

MYSTICISM AND ASHRAF ALI THANAWI, AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: *Shariah and Tasawwuf are not two apart things. Both of Shariah and Tasawwuf are the same and one thing. Sharia is the name of life style, which brought by Prophet Peace be upon him and Tasawwuf is the name of act upon on that life style. Objective of Tasawwuf is that "The laws of Shariah become nature". Certainly it is not possible to act upon on it without any Hierarchy. To get profit from this hierarchy, there are some types: For example, to become a follower completely of any Hierarchy or to study of the life of Hierarchy, it is also very useful for emendation. This article is a sequence of this chain. This article describes the fact of tasawwuf and in the light of tasawwuf, analytics of Ashraf Ali thanawi. His temperament in tasawwuf and his struggle for tasawwuf also described by this article. it also explain that How he made tasawwuf near to Quran and Hadith? And how was his methodology of emendation?*

Key Words: *Tasawwuf, Shariah, Spiritual activities, Shaikh, etc.*

Introduction of "Mysticism".

"Mysticism" (تصوّف) is that "The laws of Shariah become nature". Shariah is the name of "had retort" and mysticism is mirthfully attached to shariah. Mysticism is like manservant for shariah. Without mysticism is very hard to act upon on shariah.¹

"Mysticism" is also defining that "To get good civility, morals, ethics, goodness for example; Godliness, Courtesy, Charity, Selfless worship etc. and to extricate from underfoot habits. For example; heart burning, jealousy, enmity, arrogance, pride etc." Anyhow it is not possible to get good morals and to escape from bad habits without elder or hierarchy (شيخ) because it is said that "لكل فن رجال" it means that there are masters for every art.² A master of Islamic spirituality, Ashraf Ali Thanvi was "widely considered the preeminent Sufi of modern India."³

He worked hard for tasawwuf to become completely according to Qur'an and Hadith. His remarkable contribution in this field as Marcia K. Hermanson has pointed out, is his "attempt to rework Sufism into a more acceptable expression consistent with Islamic legalism."⁴ This summary of his tasawwuf is evident throughout his works. For example, his biographer, Aziz al-Hasan Ghawri, quotes him as saying, "I do not know how to pose myself as a ritualistic pir. I am nothing but a religious student; so inquire from me only matters pertaining to the Quran and Hadith.

Straightforwardly, I know only the Quran and Hadith, and this is real tasawwuf."⁵

Thanvi explains the true meaning of esoteric reformation or Sufism in the introduction of "حقيقة الطريق من سنة العتيق" (Haqiqat al-tariqa min sunnat al-aniqa).

After rectification of beliefs and external acts, it is compulsory upon every Muslim to rectify his esoteric acts.

Numerous Quranic verses and an untold number of hadith explicitly indicate the obligation of this. However, most people of superficial understanding are heedless of it because of their subservience to base desires. Who is not aware that the Quran and Hadith are explicit regarding the significant of abstinence (Zuhd), contentment (qana'a), modesty (tawadu), sincerity (ikhlas), patience (sabr), gratitude (shukr), love of Allah (hub al-Allah), contentment with the decree (rida bil-qada), trust (tawakkul), submission (taslim), and so on, while they emphasize the attainment of these noble attributes? Condemn the opposite of these noble qualities; love for the world (hub al-dunya), covetousness (hirs), arrogance (takabbur), ostentation (riya), lust (shahwa), anger (ghadab), envy (hasad), and so on. And warn against them? Is there any doubt that the noble qualities have been commanded, and the base traits forbidden? This is the actual meaning of reforming the esoteric acts, and the primary purpose of the spiritual path. That is obligatory (fard) is without doubt an established fact. Along with this, experience tells us that reformation is contingent upon the companionship, service, and following of those who have already reformed themselves.⁶

Further expounding how tasawwuf of the Quran and hadith is an essential part of Islam.

Thanawi says in his famous lecture Tariq al-Qalander. all the authentic principals of tasawwuf are found in the Quran and hadiths. The notion that tasawwuf is not in the Quran is erroneous wayward sufes as well as superficial scholars entertain this notion. Both groups have misunderstand the Quran and hadiths. the superficial scholars claim that tasawwuf is baseless since they believe that the Quran and hadiths are devoid of it, while the errant and extreme (ghali) Sufis assert that the Quran and hadiths contain but exoteric (Zahiri) laws. Tasawwuf, they say, is the knowledge of esoteric (batin) and there is no need for the Quran or hadiths (we seek refuge in Allah), in short, both groups consider the Quran and hadiths to be devoid of tasawwuf and the other groups has shunned Quran and hadiths altogether.⁷

The philosopher-mystic "Abd al-Bari Nadwi", a spiritual successor (Khalifa) of thanawi, points out that tasawwuf has been perceived in two ways throughout Islamic history.

