

The Ṣūfī Thought of Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī

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ABSTRACT

Islam has its own way and system of redefining concepts and giving them new meanings. It is identified by rigorous study and examination executed after taking into consideration the improvement in knowledge with the evolved comprehension of the Quran, Hadith, agreement of the recognized imams, besides the principles of reason and intellection. This system of rethinking and redefining is spread across all branches of Islamic scientology like Tafsīr, theology, fiqh, taṣawwuf, philosophy, and socio-political thought. One core area of this scientific legacy is the discipline of *taṣawwuf*, a field marked by diverse discourses all focusing on outlining its proper conception and nuanced application. As a multitude of Muslim scholars have endeavored to describe *taṣawwuf*, in this paper we shall attempt to present the understandings and assessments of Sufism by one such scholar from the Indian subcontinent namely Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī.

Keywords: *Taṣawwuf*, Sufi Thought, *Tazkiyah*, *Ihsān*.

1.1 Classical Understanding of *Taṣawwuf*

It’s imperative to have a concise look at the definitions of *taṣawwuf* as articulated by its various classical masters to get an overall idea about its conventional understanding before evaluating its concept as promoted and understood by Mawlānā Thānvī. The upholders of *taṣawwuf* have described it from different perspectives. Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910) is one of the most outstanding personalities from the early phase of *taṣawwuf* and is acknowledged as the architect of the Baghdad or Iraqi school of Sufism.¹ When inquired about his perception of *taṣawwuf*, he responded that it is “the Truth that turns you lifeless from yourself and makes you alive through Allāh.” Furthermore, “it is that you stay with Allāh devoid of whichever affiliation other than Him.”²

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Abū Muḥammad Ruwaym b. Aḥmad (d. 915-16 CE) said, “It is better for you to stay in companionship with whichever group of people, instead of staying in companionship with the *sūfis*.”³ This is for the reason that almost all people learn the exteriors of *din*, while the *sūfī* faction of people learns and study the real truths and essence of things. At the same time as all other people try to entail upon themselves the apparent commandments of the Sacred Law, the *sūfis* oblige upon themselves the Real Truth or essence of virtuous conscientiousness and constant honesty. Thus if anybody diverges from them in anything that they have attained, Allāh will eliminate the luminosity of belief from his heart.⁴ Al-Junayd submitted that the Sufis learned *Sūfīsm* not in the course of words but through hunger, the rejection of this materialistic world, and keeping themselves away from the luxuries which they are comfortable with and in which they attain enjoyment.⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sari b. al-Mughallis al-Saqatī asserts that the *sūfī* is the one in whom the radiance of awareness and understanding does not turn off the radiance of conscientiousness. He does not speak of any understanding and comprehension in his internal self that may disagree with the exterior meaning of the *Qur’ān* or the Prophet’s (ﷺ) *Sunnah*. His miracles do not push him to disobey the holiness of the divine preventions.⁶ Abū al-Husayn al-Nūrī says, “*Sūfīsm* is the rejection of everything that satisfies, gratifies, and gives pleasure to the soul.”⁷

Al-Junayd described *Sūfīsm* or *Sūfī* as someone similar to the earth. All repulsive kinds of stuff are put on it, but only excellent stuff emerges from it.⁸ Mansur al-Hallāj (d. 922) describes the *sūfī* as one who is particular in his persona, nobody acknowledges him and he acknowledges no one.⁹ According to Ma’rūf al-Karkhī (d. 815), *Sūfīsm* means standing by the realism/truth in addition to not trusting that which people enclose.¹⁰ Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī has illustrated three stages of those who are regarded as *sūfis*,

- The first one is the *sūfī* who is dead to himself and subsisting by the Truth; he has escaped from the grip of human traits and has arrived at the Truth of realities.
- *Mutasawwif*: This is the second level. *Mutasawwif* is the aspirant who tries to find this stage of the *sūfis* with his firm hard work and corrects and repairs his being at the same time. They are in quest of improving their demeanor.

- *Mustaswif*: The third are those who pretend and who attempt to be similar to the first or second group so that they attain prosperity, status and get hold of their share in the materialistic world.¹¹

Abū Zakarīyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 1520) illustrated that *taṣawwuf* educates one how to purify one's self, advance one's morals, and build up one's inner and outer facets of life to achieve eternal delight. Its object is the cleansing and refinement of the being and its end is the accomplishment of everlasting felicity and purity.¹² Some *sūfīs* recognize the idea of Sufism in the *Qur'ānic* notion of *muḥsin* (the one who is pious and does good deeds to the point of *Iḥsān*) along with *muqarrab*, which means the one near to Allāh. Therefore, the author of '*Awārif al-Ma'ārif*', Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234), asserts that for him the term *sūfī* only means *muqarrab*.

