

Muslim Sufis and their Concept of Social Service (Part-I)

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The concept of *seva* or service in Sufism operates at two levels. One is theoretical and the second is practical. Sufis have defined moral character in the sense of service to humanity and have devoted themselves to this cause by serving humanity as they attempted to heal human beings from their spiritual moral and physical ailments and miseries. Unlike philosophers, Sufis were practically involved in the transformation of society at moral, spiritual and societal levels, therefore, their precepts and lives were embodiment of a noble character, which was mainly defined by their deep concern for human salvation and alleviation of sufferings. In the following pages we will first discuss theoretical foundations of Sufi concept of service and then will relate the important stories consisting of the great career of Sufis as the models of humanity and philanthropy, especially in those times when there was no culture of NGO or civil society, and finally we will discuss the Chisti Sufis model of social service and *seva* with special reference to Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya (RA).

The concept of service in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*

Allah says in the *Qur'an*:

They prefer others above themselves, even though poverty is their portion.¹

The word *khasasah* means 'poverty' and the word '*ithar*' means 'to prefer the wish, need and desire of others above those of oneself. The meaning of the verse is that the *Ansar* used to prefer the needs of others (i.e. the *Muhajirin*,) to their own needs. That is, the former used to fulfil the needs of the latter first, then they would fulfil their own needs, even though they themselves were poor and needy.

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For the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses, there is no need to recount incidents. But because they develop in human beings the highest degree of human qualities and bring about a reform in their lives, the commentators have recounted these events in detail on this occasion, especially Qurtubi. We cite below a few of them from his commentary.

It is recorded in *Tirmidhi* on the authority of Sayyidna Abū Hurairah *that* one night a guest came to an *Ansaris'* house. The latter had only as much food as he and his children could eat. He said to his wife: 'Put the children off to sleep somehow, and put out the lamp. Then place the food in front of the guest, and sit next to him so that he may be under the impression that we too are eating, but we will not eat so that the guest may be able to eat comfortably.' At this, the present verse was revealed.²

Tirmidhi records another narration on the authority of Sayyidna Abu Hurairah (RA) that a person came to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and said: "I am hungry and distressed." The Holy Prophet (SAW) sent a message to one of his blessed wives, but she replied: "We do not have anything except water." Then he sent a message to his another wife, and she made the same reply. Then to a third one and then to a fourth one, until the message went to all the mothers of the faithful, and they all replied that they had nothing besides water. Then he addressed the congregation and asked if any of them would be willing to entertain the guest, in response to which a venerable *Ansari* said: "O Messenger of Allah, I will entertain him." So he took him with and asked his wife whether there was anything to eat. She replied: "Only as much as our children could eat." He asked his wife to put the children to sleep and then said: "Place the food in front of the guest, sit and then get up and put out the lamp. The guest should not feel that we are not eating." The guest ate the food. In the morning, the Companion went to the Holy Prophet (SAW) who informed him that Allah was very pleased with the way he handled the situation the previous night.

Mahdawi narrates a similar incident of Sayyidna Thābit Ibn Qais (RA), a venerable *Ansari* who entertained his guest one night by putting the light off.³

'Qushairi cites a story on the authority of Sayyidna 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar (RA) who reports that a person sent the head of a goat as a gift to a venerable personality from among the blessed Companions. He thought that about a Muslim brother that he and his family are more in need of this, so he sent the head to him. When the second venerable Companion received it, he sent it to a third person who in turn sent it to a fourth person. In this way it circulated in seven houses and eventually it returned to the first venerable personality. On this occasion, the verse was revealed.⁴

It is recorded in *Mu'atta* of Imam Malik (RA) on the authority of Sayyidah A'ishah (RA) that a poor person wanted something to eat. She had only one bread, and she was fasting that day. She asked her maid to give him the bread. The maid said that if it was given away, there would be nothing left for her to break her fast in the evening. Sayyidah 'A'ishah (RA) insisted and gave the bread to the poor person. The maid says: "It so happened after this that a person, who was not accustomed to send any gift, sent a whole roasted goat which was completely covered with butter on the outside, which is thought to be the best Arab dish." Sayyidah 'A'ishah (RA) called the maid and said: "Come, eat this. This is better than that bread of yours."

