The Concept of *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* in Islam in the Light of the Works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD

The University of Leeds

Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking and praising Allah, the Exalted for His infinite, incalculable bounties, without which I would indeed be in a state of loss. I thank Him and praise Him for His grace in offering me this opportunity to continue my studies.

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Finally, I would like to express my warmest gratitude to my wife Zahrah and our daughter Maryam, for their continuing love, support, patience and understanding.
Abstract

The principle of tazkiyat al-nafs is central to Islam but despite this, relatively little work has been written, if compared to the vast volumes devoted to Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) or Prophetic narration (hadith). In addition to this, much of what has been written has been within the general precepts of what is now termed taşawwuf, or Sufism and much of this work has been concerned with the post-Ghazzâli period.

Despite this, many works had been written and indeed, the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs had been developed prior to the advent of al-Ghazzâli. One of the most influential scholars in the pre-Ghazzâli period within this field was the second/eighth century Muslim scholar Abû ‘Abd Allâh al-Ḥârîth b. Asad al-Muḥâsibi, who was born in Basra around 165/782 but later resided in Baghdad, albeit a period of exile in Küfa, until his death in 243/857. Al-Muḥâsibi was also known for his skills in many disciplines, including the Qur’ân, Prophetic narration (hadîth) and scholastic theology (ilm al-kalâm) but it is for his mastery in the field of Islamic spirituality and moral psychology for which he is remembered.

Regardless of his favourable notoriety he was not without criticism, being repudiated by Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 242/856) for his “unorthodox” views and reviled by Aḥmad’s subsequent followers Abû Zur‘a al-Râzi (d. 264/878), Ibn al-Jawzî (d. 297/910) and ‘Abd al-Rahîm ‘Irâqî (d. 806/1403). Despite this, he was a prolific writer, reportedly authoring more than two hundred works, the most famous of which is perhaps Kitâb al-Rî‘âya li Ḥuqûq Allâh.

It was this latter, monumental work which drew the attention of the West in the form of the highly respected researcher Margaret Smith (d. 1970), who was the first European scholar to seriously address the life and works of this great exponent of tazkiya. This is not to say that al-Muḥâsibi has been exhausted as an area of research however, as many of his works have been preserved and indeed, have been published, edited and annotated since the pioneering work of Smith.

Thus, this research comprises:

a) An examination of the linguistic and terminological usage of the terms tazkiya and al-nafs to determine an accurate understanding of these concepts within the framework of Islam.

b) An extensive study of the historical period in which al-Muḥâsibi lived, to assess the extent to which the political, social and economic factors played a part in his life and work.
c) An extensive survey of the available biographical and historical sources, to produce an accurate and comprehensive account of this unique and extraordinary scholar’s life.

d) An assessment of al-Muḥāṣibī’s works and an exposition of the author’s understanding and methodology regarding the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs.
**A Note on Transliteration**

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*ء* is denoted by ' when not at the beginning of a word.

*ة* is denoted by *a*, except in *idāfa* constructions where it will be denoted by *t*.

**Short Vowels:**

*ِ* is denoted by *a*  
*ِْ* is denoted by *i*  
*ُْ* is denoted by *u*

**Long Vowels:**

*ـَ* / *ـً* are denoted by *ā*  
*ـِْ* is denoted by *i*  
*ـُْ* is denoted by *ū*

**Diphthongs:**

*ـَِْ* is denoted by *ay*  
*ـُِْ* is denoted by *aw*

*ـُُْ* is denoted by the doubling of the letter.

The definite article *الَّلَّه* is denoted *al-* in all cases except when it follows an inseparable preposition or construction, in which case it will be denoted *'l*.

The divine name (*lūfẓ al-jallāla*) will be transliterated as *‘Allāh* in all cases.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The principle of tazkiyat al-nafs is central to Islam but despite this, relatively little work has been written, if compared to the vast volumes devoted to Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) or Prophetic narration (hadith). In addition to this, much of what has been written has been within the general precepts of what is now termed taṣawwuf, or Sufism and much of this work has been concerned with the post-Ghazzāli (d. 505/1111) period.

Despite this, many works had been written and indeed, the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs had been developed prior to the advent of al-Ghazzāli. One of the most influential scholars in the pre-Ghazzāli period within this field was the second century Islamic scholar Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibī, who was born in Basra around 165/782 but later resided in Baghdad, albeit with a period of exile in Küfa, until his death in 243/857. Al-Muhāsibī was also known for his skills in many disciplines, including the Qurʾān, Prophetic narration (ḥadith) and scholastic theology (ʿilm al-kalām) but it is for his mastery in the field of Islamic spirituality and moral psychology that he is remembered.

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It was this latter, monumental work which drew the attention of the West in the form of the highly respected researcher Margaret Smith (d. 1970), who was the first European scholar to address the life and works of this great exponent of tazkiya in depth. This is not to say that al-Muhāsibī has been exhausted as an area of research however, as many of his works have been preserved and indeed, have been published, edited and annotated, since the pioneering work of Smith.

Thus, this research comprises an examination of the linguistic and terminological usage of the terms tazkiya and al-nafs to determine an accurate understanding of these concepts. In addition, it will provide an extensive survey of the available biographical and historical sources, to produce an accurate and comprehensive account of this unique and extraordinary scholar’s life, including a study of the historical period in which al-Muhāsibī lived, to assess the extent to which the political, social and economic factors played a part in
his life and work. Due to the large number of works produced by this prolific author and their importance, the final part of this thesis will be concerned with an assessment of al-Muḥāṣibī's works to determine the writer's understanding and methodology regarding the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs.

This being the case, before we start it requires that several basic principles be clarified; this in turn therefore, requires that a brief background or overview be presented, to supply a foundation for the following chapters, which will contain various discussions, historical and methodological, perhaps unfamiliar to the majority. Thus, the aim and purpose of this introduction is to provide the reader with an outline of the research previously carried out in this field, so as to acquaint them with the depth of scholarship regarding al-Muḥāṣibī and tazkiya, as well as to define the scope of the present work. Secondly, it is our purpose here to define and clarify the methodology to be used during the present work so that the reader is aware of the methods being employed by the researcher. Thirdly, since this area of research is concerned primarily with what is commonly termed 'spirituality' or 'mysticism', a section has been included regarding the terminology of each of these terms, so that when they are used, the reader is familiar with their meaning and context. Finally, the intrinsic link between the current area of research and what is termed Sufism or taṣawwuf, requires that a brief overview of this discipline be included as to familiarise the reader with the overall context of Islamic spirituality/mysticism.

1.1 Literature Review

Any piece of research requires that it clarifies its position with regard to the work carried out previously and in this sense the present thesis is no exception. Therefore, it is the purpose of this section to survey the current body of literature available, regarding the topic in question. However, as it is clear from the title of the thesis, the present work covers two main areas, i.e. that of tazkiyat al-nafs and secondly, that of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī. Thus, each one of these areas will be treated separately, to examine the work carried out in each field.

1.1.1 Literature Regarding Tazkiyat al-Nafs

Classical literature regarding this topic as a separate discipline is extremely limited but nevertheless there are a variety of contemporary works that exist and that include tazkiyat al-nafs in their titles. These include:
a) *Al-Mustakhlas fî Tazkiyat al-Anfus* by Sa'id Ḥawwā (4th edition, Cairo, Dār al-İslām, 1988). This is one of the most comprehensive works on the subject of *tazkiyat al-nafs* and begins with the various ways through which the soul may be purified that can be placed under the umbrella term of ‘Islamic beliefs and practices’, since they not only include physical acts of worship such as prayer (*al-salāt*) but also, metaphysical aspects such as knowledge of the ailments of the heart and their cure. The discussion also encompasses the faults and ailments of the soul such as ostentation (*al-riyā') and arrogance (*al-kibr*) and the importance of cleansing the soul of such qualities. The opposing scenario in terms of positive moral and ethical qualities that need to be nurtured, such as patience (*al-sabr*) and gratitude (*al-shukr*) is also examined, as well as the importance of emulating both the attributes of Allāh and the characteristics of his Prophet. Finally, the fruits of *tazkiya* are also expounded and can be summarised as being the eradication of every blameworthy quality of the human being. Thus, Ḥawwā’s work is extremely thorough and as such is extremely important within the context of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

b) *Manhaj al-Islām fî Tazkiyat al-Nafs* by ʿUmar Sulaymān al-Ashqar, (Amman, Dār al-Nafā'is, 1992). This very short treatise begins by stressing the importance of the subject matter in that it is only through a process of *tazkiya* that the human soul will remain ‘healthy’, which has an ultimate effect on its fate in the hereafter. Al-Ashqar subsequently defines *tazkiya* linguistically and terminologically and also discusses the importance of purification for the heart. In the second half of the treatise the author examines the Islamic methodology regarding purification of the soul, stressing the importance of true faith in Islamic monotheism (*al-tawḥīd*), knowledge (*al-`ilm*), remembrance (*al-dhikr*), and repentance (*al-tawba*). As such this work is representative of a ‘practical’ approach to *tazkiya*, being well written and concise.

c) *Tazklyat al-Nafs* by Sa'd b. Muhammad al-Ṭakhīs (Riyadh, Dār al-Ṣamīʿī, 1992). This short, contemporary work begins with an introduction to contextualise the subject matter and continues with an appraisal of the various Qur'ānic verses dealing with *tazkiya* and the commentaries of Muslim exegetes concerning them. Subsequently, a discussion of the ailments and faults of the soul is provided along with an exposition of the three types of soul alluded to in the Qur'ān.1 Al-Ṭakhīs continues by examining various ways in which the soul may be purified, including perfecting acts of worship (*iḥsān al-ʿibāda*), reciting the Qur'ān (*al-tilāwa*), Allāh’s remembrance (*al-dhikr*) and reflecting upon the lives and

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1 For a discussion of these see chapter two, section 2.2.2.2 below.
statements of the pious predecessors (al-salaf al-ṣālih). The final section of the book is devoted to the method and means of taking the soul to account (muḥāsabat al-nafs) and thus, this work also suggests a 'practical' approach to tazkiya within an 'orthodox' framework.

d) Maʻālim fi 'l-Sulūk wa Tazkiyat al-Nufūs by ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz Āl ʻAbd al-Laṭīf, (Riyadh, Dār al-Wātān, 1993). This work, as the title would suggest, deals with a variety of moral and ethical issues from the Islamic perspective before examining the importance of tazkīyat al-nafs half way through the book. Āl ʻAbd al-Laṭīf, in approaching this subject relies on quoting from classical Islamic scholarship as represented by al-Qūṭūbī (d. 671/1273), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and especially, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) to present an 'orthodox' representation of the subject matter. Although this work is limited in its dealing with tazkīyat al-nafs, it is well informed, concise and well written, the quotes in particular, being useful.

e) Tazkiyat al-Nafs (Riyadh, Dār al-Muṣlim, 1994). This book in fact is not a new work and indeed is little more than a new edition of the section by shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) discussing this topic extracted from his Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, being edited by Muḥammad b. Saʻīd al-Qaḥtānī. Al-Qaḥtānī for his part has provided an introduction regarding Ibn Taymiyya and also provides a brief section regarding tazkiyat al-nafs to contextualise the treatise of the aforementioned scholar, as well as producing the usual annotation typical of an edited text. As for Ibn Taymiyya himself, he begins by discussing the various verses mentioning the terms related to tazkiya and provides the views of the early Muslim exegetes regarding their meaning as well as supplying his own opinions. Regarding purification of the soul, he concentrates his discussion around the importance of pure faith in Islamic monotheism (al-tawḥīd), as well as complying with every legally binding command and every injunction forbidding an act. It is this very pragmatic approach that seems to have influenced many of the contemporary scholars mentioned here to adopt a very 'practical' methodology to tazkiya.

f) Tazkiyat al-Nafs wa Muʻālahat al-Ādār by ʻAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Yūṣuf (Riyadh, Dār al-ʻAṣima, 1996). After a brief introduction al-Yūṣuf begins this work by providing an interesting discussion regarding the three types of nafs alluded to in the Qur'ān and continues by examining how the soul may be taken to account (muḥāsabat al-nafs). The next chapter concerns the various moral and ethical qualities of the nafs and the duality of
these qualities and their opposites. The final part of the book discusses how the soul may be trained through various forms of worship such as remembrance (al-dhikr), prayer (al-ṣalāt), fasting (al-ṣawm) and giving charity (al-sadaqa). Thus, this small treatise also suggests a 'practical' approach to the purification of the soul and in this sense is not 'ground breaking' but nevertheless al-Yūsuf's discussion of the duality of the qualities of the nafs is extremely useful.

g) *Manhaj al-Islām fī Tazkiyat al-Nafs* by Anas Karzūn (2 vols., Beirut, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997). This work spanning two volumes is the published version of the author's PhD thesis awarded by Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca and as such is a thorough, academic and extensive survey of tazkiyat al-nafs in the Islamic context. The study begins with definitions of both tazkiya and nafs and focuses on the nafs, its relationship with the intellect (al-`aqṣā) and the heart (al-qalb), the duality of its qualities and the three types of nafs alluded to in the Qurān. The concept of the soul is further examined in the light of the views of the philosophers and modern psychology before being examined in the light of religions other than Islam such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. Karzūn then turns his attention back to the Islamic perspective by first examining the creedal basis for the process of tazkiya in Islam before examining the now familiar 'practical' approach, which includes the 'physical' acts of worship such as prayer (al-ṣalāt), fasting (al-ṣawm) but also more esoteric methods of training the soul such as taking it to account (muhāsabat al-nafs) and striving against its desires (mujāhadat al-nafs). The next major section discusses the ailments of the soul such as arrogance (al-kibr) and hindrances to the realisation of tazkiya such as the effect of Satan (al-Shayṭān) on the soul, as well as how to overcome these impediments. The final section of this work examines the fruits of implementing the Islamic concept of tazkiyat al-nafs, which may be summarised very simply as happiness in this life and in the hereafter. The value of this work cannot be underestimated due to its comprehensive nature and academic style and as such it remains one of the most important works in this field of study.

h) *Tazkiyat al-Nufūs* collected and arranged by Aḥmad Farid (Alexandria, Dār al-`Aqīda li ʻl-Turāth, 1998), which contains many of the subjects discussed as stations (maqāmāt) that we would expect to find within the classical works of the taṣawwuf genre, including sincerity (ikhlās), intention (niyā), the heart (al-qalb), seeking forgiveness (istīghfār), gratitude (shukr), contentment (rīḍā), hope (rajā), as well as many others. The content of

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2 For a discussion of these see chapter two, section 2.2.2.1 below.
the book however, has been extracted from the works of other eminent scholars such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazâli (d. 505/1111), Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbali (d. 795/1393) and seems to be an attempt to produce a book dealing with taṣawwuf issues but presenting them via the works of the scholars of the ‘salaf’. Thus, this book attempts to present the subject of tazkiyat al-nafs in the light of the above-mentioned scholars and so we find many quotes from the Qur’ān, ḥadith and the first three generations of Muslims, as well as those who followed their methodology.¹

i) Tazkiyat al-Nafs by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Abū Fāris, (‘Ammān, Dār al-Furqān, 2000). This work is yet another of those that propose a practical approach and in fact the whole book is dedicated to this purpose. After a brief but useful introduction Abū Fāris begins his exposition by first providing an in depth discussion of the concept of sincerity (aḥlāḥ) before examining more familiar acts of worship in this genre such as reciting the Qur’ān (al-tā łā wa), remembrance (al-dhikr) and prayer (al-ṣalā), as well as also discussing the subjects more familiar to the apologetic Sufi literature such as abstinence (al-zuhd), humility (al-tawālw) and forbearance (al-ḥilm). Although Abū Fāris appears to have said nothing new, his work is filled with examples and he has provided a series of counsels and advice at the end of every section, which makes his work somewhat unique.

j) Self Purification and Development by Amin Ahsan Islahi (Delhi, Adam Publishers, 2000). This work is one of the few works in English concerned with this subject area and

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¹ This term is used to indicate the trend towards following the so-called ‘salaf al-ṣāliḥ’ (lit. ‘the Pious Predecessors’) who were the group of people deemed to be intended by the Prophetic statement, “The best of generations is my generation, then the one that follows it, then the one that follows it.” See al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muhammad b. Ismā’īl, Sahīh al-Bukhārī, (Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1999) p. 612 and Muslim (d. 261/875), Muslim b. al-Hajjāj al-Qushayri, Sahīh Muslim, edited by Muhammad Fu‘ād cAbd al-Bāghi (15th edition, Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1998) p. 1110-1. Thus, these first three generations, i.e. the Companions (al-sahāba), the Successors (al-tā bi‘īn) and the Successor’s Successors (atbā‘ al-tā bi‘īn) were known as the ‘salaf al-ṣāliḥ’ or ‘the Pious Predecessors.’ There has been a tradition amongst classical Islamic scholarship, represented by the scholars mentioned above, to refer to these three earliest generations with regard to the understanding of Islam in its every aspect. On this basis a movement known as, ‘the Salafi Movement’ (al-dā‘wa al-salafiyya) was seemingly established by Muḥammad ‘Abdu (d. 1322/1905) and his student Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā (d. 1353/1935) in Egypt, in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, to revive the teachings of the first three generations and those who followed in their footsteps. This movement has often been confused with and deemed an extension of the Wahhābī movement, originated by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) in Saudi Arabia, aimed at reviving the conservative Ḥanbali tradition and eradicating innovation (bid‘a) in Islam. See Hinnels, John (ed.), Penguin Dictionary of Religions (London, Penguin, 1995) p. 554 and Sirriyeh, Elizabeth, Sufis and Anti-Sufis - the Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World (Richmond, Curzon, 1999), pp. 86-111.

² This is interesting enough in itself as an attempt to bridge the gap between the so-called “Sufis” and the so-called ‘Salafis’, who have been the traditional adversaries of one another. See Sirriyeh, Sufis and Anti-Sufis, pp. 86-111.

³ This appears to have been one of Islahi’s works that have been translated from Urdu, the original being entitled Tazkiyah-i-Nafs and being the product of his lectures on the subject in the early 1950s. This culminated in a two volume work, part I of the book being published in 1957, while the second part was completed in 1989 and published in 1992. It is also worth noting that the original work was first translated
although the author considers the main object of *tazkiya* to be the human soul (*al-nafs*), he devotes much of this work to other aspects of *tazkiya* also. These other aspects revolve around a 'practical' approach and thus, concentrate on the purification of knowledge and action, where the author focuses his attention on the practical duties of Islam embodied in the 'five pillars' namely: prayer (*al-salät*), fasting (*al-sawm*), *zakät* and pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*). Although only the first two chapters specifically concern the study area of the current thesis, this work is nevertheless a useful addition to the literature concerning *tazkiya*, especially in terms of western languages.

k) *Purification of the Soul - Concept, Process and Means* by Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo (Denver, Al-Basheer Publications, 2002). This work was published during the course of the research and as such, was an interesting and welcome addition to the literature on *tazkiya*, particularly in a western language. The book begins by examining the concept of nurturing the soul in religions other than Islam and includes discussion of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity, as well as modern psychology. The author then discusses the concept of *tazkiya* and *nafs* in Islam, summarising by providing a 'shari'ā definition of the compound term *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Having provided the reader with a working definition, the importance and goal of the purification is then examined and is followed subsequently by a discussion of the process of purification, which posits a 'practical' approach denoted by a concentration on faith and action. The work is concluded by a comparison of the 'Sunni' and 'Sufi' methods of purification and the benefits of adopting the former approach. From the contents alone, this work bears a great resemblance to that of Karzūn, is written in a semi-academic style and from a specific standpoint - that of strict, 'orthodox', Sunni Islam, indicative of the Salafi denomination.

1) *Purification of the Soul (Tazkiat al-Nafs)* by Azra Nasim Farooqui. I found a reference to this work at the following website: http://islamicbookstore.com/cgi-bin/showboo.../purification_of_the_soul.jpg&description, but have been unable to locate it since.

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m) Al-Rūḥ by Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb [Ibn al-Qayyim] al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), edited by Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Qutb and Walīd al-Dhikrā (Beirut, al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2000). This work requires little introduction due to the fact that it is one of the most extensive and in-depth descriptions of the human soul in classical Islamic literature. Although it does not deal with tazkiya directly, it does provide essential information regarding the soul from the Islamic perspective and as such, will be a major source in chapter two.

n) Al-Akhlaq al-Islāmiyya wa Ususuḥā by ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ḥasan Ḥabankā al-Maydānī (5th edition, 2 vols., Damascus, Dār al-Qalam, 1999). Similarly, although this work also does not technically fall within the realms of tazkiyat al-nafs, the subject matter of the work is intrinsically linked as it deals with the ethical and moral teachings of Islam. The work itself consists of two large volumes and as such, provides an extensive and in-depth survey of the Islamic tradition, which could not be done justice via a brief resume here. The most important aspect of this however with regard to the current study is al-Maydānī's exposition of the nafs, which is unique and this being the case will be relied upon in chapter two.

1.1.2 Literature Regarding Taṣawwuf

Due to the closely related nature of the terms tazkiyat al-nafs and taṣawwuf it also means that we must consider works written under this broad heading also. This being the case, as might be expected, when considering the term taṣawwuf we find a broad mosaic of literature from the earliest period to the present day, in several languages and from every possible perspective. As such, it is almost impossible to present a comprehensive list of taṣawwuf works here and therefore, only a few sources will be mentioned, due to their importance to the present research.

a) Al-Ta'arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf by Abu Bakr Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Kalābādhi (d. 380/990), edited by Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1993). This work, which is typical of the apologetic Sufi genre is important for several reasons; firstly, due to its comprehensive nature, as it covers many areas essential in introducing this discipline and those involved in it. It begins by explaining the reasons why Sufis were named as such, their opinions regarding faith (īmān), their opinions regarding internal aspects of Islam such as gratitude (shukr) and annihilation (fanā’) and also their practices.

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7 At this stage both terms will be considered synonyms, until the term tazkiyat al-nafs is discussed in chapter two, where the distinction will become clear.

8 The reader is advised to consult the bibliography for a more detailed treatment of taṣawwuf works.
such as listening to spiritual audience (samā') and remembrance (dhikr). The second major reason is that this book is one of the earliest of its type to deal with this subject and thus, it clearly illustrates that by the 4th/10th century, Sufis were clearly established and had clearly established practices.9

b) Ḥiliyāt al-Awlīyāʾ by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿIsāq [Abū Nuʿaym] al-Aṣfahānī (d. 430/1039), edited by Saʿīd Saʿīd al-ܕīn al-עבד al-ANTITY al-ܛܪܒܝ (10 vols., Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-ܛܘܪܒܝ al-ܛܪܒܝ, 2001). Perhaps the most comprehensive collection of biographical literature, Abū Nuʿaym’s Hilya comprises the biographies and sayings of 689 pious individuals whom he considered Sufis or their direct predecessors and as such, remains one of Sufism’s greatest claims to orthodoxy due to its narration-based, transmission style. This is further enhanced by the fact that his survey begins with the four ‘Rightly Guided Caliphs’, continues with the Companion generation and proceeds with the subsequent generations until the end of the 3rd/9th century. Due to its comprehensive nature Abū Nuʿaym’s Hilya not only provides an early view of spiritual life in the Muslim community but also provides a window upon the early personalities and their teachings and in this sense is an invaluable resource for the study of Islamic mysticism. It is also worth noting here that this work has been abridged by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1201) due to discrepancies he considered present in the original and is entitled Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa, which is an equally useful reference work due to its more concise nature.10

c) Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya by Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karim b. Ḥūzān b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ṭālḥah al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072), edited by Maʿrūf Muṣṭafā Ṣuraq (Beirut, al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2001). This work is important because it is considered a classical manual on ṭaṣawwuf. It covers the various subject headings, which have now become so familiar, in illucidating the states and stages upon the Sufi path including striving (mujāhada), vigilance (murāqaba) and steadfastness (istiqāma), as well as many others.11 These subject areas are dealt with briefly but are filled with quotes from the Qurʾān, ḥadīth and scholars known for their Sufi inclination and spiritual insight. Therefore, it is not surprising that it

9 It is not surprising that such an important work has not escaped the attention of Western scholars and this book is familiar to many as A. J. Arberry’s “Doctrine of the Sufis.”
traditionally served as guide for the novice, being a typical representation of Sufi apologetic literature.\textsuperscript{12}

d) *Al-Tašawwuf Mansha’uhu wa Mušṭalahārūhu* by Aş‘ad al-Sahmarāni (Beirut, Dār al-Nafā’īs, 1987). This contemporary book is important because, as its name suggests, it deals with the origins and the terminology of *tašawwuf*. It begins by defining *tašawwuf* and continues by describing its historical development and the basis of Sufi teachings. The book continues by explaining some of *tašawwuf*’s concepts, explaining Islam’s position regarding what has been discussed and concludes with a chapter dedicated to al-Ghazzālī.

e) *Dirāsät it-Tašawwuf wa ʿl-Akhlāq* by Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyiḥ and ‘Ā’isha Yūṣuf al-Manā‘ī (Dār al-Thiqāfa, Doha, 1991). This is another contemporary book, which also begins by defining the word *tašawwuf* and continues by explaining some of the terms used in this discipline. The book is useful however for two main reasons; first of all, as its title suggests, it concentrates on various aspects of moral character and ethics (*akhlāq*), which is particularly important in the context of the works of al-Muhāṣibi. Secondly, it presents some actual texts by well-known scholars of *tašawwuf*, introduces them, comments on them and explains them, which is useful as it gives practical examples of *tašawwuf*, rather than just vaguely explaining its concepts.

f) *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* by Louis Massignon (translated from the French by Benjamin Clark, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). This work - originally written in French but now available in English\textsuperscript{14} - is one of Massignon’s most famous works and is considered by many to be a classical western treatise on Sufism. Massignon’s basic premise that Sufism is essentially and intrinsically ‘Islamic’ is well sourced and presented and by default he also provides an extremely important discussion of Sufism’s origins in particular and the Islamic spiritual and mystical traditions in general. Similarly, he devotes a great deal of the presentation the major personalities involved in this process and our subject, al-Muḥāṣibi, is no exception.

\textsuperscript{12} This book has also courted attention from western scholars and was translated into English twice. See al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072), ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Ḥūzān [Abū al-Qāsim], *Al-Resāla al-Qushayriyya fi ʿIlm al-Tašawwuf*, translated as *Principles of Sufism* by Barbara R. von Schlegell; with an introduction by Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1990) and al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072), ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Ḥūzān [Abū al-Qāsim], *Al-Resāla al-Qushayriyya fi ʿIlm al-Tašawwuf*, translated as *Sufi Book of Spiritual Ascent* by Rabia Harris, being edited by Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago, ABC International Group Inc., 1997).

\textsuperscript{13} The works in question are a text from *Kitāb al-Riyāḍa* by Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmīdī (d. 320/932), *Kīmiyāʾ al-Sā‘āda* by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) and *Risālat al-Sīr* by Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafs ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1235).

\textsuperscript{14} The original work in French being published with the title *Essai sur les Origines du Lexique Technique de la Mystique Musulmane* (Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1922).
Although studies in Sufism have advanced tremendously since the writing of this book, Massignon's seminal examination of Islamic mysticism remains an essential source work in Sufi studies.

g) Mystical Dimensions of Islam by Annemarie Schimmel (Chapel Hill, The University of Carolina Press, 1975). Schimmel's Mystical Dimensions of Islam remains one of the most useful source texts on Sufism despite being almost thirty years old. This is due to a thorough - if brief - treatment of not only the historical development of Sufism and a survey of its major personalities but also due to her treatment of major Sufi theory and practice such as the concept of the 'path (al-ṭarīq)', Sufi psychology, Sufi orders and Sufi poetry. The work is enhanced by the fact that Schimmel was a gifted linguist and in addition to works in Arabic she includes works in Persian, Turkish and Urdu, as well as the usual European sources, adding to the comprehensive nature of the survey she provides.

h) Islamic Mysticism - A Short History by Alexander Knysh (Leiden, Brill, 1999). This book, as the title suggests, deals with the historical aspect of tasawwuf but at the same time it is much more than a history book. This work charts the development of tasawwuf from its earliest beginnings, its regional schools and the effect of tasawwuf in each region. The eventual systemisation of the Sufi tradition into tariqas is also dealt with, as well as laying emphasis upon the major personalities related to tasawwuf throughout history. The book ends with a treatment of major Sufi concepts and institutions. This work is particularly useful due to its diverse treatment of various subjects and in particular from its historical perspective; for example it devotes a whole section to the Baghdadi School, which is of special importance regarding al-Muḥāṣibi, as well as being extremely well written, lucid and informed.

1.1.3 Literature Regarding al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibi


Similarly, I have not included encyclopaedia entries due to their general nature but nevertheless two well informed articles include: al-Muḥāṣibi by Josef van Ess, in The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, edited by
The first and most obvious works to mention regarding al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi are those of the author himself. However, since these works will be dealt with specifically in chapter five, they will not be mentioned here and thus, this leaves us with the works related to al-Muḥāsibi, which will be summarised in the following paragraphs.

a) “Notice of the Writings of Abū ‘Abdullah al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibi, the first Šūfi Author” by D. S. Margoliouth and published in “Transaction of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions” (Oxford, 1908). This paper is an attempt to introduce al-Muḥāsibi and his works to those unfamiliar with either. The author begins by introducing al-Muḥāsibi, indicating the sources where his biographical details can be found and then by giving a summarised version of the aforementioned material. The author then numbers al-Muḥāsibi’s works and where they can be found. The content of these works is then described, to which the author attributes Ash’arite\(^\text{16}\) tendencies to al-Muḥāsibi and proposes that his works are from improvised sermons.\(^\text{17}\) An interesting observation is made regarding al-Muḥāsibi’s use of Christian sources, suggesting that the author had direct contact with them. Margoliouth then compares al-Muḥāsibi to later scholars, alludes to his influence upon them and shows that al-Muḥāsibi’s works are free from many of the Sufi doctrines which developed later. However, the most interesting statement made by the

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Robert McHenry (15th edition, 29 vols., Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992) vol. 8, pp. 400-1 and al-Muḥāsibi by R. Arnaldez in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, edited by Gibb, Kramers, Levi-Provencal and Schacht (8 vols., Leiden and London, E. J. Brill and Luzac & Co., 1960) vol. VII, pp. 466-7. It is also worth noting that a work entitled "Sacred Mind and Profane Mind: Two kinds of 'Aql with al-Muḥāsibi and al Hakim al Tirmidhi" has been attributed to Douglas Kareem Crow at the following website address: http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/acainst/cgp/scholars.htm and was supposedly published in the Journal of Islamic Studies published by Oxford University. However on contacting the ‘author’ the researcher received no reply and upon contacting the editor at Journal of Islamic Studies they informed me that they have no record of such an article.


\(^\text{17}\) The inaccuracy of these claims will become apparent during the discussion of al-Muḥāsibi’s works in chapter five below.
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author is that al-Muhäsibi is the first ‘Sufi' author who had written works attributed to him. 18

b) *An Early Mystic of Baghdad* by Margaret Smith (New York, AMS Press, 1973). This is perhaps the most well known, if not the most important work to be carried out and as such, requires an in-depth discussion. This work is extremely thorough being over 300 pages long and consisting of fourteen chapters. The first three chapters of *Early Mystic* are concerned with the biographical details of al-Muhäsibi’s life, such as where he was born, his environment, his ‘conversion’ to *tasawwuf* and those who surrounded him, whether they were teachers, students, or associates. Chapters four and five concentrate on al-Mubasibi’s works and the sources he uses in them. Chapter six deals exclusively with what Smith terms the “Psychological Theory” the various ‘unseen’ aspects of *tazkiya*, such as the soul (*al-nafs*) and the heart (*al-qalb*). The next three chapters discuss various aspects of what Smith terms “Ascetic Theology” where such topics as sin (*dhanb*), the Devil (*Iblis*) and asceticism (*zuhd*) are discussed. The following three chapters deal with the various moral, devotional and mystical teachings of al-Muhäsibi, covering such topics as the ‘stations’ (*al-maqâmât*) and ‘states’ (*al-ahwâl*), prayer (*salât*) and love (*ḥubb*). The final two chapters summarise al-Muhäsibi’s teaching and discuss its influence on later generations.

It is easy to see why Smith’s work is regarded as one of the most important when discussing al-Muhäsibi and due to its comprehensive nature, one could argue that this is the reason why so little work has been done in this area. Despite this however, Smith does not define the methodology of al-Muhäsibi in employing *tazkiya*, nor does she discuss the method he employs during his writings. She employs a descriptive, almost phenomonological approach but this is tinged with Christian theological overtones, so indicative of the period. For example, the Arabic terms are translated using a variety of Christian ascetic terminology and the various points made are accompanied by appropriate quotes from Christian Mystics. The purpose behind this is not entirely clear: is it to draw comparison? Or simply to say that what al-Muhäsibi proposes is nothing new?

c) “The Forerunner of al-Ghazâli” in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* by Margaret Smith being published in January, 1936. Building on her excellent work in the above mentioned book and in particular chapter XIV of *Early Mystic*, Smith consequently wrote this article showing the significance of al-Muhäsibi’s teachings

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through their influence on one of Islam's most famous scholars - Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzāli. Starting from the perspective that al-Ghazzāli himself admits to reading the works of al-Muhāsibi in his al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl and the fact that there is considerable similarity between al-Muhāsibi's Kitāb al-Tawahhum and al-Ghazzāli's al-Durra al-Fākhira, Smith proceeds to make a further comparison between the content of Iḥyā' and a variety of al-Muhāsibi's works, with particular attention being paid to al-Waṣāyā and al-Ri`āya. Smith constructs her comparative analysis around a variety of positive moral qualities such as sincerity (ikhlās) and truthfulness (ṣiddq), which formed the basis of the maqām system in later Sufism, as well as a number of moral deficiencies such as conceit ('ujb) and self delusion (ghurūr). To this extent Smith's appraisal is erudite and reasonably comprehensive and she concludes that although al-Ghazzāli was an outstanding scholar in his own right, his reliance on al-Muhāsibi is considerable. As such, this article is extremely important as it establishes the importance of al-Muhāsibi as an original thinker and in addition, shows to some extent the influence of his thought on later generations.

c) Al-Muhāsibi - Un Mystique Musulman Religieux Et Moraliste by Abd-El-Halim Mahmoud (d. 1398/1978) being published by Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, (Paris) in 1940. This work is a published PhD thesis, written by the aforementioned author, under the supervision of the renowned Orientalist scholar Louis Massignon and is divided into four main parts. The first part deals with al-Muhāsibi's biography and works, being separated into three subsequent chapters. Chapter one examines the social milieu of al-Muhāsibi and assesses its effect upon him, as well as surveying other external influences, which may have played their part in affecting his thought. Chapter two deals with the works of al-Muhāsibi and is useful in the sense that it provides a chronological classification of the books he wrote. Chapter three concludes this part of the research and is concerned with the interpretive method used by al-Muhāsibi when examining the Qurān. Part two contains one chapter only - Chapter four - and deals with al-Muhāsibi's religious theory, including his concept of God, his attitude towards sects and rituals, religious obligations (al-
farā'iq) and meritorious acts (al-nawāfiḥ) and concludes with his interpretation of repentance and eschatology. Part three discusses al-Muhāsibī's moral system, including his ethico-psychological system of human nature and the factors which affect this such as al-nafs, Satan, vanity (al-ʿujīb), arrogance (al-kibr), envy (al-ḥasād) and illusion (al-ghirra), as well as discussing the topic for which he is best known - al-muḥāṣaba. The thesis concludes with part four in which the author discusses al-Muhāsibī's ascetical and mystical theory within Chapter six. This chapter deals with the various qualities required by the mystic, including reliance on Allāh (al-tawakkul), scrupulousness (al-wara'), asceticism (al-zuḥd), contentment (al-riḍā) and divine love (al-maḥābbā). Thus, this work is also of great importance as it systematically discusses the religious, moral and mystical teachings of al-Muhāsibī.

d) Kitāb al-Ri`āyah by al-Muhāsibī: a translation with introduction and notes by Kermit A. Schoonover, which was submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation to Harvard University in 1948.

e) “Al-Muhāsibī and his al-Ri`āyah” by Kermit A. Schoonover in The Muslim World (39, 1949), pp. 26-35. This article would seem to be a summary of the author's achievements in the previously mentioned work and is divided into three sections: A. Life and works of al-Muhāsibī, B. Al-Muhāsibī and the Development of Muslim Mysticism and C. A Summary of “Kitāb al-Ri`āyah.” The first section deals with the biographical data surrounding al-Muhāsibī's life and provides little which is new, reiterating his dispute with Ahmad and confirming his Ash'arite tendency. In addition to this, it provides a brief mention of the number of works written by al-Muhāsibī21 and the reason behind the author's choice of Kitāb al-Ri`āya.22 The second section identifies the importance of al-Muhāsibī's position within the overall development of Islamic mysticism saying:

For some time scholars have been aware of al-Muhāsibī and his works, but his position in the history of Muslim mysticism has yet to be adequately recognised. From the point of view of date, geographic location, number of existing works, the quality of writing and the nature of his ideas, al-Muhāsibī is in a key position to supply information for the understanding of early Islamic mysticism.23

The author then discusses the differences between al-Muhāsibī and the later Sufis, with regard to the concept of dhikr, samā'ı istimāḥ; zuhd and the purpose of the mystic, which the

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21 It is interesting to note that Schoonover mentions that only four of these have been published and as we shall see, this has increased greatly in the intervening period. See chapter five below.
23 Ibid., p. 28. This is a view that the current researcher shares and hopes he is able to contribute further.
writer asserts differs greatly. He moves on to discuss the relationship between differing types of mysticism in the Near East and their influence on al-Muḥāsibī. He refutes the concept that al-Muḥāsibī's teachings are Christian based but concludes that although al-Muḥāsibī's thought is essentially Islamic an indirect Christian influence could not be ruled out. In the third and final section Schoonover summarises al-Muḥāsibī's thought and teaching, as found in his most famous work *Kitāb al-Ri`āya*, and concludes the article with a translation from it.25

f) Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī by Josef van Ess in Theologie (vol. 4, Bonn, Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961). Bearing in mind van Ess's reputation in the field of Islamic studies and the depth of the study in question this work, along with the efforts of Smith and Maḥmūd, can be considered one of the most important in a western language. Van Ess's work is extremely well structured and begins with a discussion of 'al-Muḥāsibī's Life and Works (*Leben und Werk*)', which encompasses his 'conversion', his relationship with the traditionists (*ahl al-hadīth*) and the dispute with the Ḥanbalītes, as well as the sources quoted in his works and the problem of their chronology and authenticity.

The second major part of the book 'the Human Being (*Der Mensch*)' is divided into three sections, namely: 'al-Muḥāsibī's psychology (Die Psychologie al-Muḥāsibī's)', which includes an examination of the heart (*al-qalb*) and the self (*al-nafs*), 'the World and the Self (*Die Welt des Ich*)', where various negative human characteristics such as heedlessness (*al-ghafla*) and ostentation (*al-riyā*) are discussed and 'the Conflict of the Intellect against the Self (*Der Kampf des Verstandes gegen das Ich*)', where the intellect (*al-`aql*), knowledge (*al-`ilm*) and various other esoteric qualities such as sincerity (*al-ikhlās*) and patience (*al-ṣabr*) and their interrelationships with the ego are examined.

The third part 'God and the Human Being (*Gott und Mensch*)' is further divided into three sections and includes: 'Outward Knowledge (*Die äußere Erkenntnis*)', which discusses issues such as faith (*al-`imān*) and the debates surrounding God's existence and His attributes (*al-ṣifāt*), 'the Inner Encounter (*Die innere Begegnung*)', where such issues as remembrance (*al-dhikr*), spiritual audience (*al-samā*) and the Qur'ān are examined and 'the Friends of God (Die „Freunde Gottes")' where love of the divine (*al-maḥabbā*) and God's elect (*al-awliyā*) are discussed.

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25 Schoonover, “Al-Muḥāsibī and his al-Ri`āyah”, pp. 31-35.
As can be deduced from the discussion above, van Ess's treatise is extremely comprehensive, highly technical and written in an academic style, which makes it a major source work in the study of al-Muḥāsibī.

g) “Two Works of al-Muḥāsibī” by Ahmed Ateş in *Festschrift Werner Castel: zum siebzigsten Geburstag 5 März 1966 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, herausgegeben von Erwin Gräf (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1968) pp. 37-42. This article is part of a volume dedicated to the German scholar Werner Caskel and concerns two of al-Muḥāsibī's undiscovered works as alluded to by the Turkish scholar Ahmed Ateş. The two works in question are in manuscript form and are entitled *Kitāb Fahm al-Qurān wa Maʻānih* and *Kitāb al-Qaṣd ilā Allāhi Ta'ālā*. Thus, the main goal of Ateş's study is to present a basic description of these manuscripts and a succinct discussion of their contents. It is worth noting that at the time these manuscripts were undiscovered and that consequently both works have now been published as chapter five will reveal.

h) “Al-Junayd wa 'l-Muḥāsibī” by 'Abd al-Ḥalim Maḥmūd in *al-Jadid* (Cairo, September 1974) pp. 12-13. Despite the title, very little of this article is actually devoted to the relationship between al-Muḥāsibī and his principle student al-Junayd, apart from a few anecdotal statements from the biographical sources, which will be dealt with later. Rather, Maḥmūd discusses the historical features of the period and the open dispute between the 'orthodox' represented by the Traditionists (ahl al-hadīth) and the 'rationalists', represented by the Muʿtazila. This 'natural' conflict as Maḥmūd terms it was indicative of two irreconcilable approaches to which al-Muḥāsibī adopted a third - the use of rational methods to defend 'orthodoxy', which ultimately alienated him from both factions. Nevertheless, this 'third' method enabled him to produce some the most important books in the Islamic tradition that pioneered the exploration of moral psychology and Sufism in general, which is witnessed by the many praiseworthy comments Maḥmūd closes his article with. As such, this article provides little that is new but at the same time is a useful introduction for the uninitiated to al-Muḥāsibī and his era.


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26 See pp. 225-7 and 230-2 below.
27 See chapter four, section 4.5 below.
28 See chapter five, pp. 230-1 below.
difficulties of studying the books of al-Muhäsibi, this being partly due to the specific technical vernacular he uses and thus, the need for an explanation of this usage. Al-Quwwatli's discussion therefore concerns the period in which al-Muhäsibi lived as this was a period that many of the Islamic sciences came to fruition in a technical sense, to examine al-Muhäsibi's technical use of the language and to summarise his overall methodology. Al-Quwwatli also gives credit to Massingon, Ritter, van Ess and Roman, for their efforts in this field previously and concludes that within al-Muhäsibi's writing style four major devices can be identified: firstly, the use of definitions (al-ta`rīf) in which he attempts to isolate the essence (al-māhiyya) of the subject in question. Secondly, the inference (al-tafrī) of further information derived from the original definition; thirdly, the generation (al-tawlid) of ideas and concepts from those just mentioned and finally, his use of the term "al-`aql `an Allāh" to denote an intrinsic, divinely inspired perception of a subject, whether it be ethical, psychological, social or metaphysical. Bearing in mind the above discussion, it is clear this article is an essential tool for anyone who wants to gain a greater insight into the works of al-Muhäsibi.

j) "Tahlil Ţahirat al-Hasad `ind al-Muhäsibi" by Ḥāmid Ţahīr in Dirāsāt 'Arabiyya wa Islāmiyya (Maktabat al-Zahrā', Cairo, 1983) pp. 26-43. This particular article focuses on al-Muhäsibi's treatment of the human characteristic of envy (al-hasad) as represented in his most famous work Kitāb al-Ri`āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh. As such, Ţahīr approaches the topic by addressing essentially the same subject areas that al-Muhäsibi adopts in his work, which include: envy and rivalry (al-ḥasad wa ʿl-munāfasa), the location of envy (mawḍi` al-ḥasad), the motives of rivalry (dawāfi` al-munāfasa), the motives of envy (dawāfi` al-ḥasad) and the treatment of envy (ʿilāj al-ḥasad). In this context Ţahīr provides an examination, discussion and commentary on each of these subject areas interpolating his own thoughts with quotes from al-Muhäsibi himself and other sources. This being the case, Ţahīr has produced an excellent addition to the literature, which is extremely useful in discerning al-Muhäsibi's method as both an author and a moral psychologist.

k) "Al-`Izāt al-Hassān fi Shu`ab al-İmān" by Muṣṭafā al-Shaṝrāwi in al-İslām (Cairo, 12th June 1987, pp. 5 and 11; 19th June 1987, pp. 5 and 12 and 26th June 1987, pp. 5 and 14). These short series of articles are little more than various quotes from biographical sources and a discussion of al-Muhäsibi's works and writing style and as such, do not constitute a major addition to the literature other than providing the uninitiated reader with an introduction to this scholar.
l) Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibi: al-ʿĀlim, al-Zāhid, al-Faqīh by Kāmil Muḥammad Muḥammad ʿUwayḍa (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyya, 1994). This work published under the series title Aʿlām al-Fuqahā wa ʿl Muḥaddithān is a comprehensive treatise dealing with the life and teaching of al-Muḥāsibi by a contemporary scholar. Despite its comprehensive nature it suffers from a lack of organisation, as each subject is dealt with after the other, without any sectioning or categorisation. Thus, the book contains twenty-eight titles each dealing with a specific topic related to al-Muḥāsibi. The first ten sections - almost half the book - are concerned with the life and works of al-Muḥāsibi: thus, we find the usual biographical information; his life, teachers, students and anecdotal statements are all included. The dispute with Aḥmad is also dealt with and a survey of al-Mubasibi's works, including his narration of ḥadīth are also found and this area concludes with his death. The advantage of this book is that all of the above information is referenced to its origin in the Arabic literature, which is of obvious importance. The rest of the book is devoted to al-Muḥāsibi's teaching and the author selects various aspects and discusses them with lengthy quotations from the author's works, so as to summarise and crystallise al-Muḥāsibi's thought and teaching in one place, which is of great service to the reader who wants to gain an overview of the scholar's ideas, without having to read all of his works.

m) "Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibi's Concept of Self Examination as Reflected in His al-Ｒiʿāyah li Ḥuqūq Allāh" by Iftitāḥ Jaʿfar. This is a concise, useful introduction for the uninitiated to the subject of al-Muḥāsibi. The article consists of three main sections after a brief introduction: the first section briefly presents biographical information regarding al-Muḥāsibi. The second part briefly introduces what is regarded to be al-Muḥāsibi's greatest work - that of Kitāb al-Ｒiʿāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh. The third section and possibly the most important, deals with al-Muḥāsibi's concept of self-examination, or muḥāsabat al-nafs, where the author not only gives al-Muḥāsibi's concept but also various scholarly interpretations of al-Muḥāsibi's thought.

n) Al-Fikr al-Tarbawi `ind al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi submitted by Ahmad Diyaḍ al-Din Husayn (unpublished M. A. thesis Jordan, Jāmiʿat al-Yarmūk, 1990). This academic thesis attempts to examine the educational theory of al-Muḥāsibi whether it be related to the etiquettes of the learner/teacher relationship or psychological and intellectual development. To this effect the author begins by providing an informed biographical section on al-Muḥāsibi and assesses the effect that his environment may have had on him. The following chapter traces

29 This article was found at the following internet website address: http://www.indosat.net.id/alauddin/sufisme1.html
the development of education until al-Muḥāṣibī's time and assesses his contribution to the overall process. The next two chapters discuss al-Muḥāṣibī's approach to both the psychological and intellectual development of the human being and examine the methods that this scholar employs in attempting to achieve this goal. As such this thesis is a very important addition to the literature regarding our subject as it not only examines al-Muḥāṣibī's utilisation of moral psychology as an educational means but also assesses his pedagogical skill and methodology.

o) *Fikr al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī al-Ṣūfī fī Mizān al-Kitāb wa 'l-Sunna* submitted by Khālid b. Sulaymān al-Khaṭīb (unpublished M.A. thesis Riyadh, Jāmiʿat al-Malik Saʿūd, 1997). This thesis aims to examine the doctrinal position of al-Muḥāṣibī from his *kālam* style works by comparing it to the creed represented by 'orthodox', Sunni Islam based on the Qurān and the *ṣunna*, as well as discussing to what extent this scholar differed from the teachings of contemporary and later Sufis, in addition to assessing al-Muḥāṣibī's effect on those who came after him. To this effect al-Khaṭīb begins his thesis by providing an introduction to Sufism and its development and also a biographical account of al-Muḥāṣibī and his works. The bulk of the thesis however is concerned with an examination of the Sufi concepts of station (*maqām*) and state (*ḥāl*), where al-Muḥāṣibī's views are compared to those found in apologetic Sufi works such as the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī and the *Lumaʿ* of al-Sarrāj. Finally, an assessment of al-Muḥāṣibī's effect on subsequent scholars is made, the two examples selected being Abu Ṭalib al-Makki (d. 386/996) and Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111). Al-Khaṭīb's work is useful in the sense that it provides some good points and useful discussions but is ultimately limited by the adoption of an ultra 'orthodox' theological methodology.

p) *Mawāʿīẓ al-Imām al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī* (Beirut, al-Maktab al-İlāmî, 1999). This work which is part of the *Maʿālim fī 'l-Tarbiyya wa 'l-Daʿwa* series that examines various Muslim mystical personalities was collected and arranged by Şalih Aḥmad al-Shāmī who is the same scholar who produced a critical edition of al-Muḥāṣibī's *Sharḥ al-Maʿrīfa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*. In this book al-Shāmī has provided a brief but useful introduction to the life and personality of al-Muḥāṣibī and arranged the work on the basis of subject areas, providing quotes from al-Muḥāṣibī according to subject heading provided. As such, al-Shāmī has furnished the reader with a brief yet organised glimpse at the thought of al-Muḥāṣibī and provided a quick reference to his teachings that is a useful addition to the literature concerned with this eminent scholar.
1.2 Methodology

Any thesis requires that it adopt a certain methodology, by which it can investigate and consequently present its findings, during the course of its research. There are many methodologies which may be adopted within a religious context and these include: sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and theology. However, none of these established techniques will be used here and it is proposed that phenomenology be employed as the primary methodology in the current research. This being the case both phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion will require a detailed discussion.

1.2.1 Phenomenology

According to D. Cairns, E. Husserl (1859-1938) was the first philosopher to use the term "phenomenology" to designate a "whole philosophy" and intended his phenomenological philosophy to be an "objective" and "rigorous" science. By this he meant, inter alia, a

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30 Sociology of religion is defined broadly as a study of the interrelation of religion and society and the forms of interaction, which take place between them. Sociologists of course, assume rightly, that religious impulses, ideas and institutions influence and in turn are influenced by social forces, social organisation and stratification. The sociologist of religion then studies the way which society, culture and personality influence religion, as well as the ways in which religion itself affects them. See Wach, J., Sociology of Religion (Chicago, 1943) pp. 11 and 205; Nottingham, E. K., Religion and Society (New York, 1954) p. 1; Yinger, J. M., Religion, Society and the Individual (New York, 1957) pp. 20-21 and Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion (Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1973) p. 3.

31 E. Evans-Pritchard has defined anthropology as, "A branch of sociological studies, which devotes itself to primitive societies." Hence, social anthropology of religion is concerned with those rites, beliefs, actions and behaviour patterns in pre-literate societies that refer to what is regarded as being sacred and supernatural. Thus, religion is viewed as a cultural phenomenon in its many manifestations and it is the cultural dimension of religious phenomena, which is studied. See Evans-Pritchard, E., Social Anthropology (London, 1954) and Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, p. 4.

32 The Psychology of Religion is the study of the religious function of the mind, partly dealing with the function of the individual mind in religious contexts and partly with the problem of the impact of the social religious life on its participants. Psychology studies the reactions of the human psyche, its responses, collective and individual, to what is considered to be 'divine', in whatever way it be described and experienced, as well as that ultimate satisfaction for which the human soul craves. See Stephens Spinks, G., Psychology and Religion (Boston, 1965) p. 29; Drever, James, A Dictionary of Psychology (London, 1968) p. 246 and Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, p. 5.

33 Philosophy of Religion is a philosophical reflection on religion by systematically applying a philosophical method. Examining critically the truth-value of the immense material of myths, symbols and rites that come from the history of religions, the philosophy of religion discovers their meaning, verifies their interrelationships and affirms their foundation. See Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, pp. 5-6.

34 Theology judges, in the light of faith, the validity of the results of the History of Religions. The method of theology uses categories that are strictly theological i.e. derived from a distinctively Christian revelation and thus, it is a normative science, as it compares other religious experiences in the light of its own and at the same time, in the sense that the 'other' experiences are inferior. This is different from theology in the sense of 'a system of belief' as in reality, in this sense, each and every religion has its own theology. See Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, p. 4 and Smart, Ninian, Dimensions of the Sacred - An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs (Harper Collins Publishers, 1996) pp. 3-5.

35 Smart defines phenomenology as (1) the attempt, through informed empathy, to present others' experience and beliefs from their points of view and involving the suspension of one's own values (epoché); (2) a morphology, or classification of types of religious phenomena. See Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred, p. xxiii.

36 Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred, pp. 1-2.
system of thought which is well founded in the sense that it is free from "unexamined assumptions." Like Descartes, Husserl searched for an "unshakable" foundation to philosophy: "a cognition must be gained in philosophy which cannot be doubted but is 'absolute' in its validity and certainty." Thus, as a "rigorous science," phenomenology deals with, or is constituted by "phenomena" or "essences" and both the terms "phenomena" and "phenomenology" are derived from the Greek verb phainesthai, which means to show itself, or to appear. As such, Husserl uses the term "phenomenon" to refer to what appears to our consciousness and his concept of "phenomena" is closely connected with what could be called the basic task of his phenomenology. In other words, in the search for the "essential feature" or "essence" (Eidos) of the phenomenon.

The process which Husserl proposes to achieve this is Epoche, which is a Greek word meaning "suspension of judgement" or "abstention from beliefs" and is often used as a synonym for the "phenomenological reduction" or "method of bracketing." Husserl proposes that through Epoche "presuppositions" or "unexamined assumptions" are to be cast aside and that as a result of this phenomenological analysis of the essential feature of the phenomenon one sees, as it were, "its very essence." Another central concept to that of Epoche is that of Verstehen or "empathic understanding." By this it is meant that the phenomenologist adopt an empathic approach to the phenomenon, so that the process of eidetic vision be achieved fully.

In summary phenomenology is a method by which the researcher "brackets", or sets aside his presuppositions before beginning his/her study and seeks to reveal the essence of the phenomena in question, by adopting an empathic standpoint to it. It is in this sense that phenomenology lends itself well to the study of religions and this method has been developed to such an extent that this has now become an independent field.

38 Ingarden, Roman, On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism (The Hague, Martinuss Nijhoff, 1975) p. 10 and Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, p. 27.
39 Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, pp. 31-32 and Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, p. 18.
40 Van Peursen, C. A., Phenomenology and Reality (Pittsburg, Duquesne University Press, 1972) p. 44; and Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, p. 36.
41 This is known as the "Eidetic Vision" in phenomenology, coming from eidos meaning idea of logical meaning. See Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, pp. 38-39.
1.2.2 The Phenomenology of Religion (phR)\textsuperscript{43}

As previously mentioned, the method proposed by phenomenology lends itself conveniently to the study of religions, so much so that not only has it become a specialist field but there are many scholars who are famous as "phenomenologists of religion."\textsuperscript{44} PhR is usually considered a sub discipline of what is commonly called "Religionswissenschaft", which is an all encompassing term used today to refer to the academic, or scientific discipline that deals with the study of various religious phenomena\textsuperscript{45}: historical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical and phenomenological. J. Wach distinguishes between two main types of study within Religionswissenschaft: (1) historical and (2) systematic. By (1) he means (a) the general history of religion and (b) the histories of specific religions. By (2) he means the sociological, psychological and phenomenological studies of religions. Therefore it is the second category of Religionswissenschaft that concerns us here and more specifically the area of (2) which we are concerned with, i.e. the phenomenological study of religions.\textsuperscript{46}

The phenomenological approach to religion can be regarded as a consequence of some scholars' reaction to two different approaches to religion: a "theologically normative" and a "reductionist" approach. An approach is said to be theologically normative if its proponent takes one religion as the only "true religion' (which is usually his own) and compares it with all other religions regarded as false ones. This kind of approach was, around fifty years ago, almost the sole approach among the Christian scholars of religion, especially among the Protestant theologians in the West.\textsuperscript{47} The reductionist approach, on the other hand, makes an ontological reduction of religious phenomena to, for example, socio-economical and psychological phenomena. Representatives of this latter approach include E. Durkheim (1858-1917), K. Marx (1818-1883) and S. Freud (1856-1939).\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{43} For another useful discussion of Phenomenology of Religion, including its critics, see Hinnels (ed.), John R., *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, pp. 377-379.


\textsuperscript{45} By religious phenomena we mean phenomena such as prayers, sacrifices, religious myths, rites, doctrines etc.

\textsuperscript{46} Barbosa da Silva, *The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem*, pp. 17-18.


The phenomenologists of religion reject these two kinds of approach and propose instead the phenomenological one which, negatively speaking, is said to be non-reductionist and theologically non-normative.49 In positive terms, the phenomenological approach takes religion as an object of study in its own right. In other words, the phR aims at describing the religious phenomena as such and the phenomenologists of religion take these phenomena in Husserl's sense, i.e. they hold that the phenomenon "shows itself", "appears to us" and "unveils itself."50

This being the case, it is generally accepted that the aim of phR is taken to be, first of all, to describe and not to explain religious phenomena. As such, it is not difficult to see why the methods of Epoché and Verstehen explained above, which are specific to phenomenology, are so important to this method.51

Despite this general methodology used within phR, some phenomenologists of religion distinguish between two types of phR: the descriptive phR, which is contrasted with the essential phR.52 The former refers to the approach of those scholars who claim to restrict themselves to giving an inventory of religious phenomena of one or more particular religions. It is an inventory which claims to take into consideration the historico-cultural context of the particular religions and the “unique” meaning they have for the believers.53 M. Scheler calls this kind of study, “concrete phenomenology,” which he contrasts with “essential phenomenology”. The latter is a cross-cultural comparison of religious phenomena, viewed apart from their peculiarity, due to their historico-cultural context. In other words, it is a comparison based upon “structural” similarities among phenomena taken from different historico-cultural contexts.54

Thus, it suffices to point out that concrete phR is a kind of narrative description, while essential phR deals with the structural description, i.e. it describes the dominant or basic features of religious phenomena of the same type; for example the basic feature of myths,

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51 See Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred, p. 1 and Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, p. 17 for a useful summary.


54 Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, p. 89. Dhavamony proposes another meaning for phR which is not unlike concrete phR saying, "Namely for the study of a particular religion as an organic structure within a certain period, disregarding the historical origin of the various beliefs and practice, while concentrating on their meaning to the believer." See Phenomenology of Religion, p. 9.
sacrifices and prayers, independent of their historico-cultural contexts. In other words, concrete phR deals primarily with what the believers themselves regard as important in and peculiar to, their religions. At this level the scholar takes the believers' faith as the criterion of the correct description. In essential phR however, the scholar's own criterion of interpretation is the test of the correct description. Here the scholar may use interpretive terms such as "Holy", "Sacred", "Ultimate Reality", "Power" etc. As a result concrete phR deals with what is intersubjectively intelligible among the believers and essential phR deals with what is primarily intersubjectively intelligible among the scholars.

As a result the scholars concerned with concrete phR defend the concept that the religion is "unique" for the believers and as a result, propose Verstehen as an adequate method to describe what they term the "internal" aspect or the "core" of religion. As Cantwell Smith puts it:

Religious men have charged that the objective study of religion leaves out the very part of religion that counts; it analyses the external but misses the core of the matter ... The religious may argue that the student of religion should have, in addition to objective accuracy and precise external knowledge about religious processes, also imaginative sympathy, appreciative understanding and even experimental participation in them.

In would seem that by "imaginative sympathy" and "participation" Smith seems to mean Verstehen as a process of understanding, as he regards the methods used to study the external aspects of religion to be inadequate for studying its internal aspect. Therefore, in summary, phR attempts to decipher and interpret every kind of encounter of man with the sacred, to give us the inner meaning of a religious phenomenon, as it is lived and experienced by religious men and it is this "inner meaning", which is said to constitute the essence of the phenomenon.

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55 Smart, The Phenomenon of Religion, pp. 41-50 and Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, p. 90.
57 Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, p. 90.
60 By the 'internal' aspect therefore is that which is precious to the insider and with regard to religious phenomena, is inter-subjectively intelligible and testable only for the believers within the same community or tradition, whereas the 'external' aspect is that which is inter-subjectively intelligible and testable by both the believers and the non-believers. Thus, it is the former aspect in which verstehen becomes essential. See Cantwell Smith, Wilfred, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 11; Barbosa da Silva, The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem, p. 98 and Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, pp. 20-21.
In the light of what has already been discussed it is therefore proposed that phenomenology be the methodology on which the current thesis is based. It is further proposed that the research is carried out using the phenomenological method outlined above as phR, since the area of research falls under the umbrella term of religion. Of the two types of phR that have been discussed, the type termed "concrete phR" will be employed here as we will deal with one religion specifically, i.e. that of Islam, including its historico-cultural context and the "unique" meaning it has for the believers, as opposed to a comparative approach adopted in essential phR. Concrete phR will also be employed here because we will be, for the most part, describing a specific aspect of Islam, i.e. that of tazkiyat al-nafs, which will require that we rely on the believers' perspective of this discipline. Since tazkiyat al-nafs is an internal aspect of the Islamic faith it seems appropriate that the proposal of Smith, i.e. to adopt verstehen as a phenomenological method, is also employed here to study, understand, describe and arrive at the essence of tazkiyat al-nafs, from the practice of one of its most famous proponents, i.e. al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi.

This is not to say that phenomenology will be the only methodology used. The very nature of the area of research requires that a certain amount of theology be applied to the study.\footnote{As Dhavamony puts it, "Theology is made living when the concrete religious experience and practice of religious men is taken into account, in the explanation and elucidation of the revealed truth, worship and practice." Dhavamony, Phenomenology of Religion, p. 7.}\footnote{See footnote 32 above.} However, we do not mean it as described above but we mean theology in the sense of a system of belief.\footnote{The viewpoint that will be adopted regarding Islamic theology will be that of the Sunni community, as al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi is considered a Sunni scholar and also, to limit the scope of the research.} This is essential, as indeed Islam has its own theology, which will be used throughout the thesis to judge between the various issues that may arise during the course of the research.\footnote{The viewpoint that will be adopted regarding Islamic theology will be that of the Sunni community, as al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi is considered a Sunni scholar and also, to limit the scope of the research.}

1.3 Terminological Remarks

The discipline of tazkiyat al-nafs has a strong foundation in the classical Islamic disciplines but much of what it is concerned with is now included under the broad heading of taṣawwuf. Therefore, the next logical step would be to examine the nature of taṣawwuf but before we do so we also need to discuss the meaning of this term within western academic circles, to see if the commonly used terms are first of all, accurate and secondly, to see if they accurately incorporate the discipline of tazkiya. The two major terms used to describe
taṣawwuf are the words 'spirituality' and 'mysticism', which in turn are often prefixed by the term 'Islamic', to distinguish them from other forms of spirituality or mysticism. Thus, it is the purpose of this section to discuss these two terms to arrive at a positive, working, terminological framework at the outset for the remainder of the thesis.

1.3.1 Spirituality
The first of these terms, spirituality, is particularly difficult to define due to its derivation from another problematic term, namely 'spirit'. Its roots however would appear to lie in the Christian tradition where it has a long tradition in theology and religious practice. The spiritual can be understood by contrasting it with the physical, material and external, being primarily an internal quest. Some understand the 'spiritual' as more diffuse and less institutionalised than the 'religious'. Others, however, understand spirituality to be the very core of religion, particularly through religious and mystical experience. The subject matter of spirituality has been a perennial human concern and modern interest in spirituality has been combined with an emphasis on the individual subject and self development, thus becoming a universal term to indicate a search for direction and meaning.

Similarly, spirituality has often been described as an attempt to grow in sensitivity - to the self, to others, to non-human creation and to God, or as an exploration into what is involved in becoming human; a quest for full humanity. Thus, spirituality, not as an idea or a concept, but as a praxis found throughout human history, is resonant with the longings of the human heart for the permanent, eternal, everlasting - for wholeness, peace, joy and bliss - which have haunted human beings through the ages and for which, many people on our planet are searching today.

In addition to this, spirituality is regarded as having three distinct but interdependent levels in the contemporary understanding of spirituality:

1) spirituality as lived experience or praxis, which in a religious context can be seen as a faith's wisdom to live that faith.

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68 Hinnels (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions* p. 495.
69 In the case of Islam this would be exemplified by the likes of al-Muhäsibi.
2) Spirituality as a teaching that grows out of this praxis and guides it in turn, i.e. the spiritual disciplines and counsels of perfection found in different religions.\(^{70}\)

3) The systematic, comparative and critical study of spiritual experiences and teachings, which has developed in a new way.\(^{71}\)

In the past, much of the spirituality that was taught and lived was developed by a social, cultural and intellectual group, which alone had the necessary devotion for cultivating mind and spirit.\(^{72}\) In the differing schools of spirituality two main models can be found:

1) an ascetic/monastic model of renunciation spirituality.\(^{73}\)

2) A model of 'householder spirituality' where asceticism is less dominant.\(^{74}\)

1.3.2 Mysticism

As for the term 'mysticism' its origin lies in the Greek root 'mu:',\(^{75}\) suggesting something closed, hidden, or secret and the group of words constructed from it - mystikon, mysterion, and mystes - were used in connection with the Greek mystery religions.\(^{76}\) Mysticism is not confined to 'religion' however, as many describe 'mystical experiences' in a non-religious

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\(^{70}\) Within the Islamic framework this could be exemplified by the teachings of shaykhs to their murids within their tariqs, for which the works of al-Mubasibi serve as a primer.

\(^{71}\) This has been a product of the phenomenological approach to religion and has resulted in many works such as the Classics of Western Spirituality series and the Routledge Curzon Sufi series.


\(^{73}\) Ibid.

\(^{74}\) The author of this categorisation holds that 1) is primarily Christian Spirituality whereas 2) is primarily found in Islam, Judaism and 'Indian' religions. See Hinnels (ed.), Penguin Dictionary of Religions, pp. 495-496. However, it will be shown that many Muslims laid great emphasis on asceticism also.

\(^{75}\) It has been suggested that the term originates from the form 'mueit', meaning to close the lips or eyes, with the probable sense of 'one vowed to keep silence' and hence 'one initiated into the Mysteries', which were secret cults that appear to have survived from both underground and emotional survivals of the pre-Greek religion of the worship of the Earth Mother. See Parrinder, Geoffrey, Mysticism in the World's Religions (London, Sheldon press, 1974) p. 8.

\(^{76}\) Wakefield (ed.), A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, p. 272. This developed in the theory and practice of Christianity; already in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament a 'mystery' was known to the initiated (mystes) as a secret doctrine, which, though not necessarily difficult to understand, should not be revealed. In the New Testament the 'mystery' is the revelation of the word of God, which had not been known in previous ages but was now revealed to the believers. Paul developed this further using terms, which could have a technical, mystical association, such as 'illuminated', 'fullness' and 'wisdom'. Other, later Christian writers and theologians spoke regularly of the sacraments as mysteria, baptism as mystikon and the celebrants of the eucharistic mystery were 'mystagogues'. The basis of all of this however, was in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus, who combined Platonic and other mystical ideas into a coherent whole and whose essays are from the classics of mysticism. Plotinus taught the union (enosis) of the soul with the divine one, which is the Good and the source of all existence and values. Later Christian writers absorbed Neoplatonic ideas and a crucial role was played by the short but potent writings of the so-called 'pseudo Dionysius'. Pseudo Dionysius was probably an anonymous Syrian monk who lived around 500 C. E. and who used many technical terms of the Mysteries. He, like Plotinus before him, wrote of the 'union' of the soul with God and the gradual 'divinisation' (theosis) of man and says that by the exercise of mystical contemplation, the mystic will rise 'by unknowing' (agnosia) towards the union, as far as it is attainable, with him who transcends all being and knowledge. See Parrinder, Mysticism in the World's Religions, pp. 8-10.
context. Thus, in theistic tradition it is often described as a fundamentally unitive experience of love and communion with God, whereas in non-theistic traditions it is described as an intuitive, contemplative approach to ultimate reality. In either case it is understood as an experience beyond ordinary human experience and reason but at the same time is not antagonistic to them. The study of mysticism is undertaken from the perspectives of theology, philosophy and psychology and examines the nature and interpretation of religious experience.  

For most people, mystical experience is only indirectly accessible via mystical literature, which exists in many different genres. Common to them is the insistence on an experience of fundamental unity or oneness transcending the diversity of everyday life. To this end many religions prescribe techniques of contemplation and meditation, as well as a variety of spiritual disciplines and ascetic practices, as a means to reach mystical experience. The majority of mystics maintain that their experience is fundamentally ineffable, i.e. it cannot be adequately expressed; yet this claim does not preclude the describability of such experiences to which the mystical literature in all religions bears witness. Despite this however, when trying to define mysticism we encounter as many, if not more difficulties than with spirituality. A myriad of definitions exist and a brief overview will be given here. In the Cabbalistic tradition for example, mysticism is either a mystery or a mystery of mysteries; it is a mystery when the teacher understands it and it is a mystery of mysteries when neither the teacher nor the pupil understands it. As can be seen this is not particularly helpful to our cause, however, but there are dictionary definitions which require consideration. In the first mysticism is said to be, “Reliance on spiritual intuition or exalted feeling as the means of acquiring knowledge of mysteries inaccessible to intellectual apprehension.” This however, does not mean that mystics discover new facts, as this is the

78 The most common in the Islamic tradition is the use of poetry or prose to describe the authors’ mystical experiences.
80 For an excellent discussion regarding the definition of mysticism see Ellwood (jnr.), Robert S., _Mysticism and Religion_ (New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc., 1980) pp. 27-31. The author eventually settles for the following definition, “Mystical experience is experience in a religious context that is immediately or subsequently interpreted by the experiencer as an encounter with ultimate divine reality in a direct, non-rational way that engenders a sense of unity and of living during the experience on a level of being other than the ordinary.”
81 It is worth noting also however that mysticism is not always seen in a positive light, as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, “From a hostile point of view, mysticism implies self delusion or dreamy confusion of thought; hence the term is often applied to any religious belief to which evil qualities are imputed.” See Parrinder, _Mysticism in the World’s Religions_, p. 7.
82 Ibid.
role of science but we mean that they seek a wisdom, which gives a new vision and understanding of the world.\textsuperscript{83}

To try and define the 'universal core' of mysticism, the philosopher W. T. Stace conducted a study of mystical expression within seven representative experiences.\textsuperscript{84} From these he deduced seven central themes\textsuperscript{85}, which can be summarised as:

1) There is a unifying vision in which the One is perceived by the senses in and through many objects, so that 'All is One'.
2) The One is apprehended as an inner life, or presence in all things, so that 'nothing is really dead'.
3) This brings a sense of reality which is objective and true.
4) There is a feeling of satisfaction, joy and bliss.
5) There is a feeling of the holy and sacred that is the specifically religious element of the experience.
6) There is a feeling that is paradoxical.
7) There is a feeling that is inexpressible in words.\textsuperscript{86}

These observations lead us to give further consideration to mysticism in terms of union. The dictionary gives its central definition of mysticism as, 'belief in the possibility of union with the divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation' and it further defines the mystic as 'one who, whether Christian or non-Christian, seeks contemplation or self surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Deity'.\textsuperscript{87} Zaehner also concedes that the basic idea of mysticism is union but states that there are not only different types of union but also different understandings of the object with which union is to be achieved. What he terms 'profane mysticism' is that which may speak of union simply as 'all is one', a feeling of oneness but without any divine or religious object.\textsuperscript{88}

The simple experience of unification has sometimes been termed Pantheism but this may well be a mistake. Pantheism is the doctrine that God, or at least the divine being, is everything and everything is divine. A simple feeling of unity or exaltation does not necessarily involve any divine being or \textit{theos}. It may be expressed by a phrase from the

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{84} These included two Roman Catholics, one Protestant, one ancient classical, one modern Hindu and two American agnostics. See Parrinder, \textit{Mysticism in the World's Religions}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{85} For a similar discussion see Ellwood, \textit{Mysticism and Religion}, pp. 15-17 and 32-33.
\textsuperscript{86} Although this summary is useful it is not without its critics and does not tell us a great deal about the content of the mystical experience. See Parrinder, \textit{Mysticism in the World's Religions} pp. 11-12.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 13.
Upanishads\textsuperscript{89}, 'You are this all', but that has no evident reference to any divine being. Zaehner prefers to call such a simple expression of unity Pan-en-henism, 'all-in-one-ism'. It is profane not in any derogatory sense but simply because no sacred power is implied. There is a pantheistic mysticism, however, which may be called 'all-God-ism'. This is illustrated by famous sayings of the Upanishads such as 'Thou art That' and 'I am Brahman'. These expressions mean that the individual soul is the eternal and only real Absolute, the ultimate Being.\textsuperscript{90}

Thus, in summary we can distinguish various types of mysticism; theistic mysticism seeks union with God but not identity, whereas monistic mysticism seeks identity with a universal principle, which may be called divine though that would imply a difference from the human. Finally, non-religious mysticism also seeks union with something, or everything rather like monism.\textsuperscript{91}

From the above discussion it is clear that spirituality and mysticism are not the same, although they may occupy a similar sphere of existence, their goals are clearly quite different. As will be seen the initial period of Islamic history was filled with individuals, al-Muḥāṣibī included, who were essentially trying to realise a form of the spirituality as defined above. However, as time passed and the spirituality born out of asceticism progressed, new concepts were derived and full blown \textit{taṣawwuf} was born and often combined many of the ideas presented above as 'mystical'. As a result, this Islamic discipline would be affected forever and therefore, this requires that we now turn our attention the concept of \textit{taṣawwuf}.

1. 4 Sufism (\textit{Taṣawwuf})

The very nature of the topic of \textit{tazkiyat al-nafs}, i.e. its intrinsic spiritual nature, requires that we pay some attention to the topic of Sufism or \textit{taṣawwuf}. This is so that we can draw a comparison between the two areas of research to establish their areas of overlap and to examine the relationship between them. Despite this, however, an exhaustive discussion of

\textsuperscript{89} The Upanishads are texts of the Vedic tradition and were influential in the development of Hindu thought. Upanishad means 'sitting down close to' a Ghuṛu and hence is an esoteric teaching. Like the Brahmanas, to which they are are attached, they are explanations of Vedic tradition but on a mystical rather than a ritual level. See Hinnels (ed.), \textit{Penguin Dictionary of Religions}, p. 540; Nikhilananda, Swami, \textit{The Upanishads - A Second Selection} (London, Phoenix House Ltd., 1954) pp. 1-34 and Olivelle, Patrick, \textit{The Early Upanishads - Annotated Text and Translation} (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 3-27.


\textsuperscript{91} See Parrinder, \textit{Mysticism in the World's Religions}, p. 15.
Sufism is clearly beyond the object of the current thesis92 and this being the case, the present section will revolve around a brief discussion of the following topics:

1. The linguistic origin of the words süfi and taṣawwuf.
2. Definitions of the words süfi and taṣawwuf.
3. The historical development of Sufism.

1.4.1 The Linguistic Origin of the Words Şüfi and Taṣawwuf

Many scholars, past and present, have discussed at length the origin of the words süfi and taṣawwuf, providing a rich and varied body of literature, which will be summarised and presented here. The majority of scholars have concluded that the words süfi and taṣawwuf were unknown during the initial period of Islamic history and thus, the terms are thought to have developed at later date.93 Due to this a wide and diverse variety of opinions can be found in the various sources and can be summarised into the following points:

i) The first of these opinions regarding the origin of the word süfi and taṣawwuf is said to originate from the term al-şaff al-awwal, meaning the first row; this being an indication to the first row of the many rows behind the imam, during prayer, as this was traditionally the position of the righteous, due to their eagerness to be at the forefront of such pious actions. However, linguistically, the derivation of the word is incorrect because if this was the case
the term would not be șūfī but would be saffi and therefore, many scholars reject this derivation.94

ii) The second opinion derives its origin from the term ahl al-ṣūfā (lit. the people of the bench)95 but once again we find that this derivation is incorrect because if the word was derived from ahl al-ṣūfā then the resulting term would be sufī96 and not șūfī97.

iii) The third possibility stems from the Arabic word safā98, meaning to be pure or clean and despite its obvious connection to the subject matter, lexically the term is incorrect as the resultant descriptive noun would be safaW1 and not sü.99


95 These were the Prophet's Companions who were resident in his mosque and usually consisted of the emigrants from Mecca who had no place to stay, or no worldly wealth to speak of. Their state was such that they were also known as `al ghuraba' - the `strangers', i.e. to the worldly life. They were not specific group of people but indeed their number would vary due to their circumstances and condition. However, there were a number of Companions who would remain in the suffa on a permanent basis; these included Ābū Dharr al-Ghifāri (d. 32/652), Ābū Mūsā al-Ashqārī (d. 44/665), Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 35/655) and others. Although their number would vary greatly it is thought that their number may have reached as high as four hundred people. The Prophet was known to encourage the more wealthy members of society to feed them and look after them, so that each person would take one or two of them at each mealtine to eat. It is reported that the more well-to-do members of the Medinan society would complain and request the Prophet to remove them from his company because an unpleasant odour would emanate from them (that of sheep - presumably due to their wearing of wool) but when this happened a portion of the QurD5n was revealed saying, "And be the patient with those who call upon their Lord during the morning and evening, hoping for His pleasure and not turn away from them, desiring the adornments of this world. And do not obey those whose hearts we have made heedless to Our remembrance and those who pursue their desires and whose affairs are worthless".18(26) Due to this the Prophet is reported to have shaken hands with them and would not remove his hand until they did so first. In addition, he would not leave their company until they did so first, out of respect for them. See al-Kalābādhī, al-Ta`arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taşawwuf, p. 10; Ibn al-Jawzī, Ābū al-Rahmān, Tablis Iblīs, edited by Ayman Šālīb (3rd edition, Cairo, Dār al-Hadīth, 1999) pp. 167-8; Ibn Taymiyya, Majmū'at al-Fatāwā, vol. 11, p. 7; al-Sahmārānī, al-Taşawwuf, p. 16; al-Sāyîh and al-Manā`ī, Dirāsāt fi `l-Taşawwuf wa `l-Akhṭāb, p. 24; al-Fawzān, Haqiqat al-Taşawwuf, p. 15; Śādiq, al-Maşāād ār al-Āmmāh li `l-Talaqqī `ind al-Ṣūfīyya, p. 27; Idrīs, Maşāhīr al-Inqa`irī al-Aṣqiyya `ind al-Ṣūfīyya, vol. 1, p. 25; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 14; Baldick, Mystical Islam, pp. 31-32 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, p. 5.

96 Some scholars do not deny the possibility that this derivation may be possible both lexically and practically. From the lexical standpoint the term may have simply been added to by a waw and the shadda removed. Secondly, from the practical viewpoint, the state of the early Sufis was not dissimilar to that of the ahl al-ṣūfā. See al-Kalābādhī, al-Ta`arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taşawwuf, p. 10; al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234), Umar b. ʿAbd Allāh [Abū Ḥafs, Shihāb al-Dīn], Ḥiyāt al-Awliyāʾ (as part of Ghazālī’s Ḥiyāʾ; vol. 5, Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Imīyīya, 2001) vol. 5, pp. 65-6 and al-Sahmārānī, al-Taşawwuf, p. 17.


98 This term will be discussed further when discussing the definition of taşawwuf.

99 For this reason some scholars chose this to be the correct derivation. See al-Kalābādhī, al-Ta`arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taşawwuf, pp. 9-10; al-Asfāhānī, Ḥiyāt al-Awliyāʾ, vol. 1, p. 17; Zarrūq, Ahmad b. Ahmad, Qawā'id al-Taşawwuf, edited by Muḥammad Zuhār al-Najjār (Cairo, Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-ʿAzhariyya, 1967) and al-Sahmārānī, al-Taşawwuf, p. 16.
iv) The fourth possibility is that the word 'Sufi' is derived from a man known as 'Ṣūf', whose actual name was al-Ghawth b. Murr b. Udd b. Ṭābikha b. Ilyās b. Muḍīr. This character was known for his retreat into worship within the Holy precincts of the Ka'ba in Mecca and as such the early Sufis resembled him in this aspect. This opinion has been refuted by the majority of scholars due to its unlikely nature.

v) The fifth option was provided by a scholar named al-Biyrūnī, who suggested that the word süfi derives from the word süfi, coming from the Greek sophos, meaning 'wise'. This opinion has been proposed by several western scholars also but has received little acceptance as being valid.

vi) Another possibility proposed by a minority of scholars, such as al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and al-Hujwiri (d. 465/1072), is that the term 'ṣūfī' is not derived linguistically (ṣiṣṭīqād) nor by analogy (qiṣāṣ), but in fact nothing more than a title (laqāb) given to identify a specific group of individuals.


102 Surprisingly enough this opinion was considered the correct alternative by Ibn al-Jawzī. See Ibn al-Jawzī, Table Al-Bībālīs, pp. 167-8.

103 This is due to several factors: firstly, that this tribe is not very well known and therefore it is unlikely that the early Sufis would have associated themselves within a little known group. Secondly, this tribe were found in the pre-Islamic era and therefore, it is also highly unlikely that a group of Muslims would associate themselves with a people the jāhilī period when their association to the earliest generations of Muslims is more befitting. See Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, vol. 11, p. 7; al-Fawzān, Ḥaqīqat al-Tasawwuf, p. 16; al-Saḥmarānī, al-Tasawwuf, pp. 17-18; Ṣādiq, al-Maṣādār al-ʿĀmma li 'l-Talaqqīʿīd al-Ṣūfīyya, pp. 29-30.

104 Thus, the süfi would be considered a wise man, being from the same root as fayṣaṣ, 'philosopher', which literally means 'the one who loves wisdom'. This has another connotation however, which is that many such süfis were in fact practitioners of medicine - an understanding which is still held today in the Muslim world by the term ḍākīm, who is a practitioner of traditional healing techniques. This was said to be developed even further by the al-Sāyiḥ, who considered themselves to be the 'healers of the hearts'. See Mubārak, Zaki, al-Tasawwuf al-Islāmi B 'l-Adab wa 'l-Akhlāq (Beirut, al-Maktāba al-ʿĀṣirīya, n.d.) vol. 1, p. 41; al-Sāyiḥ and al-Manāfī, Dirāsāt fī 'l-Tasawwuf wa 'l-Akhlaq, pp. 25 and 36-38; Ṣādiq, al-Maṣādār al-ʿĀmma li 'l-Talaqqīʿīd al-Ṣūfīyya, p. 30; Ṣādiq, Maṣādār al-Talaqqīʿīd al-Ṣūfīyya, p. 15; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 14; Baldick, Mystical Islam, pp. 31-32 and Stoddart, William, Sufism - the Mystical Doctrines and Methods in Islam (Wellingborough, Thorsons Publishers Ltd., 1976) p. 20.

105 Schimmel rejects this view on the basis of it being philologically impossible. In addition to this, other questions must be raised: how could a Greek derivation become so widespread when the Greek language had only began to be translated within a similar time frame? Secondly, why these Muslim individuals prefer a 'foreign' and 'atheist' term to express their own, very particular identity? See al-Sāyiḥ and al-Manāfī, Dirāsāt fī 'l-Tasawwuf wa 'l-Akhlaq, pp. 36-38 and Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 14.

vii) The final suggestion is perhaps the most widely accepted and the area to which the majority of scholars have paid the greatest attention: this is the idea that the term 'ṣūf' derives from 'ṣūf' for wool, being similar to qamīs (a shirt) and taqammasa (to wear a shirt), i.e. 'ṣūf' (wool) tašawwafa (to wear wool). In other words, a 'ṣūf' is a person who wears wool, this being the sign of an ascetic and one who renounces the world. 107

It is clear from this discussion that the origin of the term 'ṣūf' has been debated throughout the centuries by various scholars and it is equally clear that there is no definitive answer. Despite this we can say that the the opinions i, iv, v and vi, seem unlikely due both to their linguistic and practical considerations. Although the possibilities suggested in ii and iii seem unlikely linguistically, they remain obvious practical and theoretical models for the 'Ṣūfīyya and therefore cannot be ruled out. The most obvious and most popular choice seems to the final proposition, that of 'ṣūf' and tašawwuf, this too is a highly viable choice mainly due to its linguistic implication, as well as its practical reality. After having discussed the origin of the words 'ṣūf' and tašawwuf, it seems logical that the meaning and implication of these terms be examined and indeed, this is the role of the next section.

1.4.2 Definitions of the words 'Ṣūf' and Tašawwuf
If the origin of the terms 'ṣūf' 108 and tašawwuf prove difficult to pin down then a definition of these two terms is even more elusive. In fact it would seem that there are as many definitions of 'ṣūf' and tašawwuf as there are scholars of this field. For example al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) mentions that the definitions of tašawwuf exceed one hundred, whereas al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234) states that there are more than one thousand statements on the


108 It is interesting to note that this discipline differentiate between the terms 'ṣūf' and mutasaωwuf; the former being the scholar who has reached the spiritual goal of tašawwuf, whereas the latter is the beginner on the path, who is striving to reach the same rank as that of the 'ṣūf. See al-Jilānī (d. 561/1165), 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Ghunya li Tālibi Tariq al-Haqq (3rd edition, Cairo, Maktabat al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi, 1965) vol. 2, p. 160; al-Sahāmānī, al-Tašawwuf, pp. 32-3; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 20 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, p. 5.
subject 110 and Zarrüq (d. 899/1493) claims that there are as many as two thousand.111 Consequently, to produce a definitive description for this concept proves particularly difficult, due to the myriad of definitions that exist.112 Despite this rich diversity within the literature regarding the meaning of the terms șiifi and taşawwuf, there is however a range of identifiable subjects which characterise such definitions. The first identifiable idea that can be found, when trying to capture the essence of taşawwuf, is the inclusion of the concept of moral character/behaviour or khuluq.113 This is exemplified in the statement of Abü Bakr al-Kitāni (d. 233/848) who said, “Taşawwuf is moral character (khuluq). So whoever surpassed you in moral character, has surpassed you in purity (al-ṣaфа’i)114 and in the statement of Abu Muḥammad al-Jariri (d. 311/924) who said, “Taşawwuf is to adopt every Prophetic characteristic (khuluq sunnî) and to depart from every base characteristic (khuluq dannî).”115 In fact this concept was widely accepted which we can derive from Ibn al-Qayyim’s (d. 750/1351) comment, “Those who discuss this discipline agree that taşawwuf is moral character (khuluq).”116

The next easily distinguishable feature that we find is that of etiquette and manners or adab.117 An example of the importance devoted to adab is seen on the statement of Abū Ḥafs al-Ḥaddād, who said:

All of taşawwuf is etiquette (adab): every moment has an etiquette, every state (ḥāla) has an etiquette and every station (maqām) has an etiquette. Whoever observed each moment’s etiquette has reached the position of men; whoever neglected etiquette, then he is distant even when he thinks he is close and he is rejected even though he wishes for acceptance.118

Similarly, al-Hujwiri (d. between 465/1073 and 469/1077) comments:

Know that the beautification and ornamentation of every worldly or religious affair is dependant upon etiquette. Every station (maqām) and every type of

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110 Al-Suhrawardi, ‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif (as part of al-Ghazzāli’s Ihyā’), vol. 5, p. 65 and Şādiq, al-Maşādar al-‘Āmma li ‘l-Talaqqi ‘ind al-Şūfiyya, p. 34.
111 Zarrüq, Qawā'id al-Taşawwuf, p. 3 and Şādiq, al-Maşādar al-‘Āmma li ‘l-Talaqqi ‘ind al-Şūfiyya, p. 34.
115 Ibid., p. 42.
116 Ibid., p. 43.
117 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
moral character (*khuluq*) has its etiquette. The disbeliever (*al-kāfir*) and the Muslim, the monotheist (*al-muwahhid*) and the atheist (*al-mulhīd*), the orthodox (*al-sunni*) and the innovator (*al-mubtadī*), all agree that fine manners in behaviour is good. No formality in the world is completed without the use of etiquette. Etiquette with people is maintaining one's self esteem (*al-marīʿa*), the etiquette of religion is maintaining the *sunnah* and the etiquette of love (*al-mahābbah*) is maintaining its sanctity (*al-ḥurma*). These three are linked to each other as whoever does not maintain *al-marīʿa*, he will not maintain the *sunnah* and whoever does not maintain the *sunnah* will not maintain sanctity.\(^{119}\)

Thus, from these two quotes we can easily see the emphasis that the scholars have given to this particular aspect of *tasawwuf*, to such an extent that it was to embellish every worldly action as well as every religious one.

The final term to be examined here is that of asceticism or *zuhd*. This term is perhaps the most wide spread understanding of the term *tasawwuf*, as for many the word Sufi conjures up an image of an ascetic (*zāhid*) and indeed, as we will see in the next section\(^ {120}\), many consider *tasawwuf* to have developed from an ascetic tendency within the earliest generations of Muslims. This image is also compounded by the various statements of scholars regarding not only the nature of *tasawwuf* but also the essence of *zuhd* and its intrinsic link with *tasawwuf*, even to the extent of classifying ascetics into different categories.\(^ {121}\)

To illustrate this point, al-Junayd (d. 298/810) was asked what asceticism (*zuhd*) was, to which he replied, “To remove your hand from possesion in the worldly life and to eradicate greed from your heart.”\(^ {122}\) Building on this idea Ruwaym b. Ahmad (d. 303/915) stated, “Asceticism (*zuhd*) is to deny *al-nafs* its portion of everything in the world.”\(^ {123}\) To clarify the nature of asceticism further, Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 162/778) said, “*Zuḥd* in the world isn’t wearing a patched cloak (*al-khirga*), or eating barley bread but it is the heart’s lack of attachment to the world and not having high hopes.”\(^ {124}\) Thus, it can be seen that at the very heart of *tasawwuf* is the concept of abstinence from the world and asceticism, which in turn is central to achieving the goals of the Sufi.

\(^{120}\) See pp. 34 and 40 below.  
\(^{121}\) See al-Sāyiḥ and al-Manārī, *Dirāsāt fi 'l-Tasawwuf wa 'l-Akhlāq*, pp. 46-7.  
\(^{122}\) Al-Sāyiḥ and al-Manārī, *Dirāsāt fi 'l-Tasawwuf wa 'l-Akhlāq*, p. 46.  
\(^{123}\) Ibid.  
As time passed, *tasawwuf* underwent several developmental stages including a period of systemisation, where the thoughts, ideas, doctrines and practises of *tasawwuf* were brought together within a clearly identifiable corpus of material and consequently, 'new' definitions of *tasawwuf* began to appear, indicative of this systemisation. In the following statement by al-Ghazzâli (d. 505/1111) we find a loose definition, exemplifying this development and systemisation:

"I understood that their path [i.e. that of the Sufis] is only completed through knowledge and action and the sum of their knowledge was to impose punitive measures upon the nafs and to eliminate its blameworthy traits and disgusting characteristics, until a stage is reached whereby the heart is free from any other than Allāh, being adorned with His remembrance."

In the modern period, after many years had passed to examine the teachings and practises of *tasawwuf*, contemporary scholars who hold a negative view of *tasawwuf* have also attempted to define the term. Thus, we find Zâki Mubârak defining *tasawwuf* as follows, "Al-*tasawwuf* is a combination of Islamic, Christian and Judaic ideas or a spiritual summary of those three religions." Similarly, Muḥammad Shaqfa, defines *tasawwuf* in the following way, "As for *tasawwuf* in our opinion; it is an ascetic method in training the nafs, which relies upon a number of metaphysical beliefs, whose authenticity is not based on any intellectual or religious evidence."

From the above discussion it is clear that there is no definitive definition of *tasawwuf* and the definition of the term varies greatly from person to person, period to period and one's own personal stance regarding this discipline. One may ask however why was there all of this diversity? One main reason for this, in the early period at least, was that each scholar would define the term according to his own personal understanding, state and circumstances. Therefore, the various statements differ due to the circumstances in which they were asked, the nature of the question and questioner and since *tasawwuf* is essentially a human 'journey' of spiritual development, their own personal state at the point they were

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125 See the next section, pp. 35-6 below.
127 It should be pointed out however that this has been done mainly by scholars representing the anti-Sufi genre, who have tried to separate *tasawwuf* from mainstream Islam and which is clear from the quotes above. See Mubârak, *al-Tasawwufu al-Islâmî fi 'l-Adab wa 'l-Akhlaq* vol. 1, p. 160; Shaqfa, *al-Tasawwuf bayn al-Haqq wa 'l-Khaţlq*, p. 7 and Idris, *Maţâhir al-Inîhirâf al-Aqdiyya 'ind al-Ṣâfiyya* vol. 1, pp. 31-33.
asked. Despite this diversity in expression it seems that the overall comprehension of the term *tasawwuf* continues in fact amongst those scholars concerned with it and irrespective of the period and the situation, the essence of *tasawwuf* remains understood. Perhaps one the most eloquent statements in this regard is that of ‘Ali b. Aḥmad Bushānji, who said, “Today, *tasawwuf* is a name without reality but it used to be a reality without a name.” Thus, in the next section we will attempt to survey the historical development of *tasawwuf*, to see how this ‘reality’ came into being.

