

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Shaykh al-'Alawi

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Introduction

This lucid and profound work by the Shaykh of my Shaykh, may Allah be pleased with them, is in itself a clear exposition of the gnostic science that lies at the heart of sufism. It is really a Guide Book to Khalwa – spiritual retreat – guiding the murid by the doctrine of Unity in preparation for the experiences that will befall him in the self-shattering annihilation he so desires. We feel, however, that a word should be said about the method the Master has used to present his teaching.

Shaykh al-'Alawi has taken a traditional verse poem that is learned by muslims, especially in north Africa, to give them a summary knowledge of the deen of Islam. By learning it they have the necessary basis in tawhid, fiqh and tasawwuf. That is to say, they have learned a summarised outline of the doctrine of Unity, the obligations of worship – prayer, fasting, zakat and hajj, and the science of the self which will lead to the necessary Islamic transformation of character desired by the Messenger for his people, may Allah bless him and give him peace. The Shaykh has taken this material – which is, in itself, nothing less than a summation of

Book of Doctrine

Let us start with our subject, seeking help from Allah, the Worshipped King. We do not need to introduce to you the one who made these verses, because he is one of the great and mighty ones. He said, after introducing the name of Allah, may Allah purify his dust,

**'Abdal-Wahid ibn 'Ashir says,
beginning in the name of Allah,
the most powerful.**

This is the affair of the gnostics, to start with His name, and to end with it. And it is not possible for any one of them to begin by any other than Him in speech or in action. This is why he said, 'I started my verse taking the name of Allah.' Meaning, obliterated in it, and disintegrated, until it became the beginning in speech, not me. 'I have put down verses by the name of Allah, not by myself, fearing that the reader will

It is permissible for the male to purify the body of urine and feces with stones, but not too often.

When he says, 'it is permissible to the male' he means a man of arrival, not the one who is in the woman's place - chained to the veil. The man of arrival is described by one of the undesirable attributes, because he is not an angel.

Lo! those who ward off, when a gleam from the devil troubles them, they do but remember and behold them seers!

He can remove an impurity by whatever he finds. The impurity of the man of arrival is removed by all means, because the impurity is only a barrier and is not in the essence. On the contrary, the veiled one who has not reached the station of a man cannot remove his impurities except by water, as we have mentioned before. This is the principle of the sufi with regard to impurity - which is disobedience, that is, if this disobedience is not continual. If it happens often, and he remains doing it for some time, then he must purify himself with water because he has returned to the low position of the common folk. This is why the author says, 'but not too often.' Next he begins to clarify the method of the great purification, which is reserved for the great of the gnostics. He says, may Allah be pleased with him,

The obligations of ghusl are: making an intention, completion without interruption, rubbing the whole body, penetrating the hair, followed by the hidden places like the backs of the knees, under the arms, in the elbows, between the buttocks. Reach difficult places with a cloth or a piece of rope or else get someone to help.

Book of Zakat

Then, having finished speaking about the prayer, he begins to speak about the tax. He says, may Allah be pleased with him,

Book of the Tax.

We have seen what the People have of secrets, gnoses, knowledges and subtleties - and that Allah the Exalted has given them what the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard and what has not entered the heart. When the King became real for them and was inclined to them and came into their circle because they denied themselves for the Real and became orphans for Him, He gave them all bounties and He said to others protecting their secret,

Do not approach the wealth of an orphan except in the best manner.

I have said of the one who attacks their stations,

Book of Hajj

Then he said,

Book of Hajj

Hajj in the Arabic language means to set off. Among the People it is to set off for a station beyond which you cannot increase. Speech does not help us with its depth and reality. There are no words available to express what hajj is. This is why there are very few people who speak about it. Very few among the People arrive at it, because it is not possible for them to do so. Hajj is for the one who is able. This is why it is obligatory only once during a lifetime. The author says, may Allah be pleased with him,

Book of the Foundations of Sufism

The author has finished speaking about the rules, and of their benefits. Allusions are not the same as declarations, and the subject that we are treating here is the knowledge of the People. We have taken it before from indications, but the intellects of the common do not usually reach indications because only the one who has understanding from Allah understands indications. Everything has a foundation, and the foundations of understanding from Allah are the purification of inwardness and the correction of states, which is expressed as sufism. This is why the author has written a chapter about this meaning and declared it openly so that the murid would have no excuse to leave this art by saying, 'It did not reach my intelligence to take things from their opposites and I am not responsible for this, but only for what is clear.' The author clarifies, saying, may Allah be pleased with him,

The Book of the Foundations of Sufism.

He keeps company with a Shaykh who knows the paths, who will protect him from perils on his road. He reminds him of Allah when he sees him, and he takes the slave to his lord. He takes the self to account for its breaths and he weighs the inclinations in the scale. He guards the obligatory, which are the capital, and extra acts of worship are his profit, by it he befriends. He increases invocation by his pure core, and has help in all this by his Lord. He fights the self for the Lord of the Worlds and he delights in the stations of certainty. Fear, and hope, and thanks, patience, turning from wrong actions, doing-without, reliance, contentment, and love. He is sincere with the witnessing angel in his dealings, and he is content with whatever Allah has decreed for him. He then becomes a free gnostic, and other-than-Him has left his heart, so the Lord has loved him and chosen him for the Presence of the Perfectly Pure, and has attracted him.

Here he says that it is obligatory for the murid to keep company with a Shaykh. In other words, it is an obligation for arrival at Allah. The condition of the Shaykh is that he must have gnosis of the journey, that is, the path that leads to Allah the Mighty and Majestic. He should not be Shaykh by name only. This is why he said 'has gnosis of the journey.' He should be famous for the elevation of murids to the Presence of the Lord of the Worlds. He must hurry to meet such a man. The murid must go towards him. The murid buys his