

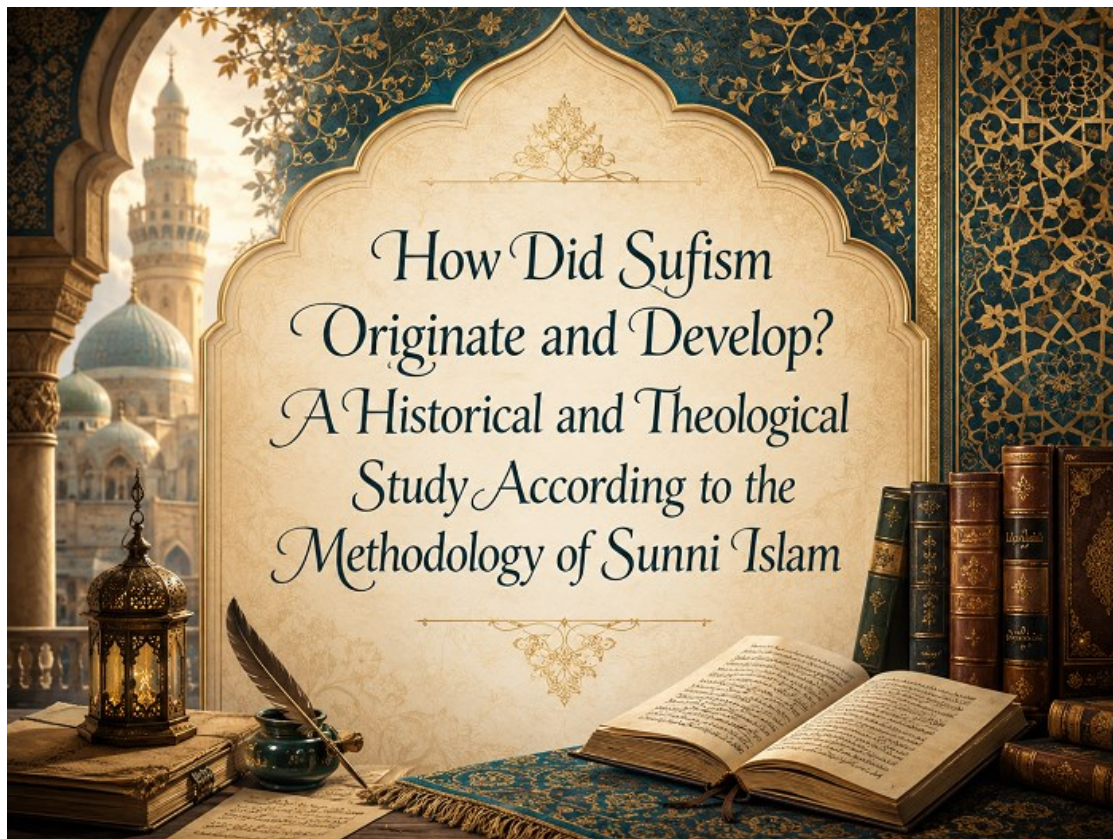
How Did Sufism Originate and Develop? A Historical and Theological Study According to the Methodology of Sunni Islam

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When Sufism is mentioned, many people immediately think of religious festivals, Sufi orders, collective litanies, visits to shrines, seeking blessings through saints, dancing, chanting, and other practices. However, impartial examination requires a distinction between three different matters: asceticism and spiritual purification as prescribed by Islam; Sufism as a term and historical movement that emerged after the era of the Companions; and the Sufi orders that arose in later periods and developed their own litanies, rituals, and institutions.



From the perspective of the adherents of the Prophetic tradition and the Muslim community “Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah”, statements and individuals are not judged merely by names or affiliations. Rather, beliefs, acts of worship, and practices are evaluated according to the Noble Qur’an “al-Qur’an al-Karim” and the authentic Prophetic tradition “al-Sunnah al-Sahihah”, in accordance with the understanding of the Companions and the righteous early generations “al-Salaf al-Salih”.

