

# The Spiritual Practices of Sufism

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Knowledge of God is the object of human life for which one should know the nature of the soul and the world. Sufis believe that true knowledge of God can be attained only through intuition. The heart of a man is like a mirror in which one can have a vision of God. One has to cleanse it completely worldly desires 'Nafs' come in the way. One has to and Adopt a two-fold practice as a remedy. One should develop detachment from the world and love of God through meditation (muraqaba) and self-examination (mahasaba). The spiritual practice is called Safr-a-journey to God. The stages or stations on the way (muqamat) and the spiritual moods or states (Hal) of the devotee (salik) are described in detail.

## HAL, KAIFIYAT AND MAQAAM:

Islam contains a threefold structure consisting of Sharia, the outer law; Tareeqa the inward path; and Haqeeqa, the arrival at the reality of Allah. The different stages of the Sufi path are called hal, state, and maqaam, station.

**Kaifiyat** is an emotional state that can be experienced by ordinary people. We often see people getting emotional and tearful while listening to a heartfelt spiritual discourse or the recitation of Divine scriptures. And when they listen to the revelation received by the Apostle, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! We believe, write us down among the witnesses,"

'**Hal**' can be described as a series of enlightened mystic moments. Sufis believe that hal is not self-induced but is caused by tajalli, Divine graces that flow from the heavens. In Sufi imagery this flow of blessings is called sharaab e marifa, the wine of gnosis, and sharaab e mohabba, the wine of love. Most mystics remain sober despite intoxication from this wine, whereas some are unable to contain the drink. Mansur Hallaj and Bayazid of Bistam are among the most famous drunken Sufi who revealed God's mysteries, those that were meant to be veiled.

Sufis of some orders use music to induce hal, a state of spiritual ecstasy. Hal is kaifiyat in a prolonged state and maqaam in its permanent state. **Maqaam** is something that descends from God into a man's heart, without his being able to repel it when it come, or to attract it when it goes, by his won effort. On perfect mystic states, Rumi writes:

The hal is like the unveiling of the beautiful bride

While the maqaam is the king's being alone with the bride.

The number of Maqaams and Hals differ widely. **Abu Nasr az Sonaj** gives seven stations (**Maqaams**) and ten states (**Hal**). **Frid jud Din Attar** Distinguishes seven valleys-**Quest, Home, Knowledge, Detachment, Unity, Amazement and Annihilation**. Umarbin and Mohammad Shahabuddin Suhrawardi mentions ten station and seven states. But al Qushairi enumerates forty five stations and states without making any distinction between them.

The two- fold practice of detachment from worldliness and attachment to God starts simultaneously. Through self-examination and meditation one should repulse the lower human nature and develop attachment to Truth. These methods should be practiced just to win the pleasure of God. Some of the steps and states in the practice are as follows:

1. **Muraqaba-Meditation:** Worshipping of God as if thou seest Him; for if thou seest Him not, yet He sees thee.
2. **Muhasaba-self Examination:** To take account of one's own actions at every step and examine them carefully and impose punishment on him self for the guilt lest it should occur again.
3. **Fiq –Reasoning:** It gives knowledge of the self on one hand and on the other it given rise to various states of the Self.
4. **Akhlas–Sincerity:** Purifying one's heart and concentrating on attaining communion with God. He should be single minded
5. **Sidq–Truthfulness:** Sincerity culminates in truthfulness in word, intention, deed and attitude towards God.
6. **Khauf – Fear:** Fear of committing evil and separation from God.
7. **Raja -Hope:** He hopes for Lord's mercy and reward.  
Love of God is basis of all states.

The Sufi path consists of different spiritual stations. These stages or station are travelled through **mujahida**, self mortification as follows:

1. **Tawba–Repentance** is the first station in the Sufi path signifying an awakening of the soul. It is the basis of all stations. It involves turning away from sin with the intention of remaining steadfast on the right path. Compassion

and mercy are among the foremost attributes of Allah who accepts forgiveness from those who truly seek it. The Sufis believe that loving Allah effectively cleanses one's sins. Bayazid of Bistam said, 'Love those beloved of Allah and make yourself lovable to them so that they love you, because Allah looks into the heart of those he loves 70 times a day. Perhaps he will find your name in the heart of the one He loves. He will love you too and forgive your wrong doings. This is the shortest way to reach Him'. When love appears God also loves the seeker.

