

What is Tasawwuf?

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In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate

Definition of Tasawwuf

Tasawwuf has been defined by different Muslim scholars as follows:

According to Sharah Sheikh ul Islam Abi Yahya Zakarya Alansari, “Tasawwuf is the knowledge of those feelings with which one controls the will, purifies moral values, and develops the external and internal self, so that the man can get eternal benefit.”

According to Hazrat Abul Hassan Nori (may peace be upon him), “Tasawwuf is the name of depleting all inner wishes.”

According to Hazrat Abu Ali Qazwini (may peace be upon him), “Tasawwuf is the name of acquiring best moral values.”

According to Abu Muhammad Jareri (may peace be upon him), “Tasawwuf is name of implementing all praiseworthy values and getting rid of all meanness and baseness values.”

According to Hazrat Katanee (may peace be upon him), “Tasawwuf is the name of good moral values, so those who have better moral values than you will be ahead of you in purity (tasawwuf and purity of heart).”

The above mentioned definitions show that implementing higher moral values and getting rid of all immoral values especially correcting the inner self along with the exterior and building a connection with Allah, giving preference to life hereafter over this world and for everything in life getting the will of Allah and accepting the will of Allah is the name of Tasawwuf.

Benefit: Those who disagree to tasawwuf should think of what tasawwuf is? If tasawwuf is the name of all of the above defined concepts then what is exactly they disagree to or are they against the Quran and the Sunnah. If some illiterate have named their wrong doings as tasawwuf or some called themselves Sufi inspite of being non-Sharia then its their own fault and not the fault of tasawwuf. Fatafkarwa ya wali albab.

Acquiring the above mentioned qualities is also known as Zuhud (devotion, abstinence), Salook (conduct), Ehsan (beneficence). Sufis are in agreement that changing the term does not make any difference because of the fact that what the reality of evil genius (nafs) is. When the reality is determined then its observed accordingly whether whatever the name is.

Definition of Sufi

Those who practice Tasawwuf are called Sufi. According to Hazrat Sheikh Abu Ali Rodbari (may peace be upon him), “Sufi is that who along with purifying the heart is also simple looking and shows abstinence to his inner will/wishes and keeps hold of the Sharit-e-Mustafa and thinks this world unimportant.”

According to Hazrat Umar Bin Usman Makki (may peace be upon him), “Sufi is that who all the time remains devoted to whom he belongs to.”

According to Hazrat Syedina Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (may peace be upon him), “Because of peaceful body, satisfied heart, glowing face, generous heart, inner soul alive and connection with Allah, a Sufi does not care about this world.”

According to Hazrat Sheikh Shibli (may peace be upon him), “Sufi is independent of all creatures and is attached to Allah.”

According to Hazrat Zawalnoon Misri (may peace be upon him), “Sufis are those who prefer Allah’s will upon all other things.”

Hazrat Imam Ghazali (may peace be upon him) in his book “Al Munqaz Min Alzalal” conveys to the entire ummah, “ Sufi’s method is complete with both knowledge and its implementation and their essence of knowledge is that the inner will should be clear of all evil and immoral values so that the heart is purified of everything that takes away from Allah and the heart beautifies with the remembrance of Allah.”

Hazrat Imam Ghazali’s (may peace be upon him) final word about the Sufis

Referring the Sufis, Hazrat Imam Ghazali in his book “Al Munqaz Min Alzalal” say, “I have come to know with complete proof that Sufi’s will be the ones who walk on the path to Allah. Their nature is the best of all natures, their way is the most simple way of all methods, their moral values are purer than all, infact if you collect all intelligence together, all hikmat together, all knowledge of the scholars together so that you find an alternate method of the Sufis which is better than theirs, then that will not be possible because their act whether is visible or invisible is taken from the nur (luminosity) of naboowat and there is no other light in the entire universe that can give light of nur.”