First, there is the tasawwuf of the Quran and hadith, which was practiced by the pious predecessors of Islam and their true followers. Then there is the pseudo tasawwuf, an imprudent syncretism of Islam and other religious and spiritual system of the world. Abd al-Bari Nadwi explains that the reason why genuine tasawwuf is prone to misrepresentation is because the "degree of misguidance and mistakes caused by a subject and proportionate to the degree of depth, subtlety, and intricacy found in that subject."⁸

Tasawwuf is the most subtle and intricate and in many ways enigmatic of the Islamic Sciences, because it not only reform the exoteric self, but it lays greater stress on purifying the esoteric self, which encompasses spiritual dimensions unseen by the physical eye.

Although tasawwuf entails a complex system of thought, however, a great reformer embraces people of all backgrounds and simplifies even the most complex religious and spiritual themes for them, so that the great number of people may benefit. The messenger of Allah says, "Give great dignity (to the people) and do not frighten them away, and create ease and do not create difficulty."⁹

A salient feature of thanawi's approach to tasawwuf was this implication, ease and flexibility. According to thanawi, the summary of Islamic mysticism is that "actions are of two types; voluntary (ikhtiyari) and involuntary (ghar ikhtiyari). A adhere to the voluntary (good) actions and do not concern yourselves with the involuntary."¹⁰

Thanawi provides rescuing consolation and comfort for the "sick-souls" of our time. His simplification of tasawwuf allowed for a more effective approach, which dispelled the notion of an arduous tasawwuf. The following words of Jalal al-Din Rumi summarize this important part of Sufi methodology.

A disciple is like a new moon, in reality no different than the full moon;

Its apparent imperfection is a sign of grateful increase. Night by night the new moon gives a lesson in gradualness; with deliberation it says, "O hasty one, only step by step can one ascend to the roof". A skillful cook lets the pot boil slowly;

The stew boiled in a mad hurry is of no use.¹¹

Thanawi, s methodology

Thanawi did not pay any attention to dreams; he disliked the display of (spiritual) powers (tasawwuf), and did not anticipate special conditions, such as ecstatic rapture, absorption, etc., but always focused on performing the exoteric and esoteric injunction of Islam. His unique taste in tasawwuf allowed his teachings to serve as a bridge between Fiqh and tasawwuf. He disliked formalities, preferred seriousness, encouraged the discontinuation of rituals, and never concerned himself with the impertinent.

He deemed that true struggle entails not leaving the permissible but abandonment of sin and lessening of the permissible. He could not tolerate anything that pressured the heart more than necessary. He preferred solitude to social interaction, however, he maintained social activity so that people could benefit from him. He was meticulous in time management. He disliked visiting the rich and government officials. These traits describe some aspects of his unique predilection.¹²

Thanawi teaches tasawwuf in a pragmatic, yet profound way, so it is easy for the layman to practice, yet deep enough for the seeker to quench his thirst. Tasawwuf is a practical methodology of reform that is associated with understanding the present human condition and then curing blameworthy character traits with divine guidance and prophetic advices, and augmenting praiseworthy character traits by establishing consistency and sincerity.

The role of Shaikh

Explaining how divine guidance reaches humans, Ibn, Arabi states, "God, the Ultimate truth, guides us to truth and shows us the truth through the wisdom

