

# The Sufi Path

An Introduction to the Ni‘matullahi  
Sultan ‘Alishahi Order

*The Sufi Path: An Introduction to the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order*

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## Preface

Sufism is the spiritual dimension of Islam. Many orientalist and historians of Islam think that Sufism is a sect that has appeared relatively late in the history of Islam because they focus on written works and consider the appearance of the term “Sufism” to mark its inception, or they imagine that Islam is confined to jurisprudential precepts, and conclude that Sufism must be something foreign to Islam. However, if we pay close attention to the teachings and sayings of the Sufis we will find that Sufism is a title that has been given to the spiritual aspect of Islam, but whose truth is rooted in the very core of Islam itself.

According to a division made by the Sufis, Islam has two aspects: the outward aspect, which includes the *shari‘ah* (the precepts of Islamic law), and the inward aspect, called *tariqah* (the spiritual way). Together, these aspects lead one to *haqiqah* (the Truth). Sufism is another term for *tariqah*. Thus, separating Sufism from Islam and attributing it to such sources as Christianity, Platonism, Hinduism or Zoroastrianism is like a false claim to paternity.

Among different Sufi orders, the Ni‘matullahi Order—whose chain of authorization goes back to the great Sufi master, Sayyid Shah Ni‘matullah Wali, and from him to Shaykh Ma‘ruf Karkhi, the authorized Shaykh of Imam Riza (عليه السلام)—is the oldest and most authentic of the orders. The main branch of this order, which since the time of Hazrat Sultan ‘Alishah has been called the *Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishah Order*, or, because of his home town, the *Ni‘matullahi Gunabadi Order*, is the most popular current Sufi order in Iran. Nevertheless, it is relatively unknown to

those who do not read Persian or Arabic, since almost all the literature of this order is either in these languages.<sup>1</sup>

The followers of this Order in the West and in India have requested an introductory work about the Order in English. For this reason, several articles and proclamations from the two latest masters (*qutbs*) of the Order, in plain and simple language, as requested, have been translated into English and collected together here.

This work has been undertaken for the sake of those who are interested in Sufism, and particularly for the English speaking followers of the Order who are not interested in complicated academic disputes about related issues.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation of the assistance of my dear friend Hajj Dr. Muhammad Legenhausen without whose help this work would not have been completed. I dedicate this work to the present master of the Order, Hazrat Hajj Dr. Nur ‘Ali Tabandeh, Majdhub ‘Alishah.

Shahram Pazouki  
*Tehran, 1381 (2002)*

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<sup>1</sup> An important exception is *Pand-i Salih (Salih's Advice)*, which has been translated into English and French. See the footnote below, p. 15.

## The Sufi Path<sup>2</sup>

### THE DEFINITION OF “SUFISM”

Different definitions have been given of “sufism” (*tasawwuf*) and “gnosis” (*irfān*), all of which amount to much the same thing. *Tasawwuf* is the journey of the soul in search of the Truth, as well as its arrival. This is the renunciation of everything but God. It is paying complete attention and having a heart-felt connection to Him. It is infinite resignation to the point that one sees nothing but God with the vision of the heart, to the point that all other beings are seen as mere shadows of the Divine, until the state is reached in which “There is no being but God,” and “There is nothing but Him (*Hu*).”

### THE ORIGIN OF SUFISM

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<sup>1</sup> The Arabic pronoun *Hu* means “He”, and refers to God, Allah. The number 121 means ‘O Ali!’; the sum of the *abjad* values for the letters in ‘Ya ‘Ali’. *Abjad* is a traditional system for giving numerical values to the letters of the Arabic alphabet. [Tr.]

<sup>2</sup> This article was originally written in Persian by the late *qutb* of the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order, Hazrat Hajj ‘Ali Tabandeh, Mahbub ‘Alishah, at the request of some of the *fuqara*’ in Western countries.

There are a number of different ideas concerning the origin of Sufism, even with regard to the nation and religion in which it originated. Some say that it began in India, while others claim that it began in Iran among the Zoroastrians, and still others propose that its origins are to be found in the Platonism of ancient Greece. However, with respect to the definition of Sufism or gnosis given above, its origin is to be found in the very truth of religion itself. The quest for the Divine is an inherent aspect of man's very nature and is not confined to any particular nation or religion. Hence, it is not necessary that any religion or nation should derive these ideas from another; all of them have drunk from the same source. In Islam, Sufism or gnosis is the inward dimension of the religion, like the kernel of a nut whose shell is the outward rules (*shari'ah*) and whose kernel is the path (*tariqah*) whose principles have been handed down from the Prophet, to the Imams, and from them to their authorized shaykhs.

## THE ETYMOLOGY OF "SUFISM"

Scholars have different theories about the etymology of *sufi*. Some say it has its etymological root in the word *suf* (wool), while others say it is from *safa* (purity), and still others say it is from *suffah* (porch) and the sincere companions who used to gather at the porch of the Prophet's house, and there are yet others who claim that the word is derived from the Greek *sophia* (wisdom).

There are also different theories about when the term became current. There are reports of the sayings attributed to the Prophet and Imam 'Ali from which it can be concluded that the word *tasawwuf* was used by them. However, most scholars are of the opinion that the word was first introduced in the middle of the second century of the Islamic era (toward the end of the ninth century, C.E.). It is thought that the first man who was known as a Sufi was Abu Hashim Kufi. Whether any of these theories are correct or not, the truth of Sufism, as we have already mentioned, is not something separate from Islam but has been present with Islam from its inception, although the word may have gained currency later.



## **THE HISTORY OF SUFISM AND THE SUFI ORDERS IN ISLAM**

After the Prophet, the Imams and their authorized shaykhs spread Sufism. The chains of authorization may be traced through the shaykhs to the Imams, and then through Imam ‘Ali to the Prophet. For the most part, the Sufi saints practiced dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) with respect to the Islamic religious law and apparently followed the school of jurisprudence that was dominant in their areas of residence. During the sixth and seventh centuries of the Islamic era (the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E.) the way of Sufism, or *faqr* (spiritual poverty), reached the height of its popularity and Sufi saints like Ibn ‘Arabi, Attar and Rumi wrote important books about the mysteries of gnosis (*‘irfān*) and the ‘journey toward God’ (*suluk*).

### **THE NI‘MATULLAHI ORDER OF SUFISM**

One of the most famous saints in the history of Sufism was Sayyid Shah Ni‘matullah Wali (A.H. 731-831/1338-1428 C.E.), and all Shi‘i orders of Sufism trace their ancestry to the his Order, which has subsequently become known as the Ni‘matullahi Order. The uninterrupted record of the chain of authorization of this Order can be traced to Ma‘ruf Karkhi, who was the authorized shaykh of Imam Riza (A.H. 148-202/765-818 C.E.).

Shah Ni‘matullah Wali is the author of more than three hundred works about the mysteries of Sufism according to a Shi‘i interpretation. He was the renewer of this Order, and most of the Sufis of his day in the other orders submitted to him. Most of the Shi‘i Sufis after him have followed his way and have even followed his style and method in their writings.

In more recent centuries, one of the vicegerents of Shah Ni‘matullah Wali is Hajj Mulla Sultan Muhammad Gunabadi,<sup>3</sup> whose spiritual title is Sultan ‘Alishah (A.H. 1251-1327/1835-1909 C.E.). He was one of the most famous Sufis (‘*urafa*) and ‘*ulama* in Iran. His chain of authorization has been recorded from Shah Ni‘matullah Wali. During his time, the Ni‘matullahi Order became more famous and popular. He is also the author of many books on Islamic, especially Sufi topics, including an exegesis (*tafsir*) of the Qur’an called *Bayan al-Sa‘adah* (four volumes, in Arabic).

His successor was Hazrat<sup>4</sup> Hajj Mulla Nur ‘Alishah (d. A.H. 1337/1918 C.E.), who in turn was succeeded by Hazrat Hajj Muhammad Hasan Salih ‘Alishah (d. A.H. 1386/1966 C.E.), author of *Salih’s Advice*,<sup>5</sup> followed by Hazrat Hajj Sultan Husayn Tabandeh Gunabadi, whose spiritual title is Riza ‘Alishah. He is the great grandson of Hazrat Sultan ‘Alishah, and is also one of the famous Islamic Sufis and ‘*ulama*. He has written many books, including commentaries on parts of the Qur’an.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> After him the Ni‘matullahi Order became known as the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order or Ni‘matullahi Gunabadi Order because of the town of Gunabad in Khorasan, which was the place of his birth. [Tr.]

