

# A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya

*An Edition and Translation of al-Baʿlabakkī's (d. 734/1333) Epistle on the  
Spiritual Way (Risālat al-Sulūk)*

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## Abstract

This article provides yet another testament to the reality that some form of Sufism existed amidst the circle of students and followers of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Based on a unique manuscript from Damascus, presented here for the first time is an Arabic edition and English translation of *Risālat al-sulūk* (Epistle on the Spiritual Way) by al-Baʿlabakkī (d. 734/1333), a Ḥanbalite student of Ibn Taymiyya who was also trained in the Sufi way. This is preceded by a study that sheds light on al-Baʿlabakkī's intellectual context, which is primarily concerned with the place of Sufism in Ibn Taymiyya's circle. The article then proceeds with a biography of al-Baʿlabakkī, followed by some relevant notes on the manuscript of *Risālat al-sulūk* and its edition and translation.

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وأود أن أشكر السيد معاذ والدكتور خير الله الشريف لمساعدتهم في الحصول على الصور من مخطوطة رسالة السلوك، ولذلك أنا مدين لهما كثيرا، وأهدي هذا العمل لهما وللشعب السوري.

## Keywords

al-Baʿlabakkī – Damascus – Ḥanbalism – Ibn Taymiyya – mysticism – speculative theology – Sufism – *sulūk* – traditionalism – al-Wāsiṭī

## Introduction

As the past years have shown an increasing interest among scholars in the Ḥanbalite shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), there is a slowly growing awareness that the study of the people around him, that is, his circle of followers and students, is also deserving of attention.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to *taṣawwuf*, or Sufism, I would argue that its presence in Ibn Taymiyya's own intellectual context as a recognized Islamic discipline of spirituality can be understood more deeply by also studying its presence among the members of his circle.<sup>2</sup> While for some of them it is practically impossible to establish whether they were in any way involved in Sufism, others actually composed works that clearly deal with the subject. An example of the latter category is found in the person of the Ḥanbalite Zayn al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Baʿlabakkī, who was both a student of Ibn Taymiyya and a Sufi in the real sense of the word. But unlike Ibn Taymiyya or his most celebrated student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), al-Baʿlabakkī did not leave behind much of a legacy. He neither produced a large oeuvre of writings nor reached any lasting fame as a Muslim scholar. We thus have very limited source-material from which to extract detailed information concerning his life and teachings, in particular when it comes to his views on Sufism.

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- 1 Caterina Bori is a good example of a scholar who has applied this approach. See for instance her article that deals with the collection and edition of Ibn Taymiyya's writings by his students, and to some degree also her article on Ibn Taymiyya's *jamāʿa*, although this is more concerned with his overall position in traditionalist circles. Cf. Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya wa-Jamāʿatuhu." In *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23–52, and: "The Collection and Edition of Ibn Taymiyyah's Works: Concerns of a Disciple," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13 (2009): 47–67. Also, the recent volume edited by her, containing articles that focus on Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya: *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah*, ed. Caterina Bori (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 2010).
  - 2 Mention must be made of a much earlier effort in this particular field by Éric Geoffroy, "Le traité de soufisme d'un disciple d'Ibn Taymiyya: Aḥmad ʿImād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (m. 711/1311)," *Studia Islamica*, No. 82 (1995): 83–101.

It is exactly here where the current article provides a contribution by presenting for the first time an Arabic edition and English translation of al-Ba'labakkī's *Risālat al-sulūk*, likely the sole surviving tract by his hand that deals with the subject of Sufism. In this concise treatise, al-Ba'labakkī aims to show that *sulūk*, the spiritual way towards God, can only be completed by means of two interdependent aspects: piety (*taqwā*) and renunciation of the material world (*zuhd*). By the first he means mostly the outer dimension of religion, which requires intimate knowledge of and close adherence to Islamic law; by the second he means mostly the inner dimension of religion, which requires the purification of the heart and abstinence from worldly passions. There is no explicit mention of the words *ṣūfi* or *taṣawwuf*, but based on the content and the author's background we can certainly say that we are dealing with a treatise that falls under the category of Sufism. The style of *Risālat al-sulūk* is sober, with a practical rather than a mystical approach to the spiritual way. While it does contain references to the Sufi concept of annihilation in God (*fanā' fī Allāh*) and to the substitutes (*abdāl*), an elite class of saints (*awlīyā'*), we must remember that such terminology was firmly embedded in the vocabulary of Sunni Islam in the Mamluk period.<sup>3</sup> Al-Ba'labakkī's main purpose in the treatise is to invoke in its reader an awareness of God, which is to inspire action, inwardly and outwardly, in accordance with God's desire, with the ultimate goal to attain a spiritual connection with Him. It could be argued that the importance of the *Risāla* lies not so much in its contents, since its brevity makes it difficult to make any large assumptions about al-Ba'labakkī's thought on Sufism. That would indeed require much more material on the subject by his hand, which, as far as I know, is simply not extant anymore. Its true significance lies rather in the fact that it is yet another testament to the reality that some form of Sufism existed in the circle of Ibn Taymiyya.

Below follows a concise study that aims to shed light on several issues that are of relevance to the text of *Risālat al-sulūk*. Firstly, in view of al-Ba'labakkī's identity as both a follower of Ibn Taymiyya and a Sufi, it is in place to provide some background to the intellectual context against which we should read the *Risāla*. I will do this by demonstrating that there was not only a certain tradition of Sufism that was accepted and respected by Ibn Taymiyya, but that there is even clear evidence that some form of Sufism was actively taught to several members of his circle, an example of whom was al-Ba'labakkī himself. I thereby

3 While Ibn Taymiyya would later come to denounce the term "*abdāl*" completely, he still used it in his *al-Aqīda al-wāsiṭiyya*, written in 698/1298–9, cf. *Majmū' Fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim, 37 vols. (Riyadh: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa-l-Awqāf wa-l-Da'wat wa-l-Irshād, 1995), 3:159. He also employs the term *fanā'* in several of his works.

aim to show what the latter's background in Sufism was, so that we can place his *Risāla* in a specific tradition. This is followed by a biography of al-Ba'labakkī based on the available material I have been able to find. The final section of the introduction will elaborate upon my discovery of the manuscript of *Risālat al-sulūk* and offer a few notes on the process of editing and translating it.

### Sufism and Traditionalism

While Ibn Taymiyya's relationship with Sufism has been the subject of some controversy, having been portrayed as both a staunch opponent of Sufism and an actual sufi himself, the dominant view on this subject is becoming increasingly nuanced, placing him, in a sense, somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.<sup>4</sup> In a recent contribution, for instance, Ovamir Anjum argues that, without identifying themselves as Sufis, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim both "endorsed Sufism devoid of mysticism, and wished to recover the earliest tradition of Sufism when mystical knowledge had not challenged the primacy of scriptural knowledge."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, to them this earliest form of Sufism was a sound branch of knowledge because it was anchored in the framework of traditionalist theology.<sup>6</sup> It were later Sufis, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

4 I refer here, of course, to George Makdisi's well-known article in which he aimed to prove that Ibn Taymiyya was a Sufi of the Qādiriyya order. See: George Makdisi, "Ibn Taymiyya: A Sūfi of the Qādiriyya Order," *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, vol. 1 (1974): 118–29. For other articles about Ibn Taymiyya's relationship with Sufism, see: Thomas Michael, "Ibn Taymiyya's *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī," *Hamdard Islamicus* 4:2 (1981): 3–12, and Th. Emil Homerin, "Ibn Taymiyya's *Al-Ṣūfiyyah wa-al-Fuqarā'*," *Arabica* 32 (1985): 219–44.

5 Ovamir Anjum, "Sufism Without Mysticism? Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's Objectives in *Madāriġ al-Sālikīn*," in *A Scholar in the Shadow*, 185.

6 I use the term "traditionalism" to refer to the school of thought identified as the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, "the partisans of tradition," who base their religious knowledge on the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the scholars rather than reason. They were mainly represented by the Ḥanbalites, but also by some of the Shāfi'ites and Mālikites, although the latter two groups would increasingly side with the Ash'arite school in the course of the Islamic Middle Period. Nevertheless, some of Ibn Taymiyya's students were still Shāfi'ites, such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Dhahabī, and clearly took a traditionalist stance in their theology. Traditionalist theology opposed and often clashed with the rationalist approach of the *ahl al-kalām* or *mutakallimūn*, the partisans of speculative theology, who would have been most strongly represented by the Ash'arites in the Mamluk period. Note that *kalām*-scholars also made use of tradition, but differed from traditionalists in the degree that reason could be applied to extract knowledge from the sources. For this distinction see: George Makdisi, "Ash'arī and the

(d. 505/1111), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), and Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn Sab‘īn (669/1270), who intermingled the spiritual path with philosophy and speculative theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*), which resulted in heresies in their writings. Ibn Taymiyya argues that:

This is in contrast with the pious men (*‘ubbād*) from ‘the folk of the Sunna and Hadith’ and their Sufis (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-ḥadīth wa-ṣūfiyyatihim*), such as as-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyāḍ, Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, Ma‘rūf al-Kharkhī, al-Sarrī al-Saqāṭī, al-Junayd b. Muḥammad al-Qawārīrī, Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, and ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān al-Makkī. Now, these were among the most splendid people to disavow those who were more virtuous than the philosophers, such as the Mu‘tazila and the Kullābiyya from the speculative theologians (*ahl al-kalām*); so just imagine how much more [they would have rejected] the philosophers!<sup>7</sup>

The above quote is representative of Ibn Taymiyya’s vision of early “authentic Sufism,” which he links to this very list of names of Sufi authorities in several of his writings. Only a few later shaykhs, among whom he counted the Ḥanbalite Sufi ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (or al-Jīlī) (d. 561/1166), were able to live up to the example of these early figures. To Ibn Taymiyya, they embodied the spiritual path because they adhered to the sound, correct creed (*‘aqīda*, or *‘itiqād*); that is, they adhered to the traditionalist creed of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, or *ahl al-sunna wa-l-ḥadīth* as he calls it here, as advocated mostly by the Ḥanbalites.

