

SUFISM AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order in Indonesia

Wahyu Nugroho

Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

wahyu_nugroho@staff.ukdw.ac.id

Article history: Received: 2 October 2020; Accepted: 8 February 2021; Published: 29 April 2021

Abstract:

Sufism plays a vital role in the process of spreading Islam in Indonesia, the key factor being inclusion and tolerance. Nowadays, the tolerant spirit of Sufi Islam is more and more challenged by certain intolerant Salafi groups. It seems that some Sufi groups in Indonesia have unfortunately adopted some of their attitudes and have become increasingly wary of other religions and unwilling to engage with them in a constructive dialogue. This negative trend creates tension within the Muslim community and in Indonesian society at large. After all, Indonesia is a country that is built on the principles of religious plurality. This article explores the teachings and practices of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order and their understanding of religious plurality. The study found that—despite the existing Salafi trend—the Naqshbandi shaykhs continue to praise religious plurality as one of God’s blessings. In their view, the sincere engagement in interreligious dialogue allows their followers to experience and actualize God’s Love. The Naqshbandi order also actively engages in interreligious dialogue with other communities in Jakarta and Kartasura.

Keywords: *Sufism, Naqshbandi Haqqani, Religious Plurality, Interreligious Dialogue, Tolerance.*

A. Introduction

Sufism plays an important role in the development of Islam in Indonesia.¹ Johns emphasized the importance of Sufism in the history of Islam in Indonesia. In his view, the tolerant and inclusive approach of the early Sufi teachers contributed to the ease with which the people of Nusantara came to accept Islam beginning from the sixteenth century.² The early Sufi teachers incorporated various elements of Nusantara

¹ Michael Francis Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton [N.J.]; Oxford [England]: Princeton University Press, 2011).

² A. H. Johns, “Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 1 (March 1961): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0217781100000260>.

culture (such as puppetry and architecture) without abandoning the core teachings of Islam.³

Abdullah adopted Hodgson's three types of Islamic influence and consolidation: Islamics, Islamicate, and Islamdom.⁴ He found that the process of Islamization in Indonesia is closer to Islamicate than the other two types; the type of Islamics puts more emphasis on dogma, while Islamdom focuses more on military power and political rule. The type of Islamicate, on the other hand, is characterized by the dialogue that existed between local non-Muslim cultures and Islamic teachings.⁵ Abdullah argued that this Islamicate approach was manifested in the local culture as literary works, local songs (*tembang*), and architecture,⁶ for example as found in *Masjid Agung Mataram* in Kota Gede Yogyakarta which blends the Javanese style (*joglo* house) and the Indian style.

Even though Abdullah did not make explicit mention of the role of Sufism in the Islamicate category, the open and inclusive character of this peaceful approach is similar to the approach taken by the Sufi teachers. He drew attention to the historical figure of Sunan Kudus⁷ who personifies the openness of the Islamicate type of propagating Islam. According to Abdullah, the historical figure of Sunan Kudus (d. 1550) showed acceptance of local cultures and respected the feelings of the local Hindus and Buddhists. He wrote:

“When Sunan Kudus wanted to build a mosque for the new Muslims, he was not eager to have it stand out and look different from the Hindu's and Buddhist's temples. He wanted to show his respect and tolerance for the other religions and not hurt the feelings of the local people, most of whom were Hindu and Buddhist...”⁸

It can be concluded here that empathy and tolerance towards other faiths was a major characteristic of the Islam introduced by the early Sufi teachers at the time. It was also one of the strongest attractions to Islam, and the local people found it easy to accept this new religion.

Today, the original Sufi spirit of openness and inclusiveness is still very much alive and still attracts non-Muslims and Muslims alike. I experienced this attraction personally during my research on the *Naqshbandi Haqqani* Sufi order (2010–2012). A young man who was attending a meeting in the Naqshbandi *zāwiyā* (retreat) in Yogyakarta said that in this Sufi group he got to know a ‘friendly’ Islam, not an ‘angry’ Islam.⁹ Likewise, the

³ Johns, “Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History,”... 22.

⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, “Islam di Indonesia atau Islam Indonesia (Studi Pergulatan Definisi dan Jatidiri),” *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 9, no. 2 (March 17, 2017): 13, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2015.092-01>.

⁵ Abdullah, “Islam di Indonesia atau Islam Indonesia (Studi Pergulatan Definisi dan Jatidiri),”... 14–15.

⁶ Abdullah, “Islam di Indonesia atau Islam Indonesia (Studi Pergulatan Definisi dan Jatidiri),”... 15–20.

⁷ Sunan Kudus (Ja'far Šādiq), founder of Kudus, is considered to be one of the Wali Sanga (Nine Muslim saints that spread Islam) of Java, Indonesia. He is said to have originated the *wayang golek*, and founded the mosque at Kudus using the doors from the palace of Majapahit.

⁸ Abdullah, “Islam di Indonesia atau Islam Indonesia (Studi Pergulatan Definisi dan Jatidiri),”... 19.

⁹ Interview with a young student who attended the *dhikr* of the Naqshbandi Haqqani's *zāwiyah* Yogyakarta on December 11, 2011.

