A Comparative Exploration of the Spiritual Authority of the *Awliyā'* in the Shi'i and Sufi Traditions

Rebecca Masterton

Abstract

This paper aims to engage in a critical comparison of the spiritual authority of the *awliyā'* in the Shi'i and Sufi traditions in order to examine an area of Islamic belief that remains unclearly defined. Similarities between Shi'i and Sufi doctrine have long been noted, but little research has been conducted on how and why they developed. Taking a central tenet of both, *walāyah*, the paper discusses several of its key aspects as they appear recorded in Shi'i *ḥadīth* collections and as they appear later in one of the earliest Sunni Sufi treatises. By extention, it seeks to explore the identity of the *awliyā'* and their role in relation to the Twelve Imams. It also traces the reabsorption into Shi'i culture of the Sufi definition of *walāyah* via two examples: the works of one branch of the Dhahabi order and those of Allamah Tabataba'i, a popular twentieth-century Iranian mystic and scholar.

Introduction

This paper aims to engage in a critical comparison of the spiritual authority of the *awliyā'* in the Shi'i and Sufi traditions to examine more closely and potentially uncover an area of Islamic doctrine that remains unclearly defined. Throughout history some Shi'i *'urafā'* have also called themselves "Sufi," or

Rebecca Masterton obtained her doctorate in the Islamic and Francophone literature of West Africa in 2006 from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. After serving as senior lecturer at the Islamic College for a number of years, she launched Online Shi'a Studies. She is currently researching the spiritual dimensions of *tashayyu'* in early Shi'i history. Her publications include a translation of *The Moral World of the Qur'an* and a volume of fiction entitled *Passing through the Dream*.

at least have not rejected the concept of Sufi practice. For example, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i's (d. 1981) *Kernal of the Kernal*[1] is described as "A Shi'i Approach to Sufism," although whether he would have agreed with this cannot be verified. In embarking upon this matter, we need to think about the history of Sufism that has come down to us and that has, more or less, become accepted as a given by such leading scholars in the field as Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003), Alexander Knysh, and Ahmet Karamustafa, as well as those who practice and teach Sufism worldwide.

The story goes like this: Prophet Muhammad passed on the secrets of his esoteric knowledge to Ali and Abu Bakr. Indeed, among Sufis such as the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya, it is not uncommon to hear how Ali was taught the *dhikr* of "*lā ilāha illallāh*" while Abu Bakr was taught the *dhikr* of "*Allāh Allāh*." Ali went on, as it is known, to become the head of all Sufi *silsilah*s, except for one Naqshbandi *silsilah* that traces itself back to Abu Bakr via Ja'far al-Sadiq. We can set aside that particular one and focus on those going back to Ali. The story continues with a somewhat mysterious figure who has nevertheless come to be so revered that even certain Shi'i scholars, such as Sayyid Muhammad al-Baqir al-Khwansari (d. 1895) have claimed him to be a prominent Shi'i: Hasan al-Basri (d. 728). It is alleged that this early Muslim knew Ali, was nursed by Umm Salama, and that, in short, imbibed the knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt.

In the Shadhili and Chishti chains of initiation, Hasan al-Basri can be seen coming directly after Ali, even though Suleiman Ali Mourad's close examination of sources in his *Early Islam between Myth and History*[2] shows that it is unlikely that the two even met or, if they did, that the last time that Hasan would have been able to set eyes on Ali would have been when he was about fourteen years old. Looking at these and other *silsilah*s, other such famous names follow on from al-Basri, among them Dawud al-Ta'i, Sari al-Saqati, Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, and al-Junayd al-Baghdadi. Most histories of Sufism mention these figures, their lives, and their contribution to the Sufi tradition.

With regard to the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt, the most comprehensive Shadhili *silsilah* has three chains of initiation, one of which is traced back through al-Ridha to al-Husayn and then Ali. The Qadiriyya also have a *silsilah* that is traced back from al-Ridha to al-Husayn and then Ali. The Haba'ib, or Ba 'Alawi, of Yemen and Hadramawt, of whom Habib Ali Jifri is a well-known contemporary scholar, trace their lineage back to al-Sadiq through his great-great-grandson Ahmad ibn 'Isa (d. 924), who is held to have travelled to Hadramawt to spread the Shafi'i *madhhab*. Ali Uthman al-Hujwiri (d. 1072-73), who composed one of the earliest catalogues on

Sufism, lists the first six Imams and discusses their merits and teachings. Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) and Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762) also recognize and narrate from the Twelve Imams. However, the following statement is typical of many Sufis.

> All paths of *tasawwuf* originated from Hadrat Imam Jafar as-Sadiq *radi-Allahu ta'ala 'anh*, who was joined to Rasulullah *sall-Allahu ta'ala 'alaihi wa sallam* with two lineages, one of which was his paternal way, which reached Rasulullah through Hadrat 'Ali *radi-Allahu ta'ala 'anh*. The second line was his maternal grandfather's pedigree, which was related to Rasulullah through Hadrat Abu Bakr *radi-Allahu ta'ala 'anh*. Because he descended maternally from Abu Bakr as-Siddiq and also received *faid* from Rasulullah through him, Hadrat Imam Jafar as-Sadiq said, "Abu Bakr as-Siddiq gave me two lives." These two ways of *faid* and *marifa* that Imam Jafar as-Sadiq had did not commingle or intersect. *Faid* has been flowing through Hadrat Imam to the great Akhrariyya guides from Hadrat Abu Bakr, and to the other *silsila*s (chains) from Hadrat 'Ali.[3]

Or "These imams of the ahl al-bayt were sunnis and awliya Allah."[4] This statement came in response to a Sunni inquirer who, surprised to find figures normally associated with Shi'ism in Sufi initiatory chains, wanted to know who they were and why they were there. After being told that they were Sunni and also *awliyā'*, he asked where he could find their teachings in Sunni sources, saying: "I haven't actually heard any Sunni teacher sourcing from the Imams." He received no response, and therein lies precisely the point. The Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are universally acknowledged as sources of great wisdom, as *awliyā'* and members of the chains of initiation, yet their teachings are mysteriously unavailable – and this in a tradition that strives to be thorough in checking *sanad*s and the authenticity of narrations, and which has made the teachings of other *awliyā'*, among them, Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166), Abu Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258), or Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1390), widely available.

This blurring of lines with regard to defining *walāyah* has engendered a Sufi tradition that celebrates many such figures whose teachings, upon closer inspection, are actually found to be copied word-for-word from the Imams but without any credit or reference given. There is a remarkable degree of coincidence between the doctrines and theories of the Ahl al-Bayt, as found abundantly in Shi'i sources, and those of various Sufis, as found in more scattered forms. Those found in the Sufi tradition, however, have no apparent *sanad*s. Virtually identical narrations about the *awliyā'* appear in both Shi'i and Sunni Sufi works. Al-Sadiq has said:

> Verily, Allah, the Almighty, the Great, does not get angry as we do. But He has created some *awliyā'* (sincere friends) for Himself who become angry […] (for the sake of Allah). Allah Himself has said (in *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*): "Whoever humiliates Me by humiliating My friends, has actually challenged Me to fight and drawn Me in combat with him."[5]

Several centuries later, Ibn Arabi also listed this in his collection: "God, ever Mighty and Majestic is He, says: 'Whoever demeans one of My Saints has declared war on Me.'"[6]

One rare case where the Imams are acknowledged is that of a certain work that Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996), author of *Qūt al-Qulūb* (*The Nourishment of Hearts*), refers to as *Ruwiynā Musnadan min Ṭarīq Ahl al-Bayt* (*Authentic Reports that We Received from the Way of the Ahl al-Bayt*). This was apparently a "*tafsīr*" attributed to al-Sadiq, consisting of *aḥādīth*.[7] Here it can be seen that the Ahl al-Bayt's teachings and practices were recognized at that time as a *ṭarīq* (a way).

