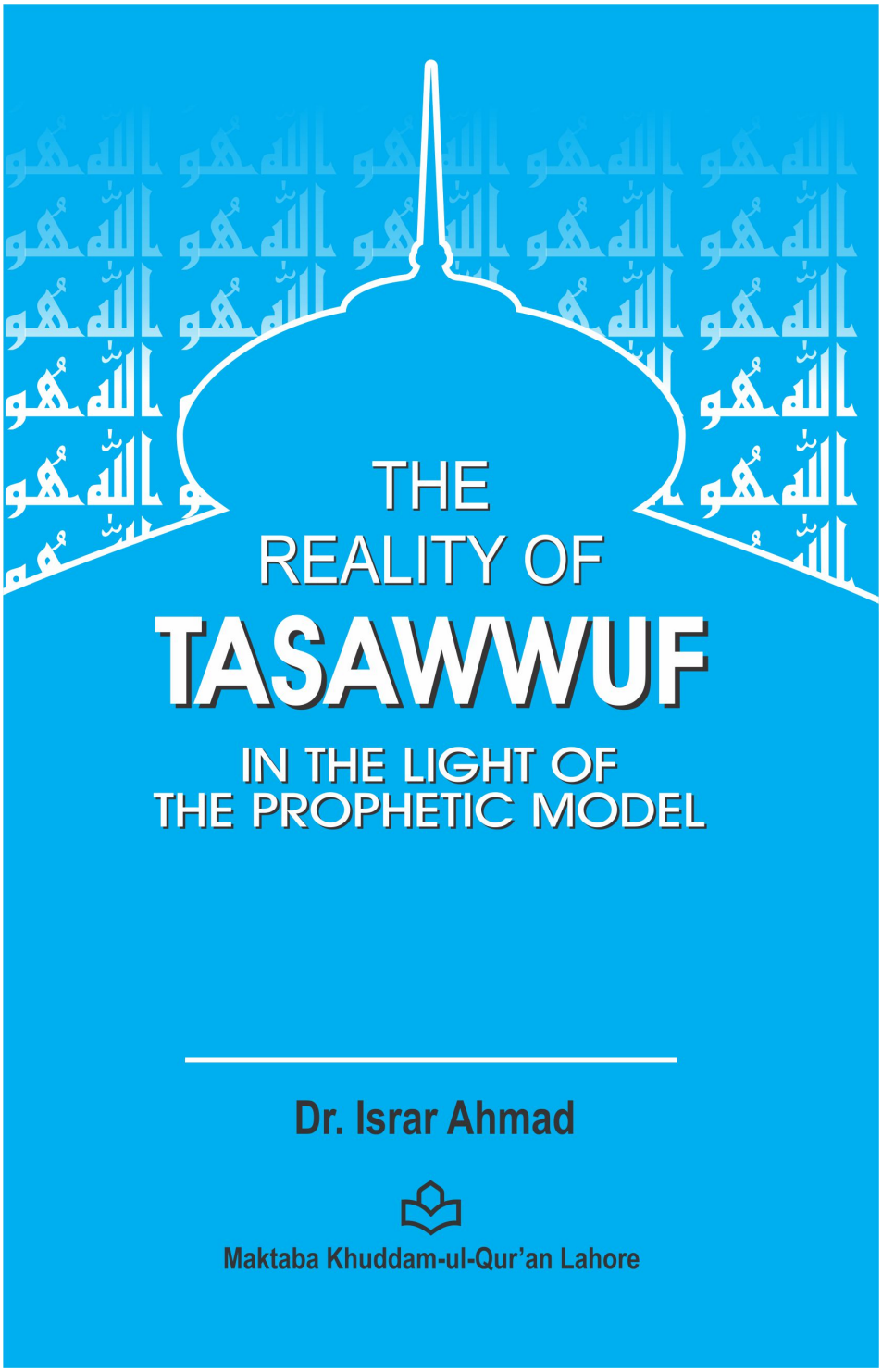

THE REALITY OF TASAWWUF

ڈاکٹر اسرار احمد

THE REALITY OF

TASAWWUF

IN THE LIGHT OF

THE PROPHETIC MODEL

Dr. Israr Ahmad

Lahore

Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

لَيۡسَ عَلَى الَّذِيۡنَ اٰمَنُوۡا وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيۡمَا طَعِمُوۡۤا اِذَا مَا اتَّقَوۡا وَّ اٰمَنُوۡا وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقَوۡا وَّ اٰمَنُوۡا ثُمَّ اتَّقَوۡا وَّ اَحۡسَنُوۡا ؕ وَ اللّٰهُ يُحِبُّ الۡمُحۡسِنِيۡنَ ﴿۹۳﴾ [المائدة ۵:۹۳]

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Those who have attained to *Iman* [faith] and do righteous deeds incur no blame by partaking of whatever they may have [in the past], so long as they are conscious of Allah and have *Iman* and do righteous

deeds, and continue to be conscious of Allah and have [true] *Iman*, and then grow ever more conscious of Allah and do [reach the level of] *Ihsan*; and Allah loves those who have attained to *Ihsan*. *(Al-Mai'dah 5:93)*

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

INTRODUCTION

Tasawwuf or Sufism is the name given to the mysticism of Islam: the inner dimension of faith and devotional religious practices. The roots of the word Tasawwuf are to be traced to very early times in the history of Muslim civilization. The word probably drawn from *"soof"* (meaning wool) indicates the wearing of a rough woolen garment as mark of asceticism. It may also be derived from "safa" --- meaning purity of heart and motivation. It is a fact however that Muslims never seek a mystical way of life just for its own sake. The practice of Sufism developed not in the renunciation of the outer life but bringing into its every aspect a consciousness of God, and a ceaseless vigil on purity of motive and inner integrity. Tasawwuf highlights the need for personal purification and piety through constant awareness and love of God, and honest and humble self-knowledge. Far from the modern academic interpretations of Tasawwuf in terms of elusive theophanies and purely philosophical doctrines , Dr. Israr Ahmad considers the inner spirit and content of Tasawwuf as the true Islam, the real heart of the faith. He fully concurs with Ali Hujweri (RA) when he wrote: "In the time of the Companions (RAA) of the Prophet (SAW) and their immediate successors this name did not exist, but its reality was in everyone. Now the name exists without the reality." More than the mere name or term, Dr. Israr Ahmad is interested to shed light on the reality of Tasawwuf and relates it to the highest degree, in ascending order, of true inner faith or *Iman* . In verse 93 of Surah Al-Maida this is referred to as level of *Ihsan*: growing ever more conscious of Allah and worshipping Allah as though one sees Him. *Ihsan* is a central Quranic concept that is organically related to *Islam* and *Iman* and Dr. Israr Ahmad expounds and discusses the

nature of Tasawwuf in light of the famous Hadith of Gabriel. It is profound deep and existential love of Allah that motivates a true believer to perform all obligatory duties with full inwardness and commitment.

Tasawwuf in this perspective is thoroughly dynamic and active and does not lead to repose and passivity. It evokes a deep and intense awareness of the Islamic obligation with regard to achieving the ascendancy of Islam at the global level: obligation to restoring Power to the *Ummah*. There is no other subject more important to Muslims today than the restoration of Power --- that Power which functions as an effective deterrent to the enemy, which can be used for responding to aggression and for liberating the oppressed and the tyrannized, and through which the truth of Islam can be seen more clearly by mankind. The core

of *Tasawwuf* lies in facilitating the penetration of the transcendental foundations of knowledge, in strengthening faith, in uniting the community and in developing a life of self-discipline and total servitude to Allah (SWT).

As a matter of fact, in the Qur'anic epistemology great importance is assigned 'to heart' in addition to sensory and rational knowledge. The Holy Qur'an clearly and at several places mentions the epistemic function of the heart --- lahum qulubun yaqiluna biha (Al-Hajj 22:46) they have been given heart through which they should ponder and reflect. This means that axiology is the form of purity of heart and its discernment. Morality and religious truth, according to the Qur'an, are the formal entailments of being pure of heart. "Cogitating heart" means more of course than merely adding feeling to thought, so as to have "heart-felt" thoughts. The expression refers to a deep appropriation as a mode of cognizing. Deep appropriation demands that the words be put to practice; the thought must involve itself in action. Reality being unremittingly situational, thoughts and words must get situated in the sorts of real activity that pertain to their subject matter.

They must get enacted so that the relevant concepts get exercised and the reader gets capacitated in order to begin even to apprehend the reality of which the words speaks. Otherwise, with the words "left on the lips" doubt defeats understanding and the reader remains an inert victim trapped in a realm of abstraction. From the Qur'anic perspective, epistemology is never detachable from its ethics. It is a theory in which knowing is always a function of doing. The knowledge of God is always a matter of obeying God. In early Islam it was axiomatic that one obeyed in order to know God. That is to say, apprehension constituted a fundamental component of knowledge and the role of activity in its acquisition was paramount. These are the grounds from which Ghazali set forth as an epistemic principle: "Whoever through his knowledge obeys God, his heart becomes illumined." Theology for him is not one of the abstract disciplines; rather here truth is learned in a never ceasing practice. In the Qur'an, heart is treated as both a cognitive source and an agency of motivational force for action and adherence.

Indeed, the deep and profound meanings of verse 93 of Surah Al-Mai'dah of the Holy Qur'an become clear only in this perspective.

Allama Muhammad Asad, who in my judgment has to some extent captured the real significance of this verse, has translated it thus:

Those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds incur no sin by partaking whatever they may, so long as they are of conscious of God and (truly) believe and do righteous deeds and continue to be conscious of God and to belief, and grow ever more conscious of God, and persevere in doing good: for God loves the doers of good.

In the explanatory notes he writes that the repetition of the particle *thumma* refers to a sequence expressing growth and intensification. Hence he renders it

in the first instance as "(they) continue to be" and, in the second instance, as "(they) grow ever more conscious of God." Dr. Israr Ahmad in his explication of this verse, has rightly tried to understand the deep structured meanings of this verse in light of the famous and authentic Hadith of Gabriel, in which the three levels --- of *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan* --- have been very succinctly expounded by the Holy Prophet (SAW). At the first level, the level of *islam*, people are not asked to understand the unseen verities, rather simply to accept that they are real and to act accordingly, by performing the five obligatory practices — five pillars — and the other activities set down in the revealed guidance. At this level, *Taqwa* or God wariness — a preliminary or starting point, yet a persistent continuent throughout the myriad development of true inner religiosity — is the key word which means that the order of submission and obedience is prior to knowledge of truth *(iman)* and existential sense of the presence of God *(ihsan).* The order of obedience comes before the dawning of truth, for, whatever our lights it is only in and after our practice that our disclosures are forged. Religious truth is a living into truth, a performative truth. The discovery of the ultimate truth is only made *after* the aspirant is true to hoped-for truth: it requires both antecedent and concomitant obedience. I cannot here resist the temptation of quoting Prof. W. C. Chittick who has delved very deep in the *hadith of Gabriel* in his book *The Vision of Islam* :

Behind all the stress on practice is the recognition that the Qur'an must become flesh and blood. It is not enough for people to read the Qur'an or learn what it says. They have to embody the Book. It must become the determining reality of what they do *(islam),* what they think *(iman)*, and what they intend *(ihsan).* (P. 9)

Really meaningful and vibrant Islamic religious discourse necessarily demands, indeed it is the product of,

individual and collective Islamic practice and endeavor. Divorced form action, it is mere jumble of lifeless words and sounds. Grasping religious truth requires active participation, involvement, "being *da'ee* (leader and caller to Allah) or disciplined member of a well-knit group" that personally backs the speech. By the same token, any proposal or agenda conceived and presented for ameliorating the decadence of Islam and reforming and reorganizing Muslims necessitates that to be meaningful it must accompany action and concrete effort. It is action and organized concrete endeavor that leads to unveiling of many new and subtle points and refinements which could not possibly be conceived or visualized merely at the theoretic level. Unveiling through practical involvement can add depth of understanding, clarity of vision, certainty, and so on to the strategic program and its underlying doctrine.