Nasa'i has recorded that once Sayyidna 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar (RA) fell sick and he felt like eating grapes. A bunch of grapes was bought for him for a dirham. Co-incidentally, a poor person came begging. Sayyidna 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar (RA) said that the bunch be given to him. One of the Companions furtively followed him, and bought off the bunch from the beggar and gave it back to Sayyidna Ibn 'Umar (RA), but the beggar came again and begged, Sayyidna Ibn 'Umar (RA) gave it to him again. Again someone went behind the beggar secretly and bought off the bunch from him for a dirham and gave it to Sayyidna 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar (RA). The beggar wanted to turn

up the third time and beg, but the people stopped him. If Sayyidna 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Umar (RA) knew that the bunch is the same one that he gave out in *Sadaqah*, he would never have accepted it and eaten it. He probably thought that someone had brought it for him from the market-place, and therefore he had eaten it.

Sayyidna Ibn Mubarak reports on the authority of his chain of transmitters that once Sayyidna 'Umar (RA) sent four thousand Dinars in a Money bag to Sayyidna Abu 'Ubaidah (RA) with his servant, with the message that the money was being sent as a gift. He should use it as he deemed fit. The servant was instructed to remain for a while in the house to see what he would do with the money. The servant, accordingly, gave the moneybag to him and waited for a while. Sayyidna Abu 'Ubaidah (RA) took the bag full of money and supplicated for Sayyidna 'Umar (RA) that Allah may reward him and shower his mercy upon him. Instantly, he called his slave-girl and instructed her to give seven Dinars to so-and-so, five Dinars to so-and-so until all four thousand Dinars were distributed then and there.

The servant came back and narrated the story. Sayyidna 'Umar (RA) filled another moneybag with four thousand Dinars and sent it with the servant to Sayyidna Mu'adh Ibn Jabal (RA), with the same message to him and with the same instruction to the servant. The servant followed the instruction. Sayyidna Mu'adh Ibn Jabal (RA) took the bag of money and supplicated to Allah for Sayyidna 'Umar (RA), thus: "May Allah shower His mercy upon him and reward him." Then he too immediately sat down to distribute the money. He divided the money into many portions and sent them to different houses. His wife was watching all that was happening. She could not hold herself and eventually spoke out: "By Allah! We too are poor and we should also receive something." At that time only two Dinars had remained in the bag, and he gave them to her. The servant saw all this, returned to Sayyidna 'Umar (RA) and reported to him all that he saw. He said: "They are all brothers, and they all have the same disposition."

Sayyidna Hudhayfah 'Adawi (RA) narrates: "During the battle of Yarmuk, I went out in search of my paternal uncle's son [cousin] among the martyrs, and took with me some water just in case there was the last breath of life left in him, so I would give him a sip of water. When I reached him, there was the last spark of life left in him. I asked him whether he would like to have a sip of water, and he nodded 'yes'. Just as I was going to pour the water into his mouth, another martyr next to him heaved a sigh. My cousin indicated to give him the water. When I reached him and was about to give him the water, I heard the voice of a third martyr. The second martyr indicated to give the water to the third one. This series of events continued up to seven martyrs. When I reached the seventh martyr to give water, he had already breathed his last. From there I went back to my cousin, he had also met his end."⁵

Qurtubi cites a narration of the two Sahihs on the authority of Sayyidna Anas Ibn Mālik (RA) that when the *Muhajirin* arrived in Madinah from Makkah, they were absolutely empty-handed. The *Ansar*, on the other hand, had properties and lands, and they shared half-and-half of all their holdings with the *Muhajirin*. The former gave half of their fruits to the latter annually. Umm Sulaim (RA), the mother of Sayyidna Anas (RA), gave a few of her palm trees to the Holy Prophet (SAW) which he granted to Usamah Ibn Zaid's mother, Umm 'Aiman (RA).⁶

Maulana Mawdudi says about this verse that it is in praise of the *Ansar*, the Muslims of Al- Madinah. When the emigrants came from Makkah and other places to their city, they offered their gardens and oases to the Prophet (peace be upon him) with the request that he distribute them among their emigrant brethren-in faith. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: These people do not know gardening: they have come from a region where there are no gardens. Could it not be that you (the *Ansar*) continue to work in the gardens and oases and make the emigrants partners in the produce? The *Ansar* submitted: We have heard and obeyed.⁷

