TRANSFORMATIVE ISLAMIC EDUCATION: AN EXPLORATION OF PERCEPTIONS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN CLASSICAL MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

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Abstract
Education is a contemporary social science that has received a lot of attention. As education defines society, it is imperative to introspect the philosophy of education. Moreover, the current philosophy of education in conventional settings is confined to empiricism. Thus, the broader concepts of education such as spiritual transformation and character reformation seem to be non-existent. The lack of discussion-based pedagogies compounds the educational crisis. This article aims to explore human development models relevant to Islamic education as its purpose is, alongside enhancing academic prowess, to provide spiritual transformation that leads to God's pleasure and good character. The inquiry uses a historical-textual methodology with a particular focus on psychological foundations of Islamic theory to answer its questions. It will aim to explore childhood developmental models briefly and the concept of self-reflection more specifically and how it can be applied in Islamic education. The key findings of the study illustrate the concept of the three types of Nafs and how self-reflection is integral in achieving transformation, a concept that is condoned in conventional educational practice. Muhāsibī's Risālatul Mustarshidīn with Shaykh Abdul Fattāh Abū Ghudda's footnotes is the primary text used to establish the broader purpose of education. A brief overview of Qushayrī's Risālah and Ibn Qayyim's Kitābul Rūh will be outlined. Moreover, multiple attributes of human development conform to the demands of contemporary psychology to achieve a healthy mental transformation.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Human Development, Classical Muslim Educational,

INTRODUCTION
Human development plays a vital role in Islamic education as its ultimate goal is to foster cognitive and spiritual transformation resulting in mature human development and faith formation¹. Islamic primary sources stress upon the importance of such transformation. For instance, the Quran states the people of knowledge truly have God's awareness, meaning the

more knowledge one possesses of God, the closer to God he becomes. Furthermore, the Apostle contrasted between beneficial and unbeneficial knowledge and supplicated for the former and sought refuge from the latter. On this predicate, researching Islamic education and how it ought to function is mandatory to ensure its above objectives are achieved.

The Islamic tradition is replete with literature pertaining to spiritual and cognitive transformation. Alongside primary sources, secondary sources are dedicated towards spiritual transformation. Such examples are the likes of Abdullah bin Mubarak’s and Imam Ahmad’s Kitabuz Zuhd. Crucially, spirituality was amalgamated with knowledge in their era. However, once education was institutionalised, there seemed to be a polarisation between the two fields. Moreover, theses such as Karmali’s highlight that spirituality in the form of reflection was practised within Islamic educational institutions (Madrasas) as opposed to spiritual purification. Moreover, Thanvi’s Tarbiyyatus Salik, even though it could be argued that it was specific to disciples, contains invaluable passages that can be applied educationally.

Based on the above, this paper attempts to go a step further and examine various human development models and postulate different ways how they can be applied into educational settings with a brief examination of its relevance with contemporary psychology. It will explore the following enquiries: 1) How human development is perceived in Islamic thought and how this can be applied in modern Islamic education? 2) Are there any eclectic interpretations and methodologies of human development in Islamic literature? Moreover, is the science of Sufism an Islamic model for human development? Are there any methods for human development postulated by Sufi? 3) What is the nature the concept of Nafs and Rab (both can be defined as the Self) as they are crucial elements of Tazkiyah (inner purity)? Can Western models such as Erikson’s on human development be integrated with Sufism?

**METHOD**

This essay aims to use a historical, textual method alongside educational theory with a focus on psychological foundations of Islamic theory. It is imperative to understand educational theory to appreciate how human development can be practiced in educational settings. Educational theory is no different to other theories which are based on the perceptions of the world. Therefore, educational theory can change according to the perception of the theorists based on classroom experience. Educational theory comprises of critically engaging with its process rather than merely going through the system. It addresses

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the influence of education on students, teachers, politics, society and so on. Moreover, education is an interdisciplinary subject that involves philosophy, sociology, psychology and history. A psychological approach would involve human development and a method of maximising student skills. The psychology of motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, memory, intelligence and cognitive psychology are also frequently discussed. Furthermore, Islamic theory of education would involve ‘thinking educationally about Islam’, developing a pedagogic vocabulary from its primary sources and applying ‘evidence-based policies’ into Islamic education. However, this is not an attempt to westernise Islamic education as conventional education itself contains various flaws. Sufism (spiritual traditions in Islam) would be the most plausible method to amalgamate psychology with Islamic theory as it focuses on human development in a similar way to how Western human development models have influenced contemporary education.

