

AN APPRAISAL OF SOFI THEMES IN AL-'UBUDIYYAH OF IBN TAYMIYYAH

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Abstract

Ibn Taymiyyah is one of the scholars in Islam whose death did not affect the spread of their influence and legacies. He is a scholar to be reckoned with in every aspect of Islamic studies across all ages. He wrote quite a number of works in which *Al-'Ubudiyyah* which this paper focuses on is one of them. One of the aspects of Islamic discourses which usually generate rumbles among the Islamic scholar is *tasawwuf* on which Ibn Taymiyyah wrote to enrich the discourse and make his position known. The aim of this writing therefore is to appraise the mystical discourse of Ibn Taymiyyah in *Al-'Ubudiyyah* and to determine their level of similarities or otherwise with those of the Sufis. The paper adopted analytical method which availed opportunity to analyse various discussions in the work in comparison with those of the Sufis. This paper revealed that Ibn Taymiyyah did not out rightly reject or condemn Sufism but also endeavour to examine the doctrines and practices therein and came up with submissions that sometimes agree with the Sufis and go against some of them at another time. It is therefore concluded that contrary to the general anti-Sufi notion which has been spread across board about Ibn Taymiyyah on Sufism, he expressed pair views (condemnation and commendation). The paper therefore recommended a further research on the other works of Ibn Taymiyyah vis-a-vis Sufism in order to have an over-view of his submissions on *tasawwuf* as contained in all his works.

Introduction

Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728AH/1328CE) is a prolific writer who had written numerous books on different aspects of Islamic Studies ranging from *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), *Hadith*, Philosophy, *tasawwuf* and a host of others. His works are of inestimable values and of tremendous benefits to the scholars of Islamic Studies. *al-'Ubudiyyah* is one of the works of this great *Shaykh* on *tasawwuf*. It is written to review some Sufi doctrines as being practised among the Sufis. This is done by Ibn Taymiyyah to reconcile Sufism with *Sharfah* because it is generally believed that the two are at variance. This paper therefore, attempts to examine some Sufi doctrines and practices as discussed by Ibn Taymiyyah in the book. This shall be done by comparing his views with those of Sufis to see the level of their similarities or otherwise. This is imperative because the position of Ibn Taymiyyah on Sufism is shrouded in confusion among the Islamic scholars. There are different claims from different quarters aligning him to either the Sufi or *Salafi* bloc.

Al-'Ubudiyyah in Brief

Al-'Ubudiyyah is a book of one hundred and fifty-one (151) pages written by Ibn Taymiyyah in response to questions posed to him by one of his followers on chapter two (2) verse Twenty-one (21) of the glorious *Qur'an* which reads:

O ye mankind, worship your Lord... (Q2:21)¹ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُم



The impending questions include, what is worship (*al-'ibādah*) and its branches? Does it entail all spiritual and temporal actions? What are the necessities of servanthood? Is there any station above the station of being a servant to this world and the hereafter? And a host of others.

Ibn Taymiyyah proceeds to provide answers to each of these questions. His discourse which forms the content of this book (*al-'ibādah*) provides answers to the basic question which bordered on what should be the relationship between man and God (Allah). These answers lead him to some mystical doctrines which he discusses to some extent. These are *al-'ibādah* (worship and servanthood), *maḥabbah* (love), *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), *istisṭā'ah* (seeking assistance or help from Allah), and *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), *qanā'ah* (contentment), *ikhlāq* (hope) among others. Each of these shall be explained in due course.

Al-'ibādah (Worship)

Ibn Taymiyyah defines *'ibādah* to mean all that Allah loves and pleases with, either actions or words of mouth overtly or covertly.¹ The instances he gives include every act of worship like *Ṣalat* (canonical prayer), *Ṣawm* (abstaining from eating and drinking), *Ḥajj* (pilgrimage), talking, discharging the trust, goodness to parents, fulfilment of promise, enjoying the virtues and forbidden vices, *Jihad* (strive in the cause of Allah), kindness to orphans, needy, wayfarers, slaves, even animals and other creatures, praying, recitation of the Glorious *Qur'ān* and a host of others, as constituting the act of *'ibādah* since one stands to get benefits or rewards there from.²