<sup>4</sup> The term *hazrat* literally means “presence”. It is a title of respect usually applied to distinguished religious figures in Islam. [Tr.]

<sup>5</sup> *Pand-i Salih* was first published in Persian in 1939. The Persian text with an English translation first appeared in 1986, (Tehran: Husayniyah ‘Amir Sulaymani Library), and a second revised edition appeared in 1993. This is a concise epistle containing teachings and instructions of the Sufi path. [Tr.]

<sup>6</sup> He passed away on the eleventh of *Rabi‘ al-Awwal*, A.H. 1413, the ninth of September 1992, may he rest in Peace. He was succeeded by his son, Hazrat Hajj ‘Ali Tabandeh, whose title in *tariqah* is Mahbub ‘Alishah. He is the author of *Khorshid-e Tabandeh*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tehran: Haqiqat, 1377/1998) a detailed biography of his father along with a detailed introduction to sufism, as well as several other unpublished works. He passed away on the sixth of Ramazan 1417, the sixteenth of January 1997, may he rest in Peace. The present *qutb* of the Order is Hazrat Hajj Dr. Nur ‘Ali Tabandeh, whose title in *tariqah* is Majdhub ‘Alishah. He is the son of Hazrat Salih ‘Alishah. [Tr.]

## CHARACTERISTIC TEACHINGS OF THE NI‘MATULLAHI GUNABADI ORDER

(1) Members of the Order are required to observe the religious law (*shari‘ah*) strictly, and to respect the external aspects of the religion, even to the extent that they are to avoid religiously discouraged activities (*makruhat*), and should perform acts that are recommended (*mustahabbat*) regularly including maintenance of ritual purity, performance of prayers at the recommended times, vigil in the early dawn, and recitation of the Qur’an.

(2) Members are required to work for a living, and to avoid idleness. Even the masters of the Order have often engaged in farming to support themselves. Those who are addicted to opium and other drugs are not admitted to the Order, and smoking opium is expressly forbidden. Despite the emphasis on gainful employment, work is forbidden from Thursday evening until Friday afternoon, which time is reserved for ritual observation in accordance with the injunction of the Qur’an (in *Surah Jum‘ah*).

(3) The followers of the Order are enjoined to respect the followers of other orders and the adherents of other religions, and to treat them with kindness. They are to accord praise and blame to the deeds of others and not to the persons who perform them. A wayfarer (*salik*) on the spiritual path is to obey the order to be in servitude to God, to be kind and benevolent to people in general, and to demonstrate humility and to be at the service of the other wayfarers on the spiritual path.

(4) As far as possible the number of wives should be limited to one. Divorce is also allowed only in case it is absolutely impossible for the couple to live together, or in case the religious life of the partners would otherwise be corrupted.

(5) Respect is to be accorded to the ‘*ulama* who are authorized to narrate sayings of the Prophet and Imams and to propagate the religious law, because it is believed that the religious law (*shari‘ah*) is the basis of the spiritual way (*tariqah*).

(6) The followers of this Order are not permitted to engage in politics or in political parties under the auspices of Sufism.

(7) There is no special distinctive dress for the members of the Order so as to avoid causing divisions among the Muslims. Sufism is considered as something spiritual which does not require any special outward appearance.

(8) The masters of the Order believe that religious authorization (*idhn*) is required in both external religious affairs (*shari'ah*) and in matters of the way (*tariqah*). Without such authorization (*idhn*), occupation in religious affairs is prohibited. The documented chain of authorization must be traced through the Imams and through them to the Prophet. The authorization for being Master of the Order has nothing to do with scholarship, publishing books, founding *khanaqahs*,<sup>7</sup> or any other socio-cultural affairs. The Prophet of Islam, may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be with him and his folk, himself was illiterate, but, as is stated by Allah, the Exalted in the Qur'an: «*Allah knows best where to place His message*» (6:124).

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<sup>7</sup> A *khanaqah* is a Sufi hospice or meeting place. In the past they were quite common. [Tr.]

## Shi‘ism, Sufism and Gnosticism (‘*Irfan*)<sup>1</sup>

“My Lord! Expand my breast for me, and make easy for me my work, and loosen the knot of my tongue that they may understand my speech.”<sup>2</sup>

Concerning Shi‘ism and Sufism—two words denoting the same reality—many mistakes have been made by contemporary scholars, especially Westerners. These mistakes have either been made out of ignorance or were intentional. From the start, the mission of some of them was to create corruption within Shi‘ism and to instigate sectarianism within Islam, as well as to provide information for their own colonialist apparatus. Many of them came to the same conclusion sincerely, although they were exploited by others.

The first mistake that they made about this problem was with regard to what they called the date of the historical appearance of Shi‘ism. Some say that it began after the passing away of Imam ‘Ali, peace be with him. Others say that it appeared after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, peace be with him. There are other opinions of this sort, as well. Their mistake is a confusion between the appearance of a name with the appearance of its denotation. While a name can appear or gain currency at any time, this plays no role in the main issue. When a school of thought is at issue, one should not pay attention to mere labels. Just as the Shi‘ites were sometimes called the Shi‘ites of ‘Ali and sometimes the

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written by the present *qutb* of the Order, Dr. Hajj Nur ‘Ali Tabandeh, Majdhub ‘Alishah, in response to a letter inquiring about the relations among Shi‘ism, Sufism and Gnosticism (‘*irfan*). The author has explained himself in simple language at the request of the correspondent. It was published in Persian in the Journal *Erfan-e Iran*, (2000) Vol. 2, No. 7, 11-23.

<sup>2</sup> Qur’an (20:25-28)

*Shu‘ubites*,<sup>3</sup> for the Shi‘ites clung to this verse of the Qur’an in which God says, *«O people! Verily We have created you of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes (shu‘ub) that you may recognize each other. Verily, the most honored of you with God is the most God-wary.»*<sup>4</sup> This was because there were non-Arabs who converted to Islam and who expected no difference to be made between them and the Arabs. Unfortunately however, among the caliphs, except for Imam ‘Ali and Imam Hasan, such differences were more or less made. In reaction to this, the Shi‘ites referred to this verse. There was also a period during which they were called *Rafizi*, meaning “those who abandoned their religion”. In this way, the Shi‘ites were called by a variety of names, but, as was mentioned, the appearance of a name is no reason for the previous absence of its denotation.

We have to see the difference between the Shi‘ite and Sunni views within Islam, and what are their principles so that we can discern when Shi‘ism originated on the basis of the appearance of its principles.

After the passing away of the Prophet, ‘Ali, ‘Abbas the uncle of the Prophet, and perhaps some of the other Hashimites busied themselves with his burial. While they were busy with this, a group gathered in a place known as Saqifah Bani Sa‘idah, and appointed Abu Bakr as caliph in a process narrated in history. Abu Bakr thus became the first caliph. After Abu Bakr, ‘Umar became caliph, and after him ‘Uthman. The fourth was ‘Ali, peace be with him.

From the very beginning, after the passing away of the Prophet, those who disapproved of the event of Saqifah Bani Sa‘idah said that just as the Prophet was not selected by us, but was chosen by God, likewise, his successor should not be selected

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<sup>3</sup> This word comes from *sha‘b* meaning folk, nation or tribe. [Tr.]

<sup>4</sup> Qur’an (49:13).

by the people, and the people have no right to do that, but it should be according to God's will. They continued that since our Prophet is the last of the prophets, there is no further revelation, but because whatever the Prophet said amounts to revelation, as is explicitly affirmed by the verse *«Nor does he speak of his own inclination. It is naught but a revelation revealed unto him,»*<sup>5</sup> whoever the Prophet appoints is appointed by God Himself. The Prophet appointed 'Ali to be his successor at various times during his mission. Therefore, the successor of the Prophet is 'Ali, not anyone appointed by the people.

Those Sunnites who accept the event of Saqifah say that since the people were gathered there and chose the caliph, their choice is valid, and he is the caliph (although, this position has also been subject to criticism, since all the people or the chiefs and decision makers were not present).

Historically speaking, there is no doubt but that after the Prophet, Abu Bakr, then 'Umar, then 'Uthman, then 'Ali, and then Imam Hasan became caliph. But the Shi'ites say that the real succession to the Prophet, that is, his spiritual caliphate, is the right, or rather, the duty of 'Ali. The major difference and disagreement arises from this point. The followers of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman were named Sunnites, while the followers of 'Ali and Imam Hasan were called Shi'ites. So, the main difference between the Shi'ites and the Sunnites is that latter allow the people to select the caliph while the former believe that the caliphate should be determined according to the order and decree of the Prophet.

