



## SPIRITUAL VALUES IN ISLAM: THE SUFI MODEL

● **Mohammed Hilmi Abdel Wahhāb** ●

It would be no exaggeration to say that religion – any religion – is essentially and fundamentally a value system. It is well known that godliness as a value has a powerful influence on society as a whole because it helps bring the individual members of an *ummah* (nation) together and guides them towards an uplifting spiritual life, along with all that a spiritual life implies including high-mindedness, self sacrifice and altruism.

Evidence for that can be seen in the fact that the belief system (particularly with respect to ‘rewards’, ‘punishment’ and the ‘next world’), which is the essence of religious experience, may be regarded as the infrastructure for dealing with human behaviour and self-justification within a practical framework. At the same time the mighty Sharia system, which is unique to the Islamic religion, is essentially a strategy for implementing the methodology under which that value system operates.

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● Scholar and academic from Egypt.



It is recognised that every religion normally consists of two main elements: firstly, a system of beliefs that provides it with its foundation and, secondly, a set of rites or ceremonies, which represent its visible form. In reality, neither element can be separated from the other; rituals and acts of worship are no more than outward signs aimed at bringing the worshipper closer to Allah the Most High, since religion, as the Sheikh and Imam Mohammed Abduh points out, is nothing more or less than the ‘surrender and submission of the *nafs* (soul/psyche) to its God and its obedience to His Commands in what He requires from it.’<sup>1</sup>

One can conclude from the above that the idea of religion being a value that engages the commitment is indisputable. Even those who reject ethical creeds do not deny the power of religion, despite their views. The same is true of pragmatism, which has, historically, made a rich contribution to the debate with those committed to the powerful values of religion and has recognised that religion plays an undeniable role in real life. Some people maintain that, looked at from this angle, the function of religion can be seen as comprising three main elements, all of which are value-derived. They are:

1. Commitment to a value.
2. Psychological satisfaction and a balanced state of mind.
3. The ability of religion to be an ideologically cohesive force<sup>2</sup>.

What we mean by ideology here is a system of values, ideas, interests, goals and criteria representing the community as a whole, that is to say, it makes people more than a mere collection of individuals. Religion as a system of intellectual beliefs possesses a force of its own where values are concerned, and is able to unite society ideologically by satisfying its

1 Abduh, Mohammed, *Complete Works*, ed. and introduction Amarah, Mohammed, Dar al Shurooq and Maktabat al Iskandariyah, second impression 1427 AH – 2006 CE, Part 5, *Fi Tafsiri'l Qur'an*, p.485.

2 Compare Yumna Tarif al Khawli, *Al Qiyam wa'l Deen fi'l Qarni'l Qadim (Values and Religion in the Coming Century)* in *Al Fikr al Dini wa Mustaqbal al Qiyam 'ala Masharifi'l Qarni'l Qadim (Religious Thought and the Future of Values on the Brink of the Coming Century)* from the symposium organised by the Dialogue of Civilizations Forum at the Coptic Gospel Society for Social Services on 19th May 1999, ed. by Rev. Zaki, Andre, Dar al Thaqafah, Cairo, V.1 1999, p.13.



psychological needs and creating a sense of cohesion and common destiny. It is on this basis that it is able to mobilise and motivate the community to adopt its solid guiding values.

Religion may be regarded as the ‘soul’ or ‘heart’ of an individual’s character. If it, ie. the individual’s religion, is good and pure, his character will be strong and capable, while if it is rotten or corrupt, his character will be weak and stray from the right path. In this connection, Allah the Most High says, ‘By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right. Truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it!’ (*Al Shams – The Sun: 7-10*. Tr. A. Yusuf Ali). And the Noble Messenger says, ‘There is in the body a small piece of flesh; if it is good, the whole body is good, and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted, and that is the heart.’<sup>1</sup>

We can conclude from the above that spiritual and moral values stem from a number of belief-related sources, the most important of which is ‘Belief in Allah and the next world’. It is universally recognised that a commitment to these values requires a person to feel that there is a spiritual force within himself that drives him to do good and warns him against committing evil acts – *al nafs al lawwamah* (the self-reproaching soul), which people in this day and age know as the conscience. In former times Muslim Sufis described it in terms such as ‘*muraqabat Allah*’ (‘Allah’s surveillance’) and ‘*muhasabat al nafs*’ (‘holding the soul to account’).

The fact is that the feeling that Allah is watching us, ie. the human conscience, becomes most apparent when we are performing the *sawm* (fasting) act of worship. This is because the experience of fasting reinforces one’s sense of Allah’s presence while diminishing one’s sense of the presence of other human beings. However intense his hunger or thirst, the *sa’im* (fasting person) refrains from stretching out his hand to take any food or drink that could allay his hunger or quench his thirst – not out of fear, or reticence, that he will be observed by, but in submission to surveillance by the Almighty, who knows ‘(the tricks) that deceive with the eyes and all that

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1 Narrated by al Bukhari in *Kitab al Iman (The Book of Faith)*.



the hearts (of men) conceal'<sup>1</sup>; 'for He knoweth what is manifest and what is hidden'<sup>2</sup>; 'for nothing whatever is hidden from Allah, whether on earth or in heaven'<sup>3</sup>; 'There is not a secret consultation between three, but He makes the fourth among them ... for he has knowledge of all things'<sup>4</sup>.

Religion, in this sense, gives man his dignity when it awakens his conscience and enables him to judge aright when people's affairs are put before him for his consideration. Thus we can understand the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), 'Seek the "*fatwa*" ("legal opinion") of your heart, even if they give you a *fatwa*', and his statement: 'Uprightness is that in which the *nafs* acquiesces and the heart feels confident, while sin is that which discomforts the breast and which a man hates that others should see.' It is also recorded that the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Allah has given a parable of the straight path. On the two sides of this path there are two walls containing doorways. On these doorways, there are curtains that are lowered down. On the gate of this path there is a caller calling, "O people! Come and enter the straight path all together and do not separate from each other." There is also another caller who calls from within the path, who says when a person wants to remove the curtain on any of these doors, "Woe to you! Do not open this door, for if you open it, you will enter it." Some have interpreted this as meaning that the straight path is Islam, the two walls are the limits set by Allah, the open doors lead to Allah's prohibitions, the caller on the gate of the path is Allah's Book and the caller from within the path is Allah's admonition in the heart of every believer.

Muslim Sufis understand that making spiritual values a reality usually requires a combination of sound faith and a wide spiritual culture, because godliness, which is the basis of spiritual values, can only be instilled in a person through contemplation of Allah's creation and by meditating on the words of the Most High: '[Now let man think from what he is created](#)' (*Al Tariq* – The Night-Visitant: 5); and '[On the earth are signs for those of assured](#)

1 *Holy Qur'an, Surat Ghafir* (The Forgiver), v.19.

2 *Ibid., Surat al A'la* (The Most High), v.7.

3 *Ibid., Surat Ibrahim* (Abraham), v.38.

4 *Ibid., Surat al Mujadilah* (The Pleading) v.7.



faith’ (*Al Dhariyat – The Winds that Scatter: 20*) ; and ‘And also in your own selves. Will ye not then see?’ (*Al Dhariyat – The Winds that Scatter: 20*).

It is a historically established fact that people only reach a state in which religion ceases to have any influence on human ethics or politics – or vice versa – if their religion detaches itself and withdraws totally from worldly concerns, that is to say from day-to-day life and human affairs; this is hard to achieve, if not impossible, because ‘religion is a spiritual, cultural and social force and the religious authority is a spiritual, cultural and social authority. Therefore religious faith, even in countries where religion has no official status, occupies a position similar to that occupied by ideological belief.<sup>1</sup>’

## The First Issue

Regarding the relationship between Sufism, ethics and values

Firstly, one can say that a value is not something that exists independently of human behaviour. On the contrary, it is ‘intertwined’ with behaviour, so that a person’s behaviour is an indication of the value he believes in. Therefore, man is a ‘value bearer’ and it is possibly this fact that has led some people to say that ‘a revolution in values is more vital than any other revolution, because it provides the basis for political, social, economic and cultural revolution.<sup>2</sup>’

Spiritual values in this sense inspire the intellect and guide it to the straight path, particularly since the mind recognises things for what they are. However, why should the intellect prefer to follow one path rather than another, and why does the *nafs* move in one direction and not another? The answer is that the value system, which illuminates the path, enables the intellect and the *nafs* to distinguish truth from falsehood.

