IBN TAYMIYYA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS
SULFISM AND HIS CRITIQUE OF
IBN AL-'ARABI'S MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY

by

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Dedicated to my parents who first taught me the rudiments of Islām and paved my way along the path of Islāmic scholarship.
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<td>American Journal of Arabic Studies</td>
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<td>Bidāya</td>
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<td>Culture</td>
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<td>E.I.</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia of Islam</td>
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<td>Al-Fatāwā</td>
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<td>J.R.A.S.</td>
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<td>Kashf</td>
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This study is primarily concerned with Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards the theory and practice of the Sufis and his critique of the doctrines of Ibn al-'Arabi, the chief spokesman of the Sufis, who has transformed Sufism into a kind of mystical philosophy.

The introduction attempts to discuss the life and reform movement of Ibn Taymiyya and the state of Sufism before and during his time. It also discusses the role of the Sufi shaykhs in his period and the influences of Sufism, especially the factors that had motivated people to accept Sufism. Chapter one has been devoted to the discussion of his creed of Hama, which outlines his anthropomorphic teachings and its repercussion in the response of his enemies, the Sufis. A detailed discussion of Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine of wahdat al-wujud and al-a'yân al-thabitā, and Ibn Taymiyya's subsequent criticism, has been presented in chapter two. Chapter three discusses Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards the Sufi brotherhoods. Chapter four studies Sufi practices such as dhikr, samā' and ragā'. Chapter five deals with Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation of some mystical ideas, concept of wilāya and his critique of the Sufi hierarchy. Chapter six deals with Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of the popular practices associated with visitation of tombs and his doctrines concerning such points as intercession. The thesis concludes with a summary of Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards Sufism.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This independent research has been carried out under the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Ian Howard, to whom I would like to express my thanks for his assistance in reading and offering useful suggestions and constructive criticisms. Much gratitude goes to my sponsors, the Kano State Government, for awarding me the scholarship to enable me to carry out my research and the Bayero University for awarding me the fellowship throughout my stay in Edinburgh University.

The success of this study depended largely on the bulk of the sources used about Ibn Taymiyya, which have been generously provided by the Vice-Chancellor of Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa'ūd Islamic University, Riyād, Dr. 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Turki. I am deeply grateful for the carton of books which he had sent me from Riyād. I would also like to record my thanks to my friend Mallam Yusuf Gade Hassan Katsina of al-Azhar University, Cairo, who had kindly assisted me in purchasing some books while I was in Cairo.

I would also like to thank staff members of the Inter-Library Loan Department at Edinburgh University for their help and co-operation. I also thank my typist Mrs. Mona Bennett who has typed the thesis.

A special gratitude goes to my wife and children who gave me moral support, love and encouragement towards the completion of this work. In fact, the final year of this thesis has been blessed by the birth of twins, a period which culminated in happy and encouraging academic pursuit.
The system used for transliterating Arabic is that generally used by the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Edinburgh University.
In writing this thesis, great dependence has been placed on the works written by Ibn Taymiyya himself. The bulk of the sources utilised in analyzing and evaluating Ibn Taymiyya's ideas is therefore original. The data have been carefully assessed and evaluated with a view to confirming their authenticity. The same style and scholarly presentation is reflected throughout Ibn Taymiyya's works. These findings have been reached by a comparison of the treatment of various subjects in many of his works. For example, the presentation of intellectual arguments, the analysis of his ideas and those of his opponents, and the precision of concluding remarks, are demonstrated both in his Majmū‘at al-Rasā‘il Kubrā and Majmū‘at al-Rasā‘il wa-l-Masā‘il. His Majmū‘ and Al-Fatāwā are both clear and scholarly. It should be remarked that according to Ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyya, Ibn Taymiyya's principal student and compiler of his works, the latter has written over 300 works in volumes and treatises.

His works on Sufism are mainly critiques of the theories of some Sufis, which he regarded as incompatible with the shari‘a. These critiques appear in Majmū‘at al-Rasā‘il wa-l-Masā‘il, Majmū‘at al-Rasā‘il al-Kubrā and Al-Fatāwā. For example, in the Majmū‘at al-Rasā‘il al-Kubrā, he devoted a whole chapter to the refutation of the practice of listening to music (sama‘) as an aid to the attainment of ecstasy. In the Majmū‘at al-Rasā‘il wa-l-Masā‘il, he criticised the major doctrines of some prominent
sūfīs of Egypt, especially the theories of Ibn al-'Arabī. In al-Fatawā, he analysed and criticised the theories and practice of the sūfīs. In his al-Ṣūfiyya wa-l-Fuqara', he explained the meaning of asceticism and sūfīsm and refuted some practices of the sūfīs. He also devoted a whole book to the theory and practice of the Ahmadiyya/Rifa'iyya order (tariqa), in which he explained the acceptable and unacceptable forms of their sūfīsm. In his Kitāb al-Nubūwā and Maimū'at al-Rasā'il wa-l-Masā'il, he criticised Ibn al-'Arabī's theory of prophethood and sainthood. Ibn Taymiyya explained the necessity of the superiority of a prophet over a saint. In his al-Furqān he discussed his interpretation of a saint (wali).

The materials used in this study about Ibn al-'Arabī's mystical philosophy are also original. His Futūhāt al-Makkiyya has provided the intricate and abstruse exposition of his peculiar mystical philosophy.

The secondary sources about Ibn Taymiyya's reform and ideas, such as the works of Henry Laoust and Abū Zahra, have supplemented the understanding of his thought. The works of his biographers, such as those of Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Hajar, and many others have provided us with historical data about his reform. The interesting work of Affīfi has helped to elaborate the philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabī.

In the bibliography I have given a list of all the works so far published on Ibn Taymiyya as well as the principal studies of his work.
Ibn Taymiyya and His Reform Movement


1. Ibn Taymiyya's grandfather was asked about the name Taymiyya and he replied that his own grandfather set off for pilgrimage to Mecca at a time when his wife was pregnant and when he came to a village called Tayma near Tabuk, he saw a pretty lady coming out from a tent. When he came back home, he found that his wife had already delivered a beautiful baby girl. When the people took the child to him, he raised her up cheerfully declaring, "Oh Taymiyya! Oh Taymiyya!", implying that she resembled the pretty lady he saw at Tayma and she was thus named Taymiyya. In another version of the origin of the name Taymiyya, Ibn al-Najjar mentions in the Pawat al-Wafayat that the mother of Muhammad Ibn Taymiyya's great-grandfather was a preacher called Taymiyya. He was then nicknamed after her name.

2. The city of Harran became famous during the medieval period as a great centre of religion and learning, particularly at the time of Sabians. It served as an important centre for the spreading of philosophy and other Hellenic sciences to the
Ibn Taymiyya was born in the thirteenth century, about five years after the destruction of Baghdad. It was a century characterised by military revolutions brought about by the Mongol invasion. It culminated in atrocities, innumerable massacres and devastation. (1) The destructive activities perpetrated by the Mongols seemed to create a lasting impression on the mind of the young boy who continued to nurse antipathy and resentment against the barbaric attitude of the Mongols towards the Muslim World of the time. (2) Syria and Egypt were among the few countries which had escaped that devastation and massacre. When Ibn Taymiyya was seven, his family had migrated to the city of Damascus, fleeing from the terrors of the Mongol invasion.

Historians seem to be silent about the origin of Ibn Taymiyya's family because they do not seem to trace the origin of the family from any of the Arab tribes. Perhaps Ibn Taymiyya himself was not an Arab. Abu Zahra suggests that he may have been Kurdish. (3) Certainly his character reflects the virtues of Arabs. It played an important role in transmitting Hellenistic ideas which influenced the subsequent trends towards sufism, alchemy and Neoplatonism. (See E.I. art. "Harran").

for which the Kurdish people have been praised, piety, determination and bravery. This is perhaps the main basis for the supposition that he might have been of Kurdish stock. The Kurds also exhibited great courage in the defence of Islam during the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. (1) Although it must be said that such qualities are human and, therefore, it is not a sound basis for the claim of Kurdish descent.

The family of Ibn Taymiyya migrated to Damascus in 1269 A.D. to escape the occupation of the Mongols, which had threatened the life of Muslims at that time. This family had already earned a high reputation for its learning and piety. It produced a host of scholars (ʻulama) of repute who had written on many different aspects of Islam. (2) His great-grandfather Muḥammad Ibn Khidr was a great jurist (faqīh) of his period and his grandfather Abū-l-Barakāt Majd al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya was counted among the best scholars of the Hanābila. (3) He was said to have earned the fame of being an expert in independent legal judgement (i.e. al-Mujtahid al-Mutlaq). The family followed the Hanbali school of law (madhhab) and always seems to have been associated with the Hanbali school. Their effort to disseminate the Hanbali madhhab might have been one of the main

1. See Ibid., pp. 18-19.
2. See Ibid., p. 20; also Nadwi, p. 34.
3. Cf. Nadwi, p. 34; Hanābila is a collective term used for the followers of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.
reasons why their opponents described them as fanatically inclined to the Hanbali orthodoxy. Nadwī tells us that Majd al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya was born in 590 A.H. and received his early education from his uncle, the preacher (khatīb, wā'iz) Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, and then continued his studies under numerous teachers from Harrān and Iraq. He attained proficiency in his studies and thus became a jurist (faqīh). The father of Ibn Taymiyya, Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn 'Abd al-Halīm Ibn Taymiyya also had been a legal scholar and attained, like his parents, a renown in Islamic sciences. When he migrated to Syria he took up a teaching post in al-Jāmi‘ al-Umawī, his fame spreading everywhere, because he was said to be lecturing from memory. Eventually he was appointed the head of the Sukkāriyya school. He died in 682 A.H.

This family was well-known for its tenacious and retentive memory. Both his father and grandfather had inherited this trait, but Ibn Taymiyya seemed to have excelled in it. Abū Zahra has informed us that one of the shaykhs of Damascus heard that Ibn Taymiyya was gifted with a retentive memory and he decided to come and test the boy. He waited in the tailor's shop until Ibn Taymiyya arrived from school carrying his slate. The shaykh called Ibn Taymiyya and asked him to erase his slate.

1. See Nadwī, p.34.
2. Cf. Ibid., p.37.
so that he might take a dictation. He dictated eleven traditions (ahādīth) and asked him to recite them (without reference to the slate), which Ibn Taymiyya did with skill and clarity. He then asked him to erase them for another dictation. He then dictated for the second time different narrations and asked him to recite them in the same way. Ibn Taymiyya demonstrated his level of proficiency by reciting the narrations and the shaykh was so impressed by Ibn Taymiyya's brilliance that he declared: "If this boy lives long, he would certainly become great. For nothing like him has been seen before."(1)

Ibn Taymiyya's intellectual acumen and strong determination paved the way for, and made an impact on, his subsequent religious reform. In his lifetime he became a prolific and versatile writer.(2) His education was broad and comprehensive in Islamic sciences. His devotion to learning had earned him the credit for being capable of giving religio-legal decisions to a problem (fatwā) at the age of eighteen(3) and he succeeded his father as the head of the Sukkāriyya school. His first lecture(4) was attended by the prominent shaykhs and 'ulamā' of Damascus to see how the young scholar would get along. Among the 'ulamā' was the chief qādi, Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Zakī

1. See Abū Zahra, p.21.
3. See Ibid., p.5.

See also Nadwī, p.35.
al-Shāfi‘ī. The ‘ulamāʾ were astonished and impressed by Ibn Taymiyya’s command of his subject and fluency of expression. Ibn Kathīr mentions that this impressive lecture was written down by Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn al-Fizarī because of its significance. Ibn Taymiyya also gave a talk on Qur’ānic interpretation in the same year on Friday at al-Jāmi‘ al-Umawī, which was attended by a large number of people.

Ibn Taymiyya has always been regarded by both his critics and admirers as one of the great religious thinkers of the Middle Ages. While his opponents looked upon him as an iconoclast cut off from the mainstream of popular tradition, his admirers always regarded him as a prodigy of learning whose like had not been seen during his lifetime. His literary output was enormous and covered all fields such as theology, philosophy, politics, logic, Sūfism, law, jurisprudence, hadīth, tafsīr.

His enthusiastic radical reformism, well defined and well presented in his polemical writings, revealed him as the most controversial Muslim thinker of the fourteenth century. Ibn Taymiyya truly represents Hanbalism, whose characteristic feature, as far as interpretation of the sharī‘a is concerned,

2. See Ibid.
has always been a non-rational and non-speculative attitude. (1) Hanbalism also seems to be hostile to rationalism, pantheism and aspects of Sufism, as long as these disciplines cannot be traced back to what it regards as the normative sources of Islam. (2) Hanbalite rigidity towards the principles of Islam is well exhibited in their attitude to the Qur'an, Sunna (the practices of the pious forebears, i.e. al-Salaf al-Salih). (3) Ibn Taymiyya himself, being a great Hanbalite theologian, jurisconsult (mufti) and uncompromising controversial scholar, recognises no sources other than the Qur'an and Sunna.

Having become well acquainted with the social, religious and political problems of his society and the general decadence which seemed to have encroached into its polity, Ibn Taymiyya always demonstrated great vigour to reform that society and showed a confident lack of concern for the consequences which reactions to his reforms may have produced. He strongly believed that Islam was corrupted by accretions such as certain aspects of Sufism, philosophy, theology, pantheism and all sorts of superstitious beliefs and innovations like saint worship and visitation to tombs, as these cannot be traced back to the Qur'an and Sunna and no direct stipulation can be found with regard to them. (4)

The quality and importance of Ibn Taymiyya's reform movement which shook the very basis of popular Islam and exposed him to severe criticism, (1) rested fundamentally on his cherished hopes and endeavours of reviving and reforming the teachings of Islam and Islamic society of that period, by teaching the Muslims to accept a complete return to the earlier and conservative practices of the forebears (al-Salaf al-Sālih). His insistence on going back to pristine Islam was based on the strong conviction that al-Salaf al-Sālih, who represented the best type of Muslims in the Islamic community, should be taken as a model, whose Islamic practices and devotions were not contaminated with alien mystical or popular teachings. The reason being that Ibn Taymiyya believed the Salaf lived in a period in which true Islamic principles were maintained and safeguarded. He felt that by his own time, in the fourteenth century, Islam had become a victim of mystical and popular teaching, (2) it seemed to be doomed unless it could listen to the call of salvation by recanting from those deviations of Sufism and by following the model of those righteous Salaf. (3) He always interpreted Islam in the manner in which it was literally expounded in the Qur'ān without allowing any degree of figurative or metaphorical interpretation which he thought would alter the essential meaning contained there. His tendency of interpretation of the Qur'ān, therefore, always seemed to be

2. See Abū Zahra, p.196.
entirely anthropomorphic. (1) He was constantly accused of literalism and anthropomorphism by his opponents who always advocated the utilization of figurative interpretation to some degree, so as to save the essence of God from what they considered to be anthropomorphism. (2)

The socio-religious environment in which Ibn Taymiyya lived was characterised by blind following (taqlīd) in religious matters, and there was a general acceptance of the mystical doctrines of the sufi shaykhs. (3) That society had witnessed the emergence of those sufi shaykhs who, through the passage of time, had been able to wield profound influence over the people and who were treated by many in a way that was similar to adoration. They made use of their religious position to influence the masses in mystical ideas and to play a major role in shaping the socio-religious life of the people. (4) The mystical ideas which those shaykhs attempted to spread and instil in the minds of the people included Unity of Being (wahdat al-wujūd); monism (al-ahādiyya); and incarnation (al-hulūl). (5) It would appear

4. See Ibid., p.196.
that those doctrines were alien mystical ideas borrowed from Neo-Platonic, Persian and Indian mysticism.\(^{(1)}\) It was his determination to purge the society of these mystical deviations and emancipate the people from the shackles of the shaykhs. He maintained that the harbingers of the inner spirituality of Islam never at any period of time attempted or implied any mystical teaching reflecting or directed at the notion of pantheism, incarnation or monism, otherwise such mystical doctrines would have been part of inner Islamic teachings, had they been consistent with the ideals of Islam.\(^{(2)}\) A few decades following the establishment of Islam, ideas derived from Greek, Syriac, Persian or Indian religious practices began to be introduced into Islamic society because the neophytes of other religions brought into Islam their earlier religious ideas which unavoidably made a great impact on subsequent Sufism. Having been a versatile scholar, well-acquainted with all Islamic disciplines\(^{(3)}\) and having written many polemics against the deviations and digressions resulting from those disciplines, Ibn Taymiyya attempted with great courage to attack and condemn those alien mystical teachings which had infiltrated into some of the teachings of Islam. He felt these to be not only heretical and contrary to the principles of Islam, but also perilous and liable to corrupt innocent Muslims.

Ibn Taymiyya suffered a series of imprisonments due to his radical religious views which were contrary to popular Islamic views as well as his acerbic attacks on his contemporary Sufis. We are told that his uncompromising attitude towards the Sufis and ulama engendered hostility between them. Among his principal opponents were the two influential Sufis, Shaykh Abū Nasr al-Manbiji and Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh. The prominent Sufis of Cairo became exasperated with Ibn Taymiyya’s attacks and calumnies on the Sufi shaykhs, especially Ibn al-‘Arabī. The Shaykh al-Shuyukh of Cairo together with Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh and other prominent Sufis staged a mass demonstration in 1308 A.D., marching through the streets of Cairo to the Citadel to protest against Ibn Taymiyya’s attacks on Ibn al-‘Arabī and mashayikh of Sufism. Ibn Jamā’a was sent to keep order and a discussion was held in which Ibn Taymiyya met Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh face to face. Ibn Kathir informs us that although none of the allegations levelled against Ibn Taymiyya by Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh was substantiated, nevertheless he was imprisoned because of his view that seeking help (istighātha) should be addressed to God only.

A number of discussions took place between the years 1298-1308 with a view to evaluating and assessing his theological views on matters of faith. Ibn Kathir mentions that Ibn Taymiyya was envied by a group of ulama and Sufis due to his popularity both among the people and the rulers, especially his close contact with the authorities, his staunch support for the cause.

of enjoining good and prohibiting evil (Al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar) and his sincerity of purpose and action. A few years before his death Ibn Taymiyya's books and writing materials were all taken away from him and he was prevented from writing anything. This terrible disgrace hurt him very profoundly and he died shortly afterwards in 1328 A.D.

The Development of Mysticism and Sufism up to the Time of Ibn Taymiyya

It is appropriate here to discuss briefly the development of asceticism, mysticism and sufism before Ibn Taymiyya's period. That discussion will help us to understand sufism in the context of Ibn Taymiyya's society.

The message of Islam which was revealed to the Prophet during the 7th century A.D., encompassed the whole spectrum of religious devotions without any marked difference between the inner spirituality of Islam and the outer observances of worship. This is because the religion of Islam is essentially a system of worship which was codified in the Shari'a.(1) That system of worship incorporated both the legal and mystical domains, that is, its outer and inner spheres constituting the faith. The division between the exoteric and esoteric forms of Islam became fully realised during the beginning of the

The first century of Islam had witnessed the emergence of people of high religious integrity and intense piety who devoted their lives to rigorous ascetic practices by renouncing the world and its attractions and became occupied with strenuous devotions for the avoidance of the terrors of the last day and the torments of hell. (1) Those people are sometimes called nussāk, zuhhād (ascetics), bakkā'un (weepers), and 'ubbād (worshippers). These terms had been applied to any group of people who displayed a tendency towards leading an ascetic life, instead of the prevalent loose and luxurious life which served as an obstacle to the release of the soul in its endeavour to seek God. The distinctive feature of the ascetics which had separated them from the rest of the Muslims had always been intense religious practices indicative of piety, poverty, fear of and resignation to God and renunciation of the world. Some of the Companions of the Prophet were said to have paved the way for the subsequent mysticism for they were counted as the pioneers of ascetism and often resorted to complete seclusion and religious confinement in mountains and caves far away from the clamour of the materialistic city life. For instance, Abū Dharr al-Ghifāri, Salmān al-Fārisī, 'Ammār, Miqād and Hudhayfa were counted among the chief ascetics of that period. (2)

In this early period, those renowned Sahāba of high religious integrity were said to have protested against the rampant materialism which might block the way to salvation, and the consciousness of the horrors of the last day combined with the punishment in hell urged men to take up the ascetic life. There are many verses of the Qur'ān exhorting people to behave themselves and beware of the terrors of hell which await them and guard against the transient and sportive life of this world by leading a pious life and performing noble deeds which would prepare them to attain salvation. Some of the Sahāba(1) were usually referred to as the Ahl al-Suffa, i.e., People of the Bench, a collective name for a group of people who had dedicated their lives to pious devotions and ascetic ideals. They made the Prophet's Mosque their home in al-Medina. Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī was said to be one of them. The Prophet was reported to have kept their company and even on several occasions discussed religious issues with them. Their leader was said to have been Abū Huraira, the famous Companion of the Prophet who had been constantly with him narrating so many Traditions. Their designation "Ahl al-Suffa" appeared among the possible derivations of süfism.(2)

Hasan al-Basrī (d. 728) is always reckoned as being one of the most important figures in the history of asceticism

because he cultivated the ascetic ideals. He was a famous scholar and a venerable ascetic who had made a great impact in the lives of subsequent mystics and of Sufism. His ascetic ideals were always regarded as a precedent and emulated by those concerned with the spirituality of Islam. He had a large following and disciples who also became conscious of the terrors of the future life and preferred to lead a very strenuous and intense ascetic life. They considered renunciation of the world and its vanities as the main vehicle towards the attainment of salvation.

It will be remarked that most of those early ascetics lived and died in the first century A.H. and cultivated enviable ascetic ideals. But they could not possibly have been called mystics because mysticism had started a little later, i.e. after the end of the first century. Although the characteristic features of mysticism might resemble those of asceticism, it is still possible for one to discern a distinct difference, namely the doctrines of love and yearning for God as well as the endeavour to seek communion with Him. These differences, it would seem, had appeared in the beginning of the second century A.H. and were followed by the mystics who flourished during that period. Whereas in the case of the ascetics, it had been obsession with the profound fear of God and retribution which had dominated their asceticism. (1)

The transition from asceticism to mysticism took place during the early beginnings of the second century A.H., adopting and accommodating the ascetic ideals of the first century and introducing for the first time in the history of Islamic spiritual discipline, the doctrine of love, the very fundamental doctrine which differentiated between the two systems. It would seem that the characteristics of asceticism of fear, sadness, weeping and despondence were transformed into passionate and fiery love of God as the main objective of mysticism. Shībī states that it was 'Āmir Ibn 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abd al-Qays, who was the first mystic of Basra to free himself from sadness, fear and weeping and direct his mind toward the love of God, as the principal objective of mysticism. (1)

The love of God became a distinctive feature in the history of Islamic mysticism and was the main target of mystics. The later ṣūfīs expressed its full realization both in theory and practice in the development of the subsequent period of ṣūfism. The emergence of the expression of this divine love as the fundamental principle of early mysticism and later ṣūfism, is said to have started with the famous woman mystic Rābi'at al-'Adawiyya (d. 801). But according to Shībī some mystics, like 'Āmir, had spoken of divine love before her and the doctrine of love only reached its peak during her time. (2) She used to say in some of her conversations: "My God, you would burn

1. Shībī, Al-Sila, p.298.
2. Ibid.
with fire a heart which loves you? Earlier mystics had spoken of yearning (shawq) and friendship (khulla), but Rabi'a went far beyond them by speaking in passionate terms of the believer's love of God. Other writers still tend to attribute the teaching of the divine love in mysticism to her. Margaret Smith, the contemporary European researcher in mysticism who devoted much time to studies on Rabi'a, the mystic, attested the fact that it was Rabi'a who for the first time spoke about divine love. She says: Rabi'a was one of the first to teach the doctrine of disinterested love for God, a new conception to many of her fellow sufis, who for the most part served God in hope of eternal reward or in fear of eternal punishment.

With the introduction of divine love as the main object to be attained by any mystic, Rabi'a had, for the first time, brought a remarkable change in the principles of asceticism and mysticism. Unfortunately, the overt expression and display of this divine love could sometimes be very unsafe to mystics, because they could be subjected to persecution by the legalists who found it very shocking to hear of an expressed love for God. They maintained that love should only be expressed between the like, i.e. between man and man and not between God and man because "nothing is like Him". Trimingham has this to say: "The doctrine of love preached by early mystics like Dhūl-Nūn al-

4. Cf. Ahmad Amin, Ibid.
Miṣrī, Rābiʿa al-Adawiyya, al-Muhāṣibī and al-Hallāj, was viewed with gravest suspicion by conformists to the narrow path of legal Islam."(1)

During this period in question we find that there were two principal schools of mysticism, namely that of Küfa and Basra. Şufyān al-Thawrī (d. 765) was the chief of the school of mysticism in Küfa while Hasan al-Basrī (d. 728) was the founder of and most outstanding figure in the Basra school. Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 815), Mansūr Ibn ʿAmmār (d. 839), Bishr Ibn al-Hāfī (d. 842), al-Muhāṣibī (d. 857) and al-Junayd (d. 910) were counted among the prominent mystics of Baghdād.(2)

Before we discuss the transition of mysticism into süfism, it would be worthwhile to trace and identify the factors that had urged Muslims to practise asceticism and mysticism during the first and second centuries of Islām. One of the basic motives that had urged Muslims to lead ascetic and mystic lives had been the increasing worldliness and the luxurious life led by Muslims which was brought about as a result of the prosperity of the Islāmic conquests in which Muslims became masters of the lands of Egypt, Syria, Persia and Byzantium. The contemporary Persian researcher Qāsim Ghāni emphasized that "the ‘Arabs during the early period of Islām were poor and accustomed to hard and coarse desert life and the Islāmic conquests provided

2. C.F. Shībī, Al-Sīla, pp.298-300.
them with the favourable opportunities of living a comfortable life and they soon became rich and accumulated wealth and luxury from the conquered cities of their civilized subjects". (1) The display of wealth and living a comfortable life and subjection to earthly pleasures without any attempt to show regard to the future life was perhaps one of the reasons which had motivated the pious Muslims to protest and rebel against that materialism. Some scholars (2) are of the opinion that the intermittent civil war that had ensued in the time of the Sahaba, the inevitable conflict during the Umayyad period, together with the other political upheavals, unrest and insurgence, as well as the rampant materialism, impelled some pious Muslims to seek peace of mind and spiritual satisfaction by taking up the ascetic and mystic tendencies and ways of life which would somehow be a stepping stone towards the attainment of salvation. Nawbakhti says that Sa'd Ibn Malik, Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas, 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar and Muhammad Ibn Maslama went out of Mecca away from the civil war (fitna) to devote themselves to ascetic activities. (3) Amin also adds that Hasan Ibn Thabit, 'Abdullah Ibn Salam went out of Mecca so as to devote themselves to pious observances. (4)

Mysticism during the 2nd/8th century as an institution reflecting a particular religious behaviour was not organised with

formal techniques, hierarchy of the shaykhs and disciples or methodology.\(^1\) The mystics were more or less scattered individuals travelling from one place to another performing intense religious practices and reading the Qur'ān and chanting the dhikr. In this period we meet Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī (d. 874) expressing his passionate yearning for God and always talking excessively about his love for God and communion with Him.\(^2\)

The period covering the latter part of the eighth century to the beginning of the ninth century A.D. marks the important transition of mysticism into Sūfism. As a matter of fact, the term Sūfī, though it started to be applied to mystics who lived at the end of the 2nd/8th century, assumed wide currency at the beginning of the 3rd/9th century when Sūfīs were characterised by wearing the woollen robe as a sign of piety and renunciation of the world. The mystical ideals cultivated by the venerated mystics were carried over to the Sūfīs with some additional mystical principles which did not seem to be present during the 2nd/8th century. It was in the formative period of the Sūfī development that new methods and techniques of Sūfism began to be worked out by the prominent Sūfīs. Sūfism at this period seemed to form a kind of philosophy due to the remarkable introduction of Sūfī successive degrees of attaining union with God classified as stages (maqāmāt) and states (ahwāl).\(^3\)

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2. Ibid.
categorization of stages and states were unequivocally new sufi techniques which appeared to be totally absent during the mystical development of the 1st/2nd centuries A.H. Another concept which differentiated sufism from mysticism was the introduction into the sufi method of the doctrine of annihilation (fanā') and permanent stay in God (baqā') both of which did not seem to emerge till the period of sufism. Other mystical doctrines such as the unity of being (wahdat al-wujūd), incarnation (hulūl) and pantheism were introduced into sufism by some prominent sufis during the subsequent years of the development of sufism. These mystical doctrines, which were introduced into Ibn Taymiyya's society, were to play a major role in the mystical indoctrination of the people. It was those doctrines which he considered as mystical accretions that he refuted and criticised. We shall, in due course, discuss the influences of sufism which had affected the religious life of Ibn Taymiyya's people.

The religious behaviour of the early mystics which were exhibited in their mystical ideals, gradually attracted a large group of mystics who started to organise their mystical practices in the formation of techniques, rituals, rules and hierarchy of shaykhs and novices and collectively formed the group of sufis and their movement sufism. Nicholson and Amin(1) have both demonstrated that sufism gradually became an

organised system with rules of discipline and devotion.