2. **Zuhd** – Piety involves renouncing worldly pursuits and being extremely cautious with one's actions. A person practicing abstinence of a high degree is known as Zahid. Prophet Muhammad called this inward battle *jihad e akbar*, the highest struggle. The lower instinct is recognized as **nafs al ammara bis su**, in the Quran. The struggle against the nafs has dominated Sufi philosophy through the centuries. The nafs has often been compared to a snake that can be turned into a useful rod, similar to the rod of Moses, which became a serpent that destroyed other dangerous serpents.
3. **Tawakkul** – **Trust in God**, Sufis inculcate **tawakkul** to reach the mystic goal, not relying on anything or anyone except Him. Sahl Tustari writes, 'One who is concerned about his sustenance after the guarantee has been given to him by Allah, has no value for Allah.' Prophet Abraham exemplified complete trust in God by refusing the help of Archangel Gabriel when Nimrod cast him in the blazing fire. His trust in Allah was rewarded and the inferno turned into a rose garden.
4. **Faqr** – **Poverty**, forms another vital pillar of the Sufi doctrine. Poverty was exalted for prophet Muhammad declared, 'Poverty is my pride.' Uthman Hujwiri, the eleventh century author of the Sufi manual *Kashf al Mahjub* wrote, 'Know that poverty has a high rank in the way of the Truth and the poor are held in great esteem by God.' He explained that Sufism was metaphorical poverty where the mystic is free from bonds of acquisition. However, the idea does not mean that Sufis should not earn their living. On the contrary, Sufi aspirants are encouraged to pursue livelihoods until they reach a definite state of trust with God and are clearly ordered to withdraw from worldly work.
5. **Dhikr** (pronounced *Zikr* in the subcontinent), **the remembrance of God**, is central to the Sufi discipline. It is a process where all the faculties of the body including the inner most conscience are involved. Prophet Muhammad described **Salat**, prayer as a way of communicating with God. Apart from the five mandatory prayers mystics attach immense value to additional voluntary prayers, especially **tahajjud**, the night vigil. Group sessions of dhikr are called **halqa**, the silent dhikr is called **dhikr e khafi**, and a vocalized rhythmic chant is **dhikr e jahri**. These methods usually consist of repetitions of one or all the 99 names of Allah, or of a phrase dedicated to His glory.
6. **Sabr** – **Patience**, is another milestone on the Sufi path. The Quran repeatedly informs us that Allah is with those who remain patient during tribulations. The tale of Prophet Job swallowed by the whale that of Prophet Joseph being reunited with his father after years illustrate ideals of patience. Rumi enlightens us:

Patience O Father, is an iron shield  
On which God has written 'victory has come'.

7. **Shukr, gratitude**, is a station achieved by God's grace. The enlightened Sufis remain grateful to Allah through the worst afflictions. They thank God for everything that happens to them believing that whatever He grants it is good for them. Bayazid of Bistam told followers, 'If you have a friend whose relationship with you is at its worst, the relationship will improve if you act according to the right code of behavior. If something is given to you, be thankful to Allah, because He alone turns hearts in your favour. If you suffer calamity, take refuge in repentance and patience, because your being will gather strength.'
8. **Rida** – **contentment**, like shukr is loving acceptance of God's will. The Egyptian Master Dhun Nun defines rida thus: 'It is the joy of the heart in the bitterness of the Divine decree.' The seeker accepts all conditions with satisfaction.
9. **Mohabba** – **love**, is the highest station reached by a Sufi when the heart has been emptied of all else but love of Allah. No longer troubled by fear of hell or tempted at the thought of heaven, the heart loves Allah for the sake of love.

Sufis have interpreted Divine love according to varying personal experiences termed:

- **Qurb, (Qurk) proximity** is a state of nearness.
- **Shauq** – **longing** When beauty is revealed a fond yearning 'Shauq' to reach Him develops.
- **Uns** – **intimacy** Then a state of intimacy between the lover and the Beloved follows which is called 'Uns'.
- **Wasil Billah** – The one becomes *wasil Billah* "one who is in communion with God"
- **Fana** – 'Fana' is Annihilation of self in God.

- **Baqa** – Subsistence with God is Baqa’

In ‘Zahire Fana’ i.e. Outer Fana god appears in all his (seeker’s) actions. In ‘Batini Fana’ i.e. Inner Fana the seeker is overwhelmed by the presence of God. Ultimately he becomes a Baqi when the lover is one with God without any Veil between the two.

Junayad of Baghdad explains, ‘Love is the annihilation of the lover in his attributes and the confirmation of the Beloved in His essence.’ Rumi writes, This love is flame that burns everything except the beloved.’

10. **Marifa – divine knowledge**, the final Sufi station, signifies the complete annihilation of the conscious self where the lover ceases to exist and merges with Allah’s Light. The word marifa is derived from the Arabic word arif, one who attains knowledge. Rumi explains the mystic state:

Like the fame of the candle in front of the sun

he is non-existent, though he is existent in formal form.

Sufis believe that death liberates the body enabling the union of the soul with God. The **Urs**, death anniversaries of Sufis are important spiritual and festive occasions. Devotees offer prayers at the tombs of honoured Sufis with the belief that they have the ranks to intercede with God.

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