It is obvious that 'Ali was appointed after the Prophet, and since there must always be a divine representative on the face of the earth, after 'Ali, whoever he appoints is the caliph, and so on and so forth. If we take this difference into consideration, we will see that the basis of Shi'ism came into sight immediately after the

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<sup>5</sup> Qur'an (53:3-4).

passing away of the Prophet, but one cannot say that it came into existence then. The difference was already present, but during the lifetime of the Prophet, it did not emerge because there was no case for it. After the passing away of the Prophet, the different inferences became apparent.

Thus, Shi'ism appeared right from the time of the passing away of the Prophet. But later, Shi'ite and Sunnite Islam absorbed other materials and ideas as they moved forward through the course of history so that each of them was transformed into a system of rules and ideas. The basic principles of Shi'ism are those mentioned above. We could say that every poet, writer and Sufi is a Shi'ite who believes in the *walayah*<sup>6</sup> of 'Ali, that is, that 'Ali is the immediate and true successor of the Prophet, and that this is his exclusive right. Taking this point into consideration, people like Sa'di, Hafî and Rumi, and in general, all the great Sufis were Shi'ites.

If they differed according to their jurisprudential precepts, this difference is irrelevant to the basic issue, just as there are numerous issues of Islamic law about which Shi'ite and Sunni jurists disagree that are also among the Shi'ite jurists themselves. However, the basic point is that anyone who believes in the *walayah* of 'Ali may be considered Shi'ite. Therefore, as we have mentioned, Shi'ism appeared right after the passing away of the Prophet, although its teachings were already present. This was not apparent because there was no opponent to deny them.

When foreign non-Muslim scholars investigate an idea, they do not engage the school of thought itself and its principles; rather, they focus on its outward phenomena. Therefore, since 'Ali sometimes helped the caliphs to carry out the rules of Islamic law, such scholars do not consider this period to be that of the existence or emergence of Shi'ism. They take as their criterion for the emergence of Shi'ism the time when differences arose between

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<sup>6</sup> For an explanation of *walayah*, see the note on page 48. [Tr.]



‘Ali and the caliphs. Of course, this mistake has also insinuated itself among Muslim researchers, especially those who are ignorant of the basic spirituality of the first Muslims. Throughout history there have always been numerous disagreements between these two ideas—the Shi‘ite idea of appointment of the leader, and the Sunnite idea of election. The caliphs were constantly busy with destroying the Shi‘ite idea through various means, and they even persecuted the proponents of this idea, the Shi‘ites, so that they practiced dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) during the entire period of the Imams, and even later. This is the cause of the encouragement of dissimulation among the Shi‘ites. In this regard there are famous stories, such as that about ‘Ali ibn Yaqtin who was a minister of Harun al-Rashid and practiced dissimulation.

In this way, a number of the Shi‘ites were forced to retirement in order not to be found out and so that they could organize their ideas and beliefs and guide others. They found another name in the history of Islam, that name was Sufi, and little by little the term *tasawwuf* (Sufism) became current. It makes no difference what the etymology of the word Sufism is. What is usually said and referred to, is that *tasawwuf* stems from the root *suf*, meaning wool, and that the meaning of *tasawwuf* is wearing woolen garments. Sufis usually wore wool and it is reported that the prophets also dressed in wool. Since wool is especially coarse, and it is uncomfortable to the body, one cannot sleep much with it, and is kept awake to pray. It is from this that a story in the book *Tadhkirah al-Awliyya*<sup>7</sup> was written, according to which someone (Sufiyan Thuri) came across Imam Ja‘far Sadiq, peace be with him, on the road. He saw that the Imam was wearing expensive cloth woven of silk and wool (*khazz*),<sup>8</sup> so, he came to him and after greeting him said, “O son of the Apostle of Allah! It is not

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<sup>7</sup> Shaykh Farid al-Din ‘Attar, *Tadhkirah al-Awliyya*, Muhammad Isti‘lami, ed. (Tehran: Zavvar, 1984), 15. [Tr.]

<sup>8</sup> There is a reason for the differences in the lives of the Imams, for example Hazrat Ja‘far Sadiq and Imam Hasan with ‘Ali, and this is another problem that we have to pass over for the moment.

appropriate for you, as the son of the Apostle of Allah, to wear such luxurious soft clothing.” The Imam took his hand and placed it under his sleeve. He saw that the Imam was wearing a coarse woolen undergarment that irritated his arms. The Imam said, “This one is for God,” as he indicated the woolen garment; “and that one is for the people,” he said, pointing to the soft garment (*khazz*). The very occurrence of such a story and such an encounter, even if we do not believe it really happened, in the writing of Shaykh ‘Attar, which says that the woolen garment is for God, indicates that the great Sufis, the head of whom at that time was Hazrat Ja‘far Sadiq, considered the rough woolen garment to be a sign of worship and preparation for worship.

In any case, it is apparently more suitable to take the word Sufism (*tasawwuf*) as being from the root *suf* (wool). In fact, it is another name that has been applied to this group, [that is, the Shi‘ites] which has gained currency. In the same way, we see that today, for example, in a country whose government is against Islam and that proclaims itself to be secular, they disband an Islamic party and destroy its name; but the same group under a different name forms another party, and for a while continues its activities. Shi‘ism has proceeded in the same manner, that is, in the history of Islam, Shi‘ism has shown itself under another name, the name of Sufism.

The basis of Sufism from the beginning, as regards doctrines, was that the successor of the Prophet is ‘Ali, and that among the companions of the Prophet, ‘Ali was the most excellent. However, in practice they had various styles of life, in the same way as the Shi‘ites believe that every age has its own requirements. ‘Ali, for example, had an outwardly humble life of poverty. In spite of the fact that he founded many palm groves through his own labor, he endowed all of them and did not make use of them himself. In contrast, Imam Ja‘far Sadiq had an outward life of luxury and wealth. It is up to the Imam, the great person of his time, to decide according to the demands of the times how to live.

Thus, in the course of history we find that sometimes Sufism takes the form of asceticism and seclusion, and at other times, or in the case of certain persons, it appears as social activity and struggle. In the same way, we have observed different styles of life

through the course of history, but none of these is the basis of Sufism. The foundation of Sufism is nothing but executorship (*wasayah*)<sup>9</sup> and *walayah*, not other extraneous matters. The other matters came about through the course of history because of the demands of the times. The same error that has arisen regarding Shi'ism and the word *tashayyu'* has also appeared regarding Sufism. Some say that for the first time it appeared in the second/eighth century. Accordingly, every writer seems to have his own theory, however, Sufism is the very essence and meaning of Shi'ism.

In the history of Shi'ism, some people paid more attention to the rules of Islamic law, and presented their theories in this regard. They are the *fuqaha* (jurists of Islamic law). Another group of Shi'ites gave priority to doctrinal issues and to the way of perfection toward God. They are the Sufis. In fact, they are, as the expression goes, like the two arms of one body. However, many times, without noticing this, some hold that there is opposition between these two groups. Many orientalist do the same, because the more opposition there is among them, the more the orientalist benefit. The basis and spirit of Islam is in Shi'ism and the spirit of Shi'ism is in Sufism. Sufism is nothing other than Shi'ism, and real Shi'ism is nothing other than Sufism.

It is here that researchers have found another ground, but a ground that also creates schisms. Only God knows whether this was deliberate or unintentional. In any case, some have said that Sufism was created in order to destroy Shi'ism and to spoil Islam. They made some pseudo-Sufis their criterion, and they referred to some pretenders to Sufism who either paid no attention to spiritual matters, or whose links to their source was broken. Since in Sufism, according to the principles of Shi'ism, only those who have been explicitly appointed by the previous guide and *pir*,<sup>10</sup> deserve leadership and guidance of the people, and all are agreed

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<sup>9</sup> *Wasayah* means that the successor should be appointed according to the final testament of the predecessor, not by the election of the people. [Tr.]

