MAKING KNOWLEDGE USEFUL: APPLYING AL-GHAZĀLĪ’S TEACHINGS IN THE MALAY WORLD

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Abstract: The eighteenth century scholar of Malay-Arab descent Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī wrote a seminal Malay-Jawi text entitled Siyar al-Sālikīn ilā ʿĪbādat Rabb al-ʿĀlamīn, being a translation-cum-commentary on the Mukhtaṣar Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad’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. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad discerned two main crises: first, the lack of knowledge among the Malays on the essential teachings of Sufism or taṣawwuf; 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 ʿAbd al-Ṣamad 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 ʿAbd al-Ṣamad by drawing upon the higher Islamic intellectual tradition for solutions to their present predicament.

Introduction

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī was an eighteenth century scholar of Malay-Arab descent who wrote a Malay-Jawi text entitled Siyar al-Sālikīn ilā ʿĪbādat Rabb al-ʿĀlamīn. The Siyar al-Sālikīn is a translation-cum-commentary on the Mukhtaṣar Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn written by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. With this work ʿAbd al-Ṣamad successfully transmitted al-Ghazālī’s teachings to the Malays and left a great impact on their religious life and thought. He applied al-Ghazālī’s teachings in an attempt to solve the intellectual and religious problems faced by the Malay community during his time. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad 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 (turuq). He discerned two main crises: first, the lack of knowledge among the Malays on the essential teachings of taṣawwuf; 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, 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 Ṣamad on Self-Delusion**

In his initial approach to the Malays’ confusion over orthodoxy, Ṣamad defined the meaning of self-delusion (Arabic: ghurūr; Malay: terpedaya) 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 (azhār al-asbāb) of human destruction (al-halāk). 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-nafs) with what corresponds with its inclination (al-hawā) from imagination (al-khayāl) and error (al-shubhah).” 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. 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, Ṣamad efficiently summarises the essential characteristics of these groups of people in terms of their delusions. They are first, the scholars (ʿulamāʾ); second, the devout (orang yang berbuat ʿibādah); third, the Sufis and those who participate in Sufism (al-ṣūfīyyah wa al-mutaṣawwifah); and fourth, the wealthy (orang mempunyai harta).

The first group of people who may be afflicted with self-delusion that Ṣamad lists are the scholars. These scholars may possess knowledge of the Sharī‘ah, of taṣawwuf, the intellectual sciences (ʿilmu ʿaqīliyyah) or the transmitted sciences (ʿilmu naqiyyah), but they are devoid of the knowledge of the truth (ʿilmu ḥaqīqah) or knowledge of unveiling (ʿilmu al-mukāshafah) 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 ʿulamāʾ al-zāhir, ʿulamāʾ al-rusūm and fiqahāʾ al-zāhir. To bolster al-Ghazālī’s assertion, 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 bātīn] becomes a reprobate [Arabic: tafassaqa; Malay: fāsiq].”

14 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 (ʿaib dirinya); i.e., taṣawwuf, or one who knows but does not attempt to vigorously purify himself of these vices.

The second group, the devout, are people who perform the outward ritual obligations (ʿibādah yang zāhir) such as the canonical prayers (sembahyang) and fasting (puasa) but do not purify their hearts from inward vices (maʿṣiyah yang bātīn). 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 Hadīth which essentially defines the function of the heart (qaḥb) 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.

16 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-ʿAmad 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) 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.

17 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 Hikam, who warned of the harm (madarrah) 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)\textsuperscript{19} and other teachings related to it but who do no study the Sharī‘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).”\textsuperscript{20} 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” (taḥaqqaqa) as those who are not under self-delusion; i.e., those who combine the study of both the Sharī‘ah and tariqah (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).\textsuperscript{21}

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.\textsuperscript{22}

‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s approach throughout proceeds by setting forth the merits and benefits of the Iḥyā’ 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.\textsuperscript{23} The most important statements extolling the Iḥyā’ came from the ancestor of the al-‘Aydarūs clan, al-Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydarūs (d. 865/1461), as in the following examples:\textsuperscript{24}

...in the Iḥyā’ is contained a commentary of the Qur’ān, the Sunnah and the tariqah; Whosoever loves the Iḥyā’ 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 *Iḥyā’*.

In this way, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad affirmed the authenticity of al-Ghazālī’s teachings as providing the beneficial knowledge (‘ilm al-nāfī’) referred to by the Qur’an, which according to ‘Abd al-Ṣamad is the knowledge of *taṣawwuf* and is called by several names: science of the inward (‘ilmu bātin atau kebatinan); science of the Path (‘ilmu ẓariqah); and science of wayfaring (‘ilmu sulūk). In terms of the hierarchy of knowledge, knowledge of jurisprudence (‘ilmu fiqh) and theology (‘ilmu kalām) or principles of religion (‘ilmu ʿusūl al-dīn) are lower in rank than *taṣawwuf*, and the latter leads to the highest which is knowledge of God (‘ilm maʿrifah bi Allāh) or knowledge of the Divine Truth or Reality (‘ilmu ḥaqīqah). Twenty-five years after this, ‘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 (kufr) and persecution of the Malay Wujūdīyah a century earlier. The main attack against the group was that their metaphysical teachings were pantheistic, considered heresy in Islam. He was concerned to cement the adherence of the *Sharīʿah* in their doctrines and practices by pointing out to the Malays that the *Sharīʿah* 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 (*Sharīʿah*), and the way to the ultimate Truth (ḥaqīqah) is by following the spiritual path (ẓariqah). Hence, there can be no ẓariqah and ḥaqīqah without the *Sharīʿah*.

