

SUFISM AS THE CORE OF ISLAM: A Review of Imām Junayd Al-Baghdadī's Concept of Taṣawwuf

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Abstract:

This paper studies the thought of the Persian mystic Junayd al-Baghdadī, a prominent figure in the early development of Sufism (taṣawwuf). This study attempts to determine the relationship between Sufism and Islam and test the popular assumption that Sufi ideas and practices corrupt the original Islamic teachings and thus constitute innovation (bid'ā). This quantitative study focuses on the Rasā'il Junayd (Epistles of Junayd) as the primary source of data and concludes that Sufism is not only based on authentic Islamic teachings but represents the spiritual core of Islam. Junayd al-Baghdadī formulated its three central concepts of the covenant (mīthāq), annihilation (fanā'), and unification (tawḥīd). He successfully reconciled the spiritual concepts of taṣawwuf and the legal concepts of fiqh and thus helped to free Sufism from the stigma of heresy and integrated it into mainstream Islam.

Keywords: *Islam; Sufism; Junayd al-Baghdadī.*

A. Introduction

In Indonesia, Islamic teachings experience a persistent degradation in meaning. The reason stems from the general inclination to study Islam only from the aspect of law or *fiqh* (jurisprudence).¹ This phenomenon contradicts the fact that

¹ Moh Mukri, "Dinamika Pemikiran Fikih Mazhab Indonesia (Perspektif Sejarah Sosial)," *Analisis* 11, no. 2 (2011): 189–218, <http://ejournal.radenintan.ac.id/index.php/analisis/article/view/608/0>.

the history of Islam in Indonesia is intimately connected with the moral and spiritual aspects of the religion. Furthermore, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW focused on social and moral reform. According to a famous narration, he said: “I was only sent to the perfect moral character [*akhlāq*].”² By understanding and practicing *taṣawwuf*, an intimate relationship between the believers and God will form, and consequently, they will experience a moral transformation.

Although Sufism was always considered an integral part of Islamic culture, certain recent intellectual trends within Muslim society started to question its legitimacy. Certain reformist groups condemn *taṣawwuf* as an inherently un-Islamic tradition promoting ignorance and fatalism, some even making it responsible for the decline of Islamic thought and Islamic civilization.³ One such critic of Sufism was Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897). In the view of this early modern reformer and Islamic revivalist, the Sufi groups were responsible for the decline of Islam. Sufism had failed in several areas, including making false interpretations of Islam, which disassociated Islam from its original nature and emphasis on rational principles. Further, Sufism supported a fatalist attitude toward God’s predestination which resulted in passivity and inactivity.⁴ Muslim opinions are also divided as to whether *taṣawwuf* is a spiritual practice or a field of study.⁵ The mystic and founder of the Qadiri Sufi order, Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1078–1166), viewed *taṣawwuf* as a way toward the pinnacle of a servant’s sincerity toward God, which leads the servant to experience states of absorption in God (*fanāʾ*) and gnosis (*maʾrifa*). In other words, *taṣawwuf* is understood as a way to know God.⁶ Although there are many different descriptions, they have a common sentiment and vision, which is to reach closeness with God.

The term *taṣawwuf* first emerged in the early third/ninth century. The early Sufi teachers propagated *taṣawwuf* to reform society and call for personal piety and morality.⁷ Early Sufi teachings put emphasis on moral issues as well as other

² Komaruddin Hidayat, *Agama Punya Scribu Nyawa* (Bandung: Noura Books, 2012). See also, Malik bin Anas, *Muwattaʾa Imām Mālik*, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Riwāyah, 1991) Vol. 2, p. 75.

³ Mohammad Dawami, *Tasawuf Positif Dalam Pemikiran Hamka* (Yogyakarta: Fajar Pustaka Baru, 2000).

⁴ Sulaiman Al-Kumayi, “Gerakan Pembaruan Tasawuf di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Theologia* 24, no. 2 (2013): 247–78, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2013.24.2.335>.

⁵ Muhammad Hafidun, “Teori Asal Usul Tasawuf,” *Jurnal Dakwah*, 13 no. 2 (2012): 241–253. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jd.2012.13206>.

⁶ Muhammad Alif, “Tauhid Dalam Tasawuf,” *Aqlania* 8, no. 2 (2017): 97–129, <http://dx.doi.org/10.32678/aqlania.v8i02.1027>.

⁷ Abu Al-Wafa, *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman* (Jakarta: Pustaka, 1985).

related matters such as spiritual exercises to discipline the ego (*riyāḍat al-nafs*), proceed on the spiritual stages (*maqāmāt*) and achieve higher states of consciousness (*aḥwāl*).⁸ The first Sufi to discuss *taṣawwuf* was al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (781–857) from Basra, Iraq. Sufis from this period are classified into two groups; first, those who held firmly to the Shari‘a laws, such as Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz and Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, and second, those who gravitated toward the extreme, such as Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭamī and Al-Hallāj.⁹

This paper reviews the *taṣawwuf* concepts developed by Imām Junayd al-Baghdadī. He explained Sufism in such a way that there seems to be no contradiction between Islamic teachings and Sufi teachings. His sober concepts of *taṣawwuf* were directly derived from the Qur’an and the Sunna, hence there was no opposition to his work, especially from those who disapproved of *taṣawwuf*.¹⁰ Imām Junayd was not a reclusive mystic and ascetic. He lived in the busy commercial center of Baghdad and made his living by selling glassware and was an active member of the intellectual circles of the scholars. His apparent spiritual insight and wisdom earned him the title *Sayyid al-Ṭā’ifah* meaning ‘leader of the group.’ However, this does not rule out the possibility that there lived Sufis with more extensive knowledge and spiritual awareness than Imām Junayd, such as Ma’rūf al-Kharki, al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī, and al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, who were among his teachers.¹¹ As was characteristic for Imām Junayd, he viewed *taṣawwuf* from two perspectives. First, he viewed it as a religious experience in the form of unification between the Creator and His creation, thus emphasizing the experience of oneness (*tawḥīd*). This spiritual experience cannot be described in words since it is a highly subjective experience. Second, he viewed *taṣawwuf* as a field of study and described the methods and practices that can be learned from Sufi masters.¹²

There are numerous studies on the thought of Imām Junayd al-Baghdādī. Muhammad Nursamad Kamba explored the concept of gnosis (*ma’rifā*);¹³ Muhammad Abdu-r-Rabb analyzed the concept of oneness (*tawḥīd*);¹⁴

⁸ Al-Wafa, *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman...*

⁹ Al-Wafa., *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman...*

¹⁰ MN. Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam* (Tangerang: Iman, 2018).

