



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**COURSE CODE: ISL355**

**COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO TAŞAWWUF**



# NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

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Printed 2013  
Reprinted 2014, 2015  
ISBN: 978-058-918-1 :

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**COURSE  
GUIDE**

**ISL 355  
INTRODUCTION TO TAŞAWWUF**

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## INTRODUCTION

*ISL 355: Introduction to Taṣawwuf* is a two- credit unit course for the BA Islamic Studies programme of the National Open University of Nigeria offered by students in the second semester at the 300 level. The course gives you an insight into the English equivalent of the word *Taṣawwuf* and the word *Zuhd* which is closely related to it. The Course also traces the origin of the Islamic phenomenon and its growth and development. It gives the profile of prominent *Ṣūfīs* and their contributions to the *ṣūfī* doctrines and practices. It briefly addresses the conflict between the Jurists and the *ṣūfīs* and concludes with a highlight of the emergence of *ṣūfī* Orders.

## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE

As indicated in the above paragraph and as you will come across in the table of contents, this Course will impart to you the significance of *Taṣawwuf* i. e. asceticism/mysticism in Islam and its origin, growth and development. It will give you the profile of prominent *Ṣūfīs* and their contributions to the *ṣūfī* doctrines and practices. It briefly addresses the conflict between the Jurists and the *Ṣūfīs* and the roles played by Abu Hāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. c. 1111) and Abdu ‘l-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 1166) in placing *ṣūfī* phenomenon on comfortable position at least for a long period of time within the Islam and among Muslims. The Course concludes with a highlight of the emergence of *ṣūfī* Orders.

## COURSE AIMS

There are twelve units in this course and each unit has its objectives. You should read the objectives of each unit and keep them at the back of your mind while you study each of the units. Meanwhile, the overall aims of this course include the following:

- to introduce you to *Taṣawwuf*
- to familiarise you with the origin and growth of Islamic mysticism
- to acquaint you with prominent mystics of Islam, their place in Islamic mysticism and contribution to *ṣūfī* doctrines and practices
- to intimate you with the area of conflict between Muslim Jurists and the *Ṣūfīs*
- to present the account of the emergence of the *ṣūfī* Orders to you.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Based on the general aim of this course, some specific objectives of each unit are spelt out. These are the things you should be able to do at the end of the course. If you are able to meet the objectives, you would have achieved the aims of the course. However, on the completion of this course, you should be able to:

- discuss the meaning of *Taşawwuf* and its significance
- explain its origin with proofs and quotations from Qur'ān, Sunnah and other Islamic traditions
- discuss the profile of prominent *Şūfīs* in the early Islamic period
- discuss the development of asceticism to mysticism
- explain the conflict between the early Jurists and the *Şūfīs*
- discuss the reconciliation between exotericism and esotericism
- explain briefly for the emergence of mystical Orders in Islam
- enumerate the major *Şūfī* Orders (*Tarīqahs*).

## WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

To complete this course you are required to read the study units, as well as other related materials. Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at certain points in the course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you are going to sit for a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course, what you have to do and how you should allocate your time to studying the course.

## COURSE MATERIALS

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks and References
4. Assignments File
5. Presentation Schedule

## STUDY UNITS

There are 12 study units divided into 3 modules in this course. These are listed below:

### Module 1

- Unit 1 Definition of the Term and Origin of Taṣawwuf
- Unit 2 Significance of Asceticism
- Unit 3 Asceticism in Islam and its Qur'ānic References
- Unit 4 The Prophet's Companions and the Ascetics among their Successors

### Module 2

- Unit 1 Stages of the Development of Asceticism to Mysticism
- Unit 2 Hasan Baṣrī (d. 107/728) and Abu Hāshim of Kufah (d.160/776)
- Unit 3 Khurāsānian School, Bishr (the Barefooted) and al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī

### Module 3

- Unit 1 Extraneous Influence and Conflict between the Jurists and the *Ṣūfīs* in the 3rd/9th Century
- Unit 2 Two Forerunners of Pantheism in Pantheism
- Unit 3 Theorists of Sainthood and its Hierarchy
- Unit 4 Hallāj's Tragic *Ṣūfī* Career
- Unit 5 The Emergence of *Ṣūfī* Orders

## TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

Ali b. Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (1976). *Kashf u `l-Mahjūb*. In: R.A. Nicholson. (Ed.). Lahore.

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Brakke, D. (1998). *Athnasius and Asceticism*. John Hopkins University Press.

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- Winbush, V. & Richard, V. (2002). *Asceticism*. Oxford University Press.

## **ASSIGNMENT FILE**

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will form part of your total score for this course.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES**

The exercises together with the tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) help in achieving the aims of each unit in particular and objectives of the course in general. The self-test questions on the section you have covered assist in evaluating your progress and maximum understanding of the course.

## **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS (TMAs)**

Every unit contains at least one or two assignments. You are advised to work through all the assignments and submit them for assessment. Your tutor will assess the assignments and select three, which will constitute the 30 per cent of your final grade.

The tutor-marked assignments may be presented to you in a separate file. Just know that for every unit there are some tutor-marked assignments for you. It is important you do them and submit for assessment.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Your assessment will be based on tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and a final examination which you will write at the end of the course.

## **FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING**

At the end of the course, you will write a final examination, which will constitute 70 per cent of your final grade. In the examination, which shall last for two hours, you will be requested to answer three questions out of at least five questions.

## **COURSE MARKING SCHEME**

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count as 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

## PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

The Presentation Schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due dates. You should guard against falling behind in your work.

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Unit	Title of Work	Weeks Activity	
<b>Module 1</b>			
Unit 1	Definition of Term and Origin of Sufism	Week 1	Assignment 1
Unit 2	Significance of Asceticism	Week 2	Assignment 2
Unit 3	Asceticism in Islam and its Qur'ānic References	Week 3	Assignment 3
Unit 4	The Prophet's Companions and the Ascetics among their Successors	Week 4	Assignment 4
<b>Module 2</b>			
Unit 1	Stages of the Development of Asceticism to Mysticism	Week 5	Assignment 5
Unit 2	Hasan Basrī (d. 107/728) and Abu Hashim of Kufah (d.160/776)	Week 6	Assignment 6
Unit 3	Khurāsānian School, Bishr (the Barefooted) and al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī	Week 7	Assignment 7
<b>Module 3</b>			
Unit 1	Extraneous Influence and Conflict between the Jurists and the Ṣūfīs in the 3rd/9th Century	Week 8	Assignment 8
Unit 2	Two Forerunners of Pantheism in Sufism	Week 9	Assignment 9
Unit 3	Theorists of Sainthood and its Hierarchy	Week10	Assignment 10
Unit 4	Hallāj's Tragic Ṣūfī Career	Week 11	Assignment 11
Unit 5	The Emergence of Ṣūfī Orders	Week 12	Assignment 12
<b>Revision</b>			
<b>Examination</b>			

## HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

In distance learning, the study units replace the University lecture. This is one of its great advantages. You can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read, and which are your text materials or set books. You are provided exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercises. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a reading section. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment.
2. Organise a Study Schedule. Design a 'Course Overview' to guide you through the Course. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Important information, e.g. details of your tutorials, and the date of the first day of the Semester is available from the study centre. You need to gather all the information into one place, such as your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates and schedule of work for each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please, let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to unit1, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. You will need your set books and the unit you are studying at any point in time.
6. Work through the unit. As you work through the unit, you will

- know what sources to consult for further information.
7. Keep in touch with your Study Centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there.
  8. Well before the relevant due dates (about 4 weeks before the dates), keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.
  9. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
  10. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
  11. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also the written comments on the ordinary assignments.
  12. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed in the Course Guide).

## **FACILITATORS, TUTORS AND TUTORIALS**

The dates, times and locations of these tutorials will be made available to you, together with the name, telephone number and address of your tutor. Your tutor will mark each assignment. Pay close attention to the comments your tutor might make on your assignments as these will help in your progress. Make sure that assignments reach your tutor on or before the due date. Your tutorials are important; therefore try not to skip any. It is an opportunity to meet your tutor and your fellow students. It is also an opportunity to get the help of your tutor and discuss any difficulties encountered on your reading.

## **SUMMARY**

In this Course Guide, we have made available to you a general overview of *ISL 355: Introduction to Taşawwuf* in which students of Arabic and Islamic Programme must earn two credit units. The course aims and objectives and what learners will gain working through the Course Material and its Study Units are stated clearly at the outset. We have also provided you a list of textbooks and references for your further reading. As an inference in the Guide, to develop an active interest in

the course is a prerequisite for its successful completion. Assess yourself through the self-assessment exercises (SAEs). You will equally be assessed for grading purposes through the tutor-marked assignments (TMAs). Thus to do well in the course, you must get yourself organised and try to conform to the presentation schedule.

We wish you success in the course.



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## MODULE 1      DEFINITION      AND      ORIGIN      OF TAŞAWWUF

Unit 1	Sufism: Definition and Derivation
Unit 2	Significance of Asceticism
Unit 3	Asceticism in Islam and its Qur'ānic References
Unit 4	The Prophet's Companions and the Ascetics among their Successors

### UNIT 1      SUFISM: DEFINITION AND DERIVATION

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2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Definition and Derivation
3.2	Qur'ānic Origin
3.3	The Sīrah and Sunnah Origin
3.4	The Şahābah's Role
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### 1.0      INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses the various views concerning the definition of the terminology Sufism. It attempts to trace the origin of the Islamic spiritual phenomenon to the Qur'ān, Sunnah and practices of the Şahābah and the Tābiūn. It rounds up with a highlight of the main characteristic of the practice in its early stage.

#### 2.0      OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- highlight the various views on the definition and derivation of the terminology *Sufism*
- discuss the *Qur'ānic* origin of the terminology
- explain the *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* origins of the *Şūfī* doctrines and practices.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Definition and Derivation

Sufism is the English word for the mystical tendencies in the Islamic religion. The word is formed from the Arabic term “*Şūfī*” which is applied to the Muslim mystics. From the term “*Şūfī*” also derives the word “*Taşawwuf*” which is the Arabic term for mysticism. The consensus of *Şūfī* scholars seems to be in favour of the view that the root of the word “*şūfī*” is *şūf*, i.e. wool from which was made the coarse-woolen garment worn by the first Muslim mystics to distinguish themselves from their fellows, a practice which has come to be accepted as the conventional dress of the pious in times when silks and brocades had become the fashion of the wealthy and worldly conscious people. The other roots proposed for the term have been rejected either on etymological grounds or philological impossibility. The more significant among such roots are *şuffah* i.e. platform where some poor exiles consecrated their lives to religious devotions in the mosque of *Madinah* during the life-time of the Prophet Muhammad; *şaffawwal* i.e. first rank (before God); *şafā’* i.e. purity (of mystics’ hearts and acts before God<sup>1</sup>) and *işţifā’* (a word from which the epithet *Muşţafā* was coined for the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and with which we come across in several passages of the Holy Qur’ān describing the eminence of the chosen men of God. The Greek word *sophos* meaning wise is also inclusive.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give the definition of Sufism and the various views about the derivation of the word.

#### 3.2 Qur’ānic Origin

Sufism is a natural development within Islam owing its origin to inspirations drawn from the *Qur’ān* as revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Themes that inspired the faithful to embrace ascetic life and shun over-worldliness are the divine words, presentation of God’s attributes and its repeated command of mankind to contemplate the creation; its narratives of Messengers and Prophets and the special mark of divine favour bestowed upon each of them the greatest of which is the Beatific Vision; Its exhortation of man to hasten earnestly to repentance, to celebrate the praise of the Lord, to remember God often, to love, adore and draw near God, and its several verses which depict the transient nature of worldly goods and its eschatological admonitions are also piety-inspiring themes in the Book. This postulate becomes more favourable if we remember

that the *Qur'ān* was committed to memory and recited constantly aloud or in the heart so that the memorisers were in a state of uninterrupted meditation upon its contents. Furthermore, many *Qur'ānic* passages tend to attract esoteric interpretations beside the exoteric ones, because of the very style of the Holy Book which is highly rhetorical, rhapsodic and nerve-arousing.

In actual fact the Holy *Qur'ān* extols a branch of religion and one of the missions of Prophet hood for which the word *Tazkiyah* is applied. It mentions it as one of the four pillars of religion for which the great Messenger was sent to accomplish and fulfill. "He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (ﷺ) from among themselves, reciting to them His Verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and al-Hikmah. (Wisdom) Q.62:2. The purification meant here is that of the Soul, its refinement and its adornment with virtues and disengagement from vices.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the Qur'ānic origin of sufism.

### 3.3 Sīrah and Sunnah Origin

Sufism also owes its origin to Prophet Muhammad's life-style. The Prophet's practice of spiritual retreat in the cave of Mount *Hirā'* during the month of Ramadan in the years immediately preceding his Call which culminated in the revelation of the *Qur'ān* to him through the arch-angel *Jibrīl* in the year 612 A.D., a practice he resumed, if indeed he ever relinquished it, in the latter part of his life when he used to go to the mosque of Madina for *i'tikāf* (seclusion in the mosque during Ramadan) served as the prototype of the *Ṣūfī* spiritual retreat. Also, his ascension through the heavens to the divine presence to which the first lines of Quran Chapter 17 allude has become the prototype of the *ṣūfī* ascension into the intimate presence of the Divine Being. Various Traditions that are attributed to him have served the *Ṣūfīs* tremendously in the development of their doctrines.

A number of his sayings about the importance of prayers and night vigils, merits of *dhikrs* and poverty constituted the core of *ṣūfī* tenets, although we are not sure how many of such Traditions are authentic and how many are invented. By virtue of his position as the messenger of God, great importance was attached to his personality for the spiritual life of his community. He was the ideal leader and the duty of every faithful was to emulate him. He was the source of esoteric wisdom and spiritual emanations; the preservation of this idea being made by the *Ṣūfīs* by having his name at the end of the chain of authorities of all

the *şūfī* Orders; Sunnites, *Shi'ites* and others alike. Respect for him reached its peak when he was conceived by the medieval *Şūfīs* to be the Perfect Man par excellence and the Cause and Goal of the Creation.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give a brief account of *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* as a source for the *Şūfī* doctrines and practices.

### 3.4 The Role of the *Şahābah*

*Şūfī* traditions usually include some of the Prophet Muhammad's companions among the spiritual ancestors of Islamic mysticism. Mention has already been made of Ahl al-Şuffah, the people of the Bench, poor and pious members of Prophet Muhammad's community who lived in the mosque of Madinah and to whom some have traced the root of the term "*şūfī*". Abu Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 31/653) is among the Prophet Muhammad's Companions often associated with many traditions about poverty and he appears as the prototype of the true faqīr i.e. the poor person who possesses nothing but who is totally possessed by God in the spirit of the *Qur'ānic* verse: "And Allah is the rich and you are the poor (Q.47:38).

A more important personality is *Salman al-Fārisī*, the Persian-born companion who was taken into Prophet Muhammad's household and became a model of spiritual adoption. His spirituality was later considered a decisive element in the history of Persian Sufism. The mysterious *Uways al-Qarnī* is another Companion mystically connected with Prophet Muhammad. Uways, about whom *Şūfī* tradition relates that he spent all his nights in prayer, became for the later *Şūfīs* the prototype of the inspired *Şūfī* who has been guided solely by divine grace, knowing of the Prophet without outward contact. He is the mystic who has attained illumination outside the mystical regular system without the mediation of a living *Shaykh*.

As regards the four rightly guided caliphs, Abu Bakr is placed by the *şūfī* Shaykhs at the head of those who have adopted the contemplative life (*mushāhadah*) on account of the fewness of the stories and traditions which he related. 'Umar is placed at the head of those who have adopted the purgative life (*mujāhadah*) because of his rigour and assiduity in devotion. The *Şūfīs* make him their model in wearing patched frock and rigorous performance of religious duties. The *Şūfīs* take 'Uthmān as their example in sacrificing life and property, in resigning their affairs to God and in sincere devotion.

Among the Companions, the position of ‘Alībn Abu Tālib, the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, is unique and deserves a special remark because of his significance. *Ṣūfī* traditions claim that esoteric knowledge (al al-‘ilm-ladunī) and sainthood (*wilāyah*) were transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad through him. He is therefore considered the guide to the principle and practice of esoteric Reality. His name thus follows the name of the Prophet Muhammad in the spiritual chains of authority of many *Ṣūfī* Orders out of which the *Rifā’iyyah* and the *Hamūyā* orders are two examples. The *Baktāshīyyah* has so strong a reverence for the ‘Alid House that it might well be called a *Shī’iteṢūfī* order. The *KhalwatiyyahṢūfī* order at its inception had very strong link with the *Shī’at ‘Alī*.