1.2 Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī on *Taṣawwuf*

While amplifying the real essence of *Ṭarīqah*, he informed us concerning things that are not compulsory in *taṣawwuf*. Amongst these, he lists *kashf* (unveiling), *tawīz* (amulets), *karāmah* (miracle) for materialistic pursuits or worldly pursuits, absolute elimination of all vices, astonishing spiritual states, seeing lights while remembrance of Allāh, beatific visions, accurate inspirations (*ilhām*), and Shaykh's taking responsibility for someone's exoneration on the Day of Judgment.¹³ The core thrust of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's descriptions is the indispensable goals of *taṣawwuf*.¹⁴ Other things that are by and large allied with *taṣawwuf* but are not fundamental to *taṣawwuf* are negated so that the adherent can have honest intentions focusing only on the imperative goals of *taṣawwuf*.

Mawlānā Thānvī has affirmed that he did not give priority to '*ulūm al-mukashafah*' (sciences of unveilings); rather his main focus was on '*ulūm al-mu'āmalah*' (sciences of actions). He thinks that the former has no function in achieving nearness to Allāh, while the latter is related to guidelines and prohibitions and leads to the unswerving part of achieving closeness to Allāh.¹⁵ Understandably, *taṣawwuf* is a multifarious phenomenon. Consequently, *taṣawwuf* as perceived by Mawlānā Thānvī comes to one thing: the quest for the pleasure of Allāh.¹⁶ To achieve this, one must have *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh*, which means that one ought to attempt to be assiduously cognizant of Him which is *iḥsān*. To accomplish *iḥsān*, one must purify

oneself of malice and beautify oneself with praiseworthy character. This is *tazkiyat al-Nafs*. Furthermore, for one to uphold *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh* and be respected by Him one must avoid everything forbidden by Him. This is obedience to the commandments of *Sharī'ah* both on the exterior and on the interior.

1.3 Development of Science of Sufism

Mawlānā Thānvī has also shed some light on the progress of the discipline of *taṣawwuf*. He holds that during the epoch of the Prophet (ﷺ), the disciplines of *Tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* or *uṣūl al-fiqh*, etc., were not branched. Afterwards, classification was done and several sciences originated from the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* and each was given a different name. Just as other derived sciences received a specific name such as the science of *fiqh* and science of *ḥadīth*; likewise, the given name of the “way” or the “path” formulated by shaykhs was known as Sufism. The one who studies *Sharh al-Wiqayah* or *al-Hidayah* is called the learner or student of *fiqh*. Similarly, a person who learns the science of *ḥadīth* or *Tafsīr*, it is not presumed that he is learning science of *fiqh*, even though *fiqh* had many 'ulūms in it such as 'ulūmal-ḥadīth, 'ilm al-kalām, etc. Likewise, if a person goes behind the path of the Sūfī teacher, we say he is studying Sufism or it is said that he is a ṣūfī. Someone who just offers salah or goes for fasting can't be called as a ṣūfī although Sufism in its comprehensive sense contains all of this. He further adds that the way *Kanz al-daqa'iq* and *al-Hidayah* are indispensable; in the same way, it is crucial to learn the work of Abū Talīb Makkī namely *Qūt al-qulūb*, Imām al Ghazālī's book called as *al-Arba'ūn* along with Shaykh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's work termed as 'Awārif al-ma'arif.¹⁷

1.4 Significance of Classical Shaykhs

Mawlānā Thānvī makes the following of a classical shaykh prerequisite for anyone who wants to understand *Sufism*. The initiators of the above-mentioned traditional sciences of Islam were accredited as Imams by all. Bearing in mind Imām Abū Ḥanīfa's knowledge of the science of *fiqh*, Imām al-Shāfi'ī was strained to declare that Muslims require Imam Abū Ḥanafī in the field of *fiqh*. Imam al-Bukhārī was recognized as an Imam; furthermore, even today his scholarship in science of *ḥadīth* is renowned. In the same way, there have been such pious people who have been approved as the leading figures in the discipline of *taṣawwuf* like Junayd Baghdadi,

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Jilani known as the shaykh of shaykhs, Khawaja Baha' al-Din Naqshband—founder of Naqshbandi order, Khawaja Mu 'in al-Din Chishtī—founder of Chishti order in south Asia also known as Khwaja Ghareeb Nawaz and Shaykh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi —author of *'Awarif ul-Maarif*, so on. The afterward generations cannot do anything in affairs of *Sharī'ah* exclusive of following the preceding ones; equally, in *Sufism*, there is not a single method above and beyond following the traditional masters of the way even though, the lowest rank of purification of self which shows the way to *Najat* can be achieved without following the shaykhs of the path. Nevertheless, that which is preferred and is the flawlessness and excellence of *tazkiyat al-nafs* cannot be attained except with the companionship of the shuyukhs or masters.¹⁸ Now let's go through the *sūfī* thought of Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanvī, “The spiritualist penchant in human temperament—has been the trait of serious and strong minds in all ages and the midst of every segment of society.”¹⁹ Religion in broad-spectrum and the mystical pursuit scrupulously are as everlasting as man's subsistence itself, as a man cannot stay behind exclusive of looking for or enquiring about the infinite and without desiring to rise above himself. To be a man denotes to want to exceed the purely human or material self.

