

The Place of Tasawwuf in Traditional Islamic Sciences

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PERHAPS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGING ISLAM CORRECTLY TODAY IS THE SCARCITY OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE
authenticated hadith that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

"Truly, Allah does not remove Sacred Knowledge by taking it out of servants, but rather by taking back the souls of Islamic scholars [in death], until, when He has not left a single scholar, the people take the ignorant as leaders, who are asked for and who give Islamic legal opinion without knowledge, misguided and misleading" (*Fath al-Bari*, 1:194, hadith 100).

The Process described by the hadith is not yet completed, but has certainly begun, and in our times, the lack of traditional scholars—whether in Islamic law, in hadith, in *tafsir* 'Qur'anic exegesis'—has given rise to an understanding of the religion that is far from scholarly, and sometimes far from the truth. For example, in the course of my own studies in Islamic law, my first impression from orientalst and Muslim-reformer literature, was that the Imams of the *madhhabs* or 'schools of jurisprudence' had brought a set of rules from completely outside the Islamic tradition and somehow imposed them upon the Muslims. But when I sat with traditional scholars in the Middle East and asked them about the details, I came away with a different point of view, having learned the bases for deriving the law from the Qur'an and sunna.

And similarly with *Tasawwuf*—which is the word I will use tonight for the English *Sufism*, since our context is traditional Islam—quite a different picture emerged from talking with scholars of *Tasawwuf* than what I had been exposed to in the West. My talk tonight, in Sha' Allah, will present knowledge taken from the Qur'an and *sahih* hadith, and from actual teachers of Tasawwuf in Syria and Jordan, in view of the need for all of us to get beyond clichés, the need for factual information from Islamic sources, the need to answer such questions as: Where did Tasawwuf come from? What role does it play in the *din* or religion of Islam? and most importantly, What is the command of Allah about it?

As for the origin of the term Tasawwuf, like many other Islamic disciplines, its *name* was not known to the first generation of Muslims. The historian Ibn Khaldun notes in his *Muqaddima*:

This knowledge is a branch of the sciences of Sacred Law that originated within the Umma. From the first, the way of such people had also been considered the path of truth and guidance by the early Muslim community and its notables, of the Companions of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), those who were taught by them, and those who came after them.

It basically consists of dedication to worship, total dedication to Allah Most High, disregard for the finery and ornament of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, wealth, and prestige sought by most men, and retiring from others to worship alone. This was the general rule among the Companions of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and the early Muslims, but when involvement in this-worldly things became widespread from the second Islamic century onwards and people became absorbed in worldliness, those devoted to worship came to be called *Sufiyya* or *People of Tasawwuf* (Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddima* [N.d. Reprint. Mecca: Dar al-Baz, 1397/1978], 467).

In Ibn Khaldun's words, the content of *Tasawwuf*, "total dedication to Allah Most High," was, "the general rule among the Companions of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and the early Muslims." So if the word did not exist in earliest times, we should not forget that this is also the case with many other Islamic disciplines, such as *tafsir*, 'Qur'anic exegesis,' or *ilm al-jarh wa ta'dil*, 'the science of the positive and negative factors that affect hadith narrators acceptability,' or *ilm al-tauhid*, the science of belief in Islamic tenets of faith,' all of which proved to be of the utmost importance to the correct preservation and transmission of the religion.

As for the origin of the word *Tasawwuf*, it may well be from *Sufi*, the person who does Tasawwuf, which seems to be etymologically prior to it, for the earliest mention of either term was by Hasan al-Basri who died 110 years after the Hijra, and is reported to have said, "I saw a Sufi circumambulating the Kaaba, and offered him a dirham, but he would not accept it." It therefore seems better to understand Tasawwuf by first asking what a Sufi is; and perhaps the best definition of both the Sufi and his way, certainly one of the most frequently quoted by masters of the discipline, is from the sunna of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) who said:

Allah Most High says: "He who is hostile to a friend of Mine I declare war against. My slave approaches Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him, and My slave keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks me, I will surely give to him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely protect him" (*Fath al-Bari*, 11:340–41, hadith 6502);

This hadith was related by Imam Bukhari, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Bayhaqi, and others with multiple contiguous chains of transmission, and is *sahih*. It discloses the central reality of Tasawwuf, which is precisely *change*, while describing the path to this change, in conformity with a traditional definition used by masters in the Middle East, who define a Sufi as *Faqihun 'amila bi 'ilmihī fa awarathahu Llahu 'ilma ma lam ya'lam*; 'A man of religious learning who applied what he knew, so Allah bequeathed him knowledge of what he did not know.'

