

# MAKING KNOWLEDGE USEFUL: APPLYING AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S TEACHINGS IN THE MALAY WORLD<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The eighteenth century scholar of Malay-Arab descent Shaykh ‘Abd al-Şamad al-Palimbānī wrote a seminal Malay-Jawi text entitled *Siyar al-Sālikīn ilā ‘Ibādat Rabb al-‘Ālamīn*, being a translation-cum-commentary on the *Mukhtaşar Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. ‘Abd al-Şamad’s *Siyar* exercised a great impact on Malay religious life and thought, by applying al-Ghazālī’s teachings to solve the intellectual and religious problems faced by the Malay community during his era. ‘Abd al-Şamad discerned two main crises: first, the lack of knowledge among the Malays on the essential teachings of Sufism or *taşawwuf*; secondly, scholars who suffered from self-delusion and misled their students. He creatively applied encyclopaedic scholarship by providing an extensive bibliography of over one hundred titles of works on Sufism, categorised for each stage of study to ensure qualified access to esoteric knowledge as well as to avoiding misunderstanding of doctrines. Thereby ‘Abd al-Şamad made al-Ghazālī’s spiritual teachings relevant and useful to the Malays in their attempt to discern truth from falsehood when dealing with competing currents of thought and beliefs prevailing at the time. The problems faced by Malay Muslims three hundred years ago are instructive for us today. Muslims may respond creatively as did Shaykh ‘Abd al-Şamad by drawing upon the higher Islamic intellectual tradition for solutions to their present predicament.

## Introduction

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Şamad al-Palimbānī was an eighteenth century scholar of Malay-Arab descent who wrote a Malay-Jawi text entitled *Siyar al-Sālikīn ilā ‘Ibādat Rabb al-‘Ālamīn*.<sup>2</sup> The *Siyar al-Sālikīn* is a translation-cum-commentary on the *Mukhtaşar Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* written by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.<sup>3</sup> With this work ‘Abd al-Şamad successfully transmitted al-Ghazālī’s teachings to the Malays and left a great impact on their religious life and thought.<sup>4</sup> He applied al-Ghazālī’s teachings in an attempt to solve the intellectual and religious problems faced by the Malay community during his time. ‘Abd al-Şamad perceived the confusion of Malays regarding the orthodoxy of the Sufi tradition as adhered to and religiously practiced by Malay scholars and their followers in the Sufi orders (*туруq*).<sup>5</sup> He discerned two main crises: first, the lack of knowledge among the Malays on the essential teachings of *taşawwuf*; and second, scholars who

suffered from self-delusion and who misled their students. In his chapter on “The Censure of Self-Delusion” (*ghurūr; terpedaya*) in the *Siyar al-Sālikīn*,<sup>6</sup> ‘Abd al-Ṣamad uses his authority and knowledge with the support of other scholars in the al-Ghazālīan tradition of Sufism to validate the orthodoxy of these groups. More creatively he then applied encyclopaedic scholarship by providing an extensive bibliography of over one hundred titles of works on Sufism, categorised for each stage of study to ensure qualified access to esoteric knowledge as well as to avoid misunderstanding of doctrines.

### Shaykh ‘Abd Al-Ṣamad on Self-Delusion

In his initial approach to the Malays’ confusion over orthodoxy, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad defined the meaning of self-delusion (Arabic: *ghurūr*; Malay: *terpedaya*)<sup>7</sup> according to al-Ghazālī and explained its causes and spiritual significance. Following al-Ghazālī, he states categorically that self-delusion is the most apparent cause (*aẓhar al-asbāb*) of human destruction (*al-halāk*).<sup>8</sup> It is the belief in the outward goodness of a thing when in essence the thing is contrary to that assumption. He defines this attribute of the soul as “believing a thing that is different from what it is. It is a kind of ignorance (*al-jahl*) and in which the soul is quiet (*sukūn al-naḥs*) with what corresponds with its inclination (*al-hawā*) from imagination (*al-khayāl*) and error (*al-shubḥah*).”<sup>9</sup> He wrote that al-Ghazālī gave much significance to this defect of the soul based on verses from the Qur’ān in which God warns man against being deluded by the world and self-delusion deceiving him in respect to God.<sup>10</sup> Although al-Ghazālī stated that people who suffer from the disease of self-delusion are numerous, he divided them into four groups. In the *Siyar*, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad efficiently summarises the essential characteristics of these groups of people in terms of their delusions. They are first, the scholars (*‘ulamā*’); second, the devout (*orang yang berbuat ‘ibādah*); third, the Sufis and those who participate in Sufism (*al-sūfiyyah wa al-mutaṣawwifah*); and fourth, the wealthy (*orang mempunyai harta*).

