



Contemporary Sufi Epistemology Reconsidered: An Examination of Badi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursi's Thought

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the epistemological framework of Sufism as articulated by Sa'id Nursi within the contemporary era. Sufism has come to be regarded as harboring deviant doctrines and practices that stand in contradiction to Islamic law in the modern period. Certain Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have contended that Sufism does not originate from within the Islamic tradition. It is therefore imperative to address this misapprehension by illuminating the authentic epistemological foundations of Sufism through reference to the thought and conduct of a contemporary Sufi practitioner, Sa'id Nursi. This study employs a qualitative library research design. Both primary and secondary data were gathered through documentary techniques, and the collected data were subsequently subjected to content analysis. The findings of this study indicate that Nursi delineates four foundational pillars of Sufi epistemology. The first pillar holds that authentic Sufism is grounded in the Quran and the Sunnah, internalized and expressed through the soul and heart, as upheld by authoritative Sufi scholars. The second pillar asserts that the purification of Sufi teachings and practices must originate from the cleansing of the heart and soul. The third pillar pertains to social equality, understood as the enactment of life's values in recognition that all human beings stand equal before God. The fourth pillar calls for the consistent cultivation of four Quranic values, namely tauhid (the unity and oneness of God), nubuwah (prophecy), hashr (resurrection), and 'adl (justice).

Keywords: Badi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursi, Contemporary, Sufi Epistemology, Sufism.

Introduction

The epistemological study of Sufism is fundamental to the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Islam. The epistemological framework of Sufism has at various points throughout its history served to constrain the development of its teachings and doctrines as well as the recognition of its orthodox standing.(Riyadi, 2015, p. 29)

Sufism is frequently perceived as encompassing erroneous teachings and practices that are at variance with Islamic law. For those who represent authentic Sufism, however, such deviations from the Sufi path constitute what may be termed pseudo-Sufism.(Ihsan et al., 2022b, pp. 275-302) Pseudo-Sufis seek to legitimize their teachings and practices even when these are derived from superstition (*khurafat*) and heresy.(Azhar & Ilyas, 2000, p. 120) This error originates from heterodox sources and subsequently influences Sufi adherents to engage in practices such as tomb veneration and the seeking of intercession (*wasilah*) from those believed to possess spiritual authority.(Bahwan, 2019, pp. 115-155) It is therefore necessary to reestablish the authentic epistemological structure of Sufism so that its teachings and practices may be properly comprehended, applied, and returned to their orthodox foundations.

There is furthermore a persistent argument that Sufism does not derive purely from the Islamic tradition. This view was advanced by orientalist including Ignaz Goldziher, Alsin Palacios, Alfred von Kremer, and R. A. Nicholson, who maintained that Sufism originated from Christianity.(Abdullah et al., 2002) This argument is untenable, as Sufism is an authentically Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition.(Riyadi, 2015) This can be demonstrated by the existence of Sufi figures such as Ibn Arabi,(Chittick, 2000, pp. 145-190) al-Jili, al-Ghazali, and later Said Nursi. Said Nursi engaged in Sufi practices daily, despite not formally affiliating himself with any particular order. This attests to the fact that Sufism constitutes an inseparable dimension of Islam.(Nursi, 1998, p. 268)

Previous scholarly works have addressed the epistemological construct of Sufism, focusing on individual figures. These include "Epistemology of Modern Sufism: the Study of Hamka's Modern Sufism Book,"(Hariyanto, 2017) "Nursi's Sufism Concept, a Refreshment of Contemporary Sufism Discourse,"(Faiz, 2015, pp. 1-14) "Junaid Al-Baghdadi Sufism and Its Implications in the Contemporary Era,"(Yulanda & Putra, 2020, pp. 74-85) "Sufism in the Modern Era (Comprehensive Study of Neo-Sufism)," (Sakdullah, 2020) and "Sufi Epistemology: Being the Earliest Exposition in *Kitâb al-Luma'* of al-Sarrâj and its Manifestation in the Works of Indonesian Sufis."(Ihsan et al., 2022b, pp. 275-302) The novelty of the present paper resides in its focus on the epistemological construct of Sufism as developed by a contemporary Sufi figure, with the objective of understanding Sufism in a reasonable and proportionate manner.