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1 Nassar, Nasif, *Mantaq al Sultah (The Logic of Power)*, Dar al Amwaj, Beirut, Second Impression, 2001, p.181.

2 Al Ahwani, Ahmed Fuad, *Al Qiyam al Ruhiyah fi'l Islam (Spiritual Values in Islam)*, Studies in Islam series No. 21, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf, Rabi' al Thani 1382 AH, September 1962 CE, p.8.



This leads one to the conclusion that, where the nature of human value is concerned, it is man himself who bestows value on things, so that value is derived from and emanates from his inner being and not from any external source. Two main points may be deduced from this: firstly, that a value's clarity and strength and the authority of its guidance is determined by the extent to which a person is aware of his inner self; and, secondly, that awareness of a value is a fundamental condition for moral advancement and social refinement. Muslim Sufis were aware of both these points. From a very early stage they sought to awaken religious faith in the *nafs*, and they imbued worship with a spirit of ardour. It is a historically established fact that the Muslim Sufis gave new life to religious rituals and ceremonies and made themselves examples for others to follow. They never resorted to coercion or violence, but chose the path of love and brotherliness, and they had a deep influence on Arab and Islamic civilisation throughout its long history.

There are those who recognise ethics as reflecting 'a way of looking at man's efforts to express his innermost self in the world and a desire for order and harmony, while aiming to gain an intrinsic understanding of human behaviour.'<sup>1</sup> In reality, it seems that values are always present in human behaviour because they determine its form and nature and the direction it will take. One can, therefore, define a value in general terms as 'the form of reality that is inseparable from our actions, or a kind of venture into the world that is coloured by our permanent or temporary wishes or needs.'<sup>2</sup>

Where the connection between Sufism and the value system is concerned, there can be no doubt that Sufism is essentially a 'feature of nurture' – or an educational trait – designed to produce a high form of 'the complete human being', who combines strength, willpower and vitality while remaining on a higher plane above worldly ambitions, passions and desires.

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1 Al 'Awa, Adel, *Al Qima'l Akhlaqiyah (Ethical Value)*, Arab Co. for Press, Printing and Publication, 1385 AH, 1965 CE, p.36.

2 *Ibid.*, p.38.



Hence, Islamic Sufism was greatly concerned with the human *nafs* and with ways of examining and training it, refining its moral character and exposing its shortcomings. Sufis asserted that man's first obligation is to acquire a 'knowledge and understanding of the *nafs*' shortcomings, train it and refine its moral character.' Sufism was thus based on the ethical ideal – 'conduct yourself with the morals of Allah' – and on the *Holy Qur'an's* ethical ideas.

Accordingly, the Sufis' knowledge was based on *kashf* (unveiling, or metaphysical illumination), *dhawq* ('tasting' of spiritual bliss, or mystical intuition) and *'irfan* (gnosis), that is to say, on spiritual, not sensory, knowledge, or direct perception resulting from direct contact between the heart and the subject of the perception, ie. Allah. Sufis also stressed that acts of worship based on *fiqh* (doctrinal knowledge) alone were likely to be sterile and 'straitjacketed', while Sufi worship involved direct experience and was free from formalistic restrictions.

Of all the different aspects of Sufism, the most important one as far as Sufis are concerned is the value aspect, which they sometimes define as 'purifying the heart from everything apart from Allah', and at other times as 'entering every being that is sublime and exiting from every being that is vile' etc.

Sufism, in general, is based on five main principles: holding the *nafs* to account, seeking the Face of Allah the Most High, asceticism in this world, conditioning the heart to mercy and love and, finally, adopting nobility in manners and morals.

## The Second Issue

Regarding spiritual values in Islam

From the first hour of Islam's birth as a new religion, its teachings injected new religious, social and ethical values into Arab society and gave it an understanding of those values through *al hikma wa'l maw'idha'l hasana* (wisdom and gentle exhortation) that enabled it to embrace and spread the message of Islam. Within a short period of time the desert Arabs



were carrying these new values, igniting a religious and social revolution not only on the Arabian Peninsula but in every part of the world that had been reached by the Light of Islam.

It is a historically established fact that Muslim Sufis helped the spread of the new religion in numerous areas that the Islamic conquests had not reached, such as the Indian subcontinent and the interior of Africa, where the honesty, truthfulness and sincerity of their trade dealings – a reflection of their Islamic values – impressed the inhabitants of those lands. The spiritual values propagated by Islam took root in people's hearts and vanquished the old customs and traditions of the Time of Ignorance. As soon as these values had taken root in the hearts and minds of Muslims of all races and nations, Muslims gradually began to open up to the world. Later, they started to interpret those values in the light of the philosophical knowledge that they had recently acquired from the Greeks, Persians and Indians.

By the start of the fifth century of the Hijra, creativity began to give way to stagnation and imitation, a situation best summed up by Hujjat al Islam Abu Hamid al Ghazali in his book *Al Munqidh min al Dalal (The Deliverer from Error)* in which he laments Muslims' tendency to follow the path of *taqlid* (imitation)<sup>1</sup>.

So these Islamic spiritual values stagnated, 'and when they stagnated they lost their quality of being essential values, because they came to be defined in terms of stagnation. And when people began to imitate, their minds became closed and they came to rely on the thinking of others, and they lost their awareness of themselves.'<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the most important spiritual value brought by Islam is the value of *tawhid* (Divine Unity or Oneness) because it was the greatest factor in uniting Muslims on common terms. *Tawhid* was the organic bond that brought the Believers together through a single link to Allah, and linked

<sup>1</sup> See al Ghazali, Abu Hamid, *Al Munqidh min al Dalal (The Deliverer from Error)*, ed. Abdul Halim Mahmood, Dar al Kitab al Lubnani, Beirut, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Al Ahwani, Ahmed Fuad, *op.cit.*, p.13.



them to each other through the common spiritual values in which they all believed. Islam also established the value of equality, declaring, 'There is no preference given to an Arab over an *a'jami* (foreigner) except in their degree of piety and good deeds.' In tribal societies this new value had a great influence on the spread of Islam.

Adherence to spiritual values requires a truly strong *jihad li'l nafs* (struggle against the self and against evil ideas, desires and influences). Muslim Sufis in particular were aware of this and recognised that values struggle against each other, just as nations and peoples do. It is recognised that it is not always the best who survive; generally those who survive are the strongest. Hence, the easiest course for a human being is to follow his desires and appetites, at the same time giving preference to others over oneself and withdrawing oneself from worldly values for the sake of higher and finer spiritual values is a hard road to tread and requires patience, effort and steadfastness.

So, Muslim Sufis were fully aware of all the dangers that threaten the *murid* (committed person, Sufi pupil), at least at the start of his journey towards Allah. Ruwaym al Baghdadi (d.303AH) pointed this out when he told a new *murid*, 'It is better for you to sit with every class of people rather than with Sufis. All other people sit in accordance with *rusum* (customary forms), while Sufis sit in accordance with *haqa'iq* (truths). All other people seek outward appearances for themselves, while Sufis seek true piety for themselves, and truthfulness at all times. So if a person who sits with them disagrees with them on a matter which they are sure is right, Allah will remove the light of faith from his heart.<sup>1</sup>'

Below, we shall review four immortal Islamic spiritual values: *haqq* (truth or right), *'adl* (justice), *'ilm* (knowledge) and *salam* (peace). We cannot, of course, review all Islam's spiritual values, since they form a whole world in which man is, first and foremost, the axis.