Although it may not be possible to speak of a neatly defined, distinct spiritual method that made up the type of Sufism referred to and envisioned by Ibn Taymiyya, we can at least observe that there indeed existed a tradition of Sufism that was particular to traditionalist Sunnite circles. This form of Sufism, which I like to call “traditionalist Sufism” because of its concurrence with traditionalist theology, indeed existed well before Ibn Taymiyya, and frequently clashed with the growing trend that increasingly partnered Sufism with rationalist theology, as articulated by the Ash‘arite school in particular.<sup>8</sup>

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Ash‘arites in Islamic Religious History,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 17 (1962): 49, and for the subtleties of the differences between these trends I recommend the study of Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), for the definition of traditionalism, see: ix.

7 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Shādhilī fi ḥizbayhi wa-mā ṣannaḥa-hu fi ādāb al-ṭarīq*, ed. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-‘Imrān (Mecca: Dār al-‘Ālam al-Fawā‘id li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 2009), 39.

8 This partnership between Sufism and Ash‘arism had become all the more evident in Ibn Taymiyya’s time. Regarding Sufism in the Mamluk period, Éric Geoffroy states that: “It is

In his study on the formative period of Sufism, Ahmet Karamustafa points to this as well where he distinguishes between a movement of traditionalist Sufis and one of *kalāmī*, rationalist Sufis. Among the traditionalists he counts Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), Abū Maṣṣūr Ma‘mar (d. 418/1027), and ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089).<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that, although Ibn Taymiyya certainly criticized several teachings of some of these four Sufi shaykhs, he would undoubtedly have agreed with Karamustafa and recognized them as traditionalists. In his *Kitāb al-Īmān*, Ibn Taymiyya displays his reverence for the first of these, al-Makkī, by mentioning him as one of the masters of Hadith, the Sunna, and the spiritual realities (*ḥaqā’iq*).<sup>10</sup> As for the other three, in his *Dar’ ta‘arūḍ al-‘aql wa-l-naql* we can find him either citing or referring to Abū Nu‘aym, Ma‘mar, and al-Anṣārī as important authorities who advocated the traditionalist creed. Rather than resorting to the approach predominant in *kalām*-theology, which is to apply a metaphorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) when dealing with ambiguous descriptions of God in the revelatory sources, he claims that these shaykhs affirmed all of God’s divine attributes (i.e. *ithbāt al-ṣifāt*). As he contends, the traditionalists understood that in such cases *ta’wīl* is to deny the way God describes Himself in the Qur’an and the Hadith, which would ultimately lead to denying Him altogether.<sup>11</sup>

These references show firstly that there was some degree of truth to the connection Ibn Taymiyya claimed existed between traditionalism and some of the early Sufi authorities, and secondly, that he considered his own outlook on Sufism to be rooted in this tradition that far predated him. In that sense, he did not view himself as an architect of some new form of Sufism; he was simply aiming to propagate what he considered to be the way of these early masters as an alternative to the many problematic interpretations that were gaining ground during his lifetime. Although we are only scratching the surface here, it should nonetheless be clear that Sufism, within the boundaries of traditionalist theology, had a place in Ibn Taymiyya’s worldview.

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known that not all Sufis are Ash‘arites, but it cannot be denied that Taṣawwuf had already acquired respectability within the school of al-Ash‘arī during the Mamluk period. This marriage, which is apparent with many medieval authors, was built on the remains of esoteric Shi‘ism and Hellenistic philosophy” (my translation). Cf. idem, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie Sous les derniers mamelouks et les premiers ottomans* (Damascus: Institut français d’études arabes de Damas, 1995), 95.

9 Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 87–97.

10 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Īmān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1983), 205.

11 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’ ta‘arūḍ al-‘aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālīm, 11 vols. (Riyadh: Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1991), 6:252, 256–7, 7:109.

The next logical step would be to question whether there is any indication that Sufism was also being taught and practiced within his circle. To answer this question, however, we must look beyond Ibn Taymiyya. Despite his many writings that touch upon Sufism in some way, it is not exactly clear in how far he may have taken it upon himself to actively teach a particular method of spirituality to his followers. Most of his works on Sufism are of a polemical nature, aimed at filtering out problematic concepts or refuting heresies he found in the words of certain Sufi scholars. We do know with certainty that one of his loyal students, the Ḥanbalite Sufi ‘Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī, fulfilled the role of Sufi shaykh in the Taymiyyan circle until he passed away in 711/1311. Although Ibn Taymiyya’s senior, al-Wāsiṭī adopted the *shaykh al-islām* as his teacher after he had become deeply convinced that he was the greatest scholar of his age. Ibn Taymiyya in his turn appears to have been deeply impressed by al-Wāsiṭī’s profound understanding of Sufism, and reportedly said, in praise of him: “He is the Junayd of his time.”<sup>12</sup> Note that the Baghdadi Sufi al-Junayd (d. 297/910), already mentioned in a previous citation, was one of those early Sufis Ibn Taymiyya so greatly admired. The weight of Ibn Taymiyya’s words of praise for al-Wāsiṭī should be evident from the fact that he considered al-Junayd as “someone who spoke with the words of the imams who know God by experience (*al-a’immat al-‘arifīn*).”<sup>13</sup>

I am currently in the process of writing a detailed study of al-Wāsiṭī’s life and teachings, so I will not delve deeply into this still little-known Sufi master here. In consideration of the subject at hand, it suffices to know that several sources affirm that al-Wāsiṭī taught a specific method in Sufism—or *sulūk* as he often refers to it—to a group of Damascene traditionalists, consisting of Ḥanbalites and Shāfi‘ites, the majority of whom were followers and students of Ibn Taymiyya as well. This is clear among other things from al-Wāsiṭī’s entry in the *Ṭabaqāt* of the Ḥanbalite biographer Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392), who states that “a group of our shaykhs, and others, have learned [the spiritual way] from him.”<sup>14</sup> Ibn Rajab also tells us that al-Wāsiṭī authored many works on the Sufi way, and that “these are some of the most useful books on Sufism for spiritual aspirants (*murīdīn*), and a group of the Sufis from the *ahl al-ḥadīth* have

12 Zayn al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *al-Dhayl ‘alā ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaymān al-‘Uthaymīn, 5 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, 2005), 4:382.

13 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-ṣafadiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1986), 1:266.

14 Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 4:383.

derived benefit from them...<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, two of Ibn Taymiyya's most distinguished students, Ibn al-Qayyim and the historian and Shāfi'ite jurist Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), were both also students of al-Wāsiṭī. The former calls al-Wāsiṭī "our shaykh" where he cites him to explain several Sufi terms in his *Shifā' al-'alīl*.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, al-Dhahabī mentions al-Wāsiṭī several times in his biographical works, always referring to him as "our shaykh," and states in his *Tārīkh* that he sat in his classes and benefitted from him.<sup>17</sup>

It should not come as a surprise, then, that the Ḥanbalite Sufi al-Ba'labakkī also studied under both Ibn Taymiyya and al-Wāsiṭī. In fact, as we shall see below, al-Ba'labakkī's intellectual context was very much defined by his membership of Ibn Taymiyya's circle, so that the Sufism to which he was exposed by al-Wāsiṭī must certainly have been rooted in traditionalist theology. In light of what I have tried to sketch here, I believe that his *Risālat al-sulūk* should therefore be seen as a product of traditionalist Sufism.

### The Life and Career of al-Ba'labakkī

He is mentioned in the biographical dictionaries as Zayn al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥmūd al-Ba'labakkī, or al-Ba'li.<sup>18</sup> Born in 675/1276, he was a native of the small city of Baalbek in current Lebanon. In spite of Baalbek's importance as a center of Ḥanbalism at that time, he spent the greater part of his life in Damascus.<sup>19</sup> It may very well have been that he was drawn to Damascus because of the many Ḥanbalite authorities of repute that were based there. Besides Damascus, he also traveled to Hama

15 Ibid., 4:382.

16 Muḥammad Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Qayim al-Jawziyya, *Shifā' al-'alīl fī masā'il al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar wa-l-ḥikma wa-l-ta'līl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1978), 16.

17 See for instance: Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), 4:191, and also by al-Dhahabī: *Dhayl tārikh al-islām*, ed. Māzin Sālim Bā Wazīr (Riyadh: Dār al-Mughnī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1988), 126.

18 It is thus written in the manuscript of *Risālat al-sulūk*, and also in: Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. 'Alī Shūrī, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1988), 14:194, and also: Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī a'yān al-mī'a al-thāmina*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'īd Ḍān, 6 vols. (Hyderabad: Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Uthmāniyya, 1972), 3:139. Ibn Rajab, however, has "Abū al-Faraj" instead of "Abū Muḥammad," and "Ubayd" instead of "Ubaydān," cf. Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:50.

