

# *Ḥadīth* and Sufism in Ethical Discourse

## *Exploring ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī’s Conception of Taḥbīb*

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### 1 Introduction

The Ḥanbalī Sufi scholar ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) argues in his works, *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* (“Revelations of the Unseen”) and *al-Faḥ al-Rabbānī* (“The Sublime Revelation”), that a Sufi may enjoy certain worldly pleasures after struggling through various stages of asceticism (*zuhd*). This chapter discusses the scriptural foundation of this idea and how al-Jīlānī avoided the contradiction between the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and Sufi ethics, which is based on “self-purification.” We will analyse *ḥadīth al-taḥbīb* that translates as “I was made to love (*ḥubbiba ilayya*) from your world women and perfume, and I found the coolness of my eyes (*qurratu ‘aynī*) in performing the prayer,” and compare al-Jīlānī’s interpretation with that of other scholars in pre and post Jīlānī era.

Some ascetics and Sufis believed that marriage and family life are hindrances to achieving excellence in the path of Allāh, as evident from different quotations recorded in Sufi and *zuhd* literature. However, the majority refuted this idea pointing to the life of the Prophet and his encouragement for marital life. At the same time, the former opinion highlights the Prophet’s foresight of later generations becoming worse overtime, and in such a time, it will be better for a person to live isolated from people.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, some scholars found two key terms in the *ḥadīth*, “*ḥubbiba*” and “*dunyā*” problematic, hence necessitating explanation. How could the Prophet say that he loves things from this world (*dunyā*), whilst he has described it as a damned place elsewhere. Abstaining from the *dunyā* has often been regarded as the fundamental principle of asceticism and Sufism. These contradictions have triggered various interpretations and have sometimes placed the Sufis in a defensive mode.

1 The *ḥadīth* has been recorded in various corpuses including the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (see al-Bukhārī 1987, 1:15; *Kitāb al-Īmān* (“Book of Faith”), *Bāb min al-Dīn al-Firār min al-Fitan* (“Chapter on Avoiding/Escaping Temptation belongs to Religion”). Scholars have used this *ḥadīth* to justify celibacy (see Ibn al-‘Arabī 2003, 3:144).

Furthermore, some have criticised Sufis for enjoying worldly pleasures, and even al-Jilānī himself had faced such criticism.<sup>2</sup> By intertwining *ḥadīth* with Sufi perspectives, al-Jilānī responded to this criticism and apparent contradictions. At the same time, he tried to establish that the Sufi concepts of *fanā'* and *baqā'*, which refer to the developed form of asceticism, are not contradictory to the Qur'ān and Sunna as some may have claimed. Indeed, the *ḥadīth* mentioned above is a piece of excellent scriptural evidence to substantiate his stance.

## 2 *Takhrīj* and the Form of the *Ḥadīth*

The *ḥadīth* was recorded on the authority of Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712) from the beginning of the third/ninth century in different sources, including those which were arranged according to themes and narrators such as *Sunans* and *Musnads*. Yet, among the six canonical ones, only al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915) recorded it in his compendium.<sup>3</sup> Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014) recorded it in his *Mustadrak* and evaluated it as authentic by the standard of Muslim, though the latter did not record it in his work. Nevertheless, the great *ḥadīth* scholar and verifier, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1448), treated it as a considerable one (*ḥasan*) (Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī 1995, 3:249).

In the primary thematic sources of *ḥadīth*, the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb* has been cited to highlight various issues including the status of *ṣalāt* (prayer) in Islam as found in Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazī's (d. 294/906) *Ta'zīm Qadr al-Ṣalāt* ("The Aggrandisement of the Status of Prayer") (al-Marwazī 1986, 1:331). Al-Marwazī stated that *ṣalāt* is the most significant act of worship in the eyes of Allāh; thus, He made it dearer to His dearest servant. It is also recorded as an encouragement towards marriage in the book of *Nikāḥ* ("Marriage"), in Abū 'Awāna's (d. 316/928) *Mustakhraj* ("The Extracted") and al-Bayḥaqī's (d. 458/1066) *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* ("The Great Sunnas").<sup>4</sup> Unlike the latter, the former gave quite a long title for his chapter to project the *ḥadīth* as an instruction by the Prophet to all Muslims to marry more than one wife whenever possible, to bring forth

2 See the questions he encountered pertaining to his marriage below.

3 Al-Nasā'ī 1986, 7:61: *Kitāb 'Ishrat al-Nisā'* ("Book on Living with Women"), *Bāb Ḥubb al-Nisā'* ("Chapter on the Love for Women").

4 Al-Isfarāyīnī 1998, 3:12: *Kitāb al-Nikāḥ* ("Book of Marriage"), *Bāb Dhikr Ḥaqq al-Nabī 'alā Tazwīj al-Abkār al-Wadūd al-Walūd wa-'alā Ibtighā' al-Nasl fa-Yukāthir bihinna l-Umam* ("Chapter on the Prophet's Encouragement of the Marriage of Amiable and Fertile Virgin Women and on Pursuing Offspring to Increase the Population"); al-Bayḥaqī 2003, 7:124: *Kitāb al-Nikāḥ* ("Book of Marriage"), *Bāb al-Raghba fī l-Nikāḥ* ("Chapter on Desiring Marriage").

more good people into their community. For al-Nasā'ī, the *ḥadīth* instructs men to observe fair treatment of women. Therefore, he included it in the chapter of *Kitāb Ishrat al-Nisā'* ("Kind Treatment of Women") under the subheading of *Bāb Ḥubb al-Nisā'* ("Loving Women/Wives").

