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international imam-i rabbani symposium

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## The essential necessity of the law according to Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's teachings

Demetrio Giordani

Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's teachings are fully rooted in the tradition of the Naqshbandī school, of which he was the most senior representative in India. This school is perhaps the one that has most emphasized the priority of the law in the context of spiritual experience, by enhancing rigorous observance of traditional rules. One of the most common themes in the teaching of the masters of the Naqshbandī Order is the essential necessity of the law (*iltizâm-i sharî'at*), and conforming to the prophetic tradition (*ittibâ'-i sunnat*). Many distinguished men have testified to the strict adherence of Hazrat-i Imâm-i Rabbânî to *Sharî'ah* rules and the precepts of the *Sunnah*, even in the smallest details of his everyday life. Among them Khwajah Muḥammad Hâshim Qishmî narrates in his *Zubdat al-Maqâmât*:

Once when he called for some black pepper seed, Saleh Khutlani brought him (to Hazrat Mujaddid) six seeds from a pouch. Aggrieved, he said: "Look at our Sufi that so far he has not heard what Allâh has said: "Allâh is odd (as God is one and unique) and likes odd numbers in everything". It is better to keep it in mind. Don't you know what people think about an approved act? An approved act is one which Allâh likes. If you give away this world and the hereafter for an act which Allâh likes, you shall not be among the losers".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover this is what Shaykh Badruddin Sirhindī reports on the basis of its direct testimony, about the way the Mujaddid performed his prayers. He writes in his *Hazarât al-Quds*:

"This lowly one [Badr ad-Dîn Sirhindî], prior to entry into the group of servants of that Imâm, who is the source of concentration, several times went to his mosque. Once I saw him performing prayer. Involuntarily I left my place, for I knew that he was in companionship with the holy Prophet (slm), and that he saw him performing prayer; he himself was performing prayer according to that example. Otherwise this lowly one has seen religious scholars and masters, but I have

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1 \* Prof. Dr. Department of Studies on Language and Culture, University of Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italy

*Zubdat al-Maqâmât*, Hazrat Abûl-Hasan Zayd Fârûqî: *Hazrat Mujaddid and his critics*, p. 43.

never seen this kind of prayer from anyone”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore Shaykh Badruddin Sirhindī testifies in his book the way Mujaddid was performing late night prayer:

“After completing ablutions, he also recited customary prayers, but he did not clean the body with a robe after ablutions. Then he put on a fine clean robe, and with a splendid and dignified bearing he headed to ritual prayer. He performed two minimum cycles of ritual prayers and he did the rest of the late night prayer with lengthy recitation from the Qurân. Usually he recited two or three portions of the thirty equal portion of the Qurân. Sometimes he went from midnight to dawn in a single cycle of prayer. When the attendant called, saying that dawn had arrived, he performed a second cycle of ritual prayer in the minimum fashion and said the *taslim*.

Most of the time he performed up to twelve cycles of ritual prayer, more or less, according to the needs of the hour. After every two *rak'ats*, in submission and humility he became absorbed in meditation, and when he was done, he prayed for forgiveness and performed other prayers and blessings, a hundred times. He meditated until dawn, or else recited the profession of faith, and a little before dawn, in accordance with the traditional example of the Prophet (prayer, blessing, and salutations upon its source), he would go to sleep, thus realizing the saying: “Keep late night vigil between two times of sleep”<sup>2</sup>

The adherence of Hazrat-i Mujaddid to the prophetic model was so accurate even during meal time:

“When the morning became advanced, he performed two cycles of morning prayer, though at times from necessity he performed four. He then took food, and while eating he could be seen most of the time to be dividing food for the dervishes, his family, the attendants, and guests. During this time he would sometimes pick up a morsel with three fingers, and sometimes reaching to a plate he would put some food in his mouth and taste it. At that time it was well known that he scarcely needed any food, and he only ate because eating is prophetic tradition; prophets have not dispensed with that. At the time of eating, his manner of sitting was by the path of the prophetic tradition: sometimes he pulled up both knees, and sometimes he put the right foot on the left foot and the right knee on the left knee. After finishing with food, he recited the customary prayers of that hour, but he did not, according to popular practice, recite the Opening (*Al-Fâtiha*) after eating, for that is not in accordance with the prophetic example”<sup>3</sup>

The exemplary behavior of Sirhindī goes to show what the Sharī‘ah and the

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1 *Hazarât al-Quds*, Hazrat Abûl-Hasan Zayd Fârûqî: *Hazrat Mujaddid and his critics*, p. 45.