1.4.3 The Historical Development of Sufism

If the linguistic origin and the definition of the word *tasawwuf* proved problematic then its historical development is no easier to chart. This due to the fact that the researcher, on examining the literature, finds two polarised viewpoints regarding the origin of *tasawwuf*. The first of these suggests that *tasawwuf* is a later incursion on the original Islamic format, being derived from external, ‘foreign’, un-Islamic sources such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Shamanism and Zorastorianism, as well as Greek philosophical influences. As a result, *tasawwuf* is viewed as a later appendage and from the historical perspective its chronology thus starts in the 2nd/8th or 3rd/9th centuries. Contrary to this, there is an opposing view which is that *tasawwuf* has it origins in Islam and more specifically, in the Qurān, ḥadīth and the life of the Prophet and his Companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*). They argue that this developed in the time of the Successors (*al-tābi‘ūn*) and in the time of those after them in much the same way that the other Islamic disciplines such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qurānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and doctrine (*‘aqīda*) did. As a result the historical chronology of *tasawwuf* in this view begins with the Prophet himself and continues with his Companions and the succeeding generations.

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This latter view culminates in the personality of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), a successor who as his name suggests was a native of Iraq, as many regard him to be a pivotal figure in Sufism's development and who is often termed the 'archetypal proto-Sufi'. He is even attributed the honour of being the first person to have used the term 'Sufi', along with Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 162/778), and the first person who is said to have founded a circle for the Sufis was ʿAbd al-Wāḥib b. Zayd (d. ca. 133/750), who was also a companion of al-Ḥasan. Thus, from this short summary it would seem clear that this trend was firmly established in Basra and that the term 'Sufi' was clearly established in the early period of the 2nd/8th century. Similarly, the term taṣawwuf also appears to have been known, which we can derive from the following statement of al-imām Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795), who is reported to have said:

He who practices Sufism (taṣawwufa) without learning sacred Law (lam yatafaqquh) corrupts his faith (tazandaga), while he who learns sacred Law (tafaqqaḥa) without practicing Sufism (lam yatasawwut) corrupts himself (tafassaqa). Only he who combines the two has achieved the realisation (tahagqaqa).

These were not the only names known in the period and in fact we find a rich mosaic of various personalities, who in one way or another were influential on the development of Sufism, as well as portraying a variety of devotional styles. This can be seen in the next generation of Muslim ascetics who included Ibrahim b. Adham (d. 160/777), ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) and Fudayl b. ʿIyāḍ (d. 188/803). Perhaps the most

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137 See Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, vol. 11, p. 7; Ṣādiq, al-Maṣādār al-Āmmā liʿl-Talaqqī ʿind al-Šīfiyya, p. 38 and Idris, Maẓāhir al-Īmān al-ʿAgādiyya ʿind al-Šīfiyya, vol. 1, p. 36. This is in opposition to Baldick and Schimmel, who state that the first person who was termed a Sufi was a certain Abū Ḥāshim, who died in 161/776. See Mystical Islam, p. 30 and Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 31.
141 See Ibn ʿAjlūn, ʿAbd al-Muḥammad, Ḥujjat al-Ḥikam wa Sharḥ al-Ḥikam (Cairo, Muṣṭafā al-Bābi wa Awlāduhu, 1972) pp. 5-6 and al-Miṣrī, Ṣūluk wa ʿUddat al-Ṭāhirī, p. 862. This statement once again would seem to prove Baldick wrong, see footnotes 135 and 138.
142 From al-Ḥasan's circle alone were the following: Yāzīd b. Abān al-Raqāṣī (d. between 101/729 and 121/738), Muḥammad b. Wāṣi (d. 127/738), Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 128/745), Farqad al-Sabakhi (d. 132/749) and Dāwūd al-Taʿārī (d. 165/781). See Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 13 and 35.
143 For details concerning his life see al-Miṣrī, Ṣūluk wa ʿUddat al-Ṭāhirī, p. 1061; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 37 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 19-20.
144 For details concerning his life see Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 21-2.
innovative of these devotional styles was that of Rābi`a al-`Adawiyya (d. 185/801), who promoted the concept of 'absolute love for the divine', and was later to influence many with her love mysticism. Another is Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 195/810) who was instrumental in the formation of mystical language, speculation and what is now termed 'the knowledge of the Path' (īlm al-tāriq), as he seems to have been the first to discuss the various levels of spiritual attainment and their stages (manāzil).

These teachings were not only confined to the eastern provinces and indeed there were many important characters were also found in the western territories, who were disseminating the eastern tradition. For example, in Syria there was Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), who had studied with 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd and evolved his own version of al-Ḥasan's teaching. Similarly, in Egypt we find Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/860), who studied with Fuḍayl b. ʿIyad and is accredited with the systematic teaching of the mystic 'states' (ahwāl) and the 'stations' (maqāmāt).

This rich period was the 'golden age' in the development of what would become known as Sufism and culminated in what was later referred to as being the 'Baghdadi School'. This 'school' had amongst it ranks some of the most famous names to be found in Sufi history and was to have arguably the greatest influence on future generations. This is of importance to the current research as the subject of the thesis, namely al-Ḥārith al-Mubasibi, was not only a major figure of it but also one of the major contributors to its thought and teaching. Due to its heavy emphasis on extreme asceticism and its strong moral teaching, the Baghdadi School was often termed the 'sober (ṣaḥw) school' of Sufism and was said to be

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145 For details concerning his life see Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, pp. 35-6 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 23-4.
147 For details concerning his life and teaching see Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 38 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 32-5.
150 The Baghdādi School will be discussed later, see chapter three, section 3.4.1 below.
151 These included: Maʿruf al-Karkhi (d. 200/815), Bishr al-Ḥāfi (d. 247/842), Sari al-Saqāṭī (d. 253/867), Abū Saʿd al-Kharrāz (d. ca 286/899), al-Junayd al-Baghdādi (d. 298/810), Abū Hamza al-Khurāsānī (d. between 290/903 and 298/911), ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān al-Makki (d. 291/903), Abū ʿl-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907), Ruwaym b. Ahmad (d. 303/915), Khayr al-Nassāj (d. 322/934), Abū Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/946), Abū Muḥammad al-Jurayrī (d. 312/924), Abū ʿAli al-Rūḍbārī (d. 322/934) and Jaʿfar al-Khulḍī (d. 348/959).
exemplified by al-Junayd (d. 298/910). In contrast to this, there developed another school the so-called 'school of intoxication (sukr)', which would appear to have its roots in the teachings of Abū Yazid al-Biṣāmi (d. 234/848 or 261/875). These concepts were developed further by one of the most controversial figures in the history of Sufism and Islam, that of al-Ḥusayn b. Mansūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), until a whole new ideological teaching was formed. A discussion of al-Ḥallāj is beyond the scope of the current treatise but what is clear is that he is representative of a school of mystics who were given to so-called 'ecstatic utterances' (shaṭaḥāt), whilst expressing their experience of the divine and which, as a result, often raised the hackles of the jurists, due to their seemingly blasphemous overtones.

This is not to say however that Baghdad was the only centre for Sufism and Sufis. In the same way that individuals appeared throughout the Islamic empire, as we have seen, other ascetic and mystical movements existed outside of Baghdad. In Basra for example there was a group that developed known as the Sālimiya. The roots of this movement lie with the famous mystic Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustari (d. 283/896), his disciple Mūḥammad b. Sālim (d. 297/909) and the latter's son Aḥmad b. Sālim (d. 356/967), from whom the movement took its name. The thought and teaching of the Sālimiya are found articulated in the words of Abu Ṭālib al-Makki (d. 386/996), in his monumental work Qūt al-Quṣūb.

A regional school which did not survive the ideological expansion of Baghdad Sufism was that of the Karrāmiyya, which flourished in Jerusalem. Transoxiana and Khurasān from

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155 For an exhaustive discussion regarding the shaṭaḥāt see Ernst, Carl W., Words of Ecstasy in Sufism (Alhany, State University of New York Press, 1985) which gives an extensive introduction to this topic on pp. 9-20 and discusses al-Ḥallāj in detail on pp. 63-72 and pp. 102-110.

156 For a discussion of relationship between the orthodox and that of the Sufis regarding shaṭaḥāt see Ernst, Words of Ecstasy in Sufism, pp. 117-132.

157 See page 41 above.


the 3rd/9th century until the Mongol conquest, under the auspices of their founder Ibn Karrām (d. 255/869).162

A contemporary movement to that of the Karrāmiyya was a loosely structured ascetic movement known as the Malāmatiyya163, who derived their name from the Qur'anic verse (5:54), which praises those who, “Fear not the blame of any blamer.” This group emerged in Nishapur in the 3rd/9th century and derived its following mostly from a middle class artisan or mercantile milieu. Al-Sulami, the first author to describe the tenets of the Malāmatiyya, linked its origins with the teaching of Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār, his master Abu Ḥafs al-Ḥaddād (d. between 265/874 and 270/869) and Abū ʿUthmān al-Hīrī (d. 298/910). The latter was a disciple of Yaḥyā b. Muʿādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) who accredited with giving Khurāsānī mysticism its final form.

Following the formalisation of various other Islamic disciplines such as fiqh and hadith, in the 4th/10th century, Sufism also underwent a period of construction and consolidation and many scholars term this period ‘a period of systemisation of the Sufi tradition.’164 In fact within the next century, from 356/967 to 465/1074, we find that a myriad of treatises, biographical/historical works and manuals were produced discussing Sufism as a discipline or a science, which was termed ‘ilm al-tasawwuf. An in-depth discussion of these works, their contents and their contribution to Sufi thought is beyond the scope of the current work but the major works and their authors will be mentioned, so as to provide the reader with an overview.

The first of these worth mentioning is Ṭabaqāt al-Nussāk by Abū Saʿīd al-ʿArabī (d. 341/952), followed by Akhbār al-Ṣūfīyya by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Dāwūd Pārsā (d. 342/953), Ḥikāyāt al-Mashāʾikh by Jaʿfar al-Khulḍī (d. 348/953), Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya by Abū al-Faraj al-Warahānī (d. 372/982) and finally, Ḥikāyāt al-Ṣūfīyya by Abū Bakr Shāḥīn al-Rāzī (d. 376/986). These works provided the basis for the classical Sufi text books, which gave Sufism its final shape and orthodox flavour, namely Kitāb al-Lumaʾ fiʾl-Taṣawwuf by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988)165, Qūt al-Qulūb by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 465/1074).166

162 For a discussion of the Karrāmiyya see Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 88-94.
164 See Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, pp. 77-97; Baldick, Mystical Islam, pp. 50-85 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 116-149.
165 For a discussion of this work and its author see Ibn al-Jawzi, Tablis Iḥlīs, p. 169; Sādiq, al-Maṣāḏdar al-ʿAmma liʾl-Taẓāqqiʾ ʿinda al-Ṣūfīyya, p. 44; Idris, Maẓāhir il-Aḥkām il-ʿَا qālīyya ʿinda al-Ṣūfīyya, vol. 1, p. 47; Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 84; Baldick, Mystical Islam, p. 55 and Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 118-120.
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386/996)\(^{166}\) and *al-Ta’arruf li Madhhab Abl al-Tašawwuf* by Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990).\(^{167}\) One should also not neglect to mention the valuable contributions of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami (d. 412/1021)\(^{168}\), especially his *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, the *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā* of Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿAsfahānī (d. 430/1038)\(^{169}\), the *Risāla fi ‘l-Tašawwuf* of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074)\(^{170}\) and the first Persian treatise on Sufism by ʿAli b. ʿUthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. 469/1077) entitled *Kashf al-Mahjūb*.\(^{171}\) In addition, it is interesting to note that the tone of these works is often apologetic so as to satisfy the opponents of Sufism regarding its orthodoxy, which built up from the earliest period and culminated in the execution of al-Ḥallāj and its consequent backlash.\(^{172}\) The fourth century ended and the fifth began with perhaps the most celebrated ‘champion’ of the Sufi cause, that of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111)\(^{173}\), who is accredited by many to have bridged the gap between the Sufis and the ‘orthodox’ with his *magnum opus Iḥyā‘ Ulūm al-Dīn*.

In the post-Ghazzālī period, the next major development in Sufism came in the form of perhaps the most synonymous term associated with Sufism and one, which is known to the majority, that of the Sufi brotherhoods or *ṭuruq*, as they are known in Arabic. A major discussion of this topic is, as stated several times before, beyond the scope of the present work but a brief overview of some of the major brotherhoods will be given here.\(^{174}\) After a period of consolidation, where Sufi theory had been systemised, various groups of Sufis appeared and gathered in ‘lodges’ (*zāwiya*, *khānaqā*, *ribāṭ*) established by their


predecessors. These ‘novices’ (murid) would gather around a ‘master’ (shaykh) from whom they would take spiritual instruction. This instruction would normally take the form of remembrance (dhikr) or litanies (wird, hizb), spiritual music (samâ, ḥadra) and seclusion (khalwa) for those more advanced along the ‘path’ (tariq). This basic formula also developed a hierarchical system, including specific rites of initiation, codes of conduct (adab) and spiritual genealogy (silsilâ). These basic elements, as well as others, were common to most tariqas but varied according to the specific teachings of each master and the geographical location of the tariqa, which resulted in many ‘off shoots’ or ‘branches’ of the original brotherhood.

Despite this rich mosaic of mystical schools, several major brotherhoods can be indentified. The first of these worth mentioning here is the Qädiriyya founded by ‘Abd al-Qädir al-Jiläni (d. 561/1166). A contemporary of ‘Abd al-Qädir was ‘Abd al-Qähir al-Suhrawardî (d. 563/1168) who is attributed with establishing the Suhrawardiyya brotherhood. North African Sufism is to a large extent associated with the Shädhiliyya brotherhood, which in turn is inextricably linked with the personality and teachings of Abû al-İhasan ‘Ali al-Shâdhili (d. 656/1258), although this tariqa also has branches throughout the world. In Central Asia, although certainly not confined to it, the next major tariqa, the Naqshbandiyya, found its eponymous founder in the form of Bahâ’ al-Din Muhammâd b. Muhammad Naqshband (d. 791/1389). These brotherhoods, as well as many others beyond the scope of the present study, were instrumental in developing the form of Sufism

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known throughout the world today and not only that but from their inception they were a powerful motivating force, as we shall see later.¹⁷⁹

The next major development within the field of Sufism was firstly, the expansion of the poetical theme which had been present throughout - as Sufis often preferred to express their experience through verse - and secondly, its somewhat uncomfortable relationship with metaphysics. The poetical theme was developed in the sense that for the first time Persian replaced Arabic as the preferred medium and one of the primers of this change was Farid al-Din al-`Attār (d. 627/1230) ¹⁸⁰, in such works as *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*. The Arab poets were not without representation, however and their thought was expressed by Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) of Cairo, who was to have an equally important role in influencing Sufi ideas.¹⁸¹ The Persian tradition was to reach its pinnacle however in the form of Jalāl al-Din Rūmü (d. 672/1273), who benefitted greatly from al-`Attār and consequently was known as the greatest Persian poet, due to such works as the *Mathnawi*, which is considered to be his *magnum opus*.¹⁸² The languages of both Arabic and Persian were used to express the thought of the final poet to be discussed here, that of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi (d./1492), in such works as *Tuḥfat al-Aḥrār* and *Subḥat al-Abhrār* but he will also be remembered for his commentaries on the works of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Muḥammad b. 'Ali (Muḥyī al-Din) Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240), to which he contributed a great deal in the development of the latter’s thought.¹⁸³

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¹⁷⁹ See pp. 47-8 below.


This latter scholar, i.e. Ibn ‘Arabi, with the exception of al-Ḥallāj, is arguably the most controversial figure in the history of Islam, let alone that of taṣawwuf. This rather unenviable position arose due to his development of what may be termed ‘the metaphysical theosophy’ of Sufism. In such works as *Fusūṣ al-Hikam* and *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyya* he expounded his own mystic interpretations of Islam, developing the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This earned him the honourific title of ‘*shaykh al-akbar*’ (the greatest *shaykh*) whereas those less endeared to him regarded him as ‘*shaykh al-akfar*’ (the most heretical *shaykh*). Like him or loathe him, Ibn ‘Arabi has had a major effect on the development of Sufism as we know it, as both his works and his thought are still considered by some corners of the Sufi fraternity to represent the essence of ‘true’ Sufism.

It is hardly surprising that such controversial ideas would be the target of an assault from the ‘orthodox’ elements of the Islamic community and indeed the 12th–14th/18th–20th centuries witnessed a backlash upon Sufism, reminiscent of al-Ḥallāj’s era. This was not the only threat that Sufism faced however and indeed Sufism, as with the rest of Islam, was under severe pressure from their colonialist mentors. Despite this onslaught Sufism was now deeply entrenched in the popular religion of the masses and survived the attack. In fact, the Sufi brotherhoods were often instrumental in the politics of this period and their role in it varied considerably. On occasions they were instrumental in the maintenance of colonialist rule, whereas in others they were in violent opposition to it. In any case

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185 As Knys puts it rather succinctly, “He [Ibn ʿArabi] viewed the world as a product of God's self-reflection that urged His unique and indivisible essence to show itself in the things and phenomena of the material universe as in a mirror. ... In Ibn ʿArabi's system, God was not the otherworldly and impregnable entity of the mainstream Muslim theologians. Consequently, many of the latter came to view him as the founder of the heretical doctrine of oneness of being (waḥdat al-wujūd), understood as pantheism pure and simple.” See Knys, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 168.

186 For an example of this see Chittick, *Sufism - A Short Introduction*, where the author continually refers to Ibn ʿArabi as if to represent Sufism through the latter's thought and teaching.


188 Ibid., pp. 27-85.

189 For a discussion regarding the role of Sufism in the regional, social context over the last six centuries see Knys, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 245-300.

190 For example see Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, pp. 30-4.

191 Ibid., pp. 34-42.
Sufism has survived into the 21st century and remains as the focus of religious life for many Muslims.

From the above discussion it is clear that the term 'Sufism' has no clear cut definition nor a singular method to reach its goals. However, the basic concept, in its early phase at least, was understood. Despite this, the word 'Sufism', particularly in the later period, also seems to have used as an umbrella term to encompass a mixture of beliefs, practices and teachings, some of which may have even been at odds with 'mainstream', 'orthodox' Islam.

As for its development, what we now know as Sufism would appear to have its primordial origins in the Prophetic period, which passed onto the Companions and their followers, the early Successors. However, it was during the Umayyad period that the signs of what would be recognised as Sufism were made manifest. This seems to have been a reaction to the decadence and extravagance of the Umayyid leaders and a longing to return to the simplicity and spirituality of the Prophetic period. Sufism like the other Islamic disciplines of the period did not stop there however and much like the development of fiqh, regional schools sprang up, including the celebrated Baghdadi school. With the introduction of other peoples, cultures and beliefs, we have seen that Sufism then took on specific characteristics, particularly in the period of systemisation. This development did not stop there, as both Persian as a language and Greek metaphysics as a philosophy, took Sufism to new dimensions, which were then incorporated and preserved in the various Sufi brotherhoods that are manifest until the current period.

The question remains however, "What is the relationship between Sufism and tazkiyat al-nafs?" The next chapter will attempt to answer this question as it tackles the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs in Islam.

192 See Bushânjî's comment, p. 31 above.
Chapter Two: The Concept of *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* in Islam

Having provided the reader with an outline of the ideas and methodology behind the current thesis it is now time to turn our attention to the first major section of the work. As the title suggests this thesis aims to explore the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam so as to draw a comparison between it and the teachings of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi. To achieve this aim the chapter will be divided into the following sections: firstly, an examination of the meaning of the words *tazkiya* and *nafs* etymologically, i.e. within the Arabic language, by referring to classical and contemporary lexical sources to arrive at a basic linguistic understanding for these terms. Secondly, an in-depth study of these two terms as found in the Qur'an, being the primary source of Islamic thought and Law, by locating these words within their various Qur'ānic contexts and examining them in the light of the exegetical literature (*tafāsir*). Having derived a meaning for these two terms in the Qur'ānic context, attention will then be turned to the second source of Islamic thought and Law, i.e. the *hadith*, by consulting the foremost collections of *ḥadith* and their explanatory companion texts (*shurūḥ*) to arrive at an understanding of how these words were used by the Prophet, his Companions and the early generations who followed them. The final section will deal with the statements of the scholars of Islam (*al-ʿulamāʾ*) throughout history, by consulting them in their various source works to examine their understanding of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, in the light of what was discussed in the previous sections.

2.1 The Concept of the Terms *Tazkiya* and *Nafs* within the Arabic Language

Although we wish to examine the concept of the compound phrase *tazkiyat al-nafs* as a whole it suits our purpose here to treat each term separately and then attempt to derive an overall understanding of the phrase. Consequently, the term *tazkiya* will be dealt with first and the term *nafs* will be dealt with thereafter.

2.1.1 The Concept of the Term *Tazkiya* within the Arabic Language

The term ‘*tazkiya*’ is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of the form II verbal conjugation ‘*zakkā*’, the root of this verb being *Zay Kāf Yā*. On examining the lexical sources it is not surprising that this form of the verb is intrinsically linked to form I of the verb ‘*zakā*’ and as such, the discussion of the connotations of *tazkiya* will begin here. The essential meanings of this
form of the verb are to grow and flourish (nāmā), or increase and augment (zād), or enjoy
the blessing and abundance of God (tanāma) but can also mean to reform (ṣalāḥa) if used
in conjunction with a person. In addition, it is also worth noting that the adjective derived
form the verb ‘zakiyyut (pl. azkiyā) means righteous or pious and is synonymous with
‘taqiyyut (pl. atqiyyā). As for the form II of the verb ‘zakkā; it possesses the meanings alluded to above but the
emphasis of the action is different, in the sense that form II indicates a causal effect; for
example ‘zakkā’ does not just mean to grow, increase and reform but means to cause to
grow, increase and be reformed. In addition, another of the essential meanings of the form
of the verb is to be purified (jahhara - [hu]) and is used in conjunction with himself (zakkā
nafsahū) to indicate self-praise. This concept of ‘praise’ is also extended to other contexts
where the term ‘tazkiya’ is used for example in the legal context, when tazkiya is used in
conjunction with witnesses (shuḥūd); it would indicate their suitability to perform this task
in a court of Law. Similarly, this concept of suitability is also seen when the term tazkiya is
used in connection with a candidate for a particular post, as tazkiya here would mean
‘recommendation’. Perhaps the most familiar derivative however, from the root Zay Kāf
Yā in the Islamic context, is the term ‘zakāt, this being the third ‘pillar’ of the Islamic faith
and indeed, when the form II verb is used in conjunction with a person’s wealth (mālahu) it
means to pay the appropriate amount of zakāt, which is due.

Having briefly surveyed the lexical sources regarding the meaning of the term ‘tazkiya’ it is
now appropriate that the term ‘nafs’ is now examined, which is the task of the next section.

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Beirut, ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1994) vol. 6, p. 300; al-Fayruzābādi (d. 817/1414), Muḥammad b. Yaqūb, al-Qāmūs
al-Muḥīf, edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Ma‘āshī (2 vols., Beirut, Dār Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī,
Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq al-‘Ubaydi (15 vols., Beirut, Dār Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-
‘Arabī, 1999) vol. 6, p. 64; al-Muqīrī (d. 770/1368), Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Fa‘ūlī, al-Mīsāḥ al-
660/1262), Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr, Mukhtar al-Sīhāb, (Beirut, Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1992) p. 273 and Lane,

194 Literally to attribute ‘purity’ and excellence to one’s self.

195 For example, a letter of recommendation or reference is often termed ‘risāla tazkīyiyya’.

2.1.2 The Concept of the Term *Nafs* within the Arabic Language

As for the term 'nafs' it is a noun derived from the root *Nūn Fā Shin* and is distinguished by the second letter, i.e. *Fā*, having the sukūn vowel marking. The word *nafs* (pl. *anfus/nufūs*) is unusual in the sense that it has a variety of connotations, some seemingly having no link whatsoever with the original meaning of the verb. In this sense a survey of all the meanings of this noun will be made so as to provide the reader with a glimpse of the variety that this term provides. Thus, on examining the lexical sources regarding the word *nafs*, we find the following usages:

1. The Soul (*al-rūḥ*)

There seems to be a consensus in the sources consulted regarding this usage of 'nafs', as all of them allude to this meaning: the Arabs are known to say, “His soul left [his body] (kharajat nafsuhu)”. In fact, there seems to be an indication that the terms 'nafs' and 'rūḥ' are synonyms for the English equivalent of 'the soul'. Despite this however, as will become clear from the discussion below, some authors indicate that they are not synonymous with one another. In addition, it is worth mentioning that *rūḥ* is viewed as a masculine noun whereas *nafs* is mostly regarded to be feminine.\(^{197}\)

2. Blood (*al-damm*)

Similarly, there seems to be a consensus in the sources regarding this usage of 'nafs', as all of them allude to this meaning, as the Arabs are known to say, “His blood ran (sālat nafsuhu)”.\(^{198}\) The implication of this however, is far deeper than one might expect, since the ‘blood’ here signifies the ‘life-blood’ of a living being, since it is blood which facilitates life through its passage through the arteries and veins. The link between this usage and the previous one is also not difficult to establish, since if one’s blood flowed to such an extent that one’s life were threatened, then the soul would also follow it upon death.\(^{199}\)

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\(^{198}\) It has also been explained that this is why women who experience blood flows as a result of post-natal bleeding are termed ‘al-nufasā’ which is derived from the same root as *nafs*. See al-Muqrī’, *al-Miṣḥāḥ al-Munīr*, p. 317.

3. Life (al-

hayāt) and 4. The Intellect (al-

āqīl)

This is based on the statement which was related from the Prophetic Companion ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAbbās (d. c. 67-8/686-8) who is reported to have said, “Every human being has two nafs; the first of them is the nafs of the intellect (al-

āqīl), with which he discriminates and the other is the nafs of the soul (al-

rūh) through which life exists.” The rationale behind this comment can be understood in the following way: when a person sleeps the first type of nafs, i.e. the intellect, mentioned here is said to be taken by Allah200 and as such, a person loses consciousness during sleep. Such a person may be unconscious but is still alive as the soul (al-

rūh), which is the cause of his life, is still intact and this person will not die until the soul is actually taken at death.201 Once again the link between the concepts expressed here and those proposed in the first two meanings are not incredibly dissimilar and they accommodate each other quite easily.202

5. The Self

This is used as a reflexive pronoun in the same way that it is used in English to mean ‘myself, ‘yourself, ‘ourselves’ etc., as the Arabs use it in much the same way. For example, they would say, “He talked to himself (ḥaddathahu nafsahu)”, or “He killed himself (qatala nafsahu)” and “He caused himself to fall into destruction (ahlaka nafsahu).”203

6. The Essence (al-

dhāt) and 7. The Body (al-

jasāṣ)

These two meanings are supported by examples in the Arabic language itself but do not transfer very well into English; for example, if we examine the concept of ‘essence (al-

dhāt)” the Arabs would say, “Nafs al-

jabal muqābili (lit. [the essence of] the mountain is in front of me)” and with regard to a person they would say, “Ra’aytu fulān nafsahu (lit. I saw so and so [himself]).” As for the term nafs meaning the body (al-

jasāṣ), many sources quote this term but give no examples as to how it is used linguistically.204

200 Through an angel.

201 In Islamic theology it is actually an angel - the Angel of Death (Malak al-

Mawrī) - who takes the nafs but the command itself comes from Allah.

202 See Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-

 Arbāb, vol. 14, p. 234; al-

Rāzi, Mukhtār al-

Ṣiḥāḥ, p. 672 and Lane, An Arabic-

English Lexicon, vol. 1, p. 2827.

203 Al-Fayruzābādī, al-

Qāmūs al-


204 Al-Fayruzābādī, al-

Qāmūs al-

Muflīf, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-

 Arbāb, vol. 14, p. 235; Muṣṭafā et al (eds.), al-

Mujam al-

Wasīṭ, p. 940; al-

Rāzi, Mukhtār al-

8. The Human Being (al-\textit{insān})

The word \textit{nafs} may also be used to mean a human being as a whole (\textit{al-shakhs}) as the Arabs would say, \textquotedblleft I have three people with me (\textit{‘indi thalātha anfus}).\textquotedblright\ It is also worth mentioning that when it is used this way many scholars consider it to take a masculine form.\textsuperscript{205}

9. Manners/Endurance/Generosity (\textit{khulūq/ jalāda/sakḥā})\textsuperscript{206}

In this instance the term \textit{‘nafs} is used as an adjective to describe a person positively as the Arabs would describe a man as being \textit{rajulun dhū \textit{nafs}}, i.e. as having manners (\textit{khulūq}), endurance (\textit{jalāda}) and generosity (\textit{sakḥā}).\textsuperscript{207}

10. An Evil Eye (\textit{al-‘ayn})

This usage of the word indicates that \textit{‘nafs} is a synonym for the term \textit{‘ayn} meaning an evil or envious eye, as the Arabs are known to say, \textit{‘aṣābat-hu \textit{nafsun}}, meaning \textquoteleft he has been affected by an evil eye.\textquoteright\ In fact the source of the evil eye (\textit{al-‘ayn}) is also termed \textit{‘al-nafis}, the person affected by the evil eye (\textit{al-mayūn}) is termed \textit{‘al-manfūs} and the evil eyes themselves (\textit{al-‘uyūn}), which affect the wealth and possessions of people and so on, are known as \textit{‘al-nufūs}, all of which are derived from the same root.\textsuperscript{208}

11. Punishment (\textit{al-‘uqūba})

This particular meaning of \textit{nafs} is arrived from the discussion of two particular Qur\textsuperscript{ā}nic verses, namely (3: 28 and 30), where the phrase, \textit{Wa yuhadhdhrūkum Allāh \textit{nafsahu}} (And Allāh warns you concerning His \textit{nafs}), is repeated and since this usage does not fit with the usual usages discussed in this section, scholars allude to the concept of \textit{nafs} here to mean punishment (\textit{al-‘uqūba}) and thus, the verse would therefore read, \textit{And Allāh warns you concerning His punishment.\textsuperscript{209}}


\textsuperscript{206} This may also be indicative of the positive human qualities and virtues that a person may develop if the soul is nurtured in the correct manner.


Similarly, this usage is narrated in the lexical sources to describe another Qur'anic verse, namely (24:61), where the phrase, “If you enter houses then greet yourselves,” the literal meaning of which is ‘yourselves’ and in which case the verse would read, “And if you enter houses then greet yourselves.” As such the verse seems to make little sense and therefore scholars have mentioned that the meaning is not literal here; thus, the suggested meaning of ‘anfusikum’ here is ‘your brothers’ in which case the verse would read, “And if you enter houses then greet your brothers.”

13. Meaning ‘with’ (‘inda) and 14. The Unseen (al-ghayb)

These meanings of the term nafs are also derived from a Qur'anic verse, namely (5:116), where the story of Jesus (Isa) is related, and the phrase, “You know what is in my nafs but I do not know what is in Your nafs,” is found. As a result the interpretations regarding the meaning of ‘nafs’ here have attempted to accommodate a usage consistent with the divine attributes of Allah and at the same time render an appropriate meaning. One of the suggestions made is that the meaning of ‘nafs’ in the verse is ‘with’ (‘inda) and thus, the rendering of the verse would be, “You know what is with me (‘inda) but I do not know what is with You (‘indak).” Similarly, another proposed meaning is that the term ‘nafs’ here means the unseen, the hidden or that which is concealed (al-ghayb) and thus the understanding of the verse would be, “You know what I have concealed (ghaybi) but I do not know what You have concealed (al-ghayb).”

Another option was supplied by al-Fayrūzābādi (d. 817/1414), who suggests that ‘nafs’ also implies the meaning of reality (al-haqiq) and thus, he considers the meaning of the verse...
to be, “You know what the reality of me is (ḥaqīqati) but I do not know what the reality of You is (ḥaqīqatak).”

15. Majesty/Might/Zeal/Pride (al-‘azama/ al-‘izza/ al-himma/ al-anafa) Al-Fayruzabadi, Ibn Manzur and Lane all allude to these meanings of al-nafs but give little further qualification, making it difficult to assess the usage of such terms in the Arabic language.

16. An amount of tanning material (qadr dabgha) This is perhaps the most surprising usage of the term but nevertheless the lexical sources regularly mention that the word nafs was used by the Arabs to denote a quantity of tanning material used for the tanning of hides and that the measure would be approximately a handful (mil‘ al-kafi).

2. 1. 3 Section Summary Since the classical works of Islam are presented in the Arabic language, it was the goal of this section to survey the lexical sources dealing with this language to arrive at an understanding, which will provide the groundwork for subsequent discussions. This being the case, both the terms ‘tazkiya’ and ‘nafs’ were dealt with separately, so as to survey the various meanings, usages and connotations that these words have within the Arabic language. The discussion has no doubt produced a variety of information, which in some cases may have been surprising.

On examining the term ‘tazkiya’, it is clear that the usages of this word related to the payment of zakāt and self-praise/recommendation are of little worth to the current discussion, as their relevance is limited. Similarly, the form I verb construction gives little more than an indication of the meanings, which are appropriate to the subject matter as a whole. Not surprisingly it was the form II verb construction - of which ‘tazkiya’ is a verbal noun (maṣdar) - that provided the most useful results. The meaning of purification


213 It may well be that these could be negative qualities which manifest themselves in the soul if it is not disciplined in the correct manner.


(tahhara) was very much expected as this is the most common phrase used by authors when discussing this topic. However, other, less expected meanings were also observed; these included to grow and flourish (namā), or increase and augment (zād), or enjoy the blessing and abundance of God (tan‘ama) but can also mean to reform (ṣalāḥa), all of which indicate an overall process of development, which could be termed ‘purification’ in the broad sense.

As for the term ‘nafs’, the task has proved far more complex, as the usage of this word in the Arabic language seems to have a variety of meanings, many of which are not consistent with the topic of discussion here. Examples of this include: blood (al-damm), life (al-ḥayāt), manners/endurance/generosity (khuluq/ jalāda/sakhā), an evil eye (al-‘ayn), punishment (al-‘uqūbā), brother (al-akh), ‘with’ (‘inda), the unseen (al-ghayb), majesty/might/zeal/pride (al-aẓama/al-‘izzā/al-himma/al-anafa) and an amount of tanning material (qadr dabgha). In contrast however, the remaining usages may all have some significance regarding the subject matter and as a result the terms the soul (al-rūḥ), the intellect (al-‘aqil), the self, the essence (al-dhāt), the body (al-jasā), the human being (al-insān), all require further qualification.

Thus, although at a very superfluous level, the above discussion would suggest that the term ‘tazkiyat al-nafs’ from the perspective of the Arabic language at least, would indicate the growth, augmentation, reform and development of a human being’s soul, intellect, body and self. This however, is the result of consulting the lexical sources of the Arabic language only and therefore, it remains vital to examine this term in the light of Islam, which is the task of the next section by referring to Islam’s primary source - the Qurān.

2.2 The Concept of the Terms Tazkiya and Nafs within the Qurān

The discussion in the last section concerned the meaning of the terms ‘tazkiya’ and ‘nafs’ within the context of the Arabic language, due to no other reason than the fact the classical source texts of Islam - namely the Qurān and the hadth - are recorded in this language and as such, the Arabic language provides the researcher with a valuable starting point in understanding any ‘Islamic’ term.

There can be no doubt that the aforementioned discussion has been enlightening but it is not sufficient however as the goal of the current thesis is to examine such terms in the context of Islam as a whole. Thus, the next logical step is to examine these terms within the Qurān, as this is regarded by Muslims throughout the ages to be the direct, revealed word.

Consequently, each of these terms will be examined individually to come to an understanding of the meanings in the Qur'ānic context, so as to shed light on their implications within the religion of Islam.

2.2.1 The Concept of the Term \textit{Tazkiya} within the Qur'ān

From the Islamic perspective it is Allah who created the human being and his \textit{nafs}, as the following Qur'ānic verse states: "O Mankind, fear your Lord Who created you from a single \textit{nafs}"\footnote{The word \textit{nafs} here could have the any of the following meanings: "[from a single] soul, person, human being ..." and refers to the first created man and prophet Ādam. This is significant in itself as in the Islamic tradition Allāh created Ādam as a single \textit{nafs} and then Allāh created his mate from this single \textit{nafs}; consequently, through a normal procreative process many \textit{nafs} were produced from a single lineage. Therefore, it is also logical that since the source of humanity is a single \textit{nafs} that each of individual human beings who followed would share some form of that humanity and certain qualities, which would be common to all. See Qur'ān, (4: 1, 7: 189, 39: 6 and 6: 98) and al-Maydāni, 'Abd al-Rahmān Ḥasan Ḥabanka, \textit{al-Akhlāq al-Islāmīyya wa Usūsuhā} (5th edition, 2 vols., Damascus, Dār al-Qalam, 1999) vol. 1, pp. 229-230.} \"(4: 1)\"\footnote{The terms quoted in the Qur'ān other than form II include the form I of the verb 'to purify (zakaD) in the past tense (23: 21) and it is used to indicate that it is Allāh who purifies the human being and that this is from His bounty upon them.}

As such one may argue that it stands to reason that the Creator of such a \textit{nafs} would not only allude to the nature of this \textit{nafs} but also to the way in which \textit{tazkiya} of it may be carried out.

Thus, on examining the Qur'ān for the verb forms of the root \textit{Zay Kāf Yā} we find numerous usages and derivatives. However, since the term \textit{tazkiya} is a verbal noun of the form II verb the emphasis in this section will focus on this usage.\footnote{The forms quoted in the Qur'ān other than form II include the form I of the verb 'to purify (zakā) in the past tense (23: 21) and it is used to indicate that it is Allāh who purifies the human being and that this is from His bounty upon them.}

Perusal of the Qur'ānic text results

The form \textit{V} derivative also meaning 'to purify' in both the past tense (tazakkā) and in the present tense (yatazakkā) is also used (20: 76, 35: 18, 79: 18, 87: 14 and 35: 18, 92: 18 respectively) and alludes to the human being taking the initiative to purify himself from the 'filth' of disbelief (kufr), polytheism (shirk), ignorance (jahālī) and sin (dhanūb). It should also be noted that this derivative also exists in a condensed form (yazzakkā) where the tā has been merged (iadghām) as found in verses (80: 3 and 7), with a similar connotation and without changing the meaning.

Also, the superlative (azkā) is found on four occasions (2: 232, 18: 19, 24: 28 and 24: 30) with the implication of being 'purer' or more 'pure'.

The adjectival derivative is also used in both its masculine (zakī) and feminine (zakiyya) forms in verses (19: 19 and 18: 74 respectively) again with a similar connotation of 'purity' or 'innocence' and in fact the feminine form (i.e. 18: 74) being used in conjunction with the word \textit{nafs}.
in twelve instances of the form II verb being found in both its past and present tenses. The connotation of self praise, when the verb is used in conjunction with the term nafs or its plurals alluded to in the previous section\textsuperscript{220}, can be located in two of these verses, namely (4:49 and 53:32), both being used in the present tense and indicating a blameworthy quality of the human being.\textsuperscript{221}

Another four verses containing the verb can be seen where Allah is the subject of the verb; in other words it is Allah who directly takes on the role of tazkiya of the human being. Two of these verses (4:49 and 24:21) indicate that it is Allah who decides who is worthy of tazkiya as in both verses the phrase, “Allāh purifies (yuzakkr) whomever He wills” is found, which is extremely significant from the Islamic perspective, as it indicates that not only is it Allāh Who decides who will be purified but it is He Who is the source of the tazkiya. In addition, this process of tazkiya is not arbitrarily decided but due to the need that the divine attribute of justice (al-‘adl) be fulfilled; the verses end, “... and Allāh is not unjust in the slightest”\textsuperscript{222} (4:49) and, “... and Allāh is the All Hearing, the All Knowing” (24:21). In the second two verses (2:174 and 3:77) where Allah is the subject, the context is the Day of Judgement and describes the state of the disbelievers. These verses indicate that Allāh will neither address them (yukallimuhum) nor ‘purify’ them (yuzakkūhim) by forgiving them their transgressions and thus, entering them into Paradise. Once again the emphasis here is on the fact that in any eventuality it is Allāh alone who is the source of tazkiya.\textsuperscript{223}

In addition, another four verses can be observed where the subject of the verb is a divinely chosen emissary (rasūl). The sequence of verses begins in sūrat al-Baqara with the supplication of the Prophet Ibrahim (2:129) where he says, “O my Lord send them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your signs (āyātika), who will teach

\begin{footnotes}
\item[221] The verse actually reads, “... and Allāh will not be unjust [even the amount of a] fatīlah, the fatīlah being the delicate fibre-like material that covers the depression in the centre of a date stone.
\end{footnotes}
them the book (al-kitāb) and wisdom (al-ḥikmā) and who will purify them (wa yuzakkīhim).” From the Islamic perspective this supplication was fulfilled with the sanctioning of the mission of the prophet Muhammad, as in the very same sura (2:151) we read, “Similarly, We sent amongst you a messenger from yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, purifies you, teaches you the Book and wisdom and teaches you what you did not know.” In latter parts of the Qur’ānic text (3:164 and 62:2) we see that this concept is further reinforced as almost identical verses are found.224

In addition, there is also an indication as to how exactly the Prophet should ‘purify’ those around him in verse (9:103), where we find Allāh addressing the Prophet saying, “Take a charity from their wealth to cleanse them (tutahhiruhum) and purify them (yuzakkihim) ...” Thus, in this series of verses containing the verb ‘yuzakkī’ we see that from the Islamic perspective, although the source of tazkiya is Allāh, He facilitates the process of tazkiya by the sending of Prophets, whose role is to instruct humanity as to how to perform the task of tazkiya, by various means, one of which is the giving of one’s wealth for God’s sake.225

The final instance of the verb occurs in (91:9) and is the only occurrence of this verb being used in conjunction with the term ‘nafs’; thus, it is the most significant verse with regard to the current research and as such, will be discussed in the next section, after the appraisal of the term ‘nafs’ in the Qur’ān has been concluded.

2.2.2 The Concept of the Term Nafs within the Qur’ān

As was mentioned previously,226 from the Islamic perspective the nafs of the human being is believed to have been created by Allāh and since the Qur’ān is also believed to be the final revelation to humanity from Him, one might expect to find various references to the nature and origin of the nafs in the Qur’ān. In fact, the term nafs and its derivatives occur in the Qur’ān 398 times,227 which provides the researcher with a vast wealth of material but it is

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226 See p. 56 above.

also worth mentioning that most of these occurrences are usage of the reflexive pronoun and therefore, are of little actual use.

Despite this, there are numerous verses that are of significance when discussing the nafs from the Qur'ānic perspective. The following usages may be observed:

a. The Nafs meaning the Soul (al-rūḥ)

This is evidenced via the description of the souls being extracted from the body at death by the angels, who rip the souls of disbelievers from their bodies, ultimately causing their demise. The verse in question is (6:93) where the angels are said to stretch forth their hands to grip the souls and drag them outwards, the souls themselves being termed, "anfusikum."²²₈

b. The Nafs meaning the Human Being (al-insān)

Once again the Qur'ān, as one might expect, makes reference to the nafs with the meaning of the human being as a whole, including both the body and the soul. One of the verses which identifies this usage is (31:27) in which the creation and resurrection of human beings is discussed and is described as being easy for Allāh, as if it were only the creation/resurrection of a single person (nafsun wāḥida).²²₉

c. The Nafs meaning the Human Being's Power of Understanding (al-off al-mufakkrā)

By this it is meant that the human being has the ability to comprehend and reason using his intellect to arrive at and perceive certain ideas and concepts. Not only this, but the Qur'ān has also clarified that the human being may comprehend an idea until it becomes fixed in his mind to the extent that he reaches a level of certainty regarding the reality of this concept and it appears as fact, as far as he is concerned. The verse in question is (27:14), where this level of certainty is described as having been reached and in addition, is attributed to the nafs (wa īstayqanat-hā anfusuhum).²³₀

d. The Nafs meaning the Heart (al-qalb)

In addition to the intellectual implication of the term 'nafs' in the Qur'ān, there is also an implication that an emotional aspect also exists. Verses that imply such a meaning include (7:205 and 10:77), where both the attributes of remembrance (al-dhikr) and concealing a secret (al-sīrīt) are described as being actions of the nafs. It is also worth noting that both

these qualities are considered actions of the heart (al-qalb) and therefore, such verses indicate an intrinsic and fundamental link between the heart and the nafs. 231 e. The Nafs meaning the Inclination to Good and Evil (quwwâ al-khayr wa 'l-sharr)
The duality of the nafs to incline towards good and evil as described in the Qur'an and its tendency to change between the two, is one of its outstanding characteristics. Various verses indicate this including (50:16, 75:2 and 79:40-1) 232 and due to the importance of such qualities, they will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

From this discussion it is clear, as one might expect, that the Qur'an uses the term 'nafs' in a number of usages which despite being identical or similar to the meanings alluded to in the section regarding the Arabic language, also have their own implication within the Qur'anic context. 233

In addition to the general description of the nafs in the Qur'an, there are also two main areas that become apparent on examining the Qur'anic text: qualities that the nafs itself manifests to which various verses allude and secondly, verses which describe the various states that the nafs experiences. This being the case the following sections will attempt to shed light upon these phenomena in the Qur'an.

2.2.2.1 Qualities of the Nafs within the Qur'an
The basis for this discussion lies in the information alluded to in verses (91:7-8), which reads, "And [by] the soul (nafs) and the One Who proportioned it; then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness." From this verse several issues become clear; firstly, that once again we find an inclination to the fact that, from the Islamic perspective, it is Allâh Who not only created the soul but also fashioned it as He willed. Secondly, part of this fashioning was to inspire the soul to know, put very simply, that which is 'right' and that which is 'wrong'. As such, this ability to comprehend the difference between virtue and sin also implies the faculty of 'free will' to choose between the two and consequently, makes the nafs accountable for its actions in both this life and next. In addition, this may also indicate that the nafs inclines to certain characteristic behaviours, which manifest themselves and are not only an indication of the soul’s inner state but a

233 It is also worth mentioning that many of the linguistic usages of the term 'nafs', particularly the more obscure usages, are entirely absent from the Qur'an. Cf. section 2.1.2 above.
manifestation of an individual's humanity as a whole.\textsuperscript{234} As a result the following qualities of the \textit{nafs} can be identified and observed in the Qur'ān:

\textbf{a. It is the \textit{Nafs} that Experiences Death.}

As has been alluded, from the Islamic perspective, it is Allāh Who created the human soul or \textit{nafs} and as such, it is Him who gives life to it also. Life is first given to the human being when it comes into existence in this life, where it undergoes a phase of trial to test which of them is best in action.\textsuperscript{235} Then death will occur and the soul will enter a new sphere of existence,\textsuperscript{236} which is a stage it remains in for a considerable period, until once again it enters another sphere of existence when it is resurrected and where it will return to its Lord, to be recompensed for its actions.

As such every soul will experience death to which a number of Quranic verses make reference, namely (3: 185, 21: 35 and 29: 57) where the phrase, "Every soul will 'taste' [lit.] death (\textit{kullu nafsīn dhā'iqat al-mawt})" is reiterated.\textsuperscript{237} Also, in the same way that bringing life to the \textit{nafs} is as a result of divine will then similarly, the causing of death is also by divine will (3: 145). In addition, the lifespan of the \textit{nafs (al-ajāl)} is also predetermined by Allāh, Who will neither delay its term nor bring it forward (63: 11).\textsuperscript{238}

\textbf{b. The \textit{Nafs} has Perceptive Faculties}

In addition, the Qur'ān also indicates to a number of sensations, feelings and emotions, which the \textit{nafs} perceives, is conscious of and that can be discerned. A survey of these is given below:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Desires (\textit{al-hawa})
  \item Appetites (\textit{al-shahwa})
  \item Needs (\textit{al-ḥājāt/al-matālib}).
\end{enumerate}

The Qur'ān confirms for us that the \textit{nafs} can be described as having desires (\textit{al-hawa}), which act as emotions that drive it to fulfil its needs (\textit{al-ḥājāt/al-matālib}), seek the fulfilment of its pleasures and appetites (\textit{al-shahwa}) and which in most cases, are harmful and destructive for it.\textsuperscript{239}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{235} See Qur'ān (67: 2).
\textsuperscript{236} This is commonly termed '\textit{al-barzakh}' in Islamic theology and literally means a 'barrier', i.e between the worldly life and the hereafter.
\textsuperscript{237} It should be also noted that in addition to the complete retaining of the \textit{nafs} at death, the \textit{nafs} is partially retained during sleep where it may be returned to the body in which life continues or retained completely, in which case death results. See Qur'ān (39: 42) and cf. 2.1.2, number 3 of the Language section.
\end{footnotesize}
iv. Difficulty and Hardship (*al-mashaqa*)

In addition the *nafs* is given to preferring ease over hardship and as such it dislikes to be burdened with what it considers difficult tasks.\footnote{For example see the following verse, (16:7) and al-Maydāni, *al-Akhlāq al-Islāmiyya wa Ususuḥā*, vol. 1, pp. 237-8.}

v. Endurance (*al-ṣabr*) and Impatience\footnote{This begins a series of qualities which display the duality of the *nafs* mentioned above and in verse (91:7-8), where either quality - positive or negative - may be manifested by the *nafs* or more commonly where one of the qualities mentioned is more apparent.}

The *nafs* has the ability to endure hardship and be patient, persevering in adversity but its more common reaction is to be impatient with the events that befall it.\footnote{For example see (2:109) and al-Maydāni, *al-Akhlāq al-Islāmiyya wa Ususuḥā*, vol. 1, p. 239.}

vi. Generosity (*al-jūd*) and Miserliness (*al-shuḥḥ*)

Again the Qurānic text indicates the presence of the quality of miserliness (*al-shuḥḥ*) within the human *nafs*, suggesting that this is one of its overwhelming qualities, as it is commonly found in many souls. However, on the contrary, the Qurān also not only criticises this unenviable characteristic but also encourages its eradication and in fact extols the virtue of generosity (*al-jūd*), which is its direct opposite, suggesting that one replace the other entirely.\footnote{For example see (2:265, 4:4 and 127, 18:28, 59:9 and 64:16) and al-Maydāni, *al-Akhlāq al-Islāmiyya wa Ususuḥā*, vol. 1, pp. 238-9.}

vii. Envy and Jealousy (*al-ḥasad*)

Another of the most blameworthy characteristics in Islamic moral psychology is that of envy and jealousy (*al-ḥasad*) and therefore it is not surprising that the Qurān would be critical of such a quality. In addition however, this is not only regarded as being reprehensible but is also described as emanating from the *nafs* and as such, it also has the potentiality of not being characterised by this negative description but by positive counter qualities.\footnote{For example see (2:109) and al-Maydāni, *al-Akhlāq al-Islāmiyya wa Ususuḥā*, vol. 1, p. 239.}

viii. Fear (*al-khawf*)

Fear or apprehension (*al-khawf*) is a common psychological state which may be induced by a variety of stimuli and as such it is hardly surprising that the Qurān describes it as being a potential characteristic of the *nafs*. Similarly, the *nafs* has an equal potential to display directly opposing qualities such as bravery and self confidence.\footnote{For example see the following verses, (20:67 and 68) and al-Maydāni, *al-Akhlāq al-Islāmiyya wa Ususuḥā*, vol. 1, p. 239.}
Pride, arrogance and conceit (al-klbr) are all qualities that the Qurān states are present in the nafs and similarly, the potential to attain modesty, humility and humbleness is also possible, if the negative characteristics are eradicated. However, as with many qualities of the nafs arrogance and conceit (al-klbr) are commonly manifest in the majority of souls.246

x. Anxiety (al-dāiq) and Distress (al-ḥaraj)

Other psychological states, which result from personal discomfort, are anxiety (al-dāiq) and distress (al-ḥaraj). Once again the Qurān counts these from being the qualities with which the nafs is characterised and in the same way it can also be nurtured to adopt the contrary qualities of being relaxed (al-ittisā) and tranquility (al-inshirāh).247

xi. Affected by Eloquent Speech (al-ta'aththur bi 'l-qawl al-baligh)

The Qurān also confirms that the nafs may be affected by eloquent speech to the extent that the behaviour of a human being may be reformed due to it. As such, through being addressed with an eloquent, oratory or written style, the nafs may receive admonition and thus, return to the truth.248

xii. Regret (al-nadm) and Grief (al-tahassur)

As well as psychological states the nafs also experiences emotions and the Qurān implies this in a number of verses. Of these, the feeling of regret and grief over matters which may appear to be lost are mentioned in the Qurān. For example, in verse (35:8) Allāh informs His Prophet not to grieve over or feel regretful regarding the actions of his people in Mecca. Similarly, such feelings are also expressed in verse (39:56), where the situation on the Day of Judgement is described and the nafs will regret and grieve over its deficiencies regarding its duty to its Lord.249

xiii. The Ability to Comprehend (al-ʾidrāk)

As mentioned earlier250, the Qurān in verse (27:14) has also clarified that the human being may comprehend an idea until it becomes fixed in his mind to the extent that he reaches a level of certainty regarding the reality of this concept. Similarly, the ability of the nafs to completely comprehend may be impaired due to its consideration of baseless conjecture (al-ẓann), causing doubts and worries to flourish, as is found in verse (3:154). As such, it could be argued that all other levels of understanding with regard to the nafs would fall between

246 For example see (2:21) and al-Maydāni, al-Akhlāq al-İslāmiyya wa Ususuhā, vol. 1, pp. 239-40.
247 For example see (4:65 and 9:118) and al-Maydāni, al-Akhlāq al-İslāmiyya wa Ususuhā, vol. 1, p. 240.
248 For example see (4:63) and al-Maydāni, al-Akhlāq al-İslāmiyya wa Ususuhā, vol. 1, p. 240.
250 See p. 59 above.
these two extremes. In addition, from the Islamic perspective, Allah as the Creator of all mankind has endowed every one of them with the ability to perceive and comprehend righteousness (al-taqwa) and immorality (al-fujur), or put very simply - the difference between good and evil. As such, every nafs is aware of its actions and is conversant with the nature of such actions, as a number of verses indicate. In the same way that the nafs can come to 'know' certain information, it may also be heedless or ignorant of other matters. Indeed, from a Qur'anic perspective, the nafs is completely unaware of the unseen (al-ghayb), including the true nature of the hereafter, how it will act in the future and where its demise will be, as verses (31: 34 and 32:15-17) indicate.

xiv. The Ability to Conceal Feelings
As was mentioned earlier, the nafs manifests certain emotions but at the same time it also has the ability to conceal and hide its true feelings. Despite this however, one of the major concepts progressed in the Qur'an is that Allah is fully acquainted with even these concealed thoughts, emotions, ideas and feelings.

xv. Responsibility
Bearing in mind the various abilities described above that the nafs has been granted, including emotional, perceptive and intellectual faculties, as well as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the nafs is consequently responsible for its actions within the realms of its capabilities. As such every nafs has the ability to act and earn or acquire good deeds and bad deeds, based on its intentions, personal efforts, determination and free will. This responsibility is unique to each individual and as such, every human being is personally responsible for their actions. Consequently, each person will be recompensed accordingly on the Day of Judgement, their ultimate abode being determined by their actions in this life.

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2.2.2.2 States of the Nafs within the Qur'ān

In addition to the aforementioned qualities of the nafs as expounded in the Qur'ān, there are a number of categories or states that the nafs experiences, which the Qur'ān has also elucidated. As such, the human being experiences these states as a result of his intentions, thoughts, motives, deeds and will and therefore, it is appropriate at this juncture to shed light on these states of the nafs. On examining the Qur'ānic text the reader finds three types of nafs described, they are as follows:

a. The Soul Inclined to Evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sü'ū)

This state of the nafs occurs when the human being is overcome by his desires, to the extent that he pursues the appetites of his soul, to the exclusion of everything else. As such the limits set by Allāh are made secondary in comparison to the fulfilment of his own needs and
desires. Thus, the performance of forbidden acts is common and the ultimate result of this state is sin and transgression. The essence of this notion is evidenced in the following verse, "And I do not absolve own self [of blame], as indeed, the [human] soul is prone to evil (inna 'l-nafs la ammāra bi 'l-sū'), except when my Lord bestows mercy, as indeed my Lord is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful." (12:53)258

This verse alludes to the lowest level of the human soul, which not only encourages the performance of evil but also exerts effort to make such actions acceptable and appealing to the human being. Thus, the nafs is described as enticing (sawwalat), subjecting (tawwa'at) and tempting (tuwaswis) in verses (20:96 and 12:18, 5:30 and 50:16) respectively. Therefore, it is not surprising that the exaggerative form ‘ammāra’ is used to describe the nafs, as it literally means ‘constantly urging, always demanding, inciting and instigating’259, as if this type of nafs is always commanding the evil and the base. As such, al-Jurjāni (d. 816/1413) defined the al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū as follows, “It is the one [nafs] that inclines to the bodily nature, ordering [the pursuit of] physical pleasures and appetites, attracting the heart to base levels; as such, it is the abode of every evil and the source of blameworthy characteristics.”260

In addition, this verse also implies that from the Islamic perspective it is from Allah's mercy alone that this state of the nafs does not exist permanently, as this is its natural and regular state if left to its own devices and is not refined. As such, it is only from Allah's beneficence that the other states of the nafs, via repentance and turning away from the soul's desires, become manifest in the human being.

Also, on examining and contrasting these qualities of the nafs as described in the Qurān, one finds a direct comparison between such attributes and those used to describe Satan (al-shayṭān). In fact the Devil (Iblis) has been characterised as enticing (sawwala), tempting (waswās) and misguiding (yu(l ll) in verses (47:25 and 114:3-4, 5:30 and 4:60) respectively. Thus, there is a clear and intrinsic link and relationship between the behaviour of the nafs and the role of Satan in influencing this behaviour. It would seem that the Devil entices and suggests actions and thoughts to the nafs, whereas the nafs itself, due to its self serving outlook, pursues such deeds satisfying the conscience by making them seemingly acceptable and appealing. To this effect, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya comments:

259 Wehr, The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, p. 27.
260 Al-Jurjāni, al-Tarīḥ, p. 239.
As for the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammâra bi 'l-sūr), Satan is its associate and companion; he makes promises to it and awakens its desires, casting falsehood into it, commanding it to evil and making it appear appealing in a form that it will find acceptable and condone, with a variety of provisions and falsehood, false hopes and destructive appetites. He seeks aid against it with its desires and wishes and through him every evil enters it.261

b. The Self-Reproaching Soul (al-nafs al-lawwâma)262

This is the next level of the nafs, where it is elevated from the previous base state, so that the veil of disobedience is lifted and the soul begins to blame itself for the transgression it has committed, inclining towards repentance, regret, self recrimination and reproach. These implications are gleaned from the following Qur'anic verse (75:1-2), “Do not swear [an oath] by the Day of Judgement nor by the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwâma).” This verse is clear evidence of a second state of the soul, i.e. the soul being described as being self-reproaching or ‘lawwâma’. However, this particular adjective describing the soul has been the focus of discussion for numerous Muslim scholars, leading them to a variety of opinions, which will be summarised here.

The first of these views suggests that this term is derived from the Arabic verbal noun ‘al-talawwum meaning 'shifting repeatedly' being synonymous with ‘al-taraddud. This state of the soul is characterised by its changeability, fickleness, capriciousness and inconsistency, never truly remaining steadfast in one state of affairs.263 As such, in this state, the soul is mindful then heedless, loves then hates, is happy then sad, is obedient then disobedient, righteous then immoral, as well as many other qualities and a variety of levels of each characteristic in between, changing from one state to another, never truly settling on one quality.264

The second view considers this to be derived from the term ‘lawm’ meaning 'blame', the implication being that the soul blames itself or alternatively is blameworthy. As such, the opinions regarding this derivation of ‘lawwâma’ also vary and these opinions can be summarised as follows: the first of these is that the aforementioned verse refers to the

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261 Al-Jawziyya, al-Rūh, p. 263.
263 This fits neatly with the description of the nafs’s duality above in section 2.2.2.1, where the potentiality of the soul to adopt a positive quality, or its negative counterpart was explored.
description of the soul of a believer (*al-mu'min*). This opinion was common amongst the early Muslim scholars, as it is reported that al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) said regarding this verse, “By Allâh, we do not see the believer except that he blames himself; [asking himself] ‘What did I intend by my speech? What did I intend by my eating? What did I intend by my thoughts?’; whereas the shameless reprobate (*al-fâjîr*) continues step by step, not sanctioning his soul.” Similarly, when Mujâhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), the famous exegete (*al-mufassîr*) was asked regarding the same verse he replied, “This is the soul that blames itself for what has passed and feels regret; it blames itself for the evil it has committed, as to why it did it and with regard to doing good, as to why it did not do more.”

In a different view *al-nafs al-lawwâma* is considered to refer to both the sinner and the righteous person in the sense that the righteous person blames his soul for the committing of a sin or the neglect of an act of obedience. As such, al-Jurjâni (d. 816/1413) defined *al-nafs al-lawwâma* as follows, “It is the one [*al-nafs*] that is illuminated with the light of the heart according to the amount that it has become awakened from habitual heedlessness; as soon as it commits a transgression due to its naturally oppressive disposition it takes to blaming itself.”

In contrast, the degenerate person blames itself for losing out on some form of carnal satisfaction.

In a variation of this theme, this form of blaming is said to take place on the Day of Judgement, where every soul will blame itself for its deeds in the worldly life. Thus, there will be the sinful who will blame themselves for the sins they have committed, whereas the righteous will blame themselves for their deficiencies with regard to Allâh’s rights over


268 In this regard al-Maydâni considers this state of the nafs to be the state that manifests human free will (*al-irâda al-‘urrâ al-mukhtâra*) and quotes verses (32:13 and 18:29) as proof of this. See al-Maydâni, *al-Akhlaq al-Islâmîyya wa Ususuhâ*, vol. 1, p. 253.
In this regard, al-Hasan al-Basri is reported to have said, “There is no one who exists in the heaven or on the earth except that he will blame himself on the Day of Judgement.”

Commenting on these various views Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya states:

All these statements are true and do not contradict one another, as the soul (nafs) may be described as such, in the sense that it has been termed ‘self reproaching (lawwaama)’. However, self reproach (lawwaama) is of two types: self reproach that is blameworthy (malüma), by which is meant the soul that is ignorant (jähila) and tyrannical (zällma) and which has been censured by Allah and His angels. [The second type is] self reproach that is not blameworthy (ghayr malüma), which is the soul that continues to reproach its owner regarding his deficiencies in Allah’s obedience despite his best efforts; [in this sense] this is self reproach that is not blameworthy (lawwaama ghayr malüma).

c. The Tranquil Soul (al-nafs al-mutma’Inna)

This is the highest state of the nafs, having gained tranquillity from establishing Allah’s obedience, accepting His promise of threat of punishment and promise of reward in Paradise, being satisfied with His decree. Such a soul has put its trust in Him alone, tasted the sweetness of faith and felt the pleasure of communicating with its Lord, to the extent that it seeks no other substitute. As such it has not deviated from Allah's devotion nor been affected by the changes in circumstances that normally cause a change in the psychological state of the human being, nor is it attracted to the ornamentation of the worldly life. This state of the nafs and its 'serenity' and 'stability' is alluded to in the following verses (89:27-30), “[It will be said to the righteous] O tranquil soul (al-nafs a1-mutma’Inna), return to your Lord content [with Him] (rädiya) and pleasing [to Him] (mardlyya), so enter into [the ranks of] My devotees and enter My paradise.”

269 It is worthy of note that the verse itself is almost indicative of both circumstances in the worldly life and in the hereafter, as the verse mentions the Day of Judgement (al-qiyäma) prior to mentioning the self reproachful soul. As such, there is a subtle indication of self recrimination in the worldly life that is private and self governed, whereas on the Day of Judgement, according to Muslim theology, the censuring will be imposed and extremely 'public'.


Commenting on this verse, early Muslim scholars provide a variety of views, which will be summarised here. For example, regarding the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma’inna) Mujähid (d. 104/722) said, “It is the soul that is satisfied with the decree of Allâh; it knows that what does not befall it was not destined to do so and what does befall it was destined to do so.” Similarly, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrî (d. 110/728) clarifies, “If Allâh, the Mighty and Exalted, wishes to seize it [the nafs], it is contented with Allâh and Allâh is satisfied with it. As such, He commands its soul (rûḥaha) to be seized, enters it into paradise and makes it of His righteous devotees.” In addition, Qatâda (d. 118/736) comments saying, “It is the believer (al-mu’min) whose soul became assured regarding what Allâh has promised.” Moreover, Ibn Zayd states, “It [the nafs] was termed tranquil (mutma’inna) due to it being given glad tidings of paradise upon death, at resurrection and on the Day of Judgment.” In a similar quote the famous Qurānic exegete Ibn Kathîr (d. 774/1372) commented regarding the last part of the verse (89: 30), “Enter My paradise”, that this will be said to the believer during the throes of death and on the Day of Resurrection.274

From the verse itself and the explanatory notes from Muslim commentators we can glean a reasonable amount of information; firstly, that this particular state of the nafs has been described as ‘mutma’inna meaning ‘tranquil’ or ‘serene’ but one may well ask what is the source of this ‘tranquillity’ and ‘serenity’? Similarly, the nafs in this state of ‘serenity’ is commanded to return to its Lord being in a state of absolute contentment (râdiya) with Him. One may well query once again in what way is satisfaction (râdiya) a quality of the serene soul and what is the relation between them? In these verses the nafs is also described as being pleasing to Allâh (mardîyya) and we must also enquire as to what has brought about Allâh’s approval of such a soul?

As for the first and paramount quality, i.e. that of ‘tranquillity’ and ‘serenity’, this is said to be brought about by this soul’s constant remembrance of Allâh, relying on the following Qurānic verse (13: 38), “Those who have believed and whose hearts become tranquil through the remembrance of Allâh; isn’t it through the remembrance of Allâh that the hearts become tranquil [?].” As such, one of the methods through which this state of the

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nafs may be attained is through being engaged in the remembrance of God as much as possible.\textsuperscript{275}

This serenity of the soul is further augmented by the acquisition of the quality of satisfaction and acceptance (\textit{ridā}). This can be understood in the very broad sense of satisfaction and acceptance of the religion of Islam, as is indicated by the following narration transmitted on the authority of the Prophet's uncle al-Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 33/654 or 34/655), where the Prophet is reported to have said, "The one who is contented with Allāh as his Lord, Islam as his religion and Muḥammad as his prophet has truly 'tasted the flavour of faith'."\textsuperscript{276} On a more specific note however, this form of \textit{ridā} is usually related to the devotee's faith in the sixth pillar of Islamic belief, commonly referred to as faith in divine predestination (\textit{al-qadr} wa 'l-\textit{qadr}), where the practitioner of Islam is required to believe in Allāh's preordainment of all matters. This final article of Islamic faith is arguably the most difficult to actualise since it requires firm conviction (\textit{yaqīn}) in God's overall wisdom and plan; as such this conviction is alluded to and hence nurtured in a number of Qurānic verses including (57:23-4 and 64:11). This being the case, there is an indication then that the tranquil soul (\textit{al-nafs al-mutma'īnna}) has not only reached this level but perfected it, in the sense that no matter what befalls it in terms of human or personal tragedy, its faith in the Almighty remains firm, as it knows that this has been preordained before it even existed. Similarly, it is not overjoyed by bounties it enjoys but on the contrary recognises God's favour upon it and fulfils the divine right of gratitude. It is thus this elevated level of perfection in faith that brings about God's pleasure and satisfaction regarding it, as no matter what such a soul endures it remains content with its Lord and as a result, its Lord is satisfied with it.\textsuperscript{277}

In this regard Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) comments:

If the \textit{nafs} became at ease from doubt to certainty; from ignorance to knowledge; from heedlessness to remembrance; from deception to repentance; from ostentation to sincerity; from deceit to truthfulness; from being incapable to being competent; from the tyranny of conceit to the


submissiveness of humility; from arrogance to modesty and from laxity to action, then the soul has achieved tranquillity.\textsuperscript{278}

This is obviously an extremely elevated state of faith and practice which Ibn al-Qayyim refers to further saying:

As for perfection in serenity it is contentment with His command, in terms of fulfilling it, sincerely and perfectly, so that no wish, desire or blind imitation is preferred to it. As such, neither uncertainty that contradicts His revelation nor any whim that opposes His command is entertained. Indeed, if it occurs it is considered to be satanic insinuation (\textit{al-wasāwiś}), such that if he were to fall from the heavens to the earth it would be more beloved to him than to find it (in his soul); this is what the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him termed, “Pure faith (\textit{sariḥ al-imān})”\textsuperscript{279}

In addition to the perfection of faith alluded to in the above discussion, the quality of permanency also graces this state, in the sense that this type of soul is so well accustomed to this form of faith and practice that it becomes a resident feature of its nature and character.\textsuperscript{280} In this regard al-Jurjānī has defined the tranquil soul (\textit{al-nafs al-mutma'īnna}) as follows, “It is the one [\textit{al-nafs}] whose illumination with the light of the heart has been completed to the extent that it has been divested of every blameworthy attribute and has been adorned with every praiseworthy characteristic.”\textsuperscript{281}

2.2.3 The Singular Qurānic Verse Mentioning both the Terms \textit{Tazkiya} and \textit{al-Nafs}

Finally, we turn our attention to the singly, most important Qurānic verses regarding our area of enquiry, verses (91:7-10). The significance of these verses cannot be over emphasised due to their mention of not only the nature of the soul and the potentiality and duality created in it but also the matter of its purification or defilement. As such this is the only series of Qurānic verses that make mention of both the \textit{nafs} and its \textit{tazkiya} in one place and therefore, is deserving of particular mention and merits specific attention. The verse itself reads, “And [by] the soul (\textit{nafs}) and the One Who proportioned it; then He

\textsuperscript{280} This is said to be one of the main differences between the tranquil soul (\textit{al-nafs al-mutma'īnna}) and the self-reproaching soul (\textit{al-nafs al-lawwāma}); whereas the former has gained mastery over its appetites and desires through extreme effort, strong conviction and imposing punitive measures, the latter remains somewhat disposed to the soul inclined to evil (\textit{al-nafs al-amūmā bi 'l-sūf}), despite its best efforts to overcome it. See al-Jawziyya, \textit{al-Rūh}, pp. 265-6; Karzūn, \textit{Manhaj al-Īslām fi Tazkiyat al-Nafs}, vol. 1, p. 57 and al-Maydānī, \textit{al-Akhīlāq al-Īslāmiyya wa Ususūhā}, vol. 1, pp. 252 and 254.
inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness; indeed, he who purifies it has succeeded; and indeed, he who defiles it has failed.”

These particular verses are interesting in a variety of ways and as such merit some reflection and discussion. The first characteristic is that the series of verses begins with the swearing of an oath using waw al-qasm, which according to the Islamic exegetical tradition implies emphasis to draw the attention of the reader/listener to the importance of the discourse being presented. Not only this but this particular verse comes at the end of six previous oaths at the beginning of each verse, the objects of the oath being the sun (al-shams), the moon (al-qamar), the day (al-nahār), the night (al-layl), the heaven (al-samā’), the earth (al-ard) and finally, the seventh oath concerns the soul (al-nafs). Commentators allude to the fact that this style in the Qur’ān is utilised to draw attention to the greatness and perfection of such creations, these ultimately being indications of the Creator Himself. Perhaps more subtly however, it can be further noticed that the first six items are manifest, i.e. ‘seen’ in the simplest sense, whereas the final object of the oath is ‘unseen’, causing some exegetes to conclude that this is in fact the greatest of the ‘unseen’ creations.282

Similarly, there is a direct reference to the Creator of this soul; the word used in the verse is ‘mā in this instance ‘mā al-mawsūlā or the relative pronoun, carrying the meaning of ‘alladhi and in this specific example meaning ‘marī or ‘the one who’.283 Thus, the verse speaks not only of the soul itself but also of the One, meaning Allāh, Who ‘sawwāhā carrying the meaning of ‘proportioned, made equal, made even and balanced’, suggesting not only that the soul created was thus in the body but also that the soul has been given ‘free will’ to choose at a moral level between good and evil, to which the following verse adds further credence.284

The next verse begins by making an important statement, i.e. that the soul is capable of receiving inspiration and insight, indicated to by the use of the verb ‘alhamahā, once again the active participle being Allāh, stating clearly that He is the source of inspiration. The subject of the inspiration is equally significant however, as it is stated as being the soul’s iniquity (fuhrūr) and its righteousness (taqwā), i.e. the soul has been inspired and given insight to be able to discern between and choose either right action or sin. In this regard


Ibn ‘Abbās (d. c. 67-8/686-8) said that the verse means, “Clarified for it [the soul] the good and the evil” and this was also the opinion of Qatāda (d. 118/736), al-Ḍahḥak (d. 102/721) and Sufyān al-Thawri (d. 162/778). In addition, this is another indication of the soul’s ‘free will’ and as such some commentators as a result consider this to be an indication of the human being’s rational faculty or intellect (al-aql), this being the highest form of human ability. However, it should be noticed that the subject of this inspiration is to choose between iniquity (fujūr) and righteousness (taqwā), which is essentially a moral dilemma, in which there can be no doubt that the intellect plays a role, but the influence here of the heart (al-qalb) and/or of the conscience (al-ḍamīr) cannot be underestimated. As such, this verse is also an indication of the dual potentiality within the soul, alluded to previously and also alludes to its responsibility and accountability, in both this life and the next, as it has been endowed with the capacity to discern and the ability to choose the right course of action or alternatively its opposite.

The results and consequences of such ‘informed’ choices are the subject of the next two verses, which is also the only time in the Qurān where the nafs is used in conjunction with a derivative of the term tazkiya. In the very next verse we are informed that true success, prosperity and salvation (falāḥ), meaning the acquisition of God’s good grace and entry into His paradise, will be attained by a person who ‘purifies it (zakkāhā)’. This is the usual form II usage of the verb alluded to previously and therefore gives the meanings of ‘bringing about or causing growth, augmentation, reform and development’ or ‘purification’ in the broad sense. However, it is the subject of ‘it’ which concerns us here, as the attached pronoun being used is feminine, i.e. ‘hi’ and which as such refers directly to the term nafs mentioned previously. Thus, the verse in its broadest sense would mean, “He who has caused his soul to grow, be augmented, be reformed, developed and purified has indeed attained true success, prosperity and salvation.” In this sense Qatāda (d. 118/736) said that the meaning of the verse is, “He who has purified his soul through obedience to Allah and cleansed it from base characteristics and vices has indeed attained true success.” It is also worth mentioning that the subject of the verb ‘zakkā is not immediately obvious and thus, Muslim exegetes have differed regarding exactly ‘who’ it is that is doing the

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purifying; the first of these views suggests that it is Allah which is the subject, in which case the verse would mean, "He whom Allah has caused his soul to grow, be augmented, be reformed, developed and purified has indeed attained true success, prosperity and salvation." In this regard it is related that it was the opinion of both al-Farā' (d. 207/822) and al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) that the meaning of the verse is, "Indeed, a soul which Allah has purified is successful and indeed, a soul which Allah has defiled has failed." The second view posits that it is the human being who brings about this process at a personal level, in which case the verse would mean, "He who has caused his soul to be purified has indeed attained true success." In this sense, Sufyān b. 'Uayna (d. 198/813), Qatādā (d. 118/736) and others, said regarding this verse that the meaning is, "Indeed, he who has purified his soul with Allah's obedience and righteous actions has succeeded", and similarly, Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1201), commented that the meaning of 'zakkāhā is, "Purified it from sin and reformed it with righteous deeds." It is not wholly implausible however that the process is indeed a combination of the two in harmony with one another.

The alternative consequence of these 'informed' choices is clarified in the very next verses, which alludes to the idea that whoever selects a path of iniquity will indeed have failed (khāba). The verse used in diametric opposition with 'zakkāhā is equally worthy of mention here; the conjugation used is 'dassāhā from the root 'dassasad, the final radical of this verb being substituted for an alif to ease and facilitate pronunciation (takhfīf). The meaning of this verb is to 'hide' or 'conceal', which at first glance may seem obscure but the implication is that the person would commit sins, disbelieve and be disobedient, so much so that his soul would be 'submerged' in such reprehensible acts to the extent that his soul would be 'buried' in them. In this sense Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) said the meaning of 'dassāhā is,
"Concealed it with iniquity and disobedience, as the reprobate hides his soul (dassa nafsahu) i.e. suppresses it through his committing of obscenities."\(^{293}\) Similarly, al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) commented by saying that such a person makes his soul lowly, despicable, vile and wretched.\(^{294}\) This emotive metaphor elucidates the state of such a soul and clarifies exactly how its ‘failure’ is constituted.

### 2.2.4 Section Summary

This section has attempted to survey the mention, usage and concept of the terms ‘tazkiya’ and ‘nafs’ in the Qur'ānic text to shed light upon their understanding in Islam. As such, the discussion began with the term ‘tazkiya’ and it was found that the linguistically implied meaning of the word has changed little, if at all, from its original usage in the language and therefore, can be considered still to mean, ‘to cause to grow, be augmented, be reformed, developed and purified’.

Despite this however, a great deal has been learned regarding the emphasis of tazkiya and indeed, its facilitation and implementation. It was found for example, from the Qur'ānic and by default the Islamic perspective, that it is Allah who is the source of tazkiya, as many verses indicate and the decision of who will be purified in this sense is ultimately a divine one.\(^{295}\) Similarly, the process and implementation of tazkiya has also been attributed to the Prophets and Messengers and to the Prophet Muḥammad in particular. There are various verses in the Qur'ān that allude to this and in fact they state that this is one of the major roles of such divinely chosen and guided emissaries.\(^{296}\) In addition, depending on the interpretation of the verses in question, it has also been shown that the human being himself can take the impetus regarding the process of tazkiya via the decisions he makes, having been endowed with the faculty of discernment regarding the course of right action or a path of misguidance. As such, tazkiya can be understood to be a multi-level and multi-faceted process, indicating a subtle, complex and yet complementary process of human development.

On examining the term nafs it was also found that there is a great deal of overlap between the linguistic usages of the term and their utilisation in the Qur'ān. Many of the linguistic usages - quite expectedly - were not found in the Qur'ān but many also were and it can be

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\(^{295}\) See pp. 57-8 above.

\(^{296}\) See pp. 57-8 above.
said that the following concepts regarding the nafs are presented in the Qur'anic discourse: the nafs meaning the soul (al-rūḥ); the nafs meaning the human being (al-insān); the nafs meaning the human being's power of understanding (al-quwā al-mufakkrā); the nafs meaning the heart (al-qalb) and the nafs meaning the inclination to good and evil (quwā al-khayr wa 'l-sharr). 297

In addition, the following section shed greater light on the very nature of the nafs by elucidating various qualities that the nafs possesses; it was seen for example that the nafs experiences a variety of 'psychological' and almost 'physical' states, which dictate its nature. Also, it was also seen that there is almost a 'dual potentiality' within the nafs, where its nature tends to negative potentialities but with volition, will, training and experience, the positive potentialities can be nurtured. 298

Further information can be gleaned regarding the nature of the soul from the Qur'ān's discussion of the 'types' or 'states' of the nafs. These were found to be: the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sīr), the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) and the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma'inna). The first of these is said to be the base form of the nafs in its natural state, being inclined to the worldly life and being closest to an animal existence; it is controlled and motivated by the fulfilment of its desires and Satanic insinuation, being forever inclined to the base and the contemptible. The second can be viewed as an intermediate state where the nafs is undergoing an internal moral and psychological battle between good and evil and as such is continuously shifting between the positive and negative potentialities inherent within it. The final form is the ultimate state of the nafs, where the base instincts have been conquered, the internal moral and psychological battle has been won, the truths of faith have been realised and complete contentment with God has been attained. 299

The final discussion concerned the only verses in the Qur'ān to make mention of both these terms in conjunction and a variety of information was further gleaned from this valuable series of verses. Indeed, it was seen in these verses that from the Islamic perspective, it is Allāh who primarily created this nafs in a form of equilibrium, inspiring it and giving it insight to be able to discern between choosing either right action or sin. Consequently, the result of such choices will lead ultimately to the nafs undergoing a process of purification

297 See section 2.2.2 and cf. section 2.1.1 above.
298 See section 2.2.2.1 above.
299 See section 2.2.2.2 above.
(tazkiya) or alternatively, a process of defilement (tadsiqa), which has enormous consequences for it in the hereafter.

As such, our original conclusion seen at the end of the discussion of the linguistic implications of these terms, i.e. 'the growth, augmentation, reform and development of a human being's soul, intellect, body and self', has changed little having surveyed the Qur'anic text for the same purpose. All this increases our understanding of the process and goal of tazkiyat al-nafs considerably. The subtle interplay between the divine (Allâh), the human elect (Prophets/Messengers) and the humble worshipper (the human being), all have their parts to play; from divine guidance and inspiration, to human moral and spiritual excellence and example, to firm will, certitude and extreme effort. Similarly, that very essence of humanity - the human soul - has been seen to be multifaceted, multilayered and highly complex. Despite this, the Qur'ân has alluded to the goal of the aforementioned process of tazkiya, i.e. the attainment of the state of the nafs known as the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'inna), which is its final and ultimate product. Thus, we may conclude that our understanding of tazkiyat al-nafs has now developed to mean: the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'inna).

This discussion has shed a great deal of light upon the understanding of the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs in Islam but no such discussion would be complete without reference to Islam's secondary source of Law and thought, namely the hadith and this is the goal of the next section.

2.3 The Concept of the Terms Tazkiya and Nafs within the Hadith Literature

From the Islamic perspective the Qur'ân is not the only form of divinely inspired revelation. Indeed, the very life of the Prophet is considered to be a source of guidance, where his customary practice known as the sunna is constituted by his statements, actions and tacit approval and is contained in a vast corpus of narrations transmitted by Muslims throughout history, known as hadith.300 This literature is viewed as complementary to the Qur'ân and it is seen to fulfil an explanatory or interpretative role regarding Islam's primary sacred text.301
This being the case, it is imperative that any 'Islamic' term or concept be examined in the light of this literature and as such, *tazkiyat al-nafs* is no exception. This said, the vast nature of the material means that only a representative survey will be made here and indeed, only those texts that have a direct link with the subject matter will be considered.

Following a similar methodology to the previous sections, each of these terms will be dealt with separately to shed light on their meanings and concepts so as to provide further information regarding these words; we will begin here by discussing the term 'tazkiya' as it occurs in the *hadith* literature.

2.3.1 The Concept of the Term *Tazkiya* within the *Hadith* Literature

When surveying the usage of words with the *Zay Kāf Yā* root within the *hadith* literature perhaps the most familiar derivative in the Islamic context, is the term ‘*zakāt*, this being the third 'pillar' of the Islamic faith and indeed, when the form II verb is used with a person's wealth (*mālahu*) it means to pay the appropriate amount of *zakāt*, which is due. Despite the vast wealth of narrations regarding this topic, as was mentioned earlier, this usage is of little use to us here and therefore will not be considered.\(^{302}\)

This leaves rather a limited choice of *hadith* to consider but fortunately the remaining narrations that contain the form II version of the verb ‘*zakkā* also make mention of the term ‘*nafs*’ also. The first of these is of particular significance, as indeed it makes specific mention of *tazkiyat al-nafs*; in the text of the *hadith* the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

> There are three acts [whereby] whoever performed them has tasted the sweetness of faith; he who worships Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, alone as none is worthy of worship except Him; he who gives his *zakāt* willingly, not giving a weak old animal, a mangy animal or a sick animal but indeed, he gives from the median range of his wealth, as Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, does not ask you [to give] the finest of it and did not order you [to give] the least of it; and he who purifies his soul (*zakkā nafsahu*). So a man asked, "And what is purification of the soul (wa ma tazkiyat al-nafs)?" He [the

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\(^{302}\) See p. 49 above.
Prophet] replied, “That he knows that Alläh, the Mighty and Exalted, is with him wherever he may be.”

This *hadith* seems to have solved the problem of the meaning of *tazkiyat al-nafs* since it is a direct definition and quotation from the mouth of the Prophet of Islam himself. Indeed, some scholars of the discipline of *hadith* consider this narration to be authentic but on closer inspection however, this seems not to be the case. As such, it will not be considered here due to its lack of authenticity and hence cannot be viewed as a statement of the Prophet.

In the second of these narrations it is reported by the Prophetic Companion Zayd b. Arqam (d. 66/686 or 68/688) that the Prophet, would teach them the following supplication:

O Alläh, indeed I seek shelter in you from incapacity and laziness, senility and cowardice and miserliness and the punishment of the grave. O Alläh, grant my soul (nafs) its righteousness and purify it (zakkiiha), as indeed, You are the best of those who purify it (zakkiiha), You are its Guardian and Master. O Alläh, I seek shelter in You from a heart that has no fear [of You], a soul that cannot be satisfied (nafs lä tashba’), knowledge of no benefit and a request that will not be granted.

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305 After a prolonged discussion from authoritative sources of this *hadith*‘s chain of narrators, Zarabozo concludes the lack of authenticity of the narration. In addition, on consulting with sheikh ‘Abd Allah al-Juday - one of the foremost scholars of *hadith* in this time - he arrived at the same conclusion and kindly provided the researcher with a short commentary upon this narration, which has been included in Appendix 1. See Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul*, pp. 73-4 and Appendix 1.

306 It is worth mentioning however, that the meaning of this *hadith* is contained in another famous authentic narration known as *hadith Jibril*, where the Prophet is questioned by the angel Gabriel, “And inform me of spiritual perfection ([ihsän]) to which he replies, "It is to worship Alläh as if you see Him [and know] that if you do not see Him, He sees you." See Muslim, *Saḥîh Muslim*, pp. 26-6; Karzün, *Manhaj al-Islâm fî Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, vol. 1, pp. 12-13 and Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul*, pp. 74-5.

In comparison this second narration was related by the famous hadith scholar, Imam Muslim as well as others and as such, from the Islamic perspective is considered rigorously authenticated. Its significance is manifold; firstly, this supplication (du'tā) was actually taught by the Prophet to his Companions, which in itself is enough to show the importance of the content of this particular prayer. The subject matter of this supplication is seeking shelter in Allah against negative or unbenevolent qualities and as such the nafs occurs reiterated within it. We find that granting the nafs its righteousness is attributed to Allah alone and is reminiscent of the Qur'anic verse (91:8) regarding the inspiration of the soul, as if to say not only has the soul been inspired to dual potentiality of both good and evil but in the light of this, there is a request of the divine for only the 'good' of such inspiration.

The supplication continues requesting divine assistance regarding the soul's consequent purification (tazkiya), which is indicative of the fact that this 'purification' is indeed what will bring about righteousness in the soul and which in turn, reminds us of the qualities of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'inna), which is the ultimate goal of this process. Despite this however, although Allah is regarded to be, "The best of those who purify it (zakkāha)", which clarifies that there is primarily a divine role in purification, which has been witnessed earlier, but this also shows that tazkiya is not restricted to God alone but that it is He Who has achieved perfection in this regard. This also opens the possibility that others, i.e. other than God, may undertake this process and as we have also seen, this is the role of the Prophets and Messengers and indeed, the human being himself.  

In addition, the fact the Prophet himself would make and teach such a supplication is an indication of the enormity of the task in hand, as it would seem to be an indication that even God's elect require His assistance in this regard and as such, the need of the 'mere mortal' is even greater. Indeed, it would seem in the light of this narration that to attain purification of the soul is impossible without divine intervention and the humble request for it.

These are the only Prophetic narrations that this researcher was able to locate; there are however, a number which relate directly to the nafs itself and therefore, it is the task of the next section to survey such transmissions to shed further light on the nature of the nafs from the Islamic perspective.

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308 It should also be noted that al-Nawawi (d. 626/1277) considers the meaning not to be preferential but indeed, "It [the soul] has no purifier (muzakki) except You." Al-Nawawi, Sahīh Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawi, vol. 17, p. 34.
2.3.2 The Concept of the Term Nafs within the Hadith Literature

When surveying the vast material of the hadith literature for the term 'nafs' we find - quite expectedly - a huge number of transmissions that contain this term. However, as was noticed previously, many of these narrations utilise this word as a reflexive pronoun, in much the same way that we use in English 'myself', 'yourself', 'ourselves' etc. and as such, these usages will not be considered here.

On examining the remaining material however, we find many references to the negative aspects of the nafs. For example, in the hadith discussed in the last section, in addition to the mention of the concept of tazkiya, we also find the phrase, "O Allāh, I seek shelter in You from ... a soul that cannot be satisfied (nafs lā tashba')", this being an indication of the nafs's voracious appetite to fulfil its desires as alluded to earlier, which is a particular characteristic of the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sā'). Indeed, al-Nawawi (d. 626/1277) comments that the meaning of this supplication is, "Seeking shelter from greed, avarice, voracity and the soul (al-nafs) having high hopes." Furthermore, the nafs in question in the supplication is non specific and may be the nafs of the person making the du`ā or those of others; in either case this is further evidence of the need of divine assistance in protecting oneself from the evils of the soul.

On a similar theme, in a famous public address made by the Prophet, known as 'khutbat al-ḥāja', we find the phrase, "... We seek shelter in Allāh from the evil of our own souls (shurūr anfusīnā) and our sinful deeds (sayyī'āt a'mālinā)..." This once again is a direct reference to the negative qualities of the nafs; in fact the narration is extremely explicit in its choice of words, since the word 'shurūr' is the plural of 'sham' meaning evil or wickedness, indicating the many types of iniquity found within the nafs. Similarly, this seems to allude to the

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310 See p. 61 and cf. pp. 65-7 above.
311 See p. 62 above.
313 For this particular phraseology and variations of it see Sijistānī, Sulaymān b. al-Ash’ath (Abū Dāwūd), Sunan Abū Dāwūd (Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1999) pp. 165-166 and 715; al-Tirmidhī, Muhammad b. Jāmī, Sharḥ al-Tirmidhī (Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1999) pp. 266-7; al-Qazwīnī, Muḥammad b. Yazīd (Ibn Mājah), Sunan Ibn Mājah (Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1999) p. 271; al-Nasārī, Sunan al-Nasārī al-Ṣughrā, pp. 198-9; Ibn Ḥanbal, Ahmad, Musnad al-Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, p. 252; It is also worth mentioning that al-Albānī (d. 1420/2000) considers both the narrations in Sunan Abū Dāwūd to be inauthentic (da`īf) but since the concept of the evil of the soul (sharr al-nafs) is established in the remaining transmissions it can be considered to be an authentic concept. See al-Albānī (d. 1420/2000) Muḥammad Nāṣīr al-Dīn, Da`īf Sunan Abū Dāwūd (Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1991) pp. 108 and 503.
consequences of such evils as the very next phrase used is, “... We seek shelter in Alläh from ... our sinful deeds (sayyīrāt a'mālinā)...”, as if to say that these sins that have been committed are no more than a product or a consequence of the evils of the soul. Once again there is the pedagogical aspect of teaching such phrases in a public arena and also, the concept that such negative qualities found within the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammarā bi 'l-su) will not be overcome except through seeking the assistance of the Creator of the soul, Alläh, the Mighty and Exalted. 314

Similarly, within the corpus of hadith literature the dual potential of the nafs for both positive and negative qualities can be identified. The following narration illustrates this dichotomy; the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said:

Satan ties three knots on the nape of the neck of one of you when he sleeps, striking the place of every knot, [saying:] “The night is long so sleep.” So if one of you awoke, remembered Alläh one knot is untied; then if you performed ablution (wudu') another knot is untied and if you prayed another knot is untied. [Thus, such a person] will become energetic and genial (tayyīb al-nafs) or otherwise he will be lazy and unpleasant (khabīth al-nafs). 315

In this narration we find two diametrically opposed notions regarding the nafs, i.e. those of goodness (ṭib) and malevolence (khubth), which manifest themselves behaviourally in terms of geniality and unpleasantness. These are again examples of the soul's inspiration to both 'good' and 'bad' as alluded to in verse (91:8). Moreover, the significance of Satanic influence is also mentioned here and seems to fit nicely with the description of the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammarā bi 'l-su) mentioned previously316 and its inclination to devilish insinuation, which seems to interact at the 'metaphysical' level. Furthermore, this particular narration also suggests the role that 'physical' acts of worship can have on the nafs in changing its state and presumably, its purification, as this hadth mentions specifically remembrance of Alläh (dhikr), ritual ablution (wudu') and prayer (salāt), these

314 See footnote 119 above.
316 See pp. 65-7 above.
being righteous deeds associated with the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'Inna), also mentioned previously.\textsuperscript{317}

The duality of the *nafs* is also alluded to in another extended narration which discusses the fate of the soul upon death; the Prophet is reported to have said:

The angels come to the dead person [upon death] and if he was righteous they say, “Exit O good soul (nafs tayyiba) that was in a good body; exit nobly and receive glad tidings of repose (rawh), benevolence (rayhan) and a Lord Who is not wrathful.” This will continue being said to it until it exits [the body]. Then it will be elevated into the heavens and they will be opened for it. It will be said, “Who is this?” And they [the angels] will say, “It is such and such.” It will be said, “Welcome to the good soul that was in a good body; Enter nobly and receive glad tidings of repose, benevolence and a Lord Who is not wrathful” and this will continue being said to it until it reaches the heaven in which Allâh, the Mighty and Exalted resides.