Who Are the *Awliyā'*?

The Ahl al-Bayt themselves have mentioned the existence of certain *awliyā'*, and this remains another point of discussion among Shi'is. In the Shi'i tradition, some argue that only the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are *awliyā'*. Indeed, al-Sadiq has stated:

> "There is no night of Friday without there being joy for the *awliyā' Allāh* in it." I said: "How is that? May I be your ransom." He said: "When the night of Friday comes the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h.a.h.p) reaches to the Throne, and the Imams (p.b.u.t.) reach (it) with him, and I do not return without gaining knowledge."[8]

The Imams have also described and defined the characteristics of those who may be called *awliyā'*. Ali says:

> The *awliyā' Allāh* are those who look at the inward side of the world while others look at its outward side. They busy themselves with its remoter benefits while others busy themselves in the immediate benefits. […] Through them, the Book is learnt and they have learnt through the Book.[9]

The final sentence in this statement seems to indicate that he is referring to the Imams in this case; however, Tabataba'i cites a narration from Ali, in reference to the *awliyā'*, that seems to refer to anyone who has succeeded on

the journey of the soul. He explains that their final spiritual "abode" (or spiritual station) is that of *yaqīn.*

> The statement made by Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (may God's greetings be upon him) points to the station attained by such a traveler: "[…] who has seen his way, has traversed his path, has recognized its minaret, and has removed its veils. He has attained a degree of certainty which is like the certainty of the rays of the sun."[10]

In *Lantern of the Path*, attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, he also mentions the *awliyā'*, stipulating specific "principles of conduct" with God, the self, the people, and the world that they should fulfil before qualifying as such. These include being patient with trials, being just, and practicing asceticism.[11] Since this volume seeks to give advice, it would seem to be for those aspiring to become *awliyā'*. A narration by Musa al-Kadhim also indicates that the *awliyā'* are the lovers (and possibly elite Shi'is, according to the precise definition given by the Imam) of the Imams: "A person who fulfills the need of one of our friends [*awliyā'inā*] is like the one who has fulfilled the need for all of us (the Ahlulbayt)."[12]

What, then, did the Imams have in mind with regard to the authority of these *awliyā'*, and how did their authority differ from that of the *awliyā'* of the Sufi tradition? Certainly, with regard to both traditions, there are places in which the Imams denounced outright those who are revered elsewhere as *awliyā'*. Suleiman Ali Mourad notes a narration in which it is said: "Whenever al-Hasan [al-Basri] was mentioned in the presence of Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ali b. al-Husayn [al-Baqir], he would say: 'Oh, that one whose words are like the words of prophets!'"[13] On the other hand, as Arzina Lalani has pointed out in her *Early Shi'i Thought*,[14] there are many instances where al-Baqir expressed anathema toward Hasan al-Basri; for example, when the latter interprets Qur'anic verses in a way that conceals the message of the Ahl al-Bayt's *wilāyah*. Al-Baqir calls him "*al-muḥarrif li kalām Allāh*" (a distorter of God's words). Zayn al-Abidin is also noted as having refuted Hasan al-Basri,[15] which raises the following question: "Who was responsible for Hasan al-Basri's prominence as a *walī* in the Sufi tradition?" This is just one issue that requires further exploration.

In the Sunni tradition, the *awliyā'* gradually came to be identified with the Sufis, or perhaps it might be said that the Sufis began to be identified with the *awliyā'*. Today, one might assume without question that this is a natural correlation; however, it was not always so. As Jamil Abun-Nasr points out, the idea that it is the Sufis who are God's special confederates who deputize

for Him in the guardianship of the believers began with the ascetic movement in Basra. They adopted the term *awliyā' Allāh* for themselves at the beginning of the eighth century, but "did not claim any special spiritual authority [for] themselves."[16]

The first half of the eighth century coincides with the imamates of al-Baqir and al-Sadiq – a time, it is known, when Shi'i doctrine began to crystallize and spread more widely, with al-Baqir in particular explicitly elaborating upon *walāyah*. According to Abun-Nasr, during the second half of the eighth century (al-Kaḍim's Imamate) the term *awliyā' Allāh* became more specialized until it came to be applied to those who had attained the heights of piety and esoteric knowledge. With regard to Q. 5:55,[17] the ascetics assumed that this term referred to them. Abun-Nasr notes the changes in its usage from the early period in Basra, from the plural *awliyā' Allāh* to *walīyu Allāh* to simply *walī*. With this, "as the recipient of God's special guardianship, the *walī* became venerated as his deputy in the guardianship of the believers."[18]

While contemporary Sufis such as Shadhili Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller make it a condition that one must be Sunni to join the *ṭarīqah*, and while many Sunni Sufis insist that Sufis are only Sunni, the term *ṣūfī* was actually first used by and for Mu'tazilis and ascetics with Shi'i tendencies. Kamil al-Shaibi states that the first three people to be called Sufi were from Kufa: Abu Hashim al-Kufi (d. 777); 'Abdak al-Sufi (d. 825-26), who anticipated the return of Imam Mahdi[19]; and Jabir ibn Hayyan (d. 803), a student of al-Sadiq.[20] Abu Hatim al-'Attar (d. 874) was a Mu'tazili who resided in Basra. Al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910) was known to have associated with some of his followers, also called "Sufis," before setting up his own "Sufi school" in Baghdad. In addition, those who later came to be called Sufis, such as al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857) and Sari al-Saqati (d. 867), were not known as such in their own time.[21]

The Centrality of *Walāyah*

With regard to comparative doctrines in Shi'i and Sufi *'aqīdah*, we can begin with that of *walāyah* itself. The Shi'i tradition makes a clear distinction between *wilāyah* (an all-encompassing authority) and *walāyah* (the friendship and protection of the Imam), whereas the Sufi tradition more or less uses both terms interchangeably and has thus blurred the lines of definition. According to the Imams, *walāyah* is fundamental to the entire religion of Islam. Al-Baqir says that "*walāya* or *imāma* is the most important duty … the major pillar of Islam and the pivot around which all other pillars revolve."[22] Let us compare

this to what al-Hujwiri says: "The foundation of the entire Sufi *tarīqa* [meaning not one particular *tarīqa*, but the entire Sufi way] is the affirmation of the existence of *wilāya*. All *shuyūkh* are united in this regard, but they speak of *wilāya* in different terms."[23] He even says that "knowledge of Allah rests on *wilāya*."[24] Al-Sadiq implies the same: "Only the successors are the gates of Allah, to Whom belong Might and Majesty, through which He can be reached."[25] Ahmad al-Tijani, founder of the Tijani order that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in North Africa and adheres to "classical" Sufi teachings derived from al-Ghazzali and Ibn 'Arabi, repeats this doctrine, but in reference to the *awliyā'*: "*L'ascète n'arrivera à Dieu que par l'intermediare des gnostiques, titulaires d'une permission spéciale d'initiation*."[26]

Al-Hujwiri does differentiate between *wilāyah* and *walāyah*: "*Waláyat* means, etymologically, 'power to dispose' (*tasarruf*), and *wiláyat* means 'possession of command' (*imárat*)."[27] Thus, one can see that entering the Sufi path (*ṭarīqah*) entails the obligation of acknowledging the concept and institution of *walāyah* and that the Sufis – who, according to al-HujwirI, are the *awliyā'* – possess the "command" (*'amr*), which would imply that it is obligatory to obey them.

