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THREE GRADES OF ISLAM & NECESSITY OF TASAṢWUF IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

☆Dr Hassan Mohi-ud-Din Qadri

Abstract

Islam alone offers an ideal code of life to humans so that they may lead a balanced life which is composed of exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) aspects. The Scriptural evidence, the Apostolic conduct and traditions explicate the three levels of faith so that people, growing spiritually, might draw near to Allah ﷻ: Islam, *iman* and *ihsan*. All Islamic teachings are embodied in these three levels of faith: The teachings pertaining to actions fall under Islam; its theological aspects fall under *iman*; and the inner states of divine love fall under *ihsan*. This research paper deals with the third aspect of faith, *ihsan* (spiritual excellence), in detail. This subject has been named *ilm al-tasawwuf* and *ilm al-tazkiyya* by the classic Muslim authorities. Briefly, *ihsan* is the discharging of obligations, refraining from prohibited and dubious things and even obtaining permissible and licit things without passion. Treading the footsteps of the Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), Muslim mystics worked on the practical, intellectual and scholastic aspects of Islamic spiritualism.

Keywords: islam, iman and ihsan, three grades, tasawwuf, tazkiyya, mysticism, mystics, sufi.

There are many angles and aspects of the science of *tasawwuf*. The validity, lawfulness and reliability of each and every subject and science in Islam lies in its roots in the *Qur'an* and Sunna, as these two are the main fundamental sources of Islamic

teachings and sciences. Similarly, the term *tasawwuf* has its meaning, origin, root implications and all other relevant things, specifically, but the main introductory aspect of the science of *tasawwuf* which needs to be elaborated is that *tasawwuf* is the science of the remembrance of the righteous people. This is one of the aspect to understand about *tasawwuf*.

Allah's Messenger ﷺ described these three levels of religion: Islam, *Iman* and *Ihsan*. From his early days to the moment of his demise, he strived for the cause of peace by spreading the message of Islam i.e. peace, *Iman* i.e. security and *Ihsan* i.e. the excellence of character. These are the levels of the religion applicable to actions, beliefs and inner spiritual states. All Islamic teachings revolve around these three levels, as proven by an agreed upon hadith by both Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim. This hadith is also known as the 'hadith of Jibril'. These three words, *Iman*, Islam and *Ihsan*, have been taken from this hadith. Once Angel Jibril came to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and asked certain questions. The Companions ﷺ were also sitting there. When he went back, the Holy Prophet ﷺ asked the Companions ﷺ, 'do you know who that was?' They said, 'No, Allah ﷻ and His Prophet know better'. The Holy Prophet ﷺ told his Companions ﷺ that this was Jibril ﷺ; he had come and asked certain questions from him to teach them their *Dīn*.

"Angel Jibril asked about Islam, Iman and Ihsan. First, he asked,

Please inform me about Islam. What is Islam?

Replying to angel Jibril the question about Islam, the Prophet ﷺ described the basic practices of Islam; the *shahada* of *tawhid* and *risala*, *iqama al-sala* (performance of prayer), fasting, performing Hajj and giving alms-due. Then he asked the second question:

Please inform me about Iman, Oh Holy Prophet. What is Iman?

When asked about *iman*, he described the basic tenets of belief in the *din*; to believe in Allah ﷻ, to believe in the Prophets and Messengers, to believe in angels, to believe in the divinely revealed books, to believe in the life hereafter, to believe in the Day of Resurrection, and to believe in the Destination.

Then Jibril ؑ asked the third question that is most relevant to our today's discussion. He said:

Please inform me about *Ihsan*.

In the hadith of Jibril, when asked about the spiritual excellence [*al-ihsan*], the Holy Prophet ﷺ stated:

[Spiritual excellence requires] that you worship Allah ﷻ as if you see Him, but if you do not see Him, then you must know that He sees you!

In other words, when asked about *Ihsan*, he described the inner states of the heart and the spiritual experiences pertaining to the *din*, which bring about the purification of the inner self, spiritual elevation and stability and strength in character. It is seeing the divine countenance or a state of being seen by Him. So it is introspection, the consciousness of introspection and the God-consciousness turned into the visual experience of the Transcendent. The quality of love for Allah ﷻ, self-purification of body, heart and soul and the secret self and obedience to the Lord and self-extinction required for the visual of the Transcendent beggar description. Allah ﷻ has called it *al-ihsan*, the process of *ihsan* encompasses the entire vastness of the phenomena called faith.

Spiritual excellence and benevolence is that condition of prayer in which man discovers the presence of God. It was essential to suggest a practical way to achieve this condition: what should a man do to reach this level of excellence and to achieve union with the forces of truth? The hadith has furnished the answer to this question. The words of the hadith should be reconsidered. It is declared that if you fail to behold the divine

countenance through the state of benevolence, its practical manifestation is that you should not be yourself or you should efface yourself. You should become extinct. You should shun yourself, your benefits and interests, your lusts and desires in such a way as if you are completely extinguished. When you are not yourself, when you have deleted your ego and decimated your ‘isness’, you will discover Him. Therefore self-extinction is basic to benevolence and spiritual excellence—*ihsan*. Khawaja Muin al-Din of Ajmer stresses the value of self-extinction as a necessary prelude to eternal existence. Self-depreciation is therefore the basis of self-elevation. The perfection of the spirit of sacrifice is self-abnegation and self-effacement. Mullah Ali al-Qari expresses it in these words:

“When you die your worldly death i.e., when your physical self is quashed and you enter the world of eternal life, you shall have a direct vision of the Creator you will be visibly drawn to the brightness and effulgence of the Lord.”⁽¹⁾

Hence, these are three terms used in the above hadith in connection to the religion of Islam: *Islam*, *Iman*, and *Ihsan*. This hadith tells us that the whole of the religion is embodied or is contained within these three levels; it does not go beyond the ambit of these three things.

