besmirch their reputations, as has happened often to the scholars – they say that al-Jīlī's *Sharḥ al-Tanbīh* is full of incredible statements which are alien to his school and are not his words at all, but were added by a jealous rival to spoil the book – or else by a wicked unbeliever seeking to support his own beliefs by adding them to the work of a renowned author trusted by the people. A judge I know and trust told me that when the great and noble scholar Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ḥaḍramī lay dying in Noble Mecca, someone asked him about a line of poetry by Ibn al-Fāriḍ in which he says:

When I ask Your leave to See you truly,
Allow me, and do not answer 'you shall not see.'

He replied, 'These are not the words of Ibn al-Fāriḍ; for he was a gnostic, and gnostics do not say such things.'

As for the rational interpretations which may be offered, there are several. The first is that the things perceived through spiritual ecstasy are extremely difficult to describe exactly. Imagine trying to describe sexual pleasure to someone who has never experienced it, with words that will make them understand it exactly as it is. One could never do such a thing. All minds are agreed that axioms and things which are self-evident cannot be defined. Imam Fakhr al-Dīn affirms that knowledge cannot be defined, because it is self-evident; Imam al-Haramayn [al-Juwaynī] says that it is not self-evident, but nonetheless hard to define. Knowledge of something enters the heart of the gnostic and he wants to express it, but since it is impossible to express properly, his words are ambiguous. Al-Ghazālī said that those who know what spiritual extinction is cannot find an expression to describe it successfully so that others can understand it. Ibn 'Abbād says that it is very difficult to describe the levels of witnessing [*marātib al-shuhūd*] as they truly are, and that many people have slipped up because of this.

The *Ta'arruf* says:

The visions of the heart and the innermost being cannot be expressed as they truly are, but can only be known by the experience and ecstasy of moving through their stages; only those who experience them can know them.

Al-Qūnawī adds in his commentary:

This is comparable to how it is with sadness or anxiety, and those who experience them. A man might experience things in his soul which he finds

difficult to describe in words, falling short of a proper definition of them.

Secondly, it may be the case that words are used in different senses than the ones commonly used by the scholars, either by way of humility or by way of special technical usage. Take the word *ittiḥād* [literally 'union'], for example: it can be used as a synonym for 'indwelling', as is the case in the writings of al-Ghazālī and al-Bayḍāwī, in which case it amounts to unbelief; or it can be used to mean *tawḥīd* and the consignment of all things to Allah. This has been pointed out by some rightly guided scholars, including 'Allāma Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī. In this regard, Sidi 'Alī Wafā says:

They think I espouse indwelling and pantheism,
Yet my heart contains nothing but *tawḥīd*.

Thus he repudiated *ittiḥād* with the meaning of 'indwelling.' Yet in another line, he said:

Your knowledge that all things are Mine
Is what is meant by *ittiḥād*.

So he makes it clear that when the Sufis speak of *ittiḥād*, they mean consignment of all things to Allah, and surrender to His will and His fate without objecting to any of it, and disregard for all created beings, so that one does not consider them to possess the power to give or withhold.

Abū Yāqūb said: 'Actions are sincere when no angels knows of them to record them, and no enemy knows of them to spoil them, and the soul does not know of them to take satisfaction in them.' *Al-Ta'arruf* says that this means for the servant to cut himself off from everything but Allah, and

to ascribe his own actions to Him. Al-Qūnawī comments on this:

That is when the servant is completely cut off from all but Allah, and extinct to his own actions, his action becomes like inaction, as though he does nothing at all. The angel does not record it, nor does the enemy spoil it, nor does the soul take satisfaction in it. This is a metaphor, then, which treats something existent as though it were non-existent, or vice versa.

Most Sūfī expressions can be understood metaphorically in this way; those who take them literally will misunderstand them, and end up thinking badly of those who say them.

Thirdly, when they say something about themselves that should only be said of Allah, it may be that they are saying this by way of quoting Allah; for when someone speaks, he may either be speaking for himself, or quoting someone else, even if he does not explicitly state this. An example of this is the ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه wherein the Prophet ﷺ said: 'When I seize My believing servant's dearly beloved of the people of this world, and he bears it expecting compensation, his reward is nothing but Paradise.' Now when the Prophet ﷺ said this, he was clearly quoting his Lord, though he did not explicitly say so. Similarly, Allah says *«None of us is there, but has a known station»* [37:164], which are the words of the angels; and He said *«We come not down, save at the commandment of thy Lord»* [19:64], which are the words of Gabriel. This is a subtle and delicate form of expression. Another example of it is found in the words of Sidi 'Alī Wafā (may Allah have mercy on him and on all the Muslims):

You must obey Me in all things,

And your flaw is that you resent My will.

He clearly said this by way of speaking for Reality. Likewise, Ibn al-Fāriḍ said:

Though the Magians worshipped the fire
Which burned for a thousand years,
In reality they only worshipped Me,
Though they did not intend to.

Again, he was speaking for Reality, and alluding to the fact that the worship and prostration which the unbelievers offered to fire and idols was in reality directed to Allah, because such things are too low to be worshipped and prostrated to; the prostration belongs to Allah, despite the intentions of the unbeliever who offers it to something other than Allah. This is the meaning of His words *«To Allah prostrate all who dwell in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly»* [13:15]. Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates in his *Tafsīr* that Qutāda said of this verse: 'The believer is he who prostrates willingly, and the unbeliever is he who prostrates unwillingly.' Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim all narrate with a rigorously authentic chain of transmission that Ibn 'Abbās said of this verse: 'The worship of all of them belongs to Me, willingly or unwillingly.'

As for thinking the best and refraining from criticism, it is encouraged by many verses of the Qur'an, hadiths, traditions and statements of scholars. For a person to err by refraining from criticism is better than for him to err in criticising. The Sacred Law's objective can be fulfilled by warning against these words without speaking about the individuals said to have uttered them. A scholar said, 'Were a man to go his whole life without cursing Satan, Allah would not ask him about this.' Al-Subkī said in his *Fatāwā*:

to ascribe his own actions to Him. Al-Qūnawī comments on this:

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In reality they only worshipped Me,
Though they did not intend to.

Again, he was speaking for Reality, and alluding to the fact that the worship and prostration which the unbelievers offered to fire and idols was in reality directed to Allah, because such things are too low to be worshipped and prostrated to; the prostration belongs to Allah, despite the intentions of the unbeliever who offers it to something other than Allah. This is the meaning of His words *«To Allah prostrate all who dwell in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly»* [13:15]. Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates in his *Tafsīr* that Qutāda said of this verse: 'The believer is he who prostrates willingly, and the unbeliever is he who prostrates unwillingly.' Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim all narrate with a rigorously authentic chain of transmission that Ibn 'Abbās said of this verse: 'The worship of all of them belongs to Me, willingly or unwillingly.'

As for thinking the best and refraining from criticism, it is encouraged by many verses of the Qur'an, hadiths, traditions and statements of scholars. For a person to err by refraining from criticism is better than for him to err in criticising. The Sacred Law's objective can be fulfilled by warning against these words without speaking about the individuals said to have uttered them. A scholar said, 'Were a man to go his whole life without cursing Satan, Allah would not ask him about this.' Al-Subkī said in his *Fatāwā*:

Know that we are always at pains to avoid *takfir* [declaring someone an unbeliever], because it requires one to examine the person in question, which is difficult because one cannot see what is in his heart and be certain about it with no trace of ambiguity. It is difficult enough for a person to thoroughly examine his own beliefs, never mind anyone else's. Of course, the person is hardly likely to confess his unbelief, and any evidence provided by another is difficult to accept for the reasons we have just given.

Shaykh Walī al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī was asked about Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and answered:

I cannot pass judgement on Ibn ʿArabī himself because I cannot be certain that this book is really his, or that he held to it until his death.

As for Ibn al-Fāriḍ, his poetry clearly seems to speak of 'union', but the scholars of his time mentioned him in their biographical encyclopaedias, and never mentioned anything about that. Ḥāfiẓ Zakī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm al-Mundhirī said in his *Muʿjam*: '[Ibn al-Fāriḍ is:] Umar ibn ʿAlī ibn Murshid al-Shāfiʿī al-Adīb. He took from al-Qāsim ibn Abī al-Qāsim ibn ʿAsākir and related hadiths from him. I have heard some of his poetry.' Ḥāfiẓ Rashīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār said in his *Muʿjam*: 'He was a notable and erudite shaykh, a fine poet and deep thinker. He followed the Ṣūfī way and the Shāfiʿī school. He lived in Mecca for a time, and kept the company of several shaykhs.' Ḥāfiẓ Abū Bakr ibn Masadī said in his *Muʿjam*: 'He was erudite, mild-mannered, amiable, eloquent, subtle, amenable, and noble-spirited. He was a deep-thinker and a Ṣūfī,

beautiful both in appearance and in character. Every noble trait was combined in him.'

As for the impermissibility of reading these books, we say that if there is no possible interpretation for them, then it is clear that they may not be read. If there is a possible and reasonable interpretation, then there are two things to be said. Firstly, regarding the reader, we say to him: What is your intention in reading these books? Is it merely to understand the science? If so, then have you reached proficiency in the important sciences of the Law, such as jurisprudence (which is all about responsibilities), ḥadīth (which imparts noble etiquettes), exegesis (which is a refined science), or the necessary tools to gain an understanding of all this? No, by Allah, you have not reached proficiency in any of this. This is a contravention of etiquette and reason, since it amounts to neglecting vital knowledge in favour of less important knowledge.

If your intention is to become an enlightened Ṣūfī by reading these books, then I swear by Him who split the seed and created the soul, if you read as many of these books as there are grains of sand, and have the lifetime of Noah to do it, you will not become a Ṣūfī any more than a rope can pass through the eye of a needle. Sufism means to busy oneself with obedience and renounce all disobedience; to wean the soul of its habits; to lose all desire for what other people have, even that which is lawful, never mind that which is doubtful; to cease seeking the aid of created things, and rely only on Allah at all times; and to have no regard for the company of kings and princes, never mind any other people. Al-Junayd said: 'We did not take Sufism from words, but from hunger, leaving this world, and breaking habits.' The Sufis have criticised those who obsess over minute details of jurisprudence with little practical significance,

such as obscure issues relating to menstruation, leasing, sharecropping and the like, seeing that firm adherence to worship and the purification of the soul is more important. How, then, could they allow the aspirant to read these books, which have nothing to do with the spiritual path or the training of the disciple, but are only allusions based on ecstasies which their authors experienced when they finished the path and then wrote about? The aspirant has no need for any of this, nor can they give him any help on his spiritual journey. At one point in the *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazālī speaks of a certain mystery, and then says:

Perhaps it would have been better not to mention this, since the one who has travelled upon this path does not need to hear about it from anyone else, and the one who has not yet reached it will not benefit anything from hearing it; indeed, he might be harmed by it, since it will dazzle him with incomprehension.