Otherwise it will on the whole remain sterile, empty and impactless, even though it may find favor with a few academicians with absolutely non-committal attitude. Dr Israr Ahmad has very commendably followed this principle in his study and understanding of the Holly Book and the *Seerah* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

The contents of this booklet were translated into English by Dr. Basit Bilal Koshal several years ago and published in the quarterly Qur'anic Horizons. I thankfully acknowledge his labor and erudition in meticulously rendering the subtle ideas of Dr. Israr Ahmad on a very important and sensitive topic for the benefit of English reading people. At a few places some very minor alterations have been made by me to make the meaning clear and more faithful to the ideas expressed by the learned author in Urdu. It is hoped that this publication will be received warmly by interested readers.

Dr. Absar Ahmad

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بسم اللہ الرحمن الرحیمObjectives of *Tasawwuf*

The question of the legitimacy of what has come to be known among the Muslims as *tasawwuf* (or Islamic mysticism) is often passionately debated among its proponents and opponents. When we look at the subject of *tasawwuf* and its objectives, it becomes plainly evident that these are completely in keeping with Islamic teachings. The subject of *tasawwuf* and its goals can be summarized as follows:

- Salvation from ignorance and attainment of gnosis (*Ma'arfah*);
- Refinement and purification of the self (*Tazkiyah Al-Nafs*);
- Cleansing of the spiritual heart (*Tasfiyah Al-Qalb*) and the enlightenment of the soul (*Tajliyah Al-Ruh*);
- Sincerity and devotion to the Creator (*Ikhlas*) and detachment from material and worldly concerns (*Zuhd*); and
- Commitment to the service of all the creatures of God.

This last point has been beautifully summed up in a couplet by Shaikh Sa‘di:

طریقت بجز خدمت خلق نیست

بتسبیح و سجاده و دَلق نیست

The essence of *tariqah* is not to be found,

In the rosary, or the prayer rug, or the *Sufi* cloak.

It is the service to God’s creatures in which,

You will find its true meaning manifest.

It is patently clear that these objectives of *tasawwuf* are also the objectives of Islam. Consequently, as far as the subject and goals of *tasawwuf* are concerned, they cannot be separated from the objectives and goals of Islam.

The Term *tasawwuf* and its Origin

While the goals of *tasawwuf* are completely in keeping with the goals of Islam, a critical study of the subject reveals that the practical *Sufi* methodologies developed to attain these objectives contain significant departures from the methodology outlined by authentic Islamic teachings. An understanding of this departure and the contrast in methodology must begin with an understanding of the departure in terminology.

The term *tasawwuf* is a foreign term that has been introduced into the vocabulary of Islam from outside. It is found neither in the Qur’an nor in the *Hadith* literature, the latter being a record of the sayings and deeds of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his Companions (RAA). While this point may appear to be nothing more than pedantic nit picking, its implications have been devastating and far-reaching. Not only is the term *tasawwuf* not found in the primary sources of Islam, but its actual origin also remains a topic of debate. This word made its appearance in the language of Islam towards the end of the second century *Hijrah*. Meer Valiuddin has even identified the exact year when this word first appeared — 822 C.E.[1] The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had passed away in 632 C.E. and the *Hijrah* took place in 622

C.E. Therefore this word appeared in the Islamic lexicon exactly 190 years (or 196 years according to the lunar calendar) after the demise of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

There are four different opinions regarding the origin of the word *Sufi*. The rules of Arabic grammar, however, make three of the four opinions untenable. These are summarized below:

- The first opinion is that the root word is *safa* (cleansing). But, grammatically speaking, the word *Sufi* cannot be derived from *safa*, the proper derivation is *safavi*.

- Another opinion is that the root word is *saff* (row or rank). But this is also implausible because the derived word is *saffi* (one who is standing in a row) and not *Sufi*.

- A third opinion is that the root word is *suffah* (platform), but the word *Sufi* cannot be derived from this root word either, the proper derivation being *suffi*.

A fourth opinion is that the root word is *soof* (wool). This opinion is widely accepted and there is some validity in this argument. Firstly, the word *Sufi* can be derived from *soof* according to the rules of Arabic grammar. Secondly, it is related to the practice of the early *Sufis* who used to wear woolen clothing as a sign of their detachment from and discomfort with the material world. The early Sufis wore the rough woolen cloak without any undergarments, so that there would be constant irritation of the skin. This pricking of the skin by the wool would keep the *Sufi* in discomfort which would serve as a constant reminder that the seeker has nothing to do with the comforts of this world, his only goal being to please Allah (SWT). There is a near consensus that the word *Sufi* is derived from *soof* and this is an acceptable position as far as the rules of Arabic grammar are concerned.

In this regard, my personal opinion had been that the word *tasawwuf* was derived from the Greek word *sophia*, meaning wisdom. It has recently come to my attention that although this view was favored by a number of Western experts in Islamic studies earlier in the century, it has now been shown to be untenable.[2] In light of this, I will have to modify my opinion in favor of *soof* as the probable root word of *tasawwuf*.

The bottom line in this discussion, however, is the fact that the origin of the word tasawwuf in the language of Islam has always been a topic of debate and its origin has not been definitively established. Even more certain than this is the fact that this word is nowhere to be found in the primary sources of Islam — the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith literature.

A Himalayan Mistake and its Disastrous Consequences

The introduction of the word *tasawwuf* into the language of Islam has produced two disastrous results. The first is the alienation from, and indifference to, a very important Qur'anic and Prophetic term; the second is the hostility towards *tasawwuf* among those who are loyal and committed to the terminology of the Qur'an and the words of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

1-Indifference to an Important Qur'anic and Prophetic Term

The first of the two disastrous consequences of the introduction of the term tasawwuf into the language of Islam was that Muslims became virtually ignorant of an extremely important Qur'anic and Prophetic term. Keeping in mind the fact that the objectives and goals of tasawwuf are totally in keeping with the teachings and spirit of Islam, it is only natural to assume that Islam has a specific word or term to signify that which has come to be known as tasawwuf. In fact, the language of the Qur'an and the words of the Prophet (SAW) do indeed contain such a term, viz., Ihsan. Although the word Ihsan can mean doing good to another person, it is primarily a very significant Islamic term. Unfortunately, since the word tasawwuf has become prevalent and widely accepted, the use of the authentic Islamic term Ihsan practically disappeared from the discourse of the Muslims. Consequently, although the word Ihsan has been used in the Qur'an and Hadith in a very profound sense, its actual usage by the Muslims became very limited and truncated. In other words, the

term tasawwuf usurped an important conceptual dimension of Islam that is defined by the term Ihsan.

Since the term Ihsan was supplanted by tasawwuf, the meaning of Ihsan in actual usage became limited only to benevolent and charitable behavior towards another person. The Qur'an does use Ihsan in this sense: "...and do Ihsan to others as Allah has done Ihsan to you…" (Al-Qassas 28:77). The literal meaning of Ihsan is related to its root — h-s-n — which denotes "beauty," and therefore it is used in the sense of adding the element of beauty to a thing or task, to adorn or beautify something. For instance, consider the following hadith, in which this word is used in its literal sense. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "The beauty of an individual's Islam is that he gives up all useless (and unproductive) activities." In other words, one aspect of the beauty of Islamic behavior is to avoid wasting one's time in diversions that provide no benefit for this world or for the Hereafter. In other ahadith too, the word Ihsan is used by the Prophet (SAW) to denote the performance of an action in the best possible manner — doing something with full attention, putting one's heart into it, taking care of the small details. Indeed, if something is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well! This, in short, is the essence of the word Ihsan when it is used in its literal sense.

In addition to its literal meaning mentioned above, the word Ihsan has also been used in the Holy Qur'an as well as in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in a very particular sense; this special usage of

the word Ihsan has turned an Arabic word into a very important Islamic term. Conceived as a pivotal locution, the meaning of Ihsan is intimately and organically related to two other fundamental Islamic terms — Islam and Iman — as described below.

In the famous *hadith* of Gabriel (AS), the first three questions asked by the Archangel refer to the essence of

Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. The important point to note here is that, even though the hadith of Gabriel (AS) is among the most well known and often repeated Prophetic sayings, the Muslims have become practically ignorant of the fact that Ihsan is a central Islamic concept that is organically related to Islam and Iman. This is a reflection of the fact that their understanding of the word Ihsan has become extremely limited and truncated. The hadith of Gabriel (AS) is as follows:

عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: بَيْنَا نَحْنُ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ذَاتَ يَوْمٍ إِذْ طَلَعَ عَلَيْنَا رَجُلٌ شَدِيدُ بَيَاضِ الثِّيَابِ شَدِيدُ سَوَادِ الشَّعْرِ لَا يُرَى عَلَيْهِ أَثَرُ السَّفَرِ وَلَا يَعْرِفُهُ مِنَّا أَحَدٌ حَتَّى جَلَسَ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسلم فأسند رُكْبَتَيْهِ إِلَى رُكْبَتَيْهِ وَوَضَعَ كَفَّيْهِ عَلَى فَخْذَيْهِ وَقَالَ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ أَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِسْلَامِ قَالَ: " الْإِسْلَامُ: أَنْ تَشْهَدَ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَتُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةَ وَتُؤْتِيَ الزَّكَاةَ وَتَصُومَ رَمَضَانَ وَتَحُجَّ الْبَيْتَ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا ". قَالَ: صَدَقْتَ. فَعَجِبْنَا لَهُ يَسْأَلُهُ وَيُصَدِّقُهُ. قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِيمَانِ. قَالَ: «أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَتُؤْمِنَ بِالْقَدَرِ خَيْرِهِ وَشَرِّهِ» . قَالَ صَدَقْتَ. قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِحْسَانِ. قَالَ: «أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ» . قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ السَّاعَةِ. قَالَ: «مَا المسؤول عَنْهَا بِأَعْلَمَ مِنَ السَّائِلِ» . قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنْ أَمَارَاتِهَا. قَالَ: «أَنْ تَلِدَ الْأَمَةُ رَبَّتَهَا وَأَنْ تَرَى الْحُفَاةَ الْعُرَاةَ الْعَالَةَ رِعَاءَ الشَّاءِ يَتَطَاوَلُونَ فِي الْبُنْيَانِ» . قَالَ: ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ فَلَبِثْتُ مَلِيًّا ثُمَّ قَالَ لِي: «يَا عُمَرُ أَتَدْرِي مَنِ السَّائِلُ» ؟ قُلْتُ: اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ. قَالَ: «فَإِنَّهُ جِبْرِيل أَتَاكُم يعلمكم دينكُمْ» [رَوَاهُ مُسلم، كتاب الايمان]

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (RAA) reports: One day when we were with Allah's Messenger (SAW), a man with very white clothing and very black

hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognized him. Sitting down beside the Prophet (SAW), leaning his knees against his and placing his hands on his things, he said: "Tell me, Muhammad, about *Islam*." He replied: "*Islam* means that you should testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (SAW) is Allah's Messenger, that you should observe the prayer, pay the *Zakat*, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to go there." He said: "You have spoken the truth." We were surprised at his questioning him and then declaring that he spoke the truth. He said: "Now tell me about *Iman*." He replied: "It means that you should believe in Allah (SWT), His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you should believe in the decreeing both of good and evil." Remarking that he had spoken the truth, he then said: "Now tell me about *Ihsan*." He replied: "It means that you should worship Allah (SWT) as though you see Him, for He sees you though you do not see Him." He said: "Now tell me about the Hour." He replied: "The one who is asked about it is no better informed than the one who is asking." He said: "Then tell me about its signs." He replied: "That a maid-servant should beget her mistress, and that you should see

barefooted, naked, poor men and shepherds exalting themselves in buildings." [Umar] said: He then went away, and after I had waited for a long time, [the Prophet] said to me: "Do you know who the questioner was, Umar?" I replied: "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "He was Gabriel who came to you to teach you your religion." (Narrated by Bukhari)

In this connection, note that the following Qur'anic *ayah* also reflects the relationship between *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*:

لَيۡسَ عَلَى الَّذِيۡنَ اٰمَنُوۡا وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيۡمَا طَعِمُوۡۤا اِذَا مَا اتَّقَوۡا وَّ اٰمَنُوۡا وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقَوۡا وَّ اٰمَنُوۡا ثُمَّ اتَّقَوۡا وَّ اَحۡسَنُوۡا ؕ وَاللّٰهُ يُحِبُّ الۡمُحۡسِنِيۡنَ ﴿۹۳﴾[المائدہ5 :93]