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani writes about extinction:

“If you continue to behave properly, you will come to see with the eye of certitude and become as the Commander of the Believers Ali b. Abi Talib has said: “Should the veil be removed, I would not have more certitude.” He was also asked: “Have you seen your Lord?” He replied: “I would not worship a Lord that I have not seen.” A certain righteous man was asked: “Have you seen your Lord?” He answered: “If I have not, I would have died.” If then someone would ask: “How can you see Him?” I

would say that if the creatures left the servant's heart and nothing remained in it other than the True One (mighty and glorified is He), he will see Him and draw as near to Him as he likes. He will see Him inwardly as others see Him outwardly. He will see as the Prophet saw in the night of the Heavenly Ascension, as he likes. His Lord will make such a servant see Him, draw near to Him, and talk to him in his sleep. He may also attract his heart to Him in wakefulness and close the eyes of his existence so the servant sees Him with His eye as He outwardly is. And He will give him another essence with which he sees Him. He will see His attributes, blessings, favours and beneficence to him. He will see His bounty and protection.

The reality of unveiling completes only after emerging from the veils. If you wish for attainment to Him, give up this world, the Hereafter, and everything from beneath the Throne down to beneath the surface of the earth. Each one of the creatures is a veil except the Messenger, for he is the door: "And whatever the Messenger (ﷺ) gives you, take that and whatever he forbids you, abstain (from that)." (Q.59:7). Following him is not a veil but rather the means of attainment." (2)

This is the infinite calm and tranquillity the Messenger of Allah ﷺ bestowed upon his Companions ﷺ through his mercy, compassion and clemency.

The details of these three levels of the *din* have been elucidated in a number of hadith reports. Similarly, Almighty Allah ﷻ revealed details about these levels on different occasions in the Qur'an. As for the first level, God says:

"Today I have perfected your din for you, and have completed My Blessing upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as a din." ∑⁽³⁾

Regarding the second level, Almighty Allah ﷻ says:

“The Bedouins say, ‘We have believed’. Say, ‘You have not believed. Rather say, ‘We have accepted Islam’, for true belief has not yet entered your hearts.” $\sum^{(4)}$

And regarding the third level, God says:

“And with regard to din, who can be better than he who submits his whole being entirely to God while he also observes spiritual excellence?” $\sum^{(5)}$

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Almighty Allah ﷻ mentions these three levels together. He says:

“There is no sin on those who believe [have Iman] and do righteous deeds with regard to what they have eaten [of the unlawful things before the prohibitions came], so long as they observed piety and possessed firm faith and practised pious deeds consistently, and later, [after the revelation of the prohibitions] they desisted from [unlawful things] and believed [with certainty regarding their unlawfulness], became people of piety and [finally] rose to the station of those of spiritual excellence[Ihsan]. And God loves those who observe spiritual excellence.” $\sum^{(6)}$

If we consider the general meaning of the word Islam, we see that it refers to the *din* as a whole; however, if we reflect on a particular meaning of the word, we see that it denotes the basic—although significant—practices known as the ‘pillars of Islam’. It is these pillars that shape the Muslim’s individual and collective life into a practical mould. In the same way, the teachings of the religion that pertain to actions and commands fall under Islam. We have to perform the act of prayer, fasting, Hajj and Zakat with our body and Islam is a physical and bodily act. In the same way the practices in ‘Islam’ became *ilm al-ahkam* and when the category of ‘Islam’ was discussed and converted into a regular branch of knowledge and science. It was provided with the details and substantiated with the arguments of Qur'an and Sunnah. Then the knowledge of these practices became *ilm al-ahkam*, *ilm*

al-Shariaa and *ilm al-fiqh*. How to pray, how to fast, what is permissible, what is not, what is lawful, what is unlawful, what breaks the fast, what breaks the prayer, what completes it. All these conditions are discussed in *ilm al-ahkam*, *ilm al-Sharia* and *ilm al-fiqh*. A scholar who knows the details or the practices of *Islam* is known as a jurist or a *faqih*.

However, the teachings that pertain to beliefs and doctrine fall under *Iman* which describes the theological aspect of human life. *Iman* and the elaboration of *Iman* in the form of the basic tenets of faith became the foundations of *aqida* in Islam. It deals with matters of faith, matters of *tawhid*, *risala*, *akhira*, and angels. Faith is *Iman* which is a verbal and intellectual act of mind and intellect. It is:

To declare something with tongue and certify it with heart.

A scholar who is a specialist in the science of *aqida* is a theologian, a *muhaqqiq*, an *alim* and a *mutakallim*. Consequently, the teachings of Islam bless us with lofty inner feelings of connection to God, and the spiritual states of heart converge on the third level of *din*, *Ihsan*.

These teachings purify Muslims morally and spiritually. The *mu'min*'s heart and inner self is developed and elevated, which is the main objective of Islam and *Iman*.

