

Islam's Stance on Sufism :: Fatwa Management System :: World Fatwa Management and Research Institute

Question:

As-Salamu `alaykum.

What do we have to know about Sufism? And what is Islam's stand on it?

Jazakum Allah khayran.

Answer:

Wa `alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

Dear questioner, we commend your keenness on getting your self well-acquainted with Islam and its teachings, which is the way Allah has chosen for the welfare of His servants.

Responding to the question you raised, the eminent Muslim scholar, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, states:

“Sufism is a form of practicing an ascetic way of life. Such an act of worship is recognized by all religions though the way of practicing it differs from one religion to another.

For instance, in India, the Hindus' lower class tend to go to extremes by inflicting tortures on themselves just with the aim of reaching an exalted level of spirituality. The same applies to Christianity, especially to celibacy.

Also in Persia, there is a sect known as Manism, while in Greece there is another sect known as "Ar-Ruwakiyeen" (People who reject life luxuries). In fact, in many other countries, there are similar groups who are somehow extremist in their beliefs. In a sharp contrast to all this, Islam came with a moderate approach to life and man's relation with his Lord. It views man as a human being of mind, soul and body, and it has made it clear that all these components need a special care.

This is what the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) made clear to one of his Companions, `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`Aaas, who took to extremes in worshipping Allah, to the extent that he gave up eating, sleeping and even his conjugal right. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) warned him against that saying: "...Your eyes have a right on you, and your body and your family (i.e. wife) have a right on you. Give everyone his due right."

Also some Companions went to the Prophet's house to ask his wife how he used to observe acts of worship. Upon being told the details of his acts of worship they found theirs falling behind those of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

They deemed themselves falling short of the required standard of being a true believer. Besides, they saw no reason why they shouldn't do like or even exceed him in worship, for he actually had been forgiven all his sins. Therefore, they started making vows of getting down to an extensive act of worship. One of them vowed to start observing a non-stop fasting (without breaking it at all), the other vowed to abandon his conjugal right, while the third said that he would observe supererogatory prayers for all nights without sleeping. Upon being told of this, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) gathered them and admonished them saying:

"By Allah, I am more submissive to Allah and more afraid of Him than you; yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep and I also marry women. So he who does not follow my tradition in religion, is not from me (not one of my followers)." This shows that Islam maintains moderation in everything.

However, people tend to practice Sufism as a means of rescuing themselves from the throes of materialism that has taken its toll on them, thanks to the abundance of property and economic boom in which people found themselves. All this has made them enslaved by life's luxuries in addition to being governed by baseless ideologies. Thus, religious beliefs have been attributed to the dictates of philosophy and theology, and this led to frenzied argument that completely made people neglect spiritual aspects of life.

Meanwhile, those who engaged themselves in Islamic jurisprudence failed to go deeper in it; instead of trying to understand the spiritual aspect of worship, they merely stuck to its physical aspects. This gave birth to a religious group known as Sufis who came to fill the gap left by theologians and jurists; as I've just said, the latter failed to transform people spiritually.

The Sufis give a great concern to analyzing man in terms of what he feels inside, not what he really does; they focus on psychological matters, with the inward rather than the outward. Their main objective is to reshape man's manners in order to help him achieve spiritual grace. One of the Sufis is quoted to have said: "Good manners are what make a good Sufi."

Actually, the early Sufis set a good example by sticking to the teachings of Islam as conveyed by the Glorious Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition. Besides, they did their best in propagating Islam, in fact, many people were converted to Islam by these great Sufis who left no stone unturned in waging war against heresy, atheism and polytheism.

On the other hand, history also recorded bad examples laid down by some Sufis who formulated ideas that have no basis in Islam. Part of these ideas is the difference between reality and perception, in the sense that man should not be judged by his apparent acts (i.e. by what we perceive of him), rather he should be judged by the state of his mind (i.e. by what he really feels inside). Through this one may find some excuses for his misdemeanor. They also say that the inner feelings of a Sufi are his source of guidance; through them he knows the lawful and the forbidden. That is why they always find faults with the scholars of Hadith who always say "So-and-so quotes so-and-so as saying..."

They find such narration as inauthentic. Rather, a genuine statement, approved of by the Sufis, should begin with: "I was inspired by my Lord that" They also used to mock the scholars of Hadith saying: "You are fond of narrating statements from mortals. But we, Sufis, narrate our statements from Allah, the Everlasting Lord." With this they claim to have a direct link with heavens. All such baseless ideas led the Sufis to take their students as worthless figures; they say: "In front of their Sufi masters, students are just like a helpless corpse at the control of those who wash it." Not only that, they even deprive the students of the right of seeking more information from masters; they consider such act as a starting point of failure.

To say the fact, such a perverted attitude of this group of Sufis has taken its toll on today's youth who are driven by ignorance to take all that they hear for granted. Such exaggeration results in weakening the character of the Sufi under the authority of his Sheikh, as the Sufi becomes so helpless like a dead between the hands of his undertaker or the one who washes him. Thus, they develop a negative and passive attitude towards oppression and injustice, thanks to what their Sufi masters tell them that "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and let the Lord of man take care of man."

However, as a spot of light seen at the end of the tunnel, some Sunni scholars as well as early virtuous Muslims (Salaf) have tried their best to reform many Sufi ideas with the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition.

One of the great scholars whose efforts are undeniable in this respect is Ibn Al-Qayyim who wrote a book entitled Madarij As-Salikin ila Manazil As-Sa'irin. This book is written purposefully to explain the book written by Sheikh Isma'il Al-Harwi Al-Hanbali, entitled: Manazil As-Sa'irin ila Maqamat Iyyaka Na'budu Waiyyaka Nasta'in. The book is in three volumes, one can resort to it to coordinate between the Sufi ideas and the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

By and large, we should try to take from Sufi ideas what corresponds to the teachings of Islam, such as the one that calls to noble values of mutual love, as well as one that teaches one how to get rid of psychological ailments and to attain spiritual grace.

In fact, there are some examples of good Sufis, with some minor exceptions, from whom one can understand better this form of worship. Imam al-Ghazali is one of such moderate Sufi figures whose ideas go in line with the teachings of Islam.”

You can also read:

Is Sufism Islamic?

What Does Islam Say About Sufism

Should the Da`iyah Be a Sufi?

Allah Almighty knows best.

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