To clarify, a Sufi is a *man of religious learning*, because the hadith says, "My slave approaches Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him," and only through learning can the Sufi know the command of Allah, or what has been made obligatory for him. He has *applied what he knew*, because the hadith says he not only *approaches* Allah with the obligatory, but "keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him." And in turn, *Allah bequeathed him knowledge of what he did not know*, because the hadith says, "And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks," which is a metaphor for the consummate awareness of *tauhid*, or the 'unity of Allah,' which in the context of human actions such as hearing, sight, seizing, and walking, consists of realizing the words of the Qur'an about Allah that,

"It is He who created you and what you do" (Qur'an 37:96).

The origin of the way of the Sufi thus lies in the prophetic sunna. The sincerity to Allah that it entails was the rule among the earliest Muslims, to whom this was simply a state of being without a name, while it only became a distinct discipline when the majority of the Community had drifted away and changed from this state. Muslims of subsequent generations required systematic effort to attain it, and it was because of the change in the Islamic environment after the earliest generations, that a discipline by the name of Tasawwuf came to exist.

But if this is true of origins, the more significant question is: How central is Tasawwuf to the religion, and: Where does it fit into Islam as a whole? Perhaps the best answer is the hadith of Muslim, that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said:

As we sat one day with the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace), a man in pure white clothing and jet black hair came to us, without a trace of travelling upon him, though none of us knew him.

He sat down before the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) bracing his knees against his, resting his hands on his legs, and said: "Muhammad, tell me about Islam." The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and to perform the prayer, give zakat, fast in Ramadan, and perform the pilgrimage to the House if you can find a way."

He said: "You have spoken the truth," and we were surprised that he should ask and then confirm the answer. Then he said:

"Tell me about true faith (iman)," and the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) answered: "It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His inspired Books, His messengers, the Last Day, and in destiny, its good and evil."

"You have spoken the truth," he said, "Now tell me about the perfection of faith (ihssan)," and the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) answered: "It is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you see Him not, He nevertheless sees you."

The hadith continues to where 'Umar said:

Then the visitor left. I waited a long while, and the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said to me, "Do you know, 'Umar, who was the questioner?" and I replied, "Allah and His messenger know best." He said,

"It was Gabriel, who came to you to teach you your religion" (*Sahih Muslim*, 1:37: hadith 8).

This is a *sahih* hadith, described by Imam Nawawi as one of the hadiths upon which the Islamic religion turns. The use of *din* in the last words of it, *Atakam ya'allikumum dinakum*, "came to you to teach you your religion" entails that the *religion* of Islam is composed of the three fundamentals mentioned in the hadith: *Islam*, or external compliance with what Allah asks of us; *Iman*, or the belief in the unseen that the prophets have informed us of; and *Ihsan*, or to worship Allah as though one sees Him. The Qur'an says, in Surat Maryam,

"Surely We have revealed the Remembrance, and surely We shall preserve it" (Qur'an 15:9).

and if we reflect how Allah, in His wisdom, has accomplished this, we see that it is by human beings, the traditional scholars He has sent at each level of the religion. The level of *Islam* has been preserved and conveyed to us by the Imams of *Shar'i'a* or 'Sacred Law' and its ancillary disciplines; the level of *Iman*, by the Imams of *'Aqida* or 'tenets of faith'; and the level of *Ihsan*, "to worship Allah as though you see Him," by the Imams of Tasawwuf.

The hadith's very words "to *worship* Allah" show us the interrelation of these three fundamentals, for the *how* of "worship" is only known through the external prescriptions of *Islam*, while the *validity* of this worship in turn presupposes *Iman* or faith in Allah and the Islamic revelation, without which *worship* would be but empty motions; while the words, "as if you see Him," show that *Ihsan* implies a human *change*, for it entails the experience of what, for most of us, is not experienced. So to understand Tasawwuf, we must look at the nature of this change in relation to both Islam and Iman, and this is the main focus of my talk tonight.