This paper adopts a method of historical inquiry to track the notion of human development in Islam. Moreover, it will focus more on secondary sources as Sufi literature is of an esoteric and hermeneutical nature of core sources such as Quran and Hadith. Different methods have been employed to study history in Islamic intellectual tradition. Such approaches include descriptive history, historical analysis and the critical approach. Tabarî (d. 310AH/923AD) adopted a descriptive method whereas Ibn Khaldûn (d. 808/1406) opted for an analytical method. In spite of this, history has its limitations in the form of historicity as authenticity of divine books can become questionable as is the case with Cole, who alleges that the Prophet learned about the Jewish and Christian scriptures whilst travelling to North Syria, learnt Arabic during his travels to Syria, a geographical area, plagued by disputes and warfare, and therefore, formed the basis of his Quran. However, Sahin critiques this book positing that it is merely the work of a historian who is oblivious to the diverse accounts and narratives regarding Mohammed. Moreover, the lack of Islamic knowledge is apparent in this work. Besides a historical analysis, an analytical textual method has also been adopted.

Due to the field of Sufism being controversial to certain fragments of Muslims and the differing opinions regarding some of its concepts, a textual approach analysing the data from the earliest sources of Sufism such as Mubâsîbî’s (d. 243/857) Risâlatul Mustarsîdîn, in detail, and Qushayrî’s (d. 465/1072) Risâlah, in brief, to more contemporary works of Sufism. Furthermore, it will observe how human development was perceived and whether there were any epistemological alterations as the science developed. Books are generally composed to expose problems, provide solutions or address current affairs of the time. Therefore,

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11 Bartlett.
14 Abdul Rahmân Ibn Khalduûn, Munqalldinah (Beirut: Dârul Fikr, 1988).
18 Abul Qâsim Qushayrî, AlRisâlah Qushayrîyya, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dârus Salâm, 2014).
contextualisation of these texts is imperative in assessing why they were written, what were the predicaments prevalent and how to go about resolving them.\(^\text{19}\)

**DISCUSSION**

Modern psychology has also produced models and concepts regarding human development and education in general. A student can develop when the teacher understands and applies concepts such as: memory, motivation, cognitive function and learning styles.\(^\text{20}\) Different models have been posited in eclectic formats that have influenced contemporary education. For example, Erikson’s model on human development which is demarcated into eight stages. If a human has had positive experiences and is well catered for throughout his life, he will go through stages of trust, autonomy, intuition, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity and integrity. Otherwise he will experience stages of mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, role confusion, isolation, stagnation and despair. Other models include Marcia's identity development theory and Piaget’s cognitive development theory.

Piaget who was born in 1896 focused his work on cognitive development to explore how children would think. He discovered that children learn differently to adults and theorised how their thinking develops.\(^\text{21}\) Children learn how the world works by developing *schemas* (mental structures) and applying them to new situations in life through either assimilation or accommodation. Assimilation meaning that the child can make sense of a new experience using existing schema such as a sparrow fitting into the bird schema. Accommodation requires newly formed schemas to understand foreign information such as an aeroplane that is completely different to a bird.\(^\text{22}\) Moreover, Piaget then developed stages of development as children learn the rules of the world at similar ages. However, Vygotsky challenges this notion postulating that a child can mature quicker depending upon his experiences.\(^\text{23}\) The four stages are fixed and one has to follow the other. These stages consist of: sensorimotor (0-2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete (7-12 years) and formal operation.

Piaget’s theory was initially critiqued for bias as he conducted his experiments on his own children and a selected group of students.\(^\text{24}\) Moreover, the ages were also ‘overestimated’ as further findings had proved.\(^\text{25}\) Therefore, it can be argued that the theory needs to be further developed as children develop differently to those in Piaget’s time.\(^\text{26}\) However, his theory can still be applied to contemporary education as it enables the teachers to adapt their teaching methods in accordance to student ability. In an Islamic school, a curriculum can be reified that would complement the ‘key stage’ process in conventional education. Collaborating with educationalists specified in cognitive development and producing Islamic

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20 Bartlett, *Introduction To Education Studies*.
22 Jarvis and Chandler.
material that is suitable for primary and secondary school students would be a practical solution to facilitate comprehension. Pedagogies such as activity fun-based learning would perfectly apply with key stage one, two and three students.

