AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. DERYA BAŞ ON SUFISM

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Q. Dear Professor, can you tell us about yourself and your work in the field of Sufism?

A. During my study in the Faculty of Theology at Marmara University (1986-1991), my research interest was philosophy of religion. I completed my master's degree with a thesis titled "Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's (d. 547/1152[?]) Philosophy of Religion" in 1995. Abū al-Barakāt, who was born into a Jewish family and was good enough to be a physician in the palace circles, is a classical medieval philosopher. Especially after he became Muslim, the philosopher's book named *Kitāb al-Muʿtabar* attracted attention with his criticisms of Peripatetic philosophy. As can be understood from the name of the book, Abū al-Barakāt gives importance to personal contemplation and reflection, and the book of creation, the exemplar of existence, should be read rather than books. In this respect, he prioritizes revelation and unveiling (*kashf*), that is, the knowledge of prophets (*anbiyāʾ*) and friends of God (*awliyāʾ*), above the knowledge of scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*). Although his philosophy has a mystical-illumunative (*ishrāqī*) color, this is not enough to see Abū al-Barakāt outside the boundaries of Peripatetic philosophy. In this respect, Abū al-Barakāt acted as a bridge in my world of thought to move to another field. Many Muslim philosophers, especially Ibn Sīnā, can offer such a gateway to the reader. For me, this gate was Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī.

Of course, the factors affecting one's world of thought are multiple and as Abū al-Barakāt states, it has personal aspects that one rely on. Foremost among these is that I have the honor of getting to know the recognizer (*ʿārif*) - perfect humans (*insān al-kāmil*) who are familiar with the Sufi tradition that still exists in our country. From the very beginning, the Sufi culture living in Istanbul held a clear mirror to my interest in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

When I started working in the field of Sufism, I did not want to stay in the isthmus between philosophy and Sufism. I prefer to jump off the pier instead of diving into the sea with steps that get one used to the heat of the sea. With a sharp break from my philosophical background, I started a study that concerns the practical side of Sufism; my doctoral thesis has the title "Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī, his Order and Badawiyya in Istanbul". Sufi historiography tradition in the academic field in our country can be started with Fuat Köprülü (1919). His book, *The First Sufis in Turkish Literature*, which reflects the notion of modern historiography in an early period and contains a serious scientific background,

was an exemplary model. This work is a very early product based on the method of the Annales school. However, the Sufism chairs of the Faculty of Theology were determined to follow a different path in writing the history of Sufism. Although the historiographic model of Sufi-Generations (*ṭabaqāt*) works has not yet been scientifically studied and discussed, it was implicitly aimed to update these models, in other words, to keep this spirit alive. Sufi generations books (*ṭabaqāt-nāma*), books of Sufi-hagiography (*manāqib-nāma)*, books of Sufi Paths (*ṭarīqat-nāma*), and other subject-based Sufi works were expected to feed Sufi historiography. Countless theses written on the history of Sufism and the Sufi Paths (*Ṭarīqāt*) in Sufism chairs in Turkey have been consciously or unconsciously fed from this ground. Through the eyes of the Sufis, they reflect a reconciliatory, not confrontational, perspective that reflects their understanding and conception of the world. Because sufi-generations books or books of sufi-hagiography are also a praise. This character of Sufi texts has also led them to be seen as a kind of story or literature. A Sufi historian has to take the risk and undertake this in order to have the terms that make this discipline possible and to stay true to its contents. This is a matter related to the notion of theology education, not just the Sufism department. This is the escapade of my thesis called "Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī, his Order and Badawiyya in Istanbul." The rest consists of examining many limited and printed works and presenting a tidy history of Badawiyya Ṭarīqa, although some historical sections are missing.

I should add that the influence of Fuat Köprülü and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, who continues his understanding, is obvious in the theses related to the history of sufism in the history departments.