Therefore, to be pleased with the simple human is to plummet into the infra-human position.²⁰ This prime and perpetual quest, entrenched in man's nature, is certainly a search for truth, about the nature of Allāh, man and universe. An assortment of ideologies in the narration of human deliberation which has been put forward to endow us with solutions to the problems are fundamentally metaphysical or transcendental and have been responded to on assorted levels such as philosophical, religious, and mystical. We shall focus our attention to the way or methodology embraced by Mawlānā Thānvī towards the understanding of these problems –Allah, man, and the universe in light of the *Qur'ānic* and *ḥadīth* basis.

1.5 Allāh

1.5.1 Existence of Allāh

Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī dealt with the question of the existence of Allāh in his way. His observations and analysis can be abridged as follows:

- a. The whole universe with its obscure structure requires the existence of an Architect (*sāni‘*) who has not merely planned but has categorized it. He oversees and controls it via His will and supreme authority. Nature as well as its rules (physical laws) are under His formation. Nature itself is submissive in the way that it has neither any force nor awareness of its own and is reliant on Allāh for all its functions. Allāh is an all-powerful Maker who enjoys the authority to alter even the properties of every facet. The causes themselves are, as a result, ineffective unless they are put to action or activated by Allāh.²¹
- b. Every occurrence in the universe is relative and dependent. There being or incidence is neither interminable nor predictable. The facet of possibility is, though compulsory for every dependent which depends on its consciousness, realization, and clarification on something exterior to itself that is not conditional but is a reason for its subsistence. That something is Allāh called as *Wājib al-Wujūd* i.e., the Necessary Being, who depends for His subsistence upon nobody but His being. He is the Manufacturer and the Originator of the universe. He enjoys timeless, arbitrary willpower, and exercises it devoid of exterior intrusion, the query then arises: is it not incongruous to embrace that the divine will is everlasting, and what is willed conditional? Mawlānā Thānvī asserts that it is the qualities of the Essential Being that are perpetual, at the same time their relationship with the possibles is dependent.²²
- c. To sum up, Ashraf ‘Alī said that Allāh could have revealed Himself in this universe in that way putting end to every difference, allied point of views and discussions but then belief would have become somewhat enforced on one and all, and human reflection, thoughtfulness and ultimately surrender would have no part/share in it.²³

Maulana Ashraf ‘Alī has simply illustrated four attributes of Allāh. They are Creation, Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom.

- Creation: Ashraf ‘Alī holds that Allāh produces whatsoever He desires and for the implementation of His will He does not require a manager or any explicit cause, nor any equipment, artisan, helper. He says “Be,” and His will is materialized. This realization or materialization takes place with or

devoid of any reasons or ways as these too at the end of the chain consequently necessitates a willing decisive cause.²⁴

- After knowing that Allāh is eternal and the only Creator, one gets encountered with questions whether the act of creation is necessary for divinity, then even creation itself presumes perpetuity? Ashraf ‘Alī tackled this by stating that Surah *Luqmān* 31: Verses 10-11, in reality, emphasizes that Creation of that which is possible is the power and attribute of Allāh and in no means does it put forward the perpetuity of the act of creation.²⁵ Allāh acts continuously all the time but His actions ought not to be considered as compulsory for His Essence as it would involve certainty in the eternity of creation. Ashraf ‘Alī asserts that the verse *Kulla yawum Huwa fi sha’n* expresses the reality that the whole things that take place through the universe, together with creation, nourishment, regulation, etc., obtain their occurrence from Allāh.²⁶ Allāh is therefore not just the one and only Creator of the universe but also the only Sustainer and Administrator of it.²⁷
- Knowledge: Allāh is away from the requirement of an associate. He is matchless in creation in addition to legislation, exclusive in being the Ultimate Supreme Ruler, Omniscient, Invincible, and Giver of incalculable rewards. He makes anything He likes and devises regulations as He desires. He has perfect knowledge of diminutive things scrupulously, whether apparent or concealed.²⁸
- Omniscience (knowing everything) is an exclusive attribute of Allāh and is judiciously not possible for anyone else.²⁹ His knowledge crosses over both in the existence and those who are not existent, and that too in infinitesimal points. Every incidence dealing with the past, present along with future has been documented in the *Lauh-i Mahfūz* i.e., Guarded Tablet which does not in any sense demonstrate that Allāh requires it. Allāh’s trait of Knowledge is infinite in its totality.³⁰
- Power: Mawlānā Thānvī delineates *‘ilm-i ghayib* as complete, unswerving knowledge that moves beyond the perimeters of time and space. It is exclusively the excellence of Allāh and, so, inaccessible. As for the human acquaintance of genes and the timing of rain is concerned, he remarks that these aren’t away from the scope of human knowledge as a man can be

familiar with these with the assistance of a range of signs, but even here human knowledge requires a medium or the signs, whereas Allāh's knowledge is unswerving and direct.³¹