The scope of *'ibādah*, as indicated by Ibn Taymiyyah also covers love of Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad, SAW), seeking for repentance, patience, gratitude to Allah, satisfaction with His decree or judgment on one, reliance solely on Him, having hope in His mercy and fear of His punishment as constituting the act of *'ibādah*.³ Therefore, it (*'ibādah*) is the main purpose of creation of angels and both intelligent beings (man and jinn) as indicated in the Glorious *Qur'ān*. Allah says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I (Allah) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me. (Q51:56)⁴

He proceeds to state that each of the prophets and messengers of Allah, from Adam to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a slave of Allah and came to establish the act of *'ibādah* on earth.⁵ It is therefore required of each of both the messengers and the recipients of the message to worship Allah to the point of death.⁶

And worship your Lord till you get certainty (Q15:99)⁷ *وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ*

Allah therefore condemns whoever shuns the act of worship and He promises them a great chastisement in the hereafter.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَمْسِكُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ

... Indeed, those who scorn My worship, they will surely enter Hell in humiliation. (Q40:60)¹⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah goes still further to point out that *dīn* (religion) has its origin from submission which entails two elements, these are worship and love. Hence, *dīn* (Religion)

is often defined as a way or method of worship.¹¹ Therefore, a sincere worshipper or slave will stand humbly by the law of the worshipped or Lord and will love and hate as may be dictated to him. No one is exempted from worshipping Allah.¹² To this end, heeding the commandments of Allah, the Supreme creator and the Lord of the universe is essential in attaining His pleasure. Otherwise, one becomes an ally of *Shaytān* (Devil).¹³

Ibn Taymiyyah is categorical in stating that some *awliyā'* (Saints) and their followers who claim exemption from the act of worship are worst types of *kuffār* (Infidels),¹⁴ though he did not mention name(s). He also alludes to the claim in some quarters that *Khidr* (AS) is also exempted from heeding the commandment of Allah due to his ability to recognise the will of Allah¹⁵ as contained in *Sūratu 'l-kahf* of the Glorious *Qur'an*.

Ibn Taymiyyah states that, inability to differentiate between cosmic reality (*al-Haqiqatu 'l-kawniyyah*) and religious reality (*al-Haqiqatu 'd-diniyyah*) is responsible for the claim of exemption in the worship of Allah.¹⁶ The former is recognition of Allah as supreme creator of the universe. Every human being recognizes this fact including the *kuffār* (infidels) and *Iblīs* (devil).¹⁷ Religious reality (*al-Haqiqatu 'd-diniyyah*) on the other hand, means worshipping Allah and obeying His commandments. Many *awliyā'* who claimed exemption from worshipping of Allah and heeding His commandments recognize only cosmic reality and this according to Ibn Taymiyyah is a blatant error. This is because such people regard every reality as equal to the extent of regarding Allah and Idols as equals¹⁸ as could be inferred from the doctrine of *Wahdatu 'l-Wujūd* (Unity of Being) which was championed by Ibn 'Arabi.¹⁹

However, Ibn Taymiyyah explains why people are misguided in matters of *'ibādah* which is the main purpose of creation. He discusses this by explaining the Divine decree and preordainment (*al-qada' wal-qadar*) citing the view of Shaykh 'Abdul-Qādiri (d.561AH/1166CE), who opines that the real man is the one who faces up the Divine decree sincerely, and not the one who meekly submits to it.²⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah then, illustrates that the decree of Allah is to hold on to Allah and the precepts of His messenger. Whereas, different sects like the Mu'tazilites, Qadarites, Jabarites²¹ and a host of others held different opinions on divine decree. Some of them opine that Divine decree may cause them not to obey Allah's instructions²² since they are not responsible for their actions. They therefore meekly submit to the decree of Allah and downplay religious duties and indulge in filth.

