

THE ETHICAL ESSENCE OF THE CONCEPTS OF SHUKUR, RIDA AND SABR AS PER SUFI-PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS OF AZIZIDDIN NASAFI

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Abstract. In the following article the ethical essence of the concepts of shukur, rida and sabr as per sufi-philosophical views of Aziziddin Nasafi are reconsidered. His views are analysed from the viewpoint of the comparison of the treatises compiled by Khujviri based on his "Kashf al-Mahjub". His relying on the activities of Zunnun al-Misri is revealed through his reform approach in the tariqat.
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Introduction. Sufism, in its essence, is a spiritual and moral process of self-perfection that aims to cultivate ethical virtues within an individual. Moreover, Sufism holds an important place in acquiring noble character one of the core principles of religion and in forming a strong and harmonious personality structure. From this point of view, it can be said that Sufism, especially throughout history, has made a significant contribution to the emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and moral development of Muslim individuals and societies. Sufism is a teaching that calls a person to the highest moral standards, to knowledge, enlightenment, spirituality, purity, compassion, humanity, and perfection. The doctrine and philosophy of Sufism, in their entirety, embody complete moral principles and rules. One of the most important indicators that reflect a person's humanity is their spiritual and ethical aspect. Morality, moral education, and ethical relations have always remained relevant and have served as the foundation of social development throughout all periods of human history.

Materials and Methods.

The role of Sufi teachings and philosophy in establishing spiritual and moral education is truly incomparable. In his ethical views, Aziziddin Nasafi gave broad attention to moral categories, norms, and principles. He regarded every form of immorality as a manifestation of ignorance. In general, Nasafi, who based his understanding of fate and destiny on divine determinism, was also influenced by this outlook in his ethical views. As mentioned above, according to Nasafi, in the relationship between the body and the soul, the soul — originally created pure and immaculate — is connected to the body, and this very body exerts a significant influence on the soul.

Nasafi described the body and its related physical and moral actions as "zahir" (the outward), while he referred to the soul as batin (the inward). According to him, the outward and the inward influence one another. In his work "The Book of the Perfect Man", the Sufi thinker states: "Until the outward is made right, the inward will not be pure. For the outward is like a mold, and the inward is like the substance poured into that mold. If the mold is straight, what is formed within it will also be straight; but if the mold is crooked, what is formed will likewise be crooked [1]."

The *zahir*—that is, the body and the physical and moral actions connected to it—can be corrected through ascetic practice (*riyazat*), purification (*tazkiya*), and the companionship of the wise. When our outward aspect is upright, our inward aspect will also be upright. The human soul exists between two worlds: one is the “world of witnessing” (“*shahadat al-‘alam*”), symbolized by the body, and the other is the world of the unseen (“*ghayb al-‘alam*”). Since the world of the “*Ghayb*” is pure and immaculate, the soul finds peace in belonging to that realm.

Indeed, in the world of the unseen, there is no hardship, oppression, or sorrow. The second realm to which the soul is connected—the body—is tied to material desires and aspirations. During the period in which it becomes captive to passion and anger, it remains dark and clouded, thereby also dimming and darkening the soul. Therefore, the purity and clarity of the body enhance the purity and clarity of the soul. According to Nasafi, a truly moral person is one who is perfect both in spirit and in body. Becoming acquainted with metaphysical truths also depends on this harmony. However, Nasafi considered the *batin* (the inner) superior to the *zahir* (the outer) when viewed separately. In his view, outward form gains value only when it is accompanied by the inner essence. Otherwise, a person’s true humanity lies in the soul. One who is spiritually at the level of an animal remains at that level regardless of how perfect their outward form may appear. As mentioned earlier, Nasafi explains the common goal of *sharia* (the law), *tariqa* (the path), and *haqiqa* (the truth) through four key principles: righteous speech, righteous action, righteous morality, and enlightenment (*ma‘rifa*).