If [however] he was wicked they say, “Exit O despicable soul (nafs khabitha) that was in a despicable body; Exit in disdain and receive tidings of scalding water and purulence and other forms and types [of punishment].” This will remain being said to it until it exits [the body]. Then it will be elevated into the heavens and they will not be opened for it. It will be said, “Who is this?” And they [the angels] will say, “It is such and such.” It will be said, “No welcome for a despicable soul that was in a despicable body, go back in disdain as the gates of the heavens will not be opened for you.” Then it will be sent [away] from the heavens and will go back to the grave.\textsuperscript{318}

In this detailed account of the fate of the soul after death we are given to contrasting images of the soul depending on its actions and state before death. On the one hand, the good soul (nafs tayyiba) will be encouraged to leave the body, being extolled with the good news of its entry into paradise and the pleasure of its Lord. This honorific position is enhanced by its ascension into the heavens, where it is welcomed and ultimately is favoured with being brought into the proximity of its Creator. This no doubt is reminiscent of the description of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma’Inna) and the success (falâb) awarded to it. In contrast, the despicable soul (nafs khabitha) is granted no such luxury; indeed, it exits the body in humiliation, being informed of the torments that await it. Similarly, there is no welcome for it in the heavens and it is commanded to return to its grave in disgrace. Once again this seems to allude to the fate of the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammâra hi 7-S17) that has disgraced itself with continuous self interest in the worldly life.

Therefore to avoid this form of humiliation there are a number of narrations praising the combating of the soul and disciplining it. It fact, one of the greatest acts of worship in Islam,

\textsuperscript{317} See al-Nawawi, *Sahîh Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawi*, vol. 6, pp. 58-9 and pp. 69-72 above.

that of struggle or jihad - usually associated with physical combat - takes on a new connotation in this context. The religious warrior (al-mujähid) is no longer, merely a soldier in God's path but as the Prophet stated, "The religious warrior (al-mujähid) is the one who struggles against his soul for the sake of Alläh, the Mighty and Exalted." Thus, from this we can glean that one of the essential qualities of dealing with the nafs is to struggle and strive against it, so as to purify it and in doing so, the practitioner of this difficult task gains the privilege of being considered a combatant in the path of Alläh.

In a similar vain, it is reported that Abü Bakr al-Śiddiq (d. 13/634), the famous Prophetic Companion and the first caliph after the death of the Prophet, said, "Whoever loathes his soul for the sake of Alläh [then] Alläh will save him from His wrath." Thus, having disdain for one's soul, particularly the state referred to as the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-amnāra bi 'l-sü) and its contemptible actions, is considered praiseworthy in the process of disciplining it and ultimately purifying it.

In addition to struggling against one's own soul, commonly referred to as `mujähada' and having contempt for the soul, a further course of action is found in the narrations related to the nafs - that of taking the soul to account or `muhäsaba', as it is known in Arabic. This concept is pivotal in the teaching of al-Mūhäsibi and in fact his name is said to be derived from this quality. It is interesting to note however, that this concept was also found in the formative period before him, as it is related that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), another famous Prophetic Companion and the second caliph in Islamic history is reported to have said:

Take your souls to account before they are taken to account; weigh your souls [actions] before they are weighed, as indeed, it will easier for you in the Reckoning tomorrow that you take your souls to account today; adorn yourselves for the great display! On that day you will be brought forth and not even the most hidden secret will be concealed.
Thus, it can be seen that it is necessary to take the soul to account in this life in order to make the reckoning in front of Allāh easier, since any sins committed would have had repentance made for them and as such would be forgiven, making them insignificant on the Day of Judgement. Once again it is easy to see how this along with other qualities mentioned above is an intrinsic component in the process of purifying the soul.

Despite the idea of implementing punitive measures on the nafs as a form of disciplining it, described in the aforementioned narrations, we also find a sense of balance in this process, as is related in the following ḥadīth regarding fasting in which the Prophet is reported to have asked ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr al-ʿĀṣ (d. between 63/683 - 77/696):

“Do you fast continuously and pray the night prayer?” To which he replied, “Yes.” The Prophet responded, “If you [continue] to do that the eyes will be overwhelmed and the soul will be exhausted (nafiḥat lahu al-nafs). Do not fast continuously; fasting three days [a month is the equivalent of] fasting continuously.” So he said, “I am able to do more.” To which the Prophet replied, “Then fast the fast of Dāwūd, peace be upon him, who would fast one day and break his fast the next” ... ³²³

Thus, forcing oneself into a state of continuous, physically demanding acts of worship, such as fasting - which is normally considered a highly effective way of disciplining the soul - is not recommended, as ultimately it has a negative effect, as the ḥadīth itself suggests, “... the soul will be exhausted (nafiḥat lahu al-nafs) ...” By implication also, this cannot be the method of purifying or disciplining the soul as otherwise this narration would have indicated as much; on the contrary this process must be balanced, bearing in mind both the physical and emotional needs of the person, whilst combating the negative qualities to which all souls are prone.

Perhaps on a more positive note we find that the Prophet is also reported to have said, “Being rich is not [due to] having a lot of material wealth but being [truly] rich is [having] richness of the soul (ghinā al-nafs).” ³²⁴ This is a very significant indication of the importance of purification of the soul, as it alludes to the true meaning of happiness in the worldly life. Many people may consider having vast amounts of money to be understood as being wealthy and similarly, may consider that a penniless person is poor. However, this ḥadīth clarifies Islam’s position regarding being rich; in reality the person who thinks that

material wealth is in fact the true source of being rich is fooled, as he is not satisfied with what he has been given. Such a person continues trying to accumulate ‘wealth’ and as such all forms of temporal benefit, to the extent that they are indifferent as to the source of this ‘wealth’ due to their overwhelming greed; in this sense according to the above narration such a person is indeed ‘poor’ and not wealthy at all. Alternatively, if a person suffices himself with what he has been given, is satisfied and content with it, not desiring an increase in it, then this is the true meaning of ‘wealth’ since such a person does not feel ‘in need’ due to his satisfaction with what he has.325

In this regard al-Qurtubi comments:

The meaning of the hadith is that richness that is beneficial, great and praiseworthy is richness of the soul (ghina al-nafs); this means that if a person’s soul is content, it refrains from desires, is enhanced and becomes superior, attaining respectability, prestige, honour and praise, which is more than the wealth that is acquired by someone who has poverty of the soul (faqir al-nafs) due to his greed, as this embroils him in contemptible matters and despicable acts due to his base aspirations and his miserliness; [such a person is] continuously condemned by people, his position being diminished [in their sight], thus becoming the lowest of the low. As for the person who is described as having richness of the soul (ghina al-nafs), he is content with what Allâh has provided him, he does not seek an increase that is more than his need, nor is he insistent or demanding in his request; indeed he is satisfied with what Allâh has ordained for him.326

This ‘poverty’ and ‘wealth’ is reminiscent of the characteristics of both the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammâra bi ‘l-sû) and the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma’inna) respectively. As for the first, it remains self-serving, being controlled by its desires to the extent that accumulation - and consequent consumption - is its primary goal, to the extent that it ignores its duties to its Creator. On the contrary, the outstanding quality of those endowed with richness of the soul is their satisfaction with God, this being one of the most outstanding qualities of the tranquil soul, as described above. Thus, we can equate poverty of the soul as being a characteristic of the soul prone to evil and richness of the soul to be a characteristic of the tranquil soul. Similarly, it stands to reason that eradicating the soul of such ‘poverty’ and adorning it with ‘richness’ is a major goal of tazkiyat al-nafs.

2.3.3 Section Summary

Having examined Islam’s secondary source of thought and Law, namely the *sunna* as preserved in the *hadith* literature, we have found another source of valuable information regarding the terms ‘tazkiya’ and ‘nafs’. Concerning the term ‘tazkiya’, after initial disappointment regarding an inauthentic narration that contained the compound phrase ‘tazkiyat al-nafs’, another narration shed further light on the process and means of *tazkiya*. This narration, in the form of a Prophetic supplication, provided further clarification on a number of issues; firstly, that even the Prophet himself sought shelter and assistance in Allāh regarding the process of purifying the soul. Indeed, Allāh was further qualified as the source and agent of this process but it was also found that the phraseology of the supplication also did not rule out the possibility of other agents taking a pro-active role in the purification process. At the same time however this narration seemed to allude to the idea that ultimately this process would not be completed except by placing one’s trust in the guardianship of God, the Creator of the soul and “... the best of those who purify it (*zakkāhā*) ...”327

With regard to the term ‘nafs’ it was also found that many of the concepts discussed in the section concerning the Qur’ān were also reinforced. Firstly, the negative qualities of the *nafs* that are so indicative of the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi ‘l-sū) were encountered; for example, the *nafs* is clearly characterised by iniquity (sharr) and this innate quality leads to sins and misdeeds, which are ultimately so destructive in the Hereafter. As such, the importance of seeking divine assistance was also stressed, once again due to the fact that ultimately these negative qualities would not be overcome except through the intervention of the Creator of the soul and “... the best of those who purify it (*zakkāhā*) ...”328

Similarly, the dual potentiality of the soul was also seen in the *hadith* literature; such phrases as genial (*tayyib al-nafs*) and unpleasant (*khabīth al-nafs*), the ‘good’ soul (*nafs *tayyiba*) and ‘despicable’ soul (*nafs khabītha*) and richness of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*) and poverty of the soul (*faqīr al-nafs*) were identified, all of which are indications of the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi ‘l-sū) and the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma’īnna) respectively. The transformation of such negative aspects of the soul to their positive counterparts was also discussed and certain disciplinary practices such as having contempt for the soul (*maqt al-nafs*), struggling against one’s own soul (*mujāhadat al-nafs*) and taking

327 See pp. 80-1 above.
328 Ibid. and see section 2.3.2 above.
the soul to account (muḥāsabat al-nafs) were also identified. Despite this, it was also seen that there has to be a degree of balance in this process of purification as the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the human being need to be considered, or in the words of the Prophet, "... the soul will be exhausted (naḥfat lahu al-nafs) ..."\(^{329}\) As such, in many ways the definition proposed at the end of the section concerning the Qurān, i.e. "the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma’inna)" has not changed greatly. However, despite this our understanding of the process has, since this purification to bring about a 'richness of the soul' will not occur except by eliminating its 'iniquity' by a balanced and integrated process of 'striving against it' and 'taking it to account'.

Having surveyed the Arabic language and Islam's primary literary sources to gain a greater understanding of 'tazkiyat al-nafs', it is appropriate to examine the works of Muslim scholars to shed light upon their understanding of this term, bearing in mind their familiarity with these same sources and this is the goal of the next section.

2.4 The Concept of the Terms Tazkiya and Nafs in the view of Muslim Scholars

Having surveyed Islam's revelatory sources and gained an understanding of the presentation of tazkiyat al-nafs therein, it is now equally appropriate that we examine the views of its scholarly circles so as to extend further our knowledge of this subject matter. At the same time however, this discussion is by no means intended to be exhaustive and comprehensive, as this itself would require a separate work. Instead, a selection of opinions will be presented here, to add to the discussion so far, in the sense that there will be an attempt to represent views that have not already been mentioned or have their own specific significance, thus adding to the richness of the discussion of this intriguing topic. In addition, the opinions discussed are merely representative of a wide range of similar views that exist and as such, are not meant to represent a particular stance or school of thought. Similarly, little commentary will be provided due to the lucidity of many of the quotes, to let such opinions 'speak for themselves'. It is also worth noting that this section should be read in conjunction with the last two sections as many scholarly opinions were quoted previously, whilst examining the textual evidence found in the Qurān and ḥadīth and as such, are very much part of the scholarly debate concerning the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs.

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\(^{329}\) See section 2.3.2 above.
Finally, in keeping with the methodology of the previous sections each of the terms 'tazkiya' and 'nafs' will be discussed separately before discussing their compound derivative.

2.4.1 The Concept of the Term Tazkiya in the view of Muslim Scholars

The goal of this section is to clarify the views of Muslim scholars regarding the concept of the term ‘tazkiya’ both in its general linguistic usage and in its specific terminological usage within the shari‘a context. One of the most prolific medieval scholars of Islam was the celebrated shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalim Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and bearing in mind his extensive writings it is not surprising that he also discussed this topic. Concerning the linguistic considerations of this term he said:

*Al-tazkīya* is to make something pure (zākiyyan), either in its essence or in terms of belief (al-ittīqād) [in it] or informing (al-khabar) [regarding it], in the same way that it is said, “I straightened it ('addaltahu’); if you straightened it in itself or in terms of people’s belief regarding it. He the Exalted says, “And do not claim purity for your souls (wa lä tuzakkū anfusakum) [53:32]”, i.e. [do not] inform [others] of their purity. 330

In addition to discussing the linguistic implications of the word ‘tazkiya’ Ibn Taymiyya also makes an important point; that *tazkiya* is not only a process of purification but indeed, this purification requires that not only ‘good’ qualities are encouraged but that ‘bad’ characteristics are eliminated. In this regard he says:

The origin of *al-zakāt* is an increase in good; it is said, “The crop increased (zakā al-zar) and the wealth increased (zakā al-māl)” if it grew, and good will not grow except via the relinquishing of evil, in the same way that a crop will not grow (yazkū) until the weeds are removed from it. Similarly, the soul (al-nafs) and deeds (al-a‘māl) will not be purified (lä tazkū) until that which contradicts is removed; a man will not be purified (mutazakkiyan) until he has relinquished evil and whoever does not relinquish evil will not ever be pure (zākiyan), as indeed evil pollutes the soul (al-nafs) and defiles it. 331

Regarding the process of purification he recommends a ‘practical’ approach332 to the problem beginning with the very essence of faith and moving on to the practical aspects of religious life. For example he says:


332 This approach, which involves an all-encompassing practice of Islam has been popularly promoted by a variety of contemporary scholars but will not be examined in great detail here, as the goal of the current thesis
As such, monotheism (tawhīd) and faith (īmān) are the greatest things through which the soul (al-nafs) is purified (tatazakka), whereas polytheism (shirk) is the greatest thing which defiles it. It is also purified by righteous deeds and acts of charity and all of this is what has been mentioned by the predecessors. They said, “He who is purified is indeed successful [87: 14]”, is he who is purified from polytheism and [purified] from disobedience through repentance.  

Of the contemporary scholars who have discussed the topic of tazkiya Amin Ahsan Islahi’s account of the topic is easily one of the most lucid and comprehensive studies. In the following extended quote he clarifies the effect of tazkiya on the human being:

The action of tazkiyah on different things will appear in different forms on the surface. On material objects it will take one form and on abstract objects quite another. But this apparent difference will not change the reality. The spirit of purification, growth and development and its final perfection will be visible in its actions everywhere. For instance the action of tazkiyah may be performed on a tract of land and also on the inner self of a person. Although due to variations in the fields of action, there will be a difference in the form, yet in reality and in its object there will be no difference between the two. The tazkiyah of the tract of land will comprise clearing it of the weeds, brushwood and brambles, levelling it, ploughing it to make it soft and porous, then watering it so that it may become capable of developing the healthy seeds of some sort in keeping with its natural capacity, and take it to the final stage of blossoming and fruition. The tazkiyah of the inner self of a person involves eradication of erroneous thought and false assumptions, the correction and levelling of the perversions and angularities created by the corrupt morality and bad habits; removal of the ills produced by the blind emulations and ritualism; treatment and cure of the evil of drooping spirits and cowardice created by craving for ephemeral carnal pleasures so that his eyes may be opened and his mind may become capable of thinking freely, his drooping spirits may be raised, his habits may be reformed and through development of his mental, moral and spiritual powers according to his natural capabilities, may attain the heights God endowed him with to reach. Technically it conveys the sense of checking ourselves from erroneous tendencies and learnings and turning them to the path of virtue and piety

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(fear of God's displeasure) and developing it to attain the stage of perfection.\textsuperscript{334}

Regarding the vast scope of the purification process he comments:

On the contrary \textit{tazkiyah} deals with all the apparent and hidden aspects of our selves. It critically judges all the powers and the capabilities of which we are constituted, discusses all our emotions and feelings and corrects and reforms them; it takes stock of all the variegated and multifaceted ties that we are bound with, and creates an order in and regulates them all under a particular principle and regulation. Our thoughts, our apprehensions, our inclinations our movements, our eating and drinking, our engagements, entertainments, and interests, the daily routines of our lives, in short, no department and nothing that touches our lives is outside the pale of \textit{tazkiyah}.\textsuperscript{335}

Concerning the object of the purification process he is no doubt, as he states:

\textit{Tazkiyah} does not demand only that our soul may somehow be subordinated to the Commandments of the \textit{Shari'ah}, but its real demand lies in breaking this unruly steed of our soul in such a way that it carries out the orders of God and His apostle in the best possible manner. It does not only demand from us the service where the slave comes to imagine that he is beholding his Lord with his eyes (physical vision). In short, it means that \textit{tazkiyah} places before us the demand of \textit{Iman} or belief, \textit{Islam} or submission and \textit{ihsan} or utmost sincerity, at the same time. It demands that we believe in God with all His attributes, also that we obey His Commandments in every sphere of our lives and above all that this belief and obedience may not be formal and superficial but fully conscious and deeply sincere in which our hearts must coordinate with our physique.\textsuperscript{336}

Similarly, he considers the process of \textit{tazkiya} to be a continuous one, where the human being continually strives for perfection. In this regard he comments:

This nature of \textit{tazkiyah} makes it a perpetual striving and a continuous struggle without any break or a period of rest. In this journey there is no turn or stage which may be mistaken for the last lap of the journey the destination where one may sojourn a while or become permanently at ease. At every stage in this striving one goes on looking for greater excellence and higher standards and nowhere his eyes can come to rest on any degree of excellence. With the greater polish of the deeds, the morals and the exterior and the inner self, the fineness of morals and the exterior and the inner self, the fineness of tastes, the degree of sensibility and keenness of eye-sight also progresses by leaps and bounds, with the result that no sooner has one

\textsuperscript{335} Ibid., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{336} Ibid., p. 23.
washed the old stains off his raiment some more stains come in sight to be cleansed.\textsuperscript{337}

Finally, one of the most important roles that \textit{tazkiya} can play is in developing the individual's personality and by building his character. Concerning this aspect of the purification process Khurshid Ahmed says:

\textit{Tazkiya} means literally the purification or the cleansing of all those things which are unwholesome and unwelcome and unwanted. At the same time it endows the human being with all those things that are essential for growth and development, for blossoming and flowering. The \textit{tazkiya} of a person would mean the developing of his character, his thought, his behaviour; it would mean the moulding of his entire flow of actions to free them from those evils, those unwholesome traits which are obnoxious, undesirable in the eyes of Allah, and to endow them with all those virtues which Allah wants to flourish in human life. \textit{Tazkiya}, one might say, is a “short-hand” word for the entire concept of character-building.\textsuperscript{338}

2.4.2 The Concept of the Term \textit{Nafs} in the view of Muslim Scholars

One of the oldest discussions that has occupied the minds of men from the earliest time is the question concerning the essence of humanity: what is the soul? Islahi alludes to this when he says:

\begin{quote}
Evidently enough the theme of \textit{tazkiyah} is the human soul. But what is soul is an important question stressed in the Islamic philosophy and in that of \textit{Jahiliyah} too, well enough. The arch of the doorway to the temple in ancient Athens bore the inscription of the sayings of Socrates: “Man know thyself!” This is a pointer to the fact that in Greek philosophy knowledge and cognizance of the soul was considered of fundamental importance.\textsuperscript{339}
\end{quote}

This being the case it is hardly surprising that Muslim scholarship has also addressed this fundamental question and indeed, due to the nature of this enquiry, theologians discussed this issue at an early stage. One of the first and still most popular ‘orthodox’ creeds of Islam was that set down by Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933). In a classical exposition of this creed Ibn Abū al-'Izz al-Ḥanafī (d. 792/1390) alludes to the variety of opinions in this debate before clarifying the ‘orthodox’ position when he says:

\begin{quote}
There is a difference of opinion regarding the soul (\textit{al-ruh}) as to what it is. Some say it is a body and some say it is an accident (\textit{‘arad})\textsuperscript{340}. Others say that they do not know what it is, either a substance or an accident. Some say
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{337} Ibid., pp. 23-4. \\
\textsuperscript{338} See \url{http://www.salaam.co.uk/knowledge/aspects.php}, Ahmed, Khurshid, “Some Aspects of Character Building”. \\
\textsuperscript{339} Islahi, \textit{Self Purification and Development}, p. 25. \\
\textsuperscript{340} This of course is in the terminology of the philosophers being the opposite of a substance (\textit{jawhar}).
\end{flushright}
that the soul is nothing more than a balance of the four natural components [i.e. earth, air, fire and water]. Some others say that it is pure blood free from impurities and putridity. Some say that it is the natural heat that is life itself. Some say that it is a non-composite substance spread throughout the animal world that drives and organizes that world and that it is not divided into essence and structure, being existent in every animal of the world, as one. Others say that it is the breath that enters and exits during breathing and yet others have further opinions ...

The Qur'an, sunna, consensus of the Companions and rational evidences prove that the soul is a body which differs in essence to that of the tangible body. It is a heavenly body of light that is agile, animate and is motile. It passes through the substance of the limbs in the same way that water spreads through a rose, or the way that oil diffuses through an olive, or the way fire enflames a coal. As long as these limbs remain healthy to accept the effects of this delicate body [the soul], this delicate body remains diffused throughout the limbs and drives effects, such as sensory perception, motion and volition. However, if these [limbs] become compromised due to an imbalance in the body and it becomes unable to accept the effects [of the soul on it], the soul will separate from the body and leave for the sphere of souls (ālam al-arwāḥ). 341

In a similar attempt to define the nafs in a terminological manner, seemingly basing his discourse upon verse (39:42) and the commentary of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. c. 67-8/686-8) mentioned previously 342, we find the following text from al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413):

It is an ethereal, delicate essence that carries the life force, sensory perception and motion; al-Ḥakīm called this the animal soul (al-rūḥ al-ḥayawāniyya). As such it is an illuminating essence within the body, so at death its light is detached from the internal and external parts of the body. As for during sleep it is detached from the external part of the body and not the internal, which confirms that death and sleep are of one category, as death is a complete cessation whereas sleep is a partial one. Thus, it is confirmed that the All Powerful and the All Wise has connected the essence of the soul to the body in three ways: firstly, if the light of the soul reaches all parts of the body, both the external and the internal, then this is [termed] wakefulness; if its light was from the external part of the body and not the internal, then this is sleep, or [if it is detached] completely, then this is death. 343

In addition to the theological attempts to define the nafs there have also been conceptual ideas regarding the soul from other sections of Muslim scholastic circles. The most obvious of these is the Sufi community. Bearing in mind the intrinsic nature of the subject matter and its relation to Sufism it is particularly important to spend some time discussing these

342 See p. 51 above.
343 Al-Jurjānī, al-Taʾrīfāt, p. 239.
ideas. The main concept of the Sufis is that nafs is the seat of every blameworthy quality; seemingly equating it entirely with the state of the soul termed 'the soul prone to evil (al-nafs la ammära bi 'l-sūr)' in the Qur'ān. In this regard, we find the following statement from one of the early practitioners of Sufism, who discussed the nafs in detail, al-Ḥakim al-Tirmidhi (d. ca. 300/910), who states:

It is a 'land (ark) of debauchery, inclined to carnal appetite after carnal appetite and desire after desire; it does not gain calmness nor does it gain stability. It actions vary, none of them resembling the other; one time it is servitude and another it is divinity, one time it is surrender and another it is domination, one time it is incapacity and another it is capability. So if the soul is contented and disciplined it will become obedient. \(^{344}\)

Another of the early Sufi masters Abū Sa'id al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) elucidates the importance of seeking divine aid when dealing with this 'internal enemy' and clarifies exactly how the soul should be treated when he says:

From the characteristics of the truthful (al-ṣādiq) in intending Allah the Exalted, is that he calls his soul (al-nafs) to Allah the Exalted's obedience, seeking His pleasure and if it responds he praises Allah the Exalted and treats it [the soul] well. If however, it does not respond regarding which pleases Allah, or he sees it slow [to respond] then he prevents it from its beloved in this life, opposes it regarding what it desires, takes it as an enemy for Allah's sake and complains to Allah about it until He reforms it for him...

Thus, it is related that some scholars said, 'Indeed I know that part of my reforming of my soul is my knowing its vices.' As such it is sufficient evil that person knows a fault in his own soul and doesn't correct it. \(^{345}\)

Commenting on the importance of reforming and purifying this base form of the soul and realising the true potential of one's own humanity al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234) states:

Whoever knows the essence of the soul (al-nafs) and it deceptions, also knows that he has no power over it except by seeking the assistance of its Lord and Creator. As such, the devotee will not fully realise his humanity until he casts aside his animal instincts with knowledge and uprightness, by being careful to observe his excesses and his negligence. Through this his


humanity will be enhanced, he will comprehend the satanic characteristics within him, the blameworthy qualities and the perfection of his humanity.\[^{346}\]

Regarding the many faults of the soul\[^{347}\], its positive/negative duality and its deceptive nature, the renowned Sufi and eponym of the Qādiri Sufi brotherhood, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilāni (d. 561/1156) states:

Among the spiritual dangers posed by the lower self (āfāt al-nafs), is its dependence on acquiring praise, a good reputation, and the approval of fellow creatures. To that end, it is even prepared to endure the burdens imposed by acts of worshipful service (ʿibādāt). In order to do so, it must resort to ostentation (riyā) and hypocrisy (nifāq). The symptom of this is apparent in its return to laziness and indifference, as soon as the performance is over, along with the risk of criticism from other people.

You will not become clearly aware of the spiritual dangers posed by your lower self (nafs), its polytheistic association (shirk), its pretension and its falsehood, unless you undergo a process of intense examination and assessment, designed to probe the roots of its pretentious behaviour. This is because it will speak in the manner of the fearful, as long as you are not compelled to experience fear, but if you need it [to respond correctly] in situations where fear is appropriate, you will find it feeling comfortably secure. It will speak in the manner of the righteous (abrār), as long as you are not being tested for true devotion (taqwā), but if you need it then, and call upon it to satisfy the preconditions of true devotion (taqwā), you will find it polytheistic (mushrika), hypocritically ostentatious (murā'īya), and vainly conceited (muṣjaba). It will seem to fit the description of those who truly understand (ārifin), as long as you do not need to explain what something really means, but if you ask it to supply that information, you will find it telling lies. It will pretend to be one of those who are genuinely certain (mālqīn) of their claim, as long as you are not tested for sincerity (ikhlās). It will insist that it is one of those who are modestly unassuming (mutāwakkīl), as long as it is not presented with opposition to its passionate desire, in an anger-provoking situation.

It will likewise lay claim to generosity, magnanimity, altruism, liberality, affluence, chivalry (futuwwa), and other such praiseworthy characteristics; the characteristics of the saints (awliyā); the spiritual deputies (abdāl), and the spiritually eminent (ayān) from motives of desire, frivolity and foolishness. If you demand proof of all that, and put it to the test, you will find that it resembles nothing more than the

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[^347]: These are enumerated as being as many as 68. See http://www.crescentlife.com/spirituality/blemishes_of_nafs.htm, al-Jerrahi, Tosun Bayrak, “68 Blemishes of the Nafs”.
mirage (ṣarāb) of an oasis, which the thirsty traveller supposes to be water, until he reaches it and finds that it is really nothing at all. If there had been any truthfulness (ṣidq) and sincerity (ikhlāṣ) present, if its word had indeed been correct, and its tongue had spoken the truth, it would not have put on a fancy display, designed to impress mere creatures, who have no power to cause it either harm or benefit. Its actions would have been appropriate, under the test conditions, and its words would have matched its deeds. 348

In dealing with such faults of the soul Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) enlightens us regarding his own personal account:

One day I asked shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya, may Allah have mercy on him, about this matter and how to eliminate faults and occupy oneself with the cleansing of one's path. The gist of his reply was that the self is like a garbage pile: the more you dig in it, the more of it comes out to the surface; if you can pave a pathway over it and go past it, do so, and do not preoccupy yourself with digging into it for you shall never reach its bottom because the more you dig the more that surfaces. The similitude of the faults of the souls (āfāt al-nafs) is like that of snakes and scorpions in the path of a traveller; if he started to examine the road for them and was preoccupied with killing them he would be halted and never be able to make progress. However, your aspiration should be to progress on your journey and to avert yourself from them [the faults] and not to pay any attention to them. However, if you are faced with something that prevents your journey then kill it and then continue on your way. 349

Bearing in mind the prolific writings of the celebrated ‘Proof of Islam’ (Ḥujjat al-Islām) Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzāli (d. 505/1111), it is not surprising to find that he has commented on the concept of the nafs and in doing so he discusses both the previous concepts of the nafs, as well as the states of the nafs, saying:

Nafs: It also has several meanings, two of which concern us here; first, it means the powers of anger and sexual appetite in a human being, which will be explained later, this usage being mostly found among the people of ṭaṣawwuf [Sufis], who take "nafs" as the comprehensive word for all the blameworthy characteristics in the human being. That is why they say, 'One must certainly do battle with the ego and break it', as is referred to in the ḥadith, "Your worst enemy is your nafs which lies between your flanks." 350

348 http://www.students.missouri.edu/lists/muslim-l/0460.html
350 Al-İrāqī (d. 806/1404) says it is in al-Bayhaqī on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās. However, its chain of transmission contains Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ghazwān, who is one of the forgers. See Al-Ghazālī
The second meaning of *nafs* is the delicate entity [the soul] we have already mentioned, the human being in reality, his self and his essence. However, it is described differently according to its different states. If it assumes calmness under command and has removed from itself the tumult caused by the onslaught of passion, it is called 'the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-mutma‘ınna*)', as the Exalted said regarding it [89:27-30], "O tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-mutma‘ınna*), return to your Lord content [with Him] (*rādīya*) and pleasing [to Him] (*mardijya*), so enter into [the ranks of] My devotees and enter My paradise." In its first meaning of the *nafs* one does not envisage its return to Allāh, as it is far removed from Him and is from 'the party of Satan'. However, when it does not achieve calmness, yet resists the base soul (*al-nafs al-shahwānlyya*), objecting to it, it is called 'the self-reproaching soul' (*al-nafs al-lawwäma*), because it rebukes its owner for his deficiencies in worshipping its Master, as the Exalted said regarding it, [75:1-2], "Do not swear [an oath] by the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwäma*)." If it gives up all protest and surrenders itself in total obedience to the call of passions and enticement of Satan, it is named 'the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammära bi ‘l-sü‘*)' as the Exalted said regarding it, by way of informing regarding Yusuf and the vizier's wife [12:53], "And I do not absolve my own self [of blame], as indeed, the [human] soul is prone to evil (*inna ‘l-nafs la ammära bi ‘l-sü‘*), except when my Lord bestows mercy, as indeed my Lord is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful", which could be taken to refer to the soul in its first meaning. As such, the *nafs* in the first meaning is absolutely blameworthy, whereas in the second meaning it is praiseworthy, being the essence and reality of the human being that has cognisance of Allāh and all other particulars.  

Finally, a contemporary scholar Karzūn, attempts to combine the various elements of the above discussion when he summarises, "*Al-nafs*: is something internal within the human being, whose essence cannot be comprehended; it is susceptible to being directed to good and bad, and encompasses many of the human characteristics and qualities that have a manifest effect on human behaviour."  

2.4.3 The Concept of the Term *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* in the view of Muslim Scholars

Some Muslim scholars would argue that not only is *tazkiyat al-nafs* an intrinsic part of the Islamic teaching but indeed it is the ultimate objective of this religion as Sa’īd Murād comments, "The goal that Islam strives to fulfil regarding mankind, in terms of belief and rectitude, is to combine in the individual travelling along such paths, correct belief and
methodology, so that he can be elevated to the rank of the ‘people of purity’ (ahl al-ṣafā'). This is fulfilled by struggling against the soul (al-nafs) and training it.  

Similarly, since this is one of the main roles - if not the main role - of the manifestation of Islam, as we have seen previously, one of the fundamental tasks of the Prophets and Messengers was also to purify the souls of their followers. In this regard, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) states:

Purification of the souls (tazkiyat al-nufūs) is more severe and more difficult than treating the body; so whoever purified his soul by training (riyāda) and disciplining (mujāhada) [it] and spiritual retreat (khalwa) in a manner that was not brought by the Messengers then he is like a sick person who attempts to treat himself using his own opinion. And how does his opinion compare to that of a physician? The Messengers are the physicians of the heart and as such, there is no way to purify them or reform them except [by adopting] their method, putting yourself in their hands, with absolute compliance and submission to them.

Continuing on this theme and developing it to express the scope and nature of purification of the soul Sa‘īd Ḥāwwā states:

Tazkiyat al-nafs is one of the tasks of the prophets, it is the goal of the righteous and through it will be salvation or destruction. Tazkiya linguistically has two meanings: [firstly,] purification (tathīr) and [secondly] growth (namuw). Similarly, it has the same meaning terminologically, as purification of the soul (zakāt al-nafs) means its cleansing (tathīrahā) from sicknesses and faults, its realisation is through spiritual stations (maqāmāt) and its [the soul's] adoption of [divine] names and attributes. Thus, tazkiya in summary is cleansing, realisation and adoption. Its means are legally legitimate and its essence and fruits are the shari`a. Its effect is seen in one's behaviour, in one's relationship with Allāh the Mighty and Exalted, in one's relationship with the creation and in one's control of the limbs with regard to Allāh's command.

In addition to this a number of contemporary scholars have attempted to elucidate this concept further. For example, ‘Umar al-Ashqar said:

Tazkiyat al-nafs terminologically means the cleansing of the soul from corruption that intermingles with the soul and its development with good and blessed things, which is all achieved by the performance of righteous deeds and the leaving of despicable acts. The purified soul (al-nafs al-zakiyya) is the one that has been cleansed in accordance with the shari`a of Allāh; it is the good soul (al-nafs al-tayyiba) being the one that is deserving

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Similarly, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Abū Fāris, states, “Tazkiyat al-nafs is achieved through cleansing of the soul of polytheism, disbelief, base characteristics and despicable acts; it is also achieved through developing the good and the growth of piety in the soul, which is a path that leads to paradise.” In an exposition of the singular ḥadīth mentioning this term, Karzūn, summarises, “Al-tazkiya: is the cleansing (taḥlīl) of the soul (al-nafs) from being inclined to iniquity and sin and the development of the natural disposition to good within it, which leads to its rectitude and it reaching the level of spiritual perfection (iḥsān).” Also, Āl ‘Abd al-Latīf defines the concept succinctly thus, “Al-Tazkiya linguistically means cleansing (al-taḥlīl), growth (al-nimā) and increase (al-ziyāda) but the meaning here is reformation of the souls and their cleansing via beneficial knowledge, performing righteous deeds and carrying out what has been commanded and refraining from what has been forbidden.” Finally, in a more elaborate definition Zarabozo states, “Purification of the soul equals the process in which the healthy elements found in the soul are fostered, built upon and added to while any invading contaminants are removed or controlled such that the person worships Allah properly and fulfils his purpose in life, which can culminate in the ultimate expression of true iḥsān.”

2.4.4 Section Summary

Having examined the primary revelatory sources of Islam, namely the Qur‘ān and the sunna in the form of ḥadīth, as well as the medium of these sources, the Arabic language, the purpose of this section was to provide an overview of how Muslim scholarly circles have interpreted these sources, what theories they have constructed, what concepts they presented and what contribution they have made to the understanding of this topic. Upon examining the views of the ‘ulamā’ one cannot help but be impressed by the rich variety that is found, regarding both the terms ‘tazkiya’ and ‘nafs’, as well as their compound derivative. It must be said however that little has been forwarded in this section regarding the term ‘tazkiya’. Many of the scholarly opinions are somewhat repetitive, particularly in

358 See pp. 79-80 above.
360 Āl ‘Abd al-Latīf, Ma‘ālim fi ‘1-Sulūk wa Tazkiyat al-Nufs, p. 57.
361 Zarabozo, Purification of the Soul, pp. 76-7.
their exposition of the linguistic usage of the term and it remains very much with the realms of to grow and flourish (namā), or to increase and augment (zād), or to enjoy the blessing and abundance of God (tan‘ama) but can also mean to reform (ṣalāha), all of which indicate an overall process of development, which could be termed ‘purification’ in the broad sense. Having said this, their interpretation of these implications in the Islamic paradigm does yield an interesting response. For example, as we have seen, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) develops this theme not just to mean the positive sense of ‘growth’ and ‘development’ but quite astutely observes that this process of development will not occur with the presence of negative influences. Indeed, the ‘cultivation’ simile is a common feature of the literature on this point, the negative qualities of sin and iniquity being likened to the ‘weeds’ that endanger the growth of any ‘crop’.362

Furthermore, there is a tendency to a very practical approach to the topic, being represented in an absolute and complete implementation of Islam at its every level, from issues of belief to physical acts of worship, to seemingly ‘beat’ the nafs into submission. This ‘broad scope’ of tazkiya, as Islahi suggests, needs to permeate every aspect of the human being; this encompasses not only the soul but also the intellect (al-‘aql), actions, relationships, interactions and the very consciousness of a person’s humanity. As such, tazkiya is an absolute method to reform the human state, which is the very goal of revelation.363

On examining the concept of the nafs, which by now we can comfortably equate to the human soul, we find - somewhat expectedly - a much more diverse set of views. The very nature of the soul, its vague description and almost ineffable quality, have occupied the minds of men for millennia and as such, it is not surprising that the Muslim scholarly elite have also engaged in this debate. Thus, almost every section of Muslim scholarship can find representation here from theologians to philosophers and Sufis to jurists. The rich variety of this debate can easily be seen in Ibn Abū al-‘Izz’s (d. 792/1390) introductory paragraph before discussing the theological view of the soul, where non Islamic influences are equally evident.364

It may be said that when examining would-be definitions of the soul such efforts often enlighten our concept of the soul rather than facilitating a definitive view of it. In fact one may argue that attempting to define the soul is a thankless task, let alone a near impossible one. The Qurān itself alludes to the ineffability of the human soul, in an incident where the

362 See section 2.4.1 above.
363 Ibid.
364 See section 2.4.2 above.
Prophet is reported to have been asked regarding the soul, the Qurān responds (17:85), "They ask you concerning the soul (al-rūḥ), say: the soul is the concern of my Lord and you [mankind] have been given nothing more than a little knowledge." This verse is particularly poignant, as it not only affirms the fact that both the soul and consequently, its purification are concerns of the divine but also that whatever knowledge mankind has regarding the soul, can only be a fraction of the true knowledge of its nature.

However, where the Qurān is particularly informative, as has been shown previously, is regarding the description of the soul, its attributes and its states. In this particular field the Sufis have concentrated a great deal of effort, their whole concern being to oppose the nafs and its every whim. This seems to be due to the fact that they equate the nafs with the base form of the soul, which the Qurān terms 'the soul prone to evil (al-nafs la ammāra bi 'l-sūr). This being the case, much time is dedicated to discussion of the faults of the soul (āfāt al-nafs), its deception (khud'a) and the duality of its nature, the goal of these discussions being of course to enlighten the owner of such a soul to its dangers and to put in place a programme to eliminate such negative qualities.365 As such, a much less involved discussion is made regarding the other two states of the soul mentioned in the Qurān, i.e. the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) and the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma'īnna), which as mentioned previously, is the goal of tazkiya.366

In addition, many contemporary scholars have revived the study of tazkiyat al-nafs, seemingly in an attempt to oppose the 'unorthodoxy' of many Sufi practices and to accentuate the spiritual element of the Islamic faith. As such, they attempt to revive the practical approach so evident in the writings of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his student, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). These are useful attempts and provide a valuable addition to the literature, as well as the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs, which is apparent from their definitions of these terms.367

Conclusion

As the title of this thesis suggests, the main aim of this work is to explore the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs in Islam and draw a comparison between it and the teachings of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi. As such this chapter was divided into the following sections: firstly, it examined the meaning of the words tazkiya and nafs etymologically to arrive at a basic

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365 See pp. 95-8 above.
366 See section 2.2.4 above.
367 See section 2.4.3 above.
linguistic understanding for these terms. Secondly, it made an in-depth study of these two terms as found in the Qurʾān by locating these words within their various Qurʾānic contexts and examining them in the light of the exegetical literature (tafāṣīr). Having derived a meaning for these two terms in the Qurʾānic context, attention was then turned to the ḥadīth, to arrive at an understanding of how these words were used by the Prophet, his Companions and the early generations who followed them. The final section dealt with the statements of the scholars of Islam (al-ʿulamāʾ) to examine their understanding of tazkiyat al-nafs, in the light of what was discussed in the previous sections.

In conclusion the researcher, rather than attempting to define the term tazkiyat al-nafs in a strict sense as other authors have, would prefer to present an overview of the understanding of this term as discussed in this chapter. As such, it may be summarised that our understanding of tazkiyat al-nafs has now developed to mean: the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭmaʿīnna). This process involves the nurturing of its positive potentialities and eradicating its negative inclinations, to bring about its purification (tazkiya) and eliminate its defilement (tadsiya). This in turn is attained by executing a balanced and integrated process of punitive measures, such as striving against it (mujāhada) and taking it to account (muhāṣaba), as well as implementing both the basic beliefs and practical actions of Islam, to bring about a richness of the soul (ghinā al-nafs), which is indicative of the soul's success (falāḥ) in both this life and the next.

From the Islamic perspective, the religion of Islam, whether in terms of tenets of faith or legislation, is said to have been completed during the lifetime of the Prophet.368 Despite this, this teaching is thought to have lived on after his death, being preserved in the practice and teachings of his Companions and their Successors, until the Islamic tradition was formalised in a written format in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries. Nevertheless, this tradition, during this period and up until the present day, has had an ethos of informed interpretation and intellectual enquiry.

Islamic history bears the names of a multitude of theologians, exegetes and jurists, who enhanced and enriched this tradition. It is suggested here that the field of tazkiyat al-nafs was no different and in the same way that there were jurists (fuqahāʾ) capable of independent reasoning (iḥtiḥād) known as mujtahīds in the field of jurisprudence,

368 See Qurʾān (5:3).
outstanding exegetes (*mufassirûn*) in the field of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsîr*) and exemplary intellectuals in the field of hadîth (*muḥaddithûn*), there were also exceptional and erudite scholars of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

It is further suggested that Abû ‘Abd Allâh al-Ḥârith b. Asad al-Muḥâsibî (d. 243/857) was one such scholar and this being the case, it is also suggested that he and his works are a case study of how the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* may be implemented. Therefore, the following chapters will discuss al-Muḥâsibî’s methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in the light of the present chapter. Firstly, however, this will require that the period in which he lived be examined to assess the effect of his social milieu upon him, before moving onto an exposition of his life, works and methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs* and indeed, this is the goal of the next chapter.
Chapter 3: The Historical Background to al-Muḥāsibī's Life

Al-Muḥāsibī was born in a highly interesting and well chronicled era known as the 'Abbāsid period. Such a rich historical period is difficult to represent in a short chapter such as this bearing in mind that individual works have been dedicated to this cause. This being the case this section of the thesis concentrates on the factors within the reign of the 'Abbāsids that may have directly affected the life of al-Muḥāsibī. As such, this chapter will begin by providing a brief impression of the 'Abbāsids themselves, so as to furnish the reader with an overview of the rulers of this particular period of Islamic history. Similarly, the early 'Abbāsid period is often regarded as the 'Golden' era of Islamic learning and thus, an assessment of intellectual life under these caliphs will also be made. Thirdly, since al-Muḥāsibī spent his formative years in Basra and the better part of his life in Baghdad, both these geographical locations will be discussed to assess their influence on our author. Finally, perhaps the single most important religio-political event in this period was the miḥna, commonly termed the 'Inquisition', which affected religious praxis during a large proportion of al-Muḥāsibī's life and therefore, this event will also be examined, so as to assess its impact on our scholar.

3.1 The 'Abbāsids

As noted previously, a full representation of this period is beyond the scope of this study and therefore, only a very brief overview will be given here, so as to give the reader a taste of the era as a whole. The 'Abbāsid period in its entirety covers approximately half a millennium spanning the years 132/750 to 656/1258.369 Consequently, historians have divided the period into three sub-periods.370 The primary era, being known as the first 'Abbāsid period (132/750-247/861)371, is generally regarded as a period of growth and prosperity, having built upon the successes of the Umayyads. This is followed by the second 'Abbāsid period (247/861-447/1055)372, which is regarded as era of political decline, due to

372 The point at which the second period begins is focus of dispute amongst researchers in Islamic history but the consensus is that the period begins with the death of al-Mutawakkil in 247/861. Abū Zayd, al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya, p. 63.
the events leading to the loss of ‘Abbāsid power. Finally, there is the third ‘Abbāsid period, which includes the eventual collapse of the caliphate (447/1055-565/1258).\textsuperscript{373}

The ‘Abbāsids themselves took charge of the Islamic empire from the Umayyads with the ascension to the throne of Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad (r. 132/749-136/754), commonly known as ‘al-Saffāḥ (lit. ‘the blood spiller’) due to his merciless execution of the remaining Umayyad dignitaries. The rise of the ‘Abbāsids was mainly due to on the one hand to the lack of popularity of the Umayyads, who were seen as a debauched, ‘pro- Arab’ aristocracy who had little regard for the welfare of their subjects and the messianic campaign of the ‘Abbāsids for a return of authority to the house of the Prophet or ‘al-riṣāla min āl Muḥammad as they put it, on the other. Their claim to authority came through their familial link to the Prophet's uncle al-ʿAbbās and they would later counter the ʿAlīd claim to authority - since they were also of Prophetic lineage - by showing that their link was through a male relative, i.e. al-ʿAbbās and not through a female one, i.e. Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter, which was apparently still an important factor despite this being a supposed post-jahili, Arab society. This call, or daʿwa, proved very popular and gained great support in the eastern provinces generally and in Khurasān in particular. Subsequently, it would be support from this province that would bring the ‘Abbāsids to ascendancy and remain their powerbase for years to come.\textsuperscript{374}

The seemingly religious overtone to their claim of legitimacy as rulers was consolidated by their adoption of honorific titles (alqāb, sin. laqab), which was unprecedented and seemingly added to their apparent link with God and later, by their patronising of religious learning, which equally added to their claim of ‘orthodoxy’. Despite this however, their powerbase constituted a departure from the ‘Arab aristocracy’ of the Umayyads, since the majority of their supporters were in fact of Persian origin. Thus, the early ‘Abbāsid period became synonymous with the rise of the Persian ‘clients’ or mawāli, who occupied key

\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., p. 110.

positions in the ‘Abbāsid administration and who seemingly ‘Persianised’ the running of the state along the lines of the old Sasanian model.\(^{375}\)

The consolidation of ‘Abbāsid power did not lie with Abū ’l-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ however and indeed, it was his successor Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ‘al-Manṣūr’ who succeeded in suppressing the ‘Alid uprisings and provided the ‘Abbāsid state with a new epicentre, Baghdad\(^{376}\), which would remain the state capital for more than half a century to come.\(^{377}\)

It was into this era that our subject al-Muḥāsibī is reported to have been born in 165/782 and since he died in 243/857, he lived through a considerable portion of the entire primary period of the ‘Abbāsid era. This being the case, al-Muḥāsibī lived through the reign of eight ‘Abbāsid caliphs, who were briefly as follows:

1. Muḥammad b. al-Manṣūr, ‘al-Mahdi’ (r. 158/775-169/785)

Due to the determination, energy, political acumen and renowned frugality of his father, al-Mahdi inherited an empire that was stable, powerful and richly endowed. Consequently, al-Mahdi is remembered as being generous in comparison with his father and he used the state’s substantial wealth to improve relations with the ‘Alids, by offering them generous stipends and esteemed positions. Seen as a religious ruler due to his building of mosques and patronising of the pilgrimage, al-Mahdi is also remembered for his persecution of those with anti-Islamic tendencies known as zindiqs. At the political level, his reign is also a period in which the ‘clients’ mawāli continue to come to prominence and there is a continuation of the expansion of the new class of civil servants known as the ‘kuttāb’, who helped define the administration’s bureaucracy.\(^{378}\)


With his reign being so short and with the sources comparing him unfavourably with his brother Ḥārūn, al-Hādi is difficult to assess yet we are given the impression that he was determined, forceful and on occasion hasty and ill-tempered. In many ways his reign was a reaction to his father’s, as he reversed his policies regarding the ‘Alids and attempted to limit the influence of both the mawāli and the kuttāb. His greatest aim however was to


\(^{376}\) For a more in-depth discussion of Baghdad see pp. 126-33 below.


remove his brother Hārūn from the succession and replace him with his own son Ja'far but
his life was cut short in suspicious circumstances and considerable court intrigue.379
3. Hārūn b. al-Mahdī, 'al-Rashid' (r. 170/789-193/809)
Arguably the most famous of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs, Hārūn al-Rashid is well known due to
his relations with Europe through Charlemagne and perhaps more so, for his apparent
immortalisation in the One Thousand and One Nights. Similarly, he has a privileged place
in Sunni hagiography for his frequent trips for pilgrimage and his own personal support of
the jihad against Byzantium. His reign would be marked, however, by his appointment of
members of the Barmakid family as his closest ministers and confidantes, who essentially
administered the caliphate on his behalf for most of his reign until their untimely demise in
controversial circumstances under the very same caliph. Al-Rashid's caliphate is
considerably marred however by his almost naive decision to divide power after his death
between his sons Muḥammad and 'Abd Allāh - a decision that would lead ultimately to civil
war.380
4. Muḥammad b. al-Rashid, 'al-Amin' (r. 193/809-198/813)
Often portrayed as politically incompetent, reckless and somewhat debauched, al-Amin
remains one of the most tragic figures in ‘Abbāsid history. Having been denied the entire
caliphate to himself by his father's will, he wasted little time in attempting to manipulate it
back to his own control. His brother's steadfastness in resisting the caliph's attempt at
wrestling power away from him could only have one possible outcome - a civil war.
Hostilities soon ensued and culminated in a siege of Baghdad that lasted several months
and destroyed great areas of the city but a more severe blow was dealt to the ‘Abbāsid
caliphate when al-Amin was executed by his brother's forces, this being the first incident of
regicide during the dynasty's rule.381
5. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Rashid, 'al-Ma'mūn' (r. 198/813-218/833)
After receiving the caliphate in the most inauspicious manner al-Ma'mūn redeemed himself
somewhat, by proving himself a patron of the arts through actively supporting the
translation movement and the celebrated 'House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Ḥikma)'. Thus, he is

al-Dhahabi li ʿl-Dawla al-ʿAbbāsīyya, pp. 192-301; Kennedy, The Early Abbasid Caliphate, pp. 115-33 and El-
Hibri, Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography, pp. 17-58.
al-Dhahabi li ʿl-Dawla al-ʿAbbāsīyya, pp. 302-37; Kennedy, The Early Abbasid Caliphate, pp. 135-48 and El-
Hibri, Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography, pp. 59-94.
remembered for his role in the translation of Greek, Indian and Persian works on astronomy, mathematics, medicine and philosophy, which will be elaborated on further, shortly, as well as his encouraging of court debates on a variety of intellectual matters. His spirit of ‘tolerance’ was further enhanced by the fact he seemingly attempted to bridge the gap between his own family’s dynasty and the rival ‘Alids by appointing Ali al-Riḍā as his heir but this attempt proved doomed to failure. Due to his tolerant approach to ‘foreign’ learning and ‘unorthodox’ views he was labelled ‘commander of the unbelievers (amīr al-kāfirīn)’, a title which would be given further credence in the eyes of his opponents by his adoption of the ‘Inquisition (miḥna)’ - a policy, as we will see, that would define his caliphate.382

6. Muḥammad b. al-Rashid, ‘al-Muṭṭaṣīm’ (r. 218/833-227/842)

On ascending the throne al-Muṭṭaṣīm had been requested by his brother to continue pursuing the policy of the miḥna, which he did reluctantly and it seems that he was satisfied to pursue it in the form of courtroom formality only. The one exception was of paramount significance, however, as it lives on in the pages of history, this being the trial of Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, which will be discussed later. Al-Muṭṭaṣīm’s reluctance to pursue the miḥna is often attributed to his lack of intellectual learning but equally the caliph was occupied by a number of events during his reign, such as the revolt of Bābak, the trial of his general Ashfin, mounting his offensive against Amorium, coping with the revolt of Mayzār, overcoming the Zoṭṭ revolt and the transfer of the capital from Baghdad to Sāmarrā’. This latter move was an attempt to relocate the army which had become influenced by its Turkish contingent - a feature that would define ʿAbbāsid politics in the years to come.383


In many ways the reign of al-Wāṭiḥiq was also an extension of his father’s, as he continued appointing Turks to key positions in the military and Bughā was one of these who distinguished himself in suppressing the various revolts of the period. Although al-Wāṭiḥiq was seemingly a capable politician, he relied heavily on his two chief ministers, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt and Abū Du‘ād, to the extent that he consulted them in all of his affairs. It was under this latter vizier that the miḥna was vigorously pursued and

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the insurgent Ahmad b. Nasr al-Khuza‘i was executed seemingly not for his ill-fated coup but for his opposition to the state creed. Ibn Abū Du‘ād continued to wield power within the administration until he was defeated in a debate regarding the nature of the Qur‘ān and thus, the caliph seems to have withdrawn his support for the mihna policy.384

Despite this general period being known as a period of decline, the ascension of al-Mutawakkil began a period of relative stability for the Islamic state. It is true that the caliph began to lose his influence over the wider boundaries of the empire, due to the internal competition of his officers and bureaucrats but despite this, the state stabilised due to al-Mutawakkil’s ending of the Mu‘tazilite policy and its consequent inquisition. In addition to this, the caliph also adopted a severe policy regarding the Shi‘ite elements, destroying the mausoleum of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā‘. Thus, the rule of al-Mutawakkil had a rather authoritarian flavour, as he took his dignity as a ruler very seriously. This however, was not sufficient for him to survive the devious plotting of his Turkish amīrs and they eventually succeeded in assassinating him in 247/861.385

3.2 Intellectual Life in the Early ‘Abbāsid Period
Despite virtual autonomy in the Middle East the Arab caliphate had little to show in terms of academic endeavour, the Arabs being mostly an illiterate people whose main achievement was the eloquence of their language and the recording of their history and culture in a poetic form. This ‘underachievement’ was to change dramatically during the early ‘Abbāsid period for a number of reasons, the foremost of which will be alluded to here. Firstly, the shifting of the seat of power to Iraq placed the new caliphate at the centre of the academic and cultural world; India with a long history of mathematics, medicine and science lay to the east. Alexandria, the seat of accumulated Greek thought lay to the north as did the academic centres of Damascus and Harrān. Similarly, in neighbouring Persia were other intellectual institutions such as that at Jundisābūr.386

These locations had also existed under the rule of the Umayyads yet they had little impact. Therefore, the second important factor in the flourishing of learning under the ‘Abbāsids was the changing demographic structure of its administration. The introduction of the mawālī ‘clients’ into the bureaucratic structure created a new ‘civil servant’ or ‘secretary’ class (kuttāb) into the administration, the vast majority of whom were non-Arabs and who were exemplified by the Barmakids and Nawbakhts and their protégés. Having access to the caliph and hence influence, this ‘foreign’ contingent encouraged the rulers to take an interest in the surrounding culture of science and learning of the adjacent non-Arab/non-Muslim populations. 387

The response of the caliphs was forthcoming and they obliged by patronising the accessing of this knowledge of the ancient and diverse societies surrounding them. The impetus for this development came from what Gutas terms ‘the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement’ that existed in Baghdad and early ‘Abbāsid society. 388 This primary cause in the development of learning in the ‘Abbāsids era would have been impossible however without an important discovery - that of paper. The introduction of this technology by Chinese prisoners of war quickly replaced the regular writing materials of the day and although initially it was only used by the caliph himself for official documents and personal letters, it soon became more widely available, thus fuelling the learning process. 389

Although the translation of ‘foreign’ works was not unheard of in the Umayyad period it was under the ‘Abbāsids reign that it flourished initially under the policies of both al-Manṣūr and his son al-Mahdi. 390 The same policy of translation continues amongst their successors but it was under the authority of al-Maʿmūn that the translation movement was at its height 391, culminating in the development of the celebrated Bayt al-Hikma ‘the House of

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388 See Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture, pp. 1-191 passim.

389 See Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture, pp. 1-191 passim.

390 See Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture, pp. 28-74.

Wisdom', which acted as an institution for the translation, copying and keeping of books.\footnote{392} It is also worth mentioning that it was not only the caliphs who played a role in this process but indeed other members of society also took part in this culture of supporting the translation of non-Arabic works; the most celebrated of these were arguably the Banū Mūsā, i.e. Mūsā b. Shākir and his three sons, who would pay as much as 500 dinārs monthly for full time translators.\footnote{393} As for the translators themselves, it is worth noting that many of them were Christians, usually of the Nestorian denomination, due to their skills with Greek, Syriac, which was usually an intermediate language and Arabic. These scholars were numerous but the foremost in this field were Yaḥyā [Ibn] al-Bīṭriq, Qusṭā b. Lūqā (d. 298/912), ‘Abd al-Masih b. Nāʿima al-Ḥimsi, Yaḥyā b. ʿAdi (d. 362/974) and Abū Bishr Mattrā b. Yūnūs (d. 327/940).\footnote{394} However, the most illustrious of these scholars was the renowned Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 296/910), who is reported to have translated more than 31 works, being paid 500 dinārs per month and an amount of gold equivalent to the weight of the books translated, in addition to being the court physician during the time of al-Mutawakkil.\footnote{395} The nature of the translated works concerned classical learning as a whole and included astronomy, mathematics, medicine and philosophy from the works of Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, Plotinus and Ptolemy.\footnote{396} This is not to say that these sciences were merely academic efforts but indeed, they were put to practical use by a number of luminaries of the period. Astronomical observation had begun in Baghdad at an observatory in the al-Shammāsiyya district, on the left bank of the Tigris, east of al-Ruṣāfa and Ibrāhīm al-Fazārī, who had translated the Indian book of Astronomy, Sindhind, into Arabic for al-Manṣūr and who had helped plan the foundation of

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\item \footnote{394} See Gutas, \textit{Greek Thought, Arabic Culture,} pp. 136-141 and Watt, \textit{The Formative Period of Islamic Thought,} p. 303.
\item \footnote{395} See Sa'id, \textit{Warrāqü Baghdād fī ʿl-ʾAṣr al-ʿAbbasī,} p. 52; Gutas, \textit{Greek Thought, Arabic Culture,} pp. 2-185 passim; Watt, \textit{Islamic Theology and Philosophy,} p. 41; Weit, \textit{Baghdad,} p. 69 and Hanafi, Manzoor Ahmad, \textit{A survey of Muslim Institutions and Culture} (Lahore, Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1980) p. 175.
\item \footnote{396} Hasan, \textit{Tārīkh al-İslām,} vol. 2. pp. 346-7 and Gutas, \textit{Greek Thought, Arabic Culture,} pp. 136-50 passim.
\end{itemize}
Baghdad, was the first in the Arab world to make astrolabes. This work was continued in the time of al-Ma'mūn by Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, who also adapted Ptolemy's *Geographike Hyphegesis* and composed the first independent textbook on algebra (*al-jabr*), resulting in his name surviving until today in the term 'algorithm' for the formulation of the calculation method.

Medicine was always a popular topic academically, considering its practical application and the royal court's requirement for the caliph's treatment when ill. Thus, in addition to Ḥunayn b. Ishāq there were a host of royal physicians during the 'Abbasid period; the earliest of these may have been Jurjīs b. Jibrīl b. Bukhtishū who came from Jundisābūr to Baghdad in 147/765 to treat the caliph al-Manṣūr due to his skill in Hippocratic/Galenic medicine. The Bukhtishū family was arguably the most influential medical dynasty, their descendants serving a series of caliphs right up until the time of al-Mutawakkil. In addition, other Jundisābūr families also participated in this field including those of al-Ṭayfūrī and Māsawayh who were the most prominent, Yaḥyā b. Māsawayh being the foremost exemplar of the latter family.

Perhaps the most influential of these academic disciplines from the ancient world to have the greatest effect on the religious learning was that of philosophy. In the same way that the other translated sciences found their champions mentioned above, philosophy would find its champion in the personality of Abū Yusuf Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. ca. 255/870). Al-Kindī was from the well known, aristocratic Arabic tribe of Kinda and enjoyed a privileged upbringing, his family being associated with government positions in the 'Abbasid regime, while he himself became attached to the court in the time of al-Muṭṭasim. It would be a misrepresentation however, to portray al-Kindī as purely a philosopher, as he was a polymath, involving himself in all of the disciplines mentioned thus far and indeed, he was very much a product of his time. Nevertheless, it is with philosophy that his name is synonymous and to this end, he was one of those who introduced the Muslim world to

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philosophy, to the extent that he was given the honorific title of 'the philosopher of the Arabs (faylasuf al-'Arab)'.

This is not to say that the only works that were translated were of a scientific nature, as in fact literary works were also transferred from one culture to another, to which Ibn al-Muqaffa's (d. 139/757) translation of Bidpai's fables, in the form of *Kalila and Dimna* bears witness. Ibn al-Muqaffa's superb writing style is regarded to have given birth to Arabic prose (adab) as a discipline but his seminal efforts were brought to fruition by other writers who wrote not from translations but from their own literary ability. The most illustrious of these was Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Bahr al-Jāḥīz (b. 250/864 or 255/869 or 256/870), who in addition to being an ardent Mu'tazilite, wrote prose works of outstanding quality, such as *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* and *Kitāb al-Bukhālā*. A similar polymath, who followed shortly behind al-Jāḥīz in the field of Arabic prose was his contemporary, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), who distinguished himself with equally impressive works such as *Adab al-Kātib*.

Despite the development of a new literary vehicle, i.e. that of prose literature, Arabic poetry remained a vibrant artistic form. Nevertheless, the style, metre and to some extent, the content differed from the more 'classical' Arabic style. The Arabs, for the most part, no longer lived a nomadic lifestyle in the desert but rather, had become urbanised, living in flourishing cities and budding metropolises and consequently, this was reflected in their poetry. The poetry also took a more 'debauched' feel as the subject matter was often concerned with wine drinking and illicit affairs; the most notable of the poets of this genre in the 'Abbāsid period were Abū Nuwās, whose drunken misadventures were often the

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subject of his poetic talent and Bashshär b. Burd (d. 166/783), who frequented the court of al-Mahdi but whose eroticism alarmed those with religious tendencies. Other linguistically related disciplines were also not neglected during this period and Arabic philology was notably developed. The need to examine the depth of the Qur'anic implementation of the Arabic language became paramount so as to understand the nuances of usage and to gain insight into the multiplicity of meanings that some verses could potentially present. To this end, a number of scholars began the process of formulating works in his field, which apparently resulted in competing schools in both Basra and Küfa. Of the early Basran contingent Khalil b. Aḥmad is the most famous for his dictionary Kitāb al-'Ayn, which employed the method of utilising classical poetical verses as proof of usage - a method that later would become the established practice. Similarly, Khalil is credited with the creation of the basic concepts that govern poetic meter (ʿilm al-ʿarūḍ) and grammar (al-naḥw) and therefore, his contribution cannot be underestimated. Equally significant however, are the efforts of his student, the much celebrated Sibawayh, who preserved this grammatical system and developed it further. On the Küfan side Sibawayh's competitor was al-Kisāʾi, who had taught al-Rashid and his son al-Mahdi, as well as his disciple al-Farrāʾ, who taught Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) in the mosque at Küfa and composed a work on grammatical definitions in the court of al-Ma'āmūn.

It was also in this period that Muslims began to register works concerning their history and in particular, biographical details concerning the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (al-sīra al-nabawīyya). One of the earliest of these works to reach us is a complete account of the Prophet's life written for al-Manṣūr by Muhammad b. Isbaq (d. 151/768). His work was continued under al-Rashid by the Barmakid protege al-Wāgidi (d. 207/822), whose efforts concerned the campaigns of the Prophet (al-maghāzī). Similarly, another work in the period and heavily reliant on Ibn Isḥaq is one the most famous works of the genre, the Sīra


Rasūl Allāh of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833). In addition to strict biographical accounts, another genre appeared - that of charting each generation from the Prophet's time to the present, commonly referred to as 'tabaqāt' and the first scholar to construct a work in this manner was Muḥammad b. Sa‘d (d. 230/845). 406

This biographical trend can be seen as an extension of another tradition that had continued from an early period - that of collecting narrations regarding the Prophet's actions, statements and tacit approval - also known as ḥadīth. 407 Although this process had continued for some time and had some official support under the Umayyads, it was under the ʿAbbāsid regime that it would flourish and in many ways come to fruition. 408 During this period there were a number of prominent ḥadīth collectors scattered throughout the Muslim world who included: ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd al-Azīz b. Jurayj (d. 150/767) at Mecca, Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. 151/768) and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Dhi‘b (d. 158/775) in Medina, Sa‘d b. ʿArūba (d. 156/773) and Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783) at Basra, Zā‘ida b. Qudāma (d. 160/777) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) at Kūfah, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Amr al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157/774) in Syria, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) in Khurasān, Hushaym b. Bashir (d. 183/799) at Wāsīt, Jarīr b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (d. 188/804) at Rayy and ʿAbd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/813) in Egypt. 409

Despite their best efforts, of the earliest ḥadīth works to reach us from this era is that of the imam of Medina, Mālik b. Anas's (d. 179/795) al-Muwatta, reportedly written at the behest of al-Mansūr 410, in addition to the encyclopaedic ʿMusnad of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), which contains nearly 30,000 narrations. 411 These early works were followed by the most famous collections of ḥadīth, known as the 'six canonical works' that comprised al-

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408 See al-Khatib, Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth, pp. 176-81; Azami, Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature, p. 15 and Siddiqi, Hadith Literature, p. 6.


410 See al-Tūrāyfi, Tārīkh al-Fiqh al-Islāmī, pp. 87-8; Azami, Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature, pp. 81-3 and Siddiqi, Hadith Literature, pp. 7-8.

411 See al-Khatib, Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth, pp. 328-30; Azami, Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature, pp. 84-6 and Siddiqi, Hadith Literature, pp. 46-52.
Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ of Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870)⁴¹², al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ of Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī (d. 261/875)⁴¹³, the Sunan of Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Asbā'ath al-Sījūstānī (d. 275/889)⁴¹⁴, the al-Jāmi' of Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892)⁴¹⁵, the Sunan of Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān Aḥmad b. Shuʿayb al-Nasā'i (d. 303/915)⁴¹⁶ and the Sunan of Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Qazwīnī [Ibn Mājah] (d. 273/886)⁴¹⁷, in addition to a variety of other works in the period.⁴¹⁸

The collection of hadīth also contributed to the development of another field of learning that was equally vibrant during the 'Abbāsid period - that of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). The flourishing of fiqh during this period was facilitated by a number of factors including state support for jurists and the commissioning of jurisprudential works, the atmosphere of debate and discussion that was apparent amongst the scholars and that even took place at the royal court, the increase in the centres of learning and the compilation of the first works.⁴¹⁹ This ultimately led to the formation of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence that still exist today, i.e. those of Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān b. Thābit (d. 150/767) known as the Ḥanafī school (al-madhhab al-ḥanafī)⁴²⁰, Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) known as the Mālikī school (al-madhhab al-mālikī)⁴²¹, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-
Shāfīī (d. 204/820) known as the Shāfīī school (al-madhhab al-shāfī‘ī) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) known as the Ḥanbalī school (al-madhhab al-ḥanbali). This is not to say that there were only four skilled, independent jurists (mujtahīdīn) during this period but indeed, this part of Islamic history was renowned for the existence of a host of prominent scholars of comparable ability who included: Sufyān b. Sa‘īd al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Amr al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157/774), al-Layth b. Sa‘īd al-Fahmī (d. 175/791), Sufyān b. ʿUyayna al-Hilāli (d. 197/814), Abū Thawr Ibrahim b. Khālid al-Kalbī (d. 240/854), Dāwūd b. ʿAlī al-Zāhīrī (d. 270/884) and Muḥammad b. Jarir al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).

Theological debate was no less dynamic during the reign of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs; the Shi‘īte and Khārijīte tendencies of the early period were still active and the trend towards polemics regarding man’s actions and divine will was further developed by a new sectarian view termed Muʿtazilism, geared towards a rational dialectic and probably fuelled by the introduction of the Greek sciences of logic and philosophy. This latter trend will be dealt

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432 See Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, pp. 33-4 and 50-57.


with briefly in the following sections but the discussion here will focus on a repercussion of this development. The general populace of the Muslim community and their scholars at this stage can be designated as being 'Sunni' and be considered in opposition to the controversies raised by the sects just mentioned. With the advent of a rational approach as proposed by the Mu'tazilites, what Watt terms 'the General Religious Movement' was faced with a new challenge to their claim of 'orthodoxy'. In the face of the onslaught of Mu'tazilite rationalism many scholars remained steadfast, doggedly holding on to the creed they inherited from their predecessors, whereas others evolved an equally rational approach to defend their 'orthodox' beliefs against the digressions of their coreligionists. This rational method of defending orthodoxy that would be closely associated with Abū l-Hasan 'Ali al-Ash'ari (d. 324/935) in later times, was apparent in the first generation of Sunni scholastic theologians (mutakallimū ahl al-sunna) long before his arrival. Indeed, these scholars maybe viewed as the precursors of al-Ash'ari and included such notables as: 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'id b. Kullāb (d. ca. 239/854), Abū '1-dAbbäs al-Qalänisi and of most interest to us, our subject al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī. As such, this trend, which was vehemently opposed by ultra 'orthodox' Sunnites such as Ibn Ḥanbal, is extremely significant as it lays the ground for the latter day Ash'arite school of scholastic theology (kalām).

In summary, when reflecting on the discussion that has been presented above in the current section it is hardly surprising that the early 'Abbasid period was known as the 'Golden Age' of Islamic learning. Bearing this in mind, it is appropriate now to examine the geographic locations in which al-Muḥāsibī lived, to explore what other trends may well have influenced his life and works.

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440 See Watt, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, p. 64 and The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, pp. 287-9 and 311-12.
3.3 Basra in the ‘Abbāsid Early Period

The city of Basra may well stand on the site of an old Persian settlement as it was known to the Arabs as ‘al-Khurayba’ (lit. the little ruin) but its life as a Muslim town can be considered a new construction. The area was chosen by the Prophetic Companion Utba b. Ghazwān in 17/638 on the orders of the second caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb to establish a military camp; this became known as al- Başra, probably due to the nature of the area’s soil, as the name appears to mean ‘black pebbles’. Strategically placed 15 kilometres from the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab, Basra was to afford control over the Persian Gulf and provide a base for expeditions east. The location’s first dwellings were simple reed huts, which were gradually replaced by crude bricks and eventually by baked bricks due to the efforts of Ziyād b. Abū Sufyān, who can be regarded as the artisan of the city’s prosperity.

Despite its early development, Basra suffered from a lack of readily available drinking water and a notoriously difficult climate but nevertheless, due to various economic and political factors it became a great city. Being a major military encampment it was populated by some of the aristocratic tribes, the town being divided into five tribal sectors (khums, pl. akhmās): Āh al-ʿĀliya, Tamīm, Bakr b. Wālī, ʿAbd al-Qays and Azd. Similarly, the population of Basra included the ranks of the mawāli, and a number of immigrant populations, such as Persians, Indians, Malays and people from Sind, and the Zanj, adding to the new town’s ‘cosmopolitan’ nature.

Basra reached its zenith in the 2nd/8th century, being fully developed and having a large population. At this stage it was very much a great city and a ‘complete metropolis’, as it had a commercial centre, Mirbad (the kneeling place for camels), situated at the western gate where the caravans halted and which, was one of the busiest parts of the city. Similarly, it contained a river port termed al-Kallāq, which could accommodate ships of a fairly large tonnage and a financial centre run by wealthy non Arabs, Christians and Jews. In addition, Basra also had an industrial area with its arsenal and an agricultural centre famed for its variety of dates. During this period Basra had the character of a semi-independent metropolis but with the foundation of Baghdad it lost most of this quality that

443 Ibid.
it had possessed since its inception, becoming little more than a provincial town, being completely supplanted by the newly founded ‘Abbāsid capital.\footnote{Gibb et al (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 1, p. 1086.}

3.3.1 The First Ascetic School in Basra

It is hardly surprising that such a metropolis that boasted such a highly diverse demographic make-up also became a centre for intellectual endeavour and academic excellence. In fact Basra was one of the earliest and most influential centres of learning in the Muslim world, as Louis Massignon comments, “Basra, in fact, is the veritable crucible in which Islamic culture assumed its form, crystallised in the classic mould, between the first and 4th centuries of the \textit{hijra} (16/637-311/923).”\footnote{Ibid.} As such, a number of intellectual, academic and religious movements arose in tandem with the flourishing of Basra itself. Some of these are of primary importance to the current discussion, in the sense that they may have direct relevance to the life of al-Muḥāṣibi and therefore, will be discussed presently.\footnote{Similarly, there are number of trends and developments in learning that originated in Basra but their effect on the life of al-Muḥāṣibi is less tangible and therefore, they have been discussed above in the general section dealing with intellectual life in the early ‘Abbāsid period.}

Of these clearly identifiable trends is the ascetic nature of the spiritual teaching in Basra, which is almost exclusively associated with the city’s most famous son al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and which, is commonly held to be the precursor of what would later be termed Sufism. Although al-Ḥasan’s influence upon the ascetic tradition in Basra cannot be denied, upon examination we find that this trend originates long before his arrival on the scene. In fact the trend for an ascetic, spiritual lifestyle can be traced back to one of its early governors from the Companion generation, Abū Mūsā [Abd Allah b. Qays] al-Ash‘arī (d. 44/665). Abū Mūsā was one of the most famous Prophetic Companions, being associated with \textit{ahl al-ṣūffa} (lit. the people of the bench)\footnote{See pp. 32-3 above.} and one of the renowned reciters of the Qurān, who were requested by the Prophet himself to recite for him personally. With this in mind, the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb placed him in charge of the affairs of Basra but in addition to his administrative duties, one of his main tasks was to teach the recital of the Qurān - a tradition that later became a manifest quality of the Basran ascetic ‘school’.\footnote{The term ‘school’ is used in a very loose way in the sense that this was not a specific group of individuals who would meet in a specific location, study a particular curriculum and express a certain number of beliefs but rather, a nascent teaching that had identifiable trends in a particular locale, in this case Basra. Indeed, this}
In addition, he was famed for his fasting despite the heat and his rousing sermons, in which he would warn of the torments of hell and the dangers of becoming attached to the worldly life, to the extent that the audience would weep out of fear - another quality that became an intrinsic part of the spiritual teaching in Basra. The initial impetus supplied by Abū Mūsā al-Asḵārī gave rise to a number of scholars who took up the mantle of such an ascetic teaching, each of them advancing it in their own way until we find the development of what al-Nasḥshār terms, 'the first Basran school (madrasat al-Baṣra al-uṭūlā). This school was exemplified by a number of personalities but since an in-depth discussion of each of them individually is beyond the scope of the current research, only the prominent names will be given here: ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd [al-] Qays (d. ca. 50/670), Harim b. Ḥayyān, al-Ḥānaf b. Qays, Abū ʿAliya [Rafl b. Mahrān] al-Rayyāḥī (d. 93/712), Ṣīla b. Ushaym al-ʿAdawi (d. 62/682) and his wife Muʿādha bt. ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿAdawiyya.

3.3.2 The Second Ascetic School in Basra

The development of asceticism did not stop here however and continued into what al-Nasḥshār terms 'the second Basran school (madrasat al-Baṣra al-thāniya)' for which was the case throughout the initial period of Islam's spread throughout the region, as formulated schools in the traditional sense did not appear until much later.


Muṭarrif b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Shākir (d. 87/706 or 95/714) may be viewed as a precursor. The eponym of this school was not Muṭarrif however but Basra’s most illustrious inhabitant al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri, whose influence in shaping religious life in general and the ascetic life in particular in Basra is proverbial. After spending his formative years in the city of the Prophet, Medina and a brief period of military service on the frontiers, he eventually settled in Basra where he became famous - like his spiritual predecessor Abū Muṣā al-Asʿārī - for his fiery sermons, which are held to be masterpieces of religious rhetoric, as well as one of the earliest specimens of Arabic prose. His teaching revolved around the avoidance of sin, anticipation of the Last Judgement, rejection of worldly attitudes and the attachment to worldly possessions. Similarly, al-Ḥasan’s practice of humility and self scrutiny provided the cornerstone of his self discipline and introspection and when combined with his brotherly feeling towards his contemporaries, it defined him as Knysh puts it, as being “the archetypal proto-Sufi”.

It is hardly surprising that such a personality influenced so many of his contemporaries and although there were many, due to the constraints of the current research, only the most prominent names will be mentioned here: Yazīd b. Abān al-Raḳāshī (d. between 101/719-121/739), Muḥammad b. Wāsī (d. 120/738 or 123/741 or 127/745), Thābit b. Aslam al-Buṇānī (d. 123/741 or 127/745), Mālik b. Dinār (d. 124/745 or 127/745).
This generation of scholars were known as ascetics (nussāk) due to their austere lifestyles, reciters (qurrā) due to their emphasis on the teaching of the Qurān and presumably its implementation, worshippers ('ubbād) due to their strict adherence to their devotions, preachers (quṣṣāṣ) due to the delivery of their heart rendering sermons and 'weepers' (bakkān), due to their shedding of tears publicly when moved by eloquent speech or the remembrance of death or the hereafter. This teaching was further advanced by the students of Ibn Zayd, such as Riyāḥ b. AAmr al-Qaysi (d. 195/210) but more famously by Rābī'a al-Adawīyya (d. 185/801), who espoused the doctrine of 'divine love (al-ḥubb al-ilāhi)', which would infuse the doctrines of Sufism for centuries to come.

3.3.3 The Muctazilite School in Basra

The other outstanding intellectual trend that may have had a direct effect on al-Mubasibi during the early ‘Abbasid era was the establishment of the Muctazilite school in Basra. Quite paradoxically this too is said have been a product of the circle of students that surrounded al-Hasan al-Bāṣrī. Tradition has it that a student of al-Hasan, Wāsil b. cAtā' (d. 131/749), was present during a debate concerning the status of a sinful believer, i.e. what

would be the abode of such a person in the hereafter, paradise or hell? Wāsil's opinion, which he no doubt expressed, was that such a person would neither be in paradise nor hell but in an intermediate position (manzila bayn manzilatayn). This view was opposed by those present and Wāsil left this gathering to which al-Ḥasan is reported to have said that Wāsil has withdrawn (jāzala). Thus, such exponents of this view were known as al-Muṭṭazila, lit. 'those who have withdrawn', i.e., from the views held by the majority of the community.474

This 'intellectualising' of religious dogma seemingly set in motion by Wāsil b. ʿAtā' developed into a rationalised approach to theology, which seems to have been associated with the acquaintances of another Basran theologian, Abū ʿAmr ʿDirār b. ʿAmr al-Gḥaṭafānī (d. 182/800 or 204/820)475 and culminated in what became to be known as the Muṭṭazilite school in Basra. A full discussion of this school and its views are beyond the scope of the current work and as such, only the names of the most prominent personalities will be given here: Abū Hudhayl Muḥammad b. Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 227/842)476, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām (d. 221/836 or 230/845 or 231/846 or 232/847)477, Muʿammar b. ʿAbbād al-Sulāmī (d. 214/830 or 220/835)478, Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Kaysān al-ʿAṣāmī (b. 200/816)479, Hishām b. ʿAmr al-Fuwaṭī al-Ṣayyābānī (b. 218/833 or 226/841)480,


475 See Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, pp. 189-95 and 219 and Islamic Theology and Philosophy, pp. 42-4.


Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Bahr al-Jāhīz (b. 250/864 or 255/869 or 256/870)\textsuperscript{481} and Abū Ya`qūb Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh al-Shaḥhām (d. ca. 266/880)\textsuperscript{482}.

3.4 Baghdad in the Early `Abbāsid Period

It is a common historical feature that each dynasty upon its seizing the reins of power establishes a new seat for that power, to demonstrate its identity and prestige and thus, wipe their subjects' memories from its predecessors. In this regard, the `Abbāsids were no exception; on ascending the throne al-Saffāh had moved the centre of the empire from Damascus to Kūfā and later, to a purpose built capital known as al-Hāshimiyya, in honour of the dynasty. This proved relatively unsuccessful however since the establishment of this new centre was attempted at four different sites in the vicinity of Kūfā and Anbar.\textsuperscript{483}

Upon taking control of the state from his brother, al-Mansūr maintained al-Hāshimiyya as the capital but with the riot of the Rāwandiyya in 141/758 and the close vicinity of Kūfā, which had maintained its Shiʿite sympathies from an early period, al-Mansūr decided to search for a new more suitable seat for his power. In addition, he decided that the new capital would remain in Iraq despite the power-base of the dynasty being in Khurasān, as this province was far too remote from the rest of the empire for power to be wielded efficiently but nevertheless, the `Abbāsids still required a suitable location to settle their eastern partisans. After travelling to inspect various sites personally, al-Mansūr eventually decided upon the small hamlet of Baghdād, being suitably impressed with its strategic position - on the banks of the Tigris, its pleasant climate and the legends surrounding it - the name apparently meaning `a gift from God'.\textsuperscript{484}

Having chosen the site, al-Mansūr himself was active in tracing the foundations of the new city and having done so, summoned the local craftsmen and artisans to begin work on the


\textsuperscript{482} See al-Baghdādi, al-Farq bayn al-Firaq, p. 167 and Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, p. 221.


construction in 145/762, which was located on the west bank of the Tigris. The official name of the city was Madinat al-Salām ‘the City of Peace’ in reference to paradise in the Qur'ānic verse (6:127, 10:26) but the city was also known as al-Zawrā‘the crooked’, as well as the original name of Baghdād. At the heart of the construction was the tremendous Round City, with its huge fortifications, walls, moat and gates. At the centre of the Round City lay some administrative buildings, troops quarters, the main mosque and the caliph's palace, known as the ‘Palace of Gold (qaṣr al-dhahab)’, famous for its green dome over the audience chamber. The almost ‘cosmic’ design of the Round City with its four huge gates, each leading to a ‘corner’ of the empire (Syria [NW], Kūfā [SW], Basra [SE] and Khurasān [NE]), seemed to imply the caliph’s centralising of the ‘Abbāsīd power, as well as supplying him with a fortress to act as a base for his plans. The initial building process took almost one year - 146/763 - before the official caliphal administration was moved to the new capital and construction was finally completed in 149/766.485

The eloquent town planning of the Round City was not the only stroke of genius manifested by al-Mansūr however, but indeed, the surrounding and adjacent areas to the main complex were also well thought out. The neighbouring areas to the Round City were organised into quarters that were designed for a specific purpose and to be populated by a specific section of society. Most notably these included al-Ḥarbiyya district, which housed the military contingent made up of the Khurasānī troops and the Karkh quarter, which was a commercial district, housing the main markets of Baghdad and supplying the palace complex with its needs. Similarly, al-Mansūr built himself a second palace termed ‘al-Khuld (Eternity)’, which later became his and many of his successors’ preferred residence, possibly due to its pleasant location on the bank of the Tigris and as an escape from the pressure of the administrative centre in the Round City. In addition, the east bank also flourished with the building of bridges and a new district termed al-Ruṣāfa ‘the causeway’. This was further enhanced by the establishment of a further palace for his son and heir known as ‘Askar al-Mahdi, due to the encampment of his troops there, in 151/768 on his triumphant return to

Baghdad. Subsequently, this had the knock on effect of developing the market areas on the
east side to the extent that they came to rival the Karkh district on the western bank.\textsuperscript{486}
Thus, by the time al-Mahdi ascended the throne in 158/775 - some seven years before the
birth of al-Muḥāṣibī - Baghdad was a fully developed, thriving metropolis, acting as the new
capital for a firmly established ‘Abbāsid state. With the myriad of opportunities such a new
construction posed, it is not surprising that the capital also became a multicultural centre
assimilating various peoples and culture in an open, Islamic context, in much the same way
that Basra had done before it. As such, it became a ‘melting pot’ for new ideas, thought and
learning, which was a product of its nascent demography. Consequently, numerous new
intellectual trends appeared and developed to the background of Baghdad society and this
being the case it is appropriate that the most prominent and significant of these to our study
be examined.\textsuperscript{487}

3.4.1 The Mystical School in Baghdad

If the ascetic school in Basra exemplified by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and his teachers was
extremely prominent, it was by no means unique in Iraq and indeed, a similar trend existed
in other cities such as Kūfā. The foundation of Baghdad, however, provided a focal point for
the gathering of scholars and the accumulation and assimilation of the various trends that
existed in a variety of fields of Islamic learning. This being the case spiritual instruction was
no exception and the formation of one of the earliest tendencies towards a ‘true’ form of
Islamic mysticism - or Sufism as it was later termed - can be seen to develop out of the
prevailing spiritual propensities in the new ‘Abbāsid capital, which has caused this
development to be termed the ‘Mystical School of Baghdad’.\textsuperscript{488}

\textsuperscript{486} See al-Baghdādi, Tarikh Baghdādī, vol. 1 pp. 75-98 and 66; Ḥasan, Tarikh al-Islām, vol. 2. pp. 374-378; al-
Wakil, al-ʿAsr al-Dhahabi li ʿl-Dawla al-Abbāsiyya, pp. 86-90; Saʿīd, Warrāqī Baghdadī fi ʿl-ʿAsr al-Abbāsi, pp. 23-4; al-
Khudari, al-Dawla al-Abbāsiyya, pp. 77-8; Gibb et al (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 1, pp. 895-7; Le Srange, Baghdād
During the Abbasid Caliphate, pp. 40-2; Kennedy, The Early Abbasid Caliphate, pp. 88-9; Lassner, The Shaping of
Abbasid Rule, pp. 196-229; Brockleman, History of Islamic Peoples, p. 109; Weit, Baghdād, pp. 16-30; Clot, Harun al-Rashid
and the World of the Thousand and One Nights, pp. 155-6 and Appendix 3.

381-401; Saʿīd, Warrāqī Baghdadī fi ʿl-ʿAsr al-Abbāsi, pp. 41-53; al-Khudari, al-Dawla al-Abbāsiyya, pp. 130-
2 and 198-214; Gibb et al (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 1, pp. 898-9; Lassner, The Shaping of
Abbasid Rule, pp. 229-41; Brocklæmann, History of Islamic Peoples, p. 110-29 passim; Weit, Baghdād, pp. 11-
17; Shaban, Islamic History, vol. 2, p. 19; Weit, Baghdād, pp. 64-82 and Clot, Harun al-Rashid and the World of
the Thousand and One Nights, pp. 156-64.

\textsuperscript{488} See Massignon, Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism, pp. 158-60; Abdel-
The development of the school is relatively difficult to trace but the agent of its design in its initial stages is usually regarded as being Abū Maḥfūẓ Maʿrūf b. Fayruzān al-Karkhī (d. 200/815). Maʿrūf al-Karkhi is a pinnacle personality in the nascent Baghdadi school as he was a student of Farqad al-Sabkhi, which thus links him to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and consequently, the Basran tradition as a whole. Though not formally trained, Maʿrūf carried on the Basran tradition as a pious sermoniser, who preached abstinence and humility.

Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi ‘the barefoot’ (d. 227/842) was another personality associated with the Baghdadi school despite originally being a native of Merv, where he is said to have been a member of a gang and lived a particularly irreligious life. At some point however, he left this lifestyle and journeyed east where his travels brought him into the company of the renowned jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), with whom he studied jurisprudence and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), under whose supervision he studied ḥadīth. Despite this ‘formal’ training in Islamic learning he shunned the notoriety and potential wealth it could bring, preferring to live the life of a poor ascetic. Similarly, his attitude was similar to his ascetic predecessors and his teaching emphasised the importance of righteous deeds rather than theoretical knowledge.

A contemporary and seemingly a rival of al-Muḥāsibī was Sāri b. al-Mughallas al-Saqaṭī ‘the spice seller’ (d. 253/867). The son of a peddler, Sāri too became a merchant but as was the habit of the time, became equally interested in the study of ḥadīth. These aspects of his lifestyle came to an end when he heard a typically fiery sermon by Maʿrūf al-Karkhi which ultimately led him to pursue a more spiritual approach to his religious convictions. His teaching combines the various elements of the ascetic schools up until that point and is characterised by his succinct comments regarding loyalty to one’s friends, practical virtues, the dangers of hypocrisy and the remembrance of God. Although these themes seem

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489 Seemingly named after the Karkh district of Baghdad, which was one of the main commercial centres housing the markets of the capital’s southern area.
490 He is reportedly equally linked to the Kūfan school via Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī (d. 166/783) but this claim is contentious. See Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 48-9.
familiar to the preceding traditions, it is Sari's teaching that is characteristic of the Baghdadi school and is a significant departure from the basic ascetic practice of those before him. In this regard Knysh comments:

In a sense, Sari's religious attitude marks a departure from the traditional asceticism of Basra and Kufa. Although he built his preaching upon basically the same assumptions as his predecessors, the accents he placed on various strands of the old ascetic tradition constitute his distinct contribution to its growth and sophistication. Moreover, his teaching reflects his internal evolution from a conventional ascetic, preoccupied with avoidance of sin and meticulous compliance with the religious and social conventions of the age, to a fully-fledged mystic immersed in the contemplation of God and, therefore, totally oblivious to the world around him.  

Similarly, Abdel-Kader observes:

We may regard as-Saqaṭī as the founder of the Sufi School of Baghdad. This school differed from contemporary Sufi schools in Syria and Khorasan. The Baghdad school's main topic was Unification, Tawḥīd, and it developed the 'knowledge' of Unification. The school is distinguished by its symbolic expressions and by its discussions on the mystic state and station of the šuﬁ. The members of the school are, therefore, called 'The Masters of Unification,' Ahrāb al-Tawḥīd, like al-Junayd, an-Nūrī and ash-Shibli.  

The principal personalities of Mārūf al-Karkhi, Bishr al-Ḥāfi and Sari al-Saqatī, amongst others, in turn produced a variety of students who all contributed in their own personal way to the Baghdad mystical tradition but due to the limitations of the current thesis, cannot be discussed at length and as such, only the few, representative names will be given here: Abū Sa‘īd [Ahmad b. ʿIsā] al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 286/899), ‘Amr b. ʿUthmān al-Makki (d. 291/903 or 297/910 or 300/913), Abū ʿl-Ḥusayn [Ahmad b. Muḥammad] al-Nūrī (d. 295/907) and Ruwaym b. Ahmad (d. 303/915).  


Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, p. 11.  


