
Spiritual Purification in Sufism – An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT:

Purification or purgation is ceremonial cleansing from defilement by the performance of appropriate rites and rituals. It is considered the act to get rid of sin or guilt through repentance for moral or spiritual cleansing. This research will explore the development of Sufism describing their popular religious practices. The study explores the stages and levels in the development of Sufi concept & practices.

The purpose of the research is to understand the basic concept of Sufism along with pointing out the Quranic verses' and the great moral ideal system set by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ).

This paper seeks to identify, highlight, and explain the internal spiritual abilities and hidden secrets within human body, mind, heart, and soul (terms of Islamic spiritual purification); will be explain in details; it includes the spiritual development along with the mystical achievement.

The paper would depend on concept aligning & explaining religious traditions on Sufi themes. This paper work will provide theoretical orientation; make reference to relevant theoretical and empirical literatures for adequate clarification, comprehension and action sought where needed. Qualitative research methodology has been adopted.

Keyword:

Purgation, Sufism, Mystics, Hidden Secrets, Spirituality

Spiritual Purification in Sufism

Purification is an act of cleaning by getting rid of impurities, refining process, or the process of removing impurities by using some particular oil an ancient herbs or metals or sugar or purification apparatus etc. it is religious rituals action by which a defiled person made clean. Purification or purgation is a ceremonial cleansing from defilement or uncleanness by the performance of appropriate rites and rituals. It is also considered the act to get rid of sin or guilt through repentance for moral or spiritual cleansing. It is an operational process to separate or remove that is impure or noxious as the purification of liquors and metals."¹ "It is a cleansing process to remove dirty or harmful substances to become morally good".² In some religions, "the act of removing from a person, usually by a ceremony, the bad affects that they are suffering because they have broken a religious or a moral law".³ "Purification may be considered as including any ceremony or

rituals observance undertaken with a view to purging or cleansing a person, place, or things from the rituals consequences of impurity”.⁴ New Catholic Encyclopedia describes purification cleanses of all disorders occurred by sin. “Spiritual purification moulds and shapes sin into virtues and forces the soul to seek God and his will as it should be his ultimate goal. Not to oppose the laws of God but redirected towards God and employed in what is for greater glory alone”.⁵

The concept of purification is exactly to purify or clean ourselves from evil desires and to adopt a pure life of superior qualities with the help of its foundations that are as repentance, fear of Allah, patience, gratitude and truthfulness. If the man is not spiritually purified then the result is a scattered personality with confused mind. New Catholic Encyclopedia describes “a soul goes under passive purification. The passive privations demand supernatural virtue. This virtue unites human with God alone, thus the lower part of his soul to the higher and higher to the divine spirit, there is no purification”.⁶ Purification is basically a tool to be closer to the God. Our body and soul commits sins by different acts. Some time we became morally sick and some time physically. As humans are the combinations of both so both needs to be clean and purify. It is also considered that soul comes from and goes back to the upper world. When a person commits sin and break his religious laws, the level of spirit gradually come at the lower level. Different kind of sufferings hardships and difficulties of the worldly life makes the human filthy. By the purification’ may be in form of physical rituals and ceremonies or I form of meditation and contemplation’ the purpose is same, to be spiritually high. As Bible says *“only those will be blessed on and see the God, who are pure hearted”*.⁷

Islam describes that the purification is actually the cleansing of the inner self. That is to refine the inner self of all the evil worldly desires of false believes, useless practices and unethical temperament. Physical purification is prerequisite for spiritual purification. Islam says that material or physical and spiritual dimensions go side by side so the man can well perform his duties toward Allah and humans as well. Purification of soul does not mean to give up all worldly business. It means to observe all rights of the creator and His creatures with full practical sense of duty, as his Creator is in front of his eyes or at least Allah is monitoring him during all courses of his actions. From a hadith, an Islamic terminology has been established as, *‘Ihsan*⁸.

In some religions, purification is ceremonial and sometime un ceremonial. Ceremonial purification is concerned with some formal events in human life like wedding, or child birth or death etc. These ceremonies conducted to achieves particular goal.⁹ Purification identifies the pattern of

rotten thoughts. It is a process and effort to control bad habits and don't let our conscious to move on distractive things. Purification not only identifies the causes of destructiveness but also gives fixed patterns and rules to follow. We put our thinking's at a set pattern or a particular way. In purification a person keeps on practicing and sustains some practices that will confine it to be distractive by any force or need. After going through the definitions originated by different scholars, the primary theme of their definitions can be concluded into the following points.