Among those who had gone astray from the path of *'ibādah* is the Gnosis (*'ārif*) who claims to have the ultimate knowledge of reality and therefore abandons religious duties. They went ahead to differentiate between the masses (*al-'Am*) and the elites (*al-khas*).²³ They there by believe that those laws of Allah are meant for the masses and not for the elites who have recognised the cosmic reality. So, they can drink, fornicate and indulge in other vices because they are like ocean that cannot be contaminated by sin.²⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah states further, that an examination of this shows a sharp contradiction with the principles of *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. Therefore, he submitted that they have drawn into the obedience of their whims and desires.²⁵

However, in the view of Sufi adherents, *'ibādah* entails submission and love of Allah. It is characterised by weakness, poverty, incapability of the servant and his total dependence on Allah.²⁶ The Sufis maintained that Allah must be worshipped with love

alone without the fear of Hellfire or Hope of paradise.²⁷ According to Qushayri in his *Risālah*, Servanthood is embracing whatever God has commanded and departing from what He has prohibited.²⁸ Also, Abu 'Ali Al Daqqaq says, nothing is nobler than servanthood and there is no other perfect name for the believer than being called a servant. He cites the ascension of the Prophet to heaven where Allah qualifies him with 'abd (servant), he states that if there are other perfect names, Allah would have addressed him with any of them.²⁹ Dhu l-Nun al-Misri (d.246AH/861CE) said, Servant hood is that you remain His servant at all time.³⁰

Despite the different backgrounds from which Ibn Taymiyyah and Sufis are writing from, there are some similarities between their views especially in the areas of definitions and the scope of worship as given above. However, the dissimilarity is noted in what constitutes the objects of 'ibādah. To Ibn Taymiyyah, worship entails emphasis on three objects together. These are love, fear and hope, whereas, Sufis placed preference on love over and above the other two objects as the unique element of worship. This can best be understood as a kind of distinction without a difference. This is because what matters is the presence of those objects.

Another area of attraction in Ibn Taymiyyah's writing is in the claim of exemption from the act of worship by 'ārif. It is not uncommon to see gnosis ('ārif) who played-down worship ('ibādah), especially *Salat* (canonical prayer) believing that it constitutes a veil between him and the Reality (God).³¹ This has been condemned by Sufis like Abu Qāsim Al Junayd (d.297AH/909CE) who reacted sharply when he was asked concerning some gnosis who abandon acts of worship. He (Junayd) said, it is indeed, a grave sin which is worse than theft and fornication,³² while Shirindi likens it to heresy and infidelity.³³ Therefore, a true Sufi will never abandon *Salat* or any act of worship.

It should be stated, that there are some leaders of Sufis like 'Abdul Qadiri Al Jilāni (d.561AH/1166CE), Ibrahim ibn Adham (d.160AH/777CE), Abu Qāsim Al Junayd (d.297AH/909CE), Fu'ayl ibn 'Iyāḍ (d.187AH/803), among others whom Ibn Taymiyyah calls *Mashā'ikhu 'l-Islām wa A'imat 'l-hudā, Mashā'ikhu 'l-kitāb wa 's-Sunah*, because their mystical experiences did not allow them to deviate from the path of *Sharī'ah*.³⁴

Al-Mahabbah (Love)

Ibn Taymiyyah writes, as previously mentioned, that the act of worship which Islam commands is embedded in the love of Allah. A slave or worshipper therefore must love Allah and loves what Allah loves. Loving other than Allah is futility.³⁵ Allah alone deserves to be loved. Worship of Allah, according to Ibn Taymiyyah and as stated above, entails three main parts of which one must not be left out, otherwise the act of worship becomes meaningless. These are *hubb* (love), *khauf* (fear) and *rajā'* (hope). Whoever worships Allah with these three ingredients will be rewarded accordingly. Therefore, act of worship which is accompanied by love alone makes the worshipper to be a *zindiq* (pretender), if accompanied with fear alone, such a worshipper is a *Harūrī* (Harurites) and worship of Allah on the basis of hope alone turns the worshipper to a *Murjī* (Murijites), but combination of the three makes one to be a true monotheistic believer.³⁶

Love of Allah entails obedience to His Messenger.³⁷ Whoever, in the view of Ibn Taymiyyah claims to love Allah but to the exclusion of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

and refuses to obey his (Muhammad, PBUH) instructions is not a true lover of Allah. Qur'an says:

....إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ

If you (really) love Allah then follow me; Allah will love you. (Q3:31)³⁸

The above verse therefore, shows that the love of Allah should be demonstrated in making the prophet as a model.

Also, in justifying the love of Allah and Prophet Muhammad as the peak and perfection of love, he (Ibn Taymiyyah) cites the *Hadith* which says:

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّى أَكُونَ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ وَلَدِهِ وَوَالِدِهِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ³⁹

On the authority of Anas ibn Malik who said the messenger of Allah said: None of you is a believer until I am dearer to him than his parent, children and generality of the people.

