

## Chapter 16: Early Sufis Doctrine

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(by M. Hamiduddin)

#### A

Sufism like many other institutions became, early in its history, a fertile ground for imitators, impostors, and charlatans. The corrupting influence of these charlatans was regarded as a source of great confusion to all those who either wanted to follow the Path of Sufism; or wanted honestly to understand it, one reason why this was so was that Sufism by its very nature was a discipline meant not for the average but for those who always felt ambitious for something above the average.

Besides these charlatans and impostors who put on the garb of Sufism and exploited the credulous and the unwary, there was another group of men who unwillingly became the source of corruption and confusion. Since a Sufi more often than not was a man significantly different from the average, it was but natural that some among the Sufis went so far away from the norms of their societies and communities that they created doubts in the minds of their followers regarding the legitimacy of the commonly accepted norms.

Such doubts, if not properly tackled, could lead to the corruption of vast segments of the communities concerned, an inevitable result of which would have been either a widespread scepticism regarding the erstwhile universally accepted norms, or a universal condemnation of that which such exceptions among the Sufis stood for. Neither of these two courses was considered to be healthy, for, whereas the first would have resulted in the complete demoralization of all Muslim communities, the latter could have resulted in the condemnation not only of the exceptional Sufis, but of all Sufis without exception, as deviants from the accepted norms.

Most of the early treatises on Sufism, like the one that will be referred to in this chapter, were written with two main aims in view: (1) to point out to all those who cared to read these works what Sufism really

meant; and (2) to raise as strong a note of protest as possible against the current malpractices of the charlatans and impostors so that even those who may not have the time and the will to follow the path of true Sufism may at least escape the clutches of these charlatans.

The extent to which this two-fold desire of the early writers shaped their works is worth noting, because it is a measure of the dependability of these works. This is how the author of *Kitab al-Luma'*, one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Sufi texts now available, Sarraj (d. 456/1063), felt: "It is necessary for the intelligent among us that they understand something of the principles, aims, and ways of those who are the people of rectitude and eminence among this group (Sufis) so that we can distinguish them (genuine Sufis) from those who just imitate them, put on their garb, and advertise themselves as Sufis."<sup>2</sup>

"There are to be found (in our days)," he adds, "many of those who just parade as Sufis, point to themselves as genuine Sufis, and set themselves to the job of answering all sorts of questions and queries regarding Sufism. Everyone of these impostors claims to have written a book or two on Sufism which in reality he has filled with nothing but utter trash and absurdly nonsensical material in answer to equally meaningless and silly questions. Such impostors do not realize that it is not only not good but is a positive evil to do all this...."

The early masters discussed the Sufistic problems honestly and earnestly only to point out through their wise word the true answers to them. They turned to handle them only when they had severed their connection with the materialistic world, had chastened themselves through long and austere prayers, practices, and discipline, and had arrived at the clearest knowledge of reality, which knowledge found its full and necessary expression in their honest, sincere, and truthful actions. Such early masters used to be models of men who having burnt their boats of worldly affairs lived in constant contact with the Almighty."<sup>3</sup>

In his *Kitab al-Ta`arruf*, another very early work, Kalabadhi (d. 378/988) wrote: "Finally the meaning departed and the name remained, the substance vanished and the shadow took its place: realization became an ornament, and verification a decoration. He who knew not (the truth) pretended to possess it, he who had never so much as described it, adorned himself with it; he who had it much upon his tongue, denied it by his acts, and he who displayed it in his exposition, concealed it by his actual conduct."<sup>4</sup>

In his *Risalah*, al-Qushairi (d. 465/1072) too talks in the same vein: 'There set in decadence in this Path (Sufism) to such an extent that both reality and the path were lost to men. Neither were the old teachers to be found who could guide the young seekers of the true path, nor were the young stalwarts to be seen anywhere whose life one could take as a model. Piety left us bag and baggage. Greed and avarice became the rule of the day. And all hearts lost genuine respect for the Shari'ah. "<sup>5</sup>

Later on, the author of *Kashf al-Mahjub*, 'Ali Hujwiri (d. c. 456/1063), came out even in stronger terms against what was prevalent in his days : "God has created us among men who give the name of *Shari`ah* to all that their base selves crave for, and who give the name of honour and science to all those

tricks with which they seek worldly power and glory, and who call double-dealing the fear of God, and who label the art of concealing hatred of men in their hearts the virtue of tolerance.”<sup>6</sup>

‘Attar, who came much later, is perhaps, just because of that, more explicit than his predecessors: “Ours is the period in which this mode of talking (the truth) has taken on the veil of complete concealment. It has become fashionable with the charlatans to parade as the wise and the virtuous, and the genuine men of love and insight have become rare like anything. We are living in such times that the evil-doers have pushed the good and the virtuous into complete oblivion.”<sup>7</sup>

The great concern for truth that all those writers felt comes out indirectly also in the special mode of recording and reporting statements from great Sufis which all of them generally (and al-Qushairi especially) adopt. Practically every point that al-Qushairi makes, regarding every feature, major or minor, of Sufi way of life, is supported by him with three types of evidence. (1) Some statement from the Qur'an, better than which there is no basis for any principle governing the life of the faithful. (2) Some *hadith* or some incident in the life of the Holy Prophet. (3) Some comment or some incident in the life of a great Sufi.

So far as the first of these is concerned, we know, the matter is very simple. Nobody can afford to misquote the Qur'an, for the danger of discovery is always there. As to the second and third types of evidence, the risks of misquoting are always there. It was to avoid these risks that scholars of Hadith had devised the special techniques which came later on to be known as techniques of *isnad* (the method of basing traditions on the authority of narrators), and *Asma' al-Rijal* (the chain of narrators supporting a tradition). The care that the Hadith-writers took regarding their *isnad* and its various links was so great that it became the model of authentic reporting in all historical writings. Al-Qushairi follows this technique of Hadith-writing in practically everything he reports and every point regarding the practices of the Sufis he makes, to such an extent that nearly half of his long treatise consists of nothing but the *isnad*.

## B

Although none of our sources goes beyond the fifth/eleventh century, we have evidence, in these very sources, that people had started taking interest in Sufism, and in using the words *al-tasawwuf* and *sufi*.

Sarraj starts by repudiating the view that the word *sufi* is of recent (relative to Sarraj's days) origin and that the people of Baghdad were the first to use it. He thinks, on the other hand, that the word was current in the days of the *Tabi'in* (the Successors of the Companions of the Prophet) as well as the *Tab' Tabi'in* (the Successors of these Successors). By implication, he would say, although he does not verbalize it, that the word was current even in the days of the Prophet and his Companions, because, as he states explicitly, it was current in pre-Islamic days.