Although the Baghdadi school produced a number of notable exponents, as exemplified in the previous list above, its most illustrious student is without doubt Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910). Born of Persian stock in Baghdad, al-Junayd was raised in a mercantile environment, where his father was a glass merchant [hence the appellation ‘al-Qawāriri’] and he himself became a silk merchant [hence his appellation ‘al-Khazzāz’]. In addition to his mercantile activities, he also studied classical knowledge in terms of ḥadīth and jurisprudence under the auspices of the foremost jurist in Baghdad before the arrival of al-Shāfiʿī, Abū Thawr ʿIbrāhīm b. Khālid al-Kalbi (d. 240/854). This ‘formal’ knowledge was supplemented by gatherings with a number of spiritual masters, the most notable being his paternal uncle Sari al-Saqāṭī and our subject within this thesis, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī. Through these latter scholars al-Junayd was introduced to the now more sophisticated Baghdadi school and he himself also contributed to its development. The exact nature of this development is difficult to assess in many ways, as no more than a number of his epistles (rasāʾīl) on mystical themes have reached us and their language is obscure and extremely difficult to access. Nevertheless, the Baghdadi School, under the leadership of al-Junayd, due to its heavy emphasis on extreme asceticism and its strong moral teaching, was often termed the ‘sober (ṣahw) school’ of Sufism and was said to be exemplified by its chief exponent. This, ‘sober’ school, with its roots in ‘orthodox’ learning was perhaps al-Junayd’s biggest legacy, as it defined the nature of Sufism for centuries to come.500

Of al-Junayd’s illustrious students Abū Bakr ʿUalā al-Dulaf b. Jaḥdar al-Shibli (d. 334/946)501 stands out but he is eclipsed in terms of notoriety by al-Ḥusayn b. Maḥṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). This latter personality seemingly advanced the concepts initiated by Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) until another school developed, the so-called ‘school of intoxication (ṣuḵr)’. This second school was in opposition to the method of al-Ḥallāj’s master al-Junayd and was characterised by the so-called ‘ecstatic utterances’ (shāṭaḥāt), which such mystics would make whilst expressing their experience of the divine and which,

as a result, often raised the hackles of the 'orthodox', due to their seemingly blasphemous overtones.502

3.4.2 The Mu'tazilite School in Baghdad

In the same way that the Mystical School of Baghdad was a product of the Basran ascetic school, when Basra was supplanted by Baghdad as the 'Abbāsid state capital, the trend towards rationalising the Muslim creed did not stop there and the era which Watt terms the period of 'the Great Mu'tazilites'503 continued for some time. In fact many of the major personalities of the Basran Mu'tazilite school such as Abū Hudhayl, al-Nazzām, Mu'ammar, al-Fuwaṭi, al-Jāḥiz and al-Shahḥām, later migrated to Baghdad at some point and were active in court affairs, particularly in the reign of al-Ma'mūn.504 This is not to say however that there was no Mu'tazilite influence in Baghdad before the arrival of the Basran contingent. Indeed, there did exist at that time a completely independent school of Mu'tazilism in Baghdad, which although the Basran school is thought to predate the Baghdadī school, co-existed in a similar time frame. These scholars are remembered as having influence at the highest echelons of 'Abbāsid society in Baghdad, primarily by participating in debates arranged by the famous vizier Yaḥyā al-Barmaki but more importantly, in the time of al-Ma'mūn, where some of them even held official appointments, particularly during the miḥna period. Once again a full discussion of their thought and teaching is far beyond the present research but nevertheless the most famous personalities will be mentioned here: Abū Sahl Bishr b. Mu'tamir al-Hilāli (d. 226/841)505, Abū Ma'n Thumāma b. Ashras al-Numayrī (d. 213/828)506, Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Abū Du'ād al-īyādī (d. 239/854)507, Abū Mūsā 'Īsā b. Šubayḫ al-Murdār (d. 226/841)508, Abū Faḍl Ja'far

504 Ibid., pp. 209-21.  
505 See ibid., pp. 209-21.  
507 See ibid., pp. 209-21.  
b. Ḥarb (d. 235/850)\textsuperscript{509}, Abū Muḥammad Jaʿfar b. Mubashshir al-Thaqafi (d. 233/848)\textsuperscript{510} and Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Iṣkāfī (d. 239/854)\textsuperscript{511}.

3.5 The Mihna

Having discussed the Muʿtazilite schools of both Basra and Baghdad, this brings us neatly to the subject of the current section - that of the miḥna. This historic event demonstrates to us the way in which this relatively obscure group of scholastic theologians (mutakallimūn), became a driving force in the religious life of Muslims at large during this period, due to their acquisition of caliphal support in the form of al-Maʿmūn. The term itself ‘miḥna’ and its synonym ‘imtiḥān’ have the connotation of ‘to test, to try and to put to trial’ but in the specific historical context of the early ‘Abbāsid period, mean ‘a test of faith’, this being synonymous with the religio-political trial introduced by al-Maʿmūn.\textsuperscript{512}

The subject of this trial of conviction may seem even more curious to the casual observer, as it concerned a seemingly hair splitting article of faith, i.e. the very nature of revelation - is the revealed word of God, in this case the Qurʾān, created or not? For the vast majority of Muslims who held the Sunni view, the Qurʾān was considered to be uncreated and an intrinsic attribute of the divine being, i.e. His speech and thus, inseparable from Him.\textsuperscript{513}

For the Muʿtazilites, however, this contradicted one of their most basic concepts as it was at odds with their comprehension of one of their ‘five principles (al-uṣūl al-khamsa)’, which are enumerated as being: ‘divine unity’ (al-tawḥīd), ‘justice’ (al-ʿadl), ‘the promise of reward and threat of punishment’ (al-waʿd wa ʿl-waʿid), the ‘intermediate state’ (al-manẓila bayna
manzilatayn), and 'enjoining the good and forbidding the evil' (al-amr bi 'l-ma'ruf wa na'by 'an al-munkar). The principle in question was 'divine unity' or al-tawhid, by which they meant that Allah was incomparable and unique - a view common to Sunni belief, but they employed it to mean that the divine attributes (al-sifat) are not a distinct quality of divinity, as this would indicate multiplicity in the Godhead but are in fact identical with His essence and as such, they denied their true nature to a large extent. For example, they would affirm the names of Allah, such as the 'All Knowing (al-'Alim)' as it occurs in the Qur'an but at the same time they would deny the fact that for Allah to be 'al-'Alim, it was intrinsic that He possessed the hypostatic attribute of knowledge (ilm), as this would create an additional feature in His essence and thus, multiplicity, which is diametrically opposed to indivisible nature of al-tawhid. As such, the Mu'tazilites were referred to as 'al-muCattila', as they would 'strip' God of His attributes (ta'til) and deny them (nafi al-sifat). Similarly, when discussing the issue of the Qur'an, they would infer that if it is uncreated, this must also mean that it is pre-eternal (qadim) and since only Allah existed in pre-eternity it is impossible that the Qur'an also existed, as this would mean that there was a duality in pre-eternity, which once again negates al-tawhid. Due to this, they believed that the Qur'an is created as it is considered the 'work' of Allah and not His speech, which also dictates that the Qur'an in their view is not eternal, as this would also indicate multiplicity. Although this view is traceable before the advent of al-Ma'mun, as it is tangible as early as the Umayyads in the form of Ja'd b. Dirham, most famously in Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man and later in the reign of al-Ma'mun's father al-Rashid through Bishr al-Marisi (d. 217/833 or 218/834 or 226/842), it never gained much credence outside the dialectical discussion of scholastic theologians, particularly those of the Mu'tazilites. Nevertheless, al-Ma'mun appears to have made this issue the crux of mi'na, which raises an important question; why choose this particular tenet of faith to base the test upon when there were many other creedal points upon which the Mu'tazilites differed with the majority to choose from?


To answer this question is far from an easy task but researchers have made attempts to unravel this conundrum. For example Watt suggests that this was an attempt by al-Ma'mūn to undermine the authority of the scholarly class (al-'ulamā'), who were the reference point for the general Muslim populace regarding matters of religion and reassert the power of the caliph in this circle of subjects. At the same time, by disempowering the scholarly elite this move would also afford the 'secular', civil servant class (al-kuttāb) more influence in the running of the state, as a created Qur'an simply had less 'prestige', since the implication was that as such, it is changeable and if so, its edicts may be overruled by an inspired imam (imam al-hudā).517 Although the initial notion may be true, i.e. that al-Ma'mūn sought to undermine the authority of the scholarly class, which is clear from the fact that he targeted many of the populist hadith luminaries, the second aspect, i.e. that the authority of the Qur'an was somehow to be overruled, is less convincing. As Hinds observes, "But this misses the point: for one thing, the doctrine of the created Qur'an is a doctrine about God and more specifically God's unity, rather than a doctrine about the Qur'an, and there is in any case no evidence whatsoever to support the view that al-Ma'mūn wanted to overrule the Qur'an."518

The extent of the Mu'tazilite influence over al-Ma'mūn is further evidenced by a mīhna letter quoted by Abū 'l-'Arab (d. 333/944) in his Kitāb al-Mīhān, which stipulated that not only the doctrine of the created Qur'an be imposed but also the doctrine of denying the punishment in the grave ('adhāb al-gabr), this being a popular feature of Mu'tazilite dogma.519 Thus, at best we can view al-Ma'mūn as a sincere proponent of Mu'tazilism, using his considerable influence to correct the 'misguided' beliefs of the ignorant masses, or at worst a divisive politician who manipulated the Mu'tazilite creed to achieve political supremacy. It is further suggested here that in the first case scenario, he may well have begun the reformation of the Islamic belief system with the Qur'an due to its pivotal position in the lives of Muslims, thinking that if he could succeed here, then convincing the public of the remaining doctrines would be 'easy'.

Al-Ma'mūn's Mu'tazilite sympathies are also seen in the fact that many of the leading proponents of this school such as Bishr b. Mu'tamir and Thumāma b. Ashras, are witnessed at an early stage at Merv in 201/817, as signatories on the document declaring Ali al-Ridā'.

517 See Watt, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, p. 35; The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, p. 179 and Hinds, Studies in Early Islamic History, p. 242.
heir to the caliphate, long before al-Ma'mün's move to Baghdad to assume the caliphate proper. Similarly, one of the major figures of this incident, as we shall see, is Aḥmad b. Abū Du'ād who was greatly honoured at the court of al-Ma'mūn, was charged with supervision of the miḥna after his death, as the caliph apparently stipulated this in his will for his successor al-Mu'tasim. It has been suggested that al-Ma'mūn did this due to al-Mu'tasim's lack of intellectual acumen in dealing with such issues, yet it is further evidence of Muṭtazilite influence at the caliph's court, as presumably al-Ma'mūn would not have appointed Ibn Abū Du'ād unless he thought he could fulfil the task, as well as being an indication of his conviction that the miḥna should be pursued in the first place. These facts and the others have caused Abū Zahra to conclude that Ibn Abū Du'ād was in fact the architect of the miḥna but even if we concede this, he could not have brought it into being without the caliph's support or will, suggesting that although al-Ma'mūn may have had some political ambition from the implementation of the miḥna, he was also sympathetic to the ideological foundation behind it.

As for the historical details of the miḥna itself, al-Ma'mūn is said to have been convinced of the created Qurʾān doctrine as early as 212/827 or even earlier and paved the way for its imposition by deposing the chief judge (qādī al-quḍāt) Yahyā b. Aktham, who apparently opposed the idea and replaced him with Aḥmad b. Abū Du'ād in 217/832. Thus, in the last year of his reign in 218/833 and with his new appointee in place, al-Ma'mūn utilised his state power and initiated the miḥna, by sending the first of the miḥna letters to his deputy in Baghdad, Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhim. The letter instructed this official to examine the judges (qādī, pl. quḍāt) under his jurisdiction regarding the creation of the Qurʾān and used particularly critical language, vilifying those who opposed this creed, terming them “a people ignorant of God”, “deficient in understanding”, “those who lie about God and His creation” and the “worst and chief in error.” Copies of this letter were also sent to the other provinces of the caliphate but in reality seem to have had little effect due to a lack of

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520 See Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, p. 222.
522 Abū Zahra, Ibn Ḥanbal, pp. 63-5.
popular support. Similarly, al-Ma'mūn wrote to Ishāq b. ʿĪbrāhīm again ordering him to send seven prominent personalities including the traditionists (muḥaddithūn) Muhammad b. Saʿd and Yaḥyā b. Maʿān (d. 233/847) to him at al-Raqqa, where he undertook the examination himself and as a result all seven succumbed to the doctrine of the created Qurʾān.

Consequently, al-Ma'mūn wrote another miḥna letter to his deputy in Baghdad in a similar style and manner to continue the process. Thus, Ishāq b. ʿĪbrāhīm gathered around thirty of the leading jurists (faqīh, pl. fuqahāʾ), judges and traditionists and began examining them regarding the Muʿtazilite creed regarding the Qurʾān. The vast majority of these scholars, some of them notably under duress, yielded and there were only two exceptions, that of Muḥammad b. ʿNūḥ al-ʿIjli and more significantly, ʿAḥmad b. Ḥanbal. These latter two scholars were thus despatched to Tarsus to be dealt with directly by al-Ma'mūn but the caliph's demise occurred on route (Rajab 218/August 833) and they were therefore, temporarily reprieved. However, Muḥammad b. ʿNūḥ died on the return journey to Baghdad and ʿAḥmad was kept in detention upon his arrival.

Al-Ḥaḍrami's advent to power saw no reprieve in the miḥna as a policy, as al-Ma'mūn had stipulated in his will that his brother continue with this course of action and make Ibn Abū Duʿād his closest confidant in the issue, with which he duly complied. Nevertheless, the issue of the miḥna during his reign is seemingly easier due perhaps to the reluctance of the new caliph to pursue this policy. However, there was one exception - that of ʿAḥmad b. Ḥanbal. After a period of approximately two and half years in prison ʿAḥmad was removed, apparently due to the intercession of his uncle Ishāq b. Ḥanbal with the prefect of Baghdad, Ishāq b. ʿĪbrāhīm, as his uncle thought that ʿAḥmad would relent. In actual fact it was possibly the worst thing he could have done as his interrogation was initiated once more. Over the next two days ʿAḥmad defended his position with a variety of questioners, including the caliph and gave a good account of himself, the time in prison seemingly giving him time to formulate convincing arguments of a kalām style. On the third day, however, under pressure from the Muʿtazilite faction at court and despairing of ʿAḥmad yielding his


position, al-Mu'taṣim ordered him to be flogged, during the course of which his wrists were dislocated and he lost consciousness after thirty or so lashes. That Aḥmad was released after the flogging seems in little doubt; however the circumstances in which his release took place are disputed. The hagiographic works dealing with this incident suggest that his release was due to outrage expressed by the population of Baghdad, who when they heard of the harsh treatment of their imam, gathered angrily outside the palace in protest, which caused al-Mu'taṣim to release Aḥmad, despite the objections of Ibn Abū Du'ād. The less friendly, Mu'tazilite sources of al-Jāḥiz and Ibn al-Murtaḍā, as well as others, suggest that Aḥmad actually capitulated and his release was a result of his acknowledgement, as the caliph would have no other real reason to free him. In any case, whatever the truth regarding Aḥmad's release may be and despite this being one of the few incidents to draw attention during al-Mu'taṣim's execution of the miḥna policy, it still remains the most significant.

Similarly, the miḥna did not relent with the advent of al-Mu'taṣim's son al-Wāthiq. In fact, the miḥna can be said to have increased in severity during the beginning of his reign, as he wrote to the various regional capitals, commanding them to a renewed prosecution of the policy. This was particularly true in Egypt, where the regional ʿāudi, Muḥammad b. Abū Layth al-ʿAṣamm, was instructed to implement the miḥna with vigour and he duly complied, leaving no prominent religious figure untouched, until the prisons were full with dissenters to the state-imposed creed. A more peculiar incident is that of Ahmad b. Nasr al-Khuzā`i who attempted an unfortunate uprising that misfired and was brought before the caliph for questioning. The interesting feature of this interrogation, however, was not the caliph's questions regarding the failed coup but that he asked this 'second' Aḥmad regarding views concerning the doctrine of the created Qur'ān. His answers, due to his opposition to the creed are said to have enraged the caliph to the extent that he had him decapitated and his head displayed in Baghdad, as a grisly deterrent to would be non-conformists. Perhaps the most significant incident however concerns a 'shaykh from ahl al-fiqh wa 'l-hadith', who when brought before the caliph and questioned by Ibn Abū Du'ād regarding the creed,

529 Among his victims was the prominent jurist and disciple of al-Shāfi`i Yūsuf b. Yahyā al-Buwayṭi who died while languishing in a Baghdadi jail in 231/846.
bettered the latter in the discussion, which ultimately led to the caliph withdrawing active support for the policy.\textsuperscript{530}

The \textit{miḥna} did not formally end here either however but was eventually abolished under al-Wāthiq’s brother and successor, al-Mutawakkil. The whole process of abolition of the policy was not immediate and appears to have taken place over a period of time; the first stage seems to have been the caliphal prohibition of debate concerning the Qurʾān throughout the empire, which took place in 234/847, being pre-empted by Ibn Abū Duʿād’s paralysis the year before. Similarly, the following year many of the \textit{miḥna qāḍīs}, including Ibn Abī Layth, the \textit{qāḍī} in Egypt, were removed from office and this continued over the next two years. The policy was formerly brought to a close after almost twenty years of persecution and Sunni ‘orthodoxy’ firmly re-established in 237/851, with the dismissal of Ibn Abū Duʿād and his sons.\textsuperscript{531}

Having surveyed the most significant historical, political, cultural and intellectual events of the early ‘Abbāsid period to our study, it is clear that this part of history was an extremely important and interesting era. It remains to be seen, however, how these events may affect the life and development of an individual. This being the case it is equally relevant now to examine the life of our subject, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi, to examine and assess the impact of these events, if any, on him, his life, his works and his teachings and indeed, this is the goal of the next chapter.


Chapter 4: The Life of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibī

Having highlighted the era into which al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibī was born, the current chapter is concerned with surveying the biographical details of his life. Little is known about al-Muhāsibī other than a few, anecdotal statements and factual, historical glimpses that the biographical and historical sources provide. Nevertheless, there is sufficient material to attempt a chronological reconstruction of his life from these works to attempt to provide a coherent picture of this eminent scholar’s worldly moments. This being the case, the usual biographical sketch will be attempted including a survey of his early life, his teachers, his influences, his students and his death. In addition, however, since all we have are a few anecdotal statements regarding al-Muhāsibī, an examination of these reports will be made, as well as a discussion of the controversy surrounding Ibn Ḥanbal’s dispute with him, which unfortunately affected the final days of his life and his reputation, particularly with a section of the scholarly elite, in subsequent generations. Finally, an assessment of the effect of al-Muhāsibī's milieu, environment and period upon his life will be made to examine to what extent he was ‘a product of his time.’

4.1 Al-Muhāsibī's Early Life

The classical biographical and historical sources agree that al-Ḥārith b. Asad was born in the thriving metropolis of Basra, but unfortunately, are less forthcoming regarding the date of his entry into this world. More contemporary scholars, however, seem also to have reached a consensus that his birth occurred in the year 165/781 but this is purely a speculative opinion based on circumstantial evidence as support. What is more certain is the affirmation of the appellation ‘al-cAnazi’ seemingly denoting an affiliation with the Arab tribe of ‘Anaza, which may well have been one of the Arab tribes to settle in Basra after its founding. Similarly, there is an even larger consensus amongst the biographical and historical sources that al-Ḥārith b. Asad’s agnomen (kunya) was Abu-‘Abd Allah; this is in

Much of this is based on subsidiary historical information, such as the fact that al-Muhāsibī related hadith from the same shaykhs as Ibn Ḥanbal and that his father was involved in the theological controversies of the time. Despite this, however, there remains no clear statement in the classical literature regarding this issue, but nevertheless, the date supplied has little to refute it and in the absence of an alternative, may be used from a practical perspective. See al-Muhāsibī, al-Rī'āya li Huğūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 6; al-Muhāsibī, al-'Aql wa Fāhm al-Qu'rān, ed. al-Quwati, pp. 12-13; Maḥmūd, Uṣūl al-Sā'irīn, p. 31; ‘Uwayda, al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muhāsibī, p. 7; Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 5; Schoonover, “al-Muhāsibī and his al-Rī'āya’, The Muslim World, p. 26 and Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 54.

spite of the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that he was married or had children and as such, this seems to be a manifestation of the cultural trend towards the use of kunya in Arab society rather than having a basis in reality.\textsuperscript{534}

Despite his familial affiliation, there can be little doubt that al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-ʿAnazi did not reach fame under this name but rather, under the appellation of ‘al-Muḥäsibi’, for which biographers and historians give two accounts regarding its origin. The first and less common view posits that the appellation ‘al-Muḥäsibi’ is due to the fact that he possessed a number of small pebbles (ḥāṣan) that he would enumerate (yaʿudduhā wa yahsubuhā) whilst engaged in the remembrance of God (ḥāl al-dhikr).\textsuperscript{535} The more established opinion regarding the appellation ‘al-Muḥäsibi’ and perhaps more befitting bearing in mind his teachings, is that it relates to al-Ḥārith’s excessive practice of taking himself to account in all circumstances (li kathrat muḥāsabatihi li nasifti fi jamīr al-ahwāl).\textsuperscript{536}

Other than this very little is known regarding al-Muḥäsibi’s early life apart from two narrations related by Ibn Ẓafr al-Ṣaqlī in his Anbā’; one of which reads as follows:

It has reached me that al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥäsibi, may Allāh be pleased with him, whilst still a child passed by some young boys playing outside the house of a date seller and al-Ḥārith stopped to watch them play. Meanwhile, the owner came out carrying with him some dates and said to al-Ḥārith, “Eat these dates.” Al-Ḥārith replied, “What do you know about them?” The date seller said, “I have just sold some dates to a man and these fell from them.” Al-Ḥārith then said, “Do you know him?” and he replied “Yes.” Al-Ḥārith then turned his attention to the children who were playing and said, “Is this man a Muslim?” to which they [the children] said, “Yes, yes.” Al-Ḥārith then left him and the date seller followed until he caught up with him and grabbed him saying to al-Ḥārith, “By Allāh I will not release you until you tell me what

\textsuperscript{534} Similarly, there is no information regarding siblings, if they existed at all.


you think of me.” So he replied, “O shaykh if you are a Muslim then seek out the owner of the dates and free yourself from your transaction with him in the same way that you would seek out water if you were extremely thirsty. O shaykh do you feed Muslim children the unlawful (al-suht) whilst you yourself are a Muslim?” The man then said, “By Allah, I will never undertake a worldly transaction again!” 537

This anecdotal statement is typical of the Sufi biographical tradition and being couched in religious imagery, it sheds much light on the early life of al-Muḥāṣibi. We find that al-Muḥāṣibi is a regular child observing his peers at play, although not joining in their frivolity, who is then confronted by a seemingly innocuous offer of dates from a person who would be fully expected to possess them, i.e. a date seller. Al-Muḥāṣibi does not just simply accept the offer however but rather enquires as to the source of the dates in order to ascertain their lawfulness and after finding out that they were unlawful, which is made worse by the fact that the owner of the dates is a Muslim, the devout youth flees to escape such an undesirable scene. Consequently, on confronting the date seller, he shocks him further with a pious admonishment that not only clarifies the legal aspect for him but also counsels him in a sermonising manner, showing the enormity of his crime by drawing his attention to the fact that he had not only committed a forbidden act but in addition, that he intended to involve the next generation of believers in it also. Thus, the intention of this report is clear; to clarify that al-Muḥāṣibi at even a young age was indeed knowledgeable, scrupulous and concerned with the affairs of his community, which in itself is a pattern that would follow him into adulthood.

The same author provides us another glimpse of the young al-Ḥārith in the following text:

It has reached me that a woman came to him [al-Muḥāṣibi] while he was in elementary school (al-maktab) and requested that he write a letter for her, which he did and she gave him a dirham but he returned it to her, so she took it and left. The teacher (al-mu’addib) then said to him, “Why did you return the dirham to her when she had engaged your services [and paid you] for it?” He [al-Muḥāṣibi] replied, “Because of His, the Exalted’s statement, `And let no scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him [to do so]’ (2:282) so I wrote it [the letter] for her out of obedience to Allah, as He commanded so how can I take payment for being obedient to Allah?” The teacher then asked, “Then what prevented you from giving it to me if you didn’t want to take it?” So al-Ḥārith replied, “I was prevented by His, Glory be to Him, the Exalted’s statement, ‘And they will surely carry their [own] burdens and [other] burdens in addition to their burdens and they will surely be questioned on the Day of Resurrection regarding what they used to fabricate.’”(29:13). 538

538 Ibid., pp. 149-50.
This further anecdotal statement creates yet another image of piety for us regarding our subject al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi; an image of a boy who, when employing the skills acquired as part of his education, still refused to take payment for his efforts out of fear that it would impinge upon his sincerity and distract him from implementing the command of his Lord. The use of Qurān in the report also indicates to us that, even at such a young age, he perhaps memorised a large portion, if not all of the text, as he quotes from differing parts at will but what is far more significant is the application of this knowledge in a practical manner, even in the minute details of his life. He implements this knowledge further with the teacher, reminding him that despite the dirham that he enquired about being of little worth and seemingly insignificant in this life, that its implications would be much greater in the hereafter, thus admonishing him in the process. Similarly, al-Muḥāsibi may have well left the issue at refusing to take the money but instead attempts to avert a disaster in the hereafter for one of his peers, which not only shows his concern for those in his company but also demonstrates his highly honed spiritual insight. Once again we are given a portrait of a youth full of devotion, who prefers the lasting pleasures of the hereafter to the fleeting comforts of the worldly life and as such, it is not surprising that he lived in poverty for most of his life, as his religious conviction would not allow him to make a living at the expense of serving his Lord.

Al-Muḥāsibi’s scrupulousness first seen as a young boy in the first report above was to manifest itself further in adulthood in another narration that many biographers quote and which Abū Nu‘aym relates as follows in his Hilyat al-Awliyā:

Ja‘far [al-Khuldi] informed me that Abū ʾl-Ḥasan told him that he heard al-Junayd say: On the day that al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi’s father died al-Ḥārith was in desperate need of a silver dāniq539 and his father had left a huge sum of money540 but he took nothing from it; he [al-Ḥārith] would say, “The people of two [differing] religions do not inherit from one another541, as his father was a Wāqīfī542.543

539 A common unit of currency at the time worth one sixth of a Dirham, which was of little value and used here to indicate the abject poverty in which he lived.

540 In differing reports the amount varies, being sometimes quoted as being 30,000 dinārs, 70,000 dirhams and 90,000 dirhams. In any case it was a considerable sum of money for the time and certainly not an amount to be rejected so easily.

541 This phrase is based on a statement of the Prophet. See al-Sijistāni, Sunan Abū Dāwūd, p. 423.

542 The nature of his father’s theological stance is variably quoted as being Qadarite, Rāfīḍite and Magian. However, I have selected ‘Wāqīfī’ here as it is quoted more commonly and fits more conveniently with the historical context, as a Wāqīfī was someone who held back (waqafa) in giving an opinion on the issue of the created Qurān, i.e. is it created or not? This of course was the great debate of the day, which ultimately led to the mihna described in pages 133-9 above. It is also worth noting that the term Qadarite was almost synonymous with being a Muctazilite by this point and this too cannot be ruled out.

There can be little doubt that this text is indicative of al-Muhäsibi’s extreme scrupulousness (wara) as indeed, he forfeited what can be considered a huge fortune, which was rightfully his and in spite of his grave need, for the sake of avoiding any remote chance of there being the slightest doubt (shubha) regarding his father’s wealth. The same report upon reflection is indicative of other factors also however; for example, it informs us that al-Muḥāsibi, despite his later poverty, may have been raised in a household with considerable wealth. This in turn may also cause us to conclude that due to this financial stability he may have been privy to a high standard of religious education, which was common to the period in his places of residence, both Basra and Baghdad. This is also confirmed by his familiarity with both the lawful (al-ḥalāl) and the unlawful (al-ḥarām) as indicated in the first two reports and his knowledge of hadith, as indicated by the third. In addition, the fact that his father held such a theological stance is indicative not only of the extent of the controversy concerning the created Qurān but also of the fact that al-Muḥāsibi’s father was equally acquainted with the issue and as such, may have been equally conversant with other aspects of religious knowledge and learning.

In a related report, which in many ways actually precedes the previous one we find an equally impressive account of al-Muḥāsibi’s religious zeal as once again Abū Nu‘aym relates in his Ḥiyyat al-Awliya: “I heard Abū ‘l-Ḥasan b. Muqsim say: I heard Abū ‘Ali b. Khayrān al-Faqīh say: I saw Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad at Bāb al-Ṭāq (the Gate of the Archway) in the middle of the road clinging to his father whilst the people gathered [around them] saying to him, ‘Divorce my mother as you are upon one religion and she is...”


544 The ‘doubt’ here of course being the inference that a ‘Wājifi’ stance regarding the Qurān is paramount to infidelity (kufr), which was hardly as cut and dried as al-Muḥāsibi’s decision would have us believe.

545 A thriving commercial district on the east side of Baghdad, which challenged the Karkh district on the west side, being denoted by its large gate (bāb). See Le Strange, Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate, pp. 218; Lassner, The Topography of Baghdad, pp. 173-6 and Appendix 3.
upon another'. This second report concerning his relationship with his father indicates that by this time al-Muhäsibi and his family had moved to Baghdad and so both these incidents must have taken place there. What is more striking, however, is the zealous approach of al-Muhäsibi regarding the issue of his father's theological stance, from which it is quite apparent that he thought of it as innovative from a religious perspective and thus, completely rejected. So much so that he felt it necessary to proclaim his disapproval of this publicly, hence the significance of the incident taking place at Báb al-Ṭaq. Notwithstanding, his request for his father to divorce his mother is equally significant, as this cannot be regarded as an act of scrupulousness (wara'), which by its nature is supererogatory but we can only assume that al-Muhäsibi held that his father's belief was an act of disbelief (kufr), as there is no other explanation for his insistence that a solemn marriage vow be broken. Thus, we can conclude that al-Muhäsibi was not only pious and scrupulous as a young man but also that his religious fervour was extremely high, to the extent that even his closest family members were not spared.

4.2 Al-Muhäsibi's Teachers

The primary education indicated in the anecdotes mentioned above was not only acquired at the basic level but like so many scholars of his period al-Muhäsibi also undertook studies of an advanced type. Perhaps of the most common forms of study was that of hadith and as with many of his contemporaries, he undertook instruction in this discipline with a variety of traditionists of the period. The very nature of hadith transmission, i.e. its narration based format, dictates that the number of narrations transmitted from a singular shaykh may vary from one scholar to another and in this sense al-Muhäsibi was no different. Of those from whom he relates only singular narrations include: Hushaym b. Bashir (d. 183/799), Marwän b. Shujä' (d. 184/800), Wāki b. Jarrāḥ (d. 197/813), 'Abbād b. al-'Awwām (d.


547 An in-depth discussion of each of al-Muhäsibi's teachers is beyond the scope of the current thesis and as such only a brief mention of their names will be made here.


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185/801)551, ʿAli b. ʿĀṣim (d. 201/816)552, Sulayman b. Dāwūd al-Ṭayālisi (d. 203/818)553, Abū Nuʿaym al-_FD7 b. Dukayn ʿ[Amr b. ʿHAMMĀD al-Taymi] (d. 219/834)554 and Abū Bakr b. Abū Shayba (d. 235/849)555. Similarly, there were other scholars from whom he related more than one narration and these included: Yahyā b. Abū Bukayr (d. 209/824)556, ʿAbd Allāh b. Bakr (d. 208/823)557, Ḥujayn b. al-Muthānā (d. 205/820)558, Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāṣim b. Sallām (d. 224/839)559, Sunayd b. Dāwūd al-Missisi (d. 226/841)560, Surayj b. Yūnus (d. 235/849)561, ʿAffān al-Baṣrī (d. 220/835)562, ʿAbd al-Azīz b. ʿAbd Allāh563 and Muḥammad b. Kathīr564. In addition, it is well documented that the most famous of his hadīth shaykh was Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821), from whom he received a great many hadīth.565

In addition to hadīth, one of the other foremost religious disciplines studied at the time was jurisprudence (fiqh) and once again it is not surprising that al-Mubāṣibi also underwent a

564 Ibid.
form of juridical training, which is apparent in many of his works but especially in Fahm al-
Šalāt, Kitāb al-Makāsib and Kitāb al-Masāʾil fī Amāl al-Qulūb wa ’l-Jawārīḥ. What is more
striking however is that al-Muḥāṣibi is not linked with one of the many, perhaps more
obscure personalities, but indeed, is documented as being a pupil of none other than
Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfīʿī (d. 204/820), the founder of the later Shāfīʿī school of
jurisprudence (al-madhhab al-shāfīʿī). However, many of the scholars of this school contest
the notion that al-Muḥāṣibi was a direct disciple of al-Shāfīʿī, but rather suggest that he was
in fact one of those included in the first generation of jurists to follow al-Shāfīʿī who were
not his direct pupils, as the following statement from Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrāzūrī (d.
643/1245) would indicate:

Abū Manṣūr al-Tamīmī regarded him [al-Muḥāṣibi] as being from the first
generation (al-ṭabāqa al-ḥilā) of the Shāfīʿī scholars who associated [directly]
with (ṣaḥīḥa) al-Shāfīʿī, saying, “[al-Muḥāṣibi is an] imam of the Muslims in
jurisprudence (al-fiqh), principles (al-uṣūl), Sufism (al-taṣawwuf), prophetic
narration (ḥadīth) and scholastic theology (kālām). His books in these
disciplines are the foundation for whoever desired to write on such subjects.
[In addition], most of the theologians of al-Ṣifāṭīyya566 are linked with him.”
He [al-Tamīmī] also said, “If there had been no one else than al-Ḥārith b.
Asad al-Muḥāṣibi from the companions of al-Shāfīʿī in jurisprudence (al-fiqh),
scholastic theology (kālām), principles (al-uṣūl), analogical deduction (al-
qiyyās), abstinence (al-zuhd), scrupulousness (al-wara) and gnosis (al-maʿrifa),
it would have been ‘dust in the faces’ of his opponents and all praise is due to
Allāh for that.”567

Ibn Ṣalāḥ then states:

I haven’t seen his [al-Muḥāṣibi’s] association with al-Shāfīʿī, may Allāh be
pleased with him, mentioned by anyone other than him [al-Tamīmī]. In this
regard, Abū Manṣūr is not an expert, such that a unique opinion of his would
be relied upon and in fact, corroborating evidence bears witness to the lack of
al-Muḥāṣibi’s association with al-Shāfīʿī.568

Commenting on this appraisal al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) says:

566 A term used in the initial period that indicated all of the earliest generations (al-salaf) who would affirm
the divine, eternal attributes of God (yuthbirūna li Allāh sifāt asālīyya), whether they were essential attributes
(sifāt al-dhāt) or ‘active’ attributes (sifāt al-fīʿ), as opposed to stripping God of them (al-taʿtīl) or figuratively
interpreting them (al-taʿwil), which was the methodological approach of the Muʿtazilīs and thus, they were
known as ‘al-Muʿtalla’, this being almost an antonym of ‘al-Ṣifāṭīyya’. See Shahrastānī, al-Mīlāl wa ’l-Nīḥāl,
vol. 1, pp. 73-4.
567 See al-Shahrāzūrī, Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahāʾ al-Shāfīʿyya, vol. 1, p. 439; al-Ṣubkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfīʿyya al-Kubrā,
vol. 2, p. 275; al-Asnawī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfīʿyya, vol. 1, p. 25; Ibn Kathīr, Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahāʾ al-Shāfīʿyyin,
vol. 1, p. 126; Ibn Mulaqqīn, al-Aṣqalānī, Ṭabaqāt al-Madḥhīb fī Ṭabaqāt Ḥamalat al-Madḥhīb; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, Ṭabaqāt al-
568 Ibid.
If Abū Mansūr has clearly stated that he [al-Muhāṣibī] associated [directly] with al-Shāfī‘ī, then an objection to this is appropriate, otherwise when he said, 'The first generation' he must have meant of those who were contemporaries of al-Shāfī‘ī and as such, those who were of the generation who took from his knowledge. Abū ‘Āṣim al-‘Abbādī also mentioned him in the first generation, saying, 'He was from the contemporaries of al-Shāfī‘ī and chose his school,' and he didn't say, "He was of those who associated [directly] with him." So perhaps this is what Abū Mansūr meant.\(^{569}\)

Thus, it would seem that al-Muhāṣibī did not in fact directly study with al-Shāfī‘ī but nevertheless, it is apparent from these excerpts also that he was clearly regarded as al-Shāfī‘ī's pupil in the sense that he adopted his principles and adhered to his school.\(^{570}\)

In addition to traditionist and jurisprudential studies, al-Muhāṣibī also acquired knowledge concerning the Arabic linguistic tradition and the sciences of the Qur‘ān (al-lugha wa ‘l-Qur‘ān). These disciplines were studied in particular with Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839), who is famous for the works Gharīb al-Ḥadīth and Kitāb al-Amwāl and with whom al-Muhāṣibī also studied ḥadīth. Thus it is likely that under the tutelage of Abū ‘Ubayd, al-Muhāṣibī mastered the concepts of abrogation (al-nāsikh wa ‘l-mansūkh) and other Qur‘ānic sciences such as the 'general' and the 'specific' (al-‘āmm wa ‘l-khayṣ), which are apparent in his work entitled Fahm al-Qur‘ān. From this it is clear that from an early period al-Muhāṣibī understood that many of the disputes that raged in his time revolved around linguistic concepts regarding the Qur‘ānic text and to this effect we find that many of his narrations from Sulaymān b. Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 203/818), Shurayh b. Yūnus (d. 235/849) and Yazid b. Hārūn (d. 206/821) are related to these issues.

Thus, it is clear from the above account that al-Muhāṣibī enjoyed an excellent education, typical of what the period offered in terms of instruction and the extent of which is apparent from the variety of sources that he quotes.

4.3 Al-Muhāṣibī’s Sources\(^{571}\)

In addition to and most probably as part of the learning al-Muhāṣibī undertook, we can identify numerous sources which he quotes, both to clarify his thought and add credence to it. As such, al-Muhāṣibī, in addition to quoting the Qur‘ān and hadīth literature, provides a

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\(^{570}\) This is an assumption that requires further qualification as the researcher is yet to see an academic work that examines al-Muhāṣibī’s jurisprudential views and establishes the similarity between these and those of al-Shāfī‘ī.

\(^{571}\) Similarly, an in-depth discussion of each of al-Muhāṣibī’s sources is beyond the scope of the current thesis and as such, only a brief mention of their names will be made here so as to provide a representative selection.
rich mosaic of opinions from the early generations of scholars, which at times reads like a ‘who's who’ of famous and important Islamic personalities.\(^ {572}\)

Thus, in the Companion generation (al-ṣaḥāba) we find a variety of names including the following: Abū Bakr [al-Ṣiddiq] (d. 13/634), Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), Uthmān b. Affān (d. 35/655), ʿAli b. Abū Ṭalib (d. 40/660), Abū Allāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/652), Abū Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās (d. 57/678), Hudhayfā b. al-Yamān (d. 36/657), Muʿādh b. Jabal (d. 17/639), Abū Dardāʾ [ʿUwaymar b. ʿAbd Allāh] (d. 32/653), Abū Hurayra [ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Sakhr al-Dawsī] (d. 58/677), Abū Mūsā [ʿAbd Allāh b. Qays] al-Asḥārī (d. 44/665), ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr al-ʿĀṣ (d. 79/698), Tamīm al-Dārī, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 32/652) and ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿlām (d. 43/663) amongst others.\(^ {573}\)

In the following generation of the Successors (al-tābiʿūn) we find an equally impressive array of personalities upon whom al-Muhāṣibī relies including: Abū ʿĀliya (d. 90/708), Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib (d. 91/709 or 94/712), Ibrāhīm al-Taymi (d. 92/710), ʿAbd Allāh b. Qays (d. 103/721), Mūjāhid b. Jabr al-Makhwūmī (d. 104/722) and Tāwūs b. Kaysān al-Yamānī (d. 105/723). However, the most important authorities of this generation with regard to al-Muhāṣibī’s works are Abū ʿAbd Allāh Wahb b. Munabbih al-Dimārī (b. 110/728) and the celebrated al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). Of the later luminaries of this period we also find ʿAṭāʾ b. Abū Rabāḥ (d. 115/733) and the mystic students of al-Ḥasan, Thābit b. Aslam al-Bunānī (d. 123/741 or 127/745), Mālik b. Dinār (d. 128/746) and Ayyūb b. Tamīma al-Sikhtiyānī (d. 131/749).\(^ {574}\)

Similarly, from around the middle of the second/eighth centuries we find the following authorities quoted: Sulaymān b. Miḥrān al-Aʿmash (d. 148/765), Ibn Jurayj al-Makki (d. 150/767), Abū al-Raḥmān b. ʿAmr al-Awzāʾī (d. 157/773), Abū ʿUthmān Wuḥayb al-Makki (d. 153/773), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/777) and Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 160/777). Following on from this group of scholars we then find a number of al-Muhāṣibī’s contemporaries who are also quoted and include: Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ (d. 188/803), Shaqiq al-Balkhī (d. 194/809), Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 198/814), Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfīʿī (d. 5'2 It is also worth noting that much of what is related is concerned with the ‘spiritual’ and ‘esoterical’ aspects of religious practice as opposed to the more ‘legalistic’ or ‘exoteric’ aspects.


\(^ {573}\) See Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 61-4 and Schoonover, Kitāb al-Riʿāya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh by al-Muhāṣibī, pp. xlv-liv passim.
204/820), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Aḥū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/842) and Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/860).

The selection of authorities quoted by al-Muḥāsibī alluded to in this section has been provided merely to demonstrate the range of al-Muḥāsibī’s learning and familiarity with a variety of fields of study and their major personalities. Thus, within this representative collection we find scholars famous as Qur’ānic exegetes (mufassirūn), traditionists (muḥaddithūn) and jurists (fuqahā’), all of whom al-Muḥāsibī quotes effortlessly, not only exemplifying his own level of knowledge and understanding but also adding - indirectly - ‘orthodox’ authority to his own works. Further, these quotations also indicate to us that al-Muḥāsibī did not consider himself to be ‘innovating’ a new technique of spirituality and purification of the soul but rather, that he based his teaching on ‘classical’ Islamic sources of learning. Yet at the same time, he was developing his own unique approach to moral psychology in an Islamic framework drawn from these very sources, which would be utilised by mystics for centuries to come.

4.4 Al-Muḥāsibī’s Students

The foremost student of al-Muḥāsibī is without doubt Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910), the celebrated latter day leader of the Baghdadi school and through whom we have retained a great deal of information regarding al-Muḥāsibī, particularly in Abū Nu‘aym’s Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’.576 Another of the primary figures of the Baghdadi school who became synonymous with it and who was also associated with al-Muḥāsibī was Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nūrī (d. 295/907).577 Similarly, Abū ‘l-Abbās Aḥmad b. Masrūq al-Ṭūsī (d. 298/910) also gained a considerable reputation within Sufi circles and was likewise an associate of al-Muḥāsibī, providing us with some of

575 Similarly, an in-depth discussion of each of al-Muḥāsibī’s students is beyond the scope of the current thesis and as such, only a brief mention of their names will be made here.


the anecdotal phrases we find regarding his shaykh in Abū Nuʿaym’s Hīlya.⁵⁷⁸ Another of al-
Muḥāṣibī’s associates who also had mystical proclivities and was also a traditionist, yet of
whom little is known is Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Abd al-Jabbār ‘al-Ṣūfi al-Kabīr’ (d. 306/918)
who transmitted ḥadīth from his teacher.⁵⁷⁹ Perhaps the greatest contributor after al-Junayd
to our portrait of al-Muḥāṣibī in Hīyat al-Awliyā’ is the little known Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad
b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khawwās, whose many narrations also indicate his intimacy with our
subject.⁵⁸⁰

Of the less well known disciples of al-Muḥāṣibī was Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim al-
Farāʿīḍi (d. 310/932), the brother of Abū Layth, who led an extremely ascetical lifestyle and
who also related ḥadīth from his teacher.⁵⁸¹ More famous in Sufi circles being celebrated in
their hagiographic works was Abū Ḥamza Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Bazzāz [al-Baghdādī]
(d. 269/883), who famously taught his ideas publicly and seemingly enjoyed the approval
of Ibn Ḥanbal.⁵⁸² A close associate of al-Muḥṣibī was Abū Bakr Iṣmāʿīl b. Iṣḥāq al-Sarrāj (d.
286/899) to the extent that his teacher would gather in the aforementioned student’s
house with his other disciples.⁵⁸³ Finally, perhaps an unexpected associate of al-Muḥṣibī
was Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Ibn Khayrān (d. 310/923), who was a renowned Shāfī jurist (ʿāqīḥ)
known for his scrupulousness to the extent that he refused a judgeship (al-

8, p. 211; Ibn al-Jawzī, Shiḥat al-Ṣalīva, vol. 4, pp. 367-8; al-Shahrazūrī, Ṭabaqāt al-Fuṣagha‘ al-Shaṭhīyya, vol. 1,
Nubalā‘, vol. 12, p. 110; Mizān al-Fīzhīl fī Naqq al-Rījāl, vol. 1, p. 430; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shaṭhīyya
Language of Islamic Mysticism, pp. 170 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 34-5.

⁵⁷⁹ See al-Asfahānī, Hīyat al-Awliyā’, vol. 10, pp. 91-2; al-Mizzi, Ṭahdhīb al-Kamāl, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī,
Mystic of Baghdad, p. 38.


⁵⁸¹ See al-Asfahānī, Hīyat al-Awliyā’, vol. 10, pp. 91-2; al-Sulami, Ṭabaqāt al-Sūfīyya, p. 56; al-Mizzi, Ṭahdhīb
al-Kamāl, vol., 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, Ṭārīkh al-Islām, vol. 18, p. 205; Saʿdīr ‘Alām al-Nubalā‘, vol. 12, p. 110; al-
ʿAsqalānī, Ṭahdhīb al-Ṭahdhīb, vol. 1, p. 326; Massignon, Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of
Islamic Mysticism, pp. 170 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 37.

⁵⁸² See al-Asfahānī, Hīyat al-Awliyā’, vol. 10, pp. 273-4; al-Sulami, Ṭabaqāt al-Sūfīyya, p. 295-8; al-Qushayrī,

Nubalā‘, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shaṭhīyya al-Kubrā, vol. 2, p. 276; al-ʿAsqalānī, Ṭahdhīb al-
170 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 35-6.
4.5 Anecdotes Related About Al-Muḥäsibi

Since the historical and biographical works offer us very little information about the life of al-Muḥäsibi, other than a series of anecdotal statements, it is appropriate here that a selection of these be examined to assess exactly what kind of picture we are presented with regarding his life and personality.

Much of this information is provided by his foremost student Abu `l-Qāsim al-Junayd, from whom the following narration is transmitted in Abū Nu`aym’s *Ḥilya*:

Al-Hārith was very emaciated and as he passed by one day while I was sitting at our door, I saw that his face was further shrunken due to hunger, so I said to him, “O uncle, if you enter you can partake of something we have.” He replied, “Would you do that?” and I said, “Yes, and by doing so you will have pleased me and honoured me.” So I entered and he followed; I proceeded swiftly to my uncle’s house, as it was more spacious than ours and was never empty of sumptuous foods, the like of which we didn’t have in our house.585 I then brought a variety of foods and set them before him. He then stretched out his hand and took a morsel, raising it to his mouth; I saw him chew it but he did not swallow it and then he left without speaking to me. The next day I met him and said, “O uncle you pleased me and then you caused me distress.” So he replied, “O my son, as for my need it was great and I made every effort to partake of the food you set before me but there is a sign between myself and Allāh586 - if the food is not acceptable to Him, a rancid odour arises in my nose from it, which I cannot accept587, so I threw that morsel in your porch way and left.”

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586 Equally, the ‘sign’ (‘aṭā‘a) is said to be that a vein in his finger would throb if the food was doubtful (shubha), yet this view seemingly has little textual evidence. See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Āyān*, vol. 2, pp. 58; al-Bundanjī, *Jāmi’ al-Anwār fi Manāqib al-Akhūyār*, p. 291; al-Ṣafādī, *Kitāb al-Wafayāt*, vol. 11, p. 258 and Aṭā‘, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’*, p. 144.


In some reports the narration continues with al-Junayd asking, “Will you enter today?” and he said, ‘Yes!’ So I set before him a piece of bread that we had and he ate it and said, ‘If you offer anything to the destitute (al-faqir) then offer such as this.’ The reports in the primary sources vary somewhat regarding this particular anecdote, casting some doubt as to its authenticity yet at the same time, the main features remain consistent. The first identifiable feature is al-Muhäsibi’s desperate state of poverty being evidenced by his emaciated appearance, which was clearly visible to his disciple. Despite this being an indication of his otherworldliness we can also conclude that this was not necessarily a state which he chose, since when he was invited to eat by his student, he dutifully accepted fulfilling the Prophetic guidance on the subject. Where his true spiritual status is indicated is in the next part of the story; previous anecdotal narrations have shown al-Muhäsibi’s extreme sense of scrupulousness but here, in this narration this characteristic is enhanced further, as al-Muhäsibi is held in a kind of ‘divine custody’ where due to his own efforts at being scrupulous, God has granted him an elevated state of protection from all that is unlawful and doubtful from the perspective of sacred law.

As such, this is not only indicative of his advanced spiritual station but also of his preference of his Lord’s pleasure as opposed to the ephemeral enjoyments of the worldly life, as he forsakes the food from the wedding feast - usually the most delicious and well prepared - for food which is not only lawful in a strictly legal sense but has also gained God’s approval. This is further evidenced by the addition to the narration, which shows al-Muhäsibi’s preference for the simple, humble sustenance of a true devotee of God, i.e. a simple piece of bread that will suffice his hunger and please his Lord, rather than a sumptuous banquet of ‘doubtful’ origins, suggestive of the fleeting pleasures of this life.

In another report narrated to us and preserved in Ḥilīya we find that Abū Nu‘aym narrates on the authority of Ja‘far al-Khulīl that al-Junayd stated:

I would often say to al-Ḥārith, “Seclusion is my delight and you extract me [from it] to the alienation of seeing people and [the ‘dangers’ of] the streets”.


589 I have translated this term in its strict linguistic context but it is equally possible that the technical term being synonymous with ‘Sufi’ is meant.


591 This of course is considered in the Sufi apologetic works to be an indicator of his highly elevated status with God, being considered a miraculous divine gift (karāma). See al-Ṭūsī al-Lumā‘, pp. 42-4 and 284-5 and al-Qushayrī, al-Risāla al-Qushayrīyya fī ‘Ilm al-Taṣawwuf, pp. 109-115.
so he replied, “How often you say that seclusion is your delight! Yet if half of [God’s] creation came close to me I would find no delight [in their company] and if the other half distanced themselves from me I would not feel alienated due to their remoteness.”

In this statement we also find a variety of features that are used to indicate his spiritual station and ascetical nature. The first feature is al-Muḥāṣibī’s correction of the misplaced notion that being detached from the world in a spiritual sense or to refrain from sin requires that one remain secluded from society. On the contrary, al-Muḥāṣibī clarifies for his student that being detached from the world requires no physical detachment but rather a spiritual detachment of the heart from the world and those who exist within it. This in turn clarifies for us not only al-Muḥāṣibī’s concept of this issue but also that this was indeed his own spiritual experience as he is talking from a purely personal perspective. In addition, it also gives a further indication to al-Muḥāṣibī’s ability to discern the finer, more subtle qualities of human nature and similarly, his pedagogical skill in providing guidance to an aspirant upon the spiritual path.

In a seemingly related narration, again it is al-Junayd, who informs us in Abu Nu‘aym’s Ḥiyya:

Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī would come to our house and say, “Come with me and let’s go to the desert.” So I would reply, “Would you turn me out from my seclusion and the security of my soul to the [the ‘dangers’ of] the streets, tribulations and to witness carnal desires?” He replied, “Come out with me and do not fear.” So I went out with him and it was as if the street was empty, such that we saw nothing that we disliked. When I reached the place where he would sit he said, “Ask me,” to which I would reply, “I have no question to ask” and he would repeat, “Ask me about what occurs in your soul” and questions would crowd in on me such that I would ask him and he would answer me immediately and then return home, writing them as books.

This narration begins by further reiterating the main message of the last anecdote, i.e. that al-Muḥāṣibī was not merely an exoteric ascetic - although he was known for his outward renouncement of the world - but for him, it was an esoteric asceticism of the heart, which was also vitally important. Similarly, we find him portrayed as a man entirely certain of his reliance on God, as when questioned anxiously by his disciple he simply replies, “Come out with me and do not fear”, thus instilling a sense of calm and serenity in his student, allaying

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his genuine concern. A similar, 'miraculous' event then ensues, with al-Muḥāsibī's certainty proven true as God seemingly rewards his trust in Him by emptying the street of all that al-Junayd feared - which serves as a further indication of his elevated status and closeness to his Lord.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this narration however, is the section relating to al-Muḥāsibī's questioning of his associate, which is equally suggestive of his concern for his student but also, of his quest to reach the depths of human experience and provide answers to the spiritual ailments of his peers. The very nature of the question and answer format referred to in the report - which also adorns many of his works - is also indicative of his intimate relationship with his disciples and a specific and unique, esoteric approach to purification of the soul, rather than relying on a merely ritualistic enactment of physical acts of worship. In essence al-Muḥāsibī strives to reach the very core and nature of the soul so as to enhance its positive qualities and leave it bereft of the negativity of its base proclivities. As such, this unique and very "hands on" approach supplied al-Muḥāsibī with the basis for his essential works on moral psychology for which he became renowned. Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī demonstrates a profound knowledge of human nature and its weaknesses that predates Freud by a millennium, albeit in a religious context and reveals "the discerning wisdom and inspired insight of a true spiritual director and shepherd of souls."

In another of such anecdotes, related in al-Hujwiri's (d. between 465/1072) Kashf al-Mahjūb, we find the following story,

He [al-Muḥāsibī] possessed a 'king bird' (šāhmurghī), which used to sing aloud. One day, Abū Ḥamza al-Baghdādi, who was al-Ḥārith's pupil and an ecstatic man came to see him and during his visit the bird sang and Abū Ḥamza shrieked out loud. Al-Ḥārith rose, seizing a knife and declared, "You are a disbeliever", and would have executed him had it not been for the intervention of his disciples. Then he [al-Ḥārith] said to Abū Ḥamza, "Become a Muslim O reprobate!" His disciples exclaimed, "O shaykh, we all know him to be one of the elect saints and monotheists, why does the shaykh regard him with suspicion?" Al-Ḥārith replied, "I do not suspect him, his opinions are sound and I know that he is a profound monotheist but why should he do something that resembles the incarnationists (al-ḥulūliyyūn), which has the appearance of being derived from their doctrine? If a senseless bird sings capriciously after its fashion, why should he behave as though its song were the voice of God? God is indivisible and the Eternal does not become incarnate, united with creation or merged with it." When Abū Ḥamza perceived the shaykh's insight, he said, "O shaykh, although I am right in
theory, nevertheless, since my action resembled those of heretics, I repent and withdraw.”

In this excerpt, al-Muḥāṣibī is portrayed as a strict adherent to ‘orthodox’ doctrines, not tolerating for one moment phrases resembling the ‘ecstatic utterances’ (al-shaṭāḥāḥ) of the so-called intoxicated school of Sufism (al-sukr), exemplified by such notables as Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmi (d. 234/848 or 261/875) and al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). As such, al-Muḥāṣibī is seen as a paragon of strict orthodox virtue, defending the beliefs of Islam to the extent of threatening one of his own students with the most severe of consequences for his errant misdemeanour. Similarly, al-Muḥāṣibī is also portrayed as an erudite spiritual master, explaining the reason for his apparently extreme reaction and as such, clarifying for his students his views regarding spiritual purification and development on the path to God. Thus for al-Muḥāṣibī, his goal is not divine union (al-ittihat) or incarnation (al-ḥulūl) like that of the ‘ecstatic’ Sufis but rather, an evacuation of all falsehood from the inner sanctuary of the soul, to allow it to be purified and consequently elevated, by attaining closeness to God.

In summary, in al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī we are presented with an image of a man who was erudite in the fields of learning of his day and strictly ‘orthodox’ in his belief, yet at the same time a man who had acquired great spiritual insight and a window upon the human soul, to the extent that his spiritual state and proximity with regard to God, was extremely elevated. This is particularly true of the Sufi hagiographical works and their apologia, where al-Muḥāṣibī is regarded as one of the early exemplars of their tradition, being held in high esteem. Nevertheless, despite this ‘positive press’ al-Muḥāṣibī was not without his detractors and indeed, his personality is equally couched in controversy within sections of the biographical and historical literature.

4.6 Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s Repudiation of al-Muḥāṣibī

The excellent reputation that al-Muḥāṣibī enjoyed in scholarly circles generally and in Sufi circles specifically, may well have survived the controversy that surrounded him if the personality involved had been relatively unknown, or had been poorly regarded amongst the scholarly elite. However, al-Muḥāṣibī was not spared this misfortune, as the detractor in question was none other than Abū Ἐḥd Allāh Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, the great traditionist and

imam of the Sunni community at the time. Thus, the status of Ibn Ḥanbal in Muslim society and his reputation as a steadfast, defender of ‘orthodoxy’ due to his dogged opposition to the doctrine of the created Qur‘ān at the time of the inquisition (al-miḥna), meant that anyone who courted his disapproval would be castigated in no uncertain terms and in this sense, al-Muḥāsibī was no exception.

Thus, the rejection of al-Muḥāsibī is essentially contained in the following narration related to us by al-Ḵaṭṭīb al-Baghdādī in his Ta‘rīḵh:

Muḥammad b. Ḥāmid b. Yaʿqūb informed me that Muḥammad b. Naʿīm al-Ḍabī said that I heard al-imām Abū Bakr Ḥāmid b. Iṣḥāq - meaning al-Ṣibghī - say that I heard Iṣmāʿīl b. Iṣḥāq al-Sarrāj say, Ahmad b. Ḥanbal said to me one day, “It has reached me that al-Ḥārīth - meaning al-Muḥāsibī - frequents your company, so would you bring me to your house and allow me to sit, such that he can't see me but I can listen to his discourse?” so I replied, “Your word is my command 0 Abu-Ḥaballah!” This initiative from Abū ‘Abd Allāh pleased me and so I made for al-Ḥārīth and requested him to attend that night and said, “And ask your companions to come with you.” He replied, “O Iṣmāʿīl, they are many so do not give them more than pressed oil (kūṣb) and dates, or otherwise more than that you will not be able.” So I carried out all that he had commanded me and went to Abū ‘Abd Allāh and informed him, who came after the sunset prayer (al-maghrib) and ascended to a room in the house, where he busied himself with reading a portion of the Qur‘ān (wird) until he had finished. Al-Ḥārīth and his companions then came, ate and stood for the evening prayer (al-ʿatama) and they prayed no further prayer after it. They then sat in front of al-Ḥārīth silently; not one of them said a word until almost half the night had passed, when one of them asked al-Ḥārīth a question and he began to speak whilst his companions listened attentively, some of them weeping and others crying out during his discourse. Then, I went up to check on Abū ‘Abd Allāh and found that he had wept until he lost consciousness, so I went back to them and they remained in this state until the morning, when they stood and went on their separate ways. I then went back up to Abū ‘Abd Allāh and his state had changed and I asked him, “How did you find them 0 Abu-Ḥaballah?” To which he replied, “I don’t think that I have seen a people such as these nor anyone speak regarding the realities [of faith] (al-haḡāʾiq) like this man, yet despite what I have said, I do not think that you should keep their company.” Then he stood and left.\(^595\)

It is this peculiar anecdotal statement, which has set into motion the debate regarding Ibn Ḥanbal’s censuring of al-Muḥāṣibī. The story itself is difficult to qualify as it contains many apparent contradictions. Firstly, as unlikely as it may seem, the first step in the story is taken by Ibn Ḥanbal himself by instigating the secretive observance of al-Muḥāṣibī’s teaching of his disciples and upon hearing his discourse, he is not only suitably impressed with its content but moreover, is overcome with emotion whilst listening to it. Similarly, he seemingly endorses the content of the discourse and states his approval of its originator and his associates, yet in the very same sentence he considers this form of instruction unsuitable for the very man who arranged his attendance at al-Muḥāṣibī’s night vigil. Thus, the semiotics of this narrative prove virtually indecipherable and as such, have produced a great deal of debate regarding the nature of Ibn Ḥanbal’s dislike of al-Muḥāṣibī’s method and teaching, which will be categorised and will be summarised here in the following sections.

4.6.1 Al-Muḥāṣibī’s Elevated Spiritual Station (maqām)
This view is perhaps one of the least popular views expressed concerning the dispute between Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Muḥāṣibī and in fact is only proposed by one scholar, this being Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī [ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. ʿAlī] (d. 771/1369), who was consequently quoted in this regard by Ibn Ḥajar [Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿAṣqālānī] (d. 852/1448). Thus, after relating the above mentioned story quoted by al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī concerning Ibn Ḥanbal’s observance of al-Muḥāṣibī’s discourse, al-Subkī comments:

Contemplate this story with intuitive insight (ʿayn al-basīra) and know that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal did not consider this man’s accompaniment of them [appropriate] due to his inadequacy regarding their spiritual station (maqām), as they were in a very restricted spiritual station that not every one can adopt and as such, one fears for those who do adopt it. Despite this, Aḥmad indeed wept and showed gratitude to al-Ḥārith and each of them has his own personal view and independent opinion (raʾ wa ijtihād).

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596 The peculiarity of the story is pointed out by al-Dhahabi who states, “Ismāʿīl [b. Ishāq al-Sarrāj] was considered reliable by al-Dāraqūṭnī and this story is authentic in its chain of transmission (ṣahiḥat al-sanad) but rejected (munkara); it doesn’t find acceptance in my heart and I consider it highly unlikely that something like this would be done by Aḥmad.”

In addition, the final part of the story is even more peculiar in al-Bundānī’s version where he claims that Ibn Ḥanbal said, “It has reached me that there are circles of remembrance (majālis al-dhikr) in which people gather and if these are such circles, then I do not disavow anything of them.”


This interpretation of the original narration quoted above is perhaps the most hagiographic in nature as al-Subki, fully aware of the status of both these scholars and of Ibn Ḥanbal in particular, attempts to find a suitable solution to the apparent dislike of Ibn Ḥanbal for al-Muḥāṣibī’s teachings. Therefore, he employs almost a Sufi interpretation of events and attributes the seemingly derogatory comment to Aḥmad’s intuitive knowledge of spiritual matters. This being the case, Ibn Ḥanbal is portrayed as being not only the ‘orthodox’ scholar of hadīth for which he is renowned but also, a shaykh of deep spiritual insight who, bearing in mind the student’s spiritual status and caring for his spiritual welfare, advises him not to adopt such a teaching as it is beyond his capability.

At the same time Ibn Ḥanbal is also portrayed as having comprehended al-Muḥāṣibī’s message from his discourse such that it affected him emotionally, to the extent that he comments, “I don’t think that I have seen a people such as these nor anyone speak regarding the realities [of faith] (al-haqqāqīq) like this man,” which serves not only to indicate Aḥmad’s spiritual status but more importantly, al-Muḥāṣibī’s also, as well as keeping his reputation intact.

Finally, perhaps the cleverest part of al-Subki’s interpretation is the final comment, “... and each of them has his own personal view and independent opinion (ra‘ī wa IBUTIhād).” By stating this al-Subki is denoting that the whole subject area under discussion is an issue of personal reasoning and judgement (IJTIHĀD), which by its very nature is open to disputation that is not only permissible but also, is extremely likely to occur. As such, the scholar capable of IJTIHĀD, the mujtahid, is often regarded as the most elite scholar in Islamic learning who, even if he errs, is rewarded due to his elevated status described in a Prophetic narration. Therefore, by employing this kind of terminology al-Subki further secures the reputations of both scholars and in fact enhances them somewhat, attributing the dispute between them to the exercising of personal judgement in religious matters of which both of them were more than capable.

Although this interpretation of the events by al-Subki fits neatly with the overall image portrayed the in original narration, it hardly fits with our image of Ibn Ḥanbal and as such, cannot be considered the ‘full’ story. This being the case other possibilities have to be given consideration.

598 See al-Bukhārī, Sahīh al-Bukhārī, p. 1264 and Muslim, Sahīh Muslim, p. 761.
599 By this I’m not suggesting that Ibn Ḥanbal was not a deeply spiritual and intuitive individual or indeed, that he would not have made such a observation but rather, the impression given by al-Subki is far too convenient, bearing in mind the image of Aḥmad that is portrayed to us by the sources.
4.6.2 Al-Muḥāṣibi’s Method was Innovative (*bidʿa*)

One of the popular views expressed regarding the dispute between Ibn Ḥanbal and al-
Muḥāṣibi is that the former scholar considered both al-Muḥāṣibi’s approach and
methodology innovative (*bidʿa*) in a pejorative sense. Although there is no direct statement
from Ibn Ḥanbal on this particular issue regarding al-Muḥāṣibi, we find some evidence to
suggest this from various indirect sources. One of Ibn Ḥanbal’s more celebrated students
was Abū Zurā’ al-Rāzī (d. 264/878), who, when he asked concerning al-Muḥāṣibi and his
books, as al-Khaṭīb informs us in his *Tārīkh*, said:

> “Do not dare read such books (*iyyāka wa hādhīhi ʿl-kutub*)! They are books
> of innovation and misguidance (*bidaʿ wa ḥalālāt*). Concern yourself only with
> transmission (*al-athar*) as you will find within it that which will suffice you of
> such works.” It was said to him that within such books one may find
> beneficial lessons (*ʿibra*) to which he replied, “Whoever does not find
> beneficial lessons in the Book of Allāh, Exalted is He, then he will find no
> such beneficial lesson in these books either. Has it reached you that Malik b.
> Anas or Sufyān al-Thawrī or al-Awsā’ī or any of the previous imams wrote
> books about fleeting thoughts (*al-khaṭārat*), satanic insinuation (*al-wasāwis*)
> and other such things? They are a people who have contradicted the people
> of knowledge (*ahl al-ʿilm*); one time they come to us with al-Hārith al-
> Muḥāṣibi, another with Abd al-Raḥīm al-Dubaylī, another with Ḥātim al-
> Aṣāmm and yet another with Shaqiq [al-Balkhi].” Then he said, “How swift
> people are in turning to innovation!”

The polarised view presented here is indicative of the stance adopted by many of the
traditionists of the time and the significance of the phraseology cannot be underestimated.
Al-Rāzī begins with a strict censuring of approaching such works, clarifying that as far as he
was concerned they are nothing more than books that contain erroneous teachings and
conjecture. The ‘true’ methodology is consequently elucidated as being a strict and
uncompromising adherence to both the Qurʾān and the Prophetic practice, as laid down in
the *hadith* literature, which is further evidenced by the fact that none of the earlier scholars
contributed in terms of written treatises other than in these two primary fields of Islamic
learning.

Thus, we are left with the impression of a clash of methodologies, in the sense that the
works and subject matter of al-Muḥāṣibi and others of his ilk were simply unheard of and as
such, constituted a departure from the teachings of the previous, exemplary generations.

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171-2; al-Dhahābī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, pp. 208-9; *Mīzān al-Fıldī fī Naqd al-Rījāl*, vol. 1, p. 431; *Siyar
The context of this clash is further illustrated by the terms "... fleeting thoughts (al-khaṭārāt), satanic insinuation (al-wasāwīs) and other such things ...", which indicates that the inner workings of the human being were almost not a subject for discussion and the dismissive nature of the phraseology indicates the speaker's contempt for such issues. The people (qawm) involved in this field of enquiry are also alluded to and in addition to al-Muḥāṣibi, include other luminaries who were to be found later in the ranks of celebrated Sufis and al-Rāzi also clarifies his contempt for the 'new' spiritual and mystical direction taken by some sections of Islam's scholarly community.

It is interesting to note that despite his being al-Rāzi's teacher, the name of Ibn Ḥanbal is not mentioned here amongst the other eminent jurists or traditionists of the time. Nevertheless, we can assume that Ibn Ḥanbal's methodology did not differ drastically from his contemporaries as we find that his teacher, the celebrated traditionist 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī (d. 198/814) is reported to have said, "It is forbidden for a man to speak regarding an issue of religion except [he bases it on] something that he heard from a reliable narrator (thiqqa)." In a comparable statement, Ibn Ḥanbal himself said to al-Maymūnī, "O Abū 'l-Hasan do not dare speak on an issue unless you have a proof (imām) regarding it." Similarly, when asked regarding the issue of fleeting thoughts (al-khaṭārāt) and satanic insinuation (al-wasāwīs) mentioned above, he is reported to have replied, "Neither the Companions or the Successors spoke regarding them." Illustrating this point further, Ibn Ṣā‘īd al-Ḥanbali [Abd al-Raḥmān b. Shihāb al-Din] (d. 795/1393) states:

Al-Asfahānī, Ḥiyāyat al-Awliyā’, vol. 9, p. 6.
Ibn al-Jawzī, Manāqib al-Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, p. 231.
Ibid., p. 232.

Ahmād and others only censured those amongst the Sufis who discussed fleeting thoughts (al-khaṭārāt) and satanic insinuation (al-wasāwīs), as their statements in this regard were not based on any legal evidence (dalīl sharī‘) but rather, [were based] on personal opinion and experiential knowledge (ra‘ī wa dhawq). Similarly, he would reject statements on issues of the permissible and the forbidden (al-ḥalāl wa ‘l-hārīm) based purely upon personal opinion (ra‘ī) without any legal proof.

In addition to the discussion regarding various aspects of the esoteric and psychological religious life, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) adds a further possibility for the proposal that Ibn Ḥanbal rejected al-Muḥāṣibi on the basis of innovative practice, saying:
Indeed, he [Ahmad] disliked that because their discourse contained aspects of asceticism and extreme behaviour that had no legal basis and a precise form of taking the soul to account, that was meticulous and exaggerated but which had not been commanded. Due to this when Abü Zur'a al-Räzi read al-Härith's book entitled al-Ri‘āya he said, “This is innovation (bi‘da)” and said to the man who brought the book, “You should follow that which Mālik, al-Thawrī, al-Awzā‘ī and al-Layth followed and leave this, as indeed it is innovation.”

Upon examining these various views regarding al-Muḥāsibi’s practice and methodology we find that they are far more difficult to prove than one might at first imagine. Regarding Abü Zur‘a al-Räzi’s censuring of al-Muḥāsibi, in which he states that one must restrict one’s learning to the Qur‘ān and hadith, then of course when examining al-Muḥāsibi’s works we find a great deal of personal introspection is evident. However, at the same time what we also find that he includes a plethora of Qur‘ān verses and multifarious hadith, many of which he transmitted personally, to add form, structure and authenticity to his writings. Thus, the claim that al-Muḥāsibi’s teachings existed outside the sphere of the Islamic paradigm is for the most part, simply erroneous.

The next accusation from al-Räzi’s perspective that none of the previous scholars had written on the topic of fleeting thoughts (al-khātārāt), satanic insinuation (al-wasāwiṣ) and Ibn Hanbal’s perspective that both the Companion and Successor generations had not discussed this, is equally misleading. The fact that a topic had not been discussed in a written form in the formative generations of Muslims does not necessarily mean that they were not aware of it and indeed, many of the Islamic disciplines that became an intrinsic part of learning were not discussed in the technical sense they inferred at a later date. Examples of these include the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (usūl al-fiqh), which had been utilised practically from the time of the Companions but did not reach fruition until its codification in al-Shāfi‘ī’s al-Risāla and various hadith disciplines that both Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Rāzi would have been familiar with, such as hadith terminology (muṣṭaḥal al-ḥadith) and the biographical tābaqāt and riḍāl genres, which were developed purely to authenticate hadith and which, had not even been fully developed in the time of these two eminent traditionists.

Similarly, the most controversial religious incident of the period, the mihna, was driven by an issue never discussed in the initial generations of Muslims, i.e. that of the created Qur‘ān

and indeed, Ibn Ḥanbal himself engaged - admittedly under duress - in this debate to
defend the 'orthodox' view. Thus, we can conclude that the fact that an earlier generation
of scholars did not discuss a topic does not exclude its inclusion in a later scholarly
tradition. As such, the topic in question, i.e. the introspective thought process is in fact
alluded to in the Qurān, in the following verse, "Indeed, We created the human being and
We know that which whispers in his own soul; We are closer to him than his jugular vein"
(50:16) and this being the case, in addition to the body of material related in chapter two
regarding the human soul from both the Qurān and hadith, provides the theoretical,
practical and legal basis for much of what al-Muḥāṣibi dedicated himself to in his life and
works.

In addition, the notion that Ibn Ḥanbal rejected al-Muḥāṣibi on the basis of his extreme
asceticism is equally questionable, as the biographical material dealing with Aḥmad's life is
replete with examples of his own extreme asceticism, which also on occasion seems beyond
the normal boundaries of religious practice.606 This otherworldliness of Ibn Ḥanbal is so
celebrated to the extent that even the Sufi apologetic works include anecdotes from him in
this regard as al-Qushayri's al-Risāla contains the following narration:

Ahmad b. Ḥanbal said, "Asceticism (al-zuḥd) is of three types: the first is to
leave that which is forbidden (al-ḥarām) and this is the asceticism of the
common folk (al-`awāmm). The second is to leave that which is superfluous
from the permissible (fadl ʿal-ḥalāl) and this is the asceticism of the elite (al-
khawāss). The third is to leave that which occupies the devotee from any
other than Allāh the Exalted and this is the asceticism of the gnostics (al-
ārīlin)."607

Thus, in summary we may conclude that the basis of the argument posited to prove al-
Muḥāṣibi's 'unorthodox' teaching is at best contentious and rather than being indicative of
his innovative practice, could equally be viewed as being a by-product of the rigidity of the
traditionist faction that was in the ascendancy in the post-mihna period. One of the major
factors in this stance adopted by this traditionist faction - also referred to as the Ḥanābīd608

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Ḥanbal, pp. 255-60; Patton, Ahmed Ibn Hanbal and the Mihna, pp. 139-172 passim and 178-82 and
Cooperson, Classical Arabic Biography, pp. 138-151 passim.

607 Al-Qushayri, al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fi IN al-Tasawwuf, p. 119.

608 This term being the plural of the word 'Hanball' proves difficult to define as it is used to denote both the
juridical school and the theological stance adopted by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, as well as being used to infer
an uncompromising and rigid position on religious matters. What we can say here, however, is that the phrase
when used to describe certain sections of society at the time of al-Muḥāṣibi did not refer to the school of
jurisprudence, as this had yet to be formed but rather, the theological stance adopted by Ibn Ḥanbal against
the Murtazilites and perhaps, a dogmatic and obdurate 'attitude' that accompanied it amongst Aḥmad's
- seemingly arises from their interpretation of what constitutes innovation, in the sense that from the statements of both Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Rāzī it seems to infer a practice or belief that either contradicts the religious praxis and creedal system of the earliest generations, or indeed, topics that were never discussed by them. Thus, their understanding of the term ‘bid‘a was in reality very restricted and limiting and it may well have been the case that al-Muḥāṣibī understood ‘bid‘a to be a practice or belief that had no basis or precedent in the revelatory sources of the Qurān and hadīth, rather than his contemporaries' rigid interpretation. As such, the source of this dispute is in fact a methodological one, on the one hand between a group of scholars whose world view was extremely obdurate and uncompromising, rejecting outright any teaching which in their view contradicted their system, or indeed was simply 'new' and on the other, a scholar who having grounded his teaching in the primary sources, aimed to treat the moral and psychological ailments of his peers.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, this view does not solve the conundrum of the original narration related by al-Khaṭīb, if one bears in mind the strictness of the stance of the Ḥanbali/traditionist faction to bid‘a generally and the position of Ibn Ḥanbal in particular, which is that if Ibn Ḥanbal had considered al-Mubāṣibī's discourse so innovative, as we are lead to believe, then why did he stay until the morning listening to it? The uncompromising nature of Ibn Ḥanbal on such an issue would lead us to imagine that he would not have stayed even a moment longer than necessary, if this was really the case and therefore, we must consider other possibilities in this regard.

4.6.3 Al-Muḥāṣibī’s Unreliability in Hadīth (da‘f)

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, al-Muḥāṣibī studied the science of hadīth with some of the most eminent traditionists of the period and in fact many of these scholars were also the teachers of Ibn Ḥanbal. Similarly, with regard to the biographical hadīth literature that deals with reliability and acceptability of narrators, al-Muḥāṣibī receives a favourable appraisal from the critics of this discipline, being considered both truthful in followers. See Abū Zahra, Ibn Ḥanbal - Hayātuhu wa ‘Aṣrūhu wa Ārā’uhu wa Fiqhuhu, pp. 356-65 and Gibb et al (eds.) The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 3, pp. 158-62. For examples of Ibn Ḥanbal’s treatment of innovators see Ibn al-Jawzī, Manāqīb al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, pp. 236-41. See pp. 145-6 above.
himself (ṣadūq fi nafsihī) by al-Dhahabi and acceptable (maqṣūb) by Ibn Hajar. Nevertheless, al-Muḥāsibī has been accused of utilising inauthentic ḥadīth in his works and as such, this has been suggested as being a possible reason as to why Ibn Ḥanbal disliked him.

In this regard, we find that the celebrated Mālikī jurist and traditionist Ibn al-`Arabi [Muḥāammad b. ‘Abd Allāh] (d. 543/1148) states:

"... the most excellent of those who discussed this was our eminent scholar al-Hārith b. Asad [al-Muḥāsibī] and from the principal [ḥadīth] that he took [to be authentic] was al-Saʿdī's statement from the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, "The devotee will not reach the [rank of the] righteous (al-muttaqīn) until he leaves that which is doubtless out of fear that it is doubtful", and other such narrations of this level [of authenticity] and of other levels [of authenticity]. He also said on the authority of Abū Dharr, "The perfection of God-consciousness (al-taqwā) is that the devotee fears Allāh by leaving some aspect of the permissible (al-halāl) out of fear that it is forbidden (ḥarām), [taking it] as a barrier (ḥijāb) between himself and the forbidden." He also mentioned that it was said to Ibrāhim b. Adham, "Will you not drink from Zamzam water?" He replied, "If it was not for the leather bucket (al-dalw) I would drink", indicating to the fact that the leather bucket was from the property of the ruler (māl al-sultan) and as such, the property of the ruler is doubtful (mushrakah). He also mentioned that Saʿd burnt his vineyard (karm) and said, "I am not a shaykh if I sell wine" and he also said, "Indeed, it was only due to a doubt (shubha) that occurred in my heart, which should be avoided." It has been narrated that the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, said, "Examine your soul (ifti nafsaka) even if those who are asked have [already] answered you" and he [al-Muḥāsibī] discussed these [narrations] at length, producing benefit in that which he reiterated, was original in that which he wrote, if only he hadn't been attached to inauthentic ḥadīth and the formulation of principles from them. If the scholars of ḥadīth had read them [the narrations] they would have ridiculed them and derided him, despite him having met the world's experts regarding the study of ḥadīth such as Ibn Abī Shayba and others. My opinion and Allah knows best, is that which we have narrated from Abū b. Iḥāmad, "Inauthentic ḥadīth are permitted in the issue of scrupulousness (al-wara)." And may Allāh be pleased with al-Bukhārī who did not consider it fitting that the heart should be attached nor the religion linked to anything except that which is authentic (al-sahlī) and this is our opinion also. If we were to incline to the opinion of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, "Inauthentic ḥadīth should not occur in anything except sermons that are meant to soften the heart and with regard to principles (al-usūl) then this is not possible.""
Commenting on this in the introduction to his edited version of al-Muhäsibi’s *Risälat al-
Mustarshidin*, Abū Ghudda adds: “This flaw is conspicuous in the books of Abū 'Abd Allāh
[i.e. al-Muhäsibi] and cannot be [easily] disregarded as indeed, this treatise *Risälat al-
Mustarshidin* despite its small size, has a number of inauthentic (da'īfi) and some fabricated
(mawdūq) hadith, as you will see during the course of the [book’s] verification.”

Thus, we are given the impression that al-Muhäsibi was a scholar who, despite his extensive
training in the field of hadith, used inauthentic narrations freely within his works, which
would of course in turn raise the hackles of an ardent traditionist such as Ibn Ḥanbal.
However, before we assert this conclusion we must first examine the status of the utilisation
of inauthentic hadith within the Islamic tradition to assess this claim fully. In fact, when
examining the works dedicated to the science of hadith, we find that there are three
approaches adopted by traditionists in dealing with the utilisation of inauthentic narrations.
The first of these rejects the notion of applying such hadith under any circumstances
either in terms of legal rulings (al-ahkām), articles of faith (al-aqā'id), or even the
encouragement of virtuous acts (al-faḍā'il) and this was the opinion of a number of
prominent traditionists including al-Bukhäri and Ibn al-'Arabi, as the above quote indicates
but also, Yaḥyä b. Ma'in and Muslim.

The second of these views states that implementation of such hadith is acceptable under all
circumstances, regardless of the nature of the application and especially when there is
nothing other than personal opinion involved, this being ascribed to both Ibn Ḥanbal and
Abū Dāwūd.

The third and final of these opinions posits that inauthentic narrations may not be used in
legal rulings (al-ahkām) and articles of faith (al-aqā'id) but may be utilised for the
encouragement of virtuous acts (al-faḍā'il), pious sermonising (al-mawā'iq) and the like.
This latter implementation is not without some reservation, however and the following
prerequisites are to be applied:

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a) That the weakness in the narration not be extreme, such that hadith containing known liars or those accused of lying, for example, would not be included.

b) That the content of the hadith be included with a general precept which has already been firmly established within the revelatory sources.

c) That when utilising such a hadith, one does not believe its authenticity but indeed, that one should be cautious in ascribing it to the Prophet.617

Therefore, when re-examining Ibn al-`Arabi's appraisal above, we may assume that most probably al-Muhâsibi adopted the third approach to the issue of inauthentic hadith, as we find that the various narrations quoted by Ibn al-`Arabi would come under the general heading of piety (al-taqwâ) or scrupulousness (al-wara'), which are both such well established concepts within the Islamic tradition such that we may dispense with even giving examples here due to their widely established proofs. Nevertheless it seems appropriate to examine one example here; with regard to the narration quoted above, “Examine your soul (istaftâ nafsaka)618 even if those who are asked have [already] answered you”, we find a related narration in Muslim's Şâhih which reads, “Righteousness is good character and sin is that which pricks your conscience (ma ťâka fi nafsika) and that which you would hate people to know about”619, this being related a hadith collection regarded by the vast majority of traditionists to be rigorously authenticated. Similarly, a virtually identical narration is related by al-Tabrizî in his Mishkât al-Mašâbih, which concerns a man who came to the Prophet and asked him regarding righteousness to which he replied, “Ask your heart (is'al qalbaka)”, this being a hadith deemed authentic (hasan) by the foremost traditionist of this time, Muḥammad Nasîr al-Dîn al-Albânî (d. 1420/2000).620

Thus, we can see that in this case at least it is true that al-Muhâsibi was utilising an inauthentic hadith, yet the concept promoted within it is already firmly established within


618 It would equally valid to translate this as “conscience” bearing in mind the context.

619 Muslim, Sahîh Muslim, p. 1120.

other narrations of a similar genre and since the very nature of his works were the encouragement of virtuous acts based on an exposition that resembles a pious sermon, we could conclude that al-Muḥāṣibī held a view similar to that proposed in the third opinion above.

Despite this however, even if we accept that al-Muḥāṣibī used inauthentic hadīth, and this certainly seems to have been the case, it is still difficult to establish that this was the reason that caused Ibn Ḥanbal’s dislike of al-Muḥāṣibī. This is due to several factors: firstly, the quote from Ibn al-ʿArabī himself indicates that Ibn Ḥanbal permitted the use of weak narrations in the issue of scrupulousness (al-waraʾ) and since much of al-Muḥāṣibī’s works and teachings were on this and other pietistic subjects, which encouraged the performance of virtuous acts via pious sermonising, it would seem highly unlikely that Ibn Ḥanbal would hold this against al-Muḥāṣibī to the extent that he would request an aspiring student to avoid his company. In addition, as mentioned above and as shown by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Ḥanbal considered the implementation of such hadīth acceptable and especially in legal matters, when there is nothing other than personal opinion exists as a solution, such that he approved the application of an inauthentic hadīth rather than resort to a view of a non-‘revealed’ variety such as analogous deduction (al-qiyyās), albeit with certain prerequisites. 621 Similarly, it seems extremely unlikely that Ibn Ḥanbal would censure al-Muḥāṣibī for actually using hadīth, even if they were inauthentic, bearing in mind that he had devoted his entire life to this science and the tremendous reverence he had for it. As such, we can consider this particular suggestion unlikely and this being the case, it requires that we examine further options.

4.6.4 Al-Muḥāṣibī and Ibn Ḥanbal were Contemporaneous (aqrān)

Of the less popular explanations for Ibn Ḥanbal’s dislike of al-Muḥāṣibī is that they were contemporaries who may have disagreed upon an issue of religious knowledge which in turn, led to a dispute of a personal nature, causing Ibn Ḥanbal to react in the way that he did. In this regard, Islamic scholarship, particularly in the field of hadīth through the genre of literature dealing with the disparagement and acceptability of narrators known as ʿal-jarḥ wa ʿl-taʿdīl, has discussed incidents of such a nature and developed its own particular stance regarding it. Accordingly, we find the following statement from al-Subki:

So it is appropriate for you, O seeker of guidance (al-mustarshid) that you adopt the correct etiquette with the previous scholars (al-a'Imma) and do not look at the statements of some of them regarding others except if they produce clear evidence. Thus, if you are able to interpret [such incidents] or have a good opinion (husn al-ğann) [regarding them] then do so, otherwise ‘turn a blind eye’ regarding what occurred between them as you were not created for this purpose and concern yourself with that which concerns you and do not concern yourself with that which does not. A student of knowledge (fâllâh al-ğilm) remains noble in my sight until he delves into that which occurred between the predecessors and judges [in favour] of some rather than others. So dare not incline [to one or the other] in that which occurred between Abû Hanifa and Sufyân al-Thawrî, or Mâlik [b. Anas] and Abû Dhi'b, or Aḥmad b. Ṣâliḥ and al-Nasâ'î, or al-Ḥârîth al-Muḥâsibî and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, which continued until the time of Ibn Abd al-Sâlâm and al-Taqî b. al-Sâlâh. As indeed, if you busied yourself with this I fear for your destruction! These people were renowned scholars (al-a'Imma), their statements may be interpreted in more than one way and perhaps some of them were not understood. As such, we can do nothing except be pleased with them and be silent regarding what occurred between them in the same way that we do regarding that which occurred between the Companions, may Allâh be pleased with them.

Thus, we can see from al-Subki’s comments that with regard to disputes between scholarly personalities, including that which occurred between al-Muḥâsibî and Ibn Ḥanbal, he adopts a non-inflammatory approach, which attempts to diffuse the situation and which is reminiscent of his appraisal of the dispute between al-Muḥâsibî and Ibn Ḥanbal in his Ṭabaqât al-Shâfi‘îyya al-Kubrâ mentioned above. It is interesting to note, however, that there is an exception to this approach which is indicated by the phrase, “...except if they produce clear evidence (burhân wâdîh)”, a factor that up until now in texts previously quoted, Ibn Ḥanbal has not alluded to.

Similarly, it is equally interesting to note that al-Subki also attempts to diffuse the situation further and maintain reverence for such luminaries by suggesting that in some cases the reasons behind the discourse of certain scholars are difficult to discern, indicated by the phrase, “These people were renowned imams, their statements may be interpreted in more than one way and perhaps some of them were not understood.” In the particular case under discussion here, i.e. the dispute between al-Muḥâsibî and Ibn Ḥanbal, this is certainly the case as Ibn Ḥanbal did not qualify further his statement, “... yet despite what I have said, I

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622 The literal translation of the term used would be ‘to turn one’s cheek away’ (fa ‘drib safhàn ‘an) meaning not to even look but I have used ‘turn a blind eye’, which appears a useful equivalent in English.


624 See p. 159 above.
do not think that you should keep their company" and this is equally demonstrated by the number of opinions and amount of discussion that this comment has generated. Thus, the approach of traditionists in assessing the reliability of narrators is further elucidated in a comparative discussion in the *al-Raf wa 'l-Takmil fi al-Jarh wa 'l- Ta'dil* of the more modern *hadith* scholar 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Luknawi (d. 1304/1886) who states:

If disparagement [of a narrator] (*al-jarh*) is a result of fanaticism (*ta'asub*), or enmity (*'adwa*), or personal dislike (*munāfara*), then it is disparagement which is rejected (*jarh mardūd*). As such, the statement of al-imām Mālik [b. Anas] regarding Muḥammad b. Ḥishāq - the author of *al-Maghāzī* - that he was a "deceiving charlatan (dajjāl min al-dajjaliyya)" is not accepted ... [Similarly] al-Nasā'i's vilification (*qadd*) of Ḥāmid b. Ṣāliḥ al-Miṣrī, or [Ṣufyān] al-Thawrī's vilification of Abū Ḥanīfa, or [Yaḥyā] Ibn Ma'īn's vilification of al-Shāfī, or Ḥāmid's vilification of al-Ḥārith al-Muhāsibī would also not be accepted ... So do not dare delve into that which occurred between Abū Ḥanīfa and Sufyān ... or between Ḥāmid and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī.

As such, al-Luknawi goes a step further than the non-inflammatory approach of al-Subki inferring that not only should such disparaging or ambiguous statements of scholars regarding their peers be 'overlooked' but that they should even be rejected due to the underlying reasons for such comments being not only contentious but possibly even occurred as a result of personal dislike. Thus, according to al-Luknawi, Ibn Ḥanbal's comment regarding al-Muḥāsibī may be cast aside altogether because it is impossible to know the true reasons behind it.

Shedding further light on this al-Subki comments, "And what must also be taken into consideration - and, as shaykh al-Islām Ibn Daqiq al-Īd has pointed out - is the dispute that occurred between many of the Sufis and the traditionists (*aṣḥāb al-hadīth*), as indeed many of them imposed statements regarding one another, as some of them did regarding al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī and others." Thus, we are given the impression that due to the methodological differences alluded to above, many traditionists often depreciated those they considered 'Sufis' and as such, when examining the disputes between scholars of these two denominations this factor must be taken into consideration. Therefore, the inference here also is that the comments of traditionists regarding other non-traditionists and Sufis in particular, should be rejected due to the nature of the methodological dispute between them.

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627 See pp. 160-4 above.
This is further confirmed by Ibn al-Jawzi, who demonstrating his uncompromising Ḥanbalite tendency, comments before briefly mentioning the dispute between Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Muḥāṣibi:

Indeed, *al-imām* Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal due to his extreme adherence to the Prophetic practice (*al-sunna*) and his forbidding of innovation (*al-bidʿa*) criticised a number of the elite (*al-akhyār*), if they did anything that contradicted the *sunna* and his statements in this regard should be interpreted as providing good counsel in religious matters (*al-naṣiḥa lī ʿl-dīn*). 628

Thus, from the above statement even Ibn al-Jawzi admits that, due to his own strict interpretation and application of Islamic principles, Ibn Ḥanbal would disparage those whom he considered to contradict such fundamentals, despite their being from the scholarly ranks of the community “*al-akhyār*”. However, rather than interpreting this tendency as a case of, “... providing good counsel in religious matters (*al-naṣiḥa lī ʿl-dīn*)”, as Ibn al-Jawzi has done, one may equally interpret this in the light of the discussion above, provided by traditionists dealing with the discipline of *al-jaṛḥ waʿl-taʿdīl*, as being the result of a stance taken due to a different methodological approach being adopted.

Further clarifying the concept amongst scholarship that there was almost a ‘natural’ departure between the traditionists and the ‘Sufis’, al-Dhahabi, having quoted the remarks made by al-Rāzi, comments in his *Mīzān al-ʿItdād*:

Where are the likes of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibi?! How then if Abū Zur’a had seen the books of the later Sufis, such as the *Qūṭ al-Qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib [al-Makki] and where are the likes of the *Qūṭ*?! How then if he had seen *Bahjat al-Asrār* of Abū Jahdām, and Ḥaqqāʾiq al-Tafsīr of al-Sulami?! He would have lost his mind (*la ṭāra lubbuhu*)! How then if he had seen the works of Abū Ḥāmid [al-Ghazzālī] al-Tūsī bearing in mind the many fabricated *ḥadīth* (*al-maqdūḥāt*) there are in *al-Iḥyāʾ*?! How then if he had seen *al-Ghunya* of shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir [al-Jilānī]?! How then if he had seen *Fusūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyya* [of Ibn ‘Arabī]?! Indeed when al-Ḥārith was the spokesman of such people in his era (*līsān al-qawm fī dhālika ʿl-ʿasr*), his contemporaries consisted of one thousand scholars of *ḥadīth*, including the likes of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ibn Rāhawayh but when the pole of Gnostics (*quṭūb al-ʿārifīn*) became the author of *al-Fusūṣ* [i.e. Ibn ‘Arabī] the scholars of [in that time] were the likes of Ibn Walad al-Khamsin and Ibn Shaḥāna. 630

On examining this excerpt in the light of the quote from al-Rāzi, we may conclude that, even if al-Dhahabi accepted his claim that al-Muḥāṣibi was a proponent of innovation, he

629 See p. 160 above.
clearly thought that al-Muḥāṣibi’s ‘bid‘ā was insignificant compared with the ‘innovations’ of the later exponents of Sufism, to the extent that he concludes that, if al-Rāzī had encountered these later works he would have gone insane! Similarly, al-Dhahābī also takes into consideration the factors of space and time, in the sense that he attempts to make an appraisal of al-Muḥāṣibi within his own historical context. This being the case, he quite correctly notes that this era was the ‘golden age of traditionism’ to the extent that not only was the vast majority of scholarship was concerned with the transmission and authenticating of narrations but also that this period contained many of the authorities in the field of hadith, who would be considered its greatest exponents and experts for centuries to come. Thus, bearing this factor in mind and also taking into consideration the ‘clash of methodologies’ between the traditionists and other sections of the scholarly community, it is hardly surprising that al-Muḥāṣibi came under scrutiny and consequently, incurred the wrath of the hadith experts who were in the ascendancy in the post-miḥna period.