Sufis contemporary with Ibn Taymiyya exercised profound influence and enjoyed high esteem and prestige in the socio-religious life of the people. (1) One can envisage the difficult task which he set himself to accomplish and it would seem almost impossible to eradicate those magical practices in Sufism overnight as they became implanted in the minds of the people. Those practices apparently left an adverse impact on the social life of the people, but a complete return to the Qur'an, Sunna and the practices of al-Salaf did not work out sufficiently well, especially in Egypt, as Ibn Taymiyya had anticipated, because the impact of Sufism had been great among the people and the possible consequences of his religious enterprise would only meet with challenges, criticisms and fiery opposition both from the Sufis and some 'Ulama who were either envious of his influence or averse to his reform. (2)

It was in Egypt that there was the strongest resistance to Ibn Taymiyya's ideas. Sufism had become particularly strong in Egypt during the thirteenth century because many great Sufis had lived there all their lives, teaching and spreading mystical ideas which obviously made a great impact on that society. When he was in Egypt he faced active opposition due to the fact that the people were indoctrinated by the doctrines of wahdat

1. See Abu Zahra, p.206.
al-wujūd, (1) a mystical philosophy introduced by the great Andalusian sufi Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240). The Egyptian sufis also taught the concept of monism (ahādiyya). Ibn al-Fārid (d. 1234), the Egyptian mystic-poet, became influenced by Ibn al-‘Arabī's doctrine of wahdat al-wujūd. Some of the sufis of Egypt claimed exemption from religious duties when they reached a mystical state (ḥāl) in which they became united with the Divine essence. (2) This exemption from religious duties, called ibāha, seemed to be due to an Indian influence derived from the Vedantic teachings, because Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmi (d. 877), who was the first person to introduce the idea into Islamic sufism, had been influenced by Vedantic mystical principles. (3) Zaehner tells us that "the Upanishads and the laws of Manu all speak of the liberated man as having passed beyond all the rites of religion". (3) Ibn Taymiyya attacked this exemption from religious duties, for nobody, even prophets, could be said to be exempt from the statutory worship of God. (4) One of the reasons for the development of this kind of sufism in Egypt was the environmental influence. Egypt was an old centre of Greek learning, Neo-Platonic theosophy and a stronghold of sufism and many mystical doctrines were being circulated

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1. The fundamental teaching of the wahdat al-wujūd is the idea that the existence of phenomenal world (khalq) is the essence of the existence of God (al-Haqq). A detailed discussion of wahdat al-wujūd is done in Chapter II.

2. See Abū Zahra, p. 330.


there among the people, probably before the third/ninth century, i.e. a little before the emergence of Dhū-l-Nūn al-Misrī (d. 861), the founder of the school of Islamic theosophy. (1) Having become profoundly influenced by sufī and theosophical teachings in that ancient environment well-known for its heritage in Neo-Platonism and alchemy, the people who lived in those surroundings naturally would accept those sufī teachings. Ibn Taymiyya's teachings, therefore, did not seem to appeal to the people in Egypt. His reform movement, particularly in Egypt, was therefore very disheartening and unsuccessful. For example, great sufī shaykhs who had lived during that period included the following: Ahmad al-Badawī (d. 1277), founder of Ahmadiyya; Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqi (d. 1278), founder of the Dasūqiyya; Ibn al-Fārid (d. 1234), the great Egyptian mystic-poet; Ibn ʿAtaʾ Allāh (d. 1309), Ibn Taymiyya's main opponent who did much to undermine his influence and sabotage his reform movement; (2) ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 1291); Ibn Sabīn (d. 1271); and al-Shushtāri (d. 1270); ʿAbd al-Dīn al-Qunawī (d. 1274), Ibn al-ʿArabī's chief disciple and the propagator of his ideas. It was this al-Qunawī who spread the doctrines of Ibn al-ʿArabī in Asia Minor, particularly in Qonya. Some of those sufī shaykhs flourished and spread their mystical teachings in Egypt. Ibn Taymiyya's venture, particularly in Egypt, cost him hatred and a loss of respect, for he was branded as a heretic and even

on several occasions was incarcerated in Cairo. (1) But, in other countries like Syria, he acquired a tremendous success, as we shall see in the following pages.

The state of affairs in Syria with regard to Ibn Taymiyya's reform seems to have been favourable and encouraging. Due to the fact that Syria was his home country, he was able to gather a large following who gave him their unflinching support (2) and the 'ulamā' of Syria sympathised with him, though on several occasions they could not help criticising him on some controversial theological issues such as those discussed in the creed of Ḥama, in which he attempted to outline his views concerning the attributes of God and their relation to His essence. We shall have occasion to examine the contents of the Creed of Ḥama and the subsequent stir and turbulence it had caused. Disregarding the opposition and criticism levelled against Ibn Taymiyya, his admirers nevertheless had demonstrated their loyalty, sympathy and vigorous support in defending him against those who openly paraded and protested against that treatise of Ḥama. (3) The loyal defence shown by the multitude of his supporters in Syria would perhaps be a clear testimony of the kind of influence he exercised there; for his reformist ideas were believed to be intended genuinely to reform and enlighten Islamic society of that period about the kind of pure and

untarnished sort of Islam they were expected to believe and practice, which always remained compatible with the Qur'ān and Sunna, rather than succumbing to and subjecting themselves to the indoctrination of the mystical ideas of the Sufi shaykhs which seemed to be full of mystical accretions and heresies. (1)

The Possible Attractions to Sufism in Ibn Taymiyya's Time

The Sufis during Ibn Taymiyya's time enjoyed a very influential status. They had succeeded in attracting people to accept Sufism, and cherish the Sufi shaykhs. These men were responsible for preparing the novices for mystical training through passing different stages (maqāmat) and states (ahwāl) and performing rigorous mystical activities until such time when they were sufficiently ready to reach the state of the self passing away in God (fanā'). Then they moved into the state of the self abiding in God (baqā'). (2) This state of baqā' was the final stepping stone towards the actual union with God, if the individual self became united with God it experienced the ecstatic contemplation of Divine Beauty. (3) That ecstasy (dhawq) was the final mystical venture which every Sufi always yearned to attain.

The first motivating attraction of Sufism would seem to be
the people's cherished desire to become affiliated to one of the
many Sufi orders. One might infer at this juncture that the
people had a psychological need of recognition and social
acceptance, reflected in the Sufi brotherhoods, for it was a
matter of pride for a devotee to be associated with one of the
venerable Sufi shaykhs as his master. This associative pride
of being identified with a mystical luminary would probably
be one of the foremost factors which had attracted them to
Sufism. During that period the Sufi brotherhoods which started
to emerge in the second part of the twelfth century A.D. were
attached to the names of the Sufi shaykhs, who either founded
them or whose names had somehow become linked with the orders,
for example, Qadiriyya, founded by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani
d. 1166); Mawlawiyya, founded by Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 1273);
Shadhiliyya, founded by Abu l-Hasan 'Ali Ibn 'Abd Allah
al-Shadhili (d. 1258).

Another possible attraction that had prompted the people
to accept Sufism during that period would seem to be their
earnest enthusiasm to attain and experience ecstasy (dhaqan)
which always culminated in the "union with God". It is quite
possible for one to gain a high rank from God through performing

1. See Trimingham, pp.9-22.
3. See Abu Zahra, p.329; also cf. Trimingham, Sufi Orders in
Islam, pp.3-4.
religious devotions as prescribed in the shari'a and possibly become one of the elite of God. But spiritual union with God must always proceed from a direct mystical experience.\(^{(1)}\) That subjective ecstatic experience peculiar only to the süfîs might be conceived by people to be a more immediate way of reaching God compared with the traditional observance of religious duties prescribed in the shari'a.

The third attraction to süfism as a popular religious movement is connected with mystical rituals in the süfî congregations. The süfîs of that period were led by a religious elite possessing the esoteric knowledge, 'ilm al-Haqîqa, which is the inner part of the exoteric shari'a. The people of that period might be attracted to participate in the performance of the süfî rituals such as mystical dancing (râqs) and listening to music and süfî odes (samâ') and chanting litanies. Ecstasy can normally be attained through incessant recitation of God (dhikr) and dancing. These rituals served to encourage people to join süfî orders.\(^{(2)}\)

The fourth potent factor responsible for attracting people to look up to süfism at that time was the people's conviction and acceptance of the fact that the great süfî shaykhs could work miracles (karamât).\(^{(3)}\) This ability to work miracles,

1. See Trimingham, p. 3.
2. Ibid., pp. 195-200.
3. Ibid., pp. 226-227.
being the exclusive right and speciality of the shaykhs would perhaps appear to ordinary people as the most wonderful mystical act. Thereby would the role of the shaykhs as really venerable and revered masters be boosted. The people would be filled with awe and adoration as a result of that extraordinary mystical performance which always brought esteem and reverence to the shaykhs. Mazzaoni(1) has stated that the performance of miracles draws the common man to the sufi saint and wins his heart by teaching him to attain communion with God.

The psychological satisfaction and emotional security which the people of Ibn Taymiyya's time derived from the shaykh's

1. Cf. M.M. Mazzaoni, Origin of the Safawids, p.42: "In fact there was something else that was drawing the common man away from the controversial arguments of the scholars, something which sounded understandable to him, something that had less to do with dogmatic beliefs and more with the real wonders of his life. For around him, in almost every town and city there was a 'holy man', a sufi saint, who could perform miracles or do actions which to the common people appeared truly amazing. This saint was attracting the common people away from the difficult and exacting problems of Islam the religion and, through local meetings, gatherings, repetitive prayers, simple monotonous singing, and even mass hysteria, the pious saint won the people's hearts with the promise of attaining the final stage of communion with God in a state of utter and supreme ecstasy."
blessings, combined with the need of social approval within the brotherhood, can be regarded as the most potent factor motivating them to accept Sufism. The people regarded the Sufi shaykh as a spiritual guide whom they always got in touch with both in time of distress and happiness. They were always seeking his blessings and advice on the many pressing problems which affected their religious and social lives. He played a vital role in Sufism due to the fact that he was the venerable shaykh or spiritual leader and the channel through which a novice could attain access to God by performing intense spiritual exercises and passing through stages and states, until such time when he was sufficiently ready to hold communion with God. He was the sole authority of the path (tariqa) and he acquired the necessary truths of the path and he taught his devotees the ways and means of attaining those truths. In his Ghunya, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani mentions that the leaders (shuyukh) are themselves the path to God, its guide and the doors of entry; therefore, every aspirant to God must seek a shaykh. Ibn al-'Arabi is also of the opinion that the masters are the representatives of God (nuwâb al-Haqq) in the world. The importance of the spiritual guide in the path is so great that no aspirant can attain any spiritual realisation without a guide. Abû Yazid al-Bistami expresses the view that anyone without a shaykh has the devil as his shaykh.

Mamlük Support for Sufism

The Mamlûks were formerly slaves, as their name implies, "those owned", who were purchased from Central Asia and served the Sultân and Amîrs as bodyguards. They assumed high military positions and in due course they attained independence and freedom. During the decline of the Ayyûbid dynasty, the successors of Saladin, the Mamlûks took increasing power in Egypt, until in 1250 they took complete control themselves. Mamlûk rule in Egypt lasted from 1250 - 1517; during almost all this time they controlled Syria too, especially in the time of Ibn Taymiyya. Two principal groups of Mamlûks may be identified: the Bahri and Burji Mamlûks. (1)

The response of the Mamluks generally towards the religious life of the Muslims was very encouraging because they safeguarded and protected Sunnî Islâm. (2) Following the precedent of Nûr al-Dîn (3) and the Ayyûbids, they gave the four schools of Islâmic law (i.e. madhâhib) official status within the Islâmic faith, (4) and eventually created four chief gâdis, one for each school.

1. Cf. E.I. article "Mamlûks".
3. Ruler of Aleppo from 1147 and of Damascus from 1154 until his death in 1174.
The Bahri Mamluks who were the dominant faction at the time of Ibn Taymiyya brought about political stability and good administration in Egypt and Syria. During their reign they generously assisted the spread of sufism and built many sufi convents. The great interest and active support they demonstrated in religious affairs ensured that they maintained Sunni Islam as the official creed of the state. It is noteworthy that in Mamluk times there was an official called the shaykh al-shuyukh who was responsible for the overall administration and discipline of the sufiis and liaised between the sufiis and the sultan. With regard to education, great emphasis was laid upon religious instruction besides other sciences. The role played by the 'ulama' in the Mamluk administration was vital to the Mamluks to provide them with religious legitimation, while the 'ulama' needed the Mamluks to provide stability. Thus they were not only advisers whose advice was sought in the running of the state, but also influenced the decisions and policies of the Amirs in administrative affairs. The Mamluks followed the example of Fatimids in Egypt and the Seljuqs in Iran in their recognition of the value of a network of madrasas, khawaniq and other religious establishments for the propagation of a particular religious view. They seemed to be motivated by a genuine religious impulse in this, but they were no doubt also concerned to consolidate their rule and sought therefore

the support of the süfís and 'ulamā’, giving them appointments to teaching and administrative posts.\(^{(1)}\) The relationship between the süfís and the 'ulamā’ seems to have been rather close during the period in which Ibn Taymiyya lived.

The convents or sanctuaries of the süfís remained centres of religious devotion and visitation.\(^{(2)}\) The Mamlūks themselves became disciples of the süfī shaykhs (for example, the Mamlük Amīr Jāshnikīr (d. 1310) had Abū Nasr al-Manbījī as his spiritual leader) and visited many tombs of the saints. Nūr al-Dīn Zankī and Mālik al-Nāsir Qalawūn, a good friend of Ibn Taymiyya, also built such kinds of khāneqa for the süfís.\(^{(3)}\)

Thus the social institution of süfīsm during the thirteenth century was strengthened by the mass establishment of the religious houses (zawāīa)\(^{(4)}\) and khawāniq, special mystical buildings of the süfī brotherhoods. Danner has remarked that, in Egypt and Syria, both the Ayyūbid and later Mamlūk rulers of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh’s day had khawāniq built in support of süfīsm.\(^{(5)}\)

2. Ibid., p.119.
4. Zawāīa is a plural of zawīya - Azawīya is a religious house (literally corner) which is being occupied by a süfī shaykh as his residence, where he teaches mystical activities.
The establishment of the khawāniq seems to have started during the period of the Seljuqs.\(^1\) The concept, if not the word, of zāwīya goes back to early Islam when such a place was used for religious instruction.\(^2\)

One would infer that the patronage afforded to them by the Sultāns, combined with the lavish gifts and donations they received from the masses, had made them economically independent.\(^3\) That economic independence always served as a strong incentive for them to take much care in maintaining their spiritual disciples. The sufis as a collective religious elite enjoyed much respect, high esteem and profound reverence from the common people, who tended to accept unquestioningly the authority of the sufī shaykhs.

\[\text{\scriptsize {1. Cf. Danner, p.28.}}\]
\[\text{\scriptsize {2. Gibb & Kramer, Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam (1953), art. zāwīya.}}\]
\[\text{\scriptsize {3. Cf. Sartain, pp.12-16; 86; also pp.118-119.}}\]
CHAPTER I

THE CREED OF HAMĀ : IBN TAYMIYYA'S RESPONSE TO MYSTICAL AND METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE QUR'ĀN

The Creed was written by Ibn Taymiyya in 1299 A.D. as a response to the request from the people of Hamā to give a religious advice (fatwā) on some anthromorphic verses of the Qur'ān. (1)

The treatise of Hamā, while of enormous significance for the understanding of Ibn Taymiyya's theology, is also of importance for his relationship with the ṣūfīs because it provoked the reaction of influential ṣūfīs such as Abū Nasr al-Manbījī (719/1319), Ibn ‘Atā‘ Allāh (709/1309) and Ibn al-Makhlūf (718/1318). They interpreted it to the authorities emphasizing what they tried to show to be the anthropomorphic tendency in it. These ṣūfīs had always been bitter enemies (2) of Ibn Taymiyya and utilised this treatise to charge him with anthropomorphism which was punishable with imprisonment. (3)

An event which took place six years after the composition of the Creed of Hamā may serve further to illustrate

the constant tension existing between Ibn Taymiyya and the ṣūfī shaykhs. Ibn Taymiyya wrote a long letter(1) to Shaykh Abū Nasr al-Manbījī in which he attacked Ibn al-ʿArabī and those who followed his teachings. That letter provoked the anger and resentment of Ibn al-ʿArabī's most important followers: al-Manbījī and Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh. Both of them denounced Ibn Taymiyya and brought him under the displeasure of Amīr Jāshnikīr under whose orders Ibn Taymiyya was gaaded.(2)

Al-Shaykh al-Manbījī had a great influence as a ṣūfī shaykh and was held in high esteem both among the masses and the ruling class. He had a religious house (zāwiya) which was being visited by many people as well as amīrs and judges (qudāt) and among them was Amīr Jāshnikīr who was the chief disciple of al-Manbījī. It was that very al-Shaykh al-Manbījī who was bitter about Ibn Taymiyya's attacks on Ibn al-ʿArabī and had always been searching for ways and means by which he could retaliate against the insult cast on Ibn al-ʿArabī by Ibn Taymiyya. In connection with the tradition of the Prophet about descending (nuzūl) that "God descends to earth", Ibn Taymiyya was said to have made a practical demonstration when he was on a dais preaching and said, "God descends to earth like my descending now," and then he descended a step down from the dais. So, al-Manbījī made use of Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation of nuzūl and other anthropomorphic interpretations contained in the creed of Ḥamā to charge him with tashbīḥ. He incited the scholars and ṣūfīs against

Ibn Taymiyya and claimed that he was guilty of anthropomorphism and his refusal to acknowledge seeking help of the Prophet (istigfâtha). As a result of al-Manbiji's machinations and incitement, Ibn Taymiyya was incarcerated in 705 A.H. (1)

It should be noted also that Ibn al-Makhluf accused Ibn Taymiyya of corrupting the minds of many people by his creed of Hamâ which he characterised by the doctrine of anthropomorphism (tajsim) and he branded anybody holding those views as an infidel. Al-Manbiji and Ibn al-Makhluf suggested that Ibn Taymiyya should be summoned to Cairo so as to recant his anthropomorphic views but he refused and remained ever adamant. (1)

The dispute over the literal and metaphorical interpretation of the Qur'ân centred on four main concepts. These were Yad (hand), Wâjh (face), 'Ayn (eye), 'Arsh (throne). It would be useful in order to understand Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation to outline the views of major Qur'ânic commentators before him and this will also help to show how the metaphorical interpretation had become more influential.

The Views of Some of the Major Commentators on the terms Istiwa', Yad, Wâjh

The Muslim commentators whom we have chosen give a general picture of Qur'ânic commentary. Al-Tabarî, who is essentially

a collector of earlier views, al-Zamakhshari, who represents the Mu'tazila viewpoint, and al-Baydawi, who is more orthodox.

1. God's sitting on the Throne (istiwa')

(a) Tabari seems to be very silent about God's sitting on the Throne. He neither gives literal nor figurative interpretation. All he says about istiwa' is simply other people's views that some people have interpreted the verse, thumma-s-tawå'ilâ s-samâ', (1) as "Then He turned or approached the heavens". He explains istiwa' as 'ulû' and irtifâ', meaning height and elevation respectively.

(b) According to Zamakhshari, the verse which reads, "The Beneficent who is seated on the Throne", is a metaphorical statement of the Throne implying power or kingdom (mulk). He states that if we speak of someone as sitting on the throne, it does not literally mean sitting, but it has metaphorical meaning of power. (2)

(c) Baydawi also uses figurative explanation of the istiwa' to imply power of God. He says it indicates the perfection of the power and will of God (i.e. Kamal qudratihi wa iradatihi). (3)

1. Qur'an, XLI, 11.
2. Hands of God

With regard to the verse which reads: "That which I have created with both My hands", (1) (a) Tabari's interpretation about the "hands" of God is literal, without any figurative explanation. He says plainly that God created Adam with His hands. He even quoted a *hadīth* on the authority of Ibn 'Umar that God created four things with His hands, viz.: the Throne, Paradise of 'Adn, the Pen and Adam. (2) (b) Zamakhshari alludes to figurative interpretation, "hands" here imply power (*qudra*) from which God created Adam and asked Iblīs to prostrate before him but Iblīs refused because he felt himself to be superior to Adam who was created out of clay (*tin*), while Iblīs was created out of fire (*nār*). (3) (c) As for Baydawi, he interprets "hands" of God by explaining that God created Adam without any intermediary such as father and mother, because other human beings have been created by God through the media of the biological union of the parents. (4) It seems that Baydawi gives the impression that God created Adam with His hands literally.

In another verse, the Jews said that "God's hand is fettered", (5) and He replied "Their hands are fettered and

1. Qur'an, XXXVIII, 76.
5. Qur'an, V, 64.
accursed for saying so. Nay, but both His hands are spread out wide in bounty'. (1) (a) Al-Tabari's view of "His hands are spread out in bounty" implies that God is most liberal, generous and openhanded, giving out His bounties, riches and favours to whomever He wills. (2) Zamakhsharî says that "hands" here do not imply physical hands but were used figuratively to imply God's generosity and bounty. (3) So the words yadâhu mabsûtâti imply that God is most generous and bountiful as against the accursed Jews who said His hand is maghûla, i.e. fettered. (c) Baydawi is also of the opinion that "God's hands are spread out in bounty" is a metaphorical verse implying a direct affirmation of God's bounties, generosity and openhandedness. (4)

With regard to the verse which reads, "God's hand is above their hands", Tabari, Zamakhsharî and Baydawi unanimously agreed on the metaphorical interpretation of the verse to imply two things: (a) that the pact and covenant of the Prophet at Hudaybiyya with the infidels of Mecca is like making a covenant with God -- just like the verse which says, "Anyone who obeys the Messenger is obeying God". (6) Therefore, by swearing allegiance to the Prophet, they were making allegiance to God and any sort of allegiance to the Prophet was essentially an allegiance to

1. Qur'ân, V, 64
5. Qur'ân, XLVIII, 10
6. Qur'ân, IV, 80.
God. (b) The second interpretation of "God's hand is above their hands," implies that God's force or power overshadowed their power. (1)

3. Wāḥ, Face of God

With regard to "Countenance of Your Lord" (2) (wāḥ rabbikā), Tabarî declines to give either literal or metaphorical explanation of the verse about the Face of God. He only states the might and glory (jālāl and ikram, respectively) which qualify the countenance of God. (3) Zamakhsharî, and also Baydâwî, interpret the verse as implying the Being (dīhāt) of God, that everything on earth will be destroyed except the Being of the Almighty. (4) This explanation sounds to be more figurative than the literal physical face.

On the whole, it can be maintained that Ibn Taymiyya's interpretations of the Qur'ān, and some basic dogmas of faith, always tended towards a more anthropomorphic interpretation, a tendency which he seemed to have inherited from his predecessors (i.e. Ḥanāfîs) who have made little or no recourse to metaphorical interpretation of the shari'ā. His treatise of Ḥamā and its

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sister al-Wäṣitiyya\(^{(1)}\) both brought about the accusation of anthropomorphism (tashbih) levelled against him by his opponents, particularly the Ash'arites.

**Interpretation of the Süfis**

Istiwā', Yad, ‘Ayn, etc.

The süfis also generally tend to explain their mystical doctrines and terminologies allegorically or metaphorically with a deliberate intent of making those doctrines obscure to non-süfis. Ibn al-‘Arabi says that the usage of technical terms by the süfis was a mercy so that a non-süfi might not deny any mystical truths lest he would be penalised for that. Similarly, their interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses was always mystical, which revealed their understanding of the esoteric knowledge of the shari‘a.

In his discussion of anthropomorphism, Ibn al-‘Arabi expresses the view in his Futūhät that we must always stick to the incomparability (tanzih) of God so that when we describe Him, we should make that description to be most appropriate and most fitting to His essence.\(^{(2)}\)

1. **Istiwā’**:

   According to Ibn al-‘Arabi, the word istiwā’ implies


settlement (istiqrār), turning to (qusūd) and authority or control (istīylā'). He further says that istiqrār is one of the features of the human body which cannot be applied to God, the Most High—except when we use it to imply affirmation (thubūt) of God. The word “turning to” (al-qasd) means “will” (irāda) which is one of the features of God, because the verse thumma-s-tawā' ilā-s-samā' means "then He turns (or wills) to the heavens". Therefore, istawā' al-‘arsh means God's authority, power or control. (1)

In another place in the Futūḥat, Ibn al-‘Arabī gives an allusion to istiwā' as the majesty of God, (2) and that istiwā' is a hint of God's gracefulfulness, kindness (lutf) and beauty, completenes (jamāl). At this juncture, Ibn al-‘Arabī's interpretation of istiwā', which is metaphorical, essentially agrees with that already expressed by Zamakhsharī and Baydāwī.

2. and 3. Eye ('ayn) of God; Hand (yad) of God

Ibn al-‘Arabī's interpretation of the verses which describe God as having eyes and hands, alludes to the fact that those verses are descriptions which are unknown and have been used to avoid anthropomorphism. The most probably explanation is that Ibn al-‘Arabī was speaking allegorically to indicate the fact that although such verses contained physical descriptions, yet those descriptions (of God's eyes and hands) were unknown and

2. Ibid., p.321.
3. Ibid.
should not assume an anthropomorphic interpretation. (1) In this regard, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s interpretations of the hands and eyes of God also correspond with those of Zamakhsharī and Baydāwī.

The Creed of Hamā

The question posed by the people of Hamā reads: "What is the view of the eminent scholars and Imāms of religion, may God be pleased with them, concerning the verses on the attributes of God, such as: 'The Beneficent who is seated on the Throne', and some traditions of the Prophet bearing on some attributes of God such as: 'The hearts of the sons of Adam are between the two fingers of the Beneficent, and the Almighty puts His feet in the fire'", etc. (2)

Ibn Taymiyya started responding to those questions on the attributes of God, first by mentioning the praises and thanks due to God, as his usual attitude of thanking God, and stressed the fact that his view was no more than what God, His Prophet and the Imāms of religion have said about the attributes of God and His sitting on the Throne. He then gave a long and detailed elaboration of the attributes in the anthropomorphic manner in which they appear in the Qur’ān, without allowing any figurative exposition. His fundamental objective regarding the attributes of God and His sitting on the Throne had always been

The dictum that God should be described only in the appropriate manner in which He has described Himself or in the manner in which His Prophet, the Companions from among the Emigrants and Helpers, and those who followed them in goodness, have described Him without going beyond the limits of the Qur'an and hadith. Ibn Taymiyya further explained that the self-descriptive dictum of God should not in any way reflect likeness to the human beings, for "nothing is like Him", because God has real essence, attributes and actions most fitting to His Being and nothing is comparable to those characteristics. He has all the attributes of perfection and is devoid of all anthropomorphic tendencies, for His sublimeness encompasses everything.

It is important to note at this juncture that although Ibn Taymiyya's insistence on literal description of God's sitting on the Throne provoked the anger of his opponents who accused him of anthropomorphism (taashbih) and heresy, in fact he seems to be most insistent on maintaining that the attributes of God should not be described anthropomorphically. He always emphasized that nothing was comparable to God, though we could describe Him as having hands, face, etc., but His hand is not like our hand, His face is not like our face, both being attributes peculiar to His sublime Being. It would seem

2. Ibid.
ironic that Ibn Taymiyya was also attempting to refrain from anthropomorphistic interpretation, though his adversaries had accused him of anthropomorphism, a tendency which he always tried to avoid.

God's sitting (istiwā'), as described in the Qur'ān, should be understood in the manner in which it was described without alluding to any metaphorical interpretation. (1) The Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal is also of the opinion that God can only be described in the manner consistent with His description in the Qur'ān and sunna. (2) Imām Mālik Ibn Anas is said to have been asked by a certain man: "Tell us about the verse, "the Beneficent who is seated on His Throne", how is He seated?" Mālik raised up his head and declared: ""Sitting" is not unknown, "how" is illogical and belief in it is compulsory, while asking about it is an innovation (bid'ā) and I think you are an innovator (mubtadi'ī)', and he asked him to get out." (3)

Ibn Taymiyya quoted the above report about Mālik in order to indicate that his own views reflected those of earlier leading scholars. He, in fact, claimed that his interpretation was the interpretation of the Salaf.