Employing library research and content analysis methods, this article endeavors to elucidate the epistemological structure of Sufism by reference to the contemporary Sufi figure, Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi.(Suprayogo & Tobroni, 2003, p. 71) It begins with a brief overview of the history of Sufism and proceeds to address the epistemological principles underlying Nursi's Sufism.

History and Development of Sufism

The Sufi tradition may be said to have taken root in the early Islamic period. Amin Syukur identifies five developmental phases through which Sufism has passed. The first is the formative phase, which commenced during the era of the Prophet and the Righteous Caliphs. Although the term *sufi* was not in use at that time, this does not imply that the underlying practices were absent. Sufism can be discerned in the disciplines of fasting, asceticism, and other forms of spiritual practice exemplified by the Prophet and his companions, who fasted throughout the day, engaged in prayer, and recited the Quran at night. The companions who embodied such ascetic devotion included Abu Darda', Abu Dzar al-Ghifari, Bahlul bin Zubaid, and Kahmas al-Hilali. Subsequently, in the middle of the second century of the Hijri calendar, Hasan Basri (110 H / 728 AD) emerged as the foremost ascetic (*zahid*) figure, disseminating the teachings of *khauf* (fear of God) and *raja'* (hope). Several scholars thereafter joined his circle in pursuit of spiritual advancement. During the same century, a female *zahid* from Basrah, Iraq, named Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah (185 H / 801 AD), appeared and advanced the teaching of love for God (*hubbullah*). Through this teaching, she devoted herself entirely to God, divesting herself of both the desire for heavenly reward and the fear of divine punishment. (Syukur, 2002, p. 30)

The second phase is that of development, which unfolded between the third and fourth centuries of the Hijri calendar. At the outset of the third century Hijriyyah, the discourse on *zuhd* (asceticism) began to give way to a recognizably Sufi orientation. The expansion of Sufi teachings was accompanied by the cultivation of a spirituality that extended beyond mere asceticism. This period witnessed the introduction of numerous new concepts and terminologies, including *maqam* (spiritual station), *hal* (spiritual state), *ma'rifah* (direct knowledge of God), *fana'* (annihilation of the self), and *hulul* (divine indwelling), among others. Prominent figures of this period included Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (200 H), Abu Sulaiman Ad-Darani (254 H), Dzun Nun Al-Mishri (245 H), and Junaid al-Baghdadi. (Bagir, 2006, p. 100) In the later part of this period, several Sufi figures rose to prominence, among them Abu Yazid Al-Bustami (261 H) with his teachings on *fana'* (annihilation), *liqa'* (meeting with God), and *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being); Abu Mansur Al-Hallaj (309 H) with his teachings on *hulul* (God's incarnation) and *nur Muhammad* (the light of Muhammad); and *wahdatul adyan* (the unity of religions). Other Sufi teachings during this era encompassed *wahdat as-syuhud* (oneness of witnessing), *Ittishal* (union with God), *jamal wal-kamal* (the beauty and perfection of God), and *insan kamil* (the perfect human being). These concepts were held to be unattainable without rigorous spiritual discipline (*riyadhah*). (Syukur, 2002)

The third phase is the consolidation period, which took place during the fifth century H. This phase continued the intellectual debates between the Sunni and Mu'tazilah schools that had characterized the preceding periods. The Sunni school of Sufism ultimately prevailed, constituting a dimension of the broader triumph of the *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah*, a theological school pioneered by Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari (324 H). Al-Asy'ari subjected the theories of Abu Yazid and al-Hallaj to critical scrutiny, identifying them as deviations from Islamic principles. This phase was accordingly one of consolidation and restoration, returning Sufism to its original foundations in the Quran and Hadith. The leading scholars of this school included al-Qusyairi (376-465 H), al-Harawi (396 H), and al-Ghazali (450-505 H).