Whatever conforms to divine revelation is accepted because it is part of Islam, and whatever contradicts it is rejected, irrespective of the name, status, or number of followers of the person who advocates it.

Asceticism and Spiritual Purification in the Qur’an and the Prophetic Tradition

Legitimate asceticism, sincerity, fear of Allah, self-examination, and purification of the heart from showing off, arrogance, and envy are not concepts created by Sufism. Rather, they are firmly established Islamic principles found in the Noble Qur’an “al-Qur’an al-Karim” and the Prophetic tradition “al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah”.

Allah, the Exalted, states:

“Successful indeed is the one who purifies their soul, and doomed is the one who corrupts it!” ([Qur’an 91:9–10](#)).

He, Glorified and Exalted, also states:

“Do not let your eyes crave what We have allowed some of the disbelievers to enjoy; the fleeting splendour of this worldly life, which We test them with. But your Lord’s provision in the Hereafter is far better and more lasting” ([Qur’an 20:131](#)).

Prophet Muhammad, may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, lived a life founded upon servitude to Allah, humility, and contentment with little of the material enjoyment of this world, while fulfilling his responsibilities towards his family, his Companions, and his community. He slept on a mat, and one or two months would pass without a fire being lit in the homes of his wives. He repaired his own sandals and served himself and his family.

Prophet Muhammad, may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, said:

“What do I have to do with the world! I am not in the world but as a rider seeking shade under a tree, then he catches his breath and leaves it” ([al-Tirmidhi, 1996, Hadith no. 2377](#)).

The asceticism of Prophet Muhammad—peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam”—did not involve absolute abstention from wholesome things, prohibiting what Allah had made lawful, or withdrawing from life. Rather, it meant that the heart was not attached to worldly life, while the duties of religion, family, and society were fulfilled.

Prophet Muhammad—peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam”—rebuked those among whom one wished to pray throughout every night, another wished to fast continuously, and a third wished to abstain from marriage. He said, ‘Whoever turns away from my religious tradition, “Sunnah”, is not of me’ ([Al-Bukhari, 2002, Hadith 5063](#); [Muslim, 2006, Hadith 1401](#)).

The Companions—may Allah be pleased with them, “radiya Allahu anhum”—followed this approach. Some were poor and others wealthy, while among them were worshippers, scholars, merchants, fighters in the cause of Allah, and rulers. A reduction in wealth or the wearing of coarse clothing was not a condition of asceticism, “zuhd”. Indeed, our masters Uthman ibn Affan and Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf—may Allah be pleased with them both, “radiya Allahu anhuma”—were wealthy, yet they devoted their wealth to obedience to Allah and did not allow their hearts to become attached to it.

It is authentically established in the Authentic Collection of Al-Bukhari, “Sahih al-Bukhari”, that food was brought to Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf—may Allah be pleased with him, “radiya Allahu anhu”—while he was fasting. He remembered Musab ibn Umayr—may Allah be pleased with him, “radiya Allahu anhu”—and said, ‘Musab ibn Umayr was martyred, and he was better than I.

He was shrouded in a cloak; when his head was covered, his legs became exposed, and when his legs were covered, his head became exposed.’ He then mentioned the worldly provisions that had been bestowed upon them and feared that the rewards for their good deeds might have been granted to them prematurely in this world. He continued weeping until he left the food ([Al-Bukhari, 2002, Hadith 1275](#)).

As for the People of the Sheltered Platform, “Ahl al-Suffah”, they were among the poor Emigrants, “Muhajirun”, and others who had neither homes nor clans in Medina. For a period, they resided in a sheltered area at the rear of the Prophet’s Mosque, “al-Masjid al-Nabawi”.

They were not an independent religious order, and it has not been established that all of them wore wool or followed a distinctive program of worship. Nor is it valid to attribute the term Islamic mysticism, “Sufism”, to them merely because of the verbal similarity between the sheltered platform, “al-Suffah”, and Islamic mysticism, “Sufism”.