The Hanbalīs generally clung to the teachings and traditions of their predecessors (al-Salaf) which they believed to have

2. Ibid., p. 438.
3. Ibid., p. 443.
been derived either from the Prophet and his Companions or from the immediate followers of the Companions. (1) The stringent religious formalism which characterised their school of theology was influenced by their master Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, (2) the famous founder of the Hanball school of law, who insisted on interpreting the shari'ā by utilizing only the Qur'ān and Sunna with little or no recourse to metaphorical explanation. His tendency, which subsequently influenced the followers of the Hanbalī school, was characterised by literal interpretation of the Qur'ān. (3) That literal interpretation of the basic Islamic sources and the fact that they often seemed to have recourse to anthropomorphic tendencies, separated the Hanbalīs from their adversaries, the Ash'arites, who always resorted to opposite means of interpretation of the shari'ā, namely the use of speculative method, logic and reasoning as well as figurative interpretation. (4) Ibn Taymiyya, being one of the great Hanball scholars, stuck rigidly to the system of his predecessors of strict adherence to the normative sources of Islam. (5)

2. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 A.D.) was the founder of the Hanbalī school of law and theology. It is often claimed that Hanbalism is hostile to theology (kalām) and sufism. The rigidity and dogmatism of the Hanbalīs rest on their insistence on the Qur'ān and Sunna as basic sources for interpreting the shari'ā and recognising no other source.
With the emergence of scholastic theology in the ninth century A.D., the introduction of rational interpretation of the shari‘a, particularly on some Qur’anic verses bearing on the attributes of God, had been deemed necessary. The Ash‘arites emphasized that there was a need to employ metaphorical interpretation to Qur’anic verses such as God’s sitting on the Throne. The Ḥanbalī school emerged during a period when there was considerable theological speculation. Instead of resorting to speculative reasoning, the Ḥanbalīs adopted the adage of going back to the normative sources of Islam and the Salaf. This is why they avoided any use of rational interpretation and resorted to the dictum of describing God "as He describes Himself", thus denying any scope for speculative, rational or philosophical interpretation, the utilization of which they thought would damage the spirit of the shari‘a; for that interpretation is bound to alter the meaning of some Qur’anic verses as they appear in the Qur’ān. The conflict between the Ḥanbalīs and the Ash‘arites culminated in the persecution of the Ḥanbalīs in 705/1305 by the Ash‘arites. (1) Prior to this, there had been an attempt by the chief gādī of Egypt, Ibn Makhlūf, who had initiated a kind of persecution against the Ḥanbalīs of Egypt as a result of Ibn Taymiyya’s increasing influence. (2)

With a view to retaining their formal literalism and tradition, the Ḥanbalīs seemed to remain adamant and uncompromising.

with regard to their insistence on the use of literal interpretation for some Qur'ānic terms such as face, hand and sitting of God. They thought that these must be described in the manner in which they appear in the Qur'ān, without asking "how", because they were special attributes with which God has described Himself. Ibn Taymiyya had all the time emphasized the fact that the opinion of the Salaf had always been between ta'tīl (negation of the attributes of God) and tamthīl (comparability with men).\(^1\) In other words, they admit the fact that God possesses some physical attributed characteristic to His essence though such attributes are not anthropomorphic because they could not be comparable with human attributes for nothing is like Him. The Salaf neither described the attributes of God as comparable to those of human beings nor denied Him those attributes by which He has described Himself.\(^2\)

Ibn Taymiyya further explains that the whole crux of the matter had always been the dictum which had been advocated by the people of the golden mean i.e., Ummat al-Wusta, that God is appropriately seated on His Throne in the manner most fitting to His majesty, for He knows everything, He has power over all things, He sees and hears everything.\(^3\) The Almighty is therefore always seated on the Throne, though we cannot compare the characteristics of His sitting to those of the contingent

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 440.
beings. The Mu'attila (those who deny the attributes of God), in their zeal to safeguard and protect the essence of God from being described anthropomorphically, always denied any attributes to God, because His sublime essence is always devoid of those characteristics such as face, hand, eye or sitting, etc., which are only applicable to the human beings. They argued that it is not logical to describe God as sitting on the Throne, for such a description would imply three things: if God were to be seated on the Throne, then the hypothesis would be either He becomes bigger than the Throne, or smaller, or the right size for it. (1) Now, all those speculations are impossible fantasies which are far from being linked with God. His manner of sitting is most appropriate and most fitting with the majesty of His essence and not linked with any of the above suppositions. The Mumaththilun (anthropomorphists), on the other hand, advocate a clear and physical description of God's sitting, comparable to human sitting on chair or bed. They argued that if God could be said to have been seated on the Throne, then His sitting would be comparable to that of a man sitting on a chair. (2) Here, Ibn Taymiyya summarized the two positions as follows: while the doctrine of ta'ttil denied God's actual sitting on the Throne, the doctrine of tamthil affirmed His sitting on the Throne comparable to the characteristics of human sitting. (3)

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
The intermediate view, which lies between ta'tīl and tamthīl, has been supported by Ibn Taymiyya. It is that in which the Salaf neither denied the attributes of God such as hand, face, sitting, etc.; in such a manner that He becomes devoid of all characteristics, nor described His features to be comparable to those of the human beings, but they only described Him with those attributes as they appeared in the Qur'ān, i.e., "describe Him as He has described Himself". (1)

Ibn Taymiyya considered that the whole controversy regarding anthropomorphism had its central theme on the dictum of the Qur'ān that God is seated on the Throne. Now, if that dictum is closely examined, four different propositions can be inferred, each supporting the actual manner in which God can be conceived to have been appropriately seated on the Throne.

(a) The Mu'attila virtually denied any sort of God's sitting on the Throne, for He is devoid of characteristics such as hand, face or sitting. (2)

(b) Mumaththila positively affirmed God's sitting on the Throne to the extent that they described His sitting as comparable to that of a man sitting on a chair. It seems most evident that Mumaththila are the real anthropomorphists who have virtually likened all divine attributes to those of a human. They are

2. Ibid.
sometimes called Mushabbihah. (1)

(c) Ash'arites always maintained a figurative or metaphorical description of God's sitting to imply majesty, power or control. They have always refrained from any form of anthropomorphism. (2)

(d) Ahl al-Sunna. The view of the Ahl al-Sunna, which Ibn Taymiyya always advocated in the name of al-Salaf, is the intermediate idea that God's sitting on the Throne is unequivocally positive, although He neither is devoid of the physical characteristics nor is His sitting comparable to human sitting and attributes. However, it is emphatically stated in the Qur'an that "He is seated on the Throne" and He should be described as He describes Himself without any negation or alteration. (3)

Ibn Taymiyya regarded the doctrine of ta'til as rationally convincing because in his view God could not be conceived as devoid of basic attributes, otherwise it would be relegating Him to being an empty being without some physical characteristics most fitting to His sublime Being. Such a relegation would be tantamount to His not being a living God. For to relegate Him simply to pure essence with sublimeness would not make any sense and that negation of the attributes would fundamentally contradict His basic attributes of seeing, doing and hearing.

2. Ibid., pp.440-442.
3. Ibid., p.438.
The attributes of face, hand and sitting on the Throne, as described in the Qur'ān, apply essentially to Him, though He cannot be described anthropomorphically, for he is above human description. (1)

The doctrine of tamthīl, on the other hand, is also logically unacceptable, for it is a ridiculous anthropomorphism to attempt a description of God's sitting in human terms. God's sitting is not and never will be comparable to man's sitting on a chair, (2) for that would relegate His omnipotence and omniscience, because "nothing is like Him".

The Ash'arite view, which partakes of the rationalism of the Mu'tazila, was that the hand, face, eye or throne, as they appear in the Qur'ān, should be figuratively interpreted to imply power, majesty and control of God. (3) But it raises the question of whether by the use of metaphors there is the denial of God's basic attributes of having face, hand, eye or posture of sitting most fitting and appropriate to His Being.

The view of al-Salaf, always advocated by Ibn Taymiyya lies essentially in the intermediate position between taʿṭīl and tamthīl and opposed to that of the Ash'arites. The Salaf, according to Ibn Taymiyya, always advocated the fact that God is

2. Ibid., p.439.
3. Ibid., p.460.
positively seated on His Throne without "how"(1), because it is not man's concern to explore the characteristics of His sitting. His attributes of face, hand, or Throne should not be interpreted to imply majesty, power or control because such interpretation has not been stated in the Qur'ān. What has been mentioned in the Qur'ān, however, is always to the effect that we should describe God as He describes Himself. The characteristics of hearing, seeing, face or hand are attributes which He affirmed to Himself, and when we describe Him, the description has to tally and correspond with those attributes.

Ibn Taymiyya has quoted a number of traditions of the Prophet to substantiate the dictum of God's sitting on the Throne and the general attributes (sifāt) of God. "Bayhaqī has narrated that the four Imāms, namely: Malik, the Imām of Hijāz; Awzā'ī, the Imām of Syria; al-Layth, the Imām of Egypt; and al-Thawrī, the Imām of Iraq, all believed that God is seated on the Throne. They also believed in the attributes of God as they appear in the Qur'ān and Sunna."(2) It has also been narrated on the authority of al-Walīd Ibn Muslim who said, "I asked Malik Ibn Anas, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Layth ibn Sa'd and Awzā'ī about the attributes of God. They said: 'Teach the attributes as they have been narrated' and, in another version, 'Teach the attributes as they have been narrated, without how.'"(3) The phrase "as

2. Ibid., p.441.
3. Ibid., p.442.
they have been narrated", and the axiom "without how", are rebuttals to the Mu'attila and Mumaththila.

The different and conflicting views regarding God's sitting on the Throne and His existence in the Heavens have given rise to the most controversial issues in theological matters among the Islamic sects, each interpreting its own understanding about the speculation of God's sitting on the Throne. The ahl al-Sunna always advocated the view that God is firmly seated on His Throne in Heaven, "without how", but only in the manner most appropriate to His essence. They unanimously accepted the attributes as they appeared in the Qur'ān and Sunna, taking special care not to explain "how", for such an elaboration or description would be tantamount to the violation of the attributes. (1) But in opposition to the ahl al-sunna the Mu'tazila rejected the attributes and the idea of God's sitting on the Throne and conceived Him as simply pure essence, devoid of any attributes separate from His essence which might impair His Godhead. (2) The ahl al-sunna always substantiated their seemingly anthropomorphic interpretations from the verses of the Qur'ān. For example, they emphasized that (i) God is seated on the Throne: "The Beneficent who is seated on the Throne"; (ii) His hands: "Nay, but both His hands are spread out wide in bounty."; (iii) His eyes: "That ran (upon waters) in Our sight as a reward for him who was rejected."; (iv) His face: "There remains but the Countenance of your Lord

2. Ibid.
Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the heterodox sects which he enumerates as Mu’tazila, Khārijites, Harūriyya and Jahmiyya have always resorted to metaphorical interpretations on Qur’ānic verses such as al-Rahmān ‘alā-l-‘arsh istawa‘ (i.e. The Beneficent who is seated on the Throne) to imply that God has tremendous and extended control over all things. They have also rejected the view that God is in Heaven so as to avoid locating Him in a particular and specific place; instead they advanced the theory that He is everywhere. Their pantheism is mainly focussed upon denying that anything could limit God because He transcends limitations. (1) But the ahl al-sunna strongly opposed the pantheistic view of God’s location. They argued that if He were to be conceived as being everywhere, then we might locate Him in various places which would be very inappropriate and unfitting to His Being and such pantheistic description could relegate Him to being put on the same level with the base contingent beings. We should therefore avoid that relegation and describe Him as being existent: in Heaven, as the Qur’ān describes Him, without asking how. (2)

It is quite evident that Ibn Taymiyya’s Qur’ānic interpretations differ remarkably from those of the Mu’tazila, Ashā‘ira and the Sufis. The interpretations of the Sufis, which

2. Ibid., pp.460-61.
tend to be allegorical, correspond conveniently with the metaphorical interpretation of the Mu'tazila and Ash'ā'ira. In view of the fact that sufis' interpretation is figurative, while that of Ibn Taymiyya tended to be more anthropomorphic, that difference in the interpretation of Islamic basic sources has been one of the root-causes of friction between Ibn Taymiyya and his contemporary sufis who used his creed of Hamā to incriminate him for the offence of anthropomorphism.
CHAPTER II

IBN TAYMIYYA'S CRITIQUE OF
IBN AL-ʿARABI'S MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY

This chapter concerns Ibn Taymiyya's critical study of Ibn al-ʿArabi's mystical philosophy. The chapter attempts to examine briefly the biography of Ibn al-ʿArabi, discuss his mystical corpus, the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujūd) and the major theories of his fixed prototypes (al-aʿyān al-thābita) and their relations with God. It is also the primary concern of this investigation to examine and assess Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Ibn al-ʿArabi's two fundamental systems and detect the areas of conflict and disagreement between the two scholars. We also hope to find out the reasons for Ibn Taymiyya's acerbic attacks on some sufi shaykhs, particularly Ibn al-ʿArabi, the main target of his criticism.

A Concise Biography of Ibn al-ʿArabi

Ibn al-ʿArabi, the Spanish venerable mystic who lived from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, offered invaluable contributions to Islamic sufism. His peculiar mystical doctrines which may seem to a layman to be too technical and inconsistent with the simple sufism, emerged from his literary production, particularly al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, the Meccan Revelations and the Fusūs al-Hikam, the Wisdom of the Prophets.

His full name is Shaykh Muḥyī-ʾl-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī Ibn
ash-al-'Arabi, well known as Shaykh al-Akbar. Born in 1164 A.D. at Murcia in the south east of Spain, his family had traced their origin to Hātim al-Ta'ī (the Islamic poet) and they had a reputation for piety and mysticism. His religious education was comprehensive and comprised all Islamic disciplines. His intellectual curiosity motivated him to grasp and utilize all the educational sources available in the libraries of southern Spain. He remained in Seville for thirty years where he met most of his early spiritual shaykhs. In al-Futūḥât al-Makkiyya, he says that in the course of an illness, he enjoyed a vision which changed the course of his life, leading him to regard his earlier years as a period of jahiliyya. In 1202 he made a pilgrimage to Mecca where he stayed for two years, frequently performing tawaf, reading and meditating and enjoying many mystic visions and dreams. It was here that he wrote his Taj al-rasā'il, Ruh al-Quds and began in 1202 al-Futūḥât al-Makkiyya.

Ibn al-‘Arabi travelled extensively in Spain, North Africa and Asia Minor. He did not seem to find encouragement with regard to the spread of his mystical ideas during the period of Almohades and, as a result of this, he decided to move eastwards. He found Egypt an uncomfortable and perilous place in which to stay. Mecca, the cradle of Islam, appealed to him. He stayed there for eight years composing his system and actively teaching

1. Affifi, Mystical Philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabi, p. XV.
3. Affifi, Mystical Philosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabi, p.XV.
and writing. Finally, he settled in Damascus which was very conducive to literary production and it was there that he completed his major works Futūḥāt and Fusūs.

One of the significant facts to be remembered about Ibn al-‘Arabī’s mystical influences which had affected him during his travels, was the mystical vision ruʿya, which he experienced in Mecca and Damascus. It was in Almeira that he was initiated into Sufism and met many Sufi shaykhs who motivated him to take active part in mystical enterprise. He was deeply influenced in Almeira by the school of Ibn Māsarrah,\(^1\) whose mystical ideas he adopted and merged into his own mystical system. His contact with the famous Sufi shaykhs in Spain and North Africa also gave him a profound inspiration which paved his way in mystical preparation for becoming a great Sufi.

Another interesting feature about Ibn al-‘Arabī’s mystical development was his bold claim, which was always characteristic of Sufis, of being "commanded" by God in a vision (ruʿya) or in a dream (hulm) to do something for the benefit of the Sufis or write about mystical truth. Fakhri has attested that type of peculiar Sufi claim which always leads to activities of mystical significance. He writes: There in Mecca ... he was "commanded" to begin writing his voluminous work, al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya and met the girl who was to become his wife, a Persian Sufi.\(^2\)

2. Ibid.
On the basis of his bold claim of being "commanded" to write about mystical truths, Ibn al-'Arabī seems to be claiming authority from God for his mystical activities. In other words, it would seem quite probable that he was trying to justify the authenticity of his mystical actions as binding and authoritative, because they came to him not as a result of his whims and caprices, but primarily due to his piety, devotion and intensive mystical training. For example, Ates told us that Ibn al-'Arabī wrote his major books Rūḥ al-Quds, Futūḥat al-Makkiyya and Fusūs in compliance with the order he received in a dream. "Fusūs al-Hikam was dictated to him in Damascus by the Prophet in a dream."(1)

It is indisputable that Ibn al-'Arabī, with his exceptional and mystical perception which made itself visible in his enormous literary output, had really occupied a highly prominent place in the history of Islāmic sufism. His arrival into the field of sufism is to be regarded primarily as a turning point in the subsequent development of sufism, because his unusual mystical doctrines have to a large extent transformed sufism into a kind of philosophy. These mystico-philosophical doctrines, as we shall see later in the following pages, have a direct bearing on diverse philosophies which he managed to draw upon in building his own peculiar system. He was a distinguished and cultured man of his time and had attained an intellectual reputation. He was also noted for his varied cultural background in literary,

legal, mystical and theological matters; and above all his mystical expertise brought him into such prominence that he was often referred to as "al-Shaykh al-Akbar". (1)

Ibn al-'Arabi's Doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud or the Unity of Being

Before discussing Ibn al-'Arabi's ideas we should remark that he uses some technical and mystical terminologies interchangeably. Sometimes the same terms express the same idea while on other occasions they are used in a different sense. The reason is simply that his style tends to be ambiguous, disorderly and incoherent. Affifi says: "It is not the subject about which Ibn al-'Arabi writes that is difficult to understand, it is the way he expresses it". (2) Therefore, one needs to study carefully the context of the ontological and metaphysical doctrines and terms which Ibn al-'Arabi uses before one is able to draw a final conclusion about the precise meaning of those terms. The ideas presented here do not purport to be a comprehensive picture of Ibn al-'Arabi's mystical philosophy. They are only those which caused Ibn Taymiyya to write refutations of them.

Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud, i.e. Unity of Being, is the major element in his ontological and mystical system. It has provoked heated controversy both from within

2. Affifi, p. XIX.
and without the circles of the sufis.

The basic teaching of Ibn al-'Arabi's Wahdat al-Wujud is the doctrine that "existence is one and a unity". This is elaborated by his views that the existence of the Creator (al-Khaliq) is the 'ayn (substance or underlying reality) of the existence of creatures. Thus the existence of the phenomenal world is an actual manifestation of God.

Ibn al-'Arabi does not seem to accept the notion of the possibility of different finite and temporal existences, separate and distinct from the existence of God. According to him, there is only one real absolute existence (al-Wujud al-Mutlaq) which is the origin and source of all other existences, which are in fact manifestations of that existence. Their multiplicity is a unity testifying the reflection of His necessary existence (Wajib al-Wujud). Thus it would seem that on the basis of Wahdat al-Wujud, the finite existence of all created things (al-kainat) living and non-living things, the human, animal, vegetative and mineral kingdoms, jinn and the entire multiplicity of things in this universe, including impurities, unbelief, immorality, idolatry, corruption, disobedience and righteousness is intrinsically manifesting and extrinsically demonstrating the 'ayn (substance or underlying reality) of that

4. Also see Abū Zahra, Ibn Taymiyya, p.331.
Absolute Existence (al-Wujūd al-Mutlaq), or Absolute Reality (al-Haqq al-Mutlaq), as he sometimes refers to it.

Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrine seems to be asserting that without His being Absolute Reality or Absolute Existent, the contingents of al-khalq would not have become existent. Ibn al-‘Arabi explains the unity which exists between the Absolute Reality and the khalq, by saying, in the Futūḥāt, that the Lord and the servant are one and the same thing and that there is no basic difference between the Creator and the creature since the creature is essentially revealing and reflecting the Creator.¹

He further states that the Absolute Reality can be understood in two ways: al-Haqq (the Real) when we regard it as the ‘ayn of all phenomena and al-khalq (contingents) when we regard it as the phenomena manifesting that ‘ayn.² Sometimes he explains the Reality in terms of the One (³) (al-Haqq; the Real) and the Many (al-khalq; contingents). When he speaks of the Haqq and Khalq he is referring to the inner and outer aspects of the One. In other words, as Affīfi has stated: "The One stands to the Many in relation of a substance to its accidents".⁴ That

³. In Ibn al-‘Arabi’s ontology the One is the Haqq. The Real which is everywhere and the only Reality in existence is something like the Islamic God.
⁴. See Affīfi, op. cit., p.12.
is why Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes says Haqq is Khalq and Khalq is Haqq or I am He and He is I etc. (1)

When Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of "Haqq is Khalq" he seems to be explaining that the Absolute Reality is the 'ayn (substance or underlying reality) of all phenomena, and "Khalq is Haqq" implies that the phenomenal world is nothing but a manifestation of the 'ayn of the Real. (2) "Haqq is not Khalq", according to Ibn al-'Arabi, means the Absolute Reality which is the omnipotent, self-subsisting, eternal, and the source of all other existences, is not the same as the Khalq which is temporal and dependent on the Absolute Existence. "Khalq is not Haqq" implies that the transient and dependent created beings (phenomenal world) cannot be conceived to be the Haqq, which is the Absolute Reality. "I am He", according to Ibn al-'Arabi, means that I am His manifestation i.e. the outside aspect of the One; and "He is I" means that He is the 'ayn of my manifestation, etc.

One of the peculiar features which arose out of this doctrine was Ibn al-'Arabi's view that existence being one and a unity, the worship of idols is legitimate, because it is not the idols that are the objects of reverence and worship but God who is the 'ayn of all things, so by invoking the idols we are in fact invoking God. (3) Ibn al-'Arabi says that the people of

Moses who worshipped the cow, were in fact worshipping God. (1) Pharaoh could claim, according to Ibn al-`Arabī, divinity for himself by saying: "I am your Lord the most High." He was, according to Ibn al-`Arabī, the 'ayn of God. Ibn al-`Arabī also rebuked Noah for prohibiting his people from idolatry, but condoned them worshipping idols because such worship is the same as worshipping God. (2)

According to Ibn al-`Arabī's monism, the Absolute Reality, whose existence was the existence of the Khalq, was the 'ayn of all things. In spite of the fact that the Khalq was the 'ayn of the Hagg, Ibn al-`Arabī seemed to deny the reality of the Khalq because their existence was finite and he admitted the existence of only one Absolute Reality. (3) Ibn al-`Arabī's view seems to allude to the idea that since the Reality was the 'ayn of the phenomenal world and the Khalq were manifesting evidential proof of the existence of the Real, then it followed that the reality of both the Hagg and the Khalq is but one. This seems to be the reason for him maintaining that there is only one Absolute Reality in existence. The doctrine of regarding the Absolute Reality as a unified whole, testifying that the totality of the universe was a reflection of a transcendent Absolute Being, demonstrates that Ibn al-`Arabī was a monist.

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2. See Nadwi, p. 70.
On the other hand, aspects of the same doctrine enable us to describe Ibn al-‘Arabī as a pantheist. Thus, he says in the Futūḥāt: "Glory be to God who created things, being Himself their a‘yān." (1) At the same time, it should be understood in terms of his ontological doctrine that nothing really exists except Absolute Existence. The phenomenal world (Khalq) is finite and unreal, compared to the Reality (al-Haqq). (2) 

Some other sufīs, the gnostics (‘ārifīn), see God in everything because He is the Hidden and the Apparent and there is a symbol, a sign in everything which testifies that He is One. So, "God is everything" and He penetrates everything with His immanence. (3) ‘Abd al-Baqī seems to explain Ibn al-‘Arabī's pantheism by stating that although God is evidently manifest in everything and His immanence is observable in numerous forms, it does not, however, mean that there is plurality in His essence.

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1. Ibn al-‘Arabī, Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, vol. II, p. 604. This statement has aroused suspicion of heresy among the circles of both the sufīs and ‘ulamā’. Some sufīs, like Alā' al-dawlatal-Simnānī, have bitterly criticised Ibn al-‘Arabī's pantheism. We shall later discuss that criticism.
2. See Affīfī, op. cit., p. 55.
Reactions to Wahdat al-Wujūd

The Unity of Being, as we have earlier mentioned, became a subject of dispute and criticism among the 'ulama' and sufis because it seemed to be contrary to the accepted belief of the unity of God which had been expressed in the sharī'a. Ibn Taymiyya felt that the Unity of Being as it stands, seems to be an expression of the denial of the existence and Unity of God which makes it unacceptable to the generality of Muslims. (1) The critique came not only from without but also from within the circles of the sufis.

It is significant to remark that it was not only the renowned theologians like Ibn Taymiyya who took active part and exerted relentless efforts to criticise Ibn al-'Arabī, but also some prominent sufis, like the Iranian mystic Alā' al-dawlat al-Simnānī (2) (1261-1336) and the Indian mystic Ahmad.

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2. Landolt tells us that al-Simnānī read Ibn al-'Arabī's Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya about the praise of the Divine Being: Subḥānā man 'azhara -l-ashyā' wa huwa 'aynūhā. "Praise be to the One who made things appear and who at the same time is their essence". Simnānī commented on this by writing the following into the margin of his own copy of al-Futūḥāt: "Oh Shaykh! If you heard someone saying that the excrement of the Shaykh is identical with the existence of the Shaykh, /you
al-Sirhindī(1) (1564-1624). Al-Simnānī, who seems to be a mild ṣūfī, branded the Wahdat al-Wujūd as a heresy due to its relegation of the sublime Unity of God and even asked Ibn al-'Arabī to repent.(2) Al-Sirhindī also attacks Ibn al-'Arabī for equating the existence of God with that of creatures.(3)

It seems that Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujūd

you certainly would not accept this from him; no, you would be angry. How, then, is it possible for a reasonable being to apply such nonsense to God the King and Judge? Return to God by sincere repentance, so that you may get out of this dangerous intricacy for which even the materialists, the naturalists, the Greeks (the philosophers) and the Buddhists have only disdain! Peace upon those who follow the Right Guidance." p.100.

1. Cf. 'Azīz Ahmad, Islamic Culture in Indian Environment, pp.187-188.
2. H. Landolt, op. and loc. cit.
3. Ahmad al-Sirhindī was a seventeenth-century Indian mystic, though his mysticism did not attract him to entertain mystical doctrines which were the main features of some ṣūfīs. He declared the Wahdat al-Wujūd of Ibn al-'Arabī as heretical for its relegation of the Unity of God. In his criticism, Sirhindī says God is essentially unique in both His actions and qualities. It would be wrong, he says, to conceive any created object to be part of Him. Al-Sirhindī substituted the Wahdat al-Wujūd with the Wahdat al-Shuhūd, i.e., Unity of Witness.
may have been taken from the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism.\(^{(1)}\)

Täha `Abd al-Baqī expresses a view that both the theory of the Unity of Being and that of Incarnation are doctrines which have emanated from alien religious ideas quite unknown in Islām. Abū Zahra also holds a similar view that both the above doctrines are exotic religious ideas which were imported into Islām.\(^{(2)}\)

On the whole it seems that the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujūd of Ibn al-`Arabī, although becoming influential in certain Sūfī circles, did not receive universal support and was strenuously denounced by some of the `ulamā'. Although the whole existence of the physical world is basically the manifestation of God, it may seem erroneous to try and identify that illusive manifestation as identical with the absolute existence of the Supreme Being. The existence of the contingents never will be, in any sense, identical with absolute existence of the Necessary Being. The sensible world being unreal should not be confused with the actual Reality.

**Ibn al-`Arabī's Theory of al-A'yan al-Thābita or Latent Realities of Things**

Another distinctive doctrine of Ibn al-`Arabī's mystical philosophy was the theory of al-a'yan al-thābita, the latent

realities of things, or the fixed prototypes. Affīfī is of the opinion that Ibn al-‘Arabī was the first Islāmic mystic to speak and write a comprehensive exposition of al-ā'yān al-thābita which occupied a prominent place in his theory of Wahdat al-Wujūd. Ibn al-‘Arabī meant by al-ā'yān al-thābita realities (al-ha #), essences (al-dhawāt), or quiddities (al-ramāhiyyāt) of things which subsist in the Mind of God. In their relation to the physical world, these 'ayān can be described as potential. They subsist in a state of potentiality in the Mind and Essence of God. Since al-ā'yān constitute the contents of God's eternal knowledge, they are themselves not created in the sense of being caused. (4)

Thubūt is a philosophical term used by Ibn al-‘Arabī to designate the state of latency or potentiality, i.e., what he calls abstract existence (wujūd al-aqīl) or wujūd al-dhīmlī for example the existence of man's māhiyya, quiddity, in abstract state. When he refers to al-ā'yān al-thābita, he means the existence of the intelligible world, wujūd al-‘ālam al-ma'qūl; which comprised the realities of things or their essences corresponding to the sensible world al-‘ālam al-khārīji al-mahṣūs, which contained created beings. (5)

2. Ibid., p. 209.
3. See Affīfī, Mystical Philosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabī, pp. 47-48; also see Arnold, The Legacy of Islām, p. 224.
These a'yan could be regarded as ideas existing in the Divine Mind of God and they always remained the contents of God's knowledge. When they assumed concrete manifestation they became things in the physical world. By creating the whole creation, God revealed Himself to Himself in an infinity of forms. The relationship of the creation towards God is something like that of an image to a mirror, in other words, the creation is essentially a reflection and manifestation of God. Ibn al-'Arabi goes further by making the claim that the existence of the creation is a'yan of God's existence.