The first group of people who may be afflicted with self-delusion that ‘Abd al-Ṣamad lists are the scholars. These scholars may possess knowledge of the *Sharī‘ah*, of *taṣawwuf*, the intellectual sciences (*‘ilmu ‘aqlīyah*)<sup>11</sup> or the transmitted sciences (*‘ilmu naqlīyah*),<sup>12</sup> but they are devoid of the knowledge of the truth (*‘ilmu ḥaqīqah*) or knowledge of unveiling (*‘ilmu al-mukāshafah*)<sup>13</sup> received directly from God. This is because their knowledge is limited to the exoteric aspects of the *Sharī‘ah* and does not encompass the esoteric dimension. These exoteric scholars are referred to variously as *‘ulamā’ al-zāhir*, *‘ulamā’ al-rusūm* and *fuqahā’ al-zāhir*. To bolster al-Ghazālī’s assertion, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad quotes the saying attributed to Imām Mālik (which he applied several times

throughout the *Siyar*): “He who learns jurisprudence [Arabic: *man tafaqqaha*; Malay: *barangsiapa menuntut ‘ilmu fiqah yang zāhir*] and neglects Sufism [Arabic: *lam yataṣawwaf*; Malay: *tidak menuntut ‘ilmu taṣawwuf yang bāṭin*] becomes a reprobate [Arabic: *tafassaqa*; Malay: *fāsiq*].”<sup>14</sup> Al-Ghazālī feared that people who do not devote themselves to learning the inner science and practicing its way would persistently commit sin without realising it. He believed *taṣawwuf* alone provided knowledge of the inner faults or vices. Accordingly, the self-deluded scholar is one who does not know the science that provides knowledge of the inner faults (*‘aib dirinya*); i.e., *taṣawwuf*, or one who knows but does not attempt to vigorously purify himself of these vices.<sup>15</sup>

The second group, the devout, are people who perform the outward ritual obligations (*‘ibādah yang zāhir*) such as the canonical prayers (*sembahyang*) and fasting (*puasa*) but do not purify their hearts from inward vices (*ma‘ṣiyah yang bāṭin*). These people are deluded since the performance of outward acts of worship does not purify the heart from vices. This pronouncement is based on the *Ḥadīth* which essentially defines the function of the heart (*qalb*) in man, the source of all goodness and evil. If the heart is pure and clean, without inward vice, all the acts of worship performed by the body will be good, but if the heart is not free from the impurities, then the external acts will also be the same.<sup>16</sup> Every deed and act of worship contains in it harm (*āfāt*) which could vitiate all acts of worship such as prayers, fasting and reciting the Qur’ān. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad states that whosoever does not know the places at which harm enters and persists in holding on to his acts of worship is deluded. One such example are those who take lightly or neglect what is obligatory upon them but are rigorous in their execution of the supererogatory, as in the case of those who preoccupy themselves with “inner-whispering” (*waswās*)<sup>17</sup> when taking their ablutions or cleaning their clothing or place of prayer, resulting in the time of their prayer to be delayed or to lapse. Only with knowledge of *taṣawwuf* will a person be instructed in the things which destroy his worship and those that improve his outward and inner self.<sup>18</sup>

In the third category, the Sufis and the aspirants of Sufism, the deluded among them focus on external appearances and outward behaviours of Sufis but are ignorant (*jāhil*) of the internal aspects of disciplines enriching their inward devotional acts and behaviour. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad quotes the great Sufi exponent Abū Madyan, the precursor of the Shādhilī tradition, in his book the *Ḥikam*, who warned of the harm (*maḍarrāh*) of befriending a learned man who is heedless (*lalai*) in the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*) or a Sufi who is ignorant of the esoteric teachings of the spiritual path or one who imparts knowledge for the sake of glory, praise and fame. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad specifically singles out, in this group of Sufis inflicted with self-deception, those who study the science of inner

realities such as the doctrine of the “seven levels of being” (*martabat tujuh*)<sup>19</sup> and other teachings related to it but who do not study the *Shari‘ah* namely, *uṣūl al-dīn* and *fiqh*. He quotes Imām Mālik again to emphasise his point: “He who learns Sufism (*man taṣawwafa*) and neglects jurisprudence (*lam yatafaqqah*) becomes an apostate (*tazandaqa*).”<sup>20</sup> Our Malay Sufi master takes a step further from al-Ghazālī’s classification of self-deluded people by pointing to Imām Mālik’s qualification of the “people who have attained the realisation of the Truth” (*taḥaqqāqa*) as those who are not under self-delusion; i.e., those who combine the study of both the *Shari‘ah* and *ṭarīqah* (*man jama‘a baynahumā*). These are the people who have attained knowledge of God (*‘ilmu ma‘rifah akan Allāh*) at the level of certainty (*yaqīn*) and finality (*putus*).<sup>21</sup>