American researcher Simmons¹⁰ accepted Islam after joining the circle of Shaykh Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, a Sufi shaykh in Sri Lanka. She described him as a very tolerant person, loving, welcoming, and friendly to anyone.¹¹ Through her shaykh, Simmons experienced Islam as a religion of harmony that which makes it forbidden to be hurtful or adverse to others.¹²

The above statements were affirmed by Howell in her research on Sufism and the revival of Islam in Indonesia.¹³ She highlighted Howell's point, namely that Sufism is able to soften the contrast between traditionalist and modernist approaches to Islam. Furthermore, Sufi thought and practice put due emphasis on the relation to God which is embodied in horizontal (social) relations. This approach encourages the followers to develop tolerant attitudes towards other religious communities and welcome the religious plurality in Indonesia.¹⁴

However, Howell cautioned that the tolerant character of Sufism can be weakened by charismatic figures who interpret the Sufi teachings and practices in their own way. She compared the views developed by the Indonesian philosopher, scholar, and politician Hamka (1908–1981)¹⁵ with those of the Islamic preacher M. Arifin Ilham¹⁶ (1969–2019) and found that both figures had heavy Salafi leanings and were generally critical of Sufi practices. Nevertheless, Hamka the philosopher acknowledged the universal dimension of Sufism. He understood the highest level of Islamic spirituality, *ma'rifa* (gnosis) not so much in the sense of *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence) but as a mystical sense of unity and connectedness with all elements of God's creation. This aspect of the common humanity shared by all people, regardless of ethnicity and faith, is in line with the concept of humanitarianism as established in the second precept of *Pancasila*.¹⁷ On the other hand, Ilham tended to emphasize more on the exclusive and homogenous side of collectivism.¹⁸ Through the ritual activity of *dhikr* (remembrance; Ind.: *zikir*), Ilham offered a set of criteria for 'true believers' (Arab.: *mu'minūn*) in line with *Salafi* principles. He offered

¹⁰ Simmons is an Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of Florida and specializes in Islamic feminism and the impact of Shari'ah law on Muslim women.

¹¹ Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, "Sufism and Its Response to Fundamentalism," in *Sufism and Social Integration*, ed. Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Golam Dastagir (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc, n.d.), 346.

¹² Simmons, "Sufism and Its Response to Fundamentalism,"... 347.

¹³ Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 2001): 701–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700107>.

¹⁴ Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,"... 722.

¹⁵ His original name was Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah; he wrote under his pen name Hamka.

¹⁶ Julia Day Howell, "Indonesia's Salafist Sufis," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (September 2010): 10291051, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X09990278>.

¹⁷ Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,"... 1040.

Pancasila is Indonesian state philosophy consisting of five principles: (1) belief in one Almighty God; (2) just and civilized humanity; (3) the unity of Indonesia; (4) democracy guided by the wisdom of deliberations among representatives; and (5) social justice.

¹⁸ Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,"... 1044.

sympathetic support to those Islamic groups that want to see all of Indonesia ruled by the *shari‘a* and approved of the FPI.¹⁹

For Ilham, however, such sympathy did not mean that his own *Majlis Dhikr* circle, al-Zikrah, had a definite political agenda. Howell also argued that this *Majlis Dhikr* movement constitutes part of regular Islamic piety and is not necessarily politically motivated, in her own words, not "high politics but a sky politics" agenda.²⁰ She did not further specify, however, what she meant by both types of politics. I suppose that Ilham identified himself with the 'sky politics' agenda to differentiate between the religious agenda that is based on Islamic piety and the political agenda ('sky politics') that uses religious issues to attain political goals. Ilham's call to establish the rule of the *shari‘a* in all of Indonesia is indeed higher than any worldly political agenda. In consequence, however, he reduced the universal character of Sufism by inserting the politics of identity into his movement.

These problematic issues were also highlighted by the Japanese scholar Miichi who studied the role of the Indonesian Sufi community in the 2017 DKI regional elections. Miichi explored the involvement of the *dhikr* group founded by Habib Munzir al-Musawa in a rally against Governor Ahok after he was publicly accused of blasphemy. In his opinion, the involvement of the Habib group did not represent the general trend of Sufi groups in Indonesia. In fact, Habib's direct involvement in current political affairs revealed a strict dichotomy between Islamists and Sufis that does not generally apply to Indonesia where the Salafist groups do not categorically reject Sufism.²¹ Nevertheless, Miichi viewed the involvement of this *dhikr* group in a positive light, namely to soften the aggressive approach of the Islamist groups associated with Ahok. Some key figures of the *dhikr* group abstained from public polemics and demonstrations and called for legal action instead, obviously with the intention to ease the tension.²²

Considering the above studies of Howell and Miichi, we understand that the concept of tolerance is indeed dynamic. Sufi groups tend to emphasize their tolerant character, even though they are often faced with conflicting political and religious interests. To avoid such exposure to the conflict they may opt for exclusivism. Therefore, this study attempts to confirm the tolerant nature of Sufism in the context of religious plurality based on the field research I conducted in 2010–2012 on the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order in Indonesia (focusing on their *zā wiyas* in Jakarta, Sidoarjo, Yogyakarta, and Kartasura). I examined the approach of this Sufi *ṭarīqa* (order) to interreligious dialogue through library research, with specific reference to the teachings of Shaykh Nazim Adil al-Haqqani (1922–

¹⁹ Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,"... 1046–47.