Reason for Naming in Sufism

A few words for the reasons of naming in Sufism:

1. Sufi is derived from Safa (pure) and Safa means purity of the heart. Sufi is called a Sufi because his heart is clean from the internal infirmity (irresolution).
2. Sufi is derived from Saf and Saf means the first top purity. Since Sufis are the nearest/closest to Allah that is why they are called Sufi.
3. Sufi is derived from Safah. Safah was the platform in the Holy Prophet’s mosque. This word refers to the followers of purity (Ehl-e-Safah). Ehl-e-Safah were few of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) who had dedicated their lives to the court of Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him), that is, they specially wanted the audience (companionship) of the Nabi (may peace be upon him). These people used to wear simple clothes and eat simple food. Since the Sufi’s lives are like the lives of these Ashab-e-Safah, that’s why they are called Sufi.

Benefit: According to the research of Allama Ibn-e-Taimia (may peace be upon him) the last reason the correct reason because the other reasons have some etymological and grammatical weaknesses. Hence the last reason is the most logical reason.

Reference to the Journal Qasheria in Islamic Encyclopedia, there is no one reason for naming of Sufi, infact all meaning are considered that direct towards this word. If there was only one meaning then the Sufis would not have reserved this word for themselves. The word Sufi reflects all the situations which are related to or are in accordance to Sufi. For example, purifying the heart, and piousness, Safu refers towards the chosen humans, Safi refers towards pure friends.

Brief History of the Word Sufi and Tasawwuf

The reality is that Tasawwuf is true Islam. Its existence is with the existence of Islam. In the beginning it was known as Zuhud, Sulook, Ehsan etc.

Hazrat Ali Hajweri said that today tasawwuf has become a name without reality but in the past tasawwuf was real without a name.

Hence, according to the research of Hazrat Allama Ibn-e-Taimia, the word Sufi was first used in Basra for the associates of Hazrat Khwaja Hassan Basri because there was a lot of Zuhud, divine worship and fear of Allah in Basra to the extent that it was famous that thought is Kofi and worship is Basri. Some say that the name was first associated to Jabir Bin Hayat (a well known scientist of chemistry), who was very much used to the Zahad. Almost after fifty years, after the 2nd century the word Sufi became common among the Muslims. After almost 200 Hijri the topic was being taught in the mosques of Baghdad. After that from time to time the terms of tasawwuf were conditioned.

The ancient sufi's educational collection was first organized by Hazrat Haris Mahasbi (243 Hijri) who wrote the book "Al-Raya".

Imam of the Sufis Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi (297 Hijri) termed tasawwuf as an art (campaign). After his collections, his opponents also accepted that tasawwuf is exactly according to the Sunnah.

Abu Nasr Siraj Toosa (378 Hijri) wrote a book in the 4th century in which all basic elements of tasawwuf were presented in the light of Hadith. In the 4th century At-taaruf was written in Bukhara which contains information about the theology of the Sufis and their stories. Hazrat Abu Talib Makki (384 Hijri) wrote Qaub-ul-Quloob in the 4th century. In the 5th century Tabqaat-al-Sufia was written in Nishapur and Abu Naeem Isphani wrote Hulyatul Auliya in Isphan in 430 Hijri. Allama Qasheri (445 Hijri) wrote Risala-e-Qasheia in Nishapur in the 5th century. Hazrat Ali Hajweri wrote Kashful mahjoob in the 5th century. At the end of the 5th century Hazrat Imam Ghazali addresses the Muslim Ummah through Ahya-e-Uloom and Almunqaz Man Alzalal and with solid reference, organization and smooth method briefed about the basic elements of tasawwuf and in Al-Munqaz, he supported that the followers of Tasawwuf are the ones with greatest mission. In the 6th century Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir (may peace be upon him) adopted this way. With this method Hazrat Imam Rabbani Mujaddid Alf-e-Thani, Hazrat Sheikh Shahab uddin Suharwardi, Hazrat

Moinuddin Chisti Ajmeri (may peace be upon them) and other religious scholars spread tasawwuf through their speeches and Tableegh (preaching).