19 Henri Laoust, "Le hanbalisme sous les Mamelouks bahrides," *Revue des Études Islamiques*, no. 28 (1960): 66–8.



to study with its judge, Sharaf al-Dīn b. al-Bārīzī al-Ḥamāwī (d. 738/1337) who, according to Ibn Rajab, often extolled him after that, saying that he had never seen anyone like him.<sup>20</sup>

In Damascus he studied jurisprudence under Ibn Taymiyya and entered a master-disciple relationship (*ṣuḥba*) with al-Wāsiṭī, under whose guidance he was trained in *sulūk*.<sup>21</sup> It was thus al-Wāsiṭī, and not Ibn Taymiyya, who was his shaykh in Sufism. Although this does not appear to be confirmed in the biographical sources, I suspect that al-Ba‘labakkī may have traveled with Ibn Taymiyya to Cairo in 705/1306 and stayed with him in Egypt for some time. We have at our disposal a letter by al-Wāsiṭī that addresses seven of Ibn Taymiyya’s followers by name, among whom al-Ba‘labakkī, urging them to stick by their shaykh’s side and support him unconditionally. Since al-Wāsiṭī stayed in Damascus till his death, and we know that Ibn Taymiyya got in serious trouble with the Mamluk authorities during his stay in Egypt, it is not hard to imagine that this letter may have been sent to Cairo during those times of distress, with the aim to hearten the addressees.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever the case may be, it was Damascus where al-Ba‘labakkī built a career as a professional Muslim scholar. Ibn Rajab states that a group of scholars benefited from his classes in Ḥanbalite jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*uṣūl*), and tradition (*ḥadīth*), the most notable of whom was the staunch Ḥanbalite and admirer of Ibn Taymiyya, ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū Ya‘lā Ḥamza b. Mūsā Ibn shaykh al-Salāmiyya (d. 769/1368).<sup>23</sup> Besides teaching, al-Ba‘labakkī authored works in the fields of jurisprudence, Hadith, and Sufism. He wrote a book on legal judgments (*aḥkām*) called *al-Muṭlī‘*, which is arranged according to the chapters of Ibn Qudāma’s *al-Muqni‘* and provides proofs by citing authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and good (*ḥasan*) prophetic reports from the six canonical Hadith collections.<sup>24</sup> Al-Ba‘labakkī also produced at least two *fiqh* manuals,

20 Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:51.

21 Ibid., 5:50.

22 ‘Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī, *al-Tadhkira wa-l-‘tibār wa-l-intiṣār li-l-abrār*, ed. ‘Alī Ḥasan ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Majīd (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā‘ir al-Islāmiyya, 2014), 21–3. Caterina Bori gives a short, but comprehensive overview of the contents of this letter in her article “Ibn Taymiyya wa-Jamā‘atuhu,” 26–9.

23 Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:51–2. For al-Ba‘labakkī’s student ‘Izz al-Dīn, see: Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:196, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnā‘ūt & Turkī Muṣṭafā, 29 vols. (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 2000), 13:111, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fi akhbār man dhahab*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Arnā‘ūt, 11 vols. (Damascus and Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1986), 8:367.

24 ‘Abd al-Qādir b. Aḥmad Badrān, *al-Madkhal ilā madhhab al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1985), 468.

the first being a commentary on the above mentioned *Muqni'*, the second being *Zawā'id al-muḥarrar 'alā l-muqni'*.<sup>25</sup> In Sufism there are no other titles that I have been able to find by his hand other than *Risālat al-sulūk*.

There is very little to say about al-Ba'labakkī's role as a Sufi shaykh. It is only through *Risālat al-sulūk* that we can get a very basic image of his perception of the spiritual way. Thanks to Ibn Rajab's entry on him, we can at least say that Sufism appears to have been an important part of his scholarly life. The Ḥanbalī biographer relates that al-Ba'labakkī experienced spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) and saintly miracles (*karāmāt*). It was said, for instance, that every year he would be aware which night was the Night of God's Decree (i.e. *laylat al-qadr*).

In 718/1318 one of his miraculous claims gave rise to such controversy that he was eventually brought to trial before judges and jurists in the Dār al-Sa'āda of Damascus. Al-Ba'labakkī's case came to light after some of his companions had found out about a certain spiritual state he claimed to have reached, for which they were apparently able to provide written proof in his handwriting. The following claims were reportedly made by him:

He [claimed that he] saw the Real (glorified and exalted is He) and contemplated the World of Sovereignty (*malakūt*). He saw Paradise (*firdaws*) and ascended above the Throne [of God]. He heard divine speech (*khiṭāb*), and it was said to him: 'I have granted you the spiritual state of shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir [al-Jīlānī].' [He claimed] that God (exalted is He) took something like a cloak from 'Abd al-Qādir and put it on him, and that He gave him three drinks of different colors. He sat before God, together with Muḥammad, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and al-Khaḍir (peace be upon them), and it was said to him: 'this is a rank (*makān*) that no saint (*walī*) can surpass.' It was also said to him: 'You will be the spiritual axis (*quṭb*) for twenty years.'<sup>26</sup>

Albeit without much detail, Ibn Kathīr affirms that al-Ba'labakkī made claims regarding some spiritual experience: "Something either afflicted his mental state (*'aql*) or he lost his mind. Or [perhaps] he had been so devoted to disciplining [his ego] that his inward being was burning with hunger. He saw

25 Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī al-Bābānī, *Hadīyyat al-'arīfīn: asmā' al-mu'allifīn wa-āthār al-muṣannifīn*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Wikālat al-Ma'ārif, 1951), 1:526, Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:52. The *Zawā'id* has been published under the name of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Ubaydān al-Ḥanbalī al-Dimashqī, *Zawā'id al-kāfi wa-l-muḥarrar 'alā l-muqni'*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: al-Mu'assasa al-Sa'īdiyya, 1981).

26 Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:51.

figments of the imagination (*khayālāt*) that have no reality, believing that they were something supernatural (*amr khārījī*), while they were only a false figment of the imagination."<sup>27</sup> While Ibn Kathīr does not state what it was that al-Ba'labakkī claimed to have experienced, it appears from Ibn Rajab that it concerned an heavenly ascension, reminiscent of the Prophet Muḥammad's *mi'rāj*. His account suggests that al-Ba'labakkī thereby attained the rank of the *quṭb*, which in Sufi terminology is generally considered to be the highest degree of sainthood. Al-Jilānī's presence in the account is also noteworthy, since this Sufi was well-respected by Ibn Taymiyya and the Ḥanbalite community, and thus an archetype of the form of Sufism accepted among traditionalists. That al-Ba'labakkī's supposed claims were so controversial that the death-penalty was actually considered is hinted at when Ibn Rajab states that the judge decided to spare his life. The seriousness with which his case was dealt with is not so strange in view of its historical context. In the Mamluk period, claims to heavenly ascension were indeed very rare and were known to have met with great controversy. Sufis were obviously very careful in claiming such a thing for themselves.<sup>28</sup> While al-Ba'labakkī was not sentenced to death, the final outcome must nevertheless have struck a severe blow to his career. He was censured for his claims and had to renew his profession of Islam. The judge's sentence was that he be chastised and detained for some days. He was also forbidden to give fatwas or produce marriage contracts. Ibn Rajab's account concludes that, after that, al-Ba'labakkī's mistake became clear to him. Rather than having physically ascended through the heavens, he affirmed that what he had experienced were spiritual contemplations (*shawāhid*) and lights of the hearts (*anwār qalbiyya*).<sup>29</sup>

Al-Ba'labakkī was eventually able to pick up his scholarly life once more, teaching Islamic sciences at several madrasas in Damascus. He passed away in 734/1333 in his hometown of Baalbek, and was reportedly escorted to the cemetery at the city's Saḥḥān gate by a crowd of locals, who carried him above their heads in honor. There was also an absentee funeral prayer (*ṣalāt al-ghā'ib*) for him in Damascus, which suggests that in the end he must have enjoyed something of a respectable position in the Mamluk capital of Shām.<sup>30</sup>

27 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:194.

28 The matter of *mi'rāj* among Mamluk Sufis has been treated by Éric Geoffroy in *Le Soufisme*, 434 (I owe this reference to Christian Lange).

29 Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:51.

30 Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 5:52, Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:194.

### Some Notes on *Risālat al-sulūk*

My road towards al-Ba‘labakkī’s *Risālat al-sulūk* started with the question whether any of al-Wāsiṭī’s students or affiliates produced writings in the field of Sufism. As I examined the sources on al-Ba‘labakkī, I found both Ibn Rajab and Ibn Kathīr confirming that this was the case with regard to him, with the latter explicitly stating that he wrote on Sufism and the works of the hearts (*al-taṣawwuf wa-a‘māl al-qulūb*).<sup>31</sup> Without any mention of a title, I tried my luck by searching for al-Ba‘labakkī’s name in *Khizānat al-turāth*, a database of Arabic manuscripts that can be accessed through *al-Maktaba al-shāmila*, a digital library of Islamic literature. I thus found that there is a tract on Sufism by the title of *Risālat al-sulūk* that is kept in the Zāhiriyya Library of Damascus, which I was subsequently able to confirm in the catalogue of the Zāhiriyya collection of Sufi literature.<sup>32</sup> I could not find any other copy of the *Risāla* in the online databases or catalogues I consulted, so that the Damascene version appeared to be the only way to gain access to it. Unfortunately, due to the current deplorable situation in Syria, I was unable to travel to Damascus to view it myself. It is thanks to the generous help of Dr. Khayr Allāh al-Sharīf that I received the invaluable photographs of the Damascene manuscript on which I was able to base my edition. Because of this, there are limits to the degree that I can give an in-depth description of the manuscript here. Nonetheless, owing to the information found in the catalogue of the Zāhiriyya Library and the *Khizānat al-turāth*, there is still a thing or two to be said in its regard.

#### Concerning the Manuscript

The manuscript of *Risālat al-sulūk* is part of a collective volume that is held in the Zāhiriyya Library under shelf-number 6595. According to the *Khizānat al-turāth*, the manuscript contains at least four other treatises, namely:

- *Al-Risāla al-quḍsiyya bi-adillatihā al-burhāniyya*, a work on creed by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111).<sup>33</sup>
- *Ajwibat al-Shādhilī*, which will be mentioned below.<sup>34</sup>

31 Ibid.

32 *Khizānat al-turāth*, 89:165, and Muḥammad Riyāḍ al-Mālīḥ, *Fihris makḥṭūṭāt dār al-kutub al-zāhiriyya: qism al-taṣawwuf*, 3 vols. (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ḥijāz, 1978), 1:636–7.

33 *Khizānat*, 75:514.

