

Ibn Khaldun and Tasawwuf (Sufism): A Different Approach to The Shaykh and Other Relevant Concepts*

İbn Haldun ve Tasavvuf: Şeyh ve İlgili Diğer Kavramlara Farklı Bir Yaklaşım

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Abstract: Discussions on whether or not a shaykh is necessary in sulūk (spiritual pathway) have especially intensified in the eighth/fourteenth century, and even after Andalusian scholars had long taken care of this issue, the well-known scholar Abū Ishāq al-Shātibī (d. 790/1388) compiled a survey-like treatise on this issue by appealing to the erudition of Moroccan scholars. The Moroccan scholars include: Abū Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abbād al-Rundī (d. 792/1376) and Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Qāsim b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kabbāb (d. 778/1376). These two scholars gave their fatwā (judicial opinion) in Wansharī’s extant work Al-mi’yār almurīb. Ibn Khaldūn who has seen Shātibī’s Risālah put forward his views on this matter (in spite of not being a scholar of Sufism, and also not being asked of his stance). It was solely for this purpose that he had penned Shifā al-sāil li tahdhīb al-masāil. Ibn Khaldūn speaks of three kinds of Sufism in his book, and treats these three Sufistic characteristic types in relation to whether or not a shaykh is necessary.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, Sufism, Sultans

Öz: Sülûkda bir şeyhin gerekli olup olmadığı yolundaki tartışmalar bilhassa VIII/XIV. asırlarda şiddetlenmiş, Endülüs alimleri uzun tartışmalardan sonra bile bu meseleyi halledemeyince, tanınmış alimlerden Ebu İshak eş-Şâtibî (v.790/1388), mezkur konuda iki tarafın görüşlerini ihtiva eden anket mahiyetinde bir risale düzenleyerek bu konuda Fas alimlerinin bilgisine müracaat etmişti. Bunlar, Ebu Abdillāh Muhammed b. İbrahim b. Abbad er-Rundî (v.792/1376) ile Ebu’l-Abbās Ahmed b. Kasım b. Abdirrahman el-Kebbâb (v.778/1376) idiler. Bu iki âlimin verdiği fetvâ Venşerisi’nin el-Miyâru’l-Murîb adlı eserini içinde zamanımıza kadar gelmiştir. İbn Haldûn, Şâtibî’nin Risâle’sini görmüş, kendisine sorulmadığı (ve bir tasavvufçu olmadığı) halde) bu konudaki görüşlerini açıklamıştır. O, Şifâu’s-Sâil li Tehzîbi’l-Mesâil adlı eserini sırf bu

* This article is a review of the paper presented at the "2nd International Ibn Khaldun Symposium" organized on 29–31 May 2009 in Istanbul.

gayeyle kaleme almıştır. Mukaddime'sine göre tasavvufa karşı daha sert tenkitlerine muttali olduğumuz bu kitabında İbn Haldûn, üç çeşit tasavvuftan söz eder ve şeyhin gerekli olup olmadığı açısından bu üç çeşit tasavvufun mahiyetini ele alır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İbn Haldun, Tasavvuf, Sultanlar

Since Ibn Khaldûn (732/1332 – 808/1406) discloses his views on Sufism while dealing with the question of whether or not a Sufi is necessary in *sayr wa sulûk*, or wayfaring (lit: journeying and traveling), it is necessary to look at it from this perspective -- that is to say, to start by addressing at the onset this issue on the necessity of a shaykh. In fact, his stern attitude towards philosophical Sufism and his criticisms are well known, and many articles have been written on this subject, and yet his views on issues related to the shaykh are often circumvented with one or two sentences. The paper in your hand is aimed at bringing together what needs to be said concerning this matter.

According to a generally accepted assumption in Sufism, 'every aspirant (*murîd*) (the one who yearns for God, and the one who is absent in the will of God) must learn *adab* (etiquette) from a shaykh. One who does not have a teacher (*ustâd*) can never progress. A well-known fact known to anyone concerned with the subject matter is the following saying of Bayazîd al-Bisṭāmî (d. 234/848): "The one who does not have a teacher, his leader (*imâm*) is the devil (*shayṭân*).” Qushayrî's (d. 465/172) teacher Abû 'Alî Dakkâk also said: "A tree under its own accord will come into leaf but will not bear fruit" (Qushayrî, 1413/1993: 380). This means that ideas on the necessity of a shaykh have been accepted since the early days of Sufism. According to the Sufi, everything is for God. Those who bring one closer to Him, even if not as much, are also loved. One's attachment with the shaykh, which includes his service, spiritual discipline, spiritual struggle, retreat, and mortification with the shaykh, is a mean to reach God and nothing else; a Sufi with foresight is conscious of this. When he gives an oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the shaykh, he imagines it to be with God.¹

Everything you do contains a certain symbolism. What is important here is the concept of the spirit of the movements that people do; otherwise, one who goes on the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and does not know the meaning of one's ritual purity (*ihrâm*), circumambulation (*ṭawâf*), treading (*sa'î*), pausing (*waqf*), stoning of the devil (*ramy al-*

¹ In the tenth ayah of Surah al-Fath the oath of allegiance to the Prophet is mentioned along these lines.

jamarāt), sacrificing, etc., whatever level one's Hajj is in will stay on that level. All the movements of the aspirant who follows a teacher without grasping or is unable to grasp its meaning is condemned to stay at that level. Talking without knowing this symbolic language can be misleading.