²⁰ Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,"... 1048.

²¹ Ken Miichi, "Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of *Dhikr* Associations in the Anti-‘Ahok’ Rallies," *South East Asia Research* 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 235, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2019.1667110>.

²² Miichi, "Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of *Dhikr* Associations in the Anti-‘Ahok’ Rallies,"... 233–34.

2014) and Shaykh Hisham Kabbani (1945–) who are the key figures of this Sufi order. The central theme of this study is religious plurality on the path of devotion to God. Through the diversity of religions, the members of the Naqshbandi order experience the Love of God, which has an impact on their practice of social piety that is expressed in building relationships and being open to direct encounters with other religious communities.

B. Characteristics of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order²³

The beginning of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order in Indonesia began in 1997. This year was marked by the visit of the Grand Shaykh, Shaykh Nazim 'Adil al-Haqqani al-Qubrusi al-Naqshbandi. This particular Sufi order is one of the branches of the Naqshbandi Sufi order whose history and development in Indonesia has been extensively discussed by the prominent sociologist, van Bruinessen.²⁴

Every Sufi order has its beginnings in the spiritual journey of the founder; thus, I will first describe the background of Shaykh Nazim (born in the city of Larnaka, Cyprus on 21 April 1922). In 1940 he entered the Faculty of Chemistry at Istanbul University. His life course changed abruptly when he learned that his brother had died in the war (Second World War, 1939–1945). This incident caused him to experience an existential struggle and forced him to ask himself important life: “*Why should a person live his life in the world as a scholar, doctor, or engineer if in the end he must leave it all and return to God, his Creator? Therefore, I prefer to immediately live life on the path to God.*”²⁵

From the Sufi perspective, any major decision in life is not seen as an individual decision and an independent act of human agency, but rather as an expression of God's Will. Shaykh Nazim explained, “*We believe that everyone has a certain purpose in life. The way to reach it is not a straight path. Sometimes you have to turn around, turn around, even pause. Even humans have to deal with U-turns in their lives. All of that is the reason, as God did in my life while still in Istanbul. God commanded that I turn my attention from the worldly life (dunyā) to life in the way of Sufism.*”²⁶

However, nobody can walk the Sufi path alone and needs a spiritual teacher (*murshid*) as a helper and guide. Among the teachers of *Shaykh Nazim* were *Shaykh Jamal ad-Din al-Lasuni* (died 1955), a *scholar of fiqh and hadith* and *Shaykh Erzurumi Haci Süleyman Efendi* (died 1948). The latter introduced his student to *Shaykh Abdullah Fa'izi ad-Daghestani* (d. 1973) in Damascus, Syria.

²³ I have adopted this part from my previous article: Wahyu Nugroho, “Keterlibatan Sosial sebagai Sebuah Devosi: Sebuah Kesalehan Sosial Tarekat Naqshbandiyah Nazimmiyah” (Social Engagement as Devotion: Social Piety of the Naqshbandi-Nazimi Order), *Gema Teologi* 39, no. 1 (2015): 36–38.

²⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Di Indonesia: Survey Historis, Geografis Dan Sosiologis* (The Naqshbandi Order in Indonesia: A Historical, Geographical and Sociological Survey) (Bandung: Mizan, 1992).

²⁵ “Über Das Leben Maulana Scheich Nazims,” (From the Life of Mawlana Sheykh Nazim) *Morgenstern*, n.d., 10 edition, 5.

²⁶ Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani, *Defending Truth* (London: Zero Productions, 1997), 79.

During the war, traveling from Cyprus to Damascus was not an easy feat to accomplish. There were many obstacles the young disciple (*muīd*) had to face. But for one who is familiar with the Sufi's tradition, the obstacle is understood as a test to prove the sincerity of the *muīd* in his quest to obtain spiritual guidance from his *shaykh*. In 1945, the young Shaykh Nazim finally succeeded to meet Shaykh Abdullah, but only for one night. During this short but singular encounter, Shaykh Abdullah allegedly transferred his esoteric knowledge to Shaykh Nazim. This process of transferring spiritual knowledge does not need to be explained here, but it is no doubt part of the spiritual peculiarities of the Naqshbandi Sufi order which believes in the power of Divine attraction and transference. Here, the Sufi *shaykh* can see into the heart of his disciple, encourages it to cleanse itself, and leads it to a higher level of spirituality. This process of purification which requires the active participation of the *muīd* is often referred to as *murāqaba* (self-observance, introspection).

