

of his vision are his *Sirat-e-Ḥallāj*, a biography of Maṣūir al-Ḥallāj and an exposition of his teachings on *taṣawwuf*, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, *Kalid-e-Mathnawī*, *Ṭrfān-e-Ḥāfiẓ*, *Masā'il-e-Sulūk*, *al-Takashshuf*, and *al-Tasharruf*. These latter two works will be the subject of detailed discussion later on in this introduction.

Mawlānā's Perception of Taṣawwuf

There is no denying the importance of Mawlānā's written work. Yet, of no less importance to the Muslims of the subcontinent was Mawlānā Thānawī's spiritual guidance. It had become a lamentable fact of life in India that *taṣawwuf* had degenerated to such a degree that there was little to distinguish a yogi from a Sufi. The *ṭarīqas*, or Sufi orders had become social clubs and sources of income for the chosen few. Indeed, in most orders *khilāfah* or spiritual leadership had become a matter of inheritance, like the feudal lordship, which was the bane of Indian society.

Mawlānā Thānawī's contribution was to re-establish in the public mind the connection between *Sharī'a* and *ṭarīqa*. This he accomplished to a certain extent in his writings. However, the real breakthrough in this potent field for the reform of the individual and society was made by Mawlānā Thānawī, the sheikh and *murshid*, not by Mawlānā Thānawī, the author and scholar.

The difference should be easy to understand. It is one thing to spread the word, and another thing entirely to be an example of the living word. Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī went a step further. As the result of his attention and guidance, scores of others themselves became living examples of the word of Islam and, in turn, influenced hundreds and thousands of Muslims. The register of Mawlānā Thānawī's spiritual successors (*khalifahs*) includes some of the most accomplished, learned, pious, and spiritually influential Muslims of the century.⁷

In bringing the Islamic ideal of equilibrium to the field of spiritual guidance, Mawlānā Thānawī established a number of criteria for his disciples. To begin with, all disciples were classified as belonging to one or another of the following four categories:⁸ (1) scholar and single, (2) non-scholar and single, (3) scholar and married, (4) non-scholar and married.

The reasons for such a division would have to do with the kind of opportunity a disciple had for attention to spiritual disciplines and exercises and the kind of understanding he–she brought to them. What is significant is the Mawlānā's acceptance of the circumstances and responsibilities of his followers, and his attempt to reasonably accommodate all those interested in pursuing a spiritual

relationship. Thereafter, disciples were classified as possessing limited, average, or advanced abilities, and for each group separate sets of disciplines and exercises, as well as reading matter, were prescribed.⁹

One exceptionally lucid work, also entitled *Ḥaqīqat al-ṭarīqa*, or *The Truth About the Way*, was required reading for all of Mawlānā's disciples at the time of their entering the Sufi order.

As this work is quite brief, and yet sheds a good deal of light on Mawlānā Thānawī's teachings, it is translated here into English for the benefit of the reader.

ḤAQĪQAT AL-ṬARĪQA: THE TRUTH OF THE WAY

The Essence of Inner Conduct

1. Neither *kashf* (visions) nor *karāmah* (minor miracles) are required or expected.
2. On the Day of Judgment no one (other than yourself) will be responsible for your salvation.
3. There is no promise that your worldly affairs will improve (as a result of your becoming a disciple of this Sufi order, or) through your tying talismans or charms around your necks, or that you will win court cases, or have an increase in income, or be cured of disease. Or be granted knowledge of what is in the future.
4. Your behavior will not be reformed merely through the attentions of your sheikh, nor will you cease to think evil thoughts. You will not automatically engage in worship without even having to resolve to do so. And your knowledge and understanding of the Qur'ān and Islam will not necessarily register any sort of increase.
5. There is no promise that you will attain any inner spiritual states, or even that you will find pleasure in the performance of worship or spiritual exercises, or that you will not be beset by alien thoughts while in worship. There is no guarantee that you will wash your sins away with your tears of remorse.
6. In your performance of spiritual exercises you need never see mystic lights or hear voices from the Unseen.
7. You may never have a sublime or meaningful dream or receive guidance from above.

⁷ For a complete list of Mawlānā's *Khalifahs*, see: Munshi 'Abd al-Rahmān Khān, op. cit., p. 648–655

⁸ See *Qasḍ al-Sabīl*, op. cit.

