

Sufism

Students' Notes

1. **Outline the distinctive characteristics of Sufi Islam.**
2. **Describe the relationship between Sufism and Islam.**
3. **Discuss the principal features of the teachings of Sufism.**

Islam is a religion that has been sent through the last prophet (ﷺ) as a code of conduct. That code deals with both the external and internal appearances of the Muslims. According to the famous hadith Jibril (Muttafaq ‘alaih hadith in both Swahih Al Bukhariy Book 65, Hadith 4777, Swahih Muslim Book 1, Hadith 5), the angel Jibril (عليه السلام) came to the Prophet (ﷺ) with three questions based on Islam, Iman and Ihsan. In this way the three constitute the external and internal aspects of a Muslim. From Ihsan, a field of study known as Tasawwuf or Sufism has emerged.

There are many opinions regarding the origin of this word, Tasawwuf (تصوف) – Sufism. Some people associate Sufism to the Ahlus-Sufaah (people of As-Sufaah) who was at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). That group of people was very poor and they stayed in the courtyard of the mosque of the holy prophet (ﷺ) in devotional acts. Some say that Sufism comes from As-Saff al-Awwal (First Row), implying that some companions of the holy prophet (ﷺ) would stay in the first row in the mosque of Madinah. Their main aim was to study Islam in depth. Some claim that the term is derived from As-Safaa meaning clearness, purity, sincerity. Some accept the opinion that the term Sufism refers to the wearing of woollen clothing (Suf). This is so because many scholars known to be Sufis used to wear woollen cloth. According to the 4 Imams, Sufism has its place in Islam. Imam Abu Hanifa (رضي الله عنه) (85 H. - 150 H) said that “If it were not for two years, I would have perished.” He said, “For two years I accompanied Sayyidina Ja’far as-Sadiq (رضي الله عنه) and I acquired the spiritual knowledge that made me a Gnostic in the Way.” (Ad-Durr al-Mukhtar, vol 1. p. 43). Imam Malik (رضي الله عنه) (95 H. - 179 H.) said that “Whoever studies Jurisprudence (tafaqaha) and doesn’t study Sufism [tasawwuf] will be corrupted; and whoever studies Sufism and doesn’t study Jurisprudence will become a heretic; and whoever combined both will be reaching the Truth.” (‘Ali al-Adawi, vol. 2, p 195.) Imam Shafi’i (رضي الله عنه) (150 - 205 AH.) said that “I accompanied the Sufi people and I received from them three knowledges: (1) how to speak; (2) how to treat people with leniency and a soft heart, (3) and they guided me in the ways of Sufism.” (Kashf al-Khafa, ‘Ajluni, vol. 1, p 341). Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (رضي الله عنه) (164 - 241 AH.) said that “O my son, you have to sit with the People of Sufism, because they are like a fountain of knowledge and they keep the Remembrance of Allah in their hearts. They are the ascetics and they have the most spiritual power.” (Tanwir al-Qulub p. 405)

According to a Hadith Hazrat An-Nu’man bin Bashir (رضي الله عنه) said that the holy Prophet (ﷺ) said that “... Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoiled the whole body gets spoiled and that is the heart.” (al-Bukhari: 52, Muslim: 1599) and Hazrat Abu Huraira (رضي الله عنه) said that the holy Prophet (ﷺ) said (emphasizing on the heart) that “Verily Allah does not look to your bodies nor to your faces but He looks to your hearts,” and he pointed towards the heart with his fingers.” (Swahih Muslim: 2564). As such the Sufis try to link the theoretical concept known as Iman with the practical concept known as Islam through its excellence and beauty known as Ihsan. In trying to do so, the Sufis Masters have developed both the internal and external conducts and principles. In fact the following will deal with these concepts and teachings of Sufis and how they must lead their inner selves to practice Islam.

Firstly, there is the concept of Tawbah which is the repentance for all small and big sins. The first step is to avoid all sins from all parts of the physical and spiritual bodies. This is proven from the Qur’an (66: 8): ‘O ye who believe, Turn unto Allah in sincere repentance!’ (Tawbatan Naswouha).

Secondly, the sufi adopts the concept of Muhaasabah which is the analysing of our nafs. It deals with scrutinising deep into our own selves of our weaknesses or sins and tries to change them. This is a proven

from the Qur'an (59: 18): 'O you who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul consider what it has sent forth for tomorrow, ...'.

Thirdly, the sufi lives in Khawf which is the fear for Allah. It is the sweet fearing of Allah's wrath, greatness and magnificence. It is said in the Quran (49: 13): 'Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-aware.'

Fourthly, the sufi cultivates the concept of Rajaa which is the hope we place in Allah. It is an everlasting and joyful hope for His kindness, goodness and generosity in this world and the next. It is said in the Qur'an (17: 57): 'and they hope for His mercy, and fear His punishment'.

Fifthly, there is Swidq which is the attestation of truth. Whether we have seen Allah or not we must attest of His existence with firm faith with feeling of it. It is said in the Qur'an (9: 119): 'O those who believe, fear God, and be with the truthful ones'.

Sixthly, the sufi develops the concept of Ikhlās which is the sincerity in faith and action. Ibaadah without sincerity is worthless in the eyes of Allah. All actions and intentions must be sincere for Allah only. It is reported in the Qur'an (98: 5): 'And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, being sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth ...'.

Seventhly, a sufi adopts the concepts of Swabr which is patience in worldly and spiritual affairs. In whatever situation a sufi finds himself, he just accept it with patience and perseverance. Allah says in the Qur'an (2: 155): 'and give good tidings to the patient ones'.

Eighthly, a sufi treads the path of Waraa which is abstaining from haram and doubtful. He is conscious that haram will lead him to darkening of the heart and doubtful will never resolve the problem of darkness. Allah says in the Qur'an (23: 3): 'and those who turn away from impious talks' and (2: 172): 'O believers! Eat of the good things that We have provided you'.

