



The Knowledge of Sufism and Its People

Praise belongs to Allah, Who by His Magnificence is veiled from the perception of the eyes, and by His Glory and Might is exalted above the attainment of thoughts, Whose Essence, being unique, does not resemble the essence of created beings and Whose Qualities are far removed from the qualities of creatures born in time. He is the Ancient, Who has never ceased. The Abiding, Who will never pass away. High set is He beyond all likeness, opposites, and forms. By His marks and signs He guides His creation to (a knowledge of) His Uniqueness making Himself known to His Saints through His Names, Qualities, and Attributes-for He brings near to Him their secret parts and inclines their hearts towards Him. With His kindness He advances upon them and in this loving kindness He draws them unto Him, having cleansed their inward parts from the impurities of their souls. Exalting their faculties above associating with the things that perish, He has chosen from among them those whom He wishes to be His Messengers. He elected those whom He desired to be His Prophets and the recipients of His revelation. Upon them He has sent down Books containing His command and prohibition, giving promises to those who obey and warnings to such who disobey. He has made clear their superiority over all mankind, raising their ranks beyond the reach of every person of whatever consequence. With Muhammad, upon him be blessings and peace, Allah has sealed them. Ordaining faith in Him and in Islam: His religion, the best of religions, His community, the best of communities. His law can never be abrogated and there is no community after His community.

Among them Allah has placed men, chosen and elect, excellent and pious-Allah's better portion comes to them betimes. For Allah bound them with the word of devoutness and godliness turning their souls away from this world. They were true in their endeavors; they attained the sciences of study. Their dealings were therein sincere and they were granted the sciences of inheritance (hadith). Their secret hearts were pure; they were ennobled with true intuition-their feet firm, their understandings clean, their beacons bright. They had understanding of Allah and journeyed unto Allah and turned away from what is other than Allah. Their lights pierced the veils; their secret parts moved around the Throne of Allah. Very highly were they esteemed by Him who sits upon the Throne and their eyes were blind to all beneath the Throne. They were spiritual bodies, upon earth celestial with creation divine, silent and meditative, absent (from men) but present (with Allah); kings in rags, outcasts from every tribe, possessors of all virtues and lights of all guidance; ears attentive, hearts pure, their qualities concealed-chosen, Sufis, illuminated, pure. They were deposited by Allah among His creation, chosen from those whom Allah made; His testament to His Prophets, His secrets, entrusted to His Chosen One. During the Prophet's lifetime they were the people of his Bench (ahl-as-suffah), and after his death they were the best of his community. Thereafter, the first did not fail to call the second, and the predecessor the successor. The tongue of their work (example of their life) freeing the necessity of speech. But then desire diminished, purpose flagged, and with this came the spate of questions and answers, books and treatises whose inner meanings were known to those who wrote and the breasts (of those who read) were receptive to understand. Know, may Allah protect you that Sufism was called so due to the purity of its secrets and the clarity of its traces.

The name Sufi comes from the purity (safa) of the heart of the Sufi towards Allah, and the one who is pure in heart in his search for Allah, Exalted is He, is blessed by Him. They were called Sufis for standing in the first row (saff) in front of Allah according to their endeavor towards Him and according to the seeking of their hearts for Him, their standing before Him with all secrets and clearness of conscience before Him. They were called Sufis for the closeness of their attributes (sifat) to the attributes of the people of the sifa who were living during the lifetime of the Prophet (upon him be blessings and peace). It is said they are called Sufis according to the woolen (suuf) clothing they wore. Their relationship to the attribute (sifa) and the wool (suuf) testifies of their outer state, being people who have left the outer world (dunya) behind them. They were seekers who left their countries and abandoned their people and wandered in the lands leaving food and clothing and only taking the very necessary to cover their nakedness and still their hunger. For leaving their countries they have been called strangers and for wandering all the time they have been called wanderers.

The ones who related them to the purity (safa) and the first row (saff) have meant to express their secrets and their inner state. For the one who leaves the outer world (dunya), renouncing it and leaving it behind him, Allah purifies his secret heart and illuminates his heart. The Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him, said, "When light enters the heart it opens and expands it." He was asked, "And how do you recognize that, oh Prophet of Allah?" He answered, "You leave the state of self-delusion and blame and enter the state of infinity. You enter the state of preparation for death before it comes." Know that the one who carries these attributes and is in this state of purity of heart, is truly in the first row standing with clarity in his secret heart and illuminated chest. These are the attributes of the antecedents and the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, for he said, "From my community seventy thousand will enter Paradise without being judged." Through the purity of their secret hearts, the openness of their chests and illumination in their hearts they had true knowledge of Allah, not reasoning about the trust in Allah but depending completely upon Him, content with what destiny held. And know that the heart of the Sufi has seen Allah and whoever sees Allah will never die. He who has seen Allah enters eternity. The word of the Sufi is immortal like the heart of the Sufi and will never die because it was woven with Allah and has asked for His contentment and has taken from His guidance and has shone with His love

and been illuminated by His light. The topic Sufism – whether of morals, knowledge, behavior or expressing insights one has taken or illustrating spirituality or even talking about the tasting of Divine revelation or illuminism – is always a topic connected to Allah, dependent on Him and annihilated by Him, Praised is He. Therefore Sufis believe they are Beloveds of Allah – pure, chosen ones.