Divine Protection from Sin

The Shi'i tradition holds that *wilāyah* is divinely bestowed upon the Imams. According to al-Sadiq, no Imam is free to choose his successor; rather, the Imamate is a covenant (*'ahd*) from God and the Prophet that is passed to the next successor.[28]

> The Imamate is a covenant [*'ahd*] from Allah, to Whom belong Might and Majesty, which is entrusted to men who are named. It is not for the Imam to withold it from him who is after him.[29]

Sunni mystic al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d. 900) makes an almost identical statement, but in reference to the proto-Sufis of his time: "Like *nubuwwa* (prophethood), [*walāyah*] is a covenant (*'aqd*) with God [...] But [...] it is a divine gift and not a right the believer earns by his own endeavours."[30] In the Shi'i tradition, an integral aspect of *wilāyah* is that the Imam is divinely protected from committing any evil (*ma'ṣūm*). Interestingly, we find that while the Sufi tradition largely denies the Imams' infallibility as well as their status as divinely selected guides, the belief that the *awliyā'* were both divinely selected and infallible became standard doctrines. The idea that this "infallibility" is also divinely bestowed upon the *awliyā'* appears in al-Hujwiri's text.[31]

However, he is careful to define a special type of infallibility here in order to offset any potential accusations that he was claiming for the Sufis the same status as the prophets. Stating that only prophets are *ma'ṣūm*, he prefers to use the term *mahfūḍ* – "(protected) from any evil that involves the denial of their saintship."[32] There appears to be no mention in the Imams' teachings that the *awliyā'* are *mahfūḍ*.

Rightly Guided Leaders

Linked to the matter of being *ma'ṣūm* in the Shi'i tradition is that individual's position as the community's rightly guided leader whom one is obligated to follow, for following anyone else not only means potentially being misguided but also disobeying God's command. Al-Baqir again makes this very clear. The Imams are "the ones firmly rooted in knowledge […] pure and protected from sin and error and they are the light of God by which people may walk and be guided aright."[33] Al-Sadiq confirms this.

> He who knows us is a believer, and he who denies us is an unbeliever. He who neither knows us nor denies us is misguided, til he returns to the path of guidance, which Allah has made an obligation for him as a binding obedience to us.[34]

The Sufi tradition contains a doctrine that is similar to Imamate, one that holds that where *nubūwah* ends, *walāyah* begins: "The *awliyâ'* follow the prophets and confirm their messages at all time[s]. For the prophets are more favoured [by God] than the *awliyâ'*, and consequently *walâya* ends where prophethood begins."[35] Since *walāyah* continues to uphold and confirm the prophetic message, the *walī* becomes the Prophet's successor and representative. For example, al-Hujwiri says that the *walī* is like a living representation of the Prophet in the *murīd*'s (aspirant) life, a living proof (*burhān*) of prophethood. He further says that "the Saints [are] the governers of the universe."[36] 'Abd al-Karim Jili (d. 1408) said that the *awliyā'* are the human embodiments of Prophet Muhammad's essence (*al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadīyah*).

> The Perfect Man is the *Qutb* (axis) on which the spheres of existence revolve from first to last, and since things came into being he is one (*wáhid*) for ever and ever. He hath various guises and appears in diverse bodily tabernacles (*kaná'is*) [...] His own original name is Mohammed, his name of honour is Abu'l-Qásim, his description 'Abdullah, and his title Shamsu'ddín. In every age he bears a name suitable to his guise (*libás*) in that age. I once met him in the form of my Shaykh, Sharafu'ddín Ismá'íl al-Jabartí, but I did not know

> that he (the Shaykh) was the Prophet, although I knew that he (the Prophet) was the Shaykh. [...] The name Mohammed is not applied except to the Idea of Mohammed (*al-Haqíqatu'l-Muhammadiyya*). Thus, when he appeared in the form of Shiblí, Shiblí said to his disciple, "Bear witness that I am the Apostle of God"; and the disciple, being one of the illuminated, recognised the Prophet and said, "I bear witness that thou art the Apostle of God."[37]

The Tijani order likewise holds that "*Le saint parmi les siens est comparable au Prophète dans sa communauté; le suivre, c'est suivre le Prophète*."[38]

The Stations of the *Awliyā'*

According to al-Tirmidhi, the *awliyā'* are those upon whom God has delegated the guidance of the believers. This group comprises forty *awliyā'* who appeared after the Prophet's death and have different grades of status (*darajāt*). When one of them dies, God replaces him with a *walī* of the same status. A similar doctrine can be found in the Imams' teachings. Al-Sadiq explains: "Ali (p.b.u.h) was a man of Knowledge, and Knowledge is inherited. And a man of Knowledge never dies unless another one remains after him who knows his Knowledge."[39] Al-Ridha confirms this by explicitly using the term *Imam* to say that when one Imam dies another one is divinely appointed.[40] Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, a major figure in the establishment of Sufi doctrines, was born between 820 and 824, just a few years after the birth of Muhammad al-Taqi, the Ninth Imam. He died in 892, approximately twenty years after the martyrdom of the Eleventh Imam, who, it is said, notified "forty reliable Shī'ites" as to whom would be the Twelfth Imam's representative: 'He informed them that they would not see him again and commanded them to obey 'Uthman [b. Sa'id]."[41]

At the age of twenty-seven (c. 850), some time after al-Mutawakkil had had the Tenth Imam (Ali al-Naqi) brought from Madina to Baghdad, al-Tirmidhi made his hajj, travelling from Tirmidh (Khorasan) to Basra and then on to Makka. He went to Basra "in search of Traditions."[42] After his *tawbā* in Makka, he returned to Iraq and began to "search in books" for knowledge; however, he remained "bewildered" until "the teachings of the people with knowledge of God (*ahl al-ma'rifah*) reached my ears."[43] Al-Tirmidhi does not say who these people were and only mentions reading one work by a student of al-Muhasibi. According to his own claims, the rest of his knowledge appears to come from dreams. Overlooking the fact that al-Tirmidhi was in Iraq during the Eleventh Imam's imprisonment in the north at Samarra, Karamustafa concludes that since al-Tirmidhi does not appear to have spent time

in lower Iraq (although, as has been seen, al-Tirmidhi himself says that he passed through Basra), or been with the Sufis of Baghdad, then he must have developed his thought by himself.[44] Yet it is known that he was aware enough of the Imami school and its doctrines to write polemical treatises against "the Rawafid."[45]

As mentioned above, many Shi'i doctrines and concepts can be found in Sufi works without any attributions given. For example, since al-Tirmidhi is silent about the origin of his "knowledge," he is credited with the visionary conception of the states and stations through which the soul passes in order to attain *wilāyah*/*walāyah*, apparently using terms that are not found among other Sufis: "In Tirmidhi's usage *manāzil* correspond more or less to the *ahwāl* and *maqāmat* of the classical books on Sufism with the meaning 'halting stations.'"[46] It may be noted that Zayn al-Abidin had used *manzil* some 150 to 200 years earlier. In the first *du'ā* of *Al-Saḥīfah al-Sajjadīyah*, he says:

> Praise belongs to God [...] a praise through which He will illuminate for us the shadows of the interworld [*barzakh*], ease for us the path of Resurrection, and raise up our stations [*manāzilanā*] at the standing places [*mawāqif*] of the Witnesses.[47]

Al-Sadiq, approximately 100 years before al-Tirmidhi, also used *manzil*: "The Imams are of the station [*manzila*] of the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h.a.h.p.), except that they are not prophets."[48] Al-Tirmidhi incidentally replicates this teaching with regard to the *awliyā'*:

> The student asked him: "And what is the description of the Friend who possesses the imamate of Friendship with God, as well as the leadership and the seal of Friendship with God?" He replied: "He is very close [in rank] to the prophets, in fact he has almost attained their status."[49]

This is just one instance of terminology, concepts, and doctrines migrating from the Imams' works and words of the Imams to the works and words of pioneering Sufis who also wrote works against "the Rawafid."