The fourth phase occurred during the sixth and seventh centuries H and was distinguished by two significant trends: the emergence of semi-philosophical Sufism, which converged with philosophy, and the proliferation of Sufi orders (*thariqa*). Prominent figures in philosophical Sufism included Ibn Arabi with his doctrine of *wahdatul wujud*, Suhrawardi with his *hikmah isyraqiyyah* (illuminationist wisdom), Ibn Sab'in with his theory of *ittihad*, and Ibn al-Faridh with his concepts of *mahabbah* (love), *fana'*, and *wahdatus syuhud*. The Sufi orders emerged in the seventh century H, including the Qadiriyyah founded by Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani in Baghdad, the Naqshabandiyyah founded by Muhammad ibn Baha'uddin in Central Asia, the Maulawiyyah (Rumiyyah) established by Jalaluddin Rumi in Persia, the Bekhtasiyyah by Bekhtasyi in Turkey, the Tijaniyyah by at-Tijani in Morocco, and numerous others amounting to approximately thirteen orders according to Ja'far Shodiq. (Shodiq, 2008, p. 31)

The fifth phase is the purification period, which unfolded in the seventh century H. This was a period marked by criticism of prior Sufi developments. Figures such as Ibn Arabi, Ibn al-Faridh, and Jalaluddin Rumi exercised considerable influence in disseminating this model of Sufism; even sultans and princes extended their personal patronage and loyalty to these figures. Over time, however, corruption and moral scandals emerged, undermining the reputation of Sufism. During this period, Sufism became permeated by heresy, *khurafat*, occultism, and a disregard for *shari'ah*, moral values, and knowledge. (Syukur, 2002) Scholars such as al-Ghazali undertook efforts at reform and purification. Sufism subsequently shifted and became intermingled with Greek, Hindu, and Persian philosophical traditions. Ibn Taimiyyah (661-728 H) later emerged as a prominent figure committed to purifying Islamic teachings, which he regarded as having been corrupted. This purification effort was continued by figures including Ibn Qoyyim al-Jauziyyah (691-751 H), Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab (1112-1198 H), Sidi Muhammad as-Sanusi (1206-1275 H), Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1839-1897 AD), Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905 AD), and Muhammad Iqbal (1878-1938 AD). (Ni'am, 2014, p. 133) Among these reformers was also Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960).

Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960 AD) was a figure who commanded the allegiance of many Muslim communities experiencing a crisis of faith during the early twentieth century, particularly in Turkey. The ascent of Mustafa Kemal to power precipitated a series of radical transformations: the caliphate was dissolved, laws grounded in Islamic jurisprudence were supplanted by Swiss civil law, Western modes of living were imposed, Arabic script was replaced by Latin characters, the call to prayer was issued in Turkish, and numerous other sweeping changes were enacted. (Vahide, 1992, p. 203)

Mustafa Kemal introduced comprehensive secularism, which generated profound spiritual disquiet within the Turkish Muslim community. (Vahide, 1992) Nursi was cognizant of this spiritual restlessness and endeavored to offer responses from within the framework of Sufism. He recognized, however, that the Sufistic discourses he was called upon to present should not be the old, deviated Sufism no longer relevant to contemporary circumstances, but rather a renewed form of Sufism suited to the needs of twentieth-century Turkish Muslim society. (Nursi, 2011c, p. 27)

The old *tasawwuf*, fragmented across various *thariqa* movements such as the Naqshabandiyyah, Qadiriyyah, Syadziliyyah, and Maulawiyyah, was no longer capable of addressing the spiritual decline of Muslim society. In Nursi's assessment, the most pressing need for Muslims,

particularly Turkish Muslims of the twentieth century, was the preservation and reinforcement of their faith against the relentless advance of secularism and materialism.

According to Nursi, the old Sufi discourses, fragmented by the *thariqa* tradition, were inadequate to address the contemporary situation of Muslims. A new formulation of Sufism was therefore required, one that would be accessible and acceptable to all Muslims. Nursi accordingly sought to reinterpret Sufism by drawing directly from the illumination of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet as the two primary sources of Islam, with the objective of producing a Sufi teaching comprehensible to all strata of Muslim society. (Nursi, 1998)

The historical periodization and emergence of numerous Sufi figures demonstrate that Sufism developed from authentic Islamic teachings. The categorization and evolution of Sufism frequently yielded the conclusion that Sufism was not merely an endeavor to draw closer to God, but was also accompanied by a turning away from worldly concerns. This gave rise to a diversity of inner experiences and a variety of concepts and terminologies to articulate those experiences. Such differentiation was shaped not only by differing subjective experiences but also by the political developments and personal circumstances of the Sufis who gave expression to them.