To show that the word *sufi* was current in the days of *Tab' Tabi'in*, Sarraj quotes a comment from Sufyan of Thaur: “If it were not for Abu Hashim the Sufi I would not have understood the true meaning of ...”<sup>8</sup>

It is easy to identify Sufyan of Thaur's period if one were to recall the well-known story of Qadi Shuraib's appointment as the Qadi of Baghdad by the Caliph Abu Ja'far Mansur. Sufyan, according to Hujwiri, was one of the original four great saints and scholars of the day whom the Caliph had called up to select from among them the one who was really fit to administer justice to the people of his vast empires. [9](#)

To show that the word *sufi* was current in the days of *Tabi'in*, Sarraj quotes a comment from Hasan of Basrah: "I saw a Sufi going round the Ka'bah; I offered him something, but he did not accept it saying..." [10](#)

That Hasan of Basrah belonged to the period of *Tabi'in* is borne out by Hujwiri who includes him among the eminent Sufis of this period. [11](#) The exact part of this period to which Hasan of Basrah belonged is brought out by 'Attar who mentions that Hasan was a child when the Prophet was still alive, and on growing he took 'Ali bin abi Talib or his son Hasan as his preceptor. Hasan had met, according to 'Attar, a hundred and thirty Companions of the Prophet of whom seventy had fought at Badr. Hasan died in 110/728. [12](#)

Sarraj anticipates the question why none of the Companions of the Holy Prophet was ever called a Sufi if this word was current during his time. He answers this question by emphasizing that since the honour of having the Prophet as one's preceptor in person and. having worked with the Prophet for the glory of God was in the eyes of every true believer the highest honour, nobody ever thought of calling the Companions of the Prophet by any other name. It was for this reason that he whom God gave this distinction was considered to be the embodiment of all that was the noblest in a Sufi without his being called so. [13](#)

To show that the word Sufi was current in the pre-Islamic days Sarraj quotes from the "History of Mecca" by Muhammad bin Ishaq bin Yasar, and from others, that there was a period in the history of Mecca when everybody had gone away from Mecca so that nobody was left there to pay homage to the Ka'bah and to go round it. During these days a Sufi used to come from a distant place in order to go round the Ka'bah in the prescribed manner. If this story is true, Sarraj points out, then it is evident that the word *sufi* was current in the pre-Islamic days, and was used for men of excellence and virtue. [14](#)

Having brought out that the word *sufi* was current even in pre-Islamic days, Sarraj argues that it is derived from *suf* which stands for coarse woolen clothes which had come to be accepted as the conventional dress of the pious, even of the prophets, among the Semitic people. And to show that it was an established custom among the Arabs to refer to men by their specific conventional garb rather than by their specific attributes and traits, Sarraj quotes from the Qur'an: ***wa qal al-hawariyyun***, emphasizing that the Companions of Jesus Christ were referred to by their white garb rather than their virtuous traits. [15](#)

The two comments from Sufyan of Thaur and Hasan of Basrah quoted by Sarraj as evidence of the fact that the word *sufi* was used by *Tab'i Tabi'in* as well as *Tabi'in*, have been quoted by several later authors

too. Dr. Zaki Mubarak, author of *al-Tasawwuf al-Islami fi al-Adab wa'l-Akhlaq* (second edition, 1954), quotes the comment attributed to Hasan of Basrah from 'Afif al-Din 'Abd Allah bin Asad of Yafa'i's book *Nashr al-Mahasin al-Ghaliyah fi Fadl al-Aslah al-Maqamat al-'Aliyyah*, and the comment attributed to Sufyan of Thaur from Zahr al-Adab of Abu Ishaq al-Husri (who must not be confused with Abu al-Hasan 'Ali son of Ibrahim al-Husri al-Basri, a pupil of Shibli, who died in the year 371/981 and from whom Sarraj himself quotes quite a few comments). Even if these later authors had ultimately taken these comments from Sarraj, which is not improbable, their quoting them at least points to the fact that they did not regard Sarraj's point of view altogether unacceptable.”<sup>16</sup>

Sarraj's view that the word *sufi* was current in pre-Islamic days is supported similarly by Abi al-Farab ibn al-Jauzi, Zamakhshari, and Firuzabadi. Dr. Zaki Mubarak quotes the following extract from ibn al-Jauzi's book *Talbis Iblis*: “Mubammad ibn Nasir related to us from Abi Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Said al-Hibal who said: 'Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghani ibn Said al-Hafiz said: I asked Walid ibn al-Qasim: What is it on account of which a person is called a Sufi? And he answered: There were a people in the pre-Islamic days known as al-Sufiyyah; they had given up every worldly thing for the sake of God Almighty, and had made Ka'bah their permanent abode, and place of worship.' Those who lived like them came to be known as al-Sufiyyah.”<sup>17</sup>

Kalabadhi mentions that there had been seventeen Sufi writers before him who had published the sciences of allusion in books and treatises, and eleven Sufis who had written on conduct.

Al-Qushairi states explicitly in one place that the word *tasawwuf* had been used by people before the second/eighth century: “Those among the Sunnites who took extreme care in keeping their contact with God alive and saving themselves from the paths of negligence came to be known by the special name of *ahl al-tasawwuf*. And this name for these leaders of the pious became well known among people before 200/815.”<sup>18</sup>

Men who followed the Path of Sufism had started using the word *sufi* as part of their titles and names long before *Risalat al-Qushairiyyah* was composed.

Hujwiri traces back the use of the word *sufi* even to the Holy Prophet; for example he remarks in one place: “And the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him, said, ‘He who hears the voice of the people of *tasawwuf* and yet does not take their words to heart is listed in the eyes of God as one of the negligent ones.’”<sup>19</sup>

## C

Sufism went through considerable development and modification as the Muslims came into contact with peoples of other races and cultures in the course of their history. Consequently, what came to be known as Sufism later on must be distinguished from what Sufism was in its early days. For, in spite of a great deal of what in later Sufism may be recognized as nothing but an elaboration of what was there earlier, it

would be instructive to find out at least what the earlier form was. The ideal thing from this point of view would be to go back to the writers of the first and second/seventh and eighth centuries. But unfortunately the sources available to us do not go so far back. We will have, therefore, to be content with whatever can be culled from the sources available.

Qushairi makes a large number of statements about the characteristics of a true Sufi of his own days or of two or three generations earlier. Hujwiri holds practically the same view; only his account is more detailed.

One of the first things that Qushairi emphasizes regarding a Sufi is that he is absolutely convinced that of all the paths of life open to a man his path is the best. This is how Qushairi expresses it: “And the grounds on which their path was built were stronger than the grounds on which the paths of others were established, be they men of tradition and culture, or men of thought and intellect”[20](#)

Having felt convinced that Sufism is the best of all the paths, the Sufi has to take a few decisions regarding his relation to God, man, and the world. For it is in the light of these relations that he can be distinguished from others. In a way these relations constitute the criteria on the basis of which a genuine Sufi could be distinguished from those who just pretended to be so.

Out of these three types of relations the Sufi's relation to God is the most important, because the other two, strictly speaking, are derived from and based on it. Qushairi makes the following significant statements in connection with the Sufi's relation to God.

1. The first and foremost thing is that one's belief in God should contain no element of doubt. It should not be contaminated with new-fangled notions and misguiding concepts, and should be firmly rooted in self-evident facts.[21](#)

Doubt in this context means vagueness about the attributes of God and scepticism regarding His existence. Obviously for the Sufi to avoid this vagueness and scepticism is possible only if he relies on whatever has come down to him by way of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. That this is so is pointed out by the warning against “new-fangled” notions and “misguiding concepts.” What these notions and concepts were, one can easily find out from what both Qushairi and Hujwiri bring under the heading of Malahidah and Qaramitah, etc. But what is most remarkable in this connection is the emphasis the Sufi lays on factual evidence, for he believes that the purely conceptual is not the only relation man can have with God; this relation can be experiential too.