⁹ See Thānawī's *al-Takashshuf 'an muhimmāt al-taṣawwuf* (Lahore: Sajjād Publishers, 1960) p. 30.

Character: Spiritual Vigilance

Complete reflection on, and attention to, any particular subject, along with a continued effort to take its meaning to heart is called vigilance or *murāqaba*. Obviously, the aging mentioned here as a result of awe depends chiefly on constant and concentrated attention to the subject. In this wise, the ḥadīth points clearly to the practice of *murāqaba*.

ḤADĪTH 38

عن أبي سعيد رضي الله عنه أن رسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قال: «اتَّقُوا فِرَاسَةَ الْمُؤْمِنِ فَإِنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ بِنُورِ اللهِ تَعَالَى». (أخرجه الترمذي)

It is related on the authority of 'Abū Sa'id al-Khudarī ؓ that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "Beware the intuition of a believer, for the believer sees with the light of Allāh." This ḥadīth was related by Tirmidhī.⁸³

States: Intuition

Through the purity of heart, which is in fact the fruit of constant remembrance and heeding, it quite often happens that a Sufi is able to perceive obscure spiritual truths. A branch of *kashf*, or spiritual vision, this is known in Sufi parlance as intuition or *firāsa*. The ḥadīth above mentions this faculty explicitly. Furthermore, the "light of Allāh" mentioned in the ḥadīth refers directly to the purity of heart which is brought about through remembrance, *dhikr*, and heeding, *taqwā*.

ḤADĪTH 39

عن عائشة رضي الله تعالى عنها أنها قالت: قلت يا رسول الله ﷺ الَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَا آتَوْا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجَلَةٌ أَهْمُ الَّذِينَ يَشْرَبُونَ الخمرَ وَيَسْرِفُونَ؟ قَالَ: «لَا، يَابِتَ الصَّدِيقِ! وَلَكِنَّهُمْ الَّذِينَ يَصُومُونَ وَيَتَصَدَّقُونَ وَيَخَافُونَ أَلَّا يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُمْ: أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ». (أخرجه الترمذي)

It is related on the authority of 'Ā'isha ؓ that she said, "I asked the Messenger of Allāh if the people referred to in the verse: 'Those who give of what they are given, with their hearts quaking,' were those who drink wine and practice thievery. He, Allāh bless him and give him peace, answered

⁸³ Tirmidhī: 3127

me, saying, 'No, O daughter of al-Siddiq! Rather, they are the ones who keep fasts and give alms, and then fear that perhaps their deeds will not be accepted of them. Those are the ones who truly vie in good deeds.'" This ḥadīth was related by Tirmidhī.⁸⁴

Character: Fear and Humility

This ḥadīth is clear in its bespeaking these two characteristics of the Sufis, as it contains mention of those who, when they look on the lowliness and insignificance of their own condition, and then on the majesty of the Almighty, are overcome by fear of the possibility that their works will not avail them in the Hereafter.

Signs: Those Nearest to Allāh

In the Qur'ānic verse quoted above, Allāh described certain characteristics as the attributes of His closest servants. These characteristics, then, are among the signs that indicate the true Sufi masters.

ḤADĪTH 40

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنه في قصة هلال بن أمية قال: وَالَّذِي بَعَثَكَ بِالْحَقِّ إِنِّي لَصَادِقٌ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى مَا يَرِي ظَهْرِي مِنَ الْحَدِّ فَتَزَلَّ جَبْرَيْلُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَفِيهِ قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «كَوْلَا مَا مَضَى مِنْ كِتَابِ اللهِ لَكَانَ لِي وَهَذَا شَأْنٌ». (أخرجه البخاري والترمذي وأبو داود)

It is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās ؓ that when Hilāl ibn 'Umayyah ؓ was unable to produce witnesses, after accusing his wife of adultery, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ told him that if he was unable to produce witnesses, he would have to face the penalty for false accusation.⁸⁵ So, Hilāl ؓ said, "By the One Who sent you with the true faith! I am telling the truth. Surely the Almighty will reveal something to exonerate me and spare me from that penalty!" Just then, Jibril ؑ descended.⁸⁶ In the same ḥadīth it is related that⁸⁷ the Prophet ﷺ said, "Had it not been for what was revealed in

⁸⁴ Tirmidhī: 3175

⁸⁵ The specific, *hadd* penalty for false accusation, *qadhf*, in cases of adultery is eighty lashes. See Qur'an, 24:6. YTD.