There upon the emigrants said: We have never seen any people so self-sacrificing as the *Ansar*, for they would work and labour and make us partners in the produce. We think they would thus be entitled to all spiritual rewards. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Nay, as long as you would praise them and pray for their well-being, you also would get your rewards".⁸

The same self-sacrificing spirit was shown by the *Ansar* when the territory of Bahrain was annexed to the Islamic State. The Prophet (SAAS) wished that the conquered lands of that territory be given to the *Ansar*, but they submitted: 'We would not take any share from it unless a similar share was given to our emigrant brothers'. Allah has praised the *Ansar* for this very spirit of self-sacrifice.⁹

Ibn Kathir interprets this verse as: "and give them preference over themselves even though they were in need of that", meaning, they preferred giving to the needy rather than attending to their own needs, and began by giving the people before their own selves, even though they too were in need. An authentic *Hadith* stated that the Messenger of Allah said,

أَفْضَلُ الصَّدَقَةِ جُهْدُ الْمَقُولِ

The best charity is that given when one is in need and struggling.

This exalted rank is better than the rank of those whom Allah described in His statements:

وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ

And they give food, in spite of their love for it¹⁰

وَأَتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ

And gives his wealth, in spite of love for it¹¹

The latter give charity even though they love the wealth they give, not that they really need it, nor that it is necessary for them to keep it. The former prefer others to themselves even though they are in need and have a necessity for what they

spend in charity. Abu Bakr As-Siddiq gave away all his wealth in charity and Allah's Messenger asked him,

مَا أَبْقَيْتَ لِأَهْلِكَ؟

“What did you keep for your family”, and he said, "I kept for them Allah and His Messenger." `Ikrimah bin Abi Jahl and two other wounded fighters were offered water when they were injured during the battle of Al-Yarmuk, and each one of them said that the sip of water should be given to another of the three wounded men. They did so even though they were badly injured and craving for water. When the water reached the third man, he and the other two died and none of them drank any of the water! May Allah be pleased with them and make them pleased with Him. *Al-Bukhari* recorded that Abu Hurayrah said: "A man came to the Prophet and said, `O Allah's Messenger! Poverty has stuck me.' The Prophet sent a messenger to his wives (to bring something for that man to eat) but they said that they had nothing. Then Allah's Messenger said:

أَلَا رَجُلٌ يُضَيِّقُ هَذَا، اللَّيْلَ رَحِمَهُ اللهُ

Who will invite this person or entertain him as a guest tonight; may Allah grant His mercy to him who does so". An *Ansari* man said, `I, O Allah's Messenger!' So he took him to his wife and said to her, `Entertain the guest of Allah's Messenger generously.' She said, `By Allah! We have nothing except the meal for my children.' He said, `Let your children sleep if they ask for supper. Then turn off the lamp and we go to bed tonight while hungry.' She did what he asked her to do.

In the morning the Ansari went to Allah's Messenger who said:

لَقَدْ عَجِبَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَوْ ضَجِكَ مِنْ فُلَانٍ وَفُلَانَةٍ

Allah wondered (favourably) or laughed at the action of so-and-so and his wife. Then Allah revealed

وَيُؤْتُونَ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ

and they give them preference over themselves even though they were in need of that.¹²

Islam lays much emphasis on social service, feeding the poor, consoling the sick and healing the injured. *Sahih Muslim* contains the following Hadith-i Qudsi: On the Day of

Judgement God will address a particular individual: ‘O Son of Adam! I fell ill but you did not attend on me.’ Bewildered, this individual will say: ‘How is that possible? Thou art the Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds.’ God will reply: ‘Doesn’t thou know that such and such a creature of mine living near thee fell ill, but you did not turn to him in sympathy? If you had but gone near him you would have found Me by his side.’ In like manner, God would address another individual: ‘O Son of Adam! I had asked of you a piece of bread but you did not give it to me!’ The individual would submit: ‘How could this happen? Thou doesn’t stand in need of anything’. And God will reply: ‘Do not you remember that so and so among the hungry creatures of Mine had asked you for food and did you not refuse to give it to him? If you had fed him, you would have found Me by his side.’ The *Sunan-i-Abu Da’ud* reports that the Prophet used to pray at night: “Oh God! I bear witness that all Thy creatures are brothers”.

