

Shāh Walī Allāh in Defence of Ibn Taymiyyah: A Translation and Reading of *Risālah fī Manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah wa 'l-Difā' 'anhu*

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Abstract

*Until now, only a short excerpt from the eighteenth-century South Asian reformist Shāh Walī Allāh's (d. 1176/1762) treatise in defence of the medieval Syrian theologian Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) has been published in English. In addition to providing a full translation of *Risālah fī Manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah wa 'l-Difā' 'anhu* (Epistle on the Virtues of Ibn Taymiyyah and in His Defence), this article argues that Shāh Walī Allāh's due attention for Ibn Taymiyyah is principally a defence of his own work for the larger Walī Allāhī project, heavily inspired by the latter, and an effort to reconcile thinkers as disparate as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), with the mainstream of Sunni Ash'arī thought. Far from being a reproduction of one or the other in South Asia during the eighteenth century, however, it seems to the writers that Shāh Walī Allāh proves himself to be an independent figure with his own unique philosophy for reformation whose broader vision accommodates polemics among Muslim thinkers from across the spectrum in issues of creed, Qur'ānic hermeneutics, ḥadīth sciences, theology, law, and spirituality.*

Keywords

Shāh Walī Allāh, Ibn Taymiyyah, late-Mughal India, translation, Sunni-Shī'ah polemics.

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Introduction

Sometime likely following his return to Delhi from studies under eminent scholars in the Ḥijāz, Shāh Walī Allāh, the renowned reformist Indian Islamic scholar of the eighteenth century, received a letter from his student, a Sindhi Ḥanafī scholar, asking for his opinion on the controversial fourteenth-century Syrian scholar Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah.¹ The treatise he penned in response to Makhdūm² Muḥammad Muʿīn Sindhī (d. 1161/1748)—a traditional Sufi thinker of the Naqshbandī order with an inclination for ecstatic musical gatherings³—the *Risālah fī Manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah* has yet to receive any direct, focused treatment in an academic study. Jonathan Brown mentions the treatise in a description of Shāh Walī Allāh’s praise for Ibn Taymiyyah’s work,⁴ and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami translated a section from it in an article on Ibn Taymiyyah’s influence in South Asia.⁵ Nonetheless, the work, though brief, covers numerous issues of law, creed, and spirituality shedding important light on Shāh Walī Allāh’s views on a thinker who deeply influenced the entire breadth of his scholarship.

Shāh Walī Allāh was first introduced to Ibn Taymiyyah by his most important teacher, Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdī (d. 1145/1733),⁶ cited in the *Risālah*,

¹ Ibn Taymiyyah was a figure who aroused considerable controversy in his own time and in the following centuries up to the present day, for his unique views on theology, law, the philosophy of language, and practically every field in which he wrote. See Caterina Bori, “Ibn Taymiyya wa-Jamāʿatuhu: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya’s Circle,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34ff.

² *Makhdūm* (literally meaning “master”) was an honorific title historically employed for scholars, especially those of Arabian and Yemeni backgrounds, in India and Southeast Asia. See Sebastian R. Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 110.

³ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, *al-Iʿlām bi Man fī Taʾrīkh al-Hind min al-Aʿlām al-musammā bi Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir wa Bahjat al-Masāmiʿ wa ʿl-Nawāzīr*, 8 vols (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1999), 6:837.

⁴ Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet’s Legacy* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 78.

⁵ Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “The Impact of Ibn Taymiyya on South Asia,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 136-37.

⁶ Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kurdī al-Madanī was a teacher of Shāh Walī Allāh during his time in the Ḥijāz. He states about him in his book *Insān al-ʿAyn*, “I attended his circle of lessons for some time while he was teaching al-Bukhārī. I read the beginning and ends of the six works of *ḥadīth*, the *Muwattaʿa* of Mālik, *Musnad al-Dārimī*, and *Kitāb al-Āthār* of Muḥammad [b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī]. I took permission from him (to relate) all the works.” Named by some as Shāh Walī Allāh’s most important teacher, Abū Ṭāhir shared many of his student’s intellectual preoccupations and held similar hopes to

during his studies in the Ḥijāz.⁷ As is apparent in this treatise and elsewhere among his works, Shāh Walī Allāh is full of praise for the thought and character of Ibn Taymiyyah. His work is in many ways a continuation of the latter's intellectual project, such that Rizvī writes that "Shāh Walī Allāh's contributions to the history of Islām mark him . . . as the successor of the great Sunni revivalist Ibn Taymiyyah."⁸ The work covers a range of debatable topics surrounding Ibn Taymiyyah: his account of the directionality of God, the visitation of graves, Sufi hagiology, and polemics against Shī'ī beliefs, the last of which proved of immediate relevance to his contemporary context.

This article will explain Shāh Walī Allāh's *Risālah* with regard to the author's political and religious context and in light of his larger intellectual project to validate *ijtihād* and legitimate juristic difference of opinion in the light of his theory of "*al-Jāddah al-Qawīmāh min al-Sharī'ah al-Muḥammadiyyah*,"⁹ followed by a translation of the original text in full.

Sectarian Concerns

Shāh Walī Allāh's *Risālah* and its defence of Ibn Taymiyyah's anti-Shī'ī polemic were highly pertinent to eighteenth-century Indian subcontinent Muslim society, which was riven with sectarian conflict. "The predominance of Iranian [Shī'ah] nobility in the days of [Shāh Walī Allāh] had given rise to a sort of intellectual anarchy among the Muslims," writes Mosleh Uddin, "[and shook] not only their creed and social behaviour but

synthesise the range of interpretations of the *ḥadīth* literature and the Sufi orders. He himself was initiated into the major Sufi orders of his time and passed these on to Shāh Walī Allāh as well. Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qannūjī, *Abjad al-'Ulūm*, 3 vols. (Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa 'l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1978), 3:169; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvī, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times: A Study of Eighteenth Century Islām, Politics and Society in India* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House, 1980), 215. Abū Ṭāhir also prefigured his student in his synthetic approach to Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Arabī, both of whom he held in high regard. Nizami, "The Impact of Ibn Taimiyya on South Asia," 136.

⁷ While Shāh Walī Allāh's studies in the Ḥijāz were significant for his development, it would be a mistake to characterize him as a "Ḥaramayn scholar," or anything but a scholar of the Indian Islamic tradition. The case for the Shāh's local education and concerns, along with a number of other great scholars of the eighteenth century, has been forcefully argued by Ahmad Dallal in his recent book. See Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam Without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 56–91.

⁸ Rizvī, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times*, 399.

