SYARIAH-BASED SUFISM IN THE MODERN ERA: A LOOK AT THE WORK OF SHAYKH ʿABDULLĀH BIN BAYYAH

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the legal (*sharʿī*) validity and practical relevance of Sufism in the modern era through exploring the life and works of the contemporary *Mālikī* scholar, Shaykh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah. Famous for his works in *Mālikī Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* and global work with Muslim minorities (especially *Fiqh al-ʿAqalliyāt*), Shaykh bin Bayyah is less well-known for his Sufism. And yet, the life and works of the religious figurehead of a network that extends from West and North Africa, and the Gulf countries, to the United Kingdom and the west coast of the United States of America, provide an illuminating window on some forms of contemporary Sufism. Drawing upon official biographies, secondary literature, a personal interview, and a key, as yet unpublished, text, *Al-Mākhidh ʿalā al-Taṣawwuf* (The Criticisms of Sufism), the author argues Bin Bayyah has a distinctive (though not necessarily unique) practical approach to Sufism that is most relevant to our times. Not only does it help provide a balanced, tolerant, and learned antidote to religious extremism, which is firmly rooted in the Syariah, his practical Sufism also lays the foundations of a path towards civic contribution of *Ṣūfī* communities in fields as diverse as education, prison reform and peace-making.

Keywords: Sufism, Syariah, 'Abdullah bin Bayyah, Contemporary Society, Practical

Introduction

There is no single definition or characterisation of Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*), but notwithstanding its diversity, Sufism is frequently identified with mysticism (Schimmel, A., 1975; Trimingham, J. S., 1988; Arberry, A. J., 2007; Ewing, K. P., 2020; Voll, J. and Ohtsuka, K., 2021) and esoteric practices (Sirriyyah, E., 1999). William Chittick once described Sufism as favouring 'inwardness over outwardness, contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social interaction' (Chittick, W., 2021). The notion, therefore, that Sufism can be, or is, predominantly Syariah-based, with 'teachings geared towards practical goals from orthodox understandings of Islam' (Meyer, V., 2020) and its feet firmly placed in the social, legal and political environments, appears to fly in the face of much academic writing in the West. It also seems to conflict with understandings of those who regard Sufism, at best as an irrelevance, but at worst as a dangerous deviation ('*bidʿah*') from 'true Islam'. It is for this reason that *Ṣūfī* shrines (*maqāmāt*), and the *masājid* which surround them, have been the target of so many terrorist attacks.

Since 9/11 and the attacks on the Twin Towers, the late twentieth century revival of Sufism[1] has gathered momentum. Sufism has been seen by Muslim and western governments alike, as a bulwark against Salafist-inspired extremism. For Muslim countries in particular, Sufism has offered a stark contrast to the sometimes-radical foreign strains of Salafism. Instead, it has been promoted as part of a return to 'traditional Islam', reflecting certainties of the past and the renewal of a more tolerant, indigenous, national tradition (Fakir, Intissar 2021). This re-emergence has taken different forms in different places, working in tandem with local cultures and politics, but has emphasised the value of following the juridical schools (*al-Taqlīd*), the Ashʿarī creed and an established *Ṣūfī* path (*ṭarīqah*) (Fakir, Intissar 2021).

As with most re-iterations, the re-emerged is a re-imagination of the past, adapted to new circumstances of the contemporary world and a response to prevalent trends. Contemporary *Ṣūfī* movements are increasingly social and political actors (Green, N., 2012; Muedin, F., 2015; Milani, M., 2017), making important civic contributions as part of a 'theology of action' and focus on practical aspects of their Path. Rather than retreating into metaphysical introspection, they contribute to fields of education, economics, law, prison reform, international politics and peace-making.

In this piece, by way of illustration, the author examines some of the life works and activities of Shaykh ʿAbdullāh bin Bayyah, a highly influential Islamic scholar from Mauritania and political actor. He is well-known for his global work with Muslim minorities (*Fiqh al-ʿAqalliyāt*) as well as for his peace initiatives in the predominantly Muslim world, though less known for his Sufism. The religious figurehead of a network which extends from West and North Africa, and the Gulf, to the UK and the west coast of the United States, his life and works provide a window on this form of contemporary Sufism. The author draws upon official biographies, secondary literature, a personal interview (Bin Bayyah, December 12, 2019), and a key text[2] of - *Al-Mākhidh ʿalā al-Taṣawwuf* (The Criticisms of Sufism), an unpublished work of *Al-Taʾṣīl Al-Sharʿī lil-Taṣuwwuf* (The Legal Roots of Sufism) (Bin Bayyah, 2011; 2021) establishing the essentially legal (*sharʿī*) foundations of Sufism. The author has retained the original title of the article in the form originally provided by his students.