Ninthly, a sufi will adopt the concept of Zuhd which is abstaining from love of worldly luxuries. The sufi is not interested in luxuries. He will lead his life as any human being with his family and job but will not run after this world. Allah says in the Qur'an (6: 32): 'What is the life of this world but play and amusement? But best is the home in the hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will ye not then understand?'

Tenthly, the sufi will adjust himself to the concept of Radwaa which is the satisfaction from what Allah gives. He will never complain of his situation whether he is ill, poor or at ease. He accepts any state and condition from his Lord who says in the Qur'an (98: 8): 'God is well-pleased with them, and they are well-pleased with Him; that is for him who fears his Lord'.

Another step adopted by the sufi is Tawakkul which is complete Trust in Allah in all circumstances. He depends on Allah alone and is committed only to Him. Allah says in the Qur'an (65: 3): '...And whosoever puts his trust in God, He shall suffice him. God attains his purpose...'

The **last code** of conduct put into practice internally is Shukr which is the everyday thanks to Allah for everything. He knows that whatever he has or will have is thank to Allah. He exists because of Allah and as such he always thanks Allah. Allah says in the Qur'an (14: 7): 'And when your Lord proclaimed, "If you are thankful, surely I will increase you, but if you are thankless My chastisement is surely terrible"'. All the above mentioned concepts are real concepts of the Qur'an and the Hadith / Sunnah and are not challengeable. Through all the above concepts the Sufi Master helps people to incorporate spirituality in the hearts of Man thus joining Islam, Iman and Ihsan all together.

Now turning to the external concepts and practices the sufi adopts different ways. **Firstly**, there is the Dhikr. It is most likely the most frequent form of prayer. Among the orders of Muslims that practice dhikr, there are some who advocate silent, individual prayer, while others join together in an outward, group expression of their love for God. There are also a number of hadiths that give emphasis to remembrance of God (Swahih Bukhariy Hadith 7405). It is the constant remembrance of Allah through any kind of Ibaadah especially the frequent recitation of the Shahadah – Laa Ilaaha Illallah as it is said in Jami' al Tirmidhi

(hadith 3383): ‘the best of dhikr is Laa Ilaaha Illallah’ and it is said in the Qur’an (33: 41) ‘o you who believe, make abundant remembrance of Allah’. There are some Sufi orders that perform a ritualized form of Dhikr in groups termed “ḥaḍra” (literally presence) standing as mentioned in surah 3 verse 191: ‘Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides’. Another method of dhikr, but which is most commonly associated with Sufism, is the repetition of the Arabic name "Allah" like ‘Call upon Allah, or call upon the Merciful (Ar Rahman)’ (17: 110). When the Dhikr involves the repetition of particular phrases a specific number of times, the beads are used. It is said in Sunan Ibn Majaa hadith 3793 : ‘Always keep your tongue moist with the remembrance of Allah, the Mighty and Sublime’. Dhikr can be done at any time but most preferably during the night and in early morning.

Secondly there is the practice of Muzaakarah. It is the seeking of guidance from the Shaikh for Shari’ah and spirituality. It is said in the Qur’an (16: 43): ‘question the people of the Remembrance, if you do not know’. The aspirant sufi or the student is deprived of the knowledge of the shari’ah and spirituality. He is in need of a guide and of someone who has already taken and gone along the path of shari’ah and spirituality. Like a patient will depend on the advice of his doctor for curing his cancer, likewise the student or aspirant sufi will depend and trust his teacher or shaikh for the inner purification of his heart and ego and the outer purification of his body and conduct. Muzaakarah is important for the aspirant as the way towards Allah is so difficult with the presence of Shaitaan. At any time Shaitaan may tempt the student. The shaikh is the pole, guide, light and way to make him reach his goal that is Allah who says (18: 17): ‘He whom Allah guides is the guided, but he whom He leaves astray - never will you find for him a protecting guide’.

Thirdly, there is the concept of Khalwah. The literal meaning of Khalwah is seclusion or retreat, but it has a different connotation in Sufi terminology. It is said in the Qur’an (2: 51): ‘And (remember) when We appointed for Musah forty nights’. It is the act of total self-abandonment in desire for the Divine Presence. In complete seclusion, the Sufi continuously repeats the name of God as a highest form of Dhikr. It is recommended for the aspirant to spend at least one hour per day for Khalwah. It is the complete abstinence of this world to seclude oneself in one’s room to praise Allah. It can be in different form like reading of the Qur’an or making tasbihaat. It is said in swahih Bukhariy hadith 1423: ‘...a person who remembers Allah in seclusion and his eyes get flooded with tears’. It can be more than one hour depending on the level of the aspirant sufi. However for the sufi master it can be for a whole night from swalaat Isha till Fajr. It is said that the prophet (ﷺ) spent days and nights in seclusion in the cave of Hira (Bukhariy hadith 3) (then the love of seclusion was bestowed upon him. He used to go in seclusion in the cave of Hira where he used to worship (Allah alone) continuously for many days before his desire to see his family. He used to take with him the journey food for the stay and then come back to (his wife) Khadija to take his food) and Allah says (73: 8): ‘And remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with (exclusive) devotion’.

