

TASAWWUF: SPIRITUAL PURSUIT IN ISLAM

Tasawwuf in the recent past has evoked two different reactions by scholars of Islam. On the one hand it is discredited as a foreign element that has no relevance to Islam and on the other it has been overstrained with practices that are also alien to Islamic teachings. Worse are the practitioners, the so-called spiritual guides who have distorted *tasawwuf* that it becomes difficult to even recognise the essential forms that make up the inner dimensions of Islam.

The Qur'ān explicitly states the function of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) in these words:

It is He Who has sent among the unlettered nation a Messenger from among themselves, who communicates the message as it comes to him from Almighty Allah. He purifies them and he expounds the Qur'ān and he teaches wisdom. (62: 2)

How to be a Muslim is derived from the shari'ah which guides one to be a true believer. The graded status of *tasawwuf* has its roots in the Qur'ān and the sunnah. The terms used are meant to give this discipline a structured form without deviating from the spirit of the sunnah.

Consider the term *tariqah*. It is the path or the way that provides a blueprint to earn Allah's pleasure. Thus, the methodology employed is the *tariqah*: developing the human personality from the lower level to the higher level. There is perseverance to fight against the impulses of *nafs al-ammārah* (base self), to nurture the soul to be in obedience to the shari'ah by consciously following a methodology for which earn divine reward and Divine pleasure are promised.

The next level is to develop *ma'rifah*: Godly knowledge beyond which is that 'superior' knowledge called *'irfān*. It has three levels:

- Man should know himself. He should nurture his personality as a Muslim and adopt the methodology that will give him

access about himself - *`ilm al-nafs*.

- *`Ilm al-Afāq* – knowledge about the environment and the cosmos.
- Knowledge about Allah, to know Allah and experience and build *yaqin* (conviction) in the fullest sense.

In the celebrated works of classical Sufis, *tasawwuf* has a common theme: cleansing the soul (*tazkiyah*) in compliance with the shari`ah. These works refute the deviant interpretations of those who are not grounded in the inner dimensions of this tradition. Focused spiritual training under an experienced master leads to the path of *ma`rifah* and *`irfān* - the core spirit of *tasawwuf*. Essentially, shari`ah is the foundation on which the structure of *tasawwuf* is built.

In the words of Shaykh Abdul Qādir Jilāni: The

*The spiritual pilgrim cannot go one hair's breath out of the shari`ah.
This is tasawwuf.*

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