Those who have attained to Iman [faith] and do righteous deeds incur no blame by partaking of whatever they may have [in the past], so long as they are conscious of Allah and have Iman and do righteous deeds, and continue to be conscious of Allah and have [true] Iman, and then grow ever more conscious of Allah and do [reach the level of] Ihsan; and Allah loves those who have attained to Ihsan. (Al-Mai'dah 5:93)

In order to appreciate the wisdom contained in this *ayah*, and to understand why the word *Iman* is used repeatedly, we need to differentiate between legal or dogmatic *Iman* on the one hand and actual or real *Iman* on the other. Legal, dogmatic faith is that which is uttered by the tongue, by virtue of which an individual enters the community of Islam. Having become conscious of Allah (SWT), the individual verbally accepts the Islamic creed and begins to live his or her life according to the Islamic *Shari'ah*. At this stage, the individual is a legal Muslim and his or her behavior falls under the category of "righteous deeds" to the degree that it is in accordance with the *Shari'ah*. In other words, when an individual verbally attests to the verity of the Islamic creed and shapes his or her behavior according to the *Shari'ah*, that individual is said to have entered the fold of "obedience" to Allah (SWT) or *Islam*; he or she has, in effect, given up resistance and surrendered before the orders of the Almighty Lord. At the level of *Islam*, however, the verbal acceptance of the Islamic creed is not necessarily reflective of what is in the individual's heart regarding that which he or she has uttered with the tongue. Nonetheless, verbal attestation and righteous behavior do indeed heighten the individual's consciousness of Allah (SWT) and he or she

becomes prepared to move to the next stage. When an individual's heart genuinely understands and freely accepts that which the tongue has uttered and this understanding and utterance continues to be complemented by righteous deeds, which correspondingly improve in sincerity and elegance, then that individual is said to have attained genuine and true *Iman*. At this stage, the statement of faith is not merely a dogmatic, theological assertion but a living and life-giving conviction. When there is no discrepancy between what is uttered by the tongue, what is manifested in action, and what is believed in

the heart then the level of *Iman* has been reached. It appears that this is the apex of the religious journey but this is clearly not the case. The fore-cited Qur'anic *ayah* and the above cited Prophetic *hadith* make it clear that there is a third stage beyond *Islam* and *Iman*, and this is the stage of *Ihsan*. With the consciousness of Allah (SWT) being heightened further at the level of *Iman*, the individual is prepared to enter the stage of *Ihsan*. Consequently, *Ihsan* constitutes the apex of the religious journey in Islam — where the consciousness of the believer becomes so acute that, metaphorically speaking, Allah (SWT) is always before the believers' eyes.

From the Qur'anic and Prophetic point of view, therefore, *Ihsan* represents the zenith of spiritual development. This stage marks complete deliverance from ignorance and darkness and the attainment of gnosis. At this stage, the individual self or ego becomes so cultured and purified that it becomes capable of beholding directly the true nature of reality. The heart is also cleansed and the light of the human spiritual soul enlightens the whole being of the person. The individual sees nothing but Divine Love, Majesty, and Beauty in the created universe and therefore selflessly devotes him/herself to the service of His creatures. In serving the creatures, he or she expects nothing in return from those being served but only heightened awareness of the Creator. In other words, the

level of *Ihsan* can be referred to as being the objective and goal of *tasawwuf*.

A very important *hadith* sheds further light on the displacement of the term *Ihsan* by the term *tasawwuf*. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "Whenever an innovation is introduced into the *Deen* it is inevitable that an authentic Prophetic practice is displaced." This *hadith* clearly states that every innovation in religion invariably replaces a *Sunnah* and, in the context of the present discussion, we see how the word *tasawwuf* has displaced the genuinely Islamic term *Ihsan*.

2. Hostility towards *Tasawwuf*

In my opinion, the second disastrous outcome of the displacement of the term *Ihsan* by the term *tasawwuf* has been even more damaging. An attitude of aversion towards *tasawwuf* developed among certain enthusiasts committed to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The result of this reaction against *tasawwuf* was an overemphasis on the externalities of Islam — the specific, minute details of religious rituals and dogma. In other words, most of the emphasis was placed on the exoteric and formal dimension of Islam whereas its esoteric and spiritual dimension began to disappear from view. Although the aversion was initiated by the label of *tasawwuf*, which was perceived alien and therefore unauthentic, it is important to note that there were other significant factors as well that contributed in this regard, as discussed later. In this regard, the personality of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA) is the most prominent manifestation of the aversion towards *tasawwuf*.

When it is argued that *tasawwuf*, as it is found among the Muslims, is a product of the post-Prophetic period, the point is countered by noting that many other areas of Islamic studies are also products of the post-Prophetic era. In this regard, it should be noted that the titles or labels of other areas of Islamic studies have been

derived from the Qur'an and *hadith*. The word *tasawwuf* is unique among all other fields of Islamic studies because it is the only title or label that cannot be located in the Qur'anic or Prophetic vocabulary. For example, the word *tafseer* (Qur'anic exegesis) is used by the Qur'an itself and it was in usage among the Companions (RAA). The word *hadith* is also used by the Qur'an to describe itself — the Qur'an is the *hadith* of Allah (SWT) — although the term *hadith*, as it came to be used later, refers to the speech and actions of the Prophet (SAW) and the Companions (RAA). In the same way, the word *Fiqh* is found in certain sayings of the Holy Prophet (RAA), where it refers to a proper and profound understanding of Islamic teachings. These areas of Islamic scholarship locate their titles or labels in Qur'anic and/or Prophetic vocabulary. In stark contrast, however, the title or label of *tasawwuf* is nowhere to be found in these primary sources. Consequently, the assertion that *tasawwuf* is just like other areas of Islamic studies is totally baseless.

It is only natural that an individual who has deep affection for, and attachment to, the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, would feel some reservations regarding the word *tasawwuf*, especially when it is asserted that *tasawwuf* represents the "soul of Islam." It is strange indeed that the label of something claiming such a noble stature cannot be found in the vocabulary of the primary sources of Islam. While the alien and unknown origin of this word produces reservations and doubts, the fact that foreign ideas and concepts influenced the development of *Sufi* thought further intensifies this reservation, till it leads to outright aversion.

It has been noted that Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA) is the most notable example of an individual who manifests aversion towards *tasawwuf*. However, I still include him among the reformers of Islam. Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA) made significant headway in purging the religious practices and beliefs of the Muslims

in the Arabian Peninsula of innovative and un-Islamic elements. He also eradicated many of the un-Islamic cultural norms that had taken on the veneer of religiosity among the Arabs. It must also be acknowledged that he made significant achievements in presenting an authentic and purified version of the exoteric and ritualistic dimension of Islam. Therefore, he must be included among the reformers of the Muslim *Ummah*. However, if we compare his accomplishments to his Indian contemporary, Shah Waliullah Delhvi (RA), it is obvious that there is no comparison between the two. Shah Waliullah (RA) accomplished at both the esoteric and exoteric level what Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA) could only achieve at the exoteric level. Shah Waliullah's work in philosophy, spirituality, and social thought is

unparalleled by any other thinker from either the classical or the medieval age of Islam. In other words, the work and personality of Shah Waliullah (RA) is much more holistic, integrated, and profound than that of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA).

Here it should be noted that the ideas and achievements of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA) are at least partially responsible for the almost total disregard for the spiritual dimension of Islam that is a defining characteristic of modern Islamic revivalist movements. For the modern day revivalists, the accomplishments of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (RA) have remained a model of a successful effort to restore the *Shari'ah* of Islam after a long period of decay. Even though the support of the House of Sa'ud was indispensable for his mission, the fact that his reformist movement did attain success in implementing the Islamic Law made the Najdi Movement an ideal for the later-day Muslim revivalists — and they inherited the aversion towards *tasawwuf* that was so characteristic of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab's thought. In this context the name of Ibn Taymiyya is also cited. But in my assessment his thought and personality represents a quite different paradigm.

The Prophetic and Qur'anic Methodology

Having made these preliminary remarks, we now turn to the subject itself. It has already been noted that the objectives which *tasawwuf* sets forth are in complete harmony with Islamic teachings. The real question that needs to be addressed at this stage is: What is the Qur'anic and Prophetic guidance regarding the actual method of obtaining the objectives of *tasawwuf*? It is obvious that the methodology that is faithful to the guidance contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* would be not only the Prophetic way but also the way that appeals to logic and rationality.

The first point to note in this regard is the principle that is outlined in the first sentence of the Basic Resolution of Tanzeem-e-Islami, namely: "The call of religion is primarily addressed to the individual." This point can be understood with the help of the following metaphor: Each individual is a robust seed that has been planted by Allah (SWT) in His garden (the earth). Obviously, the Gardner wishes that every seed in his garden should sprout, mature, and produce beautiful flowers and fruits. In other words, Allah (SWT) wishes to see the fruition of all the potentialities that are inherent in each individual, and to see the individuality of each person blossom in its full glory. In this regard, the following couplet by Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil is very instructive:

ستم است اگر ہوست کشد کہ بہ سیرِ سرو و سمن در آ

تو ز غنچہ کم نہ دمیدۂ دَرِ دل کُشا، بہ چمن در آ

It is a shame that your baser self impels you to seek serenity,

In the gardens and meadows of the outside world;

Your own inner being is no less than a blossoming bud,

Open the door of your heart and step into the inner garden!

23

The meaning of this couplet is that the beauty and serenity of the garden within is much more attractive than the beauty and serenity of the gardens without, only if we take the time and effort to look for this hidden, inward beauty. It is worth repeating that, in the eyes of Allah (SWT), each individual is a work in progress, a seed that has been planted. Allah (SWT) wishes to see this seed sprout and go through all the stages of maturation so that all of its potentialities are realized and all of its internal beauty is manifested. In this regard, it is important to bring to mind the following *ayah* from Surah Mai'dah:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا عَلَيْكُمْ اَنْفُسَكُمْ ۚ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَّنْ ضَلَّ اِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ ۭ[المائدة 5: 105]

O you who believe! It is [only] for your own selves that you are responsible. If you follow the right path, those who have gone astray will not be able to do you harm…. (Al-Mai'dah 5:105)

While it is obligatory to call others to the Divine Word, the believer will not be judged according to the number of individuals who responded to the call. Instead, the believer will be judged solely on the basis of his or her own efforts to fulfill the religious obligations. It is an important Islamic obligation to minister to others, to make others aware of the Divine Word, and to invite them to shape their lives according to Divine Guidance. But in spite of all these obligations, the individual believer remains accountable for no one other than him/herself. As for those to whom the believer has called towards Divine Guidance and who did not respond to the call, the following words of the Qur'an are highly instructive:

وَّ لَا تُسْـَٔلُ عَنْ اَصْحٰبِ الْجَحِيْمِ ﴿۱۱۹﴾ [البقرة 2 : 119]

...and you will not be held accountable for those who are destined for the blazing fire. (Al-Baqarah 2:119)

24

The fore-cited *ayah* of Surah Mai'dah has been misinterpreted, and this happened even during the period of the Companions (RAA). Taking this *ayah* in isolation from other *ayaat* and Prophetic injunctions, an

opinion began to be expressed that since each individual is responsible for none other than him/herself, there is no need to make any efforts to spread the word of Islam. It is obvious that, even among this early generation of Muslims, there were many hypocrites and people with weak faith who wanted to cut corners regarding their religious obligations; one easy way to do this was to take a particular *ayah* out of context and in isolation from other religious instructions. In response to this errant reading of this *ayah*, Abu Bakr (RA) made it a point to explicate its proper meaning in a sermon. He stated that the words "[only] for your own selves are you responsible" do not absolve the individual from his or her religious obligations of spreading the word of Islam, enjoining righteousness and forbidding evil. There is no doubt that each individual is accountable for only his or her own actions and not for the actions of anyone else, but the issue of accountability cannot be confused with the issue of obligations towards others. In other words, just because one is not accountable for the actions of others does not mean that he or she does not have any obligations towards them. The Qur'an records the following words of Prophet Musa (AS) regarding his despair over the behavior of his people after they refused to fight for the cause of Allah (SWT):

{رَبِّ اِنِّیۡ لَاۤ اَمۡلِکُ اِلَّا نَفۡسِیۡ وَ اَخِیۡ} [المائدة 5: 105]

O Lord! I have authority over none but myself and my brother [Harun]…. (Al-Mai'dah 5:25).