The fourth category of self-deluded people is made up of the wealthy who spend on good works but their actions are accompanied by feelings of ostentation (*riyā’*) or vain-glory (*‘ujb*) or wanting a good reputation (*sum‘ah*), or who desire glory and seek fame or want to be known by people as generous and to receive praise from them. There are also those who spend money building mosques or hospices for the poor and require that their names be placed on these buildings so that they can become famous and be known by people for such acts. Furthermore, they are greedy in wanting their rewards (*pahala*) or in wanting their sins (*dosa*) to be forgiven. According to ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, the deceptions in this case come in two forms: either the funds for these good works are unlawfully derived or the good works are performed ostentatiously, desiring a good reputation, which becomes evident if they are reluctant to make any contributions without getting recognition in return. There are also those who build mosques with lawful money but waste on unnecessary decorations and ornaments.<sup>22</sup>

‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s approach throughout proceeds by setting forth the merits and benefits of the *Ihyā’* and al-Ghazālī’s works on *taṣawwuf* and quoting the scholars of the Ḥaḍramawt tradition in their laudations of his works. The Ḥaḍramī scholars were authorities and transmitters of al-Ghazālī’s teachings and wielded great influence among the Malays both religiously and intellectually following the introduction of Islam in the Malay Archipelago.<sup>23</sup> The most important statements extolling the *Ihyā’* came from the ancestor of the al-‘Aydārūs clan, al-Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydārūs (d. 865/1461), as in the following examples:<sup>24</sup>

...in the *Ihyā’* is contained a commentary of the Qur’ān, the Sunnah and the *ṭarīqah*; Whosoever loves the *Ihyā’* peruses it and acts according to its contents, is worthy of receiving the love of God, His Messenger, His angels, His prophets and His friends...;

And indeed the books of al-Ghazālī are the quintessence of the Qur’ān, the Sunnah and the intellectual and transmitted sciences. And God is the Trustee of what I said;

If God were to resurrect the dead certainly they will not give counsel to the living except to act by what is in the *lḥyā*'.

In this way, 'Abd al-Ṣamad affirmed the authenticity of al-Ghazālī's teachings as providing the beneficial knowledge (*'ilm al-nāfi'*) referred to by the Qur'ān, which according to 'Abd al-Ṣamad is the knowledge of *taṣawwuf* and is called by several names: science of the inward (*'ilmu bāṭin atau kebatinan*); science of the Path (*'ilmu ṭarīqah*); and science of wayfaring (*'ilmu sulūk*). In terms of the hierarchy of knowledge, knowledge of jurisprudence (*'ilmu fiqah*) and theology (*'ilmu kalām*) or principles of religion (*'ilmu uṣūl al-dīn*) are lower in rank than *taṣawwuf*, and the latter leads to the highest which is knowledge of God (*'ilm ma'rifah bi Allāh*) or knowledge of the Divine Truth or Reality (*'ilmu ḥaqīqah*).<sup>25</sup> 'Abd al-Ṣamad felt there was a need for this verification since the question of orthodoxy of Sufi adherents was of prime importance and remained an unsettled issue following the charge of infidelity (*kufṛ*) and persecution of the Malay Wujūdīyah<sup>26</sup> a century earlier. The main attack against the group was that their metaphysical teachings were pantheistic, considered heresy in Islam.<sup>27</sup> He was concerned to cement the adherence of the *Sharī'ah* in their doctrines and practices by pointing out to the Malays that the *Sharī'ah* is the foundation for all knowledge and action in Islam. He repeatedly stated that the highest form of knowledge, which is knowledge of God, is unattainable without the groundwork of the Law (*Sharī'ah*), and the way to the ultimate Truth (*ḥaqīqah*) is by following the spiritual path (*ṭarīqah*). Hence, there can be no *ṭarīqah* and *ḥaqīqah* without the *Sharī'ah*.

'Abd al-Ṣamad reiterated that those people who seek knowledge and perform acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, and alms-giving without purifying their hearts from inward vices are self-deluded. Their devotional acts will not be accepted by God unless they are done sincerely – solely for the sake of God and for the purpose of obeying His command – as well as on the condition that they stay away from committing both inward and outward sins. He asserted that no one who performs devotional acts is free from delusion save those who follow and whole-heartedly practice the Way (*madhhab*) of the Sufi. The Way of the Sufi scholar encompasses knowledge derived from both the outward and inward meanings of the *Sharī'ah* (*segala 'ilmu Sharī'ah yang zāhir dan 'ilmu Sharī'ah yang bāṭin*).<sup>28</sup> Essentially, it goes beyond understanding and practicing the *Sharī'ah* in its external form to penetrating into its inner meaning and living out this inner dimension, i.e., the *ṭarīqah*. Those who embody this combination of knowledge are those who have attained knowledge of the *ḥaqīqah*, the Origin of all things. The ultimate goal of the Way is to gain illuminative knowledge, by which one knows God through God Himself (*ma'rifah bi-llāh*) and not

through purely human knowledge. Reflective of al-Ghazālī's emphasis on both knowledge (*ilm*) and action (*amal*), knowledge of the Truth is not attained by mental comprehension alone but by the soul's realisation of the Truth which can be actualised by undergoing the spiritual discipline of the *ṭarīqah* and realising the spiritual virtues. 'Abd al-Ṣamad referred to "those people who are rid of self-delusions and have realised the Truth in themselves" as '*orang Ṣūfī yang muḥaqqiq*' (the verifiers among the Sufis).<sup>29</sup>