On the other hand, the part of the *ḥadīth* regarding fragrance has been the concern of other *ḥadīth* compilers such as 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) and Abū l-Shaykh (d. 369/979) (al-Aṣbahānī 1998, 2:58). The former presented it in a chapter titled *Bāb al-Mar'a Tuṣallī wa-Laysa fī Raqabatihā Qilāda wa-Taṭayyub al-Rijāl* ("A Woman Prays without a Necklace on Her Neck and Perfume of Men") in his *Muṣannaḥ* ("The Topically Arranged"), whereas the latter employed it in a chapter titled *Bāb Dhikr Maḥabbatihī lil-Ṭībi wa-Taṭayyubihī bihī* ("The Mention of the Prophet's Love for Perfumes"). Quite intriguingly, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim (d.287/900) in his collection on asceticism alluded to the fact that wives and perfumes could not be considered as something against asceticism. His chapter is titled *Bāb Ḥubbiba ilayya min Dunyākum al-Nisā' wa-l-Ṭīb* ("Wives and Perfumes are Made Dearer to Me [the Prophet]") (Ibn Abī 'Āṣim 1988, 1:119). The *ḥadīth* was also recorded in the *Musnad* ("The Supported") of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and *al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ* ("The Middle Sized *Mu'jam*") of al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) on the authority of Anas b. Mālik (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal 2001, 19:305; al-Ṭabarānī 1995, 5:241).

Though the scholars have no serious disagreement on the authenticity of the *ḥadīth*, they have different opinions regarding its textual form. The most significant amongst such debates is the one concerning the number "three" (*thalāth*) found in some versions of the *ḥadīth*, i.e., "three things from your *dunyā* are made dear to me." While scholars like Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) have tried to justify it, others like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) have argued that it is not part of the original *ḥadīth*; instead, it was later added into the text.<sup>5</sup> According to Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and others, the addition "three" was not found in any primary sources of the *ḥadīth*. It was only found in some non-*ḥadīth* experts' works such as *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* ("The Revival of Religious Sciences") of al-Ghazālī and *al-Kashshāf* ("The Revealer") of al-Zamakhsharī (al-Sakhāwī 1985, 1:292).

Finally, another genre that could be said to have also pursued the debate on the literal form of the *ḥadīth* is the genre of *al-aḥādīth al-mushtahira* (viral *ḥadīth*). Some of the works of this genre include *al-Maqāṣid al-Ḥasana* ("The Good Purposes") of al-Sakhāwī (al-Sakhāwī 1985, 1:292) and *Kashf al-Khafā'* ("Uncovering the Hidden") of al-'Ajlūnī (d. 1162/1749) (al-'Ajlūnī 2000,

5 See their interpretations below. For Ibn Fūrak's and Ibn al-Qayyim's justifications, see Ibn Fūrak 2015; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1997, 238.

1:391–393). The authors validated the *ḥadīth* by referring to various narrations and additions found in different reports. However, both affirmed that the addition of the words “three things” was not found in any narrations recorded in the primary sources. For them, this addition affects the meaning of the *ḥadīth* because prayer should not be qualified as one of the worldly matters. Nevertheless, al-‘Ajlūnī, a later contributor to this genre, did not object to the views of those who report and interpret the “three things.” He attempted to justify that the third of the three things could have been omitted from the narration. It could be retrieved from a version reported by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal on the authority of ‘Ā’isha (d. 58/678), which reads, “He likes three things from this world: women, perfumes, and food. He gained two but not the third. He got women and perfumes but not the food” (al-‘Ajlūnī 2000, 1:391–393).

### 3 *Ḥadīth of Taḥbīb: Interpretations in Ḥadīth Commentaries*

In the pre-Jilānī era, Sufis and people of *zuhd* were the individuals most interested in this *ḥadīth*. After al-Jilānī, the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb* can be said to have gained wider attention. The main reason could be the increasing scholarly engagements with the *Sunan* of al-Nasā’ī. Another secondary source of the *ḥadīth*, which has also attracted numerous great exegetes to advance worthwhile discussions about its meaning, is *al-Shifā* (“The Healing”) of al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d. 544/1149). The *ḥadīth* was considered as a part of the *shamā’il* (qualities and attributes) of the Prophet, particularly concerning his marital life. Continuous discussion on the *ḥadīth* within this genre could be appreciated from *al-Mawāhib al-Ladunniyya* (“The Divine Providences”) of al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 686/1287). On the other hand, scholars of jurisprudence deduced rulings on fragrance from the *ḥadīth*. Due to the multidimensional nature of its interpretation, debates surrounding the *ḥadīth* will be tackled in several sections as follows.

### 4 *Zuhd* and Marriage: Conflict or Harmony?

The most critical point with regards to this debate is that, as far as the available sources are concerned, no scholar has connected this *ḥadīth* with the concepts of *fanā’* and *baqā’* prior to al-Jilānī. A contemporary scholar of al-Jilānī, al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, did discuss this *ḥadīth*, however with an attempt to suit the *ḥadīth* to the notion of *zuhd* (al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ 1987, 1:19–46). He averred that married life does not contradict with the practice of *zuhd* by citing the examples of married

Prophets. Although there were unmarried Prophets, according to him, the ones who got married and fulfilled their family duties are deemed higher in status. Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ perceived the *ḥadīth* as a general promotion for marriage whereas al-Jīlānī undoubtedly proclaimed that *nikāḥ* is prohibited for a *murīd*, and in terms of *murād*, he has no choice but to follow what has been determined by God.

Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's appropriation of this *ḥadīth* to *zuhd* was a response to those who thought that marriage is a hindrance on the path towards Allāh. In *Qūt al-Qulūb* ("The Nourishment of the Hearts") of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) and *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn* of al-Ghazālī, *imām* Aḥmad was quoted as saying that he had debated a group of scholars regarding Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's (d. 110/728) claim that "if Allāh wishes *khayr* (goodness) for a person He will not occupy him with family and wealth" (al-Makkī 2005, 2, 413). The well-known Sufi contemporary to Aḥmad, Bishr al-Ḥāfi (d. 227/841) was not married, and when he was asked about it, he replied that he preferred to be engaged with obligatory deeds to the supererogatory ones (al-Ghazālī n.d., 2:23). The great Sufi literature, such as the two mentioned above, discusses both views that encourage or discourage marriage in detail and provide many traditions in support of both arguments.

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Abī 'Aṣim argues that wives and perfumes could not be considered as something against asceticism. Yet, other works on asceticism included a section on *Bāb man Kariha al-Māla wa-l-Walad* ("Disinterest in Offspring and Wealth") in which some ascetics were reported to ask Allāh to be free from offspring and wealth. Astonishingly, when those ascetics wish to pray against anyone, they will pray that Allāh increase the person's wealth and children, so that he will be burdened with them (Ibn al-Jarrāḥ 1984, 415–417).