⁸⁶ Jibril ؑ brought revelation exonerating Hilal from the penalty in exchange for his oath and that of his wife. See Qur'an, 24:6. YTD.

⁸⁷ This is what the Prophet ﷺ said when Hilāl's ؓ wife gave birth to a child who displayed the exact

عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مُعْتَكِفًا فَآتَيْتُهُ أَرْوَرَهُ لَيْلًا فَحَدَّثْتُهُ، ثُمَّ قُمْتُ لِأَنْتَقِلَبَ فَقَامَ مَعِيَ حَتَّى إِذَا بَلَغَ بَابَ الْمَسْجِدِ مَرَّ رَجُلَانِ مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ، فَلَمَّا رَأَى رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَسْرَعَا، فَقَالَ: «عَلَى رِسْلِكُمَا إِنَّهَا صَفِيَّةُ بِنْتُ حُيَيٍّ» فَقَالَا: «سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! فَقَالَ: «إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَجْرِي مِنَ ابْنِ آدَمَ بِمَجْرَى الدَّمِّ وَإِنِّي خَشِيتُ أَنْ يَفْزِفَ فِي قُلُوبِكُمَا شَرًّا أَوْ قَالَ شَيْئًا». (أخرجه الشيخان وأبو داؤد)

‘Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه related that Ṣafīyyah رضي الله عنها said: “The Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم was in seclusion (*itikāf*) so I went to visit him one night. I spoke to him for some time and then got up to leave. He accompanied me until, when he reached the door of the *masjid*, two men from the Anṣār passed by. When they saw the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم they hastened [so that they may leave the precinct of the *masjid* quickly because they saw Ṣafīyyah رضي الله عنها with him, and etiquette demanded that they do this]. The Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم said to them: ‘Walk slowly [there is no need to hurry]. This is Ṣafīyyah bint Ḥuyayy [my wife. Do not have any other thoughts].’ They said: ‘Glory to Allāh, O Messenger of Allāh! [Can we have any evil thoughts about you that some strange woman is in solitude with you?!]’ He صلى الله عليه وسلم said: ‘Satan flows in man as blood flows through his veins. I feared he might cast some evil in your hearts’, or he said: ‘some evil thoughts in your hearts.’” This was related by Bukhārī, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd.⁴⁶³

Commentary: Avoiding whatever gives rise to suspicion

Some Sufis are extremely imprudent. Despite their adherence to the Shari‘a, they make careless statements or perform acts which cause not only the masses, but also their close associates to have negative thoughts about them. Such Sufis should ponder the lesson of this ḥadīth, how cautious the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم was! As for those Sufis who really do not consider it essential to follow the Shari‘a, what can be said about them?! These days, most aspirants are like this [not bothered about following the Shari‘a], and so are their masters.

ḤADĪTH 308

عَنْ صَفِيَّةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا وَبَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا أَرْبَعَةُ أَلْفِ نَوَاقٍ تُسَبِّحُ بِهِنَّ. الْحَدِيثُ (رواه أبو داؤد والحاكم)

⁴⁶³ Bukhārī: 2035, Muslim: 2175, Abū Dāwūd: 2470, Ibn Mājah: 1779

Ṣafīyyah رضي الله عنها related that the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم came to her when she had in front of her 4000 date-pits which she was using [as counters] for the glorification of Allāh [i.e. saying *subhānAllāh*]. This was related by Abū Dāwūd and Ḥākim.⁴⁶⁴

Commentary: The practice of using counters

Most of those who engage in the remembrance of Allāh are in the practice of using counters (*tasbīh*) to count the different repetitions of *dhikr*. This ḥadīth is the basis for this because there is no difference between date pits and the beads which they use. The string [which is used for the counter] is merely to keep the beads attached. This ḥadīth shows that those date pits were kept together [and not scattered everywhere]. As for the objection that holding such a counter in one’s hand smacks of ostentation, the reply to this is that it is necessary to abstain from the essence of ostentation and not the form [or outward appearance] of ostentation. Towards the end of this book is a ḥadīth from Ṭabarānī which clearly states that abstention from the outward form of ostentation is not obligatory.