The principles of Sufism, from forming a divine bond with God and eradicating spiritual maladies from the heart, can be traced back to the Prophet's time though it was not a distinct discipline. Moreover, narrations lucidly expound on an intimate bond with God. One example is the Prophet's saying that a person performing prayer is holding a private conversation with his Lord. In another narration, the Prophet defines Ihsān as a state in which the servant worships God as though he can see him; or at the least keeping in his conscience that God is watching him. Another narration mentions the Prophet being the closest to God. Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1449) elucidates on this stating that there are multiple levels of proximity to God. Thus, different stations of a mystic bond with God imply human development which can be further underpinned by Ibn Rajab’s (d. 795/1392) statement. Hence, Sufism existed at the time of the Prophet but was not yet defined a science.

The etymology of Sufism has evolved over time and scholars have differed regarding whether the terminology was derived or a separate title itself. The Prophet left behind companions who were the most virtuous figures living in a virtuous era. At the end of the reign of the four Caliphs in which Islam had disseminated far and wide, Islam had become more cosmopolitan and multiple trials had inflicted the Muslims in diverse forms. Diverse local cultures had also infiltrated the Muslim societies shaping how Islam was expressed. The humble and simplistic lives of the Prophet, companions and their successors that had once set precedent to the Muslims had now more or less become extinct. Multiple titles were given to different groups. Based on this, Qushayrī in his Risālab postulates that the term Sufism to be a title rather than a derivative attributed to those known for worshipping God and renouncing the world. Kilābādhi (d. 380/990) in his Ta’arruf posited that it was also the attire of the Prophets and the destitute. Qushayrī further mentions an opinion claiming the term is derived from Sūf, meaning wool, as the adherents were known to don themselves with woollen clothing in response to those who wore silk which insinuated unhealthy attachment to the world. Tūsī (d. 378/988) in his Allum’a further posits that it was also the attire of the Prophets and the destitute. Qushayrī’s opinion seems more convincing as different groups were formed within the Aḥlus Sunnah Wāl Jama’ah (the path the Prophet and his companions followed) by the end of the second century. The nature of Sufi sources are generally of secondary nature as they are interpretations and analyses of primary sources such as Hadith. For example, if the term Sufism is derived from Sūfīa, then it is an interpretation of the Hadith that describes the people of Sūfīa. Due to

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27 Muhammad Bukhārī, Sahīh Bukhārī (Beirut: Dārū Tawq Najāh, 2001).
28 Ahmad Ibn Hajar, Fathul Bāri (Beirut: Dārul Marifah, 1959).
30 Qushayrī, Aḥlisālah Qushayriyya.
31 Abū Bākī Kilābādhi, Attarruf Limādhibi Abī Tasawwuf (Beirut: Dārul Kutub Ilimiyyah, 2011).
32 Umar Suharwardi, Awāriful Ma‘ārif (Cairo: Dārul Ma‘ārif, 2000).
33 Qushayrī, Aḥlisālah Qushayriyya.
34 Sirāj Tūsī, Allum’a Fi Tarīkhī Tasawwufil Islāmi (Beirut: Dārul Kutub Ilimiyyah, 2007).
Sufism being a delayed science, majority of its esoteric terms are interpretations of Hadith, a primary source.

Due to the formation of diverse literature in fields such as Hadith, Fiqh (Jurisprudence), and Aqidah (creed), books were also written regarding Sufism such as Adabun Naqsh and Risalah Mustarsidin by Muhaisabi. Moreover, groups were given titles such as Muhadithun, Ubaid, Mutakallimin, and Fuqahah. Therefore, it seems plausible that the term Sufism was specified for the worshippers. Moreover, Islamic sciences such as Hadith and Fiqh became legal leading to a binary state of affairs between legal and spiritual sciences. Tracing the etymology of Sufism to the time of the Prophet does not seem tenable as all the companions had an intimate spiritual state with God which is also evident from the companions who were not part of the people of Suffa. The angels descending to listen to Usayd bin Hudhayr’s recitation is one of many examples. Hence, such spiritual phenomena were not exclusive for the people of Suffa. Moreover, nor were the Sufis the only group who wore coarse woollen clothing. The orientalist Nicholson opines that most Sufis conceive the term is derived from Safa indicating internal purity. Beyruni (d. 440/1048) in his opines that the term Sufism has no connotation with Islam. Rather, it is derived from Greek Sufia (with the letter Sin in Arabic) meaning wisdom. When non-Muslims would observe their similarities with their Muslim counterparts, they would name them Sufis. However, Nicholson traces the etymology of Sufism further back claiming that the concept predates Islam despite the principles not contradicting Islam. He further posits that elements of mysticism can be seen in Christianity and Neoplatonism (a student of Plato known as Plotinus). In summary, the etymology of Sufism is debatable as it is difficult to pinpoint the actual origin of the word meaning the absence of a definite answer.