No imam of the Path has ever been known to form study circles to teach these kinds of books and go through them as is done with all the other sciences. Rather, what they do is direct the disciple to make solitary vigils, perform acts of obedience and invocation, struggle against his lower self, and so on, as is well-known, until Allah gives him a spiritual opening. Those of them who are successful, and have an aptitude for it, are then given permission to hold circles of learning, where they give the people beautiful counsel and goodly wisdom, and guide them to the impurities in their inner beings according to the insight Allah gives them. Thus they uphold the truth with sincerity and devotion, and by means of their counsels, Allah rectifies the people's characters, cures their spiritual ailments, enlightens their hearts and guides their insights, without them even being aware of it.

This is what the Sufis do, and it is for this reason that Ibn Surayj would attend the circles of al-Junayd, and why Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī would attend the circles of Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī.

Secondly, regarding the one who teaches these books, we say to him: Shaykh, may Allah benefit you and us, you should educate the disciples according to the guidelines laid out by the people of this Path, and do not allow them to read these books, which can cause them to fall into error. We say this to him even if he is one of those enlightened people who knows how to interpret these writings in the best way; for if the disciples become preoccupied with this, it will distract them from what they should be doing. This is true even if they are properly prepared to receive these teachings and understand them, and have strong minds which countenance no heresy and entertain no doubts. It is all the more true if they are not properly prepared, even if it be only that they are not sufficiently grounded in the principles of theology, and what is possible for Allah and what is impossible for Him, and the doctrines of prophethood, and the doctrine of the world's contingency, and other similarly vital matters. May Allah save us from every trial and protect us from error; He is Generous and Kind.

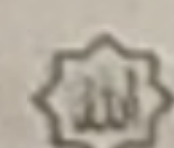
Lord, sent not our hearts astray after You have guided us, and give us mercy from You; you are the Giver.

Remove the love of this world from our hearts, for it is the root of all sin; and remove the love of leadership from our minds, for the soul enjoins to evil in its love for high status.

Lord, grant us protection in You, adherence to Your Book, and allegiance to Your Prophet, Master of the messengers, Imam of the righteous, and Leader of the elite. I seek no alternative to his Sunna, or any way besides it, and I seek not to avoid its noble

etiquettes, neither in word nor deed, neither by night nor day, neither by evening nor morning, neither when awake nor asleep, neither in life nor death. Who could ever reach his Master save by his door? Whose link to Him could ever firm, save for the noblest of all His beloved?

May Allah bless him and give him peace, and the same for his noble Family and Companions.

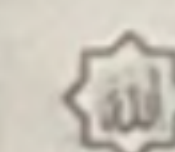


ADDENDUM: Earlier it was said that one should 'adorn oneself with the divine Qualities.' Now this should not be taken to mean that a created being can literally be endowed with Allah's Qualities, for this is impossible. Rather, this means the name (and not the reality) of the Creator's Quality in a contingent equivalent which suits the human being, as was made clear in what was quoted from al-Qusṭallānī. 'Merciful', for example, is something said of Allah and also of human beings, but in the case of the human being it means softness of heart, which is impossible for Allah; for Allah, 'mercy' means the will to be good, or to do good, depending on whether it is a quality of Essence or a quality of Act. Al-Ghāzālī says in the *Iḥyā'*:

Any name which can be attributed both to Allah and to other than Allah does not have anything like the same meaning in the two attributions. Even the name 'the Being', which of all names is the one most widely shared, does not apply equally to the Creator and the created in any sense. This is because the being of everything but God is derived from His Being, and derived being cannot be equal to the Source of all being. The only thing they share is the name.

The tree and the horse both share the attribute of corporeality, since they are both corporeal without either one of them possessing this attribute originally and intrinsically; neither one of them derives its corporeality from the other. That is not how 'being' is with respect to Allah and His creatures. Now this disparity applies all the more so to the other qualities, such as knowledge, will, power and so on; in each of them, the Creator does not resemble the creature.⁶⁴

Here ends what we have to say about the first matter, namely the Sufis' repudiation of the doctrines of indwelling and 'union with God'. If we have discussed it at great length, then it is our right to do so, since it is such a grave stumbling-point.



The second matter to be discussed is that of licentiousness or the 'suspending of the Law.' Now this is also something that no well-respected Ṣūfī has ever espoused; it has only ever been promoted by certain extremists, who claim that when one reaches the station of extinction, religious responsibility no longer applies to him and all forbidden things are made lawful for him. The words of al-Qusṭallānī and Abū Nu'aym condemning this as heresy have already been quoted above. Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ stated that there is scholarly consensus on the unbelief of any would-be Ṣūfī or promoter of licentiousness who claims that the commandments of prohibitions of Allah no longer apply. Al-Qūnawī says in *Sharḥ al-Ta'arruf*:

⁶⁴ This passage has been translated directly from the *Iḥyā'* because of problems in the printed text of Imam al-Suyūṭī's quotation.

It is said that certain errant people say that when the servant reaches Allah, religious responsibility no longer applies to him. They say that this is because the whole purpose of legal responsibilities is to draw one closer to Allah, and so once one has reached Him, the means are no longer required. This is pure unbelief and denial of Allah's religion, for all believers know that the closest people to Allah are His prophets and messengers, and all are agreed that religious responsibility never ceased to apply to them – so how could it do so for anyone below their station?

Al-Ghazālī says that if any well-respected Ṣūfī ever says anything which seems to imply this, it should be interpreted to mean that the burdensomeness of religious responsibility cease to apply to him, not the responsibility itself, meaning that he enjoys acts of worship and feels no burden in prayer. This is what is meant by the Prophet's ﷺ words 'Give us peace with [the call to prayer], O Bilāl!',⁶⁵ and the like.

The proof that the Path of al-Junayd and al-Shādhilī is innocent of all this is that it is related that in the time before al-Junayd's death, he could only pray in a seated position, and would draw up his legs to indicate the prostration. He continued to do this until he lost control of his legs, whereupon he would pray with them stretched out; and when they told him to lie down to pray, he said, 'My time grows ever shorter.' He continued in this way until he died. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī related on the authority of his grandfather that Abū al-'Abbās ibn 'Aṭā' went to see al-Junayd when he was in his last moments of life. He greeted him, but al-Junayd did not return the greeting at first, but

⁶⁵ Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and al-Ṭabarānī.

only after a while, after which he said, 'Forgive me, I was reciting my *wird*.' He then turned to face the *qibla*, said 'Allah is Greater', and died. He also said that he heard on the authority of 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Bakr that Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz said that al-Junayd was asked about a person who has nothing left of this world but a date pit. He replied, 'The *mukātab*⁶⁶ remains a slave as long as any part of his emancipation price has yet to be paid.'⁶⁷

In one of his supplications, Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī says: 'Give us goodly provision which constitutes no veil in this life, and brings no punishment in the next, in accordance with *tawḥīd* and the Law.' Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn says in the *Tanwīr*:

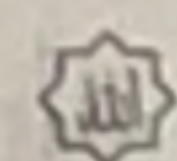
By 'in accordance with *tawḥīd*', he means: 'Such that I see You in all that You provide unto me and all that you feed me, in that I do not see it as coming from anyone but You, or ascribe it to any of Your creatures.' Thus it is with the Folk of Allah: they only eat at Allah's table, no matter who feeds them, because they know that no one possesses anything but Allah. This causes the vision of created things to leave their hearts; their love and devotion is offered solely to Allah, and no one else, because they see how He feeds them and gives them his bounty.

He then says 'and the Law' because anyone who realises pure *tawḥīd* and sees that all things belong to Allah and no one besides Him, yet does not remain within the bounds of the Sacred Law, has dived into the sea of heresy, and his spiritual state has turned

⁶⁶ The *mukātab* is a slave whose owner has agreed to free him for a fee.

⁶⁷ Al-Junayd was quoting a ḥadīth narrated by Mālik, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd and others.

into a curse. The right way is to draw support from the Reality, and restrict oneself to the Law; to seek the Reality without the Law is a vain pursuit.



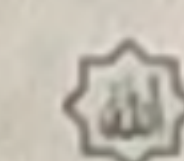
The third matter to be discussed is that of pantheism. As we quoted above, al-Qusṭallānī made it clear that this doctrine has been espoused by certain Sufis who occupied themselves with the teachings of the ancients and incorporated them into their Sufism, along with certain beliefs of the philosophers such as the eternality of the world and of spirits, and the existence of 'prime matter.' All of this is foreign to the way of Islam, and we seek Allah's refuge from it. From this comes the doctrine of pantheism [*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*, literally 'absolute unity']. One of those who based his Sufism on the school of the philosophers was Ibn Sīnā, who was blind in his heart and his insight.

May Allah reward our imams, who forbade the study of logic and philosophy, lest anyone be drawn into these false doctrines. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ said about this: 'That which leads to evil is itself evil. I wonder at those who wish to reach the level of the righteous, yet set aside the Sunna of the Master of the prophets and the righteous, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and instead follow the way of errant unbelievers, and base their principles on theirs, in order to arrive at that level! Indeed, they have arrived – to a crumbling precipice.'

I have been told that 'Allāma al-Karīmī said that someone once saw the Prophet ﷺ in a dream, and asked him about al-Ghazālī, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī and Ibn Sīnā. He praised al-Ghazālī greatly, and said that al-Fakhr had incurred rebuke; and of Ibn Sīnā, he said: 'He wanted to reach Allah without my intermediation, and so was cut off.'

Now if you study the books of the noteworthy Sufis, such

as al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, the sayings of al-Shādhilī and the books of Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn [ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh], you will not find a single word of this doctrine therein. If they happen to use the word *waḥda* ['unity'], what they mean is *tawḥīd* and Allah's sole possession of being and the requisites of being, and not what those others mean.