⁹ For details on this, see Shāh Walī Allāh, *Tafhīmāt-i Ilāhiyyah*, ed. Ghulām Muṣṭafā al-Qāsīmī (Hyderabad, Sindh: Academy of Shah Wali Allah, 1970), 202–12.

also endangered the continuance of their authority over the country.”¹⁰ Sectarian violence was widespread and peaked year on year during the religiously-charged month of Muḥarram, amid Shīʿī mourning rituals and self-flagellation (*mātam*) for the tragedy of Karbalāʾ.¹¹ Hermansen writes that in the eighteenth century, “the issue of who should have been the successor of the Prophet was actively debated by representatives of each belief [Sunnism and Shiism]—Shāh Walī Allāh was very staunch in his defense of the Sunni position and his repudiation of Shīʿa views of the caliphal succession. His enterprise of the reconciliation of divergent positions among Muslims, therefore, did not include these Shīʿī elements.”¹² The pervasiveness of Shīʿī doctrines in his days was gravely concerning to the Shāh; in the introduction to *Izālat al-Khafāʾ* ‘*an khilāfat al-khulafāʾ*’, a work focused in large part on the debate over caliphal succession, he warned that

In this age, the reprehensible innovation of the Shīʿah has spread in a terrible fashion, and common people have been influenced and confused by the doubts raised by the Shīʿīs regarding the righteous Caliphs. The light of Allah’s assistance has confirmed the knowledge in my heart that proving the valid caliphate of the exalted Caliphs is necessary and is from the very principles of the faith.¹³

Shāh Walī Allāh’s treatise on Ibn Taymiyyah and discussion of his arguments against Shīʿī claims can thus be comfortably situated in the expansive sectarian polemical literature of South Asia, as a timely response to a pressing issue in the eighteenth-century Indian Muslim intellectual life.

The *Risālah* as Self-Defence

In addition to the contemporary sectarian context of eighteenth-century North India, the *Risālah* should also be situated within the Shāh’s own bibliography in which it becomes clear that his own credibility was intimately tied up with that of Ibn Taymiyyah. Contemporary Indian subcontinent Muslim intellectual culture was hostile to religious interpretations of a Taymiyyan cast. “The entire world of Islam,

¹⁰ Muhammad Mosleh Uddin, *Shah Waliullah’s Contribution to Hadith Literature: A Critical Study* (Aligarh: The Aligarh Muslim University, 2003), 101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Marcia K. Hermansen, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shāh Walī Allāh’s Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha* by Shāh Walī Allāh, trans. Marcia K. Hermansen (Leiden: Brill, 1996), xxix.

¹³ Shāh Walī Allāh, *Izālat al-Khafāʾ*, trans. Fayrūz Akhtar al-Nadwī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2013) 1:79.

particularly those countries which had succumbed to the intellectual and cultural influences of Iran had, for the past several hundred years, yielded virtually to a sort of mental serfdom to Greek philosophy,” writes the prominent twentieth-century Indian Muslim thinker, Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadwī (d. 1420/1999), “Shāh Walī Allāh’s own [inclination] . . . led him to recognize the greatness of Ibn Taymiyyah and defend him against his detractors. Ibn Taymiyyah had, in the immediate past, been severely censured, but Shāh Walī Allāh paid glowing tribute to him.”¹⁴

Al-Nadwī here alludes to the fact that many of Ibn Taymiyyah’s most famous views, such as his more literal understanding of the divine attributes or his uncompromising attitude towards the Shī’ah, were profoundly unpopular during the lifetime of Shāh Walī Allāh, partially owing to the political prominence of Shī’ī *navābs* in the late Mughal Empire.¹⁵ The Shāh attracted controversy by claiming *ijtihād* and going against the grain of contemporary scholarship on a number of issues in theology and jurisprudence, many of these were directly inspired by the positions of Ibn Taymiyyah. Thus, the eighteenth-century criticisms against Ibn Taymiyyah which spurred the writing of the *Risālah* were, in a more current sense, criticisms of Shāh Walī Allāh’s creed and unsurprisingly garnered a thorough response in this treatise.

The Larger Walī Allāhī Project

This being said, it becomes fairly obvious to the reader of this defence that Shāh Walī Allāh does not always arrive at the same conclusions as Ibn Taymiyyah on numerous issues. Far from being a reproduction of Ibn Taymiyyah’s project in South Asia during the eighteenth century, Shāh Walī Allāh proves himself to be an independent figure with his own unique philosophy for reformation.

Through the synthesis of demonstrative proof (*burhān*), the traditional study of the Islamic sciences (*manqūl*), with *ḥadīth* studies as a focus, and a grasp of the inner dimensions of thought (*wijdān*), the Shāh held that one could arrive at the truth and resolve the petty divisions that persisted among the scholars; divisions which broke out into broader sectarian conflict within his own late-Mughal Indian society.¹⁶

Yet, it is perhaps this very reconciliatory approach, which permeates through the writings of Shāh Walī Allāh beyond all else that leads him to

¹⁴ Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Saviours of Islamic Spirit*, 4 vols. (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1974), 4:116-17.

¹⁵ Mosleh Uddin, *Shah Waliullah’s Contribution to Hadith Literature*, 12-14.

¹⁶ Shāh Walī Allāh. *Tafhīmāt-i Ilāhiyyah*, 1:20-22, 30, 225-29, 260.

defend scholars and saints from various ends of the classical Sunni spectrum. The Shāh found himself living during an incredibly tumultuous period of history. Delhi was under constant attack by subcontinental rivals to the Mughals and faced a rebellion from the various factions inside the city.¹⁷ Although unmentioned in his writings, “Shāh Walī Allāh must have been aware of the oppressive policies of the Company, and of the economic collapse of Bengal and Bihar under British jurisdiction.”¹⁸ As Ahmed notes, however, the scholar’s focus, like that of many in his age, was on internal reform as a means to improve the worldly situation of Muslims.¹⁹ It would seem that the Shāh’s project was “reconciliation, not condemnation”—to silently bring together the different groups of Sunnis under one banner of mutual tolerance to preserve what remained of the visibly crumbling Mughal Empire.²⁰

The Shah would direct letters to the *vazīrs*, leaders and nobility, explicitly exhorting them to be mindful of these looming threats from non-Muslims in the region and advising them to be mindful of their own company, as well as those appointed to official posts in the government. He stresses in one of his points that “the judges [*quḍāh*] and treasurers [*muḥtasibūn*] should be sincere Sunnis. It should be widely known they [are] incorruptible.”²¹

From the very outset, one observes Shāh Walī Allāh’s reconciliatory approach in his great reverence for the mediaeval Andalusian Sufi author Ibn ‘Arabī, a personality that he struggled to adjust with mainstream Sunni orthodoxy. In his *Tafhīmāt*, he refers to Ibn ‘Arabī as the reformer of Islamic spirituality (*taṣawwuf*), far from a deviant and a heterodox personality.²² Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, or more precisely Indian works inspired by these, were widely read in South Asia across centuries, creating a religious milieu heavily influenced by Akbarian (i.e., Ibn ‘Arabī’s)

¹⁷ For an introduction to the Shāh’s views on the Mughal decline, see Vasileios Syros, “An Early Modern South Asian Thinker on the Rise and Decline of Empires: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, the Mughals, and the Byzantines,” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 4 (2012): 817ff.

