

Tasawwuf can be called the inwardness of Islam. Islam, like most other faiths, to a greater or lesser extent consists firstly of certain beliefs, such as the existence of God, the coming of the Judgement, reward and punishment in the next life, and the outward expression of these beliefs in forms of worship, such as prayer and fasting, all of which are concerned with man's relationship to God. Secondly, it consists of a system of morality which concerns man's relationship with man, and has its outward expression in certain social institutions and laws, such as marriage, inheritance, civil and criminal laws. But it is obvious that the basis of this faith, the spirit that gives it life, is man's relationship with God. Forms of worship are simply the physical vehicles of this relationship, and it is this relationship again which is responsible for the origin, the significance and the ultimate sanction of the principles of morality and their formulation into a specific social and legal system. If the interior converse with the Supreme Being and inspiration from Him are present, then they are comparable to the soul within the body of the exterior religion; if they die away, or in proportion to the extent they wither or become feeble, the outward form of the faith becomes like a soul-less body, which by the inexorable law of nature swiftly succumbs to corruption. It is therefore man's direct relationship with his Maker which is the breath and life of religion, and it is the study and cultivation of this relationship that the word Tasawwuf connotes.

It may be wondered why the words "Sufi", which means "woollen-clothed" and "Tasawwuf" which means "the path of the Sufis," i.e., the woollen-clothed ones, should have become so universal in order to denote something which belongs properly to the realm of the spirit. This name is symbolic rather than descriptive. To be a Sufi does not require a person to literally wear woollen clothes, but presumes an inner quality which was at one time characteristic of those who wore them. In the early generations of Islam, through the closeness to the time of the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) and the illumination of his incomparable spirituality, which encompassed so completely the inner and the outer, the comprehension of the inwardness of Islam enwrapped in its outward expressions was so general that no group of people who devoted themselves specially to this aspect of the faith was distinguishable. It was only when the inevitable course of development of human affairs began to run and the original trunk of universality to throw out branches of specialisation, that Islamic knowledge was progressively divided into the interior and the exterior, and the general word *Ilm* (Knowledge) began to denote more the academic study of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh than their spiritual content, contrary to its Qur'anic use in the sense of "Knowledge of Allah". At this stage that body of Muslims who devoted themselves more particularly to the cultivation of the spiritual heritage of their Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*), began to use the term *Ma'rifat* (Recognition of Allah) and *Arif* (One who recognises Allah) to denote this inward aspect of knowledge, and indeed still do to the present day. So it was possible that instead of Sufis they might have been termed *Ahle-e-Maarifat* or *Arifin*. But every aspirant to spiritual development is not an Arif, and the average human mind seeks more the outer badge than the inner reality, which in this case is anyway difficult to describe; so the habit observed in certain Godly persons (in reaction to the excessive luxury of the times) of wearing coarse woollen clothes, which were then the mark of extreme poverty, was taken as the symbol of all those who sought the inner life, and this term's convenience and simplicity has withstood all the vagaries of time and place throughout the Islamic world.