In a similar vein, further accentuating the ‘clash of methodologies’ between the traditionists and the nascent Sufi fraternity, Ibn Khaldūn comments in his Shīfā’ al-Sā’ī:

The basis of the story between al-Muḥāṣibi and Ibn Ḥanbal, was Ibn Ḥanbal’s belief that it is not permissible for someone studying Sacred Law (al-sharī‘a) to have a shaykh to whom he submits his affairs but rather that acquisition [of knowledge] should be from the Book [i.e. the Qur‘ān] and the Prophetic example (al-sunna) [directly].

As such, this is a further indication of the disparate approaches of these two scholars, which appear on the surface to have created an unsolvable rift between them.

Therefore, at least from a superficial perspective, the fact that these two eminent Muslim personalities were contemporaneous may be a possible cause of their discord. However, I would suggest here that there is little indication that the dispute in question was in fact fuelled by personal feelings, but rather, that their methodologies of religious practice were entirely different, as was shown in this section and even more so in section 4.6.2 above. Despite this, however, there remains yet another major factor in the relationship between al-Muḥāṣibi and Ibn Ḥanbal and since this is arguably the most important it will be dealt with at length in the next section.

4.6.5 Al-Muhäsibi’s Utilisation of Scholastic Theology (ilm al-kalâm)

Of the most popular and regularly cited reasons for Ibn Ḥanbal’s abjuration of al-Muhäsibi is the suggestion that Ahmad’s dislike of al-Ḥārith stems from the latter’s utilisation of scholastic theology (ilm al-kalâm) and in particular, in refuting ‘unorthodox’ views, especially those of the Muʿtazilites and Shiʿites. The fact that al-Muhäsibi employed dialectical and rational argument in some of his works is well established, as this technique is tangible during his discussion of the aforementioned sects within a minority of his works, namely in particular Māhiyyat al-ʿAql and Fahm al-Qurʾān. Therefore, this suggestion requires further qualification not from the perspective of al-Muhäsibi, as his use of kalâm is known, but rather, one has to first clarify Ibn Ḥanbal’s view of this subject, so as to establish the validity of this concept.

In fact, upon examining the classical biographical and historical sources, one finds a trend amongst the more strict traditionist and jurisprudential ranks towards vehement censuring of the use of ilm al-kalâm in any format and under any circumstance. As such, we find that when it was said to one of Ibn Ḥanbal’s teachers, ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Mahdi, “Such and such (fulān) has authored a book regarding the sunna as a refutation against someone else”, he replied, “Did he refute [him] with the Book of Allāh [i.e. the Qurʾān] and the practice of His Prophet (sunnat nabīyyihī), may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him?” It was said to him, “[He refuted him] with scholastic theology (kalâm)”, to which he replied, “Then he has refuted falsehood with falsehood (bāṭil bi bāṭil).” Thus, we find that this view - representative of the traditionist stance towards kalâm - not only rejected it as a method since it was considered falsehood (bāṭil) but moreover, its use was even rejected in refuting others who may well employ it within a religious discourse, despite its purpose being the defence the ‘orthodox’ position.

In a more scathing attack on those who engage in scholastic theology and dialectics, another of Ibn Ḥanbal’s teachers - the renowned jurist Muhammad b. Idris al-Shāfiʿī - is reported to have said, “No one engaged in kalâm and was successful.” He also said, “For a person to be afflicted with everything that Allāh has forbidden apart from polytheism (al-

632 It is worth noting here that al-Khaṭīb contends that there are theological issues other than those alluded to in this section, in which al-Muhäsibi contradicts the creed of ‘orthodox’ Sunnism. However, most of these are derived by examining al-Muhäsibi’s views from his works, in particular Fahm al-Qurʾān, whereas the goal of this section is to explore this contention from the classical primary sources as a whole, so as to reach the essence of this dispute. See al-Khaṭīb, Fikr al-Ḥārith al-Muhäsibi al-Sūfī fī Mizān al-Kitāb wa ‘l-Sunna, pp. 40-7.

633 See pp. 221-2 and 225-7 below.

634 See al-Asfahānī, Ḥīyat al-Awliyā; vol. 9, pp. 11-12.

635 Ibid., p. 100.
shirk) is better than if he were to engage in al-kalām. Similarly, his own judgement regarding scholastic theology was clear as he stated:

My opinion and my position (rayi wa madhabli) regarding those who engage in scholastic theology (ašbaḥ al-kalām) is that they should be beaten with palm branches (al-jarid), put on camels and paraded amongst the clans and tribes and that it should be proclaimed, “This is the recompense of anyone who left the Book of Allah [i.e. the Qur’ān] and the Prophetic practice (al-sunna) and engaged in al-kalām.”

As for Ibn Ḥanbal himself, he had an equally negative view of scholastic theology and dialectics, as it is reported that he said, “Do not sit with those who engage in scholastic theology (ahl al-kalām) even if they defend the Prophetic practice (al-sunna).”

Thus, the traditionists and jurists of the period are portrayed as holding an uncompromising and rigid view regarding both scholastic theology and those who engaged in it. This can be understood in several ways: firstly, they held the view that Islam was a revealed religion and it was to be understood from its revelatory sources, these being entirely sufficient to understand and interpret this religious tradition. Secondly, bearing in mind the ‘self sufficient’ nature of the revelatory sources, there was simply no need for another interpretative method, such as scholastic theology, to be employed and this being the case, such a subsidiary interpretative method was extraneous and thus surplus to requirement. Thirdly, since scholastic theology by its very nature relies on dialectic and rational discourse to prove its point rather than basing an argument exclusively on a Qur’ānic verse or Prophetic hadith, then such a method had no basis from a religious or legalistic perspective and was to be rejected as innovation (bid’ā), even if it were to employed to defend the ‘orthodox’ stance from other ‘innovative’ sects. Fourthly, such scholars, from their perspective, had seen the ‘negative’ effect of engaging in kalām, since many of the ‘innovations’ of groups such as the Qadarites, Mu’tazilites and the Jahmites had been due to their delving into theological debate on a ‘rational’ basis rather than a ‘revelatory’ one, which in many ways ultimately led to the tribulations of the mihna.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that anyone found employing scholastic theology, even if it were to for the noble goal of defending the ‘orthodox’ position by using the methods of the ‘unorthodox’ against themselves, was strongly censured and vilified. Therefore, it is equally no surprise that al-Muḥāsibī was subject to such vilification, as he was clearly involved in

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636 Ibid.
637 Ibid., p. 104.
the defence of the beliefs of Sunni 'orthodoxy' by utilising rational and dialectic methods, comparable to those of the sects with whom he was engaged, such as those of the Mu'tazilites.

Bearing these factors in mind and despite his 'non inflammatory' approach to the dispute between Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Muḥäsibi alluded to in the aforementioned discussion, al-Subki also concedes that al-Muḥäsibi's utilisation of scholastic theology may well have been a factor in this issue, as the following excerpt shows:

Know that al-imām Aḥmad, may Allah be pleased with him, was highly critical of anyone who spoke regarding scholastic theology ('ilm al-kalām) out of fear that it would lead to that which is inappropriate. There is little doubt that to remain silent regarding it [kalām] is preferable provided there is no need to do so and to speak concerning it when there is no need is innovation (bidʿa) and al-Ḥāríth had indeed spoken on some issues of scholastic theology; Abū al-Qāsim al-Nāṣirābādhī said, "It has reached me that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal repudiated him for this reason." I say: it is presumed that al-Ḥāríth only spoke [regarding kalām] when the need arose.639

Thus, while acknowledging Ibn Ḥanbal's strict censuring of kalām under all circumstances due to its potential to open discussions of a theological nature that may even be impermissible or at the very least misleading, al-Subki differentiates between this approach and another, which suggests that scholastic theology may be employed when the need to do so arises. If no such need arises, however, then to introduce kalām into the discourse is, according to al-Subki at least, innovative. On this premise al-Subki sets out to defend al-Muḥäsibi's position by suggesting that he did not engage in dialectical debate for its own sake but rather, when the need arose to defend the Sunni 'orthodox' position from the onslaught of the rationalising theology of the Mu'tazilites - an objective, as we have already seen, that Ibn Hanbal found equally unacceptable.

Arguing from a similar perspective, al-Ghazzāli [Abu-Ḥamid] (d. 505/1111), provides a similar defence of al-Muḥäsibi's approach. Al-Ghazzāli in his typically lucid style, presents what he considers to be representative of the views of these scholars by way of an imaginary dialogue and then gives his own conclusion, as we find in the following quote from al-Mungidh:

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal rejected al-Ḥāríth al-Muḥäsibi's writing of refutations against the Mu'tazilites, so al-Ḥāríth said, "To refute innovation (al-bidʿa) is a compulsory duty (fard)" and Aḥmad replied, "Indeed, but you first make mention of their deviant view (shubha) and then you reply to it; What guarantee do you have that someone won't examine this deviant view such

that it sticks in his mind and then he will not be attentive to the reply, or give it consideration yet not understand its full significance?" What Āḥmad has mentioned is true but only in the case of a deviant view that is not widespread or well known. However, if such a deviant view became well known, then to reply to it is compulsory and it is not possible to reply to it without first making mention of it. ⁶⁴⁰

Therefore, al-Ghazzālī's first defence of al-Muḥāṣibī's refutations against the Muʿtaẓīlītes comes from a legalistic perspective, i.e. that it is a compulsory duty (fard) to do so, perhaps a view that Ibn Ḥanbal may even have agreed with, as he himself did so during the ṭiḥna. However, according to al-Ghazzālī, this was not the reason for Ibn Ḥanbal's censuring of al-Muḥāṣibī but rather, his mentioning of their doctrines before replying to them to refute them, as there is no guarantee that someone reading such an exposition may be convinced by the Muʿtaẓīlīte view before reading the refutation or even be confused by it, such that the specific nature of the reply may not be fully understood. Al-Ghazzālī contends, however, that this is only true in the case of a deviant view that is not widespread, since in this case mentioning such a view which is not well known to the public would only cause them further consternation. In the case of the Muʿtaẓīlītes however, the opposite was true, since their doctrines came into the public domain due to the very nature of the ṭiḥna. In this case al-Ghazzālī suggests that it is a duty to answer such widespread views by refuting them openly and that one can only achieve this by first making mention of such views and then refuting them systematically - a duty that al-Muḥāṣibī gratefully undertook on behalf of his peers. Although al-Ghazzālī's reasoning is sound, his explanation does not deal with the fundamental question of al-Muḥāṣibī's engaging in kalām, as, even if Ibn Ḥanbal were to accept such an appraisal he would have surely contended that this process could have been undertaken without utilising a kalām-style method - an approach which he himself adopted in dealing with the Muʿtaẓīlītes.

With regard to mentioning the views of heretical groups we find a similar defence from qāḍī ʿIyyāḍ as he states in his Kitāb al-Šifā':

Both the predecessors (al-salāf) and later scholars (al-khalāf) from imams of guidance agreed that it was permissible to quote the views of the disbelievers and atheists in their books and assemblies to make them clear to people and to refute their heresies. Although it has been reported that Āḥmad b. Ḥanbal objected to al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāṣibī doing this, Āḥmad b. Ḥanbal

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himself did something similar when he refuted the *Jahmiyya* and those who said that the Qur'an was created.\(^{641}\)

The contention that al-Muhãsibi made mention of the 'innovative' sects in Islamic doctrine seems to be a baseless argument, since, as *qādi* ʿīyyād has pointed out, there is a consensus amongst both the early and later scholars of Islam that this is permissible - if the goal of it is to clarify their heresies and at the same time refute them. Indeed, this was the same goal to which al-Muhãsibi aspired and moreover, as *qādi* ʿīyyād observes, Ibn ʿHanbal himself appropriates the same technique when refuting similar heretical views in his work *al-Radd ʿalã ’l-Jahmiyya wa ’l-Zanãdiqã*.\(^{642}\) Therefore, the claim that al-Muhãsibi was repudiated for this reason seems unlikely, since Ibn ʿHanbal himself in this work and as the *miḥna* accounts bear witness, engaged in refutation of his opponents and their views. The only possible explanation of this is that Ibn ʿHanbal's objection was due to the fact that al-Muhãsibi utilised *kalām* as a method to achieve this goal, whereas Aḥmad, due to his opposition to this approach, employed discussions purely based on the Qurãn and *sunna*.\(^{643}\)

It is also worth mentioning here that Ibn ʿHanbal's contention with al-Muhãsibi may not just have been with his utilisation of *kalām* as a method but also with some the specific views he may have held regarding the doctrine surrounding the Qurãn. There is little doubt that al-Muhãsibi's general view regarding the Qurãn was that of Ibn ʿHanbal, in the sense that he held that the Qurãn was the uncreated word of God. Despite this, however, during the course of the dispute concerning the nature of the Qurãn other, more subtle and complex debates arose. One of these concerned the physical, human articulation of the Qurãn during recital (*al-lufž*); the question being of course - is this created also? Those who contended that the recital of the Qurãn was in fact created were thus termed 'al-Lufžiyya' due to their belief in this specific aspect of doctrine concerning the Qurãn and this too has been suggested as a possible reason behind Ibn ʿHanbal's contention with al-Muhãsibi, as al-Dhahabi states:


\(^{642}\) It is worth noting that this particular work is one of the many works attributed to Ibn ʿHanbal and whose authorship is questionable. For a discussion of this issue see Ibn ʿHanbal (d. 241/855), Aḥmad, *al-Radd ʿalã ’l-Jahmiyya wa ’l-Zanãdiqã*, edited by ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-ʿUmayra (Riyadh, Dâr al-Liwâ, 1977) pp. 72-8.

\(^{643}\) This is a contention that requires further research and perhaps even a comparative study of both Ibn Ḥanbal's and al-Muhãsibi's works and their refutations of 'heretical' sects will be a useful addition to the literature.
Ibn al-Aʿrābi said, “Al-Hārith studied jurisprudence, recorded hadāth and became familiar with the practices of the ascetics, such that he reached an [elevated] rank in knowledge. However he spoke regarding [human] articulation [of the Qurān] (al-lufẓ) and faith (al-imān) and thus, it is said that Aḥmad repudiated him such that he went into hiding for a while.”

Regarding this issue, Ibn Ḥanbal's position was equally uncompromising as with other aspects of the discussion regarding the divine nature of the Qurān. In this regard al-Subki relates:

It has been narrated that it was said to [al-Ḥusayn] al-Karābisi, “What do say regarding the Qurān?” to which he replied, “It is the uncreated speech of Allāh.” So the questioner then asked, “What do you say regarding my articulation of the Qurān?” and he replied, “Your articulation of the Qurān is created.” So the questioner went to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and explained to him what occurred to which he commented, “This is innovation (biḍā).”

[Al-Subkī:] As for our opinion it is that Aḥmad, may Allāh be pleased with him, by saying, ‘This is innovation’ was merely referring to answering a question regarding articulation [of the Qurān] (al-lufẓ), as this does not concern a person and for a person to delve into that which does not concern him within scholastic theology is an innovation and as such, to remain silent concerning it is better and more preferred.

Similarly, no one should think that Aḥmad, may Allāh be pleased with him, is claiming that the words articulated from the lips are pre-eternal and at the same time al-Ḥusayn’s statement has been related from the likes of al-Bukhārī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibi, Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazi and others and we will return to this during the discussion of al-Bukhārī’s biography. It has also been narrated that when Aḥmad said, “This is innovation”, the questioner returned to al-Ḥusayn who then said, “Your articulation of the Qurān is uncreated.” The questioner once again returned to Aḥmad and informed him of al-Ḥusayn’s statement, which Aḥmad also rejected saying, “This is also innovation.” This indicates to you what we are saying, [i.e.] that when Aḥmad said, “This is also innovation” he was merely referring to the question itself, or otherwise how could he oppose the affirmation of something and then [also] its denial?!

The first striking feature of the above quotation is the involvement of al-Ḥusayn al-Karābisi, a renowned scholastic theologian (mutakallim) who would revel in Ibn Ḥanbal’s criticism of him due to his discussion of this particular issue, i.e. the articulation of the Qurān (al-lufẓ) and therefore, it is equally not surprising that Ibn Ḥanbal regarded his opinion as innovative. What is more interesting is the attribution of the view to major jurists and traditionists other than al-Muḥāṣibi, including such eminent personalities as al-Bukhārī and

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646 Ibid., p. 118.
al-Marwazi, indicating that this was not only a well known view but also that its interpretation was extremely complex.

Ibn Ḥanbal’s stance towards this issue, according to al-Subki at least, is one of disengagement, in the sense that he considered the question itself innovative and therefore, it is no surprise that anyone who answered the question or held a specific view regarding it would also be considered an innovator, which seems to have been the situation in al-Muḥāsibī’s case.

The discussion provided here by al-Subki seems to be little more than a biographical gloss, as, when we examine other sources Ibn Ḥanbal’s position becomes crystal clear. Ibn al-Jawzi, for example, relates the following reports regarding Ibn Ḥanbal’s stance towards the issue at hand, “Ahmad b. Zanjuyayh said that he heard Ahmad b. Ḥanbal say, ‘Al-Lufṣiyya are worse than the Jahmiyya.’” In a similar narration we find, “Muḥammad b. Muslim said that he heard Ahmad b. Ḥanbal say, ‘Whoever said that my articulation of the Qurʾān is created (lufṣi bi ’l-Qurʾān makhlūq) then he is a Jahmi.’” Moreover, his position is further clarified by the following statement, “Isḥāq b. Ḥibli b. Hānī said that Ahmad b. Ḥanbal was asked should one pray behind someone who says that their articulation of the Qurʾān is created, he said ‘He should not be prayed behind, nor should he be sat with and no-one should pray [the funeral prayer] over him.’

Thus, the issue is far more serious than al-Subki seems to indicate, since the issue of articulation of the Qurʾān was not merely an issue that should not be raised but also, if one did so and in addition, believed in it, if one did so and in addition, believed in it, was clearly considered by Ibn Ḥanbal to be a disbeliever (kāfir). This is indicated not only by the phrase, “... no-one should pray [the funeral prayer] over him” but also due to Ibn Ḥanbal’s position regarding the Jahmites in general, to which al-Lufṣiyya are compared in these narrations. As such, Ibn Ḥanbal’s opinion of someone who considered their own personal articulation of the Qurʾān to be created is unequivocal; he considered them non-Muslims and it would suggest that, if he did indeed think that al-Muḥāsibī adopted this article of faith, then it would a manifest reason for his repudiation of him. Despite this however, it does not entirely explain the initial comment made by Ibn Ḥanbal, quoted at the beginning of this section, since once again - as was the case with the accusation that al-Muḥāsibī engaged in innovation - it stands to

647 Ibn al-Jawzi, Manāqib al-Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, p. 205.
648 Ibid., p. 206.
649 Ibid., p. 207.
reason from the above quote of Ibn Ḥanbal himself, that he would not spend even one moment in the company of someone who was even suspected of holding such a belief.

In a similar and somewhat related debate surrounding the nature of the Qurān, yet another complex theological concept is proposed as the reason for Ibn Ḥanbal’s rejection of al-Muḥāṣibi. In an almost reversed argument, the question in hand does not concern the human being’s articulation of the Qurān but the divine pronunciation of speech, in the sense that, is this articulation of words accompanied by sound or not? In this regard we find the following quote in al-Futūḥi’s *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munir*:

Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Rajab [al-Ḥanbali] said in *al-Manāqib*, “And from the innovations concerning the Qurān that ʿAlī would reject is the statement that Allāh spoke without sound (*bi ghayrī sawt*), such that he [Ibn Ḥanbal] would reject this view and attribute innovation to the one who held it.” It has been said that Ṣaḥīḥ renounced al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibi for this reason. Abū al-Abbās [Ibn Taymiyya] comments, “This was the reason for ʿAlī’s abjuration of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibi and others like him from the Kullābiyya.”

On the same theme and illustrating this point further we find that al-Dhahabī relates in his *Ṭārīkh al-Islām* that al-Marwadhi also stated that:

Abū Bakr b. Ḥammād told me that al-Ḥārith passed by him one day and Abū Ḥafṣ al-Khaṣṣāf was with him, so he said to him, “O Abū ʿAbd Allāh, do you say that Allāh’s speech [is articulated] with sound?” So he said to Abū Ḥafṣ, “Answer him” and Abū Ḥafṣ replied, “If I say it is [articulated] with sound, then I also need to say this or that (*kadāh wa kadāh*)” So I said to al-Ḥārith, “What do you say?” and he replied, “Abū Ḥafṣ has already answered you.” So Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ṣaḥīḥ b. Ḥanbal then said, “From this day I will warn [others] against Ḥārith.”

Thus, having consulted the previous two texts regarding the articulation of divine speech, one may conclude that such an issue was ‘cut and dried’, since al-Muḥāṣibi appears to have adopted this particular theological stance to which Ibn Ḥanbal was equally opposed.

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650 The first generation of Sunni scholastic theologians (*mutakallimū ahl al-sunna*) associated with ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṣāʿīd b. Kullāb (d. ca. 239/854) who engaged in scholastic theology so as to defend the beliefs of the ‘orthodox’ majority from the innovations of deviant sects and included in addition to al-Muḥāṣibi, such luminaries as Abū ʿI-ʿAbbas al-Qalānī. Whether this was indeed a formal ‘school’ and that al-Muḥāṣibi and al-Qalānī followed Ibn Kullāb rigorously or indeed, merely adopted a similar form of argumentation requires further research. See Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa l-Nihal*, vol. 1, p. 74; al-Nashshār, *Nashrat al-Fikr al-Falsafi fi l-Islām*, vol. 1, pp. 265-84; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 58-9, 64 and 136; The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, pp. 282 and 286-9 and p. 119 above.


652 Meaning that one would then have elaborate regarding the modality of how the sound is produced.

However, the complexity of the issue and al-Muḥäsibi’s view regarding it is alluded to by al-Kalābādhī in his discussion of the nature of divine discourse when he states:

The vast majority of them [the Sufis] agreed that Allāh the Exalted’s speech consists of neither letters (ḥurūf) nor sound (sawt) or words (ḥijāf). Indeed, letters, sounds and words are indicators of speech yet they require specific devices and bodily parts [for articulation], which are the uvula, the mouth and the tongue and since Allāh the Exalted has no bodily parts, nor a need for devices, His speech does not consist of words and sounds. Some the most revered [Sufis] said regarding His speech, “That whoever speaks with words then he is deficient (ma`Iul) and whoever speaks sequentially [i.e. one word after another] is in need (muṣṭarr).”

Another group of them said that the speech of Allāh does consist of words and sounds as they claimed that speech is not known any other way, despite their affirmation that it is an uncreated attribute of Allāh the Exalted in His essence and this was the view of Ḥārith al-Muḥäsibi and from the later scholars, Ibn Sālim. The basis for this is the following: since it has been established that Allāh the Exalted is pre-eternal (gadm) and that He does not resemble His creation in any way, nor do any of His attributes resemble those of created beings, then His speech will not consist of words and sounds like that of created beings.654

On examining this text, one realises the subtlety of al-Muḥäsibi’s argument, which is typical of the kalām style; he was in fact saying that God’s speech does consist of sounds but also, that since He does not resemble His creation in any way, then neither does His speech. The sounds that articulate His speech do not resemble His creation either and al-Muḥäsibi, in his view at least, eliminates the possibility of anthropomorphism (al-tashbih). As we have seen however, this would most likely have been rejected by Ibn Ḥanbal for a variety of reasons; firstly, he may have regarded the question itself to be innovation and as such, whatever one’s personal conviction regarding the issue it is unacceptable to even discuss such a matter, as it has no precedent amongst the preceding generations. Secondly, the argument proposed above adopts a dialectical technique typical of the kalām style and is, therefore rejected as a method of proof.655 Thirdly, it is unlikely that he would have even entertained the argument in the first place, as Ibn Ḥanbal often appears only to have been interested in the answer to the question itself rather than the rationale behind it. However, as was the case with the issue of the created nature of the Qur’ān’s articulation, this does not explain Ibn Ḥanbal’s comment at the beginning of this section, as one may safely assume that he would not have entertained al-Muḥäsibi’s discourse for one moment, if he

654 Al-Kalābādhī, al-Ta’arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf, p. 42.
655 It should also be noted here that Ibn Ḥanbal actually held that there was evidence concerning this issue from the revelatory sources and there was no need to exercise one’s own rational faculties in trying to explain it. See al-Futūḥi, Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munir, pp. 47-8.
thought that it was underpinned by an unacceptable aberration in a believer's faith such as this.

Thus, it is clear from the discourse presented here that one of the most manifest explanations for Ibn Ḥanbal's abjuration of al-Muḥāṣibi is the latter's engagement in scholastic theology (ʿilm al-kalām) to which Aḥmad was completely averse. Although the specific feature of al-Muḥāṣibi's engagement in kalām is not entirely clear as alluded to in the above discussion, nevertheless it provides a strong basis for the suggestion that this was the primary factor in the dispute between these two eminent personalities of the scholarly community in 2nd/8th-3rd/9th centuries Baghdad. As such Ibn Ḥanbal's comment, "I don't think that I have seen a people such as these nor anyone speak regarding the realities [of faith] (al-ḥaqāʾiq) like this man, yet despite what I have said, I do not think that you should keep their company" may be understood in the light of al-Subkī's comment mentioned above, "Know that al-imām Aḥmad, may Allah be pleased with him, was highly critical of anyone who spoke regarding scholastic theology (ʿilm al-kalām) out of fear that it would lead to that which is inappropriate." Therefore, although Ibn Ḥanbal may well have been impressed by al-Muḥāṣibi's discussion of spiritual matters, he was not willing to allow a student to keep his company whilst the possibility existed that al-Muḥāṣibi may engage in kalām during his discourse, which as Aḥmad viewed it, was an unacceptable risk and indeed, detrimental to the religion as a whole, even if it was on the premise of defending the faith.656

4.7 Al-Muḥāṣibi's Death

Although there is no confirmed report of the date of al-Muḥāṣibi's birth, the historical biographers are in agreement that his death occurred in 243/857, approximately two years after that of his adversary Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. With regard to this incident, i.e. the occasion of his death, we find the following report: al-Qādī al-Ḥusayn b. Ismāʿīl al-Mabāmili said Abū Bakr b. Hārūn b. al-Mujaddar told me, "I was present at the demise of al-Ḥārith - meaning al-Muḥāṣibi - and he said to us, 'If I see that which pleases me then I will smile at

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656 One of the great ironies of this incident is that the defence of Sunni 'orthodoxy' via rational and dialectic methods as employed by scholastic theology became a normative practice during the following centuries with the development of Sunni kalām and the advent of Abū ʿl-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Ashʿarī and the subsequent school associated with him. In this regard al-Muḥāṣibi's contribution is significant and not without appreciation as al-Bağdhādī observes, "And the books of al-Ḥārith b. Asad on scholastic theology (al-kalām), jurisprudence (al-fiqh) and Prophetic tradition (al-ḥadīth) were relied upon by the theologians (mutakillīn), jurists (fiqḥāʾ) and Sufis from our companions [i.e. the Ashʿarites]." See al-Bağdhādī (d. 429/1037), ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad, Kīrāb Usūl al-Dīn (Istanbul, Maṭbaʿat al-Dawla, 1928) p. .
you but if I see something else [other than that which pleases me] you will find it apparent on my face.\textsuperscript{657} Then he smiled and passed away.\textsuperscript{658} This 'pleasant' end, indicative of piety in the hagiographical literature, was certainly short lived at his funeral, as, even if God had accepted his efforts during his life, the people of Baghdad were less forgiving, apparently due to Ibn Ḥanbal's abjuration of al-Muḥāsibī and the population of Baghdad's fanaticism for the great traditionist. In this regard we find that Abū al-Qāsim al-Nāṣīrībādhī narrates,

It has reached me that al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī had spoken [on issues] regarding scholastic theology (al-kalām), so Ahmad b. Ḥanbal repudiated him and he [al-Muḥāsibī] went into hiding in a house in Baghdad, dying therein; only four people prayed over him [at his funeral] and he passed away in the year two hundred and forty three.\textsuperscript{659}

The place of al-Muḥāsibī's burial is therefore confirmed as being Baghdad yet there is some dispute as to the actual location of his grave;\textsuperscript{660} al-Mustawfi (d. 750/1349) for example proposes in his work Ṯuṣḥat al-Qulūb that his grave is on the west side of Baghdad. On the contrary al-Bundaniji (d. 1283/1866) in his Jāmi‘ al-Anwār fi Manāqib al-Akhyār goes into great detail, suggesting that al-Muḥāsibī is buried on the east side of Baghdad on the site of a mosque formally known as 'Zāwiyat al-Mawlāwīyya' built by Dāwūd Bāshā and now known as 'Jāmi‘ al-Āṣawīyya'.\textsuperscript{661}

4.8 The Effect of al-Muḥāsibī's Milieu on his Life

Having selectively examined the era in which al-Muḥāsibī lived in the last chapter and consequently shed considerable light on his personal biography in the current chapter, it is equally befitting here to discuss to what extent this historical period had an effect on our subject, to try and assess the extent that his surroundings played in shaping his life. Although in reality little biographical detail is available regarding the specifics of al-Muḥāsibī's life, one factor that is confirmed is that his birth and formative years were in

\textsuperscript{657} Al-Subki affirms the phrase “tanassamtum fi wajhī” but I feel the original proposed by al-Khātīb “tabayyantum fi wajhī” is more accurate.


\textsuperscript{660} Both these claims are virtually impossible to verify almost 1200 years on but have been mentioned here to make the survey of the literature complete.

Basra. Similarly, the suggested date of his birth is 165/781 and at that time we may assume that Basra was at the beginning of its decline as a major urban centre, coinciding naturally with the rise and flourishing of Baghdad.

Nevertheless, one may also assume that the ascetic tradition that was associated with Basra did not die over night and indeed, bearing in mind that this social trend is said to originate with the Prophetic Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘ari, one may suggest that this world view was deeply rooted in certain sections of Basran society. In fact this early pietistic trend was further developed with the group of individuals whom al-Nashshār terms, ‘the first Basran school (madrasat al-BAṣra al-ūlā)’, which culminated in the life and personality of Basra’s most famous son al-Ḥasan al-BAṣrī and the development of another group of ascetics who formed the basis of ‘the second Basran school (madrasat al-BAṣra al-thāniya)’. Although al-Muḥāsibī was far too young to have met most of these personalities, some of them such as ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd and his student Riyāḥ b. ‘Amr al-Qaysī were still alive in his childhood years and despite having no firm evidence to support their meeting, it seems reasonable to assume that the trend towards religious austerity and moral excellence was still prevalent in his early life, a fact which is confirmed by the two narrations from Ibn Ṭafr al-Ṣaqli.662

This was not the only tangible influence that may have had an effect on his early life in Basra however, as the trend towards rational and dialectical theology seems also to have started there. Indeed, one of the earliest incidences of this sort - as the tradition would have it - appears to have occurred within the circle of al-Ḥasan al-BAṣrī, ultimately leading to the exit of one of his students Wāṣiṣ b. ‘Aṭā’. This incident is quoted as being the historical starting point for the Muṭazilite movement and consequently, al-Muḥāsibī was contemporaneous with some of the Basran school’s greatest figures including Abū Hudhayl and al-Nazẓām. Despite this, al-Muḥāsibī did not join or indeed even accept the teachings of the early Muṭazilites but rather, in the tradition of al-Ḥasan al-BAṣrī, remained strictly ‘orthodox’ in his outlook but at the same time one cannot help but feel that this familiarity with such a methodology at an early stage may well have influenced his use of scholastic theology at a later stage.

Having spent his formative years in Basra, he moved to Baghdad with his family at an early age, most probably due to the perceived opportunities therein and the relative decline of Basra, as Baghdad had now been established as the ‘Abbāsid state capital for at least twenty

662 See pp. 141-2 above.
years or more. It is here that al-Muḥāṣibī seems to have flourished as a young man, particularly in terms of his learning. It will be remembered from chapter three that this period is often referred to as “the Golden era of Islamic learning” and despite that fact that there is no evidence to suggest that al-Muḥāṣibī was involved with the ‘secular’ disciplines of medicine, philosophy and astronomy, there is ample evidence of his engagement with religious learning. Indeed, it is equally clear from the second quotation from Ibn Żafr al-Ṣaqli that al-Muḥāṣibī’s training began very early in the basics of reading, writing and memorising the Qurān and we may assume that this process continued after his move to Baghdad. In fact al-Muḥāṣibī himself alludes to this at the beginning of his work al-Naṣā’īḥ and his studies in the Qurān and hadith, as well as fiqh, have already been alluded to earlier in this chapter.663

The tendency towards the learning and teaching of the Qurān, hadith and fiqh was not the only intellectual trend that was present in Baghdad however and indeed, the inclination towards a moralising, spiritual asceticism that was prevalent in both Küfa and Basra prior to the establishment of Baghdad, continued in a new form in the new state capital. The manifestation of this trend seems to have been a reaction to the affluence and somewhat ‘irreligious’ lifestyle that was a remnant of the old Umayyad dynasty but continued - albeit in a form cloaked in a much more religious appearance - with the advent of the ‘Abbāsids and the expansion of their empire. As a consequence, the teaching evolved in Baghdad became the first ‘model’ to which the subsequent generations of Sufis would turn to for inspiration, being known as the ‘Mystical School of Baghdad’. This ‘school’ combined a variety of ascetical and spiritual teachings and was developed by the efforts of a number of prominent personalities such as Maṭūf al-Karkhi, Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi and Sari al-Saqāṭ, as well as al-Muḥāṣibī himself, and culminated with the ‘sober (ṣaḥw) school’ of Sufism associated with al-Junayd. Such eminent company was no doubt a great influence on the life and teachings of al-Muḥāṣibī and combined with the introspective asceticism of the Basrans, as exemplified by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, provided the essence of much of his thought.664

What is equally apparent however, in addition to the deep, spiritual tendencies found in the teachings of al-Muḥāṣibī, is his staunch stance regarding the Muʾtazilites, of which there was by now a second school in the capital of Baghdad and chronologically at least, many of

their most famous exponents such as Bishr b. Mu'tamir were also his contemporaries. His defence of 'orthodox' Sunni doctrines reaches its pinnacle - as will be seen in the next chapter - in his works Māhiyyat al-Aql and Fahm al-Qur'ān but is equally tangible in his own personal life with both of the narrations elucidating his relationship with his father, all of which indicates not only the widespread extent of the Mu'tazilite doctrines but also, the effect that this dispute had on him personally. One may also assume that this was a major factor in his employing scholastic theology ('ilm al-kalām) as an approach, so as to hold a discourse with the Mu'tazilites, in an attempt to defeat them using their own vernacular and methodology.665

Related to this of course is the most singularly significant religio-political event during al-Muḥāsibī's life, i.e. that of the miḥna, since this was intrinsically linked to the Mu'tazilite movement and the caliph's support for it at a state level. Bearing in mind al-Muḥāsibī's strong refutation of Mu'tazilite doctrines, one may have expected to find his name intrinsically associated with the event as a whole. However, in contrast, one finds that al-Muḥāsibī has no mention whatsoever during the miḥna accounts and this in itself requires some pause for thought.

This is especially true if we consider the fact that he was involved in a public display of disavowal of the Mu'tazilites' doctrines when he openly disowned his father at Bab al-Ṭaq - an event that in all likelihood could not have failed to escape the attention of the state authorities. In this case, the incident may be explained from the perspective that al-Muḥāsibī was still fairly young and as such, had no common backing or power - either religious or political - to wield, being relatively unknown and thus, having little or no popular support. This does not explain, however, his indirect attack on the state doctrine by the writing of specific refutations of the Mu'tazilites such as those found in Māhiyyat al-Aql and Fahm al-Qur'ān but this may also be understood in a number of ways: firstly, al-Muḥāsibī wasn't a judge (qāḍī) and did not occupy any other state appointment. Likewise, he was not even a popular preacher or renowned scholar of hadith and therefore, was not in the direct 'line of fire' in terms of the caliphal administration, as it was only such people who could command popular support and who seem to have been targeted in the initial period at least. Secondly, it may have been the case that, even if al-Muḥāsibī had been suspected, he would have been left alone, as he was more commonly known for his exposition of spiritual matters rather than his scholastic theology or his political ambition

and indeed, al-Ma'mūn is even reported to have entertained those whom he considered 'ignorant ascetics'. Finally and most probably in the opinion of this researcher, is that al-Muḥāsibī wrote works containing refutations of the Muʿtazilites such as Māhiyyat al-ʿAql and Fahm al-Qurān in the post-miḥna period, when the situation allowed him to do so due to the apparent 'pro-Sunnism' stance of al-Mutawakkil, or at the very least if al-Muḥāsibī did write such works in a pre-miḥna period, he kept them very close to his chest. In any case, the presence of an anti-Muʿtazilite trend within his works, in addition to the disavowal of his father, is sufficient proof that al-Muḥāsibī was clearly affected by the impact of such theological issues to the extent that he took action in his own, personal way to uphold a belief, which he felt was under a critical attack and which, he felt duty bound to defend. Although al-Muḥāsibī himself may not have been directly affected by the event of the miḥna, there can be no doubt that the person it affected more than anyone else was al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and despite his elevated position in Sunni hagiography, one of the most difficult incidents to comprehend is his repudiation of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī. Possible reasons for Ibn Ḥanbal's stance regarding our subject have been elaborated above and although the most apparent of Aḥmad's objections to al-Muḥāsibī was his utilisation of scholastic theology (ilm al-kalām), it is likewise possible that the suggestions posited above are to a lesser or greater extent, equally feasible or indeed, one cannot rule out a combination of factors. The viability of each suggestion has also been shown in the sense that the accusations that al-Muḥāsibī used weak ḥadith, that he engaged in scholastic theology and dialectics and that he adopted and 'invented' a 'new', strict, introspective spiritual approach have been proven. In this sense one can suggest that al-Muḥāsibī's methodology in approaching religious learning was fundamentally different from that of Ibn Ḥanbal and in the same way this requires us to examine the methodological approach of al-Muḥāsibī, by the same token it equally requires that we shed further light on the personality and thought of Ibn Ḥanbal and the aura that surrounds him.

It is clear from the above discussion that Ibn Ḥanbal was an exponent of the traditionist trend that began to take precedence in Islamic learning from the beginning of the second

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666 See for example Cooperson, Classical Arabic Biography, pp. 44-8.
667 It is suggested here that al-Muḥāsibī wrote such works in the post-miḥna period, as this would have given sufficient reason for Ibn Ḥanbal to repudiate him. This is because from Ibn Ḥanbal's perspective this issue was now 'dead and buried' and similarly, we must not forget his personal feelings on the issue, as he had personally suffered torture and imprisonment because of it. Therefore, for al-Muḥāsibī to retread the whole issue of the miḥna in his works by refuting the Muʿtazilite views must have not only been objectionable to Ibn Ḥanbal but also very painful for him, potentially inciting his anger in the process.
668 See pp. 160-82 above.
century onwards. This trend was characterised by an erudite approach to the authentication of *hadith* narration and the verification of their chains of transmission but also, by a strict and uncompromising outlook both to the interpretation and application of such texts, which constituted the *sunna* and which is also clear from the above statements of ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī, Abū Zur‘ā al-Rāzi and Ibn Ḥanbal himself.\(^{669}\)

In addition to this however, Ibn Ḥanbal was a unique scholar in his own right with his own unique approach. For example, regarding the authorship of books, his strict traditionist nature comes through in the following quotation from Ibn al-Jawzī that Ibn Ḥanbal said, “Do not look at the books of Abū ʿUbayd, nor that which ʾIṣḥāq wrote, nor that of Ṣufyān, or al-Shāfiʿī, or Mālik; you yourself should go to the source (*ʿalayka bi ʾl-ʿasl*).”\(^{670}\) Thus, in the issue of written works, even the opinions of the foremost scholars were to be cast aside, when compared to the original sources such as that of the *hadith* and indeed, one should not even bother to consult them but should consult the original texts themselves. Similarly, this attitude was not only applied to other scholars but also by Ibn Ḥanbal to himself, in the sense he would forbid that even his own statements be recorded.\(^{671}\) Bearing this in mind it is little surprise that the works of al-Mubasibi were so reviled, since although they contain textual evidence from the sources, they mostly consisted of al-Mubasibi’s own thoughts and interpretations.

Another factor that requires consideration is the reverence that Ibn Ḥanbal enjoys within the Sunni hagiographical sources due not only to his immense knowledge but also to the very fact that he was persecuted during the *miḥna* for his insistence on this belief and as a consequence, he has been referred to as the ‘Imam of Ahl al-Sunna wa ʾl-Jamāʿa’. This, no doubt, is a rank which Ibn Ḥanbal probably deserved due to his forbearance, patience and certitude during the tribulation that personally afflicted him, but at the same time his position has been somewhat exaggerated in consequent generations. This has led to what Cooperson terms “the cult of sanctity” that surrounds the personality of Ibn Ḥanbal in the hagiographical sources generally and those dealing with the Ḥanbalites specifically.\(^{672}\) The essential notion that this posits is the idea that due to his closeness to the original sources and his application of them, as well as his experiences during the *miḥna*, Ibn Ḥanbal becomes almost ‘untouchable’ and ‘infallible’ and the precedent that he sets is considered to be the standard by which religious belief and practice is judged. This is a consistent theme

\(^{669}\) See pp. 160-4 above.


\(^{671}\) Ibid., pp. 251-2.

\(^{672}\) See Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, pp. 138-151 passim.
throughout the biographical sources dealing with Ibn Ḥanbal but due to the limited scope of this study only a few examples will be quoted here.

Perhaps the best examples of the exaggerated reports to enhance the status given to Ibn Ḥanbal is manifested in Ibn al-Jawzi’s *Manāqib*, where he relates a spurious narration regarding a man whose boat is damaged when travelling on the Indian Ocean and consequently, he encounters two people who inform him that he would saved if he simply relayed the greeting of *salām* to Ibn Ḥanbal; the first of these two being the angel entrusted with the welfare of the oceans and the second being the prophet Elias (Ilyās). In an equally incredible story another man from Baghdad is entrusted with relaying the greeting of *salām* to Ibn Ḥanbal from the semi-legendary figure of al-Khiḍr and similarly, when al-Khiḍr is asked regarding the status of Ibn Ḥanbal the questioner is told that he is, “A man of true faith (*ṣiddiq*).” Such fabrications are clearly hagiographic devices to further augment Ibn Ḥanbal’s already considerable status and as such, almost place him in a position where his views are beyond reproach.

In a less esoteric but equally exaggerated account Ibn Abū Ya’lā (d. 526/1132) relates in his *Taバqāt al-Ḥanābila al-Shāfi‘i*s statement that Ibn Ḥanbal was an imam in eight qualities: Prophetic narration (*ḥadīth*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), language (*lughah*), the Qur’an, poverty (*faqr*), abstinance (*zuḥd*), scrupulousness (*wara‘*) and Prophetic practice (*sunna*). Ibn Abū Ya’lā then goes on to elucidate these various facets of Ibn Ḥanbal’s but by far the most interesting for us here is his exposition of the last quality, “imam concerning Prophetic practice (*al-sunna*).” In this regard Ibn Abū Ya’lā relates another quotation attributed to al-Shāfi‘i who is reported to have said, “Whoever shows enmity towards ʿAḥmad b. Ḥanbal then he is a disbeliever (*kāfir*).” Al-Rabi’ b. Sulaymān then asks, “Do you attribute disbelief to such a person?” Al-Shāfi‘i then replies:

Yes! As anyone who shows enmity towards Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal has opposed the *sunna* and whoever has opposed the *sunna* has intended [to harm] the...

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674 Khiḍr (meaning greenness), according to commentators, is Baylā‘ b. Malikān, Abū ‘Abbās al-Khiḍr, who is referred to in the Qur’ānic story of Mūsā (Moses) (18:65). It is said that he is from the Israelites (Banū Isrā‘îl), while others relate that he was a prince who left his worldly life for a life of asceticism and devotions. Scholars differ as to whether he is presently alive and to whether he is a prophet, angel or wāli. See al-Misrī (d. 769/1368), Ahmad b. Luḥlu‘ [Ibn Naqīb], *‘Umdat al-Sālik wa ‘Uddat al-Nāsik*, translated as ‘Reliance of the Traveller: a Classical Manual of Islamic Sacred Law’ by Nuh Ḥā Mim Keller (3rd ed., Maryland, Amana Publications, 1999) p. 1067; Netton, Ian Richard, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam* (Richmond, Curzon, 1997) pp. 142-143.
675 Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manāqib al-Imaml Ahmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 188.
Companions and whoever has intended [to harm] the Companions has shown enmity towards the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, and whoever has shown enmity towards the Prophet has disbelieved in Allāh, the Exalted. 677

Thus, the very delicate issues of belief and disbelief are no longer to be judged according to the revelatory sources but rather, to be judged according to the faith and practice of Ibn Ḥanbal, due to his physical and moral representation of the essence of Islam. In a similar embellishment Ibn Abū Ya'lā also quotes ʿAli b. al-Madini who is reported to have said, "Allāh supported this religion with two men: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddiq during the apostasy [wars] (al-ridda) and ʿAḥmad b. Ḥanbal during the miḥna. 678 Therefore, once again Ibn Ḥanbal is equated with one of the Prophet’s closest and most revered companions, not only in terms of position but also in terms of sacrifice for the sake of protecting the religion. Moreover, to elucidate this point further he adds to this the statement of Ishāq b. Rāhawayh who is quoted as saying, "If it wasn’t for ʿAḥmad b. Ḥanbal and his personal sacrifice, Islam would have disappeared. 679

Not satisfied with al-Shāfīʿi’s appraisal, Ibn Abū Ya’lā then adds another eight qualities, which he claims were unique in the personality of Ibn Ḥanbal but in reality they are little more than a repitition of the points raised by al-Shāfīʿi. 680 Nevertheless, two of the issues stated by Ibn Abū Ya’lā further illustrate the exaggerated status given to Ibn Ḥanbal and therefore, will be discussed briefly here. The first of these is the contention that the principles of faith (al-ṣiḥah) that Ibn Ḥanbal derived and believed in personally have reached the status of consensus (al-ijmāʿ) such that, “If anyone deviated from such a principle (al-ṣiḥā) they would attribute disbelief to him, warn others regarding him and repudiate him, as all proof leads back to him (Ibn Hanbal).” 681 In a later, related point Ibn Abū Yaʿlā also suggests that concerning the issue of innovators (ahl al-bidʿa) Ibn Ḥanbal’s opinion regarding them is final such that, “If anyone manifested rejection of his [Ibn Ḥanbal’s] view or wished to change one of his beliefs, then the attribution of disbelief to such a person is confirmed. 682

Thus, the image portrayed to us of Ibn Ḥanbal is one of religious perfection such that his opinions, beliefs and praxis are the criterion by which all issues in Islamic thought and Law

677 Ibid., p. 7.
678 Ibid.
679 Ibid.
680 Ibid., pp. 8-11.
681 Ibid., p. 8.
682 Ibid., p. 9.
should be judged. As such, al-Muhäsibi’s fate seems to have been decided from the very start and it is not difficult to understand why al-Muhäsibi and others fell foul of this exemplary figure, being completely censured in the process.\textsuperscript{683} Despite the hagiographical glosses quoted above however, the impression one is left with when reading the biographical tradition surrounding Ibn Ḥanbal is his rigid and uncompromising nature. Perhaps the most striking and near incomprehensible display of this is his obdurate attitude regarding al-Muhäsibi portrayed in the following report related by al-Dhahabi:

\begin{quote}
Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Khirāqi said, I asked al-Marwadhi concerning the reason why Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ibn Ḥanbal] repudiated al-Muhäsibi and he said, “I said to Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ibn Ḥanbal] that al-Muhäsibi has gone to Kūfah to record ḥadīth and has said, ‘I repent from all that Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ibn Ḥanbal] rejected’,” and he [Ibn Ḥanbal] replied, “There is no repentance for al-Ḥarīth; they bear witness against him with something and he denies it. Repentance is only for those who acknowledge [their guilt] and as for those for whom witness has been born against them yet they deny it, then there is no repentance for them.”\textsuperscript{684}
\end{quote}

As such, even when al-Muhäsibi engaged himself with the recording of ḥadīth, which was a quality Ibn Ḥanbal must have deemed praiseworthy and had seemingly repented from whatever objections Ibn Ḥanbal may have had, this was still not enough for Aḥmad, who even rejected al-Muhäsibi’s repentance.

In contrast, in the only narration in which al-Muhäsibi makes mention of Ibn Ḥanbal we find a rather different attitude as Ibn al-Jawzi relates in his Manāqib that al-Fath b. Shukhruf said to al-Muhäsibi:

\begin{quote}
I heard from ʿAbd al-Razzāq that Sufyān b. ʿUyayna said, “There were three scholars, one in each period: Ibn ʿAbbās in his time, al-Shaʿrī in his time and al-Thawri in his time.’ Al-Fath then said to al-Ḥarīth, ‘And Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in his time” to which al-Ḥarīth replied, “Except that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal suffered in a way that al-Thawri and al-Awzā‘ī didn’t.”\textsuperscript{685}
\end{quote}

Therefore, we can assume that al-Muhäsibi clearly appreciated the sacrifice of his contemporary and despite Ibn Ḥanbal’s repudiation of him, al-Muhäsibi confirmed the excellence and status of Aḥmad.

The goal of this discussion was not to provide a critique of Ibn Ḥanbal but rather to clarify the nature and atmosphere of the environment in which these eminent scholars lived. Thus,


\textsuperscript{684} Al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-Īslām, vol. 18, p. 209.

\textsuperscript{685} Ibn al-Jawzi, Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, p. 161.
in summary we may regard Al-Muḥāsibī as very much a product of his time in the sense that he engaged himself with the various fields of learning of the day and making the most of his presence in the thriving state capital. Indeed, he appears to have developed his own scholarly methodology in dealing with the deep, moral introspection of the human soul and actively engaged in the theological debates of his era, as to provide a rational defence of Sunni 'orthodoxy'. At the same time, however, this very approach, which in many ways seems diametrically opposed to the staunch traditionist stance, caused him to be reviled in his own time and in consequent generations and as such, by the same token he may be viewed equally as a 'victim' of his own era, falling foul of the scholars whose very view he was trying to defend.

In any case whatever the truth of Ibn Ḥanbal's repudiation of al-Muḥāsibī may have been, what is certain is that despite the Baghdad population's disavowal of this scholar, this city and the Muslim community at large lost one of their greatest, erudite and innovative scholars of his generation. Consequently, his real value would only be sufficiently realised in the years to come, through the examination of his legacy of works, which indeed is the goal of the next chapter.
Chapter 5: The Works of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibi

Since so little is known about the life of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibi, it is worth surveying the works of this eminent scholar, so as to glean more information regarding his personality. In addition to this, the works of al-Muḥāsibi will also be our first port of call in trying to assess the nature and essence of his thought and teaching, which will lay the foundation for the subsequent chapter. To this effect al-Muḥāsibi himself has made our task easier, as it has been reported by al-Subki (d. 771/1370) that al-Muḥāsibi authored approximately two hundred works. If, as al-Subki claims, al-Muḥāsibi was indeed such a prolific writer then we have little evidence of it, due to the simple fact that only a fraction of these works have actually reached us. Consequently, the earlier generation of researchers in the modern period recorded less than twenty-five works being attributed to al-Muḥāsibi. However, as the various libraries of manuscripts throughout the world began to be catalogued, many of al-Muḥāsibi’s works came to light; not only this but a new generation of scholars began the process of editing al-Muḥāsibi’s works for publication. Thus, both these factors have had an extremely important effect on the research that has been carried out on al-Muḥāsibi and bearing this in mind, the goal of this chapter is to survey the works of al-Muḥāsibi mentioned in the literature, so as to provide an overview of the material written by this scholar. To this effect, the works of al-Muḥāsibi can be classified as follows:

5.1 The Published Works

1. Kitāb al-Ri`āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh (wa ‘l-Qiyām biha)
This is arguably al-Muḥäsibi’s most famous if not his greatest work691 and therefore the discussion regarding the writings that have reached us will start here.692 If we were to ask a

691 For example ‘Uwayda says, “This book contains a number of issues which were [subsequently] approved and reached a state of consensus amongst the Sufis of ahl al-sunnah.” ‘Uwayda, al-Ḥāarith ibn Ṭasal al-Muḥäsibi, pp. 32-3. Also see al-Muḥäsibi, al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 37.

692 That this is al-Muḥäsibi’s greatest work is testified to by the great deal of attention it has received by various scholars throughout history. The book itself has had various publications, these include:

1. Smith’s own edited version of al-Ri‘āya. This is possibly the first published version of this work being printed in 1940, as part of the E. J. W. Gibb memorial series by Luzac & Co. (London). Smith includes a concise but useful introduction to both the author and his works. However, the most valuable addition found in this section is the discussion regarding the manuscripts used by the editor to produce the final published version. Smith mentions the following manuscripts:

a) Hunt. 611 of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, containing 147 folios (4b-151b), which is preceded by a title page verifying the author and title. The copy was made at Hamāt (N. Syria) and is written in neat, clear hand, with 28 lines to the page. The copy was completed on the 5th of Dhu al-Qa‘da 539/25 April 1145. See al-Muḥäsibi, Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh, edited by Margaret Smith (London, Luzac and Co., 1940) pp. xvii-xviii; al-Muḥäsibi, Kitāb al-Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 24 and Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabi, vol. 1, p. 115.

b) Jāmī’ al-Kabir, Broussa 1534, containing 175 folios, which is written in a good, well formed hand and has additional titles not included in a). There is no title and the manuscript is undated. This copy is incomplete, defaced in parts and has some displacement. See al-Muḥäsibi, Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh, ed. Smith, p. xvii.

c) Diyarast isleri riyāsētī, Angora 403, which contains 142 folios, numbered as 284 pages. The manuscript is written in a small, clear hand, with 25 lines to the page and is almost fully vocalised. The copy was made by ‘Ali b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭamān. The copy was completed on the 16th of Dhu al-Hijja, 739/9th June, 1339. Despite this detail there is some displacement of the text. See al-Muḥäsibi, Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh, ed. Smith, pp. xviii.

d) No. G 702 of the Chester Beatty collection, Damascus, which is in a good naskh style and is entitled ‘Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li Sulāk.’

e) In addition there is a copy of manuscript d) in the Manuscript Library of Kuwait University under number 2096 mim kāf.


3. A version edited by ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, published by Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyya (Beirut), in 1985. The copy the researcher has is the 4th edition which is termed, “increased (mazīda), revised (munaqqahā) and includes referencing of the prophetic narrations (mukharrarāt aḥādīthī+hā).” This is due to it being an updated version of the work, which was published by Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīrīya in 1970 and which used the manuscripts located in Dār al-Kutub al-Šarīyya and al-Azhari Library. In addition, the ‘referencing of the prophetic narrations (mukharrarāt aḥādīthī+hā)’ was also misleading as this part of the research was littered with errors, as the editor has seemed to rely upon ‘al-Muṣjam al-Muḥāffaras li Ṭalāṣal al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawiyya, quoting from it extensively without verifying the hadīth from their original sources. See al-Muḥäsibi, al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 4-5 and al-Muḥäsibi, Kitāb al-Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 25.

4. A version edited by ʿAbd al-Rahmān ʿAbd al-Ḥaḍīr al-Barr, published by Dār al-Yaqin (al-Mansūra, Egypt), in 1999. The editor states that his reasons for working on al-Ri‘āya are to produce an academic version of the text, including referencing of the narrations (takhrij) whether they be from the Prophet, the Companions (al-sahābah) or the Successors (al-tābi‘ūn) from their original sources and consequently, state the authenticity of such narrations (darajat al-aḥādīth). In addition, he provides explanation of the peculiar words and ambiguous phrases in the text. Despite these useful additions there is no mention of which manuscripts (if any) were used by the editor to verify the original. Due to the quality of this version, if the researcher quotes from al-Ri‘āya, then it will this version which is intended.
simple question, 'If no other work of al-Muḥāṣibī's was available to us, would Kitāb al-Riṣāya suffice us in understanding al-Muḥāṣibī and his thought?' In fact the answer to this query would almost certainly be in the affirmative. This is due to the fact that al-Riṣāya contains all of the main ideas found in his other works such as 'al-Waṣāyā, 'al-Tawāḥhum, 'al-Makāṣīb, 'Badr Man Anāba ilā Allāh', 'Ādāb al-Nufūs' and 'al-Masā’il fi Amāl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāris'. Not only does al-Riṣāya encompass the ideas expressed in these works but it is also more comprehensive, better organised and more logical.693

To this effect al-Quwati summarises this very well saying:

This book represents the pinnacle in the development of al-Muḥāṣibī's thought: in it he leaves scholastic theology ('ilm al-kalām) well behind him. Indeed, he leaves jurisprudence (al-fiqh) also; he uses hadīth sparingly and concentrates entirely on Sufi topics, which concerned every part of the Islamic world at that time. He becomes more precise and delves deeply into fine points of Sufism, along with a focus upon his favourite topic: the etiquettes, desires and faults of the soul (al-nafs), including its treatment and its taking to account. Isn't this al-Muḥāṣibī?694

Thus, if al-Riṣāya had been lost, we would still be able to acquaint ourselves with al-Muḥāṣibī via his other works, but it is only through al-Riṣāya that we see the real quality of

5. A version edited by Ḣāsim Fāris al-Ḥarastānī and Muḥammad Ibrahim al-Zaghīlī, published by Dār al-Jīl (Beirut), 2001. The editors of this particular version claim that the existing publications still require verification of the text. In addition, they include referencing of the prophetic narrations (tāhrij al-ḥadīth) and state the authenticity of such narrations (darajat al-ḥadīth). Despite these useful additions, once again there is no mention of which manuscripts (if any), were used by the editors to verify the text.

In addition to the original work there is also an abridged version of al-Riṣāya by ‘Īzz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulāmī (al-‘Īzz b. ‘Abd al-Salām [Ṣulāmī al-Ulāmā] d. 660/1262) entitled ‘Maqāsid al-Riṣāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh ‘Azza wa Jall’. This abridgement is approximately a quarter of the original text and has five existing manuscripts:

a) ‘Āṭif Afāndī, 1417, folios (114a-138b), written in 853/1449 and copied from a version read to its author and corrected by him.
b) Number 3183:2 of the Chester Beatty collection, Damascus.
c) Berlin, no. 2812.
d) Al-Khīzānā al-‘Āmma, al-Rībāṭ, no. 2279d.

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In terms of Western academic writing, al-Riṣāya has also been translated by Kermit Schoonover as part of as yet unpublished PhD thesis, presented to the Department of the History and Philosophy of Religion at Harvard University, in March 1948. The same author published an article entitled ‘Al-Muḥāṣibī and his al-Riṣāya in The Muslim World, 1949, 39, pp. 26-36, extracting much of it from the aforementioned thesis.

Finally, a very useful article entitled ‘Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī’s Concept of Self Examination as Reflected in His al-Riṣāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh’ has been written by ʿĪftīḥār Ja’far and can be found on the internet. See page 19 above and http://www.indosat.net.id/alauddin/sufisme1.htm, Ja’far, ʿĪftīḥār, “Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī’s Concept of Self Examination as Reflected in His al-Riṣāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh’.

693 Malimild, Ustādh al-Saʿirīn, p. 76.

al-Muḥāṣibī in exposing the secret hidden depths of the human soul and the consequent alleviation of its ills. It is here that we see al-Muḥāṣibī as a true scholar in the disciplines of religion, an expert in human behaviour and a physician of the soul.695

Part of this is indeed due to the fact that al-Muḥāṣibī had a particular and specific goal in mind from writing al-Riḍāya, as the title would suggest, which is to clarify for the human being what is incumbent upon him with regard to fulfilling the command of Allah. Despite this however, he does not tackle the topic directly but believes that the human being requires wise advice at the beginning, before his travelling to the greater goal, which will open his heart and which will make his intellect attentive to the discourse.696

Similarly, al-Muḥāṣibī, despite the title of the book, does not simply concentrate on quoting the permissible and the prohibited in religion (al-wājibāt wa ’l-muharramāt) but concerns himself with a methodology, which can be employed by the human being in performing these commands practically with sincerity and purity. Bearing this goal in mind al-Muḥāṣibī observes that people in every place are slowly distancing themselves from this path day by day697 and therefore, he provides a description of the route to repentance and the subsequent return to Allah.698 In addition, in this particular work, al-Muḥāṣibī is more concerned with giving precise meanings to the terms used, almost providing the reader with a series of definitions of the various concepts he discusses.699

The work itself is in the form of counsels given to the seeker in reply to his questions regarding the aforementioned methodology. The book contains eight major books (kitāb, pl. kutub)700 each with numerous subsections (bāb, pl. abwäb) and indeed the first of these books is preceded by various chapters (abwäb) discussing a variety of topics.701 Thus, he begins by giving advice regarding being attentive while listening (husn āl-Istlma) and then he approaches the topic of the book, not in depth or with extensive explanation but simply clarifying the necessity of the human being’s submitting of his nafs to the will of Allah. This is because it is through this submission that piety (taqwā) springs forth and it is this which

695 Mahmūd, Ustādh al-Sābirin, p. 77.
696 Ibid.
697 The role and influence of his society on him cannot be underestimated here as he was clearly affected by the milieu surrounding him, with its varying morality, obsession with material wealth and preoccupation with the worldly life and its enjoyment.
698 Mahmūd, Ustādh al-Sābirin, p. 77.
699 Ibid., p. 76. ‘Uwaydā gives plenty examples of this. See ‘Uwaydā, al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, pp. 34, 38-9 and footnotes 709-13 below.
700 These are namely Kitāb al-riya, Kitāb al-ikhwān wa maʿrifat al-nafs, Kitāb al-tanbih, Kitāb al-ujb, Kitāb al-kibr, Kitāb al-ghirra, Kitāb al-ḥasad and Kitāb tādīb al-murid.
701 See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Riḍāya li Ḥuquq Allah, ed. al-Barr, pp. 41-195; ‘Uwaydā, al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, p. 33; al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Riḍāya, ed. Smith, pp. xvii and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 44.
will lead the person to fulfil the command of Allāh and shun that which He has forbidden.  

Al-Muhāsibī then begins to explain the nature of taqwā defining it as being, “Shunning associating partners [with Allāh] (shirk) and every sin lesser than this from that which Allāh has forbidden, or neglecting any obligatory act, which He has prescribed.”  

He then continues to explain the nature of this taqwā and its virtues, clarifying the preparation that the human being needs to make to be ready to stand before his Lord on the Day of Judgement. He then defines scrupulousness (wārah), warning not to be deceived by external aspects of worship and continues by describing exactly what steps need to taken first by the slave on his journey on the path to his Lord.  

Having realised this aspect, the human being then reaches a stage of varying levels of repentance (tawba), intending that his worship is sincerely for Allāh alone. However, at this point he will be at odds with what may be termed ‘elements of evil (‘anāsir al-sharr), which may cause him to err from the straight path through heedlessness (ghafla). These elements are particularly dangerous, as they are constantly on the alert and are constantly feeling out their prey in the human being, who is by his nature weak.  

Al-Muhāsibī considers there to be two main ‘elements of evil’; the first of these is the nafs itself, which he considers to be the internal element of evil, whereas the Devil (Ibūls) is the external element, who manipulates the first element by inspiring it to evil. He therefore cautions the reader concerning them and the complexity of their strategies.  

He does not stop there, however, but also warns against the other elements of evil such as negative companionship (ikhwān al-sūr) and corrupt environments (mujtama‘āt al-fasād).  

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706 This of course is where the process of ‘taking the soul to account’ (muḥāsabat al-nafs) takes precedence to which al-Muhāsibī also devotes a substantial discussion of al-Ri‘āya. He considers the basis of taqwā to be founded on muḥāsabat al-nafs, which in turn is rooted in fear (khawāf) [of Allāh’s punishment] and hope (raja) [in His mercy]. See al-Muhāsibī, al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 38 and 65-77; al-Muhāsibī, al-Ri‘āya, ed. Smith, pp. xvii; Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 45 and Schoonover, “al-Muhāsibī and his al-Rī‘āya”, The Muslim World, p. 34.  


Having clarified the dangers of these aspects of human existence, al-Muḥāṣibī further explains that this is not sufficient to know; indeed he then draws our attention to the aspect of sincerity (al-ikhlāṣ) to Allāh, which is the foundation of all action and through which a person is rewarded. Having described this essential aspect of human endeavour he then explains at length the quality that destroys such actions due to it opposing al-ikhlāṣ, which is ostentation (al-rīyā'ā)⁷¹⁰. Al-Muḥāṣibī concentrates on this topic, as it is an aspect of behaviour that lowers the quality of the human being, as this is essentially his field. He continues to discuss other negative human character traits by examining self conceit (al-‘ujb)⁷¹¹, arrogance (al-kibr)⁷¹², self delusion (al-ghirra)⁷¹³ and envy (al-hasad)⁷¹⁴, dedicating a complete book (kitāb) of al-Rīyāya to each of them. He does not suffice however with only describing these faults and their consequences but also clarifies their causes, how they can be avoided and how they can be treated.⁷¹⁵

Al-Muḥāṣibī concludes his book with the section entitled Kitāb ta’dīb al-murid in which he describes a programme designed to govern the conduct of the slave ‘by day and by night’, being always mindful of the One Whom he serves, of the constant self discipline required

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⁷⁰⁹ He devotes a whole book (kitāb) of al-Rīyāya to this topic. See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Rīyāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 198-374 and footnote 699 above.

⁷¹⁰ Al-Muḥāṣibī defines al-riyā' as being, “To perform an act of obedience intending other than the pleasure of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted; thus al-riyā’ is seeking the pleasure of the creation via an act of obedience to Allāh.” See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Rīyāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 207-9 and ‘Uwayḍa, al-Ḥārīth ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, pp. 37-8.

⁷¹¹ Al-Muḥāṣibī describes al-’ujb as follows, “This is a fault in many of the devotees (al-‘ibād), which blinds the heart until the conceited person (al-mujāb) considers himself good when in fact he is bad, he has attained salvation when in fact he is destroyed and is right when in fact he is wrong.” See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Rīyāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 415 and ‘Uwayḍa, al-Ḥārīth ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, p. 38.

⁷¹² Al-Muḥāṣibī describes al-kibr as follows, “This is the greatest of faults as every other affliction stems from it. It makes compulsory the swift punishment and anger of Allāh the Mighty and Magnificent. Al-kibr is not the right of anyone other than Allāh, as it is not appropriate or befitting of any other than Him.” See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Rīyāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 469 and ‘Uwayḍa, al-Ḥārīth ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, p. 38.

⁷¹³ Al-Muḥāṣibī describes al-ghirra as follows, “This is a deception (khid`a) from the nafs and an enemy, which reminds you of your hope in the oneness of Allāh (al-rajā’ li tawḥīd Allāh), or of your righteous forefathers (al-‘abā’ al-sāliḥīn), or of some small, insignificant action [you've performed]; the nafs becomes satisfied with this deception until it considers its sins of little importance because of its [mistaken] belief that it has been forgiven.” See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Rīyāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 550 and ‘Uwayḍa, al-Ḥārīth ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, p. 38.

⁷¹⁴ Al-Muḥāṣibī defines two types of al-hasad as found in the Qurān and sunna, “The first of which is not forbidden as it is similar to competition; the other type is forbidden and it is this type that Allāh termed blameworthy in His Book and the Prophet in his sunna, [which is] hatred of a bounty to be bestowed upon the devotees and the desire that it would be removed.” See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Rīyāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 607-616 and ‘Uwayḍa, al-Ḥārīth ibn Asad al-Muḥāṣibī, p. 38.

to remain on this path and to guard against the temptations, which may assail him after he has begun to serve Allāh with his whole body, mind and soul.716

It may seem an over simplification but al-Riḍāya is essentially a book concerning sincerity to Allāh, cleansing the heart, purification of the soul and a life of complete moral, ethical and behavioural perfection.717 In summary, we quote Smith, who has captured the essence of al-Riḍāya when she says:

This is al-Muhāsibī’s great treatise on the interior life, which reveals a profound knowledge of human nature and its weaknesses, while in the means which he suggests for combating these weaknesses and for attaining to the single-hearted service of God, he shews also the discerning wisdom and inspired insight of a true spiritual director and shepherd of souls.718

2. Kitāb al-Waṣāyā719/ al-Naṣāʾīḥ al-Diniyya720

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717 To this effect [Āhmād b. Muḥammad] Ibn Āṭā Allāh al-İskandārī (d. 707/1307) says, “I read al-Muḥāsibī’s al-Riḍāya to Abū al-ʿAbbās Āḥmad b. ʿUmar al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) and he said, ‘Two words will suffice you concerning everything which is in this book: worship Allāh with knowledge and don’t ever be satisfied with your nafs.’ He never let me read that book again and I don’t know why!” See Uwayda, al-Hārīth ibn Asad al-Muhāsibī, p. 32 and Mahmūd, Ustādh al-Sāʾīrīn, p. 79.

718 Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 45.


This particular work is related with both these names, for example Massiğnūn, Smith, Quwawāṭī and Āḥmad, quote both titles, whereas Mahmūd terms it “Kitāb al-Waṣāyā,” Abū Ghuddā terms it “Risālat al-Waṣāyā” and Āṭā terms it simply “al-Waṣāyā.” See al-Muḥāsibī, al-Hārīth b. Asad, Risālat al-Mustarshidīn, ed. Abū Ghuddā, p. 31; al-Muḥāsibī, al-Waṣāyā, ed. Ābd al-Qādir Āḥmad Āṭā, p. 40; al-Muḥāsibī, al-Aqīl wa Fahn al-Qurán, ed. al-Quwawāṭī, pp. 63-4; Mahmūd, Ustādh al-Sāʾīrīn, p. 79; al-Muḥāsibī, Kitāb al-Naṣāʾīḥ, edited by Muhammad Ābd al-ʿAzīz Āḥmad (Cairo, Maktabat al-Qurán, 1992) p. 10 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 46.

720 This book, with either name, has the following extant manuscripts:

2. İstanbul, Bağhdādī Wehbī, 614.
3. Three copies in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya:
   a) No. 3 shin, taṣawwuf, is written in a North African hand and is from the legacy of the famous scholar Muḥammad al-ʿAmin al-Shanqītī (d. 1392/1972) (min mukḥallafāt al-ʿallāma al-Shanqītī). This is a very good copy and was written in a clear, beautiful naskh style and has few mistakes.
   b) No. 30 mim, taṣawwuf, of which the last part is missing and chapters 3 to 20 are perforated in various places. In addition the handwriting is particularly poor.
   c) No. 1416 taṣawwuf. This is the best of the manuscripts, being written in a clear, beautiful naskh style and has few mistakes.

4. A copy located in The Chester Beatty Library under catalogue number 4918 and entitled ‘al-Naṣāʾīḥ. The copyist is recorded as being Ismāʿīl b. Muḥaymin al-Tahḥaz and the manuscript is dated Monday, 7th Safar 734/18th October 1333.

After *al-Ri`äya* this work is one of the longest of al-Muhäsibi's books to reach us and therefore will be discussed next. 721 In a similar manner to *al-Ri`äya*, this work represents a foundation in the skill of examining the *nafs*, as it delves into its depths and qualities, which are hidden from the vast majority of people. 722

As 'Atä' puts it:

This book, along with the other works of al-Muhäsibi, was a new development in the field of Islamic psychology ('*îlm al-nafs al-Islämi*) for the ascetics (zuhhäd) of the third century [hljrl] and the master of this development was indeed al-Muhäsibi: the splendour of the scholars (zahrat al-`ulämä'), the pride of the ascetics (*jakhr al-zuhhäd*), the imam of the path of the people of Alläh (*ahl Alläh*). 723

In addition to this however one of the most important aspects of this work is the fact that al-Muhäsibi sheds light on his own life, his personal search for the truth and his despair at

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721 Despite this Mahmüd does not consider it one of his better works from a stylistic perspective but Atä holds an opposing view. On this point I would have to agree with Atä, as the introductory paragraphs of *al-Nasä'ih* bear witness. See Al-Muhäsibi, *Kitäb al-Nasä'ih*, ed. Ahmad, p. 11-13; al-Muhäsibi, *al-Wasäyä*, ed. 'Abd al-Qädir Ahmad Atä, p. 42 and Mahmüd, *Ustädh al-Sä'irin*, p. 79.


723 Ibid.
not finding the guidance he sought. He also sheds considerable light indirectly on the period in which he lived, in particular the political situation and the state of the people in his environment generally.

These points become apparent from the very first statement which he makes: he begins by saying\(^724\), "It has reached us that 'This community (umma) will split up into seventy-three sects; of them only one will be saved'\(^725\), and Allâh knows best regarding the remainder of them."\(^726\) By this very statement al-Muhâsibî indicates his own mood and the mood of the period in general, as we know the state of the sects attributed to Islam at this time in addition to the political discord sewn through the dispute between al-Amin and al-Ma'mûn.\(^727\) He continues by mapping out his own personal journey in seeking the truth, acquiring knowledge and practice of the religion. During this process he identifies various types of people within the members of society he has come across\(^728\) and clarifies his own stance regarding the path to take.\(^729\) Based on the \textit{hadîth} mentioned above he then

\(^724\) Of course he says this after making the customary introductory comments of praising Allâh and sending peace and salutations upon His Prophet. See al-Muhâsibî, \textit{Kitâb al-Nasa'îh}, ed. Ahmad, p. 11.


\(^727\) See pp. 108-9 above.

\(^728\) He identifies them as being:

1. "A scholar in the affairs of the hereafter (al-akhirîn); meeting him is difficult and his presence is rare.
2. The ignorant person; to keep one's distance from him is a blessing (ghanîma).
3. Those who resemble the scholars but are infatuated with the worldly life, being affected by it.
4. Those who have knowledge associated with the religion but seek glorification (al-ta'zîm) and grandeur (al-qulw) through it; thus they receive the pleasures of this life (ard al-dunya) via the religion.
5. People who have knowledge but have no understanding of it.
6. Those who resemble the devout ascetics (al-nusâk), they pursue the good, they have no wealth and no implementation of the knowledge they have; their opinion is not to be relied upon.
7. Those who are associated with intellect (al-aql) and cleverness (al-dihâ) but have neither scrupulousness (al-wara') nor piety (al-taqâ).
8. Friends, who concur in serving their desires, they humble themselves for the worldly life, seeking leadership.
9. Human devils (shayî'în al-ins), they block the path to the hereafter, they struggle fiercely for the worldly life, they hasten in its accumulation, they desire an excess of it; they are alive in this life but conventionally (fi 'l-turûf) they are dead.


\(^729\) For example he says, "Then I found in the consensus of the community (ijmâ' al-umma) and Allâh's revealed book that the path to salvation lay in: holding firmly to the fear of Allâh and the fulfilment of what he has made compulsory; being scrupulous in what He made permissible, what He forbade and in all the confines set by Him; sincerity to Allâh by worshipping Him and emulating His Messenger." Al-Muhâsibî, \textit{Kitâb
searched for the 'saved sect' and after much hardship he finally found what he was looking for.

As such al-Muhäsibi divides his work into forty one sections (abwäb) on a variety of topics, which is his usual method; the main ideas, however, will be summarised here. In this work al-Muhäsibi proposes various counsels as to how to identify the faults of the soul via long research and reflection, thus clarifying his path and as a result it contains a summary of his experience. He does this by discussing his own thoughts and ideas but also lends great importance to the revealed texts also, with the goal of perfecting the human soul. He is concerned with avoiding misguidance due to the turmoil of the soul and the various facets of personality and consequently, he attempts to deal with illness at its root.

To this effect al-Muhäsibi begins by reminding the reader that the origin of happiness lies in the fear of Alläh (tagwa) and that the basis of discontent is love of the worldly life (ḥubb al-dunya).


For example he says, "I considered my misfortune multiplied due to the loss of the pious and I feared that death would come suddenly and surprise me during this tumultuous part of my life because of the disputes within the community." Al-Muhäsibi, Kitāb al-Näsäh, ed. Aḥmad, p. 12 and al-Shämi (ed.), Mawā‘iz al-Imâm al-Ḥārīth al-Muhäsibî, pp. 30-31.

He describes them in the following manner, "Then the All-Merciful to His devotees destined for me a people (gawm); I found in them the indications of piety, the signs of scrupulousness and that they prefer the hereafter over the worldly life. I found their guidance and advice in agreement with the actions of the rightly guided imams. I found them in agreement regarding advising the community; they do not desire that anyone fall into His disobedience nor do they despair of His mercy for anyone. They are continually patient during adversity and distress, satisfied with His decree (al-qadā) and show gratitude for His bounties (al-nir‘ā). They cause Alläh the Exalted to become beloved to the devotees by reminding them of His favours, His kindness towards them and they encourage the devotees to return to Him. They are scholars of Alläh's sublimity, scholars of His exalted power and scholars of His book and His Messenger's sunna. They are jurisprudents in His religion and scholars of what He loves and hates. They avoid innovations and blameworthy desires, they have left delving deeply [into controversial issues] and [seeking] admiration, they despise debate and argument and they shun slander and oppression. They oppose their own whims, take their souls to account, control their body parts, are scrupulous in their food, clothing and all their affairs. They avoid dubious issues (al-shubahāt), shun their appetites (al-shahawāt); are content with a meagre provision, take little from that which is allowed (al-mubāh) and are austere in that which is permissible (al-ḥalāh). They are wary of the reckoning (al-ḥisāb) and are filled with dread regarding the return (al-ma‘ā). They hold themselves in contempt but not others and every person has a state which will suffice him [80: 37]. They are scholars in the affairs of the hereafter and the terrors of the day of judgement; [a day of] tremendous recompense and painful punishment. This has caused them [a state of] permanent sorrow, continuous worry and so they became distracted from pleasures of this world and its delights. Their excellence became obvious to me, their advice was clear to me and I was certain that they were working towards the path of the hereafter. They emulate the messengers, they are a beacon for whoever sought to be enlightened by them and guides for whoever sought guidance. Thus, I became desirous of their way, acquiring their morals, accepting of their manners, loving their obedience, not equating anyone with them and not preferring anyone to them." al-Muhäsibi, Kitāb al-Näsäh, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 12-13; ‘Uwaydā, Al-Ḥārīth ibn Asad al-Muhäsibî, pp. 29-30 and al-Shämi (ed.), Mawā‘iz al-Imâm al-Ḥārīth al-Muhäsibî, pp. 31-33.


love of wealth, the desire to accumulate it and the power this has over the human being.\textsuperscript{734} He discusses this in a general manner but also discusses the position of the Companions regarding this issue, proving, as far as he is concerned, their extreme dislike of wealth and attachment to the worldly life.\textsuperscript{735} Whilst discussing this topic he covers the following areas: the earning of wealth in a permissible manner, being economical in the use of the sustenance provided, being careful not to waste what you have (\textit{isrāf}) and at the same time avoiding being miserly (\textit{bakhīh}).\textsuperscript{736}

After explaining the importance of freeing oneself from the power that wealth can have over the human being, al-Muhāṣibī turns his attention to the topics for which he is familiar, i.e. those dealing with the internal workings of the mind, heart and soul. He deals with issues we have already seen\textsuperscript{737}, such as satisfaction with the decree of Allāh (\textit{al-ridl hi gā''), the traps of the Devil (\textit{makā'id al-Shaytān}), self conceit (\textit{al-\textit{qub}'), arrogance (\textit{al-kibr}), as well as dealing with the \textit{nafs} itself and the heart (\textit{al-qalb}).\textsuperscript{738} He then spends some time warning the reader from the disputes within the community\textsuperscript{739} and the concept of \textit{ri'āya li ḥuqūq Allāh} is frequently quoted throughout \textit{al-Waṣāyā}.\textsuperscript{740}

In addition to this al-Muhāṣibī also gives importance in this work to the subject of \textit{‘ilm}, clarifying the significance of having sound knowledge, as this is the basis of sound action. He also indicates the importance of intellect but at the same warns against misuse of both these important faculties, as well as discussing the defects knowledge can cause in the character, if it is not kept in check.\textsuperscript{741}


\textsuperscript{735} We sense here that al-Muhāṣibī may well have been refuting scholars of his period who supported this idea, as to satisfy the caliphs of the day, which once again is an indication of the effect the social milieu had on him.


\textsuperscript{737} See pages 198-9 above.


\textsuperscript{739} This is most likely due to the fact that he suffered himself as a consequence of this issue, as we have seen. See pages 201-2 above, al-Muhāṣibī, \textit{al-Aql wa Fahn al-Qurān}, ed. al-Quwват, p. 64 and Maḩmūd, \textit{Uṣūd al-Sā’irīn}, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{740} For example he talks about \textit{ri'āya li jawārih wa 'l-qulb, muṣābat tadyī ḥuqūq Allāh, and irādat adā' al-ḥuqūq}, which suggests this is why he wrote a separate work on this subject on this topic as we have already seen. See al-Muhāṣibī, \textit{Kitāb al-Nasā'ih}, ed. Aţā, pp. 8-9, 44-46 and 65-7; Maḩmūd, \textit{Uṣūd al-Sā’irīn}, p. 80; Smith, \textit{An Early Mystic of Baghdad}, p. 47 and pages 193-9 above.

\textsuperscript{741} Al-Muhāṣibī in \textit{al-Waṣāyā} affords a great deal of discussion to both the subjects of wealth and knowledge, as he considers them to be a great source of good but at the same time they can be the most corrupting elements regarding the character of the human being, if they are not subject to accountability. It is interesting that al-Muhāṣibī discusses knowledge in this regard, as for the majority of people wealth can be a source of corruption but knowledge, which is usually regarded by the majority as a source of benefit, at the same time can be equally as deadly to the human soul. This once again shows the subtlety of his investigation of the
Another interesting aspect of *al-Waṣāyiya* is al-Muḥāsibī’s in-depth discussion of the physical acts of worship that are either incumbent on all Muslims or are highly recommended. As one might expect al-Muḥāsibī does discuss these in traditional jurisprudential manner, but links the legal element of these actions to their hidden, internal aspects. Thus, we find him discussing such aspects as presence of mind in prayer (*al-khushū’ fi ’l-ṣalāt*) and not just the physical mechanical movements of prayer and fasting and includes fasting from that which Allāh has forbidden and not just from food, drink and sexual relations. In addition he advises increasing the superogatory acts (*al-nawāfil*) as a means of fulfilling the compulsory duties⁷⁴² and as a means of erasing the sins committed. He also mentions the importance of supplicating (*al-du`a*) in private, having presence of heart while speaking and reflecting and contemplating whilst reciting the Qurʾān.⁷⁴³

Al-Muḥāsibī continues throughout the various sections mentioned and continues in the latter part of the work by discussing more issues regarding the soul and heart and concludes his book by discussing sincerity to Allāh in acts of obedience (*ikhlāṣ al-ta`a*), as if to close the discussion on this fundamental point, which is of course the very corner stone of much of his teaching.⁷⁴⁴

In summary we quote ʿAṭā who clarifies clearly the result of implementing the methodology of al-Muḥāsibī in this work:

> Thus if a person has been able to remove the power wealth and knowledge have [over his soul], correct his intention in acts of worship, desire to work for Allāh alone and has knowledge, which pushes him forward, then he will be a human being who enjoys perfection of his soul and has complete peace of mind.⁷⁴⁵

3. *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*⁷⁴⁶

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⁷⁴² This is an interesting concept proposed by al-Muḥāsibī here, as many people consider the performance of extra acts of worship to be a source of additional reward or an increase in their position with Allāh. On the contrary, however, al-Muḥāsibī clarifies his own position, which is that such acts are actually only used to fulfil and complete the compulsory duties, in the sense of fulfilling the deficiencies found in such acts.


⁷⁴⁶ This work appears to have three extant manuscripts, they are:

1. A manuscript entitled ‘*Kitāb al-Tawahhum*’, which is located in the Chester Beatty library, Dublin, under number 611, fols. 152a-172a, being copied in 539/1145.

2. A manuscript entitled ‘*Kitāb al-Tawahhum*’, which is located in the Bodleian library, Oxford, Hunt, under number 611, fols. 152a-172a, being copied in 539/1145.
This work is one of al-Muhäsibi's most famous works and has received a great deal of attention, being published several times. This is indicative of the importance of this work


6. A version edited by Khālid ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-ʿAk and published by Dār al-Bashāʿr (Damascus), in 1991. Al-ʿAk, in editing this work has provided a useful introduction regarding the Hereafter (al-ākhira), as well as the usual biography of al-Muhäsibi but has made no mention of the manuscripts used, if any, in editing this text. See al-Muhäsibi, Kitāb al-Tawahhum fi wasf ʿAḥwāl al-Ākhira, edited by Khālid ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-ʿAk (Damascus, Dār al-Bashāʿr, 1991) pp. 2-17.


9. A version published by Dār al-Furqān, with no mention of place or date of publication. See al-Muhäsibi, al-Tawahhum (Dār al-Furqān, n.p., n.d.).

The final two versions (7 and 8) were mentioned in the catalogue of Al-Rushd bookstore in Riyadh but unfortunately the researcher was unable to acquire a copy as they were out of stock. Consequently, it is suggested that there may be more versions of this work than those mentioned here.
and therefore it will be discussed here after al-Rīāya and al-Wašāyā. The work itself is a short treatise of an eschatological nature, which discusses the events that all human beings will face in the hereafter (al-ākhirah). To this effect al-Muḥāsibi begins sequentially, starting with death, its pain and its agonies, describing how each person struggles with the throes of death and the events that occur in the grave itself, immediately after death, such as the questioning of the two angels and gazing into paradise and hell.\(^{748}\)

Al-Muḥāsibi continues by painting a vivid picture of the resurrection where every soul will be summoned to stand before its Lord on the Last Day. He describes the events in detail; how all will stand equal in front of their Lord bereft of the virtue of wealth, status and position, which they enjoyed in the worldly life, as only faith and righteous deeds will avail them in the trials ahead. Due to this their state is one of fear, astonishment, desperation and regret. Not only this, but the other creatures that Allāh created will be summoned devoid of their animal tendencies, standing still and humbly in front of their Lord; all will be gathered and wait meekly for the judgement of the King of kings.\(^{749}\) The heavens will then be cast asunder, being destroyed forever and the angels in all their glory, power and immense size and creation will pour forth surrounding the assembly. The sun will then be drawn close and the resurrected will begin to sweat in accordance with the actions they did in the worldly life and there will be no shade from this intense heat except in the shade of the throne of Allāh.\(^{750}\)

Every soul will then cry for its own fate as the messengers of Allāh are questioned regarding the message that they brought and each individual tries to flee from even the most beloved people to them in this life. The deeds of each soul will then be weighed and their records distributed, as Allāh questions them regarding all that they did. The records will then be given, in the right hand of those who were successful and the left hand for those who are disgraced to dwell in eternal paradise or hell respectively.\(^{751}\) Each individual will then travel the bridge over hellfire (al-ṣirāf), that is 'finer than a hair and sharper than a sword's blade', the speed at which they pass across it being proportionate to the deeds that they

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In addition to the work itself, there is also an academic appraisal of it and its author, entitled ‘Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibi wa Kitābuhu al-Tawahhum’ by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Yāfi and published in ‘al-Turāth al-ʿArabi’, which is a cultural magazine produced by Ittihād al-Kitāb al-ʿArab in Damascus. The article itself is extremely useful in describing both the life and one of the works of al-Muḥāsibi, being written in a highly academic style, provides useful footnotes and has even used Western sources. See al-Yāfi, ‘Abu-Abd Allah al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibi wa Kitābuhu al-Tawahhum’, al-Turāth al-ʿArabi (Damascus, Ittīḥād al-Kitāb al-ʿArab, no. 41, October 1990) pp. 7-34.

\(^{748}\) See al-Muḥāsibi, al-Tawahhum, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 31-4.

\(^{749}\) Ibid., pp. 34-5 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 47-8.


performed, to reach paradise on the other side or to fall from it into eternal damnation in hellfire.\(^{752}\)

As for those who survive this treacherous journey, their faces are enlightened and made radiant as they enter the gates of paradise, joyous in the company of the righteous. They delight in the foods, drinks, clothing, vessels and palaces which have been prepared for them and most of all the sheer unadulterated beauty of their companions with whom they dwell with therein.\(^{753}\) This, however, is not the only pleasure of paradise, in fact the greatest and most honourable of its bounties is still yet to come as it has been saved for Allah's beloved elite (al-awliyā'); they will be summoned, the veils will be set aside and there, they will gaze upon their Lord in all His majesty and splendour.\(^{754}\)

The value of this work lies not only in the fact that he substantiates it with a variety of verses from the Qur'ān, Prophetic narrations and statements of the earliest generations, providing it with authenticity, but also in the eloquent style in which it is written and the vivid images it portrays. It would also seem a very personal work, as it is clear from the expression of the thoughts that al-Muḥāṣibi had actually imagined himself taking the same journey and thus, is extremely significant, to the extent it may have influenced others.\(^{755}\)

4. Risāla\(^{756}/\)Kitāb al-Makāṣib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubaḥihā wa 'l-Maḥṣūrīhā wa Ikhlīf al-Nāṣ fi Ṭalābīhā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghāliṭīna fihī\(^{757}\)

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\(^{755}\) Smith has already discussed the possible influence of al-Muḥāṣibi on Dante in his 'Divine Comedy' but it also interesting to note that within the Islamic context, al-Khusht mentions the influence of al-Muḥāṣibi's al-Tawāḥhum on another eschatological work, the 'Risālat al-Ghufrān' of Abū 'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arri. See al-Muḥāṣibi, al-Tawāḥhum, ed. al-Khusht, p. 18 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 290-1.

\(^{756}\) Both Mazālī and Smith term this work 'Risāla' as this seems to the name recorded in the manuscripts. See al-Muḥāṣibi, Kitāb al-'Ilm, ed. Mazālī, p. 27 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 50.

\(^{757}\) There would appear to be three existing manuscripts for this work, they are:
1. A manuscript located in the Carullah section of the Sıleymaniye library in Istanbul under number 1101, fols. 29a-51b.
2. A copy of '1.' above located in Cairo University under number 9678 and entitled 'al-Makāṣib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubaḥihā wa 'l-Maḥṣūrīhā wa Ikhlīf al-Nāṣ fi Ṭalābīhā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghāliṭīna fihī. The manuscript consists of 43 pages, with 20 lines to a page and an average of 12 words to a line. In addition the manuscript is extremely difficult to read in places.
3. A version of this work included as part of compilation of al-Muḥāṣibi's works found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Ahmad al-Jazzār Bākā, being stored in al-Azhar under number 1367 taṣawwuf.
4. A manuscript located in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyya, under 4064 taṣawwuf.
5. A manuscript found in Jāmī'at Fu'ād, under number 26048.

The effect of al-Muḥāṣibī's environment becomes apparent on him again here as he discusses the manner in which a human being should gain his daily provision. To this effect he begins by presenting the importance of the concept of putting absolute trust and reliance in Allāh (al-tawakkul) and for each and every human being to realise that He alone is their Sole Provider, the Sovereign over all things and the Most Generous of those who give. This by its very nature dictates that mankind be grateful, put their complete trust in Him and remember the bounty of their Lord, but at the same time it does not mean that they should refrain from taking lawful means to earn a livelihood, or live idly at the expense of others. 758

Al-Muḥāṣibī then turns his attention to the topic of scrupulousness (al-wara), explaining that this is to abstain from that which Allāh has forbidden and that which is objectionable to Him, whether in word or deed, thought or motive and this can only be achieved through extensive self examination prior to action. 759
Having discussed various spiritual and theosophical dimensions of how provision is earned, al-Muḥāṣibi utilizes the second half of the book to discuss a variety of issues of a juristic nature and gives his opinion regarding them. Such issues include the rulings regarding inheriting from a father who is a transgressor, doubtful matters (al-shubha), the permissible and the prohibited (al-ḥalāl wa l-ḥarām) and the permissibility of accepting gifts from rulers, as well as seeking out the ‘purest’ forms of sustenance. He also uses this work to discuss various ascetic practices familiar at the time, including a refutation of those who claim that hunger is in itself an act of worship. He concludes this treatise with a discussion of various juristic issues regarding the categories of land used for agriculture and the rulings regarding the permissibility of gaining sustenance from them.