¹¹ Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

¹² Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

¹³ Muhammad Nursamad Kamba, “Nadhariyah Al-Ma’rifah Inda Al-Junaid AL-Baghdadi” (Prodi Aqidah dan Filsafat Fakultas Ushuluddin Universitas Al-Azhar, 1994).

¹⁴ Muhammad Abdur-Rabb, “Al-Junayd’s Doctrine of Tawḥīd; An Analysis of His Understanding of Islamic Monotheism,” Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1967.

Muhammad Nur examined the works of Imām Junayd;¹⁵ Nor Ipansyah discussed the development of his Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*) in South Kalimantan;¹⁶ Nadiya Febriyanti, Abubakar, and Muhammad Husni traced the history and influence of his Sufi order in Palangkaraya;¹⁷ and Subaidi studied the economic aspects of his thought.¹⁸

This paper discusses whether Sufism is a legitimate aspect of Islam or a later development. It argues that Sufism is not only part of Islamic culture but represents the core values and teachings of Islam. In the words of Shaykh Nur Samad Kamba, “Sufism is Islam itself”.¹⁹ Thus, to dissect the research theme, the author uses the *hadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad SAW about the three aspects of religion, namely submission (*islām*), faith (*īmān*), and perfection (*iḥsān*)²⁰ as a theoretical foundation to evaluate the thought of Imām Junayd al-Baghdadī as manifested in his *Rasā'il* (Epistles).

B. Biography of Imām Junayd al-Baghdadī

His full name was Abū al-Qāsim Junayd ibn Muḥamad ibn al-Junayd al-Khazzaz, with the three attributions (*nisba*) al-Qawārīri, al-Nihawandī, and al-Baghdadī. The name al-Qawārīri was given by Imām al-Hujwiri because Imām Junayd sold glass vessels (*qawārīr*) for a living; al-Baghdadī because he came from Baghdad in Iraq, as added by Imām al-Qushayrī; and al-Nihawandī because of his ancestor's place of origin namely Nihawand in Persia.²¹ He was reportedly born in 215/830 in Baghdad and was of Persian ancestry.²² Imām Junayd's mother was the sister of his teacher, Imām Sarī al-Saqatī, and her father was a glassmaker. He probably learned the glass trade from his father. In his youth he

¹⁵ Muhammad Nur, *Teks-Teks Sufistik Junaid Al-Baghdadi*, Makalah Diskusi Dosen, STIT, 2013.

¹⁶ Nor Ipansyah, “Tarekat Junaidiyah Di Kalimantan Selatan,” *Al-Banjari: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 1 (2017): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.18592/al-banjari.v10i1.929>.

¹⁷ Nadiya Febrianti, Abubakar Abubakar, and Muhammad Husni, “Eksistensi Tarekat Junaidi Al-Baghdadi Terhadap Pembinaan Masyarakat Islam Di Majelis Darul Ikhlas Kota Palangka Raya,” *Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Masyarakat* 15, no. 2 (2019): 118–32, <https://doi.org/10.23971/jsam.v15i2.1622>.

¹⁸ Subaidi Subaidi, “Teori Ekonomi Junaidi Al-Baghdadi,” *At-Taḥdzib: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Muamalah* 2, no. 1 (2014): 138–48, <http://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/mataraman/index.php/tahdzib/article/view/2517>.

¹⁹ Kamba, “Nadhariyah Al-Ma'rifah Inda Al-Junaid AL-Baghdadi,” ...

²⁰ Syekh Islam Muhyiddin Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Syarif An-Nawawi, *Riyadhus Shalihin* (Beirut: Mu'assasah Riwayah, 1998).

²¹ Muhammad Musthafa, *Tāj al-Ārifīn* (Cairo: Dar al-Thab'ah al-Muhammadiyah, 1987).

²² Musthafa, *Tāj al-Ārifīn*...

might have also been involved in the silk trade, hence the other attribution of al-Khazzaz.²³

Imām Junayd learned Islam from his uncle, al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī, who was a spice trader by profession. He was known for his piety and morality. Reportedly, al-Saqāṭī was unperturbed upon learning that his shop was on fire and saying, “Then I don’t have to take care of it anymore.”²⁴ This alludes to his lack of concern regarding his material wealth and possessions. Imām Junayd also learned from Ma’ruf al-Karkhi who was the teacher of Sarī al-Saqāṭī.²⁵

The influence of Ma’ruf al-Karkhi and Sarī al-Saqāṭī on the thought of Imām Junayd is apparent. All three figures shared similar attitudes, dispositions, and objectives in their spiritual journeys. The similarity is especially apparent in their views on the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), as evident from many surviving anecdotes. For instance, when Ma’ruf was asked why he worshipped God he remained silent. When asked further whether it was because he feared Hell and wanted to go to Heaven, Ma’ruf answered, “Whatever it is, it lies in Allah’s hand. When you love Him, He will make you forget everything else except Him. If you know Him, then He will protect you from everything.”²⁶ Imām Junayd expressed a similar view. He argued that when someone truly loves Allah, he will transform and adopt the characters of his Beloved, as described in a *ḥadīth qudsī* wherein God says, “*If I love him, then I will become the eyes he uses to see, the ears he uses to hear, and the hands he uses to hold.*”²⁷ Therefore, we can conclude that Ma’ruf al-Karkhi and Imām Junayd had similar views on love (*maḥabba*) and suggest the influence of Ma’ruf Al-Karkhi on the ideas later developed by Imām Junayd.