Ibn Taymiyyah cites another narration of the Prophet where it is reported that Umar Bin Al-Khattab said: "O messenger of Allah, by Allah you are dearer to me than everything except my own self." He said: "No, O Umar until I am dearer to you than your own self." Umar then said: "By Allah! You are dearer to me than my own self." The prophet then replied: "Now you are right."⁴⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah goes ahead to itemise the kind of people that Allah loves. They include the righteous (*al-Muhsinīn*), the pious (*al-Muntaqūn*), the repentant slaves (*al-Tawabūn*), those who keep hygiene (*al-Mutatahirūn*), the Jihadists, and those who love Allah.⁴¹ These are the categories of people that Allah loves.

Ibn Taymiyyah also points out that sweetness of faith lies in love of Allah. He buttresses this with the *Hadith* of the Prophet which says:

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ ثَلَاثٌ مَنْ كُنَّ فِيهِ وَجَدَ حَلَاوَةَ الْإِيمَانِ أَنْ يَكُونَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْهِ مِمَّا سِوَاهُمَا وَأَنْ يُحِبَّ الْمَرْءَ لَا يُحِبُّهُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ وَأَنْ يَكْرَهُ أَنْ يَعُودَ فِي الْكُفْرِ كَمَا يَكْرَهُ أَنْ يُقَذَّفَ فِي النَّارِ⁴²

On the authority of Anas Ibn Malik, may Allah be pleased with him, reported from the Prophet, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him, said: There are three things, whoever has them has discovered the sweetness of faith. One, when Allah and His messenger are more beloved to him than anyone else. Two, when he loves others only for Allah's sake and three when he hates returning to kufr (Infidelity) after he has been saved from it.

Ibn Taymiyyah continues by making particular reference to *Habīb* (beloved) and *khalil* (Close friend of Allah). To him, *khalil* is the peak and perfection of Love why *Habīb*

is lesser in degree and is required of a slave in consequence of his servitude to Allah. It is therefore a love between Allah and His slave whom He loves and who loves Him.⁴³

In the same token, Ibn Taymiyyah cites a narration of the Prophet wherein the Prophet asserts base on revelation to have attained the status of *khalil*. The Hadith reads: Allah has taken me as a *khalil* just as He took Ibrahim as a *khalil* (Muslim).⁴⁴

However, contrary to the general teachings of the Sufi that *Habib* occupies the peak of proximity to Allah and perfection of love,⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah comes up with the idea that *khulāh* is higher in status than *Habib*. Therefore Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asserted to have attained the status of *khalil* which is higher; otherwise he would not have claimed to have attained it, as indicated in the above *Hadith*. He (Ibn Taymiyyah) also points out that *khalil* is reserved for few people while *Habib* could be attained by every devotee. He (Ibn Taymiyyah) mentions prophets Muhammad (PBUH) and Ibrahim as the only being who have attained the status of *khalil* in this world.⁴⁶

In setting out the degree of love, Ibn Taymiyyah opines that the highest degree thereof is *tatayyum* (total enrapture) while the lowest degree is *'alaqah* (attachment) when the heart is attached to the beloved. This is closely followed by *sababah* (infatuation) this is when the heart is poured out, then *gharam* (passion) when love never leaves the heart, then *'ashaq* (ardent love) and finally *Tatayyum*.⁴⁷

The nomenclatures and the grading of love, as spelt out above by Ibn Taymiyyah are not available in Sufi literatures and Sufi concept of Love. Therefore, it could be said that Ibn Taymiyyah is introducing another dimension into the concept of love which may not be acceptable to Sufis.

One of the major exponents on the concepts of love among the Sufis is Rabi'atu Al Aqawiyyah (185AH/801CE). Sufi literatures are replete with many anecdotes on her concept of love. In one of her sayings, she is reported to have said: "O God, whatever share of this world Thou hast allotted to me, bestow it on your enemies; And whatever share of the next world Thou hast allotted to me bestow it on Thy friends; Thou are enough for me"⁴⁸.