Now, if *DIn* was only *Iman* and Islam, if *Din* only recognized the question of faith and practices, and all other Islamic practices fell under the caption of *Islam*, and the rest of the details of Islamic *aqida* can fall under *Iman*, then why did angel Jibril asked the third question under the caption of *Ihsan*? Had the Prophet ﷺ informed him that after *Iman* and Islam nothing else is required? Islam as a *DIn* is complete and perfect with *Iman* and *Ihsan*, there is no other stage or further state and level after fulfilling the requirements of *Iman* and *Ihsan*. He had a very specific definition of *Ihsan*, in the same way as he defined specifically the words of Islam and *Iman*.

It means that Jibril ﷺ believes that there is a stage which comes after fulfilling the requirements of Iman and Islam. There is another status to be achieved, some other requirements to be fulfilled in order to complete and perfect the Iman. To further elaborate, the zenith of Islam culminates in *Iman* and the apex of Iman is identified as *Ihsan*. The hadith of Gabriel (Jibril) verifies this hierarchy. Islam relates to verbal and physical obedience, while *Iman* is its internal aspect, comprising the verification of the inner self and its commitment and conviction; and *Ihsan* points to fruition and inner states of divine love and beauty.

A Muslim, therefore, is the one who embodies peace, sanctity, and protection for the whole of humankind. A *mu'min* is the one who, at the same time, possesses the traits of human dignity, coexistence, tolerance, moderation and love and peace. And a *muhsin* is the one who is a blend of the first two levels along with the spiritual and divine experiences that are useful for others.

According to Imam Malik:

“Those who want to become the worshipper and claimant of *sufi* or *ilm al-batin* but do not achieve the proper and sound knowledge of Din will be misguided, and those who just want the knowledge of *ilm al-zahir* but do not believe in *tasawwuf* and the knowledge of perfection of mind and soul are also misguided, and the ones who combine both, the knowledge of *Sharia* and *tarlqa*, are the ones who achieve the truth and reality.”⁽⁷⁾

Moreover, the word *Ihsan* is the verbal noun of the triliteral verb *hasana/hasuna, yahsunu, husnan*. It means beauty, balance, betterment, benevolence, piety and goodness. It is the opposite of ugliness and evil, sin and vice and bad deeds. The antonym of *Ihsan* is *isa'a*, which means the same thing as ugliness.

Imam Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Azhari quoted the saying of al-Layth al-Shaybani regarding the basic meaning of *Ihsan* in *Tahdhīb al-lugha*. Regarding the verse:

*And speak with goodness [husnan] to people*Σ⁽⁸⁾

al-Layth said that it means to say good and pleasant words to others.

Similarly, there are a lot of verses in the Holy Qur'an that describe the details of *Ihsan*. All of them contain the meanings of nice manner, beauty, goodness and benevolence, etc. Some verses are:

*"And they repel evil by means of good."*Σ⁽⁹⁾

*"Surely, good actions remove the evil actions."*Σ⁽¹⁰⁾

*"Indeed, God enjoins justice and benevolence [towards everyone]."*Σ⁽¹¹⁾

The interpretation of *ihsan* is contained in many other hadith reports:

"According to Abu Dharrؓ: 'My beloved Messengerؐ blessed me with the advice that I must attain to the state of fearing Allah ﷻ as if I see Him. Then if I do not see Him, He surely sees me!'"⁽¹²⁾

"According to Anas b. Malikؓ, Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: 'Spiritual excellence requires that you behave for Allah ﷻ as if you see Him, for even if you are not seeing Him, He surely sees you!'"⁽¹³⁾

"According to Zayd b. Arqamؓ, Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: '(O servant of Allah!) Be (all the time) as if you see Allah, for even if you are not seeing Him, He surely sees you!'"⁽¹⁴⁾

To further elucidate, *Iman* is the beginning of a journey of a Muslim, 'Islam' is the travelling during the journey towards the destination and *Ihsan* is to arrive to the destination. There is an end to every journey, and if we achieve destination, this is the excellence and perfection of our journey.

That perfection and achievement of the destination is indicated in the form of *Ihsan*, and this is the basis of *tasawwuf*. The two

concepts of *Iman* and *Islam* are the basis of Sharia and *aqlida* respectively and *Ihsan* becomes the basis of *tarIqa* and *maarif*.

“Explaining another aspect of hadith of Jibril in a different way regarding Ihsan, the Holy Prophet a said that you should perform your worship as if you are looking at Allah ﷻ and if you cannot achieve this status then at least you should consider that He is looking at you. This is related to meditation, contemplation and act of spiritual imagination. The two terms, *muraqabah* (when He is looking at you) and *mushahadah* (when you are conceptualizing Him), are introduced here. You are conceptualizing a reality and you are spiritually trying to realise something in your mind and heart, you are trying to visualise the absolute beauty and absolute *nur* of Almighty Allah ﷻ.”

What does *Ihsan* say? Ihsan says that during your act of worship we have to step further to conceptualise what was uttered by our mouth. According to *Iman* and *Islam*, facing towards the *kaba* is sufficient, and according to *Ihsan* facing your heart and soul towards Allah ﷻ is needed. This is: *an tabud’Llah-a ka’annak-a tarah-u*.