In addition to his family, he also learned Islam from Abū Ja’fār Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Qashshāb (d. 275/888) whom he called his ‘true teacher’.²⁸ However, Imām Junaid did not give any further information about his person. He explains his silence as by the fact that Allah does not desire equality in front of Him between His chosen ones and regular people, as He says (in the Qur’an), “*Surely, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous*

²³ Musthafa, *Tāj al-‘Ārifn...*

²⁴ Ali Hasan Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi* (Yogyakarta: Diva Press, 2018).

²⁵ Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

²⁶ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

²⁷ Abu Nasr al-Saraj al-Tusi, *Al-Luma*, trans. Wasmukan dan Samson Rahman (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2002).

²⁸ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

among you”.²⁹ Further, his teacher lived only for Allah; therefore, “Allah hides him from everything except Himself.”³⁰

C. The *Rasā'il* (Epistles) of Imām al-Junayd

Although an eminent figure in the development of early Sufism, Imām Junayd never wrote a summary work on *taṣawwuf*. However, he wrote about his spiritual experiences and ideas in the form of short treatises or epistles; for instance, he wrote a short treatise for his friend Yahyā ibn Mu‘adh al-Rāzī,³¹ ‘Umar ibn ‘Uthmān al-Makkī,³² and Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf ibn Husayn al-Rāzī.³³ In 1988, ‘Alī Hasan ‘Abdel Kader collected the writings of Imām Junayd, which were then published as a book under the title *Rasā'il Junayd*.

Imām Junayd’s extensive spiritual experience and knowledge make his works authoritative references in *taṣawwuf* studies. For instance, Abū Nasr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭusi included many of the former’s teachings in his *Kitāb al-Luma' fī al-Taṣawwuf* (The Book of Light Flashes on Sufism),³⁴ Imām al-Hujwīrī in his *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (Revelation of the Veiled),³⁵ and Imām al-Qushayrī in his *Risāla al-Qushayriyya* (The Qushayriyan Epistle).³⁶ The translations of these books were published in Indonesia.

D. Imām Junayd’s System of *Taṣawwuf*

Among the first observations of the Sufis was the existence of a great distance between Allah and mankind. This realization allowed them to sense a vast “desert” between the helpless mankind and Allah the Almighty. This further creates a deep longing toward God, thus they attempted to bridge the distance between God and mankind through *taṣawwuf*. To understand and practice the *taṣawwuf* teachings of Imām Junayd al-Baghdadī, we must understand its three

²⁹ Q.S. Al-Hujurat:13.

³⁰ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

³¹ Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd, *Rasā'il Junayd*, ed. Ali Hasan Abdul Qadir (Cairo: Daar Kutub al-Misriyah, 1988).

³² Al-Junaid, *Rasā'il Junayd...*

³³ Al-Junaid, *Rasā'il Junayd...*

³⁴ Al-Tusi, *Al-Luma...*

³⁵ Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. Abdul Hadi Suwardjo Muthary (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2015).

³⁶ Abul Qasim Abdul Karim Hawazin Al-Qusyairi, *Risāla Al-Qushairīya*, trans. Umar Faruq (Jakarta: Pustaka Imani, 2013).

elements: the concept of the covenant (*al-mīthāq*), the annihilation of self (*fanā*), and unification (*tawhīd*).

1) The Covenant (*al-Mīthāq*)

In the chapter on the covenant (*al-mīthāq*), Imām Junayd believes that before acquiring a physical body, human beings already have a primordial existence (i.e., soul). This conclusion is based on the following verse: “*And recall, when your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the children of Adam and made them witness against their own selves, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we do testify”*”³⁷ Imām Junayd offers the following interpretation of the above verse:

“Don’t you know that Allah said when He took children of Adam, (he then quotes the verse until “we do testify”). In this verse, Allah explains to you that He had a conversation with mankind before they had a form and was inside Him. The existence of mankind in that time did not have the kind of attributes they have today. It’s existence only Allah knows. Allah knows their existence. He saw them when they didn’t have a form and didn’t know their forms in the following time on earth. Their existence was before time. It was a divine form and concept which only He possesses.”³⁸

The *shahāda* of declaring the oneness of God and acknowledging Muhammad as God’s messenger is thus no longer a testimony of God’s servant but God’s testimony of his Oneness through the means of His servant. As He mentions, “*Allah Himself bears witness that there is no God but He, and likewise do the angels and the men possessed with knowledge bear witness in truth and justice that there is no God but He, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise*”.³⁹

The spiritual seekers on the Sufi path yearn for this kind of experience where Allah has taken over their own selves and they drift in a divine atmosphere (*ilāhīyya*).⁴⁰ This experience is the last stage of servanthood, which is to return to the origin⁴¹ or what their primordial nature (*fiṭra*).⁴² When taking

³⁷ Q.S. al-A’rāf:172.

³⁸ أليس تعلم أنه عز وجل قال " وإذ أخذ ربك من بنى آدم " الى قوله " شهدنا " فقد أخبرك عز وجل أنه خاطبهم وهم غير موجو دين إلا بوجوده لهم , إذ كان واجدا بغير معنى وجوده لأنفسها , بالمعنى الذى لا يعلمه غيره , ولا يجده سواه , فقد كان واجدا محيطا شاهدا عليهم بديا فى حال فنائهم عن بقائهم , الذين كانوا فى الازل للأزل , فذلك هو الوجود الربانى والأدراك الإلهى الذى لا ينبغى إلا له جل وعز.