### ‘Abd al-Ṣamad on the stages of the science of *taṣawwuf* (‘*ilmu taṣawwuf*’) and its books<sup>30</sup>

'Abd al-Ṣamad's ultimate approach to solving the problem of Malay confusion, and his most significant contribution in this chapter, lies in categorisation of the science of *taṣawwuf* into three levels according to the stage of the traveller on the spiritual path and the benefit derived in terms of knowledge acquired from Sufi works at each particular stage. The three levels are the elementary (*mubtadi*), intermediate (*mutawassit*) and advanced (*muntahī*). The knowledge derived at the first level is beneficial for wayfarers at all three stages in their spiritual journey, namely, the beginner or novice, the intermediate, and the advanced or adept. He described the novice as one who possesses "soul" (*nafs*)<sup>31</sup> and is just starting out on the Path and whose heart is not pure (*suci*) from internal vices such as ostentation, pride, and anger (*ghaḍab*), although it is clean from external vices. The intermediate traveller is one who possesses "heart" (*hati*), in other words, who is at the middle stage of traversing the path and whose heart is pure from internal vices. Finally, the adept is one who possesses "spirit" (*ruh*) and whose heart is pure from internal vices and everything else that is other than God. These adepts are the gnostics (*‘arīfīn*), referring to those who have arrived at true knowledge of God (*ma‘rifah akan Allah Ta‘ālā dengan ma‘rifah yang sebenar-benarnya*).<sup>32</sup>

'Abd al-Ṣamad recorded fifty titles of works on *taṣawwuf* which are suitable for the first or elementary (*mubtadi*) level.<sup>33</sup> These titles comprise mainly al-Ghazālī's writings and some other early standard Sufi works. For the second or intermediate (*mutawassit*) level, he mentioned as many as thirty titles.<sup>34</sup> In this category, according to 'Abd al-Ṣamad, none are more beneficial than works written by masters of the Shādhiliyyah order and their commentaries. He also recommended works by scholars from the Indian Sufi tradition in addition to works by his Shaykh, Muḥammad al-Sammān<sup>35</sup> (d. 1191/1777) on the practical aspects of the *ṭarīqah*. For the third or highest (*muntahī*) level, he mentioned a total of twenty titles which he considered suitable.<sup>36</sup> They comprised mainly works by al-Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) and their commentaries which

contain esoteric knowledge of the supernal realities, other metaphysical works from scholars in the Ibn al-‘Arabī school, al-Ghazālī’s more esoteric works, and works by Malay scholars of the Wujūdīyah school, for example, Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī<sup>37</sup> (d. 1040/1630).

‘Abd al-Ṣamad explains that although the science of *taṣawwuf* is useful in this world and the Hereafter, yet when it examines the science of realities at the third level, it brings very little benefit to all but the adepts. He cautioned that it may prove harmful to the novice not well versed in the *Sharī‘ah* and the *ṭarīqah* and who does not practice its method: its knowledge may prove harmful and may even turn him into a heretic (*zindīq*).<sup>38</sup> ‘Abd al-Ṣamad listed the qualities of the people qualified to delve in the science of *taṣawwuf* at this third and highest level: first, it is certain that they possess knowledge of the exoteric aspects of the *Sharī‘ah*, i.e., *uṣūl al-dīn* and *fiqh*; second, they possess knowledge of the *ṭarīqah* as set down for the first and second levels; third, they have struggled to purify their souls from all vices and adorned themselves with virtues; fourth, they have truly followed the spiritual path (*menjalani sebenar-benar ‘ilmu ṭarīqah itu*); fifth, they have no more love for anything in this world except God, and nothing remains in their hearts except seeking (*menuntut*) Him. Lastly, although not really a condition but a Grace bestowed by God (*dianugerahi oleh Allāh Ta‘ālā*) on them as a result of which they become wise (*bijaksana*) in integrating (*menghimpunkan*) the knowledge which ‘Abd al-Ṣamad described as “knowledge that lights up like fire” (*‘ilmu yang nyala seperti api*), they possess the discernment (*pemilih*) to choose between good and evil; they become more intelligent (*terlebih cerdas*); and they possess an understanding free from error (*faham yang suci daripada tersalah*).<sup>39</sup> ‘Abd al-Ṣamad added that the master or spiritual guide has a clear role and responsibility in this matter. It is imperative that he forbid disciples from studying books belonging to the third level if he finds them to be weak in intelligence.<sup>40</sup> When they read esoteric works, disciples of this type misunderstand the meaning of the words and interpret them differently from their original meaning. Naturally, practicing the wrong things will bring them harm and lead them to destruction. Secondly, they lose years off their life studying these books without deriving any benefit from them and this is of course futile. Hence, it is better that they preoccupy themselves with activities which benefit them.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