Fourthly, there is the concept of Muraaqabah. It is the sincere concentration on Allah in all Ibaadah. It can exist in different stages. The first one is making muraaqabah on our sins. We ponder on our weaknesses and try to reform them. It is said (39: 53): ‘Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful’ Muraaqabah is where you concentrate on Allah, so from one side you are taught how to recognize and avoid the doings of Shaitaan, and on the other, how to establish a nisbah (relationship), or closeness with Allah. It is said (13: 28): ‘Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction’. This is done in a special way, which is be dedicating a special time for Allah, where you will try to only reflect on Allah by way of His Asmaa (names) and His creation. This increases the love of Allah in your heart. As we know when one remembers someone a lot, that person becomes dear to us, hence if we remember Allah all the time, He becomes dear to us. It is said in swahih Muslim hadith 2750 ‘and if your state of mind is always the same as it is at the time of remembrance of Allah, the Angels would shake hands with you and would greet you on the path by saying: As-Salamu-Alaikum’. The word Muraaqabah is derived from the attribute of Allah, ar Raaqib – the one who is ever watchful as ‘Allah is watchful over everything’ from (33: 52). It is said in (50: 18): ‘Not a word does he utter, but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it)’. The sufi is careful of what he says, thinks and does.

Fifthly, there is the concept of Khanqa. A Khanqa is a building designed specifically for gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood, or tariqa, and is a place for spiritual retreat and character reformation. In the past, and to a lesser extent nowadays, they often served as hospices for Sufi travellers (saalik / soulouk) and Islamic students. It is said (3: 37) concerning the retreat of Hazrat Maryam (رضي الله عنها) in the mosque to learn and study: 'So her Lord (Allah) accepted her with goodly acceptance. He made her grow in a good manner and put her under the care of Zakariya. Every time he entered Al-Mihrab to (visit) her, he found her supplied with sustenance ...'. It is similar to a Dar ul 'Uloom. Khanqa are very often found adjoined to dargah (shrines of Sufi saints), mosques and Madrasah. It is said (18: 21) that a mosque was built over the graves of the youngsters of the cave by the believers: 'Construct over them a structure. Their Lord is most knowing about them.' Said those who prevailed in the matter, "We will surely build over them a masjid.'. It is also known as zawiyya. All Khanqa, regardless of size, feature a large central hall. The daily swalaat are held in this hall, as are the specifically Sufi forms of Dhikr, meditation and celebration of the divine. Large Khanqa often grew up around the tomb of a tariqa's founder or the mausoleum of a Sufi saint. It is said in Hadith Bukhariy 488 (Book Swalaat hadith 135) that 'there are two or three graves by the side of a mosque on a plateau. There was a mould of stones over the graves ... the prophet (ﷺ) prayed swalaat Zohr in that mosque'. Some Khanqa include dwellings for the Sufi sheikh, and his family, or cells for Sufis who wish to pursue their Dhikr in quiet and isolation. They may also include lodgings for travelling Sufis and pilgrims and premises for charities such as hospitals. This is similar to the mosque of Madina where there is the place for prayer, the house of the prophet (ﷺ), the house of Hazrat Faatima (رضي الله عنها) and place for Ashaab us sufah.

Sixthly, there is the concept of Silsila. It is an Arabic word meaning chain, often used in various senses of lineage. In particular, it may be translated as "religious order" or "genealogy". Centuries ago, Arabia did not have schools for formal education. Students went to masters who taught them. Upon completion of their study, they received ijazah (permission) which acted as the certification of education. It is said in Swahih Bukhariy hadith 7172 and in Swahih Muslim hadith 29 of book 1 that Hazrat Mu'adh bin Jabal (رضي الله عنه) said that the prophet (ﷺ) sent him as the governor of Yemen and instructed him. A graduate then acted as a master having his own students. This chain of masters was known as Silsila. The shaikh gives his disciples permission (ijaaza) to practice the tariqa and he may also authorise one or more of them to teach it to others. It is also said in Swahih Bukhariy hadith 3924 that the prophet (ﷺ) sent Hazrat Mu'adh bin 'Umair (رضي الله عنه) as the first envoy to madina to teach the people there. It is a major conduit of the baraka (blessing) of any genuine Sufi school, and links the mureeds (students) of that order with the combined spiritual power of their spiritual antecedents and with the unseen transformative forces that transpire behind the outward manifestation of the Chain, which is called the Silsila ("chain" or "pedigree"). The representation of the chain of transmission is called the Shajara (tree).

Seventhly, following the silsila, there is the relationship between the Murshid (teacher or shaikh) and the Mureed (student or aspirant seeker). The seeker must submit to the will of the shaikh and to obey him in all his orders and advice, because the shaikh has more experience and more knowledge in haqiqat, in tariqat and in shari'ah. . It is said (18: 69) when Hazrat Musah (عليه السلام) met Hazrat Khidr (عليه السلام) the former said that 'If Allah wishes, you will find me patient and I shall not disobey any of your orders'. As such it is the principle and respect of a student. The seeker must not object to the way the shaikh instructs and controls the murids. Each shaikh has his own way, which he has been permitted by his own shaikh to use. It is said in Swahih Bukhariy hadith 5028 that 'The most superior among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it'. Imam Ibn Hajar al-Haythami said, "Whoever opens the door of criticism against shaikhs and their behaviour with their murids and their actions will be punished and will be isolated from receiving spiritual knowledge. Whoever says to his shaikh, 'Why?' will never succeed." [al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyya, p. 55]. The seeker must respect and honour the shaikh in his presence and his absence, if only because the shaikh can see with the eye of the heart. The murid must be sincere and loyal to the company of his shaikh. It is said in Jami' Tirmidhi hadith 1919 that 'He is not one of us who does not have mercy on our young and does not respect our elders.'. It is the same respect that we have for our teachers or Ustadh in madrasah or dar ul 'uloom. As it is not appropriate to rebuke or go against our teacher / ustadh in Tajweed, alike we must respect our teachers in shari'ah. The mureed must love his shaikh with an extraordinary love. He must not

look to any other than his shaikh, though he must keep respect for all other shaikhs. He must agree with the opinion of his shaikh completely, as the patient agrees with the physician. He must behave well in the association of the shaikh, by avoiding yawning, laughing, raising the voice, talking without authorization, extending the feet, and always sitting in a respectful manner. He must serve his shaikh and make himself as useful as possible. He must attend the association of the shaikh. Even if living far away, he must make an effort to come as often as possible. These above external concepts help Man to leave this materialistic world and to get a spiritual touch with a spiritualised environment. Sufism helps Man to put Islam in practice both inwardly and outwardly.

