

The Importance of Knowledge and Practice in Sufism

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Abstract

Knowledge and practice are the most important thing in Sufism. Knowledge refers to spiritual stations and levels of the heart, which increases the confidence of the heart from one level to the other, until the position of faith and the dignity of a Muslim becomes inward. Practice is the behavior and deeds that affect the change in the heart of a person. This article aims at clarifying the importance of knowledge and practice in sufism, discussing the change in the mind of a sufi and identifying the relation between knowledge and practice. All which makes a person muhsin, the peak of the spiritual journey of a servant to the pleasure of Allah. This qualitative study is based on content analysis using various sources of sufism discipline. The study finds that knowledge and practice are important elements in sufism; they are the fundamental basis that one cannot ignore in attaining closeness to Allah s.w.t. This is because all knowledge and practices in sufism is aimed at constant concentration on the unity to Allah s.w.t., the main milestone in the creed of Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. Without unity and closeness to Allah, the aqidah is believed to be only blank and not strong enough to guide towards the perfection of self-sacrifice to Allah s.w.t. Therefore, it is worth explaining that knowledge and practice are not merely knowledge that refers to mere deeds and actions of the limbs that are unconnected to the change in the nature of the heart.

Keywords: Knowledge, Practice, *Muhsin*, Sunah, Jama'ah.

Introduction

Nowadays, it seems that many individuals learn discipline and practice in sufism because it is the only way to attain unity in Allah s.w.t, to be firm and steadfast. This paper discusses the importance of knowledge and practice in sufism and the relation of one to the other. The

saying “*Knowledge without practice is like a tree without fruit*” denotes the meaning of every form of worship to Allah s.w.t. Knowledge without practice is wasted, and practice without knowledge is a loss.

Understanding the meaning of knowledge and charity in sufism is essential through the Qur’an and sunnah of the Prophet s.a.w. Allah says:

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ، هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْمُحْسِنِينَ. الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ. أُولَئِكَ عَلَى هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ.

These are the verses of the Book which contain the wisdom and the sure truth. A guide and a mercy for those who do good deeds. Those who establish *salat* and pay *zakah*, and believe in the Hereafter. Those are guided by their Lord, and they are the successful (surah Luqman: 2-5).

Imam al-Junaid al-Baghdadi is reported as saying that those who do not understand the Qur’an and do not study the Hadith of the Prophet s.a.w cannot practice sufism, because our knowledge (sufism) is closely related to the Qur’an and Sunah. There are verses of the Qur’an that iterate advantages and obligations of knowledge and deeds. Among them are, but not limited to:

...يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

... Allah will raise, to some degree, those of you who have accepted faith and those of you who have been given knowledge. And Allah is well acquainted with what you do (surah al-Mujadalah: 11).

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا كَافَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

And it is not for the believers to go forth [to battle] all at once. For there should be from every division of them a group [remaining] to obtain understanding in the religion and warn their people when they return to them that they might be cautious (surah al-Tawbah: 122).

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَيَلَكُمْ ثَوَابُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِّمَن ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَلَا يُفْتَنُهَا إِلَّا الصَّابِرُونَ

But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient (surah al-Qasas: 80).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا

We do not abolish the reward of those who believe and do righteous deeds (surah al-Kahfi: 30)

There are also many hadiths on the importance and obligations of knowledge. Some among these are, but not limited to:

عن أنس بن مالك قال، قال رسول الله عليه وسلم: طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم ووضع العلم عند غير أهله كمثل الخنازير لجواهر واللؤلؤ والذهب

From Anas ibn Malik who said: The Messenger of Allah s.a.w said: seeking for knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, and relating knowledge to those who worth it not is like decorating pigs with gems, pearls and gold (Ibn Majah);

أطلبوا العلم من المهد إلى اللهد

Seek for knowledge from the cradle to the saddle;

من أراد الدنيا فعليه بعلم ومن أراد الآخرة فعليه بعلم ومن أرادهما معا فعليه بعلم

Whoever wants the material world should seek for knowledge, whoever wants the hereafter should seek for knowledge, and who wants the two together should also seek for knowledge; and

من سلك طريقا يلتمس فيه علما سهل الله له طريقا إلى الجنة

Whoever pave a path through which he seeks for knowledge, Allah will ease for him the path to the Jannah.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study is based on content analysis using various sources of sufism. The study finds that knowledge and practice are important elements sufism, an essential foundation one cannot ignore in attaining closeness to Allah s.w.t. This is because all knowledge and practice in sufism is aimed at being one with Allah s.w.t, the milestone in the creed of Sunnah wa al-Jema'ah.