The approach and contents of this important chapter in *Siyar* demonstrate how ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, by means of the teachings of al-Ghazālī, defended and clarified the orthodoxy of Sufism and of its Malay adherents who had been accused of

heterodoxy. For ‘Abd al-Ṣamad one of the root causes of this problem is self-delusion among the Malay scholars, both exoteric and esoteric. The first group of scholars possesses knowledge restricted to the *Sharī‘ah* which is limiting, while the second is not grounded in the *Sharī‘ah* when actually, as ‘Abd al-Ṣamad showed by the example of Ibn al-‘Arabī, *taṣawwuf* is the practice of the *Sharī‘ah* at its highest level.<sup>42</sup> He pointed to al-Ghazālī’s works as the measure of orthodoxy and verifies this with the approval awarded them by the Ḥaḍramī scholars who historically exerted influence upon the Malays. He classified the science of *taṣawwuf* into three levels, implying that its various teachings were appropriate at differing levels. He listed the important available works according to the qualification for each level in the hierarchy. He asserted that conditions must be met to qualify for the study of this esoteric science, the two important ones being God’s bestowal of His Grace for its pursuit and intelligence, hence clarifying that it is not meant for everyone. He also explained that the acquisition of its knowledge is a gradual process which must be scaled step by step; and finally he clearly stated the dangers which could occur through misunderstanding and lack of knowledge if these conditions and requirements are not adhered to properly.

From the list of about a hundred titles which ‘Abd al-Ṣamad compiled for all three levels, it is evident that he was a very learned scholar well grounded in the higher reaches of Sufi tradition. In order to determine and categorise these works for each stage of study he must have been well versed in their contents. His contribution here is that he not only provided a comprehensive bibliography of works by Sufi masters in the heartland of Islam for Malay readers and students to refer to, but more importantly, he aided in providing a hierarchy for the science of *taṣawwuf* founded on the written works of these great Sufi masters which was urgently required at the time and place. Evidently, he did not consider the Malay Wujūdīyah scholar al-Sumatrānī as a heretic or an infidel since he listed two of his works at the highest level.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, he did not include any of the works of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1068/1658), the main critic of the Wujūdīyah, in his list despite the latter’s prolific output.. This is a clear indication of his position on the charge of heresy as well as his opinion of al-Rānīrī’s knowledge and scholarship.

The problems faced by Malay Muslims three hundred years ago remain relevant and important today. Many would argue that following in Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s footsteps, we may, like him, respond creatively and draw from our Islamic intellectual tradition to solve our present predicament. By interpreting and applying relevant principles derived from original works in the past to local contexts, contemporary Muslim scholars are able not only to instruct and educate but to address issues and solve religious and intellectual problems of our day as



well. In this way, they can make received knowledge relevant and adequate to the needs and realities of the contemporary Muslim community.

Taking the concrete context of the field of education in Malaysia in the twenty-first century as an example, the Ministry of Higher Education realises the importance of moving universities to redefine higher education and the knowledge they provide, in addition to making the knowledge benefit the community and serve the local needs. In achieving this general goal, some of the recommendations suggested by the Deputy of Higher Education Minister, Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah,<sup>44</sup> are the following:

- Universities in the region and in Malaysia in particular, must cooperate to “de-Westernise” and move to redefine higher education and knowledge they provide.
- These universities must form their own worldviews instead of following those prescribed by former colonial masters and the Western world.
- Institutions of higher learning need to develop indigenous knowledge.
- Knowledge and research by the higher learning institutions must benefit the people and address local issues.
- An environment of empowerment should be created where youths and students are encouraged to debate, speak freely and be recognised.

We can safely conclude that these recommendations are compatible with and do not contradict the essence of the teachings and practices of the Muslim scholars in the past in carrying out their dual role of transmitting knowledge and solving problems of human society. In the Malaysian context, the knowledge framework and education system must reflect the ideals and requirements of its multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society.

## APPENDIX

### LIST OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS ACCORDING TO THREE LEVELS BY SHAYKH ‘ABD AL-ŞAMAD AL-PALIMBĀNĪ

#### I. Elementary (*Mubtadi’*)

Al-Ghazālī’s standard Sufi works:

- *Bidāyat al-hidāyah*
- *Minhāj al-‘ābidīn*
- *Kitāb al-arba‘īn fī uşūl al-dīn*

- *Mukhtaṣar ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*
- *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*

‘Abd Al-Ṣamad’s translation-cum-commentary of al-Ghazālī’s works:

- *Ḥidāyat al-sālikīn*
- *Siyar al-sālikīn*

Other early standard Sufi works:

- *Qūt al-qulūb* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī
- *Risālat al-Qushayrīyah* by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī
- *Kitāb al-Gunyah* by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī,
- *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī
- *Ādab al-murīdīn* by Muḥammad bin al-Ḥabīb al-Suhrawardī

Works by Ḥaḍramī Sufi scholars such as:

- *Al-Durr al-thamīn* by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-‘Aydarūs
- *Al-Naṣā’ih al-dīniyyah wa al-waṣāyā al-īmāniyyah* by ‘Abd Allāh bin ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād

Several treatises by Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī and Muḥammad al-Sammānī for new initiates on the Path, specifically for those belonging to the Khalwatīyah and Sammānīyah orders.