Shortly before his death in 1973, Shaykh Abdullah appointed Shaykh Nazim as his successor and shared his vision of Shaykh Nazim being entrusted with the mission to spread the teachings of the Naqshbandi Sufi order all across the world: *Shaykh Nazim will establish the Naqshbandi ṭarīqa in London, and from there it will extend to Europe, the Far East, and the United States. It will spread sincerity, love, piety, harmony, and happiness to many so that they will abandon all ugliness, acts of terrorism, and political hypocrisy. He will spread peace into the hearts of every person, community, and nation so that war and contention move away from human life and peace into the values that dominate human life in the world. Many young people will flock to him to ask for blessings. He will show them how to fulfill Islamic religious obligations, deliver them to live peacefully with every one of different religions, and forsake hatred and hostility.*²⁷

Today, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order is not only firmly established in Western Europe and America but also in Southeast Asia and Africa (28 countries), including Indonesia. Due to the widespread distribution of this Sufi order, many experts refer to it as a transnational order.²⁸ When Shaykh Nazim died on 7 May 2014 (aged 92), he had indeed fulfilled the mission that had been entrusted to him in his youth.

Love and peace were the core teachings of Shaykh Nazim and his greatest and most profound legacy. Through the Sufi way, he introduced a friendly way of Islam to the people in Europe and the United States, many of them new to Islam. With the help of his representative who has been mandated to guide the students of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order in America and Asia, Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, this *ṭarīqa* has established several organizations that are committed in their efforts to build peace and harmony among all religious communities.

²⁷ Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004), 468.

²⁸ Jorgen S. Nielsen, Mustafa Draper, and Galina Yemelianova, "Transnational Sufism: Haqqaniya," in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2006), 104.

C. A plurality of Religion as a Beautiful Flower Garden

Love plays a vital role in how Shaykh Nazim viewed religious plurality. Everything in the world comes from and is determined by God's Love.²⁹ When people meet because of their Love for God, the differences that exist among them become the embodiment of God's love for them. Therefore, the Naqshbandi Haqqani *ṭarīqa* views religious plurality as a positive reality. Based on Sūra al-Hujurāt (49): 13³⁰ and Sūra al-Māi'dah (5): 48³¹ they understand the diversity of religion as the result of God's creation.³² This understanding is in line with the pluralistic thinking of great mystics such as al-Hallaj (d. 922) and Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240); both regarded these differences between the religions as external appearances. The same idea was expressed by Jalaluddin al-Rūmī (d. 1273), who recognized religious differences as universal manifestations of God's Love.³³

Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, the representative of Shaykh Nazim in America, described the diversity that exists in the world (including religion) as a garden filled with flowers of various colors and fragrances:

“Everyone is like a candle, and every candle is unique. This one is red; this one is yellow and the other is white. Everyone is happy with his candle and all of them give a flame; indeed, they all give a let everyone be everyone. Let him or her be himself or herself but let us be together. Like flowers, white and red. Thus give a nice flavor. We are different colors: one garden with different colors.”³⁴

His statement “*Let him or her be himself or herself but let us be together*” means that a religious person not only respects the freedom of other religions; it also includes a sincere willingness to build a good relationship with them. This attitude is based on certain verses of the Quran, especially Sūra al-Kāfirūn (109): 6³⁵ and Sūra al-Hujurāt (49): 13.³⁶

²⁹ Maulana Shaykh Nazim, *Love* (Malaga: Sereseres Ediciones/ Alejandro Jose Baudino, 2009), 69.

³⁰ “Hey human, Real we create you from A Laki-man and A woman and make your nations and ethnic groups so that you each know. Real the noblest at between you at side God Is the most takwa at between you. Real God great know again great know.”

³¹ “And We already lower You Quran with bringing truth, what YAng previously, that is books (which Derived previously) and stones test towards other books that; so decide case they according to what which God lower and Do not you follow weather lust they with leave truth that already dating You. For every nation among you, we give rules and a bright street. If Allah wills, he will make you a people. but God will test you against His judgment on you, so compete for virtue. To Allah is your return, and He has informed you of what you differed about.”

³² Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Pearls and Coral: Secrets of the Sufi Way* (Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2005), 86.

³³ Mohmmad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

³⁴ Shaykh Hisham deep a meeting in Los Angeles on March 18th, 2007 (http://www.sufi-live.com/The_Flowers_of_Unity_One_God_One_Love_-1450-print.html, accessed on February 24, 2013).

³⁵ “For you are your religion, and for me is my religion.”

³⁶ “O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Surely the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most godless of you. Real God great know again great know.”

In obedience to this Divine command, every believer has to be willing and open to get to know 'the others' and help build a harmonious relationship between different religions. Shaykh Hisham further interprets such command as an invitation to build a 'bridge' between religions: "*He (God) said, 'O people,' he didn't say, 'O Muslim.'* 'We made you into nations and tribes,' to do what? To know each other, to build bridges!"³⁷

Building such harmonious relationships refers to the dialogue that has to be established between the adherents of different religions. Recognizing and accepting the existence of other religious communities but without communication or dialogue is only a passive form of co-existence, without the desire to know one another. But it is only through direct conversation that the members of one community can get to know the members of the other community and interact with them meaningfully.

D. Building Bridges between All Believers

How should this communication or dialogue among the different religious communities take place? There are at least two paths that can be taken, namely the path of formal communication and the path of informal communication.