The fourth matter to be discussed is that of unquestioning reliance on every thought that enters the head, whether it accords with the Law or not, and even if the person who has this thought has no knowledge of legal matters at all, whether fundamentals or branches, and in addition has not trained his soul in the way prescribed by those who speak about divine inspiration; thus he has attained neither the one form of knowledge nor the other. Despite this, he still decides to put stock in every misgiving and thought which comes to him, affirming them, recording them and implementing them. He imagines that this is what spiritual realisation is, and gives them precedence over religious laws and prophetic hadiths, and claims that the jurists are cut off from this experiential knowledge of his. Upon my word, has Gabriel come to him from Allah and told him that his thoughts are infallible, and that all the jurists are veiled from recognising the truth of this?

The fact is that this violates the consensus of every group, including the Sufis, who have plainly stated that no one's thoughts are infallible, and that they must be judged according to the Qur'an and Sunna, which must come first. Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī said: 'Sometimes a Ṣūfī perception comes to my heart and stays there for days, yet I only accept it with the assent of two just witnesses: the Qur'an, and the Sunna.' Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād said: 'If someone does

not constantly weigh his deeds and states according to the Qur'an and Sunna, and does not critically appraise his every thought, then he is not one of the True Men [*rijāl*].' Al-Junayd said: 'The Path is barred to all save those who follow the tracks of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.' He also said: 'One who does not memorise the Qur'an and write the Hadith should not be followed in this matter, because this science of ours is governed by the Qur'an and Sunna.' He also said: 'This way of ours is built on the teachings of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.' Al-Ghazālī says in the *Iḥyā'*, in the section on spiritual seclusion [*uzla*]:

It is a sin to enter into seclusion before one has learned what his religious obligations are. Once he has learned them, and finds he has more aptitude for increased worship than increased study, he may enter seclusion. If he has the aptitude to master the legal and rational sciences, then to enter seclusion before furthering his study is a huge mistake. For this reason, al-Nakh'ī and others have said: 'Study, then enter seclusion.' The one who enters isolation before studying will usually end up wasting his time with sleep and useless daydreaming; at best, he will spend his time reciting those litanies he can manage, without being able to free himself from all kinds of delusions which hinder his progress and nullify his works without his being aware of it. His belief in Allah and His Qualities retains delusions and errors which spoil it, so that most of the time he is a source of mirth for Satan, and not the worshipper he imagines himself to be. Knowledge is the foundation of this religion, and there is no goodness in the isolation of laymen and ignorant people.

In the section on divine inspiration [*ilhām*] he says:

Some Sufis say that the way to attain divine inspirations is first of all to separate oneself entirely from this world, empty one's heart of it, and renounce one's concern for family, wealth, children, fealty and pride, so that his heart comes to hold them all equally unimportant. One then secludes himself in a lodge, reduces his worship to only the obligatory and highly recommended prayers, and sits with an empty mind and a gathered heart, not dispersing his mind by reciting the Qur'an or pondering its exegesis, or writing hadiths, or anything else, but rather striving to keep everything but the remembrance of Allah from his mind. He stays in seclusion saying 'Allah, Allah, Allah' over and over with presence of heart, until he reaches a point where he ceases to move his tongue and sees, as it were, the word moving across his heart. He continues in this way until its trace disappears from the tongue and is etched on the heart, and the invocation continues in this way until the image of the word and its letters disappears from the heart, too, and only the meaning of the word remains present in the heart, and stays there without leaving. If he remains in this state, he attains the ability to keep misgivings away, but not to attain mercies from Allah; although his action does expose him to the breezes of mercy, should they blow. Then all that remains is to await any mercies that Allah should choose to send his way. If his intention is true, his aspiration pure and his diligence constant, and if he is not attracted by his passions or disturbed by thoughts of worldly connections, then glimmers of truth will flash in his heart. In the beginning they will be fleeting like lightning; then they will return, although the wait for them may be long. When they

return, they might be constant, or change; and if they are constant, this may last a long time, or it may not. It may take many successive forms, or be restricted to one kind. The stations of the Friends of Allah are beyond count, as are their differing levels.

Now this method boils down to a complete purification and cleansing on your part, and then a state of preparedness or simply waiting. As for the people of insight and reflection, they do not deny that this method exists and that it is possible to follow, and that it is sometimes successful, albeit rarely; but they consider it extremely difficult, and hold that its fruits are slow in coming, and its conditions rarely fulfilled. They say that erasing all one's worldly attachments in this way is virtually impossible, and that even if one is successful in doing so, it is rarely sustained once the misgivings and thoughts begin to assail the heart. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'The believer's heart is more volatile than a boiling pot.'⁶⁸ He ﷺ also said: 'The believer's heart rests between the fingers of the Compassionate.'⁶⁹ While this struggle is going on, one could be unbalanced, confused and physically ill; and if the taming and refining of the soul is not preceded by the attaining of knowledge, the heart can be beset by corrupt fancies which the soul accepts gladly for a long time before they finally leave, so that one's entire life is spent trying unsuccessfully to get rid of them. Many a Ṣūfī has followed this Path and then spent twenty years trapped in a single fancy; had

68 Narrated by Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim, who declared it rigorously authentic, on the authority of al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad.

69 Narrated with a slightly different wording by Aḥmad and Muslim on the authority of Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما.

he only attained knowledge before starting, he would have recognised and dismissed this fancy as soon as it came to him. To follow the method of study is safer and more likely to lead one to the goal.

[Proponents of the latter method] say that this [former] method is like a person neglecting to study jurisprudence, claiming that the Prophet ﷺ did not study it, but was given knowledge of it by revelation and inspiration after repeated invocation and devotion; perhaps this person might even claim that the Prophet ﷺ attained all this because of his spiritual struggle. Now anyone who believes this has wronged himself and wasted his life; he is like someone who neglects to work and earning a living in the hope that he will discover some treasure. Indeed this is possible, but highly unlikely; and the same is true of this belief. They say that one must first attain what the scholars have attained; and after that, he may well discover more through spiritual struggle.

Al-Quṭb al-Qusṭallānī said:

One aspect of the knowledge of the Sufis is that certain sensations come to them because of their prior righteous deeds and the states which these deeds produced; for righteous deeds produce spiritual states. This begins with the required sciences of the Sacred Law such as jurisprudence and doctrine according to the Qur'an, Sunna and righteous early Muslims, without delving into minute details and abstruse issues. Once one has attained sufficient knowledge of this, he applies what he has learned and works to serve Allah to the best of his abilities. The first thing he must do is

seek out the flaws and blights of the soul and how they get into it, so that he can refine its attributes and thereby close all the doors to the trials of this world and the plots of Satan, working and striving against them. This is the noble science of wisdom [*ḥikma*], of which Allah says: «Whoso is given wisdom is given a great good» [2:269]. Once the soul is trained in these things and these duties, and its character and nature softens and loses its harshness and boorishness, and is cleansed outwardly and purified inwardly, the spiritual wayfarer is then able to monitor his thoughts and purify his inner impulses. This is what is known as the science of gnosis [*ma'rifa*], which can be communicated by expression [*ibāra*]. After this comes knowledge of thoughts, unveilings and witnessing, which is called the science of allusion [*ishāra*]. This is the special science of the Sufis, coming after their participation in the aforementioned well-known sciences. It is called 'allusion' because it cannot be communicated by expression, being a science of taste, experience and continuous sensation, none of which can be summed up in words. All the tongue can express is beneficial knowledge and teachings. It is narrated in a *mursal*⁷⁰ report on the authority of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'There is a certain knowledge like a hidden secret, known only to the people of gnosis; and when they speak it, no one objects to it but those who are ignorant of Allah.'

This ḥadīth was also narrated with a complete chain via

⁷⁰ See note 3 above.

'Aṭā' on the authority of Abū Hurayra.⁷¹ Al-Qusṭallānī says elsewhere:

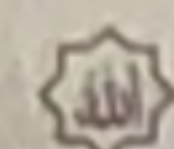
The aspirant is by no means free of need for knowledge. If he has no time to study, then he must direct his religious questions to those who are qualified to answer them, and place no authority in the thoughts that come to him in that regard; for to do so would be to stray from the way of righteousness.

Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī ʔ said:

Even if you are one of the spiritual elite, and in your solitude a thought comes to you which seems as far as you can surmise to be knowledge by way of inspiration and unveiling, do not accept it, but return to the plain truth of the Qur'an and Sunna. Know that if what came to you was really the truth, yet you rejected it in deference to the Book of the Real and the Sunna of His Messenger ʔ, you would be entirely blameless in doing so, because in effect you would be saying, 'Allah has vouched for the infallibility in the Qur'an and Sunna, but has not vouched for the infallibility of unveilings, inspiration and witnessing.' Even if you were to accept it by way of inspiration, you could not do so without first judging it by the standard of the Qur'an and Sunna; so if you cannot accept it without their assent, then why on earth would you be happy to accept any doubtful misgiving? Adhere to this principle, so that you may act with insight from your Lord; and

⁷¹ Narrated by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (*al-Arba'īn*), al-Daylamī (*Musnad al-Firdaws*) and al-Ṭabsī (*al-Targhīb*).

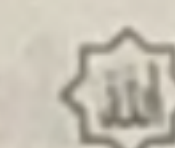
pass it on, for it is clear and without ambiguity, may praise be to Allah.



ADDENDUM: A fellow who liked to read Ṣūfī books observed, in a certain book, a passage which seemed to say that Pharaoh died a believer. He understood this literally, and began to say, 'This is only a case of thinking the best of a man.' I said to him, 'You think the best of a man whose unbelief is affirmed by the Qur'an?' He said, 'The Qur'an also contains a passage that suggests he did believe, namely Allah's words: ﴿He said: 'I believe...﴾ [10:90]. I told him that this was merely a quotation of his words, not an attestation to his faith, and that to declare one's faith at such a moment has no benefit, as Allah says: ﴿Their belief could not avail them aught once they saw Our wrath﴾ [40:85]. He said, 'There is nothing in the Qur'an that clearly states that Pharaoh is in Hell.' I reminded him of Allah's words ﴿Admit the folk of Pharaoh into the most terrible chastisement﴾ [40:46]. He said, 'This speaks of his folk, but not of him personally.' I reminded him that he had forgotten Allah's words ﴿He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, and lead them down to the Fire﴾ [11:98]. He replied, 'He will lead them into it and then come back out and leave them there.' At this, I said, 'Allah is Greater!' This is the blight of those who leave what concerns them and occupy themselves with what concerns them not. Were these people to read the exegesis of the Mighty Book and the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, so that their hearts were illuminated with religious knowledge and exalted etiquette, they would recognise the unbelief of Pharaoh with certainty, and affirm the unbelief of anyone who says he was a believer and thereby denies the clear texts of the Qur'an and Sunna.