2. A person's relation to God should be so thorough, comprehensive, and intimate that it would lead him to feel as if he lives and does everything not because he is doing it all, but because God is doing it all. In identifying himself with God he would go through the double process of losing his mortal self in Him and experiencing Him in every act of his own self. As a consequence of this the Sufi, from the very beginning, endeavours to have a life about which it may be truly said that it is a life with and in Him.[22](#)

3. Another way of putting the point stressed above is that the Sufi not only stops referring all his acts to his mortal self, but he builds up the positive attitude that it is the divine will which must be accepted by the Sufi as supreme, not on this or that occasion, nor in such and such particular situation, but always, and in every situation of which his life is composed.[23](#)

4. The Sufi's relation to God is a pure relation in the sense that it is a relation just between him and his God without any material link.[24](#)

5. This relation rids man of all occupation with affairs worldly and mundane.[25](#)

6. The Sufi must regard himself as having been created for nobody and nothing except God.[26](#)

Regarding their relations to their fellow-beings and the world at large, the early Sufis were quite explicit in emphasizing that the *Shari'ah* is the framework within which these relations have to be built and maintained. With this in view they enjoined on every Sufi to pursue all the sciences on which the *Shari'ah* is based;[27](#) it was enjoined especially that he should seek enlightenment about the way the Holy Prophet lived his life so that the Sunnah might become the guiding light for him in everything he does and every relationship he builds.[28](#)

While the different schools of Sufis had each its own unique pattern of Sufi techniques, they were all agreed on one common framework of ultimate reference, and that was the framework of the *Shari'ah*.[29](#)

Apart from emphasizing that for a Sufi it is necessary at every stage to keep the *Shari'ah* in view as the ultimate criterion, the early Sufis seldom missed to point out that those who did not care much for the *Shari'ah* got themselves involved in confusion and contradiction. The early Sufis were always anxious that their fundamental position must be clearly distinguished from that of the orthodox scholars and the theologians, as well as the innovators and the sophists.

The distinction between the Sufi's position and that of the orthodox theologian lies in the fact that the theologian regards the Law (*Shari'ah*) and Reality (*Haqiqah*) as one and the same, while the Sufi maintains that the two are so different from each other that unless one explicitly recognizes the difference, one is apt to commit a fundamental error.[30](#) Reality from this point of view is a special aspect of God, such that man can never completely comprehend it, whereas the *Shari'ah* is a code of human conduct which man can and must aspire to understand and act upon as completely as possible.

The identity of reality and the *Shari'ah* which the Sufi attributes to the theologian does not appear to be easy to understand. Going by what one finds in the writings of the leaders of the four schools of *Fiqh*, one would say that the theologian is very logical and cautious in his views regarding the attributes of God. He would be the last person to identify the *Shari'ah* and the *Haqiqah*, for whereas the understanding of *Shari'ah* requires no special faculty other than the one which an average mortal requires for solving the problems of his daily life, the understanding of *Haqiqah* requires a special capacity with which the prophets alone are endowed.

Regarding the distinction between the Sufis and the innovators and sophists, it is pointed out that while the Sufis hold that the *Shari'ah* and *Haqiqah*, in spite of their theoretical distinction, always operate in intimate relation, the innovators maintain that the *Shari'ah* is operative only so long as a man has not established contact with reality; for whenever he does establish this contact, the *Shari'ah* stops being operative and becomes altogether useless and futile.<sup>31</sup>

The broad significance of this distinction is that the early Sufi never regarded himself as completely free from the bonds of the *Shari'ah*. He never dared claim himself, as some of Carmathians and others did, as law unto himself, or as a lawgiver to others.

Apart from these distinctions between the position taken up by the Sufis on the one hand and theologians, Carmathians, etc., on the other, the early Sufi felt the need of another distinction; and that was the distinction between his attitude towards the *Shari'ah* and that of the average Muslim. He held that, while for the average man of religion a large number of conveniences and concessions are permissible within the framework of the *Shari'ah*, there are no such concessions and conveniences for the Sufi. The latter does not believe in sparing himself so far as the rules and regulations of the *Shari'ah* are concerned. For him there is no "take it easy" in the *Shari'ah*. The early Sufi believed in an extremely high level of conformity with the Law. As there is no transgression for the Sufi, there is no relaxation for him. Even the relaxation permissible to others is a threat to him.<sup>32</sup>

This unsparing attitude of the Sufi is not the result of his belief in asceticism *per se*. It is rather the logical result of his basic attitude towards God which is his starting point, and by virtue of which alone he is justified in calling himself a Sufi. The concessions given by the *Shari'ah* to an average Muslim are determined by his station in life in so far as he accepts the rights and obligations conferred or enjoined on him by the various groups of which he willingly accepts the membership. For the Sufi there is no such membership of social groups, to begin with; and, therefore, he can claim no special rights and obligations for the fulfilment of which concessions and conveniences within the *Shari'ah* may be necessary.

This point becomes clear when one compares the attitude of the Sufi with that of the ascetic. Whereas the ascetic believes in the strategy of now sacrificing this asset or resource, now that in his search for goodness, the Sufi believes in an all-out bid to reach God. There is nothing too precious, too dear, or too delicate to be spent and expended in the Sufi's endeavour at reaching the fountain which alone can quench his thirst.<sup>33</sup>

It would be easier to understand this attitude still further if we bear in mind why the early Sufi regarded the *jihad* with the self as the bigger and the more difficult and worthwhile form of *jihad* than the *jihad* against the political enemy with the help of the sword. For the Sufi engaged in the *jihad* against himself, all actions stemming from his narrow personal considerations lead to evil directly or indirectly.

This belief, that everything that is narrowly selfish and personal must directly or indirectly lead to evil, is

closely related, in the mind of the early Sufi, to his attitude towards God as the only reality, which in technical language is known as *tawhid*. It is the Sufi's acceptance of *tawhid* as basic and fundamental that helps him build the right type of relation with God without which there is nothing in his life because of which he may be called a Sufi. It would be necessary, therefore, to state clearly what *tawhid* meant to the early Sufis.

A Sufi like Junaid of Baghdad believed that *tawhid* means that a man has the knowledge, as sure as any scientific knowledge today would be, that God is unique in His timelessness, and that there is none like Him, and, further, that nothing and nobody can carry out the actions which He, and He alone, is capable of carrying out.<sup>34</sup> On another occasion Junaid puts his ideas about *tawhid* thus: It is the maximum of certainty with which you believe that all motion as well as lack of motion of things created is the act of God.<sup>35</sup>

Ja`far al-Sadiq explained *tawhid* by saying: He who thinks that Allah is in some thing, or of something, or on something, commits the sin of making things other than God His equals, because if God be on something it would mean He is being supported or carried by that something, and if God be in some thing it would mean that He is encircled by that something, and if He is of something it means that He is in time and in space.<sup>36</sup>

Abu 'Ali Rudhbari expressed what *tawhid* meant to him by saying: God is other than that which man's thinking and imagining makes Him out to be, because He Himself says in the Qur'an, "There is nothing like Him and He hears all and sees all."<sup>37</sup>

Abu `Ali al-Daqqaq, the teacher of Qushairi, puts his ideas about *tawhid* in one pithy comment: Somebody asked a Sufi where is God, and he replied, "Woe be to you, you wish to see with your physical eyes where God is."<sup>38</sup>

Husain ibn Mansur thought the first step in *tawhid* means denying the possibility of there being an equal of God as completely as possible.<sup>39</sup> Husri regarded that *tawhid* is based on five principles: (1) absolute negation of God's temporality, (2) complete assertion of the eternity of God, (3) relinquishing of lands and abodes, (4) separation from brethren, and (5) complete disregard of that which one knows and that which one does not know.

Explaining the third principle, Hujwiri says: It means the forsaking by the disciple of the established ways of seeking comfort and convenience for one's own self.