My second book is a *Badawī Shaykh of Rind-Spirited in the Twentieth Century: Shaykh Rāmī al-Badawī*. Although my doctoral study gave me great pleasure and depth, in fact I was not planning to do a new study on the Badawiyya Ṭarīqa. After my doctorate, I was working on 'Abd Allāh al-Bosnawī's commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* called *Tajalliyāt al- 'Arā'is al-Nuṣūṣ*. However, as a result of the good interest shown by the Badawiyya followers to my book and to myself, faqīr, I found a series of very precious works in my opinion. In 1925, when the dervish lodges were closed in Turkey, the uncensored autobiographical works written with the most sincere feelings by a shaykh, who separated from the lodge (*dargāh*) life, were worth a treasure. The manuscripts were bearing witness to this period and gave us the opportunity to get to know a shaykh and his circle closely. I completed my research based on these books, which I think provide important data in this period when macro-historiography lost its importance and micro-writing gained importance.

Q. In both of your works, you have discussed the Badawiyya Ṭarīqa. In what ways is the Badawiyya Ṭarīqa important for the history of Sufism?

A. Sufi authors have identified numerous similes and parallels on the conceptualization of the terms Islamic law (*sharī'a*), Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*), Reality

(*ḥaqīqa*) and Recognition (*ma'rifa*), as in many sufi terms. One of them is that the Badawī ṭarīqa corresponds to the rank of the Ṭarīqa in this four-folded classification. For example, Rifā'iyya represents the Ma'rifa in this classification. Of course, every ṭarīqa has these four concepts all-together, but it is a separate pleasure for the researcher to find a predominant theme as an orientation in ṭarīqas. The Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*), which means a narrower, side path comparing to the Islamic law (*sharī'a*), is possible with aspiration (*himma*) like passing through the narrow door, which is more than gathering the intention and will; as René Guénon puts it, it is linear and uni-directional. The Badawī ṭarīqa had this quality both like other ṭarīqas and more of it. The conclusion that Micheal Winter reached when his efforts to seek sociological, cultural or any other commonality for the members of the Badawī ṭarīqa did not yield any results; "The only common point of all Badawiyya members is their extreme love for Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī; urban or rural." As my research progressed, I realized that the Badawī ṭarīqa was very suitable to see the course of a ṭarīqa built around a shaykh (*pīr*).

The Badawī ṭarīqa, despite the fact of the ascetic and mysterious nature of its shaykh, as being one of the first ṭarīqas to establish and took a dominant position in the constitution of the ṭarīqas, and the character of the ṭarīqa somehow mixed with Egyptian territory and culture like the position of the Bektashī ṭarīqa in the Anatolian territory, deserve the attention in studies of the history of Sufism. This requires the subjects valid for all tarīqas established in the 12th, 13th centuries.

How did Sufism, which was reactive and introvertedly ascetic since the 2nd century and whose main issue since the 3rd century was to explain and systematize the states caused by spiritual intoxication, become institutionalized? Just as the question of how did the ascetism evolve into Sufism? Institutionalization is regarded as an ijtihād. Authorities of this ijtihād are esteemed as ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Sayyid Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī as being in the first place and Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī and Sayyid Ibrāhim al-Dasūkī as well. In the same century, there were other ṭarīqas established like Yasawiyya in Khorasan, Sā'diyya in Damascus, Mawlawiyya and Bektāshiyya in Anatolia. One of the reasons why these four ṭarīqas became prominent in the history of ṭarīqas can be their locations in the centers of the caliphate at the age of the establishment of the ṭarīqas. Baghdād (Qādiriyya-Rifā'iyya), which was the center of Sufism in those centuries, was also the center of the caliphate. Egypt (Badawiyya, Dasūkiyya, Shāzaliyya), which was the center of Sufism later on, became the new center of the caliphate (Ayyubids and Mamluks). Institutionalization in the middle ages cannot be thought of independently of religious movements; just as religious movements were limbs of politics, politics was fed from religious thought as well.