Taken together, it will be argued that these data sets suggest Bin Bayyah's approach to Sufism has five elements: first, a system of traditional Islamic learning adapted to modern contexts; second, a systematic promotion of virtue (*al-Iḥsān*) through prioritising the creed (*al-ʿAqīdah)* and morality (*al-ʿAkhlāq*) within an established juristic framing of Sharīʿah (*al-Taqlīd*); third, an ecumenical approach which, while rooted in historical paths (*ṭuruq*), does not make attachment to a specific path (*ṭarīqah*) a requirement; fourth, provision of service (*khidmah*) to the community whether in a predominantly

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[1] On the revival of Sufism in north Africa, see Boukhars, A., 2021.
[2] Although the space here does not allow, the Shaykh has also published many works that demonstrate his role as a peace maker and religious interlocutor (Bin Bayyah, 2007; 2015; 2017).

Muslim or non-Muslim country, or internationally; and fifth, a valorising of stability reflected in supporting established government 'quietism' and opposing perceived extremism and radicalism.

Traditionalism, Politics and Public Service

Shaykh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah, while clearly 'political'[3] presents as a Sunni traditionalist.[4] This is most apparent in his official website where he is cast as a scholar conversant with the juristic canon and the richness of its heritage (Official Website of Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah, 2021). It conveys he was brought up and educated in a scholarly and religiously scrupulous home (*bayt ʿilm wa waraʿ*), studied the traditional Islamic sciences and in the traditional way. He follows *sanad* (transmitted authority) and studied from teachers who themselves were scholars. First, his father, the famous Chief Justice and Mauritanian scholar, al-Shaykh al-Maḥfūẓ, from whom he received *awrād/* litanies and was his primary teacher (Bin Bayyah, Interview, December 12, 2019); second, Shaykh Muḥammad Sālim ibn Al-Shīn who taught him the sciences of Arabic language and third, al-Shaykh Bayyah ibn al-Sālik al-Masūmī, from whom he studied knowledge of the Qur'ān (Official Website of Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah, 2021).

And yet, this is not quite the traditionalism associated with *taqlīd*, where legal precedent and past practice is understood irrespective of contemporary reality (*al-wāʿqi'ah*) abstracted from social conditions and culture.[5] Bin Bayyah was not 'home-schooled' and protected from all outside influences. He attended the Mauritanian *Maḥẓarah*, a pre-eminent Islamic schooling system known for preserving both Mauritanian and Islamic cultural heritage (Ladjal, T. & Bensaid, B., 2017). Further, even after graduating from the *Maḥẓarah*, rather than going to train at al-Azhar, he left for Tunis to train for the judiciary while under French occupation and studied the 'modern legal systems' that would be applied in Mauritania (Bin Bayyah, 2019).

The type of 'adapted' traditionalism Bin Bayyah expresses is also reflected in his own 'crafting' of Islamic jurisprudence (*Sināʿat al-Fatwā*) which engages the modern and complexity of the present in light of the juristic heritage (*al-Turāth*) (Bin Bayyah, 2018). As David Warren (2021) comments, Bin Bayyah's contribution to Islamic jurisprudence is his re-working of the classical legal concept of *taḥqiq al-manāṭ* (refinement of the cause) which has allowed him to issue new rulings while appearing to remain faithful to a text's original justification. This has produced a variety of new *fatāwā*, ranging from prohibitions on offensive *jihad* in the modern era to a specialised 'fiqh of minorities' (*Fiqh Al-ʿAqalliyāt*) (Bin Bayyah, 2018, pp. 251-442). In conjunction with his relationship with the American Muslim preacher, Shaykh Hamzah Yusof Hanson, this has enabled Bin Bayyah to extend his influence[6] beyond MENA and the Middle East and towards Muslim minorities in the West.

In contrast to Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, however, Bin Bayyah's embrace of the modern with a focus on the West has not extended to advocacy of democracy; not for Arab Muslim states in any event. He remains quietist in the traditional Sunni mould.[7] Bin Bayyah is philosophically and religiously committed to stable and established political authority (Warren, David., 2021), even if a dictatorship. Speaking to the OIC assembly at its annual meeting in Jeddah in 2007, he stated:

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[3] Notwithstanding his past participation in politics, Bin Bayyah has more recently expression an 'aversion' to 'formal politics' and described it as an 'evil disease' (Al-Azami, U., 2019).

[4] 'Traditionalism' as with 'Islamism', is not self-defining and can be interpreted in different ways (Graham W. A., 1993).

[5] The doctrine of *al-taqlid* has been criticised on this very basis (Ramadan, T. 2008).

[6] This was true before his refusal to condemn the massacres of pro-democracy demonstrators in Egypt. Bin Bayyah's open support for the regimes in the Middle East, however, has led to vigorous criticism and cancellation of his appearances at conferences for young Muslims in America.

[7] This includes Sufism. Sufism was embedded within Ottoman Islamic political authority until the advent of Islamic modernism (Brack, Jonathan 2016).