Findings and Discussion

With reference to knowledge and practice in sufism, there are various definitions highlighted by Sufi figures, from the earliest time and up till now. Shaykh Zaruq (899H) says that knowledge and practice refers to the true nature of the heart needed to be a servant of Allah and to guide the affairs of the heart to be one with Allah s.w.t (Zaruq, 1985). Al-Qushayri (1989), defines knowledge and practice in sufism as the knowledge and practice of the purification of the soul, and the admiration of praiseworthy character and the abandonment of despised behavior (Isa, 2001), educating and training one's lust for Allah (Sakhr, 1970; Ibn 'Ajibah, 2009), the knowledge of spiritual ascension (*taraqqi*) to become the perfect servant (Hajj Khalifah, 1990) and guided by the spiritual experience they had lived, biased and understood. Imam al-Junayd al-Baghdadi defines knowledge and practice in sufism as: "Allah kills you from you and awakens you with Him", referring to the culmination of a person in the process of obeying Allah (al-Qushayri, 1989). Some also define it as a process of polishing the soul been stricken with various bad habits in order that the heart be restored to good. So, knowledge and practice of the process is the science and practice in sufism. In sum, the set of knowledge and practice definitions in sufism is referred to either the ultimate goal to be achieved or the process of practice and appreciation that one must pursue to purify one's soul, or merge the two aspects (Isa, 2001). Imam al-Qushayri, in *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, under the subtitle '*Usul al-Tawhid 'ind al-Sufiyyin*', discusses the purification of creed according to practice Sufi figures. They are the Ahl Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah who distance Allah s.w.t away from the deviant belief of *tashbih* (likening Allah to His creatures) and purify Him from *ta'thil* (denial of God or His attributes).

Imam Abu Bakr al-Kalabadzi, in *al-Ta'aruf li madzhab ahl al-Tasawuf*, wrote:

Know that the knowledge of the Sufis is a spiritual station. A spiritual station is a level of state in one who can only be achieved by practicing the true shari'ah. And the practice of the true shari'ah is first of all knowing knowledge. Shari'ah science covers the basics of juristic knowledge such as prayer, fasting, and other fardu. Then knowledge of mu'amalat like marriage, talak, business, and all that is required and destroyed by Allah ".According to Imam al-Ghazali, every knowledge and charity will be accompanied by knowledge and practice

from the point of fact. For example, every knowledge and practice such as prayer, zakat, fasting and hajj will have knowledge and practice as fact, repentance, gratitude, devotion, sincerity, ease and patience. This is every thing that will lead to the inner person of the heart.

وعن الحسن رضي الله عنه ، قال : العلم علمان: فعلم في القلب فذلك العلم النافع، وعلم على اللسان فذلك حجة الله عز وجل على ابن آدم.

knowledge are of two types; a knowledge in the heart is a useful knowledge, and a knowledge on the tongue used as a *hujjah* (evidence) against the children of Adam (al-Darimi).

From the above hadith, it is found that useful knowledge is the knowledge that leads to the consciousness of Allah, and it is this consciousness that gives birth to being obedient to Allah through following His commands and avoiding disobedience to Him. This ascertains the word of Allah when He says:

... إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ عَلَّمُوا اللَّهَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا عَفُورًا

...it is truly those who gifted with knowledge who are conscious of Allah the most, for Allah is Great and Forgiving (surah Fatir: 28).

SUGGESTION AND APPROVAL FOR KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN SUFISM

The ultimate aim of knowledge and practice in sufism is to reach the culmination of recognition of Allah s.w.t. When one is firm and steadfast in the existence of Allah, with the Majesty and the Perfection (*al-Kamal*) of Allah s.w.t, and purification of life (*istiqamah*) in performing the worship of Allah s.w.t, one is accompanied by knowledge and practice in the pillars *Ihsan* (sufism) as stated in the hadith of Jibril a.s when he asked the Prophet s.a.w

ما الإحسان؟ قال : أن تخشى الله كأنك تراه، فإن لا تكن تراه فإنه يراك

...what is *ihsan*? The Messenger of Allah s.a.w replied: *ihsan* is that you are truly conscious of Allah as if you see Him, for if you cannot see Him, He most surely sees you.

It shows from the above hadith knowledge and practice in sufism is closely related to *ihsan*, a knowledge and practice that is necessary to be enhanced from time to time to achieve *dhawq* in the existence and oneness of Allah s.w.t.

Therefore, Muslims who have attained the rank of *ihsan* always feel watched by Allah s.w.t and this prevents them from doing what He hates, avoiding acts of immorality, avoiding degrading and wrong deeds until they achieve the noble stage described by the Messenger of Allah when he said: "إنما بعثت لأتمم مكارم الأخلاق" (verily I am sent by Allah to perfect character) (Ahmad).

Conclusion

The emphasis on knowledge and practice in sufism can nourish the sense of piety in a Muslim individual to the existence and oneness of Allah s.w.t. By so doing, the heart becomes clean and one can adapt oneself to the nature and recognition of Allah s.w.t. As Muslims, we cannot ignore the importance of knowledge and practice, because the awareness of both is essential

to the enjoyment and pleasure of Allah s.w.t. The study found that the importance of the Muslim spiritual process of development is dependent on the sincere intention and the sincerity of increasing knowledge and practice in sufism as a source of strengthening identity.

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