It will be recalled that we have described Ibn al-'Arabi as an eclectic mystic whose profound intellectual perception, together with his broad spiritual vision, urged him to select from diverse sources, theories or doctrines which he evaluated, adapted and eventually accommodated into his peculiar mystical system. It is no wonder, therefore, if we find his theory of al-a'yan al-thabitah to be a combination of ideas derived from diverse sources. The theory of al-a'yan may seem to be something like Plato's theory of Form (mathal) though they are not identical. Ibn al-'Arabi's theory of al-a'yan is much more complex than Plato's. It is more like the Mu'tazilite theory of ma'dumat (non-existents) and Ishraqi's theory of intelligible

1. Affifi, op. cit., p. 32.
2. Ibn al-'Arabi means that God revealed Himself in the a'yan which are themselves reflections of His eternal knowledge. Cf. Arnold, op. cit., p. 224.
existence, and he does seem to have selected some of these ideas and merged them into his mystical system. (1) This seems quite probable because he often refers to his al-a'yan as things non-existent (ma'dūmāt), a term which he undoubtedly borrowed from the Mu'tazilite theory that al-ma'dūm, the non-existent, is something (shay') having substance, essence and characteristics. (2)

The leading men of the Mu'tazila such as Abū Ya'qūb al-Shahhām, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī and his son Abū Ḥāshīm, Abū-l-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt, Abū Abdullāh al-Baṣrī, Abu-l-Iṣḥāq Ibn Iyāsh, as well as Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār Ibn Ahmad, all claim that non-existents (al-ma'dūmāt), even before their concrete existence, are to be regarded as essences (dhawāt), substances (a'yān) and realities (hāqā'īq). (3)

Ibn al-'Arabī's expression of al-ma'dūm as something thābit (latent) implies that the non-existent (al-ma'dūm) is already fixed as something positive in its state of latency or in the abstract state. By al-a'yān al-thābita, he seems to be asserting that prior to their concrete existence, things of the sensible world have their a'yān (substances or underlying realities) already fixed, thābita, in intelligible existence. (4)

Although Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes calls *al-a'yān al-thābita* non-existents (i.e. *ma'dūmāt*), he does not use the term in the sense that they have no reality or being, he means that although they exist in potentiality with 'essence (*dhāt*) and 'substance (*'ayn*), they have not yet assumed external or concrete existence, and therefore, they are non-existents. It seems most probable that a careful scrutiny of Ibn al-'Arabi's theory of *al-a'yān* would certainly reveal some similarities between them and Plato's theory of *Ideas*. We are told that Plato describes his *Ideas* as "true substance", (1) as "existing in reality", (2) and as "existing eternally". (3) This seems to demonstrate the fact that the similarity which exists between Ibn al-'Arabi's *a'yān* and Plato's *Ideas* is that while the former describes his *a'yān* as realities, essences and quiddities which exist in the intelligible world, the latter also conceives his *Ideas* as true substances which are eternal and exist as "forms". One may infer from what has been said about the possible similarity or connection between *a'yān*, *ma'dūmāt* and *Ideas*, that Ibn al-'Arabi's theory of *al-a'yān* seems to have been based on both the Mu'tazilite doctrine of *al-ma'dūmāt* and Plato's theory of *Ideas*. If we examine the three terms carefully, i.e., *al-a'yān*, *Ideas* of Plato; and *ma'dūmāt* of Mu'tazila, we shall be able to arrive at a definite conclusion that they seem to share common fundamental features. The general features and characteristics relating to them can be summarised

2. Ibid., p.308.
3. Ibid., p.442.
as follows:

1. While the Mu'tazila describe the non-existent, al-ma'dūm, as something positive in latency, having existence, Ibn al-'Arabi's al-a'yān are also things eternally existing primarily in the Mind and Essence of God. (1) Plato's Ideas also share the common characteristics of being true substances which eternally exist as forms. (2)

2. Al-ma'dūm of the Mu'tazila and al-a'yān of Ibn al-'Arabi both have characteristics of essence (dhāt); quiddity (māhiyya); and reality (ḥādīqa). Both Ibn al-'Arabi and the Mu'tazila claim that the dhāt of al-a'yān and al-ma'dūm is not caused by God, but God grants existence to its dhāt. Thus both al-ma'dūm and al-a'yān are eternal, a view which has been sustained by Ibn al-'Arabi and Mu'tazila. Plato's Ideas are also real substances and eternal having "existed eternally". (3)

3. Al-a'yān and al-ma'dūm both seem to share the same fundamental characteristic features which affirm their existence. These are al-sifāt al-dhātiyya, the qualities of essence. In other words, before attaining concrete existence, both al-a'yān and al-ma'dūm have the qualities of essence which warrant their

existence. With regard to Plato's theory of Ideas, we are told that they are real, a statement which seems to indicate that they have qualities of essence in the world of forms, because they "exist in reality".

Ibn al-'Arabi discusses the role of al-a'yān. The realities of things are externally known to God and "give" His knowledge to Him by virtue of their being that which He knows of them. His creative Word (Kūn, "Be"!) actualises their existence, but properly they bring themselves into existence. He only wills what they have in them to become.

Ibn al-'Arabi seems to make a distinction between what he calls the creative command of God, i.e., al-amr al-takwini; and religious command, al-amr al-taklīfī. The former confirms the activity or command which is required by the nature of al-a'yān and must take place at a particular time. There is no violation of this creative command; it is inevitable, for example, the destruction of an evil nation. The religious command is imposed by God on mankind like the divine teachings conveyed by the Prophets, but can be violated by their respective peoples.

For example, Pharaoh obeyed al-amr al-takwini, by claiming divinity for himself, because the nature of his 'ayn required the occurrence of that action, although in doing it he disobeyed the al-amr al-taklifi which forbids polytheism. The activity of a sinner and his disobedience, the obedient and his obedience are subjected to al-amr al-takwini, because both the obedient and disobedient are acting on what is required by the nature of al-a'van. This idea might be understood in the sense that from eternity God has decreed the occurrence of an action which is inevitable and unalterable. According to Ibn al-'Arabī, God's actions are subjected to the requirements of al-a'van since they are the contents of His knowledge and His reflections.

Ibn Taymiyya's Critique and Refutation of Ibn al-'Arabī's Fundamental System

The purpose of this section is to present Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Ibn al-'Arabī's two basic teachings as they appear in his mystical doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujūd. He observes that Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine is based upon two fundamental teachings.

1. The existence of creatures (al-khalq) is the substance ('ayn)

1. Affifi, Mystical Philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabī, p.47.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.32.
of the existence of the Creator (al-Khāliq).

2. The non-existent (al-ma'ādūm) is something (shay') positively fixed (thābit) in non-existence (al-'adam).

With regard to the first of these, Ibn Taymiyya says that he had examined and scrutinised Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujūd and found it to be heretical because its contents cannot be consistent with the teachings of Islam. (1) This is due to the fact that in his monism, Ibn al-'Arabi seems to deny the existence of God (al-Khāliq) because he equated the existence of the Supreme Being with that of the contingents. (2)

In his criticism and refutation of Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine that existence is one and a unity in so far as the necessary existence of the Creator is the same as the potential existence of the contingents, Ibn Taymiyya remarks that the monists and those holding that view are incapable of making any distinction between the existence of the Creator (al-Khāliq) and that of the created (makhluq). He says that the difference between al-Khāliq and al-makhluq is quite manifest and apparent since al-Khāliq is the origin and source of all existences, His existence being

eternal; while the existence of al-makhlūq is temporal and transient. (1) Although they seemed to understand the multiplicity of creation, nevertheless, they became confused in their enthusiasm to unify the multiplicity of the contingents with the existence of God to reflect one absolute existence. Ibn Taymiyya also criticises Ibn al-‘Arabī's theory of al-a‘yān in which their existence is essentially the existence of God. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, the monists, cannot make a demarcation between God and created beings, neither the essence (dhāt) of the Creator nor that of the created.

He compared them to a person who saw the beam and mistook it for the sun. (2) Ibn Taymiyya says that Ibn al-‘Arabī seems to be asserting that the Creator has not any necessary essence (dhāt wājiba) distinct from the essences (dhawāt) of the potential. But Ibn Taymiyya emphasises the view that al-Khāliq who is eternal has absolute essence (dhāt) which is distinct and different from all other secondary essences (dhawāt). (3) He remarks that the monists have made an error in unifying and merging the dhāt essence of God with that of His contingents so that their essence becomes one. Ibn Taymiyya says that this doctrine violates the divine message of the unity of God which has been brought by rusul (Messengers of God). (4) He further explains that Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, who hold the view

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that the existence of al-a'yān is the substance or underlying reality of God's existence, seem to be isolated from the group of people who have acknowledged the existence of the Creator, such as the Muslims, Christians and Jews. (1)

Ibn Taymiyya also rejects Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine that the essence of God is soft and fine (latīf) which he calls al-Haqq, while that of the contingents is thick and condensed (Kathīf) which he calls Khalq. Ibn Taymiyya regarded this doctrine as absurd (bātil) since the two essences are basically different, the former being eternal and the latter temporal and dependent on the former for its existence. Therefore, it is inconceivable to regard al-Haqq as the same as al-Khalq. He emphasises the fact that the existence of al-Haqq cannot be said to be predicated by anything transient, i.e., al-Khalq. (2) It would seem logical, therefore, that the existence of the contingents (Khalq) would never be the substance ('ayn) of the existence of the Supreme Being (al-Haqq). Ibn Taymiyya seems to be maintaining that it is true that the phenomenal world is a clear and overt manifestation of the existence of God, since He is their Creator (al-Sāni') and Lord (Rabb); and they are His created beings (al-makhluqāt), but it will be baseless (bātil) to describe that manifestation as being identical with His substance. (3)

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In his assessment and evaluation of Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine that the existence of Khalq or al-a'yân is the substance of the existence of Al-Haag, Ibn Taymiyya identifies four fallacies which he has ascribed to Ibn al-'Arabi. (1)

1. He says that with his doctrine of wahda (monism), Ibn al-'Arabi denies the existence of God (Inkar wujud al-Hagg) because he maintains that existence is one and a unity; no Creator and no created. (2)

2. Ibn Taymiyya also seems to be asserting that with the above doctrine of wahda, Ibn al-'Arabi is in fact denying God's creating creatures (i.e. Inkâr khalqihi li-makhlüqatihi) since the existence of Al-Haag is the same with that of Al-Khalq, the former neither supersedes nor creates the latter. (3)

3. Ibn Taymiyya further states that Ibn al-'Arabi does not differentiate between the Creator and created, both being equal. (4)

4. Ibn Taymiyya says that Ibn al-'Arabi is advocating the view that on the basis of wahda there is no lordship (rubûbiyya) except that of al-a'yân, which are themselves independent of God's actions. (5)

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5. Ibid., p.58.
It is clear from the four points enumerated by Ibn Taymiyya that he did not accept Ibn al-`Arabi's doctrine that the existence of al-Hagg is the substance of the existence of al-Khalq. In fact, he branded the doctrine as a heresy only acknowledged by Pharaoh and Qaramita who have also denied the existence of the Creator al-Sani'.

Ibn Taymiyya also seems to reject some teachings of Ibn al-'Arabi which are central to the latter's main doctrine. For example, he utterly rejected Ibn al-`Arabi's thesis that al-ma'udum, al-a'yan and al-mawjudat pre-exist as ideas in the Mind of God, having quiddities, essences and substances, before attaining physical existence.

Ibn al-`Arabi claims that God's knowledge of His creatures comes through al-a'yan, and not through a kind of knowledge independent of those al-a'yan, because they are indispensable to God since He needed them for His knowledge. But in his rebuttal Ibn Taymiyya says that this theory is absurd (bati'il), because God knows all things even before their creation, with His eternal knowledge. "Should He not know what He created? And He is the Subtle, the Aware."

Ibn Taymiyya says this verse is an ample proof for God's

2. Ibn Taymiyya, Ibid., p.50.
knowledge of things. Ibn Taymiyya has made some inferences at this juncture, that:

(a) God is the Creator of those things.

(b) That the creation comes through His independent will and not through the necessity of al-a'yān.

(c) That the things originated from Him since He is their cause of existence.

(d) His omniscience warrants the knowledge of all things, because His eternal knowledge is independent of al-a'yān. (1)

There seems to be a tendency by Ibn al-'Arabi to deny some God's aspects of power, since he made God's will dependent upon the requirements of al-a'yān and He acted only on what they required. Ibn Taymiyya says this is what Ibn al-'Arabi calls "secret of fate" (i.e. sirr al-qadr); in which God is rendered impotent and unable to do anything or act upon what is independent of Him like those al-a'yān; (2) except what He found already required in latency('adam). In his enthusiasm to refine God from all that is inappropriate to Him, Ibn Taymiyya remarks that this type of impotence and incapability which Ibn al-'Arabi ascribed to God and called sirr al-qadr is "sheer unbelief (kufr); even those of

his like who are astray would not entertain that fallacy."(1)

In his criticism of al-ma'dūm, Ibn Taymiyya observed that Ibn al-'Arabī's idea of al-ma'dūm seems to be a direct adoption of the Mu'tazilite theory of the non-existent, particularly the theory of their principal teachers who have claimed that the non-existent is something fixed and established in the state of latency. He further states that the first teacher among the Mu'tazila to express and advocate the theory of al-ma'dūm "was Abū'Uthmān al-Shahhām Abī 'Allī al-Jubbā'ī and his followers from the sects of al-Qadariyya and al-Rāfida."(2) These people have claimed that the existence of al-ma'dūm in latency is possible because its reality, (ḥaqīqatuhu), quiddity (māhiyyatuhu) and substance ('aynuhu) are already established in latency, i.e., fī-l-'adam. Ibn Taymiyya remarks that this theory of al-ma'dūm is absurd (bātil), since it cannot be comprehended and its existence is not rationally possible and therefore, "it can be described as illogical and absurd."(3) Although the Mu'tazila have admitted the existence of al-ma'dūm in potentiality, however, they did not seem to assert its existence to be the substance of God's existence as it was boldly expressed by the master of al-Fusūs (i.e. Ibn al-'Arabī) "who has claimed that

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the existence of al-\textit{ma'düm} is the substance of God's existence." (1)

Ibn Taymiyya asserts that those who have maintained al-\textit{ma'düm} to be something fixed in latency have argued that its existence is either created by God or that it is eternal. Generally they seem to have tended to the view that it was eternal. They did this, according to Ibn Taymiyya, because they maintained \textit{al-mahiyyät} (quiddities) and \textit{al-a'yān} (substances) were also eternal (uncreated) since the existence of something is an additional feature to its quiddity and therefore, its essence is a quality of the existent (\textit{al-mawjūd}). (2)

In view of the fact that the exponents of al-\textit{ma'düm} asserted that it is something existing in the state of potentiality (even though it did not assume external concrete manifestation, its essence and quiddity being uncreated) it would seem to be self-sufficient and independently existing, and not to depend upon any external existence to attain its own existence. The inference to be deduced here would seem to be that al-\textit{ma'düm} is eternal. (3)

The eternity of al-\textit{ma'düm}, as we have already mentioned, is in line with Ibn al-‘Arabi’s \textit{al-a'yān al-thābita} with regard to their existence in potentiality, emphasizing the fact that al-\textit{ma'düm}, like \textit{al-a'yān}, though uncreated by God still continues

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to exist through Him. Ibn Taymiyya explains that the advocates of the eternity of al-ma'dūm share the same view held by "those who claimed the eternity of the world and matter" (al-Dahriyya), who boldly maintained that these contingents always exist through God, because they have eternally emanated from Him out of necessity of His nature on the analogy of the rays emanating from the sun.

Ibn Taymiyya rejected not only the existence of al-ma'dūm but also its eternity which he considered to be logically untenable. According to him, al-ma'dūm cannot be rationally comprehensible because it does not exist, not only in the state of overt concrete existence, but also in the concealed and potential existence. He argues that the latent state is both vacuum and void which is inherently useless and ineffective and therefore cannot logically be conceived to contain anything which can be said to exist or to have eternal essences and quiddities. Al-ma'dūm cannot be conceived to be eternal, argues Ibn Taymiyya, since it does not have any existence and its condition or state of latency deprives it of consideration for any existence either in potentiality or in the overt and concrete manifestation.

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Clearly, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya have entirely opposite and conflicting theories of al-ma‘dūm, which cannot and never will be reconcilable because while the former perceives it to be something fixed and established in its latency, having essence and quiddity, the latter, on the other hand, rejected its existence in potentiality. He regarded such an existence as basically absurd and impossible, because it was in the state of void.\(^1\)

But despite his rejection of al-ma‘dūm as something intrinsically capable of attaining existence and essence of its own accord and being self-sufficient of any existence, Ibn Taymiyya seems to allow a concession for its recognition as "something intelligible in knowledge."\(^2\) This seems to imply that he accepts the conceptual form of al-ma‘dūm in the intellectual sense or in the abstract terms as something; but not in physical terms. Ibn Taymiyya comments that to conceive al-ma‘dūm as something existing in potentiality having essence and quiddity and being self-sufficient of any higher form of existence, will amount to "a stark absurdity."\(^3\)

In his refutation and rejection of the theory of al-ma‘dūm, as propounded by Ibn al-‘Arabī to be something existing by itself in the state of potentiality (‘ādam), Ibn Taymiyya clearly

states in his *Majmū‘at al-Rasā’il wal-Masā’il* (1) that "al-ma‘dūm is absolutely and intrinsically nothing in itself. Its being fixed, i.e. creation and existence is the same thing." (2) In other words, it cannot be conceived to be something prior to its creation, because it is only the existing element that can be said to have substance (‘ayn), essence (dhāt), or existence (wujūd). He says that it cannot be logically substantiated that *al-ma‘dūm* should have existence in its state of latency. He stresses the view that this is the conclusive orthodox theory of the ahl al-Sunna, the sensible men among the sons of Ādam and those whose reasoning is not defective. He substantiates his view that *al-ma‘dūm* is logically nothing in itself and rationally absurd by quoting the following verses of the Holy Qur’ān: (3)

"He said: So (it will be).  
The Lord said:—‘It is easy for Me,  
even as I created you before, when  
you were naught.” (4)

In this verse God is saying that He created Zakariyya (out of nothing) and prior to his creation he was absolutely nothing. Another verse:

"Does not man remember that We created  
him before, when he was naught?" (5)

3. Ibid.  
5. Sura XIX, v. 67.
In this verse, God is telling us that prior to man's creation he was nothing in the state of latency.

Another verse:

"Or were they created out of naught? Or were they the creators?" (1)

God is saying that they were not eternal because they were created out of nothing and prior to their creation they were absolutely nothing.

Ibn Taymiyya cites the following verses to indicate the nothingness and ineffectuality of al-ma’dûm:

"And our word unto a thing, when We intend it, is only that We say unto it: "Be!" and it is. "(2)

"The Originator of the heavens and the earth! When He decreeth a thing, He says unto it only: Be! and it is." (3)

"She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal has touched me? He said: So (it will be). Allah creates what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He says unto it only: Be! and it is." (4)

1. Sura LII, v. 35.
4. Sura III, v. 47.
"Does not man remember that We created him before, when he was naught?" (1)

"But His command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says unto it: Be! and it is." (2)

These verses constitute for Ibn Taymiyya conclusive evidence that al-ma'dūm is literally nothing in itself, devoid of any characteristics of essence, being or existence. The proof of its nothingness is that if God intends or wills a thing, He only commands it, "Be!" and it is. God's manner of creation out of nothing does not need any prior effort or determinant force that is instrumental to its creation and its being brought to existence. The thing simply and obediently assumes existence from nothing out of God's power. (3) It should be remarked that prior to its existence, the object of creation (i.e. a thing being created out of nothing) did not exist in any sense of "essence" (dhāt); "substance" (fāyn); or "existence" (wujūd) in potentiality. (4)

But it seems that the proponents of al-ma'dūm have maintained that it was already fixed (thābit) and all that God did was to command it to assume physical existence. This statement seems

2. Sura XXXVI, v. 81.
to be in line with Ibn al-ʿArabī's thesis that God does not create anything. For creation, according to him, is the coming into concrete manifestation of an already existing entity.\(^{(1)}\)

At this juncture, Ibn Taymiyya boldly and tenaciously emphasized the fact that the Qurʾān has already explained that al-maʿdūm was neither created nor fixed prior to the time of its creation. "God created it at the time of His will when He intended it to be, then it assumed concrete existence; and before this concrete manifestation, it was absolutely and literally nothing." \(^{(2)}\)

Contrary to the radical view of the proponents of al-maʿdūm who asserted that quiddities are uncreated, Ibn Taymiyya sustained the opposite but orthodox view that the general orthodox theory of Ahl al-Sunna and those whose reasoning is sound is of the opinion that quiddities (mähiyyät) of al-maʿdūm are created (i.e. majūla), and that the quiddity of anything is its essence of existence.\(^{(3)}\) The existence of something is not an additional feature to its quiddity. There is nothing outside itself except its essence, being, reality and quiddity; likewise its existence and creation is not an additional characteristic outside itself.\(^{(4)}\) But it seems that the proponents of al-maʿdūm adhered to the view that existence is basically an additional characteristic to its mähiyya which is eternal. They argued that

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4. Ibid.
the existence of anything would warrant its additional features. The Ash'arites seem to support Ibn Taymiyya's view of rejecting the nature of al-ma'dūm in latency. They have claimed that the contingents (mumkināt) have no essence while in the state of potentiality ('ādam) and that they only attain their essences when they assume physical existence from the Real (al-Hagg). (1) In other words, the Ash'arites seem to deny the existence of essences in the intelligible world, or in the state of non-existence or in the potential state of al-a'īyān al-thābita, the same sort of denial expressed by Ibn Taymiyya.

Ibn Taymiyya says that the exponents of al-ma'dūm have made an error in their inability to differentiate between God's knowledge of things in potentiality and His knowledge of their physical manifestation. (2) He asserts that the view of ahl al-Sunna has always been to the effect that God has written the destinies of creatures, before their creation. Ibn Taymiyya says that God's knowledge of things in their potentiality has been inscribed in the Preserved Tablet, i.e. al-Lawh al-Mahfūz.

Ibn Taymiyya has chosen to understand the subtle and intricate mystical terminologies as expressed in the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujūd used by Ibn al-'Arabī literally. This literal understanding of mystical doctrines may have been the root-cause of Ibn Taymiyya's attacks on some Sufis. The reason would seem

to be the fact that, in every discipline, there are particular technical terms used by the experts to convey some kind of ambiguous ideas which relate to a doctrine or system, though such terms might appear to a layman as totally obscure, making the doctrine difficult. The süfis also have their own peculiar and in most cases obscure technical terms which could not easily be grasped by a non-süfī. They explained their mystical terminologies in figurative or metaphorical sense, which would appear to be incomprehensible or even nonsensical, if they are understood literally by a non-süfī. Ibn Taymiyya was not an expert süfī like Ibn al-‘Arabī. He was an outstanding jurist and theologian, while Ibn al-‘Arabī was a profound mystical thinker and sometimes expressed his mystical doctrines in poetic manner. Due to his eclecticism his doctrines always seemed abstruse. Masrūr is of the opinion that Ibn Taymiyya may have literally understood the mystical philosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabī and that literalism has led him to criticise some basic doctrines of the latter. (1) ‘Abd al-Bāqī tells us that Ibn al-‘Arabī says that süfis normally use mystical terminologies deliberately so that their doctrines become difficult to an alien (i.e. non-süfī) and that usage of the terms is a mercy, so that the non-süfī would not deny any mystical truth which he did not attain lest he would be punished for that. (2) This implies that although the süfis know very well the distinct and obvious truths concerning the pristine teachings of Islam, nevertheless, they are inclined to

1. See Masrūr, Ibn al-‘Arabī, p.194.
use their own peculiar terminologies to explain their doctrines which a layman could not easily comprehend. But it does not at all imply that all the doctrines of the süfīs are consistent with the šari‘a. Some of their teachings and utterances are difficult to reconcile with the šari‘a. Such apparent mystical incompatibility with the šari‘a is the main motive which impelled Ibn Taymiyya and his like to attack, criticise and try to refute the mystical deviations of the süfīs. His cherished hope always was to teach and guide his people to what he considered to be a pristine Islām and thus emancipate them from the corruptions of some süfīs.

Finally, it may be very difficult to reconcile the intricate and abstruse mystical views of Ibn al-‘Arabī with the fundamentalism of Ibn Taymiyya. While the former had formulated an eclectic philosophy of süfīsm, the latter branded those doctrines in that mystical philosophy as antinomian mystical teachings.

Ibn Taymiyya expressed his deep admiration of Ibn al-‘Arabī and respected him for his prodigious learning and expertise in Islāmic scholarship. He admitted the fact that "he used to have high regard and esteem for Ibn al-‘Arabī", due to the latter's important religious teachings that could be learnt from his al-literary production such as Futūḥat al-Makkiyya, al-Dūrrat al-Fākhira, al-Fūsūs al-Hikam and Matāli‘ al-Nujūm, etc. But he also admitted the fact that he did not examine Ibn al-‘Arabī's

main objectives, neither did he read *al-Fusūs* until he received a formal request from the people of Syria asking him to explain Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrines and mystical ideas. Some of the shaykhs of the East also asked Ibn Taymiyya about his opinion on the true teachings of Islam as well as the authenticity of the doctrines of the sufis.

In summing up the above discussions on Ibn Taymiyya’s critique of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s basic teachings, it is quite evident that the former distorted basic doctrines of the latter, particularly in the area of monism. While it is true that the existence of *al-Haqq* is essentially manifesting the existence of *al-Khalq*, Ibn al-‘Arabī does not accept the finite and temporal existences of the phenomenal world and therefore they are not the same, as wrongly understood by Ibn Taymiyya. The Absolute Reality (*al-Haqq al-Mutlaq*) which underlines the totality of the universe is the absolute being (*al-wujūd al-mutlaq*) which brought all other beings into existence.

Ibn Taymiyya also misunderstood Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theory of *al-a‘yān al-thābita*. Although they exist in latency as contents of God’s knowledge, they are not other than God, but exist eternally in His mind, just like the existence of His knowledge which, though eternal, is not other than God. The implication which Ibn Taymiyya fails to grasp with regard to those *al-a‘yān* is that while Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks of them as eternal and constituting God’s knowledge, they correspond to and are the same as the destinies of mankind inscribed in *al-lawh al-mahfūz*,
which are themselves eternal, constituting the knowledge of God. The significant point here is that both God's knowledge of al-lawh al-mahfūz and al-a'yān al-thābita are not separate entities outside the essence of God, but primarily aspects of His knowledge which is part of Him existing in His Mind. Therefore, there is a parallel between Ibn al-'Arabi's al-a'yān and Ibn Taymiyya's quotation of the destinies of mankind inscribed in al-lawh al-mahfūz. Though to be fair to Ibn Taymiyya, there certainly exist sufficient ambiguities in the language of Ibn al-'Arabi to make misunderstandings and misinterpretations only too likely. The fault for this must lie with Ibn al-'Arabi.

Ibn Taymiyya's Criticism of Other Prominent Sufi Shaykhs
Influenced by Ibn al-'Arabi

It is worthwhile to consider the fact that besides criticism of Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn Taymiyya had also condemned the mystical teachings of other important sufī shaykhs such as al-Tilimsānī (690/1291); Ibn al-Ḥarīrī (632/1234); Ibn Sab‘īn (699/1271); and Sadr al-Rūmī (d. 1293). He had censured their mystical doctrines in the same way as he did to their master, Ibn al-'Arabi, due to the fact that he regarded those mystical doctrines as antinomian sufī teachings. Ibn Taymiyya accused Tilimsānī of unbelief and violation of God's commandments, because the latter made legal what God had decreed to be illegal. For example, he legitimised marriage within the forbidden class and branded
the Qur'ān as polytheism.\(^1\) According to Ibn Taymiyya, unlike Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Tilimsāni did not differentiate between existence and affirmation of a thing (shay'). in the void, neither did he make any distinction between absolute existence (al-wujūd al-mutlaq) and specific existence (wujūd al-muʿayyān) as did al-Rūmī.\(^2\)

Ibn Taymiyya also condemned the monist teachings of Ibn Sabīn and the pantheistic doctrines of Ibn al-Fārid, the great mystical poet of the 13th century. Ibn Taymiyya quoted Ibn al-Fārid as saying: "Everything has a symbol manifesting that it is the substance of God."\(^3\) One might observe that this verse was an evident influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī's doctrine that the existence of creation is nothing but the substance of God. Ibn Taymiyya regarded that mystical verse as a rejection of God's essence and unity. He had always emphasized the fact that God is not and never will be a part of an attribute or identical with any of His creation, because He is essentially different from everything, having a unique essence and "nothing is like Him", a Qur'ānic verse which has been constantly repeated in revelations. Ibn Taymiyya states that those ṣūfī shaykhs such as the ones mentioned above were guilty of polytheism and violation of God's revealed law.\(^4\) He is also of the opinion that due to their antinomian mystical teachings and practices,

the appearance of those süfī shaykhs and their like was the main cause of the arrival of the / Tartars (i.e. Mongols). The infringement of the shari'ā among the Muslims could also be linked with the mystical corruption of those people.(1) Ibn Taymiyya maintained that those shaykhs who had always advocated doctrines of monism had paved the way for the arrival of Anti-Christ (al-Daijāl) who claimed to be God, the same way as those süfīs who advocated that God was everything.(2) He maintains that the Jahmites became infideis by their pantheism. But the Ittihādiyyin, continued Ibn Taymiyya, were the most astray and remotest from the shari'ā. Their doctrines encompassed all sorts of polytheism in the universe, because they did not believe in the actual unity of God; for what they believed was something between God and His creatures.(3) Ibn Taymiyya informs us that Ibn Sab'īn wanted to go to India where he could find polytheism practised everywhere since the land of Islām was inadequate for him to express and spread his pantheistic teachings.(4) It should be taken into account that Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of monism and pantheism was mainly directed against Ibn al-'Arabī, the chief exponent and proponent of those mystical doctrines. He subsequently criticised other prominent süfī shaykhs such as al-Tilimsānī, Ibn Sab'īn and others.