At the very level of Islam, we said that Tasawwuf requires *Islam*, through 'submission to the rules of Sacred Law.' But Islam, for its part, equally requires Tasawwuf. Why? For the good reason that the sunna which Muslims have been commanded to follow is not just the *words* and *actions* of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), but also his *states*, states of the heart such as *taqwa* 'godfeariness,' *ikhlas* 'sincerity,' *tawakkul* 'reliance on Allah,' *rahma* 'mercy,' *tawadu* 'humility,' and so on.

Now, it is characteristic of the Islamic ethic that human actions are not simply divided into two shades of morality, right or wrong; but rather five, arranged in order of their consequences in the next world. The *obligatory* (wajib) is that whose performance is rewarded by Allah in the next life and whose nonperformance is punished. The *recommended* (mandub) is that whose performance is rewarded, but whose nonperformance is not punished. The *permissible* (mubah) is indifferent, unconnected with either reward or punishment. The *offensive* (makruh) is that whose nonperformance is rewarded but whose performance is not punished. The *unlawful* (haram) is that whose nonperformance is rewarded and whose performance is punished, if one dies unrepentant.

Human states of the heart, the Qur'an and sunna make plain to us, come under each of these headings. Yet they are not dealt with in books of *fiqh* or 'Islamic jurisprudence,' because unlike the prayer, zakat, or fasting, they are not *quantifiable* in terms of the specific amount of them that must be done. But though they are not countable, they are of the utmost importance to every Muslim. Let's look at a few examples.

(1) *Love of Allah*. In Surat al-Baqara of the Qur'an, Allah blames those who ascribe associates to Allah whom they love as much as they love Allah. Then He says,

"And those who believe are greater in love for Allah" (Qur'an 2:165), making being a believer conditional upon having greater love for Allah than any other.

(2) *Mercy*. Bukhari and Muslim relate that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Whomever is not merciful to people, Allah will show no mercy" (*Sahih Muslim*, 4:1809: hadith 2319), and Tirmidhi relates the well authenticated (hasan) hadith "Mercy is not taken out of anyone except the damned" (*al-Jami' al-sahih*, 4:323: hadith 1923).

(3) *Love of each other*. Muslim relates in his *Sahih* that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "By Him in whose hand is my soul, none of you shall enter paradise until you believe, and none of you shall believe until you love one another" (*Sahih Muslim*, 1:74: hadith 54).

(4) *Presence of mind in the prayer (salat)*. Abu Dawud relates in his *Sunan* that 'Ammar ibn Yasir heard the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) say, "Truly, a man leaves, and none of his prayer has been recorded for him except a tenth of it, a ninth of it, eighth of it, seventh of it, sixth of it, fifth of it, fourth of it, third of it, a half of it" (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, 1:211: hadith 796)—meaning that none of a person's prayer counts for him except that in which he is present in his heart with Allah.

(5) *Love of the Prophet*. Bukhari relates in his *Sahih* that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "None of you believes until I am more beloved to him than his father, his son, and all people" (*Fath al-Bari*, 1:58, hadith 15).

It is plain from these texts that none of the states mentioned—whether mercy, love, or presence of heart—are quantifiable, for the Shari'a cannot specify that one must "do two units of mercy" or "have three units of presence of mind" in the way that the number of rak'as of prayer can be specified, yet each of them is personally obligatory for the Muslim. Let us complete the picture by looking at a few examples of states that are *haram* or 'strictly unlawful':

(1) *Fear of anyone besides Allah*. Allah Most High says in Surat al-Baqara of the Qur'an,

"And fulfill My covenant: I will fulfill your covenant—And fear Me alone" (Qur'an 2:40), the last phrase of which, according to Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, "establishes that a human being is obliged to fear no one besides Allah Most High" (*Tafsir al-Fakhr al-Razi*, 3:42).

(2) *Despair*. Allah Most High says,

"None despairs of Allah's mercy except the people who disbelieve" (Qur'an 12:87), indicating the unlawfulness of this inward state by coupling it with the worst human condition possible, that of unbelief.

(3) *Arrogance*. Muslim relates in his *Sahih* that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

"No one shall enter paradise who has a particle of arrogance in his heart" (*Sahih Muslim*, 1:93: hadith 91).