Formal Interreligious Dialogue

Shaykh Hisham Kabbani defines this form of dialogue as a struggle between the religions whereby the representatives communicate their faith to others and try to gain a correct understanding of the faith of others. The main purpose of this dialogue is to learn from each other. He said: "I am not trying to teach you, but rather I am trying to learn (together) with you. It means that 'I' and 'you' have something to share and to learn from each other. This understanding has a basis on the realization that all religions have common ground, that is in each religion we will find the Love of God, and each gets a divine message brought by their prophets."³⁸ The message emphasizes the existential right of believers to be free to follow the message carried by their prophet.³⁹

The interreligious dialogue conducted by the members of the Naqshbandi order is based on the belief that God's Love is universal, and that every religion carries a special message from God. This is achieved by organizing formal events where all invited participants listen to each other and learn from each other, each having their own view of how God manifests Himself in this world and His message. Moreover, such dialogue allows the participants to learn how God's message is experienced and understood by the adherents of other religions. It creates new insights and is a truly enriching experience for all parties involved.

Shaykh Hisham uses the conversation between Moses and the Prophet Muhammad in the story of the Prophet's Miraculous Night Journey (*al-isrā' wa-l-mi'raj*) as a metaphor

³⁷ <http://www.sufilive.com/print.cfm?id=4816&lc=EN> accessed on June 2, 2021.

³⁸ <http://www.sufilive.com/print.cfm?id=4816&lc=EN>, accessed on June 22, 2021.

³⁹ <http://www.sufilive.com/print.cfm?id=4816&lc=EN>, accessed on June 22, 2021.

for interreligious dialogue. Here, the figure of Moses is not understood in a mystical meaning, namely as a spiritual figure, but as a Jewish prophet and Messenger of God:

- Moses : O my brother Muhammad! What commandment has God given to your people? I have done a lot of things for my people concerning the 10 Commandments, but they have failed to obey them.
- Muhammad : My Allah has given the command to pray 50 times in one day.
- Moses : O my brother! They won't be able to do that as many as 50 times. You must ask your God to reduce it!
- Muhammad : No. I can't go back there. I'm ashamed.
- Moses : You don't have to go back there. Do it just from here, you can ask Him and God will accept it. I've done it before.
- Muhammad : (gladly then asked) O my Allah! I beg you to reduce it for the sake of my brother Moses!

And as the Prophet Muhammad requested, Allah reduced it to 45 times. And the Prophet (Mohammed and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to Moses that the number of his prayers had been reduced.

- Moses : No, you should better beg again because your people cannot fulfill it!

On the advice of Moses again the Prophet Muhammad asked Allah to reduce the number of prayers, and Allah answered him.⁴⁰

This story highlights the level of spiritual authority that the Prophet Muhammad has in comparison to those prophets before him. Upon his request, God reduced the number of obligatory prayers from 50 to five prayers a day. Shaykh Hisham uses this story as an example of interreligious dialogue and emphasizes three points:

1. Any dialogue between religions should be based on the realization of human equality before God. We are God's creations and it is in His will that humankind was created in diversity. This diversity also includes the ways to God. The people of different religions are brothers and sisters. The relationship between them crosses the boundaries of religion, state, and race.
2. Moses's advice given to the Prophet Muhammad in the story above is a suggestion based on his experience with the Israelite people, his people. The experiences of each religion relate to the encounter with God and are very different. However, each religious community experiences and describes the same attributes of God such as His Love and Mercy.
3. Moses's sharing of his experience is also interpreted as a call to enlighten other religions about our beliefs and vice versa; they enlighten us about their belief as well. Here, religion is not about an exclusive and jealously guarded collection of laws and rituals, but as a shared spiritual experience in which every religious person can experience God's Love which is a love that surpasses human boundaries and is a source of inspiration and enlightenment.

⁴⁰ <http://www.sufilive.com/print.cfm?id=4816&lc=EN>, accessed on June 22, 2021.

Instead of being oriented towards religious laws and rituals, the interreligious dialogue centers on the spiritual dimension that pays more attention to shared experiences of God's Love. This enlightenment approach allows the participants to reflect upon their own religious practices and beliefs. Shaykh Hisham said: “*You can find your mistake from the others when they advise you and they can find their mistake when you advise them, and that is what keeps everything in harmony.*”⁴¹ He criticized the hypocrisy of radical Islamist groups based on his interpretation of a prophetic hadith.⁴² Radical Islamist groups often defend their actions as serving Allah and Islam when in fact they are born out of ignorance, arrogance, and hypocrisy. He added that the tendency of scholars who are reluctant to highlight inclusive verses of the Qur'an and examples from the Sunnah threaten to undermine the friendly and peaceful nature of Islam.⁴³ Shaykh Hisham, on the other hand, thinks that it is the obligation of the scholars and religious leaders not to reduce the teachings of their religion to suit certain short-sighted and ideological purposes.⁴⁴

Besides, the healthy dose of self-inspection and self-criticism that a fruitful interreligious dialogue requires, it also allows the participants to become more aware of their duty to support each other and share their responsibilities. The Naqshbandi order focuses on at least two such common tasks:

1. Humanity's major problem today is materialism. It makes people enslaved to their egos and unsatisfied desires. As a result, people lose their true life orientation. Such a situation calls upon all religious leaders to restore the function of religion as a means to cleanse the human heart from the ego and worldly desires. Religion must give the right direction of life and make God the center of their life.⁴⁵
2. People tend to be self-oriented. They are preoccupied with their own needs, problems, and desires, without paying much attention to the people around them. And if they do pay attention to others, it is only to see what others have which creates jealousy in

⁴¹ http://www.sufi-live.com/The_Flowers_of_Unity_One_God_One_Love_-1450-print.html, accessed on February 24th, 2013.