‘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 (*madhhāb*) of the Sufi. The Way of the Sufi scholar encompasses knowledge derived from both the outward and inward meanings of the *Sharīʿah* (segala ‘ilmu Sharīʿah yang zāhir dan ‘ilmu Sharīʿah yang bātin). Essentially, it goes beyond understanding and practicing the *Sharīʿah* in its external form to penetrating into its inner meaning and living out this inner dimension, i.e., the ẓariqah. 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 (maʿrifah bi-llāh) and not...
through purely human knowledge. Reflective of al-Ghazālī’s emphasis on both knowledge (ʿilm) and action (ʿamal), 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 ṭariqah 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 Šūfī yang muḥaqiq’ (the verifiers among the Sufis).  

‘Abd al-Ṣamad on the stages of the science of taṣawwuf (ʿilmu taṣawwuf) and its books

‘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) 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” (ruḥ) and whose heart is pure from internal vices and everything else that is other than God. These adepts are the gnostics (ʿārifīn), referring to those who have arrived at true knowledge of God (maʿrifah akan Allah Taʿālā dengan maʿrifah yang sebenar-benarnya).

‘Abd al-Ṣamad recorded fifty titles of works on taṣawwuf which are suitable for the first or elementary (mubtadi’) level. 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. 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 (d. 1191/1777) on the practical aspects of the ṭariqah. For the third or highest (muntahī) level, he mentioned a total of twenty titles which he considered suitable. They comprised mainly works by al-Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and their commentaries which
contain esoteric knowledge of the supernal realities, other metaphysical works from scholars in the Ibn al-ʿArabī school, al-Ghazālī’s more esoteric works, and works by Malay scholars of the Wujūdíyah school, for example, Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī (d. 1040/1630).

ʿAbd 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 (zindiq). ʿAbd 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 Taʿālā) on them as a result of which they become wise (bijaksana) in integrating (menghimpukan) the knowledge which ʿAbd al-Ṣamad described as “knowledge that lights up like fire” (ʿilmu yang nyala seperti api), they possess the discernment (pemilih) to choose between good and evil; they become more intelligent (terlebih cerdik); and they possess an understanding free from error (faham yang suci daripada tersalah). ʿAbd 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. 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.

**Conclusion**

The approach and contents of this important chapter in Siyar demonstrate how ʿAbd 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-Śamad 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 _Sharīʿah_ which is limiting, while the second is not grounded in the _Sharīʿah_ when actually, as 'Abd al-Śamad showed by the example of Ibn al-'Arabi, _taṣawwuf_ is the practice of the _Sharīʿah_ at its highest level.\(^{42}\) 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-Śamad 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 Wujūdiyyah scholar al-Sumāṭrānī as a heretic or an infidel since he listed two of his works at the highest level.\(^{43}\) Interestingly, he did not include any of the works of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1068/1658), the main critic of the Wujūdiyyah, 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-Śamad’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, 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-ʿābidīn
- Kitāb al-arbaʿin fī uṣūl al-dīn
• Mukhtasår ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn
• Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn

‘Abd Al-Šamad’s translation-cum-commentary of al-Ghazālī’s works:
• Ḥidāya’t al-sālikīn
• Siyār al-sālikīn

Other early standard Sufi works:
• Qūt al-qulūb by Abū Ẓalīb al-Makkī
• Risālat al-Qushayrīyah by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī
• Kitāb al-Gunyah by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī,
• ‘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-thānī by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-‘Aydarūs
• Al-Naṣiḥ al-dīnīyyah wa al-waṣāyah 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 (Mutawassīwū)

Works written by masters of the Shādhilīyah order:
• Kitāb al-hikam by Ibn Aṯā’illāh al-Iskandarī and its commentaries such as those written by Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin ‘Abbād al-Rundī, Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm bin ‘Alān al-Naqshbandī and Aḥmad al-Qushāshī.
• Kitāb al-hikam (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,
• Jawāhir al-khamsah by Muḥammad al-Ghawth.

Books written on the Naqshbandīyah tariqah such as

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-Yawāqiṣ wa al-jawāhir  
• Al-Kibrī al-aḥmar

Works by Muḥammad al-Sammān on the practical aspects of the ẓarīqah: for example,
• Asrār al-ʿibāḍāt

Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī’s work entitled Fath al-qudsī with its commentary, Ḟiyā’ al-shams ‘alā fatha al-qudsī.

