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THE SPIRITUAL STATIONS AND STATES IN SUFISM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE SUFI PATH (*TARIQAH*)

Yarashova Mohlaroyim Shukhrat qizi
Lecturer, Department of History and Philology,
Asia International University mohlaroyimyarashova@gmail.com

Abstract: Sufism (*Tasawwuf*), the mystical dimension of Islam, proposes a structured inner journey aimed at purifying the soul (*nafs*) and achieving divine proximity (*Qurb*). This spiritual journey is systematically categorized by classical Sufi masters into consecutive stages, primarily distinguished as *Maqamat* (permanent spiritual stations attained through conscious effort) and *Ahwal* (transitory spiritual states bestowed as divine grace). This paper explores the foundational blueprint of the Sufi path (*Tariqah*), analyzing the classical four-stage framework (*Shari'ah*, *Tariqah*, *Haqiqah*, and *Ma'rifah*) and detailing the core psychological and spiritual transitions a seeker (*murid*) undergoes. By examining classical texts from Al-Ghazali, Al-Qushayri, and Hujwiri, this study highlights how Tasawwuf serves as a rigorous framework for moral transcendence and esoteric knowledge.

Keywords: Sufism, Tasawwuf, Maqamat, Ahwal, Tariqah, Nafs, Spiritual Stations.

1. Introduction

Sufism is fundamentally a methodology of internal purification and spiritual ascension. Rather than a mere philosophy, it is a lived experience, often described by classical scholars as a journey from the outer horizon of religious ritual to the inner core of divine reality. To guide seekers through this volatile psychological and spiritual landscape, early Sufi masters mapped out specific stages.

To understand the progression of a Sufi, scholars look at two interconnected dimensions: the structural macro-stages of the path and the psychological micro-stages (stations and states) experienced by the mystic.

2. The Macro-Framework: The Four Stages of the Path

In classical Islamic mysticism, the entire spiritual journey is often framed within four progressive, overlapping dimensions. They do not replace one another; rather, each wraps around the next like the layers of a walnut.

[Shari'ah: The Outer Law / Shell]
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[Tariqah: The Path / Flesh]
↓
[Haqiqah: The Truth / Oil]
↓
[Ma'rifah: Gnosis / Core Reality]

- **Shari'ah (The Sacred Law):** The indispensable outer shell. It consists of ritual obligations, ethics, and jurisprudence. A traveler cannot embark on the mystical path without anchoring themselves firmly in orthodox practice.
- **Tariqah (The Path):** The esoteric practices, meditations (*dhikr*), and disciplines under the guidance of a spiritual master (*shaykh*). If Shari'ah is the shore, Tariqah is the act of sailing into the ocean.

- **Haqiqah (Ultimate Truth):** The stage where the inner meanings of reality and religious practices are unveiled to the seeker. The illusions of the material world begin to dissolve.
- **Ma'rifah (Gnosis):** The deepest experiential knowledge of God. It is not intellectual or theological data, but a direct, non-dualistic realization of Divine Unity (*Tawhid*).

3. The Micro-Framework: *Maqamat* vs. *Ahwal*

A critical academic distinction in Tasawwuf is the difference between a "Station" (*Maqam*) and a "State" (*Hal*).

Al-Qushayri notes: "Stations (*Maqamat*) are earned through effort and persistence, while States (*Ahwal*) are gifts injected directly into the heart by Divine Grace."

Feature	Maqam (Station)	Hal (State)
Nature	Stable, permanent, and earned.	Fleeting, temporary, and spontaneous.
Method	Acquired through rigorous self-discipline (*mujahadah*).	Received purely as a divine blessing (*mawahib*).
Example	Repentance (*Tawbah*), Patience (*Sabr*).	Ecstasy (*Wajd*), Intimacy (*Uns*), Fear (*Khawf*).

4. The Core Chronological Stations (*Maqamat*)

While different masters (like Attar, Ansari, or Al-Ghazali) listed varying numbers of sub-stations, the standard transformative core remains highly consistent:

Step 1: *Tawbah* (Repentance)

The starting point. It is a complete psychological volturn, turning away from worldly attachments and egocentric desires toward the Divine Creator. It requires acknowledging past mistakes and making a firm resolve to rectify them.

Step 2: *Wara'* (Watchfulness/Abstinence)

The seeker becomes hyper-vigilant about the ethical purity of their life. This involves avoiding not only what is clearly forbidden (*haram*) but also doubtful matters (*shubhat*) that might cloud spiritual perception.

Step 3: *Zuhd* (Asceticism/Renunciation)

Often misunderstood as physical isolation, true *Zuhd* is an internal detachment. As the saying goes: *"Zuhd is not that you should possess nothing, but that nothing should possess you."*

Step 4: *Sabr* (Patience) and *Shukr* (Gratitude)

These twin stations stabilize the traveler. *Sabr* is remaining steadfast during spiritual dry spells or worldly trials, while *Shukr* is recognizing that every condition—pain or pleasure—stems from Divine Wisdom.

Step 5: *Tawakkul* (Absolute Trust in God)

The complete surrender of personal anxiety regarding the future. The seeker aligns their individual will with the Divine Will, operating in the world but anchored entirely in the absolute providence of God.

Step 6: *Rida* (Contentment)

The crown of the stations. It is a state of profound inner peace where the soul is entirely satisfied with whatever God has decreed, viewing trials not as punishment, but as acts of divine shaping.

5. The Ultimate Filiation: *Fana* and *Baqa*

At the zenith of the Sufi path, the seeker undergoes a profound psychological and ontological transformation:

- **Fana (Annihilation):** The dissolution of the ego (*nafs*). The mystic loses awareness of their individual identity, desires, and selfhood, becoming entirely absorbed in the presence of God.
- **Baqa (Subsistence):** The return to the world. After losing the ego in *Fana*, the mystic returns to baseline reality but lives *through* and *with* God. They fulfill worldly duties perfectly, yet their heart remains undisturbed, acting as a clear mirror for divine attributes.

6. Conclusion

The stages of Tasawwuf represent a highly sophisticated, classical Islamic model of spiritual psychology. By systematically transitioning from the external boundary of *Shari'ah* through the rigorous inner purging of the *Maqamat*, the Sufi transforms from a self-centered individual into a polished vessel of divine light. This structured ascent ensures that mystical experiences do not collapse into lawlessness, keeping the mystic safely tethered to ethical responsibility while experiencing profound esoteric realization.

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