The centuries in which the Badawī Ṭarīqa was influential were the Ayyubid and the Mamluk periods. Egypt has been a preferred region for Sufis since the Ayyubid period. The Ayyubid state's policies to strengthen the Sufis and their lodges (*khānqāh*), who supported Sunnism in order to establish Sunnism against Fatimid propaganda and to weaken the importance of Azhar,

were also continued in the Mamluks period, and khānqāhs became institutions where scholars ('ulamā') and sufis taught together. The ṭarīqas, which followed a course in harmony with the schools of jurisprudence (madhhab al-i'tiqādī), gained strength. Although the harmony of the Sufis and the scholars reflected the general atmosphere in these centuries, there were scholars who considered the views and some practices of the Sufis as dangerous in terms of creed, as in every period. The example of Ibn Taymiyya continues to be the most striking example of this view in the history of Islam until today. The Badawiyya Ṭarīqa took its place in history as a part of all these reconciliations and conflicts. The positive and negative contacts that the ṭarīqas established with both the scholars and the political fronts gave them great experience in institutionalization. This experience lies in the background of a ṭarīqa becoming as established as a small state. The ṭarīqas did not have the comfort of disregarding the ruling circles of the ascetics and partly Sufis. As it is seen in the example that while Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī and his followers, who chose a remote town like Tanta, were subjected to the judgment of the qadi of the qadis (qāḍī al-quḍāt; judge of the judges) from Cairo, the Badawī mawlids became the official ceremonies of the state sometime after the passing of Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī.

The ṭarīqas established the model for the Sufism to be lived in the city. Throughout the Seljuk and Ottoman centuries, city and state culture were in synergy with the culture of ṭarīqas. In the Islamic world, ṭarīqas are urban structures, unrelated to sectarianism, on which the moderns have produced fantastic fears. I say this as someone who has studied a ṭarīqa that has made a name for itself, not civilization, but bedouinism. Özkan Öztürk's thesis titled "The Manifestations of Sufism in Ottoman Political Thought" on the parallels of the hierarchy of sufism – which gained weight during the period of ṭarīqas – and the Ottoman governing hierarchy is the first and an important study in this field.

As soon as the ṭarīqas were established, the synergy between Sufism/ṭarīqas and the state and culture/civilization was noticed. Abbasid Caliph Nāṣir Lidīn Allāh planned to build the relationship between religion/sufism-politics and religion/sufism-culture on a solid ground in Baghdād, the center of Sufism. The realization of this plan was by the hands of Seljuks and Ottomans.

Q. I think you are talking about the project of the Abbasid Caliph Nāṣir Lidīn Allāh to link the chivalry (*futuwwa*) of Sufism to the caliphate. You have an article on this topic as well.

A. It is certain that there is a connection between the organization of the chivalry (*futuwwa*) and ṭarīqas. The two forms of organization are similar to each other. But which one affected the other more, I also wonder, to be honest. The path of every researcher working on the phenomenon of institutionalization of ṭarīqas falls on the crossroads of futuwwa. Futuwwa and the organization of futuwwa is a subject that has occupied many academicians. And it still maintains its relative ambiguity. The political aspect of the subject is obvious. I am talking about the use of communities and organizations that

are effective in society as an organ of the government. Until the century when bureaucracy was formed in the Ottoman Empire, ṭarīqas, like tribes, functioned as a political organ. Its political founder is the Abbasid Caliph; The effects of Nāṣir's project to build futuwwa as a part of the caliphate under the consultancy of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī were seen in the policies of the Seljuks supporting the Akhī communities; the same policy was continued in the Ottoman period as well. I am more interested in the relationship of the futuwwa organization with the institutionalization of the ṭarīqas rather than the political aspect of the issue. The historical background of futuwwa concept, which was used almost in the same sense as Sufism in the first period of Sufism, is a subject waiting to be clarified. I was particularly interested in their approach, which I conceptualized as "Ṭarīqa Shī'īsm", which came to the fore in the period of the ṭarīqas and caused them to call the orders (arkān) of the major ṭarīqas as "Futuwwa Order." What is the effect of the concept of futuwwa, which is unique to the first period, behind the fact that while Ḥaḍrat 'Alī's (k.s.) name is not mentioned much in the first period Sufi books many times, but predominantly used in the period of the ṭarīqas qualitatively? It was a reason for me to think that the intercommunity of the orders of ṭarīqas such as Qādiriyya-Rifā'iyya, Badawiyya, Sā'diyya and Bektāshiyya with the order of futuwwa. Nāṣir Lidīn Allāh's attempt to reconcile moderate Shī'ism with Sunnism, on the other hand, the fact that communities with Shī'ī tendencies found the opportunity to live under the Ottoman ruling, where Sunnism was dominant, is the result of the tolerance of a futuwwa-based understanding of Sufism. With all these aspects, it is understood that the concept of futuwwa has a versatile function in the fields of ṭarīqas, sufism and politics.