bestowed upon us by the ones who trod this path before us and who have entered this realm and understood what they saw."¹³ The Shaikh will guide the disciple to inculcate virtues and not to overexert them in the eradication of vices. Moreover, they should not become discouraged because of their blame worthy traits. Once they solely focus on the good, and the evil will vanish due to being deprived of their attention. He offered his disciples rational and pragmatic solutions, provided them with clear instructions, and prayed for them at every step of the way. He nurtured their souls with wisdom and light, encouraging them to polish their spirits. Warning them from the treachery of the nafs, Thanawi says, "The nafs is a subtle entity. It is an inviter to evil and remains in the state of contentment (*mutmaina*) for only a temporary time. It is continuous to remain suppressed due to one's exertions and struggle (in the performance of good deeds)."¹⁴ Thanawi explains that some seekers are discouraged after observing their vices while suppressing their nafs. Consequently, they end up in despair, and this hopelessness deteriorates their spiritual progress. To ward off the desolation of his disciples, he shared with them a secret of the human condition; people attain a state of contentment only for some time. He relieved his disciples by showing them the reappearance of the nafs was a natural phenomenon, and if this was not the case, then they could no longer maintain a continuous struggle. Without continuous struggle, they could not attain higher states of spirituality. Since these are contingent upon continuous struggle, in this way, he consoled his disciples and turned their despair into optimism. Allah most exalted says, "As for those who strive hard for us, we will surely guide them to our paths."¹⁵

Thanawi believed that unnecessary remorse and guilt does not do good in the spiritual path. Tasawwuf is only arduous for those lacking its proper understanding. Thanawi and William James would both agree on the following point stated by the latter in the Varieties of religious experience, "Evil is a disease; and worry over disease is itself an additional form of disease, which only adds to the original complaint."¹⁶ We usually think that worrying about our evils is necessary in tasawwuf, in order to create the urge to reform our selves. However, the subtle noteworthy point here is that this worry should not become a discouraging factor leading to despair. Thanawi and William James are basically stating that instead of focusing one's attention on the evil within, one should keep busy in good works and in developing virtues, which will eventually replace the vices. Thanawi's caution method of reformation not only diagnosed his disciples' vices, but also replaced them with virtues. He did not especially make efforts to search for the spiritual diseases of his disciples, but if by chance he observed some vices, then he would bring these negative points to their attention. He says, "A Shaikh should not try to find out the shortcoming of the disciple. However, if he observes them, then he should inform the disciple."¹⁷

Company of a pious sheikh is instrumental in the process of spiritual purification and personal reformation. As stated earlier, this process involves not only eliminating vices but also replacing them with virtues. David Watson and Roland G. Tharp assert a key

psychological principle; "Simply eliminating some undesired habit has been likened to creating a behavioral 'vacuum'. If something is not inserted in its place, the old behavior will quickly rush back in to fill the void".¹⁸ Hence, eliminating evils is not sufficient, but virtues have to replace evils. This process can easily be carried out in the company of a pious Shaikh, who not only diagnoses the spiritual diseases of the heart, but also replaces them with virtues appropriate to the seeker. Take the example of courage and mercy. Thanawi says, "A courageous person is also a merciful person, whereas a coward is also hardhearted."¹⁹ He also said, "No task is arduous with courage, which comes through the company of a pious Shaikh,"²⁰

Cardinal virtues are interrelated and the inculcation of one gives rise to another. Here Hakim al-Umma points to the co-existing relationship between courage and mercy. Courage is not being audacious and foolhardy in all that one desires, but refers to a praiseworthy trait in warding off the blameworthy character traits and replacing them with the praiseworthy character traits. Courage is the ability to stand for the truth, and unconditionally comply with the edicts of the sharia. Such courage is attained through the company of a pious Shaikh, for human affect other in unique ways.

Thanawi taught that "true respect consists of providing peace and comfort to others. Activities causing trouble to others do not constitute respect."²¹

His approach arranged for the greatest amount of peace and inner comfort for the disciple and the Shaikh. Once a disciple from Rangoon wrote to him he wished to bring some gifts for him, and required his permission before purchasing them. Thanawi replied, "How much do you want to spend on these gifts and what thing are available there? After knowing this, I can decide," pointing to the wisdom in this answer, thanawi said, "This way, the task of choosing certain gifts remains with him, while I will only be choosing from what he selects. The second reason is that I did not know what he would bring and whether it would be of any use to me or not. The reason I asked about his budget is that I will only choose the appropriate things. In short, this method assures the comfort of both."²²

Thus, the reformatory efforts of the Shaikh facilitate peace and comfort for all parties involved. What we have discussed so far only touches the surface of his teachings, a detailed study of thanawi's aphorisms (malfuzat) and lectures (khutbat) would surely provide a greater understanding of his methodology in tasawwuf. Such a study will also reveal that he develops an entire program or system of self-reformation, introducing many progressive steps and assigning these new alternatives his own, new and unique, Sufi terminology.

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