'I absolutely believe that the establishing of a centralized, strong, and stable government *(sulṭa markazīya qawīya mustaqirra)* is one of the higher intentions and purposes *(maqāṣid)* of the Sharia; because opening the door to unstoppable change, and setting out on a journey without any settled destination, is a situation that leads to civil strife, unrest, and greatly contravenes the common good."

(David Warren, 2021, p. 81)

Bin Bayyah's political quietism is not merely a theoretical commitment. He also actively participated in the development of the Mauritanian state between 1958 and 1978, occupying a number of important posts following its independence from France. Though declared an 'Islamic Republic' in October 1958, the government of French-trained lawyer Moktar Ould Daddah was not an 'Islamic State' (*Dowlah Islāmiyya*) in either a 'Qutbian' (Qutb, S., 1978) or classical sense (Seddon, D., 1996). Rather, it was typical of the majority of Muslim countries who secured their independence after the Second World War and later formed and became members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) (Farrar, Salim, 2014). The fledgling Mauritanian state sported a blend of different philosophies, among which Islam and the Sharīʿah played a bit role in conjunction with authoritarian Socialism. Mauritania had good relations at this time with communist China and Chairman Mao (Seddon, D., 1996). Hence in 1975, Daddah called for a new 'Islamic, national, centralist and socialist democracy' charter for Mauritania (Farrar, Salim, 2014).

Bin Bayyah is, and has been, a servant of the nation state, albeit through an Islamic frame adapted to a pluralist, centralised and syncretic structure. Hence, in Mauritania he was appointed President of Sharīʿah Public Affairs in the Ministry of Justice and then Deputy President of the Court of Appeal, before rising to the Deputy President of the High Court and finally President of the Sharīʿah and Islamic Affairs division of the same court (Official Website of Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah, 2021). After his legal career, he became Mauritania's chief negotiator in religious matters and was responsible for setting up Mauritania's Ministry for Islamic Affairs of which he was its first minister. Between 1970 and 1978, he was conferred with a number of political appointments within the Mauritanian government, including becoming the country's Education and Justice Minister and then Deputy Prime-Minister.

He is not, however, an agent of revolutionary change. Shaykh Bin Bayyah refused to serve the revolutionary administration in 1978 following a military coup, preferring prison and then exile in stable Saudi Arabia (Al-Azami, U., 2019).[8] He also rallied against the instability and extremism that impacted the region after 9/11 and the Gulf War. He addressed directly the fears of global Salafi-jihadism and promoted a religious politics of moderation (*al-wasaṭiyyah*) at international fora. He further participated in peace conferences, condemned international terrorism and refuted the legal case for Salafist-inspired jihad. This found its clearest expression at the Mardin Conference in Turkey in 2010 where he addressed the (allegedly) controversial Mardin *fatwā* given by the thirteenth century theologian, Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah.[9] He argued the Jihadists had sought to legitimate their actions based on a misprint, converting the verb to 'to treat' (*yuʿāmil*) into the verb 'to fight' (*yuqātil*) (Bin Bayyah, 2015).[10] In the wake of the events of the 2011 'Arab Spring', he further challenged what he called the 'chaos of the fatwa' (*fawḍā al-fatwā)* and the 'chaos in religious discourse' (*fawḍā al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*), thereby seeking to undermine the Islamic legitimacy of opposition movements across the Arab world (David Warren, 2021, p. 75).

Far from an agent of chaos, Bin Bayyah is presented as a voice of wisdom and stability: 'one of the symbols of moderation and at the centre-ground' (*aḥad rumūz al-iʿtidāl wa-l wasaṭiyyah*), supporting

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[8] Printed bibliographies state he was imprisoned for a few months after the coup, left politics due to ill health and then left for Saudi Arabia to devote his time to further study and teaching (Bin Bayyah, 2015, p.35).

[9] For a translation and thorough discussion of the Mardin fatwa, see Michot, Yahya (2006). For a contextual discussion and analysis of Ibn Taymiyyah's three fatwas against the Mongols, see Aigle, Denise (2007).

[10] For Bin Bayyah's full discussion and analysis, see Bin Bayyah (2020).

his role as an international peace-maker.[11] He establishes the Forum for Peace (FFP) in Abu Dhabi in 2014; he participates in a conference with the African Union concerning the conflict in Central African Republic to release the Chibok girls kidnapped by Boko Haram; he attends in 2015 the World Economic Forum as well as the UN Summit for Countering Violent Extremism; in 2016 he convenes the Marrakesh Declaration (seeking an authoritative Islamic statement on the rights and protections of non-Muslim minorities in Muslim-majority countries); and, in 2018, his makes his inter-faith initiative, held in Washington, on an 'Alliance of Virtues'. The latter formed the subject matter of the Sixth FFP Conference held in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

In summary, Shaykh Bin Bayyah's life, approach and activities to date demonstrate the following elements: a traditional approach of Islamic learning and legal scholarship adapted to modern contexts; the providing of service (*khidmah*) to the community whether in a predominantly Muslim or non-Muslim country, or internationally; and the valorising of stability reflected in supporting established government ('quietism'). But what of his understanding of Sufism?