The *Awliyā'* Are Hidden

According to the Sufi tradition, the status of the *awliyā'* is most often hidden from ordinary Muslims. Only when someone reaches a certain level of inner purification can they recognize a *walī*. Al-Tirmidhi mentions certain servants of God who are favored by Him and whose hearts have been purified and shine with the light of His lamps[50]; however, there are people who are "un-

aware of the state of the Friend of God: those fools whose hearts are deluded through ignorance."[51] This could be compared to earlier *aḥādīth* in the Shi'i tradition. Al-Baqir says:

> The Light of the Imam in the hearts of the believers is more brilliant than the sun shining in the day. They, by Allah, are those who illuminate the hearts of the believers. And Allah, to Whom belong Might and Majesty, veils their Light from whomsoever He wills; thus their hearts are darkened. By Allah, O Abu Khalid! No slave loves us and accepts our mastership until Allah purifies his heart. And Allah does not purify the heart of a slave until he submits to us, and is at peace with us.[52]

And "Whoever is aware of us knows (what we actually are), and whoever is not aware of us does not know (what our status is)."[53] In fact, the entire Shi'i tradition is characterized by its being hidden, by the identity of the Shi'is being hidden, by the identity of the Imams' agents being hidden, and by the Imams themselves having to conceal their teachings. Tabataba'i recalls a *ḥadīth qudsī* in which God describes to the Prophet those who attain this special station of *walāyah* and what it entails. Just a part of this *ḥadīth* says:

> O Ahmad! […] When he loves Me, I will love him and open the eye of his heart to My Majesty, and I will never hide from him the chosen of My people, and I will speak to him in the darkness of night and the light of day until he ceases communing and associating with people, and I will make him hear My speech and the speech of My angels. I will also reveal to him the secret which I have veiled from My people.[54]

According to Tabataba'i, these blessings are for the *awliyā'* who are granted the permission to "join their Imam."[55] According to the *aḥādīth* of al-Sadiq, the *awliyā'* are those who are especially close to the Imam. As al-Sadiq explains, during the Twelfth Imam's minor occultation "only certain chosen Shî'ites will know where he is hidden, and during the second [occultation], only the chosen ones among the intimate Friends in his Religion [*mawālihi fī dīnihi*] will know this place."[56] According to Amir-Moezzi, these chosen Shi'is are the Imam's representatives during the minor occultation; during this period, only they are permitted to know his "location." "The chosen ones among the intimate Friends in his Religion" are those who are initiated so as to be able to be in contact with the Imam during the major occultation.[57] To which he adds: "Note the distinction made between the two kinds of 'chosen ones'; the first are said to be Shî'ites by confession, a point that does not appear in

the second group."[58] Thus, in other words, there is an established hierarchy of knowledge. Amir-Moezzi notes this in another *ḥadīth* from al-Sadiq: "None of his [Imam al-Mahdi] friends [*walī*] or anyone else will know where he is, except for the intimate Friend [*mawlā*] who rules over his Cause."[59] In later sources (the dates of which he does not provide), these intimate Friends were called *rijâl al-ghayb* (men of the Invisible) "about whom it is said that their existence is indispensable to humanity, since they are the ones that will continue to transmit the Divine Science secretly until the Return of the hidden imam."[60] The much later teachings of the Tijani order echo this: "*Il y a en outre, une hiérarchie ésotérique des saints, hiérarchie invisible des âmes croyantes* (*rijàl al-ghaïb*)."[61]

As mentioned above, al-Tirmidhi is credited with envisioning the hierarchy of the hidden *awliyā'*, yet such hierarchies can be found in early Imami, Batini, and Isma'ili sources.[62] One of these sources is attributed to a Shi'i disciple of al-Sadiq, again about 100 years before al-Tirmidhi.[63]

Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (d. 1074) was one of the earliest Sunni Sufis to discuss the doctrine of the "hidden *awliyā'*" (about 200 years after the Twelfth Imam's occultation). Like the Shi'i doctrine of *nass* (divine selection of the Imam), al-Qushayri holds that these *awliyā'* have been divinely selected by God.[64] Here again, he conflates the characteristics of the Imam's *walāyah* with the more general *walāyah* of the pious; approximately 150 years before al-Hujwiri wrote that "*walâya* is one of the secrets of God,"[65] al-Saffar al-Qummi transmitted a narration in his *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt* attributed to al-Sadiq: "Our *'amr* [affair; matter; *walāyah*] is a secret contained within a secret."[66]

The *Quṭb*: *Imam* or *Walī*?

The issue of the *quṭb*'s identity is complex. Some Twelver Shi'is hold that only the Twelfth Imam is the *quṭb* of the Age, having inherited that station from his forefathers. Ali is said to have been the first to use this particular term,[67] which he does in reference to himself: "My position in relation to [the caliphate] was the same as the position of the axis [*quṭb*] in relation to the hand-mill."[68] Each Imam would then have inherited this position and been the *quṭb* of his time, right down to the Twelfth Imam. According to Nasr, Shi'is see the Hidden Imam as the *quṭb*,[69] although some scholars argue that this view is fairly uncommon. It is not clear exactly who today among the Twelver Shi'is calls him "the *quṭb*."

In al-Tirmidhi's hierarchy of the *awliyā'*, the *quṭb* is at the pinnacle:

> The *awliyâ'* became viewed as the holders of different ranks in an eternal spiritual hierarchy having seven grades of *walâya*. The lowest rank has 4,000 occupants called *maktûmûn* (concealed ones), who are so called because their being *awliyâ'* is not known even to themselves. The second rank has 300 occupants called *akhyâr* (benevolent ones). The third rank has forty *awliyâ'* called *abdâl* (substitutes), the fourth seven called *abrâr* (dutiful ones), the fifth four called *awtâd* (pillars),[70] and the sixth has four called *nuqabâ'* (headmen). The seventh and highest rank is occupied by the *quṭb* (the axis), who is the holder of the highest grade of spiritual authority among the *awliyâ'*. Being the ultimate source of divine grace to mankind, he is also called *al-ghawth* (the saviour).[71]

The titles of the ranks within this hierarchy may be traced to earlier narrations in the Shi'i traditions, including one attributed to Zayn al-Abidin.[72] However, again, al-Tirmidhi is credited with devising the concept of the *quṭb* and with the "first" written account of *walāyah*, as can be in seen the work of Claude Addas, a specialist on Ibn 'Arabi:

> Before we delve into a more detailed analysis of the idea of the Seal of Sainthood, let us remember that it was not Ibn 'Arabi who *invented* it. It can be traced back to the ninth century and to a Khurasani mystic, al-Hakim Tirmidhi [...] And yet, it is not so much the question of the Seal that occupies the greater part of Tirmidhi's work, but the much broader question of *walāyah*, for this was the *first time* that an author attempted to define its nature, its role, and its degrees.[73]

Al-Tirmidhi describes this *quṭb* as the chief of the *awliyā'*, and, as mentioned above, as having the title of *khatm al-walāyah* (the Seal of the *Walāyah*), "whose spiritual authority comprises that of the other *awliyâ'* in the same way that the prophethood of Muhammad, the *khatm al-nubuwwa*, comprises the prophethood of all other prophets."[74] Radtke and O'Kane explain that the *khatm al-walāyah* is "the highest spiritual successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the summit and culmination of the spiritual hierarchy" and that, as is evident from al-Tirmidhi's autobiography, he believed himself to be that successor.[75] Ibn 'Arabi built his oeuvre upon al-Tirmidhi's theory. 'Abd al-Karim Jili, after Ibn 'Arabi, also mentions such a figure whom he described as

> … the Unique Perfect Being, the Universal Support, the pole [*quṭb*] around which existence turns [...] Through him God safeguards the world. He is the Mahdi, the Seal of the Sainthood [*khatm al-walāyah*] [...] He influences the realities of existence like the magnet draws iron [...] No single thing is hidden from him.[76]

Some Sufi chains of initiation (*silsilah*s) emerged out of the archetypal *silsilah* of the Imams, whose adherents followed the Ithna'ashari *madhhab*. One such *silsilah* is that of the Dhahabi order, the "Golden Chain" said to have been founded by al-Ridha and that traces its way back through the Imams to the Prophet.[77] It includes major Sunni Sufi figures, such as Sari al-Saqati, al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, Ahmad Ghazzali, Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, and Najm al-Din Kubra. It also takes all *ṭarīqah*s, whether Sunni or Shi'i, as legitimate and goes along with the received truth of their foundation: "Know that all the chains of the Friends of God [Sufi masters] go back to Imam 'Ali al-Murtadha."[78] The order also accepts the received truth that Bayazid Bastami was al-Sadiq's water carrier and that Ma'ruf al-Karkhi was al-Ridha's doorman[79] – the former most certainly being a fabrication, since Bastami lived a century after al-Sadiq and Ma'ruf al-Karkhi is unlikely ever to have crossed paths with al-Ridha.