ḤADĪTH 309

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَيَذْكُرَنَّ اللَّهُ قَوْمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا عَلَى الْفُرُشِ الْمُمَهَّدَةِ يُدْخِلُهُمُ الْجَنَّاتِ الْعُلَى». (رواه أبو يعلى)

Abū Sa‘īd رضي الله عنه related that the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم said: “Many will be the people in this world who engage in the remembrance of Allāh on soft cushions. Allāh shall admit them to lofty gardens.” This was related by Abū Ya‘lā.⁴⁶⁵

Commentary: Comfort and luxury do not negate wilāyat

Most of the masses are under the illusion that deprivation is necessary for piety. It should be apparent from the ḥadīth above that if a person remains steadfast in his/her practice of remembrance and obedience, while living in comfort and luxury, s/he can still enjoy the fruits of a close relationship with Allāh. However, there are occasions when it is necessary to avoid the circumstances of luxury, or to avoid the company of certain people for a specified time or, in some cases, altogether. This is prescribed by a spiritual master for the sake of spiritual striv-

⁴⁶⁴ Tirmidhī: 3554, Ḥākim: 1/54

⁴⁶⁵ Abū Ya‘lā: 2/1110

ing, *mujāhadah*. Such avoidance is prescribed in particular situations and is not in itself a prerequisite for spiritual success.

ḤADĪTH 310

أَخْرَجَ أَبُو يَعْلَى عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «يُفْضَلُ الذَّكْرُ الْحَقِيقِيُّ الَّذِي لَا يَسْمَعُهُ الْحَفِظَةُ سَبْعُونَ ضِعْفًا إِذَا كَانَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَجَمَعَ اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ لِحَسَابِهِمْ وَجَاءَتِ الْحَفِظَةُ بِهَا حَفِظُوهَا وَكَتَبُوا قَالَهُمْ: انظُرُوا هَلْ بَقِيَ لَهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَيَقُولُونَ: مَا تَرَكْنَا شَيْئًا مِمَّا عَلِمْنَا وَحَفِظْنَا إِلَّا وَقَدْ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ وَكَتَبْنَاهُ فَيَقُولُ اللَّهُ: إِنَّ لَكَ عِنْدِي حَسَنًا لَا تَعْلَمُهُ وَأَنَا أُجْزِيكَ بِهِ وَهُوَ الذَّكْرُ الْحَقِيقِيُّ». (ذكره السيوطي في «البدور السافرة في أحوال الآخرة»)

Abū Ya'la related from 'Ā'isha   that the Messenger of Allāh   said: "The silent *dhikr* which even the angel scribes, *al-kirām al-kātibān*, cannot hear is seventy times superior to [vocal *dhikr*] on the day of Resurrection. Allāh will gather all of creation for the accounting of their deeds and the angel scribes will come forward with whatever they preserved or recorded. Allāh will say to them: [Apart from the deeds which are recorded], is there anything else that is left? They will reply: As far as we know and what we recorded, there is nothing that has been left out or left unrecorded.' Allāh will say [to the person]: 'I have a good deed of yours which even you are not aware of [at present, although you were aware of it when you were doing it because you did it by intent], and I will reward you for it. The deed is silent *dhikr*.'" This was related by Suyūṭī.⁴⁶⁶

Commentary: The validity of mental *dhikr*

The spiritual masters sometimes teach verbal remembrance and sometimes remembrance with the heart. Those who are concerned with the outward aspects of Islam are under the illusion that as long as the letters are not uttered by the tongue, such remembrance is not considered valid remembrance. This ḥadīth clearly states the validity and consideration of such *dhikr* because, in order for an utterance to be valid, it is necessary for the angel scribes to hear it. Since their hearing is negated [in this ḥadīth], the verbal utterance is also negated. How-

ever, a verbal utterance is unanimously considered to be a prerequisite in certain injunctions, for example, in recitation of the Qur'ān, in *ṣalāh*, in the marriage contract, in divorce, and in many other situations.