And it means that your Heart and soul and your inner self and your *batin* should be facing towards the divinity of Almighty Allah ﷻ. You are observing and conceptualising the beauties of Almighty Allah ﷻ, you are involved mentally and spiritually and from your heart and soul and feelings, in visualising in perceiving, in conceiving, in viewing, the lights showering onto your heart and to your soul during the act of worship. So your soul is facing towards Allah ﷻ, your heart is facing towards Allah ﷻ, your inner secrets are facing towards Allah ﷻ. These are the needs of *Ihsan*, these are not the needs of *Iman* and *Islam*. So if you achieve this status, then you are becoming perfect in *Iman* and *Islam* through *Ihsan*. This is an act of excellence and perfection.

In other words, *Iman* and *Islam* say that if your clothes and your body are purified, it is sufficient for prayer and worship. *Ihsan* says that ‘No’, it is still insufficient, you should go a step further. The way you purified your body and clothes, you should purify your soul, your mind and your heart so that you may appear before Almighty Allah ﷻ with a purified heart, purified soul and with a purified condition of mind. Why? Because you are standing in front of the Lord of all the worlds.

Now the question arises, ‘How does one achieve this?’ The attainment of the heart to this spiritual station comes about by performing the obligatory worship; refraining patiently from prohibited and dubious things; obtaining the permissible and licit things without passion, lustful desire and engrossment; resorting to curative pious restraint; practising total renunciation, which is the abandonment of everything other than Allah; refusing to comply with the lower self, passion and Satan; and purifying the heart totally of any creature so that praise and dispraise, bestowal and deprivation, sickness and health, affluence and poverty, good and bad fortune in this world and gold and clay become all equal. The first stage of this spiritual station is declaring that ‘there is no God except Allah ﷻ (*la ilaha illa Allah*)’,⁽¹⁵⁾ Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah ﷻ (*Muhammadun rasulu Allah*)’,⁽¹⁶⁾

and its last stage is seeing gold as worthless as clay.

Ihsan is neither an act of intellect nor the act of body. *Ihsan* is the act of our mind, act of our heart and soul. Now the question is about who those people who are specialists in *Ihsan* are. Islamic history tells us that those people are known as *Sufiya*. As we know, those who specialised in Islamic Faith are known as theologians and those who have specialised in Islamic practices are known as jurists. Both of these are scholars. Similarly, those who have specialised in the matter of *Ihsan* are known as mystics and spiritualists; *Sufiya*, the saints; *muhsinin*. They are the people of *Ihsan*. The science which deals in the way of achieving the status of *ihsan* is known as *tasawwuf*, mysticism, spiritualism. Originally, in a very simple form it was *ilm al-ihsan* or *ilm al-*

tasawwuf. When it is developed into a regular science it was known as *ilm al-tazkiya*. *Tazkiya* and *Ihsan* are two originals words.

About purification, *tazkiya*, the Qur'an says:

*“He recites the verses and purifies your inner selves.”*Σ⁽¹⁷⁾

Tazkiya is one of the four duties of the Holy Prophet ﷺ that Almighty Allah mentioned at four places in the Qur'an .⁽¹⁸⁾ So this is *ilm al-tazkiya*.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ had four prophetic obligations regarding the training of his Umma, as in the Qur'an:

*“Likewise, We have sent you (Our) Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) from amongst yourselves who recites to you Our revelations and purifies and sanctifies (your hearts and ill-commanding selves) and teaches you the book and inculcates in your logic and wisdom and enlightens you (on the mysteries of spiritual gnosis and divine truth) which you did not know.”*Σ⁽¹⁹⁾

The verse above explains that:

1. The Holy Prophet ﷺ used to recite the Holy Qur'an to his Umma.
2. He used to purify their hearts, souls, intellects, inner selves, and innermost selves.
3. He used to provide them with knowledge.
4. He used to provide wisdom and *hikma*.

The step of purification includes subjects of *tassawwuf* (spiritualism). As indicated in the above Qur'anic verse, the Holy Prophet ﷺ used to purify the hearts, souls, intellect and inner selves of people. Then the Holy Prophet ﷺ used to give knowledge and education to his Companions 1. Through his recitation of the Qur'an , others began to memorize the Holy Qur'an . When the Holy Prophet ﷺ taught the commandment of

the Qur'an , the scholars, writers of Qur'anic exegesis, compilers, and narrators came to existence.

The wisdom mentioned in the verse above is the great blessing of Almighty Allah. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ spoke about wisdom and strategy, through his grace, the jurists and revivalists came. With the Holy Prophet's ﷺ attention and purification of his Companions, and through the Companions' spiritual teachings, the *awliya'* (saints) came into existence. Through his grace, the historians, psychologists, scientists, and the knowledge of whatever education that exists in this world, came to existence. As the above Qur'anic verse mentioned, the Holy Prophet ﷺ taught his Companions ﷺ the things that they did not know at all.

Let's briefly explain the process of *tazkiya* or purification in a human being: the spirit is on the upper level, the heart is in the middle level, and the *nafs* (one's lower self) is on the lower level. The heart is influenced by either the spirit or the *nafs*. If the spirit is stronger than the *nafs*, it starts influencing the heart and illuminates it with its *nur*—the heart becomes heavenly. If the *nafs* (desire) is stronger than the spirit, it causes the heart to become dark, satanic, and worldly. The spirit can become stronger with *ibada* (worship) and by the performance of righteous deeds, and in this way, the heart comes closer towards the spirit and is saved from dying (spiritually). However, the *nafs* cannot get weaker if we just perform good deeds and *ibada*. This is a very delicate point to understand; most of the time people do not understand why they are unable to see beneficial results of their *ibada*, even though they are reciting *tasbeeh* and the Holy Qur'an and are performing other forms of *ibada* everyday. The reason why they are not seeing results is because the influence of one's lower self (*nafs al-ammara*) is still there. This lower self drives a person towards worldly gains, lusts, and impurities. One's lower self can only become weaker with *mujahadah*, the extreme spiritual strivings. This process of purification is known as *tazkiya*. Unless the influence of one's lower self is not weakened, the heart is unable to achieve a spiritual revolution.

