

## Sufism and Muslim Spiritual Development

Nozira Salleh

Department of Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies,  
The National University of Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Sufism is a very important knowledge to be learned and practiced by every Muslim. It is a knowledge that can teach people and develop their soul, emphasizing on the principles of good moral character as practiced by the Prophet. It is also a way to seek Allah's pleasure. Thus, Sufism is seen as one of a strong platform in the restoration and development of the soul and spiritual aspect. In this aspect, weakness is seen as one of the causes of the existence of various social ills that are currently plaguing the Muslim community. Muslim youth are involved in bullying, gangsterism, theft, robbery, rape, prostitution, drugs, vandalism etc. All these problems are increasing and has become a huge concern from day to day. The Muslim youths' spiritual deterioration is so severe that it has directly given many negative impacts to the society. Therefore, this paper will discuss on the role of Sufism in Muslim spiritual development.

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**Key words:** Sufism • Spiritual • Soul • Moral • Courtesy • *Tazkiyat al-nafs*

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### INTRODUCTION

In the scope of Islam, Sufism is interpreted as a mean or approach people to seek the pleasure of Allah through some various programs and implementation of life according to the Quran and Sunnah. Aspect focused in Sufism is related to the spirituality discussion as it is always about the feeling, the heart and soul of man. The emphasis on the aspect of Sufism is seen as very important for the issues that can control the minds of men of tainted by the devil and the desires and the ability to change human behavior from bad to good.

Muslims around the world face a variety of social ills such as corruption, theft, sexual immorality and many others. These problems always develop from day to day. Logically, the root cause of all these Muslims' problems is caused by the imbalance of the Muslims' souls. It means that what happened to the Muslims because their spiritual aspects are not filled and stocked with enough souls' foods, which are including prayer, fasting, charity, recitation Quran and others.

Thus, in the face and solve these problems, then, Sufism is the best way because it is regarded as a supervisor in every act and speech because they believe that God knows and watching every their deeds and actions. So, Sufism is the natural purification of soul from

all forms of impurities, to rid themselves of the stain of sin and do wrong things that are contrary to Islamic law. It is the most holistic way to be a perfect Muslim in this life and the hereafter.

**Sufism: its Definition and Position in Islam:** Sufism is a branch of Islamic knowledge which was known as the knowledge of the heart (*'ilm fi al-qalb*). In fact, it has been practiced since the time of the Prophet and should be followed by Muslims throughout the time.

**Definition of Sufism:** Sufism has a much wider meaning because it is a general phenomenon that exists in any religion, philosophy and human civilization. Oxford Study Dictionary refers Sufism as *sufiyyah* [1]. It can be understood as an ideology or doctrine of Sufism. Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka Dictionary defines it as a doctrine to identify and reach out to God. Further, it states that this knowledge is knowledge of mysticism [2]. According to al-Kattānī, Sufism is a path traveled by those who influence other people with his/her admirable character and consequently cleanses one's soul [3]. Some other figures of Sufism explained it as a shared moment with God [4]. Al-Taftazani stated that Sufism can be regarded as the soul of Islam as the rest of the pillars of Islam is based on morals. In addition, al-Sya'ranī also defines

Sufism as knowledge derived from the hearts of the saints that adheres to the Quran and Sunna [6]. On the other hand, Mohammed Ali al-Qashab and al-Baghdadi defined Sufism as someone who is noble and generous in the community [7]. Meanwhile, al-Ghazali defines Sufism as a way of purifying the soul and the act of remembering Allah constantly [8].

For Ibn Khaldun, Sufism is preserving one's character and feeling the need of total submission to Allah [9]. Al-Junaid ibn Muhammad (m.297H) has a broader definition of Sufism. According to him, it is establishing a relationship with God without any boundaries. Dalfu al-Syublî (m.334H) says that Sufism is the act of worship of Allah without sorrow. Whereas, al-Jurairî stated that Sufism is about improving manners and feeling close to God in every situation. Meanwhile, al-Qusyairî argued that Sufism is the knowledge that discusses the question of moral purification [7]. Al-Attas on the other hand have stated that Sufism is applying the Sharia law [10].

Thus, Sufism is said to be the spirit of Islam because the entire Islamic law is based on morality. In addition, Sufism is encourages good deeds (*mahmudah*) and avoiding evil. This means, Sufism in Islam is a religion of science that emphasizes morality. In addition, it is also understandable that Sufism is a method to guide people towards the purification of the soul, heart and soul. This is because the principles and practice of Sufism can guide one's spiritual journey [11]. As a result, some scholars identifies Sufism as obtaining perfection through worship [12].

**The Position and Roles of Sufism:** Sufism is one of sharia's legal disciplines. It has reached a level of perfection in the third century AH. This was mentioned by Ibn Khaldun in his book *Mukaddimah*;

"This knowledge (Sufism) is one of the sciences of al-Sharia that came into existence. The path traveled by the Salaf, the Companions, tabi'in and those who came after them, is the true path to obtain guidance "[9].