It should be noted that these four principles also represent the overarching aim of moral rules. According to Nasafi, the only guide that can save a person from the crises of thought is noble character. A person of noble character will experience no harm either in this world or in the Hereafter. For him, being of noble character means causing no harm to anyone, wishing no harm upon anyone, and desiring goodness and happiness for all. Noble character itself is happiness, whereas evil and base behavior is misfortune.

From the perspective of understanding Nasafi’s ethical views, the words he addresses to dervishes under the title of “advice” in the final sections of his works “The Book of the Perfect Man” and “*Kashf al-Haqa’iq*” are of particular importance. However, it should be emphasized that, in general, even in these pieces of advice, what Nasafi recommends aligns closely with what Islamic ethicists have generally considered as moral principles. For example, Nasafi encourages virtues such as reliance on Allah (*tawakkul*), acceptance of destiny (*riḍa bi’l-qadr*), patience, awareness of the transience of the world, performing good deeds, and being forgiving. These virtues reflect the general characteristics of Islamic ethical philosophy.

In the ethical views of the Sufi, attention is given not only to the religious and worldly aspects of morality but also to its influence on social life, with a special focus on fundamental moral rules that every individual should know. Nasafi’s ethical perspective studies a person in all dimensions—both material and spiritual—and in an integrated manner. His social and moral views are not limited only to those who follow the Sufi path (such as “*murids*” or “*saliks*”), but are expressed through constructive ideas of social significance aimed at building a moral sphere and an enlightened society based on ethical principles. Indeed, possessing noble character involves recognizing that every social class, profession, and rank has its own moral imperatives.

In Nasafi’s ethical views, special attention is given to the analysis of the concepts of gratitude (*shukr*), contentment (*riḍa*), and patience (*sabr*), emphasizing that their manifestation in human morality serves the interests of society and humanity. Regarding gratitude, the scholar stated: “O dervish! If you are grateful for what you have and consider it a blessing, your heart will always be at peace. But if you are not content with what you possess and constantly desire more, you will always live in distress and hardship, for desire has no limit” [2]. Continuing his reflections on gratitude, Nasafi highlights that it has three levels. As noted in “*Tanzil*” on this topic: “Gratitude for a blessing exists at three levels:

recognizing the blessing, acknowledging the Giver of the blessing, and using the blessing properly ”.

Result analysis.

Nasafi explains the proper observance of gratitude in detail: “If a person receives a blessing but does not recognize it as a blessing, or does not know the Giver of that blessing, he has not fulfilled the gratitude for it. If he knows that what he has received is a blessing and also recognizes its Giver, but does not use the blessing appropriately, he still has not truly expressed gratitude. Only when he recognizes the blessing, acknowledges the Giver, and uses the blessing properly does he fully fulfill the gratitude for it [3].” Regarding contentment (*riḍa*), Nasafi describes it as seeing God as the ultimate cause of all events and actions in a person’s life and fully submitting to His will. It involves accepting all occurrences and potential situations with satisfaction, pleasure, and a sense of fulfillment.

In the history of Sufism, the “Muhasibiya” tariqah established by Al-Harith al-Muhasibi introduced the concepts of “*riḍa*” (contentment), “*tawakkul*” (trust in Allah), and “*hal*” (spiritual state) into Sufi theory and practice, placing primary emphasis on the analysis of these notions. Al-Harith al-Muhasibi defines contentment (*riḍa*) as: “Contentment is the heart remaining tranquil under the decrees that have been enacted” [4]. In Sufism, various Sufi thinkers have offered multiple interpretations and definitions of this concept, reflecting its central role in spiritual ethics and inner development.

Zunnun al-Misri defines contentment (*riḍa*) as: “Contentment is meeting the bitterness of grief and fate with the joy of the heart.” Junayd al-Baghdadi, on the other hand, describes “*riḍa*” as: “The firm and correct establishment of knowledge in the heart [5]. When the heart turns to the truth of knowledge, that knowledge guides it to contentment.” Al-Hujwiri defines “*riḍa*” as: “The end of the spiritual stations (maqamat) and the beginning of the spiritual states (hal) [6].” He emphasizes that contentment exists in two forms: 1. Allah’s contentment with the servant, which manifests as granting the servant rewards and spiritual blessings; 2. The servant’s contentment with Allah, which consists of full obedience and submission to Allah’s commands and decrees. This dual aspect highlights contentment as both a divine favor and a human response in Sufi ethical and spiritual practice.