Typology and Urgency of Sufism

Sufism is directed toward attaining the highest degree of practical religious piety. Sufi practitioners ground their teachings in Islamic sources, and the *thariqah* adopted by Sufis varies according to the lineage of the teacher, the cultural milieu, and the social context in which it operates. This diversity gave rise to various schools of thought on Sufism, each with distinct teachings. The emergence of differences among these schools does not entail mutual contradiction; rather, it may reflect unity within diversity. There are at least four typologies within Sufism.

The first is *akhlaqi* Sufism, which is oriented toward moral improvement and deepening one's relationship with God through particular methods. *Akhlaqi* Sufism constitutes a discipline concerned with human behavior and moral refinement. (Amin, 2012, p. 221) Its approach centers on *akhlaq*, or human character, and has been described as the science of ethical conduct. The principal figures associated with this approach include Abu Sa'id al-Hasan bin Yasar, commonly known as Hasan Basri (21-110 H), Abu 'Abdillah al-Harith bin Asad al-Bashri al-Baghdadi al-Muhasibi (165-243 H), and Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ta'us ath-Thusi as-Shafi'i al-Ghazali (450-505 H). The teachings transmitted within this tradition consist of *takhalli* (renunciation of vice), *tahalli* (adornment with virtue), *tajalli* (divine self-manifestation), *munajat* (intimate supplication), *muraqabah* (spiritual vigilance), and *muhasabah* (self-examination).

The second type is *amali* Sufism, which focuses primarily on performing the *wirid* (prescribed Quranic recitations) and other ritual forms. The practical dimension of the Sufi path predominates over the theoretical in this tradition. The purpose of *amali* Sufism is to eliminate undesirable character traits and to direct one's entire attention toward God. This involves adhering to the rules of spiritual discipline (*tarbiyah*) and complying with various ethical precepts, including observance of the student-master relationship, *uzlah* (spiritual retreat), *khalwah* (seclusion), moderation in eating, maximizing night prayers, observing

silence, intensifying *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and adhering to all Islamic *adab* (etiquette) guidelines.

Within *amali* Sufism, disciples are organized into three tiers. The first tier consists of beginners, referred to as *mubtadi'*; the second tier comprises those with a sound knowledge of *shari'ah*, called *mutawassith*; and the third tier encompasses those who have attained maturity in their knowledge of *shari'ah*, accumulated experience on the Sufi path, and engaged in the study of spiritual knowledge, known as *muntahi*. (Ihsan et al., 2022a, pp. 22-35) Above these tiers stands the *sheikh*, the spiritual guide who oversees and directs the disciples, serving as an intermediary between the seeker and God. The highest level in *amali* Sufism is occupied by the *wali* and the *qutb*, Sufi figures of elevated spiritual standing who have attained the pinnacle of inner purity and possessed *laduni* knowledge, from whom the veil has been removed.

The third type is philosophical Sufism, which integrates mystical and rationalist modes of knowledge and cultivates an inner purity enriched by philosophical inquiry. (Dahlan, 1991, p. 31) The epistemological approach of philosophical Sufism centers on comprehension and rational reflection, drawing on the theological discipline of *kalam* and Islamic philosophy. (Auliahadi & Oktavia, 2019, p. 5) The principal figures of this tradition include Ibn 'Arabi (560-638 H), who advanced the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being); al-Jilli (767-805 H), who elaborated the concept of *insan kamil* (the perfect human being); (Thoriquddin, 2008, p. 177) (Sholihin, 2001, p. 16) and Ibn Sabi'in (614-669 H), who taught the absolute unity of existence. Other notable figures include Jalaluddin Rumi, Abu Bakar Asy-Syibli, Sheikh Abu Hasan al-Khurqani, 'Ainal-Qudhat al-Hamdani, and Sheikh Najamuddin al-Kubro, among others.