³⁹ Q.S. Āl ‘Imrān:18.

⁴⁰ Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

⁴¹ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁴² Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

on a human form, the primordial form undergoes a process of spiritual degradation in the physical realm. The human existence in this secondary form is the reason for their inexistence in front of Allah. Likewise, their inexistence in this world means the existence of their selves in front of Allah. He elaborated that:

“He separates them from Him (and returns their individualities to them). Then He will make them disappear (from this world) when they become one with Him and make them return (to this world) when He separates them again from Him (and return their individualities once again). Thus, their inexistence in this world is a form of existence in front of Allah, while their existence in this world is the only reason for their inexistence in front of Allah.”⁴³

“Without any doubt, this (spiritual) existence is the most impeccable and sharpest of all. This existence is the most important, the most dominant, the purest, and the most abandoned, compared to the visible form of the human body. In this spiritual form, mankind’s individualities completely vanish as their physical form disappears. No human nature can survive, and the normal form of man is inexistent, like what we have discussed before in the explanation regarding the divine nature of the trueness and greatness of Allah.”⁴⁴

Thus, there are two forms of an individual’s existence according to Imām Junayd. The first is the eternal divine form (the existence within Allah), and the second is the temporary physical form we inhabit in this world.⁴⁵ His view on the primordial form of existence is in line with the view of the Greek philosopher Plotinus. The form has a pure soul where every reality unites with everything.⁴⁶

Returning to this original state of the Primordial Covenant cannot be achieved without God’s help. The human soul can only return to this stage of God finds it worthy and wills it so. Imām Junayd referred to the following *ḥadīth qudsī*:

“The Messenger of Allah said: Allah has said: ‘My servant keeps on coming closer to Me through performing Nawāfil (prayer or doing extra deeds

⁴³ ثم فرقتهم ثم غيبهم في جمعهم وأحضرهم في تفرقتهم, فكان سبب حضورهم و حضورهم سبب غيبهم

⁴⁴ التي لا يشارك فيها, كان ذلك الوجود أتم الوجود وأمضاء لا محالة, وهو أولى و أغلب و أحق بالعلبة والقهر و صحة الاستلاء على ما يبدو عليه, حتى يحى رسمه عامة ويذهب وجوده, إذ لا صفة بشرية ووجود ليس يقوم به لما ذكرنا, تعاليا من الحق وقهره

⁴⁵ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁴⁶ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

besides what is obligatory) till I love him. When I love him, I become the ears he uses to hear, and the eyes he uses to see."⁴⁷

Imām Junayd commented that this *hadīth* should not be understood literally and gave the following interpretation:

"The only way to interpret the *hadīth* is by understanding that Allah has made His servant strong. He made His servant able to achieve the abilities (of hearing and seeing). Allah guides him and gives him knowledge based on what He allows and by the means which He desires, so he can obtain the truth and act according to His will. Those are Allah's gifts to him and only to him. The abilities cannot be attributed to His servant entirely since they do not originate from within himself. They originated from the outside, possession of another entity (God). This interpretation regarding the secret and independence of these abilities is the most rational one."⁴⁸

Here, God is perceived as a direct actor, acting according to His perfection, while men's actions and desires remain within His will. The concept of the *mīthāq* shows how human souls return to their primordial state before creation. This implies that they are separated from the physical body, as their spiritual existence is absorbed within God, thus manifesting a true state of oneness (*tawhīd*). However, humans can only achieve this stage after detaching themselves from their physical nature. Imām Junayd stated, "In this new state, He truly possesses them (his servants) and destroys their individualities (and disposes of their human nature)."⁴⁹

"Happiness, as the result, is not the same happiness they experience as ordinary people. In the happiness lays a test. This is because their form, after going through pressures, is no longer the ordinary form of humans. The highest truth of Allah now shines on Him, and His glory has become perfect."⁵⁰

To this point, he added, "Because of this reason, we continuously say that when Allah gifts a form to His servants, He lets His passion floods them as it

47 عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال : قال الله عزّ وجلّ " لا يزال عبدى يتقرب إليّ بالنوافل حتى أحبه فإذا أحببته كنت سمعه الذى يسمع به وبصره الذى يبصر به

48 وإنما معنى ذلك أنه يؤيده ويوفقه ويهديه ويشهده ما شاء كيف شاء بإصابة الصواب وموافقة الحق، وذلك فعل الله عزوجل فيه ومواهبه له، منسوبة إليه لا إلى الواحد لها، لأنها لم تكن عنه ولا منه ولا به، وإنما كانت واقعة علية من غيره، وهى لغيرها أولى وبه أخرى، وكذلك جاز أن تكون بهذه الصفة الخفية، وهى غير منتسبة به على النحو الذى ذكرناه

49 وفى متعتهم بالمشاهدة كمال الجهد، لأنه قد محى عنهم كل رسم ومعنى يجدونه بهم: ويشهدونه من حيث هم لما استولى عليهم فمحاهم وعن صفاتهم أفناهم

50 فوجد النعيم من غير جنس النعيم ووجد البلاء فى معلوم النعيم ووجد الوجد الوجود فى غير سبيل الوجود، باستتار الحق واستيلاء القهر

should be.”⁵¹ When Allah created man, He embodied Himself in them and made Himself one with them. Even in this world, if God chooses a servant who lives by His choice, He will relinquish individuality and replace it with the awareness of His oneness. He explained, “From any perspective, when we say that Allah has erased everything inside a man, and when Allah embodies him, Allah will show Himself as the only One, the Almighty, the True Lord, and the Real Champion.”⁵¹

These spiritual states classified and described by Imām Junayd can only be achieved through *taṣawwuf* practice. He understood *taṣawwuf* as a way for a servant of Allah to relinquish his human nature and be revived from within Him.⁵² Imām Junayd was convinced that humans can abandon their own selves and become absorbed within God (*fanāʾ*), as discussed in more detail below.