She also said:

O God if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, If
I worship Thee in Hope of paradise, exclude me from
Paradise; But if I worship Thee for your own
sake, withhold not your everlasting beauty.⁴⁹

A cursory study of the expressions of Rabi'a reflects sharp contradiction with the concepts of Love as expressed by Ibn Taymiyyah above. Hence, it could therefore be said that Ibn Taymiyyah promulgates a concepts of Love which is at variance with the general Sufi concepts of love. It could be understood that Ibn Taymiyyah came up with these names and classifications in order not align himself with the Sufis by adopting their nomenclatures. This can be strengthened with the fact that his explanations are not far from those of the Sufis and he (Ibn Taymiyyah) provides no justification for them, which is very rare of him.

Dhikr (Remembrance of Allah)

Ibn Taymiyyah states categorically that the *Sharfah* approved forms of *adhkār* are those that make complete sense in meaning and not an isolated word.⁵⁰ He says preference should be given to *dhikr 'l ma'thūr* (Traditional *dhikr*) and the *adhkār* whose wordings and meanings are not contrary to Qur'an and *Sunnah*. He states further, that *dhikr* like *hā* or *huwa* (He) whose meaning are concealed and ambiguous should be avoided because they constitute innovation.⁵¹

The submission of Ibn Taymiyyah here, contradicts the general practices of the Sufis who chant *dhikr* in different forms. According to Fakhru 'd Din Ar- Rāzi, each of the coined forms of *adhkār* carries meaning which refers to Allah though the meaning could not be revealed at the ordinary level. The instance of *anā* (I), *Anta* (you), and *huwa* (He) are given as equivalent to *Lā ilāh ilā Anā*, (Q20:14) *Lā ilāh ilā Anta* (Q21:87) and *Lā ilāh ilā huwa* (Q73:9) each of which is traced to the Glorious Qur'an. Sufis therefore see no difference between the names either in their abbreviations or full pronunciations.⁵²

More so, Sufi literatures are replete with anecdotes of the Sufis who prefer isolated *dhikr* like *Allah*, *huwa* and so on. In *Tadhkiratu 'l Awliya'*, story of Shebli is narrated when he was asked why he always chants *Allah, Allah Allah* alone and not *Lā ilāh ilā Allah*. He replies that he is afraid that his breath may stop at the point of *Lā ilāh* (There is no god). Hence, he will die as *kāfir*.⁵³ Another example is given of Fakhru 'd Din 'Irāqi, who always chants *Lā ilāh ilā 'Ishiq* (There is no god but the love)⁵⁴ instead of *Lā ilāh ilā Allah*. All these according to Ibn Taymiyyah constitute innovations. The declaration of those strange forms of *adhkār* as innovation (*bid'ah*) by Ibn Taymiyyah is not unconnected to the fact that there are no express provisions for them, neither in the *Qur'ann* nor the *ā ḥādith* of the Prophet (PBUH). His declaration therefore subsists.

Fanā' (Annihilation)

Fanā' (Annihilation) according to Ibn Taymiyyah is of three types. The first is *fanā'* of the prophets and the Saints (*awliya'*) who have attained perfection.⁵⁵ He describes this as *fanā' al qalb* from wills, desires and what prevents attainment of Allah's pleasure. Attainment of this class of *fanā'* makes one to worship Allah alone, rely solely on Him (*tawakkul*), love and hate for Allah's sake among others.⁵⁶ He mentions Abū Yazid Al Bistāmi to have attained this.⁵⁷

The second is *fanā'* of *awliya'* who have not attained absolute perfection (*Al Qāsidūn*).⁵⁸ This is called *fanā' Ash-Shuhūdī*.⁵⁹ This is attained by many of the wayfarers (*Sālikin*) due to constant recollection of Allah's name (*dhikr*), worship and love for Allah which makes them to see nothing other than Him (Allah). An experience of this kind of *fanā'* makes one to be completely unaware of anything other than Allah.⁶⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah states that this kind of *fanā'* was never experienced by the companions of the Prophet like Abubakar, Umar, the *Muhajirun* (emigrants) and the *An ḥār*. Equally, the eminent Sufis like 'Abdul Qadiri Al Jilāni, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Abu Qāsim Al Junayd, Fudayl ibn 'Iyad, Abū Suleiman Ad Darrāni and a host of other moderate Sufis never had such an experience.⁶¹ He states further that it became known at the time of *tabfūn* (successor of companions) among the worshippers in Basra like Abu Yazid, Abu Hassan An-Nūrī, Abubakr Ash Shibli among others.⁶² He (Ibn Taymiyyah) therefore discouraged it.