Maqdisi has put forward the view that Ibn Taymiyya was in fact a sufi. (1) He has argued that the Hanbalis in general were known to be advocates of constant recitation and meditation of the Qur'an - a feature of early Islamic mysticism. In addition he has cited certain Hanbali scholars who were admired by Ibn Taymiyya, such as al-Ansari, al-Harawi (481/1089) and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (561/1166), as being known sufi. Ibn Taymiyya himself strongly believed in and admired the mystical practices of the earlier mystics who flourished during the first and second centuries of Islam. He says that their mystical ideals and pious devotions were worthy of emulation, because their mystical teachings did not contradict the shari'a. He expressed his admiration of Fudayl Ibn Iyad (187/803), Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (200/816), Sarri al-Sagti (253/867) and Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir (561/1166). (2)

Apart from this sympathy with early mysticism and some of the later great mystical figures such as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, al-Maqdisi has produced evidence from a manuscript which shows that Ibn Taymiyya had received the shirqa of the Qadir order.

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1. See G. Maqdisi, "The Hanbali School and Sufism", and "Ibn Taymiyya: A Sufi of the Qadiriyah Order".
The manuscript, Bad' al-'ulga bi-labs al-Khirqa, which is attributed to a later Hanbali scholar, Yüsuf Ibn 'Abd al-Hädi (909/1503), purports to give the süfî genealogy which traces Ibn Taymiyya's pedigree back to 'Abd al-Qädir al-Jîlânî, through three intermediaries. 

Al-Maqdisî explains away Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms of süfism by citing such süfîs as al-Junayd, al-Bistämi, Sari al-Saqti, al-Husayn al-Nûrî and al-Ghazâli, who also criticised süfism without ceasing to be süfîs.

If this manuscript is authentic, it seems that it must be conceded that at some time Ibn Taymiyya became a member of the Qädirî order and at that time, at least, was sympathetic to the system of turug which had been established. A closer examination of Ibn Taymiyya's writings shows that he seems to have developed a somewhat different attitude later in his life.

1. Cf. Maqdisî, Ibn Taymiyya, p.79. According to Maqdisî the genealogy of the süfî chain (silsila) in which Ibn Taymiyya's name appears is as follows, in the descending order.

(1) 'Abd al-Qädir al-Jîlânî (561/1166)
(2) Abû 'Umar Ibn Qudâma (607/1210)
(3) Muwaffaq al-Dîn Ibn Qudâma
(4) Ibn Abî 'Umar Ibn Qudâma (682/1283)
(5) Ibn Taymiyya (661/1328)
(7) Ibn Qayyîm al-Jawziyya (751/1350)
(8) Ibn Rajab (795/1393)
The implication of receiving the *khīrga* was that one belonged to a particular *sūfī* order. The *khīrga* was used by the *sūfīs* as a means of indicating their affiliation to an order. In an authoritative *fatwa*, Ibn Taymiyya makes it clear that he regards the *khīrga* as simply a permissible apparel to cover nakedness. He totally rejects any other claims for it. He further condemns any initiation practice involved in receiving the *khīrga*, such as the drinking of water and salt, as invalid, being without any basis on the authority of the Prophet or any of the Companions. (1) As for the pledges that initiates have to make when receiving the *khīrga*, Ibn Taymiyya points out that the only acceptable ones are already required of Muslims and that any others are unacceptable to Islam. (2) The role of the *sūfī* *khīrga* is rejected as anything other than a piece of clothing, initiation rites are regarded as *bid'a* and the conditions or vows of the novice are only valid in so far as they conform to the requirements of Islam, and therefore there is no need for them to be made.

Ibn Taymiyya does not, however, totally reject the *sūfī* concept of brotherhood which has faith as its basis. He argues that brotherhood in general is a Qur'ānic precept enjoined on all Muslims and that it is a duty individual Muslims owe to

one another.  

(1) His conception of brotherhood is the same as that which has been expressed in the Qur'ān, namely the brotherly adherence of the faithful to a religious objective which was based on faith, because God says, "Verily the faithful are brothers." He also quotes the tradition of the Prophet which says, "The faith of each one of you is not complete, until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."  

(2) In other words, the brotherhood in Ibn Taymiyya's view is the one which unifies the faithful in a common religious objective through observing and abiding by the principles of the shari'ah and safeguarding the right and honour of each believer. But if some members of the brotherhood perform religious practices that are contrary to the shari'ah, then by virtue of their practices, they become worthy of blame and criticism till they recant. Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that establishing a brotherhood on the basis of a special alliance and pact such as that between the Muhājirūn and the Ansār could be permissible, though there was a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether or not such brotherhood based on treaty could be abrogated. Mālik and Shāfi‘ī supported the abrogation of brotherhood based on an alliance while Abū Hanīfa and Ahmad rejected the abrogation.  

(3) Ibn Taymiyya also criticises the practice of making a pledge to adhere to a particular tarīqa of a shaykh or a pledge of

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loyalty to the followers of a brotherhood.\(^{(1)}\). He says no one should make such kind of adherence as an aspect of religion, except that which is to be adhered to as decreed by God or taught by His Prophet. Ibn Taymiyya points out that it would be much better to act in accordance with the Qur'ān and Sunna, instead of making a pledge to adhere to a particular tarīqa which is involved in a variety of innovations.\(^{(2)}\)

It is clear from the above that whatever may have been Ibn Taymiyya's thought concerning the ṣūfī brotherhoods when he joined the Qādirī order, his later pronouncements leave little scope for public membership of an order as the whole initiation and public affiliation to an order have been rejected.

Ibn Taymiyya firmly condemned the rituals of the ṣūfī brotherhoods such as the innovation of mentioning the name of Allāh as a single term, entering fire, singing, dancing, drumming, and making dhikr and litanies (awrād) obligatory. He branded those rituals as antinomian and totally rejected the ecstasy that the ṣūfīs claimed they brought about. He even challenged the reliability of that mystical ecstasy (hāl, dhawq, wajd) and claimed that the recipients of the so-called ecstasy were vulnerable to devilish deceit and suggestions since they could have been deceived by the devil in imagining that they actually attained union with God, while in fact they attained

it with the devil. (1) His attitude to such rituals was formed early in his life. He mentions that, in his youth, he had been with a group of people, probably members of a certain Sufi order, because he described them as people of asceticism and piety (ahl al-zuhd wa-l-ibada). They intended to make a ritual of listening to mystical odes through which they could attain ecstasy, and invited him to join them in the ritual.

When he refused to join, they asked him to sit in a place they prepared for him. When their shaykh attained the mystical state, he uttered a faint statement asking Ibn Taymiyya to take his portion of the ecstasy. Ibn Taymiyya wondered about the purpose of their gathering and rejected the request of that shaykh, saying: "You take your portion of the ecstasy... as for me, I would not take any portion not coming from the Prophet." He maintained that the sensible among them realised that some members were under demonic influence while others were drunk. (2)

Ibn Taymiyya further explains the reason for his refusal by stating that the portion which the shaykh asked him to receive, and the so-called gifts and directives attained in the state of ecstasy, were all coming in a strange way incompatible with the shari'a. He says it is like inviting someone to take a glass of wine with some money as a reward for doing it. What may be gathered about his relationship with those people who performed the sama would seem to be the hypothesis that even

at this stage in his life, if he had been a member of that group, he definitely had withdrawn his membership, because he regarded their actions as contrary to the shari'ah. But if he had been there simply as a spectator, he still branded their mystical actions as innovations, outside the shari'ah.

It was the consciousness of antinomianism which always urged him to evaluate religious practices of his time and either approve or reject them. That was the sort of assessment he applied to all Sufi orders of his time. When we examine the Qadiryya order in his lifetime, we find that many innovative mystical rituals had crept into the order.

Those mystical deviations current in the Qadiryya order at the time of Ibn Taymiyya were not part of the order during the lifetime of the founder, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. We are told that there was no evidence that he ever claimed to have a Path or that he guided anyone or initiated anybody. The innovations introduced into the Qadiryya order were listening to poetry (sama') accompanied by musical instruments as an aid to attaining ecstasy, dancing and the innovation of mentioning the name of Allah as a single term. These did not exist during the lifetime of the founder. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani says those intending to make sama' (i.e. listening to the recitation of the Qur'an) should always direct it at the remembrance of God.

1. See Trimingham, op. cit., p. 42.
(dhikr) in their hearts. (1)

The organisation of the Qādiriyya order as an institution was not his making; it was his later followers who borrowed litanies (awrād) and other sūfī teachings and accommodated them into the order. Trimingham is of the opinion that in the course of time, a body of rules, teaching and practice was formed and some shaykhs began to associate their pupils with his name because his fame as an intercessor was spreading. It is interesting to note that in his Ghunya, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī does not seem to approve the use of musical instruments and dancing. We are told that music and rhythmic dancing were not introduced into the order until the time of his great-grandson, Shams al-Dīn. (2)

Therefore, one can see the reason why Ibn Taymiyya criticised the rituals performed in the Qādiriyya order, the very order to which he had been affiliated. The rituals he condemned were innovations introduced into the order by later followers and he regarded those mystical deviations as antinomian religious practices not acceptable in the sharī'a.

2. See Trimingham, op. cit., p. 43 (4). The period of his great-grandson may be 1300, about 140 years after 'Abd al-Qādir's death.
Ibn Taymiyya's Criticism of the Rifā‘iyya Sufi Order

The Sufi order which received Ibn Taymiyya's most severe criticism and condemnation due to its antinomian practices is the Rifā‘iyya order\(^{(1)}\) which was founded by Ahmad al-Rifā‘I (1106-1182). The reason for its being a victim of Ibn Taymiyya's acerbic attacks is because it contains many antinomian practices which he regarded as aspects of sheer unbelief and deviations from the shari‘a, though he admitted that among the members of the ṭariqa were men of worship and piety.\(^{(2)}\) This would indicate that the Rifā‘iyya order was characterised by a combination of nomian and antinomian mystical rituals and it was those antinomian practices that Ibn Taymiyya severely attacked. He noted that members of the order deceived people by performing fake extraordinary actions through which they gained people's confidence and loyalty. For example, they used magical devices by which they could enter fire, eat living snakes, produce honey, saffron and water, and place iron rings in their hands, necks and ears.\(^{(3)}\) Ibn Taymiyya felt that the performance of those supernatural actions was simply a deceit by which the followers of the Rifā‘iyya duped the common people into making them believe that those actions were miracles which testified to the piety of the

1. The Rifā‘iyya order is also known as Baṭā‘ihiyya, a name derived from Ahmad's centre in Baṭā‘ih.
Rifā'īs. He suggested that the Rifā'īs used to smear their bodies with fire-proof ointment and made use of wax and then entered the fire without being burnt or sustaining injury. He mentions having written treatises exposing the deceits and deviations of the Rifā'īs in his works. He says that he admonished them on several occasions to abandon those reprehensible mystical innovations, since they contradicted the shari'ā. He says he had challenged one of their shaykhs to wash off the fireproof ointment and enter the fire together with Ibn Taymiyya so that the impostor would be burnt. But, realising his deceit, the Shaykh refused.

It was in 705 A.D. that Ibn Taymiyya had an open confrontation with the shaykhs of the Rifā'īyya. Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī tells that the shaykhs of the Ahmadiyya-Rifā'īyya and a multitude of the Rifā'īs lodged a serious complaint to the governor (amīr) about Ibn Taymiyya's acerbic attacks on their shaykhs and condemnation of their mystical rituals, and asked the governor to stop Ibn Taymiyya from being hostile to their tarīqa and to take his hands off them and leave them alone. Ibn Taymiyya, who was there during this meeting, said that leaving them alone was not possible because they went outside the shari'ā. Everybody must come

together under the rule of the Qur'ān and Sunna and must abide by them in word and deed. He stressed the fact that it was an obligation to criticise and condemn anyone who went beyond the confines of the two primary sources of Islam, until he returned to them. The Rifā'īs determined to prove the legitimacy of their actions as a result of Ibn Taymiyya's critical remarks, by making a practical demonstration. But Ibn Taymiyya quickly interrupted by declaring that those actions were nothing but devilish performances and mystical deceit through which they deceived people by magic. He openly challenged the genuineness of their mystical performance of entering the fire, and said anyone among them who wanted to get into the fire should first take a hot bath by washing and rubbing his body with vinegar and potash and then get into the fire, if he was true in his claim. Ibn Taymiyya warned that even if one of the innovators succeeded in entering the fire, that action would not justify his piety, but would be indicative of the performance of a charlatan which was inconsistent with the shari'ā. (1) One of their shaykhs called Shaykh al-Munaybi admitted the fact that their mystical performances were irrelevant to the shari'ā, but maintained that they were efficacious against the Tartars. With that confession, the people who were gathered there lost confidence in the Rifā'īs, for they realised that their performances were deceitful. There and then, they were ordered to take off the iron rings from their necks and were asked to recant their devilish actions and mystical

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innovations. It was officially agreed that all followers of the Rifä‘iyya order must abide by the Qur'ān and Sunna and anyone found performing those mystical rituals would be beheaded. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya succeeded in suppressing the innovative mystical rituals of the Rifä‘iyya order. We are told that he wrote a book on the Rifä‘iyya order in which he exposed their deceits and mystical practices and explained what action was acceptable to the shari‘a and what ought to be discarded. (1)

It may be gathered from what has been discussed in this chapter about Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards süfism and süfi brotherhoods, that his primary concern was always to reform the Islamic society of his time and to suppress some exotic mystical doctrines and rituals which had crept into the süfi orders. His alleged hostility towards süfism, as has been wrongly circulated, is not focussed upon süfism per se but mainly on what he regarded as antinomian mystical practices which seemed to him to be incompatible with the shari‘a. He is a fundamentalist with respect for some aspects of nomian süfism, and that consciousness of nomianism always motivates him to criticise and correct what he regards as antinomianism in mystical and other religious aspects of Islām. (2)

2. The attacks of Danner and Laoust on Ibn Taymiyya's views show a lack of appreciation of the sincerity with which he held his views. While he may have rejected whatever did not conform to his view of Islām he, nonetheless, did
so out of a belief that the view he followed was the true interpretation of Islām. Danner, in recent comment on Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards Islām (V. Danner, Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh, p. 216), says Ibn Taymiyya had "accepted whatever could fit in with his own ideas on the nature of Islām and rejected whatever did not fit with his own scheme of things. This seems to reflect some misunderstanding of Ibn Taymiyya's fundamental objective. Ibn Taymiyya has never claimed or taught anything that could be said "to fit into his own idea of Islām." He never had any distinct idea of Islām that was exclusive to himself. He always believed that whatever he taught was always in accordance with the Qur'ān and Sunna. He strongly believed that all religious doctrines must be consistent with these two primary sources of Islām. Therefore, he understood his view of Islām to be what he regarded the Qur'ān and Sunna have decreed as binding on religious aspects. No one fully acquainted with Ibn Taymiyya's attempts at reform and versatile literary output would accept the sweeping conclusion that he "rejected whatever did not fit with his own scheme of things." (Danner, p. 216). This statement certainly sounds very subjective and again is indicative of lack of understanding of Ibn Taymiyya's primary goal. Ibn Taymiyya has never taught any religious reforms that did not seem to conform with his exoteric understanding of the Qur'ān and Sunna. Whatever he taught always comes either from the Qur'ān or from the
Sunna, and this is quite visible in his writings. Whatever he rejects must also be contrary to his view of the contents of the Qur'ān and Sunna.

Laoust's earlier comment about Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Jawzī with regard to ṣūfīsm (see H. Laoust, "Le Hanbalisme sous le Califat de Baghādād", R.E.I. XXVII /1952/, p.71) also demonstrates lack of comprehension of the essence of their aim. It is surely somewhat subjective to claim, as both Laoust and Danner do, "They would not have condemned such 'deviations', of course, if they had not felt that their own point of view was the only 'right one'.") It should be understood that Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Jawzī did not consider that they were teaching their own point of view in the Islāmic reform to which they had dedicated their lives. On the contrary, they were always concerned about what they understood the Qur'ān and Sunna had said.

It should by now be clear that what Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Jawzī had rejected were antinomian religious and mystical practices that have crept into Islām and it was that kind of antinomianism that they had always fought and condemned.
CHAPTER IV

SÜFİ RITUALS

Litanies and Dhikr in the Süfî Orders

Ibn Taymiyya seems to criticise the making of the litanies (awrād) observed by the members of the süfî orders as obligatory. He also criticises the mentioning the name of God as a single term, although he is not criticising the ḍhikr per se.

Although the followers of the süfî brotherhoods (ṭurūq) do in fact recite some litanies which have been derived from the Qur'ān, Ibn Taymiyya says the followers of the ṭurūq seem to have muddled the litanies with some reprehensible süfî activities which are frivolous. According to Ibn Taymiyya, "the particular litanies for certain days, taken over in the Ghunya from al-Makkī's Qūṭ al-Qulūb, are reprehensible if they assume the character of a legal duty." The reason for Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of the litanies being observed as a legal duty is that no mystical activity could be said to assume the character of a legal duty, except the religious observances made obligatory (wājib) by the shari'ā. The litanies are not at

2. See W. Braune, Encyclopaedia of Islam, article on 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jâlânî, p.69.
all obligatory; only the religious devotions such as prayer (ṣalāt) are obligatory. In another place, Ibn Taymiyya draws the attention of Muslims to the view that what is made permissible (mubah) by the shari'ā must remain as permissible, for example, the recitation of the āwrād was permissible, but a permissible religious act should never take the place of an obligatory act since that would be tantamount to making it a legal duty. Ibn Taymiyya explains that nothing is legal except what God decrees to be legal and nothing is unlawful except that which God declares unlawful. (1) He warns that God rebukes severely a person who makes obligatory a religious act which God has not decreed as a legal duty. Ibn Taymiyya accuses the scholars (ʻulamāʾ) and the ṣūfis (ʻubbād) of a mistake in being indifferent to and condoning the practice of making a particular religious act assume/legal duty without making people aware that it was not. "They condone the practice of making a permissible religious act a duty. This is contrary to the shari'ā. They give approval to religious acts without making any distinction as to whether they are legal duties or whether they are simply permissible acts." (2) He emphasises the fact that it is one of the grave sins to make a permissible act, either by word or deed or both, into a legal duty. He says this is one of the worst innovations, which is greater than the sins which are known as sins.

2. Cf. Ibid., p.127.
However, it had become the custom of members of the turuq to make those litanies obligatory. For a novice must commit himself to a pledge that under no circumstances will he neglect the recitation of the daily litanies. The commitment of oneself to the compulsory recitation of the litanies is one of the fundamental requirements of initiation into the turuq. (1)

Ibn Taymiyya also rejects and brands as an innovative practice the formula of mentioning the name of Allāh as a single term (dhikr bi-l-ism al-mufrad) which is often recited by the members of the turuq, for example the saying of "Allāh, Allāh." He observes that this type of recitation is an erratic and innovative act whether the mentioning of "Allāh, Allāh" is expressed internally or externally. (2) For his part, he stresses that the best expressions which have been derived from the Qur'ān and are also mentioned in the hadīth are four: glorification is due to God (subḥāna li-Allāh); praise is due to God (wa-l-hamd li-Allāh); there is no deity but God (wa-lā ilāha illa-Allāh); and God is the greatest (Allāhu Akbar). (3)

It is significant to note that, despite Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of the recitation of dhikr al-ism al-mufrad, the members of the Sufi turuq always regard that recitation as an

2. Cf. Ibid., p.87.
3. Cf. Ibid., p.87.
important requirement necessary for the preparation of the heart to become fully obsessed with the idea of Allah, so that it becomes profoundly immersed into the repetitive pronouncement of the term "Allah, Allah." In continuance of this repetitive expression of the single name of God, the heart eventually becomes accustomed to pronouncing the term, so that it comes out spontaneously from the sufi's mouth. It is in this condition of obsession with al-ism al-mufrad that the heart recollects, meditates and concentrates upon the term "Allah" alone, and begins to experience spiritual states (ahwâl). But Ibn Taymiyya says that what the sufi experiences after repetitive recital of al-ism al-mufrad is not a spiritual state (hâl, dhawq), but a demonic illusion in which the sufi becomes hypnotised by the devil who makes him imagine that he is reaching the highest spiritual state and receiving divine directives which have never been received either by the Prophet or Moses. Ibn Taymiyya admits that this and similar mystical claims in the ecstatic state are rampant among his contemporary sufis.

Ibn Taymiyya accuses al-Ghazâli of condoning that reprehensible practice of dhikr al-ism al-mufrad. He was surprised to see how al-Ghazâli and his fellow sufis never envisaged the error of that mystical practice which could lead to unbelief. Ibn Taymiyya explains that innovations always

2. Cf. Ibid., p.86.
3. Cf. Ibid., pp.86, 89.
lead to nothing but unbelief. (1) Al-Ghazālī mentions in his Ihkāl that the illuminative divine light which shines on the hearts of the Prophets can also be attained by a novice (murīd), but not through traditional study or research in theology, philosophy or natural sciences, but primarily by following the path of a mystic. Ibn Taymiyya remarks that al-Ghazālī and his fellow ṣūfīs recommend to a murīd to familiarise and train his heart with dhikr al-ism al-mufrad, and to cover his head in a secluded place and to pronounce 'Allāh, Allāh', etc., unceasingly so that his heart becomes obsessed with the term and then he experiences ḥāl and his heart becomes illuminated and he receives divine directives similar to the directives received by the Prophets. Ibn Taymiyya remarks that some ṣūfīs even claimed receiving divine directives higher than that which was revealed to Prophets. (2)

In view of the fact that the attainment of ecstasy is illusory, Ibn Taymiyya says that it is absurd to claim receiving divine directives during an ecstatic state. He maintains that it is wrong for al-Ghazālī to claim hearing the same divine talk which Moses heard from God. Ibn Taymiyya says al-Ghazālī's exaggerated praise of mysticism is not a surprise, since that gave evidence of the remaining effects of philosophy on him.

Ibn Taymiyya draws the attention of Muslims to the fact

2. Cf. Ibid., p. 87.
that what is infused in the heart can be coming either from God or from the devil. When the heart becomes devoid of everything it is ready to assimilate demonic suggestions in the same way as devils descend on sorcerers or magicians (kuhhān).\(^1\) Ibn Taymiyya asks whether, if a man's heart is devoid of everything, he can be sure that what he receives is actually true and coming from God. In other words, how can a Ṣūfī who claims to have attained ecstasy be able to differentiate between divine and demonic talk in his state of unconsciousness? Ibn Taymiyya explains that the only possible way to prove the reliability of that kind of ecstasy would be either by reasoning (‘aqīd) or by revelation (ṣamʿ), and neither of them proves that. Ibn Taymiyya adds that it can only be reliable when it is consistent with the shariʿa, otherwise it should be rejected as a devilish suggestion.\(^2\) He argues that the devil finds access only to the hearts of those who deviated from the shariʿa. But as for those servants of God who recite the true dhikr of God as prescribed by the shariʿa and conveyed to Muslims by the messengers (rusul) of God, the devil never finds access to their hearts.

Ibn Taymiyya explains the nomian religious practices by stating that the Prophet recommended his followers to observe legal devotions such as prayer, dhikr, and supplication to God. He never taught making the heart devoid of everything in the

2. See Ibid., p. 88.
anticipation of receiving divine directives. The nomian dhikr which is advantageous to man is the formula "There is no deity but God (lā ilāha illā-llāh)", though this dhikr is not the only practice leading one to God, since the best form of worship is that which involves physical movement, such as salāt and Qur'ānic recitation, etc.

\[\text{Sama'}\]

In the religious devotions, the Sufi shaykhs made use of listening to music (sama') to attain ecstasy. They claimed that it was not the material sound they listened to, but essentially the spiritual meaning. It was that listening to music and ecstasy, as well as fainting at recitation of the Qur'an, that Ibn Taymiyya criticized.

Listening to music (sama'), often regarded by the Sufis as instrumental towards attaining mystical ecstasy, has always been a subject of long dispute among religious authorities. The proponents and opponents of sama' have had long arguments and written much concerning the lawfulness of music, quoting verses of the Qur'an and narrating the relevant traditions of the Prophet, the writings of the religious leaders, the opinions of the mystics and legal precedents to substantiate their opposing views. (1)

The proponents of ṣamā', particularly the ṣūfis, maintain that it is a stepping stone toward the attainment of ecstasy, which is the objective of every ṣūfī. (1) Hujwīrī (465/1072) tells us that auditors (mustami‘ūn) are divided into two groups: a) those who hear the spiritual meaning and b) those who hear the material sound. (2) The supporters of ṣamā’ claim to be listening to the former because ṣamā’ reveals things which before were unrevealed. (3)

Al-Qushayrī (465/1072), a celebrated scholar on ṣūfism, who wrote an important work on the philosophy of ṣūfism called al-Risālat al-Qushayriyya, is of the opinion that ṣamā’ is permitted as long as the listener did not intend to listen to the music for pleasure (an act which is regarded as forbidden) or indulge in it as a pastime. (4) In his earnest attempt to support the legitimacy of ṣamā’, al-Qushayrī cited an example by saying that the Prophet had listened to some poems sung to him without making any objection. He argues that if the Prophet permitted listening to poems without the accompaniment of musical instruments, then listening to the songs accompanied

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with musical instruments would not be unlawful. (1) Al-Qushayrî informs us that Helpers (ansār) sang while digging the Trench of Khandaq, and poetry was said to have been sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments by the followers (salaf), and he mentions that the people of Hijaz and Malik Ibn Anas approved of that music being used to accompany poetry. (2)

Al-Qushayrî supports his view by citing Ibn Jurayj (150/766), who he claims accepted the lawfulness of sama', because when he was asked about its permissibility, he replied that it would be placed neither among his good deeds nor his evil deeds, implying that it was one of the things which are permitted. (3) Al-Qushayrî cites other mystics who advocated the practice of sama'. He says that Dhū-l-Nūn (254/860) had maintained that sama' was a divine influence which stirs the heart to seek God; those who listen to it spiritually attain God and those who listen to it sensually fall into heresy. (4) Music has an inherent value which influences and stirs the heart and each

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3. See loc. cit., also Robson, p. 25; also see Sarrāj, p. 348.

4. See loc. cit.; also see Sarrāj, Luma', p. 342; also see Farmer, p. 441.
soul has the capacity to appreciate it.

Al-Qushayrī seeks to find support for music among the Imāms of the four madhāhib. He tells us that Imām Shāfī'ī did not prohibit music, but classified it among the reprehensible things. Al-Qushayrī also states that Mālik Ibn Anas approved the music sung during the digging of the Trench of Khandaq.

Al-Ghazālī (505/1111) was one of the most passionate advocates of samā' because, due to his love of music and poetic talent, he always supported the lawfulness of listening to music and often makes a reference to a deaf person who misses the joy of sweet sounds and musical notes. He mentions the powerful effect when even the beasts respond to a charming melody: "even the camel, though stupid by nature, is affected by the cameleer's song to such an extent that its heavy burdens seem light to it." Robson quotes al-Ghazālī in the Iḥyā' Ulūm ad-Dīn that singing cannot be declared unlawful in itself so long as it has nothing forbidden connected with it. Al-Ghazālī further says that the law has made it permissible at times of joy and used it to establish the practice of making a wedding...

2. See above, p.121.
4. Ibid., p.85.
5. This is one of the major works of al-Ghazālī called Revivification of Religious Sciences, in 5 volumes.
publicly known, according to the opinion which is supported by the sound traditions and the prevailing schools of thought. (1) Robson has also quoted al-Ghazâlî that samâ' has a strengthening, cleansing and directive value.

As a staunch supporter of samâ', al-Ghazâlî wrote a whole book called Bawâriz al-Ilmâ (2) in which he argued and defended the permissibility of samâ'. Like his opponents, he quoted a number of traditions which he alleged to be sound to substantiate his argument. For example, he quoted a tradition from the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal that the Abyssinians were playing tambourines and dancing in the presence of the Prophet, saying, "Muhammad is an upright man." Al-Ghazâlî says this tradition indicates the permissibility of dancing and singing, since the Prophet was present and did not stop it. (3)

In his attempt to defend the permissibility of samâ', al-Ghazâlî argues that the Prophet was a lawgiver and would not be expected to conceal any matter upon which there is a legal ordinance (4) by virtue of the following verse: "Verily, those

1. See Robson, Islamic Culture, p. 123, vol. XXVI, No. 1, January, 1952. (This article is hereafter referred to as M.S.)
3. See Robson, op. cit., p. 80.
who conceal the proofs and guidance we have sent down after we have made it clear to men in the book, those Allāh curses, and the cursers curse them." (II, v. 154).