On another note, the Mālikī scholar Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148) attempted reconciliation by exploiting the change of condition across generations. Marriage was not a hindrance in the path of Allāh for the early generation. However, in later times, some scholars and ascetics found that the world had become more challenging, and people became compelled to commit prohibited acts to earn their livelihood and provide for their families. Therefore, the scholars and ascetics rejected family life and preferred seclusion (*'uzla*). Ibn al-'Arabī viewed this stance as a strong position since the Messenger of Allāh had said: "The best possession of a Muslim will be a herd of sheep with which he retires to the top of a mountain or places where rain is expected to fall (pastures), in order to safeguard his faith from tribulation."<sup>6</sup> However, he made it clear that there is no monasticism in Islam as found in Christianity, and one is

6 Al-Bukhārī 1987, 1:15; *Kitāb al-Īmān* ("Book of Faith"), *Bāb min al-Dīn al-Firār min al-Fitan* ("Chapter on Avoiding/Escaping Temptation belongs to Religion").

not supposed to immerse in worship and avoid all worldly matters, including the family. The scholars who seem to favour a life similar to monasticism were actually referring to extraordinary circumstances due to the widespread of crisis (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2003, 3:144).

The tenth/seventeenth century scholar al-Ghazzī (d. 1061/1651) also quoted this *ḥadīth* to change the perception of people who manipulated the sayings of early scholars to discourage marriage, and to depict it as an act contradictory to asceticism. He treated all these statements as conditional; when a marriage diverts a person's attention from obeying Allāh and from abiding by His rules, then it is a hindrance in the path of worshipping Allāh. Any comforts with wives and fragrance in this world could not be treated generally as blameworthy. However, he did not provide explanation on how they deviate man from the straight path and how a person can overcome them (al-Ghazzī 2011, 1:184).

A pro-Salafī contemporary interpreter, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Nāṣir al-Barrāk (b. 1933–1934) used this *ḥadīth* to criticise Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī's (d. 795/1392) position on *Kalimat al-Ikhlāṣ* ("The Word of Devotion"). Ibn Rajab stated that "the ʿarifūn have no engagements other than what they have with their Lord and no concerns about something other than Him ..." According al-Barrāk, it is nothing but an utterance of some extreme ascetics who transcended the limits with a wrong *ijtihād* due to their ignorance. Al-Barrāk criticised this position on the ground that it contradicts the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb*. He finds no issue in engaging with family, children, and other lawful comforts. However, unlike his predecessors, he resorts to criticising Ibn Rajab instead of offering a reconciling interpretation (al-Barrāk 2014, 110).

## 5 Material World: Love or Curse?

In his commentary, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ had given attention to the apparent contradiction between this *ḥadīth* and the Islamic concept of cursing the material world (*dunyā*), since this *ḥadīth* treats three things among worldly matters and depicts the *dunyā* as the loved one. Therefore, he noted that the Prophet did not see women and perfume as *his* worldly matters, but he used the words "your worldly matters." This was concluded from the addition found in some versions, i.e., the phrase *ḥubbiba ilayya min dunyākum*, which means some of your worldly matters that have been made dear to me.<sup>7</sup> According to al-Qāḍī

7 The *ḥadīth* has been recorded without the possessive pronoun "*kum*" (see al-Maqdisī 2000, 5:122; Abū Yaʿlā l-Mawṣilī 1984, 6:237; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal 2001, 21:433). So, the meaning would be "I was made to love from the world ..."

‘Iyāḍ, the Prophet perceived these matters as his *ākhirā* (the Hereafter) affairs since a Muslim can convert any worldly matter to that of the Hereafter by having the right *niyya* (insight). Nevertheless, a question remains due to this interpretation – it leaves no specific reason to the mention of only these two things since all worldly matters share the same potential of convertibility.

Other interpretations offered to solve this contradiction are those by al-Kalābādhī and al-Ghazālī. Al-Kalābādhī opines that the article “*min*” in the *ḥadīth* could be given the meaning of “*fi*” which then indicates that women, fragrance, and prayer are the three things made dear to the Prophet during his life *in this world* (*ḥubbiba ilayya wa-anā fi l-dunyā*), but they are not part of this world. Unlike later *ḥadīth* scholars, he treated the word *three* as a part of the *ḥadīth* and tried to answer two questions simultaneously: firstly, how can the Prophet love something that is a part of this world? and secondly, how can prayers be attributed as a part of this material world? Hence, these non-worldly affairs are made dear *in this world* while he was here. He further elaborated that this *ḥadīth* indicates a very high stage of *‘ubūdiyya* (worship) achieved by the Prophet. Prayer is the most elegant form of glorification (*ta’zīm*) of Allāh, and this *ḥadīth* implies that the Prophet had attained it. The other two matters, women and fragrance, represent excellent interaction with the creations of Allāh, which should be done by fulfilling their due rights as well as being kind and generous towards them. He further added that fragrance is amongst the rights of the angels, and the Prophet was applying it to fulfil their rights. Indeed, the Prophet himself is the most beautiful fragrance in this world and he does not need any fragrance (al-Kalābādhī 1999, 25). In short, al-Kalābādhī attempted to establish that the love mentioned in this *ḥadīth* was not a mere love of comforts in the material world, rather it was part of achieving the finest form of *‘ubūdiyya* and excellent dealing with others.

Al-Ghazālī also viewed this *ḥadīth* as apparently contradicting with the basic principles of asceticism and Sufism, discussing it in the book of *Dhamm al-Dunyā* (“Condemnation of the Worldly”). He argued that the things found in the *dunyā* are of mainly three categories, the first of which are the things that will go to the next world, such as one’s knowledge and actions. By knowledge he means the recognition of God, His attributes, His actions and His sovereignty over heaven and earth, and by actions, the actions done for the sake of God. To him, though it is part of the *dunyā*, it is not blameworthy but praiseworthy. To substantiate his position, he cited the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb*. Even though prayer is classified with the *dunyā*, it is an action done in the *dunyā* for the *ākhirā*. Consequently, actions related to marriage and using fragrance, although mentioned as part of the *dunyā*, do not fall into the category of a blameworthy *dunyā* (al-Ghazālī n.d., 23).