Now the person who wrote this thing did not intend by it what they have inferred. What he was doing was using the story of Pharaoh as a symbol for the soul. Pharaoh did not repent of his delusion and pride despite all the signs and counsels he was given; only when he was about to drown did he speak the confession of faith and humble himself. Likewise, if the soul is not turned back to truth by counsels and exhortations, the only way to treat it is to drown it in the ocean of struggle, to make it have faith; and all success is from Allah.

This shows you that those who are susceptible to doubt should not be reading these books; they should be studying the Sunna and jurisprudence, and then applying what they have learned and struggling against the soul and refining it; and all aid is from Allah.



One Ṣūfī is criticised for having said that the level of sainthood [*wilāya*] is greater than the level of prophethood [*nubuwwa*], which is clear unbelief. Again, he did not intend this literally, and it can be interpreted in the way we will explain shortly; but we must first say that even after it has been interpreted, this opinion is still somewhat unconventional and problematic, held only by a few and rejected by the rest. The way to interpret it is, as Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Qūnawī says in *Sharḥ al-Ta'arruf*:

Sainthood and prophethood have a general-specific relationship:⁷² every prophet is a saint, but not every

⁷² The general-specific relationship (*'umūm wa khusūs muṭlaq*) in Arabic logic describes two categories in which one contains the other, like 'animal' and 'lion': the lion is an animal, but not all animals are lions.

saint is a prophet, and therefore there is no such thing as a prophet who is not also a saint. Likewise, there is a general-specific relationship between the levels of prophet and messenger: there is no such thing as a messenger who is not also a prophet. So the one who holds this position says that the saintly side of a prophet is greater than his prophetic side;⁷³ this is because sainthood is turned towards Allah, whilst prophethood is turned towards mankind. Thus there is no need to interpret this statement in a dangerous way, because it could only mean that a saint is greater than a prophet if there were such thing as a prophet who is not a saint; yet as we have seen, such a person does not exist. A prophet is a saint with the added status of prophet, which means his rank is higher and his worth greater; there is no comparison between his station and that of anyone else.

This is the same logic as Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām employed when he said that the station of prophethood is greater than that of messenger, as Ibn Jamā'a related in *Sharḥ Jam' al-Jawāmi'*. The logic of this is that prophethood is a station of individual action and therefore directly connected to Allah, whilst the station of messenger is a station of preaching and therefore directly connected to mankind. Again, this does not mean that a prophet is better than a messenger, because there is no such thing as a messenger who is not also a prophet. A messenger is a prophet with the added status of messenger, which makes him greater than

73 Literally 'a prophet inasmuch as he is a saint is greater than himself inasmuch as he is a prophet.'

a prophet because the two stations are combined in him. Understand this.

Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī explained Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī's words 'I dived into a sea upon whose shore the prophets stand' by saying that Abū Yazīd was complaining of his own weakness and inability to catch up with the prophets; what he meant is that the prophets dived into the sea of *tawḥīd* and swam through it, past the point of drowning, to its farther shore, where they stood and called unto mankind to dive into it. 'Were I perfect as they are,' says Abū Yazīd, 'I would have reached them and stood alongside them.' Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh said:

The Shaykh's explanation of Abū Yazīd's words makes sense, given that Abū Yazīd was known to have great reverence for the Sacred Law and perfect etiquette. It is said of him that once he was told of a certain man's sainthood, and so went to visit him. He sat in the mosque waiting for him, and as the man was approaching the mosque he spat on its wall. Abū Yazīd immediately left, without meeting with the man. 'This man cannot be trusted to keep the etiquette of the Sacred Law,' he said, 'so how could he be trusted to keep Allah's secrets?'

Whenever we hear of any word or deed of the great masters of righteousness and reverence for Allah which seems on the surface to be problematic, we owe it to them to find an interpretation for it, because we know of their righteousness and good conduct. A tradition states: 'Do not think ill of anything a Muslim says, if you can find a good way of interpreting it.'⁷⁴

74 This is a saying of 'Umar ؓ; see note 59 above.

Shaykh Abū al-ʿAbbās said that the sum of all that the saints share with the prophets is like a skin filled with honey from which a few drops are shaken: what is in the skin belongs to the prophets, and the drops belong to the saints. He also said that the Prophets see the reality of things, whilst the saints only see symbols of them; this is why when the Prophet ﷺ asked Ḥāritha about the reality of his faith, he said, 'It is as though I am looking upon the denizens of Paradise', and not 'I have looked upon them.'⁷⁵

Al-Qūnawī said of this issue:

We know of no difference of opinion, among those who believe in prophethood, over the superiority of the prophets. If the opinion of the saint's superiority has been ascribed to any of them, then the interpretation of this is that every prophet is a saint, and his saintly side is greater than his prophetic side, because his sainthood is turned towards Allah and his prophethood is turned towards mankind. Nevertheless, this way of expressing things is clearly problematic in its outward phrasing.

The *Ta'arruf* says:

All are agreed that the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace) are greater than ordinary human beings, and that no non-prophet is equal to the prophets in virtue, whether it be one of great faith [*ṣiddīq*], a saint [*walī*] or anyone else, however worthy he may be, and however high his status.

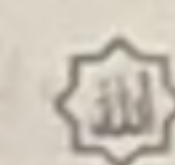
Al-Qūnawī comments:

⁷⁵ See note 27 above.

By this, the author means to rebut the belief ascribed to some misguided people that saint are greater than prophets, which the people of guidance consider unbelief and error which only a heretic could believe; and anyone who espouses it must be judged a misguided unbeliever.

Indeed, one of the later generations⁷⁶ did say that sainthood is greater than prophethood; those who think well of him interpret his words to mean that a prophet has two attributes...

He then continues to say the same as was said above.

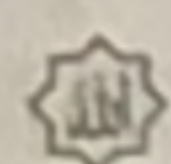


Another thing for which the Sufis are criticised is that they claim to see the Prophet ﷺ in a waking state. Now this is nothing to criticise, and among those scholars who have affirmed its possibility and occurrence are al-Ghazālī and al-Yāfi'ī, and al-Qurṭubī also alludes to it. Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī said that he saw the Prophet ﷺ and conveyed his ﷺ greetings of peace to Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, who did not criticise him for it, nor did any other scholar of the time. I have written something on this subject,⁷⁷ so there is no need to go into great detail here. Of course, there are those who falsely claim to have experienced this, so they should be tested and questioned about it. Someone once claimed to have experienced this, so some people of insight came to test him and found that he was obviously a pretender, and that his lie was written on

⁷⁶ Shaykh ʿAbdallāh's note: By this he means Ibn ʿArabī, who famously held this opinion, as can be found in his *Futūḥāt*.

⁷⁷ A treatise entitled *Tanwīr al-Ḥalak bi-Ru'yat al-Nabī wal-Malak*.

his face for all to see. A trustworthy man then had a true vision of the Prophet ﷺ, who said to him: 'So-and-so is a liar, so beware of him.'⁷⁸ Allah then put an end to him, as He does with all liars and pretenders.

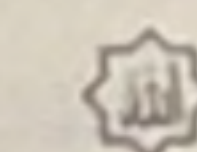


Another thing for which the Sufis have long been criticised is that they speak of al-Khiḍr and claim to have met with him, and say that he is still alive. Among those who criticised this was Ibn al-Jawzī, who said: 'Were he alive, he would have met with the Prophet ﷺ; and had he met with him, we would know about it.' Others have given rebuttals to those who deny this, including Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, who said: 'Al-Khiḍr is alive according to the majority of righteous scholars; only a few Hadith scholars deny this.' Al-Nawawī says in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: 'Most of the scholars, and all of the Sufis and people of righteousness and gnosis, agree that he is alive and living among us.' Many have written books about this, including most notably Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Ḥajar.⁷⁹ Several hadiths tell of how he met with the Prophet ﷺ; I say that although they may be weak, the sheer number of narrations and traditions give them strength. The fact that he gave commiserations to the Companions upon the death of the Prophet ﷺ, and 'Alī said 'That was al-Khiḍr' and none of the Companions questioned it, constitutes a consensus; and the story of his meeting with 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz is narrated with a

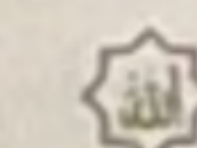
78 Shaykh 'Abdallāh notes that there may be a scribal error here.

79 Shaykh 'Abdallāh notes that this book is in print, and that Ibn Ḥajar also speaks at length about it in *al-Iṣāba*, providing a matchless commentary on the issue.

rigorously authentic chain.⁸⁰ There are many reports about him, which I quoted in *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* and in the exegesis *al-Ma'thūr*.

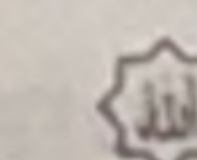


Some scholars criticise the Sufis for their talk of the Substitues, [*Abdāl*], the Elect [*Nujabā'*], the Pegs [*Awtād*] and the Poles [*Aqtāb*],⁸¹ saying that there is no basis in the Hadith for them. Yet they are wrong about this, for there indeed are hadiths and traditions which speak of them, which I have gathered in a separate book and need not mention here.⁸²



Al-Qūnawī says:

Some of the gnostics have made utterances which seem to be fatalistic, in that they deny free will and are heedless to their own souls. What they mean by this is that they do not pay any regard to their own will, because they are completely immersed in their vision of what comes from Him, not what comes from them.



Another thing for which the Sufis are criticised is what

80 Shaykh 'Abdallāh notes that Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar mentioned all these reports and many more, all with their chains, in the aforementioned two works.