The visible formulations of Islam are therefore both enlivened by the spiritual and moral force behind them, and so they are the manifestations of this force and at the same time they are the means of attaining these spiritual and moral qualities; this can be said to constitute their main purpose. Thus these two aspects of Islam are mutually generative, each one producing the other. It can be seen from the Word of Allah, the Qur'an, that wherever something concerning man's outward actions is decreed, its inward content and purpose is also stressed. Take Prayer for instance. Allah says: "Observe Prayer for my remembrance" (20:14); or "The believers have attained success; who are lowly in their prayers" (23:1, 2), emphasising that the object of Prayer is not the mere outward performance, but to remember Him with a humble heart. In the case of fasting Allah says: "Fasting has been decreed for you, as it was decreed for those who came before you, that you may be God-fearing" (2:183). Regarding sacrifice on the occasion of Pilgrimage (Hajj), He says: "It is not their blood or their flesh which reaches Him, but the devotion from you" (22:37). On the subject of marriage: "It is one of His signs that He has made for you mates of your own kind that you may find peace in them, and He has created affection and kindness between you" (30:21). On spending for the poor: "They (the righteous) give food to the needy, the orphan and the prisoner, for the love of Him. They say: We feed for the sake of Allah only, and desire no reward or thanks from you" (76:8, 9). If we reflect on these and other similar indications in the Qur'an, we are led to the conclusion that if it is necessary to develop within ourselves those qualities which are their soul; that these two are complementary and one cannot exist in a sound state without the other. When the word Shariat is used, one immediately calls to mind the basic beliefs of Islam, without which a person cannot be reckoned a Muslim, and the external decrees comprising forms of worship, rules of behaviour and civil and criminal laws. In short it is the outwardness of Islam which is normally referred to by this term. But we have seen that within this outer *Shariat* there exists an inner *Shariat* of equal importance, which constitutes both its inspiration and its goal. Like the word "*Ilm*" (Knowledge) which originally comprised both the inward realisation of divine truths as well as outward knowledge of Islamic tenets, the term "Shariat" (the road) should really include the devotion of the heart to Allah as well as specific beliefs, and the attainment of moral excellence as well as submission to the law. But just as "Ilm" came to mean only book knowledge, so "Shariat" came to mean only the law; as a result, the Sufis, the devotees of the spirit of Islam, began to use the word Ma'rifat' for inner relationship with God, and in place of the word "Shariat" they chose the word *Tariqat* (the path) to denote the way to spiritual perfection. Just as the outer "Shariat" consists of two parts, belief and practice, so also does the inner "Shariat" manifest itself in two main fields.

The first is man's attitude to his Maker. From the Qur'an and the teachings of the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) we learn that this attitude should be inspired by love, hope, fear, gratitude, patience, trust, self-sacrifice and complete devotion; and that He should be felt to be constantly near. This is the inwardness of belief. The second is man's attitude to his fellow men: Allah and His Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) have taught us that this should be inspired by sympathy, justice, kindness, unselfishness, generosity, sternness on matters of principle, lenience wherever possible, and that we must avoid pride jealousy, malice, greed, selfishness, miserliness, and ill-nature. These qualities will not be found explained in the books of Fiqh, it required a group of people distinct from the jurists to determine and develop the science of the soul. Of these two parts of the inner Shariat, it is the first i.e. man's relationship with God, which is the root, the moral attitude of man towards his fellow being derived from it. It is the realisation that all men are creatures of the One God, and that He wishes us to treat them with mercy and kindness, and at times justice, which should reflect His own sublime qualities, and that if we succeed in this we shall win His pleasure. That is the real basis of morality. Some have made the mistake of imagining that morality can exist by itself without the foundation of religion, and have tried to promulgate a non-religious ethical code as a substitute for faith. This is nothing but a mental illusion. It comes about this way: through the medium of religious teaching, a certain moral outlook permeates a whole society and colours not only the specifically religious life, but education and social customs and habits of thinking and acting. When at a later stage some people take to agnosticism and rebel against the established faith, they are unable to separate themselves from this moral attitude which has now become the very stuff of their mental being. Without realising the origin of their morality, they fall into error of considering it self-existent, and imagine that they can reform society by simply calling upon people to be ethical. But it is a matter of observation that such inherited moral attitudes, when cut off from the tree of religion to which they owe their being, very quickly decay, and it is not long before the very basis of morality is questioned and finally denied, and non-moral philosophies are openly proclaimed. Whereas the morality based on faith in God, derived from a revealed Book and given life by the consciousness of Divine pleasure, has in it the seeds, not of decay, but of growth and fruition.

That it is man's inner relationship with Allah, which gives meaning and value to his outward expression of belief and the performance of his religious duties, is asserted most pointedly in one of the most famous sayings of the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*). The following incident is reported by Hazrat Omar, the second *Khalifa*.