2) Absorption within God (*al-Fanāʾ bi-llāh*)

The Sufi discourse on the annihilation of the self in God emerged in the third/ninth century⁵³ and is discussed in the works of Abū Nasr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭusi, Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭamī, and Imām Junayd al-Baghdadī. Etymologically, the word *fanāʾ* is derived from the root verb *faniya* meaning to perish, to cease to exist, and to be consumed. In the Sufi context, it means the annihilation of impurities.⁵⁴

Al-Sarraj defined *fanāʾ* as the vanquishing of man’s desires and the complete and permanent submission to God’s will.⁵⁵ Al-Qushayrī similarly understood it as the annihilation of immoralities and the birth of moral virtues,⁵⁶ while al-Bustami simply explained it as the annihilation of everything except God. Thus, a truly immersed Sufi no longer witnesses anything but God. He is no longer aware of his own person and does not perceive himself as an entity separate from God.⁵⁷ It presupposes that someone in this state has no spiritual impurities in him and only thinks and acts morally.

ولذلك قلنا إنه إذا كان واجدا للعبد يجرى عليه مراده من حيث يشاء بصفته المتعالية ⁵¹

ولهذا قلنا إن الحق أفنى ما بدا علشيه وإذا إستولى كان أولى بالاستيلاء وأحق بالغبلة والقهر ⁵¹

⁵² Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁵³ Al-Wafa, *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman...*

⁵⁴ Al-Jurjani, *Al-Taʾrifat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Imiyah, 1988).

⁵⁵ Al-Tusi, *Al-Luma...*

⁵⁶ Al-Qusyairi, *Risāla al-Qushairīya...*

⁵⁷ Al-Wafa, *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman...*

Based on the reading of Imām Junayd al-Baghdadī’s understanding of *mīthāq* and *fanā’*, we can conclude that both concepts have the same objective namely *tawḥīd*, albeit through different approaches. The concept of the *mīthāq* restates the primordial condition of man and reminds him of his true nature, while the concept of *fanā’* instructs man in the way to return to it. Thus, a true witness to God’s unity or *muwaḥḥid* is only someone who relinquishes his human nature and leaves his secondary form to reclaim his divine or primary form. Thus, both concepts complement each other in the ultimate objective to achieve *tawḥīd*. Imām Junayd elaborated that:

“The unification of a true *muwaḥḥid* is when he becomes immortal through the immortality of God, although in that exact moment he also ceases to exist. In this condition, you are you, and at the same time, you are no longer you. You become immortal the moment you cease to exist.”⁵⁸

The above statement is in accordance with God’s words, “*Everyone upon the earth will perish, and there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor.*”⁵⁹ Therefore, *tawḥīd* causes annihilation of the self or what is meant by *fanā’*, and in essence, truly actualized *tawḥīd* is *fanā’*. This is the only logical conclusion because it is impossible to understand and realize the oneness of God without annihilating everything but God, including the self; as long as it stands between the servant and God, He will approach His servant.⁶⁰ According to Imām Junayd, *fanā’* has three levels which he described as follows:

“*Fanā’* has three levels. First, *fanā’* in the level of character, ethic, disposition, or behavior. Someone can achieve this level by doing good deeds, being tenacious to fight his lust, and consistently avoiding immoralities. Second, *fanā’* in the level of transaction in the worship of God. To achieve this level, one must annihilate his own hopes and desires for the sake of God. Then, he will be released of lusts, the cause of distance between him and God. Third, *fanā’* in the level of seeing and witnessing the true form of your own self. To achieve this, one must let Allah dominate him. Therefore, at that moment there will be no manifestation of self, except those of Allah. He will perish, and at the same time become immortal in the true form because of his perish. His physical form will still exist, but his individualities will cease.”⁶¹

58 توحيد الموحد باق ببقاء الواحد, وان فنى الموحد, فحينئذ انت انت, اذ كنت بلا انت, فبقيت من حيث فنييت

59 Q.S. Ar-Rahman: 26-27.

60 Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

61 والفناء ثلاثة: فناء عن الصفات والأخلاق والطباع, بقيامك بدلائل عملك, ببذل المجهود ومخالفة النفس, وحبسها بالمكروه عن مرادها. والفناء الثاني فنا نوك عن مطالعة حظوظ, من ذوق الحلاوات واللذات في الطاعات, لموافقة مطالبة الحق لك, لانقطا عنك اليه, ليكون بلا واسطة بينك وبينه. والفناء الثالث فنا نوك عن رؤية الحقيقة من مواخيناتك بغلبات شاهد الحق عليك, فاءنت حينئذ فان باق, وموجود محقق لفنائك, بوجود غيرك عند بقاء رسمك بذهاب اسمك

The first level of *fanā'* is connected to the worldly objective of mankind, which is to live an active life. Imām Junayd called this level as a character or quality of self that seekers yearn to achieve. In obtaining this character or quality, they must submit to rigorous moral training and an ascetic lifestyle. They must also act in opposition to their desires that can harm the purity of the objective. This is *fanā'* at the moral level.⁶²

The second level of *fanā'* implies that seekers must abstain from worldly pleasures and cease to expect a reward when they obey God's command so that the barrier in communication with God will disappear. Expecting rewards will not draw Allah closer, but instead will keep them far away from Him. It is a form of religious practice which seemingly belittles the value of worship; God does not derive any benefit from being worshipped by His servants but worshipping Him benefits His servants. This is *fanā'* at the mental level.⁶³

Achieving the third level of *fanā'* results in the seekers experiencing loss of consciousness when they achieve the state of *tawhīd*. In front of God, the sense of the self is annihilated, and only God remains. It is a state where God embraces the seeker. At this level, the individualities of men and women will disappear, although their physical body continues to exist.⁶⁴ Imām Junayd described this final state of *fanā'* in the following words:

“I'm speaking about the time when I disappeared from my ordinary condition. Then, amazing power and a blinding light dominated me and cast *fanā'* into me, so I became a new creature like when Allah created me for the first time out of nothing. I was unable to shake Him off as nothing has the power to affect Him. There is also nothing known about Him, as He himself is already aware of this knowledge. He annihilated my identity and replaced it with His own traits. In this process, my own perception disappeared as I become very close with Him. He is the One who creates and re-creates.”⁶⁵

In his psychological study of spiritualism, James argues that transient states as in *fanā'* cannot be maintained. Such intense spiritual experiences can only last for a few hours maximum until they disappear. Moreover, they do not

⁶² Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁶³ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁶⁴ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁶⁵ نطقت بغيبتي عن حالي ثم أبدى عليّ من شاهد قاهر وظاهر شاهر. أفنا في بإنشائي كما انشائي بد يا في حال فناي , فلم أوثر عليه لبراءته من الآثار , ولم اخبر عنه إذ كان متوليا للإخبار. أليس قد محي ر سمى بصفته , وبا متحائي فات علمي في قربه , فهو المبدىء كما هو المعيد

leave a clear memory of what transpired. Recurring conditions form part of the continuous development in the form of spiritual enrichment and contemplation.⁶⁶

Since the experience of spiritual states is temporary, the concept of *fanā'* must be understood in connection with the concept of *baqā'* or the immortality of God; both refer to the same condition but viewed from two different perspectives. When a seeker has achieved complete *fanā'* he becomes immortal in Allah. A complete *fanā'* is not only annihilation of self, but also a self-sustained process in the immortality of God.⁶⁷

3) Unification (*Tawḥīd*)

In Imām Junayd's days, *tawḥīd* was a popular discourse among religious groups, especially among the Mu'tazilites, the so-called 'experts of *tawḥīd*'. They understood the unification or oneness of Allah from a strictly rational approach. In their eyes, the only legitimate source of knowledge was the reason.⁶⁸

The Sufis, however, were not satisfied with this conclusion and strived to experience the unification with God not through the disclosure of the mind but through disclosure of the heart or *mukāshafa*. According to the Sufis, *tawḥīd* or the unification with God was impossible to define or describe; it could only be experienced. Imām Junayd explained that:

“You must know that the beginning of worship toward Allah, Glorified and Sublime be He, is through the knowledge of *ma'rifa*. The basis of *ma'rifa* is *tawḥīd* [accepting His Oneness]. The systematics of *tawḥīd* is to erase His nature from His descriptions, location, and the questions of how regarding Him. By liberating His nature and the concept of Him, therefore one will receive guidance from Him. This guidance towards Him is the gathering [of those who accept] God. Through the *tawfiq* (the will) of Allah, then *tawḥīd* [unification] will occur.”⁶⁹

Furthermore, Imām Junayd supported the statement made by Abu Bakr that “All praises to Allah who has blessed His creations with the inability to understand everything about Him, except through their inability to obtain any

⁶⁶ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience, Pengalaman-Pengalaman Religius*, ke-1 (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2015).

⁶⁷ Al-Tusi, *Al-Luma...*

⁶⁸ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁶⁹ أعلم أن أول عبادة الله عزوجل معرفته, وأصل معرفة الله توحيده, ونظام توحيده نفي الصفات عنه بالكيف والحيث والأين, فيه استدلال عليه, وكان سبب استدلاله به عليه توفيقه, فتوفيقه وقع التوحيد له

knowledge about Him”.⁷⁰ He commented, “*Tawhīd* is a reality where all signs and trails disappear, while Allah is constantly Himself.”⁷¹ He emphasized that *tawhīd* is beyond the capacity of the human mind.

Someone who truly experiences *tawhīd* obtains the knowledge that his nature and actions are absorbed into the essence of Allah:

“The *tawhīd* [unification] of a true *muwahhīd* is when he becomes immortal through the immortality of God. Although at that exact moment in time, he also ceases to exist. In this condition, you are you, and at the same time, you are no longer you. You become immortal the moment you cease to exist.”⁷²

In his *Rasā'il*, Imām Junayd classified *tawhīd* into four levels and elaborated on each level’s characteristics in detail. He wrote that:

“You should know that *tawhīd* has four levels. First is the *tawhīd* of ordinary people. Second is the *tawhīd* of those who master religious teachings. Meanwhile, the third and fourth levels are the *tawhīd* experienced by chosen individuals with the knowledge of *ma‘rifā*.”⁷³

To classify the levels of *tawhīd*, Imām Junayd employed the perspective of psychology and ethics, whereby each level affects the personality of the experiencing person. Therefore, the levels of *tawhīd* he proposed were not hypothetical but the result of his own immediate experiences and reflection. This was a new approach in Islamic scholarship.⁷⁴ The description about the first level of *tawhīd* is as follows:

“The *tawhīd* of ordinary people lays in their affirmation of the Oneness of God and rejection towards all forms of polytheism. However, they still have hopes and fears for other powers besides Allah. This kind of *tawhīd* has its own measure since there is still an acceptance of the Oneness of Allah.”⁷⁵

The first level of *tawhīd* is essential for every Muslim. However, the advanced *muwahhīd* does not consider this to be the ultimate level, since it is

⁷⁰ Al-Qusyairi, *Risā'la al-Qushairīya*...

⁷¹ Al-Qushairi, *Risā'la al-Qushairīya*...

⁷² توحيد الموحد باق ببقاء الواحد, وان فى الموحد, فحينئذ انت انت, اذ كنت بلا انت, فبقيت من حيث فنييت

⁷³ أعلم أن التوحيد فى الخلق على أربعة أوجه, فوجه منها توحيد العوام, ووجه منها توحيد أهل الحقائق بعلم الظاهر, ووجهان منها توحيد الخواص من أهل المعرفة

⁷⁴ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junayd al-Baghdadi*...