Thus, during the era of Prophet Muhammad—peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam”—the Companions and the Followers, “Tabiun”, asceticism, “zuhd”, was an act of worship and a form of conduct within Islam. It was not the name of a sect or an order possessing its own spiritual master, prescribed devotional recitations, slogans, and separate institutions.

When Did the Term Sufism Appear?

The designation ‘Sufi’ or ‘Sufism’ was not known during the time of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, and his Companions as the name of a religious group. Sources differ regarding the first person to be given the title ‘Sufi’. It has been said that he was Abu Hashim al-Kufi in the second Islamic century, while other views identify someone else.

Therefore, it is not valid to state conclusively that one particular person was the first Sufi without acknowledging the disagreement among historians on this matter. A number of researchers maintain that the designation ‘Sufi’ was most likely associated with wearing coarse wool, which some ascetics adopted as a sign of austerity, although other explanations concerning the origin of the word also exist.

What is historically established is that the designation and the practices associated with it developed gradually after the era of the Companions, and that organised Sufism emerged later than early Islamic asceticism (Karamustafa, 2007; Melchert, 2020).

During the first and second Islamic centuries, a strong tendency towards asceticism, fear, weeping, and abundant worship spread in Basra and elsewhere. Prominent

figures from that period included al-Hasan al-Basri, Malik ibn Dinar, Muhammad ibn Wasi', Ibrahim ibn Adham, al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyad, and others.

However, it is not correct to describe al-Hasan al-Basri as the 'founder of Sufism' or the 'first seed of Sufism'. He was a leading scholar among the generation following the Companions and the people who adhere to the Prophetic tradition and communal unity, "Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah", and was known for his scholarship, jurisprudence, preaching, and asceticism. Later Sufis included his statements in their writings, and some Sufi orders attributed their spiritual chains to him. Nevertheless, this does not establish that he founded technical Sufism or belonged to a Sufi order.

The Transition from Individual Asceticism to Organised Sufism

Some circles of asceticism and worship gradually developed, and terms such as spiritual states, "al-ahwal", spiritual stations, "al-maqamat", annihilation of the self, "al-fana", spiritual subsistence, "al-baqa", spiritual experience, "al-dhawq", and spiritual unveiling, "al-kashf", emerged. Spiritual teachers also arose around whom disciples gathered. In later periods, residential religious institutions, "al-rubut", Sufi lodges, "al-khanqahat", and Sufi centres, "al-zawaya", were established, where some ascetics and Sufis resided for worship and learning.

Among the prominent figures in this development was al-Harith al-Muhasibi, who wrote about spiritual vigilance and self-examination. However, self-examination was not a discipline created by al-Muhasibi; it was an Islamic principle that preceded him.

Al-Muhasibi also engaged in speculative theology, "ilm al-kalam", and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal criticised his approach and warned against attending his gatherings.

Therefore, it is not correct to present him as a pure representative of the methodology of the righteous early generations, "manhaj al-salaf", without explaining the criticisms directed against him.

Thereafter, al-Junayd al-Baghdadi emerged and was regarded as one of the most prominent teachers of early Sufism. Statements attributed to him emphasise the necessity of adhering to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, "al-Sunnah", including: 'This knowledge of ours is bound by the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition.'

His discourse was characterised by restraint when compared with those who made ecstatic and extravagant utterances, "al-shatahat". However, describing him as the

‘founder of moderate Sufism’ is inaccurate because Sufism did not originate through one person. Furthermore, the correctness of some of al-Junayd’s statements does not validate everything that was later added to Sufism or attributed to him.

The methodology of the people who adhere to the Prophetic tradition and communal unity, “Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah”, requires detailed assessment when judging those affiliated with Sufism. The leading Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah explained that among those affiliated with it were foremost believers brought near to Allah, moderate believers among the people of the right, and adherents who wronged themselves. People of religious innovation and heresy also entered their ranks.

Therefore, not every form of Sufism is to be praised, nor is every person to be condemned merely because of the designation. Rather, the true nature of the person’s beliefs and actions must be examined (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995, Vol. 11, pp. 17–18).