"We were sitting with the Messenger of Allah one day when a man appeared with very white clothes and very black hair, with no signs of travel on him. None of us recognised him. He came and sat before the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) with his knees touching his knees, and his hands placed on his thighs. He then said; "O! Muhammed tell me, what is Islam?" The Prophet replied: "Islam is that you testify that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah, and that you establish prayer, pay Zakat, fast the month of Ramadan and make the pilgrimage to the House of Allah, if you are able." The man said: "You are right", and we wondered that he both asked and confirmed the answer. Then he said: "What is *Iman*?" The Prophet replied: "*Iman* is that you believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Last Day, and that you believe in the predestination of good and evil." The man said: "You are right. Now tell me what is *Ihsan* (good performance)?" The Prophet replied: "That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him and if you do not see Him, He surely sees you."

Then after asking about the Last Day, the man left, and the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) informed his companions that this was the Angel Gabriel who came to teach them their religion... (*Bukhari, etc*).

Here the word *Ihsan*, which means "to perform something in the best manner" is explained as "the worship of Allah as if you are seeing Him, and if you do not see Him, He surely sees you." This means that the consciousness of the presence of Allah, and the feeling of love and awe which accompany it, must permeate both our faith and practice (Iman and Islam) and it is in proportion to this consciousness that our excellence in religion can be judged. Clearly this sense of presence is not to be confined only to worship, but to all our actions (one version of the above incident, in fact, has "to work for Allah as if you are seeing Him"). It is precisely this awareness of the nearness and presence of Allah the Sufis have as their ultimate goal in all their activities.

So far we have been speaking of the Muslims' relationship with Allah in a general way. But Tasawwuf has a more specific content, that is to say, it aims at bringing the novice to the direct spiritual experience. The fountainhead of Islam (a fact which is often forgotten) is the direct spiritual experience of the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) by means of which the message of God was conveyed to man. This spiritual experience had many forms, and was continuous throughout the period of the Prophet's prophethood, starting from the initial vision of the Angel when the call to the divine mission was sounded, and persisting throughout the inspiration of the Divine Book, with other manifestations such as the *Hadith-Qudsi* (Divine Inspirations apart from the Qur'an itself) and revelations of the next world. It is illustrated particularly in the Me'raj (The Ascension), which culminates in the vision of the Supreme Reality. When the essence of prophethood is the spiritual experience, it would be strange indeed if some portion of this aspect of the prophetic life were not inherited by the Prophet's companions and those who followed them. So we find a tradition of spiritual experience alongside that of the more obvious branches of religious teaching concerned with beliefs and practices. In the early stages it was not considered proper to publish such experiences and considerable reticence was observed; it was thought sufficient only to hint at them. As time passed, reticence was lessened and gradually the science of Tasawwuf was outwardly formulated, although the very nature of these most inward matters makes some reticence inevitable at all times.

Abu Huraira, one of the intimate companions of the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) used to say: "I acquired two vessels from the Messenger of Allah (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*). One of them I published, but if I published the other my throat would be cut." This is an interesting allusion to the danger of making a show of spiritual experiences are believed, then some people out of ignorance are inclined to raise the one who is spiritually gifted almost to divinity, if not to make him into God Himself. If they are disbelieved, the doubters become guilty of denying what is true, and deprive themselves of certain special benefits which it is the Will of God that they should have. This is the reason why Sufis' have always counselled great caution in the matter of describing some of their spiritual states in detail as these can only be appreciated in the tasting, and not in the description. In spite of the obvious references in the Qur'an, the Hadith and the lives of the Companions, some have tried to deny this spiritual heritage of the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) and claim that the early Muslims were only "ascetics" and not "mystics." But to perceive spirituality where it exists is not given to everyone, even to perceive it at all; let it suffice to say that the extraordinary dedication to Allah and His Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) and their commands by the leading companions and followers would be inexplicable without a profound spiritual experience.