- Wisdom: Allāh is judicious, no matter what He produces, He constructs with some reason, and we are unable to take hold of details because of human precincts. Even the formation of evil by Almighty Allāh—for instance, as per Mawlānā Thānvī ungratefulness or unfaithfulness—is good as it contains few positive facets. But that does not, in any case, denote that, one should believe that no matter what one does as will encompass positive sides, and that consequently one should not or would not be held answerable for negative dimensions? Because, Ashraf 'Alī says, man's analysis is provisional and limited, while Allāh's intelligence is supreme and endless. When He affirms anything to be iniquity for man, it shall stay primarily vice for him, other facets and aspects become irrelevant.³² In another place, Mawlānā Thānvī restates that Allāh being the All-Wise, all His acts are astute however the core thought and concern are ahead of human apprehension.³³ He might thoughtfully award someone triumph and the same may not be the case with others; but in showing the reality, and in conferring the authority of choice and will, He treats each one the same.³⁴ Ashraf 'Alī asserts that whatsoever He does, He does with knowledge and wisdom.

1.6 Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī on Psychological Nature of Man

Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī considers man as an exclusive amalgamation of Divine Names and Essence, the meticulous explanation of this inclusiveness lying away from the authority and power of any man, for the reason that the Divine Names are inestimable along with the Essence being transcendent. Acquaintance, knowledge, and understanding of man being limited it is impossible to comprehend the incomprehensible.³⁵ Seven attributes shape the foundation – Life, knowledge, Hearing, Sight, Will, Speech, and Power. Man is or has been made the epitome/perfect materialization and the manifestation of these seven attributes yet remaining, unmatched with Almighty Allāh.³⁶

1.6.1 Perfect Receptor

Divine Names are manifested in two ways:

- *Takwīnī*: cosmic, which are correlational.
- *Tashrīʿī*: legislative, which is inculcated.

While Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī argues, the first one is the understanding of the majority of human minds, he limits himself to the enlightening facets of the second one, using the expression *faid* for Divine elegance and graces that tumble down upon man as the result of Divine Names, instilling in him polished qualities, provided he attests himself to be a justified receiver. According to Ashraf ‘Alī, the receiver thus turns out to be an engaged spectator of Allāh such that he is not able to attribute even the term being (*wujūd*) to Him. Some of the qualities of a perfect man are:

- Generous and munificent towards the servants as well as people of Allāh and shielding himself from all that is evil and others from causing any damage.
- Gaining knowledge, understanding, excellences, and perfections, converting the imperfections into flashes of brilliance, ignoring the faults of people, however subjugating such opponents as the Lower Self and the evil powers.
- Keeping in check both the apparent and the hidden.
- He suppresses fabrication and esteems the truth, honors the upright, and prevails over the vicious.
- Kind for mankind while executing, sermonizing or directing, tolerant and pardoning, he is all the time conscious of the sham of self and alerting and making the ignorant finely aware about it.
- He bigheartedly expends his powers and his wealth, together with ordinary and saintly, for pleasing Allāh, over his dependents and the seekers of gnosis, abstaining from shutting the door of knowledge and comprehension rewards for the common welfare, denouncing all types of rivalries and animosity among the people.
- Answering the call of the Almighty unconditionally and in an obsequious manner and subserviently merciful to everyone who needs him.
- He stays away from looking suspiciously at any worldly being; somewhat looking down at the world and all that it contains.

- Ashraf ‘Alī asserts that the most perfect man is Prophet (ﷺ) a matchless personification of both the Divine Magnificence and the Divine Splendor granted by Allāh, then the Prophet’s trail by the responsibility to Allāh depends on their likeness with diverse varieties and grades of excellence and perfection.³⁷

1.7 Beatific Vision

Mawlānā Thānvī deals with one more subject that is of Beatific Vision or seeing Allāh in this world and the life hereafter. Different schools of thought carry diverse opinions about the same problem. The Mu‘tazilites clearly and firmly denied it on the basis that Allāh is free from space and direction, consequently, visualizing Him is not possible in the present world nor in the life hereafter,³⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ash‘arī,³⁹ Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī,⁴⁰ Abū Jaf‘ar al-Ṭahāwī,⁴¹ and Abū Muḥammad ibn Hazm⁴² confirmed that it is possible for the Muslims based on the *Qur’ānic* verses⁴³ and reliable Hadith related to this matter.