Sufism

Although there is no necessary correlation, Sufism has long been associated with peace and moderation and in the wake of 9/11, and the war in Iraq, was deployed by governments (including Muslim) to portray a softer face of Islam to indicate that the 'War on Terror' was not a war against Islam itself and against Muslims *in toto*, but rather a war against Jihadi Salafists (Ewing K. P. *et. al.*, 2020; Muedini F, (2015). In June 2009, for example, the Western-backed Pakistan government of Pervez Musharraf even established a 'Sufi Advisory Council' as another layer of government in June 2009 to assist in its ideological battle against the Pakistan Taliban (Ali Eteraz, 2009).

Shaykh Bin Bayyah has also deployed Sufism in his opposition to extremism. In a speech on July 10 2009, before a global *Ṣūfī* gathering at the Second International Conference in Honour of Sīdī Shīker, Shaykh Bin Bayyah stated, 'I call upon the Muslims to revive the science of *Taṣawwuf*' and proceeded to lay out a legal defence of Sufism (the written elaboration of this speech is discussed further below) (VirtualMosque.com, 2009). His appearance at this conference, organised through the Moroccan government (Tea-Mahma, 2019; Muedini F, 2015, p. 81) as part of its state sponsorship of Sufism instituted following the Salafi-Jihadist attacks in Cassablanca in 2003 Muedini F, 2015, p. 76; Fakir I., 2021), was significant representing both ostensible support for this particular strategy as well as an explicit association with Sufism. It is an association he has furthered in more recent times, sharing platforms with Ḥabīb ʿAlī Al-Jifrī at his annual Forum for the Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies in the UAE.

Notwithstanding Bin Bayyah's promotion of Sufism, he does not publicly identify with a *Ṣūfī* Order. There is no mention of Sufism in the most publicly accessible of his texts and is a matter he appears not to want to emphasise. This could be due to the nature or brand of his Sufism - an implicit and accepted part of his Mauritanian heritage and of the scholarly tradition to which he, his family and much of the current Mauritanian ruling class belongs.[12]

Bin Bayyah's Sufism is juristic, bare, and almost completely shorn of the rituals customarily attributed to Ṣūfīs. In interview, he admitted he did not dictate any particular litanies (*awrād*) to his students, apart from his children, even though his father used to, and noted his father's disdain for those 'extreme Ṣūfīs' who made a 'show' of their Sufism (*alladhīna yushaddidūna fī aḥwāl wa maẓāhir al-taṣawwuf yakrahu dhālik*). This might be an implied criticism of the Tijānīs, a predominant *ṭarīqah* in North Africa, including Mauritania, which proclaimed superiority over all other orders and a clear 'distinctiveness'

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[11] Al-Azami U. (2019, pp. 349 – 350) has questioned this role arguing Bin Bayyah has contributed to the region's instability by allying with the United Arab Emirates and counter-revolutionary forces.

[12] The former Defence Minister, Head of Security and now current President of Mauritania, Moḥamed Ould Ghazouan, along with Shaykh Bin Bayyah, his father and grandfather, all belong to the same *ṭarīqah*: the *Ghazfiyyah* (Al-Habib Al-Aswad (2021; alwahdawi.info, 2021; kiffah.info, 2016).

on the Day of Judgement guaranteeing them entry into Paradise. For him, while the path of Sufism is followed in reality by very few and rare for one to complete (*qalīl wa nādir*), its essence is very simple: the abandonment of sin, inwardly and outwardly with a view to achieving piety (*al-Taqwā*) and perfect virtue (*al-Iḥsān*). The 'best path' (*al-ṭarīq al-aḥsan*) is in avoiding prohibitions (*al-ijtināb*) and the performance of obligations (*al-imtithāl*) outwardly and inwardly where he mentions this several times but in different ways. For example, he also says: 'The essential criterion is obeying the limits of the Religious Law, outwardly and inwardly; this is the true Sufism'. The 'True Ṣūfīs' (*Al-Ṣūfiyyah al-Ḥaqīqīyyah*), he states, are not those who parade the trappings of Sufism, such as the prayer mat and the rosary beads. Rather, they are the ones who guard themselves from concealed sin, such as insincerity (*al-riyā'*) and arrogance (*al-kibr*), and benefit the people with their words and actions, combining the two together (*intifāʿ al-nās bi-kalāmihi bi-l qawl wa-l ʿamal yajmaʿūna bayn al-ithnayn*). In short, this Sufism seeks to avoid sectarianism and identification through group affiliation and loyalty to a Shaykh. Rather, its aspirations are ecumenical, aiming to perfect individuals through God-conscious action and service; or what Cornell (1998) has termed, 'socially conscious virtue'.