I have said that in the early period the outer and the inner aspects of Islam, that is, the outward observance and its spiritual content, were not divided but formed a homogeneous whole, but as time passed and specialised knowledge increased, it became necessary and inevitable that a body of Muslims should devote themselves more particularly to the inwardness of Islam which came to be known as Tasawwuf. If we consider the development of Tasawwuf as a science, that is the science of the soul, we find that it provides a close comparison with the development of other sciences based on the principles of the Divine Book and the life of Allah's Messenger (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*). To take the science of Hadith as an example, we find that during the first century, which was the time of the Companions and the followers, things remained very much in the original form of personal teaching from those who sat in the company of the Great Ones, with little sign of elaboration and formulation. During the second century we begin to find more or less comprehensive collections and criticisms of Hadiths and the formulation of rules of classification, which culminate, in the third century, in critical *recensions* based on now thoroughly elaborate and determined principles. In the case of Fiqh we find a similar process after the first century, of the direct and practical teaching of the companions and followers' the second century produces elaborate compendia of legal decisions and formulation of principles of jurisprudence which again by the third century had been built up into a relatively independent science. Tasawwuf, too, was constructed into a spiritual science on the firm foundations of the spiritual heritage of the Prophet of God (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*). Here again, the elaboration begins in the second century in the recorded sayings and treatises and books of the early Sufis, and in the third century Tasawwuf appears as a fully developed and formulated spiritual science. It is just as gratuitous to talk critically of later innovations in the matter of Tasawwuf as it is in the matter of Fiqh, Hadith and Tafsir. There is a world of difference between elaborations and innovations, which people with muddled minds find difficult to distinguish.

Although the development of Tasawwuf can be historically compared with that of the other sciences, there is an intrinsic superiority in Tasawwuf which should be well remembered. This superiority lies in that the expansion of the science of spiritual development is based on experience and direct observation confirmed in its broad pattern by thousands of travellers on the upward path of the soul, whereas the other sciences mainly owe their formulation to reason and conjecture. All, of course, are founded on 'Tradition', that is, the Qur'an and its living commentary by the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) and his followers, but the process of later elaboration has this fundamental difference. It cannot be contested that direct experience, especially when it is common to large numbers of people, is vastly more authoritative source of knowledge than rational speculation. For instance, after the data provided by 'Revelation' and 'Tradition' the chief instrument in the development of Fiqh is *Qiyas* (analogy) or *Rai* (opinion). The main pillar of the science of Hadith is *Jarh* and *Ta'dil*, which means the critical examination of the reliability of the reporters of a certain Hadith in addition to its subject matter. Obviously these processes are rational and speculative. The development of Tasawwuf, however, has consisted of the progressively more detailed expounding of the spiritual experience constituting the inner heritage of the Noble Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam*) and has no content of conjecture and opinion. This vital element has resulted in a remarkable unanimity among the proponents of this science throughout the ages and whatever differences there exist are those of emphasis or mode of expression and do not show any real cleavage in the essential unity.

We have already alluded to the function of Tasawwuf, which is to perfect the relationship of man first with his God, and secondly with his fellow men. Now it is obvious that only very few people have the call to devote themselves entirely to spirituality and become as it were specialists in the inner life. This appears to be the result of some innate urge which so drives those who possess it as not to allow them to follow any other vocation. This is not to say that even these specially gifted few entirely abandon all usual worldly activities. On the contrary, we find in Islam, in distinction from other religious communities, that its greatest scientists of the soul were mostly married, had children and conducted their household and similar affairs like other men. It is another matter that during the period of training for spiritual development a certain retirement, either total or partial, is usually required, as indeed it is during the acquirement of other branches of specialist learning. It is also true that even after reaching expertness many of the Islamic spiritualists paid very little attention to the earning of their livelihood and spent their whole time in teaching and giving solace, help and encouragement to the common people. Their physical wants were looked after by their pupils and admirers, as was the practice until recently even in the case of those who taught children how to read and write. In this deliberate neglect of their own material needs in order to devote themselves more unhamperedly to their mission, they observed the utmost selflessness and resignation to Allah, and never expressly or by implication gave any sign of the poverty or even hunger which they often had to undergo. If they neglected the world, it was only as far as their own wants were concerned; they never neglected the wants of those who came to them for spiritual nourishment, or even for physical nourishment if they had any to spare, for in addition to being at the service of those who were hungry for the things of the soul they often conducted public kitchens for the feeding of the poor, and engaged themselves in the healing of the sick in body as well as those who were sick in spirit, as is well known to those who have studied their lives.