¹⁸ Nazeer Ahmed, “Shah Waliullah of Delhi,” in *History of Islam: An Encyclopedia of Islamic History*, <https://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/shah-waliullah-of-delhi/>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ John O. Voll, *Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), 65.

²¹ Mosleh Uddin, “Shah Waliullah’s Contribution to Hadith Literature,” 8-9.

²² Shāh Walī Allāh, *Tafhīmāt-i Ilāhiyyah*, 1:77, 206.

thought.²³ Shāh Walī Allāh’s mention of Ibn ‘Arabī in connection with Ibn Taymiyyah would, for a contemporary Indian Muslim audience, have alluded to parallels in the two figures’ controversial reputations, or even perhaps Ibn ‘Arabī’s own expansive toleration of different theological viewpoints within Islam.²⁴

The Shāh also, despite writing in defence of Ibn Taymiyyah, explicitly mentions his own affiliation with the Ash‘arī school of thought—a constant point of attack for Ibn Taymiyyah—and shows reverence to and defends the founder of the school Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī. He takes matters a step further, however, and attempts to reconcile the positions of al-Ash‘arī with that of Ibn Ḥanbal and his creedal school.²⁵

One observes this reconciliatory approach in Shāh Walī Allāh’s discussions on metaphysics as well. He draws on differences between his own understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd* with that of Ibn ‘Arabī, seeking to reconcile some of his principles in the matter with that of Aḥmad al-

²³ William Chittick, “Notes on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Influence in the Subcontinent,” *The Muslim World* 82, nos. 3-4 (1992): 221.

²⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī was an eclectic figure whose categorization according to legal school and creed has been a point of contention among scholars for centuries. The Shī‘ī scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes that while Ibn ‘Arabī is typically represented as a Sunnī, “with Ibn ‘Arabī there are, in addition to these universal principles accepted by both Shī‘ah and Sunnī esotericists, doctrines of a specifically Shī‘ah character regarding the imamate and other related matters which make the question of his possible relations with Shī‘ism a difficult one to solve.” See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1964), 169. The placement of Ibn ‘Arabī within Sunnism has also been debated by Sunnī scholars. Ibn ‘Arabī himself explains that he does not align exactly with any of the four primary legal and creedal schools in a poem:

The Merciful forbade me to imitate Mālik [b. Anas], Aḥmad [b. Ḥanbal],

Al-Nu‘mān [Abū Ḥanīfah] and others, therefore pardon me.

I am not of those who say: “Ibn Ḥazm said” –

Certainly not! Nor “Aḥmad said” nor “al-Nu‘mān said.”

See ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Arnā‘ūt (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1989), 5:199.

²⁵ In his *Anfās al-‘Ārifīn*, the Shāh states seemingly reconciling the various approaches offered by the two schools in both law and theology, “After [in-depth] study and examination of the four schools, the books of Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and the *ḥadīth* narrations which are adhered to, the path of the jurists who specialize in *ḥadīth* (*al-fuqahā’ al-muḥaddithīn*) was established firmly by Allah’s guidance and resolve in [my] heart.” See Tāj al-Dīn al-Mannānī, *al-Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī wa Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah* (Thiruvananthapuram: Sulaiḥa Publications, 2011) 12.

Sirhindī's (d. 1034/1624) *waḥdat al-shuhūd*²⁶ in his work *Maktūb-i Madanī*.²⁷ He stresses that the nature of unity is that which pertains to the universal soul (*nafs kullīyyah*) from which the spirits (*arwāḥ*), blueprints (*amthāl*), and the material bodies (*ajsām*) emanate. The relationship of that universal soul with the essence of God (*al-dhāt*) is that of the original creator (*mubdi'*) and the created (*mubda'*). He emphasised the difference between the *lāhūt* (the essence of God) and the *nāsūt* (that of mankind).²⁸ Further interpretation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* in light of one another, following the spirit of the Shāh's work, was carried out by the grandson of Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh Ismā'īl Shahīd (d. 1246/1831) in his work *al-'Abaqāt*.²⁹

While the attribution of unity in its absolute sense to Ibn 'Arabī itself is debatable,³⁰ it is clear that the Shāh took the middle course, reflecting

²⁶ Aḥmad al-Sirhindī, popularly known by Shāh Walī Allāh's day as *al-Mujaddid*, was a prominent South Asian Muslim scholar and leader of the Naqshbandī Sufi order. He was well-known for the controversy over his theological term "*waḥdat al-shuhūd*" and its relation with the concept mainly associated with Ibn 'Arabī, *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Shāh Walī Allāh undoubtedly brings up his name in connection with Ibn 'Arabī and the subject of his treatise *Ibn Taymiyyah*, as another example of a brilliant though hotly-debated Muslim thinker. Shāh Walī Allāh himself attracted significant controversy for his own views on *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, claiming that it differs from *waḥdat al-wujūd* only terminologically and that this was in fact the position of Sirhindī himself. It may be that Shāh Walī Allāh's mention of Sirhindī as an eminent scholar beyond reproach despite his unorthodox positions was a subtle suggestion that he himself should be held in similar regard; this certainly would not be out-of-character for the famously self-aggrandizing Shāh Walī Allāh.

²⁷ According to Muhammad Taqi Usmani, essentially *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Oneness of Being) is the doctrine, most famously associated with Ibn 'Arabī, that all existence subsists in the divine essence, while al-Sirhindī's term *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (Oneness of Perception) denotes the doctrine that all existence is a reflection of the divine essence, not the essence itself which al-Sirhindī deemed severely heterodox to the Sunni tradition. See Muhammad Taqi Usmani, "Wahdat al-Wujud, Wahdat al-Shuhud and the Safest Position," trans. Zameelur Rahman, *Deoband.org*, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.deoband.org/2010/05/theology-rulings/wahdat-al-wujud-wahdat-al-shuhud-and-the-safest-position/>.

²⁸ Mosleh Uddin, *Shah Waliullah's Contribution to Hadith Literature*, 123-24.

²⁹ Homayra Ziad, "Poetry, Music and the Muḥammadī Path: How Khvājah Mīr Dard Brought Three Worlds together in Eighteenth-Century Delhi," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 21, no. 3 (2010): 355.