The fourth type is *irfani* Sufism, which seeks to uncover the truth or *ma'rifat* through divine gift (*mauhibah*) rather than through logic, learning, or rational inquiry. Knowledge is attained through the Sufi's effort to purify the heart (*tashfiyat al-qalb*). Through a purified heart, a spiritual dialogue with God becomes possible, and God bestows knowledge or *ma'rifah* upon the human heart, through which the essence of truth is disclosed. This constitutes an intuitive mode of knowledge. Advocates of this approach include Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah (96-185 H), whose teaching centered on love for God; Dzu an-Nun al-Mishri (180-246 H), whose teaching aimed at gaining *ma'rifah* of God through inner understanding; Abu Yazid al-Busthami (200-261 H), whose teachings addressed *fana'* (annihilation) and *baqa'* (subsistence); and Abu Hasan al-Hallaj (224-309 H), whose teachings concerned *hulul* (the divine indwelling in the human body) and *wahdat al-syuhud* (witnessing the beauty of the Creator through the eyes of the heart).

Badi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursi's Engagement with Sufism

The typologies outlined above were eventually integrated into the renewed methodological framework of the modern period. This framework was shaped in response to the challenges of modernity, which had begun to erode Islamic teachings. Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi is one of the central figures associated with the *thabi'ah manhaj al-tajdid* (the nature of the renewal method). He emphasizes the importance of *al-ta'amul al-afagy wa-l-anfusy* (contemplating the universe and oneself), *al-manhaj al-tamtsili au dlarb al-amtsal* (employing the method of

the parable), and *al-tawazun baina al-'aql wa al-qalb* (maintaining balance between reason and the heart in accordance with the *shari'a* and reality). Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi maintains that Sufism and the *thariqah* function as intermediary means (*wasilah*) rather than ultimate destinations. Performing obligatory worship (*fardu*) in obedience to divine command is of greater importance than the observance of specific *thariqah* rituals. (Nursi, 2002, p. 82)

Nursi nonetheless values the *thariqah* movement as an incontrovertible historical reality that has sustained *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) among Muslims for centuries. The *thariqah* brotherhoods succeeded in preserving the center of the Islamic caliphate for more than five hundred and fifty years during the Ottoman dynasty in Turkey, and sustained a hegemonic struggle against the great Christian empire. (Nursi, 2002) In addressing Sufism and the *thariqah*, Nursi enumerates several of their advantages and positive effects, which include their spiritual and social benefits as facilitated by *thariqah* organizations. Membership in such organizations facilitates the maintenance of faith, liberates the individual from confusion and doubt, elevates one to the level of *'ain al-yaqin* (certain knowledge gained through direct observation and experience), and enables adherence to sound principles without deviation.

Nursi further contends that a person may realize the nature of his true self by directing every part of his body and all five senses toward the fulfillment of the purpose for which he was created, namely the worship of God. Through the *thariqah*, individuals may liberate themselves from spiritual alienation, forge bonds of brotherhood through shared travel toward the Hereafter, and cultivate genuine friendships grounded in sincere affection.

Moreover, Nursi notes that the *thariqah* is capable of liberating the human soul from worldly constraints and releasing the individual from the imprisonment of worldly existence. Through this liberation, a person becomes able to perceive the full weight of the divine burden (*taklif*) that he bears, to appreciate the significance of divine law in his heart, and to live with constant remembrance of God. Nursi emphasizes that through proper *thariqah* education, the student becomes capable of complete surrender to God and attains the experience of ultimate pleasure, which constitutes the intermediate pathway to true delight and happiness in the Hereafter. This led Nursi to argue that Sufi orders are capable of protecting individuals from *khafy* (hidden) *shirk* (associating partners with God) or *riya'* (ostentation). A follower of the *thariqah* will exercise care and strive to render every habit and daily act a form of worship and every worldly endeavor a matter of consequence for the Hereafter. Hence, the *thariqah* constitutes a practice conducive to the formation of *al-insan al-kamil* (the perfect human being), as the student surrenders to God in worship to elevate his spiritual life. The authentic *thariqah* facilitates the attainment of the station of the true believer. (Nursi, 2002)