Ecstatic Utterances and the Emergence of Doctrinal Deviations

Among some Sufis, a phenomenon known as ecstatic utterances emerged. These were ambiguous or false statements made by certain individuals during states in which they claimed to experience spiritual absence or intoxication. Among the most prominent figures associated with this phenomenon were Abu Yazid al-Bistami and al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj.

Al-Hallaj associated with a group of Sufis, including Sahl al-Tustari, Amr al-Makki, and al-Junayd al-Baghdadi. However, many early Sufi scholars denounced him and disassociated themselves from his statements. Statements and beliefs concerning divine indwelling and union were attributed to him.

Among the most famous statements reported from him was:

‘I am the Truth.’

He was also attributed with statements involving the abandonment of certain Islamic legal obligations and claims that contradicted the absolute oneness of Allah.

Divine indwelling is the belief that Allah, Glorified and Exalted, dwells within some of His creation, whereas divine union is the belief that the Creator becomes united with His creation. Both beliefs are false and contradict the absolute oneness and transcendence of Allah. Allah, the Exalted, is distinct from His creation: ‘There is

nothing like Him' ([Qur'an 42:11](#)). He neither dwells within His creation nor becomes united with it.

Al-Hallaj was executed in Baghdad in 309 AH, during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir Billah, following a lengthy trial. The scholars of his time judged him according to the heresy and disbelief attributed to him. A number of jurists and Sufis condemned him, whereas some later scholars attempted to interpret his statements differently or defend him.

From the perspective of the adherents of the Prophetic tradition and Muslim community, his explicit statements are judged according to their established meaning under Islamic law. Statements of disbelief cannot be transformed into acceptable meanings on the grounds of alleged spiritual mysteries or inward states (Ibn al-Jawzi, 2001; Ibn Kathir, 1997, Vol. 14, pp. 832–836).

The Influence of Philosophy on Philosophical Sufism

The translation movement involving Greek, Persian, and Indian intellectual heritage flourished during the Abbasid era, introducing philosophical ideas into the Islamic intellectual environment, particularly Neoplatonism. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to attribute the entirety of Sufism to a single philosophical source. Early asceticism developed primarily within an Islamic environment, while some later Sufi trends were influenced by multiple philosophical and cultural sources.

Philosophical Sufism expanded the use of concepts such as self-annihilation “fana”, the Muhammadan Reality “al-haqiqah al-Muhammadiyah”, the Perfect Human “al-insan al-kamil”, mystical unveiling “al-kashf”, and the unity of existence “wahdat al-wujud”. This trend reached an influential stage in the writings of Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi, who died in 638 AH, and subsequently in the works of his students and commentators.

Ibn Arabi's writings contained statements concerning the unity of existence “wahdat al-wujud” and the relationship between the Creator and creation that were rejected by scholars of the Sunni tradition, who regarded them as contradicting the absolute oneness of Allah “tawhid”. The concept of the Perfect Human “al-insan al-kamil”, as used by all those who adopted it, does not simply mean ‘a person who never makes mistakes’.

Rather, it is a complex philosophical concept that, for some thinkers, was associated with the Muhammadan Reality “al-haqiqah al-Muhammadiyah”, cosmic mediation, and the manifestation of the divine names in the human being. Accordingly, the Salafi objection to this concept was grounded in its foundational principles of Islamic creed, rather than in reducing it merely to the notion of immunity from everyday mistakes.

The Ismaili Shia and the Fatimid State

It is a historical error to conflate the Ismaili Shia with the Twelver Shia, as they are two distinct sects. The Fatimid state was an Ismaili Shia state, not a Twelver Shia state. It began in North Africa in 297 AH/909 CE, subsequently conquered Egypt in 358 AH/969 CE, founded Cairo, and continued until it was overthrown by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi in 567 AH/1171 CE.

The Ismaili doctrine was founded upon the concept of esoteric religious leadership “al-imamah al-batiniyyah”, the belief that the Imam possessed special knowledge and interpretation, and the distinction between the outward and inward meanings of religious texts. During certain stages of its development, Ismaili thought was influenced by philosophical concepts, including Neoplatonic elements.