Historically spirituality was related to the holiness.¹⁰ It is a mostly used term especially in contemporary religions of the world. Almost all worldly religions are familiar to the term its meanings and purpose. Spirituality is increasingly being recognized as a real phenomenon and not merely a "mental illusion".¹¹ In religious philosophy the existence of a reality is distinct from matter. This being may be called mind, or spirit. It is also believed in that nothing exists in the world other than the spirit or soul.¹² Some believes that mind or spirit is the only reality and it exists even after the death of a person.¹³ We can say it is a kind of metaphysics. Inside a person, apart from the body' soul or spirit is comprehensively universal¹⁴. Mostly the term deals in collectively form rather than individuals.¹⁵ Almost all religious practices and rituals performed to attain spirituality, deals with an individual's as well as collectively. It is also thought that a man is nothing without soul is like an empty shell.¹⁶ A man cannot reach the level of humanity without *pure Soul*. Spirituality concerns with characterized and the particular believes, and that is, a totally unified approach. The concept of spirituality related to the personal holiness. The purpose of human life is self-realization. The actual happiness does not depend upon the sensual pleasure and intellectual satisfaction. It transcends in imperfection and limitations. Spirituality or the religion is the only way to elevate human soul and the truths of human heart and put them into the higher level to resolve pertaining issues created by man's free will.¹⁷

- i. The refining process to get rid of impurities, make something spiritually or ceremonially clean.
- ii. Spiritual purification moulds and shapes from sin to virtues and force the soul in seeking God and his will.
- iii. It is considered as the act of purging of sin or guilt through repentance for moral or spiritual cleansing.

- iv. The meanings derived by intended are principle meanings. However these meanings are indispensable.

Terms of purification:

Human personality is composed of body, mind and heart, soul of his hidden secrets, internal spiritual abilities and many aspects that if we put them together it makes a Human being. So both the outer and inner aspects make a purification process possible. Normally these four elements are considered to be a part of spiritual purification.

1: Heart

Heart physically exists in human body, in fact heart is the main organ; if it works we are called live. It is a biological point of view, but spiritually it affects the entire human life. It exists in every living thing like animal and even a dead person has a heart in his body. But this is only the apparent or physical meaning of heart. This is the 1st meaning of heart while 2nd meaning of heart is in a spiritual sense.¹⁸ Almost all major world religions emphasis on the cleansing heart and pure heart is demanded as heart is the center of thoughts and emotions as well. According to Islam, heart will be accountable and answerable to God. As Allah (S.W.T) says;

“and the contents of the hearts will come into possession”.¹⁹

Purification of heart means to remove from the heart, love for the short-lived world and their worry over griefs and sorrows, and to establish in their place love for God alone. Human heart is the faculty of Divine knowledge. The religion Islam says that the ultimate day (judgment) will decide the status as successful or failure of a person. The Quran says;

﴿يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ * إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ﴾²⁰

“At the day ‘nothing will benefit you. No wealth not sons, only he’ that came with the pure heart.”

2: Soul

Soul is the part of a person not in physical form. This is an organ of mystical vision. Soul is the part of human; consist of mind, thoughts, character and feelings etc. It is also believed in that soul exists even after death.²¹ In Hebrew bible, the word used for soul is *ne'phesh*²² and the Greek word *psy-khe*.²³ These words have been used over eight hundred times. The word ‘soul’ according to Bible, has been used for entire living things.

In Islamic mystics, the *Qur'ān* says; as we made and breathed spirit into human, he fell down in prostration in front of God”.

﴿يَسْتَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ * قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي﴾²⁴

﴿وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾²⁵

“And they ask you approximately the Spirit. Say, The Spirit belongs to the area of my Lord; and also you were given only little know-how”.