This section of Nursi's thought reveals his general acceptance of and permissive stance toward the *thariqah* movement, provided it does not conflict with the *shari'a*. Nonetheless, other dimensions of his thought reflect considerable caution and a firm warning directed at those seeking to enter the *thariqah*. This serves as a counterbalance to his broader views on Sufism and simultaneously demonstrates his objectivity regarding the *thariqah*. Nursi is unwavering and serious in his commitment to keeping Muslims away from *thariqah* practices that deviate from the *shari'ah*. He delineates the challenges and negative aspects of the *thariqah* as follows. First, if an individual enters an order without adhering to the guidance of the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, he risks implying that his teacher in the *thariqah* ranks higher than the

Prophet. (Ibn Taimiyyah, 1993, p. 128) This contradicts the scholarly consensus regarding the primacy of the Prophet. Second, if members of the *thariqah* venerate saints above the companions of the Prophet or even above the prophets themselves, this also contravenes fundamental Islamic teachings. Third, if members of the *thariqah* display *ta'assub* (fanatical adherence) to their own group and prioritize the *wirids* and practices of the *thariqah* over the *sunnah* of the Prophet, this constitutes a violation of Islamic teachings. Fourth, confusing divine inspiration with revelation is an error, as revelation is exclusively reserved for the prophets rather than Sufi saints or teachers. Fifth, Nursi emphasizes that the *thariqah* is not the primary objective of the Sufi journey; members who fail to grasp this may become susceptible to vainglory regarding *karamah* (high-mindedness), *dzaug* (perceptivity gained through divine grace), and *nur* (spiritual light), all of which are divine gifts rather than attainments to be sought or contended over.

By directing his attention to both the positive and negative dimensions of the *thariqah* as an instrument of spiritual purification, Nursi articulates the significance of Sufism across several aspects. First, he contends that the Islamic world is in urgent need of purification of the soul through the Sunnah, and that spiritual education and a return to the spiritual dimension are indispensable. Second, he observes that numerous misleading invitations have emerged through materialistic means, directing people toward a materialistic mode of life and estranging them from spiritual realities. Third, he identifies the condition whereby people's hearts have become absorbed in the pursuit of worldly desires, such that the widespread fulfillment of carnal needs loosens their devotional commitment and causes them to neglect spiritual happiness. Fourth, Nursi's extraordinary attention to the Quran, which serves as the foundational axis of his preaching method, reflects his conviction that the deepening of faith requires the harmonious integration of both textual and contextual dimensions of the Quranic verses.

Badi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursi's Contemporary Sufi Epistemology

Drawing on his extensive experience in observing and evaluating the development of Sufism, Nursi articulates an accessible epistemological basis for its practice. The first principle is *Quran huwa al-asas fi tajdid* ("Ensuring that the Quran is the main foundation"). The second principle is *tajdidu al-tasawuf yubda'u min tajdidi al-iman* ("The renewal process of Sufism must commence from the cleansing of faith"). The third principle is *al-washfiyah al-ijtima'iyah li al-din al-ghayah al-qushwa hiya al-nata'ij al-haya* ("Social equality is the ultimate reference in enacting the values of life, meaning that all are equal before God"). The fourth principle is *al-iltizam bi maqashidi al-Qur'an al-arba'ah al-tauhid, an-nubuwwah, al-hasyr wa al-'adl* ("Being consistent in efforts to instill the four objectives of the Quran, namely tauhid (unity and oneness of God), nubuwwah (prophecy), hasyr (resurrection), and 'adl (justice)").

In Nursi's view, the spiritual path of the Sufis, the *thariqah*, is broadly acceptable. The *thariqah* contains sacred teachings widely elaborated in the works of the people of *kasyaf* (spiritual understanding) and *dzaug* (intuition). These Sufis emphasize intuitive modes of acquiring knowledge. The Sufi can be regarded as the highest embodiment of the secret of humanity, whose ultimate aspiration is *ma'rifat*. With respect to *dzaug*, the actualization of faith is the outcome of a spiritual journey undertaken through the heart under the guidance

of the *mi'raj* (spiritual ascent) of the Prophet Muhammad and the conscious pursuit of the Quran and faith. (Nursi, 2011c)

Furthermore, the spiritual journey of Sufism aims to bring Sufi practitioners to a state of perfection that leads to the manifestation of the truths enshrined in the Quran. Nursi holds that this Sufi journey occurs through the heart, which constitutes the center of human nature. The concept of *fihriste-i camia*, or microcosm, is widely employed by Sufi scholars. As the creator of the heart, God calls upon humans to engage their hearts in all their actions. Like the intellect, the heart must be directed exclusively toward the remembrance of God throughout the spiritual journey, thereby sustaining and reinforcing faith.