34 Ibid., 88:666.

- *Sharḥ masā'il sultān al-ʿarīfīn Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī*, a Sufi text by an unknown author.<sup>35</sup>
- *Al-Muntakhab al-rafiʿ al-asnā fi l-taṣarrufāt bi-asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, a Sufi text by Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Būnī (d. 622/1225).<sup>36</sup>

The text of *Risālat al-sulūk* starts on the sixth line of folio 18b (verso), the first four lines of which are the final lines of another treatise that I have not been able to identify.<sup>37</sup> The fifth line is kept empty so as to separate the two treatises from each other.

There is no reason to doubt al-Baʿlabakkī's authorship of the *Risāla*. After the *basmala* and an invocation for the Prophet, the treatise starts by setting forth its author's full name as follows: "Says the shaykh, the imam, the scholar, the traditionist, the learned, the pious, the knower [of God], Zayn al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥmūd b. ʿUbaydān al-Baʿlabakkī." Although the manuscript does not contain a title, "*Risālat al-sulūk*," as it is called in the Zāhiriyya catalogue, appears fitting. The use of the word "*sulūk*" as the collective term for the spiritual way to God on folio 18b shows that this is exactly the subject with which the epistle is concerned.

The manuscript's writing is in clear *nashkī* script, with 21 lines per page and about 12 words per sentence, on 29,5 × 20,05 cm pages, with 3 cm margins.<sup>38</sup> *Risālat al-sulūk* ends on folio 21a (recto), on the end of the page's seventeenth line, which is directly followed by four more lines in the same handwriting that are not part of our treatise. Unlike folio 18b, this is not indicated by an empty line. These four final lines on folio 21a are possibly the copyist's own words, meant to introduce a new treatise that follows on the folio's verso. It reads:

Answers by our shaykh, our blessing: the shaykh, the imam, the scholar who puts his knowledge in practice (*al-ʿālim al-ʿāmil*), the godly, the renunciant, the unique, the learned, the most erudite, our master and our spiritual guide (*quḍwa*) to God (exalted is He): Sharaf al-Dīn Abī Sulaymān Dāwūd, the son of the servant in need of God (exalted is He), the late Abī Ḥaḥṣ ʿUmar b. Ibrāhīm al-Shādhilī—may God be pleased with him and make him be pleased! May He make Paradise his final destiny and dwelling, and may He unite us in the abode of honor, in a state of

35 Ibid., 89:584.

36 Ibid., 90:87.

37 The first four lines on folio 18b contain an account about ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. I have been able to identify this through Ibn Taymiyya's *Majmūʾ fatāwā*, 22:605.

38 Al-Māliḥ, *Fihris makhtūʿāt*, 637.

blessing and wellbeing, without hardship, in the company of Muḥammad and his family—amen, amen, amen!<sup>39</sup>

According to the catalogue of the Ṣāhiriyya Library, the treatise that follows on the verso of folio 21 is known as *Ajwibat al-Shādhilī*, by the Shādhilite shaykh Dāwūd Ibn Bākhilā—or Mākhilā—al-Iskandarī (d. 733/1332).<sup>40</sup> This is a short work, about 16 folios long, aimed to answer several questions concerning the Prophet Muḥammad's nightly journey to Jerusalem and the heavens (i.e. *al-isrā' wa-l-mi'rāj*). If, as I suspect, the words cited above are indeed of the copyist's own composition, this would mean that our manuscript must have been copied by a contemporary of al-Ba'labakkī, and that the copyist was a disciple of Dāwūd al-Shādhilī. As we have seen, our Ḥanbalite Sufi passed away in 734/1333, which would have been about a year after the Shādhilī shaykh. It may therefore very well have been copied while al-Ba'labakkī was still alive. This, however, can only be established with certainty by studying MS 6595 in its entirety, which, as mentioned, is currently impossible.

There are several instances where we find things written in the margins of *Risālat al-sulūk*. The folio-pagination is written in the upper-left corner of each folio's recto. Folios 20a and 21a have the final letters of a word that the copyist was not able to fit in its entirety within the borders its respective line written in the margins. Folio 19b has a suggestion for a different word written in the right margin, and the first word of the following page in its lower left corner. There is

39 The Arabic reads:

أجوبة لسيّدنا وشيخنا وبركتنا الشيخ الإمام العالم العامل الورع الزاهد الأوحد الحبر العلامة سيّدنا وقودتنا  
إلى الله تعالى شرف الدين أبي سليمان داود بن العبد الفقير إلى الله تعالى المرحوم أبي حفص عمر بن إبراهيم  
الساذلي—رضي الله عنه وأرضاه، وجعل الجنة منقلبه ومثواه، وجمع شملنا به في دار الكرامة في خير وعافية  
بلاحنة، بمحمد وآله آمين، آمين، آمين!

40 al-Māliḥ, *Fihris*, 1:17–8. Dāwūd al-Iskandarī was the successor of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) as the head of the Shādhilī order. A brief overview of some of his teachings can be found in Richard J.A. McGregor, "The Concept of Sainthood According to Ibn Bākhilā; A Ṣādhilī Shaykh of the 8th/14th Century," in *Le saint et son milieu ou comment lire les sources hagiographiques*, ed. Rachida Chih and Denis Gril (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2000), 33–49, and by the same author: *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā' Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn 'Arabī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 32–47. For his biography, see: al-Bābānī, *Hadīyyat al-'arīfīn*, 1:360–1; Sirāj al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā'*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Sharībah (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1994), 517–18; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Makhluḥ, *Shajarat al-nūr al-zakiyya fi ṭabaqāt al-Mālikīyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Majīd Khayālī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2003), 1:293; and, al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar*, 2:226.

a small note under the final line of the above-mentioned treatise that precedes our *Risāla* on folio 18b, stating that it has been read by one Rajab Jiddī. In the left margin of our treatise's final page we find two such notes, the first of which is by the same Jiddī, the second of which, right under the former, is by one Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥuṣnī, who adds that he read it in 1079/ca. 1668.

The manuscript appears to be in excellent shape, apart from a large stain that covers about one-sixth of every folio, which was likely caused by humidity. There is only one word that has become entirely illegible due to this. The rest of the words that are affected by the stain remain readable, so that the process of editing *Risālat al-sulūk* did not prove difficult.

### *Concerning the Edition and the Translation*

- Because I have given priority to making the Arabic text as readable as possible, I have inserted punctuation and Arabic diacritical marks where I found this fitting.
- In the Arabic text, citations from the Qur'an are put between special brackets (i.e. ﴿ ﴾) and the name of the *sūra* and number of the verse(s) in question are given in a footnote. In the translation, each Qur'anic verse is directly followed by the number of the *sūra* and the verse(s) in question between square brackets.
- In both the Arabic text and the translation, whenever a hadith is cited this is put between quotation marks, followed by a footnote that refers it to one of the well-known Hadith-compilations.
- The manuscript's folio-numbering has been put between virgules throughout the text of the edition and the translation, with 'l' or 'a' to mark a recto and 'b' or 'b' to mark a verso.
- Anything else that is inserted in the Arabic text of the edition that is not found in the manuscript has been put between square brackets.





٢١

كقوله تعالى فلا تغربكم الحياة الدنيا ولا يغربكم بالله العزيز الغفور في غير موضع من القرآن ولولا  
 ان الكلام قد طام والاذكرنا له شواهد كثيرة من الكتاب والسنة فينبغي ان يدبر الانسان  
 القرآن اذا قرأه ويخاطبه كما يخاطبه الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم ويحجده على تحصيل منتهى  
 بتجعه على الله عز وجل فانه يوشك ان لا يجد الموت تذهب عنه ما بارى العلاقات والتواغل  
 التي كانت تشغله وتعلق قلبه انما هو من الامور العظيمة في الانسان فارغ القلب من  
 شئ فربما اعترضته الشكوك والريب وربما الخوف من التوحيد الكلية لانه فارغ والشيطن  
 سلب فربما اغواه وفتنه عن دينه وهذا اختلاف صاحب النسبة الذي قد اضل قلبه  
 بالله عز وجل لان النسبة اقوى ما يكون عند نزول الحوادث الانري ان من اضل قلبه  
 او صاحب جاه اذا نزلت به ازالة يقوى قلبه محمد ومبه ولا يكترث بها لما يعلم  
 من بضرته له وتخليصه من تلك التازلة وكذلك صاحب النسبة مع الله سبحانه يرحي  
 ان ايمانه يقوى عند مصيئته الموقفة لاضال قلبه بالله عز وجل وان الله سبحانه يمكنه  
 ويرحمه لا يضيعه ولا يجذله عند اعظم ما يكون من الحاجة اليه فيموت الانسان  
 بذلك الاتصال ويعث عليه ان شاء الله تعالى قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم الكيس  
 من دان نفسه وعمل لما بعد الموت والعاجز من اتبع نفسه هواها ومعنى علي الله عز وجل  
 فسأل الله العظيم ان يثبتنا على الاسلام والسنة وان يعثنا على ذلك وان يحشرنا مع  
 انعم الله عليه من النبيين والصديقين والشهداء والصالحين انه هو البر الرحيم  
 ثم ذلك واحمد لله وحده وصلوته وسلامه على سيدنا محمد خيي خلقته وعلى اله وصحبه وسلم  
 اجوبة لسيدنا وشيخنا وبركتنا الشيخ الامام العالم العامل الورع الزاهد الاوحد  
 الحبر العلامة سيدنا وقد وثنا الى الله تعالى شرف الدين ابي سليمان داود بن العبد الفقير الى الله  
 تعالى المرحوم ابي حمزة عرين ابراهيم الشاذلي رضي الله حال عنه وارضاه وجعل الجنة  
 شقلبه وشواه وجمع لملنا به في دار الكرامة في خير وعافية بلا حنة محرواله امير امير

طالب العلم العبد  
 الفقير الى الله  
 عز وجل  
 ابي حمزة  
 عرين ابراهيم  
 الشاذلي

FIGURE 2 Ms Zāhiriyya Library (Damascus), 6595, fol. 21a (final page).