While explaining the last one of the principles, he says: Man's knowledge of things is built upon the answers to his own hows and whys provided by his own intellect, imagination, or observation; all that such man-made knowledge asserts about *tawhid* is contradicted by the true notion of *tawhid*, and that which man's ignorance regards as *tawhid* is contradicted by man-made knowledge itself. Hence *tawhid* is neither encompassed by that which man knows, nor by that which man does not know.<sup>40</sup>

Offering a positive comment of his own, this is how Hujwiri expresses what *tawhid* means: It is the sifting and absolute distinguishing of the eternal from that which is in time, in the sense that you must not regard the eternal as subject to the laws which govern that which is in time. You must not regard being in time as in any way similar to not being in time. You must accept God to be eternal and yourself to be in time. Nothing that is yours, or is like you, can be attributed to Him, and nothing which is an attribute of His can qualify you, because there is no mixing of the eternal and that which is in time; the eternal was there even before the birth of the possibility of the becoming of that which is in time.<sup>41</sup>

Keeping in mind the simple, almost naive, formulations of *tawhid* in the comments given above, one cannot help thinking that the men responsible for these formulations were not so much experts in philosophical polemics, as they were practical men concerned primarily with the guidance of their disciples. None of these formulations can stand the rigour of logical analysis, and yet every one of the formulations can provide a framework of practical conduct.

It is in view of this that, in spite of discerning traces of syllogistic pattern here and there, one must regard the efforts of the early Sufis as primarily the result of their training in the traditions of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, rather than the influences, Greek or Manichaeian, of philosophical thought, to which men like Qushairi and Hujwiri, and their predecessors like Junaid, must have been exposed. It took several centuries more for these philosophical influences to become practically the core of Sufi thinking. But during the period with which we are concerned Sufi thinking was mostly free of such influences.

The early Sufi believed that once he had set the pattern of his life in the mould of the attitudes and relations, described somewhat in detail above, he was ready to make a start in realizing his ultimate ambition, namely, the ambition of experiencing God in such a way that he might be able to say, like every Sufi: "What for others is just a matter of conjecture and vague hypothesis is for him there like the most certain entity, and what for others is a matter of conceptual understanding of God is for him something to be experienced as an existent about the reality of which there can be no possible doubt, so that he can sing with the poet:

"My night is aglow with the beauteous grandeur of the face,  
While the darkness of night envelops everyone else,  
While others are enshrouded in the pitch darkness of night,  
I am experiencing the brilliant light of the day."<sup>42</sup>

But how he should make a start, and what exactly he should do after having made a start, are matters of controversy among the Sufis. These controversies are more keen and intense among the later Sufis than among the early ones. The intensity of these controversies among the later Sufis can be judged from the simple fact that, as we come out of the period of early Sufism and get into the later period we find no Sufi who is not anxious to link himself to one of the orders like Qadriyyah, Chishtiyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Qalandriyyah, Shattariyyah, Uwaisiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Malamtiyyah, etc.

Among the early Sufis, on the other hand, we find practically no trace of such anxiety. For example, one finds little mention of such orders in Qushairi, though Hujwiri, who came after Qushairi, shows a good deal of order-consciousness. This order-consciousness of Hujwiri, which most probably reflects the order-consciousness of his contemporary Sufis, finds expression in a discussion of such orders as: al-Muhasibiyyah, al-Taifuriyyah, al-Junaidiyyah, al-Qassariyyah, al-Saiyariyyah, al-Suhailiyyah, al-Kharaziyyah, al-Nuriyyah, etc.

Without going into a detailed discussion of what among the early as well as the later Sufis constituted the basis of inter-order distinctions, one can safely say that at least one basis of such distinctions was just this matter of how one should make a start, and what one should do after having made a start. It seems every one of these orders, more the later ones than the earlier, had its own prescribed technique.

That in Kalabadhi and Qushairi there is little mention of Sufi orders – and Hujwiri discusses them with a good deal of keenness – indicates only that whereas the specific techniques of the respective orders might have been introduced in their rudimentary form in the days of the masters after whom the orders came to be known, it took several generations of followers and practitioners to recognize the merits of these techniques and give them their adequate and more or less perfected forms.

If one could, therefore, overlook the rudiments of techniques which some of the early Sufis might have introduced for the benefit of their respective groups of disciples, one could discover a large body of precepts which constituted the universally accepted techniques which all early Sufis regarded as indispensable. It is such techniques that Qushairi emphasizes in his chapter: “The Last Words to the Disciples,” and it is to some of these that we must now turn.

The first step which is regarded absolutely necessary by Qushairi in this connection is that the disciple should seek a preceptor and put himself entirely under his guidance. For, if the disciple does not do that and relies entirely on his own initiative and efforts, he is never going to succeed.<sup>43</sup>

The disciple who has no preceptor finds Satan himself acting as one.<sup>44</sup> Without a preceptor no disciple can achieve more than the mastering of industrious techniques of piety which by themselves never lead to his seeing the light and achieving an experiential contact with the Creator.<sup>45</sup>

The early Sufis regarded reliance on just one's own initiative as misleading, perhaps because they considered the experiences of a beginner to be mostly theoretical, for when he thinks he is in contact with reality, he may actually be just imagining things; or he may be a victim of illusions and hallucinations. If it is just the disciple's own insight, limited as it is in the beginning, and nothing else, on which he has to depend, he will find it almost impossible to distinguish between the genuine Sufi experiences and what he is at the time experiencing.

If, on the other hand, he is under the guidance of an established master and preceptor and observes the discipline, he is in no danger of falling a victim to illusions and hallucinations; and in case he does fall victim to such confusions, he has, in his preceptor, one who can bring him back to the right path. The

preceptor can do it because he is in actual living contact with reality, and his first-hand experience of reality can help the disciple verify whether his own experiences are genuine or otherwise.

This prerequisite, that every disciple must take a preceptor or else he is doomed, raises several issues which were discussed in detail by most of the early Sufis. One of these issues was: Is not the *Shari'ah* enough for a Muslim? Must the disciple accept the position that the framework of the *Shari'ah* is of necessity inadequate?

The most popular answer to such a question among the early Sufis was that in the *Shari'ah* there is room for the average, below average, as well as the above average. That which is for the above average in it is rooted in that segment of the *Shari'ah* which the Holy Prophet bequeathed only to the chosen few of his Companions, for it was meant only for them, and not for the common man.

What distinguished this segment of the *Shari'ah* from the other segments was that an average man's code of conduct could be complete without it, and yet it did not clash with it. To the average man it was something within the *Shari'ah* and, at the same time, over and above the *Shari'ah*, in so far as he needed it.

The discussion of who the chosen few were, for whom this segment of the *Shari'ah* was meant, and what their distinguishing characteristics were, will be too detailed for us to enter into here. Suffice it to say that they were the ones who, on the one hand, had the laudable ambition of shaping their whole lives, and not just parts of it, on the model of the Holy Prophet, and who, on the other hand, were regarded by the Prophet as adequate and competent personalities for carrying the extra load of intimate insight into the nature of Reality, that is, God.

It was from this point of view that the early Sufis regarded the *Shari'ah* of the average Muslim as just not enough for him. And it was to make up for the deficiencies of the average man's *Shari'ah* that he sought the help, guidance, and discipline of a preceptor, belonging to a line of preceptors ultimately ending up with the Holy Prophet from whom the first man in the line got his unique insight.

One additional reason which is sometimes offered by some early Sufis as an explanation for the necessity of a preceptor is that every genuine insight into God's being is an experience of a magnitude altogether beyond the capacity of an average mortal. The collapsing of the Prophet Moses at getting just a glimpse of His being is cited by them as an extreme example of it. If a disciple is lucky enough, through just his own endeavours, to get such an intimate insight into the being of God, then left just to his own personal resources he may collapse and find further progress altogether impossible.

The early Sufis' insistence on every disciple taking a preceptor raises some other issues altogether different from the ones we have discussed so far. The pre-Islamic Arab tribes insisted on certain groups of their members specializing in their genealogical trees, customs, war-records, naturally under some teachers. Likewise the early Islamic period saw schools of *Tafsir*, *Fiqh*, etc., coming into existence.