Nursi asserts that for the heart to follow the Sufi path, it must engage in contemplation and remembrance of God (*tafakkur*). (Nursi, 2011c) These two elements are the keys to elevating spiritual life and constitute sources of peace in both this world and the Hereafter. Even within urban or communal settings, the spirit of friendship and social engagement affords only transient pleasures. According to Nursi, a person whose life is detached from worldly desires will discover genuine happiness through contemplation and remembrance of God, coming to understand that God is omnipresent and that life is meaningful only in the context of remembering Him.

Nursi also affirms a fundamental relationship between prophethood and trusteeship, viewing the two as complementary. He holds that trusteeship constitutes evidence of prophethood, and that the *thariqah* likewise attests to the truth of *shari'ah*. (Nursi, 2011c) Trusteeship confirms everything that the prophets communicate; hence, wherever there is trusteeship, prophethood is also present. Furthermore, wherever there is a *thariqah*, there is *shari'ah*. In addition, Sufism serves as the most effective means of strengthening the spirit and fostering brotherhood within the Islamic world. Nursi furthermore expresses his sense of obligation to respond to the hostile attitudes of those who oppose the *thariqah*, noting that errors within an institution are typically attributable to inexperienced novices rather than to qualified teachers or competent students. (Nursi, 2011c)

Nursi also analyzes the deeper psychological dimensions of Sufi orders. He regards the commencement of a spiritual journey in Sufism as a profoundly significant and secret affair. However, the path is exceedingly narrow and fraught with peril due to its inherent difficulties. Sufis who traverse this path sometimes "drown to death," and many frequently abandon the order. In general, Nursi characterizes the Sufi path as extended, narrow, and perilous, and he firmly adheres to the traditional doctrinal framework of the Sufi teachers.

According to Nursi, Sufism occupies the third rank in Islam, preceded by the Quran in first rank and the Sunnah of the Prophet in second. Before engaging with Sufism and the *thariqah*, one must first ensure the soundness of one's faith. In Nursi's view, faith is the sole pathway to eternal happiness. He accordingly notes that figures such as Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, known as *Ghouts al-A'dzom*, the founder of the Qadiriyyah order; Shaykh Muhammad Baha'uddin Naqsyabandi, founder of the Naqsyabandi order; and the great Sufi teacher Imam Rabbani dedicated their efforts to strengthening faith and adherence to the principles of Islam. Although many may enter heaven without belonging to a Sufi order, no one attains heaven without faith. Nursi employs an instructive analogy: Sufism is the fruit, while the

essence of Islam is like rice; one cannot live without rice, but one can live without fruit.(Nursi, 2011c)

Nursi writes that *ma'rifatullah* (direct knowledge of God) in previous eras typically required a period of ten, twenty, or forty days, and sometimes extended to forty years of spiritual effort. In the modern period, however, the situation is different; reaching the essence of faith must be accomplished more rapidly. His monumental work, *Risalae-i Nur*, is designed to assist readers in attaining the *maqam* (spiritual station) of *ma'rifatullah* more expeditiously. When accused of teaching Sufism and establishing a *thariqah*, Nursi responded that Islam was of paramount importance but that the present moment was not the appropriate time for the *thariqah*.(Nursi, 2010, p. 85) He nonetheless consistently maintains that his focus is on truth and faith.(Vahide, 1992) As long as one accepts the methodological guidance of the Quran, all paths leading to God are grounded in it, and this road is comparatively brief and more secure than alternative paths.