However, it is to be noted, one teacher mentions that: "In Sufism just as in every science there is also a need for a human being to teach this knowledge." Qushayrī sees it as absolutely necessary for one to have a shaykh, yet what he means is far from what it implies today, that is, a teacher in the position of a shaykh who trains the student. In other words, Qushayrī seems to refer to the 'teacher–student' relationship. Nevertheless, he must be a very authoritative teacher. The teachers are anonymous people and what is important in the teacher–student relationship is knowledge, while the shaykhs are well-known persons and the primacy in the shaykh–aspirant relationship is the shaykh's 'personality'. In addition, unlike a sociologist, the shaykh is like a 'soul doctor' who closely follows his devotee and analyzes his spiritual developments by listening to his dreams from time to time.

The Sufis viewed the shaykh as a 'friend of God' (awliyā Allah), seeing that he was the one who showed them honor and hospitality, taught God to them, and took them to God. For example, reflective of this nature are the words of Shaykh Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Hutlī which he conveyed to the then young Hujwīrī (d. 465/1072): While pouring ablution water for his shaykh, Hujwīrī thinks to himself, "Since everything is a blessing and a fortune, then why do free and noble people cause themselves to become the servant and slave of their shaykhs?" The Shaykh read this thought from his mind and says, "I know what you think, my child. Every ruling (ḥukm) has a reason (sabab). When the Truth and Most High (God) intends (irādah) to dress a child from the lay community with the crown of supernatural deed (karāmah) and offering (ikrām), God privileges them with repentance (tawbah), and keeps them busy with serving His friend. In this way, the matter under discussion will be conducive towards service, supernatural deeds, and offerings" (al-Hujwīrī, (1374 [1954]: 208). Although it may seem that supernatural deeds and offerings are being stressed here, it is also important to notice the part on "the friends' service." As one of the poets of the sixteenth-century said:

Yâr için ağyâre minnetim aybeyleme,
Bağban, bir gül için bin hâre hizmetkâr olur.

We can say that since it is a ‘science of states’, a teacher in Sufism is more important compared to other branches of knowledge; in this way, Sufistic states and influences on an individual are phenomena that cannot be learned from books. They have agreed on the impossibility of attaining true reality (ḥaqīqah) and certainty (yaqīn) of the Truth (Haqq) for all those Sufi theorists without shaykhs, and this includes Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) who nonetheless had shaykhs like Abū ‘Alī al-Fārmadhī (d. 477/1084) and Yūsuf al-Nassāj (d. ?) (Çağrı, 1996: 491). But they also attest in their books that a human being could find true reality on one’s own.

Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), the apogee of the school of philosophical Sufism, perceives it necessary while walking in the Sufi path to be bound to a shaykh, to benefit from the guidance of a mentor (murshid), and to undergo discipline (tarbiyah) in order achieve one’s desired goals. This shaykh must be knowledgeable and competent to train others. While it is enough for an aspirant to have enough knowledge to fulfill that which is obligatory (farḍ), the shaykh must know all the Islamic sciences well (Uludağ, 1995: 98–9).

It is not surprising that Ibn Khaldūn, who is introduced in Encyclopedias as the “famous historian, sociologist, philosopher, politician and statesman,” offers his viewpoint on the subject of Sufism just as he does on all subjects. Moreover, he is not a very distant personality in Sufism: he had chosen the shrine of the famous Sufi Abū Madyan in ‘Ubbād near Tirmishan as a place to retreat for some time after being brought before the Sultan of Marīnī. Even more importantly, while in Egypt he oversaw in 790/1390 the shaykhdom authority in the Baybars Khanaqah. The expressions he uses in *Al-ta’rīf* while describing Cairo as well as the aforementioned event reveals very clearly his attitude towards Sufism: “This Turkish state from the people in Egypt and Damascus established madrasahs for the education of science; they would build khanaqahs to learn the etiquette of Sunni Sufis, and places for supplication and for prayer. They had taken this custom from their former caliphate states: they had dedicated their buildings to parcels of land that would bring profit in support of those seeking

knowledge and the common fuqarā' (destitute).² If there was something left over from the profits they would spend it on the future generation of fuqarā seeing that they took them into account. Those who were under their command, including the ahl al-riyāsah (presidency folk) and the rich, also concurred on this matter, and in this way madrasahs and khanaqahs proliferated in Cairo and became places of residence for the Sufis and the destitute from the fuqahā (jurisconsults). Such auspices were one of the beautiful sides and enduring beauties of this Turkish state" (Ibn Khaldun, 1979: 304).

