

There is a great misunderstanding among the Muslims today about the reality of *Tasawwuf*. In fact, it is an essential part of Islamic culture and civilization. It is the spiritual part and face of Islam. It purifies the soul and the behavior of the Muslims, so to bring them close to Allah Taala Most High. The name of *Tasawwuf* may be related to one of the following sources: The woolen clothes (*suf*) which all Sufis used to wear or their intention towards purification (*safa*) of their souls and hearts in order to keep it ready to receive the blessing, the light, the mercy and grace of Allah Taala Most High or it is related to the name of Sahaba, the companions of Syedna Muhammad (*Sallalaho Alaihe wa Sallam*) peace be upon him, who were known as *Ahl-e-Suffa*.

Usually there is a sheikh who is also called Murshid, guide or Ustad, the teacher. Then there is Khanqa or Zawiya or Takiya which is the place where the Murshid sits in order to receive his followers, disciples or Murideen to teach them thoroughly and practically how to strive and fight with their *Nafs* "self" for Allah's sake. These spiritual exercises are known to the Sufis as *Mujahida*. The Murid should continue the *Mujahida* until he reaches the stage of good will, *Haq al Yaqin* which is also named *Magam al Ihsan*. He will then get close to the All Mighty Allah, and gain the perfect faith and tranquillity, *Itminanah*. The main means of reaching this stage are:

1. To be a good worshiper (*Zakir*) and be absorbed in continuous remembrance of Allah Almighty.
2. To be most modest and humble.
3. To refine oneself according to the instructions of the Murshid.
4. To be very pious since piety and humility are very essential.
5. To stay in the company (*suhbat*) of the sheikh (*Murshid*).

The following text has been selected from Ahmad Ibn Nagib al-Misri's book *The Reliance of the Traveler; Umdat us Salik*, a classic manual of Islamic sacred law translated by Noah Ha Mim Keller.

In his book, *Tanwir al-qulub fi mu'ālamāt Allām al-Ghuyub*, Muhammad Amin Kurdi says: Sufism is a knowledge through which one knows the states of the human soul, praiseworthy or blameworthy, how to purify it from the blameworthy and ennable it by acquiring the praiseworthy, and to journey and proceed to Allah Most High, fleeing unto Him. Its fruits are the heart's development, knowledge of God through direct experience and ecstasy, salvation in the next world, triumph through gaining Allah's pleasure, the attainment of eternal happiness, and illuminating and purifying the heart so that noble matters disclose themselves, extraordinary states are revealed, and one perceives what the insight of others is blind to.

In *al-Maqasid fi bayan ma yajibu ma'iṣiratuhu min al-din*, Nawawi states: The way of Sufism is based on five principles: having godfearingness privately and publicly, living according to the sunna in word and deed, indifference to whether others accept or reject one, satisfaction with Allah Most High in dearth and plenty, and returning to Allah in happiness or affliction. The principles of treating the illnesses of the soul are also five: lightening the stomach by diminishing one's food and drink, taking refuge in Allah Most High from the unforeseen when it befalls, shunning situations that involve what one fears to fall victim to,

continually asking for Allah's forgiveness and His blessings upon the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) night and day with full presence of mind, and keeping the company of him who guides one to Allah.

According to Imam Ahmad Zarruq's book, *Igaz al-himam fi sharh al-Hikam*: Aspects of Sufism, defined, delineated, and explained, amount to nearly two thousand, all of them reducible to sincerity in turning to Allah Most High, something of which they are only facets, and Allah knows best. The necessary condition of sincerity of approach is that it be what the Truth Most High accepts. Now, something lacking its necessary condition cannot exist, "And he does not accept disbelief for His servants" (Koran 39:7), so one must realize true faith (iman), "and if you show gratitude, He will accept it of you" (Koran 39:7), which entails applying Islam. So there is no Sufism except through comprehension of Sacred Law, for the outward rules of Allah Most High are not known save through it, and there is no comprehension of Sacred Law without Sufism, for works are nothing without sincerity of approach, as expressed by the words of Imam Malik (Allah have mercy on him):

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

In *Tabaqat al-kubra al-musamma bi Lawaqih al-anwar fi tabaqat al-akhyar*, 'Abd al-Wahhab Shai'rani writes: The path of the Sufis is built of the Koran and sunna, and is based upon living according to the morals of the prophets and purified ones. It may not be blamed unless it violates an explicit statement from the Koran, sunna, or scholarly consensus, exclusively. If it does not contravene one of these, the very most that one may say of it is that it is an understanding a Muslim man has been given, so let whoever wishes act upon it, and whoever does not refrain, this being as true of works as of understanding. So no pretext remains for condemning it except one's own low opinion of others, or interpreting what they do as ostentation, which is unlawful.

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

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

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

In the book, *Kitab qawqin hukum al-ishraq ila kaffa al-Sufiyya fi jam'iyyat al-asaq*, Imam Ahmad Zarruq describes the characteristics of a true Sufi sheikh as follows: The conditions of a sheikh to whom a disciple may entrust himself are five:

(a) sound religious knowledge;

(b) true experience of the Divine;

(c) exalted purpose and will

(d) a praiseworthy nature;

(e) and penetrating insight.

Someone with all five of the following is not fit to be a sheikh:

(1) ignorance of the religion;

(2) disparaging the honor of the Muslims;

(3) involvement in what does not concern him;

(4) following caprice in everything;

(5) and showing bad character without a second thought.

If there is no sheikh who is a true guide (murshid), or there is one, but he lacks one of the five conditions, then the disciple should rely on those of his qualities that are perfected in him, and deal with him as a brother (A: meaning the sheikh and disciple advise one another) regarding the rest.