Despite polarised opinions, the Sufi’s purpose was to draw closer to God at a time when the sacred sciences were legalised. This by no means accentuate that the Muhadithun or the Fuqahah had no interest in attaining this. Rather, the Sufis spent most of their time in developing themselves whilst the others were more engaged in preserving the sacred sciences. Moreover, the Muhadithun and Fuqahah themselves were concerned about attaining a divine proximity with God. Scholars such as: Masriq (d. 63/682), Tawus (d. 106/723), Layth bin Abi Sulaym (d. 143/760), Qatadah (d. 116/735), Imam Ahmad (d. 240/855) and his students were known for their dedication in performing the nocturnal prayer. Likewise, they were also concerned about spiritual maladies and would take measures in remediying them. Furthermore, Dhabah (d. 748/1348) postulates that certain people did not have the time to learn intricate sacred sciences as they were preoccupied in worship. Nevertheless, The Sufis conceived that a Sulik can develop in this field and achieve the state of Ihsan. Hence, the Sufi model epitomises the perfect Islamic model for human development.

35 Buhari, Sahih Buhari.
36 Qushayri, AlRisalah Qushayriyya.
38 Abu Rayhan Bayruni, Tahqiqu Ma LiHindi Min Maqalatin Muqalatin Fil Aqli Aw Marhabilatin (Beirut: Alamul Kutub, 1983).
Muhāsibī’s work on psychospiritual development

Muhāsibī’s book Risālatul Mustarshidīn was one of the most influential books written on Sūfiṣm. Muhāsibī was born in the Abbāsid period. Despite the academic success the epoch had experienced through the establishment of the Baytul Hikmah in Baghdad, the M’utazilah, Qadriyyah and other groups had a stronghold. The leader M’amūn’s (d. 218/833) sympathising with the M’utazilah did not help the cause of the Ablus Sunnah Waliyāmah. Muhāsibī’s father was a Qadari (rejected the notion of predestination and posited that man possessed unconditional free will). Rifts with his father were evident and popular. He was in debt when his father passed away but decided against taking his inheritance money (out of caution) due to his father’s contentious beliefs. He composed up to two hundred books in the fields of Sūfiṣm and refutation of the devious sects. He had an influence on the likes of the famous saint Junayd (d. 297/910) and scholar Ghazzālī (d. 504/1111).

According to Kawtharī (d. 1371/1952), as expounded by Abū Ghuddah, Ghazzālī had remarkably benefitted from Muhāsibī’s Ri’āyah and made it the basis of his work Iḥyā. As the Muhaddithūn began to develop their field, they took a stringent stance, perhaps rightly so, in preserving their literature. People at this sensitive time would fabricate narrations for political gains and other incentives such as rewards from kings. Furthermore, the Sūfīs were known to have a lenient disposition towards Hadīth. They would conceive fabricated narrations to bring people closer to God as praiseworthy or would generally naïvely grade all narrations synonymously. Muhāsibī was not exempt from this critique as he has recorded fabricated narrations in his book. The likes of Abū Zur’ah Rāzī (d. 264/878) and Imam Ahmad had criticised his works with the former advising his acquaintances not to read his Ri’āyah.

However, the tension present was for external reasons such as Muhāsibī’s delving into Ilm Kalām and not his preaching Sūfiṣm as postulated by Abū Ghuddah quoting Khatīb (d. 463/1070), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), Subkī (d. 771/1370), Ibn Rajab and Ibn Kathīr. Muhāsibī commences his book by praising God the eternal and incontingent which is the core belief of Sūfiṣm as Junayd stated, ‘separating the incontingent from the contingent’. The people of reason are then defined as stated in the Qurān with adherence to the Quran and sunnah also greatly emphasised.