However, it is incorrect to regard Ismailism as identical to Sufism. They represent two distinct historical trajectories, although some overlap or similarity occurred between certain ideas associated with them in particular periods and environments (Daftary, 2007).

The Fatimid caliphs claimed descent from Lady Fatimah al-Zahra, may Allah be pleased with her “radiya Allahu anha”. A number of Sunni genealogists and historians challenged the authenticity of this lineage. The Fatimid state employed religious missionary activity “da‘wah” and official celebrations to consolidate its political and doctrinal legitimacy.

The Fatimids, Birth Celebrations, and Shrines

The Fatimid state observed numerous official celebrations, including the celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, the birth celebrations of our master ‘Ali, Lady Fatimah, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with them, “radiya Allahu ‘anhum”, and the birth celebration of Caliph al-Hakim. These celebrations served religious, political,

and social functions and included processions, sermons, and the distribution of food and charitable donations.

Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between those official celebrations and the later Sunni forms of the celebration of the Prophet's birth. Birth celebrations developed through several stages and did not retain a single form. It is also incorrect to attribute all popular birth celebrations throughout the Islamic world solely to the Fatimids, although they were among the first to establish them as organised official occasions sponsored by the state (Katz, 2007).

From the perspective of the righteous predecessors, "al-salaf", designating the day of Prophet Muhammad's birth, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, "salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam", for a recurring devotional celebration was not practised by Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, "salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam", his rightly guided successors, "al-khulafa' al-rashidun", his Companions, "al-sahabah", or the virtuous early generations, "al-qurun al-mufaddalah".

Loving Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, "salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam", is a great act of worship, but the evidence of its sincerity is adherence to his Prophetic tradition, "Sunnah", as Allah, the Exalted, said: 'Say, O Prophet, "If you sincerely love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive your sins. For Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful"' ([Qur'an 3:31](#)).

The Fatimids also devoted attention to shrines attributed to the family of Prophet Muhammad, "Ahl al-Bayt", and their policies contributed to consolidating the presence of these shrines in the public sphere. However, some tombs and shrines were later attributed to individuals whose burial at those locations has not been historically established.

The authenticity of every such attribution must therefore be verified. Moreover, even if the presence of a grave is established, this does not permit supplicating to its occupant, seeking his aid, or requesting supernatural assistance from him.

Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and the Restoration of the Sunni School

When Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi brought the Fatimid state to an end, his religious project was based primarily on abolishing the Isma'ili institutions, restoring the Sunni school, "al-madhab al-sunni", linking Egypt to the Abbasid Caliphate, and supporting Sunni scholars and schools.

Sufi lodges, “khawanq”, and Sufi institutions existed during the Ayyubid period, and some Sufi groups received state support. However, it is inaccurate to reduce Salah al-Din’s project to ‘supporting moderate Sufism’, or to claim that he regarded Sufism alone as the remedy for the Fatimid legacy. His project was broader and encompassed education, the judiciary, the Friday sermon, “khutbah”, mosques, schools, and various religious institutions (Hofer, 2015).

The Emergence of the Sufi Orders

The major Sufi orders, “al-turuq al-sufiyyah”, did not all emerge during the reign of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi or at the same time. Rather, the orders developed in stages between the sixth and eighth centuries after the Migration, “Hijrah”, and many of them were based on attributing a chain of spiritual masters to a central figure.

The Qadiriyyah order was attributed to ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, who died in 561 after the Migration, “AH”, and the Rifa‘iyyah order was attributed to Ahmad al-Rifa‘i, who died in 578 AH. Ahmad al-Badawi, to whom the Badawiyyah order was attributed, died in 675 AH, while Ibrahim al-Disuqi, to whom the Disuqiyyah order was attributed, died around 676 AH. Accordingly, al-Badawi and al-Disuqi lived after Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, and it is incorrect to attribute the emergence of their respective orders to his reign.