Ibn Khaldūn said he had been busy with teaching and writing when he had returned from performing the Hajj pilgrimage in the year of 790/1390 and continued to meet with and offer his salutation to the Sultan and found khanaqahs which the "Eighth Turkish King" Sultan Baybars had built, alongside many large ornate buildings and foundations which strengthened his sultanate. Baybars said that Sultan Barqūq gave his shaykhdom to him after the death of Sharaf al-Dīn Ashkār. In the same year, however, the governor of Aleppo Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī's post ended when Sultan Barqūq was dismissed from his throne, and although Sultan Barqūq later reclaimed the throne, he was nevertheless once again dismissed from his post because his signature was on the fatwā (judicial opinion) which had terminated his post (Ibn Khaldun, 1979: 343–4, 383–8).

Ibn Khaldūn divides the Islamic sciences into two: the science of the faqīh and fatwā folk, and the science of the Sufi folk. He describes Sufism as a personal struggle to reach true happiness and pleasure of the human being (Ibn Khaldun, cf.: 519). He states that one cannot deny the supernatural deeds and spiritual projection of the Sufi folk, and that the Sufis mentioned in Qushayrī's *Risālah* and in Ghazālī's *Iḥyā* are "great Sufis," and even accepts, as will be discussed broadly later, their kashf (disclosure), ilḥām (inspiration), and 'ilm al-ladun (knowledge inspired from God). Whether a shaykh is necessary during sayr wa sulūk is a question that intensified particularly during the eighth/fourteenth-century, and being unable to resolve this issue even after prolonged discussions, Abū Ishaq al-Shātībī (d. 790/1388), who was well-known among the scholars, had appealed to the knowledge of Moroccan scholars concerning this issue by organizing a survey on it which included the views of both sides. The Moroccan scholars were: Abū Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abbād al-Rundī (d. 792/1376)

² Used for the Sufis in Andalusia.

and Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Qāsim b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kabbāb (d. 778/1376). These fatwās which these two scholars gave in Abū ‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Tilimsānī al-Wansharī’s (d. 914/1508) work *Al-mi’yār al-murīb* are extant today.³

Abū ‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) summarized the above-mentioned issue as follows: The late-Andalusian (Sufi) fuqahā’ held discussions and sent letters to various countries consulting scholars of their time on whether or not it would suffice to embark on sayr wa sulūk without a shaykh and to be confined to what is written in books. The responses they received were as follows:

- 1) In terms of the shaykh: learning from books in place of an instructor (ta’līm)–shaykh⁴ will hold for a clever, intelligent aspirant. Likewise the company of a pious, intelligent person would hold the place of the company of a disciplining (tarbiyyah)–shaykh⁵. As for the place of encountering and getting together for blessings with an ascension (tarkiyah)–shaykh⁶ (people of this type) would likewise hold.
- 2) In terms of the student: a pedagogue is absolutely necessary for an aspirant who is not so intelligent. Although an intelligent aspirant is able to learn from books on the path of progress, they cannot escape their pride because the nafs (self) is stricken with the deficiency of constantly seeing themselves.
- 3) If dealt with in terms of struggle: taqwā (piety) and istiqāmah (integrity) are two important moral characteristics in Sufism. To learn taqwā one does not need a shaykh because it is explicit and general. In order to differentiate between sound and fallacious istiqāmah, however, requires a shaykh. But an intelligent aspirant can learn this from books without a shaykh. Shaykh Zarrūq mentions as an example of works on riyāḍah (asceticism or spiritual discipline) the books of Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021). In general he says that it is

³ *Al-mi’yār al-murīb*, 13. c., Beirut: Dār al-Garb al-Islāmī, 1981 (A book on Mālikī fiqh). These legal opinions have also been added to the appendix of *Shifā al-sāil* by Tanjī. (See Ibn Khaldūn, 1957: 111–35).

⁴ A shaykh who teaches the etiquette of Sufism

⁵ A shaykh who deals with discipline of an aspirant.

⁶ A shaykh who aids the aspirant in reaching spiritual states.

difficult to benefit from Qushayrī's *Risālah* which is thought to be a handbook for Sufis because it is written in a story-like fashion.

It is necessary for one to consult a shaykh in the case of ascension (*tarkiyah*) in order to interpret what has been revealed. The Prophet's recourse to Warāqah is a similar situation (Zarruq, 1412/1992: 50–1). In the course of one's *sayr wa sulūk*, a righteous, prudent friend or a shaykh who has reached true reality to advise one, to point out one's deficiencies, and to draw attention to one's mistakes (Zarruq, 1412/1992: 4).