The above explanation of Ibn Khaldun has confirmed that Sufism is the knowledge derived from the Quran, Sunna and the lives of the Companions of the Prophet. Thus, its position as one of the legitimate knowledge and practices in Islam cannot be disputed.

In addition, Sufism is also seen as one of the three basic pillars of faith called: *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*. When the Prophet was asked about Islam, he explained that it constitutes reciting the *shahada*, praying, charity, fasting during *Ramadan* and performing *Haji*. When the

Prophet asked about his faith, he explained that it is to believe in Allah, His angels, His scriptures, messengers, the Day of Judgment and to believe in one's destiny. When asked about '*ihsan*' the Prophet explained that it is an act of worship as if seeing Him and if they cannot see Him, He sees His servants. While the pillars of Islam refers to the deeds and pillars of '*iman*' refers to faith. Overall pillar of Islam is to refer to the practice of human and faith refers to the trust and confidence of people. While compassionate heart refers to testimony that leads to achievement and spiritual testimony of the divine truths of God and sincerity in performing worship. This is courtesy of the fact or the Grave of the essence of Sufism. Thus, Sufism is very important in Islam because it affects the heart and soul. In addition, the role of Sufism is necessary in protecting one's faith. This coincides with what has been described by Said Hawwa in his book *al-Ruhiyyah Tarbiyatuna*:

"Surely this is the time of destruction. I strongly believe that Sufism is a viable alternative to solve this problem. Lust cannot be eradicated with advice or words alone, but it must be eradicated with the change of attitude, a good environment and nurture. While the love for wealth cannot be erased by words alone but must be eliminated with faith. Disloyalty cannot be cured just with words, but it can be treated with humility to God, piety and good deeds. This is the practical way of Sufism "[13].

Based on the description above, Sufism is seen as one of the best ways to save Muslims from various spiritual diseases that exist in this materialistic world. It emphasizes on improving, cleansing and purifying the human soul. Thus, Muslims desperately need Sufism as catharsis, so that they can control themselves from being involved in any kind of impurities. This means, Sufism can be seen as a legitimate tool to be used to treat, cure, develop and strengthen Muslims' spirituality.

**Spirituality: Its Definition and Role:** Man was created by Allah to have two main elements. Body, which is apparent to the human element and another important element is soul. However, there are also a number of other terms related to the element of the spirit is like *aql*, *nafs* and *qalb*.

**Definition of Spirituality:** In general, it is referred to as the human soul. Imam al-Ghazali stated in his book *Ihya Uloom al-Deen* that the spiritual aspects of a person is not only can be understood by the term 'spirit', but it also could be referred to the term heart, passion and intellect. Thus, he described the four elements as *rabbaniyyah*

*Latifah ruhaniyyah*, where the real essence of human being lies. To better understand the term spirituality, it is best to first see the explanation of terms: spirit, heart, intellect and passion. First, Imam al-Ghazali defined spirit, as something that humans understand and comprehend things through [8]. In the Qur'an, it is mentioned that "...and they ask you (O Muhammad, about the spirit, say that the spirit is a command of my Lord" [14].

This means that the soul is something that is not discussed and explained in the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet at length. In fact, the spirit recognizes and acknowledge Allah as the Creator, however, once the spirit enters the human body, it will be influenced by all the impurities from the outside world. Consequently, the piety recedes.

The word spiritual has also referred to the term *qalb*, which is the heart. This word is used to show that the human heart is not apparent to the human conscience. The Prophet stated that it is the determinant for good or evil deeds. Islam looks at the heart as something that plays a very important role in humans because it is the source for faith, piety, sincerity, trust etc. However, it is also the place for disbelief and hypocrisy.

In addition, the spiritual also defined the word *aql*. According to Imam al-Ghazali, *aql* is the source and basis of knowledge [8]. This is because the knowledge can be thought of as the ripe fruit of a tree. It can also be stated the existence of *aql* helps us to distinguish the good and the bad. Islamic scholars have divided the *aql* into two types: *aql taklifi* and *aql syar'i*. *Aql taklifi* is owned by all, as long as the person is in sound mind. Whereas *aql syar'i* is the *aql* that is able to control desire and obey Allah's commandments [16].

Next, is the term called desires. The word usually refers to the whims of the call for evil. Al-Ghazali explained that this word has two meanings. First, it means the anger and lust of humans. The second meaning is the human essence [8]. This essence means *nafs* (the self). The body is merely a tool that abides to the wishes of *nafs*. In other words, the higher the *nafs*, the pious the person is and vice versa. Therefore, the scholars have divided *nafs* into several stages: *nafs ammarah*, *nafs lawwamah* and *nafs mutma'innah*.

Al-Bahi explained that the soul is fundamental to human existence. Whereas the body is something that sustains and affects it directly or indirectly [17]. The existence of the soul is mentioned in the Quran. It is something that came directly from God to man (spirit that comes from Him and breathed into it), as mentioned in the surah below:

"...Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His (created) soul and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little is you grateful..." [18].