Out of the piety of the Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad emerged the definition of *sufism* which embraces the three-fold characteristics of Islam, *Īmān* and *Ihsān*. Islam signifies the exclusive submission of the faithful to the will of God and his perfect acceptance of the injunctions of the *Qur’ān* while *Īmān* signifies faith which constitutes the interior aspect of Islam. On the other hand *Ihsān* means, according to the prophetic Tradition that you worship God as if you see Him for even though man does not see Him, He always sees man. The significance of this definition of *sufism* lies in the *Ihsān* element which has the force of inspiring in the faithful the feeling that he stands every moment in the all-embracing divine presence that he has to behave with awe and respect and must never fall back into a state of heedlessness. Undoubtedly, these three elements of the definition are fundamental in the framework of the sublime *sufism*.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. Mention and explain the kind of sufism which emerged “Out of the piety of the Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad”.
- ii. Describe the characteristics of Sufism in its early stage.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In its early stage, *sufism* was merely ascetic tendency towards simple and pious life. It meant abstinence from display of wealth, self-indulgence, luxury and enjoyment. It was the passing of life in self-denying manner in order to keep up the heart pure and unpolluted by the corrupt world with occasional retirement into retreat.

The early *Ṣūfīs* differed from the later *Ṣūfīs* in many respects. They did not make any distinction between the *Sharī’ah* (canonical law) and the *Haqīqah* (*sufism*); neither did they distinguish between the *zāhir*, the

apparent meaning of religion, and the *bāṭin*, the esoteric.

For their knowledge of religion, the early Ṣūfīs depended solely on the *Qur'ān* and the *Hadīth*. They had no philosophical doctrines but accepted the faith like common people. They were represented by the personality of individual holy men and women who were more concerned with experiencing the grace of God, teaching and directing the aspirant in ways of meditation whereby he himself acquired insight into spiritual truth and was shielded against the dangers of illusions.

Their religious intensity led them to extremes both in prayer and in fasting. They prayed far into the night and ventured to make it, whether during the prescribed period or during their *dhikr* sessions, a complete abstraction from the world, so that they could be absolutely alone with God and unconscious of all other things save God. In matters of fasting, they looked upon hunger as a means of grace, denying self and punishing carnal desires. All these they did in an attempt to establish direct interaction with God.

In the realm of faith in God, the early Ṣūfīs emphasised His absolute Unity and complete fatalism. They held that a true believer should depend upon God (*tawakkul*) throwing himself absolutely upon his goodness and providence. The fanatical ones among them carried this idea to its extremity refusing to beg for alms or earn daily bread; for, to do so would be to acknowledge himself or herself dependent upon someone other than God. When they became sick, those fanatical Ṣūfīs refused to have the aid of men, medicine or physicians, for to call in these agencies would be acknowledgement that their trust in God was not absolute. The extreme of this idea of *tawakkul* can be observed in an incident related about one of them who happened to fall into the Tigris River. Unable to swim, he floundered in the water. A man on the shore seeing him helpless called to him asking if he wished him to get someone to his rescue. “No” the Ṣūfī shouted back. “Then, do you wish to be drowned?” “No” he answered. “What then do you wish?” He replied, “God’s will be done! What have I to do with wishing?”

## 5.0 SUMMARY

“*Ṣūfī*” is the Arabic term applied to the Muslim mystics while “*Taşawwuf*” is the Arabic term for mysticism. The word derives from *ṣūf*, i.e. wool from which was made the coarse-woolen garment worn by the first Muslim mystics. The other roots proposed for the term have been rejected either on etymological grounds or philological impossibility.

Sufism is a natural development within Islam owing its origin to inspirations drawn from the Qur'ān as revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It also owes its origin to Prophet Muhammad's life-style.

Some of Prophet Muhammad's companions usually mentioned as spiritual ancestors of Islamic mysticism are Ahl al-Ṣuffah, Abu Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 31/653), Salmān al-Fārisī, and the mysterious Uways al-Qarnī is another Companion mystically connected with Prophet Muhammad.

In the Ṣūfī tradition also, Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī represent adoption of contemplative life (mushāhadah), purgative life (mujāhadah), example in sacrifice, esoteric knowledge (al -'ilm -ladunī) and sainthood (wilāyah) respectively.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Highlight the various views on the definition and derivation of the terminology Sufism.
2. Discuss the Qur'ānic origin of the terminology.
3. Précis the Sīrah and Sunnah origins of the Ṣūfī doctrines and practices.
4. Expatiate the role of the Saḥābah in the emergence of Ṣūfī tradition.
5. Give account of the characteristic of Sufism in its early period.

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## UNIT 2 SIGNIFICANCE OF ASCETICISM

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Definition of Term
  - 3.2 Asceticism in Islam
  - 3.3 History of Asceticism, Beliefs and Practices of Ascetics.
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Asceticism which literally means renouncing worldly pleasures and resisting carnal desires can also be defined as indifference to worldly appetites, living an austere life, choosing to refrain from sin in fear of God, and despising the world's carnal and material aspects. Asceticism is also described as renouncing mundane temporary ease and comfort for the sake of eternal happiness in the hereafter. The first step in asceticism is the intention to avoid what has been forbidden and to engage only in what has been allowed. The second and final step is being extremely careful even when engaging in what is allowed.

In this unit, further explanation on asceticism, Islamic asceticism, and history of asceticism, beliefs and practices of ascetics will be given to you.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define asceticism
- identify Islamic asceticism
- discuss the history of asceticism
- highlight beliefs and practices of ascetics.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Definition of Term

Asceticism is the English equivalent of the Arabic word *Zuhd*. It connotes renunciation of all selfish pleasures and giving up of carnal

pleasures. Asceticism implies a life characterised by abstinence from worldly pleasures.

An ascetic is steadfast in fulfilling his or her obligations to God, and avoids the traps of sin and evil encountered during the journey. Being cleared of unbelief and misguidance, the ascetic derives pleasure in how the creator decides to treat him or her, seeks to attain God's eternal abode and His blessings and bounties, and directs others to seek the absolute Truth.

Asceticism has also been described as observing the rules of *Sharī'ah* even in moments of depression and especially during financial difficulties, and living for others or considering their well-being and happiness while enjoying well-being and comfort. Others have defined it as thankfulness for God's bounties and fulfilling the obligations that these bounties bring with them and as refraining from hoarding money and goods (except for the intention to serve, exalt and promote Islam.)

Asceticism, according to renowned *Ṣūfī* leaders like *Sufyān al-Thawrī*, is regarded as the action of a heart set up according to God's approval and pleasure and closed to worldly ambitions, rather than as being content with simple food and clothes. The *Ṣūfīs* are agreed on these as signs of true ascetic: feeling no joy at worldly things acquired or grief over worldly things missed, feeling no pleasure when praised or displeasure when criticised or blamed, and preferring to serve God over every other thing.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Discuss the term 'Asceticism.
- ii. Mention three signs of a true ascetic?

### **3.2 Asceticism in Islam**

Historically, there have been two main categories of asceticism. "Other worldly asceticism" is practiced by people, including monks, Yogis and hermits, who withdraw from the world in order to live an ascetic life, famous examples include Laozi, Grantoma Buddha and Francis of Assisi. Such men forsook their families, possessions and homes to live an ascetic life, and according to their followers, achieved spiritual, enlightenment.

Two "Worldly asceticism" which refers to those who live ascetic lives but do not withdraw from the world; for example Mahatma Ghandi and many Roman Catholic priests have made asceticism the

personal foundation for their work in society.

Most religions - Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam - have ascetic traditions. However, some people have secular motivations to follow an ascetic lifestyle, such as an artist who deprives himself to clarify his mind for his work or the athlete who deprives himself during training to be at top form for the contest.

A common misconception about Zuhd is that a man should deem all the good things of life forbidden to himself ;he should neither eat delicious food nor drink cold water nor wear expensive clothes nor sleep on a soft bed, and if he receives some money from anywhere, he should quickly part with it. The Holy Prophet has removed the mistaken idea in the tradition that is related by Abu Dharral-Ghifari that the Apostle of God said: Zuhd in relation to the world and detachment from what it has to offer, (which is wholly a spiritual state), is not the name or making for yourself unlawful what is allowed, and destroying your goods, but its real requirement is that you place greater reliance upon what is with God and in His control than upon what is with you and in your control, and when you undergo a disagreeable experience or suffer a calamity, the ardour and yearning for the reward of the Hereafter is greater than the wish that it may not have happened (to you) at all.

Zuhd (asceticism) does not mean that one made unlawful for oneself the bodily pleasures God had declared as legitimate for His Bondsmen. Neither does it mean that one must do away with the money that might come to his hand but that a man should not rely upon what he possessed or controlled in this world believing that it was wholly transitory and perishable. It also does not mean that one must put his trust in the hidden and everlasting treasures of the Almighty and in His providential care. Its other test and indication was that when suffering or distress overtook him, the longing for the reward on it in the Hereafter was stronger than the wish that he would have been left untouched by it, i.e. instead of desiring that the misfortune had not reached him, he felt in his heart that the recompense he would receive on it in the Hereafter would be thousand times better than that the affliction had stayed away. Such a state can, evidently, be attained only when the yearning for the joy of futurity is greater than the desire for worldly comfort- and this is what Zuhd, basically, signifies.

It must, however, not be imagined that in place of comfort and well-being, people should wish and pray to God for pain and suffering in the present existence. A clear interdiction against it is contained in a number of traditions. The Prophet always exhorted the Companions to

beseech God only for comfort and well-being and the same was his own practice. (Q2:201). The purpose of Abu Dharr's report, thus, is not, at all, that the bondman should long for grief or misfortune in the present world. What it simply shows is that when a loss or distress might befall him, he should as a truthful believer and a genuine ascetic, attach greater importance to the reward he was going to get on it in the future world than the feeling that it had not reached him at all. The difference between the two states needs be understood clearly.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. Discuss the two main categories of asceticism.
- ii. What is the common misconception about asceticism.
- iii. Explain its right concept.

### 3.3 History of Asceticism, Beliefs and Practices of Ascetics

The unified and cohesive Islam evaporated with the death of the followers of the Companions. What followed was Islam in different sects: *Kharijism*, *Murjiism*, *Shiism*, *Sunnism*, *Mu'tazilism* and so on and forth, each claiming to be the real representation of authentic Islam. This is what the *Qur'ān* asserts:

But they (Men) have broken their religion among them into sects, each group rejoicing in what is with it (as its beliefs) (Q 23:53).

The different sects pointed to the elect (*'al-Khāṣṣah*) in their midst, who were seen as ascetics very common in Umayyad days. Asceticism was seen as a reaction to the increasing worldliness/materialism generated by the expanding Islamic civilization in towns and cities where new wealth and peoples embraced Islam.

The earliest form of asceticism arose under the Umayyad Dynasty (661-749) less than a century after the founding of Islam. Ascetics of this period meditated on the Doomsday Passages in *Qur'ān*, thereby earning such nicknames as those who always weep (*al-Bakkā'ūn*).

These early ascetics led a life of strict obedience to Islamic scripture and tradition and were known for the night prayers. Many of them concentrated their efforts upon *tawakkul* (absolute trust in God) which became an integral part of asceticism.

Another century or so later, a new emphasis on love changed asceticism into mysticism. This development is attributed to *Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah* (d.185A.H./801C.E.) a woman from *Baṣra* who formulated the *Ṣūfī* idea of a pure love of God that was disinterested in hope for paradise or fear of Hell.

Other important developments soon followed, including strict self-control, psychological insight, “interior knowledge,” annihilation of the self, mystical insights about the nature of man. This period, from about 800-1100 C.E. is referred to as classical mysticism. By this time, asceticism had permeated the whole of the Islamic world and played a large role in the shaping of Islamic society.

The beliefs of ascetics are based firmly in orthodox Islam and the text of the *Qur’ān*. The core principles of asceticism are *tawakkul* (absolute trust in God) and *Tawhīd* (the truth that there is no deity but God). *Tawhīd* is rich in meaning for ascetics. The love of God for man and the love of man for God are also very central to asceticism and are the subjects of most Islamic ascetic poetry and hymns.

Ascetic practices have their foundation in purity of life, strict obedience to Islamic law and emulation of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Through self-denial, introspection and mental struggle, ascetics hope to purify self from all selfishness, thus attaining *ikhlaṣ* (absolute purity of intention and act). “Little sleep, little talk, little food, little drink” are fundamental and tasting is considered one of the most important preparations for the spiritual life. Ascetics are distinguished from other Muslims by their fervent seeking of *dhawq* “tasting” that leads to an illumination beyond standard forms of learning. However, the insight gained by such experience is not valid if it contradicts the *Qur’ān*.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Trace the history of asceticism.

- i. What are the beliefs of the ascetics?
- ii. What are the practices of the ascetics?

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Thus we conclude that the *Şūfī* term *Zuhd* whose English equivalent is asceticism, describes a life characterised by abstinence from worldly pleasures. Ascetics believe that the act of purifying the body helps to purify the soul and thus obtain a greater connection with the Divine or find inner peace.

Prophet Muhammad reportedly advised people to live simple lives and he himself practiced great austerities. Even when he had become the virtual king of Arabia, he lived an austere life bordering on privation.

Early Muslim ascetics focused on introspection and behaviour. They followed a lifestyle of modesty, temperance, contentment and the denial

of luxury. Their practices included fasting, wearing light clothing in the depths of winter, or withdrawing themselves from the world.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit traces the meaning of asceticism (Zuhd), Islamic asceticism, history of asceticism and the beliefs and practices of ascetics.

It concludes that having worldly means or wealth is not contrary to asceticism - if those who possess them can control them and are not over powered by them. Nevertheless, the truest ascetic in all respects, Prophet Muhammad, chose to live as the poorest of his people, for he had to set the most excellent example for his community - especially for those charged with propagating and promoting the truth. Thus, he would not lead others to think that the sacred mission of Prophethood could be abused to earn worldly advantage.

By the middle of the ninth century, asceticism started to grow rapidly. One major figure and catalyst in its growth was the female mystic Rābi‘ahal‘Adawiyah (d.801), who emphasised the absolute love for Allah above everything else. The shift of Sufism from asceticism to divine love captured the attention of the masses and elites, and soon mysticism began to flourish in Baghdad, spreading to Persia, Pakistan, India, North Africa and Muslim Spain.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define the term Asceticism and elaborate on its characteristics.
2. Discuss the history of asceticism, the beliefs and practices of ascetics.

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## **UNIT 3 THE ISLAMIC ATTITUDE AND QURANIC REFERENCES TO ASCETICISM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Significance of Asceticism
  - 3.2 Qur'ānic References to Asceticism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The current idea of asceticism is related to love of the world and its renunciation. There is no doubt that it has a sublime significance in Islamic literature, both in poetry and prose, Persian and Arabic. Now we must see what our way of thinking about it should be in connection with the evidence and teachings offered by the Holy Qur'ān. In this unit, we will try to explain the significance of asceticism, the Islamic position concerning asceticism and renunciation of the world, then the spiritual goal.

Exponents of Zuhd have always linked its root to the Almighty God who revealed the Qur'ān to the Prophet through the archangel Gabriel. Islam is said to be the way of God' which includes asceticism that gradually developed to esoterism referred to in the Qur'ān 73:19 and Qur'ān 76:29:

“Verily this is a reminder, therefore whoever will let him take a path to His Lord.”

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the significance of asceticism
- describe the Islamic position concerning renunciation of the world
- highlight the spiritual goal
- identify the Qur'ānic references to asceticism.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Significance of Islamic Asceticism

'Al- Munjid Arabic Dictionary has defined asceticism as shunning the affairs of the world to have time for worship. It implies that the tasks of the two worlds are separate without any connection between, or benefit for, one another. Thus, to be an ascetic meant retirement from society and choosing seclusion in a monastery, or a convent or a cave, or to lead a monastic life.