Ibn Khaldūn had seen Shātībī's *Risālah*, and conveyed his views in spite of not being asked. It was solely for this purpose that he had penned *Shifā al-sāil li tahdhīb al-masāil*. It is in fact debatable on whether this belonged to Ibn Khaldūn, and neither is there a single sentence related in his own works nor in the works of Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb's (d. 776/1375)⁷ who was his contemporary who walked in the footsteps of Sufism. While contemporary authors from the Maghrib such as Shaykh Zarrūq, 'Abd al-Qādir Fāzī, and Abū 'Abdullāh Misnāwī attributed to him this work which bore his name, yet 'Alī 'Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfī and M. 'Abd al-Ghanī Ḥasan maintained that this work belonged to his uncle 'Abd al-Raḥmān (See Uludağ, 1999: 541; Al-Tanjī, 1961).

In his *Shifā al-sāil* we are presented with a much harsher criticism toward Sufism in comparison to his *Muqaddimah*, and in it Ibn Khaldūn mentions three kinds of Sufism and in accordance to this he approaches the necessity of a shaykh as follows:

- 1) Sufism addresses one "to fully obey Allah's commands, and to be careful, sensitive, meticulous, and vigilant in order not to act in contrary to these commands," in other words, the struggle for piety (*taqwā*). It is necessary to fulfill the commandments of Allah, to avoid prohibitions, to repent from errors and sins, to be observant of actions of the heart, and to direct oneself towards abstinence (*zuhd*), that is, to abstain from the accumulation of goods and the desire for authority (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 34). Knowledge of this type can be read and applied by the human being; this is because these are included in the acquired (*muktasab*) sciences. The books of the great Sufis are profuse with such knowledge. Among the many examples include Muḥāsibī's (d. 243/857)

⁷ For a neat summary on Ibn al-Khaṭīb see Kynsh, 1999: 172–176.

Riāya, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's (d. 386/996) *Qūt al-Qulūb*, and Ghazālī's *Iḥyā* (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 92). As such this struggle is an obligation (*farḍ*) for every Muslim, that is, an individual obligation (*farḍ al-'ayn*); because as it is mentioned in Surah al-Baqarah (2/229), "Whosoever transgresses the bounds of God, those are the evildoers" (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 72). Here a shaykh is not a requisite; because when it comes to things that are obligatory it is not right to wait for a shaykh and neglect what is obligatory. However, the presence of a shaykh/teacher is an instrument in that he facilitates for people how to understand what to read and how to act to attain perfection. The shaykh in this struggle is also revealing the truth and displaying it with examples. In essence, this method is one of the conditions of perfection and its instruction. Next to the narration, its basis (*masnad*) is the emotion/sense organs. As it is known, knowing the nature of an action sometimes depends on the act and sometimes on the senses. However, the "senses" are more a reliable path in terms of knowledge. As a matter of fact, the Prophet (SAW) taught his ummah in this way: "Pray as you see me praying," he said, sending his companions to instruct the tribes that newly joined Islam. Muslim children are also trained in this way. Also, the one who goes to Hajj is more knowledgeable compared to one who has learned Hajj from reading books; in any event, the person who read from book would ask one who has personally gone on Hajj (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 72–3).

- 2) Sufism prescribes a struggle of integrity, which although is open to all, that only those highly capable, and with great aptitude have inherently embraced by their own volition and preference. It is the struggle that the individual has entered into in order to purify the self, to have all actions to be in accordance to moderation, and to obtain high spiritual states, i.e. to enter into the path of the prophets and the truthful ones who are honored by God. By way of this struggle, the habits of the *nafs* is beautified, moralized by the moral values of the Qur'an, trying to "go thou straight, as thou hast been commanded" (cf. Hūd 11/112), and will come to a stage where doing good works and supererogatory deeds will come easy. It is important to note, however, that there is no such objective to remove "human attributes" in any radical sense, which would be the case with the third kind of Sufism. The human attributes are natural habits, each one created for a purpose. What is important is that they are rectified and

used for what they were created for. For example, if the sensation of anger is completely destroyed, one cannot afford to defend himself or herself against an aggressor. However, if it is not rectified it will cause one to commit wrongdoing. Again, for example, if lust is completely destroyed, there is danger of perishing due to hunger and of cutting off one's lineage because one does not desire to marry. The first condition to be able to engage in this struggle is a strong intention and spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*). Spiritual discipline is to keep the heart clean from bad habits, to sleep less, to eat less, and to avoid the things that the devil shows as good, in order to ensure that all the natural and inherent things belonging to the self are in order. However, this spiritual discipline should not be done by inflicting pain on the self, rather the self, that is to say, the saddle beast should be treated in a gentle manner (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 35–6). What this struggle constitutes and to administer it can be learned from books, but just as in the first struggle it is sounder with a shaykh (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 91–3).