(4) *Envy*, meaning to wish for another to lose the blessings he enjoys. Abu Dawud relates that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

"Beware of envy, for envy consumes good works as flames consume firewood" (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, 4:276: hadith 4903).

(5) *Showing off in acts of worship*. Al-Hakim relates with a *sahih* chain of transmission that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

"The slightest bit of showing off in good works is as if worshipping others with Allah . . ." (*al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, 1:4).

These and similar *haram* inward states are not found in books of *fiqh* or 'jurisprudence,' because *fiqh* can only deal with quantifiable descriptions of rulings. Rather, they are examined in their causes and remedies by the scholars of the 'inner fiqh' of Tasawwuf, men such as Imam al-Ghazali in his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [The reviving of the religious sciences], Imam al-Rabbani in his *Maktubat* [Letters], al-Suhrawardi in his '*Awarif al-Ma'arif*' [The knowledges of the illuminates], Abu Talib al-Makki in *Qut al-qulub* [The summit of hearts], and similar classic works, which discuss and solve hundreds of ethical questions about the inner life. These are books of *Shar'i'a* and their questions are questions of Sacred Law, of how it is lawful or unlawful for a Muslim to *be*; and they preserve the part of the prophetic sunna dealing with states.

Who needs such information? All Muslims, for the Qur'anic verses and authenticated hadiths all point to the fact that a Muslim must not only do certain things and say certain things, but also must *be* something, must attain certain states of the heart and eliminate others. Do we ever fear someone besides Allah? Do we have a particle of arrogance in our hearts? Is our love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) greater than our love for any other human being? Is there the slightest bit of showing off in our good works?

Half a minute's reflection will show the Muslim where he stands on these aspects of his *din*, and why in classical times, helping Muslims to attain these states was not left to amateurs, but rather delegated to 'ulama of the heart, the scholars of Islamic Tasawwuf. For most people, these are not easy transformations to make, because of the force of habit, because of the subtlety with which we can deceive ourselves, but most of all because each of us has an ego, the self, the Me, which is called in Arabic *al-nafs*, about which Allah testifies in Surat Yusuf:

"Verily the self ever commands to do evil" (Qur'an 12:53).

If you do not believe it, consider the hadith related by Muslim in his *Sahih*, that:

The first person judged on Resurrection Day will be a man martyred in battle.

He will be brought forth, Allah will resurrect him with His blessings upon him and the man will acknowledge them, whereupon Allah will say, "What have you done with them?" to which the man will respond, "I fought to the death for You."

Allah will reply, "You lie. You fought in order to be called a hero, and it has already been said." Then he will be sentenced and dragged away on his face and flung into the fire.

Then a man will be brought forward who learned Sacred Knowledge, taught it to others, and who taught the Qur'an. Allah will remind him of His gifts to him and the man will acknowledge them, and then Allah will say, "What have you done with them?" The man will answer, "I acquired Sacred Knowledge, taught it, and recited the Qur'an, for Your sake."

Allah will say, "You lie. You learned so as to be called a scholar, and read the Qur'an so as to be called a reciter, and it has already been said." Then the man will be sentenced and dragged away on his face to be flung into the fire.

Then a man will be brought forward whom Allah generously provided for, giving him various kinds of wealth, and Allah will recall to him the benefits given, and the man will acknowledge them, to which Allah will say, "And what have you done with them?" The man will answer, "I have not left a single kind of expenditure You love to see made, except that I have spent on it for Your sake."

Allah will say, "You lie. You did it so as to be called generous, and it has already been said." Then he will be sentenced and dragged away on his face to be flung into the fire (*Sahih Muslim*, 3:1514: hadith 1905).

We should not fool ourselves about this, because our fate depends on it: in our childhood, our parents taught us how to behave through praise or blame, and for most of us, this permeated and colored our whole motivation for doing things. But when childhood ends, and we come of age in Islam, the religion makes it clear to us, both by the above hadith and by the words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) "The slightest bit of showing off in good works is as if worshipping others with Allah" that being motivated by what others think is no longer good enough, and that we must change our motives entirely, and henceforth be motivated by nothing but desire for Allah Himself. The Islamic revelation thus tells the Muslim that it is obligatory to break his habits of thinking and motivation, but it does not tell him how. For that, he must go to the scholars of these states, in accordance with the Qur'anic imperative,

"Ask those who know if you know not" (Qur'an 16:43).