In spite of the belief among certain Twelvers that the *quṭb* of the Age is the Hidden Imam, the Dhahabi order adheres to a broader definition of the term, one that can also be found in the Sunni Sufi tradition: the "*quṭb*" is the leader of the order at any given time. In reading Mohammad H. Faghfoory's "Translator's Note" to the *Tuḥfa-yi 'Abbāsī* by Muhammad Ali Mu'addhin Khorasani (d. 1078/1667), shaykh of Dhahabi order during the seventeenth century, we find that "Its full name is the Dhahabiyya Radawiyah Murtadawiya Mahdawiya Kubrawiya order. Each title denotes a major Pole [*quṭb*] in the chain of transmission of spiritual authority."[80]

Here we can also get some insight into the nature of the *walī*'s spiritual authority, which, it turns out, is virtually the same as that which is seen in the Sunni Sufi orders: 'The Pole [*Quṭb*] of the order (*Walī-yi ju'z*) is the Universal Man who is the locus of the manifestation of the Divine attributes. He is also the inheritor of the spiritual authority of the Immaculate Imam (*Walī-yi Kul*)."[81] As with the earlier Sunni Sufis, Faghfoory conflates the Imam's exclusive, universal authority (*wilāyah*) with that of the initiatory relationship between the Imam and his Shi'i (*walāyah*)[82]; thus, this initiatory relationship is transferred to the head of the Sufi order, who is known as "the *Quṭb*": 'The Inerrant Imam is considered as the Universal Guide (*Walī-yi Kull* i.e. Friend of God), whose grace flows through the Particular pole (*Walī-yi ju'z*)."[83]

It is well known that Ibn 'Arabi elaborated on the visionary concept of the Universal Man as "the locus of the manifestation of the Divine attributes." In fact, this idea became so popular among Sufi orders that it was quite common for *shuyūkh* to claim to have attained this level, thereby rendering themselves virtually infallible.[84] That aside, Faghfoory takes the trouble to point out that the *shuyūkh* of the Dhahabi order were ahead of Ibn 'Arabi by at least

sixty years in discussing the matter of *wilāyah*. He cites two treatises, *Sawm al-Qalb* and *Bihjat al-Tay'fah* by Shaykh 'Ammar Bidlis (d. 1178), the order's eleventh master.[85]

Mu'addhin Khorasani held that Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 1191), Shaykh al-Ishraq, was also an adherent of the order. While technically being Shafi'i, Shaykh al-Ishraq had certain Shi'i tendencies. Could these have emerged from his attachment to the order, or was it simply because he had been in contact with Shi'is, having grown up in Iran? Herman Landholt notes "his ambiguous allusions to the 'time deprived of divine administration,' when the 'powers of darkness take over' and the rightful 'representative of God' (*khalifat Allah*) or 'divinely inspired leader' (*al-imam al-muta'allih*) is hidden."[86]

Suhrawardi is not listed as a *quṭb* of this order, yet he was known as the *quṭb* of his age, at least by his followers.[87] Abu Hasan al-Shadhili was also called the *quṭb* of his time. Most of the teachings recorded by his followers, mainly by Ibn Ata'Allah al-Iskandari (d. 1309) and Muhammad ibn Abi al-Qasim ibn al-Sabbaq (d. 1323), promoted him as such.[88] This raises questions about the *quṭb*'s identity: Who merits being the *quṭb* of the Age? How does he acquire such status? Can there be more than one *quṭb* of the Age? If Suhrawardi was seen as the *quṭb* of his Age and was also a member of the Dhahabi order, then why was he not considered their *quṭb* at the same time he was considered the *quṭb* by his own followers? How does this fit with al-Tirmidhi's theory that there is only one *quṭb* at any given time, who is at the pinnacle of the saintly hierarchy? Why do al-Tirmidhi and other Sufis not refer back to the head of their *silsilah*s, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as one of these *aqṭāb*? The lack of any clear identity about the *quṭb* in the Sufi tradition has meant that many prominent Sufis believed to be *awliyā'* have been able to attribute that title to themselves.

Walāyah Is Open to All

In early works on Sufism, such as those of al-Tirmidhi and al-Hujwiri, *walāyah* is seen as something that is divinely bestowed and therefore cannot be earned. Nevertheless, the issue of actually attaining it remains a subtle one. Just because it is divinely bestowed does not mean that people should not aspire to attain a level of perfection that would then make them a *walī* of God. In his Fifty-fifth Discourse of *Futūḥ al-Ghaib*, entitled "On giving up life's pleasures," which teaches about detachment, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561/1166) discusses the potential spiritual results of abstaining from the unlawful and adhering to the lawful:

> Now he travels on the steed of what is religiously permissible and lawful in all his circumstances, until this means of transport finally brings him to the threshold of *Wilāyah* and entry into the company of the masters of reality [*muḥaqqiqūn*] and the chosen ones [*khawāṣṣ*], the people of firm resolve, those who aspire to the Truth.[89]

This is where we can find similarities with the teachings of Allamah Tabataba'i, who maintains that anyone can attain the state of *walāyah*. In his *Risālat al-Walāyah*, he writes "Human perfection finds final fruition in this *walāyah, and the ultimate purpose of the true divine law [...] is to reach this walāyah*."[90] However, while it is still possible to "join the Holy Prophet and his Household" in the station of *walāyah*, no Shi'i can share in *wilāyah* (the Imam's divinely bestowed authority).[91] For Tabataba'i, attaining *walāyah* is a way of being in the company of the Ahl al-Bayt, as other *aḥādīth* have indicated.

Tabataba'i still differentiates between a *walāyah* that is open to all and a *walāyah* that is exclusive to the Ahl al-Bayt. This can be seen in his teachings, as elaborated by his student Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tihrani. There is one level of *walāyah* for those at the station of sincerity (*khulūṣ*) and another level for those at the station of righteousness (*ṣulḥ*). In his teachings, the latter station carries a certain authority: Tihrani refers to the Qur'anic verse where Satan says "By Thy Might, I surely will deceive them all, except for Your sincere and pure slaves [*mukhliṣīn*]."[92] Tihrani notes that "It is evident that this exception is not a privilege ordained by Shari'ah. Rather, it is a prerogative emanating from the essential authority of the sincere ones, earned in the station of unity with God (*tawḥīd*)."[93] The *mukhliṣīn* have authority over Satan – that is clearly stated – but the extent of their authority over the rest of creation and over those seeking knowledge from them is not.