It was actually the impact of these Islamic teachings and traditions that Islamic Sufis have developed a well defined system of philanthropy and articulated the exemplary principles governing this noble cause. There are copious sayings regarding the best morals presented by the Sufis found in *Risalah Qushayriya* and other Sufi treatises.

Good moral character

To begin with Ghaylan b. Jarir told us on the authority of Anas [b. Malik], who said: “Someone asked the Messenger of God, ‘which of the faithful have the best faith?’ He answered: ‘Those of them who have the best moral character.’ ” (68:4). Thus, a good moral character is the servant’s greatest virtue, one by means of which the true essence of men is known. One who is hidden by his outward complexion (*khalq*) reveals himself through his moral character. Abu Ali al-Daqqaq said: “God Most High favored His Prophet – may God bless and greet him – with many excellent qualities.¹³ However, none of them is more praiseworthy than his good moral character, for God Most High said: ‘Surely, thou [the

Prophet] art upon a good character.’ ” Al-Wasiti said: “He [God] attributed a good moral character to him [the Prophet] because he gave away both worlds, while being content with God, the Most High.”¹⁴

Al-Wasiti also said that “good moral character” means that one shows no enmity toward anyone, nor is shown any enmity by anyone due to one’s intimate knowledge of God Most, the High.

While defining good moral character (*khuluq*) and kindness Abu Hafs [al-Haddad] said: “This is what God – may He be great and exalted – bestowed upon His Prophet – may God bless and greet him – when He said: ‘Embrace forgiveness and bid to that which is honourable.’”¹⁵

It is said: “Good moral character is that you be close to people, while being a stranger to what occurs among them.” It is said: “Good moral character is that you accept harsh treatment from your fellow creatures and God’s decree with neither vexation, nor anxiety.” In the Gospel it is said: “O My servant, remember Me when you are angry, and I will remember you when I am angry!” Luqman said to his son: “There are three men whose true character makes itself known on three instances: a prudent man at the time of anger; a valiant man at the time of war; and a brother at the time when someone is in need of him.” It is related that the Commander of the Faithful Ali b. Abi Talib – may God be pleased with him – was found weeping one day. When asked what made him cry, he told: “Not a single guest has come over in the past seven days. I am afraid that God, the Most High may have decided to humiliate me!” It is related that Malik b. Anas – may God be pleased with him – said: “The tax of any house is that [its owner] should set aside a room for guests [in it].”¹⁶

Al-Fudayl said:

I’d rather have a good-natured sinner than bad-natured worshiper as my companion.¹⁷

Risalah-i- *Qushayriya* has quoted al-Kattani saying:

Sufism is good moral character. Whoever surpasses you in moral character has also surpassed you in Sufism. Moral goodness is depicted in our treatment not only towards humans but even with the animals and birds as we are supposed to be kind enough.

Al-Fudayl said:

He who has shown every [possible] virtue, yet has mistreated his chicken, should not be considered to be among the virtuous.

Abu Ali al-Daqqaq says that Asma b. Kharija said:

I hate to turn down anyone who approaches me with a need, because if he is noble, I guard his honour, while if he is base I guard my honour from him.” ”Shah al-Kirmani said: “A sign of the good moral character is that you do not harm others, while bearing patiently the distress they inflict on you.¹⁸

Imam Ghazzali says:

you must know the matters which are in between you and your God if there is any weakness or lapses the forgiveness is easier in these matters but the matters regarding oppression against the creatures, will not be forgiven on the Day of Judgement .Since these matters are very dangerous therefore no ruler will get rid of the consequences of oppression and only those are exempted who deliver justice and treat their subjects very justly.¹⁹

Shaikh Imam Rabani says:

My Makhdum, to do good (*Ihsan*) is desirable everywhere especially on those who are relatives and also close neighbours. The Prophet (SAW) used to stress giving the rights to the close neighbours that the Companions would feel as they are being made entitled in the inheritance.²⁰

After wards he explains the rights of the neighbours by showing the categories of neighbours and says that even a non