Even here, Prophet Musa (AS) mentions having authority over his brother Harun (AS) only because the latter had willingly accepted his authority, otherwise it is obvious that an individual does not have any control even

over his or her own sibling. The following *ayah* sheds further light on this subject:

{ اِنَّکَ لَا تَہۡدِیۡ مَنۡ اَحۡبَبۡتَ وَ لٰکِنَّ اللّٰہَ یَہۡدِیۡ مَنۡ یَّشَآءُ}[القصص 28 : 56]

[O Prophet!] Verily, you cannot guide everyone whom you love, but it is Allah who guides whomever He Wills…. (Al-Qasas 28:56).

Two Aspects of the Evolution of Human Personality

The human being's personality has the potential to develop and evolve — and this is something that Allah (SWT) wishes to see happen. In terms of the actual methodology that has to be adopted in order to begin this process of growth, it is essential to understand that the human being is a compound of two incompatible and antithetical elements. Mere incompatibility does not necessarily imply friction or opposition, it only means that the two elements are unsuitable for each other. However, the word

"antithetical" imply that the factors of friction and opposition are also present, and that the two elements actually pull the individual in opposite directions. The human being is made up of the *nafs* (the animal self) and the *ruh* (the spiritual soul); these two constituent elements are not only incompatible but also antithetical to each other in terms of their origin and inclination.

In Islamic vocabulary, the word *nafs* is either used for the total personality of an individual, encompassing all the constituent elements of his or her being, or it is used to denote the lower, baser urges of an individual's animal self. In the latter sense, the word *nafs* is roughly equivalent to Freudian id, and the Holy Qur'an uses the expression *al-nafs al-ammarah* to convey the idea that the animal instincts inherent in the physical being of an individual constantly and vehemently pull the *qalb* (or heart) — the center of

decision-making — towards its own baser and libidinal needs. When the *qalb* of an individual leans towards *al-nafs al-ammarah*, the *ruh* (or spiritual soul) protests and it is precisely this protest that is felt as the pricking of the conscience from within. This state of personality is described by the Qur'an as *al-nafs al-lawwamah*, or the "reproaching self." At this stage, the individual becomes cognizant of the fact that there are higher ideals than merely the fulfillment of one's libidinal desires. The challenge here is to discipline and control the baser, animal urges on the one hand and to strengthen and empower the spiritual soul on the other. Thus, when the *qalb* decisively turns towards the *ruh*, when higher, spiritual goals acquire the center-stage instead of baser, animal instincts as the primary objectives before a person, and the *qalb* attains an inner state of peace with the *ruh* as well as with the Lord, the state of the personality is called *al-nafs al-muta'innah*, or the "peaceful self."

In order for the human personality to grow, mature, and evolve, the *nafs* (or the animal self) has to be disciplined and purified, while the *ruh* (or the spiritual soul) has to be nourished and strengthened. The effort and struggle to meet these twin requirements can be illustrated by the following *hadith*. The Prophet (SAW) has said that an honored caller, speaking on behalf of Allah (SWT), calls out in the beginning of Ramadan: "O Seeker of the Good! Proceed onwards. O Seeker of the Evil! Fall back and go away." Since the *ruh* within each one of us is the element that lifts us towards higher ethical and spiritual ideals, this element must be nourished and empowered. At the same time, since the *nafs* within each one of us pulls us towards our lower and baser animal desires, this element must be contained, controlled, and disciplined.

Concerning the disciplining and containment of the animal self, it must be emphasized that the goal is self-control rather than self-annihilation. The concept of annihilation or mortification of self is a foreign notion that

has been introduced into Islamic thought. If the animal self is controlled, the dynamic power inherent in it can be used in the service of the spiritual soul. Shah Waliullah's categorization of human beings is based on these very two elements — spiritual and corporeal strength. He notes that the most developed individuals are those who possess both spiritual and corporeal strength, while the most base individuals are those who possess corporeal strength but no spiritual strength. The reason why he recognizes the importance of corporeal strength is that dynamism, stamina, and animation — factors that are required for action — are directly dependent upon physical and corporeal capabilities. It logically follows that the concept of self-annihilation is totally incompatible with Islamic teachings, and that the real objective is self-control and self-purification.

The combined result of the control and purification of *nafs* is what I call *Tahrir Al-Ruh*, or the "liberation of the spirit." When the animal self is restrained and cultured, the spiritual soul is emancipated and is able to continue its upward journey. In other words, there is an inverse relationship between the state of the *nafs* and the *ruh*. The stronger the animal urges of the *nafs*, the weaker will be the *ruh*. Conversely, the weaker the animal urges, the stronger will be the *ruh*. The disciplining and purification of the *nafs* results in the form of a liberated *ruh* that breaks away from the fetters of a *nafs* that constantly beckons towards base desires. The spirit or *ruh* is, so to say, librated from the shackles of *nafs al-ammara.*

Remembrance of the Divine: The Means of Strengthening the *Ruh*

Thus far it has been stated that the individual is the direct addressee of Divine Guidance and the goal of religion is to help the individual fulfill his or her dormant potentialities. It has also been noted that the human individual is a composite entity, made up of two mutually

incompatible and antithetical elements, and the fulfillment of the individual's potentialities requires that the spiritual element be nourished and strengthened while the base element be disciplined and purified. The issue now emerges regarding the ways and means for nourishing and strengthening the *ruh*. Constant remembrance of Allah (SWT) is the means through which the *ruh* gets its nourishment and strength. The Qur'anic word for this constant remembrance is *dhikr*.

The *ruh* has the gnosis of Allah (SWT) inherent in it in the form of an implicit dormant consciousness. It is the remembrance of Allah (SWT) through various means that activates this dormant consciousness. While it is clear that our *ruh* is not a part of Allah (SWT), it is equally clear that its origin is from the intimate Presence of the Divine — it is from the *amr* (or command) of Allah (SWT). The *ruh* can be described as a Divine element in the human being, as Almighty Allah (SWT) has associated it with Himself: "…and breathed into him of My Spirit…" (Al-Hijr 15:29 & Al-Saad 38-72). We know that no similitude or metaphor in any human language can be fully and adequately applied to the Divine Being, and that all such descriptions should be considered incomplete, partial, and imperfect. Having said that,

it should be noted that the most appropriate similitude that some of the gnostics have offered to describe the relationship of the *ruh* to the Lord is that of the sunbeam to the sun. No matter how far the beam travels from the sun, it remains intimately connected to its source. The very existence of the beam and its continued journey depends upon maintaining contact with the source. During its journey, the sunbeam does lose some of its luster due to various obstacles that come between it and the sun. In order to recapture the lost luster, these obstacles have to be overcome. Since the very origin of the *ruh* is in such close proximity to Divine Presence, it cannot be that the *ruh* is incognizant or ignorant of Allah (SWT). The fact of the matter is that the *ruh* loses some of its luster

and strength, and its vision of the Divine Being becomes impaired because of the obstacles that come between it and its source. The gnosis and cognizance of the Lord that is dormant in the *ruh* has the potential of being revived, if only the obstacles are removed. The Divine Word — the Final Revelation to humanity, the Holy Qur'an — is the most effective and authentic means of remembrance and reminder for the *ruh*, and the most effective and authentic means of reviving the dormant potentiality. Just as the *ruh* is from the intimate Presence of Allah (SWT), the Divine Word is also from the exact same source — the *amr* of Allah (SWT) — and that is why the *ruh* has a strong affinity towards the Divine Word.

The relationship between the spiritual soul or *ruh* within and the *wahi* or Revelation without is beautifully illustrated by the "Parable of Light" in Surah Al-Nur. In that parable, the *Light of Primordial Nature* is the light within, the pure and uncorrupted *ruh*, and the *Light of Revelation* is the light without that is contained in Divine Revelation. In order to see, the sense of sight has to be healthy and vibrant, but a person will not be able to see if this healthy faculty is not complemented by light in the external environment. Similarly, when the inner faculty of perception (i.e., a healthy and vibrant *ruh*) is complemented by the light of guidance in the external environment (i.e., Divine Revelation) then the outcome is the *Light of Faith*. This light helps the individual "see" the true nature of reality that is hidden behind numerous veils.

As one's faith increases in depth and intensity, the believer begins to feel that he or she is actually "seeing" Allah (SWT). Even if this level is not reached, there should at least be a constant and perpetual awareness on the part of the believer that Allah (SWT) is definitely watching him/her. This awareness of "seeing" and being "seen" is the highest level of faith that has been called *Ihsan* in Qur'anic and Prophetic terminology. Our language can only do partial justice in precisely describing the actual

inner state that is signified by the term *Ihsan*. We can do no better than to say that, in this state, faith reaches a level where the individual begins to "see" the spiritual and unseen dimensions of reality before his or her own eyes. This produces a degree of certainty in the faith of the believer that is akin to the certainty that is achieved by seeing something by one's own eyes. Indeed, it is not possible to explain

this state in any other terms. Faith reaches such a degree of intensity at this level that, in the words of the Prophet (SAW) "...you worship Allah as if you actually see Him, for if you don't actually see Him, He certainly sees you."

The Relationship between Allah (SWT) and the Believer

The cognizance of Divine Companionship that is the hallmark of *Ihsan* results in a *bilateral* relationship between the believer and Almighty Allah (SWT), a relationship that has several dimensions. These dimensions can be understood by pondering over a number of words that appear in the Qur'an with reference to a true believer, and the same words are also used (sometimes in a different context) for Almighty Allah (SWT) as well, alluding to the reciprocal nature of this relationship. Firstly, there is mutual *wilayah* or friendship. Allah (SWT) is the Friend and Guardian of those who believe (Al-Baqarah 2:257), and similarly all pious believers are the friends of Allah (Yunus 10:62, 63). Secondly, there is mutual *nusrah* or help and support. The Qur'an makes it clear: "O you who believe! If you help Allah, He will help you…" (Muhammad 47:7). To "help" Allah (SWT) is to take part in the struggle for His Cause, and, in return, the believers can expect that Allah (SWT) will make them steadfast and persevere in the struggle, and that He will not abandon them. Thirdly, there is mutual *zikr* or remembrance. We read in the Qur'an: "Therefore remember Me, (and) I will remember you…" (Al-Baqarah 2:152). To remember Allah (SWT) is to pray and glorify Him and to remain forever conscious of Him.

In return, Allah (SWT) will not ignore and disregard the believer or be indifferent to his or her supplications, but will shower His Mercy on the believer. Fourthly, there is mutual *shukr*, or gratitude from the servant and appreciation from the Lord. The Qur'an proclaims: "…whoever is grateful, truly his gratitude is for (the good of) his own self…" (Al-Namal 27:40); and "…Allah is Appreciative, All-Knowing" (Al-Baqarah 2:158). Fifthly, there is mutual *taubah*, or turning to each other with loving attention. This connotes repentance on the part of the servant and acknowledgement and acceptance from the Lord. Again we read: "O you who believe! Turn to Allah with sincere repentance…" (Al-Tahreem 66:8); and "…Verily, He is the One Who accepts the repentance and Who forgives" (Al-Nasr 110:3). Sixthly, Almighty Allah (SWT) and the believer gradually come closer and closer to each. Although it is the Creator Himself who provides a greater share in the growth of this spiritual intimacy, yet the believer is required to take the initiative. This is explained in a tradition thus:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى:" أَنَا عِنْدَ ظَنِّ عَبْدِي بِي، وَأَنَا مَعَهُ إِذَا ذَكَرَنِي، فَإِنْ ذَكَرَنِي فِي نَفْسِهِ ذَكَرْتُهُ فِي نَفْسِي، وَإِنْ ذَكَرَنِي فِي مَلَإٍ ذَكَرْتُهُ فِي مَلَإٍ خَيْرٍ مِنْهُمْ، وَإِنْ تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ بِشِبْرٍ تَقَرَّبْتُ إِلَيْهِ ذِرَاعًا، وَإِنْ تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ ذِرَاعًا تَقَرَّبْتُ إِلَيْهِ بَاعًا، وَإِنْ أَتَانِي يَمْشِي أَتَيْتُهُ هَرْوَلَةً [صحيح البخارى، كتاب التوحيد]

Abu Hurairah (RAA) reported that the Holy Prophet (SAW) said: Allah (SWT) says: "I am just as My bondsman thinks I am (i.e., I do for him what he thinks I can do for him), and I am with him if He

remembers Me. If he remembers Me in his heart, I too remember him in My heart; if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than they; if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; if he comes one cubit nearer

to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running." (Narrated by Imam Bukhari)

All the six dimensions of a positive and reciprocal relationship between Almighty Allah (SWT) and His servant, as described above, can be summed up in one word: mutual *love*. Allah (SWT) loves those who have reached the level of *Ihsan* (Al-Mai'dah 5:93) and the believers love Allah (SWT) more than anything and anyone else (Al-Baqarah 2:165).