Consequently, this work is also significant in presenting the personality of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibi, as it not only presents his spiritual theology and his environment’s influence upon him but also his ability as a jurist, his familiarity with legal issues and the opinions of the scholars before him. Thus, it adds a further facet to his already impressive list of disciplines with which he was well versed.

5. (Risālat) Ādāb al-Nufrūs/Risāla fi l-Akhlāq

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760 ‘Pure’ in the sense of being from a permissible source and being free of doubt regarding its nature.
761 See al-Muḥāṣibi, al-Makāsib, ed. al-Khush, pp. 94-120.
762 Ibid., pp. 121-134 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 50-2.
763 This work has several extant manuscripts they are:
1. A manuscript located in Carullah, Istanbul, under number 1101, fol. 59 alif to 103 bā, being copied in 523/1129.
2. A manuscript located in Cairo University, under number 26048 and is a copy of ‘1.’ above.
3. A manuscript located in Azhar University, this being a copy the Wali al-Dīn version.
4. A manuscript located in the Paris National Library, this being a copy of ‘1.’ above.
5. A manuscript located in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, under 4064 taqawwul and this is a copy of ‘1.’ above.
6. A manuscript found in Keuprülu, Istān, under number 725, fol. 42 onwards and was copied in the 11th/17th centuries.
7. A manuscript found in Jāmi`at Fuṣūd, under number 26048.

In addition, there are three published versions of this work that have been produced, they are:
a) A version edited by ‘Abd al-Qādir Ahmad ‘Aṭā, being published by Dār al-Jil, Beirut, in 1987. In editing this work ‘Aṭā has relied on using manuscript ‘2.’ above, using this as the source work and then comparing to manuscript ‘4.’ above.
b) A version edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-ʿAziz Ahmad, being published Maktabat al-Qurān (Cairo) and with no date of publication. Ahmad has relied on manuscript ‘2.’ above in editing this work.
c) A version edited by Majdi Fāṭḥi al-Sayyid, being published by Dār al-Salām (Cairo), in 1991. Al-Sayyid has relied on manuscripts ‘2.’ and ‘5.’ above in editing this work.

All the editors have adopted the usual manner of verifying the text in that they have provided footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, references for the verses of the Qurān and hadith quoted and included a brief introduction to the life and works of al-Muḥāṣibi.

In this work al-Muhäsibi focuses attention on the two words used in the title; namely etiquettes (adāb) and the soul (al-nafs). He combines these two concepts effortlessly throughout the work combining both of these fundamental elements of the path to Allāh, in the form of counsels, extolling the reader to adopt such lofty qualities.\(^{764}\)

In addition to discussing manners and etiquettes, it is in the discussion regarding the soul that al-Muhäsibi excels, providing an indepth examination of the nafs and its related topics. It is here that we glimpse the thought of al-Muhäsibi first hand as he clarifies that the root of the cause must be dealt with first before going forward any further. By this he means that the soul should be corrected first before even considering performing superogatory acts since there is no use in pruning the branches of a tree to assist its growth when it is the roots that are diseased.\(^{765}\)

Al-Muhäsibi, in a similar vein, also discusses the importance of purifying the soul of every blameworthy characteristic before performing any action. His rationale is simple; human beings are required to refrain from all forms of evil, but are not ordered to perform all forms of good. Thus, they must able to distinguish between the two and prioritise regarding the actions that they perform, so that a good action is not mixed with evil, or consequently the whole action will be invalidated. This however, requires knowledge of such blameworthy characteristics and al-Muhäsibi allots much time to this, as well as the praiseworthy characteristics that directly counter such negative attributes and which are consequently, absolutely necessary.\(^{766}\)

The essence of the soul's rebellious nature is its love of the worldly life and the soul's adoption of it as its only concern and goal. As a result the soul separates the worldly life from that of the hereafter, but by doing so, fails to realise the true nature of the worldly life, which is that it is nothing more than a trial to test those who are best in action. Thus, the cure for many of the diseases of the heart and soul is to remember the hereafter and in particular, death.\(^{767}\)

\(^{764}\) These include the correct etiquette to have with Allah and the Companions of the Prophet. See al-Muhäsibi, Adāb al-Nufūs, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Ahmad 'Aṭā, pp. 35-39; al-Muhäsibi, Adāb al-Nufūs, ed. Ahmad, pp. 17-20 and al-Muhäsibi, Adāb al-Nufūs, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 55-60.

\(^{765}\) See al-Muhäsibi, Adāb al-Nufūs, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Ahmad 'Aṭā., p. 32 and al-Muhäsibi, Adāb al-Nufūs, ed. Ahmad, pp. 11-12.

\(^{766}\) Ibid.

\(^{767}\) Ibid.
It is true to say that al-Muḥāsibī has discussed much of the content of ‘Ādāb al-Nuʿūs in other works in more depth, such as ‘al-Rīḍāya but despite this, this work has in return summarised much of what is contained in such extensive works without the reader having to consult them. Consequently, it is an invaluable contribution to the field of works concerned with the human soul and as al-Sayyid summarises, “This book is considered one of the hidden treasures that has reached from the earliest generation regarding the soul and its etiquettes.”

6. Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa70 wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa771

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706’Ibid. and Mahmūd, Uṣṭādh al-Sāʾīrin, p. 81.
708It is worth mentioning that in the hagiographic Sufi sources that al-Muḥāsibī himself makes reference to a work concerning al-maʿrifa as we find the following narration, “I authored a work on intuitive knowledge of God (al-maʿrifa) and was well pleased with it. One day while I was looking through it, thinking how good it was, when a young man wearing shabby clothing came in, greeted me and said, ‘O Abū ‘Abd Allāh, is intuitive knowledge of God (al-maʿrifa) the right (ḥaqq) of the True One (al-ḥaqq) upon His creation (al-kaḥal) or the right of the creation the upon the True One?’ So I replied, ‘It is a right of the True One upon His creation.’ So he said, ‘It is more appropriate that He unveil it to those who deserve it.’ So I said, ‘Then indeed it is the right of the creation upon the True One.’ To which he said, ‘He is more just than to treat them unfairly.’ Then he bade me farewell and left, so I tore it [the book] up and said, ‘I will never discuss intuitive knowledge of God again.’”


716This work more than any other has proven extremely difficult in drawing a conclusion regarding its actual status. This has been for a variety of reasons; the first difficulty is the title of the work itself. Abū Ghudda for example simply terms it ‘Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa and does not refer to any of the titles which will be mentioned below. On the contrary, Smith mentions three different titles for the one work, namely, ‘Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa’, ‘Risāla fī ‘l-Muraqabā wa Inqīsāmihā and Kitāb Muḥāsabat al-Nafs. It is clear from this that Smith saw all three titles on differing manuscripts and after comparing them concluded that they were the same work. Mahmūd on the other hand confuses issues further by terming the work, ‘Kitāb fī ‘l-Muraqabā and then states that there is another, separate work by al-Muḥāsibī entitled, ‘al-Maʿrifa. However, having examined the published versions of this work and comparing them to the quotes taken from what Mahmūd terms ‘al-Maʿrifa, it is clear that in fact these quotes are from ‘Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa, or what he terms ‘Kitāb fī ‘l-Muraqabā and therefore, there is no separate work entitled ‘al-Maʿrifa as he claims. See al-Muḥāsibī, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa, ed. Ṣāliḥ Ahmad al-Shāmī (Damascus, Dār al-Qalam, 1993) p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, Risālat al-Mustarshidīn, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31; Sezgin, Tārīkh al-Turāth al-Arabi, vol. 1, p. 117; Mahmūd, Uṣṭādh al-Sāʾīrin, pp. 85-7 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 53.

In addition, there are two published versions of this work:
1. A version edited by Ṣāliḥ Ahmad al-Shāmī, entitled ‘Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa and published by Dār al-Qalam (Damascus), in 1993. In editing the book al-Shāmī has relied on the following manuscripts:
   a) a manuscript found in the library at the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, under number 3/73 积极作用. The original manuscript can be found in al-Azhar under no. 1208 积极作用, consists of 10 fols. and was written in a clear naskh style in the 9th/10th centuries.
   b) A manuscript found in the al-Azhar library in Cairo under no. 615 积极作用. It consists of 12 fols. and at first glance appears complete but on examination there is gap in the copy equivalent to one page.
   c) A manuscript found in al-ʿImam Muḥammad b. Saʿūd Islamic University, Riyadh, under number 4979 积极作用. The manuscript was written in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 911/April 1506 and there are two places where it is incomplete.
In this concise treatise al-Muhäsibi deals with two fundamental elements concerning the disciplining of the soul, i.e. that of essential knowledge (al-ma`rifa) and appropriate advice (al-naṣiḥa), regarding the journey back to Allāh. The importance of these two issues is clear, as both of them have an effect on both the individual and the community. As for al-ma`rifa, it plays an essential role in developing the individual, as it teaches him the nature (al-naslha), regarding the journey back to Allāh. 72 The importance of these two issues is as follows:

1. A manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under number 4084 taṣawwuf. The manuscript consists of 8 fols., six of which are the work itself ending at the section entitled 'the soul prone to evil (al-nafs al-ma`mūra bi ʾ-l-sūr)', whereas fols. 7-8 contain a text copied from 'al-Riṣālah bi al-Muḥäsibi. As for al-Shämi's contribution regarding this text he has carried out a comparison of the manuscripts and edited them accordingly. In addition, he has attempted to produce a version with a minimum of annotation, so that the reader would not be lost within the footnotes at the expense of benefiting from the main text. To this effect the editor does however provide footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, as well as having split the work into two sections according to the title, i.e. 'Sharḥ al-Ma`rifa' and 'Badhl al-Naslha'. See al-Muḥäsibi, Sharḥ al-Ma`rifa wa Badhl al-Naslha, ed. al-Shämi, pp. 17-20.

2. A version edited by Majdi Fathi al-Sayyid, entitled, 'Sharḥ al-Ma`rifa wa Badhl al-Naslha' and published by Dār al-Šaḥībah li al-Tūrāth (Ṭanṭā, Egypt), in 1993. In editing this work al-Sayyid has relied on the manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under taṣawwuf al-Shaikh no. 3 (microfilm 3889). This manuscript consists of 12 fols. i.e. 24 pages with 22 lines to a page of good quality handwriting. In addition there is another copy of this manuscript in the al-Azhar library under (3/634) taṣawwuf, no. 1207. Although al-Sayyid has only relied on the manuscript described above he does however mention other copies of it and they are as follows:

a) A manuscript found in Berlin under number 2815, fols. 208-10, copied in 1200/1786.

b) A manuscript found in the British Museum, appendix 1242, Oriental 3/4026, fols. 66b ff.

c) A manuscript found in Shahid 'Ali, Istanbul, under number 3/1345, fols. 37 alif-47 alif, copied in the 8th/14th century.

d) A manuscript found in Şāfı’b, Ankara, under number 1/3319, fols. 1 alif-11 bā, being copied in 731/1331.

e) A manuscript found in Chester Beatty, Damascus, under catalogue number 4969, consisting of 17 fols., being copied in 911/1505.

As for al-Sayyid's contribution regarding this text, he has added a great deal of annotation, in a similar manner to that of Abū Ghudda in his edited version of 'Risāla al-Mustarshidīt (see footnote 819:1 below) but not in such a profuse manner. To this effect the editor provides footnotes explaining ambiguous terms and various quotes from the pious predecessors (al-salaf al-sālih), as well as dividing the work into sections and adding headings for each one. Despite this however, there are major discrepancies between the two published versions of the work. On examining the introduction alone the reader feels at times that he is reading two different books as al-Sayyid's version lacks much of what al-ŠaḥīØ provides. This is clearly due to the fact that al-ŠaḥīØ has carried out a comparison of the manuscripts available to him and therefore his version is more complete, whereas al-Sayyid has only relied on one manuscript. What is not clear however is how such discrepancies occurred in the original manuscripts? There is no simple answer to this but it may go so far in explaining why one work had so many titles. Bearing this in mind if the researcher quotes from 'Sharḥ al-Ma`rifa wa Badhl al-Naslha' it will be al-ŠaḥīØ's edition which will be meant, as it contains a broader view of al-Muḥäsibi's teaching in this particular work. Despite this, the value of al-Sayyid's footnotes cannot be underestimated and therefore, will also be quoted where appropriate.

In addition to the manuscripts mentioned above there is a further copy in Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca, under number 4/258, being entitled 'Risāla ʾtwārāqāb' and being copied in 979/1571.


77 It is almost as if al-Muḥäsibi separated the book into two sections the first dealing with al-Ma`rifa and the second with al-Naslha, which is probably why al-ŠaḥīØ choose to do exactly that. See footnote 770:1 above.
and essence of life, so that he can eventually contribute to his society and it provides him with a basis on which to act. With regard to al-naṣiḥa, it plays the equally important role of removing the ills of the individual and the society by correcting it with subtlety and wisdom. As for the subject of al-maʿrifa, al-Muhāsibi is not concerned here with discussing the theory of al-maʿrifa, as is done by the Sufi philosophers, but he is concerned with what could be termed ‘essential’ maʿrifa, which every Muslim should have a grasp of. This is summarised in the following topics:

a) The knowledge of Allāh the Magnificent and Exalted (maʿrifat Allāh ‘azza wa jall).

Al-Muhāsibi begins discussing this element of maʿrifa by extolling the names and attributes of Allāh in a manner which not only lists them but also shows how they play a practical role in the human being’s life. Al-Muhāsibi is not content with this however but also describes the method, the means and the results of absorbing this form of maʿrifa.

b) The knowledge of Satan, the enemy of Allāh (maʿrifat Iblis ‘adw Allāh).

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773 Stressing the importance of advising not just the individual but society as a whole, al-Muhāsibi says, “And do not conceal advice from the people of the qibla [i.e. the Muslims] and do not leave advising the whole of creation, whether they be righteous or corrupt…” See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, pp. 11-12.

774 This is why I have not termed it ‘gnosis’ here as Smith has done. See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, pp. 12-13 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 53.

775 Al-Muhāsibi considers this vital for every Muslim and does not consider maʿrifa to be the right of the elite (al-khāṣṣa) only, as some Sufis do. He says for example, “It [maʿrifa] is a compulsory duty from Allāh, it has been neglected even though it is in the revealed book of Allāh; through it the slave may attain the honour of rank in this world and the hereafter and through it he will receive [a high] status with Allāh and His creation. It is the foundation of all obedience, its beginning and its end; it is a duty upon all believers, [whether] they be male or female, knowledgeable or ignorant and [a duty] upon all of the creation.” See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, pp. 13 and 23-4.

776 These have obviously derived from the Qurʾān and hadith; for example he says, “As for the explanation of the maʿrifa of Allāh the Blessed and Exalted, it is that you maintain in your heart your closeness to Him, His power over you, His ability and witness upon you, His knowledge of you, that He observes and protects you, that He is one and no one shares His dominion, that when He promises He is faithful, when He makes a guarantee He fulfils it, and when He calls His devotees to Him, He is abundantly wealthy.” See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, p. 30.

777 For example he says, “Thus, maintain this in your heart with a certain faith and effective knowledge; maintain it in every part of you, every limb, every joint, every vein and nerve, every hair and every [piece of] skin.” See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, p. 31.

778 For example he says, “You will not attain any of this except through remembrance of Allāh and severing all other concerns apart from what leads you to this. So Allāh should never leave your heart, out of fear of His authority [to punish], His power over regarding what you have done and what you will do and you should be ashamed in front of Him because of His closeness to you. [Thus,] your determination will never end, your aspiration will continue and you will have no thought except that He fills it.” See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, pp. 31-2.

779 For example he says, “This is what the scholars who have intimate knowledge of Allāh know, [those who are] fearful, pious and scrupulous. May Allāh grant both us and you success in achieving it and that He does not forbid us its benefit because of our sins.” See al-Muhāsibi, Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Nasiḥa, ed. Shāmi, p. 32.

This element of ma'rifat is equally important as it is not sufficient just to know who your Lord is and His rights upon you, but indeed, it is of vital importance also to know your enemy on the path back to Allah. Al-Muhäsibi begins his discussion by informing the reader that Allah has ordered the devotees to be at war with Iblis and struggle against him at every moment. This is because Iblis was the first enemy of Adam and thus, of every prophet and of mankind as a whole. The danger arises from this adversary because of his continuous vigilance in trying to cause the slave to falter; not only this, but his goal is not only to cause them to sin but ultimately to disbelieve in Allah and consequently, dwell in hellfire eternally just as he will. It should be known that every one is in a tremendous struggle against this cunning opponent and that each and every person must turn to Allah in humility and humbleness to ask for assistance in overcoming this devious enemy.

c) The human's knowledge of his own soul (ma'rifat al-insän nafsahu).

This third element of ma'rifat concerns the human element of this series as it concerns the human being's understanding of the nature of his own soul. In this regard al-Muhäsibi adopts his familiar position in warning of the danger of this internal element by advising the reader to approach the issue of one's own soul by reflecting on how its creator described it in the Qur'an, i.e. that it "urges to evil." Indeed, al-Muhäsibi considers this 'internal enemy' more dangerous than Iblis due to its nature and tendency to serve its own interests; Iblis uses it to manipulate the human being, causing him to falter regarding his duty to his Lord. Despite this, however, al-Muhäsibi does not suffice with this warning only, but in addition, he also briefly alludes to the manner in which one can combat the soul, which includes opposing it (mukhâlifatuha), taking it to account (muḥâṣibatuhâ), knowing it (ma'rifatuhâ), expending effort against it (mujahidatuha) and keep it under strict observation (muraqibatuha). Al-Muhäsibi concludes by advising the seeker to expend effort in being sincere to Allah, seeking His assistance in combating the nafs and as a result he will acquire His pleasure.

781 For example al-Muḥäsibi concludes by saying, "So be in Allah's company always, do not think you are safe from him [Iblis] as Allah, the Magnificent and Exalted, has not created anything harder upon you than him, so be extremely careful and take every precaution, as it is your lifeblood running through your veins against destruction and salvation is only by the bounty of Allah the Magnificent and Exalted. May Allah grant us and you sanctuaries from Iblis and his armies and there is no power or ability except that of Allah." See al-Muḥäsibi, Sharîḥ al-Ma'rifā wa Badhâ al-Naslha, ed. al-Shâmi, pp. 32-5; Maḥmûd, Uṣṭâdh al-Sâ‘îrin, pp. 85-6 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 53.

782 Qur'an 12: 53.

783 For a full exposition of this, see chapter six below.

784 For example he says, "Then seek Allah's assistance in all of this, seek His pleasure in all that He has ordered you and don't seek any other than Him. If you did this and turned to Allah, He will guide you - Allah willing - give you success, love you, distance you from His displeasure, cover you with the veil of the elite - the
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d) The knowledge of actions for the sake of Allāh (ma‘rifat al-‘amal li Allāh)

In this element of ma‘rifā al-Muḥāṣibī establishes a principle at the beginning of the discussion which lays the foundation for the rest of the section. Here he distinguishes two categories of actions; the first of which are those that Allāh has ordered and which as a result he considers to be obedience (tā‘a). The second type of action is that which Allāh has forbidden and which, as a result he considers to be disobedience (ma‘ṣiya). In addition to this, he once again reminds the reader that both of these types of actions require a third factor, which has also been ordered, that of sincerity (ikhlāṣ); this is clearly the most important concern of al-Muḥāṣibī, as it is this factor which will determine the intention behind the action and which, if corrupted, will cause all actions to become acts of disobedience regardless. Thereafter he once again warns of the dangers of Iblis, in the sense that he tries to invalidate these actions, not only by trying to make the servant commit sins or corrupt the intention, but also by trying to make the person perform a lesser form of obedience rather than a more elevated one. 785

Upon this basis, i.e. the four types of ma‘rifā, al-Muḥāṣibī describes the way in which a person should act; he should neither intend an action nor perform it without first considering these four issues. This in turn has an important subsequent effect upon the nafs, as it plays an essential role in taking the soul to account (muḥāṣabat al-nafs); as such every claim that the nafs consequently makes can be examined in the light of this ma‘rifā and as a result, it can be seen in its true reality, despite the deception it may try to manifest regarding the good qualities it proposes to have. 786

The second half of the book 787 contains a variety of pieces of practical and moral advice for those wishing to purify their souls and tread the path leading to the hereafter and ultimately to their Lord, as is al-Muḥāṣibī’s usual habit. In addition to discussing the usual topics for which al-Muḥāṣibī is well known, he also includes a section where he discusses scholars of Allāh and through this they attained knowledge of Him. May Allāh give us and you success in seeking that which pleases Him and may He save us from the evil of our own souls, He is Aid and there is no power or ability other than through Allāh, the Exalted and Magnificent. See al-Muḥāṣibī, Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifā wa Badhl al-Naṣiḥa, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 38.


787 See footnote 88 above.
ten characteristics (*khişāl ʾashara*)\(^788\), which every aspirant should have if they wish to reach the highest degrees of righteousness.\(^789\)

In summary I quote al-Muḥāṣibī's own conclusion to this work:

And know, may Allāh have mercy on you, that I have left no advice [unspoken], I have expended every effort in proposing advice and there is no good in a people who do not advise or who do not like to be advised. This is my book for you, for whoever read it and act according to it; it is a supplication for the one who compiled it and thus, do not prevent anyone from it. It is advice [which] few know and few apply. May Allāh bless us and you by endowing us with His *maʿrifā* and [allow us] to act according to it, give us His success and direct us to that which He loves and pleases Him. Make this book a mirror in front of you in all your affairs as I have left out no type of advice except that I have given it and may the peace and mercy of Allāh be upon you.\(^790\)

7. *Kitāb Badʿ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*\(^791\) (taʿālā)\(^792\)

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\(^788\) See pp. 300-1 below.

\(^789\) See pp. 300-1 below.


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In addition, there are two edited versions of this text they are:

1. A version by `Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, which as has mentioned previously, he included within his edited version of *al-Waṣāyā* (see footnote 719: i above). The manuscript used by Aṭā is included within a collection of al-Muḥāṣibī's works entitled, 'al-Maṣāʾīl, which also contains 'al-Aṣqūl and 'al-Makāṣīl, which made it particularly difficult to locate. This copy of this collection can be found in the Cairo University library and it was taken from an original in the Ahmad al-Jazzār Baʿkā library, which was deposited in the al-Azhar library under *taṣawwuf*, no. 1367. This copy was made at the beginning of the 6th/12th century and is in extremely difficult to read in places. In addition the copier switches the feminine and masculine pronouns and some displacement has also occurred. As for Aṭā's contribution, he placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words as to as to make the meaning more comprehensible. See al-Muḥāṣibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, ed. `Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, pp. 45 and 329-53.

2. A version by Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid published by Dār al-Salām, Cairo, in 1991. Al-Sayyid has used a manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under *taṣawwuf*, no. 4064 and of which there is microfilm copy under 5998. The manuscript consists of seven pages (14 sides) and has 20 lines to a page, averaging seven words a line. In addition, al-Sayyid also mentions another copy in Berlin under no. 3/66. As for al-Sayyid's contribution, he has divided the work into paragraphs, placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and added annotated footnotes where appropriate. See al-Muḥāṣibī, *Badʿ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 5-19 and 21-41.

In addition to the manuscripts mentioned above, others also exist, they are:

i) A manuscript found in Carullah, under no. 1101/2 (fols. 18a-24b) being copied in 523/1129.

ii) A second manuscript in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under *taṣawwuf*, no. 4664.

iii) A further manuscript found in Jāmiʿat Fuʿād, under no. 26048.


\(^792\) The addition of 'taʿālā' is Abū Ghudda's and he is alone in doing so. Al-Muḥāṣibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31.
Once again this work despite its small size, represents one of the most important sources of al-Muhāsibī's thought and in particular, his training of the soul, its self-discipline and its purification. During the course of the book the author maps out the path that one must take in order to reach the truth for those who have committed sins, disobeyed Allah and whose hearts have hardened and are devoid of fear. He then presents the means and principles which will assist in disciplining the nafs and so drive the human being to the straight path.

The outstanding feature of this work, however, is that the author proceeds gradually, chapter by chapter, producing discussions of vital importance regarding the nafs. By doing so he imagines the nafs as a separate entity whose nature is evil; this in turn is opposed by the human conscience, which is constantly anxious and in a state of turmoil due to the nafs's remoteness from the path of Allāh. Al-Muhāsibī here spends his utmost efforts to warn the reader and to ensure that he understands that the conscience must overcome the nafs, so that it can avert it from the amusement of the worldly life and return it to the path of Allāh, which is its ultimate goal. Not only this, but in addition, al-Muhāsibī expresses this internal struggle between the human being and his nafs in such a vivid manner that it has the most profound effect on the reader.

In summary, al-Sayyid says, "This book was written for the repentant soul desiring to truly return to Allāh the Exalted and at the same time for anyone who felt regret for his failings and who is searching for a way to purify his soul, so as to attain the status of the righteous.

8. Kitāb al-Masā'il HA`māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ

Smith suggests that this is an autobiographical account and it is clear that al-Muhāsibī's drew on his own personal experience, as the account given is extremely subtle and precise. Despite this, some doubts surround the nature of the book as the customary 'qālā'/qulūt question and answer style is employed. This is not unusual but it begs the question, "Is this a conversation between al-Muhāsibī and his teacher as we've seen previously in 'al-Qaṣīd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh? Or is it as al-Sayyid suggests, a conversation between al-Muhāsibī and one of his students, or simply an imaginary conversation, which took place in the author's own mind and he recorded?" The answer is not at all clear. See al-Muhāsibī, Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 23: al-Muhāsibī, al-Wasāyā, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, p. 331 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 54.

Smith describes this path and its goal when she says:

"But when God has stirred the conscience, then it is for man to examine and discipline himself, and to keep continually before the remembrance of death and the hereafter, and so, by attaining mastery of his lower soul, and keeping his eyes fixed on higher things, he will make continual progress in the path of God, and having relinquished the pleasures and temptations of all that would hinder him from the service of his Lord, will attain fellowship to Him."

See Mahmūd, Ustādh al-Sā'īrin, p. 84 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 54.

There are two manuscripts for this work mentioned in the literature, they are:
In this treatise, as the title would suggest, al-Muhäsibi sheds light on a number of issues which concern both the interior and exterior life of the human being. He begins by stressing the importance of hiding some actions from the eyes of people and also when it is permissible to perform such actions openly. This leads quite naturally to the topic of notoriety (al-shuhra) and the seeking of it, where he provides a discussion involving the statements of the previous generations (al-salaf), regarding what is and is not permissible. In addition, he warns of a number of issues which the aspirant should be wary of, as well as discussing the merits of performing supererogatory acts.

Al-Muhäsibi then turns his attention to the heart, its duties, characteristics, its diseases, their cure, how the heart and soul may be purified and the different categories of people in this regard. He then discusses the merits and ordinances of silence and speech, including a section on debate and defence of the honour of a fellow believer. Al-Muhäsibi also presents a section regarding entrusting one's affairs to the will of Alläh (al-tawakkul), its causes, types, the way in which people differ with regard to it and the relationship between this and trusting in Alläh (al-tawakkul).

In the next section al-Muhäsibi returns to his favourite subject of the soul (al-nafs) but here discusses the relationship between it and the heart and how this may result in the attainment of true knowledge (mar'ifa). He also discusses how both heedlessness (al-ghafla) and forgetfulness (al-nisyän) effect the human being, the difference between them, their types and their differing affects on believers and non-believers alike. al-Muhäsibi concludes this work by presenting various juristic issues regarding what is and is not

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1. A manuscript located in Carullah, Istanbul, under number 1101, fols. 114a-145b, being copied in 523/1129.
2. A manuscript located in Där al-Kutüb al-Misriyya under number 464a taşawwuf.
3. A manuscript located in Jämiʿat Fuʿād, under number 26048.
4. A copy found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Abmad al-Jazzār Baḵā, being stored in al-Azhār under number 1367 taşawwuf. This particular manuscript is of extreme importance as it also includes a series of al-Muhäsibi's other works, namely 'Kitāb Masāʾil fi 'l-Zuhd wa Ghayrihl, 'al-Makāṣib' and 'al-Aql'. Consequently, ʿAbd al-Qādir Abmad ʿĀṯā edited the entire manuscript, producing all four works under one title of 'al-Masāʾil fi Amāl al-Qulūb wa ʿl-Jawāriḥ wa ʿl-Makāṣib wa ʿl-Aql, which was published by ʿĀlam al-Kutūb (Cairo) with no date. As for ʿĀṯā's contribution, he placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words as to as to make the meaning more comprehensible.


798 See al-Muhäsibi, al-Masāʾil fi Amāl al-Qulūb wa ʿl-Jawāriḥ wa ʿl-Makāṣib wa ʿl-Aql, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Abmad ʿĀṯā, pp. 91-126; Maḥmūd, ʿUṣūd al-Sāʾirīn, p. 82 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 54.

permissible to look at (al-nazar), as well as the rulings regarding the swearing of oaths (al-nudhūr).

9. (Mukhtaṣar)⁸⁰¹ Kitāb Fahm al-Ṣalāt⁸⁰²

Once again we find that despite the concise nature of this short work it sheds a great deal of light on not only the subject matter but also on al-Muḥāṣibī as a scholar and an author. Here we see al-Muḥāṣibī the jurist (al-faqīḥ) expounding issues concerning one of the most important elements of Islamic faith and practice - prayer (al-ṣalāt). In this sense we see him deal with the classical juristic issues such as ablution (al-wudū')⁸⁰³, ritual bath (al-ghush)⁸⁰⁴, the prerequisites of prayer (shūrūt al-ṣalāt)⁸⁰⁵, the actions and what is read in prayer (afāʾil


⁸⁰¹ Both Maḥmūd and Abū Ghudda include the term `mukhtaṣar' as a prefix to Kitāb Fahm al-Ṣalāt, as is recorded in the original manuscript (see footnote 801: 2 below). This usually indicates that this is an abridgement of a longer work but since there is no indication of the fact that al-Muḥāṣibī wrote a separate work and as this work is already extremely short, the researcher suggests that the term `mukhtaṣar' has been used metaphorically to indicate the concise nature of the work in question.


There are only two published versions of this work:

1. A copy edited by ʿAbd al-Qādir Ahmad ʿĀṭa and which is included within his edited version of al-Waṣāyā, as has been mentioned previously. In producing this version ʿĀṭa has relied upon a copy of this manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyya (Cairo), number 4064 ṭaṣawwuf, which was copied from the original in Carullah, Istanbul, no. 1101, fols. 1a-17b. In addition, ʿĀṭa states that there is another copy from this original in the University of Cairo's library. As for ʿĀṭa's contribution, he placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words as to as to make the meaning more comprehensible. See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-ṣāḥib, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Ahmad ʿĀṭa, p. 54; Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 1, p. 118; Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 56 and Massignon, Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism, p. 163.

2. A version edited by Muhammad ʿUthmān al-Khuṣṭ with the title Fathm al-Ṣalāt - Taʾlīm al-Ṣalāt - al-Kushūrī fī ʾl-Ṣalāt - ʿUqūbāt Ṭārīk al-Ṣalāt, being published by Maktabat al-Qurān (Cairo) in 1984. In producing this version al-Khuṣṭ has relied upon a copy of this manuscript found in the University of Cairo's library, which was copied from the original in Carullah onto microfilm (no. 9678) and is entitled Mukhtaṣar Fahm al-Ṣalāt. This manuscript begins from page 52 and carries on to page 59, each page containing around 20 lines and each line approximately 14 words. As for al-Khuṣṭ's contribution he has placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words as to as to make the meaning more comprehensible. In addition he has included a brief introduction about al-Muḥāṣibī, brief biographical notes for each personality mentioned and added an introductory chapter entitled al-Ibāda min Manẓūr Khārjī, where he discusses various aspects of the relationship between the human being and acts of worship.


⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 363.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 364.
wa aqwâl al-ṣalât), as well as what is forbidden in prayer (mâ nuhiya ‘anhu fi ‘l-ṣalât), in much the same way that we might expect to find in any classical juristic text.

Despite this, however, Kitâb Fâhm al-Ṣalât is not an average fiqh manual, but as we have come to expect from him, he deals with the spiritual elements of prayer also, linking them directly to the juristic points he raises, so as to provide a perfect and complete picture of how to pray in Islam, in a way that not only fulfils the requirements of the Islamic Law (al-sharîa) but is also pleasing to Allâh and gratifying for the soul.

There are many examples of this throughout the work and a few of these will be quoted here to illustrate the point. At the very beginning of the book al-Muḥâsibî begins by saying, "It has been narrated from the Prophet, may Allâh bless him and grant him peace, that he said, 'Purification is part of faith' and some scholars said, 'It has only been termed al-ṣalât because it is the link between the slave and Allâh the Exalted.' Entering into prayer means entry into Allâh's presence and standing before Him to communicate with Him. Thus, everything he [the person praying] performs, in terms of recital (qiṣâra), supplication (du'â) and remembrance (dhâkâ), he is communicating with His Lord the Mighty and Magnificent, as has been narrated in the hadith, 'Indeed, the person praying is communicating with his Lord.' His action [during the prayer] should be sincerity of heart and body." Al-Muḥâsibî, al-Wasâyâ, ed. ‘Abd al-Qâdir Ahmad Atâ, p. 357.

Regarding ablution (al-wudû'), he says, "And as you are taking the water you should extol Allâh in your heart as part of your purification for Him. If you can you should renew your intention for repentance for all the sins between purification of repentance and the purification of ablution as Allâh combined the two saying, 'Indeed Allâh loves those who repent and those who purify themselves' [2:222]. You should reflect whilst washing and wiping every part of your body and think about every sin you committed with them, due to the narrations which have related regarding this." Al-Muḥâsibî, al-Wasâyâ, ed. ‘Abd al-Qâdir Ahmad Atâ, p. 361.

As for the prayer itself he says, "And remember when you enter into the prayer the exaltedness of the One you are communicating with, having a firm intention to shun all that invalidates it [the prayer] and that you have entered it out of obedience to Allâh the Mighty and Magnificent, answering His command. You should understand what you recite from what He has enjoined and forbidden, His promise [of paradise] and threat [of hellfire], and comprehend that He has called upon you to fear Him, so hasten to His obedience and understand that the promise of your reward is great, if you fulfil His command. Force your mind to concentrate on what you recite and nothing else and similarly on what you perform from remembrance (dhâkî), glorification (tasbih), bearing witness (shahâda), bowing (ruki) and prostration (sujrîd), with the intention of transparency in what you perform. You should be fearful, humble, your tongue recites while your heart translates what you know of its commentary; you should comprehend what has been enjoined and forbidden, the promise [of paradise] and the threat [of hellfire], the admonition and etiquettes, the great bounty, the subtle invitation from Allâh, the great bounty upon you of true certainty, which you intend by its comprehension an increase and blessing.

Similarly, everything you recite regarding the previous nations and what came after them; your heart should see it as if it were witnessing such events, as you are reciting, your tongue speaks, your heart imagines and understands. If its concentration wanders then return it by embarrassing it [by reminding it] of Who you are standing in front of and that He sees your heart resisting His understanding and His duties upon you. Understand with the comprehension of someone who considers his heart sick and who is requesting for a cure from Allâh the Mighty and Magnificent; he understands what he recites, secretly seeking sanctuary in Him so as to attain the power of fear, an increase in understanding and an elevated gnosis. Pray as if you were praying a farewell prayer and imagine and fear that you will not pray another prayer for Allâh the Mighty and Magnificent; so perfect it and strive in it for it has been related that the Prophet, may Allâh bless him and grant him peace, said, "If you stand for prayer, pray as if it were your farewell prayer." Al-Muḥâsibî, al-Wasâyâ, ed. ‘Abd al-Qâdir Ahmad Atâ, p. 365.
If we were to pose the question, “What is the intellect and what is its purpose?” then we would find the answer forthcoming in this concise but valuable treatise by al-Muhäsibi. Bearing in mind the great importance of this seemingly innocent question during al-Muḥäsibi’s era, it is clear that he felt it needed addressing, so as to clarify the role of the intellect from his interpretation of Islam’s primary sources.812

In answering this question al-Muḥäsibi begins by defining the intellect (al-`aql) as being an innate quality of the human being and not, as some scholastic theologians (al-mutakallimūn) suggest, the essence of the soul.813 Having dispelled this theory al-Muḥäsibi then turns his attention to the use of the intellect to comprehend and gain understanding of

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809 This term as opposed to that of ‘Maḥiyya’ is recorded by both Mähmüd and Muṣṭafā `Abd al-Qādir Aṭā. See al-Muḥäsibi, Sharaf al-`Aql wa Maḥiyyatuhu, ed. Muṣṭafā `Abd al-Qādir Aṭā (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-İmīyīya, 1986) p. 15 and Mähmüd, Uṣṭād al-Şīrīn, p. 82.

810 Both Smith and al-Quwwatwāli record this addition as part of the title due to its presence in the manuscript. See al-Muḥäsibi, al-`Aql wa Fahrung al-Quʳān, ed. al-Quwwatwāli, p. 193 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 56.

811 There appear to be several available manuscripts of this work:
1. A manuscript found in Carullah, under number 1101, fols. 51b to 53b.
2. A manuscript found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Aḥmad al-Jazzār Bākā, being stored in al-Azhār under number 1367 taṣawwuf. This is part of the manuscript entitled `al-Maṣā’il fi `Amaal al-Qulūb wa ‘L-Jawārīḥ edited by `Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad `Aṭā.
3. A manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyya (Cairo), under number 4064 taṣawwuf.
4. A manuscript found in Jāmi`at Fu‘ād, under number 26048.


Based on these manuscripts three published versions have been produced, they are:
1. A work edited by ʿUṣayn al-Quwwatwāli entitled ‘al-`Aql wa Fahrung al-Quʳān, published originally by Dār al-Fikr in Beirut and then subsequently by Dār al-Kindī, also in Beirut. This edited version is an indispensable addition to the literature concerning al-Muḥäsibi, as al-Quwwatwāli has not only edited two of al-Muḥäsibi’s works in this book but also proved a variety of introductory chapters, dealing with his life, work, thought and era. In addition, he has provided a wealth of information regarding the concept of the intellect up until and including the period of al-Muḥäsibi, as well as assessing al-Muḥäsibi’s own theories regarding this subject. See al-Muḥäsibi, al-`Aql wa Fahrung al-Quʳān, ed. al-Quwwatwāli, pp. 5-192 and 241-260.

It is noticeable that this work is substantiated with quotations from the Qurān in particular. However, he does not suffice with this only but also qualifies his opinions with Prophetic narrations (aḥādīth) and statements recorded from his predecessors (`al-salāf). See al-Muḥäsibi, al-`Aql wa Fahrung al-Quʳān, ed. al-Quwwatwāli, pp. 137-9.

Allāh (al-aql an Allāh ta’ālā), which manifests itself in the form of complete obedience to Him. Al-Muḥāsibī concludes this brief treatise by discussing various issues related to the intellect to clarify the subject further and manifest the true meaning of the intellect and its role in the human being. In summary, the importance of this work cannot be underestimated due to several factors; firstly, this work represents one of the first, if not the first work in Islamic literature to deal with the subject of the intellect and its purpose within the human being. Secondly, this work is indicative of the historical era in which al-Muḥāsibī lived, as it addresses the very essence of the debate which raged between the so called ‘rationalists’ (al-Mu’tazila) and the ‘orthodox’ scholastic trend, represented by the traditionists (al-muhaddithūn). Finally, in this work al-Muḥāsibī lays the methodological foundation for the remainder of his written legacy, as much of what he discusses in his other works is dependent on the ground rules put in place in this treatise.

11. Kitāb Ḩkām al-Tawba wa radd Ḩazālim al-‘Ibād wa Khalās minhā qab al-Ma’ād

This treatise deals with the issue of repentance as its title would suggest and in it al-Muḥāsibī affirms his position that repentance is a duty upon the devotees as imposed on them by Allāh. In addition, he employs this work to discuss the major (al-kabīra, pl. al-kabā’īr) and minor sins, as well as affirming the need to repent for both.

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816 The great irony of this being that by trying to defend the position of the al-muhaddithūn by using a rationalist approach, so as to counter the stance of the al-Mu’tazila, he was then accused of being ‘unorthodox’ by the very people he was trying to defend!
818 This is the full title as given by Smith, whereas Mahmūd gives only Ḩkām al-Tawba as the name of this work. Both researchers quote only one manuscript for this treatise, this being the one located in Cairo under ṣaṣawwuf shin 3, being copied in 1173/1759 and it also appears to have been edited. Muḥammad Abū al-Qādir Aṭā states that he is in the process of publishing this work but the researcher was unable to source this published version. See al-Muḥāsibī, Muṣṭatab al-Naṣf, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Qādir Aṭā (Cairo, Dār al-ʾlṭisām, 1986) p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, Kitāb al-ʾIlm, ed. Mazālī, p. 29; Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāšt al-ʿArabī, vol. 1, pp. 117-18; Muḥammad, Uṣūd al-Sāʾirīn, p. 86; Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 56-7 and Van Ess, Die Gedankenwelt, p. 12.

In addition, this work should not be confused with another work entitled ‘al-Tawba’, attributed to al-Muḥāsibī and edited by Abū al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā. This work is in fact a compilation of works on the subject of repentance containing a work entitled ‘Aḥkām al-Tawba’ by Abū al-Qādir b. ʾĪsāʾīl al-Nābulusī, an appendix on the topic by the editor and al-Muḥāsibī’s ‘Bad’ Man Anāba ila Allāh’. It would seem that the nature of this work of al-Muḥāsibī’s (see pages 216-8 above) and in particular the term ‘Anāba, having a similar contextual meaning to ‘tawba’ caused it to be included with the rest of these works. However, this seems to have been a rather rash decision bearing in mind the fact that al-Muḥāsibī has another work with a very similar title. See ‘al-Muḥāsibī’, al-Tawba, ed. Abū al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā (Cairo, Dār al-ʾPādīa, 1977).
819 See Muḥammad, Uṣūd al-Sāʾirīn, p. 86 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 56-7.
12. Kitāb al-Mustarshid

Despite this being one of al-Muhāsibī’s shorter works it is nevertheless a very important one. This lies in the fact that this book contains all of the ideas and advice of the author

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820 This is the name cited by Smith (An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 57) and Maḥmūd (Listāh al-Sārīrīn, p. 86). In addition the book has two published versions:
1. An edited and annotated version by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda. This copy has proven very popular, as it is in its fifth edition, and has done a great deal to publicise the life and works of al-Muhāsibī. It was first published in the late sixties and was consequently translated into Turkish by ‘Ali Arslān in Istanbul. Abū Ghudda’s work on this book is indeed very useful as he has provided considerable information regarding the life of al-Muhāsibī in the biographical section of the introduction and in particular regarding the dispute with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. In addition to this he has provided profuse footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, referencing the ḥadīth and general narrations from the ‘ṣalāf’ (see footnote 3 above) according to the appropriateness of the subject matter in the text.

In producing the edited work Abū Ghudda used a personal copy of the manuscript whose handwriting is clear and has very few mistakes; it consists of 33 small pages, was probably written after the 10th/16th century by his own estimation and has no name attributed to it except that on page three the following was written in small dots, “Written by Aḥmad b. al-Ḥāj Ismāʿīl.”

In addition to this personal copy of the text Abū Ghudda also mentions another copy in the Maḥād al-Makhdūṭ al-ʿArabīyya (Cairo). This version was copied from an original in the Municipal Library in Alexandria, no. 13/3023 jīm: it consists of 14 small pages and is a North African hand but similar to the first it has neither the copyist’s name nor a date. Thus, Abū Ghudda compared both of these manuscripts in producing this version of al-Muhāsibī’s work and entitled it ‘Risālat al-Mustarshidīn’. Due to the quality of the editor’s work and the academic nature of this version it will be this edition of the work which will be relied upon in the current thesis. See al-Muhāsibī, Risālat al-Mustarshidīn, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 3-32 and al-Muhāsibī, Kitāb al-ʿIlm, ed. Maẓālī, p. 26.

2. An edited and annotated version by Amin Nuʿmān Nār, published by Đār wa Maktābat al-Ḥilāl, Beirut, in 1983 and entitled ‘Risālat al-Mustarshadīn wa Kayfa Yataqarrub al-Insān ilā Rabbihi’. This version was produced after that of Abū Ghudda’s and the editor clarifies that he was well aware of this copy but wished to produce a version with a minimum of annotation, so that the reader would not lose himself within the footnotes at the expense of benefiting from the main text. To this effect the editor also provided footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, referenced the ḥadīth mentioned and included a brief introduction to the life and works of al-Muhāsibī. It is not clear however what (if any) manuscripts he relied upon while completing this publication. See al-Muhāsibī, Risālat al-Mustarshadin wa Kayfa Yataqarrub al-Insān ilā Rabbihi, ed. Amin Nuʿmān Nār (Beirut, Đār wa Maktābat al-Ḥilāl, 1983) pp. 5-12.

It should also be noted here that in addition to what has been quoted above, there are other manuscripts mentioned in the literature, they are:

i) Another manuscript in Đār al-Kūṭub al-Ḥiṣāriyya, Cairo, no. 3. šībīn, ṭaṣawwufūs as alluded to by Smith.

ii) A copy of this manuscript in The Chester Beatty Library under catalogue number 4985.

iii) A copy of this manuscript in the Khizāna al-ʿIlmiyya al-Ṣubayḥīyya under number 5/202 (cat. no. 556).


In addition to the books produced regarding ‘Risālat al-Mustarshadīt, there is also a set of 12 tapes (11 hours approx.) produced by Deen Productions, in 2000, entitled ‘Purification of the Soul: al-Muhāsibī’s Risalat al-Mustarshideen’ by the American scholar Zaid Shākir who reads the original text in Arabic, translates it into English and provides a commentary by himself and additional notes from Abū Ghudda’s edited version. The commentary is particularly useful in the modern context and the translation is indispensable. See Shākir, Zaid, Purification of the Soul: al-Muhāsibī’s Risalat al-Mustarshideen (12 tapes [11 hours approx.], Newhaven, Deen Productions, 2000).
that we find explained at length in his other works. Thus, this treatise summarises his teachings in much the same way that the classical short texts (matn, pl. mutūn) of later writers did, which then would be memorised by students and studied later with their accompanying commentaries (sharh, pl. shurūh). Many of these mutūn would often be put into poetry to make memorisation easier, and here once again we find a common factor with this work as much of the text is rhythmical. For the sake of analogy, Kitāb al-Mustarshid fulfils the role of such a matn, whereas al-Muḥāsibī's longer works such as al-Ri'āya serve the purpose of a sharh.

The work itself takes the usual form of a series of counsels for the seeker of guidance, which are short, concise, rich in meaning and often build on one another to link the various subjects the author wishes to present. The subject matter of Kitāb al-Mustarshid is, as already mentioned, a summary of al-Muḥāsibī's thought and therefore, it contains the various subjects already discussed in detail above. Although it is slightly repetitive in parts, al-Muḥāsibī links the repetitive parts of Kitāb al-Mustarshid, to new topics so as to create a different link between them.

In summary, Kitāb al-Mustarshid is a concise manual for the wayfarer journeying to Allāh, which maps out the path before him and shows him how to adorn himself with all the etiquette and fine manners that the sharh endorses, as Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhlūf says, after discussing the nature of 'true' taṣawwuf, “And in ‘Risālat al-Mustarshidin' there is evidence to support what we have mentioned, as there is in it: instruction for the souls (tarbiya al-nūfūs), refinement of human nature and true knowledge for anyone who reads it precisely and carefully.”

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821 They would be subsequently termed ‘didactic poem’ (manẓūma, pl. manẓūmāt).
822 This begs the question, ‘Was this work written in reply to a student's request for a short treatise advising the student or a summary of the author's teachings, or did al-Muḥāsibī pre-empt all of this by writing the work to serve such a purpose?”
823 For example, whilst discussing the characteristics of the spiritual instructors (ṣifāt al-murabbīyīn) he says, “Seek [knowledge of] narrations from those whose knowledge increased them in fear (khashya), action in insight (baṣira) and intellect in gnosis (ma‘rifa). Your separation from their method is a loss of etiquette, so blame no one but yourself and the characteristics of the sincere are not hidden from the people of knowledge. Know that every thought has an etiquette, every indication some knowledge and that this can only be differentiated by understanding Allāh's intended meaning, so derive certainty in your heart from his address ... such people are a guarded treasure, whoever forsakes them for the worldly life is deceived; they are your foundation in times of trial, your reliance from emptiness, if you are impoverished they will suffice you and if they call upon their Lord they would not forget you: “They are the party of Allāh, indeed it is the party of Allāh that will succeed.” (58:22) Al-Muḥāsibī, Risālat al-Mustarshidin, ed. Ābu Ghudda, pp. 101-8 passim and al-Shāmī, Mawā'id al-Imām al-Mūrith al-Muḥāsibī, pp. 33-6.
824 See Maḥmūd, U斯塔d al-Sā'irin, p. 87 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 57.
This treatise is one of the longest of al-Muḥāṣibī's works to reach us intact and therefore is of considerable importance in clarifying further his teaching and thought. This point is compounded by the fact that "Fahm al-Qur'ān" is one of al-Muḥāṣibī's works in which he discusses many of the theological issues that were prevalent at the time. In essence "Fahm al-Qur'ān" is not only a book which discusses how the Qur'ān should be comprehended but is also concerned with how belief in Allāh should be understood and is a refutation of those who do not conform to the theological methodology therein.

To this effect we can identify six categories which al-Muḥāṣibī discusses:

a) The Qur'ān
Since the Qur'ān has such an essential and important role in the understanding of Islam and since it is 'the guardian of the intellect', al-Muḥāṣibī uses this section to discuss this fundamental element of the religion. In doing so al-Muḥāṣibī extols the virtues of the Qur'ān itself (faḍā'il al-Qur'ān), describing the various qualities that it contains and the various disciplines related to it. In addition, he also makes mention of the excellence of Qur'ānic reciters (faḍā'il al-qurrā'), their virtues, merits, etiquettes and the special position given to them by Allāh.

b) The jurisprudential issues within the Qur'ān (fiqh al-Qur'ān)
Since the Qur'ān is also the primary source of Islamic Law, there are a series of disciplines that are required for the reader of the Qur'ān to understand so that they can comprehend its legal aspects. In this regard al-Muḥāṣibī sheds light on several of these legalistic elements, including the abrogated and abrogating verses (al-nāslkh wa 'l-mansūkh), its precise and ambiguous verses (al-muhkam wa 'l-mutashābih), the general and specific verses (al-āmm wa 'l-khāṣṣ), as well as its unusual vocabulary (gharib al-Qur'ān).

c) The permissibility of Abrogation (al-nāskh)

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826 It is interesting that both Smith and Maḥmūd consider this work to be lost; in fact Ahmed Ateş described a manuscript of this work as being in the Selimiye library in Edirne, under number 951, fols. 82b to 131b and being copied in the 8th/14th to 9th/15th centuries. See al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-′Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 28; Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-′Arabī, vol. 1, p. 119; Maḥmūd, Uṣūd al-Sūrīn, pp. 86–7; Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 59; Masson, Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism, p. 163; Van Ess, Die Gedankenwelt, p. 12 and Ateş, Ahmed, "Two Works of al-Muḥāṣibī", in Festschrift Werner Castel: zum siebzigsten Geburstag 5 März 1966 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern, herausgegeben von Erwin Gräf (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1968) pp. 37–9.

There is only one published version of this work, having been edited by Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī entitled 'al-′Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān', published originally by Dār al-Fikr in Beirut and then subsequently by Dār al-Kindī, also in Beirut. See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-′Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān, ed. al-Quwwatī, pp. 239–505.

827 Ibid., pp. 246–7.

828 Ibid., p. 248.
Having discussed abrogation in the previous section, al-Muḥāṣibi elaborates further here to clarify when abrogation is permissible in the Qurān and when it is not. From the aspects of the Qurān in which there is no room for abrogation he includes the names and attributes of Allāh (asmāʾ Allāh wa ʿṣīfātuhu) and information given by Allāh regarding past or future events (akhbār Allāh taʿalā ʿammā kāna wa yakūn). Therefore as a result, al-Muḥāṣibi concludes that abrogation is only permissible in issues which involve legal rulings, as it is only that which has been ordered and that which is forbidden (al-amr wa ʿl-nahy) that can be changed.

d) al-Muʿtazila

Bearing in mind that al-Muʿtazila were the foremost sect at the time of al-Muḥāṣibi, due to the state support of the Caliph, it is hardly surprising that he deals with them in a specific part of the current work. This is compounded by the fact that many of the opinions, which differed from those of the traditionists (al-rnuhaddithīn) of the time, were misinterpretations of concepts found in the Qurān and therefore, it is to be expected that al-Muḥāṣibi, being grounded in the traditionist method of learning, would deal with them here. Consequently, al-Muḥāṣibi refutes their views, stating that they went to extremes in their use of analogy (al-qiyās), in addition to their ignorance of the Qurān's interpretation and its sciences.

e) Abrogation in Legal Rulings

Having dealt with the erroneous views of various sects during his era and their refutation, al-Muḥāṣibi then turns his attention to subjects which would be traditionally termed 'Qurānic Sciences' (ʿulūm al-Qurān) and in particular, the issue of abrogation (al-naskh).

In this section al-Muḥāṣibi identifies fifteen categories of abrogation, based on his extensive knowledge of the Qurān, once again proving his authority on the subject.
Al-Muhäsibi concludes this work with a discussion of various fields of knowledge related to Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir al-Qur'ân) and in particular those related to linguistics, such as grammar (al-naḥw) and rhetoric (al-balāgha). In this sense al-Muhäsibi discusses the bringing forward and delay of certain words (al-taqdīm wa 'l-ta'khīr) to create emphasis, ellipsis (al-idmār), additional words (ḥurūf al-zawā'id) to give the meaning more depth and eloquence and the separation and combination of words (al-faṣl wa 'l-waṣl) to give the meaning continuance. In summary, one cannot underestimate the importance of this work with regard to his thought and teaching. His position regarding various issues of the day are presented here, including his refutation of what he considered innovation (bid'a) in the religion, proposed by the sects which were manifest during his lifetime, such as the 'rationalists' (al-Mu'tazila) and the Shi'ites (al-Rāfi'īa). In addition to his vast knowledge of Islam's belief system displayed in this work, he also demonstrates his equally extensive knowledge regarding the Qur'ān, as he discusses topics which had not reached fruition in a written form at that time and therefore, his contribution to the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir al-Qur'ān) as a primordial science is also considerable.

14. Kitāb al-`Ilm

This once again is a very short treatise by al-Muhäsibi but despite its concise nature, it sheds a great deal of light upon al-Muhäsibi's own particular understanding of this facet of Islamic learning. He classifies knowledge (al-`ilm) as being of three types: firstly, the knowledge of legal matters, quite literally the ḥalāl and the ḥarām, which are rulings

834 Ibid., pp. 259-60.

There is only one published copy of this work edited by Muḥammad al-`Abid Mazāli and published by Dār al-Tūnisiyya in 1975. In editing this work Mazāli used the following manuscripts:
1. A manuscript located in the Ambrosiana library (Milan), which consists of six pages in a beautiful naskh hand. Each page of the manuscript contains 23 lines of multicoloured calligraphy and was copied in 1066/1656.
2. A manuscript located in the Shahid `Ali library, Istāna, which consists of fols. 32 bā to 34 alif, in an equally elegant hand. Each page of the manuscript contains 25 lines but there is no mention of the copier, the owner or the date of the manuscript. See al-Muhäsibi, Kitāb al-`Ilm, ed. Mazāli, pp. 41-7.

This edited work is a particularly valuable addition to the literature, as it appears that the editor is of Arab descent but lives in Switzerland and thus, he was familiar with not only the Arabic sources but the European ones also. Consequently, he provides an invaluable survey of the works of al-Muhäsibi, an account of his personality, his affect on later writers and a discussion of al-Muhäsibi's concept of al-`Ilm in this and his other works. See al-Muhäsibi, Kitāb al-`Ilm, ed. Mazāli, pp. 13-78; Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-'Arabi, vol. 1, p. 117 and Löfgren, Oscar and Traini, Renato, Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Amrosiana (vol. 1 [Antico Fondo and Medio Fondo], Milan, Neri Pozza Editore, 1958).
concerning this world and as such, are considered as outward knowledge (‘ilm al-żāhir).\textsuperscript{836} The second type of knowledge is that which concerns the affairs of the hereafter, dealing with state of the heart and soul, along with their various diseases and states and as such, is inward knowledge (‘ilm al-bātin).\textsuperscript{837} The third and final form of knowledge is that concerning Allāh and the manner in which He deals with His creation in this life and the next.\textsuperscript{838}

In addition, al-Muhāsibi informs us of three categories of people who in turn involve themselves in each type of knowledge.\textsuperscript{839} As for the first group, who are concerned with legal issues only, they have an outward appearance of piety but in reality they are corrupted internally, as they have allotted none of their time or effort to curing the heart and soul of their diseases. As for the second group, they are those who have devoted themselves to the identification of every internal fault and every hidden sin, being concerned constantly with the second type of knowledge in their quest for purification. The third group are the elite, having concerned themselves with a knowledge which is “a bottomless ocean”, as they are the scholars from the people of true faith.\textsuperscript{840}

15. Muʿātabat al-Nafs\textsuperscript{841}

\textsuperscript{836} Al-Muhāsibi himself however does not criticise this knowledge for its own sake, in fact he considers it to be an exalted knowledge (‘ilm jaḥīḥ), which is required by everyone according to their need and is a compulsory duty on the community as a whole (fard ‘alā l-kiyāfa) to learn and teach such knowledge. Thus, his contention is not with this knowledge as such but with the sole study of it to the exclusion of the other two types. See al-Muhāsibi, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazāli, pp. 82-3.

\textsuperscript{837} Al-Muhāsibi stresses the importance of this form of knowledge to the extent that he considers it to be compulsory on every individual, no matter what their state. See al-Muhāsibi, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{838} Ibid., p. 81; Maḥmūd, Uṣṭādh al-Ṣā’irīn, p. 86 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{839} This once again is indicative of the effect al-Muhāsibi’s environment had upon him, as he was clearly affected by the juristic and theological debates which surrounded him and were prevalent at the time. Ever the guide, al-Muhāsibi was clearly trying to define the path of the aspiring student, by advising him to avoid secondary matters and concentrate on the true goal.

\textsuperscript{840} See al-Muhāsibi, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazāli, pp. 82-92; Maḥmūd, Uṣṭādh al-Ṣā’irīn, pp. 86-7 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{841} There are two published versions of this treatise, they are:

1. A version edited by Muhammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAtā and published by Dār al-Ītīṣām (Cairo), in 1986. In editing the text ʿAtā has relied on the manuscript found in al-Azhar University, no. 1039, pp. 1-19. This manuscript is of very poor quality both in terms of the script and the mistakes of the copier, as well as being affected by dampness. The manuscript itself consists of 20 pages, with 17 lines to a page and 10 words to a line. In addition, ʿAtā mentions a second manuscript in the private library of his father (ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAtā) but this copy is incomplete and therefore was only used for reference purposes. As for ʿAtā’s work on the manuscript, he has followed the traditional route of producing a version with a minimum of annotation, provided footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, references the verses of the Qurān and hadith and includes a brief introduction to the life and works of al-Muhāsibi. See al-Muhāsibi, Muʿātabat al-Nafs, ed. Muhammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAtā (Cairo, Dār al-Ītīṣām, 1986) pp. 24-6; al-Muhāsibi, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 34; Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 1, p. 118 and al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, Fihras al-Kutub al-Mawjūda bi l-Maktaba al-Azhariyya ilā 1366 (Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, n.d.) vol. 3, p. 632.
This is yet another short treatise by al-Muḥāṣibi expounding the virtues of returning back to Allāh, causing the human being to reassess the way in which he lives his life. The work concerns three main topics: that of the heart (al-qalb), that of the soul (al-nafs) and the relationship of both of these with their Lord. Thus, the primary section concerning the heart deals with the means by which the heart can regain its awareness of its Sustainer to the extent that it becomes aware of Allāh's observance of both the inward and outward actions of the human being. The advantage of this is that faith in the divine decree (al-qadar) becomes a reality and the constant awareness of Allāh guides ultimately to the straight path (al-ṣirāt al-mustaqim). In addition, al-Muḥāṣibi discusses the diseases of the heart, warning of their effect on making the heart hard and indifferent to the remembrance of Allāh, clarifying that this leads ultimately to Allāh's rejection of such a hard heart.

As for al-Muḥāṣibi's treatment of the soul, he begins by reminding it that it is unable to bear the wrath of Allāh, extolling it to the remembrance of death, to be ashamed in the presence of its Lord and to compare the punishment of the hereafter to its pleasures.

When discussing the relationship of the human being with his Lord, al-Muḥāṣibi reminds the wayward soul to always seek the aid of Allāh through supplication, to always bring to mind that Allāh forgives all sins and to remember that it is destitute without the provision of Allāh and His mercy.

While following al-Muḥāṣibi's exposition of the aforementioned subjects the reader is struck by the unusual style that he employs throughout. He continually addresses each subject, i.e. the heart, soul and Allāh, as if they were in front of him and he is conversing with them directly. One feels that these are an outpouring of al-Muḥāṣibi's thoughts, feelings and emotions, which have been written down and which as a result, give us a very intimate view of the writer's personality, thus making it an important addition to the literature concerning him.

2. A version edited by Muhammad ʿIṣā Ridwān being published by Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya (Beirut), in 1986. This copy is included with the editor's version of Kitāb al-Barth wa ʿl-Nushūr mentioned below (see footnote 869 below). Although Ridwān makes no mention of which manuscripts he used it can be assumed that he used the same sources, as the literature makes no mention of a second manuscript. See al-Muḥāṣibi, Muʿātabat al-Nafs, ed. Muḥammad ʿIṣā Ridwān (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1986) pp. 39-72 and al-Muḥāṣibi, Kitāb al-ʾIlm, ed. Mazāli, p. 34.

This is an interesting addition to the works of al-Muḥāsibī as it sheds light on his own path in searching for knowledge of the hereafter. The reason for this is that this work, like much of what al-Muḥāsibī wrote, takes the form of a conversation, where the aspirant asks his guide regarding the path, returning back to Allāh. The difference here however, is that in this particular case, al-Muḥāsibī himself is the questioner. This point is clarified by the editor, ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, when he says:


There are two published copies of this work:

1. The first version has been edited by ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā. During the course of editing the text Aṭā has relied on what he terms "The only surviving manuscript of this work", which is in the Shahīd ‘Alī library (Turkey) and which has been copied to microfilm by Marḥad Iḥyā‘ al-Makhtūtāt al-Arabīyya (Cairo). Thus, Aṭā made his own copy of the original and edited the text from its 'only source'. In addition, he includes references for the Quranic verses and Prophetic narrations, a comparison of this book to al-Muḥāsibī’s other works, includes the statements of other Islamic scholars and begins by giving an introduction on the importance of understanding the actions of the heart and its effect on the development of the Muslim individual. This particular edited version was also included within the editor’s version of al-Waṣāyā but without the introduction regarding ‘the actions of the heart’.

2. The second edited version is by Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī and published in the Lebanese journal al-Fikr al-Islāmī. The work was published over a series of months beginning with an introductory article in December 1983 and continuing until February 1985. In the editing of this work al-Quwwatī mentions the following three manuscripts:
   a) A manuscript found in the Carullah section of the Sūleymaniye library in Istanbul under number 1728.
   b) A copy of a) found in the Erdine library.
   c) A manuscript found in the Rabat library, in which al-Muḥāsibī’s work is interpolated with statements from al-Shādhili (d. 656/1258) and consequently is unsuitable to be used in editing the final work.

It is interesting to note here that this edited version in far longer than that of Aṭā; in fact the point at which Aṭā’s version ends al-Quwwatī continues with another two pages of text, this being in the November 1984 edition of al-Fikr al-Islāmī. Not only this but al-Quwwatī continues for another three issues, i.e. December 1984, January 1985 and February 1985. In addition, these are only the issues that the researcher was able to locate and it is clear from the February 1985 issue that al-Quwwatī had not finished with al-Qaṣḍ wa ‘l-Ruṭṣr ilā Allāh, in this issue either. Therefore, it is absolutely certain that the version edited by Aṭā is incomplete and that al-Quwwatī had found additions in the manuscripts that he used to edit his version of the work.


It could also be for this reason that neither Smith, Ṭāhirī nor al-Quwwatī mention this during their discussions regarding the works of al-Muḥāsibī. There seems to be little doubt however that this work is al-Muḥāsibī’s as it begins with the statement, “The shaykh ʿAbū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṭāhirī b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, may Allāh be satisfied with him, said ...” After a customary introduction praising Allāh and sending peace and salutations upon His Messenger, he continues by saying, “These are questions regarding gnosis (al-maʿrīfah), knowledge of the path of the hereafter and the aim and the return to Allāh the Exalted, as He wishes and from Allāh comes [all] success, if He wills.” (See Al-Muḥāsibī, al-Waṣāyā, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, pp. 219-221 and al-Muḥāsibī, al-Qaṣḍ wa ‘l-Ruṭṣ r ilā Allāh, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, pp. 31-3). In addition there seems little purpose in attributing a book to yourself, when if fact it contains the teachings of your
This book runs the same course as most of his works: answers given in reply to questions proposed by his companions but in this book he says that he is the questioner and that Muhammad b. Müsä `Abū Ja`far replies. He also mentions him in `A`mäl al-Quılıb wa `I`Jawārīh' with the name `Abū Ja`far' only without mentioning Muḥammad b. Müsä. 848

As Aṭā has just mentioned, this work covers many of the topics which are included in his other works, but this particular source is also very important as it discusses many topics which are not included, for example in such works as `al-Ri`āya', like gnostics (al-ma`rifa), and wisdom (al-ḥikma). 849 As for the actual content of al-Qaṣd wa `l-Rujū' iľā Allāh, Aṭā summarises it saying:

The book is a summary regarding the return to Allāh beginning with repentance and ending with the fear of Allāh, passing through honesty (al-ṣidq), gnostics (al-ma`rifa), wisdom (al-ḥikma), asceticism (al-zuhd), scrupulousness (al-warā), certainty (al-yaqīn) and satisfaction (al-ridā), as well as other stages that a Muslim must pass through on his path to Allāh. 850 851

17. Kitāb al-Khalwa wa `l-Tanaqqul fī `l-Ibāda wa Darajāt al-`Ābidīn 852
Once again the title of this work is particularly appropriate as it describes concisely the subject matter. Al-Muḥāṣībi begins by extolling the virtues of spiritual retreat from the worldly life (al-khalwa) and in particular when this is performed with constant reading of and reflection upon the book of Allāh. He then continues by describing various states of worship - all internal of course - and various degrees and levels people reach regarding each of them. He facilitates this by presenting a series of counsels and answers to questions proposed by a would-be aspirant on the path to Allāh.\textsuperscript{853}

The first virtue that al-Muḥāṣībi discusses is that of certainty in Allāh (al-yāqīn bi Allāh), which is the basis of faith. The next best action after this is the acknowledgement of bounties (maʿrīfat al-nīʿam) and as a result the manifestation of gratitude (al-shukr). Al-Muḥāṣībi then clarifies the various states that a devotee may find himself in and the ability to progress from one stage to the next, which he considers to be intrinsically related to the knowledge a human being has of his own soul’s faults (ʿuyūb al-nafs).\textsuperscript{854}

He continues by urging the reader to maintain silence and to consider any speech that he is forced to make as a disaster which has struck. In addition, he warns of the importance of opposing one’s desires as this is a quality which all people suffer from.\textsuperscript{855} He completes this section of the work by discussing one of his familiar topics, that of ostentation (al-riyāḍ) and rulers (al-mulūk) are singled out in particular for criticism.\textsuperscript{856}

Al-Muḥāṣībi also discusses the importance of distinguishing between fear (al-khawf) and hope (al-raja) and that both of these will not be fulfilled except through a process of intimidating the soul (al-tarāḥib) and awakening its desire (al-targḥiḥ).\textsuperscript{857} He then furnishes us with his views regarding the importance of truthfulness (al-sīdq) in the actions performed for the sake of Allāh and even more importantly, the essence of the action, the intention (al-irāḍa). This concept is further developed and its importance discussed with regard to the compulsory acts (al-farāʾiḍ) in particular and in addition, the supplementary acts (al-nawāfīl), as well as the internal virtues of fear (al-khawf) and hope (al-raja).\textsuperscript{858}

Al-Muḥāṣībi concludes this work with a long discussion concerning the importance of maintaining a good opinion with regard to Allāh (hasn al-ẓann) and restraining oneself

\textsuperscript{855} Al-Muḥāṣībi comments, “And know that you are in a time when desires have overcome the ‘red’ and the ‘black’, the knowledgeable and the ignorant, with regard to the affairs of this world and the next.” This once again shows how critical al-Muḥāṣībi was of his society. See al-Muḥāṣībi, Kitāb al-Khalwa, ed. al-Yasūʿi, al-Mashriq, Kānin al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955, pp. 50-1.
\textsuperscript{856} Ibid., pp. 51-4.
\textsuperscript{857} Ibid., Tamüz/Tashrīn, 1955, pp. 451-6.
\textsuperscript{858} Ibid., pp. 451-62.
from despondency and despair (za'ir 'an al-qunūf), as well as discussing the necessity of realising the dangers of sin (al-say'a) and preoccupying oneself with the performance of good (al-hasanah).\textsuperscript{859}

In summary this work, as with 'Ādāb al-Nufūs before it\textsuperscript{860}, is representative of much of al-Muḥāsibi's teachings in his other works, in particular 'al-Ri'āya\textsuperscript{861} and 'al-Naṣā'i̇\textsuperscript{862}. Nevertheless, this work, as with 'Ādāb al-Nufūs is of equal importance, as it not only summarises his teaching in a concise manner but also, to some degree at least, reflects the period in which he lived.

18. Kitāb Masā'il fi 'l-Zuhd (wa Ghayrihā)\textsuperscript{863}\textsuperscript{864}

From the title of this work it would be reasonable to expect a discussion regarding ascetic theology in Islam (al-zuhd) and in this sense al-Muḥāsibi does not disappoint but it would be misleading to think that this work deals exclusively with asceticism, as in fact it deals with numerous issues. He does begin this treatise however with the discussion concerning al-zuhd and clarifies its various types and rulings, as well as discussing the characteristics of the true ascetic (al-zāhīd). Al-Muḥāsibi then turns his attention to the topics of silence (al-sāmī) and reflection (al-fikra), stressing their important affect on the heart and the internal faculties they bestow. He then presents his views regarding the true nature of wealth (al-
ghinā), poverty (al-faqīr) and gratitude (al-shukr) for the bounties bestowed upon the slave by his Lord.865

In the following sections al-Muḥāṣibī deals with familiar topics which he has also dealt with in his other works such as arrogance (al-kibr), ostentation (al-riyā'), satanic incitement (al-waswisa) and the dangers of the desires (al-hawa).866 He continues by discussing the best of the acts of worship, in which he discusses such topics as the knowledge of Allāh (al-īlīn bi Allāh), prayer (al-salāt), having sympathy with those less fortunate and coming to the aid of others.867 Al-Muḥāṣibī continues this work with a discussion of the way a person can identify the suggestions of Satan (ḥadīth al-Shayṭān) from those of the soul (ḥadīth al-nafs) and concludes with a number of beneficial counsels on a variety of subjects.868

19. Al-Ḥasad al-Dā' wa 'l-Dawā'

This work is a particularly surprising addition to the literature as, before visiting Saudi Arabia, the researcher had never come across it. However, after having acquired a copy of the work it became obvious why; this book is no more than an edited extract of al-Muḥāṣibī’s 'al-Riḍāyā', namely the author's introduction and 'Kitāb al-Ḥasad' and as such, will not be treated as a separate work here.869

20. Kitāb al-Baʿth wa 'l-Nushūl870


867 See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Masāʾil fi A`māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāri, ed. `Abd al-Qādir Aḥmād `Aṭā, pp. 73-80; Maḥmūd, U斯塔dh al-Sāerin, p. 83 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 56.


869 To term this work "an edited extract" may also be misleading as the 'editor' has not edited the work as such, having relied upon the version of 'al-Riḍāyā' published by Dār al-Maʿārif and with an introduction by ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (see footnote 691: 2 above). The 'editor's' contribution therefore, is mainly in the field of ḥadīth literature and verification. See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Ḥasad al-Dā' wa 'l-Dawā'; ed. Muḥammad Shākir al-Sharīf (Riyadh, Dār al-Ṭayba, 1995) pp. 18-23.


In addition there is a copy of this manuscript in the Islamic University of Medina, under catalogue number 455, this being a copy of the original found in al-Maktaba al-Zāhirīyya in Damascus. See al-Faqīhi (ed.), 'Ali Muḥammad Nāṣir, al-Nashr al-Biblīyārāfīyya li Makhtūṭat al-Maktaba al-Markāzīyya bi 'l-Jāmiʿa al-Īlāmīyya, (Medina, Islamic University, 1983) p. 222.

Consequently, there is only one published version of this work, being edited by Muḥammad ʿĪsā Riʾwān and published by Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥilmīyya in 1986.
This, as the title suggests, is an eschatological work charting the events that will occur after death and the details of which have been discussed by other authors. The researcher will not attempt an overview here as this work is said to be attributed to al-Muḥāṣibī only and is in fact not one of his works at all.

21. (Kitāb) Dāwā Dā al-Qalb
Sprenger attributes this work to al-Muḥāṣibī but he would appear to be incorrect and as such, it will not be a treated as one of al-Muḥāṣibī's works here.

5.2 The Works Surviving in Manuscript

1. Risālāt al-ʿAzāmā

872 Mahmūd is the most ardent supporter of this view and quotes the following reasons as to why he is certain that book is not the work of al-Muḥāṣibī:
1. Al-Muḥāṣibī has already authored a brilliant work on the same subject, namely 'al-Tawāhhum' and therefore it makes no sense that he would have written another work of a much poorer quality on the same topic.
2. In his work 'al-Tawāhhum al-Muḥāṣibī deals with the events of the resurrection in an organised and sequential manner: firstly, he deals with those who were disobedient to Allāh, describing the manner of their account, recompense and ultimate punishment in hellfire. He then turns his attention to describing the pleasure of those who preserved the rights of Allāh and their joy at being entered into paradise. Finally, he takes the reader slowly to the final scene of the hereafter, the divine vision of Allāh, reserved exclusively for His beloved elite, which is the ultimate reward and pleasure of paradise. As for the book 'al-Baṭh wa 'l-Nushūr', the sequence of events differ entirely and in fact take place in an unorganised and illogical manner. The divine vision of Allāh, for example comes in the middle passages, taking the emphasis away entirely from the greatness of this ultimate reward.
3. Finally, Mahmūd considers this work laughable due to the many superstitious stories quoted within it, thus making it impossible to be from the hand of al-Muḥāṣibī. See Mahmūd, Uṣūdāt al-Sāʾirīn, pp. 71-2. In addition to what has been mentioned by Mahmūd, on reading 'al-Baṭh wa 'l-Nushūr' one is struck by the complete lack of scholarly ability exhibited in this work. There are few facts based on classical Islamic theology, in which as has already been noted, al-Muḥāṣibī was somewhat of an expert, having even written refutations on various theological points. Similarly, al-Muḥāṣibī's works, in particular works such as 'al-Tawāhhum', display the penmanship of an accomplished author able to create and express ideas fluently but once again the style of 'al-Baṭh wa 'l-Nushūr' is particularly poor, so much so that one does not feel as though one is reading the work of such an accomplished scholar. In summary, this work can be excluded from the list of works written by al-Muḥāṣibī, as it is hardly befitting that it should be attributed to him.
This work is a refutation against al-Thanawiyya who had started to arrive in Baghdad and began spreading an atmosphere of atheism (zandaqa) and scepticism (tashkik). During the course of this work al-Muḥāṣibī discusses the unity of Allāh, His oneness and the impossibility of there being a second or third deity. Al-Muḥāṣibī's evidence for this depends upon the unity of creation; that every created being has a known place in the scheme of things and a purpose for its creation. In addition, every created being is dependent on another and as such the creation as a whole is like a chain with many links; if one were to break, then the whole chain would collapse. This unity of creation thus is indicative of a sole Creator Who is bounteous to His creation, as he provides them with sustenance from the very moment they are brought into existence. In addition, al-Muḥāṣibī exposes the fate of previous societies who rejected faith in such a Creator and suggests that anyone who reflects on this cannot fail but to believe in God and His unity. Consequently it is through such a faith that human beings will be guided, enter Paradise and reach perfect satisfaction with their Lord.

2. Risāla 'l-Taṣawwuf

3. Al-Khiṣāl al-ʿAshra allāti Jarābahā Ahl al-Muḥāṣabā
4. Muḥāṣabat al-Nafs

5. Mukhtasar al-Maʻānī

6. Al-Murāqaba wa 'l-Muḥāṣabā

7. Naṣīḥat al-Ṭalibūr (wa 'l-Faqṭ bāyin al-Taḥqiq wa 'l-Muddaʼīn)

8. Al-Radd 'alā baʻd al-Ulamāʼ min al-Aqūniyā’ ḥaythu Ḥaṭajī bi Aqūniyā’ al-Ṣaḥāba

9. Tanbih al-Āmāl al-Qulūb

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882 Āṭā mentions this work but gives no account of its content. However, he does state that there is a copy of the manuscript in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyā, no. 4184 taṣawwuf, the original being in the Berlin Library. See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Waṣāyā, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Akhmad ʿĀṭā, p. 38; al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-ʿĪlm, ed. Mazālī, p. 30 and ʿAbī Ḥādhā Ḥāyā al-Maḥkūṭāt al-ʿArabiyyā, Fiḥras al-Maḥkūṭāt bi ʿl-ʿJāmī’ā al-ʿArabiyyā, vol. 1, p. 158.

883 There appear to be three copies of this manuscript; two in Berlin, no. 2814 (fols. 80b-81a), written in 813/1410 and a small fragment, fols. 1b-7b. The other is located in the British Museum (no. 1244). See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Waṣāyā, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Akhmad ʿĀṭā, p. 39; al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-ʿĪlm, ed. Mazālī, p. 33 and Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabi, vol. 1, p. 117.


885 A copy of this manuscript is in Shahīd ʿAlī Library, Istanbul, in the taṣawwuf section, number 137. In addition there is also a copy of this manuscript in the The Chester Beatty Library, under number 4893. Abū ʿAbdallāh also makes reference to a work entitled Risālat al-Muṣāqāta which may well be the same work as Mazālī also makes reference to copies in Berlin. In addition, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿĀṭā states that the manuscript was in the process of being published, but the researcher was unable to source this published version. Once again however, it is worth noting that al-Khāṭīb suggests that this is also just another copy of Sharḥ al-Maʿṣūma and as such, this may not be in fact a separate work but similarly, is tentatively included here to make the research comprehensive. See al-Muḥāṣibī, Muṭṭābat al-Nafs, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿĀṭā, p. 23; al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Waṣāyā, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Akhmad ʿĀṭā, p. 39; al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-Mustashshād, ed. Abū Ḥudūd, p. 32; al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-ʿĪlm, ed. Mazālī, p. 34; Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabi, vol. 1, p. 118; ʿAbū Ḥādhā Ḥāyā al-Maḥkūṭāt al-ʿArabiyyā, al-Maḥkūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ʿalā 1484 - al-ʿJāmī’ā al-ʿArabiyyā, vol. 1, p. 157; ʿAbī ʿAbdallāh Ḥāyā al-Maḥkūṭāt al-ʿArabiyyā, Fiḥras al-Maḥkūṭāt bi ʿl-ʿJāmī’ā al-ʿArabiyyā, vol. 1, p. 163; Arberry, A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts (The Chester Beatty Library), 1963, vol. 6 (MSS. 4501-5000), p. 131 and al-Khāṭīb, Fikr al-Ḥarīth al-Muḥāṣibī al-Ṣūfī fi Mīzān al-Kitāb wa ʿl-Sunnā, p. 5.

886 A copy of this manuscript is in the Shahīd ʿAlī Library, Istanbul, number 3319. However Mazālī quotes the same number but suggests this copy is in Saʿīb, Ankara (fols. 23a-36b), being copied in 731/1331. In addition it also suggests the presence of another manuscript in the same collection under number 5281 (fols. 1a-8b). See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Waṣāyā, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Akhmad ʿĀṭā, p. 39; al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-ʿĪlm, ed. Mazālī, pp. 34-5 and Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabi, vol. 1, p. 118.

887 Both Mazālī and Sezgin include this addition. See al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-ʿĪlm, ed. Mazālī, pp. 34-5 and Sezgin, Tārikh al-Turāth al-ʿArabi, vol. 1, p. 118.


889 A version of this manuscript is available in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyā, number 4064 taṣawwuf, having been copied from an original in Carullah, Istanbul. Abū ʿAbdallāh also makes reference to this work with the addition
Smith mentions that only a fragment of this work is extant and the existing piece deals again with *tawḥid* (the unity of the worship of Allāh), providing rational arguments to prove the point, in much the same way that *Risālat al-ʿAẓama* does.

10. *Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa ʿl-Ridā*

Only a short fragment of this work is also extant as only the last three pages still exist. The work itself concerns two of the most important principles of *zuḥd*, namely patience (*ṣabr*) and satisfaction (*ridā*), regarding the decree of Allāh (*gādar Allāh*), whether they be favourable or unfavourable, along with complete submission to Allāh’s will when such events occur. In addition, the work is written in the form of a dialogue between the guide (*al-murshid*) and the aspirant (*al-murīd*), which is a common method employed by al-Muḥāsibī throughout his writings. Al-Hujwīrī discusses the aspect of *ridā* in al-Muḥāsibī’s teaching in detail in his *Kashf al-Mafjūb* and may well have derived it from this work in its complete form. He also presents al-Muḥāsibī’s teaching as being a new exposition of this topic, which was then adopted by later writers.

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890 See *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 58 and Maḥmūd, *Uṣṭādh al-Sāʿirin*, p. 87.

891 Ibid., pp. 55-6. In addition, Maḥmūd mentions another work entitled *Kitāb al-Tanbih*, which may well be the same manuscript, as he describes it as being in Carullah and that only quarter of a page remains. See Maḥmūd, *Uṣṭādh al-Sāʿirin*, pp. 75-6 and 87.

892 Maḥmūd states that these few pages not only exist but have been published by Otto Spies, this being produced from a manuscript found in the Public Library at Bankipore. However, Spies himself states that after examination of the available sources he was unable to find a work by al-Muḥāsibī entitled ‘*Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa ʿl-Ridā*’. As a result Maḥmūd believes that the work in question did not originally have this title and was in fact called ‘*Kitāb al-Ṣatr al-Ridā*’ only. He concludes this on the basis that since the topic of *ridā* would automatically concern the subject of *ṣabr*, then it makes sense that the title was changed as it is inconceivable that al-Muḥāsibī would author two such works with similar titles. In addition, since so little of the original remains I have included them in the current section. See Maḥmūd, *Uṣṭādh al-Sāʿirin*, pp. 75-6 and 87; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ṣabr al-ṣahr bi ʿl-Jāmīʿa al-ʿArabīyya*, vol. 1, p. 117; Maḥmūd, *Uṣṭādh al-Sāʿirin*, pp. 75-6 and 87; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidin*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Masā’il / Aʾmāl al-Qulūb wa ʿl-Jawāriḥ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Abmad ʿAtā, p. 147.

893 See *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 58 and Maḥmūd, *Uṣṭādh al-Sāʿirin*, p. 87.
11. ‘Risāla
This treatise has no title but nevertheless is attributed to al-Muḥāsibī.895

5.3 The Lost Works

1. Risāla fi ‘l-Akhlāq896

2. Kitāb897 Akhlāq al-Ḥakim
Al-Muḥāsibī mentions this work in his book al-Masā’il fi A’māl al-Quluḥ wa ‘l-Jawaḥīr.898

3. Kitāb al-Tafakkur wa ‘l-Itibār
Ibn Nadim mentions this work in his Fiḥrīṣ.899

4. Kitāb al-Ghayba
Once again it is suggested that Ibn Nadim mentions this work in his Fiḥrīṣ and in addition the work is also mentioned by Abū Bakr b. Khayr in Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana.900

5. Kitāb Fahm al-Sunan
Al-Zarkashi mentions this work in his book ‘al-Burḥān.901 In addition al-Suyūtī quotes al-Muḥāsibī from this work in his ‘al-Itqān whilst discussing the 18th category of the Qur’ān Sciences ‘concerning its collection and sequence (fi jam`ihi wa tartībihi)’.902

895 The manuscript itself is located in Bursa under number 4/1428 (fols 34b-40a), being copied in the 8th/12th centuries. See al-Muḥāsibī, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazālī, p. 35 and Sezgīn, Tāриkh al-Turāth al-Arabi vol. 1, p. 118.
896 Al-Muḥāsibī, al-Wasāyā, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Khayr b. Khayr, pp. 39 and al-Muḥāsibī, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazālī, p. 35. It is interesting to note that Massignon makes mention of an extant manuscript entitled Akhlāq, which may indeed be this ‘lost’ work but without direct access to the manuscript it is impossible to say. See Massignon, Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism, p. 163.
901 See al-Zarkashi (d. 794/1392), Muḥāammad b. ‘Abd Allāh [Badr al-Dīn], al-Burḥān fi ‘Ulūm al-Qurān, edited by Muḥāammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (4 vols., Cairo, Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, n.d.) vol. 1, p. 238; al-
There can be no doubt that one of the most controversial topics in Islamic history is that of the disputes that occurred between the Companions of the Prophet (al-sahāba). In addition, the period in which al-Muhäsibi lived was clearly affected by such disputes, as they were the subject of continuous critique, which can readily be seen in the various opinions of both the Muʿtazila and the Shiʿa regarding the Prophet's Companions. Consequently, it is not surprising that al-Muhäsibi authored a specific work on this topic and in fact, this is stated by various authors.

In actual fact, al-Muhäsibi has touched on this topic in various places within his works, in addition to the specific treatise mentioned here. On examining these various extracts one finds that al-Muhäsibi's stance regarding the issue is clear. We find that al-Mubäsibi, whilst addressing this issue attempts to find a middle ground between the extreme views of both the Muʿtazila and the Shiʿa, whose stances towards the issue by that time were well known. In addition, al-Muhäsibi, as we have already seen, was concerned not only with scholastic theology (ʿilm al-kalâm) but also its use in defending the classical Sunni position as far as he was concerned. This being the case and after witnessing his defence of classical Sunni positions on such issues as the beatific vision and the divine attributes, it is no surprise that al-Muhäsibi, for example, says that they attributed blame to the Companions. See al-Muhäsibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurʾān, pp. 70-2 and Maḥmūd, Ustādh al-Sāʾirīn, p. 74.

6. Kitāb al-Dīnāʾ/Kitāb al-Kaffʿammā Shuḥira (Shajara) bayn al-Ṣaḥāba


902 The actual text reads as follows, "Writing of the Qurʾān was no novelty, for the Prophet used to order that it be written down, but it was in separate pieces, on scraps of leather, shoulder blades and palm risp, and [Abū Bakr] al-ʾṢiddiq ordered that it be copied from the various places to a common place, which was in the shape of sheets, these [materials] were found in the house of the Prophet in which the Qurʾān was spread out, and he gathered it altogether and tied it with a string so that none of it was lost." See al-Muhäsibi, Risālat al-Mustarshidīn, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Zarkashi, al-Burḥān fi ʾUllūm al-Qurʾān, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-ʿFaḍl ʿIrāhim, vol. 1, p. 238; al-Suyūṭī, ʿAbd al-Rahmān, al-ʿIqān fi ʾUllūm al-Qurʾān, ed. Fawwāz Abū Ḥamīd Zāmarī (2 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1999) vol. 1, pp. 210-1 and Von Denffer, Abū Maḥmūd, “ʾUllūm al-Qurʾān - An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qurʾān (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1989) p. 43.

903 See for example al-Muhäsibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurʾān, pp. 70-2 and Maḥmūd, Ustādh al-Sāʾirīn, p. 74.


905 For example, says that they attributed blame to the Companions. See al-Muhäsibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurʾān, pp. 70-2 and Maḥmūd, Ustādh al-Sāʾirīn, p. 74.


al-Muhäsibi also refutes the ‘unorthodox’ position of various sects regarding the Prophetic Companions. 908

On examining his approach to the topic, we can identify various aspects which are worth mentioning. Firstly, whilst adopting the role of guide, al-Muhäsibi advises his ‘brothers’ by warning them to avoid delving too deeply into this complex issue concerning the early generations of the Muslim community. The reason for this is then made clear; the cause of the disputes of those who came after the era of the Companions were due to their examination and delving into the reasons behind the disputes between the Companions. In addition, they then used the Qur’an’s ambiguous 909 verses (mutashäbih) as opposed to its unambiguous verses (muḥkam) as proof for their stance as well as the various narrations (āthār) from the Prophet and the Companions themselves, which were also open to interpretation. 910 In addition, their ‘misguidance’ (dalāl) is compounded by the fact that they fought, killed and apostatised anyone who opposed their whims. Al-Muhäsibi includes within these sects the Qadariyya 911, i.e. the followers of Maʿbad and Ghaylän, then the followers of Wāṣīl b. ‘Aṯā 912 (who later became the Muʿtazila), the Murji‘a 913, the Rāfiḍa (i.e. the Shī‘a) 914, the Jahmiyya 915 and the Ḥarūriyya (i.e. the Khawārij) 916 917

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908 Al-Muhäsibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurʾān, ed. al-Quwwatli, pp. 70-2 and Maḥmūd, Ustādh al-Sāʾirīn, p. 74.
The safest path to adopt is to avoid delving into such complexities as the danger of doing so lies in the fact that these groups were all brothers before they adopted this position and in addition, it is impossible to find a solution which will satisfy everyone. This being the case, al-Muḥāṣibī proposes that the path to salvation is by adopting that which the Muslim community (al-umma) has agreed upon (mujmāʾ ʿalayhi) in terms of faith in Allāh, His messengers (rusūlīhī), His angels (malāʾkatīhī), His books (kutubīhī), the limits set by Him (ḥudūdīhī), the acts made compulsory by Him (farāʿīdīhī), the open manifestations of His religion (sharāʾib dīnīhī) and all that the earliest generations (al-salāf) reached consensus about, as all of this is guidance (al-rushd) and truth (al-ḥaq). Despite the advice proposed by al-Muḥāṣibī regarding this sensitive issue, he also clarifies his own personal point of view, regarding the disputes, which occurred between the Companions. In this sense once again we find him proposing the position of a classical sunnī scholar. He considers ʿUṯmān and ʿAlī both to have been killed unjustly920 and considers ʿAlī to have been correct regarding the disputes with ʿĀishah, Ṭāḥah, al-Zubayr and Muʿāwiya.921 That is not to say that he is critical of this latter group either922; in fact he considers them to have exercised their personal judgement but were mistaken in the conclusions they formulated (mujtahidīn mukhtārīn).923 This being the case, it is easy to deduce and there can be no doubt that al-Muḥāṣibī's goal from such a discussion was to absolve them of any responsibility and purify them from all sin.924

For example, al-Samānī quotes Abū ʿAlī b. Shādhān (d. 350/961) in his ʿKitāb al-Ansāʿi as stating that al-Muḥāṣibī wrote a book entitled ʿKitāb al-Dīnāʾ describing the circumstances in which the Companions' blood was spilled and that these events did not affect the unity of Islamic faith. In fact, Ibn Shādhān goes as far as to say that this book was relied upon by

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918 Ibid.
920 Regarding ʿUṯmān in particularly he relates from Abū Qulāba that those who murdered ʿUṯmān did so out of jealousy (ghayra). He goes on to relate another narration from an unknown source that, "I didn't wish for evil to befall ʿUṯmān except that some evil befell me and if I had wished for his death then I would surely have been killed." See Maḥmūd, Uṣṭād al-Sāʾirīn, p. 75.
921 For example, al-Muḥāṣibī himself states in ʿAl-makāṣib, "This community (umma) was preceded at its beginning by tribulations (fiṭan), disputes (ikhtilāfīn), division (tafarruq), as well as the tribulations of al-Jamāl, Ṣuffīn, Ibn Zubayr, al-ʿIrāq, al-Jamājum in Baṣrah, Kūfah and in other places. Indeed, the Commander of the Faithful (Amīr al-Murūnīn) ʿUṯmān was killed unjustly and out of aggression." See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Makāṣib, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 92-3 and al-Muḥāṣibī, al-ʿAql wa Fāḥm al-Qurʿān, ed. al-Quwatli, p. 72.
922 For example, regarding Mother of the Faithful (Umm al-Muʾminīn) ʿĀishah and those who attacked her, he says, "They are indeed a people who are misguided." See Maḥmūd, Uṣṭād al-Sāʾirīn, p. 75.
924 Maḥmūd, Uṣṭād al-Sāʾirīn, ed. al-Quwatli, p. 74.
him and his associates.925 Similarly, Smith quotes al-Dhahabi as mentioning a work by al-Muhäsibi entitled ‘Kitāb al-Kafi’ ammā Shuḥīra926 bayn al-Ṣaḥāba regarding the same topic.927 It is interesting that both Smith and Maḥmūd conclude that these two works are in fact one treatise, despite the differing titles, as it is highly improbable that al-Muhäsibi wrote two books on one topic.928 In either case, the work concerns the latter period of Uthmān’s era and the disagreements that occurred which ultimately lead to his death, as well as the dispute between ‘Ali on the one hand and ‘Āisha and Mu‘āwiya on the other.929

7. Kitāb al-Ḥubb li ‘llāh wa Marātiḥ Ahlihi

Smith is alone in mentioning this work930 and identifies it with Faṣl al-Maḥābba, included by Abū Nu‘aym in his ‘Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’.931 She states that this is the most mystical of al-Muhäsibi’s writings, in which he describes:

The love of God for His saints, and the signs by which these lovers of God may be known while they dwell in this world among men. To such lovers is granted the Vision of God and that communion with Him, which is the aim of the mystic, the indwelling of the human by the divine.932

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926 Maḥmūd suggests that the correct title of the work should read “Shajāra” not “Shuḥīra” so that the meaning makes more sense. See Maḥmūd, Uṣūd al-Sāʾirin, p. 74.
927 See al-Muhäsibi, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 36 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 58.
928 See Maḥmūd, Uṣūd al-Sāʾirin, p. 74 and Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, p. 58.
929 It is interesting to note here that there is a certain amount of doubt surrounding the authorship of this particular work as it is not at all in keeping with the general style and teaching of al-Muhäsibi. This is compounded by the fact that this treatise is related by al-Junayd whose own thought tended to the mystical more than that of al-Muhäsibi. In addition, al-Junayd also narrated from another major Sufi figure of the period, namely Abū ‘Ali Ahmad b. Āṣim al-Anṭākī, who had a long relationship with al-Junayd and many researchers consider this work to belong him for the following reasons: firstly, he was from al-Muhäsibi’s peers and became well known, similar to al-Muhäsibi, for his discussion of the heart, to such a degree that al-Dārānī (d. 215/830) termed him ‘the spy of the hearts’ (jāṣūs al-qulūb) because of his sharp perception. Secondly, these extracts regarding the topic of divine love are tainted with strong philosophical overtone uncharacteristic of al-Muhäsibi’s method, teaching and style, as he was staunchly against this form of ‘intoxicated’ spirituality.
Those who support the idea that al-Muhäsibi did write this work defend their opinion by saying that if al-Muhäsibi’s name had not been associated with his book ‘al-Tawahhum then no one would have attributed this work to him, as it is uncharacteristic of his general style. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think that al-Muhäsibi may well have written the work in question also, despite it being beyond the regular scope of his teachings.