81 Special categories of saints.

82 It is called *al-Khabr al-Dāll*. A translation of this is in preparation to be published. PB

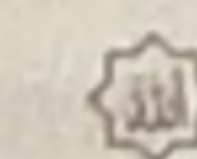
they say about the spirit [*rūḥ*]. You should be aware that there are three groups in this regard. The first, the most preferred, are those who do not delve into this matter at all, having etiquette with Allah; this is the way of al-Junayd, who said: 'Allah has kept knowledge of the spirit to Himself, and not revealed it to any of His creatures. It is not permitted to say anything more about it than that it exists; for Allah says: *«Say: the spirit is the affair of my Lord»* [17:85].'

Al-Suhrawardī said: 'People have spoken about the spirit, but it would have been better not to, out of etiquette with the Prophet ﷺ.' He then related al-Junayd's aforementioned words, and then said: 'It may be that what they have said about this is by way of interpretation of Allah's Word, since He forbade exegesis of it but allowed interpretation. Interpretation means to give a possible explanation, not a definitive one.' He was speaking of the second group, who held that the spirit is contingent.

Then there are the third group, an extremist minority who hold that the spirit is eternal. This is nothing but errant philosophising, from which we seek Allah's refuge. One of them used a better expression, saying that the spirit is a mighty being which cannot be called contingent or eternal, and that the individual spirits are rays of this supreme spirit; but this is also a false doctrine. Al-Qūnawī said: 'This is most usually found in the words of the later generations. The truth is that Allah is Eternal, as are His Qualities, and that all other things, both spirits and bodies, are contingent.'

I advise you to take care to understand this distinction well, and to hold to the belief that the spirit is contingent, and to repeat it to yourself until it sinks into your very flesh and blood. Beware of being deluded and accepting the claim of anyone who strays from this, for most of the errors of

both the later and earlier generations stem from this. All success comes from Allah.



As for *samā'*,⁸³ if no instruments are used, our view is that it is not forbidden, and should not be criticised. It has been attended by scholars of every school in every age. Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī narrated with his chain of transmission that Muṣ'ab ibn al-Zubayr attended a circle of Mālik ibn Anas, and asked him about *samā'*. He replied: 'The people of knowledge in our land do not criticise it or avoid it; it is only criticised by ignoramuses, or boorish Iraqi hermits.' He also narrated that Ṣāliḥ ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal loved *samā'* and would employ a man to sing for him, and his father also listened to him. Ibn Ṭāhir also reported that Abū Muḥammad al-Tamīmī told him that he asked Sharīf Abū 'Alī Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Mūsā al-Ḥāshimī about *samā'*, and he answered:

I do not know what to say about it, except that I visited the house of our Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn al-Ḥārith al-Tamīmī, the Shaykh of the Ḥanbalīs, in the year 370, having been invited alongside other companions of his. Others who attended were Abū Bakr al-Abharī, the Shaykh of the Mālikīs; Abū al-Qāsim al-Dārī, the Shaykh of the Shāfi'īs; Abū al-Ḥasan Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn, the Shaykh of the Hadith scholars; Abū al-Ḥusayn ibn Sam'ūn, the Shaykh of the preachers and ascetics; Abū 'Abdallāh

⁸³ *Samā'* is sacred Ṣūfī music, which might involve singing, drums, or instruments depending on the order. Because of the ambiguity of the word 'music', the Arabic word has been retained in what follows.

ibn Mujāhid, the Shaykh of the theologians, and his companion Abū Bakr al-Bāqilānī. One of those in attendance said that if the roof had fallen in on them, there would have been no one left in Iraq to give legal opinions. There was a man there who had a good voice, so they asked him to recite something. They listened as he sang:

She wrote upon the parchment a letter
In perfume, not in ink:
'Stand up and make your offer boldly,
For all know that you love me.'
I said to the one who brought her letter,
'I will take my answer myself, for all to see!'

Ibn Ṭāhir also said that one of the most prominent and respected scholars to declare *samā'* permissible was Shaykh Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, whose scrupulousness, asceticism and caution were well-known.

Al-Bayhqī says in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*:

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī told me that he asked Imam Abū Sahl Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān about *samā'*, and he answered: 'It is recommended for the people of spiritual realities, permitted for the people of scrupulousness, and reprehensible for open sinners and people who listen to it decadently.'

Al-Qūnawī says in *Sharḥ al-Ta'arruf*:

Among those of the latter generations who attended gatherings of *samā'* were Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-Īd, and

many other noted scholars and imams of Islam. Al-Asnawī says in *al-Ṭabaqāt* that Shaykh Ṭāj al-Dīn ibn al-Farkāḥ loved *samā'* and would attend gatherings of it. Another who liked it was al-Quṭb al-Qusṭallānī. Al-Māwardī says in *al-Ḥawī* that 'Abdallāh ibn Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib would often listen to singing, and buy slave-girls to sing for him.⁸⁴

That said, there are several points which must be made. Firstly, what we have said should not be taken to mean that love for *samā'* is a state of perfection. Al-Junayd said, 'If you see the disciple asking for *samā'*, know that there is still some idleness in him.' The method of Shaykh Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhilī رحمته الله did not involve *samā'*.

Secondly, al-Qūnawī says:

What we have said about lenience towards *samā'* applies as long as it is not indulged in excessively. As for engaging in it habitually and spending most of one's time doing it, this is blameworthy, as al-Ghazālī has stated. This is because the reason it is allowed is to give the heart respite; a merely permissible thing can be turned into pure worship, if the intention is to give the soul recreation, as Abū al-Dardā' رحمته الله said: 'Sometimes I give my soul recreation with something false,⁸⁵ to make it stronger in serving the truth.'

84 Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: This was also mentioned by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in *al-Istī'āb* and al-Adfūrī in *al-Amtā'*. Al-Zubayr ibn Bikār narrated with his chain of transmission that 'Abdallāh ibn Ja'far رحمته الله went to Jamila's house to hear her sing, after she had sworn that she would only sing in her house. She sang for him, and wanted to expiate her oath and then come to him to sing for him, but he told her not to.

85 Meaning something lawful but trifling.

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⁸⁵ Meaning something lawful but trifling.

[Al-Suhrawardī] says in *Ma'ārif al-'Awārif*:

This principle of respite explains why it is reprehensible to pray at certain times, in order to give respite to the servants of Allah, and to allow the soul to have some time when it is not working. Sahl ibn 'Abdallāh said: 'The sincere man's ignorance increases his work, and his falsehood increases his truth, and his worldly life increases his afterlife.' For this reason, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was made to love women, so that his blessed soul would be given its rights, and thereby kept pure.

Thirdly, *al-'Awārif* says:

Samā' has been beset by much mischief, and is no longer protected from error; it has often become the preserve of people whose deeds are scanty and their characters flawed, who hold *samā'* gatherings so often that it has become tainted, merely a way for souls to engage in caprice and play. It ends up standing in the disciple's path, as he wastes his time with it instead of offering worship to Allah. Naturally, this kind of gathering is rejected by the people of sincerity, especially when it is compounded by ostentation and attempts to ingratiate oneself with those present, and other such things which no Ṣūfī engages in unless he knows nothing of Sufism but the dress and the external form, such as the use of young boy singers who attract souls to them, or allowing women to observe the gathering, so that souls full of caprice seek to exhibit themselves with movements and displays of ecstasy. This is nothing but iniquity, whose unlawfulness is not in dispute. Indeed, ordinary sinners are better

than such people, because at least they recognise their sin, whilst the people who engage in these gatherings do not; indeed, they present it as worship to those who know no better.⁸⁶

Fourthly, *al-'Awārif* says: 'It used to be said that *samā'* is only for gnostic masters, and not for novice disciples.' Al-Qūnawī says:

The shaykhs have disapproved of it for disciples who are just starting out, before their souls have been tested by sincere struggle. Some of them say that *samā'* is only for those whose lower souls are dead and their hearts alive, their souls having been slain by the swords of spiritual struggle and their hearts having been given life by the light of divine assent and witnessing.

Fifthly, *al-'Awārif* says:

In the past they would only employ *samā'* when in the presence of those who were fit for it; and when their brothers were lost, they gave it up. It is said that al-Junayd gave up *samā'*, and they asked him why. 'With whom?', he replied. They said that he could do it for himself. 'From whom?', he asked.

Sixthly, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj says in *al-Luma' fi al-Taṣawwuf*:

Samā' is not appropriate for a disciple until he knows the Names and qualities of Allah, so that he can attribute to Allah what ought to be attributed to

⁸⁶ The *'Awārif* has been consulted directly to aid in the translation of this passage, because of problems in the printed text of Imam al-Suyūṭī's quotation.

Him, and so that his heart is not polluted by love for this world and love of praise and adulation, and so that there is no desire in his heart for created beings, and so that he watches over his heart and protects its boundaries from one moment to the next.

Seventhly, *al-Awārif* says:

If one is honest with himself, and thinks about how the people today gather, the singers with their drums and the flautists with their flutes, and asks himself if such gatherings took place in the presence of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and if they would employ professional minstrels and sit and listen to his songs, he will deny that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the Companions did any such thing. Were this a virtuous thing, they would not have neglected it. Anyone, therefore, who claims that it is a virtuous thing for which gatherings should be made, does not have true knowledge of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ or the Companions and Followers; all he is doing is relying on the preference shown for it by some of the later generations.

Many people err in this regard; whenever the early generations are cited as proofs against them, they cite the later generations as proof; yet the early generations were closer to the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and their guidance is closer to the guidance of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

I have come across a section on the rules of *samā'* by Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām⁸⁷ in which he says:

⁸⁷ Shaykh 'Abdallāh says it is at the end of *al-Qawā'id*.

Samā' differs according to the difference of those who listen to it and those who produce it, who fall into several categories. First, there are those who have gnosis of Allah; their *samā'* differs according to their differing states. Those in whom fear predominates are affected by *samā'* when it involves the mention of frightening things; it causes them to grieve, weep and change colour. Fear in turn has several categories: the first is fear of punishment, the second is fear of losing reward, and the third is fear of losing out on intimacy and nearness with Allah; those who experience the third are the best of all who fear, and the best of all who listen to *samā'*. One such as this will not employ any affectation when listening, and will only react when genuinely overcome by fear, because fear does not allow for affectation and ostentation. When such a person hears the Qur'an recited, it will affect him even more strongly than hymns and songs.