Means of Acquiring Faith

The kind of relationship between Allah (SWT) and the believer that is characterized by mutual love cannot be attained without a healthy and vibrant faith. It would be useful to briefly discuss here the three different means of acquiring faith. I have discussed this issue in detail elsewhere; for the present, however, a brief summary should suffice.

One way of attaining and increasing one's faith is to keep the company of those individuals whose faith has reached the level of certainty. The individuals who have reached the level of *Ihsan* radiate a passion and serenity that affects all those who come close to them. One who is sitting near a blazing fire cannot but feel its heat; similarly, when an individual is in the company of such noble souls he or she cannot but be affected by the warmth of faith, sincerity, and certitude that is emanating from them.

The second means of attaining and increasing one's faith is devoted observance of the *Shari'ah*. Constant commitment and sincere repetition of the prescribed duties in the *Shari'ah* gives rise to an inner state where the individual's faith begins to progress and develop in intensity.

While the company of the righteous and the observance of *Shari'ah* are means of attaining and increasing one's faith, it must be noted that the faith that is gained through these means belongs to the kind known as "blind faith." This type of faith is usually devoid of an intellectual dimension, and the elements of considerate thought and disciplined reflection are not necessary components of this type of faith. Although blind faith may have depth and intensity, it is deficient in its intellectual breadth and reach.

The kind of faith that combines depth and intensity with an intellectual element or conscious understanding can only be attained with the aid of the Revealed Word, the Holy Qur'an. Faith with an intellectual dimension rests upon conscious insight accessible to reason. In the words of the Qur'an:

{قُلۡ ہٰذِہٖ سَبِیۡلِیۡۤ اَدۡعُوۡۤا اِلَی اللّٰہِ ۟ عَلٰی بَصِیۡرَۃٍ اَنَا وَ مَنِ اتَّبَعَنِیۡ}[یوسف 12 :108]

Tell them plainly: "This is my way: I call you to Allah, on the basis of clear perception [or conscious insight] both I and those who follow me…. (Yusuf 12:108)

This kind of faith can only be attained by pondering and comprehending the wisdom of the Revealed Word, and by personally experiencing the harmony of the Qur'anic *ayaat* with the signs of Allah (SWT) in the natural world as well as those found within the human self. Faith with an intellectual dimension can neither be gained by the company of the righteous nor by constant observance of the *Shari'ah*. Its only source is the Holy Qur'an.

Concerning faith, it is important to distinguish between its *superiority* in degree on the one hand and its *beauty* or *elegance* on the other. It has been unanimously

accepted by the Muslims that the superiority (or *fadilah*) of faith that was attained by the Companions (RAA) cannot be matched by the faith of any other believer who comes after the Prophet (SAW). The reason for this is the fact that the Companions (RAA) were in the company of the Prophet (SAW) himself, an individual who was the perfect embodiment of faith and certainty. They were in the presence of a furnace radiating the heat of faith, the likes of which human history will never see again. Being merely in the presence of the Prophet (SAW) gave the Companions' faith a level of intensity that simply cannot be matched.

While all the Companions (RAA) shared this element of "blind faith," it must be kept in mind that among them there were many different kinds of personalities. While some of the Companions (RAA) did not progress beyond the level of "blind faith," there were many who reached the highest level of faith with an intellectual dimension. Those Companions (RAA) who were intellectually more sophisticated than others used the Qur'an to meet their intellectual needs, and thus their faith acquired an intellectual dimension as a result of their constructive engagement with the Divine Word.

After comprehending the issue of *superiority*, we now move to the question of *beauty* or *elegance*. Once, when the Prophet (SAW) was sitting amidst his Companions (RAA), he asked: "In your estimation who possesses the most beautiful faith in all of creation?" On receiving the reply that they were the angels, the Prophet (SAW) said: "How is it that the angels not have faith when they are in the very presence of

their Lord [and they directly witness the spiritual realities]?" Here the Prophet (SAW) is implying that while the intensity, depth, and completeness of the faith of the angels is beyond ken, their attainment of this faith is not such a remarkable accomplishment. Seeing that their first response was unsatisfactory, the Companions (RAA) gave a different response, and suggested that they were the prophets of Allah (SWT). To

this the Prophet (SAW) said: "How is it that the prophets not have faith when Revelation is vouchsafed to them." At this point, we can imagine that the Companions (RAA) must have hesitated somewhat before offering themselves as being the ones in all of creation who possess "the most beautiful faith." To this the Prophet (SAW) replied: "How is it that you should not have faith when I am present amongst you?" Then the Prophet (SAW) said: "The ones in all of creation who possess the most beautiful faith are those brothers of ours who will come after me [and they will not be blessed with my company]. They will find pages containing the Book of Allah (SAW) and they will believe in what they find therein." This tradition has been reported by Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-Aas (RAA) and narrated by Imam Bayhaqi (RA).

This *hadith* makes it clear that there is something special about the Divine Word — it adds a dimension to the believer's faith that cannot be attained from any other source. Although the most superior faith is that of the Companions (RAA), it is possible for those believers who were never blessed with the company of the Prophet (SAW) to acquire a faith that is beautiful, elegant, and fascinating. This is the faith with an intellectual dimension, and it can be acquired only by means of the Qur'an.

The Remembrance of Allah (SWT) and the Place of the Qur'anThus far we have ascertained that the aim is to strengthen the *ruh*, the means is the remembrance of Allah (SWT), and the outcome is attainment of faith. It can be inferred from the foregoing discussion that the Qur'an has a unique status in terms of the "remembrance" of Allah (SWT). Of the more than four dozen names that the Qur'an uses to refer to itself, "The Remembrance" or "The Reminder," are used a number of times. This implies that the most authentic and effective ways of achieving "remembrance" of Allah (SWT) cannot but be rooted in the

Qur'an. It is well known that *Salah* (prayer) is one form of remembrance of Allah (SWT). However, it is worth noting that prayer is made up of two visible elements: the physical acts of standing, bowing, prostrating, and the recital of the Qur'anic *ayaat* which accompany these acts. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that the Qur'an refers to the *fajr* prayer as *Qur'an Al-Fajr*. Similarly, the supererogatory night prayer of *tahajjud* is also meant for extensive recitation of the Qur'an after mid-night. Similarly, there are various supplications that the Prophet (SAW) used to recite in connection with everyday activities, and ordered his Companions (RAA) to recite them as well. All these Prophetic supplications are also forms of remembrance of Allah (SWT).

At this point, it would be useful to translate the discussion that has taken place so far regarding *Tazkiyah Al-Nafs*, *Iman*, and *Ihsan* into the language of the *Sufis*. The *Sufis* use the term *Tajliyah Al-Ruh* (enlightenment of the spiritual soul) to describe this phenomenon of "remembrance." Referring again to the parable of the sun and the sunbeam, the *Sufis* note that just like the sunbeam, the *ruh* also loses its vitality and luster for various reasons. The remembrance of Allah (SWT) is the only means of restoring this lost vitality and radiance; it is a means of restoring heat and vigor to something that has become cold and stagnant. The instrument for restoring to the *ruh* its lost vitality is the remembrance of Allah (SWT). We have already noted that the remembrance of Allah (SWT) is a state of the heart that is achieved primarily through the Qur'an, then through prayer and, finally, by means of the Prophetic supplications.

The Result of the "Liberation of Spirit"For the *ruh* that has become animated, activated, and liberated from the shackles of *nafs*, the logical result is the commencement of a journey. This journey has been succinctly described by Plotinus as "the flight of the alone

to The Alone." Without suggesting anything more than a partial and imperfect resemblance between the two, we say that our *ruh* is solitary and lonely and so is Almighty Allah (SWT). The *ruh* is not related to anyone, it has no father, it is nobody's offspring, and it has no spouse; all these relations are linked to the material body of the human being and not to the spiritual soul. In modern philosophy, the term "alienation" has come to be widely used to describe this sense of loneliness and solitude. Indeed, these are the feelings experienced by any person who begins to develop intellectually and/or psychologically. In other words, the more an individual moves above the merely animal level, the more will be his or her consciousness of loneliness and solitude. Consequently, on the one hand there is the unique individuality of the *ruh* and, on the other hand, there is The One Who is absolutely Alone. There cannot even be an inkling of the slightest contamination in the "Oneness" of The One.

Now it is an established law of nature that everything has an inherent urge or tendency to return to its real source and origin, and therefore the direction of the spirit's journey is towards its source — Almighty Allah (SWT). The *ruh* has been likened to a bird that has been imprisoned in the cage of the physical body. This bird is agitating to free itself and rise towards the heavens, and this has been symbolized by Plotinus as the "flight of the alone to The Alone." We can add a little something to this symbolism by noting that it is the flight of "the finite alone" to "The Infinite Alone." Two couplets from Iqbal's *Gulshan-e-Raz-e-Jadeed* (The New Garden of Mystery) are instructive regarding this discussion:

مرا دل سوخت بر تنہائی اُو

نم سامانِ بزم آرائی اُو

مثال دانہ می کارم خودی را

My heart burns on the loneliness of God!

In order, therefore, to maintain intact His

Ego-Society

I sow in my dust the seed of selfhood,

And keep a constant vigil over my "I." [3]

Summarizing the discussion thus far, the basic point to note is that the cultivation and strengthening of the *ruh* is an absolute must for every individual. The means for attaining this goal is *dhikr* or remembrance of Allah (SWT). The most potent means of attaining remembrance is the Qur'an — which describes itself as "The Remembrance" — then prayer, and finally the various Prophetic supplications. Remembrance of Allah (SWT) helps to enlighten the *ruh*, with the result that the depth and intensity of faith continue to develop until a stage is reached where the believer attains the level of *Ihsan*.

The Disciplining and Purification of the *Nafs*

The process of disciplining and purifying the *nafs* must accompany the efforts to nourish and strengthen the *ruh*. One has to engage in various exercises in order to culture the *nafs* so that it moves from craving libidinal gratification to being content and satisfied in the pursuit of higher ideals. Just as various exercises are required for training the vocal chords of the singer, the reflexes of the athlete, and the eyes of the physician, the disciplining of the *nafs* also requires certain exercises. Indeed, it is not possible to culture the *nafs* without undertaking intense effort and steely determination.

Foremost among the exercises to discipline the *nafs* is the establishment of prayer. In general, prayer is a means of remembrance of Allah (SWT) and therefore it helps in strengthening the *ruh*. To establish regular prayer in a collective setting, on the other hand, is a very effective means of disciplining the *nafs*. Establishing the prayer five times a day in a *masjid* requires that a specific timetable be

followed so that, in spite of all the distractions and difficulties of everyday life, one still manages to show up for the prayers regularly. In addition to the five obligatory prayers, there is the most esteemed of the supererogatory prayers, *tahajjud*. Here one has to get up in the middle of the night, although the *nafs* craves rest and sleep. Secondly, there is the exercise of fasting in which one must abstain from two of the most potent physical needs, food and sex, from dawn to sunset. The third exercise is spending one's hard earned money for the sake of Allah (SWT). Since the *nafs* wants to hold on to this wealth and lavish it on itself, it pains the *nafs* seeing this wealth being "wasted" in charity.