⁴² It has been narrated on the authority of Sulaiman b. Yasar who said: People dispersed from around Abu Huraira, and Nalyl, who was from the Syrians, said to him: O Scheich, relate (to us) a tradition you have heard from the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him). He said: Yes. I heard the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) say: The first of men (whose case) will be decided on the Day of Judgment will be a man who died as a martyr. He shall be brought (before the Judgment Seat). God will make him recount His blessings (i.e. the blessings that he had bestowed upon him) and he will recount them (and admit having enjoyed them in his life). (Then) will Allah say: What did you do (to requite these blessings)? He will say: I fought for Thee until I died as a martyr. God will say: You have told a lie. You fought that you might be called a "brave warrior". And you were called so, (Then) orders will be passed against him and he will be dragged with his face downward and cast into Hell. (Sahih Muslim Book 20 No. 4688)

⁴³ <http://www.sufilive.com/print.cfm?id=4816&lc=EN>, accessed on June 22, 2021.

⁴⁴ http://www.sufi-live.com/The_Flowers_of_Unity_One_God_One_Love_-1450-print.html, accessed on February 24, 2013.

⁴⁵ http://www.sufilive.com/Sayyidina_Ali_ra_Four_Characteristics_of_Perfection-1077-print.html, accessed on June 22, 2021

their heart. It is better, then, to turn their attention to those who are suffering in society. This will make them realize that there are still people who are less fortunate and ask: What have I done to ease their suffering? What does my religion teach me about social responsibility? This task invites all religious leaders to teach their followers to abandon selfishness and develop a stronger sensitivity for the needs of others and a stronger willingness and readiness to help them. This is a kind of social responsibility that is not an obligation. Rather, it is the embodiment of the ‘giving spirituality’.⁴⁶

Interreligious Dialogue as a Dialogue of Life

The previous discussion on interreligious dialogue is based on the personal experiences shared by Shaykh Nazim and Shaykh Hisham Kabbani who were both directly involved in interreligious dialogue in America and Europe. Interestingly, both Naqshbandi shaykhs visited their followers in Indonesia, but there is no record of any events that were organized involving interreligious dialogue.

During my field research in several *zāwiyas* of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Sidoarjo, and Kartasura, I came across two probable reasons for them not being actively involved in interfaith forums in Indonesia. Firstly, they realized that the Naqshbandi Haqqani order is relatively new in Indonesia. Therefore, at this stage, the order focuses on building internal solidarity as well relationships with other already established Islamic groups in Indonesia. Secondly, the existence of Islamic radical groups who reject Sufism and condemn it as *bid'a* (unlawful innovation) means that the Naqshbandi Haqqani order is careful with whom they share any activities to avoid horizontal tension. In terms of interreligious relations, they have opted to passively build harmonious relationships with other religions in the sense that they are positioning themselves as a neutral party who is ready to accept invitations from the representatives of other religions.⁴⁷

The absence of the Naqshbandi order in interreligious dialogue and their passive engagement in Indonesia, however, does not mean that they are oblivious to the issue of religious plurality in Indonesia. On certain occasions, Shaykh Hisham makes specific mention of other religions. The importance of tolerance and empathy towards others, regardless of their faith or personal feelings towards Muslims and Islam, is illustrated in the two stories he told:

1. Prophet Muhammad and his companions usually passed through an alley when going to the market. One of the houses in the alley belonged to an elderly Jewish widow. Every time he passed through the alley, the widow would throw a pebble at the Prophet

⁴⁶ http://www.sufilive.com/Sayyidina_Ali_ra_Four_Characteristics_of_Perfection-1077-print.html, accessed on June 22, 2021.

⁴⁷ Based on the interview with the coordinator of the *zāwiyah* in Jakarta, Bapak Mukhsin, at the Rumi Cafe Jakarta on 4 November 2011. He emphasized the readiness of his order to engage in interreligious activities when invited.

through the window of her house. The Prophet was never angry with her but responded friendly with the greeting ‘*as-salāmu ‘alaykum*’ (may peace be upon you).

One day, as usual, the Prophet and his companions marched down the alley, but the Prophet felt something strange because there was no stone thrown at him. He asked some of the people in the alley about her and was told that she had been ill for the last two days. Hearing that, the Prophet immediately went to visit her. When she saw the Prophet, she was shocked and afraid because she thought that the Prophet was angry at her for throwing the pebbles at him all this while. But what happened was different from what she expected. The Prophet treated her with kindness and genuine affection. Then, he prayed for her to get well soon. Before the Prophet left she repented and said the *shahāda*, “*Lā ‘ilāha ‘illa-llāh, wa-‘ashhadu ‘anna muḥammadan rasūlu-llāh.*”⁴⁸