Ashraf ‘Alī maintains that to see Allāh with human eyes is not possible for us (man) in this world⁴⁴ save for the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) who is said to have seen Allāh once with his human vision and after that with his heart.⁴⁵ There were different views between the *Ṣahābāh* of the Prophet (ﷺ) over this subject. Ibn ‘Abbās (d.58-678) acknowledged it in reverence of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) While the Mother of believers A’ishah denied it. In an attempt to resolve this, Ashraf ‘Alī says that what the former asserted was just the vision, not including the minute niceties, at the same time as what the latter annulled was an unfathomable and deeper understanding.⁴⁶

Ashraf ‘Alī considers that Allāh will reveal Himself twice on the final Day–Day of Verdict. Those who believe will not be capable enough to identify Him on the initial occasion. In the latter, they will be acquainted with Him and afterward go down in *Sajdah* (prostration). Mawlānā Thānvī proposes that on both the junctures the demonstrations will be similar: The Day of Decision being an extension of the exceptional world, therefore, the Essence will not be displayed or revealed. Afterward in Heaven, all the curtains will be raised from the Essence and the Muslims will be proficient to see Allāh’s Face, although there also they will be incapable to go through deeper and investigating His Nature or grasping Him.⁴⁷

1.8 Virtues (*Fadā'il*) and Vices (*Radhā'il*) in Man

Mawlānā Thānvī used Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn al-Ghazālī's list of culpable and laudable qualities and added few more to them. Mawlānā Thānvī also explained them, and the ways of avoiding the blameworthy and acquiring the praiseworthy traits.

Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's explanation on some virtues of man (*Fadā'il*)

1.8.1 *Niyya* (Intention)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Verily judgment of action depends upon one's intention."⁴⁸ Intention implies the deepest and inmost penchant of the mind to do any action or deed. Cleanness of intention comprises of three diverse facets:

- ❖ One does a specific action regarding that as a correct one, so one should execute it as one's responsibility and obligation as a human. This type of performance is laudable and exceedingly praise-worthy
- ❖ One does particular actions motivated and encouraged with wrong reason in mind. It is denounced and is considered unworthy and contemptible.
- ❖ One does any good act ordinarily without any aim or objective in mind. This outlook of mind is not absurd, irrational, and unreasonable to purity or cleanness of intention. Mawlānā Thānvī further adds that the level of reward pivot on the degree of honesty of doer. Let's have a look at the classification of degrees prepared by Ashraf 'Alī:
 - Highest grade: One should work and put efforts for the sake of Almighty Allāh without regard for any materialistic concern at all.
 - Second grade: One should work for a humanitarian cause; for the general welfare of the public regardless of one's worldly interests in view.
 - Third grade: One does any good with no specific *niyah*. He does it as routine stuff. The goal of the doer is neither any worldly gain nor has any spiritual end in mind. He does good things just for the sake of routine work. This also falls in the type of honesty of purpose and pure *niyat*.

1.8.2 *Taqwā* (Piety)

Taqwā – verbal noun–is derived from w-q-y. It means to fear someone or to protect oneself. Technically, it is taken usually as the thought of fearing Allāh and being away from sins and saving oneself from His punishment. While defining and

understanding fearing Allāh, *sūfīs* by and large cite the notion of Allāh is the most beloved and so interpret term *taqwa* as “being fearful of Allāh’s discontentment.”⁴⁹ Piety is in scheming and directing one’s each action towards the correct way in different areas and stages of life and limiting oneself from those acts which are illicit, forbidden by *Sharīah*, and to follow the doctrines and commands instructed by Islām flawlessly and with a good objective and clean intention. *Taqwa* involves two features:

- (a) The fear (of Allah’s punishment);
- (b) To save oneself from evil deeds.

Ashraf Ali says it’s quite a natural one can safeguard oneself from malevolent desire if he is scared of and is well aware of the consequent disadvantageous and detrimental outcomes of such actions. Both sides are, as a result, inter-connected.