According to the teachings of Tabataba'i, as demonstrated by the verses of Qur'an, the prophets before Prophet Muhammad were of the *mukhliṣīn*, such as Yusuf and Ibrahim. However, it is noted that Ibrahim makes *du'ā* to God to "join him with the Righteous" – the *ṣāliḥīn* – in the next world.[94] The question remains, then, who are these *ṣāliḥīn* and why should prophets of an exalted station ask to be joined with those who they see as belonging to a still greater and more exalted station? The answer is that these people are the Ahl al-Bayt, who alone have the station of righteousness. As Tabataba'i writes, God answered this *du'ā*: "Verily We chose him in the world, and certainly in the Hereafter he is among the Righteous."[95] The highest level of *walāyah* attainable in this world, even for the prophets (except for Prophet Muhammad,

who is one of the Ahl al-Bayt), therefore, is that of *khulūṣ*, which entails annihilation in the Divine Names and Attributes.[96]

Sayyid Ridha Husayni Mutlaq, author of *The Last Luminary*, also mentions those who have attained the station of *khulūṣ*:

> Among the scholars of the religion and those who narrate the traditions of the pure and infallible Ahlul Bayt (as) and those who practice what they know with true sincerity, there is a group who, through their hard work, have attained the status of the sincere individuals (al-Mukhlisun). It is this group of people who possess complete ma'rifah of Allah (swt), and through spiritual union with Him, have completely annihilated themselves in His Sacred Essence.[97]

In general, the *mukhliṣīn* are described as "scholars" or "from among the scholars." If one takes a particular *ḥadīth* from al-Sadiq narrated in *Biḥār al-Anwār* to be authentic, it would seem that, indeed, Muslims are encouraged to seek out the *mukhliṣīn* and regard them as sources of guidance:

> Ah! How I long to sit and speak with these people and how much grief I have for that which they have – however by sitting with them, my grief would go away! I am looking for these people and when I find them and benefit from their Divinely granted Light, then I too shall be guided. Through them, we will all be successful in this life and in the next. Such people are more scarce than red sulphur. Their ornament is their prolonged silence, keeping of secrets, establishing Salat, Zakat, Hajj and Fasting, being in solace, helping their brothers in faith when they have the ability and even when they are in difficulty.[98]

However, here al-Sadiq does not indicate that they have a divinely granted authority, which would make it obligatory to obey them in the same way as found in the Sufi tradition. Some *aḥādīth* indicate that obeying such people is "required." For example:

> As for the one who is from amongst the *fuqahā'* and who protects his soul; safe-guards his faith; goes against the passions of his lowly desires; obeys the commands of his master (Allah) – it is required that the common people should follow [lit. imitate; model oneself on] him. However, these characteristics are present only in some of the *fuqahā'* of the Shī'a, not all of them.[99]

Nevertheless, this does not stipulate that the authority of such *fuqahā'* is equivalent to that of an Imam; and stating that they are few indicates that the Shi'i themselves are to ascertain who they are.

According to Tabataba'i, the Ahl al-Bayt alone have the ultimate spiritual authority, the *walāyat-e kubrā-e ma'nawiya*, which he translates as "the great initiatory *walāya'*."[100] He does not mention whether a derivative initiatory *walāyah* is subsequently transferred to the *awliyā'*, but this may be inferred from the fact that, for him, the *walī* is also a guiding shaykh, a teacher. Approaching the threshold of the Throne is only possible after giving *bay'āh* (the oath of allegiance) to a *walī*, defined as "one who has traversed beyond annihilation and reached the station of subsistence in God (*baqā'-i bi'llāh*)."[101] In other words, one can only attain *walāyah* if one is initiated by a *walī* – a theory identical to that which is found in the Sunni Sufi tradition but which is not explicit in the early Shi'i tradition.

While it is known that in the early period the Imams initiated their closest followers and transmitted certain spiritual practices to them,[102] their teachings contain no clear evidence of the recommendation to take an oath of allegiance to a *walī*. However, reading Tabataba'i's theory of the emergence of "gnosis" in the Islamic tradition makes it easier to understand why he has upheld such a position:

> Gnosis or Sufism as we observe it today first appeared in the Sunni world and later among the Shī'ites. The first men who openly declared themselves to be Sufis and gnostics, and were recognized as spiritual masters of Sufi orders, apparently followed Sunnism in the branches (*furū'*) of Islamic law.[103]

As can be seen from other evidence, however, the first people to be recognized as Sufis and Gnostics were not the heads of any orders, for these developed only after the beginning of the twelfth century. Moreover, and as mentioned above, the first people to be called "Sufi" were not Sunni. Nevertheless, Tabataba'i is right that "Sufism as we observe it today" emerged in the Sunni world and seems to have been transferred to the Shi'i world, although just how the Sufism that emerged in the Sunni world initially found its roots in the Shi'i world has not been more deeply investigated. With regard to the Sufi orders, the editor of the *Tuhfah-yi Abbāsi* claims that the Sufis were originally Shi'i but later became Sunni: "Most other orders such as the Naqshbandiyah, […] in observing prudent dissimulation (*taqīyah*) have gotten mixed with [Sunni] orders."[104]

In his discussion of early Sufis, Tabataba'i includes such prominent Sunni Sufis as Hasan al-Basri and al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, although it is interesting to note that al-Basri's name was added some time later to an article entitled "Intellectual Intuition," drawn from Tabataba'i's chapter in *Shi'ah*.[105] Who added the name – Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the article's editor and translator, or

Tabataba'i himself? Tabataba'i takes a conciliatory tone toward these Sunni Sufis:

> Therefore, one could say, considering the Shi'ite concept of *wilāyah*, that Sufi masters are "Shi'ite" from the point of view of the spiritual life and in connection with the source of *wilāyah* although, from the point of view of the external form of religion they follow the Sunni schools of law.[106]

As an aside, a significant change in the use of terminology has occurred in the later edition of this sentence:

> Therefore, one could say, considering the Shi'ite concept of *wālayāt*, that Sufi masters are "Shi'ite" from the point of view of the spiritual life and in connection with the source of *wālayāt* although, from the point of view of the external form of religion they follow the Sunni schools of law.[107]

The terminology in the footnotes to this statement has also changed. In *Shi'ah*, footnote 1 reads: "In the language of the Gnostics, when the gnostic forgets himself, he becomes annihilated in God and surrenders to His guidance or *wilāyah*."[108] In *Intellectual Intuition*, it reads "In the language of the Gnostics, when the gnostic forgets himself, he becomes annihilated in God and surrenders to His guidance or *wālayāt*."[109] Nasr himself has pointed out the difference between *wilāyah* and *walāyah*, but when writing in order to demonstrate the parallels between Shi'ism and Sufism he does not discuss *wilāyah* in terms of Imamate according to the Shi'i school; instead, he modifies it so that it will fit more closely with a Sufi definition. Thus, he describes *wilāyah* merely as "sanctity" and *walāyah* as "universal initiatic function."[110] Similarly, it seems that in *Shi'ah* either he or Tabataba'i appears to have moved toward the more generic term (*walāyah*), which is used in the Sufi tradition.

Tabataba'i's theory regarding the Sufis seems to imply that their outward adherence to a Sunni school of thought is of little consequence. What is important is that inwardly they are Shi'i, because they adhere to the foundation of *walāyah*; however, as has been shown through a closer scrutiny of the Shi'i and Sufi concepts of *walāyah*, there is a clear difference between the two. The Shi'i foundation of *wilāyah*, meaning the Imam's universal and cosmic authority, also encompasses *walāyah* – the love and friendship between the Imam and his follower. These two are not to be confused with each other, as they have been in the Sufi tradition. The friends of the Imams, their *awliyā'*, must fulfil the criteria of a Shi'i, which includes having *ma'rifah* of the Imam and his *wilāyah*. A question needs to be raised, there-

fore, about the logic of a Shi'i accepting the *walāyah* of a Sufi who is ignorant of, denies, or negates the *wilāyah* of the Imams, as well as including within an initiatory lineage − and following − Sufi figures who have no *ma'rifah* of the Imam and his *wilāyah*. Tabataba'i plays down the significance of adhering to a Sunni school of thought, yet it may be seen throughout history that most Sunni Sufis have been absolutely categorical about the necessity of adhering to one of the four schools. Sufis such as 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani and Abu Hasan al-Shadhili clearly reject the legitimacy of the Shi'i school,[111] which means that they also reject the Shi'i doctrine of the Imam's *wilāyah*, which al-Baqir explicitly stated is the most fundamental pillar of the entire religion of Islam.