## 6 Jurisprudential Perspective

In dealing with the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb*, most of the scholars of jurisprudence focused on the subject of fragrance. The Mālikī Ibn al-‘Arabī referenced this *ḥadīth* in his interpretation of *al-Muwattaʿa* (“The Well-Trodden Path”), titled *Kitāb al-Qabas* (“The Book of Allusion”), to explain away other *ḥadīth* that claimed the Prophet applied perfumes during *ḥajj* whilst it is considered a prohibition to do so during such ritual. Ibn al-‘Arabī grouped different opinions of scholars into four, the first of which is that applying perfumes while performing *ḥajj* and *‘umra* is an exclusive right (*khuṣūṣiyya*) of the Prophet. It is allowed exclusively to him because it was specifically made dear to him by Allāh. Ibn al-‘Arabī further observed that the Prophet was given some privileges regarding whatever was made dear to him. In terms of prayer, it was obligatory for him to pray at night whilst it was only supererogatory for others. Likewise, he was allowed to marry more than four wives, as well as conduct his marriages without the presence of guardians and witnesses. Therefore, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, it is not strange to have a special privilege for the Prophet in applying perfume during pilgrimage (Ibn al-‘Arabī 1992, 1:553). Ibn al-‘Arabī also discussed this *ḥadīth* in his commentary on *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī* (“The Compilation of al-Tirmidhī”) explaining that the Prophet never rejected perfume when it was offered to him because he needed it and at the same time, it was made dear to him, combining need and love here. It is possible in his case to reject things other than perfume if there is any reason to do so (Ibn al-‘Arabī n.d., 10:236). Obviously, the Prophet does not need fragrance since he himself is fragrant, therefore, by “need,” Ibn al-‘Arabī might have intended his need to fulfill the rights of angels as mentioned above.

## 7 *Taḥbīb* as a Sublime Quality of the Prophet

As seen above, some jurists and Sufis have considered this *ḥadīth* as addressing a specific privilege of the Prophet. While al-Kalābādī treated it as an indication of the most excellent form of human being reserved for the Prophet, Ibn al-‘Arabī treated it as a reason for a concession to marrying more than four wives and applying perfumes during pilgrimage. Likewise, this *ḥadīth* has been much discussed as part of the Prophet’s *shamā’il* (sublime qualities of the Prophet). Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), in his commentary on *Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (“The Traditions of al-Nasā’ī”), investigates the wisdom behind the *taḥbīb* from two different angles. On the one hand, it is a *balā’* (hardship from God) because world matters have been made dear to a person whereas he needs to dedicate

his love solely to God. Therefore, life has become the most challenging task for him. On the other hand, when the enemy of the Prophet accused him as being a *sāḥir* (sorcerer), or a poet who was oblivious to ordinary life, he became concerned with worldly matters to refute their claims. In that sense, it is not a hardship, but rather a mercy from God (al-Suyūṭī 1986, 61–63).

Al-Sindī (d. 170/787) added that the divine wisdom behind the Prophet's love towards women was educational. His wives could convey many lessons from his private affairs to the coming generations. As for the perfume, it was the dearest thing to the angels and as a prophet who dealt with angels, he was using it to please them. Al-Sindī infers that his *ḥubb* was not a mere love of worldly matters, but by doing so, he was fulfilling some noble objectives. However, the coolness of the eyes is located in the Prophet's conversation with God during his prayers. It conveys the idea that if a worldly pleasure hinders the love towards God, it is not a praiseworthy thing. It is only laudable when it enhances the love towards God (al-Sindī 1986, 61–62).

On another part, most of the interpreters of *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* ("The Niche of Lamps") such 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī (d. 1052/1642) and 'Alī l-Qārī (d. 1014/1606) also elaborated on the meaning of the *ḥadīth*. They have given some attention to the word "*ḥubbiba*" as it denotes that the love did not originate from the Prophet's nature or self, but that Allāh compelled him to be so as a mercy for mankind (al-Dihlawī 2014, 8:480; 'Alī l-Qārī 2002, 8:3294). Though both of them were seen as coming from Sufi backgrounds, they did not relate *taḥbīb* with the Sufi concepts of *baqā'* and *fanā'* as found with al-Jilānī.

In *Nuzhat al-Majālis wa-Muntakhab al-Nafā'is* ("Unwinding Councils and Precious Selections"), al-Ṣaffūrī (d. 894/1489) narrated a background story, without any *isnād*, to offer context for the *ḥadīth*. It says that when the Prophet mentioned this *ḥadīth*, Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), 'Umar (d. 23/644), 'Uthmān (d. 35/656) and 'Alī (d. 40/661) responded one after another by citing the things that were made dear to them. Abū Bakr said that he was made to love three things from this world – to sit in front of the Prophet, to recite *ṣalawāt* (prayers) upon him and to spend his wealth for him. Thereupon 'Umar said: "I was made to love three things from this world; commanding good, forbidding evil, and establishing the *ḥudūd* (the prescribed punishments)." Then 'Uthmān responded that he was made to love feeding the hungry, spreading *salām* (peace greeting), and praying at night while people are sleeping. Finally, 'Alī said: "I was made to love three things from this world; fighting with the sword, fasting in summer and serving guests." Then the angel Gabriel informed the Prophet about things that he was made to love, saying: "I was made to love descending upon Prophets, carrying the message to Messengers, and praising Allāh the Lord of the Worlds." Then Allāh informed the Prophet about the three

things that He likes most: a tongue that always recites *dhikr*, a thankful heart and a body that is patient during hardship (al-Şaffūrī 1867, 1:52–53). Al-Şaffūrī commented that when this *ḥadīth* reached the four eponymous founders of the legal *madhāhib* (legal schools), Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) was reported to say: “I was made to love acquiring knowledge throughout the nights, avoiding self-praise and arrogance, and having a heart that avoids the love of *dunyā*.” Mālik (d. 179/796) also related the three things that were made dear to him: being a neighbour to the Prophet’s grave, attachment with his soil, and paying respect to his relatives (*ahl al-bayt*). Al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) said that he was made to love dealing with people with compassion, avoiding things that lead to pretentiousness, and following the way of *taṣawwuf*. Aḥmad responded that he was made to love following the Prophet in his sayings, seeking God’s blessings with his lights, and embarking on the path of his examples (al-Şaffūrī 1867, 1:52–53). Indeed, al-Şaffūrī’s extended story includes many of the major early Islamic figures, truly providing a lesson of “three” important loveable actions for later generations.