The third is *fand* 'iwujūd. This is the *fand* of affirming the existence of nothing except God and that both the creator and creatures exist as one and indivisible entity. It connotes *wahdatu 'l wujūd* (unity of being) Ibn Taymiyyah describes and calls this a misguide, heretic, pantheistic and satanic.⁶¹ It is on the basis of this that he condemns Ibn Arabi and Al-Tilmisani.⁶⁴

Fand according to Sufis passing-away of self from all form of passion and desires, be it evil or otherwise.⁶⁵ In another definition, *fand* in the view of the Sufis is extinction of phenomenal existence which involves *baqa'* (continuance of his real existence).⁶⁶ It entails moral and mental transformations which lead to cessation of all conscious thoughts.⁶⁷ The classifications of Ibn Taymiyyah above do not however appear in Sufi writings. Therefore, what Ibn Taymiyyah did here is not different from what he did while discussing the concept of love as submitted above.

***Al-Qanā'ah* (Contentment)**

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, *Qanā'ah* liberates one from human and material enslavements and gives freedom. It makes heart to offer a pure and sincere worship to Allah. This is because true richness lies in contentment.⁶⁸ The prophet is reported to have said :

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لَيْسَ
الْغِنَى عَنْ كَثْرَةِ الْعَرَضِ وَلَكِنَّ الْغِنَى غِنَى النَّفْسِ

On the authority of Abi-Hurayrah who said the messenger of Allah, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him, said: Richness is not having a lot of wealth, richness is being contented with one's lot (Al-Bukhari & Muslim).

He goes further to state that wealth is of two kinds. The first is for domestic needs which cater for one's basic needs while the second is remnants which one does not need the use of it. This according to Ibn Taymiyyah should be shunned otherwise; one becomes a slave of the world.⁶⁹

In Qushayri's *Risālah*, it is written that whoever is contented with the world is rich, even when he moves around with hunger.⁷⁰ There are other citations on how Sufis have demonstrated self-contentment in different ways. For instance, someone asks Abū Yazīd al Bistamī how he was able to achieve his mission. He replied, saying: I gathered all good things of the world, tied them up with the rope of contentment, put them in the catapult of sincerity and cast them into the sea of despair then, I rested.⁷¹ According to Dhu Nun Al Misri, "he who is contented is rich, he finds rest from his labour, receives respite from others and rises above all".⁷²

***Zuhd* (Asceticism or Renunciation)**

Asceticism is otherwise known as renunciation, *zuhd* is a Sufidoctrine which teaches declination of concern about worldliness.⁷³ It is also defined as abandoning, in this life, what is of no significance to the next life.⁷⁴ It is equally understood as downplaying secondary satisfaction because *zuhd* does not mean complete abandonment of the provisions of Allah but to shun excesses.

Ibn Taymiyyah condemned ascetic individuals (*zuhād*) whose indulgence in asceticism has made them to downplay the importance of *jihad* and struggling in the ways of Allah. He submitted that an ascetic who engages himself in worship of Allah, believing that he can get proximity to Him and refrain from other religious obligations like *jihad*, falls into the same pit of error like the Christians whose expression of love and asceticism erroneously kept them away from active struggle to meet up their mundane needs.⁷⁵ *Zuhd* according to Al-Ghazali is renunciation of material world for the next world and to turn to Allah from other than Allah.⁷⁶ In the view of Qushayri in his *Risalah*, renunciation is to look at this word with a view to its transience so as to see its total insignificance. Then, turning away from it becomes easy.⁷⁷ The above submission of Ibn Taymiyyah therefore, seems to have contradicted the Sufi concept of Asceticism.