Aziziddin Nasafi defines the concept of *riḍa* (contentment) as a two-sided acceptance, embracing both opposites. In other words, one should be content whether experiencing honor or humiliation [7]. This is because one cannot know from which direction goodness will come. Good may manifest in its acceptance or in its rejection; it may come through health or through illness. Since the source and form of goodness are ultimately unknown, a person must remain content in all circumstances.

Discussion. Although the concept of *sabr* (patience) has been explained in various ways by Sufis, they exerted the greatest effort in applying this concept in their own lives. According to them, true *sabr* is the ability to maintain a tranquil heart without distinguishing between blessings and hardships, remaining calm in both situations. *Tasabbur* (the state of compelling oneself to patience), on the other hand, is the condition in which the heart remains calm while experiencing the difficulty of a trial. In the Qur'an and Hadith, patience—obligatory for every Muslim—was classified as a spiritual station by the early Sufi scholars and was mainly divided into three types. From a Tassawufi perspective, *sabr* is both a necessary condition and a result of faith, as well as one of the most important steps on the path to becoming a perfect human being.

For the early Sufis, the fact that the prophets and great personalities were patient indicated that patience is both a moral and religious principle, and it confirmed that the level of patience corresponds to the level of mastery. Patience is regarded as a virtue displayed in response to the trials of worldly life. In Sufism, patience is one of the moral virtues that embody feelings, knowledge, and conduct, and it is essential for attaining various spiritual stages. Alongside trials, which are seen as manifestations of the relationship between a servant and Allah, patience must also be exercised in relation to acts of worship, blessings, and gifts. The early Sufis defined patience in close connection

with the concepts of contentment, sincerity, submission, poverty, and asceticism. The relationship of these moral principles with patience is manifested in worship, the use of blessings, facing trials, and expressing gratitude.

For the early Sufis, patience was the fundamental condition for maintaining proper conduct and for subtle spiritual struggle in any circumstance. This struggle, which requires great strength and willpower, is cultivated and developed through patience and endurance. Patience serves as both the means and the motivating force for attaining virtuous qualities such as contentment, sincerity, submission, poverty, and asceticism. According to the early Sufis, patience is divided into various forms, including refraining from forbidden and prohibited actions, performing acts of worship, and enduring trials such as illness and poverty. In all the earliest sources of Sufism, patience and endurance are sometimes regarded by certain Sufis as superior to all other deeds. For this reason, the reward granted for patience is considered greater than the reward for other actions. It stems from the understanding that the solution lies in the hands of Allah, the Creator, and that one must wait for it with awareness and trust.

For the Sufis, this awareness is the understanding that a servant's ability to obey the commands of Khoja is rooted in patience. Thus, according to the early Sufis, the purpose of patience is to find contentment in trials and to accept calamities willingly. For the Sufis, this consciousness—recognizing that the capacity to fulfill one's Lord's commands is itself patience—is central. Similarly, in the ethical views of Aziziddin Nasafi, the concepts of gratitude, contentment, and patience occupy a prominent place. In particular, the eighteenth chapter of his work "Tanzil" is entirely devoted to the analysis of these concepts and moral phenomena.

Conclusion.

If Nasafi's views mentioned above are analyzed from a modern perspective, it can be said that they have not lost their significance. Indeed, patience and endurance undoubtedly influence human moral character. Spiritual strength is necessary to overcome difficulties and eliminate worldly anxieties, and this is essentially patience. Through the power of patience, a person can be freed from negative behaviors such as impulsiveness and anger, which are considered moral defects. For the early Sufis, renouncing carnal desires, maintaining hope in the face of hardships, developing the habit of worship, and refraining from praising anyone other than Allah—these are all significant states that require patience and lead to salvation.

References:

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