³⁰ Bakri Aladdin, an expert on Ibn 'Arabī, contends, "By contrast, there were also many jurists, historians and Sufis who defended Ibn 'Arabī, and tried to provide an explanation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in line with the Quran and Sunnah, and far removed from the understanding of Ibn Taymiyya, who had spread the idea of a materialistic Oneness of Being for the purpose of criticising it." See Bakri Aladdin, "Oneness of Being (Waḥdat Al-

once again his broader mission towards uniting the embattled Sunni society under the broadest valid spectrum of orthodox thought possible. While holding the belief to be deviancy (*zandaqah*), he attempts to absolve Ibn ‘Arabī himself from accusations of the same, defending him from the criticisms of al-Sirhindī’s followers during a time when the topic was of keen interest, and trying to establish the differences as merely terminological and insubstantial. He asserts that the claims of absolute unity could be assigned to some who succeeded Ibn ‘Arabī, but not the saint himself.³¹

In further teachings on *taṣawwuf*, Shāh Walī Allāh builds on his reconciliatory approach, encouraging his disciples to be trained in the traditional sciences—exhorting them to interact directly with the books of *ḥadīth* and the four traditional Sunni schools of *fiqh*. He stresses to his primarily Sufi audience that many of their core concepts were not derived directly from the source texts of the religion, but rather through intuition (*wijdān*) and unveiling (*kashf*). On the other hand, however, he does not dismiss the role of these faculties either, seeing them as “natural love existing within the servants of Allah.”³²

In yet another work, *al-Insāf fī Bayān Asbāb al-Ikhtilāf*, Shāh Walī Allāh delves into law and legal theory with this same reconciliatory approach to the broader Sunni corpus. He highlights the sources through which the scholars arrived at their differences of opinion on various issues in substantive law (*furū’*) and attempts to reconcile these as legitimate differences of opinion that should be accepted and understood as “mercy for the *Ummah*,” as opposed to being sources of conflict that should propel sectarianism and division. This work, along with the *Hujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*, continues to be taught within South Asian madrasahs today.

Shāh Walī Allāh’s ultimate project of reconciliation unfolds throughout numerous works covering various subjects including law (*fiqh*), the rational sciences (*kalām*), and spirituality (*taṣawwuf*). While he may hold unique positions within the particular discourses of the sciences, he was ultimately most keen on preserving the sanctity of the broader Sunni tradition, its methodology in law and spirituality, and the scholars that helped to shape the tradition.

Taking from his teachers in the Ḥijāz, such as Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, he would attempt to bring together radically different thinkers within the

Wujūd): The Term and the Doctrine,” *The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, <https://ibnarabisociety.org/oneness-of-being-wahdat-al-wujud-aladdin-bakri/>.

³¹ Shāh Walī Allāh, *Tafhīmāt-i Ilāhiyyah*, 1:206.

³² Mosleh Uddin, *Shah Waliullah’s Contribution to Hadith Literature*, 117.

Sunni tradition. In cases such as that of Ibn ‘Arabī, Shāh Walī Allāh expresses the view that the scholar had been misunderstood, and tries to reconstruct his philosophy and mysticism in line with the orthodox tradition of his time. In other cases, such as that of Ibn Taymiyyah, he would defend the scholar by suggesting instead that his views, while often aberrant, were legitimate differences of opinion developed according to traditional jurisprudential methodology. When unable to thoroughly defend the positions of either, he suggests that their differences were minor enough so as not to merit unjust harshness and intolerance.

Ultimately, the Shāh’s reconciliatory project may be deemed a qualified success: Ibn Taymiyyah today enjoys more widespread popularity across the Indian subcontinent than ever before,³³ undoubtedly through the efforts and influence of figures such as Shāh Walī Allāh, and openness towards *ijtihād*, one of the main thrusts of his project, is widespread among the subcontinent’s Sunni schools. This development owes itself to another point of new consensus among Indian Sunni groups, which is reverence for Shāh Walī Allāh himself. Hermansen notes the remarkable fact that despite the conflict among the schools of thought, the whole breadth of South Asian Sunni learning “construe[s] Shāh Walī Allāh as an intellectual progenitor.”³⁴

Deobandis, with whose early leaders the Shāh’s son Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 1239/1824) had direct contact, claim his ideas as the inspiration for their own; the *Jamā‘at-i Islāmī* movement of Maulānā Abū ‘l-‘Alā Maudūdī (d. 1399/1979) likewise traces its reformism and puritan outlook to the Shāh. The *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* movement also traces its intellectual lineage to Shāh Walī Allāh through Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd (d. 1246/1831), a student of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd—founders of the *Ṭarīqah-i Muḥammadiyyah* movement, claimed by some to have synthesised the legacy of the Shāh with that of the Wahhābī movement.³⁵ Finally, the

³³ Influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah through Shāh Walī Allāh, some of the senior scholars of Nadwat al-‘Ulamā—known for its creedally-diverse teaching and student body and boasting countless branches across India—such as Sayyid Sulaymān al-Nadwī and Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadwī would institute some of his works as part of the core curriculum for theology at the college. Scholars from the Deobandi tradition remain divided on the controversial figure. While some laud praise on the figure, others are vocal in criticism of the scholar. Nizami, “The Impact of Ibn Taimiyya on South Asia,” 136–37.

³⁴ Hermansen, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxxiii.

³⁵ John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10. For a comparison of the religious worldviews of Shāh Walī Allāh and Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, see Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, “Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Shāh Walī Allāh: A Preliminary Comparison of Some Aspects of Their Lifes [sic.] and Careers,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 34, no. 1 (2006): 103–19.

Barelvi movement also reveres him via his closest student, Muḥammad ‘Āshiq (d. 1773), who best exemplified the Shāh’s Sufi tendencies. Among other works, Muḥammad ‘Āshiq compiled a biography of his teacher in the Sufi hagiographical tradition, titled *al-Qawl al-Jalī*.³⁶ Furthermore, works of the Shāh such as *al-Inṣāf* and *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah* are taught as central works at major Indian Sunni institutions such as Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband and Nadwat al-‘Ulamā, to name just two. The diversity of Shāh Walī Allāh’s spiritual descendants is perhaps the most conclusive argument for the vast scope of his intellectual endeavours.

The *Risālah fī Manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah* can be understood, then, as an important part of Shāh Walī Allāh’s project to defend and bring together novel Sunni thinkers of different intellectual genealogies, a snapshot of religio-political concerns of early modern North India on the eve of colonialism, as well as a defence of the validity of the wide possibilities of *ijtihād* in his own time, such as he himself claimed to explore in his own writings.

* * *

A full translation of the *Risālah* follows below, annotated with relevant references to classical Islamic literature and contemporary academic works.

Translation of *Risālah fī Manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah wa ‘l-Difā’ ‘anhu*

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful
All praise is to Allah, He Who inspires wisdom and from Whom flow all blessings, May the blessings of Allah be upon our master Muḥammad, master of the Arabs and the non-Arabs, and upon his family and Companions, those of high aspirations.