Moreover, attributing an order to a spiritual master does not necessarily mean that all its later rituals, prescribed litanies, “awrad”, and forms were established by that master. Many orders developed after the deaths of those to whom they were attributed, and their followers added practices and beliefs that have not been authentically established as originating from their founders (Trimingham, 1971).

Exaggeration Regarding the Close Servants of Allah and Shrines

Sunni Muslims, “Ahl al-Sunnah”, affirm the extraordinary favours granted to the close servants of Allah, “karamat al-awliya”, based on the statement of Allah, the Exalted: “There will certainly be no fear for the close servants of Allah, nor will they grieve. They are those who are faithful and are mindful of Him” ([Qur’an 10:62–63](#)).

A close servant of Allah, “wali”, is a faithful and pious believer. Close friendship with Allah, “wilayah”, is not restricted to the followers of spiritual orders or those associated with shrines.

An extraordinary favour, “karamah”, is an occurrence beyond the customary order that Allah brings about through a righteous servant. A close servant of Allah does not possess the ability to produce it independently. It neither establishes that person’s infallibility nor indicates that it is permissible to invoke that person or obey that person in opposition to Islamic law, “Shari‘ah”.

An extraordinary occurrence may instead be a gradual enticement towards destruction, “istidraj”, an act of sorcery, or the result of seeking assistance from devils. Therefore, the conduct and circumstances of the person concerned must be assessed according to the Book of Allah and the Prophetic tradition, “the Qur’an and Sunnah”.

Invoking the dead, seeking their aid, asking them to relieve distress, provide healing, sustenance, or offspring, or grant supernatural assistance constitutes directing worship to someone other than Allah.

Allah, the Exalted, said: ‘The places of worship are only for Allah, so do not invoke anyone besides Him’ ([Qur’an 72:18](#)). He also said: ‘And who could be more astray than those who call upon others besides Allah, others that cannot respond to them until the Day of Judgement, and are even unaware of their calls?’ ([Qur’an 46:5](#)).

Visiting graves is prescribed for taking admonition, remembering the Hereafter, and supplicating for the deceased. It is not prescribed for invoking those buried in the graves, rubbing oneself against shrines, circumambulating them, making vows to them, or believing that their occupants exercise control over the universe.

Abandoning Religious Obligations and Claiming Esoteric Knowledge

Among the most dangerous deviations that emerged among some extremists is the claim that, once a friend of Allah, “wali”, reaches a certain spiritual rank, the obligations of prayer, fasting, and all other religious duties no longer apply to him, or that he no longer needs the revealed religious texts because he receives knowledge directly from Allah or from Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, while awake.

This is false by the consensus of the Muslims. Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, continued to worship Allah until Allah caused him to die. Allah said to him: ‘And worship your Lord until the inevitable comes your way’ ([Qur’an 15:99](#)).

Here, ‘the inevitable’ means death. Therefore, if the religious obligations were not lifted from Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, they cannot be lifted from any friend of Allah, “wali”, spiritual leader, “shaykh”, or disciple, “murid”.

Likewise, visions, dreams, and alleged mystical unveilings do not establish any religious ruling, make anything prohibited permissible, make anything permissible prohibited, or establish any new belief or act of worship. The religion was perfected by the death of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”. Allah, the Exalted, said: ‘Today I have perfected your faith for you’ ([Qur’an 5:3](#)).

Prescribed Litanies and Lawful Remembrance of Allah

The remembrance of Allah is among the greatest acts of worship, but it is a divinely prescribed act of worship, “tawqifi”, that must conform to Islamic law in its wording, number of repetitions, prescribed times, and manner of performance. Whatever has been authentically established from Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, concerning the remembrances of the morning and evening, the remembrances associated with prayer and sleep, and other forms of remembrance is lawful and most complete.

However, believing that a spiritual leader received a new prescribed litany, “wird”, from Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, while awake after the Prophet’s death, that reciting this litany is superior to reciting the Qur’an, or that it carries a reward for which there is no evidence constitutes false claims. Similarly, it is impermissible to worship Allah through forms of remembrance that include seeking deliverance from deceased righteous people, “al-awliya”, unknown expressions, or names alleged to be names of Allah without evidence.