932 Smith, An Early Mystic of Baghdad, pp. 57-8.
5.4 The Chronological Sequence of al-Muḥāsibī’s Works

Having discussed the works of al-Muḥāsibī at length and in some detail, it may be worth asking, ‘Are we able to place these works in a chronological sequence?’ This issue is no easy task, since neither the classical Arabic scholars nor the contemporary Western writers have contributed a great deal in this regard. In addition, there is little in the works themselves to assist us in this task, as only a minimum of historical detail is provided by al-Muḥāsibī himself. Consequently, it is also worth mentioning here the efforts of some scholars to provide a chronological sequence for these works in order to assess the various stages that al-Muḥāsibī may have gone through as an author and writer. There have been two seminal attempts to provide such information, namely by Maḥmūd, in his work ‘Uṣṭādh al-Sāʾirīn and al-Quwwatli in his edited version of ‘aṣlī-Aql wa Fāhīm al-Qurʾān. Bearing this in mind both these view points will be presented briefly here so as to provide the reader with an overview of their opinions.

5.4.1 The Chronological Sequence of al-Muḥāsibī’s Works Suggested by Maḥmūd

The essence of Maḥmūd’s discussion revolves around the concept of al-Muḥāsibī as a Sufi and he begins with the basic and logical premise that al-Muḥāsibī was not born a Sufi and therefore must have undergone various stages of development before he reached the level expressed in his more complex and in depth works. Similarly we do not find any evidence of al-Muḥāsibī changing ‘overnight’ in adopting a spiritual path nor do we find him reaching an elevated form of Sufism until the latter period of his life. Indeed, we find that al-Muḥāsibī, at the beginning of his career as a writer, can be observed to have adopted the general style of religious writings of the period.

However, as he progressed in his path to Sufism, he also grew in age and as a result became more mature in his thinking, as it is at this stage that a person not only relies upon the knowledge he has aquired but also upon the experience he has gained. Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī gained a higher level of spirituality at this stage, but this is not all; this stage of al-Muḥāsibī’s life and career was also characterised by an outstanding ability to examine and diagnose the faults, diseases and treatment of the human soul, for which of course, he later became renowned.

933 Maḥmūd, Uṣṭādh al-Sāʾirīn, p. 88.
934 Ibid., pp. 88-9.
935 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
As he progressed in age and spiritual experience he reached the pinnacle of his Sufi teachings. It is in this period that we find al-Muhāsibī began writing works filled with counsels aimed at those searching for the correct path regarding spiritual matters and that the examination of the human soul becomes less frequent as if it became only an echo of the previous stage.\textsuperscript{936}

In summary we can say that Maḥmūd separates the stages of al-Muhāsibī's life with regard to his Sufism into the following three categories:

1. An initial stage where al-Muhāsibī was essentially influenced by the style and writing of the scholars of his era.\textsuperscript{937} Maḥmūd exemplifies this in al-Muhāsibī's 'Fahm al-Qur'ān', as this work concerns various religious issues and matters concerning belief, being written in a typically argumentative style which was common during this period.\textsuperscript{938}

2. An intermediate period\textsuperscript{939} where he progressed in his path to Sufism and became more mature in his thinking, characterised by an outstanding ability in his examination of the human soul.\textsuperscript{940} Maḥmūd exemplifies this in al-Muhāsibī's 'al-Ri'yā', as this work shows his skill in determining the faults of the soul, his depth of comprehension regarding their cure and his powerful mental ability.\textsuperscript{941}

3. The advanced stage of his life where he reached the peak of his teaching, turning his attention to guidance of others specifically and reaching the pinnacle of his Sufism. Maḥmūd exemplifies this in al-Muhāsibī's 'al-Waṣāyā', as this work concerns the beginning of how to attain the true path by advising the aspirant of the course of action he must adopt to achieve this.\textsuperscript{942}

\textsuperscript{936} Ibid., pp. 90-1.

\textsuperscript{937} Maḥmūd concludes that this period begins with al-Muhāsibī's first efforts as a writer, which is difficult to define, until the age of 38. Maḥmūd, \textit{Ustādh al-Sā'īrin}, p. 91.

\textsuperscript{938} Ibid., pp. 88-94.

\textsuperscript{939} Maḥmūd concludes that this period begins with the end of the first period until the age of 65. See Maḥmūd, \textit{Ustādh al-Sā'īrin}, p. 92.

\textsuperscript{940} Maḥmūd also concludes that al-Muhāsibī's 'al-Makāsib' is also from this period not only because of the depth of knowledge and insight displayed therein but also due to the fact that al-Muhāsibī mentions the death of al-Ma'mūn, which occurred in 218/833, making al-Muḥāsibī at least 53 at the time. See Maḥmūd, \textit{Ustādh al-Sā'īrin}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{941} In addition, a second conclusive proof confirms this as al-Muhāsibī mentions the death of Bābak, which occurred in 221/836, meaning that al-Muḥāsibī wrote this work having reached the age of at least 56. Al-Quwawṭī confers with Maḥmūd on this point and consequently they agree that the work is of later phase in al-Muḥāsibī's life. Quite surprisingly Mazālī refutes this view with various rather unconvincing arguments. See Maḥmūd, \textit{Ustādh al-Sā'īrin}, pp. 89-91, 93-4 and 95-6; al-Muḥāsibī, \textit{al-Aqīl wa Fahm al-Qur'ān}, ed. al-Quwawṭī, p. 75; al-Muḥāsibī, \textit{Kitāb al-Ilm}, ed. Mazālī, p. 67-72 and footnote 954 below.

\textsuperscript{942} See Maḥmūd, \textit{Ustādh al-Sā'īrin}, pp. 90-1, 92-3 and 96.
5.4.2 The Chronological Sequence of al-Muḥāṣibi’s Works Suggested by al-Quwwatli

In assessing the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāṣibi’s works, al-Quwwatli appreciates the suggestions made by Maḥmūd, but differs from him in the sense that he suggests only two periods in the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāṣibi’s writing. He recognizes the initial period suggested by Maḥmūd, but pays little attention to it, as he considers the information regarding this primary stage to be unreliable and consequently he distinguishes two main periods, which are identifiable regarding al-Muḥāṣibi’s authorship.

These two periods can be described as follows:

1. A period that he terms ‘a transition phase (fatrat al-tahawwul)’, which he considers to last from 195/811 to 207/823. By this al-Quwwatli seems to suggest that this is a period in which al-Muḥāṣibi’s tendency to intellectualism (al-naz’at al-ʿaglyya) is apparent in his writing, before a definitive change to Sufism became manifest. To this effect al-Quwwatli, quite surprisingly contradicts Maḥmūd, by including ‘al-Wasāyā as being from al-Muḥāṣibi’s works in this period. In addition other works included by al-Quwwatli in this period are ‘Kitāb al-Khalwa wa ’l-Tanagqul / ’l-`Ibāda wa Darajät al-`Ābidin, ‘Ādāb al-Nufūs, ‘Risālat al-Mustarshidin and ‘al-Tawahhun.

944 This being the period in which the control of the state came to rest in the hands of al-Maʿmūn. How al-Quwwatli defines this so precisely however is not at all clear. See al-Muḥāṣibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurān, ed. al-Quwwatli, p. 63.
945 Al-Quwwatli justifies this by quoting the fact that al-Muḥāṣibi warns of the schisms which affect the Muslim community, this being directly representative of the events of the dispute between al-Amin and al-Maʿmūn, as well as the theological sectarianism, which was also apparent at the time. Despite this the researcher feels that Maḥmūd’s is closer to the truth, i.e. that ‘al-Wasāyā is from the latter stages of al-Muḥāṣibi’s writing. This is for a number of reasons; firstly, the fact that al-Muḥāṣibi mentions the schisms which affect the Muslim community, is not sufficient proof that the work itself is from this period as the whole work has a retrospective feel, as if al-Muḥāṣibi is looking back on a period which he had experienced first hand. In addition, the nature of this work, i.e. that it is a set of counsels, indicates that this was wise advise from a person who had experienced the hardship of such times and that he was only to eager to guide those at the beginning of their path to guidance. Secondly, ‘al-Wasāyā is written in an eloquent style, indicating that it is the product of an accomplished author, who was not at the beginning of his career nor in a ‘transition period’. Similarly, al-Quwwatli himself mentions that al-Muḥāṣibi includes a large section discussing the soul to account (al-muḥāṣaba) and the dispraisal of ostentation (al-riyā), these being a pillars of his spiritual teaching and as such, it is unlikely that al-Muḥāṣibi would include such a detailed account of this aspect of his thought while he was still in a preliminary stage of his career. Thirdly, al-Quwwatli himself also mentions that much of the writing produced by al-Muḥāṣibi was the familiar ‘question and answer’ format whereas ‘al-Wasāyā does not manifest this method. Thus, even the style employed by the author is different in this work, further suggesting that it is not from this period. See al-Muḥāṣibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurān, ed. al-Quwwatli, pp. 63-5 and 68.
946 Al-Quwwatli justifies this by stating that the subject matter of ‘al-Wasāyā and ‘Kitāb al-Khalwa wa ’l-Tanagqul / ’l-`Ibāda wa Darajät al-`Ābidin are similar and therefore from a similar period. However this is hardly a convincing argument as the style of both works differs entirely. See al-Muḥāṣibi, al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurān, ed. al-Quwwatli, p. 65.
947 Once again al-Quwwatli justifies this by stating that the ‘spirit’ of ‘Ādāb al-Nufūs is similar to that of ‘al-Wasāyā and ‘Kitāb al-Khalwa wa ’l-Tanagqul / ’l-`Ibāda wa Darajät al-`Ābidin and therefore, they are from a
2. A period which he terms 'a instruction phase (fatrat al-tads s)', in which al-Muhäsibi taught his thought to others and which al-Quwwatli suggests lasted from 207/823 to 236/851. During this phase al-Quwwatli alludes to the fact that al-Muhäsibi's tendency towards scholastic theology (al-naz'at al-kalämiyya) dominates the early period of this part of his life and begins to be mixed with a tendency also for Sufism. In addition, he also begins to include a large number of narrations to support his views, which al-Quwwatli suggests was in reply to the harsh reaction of al-Ḥanäbila to his refutation of the sects common at that time. Al-Quwwatli also suggests that it was in this era that al-Muhäsibi's writing style reached its pinnacle in terms of eloquence and subject matter. As for the works included by al-Quwwatli in this period, they are: 'Kitäb Mä'iyyat al-'Aql wa Ma'ñähä95', 'Kitäb al-'Azama', 'Kitäb Iḍkâm al-Tawba',952 'Kitäb al-Dlmä'953, 'al-MakäsO, 'Kltäb Masä 16 similar period. However this is also not a convincing argument, as the depth shown 'Adäb al-Nufüs' regarding the treatment of the human soul is far greater generally than in either of the other two works. See al-Muhäsibi, al-'Aql wa Fähm a1-Qur'än, ed. al-Quwwatli, pp. 65-6.

948 Again al-Quwwatli justifies this by stating that the 'spirit' of 'Risälat al-Mustarshidin' is similar to that of 'Adäb al-Nufüs' and therefore, they are from a similar period. It is true that subject matter of each work is similar in content but the manner and style of each work is completely different. As mentioned previously 'Adäb al-Nufüs' is an in depth discussion of human psychology, whereas 'Risälat al-Mustarshidin' is more a brief manual on behavioural and character traits. In addition the 'Risälat al-Mustarshidin' is written in a concise, often poetic style. See al-Muhäsibi, al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'än, ed. al-Quwwatli, p. 66 and pp. 223-5 above.

949 Al-Quwwatli suggests that 'al-Tawahhunl is also from this period as it demonstrates al-Muhäsibi's tendency to the intellect (al-naz'at al-'agIyya), as do the other books in this period. However, the researcher differs with both al-Quwwatli and Mahmüd - who considers this to be from what he terms his 'second period'. This is due the fact this particular work is characterised by its eloquent and powerful style, which through its vivid imagery, has a profound affect on the reader. This is obviously not the product of a writer at the beginning of his career but is indeed the result of many years of accomplished penmanship. In addition, it has already been mentioned that this work has a very personal style and is without doubt the product of his own reflection on the journey through the hereafter. This being the case, it is also highly likely that al-Muhäsibi produced this work near the end of his life, while himself preparing for death. See al-Muhäsibi, al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'än, ed. al-Quwwatli, pp. 66-8 and Maḥmïd, Ustädh al-Sä'irin, pp. 95-6.


951 It seems highly ironic here that al-Quwwatli chooses to begin this section where al-Muhäsibi is supposed to move away from his tendency to the intellect (al-naz'at al-'agIiyaa), as do the other books in this period. However, the researcher differs with both al-Quwwatli and Maḥmïd - who considers this to be from what he terms his 'second period'. This is due the fact this particular work is characterised by its eloquent and powerful style, which through its vivid imagery, has a profound affect on the reader. This is obviously not the product of a writer at the beginning of his career but is indeed the result of many years of accomplished penmanship. In addition, it has already been mentioned that this work has a very personal style and is without doubt the product of his own reflection on the journey through the hereafter. This being the case, it is also highly likely that al-Muhäsibi produced this work near the end of his life, while himself preparing for death. See al-Muhäsibi, al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'än, ed. al-Quwwatli, pp. 66-8 and Maḥmïd, Ustädh al-Sä'irin, pp. 95-6.

952 Al-Quwwatli considers both of these works to be of the same period that 'Fahm al-Qur'än' was written as they have a similar subject matter in the sense that they discuss various aspects of faith which were points of dispute at the time. However, as Maḥmïd asserted previously, these works are typical of the subject matter and style of al-Muhäsibi's contemporaries in the same period and as such are not likely to have written at this later, more advanced stage. See al-Muhäsibi, al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'än, ed. al-Quwwatli, p. 69 and page 246 above.

953 It is even stranger that al-Quwwatli would attribute this work to any period so precisely since it has been lost and therefore is impossible to verify. See al-Muhäsibi, al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'än, ed. al-Quwwatli, pp. 70-2 and pages 240-4 above.
In conclusion, it would seem that Mahmūd's survey of the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibi's works is far more useful than that of al-Quwwatli, as it is not only more representative of his life and career but is also more accurate in attributing the works themselves to a specific period.

It is also worth mentioning here that both scholars seem to have overlooked an important aspect regarding al-Muḥāsibi's writings; in assessing the chronological sequence of his works, they have seemed to lay great emphasis on the role of subject matter, which is a rather arbitrary means of appraisal. For example, al-Quwwatli casually lumps together 'al-Makāṣīb, 'Kitāb Masā'il fi 'l-Zuhd wa Ghayrīhī and 'Kitāb al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawārih', as being from one period and where there can be no doubt that their subject matter is similar, there is little or nothing to suggest that they were written in a similar time frame.

In addition, al-Muḥāsibi himself was a unique author in both his style, subject matter and in particular, the method which he employed in authoring his works, as the incident with al-Junayd illustrates only too well.956 Al-Muḥāsibi, was an author who wrote only when the need arose, whether for his own personal journey of discovery regarding his own soul, or whether counselling his students concerning their journey along the path.957 However, even this is not easy to distinguish due to the common 'question and answer' style that al-Muḥāsibi adopts and in either case it provides little information regarding the sequence in which al-Muḥāsibi's works were written.958 As has been mentioned previously, it would also seem that al-Muḥāsibi wrote various concise works, which were expounded in later, more expansive ventures and as such, it further proves his ability as a teacher and a spiritual guide, as each of these treatises was written with a specific goal, or specific students' needs
in mind. Thus, a more appropriate question to pose, due to its methodological significance, is not when al-Muḥāsibī's works were written but why were they written and for whom were they written?

Conclusion
At the beginning of this chapter it stated that the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī were reported to have number approximately two hundred.\footnote{See p. 193 above.} Having surveyed the available literature and collated this information, it would appear that there are thirty-six works that can be confirmed as being al-Muḥāsibī's. This is by no means the two hundred mentioned by al-Subki (d. 771/1370), but it is nevertheless, a significant percentage of them. In addition, the researcher feels that this chapter is the single most thorough discussion of this topic and has produced a variety of important information regarding this eminent author. What is also apparent from this discussion is the significance of al-Muḥāsibī as a writer; not only was he the first to write in depth on spiritual matters but he was also the first to treat the human soul in so much detail. What is also apparent is that this was not the only field with which al-Muḥāsibī was familiar, but indeed, he was well aquainted with a variety of Islamic fields of learning, including the views of those before him and those of his own contemporaries. In addition, al-Muḥāsibī clearly reflected the society in which he lived as he not only discussed the issues which concerned the scholarly elite, but also debated the opinions of the various sects present at the time and paid great attention to the spiritual welfare of his community.

Having discussed al-Muḥāsibī's works in detail and at great length it is appropriate that attention is now given to his thought and teaching and indeed, this is the objective of the following chapter, where the methodology of al-Muḥāsibī regarding the purification of the soul will be discussed.
Chapter 6: Al-Muḥāsibī’s Methodology Regarding *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*

Since the discussion of the two major aspects of this thesis, namely the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam and the life and works of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī have now been completed, it is appropriate in this final chapter to discuss the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* from al-Muḥāsibī’s perspective, through the medium of his works. In this sense the current chapter will follow a similar structure to that of chapter two where both the terms *tazkiyat* and *nafs* were discussed in detail. The major emphasis, however, will be on comparing the teachings of al-Muḥāsibī with the ideas presented in both the Qur’ān and hadth, since, in terms of language, it is not expected that al-Muḥāsibī’s usage of the Arabic language would differ greatly and similarly, much of what has been presented from the perspective of Muslim scholarship occurred in the post-al-Muḥāsibī period.

This being the case the current chapter will examine the usage of the term *tazkiya* in the works of al-Muḥāsibī and its various synonyms to establish this scholar’s understanding and usage of the term. However, since al-Muḥāsibī is regarded by many to be an erudite exponent of the inner workings of the human soul, much more emphasis will be laid on providing an exposition of his understanding of the term *nafs*. With this in mind the analysis here will be concerned with the various facets of *tazkiyat al-nafs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī, as well as discussing his concept of the term *nafs*, the qualities of the *nafs*, the states of the *nafs* and the nature of the *nafs* as presented in the extant works of this author. In addition, al-Muḥāsibī’s theory and methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs* will be examined and the salient features of his approach will be identified.

6.1 The Concept of the Term *Tazkiya* within the Works of al-Muḥāsibī

Upon surveying the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, it is of little surprise that the compound term ‘*tazkiyat al-nafs*’ is found. However, what is surprising perhaps is the fact that the incidence of this phrase is very rare, occurring only on a few occasions and what is more surprising is that it is not used at all in the context used thus far in this thesis. Indeed, on each occasion the phrase is used in an exclusively negative context, as alluded to in both the language and Qur’ān sections of chapter two, meaning to indicate self praise, this being considered a blameworthy quality of the human being. It is worth noting that al-Muḥāsibī, when discussing this concept, even uses one of the verses mentioned above in chapter two, namely (53:32), “And do not attribute purity to yourselves (*wa lā tuzakkū

960 See pp. 49 and 57 above.
anfusakum), when commenting on the issue of a person attributing 'purity' and excellence to himself, particularly regarding religious practice and adds the commentary of Zayd b. Aslam, who is reported to have said that the verse means, 'And do not attribute innocence to your souls.' In addition, al-Muḥāṣibī himself comments in this regard saying that a person who engages in such self praise (zakkā nafsahu) has indeed been afflicted with self conceit (al-`ujb) and consequently, does not censure his soul regarding its contradiction of the divine command, which may ultimately lead to his destruction.961

In addition to this usage of the term 'tazkiya', other derivatives of the form II verb 'zakkā', are also found, but not in conjunction with the term 'al-nafs'. Indeed, it is almost exclusively used with the term 'deed ('amal)', where the phrases 'pure deed ('amal zakkā)' and 'the deeds have been purified (zakkat al-a`māl/tazkü al-a`māl)' are found, seemingly indicating actions of the heart and limbs, which were performed sincerely, being free from any ulterior motive and as such, are purely for God alone.962

Although the term 'tazkiya' is somewhat of a rarity in the works of al-Muḥāṣibī, it is also worth noting that other synonymous terms with similar connotations of 'cleansing' and 'purification' are also found. One such word is 'tasfiya' meaning to 'clarify, rectify and purify' and being used in conjunction once more with the term righteous deeds (a`rnāl al-birr) in the sense of being purified from the influence of the soul's appetites (shahawāt).963 In a similar example, we also find another synonymous term to that of 'tazkiya', which is the word 'yunqi' being derived from 'al-naqā' and once again meaning 'purified and cleansed'. In this instance al-Muḥāṣibī uses this phrase regarding the heart (al-galb) and denotes its 'purification' from the influences of the soul ('al-nafs), the desires (al-hawā) and the appetites (al-shahawāt).964

Despite this however, by far the most commonly utilised synonymous term with that of 'tazkiya' are derivatives of the form I verb 'tahara' and include both the form II maṣdar 'al-tathlr' and the equivalent form V conjugation 'al-tatahhur', which once again all have the connotation of 'cleansing, purging and purification'. One of these derived phrases in particular 'al-tahārd seems to indicate a highly desired state of purification as both the true...
believers and paradise are referred to as being ‘ahl al-ṭahārā’ and ‘dār al-ṭahārā’ respectively.\textsuperscript{965} This term is also used for those wishing to ‘purify’ themselves “before meeting their Lord” via repentance (al-tawba) and regret (al-nadm) for the defilement (al-danas) of every sin (al-dhanb), transgression (al-ithm) and evil deed (al-sayyī‘a) committed by the heart and the limbs and also, by turning away from all that Allah hates (al-ināba).\textsuperscript{966} In fact al-Muḥāsibī considers this so important that he states:

The best and most beneficial of virtues is that you consider your soul (nafsūkā) lesser than its true position; that your inward (sarīrā) be better than your outward (‘alāniyā) and that you are just to people without requesting justice for yourself, as there can only be purification (tathīr) and then action (‘amāl) and purification is more appropriate for us than action. Purification (tathīr) is to move away from all evil (al-shār) to the foundation upon which all good (al-khayr) is built, as a building may collapse but the foundations will remain intact and equally, it is impossible that the foundations collapse and the building remains intact.\textsuperscript{967}

Similarly, he exhorts his readers thus, “My brothers, scrutinise the hidden aspects of the soul and the secrets of the hearts and purify them (tahārinā) from enmity, envy, rancour, malice, having a bad opinion [of someone], animosity and hatred.”\textsuperscript{968}

Therefore, we can see that even though the works of al-Muḥāsibī are not a rich source of the word ‘tazkiya’, they not only contain a great many synonymous terms and concepts, which are comparative to those already discussed regarding the principle of tazkīyat al-nafs; but in many ways are closely identified with them.

6.2 The Facets of Tazkiyat al-Nafs within the Works of al-Muḥāsibī

It will be remembered from chapter two that from the Qur’ānic perspective the process of tazkiya was a multi-faceted and multi-layered process, involving three main elements: the divine, the prophetic and the human being himself. It was seen for example that the ultimate source and agent of tazkiya is Allah, as it is He who ultimately decides who will be purified. Similarly, to facilitate the process of tazkiya divinely chosen emissaries are selected from mankind to provide an interface between God and His creation, so as to provide


\textsuperscript{967} Al-Muḥāsibī, Adāb al-Nufrūs, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{968} Al-Muḥāsibī, Kitāb al-Nāsīḥ, ed. Ahmad, p. 40.
guidance through the receiving and the application of revelation. The final aspect of this process is the role of the individual himself, in taking on board this revealed message and implementing it, accompanied by expending his own considerable efforts in an attempt to conquer the base elements of his soul.969 Therefore, it is appropriate here to examine the works of al-Muḥāsibī to see if there is a corresponding concept within his understanding of how to deal with the purification and development of oneself. Upon surveying al-Muḥāsibī’s works, we find that there is definite reference to these three facets of tazkiya and therefore, the discussion will begin here with a discussion of the divine element.

Regarding this aspect of tazkiya, al-Muḥāsibī places so much emphasis on the divine element that he holds that the beginning of the path of the aspirant journeying to Allāh is that He makes him aware of the desires of his own soul, such that he is able to make it submissive to the wishes of his Lord.970 Even more important however, is that al-Mubāsibī lays great emphasis on supplicating to God (al-duʿā) for His bounty and assistance in attempting to make both the soul and its desires subservient to His command.971 One of the most eloquent of examples of this is his admonition of the soul where he addresses it directly saying:

Woe unto you (wayhakā)! Seek shelter (iṣtāʿīnī) with the Most Merciful of those who are merciful and raise your complaint to the Most Generous of those who are generous! Continually seek His aid and do not become weary due to the extent of your grievance, so that perhaps He may have mercy upon your weakness and answer you. Indeed, your disaster has been magnified, your affliction intensified and your call unanswered; all of your stratagems have been severed and your means departed and so there is no place to flee, no shelter [to be sought], no escape [from God’s anger] and no saviour except your Lord.972

Therefore, it is clear to see that al-Muḥāsibī does not underestimate the divine element in the process of tazkiya but rather apportions it a vital role. The seeking of God’s aid is not only restricted to the soul, however, but also to the negative effect that the Devil has on it, as the following excerpt clarifies:

969 See sections 2.2.1, 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 above.
And flee to Allāh the Exalted and seek shelter in Him in all of your actions and demonstrate your poverty, your desperate need and your refuge in Him, as you have no stratagem [to save you] and there is no power except through Him. And ask Allāh the Exalted to give you victory over him [Satan] through striving and finding pleasure in weeping and humility, by day and by night, secretly and openly, privately and publicly, until combating your soul becomes insignificant in your eyes because of your knowledge of your adversary [i.e. Satan] and due to Allāh granting you success, as indeed he [i.e. Satan] is the enemy of your Lord. 973

This being the case, reliance on God and seeking his assistance (al-īstī‘āna/ al-īstghātha) is seemingly a recurrent theme within al-Muhāṣibi’s works as he continuously exhorts his readers to undertake this form of worship. 974 Thus, from these texts alone it becomes clear that al-Muhāṣibi was not only aware of this divine contribution to the process of purification but also gave it precedence when approaching the topic of reforming the soul. In this regard he was clearly of the opinion that the disciplining of the nafs would not, first of all, take place if Allāh did not will it and grant it and secondly, if the human exponent of tazkiya did not put his complete trust in his Lord and seek His aid upon such a path. Thus, we can conclude that al-Muhāṣibi was in complete agreement with the Qur’ānic perspective on this issue, being in agreement with the concepts previously seen in chapter two. 975

With regard to the second element of the process of purification, i.e. the role of divinely chosen messengers being sent with revelation to guide the aspirant on the path to Allāh, we also find a number of references in the works of al-Muhāṣibi. The first of these examples was seen in the previous discussion concerning the divine element as we saw that al-Muhāṣibi consistently encourages the seeking of God’s help in purifying the soul via supplication - an act that was equally encouraged by the Prophet and which was seen in practice in chapter two. 976 Similarly, it was also seen in chapter four that al-Muhāṣibi was known for his transmission of hadith 977 and upon examining his works we find that this was far from being a purely academic exercise, as he utilises such narrations to add authenticity to the discussion and more importantly, to act as a source of guidance for his readers. 978

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973 Al-Muhāṣibi, Sharḥ al-Ma’rīfa wa Badl al-Nasiha, ed. al-Shāmi, p. 34.
975 Cf. sections 2.2.1, 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 above.
976 See section 2.3.1 above.
977 See sections 4.2, 4.4 and 4.6.3 above.
978 There are many examples of this in the works of al-Muhāṣibi but one of the most apparent is his discussion of careless use of the tongue in Ādāb al-Nufūs, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 62-3.
Indeed, al-Muḥāṣibī encourages the examination and study of the knowledge associated with the narrations of the Prophet, since this has a direct effect on the soul, being an alternative to the mundane, worldly and quite often sinful discourse offered by the rest of humankind. His encouragement does not stop there, however, as he also enjoins strict adherence to the Prophetic practice (ittibā'), this being the criterion with which all actions should be judged. In this regard he provides his own understanding of the term 'sunna':

As for being correct (al-ṣawāb) it is the sunna, and by the sunna I do not mean excessive prayer, fasting or charity, nor [do I mean by the sunna] the intellect or understanding, nor peculiar wisdom, nor eloquence or admonition but rather, strict adherence and submission to the book of Allāh and the practice of his Prophet and the rightly guided imams who came after him.

Similarly, the process of tazkiya via prophetic guidance is not only restricted to adherence to the Prophetic practice but al-Muḥāṣibī also introduces a second concept in this regard, which may be termed 'emulation of the Prophet' (al-ta'assī bi 'l-rasūl). This emulation is not merely a 'blind following' and differs from strict adherence in the sense that al-Muḥāṣibī intends that one should emulate the Prophet in his every action, not simply because one is commanded to do so, but rather, out of love and reverence for him. This may be considered a particularly useful device in cleansing the soul as someone who undertakes such emulation prefers the actions, motives and practice of the Prophet to that of his own and as such, leaves his nafs no portion from its needs, whims and desires. Furthermore, al-Muḥāṣibī considers this to be the characteristic of the knowledgeable spiritual guide and it is such people who should be followed and indeed, he quotes this as being one of the attributes of the scholars of the hereafter ('ulamā' al-ākhlāq) whom he sought in his youth and whom he eventually found.

Thus once again it would seem that al-Muḥāṣibī is following a similar methodology regarding this facet of tazkiya as that seen previously in chapter two and in this respect is very much within the Islamic paradigm.

This leaves the final facet of the process of tazkiya, namely the human being as the individual who is personally responsible for undertaking the task of purification by employing the aforementioned facets and by exerting his own efforts, in subjecting the

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979 See al-Muḥāṣibī, Badr Man Anāba ila Allāh, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 27.
981 Al-Muḥāṣibī, Ādāb al-Nufūs, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 78.
983 Cf. section 2.2.1 above.
negative qualities of his soul and enhancing its positive potentiality. When surveying the works of al-Muhäsibi one finds that this is by far the most important feature of tazkiyat al-nafs from his perspective. As such, his works have a left a rich and insightful account of the human condition and rather than discuss this important facet of purification at this juncture, it will left to be seen in the coming sections and in particular section 6.7, where al-Muhäsibi's theory and methodology of tazkiyat al-nafs will be discussed.

6.3 The Concept of the Term Nafs within the Works of al-Muhäsibi

On examining the concept and usage of the term ‘nafs’ in the Qurān, it was found that a number of connotations can be found that included: the nafs meaning the soul (al-rūḥ); the nafs meaning the human being’s power of understanding (al-quwä al-mufakkira); the nafs meaning the heart (al-qalb); nafs meaning the inclination to good and evil (quwä al-khayr waʾl-sharr) and the nafs meaning the human being (al-insān). Since the vast majority of al-Muhäsibi’s works deal with the term ‘nafs’ in one form or another, it is equally appropriate here to examine the works of this author and assess the usages of this term therein.

It was noted in chapter two that the most common synonymous term associated with the term ‘nafs’ was the word rūḥ, which may be commonly referred to as ‘the soul’ in English. Since the term ‘rūḥ’ is commonly associated with death, as this occurs when the 1-lb exits the body, it is little surprise that al-Mubasibi utilises this term in exactly the same context. We find that when discussing the state of an immoral person, al-Mubasibi describes such a person thus, “Indeed some of them wish that their souls would never be extracted (yunzicu nafsuhu)” and similarly, “... and then he will know that his weakness will not save him from the punishment of Allāh but unfortunately his soul will be extracted (tanzicu nafsahu) and then he will ask to return.” Therefore, it is easy to see from these two examples that al-Muhäsibi uses the term ‘naR to mean its synonym ‘rūḥ’ in exactly the same way that we have seen it used previously.

Further evidence of this is that al-Muhäsibi also comments on verse (39:42) and quotes Ibn Jurayj in this regard who is reported to have said:

The rūḥ and nafs are in the body of a person, being separated by something resembling a ray of sunlight. So if Allāh takes the nafs [during sleep], the rūḥ

984 See section 2.2.2 above.
986 Al-Muhäsibi, al-Riāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 189.
remains in the body but if Allāh seizes the nafs the rūḥ will also exit the body and if He doesn’t cause the person’s death, He will return the nafs to its place before the person awakes. 987

Al-Muḥāsibi then comments, “And Ibn ‘Abbās made a similar comment except that he termed the nafs the intellect (al-‘aql).” 988 It is interesting to note here that al-Muḥāsibi quotes a text which differentiates between the rūḥ and nafs but at the same time demonstrates their intrinsic link with each other. Similarly, he follows up this quotation with another explanatory comment from the famous companion and exegete ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, which we have also already seen regarding the same verse. 989

Although less frequent than the usage of the term nafs to mean rūḥ, we can also locate in the works of al-Muḥāsibi the use of the word the nafs meaning the human being’s power of understanding (al-qūwā al-mufakkira), as seen in verse (27: 14) and characterised by the phrase, “... and their souls were convinced of it (wa istayqānāthā anfusuhum) ...” 990 The use of this concept is limited and indeed, the exact phraseology differs slightly, being a derivative of the same verb, but nevertheless, the concept remains intact, as al-Muḥāsibi comments regarding the self-deluded person (al-mughtarr) concerning the way in which he has deceived himself, “Indeed, within his own soul he is absolutely convinced (mūqīn).” 991

Another connotation of the term nafs meaning the heart (al-qalb) is comparatively rare, but nevertheless, remains present in the works of al-Muḥāsibi. During the course of al-Muḥāsibi’s discussion concerning the torments and agonies in the hereafter in his work al-Tawahhum, the following phrase is repeated twice, “... so your ‘nafs’ became constricted in your chest (fa ḍāqat nafsuka fī ṣadrika) ...” 992 Since the nafs with its other usages mentioned here are not usually associated with a specific locale within the body and conversely, the position of the heart is exclusively linked to the chest, we can safely assume that Muḥāsibi’s usage of the term ‘nafs’ in this context means the heart (al-qalb).

In addition, the implication of the nafs meaning ‘the inclination to good and evil’ (qūwā al-khayr wa ‘l-sharr) and hence, the duality of the nafs is also tangible within the works of al-Muḥāsibi. Since this dual potentiality of the soul will be discussed in more detail in section 6.6 ‘the nature of the nafs within the works of al-Muḥāsibi’, we will suffice here with only a minimal exposition. In one such example of this, al-Muḥāsibi speaks in broad terms stating,

987 I have deliberately avoided translating the terms rūḥ and nafs to limit any further confusion.
988 Ibid., p. 647.
989 See p. 51 above.
990 See p. 59 above.
"And know that you have been created with the innate quality of good and evil (matbu‘- tibā‘ hasana wa sayyi‘a)" and further gives a specific example of this saying, "... all of mankind have been created with a natural disposition (tubi‘a ‘alā) to heedlessness (al-ghafla) and attentiveness (al-tayyiq) ..."993

Thus, from these two quotes it is easy to see that al-Muḥāsibi understood the very nature of the nafs to have a dual potentiality to both good and evil in the very broad sense and to particular manifestations of these in the specific sense. Indeed, his use of language is equally interesting here, as al-Muḥāsibi uses derivatives of the verb ‘tabā‘ē as if to indicate that these dual qualities are 'imprinted' and 'stamped' upon the soul and as such, part of the very makeup of human nature. Furthermore, one may attain knowledge and insight into the potential duality of the nafs, as al-Muḥāsibi also states, "And know that whoever was from the people of solicitude with his soul (ahl al-‘ināyā bi nafsīhi) and had been granted comprehension of experience, then he has reached the understanding of good and evil (al-khayr wa ‘l-sharr)..."994 Therefore, al-Muḥāsibi maintains that, through having care and concern for the soul and understanding of its varying experiences and conditions, one may be able to differentiate between the two potentialities that exist within it and consequently, act appropriately.

As for the final connotation of the nafs meaning the human being (al-insān), then this is equally well evidenced in the works of al-Muḥāsibi, so much so that one may even be surprised of the extent of the physicality of the description of the nafs, since it is described variously as having a body (jism); tongue (lisān); tears (dumū‘); speech (lufz); silence (sukūr); nourishment (gīdhā‘) and nakedness (‘awra). This notion is extended even further as al-Muḥāsibi also attributes to the nafs a heart (galb); intellect (‘aql), a conscience (damlīr) and even a soul (nafs).995 Thus, we may also safely assume that, bearing in mind both the physical 'exoteric' and the hidden 'esoteric' aspects of the nafs as described in his works, al-Muḥāsibi clearly means the human being as a whole in his every attribute.996


996 It is equally interesting to note that this is the most common usage of the term 'nafs' in al-Muḥāsibi's works and therefore, makes the scope of tazkiya much broader and indeed, brings it into line with the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs arrived at in chapter two.
Consequently, we can confirm with confidence that al-Muḥāṣibī uses the term *nafs* to mean the soul, the human being's power of understanding, the heart, the inclination to good and evil and the human being, in exactly the same way as we have seen it used thus far in the current thesis.

6.4 The Qualities of the *Nafs* within the Works of al-Muḥāṣibī

In addition to the various concepts of the *nafs* that can be identified within the Qurʾān as discussed in chapter two, it was also seen that there are a variety of qualities and attributes that can also be identified with the human soul. When examining the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī, we can also identify the vast majority of these qualities and as such, we can see that the *nafs*: experiences death; has perceptive faculties; has needs (*al-ḥājāt/al-maṭālib*); experiences difficulty and hardship (*al-mashaqqa*); can exhibit generosity (*al-jūd*) and miserliness (*al-shuḥḥ*); experiences anxiety (*al-dīq*) and distress (*al-ḥaraq*) as well as relaxation (*al-ittisār*) and tranquillity (*al-Inshārār*); is affected by eloquent speech (*al-taʿāththur bi ʿl-qawl al-baligh*); has the ability to comprehend (*al-Idrāk*) and the ability to conceal feelings; all these are observed in the works of our author to a greater or lesser degree.

Similarly, the qualities of the *nafs* specifically seen in the *ḥadīth* literature, such as wealth of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*) and the good soul (*al-nafs al-tayyība*) vis-à-vis the despicable

99See section 2.2.2.1 above.
soul (al-nafs al-khabîtha)\textsuperscript{1008}, are also identifiable within the discussions provided by al-Muḥâsibî.

Bearing in mind the great deal of attention al-Muḥâsibî affords to the negative attributes of the nafs it is little wonder that in his exposition, such qualities are mentioned more frequently and good examples of these are envy and jealousy (al-ḥasâd)\textsuperscript{1009} and conceit (al-kîbr).\textsuperscript{1010} In addition, it is also worthy of note that the more ‘positive’ qualities of regret (al-nadm) and grief (al-tâbassûr)\textsuperscript{1011} and fear (al-khawâf)\textsuperscript{1012} are equally well represented.

Despite this, however, most of the qualities of the nafs mentioned thus far are relatively rare in the works of al-Muḥâsibî and so will not be discussed at length here. Conversely, there are qualities of the nafs in the works of al-Muḥâsibî such as the desires (al-hawâ) and appetites (al-shahawât) that are continuously reiterated throughout and therefore, due to their importance the discussion of the qualities of the nafs within this section will concentrate on these attributes of the soul.

Of the aforementioned qualities of the nafs, perhaps the most commonly mentioned attribute is that of the desires (al-hawâ) and indeed, this is very much a recurrent theme within the works of al-Muḥâsibî.\textsuperscript{1013} The problematic nature of this quality of the soul is


\textsuperscript{1013} See al-Muḥâsibî, ʿĀdâb al-Nuṭûsî, ed. al-Sâyîd, pp. 61, 88-9, 128-9 and 135-6; al-Muḥâsibî, Sharḥ al-Muṣâfî wa Badl al-Naṣîha, ed. al-Shâmi, pp. 46, 53-4, 57 and 61; al-Muḥâsibî, al-Makâsîb, ed. al-Khush, p. 54; al-Muḥâsibî, Muʿtaţabat al-Nafs, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qâdir ʿAṭâ, p. 71; al-Muḥâsibî, Risâlât al-
made extremely clear in the works of al-Muḥäsibi, as it is the primary source and cause of disobedience, being the result of heedlessness that allows the desires to flourish and ultimately cause the corruption of the worshipper’s intentions, motives and deeds.\textsuperscript{1014} In this regard al-Muḥäsibi provides a working definition of the desires, which he describes as follows, "The attachment of the soul to its appetites (al-shahawät) and its inclination to ease and comfort. Thus, according to the strength of the appetites, the soul will be afflicted with weakness and then the desires (al-hawa) will overpower it."\textsuperscript{1015} Thus, such a person eventually becomes overwhelmed by his desires, becomes dependent upon them and finds pleasure in them until they are eventually consumed by them.\textsuperscript{1016} As such, the desires are an intrinsic quality of the nafs, as al-Muḥäsibi clarifies in the following passage:

If the truth is required of it [al-nafs] it prefers its desires (hawāḥā). If the time came for its actions to be tested it clings to its desires, divesting itself of knowledge, insight, the manifest aspects of its intellect and the hidden qualities of wisdom. Thus, it withdraws [from action] due to its desires, it acts in accordance with its desires, it becomes angry for the sake of its desires and it is pleased [with something] because of its desires.\textsuperscript{1017}

Consequently, every good that is lost and every mistaken or incorrect opinion leading to innovation (al-bid`a) is a result due to desires of the soul (hawa al-nafs).\textsuperscript{1018} This being the case, the soul’s desires are pivotal in the growth and production of a number of negative potentialities within it. For example when asked regarding the esoteric aspects of the world (bāṭin al-dunya) al-Muḥäsibi replies that it is:

Strict adherence to the desires (ittibâ al-hawā) that are concealed with the souls (al-nufs), which are consequently pursued by the heart such as:


conceit (al-kibr); malice (al-ghilha); envy (al-hasad); ostentation (al-riya); having a bad opinion [of someone] (si al-zann); believing in the evil of the conscience (ritqad si al-ghalab); the love of praise (hubb al-mahmada); the love of accumulating wealth (hubb jam al-mal); excess (al-takathur); bragging (al-tafakhur) and the love of rank (hubb al-sharaf).\(^{1019}\)

Indeed, the soul's adherence to this facet is fuelled by high hopes (tul al-amal) and equally, the desires of the soul are manipulated by Satan until one becomes a slave to them, being ultimately destroyed by them.\(^{1020}\)

It is little surprise then that al-Muhāsibi exhorts his readers to gain mastery over the soul's desires (ghalabat al-hawa).\(^{1021}\) In this regard al-Muhāsibi does not underestimate the divine role in the process of purifying the soul of its desires as he suggests that it is only through God and through His assistance that the desires can be overcome.\(^{1022}\) As for the human being himself, then his greatest weapon against his soul's desires is his intellect (al-‘aqil, which God awakens and through which the human being may make his desires subservient by overcoming the emotions of the soul with the light of reason, as al-Muhāsibi states, "The soul awaits its desires and the desires await the intellect; so if the intellect restrains them, then they hold back but if it relaxes then they continue onward."\(^{1023}\) Clarifying this further he says, "If you want your intellect to be dominant over your desires, then do not rush to fulfil your appetites until you have considered the outcome, as indeed, it has been said, 'regret for fulfilling one's appetites remains longer in the heart than the pleasure the heart experiences through fulfilling its desires.'\(^{1024}\)

Consequently, he equally exhorts his readers to: oppose their desires (makhalafat al-hawa);\(^{1025}\) disassociate themselves from their desires (mufaragat al-hawa);\(^{1026}\) to wear down


\(^{1022}\) See al-Muhāsibi, al-Ri‘āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 81.

\(^{1023}\) Ibid., pp. 306 and 433.

\(^{1024}\) Ibid., p. 68.


\(^{1026}\) See al-Muhāsibi, Risālat al-Mustarshidin, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 79.
the desires (mukābadat al-hawā)\textsuperscript{1027}; combat their desires (mujāhadatal-hawā)\textsuperscript{1028}; avoid adhering to the soul's desires (ittibāʿ al-hawā)\textsuperscript{1029}; avoid the desires (mujānibat al-ahwā')\textsuperscript{1030} and repudiate the desires (khal' al-hawā)\textsuperscript{1031}, all of which indicates how dangerous this facet of the soul is to the human being and how important it is to discipline the nafs in this regard.

It is worth noting here however that al-Muhāṣibī's exposition regarding opposing one's desires is not only theoretical but rather, he also gives practical advice and indicates in the following text, as to how one should begin this process, as he says:

The first stage of opposing the desires (mukhālafat al-hawā) is to gain control over one's stomach, since if the devotee can control his stomach he will have charge of his limbs, he will have full knowledge of his heart, taking his soul to account (al-muhāṣaba) will become easy and he will be able to oppose his soul in everything it desires, if Allāh wills. However, if you lose control of your stomach then the issue will become difficult for you, your limbs will go astray, your heart will overstep the bounds and be misguided, you will not truly know your state and you will not be able to take your soul to account.\textsuperscript{1032}

Similarly, al-Muhāṣibī also provides a number of other devices that help in the process of restricting the desires, such as: remaining silent instead of indulging in vain talk; lowering one's gaze; avoiding backbiting; the avoidance of indulging in sins and excesses, as well as contemplation and remembrance of God, as all of these acts preoccupy the soul from its desires. Moreover, he gives a full account of how the desires may be weakened in the following excerpt:

Persist in: reflecting upon your past sins; fear regarding the hardship Allāh has imposed upon you because of them; contemplating the resurrection, the questioning, hellfire and being forbidden paradise, as indeed you will have to answer to all of this. Also persist in: renewing your repentance and intention; caution regarding that which awaits you in the future and forbidding the soul (al-nafs) its pleasures, which its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted dislikes. If it [al-nafs] falters then return quickly and renew your


\textsuperscript{1030} Al-Muhāṣibī, al-Ri`āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{1031} Al-Muhāṣibī, al-Masmū'il fi 'Armāl al-Quṭūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-Aqīl, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṣā, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{1032} Al-Muhāṣibī, Shahr ar-Ma`rīfah wa Badi al-Nāṣīḥa, ed. al-Shāmi, pp. 53-4.
intention and repentance. If you continue with the thought of instilling fear into your soul then your fear will be strengthened and if you continue to refute your soul and be disobedient to it, leaving the entertainment of its desires, then it \[al-nafs\] will be severed from its habits, despair from you providing it its pleasures and its appetites will be terminated, as they are not being entertained. However, if you do entertain them \{the appetites\}, you censure it \[al-nafs\] with fear and grief and then it will be strengthened and become upright upon truthfulness, ascending in the observance of Allah, the Mighty and Exalted, and \{ascending\} in sincerity to Him.\[1033\]

Thus, we may summarise al-Muhäsibi's regarding the desires of the soul in his own words as he states, “If the benefit of the soul \{al-nafs\} and its welfare lay in that which it desires and wishes for, then all of mankind would be from the righteous \{al-sâlihin\}, so consider its reform to be in that which it dislikes and its corruption in that which it loves and wishes for.”\[1034\]

What is clear from the above discussion of the soul's desires is the intrinsic relationship between this and another quality of the \textit{nafs}, that of the appetites \{al-shahawât\}. Indeed, on surveying the works of al-Muhäsibi we find that this quality of the soul is mentioned with equally impressive frequency, thus indicating to us the importance that our author gives this facet of the \textit{nafs}.\[1035\] In his exposition of this quality of the soul al-Mubasibi relies on both Prophetic guidance through the medium of \textit{hadith} and the explanation of his Companions to elucidate the dangers of the \textit{nafs}'s appetites as the following quote shows:

\[\text{Abd Alläh b. Mas‘üd is reported to have said, “Do not exceed the limits set by Allah” and then he mentioned the \textit{hadith} of the Prophet, “Indeed, paradise is surrounded by unpleasant things and hellfire is surrounded by appetites \{al-shahawât\}.”}\[1036\]

\[\text{He [Ibn Mas‘üd] then commented, “Whoever lifted the veil will fall into what is beyond it.” [Al-Muhäsibi] meaning: whoever exceeded the boundary of hellfire will fall into it, as its boundary is...}\]
the appetites and the boundary of paradise is that which is unpleasant; so whoever went beyond the unpleasant entered paradise and whoever preferred the appetites entered hellfire and thus, it is known that the point of departure (al-maṭla') is exceeding [the limits] (al-mujwaza).

In a variation of this hadith, al-Muhāṣibi relates another narration to clarify his point further where the Prophet is reported to have said:

Indeed, Allāh the Blessed and Exalted, created hellfire and said to Jibrīl, “Go and look at it”, so Jibrīl went and looked and said, “By your Might, no one will hear of it and consequently enter it.” Then it [hellfire] was surrounded by appetites (al-shahawāt) and He said [to Jibrīl], “Go and look at it”, so Jibrīl went and looked and said, “By your Might, I fear that there will be no one who didn’t enter it.” Then He created paradise and said [to Jibrīl], “Go and look at it”, so Jibrīl went and looked and said, “By your Might, no one will hear of it and consequently not enter it.” Then it [paradise] was surrounded by unpleasant things (makārīh) and He said [to Jibrīl], “Go and look at it”, so Jibrīl went and looked and said, “By your Might, I fear that there will be no one who will enter it.”

Al-Muḥāṣibi then comments, “So whoever leaves what his heart desires (yahwā’ galbuhu) and his soul wishes for (tashtahi nafsuhu) from that which his Lord, the Mighty and Exalted, dislikes then he has protected himself from hellfire and brought about proximity to Allāh.” Thus, as with the soul’s desires (al-hawa), the appetites of the soul (al-shahawāt) are equally destructive and indeed, there can be only one outcome from pursuing them - annihilation in hellfire. This being the case al-Muḥāṣibi expends a great deal of effort to explain what the appetites are and also their nature. Seemingly relying on the Qur’ānic verse (3:14), al-Muḥāṣibi enumerates a number of such appetites in the following excerpt, “... the bodily appetites (shahawāt al-jasād) are women, children and excess food, drinks, clothing and riding animals. These are all detrimental to abstinence (al-zuhd) ...” Thus, al-Muḥāṣibi describes the bodily, carnal and ‘physical’ appetites, which he commonly terms ‘worldly appetites’ (shahawāt al-dunya) and which are inherent in all human beings but also distinguishes a further ‘esoteric’ or ‘psychological’ category of appetite that is, in his opinion at least, even more destructive as the following quote clarifies:

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1037 In the sense that it requires personal effort and may incur some difficulty.
1042 See al-Muḥāṣibi, Kitāb al-Nasā‘ī, ed. Āṭā, pp. 23 and 34.
... The appetites (al-shahawāt) are not sins (dhunūb) and evil deeds (sayyirān): the appetites are foods; drinks; clothing; buildings; riding animals; women; gold and silver. However, the most destructive of appetites are [craving] status; the love of leadership; establishment of prestige; the attainment of rank; [the desire for] the acceptance [of one's] command and prohibition; the fulfilment of needs; the love of good reputation amongst neighbours, friends and brothers and to be praised for the righteous deeds one has performed.\textsuperscript{1043}

Therefore, the human being is not only subject to a variety of 'physical' appetites, many of which are part of his innate nature\textsuperscript{1044}, but also a variety of 'psychological' appetites, which are hidden and much harder to identify.\textsuperscript{1045} This is, therefore, what al-Muhāsibi terms 'hidden' appetites (al-shahawāt al-khāfiyya), which are concealed within the soul and which he contrasts with the 'manifest' appetites (al-shahawāt al-zāhirā) that are the focus of the body. The danger of such 'hidden' appetites is that a person may well exhibit the outward manifestation of righteousness, but inwardly, they may be afflicted with other ailments, which have a detrimental effect on their sincerity to God, as al-Muḥāsibi explains, "This does not become clear except through knowledge that indicates to the nature of his intention, as they [a]-shahawät are hidden and concealed from the person undertaking the act if he is not illuminated by knowledge."\textsuperscript{1046}

Apart from the hidden aspects of the appetites, which by default makes them treacherous, the appetites are also subject to many of the factors that affect the desires (al-hawa). For example, the appetites are a product of heedlessness (al-ghafla) and forgetfulness (al-sahw) and are increased by entertaining high hopes (tīl al-amāl). Similarly, the soul by its very nature is given to its appetites being agitated (hayajān) and stimulated (jayyāsh) and once again, Satan duly obliges by instigating the appetites by inviting the soul to them.\textsuperscript{1047}

Indeed, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that the soul takes pleasure in (ladhdha) and

\textsuperscript{1043} Al-Muḥāsibi, Ādāb al-Nufūs, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{1044} A good example of this is eating, as human beings would simply die if they didn't have the appetite to nourish their bodies. Therefore, al-Muḥāsibi is not suggesting that one divest oneself of this quality, as this would be simply preposterous but rather, he is proposing that such appetites be controlled and reined in. The consequence of not doing this is that the appetites can then lead to an excess that in turn causes an exceeding of the limits, which is exactly what the above hadiths are referring to.
\textsuperscript{1045} Thus, once again al-Muḥāsibi shows just how adept he was at identifying the character traits of the human soul.
enjoys the ‘sweetness’ (halāwa) of its appetites, and thus, if denied one of them, it immediately seeks out another, as al-Muhāṣibī observes, “The soul, if it is forbidden from certain categories of appetites (aẖwāb al-shahāwāt), then it will seek other appetites for its enjoyment, as a substitute for the appetites and pleasures it has been prevented from.”

Despite the complex nature of this adversary, al-Muhāṣibī remains undeterred and indeed in a similar fashion to the way in which he deals with the desires (al-hawa), he urges his readers to: be cautious from falling into the enticements of the appetites; oppose the soul’s desires (mukhālat al-shahāwāt); to combat their appetites (muḥāhadat al-shahāwāt); to wear down their appetites (muḥābadat al-shahāwāt); overcome their desires (ghalabat al-shahāwāt); be fearful of the voracity of the appetites (darāwat al-shahāwāt) and to have enmity towards their appetites (al-bughl li ’l-shahāwāt). Similarly, one of the consistent counsels that al-Muhāṣibī gives is to abandon one’s appetites (tark al-shahāwāt) for God’s sake, so as to be safe from their harm and indeed, this again is one of the attributes of the guiding scholars whom he sought in his youth.

In addition, as with the desires of the soul (al-hawa), al-Muhāṣibī’s exposition of the soul’s appetites is not just a theoretical presentation, but rather, he also gives practical advice; thus, in dealing with appetites he says, “The most effective way to mortification of the appetites is to maintain grief (al-huzn) in the heart.” In a similar quote, he advises, “Avert the sudden occurrence of appetites with grief (al-huzn) and regret (al-nadma) for the fulfilment of previous appetites, whose pleasures have been gratified but whose consequences have remained with you.” Therefore, we can assume that maintaining and

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1049 Al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Riḍāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 111.
1053 Ibid., p. 241.
1055 See al-Muḥāṣibī, al-Riḍāya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 46.
inculcating grief (al-ḥuzn) into the nafs is a major goal in al-Muhāsibi's system of purifying the soul from its negative quality of its appetites. Another measure that al-Muhāsibi suggests is the imposition of hunger (al-jūr), which he considers a valuable method of severing the soul from its appetites (qat' al-shahawāt). If done sincerely for God, the divine element of tazkiya also plays a role, since God then causes such a person to 'taste' the 'flavour' of divine love and the 'sweetness' of conversing with Him, which in turn further severs him from his desires. Consequently, the carnal pleasures of the appetites are replaced with the spiritual delights of divine satisfaction.  

Thus, the greater the extent to which the soul is disciplined (ta'dīb) the easier it is for the individual to reject his soul's desires (rafd al-shahawāt). In this regard, al-Muhāsibi comments, "Indeed, the appetites (al-shahawāt) are a mere amusement (li'b), but if amusement exists, then seriousness is absent. However, the world will not exist and the religion (al-dīn) will not be reformed except through being serious." Therefore, for al-Muhāsibi the purification of the soul and its disciplining regarding its appetites is a pinnacle feature of spiritual life upon which the very status of religion is dependent.

In summary, once again we can conclude that al-Muhāsibi's conceptual understanding of the soul's qualities as elucidated in chapter two, is in complete agreement with the Islamic paradigm. Moreover, al-Muhāsibi due to his emphasis being on the base form of the soul, al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-su, provides an extensive exposition of the most destructive facets of this state of the nafs, namely its desires (al-hawa) and its appetites (al-shahawāt). Not only this but he also provides both encouragement and practical advice on how to deal with these facets of the soul further expounding his methodology regarding its purification.

6.5 States of the Nafs within the Works of al-Muhāsibi

During the discussion of the human soul in chapter two it was discovered, that from the Qur'anic perspective, the soul may experience three states, namely the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'īnna), the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) and the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-su). Since these are firmly established concepts within the Qur'anic text it is equally important to examine the works of al-Muhāsibi to ascertain whether or not this author utilises these terms during the course of his writings.

Upon surveying the works of al-Muḥāṣibi for the phrase ‘the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭmaʿīnna)’, one does not find this scholar using this exact wording but does find derivatives of it. For example when discussing the importance of intimately knowing the soul al-Muḥāṣibi states:

So if you gained knowledge of it (al-nafs) you will increase in love and affection for Allāh and in hatred and enmity for it; similarly [you will increase in] trust and confidence in Allāh, the Magnificent and Exalted and in despair of it. Likewise, you will increase in tranquillity towards Allāh (tumaʾīnna ilā Allāh) and in cautiousness concerning it.1064

On the same theme al-Muḥāṣibi also states, “And whoever gained knowledge of his soul (‘arafa nafsahu) then self conceit (al-‘ujb) will leave him, his gratitude to Allāh will increase and his cautiousness regarding it [al-nafs] and his tranquillity and his trust in his Master will be intensified.”1065 This is not exclusively an attribute for the worldly existence however, as, when clarifying the state of the believer who has been informed of their admittance into paradise, post-mortem in the grave, al-Muḥāṣibi describes him as follows, “... and so your soul will find tranquillity with Allāh (tatmaʾīnna Ilā Allāh nafsuka).”1066

Similarly, during the exposition of the tranquil soul in chapter two, it was seen that reason behind the soul being described as ‘tranquil’ was the satisfaction (rīḍā) of both parties - the divine and the human - with one another and in particular the human being’s satisfaction with divine predestination and predetermination (al-qadā wa ‘l-qadar).1067 When surveying the works of al-Muḥāṣibi we also find a great deal of emphasis laid on the quality of satisfaction (al-rīḍā) and in particular satisfaction with divine predestination and predetermination (al-qadā wa ‘l-qadar).1068 For example, when asked regarding the meaning of al-rīḍā he replies, “It is the satisfaction of the heart with the ‘bitterness’ of divine predestination”1069 and with regard to the manifestation of al-rīḍā in reality he reiterates, “It is satisfaction with divine predestination, meaning: the composure of the heart regarding the judgement of Allāh and to entrust (al-tafwīd) [all affairs] to Allāh before satisfaction (al-rīḍā) and to be satisfied after having entrusted [all affairs to

1065 Ibid., p. 437.
1066 Al-Muḥāṣibi, al-Tawahhum, ed. al-Khusht, p. 32.
1067 See p. 71 above.
Regarding the importance of this quality al-Muhäsbî also states, “And know that you will not 'taste' the 'flavour' of faith until you believe in divine predestination, the good of it and the bad of it.”

Thus, we can conclude that even though al-Muhäsbî does not use the specific phrase ‘al-nafs al-muṭma‘innad, the concept was not alien to him and indeed, when dealing with the human soul, the quality of tranquillity and serenity (al-ṭuma‘inā) is seen to be an attribute of the person who has truly understood the nature of the nafs and consequently, gained success in the hereafter because of it. Similarly, he also exhorts his readers to the qualities that will bring about the reformation of the soul until its reaches a state of ‘tranquillity’, namely al-ridā with divine predestination, which in turn results in the pleasure of God.

This is further evidenced by the following excerpt which is almost a perfect description of the tranquil soul:

So when his [the believer's] state changes and it [al-nafs] deems agreeable that which it used to be averse, found pleasant that which it found to be distasteful and was abstinent concerning that which it desired, then his heart will be purified. As such, his heart will be illuminated with certainty in the hereafter and he will witness in his mind that which is unseen in the next life. Then, the exaltation of Allāh will be strengthened in his heart, his fear of Him and hope in Him will be intensified and his shame in front of Allāh will be awakened. Moreover, he will be irritated by every barrier that prevents him from proximity to his Lord and every issue that preoccupies him with other than Him.1071

If mention of the tranquil soul is rare, then mention of the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) is even rarer, as it is not mentioned by name even once in the works of al-Muhäsbî. Despite this, however, bearing in mind the description of this state of the nafs given in chapter two1072, we can deduce some inference to the self-reproaching soul in a limited number of examples in al-Muhäsbî's works. The first of these describes the actions of someone who has just come to the realisation of the true nature of his soul and his past misdeeds and as such, al-Muhäsbî describes his state thus:

And when this has become clear to him, he will know that in being obedient to it [the nafs] lies his perdition on the Day of Judgement and in being disobedient to it lies his salvation in the hereafter and that it has habitually attempted to destroy him, becoming accustomed to extended reticence and aversion to that which pleases his Lord.1073

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1070 Al-Muhäsbî, Ādāb al-Nufūs, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 146.
1071 Al-Muhäsbî, Bad’ Man Anāba ilā Allāh, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 32.
1072 See pp. 67-9 above.
1073 Al-Muhäsbî, Bad’ Man Anāba ilā Allāh, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 25.
In a similar example, al-Mubasibi describes the course of action of such a person as follows, “So then he rebukes it [the nafs], reminding it of its sins; he then strikes fear into it that it may have incurred [God’s] wrath because of them and that it did not perform its duty to Him as He truly deserves and also, as it does not know in what state it will die. Consequently, it became submissive, fearful, trembling and humbled.”

Moreover, although al-Muḥāṣibi does not mention the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) by name, he does describe its state and the circumstances that bring about this state. Therefore, the description of the nafs given above is neither the base state of the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammūra bi ’l-sūr) but nor is it the elevated state of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma’īnna) and thus, we can conclude that it is an intermediate state where the soul begins to blame itself for the transgression it has committed, inclining towards repentance, regret, self recrimination and reproach, these being salient features of the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma).

Bearing in mind the importance that al-Mubasibi gives to the discussion of the negative qualities of the nafs in general and of the desires and appetites specifically, as seen in the last section, it is little wonder that of the three states of the nafs related in the Qurʾān by far the most common in the works of al-Muḥāṣibi is the third and final state, the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammūra bi ’l-sūr). Indeed, al-Muḥāṣibi makes mention of this form of the soul in both terms of concept and exact phraseology and this is indicative of the importance that al-Muḥāṣibi gives to this state of the soul and the emphasis he lays on gaining knowledge of it, combating it and reforming it. Thus, his concentration on dealing with this form of the nafs is due to the fact that, as we have seen in chapter two, it alludes to the lowest level of the human soul, which not only encourages the performance of evil but also exerts effort to make such actions acceptable and appealing to the human being. Thus, the nafs is described as enticing (sawwalat), subjecting (tawwa’at) and tempting (tuwaswis), causing the human being to be overcome by his desires, to the extent that he pursues the appetites of his soul, to the exclusion of everything else. As such, the limits set by Allāh are made secondary in comparison to the fulfilment of his own needs and desires.

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1074 Ibid., p. 31.
1076 See pp. 65-7 above.
It is no surprise then that al-Muhāsibi warns the aspirant on the path to God regarding this state of his soul, from associating with it, being in agreement with it and the effect of its desires on acts of obedience to Him, as the following excerpt clarifies, “And know that I am not suggesting that you abandon the performance of righteous actions, as every action you do not perform today will have no reward tomorrow but rather, I am warning you concerning the deception of the Satan and the desires of your soul that is inclined to evil (hawā nafsika al-ammāra bi 'l-sū).” Similarly, al-Muhāsibi considers this state of the soul so important that he makes it one of the essential elements of his system of intimate knowledge and insight (al-ma‘rifa), stressing its importance as follows:

And as for intimate knowledge of the soul inclined to evil (ma‘rifa al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū) then abase it [al-nafs] as Allah has abased it, describe it as Allah has described it [i.e. that it is inclined to evil] and attack it with that which Allah has commanded you, as it is a greater enemy for you than Iblis, since he gains influence over you through it, due to its acceptance of him.

Therefore, a person who has gained such intimate knowledge of his soul has, “Comprehended from Allah that He has described his soul as being inclined to evil (ammāra bi 'l-sū) and enticing towards sins (li 'l-dhunūb musawwila) and it is the soul that has performed the transgressions for which his Lord will take him to account.”

Consequently, having achieved this understanding, the believer who attempts to purify this base form of his soul has:

Left the external defects and turned his attention to the internal defects, engaging the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs ammāra). Thus, he disciplines it until it renounces such characteristics and strives against it (jāhadahā) until it submits, being sincere in combating it (mujāhadatihā) until it becomes righteous. As a result, he will approach his Lord purified, repentant and divested of both external and internal defects.

This being the case, from al-Muhāsibi’s perspective it is the soul inclined to evil that presents the greatest danger in this regard, since it is the biggest factor in the potential destruction of the human being in both this life and in the hereafter and therefore, it is the target and goal of tazkiya. Thus, in summary we may quote al-Muhāsibi, who, when discussing the danger and nature of this state of the soul said, “It is sufficient for you to know that Allah, the Magnificent and Exalted, informed you that it is ever commanding to

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1078 See pp. 213-16 above.
1081 Al-Muḥāsibi, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, ed. Mazāli, p. 92.
evil (ammāra bi 'l-sū'), except for whomever your Lord had mercy upon and upon whom He bestowed His favours.\textsuperscript{1082}

Once again we may conclude that despite al-Muḥāsibi not always specifically mentioning the three states of the soul alluded to in the Qurān, he clearly understood the implications of these phrases, being entirely in agreement with them conceptually at least. This is particularly true of the base form of the soul, the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'), which is specifically mentioned in his works and which is the focus of his attention due to the danger it poses to the security of the human being and as such, from his perspective, it is this lowest manifestation of the nafs that must be purified.

6.6 The Nature of the Nafs within the Works of al-Muḥāsibi

In addition to the above survey based upon the categories and subject headings discussed in chapter two, it is also worth examining al-Muḥāsibi's own attitude, approach and view of the nafs, as manifested in his works. It was observed in chapter two\textsuperscript{1083} that the creator of the human soul is Allāh, as the following verse alludes, “O Mankind, fear your Lord Who created you from a single nafs ...” (4: 1) and it is worth noting that al-Muḥāsibi also understood this point as the following excerpt shows, “A person should know that the nature of all souls (al-nufūs) is quite similar. Indeed, all of them are prone to forgetfulness (al-sahw) and heedlessness (al-ghafia), and that his [the person's] soul is from the souls of creation, derived from the son of Ādam, peace be upon him.\textsuperscript{1084} This being the case al-Muḥāsibi regards the nature of all souls to be reasonably similar and as such, we can identify a negative trend towards the innate character of the human soul and as stated previously, when al-Muḥāsibi speaks regarding the nafs it seem that he is virtually referring exclusively to the base form of the soul - al-nafs ammāra bi 'l-sū'.\textsuperscript{1085}

In understanding the nature of soul, as we have already seen in this chapter, al-Muḥāsibi relies heavily on both of Islam's revelatory sources, namely the Qurān and hadith, as well as the opinions of the earliest generations, as the following extended quote indicates, where he is asked about the nafs:

\textsuperscript{1082} Al-Muḥāsibi, al-Ri`āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 434.

\textsuperscript{1083} See p. 56 above.

\textsuperscript{1084} Al-Muḥāsibi, al-Ri`āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 440.

\textsuperscript{1085} This is not to say there is no reference to positive qualities of the soul in the works of al-Muḥāsibi but indeed they are rare. For example, there is a reference to the patience of the soul (sabr al-nafs) see: al-Muḥāsibi, Kitāb al-Khalwa, ed. al-Yasūnī in al-Mashriq, Adhār/Nisān, 1954, pp. 188 and other limited references to the conscience of the soul (damir al-nafs), see: al-Muḥāsibi, al-Mašā`ī li Aṭmāl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-`Aql, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Ahmad ‘Āṭā, p. 91 and al-Muḥāsibi, al-Ri`āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 215 and 530.
Haven't you heard Allah, the Exalted's statement, "Indeed, the soul is prone to evil (inna '1-nafs la ammärā bi '1-sū') [12:53]? And His, the Exalted's statement, "As for the one who feared the position of his Lord and forbid his soul (nafsahu) its desires (al-hawā) [79:40]? And in the story of the son of Adam, "Then his soul made the murder of his brother seem appealing (tawwac at lahu nafsuhu) and so he killed him" [5:30]? "He [Ya'qūb] said: indeed your souls have enticed you (sawwalat lakum anfusukum) to some matter, so patience is more befitting" [12:18]? "He [Moses] said: And what have you to do with this O Sāmiri? " until His statement, "Thus did my soul entice me (sawwalat li nafsī) to the greater jihad (al-jihād al-akbar); the struggle against your souls (muḥāhadat al-nufūṣ)." A man asked the Prophet, "What is the best form of jihad?" and he replied, "Your personal struggle against your soul and your desires (muḥāhadatuka nafsaka wa hawāk) ... Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said, "Revive your hearts with the remembrance of Allah as indeed, they soon become rusty and vilify these souls (al-anfūs) as indeed they are lame (zuṣā)" ... And the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and his Companions would seek shelter in Allah from the evil of their own souls (min shūrūr anfūsuhi) as indeed, the soul (al-nafs) has the propensity to incline to the fulfilment of its desires, as long as is has not been 'etched' (yahfrūhuḥ) by fear (al-khwāf) ... 1091

Therefore, it is little surprise that, when discussing the nature of the soul, al-Muhāṣibi expends a great deal of effort to clarify the dissension of the soul (munāzaʿat al-nafs); the enticement of the soul (taswil al-nafs); the doubts of the soul (rayb al-nafs) and warns against the sinister aspirations (amān) and unrealistic hopes of the soul (irtijāʿ al-nafs), as well as the ailments and cure of the soul (daʿ al-nafs wa dawāʿuha).
Advancing the exposition of the soul above, which was entirely based upon classical Islamic sources, al-Muhäsibi provides a no less negative but more ‘psychological’ and ‘introspective’ appraisal when asked about how to have contempt (al-izdirä) for the soul, he says:

Through your knowledge of its true position and the evil of its aspirations and deeds. By knowledge of its true position I mean how it was created with a natural disposition and form; how it considers the path to salvation to be burdensome, not out of enmity for salvation but because it despises the imposition of hardship and equally despises having to abandon the things it adores from the transient world. Similarly, how it deems insignificant that which will bring about its destruction, without having any affection for destruction in the hereafter but rather, due to it avoiding its pleasures and avoiding its desires therein, despite it affirming that both the reward and punishment in the hereafter are greater and more lasting and that both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of the worldly life are lowly and ephemeral. So despite it knowing and grasping that [the world is] lowly and ephemeral, it still prefers it to the greater and more lasting, not out of denying that [the hereafter] is greater and more lasting but rather, out of preferring something from the transient world, whether it be the fulfilment of a pleasure, comfort from hardship, or that it be diverted from its passions ...

It is incumbent on someone who has comprehended this from Allâh, the Mighty and Exalted, that if he wants to bring about its [a]-nafs salvation that he never leaves being attentive and contemplative and is never heedless of it or feels secure from it. Indeed, he should divest himself of having a good opinion of it and be quick to accuse it if it was swift in seeking salvation, due to him knowing that it opposes this and due to what has already occurred in terms of the evil of its aspirations and deeds, as he knows that it considers the path to salvation to be burdensome, considers the path of destruction insignificant and that it will not submit to the path of salvation except through compulsion and coercion.1098

This being the case and bearing these factors in mind, al-Muhäsibi warns against the destruction of the soul (halk/talif al-nafs)1099; its procrastination (taswîf al-nafs) regarding the performance of righteous acts1100; its wickedness (sîr al-nafs)1101 that leads to it committing offences (jinayât al-nafs)1102 and the many faults of the soul ("uyûb al-nafs)1103,

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1102 See al-Muhäsibi, Bad' Man Anâba ilâ Allâh, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 23.
which constitute the many things that it conceals and attempts to keep them hidden (khabäyä/khafäyä/sarä'Ir al-nafs)\(^{1104}\). Indeed, the cunning nature of the soul is manifested in the fact that it is given to deception (khid'at al-nafs)\(^ {1105}\), deceit and falsehood (kidhb al-nafs)\(^ {1106}\) and employs subterfuge and various stratagems (hiyal al-nafs)\(^ {1107}\) to ensure that its appetites and desires are fulfilled. In this regard he says:

Don’t be deceived by what it makes manifest to you, do not hope for what it wishes, if you released it you will have gone astray and if you fulfilled its request you will be destroyed. If you became heedless of taking it to account, then you will have fled [responsibility], if you were unable to oppose it, you will be drowned and if you submitted to its desires you will have been appointed [a place] in the hellfire. It [the nafs] has no truth and no good can come from it; it is the cause of every tribulation, a treasure trove of disgrace, the vault of Iblis and the abode of every evil. It is as its Creator described it [i.e. ammära bi 'l-suū], every time it manifests fear then you are secure, every time it claims to be truthful it is lying and every time it mentions sincerity it is ostentation and self conceit.\(^ {1108}\)

Therefore, even to have empathy for the soul is a mistaken approach as he explains, “You have mercy on it [al-nafs] but it does not have mercy on you ... it strivesthat which pleases Satan and in that which lies the anger of your Lord.”\(^ {1109}\)

Consequently, it is little surprise that al-Muḥäsibi considers the nafs a deadly adversary and the ‘enemy within’, which is clear from his statement, “And take every precaution against your contemporaries (ahl zamānīk) and especially against your soul, as indeed, it is your true enemy.”\(^ {1110}\) Similarly, he clarifies:

So through that which Allāh has commanded, be its [al-nafs] adversary opposing that which it invites you to from its desires. Spend all your time in mortifying its desires, burying its wishes and be cautious concerning its aspirations and procrastination. Turn to it repeatedly with disparagement and deprecation, reminding it of its shortcomings, so that perhaps its authority may dwindle and be crushed. May Allāh, the Exalted, aid us and


\(^{1104}\) See al-Muḥäsibi, Kitāb al-Naṣārīḥ, ed. Ahmad, pp. 72, 75, 80, 81, 82 and 90 and al-Muḥäsibi, al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh, ed. al-Barr, p. 530.


\(^{1109}\) Al-Muḥäsibi, Sharḥ al-Maṣrif wa Badhl al-Naṣība, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 55-6.

\(^{1110}\) Ibid., p. 89
you against it without any punishment from Him! Thus, if you acted to extinguish this ‘darkness’ and these despicable characteristics from your heart, you will have become purified with your Lord and nothing will defile your soul (nafsaka)\textsuperscript{111}

As such, al-Muhäsibi expends very effort to avert his readers from being overcome, conquered and subdued by the soul and its desires (ghalabat al-nafs)\textsuperscript{112}

In summary, we can conclude that al-Muḥäsibi’s view of the soul is not only heavily grounded in his understanding of the revelatory sources of Islam and the tradition of early scholarship but also in his own, personal experience of reflection, introspection and contemplation. Consequently, he has a highly developed and intricate vision of the nafs, which forms the basis of much of his discourse within the field of Islamic spirituality and mysticism. His theory of the soul revolves around his censuring of its inclination to the fleeting and ephemeral and its proclivity to relaxation and comfort, these being its outstanding characteristics, which are seemingly ‘imprinted’ upon its nature. Moreover, he sets out to enlighten his readers to these facts and illuminate them to the subtle and precise facets of the soul, so as to ultimately bring about its reform and avoid its destruction.

It remains to be seen, however, how exactly al-Muḥäsibī proposes to ‘cleanse’ such a degenerate soul of its faults, desires and appetites and indeed, this is the task of the next section.

6.7 Al-Muḥäsibi’s Methodology of Tazkiyat al-Nafs

Due to the nature and importance al-Muḥäsibi lays on the nafs in his works, much of this chapter has been concerned with providing an exposition of his view regarding the human soul and having done so, it is now time to turn our attention to the way in which al-Muḥäsibi proposes that one may ‘deal’ with such a soul and indeed, ultimately bring about its purification. Upon surveying the works of al-Muḥäsibi, one finds a great many expressions and phrases that may be conceived to relate to what could generally be termed the ‘training’ of the soul. In fact, careful examination of such phrases suggests that despite the almost exclusively ‘negative’ view of the soul that al-Muḥäsibi holds, his approach to disciplining the nafs is not exclusively ‘negative’ also, but includes terminologies, which may be broadly considered to be ‘positive’ attitudes to ‘training’ of the soul. The following

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 74.

discussion now attempts to identify and isolate both these 'negative' and 'positive' approaches employed to bring about the soul’s purification.

With regard to the 'negative' perspective, one is able to identify a number of concepts that al-Muhäsibi employs to bring under control the detrimental potentialities within the human soul, which include dispraisal of the soul (dhamm al-nafs) for its evil actions and intentions and the pursuit of its desires, the accusation of the soul (ittihām al-nafs) due to its deceptive and deceitful nature described above and having contempt for the soul (izdirā' al-nafs), as it is the 'enemy within' and strives for the human being's destruction.

Similarly, al-Muhäsibi suggests that the soul be 'broken' (inkisār al-nafs), through imposing punitive measures upon it ('uqūbat al-nafs); that the soul be abased (muhānat al-nafs) due to its evil nature; that the soul be coerced (ilzām al-nafs) towards correct action and on occasion, he even describes the soul as an enemy combatant that should be fought against (qītal al-nafs).

Of the more common 'negative' themes within the works of al-Muhäsibi is censuring of the soul (muc tabat a1-nafs) and in this regard al-Muhäsibi clarifies in what respect it should be performed, as a person should:

... Censure his soul regarding its inadequacy (tafrīthā) and rebuke it for its committing of sins (dhunūbihā), out of adherence to the command of Allah, the Mighty and Exalted, to do this to his soul (nafsih). He should also know that he is not consistent in this except that Allah, the Exalted, to Whom he has entrusted his affairs, has caused him to be successful in it. Thus, it is He Who has destined it for him, awakened him and granted him success to censure his soul.
Furthermore, one of the more severe descriptions is that remembering the torments of the hereafter is a ‘cauterising’ of the soul (\textit{taldhī li 'l-nafs}). More conventional descriptions, however, suggest that the soul be made to proceed cautiously (\textit{takhwif} \textit{al-nafs}) by instilling fear into it (\textit{al-takhwif} \textit{al-nafs}), that it be forced to shun (\textit{azūf} \textit{al-nafs}) the worldly life (\textit{al-dunyā}), its pleasures (\textit{labhdhātihi}) and appetites (\textit{shahwātihā}), to inculcate wisdom into it (\textit{al-ḥikma}) by averting it (\textit{insirāf} \textit{al-nafs}) from its nature and restricting it (\textit{habs} \textit{al-nafs}) from its desires.

Conversely, al-Muḥāṣibi equally utilises a number of more ‘positive’ terms and concepts regarding disciplining the soul; these include that one should have both care (\textit{riḍāyat} \textit{al-nafs}) and concern (\textit{al-`ināya bi 'l-nafs}) for the soul; counsel and exhort the soul (\textit{waṣiyat} \textit{naṣīḥat} \textit{al-nafs}); be concerned with its state (\textit{al-`ishtihāl} \textit{al-nafs}) and even on occasion have gentleness with the soul (\textit{al-rīf} \textit{al-shafāqa} \textit{al-ṣāla}) and as well as instilling fear into the soul regarding God’s punishment and its own destruction, also encourages his readers to instil hope into the soul (\textit{rajjā' al-nafs}) that its repentance be accepted and God’s satisfaction be attained.

Indeed, another feature of al-Muḥāṣibi’s discourse is the reformation of the soul (\textit{īslāḥ} \textit{al-nafs}) regarding which he says, “And be carefully observant concerning your aspiration and preoccupy yourself with the reformation of your soul (\textit{īslāḥ nafṣika}) rather than being concerned with the faults of others, since it used to be said, ‘It is sufficient a fault in a person

\footnotesize{1124} Ibid., p. 102.
\footnotesize{1126} Ibid., p. 238.
that he brings to light in people that which is hidden from himself in his own soul."\textsuperscript{1136}

Furthermore, when clarifying the initial stage of the process of reformation of the soul and explaining its true position, al-Muhäsibi says, "The first thing that is incumbent upon you with regard to reformation of your soul - which will not be reformed by any other means and which is the beginning of 'concern' (al-rî'âya) - is that you know that it [al-nafs] is an indentured slave."\textsuperscript{1137}

In making the soul realise this reality and the reality of its state, al-Muhäsibi once again employs the intellect encouraging his readers to look closely at this intrinsic part of humanity (nazr ilâ al-nafs bi 'l-'aql)\textsuperscript{1138}, such that it acts as a protection (hirâsat al-nafs)\textsuperscript{1139}, guarding over the soul's treachery and deception. In addition, however, the reformation of the soul ultimately requires not only 'rational' examination but also 'physical' action and in this regard al-Muhäsibi suggests spiritual exercises (riyādat al-nafs)\textsuperscript{1140} for the soul with the goal of weaning it from its habits (iftâm al-nafs)\textsuperscript{1141} and bringing about its rectitude (istiqâmat al-nafs)\textsuperscript{1142}.

Thus, in summary al-Muhäsibi introduces a number of terms and concepts, both punitive and progressive in an integrated manner, according to the state, condition and qualities of the soul to nurture it and develop it and ultimately bring about its purification. This being as it may, these terms are relatively rare when compared to other concepts presented in the works of al-Muhäsibi and as such, are only part of the story regarding his methodology of purifying the soul. Indeed, al-Muhäsibi himself alludes to other, more important methods in the following text regarding how to deal with the soul, "It is incumbent upon you to oppose it (mukhâlafatihâ), take it to account (muḥâsabatihâ), be knowledgeable concerning it (ma'rifatihâ) and strive against it (mu'âhadihâ)..."\textsuperscript{1143} This being the case, it is equally vital that these concepts also be examined and indeed, this is the goal of the following sections.

\textsuperscript{1136} Al-Muhäsibi, Risâlat al-Mustarshidrn, ed. Abü Ghudda, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{1137} Al-Muhäsibi, al-Rî'âya li Huqûq Allâh, ed. al-Barr, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{1138} See al-Muhäsibi, Kitâb al-Nâsîrî, ed. Aḥmad, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{1139} See al-Muhäsibi, al-Qasd wa 'l-Ru'ûf ilâ Allâh in al-Wâsáiyâ, ed. 'Abd al-Qâdir Aḥmad Aṭā, pp. 229 and 232.
\textsuperscript{1141} See al-Muhäsibi, al-Rû'ûf ilâ Huqûq Allâh, ed. al-Barr, p. 395.
\textsuperscript{1143} Al-Muhäsibi, Sharâb al-Marîfa wa Badî al-Nâsîha, ed. al-Shâmi, p. 37.
6.7.1 Ma'rifat al-Nafs

As the above quote indicates, one of the principal features of al-Muḥāṣibī's teaching is intimate knowledge of the soul (ma'rifat al-nafs) and indeed, it is a recurrent theme within his works. Similarly, as we have seen previously, al-Muḥāṣibī considers this aspect of the soul so important that he makes it one of the essential elements of his system of intimate knowledge and insight (al-ma'rifā). It may seem entirely obvious to indicate that one requires a certain amount of knowledge of a thing before one may begin to understand it and indeed, in this case set about its purification. Yet as the discussion so far has alluded, the nafs is a particularly unique adversary, since it dwells hidden deep within the nature of man and this being the case, its faults and hence their elimination are especially difficult to identify. To this effect, al-Muḥāṣibī has seemingly spent the better part of his scholarly career in attempting to elucidate and verify this esoteric knowledge (ilm al-bāṭīn), so that his peers and the latter day Muslim community may be fully aware of the dangers of their own souls and the terrible consequences of ignoring such dangers.

Thus, when asked regarding intimate knowledge of the soul (ma'rifat al-nafs), al-Muḥāṣibī replied:

You have asked about the 'root' (ṣūṣh) of all good and evil and its branches (furū'ihimā), its outward and its inward, what is known of it and what is unknown. You have asked about a knowledge that no one can endure these days and whoever does endure it, does so only verbally, as they cannot endure action. This is because in this knowledge there is patience, hardship, struggling against outward and inward evil, enduring outward and inward good, which is the reality of sincerity in word and deed, true repentance, continuous grief and contemplation of the hereafter. And how impossible it is that the slave will reach the knowledge of the faults of his soul (ṣūḥub nafsahī) except through extensive knowledge and use of the intellect, unequivocal understanding, profound wisdom and penetrating insight.

Therefore, reflecting on this quote from al-Muḥāṣibī, it is easy to see the great emphasis that he places on this facet of the purification process, as he deems it to be the essence of distinguishing between good and evil, which is also seemingly an indication of the dual

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1145 See pp. 213-16 above.

potentiality within the soul. This being the case, it is only through an intimate and erudite understanding of the soul that such potentialities will be distinguished. At the same time however, due to the struggle and effort required in undertaking the study of this knowledge and its consequent implementation, al-Muhäsibi also informs us that there are very few people who adopt such a path. Indeed, this path requires that every motive and action be examined through utilising not only the knowledge gained but also, every asset of the perceptive faculties to reach the true nature of the human soul. Thus, despite the difficulties of acquiring intimate knowledge of the soul (*ma’rifat al-nafs*), it is an essential first step in the purification process, as without it the aspirant upon the path to God could not possibly hope to succeed.

As such, no one can even begin to purify his soul without first attaining some familiarity with it and in this regard, al-Muhäsibi says, "If a person didn’t know the faults of his soul (‘uyûb nafsîhî), then came to know them and rejected them, then he will be truly repentant." The implication of this is that true repentance - often regarded by Sufis to be the first stage on the mystical path - cannot take place until knowledge of the soul’s defects is comprehended and consequently, they are rejected. Indeed, by this statement al-Muhäsibi alludes to another completely different concept of repentance, in the sense that repentance is customarily associated with the expiation of sins, whereas here al-Muhäsibi suggests that one should first eliminate the cause of the sin in the first place - the faults of the soul. Therefore, the concept of purification commonly associated with repentance, i.e. that one is ‘cleansed’ from one’s sins, is taken a step further to mean the ‘cleansing’ of the cause of the sin, which therefore extends the scope of purification to a new level. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why repentance (*al-tawba*) has not been included here in al-Muhäsibi’s theory of *tazkiya*, even though it is commonly associated with the ‘cleansing’ process. This is because al-Muhäsibi, as alluded to here, seems to have been concerned with a completely different form of purification - that of identifying the defects of the soul and consequently, purifying them so that the incidence of sin would be minimal in the first place and as such, the need for repentance was equally limited.

This being the case, the consequences of al-Muhäsibi’s understanding of *ma’rifat al-nafs* are often far reaching as the following excerpt indicates:

> You will not be sincere to Allâh until you are sincere to your own soul; and you will not be sincere to your own soul until you know it well; and you

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1147 Ibid., Kânûn al-Thânî/Shabât, 1955, p. 44.
won’t know it well until you examine closely and subject it to [remembering] death and the display in front of Allah, then its [true] states will be made manifest; and its [true] states will not be made manifest until you accuse it regarding that which it considers itself righteous therein and judge it according to its misdeeds. If you have accused it, then you have examined it and if you have examined it, then its [true] states will be made manifest. If its [true] states have been made manifest, then you will also know its pretence, deception and deceit. So if you came to know it well you would be cautious concerning it; and if you were cautious concerning it, you will have scrutinised it; and if you have scrutinised it, you will see the true nature of its flight from the obedience of its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted, and its simulation of that which its Lord dislikes, as it is the treasure trove of every evil and the inviter to every affliction. Its Creator, the Mighty and Exalted, has informed you that it is ever inclined to evil (bi 'sū' ammāra), so take every precaution regarding it and accuse it for the sake of your religion. \(149\)

According to this account of al-Muḥāsibī’s conceptualisation of ma’rifat al-nafs, the very essence of religious practice - sincerity to God - is intrinsically related to the intimate knowledge of the soul, as sincerity of word and deed will not be attained except through this facet of purification. The acquisition of intimate knowledge of the soul is equally dependent however on subjecting the nafs to precise examination and scrutiny, through which its true nature of deception and deceit is known. Once a person has gained an understanding of these qualities of the soul, this in turn instils caution into him regarding it, which causes him to strive against it, further purifying it. Therefore, ma’rifat al-nafs, as al-Muḥāsibī views it, is also a multi-faceted, multi-layered process that has many positive consequences in dealing with the human soul and indeed, he regards it as being pivotal to the essence of religious praxis.

The results of this essential knowledge of the soul also become clear in the following text taken from al-Muḥāsibī’s work that specifically deals with the concept of ma’rifa:

So if you come to know it, it will become contemptible [in your eyes] and you will have gained influence over it. Thus, if these three qualities\(^{150}\) existed in you, then remain steadfast and seek Allah’s aid in maintaining them and do not be heedless. Then, if you managed to discipline your soul (adab al-nafs) and oppose it (mukhālafatihā) in that which it desires and wishes for, you will be strong in all characteristics, if Allah wills.\(^{151}\)

Thus, once one has gained a knowledge of the human soul, its true nature becomes manifest, i.e. that it is lowly and despicable and as such, once this is known the soul will

\(^{149}\) Al-Muḥāsibī, al-Riṣāya li Ḥuqūq Allah, ed. al-Barr, pp. 402-3.