Islamic Scholars say about soul (*Ruh*) merge into human body that you cannot be separate. You can understand it with the example; it's an intangible body and body is like a dress upon it, or soul is a rider and body is his conveyance. So *soul* is a delicate intangible, its outer cover is *body*.²⁶

The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasized on the vital role of purification as a powerful protective cover and shield to cure the spiritual diseases of mind and soul.²⁷

3: Brain /Mind

An organ of soft nervous tissue contained in the skull divided into cerebellum, cerebrum and medulla, according to their functions and coordination of intellectual and nervous activities²⁸. Brain controls all thinking process, memory, reactions, emotions and physical activities control system.²⁹ This distinctive intellectual quality is given to man. A Muslim scholar Imam -Ghazālī says:

“Brain is a quality that discriminates human being from all other living creature.”³⁰

Allah almighty has installed two spiritual powers in each human being. Holy Quran says; we have guided him (human) to the two paths to go with. One pulls him towards His obedience and the other grabs him to the path of defiance. The objective of purification is to potentiate the positive forces and weaken the negative forces. The positive forces have been named as soul (*ruh/qalab*) and negative forces as “*nafas*”. Collision between these two forces continues till the end of life, so, we have to continue the effort for purification till death.³¹ Anthropology describes that we are an animal organization and seek constant stimulation. We like to get objects that give us happiness and avoid all those conditions that give pain as the result. We also want to repeat the condition that gives us pleasure and fun and avoid to be engaged in painful condition. There are some negative or positive emotions and natural reactions just like any other living creature. An Indian scholar says: *Gita* guides to get peace of mind and happiness by spiritual exercises and efficient activity. A destroys mind can never achieve anything worthwhile”.³²

4: Nafas

A human being is combination of body and soul. There is the visible and invisible blended together in him, the one is necessary as other at least

so far as the initial stages of his progress are concerned, his ultimate superiority over the rest of creation depends more upon his inner merits, his intellectual capabilities, his spiritual attainments and the polish and the brilliance of his soul, then upon his exterior form and appearance and qualities of his body.³³ “*Nafs* is animal life soul, substance and desire. It is a word which occurs in the Quran and the traditions for the human conscience.”³⁴ Purification of the self (*Tazkiya-e-Nafs*) is cleansing the sensual self from immorally hateful features and animal propensities into highly appreciated qualities. It is also called the carnal or appetitive soul and is able to purification. It is likewise described as “*Nafs-e-Ammara*” or the tendency in man to disobey God. *Nafs* is also the seat of passion and lust.

Foundation of Spiritual Purification in Sufism

Qur’ānic Foundation

Islamic spirituality is God-oriented. According to Islamic, senses correspond to the spiritual entity. So training of senses emphasized in Islam. It is an integral part of spiritual growth. “*They have eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they listen now not. They are like cattle, may also extra misguided: for they may be heedless of warning.*”³⁵ It was a great blessing for Humans in the form of Prophet (ﷺ) that Allah has given for the guidance and spiritual purification.

As Qur’ān says;

﴿قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ﴾³⁶

“*God has blessed the believers, by sending his messenger among themselves, who recites holy verses on them, and purifies and teaches them the Scripture and wisdom; before that they were in obvious mistake before that.*”

Qur’ān says;

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا﴾³⁷

“*Successful is he who purified it*”.

﴿وَمَنْ زَكَّاهَا فَإِنَّمَا يَنْتَظِرُ لِنَفْسِهِ﴾³⁸

“*He who purifies himself purifies himself for his own good*”.

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا﴾³⁹

“*successful is he who purifies himself*”.

Qur’ān describes purification as “*Tazkia*”.

Qur’ān says that those are successful who adopted the self-purification.

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى * وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى * بَلْ تُؤَوتِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا * وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى﴾⁴⁰

(He who purifies himself and keeps remembers the name of his Lord and prays. He will indeed be successful. But you prefer the worldly life, whereas hereafter life is better and everlasting).

Rewards are promised by Allah to those who purified their soul by practicing obedient devotion and staying away from distractions of sins and evil. Qur'an says "Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay. Such is the reward of those who purify themselves!"⁴¹ In this holy verse of Qur'an says;

﴿إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ * وَمَنْ تَزَكَّى فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّى لِنَفْسِهِ * وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ﴾⁴²

(You can only notify or alert those who fear their Lord strictly confidential and sustain their prayer. Whoever seeks purification for him, seeks purification only for his own sake, and to God is the return.)

﴿الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى * وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى إِلَّا إِتِيعَاءُ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى * وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَى﴾⁴³

(He who gives his wealth to purify himself and does not expect any reward from anyone, but seeks only the pleasure of his Lord, the Most Exalted, and, surely, soon he will be well-pleased.)