Lawful remembrance of Allah is not performed through dancing, shouting, organised collective movements, imitating animal sounds, using music, or deliberately inducing loss of consciousness. Rather, its fundamental characteristics are humble reverence, “khushu”, attentiveness of the heart, and adherence to the example of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”.

How Do the Adherents of the Prophetic Tradition and the Muslim Community, “Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah”, Judge Those Who Identify with Sufism?

The adherents of the Prophetic tradition and the Muslim community, “Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah”, do not apply a single judgement to every individual who identifies with Sufism, because the circumstances of those who identify with it vary:

- (a) Some seek abstinence from worldly excess, “zuhd”, and purification of the soul, “tazkiyat al-nafs”, and adhere to the oneness of Allah, “tawhid”, and the obligatory duties, but use the name Sufism or fall into some religious innovations, “bida’”.
- (b) Some follow newly introduced devotional recitations, “awrad”, and rituals while the foundation of their belief in the oneness of Allah, “tawhid”, remains sound.
- (c) Some exaggerate regarding spiritual leaders and the righteous allies of Allah, “awliya’”, and attribute to them qualities that belong exclusively to Allah.
- (d) Some supplicate to beings other than Allah and seek aid from the dead. This constitutes major polytheism, “al-shirk al-akbar”, when its true nature is established, the conditions for the judgement are fulfilled, and the impediments to its application are absent.
- (e) Some adopt the beliefs of divine indwelling, “hulul”, union with the Divine, “ittihad”, or the unity of existence, “wahdat al-wujud”. These are beliefs that contradict the oneness of Allah, “tawhid Allah”, Glorified and Exalted is He, “subhanahu wa ta‘ala”.

A distinction must be made between judging a statement or action and judging a specific individual. A statement may constitute disbelief, “kufr”, or polytheism, “shirk”, but applying that judgement to a particular person requires the fulfilment of the necessary conditions, the absence of relevant impediments, and the establishment of the proof. This responsibility belongs to qualified scholars, not the general public.

Conclusion

Abstinence from worldly excess, “zuhd”, sincerity, “ikhlas”, self-examination, purification of the heart, fear of Allah, hope, reliance upon Allah, “tawakkul”, and love are authentic Islamic acts of worship established by the Noble Qur’an and taught by Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”, to his Companions, “sahabah”.

They do not require newly introduced orders, secret chains of initiation, ceremonial cloaks, or devotional recitations that have not been authentically established from Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, “salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam”.

As for Sufism as a name and an organised movement, it emerged after the era of the Companions, “sahabah”, and developed over centuries, encompassing people and trends of varying kinds. Among those who identify with it are individuals known for abstinence from worldly excess, “zuhd”, and worship, whose statements contain both truth and error.

Others have fallen into religious innovations, “bida”; some have exaggerated regarding the righteous allies of Allah, “awliya”, and graves; and others have affirmed divine indwelling, “hulul”, union with the Divine, “ittihad”, and the unity of existence, “wahdat al-wujud”.

Therefore, the criterion is neither the label “moderate Sufism”, nor the name of an order or spiritual leader, nor the antiquity of a chain of initiation, nor the number of followers, nor accounts attributed to extraordinary favours granted by Allah to His righteous servants, “karamat”. Rather, the criterion is the Noble Qur’an and the authentic Prophetic tradition, “Sunnah”, as understood by the Companions, “sahabah”, and the righteous predecessors, “al-salaf al-salih”.

Whatever is authentically established as abstinence from worldly excess, “zuhd”, sincerity, “ikhlas”, and purification of the soul, “tazkiyat al-nafs”, is accepted because it belongs to the religion of Islam, not because it is Sufi. Whatever contradicts the oneness of Allah, “tawhid”, or the Prophetic tradition, “Sunnah”, is rejected, even if it is attributed to the most renowned spiritual leaders.

Allah, the Exalted, said: ‘Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day’ ([Qur’an 4:59](#)).

Allah is Most High and knows best.

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