The absence of ostensible trappings of Sufism does not mean, however, that Shaykh Bin Bayyah objects to spiritual 'masters' or the *ṭarīqah*. In his work, *Al-Mākhidh ʿalā al-Taṣawwuf* (see further below), Bin Bayyah repeatedly refers to Sīdī Aḥmad Zarrūq, implying a deep respect for his teachings. In fact, it appears that the family of Bin Bayyah is connected to Aḥmad Zarrūq through an offshoot of the *Nāṣiriyyah Shādhiliyyah* ṭarīqah,[13] known as *al-Ghazfiyyah*.[14] The *ṭarīqah* is said to sit between the Qādirīs (originating from ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī) and the Shādhilīs,[15] and is known for its focus on deeds (*ʿamal*), output (*intāj*), austerity (*taqashshuf*) and fortitude (*jalad*). It also has a following in Mauritania (Hamāhullāh Ould Al-Sālim, 2017).

This is not the place to give a detailed explication of the teachings of Aḥmad Zarrūq, nor to recount the controversies in which he became embroiled. For our purposes, it suffices to summarise his *ṭarīqah* as a move away from an association with a rarefied *Ṣūfī* lineage, towards ecumenicalism that fuses spiritual training with legal rectitude and legal training with 'spiritual insight' (Kugle, S., 2011) This juridical framing, or Syariah basis of Sufism, is illustrated further in my analysis of the key text below.

Key Text

Al-Mākhidh ʿalā al-Taṣawwuf: famā hiya al-Mushkilāt al-ʿAshar maʿ al-Taṣawwuf idhā kāna aṣluhu al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah? (The Criticisms of Sufism: What are the Ten Problems with Sufism when its Basis is found in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah?)

This text provides a primary source for Bin Bayyah's approach to Sufism. This text is not dated but originates in the speech made by Bin Bayyah at the Second International Conference in Honour of Sīdī Shīker on 10-12 July 2009 and held in Marrakesh, as part of the Moroccan government's promotion of Sufism.

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[13] According to John Voll, the *Nāṣiriyyah* were both a religious and a secular power centred in Dar'a in the southern part of Morocco. It was founded by Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir al-Dar'i (d. 1085/1674) and permitted into its fold only scholars with multiple authorisations from the Shaykhs of their time (al-Fasi, 1973). Aḥmad al-Tijānī was originally a member of the Nāṣirīyyah, before founding his own distinctive order. The Tijānīs, Shādhilīs and Qādirīs form the three-based *ṭuruq* in Mauritania, from which other sub-branches have evolved.

[14] In his 'History of Mauritania before the Occupation', Hamāhullāh Ould Al-Sālim notes the *Ghazfiyyah* as a branch of the Shādhilīyyah deriving from al-Dawudi (2017).

[15] The combination of these two *ṭarīqahs* originates from the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq (al-Fāsī, d. 1493) who while in Cairo, studied under Shaykh Aḥmad ibn ʿUqba al-Ḥaḍramī and took from him a synthesis of the teachings of Abū Madyān, Abū Ḥasan al-Shādhilī and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (J.S. Trimingham, 1988; S Kugle, 2011, pp. 125-128) and Z Istrabadi (1988, p.23) citing Khushaim, states explicitly the Nāṣirīyyah are a Zarrūqi sub-group.

The uploaded version is dated 2011, before Bin Bayyah became the head of the Forum for Peace (FFP) in Abu Dhabi and the emergence of Daesh, but simultaneous with the events of the 'Arab Spring', the revolts against Arab governments and the destruction of Ṣūfī shrines in Egypt and across North Africa. In addition to the popular revolt against Hosni Mubarak's autocratic government in Egypt, the events of that Spring also facilitated and unleashed Salafist fervour with Ṣūfī mosques and historic sites in Egypt targeted for destruction by Salafist extremists. This included the tomb and mosque in Alexandria of the thirteenth century Ṣūfī Al-Mursī Abū al-ʿAbbās, the successor of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (Irfan al-Alawi, 2011). The article might be viewed, therefore, as an ideological toolbox for Sufism practitioners and supporters to defend their beliefs and practices in the face of the virulent rhetoric of Salafist opponents claiming that Sufism has no legal basis or roots in the religion. It also provides further legitimacy on Muslim governments to deploy Sufism as a religious alternative to Islamist opposition.