- 3) Sufism that addresses the struggle of disclosure (*kashf*) and cognition (*iṭṭilāʾ*). This kind of Sufism is, according to Ibn Khaldūn, where we can use the true meaning of the expression *ṣulūk* in Sufism. Because the question here, as a result of the states reached by the struggle for piety and integrity, to attain disclosed (*kashfī*) knowledge, such as seeing God, which can be brought forth only after death, by restraining physical forces with struggle and selfdiscipline, is where we can be free from our human attributes and be endowed with the truth of all that is in the worlds and in the secrets knowledge (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 39). According to the Sufis, it has some conditions, which are at the beginning of achieving the struggle of piety and integrity. Disdain for the orders of religion – and even atheism – will develop for one who undertakes this path without fulfilling these requirements. It is possible that non-Muslims who do this without piety and integrity are able to attain such a kind of discovery through diligence and purification of the heart, by keeping it sleepless and hungry and free from all other than God, and witness disclosure/opening of the curtains in the heart. For example, alchemists will also undergo some form of discipline for such knowledge. Therefore for a Sufi who wants to enter into this struggle, besides completing the first two struggles, a further condition is that it is necessary to the degree of it being an

obligation (*farḍ*) that one submits and ‘follows a spiritually mature (*kāmil*) shaykh’, to ‘imitate’ him, one who has already taken this path and knows its dangers and abysses. Otherwise, for the aspirant to deviate from the religion is not even a matter of being an atheist. Because, in this way, it is inevitable to come face to face with such inspired and disclosed knowledge that will emerge from the heart, and to make mistakes in the interpretation of this knowledge. The aspirant who wishes to enter this way must be separated from his body under the control of a spiritually mature shaykh and must be in solitude away from society and hold the union (*wisāl*) fast, he should be busy worshiping from night until the morning without sleeping, and so as to be totally severed from the self (*nafs*), that is, “to die before one dies.” It is clear that all of this requires a firm will. Anyone who realizes these things is manifested by all the greatness of God the Truth, and as many divine delights as no one can account for. However, there are many dangers that await the human being. Among these, it is a common danger to start enjoying turning people’s hearts and ears into oneself when it comes to preaching and giving advice to people, or to turn it around neglecting practice (*‘amal*) by saying that “purpose has been achieved.” However, when he leaves practice, his fate weakens and he is veiled again (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 39–47).

There are other drawbacks to plunging into this area of knowledge. To be more specific, it is difficult or even impossible to express things learned through disclosure; this is because it is difficult to comprehend them. The subjects that fall into this kind of knowledge are all of the true realities related to existence such as: the essence (*dhāt*) of God, His attributes (*ṣifāt*), actions, Divine will (*qaḍā’*), Divine decree (*qadar*), throne (*‘arsh*), dominion (*kursī*), tablet (*lawḥ*), pen (*qalam*) the world and the wisdom behind the creation of the world and afterworld, the reason for the afterworld being subsequent to the world, the meaning of prophethood, the night of power (*layl al-qadr*), ascension (*mi’rāj*), knowledge of the angels, enmities of the devils towards the human being, encountering of the angels with the prophets and appearing to them, revelation coming to the prophet, the supernatural deed of the saint, the method of struggle, purification of the heart, the meaning of the heart and soul, and the conditions of the day of judgment. The old Sufis did not write their perceptions of such topics in books (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 52–3). It should be noted that Ibn Khaldūn is not

entirely right here. There were at least some Sufis of the past who had expressed their opinion. Ghazzali's *Mishkāt al-anwār* is only one of such examples (See al-Gazzālī, 1414/1994).

This knowledge is in fact suited to what the prophets were created for. The flash/knowledge that is derived from the saint and truthful, its pieces come into existence by way of exertion (*takalluf*) and accrual (*iktisāb*). So everyone should deal with what is appropriate for their nature. This is why the Prophet is not granted permission to explain what the soul (*rūḥ*) is. The verses related to this matter in the Qur'an state: "(O my messenger) they ask you of the soul. Say, 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And humankind have not been given of knowledge except a little'" (Al-Isrā 17/85). Such sciences enter into sciences that are deemed ill-advised in terms of the Shariah and are not suitable for public disclosure. Things that have no practical use in learning them have not been explained in the religion. For example, in the Qur'an, it was proclaimed that the question of "crescents" signified "time for the people and the Hajj pilgrimage" (See Baqarah 2/189). According to Ibn Khaldūn, Sufis of the past were very careful about this issue. For example, they did not enter into the metaphorical/demonstrative interpretation of verses of the Qur'an (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 55–70). Ibn Khaldūn is mistaken here again. Old Sufis also had books on demonstrative exegesis (*tafsīr*). If we bring it up to Qushayrī, we can list a few of them as follows:

- 1) Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-'aẓim*, (Print: Egypt, 1329).
- 2) Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), *Haqāiq al-tafsīr* (Fatih Lib. no. 260 and 261; Selimağa, no. 77 has two copies available).
- 3) 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), *Laṭāif al-ishārāt* (Print: 3c., critical ed. I. Basyuni, Cairo).