## Arabic Text

## رِسَالَةُ السُّلُوكِ

تأليف

زين الدين أبو محمد عبد الرحمن بن محمود بن عبيدان البعلبكي

المتوفى سنة ٤٣٧هـ / ٣٣٣١م

18ب/ بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين، اللهم صلي على محمد وعلى آل محمد .  
قال الشيخ الإمام الحدّث الفاضل الورع العارف زين الدين أبو محمد عبد الرحمن بن محمود بن  
عبيدان البعلبكي - أبقاه الله تعالى : اعلم أن هذا<sup>41</sup> الطريق الذي تريد والشأن الذي يشار إليه مداره  
على شيئين، لا ينال إلا بهما مع التوفيق، وهما : التقوى والزهد . فمن لم يلتبس بهما ظاهراً وباطناً لا  
يطمع من هذا الأمر في شيء . فإن بالتقوى تحصل المتابعة في الأمر والنهي ، وبالزهد يتحقق الإخلاص .  
فحينئذ يعبد العبد الله مخلصاً له الدين ويتحقق بقوله سبحانه : ﴿ يَاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَيَاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴾<sup>42</sup> ،  
وقوله تعالى : ﴿ وَمَا أَمْرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ ﴾<sup>43</sup> .

فكثير من الناس تحقق بالتقوى والتجار والعوام ، ولم يتحققوا بالزهد ، فانقطعوا بذلك  
عن المقامات العلية ، وحجّبوا محبة الدنيا والشهوات المباحة عن المقاعد السنية . ومن الناس من  
تحقق بالزهد ولم يتحقق بالتقوى ، وهم كثير ممن ينسب إلى الفقر ، كالبحرية<sup>44</sup> وغيرهم ، فإنهم تركوا  
الدنيا وليس لهم فيها غرض طائل ، ولا قلوبهم متعلقة بها ، لكن لم يتحققوا بالتقوى ولم يراعوا الأوامر  
والنواهي ، فعوقبوا بالإبعاد وارتبج دونهم الباب ، ولم ينالوا من سلوكهم طائلاً لكونهم جعلوا بينهم وبين  
ما جاء به الرسول - صلى الله عليه وسلم - حائلاً ، ف﴿ حِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴾<sup>45</sup> .

41 في الأصل : «هذه» وهو خطأ .

42 سورة الفاتحة : 5.

43 سورة البينة : 5 .

44 هكذا في الأصل .

45 سورة سبأ : 54.

فهذان الأصلان عليهما مدار السلوك. فمن رُزِقَهما فليبشِّرْ بالفتح القريب، وليستعد لما أوصله الله له من النصيب. ومن حُرِم ذلك فقد خابَتْ صَفْقَتُهُ، وما رَجَحَتْ تجارتَهُ / 19 أ / اللهم إلا أن تأتي رجلاً جذبة من الله فتأخذه إليه. فذلك لا يسار على طريقته ولا يعاش عليه لأن سنة الله الجارية أن العبد يسلك الطريق ويقطع المنازل والمفاوز إلى أن يصل إلى المقصود مع معرفة الله تعالى له، وإلا فأين العبد من الله؟

وليعلم أن الإنسان لو اشتغل بالعلم مائة عام أو أكثر، ولم يفتح عليه بشيء مما ذكرت لك، لا يذوق حلوة الإيمان أيضاً ولا الإسلام بقلبه. لكن النفس تتحلى بكثرة العلوم ومعرفة دقائقها، لما لها فيه من الرياسة والرفعة والعلو على الأقران والنظراء والتوصل إلى مقاصدها وشهواتها. وأما الإيمان فلا يزداد بذلك، بل ربما نقص لكثرة العمل بغير الله.

والذي يعلم به أن طلاب العلم ثلاثة أقسام:

قسم طلبوا العلم لمعرفة الأحكام فقط ليس لهم غرض فيما سوى ذلك من العمل والتخلق به والتوصل به إلى العليم. فهؤلاء يعرفون بحب الدنيا، والتوصل إلى أهلها، وحب المناصب والرفعة والعلو في الأرض، فترى أحدهم لو أمكنه أن يبذل نفسه وماله وولده في شيء يحصل له منه رفعة في الدنيا أو رياسة، فعل ذلك، لينال به غرضه الفاسد. فهؤلاء حصّهم من العلم ما هم فيه من الرياسة والعلو في الأرض. وقد قال الله تعالى: ﴿ تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾ 46 وقال تعالى: ﴿ وَمَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ نَصِيبٍ ﴾ 47. ومن علاماتهم أيضاً الكبر والعجب بأنفسهم والشح والجنون واتباع هوى نفوسهم، لأنهم لم يتخلقوا بالعلم ولم يترقبوا بالعمل به. بل هم على العمامة المحضّة، بل العامة أحسن حالاً منهم، لأنهم أين قلوباً وأرق أفئدة. ولهذا ترى العامي إذا سمع القرآن أو حديث الرسول - صلى الله عليه وسلم - أو أخبار الصالحين رق لذلك قلبه، ودمعت عينه، وأصغى إلى ذلك بكليته. وهؤلاء لفرط كبرهم وعجبهم وكثرة تكرارهم وسماعهم لهذه الأشياء من غير أن يتخلقوا أو يعتبروا بها غلبت عليهم

46 سورة القصص: 83.

47 سورة الشورى: 20.

القسوة. فصاروا كمغسل الموتى في عدم الاعتبار بالموت. فنسأل الله العظيم أن لا يجعلنا من هذا القسم، وأن يقينا شرور أنفسنا وسيئات أعمالنا، إنه هو البر الرحيم!

القسم الثاني: قوم /IG/ طلبوا العلم ليعرفوا به ما أوجب الله سبحانه عليهم في فعله، وما حرم عليهم فيجتنبوه، وما أباح لهم فيتناولوه، فهو لآء [ . . . ]<sup>48</sup> العلماء أصحاب التعبّد والتهجّد والأوراد بالليل والنهار، قلوبهم متعلقة بالصلاة والذكر والتلاوة، وليس لهم إلى الدنيا ولا إلى المناصب والرفعة التفتّات طائل، لكنهم لم يسلموا من ذلك بالكلية لأن الإنسان لا يسلم من حب الدنيا والرفعة إلا أن يتحقق بالزهد، فهو لآء انتفعوا بالعلم عرفوا حلاله وحرامه ومباحه، وفرضه وواجبه وسنته، وعملوا بعلمهم وعلموه الناس، فرضي الله عنهم وأرضاهم.

القسم الثالث: قوم طلبوا العلم ليعرفوا به العليم سبحانه، فكان هو مقصودهم الأول، والعلم طريق إلى معرفته، لأنه - عزّ وجلّ - لا يعرف إلا بالعلم عرفهم نفسَه سبحانه في كتابه المنزل وسنة رسوله - صلى الله عليه وسلم -، فتعرفوه. فلما عرفوه أحبوّه لأن كل من عرفه سبحانه أحبّه. فلما أحبوّه نصحوه، إن الحب لمن يحب نصوح، وقاموله بالعبودية في الظاهر والباطن بما اقتضته أسماؤه الحسنی، وصفاته المقدسة العُلى، وأحبوا ما أحب وكرهوا ما كره. ولا يتكيف قلب أحدهم بكيفية تغاير ما يريد محبوبة. يعني أنه لا يثور في قلبه محبة ما كرهه، ولا كراهة ما أحبّه، ولا يرضى بما سخطه، ولا يسخط بما رضىه، ولا يتقاعد عما أمر ولا يسارع<sup>49</sup> إلى ما نهى عنه. وذلك حقيقة الموافقة من كل وجه، وبذلك يظهر حكم المحبة دعوى لا حقيقة لها.

وهذا لا يحصل إلا بشيئين: أحدهما: العلم الذي يعرف ما أمر الله به، وما نهى عنه، وما أحب من الأعمال ورضيه، وما كرهه منها ومقته. والثاني: رياضة القلب وسياسته على الاستقامة على ما أمر الله - عزّ وجلّ - ظاهراً وباطناً. كلما زاع القلب وانحرف إلى التقاعد عما أمر، والمنازعة إلى ما كرهه بالخاطر، أو الهمة، ذمّ العبد قلبه وردّه<sup>50</sup> إلى دائرة الاستقامة، وإنما يكون على ذلك الحب أو الخائف أو العارف، وهو شاق على من سواهم. ألا ترى أن العبد الناصح البارّ سيّده يجب ما يجب سيّده، ويكره ما يكرهه، ويرضى بما يرضيه، ويسخط ما سخطه. فكذلك العارف المحب

48 هنا في الأصل كلمة واحدة غير مقروءة.

49 في الأصل: «ينادع»، وهو تصحيف، ونجد مكتوباً في الهامش: «لعله يسارع».

50 في الأصل «زده».