Islam and Sufism are connected like the spokes and the hub of a wheel. Islam is the outer (exoteric) side of the religion, the wheel, and sufism is the hub around which the wheel rotates. The spokes connecting the outer wheel to the hub are the different paths (Tariqa) upon which the seeker may discover the inner reality of religion. Imam Nawawi (620 - 676 AH.) said that "The specifications of the Way of the Sufis are ... to keep the Presence of Allah in your heart in public and in private; to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) ... to be happy with what Allah gave you..."[in his Letters, (Maqasid at-tawhid), p. 201]. Ibn Qayyim (691 - 751 AH.) said that "We can witness the greatness of the People of Sufism, in the eyes of the earliest generations of Muslims by what has been mentioned by Sufyan ath Thawri (رضي الله عنه) (d. 161 AH), one of the greatest imams of the second century and one of the foremost legal scholars. He said, "If it had not been for Abu Hisham as-Sufi (رضي الله عنه) (d. 115) I would never have perceived the action of the subtlest forms of hypocrisy in the self... Among the best of people is the Sufi learned in jurisprudence." [Manazil as-Sa'ireen.]. Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1115 - 1201 AH.) "My father Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and I do not deny or criticize the science of Sufism, but on the contrary we support it, because it purifies the external and the internal of the hidden sins, which are related to the heart and to the outward form. Even though the individual might externally be on the right way, internally he might be on the wrong way. Sufism is necessary to correct it." [ad-Dia'at mukathaffa did ash-Shaykh Ibn Abdul Wahhab,p.85]

As such Sufism contributes to social Cohesion through love, patience, help, charity, tolerance, and solidarity. It helps the Economic Development as economically they wage war against ignorance, poverty and conflicting ideas. It helps in the Democratic Process through Participation in political and social affairs for better life. It helps in the Civil Society as the Sufi engaged in helping people to accept any kind of differences without criticising. Sufism helps in the Religious Plurality as the Sufis convey Respect of other religions and other groups within Islam. It helps to understand Sufism through elaborating on the real concepts of Islam and it helps to erase Misconceptions as Sufis help us to crush all misconceptions and wrong says about Sufism. Sufi Masters are not those people who will impose on Man to practice their concepts but rather they will explain these concepts to us and it will be up to us to decide. As the Qur'an says, "there is no compulsion in religion", the Sufi Masters leave it to Man as a code of conduct to be chosen or not depending on what we want in life. Sufism has been so much criticised because of the so called false sufi people with false innovations and concepts but the real Tasawwuf practiced by the real Sufi Masters is praiseworthy. According to Dr. Muhammad Musa Al-Shareef who studied at the Umm ul Qura University and being an assistant professor in the Department of Islamic Studies, King Abdul Aziz University, Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi (رضي الله عنه) is the master of Tasawwuf and it (Sufism) has its place in this world where materialism is taking over the hearts of Man.

- 1. Explain how Abu Hamid al-Ghazali attempted to relate Islamic observances to their spiritual significances in his Ihya' 'ulum al-din ('Revival of the Religious Sciences').**
- 2. What would you say are the main contributions of Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali to the relationship between Muslim belief and practice?**
- 3. How far did al-Ghazali succeed in his attempt to reform Sufi beliefs?**
- 4. What are the main teachings of al-Ghazali's Ihya' 'ulum al-din ('Revival of the Religious Sciences')?**
- 5. How would you defend or reject the view that this book is one of the most important Islamic religious texts ever written?**

6. How far did al-Ghazali succeed in reconciling Sufi beliefs with the beliefs of the majority of Muslims of his day?

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (رحمة الله عليه) (born 1058 C.E. in Tus, Khorasan province of Persia in modern day Iran and died in 1111 C.E. in Tus) was one of the greatest jurists, theologians and mystical thinkers in the Islamic tradition. At a certain period of his life, he did not attend any more to philosophy and applied himself totally to Sufism and to the renewal of orthodox religion. Al-Ghazali (رحمة الله عليه) composed a great work known as *The Revivification of the Sciences of Religion* (Ihya' 'ulum al-din).

He is known to have reconciled Sufism and orthodoxy. According to him Sufism is the best doctrine in comparison with philosophy or theology, because Sufism leads to a positive knowledge of God and nature. When one engages on this way, it is imperative to avoid the unlawful and the blameworthy behaviour. In opposition to these reprehensible attitudes, al-Ghazali suggests commendable conduct, among which of great importance are repentance, self-discipline and fear of God. According to Imam al-Ghazali (رحمة الله عليه) we must repent sincerely for all our sins and be firm on this way with Dhikr and Tawakkul as part of the basics of our lives. Then the murid (student) will be annihilated – Fana – in the love of Allah. Anyway, the fana' or ecstatic grasp is only a short and transient instant (al-Ghazali (1970): 62) and does not concern any kind of hulul (state) or descent and incarnation of God in the mystic. Al-Ghazali strongly rejects every immoderate claim of some Sufis, such as the utterances by al-Hallaj (I am the Truth), because they are dangerous and can lead through incomprehension to heresy and polytheism (shirk). Rather, al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of love (mahabbah). According to al-Ghazali “a true learned man loves only God Most High; and if he loves somebody who is not God, he loves him for God, the Almighty and Sublime” (al-Ghazali (1970): 257). The highest degree of love involves a full confidence in God: this is the meaning of tawakkul, such a complete trust in the Creator that the believer gives himself up to Him "like a dead man in the hands of a corpse-washer" (al-Ghazali (1970): 249; al-Ghazali (1985), 4: 242-3). An important issue is to point out that the Sufi way did not imply for al-Ghazali the neglect of the orthodox practices of worship and the careful fulfilment of the Sunnah (al-Ghazali (1967a): 71-2). Al-Ghazali is persuaded that exteriority leads to interiority (al-Ghazali (1970): 102ff).