The pattern of pupil-teacher relationship was, therefore, not altogether unknown to the early Sufis. But what the pupil in all these fields learnt from the teacher fell under the heading of knowledge in the usual sense of the term. He who had more knowledge and information could impart it to him who was prepared to sweat for it. The question arises: Was this type of pupil-teacher relationship the model of the disciple-preceptor relationship in the Sufis' special field?

There is no simple answer to this question. That the Arabs were familiar with the possibility of one's having knowledge of the phenomena other than the natural ones goes without saying. That the Jews and the Christians among them were familiar with the knowledge of the divine, distinct from the mundane, is also well known. But what is not clear is whether in the days immediately preceding Islam the disciple-preceptor type of relation was developed and cultivated in an institutionalized form or not.

For, on the one hand, we have the Semitic institution of the Prophet who by virtue, not of any ascetic practices of his own, but by virtue merely of divine blessing, is chosen to have living contact with the Almighty and, thus, become His agent for leading the Semitic people to the righteous path; and, on the other, we have the institutions of the Rabbi and the *Rahib*, who by virtue of the ascetic practices to which they devote their entire lives can acquire some sort of contact with the Almighty which puts them above the average mortal. The Rabbi and the *Rahib* in this sense are in the same category as the *Kahins* of the pagan Arabs, i.e. men who through the practices they learnt from their masters were thought to have achieved a contact with reality which could not have been achieved by those who did not have the benefit of those practices. Of course, the reality with which the Rabbi and the *Rahib* establish contact must be distinguished from the reality with which the pagan *Kahin* established contact.

If one looks at the disciple-preceptor relation of the early Sufi against this cultural background of the Semitic peoples, it is easy to see how much of it is influenced by the Jewish and Christian practices. But that is not tantamount to calling Sufism un-Islamic. Strictly speaking, the Sufi disciple-preceptor relationship is as different from its Jewish and Christian models as Islam is different from Judaism and Christianity, for the roots of such models of relations go into the over-all systems from which they spring.

The Sufi disciple-preceptor relation would be un-Islamic if it could be demonstrated that the features which distinguish it from its Jewish and Christian models are not derived from Islam but are, rather, derived from sources other than Islamic. One could say, without going into further discussion; that these extra-Jewish and extra-Christian elements in the systems of the early Sufis were not derived from sources other than the Qur'an and the Sunnah. And one could cite, in support, cases like that of Shibli, the preceptor, and Husri, the disciple. Shibli told Husri in the very beginning of their relationship that if between one Friday and the next, when he had to come to Shibli, i, e., for one whole week, any thought of anything, or any being other than God entered his mind, his coming to Shibli was altogether forbidden.<sup>46</sup>

The case of Shibli and Husri is instructive from another point too. It illustrates in a simple and concrete form what exactly the Sufi preceptor does for his disciple. To think of nothing and to live a life involved in

nothing but God, not only for one whole week, but week after week, is the least that is expected of a beginner. Such a way of life is easier described than actually lived. Life as an average mortal lives presents no parallel to this kind of involvement.

For the Sufi, especially the beginner, in spite of his having selected the Path of Sufism, is still a member of a living society which does not stop making demands on him; and he needs attending to so many other things just to survive and remain strong enough to carry out the task that the Shari`ah prescribes for him even in the context in which he has put himself. To carry out adequately all this and yet let no thought other than that of God enter his mind even for the fraction of a moment seems, at the face of it, quite an impossibility.

The only parallel one finds in ordinary life is that of a lover. The lover is seldom forgetful of his love in spite of all his activities of daily life; rather, he does everything ultimately for the sake of his beloved. Even so the Sufi does everything for the sake of his beloved, God. Once this becomes possible, acts not only like those of the prescribed five prayers a day, but even those remotely connected with praying, become acts carried out by him with God constituting the constant frame of reference.

The case of an ordinary lover is easier to understand for the simple reason that, as we all know, there is a lot within us which can never find expression or satisfaction without one's being in love. The person with whom one is in love offers a living answer to so many of the problems of the lover's personality that, without being in love with just such and such a person, the lover might have remained incomplete himself.

In so far as there is this personal, specific, and concrete element in every lover–beloved relation, it falls below the Sufi–God relation. But in so far as every genuine lover–beloved relation means the living by the lover a life which, even when it does not appear to be lived for the sake of the beloved, is actually coloured by the tender thoughts of the beloved deep in the heart of the lover, the lover–beloved relation offers the only parallel in ordinary life for the Sufi–God relation of the type Shibli demanded of Husri.

How the Sufi comes to fall in love with God, the unseen, is one of the greatest mysteries of Sufism. One may, however, safely infer that unless there is a preceptor this would be impossible for a beginner. The conceptual unseen somehow must be made experiential, for otherwise the Sufi can never have a more personalized and intimate understanding of Him than just an intellectual grasp of that which His logically defined nature can provide.

One may say that the preceptor helps his disciple fall in love with God first by turning the intellectual acceptance of God by him into an emotional acceptance. Once the disciple has worked through this stage, and succeeded in converting his own intellectual acceptance of his Creator into an emotional acceptance, he is ready for the next stage, the stage of finding this emotional acceptance of the Creator so overwhelming that every other reality, social, biological, etc., is completely subordinated to it. And if one were to go into it one may find that these are just the first stages in the Sufi's long, life-long, career

in God.

Since our purpose at present is not so much the detailed description of the various stages in the Sufis' development as the finding out of how the preceptor helps his disciple in falling in love with God, we will stop at this point. But before we pass on to the next point we must stress one thing: it is all very well to try to explain the preceptor-disciple relation in terms of modern psychology, but we must not overlook the fact that this in itself is no more than a conjecture.

Instead of relying on such explanations the best thing would be to go back to the accounts of the Sufis themselves with an open mind. If and when they open their lips to describe how they came to fall in love with God and what happened to them from that point on, we must lend credence to their word, for otherwise we shall be left with no data on which to build our own explanations. Unfortunately, there is very little in the literature concerning the early Sufis which could throw light on the actual experiences of the disciple in his progress and development, and we have, consequently, to be content with just the hints we find here and there.

Even the most intimate emotional involvement of the Sufi with the Creator does not result in his losing the perspective of his material surroundings. Account after account of a genuine Sufi's life will convince even the most sceptical that, if at all, the over-all perspective of a Sufi is more realistic than the perspective of even the most realistic of the ordinary mortals among whom he has to live. Keeping this in mind it would not be very difficult for any student of Sufism to reject the charge usually levelled against the Sufis that they are mostly unrealistic persons wrapped up most of the time in the pseudo-universe of which God, a distorted father image, is the centre.

For the early Sufi, who was lucky to have met many of those who had the privilege of seeing the Holy Prophet and learning the Islamic way of life through their personal contact with him, God was the Being not of mere conceptual nature, but rather a Being who was responsible for the Heavenly Journey of the Prophet; the Being to whom in their hour of distress they could turn and call aloud: "When is Allah going to help us!" and the Being from whom they expected to get the response in concrete terms which their anguished hearts desired. For such early Sufis God was not a pseudo-father image;. He was rather the most real and living Being, and the ultimate refuge of those lost in delusions and hallucinations.

But when all is said and done we must admit that the techniques the preceptor employs to emotionalize the disciple's intellectual grasp of God are mystery to all save those who are lucky enough to enter into such a relation with a preceptor. All that we can do by way of making an effort at an intellectual and theoretical understanding of these techniques is to describe and discuss briefly such of the hints as Qushairi gives in the chapter mentioned above.