More so, *Jihad* which Ibn Taymiyyah emphasises forms an integral part of mystical doctrines. To the Sufis, *jihad* is of two kinds. These are *jihad 'l-akbar* (greater *Jihad*) and *jihad 'l-asghar* (lesser *Jihad*). It should be pointed out that these classifications are in line with the Hadith of the Prophet as cited by Al Ghazali in *Ihya*, which says:

عن جابر قال : قدم على النبي - صلى الله عليه وسلم - قوم
غزاة فقال قدمتم خير مقدم قدمتم من الجهاد الأصغر إلى
الجهاد الأكبر مجاهدة العبد هواه⁷⁸

On the authority of Jabir who said the Prophet (SAW) received some group of warriors and said to them you are welcome from the lesser Jihad to the greater Jihad which is for a servant to struggle with his soul.

The above *Hadith* of the Prophet which has generally been classified as *Da'if* (weak) by almost every *Salafiyyah* scholar including Al-Bānī,⁷⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah⁸⁰ among others is the yardstick with which the Sufis classify and prioritise *jihād* as it is commonly found in their works.

Ibn Rajab, a prominent *Salafiyyah* scholar appears to be more instructive in support of the Sufis proposition when he submits that:

ويروى من حديث سعد بن أنس عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم
قال ليس عدوك الذي إذا قتلك أدخلك الجنة وإذا قتلته كان نورا
لك وإنما أعدى عدوك نفسك التي بين جنبيك وقال أبو بكر
الصديق رضي الله عنه في وصيته لعمر حين استخلفه إن أول ما
أحذرك نفسك التي بين جنبيك

It is reported from Hadith of Saad ibn Anas who reported from the Prophet, may the blessing and the peace of Allah upon him, said: It is not when you are killed by an enemy that makes you gain paradise. But when you kill an enemy it brings light (of Allah) upon you. Indeed, your true enemy is your soul that is in you. Hence, Abubakar As-sidiq, may Allah be pleased with him, stated when he

appointed eUmar as the Khalifah that the first thing you need to be careful about is your soul that is in you...⁸¹

The above paragraph is further strengthened by Al-Khadiri, another prominent modern *Salafiyyah* scholar who submits that the real and the greatest *jihad* is the one that is targeted at one's soul which will purge it of every form of unwholesomeness and compel it on the observance of religious duties and sincerity.⁸²

References are also often made to some prominent *Mujahidun* (Jihadists) that are Sufis. They include, Abdel Kader Al-Jaziri (d. 1883 CE), who led forces against the French imperialists in Syria in 19th century,⁸³ Abdul-Karim Al-Khitabi (d. 1963CE)⁸⁴ in Morocco, Muhammad Ibn Ali As-Sanusi (d. 1859CE),⁸⁵ *Sanusiyyah* in Libya, Umar Al-Mukhtar (d. 1931CE)⁸⁶ also in Libya, Muhammad Al-Mahdi (d. 1885CE)⁸⁷ of the Sudan and Uthman Ibn Fudl (d. 1817CE)⁸⁸ of Nigeria among others.

Tawakkul (Trust in Allah) and *Istif'ānah* (Seeking Assistance from Allah)

Ibn Taymiyyah discusses the two together. He says *tawakkul* forms an integral part of worship.⁸⁹ Qurans says:

... فَأَعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

So, worship Him, and put thy trust in Him and thy Lord is not unmindful of aught that ye do. (Q11:123)⁹⁰

Tawakkul also entails *Istif'ānah* (seeking assistance from Allah), though it is often mentioned specifically by most scholars. He maintains that Allah cannot be worshipped alone except with His assistance.⁹¹

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ

Nay, seek ((Allah's) help with patient perseverance and prayer: (Q2:45)⁹²

He states further, that assistance should be sought from Allah alone otherwise one becomes the slave of whatever one seeks it from.

فَابْتَغُوا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الرِّزْقَ وَاعْبُدُوهُ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

...then seek ye sustenance from Allah, serve Him, and be grateful to Him: to Him will be your return. (Q29:17)⁹³

The Prophet therefore, enjoins his companions not to seek any kind of assistance from anyone other than Allah. An instance is given of Abubakar who, when his whip drops while riding, did not allow anybody to pick it for him. He remarks: "my close friend (prophet Muhammad) asks me not to seek any body's assistance".⁹⁴

According to At-Tustari, as contained in *Risalat al-Qushayriyyah*, *tawakkul* is total and absolute reliance on Allah in every circumstance.⁹⁵ In the view of another eminent Sufi, Sahl b. Abdullahi, the beginning of trust in Allah is like a corpse before the washer who turns it the way he likes.⁹⁶ Sufi literatures are filled with anecdotes of Sufis who cross the desert without making any provision for feeding but relied solely on Allah. Regardless of whether or not Ibn Taymiyyah gives his definition as a Sufi, his view on *tawakkul* can form one of the arrays of definitions of *tawakkul*.