So, al-Ghazālī argues that had the performance of dancing and being present at audition, singing and playing the tambourine been unlawful, it would have been necessary for the Prophet, by the ordinance of this verse, to draw other people's attention to it. (1)

Although al-Ghazālī tries to support music and singing, this does not mean that his basic interest is in general music, but the purpose of his attitude towards music was more profound and concerned with a more specialised sort of listening to music in which God reveals to the soul many spiritual things. This is, according to him, the highest form of sama'. (2) The purpose of music, according to him, as considered in relation to God, is to arouse longing for Him and passionate love towards Him, and to produce states in which He reveals Himself and shows His favour, which are beyond description and known only by experience, and by the Sūfīs. These states are called "ecstasy". (3)

In his attempt to substantiate the lawfulness of sama', which he considered to be in conformity with Islāmic teachings,

1. See Robson, Tracts, p. 81.
3. See Ibid.
Suhrāwardī (d. 1234) quoted a number of Qur'ānic verses to justify his contention. For example, "When they listen to that which has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of their recognition of the Truth. They say: Our Lord, we believe. 'Inscribe us among the witnesses." (V, 83) He explains that this type of listening to the words of God, which is so appealing and has the power of moving men to tears, is the true and acceptable listening which is recommended by God. (1) It will be remarked that in this regard, Suhrāwardī agrees with Ibn Taymiyya about listening to the words of God as a source of inspiration and guidance.

Suhrāwardī refers to the views of Abū Tālib al-Makki (386/996). He claims that the latter expressed his view on three possible ways in which to determine the prohibition, permissibility and doubtfulness of sama‘. He said that if sama‘ was observed with the sole motive of deriving pleasure which would ease and relax the soul and prevent it from concentrating upon God, then sama‘ could be described as illegal (ḥaram). Same could be described as permissible and lawful (mubah) if the listener listened to it with keen perception in order to attain the spiritual meaning. Sama‘ could also be regarded as legally doubtful (shubha) and reprehensible if a person listened to the music supplied by his slave-girl or wife, thinking that action to be proper and acceptable. (2) Suhrāwardī says the effect of such music would

amount to diverting one's attention from seriousness in religious matters.

Suhrawardi further argues that the person who disapproves of the legitimacy of listening to music in mystical exercises does so as a result of three factors. One of the factors which has motivated the critic of sama' to disregard it as part of religious exercise, or brand it as a mere pastime worthy of censure, would be his ignorance of the precedents of the Prophet and the practices of the forebears. The second factor leading to the disapproval of sama' would be lack of initiative in doing something good to complement religious activities. The third factor for rejecting sama' would be the inability of the opponent to appreciate the beauty of music. (1)

As might be expected the proponents of sama' have narrated a number of traditions from the Prophet to justify its legitimacy. We would, therefore, quote some relevant traditions which have been narrated in support of sama'. Al-Bukhari and Muslim have related "that 'A'isha said that Abū Bakr came to see her when two little girls with her were playing the tambourine and the Prophet was covered up with his garment. Then Abū Bakr rebuked them, but the Prophet uncovered his face and said, "Leave them alone, Abū Bakr, for it is a feast day." This is the most familiar tradition narrated by the

1. See Smith, al-Ghazalī, p. 158.
supporters of samā' to show the permissibility of music. Another hadīth says, "In poetry there is wisdom." (1) God listens more intently to a man with a beautiful voice reading the Qur'ān, than does the master of a singing-girl to his slave-girl, says another hadīth. (2) There are so many traditions in support of music that it is not possible to cite them all here. The ones cited are sufficient to indicate the proofs cited by the supporters of al-samā'.

Many Qur'ānic verses have also been quoted by the proponents of samā' to support the lawfulness of music. For example, "And they in a garden shall be glad" (3) is interpreted as meaning they will listen to music. There are also many other such verses and interpretations. (4)

An early critic of listening to music was Ibn Abi-l-Dunyā (208/894), who had been one of its most severe opponents. Among the things he condemned are envy, anger, drunkenness and the use of musical instruments. (5) He is seen as having denounced music absolutely, as well as various games and pleasures. He led a pious and ascetic life and was highly respected for his exemplary way of life. (6) He is said to have written a critique

1. Cf. Al-Hujwīrī, p. 397; also see Suhrawardī, p. 155; also see Sarrāj, Luma', p. 347; also see Robson, Tracts, p. 92.
2. Cf. Sarrāj, p. 338; also see Suhrawardī, p. 155.
6. See Ibid.
of music called "Censure of Instruments of Diversion." Robson tells us that Ibn Abi-l-Dunyā's puritanism is quite visible in his tract. (1) He is quoted as having said that any pursuit which was not of a serious nature was wasted. This is the reason why he condemned all recreations and pleasures.

Al-Sarrāj (377/987) continued the condemnation of musical instruments. He is of the opinion that musical instruments are among the things that have been prohibited by the Prophet. (2) Sarrāj is quoted as having said that it brings one into association with frivolous people and that it gives no provision for the grave, and that it is not a means of salvation. (3) Even al-Hujwīrī is of the opinion that sama' should not be made a habit. (4)

Ibn al-Jawzī (597/1200) expressed very critical views against sama'. He wrote a whole book called Talbīs Iblīs (Devil's Delusion) in which he elaborated his criticisms and uncompromising attitude towards the sūfīs and their mystical accretions, which he, like Ibn Taymiyya, branded as innovations contrary to the shari'ā. In his Talbīs Iblīs, Ibn al-Jawzī enumerates two factors against sama' which he considered to be

3. See Robson, Tracts, p. 7; also cf. Sarrāj, Lumā', p. 299.
at variance with the teachings of Islām:

(a) He says sama‘ distracts a man’s heart from fully concentrating upon remembrance of God (dhikr) and His majesty as well as observing religious duties for His sake.

(b) The sama‘ has a strong tendency of inviting and attracting man to sensuous pleasures and lustful desires, the peak of which is fornication. (1) He quotes a hadīth on the authority of al-Fudā‘l Ibn Iyād that "Music is the spell of fornication." He further explains that while music is the pleasure of the soul, fornication, which is associated with dancing and music, is the peak of sensuous pleasures. (2)

Ibn al-Jawzī is of the opinion that the use of musical instruments such as the tambourine (duff), reed-pipes (mazāmīr) and the drum (tabl) is unlawful because they seem to divert people’s attention from religious devotions, as does sama‘, and therefore, both are objectionable. (3) He further says the salaf (predecessors) used to break tambourines. He quotes al-Hasan al-Basrī as saying that playing tambourines is not in the

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tradition of the Messengers of God.\(^1\)

But the use of the musical instruments is not completely forbidden, for it seems that there are exceptional circumstances in which they can be fully utilised. Ibn al-Jawzī himself acknowledges that concession, because he explains that the use of duff is only permissible during the marriage ceremony. He concedes that Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal is also reported to have allowed the use of duff during weddings.\(^2\) A hadīth on the authority of Ā'isha also allows use of the duff for wedding purposes. She says, "Announce marriage by the use of tambourines."\(^3\)

Ibn al-Jawzī also criticises al-Ghazālī for putting forward the view that there is no explicit prohibition of listening to music. Al-Ghazālī also claims that listening to a pleasant sound cannot be forbidden.\(^4\) He is quoted as saying, "For anyone who loves God and yearns to meet Him, samā' is necessary for that purpose."\(^5\) But Ibn al-Jawzī would not condone any attempt at yearning for God, and therefore strongly denounced Ghazālī's statement as a mistaken mystical way of meeting God.\(^6\)

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2. See Ibid., p. 239.
3. See Ibid.
4. Cf. Ibid., p. 245.
5. Cf. Ibid.
6. See Ibid.
Those who declared *sama* to be unlawful have quoted a number of Qur'ānic verses to support their contention. For example, in his translation of the Maghribī manuscript on listening to music, Robson mentions the interpretations of the opponents of *sama*. "And excite those whom you can with your voice." (XVII, 66). The qādī Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī says the learned have three interpretations of it. The first is that "with your voice" means singing and the oboe. The second interpretation of "with your voice" means every incentive which summons people to disobey God, which is also the meaning given by Ibn ‘Abbās. The third interpretation of "with your voice" means with your summons. (1)

"And among men are those who buy sportive talk" (XXXI, 5); this Qur'ānic verse is the most well-known verse interpreted by the opponents of *sama* to condemn music and singing. The verse has three explanations: the first is singing, the second worthless talk (and this is al-Tabarī’s interpretation). The third is polytheism, a view expressed by al-Ḍahhāk. (2) Ibn Mas‘ūd says sportive talk means singing. Ibn ‘Abbās also explains sportive talk to mean singing and its like. Mujāhid and ‘Ikrima have also the same interpretation. (3) The verse, "while you are amusing yourselves" (*wa antum sama’dun*) (LIII, 61),

2. See *Ibid*.
is also interpreted to mean singing. For example, in the Himyarite dialect sämidün means singing. Mujāhid and 'Ikrimah are of the opinion that the verse implies singing. (1)

With regard to traditions, the critics of sama‘ have quoted many traditions to prove the illegitimacy of listening to music, dancing and drumming. A hadith narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd says: “Singing makes hypocrisy grow in the heart as water makes the seed grow.” (2) Fudayl Ibn Iyād says: “Music is the spell of fornication.” (3) Another hadith says: “I have forbidden two foolish and wicked voices, singing and wailing.” (4)

Another hadith from Abū Umāma, narrated on the authority of the Prophet, says: “Teaching singing girls, buying them, selling them and having them are unlawful and their price forbidden; and God has revealed that thus in His Book, ‘And among men are those who buy sportive talk to lead people astray from God’s way without knowledge.’” (5) By Him in whose hand is my soul, no man raises his voice in song without two devils sitting on his back and kicking his breast and back till he is silent.”

Another hadith against music says ‘Ikrima, and Ibn ‘Abbās have narrated on the authority of the Prophet who says: “I have been

2. See Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 233; also see Robson, M S., p. 121.
3. Cf. Robson, p. 27; also Suhrawardī, p. 162.
sent to destroy reed-pipes and stringed instruments.*(1)*

The critics of *sama*' also claimed that the Imāms of the four madhāhib had similar views. A number of traditions have been narrated on the authority of the four Imāms rejecting or denouncing the practice of *sama*', while very few traditions have been narrated on the authority of the Imāms condoning or approving the *sama*. The Imāms of the madhāhib have been reported to have rejected singing, dancing(2) and the use of musical instruments forming part of religious activities believed by some sufis to constitute proper, acceptable and logical religious practice. For example, Imām Shāfi‘ī is quoted in the *Kitāb al-Qadā* as saying: "Singing is a sport which is disliked and which resembles what is false; he who mixes much with it is light of understanding; you shall reject his testimony."*(3)* Shāfi‘ī also is reported to have said: "Play and sport do not pertain to the custom of religious and manly people." It is reported that in the *Fiqh* book, *al-Mudawwana*, Mālik said: "The testimony of the singer, the singing-girl and the wailing woman is rejected if they have a reputation for that."*(4)* Ibn al-Jawzi tells us that Shāfi‘ī seems to have rejected singing, because he

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is reported to have said: 'I hate the rattling of a musical instrument and have left something in Baghdad, introduced by atheists, called tambourine (taghbir), by which they distract people from listening to the Qur'an.'

The Imam Mālik is also reported to have disapproved of singing and sama‘. He says that if a person purchases a slave-girl and finds her to be a singer, then it is his duty to send her back, because her being a singer is a defect, which could be a source of diverting people from having seriousness in religious matters. This view is shared by the Medinese and also the madhab of Abū Hanifa. Mālik was asked whether any concession was made for the people of Medina concerning singing. He says that only the corrupt ones among us entertain such an act. Ibn al-Jawzī informs us that Mālik forbade singing and listening to it.

Imām Abū Hanifa is reported to have detested singing.

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2. Cf. Suhrawardi, p. 162; also see Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 228.
4. Al-Ghazālī rejects the claim that Abū Hanifa disapproved of sama‘, because the latter, according to the former, was counted as one of the saints of God and all saints are said to have listened to music. (See Robson, Tracts, p. 152).
denied and the permissibility of drinking grape-wine (nabīdah). He is said to have classified sama‘ among sins. The people of al-Kūfa, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Hammād, Ibrāhīm and al-Sha‘bī, etc., share the same opinion. (1)

Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal is also reported to have disapproved of sama‘, even though mystical poems were rampant during his time. It was narrated on the authority of his son ‘Abd Allāh that song did not impress him because it implanted hypocrisy in the heart. (2) When he was asked about singing, he said: “I detest it because it is an innovation.” (3) Abu-l-Hārith also reported that Imām Ahmad said: “Al-tagḥbīr is an innovation. I detest it and forbid listening to it.” (4)

Ibn al-Jawzī says that the above narrations are adequate evidences demonstrating disapproval of music, singing and sama‘.

Al-Ghazālī’s argument, it seems, is to the effect that rejection of sama‘ by Abū Hanīfa would be tantamount to rejection of saints. For by rejecting them, he rejects himself. (See Robson, Tracts, p.89). Al-Ghazālī further explains that what Abū Hanīfa could have prohibited would have been listening to instruments of diversion.

Ibn Taymiyya was also one of the fierce opponents of sama'. He wrote a whole treatise criticising the practice of sama' and dancing conducted by some sufis.

His critique of sama', which demonstrates his uncompromising attitude towards Sufi practices, appeared in his Majmū'at al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā. (1) Unfortunately, Sirājul Haqq (2) denied Ibn Taymiyya's authorship of the treatise and attributed it to the compiler of the Majmū'a, whose name he mis-spelt as Shaykh al-Munbījī. (3) But no-one fully acquainted with the works and style of Ibn Taymiyya's writings would fail to believe that it was written by him. Although he quoted from a number of scholars, such as Ibn al-Jawzī, (4) Abū Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (5) and

1. The treatise (M.R.K., pp.293-331) is called al-Risāla fī ḥukm al-Sama' wa-l-Raqs, i.e. the treatise giving a judgement on listening to music and dancing. The Majmū'a was compiled by Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Munayī. But unfortunately, Sirājul Haqq, who wrote about sama' and raqs of the dervishes in Islamic Culture, 1944, mis-spelt the name of the compiler of the treatise as al-Munbījī. This is wrong; it should read al-Munayī.


3. See Ibid., p.112.


5. Author of the book Ḥawrīf al-Ma'ārif.
Abū Sulaymān al-Darānī,(1) to substantiate his contention, this
does not imply that Ibn Taymiyya was not its author, neither
should its authorship be attributed to the compiler of the
Majmū’a, al-Munayjî.

The treatise on sāmā’ was written by Ibn Taymiyya as a
response to a request about the nature and correctness of the
sāmā’ of righteous people. “Would the sūfī songs accompanied
with the musical instruments be indicative of pious actions?
Could those actions be lawful or forbidden?”(2)

He categorizes sāmā’ into two distinctive divisions:
(a) lawful sāmā’; (b) unlawful sāmā’. He states that the lawful
sāmā’, which seems to be religiously beneficial and which appears
to be the practice of the righteous, is the legitimate and
acceptable practice of listening to the words of God. This
meritorious sāmā’ has been commended by God and has always been
the practice of the Prophets, the Sahāba, the faithful, the
pious, the followers and those who came after the followers.
The Qur’ān testifies thus: “When they listen to that which has
been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with
tears because of their recognition of the Truth. They say: Our
Lord, we believe. Inscribe us among the witnesses.” (V, 83).

It may seem crystal clear that Ibn Taymiyya has been reiterating
the sāmā’ of the words of God which increases and strengthens

1. A prominent sūfī.
the faith, piety and humility of the believers. (1) That distinctive sama' which appeals to the hearts of men and moves them to tears would seem to be the sort of audition compatible with the sharî'ah, always advocated by Ibn Taymiyya. (2) He emphasizes the necessity of observing this lawful sama' by quoting the following verses from the Qur'ân: "Those who disbelieve say: Heed not this Qur'ân, and drown the hearing of it; haply you may conquer." (XII, 26). "And when Our revelations are recited to him, he turns away in his pride as if he heard them not, as if there were a deafness in his ears. So give him tidings of a painful doom." (XXXI, 7).

Ibn Taymiyya tells us that the Companions of the Prophet were in the habit of practising the legitimate sama' in which one of them would read the Qur'ân while the rest listened with rapt attention. The effect of that lawful sama' had made itself visible on the bodies of those pious men, for their hearts became compressed and tears flowed from their eyes. (3) 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb used to ask Abū Mūsā to read the Qur'ân for them while the rest listened attentively. The Prophet himself used to ask Ibn Mas'ūd to read the Qur'ân for him and when he read, tears would be seen flowing from the Prophet's eyes. (4) Ibn Taymiyya reiterated that that was the sort of lawful sama' which

the Prophet, his Companions and the faithful practised and always attended. The lawful sama' has certain characteristic features which are demonstrable as symptoms on the bodies of the faithful, such as contraction of the heart, oozing of the eyes and shuddering of the skin. Ibn Taymiyya says those features have been mentioned in the Qur'an. He further states that listening to the words of God has always been the basis of faith since the Prophet was sent to convey the divine message to mankind and prepare them for salvation. Those who heeded the words of God would be among the saved while those who rejected and failed to listen to the message would be among the doomed. (1)

Ibn Taymiyya asserted that listening to music and mystical poems accompanied with musical instruments, for the purpose of attaining ecstasy or any other mystical motive, was an overt innovation inconsistent with the teachings of Islam. He maintained that neither the Prophet, his Companions, the faithful Muslims, nor the revered three generations (2) ever gathered together to listen to music or mystical poems, believed by some Sufis to constitute a religious practice. (3) He further argued that the practice of sama' was never conducted by the renowned

2. The Prophet said that the best generation was the one in which he was sent with divine message, then the next generation and the next after that.
mystics and men of piety and righteousness who lived in Hijāz, Syria, Egypt, 'Iraq, etc., but the practice most probably was introduced during the close of the second century A.H. (1) The practice of sama' and the use of musical instruments, being an innovation, did not seem to attract men of religion because the Imāms of the madhāhib, as Ibn Taymiyya maintained, decried them with much suspicion. (2) This is why Imām Shāfi‘ī is reported as saying: "I left something in Baghdād, introduced by atheists, called tambourine (taghbir), by which they distract people from listening to the Qur’ān." (3) When Imām Ahmad was asked about sama' and singing he said: "I detest it because it is an innovation." "Would you sit among those playing taghbīr?" He said: "No." (4) Ibn Taymiyya further supported his contention for regarding sama' as an innovation by quoting the names of some famous mystics who lived during the second and third centuries A.H., and whom he always held in high esteem and admiration, such as Ibrāhīm Ibn Adham, Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, Sārī al-Saqīfī, Fudayl Ibn 'Iyād, and argued that these divines had never attended mystical sama' and that they never demonstrated in their mystical writings having condoned sama'.

4. Ibid., p. 304.
or mystical dancing. (1)

Ibn Taymiyya branded the use of musical instruments, whistling (mukā'), and clapping of hands (tasdiya) as pagan activities because the infidels used to perform the unlawful samā' by drumming, whistling and dancing round their shrines clapping their hands. He informs us that they were rebuked in the Qur'ān. "And their worship at the (holy) House is naught but whistling and hand-clapping. Therefore (it is said unto them): 'Taste of the doom because you disbelieve.'" (VIII, 35). He further argued that neither the Prophet nor his Companions ever participated in the reprehensible samā' characterised by drumming, clapping of the hands and whistling. He says it would amount to a gross lie to attribute such evil practice to the Prophet or his Companions. He also observed that the people who exhibited interest in samā' and use of musical instruments, such as taghbir, were in fact those accused of atheism such as Ibn al-Rāwandi, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. He says that these philosophers composed musical works and their reputation as

1. Here Ibn Taymiyya made an exception by indicating that al-Junayd (d. 910 A.D.), who was said to have attended sufī samā' in his youth, abandoned it in his old age. Junayd used to say, "He who is affected with samā' becomes crazy about it. He who avoids it becomes free from it."
musicians was well-known. (1) Ibn Taymiyya condemned the
tradition which was narrated by Suhrawardi, (2) that the Prophet
listened to a song from an Arab poet which was so melodious that
his robe fell off from his shoulder as a result of ecstasy. (3)
Ibn Taymiyya observed that the ḥadīth was weak and fabricated
and that it was narrated simply to substantiate the lawfulness
of sama'. He reiterated that it was not the practice of the
Prophet of God to listen to music or poems characterised by
frivolity which might be a source of diversion from religious
earnestness. What the Prophet listened to, and taught his
followers to do the same, was the words of God. He always urged
his followers to meet together and read the Qur'ān for guidance.
This is the type of lawful sama' which was pleasing and
acceptable to God. Ibn Taymiyya says that the Prophet had
attended many sessions in which the Qur'ān was being recited.
For example, he attended the circle for Qur'ānic recitation of
ahl al-Suffa (4) and listened to their reading. (5)

Ibn Taymiyya strongly condemned the allegation that the

mentions al-Fārābī's expertise in music that he once played
a melodious tune which made his audience cry, played another
and made them laugh and played another which made them sleep.
4. Ahl-al-Suffa, i.e. People of the bench, were a group of
pious Muslims who lived in the Prophet's mosque in Medina and
devoted their lives to the worship of God. They were known for
their piety, asceticism and devotion. See above, p.14
Prophet had attended sama'. He observed that the participation in sama' attributed to the Prophet was simply a popular allegation advocated by the proponents of sama' to seek support from the people for the lawfulness of their mystical ritual. Ibn Taymiyya always emphasised the fact that the Prophet had never taught his community in general to get together and listen to poems or songs accompanied by musical instruments and to regard that activity as complementing religious exercise. On the contrary, the Prophet instructed his followers to devote their time to the recitation of, and listening to, the Qur'an. He had always recommended them to hold fast to the two normative sources of Islam which formed the fundamental basis of his divine mission. Ibn Taymiyya insisted that the Prophet had completed all the divine messages necessary for the guidance of humanity and had not omitted any religious or mystical practices and rituals which otherwise would have been beneficial to his followers in seeking their redemption and salvation.

He says that the Prophet had been sent with the divine mission of guidance and the truth and to make the religion of God triumphant. God says in the Qur'an: "This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (V,3).

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Qur'ānic verse further supported Ibn Taymiyya's argument that all that was to be taught and revealed to mankind had been accomplished by the Prophet and that he left two fundamental sources, Qur'ān and Sunna, for the guidance of mankind. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya seemed to be advocating the view that all religious accretions which occurred in Islam during the last part of the second century A.H. should be rejected as sheer innovations if they were not consistent with God's revealed law (shari'ah). (1)

Ibn Taymiyya decried the method in which the proponents of sama'i used to establish the permissibility of sama'i by quoting false traditions for that objective. He noticed that a large number of spurious traditions had been narrated which in most cases were either popular stories told through the transmission of some sufis or the chain of transmission and the content matter seemed questionable. (2) He therefore gave a word of caution and advised Muslims to scrutinise those fabricated traditions with a view to sifting out the genuine from the spurious. He says that similar scrutiny should be applied to popular sufī teachings, mystical doctrines and theories of ecstasy. (3) He pointed out that although there seemed to be authentic traditions about mystical ideals which Muslims are

required to cultivate, yet those traditions had been muddled with spurious ones. This is why scrutiny was deemed necessary.\(^1\)

It is significant to note that Ibn Taymiyya had admitted the concession which the Prophet had allowed women, to enjoy music and dancing during nuptial occasions and the merriment of the Muslim festival (\('
\(\text{Id}\)). It should be remarked that Ibn al-Jawzî had also conceded the permissibility of music in wedding ceremonies. Ibn Taymiyya maintained that the concession granted during the above-mentioned two periods was worthwhile, because they marked an important occasion of happiness for Muslims in which they gathered together in mutual love and harmony. The Prophet is said to have permitted music and dancing at wedding ceremonies when he says: "Clapping of the hands (and other nuptial merriments) is for women, while glorification of God (\(\text{tasbih}\)) is for men."\(^2\)

Ibn Taymiyya examines the argument of the proponents of sama‘ about the legitimacy of listening to music. He says that the supporters of sama‘ claim that listening to music is basically pleasant and enjoyable in itself and that it is a means of relaxing the mind. Some of them have argued that the pleasantness of music is so effective that even children cannot resist but have to respond to it, because they are lulled to sleep by means of soft music. Good melody is a bounty from God,

\(^2\) See Ibid., p. 301.
who reprimanded bad voices: "Lo! the harshest of all voices is the voice of an ass." (V, 19). They quote the hadith of 'Ā'isha to support the allegation that the Prophet condoned her two concubines who were singing for her. They also argued that the Prophet permitted singing during wedding ceremonies, that the Prophet listened to the song of the Sahāba during the digging of the Trench and that the Prophet had invoked God to help Hassan Ibn Thābit to compose poems in defence of Muslims. They also claimed that when the Prophet entered Mecca, he was received by a multitude of Muslims singing in his praise. The proponents of samā' have reported many such instances in which the Prophet was said either to have listened to singing or to have condoned listening to music. (1)

Ibn Taymiyya has scrutinised carefully the allegation of the Prophet's listening to music and has made an assessment of the true value of that allegation. He says that the nature of something being enjoyable and gratifying to the senses does not at all make it legally permissible. He cites an example that the lustful pleasure derived from adultery does not make the pleasure permissible. (2) Similarly, musical melody, though pleasing to the senses, is capable of diverting one's attention away from remembrance of God, and it can be described as legally reprehensible. The fact that a bad voice like that of an ass is deplored in the Qur'ān does not make sweet sounds or tunes

2. See Ibid., p.317.
legally permissible and neither can musical instruments such as tambourines, flutes, oboes or drums, because of their melodious tunes and pleasant sounds which are gratifying to the senses, be regarded as legally permissible. With regard to the hadīth that the people of Medina sang a poem when they were digging the Trench and that they used musical instruments, which were approved, according to al-Qushayrī's claim, by Mālik Ibn Anas, (1) it was rejected by Ibn Taymiyya. He says that though they might have sung the poem, Mālik never permitted or approved the use of musical instruments. (2)

Ibn Taymiyya expresses some surprise about the reasoning of the proponents of samā' who have legalised listening to music simply because it is available in the Paradise. He says the weakness of their argument would imply that alcoholic drinks such as wine, which is unlawful according to Islamic law, will be lawful according to the supporters of samā'. Similarly, we cannot declare music, silk and wine as lawful simply because they exist in Paradise. The injunction bearing on their legality or illegality must come from the shari'ā.

In his disapproval of samā', which he always regarded as a mere pastime, Ibn Taymiyya made an attempt to identify the

1. Cf. above, p.121.
harmful effects which ṣūfī audition (ṣama'ī) could bring to both the heart and the soul. He argued that psychological damage could be envisaged in the ṣūfī audition, and due to its flippancy, it was capable of demoralizing the heart and depriving its recipients of profound religious earnestness and constant concentration, prerequisites which are required and exhibited in religious observances, such as prayer. He observed that listening to music, whistling and clapping of the hands and other frivolous activities would not render any benefit to the heart, except making it demoralised and perverse. He said that the moral and spiritual damage which music could render to the soul is greater than physical harm which wine could cause the body.

It should be realised that in his earnest endeavour to refute the lawfulness of music, Ibn Taymiyya has been using psychological terms to explain his argument. For example, he used terms like feelings, desires, motives, affections, etc. Although he used the terms unconsciously, nevertheless, he made an effort to diagnose through demonstrable argument the sort of moral damage which music and dancing could render to the soul.

Ibn Taymiyya rejected the doctrine of ecstasy (wajd),

2. See Ibid.
3. See Ibid.
4. See Ibid.
because he argued that those who claimed that they were attaining an ecstasy were in fact simply in a state of hypnosis. (1) Such "ecstasy" was normally induced through intensive listening to music and dancing. Intoxication, trance and fainting were always linked with ecstasy. When the Sufis performed samā' and dancing, they became subjected to the condition of trance or fainting in such a way that they attained this "ecstasy" and it was in this ecstatic condition that they claimed to be receiving mysterious wonders. (2) They also became subject to devilish suggestions. Ibn Taymiyya stated the fact that when the Sufis performed samā' they seemed to be hypnotized and became subject to the suggestions of the devils who descended upon them and spoke through their tongues as demons speak, unintelligible words through the tongue of the epileptic. (3) He further explained that it was in this intoxicated or ecstatic condition that the devils touched the performers of samā' and thus made them lose the sense of touch and perception, to the extent that if the performers of samā' were struck, they would not feel it, just like an epileptic who lost the sense of touch. Subjected to similar conditions, the hypnotics of samā' could be flown in the air, thrown in fire or take a burning rod

2. Farmer, p.441.
without sustaining any injury. Ibn Taymiyya added that the hypnotics of sama' also performed other abnormal actions which would appear truly amazing to non-sufis. It was through this sort of miracle-display that the sufis attracted large numbers of people to sufism. Ibn Taymiyya challenged and strongly refuted the actions of those hypnotics of sama' by asserting that the actions performed under the influence of ecstasy, intoxication or hypnosis were fake and magical performances which could never be achieved when the hypnotics of sama' were sober. Ibn Taymiyya emphasized that "they (hypnotics of sama') could not enter fire, touch a hot rod, or fly in the air when they were sober reading the Holy Qur'an, glorifying God or performing prayers, because these religious observances are legal, Islamic and Prophetic, they must be conducted in sober conditions and they always repelled any devilish activities." On the other hand, those abnormal actions of the hypnotics of sama' are devilish, innovative and profane actions which only attract other devils and their like.