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1 Al Qushayri, *Al Risala'l Qushayriyah (The Qushayri Epistle)*, ed. Mahmood, Abdul Halim and al Sharif, Mahmood bin, Intisharat Bidar, Tehran, photoprint from the Dar al Sha'ab edition, Cairo 1350 AH, p.77.



## 1. The First Value – Haqq (Truth or Right)

It cannot be denied that the effectuation of truth (or right) ‘sits on the throne’ of the values that man seeks, particularly since there is a clear link between those values and the trinity of justice, freedom and equality. Right and wrong (or truth and falsehood) are two sides of the same coin and every human action is subject to either one or other of them – if, that is, they are not both present in the same action. Consequently, there is no human action that does not have a value, since it inclines towards one or other of the two extremes such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice, etc.

Truth (or right), in this sense (ie. the opposite of false or wrong), occurs in the *Holy Qur’an* in several places, such as ‘That He might prove truth right and prove falsehood wrong, distasteful though it be to the guilty’ (*Al Anfal* – The Spoils of War: 8); ‘And Allah blots out falsehood and proves the truth by his words. For He knows well the secrets of all hearts’ (*Al Shura* – Consultation: 24); ‘And cover not truth with falsehood’ (*Al Baqarah* – The Heifer: 42); ‘O People of the Book! Why do ye clothe truth with falsehood?’ (*Aal ‘Imran* – The Family of Imran: 71); ‘Thus truth was confirmed and all that they did was made of no effect’ (*Al Araf* – The Heights: 118 [Arabic 18 Tr.]); and ‘Apart from truth, what (remains) but error?’ (*Yunus* – Jonah: 32).

The word ‘*haqq*’ appears on its own in 227 places<sup>1</sup>, sometimes referring to the witnessing of truth such as ‘Nor conceal the truth when ye know (what it is)’ (*Al Baqarah* – The Heifer: 42), sometimes referring to injustice such as ‘And they slay the Prophets without just cause’ (*Al Baqarah* – The Heifer: 61), and sometimes referring to debt, such as ‘If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak’ (*Al Baqarah* – The Heifer: 282).

The clearest evidence of the status of this noble value can be seen in the fact that Almighty Allah called Himself by this word. *Al Haqq* is one of Allah’s Beautiful Names; ‘They will be brought back to Allah, their Rightful Lord, and their invented falsehoods will leave them in the lurch’ (*Yunus* – Jonah: 30); ‘Then are they returned unto Allah, their Protector, the (only)

<sup>1</sup> Baqi, Mohammed Fuad Abdul, *Al Mu’jam al Mufahras li Alfadh al Qur’an al Karim (Concordance of the Holy Qur’an)*, Dar al Hadith, Cairo, first impression, 2001 CE, under *Al Haqq*, pp.255-259.



Reality; is not His the Command?’ (*Al An’am* – The Cattle: 62); ‘Such is Allah your Real Cherisher and Sustainer’ (*Yunus* – Jonah: 32); ‘There the (only) protection comes from Allah, the True One. He is the Best to reward, and the Best to grant success’ (*Al Kahf* – The Cave: 44); and, finally, ‘High above all is Allah, the King, the Truth’ (*Ta Ha*: 114).

Plato, as is well known, classed values as belonging strictly to three categories. Not surprisingly, in his system the highest degree of truth is the Creator, Glory be to Him, the Most High. He is the First Truth and the Last Truth and there is no truth after Him; all other truths derive their existence from Him and depend upon Him for their continued existence. On this subject Abu Hamid al Ghazali says in his book, *Al Maqсад al Asna fi Asma’ l’lah’l Husna*, (*The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah*: ‘Truth is spoken when confronting falsehood, and things become clear through their opposites; everything that is spoken of is either absolutely false, or absolutely true, or partly true and partly false. What is obligatory in essence is the absolute truth, what is possible in essence and obligatory in other respects is something that is partly true and partly false<sup>1</sup>.

Al Ghazali continues: ‘As regards its essential self, it is said to be existent; as regards its addition to the mind which perceives it for what it is, it is said to be truth. Hence of all the existing things the One that has the most right to exist in truth is Allah the Most High; and of all knowledge, that which has the most rightful claim to truth is the knowledge of Allah the Most High, for He is Truth in its very essence – that is to say, [He] conforms to that which is known always, and for all eternity.<sup>2</sup>’

This means that a knowledge of the truth requires the *murid* to be an inseparable companion of the truth. Thus when al Junaid was once asked, ‘Don’t you feel lonely being alone?’ he replied, ‘And how can a person feel alone when he is with the truth?’ Truth, in the context of research and study, is not something that is permanent and eternal, as some people imagine, and Islam does not state that truths are permanent and transcendent, or

<sup>1</sup> Al Ghazali, Abu Hamid, *Al Maqсад al Asna fi Asma’ il’lah’l Husna* (The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah), Dar al Kutub al ‘Ilmiyah, Beirut, 2001, p.21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.



separate from behaviour and action; rather, it places man on the scale of values in which one truth is distinct from another depending on the situations and circumstances.

## 2. The Second Value – ‘*Adl* (Justice)

When one considers the status of justice during the early Islamic era, we find that ‘*adl*, as a religious value, comes first in the five principles of the Mu’tazilites and other theological sects. That is why the Mu’tazilites were known as *Ahl al ‘Adl wa’l Tawhid* (The People of Justice and Divine Uniqueness). For them, the principle of ‘*adl* came before *tawhid* until their debates came to focus on divine qualities and attributes and ‘*adl* became merely a theoretical concept until it was finally displaced in favour of *tawhid*.

Justice, as a religious value, does not exist as a separate category from its companion – man, as the value-vehicle – and this is why we can easily understand the lives of just rulers such as ‘Umar bin Abdul ‘Aziz and others who were just in themselves and in their conduct. The word ‘*adl*, together with its derivatives – *li’a’dila*, *ta’dil*, *ta’dilu*, *ya’dilun*, *a’dilu*, ‘*adlun*, ‘*adlan* – occurs in the *Holy Qur’an* in twenty-seven places, for example: ‘**And I am commanded to judge justly between you**’ (*Al Shura* – Consultation: 15) OR ‘**Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin**’ (*Al Nahl* – Bees: 90)<sup>1</sup>.

In Islam ‘*adl* does not mean absolute equality between all people, which would mean the loss of distinctions between individuals, and between the diligence and efforts of some and the laziness of the majority. The establishment of ‘*adl* means ‘putting the right man in the right place’, regardless of such factors as kinship, class etc. ‘**Whenever ye speak, speak justly, even if a near relative is concerned**’ (*Al An’am* – The Cattle: 152).

This means that a Muslim must be free from personal whims and preferences if he wishes to live according to the rules of justice: ‘**And follow not the lusts (of your hearts) lest ye swerve**’ (*Al Nisa’* – The Women: 135); ‘**Be just;**

<sup>1</sup> Baqi, *op.cit.*, pp.550–551.



that is next to piety; and fear Allah’ (*Al Ma’idah* – The Table Spread: 8). In addition to this, justice, as a principle and spiritual value, ought to manifest itself equally in every aspect of life, great and small. Hence the *Holy Qur’an* stresses the necessity of following the path of justice towards one’s wives – ‘If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal (with them) justly, then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess’ (*Al Nisa’* [Women] 3) – since failure to follow the path of justice between women upsets the stability of the family; just as injustice in the treatment of one’s sons leads to enmity and hatred between them. Consequently ‘*adl* (which is also one of Allah’s Beautiful Names) is intimately linked to ethics and values; this is what Sheikh Mohammed Abduh meant when he said, ‘Some people with insight resorted to ‘*adl* in various ages. And they thought – as some knowledgeable people thought and maintained – that ‘*adl* was the “deputy” of *mahabba* (love). Yes. That assertion is not devoid of wisdom. But ... who is it who lays down the rules of justice and obliges everybody to observe them?’<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Third Value – ‘*Ilm* (Knowledge)

If we look at Islam as a Message to the world as a whole, we should not be surprised to find that the first *ayats* (verses) of the *Holy Qur’an* command us to read and acquire knowledge: ‘Read (or Recite)! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created – created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful; He Who taught (the use of) the pen; taught man that which he knew not’ (*Al ‘Alaq* – The Clinging Clot: 1-5). This means ‘Read (or recite) in the name of Allah, not in the name of a sultan or king, or for the sake of money and prestige or power.’