20/أ/ يتكيف قلبه بصفات مولاه - عز وجل - من الكرم، والحلم، والرحمة، والصبر، والفتح، ومحبة الطاعة والقربات، وكراهة المعاصي والمخالفات. فيبقى قلبه مجبولاً على الموافقة لأنه تصفى<sup>51</sup> من موارد النفاق، وتخلق بأخلاق الملك الخلاق. سُئلت عائشة - رضي الله عنها - عن خلق رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم -، فقالت: «كان خلقه القرآن».<sup>52</sup> فلما تخلقوا بهذه الأخلاق، وأحبوا مولاها من كل قلوبهم، كما قال - صلى الله عليه وسلم - في أول خطبة خطبها بالمدينة: «أحبوا الله من كل قلوبكم»،<sup>53</sup> وأنصحوه في العبودية ظاهراً وباطناً، جزاهم الله بفضلهم، وسُنَّته أن أحبهم وجعل أرواحهم في قبضته وأفاض عليها من أنوار عزته ما أفناهها عما سوى جماله وعظمته. وكان لهم كما قال سبحانه وتعالى: «لا يزال عبيدي يتقرب إلي بالنوافل حتى أحبه، فإذا أحببته كنت سمعه الذي يسمع به، وبصره الذي يبصر به، ويده الذي يبطش بها. ولئن سألني لأعطينه، ولئن استعاذني لأعيذنه».<sup>54</sup> ولا يستغنى أن أشير إلى حالهم في هذا المقام إلا بقوله سبحانه: ﴿فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾<sup>55</sup>. فهؤلاء أعيان الأمة وصديقوها، والمنظور إليهم كفاحاً، والمحفوفون بالمواهب مساءً وصباحاً، أهل المشاهدة والمحاطة والقرب الخاص، يُعصمون وقد استشفروا للجفاء، ويؤدبون إذا بدت منهم ناكرة، وعين الله ترعاهم وتكألمهم، لا تزال الأنوار متديلة عليهم لدوام نظر الرب سبحانه بعين المحبة والمودة والرافقة والرحمة والحفظ والكلاءة<sup>56</sup> والرعاية إليهم. فهم الصفوة بعد الأنبياء والمرسلين وهم خلفاؤهم بين أظهر الخلق، منهم من يقيم الدين الظاهر، ومنهم من يقيم الدين والحال كليهما. وبهم تقوم الأرض ويُستسقى الغيث وتُدفع الأعداء. روى الإمام أحمد في مسنده، قال: ثنا أبو المغيرة، ثنا صفوان، ثنا شريح،<sup>57</sup> يعني بن عبيد قال: ذكر أهل الشام عند علي - رضي الله عنه -، وهو [ب]العراق، فقالوا: العنهم يا أمير المؤمنين! فقال: إني سمعت رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم - يقول: «الأبدال / ٠٢ ب/ يكونون بالشام وهم أربعون رجلاً. كلما

51 في الأصل: «تصفا».

52 رواه مسلم في صحيحه، ج. 1، ص. 512.

53 انظر السيرة النبوية لابن هشام، ج. 1، ص. 501.

54 رواه البخاري في صحيحه، ج. 8، ص. 105.

55 سورة السجدة: 17.

56 في الأصل: «الكلاءة».

57 في الأصل: «شريح»، وهو تصحيف.

مات رجل أبدل الله مكانه رجلاً. يُسقى بهم الغيث، ويُتصر بهم على الأعداء، ويُصرف عن أهل الشام بهم العذاب»<sup>58</sup> - جعلنا الله منهم وسلك بنا سبيلهم، وحشرنا معهم، إنه أرحم الراحمين!  
واعلم أن طلب الدنيا والسعي فيها من أنكر ما يكون، لم يزل طالبها في تعب ونصب وعناء وذلة وامتهان، ليس له قدر - لا عند الله، ولا عند الناس! وفيهم من يتردد إلى خدمته أقوام من الظلمة أو أعوانهم أو غيرهم ممن ليست له فيه عقيدة صالحة ليعينوه على دنياه وقضاء حوائجه، فيستعبده بذلك ويذلوه، وعلى تقدير أن يقبلوا عليه ويكرموا، يكون ذلك أكبر فتنة له، وأبعد عن الله تعالى، فإنهم يصيرون صنم قلبه. كلما حدث له حادثة، أو نزل به نازلة، توجه قلبه في قضاء حاجته، ودفع نازلته إليهم. فهل يلبق بمن عنده أدنى مسككة من الإيمان والإسلام أن يعامل به - الذي خلقه ورزقه وسخر له ما في السماوات وما في الأرض، وتكفل برزقه، ويدعوه في كل ليلة إلى قضاء حوائجه - أن يستعبد قلبه لغيره، ويعتمد في قضاء حوائجه، ودفع نوازله؟ فوالذي لا إله غيره، لو أن واحداً من هؤلاء تكفل له أمير من بعض الأمراء أو غيره ممن يعتمد عليه بالرزق أو قضاء الحوائج لاطمان قلبه، واجتمع خاطره، وطابت نفسه، وانشرح صدره.

فأني إلى ذلك - يا حبيبي - ما كان ذلك إلا بعد القلب عن الله - عز وجل - وعدم اليقين بما تكفل به الله سبحانه. وكل هذا إيماناً من قبل عدم الزهد. وليعلم أن «حب الدنيا رأس كل خطيئة»<sup>59</sup> به يقع التحاسد والتباغض والتقاطع والتدابير، وتنشأ منه الرياسة والكبر والعجب والمفاخرة، ويحصل منه الرياء والسمعة لأن المرأئي إما أن يراءى لأجل الدنيا [أو]<sup>60</sup> لأجل الرياسة والسمعة. والزاهد قد سلم من هذه الآفات كلها، وهو محبوب عند الله وعند الناس، كما قال - صلى الله عليه وسلم - :  
«ازهد فيما في أيدي الناس يحبوك الناس، فازهد في الدنيا يحبك الله».<sup>61</sup> فيرجى لمن اتصف بالزهد أن الله سبحانه وتعالى يأخذه إليه بحبته إياه.

58 رواه أحمد بن حنبل في مسنده، ج. 2، ص. 231.

59 رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في كتاب الزهد، ص. 26.

60 في الأصل: «و».

61 رواه ابن ماجه في سننه، ج. 5، ص. 225.

ولو تدبر الإنسان الكتاب والسنة لوجدهما محشوتين بالزهد /21أ/ كقوله تعالى: ﴿فَلَا تَعْرَبْكُمْ  
الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَعْزِبْكُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ﴾<sup>62</sup>، في غير موضع من القرآن. ولولا أن الكلام قد طال، وإلا  
ذكرنا شواهد كثيرة من الكتاب والسنة!

فينبغي أن يتدبر الإنسان القرآن إذا قرأه، ويتخلق به كما تتخلق به الرسول - صلى الله عليه وسلم -،  
ويجتهد على تحصيل نسبة تجمعها على الله - عز وجل -، فإنه يوشك أن المرء عند الموت تذهب عنه  
سائر التعلقات، والشواغل التي كانت تشغله، وتعلق قلبه لما دهمه من الأمر العظيم. فيبقى الإنسان  
فارغاً، ليس معه شيء. فربما اعترضته الشكوك والريب، وربما انحرف عن التوحيد بالكلية، لأنه  
فارغ والشيطان مسلط، فربما أغواه وقتنه عن دينه. وهذا بخلاف صاحب النسبة الذي قد اتصل  
قلبه بالله - عز وجل -، لأن النسبة أقوى مما يكون عند نزول الحوادث. ألا ترى أن من اتصل بملك أو  
صاحب جاه، إذا نزلت به نازلة يقوى قلبه بمخدومه، ولا يكثر بها لما يعلم من نصرته له وتحليصه  
من تلك النازلة؟ وكذلك صاحب النسبة مع الله سبحانه: يرجو أن إيمانه يقوى عند مصيبة الموت  
لاتصال قلبه بالله - عز وجل -، وإن الله يكرمه ويرحمه لا يضيعه ولا يخذله عند أعظم ما يكون من  
الحاجة إليه. فيموت الإنسان بذلك الاتصال ويبعث عليه إن شاء الله تعالى. قال رسول الله - صلى  
الله عليه وسلم -: «الكيس من دان نفسه وعمل لما بعد الموت، والعاجز من اتبع نفسه هواها وتمنى  
على الله - عز وجل - [الأمانى]»<sup>63</sup>.

فنسأل الله العظيم أن يثبتنا على الإسلام والسنة، وأن يبعثنا على ذلك، وأن يحشرنا مع من أنعم  
الله عليه من النبيين والصديقين والشهداء والصالحين، إنه هو البر الرحيم! تم ذلك، والحمد لله وحده،  
وصلواته وسلامه على سيدنا محمد، خير خلقه، وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم.

62 سورة لقمان، 33، والفاطر: 5.

63 الكلمة «الأمانى» غير موجودة في الأصل، وروى الحديث بها في سنن الترمذي، ج. 4، ص. 638.

## Translation

## Epistle on the Spiritual Way (*Risālat al-Sulūk*)

by

Zayn al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥmūd b. ‘Ubaydān  
al-Ba‘labakkī

/18b/ In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate  
Praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds, O God bless Muḥammad and the fam-  
ily of Muḥammad!

Says the shaykh, the imam, the scholar, the traditionist (*muḥaddith*), the learned, the pious, the knower [of God] (*‘ārif*), Zayn al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥmūd b. ‘Ubaydān al-Ba‘labakkī—may God (exalted is He) grant him a long life: Know that this path that you seek, and the affair (*sha’n*) that it alluded to [by those who follow it] revolves around two things and it is only through them that it is granted successfully. They are piety (*taqwā*) and renunciation (*zuhd*). Whoever does not clothe himself with them outwardly and inwardly does not achieve anything from this matter, for from piety results compliance with the divine command and prohibition, and through renunciation sincere devotion (*ikhlaṣ*) is realized. Then will the servant [truly] serve God, sincerely devoting the religion to Him, which is confirmed in God’s statement (glorified is He): “You only we serve, to You alone we pray for succor” [Qur’an 1:5], and in His statement (exalted is He): “They were commanded only to serve God, sincerely devoting the religion to Him, men of pure faith” [Qur’an 98:5].<sup>64</sup>

A lot of jurists, merchants, and common people realize piety without realizing renunciation. They are thereby cut off from elevated stations, and because of [their] love for this world and licit desires, they are veiled from sublime seats (*maqā‘id*).<sup>65</sup>

64 I rely on A.J. Arberry’s translation of the Qur’an throughout the English translation of *Risālat al-sulūk*, albeit with minor alterations here and there.

65 This is a reference to Paradise, as mentioned in the Qur’an: “Surely the pious shall dwell amid gardens and a river, in a Seat of Truth (*maq‘ad ṣidq*), in the presence of a King Omnipotent” (Qur’an 54:54–5).