It should be understood that Ibn Taymiyya had strongly decried the popular suf'i allegation that both angels and the Prophets attended the session of listening to music, mystical dancing and clapping of the hands, through which the sufis believe that ecstasy could be attained. Ibn Taymiyya says the

2. See Ibid.
3. Cf. Ibid.
claim was untrue and reprehensible and on the contrary, it was the
devils (shayātīn) who always attended the șūfī samā' and infused
devilish suggestions and directives in the hearts of the performers
of samā' while they were in the state of intoxication or ecstasy. (1)
It is in these intoxicating circumstances that the advocates of
samā' claimed to have received or heard divine commands and
graces. (2) Ibn Taymiyya says the effects of the devils working
on the performers of samā' in the Jāhiliyya period were
characterised by foaming of the mouth, groaning and awful sounds.
He also explains that the attainment of ecstasy or intoxication
through șūfī samā', which diverted people from remembrance (dhikr)
of God and religious devotions, should be worthy of severe
censure since that practice contradicts the shari'ā. (3)

Dancing (Rags)

The practice of dancing (rags) in șūfī ritual also came
under Ibn Taymiyya's severe censure. He branded it as an
innovative pastime due to its frivolous nature of diverting one's
attention from religious devotion. He says that it had never
been permitted by God, the Prophet or the Imāms of the Muslim
community. He says any religious act which goes contrary to the

3. Cf. Ibid., p.325.
Islamic primary sources should be rejected. (1) He quotes the Qur'ān to prove the unlawfulness of dancing. "And walk not in the earth exultant." (XVII, 37). Ibn Taymiyya says that dancing is a form of that exultation (mentioned in the Qur'ān) in which people devoted their time and energy to constant bodily movement. God says: "Be modest in your walking." (XVII, 37). Also "The (faithful) slaves of the Beneficent are they who walk upon the earth modestly." (IV, 63.). (2)

The significance of these verses which Ibn Taymiyya has quoted in censure of Śūfī dancing would seem to indicate that the performance of dancing for the attainment of ecstasy cannot be regarded as constituting part of religious devotion. He observes that the Qur'ān teaches us moral principles by which we can learn to control physical activities and avoid any form of ecstatic act through which we might lose our consciousness and thus become far away from spiritual guidance. (3)

According to Ibn Taymiyya, Śūfī dancing, which is performed solely for the attainment of ecstasy and in which some alleged divine directives are revealed to the dancers, should be rejected.

2. I.e., the faithful servants of God always walked modestly and never danced or performed acts characterised by frivolity.
because it has no basis in the primary sources of Islam. (1)

It is significant to consider the fact that Ibn Taymiyya has always been very cautious about branding certain innovations as forbidden or reprehensible. He does not declare them as unworthy of acceptance without first referring them to the Qur'an and Sunna and he always bases his arguments on these two primary sources of Islam. One would infer that he does not condemn the innovations out of sheer whims and caprices, since he always based himself firmly on the Qur'an and Sunna. He says that it is necessary to examine the nature and quiddity of an action before it is declared legitimate or prohibited. (2) He cites an example by examining the nature of the singing of pilgrims in which they describe the Ka'aba, Zamzam (3) and the sacred place of Abraham. Ibn Taymiyya found out that the praises of those places were permissible. He also says that the songs of the Muslim soldiers were also permissible since the troops were encouraged to fight and defend Islamic territories. (4)

The gist of Ibn Taymiyya's argument is that religious practices which tend to be devious or ambiguous should be referred back to the Qur'an and Sunna for solution before declaring them permissible, reprehensible or forbidden. If the

3. A sacred well in Mecca.
advocates of sama' assert its legitimacy, their claim must be judged on the basis of what the Qur'an and Sunna have laid down. (1)

Ibn Taymiyya is always of the opinion that no religious activity can be declared legal or illegal except what God has made to be so. Similarly, religion is that which God has enacted. This is why God rebuked the infidels who introduced innovations into religion which God has not sanctioned.

CHAPTER V

SAINTHOOD AND THE HIERARCHY OF SAINTS

Ibn Taymiyya’s Interpretation of Sainthood, Friendship (al-Wilāya)

The concept of sainthood, friendship (al-Wilāya), which occupies a prominent position in Sufi thought, seems to have been borrowed from the Shi'ite doctrine of al-Wilāya. According to Shi'ite sources, the term wall, which means a friend or helper, was first applied to 'Ali Ibn Abī Talib as wall Allāh. (1) It is also reported in the hadīth al-Ghadīr that the Prophet raised ‘Alī Ibn Abī Talib and declared him as his friend (mawla, wall)(2) and helper.

According to al-Qushayrī, the term wall has two meanings: (a) a person looked after by God: "And He takes charge of (yatawallā) the righteous", for God does not leave His servant to his own actions but keeps him under His protection; (b) a person who takes upon himself the worship of God and obedience to Him, so that his worship of God becomes a continuous process, without disobedience intervening. (3) Al-Qushayrī says both

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2. See Ibid., p.347.
meanings of wall involve the wall's exercise of duties to God and God's guardianship of the wall in happiness and distress. He further states that while the Prophet is impeccable (ma'sum) in his duties, the wall needs to be safeguarded (mahfuz), in his actions, by God.

Al-Shibi tells us that the word al-wilaya occurs in the Qur'an in the sense of friendship or guardianship about sixty-five times. For instance, "Verily on the friends of God (awliya') no fear shall come, and they shall not grieve" (I, 63); also, "God is the friend (wall) of those who believe." (II, 258).

It is interesting to note that Ibn al-'Arabi's concept and definition of al-wall is more profound and more specific than being a friend of God. According to his definition, a person is a wall if he possesses the gnosis (ma'rifah) which would enable him to understand his exact relation to God (Reality) of Whom he is but a manifestation. (1) We are told that Ibn al-'Arabi claims to be the seal of saints (khatm al-awliya) (2) and says that all apostles (rusul) and prophets (anbiya) are awliya of God, and even that their saintly side is superior to their

2. See Affifi, op. cit. p.95. Also cf. Ibn al-'Arabi, Fusus al-Hikam, p.252. Before Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhammad Ibn 'Aliy al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi also claimed to be a seal of saints. Ibn Taymiyya says other people such as Ibn Hamawiyya have also claimed the seal of sainthood.
prophetic side. Ibn al-'Arabi further maintains that a Prophet is more perfect in the context of prophethood than a saint; while a saint is more perfect in the context of sainthood than a Prophet.

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the claimants of the seal of sainthood are wrong, because the seal of prophethood is by far better than that of sainthood. He says the seal of al-awliya', as a matter of fact, is the last pious believer among people and it does not mean that he is the best one of them. Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that the best of the people are Abū Bakr al-Siddīq and 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who both lived during the time of the Prophet, and no one could surpass them in devotion, piety and excellence after Prophets and Messengers. (1)

In his attempt to refute antinomianism in ṣūfism, Ibn Taymiyya wrote a whole book entitled "The distinction between the friends of God and the friends of the devil", (2) in which he discusses his interpretation of wilāya and awliya', the stages of the awliya' and the relation of faith and devoutness to al-wilayā. He also discusses the characterization of the wali and the superiority of saints over Prophets.

Ibn Taymiyya maintains that God has differentiated between

2. See Ibn Taymiyya, al-Furqān Bayna Awliyā' al-Rahmān wa Awliyā' al-Shaytān.
two types of friends (awliyā': (a) those whom He called His friends: "Verily on the friends of God no fear shall come and they shall not grieve" (X, 63); (b) those whom He described as friends of the devil: "Whoso chooses Satan for a patron instead of Allāh is verily a loser and his loss is manifest." (IV, 119).

It seems that the friends of God, according to Ibn Taymiyya, are those people who firmly believe in God and act righteously. In other words, the characteristic qualities of the friends of God are essentially strong faith and constant devoutness, and therefore, any Muslim who believes and acts devoutly deserves the merit of being a friend of God. That friendship does not depend upon his attaining esoteric knowledge or gnosis (ma'rifah), as has been asserted by Ibn al-'Arabī. The friends of God can still attain a meritorious position from God by virtue of their performance of the supererogatory acts (al-nawāfil) after having observed the obligatory duties (al-wājibāt). (1) In the hadith (al-quds) of al-Bukhārī it is reported that God said: "He who hurts my friend (wali) has allowed himself to make war on Me. My servant draws near me by performing the duties I prescribe for him and he gains my love as long as he finds access to me through observing supererogatory acts of worship. If I love him, I become his ear with which he hears, his eye with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps and his foot

On the basis of this hadith it seems quite evident that it is worthwhile for a Muslim to attach importance to the performance of the supererogatory acts of worship (nawafil), so that he can get closer to God, gain His love and above all become one of His elect.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, friendship (wilāya) is the opposite of enmity (al-‘adāwa) and the root of wilāya is love (al-mahabba) and closeness (al-gurb); the same way as the root of al-‘adāwa is hatred (al-hurād) and remoteness (al-bu’d).

The wāli is a person who devotes himself to religious duties. Therefore, in its technical meaning, the word wāli refers to a person who is devout and acts in accordance with what God wants or decrees and is seeking His friendship through the performance of good deeds.

In view of the fact that the friends of God are those faithful and devout Muslims, it seems that the degree of a person's closeness or friendship with God depends upon the extent of his faith and piety. The more devout he becomes, the closer and more immediate is his relationship and friendship with God. Ibn Taymiyya tells us that people excel each other in seeking friendship with God on the basis of their faith and piety. On the other hand, they also surpass each other in incurring

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hostility with God due to their hypocrisy and unbelief.\(^{(1)}\) It therefore seems most evident that faith is a matter of degree, so that it either increases or decreases. The Qur'ān also testifies to the increase or decrease of one's faith, such as in these verses: "and that believers may increase in faith" (LXXIV, 31); and also: "He it is Who sent down peace of reassurance into the hearts of the believers that they might add faith unto their faith (XLVIII, 4).

Ibn Taymiyya informs us that the friends of God (awliyā') are classified into two categories, viz:

1. Those of the right-hand (Ashāb al-Yāmīn)

Ashāb al-Yāmīn are the devout and reverent servants of God (i.e. al-abrār) who merit being brought nearer to God (al-muqarrabūn) by virtue of their performance of the obligatory duties (al-farā'id). They carry out what God makes obligatory upon them and refrain from what He makes illegal. They do not bother themselves with the performance of acts and devotions that are regarded as merely permissible, nor avoid performing the devotions that are recommended.

2. The foremost (servants) who are brought near (to God)

(i.e. al-Sābīqu al-Muqarrabūn)

Al-Sābīqu al-Muqarrabūn are the most devout servants of God who have attained closeness to God on account of their

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pious devotions and constancy in the performance of al-farā’id. They abstain from doing illegal and reprehensible actions. When they perform the permissible devotions to their utmost abilities in the anticipation of attaining closeness to God, He loves them perfectly. This is supported by the hadith of al-Bukhari:

"No sooner does My servant draw near Me by performing supererogatory acts than I love him." (1)

Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the wali is not characterised by his outward appearance, such as dress, physical appearance or peculiar behaviour as distinct from the generality of Muslims. (2) The only distinctive feature which is visible in his social and religious life is simply constant devoutness and unwavering faith. He has acquired these qualities as a result of performing al-wājibat which have been imposed on him by God, and refraining from al-muharramāt. Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that any Muslim who can acquire those qualities deserves the name of being a friend of God. (3)

According to Ibn Taymiyya, it is not one of the conditions of the wali to be impeccable, as it is sometimes claimed by some sufis. Although he is drawn close to God by virtue of his pious acts and devoutness, he still remains a human being. He is not infallible and therefore is liable to make mistakes or to be

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unable to understand fully some teachings of the sharī'a. Some religious teachings may seem to him ambiguous and he may mistakenly believe that extraordinary actions (al-khawāriq) are miracles (kārāmāt) even though such miracles could come from the devil.

Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that in order to avoid falling into devilish suggestions or being deluded into making mistakes, the awliyā' of God must always adhere rigidly to the Qur'ān and Sunna and all their religious devotions must be governed and directed by these two fundamental sources of Islām. Any sort of deviation from these two sources of Islām will transform the person from being a friend of God to a friend of the devil. Ibn Taymiyya states that the two prominent sufīs, Abū Sulaymān al-Darānī and al-Junayd, share the same opinion that mystical devotions must always be in conformity with the Qur'ān and Sunna.

With regard to the miracles (al-kārāmāt), Ibn Taymiyya says that the ability to work a miracle or perform an extraordinary action (al-khāriqa) does not always demonstrate that one is a wali, for such a person may be an enemy of God. The performance of such extraordinary acts could be done by anyone, even unbelievers, through the medium of the devils. Therefore, it is wrong, argues Ibn Taymiyya, to think that anyone who can

perform a miracle is a wālī of God.

It should be noted that Ibn Taymiyya has never denied the miracles of the true saints of God. He firmly believed that the awliyā' of God have been honoured by being given the ability to work miracles (al-karāmāt) as a testimony of their piety, devotion and closeness to God. The awliyā' perform their miracles in different circumstances as proofs for substantiating some religious teachings or to assist in satisfying particular needs of Muslims especially in times of distress. Ibn Taymiyya says the miracle (al-mu'jīza) of the Prophets is more effective in displaying the proofs of their divine mission and is more efficacious in convincing their followers to accept their message. The Sahāba(2) were also said to have worked miracles in special circumstances so as to assist Muslims.(3)

Ibn Taymiyya always sustains the view that the best friends of God are the Prophets and the best of His Prophets are the Messengers (al-mursalūn) who have been entrusted with the delivery of the divine mission to mankind. Among al-mursalūn are the elect of God known as those stout in heart (ūlu-l-‘azm). (4)

2. Such as Abū Bakr, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb, Sa’d Ibn Abi Waqqās; Khalīd Ibn al-Walīd, etc.
Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the wilāya of any Muslim is incomplete unless he firmly believes in al-mursalūn and acts in accordance with their directives. In the Islamic community, the followers must believe in the Prophet and accept him as the last messenger to both men and jinn. Ibn Taymiyya further explains that the love of God can be attained only by following the Prophet, by virtue of this verse: "Say, (O. Muhammad, to mankind): If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins." (III, 31).

However, Ibn Taymiyya rejects the mystical view of Ibn al-'Arabī that al-awliyā' are superior to prophets (anbiyā'). He maintains that the salaf and the generality of followers in the umma unanimously believe and accept that al-anbiyā' are by far superior to al-awliyā' by virtue of the knowledge and revelations they receive from God. Moreover, the prophets (anbiyā') have a special rank which is the first in the four ranks of God's most loved servants. The Qur'ān says: "Whoso obeys Allah and the messenger, they are with those unto whom Allah has shown favour, of the Prophets and the saints and the martyrs and the righteous. The best of the company are they!" (IV, 69).

Ibn al-'Arabī always attempted to interpret the sharī'a according to mystical views. His interpretation of the body of Islamic teachings is always followed by mystical doctrines. For example, he maintains the view that the knowledge of the laws of Islam which were revealed to the Prophets is revealed in a
similar manner and "from the same source" to some Sufis.\(^1\) He even went beyond this claim to state that "such Sufis are actually followers of their own laws which are identical with those of the Prophet and which are revealed to them directly from God."\(^2\)

However, Ibn Taymiyya holds an entirely contrary view about the interpretation of the šari'a. He always taught nominal Islam, and according to his firm conviction the general body of Islamic laws and teachings must conform with the primary sources of Islam. He is of the opinion that any person who claims to receive his own laws, revealed to him by God, and to have become independent of the Prophet is a heretic and an unbeliever. Similarly, any person who claims independence in the esoteric aspects of the šari'a and follows the Prophet only in the exoteric aspects, or simply accepts al-Haqqā and denies al-šari'a, becomes a heretic and is worse than the Jews and Christians.\(^3\) Ibn Taymiyya maintains that it is sheer unbelief to claim that the Prophet was sent with only the exoteric knowledge of the law and not the esoteric. He further explains that the esoteric knowledge of the law which is in the heart, the sphere of faith, always corresponds with the esoteric

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knowledge which is demonstrable in the performance of the devotions.

Ibn Taymiyya strongly criticised Ibn al-‘Arabi for the latter's claim that he received revelation from God without any mediation of an angel. Ibn al-‘Arabi’s argument about the superiority of the wali over a Prophet is to the effect that while the Prophet receives his revelation from an angel (al-malak), which can be described as the imaginative faculty (al-khayāl), al-wali takes his revelation directly from the source (al-ma'din), which can be described as the cognitive faculty (al-'aql). In this way the imaginative faculty is subservient to the cognitive faculty. In other words, the wali who derives his revelation directly from God is superior to the prophet who receives his revelation through the intermediary of an angel. Ibn Taymiyya branded this claim as a heresy and maintained that Ibn al-‘Arabi and his like among the sufis were heretics detached from the true sufis.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-‘Arabi seemed to be in a state of illusion when he claimed that he received revelations directly from God without any intermediary. What Ibn al-‘Arabi called al-'aql, as his source of revelation, was nothing but an illusion of spirits (arwāḥ), in which devils descended upon him.

and revealed to him certain things which he mistook for angels. Ibn Taymiyya maintained that such demons and devils were the spirits from whom Sāhib al-Fusūs (i.e. Ibn al-‘Arabī) claimed to receive revelations. (1) Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that demons and jinn also descended upon star-worshippers and idolators and revealed to them different kinds of illusions which the recipients mistook for real things. (2) During the early period of Islam, al-Mukhtār Ibn Abī ‘Ubayd also claimed to receive revelations, and the Prophet had warned the Muslims of al-Mukhtār’s devilish claim with the words: "There will come from al-Thaqīf an impostor and a liar." God revealed a verse, informing the Muslims: "Shall I inform you upon whom the devils descend? They descend on every sinful, false one" (XXVI, 221-2). This verse served to disprove al-Mukhtār’s claim of receiving revelations. "Lo! the devils do inspire their minions to dispute with you." (VI, 122). (3)

It may now seem quite evident that Ibn Taymiyya’s usage of the term wilāya differs profoundly from the view of such sufis as Ibn al-‘Arabī. While Ibn Taymiyya regarded wilā as simply a devout and pious Muslim who attains proximity and access to God depending on the degree of his faith, Ibn al-‘Arabī envisages a wilā as a special person possessing the esoteric knowledge of the gnosis (ma‘rifa) which enables him to fully understand God as being the Real. While Ibn Taymiyya maintains

the superiority of a Prophet over a saint due to the former's divine revelations and laws he receives from God, Ibn al-'Arabī asserts that a saint is superior to a Prophet within the terms of sainthood.

Mystical Hierarchy of Saints

Some süfīs classified saints into hierarchical ranks in accordance with the degree of their piety and closeness to God. It is within that mystical hierarchy that they attain high ranks such as the rank of the axis or pole (al-quṭb); the peg (al-watad); substitute (al-badal), etc. These hierarchical ranks, as we shall see later, are alleged to have been borrowed by the süfīs from Ismā‘īlī thought.

Goldziher is of the opinion that there are ten ranks and each of the ten classes is located in a particular region and assigned a particular task. (1)

Substitute (al-badal, pl. abdāl).

Al-badal is one of the degrees in the süfī hierarchical order of saints who participate by means of their powerful influence in the preservation of the order of the universe.

1. See Goldziher, Encyclopaedia of Islam, New edition, p.772, article "Hierarchy".
Goldziher tells us that there is a great difference of opinion as to the number of al-ābdāl. Their residence is said to be in Syria. Nicholson is of the opinion that the usage of al-ābdāl started in the third century and appeared in the Tadhkira al-awliyā′, in some of the sayings of Yahyā Ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī (d. 258). But al-Shibī, who bases his argument on the tradition of Ibn ʿUmar, seems to be more positive in tracing the usage of al-ābdāl to the first century of Islam. The hadith narrated by Ibn ʿUmar on the authority of the Prophet says: "The best people in my community in each century are 500 men and 40 ābdāl. Their number neither decreases nor increases. If one of the ābdāl dies, God substitutes him with another by taking one from the 500 men to fill his place."(1)

Ibn Durayd (321/933) says al-ābdāl are pious men who always live in the world and their number is 70; 40 in Syria and 30 scattered all over the world.(2) Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) maintains that al-ābdāl are 7 and are preserved by God in seven regions; each one of them resides in his region. He says these ābdāl have the knowledge of heavenly bodies and celestial secrets.(3)

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2. See al-Shibī, op. cit., p.460.
Peg (al-watad, pl. awtad)

Goldziher explains that al-watad is the third category of the hierarchy of the rijal al-ghayb, comprising four holy persons. Each one of them is charged with the surveillance of one of the four cardinal points, in the centre of which they have their dwelling-place. Al-Tustari, a celebrated sufi, prefers al-watad over al-abdal. His preference of al-watad is due to the fact that while the latter move from one place to another, the former always remain firmly fixed in their place. But according to al-Jurjani, al-watad are four men residing in four regions, viz: east, west, north, south. Ibn al-'Arabi also is of the opinion that al-watad are four. He says: You should know that God protects the world by al-watad whose number is always four, not five, and they are better than abdul.(1)

Chiefs (Nugabai)

The chiefs (al-nugabai) are 12 in number and they neither decrease nor increase. Their number is said to correspond to the 12 planets, i.e. zodiac. Each nagib knows the secrets of the planets. Ibn al-'Arabi also says that all laws that are to be revealed are in the hands of al-nugaba'.(2) According to al-Hujwiri, there are 300 men called the elect (al-akhyar); 40 abdul, 7 abrar, 4 awtad, 3 nugaba' and 1 qutb or ghwath.

All of them go around the world each night. (1)

Shībī states that the concept of chiefs (al-nugābā') is an Ismā‘īl doctrine about 12 sacred men who have been actively engaged in propagating and spreading the teachings of the Imām. (2) These pious men are sometimes called pilgrims (al-ḥijājī). According to al-Maqrīzī, those al-nugābā' have scattered all over the earth and their number has always been 12. (3) It should be noted that the rank of al-nugābā' is one of the principal ranks in the mystical hierarchies of the Ṣūfī saints. This Ismā‘īl concept of al-nugābā' seems to have penetrated into Ṣūfīsm and become one of the ranks of the Ṣūfī hierarchy. In view of the fact that Maqrīzī has mentioned in his Khīṭat that the Ismā‘īlīs have 12 nugābā', interestingly Ibn al-‘Arabī borrows the same notion of 12 nugābā' and mentions in his Futūḥāt that "al-nugābā' or al-aqṭāb are 12 in each century and they neither decrease nor increase and they correspond to the twelve planets." (4) It seems, then, that the mystical hierarchies of Ṣūfī saints were borrowed from other sources. Ibn Khaldūn is also of the opinion that the mystical hierarchies of the Ṣūfīs, particularly Ibn al-‘Arabī's doctrine of al-qutb, was borrowed

2. Ibid.
from Ismā'īlī thought. (1) We are told that Abū Ḥāshim (2) was the first to talk about al-nuqaba' and limited their number to 12 and related them to the 12 nuqabā' of the Israelites mentioned in the Qur'ān. He is also said to have related these 12 nuqabā' to the 12 nuqabā' from Medina during the time of the Prophet. (3) As we have already mentioned, the 12 nuqabā' have lofty ranks and sacredness in Ismā'īlī thought. It seems likely, therefore, that the Sufis took over the concepts of al-nuqaba' and al-aqtāb from the Ismā'īlis and merged them into their concept of al-wilāya.

the Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of Mystical Hierarchy

al-Nuqabā’, al-Aqtāb, al-Abdāl, al-Awtād, etc.

In his attempt to maintain and safeguard the qualities and characteristics of what he regarded as the true saints of God (al-awliya’) mentioned in the Qur'ān, Ibn Taymiyya rejected the mystical hierarchy of the Sufi saints such as al-ghawth, al-abdāl, al-awtād, al-nuqabā’, etc., who were alleged to have been engaged in preserving the order of the universe and administering the affairs of the world. He says the classes and number of the mystical hierarchy such as 4 awtād, 7 aqtāb,


2. Abū Ḥāshim was a Shi'i leader, son of Muhammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya whom he succeeded as head of the smaller branch of the Shi‘a, i.e. Kaysāniyya.

3. See Shībī, op. and loc. cit.
40 abdāl, 300 ḫubbā' and 1 ẓawāth, have not been mentioned in the Qur'an nor have they been taught by the Prophet. (1) He argued that if they had been of any religious value which Muslims should know about for the betterment of their religious beliefs and practices, the Prophet would certainly have told his community about those men in the mystical hierarchy, and he would have drawn the attention of the Muslims to follow the footsteps of those al-aqtāb, al-abdāl, etc. Ibn Taymiyya further explains that the mystical hierarchy had not been mentioned in any authentic or genuine ḥadīth, though there is a ḥadīth of broken chain of transmission narrated on the authority of 'Alī Ibn Abī Talib that the Prophet said: "There are 40 abdāl in Syria, and if one dies, God replaces him with another." But Ibn Taymiyya has denied the authenticity of this ḥadīth due to its broken chain of transmission and seemingly doubtful subject-matter. (2)

Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that the mystical hierarchy of the ṣūfī saints does not seem to appear in the early works and discussions of al-salaf, neither has it been reported from the scholars who command the respect of the generality of Muslims. The mystical hierarchy of the ṣūfī saints appears only in the works of the later scholars and they do not appear to be very clear about it. He says the assertion by the ṣūfīs that

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2. See Ibn Taymiyya, op. cit., p.46.
the names, number, ranks and organisation in the mystical hierarchy of the saints are constant at all times is an absurd claim. The reason is that the population of people in any society has never remained constant, since there must be increase or decrease in their number. It is not a condition of the friends of God, the pious and the elect to assume constancy in respect of their number, place or rank at all times. Ibn Taymiyya supports his argument against constancy in the number of any people by citing an example about the Prophet’s mission in Mecca. He says the number of the Prophet’s followers was at the outset less than seven, then it increased to less than forty, then to less than seventy and again to less than three hundred and from there to fifty thousand and so on. The number of the Prophet’s followers at that period had never remained constant at all times. Ibn Taymiyya says that in each century there is a great number of God’s saints, whose number cannot be estimated with any degree of certainty due to the fact that it has never been constant. (1)

Al-Ghawth occupies a prominent position in the Sufi hierarchy of saints. He is the top saint in the hierarchy of saints, whose aid is sought both in times of distress and happiness. But Ibn Taymiyya has strongly criticised and condemned seeking help or guidance from anyone other than God. He firmly believes that the terms al-Ghawth and al-ghiyāth are specialities of God which cannot be applied to any mortal, no matter whether he is king, prophet, angel, living or dead. God is the only helper (al-Ghawth), who gives succour (al-ghiyāth)

to all, and therefore seeking of help (al-istighātha) should only be directed to Him. (1) Seeking from men aid that only God can give is likened to "a drowning man seeking another to rescue him", or "a prisoner seeking another to release him." (2) It is therefore necessary for all Muslims to make their requests for rain, victory over the enemy or averting calamities, directly to God. This is because Ibn Taymiyya teaches that it is unbelief (kufr) to make requests or ask for rain or seek the aversion of calamities from any of the classes of men in the mystical hierarchy such as al-qutb, al-badal, and al-watad, etc. Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that rain, victory or richness comes through the bounty of God as a result of supplication (du‘ā‘), prayer (salāt), sincerity and belief and not through the medium of any 4C abdāl. In a ḥadīth narrated by Sa‘d Ibn Abī Waqqās it is reported that the answering of a request comes through al-du‘ā‘. The Prophet says: "O Sa‘d: Your victory or riches comes as a result of the sincerity, supplication and prayers of the weak among you." (3)

The polytheists have been rebuked in the Qur‘ān for calling on deities, but when they are in times of distress they call on God: "And when harm touches you upon the sea, all unto


whom you cry (for succour) fail save Him (alone) but when He brings you safe to land, you turn away, for man was ever thankless.” (XVII, 67). The faithful should always seek answers to their requests from God only, by virtue of this verse: "And when My servants question you concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he cries unto Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright." (II, 86). 

With regard to al-qutb who deals with the administration of secular and religious affairs, as he is the best person in his century, Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that it is wrong to claim that a particular person is the best man of God. (2) Ibn Taymiyya argues that there are uncountable pious and devoted men of God who always excel each other in attaining proximity and access to God. The sufis, therefore, cannot claim that the qutb is the sole best person, since there are numerous exceptionally pious and devout friends of God at all times and in each century.

2. Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

VISITATION OF TOMBS

Ibn Taymiyya's View on Visitation of Tombs and Intercession

This had become particularly associated with the graves of Sufi holy men and had become a feature of popular Sufism as comprehended by the ordinary people.