In the beginning, the state of *nafs* is a deceiving *nafs*. It is called *nafs makkara*. It puts wrong thoughts and ideas in the mind and distract the concentration of a person from a pious deeds by creating confusion in the mind and the person thinks whether he does this pious act or the other pious act. Sometimes it puts penitence in the person. This *nafs makkara* is not yet demanding. When the *nafs* becomes demanding it becomes *nafs al-ammara*, the evil-demanding lower self. It is strong enough to command for an evil act and fights with the spirit. Through the process of purification, the spirit becomes stronger and the *nafs* becomes upgraded and becomes a blaming *nafs*, *nafs al-lawwama*. It blames the lower self for committing evil and wrong. It starts differentiating the right and wrong. Further spiritual advancement leads the *nafs* to become an inspired *nafs* called *nafs al-mulhama*. It then starts revealing good thoughts. The next stage is *nafs al-mutma'inna* when it becomes the recipient of heavenly thought. The *nafs* at this stage dissociates itself from blameworthy and sinful tendencies. It becomes the soul at rest and assumes the state of heart. The heart, *nafs* and spirit (*ruh*) at the stage of *nafs al-mutma'inna* develop consonance, harmony and are in alignment with each other. Some *awliya'* say there are further higher stages of *nafs al-mutma'inna*, some say there are different kinds of *nafs al-mutma'inna*. The *nafs* at rest at the stage of *mutma'inna* starts the journey towards returning of its Lord. Until before, all the stages of *nafs* were striving towards the journey towards the Lord but those stages of *nafs* did not become obedient to the Lord yet. *Nafs al-mutma'inna* detaches from the lower world and attaches to the higher world and connects with spirit. At this stage the qualities of *ruh* or spirit starts transferring to *nafs* and the internal atmosphere of the body becomes the atmosphere of angels. The vegetal body becomes an angelic body. Angels come to embrace that person. At this point the returning journey starts, as Almighty Allah said; the whole body, heart, *nafs* and spirit is being enforced by the commandment of Almighty Allah and it is impossible to commit sin. *Nafs* becomes

the reflection of *ruh*. This total consonance of *nafs*, *ruh* and heart makes the person a *wali Allah* (divine friend of Almighty Allah ﷻ).

Walaya starts from *nafs al-mutma'inna*.

*“O contented (pleased) self!”*Σ⁽²⁰⁾

Almighty Allah's blessing and *noor* start showering to that person, then with further advancement, the *nafs* becomes a seeker (*mureed*) of Almighty Allah, a lover of Almighty Allah. This stage is called *Nafs-e-Radiya*. After further spiritual advancement, the *nafs* achieves the status of *Nafs-e-Mardiya*. The *nafs* becomes sought (*Muraad*) and beloved of Almighty Allah.

*“Return to your Lord in such a state that you are both the aspirant to, and the aspired of, His pleasure (i.e., you seek His pleasure and He seeks yours).”*Σ⁽²¹⁾

With further advancement, *nafs* becomes *Nafs-e-Zaakiya* and it enters in the company of the special servant of Almighty Allah.

*So join My (perfect) servants.*Σ²²

It is now totally protected from all the distractions and protection is guaranteed by Almighty Allah ﷻ. Satan has no influence on that *nafs* as stated in Qur'an :

*“Assuredly, you will not be able to overpower those who are My servants, and your Lord is Sufficient to protect and help these (friends of Allah).”*Σ⁽²³⁾

Finally, the *nafs* from the stage of *zakiya* further advances to the stage of *nafs al-muqarraba*, which enters the special Janna and drinks from the special fountain of the nearness of Almighty Allah.

*“And enter My Paradise (of nearness and sight).”*Σ⁽²⁴⁾

This is how a *nafs* returns towards its Lord.

The Sufiya, the people of *Ihsan*, have done a lot of work, practically, intellectually and academically on the subject of the purification of the mind and soul. For example, if we want details of *tafsIr*, then we go to the exegetes and the authorities of *tafsIr*. Why? Because this is a matter of Qur’anic exegesis. If we feel any need in *ilm al-hadith*, we consult hadith-scholars, *muhaddithIn*, because these are the people who can give us the knowledge of hadith. This is neither *shirk* nor any *bida*. Nobody will ask you why you are consulting the authorities on hadith. You should go directly to the Holy Prophet ﷺ i.e., just read the hadith and try to understand it.

In the same way, we consult the Imams of *fiqh*: Imam Abu ṭanīfa, Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal, Imam Shafīʿ and Imam Muhammad and Imam Abu Yusuf and all other authorities; in various *madhahib*, we consult their books. Why? Because they were the ones who were specialised in that subject. They are the authorities. When we feel a spiritual need in our life, for the improvement of our lower self *nafs* and heart, which comes under the purview of *Ihsan*, or when we need any guidance and knowledge on this subject, then we are necessarily supposed to go to the Sufiya, the *muhsinIn*, the saints and the *awliya’*. They are the protectors of the purification of the heart and soul. These are *salihIn*. All these people are teachers in Islam and they are the torch bearers, authorities and the specialists in various subjects.