2 *Hazarât al-Quds*

3 *Hazarât al-Quds*



Sunnah truly are, and what they really mean in practice. *Sharī'ah* it is not just a code of rules and regulations that govern external actions, it defines what religious life is, it also explains what faith, *tawhīd*, *taqwā*, *ihsān*, *jihād* are, and shows how to realize these realities. It is both form (*sūra*) and reality (*haqīqah*) and it is a complete unity.

As a logical conclusion, following Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's theory and practice, the "Sufi way" (*ṭarīqat*) and the law (*sharī'ah*) are not really different, and contrary to what is claimed by many Sufis, the "Sufi way" (*ṭarīqat*) and the Essential Reality (*haqīqat*) are the maidservants of the *sharī'ah*, and not *vice versa*. According to Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's teachings nothing is outside of the *sharī'at*, then the Sufi *ṭarīqat* is only a means to achieve the realities of religious life as intended and defined by the *Sharī'ah*.

Hazrat Mujaddid writes in one of his letters:

"The *ṭarīqat* and the *sharī'at* are identical and do not differ from each other even the breadth of a human hair ... Whatever is opposed to the law is to refute, and any truth that contrasts with it is heresy. The perfect men seek the truth holding firm in the Law."<sup>1</sup>

Disparity with the *Sharī'ah* is therefore a clear proof that the Sufi has not reached the ultimate goal. He wrote in one of his letters:

"The sign that a Sufi has attained absolute certainty is that the truths which are revealed to him are in complete agreement with the truths of the *Sharī'ah*. If they differ even a hair's breadth it is a proof that the Sufi has not reached the ultimate truth. The words and practices of a Sufi which are at variance with the *Sharī'ah* are produced by intoxicative experiences (*sukr waqt*)"<sup>2</sup>

Hazrat Mujaddid in his works has constantly warned anyone against the danger of consider the Sufi way as a separate path from the *Sharī'ah* and the *Sunnah*. In particular, he considered any practice of harsh asceticism which was not recommended by the Prophet's example, a useless test and a deviation from the most direct pathway, the prophetic path, which is the simplest, the harmless and the most secure among the ways.

Muhammad Hāshim Qishmī narrates in his *Zubdat al-Maqâmât*:

"Once he said: "People have a fancy for abstinence and struggle, whereas worship in the correct mode is far superior to it. It is hard to observe the obligatory and highly recommended worship, but for those whose hearts are softened, wors-

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1 *Maktūbāt* vol.I-43, pag.114.

2 *Maktūbāt* vol.I-84, ans. p.224

hip is sheer tranquility. The Holy prophet (*'alayhi salat wa salam*) said to Bilâl: "Oh Bilâl, provide me tranquility!" And Bilâl used to call believers for *namâz* and the Holy Prophet would get up for it."<sup>1</sup>

The Mujaddid frequently discouraged his disciples from engaging themselves in ascetic practices and spiritual exercises that were not in accordance with the Prophet example. He wrote in *Mabda' wa Ma'âd*:

"I sometimes prayed the final prayer of the night, or the *witr* prayer, on the first hour of the night and some other times on the last hour of the night. One night I was shown that for the devotee who goes to sleep with the intention that he will pray the *witr* prayer on the last hour of night, the angel in charge of writing good deeds for him writes good deeds on his book for the entire night until the time that he prays the *witr*. Therefore, it is better to delay the *witr* prayer. Still, nothing is acceptable to me on the matter of praying the *witr* prayer early or late, without following the authority of the 'noblest of men' [Prophet Muhammad] (slm). I do not consider any blessed deed equal to emulation [of the Prophet]. The blessed prophet sometimes prayed the *witr* at the early hours of night and sometimes on the last hour of night. I find pleasure if I can emulate the Blessed Prophet (slm) in any of his deeds even if that emulation is only in form. About some *Sunna* practices, some people give greater importance to some deeds with the intention of being awake for the whole night. I am amazed at their short-sightedness! Without the emulation [of the Blessed Prophet], I do not buy being awake for a thousand nights even for half a grain of barley. The last ten days of Ramadan, I perform *i'tiqâf* i.e. I sequester myself in the mosque and worship God. At this time, I gathered my Sufi brothers together and told them, "Do not make any intention except the intention to emulate the Prophet. For else what benefit is in our seclusion and cutting off our relationship with the world? Instead, if we can emulate a single *Sunnah* then in return we are willing to accept a hundred misfortunes. Actually, without the benefit of the emulation of the Merciful Prophet (slm), even if we do a thousand instances of seclusion and cutting off relationship with the world, it will not be accepted"<sup>2</sup>

However, according to the Mujaddid the very concept of Law has a deeper meaning. In fact, the sacred law can be received at two different levels, one more exterior and formal, the other inner and essential. The apparent form of the Law (*ṣūrat-i sharî'at*) is to abide by its precepts, and scrupulously observe its requirements, while the inmost reality of it (*ḥaqîqat-i sharî'at*) lays beyond its exterior appearance and embodies the essential aspect. Those who stick to the appearance alone ignore the essential reality of the law, and yet this is already a form of Islam.