Reading (or reciting) is a faculty that can only be acquired through repetition. Hence the Divine Command to persevere in practicing it is repeated to the Prophet (PBUH). ‘There could be no illustration more brilliant, and no more decisive evidence of the virtues of reading, writing and knowledge in all its forms, than the fact that Allah’s Book began with these words and that the Revelation started with these wonderful *ayats*, even if Muslims had not been not guided by this Guidance, and even if

1 Abduh, *op. cit.*, Part 3, p.435.



contemplating them had failed to tear away that veil which obscures the Light of Knowledge from their sight ... If they had not been guided by the first words of this Book that Makes Clear, and if they had not received illumination from this dazzling light ... then Allah would never have guided them!<sup>1</sup>

So man's value is not defined by outward appearance, nor by his physical strength, nor by his satisfying his desires and lusts. Rather, it is defined by the extent of his knowledge and the nobility of his character. This is what distinguishes man from other creatures, and it is this that enables man to gain honour and distinction, and develop the earth and build civilisations; and it is this that entitles him to be Allah's vicegerent on earth.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Prophet (PBUH) imposed a form of ransom that required captives from the Battle of Badr to teach ten Muslim children reading and writing. Nor is it strange that Islam should enjoin the search for *'ilm* upon both men and women equally; hence the sayings on everyone's lips were, 'The search for knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, male and female' and 'Seek knowledge, even in China.' The type of *'ilm* that is obligatory upon every male and female Muslim is not limited to religious knowledge or a knowledge of Islamic rites and practices, as some believe. Here the word *'ilm* has no restrictions on its meaning, so everything within the category of knowledge – whether religious or not – falls within the obligatory category. However, it appears that Islamic theologians, philosophers and Sufis came to adopt the idea of 'noblest and worthiest', which was originally a Greek concept, and began to maintain that knowledge of *Wajib al Wujud* (Necessary Existence), ie. the Existence of Allah, Glory be to Him, the Most High, is the noblest of all forms of knowledge.

While *'ilm* in general was a great and sacred value for Muslims, most Muslims drew a distinction between two main types of *'ilm*:

The different branches of Sharia and religious sciences and their

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1 *ibid.*, Part 5, pp.471-472.



related disciplines (headed by *fiqh* – jurisprudence/doctrine, *hadith*–sayings of the Prophet, *tafsir* – exegesis, and their related disciplines such as the Arabic language, history and literature).

The intellectual and philosophical sciences and their related disciplines (particularly logic, theology and philosophy, as well as natural sciences, mathematics, engineering, music and astronomy).

This continued to be the case until the ‘philosophical’ sciences came to enjoy a status no less important than that of their religious counterparts, thanks to the translation movement and the support of the Caliphs. However, it was not long before Abu Hamid al Ghazali launched his major attack on the preoccupation with the ‘philosophical’ sciences, especially in his books *Tahafut al Falasifah (The Incoherence of Philosophers)* and *Al Munqidh min al Dalal (The Deliverer from Error)*, in which he did not reject medicine, anatomy and the natural sciences but the consequences of being excessively preoccupied with them; his particular objection was to the fact that scientists who studied them in depth became so enamoured of them that they completely forgot their religion<sup>1</sup>.

#### 4 – The Fourth Value – *Salam* (Peace/ Soundness)

*Al Salam* (Peace) is one of the names of Allah, Glory be to Him, the Most High: ‘Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god – the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety’ (*Al Hashr* – The Mustering: 23). In *Al Maqsad al Asna fi Asma’ l’lah’l Husna (The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah)* al Ghazali says, ‘*Al Salam* is the One who is free from imperfection, His attributes free from shortcomings and His actions free from evil, to the extent that if this should be so, there can be no perfection in existence except it be attributed to Him and emanate from Him. I have understood that the actions of Allah the Most High are free from evil – I mean absolute evil in essence which contains no particle of good within it that is greater than it. And there is nothing in existence which possesses this quality, as has already been

<sup>1</sup> Al Ghazali, *Al Munqidh min al Dalal (The Deliverer from Error)*, ed. Abdul Halim Mahmood, Dar al Kitab al Lubnani, Beirut, 1990. p.18.



indicated.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the above, *Al salam* is the Muslims' motto and the greeting which they extend to themselves and others, in compliance with the words of the Most High: 'When a courteous greeting is offered you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or [at least] of equal courtesy.'<sup>2</sup> The value of *salam* can be seen most clearly in the goal that Allah, Glory be to Him, the Most High, set for *jihad*, which is one of the instruments of *salam* in Islam; the Islamic vision of the world is not based on the dualism of war and peace (*salam*), as some maintain. Moreover, the actual and historical practice of *jihad* bore no relation whatsoever to this over-simplified view.

It is a historically established fact that Muslims warred 'with each other far more than they fought wars with non-Muslims. They also suffered external aggression far more than they attacked non-Muslims. While wars were historically fought as a means of acquiring territory and booty, Muslims did not grant themselves the right to be the first to attack others unconditionally. Rather the *fuqaha* (jurists/legal experts) developed a clear view of the question of war and made it an exception.'<sup>3</sup>

So Islam, as a religion, has nothing to do with wars and the waves of violence in which Muslims are involved. This is confirmed by the fact that in twenty-eight out of the fifty-five civil or international wars in which Muslims have been engaged since the start of the 1960s, both the warring parties have been Muslims. In most other conflicts Muslims have been the weaker side or the victim of aggression. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a classic example of this truth, even if it is not the only one.

*Salam* as a spiritual value, then, stems from the very essence of Islam. Hence 'Every slave of Allah who is free (*salim*) from cheating and rancour, and a desire to do evil in his heart, and whose limbs and organs are free

<sup>1</sup> Al Ghazali, Abu Hamid, *Al Maqсад al Asna fi Asma' il'lah'l Husna (The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah)*, Dar al Kutub al 'Ilmiyah, Beirut, 2001, p.96.

<sup>2</sup> *Holy Qur'an, Surat al Nisa (The Women)* v.86.

<sup>3</sup> Sa'eed, Mohammed Sayyid, *Mashru' Salam Islami (Islamic Peace Project)*, introduction to 43rd edition, *Riwaq Arabi* magazine, Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies, p.10.



from sin and the commission of prohibited acts, and whose character is free from backsliding and lapses he is the one who comes to Allah with a heart unscathed (*saleem*). He is the slave who is near perfection, whose character is close to the true, absolute perfection which has no secondary [attribute] among its attributes.<sup>1</sup> This is why Islam has been defined as *salam* (peace), which is the opposite of *‘udwan* (aggression). *Salam*, firstly, between the slave and himself, then *salam*, secondly, between him and his Creator, and thirdly – and finally – *salam* between him and all other people, regardless of their gender, race, colour or creed.

## The Third Issue

### The Spiritual Significance of Sufi Acts of Worship

It is well known that acts of worship are ‘syncretic rites that are determined by their status and forms’<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, Believers are not required to ask about their status and forms, but rather to worship through them, ie. to perform them. Mere acts of worship are in themselves no more than *rusum* (customary forms), while the *deen* (religion) in its essence is concerned with the inner aspects of knowledge and actions; ritual in the form of outward and visible actions, while part of the fabric of the *deen*, is of no value without ‘inner actions’. This has been pointed out by the Islamic Sufis and also by Ibn Taymiyyah<sup>3</sup>.