Therefore, *tasawwuf* is also a science of the ‘remembrance of the *salihIn*’ or the righteous and pious people as described earlier.

The *salihIn* are the people of *Ihsan*. *ḤalīhIn* are the people who have practiced *Ihsan* in their life and who have practically gone through all the stages; who have full cognizance of the subject and have full awareness of the minor details of the subject; who have the academic command of the subject in their knowledge and their practice. That is why when we get the knowledge from them on this particular subject, this becomes *tasawwuf*.

Here are other definitions of *tasawwuf* and *sufi* to further elaborate the subject that there is no difference between *Ihsan*, *tazkiya* and *tasawwuf*.

Shaykh Abu al-Fath al-BustI said:

The word *tasawwuf* is derived from *safa'* and it means cleanliness and purity.

This definition describes the meaning of purity and *tazkiya* as we've seen these meanings in *ihsan*.

A Famous *sufi* of Indo-Pak sub-continent, Shaykh Ali b. Uthman HujwIri, defines *tasawwuf* in these words:

“*Tasawwuf* is to purify one's *batin* from the darkness of sins and the opposition of the right.”⁽²⁵⁾

Again I must say that these meanings are found in *ihsan* as well.

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani defines *tasawwuf* in these words:

“Each letter in the word *tasawwuf* has a meaning and implication.

For example, the letter *ta* in the word *tasawwuf* denotes repentance. The repentance is of two types. External repentance and internal repentance. The external repentance refers to when a person, through his verbal and physical conduct, protects all his external organs from committing sins and turns towards the obedience of Almighty Allah. Furthermore, he is ought to seek repentance from forbidden acts in sharia and acts in an accordance of the commandment of *Sharia*. The internal repentance refers to when a person keeps his heart clean from impurities (jealousy, anger, malice, worldly lust) and turns towards the pious deeds in accordance to *Sharia*.

The next letter in the word *tasawwuf* is the letter *saad*. It refers to the cleanliness. It is also of two types. The first is the cleanliness of the heart. And the second is the cleanliness of *sir*, the hidden self. The cleanliness of the heart pertains to the cleanliness from those human malevolence and impurities that are usually found in the heart. The cleanliness of the hidden self or *sir* is achieved by diverting from everything except Almighty Allah and through an everlasting remembrance of the love and the mighty names of Almighty Allah through one's tongue.

The letter *wao* in the word *tasawwuf* refers to *wilaya* (divine friendship of Almighty Allah). This is a rank that is achieved after the process of purification. Hence, Almighty Allah said: *Beware! Verily, the friends of Allah will not have any fear, nor will they grieve.* \sum^{26} *And There is for them the good news (of honour and recognition) in the life of the world, and (also of forgiveness and intercession) in the Hereafter.* $\sum^{(27)}$ The main outcome in *wilaya* is to develop the divine moral character. It is said by our beloved Prophet ﷺ: 'Develop the divine moral character in you.'

The last letter in the word *tasawwuf* is *faa*. Its meaning is self-extinction and absolute devotion in Almighty Allah. When human characteristics or attributes reaches to a station of *fana* (annihilation or self-extinction), then the characteristics that are left are divine attributes. Since that pious One (Almighty Allah) does not have extinction or demise, a human being who is mortal reaches to a rank of extinction of himself by absolute submission in the will of the immortal One, Almighty Allah, and the mortal heart of a human being also reaches to a rank of immortality with the mystery or inner consciousness (*siir*). This is explained by Almighty Allah ﷻ as: *Everything has to perish but He.* $\sum^{(28)}$

These details prove the fact that *Sufiya* always love Allah and

they lose their will with Him, because the lover has no will above the will of his Beloved. The lover is extinct in the presence of his Beloved, like the servant in the presence of his master. The wise servant who is obedient to his master does not disagree with his master or object to him at all. When this has become true of someone, his lower self and passion will die, the fire of his natural inclinations will die out, and his devil will be humiliated before him. His heart will look down on this world and its lords, then he will turn away from them and advance toward his Lord until a path for his heart will appear in the midst of the creatures which it will follow to reach the Creator (through the spiritual progress of heart from the stage of *qalb mayyit*, a spiritually dead heart to *qalb hayy* a spiritually alive heart, then progresses to *qalb khabIr* or *qalb al-arif* a heart which starts revealing the news of divinity then progresses to *qalb munIb*, *qalb sallm* a sound heart and *qalb shahId* a witnessing heart). The creatures will step aside to the left and right and clear the way for him. They will run away from the fire of his truthfulness and the charisma of his innermost being (the advancement of his inner being, *sir*—the inner consciousness, *sir al-sir*—the ultimate inner consciousness, *khafi*—the trans-consciousness, *ikhfa'*—the most trans-consciousness, *gha'ib*—the unseen and *gha'ib al-gha'ib*—ultimate unseen. At this stage, he will be called 'great' (*malakuti*, *jabaruti* and *lahuti*) in the heavenly kingdom and all creatures will come to be under the feet of his heart and seek protection under his shadow. He appears the same as other human being but his inner-self is connected to heaven. A person achieves that stage through the advancement of various spiritual entities or various stages of spirit (*ruh*), heart (*qalb*) along with the advancement of lower self (*nafs*) at various times.