Ibn Khaldūn does not recommend this last type of Sufism, saying that it is the reason that the aspirant should not seek out observation (*mushāhadah*), and that he remains in the struggle for integrity, and that this path is dangerous and unnecessary (Ibn Khaldūn, 1957: 55–70).

According to Ibn Khaldūn, *sulūk* is not possible without a shaykh. The reason why there is no shaykh in the first and second types of struggles is that *sulūk* in its true sense is not to be found in them (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 101–102). Ibn Khaldūn considers that the shaykh is necessary, even if those who reject this say that “we have no shaykh in our time (worthy of being followed), and if there is then we are unaware,” and even as this claim is beyond limits, the person who sees it as a condition to have a shaykh is obliged to say: “Although in this particular way there is no appearance of the shaykh, it is not non-existent that there will be God’s successor on earth for all those in the earth in the meaning of essences. In fact the shaykh who serves as the general path for the people, is manifest and present and the aspirant in this path is either a *sālik* (seeker) or *majdhūb* (attracted) (i.e. one will either be under a shaykh’s supervision or will take this path and God’s attraction will find them)”⁸ (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 104). In the meantime, it is important to note that we do not know which of the positions in which we are in spiritual terms, but in the century of Ibn Khaldūn there lived well-known Sufis and shaykhs including Dāwūd al-Kaysarī (d. 751/1350), Bahāuddīn Naqshband (d. 791/1389), Sayyid Nasīmī (executed: 821/1418), Badr al-Dīn Simāwī (executed: 823/1420) ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, (d. 832 / 1412), Hāji Bayram Walī (d. 833 / 1430), Molla Fanārī (d. 834/1430), Muḥammed Pārsā (d. 834/1430), and in the words of Ibn Khaldūn, “the world of this path of the shaykh” is not deprived.

Ibn Khaldūn therefore thinks that the true meaning of Sufism exists in the third struggle, but argues with somewhat of a Salafi approach that it is unnecessary. However, it is not possible to regard him as a Salafi; this is because there are many ideas of his that distinguish him from the Salafis. Among these is the meticulousness of how to obtain disclosure (*kashf*). What he says about this may be confusing for readers. Since he considers disclosure very much from one side and from the other side it is seen as a process that even the talisman can obtain and which the conditions do not stipulate. In fact, these two ideas are possible. For example, we know that he distinguishes exponents of *Waḥdah al-Wujūd*, that is, in his own term, from the Ahl al-Ḥaḍarāt, *Asmā*, *mazāhir* and manifestation (*tajallī*) from the Shari’ī Sufis, and is not very keen on their profession. But even this attitude towards them has approaches that lean

⁸ Ibn Khaldūn may have taken this section from Suhrawardī’s ‘*Awāwif al-ma’ārif*. However, according to this source, there are two further options alongside the two mentioned above: first to be a seeker then be attracted or first to be attracted then a seeker (For details, see Suhrawardī, 1426/2005: 56–57).

toward disclosure. Because those who share this opinion are too busy with the science of disclosure, sometimes they abandon this science and religious practices and fall into subjects like “kamāl-i Asmāī,” on the nature and secrets of the letters, such as the spiritual projection of secrets in the letters. In fact, it is an unquestionable truth that the names and letters that come to the fore from the letters in nature make it possible to be in nature and influence matter, and this is evident as it is recurrent and fixed. The talisman is also caught with the Ahl-i Asmā because they bring into effect by comparable means, but it should be known that the saving of the Ahl-i Asmā is gained by the struggle and disclosure that they have obtained with divine light and God’s assistance. The talisman, however, obtained it with a little spiritual discipline. This rhyme has provided the opportunity for the descending of the spiritual presence (rūhāniyyah). However, the spiritual discipline of the Ahl-i Asmā is a great one, and the objective of the realities are not spiritual projection, thus (according to them) spiritual projection is a veil; the spiritual projection that is realized from time to time is merely one of the many supernatural deeds of God. Therefore the Ahl-i Asmā, who dismisses disclosure and deals with the nature of letters and words in the context of only the names of God, is also inferior to the talisman. Because they have abandoned these rules of evidences and have not memorized their terminologies. However, even a talisman is naturally exploited by resorting to scientific principles and natural laws (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 66–7). So the issue is methodological; the issue is not that of the occurrence of disclosure. Moreover, the aspirant can also leave practice after a certain place and proceed to manifestation, and thus devotion to the religion becomes weak. Therefore salvation (salāmah) is to not deal with them.