Does Islam accept such a definition for asceticism? No, obviously not. Islam is wholly opposed to isolation from society. According to the Prophet (S.A.W) "There is no monasticism in Islam". He said that the kind of asceticism his followers practiced was as good as Jihad, or purposeful struggle. Moreover, Islam recommends as devotion what other religions regard as secular or worldly. Islam does not differentiate between the two worlds in which Muslims believe. In Islam, commerce or agriculture has both the worldly and other-worldly significance, depending on the objectives. If your trading is legitimate and not based on usury or unfairness, but intended to gain incomes to avoid beggary and to serve your society and augment its economic strength, Islam considers this as part of one's devoutness. So are our objectives in our professions and occupations such as agriculture and animal husbandry. We may embark on them with similar goal. All these are included in devotions to God on part of those who are aware of Islamic goals and pursue them. In the same way whatever other schools of thought consider as worship are regarded by Islam as a part of worldly life, so that praying and fasting are not only beneficial for the next world, but also for this one.

Asceticism in Islam is not obligatory, but an attainment towards perfection with a spiritual goal different from the worldly goals. It has been recommended to avoid worshipping pleasures and sinking in unlawful things.

The word 'asceticism' has assumed a variant significance in Islamic and other non-Islamic teachings. An ascetic is not somebody who is naturally disinclined to things, such as a patient who has no desire for food or someone who dislikes sweet meals, or an impotent man becoming disinclined to sexual intercourse. Asceticism is not an instinctive lack of desire for worldly things. An ascetic is instinctively inclined towards material pleasures, but because of special or non-material goals and purposes his conduct shows disinclination to them, so that he forsakes them. In other words, spiritual or intellectual attention to something, so as to make it the goal of an activity, is one thing, and a natural instinct is another thing.

One of the aims of asceticism is to attain a fair condition for human beings in the means of living. It is wrong to have one class of people having all blessings, and another class having all sufferings. Therefore, poverty which is not due to laziness, but caused by the stagnation of wealth through injustice and tyranny should not be allowed. God had made it incumbent upon the wise followers of Islam, who are made leaders, to accept the duty of checking excesses in wealth and poverty and have fellow-feeling and human considerations for others.

Asceticism is very prevalent among us in the sense in which it was used formerly in tradition and annals, which is different from its current sense. One of the qualities of an ascetic is to be able to be contented with the little things in life. But not everyone who is content with a little may be called an ascetic.

Asceticism may be in connection with worldly goals and riches and even to positions. If you ask whether worldly goods and wealth and positions are good or bad, the answer depends on their use or purpose. The question is what do you want them for? You may be a slave of your lust and intend to satisfy them by means of these powers. If you are such a person, whatever you use to attain carnal desires will be bad. However, if you purify yourself and do not lust, or if you avoid self-centeredness and have a divinely worthy social objective, then the wealth, or position which you employ in this way is used properly since you are using them for your spiritual goals.

Islam is a supporter of two kinds of power: spiritual and economic. It believes in spiritual power in the sense that it says you should be morally so strong that you do not pay undue attention to the world and what is in it so as not to be enslaved by it. As for economic power, we should try to gain legitimate wealth in order to use it in the right way. When we realise that Islam supports both spiritual and economic powers in this way, then we find that we are “ascetics” in the sense of harbouring weakness, or remaining actually weak in both spiritual and economic matters. If we are ascetics who have avoided wealth and economic power, we have chosen weakness. Those who lack riches obviously can do nothing economically and are obliged to stretch their hands before others. We are also spiritually weak when we are brought up to think ourselves ascetic by keeping away from wealth.

Asceticism in Islam signifies spiritual strength, and having this spiritual strength enables one to make good use of wealth.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. What is the true significance of asceticism?
- ii. Discuss asceticism and renunciation of the world.

### 3.2 Qur'ānic References to Asceticism

Indirectly, countless verses of the *Qur'ān* refer to the teachings of asceticism and its ideals. Here are just some of the verses which refer to what can be termed teachings of asceticism.

- a. 'The believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a fear in their hearts and when His verses are recited unto them, the verses increase their faith: and they put their trust in their Lord (alone).' (*Qur'ān*, 8:2).
- b. 'Those who remember Allah standing, sitting and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and earth (saying): 'Our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose. Glory is to you! So save us from the torment of the fire.' (*Qur'ān* 3:191).
- c. 'Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah; verily; in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest (13:28)
- d. In the *Qur'ān*; Allah praises the Companions of the Bench: And do not turn away those who invoke their Lord; morning and evening seeking His face. (6:52).
- e. "Allah is the Light of Heaven and Earth! His light may be compared to a niche in which there is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass; the glass is just as if it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed olive tree, {which is} neither Eastern nor Western, whose oil will almost glow though the fire has never touched it. Light upon light, Allah guides anyone He wishes to His light. Sūrah 24:35.
- f. *Sūrah* 2:156, "Verily we are for Allah, and verily unto Him we are returning."
- g. *Sūrah* 50:6, "We (Allah) are nearer to him (man) than his jugular vein."

- h. Moreover, *Şūfis* give great weight to concepts such as dependence (*Tawakkul*), patience (*Sabr*), striving with the soul (*Mujāhadatu `n-Nafs*), piety (*Taqwa*), renunciation (*Zuhd*), love (*Mahabbah*), remembrance (*Dhikr*) and supplication (*Du‘ā*).

All of the above ideas and concepts originate from the Holy *Qur‘ān* directly.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Quote some *Qur‘ānic* references to asceticism.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

We conclude here that asceticism does not involve separations of the affairs of this world and the next. Asceticism may be to sacrifice one’s own joy for the sake of others. The *Qur‘ān* has praised this quality most eloquently, showing it as a sign of the liveliness of the human spirit. Two other ideas of asceticism are to consider that devotion is beneficial for both this world and the next and an ascetic who abandons all activities in this world and retires to a cave or convent hoping to attain the next world, loses the blessings of this world, too. He virtually turns himself into a useless creature. Another supposition is that God does not grant worldly enjoyment to him who deserves other-worldly joy, or vice-versa. According to this belief it is not possible to have a happy life in both worlds, so we must forsake this world for the sake of the next one, these are dead ideas.

On a final note, asceticism is a mystical movement that is found all over the Islamic world and that still has a deep influence on the varied people of the religion. The phenomena which later developed into *sufism* is found amongst both *Sunnīs* and *Shī‘ah* being a movement within orthodox Islam. It grew historically as a reaction against the rigid legalism of the orthodox leadership and as a counter weight to the growing worldliness of the expanding Muslim empire.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discusses the significance of asceticism; renunciation of the world and the spiritual goal are also discussed. It notes that man is not granted enjoyment in the hereafter because of abandoning it here. There is no appotionment of pleasures to makeup there for a deficit here. Other-worldly pleasures are not the result of deliberate deprivation in this world, but a consequence of other factors. The unit also discusses the *Qur‘ānic* and *Sunnah* references to asceticism.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the Islamic attitude towards asceticism?
2. Explain asceticism and renunciation of the world.
3. Mention five Qur'ānic verses that refer to asceticism.
4. Explain the teachings of asceticism in the Sunnah.
5. Why is the Prophet Muhammad being referred to as the greatest ascetic?

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## **UNIT 4 THE PROPHET'S COMPANIONS AND THE ASCETICS AMONG THEIR SUCCESSORS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Şahābah (Companions of the Prophet)
  - 3.2 The Tābi'ūn (Successors of the Companions)
  - 3.3 The Ascetics after the Successors
  - 3.4 Brief Profile of Some other Sūfī Leaders
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

After the transition of the Holy Prophet (in 11A.H./632 C.E), Islam was transmitted to generations by the Companions. The numerical strength of the Companions has not been fixed by the Tradition. Not all of them have ever been found to be mystics, when they are viewed in the wider sense of the word. Muawiyah (d. 60A.H./680 C.E), the first Umayyad caliph was a Companion whose life was not attributable to any contemplative trait while that of the first rightly guided Caliphs of Islam (reigned from 11 A.H-40 A.H./632 C.E-661 C.E) were considered to be ascetical to a large extent. The four orthodox Caliphs, Khadijah and Aisha as well as Zaynab are examples. In this unit we shall examine the extent to which they practised asceticism.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- name some of the Prophet's Companions who are ascetics
- name at least five *Tābi'ūn* of the Companions who are ascetics
- mention some ascetics after the *Tābi'ūn*.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Prophet's Companions**

Despite the link between the Companions and spouses of the Prophet with mystical life, no comprehensive literature on the

spiritual life has been reported to have come from them. However, the arrival of Imam Ali's caliphate brought with it compilations of his sermons and letters found to have satisfactory details about mysticism. Regrettably, all these could only be found in scanty forms in an Arabic literature *Nahju`l-Balāghah*, a *shiite* compilation by Sharif *al-Raṅī* (d.406A.H/1015 C.E.). The collection, considered venerable by the Shiites for its exact presentation of Imam Ali's Arabic style, its analytical structure has also been found to be incomparable with what is in the *Hadiths* or sermons of the holy Prophet. This shows the development that Arab culture underwent during its contact with the Persians in Iraq. The *Nahj'alBalāghah*, which supposedly contains the sayings of Imam Ali, has always been found to be lacking in mystical elements.

The import of the whole argument is in the fact that Imam 'Alī's name features more often than that of any other Caliph, according to the *Silsilahs* of the *Ṣūfī* orders, which relate to the Messenger through his Companions. 'Alī has the monopoly of the chain of transmission as it emanated from the Prophet, and having a direct link with his mystical teachings and practices.

Another important factor that places Imam 'Alī on the higher pedestal than other Companions is the role he played in early readjustment of Islam- esoteric and exoteric-considering its emergence outside its Arabian origin and early contact with the non-Arab world especially the Persians in Iraq. This central authority enjoyed by Imam Ali in *Sunnism* and Sufism was also extended to his wife Fatimah, Prophet's daughter and her two sons-Hassan (d.50 A.H./760 C.E.) and *Husayn* (d.6./A.H./680 C.E.). Considered direct descendants of the Prophet these people were graced in two-fold fashion; they were the transmitters of his exo-esoteric message. A critical examination and analysis of the *Sūfī* Order, as far as the Companions were concerned, would be considered not only fragile, but also unacceptable without according Imam 'Alī a central and cardinal position.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Discuss some of the Prophet's Companions who are ascetics.
- ii. Mention the factors that place Imam Ali on the higher pedestal in asceticism.

### **3.2 The Tābi'ūn (Successors of the Companions)**

Next in rank after the Companions are their followers, in a technical term, *at-Tābi'ūn*. These followers did not see the Prophet, neither did they receive any teachings or messages from him directly. But

they were taught by those whom the Prophet tutored, the Companions. By this singular honour, they assumed the dual feature or characteristics of authority spiritually and direct transmission of what they received from the Companions.

If there is no certainty as regards the exact number of the Companions, it is equally difficult to ascertain the number of the followers. It can, however, be conveniently put that those who are *esoterists* or mystics are very few. Two of these esoteric followers are the Sunni, Hassan *al-Başrī* (d.110 A. H./728 C.E.) and the fourth Imam of the *Shi'ites*, *AlīZayn al Ābidīn* (d.95 A.H./714 C.E.). *Al-Hasanal-Başrī* was has both ascetic and mystical revelation by his constant preoccupation with the terrible events of judgment. Going by this, it could also be acceptably put that his outward life radiated the fear of God (*khawf*) Whatever is known about *Zayn al Ābidīn* especially his spiritual and mystical life, is attributed to a collection of his prayers, *aş-Şahīfatu's-Şajjādiyyah* (The scripture of the Worshipper) preserved by *Shiism*. Besides, so many luminous statements revealing his devotional dispositions were also transmitted by the tradition. *Al-Hasan al-Başrī* and *AlīZayn al Ābidīn* assumed the dual function of transmitting the law and the path to their generations. It should be noted here that Imam means different things in the Shiite and *Sūfi* circles. Whereas, the *Shi'ites* see their Imam on the same stratum with the Holy Prophet in both religion and political functions, the *Şūfīs* do not. The names of the duo (*AlīZayn al Ābidīn* and *HasanBaşrī*) are to be found in the *Sūfi* chains of transmission not as a Shiite Imam or a Sunni respectively, but as eminent Gnostic teachers of early Islam, an authority on the path and transmitters of the initiation. This is another way of saying that the Path was transmitted through different sages in the time of the followers and not the lineage of the Imams alone.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give brief mystical role of the Successors of the Companions who are ascetics.

### 3.3 The Ascetics after the Successors

The rank of these ascetics as claimed by the *Şūfi* tradition included *Dawud'alTāī* (d.162A.H./777C.E.), *Fuñaylbn 'Iyāñ* (d.187 A.H./802 C.E.), *Shaqīq al-Balkhī* (d.194 A.H./810 C.E.), *Habīb 'al-'Ajamī* (d. 156 A.H./772 C.E), *Ibrahim bnAdham* (d. 165 A.H./780 C.E.), *Ma'rūf 'al-Karkhī* (d.199 A.H./815 C.E.), Imam *Ja'farŞādiq* (d.148 A.H./765 C.E), and the great woman saint, *Rābi'ah 'al-'Adawiyyah* (d.185 A.H./801 C.E.). Their asceticism was subordinated to their

devotional aspirations. It was a discipline in view of the love and knowledge of God. This asceticism has been found by scholars to be discordant with the social *Sunnah* the Holy Prophet left behind without considering his mystical *Sunnah*.

Of all the above-mentioned ascetics, only the *shiite* sixth Imam, *Ja'far Ṣādiq* had his observations and statements well documented in Shiite literature. He is one of the great names in the early *Ṣūfī* tradition. Belonging to the formative years of Islam, *Ja'far Ṣādiq* was considered an authority both in the *Haqīqah* and *Sharī'ah*. Even though the *Ṣūfīs* consider him as being esoteric, a number of statements attributed to him portray him as being exoteric. This is not the case with *Rābi'ah 'al-'Adawiyah*, viewed as an embodiment of mystical way of love in all its ramifications and never marred by the exoteric formulations of Islam. The fact that *Rābi'ah 'al-'Adawiyah's* period coincided with the time the *Salaf* were laying down the classic contours of Islam gave her a way as one of *Salaf* in a mystical sense and subsequently became renowned in later *Sūfī* literature. Although at her birth, the word *Ṣūfī* was unknown, by the time she died, the word had become synonymous with the adept of the path, and *Taṣawwuf* was an integral spiritual path, the *tariqah*.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Assess the place of some ascetics after the *Tabi'ūn* in the history of Islamic asceticism.

### 3.4 Brief Profile of Some other Sūfī Leaders

*Al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī* (died 857 C.E) converted from rationalist Islam. *Dhu 'n-Nūn al-Miṣrī* (the Egyptian), (died 859 C.E.) formulated the stages of *Sufism* *Al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī* (died 898 C.E), not related to *Tirmidhi*, the *Hadith* collector.

*Junayd* of Baghdad (died 910/911 C.E.) was a “sober *Ṣūfī*” who denied total absorption with God.

*Al-Hallāj* (*Husayn al-Manṣūr*) taught the replacement of humanity with the divine; (incarnation or unification with God). He also taught you can go on the Hajj pilgrimage simply in spirit. In 922 C.E. he was flogged, publicly mutilated, hung on a *guillotin*, beheaded, and then his body burnt. The orthodox Muslims were apparently displeased with him.

Abu Naṣr al-Farābī (870-950 C.E), born in Farab in the Turkistan district, was a famous Neoplatonist philosopher and *Ṣūfī*. He taught God as the unmoved mover and introduced many to Aristotle.

Al-Ghazzālī (1058-1111 C.E) was first a skeptic before becoming a Ṣūfī. He returned to teaching in 1106, five years before his death. Al-Ghazzālī was against Neo-Platonist influence in Islam, rather favouring Aristotelian logic. He wrote the *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences) where he spoke of ritual practices, social custom, vices leading to Hell, and virtues leading to Paradise. He was instrumental in gaining a degree of acceptance of Sufism among Sunnis.

*Kharrās* was a Ṣūfī who opposed self-annihilation and taught the doctrine of “survival” with God, recovery of yourself. Peace and integrity to carry out God’s duties.

Mullah *Jalālu-ddīnRūmī* (Mohammed *bn* Mohammed *bn*Husayn *al-Balkhī*), born 1207 in Balkh, Afghanistan, and grew up in *Rūm*, Turkey. He died in 1273 C.E. He wrote one of the most popular collections of works on Sufism, and founded the *Maulawiya* Order.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give a brief profile of some Ṣūfī Leaders.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Thus we conclude that asceticism was transmitted to generations after the Prophet by the Companions. Prominent among the transmitters are the four orthodox Caliphs and the two wives of the Prophet i.e. *Khadijah* and *Aisha*; and also his daughter, *Zaynab*.