Almighty Allah has ordained us to stick to the company of these blessed people, gazing at their brightened countenances and obtaining from them spiritual benefits and the nearness of Almighty Allah. The Qur'an has clearly stated:

*“(O My servant!) Stay tenaciously in the companionship of those who remember their Lord morning and evening, ardently seeking His pleasure, (keen on the glimpse of His sight, and eagerly aspiring to glance at His radiant Countenance). Your (affectionate and caring) looks must not but focus them.”*Σ⁽²⁹⁾

Another example of attributes of divine friend or beloved of Almighty Allah is elucidated through the following *iman* enlightening hadith:

According to al-Harith b. Malik al-Ansari رضي الله عنه, “he passed by Allah’s Messenger ﷺ, who said to him: ‘How did you feel this morning, O Harith?’ He replied: ‘I felt like a true believer (enjoyed the reality of faith) this morning,’ so he said: ‘Consider what you say, because everything has a reality, so what is the reality of your faith?’ He submitted: ‘(O Messenger of Allah!) My self has become averse and disinclined to (rather turned away from) this world. So I spend my nights (restlessly) awake because of that and pass my days (quite) thirsty (of beholding Allah unveiled). And I am in such a state as if I am watching the Throne of my Lord manifest (before me)—(in one version, he said: “I have turned my self away from this world; I spend my nights awake and my days athirst, and it is as if I see the Throne of my Lord appearing”)—and as if I am watching the people of the Garden of Paradise exchanging visits therein, and the people of the Fire of Hell crying out together therein due to torment.’ He said three times: ‘O Harith, you have truly understood (the reality of faith), so cling to it (and persevere)!”⁽³⁰⁾

In one report: According to Anas رضي الله عنه. Malik رضي الله عنه, “the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: ‘You have found the reality of faith, so persevere with this state. You are the believer whose heart Allah has permeated with light.”⁽³¹⁾



The above hadith gives us a message that a lover chooses Allah in preference to His creatures. They choose Him in preference to both this world and the Next. They give up all prohibited or legally dubious things, reduce the use of the lawful, and are satisfied with whatever they already have. They abandon the bed and blanket and sleep and rest:

*“Their sides stay away from their beds.”*Σ⁽³²⁾

Neither their night is an ordinary night nor their day an ordinary one. They say: “Our God, we have left everything behind the backs of our hearts and hastened to You so that You may be pleased.” They walk to Him sometimes on the feet of their hearts, sometimes on the feet of their innermost beings, sometimes on the feet of their will, sometimes on the feet of their spiritual aspiration, sometimes on the feet of their truthfulness, sometimes on the feet of their love, sometimes on the feet of their yearning, sometimes on the feet of their humility and modesty, sometimes on the feet of their nearness, sometimes on the feet of their fear, and sometimes on the feet of their hope. They do all this in love for Him and longing to meet Him.

At another place Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani defines *tasawwuf* in these words:

Tasawwuf is to be honest and truthful with Almighty Allah and good mannered with Allah’s creatures.

This means that a *sufi* is a highly mannered person. The case is similar with *Ihsan*. *Ihsan* teaches politeness and good manners in all aspects of life, so much so that killing someone by torture, or even treating an animal with harshness at the time of slaughter, are forbidden acts—as evidenced by the many prophetic traditions on this subject. Shaddad b. Aws  reported that Allah’s Messenger  said,

“God has prescribed spiritual excellence in everything, so if you kill, do so with excellence, and if you sacrifice an

animal, do so with excellence, and let one of you sharpen his blade, in order to set his sacrificial animal at rest [causing it the least discomfort].” (33)

So when one follows *ihsan* and *tasawwuf*, he/she become closer to Almighty Allah and then society becomes fragrant with the existence of *muhsin* and *sufi*. As righteous predecessors said:

“The best of the acts is the integrity and purification of hearts and generosity of souls and good advice for the people (that can benefit them). Everyone who reached the climax of high grades, reached through these characteristics, not through a lot of diligence in fasting and prayer.” (34)

We see that *tasawwuf* is just about the well-wishing of Allah’s creatures. It is to be beneficial for them. The same was practiced by the Sufis of the Indo-Pak sub-continent. Whether it was Shaykh Ali b. Uthman Hujwiri, whether it was Khawaja Gharib Nawaz or Khawaja Nizam al-Din Awlia or Mujaddid Alf Thani or anyone else, all practiced and propagated the real teachings of *tasawwuf*. They always wanted the well-wishing of people and invited them towards Allah’s *Din* in such an attractive way that people responded to their calls from the core of their hearts. A common man loved those *Sufiya* whether he/she belong to any religion or nation. *Sufiya* spread the message of love without any discrimination and paved the way for the welfare of the public. So the whole sum of spiritual excellence in Islam is based on ethical behaviour and good social conduct. This is the criteria of spiritual excellence. If one is not good in human behaviour but fasts the whole year and worships throughout the whole night, then Almighty Allah will reject and throw away his acts of worship. Almighty Allah is not in need of our worship and acts of prostrations; rather, He wants us to treat people nicely with kindness. Good treatment brings excellence in one’s faith.