1.8.3 *Dhikr* (Remembrance)

Adhkār is the plural of *dhikr* that technically implies “to remember.” To do *dhikr* is commanded in copious places in the Holy *Qur’ān*. It has the following levels:

- a. *Ṣūrī*: *Ṣūrī* means apparent. Apparent *dhikr* implies to remember Allāh by reiterating His name. This can be done through the tongue or the heart (*qalb*). It has two further types:
 - *Dhikr-i lisānī*: It means *dhikr* with the tongue.
 - *Dhikr-i Qalbī*: It means *Dhikr* without the tongue and only in the heart, with or without the presence of mind. *Sūfīs* have long debated which one is more excellent. Opinions vary and each side is armed with proof.⁵⁰
- b. *Ḥaqīqī*: *Ḥaqīqī* means real. Real *dhikr* is recollecting Allāh through pleasing him moreover fulfilling His *Ḥaqūq*/ rights. This covers the complete *Sharīah* because His rights contain all the orders, instructions, and exclusions of *Sharīah*.⁵¹ *Ḥuqīqī dhikr* is preferred in *Sharīah* while the *Suri* is training for it. That is why it is also advantageous and laudable.⁵² Allāh says in the *Qur’ān*: Surely, *Ṣalāh* restrains one from shameful and evil acts.⁵³

1.8.4 *Al-Tawādu‘* (Humility)

The word humility signifies that one must regard himself as an insignificant person. He is indebted for his whole existence to Him alone. So, he should be most modest

amongst Allāh’s creatures on the world and should consequently shape his outlook of mind accordingly. One should groom himself in a way that one should not feel proud and pompous if appreciated and lauded and should not be upset if criticized or condemned. In short, praise and criticism shouldn’t affect him in any way.⁵⁴ Both things are the same for him. This is the elevated level of humility as per Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī and can be achieved on the intellectual plane.

1.8.5 *Tawbah* (Repentance)

To be reminiscent and remind oneself of the erroneous acts done by him and to express and feel regret over them sincerely and to make one’s mind up not to do again the same in future and to abstain from them with complete grit at the time when such urges occur is termed as ‘Repentance’.⁵⁵

Methods and Necessity

- 1) One should consciously be terrified and regretful that one should discard the routine commission of sins with all genuineness and authenticity and should decisively decide not to reiterate the same thing in the future.
- 2) One needs to constantly ask Allāh for his help from the fear of falling again in sins at any time.
- 3) One should make attempts with utmost eagerness and consciousness to deft the desire for sins and seek Allāh’s support at every time.
- 4) The best technique is to consistently prompt oneself about punishments prescribed by the *Qur’ān* and ḥadīth of Prophet (ﷺ) for the wrong doers.⁵⁶

Mawlānā Thānvī’s explanation of some vices (*Radā’il*):

1.8.6 *Kadhib* (Lie)

To believe in any happening or occurrence opposing to facts, real detail, and particulars and to utter something devoid of finding out the essential truth and on simply hearing from one saying about any incidence of any episode comes within the term ‘Lie’. The *Qur’ān* says – “*And shun lying speech*”.⁵⁷

1.8.7 *Ghībah* (Backbiting)

Backbiting implies an unpleasant expression by direct/straight terms or by replication in the absence of somebody, which if done in his presence will upset his feelings and emotions. On the other hand, if whatever is held is false, it is then fake allegation (*tuhmat*), slander, and defamation which are great sinful acts. Since it is in

contravention of one of the primary human rights, therefore the backbiter won't be exempted by Allāh unless and until the person affected and affronted pardons him.⁵⁸

The holy *Qur'ān* says: “*And spy not, neither back-bite one another*”.⁵⁹

1.8.8 *Al-Isrāf* (Extravagance)

Al-Isrāf denotes expenditure on anything not required or spending on any item devoid of any thought and consideration whether it was essential to spend on that item/thing at that very point in time. *Qur'ān* talks of such extravagant persons in the following words: “*Verily those who spend extravagantly are brothers of Satan*”.⁶⁰

The Prophet ﷺ has austere prohibited throwing oneself open to needless expenditure apart from what is essentially required.⁶¹ One should consider two main factors while spending on anything:

- One should check whether there is any sort of loss in any form if the expenses are not incurred on a specific thing.
- One should consult some specialist and knowledgeable manager having insight in the particular line whether the sum planned to be spent on a particular item will be of some use and will prove helpful in maintaining with the anticipated plan or will serve no purpose of whatever type and will be unproductive.⁶²

1.8.9 *Kibr* (Pride) and *Hasad* (Jealousy)

Pride signifies an overstated sense of worth having extremely elevated estimation concerning one's being and arrogant attitude for others and holding them as disgraceful, contemptible, insignificant, and degraded in comparison to his/one's being. Such an individual looks and thinks low for others and feels grand and ostentatious with such behavior in everyday actions of life with his associates. If, on the other hand, one acts reluctantly in a position of absentmindedness devoid of any hidden cause, it is not an evil behavior. If one does again the same thing deliberately and willingly and continues with it, it will be counted as evil action or conduct.⁶³

Allāh further praises those who are unpretentious and modest and turns His face away from the bigheaded, arrogant and egotistical, and the rewards which might have been sending to him could be ceased and closed down because of embracing egoistic approach.⁶⁴

Jealousy represents the aggrieved and resentful outlook of mind for one's associates when one sees his fellow beings in a joyful, excellent, flourishing, and affluent state. Such a person, instead of showing friendliness, develops the wish that the joyful condition of one's associate or brother should turn into an unhappy one and attempts to make difficulty for him for his abrupt ruin and collapse. And he celebrates his unpleasant conduct inside one's being.⁶⁵ There are three phases of this position of mind.