Also, the *Tābiūn* (those who did not see the Prophet but were taught by whom the Prophet tutored) assumed the role of transmitters of what they received from the companions. This is how asceticism which later developed to mysticism was transmitted through different ages.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit traces the transmitters of asceticism from the Prophet by the Companions to the *Tābiūn* and later to different stages in the time of the followers and not the lineage of the Imams alone.

This unit also discusses the ascetics after the followers. Mention of some Ṣūfī leaders with dates is inclusive. The ascetics after the followers continued the discipline of asceticism with their devotional aspirations. Also, some Ṣūfī leaders are mentioned, among them is *Dhu-Nun* of Egypt who formulated the stages of Sufism.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Trace the transmitters of asceticism from the Prophet to the era of the *Tābiūn*.
2. Mention some of the ascetics after the followers and their mystical life.
3. Give brief profile of some *Ṣūfī* Leaders.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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**MODULE 2**

- Unit 1 Stages in the Development of Asceticism to Mysticism  
 Unit 2 *Hasan Basrī* (d. 107/728) and *Abu Hashim* of *Kufah* (d.160/776)  
 Unit 3 *Khurāsānian* School, *Bishr* (the Barefooted) and *al-Hārithal-Muhāsibī*

**UNIT 1 STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ASCETICISM TO MYSTICISM****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction  
 2.0 Objectives  
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     3.1 The History of Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E  
     3.2 The Emergence of Sufism as an Integral Spiritual Path in Islam  
 4.0 Conclusion  
 5.0 Summary  
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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Louis Massignon argued, largely on the evidence of terminology that Islamic mysticism developed out of an earlier, thoroughly Islamic ascetical tradition. The argument that Islamic mysticism is a transition from Islamic asceticism has now become a scholarly commonplace. No one has gone further, though, by way of (1) precisely defining “ascetical” and “mystical” and (2) showing just where and when the transition took place. We can demonstrate that the extant record is overwhelmingly ascetical, not mystical, until Dhūl-Nūn al-Miṣrī surfaced. Thereafter, truly mystical schools emerged at about the same time in Khurāsān (AbūYazīd and especially the less famous Abu Ḥafṣ al-Naysabūrī); and in Baghdad (al-Kharrāz, al-Nūrī). There was soon trouble with old-style ascetics, and seventy-odd Ṣūfīs were arrested in the Inquisition of Ghulam Khalil. Then Islamic mysticism found the apologist it needed in al-Junayd.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the stages of transition from asceticism to mysticism
- examine a number of historical events which took place in the third/ninth century.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The History of Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E

#### 1. First Stage: Asceticism

Under the Umayyads (661-749) there was a growing tendency to compare the wealth and luxury of the ruling class with the simple lifestyle of the first four Caliphs. Devout believers were shocked by the worldliness and opulence of court life and they reacted with a growing concern for reality in their own personal relationship with God. Outward observance of the *Sharī'ah* stipulations could not satisfy their growing spiritual hunger and they started to imitate Christian hermits who had discovered asceticism and poverty as a way to develop a close relationship with God.

The first *Ṣūfīs* were ascetics who meditated on the Day of Judgment. They were called “those who always weep” and “those who see this world as a hut of sorrows.” They kept the external rules of *Sharī'ah* but at the same time developed their own mystical ideas and techniques. “Little food, little talk, little sleep,” was a popular proverb amongst them. Mortification of the flesh, self denial, poverty and abstinence were seen as the means of drawing near to God, and this included fasting and long nights of prayer.’

#### Second Stage: Divine Love

A woman from *Baṣrah in Iraq*, *Rābi 'ah al-'Adawiyyah* (d. 801) introduced the theme of Divine Love into *sufism*. She yearned to love God only for Himself, not for hope of any reward (Paradise) nor out of fear of judgment (Hell). Following her death the love theme became a dominant feature of Sufism. It expressed the *Ṣūfī's* yearning for the development of a love relationship with God that would lead to an intimate experience of God and finally to a total union with God.

The love theme found its main expression in *Ṣūfī* poetry in which the relations between God the Divine Lover and the man searching for his

love were symbolically described. Early *Şūfī* poems in Arabic express the soul's deep yearning for union with the beloved. Persian poetry often compared the soul's love relationship with God to that between a man and a beautiful youth. In Indian poetry the loving wife yearning for her husband symbolised the soul's yearning for God. Later poets developed the long mystical poems called *Mathnawis* (*Masnawis*) which expressed in symbolical verse the manifold emotions of love to God and of unity with him.

Persia had the greatest flourishing of *Şūfī* Poetry, and most of its classical poetry has a *Sūfī* content. One example is the *Mathnawi* “*Mantiqū t-Tayr*” (Speech of the Birds) by *Faridu `d-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār*, an allegory which portrays the mystic on his pilgrimage from asceticism through illumination to union with God.

Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1027-1273), named “*Mawlana*” - our Lord or Teacher - was the greatest Persian mystical poet. His famous *Mathnawi* of 26,000 rhythmic couplets is a real encyclopedia of *Şūfī* allegorical and mystical thought and experience. Persian *Şūfīs* regard it as next to the *Qur’ān* in holiness. *Rumi* also founded the *Mawlawi* (*Mevlevi*) order of whirling dervishes.

*Şūfī* poetry uses the symbols of wine (God's intoxicating love), the wine cup (the *Şūfī*'s heart) and the cup bearer (the spiritual guide). The wine house is the religion of love and it is compared to the religion of law symbolised by the mosque. Learning the many *Şūfī* symbols and their meaning is essential to an understanding of this kind of poetry.

### Third Stage: *Şūfī* Apologetics

Early *Şūfī* masters gathered informal circles of disciples and transmitted their teachings orally. At first, the orthodox religious authorities were very suspicious of the *Şūfīs* and accused them of heresy and blasphemy. This led some *Şūfīs* in the 10th century to defend *sufism* by writing handbooks of their teaching and practice in the hope of proving their orthodoxy. *Ibn al-A’rabi* (d.952), *al-Makkī* (d.966), *as-Sarraḡ* (d.988), *al-Kalābādhī* (d.1000) and *Hujwiri* (d.1057) were such masters who wrote in defence of *sufism*. They also published histories and biographies of Sufism, trying to prove that it was based on the practice (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet and his Companions.

*Al-Qushayrī* (d.1072) defended *sufism* against the accusations of antinomianism (lawlessness). In addition to writing biographies of *Şūfī* saints he wrote “*ar-Risālah*”, a book in which he defined *Şūfī* doctrines and terms. He defined the mystical stations (*maqāmāt*, a result of the *Şūfī*'s own labours), and states (*aḥwāl*, mystical states bestowed by God's grace).

*Abu Hāmid al-Ghazzālī* (d.1111), called *Hujjat al-Islam* -proof of Islam, was a great Muslim thinker who found no satisfaction in his extensive study of theology and law. Turning to Sufism he found in it the certainty of God he had yearned for and failed to find in his previous studies. In his book “The Revival of the religious sciences” (*Ihyā’ ‘ulūm `d-Dīn*) he attempted to reconcile Sufism with orthodoxy. It was immensely popular and finally guaranteed Sufism an official place in orthodox Islam alongside law and theology.

#### **Fourth Stage: Philosophical Systems (Theosophy)**

Theosophy is any mystical system of religious philosophy that claims a direct intuitive insight into God’s nature. Theosophical speculations on the nature of God and man were introduced into *Sufism* by Sahl al-Tustārī (d.896) and al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidī (d.898).

The greatest of all *Ṣūfī* theosophical writers in Arabic was Ibn al-Arabī (d.1240) who was born in Spain. He travelled to Tunis and Mecca and finally settled in Damascus. In his 500 books he teaches that all existence is but a manifestation of God, the one ultimate divine reality which is totally “other”, an undifferentiated unity, but in whom the archtypes of all potential beings exist. This is the “unknown God” from who emanates a hierarchy of divine beings (Names, Lords) the lowest of whom is the Lord of revelation and creation who is also called the First Intellect. The emanations are the mediating link between the unknowable, transcendent God and the created world. This teaching was the basis of the *Ṣūfī* concept of the Unity of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujūd*). The first intellect, an emanation of the God was also called the “idea of Muhammad”. He is the archetype through whom man was made. This emanation is incarnated in a perfect Man in every generation -the perfect *Ṣūfī*. This man most fully manifests the nature of God and he is the pole (*Quṭb, axis*) around which the cosmos revolve. Ibn al-Arabī saw himself as such “a pole” and he called himself the seal (the most perfect) of the saints.

Another theosophical system of illumination was developed by Shihābu’d-Dīn Suhrawardi al-Maqtūl (executed in Aleppo in 1191). He taught that all things exist as varying degrees of light, beginning with the Absolute Light; the Light of Lights who is God himself, Light then spreads out from God in ever weaker degrees (angels), each reflecting the light above it to those beneath it. The whole world of being is composed of innumerable angels of light spreading out in geometrical patterns.

Indian *Ṣūfīs* were influenced by Hindu mysticism and strayed far from Islamic orthodoxy in their speculations. The Naqshbandi order that was founded in the 13th century in central Asia to preserve true Islam from

the ravages of the Mongol invasions, succeeded in keeping them within orthodoxy.

Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624) taught that the unity of being was a subjective experience occurring only in the Şūfī's mind - not the Hindu concept of total annihilation of the personal in the infinite.

### **The Fifth Stage: The Rise of Şūfī Orders**

Şūfī orders began to form in the 12th and 13th centuries centering on a master founder and stressing companionship (*ṣuhbah* or *fellowship*) as essential to the Şūfī spiritual path.

This was the time of the terrible Mongol invasions when the 'Abassid Caliphate in Baghdad was overthrown. Sufism was one of the forces that helped prevent the downfall of Islam. It helped convert the conquerors and had a stabilising influence on the community during those troubled times. This period was actually *sufism's* golden age.

In its stages Sufism had been the prerogative of limited spiritual elite. From the twelfth century onwards it succeeded in involving the Muslim masses on a large scale in its network of Orders. Şūfī hospices, (Zāwiyas in Arabic, Khānaqas in Iranian, Ribāt in the Maghrib and Tekkes in Turkish) were founded all over the Muslim world from Morocco to Central Asia. The Shaykh of each order, a successor of the original founder, presided over the hospice. In this centre he taught his disciples (Murīdīs) and performed with them the Şūfī rituals of Dhikr and Sama' (remembrance of Allah and listening to voices and music).

There was an elaborate initiation ritual for the disciple when he was admitted into full membership (usually after three years). In this ceremony he received from the Shaykhs a special cloak (Khirqah) which symbolised poverty and devotion to God. Şūfīs had no rule of celibacy and most were married. The Orders received endowments from sympathetic rulers and rich citizens and some eventually became fabulously wealthy. Şūfī Orders had an extensive missionary outreach into Africa and into Southeast Asia where they are still very influential.

Each Order developed specific techniques for its *Dhikr* and *Samā'* used by its members to attain the ecstatic state. These rituals also had a social function, helping to unify people from widely varying backgrounds into a spiritual brotherhood.

The Orders were a unifying force in society who had members from all social classes to their Dhikr and Samā' ceremonies. They also drew these members to their joyous celebration of the anniversaries of the death of their founders ('Urs). They provided the masses with a spiritual and emotional dimension to religion which the hair splitting legalists could not supply.

The Orders also established trade and craft guilds and provided hospices for travelers and merchants which were located along the great trade routes (such as the famous Silk Road). Between the 13th and the 18th century most Muslims belonged to some *Ṣūfī* Tariqah.

### **Sixth Stage: The Decline and Revival of Sufism**

The *Ṣūfī* Orders grew steadily in wealth and in political influence, but their spirituality gradually declined as they concentrated on Saint worship, miracle working, magic and superstition. The external religious practices were neglected, morals declined and learning was despised.

In many areas *Ṣūfī* Orders succeeded in ruling the ignorant masses through a well organised and power hungry hierarchy. Their local saints were revered by the populace and worshipped after their death as mediators and intercessors. Pilgrim' flocked to the Saint's tombs, willing to pay for a share in the Shaykh's blessing (Barakah). The Orders became rich and powerful, and both politicians and theologians feared to oppose them and preferred to share in the profits.

Some sincere mystics still rose above the general decline. In Egypt, al-Sha'rānī (d.1565) lived at the time of the Ottoman conquest and was a serious and comprehensive scholar.

In Iran Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzi (d.1640) also known as Mulla Sadra was a great thinker who continued to develop the theology of illumination founded by Suhrawardi and integrated it with Ibn-'Arabī's Unity of Being. His impact is still felt on theologians and philosophers in Iran today.

In India in the 18th century, Shah-Wali-Allah of Delhi tried to integrate the various schools of *Ṣūfī* thought, whilst Mir Dard contributed much to the formation of Urdu poetry.

In Iran the Safavid order gained political power for two centuries (1499-1720). The Shaykhs of this order claimed descent from 'Alī and they were favourably treated by both the Mongol and the Timurid dynasties. Based in Ardabil in Azerbaijan the order became a local

power in the 15th century as it alternatively allied itself with and fought against the rulers of the Turkmen tribal confederations (Ak-Koyunlu, the White Sheep and Kara-Koyunlu, the Black Sheep).

The Turkmen Safavids of Anatolia and Azerbaijan were called Kizilbash (Redheads) from the red headgear they wore. In 1501 the SafavidShaykh Ismail I defeated the Ak-Koyunlu and took the old Mongolian capital of Tabriz where he proclaimed himself as Shah. Later he instituted TwelverShi'ism as the state religion of Persia and imposed it by force on the population. Many Sunni 'Ulama' and Shaykhs of other *Şūfī* orders were executed.

The Sunni Ottomans felt threatened by Shi'a Persia, and in the ensuing centuries of warfare between these two powers they evolved an aggressive Sunnism within their own Empire. The Sultan Selim I massacred all the Shi'ites that he could lay his hands on, and until modern times the Kizilbash of Anatolia and other Shī'ah's groups collectively called "Alevi" by the Ottomans were forced to exist as an underground movement. Alevi still number some eight million people in modern Turkey but they are officially ignored as non-existent by the authorities.

In Arabia the Wahabi puritan revival was extremely anti-*Şūfī*, seeing their practices and doctrines as later pagan additions to pure Islam.

Colonialism, nationalism and secularisation had a negative impact on Sufism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The modern revival of Islamic learning was accompanied by a violent reaction against the superstitions of sufism. It was accused as being the cause of the Islamic world's backwardness compared to the West. The two great Muslim reformers of the 19th century, Jama al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh, both campaigned successfully against *Şūfī* Orders helping to diminish their influence.

In Turkey, Kemal Atatürk abolished the *Şūfī* orders in 1925 and confiscated their lands and property. He saw them as corrupt and backward forces that hindered the modernisation of Turkish society. In other countries too post-colonial independent central government were often suspicious of the Orders. They were suspected of being cells of political unrest and revolution that held the loyalty of the masses by their superstitions, religious emotionalism and outmoded power structures.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Trace the stages of transition from asceticism to mysticism.

### 3.2 The Emergence of Sufism as the Integral Spiritual Path

Abu Nasr as-Sarrāj in his book, *Al-luma'* points out that the word *Ṣūfī* was already known in the days of Hassan al-Baṣrī, but what could not be ascertained is, at what time, in his ninety years of existence, was the term *Ṣūfī* first used. It was, however, certain that in the middle of the second/eighth century, the term was identified with some individuals such as Jabir IbnHayyan, a disciple of the sixth Imam, Ja'faru `s-Sadiq(d.148 A.H./765 C.E.) and Abu Hashim al-kufi(d.160 A.H./776 C.E.).

To identify the real emergence of Sufism, it is pertinent to examine a number of historical events, which took place in the third/ninth century. First is the tendency to confuse asceticism with the path. This arose from the incredible expansion of Islam through its conquests of vast regions of the known world which brought millions into the community. This magnificent Islamic conquest gave birth to hordes of sects trying to dispute the articles of faith, and as such ascetics, was getting out of hand, tending to be likened with the path and threatening the existence of its mystical nature. To distinguish the sages of the integral path from the drove of ascetic partisans, the former decided to call themselves *Ṣūfīs* and their discipline *ṭaṣawwuf*. So, the term *Ṣūfī* was exclusive to those who preached the total spiritual path with its aspect of love, action and knowledge. These *Ṣūfīs* were also putting on plain garments made of wool (Suf) imitative of the prophet. As days went by, however, it was clearly stated that the complete path was not only of action and love, but of knowledge. With this point the term *Ṣūfī* and its cognates applied to the followers of the spiritual way whether or not they sported wool.