Muslim neighbours has right to be taken care of by a Muslim being a neighbour .Because according to a Hadith forty houses are neighbours from all sides.²¹

In *Maktubat –i –Sadi* ,Makhdoom Jahan Shaikh Ahmad Yahya Muneeri says: that the sins related to the people are dangerous as *haqul Ibad* is most dangerous and complicated unless you return the losses incurred due to you by others and return money if you snatched it from them.²²

According to Kalabazi: Humility is taking pride in constriction, adhering to submission, and shouldering the burdens of the people of religion.” “Love is a pleasure if it be for a creature and annihilation if it be for the Creator”²³

According to a Sufi treatise, *Kitab al Luma*, the Sufis have to spend their personal strength (*quwati-nafs*) in the service of their friends after leaving behind the worldly domains and territories and their prestige.²⁴ Sufis if they are poor and needy may beg for alms and charity but once their need is fulfilled they give the remaining portion in charity.²⁵ According to Sahl ibn Abdullah that the sign of a *faqir* is that he does not beg for anything and does not also reject and does also not keep anything with him.²⁶ Generosity, according to Abu Bakr Raqaq is this that the person who has lost something should give to a person who has found something and not vice versa.²⁷ According to Yusuf ibn Al Husain to give is an honour and to take is disgrace.²⁸

The prophets and *Sadiqin* keep their relation with worldly provisions from the angle of rights of other people thus this relation is of rights [of others] and not to fulfil their desires .The objective of earning wealth should be only to help Muslims and after knowing that others have not earned they should give them the surplus.²⁹

Preferring others to Oneself

Preferring ones ease for making others lives comfortable was a permanent trait of the Sufis. Every day Ibrahim went out

to work for hire and laboured till night. All his earnings he expended on behalf of his companions. But by the time he had performed the evening prayer and bought something and had returned to his friends the night was far gone. One night his companions said, "He is late in coming. Come; let us eat some bread and go to sleep. That will be a hint for him to return earlier in future. He will not keep us waiting so long." So they did. When Ibrahim returned he saw that they were asleep. Supposing that they had not eaten anything and had gone to sleep hungry, he at once lit a fire. He had brought a little flour back with him, so he made dough to give them something to eat when they woke, then they would be able to keep fast next day. His companions awoke to see him with his beard on the floor, blowing on the fire; tears were streaming from his eyes, and he was surrounded by smoke. "What are you doing?" they asked. "I saw you were asleep," Ibrahim replied. "I said to myself, perhaps you could not find anything and went to sleep hungry. So I am making something for you to eat when you awake." "See how he thought about us, and how we thought about him," they exclaimed.³⁰

One of the saints relates, "I was with Beshr once when the weather was extremely cold. I saw him naked and trembling. 'Abu Nasr' I said, 'in such weather people put on extra clothing. You have taken off your clothes.' 'Yes,' Beshr replied, 'I remembered the poor. I had no money with which to succour them, so I wanted to share with them physically.'"³¹ Beshr also told the following story. One night I saw Ali in a dream. I said, "Give me counsel." "How good a thing," said Ali, "is the compassion shown by the rich to the poor for the sake of seeking Beshr ibn al-Hareth the reward of the All-merciful? Better still is the disdain shown by the poor towards the rich."³²

Beshr lay on his deathbed. A man entered and complained of the tight-fistedness of fate. Beshr gave him his shirt and put on a borrowed shirt, and in that shirt set out into the world beyond.³³ Such was the caution and care of the Sufis towards the sensibilities of others that they always tried to avoid hurting these.

According to *Risalah Qushayriya*, al-Sulami is reported to have said:

The master Abu Sahl [al-Suluki] never handed alms to anyone directly. Rather, he would cast it on the ground, so that the beggar would pick the alms from the ground, saying: ‘This world is of so little worth that, for the love of it, I do not want to see my hand putting anything into the hand of another man.’³⁴

It is related that Ali b. al-Fudayl used to buy his goods from neighbourhood merchants. Someone told him:

You could buy [the same goods] cheaper if you shopped at the [city] market!’ He answered: ‘These merchants have settled in our neighbourhood in the hope of serving our needs.