He said: “Know that arrival at the stations (maqamat) cannot be attained except by purification of the [human] nature (nafs), cleansing of the heart (qalb) and embellishment of the soul (ruh). The essential purpose is the embellishment of the soul (ruh). Its embellishment cannot be attained except by cleansing of the heart, and its cleansing cannot be attained except by purification of the [human] nature (nafs) and purification is a necessary preliminary.” (Jaami' al-Haqd'iq bi Tajrid al-'Ala'iq pg 183). He again said: “Know that nafs has two intrinsic qualities, which are lower desire (hawd') and anger (ghadab), and all the blameworthy characteristics are begotten from them. Its purification can be achieved by their equilibrium.” He also added: “Such a qalb, he suggests may be polished by struggling against desires, acquiring good characteristics, seclusion, solitude and continually remembering (dhikr) Allah.” (Jami', pg 21). He propounded that “the nafs of man is occupied with disobedience and following the Devil. Consequently, a black dot will appear in the ruh. When the disobedience of nafs increases, the blackness of the ruh will increase until it becomes wholly black. As a result, the doors of (he benevolence of Allah Most High will be closed to it When the ruh becomes black and the door of light are closed against it, an action appropriate to that blackness will appears in the limbs. Thus al-Ghazali suggests that the clearing away of its blackness will be accomplished through faith” (Jaami' pg 24)

Thus al-Ghazali built his system on God as starting point and foundation, unlike the philosophers who started with senses or reason. He anchored reason in iman, whence it drew its ultimate postulates; and then gave it the freedom to be as critical as it wished. Without such anchoring, reason is fallible and untrustworthy. God is knowable through His works, His order and design of nature, His omnipresent providence - all of which reason is capable of discerning in tentative but not definitive form. Between God and the world stands the realm of malakut and amr, by which al-Ghazali meant the realm of values constituting the ought of all that is or will be, a realm that is absolute, a priori and transcendent (inspirational) (malakut). Knowledge of it is yaqin (certainty) and such knowledge is the ground of all other

knowledge. Al-Ghazali, we may concede, taught the primacy of axiological knowledge (Axiology refers to ethics and aesthetics. Ethics investigates the concepts of "right" and "good" in individual and social conduct. Aesthetics studies the concepts of "beauty" and "harmony."), which relates man to God, over the knowledge of the world, which would be faulty and groundless without the first." [pp. 300-1]. Finally, Sufism is not for al-Ghazali simply an individual path to reach perfection but a whole conception of life including ethics and morality, behaviour and belief, cosmology and metaphysics. The contribution of the Sufis to society lies in their sincere and dedicated struggle to find a unity for the various elements that make up its totality. They appreciate the multi-racial, multi-religious and multilingual pattern of the society. Their efforts are directed towards the creation of a healthy social order free from dissensions, discords and conflicts. In love, faith, toleration and sympathy they find the supreme talisman of human happiness. In fact, peace and goodwill between human beings was the end all and be all of Sufi endeavours.

This book of Al Ghazali, the *Ihya*, is so important that there are many 'ulama and authors praising it. 'Abdallah bin 'Alawi al-Haddad has said: "Al-Ghazali is a graceful favour bestowed by Allah upon this nation (ummah). He has investigated the sciences and weaved them. No 'alim can have his rank", "The books of al-Ghazali quench thirst for they are a cure of the heart's sicknesses", "To love al-Ghazali is an incomparable gift, and you will see this in akhira. Only the believer whose heart is enlightened and who deals justly with his self loves the books of al-Ghazali, he has guided us with his books and the barakat of his secrets", and "The one who engages in reading the *Ihya*' is gaining firmly established knowledge, for the reading of it may suffice as a teacher and a shaykh. Nothing is more beneficial to the people of this time than to read the *Ihya*', for it is life and happiness in akhira". Ibn al-Subki said that "It ranks among the books which Muslims must look after and spread far and wide so that many people may be guided by reading them. Seldom has someone looked into this book except he woke up on the spot thanks to it. May Allah grant us insight that shows us the way to truth, and protect us from what stands between us and the truth as a veil." Al-Safadi said that "It is among the noblest and greatest of books, to the extent that it was said, concerning it, that if all books of Islam were lost except the *Ihya*', it would suffice for what was lost." Fakhr al-Din al-Razi said that "It was as if Allah gathered all sciences under a dome, and showed them to al-Ghazali."

Professor Yasin Ceylan one of the leading Muslim journals in US (vol. 12, no. 4, Winter 1995) published a paper titled "Al Ghazali between Philosophy and Sufism". The author describes al Ghazali's experience with sufism in these words: "His disillusionment with philosophy was derived from its destructive effect on the fundamentals of religion, while his attraction to Sufism was rooted in the fact that ethical refinement and the purification of the soul were necessary conditions in this discipline." [p. 584] "Al Ghazali mentions three fundamental features related to his mystical experience: a) the purification of the soul from those evils and worldly desires that hinder moral perfection; b) those spiritual dispositions or explorations that occur after the process of purification reaches the level of maturity; and c) that these dispositions are not explicable through reason." [p. 587]. In his work, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, Professor Ismail R. al Faruqi writes, "Reaffirming his view that Tasawwuf is both knowledge and action, al-Ghazali chastised those who sought to reach the mystical experience in a hurry. He also rejected the sufi claim that in the mystical experience one reaches God through fusion into or unity with the divine Being. Such a claim he regarded as blasphemous. By reaffirming that Islam implies action, al-Ghazali meant to repudiate those sufis who preached the way of the monks and cells and the withdrawal from society, any form of asceticism (abstinence) or mortification (humiliation), or no obligation to observe the rituals and all other laws of the shari'ah. Al-Ghazali thus made Tasawwuf respectable and conformant with the shari'ah and spirit of Islam.