The reason for this could be to expel the notion that the Sūfīs were infamous for carrying out innovation in religion by postulating that, if anything, they were the most ardent followers of the Qurān and Sunnah. Strict adherence and rigorous contemplation of the Qurān can stimulate self-development taking a person out from darkness to light and from doubt to conviction. Again, this may be to demonstrate that the Sūfīs religiously held firmly onto the Qurān. Intention and God consciousness is then discussed which indicates that a person should always take his self into account meaning it has potential for development if catered for. Attention is then shifted towards the positive and negative traits of the human psyche also known as the diseases of the heart. Traits such as: patience in adversity, gratitude

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41 Muhāsibī, Risālatul Mustarshidīn.
42 Tājuddīn Subkī, Tabaqāt Shafiyyatul Kubrā, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Hajar Litabā’ati Wannashri Wattawzī, 1992).
43 Muhāsibī, Risālatul Mustarshidīn.
44 Muhāsibī.
45 Qushayrī, AlRisālah Qubayrīyya.
in ease, hope in God’s mercy, self-reformation, contentment with God’s decree and good company. Therapies and remedies are then further posited to ensure that a person attains a pure state of heart. Some remarkably relate to contemporary psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy meaning that a person can challenge his cognitive deficiencies through a change of mindset and perception. The significance of knowledge is then discussed to elucidate how it empowers God consciousness and embodiment. Muhāsibī then provides a practical example of how saints should be and encourages readers to endeavour to embody those traits.

The causation behind spiritual maladies is pinpointed towards excessiveness and heedlessness with the cure lying in refraining from permissible acts that contain doubtful elements and performing acts that are unequivocally permissible. The corruption of the heart that is caused by lack of accountability of the self is synonymous to corruption of the patient’s religion. Therefore, the key concept to human and faith development evolves around self-reflection. This is akin to contemporary psychological methods such as cognitive behavioural therapy in which patients are encouraged to alter perceptions to develop their attitude. Keeping God’s blessings in mind will help a person to think positively and draw closer to God resulting in faith development as it facilitates meaning in life. Thereafter, after postulating that the heart is susceptible to change, safeguarding the tongue and limbs are emphasised which is then later followed by the limb’s due rights upon the person. Muhāsibī then reiterates various points which seems to be the theme throughout his book to alert the reader to inculcate the advices into his daily life as repetition of a message can empower its significance. Moreover, repetitive themes throughout a book facilitate the reader’s comprehension of the content. Another reason may be to relay the message into the sceptic’s minds reiterating the repeated content are the core principles of Sūfism.

Muhāsibī’s work was unique at the time in the sense that books of these genres were met with apathy and antipathy. Sūfism being an esoteric science did not help. Despite these challenges, Muhāsibī outlined the principles of Sūfism and clarified the Sufi’s stance to quash any scepticism surrounding them. It could be construed that the Sufi’s, due to their engagement, were not interested in other fields and prefer their own anecdotes and advices over the primary sources of the religion. Nevertheless, this book aids a person to infer that all the principles are based upon the primary sources which are given categorical priority. Another positive point of this book was the use of language and eloquence; words are carefully chosen to convey specific points. An example is that he refers to the pious as a ‘safe treasure’ Insinuating that their company is good in its entirety. Contrastingly, the word buried treasure would indicate an element of harm and trials as people tend to shed one another’s blood. Therefore, the choice of words and style of writing is impeccable. However, a drawback of this work is the usage of fabricated Hadīth. An example is that Jesus walked on water and if he possessed a firmer conviction in God; he would have been able to walk through air. However, it is remarkable that the model for human development is different to other Sūfis who base theirs on the types of Nafs. This may be due to Muhāsibī’s centrality in his model being Muhāsabah. A person in constant self-reflection exhibits positive traits whereas failure in self-reflection results in unwanted implications.
Contrast between Muhāsibī and other psychospiritual developmental models

The nuance between Muhāsibī and the classical scholars is marginal. The Qur'an has devised a developmental framework and dichotomised the Nafs into three types according to the Quran, namely: Nafs Mutmainnah (achieved human development), Nafs Lawwāmah (neutral) and Nafs Ammārah (need for development). Nafs Lawwāmah will be the middle ground. The Nafs then has the potential to rise to Mutmainnah if catered for; otherwise it could easily become Ammārah. The Nafs, despite its undoubtable and astounding potential, is easily inclined and susceptible towards evil and negativity. This is perhaps interpreted by Muhāsibī as Muhāsabah as its failure will lead to evil. Therefore, the catering for the Nafs at default is mandatory. The Prophet used to supplicate seeking refuge from the evil of his Nafs meaning that the Nafs is easily inclined towards evil if self-reflection is not practised. Moreover, this supplication insinuates that the Prophet was all aware of the Nafs and therefore consistently scrutinised it. Therefore, Muhāsibī’s model would seamlessly concur with the Hadith. These classical works suggest a model of human development in the following way:

Figure: 1. Human development

Source: a summary of Risālatul Mustarshidīn

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46 Muhāsibī, Risālatul Mustarshidīn.
Based on the above, the Quranic model and Muhāsibī’s contain the same developmental framework with a nuance of semantics.