There are [also] people who realize renunciation without realizing piety. They are numerous among those who are associated with [the way of] poverty (*faqr*), such as the Baḥriyya and others.<sup>66</sup> That is because they renounce this world, as there is no beneficial purpose for them in it and their hearts have no attachment to it. However, they do not realize piety and do not observe the divine commands and prohibitions. They are thus afflicted by distance [from God] and the door [to Him] is locked from them. They do not achieve any benefit with their spiritual method (*sulūk*) due to the fact that they place a barrier between themselves and that which the Messenger (may God bless him and grant him peace) has brought. Hence, “a barrier is raised between them and that they desire!” [Qur’an 34:54].

[Piety and renunciation] are therefore the two foundations around which the spiritual way (*sulūk*) revolves. Whoever is endowed with them, let him be given the glad tiding that the opening is near (*al-fatḥ al-qarīb*), and let him prepare for the share that God will convey unto him.<sup>67</sup> Whoever is denied that, his bargain is unsuccessful and his merchandise is without profit, /19a/ unless spiritual attraction (*jadhba*) from God comes upon a man and takes him unto Him. Yet, the way of that one should not be taken and one should not live in his vain, because it is God’s constant habit (*sunnat Allāh al-jāriyya*)<sup>68</sup> that the

66 The word “Baḥriyya” seems out of place in this context and is likely an error of the copyist. Perhaps it was meant to say “Aḥmadiyya,” in which case it would most likely be a reference to the Rifā’ī Sufi order, named after the Iraqi Sufi Aḥmad al-Rifā’ī (d. 578/1182). This would make sense, since the concept of *faqr* was an important part of the Rifā’ī way. As far as I know the word “Baḥriyya” could only refer to the Baḥrī Mamluks. It is certainly true that Mamluk emirs supported Sufis, whom would often be referred to as the “poor” (*fuqarā’*, sing. *faqīr*), in the sense that they are in need of God. While Mamluks did offer patronage to Sufi shaykhs and brotherhoods, and sometimes joined them themselves, it is highly unlikely that they would have been linked specifically with the Sufi concept of poverty. For the Mamluks’ fascination for and support of Sufi *fuqarā’*, see for instance: Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 51.

67 A reference to the Qur’anic verse: “support from God and imminent victory” (Qur’an 61:13); in this case it appears to have a spiritual connotation and may also be translated as a “spiritual opening,” which refers to God opening up the heart to knowledge of Him (*ma’rifā*).

68 There are several verses in the Qur’an that refer to the Sunna(s) of God: 3:137, 17:77, 18:55, 33:38, 33:61–2, 35:43, 40:85, and 48:22–3. Based on these verses, Ibn Taymiyya differentiates between two kinds: (1) those that are concerned with God’s religion, which pertain to His command and prohibition, His promise and threat, etc. (2) and those that are concerned with the natural order of His creation, pertaining to the sun, the moon, the stars, and other such habits. God may suspend Sunnas of the latter kind, which, when it occurs, is

servant travels the path [towards Him] and passes through spiritual stations (*manāzil*) and deserts (*maḥāwiz*), until he arrives at his destination with experiential knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God (exalted is He). If this were not the case, then, indeed, what would be the servant's relationship to God?

It should be known that if man devoted himself to religious knowledge (*al-ʿilm*) for a hundred years or more, and if still nothing of what I have mentioned were revealed to him, he will not taste anything of the sweetness of faith (*īmān*) or submission (*islām*) with his heart. But the carnal soul (*naḥs*) will be adorned by an abundance of religious sciences (*al-ʿulūm*) and insightful knowledge of their subtleties, for these things bring him leadership, high rank, superiority over peers and colleagues, and the fulfilment of [the carnal soul's] objectives and desires. But [his] faith will not increase by that. On the contrary, it may actually decrease due to an abundance of work for the sake of something other than God!

It ought to be known that seekers of knowledge are of three groups:

[1] A group that seeks knowledge only in order to know the legal rulings (*aḥkām*). They do not have any objective in terms of acting in accordance with it, being morally shaped by it, or arriving unto God, the All-Knowing, by means of it (*al-tawaṣṣul bihi ilā l-ʿalīm*). They are known by love for this world and connecting with its ranks, and love for stipends (*manāṣib*), high rank, and superiority on earth. Hence, you will see that if one of them is able to spend his soul (*naḥs*), his wealth, or his offspring for something by which he will obtain a high rank or leadership in this world, he would do it—only in order to achieve his depraved goal. For them, that which incites them when it comes to knowledge is what they find therein of leadership and superiority on earth. God (exalted is He) said: “That is the Last Abode. We appoint it for those who desire not superiority on earth, nor corruption. The issue ultimate is to the pious” [Qur’an 28:83]. And He (exalted is He) said: “And whoso desires the tillage of this world, We shall give him of it, but in the world to come he will have no share” [Qur’an 42:20]. Among their character-traits are also arrogance, self-admiration, avarice, cowardice, and following the caprice of their carnal souls. That is because they neither shape themselves morally through religious knowledge, nor embellish themselves by putting

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what human beings call a miracle (e.g. Muḥammad splitting the moon, giving life to the dead, etc.). Hence, I have translated al-Baʿlabakkī's use of the adjective “*jāriyya*” here as “constant,” as he is clearly referring to the first category of Sunnas, which are never suspended. Cf. Ibn Taymiyya, *Jāmiʿ al-rasāʾil*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-ʿAṭāʾ li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2001), 1:52.

it in practice. Rather, they belong purely to the category of the commoners (*‘āmmiyya*). In fact, the common people have a better spiritual state (*ḥāl*) than them, because they have softer and more tender hearts. Therefore, you will see that when a commoner hears the Qur’an, a hadith of the Messenger (may God bless him and grant him peace), or stories of the righteous, his heart will become tender on account of that, he will have tears in his eyes, and he will listen to it with his entire being. But this [group], due to the excess of their arrogance and pride, and the frequency with which they repeat and hear these things without being morally shaped or learning lessons from them, cruelty gets the better of them. They thus become like someone who washes the dead without actually considering death. We ask God, the Magnificent, to not put us in this group, and to safeguard us from the evils of our carnal souls and the transgressions in our deeds, for He is the Beneficent, the Compassionate!

[2] The second group are people /19b/ who seek religious knowledge in order to know by it what God (glorified is He) has made incumbent upon them and then do it, what He has made unlawful to them and then abstain from it, and what he has made allowed for them and then abide by it. They are [...] <sup>69</sup> the scholars, those who habitually practice devotion to God (*ta‘abbud*), perform nightly prayers (*tahajjud*), and recite litanies (*awrād*) at night and day, whose hearts are committed to prayer (*ṣalāt*), the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and reciting the Qur’an (*tilāwa*). They have no strong inclination for this world, stipends, or high rank—although they are not entirely safe from that, for the human being will only be safe from love for this world and high rank by realizing renunciation. Nevertheless, they benefit from religious knowledge, knowing what is lawful (*ḥalāl*), what is unlawful (*ḥarām*), and what is permitted (*mubāḥ*) according to it, and what is obligatory (*farḍ*), what is necessary (*wājib*), and what is commendable (*sunna*) according to it. They act according to their knowledge, and they teach it to the people—may God be pleased with them and make them be pleased!

[3] The third group is a people who seek knowledge in order to thereby get to know the All-Knowing (glorified is He), Who is their primary goal. Religious knowledge is the way towards intimate knowledge of Him (*ma‘rifatihi*), because He (mighty and majestic is He) can only be known by means of knowledge that He Himself (glorified is He) has taught them in His revealed Book and the Sunna of His Messenger (may God bless him and grant him peace), so that, consequently, they can get to know Him. When they know Him they love Him, because anyone who knows Him (glorified is He) loves Him. When they love Him they are sincere to Him, for the lover is sincere towards the one he loves.

69 There appears to be only one word here that has become illegible due to a large stain on the folio.

They offer Him their servitude (*‘ubūdiyya*), outwardly and inwardly, with that which His beautiful names and His exalted divine attributes require. They love what He loves and hate what He hates. The heart of none of them takes on a quality that differs from what its Beloved desires. This means that there does not arise any love in their hearts for that which He hates, nor any hate for that which He loves. They are not pleased with that which displeases Him, nor are they displeased with that which pleases Him. They do not desist from doing what He commands, nor do they rush to do what He has forbidden. This is the true meaning of conformity [to God’s religion] (*muwāfaqa*) in every sense. Seeing this, it becomes clear that the case of love (*ḥukm al-maḥabba*) is a mere claim with no truth to it.<sup>70</sup>

Now this [state of piety and renunciation combined] can only transpire by means of two things: the first of these is knowledge that teaches what God commands and what He forbids, and which acts He loves and is pleased with and which ones He hates and abhors. The second is to discipline (*riyāḍa*) and govern (*siyāsa*) the heart in accordance with uprightness (*istiqāma*) in performing all that God (mighty and majestic is He) commands, outwardly and inwardly. Whenever the heart deviates and turns towards negligence in regard to that which He commands, and inclines towards that which He hates by some passing thought (*khāṭir*) or whim (*hama*), the servant must censure his heart and return it to the domain of uprightness. This will only be practiced by someone who either loves (*muḥibb*), fears (*khā’if*), or intimately knows [God] (*‘arif*), for it would be difficult for anyone else. Do you not see that the sincere servant who is dutiful towards his Master will love what He loves, hate what He hates, be pleased with what pleases Him, and displeased with what displeases Him? In the same fashion the heart of the loving knower [of God] /*zōa*/ is molded according to the attributes of his Master (mighty and majestic is He), such as generosity, clemency, compassion, patience, contentment, love for obedience and pious deeds, and hate for disobedience and offenses. Then his heart will remain naturally disposed towards conformity [to God’s religion], because he has purified himself from the sources of hypocrisy and has been morally shaped by the character traits (*akhlāq*) of the King, the Creator. ‘Ā’isha (may God be pleased with her) was asked about the character of the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace), and she answered: “His character was the Qur’an.”<sup>71</sup> So when [the people of this group]

70 I suspect that al-Ba’labakkī means here that a mere claim to love for God in itself is not enough, but that it logically requires action in the form of conformity to His divine rulings.