Al-Ghazali seeks to demystify Islam. He maintains, for example, that in order to be a Muslim it is sufficient to hold the beliefs that have been laid down by God and his Prophet (ﷺ) in the Quran and sunnah, and that knowledge of the complex arguments advanced by the theologians is not requisite of faith. The essence of religion is experience, not mere profession, and the sufis are the ones who are able to experience the realities that theologians only talk about. [vol. 2, pp. 61-63].

1. **Why has the orthodoxy of Sufism often been doubted?**
2. **Explain why Sufi teachers were often regarded as a threat to orthodox Islamic believers.**

Tasawwuf is a technical term which describes the state of Ihsan, as mentioned in the famous hadith of Jibril, and the process of Tazkiyat an-Nafs (purification of the self) which is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. That is acceptable in Islam, as long as it does not contain superstition or foolish concepts. We accept Tazkiyat an-Nafs and the state of Ihsan, purification of the heart, as it is an important part of the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. However due to some false sufis (they are not Sufis) and misconceptions Tasawwuf is criticised.

The term Tasawwuf was not known in the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). However, even though the name is new, the essence of it is part and parcel of the religion and cannot be separated out from it. The purpose of Tasawwuf is to purify the heart from all kinds of bad desires and inclinations and the dirtiness that accumulates upon it due to sins and wrongdoing, either externally or internally, and to remove these bad manners and sins and to clean the self and to dress and decorate the heart with the good behaviour and good manners that are demanded by the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ). Its purpose is to create the state of Ihsan, perfection of character, which was the state of the Prophet (ﷺ), and the state which each of his Companions was striving to achieve. The term Tasawwuf was used to identify the way of cleansing the heart, originally called Tazkiyat an-Nafs in the Qur'an, but which became known later as the Science of Tasawwuf. Originally this 'ilm (science) was known by the terms the Science of Austerity (Zuhd), the Science of Purification (Tazkiyah) and the Science of Perfection of Character (Ihsan). The terms Zuhd, Tazkiyat and Ihsan were the terms used in the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). Through the passing of time, those practicing Tasawwuf, known as Sufis Masters, have elaborated an internal and external code of conduct or practices to be adopted. For internal conduct we have Tawbah, Muhaasabah, Khawf, Rajaa, Swidq, Ikhlaas, Swabr, Waraa, Zuhd, Radwaa, Tawakkul, Shukr. For external concepts we have Dhikr, Muzaakarah, Khalwah, Muraqabah, Khanqa, Silsila and Mursheed and Mureed. However, since long, there have been many critics raised against the whole concept of Sufism in Islam. These criticisms are still based on the real origin and concepts and practices of the Tasawwuf. The following will shed light on how questions are set against the topic of this work.

It must be noted here that according to Dr Muhammad Musa Al Shareef, an associate professor at the King Abdul Aziz University, there were 3 phases of Tasawwuf in history. The first phase was from the 2nd century till the 4th century of Islam. The second phase started from the 5th century till the 7th century. The third phase was from the 8th century till today. According to him criticism started in the third phase. **As such**, according to those against Sufism, they say that it was a movement in the 8th century against the prevailing impersonal and formal nature of Islam. The idea here is that if really Sufism is an Islamic concept, then it should have been existed in the holy Quran and the Sunnah of the holy Prophet (ﷺ). However, it must be noted as listed above that the aim of Tasawwuf in the purification of the heart and this is attained through the internal and external practices which no doubt are according to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. None of these practices can be challenged. Whether we change the name to Zuhd, Ihsan or Tazkiyah, the principles will be the same.

Secondly, the idea that wealth was enjoyed during the period of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) for military purposes was the response against Sufi concept of going against the materialistic world. That thought emerged as many so called sufis left their daily activities and family members to retreat in mountains or the wilderness. However, the life of a Real Sufi Master revolves around both the rights of Allah and the rights of Human Being. He has his family life as anyone else. Concerning retreat in mountains or wilderness, it is a sunnah of the prophet (ﷺ) to go for a retreat or seclusion for a limited amount of days in a secluded area or simply a room at home. The Prophet (ﷺ) did it in the cave of Hira.

Another criticism is that the whole concept of Sufism is generated from other various religions like Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Neo-Platonism and Manichaeism, for instance, the grave worshipping and the idea of fire-temple. This is so because the false sufis used to go to these shrines and worship the dead

people. However, this is against the concepts of Tasawwuf and Islam. Real Sufi Masters don't adhere to that practice. Real Sufi Masters and their aspirants do never worship or make sajdah in front of graves of Awliya. This may be the acts of false sufi but it has been attributed to real Sufi. It is incorrect.

Fourthly, according to Sufis, there are verses of the holy Qur'an and Hadith of the holy Prophet (ﷺ) having deeper meaning, that is esoteric aspects. However, the critic says that the Sufis force the meaning of the holy Qur'an and the Hadith they use are not from the sound Hadith books. However, it is a fact that things that we can't perceive and understand are considered as strange but to what extent are they right or wrong depends on the level of education, understanding and inspiration from Allah. According to Dr Muhammad Musa al Shareef of King Abdul Aziz University, there is a secret which is shared between Allah and the real Mu'min that not only we don't know but angels also are unaware of it. It is said in Swahih Bukhariy hadith 120 that Hazrat Abu Huraira (رضي الله عنه) said 'I have memorized two kinds of knowledge from Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). I have propagated one of them to you and if I propagated the second, then my pharynx (throat) would be cut (i.e. killed)'. Are we going to accuse Hazrat Abu Huraira (رضي الله عنه) of blasphemy or kufr?