Second is the establishment of great Sunni schools of jurisprudence, *madhāhib*, such as the great four Imams; Hanafi, Maliki, and the Hambali. None of these schools, regarded as the crystallisations of the *Sharī'ah* of Islam in its exoteric form, proceeded the term *Ṣūfī*. So exoterism gave birth to esoterism and consequently the appearance of sufism in the community.

The third factor, as pointed out earlier, the Shiites regarded their Imams as not only infallible in religious and political matters but also exclusive in the guardianship of the integral message of the faith reducing everyone else including masters of the *Ṭarīqah* to a peripheral function. Therefore, to dissect the concept of the path from the Shiites conception about their Imams, and ensure that the existence of *Ṭarīqah* was not dependent on the Imams alone, Sufism manifested itself as the bearer of the complete spiritual message of Revelation. So after the seventh and eighth Imams, Musa Qasim(d.183 A.H./799

C.E.) and Ali Rida (d.203 A.H./818C.E.) respectively, the interaction between the remaining Imams of Sufism and the *Şūfī* sages waned considerably. After the demise of the sixth Imam, Ja‘faru ş-Şādiq(d.148 A.H./765 C.E.), Sufism started ramifying the community with an unprecedented speed.

With the rise of Islamic philosophical schools, there was translation of Greek philosophical texts into Arabic, thus generating a lively interest in Greek wisdom which later encouraged an enquiry into the tenets of the faith. This singular factor, the faith in the series of factors pushed *Sufism* to distinguish itself from the rationalistic school. Put succinctly, the coming of philosophical thinking in Islam, which reduces knowledge to abstract, mental categories, lacking in spiritual vision of the Real (*‘al-Haqq*), sped up the realisation of Sufism as an embodiment of spiritual wisdom. And so, from the third to ninth century, the term *ma’rifah* (gnosis) started to push aside *‘ilm* (Knowledge) as the central focus of the path.

The fifth factor attributed to the public emergence of *Sufism* could be linked with the formalism of the *‘Ulama* which created the schools of jurisprudence and the irrational inference that the doctors of the law only could interpret the revealed message. These religious leaders of Islam never embraced the Umayyah Dynasty for reasons. However, the rise of *Abassid* regime saw the *‘Ulama* wielding tremendous power in the administrative, executive and judicial functions of the state, so much that they claimed exclusive monopoly of the contents of the Islamic revelation. Consequently, the *Şūfī* path had to assert itself and claim that it represented the contemplative messages of Islam, regarding exoticism as a dogmatic version of the faith.

Lastly in the series of the factors is the birth of *Sufism* as the authoritative representation of Islam to avoid total erasure of its spiritual teaching. This is because as days rolled by, the original synthetic message of action, love and knowledge as found in the *Qur’ān* and Sunnah of the Prophet was being reduced by limitations of men to a mere devotion or salvation through observance of the commandments and prohibitions of the law. The *‘Ulamas* were gaining followership because majority of the believers were not interested in treading the spiritual path.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Examine a number of historical events which took place in the third/ninth century that led to the real emergence of *Sufism*.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Here we conclude that despite religious and political attempts to eliminate them, the *Ṣūfī* Orders continued to exist, often underground. With the resurgence of fundamental Islam in the second half of the 20th century came also a *Ṣūfī* revival. Sufism still flourishes in North Africa, Egypt, Sudan, Iran, Central Asia, Pakistan, India and Indonesia, Senegal and Nigeria. In Soviet Central Asia their underground networks helped Islam survive until the reforms of the late eighties. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has allowed them to return to full public activity in the new republics.

*Sufism* today is still a formidable force in the Islamic world. It still touches and transforms the lives of Muslim people, giving them meaning and emotional support in a world that is increasingly unstable and full of economic woes, suffering and confusion.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit traces the stages of transition from asceticism to mysticism in the ninth century C.E. and also the historical events which took place in the third/ninth century are examined. The factors mentioned under this unit greatly contributed to the emergence of *Sufism* as the integral spiritual path.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Trace the stages of transition from asceticism to mysticism in the ninth century C.E.
2. Discuss the historical events which took place in the third/ninth century that led to the real emergence of *Sufism* as the integral spiritual path.

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## UNIT 2 HASAN ‘AL-BAŞRĪ (D.107/728) AND ABŪ HĀSHIM AL-KŪFĪ (D. 160/776)

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Hasan ‘al-Başrī (d. 107/728)
  - 3.2 Abu Hashim Uthman bn Sharik al-Kūfī (d. 160/776)
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This module is devoted to some early *Şūfīs* and their contributions towards the development of *Sufism*. The role they played in spreading mysticism to other parts of the Muslim world cannot be over emphasised. Mention is also made here of how some of them roamed from place to place seeking a way of living before they finally settled down to carry on with the activities of mysticism.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- list the names of some early *Şūfīs*
- identify the contributions of some early *Şūfīs* towards the spread of Sufism.
- discuss the early *Şūfīs* of Khurāsānian school
- identify special attributes and traits in some early *Şūfīs* that make their names feature conspicuously
- discuss the personality of Abu Hashim of Kufah (d.160/776).

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Hasan al-Başrī (d.107/728)

Among the early *Şūfīs*, the personality who constituted a link between Prophet Muhammad’s community and Umayyad rule was Hassan *al-Başrī* (d. 107/738). He met many Companions of the Prophet including, according to reports, seventy of those who fought at the Battle of Badr. Hasan al-Başrī was credited with the anecdote “I saw a *Şūfī* going round the Ka’bah, I offered him

something but he did not accept it.” The significance underlying this anecdote is that the word “*Ṣūfī*” was current in his days.

Hasanal-Baṣrī received his mystical guidance from ‘Ali bn AbiTalib about whom he was credited some reports of mystical significance. He later became a patriarch of Islamic mysticism, featuring prominently after ‘Ali bn Abu Talib in the chains of mystical authorities which link many *Ṣūfī* orders with Prophet Muhammad. He was reputed for his uncompromising piety and out-spoken condemnation of worldliness and corruption in high places. His preaching and exhortations, produced in beautiful sonorous Arabic influenced many pious souls in Iraq and many years later still echoed in many mystical verses. One of Hasanal-Baṣrī’s disciples founded a settlement of ascetically inclined people in Abadan on the Persian Gulf. That disciple was ‘Abd al-Wahid b. Zayd (d. 178/794) described as a typical representation of the virtues of wara’ (abstinence) and of permanent sadness. Through him Hasan’s ideals reached Syria where Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 215/830) and his disciple Ahmad b. Abu al-Hawārī (d. 237/851) were the best known members of the Basrian ascetic movement.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. Who was Hassan al-Baṣrī?
- ii. What are his contributions towards the spread of Sufism.

### 3.2 Abu Hashim Uthmān bn Sharīk al-Kūfī (d. 160/776)

Although As-Sarrāj al-Tūsi, the author of *Kitābu ‘l-Luma’* which has been regarded as one of the oldest, if not the oldest, *Ṣūfī* text book available to us, has established that the word *Ṣūfī* was current even since the pre-Islamic days of Arabia, the first to add the appellation al-*Ṣūfī* to his name among the mystics of Islam was Abu Hashim ‘Uthmān b. Sharīk of Kūfah (d.160/776). The Companions who were also considered mystics before Abu Hashim were not given the appellation because the honour of having Prophet Muhammad as their preceptor and the virtue of their being called *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions) were highest honour in the eyes of true believers. Those whom God bestowed with the distinction of Companionship of the Prophet, argues Al-Sarraaj, were considered to be the embodiment of all that was the noblest in the *Ṣūfīs* without their being called so.

Abu Hashim seems to be an obscure personality and so reports about him were scanty. Muhammad Jalal Sharaf, the author of *Al-Tasawwuf al-Islam fī Madrasat Baghdad* credits al-Jāmī as saying: Abu Hashim was of Kufah origin, lived in Syria, and was a

contemporary of SufyanThawrī and that he built the first *Şūfī* convent (khanaqah) in Ramlah. On the other hand, the celebrated hagiologist of the city of Baghdad, Al-Khatīb al-Baghdadī, states that Abu Hashim was of the earliest *Şūfīs* of Baghdad and a companion of Abu ‘Abdullah Al-Barathi.

The most quoted account of him by *Şūfī* scholars is Al-Jāmī’s statement “There were people before Abu Hashim who were famous for their asceticism (zuhd) piety (wara), trust in God (tawakkul), but it was Abu Hashim who first of all came to be called by the name of “*Şūfī*”. According to Sufyan al-Thawri, Abu Hashim knew the subtlety of riyā (showing off) more than anybody else. Abu Hashim once said that it was far easier to pull down a mountain with the help of a needle than to remove arrogance (kibr) from one’s heart. On seeing a judge coming out of the house of a minister, he remarked: “May God protect people from knowledge that does not lead to the benefit of the heart.” All these incidents point to the fact that, according to Abu Hashim inner transformation of the heart was the essence of Sufism.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Who was Abu Hashim of Kufah (d.160/776)?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We conclude that Sufism developed tremendously through some early *Şūfīs* and among them was Hasan al-Başrī who met many Companions of the Prophet including seventy of those who fought in the Battle of Badr. He was popularly known for his uncompromising piety and outspoken condemnation of materialism and corruption in high places. He was a guide to many who were known as best members of the Basrian ascetic movement.

Here, we further conclude that Abu Hashim of Kūfah (d.160/776) was a *Şūfī* who first of all came to be called by the name “*Şūfī*”. The Companions of the prophet were not given this appellation because they were considered to be embodiment of all that was in the *Şūfīs*.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit traces the personality of an early *Şūfī*, Hassan al-Başrī (d.107/728) and the contributions he made to the spread of asceticism and Sufism in Başrah. The unit also traces the personality of Abu Hashim of Kūfah as a *Şūfī* and a believer in the inner

transformation of the heart which, according to him, is regarded as the essence of mysticism.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the personality of a Ṣūfī leader, Hasan al Basri and mention his contributions to the spread of Sufism.
2. Who is Abu Hashim of Kufah?
3. What were his contributions to Sufism?

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## UNIT 3 KHURĀSANIAN SCHOOL, BISHR (THE BARE-FOOTED) AND AL-MUHĀSIBĪ

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Khurasanian School
  - 3.2 Bishr....
  - 3.3 Al-Muhāsibī
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Khurāsānian school witnessed some early mystics like Ibrahim bnAdham (d.164/780) Abdullah bn al-Mubāarak of Marw (d.181/787), Al-Fudayl b. Iyad(d.187.803), Bishr al-Hāfī (the barefooted) his disciple; Shaqīqal Balkhī (d.194/810), Abu MaḥfūzMa‘rūf al-Karkhī (d.200/816) and Ahmad b. Āṣim al-aAnṭākī of Syria. They all contributed in one way or the other to the development of the Khurāsānian Ṣūfī movement. In this unit the Khurasānian school is presented as well as some of its prominent members.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the early *Ṣūfīs* of Khurasanian school and their contributions to Sufism
- discuss the mystical life of Bishr (the bare-footed)
- examine the place of Hārith b. al-Asad al-Muhāsibī in the development of *Ṣūfī* theosophy.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Khurāsānian School

From Basrah and Kufah, the *Ṣūfī* movement spread to other parts of the Muslim world notably Khurāsān in the northeastern part of the Abbasid empire. Among the early mystics of this province was Ibrāhim bn Adham (d.c.164/780) whose tradition of conversion to mystical life has become a favourite theme in the writings of *Ṣūfī*

scholars. He roamed from place to place seeking a way of living until for a time he earned his daily bread working as a gardener in Syria and when his identity was discovered he went out to live in the desert. Ibrahim bn Ad-ham who is reported to have relinquished the princely life in Balkh, the Buddhist capital, for a mystic life has been credited with making the first classification of the stages of zuhd (asceticism). Thus, Junayd called him the “Key to Mystical Sciences” and he became in *Ṣūfī* tradition one of the proverbial examples of true poverty, abstinence and trust in God. His notion of celibacy (rahbāniyyah) that “when a man marries he embarks on a ship and when a child is born he suffers ship-wreck,” is often quoted in *Ṣūfī* poetry and prose writings. Perhaps, Ibrahim b. Adham was the first *Ṣūfī* caught with the practice of courting blame (malamoh) for ascetic motives. He later constituted a source of inspiration for the Chistiyyah *Ṣūfī* brotherhood in whose chain of authority his name features conspicuously.

The Khurāsānian *Ṣūfī* movement was continued by Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak of Marw (d. 181/787) whose fame rests on his book of abstinence (Kitābu `z-Zuhd) which has survived. The book is of some importance, not only for its being the earliest collection of Hadith relating to abstinence but also because it depicts the author as a *Ṣūfī* at work assembling evidence from the Prophetic Traditions for the justification of his teachings and practices.

Another very eminent early mystic of Khurāsānian origin was Al-Fuñayl b. Iyad who died in Makkah in 187/803. He was a magnanimous highway man between the cities of Abu Ward and Marw who, according to Hujwiri’s report, gave up banditry on hearing: “Is not the time yet to come unto those who believe, that their heart should humbly submit to admonition of God” (Q.57:15). Thereafter he devoted himself to the study of Hadith for many years in the city of Kūfah. He eventually became a typical representative of early Orthodox asceticism” and when he died ‘sadness was taken away from the world’. He disliked the company of people and has been reported as saying “when night comes, I am happy that I am alone, without separation from God, and when morning comes I get distressed because I detest the view of these people who enter and disturb my solitude. Although Fuñayl was married, he considered family life one of the greatest obstacles on the way of God. He was seen smiling only once in thirty years when his son died. The death of son was for him a sign of divine grace.

Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/810) is also worthy of mention among the early Khurāsānian *Ṣūfīs*. Recent research has shown that he was the first to define tawakkul (trust in God) as a mystical state (hal). This

Şūfī principle of tawakkul which implies negation of earning one's living was later taken up by his disciples Hatim al-Asamm (d. 237/851), and later by Hatim's disciple, Abu Turab al-Nakhshabī (d. 245/859). He was deeply concerned with what he called, "the light of pure love of God" thus coming close to Rabi 'ah al-'Adawiyah, the famous woman mystic of Basra who died only a few years before him (185/801).

Abu Mahfūz Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/816) was another celebrated *Şūfī* of Baghdad who had great impact on the development of the mystical thought of Islam. He was credited with the definition that Sufism consists of grasping the exoteric and esoteric realities (al-haqa'iq) and renouncing that which is in the hands of created beings (zuhd). He was among the first to speak about divine love (al-hubbu al ilahi) which he regarded as divine gift or God's decree (riña). He was reported as being a venerated saint having strong mystical power. His tomb at Karkh area of Baghdad on the West bank of the Tigris is still great resort for pilgrims. Al-Qushayrī related that people used to go there in order to pray for rain saying "the tomb of Ma 'ruf is a proven remedy (tiryāq mujarrab)". Of his disciples, the most famous was Sarī al-Saqatī, the Shaykh of Junayd of Baghdad. He in turn received training in tasawwuf from three renowned Şūfīs namely Bakr b. Khunays, Farqad al-Sanji and Dawud al-Tā'ī

One other great early Şūfī of Islam was Ahmad b. 'Āşim al-Antākī of Syria. He associated with Fuñayl b. 'Iyād and was a pupil of Abu Sulayman al-Dārānī, a Shaykh held in high honour by the Şūfīs. He is included in Al-Kalābadhi's work, al-Ta'arruf li Madhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf, in the list of *Şūfīs* who have written on conduct. Brockelmann, in his Supplement Band to the Gazette of Arabic literature, reported his work which has been considered as one of the earliest surviving treaties on taşawwuf. An explanation of the view held by some *Şūfīs* that the attitude of poverty is superior to wealth has been attributed to him. A brief dialogue between him and an unnamed disciple quoted by J. Arberry, portrays him as playing the role of a spiritual preceptor, a feature of Sufism which henceforth assumed increasing significance. He died in Damascus in 215/830.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss the Khurāsānian school of Sufism.

### 3.2 Bishr (The Bare-footed)

A contemporary of Al-anṭākī was Bishr b. al-Hārith al-Hāfī (d. 227/841). He was a disciple of Fuṣayl bn. ‘Iyān and like his preceptor the story of his conversion to the mystical life seems miraculous and fictitious. It is related that on the road, he found a piece of paper which he took with him because the name of God was written on it. The result of this action of his was that he had a dream promising the exaltation of his name. There upon, he repented from thievery and took to asceticism. Bishr is also said to have studied Hadith under Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and to have associated with Abu Hanīfah Nu ‘mān b. Thābit.