**Discussion regarding Nafs and Rūḥ (key Islamic concepts of human selfhood)**

Prior to discussing Nafs, the scholars differed between the terms Nafs and Rūḥ whether used intertwiningly or differently.

Firstly Rūḥ (spirit) has different meanings in the Quran. The word has been used to describe Jibrīl, Īsā, revelation and strength. Likewise, the term has been interpreted as: life, the beginning of life due to which the body dies when the Rūḥ leaves the body, movement, a substance that enters the body like fire that is formed from coal, a luminous, delicate substance which remains in the body whilst it still has life but leaves once the body dies as the Rūḥ does not die meaning that a person’s death indicates that the Rūḥ has left the body and not died.

Ibn Qayyim (d. 750/1350) opines that Nafs and Rūḥ can be used intertwiningly as used in the Qurān and further postulates that this is the view of the majority. His argument can be corroborated as the narrations have used the terms intertwiningly. For example, the Hadīth of the Prophet and his companions waking up after sunrise, the Prophet used the word Rūḥ to which Bilāl replied using the term Nafs. The Hadīth of Musnad Ahmad is more explicit in which the angel of death uses the term Nafs whereas the rest of the angels use the term Rūḥ later in the Hadīth. Therefore, Nafs and Rūḥ will share the same meaning according to above narrations. Ibn Qayyim is of the opinion that their entities are one but possess distinct attributes.

The second opinion is that the Nafs and Rūḥ are different entities. Muqātil bin Sulaymān (d. 150/767) mentions that the Nafs leaves the body during sleep whilst the Rūḥ remains. The Nafs sees the dream and the Rūḥ is the reason for the person moving and breathing in his sleep. Upon waking, the Nafs returns. Ibn Qayyim summarises eleven opinions, such as the Nafs calls towards evil and the Rūḥ calls towards good, regarding how the two entities differ and then posits that the Rūḥ that God extracts is Nafs and the Rūḥ that God inspires his servants with is a complete different entity. Moreover, the relationship of this Rūḥ to the Rūḥ in the body is the same relationship that the Rūḥ in the body has to the physical body. If the Rūḥ leaves the body, the body is no longer alive. Simply put, the Rūḥ in the body is good as dead if void of the Rūḥ of inspiration which highlights the need for focused worship.

The scholars have also differed on whether there is one Nafs present in the body or three. The majority opine that only one is present whereas the others believe that three are. Ibn Qayyim reconciles between both opinions postulating that one is present but possesses three different attributes.

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50 Muhammad Ibnul Qayyim, *Ighāthatul Labfān Fi Masāid Shaytān* (Makkah: Dār Ālamil Fawāid, 2010).
51 Ibnul Qayyim, *Kitābul Rūḥ*.
52 Ibnul Qayyim.
53 Ibnul Qayyim.
Risālah of Abul Qāsim AlQushayrī and its model of human psychospiritual development