The visitation of tombs (ziyārat al-qubūr) of saints and righteous men had come to be regarded generally as a means of obtaining blessings, intercession and answers to some requests from the dead, and had become a popular religious practice before and during Ibn Taymiyya's time. For example, there was a common practice of visiting the graves of righteous people, who were invoked to answer requests such as "My master al-Badawī, answer my request" or "give me victory over my enemy" or "heal my sickness." (1) Ibn Taymiyya declared in his al-Fatāwā, while answering a legal request (fatwā), that the claim that making supplication (al-duʿāʾ) at the graves of pious men bears fruitful results was entirely un-Islamic and an absolute innovation. The claim had no basis at all in the primary sources of Islām. (2)

2. Ibid.
Ibn Taymiyya stated that this kind of visitation of tombs, intended for the solicitation of help from the dead, was a reprehensible and illegitimate practice which was tantamount to unbelief (shirk). (1) Muslims should never invoke the dead or consecrate the graveyard of Prophets and pious men as places of worship, as did the Jews and Christians the cemeteries of their Prophets. (2) Muslims were only encouraged to visit the graveyard with the intent of making du'a' for the dead Muslims and to ask God's forgiveness for them as they did when making funeral prayers for the dead. The Prophet had approved and established the practice of visiting Muslim cemeteries for the purpose just mentioned, and also because such a visit would remind people of death. This second reason was applicable to graves of non-Muslims as well, but praying for the forgiveness of non-Muslims was strictly forbidden. In the Sahih, the Prophet was reported to have visited the tomb of his mother, and said, "I asked God's permission to seek God's forgiveness for my mother, but He did not allow me, and I asked if I could visit her and He permitted me." Then he says: "Visit graves, for they remind you of the Last Day." (3) This permission for visitation of the cemetery was granted by the Prophet after his earlier prohibition. (4)

2. See Majmu', p. 328; also see Tawassul, p. 31.
4. See Tawassul, loc. cit.
According to Ibn Taymiyya, there are two types of visitation of the graveyard. (a) Legal visitation - which is the kind that has been approved by the *shari'a* and (b) Innovative visitation - the type which has been condemned by the *shari'a* as reprehensible because it amounted to *shirk*.

1. The Sunna of the Prophet has approved the legal visitation of graves for the purpose of asking forgiveness for dead Muslims, in the same manner in which they make supplication for the dead at funeral prayers. This legal visitation is believed to be a good practice and has always been a continuous process in the religious life of Muslims. The Prophet, who instituted this meritorious practice, also commanded his followers to make *du'a* for a dead person before and after burial and wish him success in answering the examination in the grave. Abū Dāwūd and others have narrated that if a Muslim is buried, "you should wish him success, for he is now being tested."(1) The Prophet also visited a number of tombs of Muslims such as those of al-Baqi' and the martyrs (al-shuhada') of Uhud. In his *Sahīh* Muslim narrated, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, "when Muslims enter the cemetery of Muslims, they should recite a special *du'a* for them, as the Prophet says: "If one of you visits the grave of his brother he should say 'Peace be upon you, members of the house of Muslims and believers. We are going to meet you (God willing). May God have mercy upon our predecessors, upon us all and upon our posterity. We ask God to give us good"

(1) See *Tawassul*, p.30; also see M.R.M., vol.I, p.60.
health. Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that this kind of legal visitation of the tombs of Muslims has a very important motive of seeking forgiveness for the dead Muslims, which is different from the motive for the general visitation by Muslims and non-Muslims for the purpose of remembrance of the Last Day. Ibn Taymiyya explains that the visitation of the graveyard is very important and worthwhile, for it makes one remember the prospects of death and future perpetual life, because this temporal earthly life is limited and it is only by visiting a cemetery that one regrets and ponders over one's sins and improves oneself by doing good actions. Ibn Taymiyya is also of the opinion that visitation of the graveyard intended for remembrance of death includes the graves of Muslims and infidels alike, since its objective is not to perform du'ā', but it is essentially intended to remind people that sooner or later all people must reach the same destination where the dead have already gone. The Prophet had set a precedent with regard to the two kinds of visitation to tombs. The first was special and specific for Muslims, in which du'ā' is made for the dead, while the second was general and didactic, intended as a reminder for all people that death is a necessary end.

2. Innovative Visitation - The second kind of visitation of the graveyard is illegal and innovative. Ibn Taymiyya says that it is the visitation of the polytheists and partly the practice

1. See Tawassul, loc. cit.; also cf. Majmū', pp.326-327; also cf. M.R.M., p.60; also see al-Patāwā, p.306.
of Christians who invoked the dead for help and satisfaction of their requests. He maintains that the Christians prayed at the cemetery and made invocation. (1) According to Ibn Taymiyya this kind of innovative visit is inconsistent with the sharī'a, because its purpose is to seek help, make invocations, obtain blessings and seek answers to requests from the dead. He says this kind of practice of invocation is abominable and an act of infidelity even if those invoked are Prophets or saints. (2) He says that this innovative visitation and the actions done at the tombs were popular practices which had never been done by the Prophet or his Companions, and after his death the Companions had never at any time gone to his grave and asked for assistance, made requests, etc. (3)

Ibn Taymiyya elaborates that the first type of visitation of the cemetery, which has been approved by the Sunna, is part of religious activities and should be regarded as a benevolent act intended to exhibit sympathy for humanity. The second innovative visitation of tombs, which has been condemned by the sharī'a, should be seen as an act of injustice perpetrated against God and His servants, because the acts of inflicting harm or benefit, the granting of bounties, healing sickness, answering calls in times of distress and the general satisfaction of requests and needs are specialities of God which should never be sought from any mortal. (4)

1. See Majmu', p.327.
2. Cf. Tawassul; also see Majmu', p.327.
3. See Tawassul, p.31.
4. Ibid.
The Prophet had condemned and prohibited the practice of making tombs of Prophets and righteous people places of worship or of regarding them as mosques. Ibn Taymiyya explains that even if mosques were built at those tombs for the purpose of prayers only, still worship there would be unlawful, since that would lead to infidelity of associating others with God. This is the main reason why the Prophet prohibited making graves of the Prophets and pious men places for mosques, for fear of shirk. (1) The Prophet is reported to have cursed the people who had made the tombs of their Prophets mosques. He says: "God's curse falls upon those people who have made the graves of their prophets to be mosques." (2) It is also reported in the Sahih of Muslim that the Prophet said: "God's curse is upon Jews and Christians who have taken graves of their prophets as mosques." (3) Having learnt from the mistakes of the Jews and Christians, the Prophet warned his people to avoid the mistake of making his grave a place of worship, and he said: "Oh God! do not make my tomb an idol for worship." (4) In his prohibition of taking graves as mosques, the Prophet is reported to have said in the Sahih: "Do not take graves as mosques; I forbid you to." (5)

1. Cf. Tawassul, p.29; also see Majmu', pp.327-332.
2. Tawassul, loc. cit.
3. See Majmu', p.327; also see Tawassul, p.29.
4. See Majmu', p.328; also see al-Fatawa, vol.IV, p.305.
It seems that the taking of the tombs of Prophets and pious men as places of worship, as we are told, had been done by the Jews and Christians, and that practice was a reprehensible act and was condemned by the Prophet as being a form of shirk. He warned his people to avoid the same mistakes. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that since the Prophet had forbidden the taking of tombs as mosques, which was the cause of God's anger, then those who invoked the dead for help would be seen to have committed a grave sin. He says that invocation of the dead to answer requests was the reason for unbelief among the people of Noah and general idolatry among men.\(^1\) He further maintains that, according to Ibn al-'Abbās, the gap between Adam and Noah was ten centuries, in all of which the religion of submission to God (Islām) was followed. Later unbelief (shirk) emerged as a result of venerating the tombs of righteous men.\(^2\)

The practice of hero worship and worship of righteous men, as well as statues, had begun in the time of Noah. We are told that his people went astray by worshipping the statues of pious men. The Qur'ānic verse which reads, "And they have said: Forsake not your gods. Forsake not Wadd nor Suwā' nor Yaghūth and Ya'ūq and Nasr,"\(^3\) is interpreted by Ibn al-'Abbās

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1. See Tawassul, pp.31-32.
2. Tawassul, p.32.
3. Qur'ān, LXXI:23. The names underlined were idols and statues which represented pious men in the time of Noah, according to Ibn al-'Abbās.
to mean that these people were pious men who lived during the
time of Noah, and when they died, the people of Noah devoted
themselves to the worship of those pious men and made their
statues as symbols of worship on their graves. That same worship
of the statues was the first emergence of idolatry, which,
according to Ibn Taymiyya, existed among some Christians in
their worship. (1) The idolatrous practice of statue-worship
gradually spread among the Arab tribes. Ibn Taymiyya maintains
that neither the Companions nor the followers had ever, at any
time, made invocations at the tomb of the Prophet, and the
attempt of someone standing at the Prophet's grave with the
intent to make supplication was objectionable to al-a'imma,
because they regarded that du'ā' as an innovation which had
never been done either by the Sahāba or the followers.

It may seem quite clear from what has been discussed about
Ibn Taymiyya's view on the visitation of tombs, that his
criticism was mainly focussed upon antinomian practices on the
graves, such as invoking the dead for help and victory, seeking
their intercession and pleading with them to answer requests,
which he branded as reprehensible innovations which were
tantamount to shirk. He maintains that Muslims should visit
a cemetery with the motive of asking God's forgiveness for the
dead Muslims; such a visitation would also serve a didactic
purpose, in that it would remind them of death. He strongly

1. See Majmu', p. 328; also see Tawassul, p. 32.
asserted that tombs of Prophets and righteous men should never be made places of worship.

**Doctrine of Intercession (Shafāʿa) and the Act of Seeking God's Favour (Tawassul).**

With regard to the doctrine of intercession (shafāʿa) and seeking God's favour (tawassul), we shall attempt to examine the views of both Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-ʿArabī and find out whether they agree or disagree with each other's view. In view of the fact that the doctrine of shafāʿa occupies a prominent place in the legal and mystical teachings, it will be worthwhile to find out how the two scholars interpret the Prophet's intercession.

Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that the act of seeking the means of approach to God and seeking His favour should always come through firm faith (İman) in the Prophet by virtue of this verse:

"O you who believe! Be mindful of your duty to Allāh, and seek the way of approach unto Him, and strive in His way in order that you may succeed." (V, 35).

In the sahīth al-Sahīh, the Prophet is reported to have said: "Ask God's wasīla for me, because it is a high position in Paradise which is only creditable to one of God's righteous
servants, and I hope that I am that servant. He who asks al-wasīla on my behalf has my intercession made permissible to him in the Last Day."(1)

Al-wasīla is the means of approach to God which is attained by a Muslim through pious devotion and acts of worship and other benevolent acts - in order to win God's favour and approval. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that al-wasīla may be rendered incomplete without following and believing in the teachings of the Prophet. (2) He further says that seeking al-wasīla in this way is incumbent upon every Muslim who wants to seek a means of approaching God. According to Ibn Taymiyya, no one can envisage attaining salvation from God or find access to His love and mercy without obedience to and faith in all that has been taught by the Prophet, because he is the intercessor (shāfi') of mankind who will intercede on their behalf. The Prophet is the master of the exalted position (ṣāhib al-mugām al-mahmūd) in the Day of Reckoning, whose intercession will be beneficial to earlier generations and latter generations of mankind. The Qur'ān has testified the assurance of that exalted position to the Prophet in chapter XVII, 79. "It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praised position."(3)

Ibn Taymiyya has used the term tawassul to mean two

2. See Ibn Taymiyya, Tawassul, p. 9
3. Qur'ān, XVII:79
things:

(a) **Tawassul** is used in the sense of having firm faith in and obeying the teachings of the Prophet as instrumental to gaining access to God.

(b) It is also used in the sense of making supplication (du'a') to the Prophet and seeking his intercession.

Ibn Taymiyya states that these two meanings agree with the consensus of the Muslims on the Prophet's *wasi*la.\(^1\) He also explains that Muslims are required to accept these two ways of *al-wasi*la through the Prophet, and he who denies them becomes guilty of apostasy. He should be allowed time to repent, but if he persists in his denial of the Prophet's *wasi*la, he can be executed.\(^2\)

**Intercession (Shaf'a'a)**

The term *shaf'a'a* implies the act of intercession. It means the act of pleading for help on behalf of someone else or seeking God's favour for someone. But in its technical meaning it implies the act of the Prophet's intercession to God for the salvation of mankind, especially sinners and evil-doers of his

\(^1\) *Tawassul*, pp. 20 and 57.

community in the Last Day. We have earlier mentioned that the Prophet will be the chief intercessor (ṣāfi') in the Day of Reckoning, and, by virtue of his exalted position, he will seek redemption of sinners from hell. Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that the generality of orthodox Muslims unanimously agree that the Prophet will intercede for mankind in answer to their request in the Last Day and God will grant him permission to do so.¹ That exclusive right of intercession for mankind, after people have become uncertain about their fate, shows the Prophet's superiority over all other intercessors by virtue of his being sāhib al-mugām al-mahmūd.² That kind of intercession for mankind is called by Ibn al-'Arabi the highest form of intercession (al-shafā'at al-'uzmā').³

According to Ibn al-'Arabi, the Prophet, Angels, Prophets and righteous believers would, in the Last Day, intercede on behalf of the wrong-doers. He quotes the hadith from the Sahīh of Muslim in which God says: "The Angels have interceded, the prophets have interceded, the faithful have interceded, and the Most Merciful remains everlasting. For He calls Himself the Best-Forgiving." In another place in the Sahīh, God says: "My servant should have a good opinion about Me."⁴

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2. See Tawassul, pp.9-10.
4. See Futūhāt, pp.292-293.
Ibn al-'Arabi sustains the view that the Prophet would ask God for permission to open the gate of intercession on the Last Day.\(^1\) In the hadith of shafā'ā the Prophet is reported to have said: "Then I would offer thanks to God since He would teach me about shafā'ā, for now I do not know about it."\(^2\)

Ibn al-'Arabi further says that humanity would enter either Paradise or Hell and each party would remain in its destination, though those who obtained the shafā'ā would be saved from hell.\(^3\) This statement seems to imply Ibn al-'Arabi's belief in the intercession of the Prophet in the Last Day, to the effect that those sinners and evil-doers of the Prophet's community residing in hell could benefit from the salvation and intercession of the Prophet.

Ibn al-'Arabi categorically states that the shafā'ā of the Prophet for his community primarily depends upon the ability of the people to show love and affection to their close relations.\(^4\) This is what he calls "the basis of the bond of kinship." That statement seems to imply that Muslims are always required to help and assist each other by showing love not only to their close relations, but also to all brother Muslims, because love is the strengthening and cohesive instrument which

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links them together and binds them through the ethical bond of brotherhood.

In his orthodox interpretation of shafā'ā, Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that ahl al-Sunna are agreed on what the Sahāba have also accepted, that the Prophet will intercede for the sinners among his community and will also intercede for the rest of creation. Ibn Taymiyya says that some people among the Khawārij and Mu'tazila seem to deny the Prophet's intercession for sinners, because they claim that God will not forgive sinners after they have gone to hell and neither would they be acquitted through intercession. (1) Contrary to the views of the Khawārij and Mu'tazila with regard to the shafā'ā for sinners, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the Sahāba, followers, Imāms of Muslims and the rest of ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamā'a were unanimously agreed that the Prophet would grant intercession to sinners and wrong-doers of his community. He also declares that all those who have faith in the Prophet would never remain in hell. Those who have even an atom of faith in their heart would be saved from fire. (2) The Prophet is reported to have said: "My intercession is for those of my community who have committed major sins." He also says: "My prayer conceals intercession for my community." (3) The views of the prominent süfīs on the question of shafā'ā for sinners in the Muslim community seem to

2. Cf. Tawassul, p.137. Also see Kalābādhi, Ta'arrūf, p.54.
3. See Kalābādhi, op. cit., p.56.
agree with the views expressed by Ibn Taymiyya. For example, Ibn al-'Arabi sustains the view that any sinner condemned to hell would be saved through the intercession of the Prophets, Angels and Believers as long as he has an atom of faith in his heart or has done a faithful act while in his earthly life. (1)

According to Ibn Taymiyya, there are two kinds of intercession: permissible and non-permissible. The permissible shafa'a is the one by which an intercessor can intercede on behalf of other people by God’s permission. (2) It is the intercession which the righteous servants of God are permitted to make on behalf of sinners. Ibn Taymiyya says the intercession and supplication of the Prophet benefit people in the hereafter and in this world respectively. For example, God gave Anas Ibn Malik wealth, children and long life as a result of the Prophet’s du’aa for Anas. The permissible shafa’a will be fully realised in the hereafter when the Prophet will intercede for mankind to attain salvation from God.

Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that the Prophet’s shafa’a will be beneficial only to those who have Iman, even if the Iman is weak, but with regard to the infidels, shafa’a is useless to them since it will do them no good due to their infidelity. The Prophet’s uncle, Abü Tālib, who protected his nephew from the harm that might have resulted from the malice and molestation

1. See Futūḥat, pp.292-293.
of Meccan unbelievers, and gave him love and security, will not benefit from the Prophet's shafā'ā and neither will he be saved from fire, because he died as an unbeliever and the Prophet's shafā'ā is only advantageous to ahl al-īmān. In the Sahīh of Bukhārī, Abū Hurayra is reported to have said: "I said to the Prophet, 'Which people will benefit from your shafā'ā in the hereafter?' He said, 'The happiest people who will enjoy my shafā'ā are those who said with sincerity there is no god but Allāh.'"(1)

The non-permissible shafā'ā is intercession for infidels. It has been rejected by God because the unbelievers have no faith and are not worthy of salvation. Ibn Taymiyya says that without faith, the infidels and hypocrites will not benefit from the intercession of the intercessors. The Qur'ān explains: "Whether you ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them, Allāh will not forgive them. Lo! Allāh guides not the evil-living folk." (LXIII, 6). Similarly, God rejected the Prophet's forgiveness of his uncle and father because they did not believe in his message. (2)

The significance of the acceptance of the Prophet's divine message is always to the effect that without faith in him one would never get salvation, because by rejecting him one rejects God, since his message was divinely revealed to him from God.

2. See Tawassul, p.10.
Therefore it is necessary, maintains Ibn Taymiyya, to have unswerving faith in the Prophet. Intercession for infidels to save them from the fire is useless, even if that intercession comes from one of the senior servants of God. Although Abraham asked God's forgiveness for his father, he later withdrew that request when he learnt that his father was an infidel and an enemy of God. The Prophet also, following the example of Abraham, had asked God's forgiveness for his uncle, and Muslims also asked God's forgiveness for their relatives. Thereupon, God revealed this verse: "It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to pray for the forgiveness of idolators even though they may be near of kin (to them) after it has become clear that they are the people of hellfire." (IX, 113). God has also rejected forgiveness for the father of Abraham because he was an infidel. God says: "The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear to him that he (his father) was an enemy to Allah, he (Abraham) disowned him. Lo! Abraham was soft of heart, long-suffering." (IX, 114).

The significance of these verses is that faith in the Prophets and Messengers of God is of paramount importance in securing one's salvation from hell-fire. This is because no amount of forgiveness or intercession would ever benefit an infidel who rejected the teachings of the prophets. There are no intercessors greater than the Prophet and Abraham and both of their parents were condemned to hell due to their (parents') unbelief. Prayers for their forgiveness from the Prophet and

Abraham were of no avail.

Ibn Taymiyya also maintains that those who worship angels, prophets and righteous men by way of seeking their help and intercession and by making statues of them and declaring: "These are God's favourites, we seek to reach God by their worship," will be among those who have gone astray. God rejects their worship, and any intercession made on their behalf, and they are guilty of unbelief. Intercession for them is therefore useless and of no avail. (1)

Ibn al-'Arabi is of the opinion that the Prophet maintains supremacy both in knowledge ('ilm) and in the revealed law (shari'a) in the phenomenal world. In the hereafter he supersedes all humanity by virtue of his merit in opening the gate of intercession. Ibn al-'Arabi says that no prophet has ever been accorded that concession, and the Prophet would, in that Day, intercede for Messengers (rusul), Prophets and Angels. The Prophet would seek God's permission to grant Angels, Messengers, Prophets and Believers the right to intercede for mankind. (2)

It should be noted that both Ibn Taymiyya and prominent Sufis such as al-Ghazâli and Ibn al-'Arabi have quoted the

famous hadīth of shafā‘a which was narrated by Abū Hurayra,\(^1\) in which the Prophet's role as the supreme intercessor has been explained. For, by virtue of his exalted position al-muqām al-mahmūd, he will intercede for mankind. They have also quoted this verse: "And verily thy Lord will give unto thee so that thou wilt be content " (XCIII, 5) to show the concession given to the Prophet on shafā‘a.

Al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya have all mentioned the higher form of shafā‘a granted to the Prophet. During the horrible time of the Day of Reckoning, when people are filled with great fear and despondency, he will intercede on behalf of mankind when even the senior prophets, Adam, Abraham, Noah and Jesus will be uncertain about their fate. They will gather together with other people and ask the Prophet to intercede for mankind. Thereupon, the Prophet will agree to their request. He will prostrate himself before God and it will be said to him: "O Muhammad, raise up your head! Say what you will and you are being listened to. Ask and you will be given, intercede and your intercession will be accepted."

Then the Prophet will say, "O God! My community, my community."\(^2\) Then God will grant him the right to intercede for mankind. It is reported that Messengers, Prophets, Angels and Believers

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2. Cf. Tawassul, p.147. Also see al-Ghazālī, Iḥyā, vol.IV, pp.653-656. Also see Ibn al-‘Arabī, Futūḥat, p.460.
will also intercede for other people.

Ibn al-'Arabī finally expressed his certain belief and conviction about the occurrence of the intercession in the Last Day. He declares that the intercession of the Angels, Prophets and Believers and the release and acquittal of a sinner from hell is true. The condemnation of sinners and evil-doers to hell and their subsequent acquittal through shafā'a is also true beyond reasonable doubt. The abode of mankind in Paradise and Hell respectively is also true. He says whatever has been brought to mankind by way of revelation and revealed scriptures, known and unknown, is also indubitable. (1)

It is interesting to note, at this juncture, that despite his mystical interpretations of some religious issues, Ibn al-'Arabī has expressed his certain belief in and acceptance of the occurrence of intercession in the Last Day. He also agrees that the Prophet, the Angels, other Prophets and the Believers will intercede on behalf of mankind during the terrors, horrors, fears and uncertainties of the Day of Reckoning.

It seems significant that Ibn al-'Arabī's views of intercession agree essentially with those expressed by Ibn Taymiyya. That agreement on shafā'a between Ibn al-'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya is in sharp contrast to the usually clear divergence of views between the two men. It seems that only on the

question of shafāʿa did the two scholars come together in support of belief in the intercession for mankind in the Day of Reckoning.
CONCLUSION

Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of Ibn al-'Arabi and some aspects of Sufism should be seen in the context of the time in which he was living. As a fundamentalist Muslim he was naturally disturbed at the influence the Sufi orders held over the common people and even the 'ulama'. Thus his attack on Ibn al-'Arabi must be viewed in terms of the danger which he regarded these views as presenting to the integrity of Islam.

His critique of Ibn al-'Arabi's mystical philosophy represents a major conflict in Islamic thought. The conflict has intellectual importance because it reveals the different ways in which the two scholars interpreted some basic teachings of Islam. Ibn al-'Arabi was an outstanding Sufi who had evolved mystico-philosophical doctrines, some of which were borrowed from non-Islamic sources. In explaining his doctrines, he tended to use abstruse, metaphorical and somewhat ambiguous language. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya was a fundamentalist who tended to explain and systematise the shari'a literally, with little or no recourse to figurative language or speculation.

The conflict between the ideas of the two men was inevitable. Their view of religion was different because their approach to the explanation of religion was different. The problem was, perhaps, more a problem of language than either would have been prepared to admit.
In the case of Ibn Taymiyya, it is clear on several occasions that his arguments against Ibn al-‘Arabî are a result of misunderstandings of what the latter was trying to say. For example, Ibn Taymiyya misunderstood Ibn al-‘Arabî’s monism. He maintained that Ibn al-‘Arabî was teaching that existence was one and a unity, no Creator and no created. But the logic behind Ibn al-‘Arabî’s monism was that there was only one real Absolute Existence (al-Wujûd al-Mutlq) which was the source and origin of all other existences. This means that he did not accept the notion of the presence of other existences, because they are unreal. Ibn al-‘Arabî accepts only the Absolute Reality as a unified whole testifying the totality of the universe as a reflection of a transcendental Being. When he refers to Khalq, he means that the phenomenal world is essentially a manifestation of al-Haqq. This is why he says in his Futûhât that, on the basis of Wahdat al-Wujûd, the existence of the contingents (al-Kâ’înât) is the substance (‘ayn) of the Absolute Existence. His statement in the Futûhât that "Glory be to God who created things, being Himself their essence" further illustrates his doctrine that the existence of Khalq is the ‘ayn of the existence of Haqq.

With regard to al-a’yan al-thâbita, Ibn Taymiyya also failed to grasp the role and implications of those a’yan which Ibn al-‘Arabî had described. Ibn Taymiyya’s interpretation of Ibn al-‘Arabî’s a’yan was that they were eternal and independent of God. The fact is that Ibn al-‘Arabî is saying that a’yan are the contents of God’s knowledge which are themselves eternal,
although they are not other than God, but simply constitute God's knowledge of things. The analogy which Ibn Taymiyya fails to draw is that, while, in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view, al-a‘yān are eternal, constituting the contents of God's knowledge, so in his own view the Preserved Tablet, al-Lawh al-Mahfūz, which contains all the destinies of mankind, is also eternal. The contents of al-Lawh al-Mahfūz, like al-a‘yān, are also potential. Thus, by referring to God's knowledge of things in latency inscribed in al-Lawh al-Mahfūz, Ibn Taymiyya is indirectly agreeing with Ibn al-‘Arabī that al-a‘yān, as the contents of God's knowledge, are the same as the destinies of mankind which are latent in al-Lawh al-Mahfūz. In other words, there is a complete logical parallel between al-a‘yān of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya's view of al-Lawh al-Mahfūz.

Although Ibn Taymiyya's aims to purify and rejuvenate Islam were honourable, nevertheless his method of argumentation tended to be rather inconsistent and contradictory. For example, in his Creed of Hamā, although taking a literal view of Qur'ānic interpretation, he refused to identify himself with anthropomorphic interpretation. Yet, in the interpretation of God descending to earth, Ibn Taymiyya is reported to have given a practical demonstration, when he was on a dais preaching, by descending from it and saying that God descended to earth in the same manner. This would contradict his denial of anthropomorphism. However, the authenticity of this story is open to question.

In matters of Sufism, Ibn Taymiyya was rather intolerant of
the ṣūfīs and mystical doctrines. His affiliation to the Qādirīyya order may have been true. However, the authenticity of the manuscript which alleges this has yet to be established. With regard to membership of an order, he pointed out that the wearing of al-khirqa had no significance other than being a dress to cover nakedness. This statement can be regarded as a direct challenge to the innovation of initiation through putting on the khirqa and drinking salt water, practised by some members of ṣūfī brotherhoods during his time. Yet Ibn Taymiyya is also a man of paradoxes. While he ruthlessly attacks a whole range of ṣūfī practices, he expresses his admiration for two well-known ṣūfīs who belonged to his Ḥanbālī school: al-Anṣārī al-Harawi (481/1089) and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jālānī (561/1166). His admiration, too, of the earlier mystics, whom he always referred to as true ṣūfīs worthy of emulation, further indicates the nature of the paradox. Clearly he was not a practising ṣūfī, because as we have already mentioned in Chapter III, he refused a request to participate in the ritual of sama' from which ecstasy (dhawq) was attained. His reason for challenging the validity of dhawq was that a recipient of dhawq could not, while in the state of unconsciousness, differentiate between what was coming from God and what was coming from the devil.

Ibn Taymiyya also strongly criticised the mystical hierarchy of saints, which, according to him, did not appear in the primary sources of Islām. Another reason for his objection to the mystical hierarchy would have been the threat which the mystical hierarchy posed to his position as an ʿālim. The
hierarchy represents a special class of pious men who are nearer to God than other people are. This was a theocratic structure in which Ibn Taymiyya was not represented, nor would he have wanted any part of it.

In trying to understand the paradoxical nature of Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards Sufism, certain features emerge. He obviously felt that a number of deviations had crept into the Sufi rituals. As a fundamentalist, he felt it his duty to refute and condemn those mystical rituals and doctrines, though he was not attacking Sufism per se. He seems to have accepted some kind of Sufism in so far as it involved the mystical practices which were associated with the Prophet and the early Islamic mystics. His view of Islam is reflected in his insistence on going back to what he regards as pristine Islam. It was based on the firm conviction that al-Salaf al-Salih represented the best type of Muslims in the Islamic community, and should be taken as a model, since their Islamic devotions and practices were not contaminated by alien or popular teachings. His encounter with the followers of the Rifaiyya order and his subsequent suppression of what he regarded as antinomian practices was justified on the basis of a statement by one of their leading shaykhs who admitted that their actions were not relevant to the shari'a but were efficacious against the Tartars.

It is true that there was a real spiritual need for Sufism during Ibn Taymiyya's time. The need is demonstrated by
the way in which the people showed profound interest in associating themselves with the süfî shaykhs of the time. What destroyed that spiritual revival in süfism was, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the introduction and encroachment of certain mystical deviations which could not be consistent with the sharî'â.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Ibn Taymiyya's contribution to süfism was essentially negative. That negative response was a reaction to what he regarded as antinomian practices current in the mystical society of his day. If his recommendations for the abolition of these practices had been carried out, what remained would have borne very little resemblance to what is generally understood by the term 'süfism'; it would have been much closer to the pietist ideals of the ascetics of the first two centuries of Islām.
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