They believe they are from the purest of His believers and the protectors of His wisdom and His ayat. All their deeds, their movements and knowledge, their tasting and their stations, all are gifts from Allah and of His Generosity. Their Lord, Praised is He, is their teacher, their Giver and their Guide. He is the closest Beloved, the Responder, the One that bequests their deeds towards His Face. Through this passionate band of love, inspired closeness, and intimacy, the Sufi sees the Face of Allah wherever he turns-all other ceasing to exist. Everything in this world is a mirror in which the Sufi sees the Face of Allah, His wonders, His mercy, and His Omnipotence. Dhu Nun in his secret conversation with Allah says, "Oh Lord, I have never heard the sound of an animal, nor the rustle of the trees, nor the murmur of the waters, nor the singing of the birds, nor the sound of drizzle, nor the drone of winds, nor the rattle of thunder, unless to witness Your Oneness showing me that there is nothing like You." There has never been a people who have talked about Divine Love and annihilation in God like the Sufis. The annihilation of the Sufi in the Divine, in addition to being an act of very highest faith, is a school of manner (tarbiya) and behavior (achlaq) not to be compared with any other. Bearing in mind the modern schools of psychology or schools of pedagogy, the annihilation of Sufism is a way that calls for completeness and loftiness such as no other way is able to. It is the annihilation of feelings and earthly desires in something higher and greater than the highest principles defined by manner and behavior. It is the annihilation of the moods of the self.

Longing, feeling, and everything one loves, drowns in what Allah loves, wants, and orders. So the Sufi lives in and in accordance with the manners of the Divine. As Junayd said, "All his movements are in harmony with the Truth (Haqq) with no discrepancy, annihilated from discrepancy, absorbed in the harmony." It is the replacement of human nature by Divine nature and in Islam came only through Sufism. For the Sufi annihilation is not the annihilation of a body in another body or a soul in another soul, it is the annihilation of the will in a will and the annihilation of manners in manners and attributes in attributes. In

other words, the annihilation of human attributes from the attributes of the Truth (Haqq). It is the elevation into completeness (kamal), an elevation in which man's wings are spread in the Divine horizon getting higher and higher until it reaches the honorable state of alternating into the Divine attributes. This is the annihilation the Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him, meant when he said, "Let your attributes be according to the Attributes of the Divine (tachalaqu fi-achlaqi llah)." And the hadith al-Qudsi mentions: "I am the ears he hears through and the eyes he sees through." In this annihilation, the Sufi knows through feeling and taste that his body, heart, and soul are with Allah. Allah is in his conscience, movements, and words. The Sufis are annihilated in their love for their Lord and their manners are in harmony with Him. They become well-behaved and well-mannered in His prayer niche (mihrab), living in His remembrance and protection. Allah taught them, purified them, and made them righteous. He chose them, selected them, loved them and was pleased with them. And then He opened for their hearts the Kingdoms of heaven and earth, revealing the wonders of His universe, the marvel of His omnipotence, the secrets of His creation. He flowed over them His gifts, offered through knowledge and taste. Through their annihilation the chosen ones reached eternity. They became the ones who guide to Allah, through His order, protecting His creation, announcing His words, talking about His Presence, calling upon loving Him, asking for His Protection, chanting out of ecstasy and yearning, praising, and remembering Him.

The Sufis are the people of annihilation (ahl al-fana') in Allah, given by Him the best of outcomes. He gives them piety, turning their selves away from the outer world (dunya). True Sufis are sincere in their battle as evidenced by the depth of knowledge they reach in their studies of shari'a. They are pure in their behavior towards others and because of this were given the knowledge of their Muhammadan heritage, the haqiqa. Their secret hearts become pure and they gain the blessing of a truthful, keen eye. Their feet become firm, their understanding increases and their paths enlighten. They begin to understand what God says to them and they direct themselves to Allah, leaving everything other than Him behind. Their lights penetrate the veils, their secret hearts circulate His Throne and their minds are exalted near the Holder of the Throne becoming blind to everything other than the Throne. They are spiritual bodies and though they are on earth they are heavenly and with creation they are divine pertaining to God. Their ears are aware and their secret hearts pure. Their death is hidden. They are the entrusted people of Allah to His creation, His promise to His Prophet, the hidden ones among His friends. In his lifetime they were the people of his attributes and after his death the best of his community. They are the ones whose hearts have seen Allah, whose hearts have not died without His sight, but who have palpitated everlasting in the living pure love, piously remembering Allah, tasting His guidance and enjoying His contentment with them. Their hearts send out the sparkle that illuminates the path of the followers of Allah, whose hearts are eternal, alive, and pure. All their utterance is alive and pure, connected with Allah.