Spiritual Purification in the Traditions of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ)

The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) combined in himself the leadership of all various functions in his time. He was a religious teacher, spiritual guide, social reformer, commander-in-chief and political head of the Muslims stat. In short, He combined in himself all the functions of a temporal and spiritual leader.⁴⁴ The mission of the Holy Prophet was to be a role model for entire humanity till the Day of Judgment. He emphasized upon self Purification in the light of the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an shows the real status of the Prophet as the saying shows;

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ﴾⁴⁵

(It is He who sent among the unlettered a messenger from themselves; reciting His revelations to them, and purifying them, and teaching them the Scripture and wisdom; although they were in obvious error before that.)

Purification of the people was an important task for the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). These verses clearly show the great significance of the task of purification of the soul. In the prayer of the Prophet Ibrahim and Ishmail⁴⁶ the request of teaching the Book and wisdom is mentioned before the purification, but in all the three places⁴⁷ that God describes the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), purification precedes teaching the Book and wisdom. This indicates the priority and great importance of purification. So the prerequisite for learning the Book and wisdom is to purify them spiritually. A Hadith magnifies the validity of spirituality quoted by `Umr ibn -āl-Khattāb, who said:

“As we sat one day with the Messenger of Allah, a man in pure white clothing and jet black hair came to us, though none of us knew him. He sat down before the Prophet (ﷺ) bracing his knees against him, resting hands on legs, and said: Tell me about the perfection of faith (ehsan)"and the Prophet (ﷺ) answered:"It is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you see him not, He nevertheless sees you.”⁴⁸

The Prophet (ﷺ) saying:

“Tazkiah and Al-Hikma” both must play their divine and forceful function as protective cover and shield to cure the spiritual diseases of own self through the purification of heart and mind (soul).⁴⁹

Another saying of the Prophet (ﷺ);

there is a lump of flesh in every human body, if this lump is pure and good the rest of the body is correct and sound. If that lump of flesh is rotten or filthy the whole body is filthy. Beware, this is heart.⁵⁰

Another saying of the Prophet (ﷺ);

Your Lord does not look at your outer look at your body, but looks at your heart and deeds. Abdullah bin Umar from the Prophet (ﷺ) narrates: *"The hearts get rusted as the water rusts the iron. It was asked about the treatment. The Prophet advised them to have frequent remembrance of death and recitation of the Holy Quran”⁵¹*

There are different of sources of impurity. A major source of impurity is the attachment to the materialistic life & worldly affairs to the extent that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

“The attachment to this world is the source for every wrong. Beware how the one who is attached to this world has loved what God dislikes. What wrong can be a greater crime than this ”?⁵²

Spiritual Purification from Sufi and Saints

The term 'Sūfism' brought a range of things to describe their status. The meanings of the term have been much discussed and many books composed on the subject. Many Sūfis claims that Sūfism had existed before Islam and this is a true. Actually Sūfism existed before Islam is true. It is form mysticism. The major concept is that you don't know God without experience. But knowledge is very important. Allah says those who know and those who don't are equal?

The term Sūfi, derived from the Arabic word "Soof" wool⁵³ (jāmā-i-sūf), some claimed it from Ashāb-i-sūffā, and some of view is that it derived from sāfā (purity).⁵⁴ Some claims that the term was applied to Muslim ascetics and mystics⁵⁵ because they wore garments made out of wool.⁵⁶

Sūfism, as a school, has come from east to west. Sūfism is a religion if one wants to learn religion from it; it is a philosophy if one wants to learn wisdom from it; it is mysticism if one wishes to be guided by it in the folding of the soul. Yet it is beyond all these things.⁵⁷ Sūfism represents a dimension of Islamic religious life that has frequently been viewed by Muslim theologians and lawyers with suspicion. Some "Sūfis" have used the Qur'anic interpretation to strengthen their intuitional thoughts but their way of using it is different from "*Mufasssirūn*" and "*Fuqahā*". The ecstatic state of the mystic can sometimes produce extreme behavior or a statement that appears blasphemous because Sūfis sometimes feel so close to God that they lose a sense of their own self identity and feel themselves to be completely absorbed into God. This is in fact the goal of Sūfi. Devotional practices lead to higher levels of ecstatic state. Sūfis realized themselves as direct communion with God. Ultimately Sūfi feels his soul absorbed into God-known in "*Tassawūf*" or Sūfism as "*Fanaa*" Mystical Union with God.⁵⁸ Sufi believed in a strong soul close to divine. Soul can be strengthened by meditations and eventually close to Allah.⁵⁹ A Hadith tells "Whoever recognizes himself surely recognized Allah". Hence, death is not the end but in fact it is the beginning to the eternal life which is only endowed to the soul, not to the body. Spirituality gives deep insight. It gives the quality of actual interpretation of the nature of *malakūt* (soul).⁶⁰ In Islamic Mysticism four stages are mentioned of *Tazkiya* (Spiritual Developmental process)⁶¹