<sup>10</sup> The word *pir* in Persian means "old man" or "elder", and in Sufism it is used to refer to the head of an Order or guide. [Tr.]

that this permission for guidance will continue until the day of the resurrection. However, the twelver Shi'ites believe that during the occultation of the Imam, one who is appointed by the Imam only has the right to make *bay'at*<sup>11</sup> with the believers. He also has the right to appoint his successor, so that this chain continued. Therefore, one whose permission reaches from hand to hand to the Imam has legal and legitimate leadership and guidance, and otherwise his chain is broken. How many there have been whose chain was broken but based on their own personal opinions they propounded matters as Sufism that are no part of Sufism. There are a small number of researchers who have noticed this. For example, in a book that has been translated into Farsi, *Mystics and Commisars*,<sup>12</sup> the authors, Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, review Sufism in the former Soviet Union and say that Sufism is neither a sect nor a movement of renegades, but is an inseparable part of true Islam. Western analysts, in particular, are apt to close their eyes to this reality, and they repeatedly refer to Sufism as a phenomenon foreign to Islam, and even as a deviation from it. Since in the former Soviet Union forces opposing religion were in power in the government, the researcher who investigates the conditions in the Soviet Union will come to this conclusion [that Sufism is not separate from Islam].

Another argument often mentioned by some orientalist is that Shi'ism, and according to others, Sufism, was a way in which Iranians combated the governance of the Arabs after the Arabs conquered their country and defeated their royal dynasty and government. They argue that it was in this way that the Iranians showed their reaction, and that the history of much of the Sufi resistance makes it clear that it was this that led to the liberation of Iran from the chains of the foreigners. However, it should be noticed that it was not the Arabs but Islam that conquered Iran. For example, when the armies of Islam came to Iran, they succeeded in their conquest until the city of Rayy, and the people became Muslims. Afterward, everyone accepted Islam willingly.

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<sup>11</sup> For *bay'at*, see the article by the same author in this volume. [Tr.]

<sup>12</sup> Translated into Farsi by Afsaneh Munfarid (Tehran: 1998), p. 214.

A comparison of two matters paves the way to an understanding of the cause of this. On the one hand, it is narrated that Anushiravan<sup>13</sup> invited the rich merchants of the bazaar and asked them to lend him money to carry out the war. After he finished his speech, a shoemaker said, "I am ready to give you the entire amount you need, not as a loan, but as a gift. There is only one condition, that you allow my son to become literate and to study." Anushiravan became angry: "I should allow the son of a shoemaker to study!?" He did not accept. On the other hand, Islam commands "Searching for knowledge is obligatory for all Muslims." Likewise, after the Battle of Badr, when the captives were brought and their families came to pay ransom for them, the Prophet said, "Any of these captives who teach reading and writing to seven Muslims will be freed."

Compare these two matters—aside from the spiritual aspect, if you just look at the outward aspect—when two armies, one with the former sort of thinking and one with the latter, confront one another, which will be victorious?

In any case, it is Islam that conquered Iran. Iranians were always fond of Islam and the Muslims. All their revolutions made against the governments of the foreigners, if they were carried out while preserving Islam, they reached their aims, like the rising of Abu Muslim Khorasani, or the rising of the Sarbedaran [against the Mongols], or the Safavids, the latter two of which were Sufis, and others. Those who made a revolution only for the independence of Iran but who were really against Islam, were not victorious. People like Hashim ibn Hikam (known as al-Muqanna‘), Maziyar, Babak and Afshin are of this kind. For this reason, their dynasties did not last and many of them disappeared after a short time. There is not even a trace of their thinking left. However, the orientalist ignore all these facts, and consider Sufism and Shi‘ism as Iranian uprisings against Arabs and they interpret them as weapons of this struggle, although Sufism is the same as Shi‘ism and Shi‘ism is the same as Islam. Historical

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<sup>13</sup> The famous Persian king (531-579) of the Sassanid dynasty. [Tr.]

evidence for this is found in the fact that the uprising of the Safavids caused Shi‘ism to dominate Iran.

Another matter that causes confusion and mistakes about the issue is that it is said that Sufism is something other than ‘*irfan*. True, with regard to the words, they are two things: *Our expressions differ, but Your beauty is one.*<sup>14</sup> This doubt was created long ago; even many of the opponents of Sufism who wrote refutations of it have expressed their approval of ‘*irfan*. They admit that some scholars consider ‘*irfan* and Sufism to be the same, but they deny it.

Now, let’s briefly see what ‘*irfan* is. Literally, ‘*irfan* is knowing. Knowing has different stages. For example, Abraham, peace be with him, who *knew*, that is, by his own innate nature (*fitrat*) he understood that this world has a God, and that God governs all things, had some knowledge. When he saw a star, he said, «*This is my god.*» It was the bright star said to have been Sirius. But when the star set, he said, «*I do not like the setting ones.*»<sup>15</sup> When the moon appeared—which, as a rule, was a full moon—he said, «*This is my god.*» But after it set, he again thought and said, «*This also set. So, it, too, is not the God of the world.*» This means that he had reached a stage in which he knew that there is a God, and that this God has power and greatness, but that in his primitive imagination he held that this God was corporeal. Then the sun rose. He said, «*Certainly this is God.*» It also set, and he then said, «*I do turn my face toward the One Who has created the heavens and the earth.*»<sup>16</sup> At that time he recognized and understood that the God for Whom he was searching is not a body and is not corporeal, and that it is He Who created the heavens, the star, the moon and the sun.

These are gnostic (‘*irfani*) stages. The most primitive stage of gnosis (‘*irfan*) was that first one, in which Abraham did not know whether the God Who created him was corporeal or not; what

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<sup>14</sup> This is an Arabic saying, commonly used in Iranian as well as Arab culture. [Tr.]

<sup>15</sup> See Qur’an (6:76).

<sup>16</sup> See Qur’an (6:79).

sort of God is He? Gradually, he came to the point where God in the Qur'an says: «*In this way We showed Abraham the kingdom (malakut) of the heavens and the earth.*»<sup>17</sup> Thus, everyone who knows God and realizes that there is a God has a degree of gnosis, because gnosis is not an absolute matter. It is something that, as the philosophers say, is graduated (*tashkiki*), such as light and faith, which have degrees. It starts from the least degree, and if God grants success, it reaches higher degrees. For example, imagine someone in a desert in which there is no habitation. From a distance he sees a black spot in the clear air (this clear air should be understood as his pure intention). He only knows that it is a black spot, and to that extent he knows only that there is something there. When he goes towards it a bit, he sees that this black spot becomes a straight line. Then he recognizes, that is, he acquires gnosis, that the thing over there is a long body. If he continues further and goes forward a bit more, he sees that the body has different branches. He finds out that it is a tree with branches. As he advances further, he sees that on the branches there are spots like leaves. He notices that the tree has leaves, that is, it is alive. He sees that it shakes and rustles. He understands that it is affected by wind. By going further he realizes that there are things hanging from the tree. He realizes that the tree bears fruit. When he advances further, he sees that the fruit is apple, or such and such a fruit. Thus, he finds gnosis (*'irfân*). When he gets near to it and tastes the apple or whatever fruit there is, he finds out that it is sweet.

The same degrees of gnosis will appear for one who takes the course of knowing God. Gnosis and knowing God occurs in the same way. Therefore, when someone is called a gnostic (*'arif*) it does not mean that he has something of which others are absolutely deprived, that he has it all. Being a gnostic also has degrees. There is the gnostic and the one who is more of a gnostic. The way to reach perfect gnosis, that is, the perfection of gnosis, is called Sufism. This means that Sufism is the practical way of reaching gnosis (*'irfân*).

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<sup>17</sup> Qur'an (6:75).

Thus, Sufism and gnosis (*'irfān*) are two words signifying the same thing, or they may be thought of as two sides of the same coin, or it may be said that the former shows the way and the latter the result of wayfaring. In any case, they are both one and two.

The opposition that sometimes now is claimed in Iran to exist between gnosis and Sufism might be due to the bad political situation. They cannot say bad things about gnosis (*'irfān*) because so many of the great figures have appreciated it, and it is generally beloved. On the other hand, they cannot accept Sufism because it might damage their worldly life. Hence, they say that gnosis (*'irfān*) is something other than Sufism. There are even people who previously were following the way of Sufism and later became opposed to it and have written rejections of it. In order to fortify their rejections and to disassociate themselves from their pasts, they say that gnosis (*'irfān*) is good, but that it is other than Sufism. They continue to the extent that many of the older generation were mistaken and thought that these two were one. From this it is apparent that many of the great figures of the past have attested to this truth.



