

Al-Shāfi‘ī and *Taṣawwuf*

by GF Haddad – Qasyoun@ziplip.com – Shawwāl 1423

Imām al-Shāfi‘ī recommended *taṣawwuf* on condition that knowledge accompany it. He declared in his *Dīwān*:

*Faqīhan wa-ṣufiyyan fakun laysa wāhidan
fa’innī wa-ḥaqqillāhi iyyāka anṣahu
Fadhālika qāsin lam yadhuq qalbuḥu tuqan
wahādhā jahūlun kayfa dhūl-jahli yaṣluḥu*

*Be both a jurisperdent and a ṣūfī – never just one of the two.
Truly, by the Divine Right, I am advising you sincerely!
For the former is hardened, his heart tastes no Godwariness,
While the latter is ignorant – of what use is the ignorant?*¹

This is similar to Imām Sufyān al-Thawrī’s statement that “Among the best of people is the Ṣūfī learned in jurisprudence.”²

Among al-Shāfi‘ī’s sayings on Sufism and Ṣūfīs:

- “I accompanied the Ṣūfīs for ten years and benefited from them but from two words: their statement that time is a sword: if you do not cut it, it cuts you, and their statement that deprivation is immunity.”³ Some versions have “three words” and add “their statement that if you do not keep your ego busy with truth it will keep you busy with falsehood.”
- “If a rational man does not become a Ṣūfī he does not reach noon except he is a dolt!”⁴ Abū Nu‘aym narrates this from Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Faḍl, from Abū al-Ḥasan [Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith] ibn al-Qattāt [al-Miṣrī], from the *thiqa* Muḥammad ibn Abī Yahyā, from the *thiqa* Imām Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā, from the Imām.
- A contrary version of the latter saying reads: “A rational man does not become a Ṣūfī except he reaches noon a dolt!”⁵ Al-Bayhaqī narrates this from al-Ḥākim, from Abū Muḥammad Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith, from al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Daḥḥāk (Ibn Bahr), both of unknown reliability. For obvious reasons, this is the preferred version of the detractors of Sufis.

Imām al-Nawawī in his *Bustān al-‘Arifīn fīl-Zuhd wal-Taṣawwuf* (“The Garden of the Knowers in Asceticism and *Taṣawwuf*”) narrated with his chain from al-Shāfi‘ī the saying: “Only the sincere one (*al-mukhlis*) can recognize self-display (*al-riyā’*).” Al-Nawawī comments: “This means that it is impossible to know the reality of self-display and see its hidden shades except for one who resolutely seeks (*arāda*) sincerity. Such a one strives for a long time, searching, meditating, examining at length within himself until he knows, or knows something of what self-display is. This does not happen for everyone. Indeed, this happens only with special ones (*al-khawāṣṣ*). But for a given individual to claim that he knows what self-display is, this is real ignorance on his part.”⁶

In Makka al-Shāfi‘ī was the student of al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyād. It is said that he also took *taṣawwuf* from the ascetic shepherd Shaybān al-Rā‘ī. Little is known of the latter and there is no report of the two having ever met but there is a narration that Shaybān went on pilgrimage on foot with Sufyān al-Thawrī who witnessed him tame a lion and tweak its ear⁷ – Allāh have mercy on them and be well-pleased with them!

¹Al-Shāfi‘ī, *Dīwān* (p. 177 #45).

²Narrated by al-Harawī al-Anṣārī in his *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*.

³Narrated from Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī by al-Bayhaqī in *Manāqib al-Shāfi‘ī* (2:208) cf. Ibn al-Qayyim in *Madārij al-Sālikīn* (3:128) and *al-Jawāb al-Kāfi* (p. 208-209) and al-Suyūṭī in *Ta’yīd al-Ḥaqīqat al-‘Alīyya* (p. 15).

⁴Narrated from Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā by Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya* (1985 ed. 9:142).

⁵Narrated by al-Bayhaqī, *Manāqib* (2:207) cf. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* (1:25) and *Talbīs Iblīs* (1985 ed. p. 447) and Ibn Taymiyya in his *Istiḳāma* (p. 414).

⁶Al-Nawawī, *Bustān al-‘Arifīn* (p. 53-54).

⁷In Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya* (1985 ed. 7:68-69) and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* (7:203-203=al-Arna’ūt ed. 7:268). Another rare narration reports other of his miraculous gifts (*karāmāt*) in Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya* (1985 ed. 8:317 #434=1997 ed. 8:354 #425).