In the terminologies of tasawwuf, the term Wehdat-ul-Wajood (hum Ost) and its rules were first set by Hazrat Sheikh Ibn-e-Arabi. In comparison, the term Hum Az Ost and its rules were identified by Hazrat Mujaddid Alf-e-Thani (may peace be upon him). Hazrat Allama Ibn-e-Qaim wrote the explanation of Manazil-as-Sair written by a Junbli Sufi Abdullah Al-Harwari and mentioned in his explanation that very renowned speakers and thinkers would be dutiful in front of a Sufi. Mufti Muhammad Abda wrote that the devotee who reaches the last step of Salook, he gets the highest rank after the prophets.

Some Doubts about Tasawwuf and Their Answers

Question 1: There was no mention or existence of tasawwuf during the times of Rasool-e-Kareem (may peace be upon him). If there was some reality of tasawwuf in Islam, then its reference would have existed in those times, so tasawwuf has nothing to do with Islam?

Answer: Saying that since the word tasawwuf did not exist during the times of Rasool-e-kaeem (may peace be upon him) and Khulfa-e-Rashideen (may Allah be pleased with them) will be an injustice with Islam and is proof of lack of knowledge. The Islamic sciences that are taught today in the Islamic Schools such as Ilm-ul-sarf, Ilm-ul-Nahw, rules of Fiqah, rules of Hadith, rules of Tafseer, were these sciences existed in the times of Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him)? Did the companions of Rasool Allah teach about these sciences? Were these titles set during the time of Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him)? The answer is definitely negative, then why is the science of tasawwuf criticized? Tasawwuf is the name of purifying inner self etc, and it is mentioned in the Quran and Hadith at many places. Just like in the time of Rasool-e-Kareem (may peace be upon him), in order to understand the Quran and Hadith there was no need to learn any other science, and similarly there was no need for any special prayer to acquire purity of the inner self. Only the glance of Nabi Kareem (may peace be upon him) was enough to make a man perfect and since the only reason to learn all other ways is to basically understand the Quran and Hadith. Similarly tasawwuf is meant to purify the inner self and Quran has set the basic necessity of a man's success to be in purifying the inner self.

“Indeed whosoever purifies himself (by avoiding polytheism and accepting Islamic Monotheism) shall achieve glory
” (Surat Al-A’la (The Most High) 87:14)

“Indeed he succeeds who purifies his own self (i.e. obeys and performs all that Allah ordered, by following the true Faith of Islamic Monotheism and by doing righteous good deeds). And indeed he fails who corrupts his own self (i.e. disobeys what Allah has ordered, by rejecting the true Faith of Islamic Monotheism or by following polytheism, or by doing every kind of evil wicked deeds).” (Surat Ash-Shams (The Sun) 91:09, 91:10)

Benefit: This should always be kept in mind that Rasool-e-Kareem's (may peace be upon him) personality was complete, possessed beautiful qualities, and had complete

knowledge of all sciences. He was at the same time a teacher and a warrior, a receiver of the bounties from God and a source of distribution among the humanity. After Rasool-e-Akram (may peace be upon him) there can not be any human who could be his equal and Allah wants to keep his teaching alive till the Day of Judgment. For this purpose different personalities came into this world at different times. If to keep alive Qirat and Tajwid (the recitation of the Quran), people who could recite were born, to keep the Hadith preserved, people like Imam Bukhari (may Allah be pleased with him) and Imam Muslim (may Allah be pleased with him) were born. To keep the knowledge of Fiqah alive, people like Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Shafae came into this world. For purification of own self people like Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani and Imam Rabbani Mujaddid Alf-e-Thani were born. All these people only had one intention/desire, to serve at different angles of the teachings of Rasool-e-Akram (may peace be upon him).

Question 2: Every thing is divided into two in Tasawwuf. 1. external/apparent, 2. inward/invisible. The knowledge is divided into two types. 1. external/apparent, 2. inward/invisible, whereas whatever was in the times of Rasool-e-Akram (may peace be upon him) was external/visible?

Answer: External and Internal are terminologies in tasawwuf. First we need to understand what they mean. External/visible/apparent knowledge means that knowledge that deals with a persons exterior and internal/inner/invisible means that knowledge that deals with a persons inner self and for both there are a lot of instructions in the Quran. For example, Rasool-e-Kareem (may peace be upon him) has strictly forbidden hypocrisy, hatred and jealousy and all these things are only and only linked to the human mind. Allah says in the Quran,

“The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail, Except him who comes to Allah with a clean heart [clean from Shirk (polytheism) and Nifaq (hypocrisy)]” (Surat Ash-Shu’ara’ (The Poets) 26:88, 26:89)?