71 Paraphrased from a hadith related by Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar bi-naql al-‘adl ‘an al-‘adl ilā Rasūl Allāh (ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam)*, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1955), 1:512.

assume these character traits and love their Master with all of their hearts—as [the Messenger] said in the first sermon that he preached in Medina: “love God with all of your hearts!”<sup>72</sup>—and [when they] are sincere to Him in their servitude, outwardly and inwardly, God will reward them with His grace. It is His habit to love them, take their souls in His hand (*qubdatihi*), and pour out over them those lights of His might that annihilate them from all things save His beauty and greatness. What they experience is just like that which God (glorified and exalted is He) put forth [in the *ḥadīth qudsī*]:

My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory deeds (*nawāfil*) until I love him. When I love him, I will be his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes. Indeed, if he asks me [for something] I will surely give it to him, and if he seeks my refuge I will surely place him under my protection.<sup>73</sup>

It is sufficient that I allude to their state in this spiritual station (*maqām*) by God’s statement (glorified is He): “No soul knows what comfort is laid up for them secretly, as a recompense for that they were doing” [Qur’an 32:17].

They are the eminent ones of the Muslim community (*umma*) and its veracious ones (*ṣiddīqūhā*) who are under [God’s] direct supervision.<sup>74</sup> They are surrounded by divine gifts every day and night. They are the folk of divine contemplation (*mushāhada*), discourse [with God] (*mukhāṭaba*), and distinguished nearness [to Him] (*al-qurb al-khāṣṣ*). They are protected [by God] when they come in sight of harshness (*jaḥā’*) and are corrected whenever anything reprehensible arises from them, for God’s eye guards and watches them. Divine lights do not cease to descend upon them due to the constant sight of the Lord (glorified is He) with the eye of love, friendship, pity, mercy, and protection, watching and guarding over them. Hence, they are the best

72 ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm Abyārī and ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz al-Shalabī, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat wa-Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalībī, 1955), 1:501.

73 Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar min umūr Rasūl Allāh (ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam) wa-sunanihi wa-ayyāmihī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār Tawq al-Najāh, 2001), 8:105.

74 “*Wa-l-manzūr ilayhim kifāḥ<sup>am</sup>*”: Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī describes the substitutes (*abdāl*) with the same words in his Sufi manual, *Qūt al-qulūb*: “They are the seven *abdāl*, the pillars of the earth, who are under [God’s] direct supervision,” cf. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu‘āmalat al-maḥbūb wa-waṣf ṭarīq al-tawḥīd ila maqām al-tawḥīd*, ed. ‘Aṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2009), 2:200. The station of the substitutes is a distinct degree of sainthood concerning which al-Ba‘labakki cites a ḥadīth from Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad* below in *Risālat al-sulūk*.

after the Prophets and the Messengers, and they are their successors (*khulafāʾ*) amongst the people, among whom are those who uphold the pure religion, and those who uphold both the [outward] religion and the [inward] spiritual state (*al-ḥāl*). It is by them that the earth is sustained, the prayer for rain is done, and the enemies are repelled. The imam Aḥmad [b. Ḥanbal] relates [the following hadith about them] in his *Musnad*, saying:

Abū l-Mughīra narrated to us—Ṣafwān narrated to us—Shurayḥ (i.e. ibn ‘Ubayd) narrated to us, saying: The people of Greater Syria (*ahl al-shām*) were mentioned in the presence of ‘Alī (may God be pleased with him) while he was in Iraq. They said: ‘Do curse them, O commander of the believers!’ to which he replied: ‘Verily, I have heard the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) say: “The substitutes (*abdāl*) /zob/ will be in Syria and they are forty men. Whenever one [of them] passes away, God replaces him with another man. It is by them that the rain comes down, it is by them that you triumph over the enemies, and it is by them that [God’s] punishment is kept away from the people of Greater Syria.”’<sup>75</sup>

May God place us among them, lead us on their path, and gather us with them [on the Day of Judgment], for He is the most Merciful of the merciful!

Know that seeking this world and striving for its sake are amongst the most loathsome things there are. The one who seeks it will remain in [a state of] exertion, hardship, distress, vileness, and humiliation, for he has no worth—neither to God nor to the people! Among them is one whose service is frequently sought by those who are unjust, their helpers, or others in whom no sound faith (*‘aqida ṣāliḥa*) exists, in order to aid him in his worldly life and fulfil his needs. That way, they subjugate and degrade him under the assumption that they devote themselves to him and honor him. This is the greatest temptation for him and the furthest away from God (exalted is He), for these [people] become the idol of his heart! Whenever a mishap occurs to him or a severe calamity befalls him, his heart turns to them to fulfil his need and remove his calamity. Does it befit someone who has the slightest whiff of faith (*īmān*) and submission (*islām*) to serve His Lord while he subjugates his heart to something other than Him and relies [on that] to fulfil his needs and remove his calamities, [all the while it is God] Who created him, nourished him, subjected to him all that is in the heavens and the earth, is responsible for his provision,

75 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūtī, ‘Ādil Murshid, et al., 45 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 2001), 2:231.

and Who is called upon every night to fulfil his needs?!<sup>76</sup> Truly, by Him besides Whom there is no other deity, if he is sponsored by one of the emirs, or anyone else upon whom he relies for his provision or to fulfill his needs, his heart is tranquil, his passing thoughts are settled, his carnal soul is happy, and his anxieties relieved!

When it comes to this [reliance on other than God], O my beloved one, this is only caused by distance (*bu'd*) from God (mighty and majestic is He) and the absence of certainty about that which God (glorified is He) is responsible for.<sup>77</sup> All of these things only come to someone who consents to be without renunciation. It should be known that “love for this world is the root of every sin,”<sup>78</sup>—for it thereby comes to pass that people envy and hate each other, sever their relations, and treat one another with enmity. From it rises leadership, arrogance, pride, and vanity, and from it stem deeds that are done so that others may see or hear about them (*al-riyā' wa-l-sum'a*), because the insincere will either show off for the sake of this world or for the sake of leadership and reputation. The renunciant (*zāhid*) is free from all of these afflictions, and he is beloved to God and to the people, as [the Messenger] (may God bless him and grant him peace) said: “Renounce that which people have and they will love you, and renounce this world and God will love you.”<sup>79</sup> It is hoped for someone who possesses the quality of renunciation that God (glorified and exalted is He) will take him unto Himself by the grace of His love for him.

If man reflects upon the Book and the Sunna, he would find them filled with renunciation [of this world], /21a/ such as [God's] statement (exalted is He): “Let not the present life delude you, and let not the Deluder delude you concerning God” [Qur'an 31:33 & 35:5], and in more than one place in the Qur'an. Were it not for the fact that our words here would become lengthy, we would have mentioned many [more] quotations from the Book and the Sunna.

It is thus necessary that man reflects upon the Qur'an when he reads it and be shaped morally by it, in the same way as the Messenger (may God bless him and grant him peace) did, and that he strives to attain a relationship (*nisba*)

76 References to Qur'anic verses, such as 14:32, 14:33, 16:12, 16:14, 22:36, 31:20.

77 A reference to al-Ba'labakkī's words in the previous paragraph, where he states that God takes responsibility to provides man with sustenance (*rizq*). This is mentioned in the Qur'an several times; for instance: “. . . and not to slay your children because of poverty; We will provide you and them” (Q 6:151), “Surely God is the All-Provider (*al-Razzāq*) . . .” (Q 51:58), “No creature is there crawling on the earth, but its provision (*rizq*) rests on God” (Qur'an 11:6).

78 Abū Bakr 'Abd Allāh b. Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Zuhd*, (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1999), 26.

79 Muḥammad b. Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ, 'Ādil Murshid, et al., 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Risāla al-'Ālamiyya, 2009), 5:225.

that connects him unto God (mighty and majestic is He) (*tajma'uhu 'alā llāh*). For when man is on the verge of death, all of the worldly attachments and distractions that used to occupy him leave him, and his heart is solely concerned with all that comes upon him of this great affair. A person will then be destitute, having nothing with him! It may be that [at that moment] doubts and suspicions face him, and it may be that he deviates from [professing God's] divine unity (*tawhīd*) altogether, because he is destitute and Satan prevails [over him], and it may be that [Satan] deceives him and seduces him away from the religion. This is contrary to the one who has attained the divine relationship, whose heart is connected to God (mighty and majestic is He), for this relationship is stronger than anything that may happen when mishaps occur. Do you not see that he who is connected to a king or someone of high standing, that when a calamity befalls him, his heart is strengthened by his master and he pays it no heed, since he knows that [his master] will aid him and deliver him from that calamity? The same goes for the one who has attained a relationship with God (glorified is He): it is hoped that his faith becomes stronger at the trial of death, due to his heart's connection (*ittiṣāl*) with God (mighty and majestic is He), for God will honor him and have mercy on him, and He will neither neglect him nor forsake him at the moment when he will need Him the most. So, such a man will die and be resurrected with this connection—if God (exalted is He) wills it so! The Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) said: “The intelligent one is he who subjugates his carnal soul and strives for what follows after death, and the one lacking in intelligence is he who follows the caprice of his carnal soul that desires from God [what it longs for].”<sup>80</sup>

We ask God the Magnificent to strengthen us in Islam and the Sunna, that He resurrects us accordingly, and that He gathers us with the Prophets, the veracious, the martyrs, and the righteous upon whom he has given his blessings—for He is the Beneficent, the Compassionate! This [epistle] has come to completion, so praise be to God alone, and may His blessings and peace be upon our Master Muḥammad, the best of His creation, and upon his family and companions!

80 The MS omits the word “*al-amānī*,” which is found in the version of the hadith related by al-Tirmidhī. Since it makes more sense in the translation, it has been rendered between brackets here. For the hadith, see: Muḥammad Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, and Ibrāhīm 'Uṭwa, 5 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1975), 4:638.