- 1st cleanse the inner self from immoralities (*Tazkiya-e-Nafs*).
- 2nd purification of the heart from worldly wishes and worries (*Tazkiya-e-Qalb*)
- 3rd emptying thoughts' divert attention from remembrance of God (*Takhliya-e-Sirr*)
- 4th Illumination of the spirit (*Tajliya-e-Ruh*);

Passing through these disciplines, *sūfis* make spiritual progress and attain *ma'rifat* /gnosis and *Reality* is then revealed to them.⁶²

Self-purification can be created for acting upon its basic Principles. Imam Ghazzali said that these principles are compulsory for a *Sūfi* to attain closeness of Allah and with having these he (*Sūfi*) creates within himself self-purification.⁶³ The basic principles of self purification are mentioned in books of *Tasawwuf* that are repentance, patience, abstinence, thankfulness and sincerity etc. The *Sūfi* teaches the prescriptions of *tazkiya*, *zikr* and *salat* as practices of purification.

Logical Grounds of Spiritual Purification in Islamic Perspective

The personality of human being comprises of three core portions: human Body, Soul and Mind. Body is physical structure of human being that contains organs. These organs are inner and outer portion of the body. As we know that human organs have their own functions and needs. Any disorder or a problem in the organic system is called disease. We also knew that it is a set rule in biological sciences that cleanliness is the base to avoid any type of disease. The beautification of body also depends upon cleanness. Hence we can say that cleanliness is source of beautification and good health of humans. Second part of human personality is soul. That is the source of life and makes the functioning of all human organs possible. As human body has some needs and problems, similarly soul has needs and problems. Cleanliness is the core element as discussed earlier, in human body. If one says that there is no soul and no need of soul then he has to prove that why a human body and mind feels problems and dissatisfaction when there is no disease and temporal problem. He has also to reply the question when a person eats his favorite food; a satisfaction felt by him is related to which portion of his personality? Likewise a person solves a mathematical theorem and difficult arithmetic question, he feels happiness and satisfaction. In which part of body satisfaction can be felt? In the same way, a person on his way helps and gives alms to needy or bagger. This happiness and satisfaction is related to which part of body? So; to hear a sound, to feel hungry, to be conscious of pain, to feel contrition for sin and to construct an argument, which of these things identify as a purely material being? Likewise we risk our life to save a drowning person or rescue someone trapped in terrible fire, who pushes to help these suffered people? If a person claims that above mentioned satisfactions can appear in the body, it is absolutely wrong. If he says that helping poor and giving from his own money to unknown person is demand of his mind, this would be absolutely wrong. This satisfaction is only what that he feels. Non-violence, kindness, helpfulness, forgiveness, charity and brotherhood are ideals that a religion

demands from its follower. This combination of “matter” and “soul” goes side by side. The matter is manifested in the body, whereas the soul is interpreted as the inner self. Both are integrated with each other, and need suitable intake according to their own manufacturing designs. The body fulfils its nutritional needs from material food for flourishing and nourishment. The soul gets its spiritual diet to further strengthen and to promote its divinely inbuilt.

Analysis and Conclusion of the Debate

Need of a religion and spirituality is natural in humans. The purpose of a religion is to satisfy this basic need. Almost every religion of the world fulfills this need of a man to be closer to the mighty one. The basic purpose of all major world religion is to make their follower to be spiritually purified. Although beliefs and practices are different and based upon their religious scriptures. Every religion demands from its followers to adopt and maintain good and valuable conducts and ethics. To attain high level of spiritual purification every religion have set rules and regulations, some on daily basis and some attached with a particular occasion. Different religious customs, tradition and rituals have been designed for purification. The concluding point is that to purification is not merely apparent but the actual purification is inner self should be purified. To attain spiritual purification both spiritual and physical domains involved.

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