One of the first things which the disciple learns to do in order to establish his relation on a firm and operative footing is to put himself completely into the preceptor's hands. This attitude of complete faith in and reliance on the preceptor may lead the disciple sometimes into actions which, to all intents and

purposes, go against the most explicit injunctions of the *Shari'ah*. But the disciple, in spite of his awareness of what the *Shari'ah* demands of him, must obey the preceptor. This aspect of the preceptor-disciple relations has been emphasized by the early Sufis as much as by the later ones. And it came in for very strong criticism from the orthodox theologians.

But, in spite of the emphasis the early Sufis laid on the role of the *Shari'ah* in their lives, they justified this attitude of blind obedience of the preceptor, on the ground that it was just a passing phase in the development of the beginner, and a necessary phase because, without it, it was impossible for the beginner to get out of the personal and self-centred frame of reference which throughout his life up to the point he took a preceptor had been his only operative frame of reference. The way Qushairi puts the whole idea is: when the disciple has rid himself completely of the influence of his worldly position, status, and wealth, it becomes incumbent on him to set right his relation with God by deciding never to say no to his *Shaikh*.<sup>47</sup>

Once the disciple has put himself completely in the hands of his preceptor, the chances are that he will soon start having experiences of reality which till then were altogether unknown to him. This first contact with reality might not always be conducive to happy results. Sometimes the novitiate feels the urge of communicating these novel and marvellous experiences of his to anybody and everybody just to test whether he still is in possession of his senses; sometimes he communicates with others to share his delight as well as his agony with them and seek strength from such a sharing of experiences; and sometimes he communicates with others because of some other emotional urges. All this is forbidden. He should keep his experiences of reality as his most precious personal secrets to himself and divulge them to nobody except his preceptor.<sup>48</sup>

Although the early Sufi writers have given no explicit reason for this injunction, their general tone suggests that the first experiences of reality of a Sufi are based on such a delicate relation between him and his Creator that unless extreme care is taken the Sufi runs the risk of losing all capacity for such experiences. It was felt that until the newly developed relationship between the beginner's personality and his Creator is properly stabilized he should be as watchful and jealous of this unique achievement as possible. And there is no way of doing that better than sharing all such experiences with the preceptor, for he can, through his identification with the disciple, lend him his own strength and stability.

Having worked with the disciple through these early experiences, the Shaikh finds out the strength as well the weaknesses of the disciple. In the light of this understanding the preceptor then selects one of the various names of the Almighty and takes him through an involvement with it in such a way that, by the time he finishes this period of training, he is completely influenced by it in everything he does.

There are several stages in this which the disciple must pass through under the watchful supervision of the Shaikh. He first repeats this name of the Almighty with just his tongue. Then he puts his heart and soul into it to such an extent that it is not just the tongue which utters the name of the Almighty, but even his heart and soul utter nothing but this name. Then the disciple is told to keep engaged in the uttering of

the name all the time and continue thus till he feels actually as if he is with his heart and soul occupied with and engaged in nothing but his Creator. [49](#)

It is at this last stage that the disciple achieves for the first time that involvement with the Almighty which alone makes it possible for him to go on in his endeavour to achieve an infinitely progressive type of involvement with Him.

The beginner's ability to achieve a view of the universe around him as nothing but that aspect of Being which is signified by the particular name of the Almighty, on which the master trained him, depends a great deal on the influence exerted on him by the master's personality. But apart from this there is a considerable amount of hard work which has to be done by the beginner himself by way of long prayers, series of night-long vigils, self-denial in food, sleep, rest, etc. This hard work which is planned and prescribed by the master has to be carried out by the disciple, however arduous and inconvenient it may be. To this hard work the early Sufis gave the name of *mujahadah*.

The true significance of *mujahadah* is realized only when one finds in the accounts of the early Sufis how much of the first experiencing of reality depends on it. Hujwiri holds, for example, that *mushahadah* (i. e., the first seeing of the Almighty with the mind's eye) can never occur without *mujahadah*.[50](#)

One explanation of the significance of the beginner's hard work (*mujahadah*), in so far as it is a necessary condition for his first contact with reality (*mushahadah*), is that it is a process of disciplined prayers and ascetic practices which ultimately results in such a refinement of the Sufi's personality as to rid it of all that is base and low in it. This disciplined and refined personality is more ready to receive the first vision of reality than the original personality of the beginner which basically is self-centred and crude.

But even the most stringent discipline of this type (*mujahadah*) is not considered by the early Sufis to be the sole and necessary means for the first contact with reality (*mushahadah*). As Hujwiri puts it, all such discipline is the Sufi's own work, but this work brings the proper reward in its wake only when the Creator wills it.[51](#)

Why the early Sufis, in spite of rating the Sufi's labour so high, did not recognize it as the necessary means for the first contact with reality, was perhaps due to the fact that they had at the back of their minds the possibility that this very hard labour could produce in the Sufis a sense of self-righteousness verging on conceit. And this conceit was the one thing which, they thought, had been the cause of Satan's downfall, about whom the Qur'an is very explicit: he refused and felt conceited.[52](#) It was with this in mind that the early Sufis regarded the first contact with reality always a matter of grace rather than something earned by the Sufi just because of his having worked so hard.

The first contact with reality is regarded by the Sufis as just the beginning to which there is no end, because reality is infinite. But the beginning has a unique importance. Without it there would be, as one might say, no series of contacts to follow. Although there is not much explicit mention of it in the

accounts of early Sufis, scores of accounts of later Sufis bear out the fact that sometimes a beginner may toil year after year in fruitless vigils and fasts and may find his labours completely unrewarded.

There is a kind of a barrier between the mortal self of the Sufi, on the one hand, and the glorious Being of the Creator, on the other, which must be broken for the infinite series of evermore-intimate contacts between the two to follow. It is the first crack in this barrier, which, in spite of its being just a crack, gives it its unique significance. For without it there is no possibility of the more adequate removal of the barrier which has yet to come.

What happens after the first contact between the beginner and his Creator is a secret which nobody has ever completely revealed, for the simple reason, among others, that the experiences of the Sufi from this point on are on a plane altogether different from the plane of the average mortal. Communication between the Sufi and the average mortal is consequently extremely hazardous, if not altogether impossible. If the Sufi uses the language of the average mortal, he may mean one thing and actually say another; and if he uses the language he creates in order to give expression to his unique experiences, he may not be understood at all.

All that we are in possession of, therefore, in the writings of the early Sufis regarding the states and relations through which they pass after the first crack in the barrier between them and their Creator, is a collection of carefully coined and scrupulously selected terms which some of them employ to convey something at least of what they see in the course of their journey into the Infinite.

Two such terms are station (*maqam*) and state (*hal*). Each one stands for a specific type of development the Sufi goes through. The basis of distinction between them is the same as the one between *mujahadah* and *mushahadah*. Station is the general term which covers all those stages which after the initial contact with reality are considered achievable through the Sufi's own toil and labour. State, on the other hand, covers all those states which are the result of the ceaseless flow of grace of which the Sufi remains the recipient as long as he does not falter and remains steadfast in his pursuit of reality. This is expressed by Hujwiri in the following words: *Maqam* is consequent upon one's own actions, *hal* is one of the blessings; *maqam* is one of the rewards which are earned by the Sufi, while *hal* is one of the blessings conferred on him independently of his actual actions [53](#)

That of the almost infinite series of stations a perfect Sufi may achieve only a few, is explicitly mentioned by the early Sufis. But we know which the first is and which the last, for Hujwiri sums up the whole thing in two sentences:

(1) *Tawbah* (renunciation of all that had been evil in the Sufi's life up-to-date) is the beginning of the series of *maqamat*;[54](#) (2) *rida'* (absolute satisfaction with the state in which God keeps the Sufi) is the last of the series. [55](#)

Hujwiri indicates what he believes to be the true relation between *maqam* and *hal* by adding: *Rida'* is the last of the series of *maqamat* but the first of the series of *ahwal*. This shows that in spite of the earlier

impression that the two lines which intersect at many points, the correct theoretical position is that *ahwal* begin where *maqamat* end. This is in keeping with the basic attitude of the Sufi that in whatever he achieves he is in the last resort indebted more to his Creator than to his own personal endeavours. This point of view looks more logical too.