Secondly, there are those in whom hope predominates. They are most affected by *samā'* when it contains mention of desirable things. If their hope is for intimacy and nearness to Allah, they will be the best of all those who listen to *samā'* with hope. If their hope is for reward, they will be on the next-highest level, and will be affected by the *samā'* less than the others will.

Thirdly, there are those in whom love predominates. They are of two kinds. Firstly, there are those who love Allah because of the blessings and favours He gives them; they are affected by *samā'* which mentions blessings and favours. Secondly, there are those who love Allah for His noble Essence and perfect Qualities; they are affected by mention of the nobility

of the Essence and the perfection of the Qualities, and they are more affected the deeper this goes; they are better than the other, because the cause of their love is better.

Fourthly, there are those in whom magnification and glorification predominate. They are better than all the other three, because none of their *samāʿ* is meant for themselves, since the self dwindles away to nothing when it magnifies and glorifies Allah. Thus they hope for nothing for themselves when they listen, unlike the other three, who are all turned to their Lord in one respect and to their own selves in another or others, and there is a huge difference between that which is devoted solely to Allah and that which is shared between Him and oneself. The lover enjoys the beauty of his Beloved, which is for himself; it is not so for the awestricken one.

Now the states of all of the aforementioned differs according to those from whom they hear the *samāʿ*. Hearing *samāʿ* from saints affects one more than hearing it from ignoramus; hearing it from prophets affects one more than hearing it from saints; and hearing it from the Lord of heaven and earth will affect one more than hearing it from prophets. This is because the Speech of the Lord affects the awestricken person more than the speech of anyone else, just as the words of someone you love affect you more than the words of anyone else. This is why the prophets and people of great faith, and their companions, did not concern themselves with listening to music or singing, and were content to hear only the Speech of their Lord, because of how strongly it affected their states. Many people err when it comes to listening to hymns and songs, in that the melody, beautiful

lyrics and sweet singing give pleasure to the soul; when one of them hears something that moves him, his soul takes pleasure from the melody and the singing, while the lyrics remind him of love, fear and hope, and produce these states in him. Thus the soul derives pleasure in one way, and the lyrics of the song affect it in another by producing love and fear, so that the listener ends up with two things: pleasure in the soul, and attachment to his Lord's Qualities. Yet he imagines that it is all connected to Allah, which is not so.

Fifthly, there are those in whom lawful desire predominates, such as passion for one's wife or concubine. Such people are moved by *samāʿ*, which stirs in them feelings of longing, fear of separation and hope for meeting, which produce rapture in them. There is no harm in *samāʿ* for such people.

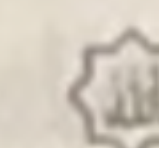
Sixthly, there are those in whom unlawful desire predominates, such as desire for boys or women who are not permitted to them. *Samāʿ* provokes such people to indulge in unlawful things; and all that leads to unlawful things is itself unlawful.

Seventhly, there are those who say 'I do not find any of these six categories you have mentioned in my heart; so what is the ruling of *samāʿ* for me?' We say that it is reprehensible [*makrūh*], inasmuch as corrupt caprices predominate in most ordinary people, and *samāʿ* might stir unlawful desires in them to which they may become attached, and towards which they may incline. It is not forbidden for them, because we cannot be certain that it will lead to something unlawful.

Now wicked people might attend a gathering of *samāʿ*, and weep and moan for dishonourable reasons

which they conceal, making it appear to everyone else present that they are moved by the *samā'* for the reasons outlined above. This means that they are combining sin with a saintly appearance. Likewise, a *samā'* gathering might be attended by people who are grieving for the loss of family members or loved ones, so that the poems sung remind them of their loss, and they weep, so that the other people present think that they are crying for the Lord of the worlds. In this case, they have a false saintly appearance, but not for something sinful.

Praiseworthy *samā'* is only attained by mention of those qualities which produce venerable states and goodly actions. Each quality produces a certain state: when someone speaks of the quality of mercy or is reminded of it, he has the state and the *samā'* of the hopeful. When someone speaks of stern retribution or is reminded of it, he has the state and he *samā'* of the fearful. When a person is in a state of love, and speaks of the beauty of the Beloved or is reminded of it, he has the state and the *samā'* of the lovers. When a person is in a state of glorification and awe, and speaks of Allah's glory or is reminded of it, he has the state and the *samā'* of those stricken with awe at Allah's glory. When a person is in a state of reliance, and speaks of the Lord's sole power over benefit, harm, raising, lowering, drawing near and banishing far, or is reminded of it, he has the state and the *samā'* of those who rely on Allah and consign all things to Him. Many people are taken by *samā'* from one of these states to the other, passing between them according to the subject of the lyrics. Another person might be so overcome by one particular state that he does not listen to what the singer is saying or pay any heed to him because of the predominance of his initial state.



The author of *Mi'yār al-Murīdīn* [ʿAbdallāh ibn Muḥammad al-Nūrī] says:

This is a description of those groups who have erred in licentiousness, 'indwelling and union' and anthropomorphism, and an explanation of their error, and a rebuttal to them. Know that the source of their errors is their ignorance of the fundamentals and branches of the religion because of how they neglected the pursuit of knowledge and went after their souls' caprices instead. Allah says: (Ask the people of the Remembrance, if you do not know) [16:43], and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Follow the example of the two who come after me: Abū Bakr and 'Umar.'⁸⁸ He ﷺ also said: 'My Companions are like stars: whichever of them you follow, you will be guided.'⁸⁹

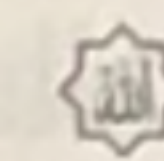
Know that if one does not bear the lamp of knowledge and the torch of knowledge, there is no doubt that the temptations of the accursed Satan will

88 Narrated by Aḥmad, al-Tirmidh, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Ḥakīm on the authority of Ḥudhayfa ؓ.

89 Shaykh 'Abdallāh says in his notes that this ḥadīth was narrated by al-Dāraquṭnī, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, al-Qaḍā'i, and Abū Dharr al-Harawī, all with problematic chains of narration; but as al-Bayhaqī pointed out, there is a ḥadīth in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* which supports its meaning: Abū Mūsā reported that the Prophet ﷺ said: 'The stars are the guardians of the inhabitants of the heavens; when the stars are gone, the inhabitants of heaven will be visited by what has been promised them. My Companions are the guardians of my community; when my Companions are gone, my community will be visited by what has been promised them.' Al-Ḥāfiẓ said that this is an allusion to the tribulations that occurred after the time of the Companions.

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have success with him. Allah warned His servants not to befriend Satan in many verses: «Satan is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy» [35:6]. The seeker of knowledge must follow the truth by which he can put right his faith, his doctrine, his *tawhīd* and his knowledge, so that he becomes one who has gnosis of Allah, and one who works solely for Allah. The knowledge which is beneficial and salvific is knowledge of the Law and the Path; the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Knowledge is of two kinds: knowledge that resides on the tongue, which is Allah's proof against His servants; and knowledge that is firm in the heart, which is where the benefit is.'⁹⁰ He ﷺ also said, 'The best of this life and the next is found with knowledge; and the worst of this life and the next is found with ignorance.'⁹¹ *Al-Firdaws* records that Abū Umāma رضي الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said: 'There are many ignorant worshippers, and many wicked scholars; so beware those worshippers who are ignorant, and those scholars who are wicked.'⁹² 'Alī عليه السلام said: 'None but two men in Islam break my back: the wicked scholar, and the heretical worshipper. People renounce the knowledge of the wicked scholar when they see his wickedness; and they are drawn to the heresy of the heretical worshipper when they see his worship.'⁹³ It is related that al-Sha'bī (Allah rest his soul) said: 'Guard yourselves against the wicked scholars and the ignorant worshipper, for they are a

90 See note 4 above.

91 Shaykh 'Abdallāh could not find a reference for this ḥadīth.

92 Narrated by Ibn 'Adī; Shaykh 'Abd Allah points out that the chain contains a known forger.

93 Shaykh 'Abdallāh could not find a chain for it, but observes that Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī also relates in in *Qūt al-Qulūb* without a chain.

blight for all who are susceptible to being led astray.' The Prophet ﷺ also said: 'The ruin of my community will come at the hands of a wicked scholar and an ignorant worshipper. The worst of the worst are the evil scholars, and the best of the best are the virtuous scholars.'⁹⁴ He also said: 'At the end of time, there will be ignorant worshippers and wicked scholars.'⁹⁵

Al-Awārif says of this:

By 'ignorant worshippers', he عليه السلام meant simple rustic people, who are often shown a glimmer of esoteric knowledge because of their pure souls and how they refrain from curiosity and chatter, yet have no prior knowledge of the matter, and are not under the care of a spiritual master. They are like a tree which produces flowers but not fruit, because it has grown naturally and not been planted and tended. This spiritual 'pruning' is necessary so that the person who experiences these things does not become deluded by his state and marvel at himself. The worship they offer in this state of ignorance is like a house built on sand. Their state can never become perfected, nor can they ever attain knowledge of sainthood, because it is not built on the rules of the Law and the etiquettes of the Path. The whispers of Satan and misgivings of the soul overwhelm them, and lead them to adopt disguises: they eschew material means and don rags, displaying their strange appearances

94 Shaykh 'Abdallāh could not find the first part of it, but found some reports which resemble it (such as the others quoted above); the last sentence was narrated separately by al-Daylimī.

95 Narrated by al-Ḥākim, Abū Nu'aym, Ibn 'Adī and Ibn al-Najjār.

and extraordinary acts in public, and frequenting places of ill-repute, and keeping silent so as bewilder people with their strangeness. They use these strange states, actions and appearances to bring them renown in order to draw people around them, and beg their provision from them. They are the charlatans and tricksters of this community, who have chosen the ephemeral world over the eternal hereafter.

Al-Awārif also says:

There is no doubt that the soul is attracted to falsehood and averse to truth. This is borne out by how Noah ^e preached to the people for nine hundred and fifty years, and only ninety souls followed him: yet the Sāmīrī, an unbeliever and a sorcerer, made a calf from gold and blew into it so it made the sound of thunder, and then called the people to it and said, 'this is your god and the god of Moses', and seventy thousand people accepted this and followed him!