⁷⁵ فأما توحيد العوام فالإقرار بالوحدانية بذهاب رؤية الأرباب والأنداد والأضداد والأشكال والأشياء والسكون إلى معارضات الرغبة والرغبة ممن سواهم فإن له حقيقة التحقيق فى الأفعال ببقاء الإقرار

still filled with the fear of punishment and desire for reward. In other words, the believer's consciousness is not free from anything else Allah.⁷⁶

Imām Junayd understood the second level of *tawhīd* as the internalized belief that there is only one true God, as affirmed in the believers' complete and unquestioning obedience to Him:

“The *tawhīd* of those who master religious teachings also depends on the affirmation of the Oneness of God and rejection towards all forms of polytheism, combined with the implementation of God's commands and the avoidance of His prohibitions. All of them are manifestations of their expectations, fears, and desires. This level of *tawhīd* has its own measure since there is a verification of the affirmation on the Oneness of Allah.”⁷⁷

People who have arrived at the second level of *tawhīd* do good deeds out of their fear of God's punishment as well as their desire to please Him. Imām Junayd argued that this level of *tawhīd* is not the final level of *tawhīd* that a seeker of God can attain. The third and fourth levels, however, are attainable only by those blessed with gnosis (*ma'rifa*). He explained that:

“The first *ma'rifa* level of *tawhīd* manifests in the affirmation of the Oneness of God and rejection towards all forms of polytheism, combined with both the internal and external implementation of God's commands and the eradication of fear and expectation towards everything except Allah. All of them arise from a person's awareness of Allah's existence within himself, as well as the call from God towards himself and his answer towards Him.”⁷⁸

On the third level of *tawhīd*, the individuality of the seeker still exists. This means that the seekers are still aware of their own selves and have not yet been absorbed in His presence. Imām Junayd wrote in one of his epistles that:

“Meanwhile, the second *ma'rifa* level of *tawhīd* manifests in the existence of a man without his individualities directly in front of Allah without using a third party. This is the level where a servant of God achieves the true form of *tawhīd* within the true intimacy with Him. Someone who achieves this level will lose his awareness and actions as Allah blesses him with everything He wills. In this level, a servant of God returns to his initial state or the state before form. As the Quran mentions: ‘And recall when your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the children of Adam

⁷⁶ Al-Tusi, *Al-Luma*.

⁷⁷ وأما توحيد حقائق علم الظاهر بالإقرار بالوحدانية بذهاب رؤية الأرباب والأنداد والإشكال والأشياء مع إقامة الأمر والانتفاء عن النهز في الظاهر, مستخرجة ذلك منهم من عيون الرغبة والرغبة والأمل والطمع, فإقامة حقيقة التحقيق في الأفعال لقيام حقيقة التصديق بالإقرار

⁷⁸ وأما الوجه الأول من توحيد الخاص بالإقرار بالوحدانية بذهاب رؤية هذه الأشياء مع إقامة الأمر في الظاهر والباطن بإزالة معارضا الرغبة والرغبة من سواه مستخرجة ذلك من عيون الموافقة بقيام شاهد الحق معه مع قيام شاهد الدعوة الاستجابة.

and made them witness against their own self, [asking them]: “Am I not your Lord?” They said: ‘Yes, we do testify.’⁷⁹

Those seekers who experience this level have completely submitted to the will of Allah. Therefore, they no longer have individual desires or fears. This state surpasses the previous levels, where individualities still dominate human consciousness. Meanwhile, in this last level of *tawhīd*, these vanish into the immortality of God. Imām Junayd used the term *al-dākhil al-qā'im* (‘a person who has entered and settled in Allah’) to describe the one who achieves the fourth and highest level of *tawhīd*. He wrote that:

“You should know that there are three types of men. The first is the seeker who is still on the way (*al-ṭālib al-qāṣid*). The second is the one who has arrived and halted (*al-wārid al-wāqif*). The third is the one who has entered and settled (*al-dākhil al-qā'im*). The first one is a seeker who is still on a journey towards Allah and always asking for guidance through spiritual teachings. He communicates with Allah through physical and spiritual perseverance. Meanwhile, the second one is someone who has arrived in front of Allah and places himself in proximity toward Him through propositions that cleanse his mind. He always motivates his heart to continuously surrender himself to the proximity of Allah. He communicates with Allah through his mind. Meanwhile, the third one is someone who has entered and settled inside Allah. He no longer sees anything except Him, and always focuses on the signs and symbols of Allah. He always scurries over to carry out every order of his Lord. This is the true nature of someone with a *tawhīd* towards Allah, Glorified and Sublime be He.”⁸⁰

At the end of his treatise unification, Imām Junayd concluded that people who have internalized their *tawhīd* perform their acts of worship with the sole aim to subjugate themselves. The following description illustrates this point:

“Imām Junayd was asked about the final objective of the worship done by people with knowledge of Allah. He answered, ‘A subjugation of their own selves.’ He explains that Allah has prepared a mission for them to conduct religious responsibilities, so they arrive at a level where they do not pity themselves. Even the prophets yearn for them. Allah chooses them as His representatives, while the Angels praise them for abandoning their material

79 والوجه الثاني من توحيد الخاص، فشبه قائم بين يديه ليس بينهما ثالث، تجرى عليه تصاريف تدييره، في مجارى أحكام قدرته، في ليج بحار توحيد، بالفناء عن نفسه وعن دعوة الحق له، وعن استجابته له، بمقتضى وجود وحدانيته في حقيقة قربه، بذهاب حسه وحركاته، لقيام الحق له فيما أراد منه، والعلم في ذلك أنه رجع آخر العبد الى أوله، و أن يكون كما كان إذ كان قبل أن يكون، والدليل في ذلك قول الله عز وجل "وإذ أخذ ربك من بنى آدم من ظهورهم ذرياتهم وأشهدهم على أنفسهم ألست بربكم قالوا بلى