Khawf (Hope)

The higher the degree of hope in Allah, the stronger the feelings of servitude to Him and the freer one becomes from things of the world.⁹⁷ This is because hope is an integral aspect of servitude. Therefore, one becomes a slave of whatever one has hope in. In other words, hope, if put in Allah totally is a means of liberation from human slavery.⁹⁸ This expression of Ibn Taymiyyah tallies in totality with those of the *Sūfi*, especially as submitted by Al-Qushayri in his *Risalah*.⁹⁹

Al-Ikhlās (Sincerity)

Al-Ikhlās according to Ibn Taymiyyah, means total dedication of acts of worship to Allah. Sincere worshippers are those who live above all forms of devil's deceptions.¹⁰⁰ He (Ibn Taymiyyah) cites Fudayl ibn 'Iyad's explanations on sincerity while interpreting verse two (2) of *Sūratul Mulk* of the glorious *Qur'an*. The verse reads:

...that He may try which of you is best in deeds....(Q67:2)¹⁰¹ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

He (Fudayl) said, this means which of you is most sincere and correct in his actions. They demand further explanation and he replies, deeds must be sincere and correct for it to be acceptable to Allah. Sincerity means deeds should be dedicated to Allah alone and Correctness means it should be done in line with the *Sunnah* of the prophet.¹⁰² Ibn Taymiyyah goes still further to state that the heart which fails to offer a sincere deeds to Allah will definitely indulge in vices.¹⁰³ Explanation of Ibn Taymiyyah here agrees perfectly with the *Sūfi* concept of Sincerity. In fact, the submissions of Fudayl ibn 'Iyad that he relied solely on strengthened shows his alignment with the *Sufis'* explanation.

Conclusion

Ibn Taymiyyah in his *al-'Ubūdiyyah* has shown the importance of *'ibādah* as the only means through which a servant can reach his Lord and the main purpose of creation. He shows different ways through which people worship Allah according to their understanding at the expense of the prescribed method which the prophets are sent by Allah to establish for men. He caps it up that for an act of *'ibādah* to be acceptable by Allah it must comply with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (PBUH).

Unlike the contemporary *Salafiyyah* scholars who bother not to consult the *Sufis'* work and assess their doctrines from the source but relied largely on assumptions and over generalisation, Ibn Taymiyyah dwells in to different aspect of *Sufidoctrines* and practices to examine the level of their compliance with his principles as he adduces them from both the Glorious *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* of the prophet. His analyses and submissions agree with some while he finds some wanting as discussed above. Ibn Taymiyyah's discourse on *al-'ibādah* wa'l *'Abdu* (worship and servanthood), has initial agreement with *Sufies* especially in terms of definition and scope, but they disagree on what constitutes the object of *'ibādah*. There are difference of opinions between Ibn Taymiyyah and the *Sufis* on *mahabbah* (Love), *zuhd*, (asceticism), *fanā'* (Annihilations), and *dhikr* (Remembrance of Allah).

However, the submissions of both parties agreed on *tawakkul* (Trust in Allah), *Istī'ānah* (Seeking Assistance or Help) *al-Qanā'* (contentment), and *khawf* (Hope) as discussed above are the same. In any case, this has shown the extent of Ibn Taymiyyah's

familiarity with *tasawwuf*. He (Ibn Taymiyyah) is therefore a scholar who has set a template for the others in terms of assessment of the works of other who might have different of opinion with them or belong to another school.

Finally, the paper recommends a further research on other works of Ibn Taymiyyah in order to make his positions and views on Sufism and other aspects of Islamic studies known. This is imperative because many of his stands and views on some topical Islamic matters remain the subject of controversies among the Islamic scholars and the Muslims in general. Examples of such issues include his position on Sufism which forms the topic of this paper. Scholars should also learn from Ibn Taymiyyah while conducting research and while making their judgements or conclusions. He maintains a middle course on Sufism and never thrown the baby away with the bathwater. He did not generalise his conclusions arbitrarily as it is the common feature among the scholars today.

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