There is no doubt that bringing about this change, purifying the Muslims by bringing them to spiritual sincerity, was one of the central duties of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), for Allah says in the Surat Al 'Imran of the Qur'an,

"Allah has truly blessed the believers, for He has sent them a messenger of themselves, who recites His signs to them and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom" (Qur'an 3:164),

which explicitly lists four tasks of the prophetic mission, the second of which, *yuzakkihim* means precisely to 'purify them' and has no other lexical sense. Now, it is plain that this teaching function cannot, as part of an *eternal* revelation, have ended with the passing of the first generation, a fact that Allah explicitly confirms in His injunction in Surat Luqman,

"And follow the path of him who turns unto Me" (Qur'an 31:15).

These verses indicate the teaching and transformative role of those who convey the Islamic revelation to Muslims, and the choice of the word *itiba'* in the second verse, which is more general, implies both keeping the company of and following the example of a teacher. This is why in the history of Tasawwuf, we find that though there were many methods and schools of thought, these two things never changed: keeping the company of a teacher, and following his example—in exactly the same way that the Sahaba were uplifted and purified by keeping the company of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and following his example.

And this is why the discipline of Tasawwuf has been preserved and transmitted by *Tariqas* or groups of students under a particular master. First, because this was the sunna of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in his purifying function described by the Qur'an. Secondly, Islamic knowledge has never been transmitted by writings alone, but rather from 'ulama to students. Thirdly, the nature of the knowledge in question is of *hal* or *state of being*, not just knowing, and hence requires it be taken from a succession of living masters back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), for the sheer range and number of the states of heart required by the revelation effectively make imitation of the personal example of a teacher the only effective means of transmission.

So far we have spoken about Tasawwuf in respect to Islam, as a Shari'a science necessary to fully realize the Sacred Law in one's life, to attain the states of the heart demanded by the Qur'an and hadith. This close connection between Shar'i'a and Tasawwuf is expressed by the statement of Imam Malik, founder of the Maliki school, that "he who practices Tasawwuf without learning Sacred Law corrupts his faith, while he who learns Sacred Law without practicing Tasawwuf corrupts himself. Only he who combines the two proves true." This is why Tasawwuf was taught as part of the traditional curriculum in madrasas across the Muslim world from Malaysia to Morocco, why many of the greatest Shari'a scholars of this Umma have been Sufis, and why until the end of the Islamic caliphate at the beginning of this century and the subsequent Western control and cultural dominance of Muslim lands, there were teachers of Tasawwuf in Islamic institutions of higher learning from Lucknow to Istanbul to Cairo.

But there is a second aspect of Tasawwuf that we have not yet talked about; namely, its relation to *Iman* or 'True Faith,' the second pillar of the Islamic religion, which in the context of the Islamic sciences consists of '*Aqida*' or 'orthodox belief.'

All Muslims believe in Allah, and that He is transcendently beyond anything conceivable to the minds of men, for the human intellect is imprisoned within its own sense impressions and the categories of thought derived from them, such as number, directionality, spatial extention, place, time, and so forth. Allah is beyond all of that; in His own words,

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him" (Qur'an 42:11)

If we reflect for a moment on this verse, in the light of the hadith of Muslim about *Ihsan* that "it is to worship Allah as though you see Him," we realize that the means of *seeing* here is not the eye, which can only behold physical things like itself, nor yet the mind, which cannot transcend its own impressions to reach the Divine, but rather certitude, the light of Iman, whose locus is not the eye or the brain, but rather the *ruh*, a subtle faculty Allah has created within each of us called the soul, whose knowledge is unobstructed by the bounds of the created universe. Allah Most High says, by way of exalting the nature of this faculty by leaving it a mystery,

"Say: 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord'" (Qur'an 17:86).