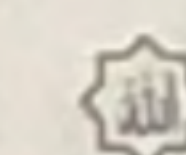
This makes it clear that the beginning of gnosis only appears to (one who has a heart, or who gives ear with full intelligence) [50:37], until he sees truth as truth, and falsehood as falsehood.

Because of this, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said 'Allah has never made an ignorant person a saint.'⁹⁶ Now if it is said, 'We have seen people who have no exoteric knowledge attain true esoteric knowledge,' we respond that indeed this can happen, but it is rare, and the exception proves the rule. If this is clear, then

⁹⁶ Shaykh 'Abdallāh's note: The famous saying usually continues, '...and had He done so, He would have given him knowledge.' Al-Hāfiẓ said: 'It is not a proven ḥadīth, but its meaning is correct.'

one of its implications is that Allah will give such a person success to worship Him according to the foundations of the Sacred Law; for ignorance results in a soul that enjoins evil, whilst the saints always have souls at peace. One of the qualifications of sainthood is to have knowledge of the commands of the Sacred Law and to obey them, and to have perfect gnosis of Reality and to act in accordance with it. When one attains all of this, he finishes the Path and is ennobled with knowledge of what it means to arrive.

I warn you, and I warn you, and I warn you: do not keep the company of evil men, for they are highwaymen on the Path. Hold fast to the rope of the Qur'an and Hadith. Sahl ibn 'Abdallāh al-Tustarī (Allah rest his soul) said: 'Avoid the company of three kinds of people: heedless tyrants, hypocritical scholars, and ignorant Sufis.' Understand this, and do not go astray, for the religion is clear.



TWO

CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF 'UNION WITH GOD' AND PROOF OF ITS FALSITY

K NOW THAT certain men of spiritual realisation have used the word 'union' [*ittiḥād*] by way of allusion to the reality of *tawḥīd*. For them, 'union' means the extreme realisation of *tawḥīd*, and *tawḥīd* means gnosis of the One Unique God. Yet people who do not understand these allusions have understood this in the wrong way, and fallen into grave error and perdition.

Now the proof that the idea of the servant's union with Allah is false is that even the unity of two servants is impossible. For example, two men cannot unite so that the one becomes the other, because they are two distinct beings, as is obvious; and the distinction between the servant and the Lord is greater still. So the whole concept of union is false. When the expression 'union' is used, and it is said 'He is he', this does not imply something that is patently impossible. It is only a metaphorical expression, such as when the poet says 'I am my Beloved and my Beloved is I.' He does not mean that they are united; what he means is that they are virtually united. When the servant who affirms *tawḥīd* comes to know the One Real, and all plurality disappears for him, this station is metaphorically named 'union', but

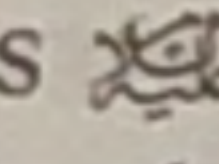
Concerning the Doctrine of 'Union with God'

in reality it is the station of true *tawḥīd*. This may be explained by saying that with the believer there is a light, a secret of Allah which abides with him, by means of which he seeks Allah, invokes Him, desires Him, knows Him, declares His unity, loves Him and witnesses Him. Were it not that this light from Allah is with him, he would neither seek Him, desire Him, invoke Him, know Him nor love him. When Allah lifts the veil from someone, and shines divine light upon his heart, and this light enlightens him, and he comes out of the darkness of his own existence, all command is given over to the Victor; and Allah is victorious over all things. When this happens, the servant's humanity disappears without a trace because of the divine light that overpowers him, and he becomes like the poet when he said, 'I am my Beloved, and my Beloved is I.'

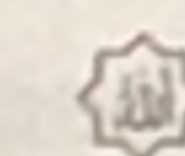
It is from here that this issue has arisen. Now when the true men of spiritual realisation speak of union and self-glorification [*subḥāniyya*],⁹⁷ they do not mean to raise themselves above the rest of the world in pride; rather, they mean to erase themselves and affirm the Almighty Real. Moreover, when they are in this station, some of them might say things like, 'He is the Seeker and the Sought, and the Invoker and the Invoked, and the Lover and the Beloved, and the Witness and the Witnessed!', attributing this to that aforementioned secret from Allah which accompanies them. Yet when these words reach the ear of one who is ignorant and veiled from the ways of Allah, he believes that they imply literal union. They compare this literal union with the way the light of the stars and planets merges with the light of the sun; now they err in doing this, because the star retains its own existence: it does not unite with the

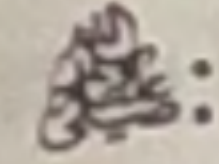
⁹⁷ In reference to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī's words 'Glory be to me, how magnificent is my state!'

light of the sun but rather is concealed by it. Were this a real union, it would mean that when the sun set, the star would set with it; yet this is not what happens.

That the servant can be united with the Lord, or that the Lord can dwell in him, is impossible and false according to all Muslims, prophets, saints, Ṣūfī shaykhs and all other scholars. It is not the teachings of the Sufis, but only of the advocates of 'indwelling', who say that the servant truly unites with Allah, because they are lacking in knowledge and have not been granted a goodly portion by Allah. Allah says: «Allah desires not to appoint for them a portion in the world to come» [3:176]. In this they resemble the Christians, who say that Jesus  was equally divine and human, with God and man united in him. All this is false and rejected; it is impossible for the servant to be united with Allah. Those to whom Allah gives His timeless protection, when they arrive at this station, recognise that what happens is that Allah's light overwhelms the servant's light, so that his light is hidden in the light of the Almighty Real. This is neither union nor indwelling. They call this the station of integration [*al-jam'*], integration of integration [*jam' al-jam'*], and the essence of integration [*'ayn al-jam'*]; it refers to extreme nearness to Allah – not physically, but by acceptance, unveiling and theophany directed at the person's innermost secret. The spiritual elite drink from the wellspring of direct witnessing of the light of the Real. By 'integration', they mean that one sees the Real in one's heart as He acts; by 'integration of integration', they mean that one sees Him in one's innermost secret at all times, and sees all that is other than Him as well; this is where one arrives when he masters this station. In this station, the gnostic is able to see his own self as it was before it came into being, when it was pure nothingness, so that he knows that the power of Allah which is with him today is the very

same power that existed before time began. Thus he says, 'I am the prisoner of the pre-eternal Power; I see myself today as it was before time began.' Before he came into being, he had no free will; and likewise, he has no free will now that he has come into being, for he surrenders everything to Allah. «On Him place your reliance» [73:9], Allah says. The one in such a station does not follow his own will, but what is willed for him this is the station of resignation and contentment in fate.

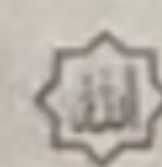


If a servant were truly united with Allah, this would make him omniscient just as Allah is omniscient; he would know all things, and nothing on earth or in heaven would be outside his ken, just as is true of Allah. There could be nothing he did not know, just as Allah knows all things without exception. Yet everyone knows that no servant possesses such knowledge; Allah even said to the best of His creation : «Say: 'I am not an innovation among the messengers, and I know not what shall be done with me or with you'» [46:9]; and He said: «They will question thee concerning the Hour, when it shall berth. Say: 'The knowledge of it is only with my Lord'» [7:187], and: «Had I knowledge of the Unseen I would have acquired much good, and evil would not have touched me'» [7:188]. Now this is the man whom Allah honoured with His words 'Were it not for you, I would not have created the heavens';⁹⁸ and when he was taken up on the night of the Ascension to a height which no creature had ever reached, Isrāfīl called

⁹⁸ Shaykh 'Abdallāh says that this is a fabricated ḥadīth, but that its meaning is sound.

out, 'Muḥammad, come to pray!'⁹⁹ He then confessed to Allah that he could not praise Him. first he said, 'I seek refuge in Your clemency from Your retribution.' Then he spoke of the qualities of Act, saying: 'I seek refuge in Your contentment from Your wrath.' Then he spoke of the qualities of Essence, saying: 'I seek refuge in You from You.' he then moved upward beyond these stations and confessed that he was unable to praise Him, saying: 'I cannot praise you enough; You are as You have praised Yourself.'¹⁰⁰ These are noble stations and exalted divine gifts, yet nevertheless they remain dialogues between two parties on the level of 'You and I.' He passed through the degrees of divine proximity until by Allah's leave he reached the station of utmost nearness to Him, where he spoke with the most perfect expression of *tawḥīd*, and said: 'You are as You have praised Yourself.'

Now if you understand this as far as knowledge is concerned, then know that it is the same with power: Allah has power over all things, and nothing in heaven or earth is beyond His power. Everyone knows that none of the prophets or saints were so powerful; for if they were, they would have been able to do anything, even live for as long as they wished. The same is true of hearing and sight: one 'united' with Allah would be able to hear everything and see everything; and what is more, he would have to live forever, since Allah is alive and will never die. Everyone knows that this is not the case for human beings.

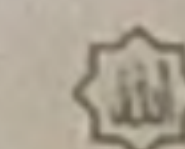


⁹⁹ There is an omission here because of a scribal error which Shaykh 'Abdallāh was unable to decipher.

¹⁰⁰ Muslim narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها reported hearing the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say this in the mosque one night.

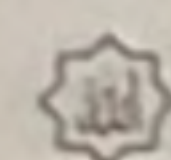
Someone unfamiliar with the way the rational world looks might be confused when looking into a mirror of a reflective pool of water, so that when he sees his face there, he thinks it is really his face. Any normal person, however, is perfectly aware that when he looks in the mirror and sees his face, his face does not dwell in the mirror or unite with it. Likewise, when the light of the Real shines upon the servant's heart when it is pure, it does not dwell in the heart, or unite with it. When a sunbeam shines on a clear mirror, the light of the sun is certainly reflected in it; but this reflected light is not the sun. Allah says: (When his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust) [7:143]. When the Almighty Real manifested himself to the mountain, He was not incarnated in the mountain; He only showed himself to it as one shows oneself to a mirror. Thus the doctrine of indwelling and union is false and rejected by revelation, reason and gnosis.

ISSUE: The word 'union' is sometimes used to mean the extinction of disobedience and the subsistence of obedience; the extinction of the soul's worldly desires and the subsistence of the desire for the hereafter; the extinction of blameworthy traits and the subsistence of virtues; the extinction of doubt and the subsistence certitude; and the extinction of heedlessness and the subsistence of remembrance.