Endurance

The Sufis have borne the ill treatment of the people happily and have never taken revenge. Here are some episodes. It is related that the Commander of the Faithful Ali b. Abi Talib – may God be pleased with him – called his servant who did not respond to his call. He called him again and again, but the servant still did not respond. So Ali went to him and found him lying down. Ali asked him: ‘Didn’t you hear me?’ The servant answered that he did. ‘Then what made you ignore my call?’ He answered: ‘I feel safe from your punishment, so I [allowed myself to be] lazy.’ Ali told him: ‘Go. You are now free for the sake of God Most High!’ and respond to you [in kind].³⁵

It is related that Abu Dharr was watering his camels at a pond, when a stranger rushed in and broke open [a side] of the pond. Abu Dharr first sat down, then lay down. When someone asked him about this, he answered: ‘The Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him – commanded us to sit down whenever we are angry and, should [our] anger persist, to lie down.’

A woman shouted to Malik b. Dinar: ‘You hypocrite!’ He answered: ‘Woman, you have found a name for me that the people of Basra have missed [thus far]!’ It is related that Ibrahim b. Adham was travelling in a desert, when he a soldier,

who asked him: “Where is the closest settlement?” Ibrahim b. Adham pointed toward the graveyard, whereupon the soldier struck him on the head and wounded him. When the soldier finally let him go, he was told that [he had beaten] Ibrahim b. Adham, the [famous] ascetic from Khurasan. When the soldier returned to apologize before him, Ibrahim told him: “When you struck me, I asked God Most High to [admit] you to Paradise.” The soldier inquired why he had done that. Ibrahim told him: “Because I knew that God would reward me for this. However, I did not want my portion to be good at your expense and your portion to be bad because of me!”

Yahya b. Ziyad al-Harithi owned a troublesome slave. Someone asked him: “Why do you retain this slave?” He answered: “In order to learn temperance through him.”

It is related that Abu Uthman was crossing a street one day, when someone dumped a bucket of ashes on him. His companions were very angry and began to curse the person who dumped the ashes. However, Abu Uthman told them: “Don’t say a word! He who has deserved the [hell] fire, yet has managed to get away with just ashes, has no right to be angry!”

Al-Ahnaf said: “He was sitting in his house, when his slave girl brought a skewer with sizzling pieces of meat. It fell from her hand on one of his infant sons, who died instantly. The slave girl was overcome with agony. Qays told her: ‘Fear not, you are now a free woman for God’s sake!’ It is related that whenever boys saw Uways al-Qarani, they would pelt him with stones. In response, he would just tell them: “If you have to do this, then use small stones, lest you break my legs and prevent me from performing my prayers.”³⁶

One day al-Ahnaf b. Qays found himself followed by a stranger, who was insulting him. When he approached his neighbourhood, he stopped and said: “Young man, if you have something more [to say], do it now before the halfwits of my neighbourhood hear you. It is said that Maruf al-Karkhi went down to the Tigris in order to perform his ablutions. He laid down his Quran and his cloak. A woman came along and took them. Maruf caught up with her and said: “Sister, I am Maruf. Don’t be afraid of me. Do you have a son who can read?” She

replied: “No.” “And [your] husband?” “No,” said the woman. Maruf told her: “Then give me the Quran back and keep the cloak.” Once thieves broke impudently into Shaykh Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami’s house and stole everything they could find. I heard one of our companions recount [the following story]: “I heard Shaykh Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: ‘I was passing through the marketplace one day when I saw my cloak on a vendor. I turned away from him and left.’”³⁷

I hear Shaykh Abu Hatim al-Sijistani say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi say: I heard al-Wajihi say: al-Jurayri said: “When I came back from Mecca – may God protect it – the first thing I did was to go to al-Junayd, so as to save him from the trouble [of visiting me]. I greeted him, then went to my house. When I was praying the Morning Prayer in the mosque the following day, I discovered that he was also praying in the row behind me. I told him: ‘Didn’t I come to you the other day in order to save you from the trouble?’ He said: ‘That was your munificence, while [praying behind you after the *hajj*] is your due.’”