Spirituality has the elements of its own such as thinking, love, anger etc. Each aspect has its nature, desire and its own functions.

**The Position and Role of Spirituality:** In Islam, spiritual element is the center for all deeds. Therefore, to abstain from evil, one has to follow the path set by Allah in the Holy Quran. In other words, spirituality is a key factor in forming a good Muslim. Good soul would lead to good deeds.

In addition, the spiritual aspect is much more important than physical aspects. This can be traced back to the time of the Prophet and his companions. They had restored the souls of the ignorant and fought idolatry, adultery, murder and other vile things. This means that the soul is one of the most important quality to be Allah's caliph and a tool to spiritual perfection.

**Role of Sufism in the Development of Spirituality:** There are variety of problems and social diseases plaguing Muslim youth in particular in every corner of the world. Muslims have suffered these diseases because of the collapse and severe damage to their psyche. Bad deeds done repeatedly without remorse and repentance, will eventually lead to the damage of the heart and soul. Thus, Sufism is seen as one of the best and precise effort to cure, remedy and restore the soul to its good form.

Islam has provided a variety of ways to perfect the approach in treating and developing the Muslim souls such as the process of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). This simple approach is seen as an initial effort and a good way for Muslims who want to treat the soul through knowledge and practice of Sufism. Among the practices that needs to be done in this simple approach is repentance and forgiveness. Every Muslim who commit sins, should repent as soon as possible. It should be done with sincerity, remorse and sorrow. In addition, the approach of Sufism can also be done through the implementation of religious duties such as *zikir*, praying, fasting, giving charity and performing hajj. The implementation of these rituals are actually enforcing the close relationship between a Muslim and Allah.

In addition to the implementation of rituals, the fact that every Muslim must instill the fear of God in his soul. It is very much needed as it motivates a person to increase piousness. Therefore, every believer must do

self-reflection. According to al-Ghazali, piety itself protects and preserves them from evil. Islam requires its followers constantly in every situation in order to keep the faith and strengthen devotion to Allah always [8].

In summary, this simple approach of Sufism is an initial approach in the treatment of soul. Spiritual journey traveled and nurtured through Sufism will create a strong Muslim. They are the people who have admirable qualities (*mahmudah*) and those who avoid moral abomination (*mazmumah*).

Next, Sufism also provide a more specific process. It is an effort to rid themselves from human desires such as *nafs al-ammarah* to *nafs mutmainnah*. It is a very difficult process as it requires commitment and hard work. This concept is in fact in line with the surah mentioned below:

“Our Lord, send to them a Messenger from among themselves, who shall recite unto them Your verses and instruct them in the Book (the Quran) and Wisdom and purify (heart and soul) them (from polytheism and sins ). Thou art the Mighty, the Wise.” [19]

Implementation of *Tazkiyat al- nafs* (purification of the soul) can produce a direct and positive effect on the soul. *Tazkiyat al- nafs* involves three main processes: *takhalli*, *tahalli* and *tajalli*. *Takhalli* is the process of cleansing the heart from evil deeds such as pride, envy, love of the world, *nifaaq*, *ghurur* etc. On the other hand, the process *tahalli* includes admirable moral qualities such as *taubah*, *zuhd*, patience, *shukr* etc. According to al-Ghazali, it is the duty of believers to practice this principle in order to free themselves from the shackles of lust. If all this were done properly, then, that person will certainly reach the third stage of the process which is *tajalli* [8]. It is the highest achievement as the soul is filled with a sense of righteousness. Soul will also be the catalyst for admirable values as required by Islam.

## CONCLUSION

In short, Sufism is the spiritual dimension of Islam that can strengthen the faith and provides variety of ways to treat, cure and develop Muslims' spirituality. Sufism is the only way Islam that provides a variety of ways to treat, cure and develop a growing spiritual Muslims today appeared quite severe damage. Sufism can correct, complete and execute a Muslim faith because it Hearing and practical demonstration on how to embrace the values of faith, how to transcend its *mazmumah* properties and attributes that can criticize the faith of a Muslim. It shows

how one slave can feel that God always watch and monitor him. Likewise Sufism strengthen and complete knowledge of worship a Muslim charity because it Hearing and practical hands-on inner perceptions that necessarily follow every practice of the tenets of a Muslim as humble, sincere and many more attributes. It also teaches the practical to the factors that led to the attributes and how to achieve it and it also increases the willingness of people to always adhere to the sharia law. In short, Sufism is the spiritual dimension of Islam that can strengthen the faith and confidence of a Muslim, the complete implementation of the obligations, strengthen appreciation of moral values in daily life behavior, cure, treat and develop the soul and the downtrodden Muslim spiritual potentials and develop good that exist in their lives. All that goodness is timely with the requirements of Islam who wish to form a Muslim-quality, dynamic and lasting through the ages tested.

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