On being called a nuisance by a cobbler when he requested a strap for one of his sandals, he threw down the second sandal and vowed never to wear shoes. Thence, he acquired the cognomen al-Hāfī (the bare-footed). Later, he justified his action with Sūrah 71:19, which says “And God made the earth your carpet” saying that one did not step onto a King’s carpet wearing shoes.

Bishr was an Orthodox *Ṣūfī* who emphasised acceptance of the Laws of Islam; despised all forms of worldly ambition; preached poverty and patience and spoke against the avaricious. Destitute, he often lived on bread alone and sometimes he was starving. His abstemiousness went beyond mere abstention from dubious things by putting a limit to the unrestrained enjoyment of lawful things. ‘Only those who have erected an iron wall against inclinations’ say Bishr, ‘can feel the sweetness of service to God.’ He advises silence to those who derive pleasure from speaking and speech to those who enjoy being silent. Asked why he took to celibacy, his answer implied that self-mortification is compulsory while marriage is supergatory.

Although only a few dicta and some verses in form of zuhdiyyat (ascetic themes) have survived Bishr contributed his quote through his words in expanding the mystical shapings of Islam. Al-Kalābādhī mentions him among those who spoke on *Ṣūfī* sciences, who expressed their states, that he has a book entitled Kitab al-Zuhd. He was very knowledgeable and intelligent. At the latest point of his life in Baghdad, he turned away from Traditionist studies, buried his Hadīth writings and concentrated on *Ṣūfī* devotions.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the place of Bishr, the bear-footed in the tasawwuf practices.

### 3.3 AL-Hārith al-Muhāsibī

The role played by Al-HārithbnAsad al-Muhāsibī (d. 243/837) in the development of *Ṣūfī* theosophy cannot be over stressed. He was the first to introduce intellectual approach into *Ṣūfī* tradition and the first author whose preserved writings influenced to a large extent all subsequent works of mystical design in Islam.

Among his works is the epistle on divine love (al-Hubb al-Ilāhī) which is known to us through excerpts quoted by Abu Nuayn al-Isfahānī in his *HilyatalAwliya*. It is presented for your reading and digestion.

The structure of his works, especially his massive book, *al-Ri‘āyah li Huqūq* portrays him as a *Ṣūfī* teacher giving answers to some fundamental *Ṣūfī* questions put across to him either by his disciples or by his friends. Topics such as piety, repentance, fear, punishment, observance of divine rights and vices connected with thoughts of the heart and activities of the body are treated as sermons. *Ṣūfī* themes such as the soul, the training and conduct of the novice feature in his discourse at length. The work no doubt exerted a great influence on Al-Ghazali when writing his *Ihyā ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*.

His book *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā* or *al-Naṣāih* is autobiographical in character, and again, serves as prototype for Al-Ghazzālī’s book *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*. It relates the events which revolutionised his life and might have been in Al-Ghazzālī’s mind when he wrote his autobiographical *al-Munqidh*. The first thing that struck both of them was the division of the Muslim community into numerous sects and sub sects each claiming the monopoly of salvation. Secondly, they both devoted the greatest part of their lives to discovering the clear way and the true path amidst these divergences. They both met all kinds of people who claimed to know and follow the truth but in almost every case they expressed skepticism. Then it was made clear to them from God’s book and the Prophet’s practice and the consensus of the believers that the pursuit of desire blinds a man and so prevents him from seeking the right path and leads him astray from the truth. This conviction led Al-Muhāsibī to self-examination (*muhāsabah*-which brought him the title Al-Muhāsibī), self-discipline and moral transformation. He realised that the path of salvation consists in the fear of God, compliance with His ordinances, sincere obedience to Him and the emulation of His Prophet. Finally through God’s grace, he was successful in his search and came across people who were models of piety -the *Ṣūfīs*.

His *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* is highly imaginative in consonance with the title, presenting the terrors of death and treating eschatological

questions in an artistic manner which reaches its zenith with a splendid picture of the Beatific Vision.

As regards his epistle on divine love (al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī) it is only known to us through excerpts quoted by Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahānī in his voluminous work *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*. The excerpts which have been rendered into English medium show that it is again in reply to questions from some of his friends on the divine love.

Abu al-Qāsim Junayd al-Baghdādī stands out prominently among the several disciples of Al-Muhāsibī and Al-Muhāsibī's name appears in the silsilah (chain of spiritual authority) of many Ṣūfī orders that emerged later.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine the place of Hārith Muhāsibī in the development of Ṣūfī theosophy.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The *Ṣūfī* movement spread from Baṣrah and Kufah to other parts of the Muslim world like Khurāsān in the north eastern part of the Abbasid empire. It witnessed some early mystics mentioned above. Among them was the first *Ṣūfī* to define tawakkul (trust in God) as a mystical state and also the first to speak about divine love (al-hubbulillahi) which was regarded as divine gift and not an acquisition.

Among them also was Bishr (the Barefooted) who was a disciple of Fudayl b. Iyad and an orthodox *Ṣūfī* who emphasised acceptance of the Laws of Islam, despised all forms of worldly ambition, preached poverty and patience and spoke against extreme desire for wealth. He practised celibacy for the regard he had for self-mortification while he confessed that it is compulsory and marriage is supergatory.

Thus, we conclude that among the early Ṣūfīs who contributed to the development of *Ṣūfī* movement are those discussed in this module. Their contributions to the development of mysticism cannot be over-stressed. The *Ṣūfī* theosophist, Hārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibī was of the conviction that pursuit of desire prevents people from seeking the truth which led him to self examination (Muhāsabah) and led to his title 'Al-Muhāsibī Self-discipline and moral transformation.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discusses some early mystics of Islam and their contributions to the spread of mysticism from Baṣrah and Kufah to other parts of the Muslim world known as Khurāsān in the north-eastern part of the Abbasid Empire.

The unit traces the brief account of the *Şūfī* life-history of Bishr bn. al-Hārith al-Hāfi (d.227/841). He contributed to the orthodox Sufism by emphasising acceptance of the Laws of Islam and despising all forms of materialism.

A discussion of the *Şūfī* theosophist, al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī draws the curtain on the contribution of the early *Şūfīs* identified in the unit.

It is our belief that the mystics being discussed in this module will go a long way in broadening your memory as regards Sufism and the mystics who contributed to its development.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the Khurāsānian School of Sufism.
2. Give accounts of the *Şūfī* life-history of Bishr (the Barefooted).
3. Examine the place of al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī in the development of *Şūfī* theosophy.

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## **MODULE 3      EXTRANEOUS      INFLUENCE      AND CONFLICT BETWEEN THE JURISTS AND THE *ŞŪFĪS* IN THE THIRD/NINTH CENTURY**

Unit 1	Extraneous Influence and Conflict between the Jurists and the <i>Şūfīs</i> in the Third/Ninth Century
Unit 2	Two Forerunners of Pantheism in Sufism
Unit 3	Theorists of Sainthood and its Hierarchy
Unit 4	Hallāj's Tragic <i>Şūfī</i> Career
Unit 5	The Emergence of <i>Şūfī</i> Orders

### **UNIT 1      EXTRANEOUS INFLUENCE AND CONFLICT BETWEEN THE JURISTS AND THE *ŞŪFĪS* IN THE THIRD/NINTH CENTURY**

#### **CONTENTS**

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4.0	Conclusion
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#### **1.0    INTRODUCTION**

The ‘Ulamā’ and the spiritual shaykhs were living peacefully prior to the third/ninth century. Later the relations came to a sore point because of the pretensions of the *Şūfīs*. In this century, the two camps developed hatred as two types of Sufism emerged. In this module, the reason for the conflict is well elaborated.

#### **2.0    OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the reasons for the conflict which ensued between the doctors of the law and the *Şūfīs* in the third /ninth century
- discuss the development and extraneous influences in *Sufism*.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Developments and Extraneous Influences

The middle of the third/ninth century witnessed the emergence of different trends in the teaching of the *Şūfīs* and their approach to God. Religious experiences were expressed in various poetical and prose forms. These trends constituted the beginning of the transition, which gradually affected the characteristics of Islamic mysticism converting it from an attitude taken up as protest against the worldliness and corruption prevalent in some early Islamic societies into pantheistic theories and theosophical system. Extraneous influence became pronounced and the orthodox theologians considered Sufism heretical.

Junayd and Bistāmī Schools came to be distinguished as two contrasting tendencies taken after two men who were more notable than any others among their contemporaries Abu al- Qāsim Junayd of Baghdād (d. 298/910) and Abu Yazīd Tayfūr al-Bisṭāmī (d. 260/874). Junayd on the one hand represented the tendency towards trust in God, sobriety, orthodoxy, companionship, theism and guidance. On the other hand, Al-Bisṭāmī represented the way based on malamah (blame), sukr (intoxication), heterodoxy, solitudeness, monism and guidance under a spiritual shaykh. However, this division could not be taken seriously or thought of as schools of thought.

Members of these groups were very loose and mobile. They traveled widely seeking masters. Foundations came into being serving as centers and rest houses for the wandering *Şūfīs*. In Arab regions many were attached to frontier post of hostels called ribat. In Khurāsān, they were associated with rest houses called khanaqah while other made their sojourns at the Khalwah or zāwiyah of a spiritual leader.

Al- Maqdisī, a geographer who was writing around 364/975 gives some information about *Şūfī* groups. He asserts that in Shirāz, *Şūfīs* were numerous, glorifying Allah (yukabbirūn) in their mosques after Friday prayers and reciting blessings on the prophet Mohammad. "There was a khānaqa in Dabil (capital of Ameniian province) whose inmates were Gnostics (arifs) in the system of tassawuf living in the strictest poverty." On what he saw in the Syrian Jawlān heights, Al maqdisī says:

I met Abu Ishāq al-Ballūtī with forty men, all wearing wool, who had a place for worship where they congregated. I found out that this man was a learned jurist of the school of Sufyān Thawrī and that their sustenance consisted of ballut, a fruit, the size of date bitter, which is split, sweetened, ground up and then mixed with barley.

These were not *Ṣūfī* Order in the real sense of it, but groups of people possessing similar aspirations, who had become disciples of an honoured master with whom allegiance was purely personal. Thus, whilst some ribats and khanaqas which were supported by endowments (*awqāf*) became permanent, those which were based upon a particular master broke up after his demise.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss the emergence of different trends in the teaching of the *Ṣūfīs* and their approach to God in the third /ninth century.

### **3.2 Conflict between the Doctors of the Law and the *Ṣūfīs***

Prior to the third/ninth century, the relatively peaceful relations that existed between the 'Ulama' and the spiritual authorities, the Shayks, were already heading for the rocks because of the pretension of the *Ṣūfīs*. Therefore, the third/ninth century witnessed a great tension between the two camps. The hatred demonstrated by the doctors of the law or scholarstic theologians toward the *Ṣūfīs* was worsened by the mystics who provoked the religious chiefs. So, in this century, there were two types of Sufism: the "Sober: and the "drunk" The *Ulamā* had little apprehension about the sober *Ṣūfīs* who were seen to be receptive of the general prescriptions of the law. However; the later *Ṣūfīs* proved thorns in the flesh of the religious leaders.

Whereas the sober *Ṣūfīs* were regarded as the intellectual leaders of the path, the drunk *Ṣūfīs* were best exemplified by the renowned Abu Yazid' al -Bastāmī (d.261AQ.H./874 C.E.) who was identified with uttering ecstatic expression such as *Subhānī* (Glory be to me) in place of *Subhānallah* (glory be to God). Regrettably, the sober *Ṣūfīs* also at times utter these expressions stirring up anger among the 'Ulama' who already were searching for a showdown with Sufism, which came to them in the person of al-Hallāj.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss briefly the reasons for conflict between the doctors of the law and the *Ṣūfīs* in the third /ninth century.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We conclude here that in the middle of the third /ninth century, there was the emergence of different trends in the teachings of the *Ṣūfīs* and their approach to God. This eventually affected the characteristics of Islamic mysticism by converting it to pantheistic theories and

theosophical system. For this reason, the orthodox theologians started to consider mysticism heretical.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit traces the development and extraneous influences in the teachings of the *Şūfīs* and their approach to God. The different trends gradually affected the characteristics of Islamic mysticism and are later pronounced which led to the consideration of mysticism as heretical by the orthodox theologians.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Justify the aim that the middle of the third/ninth century witnessed the emergence of different trends in the teachings of the *Şūfīs* and their approach to God.
2. Discuss the reasons for the conflict between the Doctors of the law and the *Şūfīs* in the third/ninth century.

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## UNIT 2 TWO FORERUNNERS OF PANTHEISM IN SUFISM

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Thawbāh bn. Ibrahim Nicknamed Dhū `n-Nūn (d.264/861)
  - 3.2 Abu Yazīd Tayfūr al-Bisṭāmī (d.261/875)
  - 3.3 Basic Doctrines of Pantheism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The *Ṣūfīs* emphasis on the individual's personal relationship and contact with God led to increasing tension between themselves and orthodox Islamic theologians Muslim leaders of that time.

Some mystics went as far as completely reject the Islamic laws, while others indeed proclaimed pantheism by saying that God is "everything and in everything". This tension was brought to a head in the tenth century after al-Hallāj, a Persian mystic allegedly said that he was God. Al-Hallāj was accused of blasphemy and executed in 922 in Baghdad.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss some basic teachings of mysticism
- expatiate the claim that Dhu n-Nūn al-Miṣrī and Abu Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī were two forerunners of pantheists' tendencies in Sufism.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Thawbān bn. Ibrahim Nicknamed Dhū `n-Nūn (d.264/861)

This period began with the upper Egyptian Nubian born Thawbāh bn. Ibrahim nicknamed Dhu n-Nūn who was a contemporary of al-Muhāsibī. He was one of the most attractive and fascinating figures in

the history of Sufism during the period. To Al-Hujwīrī he appears as one of the most eminent of the hidden spiritualities. Starting his life with the study of religious science and transmitting traditions from Imam Mālik bn Anas, he was later described as the authority of his time in scholarship, piety and mystical state and culture. At a time he was accused of being a philosopher and alchemist and the genuiness of his mystical state was doubted. Many miracles were ascribed to him and in stranger legends he figured as a kind of thaumaturgy whom men and Jinn obeyed. When he died in 246/861, legends assert, it was written on his head, "this is the friend of God, he died in love of God, slain by God". Several sayings about love (*hubb*) and intimacy (*uns*) are attributed to him. According to tradition, he formulated for the first time the theory of *ma'rifah* i.e. gnosis or intuitive knowledge of God as opposed to *'ilm* i.e. discursive learning and knowledge. However, we would scarcely agree with Edward G. Brown who considers him the first to give to the early asceticism a definitely pantheistic bent.

Since he lived in Egypt where neo-Platonism and Hermitic traditions were in the air and was regarded by some of the contemporaries as a philosopher, he may well have been acquainted with some of Neoplatonic and Hellenistic ideas.

Dhu n-Nūn emphasised God's divine names "al-Muhyī and al-Mumīt" (He who bestows life and he who causes death). He described the state of the mystic thus: Nothing sees God and dies even as nothing sees God and lives, because His life is everlasting, and who ever sees Him remains in Him and is made everlasting. He thus developed the theories of *fanā* and *baqā* (annihilation and subsistence in God) out of the Qur'ānic context of these two divine names.

Dhu `n-Nūn like most of the mystics in Islam, often juxtaposed the divine qualities and names such as *Jamāl* and *Jalāl* (Eternal Beauty and Eternal Majesty) was coinciding in *Kamāl* (Eternal perfection).

There are two attractive aspects of Dhu `n-Nūn, these are his poetical talent and his wonderful command of Arabic. He composed small charming poems - a new development in Sufism although *Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyah* is credited with a few poetical exclamations. He praised the Lord in long hymn-like poems and popularised a kind of romantic mystical stories.

A detailed study of his life and work would reveal in all probability, many previously unknown aspects of his teachings and show whether he was indeed, the first "theosophist" among the *Şūfīs* or rather the hymnodist who rediscovered the glory of God.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Give a brief account of the mystical life of Thawbān bn. Ibrahim nicknamed Dhu n-Nūn (d.264/861).