# Observations on the Meaning of *Bay‘at*<sup>1</sup>

*Bay‘at* literally means buying and selling, and comes from the word *bay‘*, although it pertains to a specific type of buying and selling. In the Qur’an, the following verse is specifically about *bay‘at*, in which God says:

﴿*Verily, Allah has purchased from the faithful their selves and their properties, and in return for them is the Garden*﴾ (9:111).

This is itself a transaction. In other verses of the Qur’an this transaction and commitment is referred to as trade (*tijarah*). For example in verses 10 and 11 of *Surah al-Saff* it says: ﴿*O you who believe! Shall I guide you to a trade that will save you from a painful chastisement?/ Believe in Allah and His Apostle, and strive in the way of Allah*﴾.<sup>2</sup> Also in *Surah Fatir* verse 29 God says: ﴿*Verily those who recite the Book of Allah and establish prayer and spend out of what We have provided them with, secretly and openly, hope for a trade that will never perish*﴾.<sup>3</sup>

## TYPES OF BAY‘AT

This method of analogy has many instances in the Qur’an, but it should also be observed that when an analogy is made, or something is used as a metaphor for something else, these two things (vehicle and target) must not be similar in every respect, but the general aspect is what is intended. For example, in the Qur’an, *taqwa*<sup>4</sup> is likened to clothing, and it says: ﴿*and the clothing of piety, that is the best*﴾ (7:26). Likewise, the wife has been mentioned as clothing for her husband, and the husband as clothing for his wife; and it says: ﴿*they are clothing for you and you are clothing for them*﴾ (2:187). In another place, ﴿*What? Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? But you*

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<sup>1</sup> The author is Dr. Hajj Nur ‘Ali Tabandeh, Majdhub ‘Alishah. The original article first appeared in the Persian journal published in Paris, *Erfan-e Iran*, No. 1, pps. 7-14.

<sup>2</sup> (61:10-11)

<sup>3</sup> (35:29)

<sup>4</sup> *Taqwa* is ‘God-wariness’; the virtue of being God-fearing; piety. [Tr.]

*abhor it.*﴾ (49:12). Therefore, this style is common in the Qur'an, and one cannot say that since it makes no sense to consider *bay'at* as trade or a transaction, it should be interpreted or defined as swearing allegiance (as will be discussed later).

In the beginning of Islam, since the Prophet had not yet established a government in Mecca, and it was only the spiritual doctrines of Islam that had been revealed, the Muslims there who visited the Prophet and converted to the faith submitted to the prophecy of Muhammad. Therefore, most of the verses of the Qur'an that were revealed in Mecca refer to them as Muslims and believers. But when the Messenger went to Medina, since he established a government there, many of the people, like the hypocrites, apparently submitted to the government, but in their hearts they were not Muslims. In reality, the *bay'at* obtained by the Prophet in Medina differed from the *bay'at* of Mecca. So, there were two kinds of *bay'at*.

#### **A. PROPHETIC BAY'AT**

This was a *bay'at* by means of which one submitted to the rules of the government, even if he had no firm faith in Islam. For example, one might not have prayed or fasted, yet he could submit to the government. In contemporary language, this was really a request for citizenship. The acceptance of the *bay'at* by the Prophet was a sort of granting of citizenship in the government of Islam to the new Muslim who requested it. In reality, this was prophetic *bay'at*, and with its performance and acceptance of Islam one was allowed to marry another Muslim and to inherit [from a Muslim]. In the time of the Messenger, nobody's Islam was accepted without *bay'at*. After the liberation of Mecca, even Hind the Liver-eater<sup>5</sup> made *bay'at*.

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<sup>5</sup> Hind the Liver-eater was the wife of Abu Sufyan, the greatest opponent of the Prophet. She ate the liver of Hamzah, the uncle of the Prophet, when he was martyred in the Battle of Uhud, because he had killed her father at the Battle of Badr. [Tr.]

## B. BAY‘AT WALAWIYYAH<sup>6</sup>

The other *bay‘at* was the *bay‘at* of faith, which was considered different from the *bay‘at* of Islam. In fact, this *bay‘at* was made with the aspect of the *walayah* of the Prophet. Those who submitted to the prophecy of the Messenger in Mecca or afterward (and submission in Medina implied submission to the government of the Prophet), entered among the people of faith by this *bay‘at walawiyah*. Of course, there was a group at that time who considered the prophecy of the Messenger to be a criterion, and they imagined that the *bay‘at* of Islam was the same as acquiring faith. Hence, in the *Surah Hujrat* it says: *«The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You do not believe, but say: We submit; and faith has not yet entered into your hearts»*.<sup>7</sup> From this, the differentiation of Islam from faith becomes clear. Islam means submission to the government, which is obtained by the verbal declaration of the *two testimonies*,<sup>8</sup> but faith pertains to the heart. Following this matter, the Prophet is addressed by God: *«They count it as a favor to you that they have submitted. Say: Do not count your submission as a favor to me, nay, rather God confers a favor on you, in that He guided you to faith, if it be that you are truthful.»*<sup>9</sup> From this verse it is clear that Islam precedes faith, that is, there can be no faith without Islam, while Islam without faith is possible. Of course, at the end of this verse it says, *«if it be that you are truthful»*, that is, if you are truthful in

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<sup>6</sup> The term *walawiyah* is derived from *walayah*, meaning friendship with God and His guardianship. The literal meaning of *walayah* is ‘nearness, closeness’, and derivative meanings are ‘authority, friendship’. It is through prophecy that Islam is revealed, and through *walayah* that faith is acquired. This is why *walayah* is said to be the interior dimension of prophecy, and is often translated as ‘sainthood’. In Shi‘i theology, Muhammad (*s*) was both prophet and saint (*wali*), and though he was the seal (or last) of the prophets, the Imams عليه السلام continued the line of his sainthood (*walayah*). [Tr.]

<sup>7</sup> (49:14)

<sup>8</sup> The two testimonies of Islam are: “There is no god but God” and “Muhammad is the prophet of God.” [Tr.]

<sup>9</sup> (49:17)

becoming Muslims, not that you have become Muslims because of fear of the government.

Considering these observations, one should note that in the time of the Prophet, the *bay'at* of faith was separate from the *bay'at* to the government, but after the passing away of the Prophet, the *bay'at* of faith was due to the *walayah* of 'Ali, and none of the other 'rightly guided caliphs'<sup>10</sup> claimed to take such a *bay'at*. However, during the Ummayid and Abbasid periods, since for the most part they did not believe from the depths of their hearts, they did not differentiate these two important kinds of *bay'at* from one another, and hence, they imagined that *bay'at* was only for the sake of governing.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, if they had noticed that our Imams were taking *bay'at*, the lives of the Imams would have been in danger.

## THE CONTINUATION OF THE BAY'AT OF FAITH IN THE TIME OF THE PURE IMAMS

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<sup>10</sup> Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman and 'Ali are referred to as 'rightly guided caliphs' (*khulafā-ye rashidin*). [Tr.]

<sup>11</sup> In the olden times, and likewise at present, the term "*bay'at*" is usually employed for governing, as was the case when the caliphs took *bay'at* and did not accept any kind of *bay'at* except their own. In this *bay'at*, those who gave *bay'at* swore to obey and observe the system of laws of the government. The government also guaranteed their lives and property and took responsibility for them. For example, in one of the wars, after the Muslims conquered parts of Syria, many people made *bay'at*, and became Muslims. These people gave *khums* and *zakat* [types of religious tithes in Islam]; some others remained with their own religions and did not abandon Christianity or Judaism and paid *jizyah* [a kind of tax for non-Muslims]. In any case, in return for giving *jizyah* or the religious tithes, the [Islamic] government protected their lives and property. However, when later the Roman army returned and reconquered those territories, the Muslims resisted, equipped an army and won back this land from the Romans. The [reestablished Islamic] government then returned the religious taxes collected as *khums*, *zakat* and the *jizyah* because it had failed to protect the lives and property of those who had paid them. This is the meaning of *bay'at* to government.

The Imams (‘a) appointed some people to take *bay‘at* for them. For example, Hazrat Sajjad عليه السلام gave license to his uncle, Muhammad Hanafiyyah, to take *bay‘at* for him. This practice continued throughout the period of the Shi‘i Imams, and the Imams, who considered *bay‘at* to be obligatory for the believers, usually took *bay‘at* in secret through their representatives.