As to what follows, the impoverished Walī Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (may Allah treat them both with His vast grace) states:

A noble message from the virtuous Makhdūm [d. 1161/1748],³⁷ who remains persistent on truth and sound religion, asks about the status of

³⁶ Hermansen, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxxiii–iv.

³⁷ Makhdūm Muḥammad Mu‘īn Sindhī was a scholar of *ḥadīth*, theology, and the Arabic language. His early studies took place in Sindh, but he would eventually travel to Delhi where he trained under the likes of Shāh Walī Allāh. He would ultimately return to his hometown where he joined the Naqshbandī order. He authored numerous books in Arabic and Persian, including *Dirāsāt al-Labīb*, where he stressed the need to return to *ḥadīth* and argue against the prevalent tradition of *taqlīd* among his orthodox Ḥanafī contemporaries. See al-Ḥasanī, *al-‘Ilām bi Man fī Ta’rīkh al-Hind min al-‘Ālām*, 6:837–39.

Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah (may Allah treat him kindly from His grace) [d. 728/1328], and what one ought to believe about him and though I hesitate to engage in such a task, a reply to his request has become necessary.

As for that which I believe, and I should love that all Muslims believe, about the scholars of Islam, bearers of the Book, the *sunnah*, and the law (*fiqh*), advocates of those who adhere to the *sunnah* (*ahl al-sunnah*) and the Prophetic traditions; it is that they are of sound character, as indicated by the affirmation of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) where he says, “From every generation, those of sound character carry this faith.”³⁸ These people are of sound character by the affirmation of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) even if some of them held positions, which do not conform to this sound creed, provided they are not contradicted by the definitive text of the Book, the *sunnah* or the consensus [of the scholars], i.e., that opinion of theirs is of a debatable nature, a matter of opinion, and something in which one may delve into further discussion, even if their positions are in matters which relate to the foundations of the faith, or in issues of the law,³⁹ or in the realities of true intuition (*wijdān*).⁴⁰

³⁸ The complete wording of the narration states, “From every passing generation, those of sound character (will) carry this faith. They will reject the alterations of the extremists, the plagiarisms of the fabricators, and the interpretations of the ignorant.” This narration, though considered very weak among the traditional scholars of *ḥadīth*, can be found in many *ḥadīth* collections, including Ibn al-Bannā’ al-Ḥanbalī, *al-Mukhtār fi Uṣūl al-Sunnah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Badr (Medina: Maktabat ‘Ulūm al-Ḥikam, 2004), 42–43, *ḥadīth* no. 3.

³⁹ While Shāh Walī Allāh discusses certain points of contention found in Ibn Taymiyyah’s writings that pertain to foundational issues in the faith, as well as his arguments against the more esoteric components of the faith propounded by the Sufis, he does not mention any issues of conflict in law. This is despite the fact that one of the central issues which became a source of constraint on Ibn Taymiyyah’s later life was his heterodox position on triple *ṭalāq* (he contended that three pronouncements of divorce in a single sitting could be understood as one as opposed to the traditional view that it would remain multiple as pronounced). This caused significant outrage among his contemporaries and after repeated attempts to censure him, the Sultan had him imprisoned in the Citadel of Damascus for nearly half a year. Despite still being considered a heterodox position in most traditional schools of thought, this position has been adopted by most modern Muslim states as official policy. See Walid Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of *An Introduction to the Foundations of Qur’ānic Exegesis*,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–62.

⁴⁰ Foundational to his conception and worldview, Shāh Walī Allāh held that truth can be arrived at through demonstrative proof (*burhān*), revelation (*manqūl*), or intuition (*wijdān*). He further believed that if Muslim scholars understood his work based on the

Upon this, our belief as to the exalted shaykh Muḥyī 'l-Dīn b. 'Alī b. al-'Arabī [d. 638/1240],⁴¹ and the shaykh, the revivalist Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Aḥad al-Sirhindī [d. 1034/1624], is that both of them are from among the choicest servants of Allah, and we heed not what has been said of the two of them (to the contrary). The same is true of Ibn Taymiyyah, for we have verified that his state is that of a [true] scholar of the Book of Allah, its linguistic and technical meanings, and of the *sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the traditions of the pious predecessors, well-versed in their linguistic and technical meanings, and a master of grammar and language. He expounded upon the jurisprudence and legal theory of the Ḥanbalī school and was

convergence of these three approaches, their differences of opinion would cease to exist. Adding to the idea of *wijdān*, in his *Hama'āt*, Shāh Walī Allāh argues that when coupled with observing the laws of revelation, this convergence of the two is the path towards attaining ultimate virtue (*iḥsān*) and the lofty ranks of sainthood. Rizvī, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times*, 229; Shāh Walī Allāh, *Tafhīmāt*, 1: 20–22, 30, 225–29, 260; Umi-Salma, “Sufic Vision of Shah Muhammad Ghaus & Shah Wali Ullah in the Light of Quranic Studies,” *The Dialogue* 5, no. 3 (2010): 270–83.

⁴¹ One of the most controversial figures in Islamic history, Ibn 'Arabī continues to be debated in most Muslim circles, perhaps more so than Ibn Taymiyyah himself. Perceptions towards Ibn 'Arabī have fluctuated as the debate around his philosophy and mysticism continues to evolve. Ibn Taymiyyah himself seems conflicted about him. It can be noted that he held Ibn 'Arabī in high regard until reading his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. He writes, “In my past, I used to be from those who would think well of Ibn 'Arabī and even glorify him. This is because of what I read in his works that were filled with wisdom. Such as his statements in much of *al-Futūḥāt*, *al-Kunh*, *al-Muḥkam al-Marbūt*, *al-Durrat al-Fākhirah*, *Maṭāli' al-Nujūm*, and the likes. However, we had not yet become aware of his true intentions, nor had we analysed the *Fuṣūṣ* and its likes. We used to gather with our brothers [for the sake of Allah] in search of the truth, to follow it, and to discover the true path. So once the issue became clear, we knew what we had to know.” Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 37 vols., King Fahd ed. (Medina: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah wa 'l-Awqāf wa al-Da'wat wa 'l-Irshād, 2004), 2:464. He also seemed unaccepting of any reinterpretations of his words, citing numerous texts written explaining these beliefs in clear detail that would leave no room for disagreement as to their intentions. Writing of those who try to excuse him using these explanations he states, “No one, save an ignorant person or a hypocrite, would come up with these excuses and their likes.” *Ibid.*, 2:132, 360. Despite his continued criticisms of numerous statements in the *Fuṣūṣ*, holding some of its beliefs to be worse than that of the Christians, Jews, and the Pharaoh, Ibn Taymiyyah would still conclude that “the statement[s] of Ibn 'Arabī—the author of the *Fuṣūṣ*—despite them being disbelief, is still the closest to Islam [in comparison to others who propagated unity (*ittiḥād*)]. This is due to the fact that his statements are interspersed with many great points and because he does not go as far in establishing [the beliefs of] unity as others. Rather, he seems quite hesitant about it. He stands with his extensive insights which sometimes direct him to the truth, and to falsehood at other [times]. And only Allah knows best upon which [belief] he passed away.” *Ibid.*, 2:143.