This long narration was repeated with some variations in al-Qaṣṭallānī’s *al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya* and al-‘Ajlūnī’s *Kaṣḥf al-Khaḥfā’*. Though the authenticity is questionable, this provides another unique understanding of the *ḥadīth*. It indicates that the things made dearer to people could be of anything apart from women and perfume. In a sense, it is congruent with al-Jilānī’s concept of *taḥbīb* where certain worldly pleasures are made dearer to specific individuals (al-‘Ajlūnī 2000, 1:391–393; al-Qaṣṭallānī n.d., 2:221).

## 8 Theosophical Perspective

It is not surprising to find that the one who treated this *ḥadīth* from a theosophical perspective was the renowned Sufi luminary Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī. He interpreted this *ḥadīth* in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (“Bezels of Wisdom”) appropriating it to a theosophical system called by others as “the unity of being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Starting with Adam, each of the 27 chapters of *Fuṣūṣ* is dedicated to a Prophet mentioned in the Qur’ān. The chapters are based on a specific Qur’ānic verse or Prophetic *ḥadīth* that describes the characteristics of the respective Prophet. The final chapter is dedicated to the last Prophet Muḥammad, and its entire discussion is based on the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb*.

According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, all things are reflections of a unique and unified Absolute Reality, God. Some things are a greater manifestation compared to others, such as the Prophets amongst other creatures and Prophet Muḥammad amongst other Prophets – he is the highest manifestation. He also believed

that a woman is the one who completes a man's recognition of the divine, and a man's witnessing of God in a woman is the most excellent witnessing. After quoting the first part of the *ḥadīth*, "three things from your *dunyā* are made dear to me," Ibn al-'Arabī said that among the three, Allāh started with women even before prayer due to this state (Bālī Zādah 2002, 312–313). Unlike other interpreters, he gave much attention to the order stated in the *ḥadīth*. To him, knowing a woman is part of knowing one's self since she is an excellent manifestation of the oneness of being. Only those who achieve that knowledge can reach the core of prayer, which is a part of knowing God. Whoever knows himself knows his Lord. According to him:

When man witnesses Allāh in women, his witnessing is in the passive; when he witnesses Him in himself, regarding the appearance of woman from Him, he witnesses Him in the active. When he witnesses Him from himself without the presence of any from him, his witnessing is in the passive directly from Allāh without any intermediary. So, his witnessing of Allāh in the woman is the most complete and perfect because he witnesses Allāh inasmuch as He is both active and passive. For this reason, the Prophet, may Allāh bless him and grant him peace, loved women.

IBN 'ARABĪ 2014, 128

According to his interpretation, the love of women is not a matter of worldly pleasure; instead, it is a medium for acquiring the ultimate knowledge about God, which is called *ma'rifa* (gnosis). He further argued that every subject yearns for its origin. Man yearns for his Lord<sup>8</sup> because He created man in His image by blowing His *rūḥ* (spirit). God loves him, who is in His image. Likewise, He makes loveable to man the woman whom He extracted for him from him and who appeared in His image. When a man loves a woman, he desires their union, and the best way to achieve it is through marriage. Ibn al-'Arabī states:

When a man loves a woman, he seeks union with her, that is to say the most complete union possible in love, and there is in the elemental sphere no greater union than that between the sexes. It is [precisely] because such desire pervades all his parts that man is commanded to perform

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8 This is based on the Qur'ānic verse 32:9, which reads: "Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His [created] spirit and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful," and the *ḥadīth* "The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allāh created Adam in His image ...'" (al-Bukhārī 1987, 5:2299: *Kitāb al-Istīdhān* ("Book of Asking Permission"), *Bāb Bad' al-Salām* ("Chapter on Commencing with the Peace Greeting")).

the major ablution. Thus, the purification is total, just as his annihilation in her was total at the moment of consummation. God is jealous of his servant that he should find pleasure in any but Him, so He purifies him by the ablution, so that he might once again behold Him in the one in whom he was annihilated, since it is none other than He Whom he sees in her.

IBN 'ARABĪ 2014, 128

In terms of the fragrance (*tīb*), the Prophet mentioned it after women because women are the best perfume. They have fragrance in their form (*takwīn*) itself, and the best perfume is the embracement of the well-beloved (Ibn 'Arabī 2014, 128).

Ultimately, within the domain of *ḥadīth* literature, the association of *taḥbīb* with the concepts of *fanā'* and *baqā'* was only found in the writings of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1622), an Ottoman scholar from Cairo. He was known for his works on the early history of Islam and the history of Sufism in Egypt, and he was also a disciple of al-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565). In his seminal work, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* ("Revelation of the Omnipotent"), al-Munāwī mentions that some scholars have related *taḥbīb* with *fanā'* and *baqā'* and, to them, the *ḥadīth* refers to a state after *fanā'*. When an aspirant annihilates in God without having any personal intention and desire, God places some worldly matters in his mind. Yet, al-Munāwī did not mention al-Jīlānī by name. Nevertheless, it is after al-Munāwī that this concept found extensive elaboration in *ḥadīth* interpretive discourse (al-Munāwī 1937, 3:371).

## 9 *Ḥadīth al-Taḥbīb* in al-Jīlānī's Works

The *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb* was mentioned two times in *al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī* and once in *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*.<sup>9</sup> In *al-Faṭḥ*, the *ḥadīth* has been quoted as: "I was made to love from your world women and perfume, and the delight of my eyes has always been in the prayer." In some latest editions of *al-Faṭḥ*, there is an addition of the words "three things," i.e., "I was made to love three things from your world;" however, they were absent in the earliest one. The addition was also found in the early editions of *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*. This addition has caught the

9 This *ḥadīth* has been mentioned in *al-Faṭḥ* in the seventh discourse on patience, and in the 25th discourse on ascetic detachment in the world (*al-zuḥd fī l-dunyā*) (al-Jīlānī 1988, 44, 114). It has also been mentioned in *Futūḥ* in the sixth discourse on *al-fanā' 'an al-khalq* (al-Jīlānī 1973, 14).

attention of many *ḥadīth* scholars since it raises some questions as explained above.