In this way we see how *bay‘at* became legitimated in Islam. As appears from the verse of the *bay‘at* of women, *«O Prophet! When believing women come to you making bay‘at on the terms that they will not associate anything with God and will not steal, neither commit adultery, nor slay their children nor bring a calumny they forge between their hands and their feet, nor disobey you in anything honorable,...»* (60:12), and from the previously mentioned verse, *«Verily, Allah has purchased from the faithful...»* (9:111), in these *bay‘ats* one commits oneself to religious affairs and selling one’s life and property. It is not merely, as some have imagined, for *jihad* and war, for *jihad* was prohibited for women even though the practice of *bay‘at* for women continued.

In the history of Islam, even those who neglected the *bay‘at* of faith, took the *bay‘at* of Islam or governmental *bay‘at*, and no abrogation of *bay‘at* has been narrated. Hence, the precept of *bay‘at* must also be practiced now.

It has already been said that in the time of the Imams (‘a), they themselves or their representatives took *bay‘at*. In the time of the twelfth Imam, the duty of the four deputies (*nuwwab arba‘ah*)<sup>12</sup> was only that they were intermediaries for the exoteric relations between the Shi‘ah and the Imam. For example, since they had been told and knew the place of residence of the Imam, they took letters that the Shi‘ah wrote and delivered them to him, obtained his replies and returned these to them. These four individuals themselves never claimed to take *bay‘at*, nor has it been written in any book that they took it. The responsibility for the practice of

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<sup>12</sup> They were ‘Uthman ibn Sa‘id al-‘Amri, Muhammad ibn ‘Uthman, Husayn ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti, and ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samarri. [Tr.]

taking *bay'at* in this period for the Imam was given to Shaykh Junayd Baghdadi.<sup>13</sup>

The explanation of the matter is that after the time of Hazrat Riza (the eighth Shi'i Imam) the strangulation of the Shi'ah intensified.<sup>14</sup> Hazrat Riza عليه السلام himself gave permission for taking *bay'at* to his door-keeper, Ma'ruf Karkhi. He also allowed him to appoint whoever he saw fit to succeed him (Ma'ruf) after informing and being granted the permission of the Imam.

Ma'ruf Karkhi appointed Sari Saqati who was thus given approval by the Imam. Sari Saqati also was given the same permission, and he appointed Junayd Baghdadi. The latter also had this license. After the occultation, the twelfth Imam gave Junayd permission to appoint his (Junayd's) successor. He exercised this permission. Hence, the *bay'at* of faith was not abrogated, and the successors of Junayd, in fact, are the indirect representatives of the Imam, who take *bay'at*. Of course, all the chains of permission are technically termed 'chains of the saints' or 'chains of Sufism' [Sufi orders], and there are various orders which claim to be connected to the Imams ('a). However, the soundness of these connections—in the view of us Shi'ah—must be investigated and researched, for orders that do not go back to the Imams have gaps in their chains of permission.

Since it is not clear that all the orders that claim to go back to the Imams are not without gaps in their chains of permission, one who has accepted these premises and the above mentioned theory is obliged to investigate and research the different orders, and those who consider themselves to be heads of the orders, to

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<sup>13</sup> Shaykh Junayd Baghdadi (d. 297/909) was initiated into Sufism by his uncle, Sari al-Saqati, and he became known by the title, *Shaykh al-Ìa'ifàh* (leader of the group of Sufis). Many Sufi orders, including the Ni'matullahi Order, trace their chain of initiation through him. [Tr.]

<sup>14</sup> In order to understand the intensity of this strangulation, refer to the book *Mafàtih al-Janan* (Persian translation by Mehdi Ilahi Qomsheh'i, Tehran: Intisharat 'Ilmi, 1342, pps. 95-96), where the days of the week have been named after the names of the Imams. There is a detailed story narrated about a meeting between one of the Shi'ah and Hazrat 'Ali al-Naqi.

discover which chain of permission goes back to the Imams without interruption. Then he should acknowledge the order (*silsilah*) or orders that probably are connected to the Imams.

### THE PRACTICE OF BAY‘AT

The practice of *bay‘at* in Islam has been performed in such a way that there must be hand to hand contact, and it is still customary at present, so that in every *bay‘at* [trade] and every transaction the two sides shake hands. In the case of women, *bay‘at* was obtained by a putting something over the hand, or by means of a bowl of water, or by using a *tasbih* [prayer beads] so that the hands may make contact indirectly. Of course, in the *bay‘at* of faith, this contact of hands has taken place in a special fashion. Where God says «the hand of Allah is over their hands» (48:11), it is addressed to the Prophet, that «those who make *bay‘at* with you really make *bay‘at* with God» (48:11). However, since God is not corporeal or material—so that one could make *bay‘at* with Him directly—He obtains *bay‘at* through His Messenger, namely, the Prophet and his successors. In fact He wants to say that in the two hands that touch, the hand of God also is among them. This is what is intended by the expression «*the hand of Allah is over their hands*».

### THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF SOME ORIENTALISTS

Before Islam, the practice of *bay‘at* of faith was customary in all the divine religions, although in every epoch it had a particular form. For example, when Jesus ﷺ went to John ﷺ to be baptized, John—who was aware of the future status of Jesus ﷺ—said, ‘I am the one who should be baptized by you’, because this is the requirement of the present time. After being baptized, according to the instructions of John ﷺ, he started ascetic practices and became a prophet.

According to what has been explained, those who do not believe in the *bay‘at* of faith, consider *bay‘at* to be only political,

and since the latter is held to be presently precluded, they take it to be completely invalid.

Another point is that since the Orientalists and Islamicists cannot easily understand the word *bay'at*, which originally meant buying and selling, in the sense of a faith commitment in which one sells his soul and property to God to attain heaven, some of the translators of the Qur'an avoid taking *bay'at* in this sense. They have translated this term with other words, which usually mean taking an oath or promising to do something. For example, in the translations of the Qur'an into French by Regis Blachere and Edward Montet it has been translated into *serment d'allegiance* and *jurer allegiance*, meaning to pledge allegiance; however, pledging allegiance is the action of a single party while *bay'at* requires two parties. Accordingly, God says to the Prophet (s), ﴿O Prophet! When believing women come to you to make bay'at...﴾ (60:12), at the end of the verse He says, ﴿make bay'at with them and ask forgiveness for them...﴾. It appears from this verse that *bay'at* also has a party that accepts it, and it is not like a pledge that only requires a single agent.

Negligence of the true meaning of *bay'at* has given rise to the same sort of mistake, even on the part of those who are expert in Islamic issues, but who are not aware of their spiritual subtleties, such as Professor Hamidullah, who has translated the Qur'an into French. He translated the word *bay'at* as *jurer fidelite*, meaning a pledge of fidelity.

Apparently, the English translators of the Qur'an have fallen into the same trap. Arberry has used the expression 'to swear fealty', Pikhall 'to swear allegiance', and finally, in the translation of Yusuf Ali the expression 'plight one's fealty' is used. All these expressions more or less have the sense of promising loyalty.

Recently, I have seen that in some books the word 'initiation' is used for *bay'at*.<sup>15</sup> Although this word is similar to 'ceremonies' and 'customs', such as purity of the body or clothes, etc., which

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<sup>15</sup> Given the dictionary definitions of 'initiation', we can say that the best synonym of the word 'initiation' is '*tasharruf*' [literally, *to be honored*, commonly used for conversion to Islam].



may be observed along with *bay‘at*, nevertheless ‘initiation’ differs from *bay‘at*. In general, it may be said that the word *bay‘at*, like the word *walayah*, has no synonym in European languages, and the word *bay‘at* itself should be employed.



# Proclamations

## I. FOURTEEN INSTRUCTIONS<sup>1</sup>

In the Name of Allah,  
the Compassionate, the Merciful

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For the sake of the repose of the pure spirit of Hazrat Aqa Riza ‘Alishah, may his grave be radiant, the *qutb*<sup>2</sup> of the eminent Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order, this faqir, Hajj ‘Ali Tabandeh, who has been honored in *tariqah* with the title Mahbub ‘Alishah, hereby offers this reminder of fourteen points, in honor of the Fourteen Innocents (*Ma‘sumin*),<sup>3</sup> to the faith illumined hearts of the *fuqara* of the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order. These fourteen points are taken from the book of the fruitful life of *faqir*, learning and virtue of that noble man, so that by according themselves with them, his triumphant spirit may be pleased, and the *fuqara* may be provided with grace and blessings in this world and in the next.

1. With the remembrance of God, make every moment count for all it is worth.

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered by Hazrat Mahbub ‘Alishah on the occasion of the fortieth day after the passing of the Hazrat Riza ‘Alishah.