If *maqamat* are achieved by the Sufi through his personal endeavour, the series cannot be infinite merely because his personal endeavour must have a limit. *Ahwal*, on the other hand, since they are based on acts of the grace of the Infinite, must of necessity be infinite as a series. The two series could not run parallel; and if one has to end before the other begins, it must be the finite, for the infinite will never come to an end.

The discussion of the *maqamat* being a finite series of states, and *ahwal* being an infinite series of states, through which a Sufi may travel, raises an interesting issue. Are we really justified in believing that the Sufi's *ahwal* constitute an infinite series of states of development to which there is no end? Whatever else one might say in answer to the question, within the framework of the *Shari'ah*, the answer in the affirmative is completely ruled out. There must be a point at which the development of the Sufi must stop in order to remain short of the status of a *nabi* or a *rasul* (a prophet without a book, or the one with a book).

Another interesting point that comes out of the discussion of the early Sufi's concept of *maqam* and *hal* is related to his attitude towards the problem of free-will. One can infer from the early Sufi's attitude, regarding *maqam* and *hal*, that with regard to the former he believes in individual freedom and initiative as well as responsibility, and regarding the latter he believes that individual freedom and initiative can take him only up to a point and no further.

Another pair of terms that was common among the early Sufis was that of knowledge (*'ilm*) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*). The difference between the two is brought out first by pointing out that, whereas the theologians ('*ulama*') make no distinction between them, the Sufis believe that the one must never be confused with the other. For the theologian all sure and certain knowledge is *'ilm*; therefore, *ma'rifah*, in the sense in which the Sufis use it, is also *'ilm* and nothing else. They consequently think that "the possessor of knowledge" ('*alim*) and "the possessor of gnosis" ('*arif*) mean one and the same thing. But, as Hujwiri points out, the theologians contradict themselves when they assert that whereas '*alim* is a descriptive term and can be used for God, the term *arif* cannot be used thus.<sup>56</sup>

The Sufis think that between knowledge and gnosis there is a basic distinction which should never be lost sight of. Knowledge, in their eyes, is that which in the last resort, when analysed, never takes us beyond empty verbal form; gnosis, on the other hand, is that awareness which when analysed ends up in direct experience of concrete facts, processes, and things. Knowledge, therefore, seldom influences one's real conduct, while gnosis can seldom remain without influencing it. From their point of view, knowledge is a rudimentary form of gnosis. Consequently, the possessor of knowledge may not at the same time possess gnosis, whereas the possessor of gnosis must have at one stage possessed

knowledge.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from this way of distinguishing gnosis from knowledge, the early Sufis tried to bring out the distinction in yet another way. This they did by emphasizing that, whereas in the case of one's knowledge regarding something communication is both possible and desirable, in the case of one's gnosis it is neither possible, nor desirable. In order fully to appreciate this distinction between the two modes of knowledge which the early Sufis regarded basic and fundamental one must keep in mind the fact that in their eyes it is only the knowledge of the ultimately Real which can develop from knowledge into gnosis; apprehension of other facts, things, or processes can never develop beyond knowledge and, therefore, must remain short of gnosis.

Theoretically, this implies the impossibility of gnosis and the possibility only of knowledge of one's own self.<sup>58</sup> From this point of view, the attitude of the early Sufi so far as knowledge of reality is concerned is as different from that of the positivist as of any traditional metaphysician.

Another way in which Hujwiri tries to bring out the distinction between knowledge and gnosis is that knowledge can be acquired, while gnosis is a gift of God;<sup>59</sup> therefore, it can never be a substitute for gnosis.

All these distinctions between knowledge and gnosis are summed up by Qushairi in what he relates from his preceptor, Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq: Gnosis is achieved by one who has knowledge of the Real in all the various aspects and then carries out his dealings with everybody within the constant framework of reference to God, gets rid of his own base features ... and does not permit even a single thought to enter his mind which attracts him to anything but God ... he who has achieved all this is known as a gnostic and his state is known as that of gnosis. Such a person achieves gnosis of his Creator in proportion to his estrangement from his own self.<sup>60</sup>

Keeping this statement in mind, one could say that the involvement of the gnostic with his Creator is an involvement as concrete and actual as one can think of; it is not mere conceiving of this or that virtue and just imposing on oneself the intellectual framework thus evolved.

Another pair of terms popular among the early Sufis is that of *fana'* and *baqa'*. As to the definition of these terms there is considerable agreement between the early Sufis. But when they come to interpret these definitions in detail, differences crop up. This is illustrated even in the attitudes of Qushairi and Hujwiri. Qushairi maintains, he whom the glory of reality overwhelms to such an extent that he observes neither in itself, nor in its effects, nor in the form of its traces and tracks, anything other than reality, is described as one who has achieved *fana'*, in respect of things created, and *baqa'* in respect of the Creator.<sup>61</sup>

Hujwiri, on the other hand, maintains: *Fana'* is the complete loss by the mortal self of the conditions of his being, and *baqa'* is his being lost in the vision of the Real. He achieves *fana'* through the vision of his own actions and *baqa'* through the vision of the acts of God. His dealings with others are coloured by

reference to Him and not to his own mortal self. Hence, he who loses all that is mortal and finite in his mortal self achieves permanence proportionately in the vision of divineness of the Real. [62](#)

This withdrawing from one's own self, and everything else, into the Creator is easier to understand if we take into consideration an explanatory comment of Qushairi: So far as his evil actions and conditions are concerned, *fana'* of the mortal self means his getting rid of all traces of these as completely as possible; while in respect of his own self and other persons and things, *fana'* means just the loss by him of his consciousness of his own self and that of other persons and things as the frame of reference for his actions ... for when he is said to have achieved *fana'* with regard to his self and other persons and things, it is still recognized that his self exists and other persons and things exist too; only he has lost consciousness of his self, on the one hand, and of other persons and things, on the other. [63](#)

Summing up all this one could say *fana'* means the complete disappearance of three things: (1) the bad actions, tendencies, and conduct, (2) the low and base self, and (3) the world at large. So far as the first form of *fana'* is concerned, the disappearance means their disappearing altogether from existence; so far as the second and third forms of *fana'* are concerned it means that, in spite of the self and others still being in existence, the Sufi has become oblivious of their existence.

Hujwiri interprets *fana'* and *baqa'* still in another way by connecting the two with the unity of God (*tawhid*). Both *fana'* and *baqa'* are rooted in one's being sincere in accepting unity, for, when one accepts unity one must also accept as being completely in the hands of God. One who is, thus, in the hands of Another has the status of one who has achieved *fana'*. Such a person must accept his complete helplessness.

For him there is no other status than that of a person who has been made what he is by the Lord. So he must build up the permanent attitude of total submission (*rida'*) towards his Creator. Anybody who interprets *fana'* and *baqa'* in any other way than this, i. e., regards *fana'* as the actual disappearing of the mortal self, and *baqa'* as the actual permanence in the Real, is no other than a sophist. [64](#)

That which distinguishes this comment of Hujwiri's from Qushairi's comments in general, and the one that follows in particular, is the consciousness of the corrupting influences that the Carmathians, Malahad, etc., had started exercising in his days. He wished to keep the definitions of *fana'* and *baqa'* as precise as possible, lest they should become tools in the hands of those who were interested in getting Sufism rid of its roots in the *Shari'ah* and *Tawhid*.