2. Shaykh Nazim followed the example of the Prophet in his daily life. One day, he was sharing the car with his relatives on the way home. When they were passing by a church, they saw a congregation coming out after attending the service. One of his relatives said, “Look! They are the people of hell.” Hearing that Shaykh Nazim became very angry and said, “If you do not take back your words about these people, stop this car and drop me off!” The relative felt shocked and ashamed. Shaykh Nazim continued: “They are also human beings, like you and me. Why do you say that about them?”⁴⁹

According to some *muñds*, storytelling is one of the methods used by their shaykhs to teach them. In the case of this story, the message is about religious plurality. The use of storytelling as a method to educate and teach is adopted from the Qur’an.⁵⁰

When the shaykh tells a story, he attracts the thoughts and feelings of the listening disciples through his spiritual power so that they can directly experience it. The shaykh guides his disciples in such a way that they discover the true meaning of the story and relate it to their own experience. Each disciple will discover the personal meaning of the story. This personal meaning is believed to be the answer given through the shaykh concerning the disciples’ own spiritual development and transformation. Thus, a story can have a different meaning from one disciple to another.

Returning to the two stories above, they do not simply relate particular events that happened in the past, but rather they reveal the practice and attitude of the Prophet Muhammad who serves as the example the disciples try to emulate. When both stories are read within the framework of interreligious spirituality, their meaning is as follows:

⁴⁸ This story was told by Shaykh Mustafa Mas’ud when I interviewed him on November 11, 2010 at Sidoarjo East Java.

⁴⁹ This story was told by Pak Mashuri, the coordinator of *zāwiyah* in Kartasura. Interview on November 14, 2011, in Kartasura.

⁵⁰ Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Keys to the Divine Kingdom* (Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2006), 19–20.

1. Although the Jewish widow in that story is portrayed negatively, Shaykh Mustafa interpreted the widow's behavior as the fruit of Satan's temptations. Here, he did not look at her religion as the cause of her enmity towards the Prophet but human weakness in general which can be experienced by everyone. Thus, the widow's attitude to the Prophet Muhammad had nothing to do with her hatred of Islam.⁵¹ Thus, the main message of the story is that violence and hate can be overcome through sincere acts of humility, love, and kindness.
2. The second story teaches the disciples that their own shaykh not only preaches religious tolerance but practices it in his everyday life. Furthermore, the story also calls the disciples to do introspection by asking themselves whether they also hate and entertain ill feelings towards the adherents of other religions. They realize that any suspicion and hatred has to be removed from their heart to purify them.

These stories reflect universal values of Sufism such as infinite love, kindness, tolerance, and respect. These values are also necessary to achieve harmony in a pluralistic society. Through stories, the Sufis add spiritual meaning to those values. In the Naqshbandi Order, these values are part of the character and nature of the Prophet Muhammad as well as Shaykh Nazim.⁵² Both are the main figures and role models for the disciples who internalize those values into their daily life. Living those values is a means for them to get closer to God and worship God sincerely, without any second intentions.⁵³ Only with this sincere attitude, the disciples can make these values part of their personality and effectively develop their spirituality.

Only when those values have been internalized, any future encounter with others, especially those of other religions, can be interpreted as a blessed encounter. I experienced this myself during the meeting and conversation with members of the Naqshbandi order, especially with Shaykh Mustafa Mas'ud in Sidoarjo and Mr. Mashuri in Kartasura. Below I quote two of their statements that impressed me the most:

1. "Since you have arrived here [in Sidoarjo], it means that our encounter happened because of God's Will. Therefore, I will accept and help you."⁵⁴
2. "It's amazing. God has provided a lot of inspiration and enlightenment through our encounter and conversation, not only for you but also for me."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Interview with Shaykh Mustafa Mas'ud on November 11, 2010, at Sidoarjo

⁵² Joko Susilo, "Tribune Jogja Edition," n.d., 13.

⁵³ As defined by Abu 'l-Qasim al-Qushayri: "The master [Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq] said: Sincerity (sincere) means making God – praise be to Him – the sole object of one's worship." By worship he meant seeking closeness to God – praise is to Him – to the exclusion of everything else, such as making a show [of one's piety] for other people, seeking their praise and taking delight in it, or any other thing [that distracts one] from getting closer to God Most High. (Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, trans. Alexander Knysch (UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2007), 220.)

⁵⁴ Said by Shaykh Mustafa Mas'ud when I introduced myself as a pastor and would do a research about the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order (interview on November 11, 2010, in Sidoarjo).

⁵⁵ Statement made by Mr. Mashuri at the end of our conversation that took place at his home (interview on 22 January 22, 2013, in Kartasura).

In saying so, both Shaykh Mustafa Mas'ud and Mr. Mashuri did not view me as a stranger (who is also a Christian pastor), but as a fellow human being who deserves to be accepted and treated with respect and kindness. The recognition and acknowledgment that our encounter was only taking place because God had willed it so eliminated any suspicion and doubt in our hearts. Mr. Mashuri also pointed out another important matter: the inspiration and enlightenment that we receive from God surpass all religious boundaries. The members of this Sufi order believe that God provides them with enlightenment which is essential in the encounter with other religions.