Concerning those who said, 'Glory be to me, how magnificent is my state, there is no god but I!', or 'I am the Real', or 'I am Allah', their words should be interpreted as quotes [of the divine Speech]. One should not think that these gnostics espoused indwelling or union, for such a thing should not even be thought of any rational person, never mind people who are marked by spiritual unveilings,

certainty and witnessing. Someone said that Abū Yazīd's words 'Glory be to me, how magnificent is my state' [*subhānī mā a'zama sha'nī*], if he really said them, should actually be interpreted as 'How magnificent is my state, since You are my Glorious One', with *subhānī* meaning 'My Glorious One' rather than 'glory be to me.' It has also been said that loftiness of aspiration is what made Abū Yazīd say 'Glory be to me', and others say 'I am the Real' or 'I am Allah', by way of living up to the Prophet's ﷺ words 'Adorn yourselves with the attributes of Allah.'¹⁰¹



101 Shaykh 'Abdallāh could not find a reference for this ḥadīth.

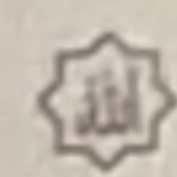
THREE CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF INDWELLING AND ITS FALSITY, AND A REBUTTAL OF THOSE WHO ESPOUSE IT

THE MESSENGER of Allah ﷺ said: 'Allah is veiled from the inhabitants of the heavens just as He is veiled from the inhabitants of earth; and He is veiled from minds just as He is veiled from eyes. He does not dwell in anything, nor is He absent from anything. The Supreme Assembly seek Allah just as you all seek Him.'¹⁰² He said 'He does not dwell in anything' because only contingent things can dwell; and he said 'nor is He absent from anything' so that the listener would not be confused by this into thinking that if He is not incarnate in a body, He must be far away from the physical realm.

102 Shaykh 'Abdallāh could not find a reference for this ḥadīth, but cites another with a similar meaning, narrated by Abū al-Shaykh in *al-Azama* on the authority of Abū Hurayra ؓ: 'Between Allah and the angels about the Throne are seventy veils of light.' Al-Ṭabarānī also narrated in *al-Awsaṭ* on the authority of Anas ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said: 'I asked Gabriel if he had ever seen his Lord, and he replied: "Between me and Him are seventy veils of light; were I to see the lowest of them, I would be consumed in fire."'

Know that divine indwelling is absolutely inconceivable, and Allah is transcendentally beyond it. This is because 'indwelling' [*ḥulūl*] can mean one of two things: either it means the relationship between a body and the space it occupies, which can only apply to two physical objects; and the Lord is far above the realm of the physical, and it is impossible that He could be contained by anything. Secondly, it means the relationship between accident and substance, since the accident exists through the substance and can be said to dwell in it; now this is impossible for One who is Self-Sufficient. In any case, indwelling cannot be conceived of even between two servants, never mind between the servant and the Lord.

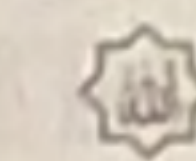
The doctrine of divine union and indwelling is therefore false, because indwelling means that the locus encompasses that which dwells in it, just as the container encompasses the content. This shows the falsity of the Christians' claim that the divine dwelled in the human; that is, it shows the falsity of their claim that Allah became incarnate in Jesus ﷺ. If the divine had become incarnate in the body of Christ, the body of Christ would have had to have been bigger than what was incarnate in it – the human body would have had to have been bigger than the divine Essence, which is impossible – glory be to Allah, that such a thing be ascribed to Him!



As for the Prophet's ﷺ words 'Adorn yourselves with the attributes of Allah', it means that we should attain praiseworthy qualities and rid ourselves of blameworthy traits; it does not mean that we can attain unto any of the Qualities of the divine Eternity. This is analogous to the way one person can light his torch from someone else's flame, or

take knowledge from someone else; he does not take away their flame, or their knowledge, but rather makes a new flame from theirs, and new knowledge from theirs. Allah's Qualities are eternal, and cannot become the qualities of anyone else, because contingent things cannot have eternal attributes.

It is not right to imagine that the intellectuals and elite of their time in sound knowledge, righteous action, spiritual struggle and duty to the Sacred Law could possibly have fallen into the error of divine indwelling and union despite the protection and grace Allah gave them, just as the Christians fell into the error of imagining that the divine had united with the human in the person of Jesus ﷺ.

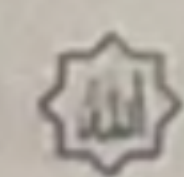


As for the sacred ḥadīth 'I am his hearing and his sight...'¹⁰³, this does not mean that the servant becomes united with Allah or that Allah becomes united with the servant, or dwells in him. Rather, the words 'I become his hearing and sight' are no different to His words 'I am his Creator and his Provider; he is created by Me and provided for by Me.' This is a sufficient answer, but the truth of the matter is that His words 'I am his sight and his hearing' really mean 'I manifest to him the qualities of My hearing and My sight, which strengthens what he hears internally and sees externally, so that he can hear what he could not hear before, and see what he could not see before.' This is analogous to a man whose senses are all functioning correctly, but who is in a dark room filled with objects he cannot see. Were he to light a flame, its light would allow him to see what is there. Obviously he can only see these things by the light of the

¹⁰³ See note 49 above.

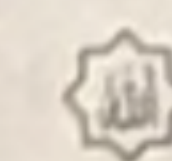
flame; and equally obviously, the flame has not united with him or become part of him, even though he can only see by means of it. Likewise, when the light of the Real shines upon the light of the servant, the servant's light is covered by the light of the Real just as the light of the stars is covered when the sun rises. The light of the Real dominates, and the servant's light is dominated, and deference is always granted to that which dominates; and Allah dominates all things. At such a point, the servant no longer has control of his own self, but all control rests with his Lord; Allah wards off the heralds of falsehood from him, and beautifies for him the heralds of truth: «But Allah has caused you to love faith, and beautified it in your hearts, and caused you to hate unbelief, wickedness and sin» [49:7]; these latter are the heralds of falsehood. Thus He protects him from committing sin, guards him against laxity in the obligations and boundaries of the Law, and reveals to him the glory of truth, in which he becomes immersed. When he considers his own knowledge, he knows nothing but Allah; when he considers his *tawhīd*, he sees nothing but Allah; when he considers his aspiration, he has no aspiration but Allah. His entire being is immersed in Him by way of aspiration and witnessing. This is given to him who attains unto inner and outer purity, refines his character and tames his soul.

This makes it clear that the Lord does not unite with the servant, nor the servant with the Lord. Understand this, and do not err. The falsity of indwelling and union in Islam is clearer than the sun, because of the Qur'anic statements which reject it. Allah says: «They are guilty of unbelief, they who say that Allah is Christ, son of Mary» [5:17].



Hulūl literally means for one thing to dwell in another

inseparably, as with moisture in water and dryness in fire, or coolness in water and heat in fire. When something dwells in a locus, it adheres to it so that when the locus moves it moves, and when the locus stays still it stays still, and when the locus is destroyed it is destroyed.



It is impossible for Allah Almighty to dwell in a created being, or beside it, or to be physically connected to it. This is what we have been taught by the Qur'an, the Hadith, and all the prophets and saints, peace be upon them all. The doctrine of indwelling was introduced into Islam because of the experiences of certain ignorant Ṣūfī aspirants, who saw in their dreams that Allah was nearer to them than their own jugular veins, and thought that He had come to dwell in them. This is not indwelling; it is only your awareness of nearness, just as the light of the sun in a room is near to the air in the room, but does not dwell in it; the proof it does not dwell in it is that it does not adhere to it to the point where it moves with it, or ceases to exist when it ceases to exist. The air exits the room through the door and windows, but the light does not go with it; and when the light in a room ceases to exist when the lamp that produces it is put out, the air does not disappear. This proves that the light does not dwell in the air.

Now the aspirant might meditate on the subject of the soul and caprice, and then have a vision that he is the Lord. This vision might well be accurate, but it requires interpretation. The correct interpretation of it in this case is that this person worships his own soul, loving it and serving it; he is one of those who have taken their caprice as their god. Allah says: «Have you seen him who takes his caprice as his god?» [25:43]. The Prophet ﷺ said: 'Woe

unto the slave of the dirham and the slave of the dinar...¹⁰⁴
Such a person sees himself as a divine lord. To cure himself
of this, he must avoid obeying his soul and his caprice, and
break his soul with spiritual struggle and discipline, and rid
himself of this impossible notion.

104 Narrated by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayra ؓ.

Hold fast to love for the Shādhilīs,
And you will attain what you hope for.
Do not remove your eyes from them,
For they are the suns of guidance.¹

1 See page 99

FORTHCOMING TITLES

1. *The Perfect Family – Virtues of the Ahl Bayt*
Compilation from the works of al-Suyuti, Ibn
Hajar al-Asqalani, Imam al-Nawawi and others

2. *Encyclopaedia of the Prophet's Mosque* ﷺ

3. *The Virtues of Imam Abu Hanifa*
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Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī took the Path from Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh, who took it from Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī, and so on back one by one to al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib, the first *quṭb*. The reason why the shaykhs of the Path of Ṣūfī initiation have to be listed in this way is because it is a matter of transmission, and transmission requires a chain.

Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī would be visited by scholars, such as Sulṭān al-‘Ulamā’ Shaykh ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām and Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-‘Id.

ABU’L-FADL ‘ABD al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khūdayrī al-Suyūṭī (born on the 1st of Rajab 849AH/1445, died in 911AH/1505) was a Shāfi‘ī *mujtabid* Imam, Ṣūfī, ḥadīth master (*ḥāfiẓ*) and historian, and a prolific writer who authored works in virtually every Islamic science.

‘ABDULLĀH IBN Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq ibn Aḥmad al-Ghumārī was born in Tangiers in 1328/1910, a descendent of the Prophet ﷺ through Imam al-Ḥasan on his father’s side and through the Moroccan Ṣūfī Ibn ‘Ajība on his mother’s side. He came from a scholarly family with a large number of notable ‘ulamā’. He was considered one of the foremost experts in ḥadīth in recent times. He studied under traditional scholars in Morocco and in al-Azhar. He authored some 150 works and was recognised as an authority by his contemporaries. He died in 1413/1993.