

True Tasawwuf

Muaz Billoo

The word “Tasawwuf” has become highly charged and controversial in some Muslim circles. Hereunder we present descriptions of *Tasawwuf* in its purest form, so that one can identify the wheat from the chaff – that is, true *Tasawwuf* from the fake.

When introducing the the term “Tasawwuf,” the late grand Mufti of Pakistan, Mufti Muhammad Shafi Uthmani (d. 1396) ﷺ – who was also the spiritual successor of Hakim al-Ummah Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (d. 1362) ﷺ – provides an apt description of its purest form, saying, “In reality, incorporating the entirety of the divine law into practice is another name for *Tariqat* and *Tasawwuf*.” In other words, applying the entirety of the Qur’an and the Sunnah into ones life – both externally and internally – with respect to ones beliefs, worship, dealings, social etiquette, and behavior is the essence of *Tasawwuf*. The true “sufi” is the one who lives his entire life in accordance with the commands of Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ. He then goes on to lament that over the ages, several individuals unaware of its reality have hijacked the name *Tasawwuf*, misrepresenting it as a set of unislamic and foreign practices.¹

The reviver of *Tasawwuf* in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah, Hakim al-Ummah Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi ﷺ said, “The primary objective (of *Tasawwuf*) is to please Allah ﷻ, and the means to attain that is by bringing all aspects of the divine law into ones practice.”²

Imam Shah Waliyullah Muhaddith al-Dehlawi (d. 1176) ﷺ said, “Engaging with the divine law without *Tariqat* (i.e. *Tasawwuf*) is philosophy. Engaging in *Tariqat* without the divine law is heresy.”³ Meaning, one must act upon the Qur’an and Sunnah in not just the outward aspects, but the inward aspects as well. If a person only studies the outward aspects, he will attain intellectual satisfaction while neglecting the pleasure of Allah ﷻ. The one who only focuses on the internal

¹ *Khulasah Wa Tashil Qasd al-Sabil* p. 2

² Ibid, p. 6

³ Ibid, p. 8

aspects while neglecting the outward aspects strays away from the commands of Allah ﷻ, thereby introducing innovations into Islam.

The author of *Tafsir Mazhari*, Qadi Thanaullah Pani Patti (d. 1225) ﷺ said, “One’s internal practice can never be purified if he does not purify his external practice.”⁴

Upon quoting the aforementioned statements and that of others, Hakim al-Ummah ﷺ states, “It is thus understood that which some ignorant claimants of Tasawwuf say regarding the divine law and *Tasawwuf* being two separate paths, and that some things which are prohibited in the law may be prohibited in *Tasawwuf* is definitive misguidance, open opposition to Islam, and stands in contrast to the way of the true Sufis.”⁵

The celebrated Shafi Muhaddith of Naisapur and Khurasan, and Imam of *Tasawwuf*, Imam Abdul Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushairi (d. 465) ﷺ, echoed the same sentiment throughout his famous *al-Risalah al-Qushairiyyah*. Under his entry on Imam Abul Qasim Junaid al-Baghdadi (d. 297) ﷺ, he narrates that a man came to Junaid, speaking about the recognition of Allah ﷻ, claiming that those who truly recognize Allah ﷻ have no need for acts of worship as they have already attained “nearness.” Imam Junaid was infuriated by this statement, responding, “This is a statement of such a people who speak of abandoning good deeds, and this to me is an abomination! The one who steals and fornicates is better than whoever makes this claim! Indeed, those who truly know Allah ﷻ adopted good deeds by His help, and by means of those good deeds did they return to Him! If I were to live for a thousand years, I would not reduce even an atoms weight of good deeds!”⁶

In his commentary of *al-Risalah al-Qushairi*, Imam Abdul Mu’ti al-Lakhmi al-Maliki (d. 638) ﷺ, explains Imam Junaid al-Baghdadi’s statement about the one stealing and fornicating being better than these false claimants to *Tasawwuf*, “This is true, because the one who steals and fornicates will realize his own deficiency and disobedience, and it is hoped that he will turn away from what he is doing, eventually repenting to his Lord. However, the one who adopts his religion as one

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid, p. 9

⁶ *Al-Risalah al-Qushairiyyah* p. 155

of abandoning good deeds, believing himself to be of the highest ranks and stations, will never leave this evil.”⁷

Imam Junaid also said, “All roads (to Allah ﷻ) are closed off, except for the one who follows the path of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.”⁸

Imam Abdul Mu’ti al-Lakhmi comments, “This is true, for indeed the meaning of ‘roads’ is that which leads to Allah ﷻ, and none can be led to Allah ﷻ except by obeying Him and following that which pleases Him, and this cannot be known except from the statements and actions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. So, anyone who does not follow the path delineated and tread by the Messenger ﷺ is far away from His nearness.”⁹

Imam Junaid also said, “He who has not understood the Qur’an nor the Hadith does not deserve to be followed in this matter, because our knowledge is restricted to the Qur’an and the Sunnah,” and he also said, “This path of ours is restricted to the foundations: the Qur’an and the Sunnah.”¹⁰

Imam al-Lakhmi says, “Neither their (i.e. the true Sufis) knowledge nor practice is independent of the Qur’an and Sunnah under any circumstances. In this there is a refutation of those who rely on the whims of their hearts while treading the path, claiming that these whims are truly from Allah, and thus they cannot oppose them, not finding any need to weight these whims against the Qur’an and Sunnah. This is pure misguidance. Yes, Allah’s protection for His friends (*Awliya*) with respect to the thoughts in their hearts, their determinations, and their physical deeds cannot be denied. The sign of Allah’s protection for them: **that which occurs to them is fully in line with that which the Prophets had come with.**”¹¹

In conclusion, any claim to *Tasawwuf* that contradicts what is in the Qur’an and Sunnah is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. Allah ﷻ allow us to engage in that which pleases Him.

⁷ *Al-Dalalah ‘Ala Fawaid al-Risalah* 1/401

⁸ *Al-Risalah al-Qushairiyyah* pg. 155

⁹ *Al-Dalalah ‘Ala Fawaid al-Risalah* 1/402.

¹⁰ *Al-Risalah al-Qushairiyyah* pg. 155

¹¹ *Al-Dalalah ‘Ala Fawaid al-Risalah* 1/406