“Indeed whosoever purifies himself (by avoiding polytheism and accepting Islamic Monotheism) shall achieve success, and remembers (glorifies) the Name of his Lord (worship none but Allah), and prays (the five compulsory prayers and Nawafil – additional prayers)” (Surat A-A’la (The Most High) 87:14, 87:15)

So these are related only to the inner self. Followers of Tasawwuf have the knowledge of inner self with which one can purify one’s heart and inner will. So actions are such that have two visions to it, one faculty is for exterior/visible while the other is inner. For example, for Namaz, Nabi-e-Kareem (may peace be upon him) has said that while praying the virtual one should face the Kaaba, wear unfoiled clothes etc. these instructions are related to exterior of Namaz, Nabi-e-Kaeem (may peace be upon him) also said that do not do hypocrisy with the namaz. This prayer should be performed such that you are seeing Allah in front of you. These instructions are related to the inner self. Now Sufis think that a human’s inner self should be so promoted that one can reach that level. Now its up to you to decide whether the knowledge of inner soul is according to the Sharia or not.

Question 3: Sufis have other concepts besides the Shariah, for example, Tareeqat (method), Reality, Maarfat (knowledge or revelation of) etc., whereas a muslim should only follow the Shariat and only Shariat is everything.

Answer: First of all we must understand the meaning of these terms.

Haqiqat (Reality): Reality means the reality of the Shariat (Haqiqat-e-Shariat).

Tareeqat (Method): Meaning the way through which one can find the reality of the Shariat. For example, there are different kinds of instructions for the namaz, some are related to external while others are for soul. Now a complete Namaz is that which contains all of those instructions and then its purpose is achieved. One person fulfills the external requirements of the Namaz, his clothes are clean, body is clean, faces the Kaaba while praying etc. Now literally we will call him a Namazi (one who performs the prayer) but if his heart is full of hypocrisy or his heart/mind is not present in the Namaz, then in reality he is not a Namazi or in other words his Namaz is of no use. Now the Shariat contains instructions for making the Namaz complete. Islamic scholars have set such methods due to which one can achieve the complete Namaz and by practicing them the heart will contain happiness and acceptance, one gets the purity of intention and this Namaz is considered to be the real Namaz. Acquiring this is called the "reality" and to reach the reality the way adopted is the "method".

Can one still say that reality and method are not part of Islam or the Shariat? Infact to acquire these are instructed in the Nasoos Qadiya (Quran and Hadith). This has been expressed by Hazrat Imam Rabbani Mujaddid Alf-e-Thani in a way that Shariah has three elements: 1. Knowledge, 2. Practice, 3. Sincerity/love. Without practice, knowledge is useless. Similarly without love, loyalty and sincerity, practice is useless. The reason for getting knowledge and practicing it is to acquire love and attachment. Tareeqat (method) and Haqiqat (reality) are the servants of Shariat. The motive behind tareeqat and haqiqat is the execution of the Shariat in real terms.

Benefit: But this is important to note that to acquire the reality of Shariat and whatever method is adopted to achieve that should be according to the Quran and Hadith or can not be against the Quran and Hadith.

Khilaf paighambar kisay rah guzeed (Who wants to go against the prophets)
Keh har giz bamanzil na khwaja raseed (or this way Khwaja will not get his destiny)

Maarfat (knowledge or revelation of): Maarfat means getting to know Allah and His knowledge what He wishes to reveal. Quran has mentioned it at many places. Or there is reference of Maarfat of Nafs (evil genius).

After understanding the meanings of haqiqat, tareeqat and maarfat, one can understand that these are according to the Shariat.

Question 4: The word Sufi is a copy of Sufoos from ancient Greek and this concept is also adopted from ancient Greek, it has nothing to do with Islam?

Answer: The research tells us where the word Sufi has been derived from. How did the word begin and further it should be noted that according to the Islamic

Encyclopedia the Azmi language spoken in ancient Greece does not contain this word that is in any way similar to the word Sufi.