*Al-Hall al-sadid li ma astashkalahu al-murid*, written by Muhammad Hashimi, explains the purpose of taking a sheikh and a path: As for when the path is merely "for the blessing of it" and the sheikh lacks some of the conditions of a true guide, or when the disciples is seeking several different aims from it at once, or the disciple's intention is contrary to the spiritual will of the sheikh, or the time required is unduly prolonged, or he is separated from his sheikh by the latter's death or the exigencies of the times and has not yet completed his journey for him and convey him to what he seeks from the path, as it is not permissible for him to remain bound to the first sheikh his whole life if it is only to die in ignorance of his Lord, claiming that this is the purpose of the path. By no means is this the purpose. The purpose of the path is to reach the goal, and a path that does not reach it is a means without and end. The path was made for travel on it with the intention of reaching one's goal, not for remaining and residing in even if this leads to dying in ignorance of one's Lord. The meaning of true disciple is one who forthrightly submits himself to a living sheikh who is a guide (murshid) during the days of his journey to Allah Most High so that the sheikh may put him through the stages of the journey until he can say to him, "Here you are, and here is your Lord."

Sheikh Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam's book, *al-Imam al-iz-Zayd Ibn 'Abd al-Salam wa atharuhu fi al-fiqh al-Islami*, explains the importance of Sacred Law, Sharia for the Sufis: The Sacred Law is the scale upon which men are weighed and profit is distinguished from loss. He who weighs heavily on the scales of the Sacred Law is of the friends (awlyia) of Allah, among whom there is disparity of degree. And he comes up short in the scales of the Sacred Law is of the people of ruin, among whom there is also disparity of degree. If one sees someone who can fly through the air, walk on water, or inform one of the unseen, but who contravenes the Sacred Law by committing an unlawful act without an extenuating circumstance that legally excuses it, or who neglects an obligatory act without lawful reason, one may know that such a person is a devil Allah has placed there as a temptation to the ignorant. Nor is it farfetched that such a person should be one of the means by which Allah chooses to lead men astray, for the Antichrist will bring the dead to life and make the living die, all as a temptation and affliction to those who would be misled.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Qahir Baghda'i quotes from *Usul al-din*, and explains the relationship between Sufism and orthodoxy: The book *Tarik al-Sufiyya* [The history of the Sufis] by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Sulami, comprises the biographies of nearly a thousand sheikhs of the Sufis,

none of whom belonged to heretical sects and all of whom were of the Sunni community, with the exception of only three of them: Abu Himaṣ of Damascus, who pretended to be of the Sufis but actually believed in Qasratism (hulul); Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, whose case remains problematic, though Ibn 'Ata, Ibn Khaffaf, and Abul Qasim al-Nasrabadi approved of him; and al-Qanqah, whom the Sufis accused of being a Mu'azilite and rejected, for the good does not accept the wicked.

What is the relationship between philosophy and Sufism? Anyone who has made a serious study of "philosophy" must acknowledge that the term has been applied to a great many widely varying procedures and styles of thought throughout its long history, and that there is little substantial agreement among philosophers as to what philosophy is or should be. What Nawawi and other Islamic scholars seem to have in mind when they speak of the unlawful character of philosophy is not the efforts at a logical critique of the methodology of the sciences which have been seen particularly in this century, but rather cosmological theories and all-too-human attempts to solve ultimate questions about man, God, life after death, and so forth, without the divinely revealed guidance of the Koran and sunna. Any opinion that contradicts a well-known tenet of Islam, like disbelief in the Koran and sunna, is unlawful (kufr), and is unlawful to learn or teach, except by way of explaining that it is unlawful. And Allah knows best.

#### About the author

Sheikh Yusuf al-Rafai is a Shafii scholar, former minister of state, educator, Sufi, and author. He is a descendant of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) through the friend (*wali*) of Allah Most High, Sheikh Ahmad ar-Rifa'i. He was made a member of Parliament in Kuwait in 1963, minister of telecommunications, and postage in 1964. Sheikh Yusuf ar-Rifa'i served as the minister of state from 1965 to 1970. He is also a sheikh of the Rifa'i tariqa. The value of Sufism in Islam, he believes, is not only a means of spiritual sincerity, but also a powerful force that conveys Islam (da'i' wa) to non-Muslims and regenerates the religion in the Muslim heartlands from within. He takes keen interest in the problems of Muslim today, and at a recent symposium in Amman with Sheikh 'Abdullah Muhammad Ghilani and Sheikh Hasan Saqqaf, he voiced his concern for the obstacles to the current Islamic revival and world propagation of Islam that are being put in its way by narrow-minded Muslims whose view of Allah is anthropomorphic. Their view of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) is that he is over-venerated and loved by Muslims, and their view of Muslims is that they are unbelievers or immersed in unlawful innovations (bidi'a). The unity of the community and its future, he said lie in holding fast to the agreed upon schools of jurisprudence and tenets of faith, directing our efforts to non-Muslims, not in trying to convince Muslims that everything their forefathers believed was a mistake. He presently directs the al-Iman school, founded in 1973 in Kuwait, which provides Islamic and secular education patterned on the al-Azhar Model at the elementary, preparatory and secondary levels. He is a familiar figure at Islamic conferences around the world. Sheikh Yusuf al-Sayyid Hashim al-Rafai was a member and then vice president of the Executive Committee of Motamar Alame-Islami, Karachi and the president of Muslim Minority Commission of the Motamar till today.