It is a medium length article, consisting of twenty pages in the Arabic and divided into two broad sections. The title page (not the uploaded version) contains a full image of a Shaykh (*murshid*) with his pupil (*murīd*), in itself provoking a Salafist response.[16] The first section focuses on defining the 'Ṣūfī' and Sufism, laying out its essential parameters. This part emphasises that Sufism lies at the heart of the religion and embodies the values, form, and substance of Islam's primary sources: the Qur'ān, Sunnah and *Athar*. This includes even the terminologies and priorities of the Ṣūfīs. The second half addresses ten criticisms of Sufism[17], commonly advanced by Salafists and opponents of Sufism. For reasons of time and space, the focus is on the first section. The language is academic and without polemic.

In his definition of Sufism and of the Ṣūfī, he adopts an '*Uṣūlī*' (legalistic) approach, replete with logical deductions and root and branch metaphors. This is especially appropriate as Bin Bayyah is a specialist in the science of *uṣūl* (the 'roots') *al-fiqh* (also known as *al-furūʿ*, or 'the branches') and is framing a legal defence of Sufism within the framework of the Syarīʿah. As a preliminary, he states:

> 'Not one group has been spared from the ideological conflicts between different Islamic groups. It would not be strange nor out of place (in this context) to attack the Ṣūfīs, root and branch. In this essay, our concern is with the root and not with the branches, for the safety of the 'root' leads to a ruling pertaining to the branches that will be judged in the (same) light, as every branch returns to its root and is considered in similar terms. The ruling of one corresponds with the ruling of the other, whether correct or in error. If they do not correspond, the attribution collapses and its cause is severed. The (matter) has its own ruling and is returned to its type and category.'

> (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 1, para 1)

In other words, if the essence of Sufism can be reconciled with Islam's primary sources, then there is nothing wrong with Sufism and its attendant practices. If, on the other hand, Sufism is inconsistent with Islamic fundamentals, then the same will be said of its practices. If divergent practices are observed, they are to be judged on their own terms rather than attributed to their source. This is a logical initial salvo and response to those who focus on what some Ṣūfīs do and cast all of Sufism in a bad light

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[16] Salafists purporting to following the Hanabilah prohibit the drawing of any living thing, especially a human being. This is because it is deemed akin to idolatry and mimicking Allāh's creating. While there are differences in the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, the school of Imām Mālik (to which Shaykh Bin Bayyah belongs) explicitly allows even full body drawings of living things. It only prohibits the crafting and sculpting of three-dimensional images.

[17] In chronological order, these criticisms are: (1) Sufism is an innovation (*bidʿah*); (2) Ṣūfī groups invent litanies and expressions to be performed by their followers that were not mentioned by the Prophet; (3) the use of rosary beads; (4) reciting litanies in congregation; (5) performing '*tawassul*' (seeking help through intermediaries) and '*tabarruk*' (seeking blessing through holy relics); (6) *istighātha* (seeking rescue through an intermediary); (7) obeying the Shaykh; (8) visiting graves of the pious and travelling to do so; (9) expressions of ecstasy (*al-wajd*) and ecstatic imitations (*at-tawajud*); and (10) claims of 'unveiling' (*kashf*), revealing secrets (*al-itlāʿ ʿalā al-asrār*) and performance of extraordinary matters (*al-khawāriq*).

while ignoring the spiritual discipline as a whole and its essence. It also appears to acknowledge, implicitly, there may be practices of some followers of Sufism inconsistent both with the Syarīʿah and the fundamentals of Sufism. That was certainly the belief of Aḥmad Zarrūq, the 'juridical Ṣūfī', whom Bin Bayyah refers to twice in the opening page of his article. In his *Al-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Bidaʿ* ('The Riposte to the People of Innovation'), Zarrūq riled against the Ṣūfīs of his time (targeting the followers of the Moroccan saint, al-Jazūlī, and his disciple, al-Ghazwānī), for their ignorance, consumption and love of the elite.

He begins the formal discussion by defining the terms 'Ṣūfī' (*Al-Ṣūfi*) and 'Sufism' (*Al-taṣawwuf*), noting there is not one particular definition, but is founded on 'total sincerity to God' (*Ṣidq al-tawwajuh ilā Allāh*) and 'perfect virtue' (*al-Iḥsān*).   The reason for the multiplicity of definitions provided by scholars rested on their particular focus and to which 'spiritual station' (*maqām*) they were referring (not, we may assume, because there was no core meaning). Citing al-Bustī (Abu-l Fatḥ al-Bustī, d. 1010/400AH), he refers to the common misconception that Ṣūfīs were so called because they wore 'Ṣūf' or thick wool, but in fact the term was derived from the verb 'Ṣafā' or 'to purify', hence 'Ṣūfī' or 'the pure one' (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 2, para 2).