In summary, we must discuss some aspects regarding the life Hereafter of *sufis*. When someone practices *tasawwuf* along with the teachings of Shariah, he gets success in the life Hereafter also. *sufis* conceal their *hal* and do not disclose to others because they are the people of *batin*.

Malik b. Dinar has narrated: On my way to Hajj, I met a young man who was on foot. He had neither any mount nor provisions of journey. I wished him peace which he reciprocated. I said, ‘Young man! Where are you coming from?’ He said, ‘From His side!’ I asked from him, ‘Where are you going?’ ‘Towards Him alone,’ he replied. Then I enquired, ‘What about the provisions?’ He said, ‘That is His obligation!’ Keen and curious, I said, ‘This journey will never end without provisions, water in particular. Do you have anything?’ He said, ‘I adopted five letters of alphabet as my provisions: *kaf*—derived from *al-Kafi*—that Allah alone is All-Sufficient; *ha*—derived from *al-Hadi*—that He alone is the Supreme Guide; *ya*—from *Mu’wI*—that He alone is the Best of Providers of shelter; *ayn*—from *Alim*—that He alone is All-Knowing and *sad*—from *sahib*—that He alone is the Companion. So the one who has on his side the All-Sufficient, the Supreme Guide, the Best of Providers, the All-Knowing and the Best Companion, how can any devastation touch him or may any fear obsess him? Should such a wayfarer too burden himself with food, water and other provisions?

According to Malik b. Dinar, ‘I wanted to present him my shirt but he regretted and said, “O my noble master! Better it is to be naked instead of being clad in a worldly shirt, for we are accountable for the lawful and liable to torment for the unlawful of the world.”’(35)

The above description of *sufiya*’ explains that these divine friends of Almighty Allah merge their choice into the divine

choice. They choose only what Almighty Allah wills them to choose. The light of Allah's pleasure kindles their hearts and they focus that light on every step they take heading toward their destination. They focus the lens of their wisdom and insight only on the attainment of Almighty Allah's pleasure. They attain it through constant remembrance and companionship of God and permanent association with those who have already acquired it. These are the ones who realize the ideal and are, therefore, the springs of true instruction and guidance. Their hearts and souls are illumined with the divine effulgence.

Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak relates:

Once, while I was in Makkah, we were struck with a severe drought. It had not rained for weeks and all the people gathered in Masjid al-Haram to pray for rain. I was also amongst them sitting next to the gate of Bani Shayba.

An Ethiopian slave wearing tatty garments came and sat in front of me. I could hear him praying, "O Allah, bad deeds and sinning have frayed the faces and you have stopped showering us with your mercy to teach mankind a lesson. I ask you O Haleem, O One, whose people know nothing except good. Send rain unto us this moment". He prayed until the clouds appeared and it rained.

When he left I followed him to find out his whereabouts. On returning home I went to see Fudail bin Iyad who asked me why I was depressed. I related the incident, he then insisted that I take him to this young man. "It is late, let me find out more about him" I told him.

After Fajr, I went to see the slave and found an old man sitting at his door. On seeing him he recognised me. He welcomed me and then asked about my need. "I need a black slave", I asked. He replied, "I have many, take anyone you like". He kept on calling the slaves one by

one and I refused until he finally called out the one I was looking for. He then refused to sell this slave on the grounds that his presence brought many blessings. When I said, “Shall I return to Sufyan bin Oayenna and Fudail bin Iyad empty handed?” He accepted and said, “Your coming was a big thing. Pay the price you like and take him.”

I purchased the slave, and headed towards Fudail’s house. On the way He asked, “Why did you not purchase a slave stronger than me? I am weak and cannot serve you. My master showed you many that were stronger. I said, ”By Allah, I am going to serve you, buy you a house and marry you off,” He began to cry. I asked, “What makes you cry?” He said, “The only reason you are going to treat me like this is because you have seen my connection with my Lord.”

He then asked if I could wait for him as he had some Rakah left over from last night. I informed him that Fudail’s house is close from here, but He insisted, ”It is not good to delay the work of Allah”. He entered the Masjid and prayed. When he finished he asked me, ”Oh Abu Abd al-Rahman, do you have a need?” I said, ”Why do you ask?” He replied, ”To the Hereafter.”

He then said, “Life was good when the secret was between my Lord and I. Now you know and then someone “else will come to know. Now I am no longer in need of this life.” He fell down and began to say, “O Allah take me now.” I came close to him and found him still. He had passed away.”⁽³⁶⁾

In conclusion, it is important to mention that today’s conditions of life force people to engage themselves in an excessive struggle to gain power and make their living luxurious. In that process, they kill their spiritual side of being a human. People often do not listen to or read what the Qur’an and our Beloved Prophet a have said, but they more importantly engage

themselves in fulfilling their endless desires and hence they almost lose the humanitarian aspect of life.

In the history of Islam, saints and Sufis like Data Ganj Baksh Ali Hujwiri, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, Khawaja Gharib Nawaz, Khawaja Nizam al-Din Awlia (May Allah ﷻ be pleased with them) stand out as being unique in the broader scope of spiritual perfection. The perfection includes their knowledge, devotion and adherence towards Almighty Allah ﷻ. They have made this point very clear in their teachings that the true essence of life lies within the love of Almighty Allah and total submission to Him as a faithful servant. They think their highest, they feel their deepest, and they live their best with total surrender, delegation and devotion to Almighty Allah ﷻ.



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