<sup>2</sup> The word *qutb* literally means “pole” and designates the leader of a Sufi order. [Tr.]

<sup>3</sup> They are ‘those preserved from sin’; innocents; this includes all the prophets, as well as, and especially in Shi‘i usage, the Fourteen Innocents: the Prophet, his daughter Fatimah, and the twelve Imams, Peace be with them all. [Tr.]

2. Place your life under the heading of kindness to God's creatures.
3. Strengthen the body, upon which the soul is mounted, with food, clothing and shelter that is the fruit of your own labor.
4. Keep the jewel of humanity radiant with the light of faith.
5. Secure the joy of the soul by love for the truth of gnosis (*'irfan*).
6. Quicken the flight of the spirit through the sky of gnosis (*ma'rifah*), with constant remembrance of God, *dhikr*, and perpetual contemplation of Him, *fikr*.
7. Illuminate the sky of the world of humanity with the light of the intellect.
8. Do not offend the voice of conscience, and be in fear of the moment it should abandon you in anger, rising beyond the heavens.
9. Keep before you the repeated recommendations of the *qutbs* of the eminent Ni'matullahi Sultan 'Alishahi Order, especially that which has been repeatedly emphasized by this *faqir*'s honorable father, to abide by the ordinances of the holy *shari'ah* of Islam.
10. Reading the book, *Salih's Advice*, and the other books of *'irfan*, gnosis, prevents one from unconscious slipping, and by studying these books keep away from instability of the self.
11. Extinguish the spark of the appearance of strife instantly, for this kind of sobriety and wakefulness, in the view of the friends of God, the *awliya*, has unending rewards.
12. Recognize that unity and convergence around the flag of Islam is the sole bulwark of salvation in today's world.

13. Protection of the family hearth, nourishing the family, attempting to bring stability to one's married life, and refraining from any kind of anger, jealousy or estrangement are all investments for one's tranquility and bring warmth to one's life.

14. Do not forget that service to one another is worship and smoothes one's daily life.

This *faqir*, in performance of this momentous responsibility, which I have had no choice but to obey and carry out, desires of each of the Ni'matullahi Sultan 'Alishahi brethren the complete observance of these fourteen principles, for I see that even an instant of slipping in the application of any of them results in the loss of this world and the next.

And Peace be with you, and the Mercy of Allah and His blessings.

A.H.L. 20 Rabi` al-Than i 1413

A.H.S. 26 Mehr 1371

October 18, 1992

On the occasion of the fortieth day after the passing of the Great Master Hazrat Aqa Riza 'Alishah, may Allah raise his high honorable station.

Faqir Hajj 'Ali Tabandeh

Mahbub 'Alishah

[signed and signeted]



## II. TWELVE ADMONITIONS<sup>1</sup>

Hu□

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To my brethren in faith, the fuqara of the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order, may Allah grant them success:

The points below, which are from the subtleties and implications of *faqr* and *dervishhood*, I offer once again as a reminder, so that in compliance with the noble order, ﴿...and remind, the Reminder profits the believers,﴾<sup>2</sup> God willing, it may be of profit.

The spiritual expectations which the way of *faqr* and *dervishhood* has of its wayfarers are:

1. Be a guard over the trust of the *faqr* and *dervishhood* God has given you for safe keeping, and by excellent words, actions and thoughts, try to be worthy of the appellations of *faqr* and *dervishhood*, for each of your wrong deeds is an embarrassment to this faqir.

2. Make the scale of your behavior the epitome of the instructions of *faqr* and *dervishhood*, which is service to God, kindness to people and ministry to the brethren, and make your deeds accord with this.

3. Do not sell the jewel of *faqr* and *dervishhood* for a small price so that you suffer loss. The jeweler knows the value of the jewel. If you are not a jeweler, know that the price of this jewel is joining the Friend.

4. The subtlety of *faqr* and *dervishhood* cannot be brought to the tongue, and speech is not the way to its truth. Do not break the

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered by Hazrat Mahbub ‘Alishah on the occasion of Ashura 1416/1995.

<sup>2</sup> (51:55).

sanctity of the heart by talk and do not say anything that may result in undermining the states (*ahwal*) of others.

5. The enemy of *fâqr* and *dervishhood* is the devil of the self, which appears in various forms. Do not be taken in by the deceptive plotting of the self, for it is possible that it may take on the appearance of being pleasing to God.

6. What is expected by *fâqr* and *dervishhood* from those who have found its way is nothing but the performance of the responsibilities of the faith. Every eye that looks for anything else in this way is due to a blind heart.

7. Do not trample the blessing of *fâqr* and *dervishhood* with egotism and conceit, for the grief of this ingratitude brings pain to the hearts of the great men of religion.

8. The world of *fâqr* and *dervishhood* is just giving the retreat of the heart to the Beloved. Those who pursue ease and who are alien to this suffering are not fellow travellers with this faqir.

9. Do not break the goblet of honor of *fâqr* and *dervishhood* with the stone of greed and neglect, and do not purchase for yourself the black heart of breaking the covenant.

10. The success of service in the world of *fâqr* and *dervishhood* is itself a spiritual reward. Seeking compensation is a poisonous neglect.

*Do not be a servant for a wage like a beggar,  
For the Friend has His own way of training servants.*<sup>3</sup>

11. Do not take captive the freedom of *fâqr* and *dervishhood* by envy of the world and yearning for the afterlife. Do not want anything from the Friend but Himself.

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<sup>3</sup> A couplet from the *Divan* of Hafî. [Tr.]



*There must be three partings in the clothing of faqr:  
Parting from the world, parting from the other world, and  
parting from parting.<sup>4</sup>*

12. The destination of *fâqr* and dervishhood requires a firm will. Accept the difficulties of the way, even if it costs your life, by the mount of yearning for union,<sup>5</sup> and expect your heart to open, for despair and hopelessness are infidelity.

I expect all the brothers and sisters in faith to meditate on these points and to look upon them with the eye of the heart, and to prepare their provisions for the way, and not to be negligent, so that:

*If anyone is home, even a single word will suffice.<sup>6</sup>*

And Peace be with you, and the Mercy of Allah and His blessings.

‘*Ashura Husayni* A.H.L. 1416  
Corresponding to A.H.S. 19 Khordad 1374  
[9 June 1995]

*Faqir Hajj ‘Ali Tabandeh*  
*Mahbub ‘Alishah*  
[signed and signeted]

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<sup>4</sup> A couplet attributed to Shah Ni‘matullah Wali. [Tr.]

<sup>5</sup> This alludes to a hadith according to which the Prophet (s) said, “...yearning is my mount...”. [Tr.]

<sup>6</sup> A famous Persian proverb originally part of a couplet by ‘Izz al-Din Mahmud Kashani. [Tr.]



### III. SEVEN REMINDERS<sup>1</sup>

Hu□

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My brethren,

This is the third reminder of this *faqir* to the wayfarers of the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order. What does the repetition of words and advice in the world of *faqr* show? A blind heart or inattention to the advisor?

1. To continue negligence in the way of *faqr* is ingratitude for its blessing, which is irreplaceable, and to repeat negligence is an obstacle to mercy. Who does not know what will happen eventually to one who closes his eyes to the lamp of the leader of the caravan?

2. The instructors of *faqr*, like all gardeners, plant the sapling of faith, and care for it until its flowers can be picked. They think of nothing but this.

3. Gardeners water. By their ability to absorb through their roots the flowers also should pay heed to the sufferings of the gardener. Do our worldly desires not trample the sufferings of the gardener?

4. The gardener is commanded to garden, and insight and knowledge of this have been given to him. It is not fair to request something of him that is not his duty. How excellent the (Prophet) has said, “You are better aware of your worldly affairs than I.”

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<sup>1</sup> This epistle was written by Hazrat Mahbub ‘Alishah in February 1996, in the form of the sacred number of seven admonitions, and like the previous one, is in a beautiful Persian prose style.

5. The seed of a plant that is not planted in the ground still has the capacity to be planted and nourished; however, if it is planted in the ground, but is not nourished, the earth will rot it and destroy it.