Ibn Khaldūn does not advise one to deal with the sciences, such as disclosure and talisman, and the other reason is that it is to be left to historiography. According to him, it may be that the sultan and the emir in their interest in the future of the states of the empire, that is, the science related to the unseen, have thought that these sciences can be used for political purposes. As it is known, Ibn Khaldūn says that it is possible to reach some knowledge about the unseen in his Muqaddimah. According to him, narrations about the period of corruption and disorder in the books of Saḥīḥ Hadith constitute the religious foundation of this subject. In addition, some companions of the Prophet from the Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House), particularly Ja’far al-ṣādiq (d. 148/765), have reported many things about knowledge of the

unseen. With Ibn Khaldūn maintaining the argument that “because the Ahl al-Bayt are regarded as saints and they can reach such knowledge through disclosure,” he thus informs us of knowledge based on the science of letters, and that this is counted in the science of disclose, and also emphasizes that this science is supported by methodologies. According to Ibn Khaldūn, rulers and emirs are most keen on matters of the unseen. Because they want to know the duration of the sovereignty of their state, the condition of the state, the time of their destruction, the wars to take place, the disorder and anarchy, and the number and names of future rulers. Some of the scholars who knew the devotion of emperors and emirs paid attention to such knowledge as in that of stars and geomancy, and they learned these things. Between the community and the state dignitaries, the words uttered about the realm through unseen disclosure are transmitted through stars and prophecies. For example, the ancient Arabs had their own prophets and disciples in this business. The Turks had legions and bakshes. These would tell you which wars will happen in the future with the knowledge they possessed. Ibn Khaldūn gives a lot of examples after mentioning that he calls it “mulhamah,” but he also mentions a mulhamah belonging to Ibn ‘Arabī, but it is true that none of the latter categories, that is, mulhamahs, are ever based on anything other than on stars or other sciences, and that there is no evidence to support their truth (See Ibn Khaldun, cf: 365–6, 376–7).

To the best of our knowledge, the most widespread example of stern criticism in the commentary books of on disclosure of the Sufis is that which Ibn Khaldūn also relates which are the famous Andalusians Ibn Barraĵān (d. 536 / 1141) and Ibn ‘Arabī. Ibn Barraĵān predicted that in the exegesis of the first verse of the Surah al-Rūm, he benefited from the knowledge of astrology and predicted that Jerusalem would be conquered in 583/1178 (Ibn Barraĵān, cf.: III, 108a–b–109a). Ibn ‘Arabī criticizes him by saying that Ibn Barraĵān used astrology and not the science of letters which thus hindered his disclosure, and by using the science of letters he would obtain the same date (see Ibn ‘Arabī, 1414/1994: I, 217 and VII, 401–402). This means that Ibn ‘Arabī applies to the science of letters more than Ibn Barraĵān.⁹ Here, the narration of the names of God is included in this narrative; as such it may be a useful distinction to state that the commentary on the names of God involves the science of both letters and jafr (manipulation of number and letter). At the beginning of the masters in this

⁹ For the science of letters in Ibn ‘Arabī’s work see Gril, 1988: 385–487.

regard are the famous Sufis like Ghazzālī, Ibn Barrajān, Ibn ‘Arabī and Qushayrī (d. 465/1072).¹⁰

It should be immediately noted that Ibn Khaldūn accepts the disclosures of the Sufis as well. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the parents constitute an important source of “ilḥām” in Islamic societies. They may ascend to their “angels” with their struggle, and this enables them to receive divine revelation/divination like the prophets (see Ibn Khaldun, pp. 106–10). According to him, the key of guidance and disclosure is piety (taqwā); it is possible to find evidence to support this in the Qur’an and Hadith. Even though God Himself has been veiled by seventy-thousand curtains in this world, and despite mentioning the tradition that the light of His face will burn everything as far as it can reach,¹¹ one’s gnosis (ma’rifah) (i.e. to know God) can be manifested in the world as well. Of course, it will be seen more in the hereafter (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 21–6, 31–3; Ibid, cf.: 518–20).

In this case, Ibn Khaldūn’s most important issue is how people have obtained disclosure. He does not reject disclosure. As a matter of fact, even though the works of the great Sufis such as Qushayrī and Ghazzālī mention disclosure in detail, they would like to criticize them in the form of negation, and they regard their works as useful works. (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 54, 91–2, Same Author, cf., 519). In fact, for me, he has also read and written passages that resemble them and have included them in his quotations. For example, evaluations of dreams are similar to those quoted from Ghazzālī’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s *al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyyah* (e.g. Ibn Khaldun, al-Ghazzālī, 1414/1994: 19, and Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 133–4). The words of God, as it has been described in seventy thousand curtains in this world, and that the light of his face, when he was lifted (See al-Ghazzali, 1414/1994: 27, et al.).