As for the objection that although the angelic scribes may not hear, they nonetheless have knowledge of deeds of the heart and therefore most certainly recorded this. Consequently it is mentioned in other ḥadīths that good intentions are recorded by these angels. The answer to this objection is that while it would appear they have knowledge of most deeds of the heart, there are exceptions. Unless, however, there is certainty regarding the particular exceptions, the deeds will be considered to be included with the majority. And Allāh knows best.

ḤADĪTH 311

عَنْ أَبِي الطُّفَيْلِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَجُلًا مَرَّ عَلَى قَوْمٍ فَسَلَّمَ عَلَيْهِمْ، فَرَدُّوا عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامَ، فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَ بِهِمْ قَالَ رَجُلٌ مِنْهُمْ: وَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي لَأُبْغِضُ هَذَا فِي اللَّهِ، فَقَالَ أَهْلُ الْمَجْلِسِ: بَيْسَ وَ اللَّهُ مَا قُلْتَ، أَمَا وَاللَّهِ لَنَنْبِئَنَّكَ، فَمَّا يَا فُلَانُ - رَجُلًا مِنْهُمْ - فَأَخْبَرَهُ، قَالَ: فَادْرَكُهُ رَسُولُهُمْ فَأَخْبَرَهُ بِمَا قَالَ، فَانصَرَفَ الرَّجُلُ حَتَّى أَتَى رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! مَرَرْتُ بِمَجْلِسٍ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فِيهِمْ فُلَانٌ، فَسَلَّمْتُ عَلَيْهِمْ، فَرَدُّوا السَّلَامَ، فَلَمَّا جَاوَزْتَهُمْ أَدْرَكَنِي رَجُلٌ مِنْهُمْ، فَأَخْبَرَنِي أَنَّ فُلَانًا قَالَ: وَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي لَأُبْغِضُ هَذَا الرَّجُلَ فِي اللَّهِ، فَادْعُهُ، فَسَلِّهُ عَلَيَّ مَا يُبْغِضُنِي؟ فَدَعَاهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَسَأَلَهُ عَمَّا أَخْبَرَهُ الرَّجُلُ، فَاعْتَرَفَ بِذَلِكَ، وَقَالَ: قَدْ قُلْتَ لَهُ ذَلِكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! قَالَ: «فَلِمَ تُبْغِضُهُ؟» فَقَالَ: أَنَا جَارُهُ وَأَنَا بِهِ خَابِرٌ، وَ اللَّهُ مَا رَأَيْتُهُ يُصَلِّي صَلَاةً قَطُّ إِلَّا هَذِهِ الصَّلَاةَ الْمَكْتُوبَةَ الَّتِي يُصَلِّيهَا الْبُرُّ وَالْفَاجِرُ، فَقَالَ الرَّجُلُ: سَلِّهُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! هَلْ رَأَيْتُ قَطُّ أَخْرَجْتُهَا عَنْ وَقْتِهَا؟ أَوْ أَصَاتُ الرُّكُوعِ هَا؟ أَوْ أَصَاتُ الرُّكُوعِ وَالسُّجُودِ فِيهَا؟ فَسَأَلَهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ ذَلِكَ، فَقَالَ: لَا، ثُمَّ قَالَ: وَ اللَّهُ مَا رَأَيْتُهُ يُصُومُ قَطُّ إِلَّا هَذَا الشَّهْرَ الَّذِي يُصُومُهُ الْبُرُّ وَالْفَاجِرُ، قَالَ: فَسَلِّهُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! هَلْ رَأَيْتُ قَطُّ قَرَطْتُ فِيهِ؟ أَوْ اتَّقَصْتُ مِنْ حَقِّهِ شَيْئًا؟ فَسَأَلَهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ا، فَقَالَ: لَا، ثُمَّ قَالَ: وَ اللَّهُ مَا رَأَيْتُهُ يُعْطِي سَائِلًا قَطُّ، وَلَا رَأَيْتُهُ يُنْفِقُ مِنْ مَالِهِ شَيْئًا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا هَذِهِ الصَّدَقَةَ الَّتِي يُؤَدِّيهَا الْبُرُّ وَالْفَاجِرُ، قَالَ: فَسَلِّهُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! هَلْ

⁴⁶⁶ Suyūṭī has recorded this in *al-Budūr as-Sāfirah* and so has Abū Ya'la, as in *Majma' az-Zawā'id*: 10/81