Developing the theme of 'purification', he cites Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, the 'Uṣūlī' and 'Ṣūfī', to explain that Sufism is concerned with purification of the heart and the inner dimension. Al-Ghazālī explained the knowledge of a transaction (*ʿilm al-muʿāmalat'*) is divided into external knowledge (*ʿilm al-ẓāhir'*) and internal knowledge (*ʿilm al-bāṭin'*). The former refers to the actions of limbs (*ʿAmal al-jawāriḥ'*) whereas the latter pertains to actions of hearts (*ʿamal al-qulūb'*). The spiritual sensations (*al-wārid*) that occur in the heart without one knowing, fall into two categories: praiseworthy *('maḥmūd'*) or condemnable (*'madhmūm'*). Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*) is concerned with reflections on the statuses of hearts (*'al-naẓr li aḥwāl al-qulūb'*) and categorises them in the same way that the generally accepted science of *fiqh* categorises actions of our limbs[18] within a framework of substantive legal rules deduced from the detailed Islamic evidential sources (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 2, para 4). The implication, therefore, is just as we require a science and a discipline (*al-Fiqh*) to guide us to use the limbs of our body in the way that complies with the Law of Allāh, also we require a science (*al-taṣawwuf*) to help discipline our hearts to run in obedience to Allāh.

Names, titles and terminology, he continues, are important for they convey their core meaning (*'maḥtawā'*) and substance (*'faḥwā'*). If both the meaning and content is good, then the accorded names for them will also be good (and the opposite is true) (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 2, para 5). Bin Bayyah argues the core meaning and substance of Sufism is 'total sincerity' (*ṣidq al-tawajjuh*) and 'perfect virtue' (*al-Iḥsān*) – which constitutes the third part of the 'trinity' in the religion after *Al-Islām* and *Al-Īmān* ('True Faith'), and referenced in the Prophetic 'Ḥadīth Jibrīl'[19] (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 3, para 1). *Al-Iḥsān*, he states, *is* perfection and has no limit; it soars with no ceiling, *combining* sensations of 'presence' (*'al-ḥuḍūr'*) and 'witnessing' (*'al-shuhūd'*) in the act of worship (*al-ʿibādah*) to the extent it is 'as if' you see Him. For Bin Bayyah, quoting Aḥmad Zarrūq again, it is this joining of 'witnessing' in the act of worship that comprises real Sufism, and importantly the combining of knowledge (*ʿilm*) with action (*'ʿamal'*). He states:

> 'It is known that Sufism cannot be realized except by practising it. Seeking its assistance without practice is deceit (*tadlīs*); for practice is a pre-requisite (*sharṭ*) for its perfecting. It has been said: "Knowledge is attained by practice lest it be lost."

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[18] Books of fiqh traditionally speak of 'sins' of the 'limbs': hands, feet, eyes and ears, stomach, tongue and the catch-all category of 'body'.

[19] This is a long and famous ḥadīth, principally narrated by Imām Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in which the Angel Gabriel asks the Holy Prophet the meanings of Islām, Īmān and Iḥsān, in addition to the occurrence of the Day of Judgment and the signs of its coming.

For Bin Bayyah, therefore, true Sufism is by definition 'practical', in the sense that it cannot be known without praxis. How then, in practical terms he asks, can *Iḥsān* be reached when it comprises actions of the heart? He states that the Ṣūfīs devised a variety of methods drawn from the Qur'ān, Sunnah and specific spiritual experiences – and in that, they relied also upon the meaning of the Qur'ānic verse:

> Translation: And in your own selves; will you not then see?

> (Surah al-Dzariyat 51: 21)

They immersed in acts of worship and obligated themselves with litanies at due times and instructed their full memorisation. Quoting the famous Māliki Uṣūlī, Al-Shāṭibī (the author of *Al-Muwāfaqāt*), he states:

> 'They (the Ṣūfīs) are punctilious in their praxis: they draw no distinctions in the normative instructions: whether obligatory (*wājib*), supererogatory (*mandūb*), disliked (*makrūh*) and prohibited (*muḥarram*). This is the normal consideration for the Ṣūfī Masters and for those who have followed them on the path of the Hereafter, resolutely and with firm determination, casting off completely the demands of a temporal life.'

> (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 3, para 4)

He also cites al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, regarded as the father of 'sober' and 'juridical Sufism' stating (Cornell, V., 1998; Kugle, S., 2011): 'We have not derived Sufism from speculative sayings, doubts and controversies; rather we have derived it from hunger (*al-jūʿ*), sleepless nights (*al-sahr*) and attendant acts of worship (*malāzimat al-ʿamāl*)' (Bin Bayyah, 2019b: p. 4, para 3).