Abdullah sewed clothes for him and the Magian paid him with counterfeit money. One day, when Abdullah left his shop on an errand, the Magian came with his counterfeit money and tried to give it to Abdullah’s apprentice. When the apprentice refused to accept it, the Magian paid him genuine money. When Abdullah came back to his shop, he asked the apprentice: “Where’s the Magian’s shirt?” The apprentice told him what had happened. Abdullah exclaimed: “You have done a terrible thing! For a long time he has done business with me with [such counterfeit] money. I have been patient with him throughout and tossed his money into a well, so that he would not cheat other folk with it!”

A Sufi recounted: “On a very cold day I came to visit Bishr b. al-Harith. He had no clothes on him and sat there trembling [from cold]. I told him: ‘Abu Nasr, on a day like this people put on extra clothing! Why do you have so little [clothing on you]?’ He answered: ‘I have remembered the poor and their plight. Since I have nothing to bestow on them, I have decided to keep their company in enduring this cold!’ ”

Sari-e Saqati relates the following story. One festival day I saw Ma'ruf picking date stones. "What are you doing?" I asked him. "I saw this child weeping," he told me. "I said, 'Why are you crying?' He told me, 'I am an orphan. I have no father and no mother. The other children have new clothes, and I have none. They have nuts, and I have none.' So I am gathering these stones to sell them and buy him nuts, then he may run along and play."

"Let me attend to this and spare you the care," I said. Sari went on, "I took the child and clothed him, and bought him nuts, and made him happy. Immediately I saw a great light shine in my heart, and I was transformed."³⁸

One night a thief entered Junaid's room. Finding nothing there but a shirt, he took that and fled. Next day Junaid was passing through the bazaars when he saw his shirt in the hands of a broker who was selling it to a customer. "I require an acquaintance who will testify that it is your property, before I buy it," the prospective purchaser said. "I am ready to testify that it belongs to him," said Junaid, stepping forward. The man then bought the shirt.

"In these days brothers in the faith have become few and far to find," a man said in Junaid's presence. "If you are looking for someone to bear your burden, such men are indeed few and far to find," Junaid countered. "But if you are seeking to carry somebody's load, such brothers are to be found in plenty with me."³⁹

The thirteenth century Andalusian Sufi Mohyeddin Ibn Al Arabi emphasised the concept of *hubb al-hubb*, or the 'love of love'. "For these Sufis love is all that exists. The Auliya Allah (friends of Allah) have emphasised love and *rahma* (divine mercy)", he said, adding that ninth century Iranian mystic Bayazid Bistami had said that 'he who gives the greatest leeway is the closest to Allah'. Dr Frembgen said that in Ibn Al Arabi's Sufism there was willingness to enter into inter-religious dialogue, and that the great mystic warned against religious exclusivism.

Reference and Notes

¹ The *Qur'an*: 59:9.

² Al-Tirmidhī has rated this *Hadith* as '*Hasan, Sahih*'

³ There is a common statement appended to all these incidents:
The above verse was revealed in connection with this event.

⁴ Tha'labi has also recorded this narration on the authority of Sayyidna Anas (RA).

⁵ These are a few events, some of which relate to the *Ansar*-and others to the *Muhajirun*. About a number of these incidents, it is said that the verse under comment was revealed regarding them. In fact, there is no contradiction in these narrations, because it is a well-known habit of narrators that if a verse was revealed under a certain circumstance, and a similar incident took place on another occasion, they mention the second incident as a cause of revelation of that verse as well. In fact, all similar incidents can be said to be the cause of revelation of the verse or, at least, included in its purport. The *Ansar* displayed a great deal of self-sacrifice in the matter of the *Muhajirun*. The former made the latter partners in their homes, their shops, their businesses, their land and their agriculture. When Allah gave the *Muhajirin* affluence, they did not fall short in doing a good turn in return for their favours.

⁶ Imam Zuhri says that Sayyidna Anas Ibn Malik (RA) reports that when the Holy Prophet returned successfully from the expedition of Khaibar to Madinah, the Refugees - all of them - calculated all the gifts of the *Ansar* and returned them. The Holy Prophet took back the trees that were granted to 'Umm 'Aiman and returned them to 'Umm Sulaim (RA), and granted trees to 'Umm 'Aiman from his own orchard. See Mufti Mohammad Shafi, *Maarif al Qur'an*, Translated by Maulana Ahmed Khalil Aziz, Revised by Maulana Muhammad Taqi 'Usmani. Volume 8, pp.390-394.