The apparent meaning that an ordinary reader gets from the *ḥadīth* is that the Prophet likes perfumes and women, yet he still found real happiness whilst performing prayers. *Qurrat al-ʿayn* (literally, the coolness of the eyes) is an Arabic metaphor for enjoyment as the tears become cold when a person becomes extremely happy (Ibn Manẓūr 1993, 12:582).

In the seventh discourse on “patience” in *al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī*, a lecture that al-Jīlānī delivered in his *ribāṭ* (Sufi lodge) on 17 Shawwāl 545 (13 February 1151), he elaborated on the *ḥadīth* of *taḥbīb* uttering the following:

Hate all things and love the creator of all things. Then if He makes you love one of the things you have hated, you may do so in safety, because He is the one giving rise to the love, not you. This is why the Prophet, Allāh bless him and give him peace, said: “I have been made to love three things: perfume, women, and the coolness of my eyes (chief comfort) is in the prayer.” He was made to love them after disliking, forsaking, renouncing, and shunning them. You must now rid your heart of everything aside from Him until He makes you love whatever part thereof, He will.

‘ABD AL-QĀDIR AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1992, trans. HOLLAND, 61

Again, in his speech on “renouncing worldly affairs” on 19 Dhū l-Ḥijja 545 (15 April 1151), he quoted the same *ḥadīth* saying:

When a person is sincere (*ṣādiq*) in his asceticism, his allotted shares (of worldly things) come to him. He receives them and uses them to clothe himself outwardly, while his heart is filled with abstemiousness toward them and other such things. This is why our Prophet Muḥammad, Allāh bless him and give him peace, was more ascetic than Jesus, blessings and peace be upon him, and the other Prophets, blessings and peace be upon them, although he did say: “I have been made to love three things belonging to this world of yours: perfume, women and my chief comfort is given in prayer.”

He loved all these, despite his abstemiousness towards them and other things, because they were part of his allotted share, of which his Lord, almighty and Glorious is He, had foreknowledge. So, he accepted them in fulfilment of the (Lord’s) commandment. Carrying out that commandment is obedience, so whoever receives his allotted shares in this manner is in a state of obedience, even if he is fully involved in this world.

‘ABD AL-QĀDIR AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1992, trans. HOLLAND, 178

In the two quotes above, al-Jīlānī did not connect the *ḥadīth* to the concepts of *fanā'* and *baqā'*, two well-known concepts in Sufism. However, in *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, the *ḥadīth* was discussed in the sixth discourse on *al-fanā'* 'an *al-khalq* (vanishing from the creature). Apart from this, two other stages of *fanā'* were explained here: vanishing from desires, and vanishing from one's own will, together with the signs of each stage. For the first, a person should completely avoid all social contact with people to free his mind from desiring what they possess (al-Jīlānī 1973, 14). For the second, it is a sign to discard all efforts for, and contact, with worldly means in acquiring any benefits and avoiding any harms. Al-Jīlānī explained it as:

to not move oneself in one's own interest and to not rely on oneself in matters concerning oneself and to not protect oneself nor help oneself, instead, leave the entire things to God; because He had the charge of it in the beginning, so will have it till the end, just as the charge rested on Him, when you were hidden in the womb (of your mother) as also when you were being suckled as a baby in the cradle.

AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1973, 14

The sign of vanishing from one's will is to maintain the passivity of the organs of his body and the calmness of his heart at the time of the manifestation of the will and act of God, without entertaining any resolve or having any desire. This passivity is not unique to *taḥbīb*, rather it is discussed with the highest level of almost all other Sufi concepts, for example, *riḍā* (satisfaction) (Khalil 2014, 378). At this moment, one will not have any feeling of internal need nor any purpose, God will be his only objective (al-Jīlānī n.d., trans. Ahmad, 31–32).

Passing these three stages, an aspirant will reach into a phase called *baqā'* (subsistence). Al-Jīlānī explains the ultimate stage, *baqā'*, an aspirant reaches by passing through the above-mentioned three different levels:

After this experience, you will never remain broken down. Neither any sensual desire nor any will remain in you like a broken vessel that retains neither any water nor any dreg. And you will be devoid of all human actions so that your inner self will accept nothing but the will of God. At this stage, miracles and supernatural things will be ascribed to you. These things will be seen as if proceeding from you when in fact they will be acts of God and His will.

Thus, you will be admitted to the company of those whose hearts have been smashed and their animal passions have vanished. Hence, they have been inspired by the Divine will and new desires of daily existence.

It is about this stage that the Holy Prophet PBUH, says: “Three things have been made dearer to me ...”

AL-JĪLĀNĪ n.d., trans AHMAD, 31–32

In his work, *al-Ghunya li-Ṭālibī Ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq* (“Richness for the Seeker of the Truth”), al-Jilānī does not reference the *ḥadīth* neither to encourage marital life nor to promote the use of perfumes as many early and later scholars had done. Unlike his two works mentioned above, *al-Ghunya* focuses on human faith and actions in day-to-day affairs, including the etiquette of marriage. While readers would expect to find the *ḥadīth* in the work, with the scholar exploiting its popular sense of promoting marital life and perfuming, this was not the case. Al-Jilānī’s neglect of the *ḥadīth* in *al-Ghunya* while having given detailed discussion in the other two works supports the perception that he did not give any attention to its apparent and popular meaning.