### 3.2 Abu Yazīd Tayfūr al-Bisṭāmī (d.261/875)

One other forerunner of this trend was Abu Yazīd Tayfūr al-Bistami (d.261/875) from the small place known as Bisṭam in north-western Persia. In his early life, Abu Yazīd studied Islamic Jurisprudence and was reckoned among the followers of Abu Hanifah, but later on he turned to Sufism. His master in Sufism was said to be a Kurd and it is related that he associated with Abu 'Alī as-Sindī. For thirty years Abu Yazīd wandered in the desert of Syria leading a life of extreme asceticism and self-mortification with scanty food, scanty drink and scanty sleep. We notice a distinct tendency toward pantheism in his locutions and paradoxes, and by the process of *tajrīd* an attempt to divest himself to Allah's personal attributes and feel himself as well as others submerged in the divine unity. Abu Yazīd attained this state of unity by austere self mortification and self negation, by emptying himself of himself until he had reached at least for a moment the world of absolute unity where as he said, lover, beloved and love are one and where he himself is the wine, the wine drinker and the cup-bearer. It must have been in such a state of rapture and ecstasy that Abu Yazīd uttered the statement *Subhānī mā azama shānī* (Glory be to me, how great is my position!) which has become controversial.

Further, Abu Yazīd was the first *Ṣūfī* who gives a detailed description of his mystic experience and called it by the name of ascension (*mīrāj*). Al-Hujwīri refers to his teachings which he called *Tayfūrī* as characterised by *ghalabah* (rapture) and *sukr* (intoxication) and the account of his experience are given by 'Attār in passages of his *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī was a forerunner of pantheism. Discuss.

### 3.3 Basic Doctrines of Pantheism

#### God is everywhere

Sufism is like orthodox Islam, a monotheistic religion that teaches the doctrine of belief in the existence of one creator, God. However, Pantheists believe that God does not only reveal himself to man

through the earlier prophets and *Qur'ān*, but that signs of God could be found in the entire universe and also in man.

In the earlier development of Sufism, orthodox Muslims at times accused them of proclaiming pantheism (in other words, God is 'everything' and in 'everything'), therefore of deviating from Islamic doctrine. It was particularly some *Şūfīs'* pronouncement that the universe and God are in fact one, and that the individual could find 'God in himself', which disturbed orthodox Muslims.

In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, however, the Islamic thinker and theologian Muhammad al-Ghazzālī succeeded in defusing the threatening conflict by explaining that *Şūfī* statements about 'God in themselves' are only metaphors and should not be understood literally.

### **The nature of man**

Pantheist *Şūfīs* regard man as mystery of God who rules over creation on his behalf. They believe that man is a 'micro-cosmos' and that the human body is made from the four elements of the universe-fire, soil, air and water. The body has five external senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling) and five internal abilities (thought, imagination, doubt, memory and desire).

The purpose of all these senses and abilities is to serve the heart or 'divine spark' and cleanse it of carnal influences. The divine spark is mankind's invisible and immortal inner core that distinguishes us from animals and comes from God himself.

### **Purpose of life**

*Şūfīs* believe that the most important purpose of everybody's life is to have intimate, personal and emotional relationship with God. By laying down our own flesh, and through love for and devotion to God, we could grow internally until we attain *baqā'-billah-* a perfect state of eternal life in unity with God.

To attain this ultimate goal of an intimate relationship with God, the *Şūfī* follows a 'mystical path' or spiritual journey where prayer, fasting, meditation and a state called *hāl* are means to that final goal.

### **An-Nafs al-Ammārah- the stumbling blocks**

The greatest stumbling blocks in the individual's aspiration to come closer to God are called An-Nafs al-Ammārah, which is the product of

one's own ego. It causes, inter alia, fear, anger, lust, addiction, anxiety, boredom, depression and self-pity-and together these negative factors contribute to the fact that the individual does not experience God's proximity and presence in his or her life.

### **Sulūk - the spiritual journey**

The most important purpose of the *Şūfī's* spiritual journey through life is to purge the soul of the negative reaction that nafs has on it, so that the heart or divine spark could dominate all aspects of the individual's life. This journey usually takes many years and consists of three phases. First phase - the carnal souls - In the first phase of the spiritual journey the individual struggles to purge him or herself of fleshiness which causes one to be disobedient to God and enjoy evil. This phase is the most difficult and it usually also takes the longest to pass through.

The body is cleansed by keeping it clean and sexually pure. The tongue is purified by keeping it from gossip, defamation and lies. Thoughts are cleansed by restraining them from distrust, evil thoughts and negative thoughts about others. The soul is purified of fear, grief, hate, jealousy, pride, lust and greed.

Second phase - soul of rebuke when the individual has brought her or his carnal soul under control, the *Şūfī* enters second phase of the spiritual journey during which he or she is able to rebuke or admonish. The individual now listens to criticism of her or his heart - the divine spark -which helps him or her to lay aside all evil and compels him to deeds of love and goodness.

The third phase- the contented soul in the third and final phase of this spiritual journey the *Şūfī* attains a state where he or she lives in obedience and perfect harmony with God and his instructions. The soul is now content to be led by the heart- the divine spark- and is completely liberated from fear and grief. (This fear and grief are regarded as human attributes that prevent the individual from surrendering her or himself completely to God).

The *Şūfī's* life is now filled with love, grace, goodness, and a burning desire to help others, Not only is continuous prayer, fasting and meditation required to attain this phase, but the individual should also eat, sleep and talk less. Sometimes it is necessary that he or she withdraws entirely from people and activities and only focus on God.

## Rituals, practices and holy scriptures

Prayer, fasting and meditation are some of the most important practices in Sufism, Isolation and silence, which usually include refraining from all material pleasure, also play a role. Other than Islamic groups, some *Şūfīs* also use song, dancing and drums during their religious rituals.

To enhance continuous consciousness of God, *Şūfīs* practise dhikr, which means to 'remember God'.

It boils down to continuously repeating loud God's name or passages from the Qur'ān out loud.

Since Sufism is largely aimed at spiritual practice or experience, *Şūfīs* do not lay as much emphasis on the importance and role of the Holy Scriptures as other Islamic groups do. Even so, the Qur'ān is recognised by *Şūfīs* as a Holy Scriptures and God's most complete revelation to man.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss some basic teachings of Sufism.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Thus we conclude that *Şūfī* beliefs are based firmly in orthodox Islam and the text of the Qur'ān although a few *Şūfī* teachers have strayed too close to monism or pantheism to remain within the orthodox fold.

Tawhīd is rich in meaning for mystics; it has been interpreted by some as meaning that nothing truly exists but God or that nature and God are but two aspects of the same reality. The love of God for man and the love of man for God are also very central to Sufism and are the subjects of most Islamic mystical poetry and hymns.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit traces some basic teachings of Islamic mysticism like God is everywhere, the nature of man, purpose of man, the spiritual journey, ritual practices and the attitude of *Şūfīs* toward the Holy Scriptures. Also the two forerunners of pantheism in Sufism i.e. Dhu - Nūn and Yazīd al- Bişāmī, are discussed.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are the basic teachings of Sufism? Explain?
2. Who are the two forerunners of pantheism in Sufism? Discuss each of them.

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## **UNIT 3 THEORISTS OF SAINTHOOD AND ITS HIERARCHY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Ahmad bn Isa al-Kharrāz
  - 3.2 Junayd, the Patriarch of Orthodox Sufism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Ahmad bn Isa al-Kharrāz (d.286/899), whose mystical hints (*ishārāt*) seems to have influenced Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, became reputed through his work *Kitābu ṣ-Ṣidq*. Tradition credits him with being one of the first Ṣūfīs to discuss the theory of *fanā* and *baqā*" (annihilation and subsistence). Kharrāz importance also lies in his definition of *tawhīd* in which some of Junayd’s and Hallaj’s ideas may be anticipated. "Only God has the right to say "I" will not reach the level of gnosis." That is why Shaytān was punished for he said "I" am better than Adam, "and that is why the angels have to prostrate themselves before Adam for they had claimed "We" are higher than he. Kharrāz goes even further by showing that this divine "I" is ontologically connected with the divine name "al-Ḥaqq" (the reality); this seems to be the nucleus of Hallāj's famous phrase *Ana ‘l-ḥaqq*. (I am the Truth).

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the theorists of Sainthood and its Hierarchy
- explain why Junayd was regarded as the pivot in the history of Islamic Mysticism.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Ahmad bn Īsā Al-Kharrāz**

Kharrāz was writing a treatise on sainthood at almost the same time that Sahl al-Tustarī (d.283/896) was discussing the problem of

Sainthood and Tirmidhi (d.297/892) was working on his book *Khatm al-Wilāyah* (The Seal of Sainthood). This coincidence indicates that during the last two or three decades of the third/ninth century, the necessity for a systemisation of mystical thought was being felt and that the problem of sanctity and sainthood was one of the central themes at the time.

Sahl's theories on saintliness are highly interesting; he spoke of a pillar of light formed from the souls of those who are predestined to become saints. It was the time in both *Ṣūfī* and Shī'ah circles that theories about the pre-existence of the light of Muhammad were being developed.

Tirmidhī was a younger contemporary of Sahl, surnamed al-Hakīm, (the philosopher) which indicates the fact that through him Hellenistic philosophical ideas were penetrating Sufism. Tirmidhī's contribution to the *Ṣūfī* thought is mainly the theory of saints in which he developed the terminology of sainthood that has been used since that time. The leader of the *Ṣūfī* hierarchy is the Quṭb (pole or pivot or Ghawth help or succor). The saints govern the universe, in certain groups of three *abdāl* (substitutes) four *awṭād* (pillars), seven *umanā* (secretaries), forty *nujabā* (nobles), or three hundred *nuqabā* (chiefs), all being entrusted with various duties in maintaining the world order.

Like the Prophets whose seal is Muhammad, the saints have their seal, the last and culminating figure in the hierarchy. The degrees of sainthood as sketched by Tirmidhī are related to the degrees of illumination and gnosis reached by the person concerned. It is not a hierarchy of love. With him the emphasis on gnosis (*ma'rifah*) becomes more explicit. He thus prepares the way for later theosophic speculations.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Who was Ahmad bn Isa Kharrāz?

### 3.2 Junayd, the Patriarch of Orthodox Sufism

The undisputed master of the *Ṣūfīs* of Baghdad was Abu 'l-Qāsim Junayd, who has been considered the pivot in the history of early Islamic mysticism. The representatives of the divergent mystical school of Islam and modes of thought refer to him as their master to the extent that the chains of later *Ṣūfī* Orders almost invariably go back to the prophet Muhammad through him.

Like many other *Şūfīs*, Junayd came from Iran. He was born in Nihawand, settled in Baghdad and studied Shafī 'ite law. In Sufism, his uncle Sarī al-Saqaṭī educated him. Muhasibi's psychological insight seems to have impressed him and the influence of Kharrāz on his formation is apparently greater than has been proved at the moment.

Faithful to Muhāsibi's tradition, Junayd sees in Sufism a way of constant purification and mental struggle. The mystical life meant to him the permanent striving to return to one's origin, that origin that was in God and from which everything precedes so that, eventually, the mystic should reach the state in which he was before he was. That is the state of primordial covenant (Q7:171), when God was alone and what is created in time was not yet existent. Only then can man realise perfect tawhīd and witness that God is one from eternity to eternity.

The tremendous majesty of God in His unity permeates every thought of Junayd. He feels that majesty whose will must be accepted in every moment of life, and before whom the servant becomes nothing, through constant obedience, worship and permanent recollection of His name until he is annihilated and is no longer separated from the object of his recollection, God. Like other mystic leaders, Junayd spoke about the different stations and stages in the *Şūfī Path* (Ṭarīqah). He praised poverty (*faqr*), which is an ocean of affliction, yet its affliction is completely glory. Mystical love means, to him, that the quality of the Beloved replaces the qualities of the lover.

A major aspect of Junayd's teaching is his emphasis on the state of sobriety (*sahw*) as contrasted to the state of intoxication (*sukr*). Abu Yazīd preferred mystical intoxication because it obliterates the human attributes and annihilates man completely in the object of adoration taking him out of himself. Junayd and his followers, on the other hand, consider the second sobriety the higher and preferable state; after the ecstatic intoxication man becomes once more aware of himself in the "life in God". When all his attributes transformed and spiritualised, are restored to him. *Fanā'* (annihilation), is not the ultimate goal, but *baqā'* "remaining" in new life in God.

Junayd refined the art of speaking in *ishārāt*, subtle allusion to mystical truth, a trend attributed first to Kharrāz, that became characteristic of later *Şūfī* writings. His epistles and short treatises (*Rasā'il*) are written in a cryptic style, their language is so dense that they are difficult to understand for one not acquainted with his peculiar way of thinking. He died in 298/910.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Why was Junayd regarded as the pivot in the history of Islamic Mysticism?

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Meanwhile, on the whole, the *Ṣūfīs* were as good Muslims as the rest of the community in Baghdad, Khurāsān, Egypt or Syria. They did not reject religious laws but rather added to it additions that made more exerting demands on their personal lives. Many *Ṣūfīs* followed normal professions to earn their livelihood and the mystical practices occupied only parts of their time. After they had gained fame as mystical leaders, some left their original profession and attracted a few disciples. Others were trained as theologians, traditionists or jurists in one of the four schools of Islamic law.

Still, by the end of the fourth/tenth century, it was considered necessary to prove the perfect orthodoxy of *Ṣūfī* tenets. This is because philosophical Sufism had all along been viewed with suspicion and the claim of some *Ṣūfīs* that they possessed the power to work miracle or attain union with the divine essence or that they possessed Divine Love exclusively, had been suspected or resented by the orthodox theologians and it had sometimes provoked a reaction such as that of which Al-Hallāj and his friend Ibn al- ‘Aṭā had fallen victim. Even without their tragic death one might well have felt that the path of Sufism had to be made accessible to people who could never reach the abysses of mystical experience Hallaj had reached or who could not be compared in sobriety to al-Junayd or in burning love and paradoxical speech to al-shibli. In order to meet this requirement a number of books were written almost simultaneously by some authorities.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit focuses the theorists of sainthood and its hierarchy. It discusses Ahmad bn Īsā al-Kharrāz whose mystical hints seem to have influenced Abu ‘l -Qāsim al-Junayd al-Baghdādī. He has been credited with having been one of the first *Ṣūfīs* to discuss the theory of annihilation and subsistence (*fanā* and *baqā*). Also, we discuss the undisputed master of the *Ṣūfīs* of Baghdad, Abu ‘l-Qāsim Junayd who was the pivot in the history of early Islamic mysticism.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Who was Ahmad bn Īsā al-Kharrāz?
2. Why was Junayd regarded as the pivot in the history of early Islamic Mysticism?

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## UNIT 4 HALLĀJ'S TRAGIC *ŞŪFĪ* CAREER

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Hallāj's tragic *Şūfī* career
  - 3.2 Shiblīs paradoxes
  - 3.3 Reconciliation between Exoterism and Esoterism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The formalistic nature that the Islamic tradition assumed was one of the reasons a cross section of the *Şūfīs* spoke scandalously as pointed out in their ecstatic expression. This singular factor, more than anything else, encouraged the exoteric 'Ulamā' to want to lay hands on the entire tradition including the path. If they had succeeded, they could have emerged as religious despots without any challenge to their authorities. This crisis was to be resolved by the 'Ulamā' of Baghdad in the year 309/922 with the execution of Al-Hallāj, the great Persian *Şūfī*.

The life and death of al-Hallāj showed everyone that there was more to Islam than the prescription of the 'Ulamā'. His entire life as a *Şūfī* was a direct celestial unveiling of the priority and eminence which the spirit has over the law and its guardians.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- give a brief account of al-Hallāj's tragic *Şūfī* career
- discuss the contribution that ash-Shibli made to Sufism
- discuss the reconciliation of exoterism and esoterism .

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Hallāj's Tragic *Şūfī* Career

In Husayn bn Manşūr al-Hallāj, we find a man who removed the veil of unitive experience publicly with incredible audacity and whose name became in the course of time, symbol of the suffering of lovers of God.

Born about 244/854 in the Persian province of Faris, he grew up in Wāsīt and Tuster, attached himself to Sahl-Tustārī and later to 'Amr al-Makkī, both of whom he left without permission. Then he sought association with Abu l-Qāsim Junayd who would not receive him.

He performed pilgrimage thrice under severe ascetic circumstances. In 291/905 he embarked upon a preaching tour in Hind, Sind, Khurāsān and Turkistan; a tour which his adversaries interpreted to mean his desire to learn magic. The external contact he made during the preaching tour drew suspicion upon him in the eyes of Baghdad government. His supposed contacts with the Carmathian rulers of Bahrayn, northern Sind and Multan, was even a greater cause of suspicion.