⁷ Bukhari, Ibn Jarir.

⁸ *Musnad Ahmad*. Then, when the territory of the Bani an-Nadir was taken, the Prophet (SAAS) made this proposal to the *Ansar*: Now one way of managing it is that your properties and the gardens and the oases left by the Jews be combined together and then the whole distributed among you and the emigrants. The second way is that you take back your properties, and the lands vacated by the Jews be distributed among the emigrants. The *Ansar* said: You may please distribute these evacuee properties among the emigrants and may give them of our properties also as you please. At this Abu Bakr cried out: May Allah reward you, O assembly of the *Ansar*, with the best of everything. (Yahya bin

Adam, Baladhuri). Thus, with the willing consent of the *Ansar* the properties left by the Jews were distributed only among the emigrants, and from among the *Ansar* only Abu Dujanah, Sahl bin Hunaif and (according to some) Harith bin as-Simmah were given shares, for they were poor people. *Baladhuri, Ibn Hisham and Ruh al-Maani*.

⁹ Surah *Al Hadeed*, see Mawlana Mawdudi, *Tafhim al Qur'an*.

¹⁰ The *Qur'an* 76:8.

¹¹ The *Qur'an* 2:177.

¹² *Al-Bukhari* recorded this *Hadith* in another part of his *Sahih Muslim*, *Al-Tirmidhi*, *An-Nasa'i* collected this *Hadith*. In another narration for this *Hadith*, the Companion's name was mentioned, it was Abu Talhah Al-Ansari, may Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Kathir's tafsir Surah *Hadeed*.

¹³ Al-Qushayri's *Epistle on Sufism*, The Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, Garnet Publishing Limited 8 Southern Court South Street Reading RG1 4QS UK, 2007, p.416-418

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.419.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.429.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.430.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.434.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.318.

¹⁹ *Naseehat al Maluk*, Urdu Tr.Dr Samih Allah Qureshi, Islamic Book Foundation New Delhi 2002, p-21

²⁰ Translation of *Maktubat of Shaikh Ahmad Faruqi*, translated by Muhammad Sayeed Ahmad Mujjadadi in Urdu entitled *al Bayinat Sharh Maktubat*, Tanzeem-i-Islami publications, Model Town, Gujranwala, 2010, p-292.

²¹ *Ibid*. p.293.

²² Dr Syed Shah Muhammad Naim Nadvi, (Urdu translation) Jaseem Book depot Delhi 1998, pp.63-64

²³ Abu Abdillah al-*Nibaji*, *The Doctrine of the Sufi*, Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi, tr by Arthur John Arberry, Kitâb Bhavan new Delhi 1994, P-85

²⁴ *Kitab al Lumah fil Tasawwuf*, Shaikh Abu Nasr Saraj, tr. Urdu Syed Asrar Bukhari, Aitiqad publishing house, new deli 1991, p-307.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.309.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.318.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *Ibid*. p.319.

²⁹ Hasht Bihist, *Malfuzat-i-Khwajgan - Chist*, Maktaba Jam New Delhi, nd, Pp- 682-684.

³⁰ Al-Qushayri's *Epistle on Sufism*, op.cit.p-73.

³¹ Ibid, p.83.

³² Ibid, p.85

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ However, [the Prophet] – may God bless and greet him – said:
'The upper hand is better than the lower hand'

³⁵ Al-Qushayri's *Epistle on Sufism*, op.cit. p- 254

³⁶ A younger contemporary of the Prophet who is said to have embraced his teaching without ever meeting him in person. Sources describe him as an impoverished and ragged figure, who chose to live a life of solitude and privation. He is said to have been killed fighting on Ali's side against the army of Muawiyya b. Abi Sufyan in 37/657.

³⁷ Al-Qushayri's *Epistle on Sufism*, op.cit. p 319

³⁸ Muslim saints and Mystics Episodes from the *Tadhkirat al-Auliya* ("Memorial of the Saints") Farid al-Din Attar, translated by A.J. Arberry, *Tadhkirat Auliya*, Muslim Media Delhi India N.D, pp.163-164

³⁹ Ibid, pp.208-9