## II. Intermediate (*Mutawassiū*)

Works written by masters of the Shādhilīyah order:

- *Kitāb al-ḥikam* by Ibn Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī and its commentaries such as those written by Muḥammad bin Ibrahim bin ‘Abbād al-Rundī, Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm bin ‘Alān al-Naqshabandī and Aḥmad al-Qushāshī.
- *Kitāb al-ḥikam (Risālat al-tawḥīd)* by Ibn Raslān and its famous commentary by Zakariyyā’ al-Anṣārī, *Fath al-Raḥmān*.

Works by scholars from the Indian Sufi tradition: for example,

- *Jawahīr al-khamsah* by Muḥammad al-Ghawth.

Books written on the Naqshabandīyah *ṭarīqah* such as

- *Miftāḥ al-ma‘iyyah fī al-ṭarīqah al-Naqshabandīyah* which is a commentary of Tāj al-Dīn al-Ḥindī al-Naqshabandī’s *Risālah fī sulūk khaṣṣah al-sādah* by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nablūsī, teacher of Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī.

Works by the Egyptian Sufi and Traditionist ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, who was also a student of Zakariyyā’ al-Anṣārī: for example,

- *Al-Yawāqīt wa al-jawāhir*
- *Al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar*

Works by Muḥammad al-Sammān on the practical aspects of the *ṭarīqah*: for example,

- *Asrār al-ibādāt*

Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī's work entitled *Faṭḥ al-qudsī* with its commentary, *Ḍiyā' al-shams 'alā faṭḥ al-qudsī*.

### III. Advanced (*Muntahī*)

Works by al-Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn al-‘Arabī: for example,

- *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and its commentaries by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, al-Nablūsī and ‘Alī al-Mahā’imī
- *Al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah* and its summary by al-Sha ‘rānī entitled *Lawāqih al-anwār al-qudsīyah*

Other metaphysical works from scholars in the Ibn al-‘Arabī school, such as

- *Al-Insān al-kāmil* by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jilī
- *Al-Nafahāt al-Ilāhīyah* by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī
- *Al-Tuḥfah al-mursalāh ilā al-nabī* by al-Burhānpūrī, and its commentaries by Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī and al-Nabulūsī entitled *Taḥīyyat al-mas’alah sharḥ tuḥfat al-mursalāh* and al-Nabulūsī's own composition *Idā’ah al-maqṣūd min ma’nā waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Works by Malay scholars of the Wujūdīyah School: for example,

- Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaṭrānī's *Jawhar al-ḥaqā’iq* and *Tanbih al-ṭullāb* and
- ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Fanṣūrī's *Ta’yīd al-bayān*, a gloss (*ḥāshiyah*) on *Idā’ah al-bayān fī taḥqīq masā’il al-a’yān*.

Al-Ghazālī's more esoteric works such as

- *Mishkāt al-anwār*
- *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā*

Several books in the *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*: for example,

- *Kitāb al-ṣabr*
- *Kitāb al-shukr*
- *Kitāb al-maḥabbah*
- *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa al-tawakkul*