The food of this ruh is *dhikr* or the 'remembrance of Allah.' Why? Because acts of obedience increase the light of certainty and Iman in the soul, and dhikr is among the greatest of them, as is attested to by the *sahih* hadith related by al-Hakim that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

"Shall I not tell you of the best of your works, the purest of them in the eyes of your Master, the highest in raising your rank, better than giving gold and silver, and better for you than to meet your enemy and smite their necks, and they smite yours?" They said, "This—what is it, O Messenger of Allah?" and he said: *Dhikru Llahi 'azza wa jall*, "The remembrance of Allah Mighty and Majestic." (*al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, 1:496).

Increasing the strength of Iman through good actions, and particularly through the medium of *dhikr* has tremendous implications for the Islamic school and increasing spirituality. A non-Muslim once asked me, "If God exists, then why all this beating around the bush? Why doesn't He just come out and say so?"

The answer is that *taklif* or 'moral responsibility' in this life is not only concerned with outward actions, but with what we *believe*, our '*Aqida*—and the strength with which we believe it. If belief in God and other eternal truths were effortless in this world, there would be no point in Allah making us responsible for it, to which we would be automatic, involuntary, like our belief, say, that London is in England. There would no point in making someone responsible for something impossible *not* to believe.

But the responsibility Allah has placed upon us is belief in the Unseen, as a test for us in this world to choose between kufr and Iman, to distinguish believer from unbeliever, and some believers above others.

This why strengthening Iman through dhikr is of such methodological importance for Tasawwuf: we have not only been commanded as Muslims to believe in certain things, but have been commanded to have absolute certitude in them. The world we see around us is composed of veils of light and darkness: events come that knock the Iman out of some of us, and Allah tests each of us as to the degree of certainty with which we believe the eternal truths of the religion. It was in this sense that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said, "If the faith of Abu Bakr was weighed against the Iman of the entire Umma, it would outweigh it."

Now, in traditional '*Aqida* one of the most important tenets is the *wahdaniyya* or 'oneness and uniqueness' of Allah Most High. This means He is without any *sharik* or associate in His being, in His attributes, or in His acts. But the ability to hold this insight in mind in the rough and tumble of daily life is a function of the strength of certainty (yaqin) in one's heart. Allah tells the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in Surat al-A'raf of the Qur'an,

"Say: 'I do not possess benefit for myself or harm, except as Allah wills'" (Qur'an 7:188),

yet we tend to rely on ourselves and our plans, in obliviousness to the facts of '*Aqida* that ourselves and our plans have no effect, that Allah alone brings about effects.

If you want to test yourself on this, the next time you contact someone with good connections whose help is critical to you, take a look at your heart at the moment you ask him to put in a good word for you with someone, and see whom you are relying upon. If you are like most of us, Allah is not at the forefront of your thoughts, despite the fact that He alone is controlling the outcome. Isn't this a lapse in your '*Aqida*, or, at the very least, in your certainty?

Tasawwuf corrects such shortcomings by step-by-step increasing the Muslim's certainty in Allah. The two central means of Tasawwuf in attaining the *conviction* demanded by '*Aqida* are *mudhakara*, or learning the traditional tenets of Islamic faith, and *dhikr*, deepening one's certainty in them by remembrance of Allah. It is part of our faith that, in the words of the Qur'an in Surat al-Saffat,

"Allah has created you and what you do" (Qur'an 37:96);

yet for how many of us is this day to day experience? Because Tasawwuf remedies this and other shortcomings of Iman, by increasing the Muslim's certainty through a systematic way of teaching and dhikr, it has traditionally been regarded as personally obligatory to this pillar of the religion also, and from the earliest centuries of Islam, has proved its worth.

The last question we will deal with tonight is: What about the bad Sufis we read about, who contravene the teachings of Islam?

The answer is that there are two meanings of Sufi: the first is "Anyone who considers himself a Sufi," which is the rule of thumb of orientalst historians of Sufism and popular writers, who would oppose the 'Sufis' to the 'Ulama.' I think the Qur'anic verses and hadiths we have mentioned tonight about the scope and method of true Tasawwuf show why we must insist on the primacy of the definition of a Sufi as "a man of religious learning who applied what he knew, so Allah bequeathed him knowledge of what he did not know."

The very first thing a Sufi, as a *man of religious learning* knows is that the Shari'a and '*Aqida* of Islam are *above every human being*. Whoever does not know this will never be a Sufi, except in the orientalist sense of the word—like someone standing in front of the stock exchange in an expensive suit with a briefcase to convince people he is a stockbroker. A real stockbroker is something else.