The establishment of prayer, fasting, and spending for the sake of Allah (SWT) are all exercises that counter the demands of the *nafs* and thereby serve to weaken its hold on the heart. Note that the same goal is further achieved through two other religious obligations, each of which combines the features of the aforementioned three obligations. First, there is the obligation of *Hajj*. In *Hajj* there are specific requirements regarding *dhikr* and prayer, restrictions of *ihram*, the spending of wealth, as well as the risk and discomfort of a long journey. Second, there is the mission of spreading the word of Islam and struggling to establish it on the earth (*Iqamah Al-Deen*). This mission also brings with it a great deal of trials and tribulations that require the believer to control the demands of the *nafs*. A believer undertaking this mission has to face abusive language and insults, endure malicious propaganda, suffer the taunts of street urchins, and bear the pain of being described as charlatan or insane. The Prophet (SAW) himself had to listen to people calling him a liar, a mere poet, a possessed individual, a sorcerer, a demented person, a magician, and other such things, all because he was calling the people towards Islam. In the face of this abuse, the command from Allah (SWT) was to remain patient and steadfast, and not to respond to any insult,

provocation, or physical harm. Just like the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions (RAA), every believer must face these insults during the course of the struggle to establish Islam — the patient endurance of which serves to control and discipline the *nafs*. Similarly, there can be no struggle for Islam without the expenditure of money, time, and capabilities. At the same time, one endangers not only one's own well being but also that of one's family by condemning tyranny and injustice. When, during the course of this mission, the stage of open conflict arrives one has to put one's very own life on the line. At this stage the two most fundamental biological instincts — preservation of the self and preservation of the species — have to be curtailed for the sake of a higher, spiritual ideal.

The most important point to note in the context of this discussion is the following: Only one of two conditions can be present in a given society: either Islam is established and dominant as a politico-socio-economic order, or it has been relegated to the private affairs of the individual. If Islam is dominant, then *Salat*, *Zakat*, *Saum*, and *Hajj* would be the primary means of disciplining and purifying the *nafs*, and one should also engage in supererogatory practices to further attain this goal. In the latter case, however, the mission of calling people to Islam and striving to make it dominant takes precedence over all supererogatory (*nafl*) acts of worship. When Islam is weak and overpowered by forces of disbelief,

primary attention has to be given to *Jihad* as a means of disciplining and purifying the *nafs* and not to supererogatory acts of worships.

The importance of engaging in the struggle to establish Islam as it relates to the culturing of the *nafs* on the individual level is quite clear — this struggle is an exercise in disciplining the *nafs* so that the *ruh* may be enlightened and liberated. There is, however, another important and collective dimension to this struggle. The ultimate goal of the struggle for *Iqamah Al-Deen* is to

establish a just and equitable society so that the opportunity is afforded to the greatest number of people to adopt the path of self-purification and spiritual enlightenment. Imagine the selfishness and self-centeredness of an individual who has spent years roaming in the deserts, isolated on mountain tops, or living in the jungles — all for the sake of his own spiritual enlightenment. This person undertakes all sorts of difficult exercises and risks in order to cleanse, purify, and refine his own self, while the vast multitudes of his fellow human beings are condemned to an oppressive, wretched, and inhuman existence due to the tyranny of men who have set themselves up in the place of God. This multitude of humanity will not even be afforded the opportunity to ponder over ideals any higher or nobler than their empty stomachs and tin-roof shacks. Whether the individual seeker actually attains spiritual enlightenment or not, that point is totally irrelevant for the vast majority of human beings — the wretched of the earth. The efforts on the part of this individual to reach the heights of spiritual enlightenment are self-centered and totally divorced from the altruistic struggle to establish justice. Whatever may be the ultimate outcome of this effort in the eyes of Allah (SWT), from a sociological point of view we can state with absolute confidence that selfishness and self-centeredness negate all higher spiritual values.

It has been detailed in my tract *The Objective and Goal of Muhammad's Prophethood (SAW)* that the advent of the Last Prophet (SAW) took place at a critical juncture in human history. From his era onwards, the domain of individual liberty and freedom began to shrink and the domain of the collective system began to expand dramatically. In other words, it became progressively more difficult for the individual to shape his or her own life, free from the influence of the collective system in place. This tyranny has reached its absolute climax in the modern secular society where the very hopes, fears, and dreams of

the individual are engineered by a corporate system over which he or she has no control. For the masses of humanity who are not privileged to enjoy the fruits of the modern corporate-consumer culture, political tyranny combines with economic destitution and a grossly unjust social stratification to produce a society where no individual can possibly assert his or her individuality. The *hadith* of the Prophet (SAW) — "Poverty leads towards disbelief" — has a direct bearing on this subject. Indeed, if the scrooges of hunger, indigence, and despair do not actually produce disbelief, they definitely have the

effect of making the individual heedless and forgetful of Allah (SWT). This idea is expressed by Faiz Ahmad Faiz in an Urdu couplet thus:

دنیا نے تیری یاد سے بیگانہ کردیا

تجھ سے بھی دلفریب ہیں غم روگار

Life has alienated me,

From the remembrance of your beauty;

More entrancing than even you,

Are the worries of this world.

Shah Waliullah Delhvi (RA) has offered a very penetrating analysis regarding the relationship between extreme wealth, grinding poverty, and the condition of religion in society. He says that the unjust distribution of wealth in society eventually leads to its concentration in the hands of a tiny elite. The elite possessing this wealth indulge in luxury, extravagance, and opulence; it becomes immersed in all the vices that inevitably accompany such a lifestyle. The impoverished masses, on the other hand, find themselves trapped in a life of destitution and desperation, a life in which the procurement of the next meal becomes their central concern. Consequently, most of the people living in such a society begin to merely exist at the levels of animals — the rich because they choose to, the masses because they are forced to. In both cases, human beings

become oblivious and forgetful of Allah (SWT). How can there be any hope of spiritual growth under such unjust socio-economic conditions?

There is a very critical point to note about the religious concept of “service to humanity.” This concept has three different levels. On the most basic level it is the feeding, clothing, and sheltering of the poor and tending to the needs of the indigent. For an individual who is calling people towards Allah (SWT) and towards the light of truth, it is of great importance that he or she not only have sympathy and empathy for the poor and the needy, but that he or she actually serves them. The second level of “service to humanity” is to help human beings regarding their fate in the Hereafter. What good is it to temporarily allay the suffering of an individual in the worldly life, if he or she will not benefit from the Grace of Allah (SWT) in the Hereafter? Consequently, calling people to Islam so that they may benefit from Divine Grace in the Hereafter is a more noble level of “service to humanity.” The third level in this

regard is to struggle for the freedom of the creatures of Allah (SWT) from bondage to the tyranny of despots, and to establish a just and equitable order in which all are free to develop their spiritual potential and to love, adore, and obey their Lord. This is the noblest of the three levels of "service to humanity" because it produces benefits in this world as well as in the Hereafter. Reducing the concept of "service to humanity" merely to the first level betrays a limited and distorted conception of religious obligations.

The Results of Deviation from the Prophetic Model

We have already discussed two general issues, viz., the displacement of the Qur'anic and Prophetic term of *Ihsan* by a term of unknown origin, *tasawwuf*; and the Qur'anic and Prophetic methodology of attaining *Ihsan*. The discussion will now move on to explore the consequences of the deviation from the methodology of

the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. I will divide this discussion into two parts, viz., indifference to the Qur'an and abandonment of *Jihad*.

1. Indifference to the Qur'an

The most important point to note in this regard is the fact that departure from the authentic Islamic terminology and methodology in relation to *Ihsan* gave rise to an attitude of apathy and indifference towards the Qur'an in Muslim thought and society. Soon after the earliest period of Islamic history, we notice that the Qur'an was gradually removed from its central place as being the axis and means of genuine *dhikr* (remembrance and reminder) of Allah (SWT). In place of the Qur'anic *ayaat*, novel formulae and innovative incantations became accepted as means of *dhikr* among the masses. The basic reason for the displacement of the Qur'an from its central place was a natural and logical process of historical development, as described in my paper "Qur'an and *Jihad*." In addition, there were also secondary factors that further contributed to this attitude of indifference towards the Qur'an, as described below.

In the earliest stage of Islamic history, the personality of a Muslim was shaped by two pivotal factors: the Qur'an and *Jihad*. The Qur'an was the means to bring about the internal revolution within the believer and to give birth to a living and vibrant faith — a faith that would reach the level of certainty. The external manifestation of this internal revolution was the struggle against the forces of tyranny, corruption, and ignorance in human society — forces symbolized by idolatry in the pagan society. However, when Islam passed through the phase of being an oppressed minority religion to the dominant ruling force, it left the phase of mission and movement and entered the phase of empire and government.

This entry into the phase of empire brought with it certain natural, logical, and inevitable results. Indeed, the onset of these

results was as inevitable as the onset of old age after youth. During the phase of state and empire, the real concern and emphasis began to be placed on law instead of faith. Consequently, the legal dimension of Islamic teachings, which deals with the issues of government and state, became the primary focus of religious scholars in this period. Slowly but surely, the entire focus shifted from faith to jurisprudence, from the esoteric dimension of Islam to its exoteric dimension. The Qur'an itself could not remain immune from the shift in focus that was taking place in society at large. Since the Qur'an is primarily a Book of Guidance, the amount of legal directives that it contains is relatively small in comparison to its discussion regarding the verity and importance of the spiritual realities. Since the attention was now focused on law, the Qur'an ceased to be the central focus of intellectual concerns for the legal scholars of Islam. Instead, the fields of *Hadith* and *Fiqh* became their primary concern. Even among the *ahadith*, the focus was on those traditions that had juristic implications. It is important to keep this point in mind so as not to develop a negative attitude towards our predecessors. This shift in emphasis was not due to any ill-will on their part; instead, it was the inevitable and natural outcome of the concrete historical circumstances in which they lived.

In addition to the emergence of state and empire, there were other contributing factors responsible for pushing the Qur'an into the background of Muslim consciousness. The onset of state and empire brought with it feudalism, and the resultant social stratification of Muslim society. This was a radical departure from the Prophetic community in Madinah and the Islamic community that existed during the reign of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs (RAA). With the social stratification of society, the royal-feudal elite consciously attempted to keep the teachings of the Qur'an hidden from the masses. They did so because it is difficult to study the

Qur'an even casually and not be struck by the intensity and bluntness with which it condemns the unjust accumulation of wealth and its ostentatious display, and of withholding what is due to the poor. These egalitarian teachings of the Qur'an are revolutionary indeed, and the interests of the elite necessitated that such teachings be kept concealed from the masses. Prof. Yusuf Salim Chishti has written an excellent essay regarding the various reasons why the Muslims became distant and detached from the Qur'an. [4]

It has been mentioned that an innovation in religion inevitably moves into the vacuum created by the removal of an authentic Prophetic practice. In other words, a *bid'ah* replaces a *sunnah*. By extension it can be stated that whenever something genuine is removed, something counterfeit will take its place. When the Qur'an no longer remained the primary focus regarding the *dhikr* (remembrance and reminder of Allah), novel incantations and formulae were adopted to take its place. The leading contemporary *Sufi*

teachers themselves acknowledge the fact that many of the incantations and formulae that have become common in *Sufi* circles during the course of history have no basis in the Prophetic tradition. An argument is put forth that there is nothing wrong with these novelties because their emergence is akin to the emergence of new legal opinions due to *ijtihad*. But this argument is transparently spurious because *ijtihad* can only be done when a new situation emerges that was not present in the days of the Prophet (SAW) and a legal verdict has to be drawn pertaining to that situation. The question is what novel situation has emerged that calls for the introduction of these new incantations or novel formulae into Islamic devotional practice? The declared goal of these techniques is to achieve self-purification and spiritual enlightenment, and this was also one of the goals before the earliest community of Muslims. It is obvious that the instruments and practices that were used by the Companions (RAA)

under the guidance of the Prophet (SAW) to achieve this goal were quite different from the instruments and practices that became popular among latter day *Sufis*. The fact that the goal is the same in both settings but the instruments and practices used are different means that something genuine has been removed and an innovation has been introduced into the Prophetic religion.