The Theory of *Walāyah* Comes Full Circle

As has been seen from studying the available *aḥādīth*, the Imams recognize the *awliyā'* because, through their *jihād al-nafs*, they have attained the station of *yaqīn* and annihilated their selves in the attributes of the Divine Reality. Through their victory over their selves and through their "wayfaring," they merit being held as teachers and as people to be followed. In *The Kernal of the Kernal*, such a theory seems to have inadvertently been attached to the Imams as well. Referring to Ali and Zayn al-'Abidin, Tihrani writes:

> Those religious leaders and spiritual guides, may God's greetings be upon them all, had passed beyond the stages of wayfaring toward God, had entered into His sanctuary, and subsequently, had attained the station of subsistence after annihilation (*baqā' ba'd al-fanā'*).[112]

"Passing through" (and of course "beyond") the stages of wayfaring entails first having to overcome *al-nafs al-'ammāra bi' al-sū'* (the soul that commands to evil). Then it means going through the stage of *al-nafs al-lawwāma*, where the soul sins but reproaches and corrects itself. However, according to the Shi'i tradition, the Imams never went through these stages nor could any Imam have "attained" the station of *baqā'*, for such a situation implies that he was not at that station previously. Obedience to the Imam is not obligatory because he has struggled through all of the precarious stages of the *nafs* and has subsequently attained the station of *baqā'*; obedience is obligatory because he has always been and will always be at this station: "Abu 'Abdillah (p.b.u.h.) said: 'The Proof [*hujja*] was there before the creatures, is there together with the creatures, and will be there after the creatures.'"[113] Obedience to the *walī*, on the other hand, may be recommended

based upon the fact that he has attained victory after struggling through all of the stages of the *nafs*.

According to Shi'i doctrine, the Ma'sumin were created as such in the realm of pre-existence. A questioner asked Imam al-Husayn: "What were you before the creation of Adam?" and he replied: "We were silhouettes of light revolving around the Throne of the All-Merciful…[114] and we taught Praise, the formula of Unicity, and Glorification, to the angels."[115] This idea has found its way into the doctrines of the Tijani order, which are based upon the works of Ibn 'Arabi: "*le sceau des saints était un saint en acte, informé de sa sainteté "alors que Adam était entre l'eau e l'argile" tandis que les autres saints ne le sont en acte qu'après avoir remplis toutes les conditions de la sainteté*."[116] The reversal in status is clear in examining the above texts: Tihrani, a Shi'i, has implied that the Imam must go through all the stages of the *jihād al-nafs* in order to fulfil all the conditions of *walāyah*, while Ahmad al-Tijani, a Sunni, has made it clear that the *khātm al-awliyā'* (who he believed was himself) was created as such in the realm of pre-existence!

In conclusion, it may be seen that the Sunni Sufi tradition appropriated for itself certain dimensions of authority that, in the Shi'i tradition, were reserved exclusively for the Imam and attached them to the *awliyā' – awliyā'* who often did not recognize the Imam's *wilāyah*. In the Shi'i tradition, the *awliyā'* were those who had indeed attained a level of perfection and the Imams thus recommended seeking them out and keeping company with them; however, these *awliyā'* have not been given any absolute authority over the Shi'i. What appears to have happened, however, is that with the gradual adoption of Sunni Sufism into the Shi'i tradition, certain doctrines with regard to the authority of the *awliyā'* have likewise been adopted, including that of the *walī*'s spiritual authority over the Shi'i and the *walī* as the only way toward annihilation in the Divine Names and Attributes. What this spiritual authority means in practice, however, remains undefined.

Endnotes

1. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tabataba'i, *Kernal of the Kernal, Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect* (*Risāla-yi Lubb al-Lubāb dar Sayr wa Sulūk-i Ulu'l Albāb*) *A Shī'ī Approach to Sufism*, trans. Mohammad H. Faghfoory, foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).
2. Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Hasan al-Basrī* (*d. 110 H/728 CE*) *and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

3. Imam Muhammad Ma'sum al-Faruqi, *Maktubat*, vol. 2, letter 59. Reformatted extracts from the book Advice for the Muslim, 11th ed., 25+ (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, Waqf Ikhlas Publications), http://www.tareeqat.com/islam-articles/34-tasawwuf/59-tasawwuf-2, accessed 28-4-11.
4. http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-58251.html, accessed 26-4-11.
5. Al-Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kulayni al-Razi, *Al-Kāfī* (Tehran: WOFIS, 1987), vol. 1, part 1, chap. 23, p. 360.
6. Muhyiddin ibn Arabi, *Divine Sayings, 101 Hadith Qudsi, Miskhat al-Anwar*, trans. Stephen Hirstenstein and Martin Notcutt (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2008) 57. Ibn 'Arabi adds a note: "I have transmitted this tradition according to the Darajāt al-Ta'ibin [by Isma'il al-Harawi]."
7. John B. Taylor, "Ja'far al-Sadiq, Spiritual Forebear of the Sufis," *Islamic Culture* (*Hyderabad Quarterly Review*, April 1966), 103. There has been continuing interest in this "*tafsīr*," although its authenticity is doubted by many Shi'ah scholars because it has come down from the Sunni Sufi Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) and has been circulated mainly among Sunni Sufis.
8. Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 42, p. 244.
9. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 66; *Nahj al-Balāgha*, vol. 4.
10. *Nahj al-Balāgha*, sermon 86, in Tabataba'i, *Kernal of the Kernal*, 79.
11. Al-Imam Ja'far Ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq, *Lantern of the Path*, trans. Fadlallah Haeri (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2007), 3.
12. *Mikyāl al-Makārim*, 2:420; *Bihār al-Anwār*, 100:121, sect. 2, no. 26, in Sayyid Ridha Husayni Mutlaq, *The Last Luminary and Ways to Delve into the Light: Practical Responsibilities of the Believers to the 12th Imam*, trans. Saleem Bhimji (Kitchener: Islamic Publishing House, 1998), 51.
13. Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History*, 28.
14. Arzina Lalani, *Early Shī'ī Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), 67.
15. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, *The Psalms of Islam: al-Sahīfat al-Kāmilat al-Sajjādiyya*, trans. and introduction by William C. Chittick, foreword by S.H.M. Jafri (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2001), xli.
16. Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2007), 52.
17. "Your Walī is only Allah and His Messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay zakāt while bowing down [in prayer]."
18. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 53.
19. http://www.iranica.com/articles/abdak-al-sufi-eccentric-religious-devotee-of-kufa-8th-9th-centuries, accessed 5-5-11.
20. Kamil al-Shaibi, *Sufism and Shiism* (Surrey: LAAM, 1991), 49.
21. Christopher Melchert, "Basran Origins of Classical Sufism," *Der Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 82:221-40.