#### 10 Al-Jilānī’s Interpretation of the *Ḥadīth* and *Tahbīb*

In his interpretation of the *ḥadīth*, al-Jilānī focuses on the word “*ḥubbiba*” which means made to love. Given this passive form, a reader would become curious about the actor who influences the Prophet. Who made those things dearer to him? There are four possible answers; he is either controlled by his own passion, by his *hawā* (desire), by Satan, or by God. For Muslims, the first three are impossible in the case of the Prophet, for a prophet could not be a person who is driven by his desire, passion, or Satan. The basics of Islamic teachings emphasise disobeying satanic inspirations; therefore, it could not be expected from a prophet. The only remaining possibility is God, the Almighty. If that is the case, further clarification is much needed.

Although some scholars have tried to elaborate on the word *ḥubbiba*, they confine this *ḥadīth* to the life of the Prophet, as can be learned from the aforementioned discussions of the pre- and post-Jilānī interpretations. However, al-Jilānī generalised *tahbīb* by describing it as a stage in a Sufi’s life, which contributes a significant addition in the *ḥadīth* interpretive discourse and Sufi tradition. He says: “... Thus you will be admitted to the company of those whose hearts have been smashed and their animal passions have vanished.” Hence, they have been inspired by the Divine will and new desires of daily existence. It is about this stage that the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, says “Three things have been made dearer to me ...” (al-Jilānī n.d., trans. Ahmad, 31–32). That means a Sufi may be made to enjoy certain worldly pleasures after struggling through various stages of asceticism (*zuhd*) to eventually

end up in the ultimate goal, *fanā'*. At this stage, God will make him long for some worldly comforts according to His will – and this can be concluded as an act of *taḥbīb*.

Al-Jīlānī applies this concept even to marriage, which is generally perceived as an act of Sunna by the majority of scholars. It indicates that if an act is not an obligatory one, it would be subjected to this theory as well. That is very clear from the application of this concept in his own life. Nevertheless, in his commentary on al-Jīlānī's *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) attempted to reconcile this theory, and the concept of *fanā'* in general, with the principles of Shari'a by reducing them to worldly affairs usually treated as merely permissible (*mubāḥ*) and not as praiseworthy in Islam. For Ibn Taymiyya, something which is praiseworthy should not be forbidden, even according to the path of Sufism. However, this could be regarded as a bend of al-Jīlānī's thought, as it does not bode well with what al-Jīlānī himself had proposed and explained, or how he applied it in his own life (Ibn Taymiyya n.d., 31).

## 11 The Exemplification of the Concept in al-Jīlānī's Personal Life

Al-Jīlānī seems to have believed that he had reached the prime stage of Sufism, *fanā'*, wherein a Sufi will experience *taḥbīb* in his life. A perfect example for this is his own marriage life. Although Islam encourages marriage, as in various Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic *ḥadīths*, a Sufi's understanding of marriage is quite different from that of the layman. When al-Jīlānī was asked about marriage, he answered – after giving a brief remark on its jurisprudential aspect – that, from a Sufi perspective, marriage is prohibited for a *murīd*, a person who strives in the path of God and has not achieved his goal. In terms of a *murād*, a person who has reached the prime stage of Sufism, Allāh will engage him either with marriage or with something else, and he need not bother about it (al-Jīlānī 1988, 345).

The above two Sufi terminologies (*fanā'* and *taḥbīb*), indicate two different stages in Sufism. However, once a Sufi reaches the paramount, he has no choice to wish something for himself. Instead, Allāh will wish for him something and make him love it, and he will wholeheartedly accept it. After getting married in his forties, al-Jīlānī was addressed with several questions concerning his marriage. He then answered: "I waited for consent from the Prophet until he suggested [to] me to do so [the Prophet appeared to him in a dream]. Then I married four wives. Therefore, they never became a hindrance in my spiritual path" (al-Suhrawardī 1971, 1:343). The marriage, thus, was instructed. One could

also notice from al-Jīlānī's response that he considered the Prophet's instruction through dreams as one of the signs of *taḥbīb*.

Another exemplification of *taḥbīb* theory in his life were his own lectures in which he says:

Allāh's destiny made me sit here although I did not wish to do it. O pupils, I have spoken out, but you are running away and not practising! My name in other countries is *akhras* (dumb, mute). I used to pretend to be crazy, dumb, or unable to speak Arabic, but it was not correct for me. Destiny brought me out here to you. I was in the underground storage bins when it pulled me out and made me sit on the lecture seat.

AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1992, trans. HOLLAND, 398; AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1988, 235

Similar expressions about him being exposed can be found in many places in his two major works, *al-Faṭḥ* and *Futūḥ*. This association with people has been justified as *wujūd* (existence) after *fanā'* (annihilation). It is also represented by other terminologies such as *bast* (expansion) after *qabd* (contraction), and *jam'* (gathering) after *tafriqa* (separation), and *ṣaḥw* (sobriety) after *sukr* (intoxication) (al-Jīlānī 1988, 213, 173, 364).

How does Allāh make a person who reached that stage love worldly affairs and how do we know whether God or others caused that inclination? These are questions that arise from the points mentioned above. As previously mentioned, sometimes the Prophet comes in a dream and gives direction to symbolise *taḥbīb*. A similar experience was reported to occur to the early Sufi, Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 297/910) (al-Jīlānī 1988, 356). Interestingly, al-Jīlānī himself was confronted with these questions as related in the sixty-first discourse in *al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī*. Al-Jīlānī's reply was:

How to explain to you what notions are? Your notions come from the devil (*shayṭān*), natural impulses (*ṭab'*), the passion (*hawā*) and this world. Your interest (*hamm*) and concern are whatever is more important to you (*ahammaka*). Your notions correspond in kind to your interest while it is active. A notion (*khāṭir*) inspired by the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He) comes only to the heart, free from anything apart from Him. He said: Allāh forbid that we should seize anyone except him with whom we found our property (Q 12:79). If Allāh and His remembrance (*dhikr*) are present with you, your heart will certainly be filled with His nearness, and the notions suggested by the devil, the passions and this world will all avoid your company. There is a kind of notion belonging

to this world and a notion belonging to the Hereafter. There is a notion belonging to the angels, and a notion belonging to the lower self (*nafs*), and a notion belonging to the heart. There is also a notion belonging to the Lord of Truth (Almighty and glorious is He). If you reject the notion of the lower self, the notion of the passions, the devil's notion and the notion of the world, the notion of the Hereafter will come to you. Then you will receive the angel's notion, then finally the notion of the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He). This is the ultimate stage.

AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1992, trans. HOLLAND, 417

He further says:

When your heart is sound, it will pause to ask each notion as it arises: What kind of notion are you? From what source do you come? So, they will tell him in return: "I am the notion of such and such. I am a true notion from the Truth (*khāṭir ḥaqq min al-ḥaqq*). I am a loving counsellor; the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He) loves you so love you too. I am ambassador (*safīr*). I am the portion of the spiritual state (*ḥāl*) of the prophethood (*nubuwwa*)."

O young man! You must devote your attention to real knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Allāh (Almighty and glorious is He), for it is the root of all that is good. If you are constant in obedience to Him, He will grant you real knowledge of Himself.

AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1992, trans. HOLLAND, 418

From his lengthy explanation, it can be understood that, at a particular stage, a person will be able to differentiate between notions, whether they come from God or others. However, it is difficult to explain the form of each notion to someone who has not attained such a status. For those who have attained it, the forms are not at all relevant to them, since they can identify the notions without prior knowledge of the forms.

## 12 *Taḥbīb* and the Concepts of *Fanā'* and *Baqā'*

The state of *taḥbīb* is a stage after *fanā'*, and it can be perceived as a stage associated with *baqā'*, the ultimate goal of an aspirant. *Fanā'* indicates the notion of "dying metaphorically before the real death," which represents a breaking

down of the individual ego and a recognition of the fundamental unity of God, creation, and the individual self. Individuals who have entered this enlightened state obtain awareness of the intrinsic unity (*tawhīd*) between Allāh and all that exists, including the individual's mind. It is coupled conceptually with *baqā'*, subsistence, the state of pure consciousness and abidance in God (see *fanā'* and *baqā'* in Murata 2018).

In *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Jīlānī related *taḥbīb* with the concept of *fanā'*, whereas, in two other places in *al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī*, he connected it with two different ideas. In one of them it is related to asceticism, as explained in the first part of this chapter. According to al-Jīlānī, *zuhd* is the way to achieve *fanā'*, and that is also apprehended when the statements in *Futūḥ* and *Faṭḥ* are considered together. While he talks about *zuhd* in *Futūḥ*, al-Jīlānī uses the term *fanā'*; he says “*ifna 'an al-khalq*,” that means to abstain from the creatures. The state represents the beginning of the ultimate *fanā'*. *Zuhd* is *fanā' an* (abstain from), but the real *fanā'* is *fanā' fi*, annihilation or dissolution in God. After *fanā'* from people, an aspirant should go forward to *fanā'* from desires, then, *fanā'* from his own will. Eventually, he will acquire *fanā'* in God.

The other context wherein this *ḥadīth* was quoted in *Faṭḥ* is where it was related to *ṣabr* (patience) or being content with *qaḍā'* (divine decree) and *qadar* (fate). In this regard, al-Jīlānī says: “Hate all things and love the Creator of all things. Then, if He makes you love one of the things you have hated ...” To hate things calls for *zuhd*, and only by going through different stages of *zuhd*, one can reach *fanā'* in Allāh and subsequently the stage of *taḥbīb*.

To denote the stages of *fanā'*, the central theme of the two books, al-Jīlānī sometimes uses different words, such as *inkisār* (to be broken), and called the heart of such a person “broken hearted.” He says:

This world belongs to one set of people, the hereafter belongs to another set of people, and the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He) belongs to yet another set of people, namely the truly convinced believers ... who are grief-stricken and broken-hearted for His sake.

AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1992, trans. HOLLAND, 53; AL-JĪLĀNĪ 1988, 37

Broken-hearted here indicates that no self-interest or intention has remained in the heart; it is broken and keeps nothing. Likewise, al-Jīlānī's statement of “*al-akhdh* (possess) after *al-tark* (renounce),” indicates that a *zāhid* fears to take from this world because he fears to lose his beloved, the Almighty (al-Jīlānī 1988, 362). But the one who achieved the ultimate *zuhd* takes from it without any fear, while gnosis emanates from Him. That appears as the meaning of his

statement “*al-tark zuhd wa-l-akhdh maʿrifa*” (to renounce is asceticism and to possess is gnosis) (al-Jilānī 1988, 362). Whoever reaches this stage attains real happiness in this world (al-Jilānī 1988, 62).

### 13 Conclusion

ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, a Ḥanbalī Sufi scholar, can be regarded as first interpreter of the *taḥbīb ḥadīth* who blended it with two essential Sufi concepts; *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ*. However, his interpretation does not attract much attention from the exegetes of *ḥadīth*, and this was the case for five centuries, until al-Munāwī accentuated this discussion in his seminal work *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*. Al-Jilānī’s exposition differs from the popular understanding of the *ḥadīth*. According to him, it could not be treated as an unconditional encouragement for marriage and perfuming, it could have pointed otherwise. Moreover, there is no point, according to him, to restrict the love mentioned in the *ḥadīth* to only the two subjects. Instead, the *ḥadīth* refers to a stage associated with *baqāʾ* (subsistence) that an aspirant has achieved after passing through the different states of *fanāʾ* (annihilation) by being persistent in asceticism. Once he achieves it, Allāh will make him love some worldly comforts. Yet, in the case of the Prophet, women and perfumes were the things that were made dearer to him. The concept of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* was not something new to medieval Sufism. Instead, they were already embraced by al-Jilānī’s great predecessors such as al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) and al-Junayd. In this regard, al-Jilānī’s approach could be treated as a defensive response to those who depicted Sufis as the adversaries of the Qurʾān and Sunna. This exploration of al-Jilānī’s idea could be appreciated as an invitation to study his attempt to substantiate other Sufi concepts with the scriptural basis, particularly the *ḥadīth*. This study covered almost all interpretations by the exegetes of *ḥadīth* in the pre- and post-Jilānī era. However, the influence of al-Jilānī’s new understanding of the *ḥadīth* on Sufis themselves requires further analysis. Ultimately, the intertwining of *ḥadīth* and Sufism can be appreciated as a mechanism for ethical discourse as evident in the scholarship of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī.

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