## Notes

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1. This paper was presented at The World Philosophy Day Congress 2010, 21–23 November 2010 in Tehran, Iran.
  2. Jawi edition: *Siyar al-Sālikīn ilā 'ibādāt rabb al-'ālamīn*, 4 juz' (Bangkok: Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muḥammad al-Nahdī wa awlādihī, n.d.). This edition is a reprint of the text published by 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Sharīkah, Cairo, 1372/1953, henceforth cited as *Siyar* (J). Romanised edition: *Siyarus salikin: Jalan para salik untuk mengabdī diri kepada Tuhan Rabbul 'alamin*, 4 Juz, Perbaikan Bahasa. Muhammad Labib, Tahqiq & Pembetulan. Syed Ahmad Semait (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional Pte Ltd, 2003), henceforth cited as *Siyar* (R).
  3. The printed editions of this work are: i) Imām Abī Ḥāmid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Mukhtaṣar Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. ed. Dr. Sha'bān Muḥammad Ismā'īl (Cairo: Maktabah Naṣīr, n.d.); and ii) Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mukhtaṣar Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyah, 1410/1990).
  4. See Megawati Moris, "The influence of al-Ghazālī on eighteenth and nineteenth century Malay thinkers and their works, with an analysis of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī's *Siyar al-Sālikīn*, a Malay rendition of the *Mukhtaṣar Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*" (Ph.d dissertation, ISTAC, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2007).
  5. On the question of orthodoxy, Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr states, "The question of orthodoxy in any religion is of the utmost importance, for the very word means 'correctness of belief or doctrine.'... In Islam, orthodoxy means possession of religious truth, and orthopraxy, the correct manner of practicing and reaching the truth... orthodoxy and orthopraxy can be understood as the state of being on the 'straight path' (*al-sirat al-mustaqīm*)..." See his, *The heart of Islam: Enduring values for humanity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 84–85.
  6. Chapter Ten (*bab yang kesepuluh*) of the third part (*juzu' yang ketiga*) of the *Siyar*.
  7. T.J. Winter remarks that this term is difficult to translate into English: "Ghurūr denotes an attitude of beguilement, illusion, vainglory, temptation, self-satisfaction, distraction: a vice which turns man aside from the quest for God." See *Al-Ghazālī on disciplining the soul and on breaking the two desires, Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the religious sciences*, trans., T.J. Winter with an Introduction and Notes (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995, Repr., 1997, 2001), 101 note A.
  8. *Mukhtaṣar al-Iḥyā'*, 214; *Siyar* (J), 3:167; *Siyar* (R), 3:335.
  9. *Mukhtaṣar al-Iḥyā'*, 215; *Siyar* (J), 3:167; *Siyar* (R), 3:335.
  10. For example, *Sūrah Luqmān*, 31: 33 and *Sūrat al-Ḥadīd*, 57: 14. *Siyar* (J), 3:167; *Siyar* (R), 3:335.
  11. In al-Ghazālī's classification of knowledge, these sciences are also referred to as non-religious sciences (*al-'ulūm ḡayr shar'īyyah*). These sciences are attained by the human intellect alone. See *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, 1:25-26. See also Nabih Faris, *The book of knowledge, being a translation with notes of the Kitāb al-'ilm of al-Ghazālī's Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Reprinted 1980), 36-7; and Osman Bakar, *Classification of knowledge in Islam: A study in Islamic philosophies of science* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute for Policy Research, 1992), 205, 264.
  12. Al-Ghazālī used this term as synonymous with the religious sciences (*al-'ulum al-shar'īyyah*) in the *Iḥyā'* and *al-Risālah al-ladunīyah*. He defined the religious sciences as "those which have been acquired from the prophets and are not arrived at either by reason, like arithmetic, or by experimentation, like medicine, or by hearing, like language." Nabih Faris, *Book of knowledge*, 36–7. See also, O. Bakar, *Classification*, 205.
  13. Al-Ghazālī also refers to this knowledge as knowledge from on high (*'ilm al-ladunī*) which he categorised as presential knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*). Presential knowledge is direct, immediate, supra-rational, intuitive and contemplative, in contrast to attained or acquired knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ḥuṣūlī*) which is indirect, rational, logical and discursive. The former is superior to the latter

since it does not contain any errors or doubts and confers the highest certitude pertaining to spiritual truths. In terms of the *farḍ ʿayn* and *farḍ kifāyah* distinction, *ʿilm al-mukāshafah* is considered as *farḍ kifāyah* and therefore, not obligatory for each Muslim. In addition, it transcends the religious (*sharʿiyyah*) and intellectual (*ʿaqliyyah*) dichotomy since al-Ghazālī considers it to be at once religious and intellectual and hence excluded from al-Ghazālī’s classification of the sciences. See O. Bakar, *Classification*, 203–204 and 209. The treatise al-Ghazālī wrote bearing this title was translated by Margaret Smith, “*al-Risālah al-laduniyya*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April 1938): 177–374.