This means that the essence of worship in Islam is actually the essence of the *deen* itself, in that first and foremost it consists of belief. It also means that worship in its outward and visible form is valueless unless the inner, spiritual content is also present. If the outward and visible actions are required because they are a vital element of the *deen*, since they are an expression of obedience to Allah, they are meaningless without ‘the actions

1 Al Ghazali, *op. cit.*

2 Al ‘Aqqad, Abbas Mahmood, *Haqaa’iqu’l Islam wa Abaatil Khusumihi (Truths of Islam and Falsehoods of its Opponents)*, Maktabat Nahdhat al Qahirah, Cairo, undated, p.98.

3 See Ibn Taymiyyah, particularly *Al ‘Ubudiyah (Slavery)*, Al Mu’assassah al Sa’udiah, Cairo, 1978 pp.8-9. Also *Al Tuhfa’l ‘Iraqiyah fi’l A’mali’l Qalbiyah (The Iraqi Treasure on the Actions of the Heart)*, ed. by Qusai Muhibb al Deen bin al Khatib, al Maktabah al Salafiyah, Cairo, second impression, 1399 AH, p.42 onwards.



of the heart', which form the foundation and basis of *iman* (faith)<sup>1</sup>.

If one of the meanings of Islam is 'surrender to Allah', this 'surrender' can only be complete if one is sincere and faithful in establishing one's act of worship of Allah the Most High. However, Islam alone is insufficient to achieve this degree of *iman*; it is not sufficient just to say the two *shahadas* (testifying that there are no gods but Allah and that Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah) with one's tongue, what is required is true surrender – both outwardly and inwardly – so that one can rise to the level of *iman* referred to in the hadith of Gabriel (peace be upon him) when he spoke to the Prophet (PBUH), when the latter asked him about the meanings, or degrees, of Islam, *iman* and *ihsan* (perfection/excellence).

At this level of *iman* the outward actions of one's limbs and organs cannot be separated from inner actions in any sense or form. Ibn al Qayyim defines *iman* as 'Outwardly, it is the speech of the tongue and the outward actions of the limbs and organs, while inwardly it is the faith of the heart, submission to Allah and the love of Him. So the outward aspect without an inner aspect is of no use.'<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, if the *deen* and acts of worship are in essence one and the same thing, this means that the *deen* and values/ethics are two inseparable things, since the actions of the heart are a necessary component of any act of worship. And since *iman* itself can only be achieved if both outward and inner actions are present, this means that acts of worship in Islam cannot be separated from this value aspect, which is the basic element of the *deen*. This is why the Sheikh Imam, Mohammed Abduh, says in *Risalat al Tawhid (Message of Oneness)*, that the *deen* is the most powerful of all influences on public and private morality<sup>3</sup>, and that Allah has only ordained such actions as produce noble moral behaviour in people<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah *ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>2</sup> Al Jawzi, Ibn Qayyim, *Al Fawaa'id (Benefits)*, Al Maktabah al Qayyimah, Cairo, first impression, 1450 AH, p.85.

<sup>3</sup> Abduh, Mohammed, '*Risalat al Tawhid*' ('Epistle of Oneness'), *op. cit.*, p.537.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.468.



To sum up, acts of worship should influence a Believer in his daily life and in his relations with other people. If they do not, then they are no more than what al Taftazani describes as empty forms <sup>1</sup>. The Islamic Sufis were actually the first people to succeed in comprehending the true nature of spiritual values in Islam as embodied in acts of worship, and in identifying their ethical content, as we shall explain below.

### 1. The Spiritual Significance of *Salat* (Prayer)

In Islam acts of worship are intended first and foremost to be a means of spiritual and moral development. For example, we find the *Holy Qur'an* referring to the effects of *salat* (prayer) in purifying and improving the *nafs* as follows: 'Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds.'<sup>2</sup> Allah also says in *Hadith Qudsi* (Sacred/Divine Hadith), 'I accept *salat* from him who in performing it humbles himself before My Greatness, who does not seek to dominate My Creation, who does not pass a night persisting in disobedience of Me, who devotes his day to My Remembrance, who is merciful to the poor, the wayfarer, the widowed and to all who suffer misfortune.'

There are numerous excellent and significant spiritual and moral aspects to *salat*; moreover, it is one of the most important acts of worship for enabling the worshipper to come close to his Creator. This is powerfully reflected in the statement of the Prophet (PBUH) that '*Salat* is the mainstay of the *deen*. He who establishes it establishes the *deen* and he who destroys it destroys the *deen*.' This can also be clearly seen in the fact that after the *shahadatain* (testifying that there are no gods but Allah and Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah) the Islamic faith is built on *salat*, *zakat* (regular charity as required from every Muslim) *siyam* (fasting Ramadhan) and *Hajj* (Pilgrimage) to the Sacred House by those who have the means to perform it. *Salat* helps promote remembrance of Allah and submission to Him; in the view of the *fuqaha* it is special act of worship, and Allah the Most High

<sup>1</sup> Al Taftazani, Abu'l Wafa, *Madkhal fi'l Tasawwufi'l Islami (An Introduction to Islamic Sufism)*, Dar al Thaqafah li'l Tabaa'ah wa'l Nashr, Cairo, 1976, p15.

<sup>2</sup> *Holy Qur'an, Surat al 'Ankabut* (The Spider) v.45.



commands his slaves to perform it<sup>1</sup>: ‘And be steadfast in prayer; practice regular charity.’<sup>2</sup> If the fundamental basis of all acts of worship is that the body should humble itself as a result of the humbling of the heart, *salat* is the greatest act of worship in which this becomes most clearly manifest, in fact, it embodies the reality of all acts of worship, whatever form they take<sup>3</sup>.

For Sufis *salat* enjoys immensely high status. According to Abdul Qadir al Jilani (d. 561 AH), ‘Its importance is great and its significance is immense.’<sup>4</sup> Muhiyeddin Ibn ‘Arabi (d.631 AH) states clearly that ‘There is no act of worship that causes the worshipper to join the ranks of the *muqarrabin* (those brought near to Allah) apart from *salat*.’<sup>5</sup>

It may have been this that inspired al Suhrawardi al Baghdadi (d.632 AH) to take the same approach when he said that all acts of worship were nothing more nor less than means of making ‘the secret of *salat*’ a reality<sup>6</sup>. Later, Ibn ‘Ata Allah al Sakandari (d.709 AH) concluded that *salat* brought together a number of elements that were not to be found in any other act of worship, including cleanliness and purity, silence, facing the *qibla* with the *takbir* (saying *Allahu Akbar*), recitation, standing, bowing, prostration, glorifying Allah etc. He described it as ‘a collection of many acts of worship’<sup>7</sup>.

In his commentary on the words of Allah the Most High: ‘Enjoin prayer on they people and be constant therein. We ask thee not to provide

1 Al Hujwairi, *Kashf al Mahjub (Unveiling the Veiled)*, ed. Is‘aad Qandil, revised by Yahya al Khashshaab, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Cairo, first impression, 1975, Part 2, p.542.

2 *Holy Qur’an, Surat al Baqarah (The Heifer)* v.43.

3 Ibn Rajab, *Al Khushu’ fi’l Salat (Humble Submission in the Prayer)*, Al Maktabah al Qayyimah, Cairo, second impression, 1983, p.20.

4 Al Jilani, *Al Ghunyah li Talibi Tariq al Haqq (The Rich Resource for the Seeker of the Path of Truth)*, Maktabat Mustafa al Babi al Halabi, Cairo, third impression, 1956 (two parts in a single volume) Part 2, p.110.

5 Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al Futuhat al Makkiyah (The Conquests of Mecca)*, Dar Sader, Beirut, and the Egyptian Public Book Authority, Cairo, undated, Part 1, p.256.

6 Al Suhrawardi, *‘Awarif al Ma’arif (Knowers of Knowledge)*, Dar al Kitab al Arabi, Beirut, second impression, 1983, p.304.