Nursi observes that the ten subtle spiritual centers (*al-latha'if al-'asyr*) practiced by the spiritual seeker (*salik*) of the *thariqah* in a concealed manner, as well as the seven dignities practiced through the absolute paths, represent difficult stages and pathways for ordinary people. He therefore identifies four accessible steps through which ordinary people may approach the essence of God, which are closer to the essence of *shari'ah* (*al-haqiqah al-syar'iyah*) than to the essence of Sufism.(Nursi, 2010)

Nursi elaborates the meaning and merits of these four brief and secure pathways to bring the *salik* to the divine essence as follows. The first pathway is *al-ajz*, signifying weakness and dependency, a quality that draws the servant to God through the vessel of worship (*ubudiyah*). This quality is akin to *al-ishq* (the sense of longing), which reflects the nature of the *qadir* (the Powerful) of God. The second pathway is *al-faqr*, meaning spiritual poverty or the sense of being in need of God, a quality that brings the servant to the meaning of the divine attribute *al-Rahman*. Both *al-ajz* and *al-faqr* are to be directed toward God alone rather than toward other human beings. The third pathway is *al-syafaqah*, meaning compassion, a quality that leads the servant toward God through a broad and tranquil path, bringing the *salik* to the divine attribute *al-rahim*. The fourth pathway is *al-tafakkur*, meaning contemplation and the full engagement of the intellect in the worship of God, a quality that generates a more luminous and expansive sense of *asyiq* (ardent devotion) and brings the *salik* to the divine attribute *al-hakim*.

The epistemology of Nursi's Sufism may accordingly be comprehended through his monumental work, *Risala-i Nur*. In *al-Kalimat* and *al-Luma'at*, specifically in *Raka'izu al-Sufism*, the following doctrines are elaborated. First, *wahdatu al-syuhud bi al-asma' al-husna*, which holds that the human being must strive to embody the ninety-nine attributes of God in daily life. Second, *al-Sair al-anfusi wa al-sair al-afaqy*, understood as the process of drawing closer to God through self-reading and reading the universe, whereby one becomes aware of being a small but integral part of a vast cosmos and of God's incomparable capacities. Third, *nazariyat al-taqarrub* (*mashadir al-ma'rifah wa mashadir al-haqiqah*) refers to the aspiration to master the theory of self-proximity to God, thereby attaining knowledge of the essence of truth. This is accomplished through ten subtle spiritual centers in the form of *al-latha'if al-'asyr*, encompassing *al-wijdan* (conscience), *al-a'shab* (nerves), *al-his* (feelings), *al-aql* (reason), *al-hawa* (desire), *al-quwwah al-syahwiyyah* (the power of passion), *al-quwwah al-*

ghadabiyyah (the power of anger), *al-ruh* (spirit), and *al-sir* (secret). (Nursi, 2011b, p. 157) The subsequent stage involves *al-maratib al-sab'u*, which enjoins the seeker to let go of the light of the intellect and attend to the meaning of the Quranic verses in the illumination of their manifest miracles, to reach for the star of reality from the celestial realm of those noble verses, to cast the devil in one's mind aside using that same light, and to jointly proclaim: *rabbi a'udzu bika min hamazati al-syayatin* (My Lord! I seek refuge in You from the temptations of the devils.). (Nursi, 2011a, p. 208)

Conclusion

Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi's ideas have revitalized the discourse on Sufism and the *thariqah*. This revitalization came at a juncture when the challenges confronting the *ulama* were growing increasingly formidable in the face of an advancing materialistic and even atheistic era. Nursi put forward a form of Sufism that is accessible and readily embraced by ordinary people. In his assessment, preserving the faith of the people is of greater urgency in the contemporary period than engaging in *thariqah* practices, which are, to a considerable degree, exclusive and represent something of a privilege for the general Muslim audience.

According to Nursi, faith is analogous to rice or other staple foods, while the practice of Sufism and the *thariqah* are analogous to fruits, which serve as complementary supplements. The present reality of the global Muslim community demands spiritual staples rather than supplementary fruits. Nursi endeavors to restore the Muslim paradigm by returning directly to the foundational values of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, Sufism must be continuously explored and developed so that its practice in the contemporary era becomes more applicable, accessible, and genuinely relevant.

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