The second point to note regarding the displacement of the Qur'an by novel incantations and formulae for the purpose of *dhikr* is the following: The volume and intensity of the novelties inevitably increased. It is obvious that the impact of the Divine Word on the human spirit cannot be matched by anything conceived by a human being — no matter how enlightened that human being may be. From a qualitative point of view, there is no comparison whatsoever between the majesty and grandeur of the Revealed Word and the incantations and formulae adopted by the *Sufis*. When the Qur'an was abandoned in favor of these practices for the purpose of purifying the self and enlightening the spirit, the only way to make up for the difference in quality was through increased emphasis on quantity. Consequently, extremely arduous and lengthy courses began to be prescribed in *tasawwuf*. This created a vicious circle: The Qur'an was removed from the center of spiritual concern due to certain inevitabilities of the historical trajectory, and new techniques were adopted to fill the vacuum in order to quench the spiritual thirst. Due to the relatively low level of quality and impact of these new practices, emphasis had to be placed on quantity and, as a result, less time and energy was available for the Qur'an.

The most dangerous outcome of removing the Qur'an from the center of the spiritual quest is the fact that the Muslims became far removed from the philosophical and intellectual teachings of the Qur'an. It is obvious that the Qur'an is not merely a Book of Remembrance and Reminder, it also provides philosophical and intellectual

guidance to those who can appreciate these dimensions of the Divine Word. Just as this Book has the capacity to quench the spiritual thirst of the soul, it also has the capacity to satisfy the philosophical quest of the mind. Being the Final Revelation to humanity, this Book addresses the human need for

guidance at all levels of intellect, and will continue to play that role for all times to come. Once the intellectual and philosophical teachings of the Qur'an were no longer apprehended and appreciated, Greek philosophy — especially its neo-Platonic variant — moved into the vacuum and put its imprint on Muslim thought. The entire legacy of classical and medieval Islamic thought shows obvious influence of Greek philosophy. When as great a thinker as Shah Waliullah could not avoid the influence of Platonic thought, what can one say about lesser minds? Similarly, ethical theories among the Muslims were greatly influenced by Platonic and Aristotelian ideals.

When foreign ideas filled the intellectual and philosophical vacuum that was created by neglecting the Qur'anic teachings, the gulf between the Muslims and the Qur'an widened further. This gulf should not be understood in theological terms. The Muslims continued to believe in the Qur'an as being the Final Revelation of Allah (SWT), they continued to recite it faithfully, and it continued to be the central axis of their liturgical practices. The gulf between the Muslims and Qur'an concerns the intellectual and the spiritual quest of the human being. During each epoch, the religious mind is confronted with new challenges and questions that emerge as the result of scientific and/or sociological development — and these challenges and questions need to be addressed adequately. After the early Muslim community, the role of the Qur'an in this particular capacity gradually diminished; in other words, the Qur'an ceased to be a source of inspiration in relation to the new challenges posed by the march of history. By the end of the classical age of Islam, therefore,

the relationship of the Qur'an to the intellectual and spiritual pursuits of Muslim society was almost completely severed. The place of the Qur'an in this regard was taken by books of incantations, sermons, and the wisdom sayings of individual pious men. There is no doubt that some of these books are masterpieces of literature, poetry, and oratory, etc. Upon close inspection, however, it becomes clear that in terms of substance and essence they leave a great deal to be desired. Iqbal has described this state of affairs in the following couplets:

خوار از مہجورِ قرآں شدی

شکوہ سنجِ گردشِ دوراں شدی

اے چوں شبنم بر زمیں افتندۂ

در بغل داری کتابِ زندۂ

You complain and grumble about the vagaries of your fate,

How low you have sunk, after abandoning the Qur'an.

As scattered dew, you lie abject in the dust,

Even though you have the Living Book in your grip!

And again:

واعظ دستان زن افسانه بند

معنی او پست و حرف او بلند

از خطیب و دیلمی گفتار اُو

با ضعیف و شاذ و مرسل کار اُو

The preacher, with his anecdotes and legends,

Has grand speech but little truth to offer.

On his lips are quotations from unreliable narrators,

Like Khateeb and Dailami.

He delights in traditions,

That are weak, rare, or insecure.

And:

صوفی پشمینہ پوش حال مست

از شراب نغمہ قوال مست

آتش از شعر عراقی دل دلش

در نمی سازد بقرآن محفلش

The *Sufi* in his garb of coarse wool,

Gets intoxicated by listening to mystic songs.

His heart is inflamed by the fervor of Iraqi's poetry,

But the Qur'an does not find any place in his circle.

In the above verses, Iqbal has lamented that both the mystic and the preacher ignore the Qur'an. The *Sufis* enjoy mystical poetry but are alienated from the Divine Word. Instead of the Qur'an, the sermonizers preach apocryphal stories of the great saints of old, and quote fanciful sayings attributed to the Prophet (SAW) that are of dubious historical authenticity.

In short, the first step that removed the Qur'an from being the central axis of *dhikr*, in direct violation of the Prophetic practice, produced results in later history that are all too obvious. There are numerous people who are engaged in *dhikr* today, but their focus has been totally removed from not only the Qur'an but from other directives of the Prophet (SAW) as well. Consequently, that which passes for *dhikr* today has no basis whatsoever either in the teachings of the Qur'an or in the practice of the Prophet (SAW) — and this is a fact that even some of the contemporary *Sufis* acknowledge. In this regard, Maulana Allah Yar Chakralwi, the spiritual guide of Maulana Muhammad Akram Awan, has acknowledged in his book, titled *Dalail Al-Salook*, that the modern *Sufi* practices cannot be traced back to the Prophetic *Sunnah*. He, however, argues that these practices are permissible because they have been adopted as a result of *ijtihad* —

but, as I have already mentioned, these practices are more like innovations than authentic *ijtihad*.

When listing the various means to achieve *dhikr*, or remembrance of Allah (SWT), I purposely did not mention one specific form. There actually are four means of *dhikr* but I mentioned only three. It would be appropriate to mention the fourth one at this point. As a means of *dhikr*, the Qur'an refers to itself as "The Reminder," then there is *Salah* (prayer) which is the most comprehensive and all-encompassing means of *dhikr*, and then there are the supplications which the Prophet (SAW) taught the believers. In addition to these three means of *dhikr*, a fourth one consists of a special something that is assigned to a particular person for specific reasons. This, in reality, is a prescription for treating a disease of the *nafs*. Note that the *nafs* of each person has its own characteristic weaknesses and maladies. For example, some individuals are overwhelmed by their carnal desires whereas others are preoccupied with a craving for wealth. Some individuals desire recognition and fame while others crave power and authority. A *Sufi* who is also an expert in human psychology is able to study the personality of the person and pinpoint the exact weakness. After having diagnosed the weakness, the expert can assign a specific form of *dhikr* to that person in order to control and discipline the *nafs*. It is obvious that this specific prescription is only that, a prescription for a specific individual. To take this person-specific prescription and generalize it for everybody is more dangerous than taking a specific pharmaceutical prescription given to a certain patient and then declaring it to be a panacea for everybody. The permanent and general status can only belong to those methods, means, and invocations that have been taught by the Prophet (SAW). In this regard, it should be mentioned that the Prophet (SAW) himself also prescribed certain invocations to certain individuals, and they fall under this fourth category of *dhikr*.

2.Abandonment of Jihad

The second outcome of the departure from the authentic Islamic terminology and methodology in relation to Ihsan is the following. The obligations of da'wah (calling people towards Islam), Iqamah Al-Deen (establishing Islam on the face of the earth), and Jihad (or struggle) for the cause of Allah (SWT) became totally irrelevant to the effort of disciplining the nafs. The root cause of this was also quite understandable. When Islam was in its initial historical stage, the struggle to establish it in the face of overwhelming opposition was the primary religious obligation of every Muslim. To spread the messages of Islam, to maintain discipline in the face of provocation, and to engage in battle when the situation so demands — all this was considered Jihad for the cause of Allah (SWT). However, when the Islamic movement succeeded and Islam entered the phase of state and empire, this comprehensive and all-inclusive definition of Jihad was replaced by a limited conception of armed conflict. Jihad was declared synonymous with qital or armed conflict, and even this armed conflict was taken to mean the defense of the borders of the Muslim empire and, if possible, to expand these borders. It is obvious that a limited number of individuals were needed for any particular military campaign. If that number became available, they would fulfill the obligation on behalf of everyone else in society. Therefore, Jihad came

to be understood as a collective religious obligation (fard kifayah), instead of being a primary individual obligation (fard ‘ain). This shift had already occurred even in the days of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (RAA). It has always been my position that it is permissible to engage in supererogatory acts of devotion in order to get nearer to Allah (SWT), provided Islam is dominant. Indeed, this was the only means available to most Muslims for the purpose of spiritual growth once Islam was established as a state.

However, when the Rightly Guided Caliphate ended and was replaced by a hereditary monarchy, the problem was further complicated. Monarchy combined with feudalism gave birth to an oppressive and tyrannical system. A number of early attempts to stop this deviation failed. Afterwards, an ideological struggle was needed to bring back the purity of Islam, but such a struggle did not materialize due to two practical hurdles. The first factor was the opinion of many scholars that Muslims cannot rebel against their ruler until and unless he explicitly orders them to break the *Shari‘ah*. Short of that, rebellion against a Muslim ruler is forbidden even if he himself is wicked or unjust. Certain *ahadith* of the Prophet (SAW) also support this position, and therefore this is the firm opinion of one school of thought. In contrast, Imam Abu Hanifa (RA) has articulated a genuinely balanced and authentically argued position that leaves open the possibility of rebelling against an unjust Muslim ruler. However, the preconditions that he has set forth which would make the rebellion permissible are so strict that it was practically impossible to meet them in a feudal-monarchical setting. Imam Abu Hanifa (RA) has argued that rebellion (or *khuruj*) is permissible when significant material and human resources have been gathered so that, in terms of worldly calculations, the success of the rebellion can be deemed likely. In a time and place where the concepts of the citizens’ rights, the right of assembly, the freedom of expression, and the freedom of association did not exist, it was practically impossible to undertake a struggle to replace the existing monarch. An ideological struggle against the status quo could not be launched despite its permissibility in at least one school of thought. The only way that was left open for the pious and the courageous was to prohibit evil by raising their voice against it, and even that was not always tolerated by the monarchy. Thus, these historical circumstances were the second factor that forestalled the emergence of an

ideological challenge to the emergent monarchical-feudal order.

As a result of the two hurdles mentioned above, the practical dimension of the Prophetic method for the purification and disciplining of *nafs* — *Jihad* for the sake of Allah (SWT) — became virtually untenable. It has already been mentioned that *Jihad* is an exceedingly important means of countering the lower, libidinal instincts of the *nafs* — it requires the spending of wealth, the loss of comfort and security, and overcoming the instinct of self-preservation. During the monarchical period this important means of self-purification became practically defunct.

An example from the world of nature illustrates this point. When a tree is growing in its natural environment it grows upwards, towards the sky. If a roof appears above the tree, however, it will continue to grow but its direction will no longer be upwards. Instead, the tree will bend and start growing sideways. Hereditary monarchy was that roof or obstacle that had to be acknowledged and accommodated, willingly or unwillingly, by the Muslims. This obstacle contorted the natural pattern of growth of the inner impulses that urge the human being to search for the higher spiritual realities. In other words, while the spiritual thirst and urge remained, the Prophetic means of satisfying this quest — *Jihad* — was no longer possible. When the authentic means were no longer possible, novel methods had to be invented in order to pursue the same goal. The content and the character of these novel ways was such that a situation developed in Muslim society where monasticism (or *rahbaniyyah*) appeared even though there are clear Prophetic injunctions against such behavior. The Prophet (SAW) said: "There is no monasticism in Islam, except *Jihad* for the sake of Allah (SWT)." Despite this clear injunction, when we look at the life histories of the *Sufis* we find many of them wandering in the deserts and

jungles for up to years at a time, as a matter of ascetic retreat. We also find many of them leading a life of celibacy, once again in clear violation of the Prophetic command to marry — the argument being that spiritual enlightenment does not go hand in hand with the toils and travails of family life.