7 al Sakandari, Ibn Ata’ullah, *Al Tanwir fi Isqati’l Tadbir (The Book of Illumination)*, ed. Musa Mohammed Ali and Abdul ‘Aal al Arabi, Dar al Turath al Arabi, Cairo, 1973, p.214-215.



sustenance.<sup>1</sup> Ibn ‘Ata Allah al Sakandari says this *ayat* shows that *salat* entails a heavy burden on the *nafs*, because it occurs – and is obligatory – at times when people are resting at home or busily engaged in activities, and it requires them to abandon these things so that they can stand before their Creator and devote themselves wholeheartedly to Him<sup>2</sup>. In evidence of this he quotes the words of the Most High: ‘Nay, seek (Allah’s) help with patient perseverance and prayer: it is indeed hard, except to those who bring a lowly spirit,<sup>3</sup>’ in which Allah relates patience to *salat*, indicating that *salat* needs patience in observing its correct timings and patience in performing its obligations, as well as the kind of patience and perseverance that prevents the heart from neglecting it<sup>4</sup>.

In the view of the Sufis, *salat* involves a number of *aadaab* (rules of decorum). The main one is that, since *salat* is the mainstay of the *deen*, the worshipper must know its rules, conditions, virtues and *nawafil* (supererogatory acts), frequently ask the ‘*ulama* (scholars) about them and seek to find out what is required of him, leaving no room for ignorance<sup>5</sup>. However, where the Sufis are concerned the *fiqh* of *salat* is not limited to knowledge of the conditions for its validity and the factors that make it invalid; they go beyond this and are also concerned with its ‘inner minutiae’ and the implications of its outward spiritual values. While the *faqih* (doctrinal scholar) is preoccupied with the literal rules of *salat*, and judges it valid if it is performed in accordance with the ‘letter of the law’, even if the worshipper’s mind is elsewhere throughout the prayer – from beginning to end – thinking about his dealings in the market for example, except when he says the first ‘*Allahu Akbar*’, the Sufi regards *salat* of this kind as being of ‘no use in the next world’<sup>6</sup>, in the words of Hujjat al Islam Abu Hamid al Ghazali (d.505 AH).

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1 *The Holy Qur’an, Surat Ta Ha* v.132.

2 Al Sakandari, *op. cit.*, p.210.

3 *The Holy Qur’an, Surat al Baqarah* (The Heifer) v.45.

4 Al Sakandari, *op. cit.*, p.212.

5 Al Tusi, *Al Lama’ (Radiance)*, ed. Taha Abdul Baqi Surour and Dr. Abdul Halim Mahmood, Dar al Kutub al Haditha, Cairo, 1960, p.203.

6 Al Ghazali, *Ihya’ Ulum al Deen (Revival of the Religious Sciences)*, Matba’ah wa Maktabat Mustafa al Babi al Halabi, Cairo, 1957, Part 1, p.19.



One glaring example of the discrepancy between the *fuqaha* and the Sufis can be seen in an incident in which Ahmed bin Hanbal spoke to Shiban al Ra'iy (d.158 AH) one day to show him that his knowledge was deficient and said (ignoring al Shafi'i's advice), 'What do you say of a person who has forgotten one of the five daily prayers and doesn't know which prayer he has forgotten? What would he be required to do?'

Shiban replied, 'O Ahmed. That is a heart that has been unmindful of Allah the Most High, so he needs to be chastised until he ceases to be unmindful of his Protector!' Then Ahmed went into a swoon, and when he came to al Shafi'i said to him, 'Did I not say to you "Do not touch upon this?"'<sup>1</sup> This is a case in which his knowledge of *fiqh* collided with the 'manners' of an authoritative Sufi over the *fara'id* (obligatory actions) that arise in the event of a Muslim forgetting the *faridah* (obligatory action) of *salat*, since in the latter's view forgetfulness is 'bad manners' to Allah.

In the Sufi view, one of *salat*'s most important spiritual values is the value of *tatahhur* (cleansing/purifying oneself). Here, however, what the Sufis mean by *tatahhur* is not the same as the conventional meaning understood by the *fuqaha*, which regards it as a necessary condition for the validity of *wudu'* (ritual ablution), and, following on from that, *salat*: in the Sufi view moral *tatahhur* is an inseparable condition of *salat* in all its movements and must be ever present with the worshipper whether he stands, bows or prostrates himself. From this one may see a close association between the meanings of *tawbah* (turning to Allah in repentance) and *tatahhur*, as in the words of the Most High: 'For Allah loves those who turn to him constantly [in repentance] and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.'<sup>2</sup> Hence the Sufis enjoined purity and cleanliness upon themselves at all times and in all circumstances, because, according to al Tusi, they never knew when death or the Hour would come upon them<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Al Janabi, Maitham, *Hikmat al Ruh al Sufi (The Wisdom of the Sufi Soul)*, Dar al Mada li'l Thaqafah wa'l Nashr, Damascus, first impression, 2001, p.103.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Qur'an, Surat al Baqarah (The Heifer)* v.222.

<sup>3</sup> Al Tusi *op. cit.*, p.197.

Their position is based on the statement that Islam obliges a person to cleanse himself of all impurities, both external and internal, so that he can become like the noble angels who, unlike the rest of creation that worships its Lord are completely and absolutely clean and pure<sup>1</sup>. It is possibly because of this that al Sha'rani says in his book *Al Bahr al Mawrud (The Sea Where All Go to Drink)* 'Pledges have been taken from us that we shall not sleep at any time unless we are pure in our inner beings, because the inner being is no different from the outward being. Otherwise, it would be as though – and I seek refuge in Allah – a person sleeps when he is tainted with malice, envy, duplicity, deceit, fraud or pride, or resentment at someone's judgment of him.'<sup>2</sup>

After *tatahhur* comes the *niyat* (intention), which also has an inner meaning for Sufis, since the Sufi instils it in his heart as a means of bringing himself closer to God, Glory be to Him, the Most High, by expelling everything from his heart apart from Allah, so that nothing remains apart from Him<sup>3</sup>. According to al Tusi, the combination of the *niyat* and the *takbirat al ihram* (the first utterance of *Allahu Akbar* in the Prayer) is *safwat al salat* (the supreme part of the Prayer), since the Prayer can only be valid if they are present<sup>4</sup>. Thus the *niyat* is a 'taste-related concept' (as in 'tasting' spiritual bliss) and – as far as the Sufis are concerned – a gentle intimation of the heart's intention to devote itself to Allah. This is affirmed by Abdul Karim al Jili<sup>5</sup>.

While the spirit of the Prayer is embodied in the awakening of the heart and the inner being and their entry into the realm of the Divine, this can only occur when the worshipper's heart is completely cleansed of everything connected with the world and its concerns, so that nothing diverts him from

1 Al Sha'rani, *Asrār Arkān al Islām (Secrets of the Pillars of Islam)*, ed. Abdul Qadir Ahmed 'Ata, Dar al Turath al Arabi li'l Taba'ah wa'l Nashr, Cairo, first impression, 1980, P 36.