22. Lalani, *Early Shī'ī Thought*, 69.
23. 'Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Wiltshire: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2000), 442-43.
24. Ibid., 210.
25. Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 12, p. 77.
26. Amadou Makhtar Samb, *Introduction a la Tariqah Tidjaniyya : ou, Voie Spirituelle de Cheikh Ahmad Tidjani* (Dakar: Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1994), 52.
27. Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 210.
28. Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 60, p. 320.
29. Ibid.
30. Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *Sirāt al-Awliyā'* (Beirut: 1992), 87, in Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 53.
31. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 50.
32. Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 225.
33. Lalani, *Early Shī'ī Thought*, 70.
34. Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 8, p. 60.
35. 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. Is'ad Qandil (Beirut: 1980), 474, in Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 54.
36. Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 213.
37. 'Abd al-Karim Jili, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, chap. 60, "Of the Perfect Man: showing that he is our Lord Mohammed, and that he stands over against the Creator (*al-Haqq*) and the creatures (*al-khalq*)," in Reynold A. Nicholson (trans.), *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), chap. 2, IV: "The Heavenly Man," 105.
38. "The saint among his people is comparable to the Prophet in his community; to follow him is to follow the Prophet." Samb, *Introduction a la Tariqah Tidjaniyya*, 53.
39. Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 32, p. 156.
40. Ibid., chap. 15, p. 106.
41. Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London: The Muhammadi Trust, 1982), 86.
42. Bernd Ratke and John O'Kane (trans. and introduction), *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by Al-Hakīm Al-Tirmidhī* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 15.
43. Ibid.
44. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 47.
45. Ratke and O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 9.
46. Ibid., 40.
47. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, *The Psalms of Islam*, 17. "The Witnesses, mentioned in [Q.] 11:20 and 40:54, are the angels, prophets, Imams, and faithful whom God appoints to give witness concerning the deeds of the men at the Resurrection." Ibid., 263, fn. 32.

48. Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 53, p. 295. Ibn ‘Arabi uses the term *wāqif* for “one who stops […] at the time that he reaches his object.” Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, trans. Rabia Terri Harris (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1981; 1989), 116.
49. Ratke and O’Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 130.
50. Ibid., 129.
51. Ibid., 130.
52. Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap. 13, p. 80.
53. Ibid., vol. 1, part 1, chap. 23, p. 358. [*‘arafnā man ‘arafnā wa jahalnā man jahalnā*].
54. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 77:28; *Al-Jawāhir al-Sanīyah*, 198, in ‘Allamah Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i, *The Return to Being, The Treatise on Friendship with God, A Translation of Risalat al-Walayah*, trans. Fazel Asadi Amjad and Mahdi Dasht Bozorgi, introduced and annotated by S. K. Toussi (London: ICAS Press, 2009), 98-99.
55. Ibid., 97.
56. Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfī, Kitāb al-Hujja, Bāb fi al-Ghayba*, 2:141-42, no. 19, in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 234, fn. 711.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., fn. 712.
60. Ibid., 137.
61. Samb, *Introduction a la Tariqah Tidjaniyya*, 47. “There is also an esoteric hierarchy of saints, an invisible hierarchy of believing souls.”
62. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, 235, fn. 715.
63. *Kitāb al-Haft al-Sharīf*, attributed to al-Mufaddal ibn ‘Umar al-Ju‘fi (Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 235, fn. 715).
64. *Al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyah fī ‘Ilm al-Taṣawwuf* (*Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism*), in Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 54.
65. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 53.
66. Al-Saffar al-Qummi, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt*, ed. by M. Kuchebaghi, 2d ed. (Tabriz: n.d.), sect. 1, chap. 12, p. 28, no. 1, in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam* (London, New York: IB Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 255, fn. 73.
67. Al-Shaibi, *Sufism and Shiism*, 75.
68. *Imam Amir al-Mu’minin Ali bn Abi-Taalib’s Nahjol-Balāgha, Peak of Eloquence, Sermons, Letters & Sayings as compiled by Sayyid Shareef ar-Razi*, trans. Sayyid Ali Reza (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 1999), sermon 3, p. 130.
69. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 3d rev. ed. (ABC International Group Inc., 1999), 111.
70. The four prominent Shī‘a followers of Imam ‘Ali, namely, Salman, Miqdad, Ammar, and Abu Dharr, were also known as the *awtād* of Islam.

71. Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 214, or 1980, 447-48, in Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 55.
72. Mohammad Khan Kermani, *Kitāb al-Mubīn* (Tabriz: 1324), 412-13, in Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien, Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. 1, *Le shî'isme duodécimain* (Éditions Gallimard: 1971), vol. 1, chap. 4, p. 122.
73. Claude Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī: The Voyage of No Return* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2000), 46. Italics mine.
74. Al-Tirmidhi, *Sirāt al-Awliyā'*, 38-46, in Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 55.
75. Radtke and O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 10.
76. 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *Universal Man, Extracts translated with commentary by Titus Burckhardt* (Roxburgh, UK: Beshara Publications, 1983), 58. Note the issue of the Mahdi's knowledge.
77. Mohammad H. Faghfoory, in Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Mu'adhdhin Sabzawari Khurasani, *Tuhfah-yi 'Abbāsī: The Golden Chain of Sufism in Shī'ite Islam* (Plymouth: University Press of America, 2008), xi.
78. Ibid., 77. The translator puts "Sufi masters" in square brackets, but of course "Friend of God" means *awliyā'*.
79. Ibid., 79.
80. Ibid., xi
81. Ibid., x.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid., xii.
84. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 237.
85. Faghfoory, in *Tuhfah-yi 'Abbāsī*, x.
86. Hermann Landholt, "Illuminationism," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007), 2.
87. "Introduction," in *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi*, trans. W. M. Thackston, Jr. (London: The Octagon Press, 1982), 1-2.
88. See *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili, Including His Life, Prayers, Letters, and Followers*. A Translation from the Arabic of Ibn al-Sabbagh's *Durrat al-Asrar wa Tuhfat al-Abrar* by Elmer H. Douglas. Edited with introduction and bibliography by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).
89. Shaikh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, *Revelations of the Unseen* (*Futuh al Ghaib*): *A Collection of Seventy-eight Discourses*, trans. Muhtar Holland, 2d ed. (Ft. Lauderdale: Al-Baz Publishing, 1999),132.
90. Tabataba'i, *The Return to Being*, 1.
91. Ibid., 96.
92. Q. 38:83.
93. Tabataba'i, *Kernal of the Kernal*, 31.
94. Ibid., 62.
95. Q. 2:1230.
96. Tabataba'i, *Kernal of the Kernal*, 61.

97. Mutlaq, *The Last Luminary and Ways to Delve into the Light*, 35.
98. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 67:351, sect. 14. no. 54 in Ibid., 37.
99. *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, vol. 27, pg. 131, sec. 10, no. 33401; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 2:88, sect. 14, no. 12, in Ibid., 34.
100. Tabataba'i, *Kernal of the Kernal*, 61.
101. Ibid., 83.
102. "Vision with (or in) the heart might have been the spiritual practice par excellence of early Imamism; the imams presented it as being the condition of authentic worship and undoubtedly initiated their closest disciples to it." Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 53.
103. Allamah Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ah*, trans. Sayyid Husayn Nasr (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2005), 134; Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, "Intellectual Intuition or Mystical Unveiling," trans. and ed., Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2, adapted from *Shi'ite Islam* (*Shī'ah dar Islām*), part 2: Shi'ite Religious Thought, chap. 3: Three Methods of Religious Thought (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977), 112-17.
104. Editor's Note, in Khurasani, *Tuḥfah-yi 'Abbāsī*, xviii.
105. The article being the one mentioned above: "Intellectual Intuition."
106. Tabataba'i, *Shi'ah*, 135.
107. Tabataba'i, "Intellectual Intuition," 3 (my emphasis).
108. Tabataba'i, *Shi'ah*, 135.
109. Tabataba'i, "Intellectual Intuition," 3.
110. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 57 and 66.
111. In fact, al-Jilani lists every extremist group that identified itself as Shi'i except for the Ithna'asharis, whom he omits. In other words, he identifies Shi'is with such groups as the Jarudiyah and Zaydiyah. See Shaikh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, *Sufficient Provision for Seekers of the Path of Truth*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Hollywood: al-Baz Publishing, 1997),1:412.
112. Tabataba'i, *Kernal of the Kernal*, 80.
113. Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, part 2, chap 4, p. 34.
114. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 11:150 and 192, in Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 32.
115. Ibid., 35.
116. Samb, *Introduction a la Tariqah Tidjaniyya,* 46. "The Seal of the Saints was a saint *in actu*, informed of his sainthood 'when Adam was between water and clay,' whereas the other saints were only so after having fulfilled all the conditions of sainthood."