III. Advanced (Muntahī)

Works by al-Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn al-ʿArabī: for example,
• Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam and its commentaries by Ḥabd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, al-Nablūsī and ‘Alī al-Mahāʾīmī  
• Al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah and its summary by al-Shaʿrānī entitled Lawāqīfi al-anwār al-qudsīyah

Other metaphysical works from scholars in the Ibn al-ʿArabī school, such as
• Al-Insān al-kāmiʿ by Ḥabd al-Karīm al-Jīlī  
• Al-Nafaḥāt al-Ilāhiyyah by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī  

Works by Malay scholars of the Wujūdīyah School: for example,
• Shams al-Dīn al-Sumāṭrānī’s Jawhar al-ḥaqāʾiq and Tanbīh al-ṭullāb and  
• Ḥabd al-Raʿūf al-Fanṣūrī’s Ṭaʾyīd al-bayān, a gloss (ḥāsiyyah) on Iḍāʿah al-bayān fi  taḥqīq masāʾ il al-aʿyān.

Al-Ghazālī’s more esoteric works such as
• Mishkāt al-anwār  
• Al-Maqṣad al-ʿulāmāʾ

Several books in the Ihyāʿ ‘ulūm al-dīn: for example,
• Kitāb al-ṣabr  
• Kitāb al-shukr  
• Kitāb al-maḥābbah  
• 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.


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-sīrat al-mustaqim).” 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.


12. Al-Ghazālī used this term as synonymous with the religious sciences (al-ʿulūm al-sharʾiyyah) 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 (ʿilm al-ladun) which he categorised as presentential knowledge (al-ʿilm al-huṣālī). Presentential knowledge is direct, immediate, supra-rational, intuitive and contemplative, in contrast to attained or acquired knowledge (al-ʿilm al-laḍunī) 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 fard ‘ayn and fard kifayah distinction, ‘ilm al-mukashfahah is considered as fard kifayah and therefore, not obligatory for each Muslim. In addition, it transcends the religious (shar’iyyah) and intellectual (‘aqiliiyyah) 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.

17. Plural: waswas. These are random thoughts, promptings and ideas projected by the devil into one’s mind to distract or confuse it. They were also termed khawātir. Al-Kalabūdhī in his Kitāb al-ta’arruf distinguishes four types of khawātir. 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 waswas or hadith al-nafs (discourse of the soul). See T.J. Winter, Al-Ghazālī on disciplining the soul, LXVII, XCI–CLII note 325, 240.
19. The Malay doctrine of martabat tujah was developed from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s original doctrine of the Five Divine Presences (al-hadarār al-ilāhīyyāt al-khams) in which Being and Its manifestations are categorised into five levels of existence. The Malays followed the Indian Sufi Muhammad Faṣl Allāh al-Burhānāpurī’s (d. 1029/1620) adaptation of the scheme into seven levels as elaborated in the latter’s work entitled al-Tufāḥ 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.
24. Taken from the commentary (sharḥ) entitled Ta’rīf al-ḥiyā’ bi-fiḍā‘ī’l-il-ḥiyā’ which is also referred to by the title, Ta’rīf al-ḥiyā’ bi-fiḍā‘ī’l-il-ḥiyā’. It is given as an annex to the Ilḥā’ī. It also appears in the margin of Iḥtāf al-sādāh al-muttaqīn by Murtuḍā 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-‘Arabī school and wrote on the central doctrine of wuḥūd. 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-Fansūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumāṭrānī from Aceh. The main critic of this group was Nār 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” (Wujūdiyyah Muwahhidah) while referring to the group led by al-Fansūrī and al-Sumāṭrānī as the “false or deviating existentialists” (Wujūdiyyah Mullīdā)h. Refer to the penetrating monograph by S. M. Naguib al-Attas, Rānīrī and the Wujūdiyyah of 17th century Aceh (Singapore: Monographs of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society III, 1966).
27. Ibid., 15–16.
29. Siyar (J), 3:176; Siyar (R), 3:352. See also, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and realities of Islam

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 ʿUthman el-Muhammady, “Penggabungan antara unsur tradisional dengan unsur intelektual dalam karya Syaikh ʿAbd al-Samad al-Falimbani dengan rujukan khas kepada Sayr al-Salikinnya,” Seminar Pemikiran Ulama’ Sheik 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. ʿIṣṭaṣarṣ (J), 3:176-77; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:353.

33. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:177-80; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:353-58.

34. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:180–82; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:358–361.

35. He was the founder of the Samaʿniyya tariqa which was an off-shoot of the Khalwaṭiyah. He appointed ʿAbd al-Ṣamad as one of his khalīfahs in the Malay world.

36. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:182–83; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:361–63.

37. Al-Sumatrānī 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. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:183; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:363.

39. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:183–85; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:363–65.

40. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:185; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:366–67.

41. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:185; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:366–67.

42. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:186; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:368.

43. See the Appendix of this paper for the two titles. ʿIṣṭaṣar (J), 3:183; ʿIṣṭaṣar (R), 3:363.