- ❖ The first one is a position when one is hindered and forced to take action otherwise.
- ❖ The second position is when one's action is calculated and purposeful acts in that way.
- ❖ The final one is that position where one tries to be in opposition to and disagree with one's jealous feeling.

The first is forgivable or justifiable and the second is evil furthermore the third is creditable and praiseworthy so is rewardable.⁶⁶

1.9 Levels of *Taşawwuf*

He delineated what he thought to be the accurate course of action and suitable sequence for attaining their levels for embarking on the spiritual way. He says there are two levels of *taşawwuf*.

1. At the outset, construction of the hidden and the apparent by following all the guidelines of *Sharī'ah*.⁶⁷ The primary stage requires two things.
 - The foremost is to get hold of *'Ilm-i Dīn* as much as is needed through whichever ways available to one.
 - The subsequent step is executing this *'ilm* with willpower.
2. The Second level of *taşawwuf* is attaining *Işlāh*. Accomplishing this level one requires two things:
 - a. Repentance: Honest penitence from every sin –big and small, is the first step. *Tawbah* necessitates that one should attempt to make up for all those responsibilities which remained unfulfilled; whether *Huqūq Allah* or *Huqūq al-'Ibād*. Consequently, whatsoever prayers one has skipped or charity one has not paid, or *ṣawm* that one has left; one must make up for all of them. In the same way, the *Huqūq* of fellow beings that one has not accomplished need to be fulfilled, or else one needs to request those to whom they are

payable that they are excused. This is an indispensable initial step. Devoid of this, efforts and actions will be of no advantage. Thānvī announces that those who don't have the strength of mind and the dedication to be on the path of *Sharī'ah* are not real seekers.⁶⁸ Real seekers have to be obedient to the rulings of *Sharī'ah*. In nutshell, one can say that the initial level has to be attained to move towards the second level.

- b. Search for Knowledge: The following footstep is that one must search for knowledge as has been illustrated concerning the primary level. When this is attained, he should search for a competent *shaykh* who can direct him on the pathway. He can then decide to take an oath (*bai'āh*) with him or continue a pupil-teacher connection exclusive of it. By and large, oath (*bai'āh*) is the chief indication of recognition as a student. The pupil must follow every guideline of his teacher or *shaykh*. If feasible for the student, after doing (*bai'āh*) he should stay with the *shaykh* for some time. If that's not possible, then he has to follow his commands anywhere he is at the same time as corresponding with him frequently.

1.10 Conclusion

Mawlānā Thānvī's method of explaining *taṣawwuf* was by transmitting to addressees what is not Sufism along with what isn't requisite and mandatory to become an Sūfī. He was of the view that those who look for extraordinary maqamat, depends on dreams, rests on mystical powers, have an extreme desire of unveiling (*Kashf*), and get involved in perplexing and inexplicable narratives in addition to mysterious assumptions and chase supposedly spiritual bliss is not what is preferably essential or else this maywell prove a diversion. The actions and performances of the masters of *taṣawwuf* of old might not be simply taken as been largely in conformity and consistency with *Sharī'ah* rules and cannot be categorized as the way moving to an acceptable end but they could be regarded as the practices of those who don't have control on what they and how they were performing and executing and, therefore were faultless and above suspicion.

Mawlānā Thānvī does not give any credence to the philosophical dialogues concerning subjects of Sufism. Thus, he represents Sufism's non-philosophical dimension. His style is straightforward and puts immense significance on the objectives. In common words, the aim is to attain the happiness of Allāh by acting

upon and following the Shar entirely without any compromise. In exact words and aligned with the conventional perceptive of Sufism, this involves restructuring one's self which is termed as *tazkiyat al-nafs*, and working tirelessly to attain nearness to Allah.