14. *Siyar* (J), 3:168; *Siyar* (R), 3:337.
15. *Siyar* (J), 3:168; *Siyar* (R), 3:337–38.
16. *Siyar* (J), 3:169; *Siyar* (R), 3:338–39.
17. Plural: *wasāwīs*. These are random thoughts, promptings and ideas projected by the devil into one’s mind to distract or confuse it. They were also termed *khawāṭir*. Al-Kalabādhī in his *Kitāb al-taʿarruf* distinguishes four types of *khawāṭir*. They may derive from God, the angels, the egotism of the soul (*nafs*), or from the devil. If they are from God or the angels, they are referred to as *ilhām* (inspiration), but more often they are from the devil and the egotism of the soul and are called *waswās* or *hadīth al-nafs* (discourse of the soul). See T.J. Winter, *Al-Ghazālī on disciplining the soul*, LXVII, XCI–CII note 325, 240.
18. *Siyar* (J), 3:169–70; *Siyar* (R), 3:339–40.
19. The Malay doctrine of *martabat tujuh* was developed from Ibn al-ʿArabī’s original doctrine of the Five Divine Presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyyāt al-khams*) in which Being and Its manifestations are categorised into five levels of existence. The Malays followed the Indian Sufī Muḥammad Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānpūrī’s (d. 1029/1620) adaptation of the scheme into seven levels as elaborated in the latter’s work entitled *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalāh ilā al-nabī*. This doctrine became one of the primary doctrines in Malay Sufi metaphysical teachings and formed the basis for other aspects of Malay Sufi thought, such as those on cosmology, psychology and epistemology as well as for the practice of the spiritual path. However, it also caused a great deal of intellectual and religious confusion among the Malays.
20. *Siyar* (J), 3:170; *Siyar* (R), 3:341.
21. *Siyar* (J), 3:170; *Siyar* (R), 3:341.
22. *Siyar* (J), 3:175–76; *Siyar* (R), 3:350–51.
23. See for example, Syed Farid Alatas, “Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami diaspora: Problems in theoretical history”, *Hadhrami traders, scholars, and statesmen in the Indian ocean, 1750s-1960s*, ed. U. Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (Leiden: Brill, 1997); and R.B. Serjeant, “The Saiyids of Hadramawt,” An Inaugural Lecture Delivered on 5 June 1956, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1957.
24. Taken from the commentary (*sharḥ*) entitled *Taʿrīf al-ahyāʾ bi-faḍāʾil al-ihyāʾ* which is also referred to by the title, *Taʿrīf al-ihyāʾ bi-faḍāʾil al-ihyāʾ*. It is given as an annex to the *Ihyāʾ*. It also appears in the margin of *Ithāf al-sādah al-muttaqīn* by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī. Quotations in *Siyar* (J), 3:172–74; *Siyar* (R), 3:344–49.
25. *Siyar* (J), 1:5–6; *Siyar* (R), 1:9.
26. They are the Malay exponents of the Ibn al-ʿArabī school and wrote on the central doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This group gathered many followers into their fold and they grew in strength and popularity as a result of the Sultan’s patronage. The two most influential representatives of this school were the Sufi masters, Ḥamzah al-Fanṣūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaṭrānī from Aceh. The main critic of this group was Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, who upheld the existentialist position himself, and he referred to his group as the “true existentialists” or “existentialists who affirm unity” (*Wujūdīyah Muwahḥidiah*) while referring to the group led by al-Fanṣūrī and al-Sumaṭrānī as the “false or deviating existentialists” (*Wujūdīyah Mulḥidah*). Refer to the penetrating monograph by S. M. Naguib al-Attas, *Rānīrī and the Wujūdīyah of 17<sup>th</sup> century Aceh* (Singapore: Monographs of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society III, 1966).
27. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
28. *Siyar* (J), 3:176; *Siyar* (R), 3:351–52.
29. *Siyar* (J), 3:176; *Siyar* (R), 3:352. See also, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and realities of Islam*

- (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), 122, 124–25, 138–39.
30. For a list of the books according to levels see our Appendix. Certain scholars have systematically listed these works according to the three levels, for example Martin Bruinessen, who also meticulously identified each work and its author from Carl Brockelman's *GAL in Kitab kuning: Pesantren dan tarekat, tradisi-tradisi Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1999), 71–87; W.M. Shaghir Abdullah, *Abdus Shamad Palembang: Ulama Shufi dan jihad dunia Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1996), 149–67; Muhammad °Uthman el-Muhammady, "Penggabungan antara unsur tradisional dengan unsur intelektual dalam karya Syaikh °Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani dengan rujukan khas kepada Sayr al-Salikinnya," Seminar Pemikiran Ulama' Sheikh Abdus Samad al-Falimbani, Dewan Masjid Kompleks al-Bukhary, Alor Setar, 30 December 2002, 1–6. See also Megawati Moris, "The influence of al-Ghazālī", 121–132.
  31. The terms "soul", "heart" and "spirit" refer to the subtle dimensions of the human reality in terms of certain qualities or attributes.
  32. *Siyar* (J), 3:176–77; *Siyar* (R), 3:353.
  33. *Siyar* (J), 3:177–80; *Siyar* (R), 3:353–58.
  34. *Siyar* (J), 3:180–82; *Siyar* (R), 3:358–361.
  35. He was the founder of the Sammānīyah *ṭarīqah* which was an off-shoot of the Khalwatīyah. He appointed °Abd al-Šamad as one of his *khalīfahs* in the Malay world.
  36. *Siyar* (J), 3:182–83; *Siyar* (R), 3:361–63.
  37. Al-Sumaṭrānī was an outstanding scholar who wrote on Sufi metaphysics and is claimed to have been the first Malay thinker to write and elaborate on the doctrine of *Martabat Tujuh* (seven levels of being) systematically in his works.
  38. *Siyar* (J), 3:183; *Siyar* (R), 3:363.
  39. *Siyar* (J), 3:183–85; *Siyar* (R), 3:363–65.
  40. *Siyar* (J), 3:185; *Siyar* (R), 3:366–67.
  41. *Siyar* (J), 3:185; *Siyar* (R), 3:366–67.
  42. *Siyar* (J), 3:186; *Siyar* (R), 3:368.
  43. See the Appendix of this paper for the two titles. *Siyar* (J), 3:183; *Siyar* (R), 3:363.
  44. Extracted from his speeches written in the New Straits Times on 29 June 2011 and 20 October 2012 via [www.saifuddinabdullah.com.my/category/New-Straits-Times.aspx](http://www.saifuddinabdullah.com.my/category/New-Straits-Times.aspx) (accessed 6 November 2012).