¹⁰ There are many printed works of Ibn Barrāj’s *Sharḥ asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā* besides its manuscript: *Sharḥ Asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā* (comentario sobre los nombres mas bellos de dios), critical edition and study by de la Torre Purificación, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas Agencia Espanola de Cooperacion Internacional). Ghazzālī’s *Al-maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā* (Cairo, 1324/1906)’dir. Qushayrī’s *Sharḥ asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. A.A. Hulvānī, (Beirut, 1986) and *el-Takhbīr fī al-tezkīrī sharḥ asmā Allāh el-Husnā*, ed. A.M. Ali (Beirut, 1420/1999). Three works related to Ibn Arabī are attributed: *Sharḥ asmā Allāh*, *Sharḥ asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā*, *Sharḥ asmā Allāh wa taḥqīqūtuha* (See Yahya, 1413/1996: 388–389).

¹¹ It should be noted here that the hadith is a tradition established by al-Ghazzālī in his *Mishkāt al-Anwār*.

As for the fact that Ibn Khaldūn may have read the books of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), especially the work of *al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyyah fī Iṣlāḥ al-Mamlakah al-Insāniyyah*, the following should be noted: (Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 154) it is interesting that Ibn Khaldūn uses Ibn ‘Arabī’s terms which he divides into two, *rā’iyyah* (subjects) *bādiyyah* and *ḥāḍirah*, *bādiyyah* as the visible world (*‘ālam al-shahādah*), and *ḥāḍirah* he divides into two as ordinary (*‘awām*) and accomplished (*khawāṣ*) (Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 154). It may also be that Ibn Khaldūn was drawn by his fascination with politics to introduce in Ghazzālīan style the human as a homeland, the heart of a human as a king and the mind as a vizier. Ibn Khaldūn, for example, defines Sufism as “piety,” and Ibn ‘Arabī, who is the target of his harsh criticism, also defines Sufism as “piety” (See Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 45), and sees disclosed knowledge as an extension of this. Both authors are in agreement when they liken the heart to a mirror and spiritual discipline as its polisher, and manifestations unfolding into space (Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 39–41, Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 59, 171).

The “*malḥamah*,” which Ibn Khaldūn used and expressed in the meaning of “giving extraordinary news about his feelings and the material world,” and which Ibn ‘Arabī also attributed to it, is in fact not welcomed by Ibn ‘Arabī. Ibn ‘Arabī says that the phenomenon of giving extraordinary news about his feelings and the material world is to be seen in early aspirants, but only after the fulfillment of the realm, he will begin to give disclosure and news about the unseen world, but to be eventually veiled (See Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 171– 2). According to him, everything that can be described as extraordinary and supernatural should nonetheless be avoided (See Ibn ‘Arabī, 1919: 171–2).

Conclusion

In short, Ibn Khaldūn is not opposed to philosophical Sufism based on disclosure. Some who have read from the heights of Sufism of works of Ibn ‘Arabī have made transcriptions from some of those works such as *al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyyah*. What he opposed was unseen reports about sensational disclosure and the material universe, and thus for it to have come to the point where this has caught the attention of sultans/administrators, i.e. for political purposes. As for disclosed knowledge that conveys information about the universe, if it is without the guidance of a spiritually mature shaykh, the danger of being distanced from religion is likely. Otherwise, when

it is done in accordance with the rules and with a spiritually mature shaykh, there must be no mention to anyone of the struggle of disclosure and cognition. Nevertheless, if one is careful, the struggle of piety and integrity is a natural continuation of the struggle of disclosure and cognition. Entering here without realizing integrity leads the person to licentiousness (ibāhī) and heresy (zandaqah); the heart is like a circular mirror. All the forms of existence and the known true realities are reflected/manifested there. In this case, a distorted thought may arise in the heart of the seeker, and they may appear as things appropriate to the desires of the self but can also be conceived as inspiration and truths coming from God (see Ibn Khaldun, 1957: 39–41).¹² When one acquires integrity they either take the decision to stop or continue on the road. To continue is to decide to completely destroy all human qualities, which is not recommended, but if it is, then a spiritually mature shaykh is necessary to protect one from the above-mentioned dangers.

In any event, when it is difficult to find a competent and effective shaykh, for example in our present day, Ibn Khaldūn's evaluations may serve as a guide to the science of Sufism. Because the Sufis have never opened this issue for debate and therefore have not offered an alternative.

Finally, it should be pointed out that claims of some researchers who believe that his evaluations on Sufism is not based on his own analysis but on his conversations with Shaykh Ibn al-Zayyād and his commentary on Ibn al-Khaṭīb's *Rawḍah al-Ta'rīf* (Kynsh, 1999: 195–07) does not seem to reflect much of the truth either. He appears to have read at least some of the works of Ghazzālī and Ibn 'Arabī.

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¹² This type of knowledge is known as “khawāṭir” and just as it can be from God, it can also be from the angels, the self, or from the devil (See Qushayrî, 1413/1993: 83).

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