On his return, he resumed preaching in public discussing unusual intensive love of God, excessive asceticism and claiming miraculous powers. Soon, Muhammad bn Dawud, the founder of the Zahirite school of Islamic Law denounced him inciting other scholars to join in attacking a man who claimed to have reached "reached union with his divine beloved".

Apart from the problem of his mystical love, other political and social problems were at stake in the tragedy of al-Hallāj. He was a friend of Naṣr, al-Qushūrī, the chamberlain who favoured better administration and fairer taxation, dangerous ideas at that time when even the caliph was almost powerless and the vizier, though all-powerful for a short period, changed frequently. The Shi'ah groups who supported the vizier Ibn al-Furāt considered Hallaj as dangerous as the orthodox wing surrounding the pious vizier, 'Ali bn Isa. All of them were afraid that the effects on the people of spiritual revival might have repercussions on the social organisations and the political structure.

Although at the end of 300/912, Al-Hallāj was apprehended, eight years passed before the vizier could obtain Hallāj's death sentence from the legal authorities in Iraq which was carried out on 26 March 310/922.

Hallāj's work, Kitāb al-Tawāsīm, probably written during his imprisonment, contain eight chapters, each of them called Tāsīm, after the mysterious letters at the beginning of Sūrah 27 of the Qur'ān which are interpreted to indicate majesty and power. This book deals with the problem of divine unity and with prophet logy. It contains a discussion between God and Shayṭān, in which the latter refuses to obey the divine order to prostrate himself before Adam, and true monotheist that he is, caught in the dilemma between God's eternal will that nobody should worship any being save Him and His explicit order to

fall down before Adam, a created being. This situation has sometimes served to explain Hallaj's own dilemma. Portions of the book are beautiful hymns in veneration of the prophet Muhammad.

The sentence, *Ana l- Haqq* (I am the Truth), led many mystics to believe that Hallāj was a pantheist, conscious of the unity of being. Hallāj's theory however has been proved to maintain absolute transcendence of God beyond the dimension of created things i.e. *qidam* (eternity that distinguishes him from the *hadath*, what is created in time). However in real moment of ecstasy, the uncreated spirit may be united with the created human spirit, and the mystic then becomes the living personal witness of God and may declare "*Ana l- Haqq*" (I am the Truth i.e. God). According to Hallāj and his like, God's nature contains human nature within it. This human nature was reflected in the creation of Adam who became *huwa huwa* (exactly He). This theory has also led critics of Al-Hallāj to the assumption seemingly enhanced by Hallāj's use of Christian terms *lāhūt* (divine nature) and *nāsūt* (human nature).

Hallāj's poetry is a very tender and intense expression of mystical yearning. Its language is chaste; the favourite symbols are the wine, the cup, the crescent, and the goblet of the intoxicating mystical joy, the virgin, the soul-bird and similar images. He sometimes uses cabalistic wordplays and relies on the secret meaning of the letters of the alphabet; alchemist expressions are also found at times.

All of his verses are weighted with deep theological and mystical meaning and filled with enigmas, but so great is their beauty that they can be enjoyed even by those who do not care for religious interpretation but do enjoy Arabic poetry at its best.

Fragments of his commentary on the Qur'ān are preserved in the *Tafsīr* of Al-Sulamī (d.421/1021) one of the leading authorities on the mystical of his time. His work *Riwāyāt*- collected by Ruzbihān Bāqilī in the late 6<sup>th</sup> /12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. -consists of tradition which are introduced not only by a chain of human transmitters, but also by a chain going back to cosmic and supernatural powers, to stars and sun to angels and spirits. His personal realisations of religious truth perhaps led him to the doctrine of *isqāt al-farāid*, i.e. that certain religious duties like Hajj can be exchanged for other acts that are useful at the particular moment. Such ideas, of course, were not acceptable to the Muslim generality.

Hallāj represents the culminating point of early Sufism, but the mystical impetus of the early Baghdad school continued in a number of Ṣūfīs who lived shortly after him and represented again different aspects of

Sufism. Hallāj's most faithful friend, Abu 'al-Abbās b. 'Atā with whom he had exchanged some beautiful poetical letters was killed in connection with hallaj's execution and thus paid for his friendship with his life.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss al-Hallāj's tragic *Şūfī* career.

### **3.2 Shiblīs' Paradoxes**

Another friend of Hallāj, Abubakr Shiblī, whose account shall close this study of *Şūfī* personalities of this period, had been a high governmental official before resigning to the mystical life.

When he died in 334/945 at the age of 86, he left behind a considerable number of sayings and paradoxes. He survived Al-Hallāj by 23 years, and tried to express some of his ideas in more comprehensive language. Although spared the fate of Al-Hallāj, his strange behaviour resulted from time to time in his confinement in an asylum.

The sayings and short delicately expressed verses attributed to Shiblī show his overwhelming feeling of God's unity and of the love that removes from the heart all but the beloved or consumes all but the will of the beloved. He is reported to have said when mentioning Muhammad's name in the *ādhān* (call to prayer) "If thou hast not ordered it, I would not mention another name besides Thee." He regarded as infidel and polytheist anyone in whose heart, there is room for Angels Jibril and Mikā'il, for according to him, the prophet's tradition states that in the moment of closest proximity there is no room even for Jibril who is pure spirit; lover and beloved are alone without separation.

He alludes to the power of *himmah* i.e. the high spiritual ambition or power that is strong enough to protect those who believe in the master by telling his disciples to go away and to know that wherever they might be they were under his protection being in perfect union with God. Some Saints of later times such as 'Abd al-Qādir claimed the power of *himmah* in a similar manner.

Another story related about Shiblī is typical of the so called *munāqarah* "quarrel" of Saints. He threw one of his fellow mystics into the river Tigris saying, if he is sincere; he will be saved, like Prophet Musa, if not he will be drowned, like pharaoh. A few days later he was challenged by that very mystic to take live charcoals from an oven without being hurt.

*Shiblī* is reported as having exclaimed, fire of hell will not touch me and I can easily extinguish it". This mystical quality has been interpreted to mean that "in the world, those who have been drawn close to God are burnt by fire of pre-eternal love, so that it is for them that God ordered the fire to be "cool and pleasant" in Q. 21:69, as He did for Prophet Ibrahim. In another saying, *Shibli* makes a similar claim that hell fire could not burn even a single hair on his body; a phenomenon interpreted as manifestation of *iltibas* i.e. the envelopment of human being in the light of pre-eternity.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Who was Abubakr al-Shibli and what contribution has he made to Sufism?

### 3.3 Reconciliation between Exoterism and Esoterism

The birth of the fourth/tenth century saw Sufism networking the Muslim world and was likened to the *ṭarīqah*. The limit of the Islamic exoterism and fragility of its representative was manifested in the collision between the doctors of the law and Sufism. This really showed that exoterism could not exist independent of all spiritual influences of *tasawwuf*. The reconciliation between the law and the path is seen in the *Ṣūfī* manual, *Qūtu 'l-qulūb* (The Nourishment of Hearts) authored by Abu Tālib al-Makkī (d.380/990). That al-Makki's reconciliation between the two was not definitive is clear from the later reconciliation by al-Ghazzālī (d.505/111) followed by that of Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī. (d.561/1166) in his book *al-Ghunyah*(The self sufficient).

The martyrdom of al-Hallāj brought to a climax the conflict between the doctors of the law and the *Ṣūfī* adepts. This calls for not only a reconciliation of the *Sharī'ah* and the *ṭarīqah* but a record of the names and sayings of the *Ṣūfī* saints relevant to transmissions of *tasawwuf*; This gave the intelligent and pious Muslims the opportunity to discern the actual authorities in the esoteric tradition of Islam. Muhammed al-Kalabādhī (d.385/995) did this to a near perfection in his book titled *Kitābu t-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (The presentation of the Doctrine of the *Ṣūfīs*). Its simplicity and conciseness made it acceptable to a vast majority of Muslims.

In the fifth/eleventh century, al-Ghazzālī had to put all these different *Ṣūfī* concepts together in a well defined manner. After his enlightenment in Sufism, he wrote his famous treatise, *Ihyā ulūmi 'd-dīn* (The revival of the Religious Sciences) where he anchored the Islamic religious on the *Sharī'ah* and the *Tarīqah*. After al-Ghazzālī

had left the scene, it became extremely difficult for knowledgeable Islamic scholars to reject the path without betraying their dearth of knowledge of the spiritual content of the Islamic message.

Therefore, later critics of Sufism could only criticise particular Şūfīs or some of their teachings and not the Tarīqah itself.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss reconciliation between Exoterism and Esoterism.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We conclude here that the tragic Sufi career of Hallāj's who was a great Persian *Şūfī* removed the veil of unitive experience publicly with incredible audacity and his name became a symbol of suffering lovers of God. Another friend of Hallāj, al-Shiblī is also mentioned in this unit. He had been a high governmental official before resigning to mystical life. When he died at the age of (86), he left behind a numerous number of sayings and paradoxes.

Lastly, the reconciliation between the law and the path is seen in the *Şūfī* manual, *Qūtu'l-Qulūb* (The Nourishment of Hearts) by Abu Tālib al Makkī (d.380 1990)

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, al-Hallāj, the great persian *Şūfī* and his friend, al-Shiblī are mentioned as symbols of suffering lovers of God. Also, reconciliation between exoterism and esoterism is discussed therein.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Give the account of al-Hallāj's tragic *Şūfī* career.
2. Discuss Abubakr al-Shiblī and his contribution to sufism.
3. Discuss the reconciliation between the law and the path.

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## UNIT 5 THE EMERGENCE OF ŞŪFĪ ORDERS

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Foundation of Şūfī Convents
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 5th/11th century was a turning point in the history of Islamic mysticism. The overthrow of political power enjoyed by the Shi‘ites in the dynasties of the Buwayhids in Persia and Fatimids in North Africa was brought about by the Turkish Seljuk rulers from Central Asia. They took control in Baghdad from the Buwayhids in 447/1055. In the Maghreb and Egypt the power of Fatimids weakened until finally they were overthrown by the Kurd, Şalaḥ-Dīn -the Ayubid in 567/1175. The new rulers were upholders of Sunnism and opponents of Shi‘ism. One of the reforms they introduced was the re-organisation of the madras system from being private schools, circles around learned masters of official institutions. In these institutions emphasis was placed on the religious sciences while the profane sciences which had flourished equally under the early ‘Abbasids and Shi‘ite dynasties were discouraged or banned.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the emergence of Şūfī Orders
- differentiate between *Silsilah* and *Khānaqah*.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Foundation of Şūfī Convents

Since religious spiritualities could not be confined within the madāris alone it was to the credit of the Turks that they encouraged the foundation of Şūfī convents, endowed them liberally and imposed a

degree of control over them. By the end of this century, the change in the attitude of the theologians and the Fuqahā' i.e. jurists, had been brought to a conclusion by Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazzālī (d. 504/1111) and the association of Sufism in its Khānaqa form with the official patronage of Nūru `d-Dīn, Ṣalāhu-`d-Dīn and their lieutenants and successors had made Ṣūfī associations respectable. Then the development of the inner Islam started in earnest.

During the period under discussion certain personalities became founders of mystical Orders (Turuq, sing; ṭarīqah.). This happened when a centre or circle became focused on one Shaykh and turned into an Order designed to perpetuate his name, type of teaching, mystical exercises and rule of life. Each such tarīqa was handed down through a continuous chain (silsilah) or mystical Isnād. The derivative shaykhs become successors after him and therefore spiritual heirs of the founder. The link of a person with this silsilah acquired an esoteric characteristics, an initiation whereby the seeker swore an oath of allegiance to the founder or his deputy and received in turn the secret wird (litany). Ibn Khallikan describes fuqara' having such a link with Ahmed al-Rufa'ī (d. 575/1182) whose silsilah is probably the earliest consciously maintained chain.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the foundation of Ṣūfī convents.

### 3.2 The Khānaqah

By the 6th /12th century, many Khānaqas had become rich and flourishing establishments and Ibn Jubayr who traveled around 576/1183 in the Near-East in Salah-Dīn's time, writes of Damascus.

Ribāts for Ṣūfīs, which here go under the name of Khawāniq, are ornamented palaces through all of which flow streams of water, representing as delightful a picture as anyone could wish for. The members of this type of Ṣūfī organisation are really the kings in these parts, since God has provided for them over and above the material things of life, freeing their minds from concern with the need to earn their living so that they can devote themselves to His service. He has lodged them in palaces, which provide them with a fore taste of those in paradise. So these fortunate, the favoured ones among the Ṣūfīs, enjoy through God's favour the blessings of this world and the next.

These ṭarīqahs never developed sectarian tendencies. Their founders maintained careful links with the orthodox institution and did not

repudiate the formal duties of Islam. The difference between the *ṭarīqahs* lay in such aspects as loyalty to the head of the Order and belief in a particular power-line, in types of organisations, method of teaching, practices and rituals. They differed considerably in their inner beliefs but their link with orthodoxy was guaranteed by their acceptance of the law and ritual practices of Islam.

How the process of ascription came about is not clear, pupils had normally been tracing or ascribing their *madhhab* or *ṭarīqahs* to their revered teachers for he was their guarantee of validity and training, but so far, this had been primarily a direct personal link. 'Alī Hujwīrī enumerates twelve schools of Sufism when he asserts:

The whole body of aspirants to Sufism is composed of twelve sects, two of which are condemned (*mardūd*) while the remaining ten are approved (*maqbul*). The latter are the *Muhāsibīs*, the *Qassārīs*, the *Tayfūrīs*, the *Hafīfīs* and the *Sayyārīs*. All these assert the truth and belong to the mass of orthodox Muslims. The two condemned sects are firstly the *Hulūlīs*, who derive their name from the doctrine of incarnation (*hulūl*) and incorporation. (*imtizāj*), and with whom are connected, the *Salīmi's* sect of anthropomorphists, and secondly, the *Hallājīs* who have abandoned the sacred law and have adopted heresy, and with whom are connected the *Ibāhatīs* and the *Fārisīs*.

But these are theoretical ways, none of which developed into *silsilahtariqah*. Their teachings were modified by their pupils in accordance with their own mystical experience.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the *Khānaqahs* in the 6th /12th century and their roles.

### 3.3 The *Ṭarīqahs*

*Dhū n-Nūn al-Miṣrī* (d. 246/861?), though continually quoted in support of mystical thought, is missing from the *Isnāds*. Similarly, *Ibn Maṣṣūr AlHallāj* (d. 309/922) is not normally found in them, whereas *Al-Biṣṭāmī* is found in the chains of some orders.

*Taqiyyu 'd-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Wāsitī*, author of *Tiryāq almuhibbīn*, writing around 721/1320 when the Orders were fully founded says that there were two distinctive ancient *Sanads* to which all the then existing lines went back, the *Junaidis* and the *Bistamis* and two extinct lines, the *Bilaliyyah* and the *Uwaisiyyah*.

The most significant of the ṭarīqahs were the Suhrawardiyyah, attributed to Abu Najīb Al-Suhrawardī (d. 562/1168) but developed by his nephew, Shihūbu `d-Dīn Abū Hafṣ `Umar (d.632/1234); the Qādiriyyah attributed to `Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d.561/1166), the Rifā`iyyah deriving from Ahmad al-Rifa`ī (d.576/1182), the Yāsawiyyah of Ahmad al-Yāsawī (d. 561/1166); the Kubrawiyyah of Najmu `d-Dīn Kubrā (d.619/1221), the Chistiyyah of Mu`inu l-Din uhammad Chishtī (d.634/1236) mainly confined to India; the Shādhiliyyah, deriving from Abu Madyan Shuayb (d.591/1197), centred in Egypt; the Mawlawiyyah inspired by the Persian Ṣūfī Poet, Jalālu `d-Dīn al-Rūmī (d.672/1273) which was restricted to Anatolia in Turkey, and the Central Asian Naqshabandiyyah, a mystical order which owes its initial insights to Yusuf al-Hamadhānī (d.533/1140) and `Abdu I-Khālīq al-Ghujdawānī (d.573/1179), but was eventually associated with the name of Bahā`u `d-Dīn Al-Naqshabandī (d.791/1389).

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

There were many other small independent lineage Orders which had only restricted local influence, but those mentioned above, together with the Western Turkish Khalwatiyyah were the foundation lines sponsoring distinctive ways of mystic thought and spiritual exercises. Through the ṭarīqahs, the Ṣūfī message was communicated to the Muslim world.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit traces the emergence of Ṣūfī orders. The roles of the Khawaniq and the ṭarīqahs including their founders are also discussed.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Trace the emergence of Ṣūfī Orders. Give names of the major ones.

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