exceedingly intelligent and a man eloquent in defence of the creed of those that adhere to the *sunnah*. There is no attribution of corruption or wrongful innovation to him, except in these few matters for which he was constrained (*ḍuyyīqa*)⁴² as a result thereof. There is nothing from among these matters, however, except that he had a proof for his opinion from the Book, the *sunnah*, or the traditions of the pious predecessors. It is difficult to find the likes of this shaykh in all the world, and who is able to reach his peak in writing or eloquence. And those who constrained him reached not one-tenth of what Allah, the Exalted gave to him, even if this constraint of theirs was founded upon a legitimate exercise of reasoned judgement (*ijtihād*). The quarrelling of the scholars in issues of that kind is no different than that of the Companions in what transpired among them, and in such a case one is obligated to speak well of them or remain silent.

It has been mentioned that he stated that Allah the Exalted is above the Throne, and in delving into this issue there are three points of deliberation:

Firstly, looking into what can be authentically established about Allah through divine revelation, and what cannot. What must be conceded on this point is that Allah the Exalted *establishes for Himself* the direction of above-ness, and the narrations are explicit on this.⁴³ Al-Tirmidhī has narrated this on the authority of Imām Mālik and his contemporaries.⁴⁴

Secondly, does the intellect permit the literal existence of what such speech describes, or does it necessitate a metaphorical understanding? What must be conceded on this point is that the intellect necessitates that it is *not* to be understood according to its apparent meaning.⁴⁵

⁴² The term *ḍuyyīqa*, “constrained” refers primarily to imprisonment, but also to banishment and forced public debates, all of which Ibn Taymiyyah was subjected to a number of times throughout his career by the Mamluk government. See Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2019), 28ff.

⁴³ Brown writes that Shāh Walī Allāh, “like Ibn Taymiyya, . . . rejected the speculative theology of Ash‘arī and advocated the straightforward acceptance of God’s description of Himself.” Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 78. However, this may easily be contested given Shāh Walī Allāh’s forceful description of al-Ash‘arī’s theology as being in harmony with that of Ibn Taymiyyah, along with his own emphatic self-identification as an Ash‘arī.

⁴⁴ This reference may be found in al-Tirmidhī’s *Sunan*, narrated through Mālik, Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah, and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak. The longer statement of Mālik is “Elevation is not unknown, its ‘how’ is not understood, belief in it is obligatory, and asking about it is a reprehensible innovation” (*al-istiwā’ ghayr majhūl, wa ‘l-kayf ghayr ma’qūl, wa ‘l-īmān bihi wājib, wa ‘l-su’āl ‘anhu bid’ah*). Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmā’ wa al-Ṣifāt*. 2 vols. ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Ḥāshidī (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Sawādī, 1993), 2:305–6.

⁴⁵ An example of this can be found in al-Juwaynī’s *al-Irshād* where he cites various verses whose literal interpretation he finds to be untenable. He states about those who hold

Thirdly, is it obligatory to interpret the statement, or is it permissible to pause on that which is apparent without clarifying what is intended? What must be conceded on this point is that it is not established in any narration, sound or weak, that interpretation is obligatory, nor that the utterance of such statements is (inherently) impermissible.

Abū Ṭāhir [d. 1145/1733] narrates on the authority of his father that he said that the scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī [d. 852/1449] said, “Nothing has been narrated through any sound path from the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) or from the Companions about the explicit obligation of interpreting anything from that [i.e., points of ambiguity], or [implicitly] prohibiting their mention. And it is impossible that Allah has commanded His Prophet to deliver what has been sent to him from his Lord, and revealed to him the verse, “Today I have perfected for you your religion” [5:3], and the Prophet overlooked this issue. Therefore, he does not distinguish what is permitted to be attributed to Allah from that which is not permitted, despite exhorting those present to deliver the message to those who are absent—so much so that they transmitted his sayings, his actions, and even [his implicit approval of] things done in his presence. This indicates that they agreed upon belief in [this issue] in the way Allah the Exalted intended, necessitating His transcendence beyond resemblance to created beings, per His saying in the Qur’ān: “There is nothing like unto His like” [42:11]. As for those who obligated other than that after [the Companions], then he has contradicted their path.

What we have elucidated thus far is in fact the position of the shaykh Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī [d. 324/935–936]. Abū Ṭāhir al-Madanī (may Allah be pleased with him) read to me, from what his father had written, that Abū ‘l-Ḥasan said in his book, “I am upon the school of Aḥmad [Ibn Ḥanbal] in the issue of divine attributes, and Allah is indeed above the Throne.”⁴⁶

such interpretations, “They have necessitated shortcomings of Allah which no person of intellect would conceivably acknowledge.” Later Ash‘arī scholars would fluctuate between *tafwīd* and *ta‘wīl*, stating the former to be *tafwīd ijimālī* and the latter to be *ta‘wīl tafṣīlī*. They would state that this latter form of *ta‘wīl* is founded on more knowledge and wisdom, as it adds further clarification, while the former (*al-tafwīd*) is the methodology of the *salaf* and the safer path, as it prevents the possibility of assigning a meaning unintended by Allah. Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī, *Tuḥfat al-Murīd ‘alā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd*, ed. ‘Alī Jumū‘ah (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2002), 156.

⁴⁶ Al-Ash‘arī’s full statement is as follows: “Holding firm to the Book of Allah our Lord, the Exalted, and to the *sunnah* of our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and what has been narrated by the noble Companions, those who followed them and the scholars of *ḥadīth*; it is in that which we seek refuge, and with that which Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal (may Allah make his face radiant) was upon. . . .” Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibānah fī Uṣūl al-Diyānah*, ed. Fawqīyyah Ḥusayn Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1976), 20.

The position of Ibn Taymiyyah is to be understood on the basis of these first and third points. If we return to true consciousness, then there is no doubt that Allah has a unique and particular relationship with the Throne for which there is no adequate expression, just as we do not find an expression to describe things heard or seen clearer than audition and sight (*al-sam' wa 'l-baṣar*), and Allah is most knowing of the realities of such affairs.

It has also been mentioned that he prohibited travelling to visit the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); this statement of his⁴⁷ is not narrated with an explicit, authentic proof. On the contrary, he did not prohibit visitation in an absolute sense, but only prohibited travelling [considerable distances] to visit his grave, as per the Prophetic tradition, “Do not undertake arduous journeys [of pilgrimage]”⁴⁸ and the other, “Take not my grave as a point of return.”⁴⁹ If there is dispensation allowed for this statement of his [Ibn Taymiyyah’s] through qualified juristic discernment (*ijtihād*), then it is not proper to be harsh upon him for holding it.