2 Al Sha'rani, *Al Bahr al Mawrud (The Sea Where All Go to Drink)* Al Matba'ah al Maimaniyah, Cairo, (undated), p.78.

3 Al Sha'rani, *Asrār Arkān al Islām (Secrets of the Pillars of Islam)*, p.41.

4 Al Tusi *op. cit.*, p.204.

5 Al Jili, *Al Insan al Kamil fi Ma'rifat al Awa'il wa'l Awakhir (The Complete Human Being on Knowledge of the Beginnings and the Endings)*, Maktabat Sobeih, Cairo, 1963, Part 2, p.87.



perfection in performing the Prayer, enabling him to enter the Divine Upper World<sup>1</sup>. It is this that led al Jilani to shout to one of his *murids*, ‘Woe to you, that you should stand in the Prayer and say “*Allahu Akbar*” yet be mendacious in your speech, with Allah’s creation being greater in your heart than Allah Himself, Glory be to Him.’<sup>2</sup> Hence the whole of the Prayer, from its beginning means that the worshipper truly turns to Allah, in sincere commitment to *tatahhur* and with his *niyat* intent on the Prayer, in realisation of the Words of the Most High: ‘And they have been commanded no more than this: to worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion,<sup>3</sup> since sincere devotion to God, Glory be to Him, is obligatory in all actions<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. The Spiritual Significance of *Zakat* (Regular Alms Giving, an Obligation upon all Muslims)

With regard to *zakat*, the *Holy Qur’an* also points to the effect it has in purifying the psyche, promoting godliness and cleansing the soul. **[The word *zakat* is related to *zaka* – to be pure. Tr.]** Addressing the Noble Messenger, Allah the Most High says, ‘Of their goods, take alms, that so thou mightest purify and sanctify them<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the Noble Messenger sees material and non-material alms as being inextricably intertwined – a combination of physical action and feeling at the moral/spiritual level – when he (PBUH) says in a hadith, ‘Your smile in the face of your brother is an act of alms giving. And your enjoining of good and discouragement of evil is an act of alms giving. And your guiding of a man who has lost his way is an act of alms giving. And your removal of a noisome object or substance from the road is an act of alms giving. And your emptying of your bucket into your brother’s bucket is an act of alms giving.’

1 Al Sha’rani *op. cit.*, pp.41-42.

2 Al Jilani, –*Al Fath al Rabbani wa’l Faid al Rahmani (The Divine Conquest and the Merciful’s Abundance)*, ed. Ahmed Abdul Rahim al Sayeh and Tawfiq Ali Wahbah, Maktabat al Thaqafah al Diniyah, Cairo, first impression 2006, pp.127-128. Also see al Harith al Muhasibi, *Fihm al Salat (Understanding Prayer)*, ed. Mohammed Othman al Khasht, Maktabat al Qur’an, Cairo, 1983, p.52.

3 *The Holy Qur’an, Surat al Bayyinah (The Clear Evidence)* v.5.

4 Al Muhasibi, *Kitab al Qasd wa’l Ruju’ ila’llah (The Book of Intention and Return to Allah)*, Dar al Kutub al ‘Ilmiyah, Beirut, first impression, 1986, p.259.

5 *The Holy Qur’an, Surat al Tawbah (Repentance)* v.103.



Of all Muslims, the Sufis were the most committed to performing this obligation, which for them had the same spiritual ‘taste’ as that with which they performed the other Islamic rites. *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam and is as obligatory as the *shahadatain*, *salat*, *siyam* and *hajj*<sup>1</sup>. Of course, Sufis do not limit themselves to the ‘outward and visible’ meaning of *zakat*, but combine its outward and inner meanings to ensure that it is performed to perfection. According to Taj al Arifin, ‘According to the reckoning of the *fuqaha*, it is such-and-such a proportion of a person’s wealth, but according to the reckoning of the Sufis, the whole of one’s wealth belongs to *zakat*.<sup>2</sup>’

In its inner sense *zakat* means thanks for favours from the recipient of favours. While in its outward sense this means a limited, specific amount of wealth, in its inner sense it is without limits, just as the favours of Allah are without limits: ‘If ye would count up the favours of Allah, never would ye be able to number them’ (*Al Nahl* – Bees: 18); ‘And whatever good thing you have is from Allah’ (*Al Nahl* – Bees: 53).

In its ‘taste-related’ sense *zakat* is not restricted to wealth but also includes *zakat* on the body and the heart in equal measure. The first thing a person needs to know about *zakat* is the basic wisdom behind paying it, that is that it consists of disbursing a proportion of one’s wealth to the poor and needy because Allah the Most High has assigned them rights in the wealth of the rich and it is an obligation upon the rich to discharge those rights, while those who have wealth enjoy no such rights. This is because wealth in reality belongs to Allah; if wealth due for payment as *zakat* belonged as of right to the person who possessed it, a person who withholds *zakat* would not be subjected to Divine threat, as in the words of Allah the Most High: ‘And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the Way of Allah, announce unto them a most grievous penalty’ (*Al Tawbah* – Repentance: 34).

We may conclude from this that a person who fails to pay *zakat* loves

1 Al Sha'rani, *op. cit.*, p.47, and Al Hujwairi, *op. cit.*, p.557.

2 Al Baghdadi, Al Junaid, Taj al Arifin al Junaid al Baghdadi, Complete Works, study, compilation and ed. Sa'ar al Hakim, Dar al Shuruq, Cairo, first impression, 2004, p.26.



his wealth to the extent that it comes to dominate him and he becomes a slave to it<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, a person is required to pay ‘*zakat* on the body’ in the manner ordained by Allah. This means that he must safeguard his limbs and organs to ensure that they are used in the service of Allah, in obedience to Him and for worshipping Him, so that he does not overindulge in diversions and play. A person who follows this path will have achieved the goal of *zakat* and purified himself<sup>2</sup>.

In his book *Ihya ‘Ulum al Deen (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*, al Ghazali separates the ‘inner *aadaab*’ for the *faridah* of *zakat* into eight categories:

1. The person upon whom *zakat* is due should understand that *zakat* is obligatory and why this should be so, while recognising that it is basically a financial obligation and not a physical act of worship. This entails recognition of the fact that by pronouncing the *shahadatain* a person commits himself totally to belief in the Oneness of Allah and testifies to the singular and single nature of the One that is Worshipped so that nothing remains in his heart but the One God. Love, fundamentally, does not accept that there should be partners to the one that is loved, just as a mere assertion of the Oneness of God with the tongue is of little value in itself. At the same time, Oneness, in this ‘taste-related’ sense, is conducive to *tatahkur* and is also a spiritual realisation of *zakat*, in the sense that *zakat* itself is purity.

Moreover, *zakat* is *tatahkur* in that it involves purifying oneself from niggardliness, confirming the Words of the Most High: ‘**And those saved from the niggardliness of their own souls, they are the ones that achieve prosperity**’ (*Al Hashr* – The Mustering: 9). Furthermore, *zakat* is an expression of thanks for favours received, since Allah has bestowed favours upon his slave with regard to both his mental wellbeing and his wealth<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Al Sha'rani *op. cit.*, p.50.

<sup>2</sup> Al Hujwairi, *op. cit.*, p.557.

<sup>3</sup> Al Ghazali, *op. cit.*, p.216.



2. It is in accordance with the *aadaab* of the *deen* that a person should aim to pay the *zakat* before the time that it is due. ‘This shows a desire to comply with the command of Allah and bring happiness to the hearts of the poor, as well as an effort to overcome time–related obstacles to carrying out acts of charity.<sup>1</sup>’
3. *Zakat* should be paid discreetly and without ostentation<sup>2</sup>.
4. At the same time, letting the payment of *zakat* be seen encourages others to follow the example of the person paying it.
5. The person paying the *zakat* should not invalidate his act by reminding the recipients of his generosity, or by harming them. This is stated in the Words of the Most High: ‘O ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury.<sup>3</sup>’
6. He should make light of his donation, because if he makes ‘a big thing’ of it, he will attract wonder and admiration for it, and wonder and admiration are traps and pitfalls; moreover, they annul the merits of one’s actions.
7. The payer should choose those items of his wealth that are the best and dearest to him, as stated by the Most High: ‘O ye who believe! Give of the good things which ye have (honourably) earned, and of the fruits of the earth which We have produced for you, and do not even aim at getting anything which is bad, in order that ye may give away something’ (*Al Baqarah – The Heifer: 267*).
8. In seeking recipients of his *zakat*, he should not merely ensure that they belong to the eight general categories of eligible recipients, because in those general categories there are special cases and he should take those special cases into account<sup>4</sup>.

Compliance with these criteria will ensure that *zakat* provides complete purification of a person’s wealth, soul and body.