\(^{150}\) Meaning: knowledge of the soul (ma’rifat al-nafs), that it is contemptible in your eyes (hawānuha) and your influence over it (al-quwwa alayhā).

\(^{151}\) Al-Muḥāsibī, Sharḥ al-Ma’rīfa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 37.
hold no influence, since one is under no illusion as to the claims it makes nor the deceptions it attempts to mask. However, this particular quote is also significant from two other perspectives; firstly, that this is not a ‘one off’ process but rather, it requires continual, renewed perseverance and steadfastness and secondly, even though one was characterised by the aforementioned attributes, the divine role in tazkiya remains constant as this whole process will be impossible without God’s assistance.

Therefore, in summary we may conclude that intimate knowledge of the soul (marifat al-nafs) is an essential and intrinsic, primary facet of al-Muhäsibi’s vision of the soul’s purification - a fact to which both the discussion in this chapter so far and the works of al-Muḥäsibi himself bear testimony. Indeed, one brief statement from our author may summarise his whole approach to the topic, as he states, “And the sign of truly knowing the soul (marifat al-nafs) is having a bad opinion of it (sūr al-ẓann bihā).”

6.7.2 al-Murāqaba

In addition to the facets of purification mentioned in the above quote by al-Muḥäsibi, one is also able to identify another aspect of the tazkiya process, which is the continual observance of God (al-murāqaba). By this we mean the constant cognisance of divine observance of every thought, word and deed and therefore, both the external (al-ẓāhir) and internal (al-bāṭin) actions of the human being, which in turn causes the believer to act in his every circumstance as if God is ‘watching’ his every move. In fact, this is a common feature of al-Muḥäsibi’s works, both conceptually and in terms of phraseology and indeed, we have seen this concept alluded to previously in chapter two, where the Prophet, when asked concerning spiritual perfection (iḥsān), is reported to have said, “It is to worship Allah as if you see Him [and know] that if you do not see Him, He sees you.” Thus, we can conclude that the concept of observance of God (al-murāqaba) is virtually synonymous with that of Prophetic notion of spiritual perfection (iḥsān).

1152 Al-Muhäsibi, Ādāb al-Nufüs, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 146.
1154 See footnote 304, p. 80 above.
Having understood this to be the case and in applying this Prophetic narration, al-Muhäsibi is unequivocal in stressing the importance of *al-muräqaba*, "You should be concerned with three characteristics to the exclusion of all others: your Lord's observance of you (*muräqabatika rabbika*), taking your soul to account (*muḥäsabatika nafsika*) and reminding yourself of your sins (*muḥākaratika dhānbika*)."\(^{1155}\) Therefore, from al-Muhäsibi's perspective, this facet of the purification process is a vital concern for any aspirant seeking to undertake the task of *tazkiya* and indeed, it is interesting to note that this along with another facet - that of taking your soul to account (*muḥäsabat al-nafs*), which will be discussed shortly, constitute the only factors that one should be concerned with, indicating their vital and essential nature.

Al-Mubasibi exhorts his readers to take on board this quality, saying, "I advise you, O my brother, after the observance of Allāh (*muräqabat Allāh*) in your aspirations and in your every movement; to listen attentively to Allāh and understand through Him, as indeed, within this Qurān, which has been revealed to us, is the clarification of everything and the knowledge of everything."\(^{1156}\) As such, the essential nature of *al-muräqaba* is made absolutely clear, as the very first piece of advice al-Muhäsibi offers is regarding it and not only this but also that it has a primary place in the advice he gives, as it precedes his counsel regarding the Qurān. Similarly, the subject matter is also made clear as it not only concerns the outward action but also the inward facets of the human being.

Thus, regarding the 'outward' acts of worship, this facet of *tazkiya* even has an effect on the most basic of Islamic duties - that of prayer, as, when describing the state of someone praying al-Muhäsibi says, "It is appropriate for anyone who knew that Allah is approaching him and is in front of him [in prayer] that he be fearful, not be distracted and turn his attention elsewhere, as he should be ashamed that He is looking at him while he has turned away."\(^{1157}\) However, as one might expect from al-Muhäsibi's discourse, it is in the more 'esoteric' aspects of religious practice that one finds the greatest benefit, as al-Muhäsibi observes:

The best of stations (*al-maqāmāt*) and the most noble of them is the observance of Allāh (*muräqabat li Allāh*). And from the best of the observance [of Allāh] (*al-muräqaba*) is that the slave is observant of being grateful for the bounties [he receives], acknowledges his misdeeds and turns his attention to pardon for them. Thus, his heart adheres to this station in all his actions and whenever he became heedless he returns to this [state],


with the will of Allāh. This [process] is assisted by abandoning sins, being free of preoccupations and being careful to critically examine [one's soul] (al-murājāta). And from the actions of the heart that are purified (tazkī) through it [al-murāqaba] are: sincerity (al-ikhlaṣ); certitude (al-thīqqa); gratitude (al-shukr); humility (al-tawādū); submission (al-istislām); counsel (al-naṣīḥā) and love and enmity for Allāh's sake (al-ḥubb wa 'l-bughḍ li Allāh).\textsuperscript{1158}

It is worth noting here that al-Muḥāṣibī considers al-murāqaba to be of the spiritual stations (al-maqāmāt), commonly associated with the Sufi path\textsuperscript{1159}, indicating his familiarity with this concept. Not only this, however, but in addition to acknowledging this idea, he also considers al-murāqaba to be the best of such spiritual stations, clearly indicating the importance he attaches to it and by implication, its importance in the process of tazkiya. Al-murāqaba is also important however, due to the fact that it instils gratitude into the believer for God's favours and also brings him to the realisation of his own shortcomings, for which he consequently seeks forgiveness.\textsuperscript{1160} The last phrase is the most important, however, as when discussing the effect of al-murāqaba on actions of the heart, al-Muḥāṣibī describes these actions as being “purified (tazkī) through it [al-murāqaba]”, this being a clear indication of this facet of tazkiya's contribution to the overall purification process.

In this regard, al-Muḥāṣibī identifies two categories of al-murāqaba; the first of these deals with the 'outward' aspects of observance, whereas the second is concerned with the 'inward' aspects of religious life, as al-Muḥāṣibī comments:

The best form of shyness (al-ḥayā') is the observance of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, (al-murāqabat li Allāh). Observance [of God] (al-murāqaba) is in three things: observance of Allāh regarding His obedience by action; observance of Allāh regarding His disobedience by abandoning it and observance of Allāh regarding intentions and fleeting thoughts due to the statement of the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, 'Worship Allāh as if you see Him [and know] that if you do not see Him, He sees you.' Indeed, observance of the heart for Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, is harsher on the body than enduring the night prayer (qiyām al-layl), fasting during the day and spending one's wealth in the path of Allāh.\textsuperscript{1161}

It is equally interesting to note here that al-Muḥāṣibī alludes to the intrinsic link between al-murāqaba and shyness/shame before God (al-ḥayā'/al-istīḥyā'), which is an equally

\textsuperscript{1158} Al-Muḥāṣibī, Ādāb al-Nuḥūṣ, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{1159} See al-Ṭūsī, al-Luma'r, pp. 51-2; al-Qushayrī, al-Risāla, pp. 189-92 and al-Suhrawardī, 'Awārīf al-Ma`ārif (as part of al-Ghazzālī's Ḥiyā'), vol. 5, pp. 222-3.

\textsuperscript{1160} Cf.: al-Muḥāṣibī, Kitāb al-Naṣāḥāt, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 67-9 and al-Muḥāṣibī, Ādāb al-Nuḥūṣ, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 95.

common theme within his works\textsuperscript{1162} and he concludes that this facet of \textit{tazkiya} is indeed, the best form of the quality of \textit{al-ḥayā}\. In addition, al-Muhāsibī also distinguishes three forms of \textit{al-murāqaba}; the first two which may be regarded as ‘outward’ forms, where as the third form is solely related to the ‘inward’ aspect of observance. It is equally interesting to note that al-Muhāsibī, in this regard, relies on the very same \textit{ḥadīth} that was quoted at the beginning of this section, indicating that he too understood \textit{al-murāqaba} to be synonymous with the concept of \textit{iḥsān} alluded to in the aforementioned Prophetic narration. What is more important to observe however is the emphasis that al-Muhāsibī places on \textit{al-murāqaba}, since he considers it to be more effective in the purification process than many of the more familiar, ‘physical’ acts of worship.

With regard to the actualisation of observance [of God] (\textit{al-murāqaba}), al-Muhāsibī notes that its origin it lies in, “The heart knowing the proximity of its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted,” which is perfected in, “The heart maintaining and persisting in the knowledge that Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, has knowledge of your every movement."\textsuperscript{1163} Therefore, we can conclude that \textit{al-murāqaba} is an intrinsic feature of the heart, as, when discussing the three qualities that a person should maintain in his heart, al-Muhāsibī states: “Having fear in the heart that he will be heedless or falter and thus, be lowered in His sight, as such a fear will make him attentive, his attentiveness will make him mindful and his remembering will make him cautious, until he [reaches the stage where he] is observant of his supreme Sovereign (\textit{yurūqib malikahu})."\textsuperscript{1164}

In addition, the process of \textit{al-murāqaba} brings about other positive qualities in the human being as al-Muhāsibī elucidates, “It causes him to have shame (\textit{al-ḥayā}) in front of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted and reverence for Him.”\textsuperscript{1165} Indeed, this quality of \textit{al-murāqaba} is the antidote to the ailment of heedlessness (\textit{al-ghafla}), which, as was seen earlier, leads to the affliction of the desires (\textit{al-hawa}) and the appetites (\textit{al-shahawāt}) and may even reach a stage where the person may in fact be concerned with the affairs of the world but at the


\textsuperscript{1164} Al-Muhāsibī, \textit{Muṭarabat al-Nafs}, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Aṭā, p. 35.

same time they are observant of God’s pleasure in their hearts. When this stage is reached, three qualities become apparent, as al-Muhäsibi clarifies:

Firstly, the joy of satisfaction that awakens in his heart out of hope for the pleasure of Allâh and not that of the people; secondly, being secure from the sins of the heart due to [the heart] being occupied with conversing with his Lord the Mighty and Exalted and finally, security from the sins [he committed] in the rest of his life in his dealings with people, which brought no benefit, neither in the religious or in the worldly life. Such a person is observant of his Lord (murâqib li rabbîhi), fearful of Him in his innermost thoughts, prefers His love to what he himself loves and has detached himself from the creation preferring Allâh, glorified be He. As such, his outward appearance is that of the people of the worldly life, whereas his inward state is that of those who revere their Lord and are in awe of Him.  

Thus, for such a person, through al-murâqaba the outward state of the worldly life is maintained, being comparable to that of the rest of his peers but inwardly, within his heart, he is in the ‘presence’ of his Lord.

Seemingly relying on the Qur’ân as his source, al-Mubasibi then clarifies the need for intensity and precision of al-murâqaba, when he says:

So do not be heedless of observance [of God] (al-murâqaba) such that even an atom’s weight [of something] does not escape your mind and do not become satiated or bored with it, as indeed, Allâh is not heedless of you; He observes you and watches over your conscience, accounting for even an atom’s weight or the weight of a mustard seed, so that He may recompense you for it.  

As such, every thought, word and deed must be carefully observed, as indeed, even the motives, intentions and aspirations of each of these very hidden, internal actions is subject to divine scrutiny, as the following excerpt indicates:

O young man, indeed the state (häla) in which all the states are combined is one state - that of observance [of God] (al-murâqaba). So maintain in your heart and your soul the knowledge that Allâh is watching you in your every movement, as indeed, you are fixed in the sight of Allâh, the Mighty and Exalted in your every moment; you are in His grasp wherever you are and the eyes of Allâh are cast upon your heart, examining your internal and external [states]. O young man, this characteristic is an ocean that has no

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1168 This is an indication to the minute detail that will characterise this ‘accounting’ and subsequent ‘recompense’.
1169 Al-Muhäsibi, Âdâb al-Nufûs, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 158.
shores; an ocean from which streams and rivers flow and ships sail therein to acquire its treasures.\footnote{170}

Thus, in summary we can conclude that continual observance of God (\textit{al-murāqaba}) being synonymous with the Prophetic concept of spiritual perfection (\textit{iḥsān}), is a salient feature of al-Muḥāṣibī’s methodology of \textit{tazkiyat al-nafs}, as it is a vital and essential facet of the purification process and at the same time, is intrinsically linked to the first element of his approach, as the following quote bears testimony, “No one sought aid against his own soul and sought to fortify his religion with anything better than the observance of Allāh (\textit{murāqaba li Allāh}) and through it [he would] attain shame in front of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, this being the essence of intimate knowledge and insight (\textit{al-maʿrifā}).”\footnote{171}

\section*{\textbf{6.7.3 \textit{al-Mujhāhada}}}

It will be remembered from chapter two that, when discussing the nature and purification of the soul, the following \textit{ḥadīth} was quoted, “The religious warrior (\textit{al-mujāhid}) is the one who struggles against his soul for the sake of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted”\footnote{172} and indeed, in this chapter we have also seen al-Mubāṣibī quote the following narrations attributing them to the Prophet:

\begin{quote}
The Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, said, “You have returned from the lesser jihad (\textit{al-jihād al-asghar}) to the greater jihad (\textit{al-jihād al-akbar}) - the struggle against your souls (\textit{mujāhādat al-nūfūs}).” A man asked the Prophet, “What is the best form of jihad?” and he replied, “Your personal struggle against your soul and your desires (\textit{mujāhādatuka nafsaka wa hawāk}).”\footnote{173}
\end{quote}

Bearing in mind that Prophetic guidance provides us with our second facet of \textit{tazkiyat al-nafs}, it is just such narrations that furnish us with the third aspect of al-Muḥāṣibī’s methodology of purifying the soul - that of combating or struggling against the soul (\textit{mujāhādat al-nafs}). Indeed, al-Muḥāṣibī himself mentions this aspect of \textit{tazkiya} in the aforementioned quote from \textit{Sharḥ al-Maʿrifā}\footnote{174} and upon closer examination one finds that this methodological tool in purifying the soul, although not as common as the previous two aspects, still occupies a central position in the works of our author.\footnote{175}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[\footnote{170}]{Al-Muḥāṣibī, \textit{al-Qasd wa ‘l-Rujūr ilā Allāh} in \textit{al-Waṣāyā}, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Ahmad Aṭā, p. 280.}
\item[\footnote{171}]{Al-Muḥāṣibī, \textit{Sharḥ al-Maʿrifā wa Badl al-Nāṣiḥa}, ed. al-Shāmi, p. 23.}
\item[\footnote{172}]{See p. 85 above.}
\item[\footnote{173}]{See p. 275 above.}
\item[\footnote{174}]{See p. 282 above.}
\end{itemize}
Once again, with regard to combating the soul (mujāhadat al-nafs) al-Muḥāsibī is unequivocal in clarifying the importance of this task as he addresses his readers, telling them that they have been afflicted with the duty of struggling against their souls and exhorts them saying, "Fight your souls with a war that is more beneficial for you than any other type of war." Thus, al-Muḥāsibī clarifies in no uncertain terms that the believer has to do battle with his own soul to bring about its reformation and in this sense can be viewed as "the greater jihad (al-jihād al-akbur)\(^\text{176}\)", referred to in the above hadith, since as we have already seen in this chapter so far, the nafs is a more than capable adversary.

Al-Muḥāsibī sets about the task of explaining in what respect the soul is to be fought against and in his work al-Nasā’īḥ we find a number of aspects, in which he explains that mujāhadat al-nafs must be employed. To this effect al-Muḥāsibī utilises the phrase, "... and struggle against your souls regarding ... (wa jāhidū anfusakum ‘alā ...)" and then lists various aspects of the soul that require disciplining. The first of these qualities is to struggle against one’s soul to be patient when afflictions and disasters strike, since even though the soul has the potential to be patient, it is rarely the case that it does so.\(^\text{177}\) The danger in this, as al-Muḥāsibī clarifies, is that impatience with an event that befalls one of us is tantamount to rejecting the predestination of God and would incur His wrath. Conversely, if one were to be patient when afflicted, then one would have gained God’s pleasure and satisfaction (al-ridā‘), a quality that will be remembered was closely associated with the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma‘īnna).\(^\text{178}\) Thus, by undertaking the process of al-mujāhadah, one may purify the soul and so attain an attribute of its most elevated form.\(^\text{179}\)

In another example of this, al-Muḥāsibī advises that once upon the path of reforming the soul to struggle against one’s soul regarding the change from blameworthy characteristics (akhlāq al-madhīma‘a), since this change is an arduous task that cannot be implemented ‘overnight’. Thus, once again it requires perseverance and patience yet its reward is the pleasure of God and as such, entry into paradise.\(^\text{180}\) Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī also encourages to struggle against one’s soul in loving that which Allāh loves, since if someone was to fulfil


\(^{178}\) See p. 62 above.

\(^{179}\) See p. 71 above.


\(^{181}\) Ibid., pp. 40-1.
this, they would not only pleased their Lord but also denied the soul its inclination to its own passions at the same time, thus causing it once again to be purified.\textsuperscript{1181}

From these few examples alone it is easy to see the positive effect that \textit{al-mujāhada} has on the soul and we may summarise al-Muḥāsibi's view with one of the counsels he provides from the very same work:

My brothers, this is the path to Allah, so adhere to what I have described to you, believe in it in your heart, construct your actions based upon it and struggle against your souls (jāhidū anfusakum) to establish it, as indeed, I see that the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra) is determined to disregard the command of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted. So be observant of Allāh (rāqibū Allāh) and do not neglect it [al-nafs] or your religion will be destroyed.\textsuperscript{1182}

Therefore, \textit{al-mujāhada} is an essential feature of the purification process and especially in its initial stages as al-Muḥāsibi, when describing the beginning of the path for the aspirant and his attempt to be sincere, asserts that it is attained:

With struggle (al-mujāhada) and endurance (al-mukābada) due to the strength of the appetites, the weakness of his intention, the lack of practice at being sincere and being habitually ostentatious. This is because the weak slave, since his childhood has been used to being insincere in front of his peers and if he wished to wean his soul away from this habit and break the strength of his appetites whilst his intention is weak and he lacks practice at being sincere, his soul will refuse and deem it difficult. Thus, he struggles (jāhada) and endures (kābada) until he is consistent in refuting his soul, sincerity becomes the norm and ostentation is rejected. Then the reward of sincerity from Allāh enters his heart with light and insight, the soul is broken due to it being prevented its passions for a protracted period and the enemy [Iblis] despairs and withdraws, awaiting [the advent of] the appetites and heedlessness. Then Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, draws near with assistance and aid due to what He has seen of his patience for His sake and his consistency in combating his desires (al-mujāhada li ḥawāhu).\textsuperscript{1183}

Thus, through continuous struggle against one's soul, one is able not only to overcome the base qualities of the \textit{nafs} but also to bring about the most essential feature of a religious act -that of sincerity for God alone. In addition, when this act of sincerity is observed at the heavenly level, the divine facet of \textit{tazkiya} plays its role also, as God then grants His servant the bounty of His assistance in maintaining this heightened spiritual state, further adding to the process of reform and purification. The divine facet of \textit{tazkiya} is further evidenced in the following text from al-Muḥāsibi's \textit{al-Rī'āya}:

\textsuperscript{1181} Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{1182} Ibid., p. 45.
So when Allâh, the Mighty and Exalted, grants the devotee strength of conviction, consistency in combating it (mujâhadathîhâ) and subduing it [al-nafs] will despair from him giving it its desire, its nature will be made subservient by strength of conviction and the light of truth, it will be overcome by the concerns and worries of the hereafter, becoming tranquil to its [the hereafter’s] invitation, severing hope in seeking its habits.\textsuperscript{1184}

The practice of \textit{al-mujâhaleda} is not restricted to the novice however and indeed, it is an attribute of the most spiritually advanced on the path to God as when discussing the characteristics of the spiritual instructors (\textit{ṣifāt al-murabbîyîn}) whom he sought in his youth and whom he eventually found, he says:

\begin{quote}
The sign of this in the truthful person (\textit{al-ṣâdiq}) is that when he contemplates he is admonished, when he is silent he reflects, when he speaks he is reminded, if he is prevented [from something] he is patient, if he is presented [with something] he is grateful, if he is tried he recalls, if [some] ignorance was committed against him he forebears, if he gains knowledge he becomes humble, if he teaches he is gentle and if he were asked he expends [his efforts in answering]. He is a healing for the aspirant, an aid to the seeker of guidance, an ally of truth, a repose of righteousness, easily pleased regarding his own rights and is zealous regarding the rights of Allâh. His intentions are better that his actions and his actions are more than effective than his words. His abode is the truth, his sanctuary is shyness, his knowledge is scrupulousness and his witness is reliable. He has insights from light that he sees with, realities of knowledge which he speaks with and evidences from certainty which he expresses.

Those who reach this are only those who have strived against their own souls for Allâh, the Exalted’s sake (\textit{jâhada nafsahu li Allâh ta‘âlā}), made their intention sincere for His obedience, feared Allâh secretly and openly, reduced their hopes, ‘buckled the belt’ of caution and ‘set sail with the wind’ of salvation ‘upon a sea’ of supplication.\textsuperscript{1185}
\end{quote}

Thus, a major factor in bringing about this change in state and undertaking the process of \textit{tazkiyat al-nafs}, culminating in the highest of spiritual levels is combating one’s soul for God’s sake and the positive consequences of this are many and varied, as he continues to enumerate its benefits saying:

\begin{quote}
Thus, his time is a blessing, his affairs are secure, he is not deluded by the adornment of the abode of deception and he is not distracted from the torments of the day of resurrection by the lustre of a mirage’s breeze ... so he [became] learned after ignorance, rich after poverty, genial after ferocity, intimate after being remote, rested after fatigue, his affairs were united and his concerns drawn together... the ignorant consider him speechless but it is his wisdom that has silenced him. The foolish consider him to be talking idly but it is his advice which has caused him to speak. [Some people]
\end{quote}


consider him rich but it is his modesty which has sufficed him and [some people] consider him poor but it is his humility which has humbled him. He doesn't involve himself in that which doesn't concern him, he doesn't burden himself more than he needs, he doesn't take that which he doesn't require, he doesn't leave that with which he has been entrusted and people are comfortable with him, while he is in a state of fatigue. He has killed his avarice with scrupulousness, terminated his greed with piety and annihilated his appetites with the light of knowledge. 

In addition to al-mujâhada being implemented on the soul, as may have been noticed in previous excerpts, the target of al-mujâhada is also the two most manifest negative qualities of the nafs i.e. the appetites (al-shahawât) and the desires (al-hawa). As such, the phrase 'combating or struggling against the soul' (mujâhâdat al-nafs) can be understood to mean the soul and its every negative facet.

It is also worth noting that the practice of al-mujâhada is not restricted to the soul only in the works of al-Muhammâsidib but also to the other hidden adversary - Satan. In this regard, al-Muhammâsidib states, “And know that your love for obedience lies in fighting your enemy (al-muhâraba li 'aduwîk), combating your soul (al-mujâhada li nafisika) and opposing your desires (al-mukhâlafa li hawâk), especially if your soul is compliant with its desires, as your desires are Iblis's poisoned arrow, through which he reaches your heart.”1188 Moreover, in al-Muhammâsidib's system of intimate knowledge and insight (al-mar'îfa), Satan plays an intrinsic part and as such, al-Muhammâsidib explains, “And as for the intimate knowledge (mar'îfa) of the enemy of Allah, Iblis, it is that you should know that the Almighty, may He be praised and His names sanctified, has commanded you to fight him (muhârabatihr) and to combat him (mujâhâdatihr), in secret and in public and in obedience and disobedience.”1189 Further clarifying the manner in which one should approach this despicable adversary, he says, “So fight him with the most severe battle and combat him with the most intense war, in secret and in public, outwardly and inwardly and do not be deficient in this until you have expended every effort in fighting him and combating him, as combating him is fighting him in every thing that he invites you to, whether it be good or evil.”1190

Therefore, in summary we can clearly see that combating the insinuations, enticements and whisperings of the Devil are an equally intrinsic part of the practice of al-mujâhada and as

1187 See Al-Muhammâsidib, al-Rî'aya li Ḥuquq Allâh, ed. al-Barr, pp. 305, 391 and 397 and pp. 264, 268 and 275 above.
1189 Al-Muhammâsidib, Sharh al-Mar'îfa wa Badi al-Naṣîha, ed. al-Shâmi, p. 32.
such, an equally intrinsic part of *tazkiya*. This being the case, the targets of the *al-mujāhada* are both Satan and his ally, the negative facets of the human soul and as such, *al-mujāhada* consists of a two pronged attack on both the hidden external enemy and his internal counterpart.\(^{1191}\)

In addition, it also worth noting that al-Muḥāsibī utilises a similar concept to *al-mujāhada*, namely that of opposing or contradicting the soul (*mukhālafat al-nafs*) and once again we find this phrase well evidenced in the works of al-Muḥāsibī.\(^{1192}\) Moreover, we may consider these two terms as being synonymous since whoever opposed his soul has most certainly struggled against and combated it. In this regard, al-Muḥāsibī states, “... Look at what your soul desires and then oppose it (*khāliḥa*), as its desires only invite [you] to the affairs of the worldly life, so oppose (*khāliḥ*) the invitations of your soul and adhere to the command of your Lord, the Mighty and Exalted...”\(^{1193}\)

Thus, it is easy to see the similarity between *mukhālafat al-nafs* and *mujāhada al-nafs*, which is further evidenced by the following excerpt, which also stresses the divine facet of *tazkiya*:

> It has been affirmed by the people of understanding (*ūla 'l-nuhā*) that whoever attained righteousness and obedience did so through opposing (*yukhāliḥ*) the soul’s passions, via some fatigue that afflicts it or by preventing it from some relaxation or pleasure it attempts to gain. As such, this is a clear proof and clear testimony against it [*a*-nafs] that the one who caused it to oppose its passions is not the soul itself but rather, the One Who is bounteous to it and as such, all praise and gratitude is due to Him.\(^{1194}\)

Therefore, in summary we can conclude that as al-Muḥāsibī himself alludes to, *mukhālafat al-nafs* and *mujāhada al-nafs* are intrinsic features of the purification process through which the soul and its base qualities of the appetites (*al-shahawāt*) and the desires (*al-hawa*) are purified and the soul’s nemesis - Satan, is controlled. This in turn brings about the pleasure of the soul’s Creator and consequently, His greatest reward, as al-Muḥāsibī alludes to when describing the believer who is a ‘worker’ (*‘āmil*) and merchant (*tājīr*) for God’s pleasure in the hereafter says, “He is a combatant of his soul (*mujāhid li nafsīh*) and endures his desires (*mukābīd li hawāhu*); he hopes that He will look at him whilst in that state and


\(^{1194}\) Ibid., p. 434.
thus, be pleased with him (yaraḍ anhu), which in turn brings about his eternal existence in His abode and secures him from His punishment."\(^{1195}\)

6.7.4 al-Muḥāsaba

In addition to the multifarious verses related to the concept of the account and recompense (al-hisāb) in the hereafter, exhibited in the Qurān\(^ {1196}\), it was found in chapter two that the Prophet’s Companion and the second caliph in Islam history, Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have said, “Take your souls to account before they are taken to account; weigh your souls [actions] before they are weighed, as indeed, it will easier for you in the Reckoning tomorrow that you take your souls to account today; adorn yourselves for the great display! On that day you will be brought forth and not even the most hidden secret will be concealed.”\(^ {1197}\)

Taking these two concepts into consideration, al-Muḥāsibī would apply a method of intricate, precise and introspective examination and taking the soul account (muḥāsabat al-nafs) to himself so seriously, out of fear for the evaluation of his deeds on the Day of Judgement by God, that he became famous for it, to the extent that it became synonymous with him.\(^ {1198}\)

Therefore, it is little surprise that he employs the concept of introspective examination (muḥāsabat al-nafs) as a valuable and intrinsic facet of the purification process. In addition, it is worth noting however, he also utilises other different but related terms within this context such as ‘appraisal and evaluation of the soul’ (muraḍa‘at al-nafs) and ‘inspection of the soul’ (mufātashat al-nafs), which are used collectively and frequently throughout his works.\(^ {1199}\) Similarly, he also makes use of the phrase ‘scrutinising [the hidden aspects] of

\(^{1195}\) Ibid., pp. 120-1.


\(^{1197}\) See p. 86 above.

\(^{1198}\) See p. 141 above.

the soul' (*tafaqqud [sarā'ir] al-nafs*)\(^{1200}\) with an analogous connotation and together these phrases all indicate an in depth, insightful, precise and exact examination of the soul and its qualities, which is invaluable as a method of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

One may be struck by the fact that a scholar is attributed an appellation based on an esoteric spiritual practice but when examining the works of al-Muḥāsibī, it is not surprising that he was renowned as 'al-Muḥāsibī' bearing in mind the huge stress he places on this facet of purifying the soul. Regarding the great emphasis al-Muḥāsibī places on introspective examination and taking the soul account (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*), he explains this to one of his students when he says, "And know that I only frequently remind you and myself of appraisal [of the soul]' (*al-murāja`at*) because it has been made clear to me how necessary it is."\(^{1201}\)

The necessity of introspective examination lies in the fact that it plays an essential role in religious and spiritual life as a whole as al-Muḥāsibī explains, "The basis of obedience is scrupulousness (*al-wara*) and the basis of scrupulousness is 'God consciousness' (*al-taqwā*); the basis of God consciousness is examining the soul (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*) and the basis of examining the soul is hope (*al-raja*) and fear (*al-khawf*).\(^{1202}\)

Therefore, as far as al-Muḥāsibī is concerned *muḥāsabat al-nafs* is a pinnacle feature of the internal faith system since it is the basis of God consciousness (*al-taqwā*), this in turn being the very essence of piety and righteousness. The relationship between *muḥāsabat al-nafs* and *al-taqwā* therefore seems to lie in the fact that introspective examination is based on two other essential features of the contemplative, moral faith system in Islam -those of hope (*al-raja*) and fear (*al-khawf*), since if one is continually hoping in God's mercy and paradise and fearing His wrath and punishment it would seem to stand to reason that a person may be described as 'God conscious'. Similarly, it is also understandable that al-Muḥāsibī would consider hope and fear as the basis for *al-muḥāsaba*, since if one were continually hoping in God's mercy and paradise and fearing His wrath and punishment, they would clearly be concerned with making their account in front of Allāh on the Day of Judgement as easy as possible and consequently, would take great pains to make sure that this account was fully in order in this life.

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Although al-Muḥāṣibi mentions in the previous excerpt that the important moral quality of scrupulousness (al-wara) is intrinsically related to God consciousness (al-taqwā), he also states that scrupulousness also has an important link to al-muḥāṣaba when he says, “The beginning of scrupulousness (al-wara) is introspective examination of the soul (muḥāṣabat al-nafs) when fleeting thoughts occur in the heart.” Consequently, when asked by a student of his to elucidate the form of al-muḥāṣaba that brings about scrupulousness, he clarifies that it is:

Proceeding cautiously in every circumstance before acting or abandoning an act, whether it be an intention in the heart or the action of the body, until it becomes clear that he should either act or abandon the action. Thus, if it became clear to him that it is something that Allāh hates then he avoids it with a firm intention in his heart and he causes his body to refrain from that which Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted, hates or [alternatively] he prevents his soul from non-performance of a compulsory duty and was swift to fulfil it.

Thus, for al-Muḥāṣibi the process of al-muḥāṣaba concerns every type of action that the human being performs, both the exoteric and esoteric and revolves around God's pleasure and command. With regard to the esoteric aspect, with which al-Muḥāṣibi seems more concerned, before relating the narration of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb seen at the beginning of this section, he says, “And examine your soul (ḥāṣib nafsaka) regarding every fleeting thought (khaṭra) and be observant of Allāh (rāqib Allāh) in every breath (nafas).” As such, al-Muḥāṣibi considers the practice of al-muḥāṣaba so important that it should even be carried out upon the most hidden of human faculties - the thought process - that may not even last for a fraction of a second. In addition, he also alludes to the fact that an intrinsic feature of al-muḥāṣaba is another facet of tazkiya that we have already seen - that of al-murāqaba, since through maintaining the observance of Allāh one may establish whether the action at hand is indeed, pleasing to Him or not. Al-Muḥāṣibi makes this even clearer in the following text when he says:

It is not appropriate for an intelligent person to be indifferent regarding inspecting his aspirations (muḥāṣarat himmatih), examining his soul (muḥāṣabat nafsih), purifying his conscience (naqā’ damirih), being observant of Allāh (murāqabat Allāh), Glory be to Him the Exalted, concerning every action he wants to perform - or otherwise he is deceived.
In an even more apparent exposition of the esoteric aspect of *al-muhāsaba*, al-Muḥāsibi makes clear that another important aspect of this practice when he says, "And from examining it [*al-nafs*](muhāsabatihā) is that you be alone with it and remind it of its deeds, saying, 'O soul, you cannot deceive and overcome Allāh, so do not accept Satan's deceit and his attempt to overcome [you] and do not follow your desires as they will ruin and destroy you'." Therefore, as we can plainly see from this text and from others he provides, that al-Muḥāsibi even advocates addressing the soul as if it were another person, as the effect of this is more manifest when attempting to censure the soul (*muʿātabat al-nafs*) regarding its immoral behaviour.

In addition to this, it is also worth noting that al-Muḥāsibi apportions the intellect (*al-`aqīq*) a pivotal role in introspective examination as he explains that *al-muhāsaba* is, "The intellect (*al-`aqīq*) being put in charge over guarding the soul's treachery and scrutinising its accomplishments from its deficiencies." Thus, it is the light of reason that is an indispensable tool in discerning the motives and intentions of the soul and differentiating between acts performed sincerely for God alone or alternatively, carried out at the behest of the soul's appetites and desires. With regard to discriminating between such features of the believers' interior life being related to God's pleasure and command in the process of *al-muhāsaba*, al-Muḥāsibi clarifies the criteria for action when he says, "Ask before any act you intend to perform, 'Why and for whom?' So if it was for Allāh then you continue in performing it but if it was for other then Allāh then you refrain from it." Thus, the only criteria for action is God's pleasure alone, this being the pinnacle of sincerity.

Therefore, one can deduce from the above texts and al-Muḥāsibi's emphasis on *al-muhāsaba* how important he held it to be. This is further confirmed when discusses the benefits of adopting this practice, as once again he describes it as being one the of the qualities of the scholars he sought out in his youth and in addition, he also includes a section in his work *Sharḥ al-Macrifa* where he discusses ten characteristics of the people of introspective examination (*ahl al-muhāsaba*), which every aspirant should have if they wish to reach the highest degrees of righteousness. He lists them as follows:

1. To not swear an oath by Allāh, whether it be true or a lie, deliberately or forgetfully.

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1207 See for example al-Muḥāsibi's text entitled *Muʿātabat al-Nafs*, which is replete with examples of this.
1209 Ibid.
2. Not to lie whether it be jokingly or in seriousness.

3. Not to promise anyone anything, such that you break a promise whilst being able to fulfil it and if you were to break a promise then it should be for a valid reason.\textsuperscript{1212}

4. Not to curse anything from creation and not to harm the smallest of insects let alone anything greater.

5. Not to supplicate against anyone even if they oppress you but bear it patiently.

6. Not to bear witness against anyone from the people of the qibla [i.e. Muslims] that they have committed polytheism (\textit{shirk}), disbelief (\textit{kufri}) or hypocrisy (\textit{nihāṣ}.

7. Not to gaze at anything that is disobedience (\textit{maʿāṣi}) of Allāh, whether in public or in private and equally, to prevent one's limbs also from falling into disobedience.

8. Not to rely on anyone from the creation for any of your needs.

9. Not to put your hope in any human being.\textsuperscript{1213}

10. Not to meet any person except that you consider them better than you, that they are more excellent than you and that their position with Allāh is higher than yours.\textsuperscript{1214}

Therefore, we can assume that it is undertaking the process of \textit{al-muḥāṣaba} that brings about this change in moral behaviour and thus, makes them of the righteous. Similarly, \textit{al-muḥāṣaba} saves one from the fear of deficiency and the disgrace of loss in the hereafter, since in the same way a merchant takes his business partners to account for the state of their business affairs, out of trying to avoid a deficit and in the hope of attaining profits, the believer equally has to take his soul to account to ensure that he to has no 'deficit' with his Lord.\textsuperscript{1215} Moreover, \textit{al-muḥāṣaba} produces an increase in insight (\textit{al-baṣira}), makes one swift in being able to establish proofs, makes one refined in discernment and increases one in understanding, according to the extent that one maintains examining the heart and soul.\textsuperscript{1216}

In addition, the practice of \textit{al-muḥāṣaba} inculcates the faculty of attentiveness (\textit{al-tayaqquz}) into the practitioner of introspective examination of the soul and as such, brings him out of a state of forgetfulness (\textit{al-sahw}) to one of remembrance (\textit{dhikr}).\textsuperscript{1217} Bearing in mind the many positive qualities that adopting \textit{al-muḥāṣaba} brings about, this also has an effect in

\textsuperscript{1212} This is obviously intrinsically linked to the first quality.

\textsuperscript{1213} This is obviously intrinsically linked to the previous quality.

\textsuperscript{1214} I will only mention the characteristics themselves here, whereas al-Muḥāṣibi provides an introduction and conclusion to the topic, as well as describing the benefits of having such qualities.


\textsuperscript{1216} Ibid., p. 230.

the divine realm as al-Muhäsibi considers such people to have attained a noble rank and position with Allah (maqám sharíf manzila sharífá) due to their sincerity to God.\textsuperscript{1218}

Conversely, the negative effects of not carrying out the process of al-muhäsaba are equally disastrous as al-Muhäsibi observes, "The farthest person from justice and the most heedless of them is the one who examines his soul the least (aqallahum muhäsabatan nafsrhl)."\textsuperscript{1219}

Similarly, when describing a person’s slippery slide into sin and disobedience al-Muhäsibi observes:

The beginning of indifference is laziness (al-kasal), so if ‘concern’ (al-rî‘ya) has any power over him then laziness will be suppressed but if not, then it will increase until it becomes ‘uneasiness’ (jazi); so if compassion prevents him he desists [from uneasiness] but if not then it will increase until he becomes averse to obedience; so if he has softness in his heart he desists but if not he will become astray and we seek shelter in Allah from that. Thus, if he was astray he has exited the authority of fear and left to the deception of security\textsuperscript{1220}; then he will increase in error to the abode of destruction, the veil of integrity will be lifted from him and he will be disgraced by the witnessing of glory\textsuperscript{1221}. And this is all due to a lack of examining the soul (muḥāsabat al-nafs).\textsuperscript{1222}

Therefore, the solution and cure to all of the aforementioned ailments is the application of this facet of the purification process. In addition, it is also worth noting that al-muhäsaba’s effect is not only limited to the soul but also, its sphere of influence extends to the heart also, as al-Muhäsibi explains:

The basis of the heart’s corruption is abandoning examining the soul (al-muhäsabat li ‘l-nafs) and being deceived by high hopes (al-ighthi‘r bi ṭul al-amah). So if you wanted to reform your heart then pause to examine your intention and every fleeting thought, accepting that which is for Allah, abandoning that which is for other than Him and seeking aid against high hopes with consistent remembrance of death.\textsuperscript{1223}

It is also worth noting however, that with respect to the application of introspective examination of the soul, al-Muhäsibi distinguishes between two categories of al-muhäsaba, which he terms examining the soul regarding future actions (muḥāsabat al-nafs fi mustaqbal al-a’māl) and examining the soul regarding past deeds (muḥāsabat al-nafs fi

\textsuperscript{1218} See al-Muhäsibi, Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifâ wa Badl al-Nasîha, ed. al-Shâmi, pp. 31 and 57.

\textsuperscript{1219} Al-Muhäsibi, Âdâb al-Nufus, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{1220} Meaning: that he is deceived by thinking he is secure.

\textsuperscript{1221} Meaning: by believing in the glory of God’s mercy and pardon only and not taking into account his punishment and wrath he will be disgraced.

\textsuperscript{1222} Al-Muhäsibi, al-Qasd wa ‘I-Rujū‘i ‘l-lâh in al-Wasâyâ, ed. ‘Abd al-Qâdir Ahmad Atâ, p. 228.

mustadbar al-a‘māh). With regard to the first category, al-Muḥāsibi states, “It is to contemplate while proceeding cautiously before slipping into error, to discern that which harms you from that which benefits you, such that you abandon that which harms you according to knowledge and you act in accordance with that which benefits you according to knowledge.” This being the case, even before performing an action al-muḥāsaba is employed to differentiate between good and evil actions to act as a preventative measure and thus, it limits the potential to commit sins before the action even takes place.

As for the second category of al-muḥāsaba, examining the soul regarding past deeds, then this - as the name suggests - takes place after the action has been completed. In this sense the deed is evaluated in its every aspect and a series of questions need to be posed, such as: ‘Why and for whom?’ regarding the intentions behind the action, ‘How would it be if it were presented in front of the Creator?’ ‘Has it been performed in a way it would be pleasing to Him?’ and ‘Was it completed in the way that He commanded?’. Depending on the answers to these questions the person performing these deeds will then need to make amends for the deficiencies therein by seeking God’s forgiveness and repenting or finding a way in which the deed can be consequently made acceptable.

Furthermore, to make this process effective, al-Muḥāsibi suggests that the following three qualities be observed:

Firstly, to sever oneself from the relationships that hinder focussing one’s concern on al-muḥāsaba, as whoever wanted to take his debtor to account, emptied his heart of all preoccupations. Secondly, to dedicate oneself to it out of choice because of the benefit that is hoped for from it and thirdly, the fear that Allah, the Mighty and Exalted will ask him concerning what he neglected concerning that which reached him upon the tongue of His Prophet, peace be upon him, when he said, “The believer should be seen at four ‘hours’: [from them] an hour in which he examines his soul (yuhāsib nafsahu).”

However, people vary in their ability to apply this process of al-muḥāsaba as al-Muḥāsibi observes:

People with regard to assessing their deeds are of two types: firstly, a person who evaluates his soul and examines his habitual practice and when he finds out that the burden of proof is established against his soul, he casts it aside and as a result, falls into the snare of Iblis. Secondly, a man who evaluates his soul and made his intellect the burden of proof between him and his desires, so whatever was found to be acceptable by his intellect he

1225 Ibid., p. 70.
1226 Ibid., pp. 73-4.
accepted it and whatever was found to be unacceptable by his intellect he discarded it. Therefore, this man knew his faults through examining his soul (muhāsabat nafṣih) and opposing his desires (mukhālafat hawāhū), such that he continued to change until he became from the party of Allāh (ḥizb Allāh), the Exalted, and became one the most anxious and worried of people in the worldly life, until death came to him and he was apprehensive, afraid and trembling.¹²²⁸

Thus, the effect that al-muhāsaba has on those who apply it is tremendous and as such, it is an essential feature of the purification process. As testimony to this, after elucidating the state of the worst of God's servants, al-Muḥāṣibī then says:

Then there is the servant who is an aspirant and is concerned with his soul, who is heedful of the book of Allāh, the Mighty and Exalted and the sunna of His Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, whose aspiration is examining his soul (muhāsabat nafṣih) to distinguish his inner thoughts; [ask yourself] with which of them is Allāh more pleased and with which of them is He more angry?¹²²⁹

Therefore in summary, we may conclude that the practice of introspective examination (muhāsabat al-nafṣ) has a deep-rooted basis in the Islamic revelatory sources and in addition to this has been developed further by al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī into an in-depth, insightful, precise and exact examination of the soul and its qualities, to the extent that he became synonymous with the practice he played a huge role in developing. In addition, this process takes into consideration not only the past deeds of a person but also his future actions and thus, subjects them to a simple, yet strict set of criteria to establish their validity in the religious context. As such, it can be observed that the practice of muhāsabat al-nafṣ has numerous beneficial results and conversely there are equally numerous negative consequences in not applying it. Consequently, we can see that this contemplative and highly spiritual exercise has a profound effect on the soul and as such, is an essential and vital facet of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī's methodology of tazkiyat al-nafṣ.

Conclusion
In summary, one is able to provide a variety of conclusions regarding al-Muḥāṣibī's methodology of tazkiyat al-nafṣ: firstly, although he does not use the term 'tazkiya' in the technical sense used in the current thesis, his in depth knowledge and insight regarding the nature of the human soul and its consequent nurturing and disciplining, intrinsically link al-Muḥāṣibī's teachings with the process of purification and development indicated by the

term ‘tazkiya’. Indeed, it is his profound knowledge of the intricate workings of the inner sanctuary of the human soul that make his work unique and to try and encapsulate his ideas regarding it is by no means an easy task. It may be remembered from chapter five that Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad b. ‘Umar al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) said regarding al-Muḥāsibī’s al-
Ri`āya, “Two words will suffice you concerning everything which is in this book: worship Allāh with knowledge and don’t ever be satisfied with your nafs”1230 and since al-Ri`āya is al-Muḥāsibī’s masterpiece in this field, one may summarise his methodology regarding tazkiyat al-nafs in much the same way.

However, the discussion in this chapter has also shown that al-Muḥāsibī’s thought regarding the purification of the soul was very much an ‘Islamic’ understanding, since it was found that al-Muḥāsibī’s exposition of the nafs, its faults and consequent training, have a strong grounding in Islam’s revelatory sources namely the Qurān and the ḥadith, as many of the concepts and terms alluded to in chapter two are reiterated in our subject’s works. As such, al-Muḥāsibī gives importance to both the divine and prophetic facets of the process of tazkiya but at the same time, by far the greatest emphasis is given to the personal element in this process, as it the individual who is ultimately responsible and has an vital role to play. Similarly, although he makes brief reference to the two ‘higher’ forms of the soul, i.e. ‘the self reproachful (al-nafs al-lawwāma)’ and ‘the tranquil (al-nafs al-mutma’inna)’, it is the base form of the soul, the ‘soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi ‘l-sū’)’, which is the target of al-Muḥāsibī’s exposition, as it is this internal adversary that threatens the individual’s ultimate destruction and as such, must be transformed. In addition however, al-Muḥāsibī does not only suffice by explaining such concepts, as many authors have attempted1231 but rather, he develops them further introducing his own vernacular regarding the nafs and provides practical, methodological advice regarding the purification of the soul.

Al-Muḥāsibī’s methodology as described here revolves around an in depth and intimate knowledge (ma‘rifā) of the nafs and its nature, which thus provides the basis for the reformation of the soul, since one could possibly bring about this change without first knowing the ‘enemy within’ and the enormity and complexity of the task. Thus, al-Muḥāsibī provides a practical method in dealing with such a ‘rebellious’ soul that revolves around the individual continually maintaining of God’s observance of him (al-murāqaba), out of fear of His punishment and wrath and out shame (ḥāya) of committing an offence in His

1230 See footnote 716, p. 199 above.
1231 See section 1.1.1 above.
'presence' thus by doing so, reaching the state of spiritual excellence (iḥsān) described by the Prophet.  

Similarly, bearing in mind the soul's nature i.e. that it is inclined to evil (ammāra bi 'l-sū) and the negative personal and moral qualities associated with it, al-Muḥāṣibi also suggests a continual striving against the nafs (al-mujāhada), including censuring it (al-muṭātaba), imposing penalties upon it (al-'uqūbāt), causing it to proceed cautiously (al-tathbīt) and restraining it (al-hābs) and averting it from its nature (al-INširāf) to reform it (al-īslāf) and ultimately eradicate evil from it and its actions.

In addition, an intrinsic part of the aforementioned process is an assessment of one's external state through an introspective analysis of one's motives and intentions (al-muḥāṣaba) to ascertain their sincerity for God. This is not only undertaken regarding past deeds as one may expect but also in the present before one even acts, in an attempt to avoid an indiscretion before it even takes place. This consequently facilitates the initiation of repentance (al-tawba) for past misdeeds, further instils the maintaining of God's observance of one's state (al-muṭāqa) and if negative elements are found, the extent to which the soul is to be combatted (al-mujāhada). As such, al-muḥāṣaba is pivotal in governing and regulating the other various facets of the purification process.

Therefore, in addition to the multi-faceted and multi-level exposition of tazkiyat al-nafs within the Islamic paradigm supplied in chapter two, al-Muḥāṣibi through his knowledge of this and his development of a methodology regarding it, has provided an equally multi-faceted approach to tazkiyat al-nafs so as to bring about the reform of the human being as a whole and thus, reach the perfection of the human state described as 'the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma'īnna)', which is both satisfied with its Lord and has, at the same time, attained its Lord's satisfaction.

1232 See footnote 304, p. 80 above.
Conclusion

From the outset and as the title of this thesis indicates, the current study is concerned with two major features of the Islamic tradition, namely the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, as manifested in this tradition and the life and works of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī. This being the case, the researcher has produced a series of chapters and discussions to fulfil this goal and ultimately derive a methodology of purifying the soul, as presented in this author's extant works. In doing so six extensive chapters have been written and the goal of this conclusion is to survey each of these to identify the most important findings and major conclusions as presented in this study.

Starting at the beginning with chapter one, which served as the introduction to the current thesis, the primary section of the study was concerned with evaluating the existing literature in the various fields concerned with the subject area in question. Thus, this section was then divided into literature that deals with *tazkiyat al-nafs*, literature that deals with al-Muḥāsibī and literature that is concerned with Sufism. Although Sufism provides a genre of literature that is very useful, in reality it still plays only a subsidiary role in the current thesis. As such, the major concentration here will be on literature related to the first two topics mentioned above.

With regard to literature concerned with *tazkiyat al-nafs*, it was found that although the term and concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* is part of the Qur'ānic paradigm, there are virtually no works in the classical literature that deal with this topic specifically and this is most probably due to the fact that since this subject is perceived to be 'spiritual' or even 'mystical' field of study, it was normally dealt with within the sphere of Sufism. However, with the rise of reformist movements in the twentieth century there seems to have been an attempt to reclaim this concept and term and to project it as being an 'orthodox' version of spirituality in Islam vis-à-vis the 'innovative' version propagated by Sufism. This has been particularly true of the Salafi denomination and we can regard the vast majority of material produced in this field and indeed, those examples discussed in chapter one, to be from this limited perspective. It was also noted that such works are mainly concerned with what has be termed here as a 'practical' approach to *tazkiyat al-nafs*, meaning that to implement the process of purification means essentially to apply the commands, prohibitions and etiquettes of Islam as a whole. Although there is nothing essentially wrong with this understanding, for the most part it fails to take into account the deep, introspective and psychological
element of purifying the soul and as such, in many ways merely projects an outward image of 'purification'. In addition to this shortcoming, although a variety of works have been authored on the topic of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, as the literature review suggested and with the possible exception of the work of Karzūn, very little of this material has been of a truly academic nature. Moreover, even less has been written in English and the only work in this sense that could even claim to be semi-academic is Zarabozo's *Purification of the Soul - Concept, Process and Means*. As such, the need to produce an academic appraisal of this subject was paramount and this researcher feels that this goal has now been achieved as was made clear in chapter two, which will be discussed shortly.

Similarly, despite the various entries regarding al-Muḥāsibi in the copious volumes of biographical and historical works of Islamic literature, it was not until the twentieth century that a separate, dedicated study was produced regarding al-Muḥāsibi and his life and works - this of course being the pioneering work of Margaret Smith entitled *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*. It was this in-depth study of al-Muḥāsibi that really introduced the English speaking world to the value and importance of this scholar. Smith's work is indeed admirable since that she had to work almost exclusively with manuscripts and moreover, because her work is intuitive, extremely well written and comprehensive. This did not hinder further studies regarding al-Muḥāsibi but rather seems to have given impetus to a number of researchers of her generation such as Arberry, Maḥmūd, Schoonover and al-Yaṣūʿī, who have all provided valuable contributions. The next major study came at the capable hands of van Ess and along with the early work of Smith, is possibly one of the most important studies of our author. In more recent times equally important work in the realm of bringing the works of al-Muḥāsibi to a published form have been made most notably by ʿAṭā but his work has also been supplemented by al-Khusht, al-Sayyid, Mazāli, al-Quwватlī and Roman. On the strictly academic front articles by authors such as Ṭāhir and Jaʿfar have been equally useful and have been supplemented by the academic theses of Ḥusayn and al-Khaṭīb. Thus, al-Muḥāsibi has generated a limited but steady stream of scholarship over the last seventy years or so, but one will also notice that most of this material is still in Arabic and the work carried out in Western languages has been limited. This being the case, the current study is therefore unique, as it examines a previously undiscovered aspect of al-Muḥāsibi's thought, i.e. his specific methodology regarding *tazkiyat al-nafs* and therefore, denotes a valuable contribution to the body of literature on this topic.
All theses require that they follow a certain methodology to be employed during the writing process and it was decided in chapter one that phenomenology be the methodology on which the current thesis is based. It was further proposed that the research is carried out using the phenomenological method outlined above as phR, since the area of research fell under the umbrella term of religion. Of the two types of phR that were discussed, the type termed 'concrete phR' was employed here as we will deal with one religion specifically, i.e. that of Islam, including its historico-cultural context and the 'unique' meaning it has for the believers, as opposed to a comparative approach adopted in essential phR. Concrete phR was also employed here because we did, for the most part, describe a specific aspect of Islam, i.e. that of **tazkiyat al-nafs**, which will require that we rely on the believers' perspective of this discipline. Since **tazkiyat al-nafs** is an internal aspect of the Islamic faith it seems appropriate that the proposal to adopt *verstehen* as a phenomenological method, is also employed here to study, understand, describe and arrive at the essence of **tazkiyat al-nafs**, from the practice of one of its most famous proponents, i.e. al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibi. This has now been achieved as the discussions of chapters two and six will show.

Furthermore, bearing in mind the nature of al-Muḥāsibi's discourse it was equally important to comment regarding spirituality and mysticism in general, so as to understand where both he and **tazkiyat al-nafs** 'fit' in the overall picture. Indeed, both of these terms prove - most probably due to their intrinsic nature - traditionally difficult to define. Despite this, our discussion showed that essentially spirituality may be referred to as an attempt to grow in sensitivity - to the self, to others, to non-human creation and to God, being associated with the longings of the human heart for the permanent, eternal, everlasting - for wholeness, peace, joy and bliss. Alternatively, mysticism is often described as a fundamentally unitive experience of love and communion with God, being an experience beyond ordinary human experience and reason but at the same time is not antagonistic to them.

Thus, if we were now to attempt to identify the concept of **tazkiyat al-nafs** with either of these disciplines, we would find that this spiritual tradition of disciplining the soul in Islam has far more in common with spirituality rather than mysticism, since in spirituality, the longings of the human heart for the permanent, eternal and everlasting would easily fit in with the concept of the tranquil soul elucidated in chapter two. Conversely, **tazkiyat al-nafs** has little to do with mysticism's quest for a unitive experience of the divine, since this concept has not even been alluded to once during the examination of this term and thus, we may conclude that **tazkiyat al-nafs** is essentially a spiritual quest rather than a mystical one.
In addition, it should also be noted that from the very outset al-Muḥāsibī was regarded by Smith - as the title of her book suggests - as a mystic, seemingly based primarily on his exposition of divine love in the treatise Faṣl al-Maḥabbah. However, upon examining this work and the remainder of al-Muḥāsibī’s ‘mystical’ teachings, it emerges that they are not as ‘mystical’ as Smith suggests but rather fall within the realms of Islam’s broader teaching. This is especially true when examining the remainder of al-Muḥāsibī’s works, as one finds that they are usually within the precepts of Islam’s ascetic and spiritual tradition and have a strong theological basis in both of Islam’s revelatory sources. Indeed, if one were to characterise al-Muḥāsibī, it would be more appropriate to perhaps consider him as a ‘introspective moral psychologist’ as his teaching revolves around the reformation of the moral, esoterical nature of man, rather than a mystic seeking experience of unity of the divine, which is a concept that has not presented itself even once in this study.

Since Islam has its own manifestation of spirituality and mysticism, namely taṣawwuf or Sufism, it was equally appropriate that this subject area be discussed to see where both tazkiyat al-nafs and al-Muḥāsibī may be placed within this tradition. It was found that Sufism terminologically at least had no basis in the primary sources of Islam but seems to have some link with practice of the early Muslim community. This is particularly true of the early ascetical tradition that was common in Basra and developed in the new Abbāsid capital of Baghdad, where the paradoxical schools of ‘sobriety’ and ‘intoxication’ existed. This was further enhanced with the passing of time into a fully developed Sufi tradition that was epitomised by its own dedicated genre of literature and eventually led to formation of brotherhoods and the mystical theosophy associated with the likes of Ibn ʿArabi. With regard to the relationship of Sufism with the two topics of tazkiyat al-nafs and al-Muḥāsibī, one has to begin by posing the question, “What form of Sufism do we mean?” Indeed, if we mean the ascetical tradition prevalent in the first two Islamic centuries, then there is a strong suggestion that in both cases a link may be established, since the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs and teachings of al-Muḥāsibī bear a strong resemblance to the early ascetical teaching of the likes of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, for example. However, if we mean by the term ‘Sufism’ the intoxicated mysticism of al-Ḥallāj or the mystical theosophy of Ibn ʿArabi, then one would have to conclude that there is no evidence in this study to suggest a close relationship between these contrasting approaches.

1233 See Smith, An Early Mystic, pp. 57-8 and 222-52.
1234 Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī was extremely critical of expressions of such unitive and mystical experiences as the incident with Abū Ḥamzah related by al-Hujwīrī in his Kashf al-Mahjūb indicates. See pp. 155-6 above.
Concerning al-Muhäsibi specifically, there is clearly a tangible link to the sober mysticism associated with the Baghdadi school and with al-Junayd in particular, but since this will be dealt with in more detail in the appraisal of chapter three, it will not be discussed further here. Thus, we may conclude that *tazkiyat al-nafs* is not exclusive to the Sufi tradition, despite the concept being present in this teaching. By the same token, it is equally difficult to attribute the term ‘Sufi’ to al-Muhäsibi in the strict sense since, as was noted in the discussion above both he and his teaching were not especially ‘mystical’.

One of the main focuses of this study was to provide a working definition and understanding of the phrase ‘*tazkiyat al-nafs*’ and in this regard, chapter two provided much of the information that would be vital for the rest of this thesis. This chapter discussed both the terms ‘*tazkiya*’ and ‘*nafs*’ and the compound phrase of ‘*tazkiyat al-nafs*’ in a variety of contexts to reach a fuller understanding of this concept. Therefore, the discussion began with the examination of these terms in the Arabic language, since this is the vernacular of Islam’s revelatory sources. By examining the linguistic and lexicographical sources it was seen that the term *al-nafs* in particular has a variety of connotations within the usage of the Arabic language, many of which, however were clearly not related to the religious context of Islam. Nevertheless, it was found that even at a linguistic level the form II constructions that form the basis of the term *tazkiya*, in conjunction with the various appropriate meanings of the word *al-nafs*, we could derive the following definition: “The growth, augmentation, reform and development of a human being’s soul, intellect, body and self.” This brief and uncomplicated description consequently defined the area of research and indeed, its subject matter.

From this basic starting point these concepts were thus developed by then consulting Islam’s revelatory sources so as to contextualise the study further and to narrow the field of research. Therefore, starting with the Qur’an it was found that from the linguistic uses of the word ‘*tazkiya*’ in the Qur’an, a process of purification is implied that was found to be multi-faceted, incorporating divine guidance, prophetic example and personal effort. Similarly, when addressing the term ‘*al-nafs*’ a number of usages are noticed including: the *nafs* meaning the soul (*al-rūḥ*); the *nafs* meaning the human being’s power of understanding (*al-quwā al-mufakkira*); the *nafs* meaning the heart (*al-qalb*); *nafs* meaning the inclination to good and evil (*quwā al-khayr wa ’l-sharr*) and the *nafs* meaning the human being (*al-Insān*). Moreover, upon examining the Qur’anic text the *nafs* is also attributed with having a number of qualities that indicate its dual potentiality to both positive and negative attributes that in turn determine its state. Consequently, three states
of the soul can be identified: the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'ānna), the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) and the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'), which indicate the highest, intermediate and base forms of the soul respectively.

Furthermore, when examining the singular verse containing a related construction of the phrase 'tazkiyat al-nafs' it was found that God created the soul in a state of equilibrium, inspiring it to the potentialities of both good and evil and as such, whoever complied with the positive component of the soul and abandoned the negative would be purified, whereas whoever complied with the negative aspects of the soul and suppresses the positive would be defiled. Many of these Qur'ānic concepts such as the multifaceted nature of the tazkiya process and the duality of the soul were also seen when examining the Prophetic hadīth, further enhancing the Qur'ānic vision of the nafs and in addition, indications of how the soul should be purified such as combating the soul (mujāhādat al-nafs) and examination of the soul (muhāsabat al-nafs), were also alluded to. Basing their views on these two principal Islamic sources, Muslim scholars have also contributed greatly to both the understanding and concept of tazkiyat al-nafs and in doing so have developed the purification process further, which was also indicated in this chapter.

Despite the best efforts of Muslim scholars however, they have failed for the most part to provide a comprehensive working definition of the term 'tazkiyat al-nafs' based upon all the factors mentioned thus far and in this sense, the current study has succeeded in furnishing such a working understanding for this term, which may be considered to be: the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'ānna). This process involves the nurturing of its positive potentialities and eradicating its negative inclinations, to bring about its purification (tazkiya) and eliminate its defilement (tadsiya). This in turn is attained by executing a balanced and integrated process of punitive measures, such as striving against it (al-mujāhada) and taking it to account (al-muhāsaba), as well as implementing both the basic beliefs and practical actions of Islam, to bring about a richness of the soul (ghinā al-nafs), which is indicative of the soul's success (falāḥ) in both this life and the next.

Having determined the nature of tazkiyat al-nafs in Islam, it was then time to turn our attention to the second major feature of this thesis, i.e. the life and works of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibi. The discussion of the life of any scholar requires first that both the period and environment of such a personality be examined to assess the extent as to which this influenced his life and works and indeed, with regard to al-Muhāsibi these factors were
discussed in chapters three and four. As such, chapter three began with the discussion regarding the historical period in which al-Muḥāsibi lived. Al-Muḥāsibi was born into an extremely interesting and important period of Islamic history and if we are to believe that he was born in 165/781, as researchers have suggested and died in 243/857 as the biographical sources confirm, then he lived well into his seventies and thus, his life spans the greater period of the initial Abbāsid era. In this regard there is a great deal of information concerning this part of history and indeed, the problem lay in exactly what to include. It was therefore decided to attempt to discuss the factors of this period of history that may have affected al-Muḥāsibi directly and with this goal in mind the discussion began in chapter three with an appraisal of the early ‘Abbāsid caliphs whose policies in many ways shaped religious and social life during al-Muḥāsibi's time. It will also be remembered that during al-Muḥāsibi's life eight caliphs reigned and this is significant in itself, since it was during this era that the first occurrence of fraternal regicide took place with al-Ma'mūn's execution of al-Amin and this incident would subsequently colour the later ‘Abbāsid reign, as royal executions were perpetuated by the treachery of the then ascendant ‘Turkish' generals and thus this feature led to a general lack of stability within the regime. Despite this however, the same period is often regarded as the 'Golden era of Islamic learning' since it was also in this period that Muslim scholarship developed its own unique character. In fact this is the first time that we find a major influx of 'foreign' sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and medicine into the Muslim world, being fuelled by a vibrant translation movement that in turn was actively supported by the government and the wealthy elite of the society. In addition, the development of Arabic poetry and prose writing continued and was supplemented by the development of the linguistic sciences of grammar and philology. The religious sciences were equally well represented however and the now familiar topics of Prophetic narration (al-ḥadīth), Prophetic biography (al-sīra), jurisprudence (al-fiqh) and scholastic theology (al-kalām) were all developed and in addition, were subject to written codification.

Moreover, the two places where al-Muḥāsibi was born and lived were also examined; with regard to his birthplace, Basra, it was found that this was a city developed almost exclusively by the expansion of the Islamic empire, being established initially as a cantonment for the government's troops stationed along the borders of the fledgling empire. Due to its geographic location and strategic significance however, Basra soon became a thriving city that attracted a variety of visitors and settlers who added to its cosmopolitan
nature. This in turn is thought to be significant in the development of two distinctive trends within the city; the first of these was an ascetical trend and this was most probably a reaction to the newfound affluence in Muslim lands and the desire to return to the simple life of the Prophet and his Companions. In addition however, this form of teaching had also been inherently present from the time of one of its early governors, the Prophetic Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash'ari and culminated in the personality of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri. The second trend was also related to the teaching of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri but from a different perspective, since it is commonly held that the beginning of an inclination to rationalising, scholastic theology that ultimately manifested itself as Muʿtazilism, is thought to have originated in the teachings of his repudiated student Wāsil b. ʿAṭāʿ.

Consequently, the significance of Basra as an ancient and thriving city was only undermined with the advent of the new ʿAbbāsid state capital, Baghdad. With the development of a new capital the emphasis on the other provincial cities in the Islamic state diminished, since it attracted a variety of people from the outlying areas, most probably seeking a better life and in this case the family of al-Muḥāsibi was no different, as he moved with his family to Baghdad in his youth. The cultural, social and even religious diversity in Baghdad equally contributed to the development of intellectual trends comparative to those and in many ways, extensions of those in Basra. As such, a similar spiritual trend was developed in Baghdad by the likes of Maʿrūf al-Karkhi, Bishr al-Ḥāfi and Sarī al-Saqāṭī and in addition to the influence of the likes of al-Muḥāsibi, was exemplified by his most famous student Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-Junayd, being known as ‘the Mystical School of Baghdad’. In addition to the spiritual teaching prevalent in Baghdad, the school of rationalising theology in Basra had its equivalent in Baghdad also and in fact, many of the Basran Muʿtazilites later transferred to the new capital. However, Muʿtazilism was not a populist movement amongst the masses and in fact, if it had not received government backing, may well have been relegated to the pages of subsequent heresiographical works. It was, however, the object of caliphal support in the person of al-Maʿmūn, who adopted their principles and eventually made them state policy, most famously in the case of the ‘created Qurān’, which consequently led to the most important religio-political event of the period - that of the ‘inquisition’ (al-miḥna). This policy was implemented by al-Maʿmūn and his successors for more than fifteen years under the influence of its real architect and arch-Muʿtazilite, Ahmad b. Abū Duʿād and resulted in the place of Ahmad b. Ḥanbal being secured in Sunni hagiographic history due to his opposition to the policy.
Thus, these two environments then were the places where al-Muḥāṣibī was born and lived and therefore, the next task of the thesis was to portray the actual events of al-Muḥāṣibī's own life, to shed light on his existence in this world. It was noted that this is not a particularly easy task, bearing in mind that most of the information that we have regarding this scholar is constituted by no more than anecdotal statements, whose veracity is impossible to establish. However, in the absence of any other verifiable material and bearing in mind that the methodology of the thesis is phenomenology, a reconstruction of al-Muḥāṣibī's life from childhood to adulthood was successfully attempted, this being the first effort of its kind. This, along with the other anecdotal statements related regarding al-Muḥāṣibī, provided us the image of a scrupulous, righteous, uncompromising and erudite individual, who was a picture of pietistic virtue, which is typical of the hagiographic images portrayed in the biographical and historical literature. In addition, the traditional enumeration of al-Muḥāṣibī's teachers was supplied and it interesting to note that his major fields of learning included grammar and Qur'ānic sciences, jurisprudence (al-fiqh) - where he was seen to be an adherent of al-Shāfī‘ī, Prophetic narration (al-hadith) - where it was seen that he studied with the foremost traditionists of his day and perhaps most significantly, scholastic theology (al-kalām). The depth of his scholarship was also evidenced by the extensive range of sources al-Muḥāṣibī quotes and indeed, by the number of students who associated with him, the most important of whom was without doubt the celebrated al-Junayd.

The main bulk of this chapter however, was devoted to elucidating a major feature of his life that equally affected his reputation after his death - Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s repudiation of al-Muḥāṣibī. Nevertheless, this was also made difficult by the very nature of Ibn Ḥanbal’s warning regarding keeping the company of al-Muḥāṣibī, since Aḥmad first praises al-Muḥāṣibī and then warns against him, without further qualifying his statement. This has led to a great deal of speculation in this regard and it was seen that there are various theories in dealing with this issue, including that Ibn Ḥanbal rejected al-Mubasibi due to: his spiritual station (maqām) and discourse being too advanced for his students; his spiritual method being innovative (bid‘a); his unreliability in hadith (da‘f) or due to the fact that he and Ibn Ḥanbal were contemporaneous (aqrān). Although any of these possibilities or indeed, a combination of them remains viable, it was concluded that Ibn Ḥanbal’s repudiation of al-Muḥāṣibī was essentially due to the latter’s utilisation of scholastic theology (ʿilm al-kalām). In this regard the current study has provided the most
comprehensive, in-depth and unique exposition of the reasons behind Ibn Ḥanbal’s
deprecation of al-Muḥāsibī to date.

Thus, in attempting to assess the influence of al-Muḥāsibī’s environment on his life, we can
conclude that al-Muḥāsibī was indeed, ‘a product of his time’ in the sense that even from an
ergy age he benefited from the nascent education system within the Muslim world and the
general intellectual atmosphere in the ‘Abbāsid era, which was brought to fruition in
adulthood with the writing of his works. In addition, one may observe that he was fully
conversant with the prevalent linguistic and religious disciplines of his day including
grammar and Qur’ānic sciences, jurisprudence (al-ṣīḥ), Prophetic narration (al-ḥadīth) and
scholastic theology (al-kālām), which he studied with the foremost authorities of his era. In
this regard however, there is much work to be done, in the sense that these facets of al-
Muḥāsibī’s intellectual life are yet to be fully explored.

For example, with regard to the sciences of the Qur’ān it will be clear from the discussion of
al-Muḥāsibī’s work Fahm al-Qur’ān in chapter five that al-Muḥāsibī had clear notions of
various Qur’ānic concepts, such as the abrogated and abrogating verses (al-nāsīkh wa ‘l-
mansūkh); it precise and ambiguous verses (al-muḥkam wa ‘l-mutashāblīh); the general
and specific verses (al-‘āmm wa ‘l-khāṣṣ), as well as the unusual vocabulary (gharīb al-
Qur’ān)1235 and as such, to examine these expositions in the light of other works of a similar
genre is extremely important to assess al-Muḥāsibī’s contribution as a whole. Similarly, one
of the earliest and most important Qur’ānic exegesis (al-tafsīr) is that of Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī
and little has reached us before his crucial work1236, but as Maḥmūd notes al-Muḥāsibī had
already developed a methodology of exegesis1237 and indeed, many of his works contain
references to early exegetes and their opinions, one of the best examples of this being al-
Rūḍāya 11 Iluqūq Allah. Thus, the importance of al-Muḥāsibī’s contribution to the science of
tafsīr cannot be underestimated and therefore, requires that it be studied in detail.

Similarly, with regard to the sciences involved with Prophetic narration (al-ḥadīth), it was
shown in chapter four that he was a known and reliable narrator and also, that he studied
with some of the major traditionists of his period such as Yazīd b. Ḥārūn, to the extent that
both he and his adversary Ibn Ḥanbal shared some of the same shaykhs. In chapter four
there was also an indication to al-Muḥāsibī’s view of the application of ḥadīth especially

1235 See pp. 225-9 above.
1236 This is why Qur’ānic exegesis (al-tafsīr) was not included in the historical survey, since, although it was an
ongoing process in terms of teaching, its codification was still somewhat limited and few early examples have
reached us.
1237 See Maḥmūd, Uṣṭād al-Sāʾirīn, pp. 97-107.
when they are inauthentic and this preliminary indication requires that it be followed with a more in-depth survey of al-Muḥäsibī's transmission of hadīth and his views regarding its implementation.

It was also shown in chapter four that al-Muḥäsibī is closely linked with the Shāfī‘ī school of jurisprudence and indeed, was considered to be from the first generation of scholars who adopted al-Shāfī‘ī's methodology and application of fiqh. However, when one surveys the works of al-Mubasibī, in particular al-Masā’il fi A’māl al-Qulūb wa ‘l-Jawārīh, Fahm al-Ṣalāt and al-Makāsib, one finds that he was a capable jurist in his own right, both quoting the opinions of the jurists of his period and deducing law with its appropriate evidence. Thus, the question that is raised is: did al-Muḥäsibī merely relate this from his fiqh teachers or did he himself reach a level where he was able to deduce law on his own? Therefore, it is equally important to examine the legalistic views of al-Muḥäsibī and since both al-Shāfī‘ī’s al-Umm and al-Risāla have reached us, make a comparative study of these opinions and reach a conclusion regarding the assumption that he was a Shāfī‘ī scholar.

Furthermore, the fact that al-Muḥäsibī even used kalām as a method in refuting the Mu’tazilites is also indicative of the effect of his environment upon him, since, despite being brought up in and living most of his life in two renowned centres of Mu’tazilism, he clung to ‘orthodoxy’ in much the same way that his Basran compatriot and predecessor al-Ḥasan al-BAṣrī did before him. In addition, however, al-Muḥäsibī also took the defence of his doctrine to another level by employing scholastic theology to deal with the Mu’tazilites, using their own methodology and vernacular to ‘beat them at their own game’ and it was this that Ibn Ḥanbal seemingly objected. This was because firstly, from the outset he rejected kalām as a method and secondly, as was suggested in this thesis, it seems that al-Muḥäsibī may have written his refutations of the Mu’tazilites in the post-miḥna period when Sunnism was in the ascendancy and it was safe to do so. This may have enraged Ibn Ḥanbal even further since he had been tortured because of the state imposition of the created Qurān creed, as well as the fact that there was simply no need to do so since this tribulation was now well and truly ‘over’.

Moreover, the discussion involved with the controversy surrounding Ibn Ḥanbal’s repudiation of al-Muḥäsibī was also productive in the sense that it helped show the subtlety and depth of al-Muḥäsibī’s arguments regarding theological issues. Indeed, this is a facet of al-Muḥäsibī’s scholarship that remains largely unexplored. In fact, when surveying material

1238 See pp. 146-7 above.
related to al-Muhäsibi’s theological views, he is almost exclusively associated with the ‘semi-rationalism’ of ‘Abd Alläh b. Sa’īd b. Kullāb and the school that developed from his teaching known as ‘al-Kullābiyya’. Since many of al-Muhäsibi’s theological views are known from a variety of his works and especially from Fahm al-Qurān, it is appropriate to challenge this notion and examine his in the light of Ibn Kullāb’s theological stance and indeed, Ibn Taymiyya’s Minhaj al-Sunna is invaluable in this regard. Similarly, in studies of al-Muhäsibi we are given the impression that he was representative of the ‘semi-rationalist’ group of Sunni scholastic theologians, such as Ibn Kullāb and al-Qalānisi, who could be described as ‘proto-Ash'arites’. This being the case, it is also suggested that, since al-Muhäsibi and his other Sunni scholastic theologians are viewed as an intermediate stage in the transition between the strict, non-scholastic theology of the Ḥanbalites and the rationalist tendencies of al-Ash’arī, who epitomises Sunni kalām, a comparative study also be made between the theological and methodological approach of al-Muhäsibi in his works and the same facets of al-Ash’arī’s teaching within his al-Luma’, al-Ibāna and al-Mağāţ, to assess the similarities between early, nascent Sunni kalām and its ‘final’ form.

Even though both Basra and Baghdad were centres of Mu’tazilism, they were also home to spiritual traditions that were unique to both of them. It was clear from the discussion in chapter three that the ascetic tradition that existed in Basra began at an early stage and went through a number of developmental phases before it culminated in the personality of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. We may also observe that, although the tradition of spiritual asceticism continued after al-Ḥasan’s death, none of its subsequent exponents achieved his status or notoriety. Indeed, in addition to the above discussion regarding whether or not al-Muhäsibi was a mystic, it is worth mentioning here that al-Muhäsibi’s teachings resembled the spiritual asceticism of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī rather than even the form of ‘sober’ mysticism associated with his student al-Junayd. In fact when examining the works of al-Muhäsibi to compose chapter six, the researcher was surprised at the similarity between the concepts provided by quotes from al-Ḥasan by al-Muhäsibi in his works and his reliance on the former scholar’s teaching. As such, this also requires that further studies be carried out to assess the true influence of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī on al-Muhäsibi not only by examining the quotes al-Muhäsibi provides in his works from his predecessor but also from other works, so as to compare the concepts provided by the former scholar on the teachings of the latter,

1239 See p. 119 above.
1240 Ibid.
which may prove al-Muḥāṣibī’s link to the Basran tradition, albeit in a Baghdadi environment.

In addition, since al-Muḥāṣibī spent most of his life in Baghdad and since his most famous student al-Junayd is considered to be the foremost exponent of the Baghdadi school, al-Muḥāṣibī has been closely associated with the mystical school affiliated with his adopted city. This is further enhanced by the indication that the questioner in the works of al-Muḥāṣibī is al-Junayd, which is supported by the latter’s own admission. Indeed, since the influence of al-Junayd is tangible in a variety of Sufi concepts, practices and brotherhoods, al-Muḥāṣibī has been afforded a great deal of indirect influence via his student. A good example of the far reaching influence of al-Junayd both in terms of time and location is the following statement by the celebrated 17th century scholar Ibn Ṭāshir [Abd al-Wāḥid al-Andalusi] (d. 1040/1630), who says in al-Mursīd al-Ma‘īn al-Durr al-Thamna, his didactic poem on religious practice, “... and I am a traveller upon the path of al-Junayd.” The influence of al-Muḥāṣibī on this ‘path of al-Junayd’ becomes apparent, however, when Ibn Ṭāshir explains the practice of Sufism and says that a person should, “Take his soul to account (yuḥāṣib al-nafs) for its every breath and weigh his fleeting thoughts upon the scales” and three lines later, “Combat his soul (yuḥāṣid al-nafs) for the Lord of the Worlds and adorn himself with stations of certainty.” Thus, the influence upon these notions is plain to see and indeed, this raises the question of whether the Baghdadi school, with which al-Junayd is accredited, was in reality the product of his teacher’s thought? Therefore, it is also suggested here that further research be carried out on the teachings of the personalities affiliated with this school and al-Junayd in particular through his extant works, to assess the true impact of al-Muḥāṣibī’s teaching on this influential school of Islamic mysticism.

Thus in summary, we can see that al-Muḥāṣibī was a multi-faceted scholar, with a polymathic knowledge of the Islamic sciences, who was unique within the scholarship of his period, yet many of the facets of his teaching still need to be studied and understood fully. One of the outstanding features of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī that distinguishes him from his contemporaries and indeed, the vast majority of the early scholars of Islamic spirituality and mysticism is that he was a prolific writer, reportedly authoring more than two hundred

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1241 See p. 154 above.
1243 Ibid., p. 143.
works. This being the case, it is imperative to examine the content and availability of such works to assess their importance and this was the goal of chapter five. This chapter not only provided an overview of the works of al-Muḥāṣibi but also supplied the reader with extensive accounts of the availability of these works both in terms of unpublished material in the form of manuscripts and the works themselves published as books.

It is noticeable in the early research that only a limited number of al-Muḥāṣibi's were identified; for example, both Smith and Maḥmūd locate no more than twenty-five works. It is not until we reach the treatise of van Ess that the picture becomes clearer and the clearest account of this author's works thus far was provided by Mazāli. It was seen in this chapter that we can identify eighteen published works by al-Muḥāṣibi, nine works in manuscript - excluding those that appear to be copies of another work, seven lost works and two works wrongly attributed to our author, giving a grand total of thirty-four books and treatises that we can confirm as being credited to al-Muḥāṣibi. This number is by no means the two hundred works that al-Subki suggests that al-Muḥāṣibi wrote, but nevertheless, it is a considerable number and is possibly the most extensive collection of works that has reached us from this period. Similarly, in addition to the volume of material, the importance of these works lies in their diversity since as has been noted, al-Muḥāṣibi was an erudite scholar who wrote on a variety of topics and so he provides a unique window on religious life and learning in his era generally and an inimitable expose on the field of Islamic spirituality specifically. It is the diversity of al-Muḥāṣibi's writing that furnishes many of the suggested research topics described above and in addition to these, it is also suggested that the remainder of al-Muḥāṣibi's works surviving in manuscript be brought to the light of publication, so as to complete the picture regarding his works and to further enhance the understanding of his thought.

Moreover, one of al-Muḥāṣibi's most important works, Kitāb al-Tawahhum, requires further attention for a number of reasons; firstly, this remains one of the earliest examples of prose literature in Arabic, being written in an elegant and emotive language and due to this, deserves a literary appraisal of its content and style. Secondly, it is has been noted by Asín Palacios in his Islam and the Divine Comedy, states that Dante's famous work may well have been influenced by the descriptions of the Prophet's night journey and ascension into heaven (al-īsra' wa 'l-mi`rāj), provided in works such as al-Maʿarri's Risālat al-Ghifrān and

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1244 See p. 193 above.
Ibn `Arabi's *Kitāb al-Isrā*\(^2\), yet an equally influential book on these works by Muslim scholars and subsequently, on Dante's *Divine Comedy* may well have been al-Muhāsibī's *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, since this remains a pivotal work on Islamic eschatology and as such, further research is required.

In addition to the discussion surrounding the availability and content of al-Muhāsibī's works, chapter five has also attempted to provide a practical appraisal of the chronological order of this author's books and treatises by examining the proposals made by both Maḥmūd and al-Quwwatli in this regard. As was noted in the appropriate section, many of these suggestions are purely deductive, as there is no way to produce a definitive chronology, but nevertheless, there are clear differences in both the content and style of his works, indicative of developmental changes in his writing style that give some credence to the proposals made. However, what is perhaps more significant bearing in mind that the current thesis is concerned with the process of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, is that al-Muhāsibī wrote various concise works, which were expounded in later, more expansive ventures and as such, it further proves his ability as a teacher and a spiritual guide, as each of these treatises was written with a specific goal, or specific students' needs in mind. Thus, a more appropriate question to pose, due to its methodological significance, is not when al-Muhāsibī's works were written but why were they written and for whom were they written? This once again is a subject for future research. In summary, taking all of these factors into consideration, it is felt that this chapter has provided the most complete and in-depth appraisal of al-Muhāsibī's works thus far.

The culmination of this thesis then, having surveyed both the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam and the life and works of al-Muhāsibī, lies in examining this author's own concept, theory and methodology, as manifested in his extant books and treatises and this was the goal of chapter six. This chapter was constructed around a similar format to that of chapter two, so a comparison could be made and it was found that when examining al-Muhāsibī's concepts of purification (*tazkiya*), the concept of the word *nafs* and the facets of *tazkiyat nafs*, they were all found to be similar, if not identical with, the exposition of these features of the purification process as elucidated in chapter two. With regard to this latter feature, i.e. the facets of *tazikiyat al-nafs*, it was found that although al-Muhāsibī alludes to both the divine and Prophetic facets of *tazkiya*, his major emphasis is on the individual's role in carrying out this practice and as such, this forms the basis of his approach to purifying the

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soul as he clearly understands verse (91:9) to mean, "He who has caused his soul to be purified has indeed attained true success." Similarly, al-Muḥāṣibī makes reference to virtually all of the qualities of the soul indicated by both the Qurān and hadith but it is worthy of mention that he pays particular attention to the attributes of the desires (al-hawā) and the appetites (al-shahāwāt), since both these negative facets of the soul are the most destructive for the human being and are manipulated by the aspirant's second adversary, Satan.

It is little surprise then that despite al-Muḥāṣibī alluding to the two more 'elevated' states of the soul, i.e. the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma) and the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'īnna), it is the third, base state of the soul, the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sūr) that al-Muḥāṣibī is almost exclusively concerned with. Bearing this in mind, al-Muḥāṣibī continually reminds his readers of the dissension of the soul (munāza'at al-nafs); the enticement of the soul (taswil al-nafs); the doubts of the soul (rayb al-nafs) and warns against its sinister aspirations (amānī). Moreover, he also makes clear to his readers the dangers of the destruction of the soul (halk/tallf al-nafs); its procrastination (taswīf al-nafs) regarding the performance of righteous acts; its wickedness (sūr al-nafs) that leads to it committing offences (jīnāyāt al-nafs) and the many faults of the soul (uyūb al-nafs), which constitute the many things that it conceals and attempts to keep hidden (khābāyā/khafāyā/sarār al-nafs). Indeed, he takes great pains to clarify that the cunning nature of the soul lies in its deception (khīḍāt al-nafs), deceit and falsehood (khalīb al-nafs) and the subterfuge and various stratagems (biyāl al-nafs) it employs to ensure that its appetites and desires are fulfilled.

It is due to these negative qualities and the soul's inclination to evil that make it necessary to purify it and with this goal in mind al-Muḥāṣibī provides a series of measures to ensure the success of this process. What is surprising about al-Muḥāṣibī's approach, however, is that for the most part it does not exclusively employ a 'destructive' approach to the nafs but rather, utilises both a 'negative', disciplinary approach combined with a 'positive', developmental method. Thus, he applies the punitive concepts of dispraisal of the soul (dhamm al-nafs); the accusation of the soul (ittihām al-nafs); having contempt for the soul (izdīrāl-nafs); that the soul be 'broken' (inkisār al-nafs); that the soul be abased (muhānāt al-nafs) and that the soul be coerced (ilzām al-nafs), but at the same time, also suggests that one should have both care (rīyāt al-nafs) and concern (al-īnāya bi 'l-nafs)

1246 See p. 75 above.
for the soul; counsel and exhort the soul (wasiyat/nasihat al-nafs); be concerned with its state (al-istighâl bi'l-nafs) and even on occasion have gentleness with the soul (al-rifq bi/al-shafaqa 'alâ 'l-nafs). Thus, there is an overall balance within al-Muhâsibî's approach to the purification of the soul, which is dependent on its state and which, is also reminiscent of the Prophetic view of this practice.¹²⁴⁷

More specifically, however, it was also deduced that al-Muhâsibî employed a specific methodology of tazkiyat al-nafs that was a multi-faceted process that comprises: intimate knowledge of the soul (ma'rifat al-nafs); the continual observance of God (al-murâqaba); combating or struggling against the soul (mujâhadat al-nafs) and introspective examination and taking the soul account (muhâsabat al-nafs). Therefore, the very foundation of purifying the soul depends on one's knowledge and insight into its nature, qualities and motives as alluded to in the above paragraphs, which instils in the mind of the aspirant the necessity of disciplining the soul and at the same time, aids it in this process. This is then combined with the constant cognisance of divine observance of every thought, word and deed (al-murâqaba), which in turn inculcates a feeling of shame before God that prevents the committing of sins and transgression and at the same time, causes the heart to experience the intimacy of being in the 'presence' of its Lord. However, due to the continual presence of the desires and appetites and their manipulation by Iblis, another facet of tazkiya is employed by al-Muhâsibî, which is the combating of the such detrimental features and the soul's proclivity to impatience inherent within it (al-mujâhadâ), to purify it and instil in it satisfaction with its Lord. To ensure that this is in fact the case and act as criterion for the soul's motives and deeds, al-Muhâsibî also utilises the practice of in-depth examination of the soul (muhâsabat al-nafs), which is not only employed regarding past actions to ascertain their deficiencies but also in future actions before their performance, so as to ensure the sincerity of such acts for God. As such, muhâsabat al-nafs, with the simple criteria of seeking God's pleasure, acts as a safety mechanism to affirm the correctness of a deed, whether it be internal or external and at the same time evaluates the measure of discipline that the soul requires. Thus, al-Muhâsibî's theory and methodology of tazkiyat al-nafs is a subtle interplay of these various facets with the goal of purifying the soul from the negative detrimental qualities that dwell within it, to gain the pleasure of its Lord and thus, enter His paradise in its most elevated state, that of the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mu'tma'inna).

¹²⁴⁷ See p. 86 above.
Bearing in mind the unique nature and depth of the discussion in this chapter, it is felt that this is a positive and valuable contribution, which is exceptional in the field of Islamic studies in general and to the understanding of early Islamic spirituality and mysticism in particular.

Bearing in mind the deep and insightful knowledge of al-Muḥāsibī manifested in the current study, it is little surprise that outside fanatical Ḥanbalite circles al-Muḥāsibī enjoyed a great deal of praise and influence. Indeed, one may attribute this to the relevance of his works in every age, since from the Islamic perspective and as al-Muḥāsibī himself notes, the nature of human souls is quite similar and as such, for aspirants on the path to God his works are as relevant today as they were when he first wrote them.

In conclusion, when considering the important findings of the current thesis, one would have to include that the study of al-Ḥarāth al-Muḥāsibī is far from being an area of research that is completely exhausted. Similarly, it has been shown that far from being a simple Sufi, al-Muḥāsibī was a multi-faceted and multi-talented scholar who wrote in a variety of fields of Islamic learning and as such, made a considerable contribution to the Islamic tradition as a whole but most notably in the field of tazkiyat al-nafs. Bearing these two factors in mind, it is the goal of this researcher to continue in this area of study and dedicate his future research to the goal of shedding further light on this outstanding scholar, who graced the Muslim community with his presence in the 2nd/8th-3rd/9th centuries and the likes of whom have rarely been seen since.

Perhaps it is fitting to end with a quote from the most famous of the later Ḥanbalite scholars, the celebrated shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalim Ibn Taymiyya, who did not follow his spiritual ancestor in repudiating al-Muḥāsibī but rather, appreciated the value of his teaching saying, “He possessed knowledge, virtue, asceticism and discourse regarding the spiritual realities (al-ḥaqāʾiq), which has been widely celebrated.”

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1248 The influence of al-Muḥāsibī has not been dealt with in the present study since the researcher feels that this topic would require a separate thesis. In addition, this work has been started by Smith who has unequivocally shown the influence of al-Muḥāsibī on al-Ghazzālī, which in itself is a significant enough finding. However, this is only preliminary effort as the various future research proposals indicate in the above discussion. See Smith, An Early Mystic, pp. 269-91 and “The Forerunner of al-Ghazzālī” in The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (January, 1936) pp. 65-78.

1249 See pp. 274 above.

1250 Ibn Taymiyya, Ḍağīr al-Fatāwā, vol. 6, p. 521.
Appendices
Appendix 1:

An Appraisal of the singular ḥadīth containing the term ‘tazkiyat al-nafs’
8 - باب حَلَوْةَ الإِيَانِ

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9 - باب حُبِّ اللَّهِ وَرُسُولِهِ

An Appraisal of the singular hadith containing the term 'tazkiyat al-nafs' by 'Abd Allâh b. Yusuf al-Juday'.

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Appendix 2:

Map of Iraq and its surrounding regions at the time of the early Ābbāsids
Appendix 3:

Map of Baghdad at the time of the early āAbbāsids
LEGEND

A. The Round City, also known as Madīnat al-Mansūr. The first palace complex of the `Abbāsid Capital, it contained the palace-mosque of the Caliph, the administrative agencies of the government, and the residences of various public officials. Construction began in A. H. 145 and was completed in A. H. 149.

B. Al-Harbiyyah. A suburban area north of the Round City, it contained the military cantonments of the Khurāsānī army stationed at Baghdad. Its development was concurrent with the construction of the Round City, with its major growth in A.H. 151 and 157.

C. Al-Karkh. The great market suburb of the greater urban area, it was occupied in Pre-Islamic times, with large-scale development concurrent with the construction of the Round City. It was redeveloped in the suburban expansion of A.H. 157.

D. Al-Rusafah. The Palace complex of the Caliph al-Mahdī, it contained his residence and a second principal mosque. Construction began in A.H. 151 and was completed in A.H. 159.

E. Al-Mukharrim. A residential district, it was possibly occupied as early as A.H. 151, with significant development after A.H. 159.

F. Al-Khuld. Al-Mansūr’s second residential palace, it was built in A.H. 157 and later occupied by Hārūn al-Rashīd and Muḥammad al-Amīn.

G. Dār al-Khilāfah. The third palace complex, it was built by the `Abbāsid Caliphs in stages, subsequent to their return from Sāmarrā in A.H. 279.

H. Al-Shammasīyah. Originally a staging ground for military reviews and a camping ground, it was developed as a palace area by the Būyid amirs in the tenth century.

I. Bāb al-Taq. Contained the commercial section serving al-Rusafah and the upper reaches of al-Mukharrim. The general area probably underwent some development as early as A.H. 151 with great expansion after A.H. 159.
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1251 Key: n. d. no date of publication, n.pub. no publisher quoted, n.p. no place of publication mentioned.


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