6. Who does not know what fate lies ahead for the corrupted seed and the withered tree. Can it be planted in another field? Seeds are not sown in planted ground. Unless the heart is purified of the love of the world, it will not become the place for the love of *mawla*.<sup>2</sup>

7. The world is the farm for the other world.<sup>3</sup> I wonder at those who, while they know that if they nourish the seed of faith with the water of love, and train it with righteous works, it will grow from the depths of the earth to the summit of the sky, and that one seed will produce between one hundred and seven hundred fruits,<sup>4</sup> yet fall short and prevent its growth with the brambles of negligence.

Finally, I hope that those who have come close to this order for the sake of wealth or position or a comfortable life will take a good look at their own selves and will not blacken their report cards any more, and that they may know that their sufferings are worthless and that they cause trouble for the gardener.

*It is as plain as day from the seed We planted  
That we are the damned, not the folk of heaven.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The word *mawla* is derived from *wali*, meaning friend or guardian, and is used to designate the Lord, Master, and especially Imam ‘Ali. [Tr.]

<sup>3</sup> This is a *hadith* attributed to the Prophet (s). [Tr.]

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the following verse of the Qur’an: «*The similitude of those who spend their wealth in the path of God is the similitude of a grain of corn that grows seven ears, in each ear of which are a hundred grains; and verily God gives manifold increase to whosoever He wills, and God is omniscient, all knowing.*» (2:261). [Tr.]

<sup>5</sup> This is a couplet from Sa‘di. [Tr.]

‘Ayd Fitr A.H.L. 1416

*Faqir Hajj ‘Ali Tabandeh Mahbub ‘Alishah*  
[signed and signeted]



#### IV. FIVE DIRECTIVES<sup>1</sup>

Hu  
121

7 Ramazan 1417  
28 Day 1375  
17 January 1997

In the Name of God, the Creator of the soul,  
The Sage, Creator of speech in language.

Dear Brethren,

Upon the passing of our great Master (*Mawla*) Hazrat Mahbub ‘Alishah, we have all become saddened. May God grant us the success of being patient and bearing the pain of separation, and may the spirit of that great man find joy and be pleased with us. We beseech the Glorious God that this paltry speck may be successful in the performance of the duties which the great master has assigned to this humble man, and in order to comply with this request, I beg the prayers of you, my brethren, for help and intercession.

The practical instructions that have been written in the epistle, *Salih’s Advice*, and also the decrees of the past great masters, are to be read repeatedly, referred to constantly and put into practice. In this way, God will be pleased with you, and the success of this humble man will be secured. For the time being, I will repeat some points that have been mentioned.

(1) Be extremely careful with regard to the observance of Islamic *hijab*<sup>2</sup> for women, which is a necessary condition for

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<sup>1</sup> This proclamation was written on the occasion of the passing away of Hazrat Mahbub ‘Alishah by his successor, Hazrat Majdhub ‘Alishah.

<sup>2</sup> The Arabic word *hijab* literally means ‘cover’; the requirement to observe modesty in dress according to Islamic Law, such that in the presence of those  
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individual and social chastity, and likewise the observance of *taqwa* (God-wariness) among the men.

(2) As you know, now more than one hundred years have passed since the use of illicit drugs was first prohibited by the Martyr Hazrat Sultan ‘Alishah, so that the initiation of addicts is not even allowed, and his successors have repeatedly emphasized and renewed this prohibition in the same manner. If, God forbid, a brother or sister has even the slightest addiction, he or she is to repent before God and beseech Him for resolution and will to quit. And since this sort of addiction impairs, and may destroy, one’s reason, until one’s repentance has been accepted and one has quit the addiction, one should not be present in the sessions of the *fuqara*, and before that one may be present only once in a while when one is sober minded, as is alluded to in the *ayah* of the Qur’an: ﴿Do not approach the prayer while you are intoxicated﴾ (4:43).

(3) The responsibilities appointed by the sacred religion have been implicitly divided into three kinds by the high ranking ‘*urafa*:

i. Precepts of the *shari‘ah* which must be obtained by *taqlid* (imitation) from a completely qualified *mujtahid* (expert in Islamic law); and the discernment of such a *marja*<sup>3</sup> is the duty of every responsible person himself.

ii. Precepts of the *tariqah* which are to be obtained from the current Master, and instruction in gnosis (‘*irfan*) is also to be found in the books of the great gnostics (‘*urafa*).

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outside her immediate family, a woman’s body is to be entirely covered except for the face, hands and feet. [Tr.]

<sup>3</sup> The word *marja*‘ literally means “source” and is used for an expert (*mujtahid*) in matters pertaining to *shari‘ah* authorized to serve as a model of imitation (*taqlid*) for non-experts. [Tr.]



iii. Personal precepts to be discerned by the person himself, in the sense that God, the Exalted, wants the spiritual powers of His servants to be put into practice, and to be exalted, and since He, the Sublime, has bestowed them, it becomes a duty that aside from the two areas mentioned above one should personally discover one's responsibilities by one's own religious thinking and reasoning.

(4) Thus, interference in and expressing views about social affairs is outside the scope of *tariqah* and the *fuqara* should not expect instructions in such regards from the authorities of the Order. One's works and intentions are to be made pure for the sake of Allah, and one's own responsibilities are to be discovered. The authorities of the Order will not express views on such questions so that it is not imagined that these are duties of *tariqah*. This same manner and absence of interference in social questions, as in the past, will be maintained.

(5) We should learn the observation of social order and respect and obedience with regard to the law from Socrates in history. Observance of the laws of the community is respect for oneself and for others. Pay attention to this important issue.

Pray for me,

*Nur 'Ali Tabandeh Majdhub 'Alishah*  
[signature]



# The Qutbs of the Ni‘matullahi Sultan ‘Alishahi Order

**The Prophet Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah**

**Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi ‘Alib**

**Imam Hasan ibn ‘Ali**

**Imam Husayn ibn ‘Ali**

**Imam ‘Ali ibn Husayn, Zayn al-‘Abidin**

**Imam Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Baqir**

**Imam Ja‘far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq**

**Imam Musa ibn Ja‘far al-Kāim**

**Imam ‘Ali ibn Musa al-Riza**

**Imam Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Jawad**

**Imam ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Naqi**

**Imam ‘Hasan ibn ‘Ali al-‘Askari**

**Imam Hujjat ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi**

Shaykh of Shaykhs Ma‘ruf Karkhi

Shaykh of Shaykhs Sari Saqati

Shaykh of Shaykhs Abu al-Qasim Junayd

Shaykh Abu ‘Ali Rudbari

Shaykh Abu ‘Ali al-Katib

Shaykh Abu ‘Umran al-Maghribi

Shaykh Abu al-Qasim Gurkani

Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Nassaj ‘Iusi

Shaykh Ahmad Ghazali

Shaykh Abu al-Fazl Baghdadi

Shaykh Abu al-Barakat

Shaykh Abu Mas‘ud al-Andalusi

Shaykh Abu Madyan al-Maghribi

Shaykh Abu Sa‘id al-Sa‘idi Abu al-Futuh

Shaykh Kamal al-Din al-Kufi

Shaykh Abu Bakr Salih Barbari

Shaykh ‘Abdullah Yafi‘i

Shah Ni‘matullah Wali

Shah Khalilullah I

Shah Muhibbullah I

Shah ‘Atiyatullah I  
Shah Khalilullah II  
Shah Shams al-Din Muhammad I  
Shah Muhibbullah II  
Shah Shams al-Din Muhammad II  
Shah Kamal al-Din ‘Atiyatullah II  
Shah Shams al-Din Muhammad III  
Shaykh Mahmud Deccani  
Shaykh Shams al-Din Deccani  
Hazrat Riza ‘Alishah Deccani  
Shaykh of Shaykhs Ma’sum ‘Alishah Deccani  
Shaykh of Shaykhs Nur ‘Alishah I  
Hazrat Husayn ‘Alishah Isfahani  
Hazrat Majdhub ‘Alishah Hamedani  
Hazrat Zayn al-‘Abidin Shirvani Mast ‘Alishah  
Hazrat Rahmat ‘Alishah Shirazi  
Hazrat Muhammad Kazim Sa’adat ‘Alishah  
Hazrat Hajj Mulla Sultan ‘Alishah Gunabadi  
Hazrat Hajj Mulla ‘Ali Nur ‘Alishah II  
Hazrat Hajj Muhammad Hasan Salih ‘Alishah  
Hazrat Hajj Sultan Husayn Tabandeh Riza ‘Alishah  
Hazrat Hajj ‘Ali Tabandeh Mahbub ‘Alishah  
Hazrat Hajj Dr. Nur ‘Ali Tabandeh Majdhub ‘Alishah