80 أعلم أن الناس ثلاثة : طالب قاصد، ووارد واقف، أو داخل قائم، أما الطالب الله عز وجل فإنه قاصد نحوه، باستر شاد دلائل علم الظاهر، معاملاً الله عز وجل بجد ظاهره، أو وارد للباب واقف عليه، متبين لمواضع تقريبه إياهم، بدلائل تصفيه باطنه، وإدراك الفوائد عليه، معاملاً الله عز وجل في باطنه، أو داخل بجمه، قائم بين يديه، منتف عن رؤية ما سواه ملاحظاً بإشترته، مبادراً فيما يأمره مولاه فهذه صفة الموحد الله عز وجل

wealth. They arrive in front of Allah only through Allah. Mankind is brought before Allah by virtue of their own deeds, without Allah's benevolence on them. This is a responsibility Allah gave all people according to their own capabilities."⁸¹

E. Influence of Imām Junayd

According to Abdel-Kader, Imām Junayd was an iconic witness, teacher, and interpreter of Islamic *tawhīd*. His systematic approach influenced many scholars after him and led to the development of Islamic mysticism as an independent discipline. Imām Junayd was not the first to teach the concept of *tawhīd* but he firmly established *tawhīd* at the center of *taṣawwuf*. He left a profound legacy for future generations of Sufi scholars, the blazing trail of his bright and vivid doctrine of *tawhīd*.⁸²

Imām Junayd combined rational thought and theory with ecstatic mystical experience and conceptualized the ideas of *mīthāq* and *fanā'*. He avoided any resemblance to pantheism, a system that eliminates any notion of God's transcendence and His separate existence from creation. Therefore, he did not position human beings as equals with Allah.⁸³ However, *tawhīd* as the central theme of *taṣawwuf* teachings as proposed by al-Junayd was not consistently applied by his students and later generations of Sufis. This partial adoption of his teachings allowed certain errors and misconceptions to enter Sufi thought and practice.

Imām Junayd's teachings succeeded in conciliating the often opposing views of Sufi scholars and legal scholars regarding the concept of *tawhīd*. As a result, he was equally accepted and esteemed in both circles. Even those who viewed *taṣawwuf* with much misgiving and suspicion changed their opinion and looked at it in a more favorable light after reading Imām Junayd's works.

Imām Junayd's ideas on *tawhīd* also played an important role in the development of Islamic key teachings. He presented an unconventional discourse on *tawhīd* which stood in stark contrast to the contemporary discourse. Most discussions on *tawhīd* were limited to describing the Oneness of God through

⁸¹ سئل الجنيد رحمه الله إلى أين تنتهي عبادة أهل المعرفة بالله عز وجل، فقال: إلى الظفر بنفوسهم، نصب الحق لهم أعمال أدلة العمال، فوقف مع ماله دون التعرّيج على ما لهم، فشوق إليهم الأنبياء، وانتسب بهم للأولياء، وسبحت لهم الملائكة، فتركوا ما لهم ووقفوا مع ماله عز وجل عليهم، وسائر الناس وقف مع ما لهم وتركوا ماله عز وجل عليهم فرد الله عز وجل كلا إلى قيمته

⁸² Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

⁸³ Abdel Kader, *Imam Junaid Al-Baghdadi...*

logical reasoning. Imām Junayd, however, went much further and included the way *tawhīd* could actually be experienced.

Al-Sarrāj al-Ṭusi's *Luma'* (Light Flashes), a popular reference for anyone wishing to study *taṣawwuf*, also took inspiration from Imām Junayd. This fact comes to no surprise as he was responsible for its early development as a discipline. Therefore, we can conclude that al-Junayd influenced the development of the Sufi orders that were created after him.⁸⁴

The teachings of Imām Junayd also greatly influenced Imām al-Hujwīrī, the author of the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (Revelation of the Veiled). This influence is apparent in the many references made to his name. Although the structure of the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* is very different from Imām Junayd's *Rasā'il* and it discusses other Sufi doctrines, the author frequently makes mention of his views.

However, *taṣawwuf* should not be limited to the study of its concepts and theories; it serves as an inspiration to actively a real and intimate relationship with God.⁸⁵ Islam is often reduced to a religion of laws, when in fact it is a religion of the heart, as the life example of His last Messenger Muhammad SAW has shown. Although Islam has an external nature, it has other teachings at its core that are deeply internal and lead to a transformation of the self.

Eminent classical scholars like Ibn Khaldun agreed that the spiritual dimensions inherent in Sufi thought and practices are based on traditions built around the character of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This means that the development of Sufism was not shaped by external influences; rather, it grew from within Islamic tradition. Although the term *taṣawwuf* only became popular in the third/ninth century, this does not mean that it did not have its origins in authentic Islamic teachings.⁸⁶

F. Conclusion

The system of *taṣawwuf* as developed by Junayd al-Baghdadī consists of three main elements: the primordial covenant (*al-mīthāq*), absorption of the self (*fanā'*), and unification (*tawhīd*). Both concepts of *mīthāq* and *fanā'* share the same objective, which is to actualize *tawhīd*.

⁸⁴ Annemarie Scimmel, *Dimensi Mistik Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2000).

⁸⁵ Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

⁸⁶ Kamba, *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam...*

The thematic study of Imām Junayd’s *Rasā’il* has confirmed our initial assumption that *taṣawwuf* should not be regarded as a mere discipline in the study of Islamic sciences. Its teachings add a vital spiritual dimension that is often lost or overlooked. Imām Junayd’s effort to develop a systematic and rational system of spiritual awakening by incorporating his own spiritual experiences was successful. As a result, Sufi teachings were firmly anchored to the core teachings of Islam and reflected the hidden dimension within Islam, and not outside Islam.

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