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1 Al Qushayri, *op. cit.*, p.443.

2 Al Ghazali, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

3 *The Holy Qur’an, Surat al Baqarah (The Heifer) v.264.*

4 Al Ghazali, *op. cit.*, p.219.



### 3. The Spiritual Significance of *Siyam* (Fasting)

Fasting focuses the mind on moral concepts and spiritual values. Hence the statement of the Prophet (PBUH): ‘As for him who does not abandon falsehood in speech and action, Allah does not need him to abandon his food and drink.’ **[Because he has already broken his fast. Tr.]** The value of the fast is made abundantly clear by the Words of Allah, Glory be to Him, in His *Hadith Qudsi*: ‘Every action of the son of Adam is for himself, apart from the fast, which is for Me and I will provide recompense for it.’ Of course, Allah’s concern with the fast rather than other acts of worship is not a mere matter of chance; rather, there are a number of reasons for this, particularly:

1. All obligatory actions involving the limbs and organs are visible apart from the fast, which is an act of worship that involves no movement on the part of the limbs and organs<sup>1</sup>. Accordingly, the fast is a secret form of worship, with an inner as well as an outward dimension. Hence the Most High said, ‘Apart from the fast, which is for Me.’<sup>2</sup>
2. The Most High’s Words ‘for Me’ refer to His *samadiyah* (everlastingness and dominance of all things), and something that is *samad* (everlasting and all-dominant) contains no empty space and has no need of food or drink<sup>3</sup>. The *Samad* is ‘the Eternal Lord to Whom people turn in times of need ... the Final Stopping Place to which all requests and petitions are submitted directly, without an intercessor or intermediary ... and it is He who sets the final *hudud* (limits) for actions and lays down the fundamental principles of the laws.’<sup>4</sup>

It may be concluded from the above that the fast has a *samadiyah* quality about it, since the reality of *Al Haqq* (the Truth – one of the Names of Allah) is that He is free from the need for nourishment, contrary to the reality of His creatures, who require nourishment. This means that the fast, in view of its nature, contains an element of Allah, since the Most High,

1 Al Tusi, *op. cit.*, p.216.

2 Al Hujwairi, *op. cit.*, p.564.

3 Al Tusi, *op. cit.*, pp.216–217.

4 Abduh, *op. cit.*, pp.558–559.



unlike His creatures, is free from the need for nourishment<sup>1</sup>. It also means that by fasting, man acquires an attribute similar to that of the Creator, Glory be to Him, the Most High. One may also conclude from the above that the reward of those who fast, like those who are patient, is unlimited: ‘Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!’ (Al Zumar – The Crowds: 10), which means that the fast is not included among the good deeds for which the rewards are counted within limits, because it requires a person to abstain from his familiar consumption of food and drink and restrain his limbs and organs from their normal desires and appetites. That is why those who fast are, considered from this angle, ‘those who are patient’<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, the additional reward for those who fast is due to its special nature as a Divine attribute. Fasting is one of the hardest things a person has to undergo, because it is contrary to his nature, because – unlike Allah, Glory be to Him, Who is free from all wants – man is dependent upon material sustenance. At the same time, Allah has made fasting attractive to mankind because it contains elements of *samadiyah*<sup>3</sup>. As far as the inner meaning of the fast is concerned, a fasting person is not required merely to abstain from food and drink, but also to fast in his inner being; that is, to satisfy both the outward and inner aspects so that the fast disciplines both his outward and inner nature. While the former requires him to restrain his body from material sustenance, the latter requires him to restrain his limbs and organs from sinful actions<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, the fast is a spiritual value through which the body and soul simultaneously develop a sense of need and deprivation, as well as of contentment and satiety.

#### 4. The Spiritual Significance of the *Hajj* (Pilgrimage)

The *Hajj* comprises a number of values that are beneficial to the individual as well as the community. *Hajj* is a ‘comprehensive obligation’,

<sup>1</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al Futuhat al Makkiyah (The Conquests of Mecca)*, Dar Sader, Beirut, and the Egyptian Public Book Authority, Cairo, Part 1, p.258.

<sup>2</sup> Al Tusi, *op. cit.*, pp.216–217.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Ajiba, *Al Futuhat al Ilahiyah fi Sharh al Mabahith al Asliyah (The Basic Research)*, ed. Abdul Rahman Hasan Mahmoud, Alam al Fikr, Cairo, 1983, p.27.

<sup>4</sup> Al Suhrawardi, *op. cit.*, p.335.



because it covers all the pillars of Islam: the *shahadah* (testifying that there is no god but Allah), since it is based on the Oneness of Allah and adherence to the Sunnah of His Prophet in his words and deeds; and *salat*, for which the reward and the value of each prayer in the *Masjid al Haram* (the Holy Mosque in Mecca) is worth a thousand prayers elsewhere. The *Hajj* also entails *zakat*, in its general sense, as well as fasting as a voluntary act or act of sacrifice in the case of those who are unable to, or have failed to, perform some of the *Hajj* rites or who have committed some acts which are forbidden during the *Hajj*.

Another *Hajj* obligation alongside these four pillars is the *faridah* of *jihad*, since the *Hajj* is basically a response to Allah's call for people to strip themselves of their everyday clothes, personal attributes and commitments and come together in the Holy Lands.

As a 'comprehensive obligation', the *Hajj* has two basic objectives: the pilgrim must divest himself of all his mental, intellectual and social encumbrances and of anything connected with class or national distinctions that cuts off the human ties between him and his fellow men. The pilgrim thus comes divested of all adornments and indications of his individual identity, clad in modest garb, which puts him at an equal level with everybody else. In joining the millions of his fellow pilgrims, he comes among them as a man divested of rank, power, class and racial or tribal partisanship, not as a proud lord and master surrounded by slaves and followers.

The pilgrim also comes stripped – or rather freed – from the shackles of slavery and poverty. He does not see the rich man pampered by his wealth, or the powerful man revelling in the might of his authority, or the white man arrogant because of his colour; in all these people he sees no superiority, merely his equality with them.

The second objective, or value, is *tawhid* (the Oneness of Allah). When people are stripped of their personal identity and all are equal, it is easy for them to accept the concept of the Oneness of Allah and they meet in equality in its shadow<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Hatta, Mohammed Kamil, *Al Qiyam al Diniyah wa'l Mujtama'* (Religious Values and Society), Iqra series, No 386, Dar al Ma'arif, Cairo, 1974, pp.115-116.



Since acts of worship comprise this moral and spiritual dimension, as well as social benefits in this world and the benefits of the world to come, the Sufis attach great importance to them, performing them in their *zawiyas* and *khaniqs* (spiritual retreats) and using a range of spiritual/educational devices to remind *murids* of their benefits.

In conclusion, we can say that the backbone of spiritual and moral values in Islam is embodied in establishing a sense of deep *wazi' deeni* (religious restraint/sanction) in the human psyche, thereby enabling the believer's character to grow in strength – sensorily, psychologically, religiously, temporally, materially, morally, etc. It is well known that human beings are drawn to good works and pious practices: either (1) for the sake of a short-term benefit, (2) for a long-term reward, (3) to repel harm from himself, or (4) out of love for and belief in noble moral behaviour, without expecting a short-term reward (people's thanks, praise) or a long-term reward (entering Heaven).

True, *wazi' deeni* produces all the above for its adherent. It tells him constantly that the *deen* is *mu'amalah* (dealing with others) and that moral behaviour brings the person who practises it happiness in this world and the next. The Most High says, 'In the case of those who say, "Our Lord is Allah" and, further, stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): "Fear ye not!" (they suggest), "nor grieve! But receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of Bliss), that which ye were promised! We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter; therein shall ye have all that your souls desire; therein shall ye have all that ye ask for! A hospitable gift from the One Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful!" Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness and says, "I am one of those who bow in Islam."<sup>1</sup>'

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1 The Holy Qur'an, Surat Fussilat (Expounded) v.30-32.