Fifthly, those who are against Sufism say that the further one delves into Sufism from an academic perspective, the clearer it becomes that both the origins and content of Sufism clearly show the inclusion of religious ideas and influences contrary and contradictory to orthodox Islam. However according to Imam Abu Hanifa (رضي الله عنه), Imam Malik (رضي الله عنه), Imam Shafi'i (رضي الله عنه) and Imam Ahmad bin Hambal (رضي الله عنه) it is recommended to study and practice Tasawwuf. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (رضي الله عنه) said "O my son, you have to sit with the People of Sufism, because they are like a fountain of knowledge and they keep the Remembrance of Allah in their hearts. They are the ascetics and they have the most spiritual power." (Tanwir al-Qulub p. 405). Were the four above mentioned scholars unorthodox?

Sixthly, it is criticized that their practices also bear close similarities to those of Hinduism and other mystical religions of the East. The Sufi orders are led by Shaykh, who play the same role as Hindu gurus. Some of the Shaykh were described as having "pronounced psychic powers." However, the Sufi orders and Khanqa are similar to a Madrasah or a Darul Uloom where the students can stay there for education and they are supposed to respect the teachers and follow their advices. This is discipline to shape the character and akhlaaq (good manners) of the students. Concerning the so called powers criticised by the opponents of Tasawwuf, it is proven in Islam and as such Dr Muhammad Musa said that these are miracles that the men and friends of Allah can do. However, it is not to forget that there are those who don't possess any of these qualities and are pretending to have them. It is mentioned in the Qur'an (27: 40) when Hazrat Sulaiman (عليه السلام) being in Palestine wanted that the throne of Bilkiss be brought to him from Yemen 'One with whom was knowledge of the Scripture said: "I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye!" then when (Sulaiman (عليه السلام)) saw it placed before him, he said'. That person was not a prophet. How was he able to do it? Is that farfetched? It is but from the Qur'an.

Seventhly, the mystical quest of the Sufis is pursued through a number of mental and physical exercises. The opponents of Sufism criticise these whirling dances "intended above all to plunge the dancer into a state of concentration upon Allah." However, according to Imam Ahmad bin Hambal (رضي الله عنه) in his Musnad Volume 3 Page 152 (Imam Maqdisi said that it is Swahih) there is a hadith where Hazrat Anas (رضي الله عنه) reported that the Ashab used to dance in front of the holy prophet (ﷺ) while reciting and saying "Muhammadun 'Abdun Swalih". The word "Raqsw" (Ra Qaf Swad) meaning to dance has been used. According to al Ghazali (رحمة الله عليه), Imam Suyuti (رحمة الله عليه), Imam an Nawawi (رحمة الله عليه) among others we can't repudiate those practicing Sufi dance and Hadra (a form of standing Dhikr in group). After all what is controversial is that those saying that Sufi dancing is haram, accept and practice "tribal dancing with swords in hands" known to be a "tribal custom". This is seen in the Arab world. It is also said in Swahih Bukhariy (949 and 950) and Swahih Muslim (892) being a Muttafaqun 'alaih hadith that Hazrat 'Aisha watched two Abyssinian (Egyptian) girls of Bani Arfida using the tambourine, chanting the songs of Buath and dancing.

Eighthly, there are “invocations of the Divine Name,” also known as Dhikr, which can be done either silently or in a chant. However, the opponents of Tasawwuf say that here also there are similarities with Hindu mantras. They say that the Sufi doctrine of the Dhikr coincides with that taught by the 19th century Hindu saint Rama-krishna, who succinctly summed it up in the phrase: “God and His Name are one”. However, we no doubt know that Dhikr done is for the best of oneself. In Swahih Bukhari hadith 7405 it is stated that Hazrat Abu Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) said that the Prophet (ﷺ) said that Allah Says: “I am just as My slave thinks I am, and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than they ...”. These are criticism against Sufism only to discredit the Sufi Masters and the field of Tasawwuf.

Ninthly, there are some sayings of some Sufis that could not explain at that time. For example there is much criticism against the words of Mansur al Hallaj which are “Anal Haqq” – “I am the Truth”. Those against Tasawwuf adamantly criticise him. As such, when speaking on characters in Sufi Islam who have eternally distorted the image of Sufi Islam in the eyes of critics, two particular people come to mind, Abu Yazid al-Bistami, and Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj. Abu Yazid Al-Bistami, in the eyes of Mainstream Muslims, had committed blasphemy upon reaching an “intoxicated state” (for which his particular Sufi sect is labelled “Intoxicated Sufis”). He felt he had attained a union with God, and in light of his discovery proclaimed “Glory be to me! How great is My Majesty!”. Many Muslims scolded Bistami, whose claim was interpreted as praise for himself instead of the divine. Al-Ghazali strongly rejects every immoderate claim of some Sufis. His intentions and interpretation of those words were subject to much scrutiny, but some prominent Muslims still held him in high regard, including the “sober” Sufi, al-Junayd Baghdadi (رحمة الله عليه). Al-Junayd (رحمة الله عليه) wrote commentary on the utterances of his Murid (Disciple), Abu Yazid Bistami, and interpreted the sayings in accordance with Mainstream teachings. As for Al Bistami, his achievement of fana (annihilation) marked the beginning of the concept of ascension as a spiritual goal in Sufism, continued by other controversial figures like Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj.