Because this distinction is ignored today by otherwise well-meaning Muslims, it is often forgotten that the 'ulama who have criticized Sufis, such as Ibn al-Jawzi in his *Talbis Iblis* [The Devil's deception], or Ibn Taymiya in places in his *fatawa*, or Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, were not criticizing Tasawwuf as an ancillary discipline to the Shari'a. The proof of this is Ibn al-Jawzi's five-volume *Sifat al-Sufiyya*, which contains the biographies of the very same Sufis mentioned in al-Qushayri's famous *Tasawwuf manual al-Risala al-Qushayriyya*. Ibn Taymiya considered himself a Sufi of the Qadiri order, and volumes ten and eleven of his thirty-seven-volume *Majma' al-fatawa* are devoted to Tasawwuf. And Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya wrote his three-volume *Madarij al-salikin*, a detailed commentary on 'Abdullah al-Ansari al-Harawi's tract on the spiritual states of the Sufi path, *Manazil al-sa'irin*. These works show that their authors' criticisms were not directed at Tasawwuf as such, but rather at specific groups of their times, and they should be understood for what they are.

As in other Islamic sciences, mistakes historically did occur in Tasawwuf, most of them stemming from not recognizing the primacy of Shari'a and '*Aqida* above all else. But these mistakes were not different in principle from, for example, the *Isra'iliyyat* (baseless tales of Bani Isra'il) that crept into tafsir literature, or the *maudu'at* (identified forgeries) that crept into the hadiths of the field, were not taken as proof that *tafsir* was bad, or hadith was deviance, but rather, in each discipline, the errors were identified and warned against by Imams of the field, because as Umma needed the rest. And such corrections are precisely what we find in books like Qushayri's *Risala*, Ghazali's *Ihya'* and other works of Sufism.

For all of the reasons we have mentioned, Tasawwuf was accepted as an essential part of the Islamic religion by the Muslim community. The proof of this is all the famous scholars of Shari'a's sciences who had the higher education of Tasawwuf, among them Ibn 'Abidin, al-Razi, Ahmad Sirhindi, Zakariyya al-Ansari, al-Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam, Ibn Daqiq al-'Eid, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, Shah Wali Allah, Ahmad Dardir, Ibrahim al-Bajuri, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi, Imam al-Nawawi, Taqi al-Din al-Subki, and al-Suyuti.

Among the Sufis who aided Islam with the *sword* as well as the pen, to quote *Reliance of the Traveller*, were:

such men as the Naqshbandi sheikh Shamil al-Daghestani, who fought a prolonged war against the Russians in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century; Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdullah al-Somali, a sheikh of the Salihiyya order who led Muslims against the British and Italians in Somalia from 1899 to 1920; the Qadiri sheikh 'Uthman ibn Fodi, who led jihad in northern Nigeria from 1804 to 1808 to establish Islamic rule; the Qadiri sheikh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, who led the Algerians against the French from 1832 to 1847; the Darqawi faqir al-Haji Muhammad al-Ahrash, who fought the French in Egypt in 1799; the Tijani sheikh al-Haji 'Umar Tal, who led Islamic Jihad in Guinea, Senegal, and Mali from 1852 to 1865; and the Qadiri sheikh Ma' al-'Aynayn al-Qalqami, who helped marshal Muslim resistance to the French in northern Mauritania and southern Morocco from 1804 to 1909.

Among the Sufis whose missionary work Islamized entire regions are such men as the founder of the Sanusiyya order, Muhammad 'Ali Sanusi, whose efforts and jihad from 1807 to 1859 consolidated Islam as the religion of peoples from the Libyan Desert to sub-Saharan Africa; [and] the Shadhili sheikh Muhammad Ma'ruf and Qadiri sheikh 'Abd al-Barawi, whose efforts spread Islam westward and inland from the African Coast (*Reliance of the Traveller*, 863).

It is plain from the examples of such men what kind of Muslims have been Sufis; namely, all kinds, right across the board—and that Tasawwuf did not prevent them from serving Islam in any way they could.

To summarize everything I have said tonight: In looking first at Tasawwuf and Shari'a, we found that other