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1 *Hazarât al-Quds*

2 *Mabda' o ma'âd, minha* 36

However, those who regard the law as something exclusively exterior and formal, as a mere peel (*qishr*), and then look for the core (*lubb*) which lies beyond the outer form of the *Sharī'ah*, will not reach their goal. Only the wise with deep knowledge understand that *Sharī'ah* is both peel and core, form and reality, reflection and principle. He writes in his *Maktūbāt*:

“Let it be known that the *Sharī'ah* is both a form and a reality, the form is the outer *Sharī'ah*, and the reality is the inner *Sharī'ah*. Therefore, the shell and the kernel are both parts of the *Sharī'ah*, the truths which are clearly defined (*muhkam*) and those which are put in symbolic language (*mutashābih*) are equally its parts. The scholars of the outer *Sharī'ah* (*'ulamā'yi zāhir*) attend to the shell; and the scholar who are well established (*ulamā'yi rāsikhîn*) attend to the shell as well as the kernel – they are grounded in the form as well as the essence”.<sup>1</sup>

As for the scholars who are well established in knowledge, as explained by Hazrat Mujaddid, those are the men whose contemplation reaches the Realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) which are beyond the curtains of God's Glory, and after having such a contemplative confirmation they know from experience the reality of what was formerly taken on faith, although common men are prevented from attaining that perfect knowledge. All of them nevertheless have faith in both the realities and the practices of Islām, but the distance between them is incomparable. He writes:

“Yes, indeed! To some of the most perfect among the loved-ones (*kummāl-i muradân*) has been granted by means of following the prophets, a place inside the prohibited court, beyond the curtains of Magnificence and Grandeur (*surâdiqât-i kibriyâ'î va 'azamat*), and what they received there cannot be described in words”.<sup>2</sup>

This is what Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī writes on his experience about the attaining the Reality of the *Sharī'ah*.

“The *Sharī'ah* has three parts: knowledge, action and sincerity (*ikhlâs*); unless you fulfill the demands of all these parts, you do not obey with the *Sharī'ah*. And when you obey the *Sharī'ah* you obtain the pleasure of God which is the supreme Good of this world and the Hereafter. [...]

The *tarîqat* and the *ḥaqîqat* for which the Sufis are known, are subservient to the *Sharī'ah*, as they help to realize its third part, namely, sincerity. Hence they are sought to fulfill the *Sharī'ah*, not to achieve something beyond the *Sharī'ah*. The raptures and ecstasies which the Sufis experience, and the ideas and truths which come to them in the course of their journey, are not the goal of Sufism. They are rather myths and fancies on which the children of Sufism are fed. One

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1 *Maktūbāt* I: 276.

2 *Maktūbāt* I:260, vol. I, p.437.

has to pass over them all and reach the stage of satisfaction (*riḍâ'*) which is the final goal of *sulûk* and *jadhbah*. The purpose of travelling the stages of *tarîqat* and *haqîqat* is nothing other than the realization of *ikhhlâs*, which involves the attainment of *riḍâ'* [...].

It is the fools who consider emotional experiences and ecstasies part of the goal and regard vision and illumination as ends. They remain captives to their fancies and never know the real perfections of the *Sharî'ah* [...].

To be sure, the realization of the *ikhhlâs* and *riḍâ'* depends on passing through these states and experiences and realizing these ideas and truths. But they are means to an end, and a way to the goal. I came to know this truth by the blessing of the Prophet and discovered that the *Sharî'ah* bore witness to it, after I had travelled full ten years in this way. Although from the beginning, I had no fascination for emotional experiences and ecstasies, and never sought anything other than the Reality of the *Sharî'ah*, the truth as it is, was revealed to me only after a period of full ten years. I thank God for this favor a thousand times".<sup>1</sup>

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1 *Maktûbât* I:36

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*Büyük âlim, ârif ve müceddid İmâm-ı Rabbânî hazretlerinin hayâtı, eserleri ve tesirlerinin ele alınacağı Uluslararası İmâm-ı Rabbânî Sempozyumu'nu teşrifinizi bekler, saygılar sunarız.*

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Başkanı

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Yönetim Kurulu Başkanı

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