Another famous Sāfī scholar was Abul Qāsim AlQushayrī who specialised in Tafsīr, Fiqh and Sūfism. Born in Khurāsān into a family that had migrated from Arabia, Qushayrī learnt the Arabic language, mastered archery and became an erudite scholar studying Hadīth and Shāfī Fiqh under the scholars of his time.54 Ibn Khalaqān mentions Qushayrī’s success in Hadīth, Fiqh, Tafsīr, poetry and Arabic literature who also spent some of his time with Abū Muhammad AlJawānī, Ghazzālī’s teacher.55 He also authored a book on Tafsīr called Lataiful Ishārāt written with a Sūfī rhetoric. His main work is his Risālah in which he laments the state of the Sūfīs prevalent in his time as true Sūfīs were seldom. Some capitalised on being labelled Sūfī and used their reputation for worldly gains and were apathetic in their mystical connection with God.56 Qushayrī felt the need to compose his Risālah rejecting this recent trend of the Sūfīs and elucidating that their methodology was in complete contrast to their predecessors. To substantiate this, Qushayrī first mentioned the Sūfī creed insinuating they had no dubious beliefs as sceptics had perceived.57 The theology posited by Qushayrī was in line with the Ash‘arī school of thought.58 After expounding on Sūfī creed, Qushayrī mentions Sūfī’s biographies and anecdotes. This may be to explain the nature of true Sūfīs who completely contrasted the pseudo-Sūfīs of his time. This method was similar to Sulāmī’s (d. 412/1021) Tabaqātus Sūfiyā. 59 Thereafter, he mentions esoteric terms and mystic states that the Sūfīs experience underpinning them by the master’s statements and presenting Hadīth when possible. Thus, it can be argued that the biographies of the saints are akin to the Sanad (chain) and the esoteric states are akin to the Matn (text).60 Qushayrī ends his book with a treatise on the etiquettes of a disciple with his mentor and personal affairs.

Muhāsibī had passed away in 857AD, over a century before Qushayrī was even born (376AH). Qushayrī had composed his Risālah in 437AH. Therefore, between both works is a gap of two hundred years. Qushayrī considered Muhāsibī amongst the great Sūfīs and even mentioned his name and biography in his Risālah. The similarities they shared was in positing that the principles of Sūfism are in absolute congruence with the Qur’an and Sunnah in response to the false notion and antipathy spread regarding the science. They also shared certain principles such as Shukr, Tawbah, Muraqabah, Khawātir etc. Some two hundred years later, Sūfism evolved as can be observed by Qushayrī’s Risālah. New esoteric terms such as Wajd, Dhawq, Futuwwah had found its way in. Qushayrī faced an additional challenge to the above mentioned which was to reinforce the principles as those who were labelled Sūfī in his time had tarnished their reputation and undermined the whole science. Qushayrī had gone out to set the record straight. Sūfism by his time had almost become a school. Disciples had mentors, who were known as Shuykh Tarbiyyah, who would

54 Dhaḥābī, Siyar Alām Nubalā.
55 Dhaḥābī.
56 Qushayrī, AlRisālah Qushayriyya.
57 Qushayrī.
59 Qushayrī.
overlook their affairs and facilitate human development. There is no explicit mention of this in Muhāsibī’s work as he seemed more inclined towards reflection and reformation through the Qur’an, peers and Shaykh Ta’lim in general rather than a Shaykh Tarbiyyah. However, it could be argued that peers were less focused in reforming one another entailing the urging need for a Shaykh Tarbiyyah.

CONCLUSION

The above findings illustrate that reflection and self-accountability are effective strategies to achieve spiritual transformation, a major objective of Islamic education. Such methods do not necessitate a formal approach to rectification. Teachers can serve as mentors to ensure student experience a positive transformation in the form of Nafs Mutmainnah. The findings also stress upon the philosophy of worship alongside its various rulings and methods such as the realisation that one is praying in front of God and prostrating to his Creator can be limiting. The philosophy is what gives rituals its meaning. The purpose of Sufism is to recognise God and inculcate good habits. Once students understand that God is an incontingent, all powerful, all knowing, transcendent being whose attributes are unlimited and beyond our comprehension; they will appreciate and revere God resulting betterment of their personal development. Furthermore, contemporary studies highlight the need to adopt this method in the adolescent years is as this stage is crucial for identity formation even in an Islamic dimension. Students begin to examine how they are perceived in society and who they are. Marcia further expands on Erikson’s research determining to what degree identity has been introspected. Holding brief sessions of self-accountability in which students are encouraged to sit and ponder upon themselves and how they can further improve would also develop the human-self according to Muhāsibī’s, and by extension Abū Ghuddah’s ideology of self-reflection. Formulating journals for students to write and then discuss with a mentor could also be a feasible method for self-reflection. For instance, gratitude journals are known to help in transformation. These methods have been postulated as they can be applied universally. It is the purpose of this paper to remain objective and not ascribe to any thoughts of Sufism.

In summary, there is a great need of developing methods and embedding practices in Islamic education to facilitate the complete education of the student based on the classical Muslim scholarly perception of human development. Methods such as self-reflection, student centred study of spirituality and theological discussions with a degree of autonomy on behalf of the student can facilitate human development Islamically.

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REFERENCES