Tenthly, Al-Junayd Baghdadi (رحمة الله عليه), as a Pir (Master) who mentored such Murids as Abu Yazid al-Bistami, could not ignore the actions of al-Hallaj. Al-Hallaj quickly became one of the more controversial and divisive figures in Islamic History. Beginning as a mutasawwif (a student on the path of Tasawwuf), he could not stay with one Shaikh for any given period, and continuously switched from one to another without the previous Shaikh’s consent. Al-Hallaj ended up as a martyr for his convictions. His refusal to denounce his famous words “ana al-Haqq” (“I am the Truth”) infused rage in the Mainstream Muslim community over such blasphemy; a rage that subsequently cost him his life. Mainstream Muslims interpreted his words in the literal sense, because, if one is not in the same mind-state, it is hard to interpret such a direct phrase any other way. Al-Hallaj, however, was likely referring to his absolute identification with the divine after the achievement of fana.

The state in which al-Hallaj was in, during the time of his blasphemous utterance could be understood in an allegory he liked to use; a human soul was like a moth and God was like a flame, engulfed with fascination for the flame, the moth eventually drifts closer until finally consumed. Mainstream Muslims, however, interpreted al-Hallaj’s utterances one way, literally. Perhaps this can be attributed to the influence of the Hanbali School of Thought on the Caliphate of the time. Hanbali thinking proclaimed all things in relation to God must be taken in the literal sense, that one should not ask questions about God, and that if one committed a “grave sin”, one must be punished accordingly and proclaimed a non-Muslim. Al-Hallaj was punished for his blasphemy; Mainstream Muslims did not believe one could attain a union with God in the present life, and to claim unity with God was questioning the very foundation of Islam; the oneness of God. Misinterpretation of Sufi Mystic rituals also stems from their unwillingness to describe many attributes of their experiences. While some Sufis claim that description of the attainment of unity, or closeness to God is indescribable, others claim one must not describe the experience. Those that claim one must not describe the experience to the curious are told to say the following, according to al-Ghazali, “There was what was of what I do not mention: So think well of it, and ask for no account”. Those that cannot grasp the concept must not be granted the knowledge that is attained when one enters such a state. This concept adheres to the exclusivity and exoteric (outer) notions of Sufism. Since most Sufi rituals and

practices are very personal to the practitioners, it is natural that the attainment of closeness with God remains an experience between man and God. It is also believed that only an 'Arif (a learned person in spirituality) can achieve fana and it is unlikely that one who does not possess piety or ma'rifat (mystical intuitive knowledge of spiritual truth) would be able to comprehend the beauty of such an experience, and for that reason, they should not be told.

There are also those who believe that the experience should be shared, but it is indescribable in actual words, and thus, to portray the beauty of such an experience, one can only use metaphors, similes, and allegories. For example, Jalaaluddin Rumi (رحمة الله عليه) allocates the feelings he experiences into similes, using words like "celestial birds" to describe his 'flight' into the highest of high stages, as well as a freer consciousness, and "sugary cubes" for the pleasant taste left in his heart and mind once he 'comes back down to earth'. Thus, those who share their experiences are unable to describe the experience in direct terms and thus, use abstract descriptions through poetry to portray it to those who have not attained it. If the notion of achieving an absolute God-centred state is possible, according to Mainstream Muslims, then, like the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Sufis, too, should be able to describe their experience. Mainstream Muslims perhaps cannot see past the esotericism (mystery) in Sufi practices because they, themselves, have never truly attempted to experience fana. It may also be because of the greater emphasis on esoteric Islam practiced by Mainstream Muslims that makes it difficult for them to understand the exoteric aspect of Sufism. This lack of understanding of esoteric and allegorical Islam is then the cause for misinterpretation of Sufi rituals and practices by Mainstream Muslims.

However there are false Sufis because of whom Tasawwuf is discredited for many reasons as follows. These false Sufis steal the words of the Sufis and present them as their own. They do not have true knowledge of that which they are speaking; it is only on their lips but not from their hearts. These people take the title of "Sufi" because it gives them a certain amount of prestige and power among people in the society. They are despicable, weak, incapable, morose, without any exit from uncertainties, and deficient in all their senses. They steal away all your attainments and will not benefit neither in this world nor the next. They are like blind men who cure eyes but in fact will be worsened. They have no scent or trace of God, but their claims are greater than those of Hazrat Shiite (عليه السلام) or Hazrat Adam (عليه السلام). They are not embarrassed to keep on saying that they are of the saints and even greater but in fact they are only liars. They steal many of the words of the dervishes, so that people may think they really are someone, having knowledge and spirituality. They are destitute of the bread and provisions of heaven. They are engaged in revealing to their disciples things that they don't know and they are pretending to know the future. They are attached to the jinns asking for their help. They are unaware of the reality of Shari'ah and commit much mistake. Their lives are not compatible with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. They are the mischief-mongers of the society and are destroying the real Islam. They say that they possess supernatural power. They say they can predict the future. They say they can do miracles. They say they can travel throughout time and space. Some of them advice their followers not to perform Swalaat and in return they will perform the ibaadah for the followers. Some spend their time in the ruins away from the society and their family. They order their students things against Shari'ah.

Tasawwuf has existed since long but in other different names like Tazkiyah of Nafs. If one doesn't like the term Tasawwuf he shouldn't use it. He can use some other term, of which there are many. However, just because one doesn't like the term Tasawwuf, perhaps because of some negative connotations that have been attributed by modernists and Orientalist, that doesn't mean great scholars didn't define the term and explain it, as a science in Islam and an essential part of the Din. Ibn Taymiyya did so in 1400 pages of Volume 10 (Ilm as-Sulook) and Volume 11 (at-Tasawwuf) of his lifework, "The Gathered Fatawas of Ibn Taymiyya" ("Majmu'a Fatawi Ibn Taymiyya").