This is how Qushairi describes *fana'* and *baqa'* in the comment particularly pointed out above: "When a person has achieved *fana'* of his self, as described so far, he goes from the vision of his *fana'* into the higher stage of his actual *fana'*.... The first stage in this ascent is the *fana'* of his self and all its attributes through his permanence in the attributes of the Real. Then comes the second stage of his losing his status in the attributes of the Real and achieving a vision of God Himself. And last of all he loses his status in the vision of the reality by merging himself completely in the being of the Real.[65](#)

One thing that, in all fairness to Qushairi, must be pointed out regarding this last comment of his is that in spite of his mode of expression being very much like that of the Malahad, the Carmathians, etc., against whom Hujwiri wishes to warn his readers, Qushairi does not mean to maintain that *fana'* is the actual *fana'* of the mortal self and *baqa'* is its actual *baqa'* in the Real as the Carmathians, etc., maintained. Qushairi, on the other hand, maintains, as would be clear from the comments from him quoted earlier, what in substance is maintained by Hujwiri himself.

Although there are scores of such pairs and groups of terms as have been discussed above, what has been said so far should be enough to give us some idea at least of what type of men the early Sufis were, and what went into making them what they were. If, on the other hand, we were to go into a detailed study of their mode of life we will not be able to do justice to it without taking into consideration not only their basic attitudes, as has been done so far, but even the specific applications of these to each and every little detail of their daily lives.

The early Sufi was involved in his Creator in a relationship, an extremely pale example of which is the relation of the maddest love between two human beings. As the lover thinks of nothing, dreams of nothing, sees nothing, and feels nothing but his beloved and of his beloved all the time, a Sufi thinks of nothing, dreams of nothing, sees nothing, and feels nothing but his beloved and of his beloved, that is, his Creator.

The result is that when one studies the lives of these Sufis, one finds that they take not even a single step in their lives without feeling sure within themselves that this and nothing else will please Him. How they should walk when they tread the earth, how they should talk when they mix with their fellow-men, how they should dress, what they should eat, what they should drink, what they should do when they get up in the morning if they go to sleep at all -- each and every little detail of everything relating to these matters is prescribed for them. And the basic principle underlying all such prescriptions is that even the maximum of obedience, service, sacrifice, devotion, and love is not enough; so they should always regard the maximum as the minimum, and constantly strive for a devotion more thorough and a love more intense.

It is this burning desire to lose oneself in the Creator on an ever-increasing scale in everything, major or minor, over the whole period of one's life, which distinguishes the early Sufi from everybody else.

1. This chapter is based mainly on the following source books : (i) Abu Nasr 'Abd Allah b. 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi, al-Kitab al-Luma' fi al-Tasawwuf; (ii) Khwajah Farid al-Din 'Attar, Tadhkirat al-Auliya'; (iii) Makhdum 'Ali Hujwiri, Kashf al-Mahjub; (iv) Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi i, Kitab al-Ta'ruf li Madhhab Ahl at-Tasawwuf translated from Arabic by A. J. Arberry: The Doctrine of the Sufis, Cambridge University Press, London 1935 (v) Abu al-Qasim al-Qushairi, al-Risalat al-Qushairiyah, Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubra, Misr, 1330 A.H.

The Kitab al-Luma' is regarded as one of the oldest, if not the oldest, Sufi texts available. Its author is 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ali ibn Muhanunad ibn Yahya Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi who died in 378/988. He is quoted by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021), the author of Tabaqat al-Sufiyyah (itself one of the oldest texts), Abu al-Qasim al-Qushairi, Makhdum 'Ali Hujwiri, Farid al Din 'Attar, al-Ghazali, and scores of early as well as later writers on Sufism. He is considered to have

written several books, but *Kitab al-Luma'* is the only one which has come down to us.

According to Nicholson, Sarraj quotes from such well-known Sufis and scholars as Abu Dawud Sijistani, Abu Said al-Kharraz, Abu Said al-'Arabi, Ibrahim al-Khawwas, Amr bin 'Uthman al-Makki, Junaid, and through him Abu Yazid al-Bistami.

- [2.](#) Abu Nasr 'Abd Allah bin 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi, *Kitab al-Luma' fi al-Tasawwuf*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, Luzac & Co., London, 1914, p. 2.
- [3.](#) *Ibid.* pp. 3–4.
- [4.](#) Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta`arruf li Madhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf*, translated under the title *The Doctrine of the Sufis* by A. J. Arberry, Cambridge University Press, London, 1935, p.3.
- [5.](#) Abu al-Qasim al-Qushairi, *al-Risalat al-Qushariyyah*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubra, Misr, 1330 A.H., p.2.
- [6.](#) Makhdum 'Ali Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, Silyanov Press, Samarcand, 1330 A.H., p.12.
- [7.](#) Khwajah Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Auliya'*, Karimi Press, Bombay, 1321 A.H., pp.5–6.
- [8.](#) Al-Sarraj, op.cit., p.22.
- [9.](#) *Ibid.*
- [10.](#) *Ibid.*
- [11.](#) Hujwiri, op.cit., pp. 108–10.
- [12.](#) 'Attar, op.cit., p.18.
- [13.](#) Al-Sarraj, op.cit., pp.21–22.
- [14.](#) *Ibid.*, p.22.
- [15.](#) *Ibid.*, p.21.
- [16.](#) Zaki Mubarak, *al-Tasawwuf al-Islami fi al-Adab wa'l Akhlaq*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, Cairo, 1954, Vol. 1, p.63.
- [17.](#) *Ibid.*, pp.49–50.
- [18.](#) Al-Qushairi, op.cit., p.8.
- [19.](#) Hujwiri, op.cit., p.34.
- [20.](#) Al-Qushairi, op.cit., p.180.
- [21.](#) *Ibid.*
- [22.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- [23.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- [24.](#) *Ibid.*
- [25.](#) *Ibid.*
- [26.](#) *Ibid.*
- [27.](#) *Ibid.* p.181.
- [28.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- [29.](#) Hujwiri, op. cit., p. 217.
- [30.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 446–47..
- [31.](#) *Ibid.* p.446.
- [32.](#) Al-Qushairi, op.cit., p.181.
- [33.](#) *Ibid.*, pp.182, 186.
- [34.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- [35.](#) *Ibid.*, p.5.
- [36.](#) *Ibid.*, p.6.
- [37.](#) *Ibid.*, p.5.
- [38.](#) *Ibid.*, p.6.
- [39.](#) Hujwiri, op.cit., p.335.
- [40.](#) *Ibid.*, pp.335–6.
- [41.](#) *Ibid.*, p.334.
- [42.](#) A1–Qushairi, op. cit., p.180.

- [43.](#) Ibid., p. 181.
- [44.](#) Ibid.
- [45.](#) Ibid
- [46.](#) Ibid. p.182.
- [47.](#) Ibid.
- [48.](#) Ibid.
- [49.](#) Ibid.
- [50.](#) Hujwiri, op. cit., p. 250.
- [51.](#) Ibid., p.252.
- [52.](#) Qur'an, ii, 34.
- [53.](#) Hujwiri, op.cit., p.223.
- [54.](#) Ibid.
- [55.](#) Ibid., p.224.
- [56.](#) Ibid. p.445.
- [57.](#) Ibid. p.320.
- [58.](#) Ibid., p. 329.
- [59.](#) Ibid., p. 322.
- [60.](#) Al-Qushairi, op cit., p. 141.
- [61.](#) Ibid., p.37.
- [62.](#) Ibid., p.299.
- [63.](#) Ibid., p.37.
- [64.](#) Hujwiri, op.cit., p.299.
- [65.](#) Al-Qushairi, op.cit., p.37.

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