You see me describing the path and way and speech of unity to the ones who do not know their school (madhah) and who have not served under their masters. I have described them with obvious words for those who do not understand their signs or have not grasped their words to protect the ones who want to know from the interpretation of the ignorant, to give an explanation for those who want to follow the path to Allah.

Know that each station has a beginning and an end and in between there are different states. Each station has its knowledge and each condition (hal) signs. In each station there are affirmations and negations. Not all that is negated in one station is negated in the one before and not all that is affirmed in it was affirmed in the one before. As the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, said, "There is no faith ('iman) for the one who is not trustworthy." The one who is not trustworthy cannot be given the promise ('aqd). The ones who have reached the station of trustworthiness or crossed to a higher station have realized this. And the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, who will always be in a higher station than theirs, explains it to them. But the ones who have not reached this state (hal), have denied it, declared it false, even called it blasphemous. This is why the Sufis started using expressions and symbols in their sciences which are only known to them, and the owner of the station understands them, but they are unknown to the hearers who have not reached this specific station. But when he reaches it, he comes back to himself knowing it was due to his limited knowledge and his poor opinion that he did not understand and he will adjoin it to his delirious state. This is better than denying the truth and ignoring it.

The subject of the Sufi is his higher essence and he searches for this knowledge either through proof or witnessing or seeing. The first is the state of the seeker and the others are the states of the ones who have reached. His theme is the self (nafs), the heart (qalb) and the soul (ruh). He seeks to refine and purify them, for the one who knows himself knows his Lord and the one who brought down this knowledge was the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, whom Allah taught through revelation and inspiration. Allah brought down upon him the angel Gabriel, may peace be upon him, carrying to him first the divine law (shari'a), and when it was determined, he came again with the haqiqa, which the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, then transmitted to only some of his followers. The first to talk about Sufism and reveal it was Ali, may Allah honor him, and from him Hasan al-Basri received it and in other sayings it was Ali's son Hasan, may Allah be pleased with him, who was the next to receive it. Sufism means the surrender of the self (nafs) to whatever Allah wants and it is said that this is based on three qualities: non-attachment to the outer world, looking at none other than Allah with the need and conviction of surrender and love, and separating and rising from the choice of one's own accord and planning. It is remembrance with reunion and ecstasy of love (wajd) with obedience. It is working and following, the purity of closeness after the cloudiness of distance, and sitting with Allah completely.

The Sufi path is the superior path because its core is the pure essence. At the beginning one stands in fear of Allah, in the middle one learns the right behavior towards Allah, and at the end lies the actual knowing of Allah, the leaving of everything other than Allah. Therefore Junayd said, "If we knew that under the sky there was a more elevated knowledge than this, we would follow it."

Know that everyone who is truthful in this knowledge is from the chosen and everyone who understands it is from the chosen of the chosen. And everyone who expresses it is like the undiscovered star and endless sea. If you see someone who believes in this knowledge, rejoice for him. If you see someone who understands this knowledge, be happy for him and turn to be like him. If you should see someone upon whom this knowledge was revealed through speech, glorify him. And if you see someone who criticizes it, flee from him as you flee a lion.

Every knowledge is in times indispensable, but Sufism is the only knowledge to be indispensable at any time. For it is a knowledge that includes everything and its condition that there is no knowledge and no work without devotion towards Allah, Exalted is He. For faithfulness and sincerity are the condition in everything one does. This concerns the law (shari'a), the punishment and the merit.

Outer knowledge and sciences exist without the knowledge of Sufism but they are lacking and limited. Know that Sufism in religion is like the soul of the body. It is the station of divine insight, which the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, explained to Gabriel, may peace be upon him, by saying, "Worship Allah as if you see Him, for even if you do not see him, He sees you." There is no other meaning to it than that. It is the seeing of all things and deeds after the witnessing of Allah, or the witnessing of Allah after the seeing. What is meant by the seeing after the witnessing is to return to the baqa' and to see what Allah wants from one in this world. Its procurement of support comes from the Book, the Sunna, the inspiration of the salihin, and the contribution of the Knowers.

Many people have given their opinion on the science of Sufism. The Imam al-Gazali, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "It is an individual duty for nobody is free of sickness or faults other than the Prophets, may peace be upon them."

The Imam Abu Hasan ash-Shadhuli, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "The one who has not entered into our science dies insisting on the great sins without feeling it. Where it is an individual duty, it is a duty to travel to the person one can take the knowledge from, one who is known for his teachings and famous in the medicine he makes, even if he disobeys his parents." This is also said by Sununu and others. The self (nafs) has to be conquered like an enemy, for it must be fought and one must seek for help in that, even if one has to disobey one's own parents.

How right are these words:

I risk my life for Your love
I travel in Your absence
overcoming all obstacles
and even leaving my mother behind.
I enter all ugliness to come to Your love
And drink from Your cup even if it were poison.
I do not listen to the ones who restrain me
And my ear is deaf to the ones who blame me.
I risk everything for Your love
And abandon for Your love my father and mother.