It has also been mentioned that he denied the existence of the Axis (*quṭb*), the Supreme Succour (*ghawth*), Khiḍr, and those whom the Shī‘ah claim to be the Mahdī.⁵⁰ It is his right to believe as such, for the Sunnī, so

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah’s full statement is “If [one] vows to travel to the grave of [Prophet Ibrāhīm] (peace be on him), or to the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), or to [other graves], he is not required to complete this vow, by the consensus of the four *imāms*, for [the intention of] travelling to these places is prohibited.” Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 27:9.

⁴⁸ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-ḥajj, Bāb lā tushadd al-riḥāl illā ilā thalāthat masājīd. The debate surrounding Ibn Taymiyyah’s prohibition is ultimately not a practical difference of opinion. If a person travels to visit the Prophet’s mosque, then visiting his grave on that [permissible] journey would not be problematic in Ibn Taymiyyah’s assessment.

⁴⁹ The entire wording is narrated by Abū Hurayrah in Abū Dāwūd’s *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṣulḥ, Bāb idhā iṣṭalaḥa ‘alā ṣulḥ jawr, where the Prophet states, “Do not make your houses graves and do not make my grave a place of [return and] festivity. But invoke blessings on me, for your blessings reach me wherever you may be.” Al-‘Azīmābādī, in his explanation of the narration, expresses that “festivity” (*‘īd*) could be a reference to returning to a place at set intervals for the purpose of worship or celebration, or it could refer to celebration and worship directly. See Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq al-‘Azīmābādī, *‘Awn al-Ma’būd Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994), 6:22.

⁵⁰ *Quṭb* and *ghawth* are Sufi terms for high-ranking spiritual leaders with extensive mystical connotations. Theories of the characteristics and identity of such people form a significant part of Sufi hagiographies. Notably, Shāh Walī Allāh considered himself to be a *quṭb* as well as a renewer of the religion (*mujaddid*) and “the ‘omega’ of all knowledge,” among other titles. Rizvī, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times*, 216. In his *Majmū‘ al-*

long as his correct belief is conditional upon that which is established through the Book, the *sunnah*, and the consensus of the scholars, and he remains silent on that which cannot be established from those sources, then it is permissible for him to not believe in the aforementioned things. Whoever from among the Sufis affirms these things does not do so from the Book or the *sunnah*, but rather through unveiling (*kashf*), which is not from among the valid proofs of the divine law. What is understood from his statement is that he intends to say that this statement is innovated, and belief in it is false according to the divine law, per the statement of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that “whoever introduces in our matter [Islam] that which is not from it, then it is rejected.”⁵¹ Even if he was explicit in his denial of these matters, he would still not deserve accusations of apostasy and corruption.

Here, then, lies a salient point for consideration. How many issues are there on which the divine law neither affirms nor rejects, but rather leaves our intellects to indicate towards the one or the other—such as how the multiplication of ten by ten produces one hundred? Or by unveiling and intuition, such as the statement that love of the self is established for the perfect, complete slaves of Allah, and love of the self is the inclination of a particular existence towards its absolute unrestricted root, as is the inclination of every genus (*‘unṣur*) towards its (natural) habitat.⁵² And these issues are encapsulated within the real existence. If a human were to believe that they were (instead) from divine law, he would be in error. Similarly, if he further held them to be something established by divine law, rejecting the one who does not hold them to be so, or he tried to

Fatāwā, Ibn Taymiyyah explores the terms *ghawth*, *quṭb*, *abdāl*, and *awṭād* at length. He asserts that the only term mentioned within the Prophetic tradition is that of *abdāl*, but that it comes from a disconnected chain. He continues by mentioning that these terms were not used by the earlier generations and were only mentioned by later scholars among the Sufis and ultimately derived from the statements of the Shī‘ah, including “the Nusayrīs and the Ismā‘īlīs.” He accepts the validity of terms such as *awṭād* and *quṭb* in a general sense to refer to scholars and the pious (rejecting their specific Sufi connotations as well as their specific number). As for the term *ghawth*, he emphatically rejects its usage for anyone except Allah, stating that it is only He from Whom aid is sought (*istighāthah*). Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 11:433.

⁵¹ This narration has been related through ‘Ā’ishah in Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-manāsik, Bāb ziyārat al-Qubūr and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-aqḍiyah, Bāb naqḍ al-aḥkām al-bāṭilah wa radd muḥdathāt al-umūr.

⁵² Shāh Walī Allāh seems to be referring to the Sufi concepts of Ibn ‘Arabī according to which the individual soul is a manifestation of a universal form, which pre-exists the physical world in the world of forms (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), and which is the true home (i.e., natural habitat) to which it seeks its ultimate return.

impress them on those who reject it in the same manner as impressing issues [actually] from divine law, he would be in error.

It has also been mentioned that he rejected belief in the Hidden Imām as per the Shī‘ī claim.⁵³ It is his right to do so, as indeed even all the Ash‘arīs denied this belief and I know of none who affirmed it. It has also been mentioned that he spoke disdainfully of our master ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with him); God forbid. I have reviewed his statements and found some of them in the context of countering the Shī‘ah in their slander of the three Caliphs in matters they deludedly held to be their shortcomings, as mentioned at the end of the *Tajrīd*.⁵⁴ This shaykh, Ibn Taymiyyah, gathered as a response to them a number of issues they themselves recognized pertaining to ‘Alī—presenting them similarly (as ostensible shortcomings) as if to argue that “these alleged shortcomings [of the first three Caliphs] are not so, as indeed similar things are attributed to our master ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with him), beloved to us and you alike. And what you would respond [in defence] of our master ‘Alī, we would likewise respond for the first three Caliphs (may Allah be pleased with them).” And this is indicative of his comprehensive knowledge, rhetorical strength, and his recognition of the virtues of our master ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with him). And it is on this principle that the well-known statement “If an opinion is not heterodox. . . .” is founded.⁵⁵

And [same is the case with] his statement that the outrage of the *ummah* surrounding the killing of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (may Allah the Exalted be pleased with him) was not as severe as that surrounding the killing of ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (may Allah be pleased with him).⁵⁶ And [as for] his statement about the virtue of Abū Bakr. . . etc.,⁵⁷ meaning a refutation of the Shī‘ah’s slander of *al-Ṣiddīq* [Abū Bakr] in his withholding of the estate of Fadak and that it was a form of harm sustained by Fāṭimah (may Allah the Exalted be pleased with her) and the Prophet (peace and blessings of

⁵³ While Ibn Taymiyyah accepts the narrations of the Mahdī, citing them as authentic, he vehemently rejects the Shī‘ī understanding and its conception as one among many examples of “the stupidities of the Shī‘ah.” Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 8 vols. (Riyadh: Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1986), 1:44–47; 2:854.