Question 5: Usually when we look at those who call themselves Sufi, some of the characteristics they possess have nothing to do with Islam, so how can we accept the method of such people correct?

Answer: The entire method should not be considered to be wrong due to one individual's bad action. Today some Muslims have adopted such habits that have nothing to do with Islam such as stealing, robbing, murdering, blood shedding etc. So just because of a few individual's wrong doings, are we going to call Islam as wrong? God Forbid, instead these Muslims should be shown the right path that these acts are against Islam. If some scholar does some wrong act, are we going to call his entire knowledge wrong? So the necessity is that we should guide the non-followers and illiterate Sufis so that the concept of tasawwuf is not understood as wrong.

Question 6: Hadith says that priesthood is not part of Islam and Sufism is a kind of priesthood. Therefore it has no place in Islam?

Answer: Calling Sufism priesthood is absolutely contemptible. Priesthood completely disregards the rights of humanity and relations whereas tasawwuf along with the rights of Allah also teaches to fulfill the rights of the humanity in community.

We should remember that before Islam there were many concepts that were based on constructive/positive thinking but later people changed those according to their own needs. Rasool-e-Akram (may peace be upon him) has told us the correct methods and separated the right from the wrong. For example, Namaz (compulsory prayer), Roza (fasting during the month of ramadhan), Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) etc., these prayers existed even before Islam but they had diminished from the world. Later Nabi-e-Kareem (may peace be upon him) showed the right concept. Similarly regarding priesthood (Surat Hadid 57:27), Allah says,

“And we ordained in the hearts of those who followed him, compassion and mercy.

But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them, but (they sought it) only to please Allah therewith, but that they did not observe it with the right observance.”

It is very clear from this Ayat that the concept of priesthood has been changed. If Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him) has forbidden priesthood, that was of that time and concept. In its place Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him) showed the correct vision of purification according to the Quran and also the correct method of achieving it. Tasawwuf is only for the purification of inner self and nothing else.

Benefit: If someone used some other method other than defined by Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him) to purify his inner self, then the inner self would become more dirty instead of being clean. It is just like washing of clothes with urine instead of water.

Question 7: The existing age is the age of materialistic development, what is the benefit of tasawwuf today?

Answer: Those who accept that Islam is the religion of all ages, then he will also accept that tasawwuf is also a need for all ages because tasawwuf is an important element from among other elements of Islam. The reason for Rasool Allah (may peace be upon him) to come into this world include the recitation of the verses of Allah, teaching of the instruction present in the book of Allah, wisdom, and purity of inner soul. Just like Islam is incomplete without learning the Quran, similarly Islam is incomplete without purifying the inner soul and the basis of tasawwuf is to acquire purification of own self which is used to gain the will of Allah, the nearness of Allah and for worldly and religious fortune. We now know that without tasawwuf a Muslim cannot become a complete Muslim and until one becomes a complete Muslim, one cannot become a complete human. The truth is that the shortcomings present in Muslims for example, lagging behind in the development in the world, clashes everywhere, along with other reasons one reason is either non-existence of tasawwuf or it is incomplete. If this is complete among us, we will prosper in this world and successfully move forward. If we consider our lag, we will notice that our way of governing is not correct. Why isn't our governing mechanisms correct? Because, we are not united. Why we are not united? Because, everyone is greedy, proud and hypocrite, and none has state of balance. Tasawwuf creates a balance in a man, the sickness of greed, pride and hypocrisy is eliminated. When these illnesses are not present then we will work together for the benefit of the entire nation. Unity and discipline will be developed in us and with these qualities we can create good governance and prosper more.

The above mentioned qualities are non-existent in not only a common man but sadly even in scholars. So the religious scholars should focus more on their inner soul so that their every minute is spent for the will of Allah. In fact if the scholars have a balance in their lives which is a basic ingredient of the knowledge, then there would be positive discussion among the scholars of different issues, ego will not stop them from going to each other. The Muslim Ummah will have a common goal/vision. So even today the good luck of the Muslims can be achieved and prosperity can be achieved for both religion and in the world.