Sufism and Ṣūfī origins, Bin Bayyah continues, are found in the Qur'ān, Sunnah and in the actions of 'the Pious Predecessors' (*Afʿāl al-Salaf*). He then cites a ḥadīth, reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī, quoted in Maxim 33 of Aḥmad Zarrūq's *Qawāʿid*. This is a long extract that tells the story of a man who borrowed one thousand dinars without a guarantor and ended up voluntarily repaying the lender two thousand dinars just to make sure he paid his debt. The story emphasises those deserving the name 'Ṣūfī', act not out of seeking temporal reward, but the reward of the Hereafter. Moreover, not only do they comply with the Sharīʿah when there is no 'state' to compel them, but they also go over and beyond what is required. In similar vein, Bin Bayyah cites the example of Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 946/334 AH), the Ṣūfī master and student of al-Junayd. A man once came up to al-Shiblī and asked him how much Zakāt he should pay for owning five camels. A young ewe would have been enough to fulfil the obligation, but Al-Shibli indicated all five camels should be paid. When asked for his justification, he replied: 'When Abū Bakr gave his property for Allāh and His Messenger, he donated all of it. The one who donates all of his money, his 'Imām' is Abū Bakr. The one who donates some of it, his Imām is ʿUthmān[20].

Bin Bayyah then returns to al-Junayd to emphasise the legal and Syarīʿah basis of Sufism. He is quoted: 'We learned this restriction from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Those who follow the one who has not heard the Ḥadīth and sat with the scholars (*al-fuqahā*) merely copying their etiquette, is corrupted' (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 5, para 2). In his subsequent analysis, Bin Bayyah states that as *Iḥsān* is the highest level that can be reached in the structuring of the religion, it is not possible to reach such a lofty height without having first passed through the levels of Islam (submission to the laws of the Sharīʿah) and Īmān (believing completely and perfectly in the Articles of Faith). He states: 'How can one build the

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[20] This part of the text must be a misprint as it does not accord with the ḥadīth upon which Aḥmad Zarrūq's maxim is based; the ḥadīth mentions ʿUmar, not ʿUthmān (Abū Dāwud, *Al-Sunan*, Kitāb az-Zakāh, Ḥadīth no. 1678). Nor does it correspond with the actual wording of Aḥmad Zarrūq's own explanation of the maxim which also refers to ʿUmar. In the remainder of the maxim, Zarrūq states: 'Whoever takes, gives, collects and withholds for the sake of Allāh, his Imām is ʿUthmān. Whoever leaves the world to its partisans, his Imam is ʿAlī. Every kind of knowledge that does not lead to the abandonment of the world, is not knowledge' (Istrabadi, 1988, p.76).

top floor before building its foundations? That is why he (the Holy Prophet) mentioned it (*al-Iḥsān*) at the end in order to point out to the hearer that one should not aspire to *Iḥsān* without having first settled on Islam and Iman. It is a ranking that has no ending point behind it, nor does it have a cap after its highest point. It is for this reason that the simile, "as if you see Him", is a witness for the situations of hearts that have gnosis of its parameters, and which lift the curtains of the veil (of "seeing" Allāh)' (Bin Bayyah, 2019b, p. 5, para 3). Compliance with the Syari'ah and the chasing of perfect virtue is thus not without purpose; but rooted in a 'Beatific Vision'.

Conclusion

In this article, the author has sought to establish Shaykh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah as an exemplar of contemporary Syariah-based Sufism. Part one established his adapted traditionalism, commitment to public service and political quietism. Parts two and three focused specifically on Sufism and supplied the two missing elements of this form of contemporary Sufism: non-exclusivity and legality. Far from being an antinomian mystical journey, Bin Bayyah's Sufism paves a systematic path of virtue (*al-Iḥsān*), prioritising first the creed (*al-ʿAqīdah)* and then morality (*al-ʿAkhlāq*) within an established juristic framing of Syarīʿah (*al-Taqlīd*). As affirmed in interview, he regards the 'best path' (*al-ṭarīq al-aḥsan*) as one based on a perfect following of Syariah in which one engages rather than detaches from the surrounding society. Higher spiritual stations are located on a ladder of legal modalities, the rules and principles of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, and realised through the temporal world of human and transactional relationships. Thus, the take-away parable and illustration of exemplary spirituality is the story of the man who borrowed one thousand dinars and who feared violating the Syariah, rather than the stereotypical Shaykh living alone on an isolated mountain top, dreaming of mystical union. Even polemics and refutations, such as his defence of the ten criticisms of Sufism, are articulated within *Uṣūli* structures and terminologies. Through a blending and integrating of the *madhhab* of Imām Mālik, the writings of Al-Shāṭibī, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and the *Qawāʿid* of Sīdī Aḥmad Zarrūq, Bin Bayyah seeks to provide not just a guide for delivering fatwa, but also a methodology for integrating hearts, minds and actions; a process he describes as 'total sincerity' (*ṣidq al-tawujjuh*).

Syariah-based Sufism is formed in the heart but manifests in public life: working in public institutions, helping to address community problems, and resolving conflicts. This is where the social conscience of Sufism is realized, as the life and works of Shaykh ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah illustrates. It may come with some risks, such as an association with questionable political authority, but the focus on total sincerity can also provide an antidote to the corruption in public life and demonstrate where the great benefits of Sufism may be achieved.

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