References and Endnotes

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- ² Al-Qushayrī, Abū al-Qāsim Nānautvī ‘Abd al karim. *Al-Risala al-Qushayrīyya fi al-Ilm al-Tasawwuf*. Bayrut. Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah. tr. by Professor Alexander D. Knysh. (2007) *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism*. Garnet. UK, pp.312- 313.
- ³ Ibid. p.48
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid. p.43.
- ⁶ Ibid. p.23.
- ⁷ Al-Qushayrī. p. 46.
- ⁸ Al-Qushayrī. p.313.
- ⁹ Ibid. 312.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. 313.
- ¹¹ Al-Hujwiri, ‘Ali ibn ‘Uthmān. (1980). *Kashf al-Mahjūb*. tr. Is‘ad Qandīl. Bayrūt. Dār al-Nahdah al ‘Arabīyah. pp. 231-237.
- ¹² Al-Din, Mir Vali. (1991). *The Qur’ānic Mysticism*. Lahore. Shaykh Ashraf Publishers. 1991. p.3.
- ¹³ Thānvī, Ashraf ‘Alī. *Al-Takashshuf ‘an Muhimmāt al-Taşawwuf*. Kutub Khāna Maḥzarī, Karāchī. p.7.
- ¹⁴ That’s the two main pillars, *Tawḥīd* and following the *Sunnah*, gnosis of the Divine, love for Allah and establishing a connection with Him. Other important dimensions of Deobandī *tasawwuf* are *Ikhlaṣ*, *Imān*, *Ihsan*, *Taqwā* and *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*.
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- ¹⁶ Thānvī, Ashraf ‘Alī. (n.d.). *Tarbiyyat al-Sālik*. Karāchī. Dār-ul-Isha ‘at. n.d. Vol 1. p.7. [Urdu].
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- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ḥayāt Aamir Hussaini. (2006). *The Religious Thought of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (R.A.)*. Jay Kay Book Shop. 2006. New Delhi. p. 21.
- ²⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr. (1972). *Living Sufism*. Mandala Books. Unwin paperbacks. London. p. 15.
- ²¹ Thānvī, Ashraf ‘Alī. (n.d.). *Ashraf al-Jawāb*. compiled and ed. by Ali Muḥammad. Deoband. Vol IV. Multan. Idāra Ta’lifāt-e-Ashrafia. pp.250-256.
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- ²⁴ Thānvī, Ashraf ‘Alī. (1978). *Mukammal Bayān al-Qur’ān*. Delhi. Vol I. p.64; Vol II. pp.19-20.

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- ²⁵ Ibid. Vol IX, p.19.
- ²⁶ Ibid. Vol XI. p.90.
- ²⁷ Ibid. Vol VIII. pp.138-139.
- ²⁸ Ibid. pp.118-119.
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- ³⁰ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Bayān al-Qur'ān*, Vol. III. pp.100-101.
- ³¹ Ibid. Vol IX. p.26.
- ³² Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Kalīd-i Mathnavī*. Vol II. pp.19-20.
- ³³ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Bayān al-Qur'ān*. Vol IV. p.5.
- ³⁴ Ibid. Vol III. p.135.
- ³⁵ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Al-Takashshuf*. p.40.
- ³⁶ Ibid. p. 41.
- ³⁷ Ibid. p.48.
- ³⁸ Sharif. M. M. (1 August, 2007). *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. Adam Publishers & Distributors. Vol I. p.292.
- ³⁹ Ibid. p. 234.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. pp.271-272.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. p.252.
- ⁴² Ibid. p. 285.
- ⁴³ Al-Qur'ān. LXXV: 23.
- ⁴⁴ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. (n.d.). *Aḥkām al-Tajallī*. Deoband. pp.3-6.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. pp.6-9.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. pp.9-16; Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Bawādir al-Nawādir*. pp. 628-629.
- ⁴⁸ Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari. (2017). *Sahih Bukhari*. 6 Vol.s. Darussalam. Vol 1. Hadith no.1.
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- ⁵⁰ Din, Muḥammad. *Shari 'at-o-Ṭarīqat*. pp. 259-260.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. p. 260.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Al-Qur'ān. XXIX: 45.
- ⁵⁴ Khawaja, Ahmad Ali. (1991). *Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī: His Views on Moral Philosophy and Tasawwuf*. Delhi. Kitāb Bhawan. p.41.
- ⁵⁵ Khawaja, Ahmad Ali. p.43.
- ⁵⁶ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Ta 'lim al-din*. p. 74.
- ⁵⁷ Al-Qur'ān. XXII:17.

⁵⁸ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Ta'lim al-Dīn*. p.102.

⁵⁹ Al-Qur'ān. XLIX:12.

⁶⁰ Al-Qur'ān. XVII:38.

⁶¹ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Malfūzāt Kamālāt Ashrāfiya*. p.34.

⁶² Khawaja, Ahmad Ali. p.82.

⁶³ Ibid. p.86

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 87.

⁶⁵ Khawaja, Ahmad Ali. p.88-89.

⁶⁶ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Ta'lim al-Dīn*, p.81.

⁶⁷ Lutf-e-Rasul, Shah. (n.d.). *Tashīl Qasd al-Sabīl*. in Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Islāhī Nişāb*. Multan. Kutub Khāna Mājidiya. n.d. pp.580-581. [Urdu] cf. Bashir, 'Aamir. *Sharī 'at and Ṭarīqat: A Study of the Deobandī Understanding and Practice of Tasawwuf*. p. 211.

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