However, events that occur because of God's Will are often spontaneous and cannot be planned. Therefore, it does not matter where such interreligious encounters take place. To internalize the values mentioned above, the Naqshbandi order prefers such encounters to take place naturally and not in the form of organized forums. These natural encounters happen all the time in our daily life: when we meet as neighbours at home, as colleagues at work, and as strangers in public places. Although we do not necessarily talk about religion in such situations, these encounters teach us that we are equals, that we share the same problems, and that we can offer each other help in illness and comfort in grief. In such real-life situations, the members of the Naqshbandi order are tested to demonstrate their sincerity in applying the values of tolerance, love, kindness, and respect. This is what dialogue of life means: the interreligious encounters that occur naturally in everyday life and directly involve us in concrete problems and situations. When the members of this Sufi order actualize God's Love through interacting with other religious adherents, they also experience God's Love through the sincere dialogue of life. This is what we understand as the devotion to 'God, the Most Loving' in the context of religious plurality.

E. Conclusion

Sufism, as the esoteric dimension of Islam, does not only focus on the inner aspects embodied in personal piety; it also helps Muslims to balance their personal piety with social piety. In Sufism, both forms of piety exist not in a dichotomy but are inseparable, like two faces of a coin. This means that personal piety in Sufism can only be realized through social piety. This is also the reason why Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandi order call their members to take an active part in the social life of their community. In the teachings of the Naqshbandi Haqqani order that deal with interreligious dialogue, we find the living example of the unity between personal and social piety.

Religious plurality in the context of Indonesia plays a vital role. Thus, the local Sufi orders need to preserve the tolerant character of their personal and social piety. The diversity of religions in Indonesia is a blessing from God, and in such diversity, their followers can experience God's Love. This understanding encourages them to welcome the adherents of other religious adherents in their life and accept them as fellow humans with whom they share God's Love. Both shaykhs of the Naqshbandi Haqqani order, Shaykh Nazim and Shaikh Hisham serve as true role models and show how the relationship

with other religious adherents is a means to express love for God and experience God's Love in return.

Authentic religious devotion has to include engagement in interreligious dialogue. Through this dialogue, the members of the Naqshbandi order learn to open themselves to Divine enlightenment, be more self-observant, and focus on enriching one another. In the end, interreligious dialogue is not a matter of theological debate but about building meaningful relationships.

Bibliography

- Abdullah, M. Amin. "Islam di Indonesia atau Islam Indonesia (Studi Pergulatan Definisi dan Jatidiri)." *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 9, no. 2 (March 17, 2017): 1. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2015.092-01>.
- Bruinessen, van, Martin. *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Di Indonesia: Survey Historis, Geografis Dan Sosiologis* (The Naqshbandi Order in Indonesia: A Historical, Geographical and Sociological Survey). Bandung: Mizan, 1992.
- Howell, Julia Day. "Indonesia's Salafist Sufis." *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (September 2010): 1029–51. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X09990278>.
- . "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 2001): 701–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700107>.
- Johns, A. H. "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History." *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 1 (March 1961): 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0217781100000260>.
- Laffan, Michael Francis. *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*. Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics. Princeton [N.J.]; Oxford [England]: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Maulana Shaykh Nazim. *Love*. Malaga: Sereseres Ediciones/ Alejandro Jose Baudino, 2009.
- Miichi, Ken. "Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of *Dhikr* Associations in the Anti-‘Ahok’ Rallies." *Southeast Asia Research* 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 225–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2019.1667110>.
- Mohamad Hassan Khalil. *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

- Nielsen, Jorgen S., Mustafa Draper, and Galina Yemelianova. "Transnational Sufism: Haqqaniya." In *Sufism in the West*, edited by Jamal Malik and John Hinnells. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Nugroho, Wahyu. "Keterlibatan Sosial sebagai Sebuah Devosi: Sebuah Kesalehan Sosial Tarekat Naqshbandiyah Nazimmiyah." (Social Engagement as Devotion: Social Piety of the Naqshbandi-Nazimi Order) *Gema Teologi* 39, no. 1 (2015): 24. <http://journal-theo.ukdw.ac.id/index.php/gema/article/view/192/181>
- Al-Qushayri, Abu al-Qasim. *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*. Translated by Alexander Knysh. UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2007.
- Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani. *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition*. Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004.
- . *Keys to the Divine Kingdom*. Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2006.
- . *Pearls and Coral: Secrets of the Sufi Way*. Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2005.
- Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani. *Defending Truth*. London: Zero Productions, 1997.
- Simmons, Gwendolyn Zoharah. "Sufism and Its Response to Fundamentalism." In *Sufism and Social Integration*, edited by Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Golam Dastagir, 2015. Chicago: ABC International Group. Inc, n.d.
- Susilo, Joko. "Tribune Jogja Edition," n.d.
- "Über Das Leben Maulana Scheich Nazims." *Morgenstern*, n.d., 10 edition.
- http://www.sufi-live.com/The_Flowers_of_Unity_One_God_One_Love_-1450-print.html, accessed on 24 February, 2013.
- <http://www.sufilive.com/print.cfm?id=4816&lc=EN>, accessed on 2 June, 2021.
- http://www.sufilive.com/Sayyidina_Ali_ra_Four_Characteristics_of_Perfection-1077-print.html , accessed on 22 February, 2013