In summary, the Qur'an and *Jihad* were the two most important realities in terms of the spiritual and moral life of the Muslims during the first century of Islam. The link between these two realities was the light of faith (*Iman*). The Qur'an produced *Iman*, and *Iman* led to a struggle for the cause of Allah (SWT). When Islam moved from the phase of mission and movement to the phase of state and empire, however, a significant shift took place as a result of natural and organic processes. On the one hand, the Qur'an ceased to be the central axis of *dhikr* and novel incantations were adopted to fill the void thus created. On the other hand, the practices of mission, struggling to establish Islam, and *Jihad* for the sake of Allah (SWT) lost their significance as they related to the process of purification of the *nafs*. These genuinely Prophetic practices were replaced by extremely arduous and difficult exercises that are not to be found in the Prophetic model.

The Cure for the Disease

Now we turn to the issue of curing the ailment that has struck the soul of spirituality in Islam. The diagnosis has been clearly outlined in the foregoing paragraphs and the causes, characteristics, and manifestations of departure from the Prophetic model have also been spelled out. This much having been done, it is relatively easy to identify the cure. The cure is simple: Return to the Prophetic model that we find in vogue during the early years of Islam.

Since the disease has two dimensions, the cure will also have to be two-pronged. Firstly, there has to be a “Return to the Qur’an.” The Qur’an must be accorded its central and pivotal place as the source of spiritual and

moral enlightenment. The depth and breadth of faith that can be attained from an intimate and organic relationship with the Qur’an cannot be had from any other source. Furthermore, it is the Qur’an and only the Qur’an that can satiate the needs of an individual who aspires to attain faith with an intellectual dimension. It has been mentioned before that one can attain blind faith — genuine and intense — by staying in the company of righteous people and by strictly adhering to the *Shari‘ah*. However, if the goal is to acquire faith with an intellectual dimension, then there is only one source for this type of faith and that is the Qur’an. The quest for gnosis and the search for the knowledge of reality free from all veils can only be satisfied by the Divine Word. I refer to Iqbal once again:

فاش گویم آنچہ در دل مضمر است

این کتابی نیست چیزی دیگر است

چون بجان در رفت جان دیگر شود

جان چو دیگر شد جہان دیگر شود

To speak the truth, the Qur’an is not just a book,

It is altogether a different thing.

When it penetrates into the soul,

The soul becomes entirely different from what it was before;

And when the soul changes, the whole world is transformed!

He further explains:

کشتن ابلیس کار مشکل است

زانکہ او گم اندر اعماق دل است

خوشتر آں باشد مسلمانش کنی!

کشتہء شمشیر قرآنش کنی!

To kill the *Iblees* is difficult,

For he lives deep in the hidden nooks of the heart.

Better far would it be to convert him to Islam,

Kill him with the sword of the Qur'an.

There is an important point regarding the recitation of the Qur'an that should be kept in mind. There are two dimensions of benefiting from the Divine Word: regular, constant, and repetitive recitation on the one hand and deep reflection, deliberation, and contemplation over its wisdom and meaning on the other. A believer must relate to the Qur'an on both of these levels, regular recitation and careful deliberation. It is obvious, however, that there is a degree of tension between these two levels — more of one means less of the other. The more occupied one is in reciting the Qur'an, the less time one will have to deliberately ponder its meaning and message. The more time one spends carefully scrutinizing and exploring the wisdom that is implicit and explicit in the *ayaat* of the Qur'an, the less time one will have to recite it repetitively. This tension can be resolved in light of the pointer contained in the following *ayah*:

سَنُرِيۡهِمۡ اٰيٰتِنَا فِى الۡاٰفَاقِ وَ فِىۡۤ اَنۡفُسِهِمۡ حَتّٰى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمۡ اَنَّهُ الۡحَـقُّ‌ؕ [حٰم السجدة :41:53]

In time We shall make it plainly clear to them Our messages [through what they perceive] on the horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [Qur'an] is indeed the truth…. (Ha-Meem Al-Sajdah 41:53)

It must be understood that the Qur'an uses inductive rather than deductive logic when putting forth arguments to draw the individual's attention towards Allah (SWT). It encourages and challenges the individual to look not only at the natural world but also in the depths of one's own being. Indeed, if one looks closely and

intently enough one will find nothing but evidence of Divine Providence both in the world without and the world within.

In light of the fore-cited *ayah* we can say that there are three types of Divine *ayaat*: a) Qur'anic *ayaat*, b) the *ayaat* in the natural world, and c) the *ayaat* in one's own being. Pondering these three types of *ayaat* and discovering the intimate relationship between them will result in the dormant consciousness being awakened and rising to the level of clear consciousness. This is actually what is meant by "remembrance" and "reminder," and this is what leads to genuine faith. It is obvious that the amount of knowledge that has been accumulated regarding the natural world far outstrips anything that was known even a century ago. Consequently, with the rapid progress of scientific knowledge fresh avenues are opening up that provide entirely new angles and insights into Qur'anic wisdom — angles and insights that are simply not available in the absence of this scientific knowledge. This development offers a profound opportunity and challenge for the modern believer, because scientific developments are naturally moving in a direction that brings the intellectual dimension of *Tazkeer bil-Qur'an* (Reminder by the Qur'an) to the forefront.

This point was emphasized by Iqbal in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. He has argued that the methods and exercises which the *Sufis* of a bygone era had adopted in order to purify the *nafs* and liberate the spirit are simply too rigorous to be borne by the modern individual. In the present discussion, we have stressed the fact that these methods and exercises find no basis and justification in the Prophetic Method, but the observation by Iqbal sheds additional light on the subject — the fact that the moderns indeed are not capable of these rigorous exercises. In order to make up for this shortcoming it is simply indispensable to emphasize the intellectual dimension of *Tazkeer bil-Qur'an*. The reason for this is the

fact that the doors of scientific knowledge have been opened wide by Allah (SWT) in the modern era as never before in human history. By virtue of this opening, the depth and breadth of Qur'anic thought and wisdom have become apparent at unprecedented levels. This development actually serves as compensation for the rigorous physical exercises that were required in bygone days in order to attain spiritual enlightenment.

In curing the disease, the second point is a return to the active struggle to establish the Kingdom of Allah (SWT) on earth as a means of countering the demands of the *nafs*. The obligatory modes of worship prescribed by the *Shari'ah* need to be the primary means of approaching the Divine, while the emphasis that was placed on supererogatory practices by the *Sufis* should be moderately reduced. Out of these supererogatory practices, the ones that are rooted in the Prophetic model should be adhered to on an individual level as much as possible, but *Jihad* for the cause of Allah (SWT) has to become the primary means for the purposes of disciplining, purifying and culturing the *nafs*. It has already been mentioned that all the objectives of controlling the *nafs* that can be achieved through the rigorous physical exercises

of the *Sufis* can also be attained through the struggle against, and uprooting the system of, tyranny, oppression, and injustice; in other words, through the efforts to establish the *Deen* of Allah (SWT) in this world. The only difference is the fact that attaining this objective through the latter method is more authentically Prophetic and far more efficient.

The second point that needs to be kept in mind is that, at the current stage in history, the *Deen* of Allah (SWT) is not ascendant. That is to say, Islam is not operative at the level of state and government; it is, in the words of a Prophetic *hadith*, in the period of "alien strangeness." Referring to his own Prophetic mission and projecting into the future, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

has said: "Islam came into the world as a stranger, and it will once again become a stranger. Therefore, give glad tidings to the strangers." When the Prophet (SAW) began his mission the concept of *Tauheed* had become so corrupt and distorted that its proper exposition sounded bizarre, not just to the pagan Arabs but also to the self-proclaimed adherents of monotheism — the Jews and the Christians. After this initial period of strangeness, Islam was established and the noble principle of *Tauheed* reigned supreme, but eventually the principle of entropy set in and the period of decline began. Consequently, at the current juncture in history the proper exposition of *Tauheed* sounds strange and bizarre even to the ears of the vast majority of Muslims — and Islam has once again become something alien and estranged. Therefore, it is logical and sensible that once again the struggle to establish the *Deen* of Allah (SWT) becomes the main focus of the Muslim, not only as a religious obligation but also as a means of combating the unruly / wayward demands of the *nafs*.

In this context, it also needs to be mentioned that many of the obstacles that were present during the period of medieval monarchy in relation to the struggle of making Islam supreme have been removed as a result of the evolution of social institutions. During medieval times there was no distinction between state and government, to oppose the government was to oppose the state. By extension, anyone opposing the state was a heretic, politically and religiously. However, the concept of human rights and the rights of the citizens have evolved over the past few hundred years. Today, the citizens of a state have the right to challenge the government within the limits of the Constitution. They have the rights of assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of organization — rights that were not present in the medieval period. From a purely theoretical and Constitutional point of view, there are no restrictions on the citizens of the modern state to organize and campaign so that a genuinely Islamic form of

governance comes into existence. By the Grace of Allah (SWT), this concept of citizens' rights is most evolved in Pakistan among all the Muslim countries — some Muslim countries are still in the medieval period in this regard. Consequently, there are no external limitations on those who wish to choose this path as a means of disciplining the *nafs*, at least in our country. The sad fact, however, is that we have

placed numerous limitations on ourselves, and have developed a tendency to look for excuses. The hurdles are internal and of our own making.

In summary, the evolution of the physical sciences has opened the way to gain profound insights into the wisdom and profundity of the Qur'an — all of this to the degree that was not possible in the pre-modern era for the average believer. This opens the door for the development of a religious faith that has an intellectual dimension. At the same time, the evolution of the social sciences has made it possible for the average believer to legally and constitutionally undertake a genuine struggle for the sake of Islam, to struggle to make Islam supreme — again an opportunity that was not available to earlier generations who lived under monarchy. This opens the door of disciplining and culturing the *nafs* in accordance with the practice of the Prophet (SAW) and the early Muslim community.

The conclusion of this argument has to return to the points that were made at the very outset. As far as the objectives and goals of *tasawwuf* are concerned, these are in full agreement with Islamic teachings. To put the matter more bluntly, the objectives and goals of *tasawwuf* are in fact the very core, the essence, and the spirit of Islam. However, during the course of Muslim history, *Sufi* thought and practice has significantly deviated from the Prophetic model in terms of the exact methodology to attain these objectives. A critical and objective academic study of *Sufism* and its comparison to the Prophetic life sufficiently illustrates this point. The advances made in

comparative academic study is also a valuable tool in this regard — a tool that helps us critically analyze the subjects under study. I must agree with Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi who has noted that the *Sufis* are the most genuine philosophers of Islam. The issues of ontology, epistemology, and that of the relationship between the two find their most authentic Islamic exposition in the words of the *Sufis* of Islam, not the "philosophers" of Islam. That much having been said, the arguments outlined in the preceding pages delineate the points on which I see major shortcomings in the institution of *Tasawwuf*. For me the Qur'an is the ultimate criterion for analyzing, critiquing, and complimenting any given subject. In this regard the example of the Prophet (SAW) — his life, his sayings, his doings, his non-doings — is almost just as important because his life is the most authentic commentary on the Qur'an. I have attempted to examine the subject of *tasawwuf* by viewing it through the lenses of the clear and indisputable teachings of the Qur'an and the life-history of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). If you find any benefit in it, it is due to the Grace of Allah (SWT); and if there is any defect in it, I beseech Allah (SWT) to grant me and you protection from any such defect. May Allah (SWT) protect me from saying anything that is not true, and may Allah (SWT) guide the reader to read these words with an open mind and heart. Aameen.

Endnotes

1. Dr. Mir Valiuddin was Professor of Philosophy at Osmania University, Hyderabad (India). He has identified the year 822 C. E. on the authority of Imam Qushayri. Cf., Valiuddin, Dr. Mir., Qur'anic Sufism (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, nd) p. 3.

2. Schimmel, Annemarie., Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) p.14 & Stoddart, William., (Sidi Imran Yahya) Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981) p. 20.

3. English translation of these verses is by the poet himself. Cf., Iqbal, Dr. Muhammad., "MacTaggart's Philosophy" in Indian Art and Letters, 6, 1932. Included in Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal, edited by Syed Abdul Vahid. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964) p. 127

4. Chishti, Prof. Yusuf Saleem., "Qur'an-e-Hakeem say Bu'd aur Begangi kay Asbab," in Hikmat-e-Qur'an, September, 1994. p.7