Just as spiritual specialists are few by the nature of things, so also the number of the pupils who shape their lives in close conformity to those of their masters is also very small. These selected followers are those who, having the inner call, are later charged with the duty of carrying on the work of teaching and exhortation in a new generation. But the majority of those who visit these inheritors of the more inward traditions of Islam are those who, while engaged in their daily vocations, wish to refresh themselves from the toils of the world at the pure springs of sincerity and devotion which they find so abundant with the Sufis. It is here that we see the influence of the Sufis working and giving new life to the whole wide land of the community. The ordinary men and women who spend a part of their time with the Sufis acquire some measure of inspiration for their spiritual and moral betterment, and to this measure their whole lives are affected. It is the spiritual orientation and the moral attitude which constitute the fountainhead of human thought, and so of human action. Events in man's history, and growth, flourishing, and decay of peoples can always be traced back to these inner sources. The contact of people of the world with the Sufis, whether they be kings, princes, captains, merchants, administrators, artisans, or peasants, indirectly affects the whole movement of the nation along the uneven road of time. It is from these most intimate wells of inspiration that a certain quality is given to the thought and life of a whole culture. What a pity that some superficial intellectuals are unable to perceive these undercurrents of history. Economics, politics, and social life are all controlled b the mental processes of man. He can only ignore, at his peril, these deep directive forces from which his mental processes emerge. The apparent obscurity and detachment of the Sufi conceal an activity of radical importance to the whole Muslim nation.

Hazrat Shahidullah Faridi (Rahmatullahe Alaih)

Hazrat Shahidullah Faridi (Rahmatullahe Alaih) was resident in Karachi for about three decades prior to his passing away in 1978. In the earlier part of his life he lived in England where he was born (1915), brought up (in a wealthy British family) and educated (Oxford). Having embraced Islam after reading Kashful-Mahjub (The Unveiling of the Veiled), the classical treatise on Sufism written by the famous Saint Ali bin Uthman al-Hujwiri (Rahmatullahe Alaih) (known in Pakistan as Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh), he had come to this part of the world on a visit (1937) in search of a Murshid (Spiritual Guide). The visit, however, turned into a prolonged stay as a result of his coming into contact with Hazrat Syed Muhammed Zauqi Shah (Rahmatullahe Alaih), a Murshid in the Chishtia Sabria Sufi Order. He became his Murid (pupil) and preferred to remain in the company (suhbat) of his Spiritual Mentor. He could have spent the rest of his time in comfort and luxury which he had inherited but chose a totally different kind of life, in the way of Allah. The prolonged stay eventually became permanent in that his association with Hazrat Syed Muhammed Zauqi Shah (Rahmatullahe Alaih) lasted some fourteen years, until the passing away of the latter. Hazrat Shahidullah Faridi (Rahmatullahe Alaih) was about forty when the responsibilities of spiritual succession to his Sheikh were entrusted to him. At this juncture, he had his own business. He voluntarily closed the business and devoted the rest of his life exclusively to his new duties in the service of Allah. He was sixty-three.

Source: *Inner Aspects of Faith* (By Shahidullah Faridi, Published by Mahfil-e-Zauqia, Karachi, Pakistan)

This book is available at Moon Over Medina: A Sufi Bookstore <http://www.moonovermedina.com/>