⁵⁴ *Tajrīd al-I’tiqād* is a famous work of Shī‘ī creed by the thirteenth-century Persian scholar Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–1274 CE). The work was the subject of numerous Sunni commentaries and served as the basis for much medieval Islamic polemical literature.

⁵⁵ The complete statement is attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah in his *Minhāj al-Sunnah*: “If an opinion is not heterodox, then there is no blame on the one who holds it.” Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, 6:112.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:188.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:194.

Allah be upon him) said, “He who harms her harms me,” what can be understood from this is that issues of this type are excluded from “harm” in the absolute sense because it is something legislated by divine law. And similar is his statement, as for the words “harms me,” God forbid that he intended to slander ‘Alī or Fāṭimah (may Allah be pleased with both of them), rather it is to highlight an inconsistency. It is as though he said, “Your libel of Abū Bakr is similar to what would become obliged against ‘Alī and Fāṭimah, and your response, in that case, is our exact response here.”⁵⁸

Other parts of [his statement] highlight the inconsistency of the Shī’ah in their establishment of the superiority of our master ‘Alī above the first three Caliphs as is similarly mentioned at the end of the *Tajrīd*.⁵⁹ Thus, this shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah sought to establish for the first three Caliphs [the same virtues] they established for our master ‘Alī, or even better ones.⁶⁰ And in mere preference (*tafdīl*), there is nothing impolite,

⁵⁸ Shāh Walī Allāh seems to be referring to Ibn Taymiyyah’s argument against the Shī’ahs in his *Minhāj al-Sunnah*. Ibn Taymiyyah responds to the accusations of the Shī’ah against Abū Bakr not giving the estate of Fadak to Fāṭimah in several ways. He argues for the weakness of some present narrations, but then also retorts and states that Abū Bakr was following the command of the *sharī’ah* and the Prophet (that the Prophets do not leave material inheritance) in refusing to bequeath the estate to her. He was not doing it for selfish reasons, as can be noted in him not taking the estate for himself or his family. If the case was between choosing the pleasure of Fāṭimah and the Prophet where the two would contradict (such as in this case), he must select the command of the Prophet. Ibn Taymiyyah continues adding to the argument by stating that the Prophet expressed this sentiment in the context where ‘Alī wanted to marry the daughter of Abū Jahl as a second wife and he did not allow it for him, in defence of his daughter’s sentiments. Ibn Taymiyyah states that if one tries to apply the last part of this narration to Abū Bakr, who upset Fāṭimah with religious justification, then it makes only more sense for it to be applied to ‘Alī, who upset her for personal reasons. Ibn Taymiyyah finally mentions another narration where the Prophet states that those who disobey his vicegerents have disobeyed him and argues that narration—which is more authentic—could hypothetically be used against ‘Alī and Fāṭimah in the case of Fadak following the same line of argumentation and so he rejects the premise entirely, stating that just as it cannot be used for them in that case, this narration cannot be used against Abū Bakr either. He finally asserts that both Abū Bakr and ‘Alī are from the most elevated saints of Islam. See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, 4:194-255.

⁵⁹ The section of the *Tajrīd* in which Ṭūsī discusses the first three Caliphs may be found from page 241 onwards in its Tehran edition by Muḥammad Jawād al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī, published in 1407 AH.

⁶⁰ At the end of the second chapter of the first volume of *Izālat al-khafā’*, Shāh Walī Allāh says that while the content of his book was based on the Qur’ān, *sunnah*, and writings of great Muslims, his original contribution lay in their coherent rearrangement. Rizvī writes that his great influences in this were Ibn Taymiyyah’s *Minhāj al-Sunnah* and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī’s *al-Ṣawā’iq al-Muḥriqah*. “Like these two great predecessors and their

for preference is, by consensus, the *modus operandi* of those that adhere to the *sunnah*; God forbid that they should be impolite and disdainful of him (may Allah the Exalted be pleased with him).⁶¹

As for explaining the verse of purity through divine law as opposed to natural law, this is correct. Similar to it are the verses “Allah wishes for you ease, and wishes not for you difficulty” [2:185], “Allah wishes that He should forgive you” [4:27], and other verses.

And finally, I implore every Muslim to remember Allah, the Glorious and Majestic, in this issue and all such issues. God forbid that anyone from among the Muslims such as this, a highly qualified jurist (*mujtahid*) and scholar, should be cursed. This is what I have been able to offer in response, and my response is not intended except as sincere advice. And Allah is most knowing of the realities of such affairs.

* * *

imitators, the Shāh forcefully demonstrated that ‘Alī admitted the superiority of the first two Caliphs to himself.” The Shāh makes the case in *Izālat al-Khafā’* that *Khilāfat-i Rāshidah* lasted only until the assassination of ‘Uthmān, and the even superior state of *Khilāfat-i Khāṣṣah* encompassed only the reigns of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. Rizvī, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times*, 250-51; Shāh Walī Allāh, *Izālat al-Khafā’*, 1:137.

⁶¹ Shāh Walī Allāh had considerable personal difficulty with the issue of *tafḍīl*, likely owing to the pervasive influence of Shiism in South Asian Islam. While agreeing with Ibn Taymiyyah’s orthodox conclusions on the superiority of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar over ‘Alī, in his own writings he confesses his preference for ‘Alī over all other Caliphs, a position overcome not through Ibn Taymiyyah’s arguments, but through mystic vision. In a visionary encounter with the Prophet, Shāh Walī Allāh asked to be reassured of the superiority of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar despite his feelings for ‘Alī. The Prophet explained that while ‘Alī was a great ecstatic and saint, his predecessors had committed themselves fully to matters related to prophethood, and he loved them more. Such ideas are also found in his book written on the subject, *Qurrat al-‘Aynayn fī Tafḍīl al-Shaykhayn*, in which he argues that the souls of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were intermingled with the light of the soul of the Prophet. Rizvī, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times*, 183ff. Shāh Walī Allāh’s son and successor, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, wrote a substantial work refuting a number of Shī‘ī doctrines, including the superiority of ‘Alī over the first two caliphs. He cites a report that in the Mosque of Kufa, ‘Alī publicly declared that “The best of this Ummah after its Prophet is Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar.” He further cites ‘Alī stating that he would enforce the legal punishment for slander on those who preferred him over them. Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz goes further, claiming that these reports were accepted by early Shī‘īs, and as a result, the belief in ‘Alī’s superiority was foreign to them. See Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlawī. *Mukhtaṣar al-Tuhfah al-Ithnā’ Ashariyyah* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Salafiyyah, 1953), 310.