Q. One of your researches is on the work of Naqshī-Malāmī Sayyid Suleiman Balkhī called _Yanābī' al-mawadda_ (the Springs of Divine Love). Is there a connection between the issue of futuwwa and the love of Ahl al-Bayt? Does the love of Ahl al-Bayt, which is predominant in Sufi circles, lead to such a compromise/tolerance? How did Ḥaḍrat Balkhī examine this issue? What is the position of Ahl al-Bayt in terms of the schools of jurisprudence (_madhāhib_)?

A. In the ṭarīqas where the love of Ḥaḍrat 'Alī is predominant, which can be said almost all of them, the love of Ahl al-Bayt is predominant as well. The first to come to mind of the Bektāshī Ṭarīqa when the order of futuwwa (_arkān al-futuwwa_) is mentioned, indicates the hand in hand being of the concept of futuwwa with the love of Ahl al-Bayt. However, as I just mentioned, many ṭarīqas, especially Rifā'iyya, have distinguished themselves with the order of futuwwa. As a matter of fact, the author of the work _Yanābī' al-mawadda_, Sayyid Suleiman Balkhī (d. 1877), was the first Naqshibandiyya-Mujaddidiyya shaykh of the Murad Bukhārī Lodge in Istanbul, the first lodge where the Naqshibandiyya-Mujaddidiyya shaykhs preached, in 1715. The book of Shaykh Suleiman al-Balkhī al-Naqshibandī is based on the view that the love of Ahl al-Bayt cannot be identified only with Shī'ism, but it is also a basis of Sunnism. When I talk about the twelve imams in the lectures, some of my students ask, are you talking about the imams of the Shiites? I answer that they

are also imams for Sunnīs, even though they do not see it as an obligation of creed. I am aware that it is almost impossible to reach a common decree on the events that paved the way for the formation of the schools of jurisprudence. Although the schools of jurisprudence could not come to an agreement, the faithful believers (*mu'min*) agreed on the love of Ahl al-Bayt. Shaykh Sayyid Suleiman Balkhī's book is a reflection of this understanding. Shaykh Suleiman Balkhī compiled the virtues and hagiographies of the Ahl al-Bayt from the sources respected by the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'a and drew attention to the fact that the narrations in the Shiite literature are included in the Sunni sources as well. Thus, he transformed the love for the Ahl al-Bayt into a common ground between the schools of jurisprudence. Love of Ahl al-Bayt is the common point of two religious traditions such as Sunnism and Shiism which is a garden of paradise where members of both schools meet.

On the other hand, it is not correct to evaluate the love and respect of the Sufis for the Ahl al-Bayt and the imams as a tendency towards Shiism. For, considering love as a command and a duty is inconsistent with the reality of the Sufis who are specialized in love (*hubb*) concept. There is nothing natural for the Sufis, who are specialized in the concept of love, to come to the fore with the love of Ahl al-Bayt. Sufis, who see themselves as a part of the Sunnī belief and the Sunnī world, have honored the love of the Ahl al-Bayt by excluding it from a religious-political or a sectarian field. Therefore, this issue is not a separation between schools of jurisprudence, but a position of perfection above the schools.

This piece has been edited and condensed with approval from the interviewee.